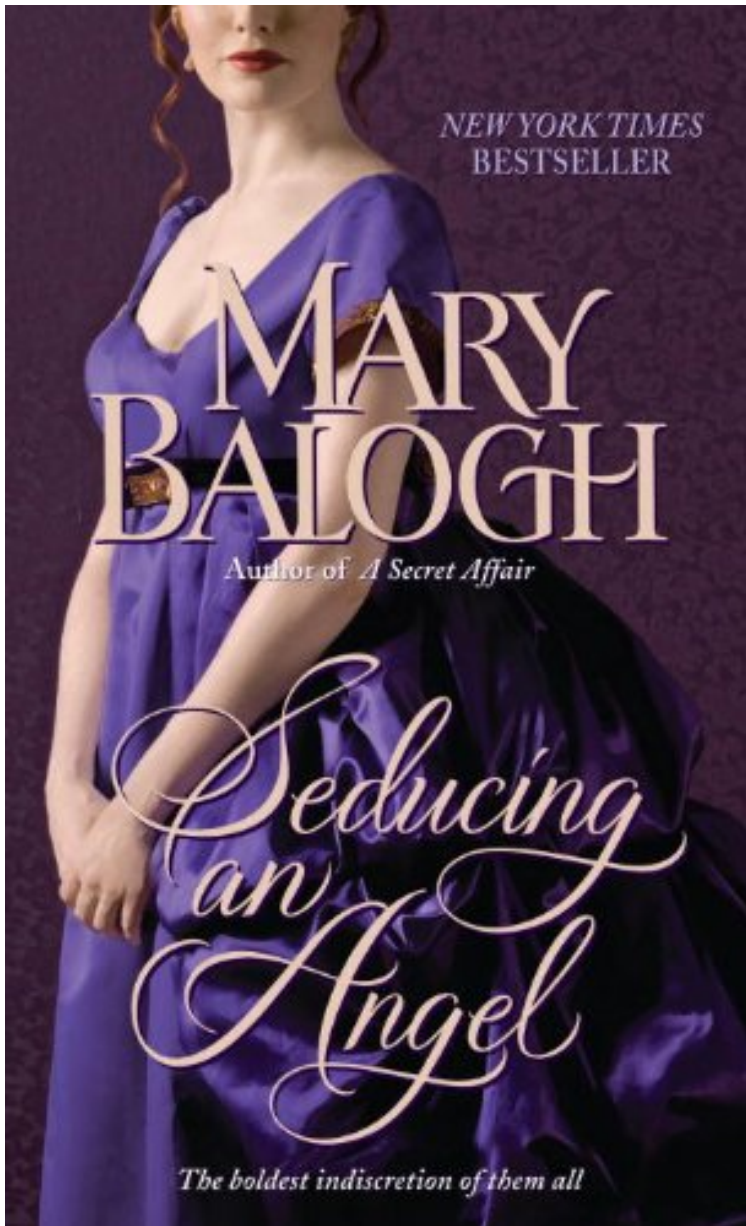


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Seducing an Angel



Par Mary Balogh
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurBONUS: This edition contains an excerpt from Mary Balogh's The Secret Mistress. In a time unlike any other, a family youll never forget . . . Meet the Huxtablethree headstrong sisters and their dashing brothereach searching for love thats always a shocking indiscretion away. . . . In her magnificent new novel, New York Times bestselling author Mary Balogh sweeps us into a world of scandal and intrigueglittering Regency Englandand introduces the youngest Huxtable: Stephen, the only son. Here Stephen will risk his reputation and his heart as he enters a scandalous liaison with the infamous beauty

intent on seduction. But when passion turns the tables on them both, who can say who has seduced whom? He must be wealthy, wellborn, and want her more than he wants any other woman. Those are the conditions that must be met by the man Cassandra Belmont chooses for her lover. Marriage is out of the question for the destitute widow who stands accused of murdering her husband and must now barter her beauty in order to survive. With seduction in mind, she sets her sights on Stephen Huxtable, the irresistibly attractive Earl of Merton and Londons most eligible bachelor. But Stephens first intriguing glimpse of the mysterious, alluring Lady Paget convinces him that he has found the ideal woman to share his bed. There is only one caveat. This relationship fueled by mutual pleasure must be on his terms. As the two warily circle each other in a sensual dance of attack and retreat, a single night of passion alters all the rules. Cassandra, whose reputation is already in tatters, is now in danger of losing the one thing she vowed never to give. And Stephen, who wants Cassandra more than he has ever wanted any woman, wont rest until she has surrendered everythingnot as his mistressbut as his lover and wife. . . .

ExtraitChapter OneWhat I am going to do is find a man. The speaker was Cassandra Belmont, the widowed Lady Paget. She was standing at the sitting room window of the house she had rented on Portman Street in London. The house had come fully furnished, but the furnishings as well as the curtains and carpets had seen better days. They had probably seen better days even ten years ago. It was a shabby genteel place, well suited to Lady Pagets circumstances. To marry? Alice Haytor, her ladys companion, asked, startled. Cassandra watched with world-weary eyes and scornfully curved lips as a woman walked past in the street below, holding the hand of a little boy who clearly did not want either to have his hand held or to be proceeding along the street at such a trot. Everything in the lines of the womans body spoke of irritation and impatience. Was she the childs mother or his nurse? Either way, it did not matter. The childs rebellion and misery were none of Cassandras concern. She had enough concerns of her own. Absolutely not, she said in answer to the question. Besides, I would have to find a fool. A fool? Cassandra smiled, though it was not a happy expression, and she did not turn to direct it at Alice. The woman and child had passed out of sight. A gentleman was hurrying along the street in the opposite direction, frowning down at the ground in front of his feet. He was late for some appointment, at a guess, and doubtless thought his life depended upon getting where he was going on time. Perhaps he was right. Probably he was wrong. Only a fool would marry me, she explained. No, it is definitely not for marriage that I need a man, Alice. Oh, Cassie, her companion said, clearly troubled, you surely cannot mean She did not complete the thought, or need to. There was only one thing Cassandra could mean. Oh, but I do, Alice, Cassandra said, turning and regarding her with amused, hard, mocking eyes. Alice was gripping the arms of the chair on which she sat and leaning slightly forward as if she were about to stand up, though she did not do so. Are you shocked? Your purpose when we decided to come to London, Alice said, was to look for employment, Cassie. We were both going to look. And Mary too. It was not a realistic plan, though, was it? Cassandra said, laughing without amusement. Nobody wants to hire a housemaid-turned-cook who has a young daughter but is not and never has been married. And a letter of recommendation from me would do poor Mary no good at all, would it? Andah, forgive me, Alicenot many people will want to employ a governess who is more than forty years old when there are plenty of young women available. I am sorry to put that brutal truth into words, but youth is the modern god. You were an excellent governess to me when I was a child, and you have been an excellent companion and friend since I grew up. But your age is against you now, you know. As for me, well, unless I somehow disguise my identity, which would not work when it came time to offer letters of recommendation, I am doomed in the employment market, and in any other, for that matter. No one is going to want to hire an axe murderer in any capacity at all, I suppose. Cassie! her former governess said, her hands flying up to cover her cheeks. You must not describe yourself in such a way. Not even in fun. Cassandra was unaware that they had been having fun. She laughed anyway. People are prone to exaggerate, are they not? she said. Even to fabricate? It is what half the known world believes of me, Alicebecause it is fun to believe such a preposterous thing. People will run screaming from me, I daresay, every time I step out of doors. It will have to be an intrepid man that I find. Oh, Cassie, Alice said, tears swimming in her eyes. I wish you would not! I have tried making my fortune at the tables, Cassandra said, checking off the point on one finger as though there were more to follow. I would have come away more destitute than I already was if I had not had a stroke of very modest luck with the final hand. I took my winnings and ran, having discovered that I do not have anything like the nerve to be a gambler, not to mention the skill. Besides, I was growing very hot indeed under my widows veil, and several people were quite openly trying to guess who I was. She tapped a second finger, but there was nothing further to add. She had not tried anything else, simply because there was nothing else to try. Except one thing. If I cannot pay the

rent next week, she said, we will all be out in the street, Alice, and I would hate that. She laughed again. Perhaps, Alice said, you ought to appeal to your brother again, Cassie. He surely I have already appealed to Wesley, Cassandra said, her voice hard again. I asked for shelter for a short while until I could find a way to be independent. And what was his answer? He was very sorry. He would love to help me, but he was about to leave on an extended walking tour of Scotland with a group of his friends who would be seriously inconvenienced if he let them down at the last moment. Where exactly in Scotland would I send this new appeal, Alice? And would I beg more abjectly this time? And for you and Mary and Belinda as well as for myself? Oh, yes, and for you too, Roger. Did you think I had forgotten you? A large, shaggy dog of indeterminate breed had got up from his place before the hearth and limped over to her to have his one ear scratched the other was all but missing. He limped because he was also missing one leg from the knee joint down. He looked up at her with his one good eye and panted happily. His coat never looked anything but unkempt, even though it was clean and had a daily brushing. Cassandra ruffled it with both hands. I would not go to Wesley even if he were still in London, she said, after the dog had lain down at her feet and set his chin down between his paws with a huff of contentment. She turned back to the window and drummed her fingertips slowly on the sill. No, I am going to find a man. A rich man. Very rich. And he will support us all royally. It will not be charity, Alice. It will be employment, and I shall give excellent value for money. There was a hard edge of contempt to her voice, though it was unclear whether her scorn was directed at the unknown gentleman who would become her protector or at herself. She had been a wife for nine years, but she had never before been a mistress. Now she would be. Oh, Alice said, her voice filled with distress, has it really come to this? I will not allow it. There has to be another answer. I will not allow it. Not when one of your reasons is that you feel obliged to support me. Cassandra's eyes followed an ancient carriage as it lumbered its way along the street below the window, its coachman looking as aged as it. You will not allow it? she said. But you cannot stop me, Alice. The days when I was Cassandra and you were Miss Haytor are long gone. I may have very little left. I have almost no money and absolutely no reputation. I have no friends beyond these doors and no relatives who will inconvenience themselves in order to help me. But I do have one thing, one asset that will assure me gainful employment and restore comfort and security to our lives. I am beautiful. And desirable. Under other circumstances the boast might have sounded unpardonably conceited. But it was made with hard mockery. For, of course, though it was perfectly true, it was nothing to be conceited about. Rather, it was something to be cursed. It had secured her a wealthy husband at the age of eighteen. It had brought her countless admirers during the nine years of her marriage. And it had brought her, within a ten-year period, a deeper misery than she had ever dreamed a lifetime could hold. It was time to use it for her own gain to acquire rent for this shabby house and food for the table and clothes for their backs and a little extra to set aside for a rainy day. No, not a little extra. A great deal extra. Never mind bare subsistence and rainy days, when they would be so dearly bought. She and her friends would live in luxury. They would. The man who was going to pay for her services would pay very dearly indeed or watch someone else claim her instead. It did not matter that she was twenty-eight years old. She was better than she had been when she was eighteen. She had put on weight in all the right places. Her face, which had been pretty then, had acquired a more classic beauty since. Her hair, which was a rich copper red, had not darkened over the years or lost any of its luster. And she was less innocent. A great deal less. She knew what pleased men now. There was one gentleman out there somewhere in London right now, at this very minute, who was soon going to be willing to squander a fortune on possessing her and buying exclusive rights to her services. There was more than one gentleman, in fact, but only one whom she would choose. There was that one gentleman who was aching for the sensual delight of possessing her, though he did not even know it yet. He was going to want her more than he had wanted anyone or anything else in his life. She hated men. Cassie, Alice said, and Cassandra turned her head to look inquiringly at her, we have no acquaintances here. How can you expect to meet any gentlemen? She sounded... *Revue de presse* With her inimitable, brilliantly nuanced sense of characterization, elegantly sensual style, and droll wit, Balogh [delivers] another addictively readable addition to her Huxtable family series. *Booklist*, starred review Tender, sultry, and thoroughly satisfying.... Balogh has added another jewel to her collection. *Library Journal*, starred review