A Matter of Class by Mary Balogh

Smoke And Mirrors From Mary Balogh

Just in time for Valentines Day, from New York Times bestselling author Mary Balogh comes yet another classic historical tale that sizzles with romance and unforgettable drama. Reginald Mason is wealthy, refined, and, by all accounts, a gentleman. However, he is not a gentleman by title, a factor that pains him and his father within the Regency society that upholds station over all else. That is, until an opportunity for social advancement arises, namely, Lady Annabelle Ashton. Daughter of the Earl of Havercroft, a neighbor and enemy of the Mason family, Annabelle finds herself disgraced by a scandal, one that has left her branded as damaged goods. Besmirched by shame, the earl is only too happy to marry Annabelle off to anyone willing to have her. Though Reginald Mason, Senior, wishes to use Annabelle to propel his family up the social ladder, his son does not wish to marry her, preferring instead to live the wild, single life he is accustomed to. With this, Reginald Senior serves his son an ultimatum: marry Annabelle, or make do without family funds. Having no choice, Reginald consents, and enters into a hostile engagement in which the prospective bride and groom are openly antagonistic, each one resenting the other for their current state of affairs while their respective fathers revel in their suffering. So begins an intoxicating tale rife with dark secrets, deception, and the trials of love—a story in which very little is as it seems.

My Personal Review:
This is the story of Lady Annabelle Ashton, the only child of the most austere Earl of Havercroft and Reginald Mason, the son of a crass social climbing merchant. When the book opens Reginald is being schooled by his father. During the last year Reginald has become a profligate dandy. His father seeks to put an end to his extravagance. Reginald counters that he is a young up-and-comer who, at the age of twenty five years, is only aping the behavior of his gentlemen companions. These are the activities and interests of the idle gentry class. And, oh by the way, his is not the worst transgression in the neighborhood, has his father heard about the Earls diamond of a daughter? No? Well, she has utterly and completely
ruined herself in a failed attempt at elopement with her fathers handsome footman. Reginalds father gleefully smiles and rubs his palms together. Here is an opportunity, for advancement and revenge. His old enemy, the Earl, is in dire straits, he needs the money his daughter was to marry into. No one of his class will have the chit now. He, the one the Earl looks down his long nose at, will save the family from ruin and in doing so elevate his son.

Proud Annabelle has been locked in a barren room with only her bible for companionship. She is to be sent to a distant estate to live out her days as a spinster. How far she has fallen. Even her mothers companionship is to be denied to her. How could her plans have gone so horribly awry? Annabelle is no ones damsel in distress, but if ever she needed a knight it is now. Someone to fight by her side. Her father enters her cell, the family has been saved. Saved by that odious merchant and his limp noodle of a son.

So begins Reginald and Annabelles story. It is a lighthearted tale. With Ms. Baloghs trademarks of sweet humor, strong characters and engaging plot. From the beginning we know that all is not exactly as it seems and it is fun work figuring out exactly what these two characters have been up to.

One quibble: at 190 widely spaced pages this book is almost unforgivably short. It probably should have been a short story selection in an anthology. That said, for this reader a taste of Ms. Baloghs storytelling is better than a full dish of most anything else.


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