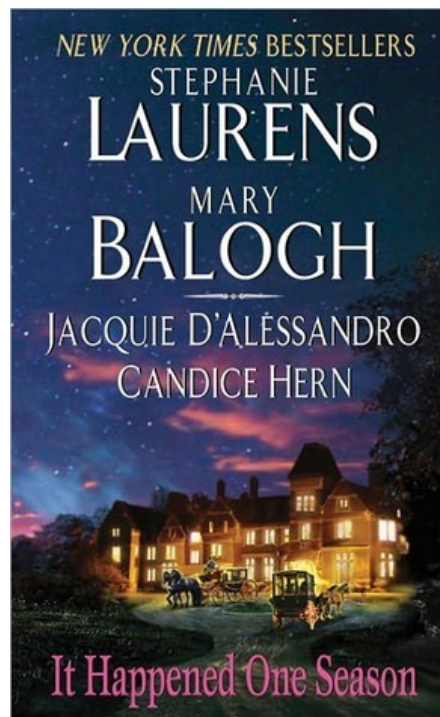




It Happened One Season

Stephanie Laurens , Jacquie D'Alessandro , Candice Hern , Mary Balogh

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New York Times bestselling historical romance superstars Stephanie Laurens and Mary Balogh, along with beloved fan favorites Jacquie D'Alessandro and Candice Hern—the four authors who brought you *It Happened One Night*—are back with *It Happened One Season*. Even more inventive than their bestselling first anthology, *It Happened One Season* presents four love stories set during an unforgettable Regency social season—each passion-rich novella based on the same themes chosen by readers during a month-long online contest...yet each one surprisingly, delightfully unique!

It Happened One Season Details

Date : Published March 29th 2011 by HarperCollins e-books (first published March 29th 2001)

ISBN :

Author : Stephanie Laurens , Jacquie D'Alessandro , Candice Hern , Mary Balogh

Format : Kindle Edition 437 pages

Genre : Romance, Historical Romance, Historical, Anthologies, Regency, Historical Fiction

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From Reader Review It Happened One Season for online ebook

Megzy says

The common theme was the younger brother, a war veteran, is told he needs to get married and begot sons because the older titled brother has only produced girls and they can't afford to have some reckless relative to inherit the title. I liked the first one the most.

Melanie says

I reviewed this book for Romance Reader At Heart.

RRAH's THOUGHTS AND PONDERINGS:

The first anthology from these amazing ladies, IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT was so good that I was eagerly awaiting their second endeavor with IT HAPPENED ONE SEASON. With the exception of Ms. D'Alessandro, all the other authors are on my keeper shelf, and I had very high expectations, which, I have to be honest, were met.

As the blurb states, this book offers four different stories with the same plot line. All four of the heroes are military men, while our heroines are wallflowers and have been firmly 'on the shelf'. Since this is an anthology, I've decided to read 'Fate Strikes a Bargain' first, then from there on I went to 'Only Love', followed by 'The Seduction of Sebastian Trantor', leaving 'Hope Springs Eternal' for last, as I'm not familiar with the author. As of right now, I intend to correct that fact and familiarize myself with said author because I truly loved her contribution to this book.

In 'Fate Strikes a Bargain', Candice Hern gives us Nathaniel Beckwith and Phillippa Reynolds. They meet while both are in hiding from the throng at a ball. It doesn't take Nat long to realize that this charming, if not dazzling, woman is all that he needs in a wife, so he proposes to her on the spot, even after she tells him of her disability, a pronounced limp. And while they strike a bargain, it's a bit more difficult convincing their respective families to go along with them, so they agree to court for the remainder of the Season, just to appease their family.

I loved these two, and I wished the story was longer so that we'd learn more of Nat and his Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Philippa's coping with her disability. However, for a short story, Ms. Hern has yet outdone herself. I thoroughly enjoyed this well told, warm and compelling love story.

Mary Balogh's 'Only Love' was so good, it made me cry. Our hero in this tale is Major Jack Gilchrist, and our heroine Cleo Pritchard, a war widow of unremarkable looks. Both are surprised and delighted to encounter each other at a ball as they've had a previous encounter long ago. Cleo's husband was his commanding officer, and Jack was the one to break the sad news of her husband's passing. During that brief moment of despair, they shared a kiss, which neither ever forgot.

Jack, aware that he has to wed as soon as possible, decides to propose to her the day after the ball. Our heroine, being a practical person, has some doubts, so she proposes a counter offer of her own to our hero. She'll accept his proposal on one condition only: if, by the end of the Season, it's proven that she can conceive and give him an heir.

What's a man to do when given such a proposal? Read this sweet love story in which Ms. Balogh's superb writing held me spellbound from the beginning to the end.

'The Seduction of Sebastian Trantor' was Stephanie Laurens' turn in introducing us to her own war hero, Sebastian Trantor, code breaker during the wars. As with the other hero's, Sebastian must marry posthaste to prevent his cousin "Mad Freddie" from inheriting.

Tabitha Makepeace has a mystery to solve in order to capture a blackmailer. Nothing will deter this young lady, not even a locked door of a library at a ball she's attending. And that's how she comes face-to-face with our hero, who is himself hiding in the same library. Since the evidence she uncovers is in code, Sebastian offers her his services; but they get discovered, and in order to save her reputation, Sebastian proposes to her on the spot and in front of witnesses. Both are in accord and are planning to use their sham of 'betrothal' as cover while in hot pursuit of the bad guys.

As usual, Ms. Laurens' heroine is sharp and witty, and we get drawn into a story of mystery and intrigue while rooting for our hero as he tries to convince his lady love that she's the perfect wife material for him.

And now we come to the last story, 'Hope Springs Eternal' by Jacquie D'Alessandro.

Captain Alec Trentwell is a man on a mission to tell the truth of the death of Edward Markham, our heroine's brother. He was her brother's commander, and eaten with guilt, feels that in voicing the truth and his part in it, he will be set free. What our hero's not counting on is the lust that he begins to feel towards our unassuming heroine.

Penelope Markham is on a verge of destitution as she finds herself fired from her governess position. She's also an aspiring artist, with no prospects in sight because of a scandal that happened in Italy as she attempted to sculpt a nude of a man. This is where our hero Alec comes in and attempts to come clean; but instead, guilt and attraction kicks in, so he offers her a commission to paint his portrait instead. That same night, however, while attending a ball in his honor, our hero feels compelled to offer for her hand, and she accepts.

I loved the way this story developed, and I fell in love with Ms. D'Alessandro's writing. Every page was filled with feeling, and you just couldn't help but be drawn to Alec and Penelope's tale of conflict and true love.

While we found all four couples share the same fate, we're given four unique stories of happily-ever-after that were well-written and compelling. All four couples were very likeable, and I would be hard-pressed to choose a favorite one. I liked them all equally.

Each tale was well-written with three-dimensional characters, steady pacing, and I found them each unique in their own way. All of them could well stand on their own, and I would have gladly read them if they each had a book of their own.

Melanie

Dls says

The Mary Balogh piece was up to her usual high standards. The Candice Hearn was also charming. The other two were much less appealing. I haven't read Stephanie Laurens in years, and this book reminds me

why; the heros and heroines are all alike, and they seem to ignore the conventions of the period she writes about. Its completely unconvincing that a society hero and heroine of the period, even when pretend-engaged, would cavort around the countryside for a couple of days in a carriage, and agree without a moment's comment to spend the night together in one room.

Wendy says

I listened to the audio version with Anna Flosnik and Simon Prebble. Four novellas, a fairly fluffy, light hearted listen, with the premise of all four being pre-determined.

1. Laurens : as usual with Stephanie Laurens there was the irritating, bossy heroine and the overbearing, protective, know-it-all hero. The 'bedroom' scenes were identical to every other book she's ever written - I reckon all of her heroes attend the same 'sex school'! Enough said - barely scraped 3 stars
 2. Balogh: even in a novella Mary Balogh writes a story worth reading/listening to. I really enjoyed it. 4 stars
 3. D'Alessandro: I didn't really enjoy this one, probably not really fair to follow a Balogh but it was at least on a par with the Laurens. 3 stars
 4. Hern: I was really pleasantly surprised with this lovely little book with quite a deep story about a young lady, lame from birth and a hardened, anti-social ex soldier. The two enter into an unconventional agreement. Loved it. 4 stars
-

Andree says

3.5 stars, but I'm in a good mood, because this is essentially an anthology of marriage/engagements of convenience.

Why are there not more of those? I would read the heck out of those.

Seriously, this is an anthology of younger sons of Earls being told by their older brother that his wife can't have any more children, so younger son needs to get married and produce a male heir post-haste.

Seriously, that's entertainment value in and of itself.

The first is by far my favourite. Because it involves a mystery and a cunning plan along with a fake engagement (which the heroine is free to dissolve at the end of the season once they've solved their mystery). I also just found the dynamic all kinds of delightful.

I would have loved the last one more, if the writing had been a little subtler. I like the idea of the last one a lot. The dynamic between the two leads is great. She has a limp, he's suffering from post-traumatic stress from the war. And they treat each other as equals. It starts strong and then peters out. Although, the third is by far the worst for sentimental writing. (view spoiler)

The second one is sweet. I almost wish it was longer. I think I like it more in hindsight.

But the first is still the best. For scheme reasons.

Cathiecaffey says

It Happened One Season is an Anthology with the same four Avon Historical Romance authors that wrote It Happened One Night in 2008. In It Happened One Night, there was a common theme that the authors Stephanie Laurens, Mary Balogh, Jacquie D'Alessandro and Candice Hern created. Each author wrote a story about a proper young lady free from society's constraints due to being stranded at a remote inn where she comes face to face with the one that ends up being her HEA (Happily Ever After). This time around, the publisher had readers suggest what themes they would most like to read. A winner was picked, and they had the above mentioned story lines as well as:

The hero must find a bride because and produce a male heir.

The big difference with It Happened One Season, versus It Happened One Night is that there are several requirements in the story while the previous one was more open. So for me, reading one story after another, felt too much of the same story at first. Once I put aside repetitiveness, I enjoyed the next three stories more. They were focused on the hero and heroine rather than the circumstances and changed my opinion of the book. Since these four authors are all favorites of mine, I rarely have any criticism. I'm a huge fan of historical romance so I'm never one to have much of any issues with what I read since I love a variety despite having favorite themes (beauty and the beast, marriage of convenience, etc). After a bit of a slow start with the first story, the rest pulled it up.

First up was The Seduction of Sebastian Trantor by Stephanie Laurens. Our hero Sebastian Montgomery Trantor, is very well read and indulges in hieroglyphics, which I believe is decoding hidden words through codes. He resides in an Abbey healing both physically and emotionally from the war. Sebastian's brother, Thomas, interrupts his serene life with a visit. Thomas and his wife have five children, all girls, so he tells Sebastian to marry so their cousin- a wastrel- won't inherit. Thus, Sebastian goes and attends the Season. Sebastian hides out in the library at a ball and discovers the heroine, Tabitha Makepeace searching a desk. Tabitha has discovered that engaged girls are being blackmailed and she is determined to discover who the culprit is. Sebastian and Tabitha end up working together to solve the crime. Sebastian figures a fictional engagement to Tabitha would benefit them both. He wouldn't have to attend any more balls and Tabitha could use his decoding skills to find who is blackmailing the ladies.

Tabitha feels she is a plain un-marriageable female on the shelf. Even though Sebastian lets her believe it's a fictional engagement, he plans to convince her that it would solve both their issues if they enter a marriage of convenience. Stephanie Laurens story was one of the longest in the anthology. It was adventurous and fun to read about the sleuthing. Although the HEA does happen, and they declare their love for one another, it didn't truly click with me- that spark that I usually can sense from the hero and heroine wasn't quite there. Beautiful wording by this author, very poetic, but that feeling of 'real and breathtaking' when they came together just wasn't there for me.

Grade: C

The second story is Only Love by Mary Balogh. Cleopatra Pritchard, Cleo, is a young widow that was married for five years and widowed for five years. Now 27, she believes that she will never marry again, as no one wants or wanted her. Cleo also thinks she'll never have a lover. She was married to Colonel Aubrey Pritchard who was 23 years her senior. He didn't want to court her, and wanted a biddable, plain lady to minister to his needs and not be a distraction to his men. Cleo felt so plain and overweight at that time of her life, she would have married anyone. Cleo has matured and gained confidence in the past decade, but her manner and behavior can still be awkward especially around men. Cleo has spent the last 4 Seasons with no

suitors. Just as Cleo is about to give up and focus on her volunteering she meets Jack Gilchrist.

Cleo had met Jack once before when she was married as he was in the Colonel's troop. Jack's brother Matthew, informs Jack that he must find a wife and marry. Although Jack's physical scars have healed, his emotional ones from the war have not. He hasn't recovered from his aversion to being in the public and loathes others calling him a hero. He saw so much devastation in the war, that when he returned, stories about him and the adoration that society subjected him to had him re-living the war over and over. When Jack sees Cleo at the ball, he's happy to see someone there he knows that isn't a young marriage minded miss.

Cleo never forgot a kiss they shared some years back, the only passionate kiss that she's experienced. Jack remembers it as well and never understood why he reacted to her that way at their one and only meeting. When together, Cleo's shyness nearly disappears. Jack blurts out a proposal, because he thinks they would suit. Mary Balogh has a way with bringing different things, people, and events into the story that bring smiles and chuckles as well as sadness- almost tears. The relationship shows in the hero and heroine's words and behavior. I thoroughly loved Cleo and Jack's story! Even now, a couple weeks after reading, I still smile when I think about them. Another huge positive of each of these stories is being able to read an Epilogue that held a beautiful future for them. Especially so with *Only Love*.

Grade: A-

Hope Springs Eternal by Jacquie D'Alessandro gives us the story of Miss Penelope Markham, who was involved in a scandal due to her art. Penelope is witty and often gets herself into trouble because of her carefree ways. As a gifted artist, she's been dismissed from being an art teacher and returns home where she meets the hero for the first time. Alec Trentwell served in the war with Penelope's twin brother, Edward. Penelope often wrote to Edward who shared his letters with Alec. Thus Alec felt he got to know Penelope – so much so that he feels responsible for her. Edward died in the war, but during his life he was Alec's commanding officer and best friend. Alec feels guilty for Edward's death, so he plans to tell Penelope what happened to her brother in the war and apologize. Alec then plans to spend his time secluded in the small cottage he purchased. Alec is suffering from flashbacks and nightmares about all he experienced in Waterloo and Penelope senses Alec's emotional scars.

Alec enjoys Penelope's company, so he puts off his original plan and conversation. Alec is enjoying his new life and is afraid he will lose Penelope if he tells her how Edward died. Alec is told to wed to provide a heir, and conveniently, he and Penelope are in love with each other. Despite that, he's terrified he will lose her. This story by Jacquie D'Alessandro may at times bring you close to tears. It is a beautifully emotional novella. Jacquie is presently writing contemporary romances. I dearly miss her historical romances and hope she comes back to writing more of her wonderful historicals.

Grade: B

The last story, *Fate Strikes a Bargain* by Candice Hern, brings us Captain Nathaniel Beckwith and Philippa Reynolds. Again following the "being required to marry and have a heir" theme, Nat's brother, Lord Dearne interferes with Nat's matrimonial plans. Philippa and Nat meet when Nat discovers her hiding in an attempt to escape the crush of a ball. Nat finds Philippa refreshingly candid and tolerant of his dark mood. Philippa's herself and her respect for his emotions leads them to having very open and frank communication. Philippa is empathic as she's dealt with her physical disability all her life. Philippa was born with a severe limp. She tolerates her over-protective parents but doesn't limit herself or let it hinder her enjoyment of as active a life as she can physically handle. But Philippa's disability often causes a sort of social ostracism. Nat sees past that much in the same way she sees past his manners (or lack thereof). While they both feel like they don't fit in with society, they realize that they fit together!

Nat can be harsh with his words, but not towards her, and Philippa is too eager for confrontation and very blunt! It was refreshing to see how they meshed. A bargain of marriage is made, though Philippa's parents

force some courting where they get to know each. During this time they begin healing together, and find so many strengths between and within them. Nat had loved the army, but grew increasingly melancholy as he realized that the fighting at Waterloo had left him traumatized with nightmares and flashbacks of the battle. This is very evident through the story and emotional to read. The author details the feelings that Nat and Philippa are experiencing nicely. As their relationship grows, the bargain is sweetened! And the epilogue is bittersweet! Well worth reading. It ends up that fate and love brings Nat and Philippa together after all.
Grade: A

When the book started I thought it would end up too similar, but they end up being so unique and special stories. I hope the authors do this again!

Overall Grade: B+

willaful says

A pretty insipid anthology. The Balogh story is sweet, and I liked the pairing in the Hearn story -- a disabled, overly protected heroine and a hero with PTSD. The other two stories were too dull to finish.

F. says

Four authors come together to write four different love stories that happened during the same year in Season time. There is blackmail, war heroes, love affairs, and other action. The stories include: The Seduction of Sebastian Tranton by Stephanie Laurens; Only Love by Mary Balogh; Hope Springs Eternal by Jacquie D'Alessandro; and Fate Strikes a Bargain by Candice Hern.

A brief summary:

"The Seduction of Sebastian Tranton": Sebastian must find a bride after his brother had a fifth daughter and no way can his wife have more children due to labor complications. Sebastian attends parties and decides to escape to the host's library. There he finds an unexpected visitor, Tabitha. She is on an investigation, and Sebastian agrees to help, but they must pretend they are engaged.

"Only Love": Jack Major must marry, so he can ensure there is an heir to the family estate. He realizes he is in love with Cleo Pritchard after he sees her at a ball. (They first met abroad during a war). Jack wants to marry Cleo, but Cleo wants to be his mistress until she is sure she can carry a child from Jack.

"Hope Springs Eternal": Alex must find Penelope to tell her the news of her brother's death and how he had died. When Alex meets Penelope he vows to take care of her, but yet he still hasn't told her about how he had killed her brother.

"Fate Strikes A Bargain": Nathaniel is not sure how to get back into the Season after being in war for so long. He takes a breather as he steps out in the hallway, only to meet Phillipa, who has a limp. Nathaniel asks Phillipa to marry him because they are very honest with each other when they first meet.

I received this book from Harper Collins' Avon Romance.

Lisa Kay says

★★★ ½ ? - Overall

I listened to the audiobook; the two alternating narrators are Simon Prebble and Anne Flosnik. At first, I thought my lower rating on Ms. Laurens' story was due to my discomfort in listening to a distinguished, elderly English gentleman narrating the love scenes; however, it didn't bother me when he narrated Ms. D'Alessandro's tale. Or maybe I had just become used to his voice.

The premise on this one is great. What would happen if the second in line to a title, inundated by nieces, was needed to produce a male heir? Well, he'd best marry first. This anthology, by four authors, is a pleasant one.

The Seduction of Sebastian Trantor, by Stephanie Laurens ★★★??

Only Love, by Mary Balogh★★★★?

The best of the bunch, but then I'm bias with regards to Ms. Balogh's works.

Hope Springs Eternal, by Jacquie D'Alessandro ★★★ ½ ?

Very nice; held my interest through-out.

Fate Strikes a Bargain, by Candice Hern

Looks like I've found a new author to read. Starts out slow and a little tedious, but ends up ★★★ ½ ?

Lady Wesley says

Nice, but fairly meh set of short stories. The improbable set-up just didn't do anything for me. The best of the lot was Candice Hern's "Fate Strikes a Bargain," which was a moving story of one soldier's PTSD.

Mary Gramlich says

IT HAPPENED ONE SEASON

written by Stephanie Laurens, Jacquie D'alessandro, Candice Hern, Mary Balogh

03/11 - HarperCollins Publishers - Mass Market Paperback, 432 pages

To a soldier what is more dangerous the battlefield or love?

The Seduction of Sebastian Trantor by Stephanie Laurens: With his brother unable to produce an heir the responsibility of finding and marrying a woman capable of the task falls to Sebastian Trantor. A former soldier who loves the unexpected but does not love the Ton at all because it is unpredictable. But a pleasant surprise arrives in the form of Tabitha Makepeace who it turns out envisions herself a spy or sorts. She is trying to solve a mystery and find the blackmailer out to hurt her friend's reputations. It seems when teamed up with Sebastian the odds are good the culprit will get caught as they are two great minds who like the puzzle and search for the answers unconventionally. Lies, deceit and blackmail all rolled up into a neat package for the two who not only find the criminal but also discover that love can be a complete and utter delight when you least expect it.

Only Love by Mary Balogh: Cleo Pritchard was an unrecognized beauty who felt that everyone tossed aside

and left her as unproductive. Even though she was married, during his lifetime her husband was very uncaring and only needed a body in his life not a warm, loving wife in his bed. Jack Gilchrist was faced with his own drama in that he had to marry to save the family estate and find a wife tomorrow and who should walk in to solve that problem but the beautiful Cleo. All Cleo wanted was a lover, but Jack wanted something permanent and the two shall meet somewhere in the middle of the bed and decide who will win this battle of the wits. Let's see how bountiful this couple can be.

Hope Springs Eternal by Jacquie D'Allesandro: to right a wrong Alec Trentwell has to find Miss Penelope Markham the sister of the man he believes he murdered on the battlefield. He is overcome with guilt and his sense of duty compels him to tell her what he has done. But when he sees Penelope he never imagines that the only thought on his mind was to ask for her hand in marriage. Alec knows she is imperfect and reassures himself that the truth will set him free just not right this minute because he has to kiss Penelope before she walks out of his life. The truth will be told and the test of love will be given for both of them.

Fate Strikes a Bargain by Candice Hearn: Nathaniel Beckwith and Philippa Reynolds are masters at hiding their imperfections and staying away from the crowd, especially anyone in the ton. Nathaniel and Philippa are not about the rules or the timing and never about the proper behavior because they know nothing gets accomplished with too many politically correct statements. They are misfits that find one another and never forget that you may limp into a relationship but a leap of faith will help you fall in love.

The theme is this anthology cannot be summed up in one word here or there. Yes each one of these stories does have a military hero and a woman with something unique about her, but other than that each one stands alone in the way it is written and the building of the characters love and passion between them. The stories flow from one to another without missing a heartbeat of love or a whisper of desire and that makes this book a wonderful read.

Hilcia says

This was an interesting historical romance anthology and as with many an anthology a mixed bag for me. All the authors stuck to the one plot line they planned to follow: The second son of an earl who is back from the war and needs to marry to provide an heir for the family because his older brother only has daughters. And the female protagonist who is considered a spinster, plain looking and has never had a beau or in some cases experienced real love.

However, even though all the authors had to follow the above mentioned plot line, each story is very different and tailored to each author's writing style. I specially liked Stephanie Laurens' novella, *The Seduction of Sebastian* and Mary Balogh's *Only Love*. Both novellas had well-plotted stories and romances that grew slowly but surely. The characterization was also excellent for novellas and they both felt like much longer reads. *Hope Springs Eternal* by Jacquie D'Alessandro was the weakest story in my opinion, with a rushed romance and very little conflict; and *Fate Strikes a Bargain* by Candice Hearn was a good read, but not one that stayed with me.

Congratulations to Phyl from Phyl's Quilts and Books! Your idea for the book was wonderful and I enjoyed reading all about it. :)

Katie says

I shall give you 3 stars overall!

3 stars for the Laurens story. I, um, don't remember it very well at this point, but it was fun! Just not in love with the execution.

3 stars for the Balogh, too. Mostly, I remember thinking it would work a lot better if it were longer. Oh, and I'm not a fan of pining or instalove, which were combined here, but, uh, also at first seemed like she had been simply attracted to him five(ish) years ago, but then it turned to I'VE BEEN IN LOVE YOU WITH YOU FOR FIVE YEARS. Okay.

1 star for the D'Alessandro. It started out okay. A little different, but it just really dragged for me. Plus, okay, the hero only sought out the heroine to tell her THE TRUTH. But then he delays telling her. Okay, I got it the first time, but then he MARRIES HER and still isn't telling her. And then he tells her and her reaction is kind of bizarre and two pages of DRAMA then it is all okay.

4 stars for the Hern. I liked this a lot. I like practical heroes and heroines. I liked them going into the marriage with such good understanding between them.

AND the heroine was born with a displaced hip and ME TOO. This is what I wrote to Beth about it, "For her, in the Regency era, it means a terrible limp. For me, in modern times, it meant I spent the first six months of my life in a brace. It's not something that has affected my life (at least, the life that I can remember!) or something I think about very often, but it's part of my identity. And seeing it in a book like this . . . THAT'S SO GREAT. I'M SO HAPPY."

So that was very awesome. And this was heading to 5 stars, but the ending wasn't great. Still, I'd read more by Hern.

Kimberly says

My review originally posted at Joyfully Reviewed: <http://www.joyfullyreviewed.com/new-r...>

A reclusive former soldier, the younger brother of a titled lord, must marry in order to ensure the succession of his family line. A shy or unattractive heroine who has never had a suitor. What do these plot points have in common? They were picked by readers to be the basis for the four stories in *It Happened One Season*. Four talented voices in historical romance have reunited to take on the challenge of creating unique novellas using these elements.

“The Seduction of Sebastian Trantor” by Stephanie Laurens

After his fifth niece is born, Sebastian Trantor agrees to marry and beget himself an heir. The only problem? He can't seem to find a tolerable prospective bride. Until one night at a ball he catches Tabitha Makepeace breaking into a desk in their host's library. Tabitha's headstrong nature and determination to catch a blackmailer targeting her friends captures Sebastian's attention. And when the two are caught in the library, Sebastian saves Tabitha's reputation by claiming they're engaged. Though he tells Tabitha their

“engagement” will only last while he helps her catch the blackmailer, in truth, Sebastian is sure that Tabitha is the perfect bride for him. He just has to convince her of that.

Of all the stories in the anthology, “The Seduction of Sebastian Trantor” feels the most blatantly constructed, as if the elements of the common plot were listed to be taken care of. However, once Sebastian and Tabitha’s story hits its stride, the awkwardness of the setup vanishes and a fun Regency romp is left in its stead. Tabitha is endearingly quirky and Sebastian both seductive and scholarly. They make a good team as they hunt down the blackmailer and they fit equally well as a couple. While there’s a bit of an awkward start to “The Seduction of Sebastian Trantor,” in the end Stephanie Laurens delivers her usual entertaining brand of romance.

“Only Love” by Mary Balogh

Cleo Pritchard has been married and widowed, but she’s never truly had a lover or a suitor. In fact, the only man who has ever truly “seen” her was Major Jack Gilchrist. But of course, though Cleo treasures the memory of her one brief glimpse of love, she has no delusions that Jack even remembers her.

Jack may not have remembered Cleo until he sees her once more, but once he does he can’t get his mind off of her. Cleo seems so content with her life and Jack knows he should be courting some young debutante whom he can wed and bed...yet the only woman he wants is Cleo. Cleo, however, doesn’t want to marry him when his sole reason for marriage is to produce an heir and she’s not certain she can have children. Can Jack convince her that, no matter what, Cleo is the bride for him?

Mary Balogh had me sighing from the first page of “Only Love.” Cleo is the embodiment of the average woman – one who isn’t beautiful or bold or extraordinary – and her realistic take on her own life both tugged at my heartstrings and helped me become invested in her story. It’s impossible not to fall into “Only Love,” for you want to see Cleo come out of her shell a bit and find happiness. Jack, who is handsome and kind, is just the man to make Cleo happy. He sees the beauty in her and appreciates Cleo for all that she is. How can you resist a hero like that? By turns sweet and softly sensual, “Only Love” is a treat to read.

“Hope Springs Eternal” by Jacquie D’Alessandro

Alec Trentwell is riddled with guilt over the death of Edward Markham. As such, he is determined to keep watch over Edward’s sister, Penelope. The beautiful artist is everything Alec desires and, most importantly, she seems to be desperately in need of funds. Since she won’t take charity, Alec commissions her to paint his portrait. His plan hits a snag when scandal threatens to ruin Penelope. Since Alec must wed anyway, he does the one thing he can to solve her plan and his: he proposes. But what will happen when Penelope learns of the role Alec played in her brother’s death?

Likeable protagonists bring life to “Hope Springs Eternal.” Penelope is an endearing, straightforward heroine that seems almost tailor-made to suit Alec, the tortured soul hero. While I liked these two together, there was a lot of buildup to Alec telling Penelope how her brother died. Yet, almost from the first it’s clear to readers that Alec’s guilt is misplaced. This doesn’t invalidate his feelings, but it does lessen the impact of “Hope Springs Eternal.” I liked “Hope Springs Eternal,” but something about the story just felt a touch short for me.

“Fate Strikes a Bargain” by Candice Hern

Nathaniel Beckwith has no desire to be out and about in society. Unfortunately, he has to find a suitable wife, which means the retired soldier must brush off his rusty manners and brave the Marriage Mart. Fate – and a strategically-placed orange tree – looks kindly on Nat when he meets the lovely Philippa Reynolds. With a disability that leaves her unable to dance or walk without a pronounced limp, Philippa is a perpetual wallflower. She also happens to be clever and kind, both traits which attract Nat immediately. He doesn’t

want to deal with the insanity that is courting a girl of the ton and she has no suitors in sight. What better solution can there be than an engagement between the pair?

If I were pressed to pick a favorite story in this anthology, "Fate Strikes a Bargain" would win, hands-down. Candice Hern charmed me from the very first page with the dynamic between Philippa and Nat. Both of them are part and yet apart from the rest of society, a fact which helps them bond rather quickly. Where most people only see Nat's military career and the fact that his son will one day be an earl, Philippa sees the man himself. Nat, too, sees beyond the surface. In Philippa's case, almost everybody – including those that love her best – sees only her disability. Nat sees *her*, listens to her, and, quite naturally, falls for her. I confess, Ms. Hern made me both smile and positively melt with their romance and I finished "Fate Strikes a Bargain" an incredibly satisfied reader.

Can four different authors take the same plot elements and create four very different stories? Yes. The stories by Mses. Laurens, Balogh, D'Alessandro, and Hern are all unique, entertaining tales. ***It Happened One Season*** is a wonderful anthology and fans of historical romance are sure to be delighted by this book.

kris says

Four veterans return and are told they must find a bride and begat some kids asap. They meet four ladies facing another season without any suitors. 3.5 stars.

The Seduction of Sebastian Tranton, Stephanie Laurens

Sebastian Tranton likes to solve puzzles and hates to flirt. So he hides out in his buddy's library and runs into Tabitha, who has a puzzle that needs solving. After deciding that he'll a) solve her puzzle, and b) marry her face off, he convinces her to pretend to be engaged for the length of their mission! WILL LOVE OVERCOME ALL.

I DID NOT HATE THIS. 1. I FUCKING LOVE PUZZLES. 2. PUZZLES. 3. It wasn't even like the puzzle made up much of the story, but I still appreciated that it was included. PUZZLES. I also kind of enjoyed how the relationship between Tabitha and Sebastian progressed; how he treated her as a partner rather than a hindrance. I DON'T KNOW WHAT THIS MEANS?? 3 stars.

Only Love, Mary Balogh

Jack (on his mama-finding mission) runs into Cleo (the widow of his former commander) at one of the balls. After proposing, they embark on a baby-making affair so that Cleo can prove herself fertile before tying herself to Jack for life. WILL FEELINGS PROVE THEM FULL TIME IDIOTS.

I was hesitant about this one at first because a baby-making affair sounds...rife with problems. But I really should just trust in my author in strife (Balogh) for her angst gives me strength. While Cleo has 6-year-old insta-love burning bright for Jack, she also suffers from the emotional cruelty of her first marriage. It wasn't great, sure, but it was a solid six-chapter narrative, and for that I award it 3.75 stars.

Hope Springs Eternal, Jacquie D'Alessandro

Alec needs to tell Penelope that he's responsible for her brothers death, but pesky boners keep getting in the way. Will their marriage of two months be enough to overcome this HORRIBLE SECRET?

FIRST TIME SEX IN A CARRIAGE. I was really a fan of how Alec was 100% INTO Penelope. At one point she's staying with his brother temporarily and his brother is like "look at all the pretty ladies!" And Alec is like "o i c only 1 HEH" and it was just...I don't know: nice, to have a hero who's like SO INTO his heroine that his boner keeps distracting him from important things. That said! Some of the dialogue was HELLA CHEESY. I definitely did not need them repeatedly quoting Pope (and the title of this piece) at each other. (I'm ignoring the epilogue.) 3.5 stars.

Fate Strikes a Bargain, Candice Hern

Nat is hiding behind an orange tree! So is Phillipa! They chat about life, limps, sucky-ass balls, and agree to get themselves hitched. WILL EMOTIONS CONQUER ALL.

This was clunky but entertaining! Nat's frustrations with himself over the lingering effects of war definitely drew attention to the fact that the emotional and psychological wounds of war are *still* not well understood or recognized. Phillipa's own small battle to be free of the coddling of her family was also well handled. Kind of questioning their intelligence as they HAVE SEX FULLY NAKED IN A FOLLY WHILE IT'S RAINING. WOULDN'T THAT SHIT BE COLD AF. 3 stars.