



Only Enchanting

Mary Balogh

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The Survivors' Club: Six men and one woman, all wounded in the Napoleonic Wars, their friendship forged during their recovery at Penderris Hall in Cornwall. Now, in the fourth novel of the Survivors' Club series, Flavian, Viscount Ponsonby, has left this refuge to find his own salvation—in the love of a most unsuspecting woman....

Flavian, Viscount Ponsonby, was devastated by his fiancée's desertion after his return home. Now the woman who broke his heart is back—and everyone is eager to revive their engagement. Except Flavian, who, in a panic, runs straight into the arms of a most sensible yet enchanting young woman.

Agnes Keeping has never been in love—and never wishes to be. But then she meets the charismatic Flavian, and suddenly Agnes falls so foolishly and so deeply that she agrees to his impetuous proposal of marriage.

When Agnes discovers that the proposal is only to avenge his former love, she's determined to flee. But Flavian has no intention of letting his new bride go, especially now that he too has fallen so passionately and so unexpectedly in love.

Only Enchanting Details

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From Reader Review Only Enchanting for online ebook

Dorine says

A Recommended Read! Will also be posted at TBRMountainRange.com with other Recommended Reads.

Enchanting aptly describes Mary Balogh's newest release in the SURVIVORS' CLUB series, ONLY ENCHANTING. It may be Flavian's, Viscount Ponsonby's, impression of Agnes Keeping when he first meets her, but I was just as enchanted with Flavian and his interaction with Agnes throughout this beautifully written novel. Author Mary Balogh made me laugh within the first few pages and I knew at that moment that this was a book to savor. What great characterization—so entertaining!

At twenty-six, Agnes Keeping had already been abandoned by her mother as a child, married and widowed, and now lives a quiet life with her elder sister, Dora Debbins, in a small cottage in Gloucestershire. Agnes' dearest friend is the newly married Sophia, wife of Viscount Darleigh, who has invited the sisters to a ball at their mansion, Middlebury Park. The ball was to be a rendition of a harvest ball years past but it is also a reception for the newly married couple who had done so quietly without much fuss. This first ball for Agnes is where she falls in love or lust; she's not really sure which emotion stands out more, but neither are what she envisioned for herself.

Viscount Ponsonby, known by his closest friends as Flavian "Flave" Arnott, has recovered as much as possible, or more so than expected, from his time at war. As one of the seven Survivors' Club members, he looks forward to their annual gathering at Penderris Hall. This year their meeting has been unanimously agreed upon to be moved to Middlebury Park rather than Penderris Hall, as his dear friend Viscount Darleigh, who is blind, doesn't want to leave his wife so soon after she gave birth to their son. Flavian still struggles with words and memory, so although he recognizes the woman he met at the ball months ago, when he encounters her again on the way to the Survivors' Club meeting, he can't for the life of him remember her name. He does remember he thought her to be enchanting but why that word, he can't imagine.

This is the first novel I've read by author Mary Balogh and it's easy to recognize why her books are so popular. I was completely mesmerized by chapter one and laughed immediately at the sisters' perception of the ball, the attendees and most especially, Viscount Ponsonby. Flavian's mocking eyebrow, hooded eyes and his rogue way of posturing, while his slight stutter seems to be his only fault, struck my funny bone from the very beginning.

Agnes Keeping has Flavian's measure right from the start, and her sense of humor, as well as her heart, is a joy to witness as these two soon-to-be-lovers banter their way to marriage. I laughed a lot but also there was such deep emotion locked away inside each of them that was evenly distributed throughout their story. It's not an easy journey but what they learn along the way makes the reader feel as if this couple will have a long lasting love.

It's rare to find an author who can pull me in within a few paragraphs and make me feel the ambiance of this era in history, but also make me laugh at the sensibility of those times as well. Mary Balogh has a keen eye for mannerisms which make her characters come alive, sometimes with imperfections that stand out in glorious hues.

As book four in the SURVIVORS' CLUB series, ONLY ENCHANTING easily reads as a standalone, but if

you're anything like me, you'll want to repeat the experience by gathering up the rest of the series for a marathon. I wasn't confused while I read, I just felt left out by not having read what seems like a thoroughly enjoyable series about healing after being at war. Each of the Survivors' Club members were injured in some way so their camaraderie and care with each other is endearing. I can't wait to know the rest of their stories after reading this one.

ONLY ENCHANTING is captivating and delightful, full of humor, forgiveness and love, exactly what a great romance should be. A Recommended Read!

Reviewed by Dorine, courtesy of Romance Junkies.

Mei says

I really don't know how to rate this book!

The first 100 pages or so were so much drawn out that I really considered DNF, but I kept in my mind all the high ratings my friend here gave, so I forced myself to continue reading.

In those pages almost nothing happened, or better, something happened, but it was lost (to me) in all the descriptions, questions, etc.

Just an example: the daffodil painting. A lot of pages were spend on daffodils that I was yawning. But when I rethink about them I get that that was the moment where Flavian first really noticed Agnes. But, as I said, the overflowing of descriptions just swallowed that important moment.

Maybe some like that type of writing, but I prefer more "clear" and direct way. But, again, that's only my opinion! :)

The things got more animated when they got married, but at that moment we're at the middle of the book!

All the best parts happen in the second part of the book and they're really, really good!

Agnes becomes more clearheaded. She start thinking in a linear way and acting with a strenght that I wasn't expecting from her. She admits to herself her love for Flavian and applies herself to make the best of her marriage.

I really appreciated how she acted and reacted to some very nasty things that I would not spoil for you, but I'm sure you'll recognize if you read this book! ;)

Flavian too is better. In the first part he is in a zombi state, but after his marriage he start becoming a person. Agnes' presence seems to be invigorating. She seems to bring him in the land of living. It was excellently done and I loved it!

Their love story after the marriage was very endearing, because they both understood that they had something very precious growing between them and I loved it!

I decided for the above reasons not to give it a 5 rating. I said to myself: I would give 2 stars to the first half, but 6 stars to the second, so $2+6=8$ and $8/2=4$, so 4 stars it is! :)

Lady Wesley says

Only Enchanting is only excellent -- one of Mary Balogh's best ever.

This is the fourth installment in Mary Balogh's *Survivor's Club* series, and while all of them have been good, this one is first-rate. It delivers what we've come to expect from Balogh – engaging, fully-developed characters, impeccable plotting, and a happily ever after that is not easily earned. I couldn't wait to find out what would happen next, the result being that I read it in less than one day

As the book opens, it's time for the members of the *Survivors Club* to gather for their annual reunion, but instead of going to Penderris Castle in Cornwall, they journey to Middlebury Park, the Gloucester estate of Vincent Hunt, Viscount Darleigh. This change in venue came about because Vincent's wife, Sophia, had recently given birth, and he would not leave her.

Living near Middlebury Park is Sophia's closest friend, Agnes Keeping, a widow who resides with her older sister Dora, a music teacher.

At the age of twenty-six, Agnes Keeping had never been in love or ever expected to be -- or even wished to be. She rather chose to be in control of her own emotions and her own life, such as it was.

Agnes was married at age 18 to an older man, "a neighboring gentleman of sober address," and while there was no love between them, there was affection, and Agnes was content. She leads a prosaic life in the village of Inglebrook and is satisfied with painting, tending house, and visiting with neighbors. She is wary of romantic passion, which was, as we learn later, her mother's downfall.

Agnes and Dora attend a Harvest Ball at Middlebury Park and into her life strolls Flavian Arnott, Viscount Ponsonby. Flavian is handsome, witty, charming, and aloof, but his affable exterior masks enduring scars. He inherited his title only upon the death of his beloved brother, David. Shortly thereafter, Flavian suffered grievous head injuries in the Peninsular Wars. He was brought home unable to speak or even think coherently. When his fiancée, Velma, jilts him to marry his best friend, all he can do is fly into a fit of sputtering rage. Fortunately, he was taken in by the Duke of Stanbrook and spent three years recuperating with the other members of the *Survivor's Club*, but he still speaks with a stammer and suffers from memory loss, headaches, and occasional outbursts of temper.

At the Harvest Ball, Flavian dances with Agnes, twice, and almost against her will Agnes falls ridiculously, hopelessly in love. The next day, Flavian leaves, and Agnes expects never to see him again. Six months later, though, he returns for the *Survivor's Club* gathering, and although he can't quite remember Agnes's name, he is pleased to see her again. He does recall dancing with her though and later tells her, "I expected you to be s-sensible, but your were enchanting instead."

Flavian and Agnes spend time together, exchanging the stories of their lives along with a few kisses. When Flavian suddenly proposes marriage, it is hard to know who is more surprised, but eventually Agnes accepts,

and they are married by special license the next day. But there are surprises in store when they arrive at Arnott House in London, for awaiting them there are Flavian's family along with the now-widowed Velma and her parents. All of them are expecting Flavian and Velma to reunite and marry, and they are unhappily surprised to learn that Flavian has married a nobody from nowhere. Moreover, Agnes is unhappily surprised to learn that Flavian has married her in order to be free from his family's manipulations.

Flavian and Agnes are faced with a choice, and Agnes's first inclination is to flee – back to her lonely but safe life in Inglebrook. But it turns out that Agnes is made of sterner stuff, and Flavian is desperate to keep her in his life. They are young, but mature beyond their years, and they address their problems directly and candidly.

Agnes is a wonderful heroine. It was great fun to watch her stand up to Flavian's mother, to Velma, and even to the dragon ladies of the ton, who have their claws out after the truth about Agnes's mother comes out. As Agnes comes into her own, Flavian begins to remember more about David's death and about his own troubled relationship with Velma. Agnes and Flavian talk to one another about their problems like mature adults, which happens all too seldom in romance.

With her trademark faultless execution and insight, Mary Balogh shows how these two emotionally scarred people work together to address their problems and find the true meaning of love. They make a beautiful couple, and I highly recommend this book.

My thanks to Signet and NetGalley for an advance copy of this book.

♥Rachel♥ says

4.5 Stars

Flavian, Viscount Ponsonby is one six friends that call themselves "The Survivors Club" after recovering together from grave injuries suffered during the Napoleonic War. It took Flavian some time to recover from being shot in the head, and still he suffers the effects of his injury. As if that wasn't bad enough, when he finally became lucid he found out his betrothed, Velma, ended their engagement so she could marry his best friend, Len, after thinking Flavian would never fully recover. Now years later, Len dies leaving Velma a widow and the way open for them to be together. Both of their family's pressure to put these two together again, but Flavian wants nothing to do that.

In the present, meeting the young widow Agnes Keeping and pursuing her is a pull Flavian can't resist. It's not that Agnes is stunningly beautiful, but there's something about her that becomes more enchanting every time they meet. It's as if his unconscious mind knows exactly what he needs.

He wanted to claim her body for his own.

And he would be safe.

Strange thought—and it was not the first time that it had popped into his head like an alien thing.

Safe.

Safe from whom?

And from what?

Agnes has avoided passion and falling in love since it brought hurt and ruin to her family. When she married

Mr. Keeping it was for companionship and because he was a logical match, but she was hardly overcome with desire. Five short years later she was widowed at the age of twenty-three. Now Agnes lives with her beloved sister, contented in life even if she is a little lonely at times. When Viscount Ponsonby comes to Agnes' little town to visit with his Survivors Club friends, her attempts at avoiding passion and love go out the window. After a whirlwind of stolen meetings and steamy encounters, Flavian proposes and Agnes, in spite of her hesitancy, can't help herself and so they marry.

To outward appearances Flavian's intention when he chose to marry Agnes was an avoidance tactic at best, and at worst a means of revenge on Velma for leaving him after his injuries all those years ago. At first this is what it seems to poor Agnes when she discovers the history, and it was a knife to her heart! I ached for her and wanted to smack Flavian for a bit! But things are not as they seem, and there is much more at play here that Flavian doesn't immediately clue into because of holes in his memory. But all along his subconscious registered what his conscious mind didn't recall. AND it becomes obvious that Flavian really cares for Agnes and he *wanted* to marry her just as she wanted to marry him.

I loved that even when the situation felt so very hurtful to Agnes she didn't throw everything away by running, but rather she thought things through. She was a truly sensible, understanding and kind woman, perfect for an injured soul like Flavian. He more than redeems himself as the story plays out and my heart swelled with happiness for these two. They had an immediate attraction that was at first fueled by passion and longing, but then grew into a beautiful bond of love.

I don't read many historical romances but I loved this story so much! I felt like I was transported into a time something like what's portrayed in *Sense and Sensibility*, one of my all-time favorite period movies! Ms. Balogh's compelling writing had me high on emotions ranging from despair and anger for Agnes and Flavian to joy and happiness over how it all turned out!

I definitely want to check out the rest of this series, and I hope there will be a romance written for Dora, Agnes' sister. There were hints of one stirring.

A copy was kindly provided by Signet in exchange for an honest review.

This review is also posted on The Readers Den.

Caz says

This is the fourth instalment in Mary Balogh's *Survivor's Club* series, and while I have enjoyed each of the other books, **Only Enchanting** is the best to date. It's a beautifully wrought and gently moving story of two emotionally wounded people trying to navigate their way through the issues that have shaped them in order to forge a lasting and loving relationship and I adored every minute of it.

Flavian Arnott, Viscount Ponsonby, returned from the Peninsula unable to speak or understand much of what was said to him as the result of a severe head injury. His terrible frustration at both his inability to express himself and at the large gaps in his memory manifested itself in frequent bouts of savage violence and his family were planning on having him confined to an institution. Fortunately for him, George, Duke of Stanbrook, heard of his situation and arrived to bear him off to his Cornish estate, Penderris, where Flavian lived for three years while he recovered, thanks to the patience and understanding of his host and the other members of the "club".

Mrs. Agnes Keeping is a widow of twenty-six who married an older man when she was just eighteen. She was not unhappy in her marriage (although she would have liked children); her husband was a decent, kind man and she cared for him. She never wanted to fall in love, believing love and especially passion to be destructive forces, and far preferring the safety of unromantic companionship.

Agnes and her sister Dora, who is the local music teacher, live close to Middlebury Park, which is the home of Viscount Darleigh (hero of Book Two, *The Arrangement*) and his new wife Sophia. Agnes and Sophia have become good friends, and the new bride invites the sisters to attend the ball they - the Darleighs - are giving in order to celebrate their recent marriage, which will also be attended by some of Vincent's fellow Survivor's Club members.

After two dances with Flavian, Agnes is stunned and annoyed to discover herself in the grip of an unexpected and unwanted emotion – love. But the charming viscount is leaving the next day, and she is confident that as she is unlikely to ever see him again, those feelings will soon fade.

A few months later, Flavian is returning to Middlebury which has temporarily replaced Penderris as the venue for the Survivors' annual gathering due to the fact that Vincent is reluctant to leave his very pregnant wife. Approaching the house, Flavian passes a young woman he recognises – but can't for the life of him remember her name. The one thing he can recall is that, for some reason, he'd called her "enchanted".

Agnes and Flavian spend some time together during his visit, exchanging stories and kisses, and when Flavian suddenly proposes marriage, it's as much a surprise to him as it is to her! She tells herself she would be a fool to accept, that her feelings for Flavian pose a real danger to a peace of mind – yet Agnes just can't bring herself to turn him down. For his part, Flavian tries to convince himself that what he really wants is someone to take to bed on a regular basis, although it's clear to the reader that he's been smitten with Agnes from the very start.

After the wedding, the couple travels to Arnott House in London where an unpleasant surprise is awaiting them. Flavian's mother, sister, and brother-in-law have all descended on the house in expectation of his arrival, but their precipitate departure from the country means they have not received the letter advising them of his marriage. To turn things from bad to worse, also present is Velma, Lady Hazeltine, the beautiful young woman to whom Flavian had been betrothed before going to war, and who had jilted him for his best friend when it seemed as though he was never going to recover.

Flavian is well aware that his mother had hoped they would finally marry, which leads to some unpleasant realisations for Agnes. At first, her inclination is to flee back home to safety and her old life, but then it's as though a switch flips and she realises she has something worth fighting for. And fight she does, making it clear to Flavian's mother and to Velma that she's here to stay. Together, she and Flavian talk to each other and work through their problems – quite a refreshing change in a romantic novel! – and with her support, he is able to regain some of the missing pieces of his memory.

I admit that at the start of the book, I wasn't sure I was going to warm to the rather dour, overly practical Agnes. But I needn't have worried, because the author has created a multi-layered, very human character, who quickly begins to emerge from her shell and shows herself to be a passionate, clever and determined woman with a backbone of steel.

Flavian is a man whose wounds are not visible, but which nonetheless go very deep; and not all of them are attributable to his wartime experiences. He's beautiful to look at, witty and kind, but his laconic, affable exterior masks a man who is still prone to anger and frustration, for all that he has learned to control them

more effectively. He speaks with a slight stammer, which worsens when he is upset or angry, and is still haunted by his older brother's death, the fact that he wasn't with him when he died, and because he can't remember why.

One of the things that works really well in the book is the way the author explores what happens after the marriage (and not just in terms of the sex, which is not explicitly written, but pretty hot nonetheless). While Flavian and Agnes do share a deep connection, they don't know each other all that well, and there are moments when each of them displays emotions towards the other which might not be particularly appealing, but which feel very real given their situation. There's a moment, for example, when Flavian resents Agnes for the feelings she's stirring up in him – "nothing like this ever happened at Penderris", and one later in the book when Agnes believes he married her simply to thwart his mother's matchmaking scheme and she hurls at him: "There was nobody worth knowing inside that beautiful body after all, was there?" In both cases, they are able to see past those feelings of resentment and anger and to move on in a way that "real people" have to do, which adds notes of depth and maturity to the story.

Another strength of the novel is the way Ms. Balogh writes the relationships between the survivors. The unconditional love and mutual understanding they feel for one another is palpable; here are people who know when someone needs pushing and when to leave them alone, and the way they support each other is lovely to see.

Only Enchanting is beautifully written, the characters are fully-rounded and the romance is emotionally satisfying. Flavian and Agnes are engaging characters who make a well-matched couple and their HEA feels all the more deserved because of the difficulty of the journey they have undergone in order to achieve it. I really can't recommend it highly enough.

Duchess Nicole says

4.5 Stars!!

Mary Balogh is like the Mona Lisa compared to a Picasso. She's dignified and lovely, serene and quietly mysterious. There's nothing about her books that screams "READ ME!" and yet, I always do. I sink into her stories and roll around in another time, another place, another way of thinking.

This was the fourth story in the Survivor's Club series, of which I've only read two. I'll certainly go back and read the others and continue the series though. One thing that struck me about this book was how Flavian (what a name!) is just not my normal kind of hero. He's the smirking type, the kind that you expect to swindle you or something. But our heroine, Agnes, sees through all that to the insecure, hurting man beneath. Just as he sees more than the somewhat dowdy, quiet woman with a bit of a crush.

This is where Balogh excels. She writes characters that are insightful and intuitive, and then she makes the reader see what they see. And makes me fall in love with them all. In this genre, loud and flowery seems to be the norm, but Balogh's characters are all so *normal* and peaceful. And yet they still have fantastic love stories to tell.

This was...if you couldn't tell...a wonderful book about a man who's seen too much and lived through some awful experiences. Flavian has a bit of a stutter, the only thing left over from his horrific injuries in the war. His fiancée left him to marry his best friend when he was deemed a madman. Now, he's back, he's normal,

but a little bitter. He's doing some soul searching, I think, and Agnes comes along at just the right time and place. Agnes is the yin to his yang, and their romance was hold-your-breath beautiful!

Advance copy provided by the publisher for review

Manda Collins says

I think this is my favorite of the Survivors Club series so far. I love the pairing of flirtatious Flavian with practical Agnes, and it was fun to watch them learn to fit into one another's lives. I predict this will become a favorite among Balogh fans and newcomers alike. I'll certainly be rereading it soon!

Tin says

When I first met Flavian in Hugo's book, I wondered what happened to him and why he was part of The Survivors' Club because he didn't seem to belong there. The rest of the members (except for Flavian and Imogen) were clearly/visibly injured by the war: Benedict is crippled, Vincent is blind, Ralph is scarred, but Flavian only has his stutter -- and, even in the previous books, he didn't seem to have been affected that much by his experiences because he was jolly and light-hearted -- always teasing Vincent and his musical aspirations.

Now that I've read Flavian's story, I wonder how he could've survived what had happened to him: getting shot in the head, then falling off his horse (and landing on his hand) and then getting trampled. It is a miracle that the only reminder/remainder from his injuries is a stutter and some gaps in his memory. One of the greatest gaps in his memory is the circumstances of his brother's death, his relationship with Velma Frome, and his return to the Peninsula, which resulted in his devastating and near-life-ending injury.

In most stories, the key to the soul of a damaged/tortured hero is to look at those moments that shaped his character and personality -- but, in Flavian's case, I was a bit worried and afraid to unravel him. It is clear that he has been to hell and back, so why ask that he revisit it? Why dredge up all those painful memories and run the risk of shattering him? The state of his memory is both a blessing and a curse, and we secretly hope, for our hero's sake, that he has forgotten the worst of his ordeal.

As more and more members of The Survivors' Club find love and a reason to move forward in their lives, Flavian slowly considers his next move and it seems that the stars are finally aligning in Flavian's favour: Velma Frome (now the widowed Lady Hazeltine) is coming out of her year of mourning and their families are eager to get them "reacquainted", but Flavian isn't sure this is what he wants in his life right now and is grateful for the short respite (annual meeting) with his friends at Middlebury Park, Vincent's estate. It is the same mistake the people in Flavian's life make: they assume that the war is over, that he has survived, and that he has recovered, and that all is well. But, like the other members of The Survivors' Club, Flavian knows that he is still fighting a battle (a greater one inside of him) and that all is not well. We see in their stories the many different shades of guilt, of loss, of fear, of shame, etc -- but, in those same instances, we see the radiance of hope and determination.

He meets Agnes at Middleburg Park (for a second time) and it's very telling that he can remember some

details about her, considering that they had only spoken briefly and shared two dances a few months ago. Agnes Keeping seems unassuming upon first glance: a proper widow now living with her spinster older sister in a small, quiet, provincial town -- there doesn't seem to be much to her story, but Mary Balogh shows us that we are mistaken in our assumptions. Agnes is a woman of surprising depth and passion. My favourite scene of Agnes is of the daffodils, and how she wasn't satisfied with her already-wonderful painting of the daffodils and had decided to view the daffodils from a different point of view.

...she knew she was seeing only half the picture and maybe not even that much. For the trumpets of the daffodils were lifted to the sky. The petals about them faced upward. If the flowers could see, as in a sense she supposed they could, then it was the sky, rather than the grass beneath them, upon which they gazed. She, on the other hand, was looking down upon the flowers and the grass. She turned her face upward to see that the sky was pure blue, with not a cloud in sight. But now, of course, she could no longer see the daffodils.

- Chapter 3

Flavian needed someone like Agnes, someone who has been tested and strengthened by her own life experiences -- someone who views the world a little bit differently because of those experiences.

This morning she had been wearing a simple cotton dress and no bonnet. Her hair had been caught back in a plain knot at her neck. Her posture had been prim and self-contained, her expression placid. He had tried to tell himself that she was quite without sexual appeal, that he must be very bored indeed out here in the country if he was weaving fantasies about a plain, prim, virtuous widow.

Except that he was *not* bored. ...

...

And she was not plain. Or prim. And if she was virtuous -- and he did not doubt she was -- she was also full to the brim of repressed sexuality.

- Chapter 6

And Agnes needs someone like Flavian. Agnes is so afraid to step beyond her comfort zone, because she is afraid to get hurt or be betrayed. Passion is Agnes's problem. She has never experienced it and doesn't want to, so she made a sensible (but passionless) first marriage. Her mother surrendered to her passions and it destroyed their family and Agnes doesn't want that to happen to her, which is why Agnes needs someone like Flavian, who has been to the breaking limits of life, felt the most extreme of all emotions, embraced madness and betrayal and helplessness, and survived.

"You fear passion?" he asked her.

"Because it is *uncontrolled*," she cried. "Because it is selfish. Because it hurts -- other people if not oneself. I do not want passion. I do not want uncertainty. U do not want you yelling at me.

Worse than that, I do not want me yelling back. I cannot stand it. I cannot stand *this*."

- Chapter 11

Daffodils represent the opportunity that each one presents to the other. As time passes, the daffodils will fade and wither and give way to the changing seasons -- Agnes only has this chance to paint these flowers properly. And Flavian only has this chance to be with Agnes. Flavian knows that, when he leaves Middlebury Park, he will have to accede to his family's wishes and end up with Velma. It might seem that this is what he had wanted and waited for all these years, but Flavian cannot shake the doubts and questions that loom in his mind. It's truly amazing how memory is both fragile and incredibly resilient -- how it can be lost and recreated, and how it can be recovered and etched forever in our memories.

The flirtation and courtship comprise a huge chunk of this book, but there's a reason for it: as the blurb mentions, there are doubts about Flavian's motives for pursuing Agnes. Is it petty revenge against Velma? Is it rebellion against his family's expectations? It's difficult to discuss this part without spoiling it, and I've been sitting and writing this review for three days now, trying to figure out a way to talk about the latter part of the story, but I can't.

I've mentioned in my other reviews of Mary Balogh's books, I am in absolute awe of her talent. Her stories unfold so naturally, like the petals of a flower (a daffodil, perhaps? ^_^) and continue to delight days after you have reached the end and put the book down. There really is so much *more* to say about how amazing this book is, but I will leave it with this: this story promises enchantment, and it delivers. ^_^

Vintage says

Re-read:

A little mood music for the review... Harry Nelson's Jump into the Fire

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w8X6m...>

Somehow I've hooked back into the "Survivor's Club" series by Mary Balogh. For those who don't care for some of MB's more depressing romances, this is a wonderful change.

All the characters of the "Survivor's Club" are woven together and have huge presences in each book. I hate reading a book with a wonderful character only to find in that the next the series that they have been marginalized. Not so here. What a band of brothers. MB truly throws the concept that nice guys (and girls) are boring. I want the "Survivor's Club" crew as my friends although not only are they fictional, they are dead.

Back to this fun couple, Agnes (yes her name is Agnes and her poor older sister is...DORA. Bad parents just for their names alone) is a sweet, honorable widow. Flavius is the hero, and he's a blonde one which is so unfortunate, but he overcomes it with his seductive ways. Unlike many heroes he limits his abilities to seduce solely to the heroine, and even that is limited as he respects her as much as he wants her. He is, however, a charming, wannabe cad that just can't push through to true rogue/cad status. In one moment he admits he lusts after the heroine with no words of love then the next moment he is carrying his blind friend's

baby boy home mentoring him on the ways of men. Okay, umm, too cute!

Sweet and eventful romance between a rakish but honorable hero who knows a good thing when he sees it, and the h that is willing to jump into the fire with him.

Toss in the aforementioned best friends, a presumptuous and truly evil OW that doesn't get what she wants, and, hey, a great romance!!!

Jump into the fire lyrics

You can climb a mountain, you can swim the sea
You can jump into the fire but you'll never be free
You can shake me up or I can break you down
Oh, oh
We can make each other happy
Oh, we can make each other happy
We can make each other happy
Oh, we can make each other happy

Old review:

This has one of my favorite tropes or plot points, when the evil other woman gets her comeuppance. Or the very least, the H doesn't take anything lying down.

There is obviously much more to this story, but this is one of my hot buttons.

Both the MC's are wonderful and nice people. Flavian's slight stutter is frankly adorable and quite appealing. Both my father and I stutter a little so I have a fondness for this weakness/idiosyncrasy whatever you want to call it.

The Survivor series is overall well-done Regency, but this is one of the better ones.

Wendy says

Only Enchanting...another winner, this series just gets better. Mary Balogh's years of experience shows, but instead of running out of ideas her novels just get richer, more empathetic and entrancing. How has she managed to come up with the diversity shown in this series alone? Number four in the series and each story is different, each character endearing, charismatic and loveable and definitely worthy of his (the men so far) happy ever after.

This story is Flavian's, Viscount Ponsonby. Rich, bored, cynical, handsome, he is nevertheless a very unhappy and unfulfilled man. Enter plain...at least on first sight...Agnes Keeping, widowed and virtuous. She believes passion and love have no place in marriage, in spite of this, at the ball given by her friend, Sophia, wife of Vincent, Lord Darleigh a fellow survivor, she is completely captivated by Flavian after dancing with him on two occasions. He on the other hand prepares himself to be charming but bored, he is instead enchanted, by this no frills, sweet young widow with a sense of humour and no guile.

Flavian has suffered devastating injuries in the Napoleonic wars and is rescued in the nick of time and carried off to the home in Cornwall of George, Duke of Stanbrook where his terrible head injuries can heal in

the company of others with horrific injuries of their own. The Survivors Club becomes the salvation for all seven members, although supporting each other through the healing process, they cannot save each other once they finally face the world again, forever changed to their families and loved ones. Flavian's life threatening head wounds have healed, at least on the outside but he still suffers from memory loss, severe headaches and temper outbursts brought on by frustration at his inability to remember, huge chunks hovering just out of range, tantalisingly close. He knows something devastating happened, but can't catch it from his subconscious. It is somehow all wrapped up with his ex fiancé Velma, who ended their betrothal on his return from the wars, to all intents and purposes a madman. Now that he is, at least on the surface, recovered, Velma would like to resume their relationship as she is recently widowed, both her parents and his family support the match. Flavian has other ideas.

Mrs Agnes Keeping is the object of Flavian's attention, he can't explain to himself why he must marry her, he just knows she makes him feel safe. Eventually he wears down her misgivings and they marry by special license. Agnes is, against her better judgement, madly and deeply in love with Flavian, they enjoy a close and loving relationship until she discovers his previous relationship, and feels he has married her simply to wreak revenge on his ex fiancé Velma. Her gut reaction is to leave him, Flavian has discovered that Agnes is much more to him than 'safe' and does all in his power to keep her by his side.

Agnes decides to stay and with her love and care, slowly helps Flavian to unlock the secrets of his mind, he in turn helps her to face her own demons, those same demons who insist that passion has no place in marriage.

Mary Balough has crafted another fabulous page turner from her talented pen. The characters of the Survivors Club are in attendance, though slowly finding peace and love. I'd love to see George settle down, he the saviour of this group of damaged human beings, offering them help and refuge, and definitely should find his own HEA. I reckon it will be Agnes's elder sister Dora, who captures George's heart, I hope so. Again for pure entertainment value and originality...5 stars.

Shabby Girl ~ aka Lady Victoria says

This series, The Survivors Club, really shows why I love Mary Balogh as one of my most favourite authors and why her books are auto buys for me. This book, plus the previous two really are the most lovely, wonderful books.

This one is about Agnes and Flavian. You could ask, and I do, how I could love a couple with names such as that, and I do wonder why this author really does sometimes pick the most awful names, but I loved these characters anyway. Flavian is the muddle headed hero injured in the war who has recovered with certain problems, such as loss of memory and a stutter, and Agnes really is the most unromantic heroine you could ever find, but she is a very practical woman who I liked. But I so loved their story, and it was such an unexpected one. It certainly kept me glued to the pages. The hero's marriage proposal really made me laugh, as did other parts of the book. I really liked the hero, he was different for sure, but I finished this book yesterday and today whenever I think of him I either laugh or have a smile on my face. He is very endearing.

I was going to give this book four stars for the first half, for whilst I like it a lot, it didn't love it, but I knew by the end I would give it five stars. I really did love this book in the end. This couple don't have what I'd call a really passionate romance, like the last two books, but I did believe their gradual love as the story went on. The heroine fell passionately in love with the hero on first meeting at a ball six months earlier (quite

profound as she is not a frivolous woman at all). The hero I think took his time, but was smitten for some reason at the same ball, and took his time to get there over the length of the book, quite a healthy and believable scenario for these two. I really do believe that this couple will both grow in affection for each other and will have an abiding love for their whole lives. There isn't any action in this book, it's a character driven romance, and is just the type of thing I love. There are misunderstandings which are inevitable with this hero, I think, and I'm still smiling when I think of him, but they are sorted in good time with the characters talking to each other.

I was just reading on Balogh's website that she has already written the next two books, Ralph next and then Imogen, and actually has the heroine in mind for the last of the survivors to fall in love, George, the Duke, but she hasn't written it yet. I am hoping it is a character we already know and that I know who she might be, so I'll look forward to seeing if we agree who she has in mind. I so hope it's who I think it might be!

This book is not for people who want action and fast pace, it's a character driven, slow paced, lovely romance written by a very, very good writer ... the best I think.

ETA: 28/08/15 - I WAS RIGHT! DORA for George! Woohoo!!

Cee (The Mistress Case) says

The first half wasn't for me. The second half was so much better. I'm looking forward to checking out the rest of the series :)

Sophia says

The Survivor's Club series is such a unique concept for a Historical Romance series. I was on-board from the beginning mostly because I'm already a long fan of the author, but also because I love it any time a book/series is connected to a military theme or characters past or present. The Survivor's Club is a band of veterans or survivors of the Napoleonic War who were brought together to heal and support each other by an older man who lost his son followed by his wife due to the war. They came to him all with different types of wounds and injuries and in their three years healing, they became closer than many families. Each book in the series takes a different survivor and tells his or her (yes, there is one lady of the group) story. This time it's Flavian, Lord Ponsonby's story.

This is the fourth book in the series. I suppose in a pinch it can be read out of order, but I wouldn't recommend it. There is an assumption that the previous books have been read and the reader is familiar with the Survivor Club world and its characters along with the previous stories. The inter-connections going on would probably be tedious to someone unfamiliar with the stories of the three survivors who already got their backgrounds and stories told.

If one were to be exacting with the chronological sequence of events, this story's beginning parallels one of the final scenes at the end of the last book just with the perspective changing to that of the new hero and heroine. It opens at the ball/wedding reception given by Vincent and Sophie when they come home to

Vincent's family home and establish themselves in the neighborhood. The widowed Agnes Keeping and her sister live in the village and are particular friends of Sophie so they are pleased to be invited to the ball. Agnes has ordinary looks at best and is dressed in a gown that is out of fashion, but she is determined to enjoy perhaps her first and only ball. The night grows into something more when one of Vince's friends, the handsome, stylish Lord Ponsonby requests her for the first dance and later for a waltz. They get on well even through his flirting kindness, but an unexpected connection happens while Flavian whirls Agnes around the ballroom floor. He calls her enchanting, but then he is gone and she is left with her warm feelings for him slowly diminishing into a pleasant warm memory. Until he comes back and stirs her up again.

Flavian puts a smiling light manner on to hide the pain and frustration below the surface. He has physically healed from his head injury, but he still experiences debilitating headaches and has blanks in his memory. Some things he remembers all too clearly. He remembers ditching his dying brother to go to a ball and then leave to go back to the front and having David die the next day. But why did he do that? He remembers when he came back wounded and still out of his mind from his injuries and his fiancée announced that she will always love him, but now she is marrying his best friend who never did come to see him and Flavian never went to see him before he died with stuff left unresolved between them. But just being in the presence of his fellow survivors during their once a year meet-up and rediscovering the enchanting Agnes whose very person makes him feel safe and peaceful, relieves him some of that. That is until his mother sends a letter happily informing him that his former fiancée is now free of mourning and back home with her family right next door to his. Flavian's feelings are mixed, but on one thing he is certain to home he will not be returning for Easter. He is also suddenly very certain that he wants to marry the sensible, steady Agnes and he will use all his wiles to persuade her. He doesn't believe in love, but neither does she right? He'll figure out how to tell her about the rest later.

Hmmm, so this one is set at Middlebury Park in Gloucestershire Viscount Darnley's family seat. The countryside is bucolic and simple. The book's pace takes its tone from the setting and meanders its way along for some time too. It establishes who everyone is and their backgrounds and connections and proceeds with a gentle romancing of sort between Flavian and Agnes. Both of them have serious hang-ups about relationships due to their pasts so it really is slow going until Flav shakes things up a bit and blurts out a marriage proposal that takes them both by surprise. Honestly, up until this point, I'm pretty sure only a big fan of the series is going to be interested in the long build up through the Survivor Club reunion and tolerate it. Not to say that I was bored as I am a fan. I totally love the Survivors and the wives and I loved the interactions. For me, it wasn't the reunion that had me impatient, but I wanted some thing to happen between Flav and Agnes long before it did. And I mean anything- highway robbers, scandal, whatever just something other than Agnes of the tight governess lips trying to convince herself that her bland life was just perfectly perfect and Flavian trying to convince her that there is nothing wrong with living a little. Flavian cracked me up several times especially when he took to shocking Agnes just to trick a response from her

It wasn't until this interesting marital pair gets to London that the story took off and the fun began. Between Flavian's secrets and flawed memory along with a truly conniving witch, I had all the excitement I could want from the story. Wowsers, Agnes got a trial by fire as her first days as Viscountess Ponsonby took place. I was a bit unsure of dour, disapproving Agnes who is terrified to live life with passion in it, but that all changed when she set her chin and took on Flav's family, Flavian, his ex, Flavian again and the Ton in that order. Flavian got so much more than he bargained for and probably deserved at first. I truly felt sorry for him and he was doing the best he could, but he really knew how to get himself in the dog house without much effort.

"Oh you are not going to get off that lightly," she said. "It is to be a marriage forever, Flavian. You married me. It does not matter why you did it. You married me and you will jolly well live up to that commitment. I will not allow you not to. And I married you. It does not matter why I did it. For better or worse, we are

married. People marry for all sorts of reasons. It is not those that matter. It is what they do with their marriages that counts. We are going to make this a good marriage. Both of us." p. 288, Agnes from *Only Enchanting*.

And that passion that Agnes was scared to feel? Not a problem between these two. They set the sheets on fire though most of their encounters weren't detailed out. The reader gets the idea and gets to fill in the blanks with their own imagination. They were so good together and good for each other once they ironed out their issues.

*"Agnes," he said. "Were you waiting for me there? At Middlebury? Were you always waiting for me? And was I always waiting to meet you?"*p. 344, Flavian from *Only Enchanting*

A few things that really struck me were that I appreciated that Flavian's war wounds were mostly the kind that people couldn't see. His traumatic head injury left him without the power of speech when he was first recovering and his frustration and anger left him violent. He worked hard to get back his speech and control that added anger he came home with. Later he learned that he had forgotten bits and pieces of his past so he has to go around fearful and wondering what he forgot because he doesn't know until he is confronted with evidence that he forgot something. Reminded me to keep this in mind personally about people bearing scars that aren't visible.

Another thing was that Agnes is the product of divorced parents which was a serious, monster big deal back then and it taints her in the eyes of society. Not to mention the scars of being abandoned by her mother and not knowing if she is even legitimate. Interesting dynamic for the heroine.

I really only had one niggle beyond the pacing of the first half of the book. Little miss villain never really got a true comeuppance. Call me bloodthirsty, but I totally would have been good with seeing her pay in a painful, public way for the lies and the greedy, malicious intent behind them that hurt and ruined not just Flav and Agnes, but Flav's brother and Flav's best friend. She was a horrid woman and I truly hated on her.

Ralph is the next survivor and I look forward to his story. And at some point, I really need to go back and get Hugo's story. He's so larger than life in each of his scene appearances.

To wrap up, the end was a good recovery, the characters were engaging as was their romance. I would recommend the series for Historical Romance lovers who don't mind the plot to take its time developing and who like things more at the sweet end of the romance spectrum though there is a touch of spice.

My thanks to Penguin and Net Galley for the opportunity to read this book in exchange for an honest review.

Kathleen says

3.5 stars. I have only read two other books in this series. This one was good, but not tremendously compelling. I stopped reading it several times. Took frequent breaks. Even though I enjoyed it, I couldn't immerse myself fully in the evolving relationship. I didn't understand how Flavian fell so fast for Agnes. Why did he instantly feel such a sexual pull toward her? Why did he instantly find her so enchanting? This was not well developed, IMO.

Furthermore, the book sort of meanders along, with few pivotal plot points, and lots of introspection from both the hero and the heroine. The pace felt slow. I cannot put my finger on any one scene that really moved

me, except the scene with Agnes, Flavian, and his loyal relatives at the London party with the malicious gossip-monger. That scene felt authentic. I liked!

In the first half of the book, the supposedly touching scenes between the Survivors' Club members failed to tug on my heart strings. No, I felt a little tug. But mostly, it was a classic case of telling me how much these wounded veterans love each other, not showing it to me.

There is a lot of sex in this book, but it's not very graphic (thank goodness) compared to some books. I couldn't feel the passion between these two. I have never felt the passion in Balogh's books. I really can't put my finger on why not. I don't like a lot of explicit graphic sex scenes, so that's not the problem. I wonder if she needs to develop a male voice more fully. Lord knows I cannot write, but I know when I read a moving love scene.

I got tired of reading Agnes's thoughts. She thinks about Flavian's masculinity a lot at the beginning, but...it felt redundant and prosaic. I liked Agnes better later in the book, when she faced the werewolves of London. At the end, I wanted to see the spiteful B getting the boot, but alas.

I liked Flavian, but at times he felt like a cardboard character, with his ever-present sleepy gaze, mocking eyebrow, hooded eyes. These expressions held Flavian at bay from me. In my view, the author portrayed his mocking face to excess. She did a better job with his stuttering.

Below are no spoilers, but a character description, courtesy of The Kind and Gracious Lady Wesley, from her review and commentary:

Heroine: Agnes Keeping is a 26- year old widow. She married at 18 and had no children with her older husband. She lives with her sister Dora, a music teacher. These sisters live in a village near Middlebury Park, the Gloucester estate where we find the stars of *The Arrangement*: Vincent Hunt, Lord Darleigh (blind) and his pregnant Sophia.

Hero: Flavian Arnott, Viscount Ponsonby is a wounded Waterloo vet. He stutters, has some memory loss, and repressed rage, buried in the lost memories. He is handsome, witty, charming, and aloof, but his affable exterior masks enduring scars. He inherited his title only upon the death of his beloved brother, David. Shortly thereafter, Flavian suffered grievous head injuries in the Peninsular Wars. He was brought home unable to speak or even think coherently. When his fiancée, Velma, jilts him to marry his best friend, all he can do is fly into a fit of sputtering rage. Fortunately, he was taken in by the Duke of Stanbrook and spent three years recuperating with the other members of the Survivor's Club, but he still speaks with a stammer and suffers from memory loss, headaches, and occasional outbursts of temper.

*** Info about all books in the series and the 7 veterans (survivors), from Balogh's website, with a few additions by Lady Wesley:

These are the stories of six men and one woman, all severely wounded in one way or another during the Napoleonic Wars before ending up convalescing together at Penderris Castle in Cornwall, the home of the Duke of Stanbrook, who lost his only child (a grown son) in the war, after which his duchess took her own life, while he watched in horror.

The Proposal is the story of Hugo Emes, Lord Trentham. Hugo is dealing with what today would be called PTSD. He marries Lady Gwendolyn Muir, a secondary character in the *Bedwyn* series.

The Suitor, an e-novella, is the story of Julian Crabbe, the Duke of Stanbrook's nephew and heir. He marries Philippa Dean, whose parents had tried to marry her to Viscount Darleigh. (So far they have not reappeared.)

The Arrangement is Vincent, Viscount Darleigh's story. He lost his sight and hearing, and while his hearing has returned, his sight has not. When the Dean family arrives at his estate, Vincent flees rather than marry the young lady (Philippa Dean) selected by his over-protective family. During his road trip, he meets quiet, unassuming Sophia Fry and they enter into a marriage of convenience.

The Escape features Major Sir Benedict Harper's story. His legs were horribly mangled, but he determined to walk again. He marries Samantha McKay after helping her escape from her late husband's dour, autocratic family.

This book: Only Enchanting features Flavian and Agnes. See above.

Only a Promise, due out in May 2015, is Ralph, Earl of Stockwood's story. He was severely wounded during a cavalry charge moments after seeing his three best friends blown to bits. His heroine is the flame-haired Chloe Muirhead, who has troubles of her own to contend with.

Only a Kiss, finished and probably out in 2015, is Imogen Hayes, Lady Barclay's story. She is paired with Percy, Earl of Hardford, who has arrived at the age of thirty with neither a trouble nor a care in the world—though that, of course, is his problem.

Only Beloved will be the seventh and final installment, with the middle-aged Duke of Stanbrook as the hero. It hasn't been written, but MB has said that she doesn't want to match him with a younger lady, so that should be interesting.

Miranda Davis says

I'm enchanted. Deftly portrayed characters whose wounds physical and emotional make them complicated, vulnerable and heroic in not so typical ways meet, marry and sort things out. This is a quiet story about a widow who fears passion and its chaos and one of the survivors' club, who struggles to reclaim his memories after healing from head wounds and fears what he cannot recall in his past. Very sweet, yet never cloying. It's a fast read, just an evening, but the sleepy-eyed viscount and the prim widow keep it interesting, touching and somehow real. Sort of ends hanging, wish there'd been more.
