

"CATHY MAXWELL  
CAN'T BE BEAT!"

Jill Barnett, author of *Wild*



CATHY  
MAXWELL

*Author of Married in Haste*

A  
Scandalous  
Marriage



**CATHY  
MAXWELL**

**A Scandalous  
Marriage**



HarperCollins e-books

To my friend Bonnie Tucker

# I Dreamed

I dreamed I held  
A sword against my flesh.  
What does it mean?  
It means I shall see you soon.

LADY KASA



# Contents

EPIGRAPH	iii
PROLOGUE	
Devon Marshall, viscount Huxhold, rode hell-for-leather across the frozen fallow...	1
Part One	
London, 1814	17
CHAPTER 1	
Devon's friends thought it a grand joke that he had...	19
CHAPTER 2	
"A virgin!" The words burst out of the Baroness Charlotte...	32
CHAPTER 3	
"Julian said no woman should trust you."	48
Part Two	
Yorkshire, 1815	73
CHAPTER 4	
Devon's long legs ate up the distance to the cottage.	75
CHAPTER 5	
The first hour did not pass quickly. Or the second.	85

<b>CHAPTER 6</b>	
“De—” Leah couldn’t finish the word. Her body stiffened as...	101
<b>CHAPTER 7</b>	
Leah woke. For several minutes, she lay still in the...	112
<b>CHAPTER 8</b>	
“Exactly as I suspected,” Mrs. Pitney declared. She turned on...	132
<b>CHAPTER 9</b>	
The baby’s crying woke Leah. She hadn’t realized she’d been...	152
<b>CHAPTER 10</b>	
Safely out of hearing, Francis the innkeeper apologized repeatedly. “They’ve...	167
<b>CHAPTER 11</b>	
Leah wanted to retreat back to the safety of the...	187
<b>CHAPTER 12</b>	
Leah was out into the hallway and past the footman...	206
<b>CHAPTER 13</b>	
Devon kept lonely vigil by his grandfather’s bedside. A single...	221
<b>CHAPTER 14</b>	
Leah didn’t understand why Devon was so wide awake—or expecting...	240
<b>CHAPTER 15</b>	262

Regina Carrollton had been a noted Spanish beauty in her...

## CHAPTER 16

Over the next few weeks, Madame Nola designed an exquisite... 275

## CHAPTER 17

The coverlet felt cool beneath her naked skin. Leah lay... 291

## CHAPTER 18

“Julian!” Leah cried. She stepped forward even as Devon pushed... 311

## CHAPTER 19

Leah wished the floor would open beneath her and she... 328

## AFTERWORD

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

## OTHER BOOKS BY CATHY MAXWELL

## COVER

## COPYRIGHT

## ABOUT THE PUBLISHER



## PROLOGUE

1815

**D**evon Marshall, viscount Huxhold, rode hell-for-leather across the frozen fallow fields, bound for London and his grandfather's deathbed.

Overhead, swift-moving clouds promised a storm. The air was already damp and heavy. He'd be cursed if he didn't beat the bad weather. His trip could not be delayed.

Suddenly, Gallant stumbled, almost tossing Devon over his head. The horse recovered his footing but limped.

"Damn." Devon's single word echoed in the winter silence. He slid off Gallant's back, his booted heels uneven on the frozen, overturned earth. The accident was his fault. He'd taken a shortcut, turning off the main road and urging his horse across pasture and farming lands. Now, he stood in the middle of Yorkshire without an idea of exactly where he was.

It was a wickedly cold day in February and no time to be traveling the North Country. Sensible people would be huddled around their fires. Then he remembered it was Sunday. The pious would be in church. He searched the surrounding tree line for a tower or steeple rising above the bare limbs. Nothing.

Gallant stumbled a step on the uneven terrain, and Devon reached for the bridle. This horse was his pride and joy. The knock-kneed black boasted a great flat head and a tendency to trot with his tongue hanging loose. More than once, the sight of Devon on Gallant's back had been compared to that of a drunken sailor winding his way home from the pub.

Devon didn't care. He had no need for grace and beauty in a horse or even in people. He valued intelligence, loyalty, and heart—qualities Gallant had in abundance. Better yet, the animal was as fiercely independent and ill-mannered as Devon himself. Gallant might be ungainly, but he had won more than his share of races and could travel with the perseverance of a camel.

Grimly, Devon picked up Gallant's hoof and took a look.

The shoe was missing. No surprise there. Gallant should have been shod the week before, but Devon had been too busy warming himself in front of his friend McDermott's fire to see to the matter. He hadn't expected to be called to London in such haste.

Taking a penknife from his pocket, Devon

cleaned the hoof, flicking out a number of small rocks.

"There you are, boy. Not much better." He patted the horse's muzzle. "You're a damn nuisance," he whispered with affection. In answer, Gallant nudged him back.

He had to find a farrier.

He had to reach London.

*You're never prepared, Devon. A wise man is always prepared.* His grandfather's words rang clearly in Devon's mind, almost as if the crafty old bastard were standing by his shoulder, saying them aloud.

Devon drew in a deep, shuddering breath. He could recall his grandfather's exact tonal inflection, even though the man hadn't chided him for his shortcomings in years. They'd seen each other, but never for long enough to start an argument. Devon's choice. Especially since all the bitter words they'd hurled at each other still haunted him.

Now it no longer mattered. Seeming indifference and polite platitudes came down to this: Devon was the marquess of Kirkeby's heir. Past differences were to be set aside because the marquess was not expected to live beyond the week.

*Beyond the week.* Those were Brewster's words in his curt message.

Devon could curse the man his terse note. So many questions had crowded his mind that he'd barely been able to take his leave from McDermott with any civility. He was still in a state of shock.

How could his grandfather, whose political power had few limits, whose personality engaged all who entered his sphere, who had proven time and time again to be larger than life itself, how could this man die...as simply, and as quietly, as all other mortals?

Now, away from friends, society, all that he knew and held familiar, Devon could not escape one unassailable truth—In spite of their differences, he had loved this man who had raised him after his parents' deaths.

He had to set things right between them.

And that's what had brought him to this point, stranded in a farmer's field, the victim of his own unpreparedness and haste.

Buttoning his heavy greatcoat and setting his beaver hat lower on his head, Devon spied a path leading from the field through a line of trees.

"Come, Gallant. Let's see what we can do for you." There had to be a farm cottage close by.

Gallant followed, his breaths coming out in puffs of frigid air.

The path wound its way through a small wood. As Devon walked, he realized this area was not totally unfamiliar to him. The seat of his good friend the earl of Ruskin was hereabout. Having his bearings made him feel better. He'd get a horse off of Rusky if he didn't find a solution sooner.

Either way, he was determined to make London and the family home, Montclef, if he had to crawl to the place.

Around a curve on the other side of the wood,

Devon caught sight of a picturesque farm less than a quarter mile away. Smoke curled from the chimney of the whitewashed cottage, while a rooster crowed from somewhere around the stone shed.

Gallant's ears picked up and then laid back. He nickered in protest. Devon sniffed. The wind carried the pungent scent of pigs. The pen must be located on the other side of the barn. It was just Devon's bad luck he was downwind from the buggers. He hated the smell of pigs. Gallant obviously did, too.

As he drew closer, the door to the cottage opened. A portly woman wobbled out and made her way across the yard toward the barn. In each fisted hand, she carried a heavy bucket with the strength of a woman accustomed to hard work. A heavy wool shawl tied around her hat and shoulders protected her from the cold. Unfortunately, the wind kept blowing the straw bonnet's floppy brim down in her face. She had to toss her head to let the wind blow it back up, allowing her to see. Consequently, her path toward the shed with the heavy buckets was a zigzag of frustration.

Devon shouted out, "Hey, there."

The wind must have carried his words away, because the woman didn't break stride. Instead, she disappeared behind the shed. A second later, Devon heard the ear-piercing squeals of hungry pigs.

Wrinkling his nose, Devon gave Gallant's reins a tug. "Come on, lad."

In the barnyard, a milk cow stuck its head out

beyond the round sandstone columns supporting the shed's roof. A pair of oxen munched contentedly, watching Devon and Gallant with seeming disinterest.

He didn't bother with the pig girl but tossed the reins around a stone posed in front of the cottage for that purpose. He knocked on the door. It swung open.

"Hello?" Devon listened for an answer.

The room was neat and homey, with rush-bottomed chairs and colorful rag rugs on the floor. Freshly baked bread was set out on the hearth.

But no one was home.

He wished now that he had sent a message telling Brewster and the members of his family he was on his way, but he'd been certain he could travel faster than any courier. Obviously he was wrong.

Doggedly, he followed the smell of the pigs. No dog barked a greeting. Even the chickens were wise enough today to roost instead of scratching the yard for food. He turned the corner of the shed and found himself on the opposite side of the pigpen from the woman.

She was busy trying to make sure the two larger pigs gave the runt his fair share. Her soft, cajoling words were ignored by the pigs...but Devon did notice she was younger than he'd first surmised.

She hadn't noticed him.

Over the noise of grunting pigs, he said, "Excuse me."

Pig squeals drowned him out. The earth was soft

and warm here, and his boots sunk a bit into the muck. He tried not to think what it was he stood in.

He raised his voice. "Excuse me!"

This time he caught her attention. The woman looked up, startled to discover she was not alone. Holding the slop bucket protectively away from the pigs, she lifted the brim of her hat, the better to see him—and then gasped in surprise.

Devon was no less shocked himself. He knew those brown eyes. They had once fascinated him with their ability to be innocent and seductive...naïve and worldly...honest and deceitful all in the same moment. A temptress's eyes.

This was no simple pig girl.

It was Leah Carrollton, a London debutante who only months ago had been the reigning belle of Society—until she had abruptly disappeared.

When she'd first vanished, her family put it about she was visiting relatives out of the city, but gossip and speculation among the ton had run rampant. Devon had heard the whispers even in his self-imposed exile from London. He had tried not to pay attention. He'd told himself that Leah Carrollton's whereabouts or grand doings were no longer his concern...but on those nights when he had no companions but a lonely fire in the grate and a half-empty bottle of brandy, he'd thought of her often. He hadn't been able to prevent himself.

Now, in the whisk of a second, he no longer saw himself standing by some yeoman's pigsty but back in London almost a year ago when he'd been

badgered into attending a ball. He usually avoided such affairs. But this one was sponsored by McDermott's aunt, a laughing, Junoesque woman whose company Devon enjoyed, and he'd good-naturedly agreed to make an appearance. Of course, he'd been determined to escape the affair as early as possible...that is, until he had laid eyes on Leah Carrollton.

*She had been standing a step apart from a group of other debutantes. They'd all worn pastels and smelled of rose water. Their conversation consisted primarily of self-conscious giggles. She was one of them, and yet alone.*

*He instantly recognized a kindred soul. He understood. She wanted, no, had to be accepted by the group but exerted her own independence.*

*She sensed him staring at her. She turned, searching, and then looked straight at him.*

*In that moment, time halted. He even stopped breathing, knowing he still lived only because his heart pounded in his ears, its beat abnormally fast. Cupid's famed arrow had found a mark.*

*For the first time in his adventurous life, he felt the sweaty palms and the singing in his blood of a man smitten beyond reason by the mere presence of a woman. The poets had been right!*

*Oh, she was lovely to look at. Petite, buxom, rounded. He could have spanned her waist with his two hands.*

*Her heavy black hair, styled in a simple, elegant chignon held in place by gold pearl-tipped pins,*

*emphasized the slender grace of her neck. He imagined himself pulling those pins from her hair one by one. It would fall in a graceful, swinging curtain down to her waist. Her eyes were so dark and exotic that they reminded him of full moons, Spanish dancers, and velvety nights.*

*But it wasn't her beauty that drew him. No, it was something deeper. Something he'd never felt before. He wasn't a fanciful man, but he could swear he'd been waiting for her to walk into his life.*

*She smiled. The most charming dimple appeared at the corner of her mouth, and his feet began moving of their own volition. He wasn't even conscious that he was walking until he stood in front of her.*

*"Dance with me." He held out his hand.*

*Carefully, as if she, too, understood the importance of her actions, she placed her hand in his. It was a magic moment. He felt changed in some indefinable way.*

*He raised her gloved fingers to his lips. "Do you feel the draw? The pull between us?"*

*She nodded. "My heart is pounding against my chest."*

*"As is mine. Tell me your name."*

*"Leah—"*

*He cut her off. "Leah." He loved the sound of it. "I'm Devon. Do you know what I think, Leah?"*

*"That we were destined to meet?" She smiled shyly.*

*Her answer reinforced his belief that something*

*greater than both of them was at work.*

*“Come.” He led her out onto the dance floor.*

*Devon rarely danced. He thought men who enjoyed dancing were little different than peacocks preening for women. But tonight, he would not let her from his sight. He was staking his claim to her. Here, on the dance floor, all the world would see that she was his. No other man could have her.*

*The dance they took their places for was the pavane, the sort of ritualistic promenade he usually hated. But not tonight; as the musicians struck the first chord, he was transformed. Him! A man who had sworn that one woman was as good as another and had sampled most. Colors were suddenly brighter, the music sweeter, the world full of possibilities.*

*In her presence, he discovered something had been missing in his life—*

*A rough hand grabbed his arm.*

*Devon whirled on his attacker, ready to defend her. Before him stood Julian Carrollton, his face red with anger, his fists clenched.*

*Devon almost laughed. Julian was more bluster than bully. The man was a shiftless gambler, just like all the members of his family.*

*The Marshalls and the Carrolltons did not mix. Especially since Devon and his grandfather blamed Richard Carrollton, Julian’s father, for the tragic accident that had claimed the lives of both Devon’s parents.*

*“Take your bloody hands off my sister, Huxhold.”*

*Carrollton's sister? Then Devon noticed the straight black hair, the midnight dark eyes common to them both. The floor seemed to disappear beneath his feet.*

*Devon didn't look at her. He didn't want to see her face and the damning confirmation. She must have felt the same. They both turned and walked away from each other like two magnets suddenly repelled from each other. Devon left the ballroom without looking back.*

*But he'd never forgotten her or those precious, magic moments...*

Now here she stood in the middle of nowhere, slopping pigs, and looking more lovely than he had remembered her. For a moment, all he could do was gape, drinking in the sight of her like a thirsty man reaching for water.

And then he realized that she'd changed.

She was pregnant. Very, very pregnant.

The jolt of jealousy was staggering. A cold numbness spread through his body.

Her lips silently formed his name.

He'd kissed those lips.

Surprisingly, he found his voice first. "Miss Carrollton," he said tersely, frigid air rising around him with the words. It took all his strength to speak.

She didn't answer. She seemed horror-struck by his presence.

Good.

"I'm certain my appearance here has caught you