

The background of the cover is a misty, historical street scene. In the foreground, a street lamp with a glowing light hangs from a post. The street is cobblestone, and the buildings are multi-story with windows. The overall atmosphere is soft and atmospheric, with a color palette dominated by muted greens, greys, and browns.

The Insider's Guide to

ELIZABETH  
HOYT'S

Maiden Lane Series

# Makepeace Family

Josiah Makepeace (d. 1736) - m. - Rebecca (d. 1722)

Verity - m. - John Brown  
(b. 1702)

Truth Hope Charity

babby girl  
lived 7 days (1705)

Concord - m. - Rose  
(b. 1703)

Winter (b. 1712)  
Thief of Shadows

Silence - m. - William  
(b. 1714) Hollingsworth (d. 1737)

Scandalous Desires

Temperance - m. - Benjamin Deans (d. 1729)  
(b. 1709)

Wicked Intentions

Josiah Prudence John & George Sarah  
(twins) Rebecca

*The Insider's Guide to*

**ELIZABETH  
HOYT'S**

*Maiden Lane Series*



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Gentle Reader,

My Maiden Lane series takes place in 1730s London, a world teeming with the sounds of church bells and hoof beats, violins and castrati opera singers, the shouts of street hawkers and the murmur of political intrigue. Coffee shops were bustling centers of gossip and news, at night you could find entertainment at the theater, opera, or pleasure gardens, and everywhere the streets were crammed with people, carriages, horses, sedan chairs, and the odd flock of sheep going to slaughter. The poor lived cheek by jowl in dirty, crammed tenement buildings in the East End and St. Giles, scratching out a living by begging, prostitution, or thievery. At the same time the very rich strolled their gilded homes in silks, velvets, and fabulously embroidered brocades, intent upon flirtation and intrigue.

From guttersnipes to dukes, gin-shop sellers to the daughters of earls, Dragoon captains to Thames river pirates, the Maiden Lane series embraces everything about this fabulous time in London's history.

Welcome to Maiden Lane!

[www.ElizabethHoyt.com](http://www.ElizabethHoyt.com)



*The Idle 'Prentice betrayed, & taken in a Night-Cellar with his Accomplice*, Engraved by T. Cook & Son, 1810, after an original by William Hogart, 1747.

# *Wicked Intentions*



LONDON

FEBRUARY 1737

A woman abroad in St. Giles at midnight was either very foolish or very desperate. Or, as in her own case, Temperance Dews reflected wryly, a combination of both.

“‘Tis said the Ghost of St. Giles haunts on nights like this,” Nell Jones, Temperance’s maidservant, said chattily as she skirted a noxious puddle in the narrow alley.

Temperance glanced dubiously at her. Nell had spent three years in a traveling company of actors and sometimes had a tendency toward melodrama.

“There’s no ghost haunting St. Giles,” Temperance replied firmly. The cold winter night was frightening enough without the addition of specters.

“Oh, indeed, there is.” Nell hoisted the sleeping babe in her arms higher. “He wears a black mask and a harlequin’s motley and carries a wicked sword.”

Temperance frowned. “A harlequin’s motley? That doesn’t sound very ghostlike.”

“It’s ghostlike if he’s the dead spirit of a harlequin player come back to haunt the living.”

“For bad reviews?”

Nell sniffed. “And he’s disfigured.”

“How would anyone know that if he’s masked?”

They were coming to a turn in the alley, and Temperance thought she saw light up ahead. She held her lantern high and gripped the ancient pistol in her other hand a little tighter. The weapon was heavy enough to make her arm ache. She could have brought a sack to carry it in, but that would’ve defeated its purpose as a deterrent. Though loaded, the pistol held but one shot, and to tell the truth, she was somewhat hazy on the actual operation of the weapon.

Still, the pistol looked dangerous, and Temperance was grateful for that. The night was black, the wind moaning eerily, bringing with it the smell of

excrement and rotting offal. The sounds of St. Giles rose about them—voices raised in argument, moans and laughter, and now and again the odd, chilling scream. St. Giles was enough to send the most intrepid woman running for her life.

And that was without Nell's conversation.

"Horribly disfigured," Nell continued, ignoring Temperance's logic. "'Tis said his lips and eyelids are clean burned off, as if he died in a fire long ago. He seems to grin at you with his great yellow teeth as he comes to pull the guts from your belly."

Temperance wrinkled her nose. "Nell!"

"That's what they say," Nell said virtuously. "The ghost guts his victims and plays with their entrails before slipping away into the night."

Temperance shivered. "Why would he do that?"

"Envy," Nell said matter-of-factly. "He envies the living."

"Well, I don't believe in spirits in any case." Temperance took a breath as they turned the corner into a small, wretched courtyard. Two figures stood at the opposite end, but they scuttled away at their approach. Temperance let out her breath. "Lord, I hate being abroad at night."

Nell patted the infant's back. "Only a half mile more. Then we can put this wee one to bed and send for the wet nurse in the morning."

Temperance bit her lip as they ducked into another alley. "Do you think she'll live until morning?"

But Nell, usually quite free with her opinions, was silent. Temperance peered ahead and hurried her step. The baby looked to be only weeks old and had not yet made a sound since they'd recovered her from the arms of her dead mother. Normally a thriving infant was quite loud. Terrible to think that she and Nell might've made this dangerous outing for naught.

But then what choice had there been, really? When she'd received word at the Home for Unfortunate Infants and Foundling Children that a baby was in need of her help, it had still been light. She'd known from bitter experience that if they'd waited until morn to retrieve the child, it would either have expired in the night from lack of care or would've already been sold for a beggar's prop. She shuddered. The children bought by beggars were often made more pitiful to elicit sympathy from passersby. An eye might be put out or a limb broken or twisted. No, she'd really had no choice. The baby couldn't wait until morning.

Still, she'd be very happy when they made it back to the home.

They were in a narrow passage now, the tall houses on either side leaning

inward ominously. Nell was forced to walk behind Temperance or risk brushing the sides of the buildings. A scrawny cat snaked by, and then there was a shout very near.

Temperance's steps faltered.

"Someone's up ahead," Nell whispered hoarsely.

They could hear scuffling and then a sudden high scream.

Temperance swallowed. The alley had no side passages. They could either retreat or continue—and to retreat meant another twenty minutes added to their journey.

That decided her. The night was chilly, and the cold wasn't good for the babe.

"Stay close to me," she whispered to Nell.

"Like a flea on a dog," Nell muttered.

Temperance squared her shoulders and held the pistol firmly in front of her. Winter, her youngest brother, had said that one need only point it and shoot. That couldn't be too hard. The light from the lantern spilled before them as she entered another crooked courtyard. Here she stood still for just a second, her light illuminating the scene ahead like a pantomime on a stage.

A man lay on the ground, bleeding from the head. But that wasn't what froze her—blood and even death were common enough in St. Giles. No, what arrested her was the second man. He crouched over the first, his black cloak spread to either side of him like the wings of a great bird of prey. He held a long black walking stick, the end tipped with silver, echoing his hair, which was silver as well. It fell straight and long, glinting in the lantern's light. Though his face was mostly in darkness, his eyes glinted from under the brim of a black tricorne. Temperance could feel the weight of the stranger's stare. It was as if he physically touched her.

"Lord save and preserve us from evil," Nell murmured, for the first time sounding fearful. "Come away, ma'am. Swiftly!"

Thus urged, Temperance ran across the courtyard, her shoes clattering on the cobblestones. She darted into another passage and left the scene behind.

"Who was he, Nell?" she panted as they made their way through the stinking alley. "Do you know?"

The passage let out suddenly into a wider road, and Temperance relaxed a little, feeling safer without the walls pressing in.

Nell spat as if to clear a foul taste from her mouth.

Temperance looked at her curiously. "You sounded like you knew that

man.”

“Knew him, no,” Nell replied. “But I’ve seen him about. That was Lord Caire. He’s best left to himself.”

“Why?”

Nell shook her head, pressing her lips firmly together. “I shouldn’t be speaking about the likes of him to you at all, ma’am.”

Temperance let that cryptic comment go. They were on a better street now—some of the shops had lanterns hanging by the doors, lit by the inhabitants within. Temperance turned one more corner onto Maiden Lane, and the foundling home came within sight. Like its neighbors, it was a tall brick building of cheap construction. The windows were few and very narrow, the doorway unmarked by any sign. In the fifteen precarious years of the foundling home’s existence, there had never been a need to advertise.

Abandoned and orphaned children were all too common in St. Giles.

“Home safely,” Temperance said as they made the door. She set down the lantern on the worn stone step and took out the big iron key hanging by a cord at her waist. “I’m looking forward to a dish of hot tea.”

“I’ll put this wee one to bed,” Nell said as they entered the dingy little hall. It was spotlessly clean, but that didn’t hide the fallen plaster or the warped floorboards.

“Thank you.” Temperance removed her cloak and was just hanging it on a peg when a tall male form appeared at the far doorway.

“Temperance.”

She swallowed and turned. “Oh! Oh, Winter, I did not know you’d returned.”

“Obviously,” her younger brother said drily. He nodded to the maidservant. “A good eventide to you, Nell.”

“Sir.” Nell curtsied and looked nervously between brother and sister. “I’ll just see to the, ah, children, shall I?”

And she fled upstairs, leaving Temperance to face Winter’s disapproval alone.

Temperance squared her shoulders and moved past her brother. The foundling home was long and narrow, squeezed by the neighboring houses. There was one room off the small entryway. It was used for dining and, on occasion, receiving the home’s infrequent important visitors. At the back of the house were the kitchens, which Temperance entered now. The children had all had their dinner promptly at five o’clock, but neither she nor her brother had

eaten.

“I was just about to make some tea,” she said as she went to stir the fire. Soot, the home’s black cat, got up from his place in front of the hearth and stretched before padding off in search of mice. “There’s a bit of beef left from yesterday and some new radishes I bought at market this morning.”

Behind her Winter sighed. “Temperance.”

She hurried to find the kettle. “The bread’s a bit stale, but I can toast it if you like.”

He was silent and she finally turned and faced the inevitable.

It was worse than she feared. Winter’s long, thin face merely looked sad, which always made her feel terrible. She hated to disappoint him.

“It was still light when we set out,” she said in a small voice.

He sighed again, taking off his round black hat and sitting at the kitchen table. “Could you not wait for my return, sister?”

Temperance looked at her brother. Winter was only five and twenty, but he bore himself with the air of a man twice his age. His countenance was lined with weariness, his wide shoulders slumped beneath his ill-fitting black coat, and his long limbs were much too thin. For the last five years he had taught at the tiny daily school attached to the home.

On Papa’s death last year, Winter’s work had increased tremendously. Concord, their eldest brother, had taken over the family brewery. Asa, their next eldest brother, had always been rather dismissive of the foundling home and had a mysterious business of his own. Both their sisters, Verity, the eldest of the family, and Silence, the youngest, were married. That had left Winter to manage the foundling home. Even with her help—she’d worked at the home since the death of her husband nine years before—the task was overwhelming for one man. Temperance feared for her brother’s well-being, but both the foundling home and the tiny day school had been founded by Papa. Winter felt it was his filial duty to keep the two charities alive.

If his health did not give out first.

She filled the teakettle from the water jar by the back door. “Had we waited it would have been full dark with no assurance that the babe would still be there.” She glanced at him as she placed the kettle over the fire. “Besides, have you not enough work to do?”

“If I lose my sister think you that I’d be more free of work?”

Temperance looked away guiltily.

Her brother’s voice softened. “And that discounts the lifelong sorrow I

would feel had anything happened to you this night.”

“Nell knew the mother of the baby—a girl of less than fifteen years.” Temperance took out the bread and carved it into thin slices. “Besides, I carried the pistol.”

“Hmm,” Winter said behind her. “And had you been accosted, would you have used it?”

“Yes, of course,” she said with flat certainty.

“And if the shot misfired?”

She wrinkled her nose. Their father had brought up all her brothers to debate a point finely and that fact could be quite irritating at times.

She carried the bread slices to the fire to toast. “In any case, nothing did happen.”

“This night.” Winter sighed again. “Sister, you must promise me you’ll not act so foolishly again.”

“Mmm,” Temperance mumbled, concentrating on the toast. “How was your day at the school?”

For a moment, she thought Winter wouldn’t consent to her changing the subject. Then he said, “A good day, I think. The Samuels lad remembered his Latin lesson finally, and I did not have to punish any of the boys.”

Temperance glanced at him with sympathy. She knew Winter hated to take a switch to a palm, let alone cane a boy’s bottom. On the days that Winter had felt he must punish a boy he came home in a black mood.

“I’m glad,” she said simply.

He stirred in his chair. “I returned for luncheon, but you were not here.”

Temperance took the toast from the fire and placed it on the table. “I must have been taking Mary Found to her new position. I think she’ll do quite well there. Her mistress seemed very kind, and the woman took only five pounds as payment to apprentice Mary as her maid.”

“God willing she’ll actually teach the child something so we won’t see Mary Found again.”

Temperance poured the hot water into their small teapot and brought it to the table. “You sound cynical, brother.”

Winter passed a hand over his brow. “Forgive me. Cynicism is a terrible vice. I shall try to correct my humor.”

Temperance sat and silently served her brother, waiting. Something more than her late-night adventure was bothering him.

At last he said, “Mr. Wedge visited whilst I ate my luncheon.”

Mr. Wedge was their landlord. Temperance paused, her hand on the teapot. “What did he say?”

“He’ll give us only another two weeks, and then he’ll have the foundling home forcibly vacated.”

“Dear God.”

Temperance stared at the little piece of beef on her plate. It was stringy and hard and from an obscure part of the cow, but she’d been looking forward to it. Now her appetite was suddenly gone. The foundling home’s rent was in arrears—they hadn’t been able to pay the full rent last month and nothing at all this month. Perhaps she shouldn’t have bought the radishes, Temperance reflected morosely. But the children hadn’t had anything but broth and bread for the last week.

“If only Sir Gilpin had remembered us in his will,” she murmured.

Sir Stanley Gilpin had been Papa’s good friend and the patron of the foundling home. A retired theater owner, he’d managed to make a fortune on the South Sea Company and had been wily enough to withdraw his funds before the notorious bubble burst. Sir Gilpin had been a generous patron while alive, but on his unexpected death six months before, the home had been left floundering. They’d limped along, using what money had been saved, but now they were in desperate straits.

“Sir Gilpin was an unusually generous man, it would seem,” Winter replied. “I have not been able to find another gentleman so willing to fund a home for the infant poor.”

Temperance poked at her beef. “What shall we do?”

“The Lord shall provide,” Winter said, pushing aside his half-eaten meal and rising. “And if he does not, well, then perhaps I can take on private students in the evenings.”

“You already work too many hours,” Temperance protested. “You hardly have time to sleep as it is.”

Winter shrugged. “How can I live with myself if the innocents we protect are thrown into the street?”

Temperance looked down at her plate. She had no answer to that.

“Come.” Her brother held out his hand and smiled.

Winter’s smiles were so rare, so precious. When he smiled, his entire face lit as if from a flame within, and a dimple appeared on one cheek, making him look boyish, more his true age.

One couldn’t help but smile back when Winter smiled, and Temperance

did so as she laid her hand in his. “Where will we go?”

“Let us visit our charges,” he said as he took a candle and led her to the stairs. “Have you ever noticed that they look quite angelic when asleep?”

Temperance laughed as they climbed the narrow wooden staircase to the next floor. There was a small hall here with three doors leading off it. They peered in the first as Winter held his candle high. Six tiny cots lined the walls of the room. The youngest of the foundlings slept here, two or three to a cot. Nell lay in an adult-sized bed by the door, already asleep.

Winter walked to the cot nearest Nell. Two babes lay there. The first was a boy, red-haired and pink-cheeked, sucking on his fist as he slept. The second child was half the size of the first, her cheeks pale and her eyes hollowed, even in sleep. Tiny whorls of fine black hair decorated her crown.

“This is the baby you rescued tonight?” Winter asked softly.

Temperance nodded. The little girl looked even frailer next to the thriving baby boy.

But Winter merely touched the baby’s hand with a gentle finger. “How do you like the name Mary Hope?”

Temperance swallowed past the thickness in her throat. “‘Tis very apt.”

Winter nodded and, with a last caress for the tiny babe, left the room. The next door led to the boys’ dormitory. Four beds held thirteen boys, all under the age of nine—the age when they were apprenticed out. The boys lay with limbs sprawled, faces flushed in sleep. Winter smiled and pulled a blanket over the three boys nearest the door, tucking in a leg that had escaped the bed.

Temperance sighed. “One would never think that they spent an hour at luncheon hunting for rats in the alley.”

“Mmm,” Winter answered as he closed the door softly behind them. “Small boys grow so swiftly to men.”

“They do indeed.” Temperance opened the last door—the one to the girls’ dormitory—and a small face immediately popped off a pillow.

“Did you get ‘er, ma’am?” Mary Whitsun whispered hoarsely.

She was the eldest of the girls in the foundling home, named for the Whitsunday morning nine years before when she’d been brought to the home as a child of three. Young though Mary Whitsun was, Temperance had to sometimes leave her in charge of the other children—as she’d had to tonight.

“Yes, Mary,” Temperance whispered back. “Nell and I brought the babe home safely.”

“I’m glad.” Mary Whitsun yawned widely.

“You did well watching the children,” Temperance whispered. “Now sleep. A new day will be here soon.”

Mary Whitsun nodded sleepily and closed her eyes.

Winter picked up a candlestick from a little table by the door and led the way out of the girls’ dormitory. “I shall take your kind advice, sister, and bid you good night.”

He lit the candlestick from his own and gave it to Temperance.

“Sleep well,” she replied. “I think I’ll have one more cup of tea before retiring.”

“Don’t stay up too late,” Winter said. He touched her cheek with a finger—much as he had the babe—and turned to mount the stairs.

Temperance watched him go, frowning at how slowly he moved up the stairs. It was past midnight, and he would rise again before five of the clock to read, write letters to prospective patrons, and prepare his school lessons for the day. He would lead the morning prayers at breakfast, hurry to his job as schoolmaster, work all morning before taking one hour for a meager luncheon, and then work again until after dark. In the evening, he heard the girls’ lessons and read from the Bible to the older children. Yet, when she voiced her worries, Winter would merely raise an eyebrow and inquire who would do the work if not he?

Temperance shook her head. She should be to bed as well—her day started at six of the clock—but these moments by herself in the evening were precious. She’d sacrifice a half hour’s sleep to sit alone with a cup of tea.

So she took her candle back downstairs. Out of habit, she checked to see that the front door was locked and barred. The wind whistled and shook the shutters as she made her way to the kitchen, and the back door rattled. She checked it as well and was relieved to see the door still barred. Temperance shivered, glad she was no longer outside on a night like this. She rinsed out the teapot and filled it again. To make a pot of tea with fresh leaves and only for herself was a terrible luxury. Soon she’d have to give this up as well, but tonight she’d enjoy her cup.

Off the kitchen was a tiny room. Its original purpose was forgotten, but it had a small fireplace, and Temperance had made it her own private sitting room. Inside was a stuffed chair, much battered but refurbished with a quilted blanket thrown over the back. A small table and a footstool were there as well—all she needed to sit by herself next to a warm fire.

Humming, Temperance placed her teapot and cup, a small dish of sugar,

and the candlestick on an old wooden tray. Milk would have been nice, but what was left from this morning would go toward the children's breakfast on the morrow. As it was, the sugar was a shameful luxury. She looked at the small bowl, biting her lip. She really ought to put it back, she simply didn't deserve it. After a moment, she took the sugar dish off the tray, but the sacrifice brought her no feeling of wholesome goodness. Instead she was only weary. Temperance picked up the tray, and because both her hands were full, she backed into the door leading to her little sitting room.

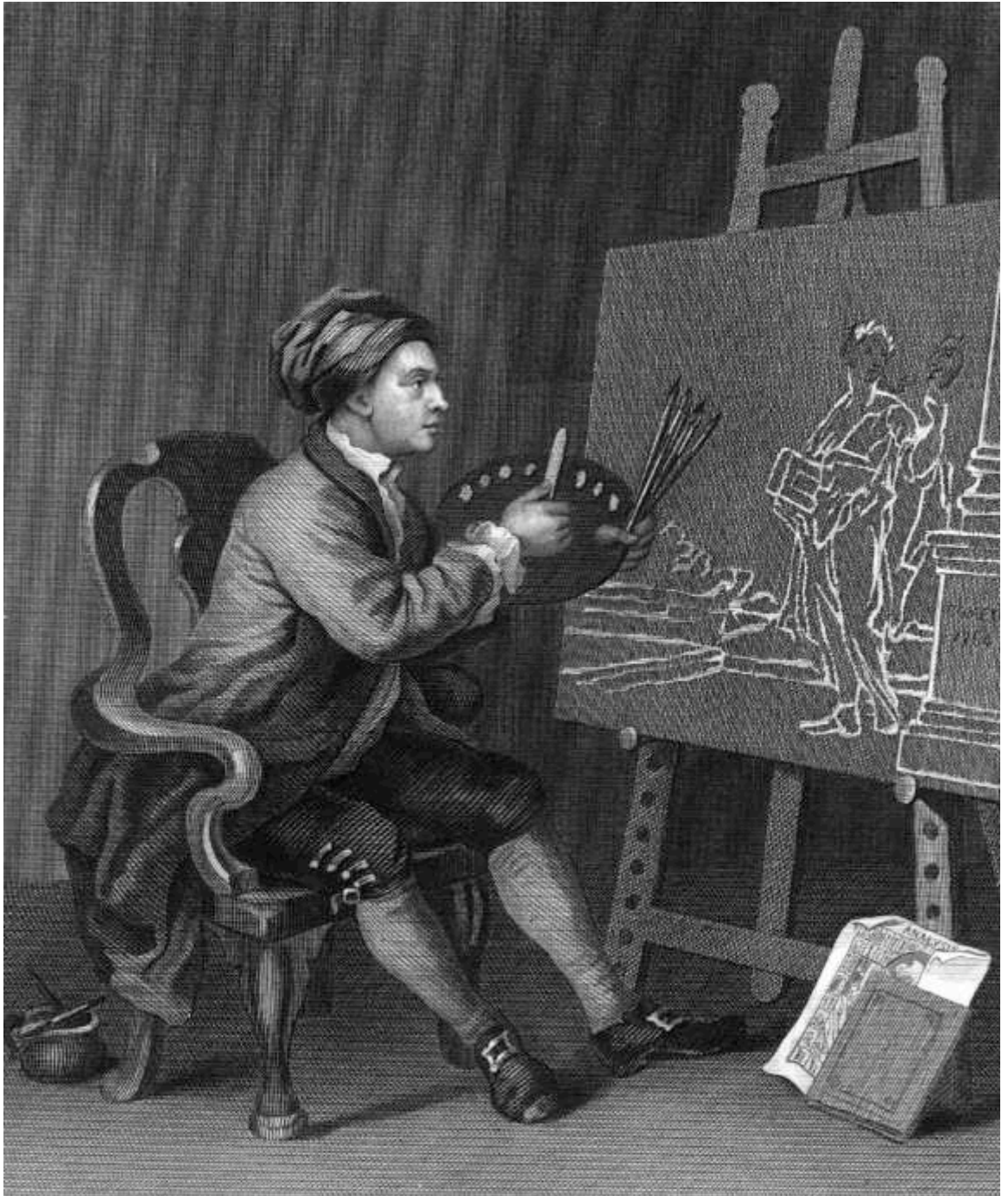
Which was why she didn't notice until she turned that the sitting room was already occupied.

There, sprawled in her chair like a conjured demon, sat Lord Caire. His silver hair spilled over the shoulders of his black cape, a cocked hat lay on one knee, and his right hand caressed the end of his long ebony walking stick. This close, she realized that his hair gave lie to his age. The lines about his startlingly blue eyes were few, his mouth and jaw firm. He couldn't be much older than five and thirty.

He inclined his head at her entrance and spoke, his voice deep and smooth and softly dangerous.

"Good evening, Mrs. Dews."





*Self Portrait Painting the Comic Muse*, William Hogarth, c. 1729.

# *Notorious Pleasures*

LONDON, ENGLAND  
OCTOBER 1737

The daughter of a duke learns early in life the proper etiquette for nearly everything. What dish to serve roasted larks in. When to acknowledge a rather risqué dowager countess and when to give her the cut direct. What to wear whilst boating down the Thames, and how to fend off the tipsy advances of an earl with very little income at the picnic afterward.

Everything, in fact, Lady Hero Batten reflected wryly, but how to address a gentleman coupling vigorously with a married lady not his own.

“Ahem,” she tried while gazing fixedly at the molded plaster pears on the ceiling overhead.

The two people on the settee appeared not to hear her. Indeed, the lady gave a series of loud animal squeals from under the skirts of her atrocious puce-and-brown-striped gown, which had been flipped up to cover her face.

Hero sighed. They were in a dim little sitting room off the library of Mandeville House, and she was regretting choosing this particular room in which to fix her stocking. Had she picked the blue Oriental room, her stocking would be straight by now and she’d already be back in the ballroom—far away from this embarrassing predicament.

She lowered her eyes cautiously. The gentleman, wearing an anonymous white wig, had discarded his embroidered satin coat and was laboring atop the lady in his shirtsleeves and a brilliant emerald waistcoat. His breeches and smallclothes were loosened to facilitate his endeavors, and every now and again a flash of muscled buttock was visible.

Sadly, she found the sight mesmerizing. Whomever the gentleman was, his physical attributes were quite . . . astonishing.

Hero tore her gaze away to look longingly at the door. Really, few would find fault with her should she turn and tiptoe from the room. That was exactly

what she would've done when she'd first entered had she not passed Lord Pimbroke not two minutes before in the hallway. For, as it happened, Hero had noted the atrocious puce-and-brown-striped gown earlier in the evening—on Lady Pimbroke. Much as Hero was loath to embarrass herself, her own feelings were not, in the end, as important as the possibility of a duel and subsequent injury or death to two gentlemen.

Having come to this conclusion, Hero nodded once, took off one diamond earbob, and lobbed it at the gentleman's backside. She'd always quietly prided herself on her aim—not that she used it much in everyday life—and she was rather gratified to hear a yelp from the male.

He swore and turned, looking at her over his shoulder with the most glorious pale green eyes she'd ever seen. He wasn't a handsome man—his face was too broad across the cheekbones, his nose too crooked, and his mouth too thin and cynical for true masculine beauty—but his eyes would draw any female, young or old, from across a room. And once drawn, their gaze would linger on the look of arrogant male virility he wore as naturally as he breathed.

Or perhaps it was merely the, er, circumstances that gave him the look.

“D’you mind, love?” he drawled, the anger in his expression having changed to faint amusement when he'd caught sight of her. His voice was gravelly and completely unhurried. “I’m busy here.”

She could feel heat suffusing her cheeks—really, this was an impossible situation—but she met his gaze, making quite sure hers did not wander lower. “Indeed. I had noticed, but I thought you should know—”

“Unless you’re the type who likes to watch?”

Now her face was aflame, but she wasn't about to let this . . . this wretch get the better of her verbally. She allowed her gaze to drop swiftly and scornfully down over his rumped waistcoat and shirt—fortunately the tail hid his open breeches—and back up. She smiled sweetly. “I prefer entertainments in which I’m not in danger of falling asleep.”

She expected her insult to anger him, but instead the rogue tutted.

“Happens a lot to you, does it, sweetheart?” His voice was solicitous, but a sly dimple appeared beside his wide lips. “Falling asleep just as the fun’s about to begin? Well, don’t blame yourself. Like as not, it’s the gentleman’s fault, not yours.”

Good God, no one ever spoke to her like this!

Slowly, awfully, Hero arched her left brow. She knew it was slow and awful because she'd practiced the movement in front of a mirror for hours on end at

the age of twelve. The result made seasoned matrons tremble in their heeled slippers.

The devilish man didn't turn a hair.

"Now, as it happens," he drawled obnoxiously, "my ladies don't have that problem. Stay and watch—it'll prove instructive, I guarantee. And if I have any strength left over after, maybe I'll demonstrate—"

"Lord Pimbroke is in the hallway!" she blurted before he could finish his dastardly thought.

The mound of puce-and-brown-striped skirts quaked. "Eustace is here?"

"Quite. And heading this way," Hero informed Lady Pimbroke with only a touch of satisfaction.

The gentleman exploded into action. He was up and off the lady and throwing down her skirts to hide her pale, soft thighs before Hero could even blink. He caught up his coat, made one swift, appraising glance about the room, and turned to Hero, his voice still unhurried. "Lady Pimbroke has torn a ribbon or lace or some such thing, and you've kindly consented to help her."

"But—"

He placed his forefinger against her lips—warm, large, and quite shockingly inappropriate—At the same time, a male voice called from the hallway.

"Bella!"

Lady Pimbroke—or Bella—squeaked in fear.

"There's a good girl," the rogue whispered to Hero. He turned to Lady Pimbroke, kissed her on the cheek, and murmured, "Steady on, darling," before disappearing under the settee.

Hero had only a moment to watch Lady Pimbroke's pretty, insipid face go ashen as she realized fully the peril she was in, and then the door to the sitting room crashed open.

"Bella!" Lord Pimbroke was big, reddened, and quite obviously intoxicated. He glanced belligerently around the room, his hand on his sword, but froze in consternation when he saw Hero. "My lady, what—?"

"Lord Pimbroke." Hero casually stepped in front of the settee, obscuring a large masculine heel with her wide skirts.

She employed her left eyebrow.

Lord Pimbroke actually backed up a step—quite gratifying after the reception her eyebrow had received from the rogue—and stammered. "I . . . I . . ."

Hero turned to Lady Pimbroke, touching lightly the horrid yellow braiding

on the elbow of her gown. “That’s fixed, I think, don’t you?”

Lady Pimbroke started. “Oh! Oh, yes, thank you, my lady.”

“Not at all,” Hero murmured.

“If you’re done here, m’dear,” Lord Pimbroke said, “then perhaps you’re ready to return to the ball?”

His words may have been a question, but his tone of voice most certainly was not.

Lady Pimbroke took his arm rather sulkily. “Yes, Eustace.”

And with a perfunctory good-bye, the two left the room.

Almost immediately, Hero felt a tug upon her skirts. “Hist! I can hardly breathe under here.”

“They may return,” she said serenely.

“I think I can see up your skirt.”

She moved back hastily.

The rogue rolled out from under the settee and stood, towering over her.

Nonetheless, she glared down her nose at him. “You weren’t—?”

“Now, now. If I was, do you really think I’d tell you?”

She sniffed, sounding rather like Cousin Bathilda at her most priggish. “No doubt you’d boast of it.”

He leaned over her, grinning. “Does the thought have you all hot and bothered?”

“Is your wig growing tight?” she asked politely.

“What?”

“Because I would think your swelled head would make it quite uncomfortable.”

His smile became a trifle grim. “My head isn’t the only thing out of proportion, I assure you. Maybe that’s why you came in here? To sneak a peek?”

She rolled her eyes. “You have no trace of shame, do you? Most men at least pretend to be abashed when caught in wrong doing, but you—you strut about like a feckless cockerel.”

He paused in the act of donning his coat, one arm thrust out, the sleeve half on, and widened his beautiful green eyes at her. “Oh, of course. Moralizing. Naturally you must hold yourself superior to me when—”

“I saw you engaging in adultery!”

“You saw me engaging in a pleasant fuck,” he said with slow emphasis.

She flinched at the crudity but stood her ground. She was the daughter of a

duke, and she would not flee from a man such as he. “Lady Pimbroke is married.”

“Lady Pimbroke has had numerous lovers before me and will have numerous lovers after me.”

“That does not forgive your sin.”

He looked at her and laughed—actually laughed—slow and deep. “And you are a woman without sin, is that it?”

She didn’t even have to consider the matter. “Naturally.”

His mouth twisted cruelly. “Such certainty.”

She stared, affronted. “Do you doubt me?”

“Oh, no, far from it. I believe absolutely that the thought of sin has never once crossed your perfect little mind.”

She tilted her chin, feeling a thrill of excitement—she’d never before argued with a gentleman, let alone a strange one. “And I begin to wonder if any thought of righteousness has ever crossed your shameless little mind.”

He watched her a moment, a muscle twitching in his jaw. Then he bowed abruptly. “I thank you for going against your own inclinations and saving me from having to kill Lord Pimbroke.”

She nodded stiffly.

“And I hope most fervently that our paths never cross again, my Lady Perfect.”

Unaccountably, Hero felt a pang of hurt at his dismissive words, but she made sure not to let the weak emotion show. “I will certainly pray that I never have to suffer your presence again, my Lord Shameless.”

“Then we are in agreement.”

“Quite.”

“Good.”

For a moment she stared at him, her breasts pressing against her stays with each too-fast breath, her cheeks hot with emotion. They’d drawn closer in the heat of their argument, and his chest nearly brushed the lace of her bodice. He stared back, his eyes very green in his loathsome face.

His gaze dropped to her mouth.

Her lips parted and for an endless second she forgot to breathe.

He turned and strode to the door, disappearing into the dim hallway beyond.

Hero blinked and inhaled with a shudder as she looked dazedly around the room. There was a mirror hanging on the wall, and she crossed to it to peer at

her reflection in the glass. Her red hair was still elegantly coiffed, her lovely silvery-green dress properly in place. Her cheeks were a little pinkened, but the color was becoming. Strangely, she didn't appear all that changed.

Well. That was good.

She threw back her shoulders and swept from the room, her step graceful but quick. Tonight of all nights, it was important she present a serene, lovely, and perfect aspect, for tonight her engagement to the Marquess of Mandeville was to be announced.

Hero tilted her chin at the remembered sneer of the stranger as he'd mouthed the word perfect. What could he possibly have against perfection anyway?





*MacHeath in Chains*, engraving after painting by Gilbert Stuart Newton, c. 1730

# *Scandalous Desires*

LONDON, ENGLAND

APRIL, 1738

Wolves, as Silence Hollingbrook well knew, are savage beasts, little given to pity or honor. If one must face a wolf cleverly disguised in human form, it did no good to show fear. Rather, one must throw one's shoulders back, lift one's chin and stare the damned beast down.

That was what Silence told herself in any case as she eyed Mickey O'Connor, the most notorious river pirate in London. As she watched, Mr. O'Connor did something far more alarming than any real wolf.

He smiled at her.

Silence swallowed.

Mickey O'Connor lounged like the pirate king he was on a gilded throne of red velvet at one end of a lavishly corrupt room. The walls were lined with sheets of gold, the floor was a fabulous mosaic of different-colored marbles, and around her, piled high, were the spoils of thieving: trunks overflowing with furs and silks, crates of tea and spices, and treasures from every corner of the globe, all of it stolen from the ships that came into London's docks. And Silence stood before him like a petitioner.

Once again.

Mr. O'Connor picked up a sweetmeat from a tray offered by a small boy, holding it between long, beringed fingers as he examined her. One corner of his wide, sensuous mouth curled in amusement. "'Tis always a pleasure to gaze upon yer sparklin' hazel eyes, Mrs. Hollingbrook, but I do wonder why ye've come to see me this lovely afternoon."

His mocking words strengthened Silence's spine. "You know very well why I'm here, Mr. O'Connor."

The pirate lifted elegantly winged black eyebrows. "Do I, now?"

Beside her, Harry, one of Mickey O'Connor's guards and her escort into the throne room, shifted his weight nervously. Harry was a big man with a

battered face--a man who'd obviously lived a rather rough life--yet he was just as obviously wary of Mickey O'Connor.

"Easy now," he muttered to her beneath his breath. "Don't want to get 'is anger up."

Mr. O'Connor popped the sweetmeat into his mouth and chewed, his black eyes closing for a moment in pleasure. He was a beautiful man. Silence could see that even if she found him quite repugnant herself. His eyelashes were thick and black, surrounding dark, liquid eyes, his complexion a smooth olive, and when he smiled...well! The dimples that were revealed on his cheeks made him look both as wicked as the devil and as innocent as a small boy. Had a Renaissance master wanted to paint all the seductive allure of Satan, he would've painted Charming Mickey O'Connor.

Silence inhaled. Mr. O'Connor might well be as evil as Satan himself, but she'd braved him once before and survived--even if she hadn't walked away entirely unscathed. "I've come for Mary Darling."

The pirate's eyes opened lazily as he swallowed his sweetmeat. "Who?"

Oh, this was too much! Silence felt her face heat as she shook off Harry's restraining arm and marched right up to the foot of the small dais on which the ridiculous throne stood. "You know very well who! Mary Darling, that sweet little baby girl I've taken care of for nearly a year. Mary Darling, who knows only me as her mother. Mary Darling, who you took from the foundling home where we both live. Give her back to me at once!"

So great was her ire that Silence found herself out of breath at the end of her little tirade and pointing her finger nearly in Mr. O'Connor's face. For a moment she froze, her finger only inches from his nose. Everyone in the room seemed to hold their breath. Mickey O'Connor had lost his smile, and without that expression to lighten his face, he looked quite, quite frightening.

Silence let her hand fall.

Slowly, the pirate straightened from his chair, his long limbs uncurling silently like a predator. He stood, his polished black jackboots thumping to the floor, and stepped down from the dais.

Silence could've backed up, but that would've shown fear. And besides, she thought she might've become rooted to the spot. The scent of lemons and frankincense drifted about her. She lifted her chin in defiance as Mickey O'Connor's smooth, tanned, bare chest nearly touched her nose--the man was so vain he left his extravagantly ruffled shirt unlaced--and looked him in the eye.

Mr. O'Connor bent, his mouth lightly touching her ear, and murmured, "Well, and why didn't ye say so in the first place, darlin'?"

And while Silence gaped up at him, he straightened, his gaze still locked with hers, and snapped his fingers.

A door opened and Silence finally found the willpower to tear her gaze from those black, impenetrable eyes. And then she forgot all about Mickey O'Connor. A servant girl had entered, and in her arms was the sweetest, most wonderful being in the whole world.

"Mamoo!" Mary Darling shrieked. She began a frantic bouncing in the servant girl's arms. "Mamoo! Mamoo! Mamoo! Up!"

Silence rushed to catch the toddler before she could completely squirm from the girl's arms. "I have you. I have you, my love," she murmured as Mary Darling wrapped soft, pudgy arms about her neck and squeezed.

Silence breathed in the scent of milk and baby, tears pricking her eyes. When she'd found the toddler gone...when she'd feared that she'd never see Mary Darling again, her heart had seemed to shrivel into a tiny, frozen thing.

"Mamoo," Mary Darling sighed, and unwrapped her arms to pat Silence's cheeks.

Silence ran her hands over Mary Darling's black curls, touching and squeezing and rubbing, making sure the little girl was as well as when she'd last seen her, half a day before. The previous six hours had been the most frightening of her life and she never wanted to repeat--

"Ahem," a masculine voice murmured nearby, and Silence suddenly remembered where she was.

She clutched Mary Darling to her breast and whirled to face the river pirate. "Thank you. It's most...most kind of you to have given her back to me. I really can't thank you enough." Silence took a step backward, afraid to take her eyes from Charming Mickey's face. "I...I'll just be leaving--"

Mr. O'Connor smiled. "Oh, certainly, sweetheart, do as ye wish, but the little one will be a-stayin' with me, I think."

Silence froze. "You have no right!"

The pirate lifted one inky eyebrow and reached out to finger Mary Darling's black curls. His tanned hand was large against her little head. "Oh, don't I?"

"Bad!" Mary Darling glared at Mickey O'Connor, dark eyes meeting dark eyes, black curls framing a face that might've been a feminine miniature of Mr. O'Connor's own.

The resemblance was quite devastating.

Silence swallowed. Mary Darling had been abandoned on her doorstep almost a year ago to the day. At the time she'd thought that the baby had been left with her because Silence's brother, Winter, ran the Home for Unfortunate Infants and Foundling Children. Now she wondered if there had been a much more diabolical reason. Fear that she was about to lose Mary Darling forever made her clutch the baby closer.

"You don't love her," she tried.

"No." Mickey O'Connor let his hand drop. "But I'm a-thinkin' that doesn't matter all that much when ye do, Mrs. Hollingbrook."

Silence felt the breath catch in her throat. "Let me leave with her."

"No."

Mary Darling squirmed again, with one of those mercurial shifts of moods that toddlers are prone to. "Down!"

Silence let her slip from her arms, watching as the little girl carefully stood against one of the huge trunks of booty. She looked so small. So precious. "Why are you doing this? Haven't you done enough to me in this lifetime?"

"Oh, not nearly enough, me darlin'," Mickey O'Connor murmured. Silence felt more than saw him reach out his hand toward her. Maybe he meant to fondle her hair as he had Mary Darling's.

She jerked her head out of his way.

His hand dropped.

"What are you about?" She folded her arms and faced him, though she kept Mary Darling within sight.

He shrugged, the movement making his shirt slip further off one muscled shoulder. "A man in me position has many an enemy, I fear. Nasty, mean creatures who don't let the thought of innocence or youth stop them from doin' terrible, murderous things."

"Why take her now?" Silence asked. "Are these enemies new?"

His mouth curved into another smile, this one entirely without humor. "Not at all. But me enemies have become more...er...persistent in the last month, ye understand. It's merely a matter o' business--one that I hope to soon tidy up. But in the meantime, should me enemies find the wee child..."

Silence shivered, watching as Mary Darling grabbed for a dark fur and pulled it half out of the trunk. "Damn you. How could you have put her in this danger?"

"I didn't," he said without any signs of conscience. "I gave her to ye,

remember.”

She shifted her gaze to him and was disconcerted to find him only a foot away. The room was big, and besides Harry and the sweetmeats boy, a gang of pirates sat around Mr. O’Connor’s throne. Was he worried they’d be overheard?

“Then let me keep her,” Silence whispered. “She doesn’t know you, doesn’t love you. She’s been safe with me for a year. If there’s a danger, then send men to guard her where we live, but let her stay at the home. If you have any decency in you at all, you’ll let her go with me.”

“Ah, love.” Mickey O’Connor tilted his head, long coal-black locks of hair slithering over his broad shoulders. “Don’t ye know by now that decent is the last thing anyone would be a-callin’ me? No, the lass stays with me and me men, here where I can keep me eye on her night and day until I can put an end to this bit o’ bother.”

“But she thinks me her mother,” Silence hissed. “How can you separate us when--”

“An’ who said anything about separatin’?” Mr. O’Connor asked with feigned surprise. “Why, darlin’ I said the babe had to stay with me, I never said ye couldn’t as well.”

Silence inhaled and then found she had trouble letting the breath out again. “You want me to come live with you?”

Mr. O’Connor grinned as if she were a pet dog that had finally learned a trick. “Aye, that’s the way of it, sweetin’.”

“I can’t live with you,” Silence hissed furiously. “Everyone would think...”

“What, now?” Mickey O’Connor arched an eyebrow, his black eyes glittering.

She swallowed. “That I was your whore.”

He tutted softly. “Oh, an’ we can’t be havin’ that, now can we, what with yer reputation bein’ all snowy white an’ all?”

Her hand was half raised, the fingers balled into a fist before she even realized it. She wanted to hit him so badly, wanted to wipe that smirking smile from his face with all her soul.

Except he was no longer smiling. He watched her, his face expressionless, his eyes intent, like a wolf waiting for the hare to break from cover.

Trembling, she let her hand fall.

He shrugged, looking mildly disappointed. “Ah, well, it’d be a great inconvenience to have ye livin’ under me roof anyway. I ‘spect ye’ve made the

right decision.”

He turned away from her, sauntering gracefully toward his throne. She'd been dismissed, it seemed. He no longer found her interesting enough to play with.

In that moment, with rage and grief, and yes, love, swirling all inside her being, Silence made her decision.

“Mr. O'Connor!”

He stopped, still turned rudely away from her, his voice a rumbling purr. “Aye?”

“I'll stay.”

# *The Maiden Lane Series*

## *Cast of Characters*

*Note: Not all characters appear in each book. Starred characters are main heroes and heroines.*

**Artemis Greaves** She's the overworked companion to **Lady Penelope Chadwicke** and the possessor of a pair of lovely dark gray eyes.

**Asa Makepeace** The second eldest brother in the Makepeace family. He has the shoulders of a bull, the mane of a lion and his business is a mystery to his family.

**Bert** A tooth-challenged tough who works for **Charming Mickey**.

**Bran Kavanagh** **Mickey O'Connor**'s youthful—and eager—lieutenant. Like Mickey he grew up in St. Giles...but is he as ruthless as his leader?

**Lady Caire** She's a haughty society matron and mother of **Lord Caire**.

**Lady Caroline Huff** Eldest daughter of the Reading family—a great beauty who loves to point out when others are in the wrong.

**Concord Makepeace** The eldest brother of the Makepeace clan is a beer brewer with a brood of children and a constantly pregnant wife.

**Cousin Bathilda** A rather stout lady who is always accompanied by her little spaniel, Mignon, Cousin Bathilda brought up **Lady Phoebe** and **Lady Hero** after their parents were killed.

**Fionnula** A kind maidservant in **Mickey O'Connor**'s palace. She's **Bran Kavanagh**'s sweetheart.

**The Ghost of St. Giles** A mysterious figure dressed in harlequin's motley and mask wielding two swords. Is he a guardian of the poor or something much more sinister?

**Godric St. John** A scholar and a gentleman, his reserved exterior hides a tragic heartbreak.

★**Lord Griffin Reading** He's the younger brother of the **Marquess of Mandeville** and well known for his debauchery—but is he as much of a rake as society thinks? (*Notorious Pleasures*)

**Harry** A thug with a heart of gold who, along with his sidekick, **Bert**, guards **Charming Mickey's** palace in St. Giles.

**Henry Putman** An orphan at the Home for Unfortunate Infants and Foundling Children, he's the only boy to *not* be called Joseph as he was old enough (four years old) when he came to the home to insist he keep his own name.

★**Lady Hero Batten** The elegant and somewhat shy sister of the **Duke of Wakefield**, she hides a wicked sense of humor. (*Notorious Pleasures*)

**Lord Huff** Genial spouse to **Lady Caroline Huff**.

**Lady Isabel Beckinhall** Elegant and witty, Lady Beckinhall is the newest addition to the Ladies' Syndicate for the Benefit of the Home for Unfortunate Infants and Foundling Children.

**Captain Jonathon Trevillion** Stern captain of the dragoon regiment sent to clean up St. Giles.

**Joseph Tinbox** A mischievous orphan at the Home for Unfortunate Infants and Foundling Children.

**Lavinia Tate** A scandalous society widow, she's known for her *affaires de coeur*, but the man she really wants has already rejected her.

★**Lazarus Huntington, Lord Caire** He's a scholar by day and a rake by night, notorious for the demands he makes on his bed partners. (*Wicked Intentions*)

**Lady Mandeville** Mother of both **Lord Reading** and the **Marquess of Mandeville**, she loves both her sons...though they cannot stand each other.

**Lady Margaret Reading** The younger sister of **Lord Reading** and the **Marquess of Mandeville**, she knows she must make a suitable match—but can't she find love as well?

**Mary Darling** A foundling infant mysteriously left on a doorstep.

**Mary Hope** An orphan infant saved by **Temperance Dews**.

**Mary Whitsun** The eldest orphan at the Home for Unfortunate Infants and Foundling Children. It's time she was apprenticed out, but can the home—and **Temperance's** heart—survive without her?

**Maximus Batten, the Duke of Wakefield** Arrogantly aristocratic, His Grace spearheads the fight to rid London of gin.

★**“Charming” Mickey O'Connor** The most notorious river pirate in London. Dangerous, cunning, and without compassion, Mickey makes a devilish offer...that ends up threatening his own soul. (*Scandalous Desires*)

**Mignon** A small rather irritable Cavalier King Charles spaniel belonging to **Cousin Bathilda**

**Mother Heart's-Ease** A venial gin seller in St. Giles.

**Nell Jones** A former actress and prostitute, Nell is **Temperance's** right hand at the Home for Unfortunate Infants and Foundling Children.

**Nick Barnes** He's been a professional boxer—and worse—but he's loyal to **Lord Reading**.

**Pansy** She's the manager of Mrs. Whiteside's House in St. Giles—a brothel that caters to a clientele with unusual tastes.

**Lady Penelope Chadwicke** Spoiled daughter of the Earl of Brightmore, she's rumored to have a spectacular dowry.

**Lady Phoebe Batten** Youngest of the Batten family, she longs for her debut into society...if her disability doesn't prevent it.

★**Silence Hollingbrook** Beautiful, passionate, and perhaps *too* brave, Silence is the youngest of the Makepeace clan and married to ship captain, **William Hollingbrook**. (*Scandalous Desires*)

★**Temperance Dews** The fourth Makepeace offspring. She runs the Home for Unfortunate Infants and Foundling Children in St. Giles along with her brother, **Winter Makepeace**. She is all that is respectable—on the surface at least. (*Wicked Intentions*)

**Thomas Reading, the Marquess of Mandeville** A leading member of the House of Lords and a political ally of the Duke of Wakefield.

**The Vicar of Whitechapel (Charlie Grady)** A notorious gin-making crime lord with ambitions to control the entire East End.

**William Hollingbrook** Captain of the *Finch* and husband to **Silence Hollingbrook**.

**Winter Makepeace** Second to the last of the Makepeace clan. A schoolteacher and manager of the Home for Unfortunate Infants and Foundling Children, he seems austere, but does his severity disguise a passionate heart.

# Reading Family Tree

- CAUSARUM JUSTIA ET MISERICORDIA ~

William Reading  
2<sup>nd</sup> Marquess of Mandeville  
(d. 1726)

m.

Sarah Howard  
(Dowager Marchioness Mandeville)

Thomas Reading  
3<sup>rd</sup> Marquess of Mandeville  
(b. 1705)

m. Anne Frentlock (d. 1734)

Lord Griffin Reading  
(b. 1707)

Caroline  
(b. 1710)

Margaret  
(b. 1715)

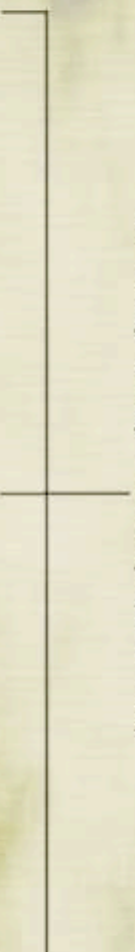
m. Lord Huff

*Notorious Pleasures*

# Batten Family Tree



Charles Batten, 5th Duke of Wakefield (d. 1721)  
-m- Lady Mary DeBray (d. 1721)



Maximus Batten,  
6th Duke of Wakefield (b. 1707)

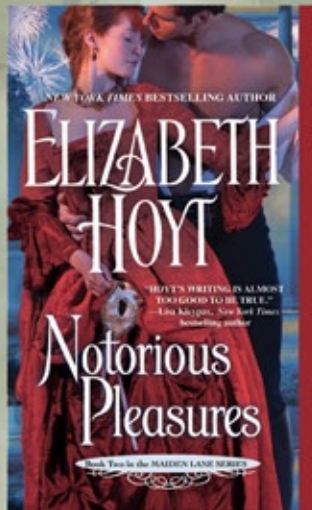
**Hero** (b. 1713)

Phoebe (b. 1720)

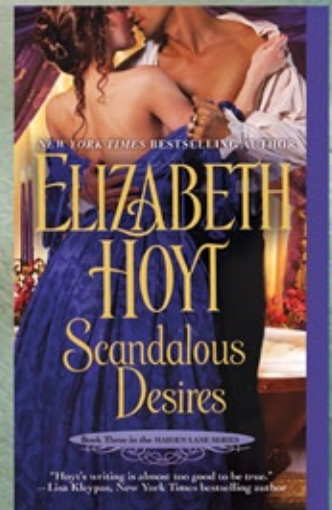
*Notorious Pleasures*



Wicked Intentions  
August 2010  
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Notorious Pleasures  
February 2011  
0446558958



Scandalous Desires  
November 2011  
0446558931