



*It'll take a
shrew to tame
this beast...*

THE
BEAST
OF
BESWICK

*"A smart, sexy, deliciously feminist romance
that I couldn't put down."*

—NYT bestselling author Sarah MacLean

AMALIE HOWARD

Dear Reader,

Please note that this Advance Reading Copy is not a finished book.

That's right. Because we want to give you a special, early sneak peek of this incredible story, you're holding the first stage of printer's proofs, which has not yet been corrected by the author, publisher, or printer.

The design, artwork, page length, and format may change before publication, and typographical errors will be corrected during the course of production.

If you quote from this ARC, please note that your review is based on uncorrected text.

Happy reading!

Entangled Publishing

THE
BEAST
OF
BESWICK

THE
BEAST
OF
BESWICK

AMALIE HOWARD

ADVANCE READER COPY
UNCORRECTED PROOF
NOT FOR SALE OR REDISTRIBUTION

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

Copyright © 2019 by Amalie Howard.
Preview of *My Darling Duke*
copyright © 2019 by Stacy Reid.

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce, distribute, or transmit in any form or by any means. For information regarding subsidiary rights, please contact the Publisher.

Entangled Publishing, LLC
2614 South Timberline Road
Suite 105, PMB 159
Fort Collins, CO 80525
rights@entangledpublishing.com
Visit our website at www.entangledpublishing.com.

Amara is an imprint of Entangled Publishing, LLC.

Edited by Liz Pelletier and Heather Howland
Cover Artist: Erin Dameron-Hill, EDH Graphics
Photograph by VJ Dunraven/Period images,
Peter Tittmus/123rf.com, and
srongkrod481/depositphotos.com
Interior design by Toni Kerr

MMP ISBN 978-1-64063-741-2
ebook ISBN 978-1-64063-742-9

Manufactured in the United States of America
First Edition December 2019

AMARA

ALSO BY AMALIE HOWARD

LORDS OF ESSEX

My Rogue, My Ruin

My Darling, My Disaster

My Hellion, My Heart

My Scot, My Surrender

TARTANS & TITANS

Sweet Home Highlander

A Lord for the Lass

What a Scot Wants

For Cameron, the prince of beasties.

CHAPTER ONE

England, 1819

Her pulse drumming at a fierce clip, Lady Astrid Everleigh burst through the front doors of her uncle's country estate in Southend. The flashy coach in the drive was as unmistakable as its owner—the arrogant and deeply persistent Earl of Beaumont. A sickening feeling leached into her as she scanned the foyer. No one would meet her eyes, not the butler, not the footmen, not even her uncle Reginald whose pallid cheekbones had gone an ugly shade of puce.

“You were s-supposed to be at the market,” he sputtered in surprise.

“What have you done, Uncle?” she demanded, flinging off her cloak. “Did you arrange this without my knowledge or consent?”

Her uncle's color heightened. “Now, see here,” he blustered, “it's demmed high time your sister marry, and you know it—”

Not to *him*. Never to him.

The pit of sickness in Astrid's stomach deepened at the thought of sweet, innocent Isobel in the clutches of such a man. The Earl of Beaumont was scraping the bottom of the barrel as far as Astrid was concerned, even if he was now a peer of the realm.

Throttling the ugly memories his name alone conjured, Astrid turned away from her uncle to her

ashen lady's maid, who had appeared upon hearing her voice. "Where are they, Agatha?"

"In the morning salon, my lady. With the viscountess."

Astrid's heart plummeted at the sight of the closed doors. Aunt Mildred's chaperonage would be questionable to say the least. "How long have they been in there?"

"Not five minutes, my lady."

A blink of an eye and yet enough time for her sweet sister to be thoroughly compromised. Isobel was barely sixteen. She'd been an unexpected and much welcomed surprise to their parents, and Astrid had always been protective. To her, Isobel was still a child, no matter their uncle's declaration of her being ready to wed. She hadn't even had a proper Season yet, and already he wanted to marry her off to the highest bidder.

To a liar and a lecher, no less.

Edmund Cain had inherited the earldom from his uncle a handful of years ago. Though a title made him eligible to most, he was still the heartless brute who'd destroyed Astrid's reputation without a qualm during her first—and only—Season, when she'd had the *audacity* to turn down his suit. He'd retaliated with a horrible lie about her lack of virtue, and her entire future had crumbled.

When their parents were taken by illness a year later, she and Isobel had gone into the care of their only living relatives in England. After the year of mourning, Astrid had decided any money left to her would be better saved for Isobel's coming out. She was the daughter of a viscount, and when the time

came, Isobel deserved her due.

But that was before her uncle had gotten his hands on their inheritance. Most of it was gone, except for specific, unreleased funds, which would come to them only upon marriage or the age of twenty-six. Astrid was one year away, and Isobel was a decade away, unless a marriage came first, which clearly was the goal here. But now, eight years after her parents' deaths, the girls were nearly destitute, or so her uncle claimed.

Destitute enough to seek a connection with an utterly unsuitable earl? If money was in question, it was a certainty. Uncle Reginald would sell his own soul if he could get a farthing for it.

"Lord Beaumont is a peer now," her uncle said, drawing her attention. "He's not the man you knew."

"A leopard cannot change its spots."

"Now see here, Astrid," he said, blocking her path. "It is done. Lord Beaumont has pledged—"

"You will stay a far step from me, Uncle. And I don't care what that man has promised; he will never—" Astrid broke off, the threat as empty as the power she held...which was none.

Without a husband of her own, the truth was that as their guardian, if her uncle wished to marry Isobel off to a pox-marked pauper, he could, and there would be nothing either of them could do about it. Such was the place of a woman in their world.

Astrid switched tactics, turning toward him, her voice softening. "Uncle Reggie, be reasonable. Isobel hasn't even had a Season yet. Perhaps she can make an even better match, one with greater reward." She let the suggestion hang in the air, knowing the

promise of coin would make her uncle salivate.

The viscount thinned his lips. "Better an egg today than a hen tomorrow."

"Spoken by the rooster who has nothing to lose," Astrid said under her breath, though her stomach churned. Had he already made a settlement with Beaumont?

Reasonable discussion was clearly getting her nowhere.

Shooting a look of pure loathing at her uncle, she darted around him to the salon doors and shoved them open, searching for her sister.

Isobel's face was pinched and her spine rigid. With fear or shock, Astrid did not know. Thankfully, her sister sat on the sofa, hands clasped in her lap while Beaumont stood a short distance away. Not far enough away in Astrid's opinion. No one else was in the room. Gracious, where on earth was her aunt?

"I thought I told you I wished to be alone, Everleigh," Beaumont said over his shoulder, annoyance flashing in his eyes for a second before he realized that it wasn't her uncle who had barged in. "Ah, it's the spinster. Have you come to congratulate us?" he drawled, satisfaction creeping over his deceptively handsome features. "I assume you've heard that I intend to court your sister."

She let out a breath, but before she could form a reply, her aunt emerged from the far end of the room, her face pulling tight with vexation. Astrid frowned. Good Lord but Aunt Mildred's designs were transparent. Even though they weren't in London, her aunt well knew the rules of the aristocracy...especially with respect to chaperoning

unmarried young ladies.

Astrid swallowed the spurt of anger when she thought of how easily Isobel could have been compromised. Her eyes narrowed with sudden understanding.

Is that what my fortune-hunting relatives intended?

Astrid's frustration pricked as her eyes touched on the smug face of the Earl of Beaumont. She bit her lip, fingers clenching at her sides, her stomach threatening to upend itself. If she hadn't forgotten her market day list, she would never have returned in time...and who knew what else might have happened. Right now, however, Isobel was safe and that was all that mattered. She *was* safe, right? Swallowing a rise of dread, her gaze shifted to her sister.

"Isobel, are you well?" she asked.

Her sister nodded, though her rosy skin was ashen. "Yes, but I do feel a bit of a megrim coming on."

"Perhaps you should rest."

With a grateful look, Isobel nodded and stood, bobbing a hasty curtsy in the earl's direction, and fled the room with Aunt Mildred on her heels.

Beaumont gave a careless wave as she left. "I'll be seeing you soon, dearest."

"You will not," Astrid said.

His stare raked her from head to toe, making her feel as if she were wearing far less than the sturdy gray woolen dress with matching pelisse, buttoned up to her neck. "Tell me, Lady Astrid, what can *you* do to stop me?"

“She’s sixteen,” she said.

He nodded. “Indeed. Marriageable age.”

Astrid swallowed the rise of anger. The same age *she’d* been when he had first set eyes on her in London. His interest, intent, and timing were no mistake. The newly minted earl was back to settle a score.

“Isobel is to have a Season in London,” Astrid said.

“Not if your uncle accepts an offer beforehand. She will make a lovely countess, don’t you think?”

Astrid scowled, her heart thudding. “Why are you so fixated on her for a wife? She’s not part of your set.”

“Perhaps because I was denied nine years ago.”

And there it was as plain as day—the heart of the matter—the *score*.

A calculated stare met hers as Beaumont approached where she stood, her posture rigid with a sick combination of fear and fury. His victorious smile made Astrid’s blood run cold. He’d already wrecked her future. She could not...*would not* let him threaten her sister’s.

“No, I won’t allow it,” she said. “I am her guardian.”

“Ah, but Viscount Everleigh is *your* guardian, is he not? And *his* approval has already been granted, or at least it will be once we come to terms. You, my dear, have no say in the matter, and as much as you think you can sway me, you will find that what you desire is of no import. You had your chance, as they say.” His grin was slow and mocking. “I told you that you would regret it.”

Stifling the retort that she absolutely did *not* regret refusing him, Astrid sucked in a calming breath. "Isobel is barely out of the schoolroom. You are four and thirty, Edmund. Surely you can find a more appropriate wife closer to your own age."

His eyes narrowed at her use of his given name. "It's Lord Beaumont now. Are you proposing yourself as a substitute? Though, for a woman in your situation, marriage would be out of the question now, of course." He canvassed her figure with a lewd glance that made her want to cover herself with a blanket. "However, I could be moved to reconsider with the right incentive."

"I'd rather be mauled by rabid dogs."

"Ah yes, there's that barbed tongue of yours," the earl replied. "You're like a fine-aged whiskey with a bite that has only sharpened with time. Lady Isobel seems much more well-behaved, though it will be my greatest pleasure once we're wedded to discover if she has a stubborn streak like you."

Astrid stiffened. "You will marry my sister when hell freezes over, *Lord Beaumont*. Count on that." With as much effort as she could muster, she tamped down her mounting temper and swept from the room.

Shaking with outrage, Astrid attempted to compose herself in the corridor. Regardless of Beaumont's looks, title, or fortune, she would not wish such a heartless man on her worst enemy, much less her sweet, innocent sister. Given a proper Season, a jewel like Isobel would have her choice of husbands.

Her uncle knew it, and Beaumont knew it, too.

Once the earl had taken his leave, she sought out her uncle, who had retreated to his study, giving her tongue free rein. “How could you? She’s only sixteen, for God’s sake.” She turned to her aunt standing quietly near the desk. “Aunt Mildred, have you nothing to say? What about Isobel’s feelings on the matter?”

Her aunt’s mouth thinned. “Her future husband will tell her what to think.”

“Said no woman with half a spine ever.”

“Would you rather her end up like you, then?” her uncle said. “Unmarried, ruined, and a bloody burden to your aunt and me?”

She sucked in a gasp. Her father, the previous viscount, had made sure that his daughters would live comfortably, with the hope that his brother would do his duty by his nieces. Her sister and she had learned early on that that would not be the case. Their father’s old family solicitor, Mr. Jenkins, who checked in on them once a year, had advocated for their father’s wishes, including a Season for Isobel once she came of age, but Mr. Jenkins had passed away a year ago. His firm oversaw the estate, but there was no one left to keep the greedy Everleighs in line.

“Papa made sure we would not be,” Astrid said, striving for patience. “We did not come to you cap in hand.”

“That blunt is gone.”

Riled beyond belief, she threw caution to the wind. “Where, Uncle? Where did all of it go? Papa bequeathed us a fortune by any standards.”

His nostrils flared, eyes bulging as he rose behind

his desk. "How *dare* you, you insolent chit! After your aunt and I took you in, this is how you repay us? With mistrust and suspicion? That demmed money went to gowns, shoes, food, and finishing school." He snorted. "To those books of yours. Your sister's dancing and pianoforte instructors. Do you think it's inexpensive to raise two demanding chits? And what about your horses?"

The horses he spoke of were *his* thoroughbreds bought with his dead brother's money, but Astrid didn't point that out. She glued her lips together, stifling her anger. If Uncle Reginald decided to throw her out on her ear, she would be destitute and homeless. She would not come into her own portion until she was six and twenty, months away, and until then, she had to guard her tongue. Without her, Isobel would be on her own and vulnerable.

"And what about *you*?" he went on, eyeballing her. "You were supposed to make an advantageous marriage. Instead, you've brought ruin upon the Everleigh name." He sneered at her, his eyes cold. "What? You thought your sins would not leach to your poor sister?"

A sound of pain escaped Astrid's lips. Her *sins*. She'd done nothing wrong, and yet she had been the one punished. Excoriated and summarily dropped by the *ton* upon the faithless account of a scorned liar.

"You know what he did," Astrid whispered, hand clutched to her chest and eyes burning with unshed tears. "What he did to *me*, and yet you still welcome his presence. How could you be so cruel?"

Her craven uncle would not meet her eyes. "He is

an earl. And perhaps he wants to make it right.”

Her uncle was wrong. Beaumont didn’t want to *make it right*. He wanted to make Astrid pay.

“Please, Uncle Reggie,” she tried, resorting to begging. “Even if that is so, surely you see how poor of a match it is. Beaumont is twice her age. He isn’t fit for someone as tender as Isobel. Can’t you see that?”

Uncle Reginald’s mouth thinned as he stood and indicated the opened study door. “Nonetheless, he is an earl. A rich earl. And you’re forgetting that reformed rakes make the best husbands. He intends to join our estates and revive them. Isobel will be a countess and want for nothing. Now begone and leave me be.”

What he really meant was that he and Aunt Mildred would want for nothing. Astrid’s heart sank as she obeyed the rough dismissal.

Upstairs, she found her sister in the bedroom they shared. Isobel’s eyes were red-rimmed as though she’d been weeping, and Astrid went to her immediately.

“What will we do? I don’t wish to marry him.” Isobel sniffled. “But Aunt Mildred says I must do my duty to our family.”

Astrid took her sister’s hands into her own. “You won’t have to, I promise.”

“But how?” Her pale eyes watered. “He’s an earl. And since Uncle approves the match, I have no choice.”

“Don’t worry, Izzy—fortune favors those best prepared.” She hugged her sister tight, her resolve hardening. “I will find a way to see us out of this.”

Their options were limited. It was clear what her uncle intended—to sell Isobel’s virtue to someone willing to pay for the privilege, in this case, Lord Beaumont. It was unconscionable and it sickened her, but there wasn’t a thing she could do about it. Not without help.

Astrid blew out a frustrated breath.

If only her father were still alive or she had a husband of her own...

She blinked, an outrageous idea blossoming.

It would solve everything. It was a dreadful, desperate plan, but it was something. It was a *chance*.

At five and twenty, she was well on the shelf, but she wasn’t dead. She might be ruined in the eyes of the *ton*, but she had a sound brain, she’d been raised to run an aristocratic household, and she was the daughter of a viscount. It could work. *It could work*.

She would just have to marry a different kind of beast than the earl to save her sister.

And she knew just the man.