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# ENOLA HOLMES

— AND THE —

## ELEGANT ESCAPADE

NANCY SPRINGER

# ENOLA HOLMES

AND THE ELEGANT ESCAPE

Nancy Springer



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# Prologue

Seventeen-year-old Lady Cecily Alistair took a knitting needle in her left fist and used its point quite forcibly to scratch a crude, life-sized caricature of her father on the inside of her locked bedroom door. Then she stepped back, barefoot, in her nightgown, to look at the pudgy, fat-headed portrait she had just etched in splintery brown scratches on the door's white paint. She could have done far better with paint or charcoal, but her father had not allowed her any when he had shut her in here a week ago. He had not allowed her journals to write in, either, or pencils, or pen, or books to read,

or anything to do except knit, which he knew she did not like and never had, not even before.

Before it all happened, only a year ago, she had been an obedient if not particularly happy daughter, and all she had to worry about was preparing to be presented to the queen, practicing how to curtsy nearly to the floor without displacing the three large white feathers absurdly sprouting atop her coifed head. And, after that, “coming out” as a debutante and finding a suitably rich and titled husband.

Thinking about those times, Lady Cecily aimed her knitting needle like a dart and hurled it hard at the imaginary target of her father’s heart—or lack of one.

Not that she had exactly *dreamed* of “coming out” or marriage, but she would have gone along with her parents’ plans; it was not she who had spoilt them. Certainly, it was not her fault she had been hypnotized and *kidnapped*, of all things.

Lady Cecily’s projectile clattered against the locked door but missed its target.

Frowning, picking it up to try again, she wondered not for the first time why she had been so meek, so docile, so utterly possessed by—by her family’s expecta-

tions, yes, but more disturbingly, by the villain's power. He, the charismatic kidnapper, had Mesmerized her so that she might never have escaped his control if it were not for a strange, gawky, gallant girl named Enola who had appeared out of the night and, after rescuing Cecily and saving her life, disappeared back into the night as if she were a phantom.

Enola: mystery. Enola's name written backwards spelled "alone." If Cinderella had a fairy godmother, then Cecily seemed to have a fairly odd godsister.

If her life were a fairy tale, she would have returned home to live Happily Ever After, but not so. Papa had fulminated and thundered even though nothing had *happened* between his daughter and the kidnapper except that he had starved her, overworked her, and oh, by the way, tried to kill her. But to Papa, and most of society, this was all scandalous and she, Cecily, the victim, was soiled, stained, ruined matrimonial goods. She could never be presented at court, be a debutante, or attract an aristocratic husband.

Papa had not even given her time to recover from her ordeal before he had turned her over to his two odious sisters in a plot to have her marry, perforce, her

toad-like cousin. Her darling father had very nearly succeeded in selling her like a slave into wedlock. She did manage, at a lucky chance encounter in a public lavatory, to slip a coded message to Enola, but with very little hope of rescue. By the morning of her nuptials, Cecily was so weakened by starvation and ill-usage that she would have let herself be dragged like a rag doll through the ceremony. She would have been shackled by law to a loathsome husband if it were not for Enola.

Enola, appearing at the last moment like a fairy-tale hero, or at least like a fairly tall one. Cecily had learned more about Enola that day, for Enola had delivered her to her brother, who had turned out to be the great detective Sherlock Holmes! So, Enola was Enola Holmes, but to Cecily it seemed as if . . . truly, somehow Enola was her very best friend even though they had only met twice, last January and last May . . . well, three times, if one included a very brief and wordless encounter in the First Ladies' Lavatory of London.

Sherlock Holmes had escorted Cecily to the safety of her mother's arms, and then, for a while, it had seemed as if all would be well. But far too soon, Papa had found them and taken them back, and he had im-

prisoned Cecily in her room, stating his intention to marry her off to someone, somehow, at the first opportunity. Not only had he deprived Cecily of her books and her art for punishment, but, to prevent even the most remote possibility of her escape, he had taken all of her clothes away.

Which was why, in the middle of a sunny October afternoon, she had nothing to wear except a nightgown and nothing better to do than scratch a big, fat likeness of her father on the inside of her locked bedroom door.

Cecily's hand, holding the knitting needle, tightened into a fist. And instead of hurling her weapon at her target anymore, she marched over and forced its point into the wood. Defiantly, with her forbidden left hand, she stabbed the effigy of Sir Eustace Alistair, Baronet.

# Chapter the First

*October 1889*

Alighting from my cab on that sunny October day, I felt an extraordinary sense of well-being. My new calling cards had finally arrived from the printer, and they bore my very own name, Enola Holmes. Wearing my brand-new, cherry-red “polonaise” style jacket, I was going calling on my best friend, and we had a great deal to talk about. Much had happened since the last time I had seen her, several months before.

First and foremost, I was no longer a fugitive from my older brothers, Sherlock and Mycroft Holmes. Since that fateful July day when my mother had disappeared,

over a year ago, they had been trying to take me in hand, send me to finishing school, et cetera, and I had been running away from them. But, due to my adventures—indeed, my coups—during that time, they had made peace with me and agreed that I—Enola Eudoria Hadassah Holmes!—was quite capable of living on my own even though I was not yet of legal age.

Also and furthermore, all three of us together, we had learned the whereabouts of our mother. She had conveyed to us a most elucidating letter saying that she was now deceased, and she had known she had not long to live, but she had gone away to spend her last days in peace, beyond the clutches of society's dictates. She lay in an unmarked grave, and we were not to wear any ridiculous and ritualistic black mourning garments for her.

In consequence of all this—reconciling with my brothers at the same time as losing my mother—I had paused to take a breath, so to speak, in my youthful but eventful life. I now boarded in a room at the Professional Women's Club, where even my brother Mycroft had to admit I was perfectly safe, as no males were allowed on the premises. And I had put off practicing as

a “Scientific Perditorian,” a finder of things lost, until the future. No longer spending my days at “Dr. Rago-tin’s” office, I was instead taking classes at the London Women’s Academy, where I particularly enjoyed the challenges of algebra, geometry, and natural philosophy. Even more, I enjoyed socializing, or perhaps I should say fraternizing, with my brothers, especially Sherlock. Getting to know him better was a particularly intriguing process.

Also and finally, during this time I quite reveled in shopping. How delightful I found it that the “hour-glass figure” had at last gone out of style! Just when I no longer needed to wear hip transformers and bosom enhancers to disguise me from my brothers, they were no longer required anyway! On this particular day, I had made the rounds of the dress shops in London with my new friends Tish and Flossie, I had purchased a very modern outfit that disguised me as no one but my slender self, and now I wanted only reunion with my very best friend, Lady Cecily Alistair, to complete my happiness.

Yes, indeed, somehow she was my very best friend even though I had only met her twice, last January and

last May . . . well, three times, if one insisted on including the encounter in the lavatory.

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Sashaying up the Alistairs' fancy-brickwork walk, I rapped a cheerful rat-a-tat-tat with the front door knocker.

After what seemed like a longish time, the customary stony-faced butler opened the door. Proffering my card, I directed more than asked, "Is Lady Cecily in?"

"Lady Cecily is not seeing anyone." He started to close the door.

"Wait!" I stepped forwards, one foot inside the mansion to prevent him. Surely, even if she was napping, Cecily would not wish to miss my visit. I told the butler, "Take up my card and we shall see."

But without reaching for his salver, he repeated, his tone adamant, "Lady Cecily is seeing *no one*."

The sun continued to shine—a rare event in London, especially in the autumn—but I felt chilled and shadowed for Lady Cecily's sake. What could be the matter? Having the upper-class misfortune of being born left-handed, Lady Cecily had experienced an even

more draconian upbringing than most such girls, being moulded into a demure and docile *right-handed* ornament for society. But, secretly, she had rebelled by boldly sketching in charcoal with her left hand, and she had developed two quite different handwritings. And two personalities: one sweet and ladylike, the other a social reformer. Had she revealed her views to her parents; was she in trouble for that? Or was something more sinister going on? I had been unhappily surprised when I had heard that Cecily's mother had returned to London to reconcile with her husband. Was "reconcile" perhaps not the exact right word?

I told the stone-faced butler, "In that case, I would like a word with Lady Theodora." Once more I offered my card.

Once more he ignored it. "Her Ladyship is seeing no one."

What in the world? Lady Theodora, not entertaining callers? Something was wrong.

"Heavens to Mehitabel!" I exclaimed, becoming wrought. "You know quite well she will see *me*. Do you not remember me?" By rounding and narrowing my shoulders, lowering my head, addressing the floor, and

speaking like a well-bred sparrow, I became “Mrs. Ragostin,” who had befriended Lady Theodora in a time of crisis. “Do you not remember me?” I repeated in a bitty birdy voice before I straightened to glare at the butler from under my straw hat brim. “Well?” I barked.

I suppose my performance must have shaken him, for his carved-in-marble facade cracked and his demeanor crumbled. “Miss, um, Ragostin, Mrs. I mean, what I’ve been instructed is nobody gets in, begging your pardon, by Sir Eustace’s strict orders.” Crisp intonations had deserted him. “I dasn’t so much as touch your card, missus, or I could lose my place.”

“Sir Eustace’s orders!” I echoed, aghast, with my kid-gloved hands to my mouth, for I had heard nothing complimentary and much that was deplorable about Lady Cecily’s father.

The poor butler actually flinched. “Oh, no, miss, I didn’t mean to say—”

But I did not stay to hear what he didn’t mean to say. Dazed and alarmed, I turned, walked down the steps and out to the pavement where a hansom cab awaited me at the kerb.

From his lofty perch, the driver took the unusual

liberty of expressing concern. “Rum go, Miss Enola?” A favourite of mine because he had once loaned me his cab and his exceedingly capable horse, Brownie, he had become my regular cabdriver.

“Rum, indeed, Harold,” I told him. He called himself “Arry,” but I titled him Harold. “Please take me home.”

From hearing this exchange, the Alistairs’ butler may have concluded, if he was listening, that he had disposed of me. If so, then he was much deluded. I had every intention of seeing and speaking with Lady Cecily by whatever means possible before another day had passed.

Seated in the hansom, I smoothed my fashionably narrow skirt and sighed. The outfit I wore had *no* pockets and only a button-up bosom in which to stow supplies for contingencies. Never would I have dreamed I’d ever miss overskirts, bustles, panniers, and all the storage space concealed thereby! I was going to need to develop new safeguards for sleuthing.

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Once back home at the Professional Women’s Club, I did not immediately retire to the chamber upstairs

where I lodged. Instead, unbuttoning my polonaise, taking off my hat and swinging it by its ribbons to give an appearance of idleness, I strolled through the reading room and the library, smiling at women who looked up at me. The gentle reader must understand this was London's, and perhaps the world's, first exclusive club for females only. Once secure within its citadel, we could relax without fear of predatory males or society's protocols; other members smiled back at me even if we had not been introduced.

Having not yet located the person I sought, I continued, nodding at women I recognized, through the tea room with its delicate Japanese-style furnishings, then through the card room, and so into a cheerful chintz-draped sitting room, where I saw her standing near a window: a tall, elderly lady who had interested me deeply since the first time I saw her.

She would not have gone unnoticed in any surroundings on account of her toilette: a soft, sunflower-yellow "Aesthetic" gown draping her from her shoulders to her slippers and her long grey hair streaming loose down her back. I did not know her name, but I quite wanted to become acquainted with her because I had

overheard her chatting with her exceedingly cultured friends about my mother.

She had known Mum.

So I wanted to know her, although I did not yet wish to reveal who I was—because if I told her my last name, then I would have to report that Mum was deceased, when what was the harm of letting people think that Lady Eudoria Vernet Holmes was vital and free and enjoying life to the fullest somewhere?

This was the first time I had happened upon the tall woman in the loose, flowing gown by herself, which made her easier to approach, although I felt as shy as a child. “Please excuse me for intruding,” I ventured.

She turned, quite lithely for one so old, to scrutinize me with the most extraordinary large eyes of celadon green—but no, I realized with mingled shock and glee, her eyes *looked* large and jade-coloured because she had used Spanish papers or something of the sort upon them. How daring! But the forbidden facial emollients were not wasted upon her, for even with her parchment-like skin pleated over the bones of her face, she was strikingly beautiful.

“Why hello, dear.” She smiled. “I’ve seen you about.”

Her smile grew puzzled. "But you are looking younger than before."

"Yes," I agreed, "when I came here last May, I was being a married woman in my twenties."

"You 'were being'? Do please explain yourself!" She perched on a camel-back chintz love seat and patted the place next to her for me to sit. "Dear me, there has been a great deal of speculation about Mrs. John Jacobson's marriage, and you mean to topple it all by saying you are not she?"

"Quite so. I am not married." Sitting next to her, I looked up at her. "Please, may I ask what is your name?"

"Oh, how stupid of me not to tell you at once! I am Lady Vienna Steadwell, dear."

Not sure I had heard correctly, I must have frowned.

"Yes, Vienna," she said, her smile ever widening, shirring her thin face. "I was named after the place I was born in, like Florence Nightingale, you know. It must have been a fad of creative parents at the time."

"Much as my creative mother named me Enola." Thus, I managed to tell her my name in part and in passing. I held out my hand. "How do you do, Lady Vienna Steadwell?"

After shaking my hand warmly, Lady Vienna started to ask me something more about myself, but just then the maid entered. Servants, in my experience, possess an uncanny knack for appearing at just the wrong time, but not in this case. Gratefully, I saw the girl coming in with watercress sandwiches, macaroons, and a pitcher of lemonade. As she served, I made quite a point of complimenting her on her simple floral-print dress. Maids at the Women's Club were not required to wear the usual black dress and white apron with ruffled yoke, plus an absurd starched cap that stood up like a wren's tail.

As I had hoped, Lady Steadwell then spoke of dress reform while we devoured sandwiches and macaroons, and I took the chance to tell her how much I liked her unconventional Aesthetic clothing. But she was no fool. Eventually, peering at me, she asked, "Miss Enola, how on earth do you come to be living here, alone, in London at your age?"

"My family lives not far away." True, if evasive; Mycroft and Sherlock were my family.

"Indeed? And what do you do with your days, besides shopping?"

Not minding a bit of teasing, I smiled. "I have been taking a few classes at the Women's Academy."

"Aha!" She quite approved. "Classes in what field of study?"

"A variety. My life's goal is to be a Scientific Perditorian: one who looks for missing persons and things."

"How very extraordinary!"

Her smile and her eyebrows expressed perplexity, but I soldiered on. "In fact, I have a troublesome problem in hand right now, and I hope you won't think me impertinent. . . ." At last I had reached the point where I could pose the question I needed to ask her. "Lady Steadwell, do you happen to be acquainted with the Alistairs?"

She blinked only a few times before answering. "I was, when they were living. But—the Alistair children, you mean? Otelia, Aquilla, and Eustace?"

Children? They were quite my seniors. "Sir Eustace Alistair and his family."

"I am not on familiar terms with any of them, but, of course, I know *of* them. One hears the most deplorable things of them." She sounded a bit prim; evidently, she did not relish gossip.

But I very much wanted to know those deplorable things. “For instance?”

“Oh, for instance, Lady Theodora married Sir Eustace in a fit of martyrdom after having her heart broken by another, and she has been regretting it ever since.”

I pretended ignorance. “Sir Eustace is not a good husband?”

“He is not much inferior to the ordinary run of husbands,” said Lady Vienna wryly, but then she put down her teacup and spoke more seriously. “Even beyond having his share of the usual masculine flaws, Eustace is short, plump, aspires to a higher station, and altogether has quite a full-blown Napoleon complex.”

Now I was ignorant. “Napoleon complex?”

“That is what the alienists call it when a man looks and behaves like a bantam rooster.”

“Ah. The alienists,” I echoed.

“Yes, the founders of a new science of human behaviour. You have heard about their remarkable studies?”

“Yes.” Of which Lady Cecily, with her dual personality, would have been a worthy subject.

“The Napoleon complex,” Lady Vienna continued, “is a characteristic form of inferiority complex developed

in short men. Sir Eustace exhibits classic symptoms: strutting, posturing, bellowing, being opinionated to the point of megalomania, establishing absolute tyranny over his household.”

“Lady Steadwell.” Pushing aside the tea tray, I leaned towards her, closing the distance between us and giving her my steady regard. “In your judgment, is Sir Eustace Alistair capable of imprisoning his wife and daughter within their own home?”

Her level gaze never left mine as she replied with blessed simplicity, “Oh, yes.”

This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

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