

# SEX, LIES AND PRIVATE EYES

Edited by Joe Gentile  
and Richard Dean Starr



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## First Moonstone edition 2009

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10 digit: 1-933076-45-3 13 digit: 978-1-933076-45-4

Cover art: Craig White

Cover art direction: Richard Dean Starr

Project design: David P. Greenawalt

Editorial assistant: Paul Morris

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And a special thanks to Richard Dean Starr and Eric Fein.  
Printed in the USA

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Published by Moonstone, 582 Torrence Ave., Calumet City, IL 60409

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Sample file

# THE PRIVATE WIFE OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

Carole Nelson Douglas

AN IRENE ADLER AND SHERLOCK HOLMES STORY

Climbing stairs is excellent exercise and it is also handy to have an eagle's-eye view of the street and forthcoming visitors.

So I stood in the bow window of 221B Baker Street eyeing the shiny crowns of cabbies' top hats and the gleaming rumps of London's many hackney horses.

When one of the pedestrian hat crowns paused before the entry door below, I drew back from the window and contemplated where I wished to greet the visitor. How was not in question.

Should I meet him at the door or draw back to the mantel? Should I remain standing or seat myself in the basket chair near the fireplace? One of my profession finds setting the stage for an interview useful indeed. It determines that I will control the situation, however perplexed or distraught the visitor.

I decided to stand on the peelskin rug by the fireplace mantel, a suitable distance from the lofty aroma of tobacco shag in a Persian slipper and the cabinet photograph of a fashionable lady.

Mrs. Hudson had intercepted the visitor below and their conversation drifted up through the closed door. She subjected him to several adamant words. I smiled the smile few seldom saw. I guard against looking smug in public.

I amused myself by studying familiar elements of the somewhat bohemian scene: the VR of bullet holes punctuating the wall opposite the bow window, for example. Her Majesty Victoria Regina, one supposed, would not be amused. One wonders if the exercise scared the horses in the street, not to mention the doughty and no doubt much tried landlady.

Soon heavy steps challenged the long stairs as if climbing a slope of Mount Everest, sturdy and determined.

I smiled again, and then composed my expression.

When the door burst open the indignation was not long in coming. "Of all the colossal nerve!" the man burst out as abruptly as the door had sprung wide.



"I don't know who you think you are," he added, advancing on me.

Then he stopped. Stared. "But *you* are dead."

"Perhaps . . . not."

"Holmes—" he began, again indignant. Then he slowed down his words. "Holmes was always damnably smug on that topic."

"How else was he about me?"

"See here, madam. I'd far more welcome you coming back from the dead than conducting this absurd charade. You are not 'Mrs. Sherlock Holmes,' as you told our poor landlady when you demanded admittance to these rooms."

I smiled again, this time for public consumption. "Can you really be sure, Dr. Watson?"

"Holmes has not denigrated the cleverness of women since he encountered you, madam, but he is a bachelor born and even one of your many and obvious attractions will not change that. Besides, you became Mrs. Godfrey Norton by the end of that unfortunate case six years ago."

"So you reported in your debut piece of fiction called 'A Scandal in Bohemia,' Dr. Watson. My emphasis is on the word 'fiction.'"

I took out my Fabergé cigarette case and lit one of the slim dark cylinders inside, tossing the match into the hearth behind me. Dr. Watson frowned at my unladylike habit but would not be distracted, like all who scribble for print and sometimes even pay, from defending his writing.

"That account is as accurate as I dared make it, although disguising the names of the royals involved."

"You were wrong to describe me as 'the late Irene Adler' and I would also contest the 'of dubious and questionable memory.' *Tsk, tsk.* A woman seeks to defend herself against an arrogant and powerful aristocrat and you question *her* reputation. Mr. Holmes was never so foolish. Perhaps that's why I married him."

"Holmes has never been married! You'll never convince me of that."

"Ah, but Watson, the lady has a point," came a voice from an adjoining doorway.

Into the front room stepped a ragged and scrofulous street beggar of the most repulsive sort. Any refined eye would avert itself from him, which was the idea.

"Your unexpected visit has caught me in dishabille, madam," Sherlock Holmes told me dryly in massive understatement. "Watson, would you be so good as to entertain the lady whilst I reassemble myself? There's a good fellow."

He ducked back into what I could glimpse of his bedchamber. I was pleased to spy a gramophone atop a table on the far wall.