



## More Than a Stranger: A Sealed With a Kiss Novel

*Erin Knightley*

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When his family abandoned him at Eton, Benedict Hastings found an unexpected ally in his best friend's sister. Her letters kept him going—until the day he had to leave everything behind. Years later, Benedict has seen his share of betrayal, but when treachery hits close to home, he turns to his old friend for safe haven....

After five torturous years on the marriage circuit, Lady Evelyn Moore is finally free to live her life as she wishes. So when her brother shows up with a dashing stranger, she finds herself torn between her dreams...and newfound desires. Despite his determination to keep Evie at a distance, Benedict cannot deny the attraction that began with a secret correspondence. Yet as they begin to discover one another, the dangers of Benedict's world find them, threatening their lives, their love, and everything they thought they could never have...

## More Than a Stranger: A Sealed With a Kiss Novel Details

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## **From Reader Review More Than a Stranger: A Sealed With a Kiss Novel for online ebook**

**Annie (Under the Covers Book Blog) says**

**Posted on Under the Covers**

Erin Knightley's debut regency novel, MORE THAN A STRANGER is a surprise waiting to be discovered by all. Immediately upon starting this book, I knew that I had found something special.

Knightley has a distinct and unique voice that I instantly noticed and loved. Her writing is natural, seeming to flow without much effort at all. From the start, her writing captured my attention and didn't let go until the very end. In fact, it flowed so well that I didn't feel as if I was reading at all. The heroine, Evelyn aka Evie Moore and the hero, Benedict Hastings have been long time friends. Despite the fact that they are separated as Hastings resides in Eton, Evie and Hastings still keep in contact through letters. These letters introduce the lovely friendship and most importantly the trust they have developed for one another. Though sometimes teasing and snarky, they reflect a blooming long distance relationship that remains strong until one day, Evie stops receiving these letters from Hastings. Naturally, she wonders what happened to Hastings but no word has been heard from him at all.

Later, Evie's older brother, Richard and his best friend, Hastings return home but do not know that Richard's family is there and in particular, Evie. It appears that Hastings wants to keep his identity a secret because when he stumbles upon Evie, he lies to her face, introducing himself as Mr. Benedict instead of Hastings. With Evie's brother's help, Hastings is able to keep his true identity a secret. However, Richard's older younger sister soon finds out. The reason why Hastings wishes to keep his identity a secret is because he fears for Evie's feelings. Their friendship ended, or rather had been stalled by his actions and he still feels terrible about it.

Normally, I would be angry at any hero who lies to the heroine. However, I couldn't find myself being upset by his actions. This time, the deception is one that readers actually want the heroine to discover because we know how well they got along through the letters.

Knightley achieves great sexual tension between the hero and heroine. Evie cannot deny the physical attraction she has for Mr. Benedict. So though her body declares its need, Evie doesn't act on them because her heart belongs to someone else. Or so she thinks...

Fans of Julia Quinn, Lisa Kleypas and Suzanne Enoch would enjoy this book in a new series. With Lord Raleigh's book next, I can truly say that I am excited for it and Knightley has gained a new fan in me.

\*ARC provided by publisher

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**Booknut says**

**Ah...forgiveness. Something that some fictional females hand out like candy, and that fictional males often don't deserve.**

I'm sorry gents, but saying "sorry" does not get you an automatic *Get Out Of Jail Free* card. Relationships are *not* games of Monopoly come to life.

Why is that fictional males tend to screw up royally, break the female's heart, and then all they have to do is:

- (i) Be in a near-death incident
- (ii) Say they're "sorry"
- (iii) Write a long, regret-filled letter

...and the female is rushing into their arms again, like nothing ever happened!

**But let's be honest. Sometimes these women set themselves up for disappointment.**

I'm as much of a romantic as the next woman. But seriously, girls - don't fall in love with a guy you've just met, or to a guy you've never seen face to face...and then become heartbroken when he doesn't reciprocate your feelings.

Real, working, healthy relationships take time. And they also need a certain amount of R.E.S.P.E.C.T. Come on, guys: even Sonic the Hedgehog knows the importance of respect.

(Although his spelling leaves something to be desired!)

If *I* were Evie, I would have kicked Benedict out on his sorry behind the moment I realised he'd been lying to me. Excuses be damned! Since when did being a secret agent for the government absolve a man of all the wrongs he's done?!

Apart from the 'less than desirable' relationship, there were some good parts to this book. Especially the romantic kiss under the stars, which was totally swoon-worthy.

Buuuuut straight after the kiss, Benedict goes back to his 'hot and cold' routine. Honestly, he's so hot and cold that he could have been a part of Katy Perry's *Hot N Cold* music video!

(Just insert a handsome man in Regency wear in the background!)

Overall this book was a mix of hits and misses. But I did enjoy it overall, and it was a pleasant read.

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### **Andrea says**

This was such a sweet, lovely, and even heartbreaking story. There was a little too much unnecessary drama towards the end for my taste, but still a great start to a promising series.

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### **Lindsey says**

I really enjoyed this story. It was light and fun. The family dynamic is great and refreshing. The series of letters throughout the book was great. Great light series by a new author. I look forward to next books in this series.

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### **Dahlia (yadkny) says**

As a young girl, Evie got her first taste of true jealousy when she discovered her beloved brother had indeed acquired a new best friend while away at Eton. She was her brother's best friend, so to put everything to rights, Evie decided to write to this Hastings and establish that the title of best friend belonged solely to her. It wasn't long before she received a very deliberate response to which she was compelled to reply in her own feisty fashion. And so began the unconventional courtship of Evie and Hastings.

Throughout the years that followed Evie and Hastings continued to write to each other and formed a bond and trust that transcended expectation. They became comfortable and confiding in their anonymous companionship. However, just when they were to become introduced for the first time in the flesh, life led Hastings on another path and one that required he cut all ties to his previous life including Evie. What neither of them counted on was the spirit of their relationship to continue on when eventually their paths cross. As they explore this new and yet familiar connection, Hastings must continue keeping his identity secret even while Evie tempts him to distraction. She has shown him the life he could have and the one he wants most with her, but the cost of such desires could be deadly.

From the beginning, the reader is swept away with the lively letters Evie and Hastings write to each other. Their correspondence is sarcastic, witty, and flirtatious and with each new chapter, an enlightening and relevant snippet from their letters is shared. I appreciated that there wasn't a long dramatic setup and instead immediately focus in on the boy and girl who unknowingly spark a friendship with just ink and parchment. The high stakes drama and mounting consequences from Hastings' actions is thoughtfully planned and written into the story. All the while, an underlying romantic tension mounts between these two challenging and independent characters.

Although the climax of the conflict was a little long winded, I was nevertheless immersed in the to be or not to be relationship status of Evie and Hastings. This historical read will appeal to romance fans looking for a bit of intrigue and suspense with a promise of charming characters and setting. A delightful start to a new series and debut author!

### **Review soon-to-be posted @ Night Owl Reviews**

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### **Inshirah Kamal says**

letters. predominantly letters.

i am a sucker for letters and witty conversations and this book had both.

i loved the concept that the initial contact is a series of letters that started when she was 11 and he not much older.

certain parts felt like a big drag, but maybe it was my moods.

“And I love you,”  
he said as she drew him down for another kiss.  
“Just don’t be surprised if while you are looking to the heavens,  
I am looking to you. You, my dear Mrs. Hastings, are all the beauty, guidance, and light I will  
ever need.”

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### **Melanie says**

Oh my but this blurb does not do justice to this wonderful, sweet and very touching love story. Ms. Knightley's debut novel tells the story of two people that come to know each other through the correspondence first, and then many years later both feel the physical attraction that was years in making.

Lady Evelyn Moore is a lady to be reckoned with ever since she was a child. She loves her family, but adores her brother Richard, so when someone such as a friend from his boarding school begins to threaten that relationship, she decides to put him in his place by ordering telling him that Richard already has a best friend and he is to leave him be.

“Dear Mr. Hastings,  
I am sorry to tell you that my brother already has a best friend. I don't care that you can shoot and ride well. Besides, I promise that you cannot ride better than me. Kindly leave Richard alone.”

As a young Benedict Hastings receives this missive from his best friend's sister, his curiosity takes flight and nothing would have stopped him from responding to this impudent child.

“Dear Lady Evelyn,  
I would first like to say that, as a dear family friend to your brother, I give you leave to address me simply as Hastings. I hope you will likewise allow me to address you as Evie, since that is how I think of you, thanks to your brother's many stories.

Second, I would like to point out that Richard is free to befriend whomever he chooses. As it is, we get along well, so I don't expect I shall abandon our acquaintance, particularly over his little sister's complaint. We are, as I have stated, great friends by now.

Third, as Richard is here at Eton, and you are off in the country, I don't think it is very well done of you to begrudge him a friend. As his friend, I, for one, would want him to have as many acquaintances as would make him happy. And finally, I am sure you do ride very well—for a girl.

I am, my lady, your most humble servant.

The Honorable Benedict Hastings”

From that point on we're invited to witness the development and growth of two amazing characters. My heart went out to both and especially to the young man who through neglect of his family tries to fill the void with letters from this young woman who slowly but surely burrows deep into his heart.

Erin Knightley's debut is well written and paced to perfection. She took her time in developing her characters and rolling out their story slowly, without rushing it. It was my pleasure to watch the budding, innocent relationship between Evie and Hastings turn into a passionate romance.

If you're a fan of Carla Kelly, this novel will surely delight you with its wit and charm. It did me. It reminded me so much of the 'old fashioned movies' in which the sexually explicit scenes were left out, yet still made your heart race because they were left to my imagination. And this is what made this story, to me, unique and sweet.

Melanie (for Romantiv Crush Junkies eZine)

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### **Starbubbles says**

This was the last book I read for 2016, and I have to say, it ended on a good note. I enjoyed reading their secret correspondence throughout the book. I also appreciated the combination of past and "present" events to add to the anticipation of everything. But I greatly enjoyed their wit and struggle to connect. I apparently need my characters to go through life or death ordeals because for the last quarter of the book I was like "YAY!" haha, don't judge me.

Anyway, am I tired of people being hopelessly in love with their first kiss and spoilers, marry them? Yes. Oh England and your silly ways of propriety. Makes me terribly glad America bypassed that sticky royalty business. I mean, all women should be treated with respect because they are humans, not some to be treated like tissues because they are not of some sort of noble birth. Unnecessary class bullet dodged as far as I am concerned.

I got sidetracked. This book was fairly light considering all of the mortal danger everyone was in. Things wrapped up all happy-pappy. I was even able to put the book down to sleep on occasion. All in all, I truly like reading Knightley's books.

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### **Lady Bocwyrn says**

I FEEL AS IF I'VE SPOTTED THE LOCH NESS MONSTER! IT'S A HISTORICAL ROMANCE THAT WHILE BEING ALL THAT TYPIFIES A ROMANCE...IT WAS CLEAN! THE MOST SCANDALOUS THING TO HAPPEN IN THIS BOOK IS THE LOVE INTRESTS \*GASP\* KISS (I KNOW, SHOCKING). NO CLOTHING WAS REARRANGED OR REMOVED (THE LEADING MAN DOES HAVE HIS SHIRT OFF ONCE, BUT THAT WAS BECAUSE HE WAS ALONE, IN HIS ROOM, EXERCISING), NO ONE TUMBLED INTO BED WITH ANYONE ELSE (IT IS IMPLIED THAT THEY DID SO, AFTER THEY WERE MARRIED); HANDS DID NOT WANDER ANYWHERE THEY SHOULDN'T. IT'S A TRULY DELIGHTFUL, LIGHTHEARTED READ ABOUT FALLING IN LOVE WITH YOUR BEST FRIEND. AND TO TOP IT OFF, IT'S A CLEAN ENOUGH BOOK THAT I WOULD NOT HESITATE TO GIVE IT TO ANYONE FROM MY GRANDMOTHER TO A TEEN. I LOOK FOWARD TO SEEING WHAT ELSE ERIN KNIGHTLEY COMES OUT WITH.

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## **Karen Darling says**

A little funny, but too tedious with the teasing.

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## **Caz says**

### **I gave this a C+ for content and a C for narration at AudioGals, which I've rounded to 3 stars here.**

*More Than a Stranger* began very promisingly, with the hero and heroine falling into a correspondence when they are children (and I'm a sucker for a good “friends-to-lovers” story!). Lady Evelyn Moore is close to her brother, Richard, but when he goes off to Eton and forms a friendship with Benedict Hastings, Evie gets jealous. Upon receipt of yet another letter from Richard, which is full of “Hastings, this” and “Hastings, that”, eleven-year-old Evie has had enough and sets out to give the mysterious Hastings an epistolary dressing down.

He responds to her letter and thus a correspondence is born. The letters between the two in the prologue and at the beginning of each chapter are one of the highlights of the book and demonstrate that Ms. Knightley has a real talent for witty banter and engaging dialogue. Alison Larkin’s reading once again revealed her deft touch for comedic narration, and I settled in for an enjoyable listening experience.

Unfortunately however, I had listened to less than a quarter of the story before I began to get frustrated. We learn that Benedict had suddenly cut off all contact with Evie when he was eighteen and has had no contact with her for the past nine years. Neither she nor the reader/listener knows the reason for it and I discovered that I find this sort of plot development easier to cope with in print than I do in audio. There are hints that Benedict is in serious trouble, and as the story progresses, we discover that there are people looking for him who clearly do not wish him well. We are left in the dark as to why this is until well into the second half of the story.

Benedict and Evie have never met and when Benedict needs to hide out as a result of whatever trouble he’s in, he turns to his best friend for help. He journeys to Hertford Hall with Richard, not expecting the family to be in residence but their departure for London has been delayed. When he meets Evie for the first time, Benedict is almost dumbstruck but instead of telling her who he is, he gives her an assumed name, without really considering what he is doing. One lie leads to another, and another, and before long Benedict is digging himself bigger and bigger holes. Not only is that frustrating in terms of the storytelling, it doesn’t say much for Benedict’s character, or his competence. He’s been working as an agent for the Crown for the past eight or nine years, but if he’s so easily panicked into lying, I have to wonder whether he was cut out to be a spy!

You can read the rest of this review at [AudioGals](#).

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## **Arely says**

We start off with Evie and Benedict (then known as Hastings) writing letters back and forth, back and forth... until something forced Hastings to stop all correspondence with Evie. Then he comes back, for reasons

unknown to us, and asks his best friend—who just so happens to be Evie’s brother—if he can stay with him for a little while. Richard (Evie’s brother) says yes.

Then he bumps into Evie. Panicked, Benedict hides his identity from her, knowing that she would never forgive him for his last letter. And then the story truly begins...

I really enjoyed *More Than A Stranger*. Benedict’s reasons for cutting all ties from his old life—and his reasons for coming back—are hidden even from the reader. This kept me extremely curious as to what happened in Benedict’s life that he had to go to such extreme circumstances. There are hints to his past and his reasons, but they aren’t revealed until the ending is near.

Evie, on the other hand, is an open book. We know all about her throughout the book, except for the Benedict’s mysterious last letter. We don’t know what he wrote, nor do we know why.

Evie and Benedict are very strong characters, and their meetings always had me laughing or sighing—or both. While Evie could be very stubborn and Benedict could be very pig-headed, they worked together, and you could see it every time they met.

I was always rooting for Benedict and Evie, even at the point when everything went wrong. However, I did feel like Evie and Richard overreacted a bit at a certain scene where what Benedict is running away from catches up to him. It was partly Benedict’s fault, but he had very good reasons and some things he couldn’t control. (I, for one, forgave Benedict immediately, but that’s not a surprise. I am, after all, a romantic ;D ) I also really liked the small twist at the end of the book! I was not expecting it and was very happy with the way things worked out.

I recommend this book for people who enjoy action (though not a lot of it), passion, and most of all, love.

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### **Shawna says**

3 stars – Historical/Regency Romance

This is a pretty good debut, and I enjoyed the author’s writing style and the witty banter between the H/h and the siblings. It features some of my favorite plot devices...heroine crushing on older brother’s best friend, childhood friends/sweethearts maturing over amusing, flirtatious correspondence, seemingly unrequited love, and quirky family relationships.

Unfortunately, the deception, intrigue, mystery, and suspense part of the storyline didn’t work as well and that combined with the fact that Benedict and Evie share nothing more than a few kisses dragged down my rating. The HEA felt rushed and just wasn’t as sweet or satisfying enough for me without a single love scene between the H/h. (view spoiler) That’s this avid romance reader’s modest opinion, anyhow.

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### **Jenny says**

Note to self: avoid book because zero love scenes between H/h.

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## Becca says

More Than a Stranger is Erin Knightley's debut novel. I have been reading her second series and all of her novellas and I can say, I am a huge EK fan; unfortunately, this one didn't do it for me :(

Evie and Benedict start an unorthodox, but often hilarious, written correspondence when Evie discovers that Benedict has become a close friend of her brother and she gets jealous. This exchange continues for years throughout their childhood until Evie is 16 and Benedict is 18 and finishes school. I am a sucker for for penpal stories, which is why I selected the book. Unfortunately, the story picks up again 10 years after the letters brutally ended. After the sweet beginning, the story took a downward turn into the false identities plot line (aside from cross-dressing heroines, false identities is my least favorite trope). Benedict is an agent for the crown and has recently been betrayed; therefore, he turns to his oldest friend, Richard, brother to Evie, for a place to hideout and think about his next move. Richard takes Benedict back to his country estate that Benedict assumes will be empty, but soon drags Richard's entire family into his mess (they are all at the estate) by lying to them about why he is with them.

To make matters worse, Benedict further lies to Evie by not telling her who he really is so that he doesn't have to face all of the hurt and questions that will result in why he wrote such a nasty letter to abruptly end their correspondence (and you get to see the letter at the end of the story and it is awful). Then, despite himself, he leads Evie on and has her develop feelings for his false identity. Ugh.

So, needless to say, the hero was not at all swoon-worthy. He was a terrible spy, he lied to his oldest friends and put the entire family in danger, and he kept having a pity party about his situation instead of coming clean and facing the music. Spineless much? Also, he is moody because of all the lies which I find terribly unattractive. Poor Evie is constantly confused:

Benedict and his moods--changeable did not even begin to describe the man. In the short amount of time she had known him, it seemed as though she had already seen a dozen different sides of him.

The false identity continues until after the halfway point, but until the last 15% of the novel, there are still secrets that Benedict has to reveal. Evie dishes out some pretty vicious epithets when the truth does come out. Her comeback to his apology really highlights how much of an idiot Benedict was:

"I didn't want to hurt you by dredging up old memories."

"So you lied?" She shook her head, setting loose a few golden wisps of hair from her braid.

"What a brilliant plan. Lie about your name so as to avoid all the repercussions, all the while convincing yourself it is all for my own good. Forgive me if I don't fall on my knees in gratitude for your magnanimous gesture."

Everything works out in the end, but I just didn't quite get all gooey inside because the hero was just not, well, a hero. I think romances work best for readers when you are at least somewhat in love with the hero at the end. If all you do throughout the book is curl your lip in disgust at his cowardly and inept behavior, well,

the HEA just doesn't mean as much as it should, no matter how sweet the ending.

Now, I know this is a pretty negative review here, but I will close by saying that despite this book being a dud for me, I am still very much a fan of EK's work. I have loved some of her other novels and I think she handles stories best when there is not a lot of excess spy drama (which is what happened in her second series and her novellas). She has a lot of fun scenes, particularly between friends and between siblings. It is these funny little scenes that kept me going despite really not liking the hero much.

Here are some examples that made me smile:

A light-hearted scene between Richard (fashionable) and Benedict (not so much):

"Good God, man--who tied your cravat--a wild animal?" .....

"At least I don't look as though I've been assaulted by a French dressmaker."

A simple bit of wisdom:

The golden rule, however tarnished, was steadfastly observed: Do not nose into other people's business lest they nose into yours.

A hilarious bit of backhanded complimenting from Evie to her brother Richard:

"As I recall, you may ride like a beef-wit, but you shoot like a cavalryman."

See? There are some really cute bits. EK is a great writer and I will still be reading all her books, but if you are new to her writing, this is one I would skip.

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