

SPIES,
LIES and
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HEATHER HOLMES

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Foreword

24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year we are kept safe by The Nelson Marlborough Rescue Helicopter service. The highly trained crew, pilots and St John intensive care paramedics fly to the rescue of people needing urgent medical care and transportation. Every year they assist in over 500 missions.

As a community based, self-funded operation the Nelson Marlborough Rescue Helicopter needs your support and this book has been written to provide just that.

We all hope that we will never need their help but if we do we know they will be there.

Many thanks to Helen for her editing and amazing English language skills, to the Nelson Romance Writers, Annika and Sally in particular, for their feedback, critique and proofreading support, Dave and Suzanne from The CopyPress and my wonderful husband, family and, of course, friends. Without you this book would never have made it to print.

Together we can all make a difference. Thank you for buying this book.

JUNE, A SOLSTICE MONTH, a time for changes. A year ago who could have guessed the changes Fate had in store for the Lennod family. Definitely not Igor.

Hands on hips, he stood in his garden and looked up at the Hall. Dusk was fast approaching and through the lattice of scaffolding, lights from the windows cast a soft, golden glow into the growing darkness. Had it only been one year? So much had happened, it was almost unbelievable.



—┐┐→ The Beginning —┐┐→

IT STARTED WITH A mistake, a single, simple mistake. One person not paying enough attention to detail; one person with other things on their mind. Nothing major in the scheme of things, but enough to give Fate the opportunity to take the advantage; to snatch up the ball and run. And look where it went – straight to Appledale Hall, the Lennod family and total chaos. Nothing new there. Throughout history the Lennod's story has always been complicated by the unexpected.

All will become clear in time but, first, to completely understand how this tale unfolds, I think we need a little background information.

Built in the fifteenth century in the tiny Yorkshire village of Appledale, the Hall and her sister structures – the Coach House and the Manor House – form a trio of ancient establishments that have stood the test of time. Situated at three corners of the village green they are similar in style: high-gabled, slate-roofed, thick-walled and multi-chimneyed. But the Hall, four storeys high, set in over an acre of walled gardens and complete with gatehouse, is the largest and grandest of the three.

Purpose-built for the Prenderville family, court favourites of Henry VII, it was designed to make a statement and command respect. In those days the Prendervilles were people of importance and came with royal connections.

Unfortunately for them nothing lasts forever. When that Henry died the family failed to make the smoothest of transitions into the circles of favourites swirling around his son, Henry VIII. While the social climbers jostled and fought for prime places in the new king's eye, enemies were made and friendships lost. In this claustrophobic and petty environment, jealousy, gossip and malice couldn't help but abound.

With French roots and known to be staunch supporters of the Pope, once the King began to look in the direction of Anne Boleyn, the Prendervilles soon slipped even further out of favour.

Instead of doing the sensible thing, hunkering down and maintaining a low profile to protect their assets, they took a more dangerous route. They followed their faith and joined the resistance to the Reformation.

With the benefit of hindsight, some would say this showed a serious misunderstanding of the political situation of the day. In the end it was a decision which resulted in several Prendervilles fleeing to France and those remaining spending time in the Tower of London and losing their heads.

But it is a sad day when the sun shines on no one and the Prendervilles' loss was the Lennod family's gain.

Once the previous owners had been permanently evicted, the Hall was gifted to them by a grateful Henry VIII. A reward for a daring deed that delivered four renegade priests into the hands of the King. This was the happy result of another life-changing mistake. The Lennods don't do bravery in the regular course of events, but more about that later.

Although fairly battered when handed over – the Prendervilles didn't go down without a fight – the Hall has provided a happy home over the years.

History has shown that the Lennod family are, in general, an entrepreneurial, if impoverished, crew with a degree of diversity among its members when it comes to conventional hard work. Some enjoy the challenge, while others will go to any lengths to avoid it. However, the one thing they all have in common is dreams way beyond their station, so from day one they needed their property to work for them.

In its time Appledale Hall has been many things including a bawdy house, a school, a coaching inn and a boutique hotel, until today where it finds itself once again reborn, as a residential home for the elderly

rich and occasionally bewildered, under the tender ministrations of Annie Lennod and sons.

The much loved and deeply indulged only child of Edward and Louisa Lennod, Annie was lucky enough to inherit the blonde, blue-eyed good looks of her father's side of the family. No one could ever argue with the idea that she was anything but beautiful. Small and slim, she bore a striking resemblance to a distant great aunt, who was, in her turn, the image of Marilyn Monroe. As there is always balance in nature, and beauty is seen as desirable, she was also given something less coveted, at least in the family's eyes. Annie inherited the Lennod aversion to regular employment, instead favouring a life less ordinary. A trait spectacularly demonstrated by her ancestor, the infamous explorer, great-great-great uncle Arthur.

Born in the early eighteen hundreds, Arthur was handsome, fearless, swashbuckling and intrepid. Somehow he managed to find the funds to travel the length and breadth of Europe, Asia and the Orient, returning occasionally to his long-suffering parents and Appledale Hall with tales of his exploits and souvenirs of his travels. A portrait of him, smiling in the jungles of somewhere tropical, surrounded by exotic birds and flowers, still hangs on the stairs of the Hall today.

Like her uncle before her, Annie's dream was to travel, see the extraordinary and meet the world on her terms. Discarding education at the tender age of seventeen, she threw on her backpack and set off across Europe in search of adventure.

What she found was Dimitri, a descendent of Genghis Khan, or so he said. A dashing Cossack he swept her off her feet, raced her on horseback across the Russian Steppes and left her with more than the usual holiday souvenir. Igor was born six months after her return home.

Two years later, a weekend city break in Stockholm and forty-eight hours of fun with a diamond dealer in training, resulted in Erik. And finally, after a Caribbean cruise, (first prize in the Appledale church

reroofing raffle), came Sid, so named because his father bore a striking resemblance to Sidney Poitier. Annie had a weakness for the rich and famous.

After that the Lennods thought it was probably best if they kept their wayward daughter more or less restricted to the confines of the village. Three wild and ill-disciplined little boys per household were more than enough.

Annie coped with the difficulties of being a single parent to her boisterous and genetically diverse sons by leaving them, for the most part, to raise themselves. Fortunately they had their grandparents and the Hall's cook, Kathleen McMillen, affectionately known as Cookie, to help. A single lady, then in her thirties, Cookie was more than happy to be a surrogate parent during the day, returning to the peace and tranquillity of her gatehouse home each evening.

Throughout their formative years, Cookie fed the boys wholesome meals at the kitchen table, washed their faces, patched their knees, helped with homework and sent them off to school with lunch boxes full of healthy but tasty treats. For the most part she also did her best to protect their ever more bemused grandparents from the worst of their mischief. And under this gentle veil of love and kindness the boys thrived.

Igor grew to be the image of his father. Almost two metres in height he looked the archetypal Russian. That is to say, tall, dark and ridiculously handsome with a lean, muscled body, high chiselled cheekbones, brooding hooded eyes, soft dark curls and a strong, silent, slightly menacing presence. No one with any sense of self-preservation ever got on the wrong side of Igor. Although to be fair he also had, much to the embarrassment of his Cossack genes, his mother's kind heart, something he kept carefully hidden behind his stern and forbidding exterior.

Igor also inherited his father's gift of alpha male attraction which resulted in him being more or less irresistible to 99% of the world's

female population. Consequently he had a constant stream of likely ladies, of all ages, shapes and sizes, vying for his attention. When Igor walked into a room all female eyes moved in his direction, pulses raced and sighs followed. Dangerous but unbelievably sexy is probably the most apt description.

Son number two, the blond and blue-eyed, Erik was the complete opposite of his brother, both in looks and temperament. Like his father he was average height and stocky, with a thick mane of corkscrew curls that fluffed out to surround his face like a halo. Whatever the time, day or night, he always had a happy smile on his pale, cherubic face. But what he lacked in striking good looks, he more than made up for in personality. He saw life's challenges as opportunities for adventure and set out to enjoy them. At his baseline it would be fair to say, he was an incorrigible optimist.

The baby of the family, Sid, took after his namesake, so definitely tall, dark and handsome with a dazzling smile, but with a character, thankfully, more like Erik's than Igor's. An incurable romantic, he could often be found behind the Hall's bank of ancient and precariously leaning glasshouses, with a flask of coffee in one hand and a Mills & Boon paperback in the other. He enjoyed peace and quiet, yoga, reading and his own company. A gentle man who sought the simple life says it best.

Despite their mother's air of disinterest in their daily well-being, or perhaps because of it, the boys stayed close to her and once they'd finished their education, all three returned to work in the family business.

Igor's methodical mind took him to the administrative side. Cossacks like to be in control of every situation.

Always immaculate, whatever the season, in shiny, black leather boots, dark suit, white shirt and conservatively coloured tie, he oversaw the Lennod empire, small though it was, from his office desk. This also

kept him, for the most part, separated from the female residents. Being in their autumn years did not grant them immunity to Igor's charms and the last thing he needed was a bevy of eighty-year old lovestruck ladies trailing in his wake.

Erik's friendly personality proved perfect for dealing with people in general and the elderly residents of Appledale Hall in particular. He waited on their tables, patched up their problems, diffused arguments and generally kept the place ticking along smoothly.

He also ran the Hall's laundry from a large section of the stable block. Under his control were six, giant, industrial-sized washing machines and a bank of equally gigantic dryers.

Shakira, a cheery soul from the village, helped with the ironing. Plugged into her iPhone, she danced and sang her way through the endless piles of shirts, skirts and trousers, sheets, tablecloths, napkins and towels, her carefree personality a perfect match for Erik's positive optimism.

Sid's domain was the garden and his workshop. He preferred the silence and solitude of the outdoors to the constant chatter, noise and bustle of the main house and laundry. Here he grew vegetables for Cookie's kitchen, tended the flowerbeds, clipped the hedges, mowed the lawns and dreamed of finding his one true love, Mills & Boon style. When the weather drove him inside, he serviced the gardening equipment in a workshop in the old stable block.

It was in this workshop, as a child and under the tutelage of the Hall's full-time gardener and handyman, he'd discovered his vivid imagination and the gift of turning the everyday into the extraordinary.

For example, to Sid a cardboard box wasn't only a piece of packaging. In his hands, with paint, glue and a few accessories, it could become an old-style television or radio, a robot or a jack-in-a-box, a tea-time tray or a cupboard door. The potential was endless. All that