

## Starring Adele Astaire

William Morrow Paperbacks

By Eliza Knight

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### Introduction

**USA Today** bestselling author Eliza Knight returns with a story full of glitz and glam as she delves into the life of Adele Astaire, a spirited and talented woman who served up smiles and love both on and off the stage, with and without her also famous brother Fred Astaire.

*A spirited rising stage star...*

Adele Astaire was a glittering, glamorous star, dancing with her brother, Fred, endearing herself to audiences from New York to London. But although she is toasted by royalty and beloved by countless fans, Adele Astaire has dreams of a loving husband and a houseful of children. And when she meets Lord Charles Cavendish, her wishes may just come true—but at what cost?

*A determined young dancer ...*

Ever since Violet Wood could walk she's wanted to dance on the London stage. Befriended by Adele, filled with ambition, she is more than willing to make the sacrifices

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it will take to become a star herself, and her rags-to-riches hopes are within reach. But the road to fame is never easy.

*Two women with unquenchable spirit ...*

From the fast-paced world of roaring 20s New York to the horrors and sacrifice of wartime London, Adele's and Violet's lives intertwine, and each must ask themselves if fame worth the price you must pay?

### **A Conversation with the Author**

*How did Adele Astaire first come to your attention, and what inspired you to want to write about her?*

Several years ago, when I was doing the research for The Mayfair Bookshop, I discovered a letter from Nancy Mitford to one of her sisters, chatting about how she'd had lunch with a delightful woman named Delly. I thought I knew all of Nancy's friends, but Delly wasn't familiar to me. So, I did a research dive--and guess who it was, none other than Adele Astaire, sister to Fred Astaire. At the time, she was the more famous of the two, having made her start in the US Vaudeville circuit and then Broadway in NYC, she was lured to the stage in the West End of London where she promptly became fast friends with socialites, royalty, literary phenoms and more. As often times happens, her name and fame faded into obscurity. I enjoyed so much digging into her life and weaving a story, that I hope you will all delight in as much as I did!

*What did the research process involve?*

There are a number of layers of research that goes into writing a book. First, you want to learn everything there is to learn about the person you're writing about. But you also want to learn everything you can about their friends, their family, the era that they lived in, the places they lived, and what sort of current events were going on at the time. You want to know everything about what they did for fun, what they did for work. What did they eat and drink? What clothes did they wear? What sort of lingo did they use?

For Adele, I read biographies and her and her brother. I read Fred's memoir. I read a book written by Fred Astaire's son in law. I read about jazz music, theater, and the people they called friends. But what was the most fun for me, was the two days I was able to spend at the Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center at Boston University's library. They hold the Adele Astaire collection, which is filled with letters, receipts, scrapbooks, diaries, newspaper articles and reviews, a costume from the Vaudeville

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days, and so much more. I was lucky to get the two days with them, given it was in the midst of Covid and they hadn't been open for nearly the whole year I was writing the book. My research there shifted a lot of scenes in the book, and I'm so grateful to have had the opportunity to go there.

*What was the most surprising thing you came across in your research?*

There were a number of things that surprised me while researching, like that Adele went through a pair of dancing shoes a week, and that in the early days, her hair was styled to look like a bob but actually came down to her waist. But I think the most fun fact I discovered during my research was that when her and Fred decided they wanted to buy a Rolls Royce—and to have the only one in NYC—instead of using their savings, they just picked up an extra gig of dancing at a night club for 6 weeks after their daily theater performances. They made \$25,000 doing so and bought themselves a new car.

*Did you draw on any real figures when creating the character of Violet?*

Yes! In fact, Violet was a character inspired by Daisy Violet Rose Wood, a music hall singer from Hoxton—which is a neighborhood on the East Side of London. Though she was born about two decades before my fictional Violet Wood, in 1877, and she was famous on stage about a decade before my story takes place. She was one of nine children. (In my original draft, Violet was one of six.) Six of Daisy Wood's siblings were also performers like her. Due to family circumstances, and marriage, she retired from theatre, but only for a short time until their financial circumstances urged her back on stage. She was offered a position as a performer in NYC with some of her sisters, which was received well. And they continued to perform on and off together through the 1930s and 1940s.

*Can you speak to the relevance of Adele's story today?*

No matter the generation, I think we are drawn to stories about women who persevered. And Adele was a perfect example of not only persevering and thriving, but of surviving. She started from nothing, and had plenty of setbacks, but continued to push and push. Most of the time, she was ready to show the world her funny side, which wasn't just a character, it was the very essence of her. She was vibrant, clever, silly and insanely talented. But she also loved fiercely, whether it was her brother, mother, husband, friends or dance itself, she was a force that couldn't be ignored.

When I think of Adele, I am full of admiration for how much she accomplished in her life, and that is one of the things I wanted to share with the world, this wildly exciting person who is an excellent example of finding, and living, your truth, your passion. Someone who faced fear, put on a brave face and marched forward.

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Additionally, and on a not so bright side, is the darker side of the performing world. Much has changed, but much has not. In Adele's time, women were not always respected for their artistic talents, but seen as playthings. They were beholden to a male authority figure within their particular showbiz field who might expect certain favors, even demand it, because they think it's their right to take advantage of a woman, or to barter sex for roles. That is still unfortunately something we're hearing about today. It is an ugly relevance, but one that needs to be addressed.

### Questions for Discussion

1. Many people only remember Ginger Rogers as Fred Astaire's dance partner, but as you read, long before there was Ginger, there was his older, more talented sister. Did you know about Adele Astaire before you read the book?
  2. Have you ever watched a Fred Astaire movie? If so, which one is your favorite?
  3. Did your opinion of the book change as you read it?
  4. Which character did you relate to more – Adele or Violet?
  5. What did you learn about theatre life that you didn't know before?
  6. What is your favorite theatre show? Why?
  7. In many ways Adele and Violet's lives were similar, but in just as many ways their lives were juxtaposed. In what ways did you feel their lives compared and contrasted?
  8. What is your favorite quote from the book?
  9. Violet is adamant that a relationship with a man will derail her career aspirations. And for many women in her time, a fear like that was a very real concern. Is this something you've ever experienced?
  10. For both Adele and Violet, they are often asked to choose between their careers and family. For them, there isn't often a balance, a sign of the times, but also the career paths they chose. Finding balance between both is still a struggle for women today. Is this something you've encountered? If so, what are some of the ways you've tried to balance your day?
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11. What do you think about Fred and Adele's mother, Ann? She too went through a transformation from a young, poor bride, to the mother of superstars, who she remained devoted to for the entirety of her life.

12. Adele and Fred really wanted that Rolls Royce, and they were willing to work themselves to the bone to get it. Have you ever wanted something so bad you were willing to work hard into the wee hours for it? What was it, why did you want it so bad, and what did you do to get it?

13. If you were interviewing Eliza, what would you ask her?

14. Who would you cast in an adaptation of this book to television or film?

## Playlist

Every time I write a book, I make a playlist and listen to the songs for inspiration. Enjoy these songs! Listen to the playlist here: <https://bit.ly/StarringAdeleAstairePlaylist>



PLAYLIST

### Starring Adele Astaire

Inspiration for the making of the book! Enjoy!

Eliza Knight • 57 songs, 3 hr 21 min

#	TITLE	ALBUM	DATE ADDED		
1	Oh Gee! Oh Gosh! Fred Astaire	The Complete London ...	Aug 20, 2021	♥	3:08
2	I'd Rather Charleston - ... Fred And Adele Astaire	Charleston (25 Tracks O...	Aug 20, 2021	♥	3:01
3	Come Little Children Erutan	Come Little Children	Aug 20, 2021	♥	2:56
4	Moonlight Sonata 1st ... Ludwig van Beethoven, M...	Beethoven's Best Piano ...	Aug 20, 2021	♥	6:08
5	Better Than the Pain - ... The Woodlands	Parallels, Vol. II	Aug 20, 2021	♥	4:21
6	Until the Day Dims - Po... The Woodlands	Parallels, Vol. II	Aug 20, 2021	♥	1:37
7	Death Waltz Adam S Hurst, Adam Hurst	Ruin	Aug 20, 2021		4:27
8	Waltz of Souls Adam Hurst	Nightfall	Aug 20, 2021		2:55
9	Forever and Never Peter Gundry	The Edge of Darkness	Aug 20, 2021		4:05
10	Requiem, K. 626: Laci... Wolfgang Amadeus Mozar...	Mozart: Requiem Realis...	Aug 20, 2021		2:50

## Book Club Menu Suggestions

In the book, Violet's sister Pris makes her a Victoria Sponge, though it's made from rationed ingredients. They have a bottle of saved French wine, but I think it pairs better with champagne or prosecco, with a few slices of strawberry. And it definitely tastes better with all the right ingredients. If you prefer a mocktail to a cocktail, then see my suggestion for that below!



### Pris's Victoria Sponge

Ingredients:

*For the sponge-*

- 4 large eggs
- 1 cup of granulated sugar
- ¼ cup of powdered sugar for dusting
- 2 cups of flour
- 1.5 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 cup of unsalted butter, softened
- 4 tbsp of milk

*For the jam-*

- 1 cup of strawberries (fresh or frozen is fine)
- 1 cup of granulated sugar

*For the buttercream-*

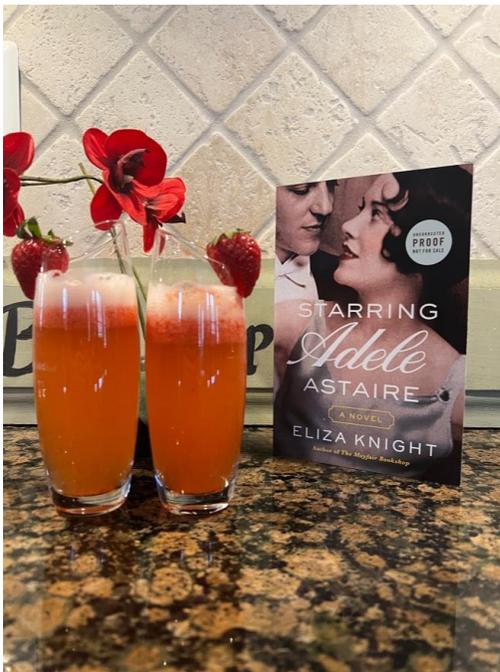
- ½ cup of unsalted butter, softened

- 2 cups of powdered sugar
- 1.5 tsp of vanilla
- 2 tbsp of milk

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°
  2. Grease the inside of two 8inch cake pans (cooking spray or butter is fine), making sure bottom and sides are coated. The bottom of the cake pans with parchment or baking paper (cut into a circle is even better!)
  3. In a mixing bowl or stand-mixer, add eggs, sugar, flour, baking powder, salt and softened butter. Mix until well combined, but do not over mix.
  4. Divide the cake batter evenly between the two pans, smoothing the surface of each with a spatula.
  5. Bake the cakes in the center of the oven for 25 minutes.
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6. As the cakes bake, it's time to make your jam! Put the strawberries into a saucepan and crush them with a masher (I use a potato masher). Stir in the sugar and bring to a boil over low heat, stirring until sugar is melted. Increase the heat slightly and boil for 4 minutes. Remove from heat and pour into a separate container to stop the cooking process. Set aside to cool.
7. Cakes are finished cooking when they are golden brown and coming away slightly from the edges of the pans. Use a cake tester or toothpick to check the center. Press on the cakes very lightly with your hand and be springy to the touch. Set aside to cool for about 5 minutes.
8. Using a spatula or cake removal knife run it around the inside edge of the cake pan. Place a tea towel over each cake, and gently turn the pans over and carefully remove the cakes from the pans onto your hand. Then place the tea towel side down and the cake onto the cooling racks so you don't get cooling rack lines. Allow to cool completely.
9. While the cake is cooling, make your buttercream. Beat the butter in a large bowl or mix stand until smooth and soft. Add 1 cup of the powdered sugar and beat until smooth. Add the remaining powdered sugar, the vanilla and 1 tbsp of the milk. Check for consistency before adding another tablespoon of milk if needed. You want the consistency to be good for spreading. Not too thick, but not too runny. Spoon the buttercream into a piping bag with a plain nozzle.
10. Cakes are completely cool, and you are ready to assemble! Choose the cake with the best top and set aside. Place the other down on your serving platter. Spread the jam evenly on top of the cake. Pipe the buttercream evenly on top of the jam. Place the other sponge right-side up, on top of the jammed and buttercreamed cake. Don't press down. Sprinkle with remaining powdered sugar on top of your finished Victoria sponge, and voila! Enjoy!



### Cocktail and Mocktail

#### **Strawberry Champagne**

*Makes about four cocktails*

Ingredients:

- 1 bottle of Dry/Brut Champagne or Prosecco
- 2 cups of strawberries
- 1 tbsp of fresh-squeezed Lemon Juice

Directions:

1. Set aside enough strawberries for cocktail garnishes – about 1 cup
  2. In a blender, process the remaining strawberries in a smooth puree with the lemon juice
  3. Pour a small amount of the puree into the bottom of each glass, about 2 tbsp.
  4. Pour the champagne/prosecco over the strawberry puree, and gently stir
  5. Garnish each glass with sliced strawberries
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## Strawberry Sparkler

*Makes about four mocktails*

Ingredients:

- 2 cups of Sparkling water (about 1.5 cans) – I love to use LaCroix Limoncello
- 2 cups of Strawberries
- 2 cups of Lemonade – I love Simply Lemonade

Directions:

1. Set aside enough strawberries for cocktail garnishes – about 1 cup
2. In a blender, process the remaining strawberries in a smooth puree
3. Pour a small amount of the puree into the bottom of each glass, about 2 tbsp.
4. Pour ½ cup of the sparkling water over the strawberry puree
5. Pour ½ cup of lemonade into the glass, and gently stir
6. Garnish each glass with sliced strawberries

## Deleted Scene

In every book I write there ends up being scenes or characters that don't make it to the final draft, and this scene, and Kit are one of those... In the original version of STARRING ADELE ASTAIRE, Kit was Violet's best childhood friend. They lived in the same building, and it was his mother who helped her get the job at the theatre where they both worked. Alas, the book was too big to fit Kit and their friendship, and so we had to say goodbye. Additionally, in the original version Violet had more siblings, but they too were cut for the sake of space. Enjoy a sneak peek at this unpublished and unedited deleted scene!

"You are not going to believe this," Violet told Kit as they yanked the heavy theatre doors shut, locking up for the night. The air was chilly, and sharp gusts brought the scent of rain.

Violet stared up at the sky, ominous with clouds, praying that it didn't start pouring before she made it home, and knowing such hopes were futile. She was going to be drenched.

"I'll believe mos' anything 'onestly." Kit tucked the key to the theatre into his pocket, a longing smile pointed in her direction. "As long as you is doing the weeping and wailing."

Violet rolled her eyes. "You're a nut."

Kit's shoulders drooped, and he averted his gaze, tucking away his disappointment, but not before it kicked her in the shin.

Violet hesitated to tell him more, worried about his reaction. But to stand there silent made her feel even more awkward. "Well... I got caught."

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Kit pulled a rolled cigarette from his pocket, struck a match on the bottom of his shoe, and touched the flame to the tip.

He took a long drag and held out the stub. "Doing what?"

Violet shook her head, never having had a taste for smokes. Her father had been a heavy smoker, making their tenement unbreathable at times. Whenever she caught the scent now it made her ill. She waved at the smoke in front of her face, and Kit smiled apologetically, blowing in the opposite direction.

She flashed him a grateful beam as they started on their way. "Dancing. Singing."

"Nothing new." Kit leapt over a discarded bottle in his path, as they turned the corner on Strand and headed toward Aldwych Station.

"I got caught *on the stage*. And it was Adele who saw me." The nerves that had punctured her insides when Adele had appeared before her still left impressions deep within.

Kit took another drag of his cigarette, making a series of rings with the smoke.

Violet waved at the rings that floated in front of her face. "Why don't you just quit that? Every time you smoke you choke."

"I probably should." He took the last drag, the embers singeing the tips of his fingers before he crushed it against the bottom of his shoe. "I don' really even like it tha' much. Bu' men like a good cough and drag."

Violet shook her head. "You know you don't have to follow everything everyone else does, right?"

Kit laughed and tossed the butt into a nearby bin.

"That's a start." Violet hated how judgmental she'd sounded, but she came from a good place. "The rest of the blokes would have left it on the ground for a dog to choke on."

"I saw tha' once. Awful."

Violet shuddered, rubbing her arms of her threadbare coat as they headed toward the tube.

Kit paused eyeing her with a curious expression before he opened the door leading into the station. "You think the American ac'ress will blab?"

They descended the stairs into the dank underground, which held a faint trail of engine oil and mildew combined with something like old cellars and dungeons.

"I'm not going to get canned. At least I hope not." Violet frowned as they hurried toward the waiting train that would take them to Old Street Station. "She said she'd talk to the director about adding me to the show."

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“Are you pu’ting me on?” Kit passed their fare to the conductor for passage as they boarded the crowded train, shouldering their way through the bodies and squeezing into the only two remaining seats together.

“I’m dead serious. I hardly believe it myself. Pinch me.” She held out her arm, and Kit gently pinched her, barely enough to feel it through the fabric of her sleeve. “You’ll have to do better than that.”

Kit chuckled and gave her arm a friendly squeeze. “You’re no’ dreaming, Vi. Damn, tha’s incredible. I ‘ope she comes through.”

“Even if it doesn’t happen, the fact that she was willing means the world to me.” That all Violet had been striving for, the sacrifices she’d made, were worth it.

Beneath the words she’d laid out, there was a mound of self-doubt. How was she going to be able to walk into the theatre tomorrow if it wasn’t to strap on a pair of dancing shoes and whirl about the stage?

“Wha’ do you think Mr. Cowden is going to ‘ave a say?” Kit hedged.

“I’m sure it will involve a few vulgar phrases. Something like, ‘Who the bloody hell do you think you are? Get your ass back to work, you bleedin’ dewdropper.’”

Kit chuckled, then puffed his chest and put on a face that could have soured grapes. “And you there, wha’ are you looking at? I don’ pay you to faff around like a bleedin’ imbecile.”

“He’d be effing and blinding until closing time,” Violet giggled, and elbowed Kit in the ribs. “That might actually be quite entertaining.”

He nodded. “Aye. Wha’ abou’ those girls, though? The ones who snubbed you?”

Violet put on a confident grin. “Likely the same, only with a tarted-up smirk. But this time I’d get to stand beside them, and there would be nothing they could do about it.” Wearing the same silky, sparkly getup. Dancing the same moves. What a coup that would be.

Kit nearly choked on his own breath. “Give ‘em ‘ell, Vi.”

“I’m determined.” The whistle blew for their stop, and they dodged elbows and shopping bags in getting off, then climbed the stairs like a herd of cattle headed out of a dark barn to pasture.

“More than mos’.” Kit shrugged and looked off into the distance down the streets, dotted with workers coming home, posture slumped. There was a sense of defeat in the way some walked. Yet others stood tall. What was the difference?

Violet glanced at Kit, noting he didn’t slump. In fact, she got the impression that his far-off look was him seeing a future designed for him, one that he was striving for. She supposed that’s why they were friends because they both pictured themselves far away from here.

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“What’s your aim, Kit? Are you going to work at the theatre until your bent in the spine?” She nodded toward an older gentleman shuffling past, his hat pulled low, and the patches on his elbows coming loose.

Kit let out a soft laugh, that was almost distracting in its intent. “I don’ know. Maybe cleaning up after other people is all I’ve go’ in this world.”

“I think you’ve got more than that inside you.”

He glanced at her, a glint of mirth in his gaze. “You think I should ge’ caught’ dancing on s’age?”

“You are nimble on your feet,” she teased back.

Kit bumped her arm, laughing with her as they walked down Old Street, passing the Hoxton Market as they did every night on their way to Drysdale Street.

She paused outside the tenement building she shared with her mom and siblings, staring up at the dimly lit windows, the aroma of onions mingling from the open windows with the stale urine on the street.

Three of her younger siblings, Dorothy, Joseph, and Elaine, pushed out of the door with a mangy dog, their mother shouting orders from somewhere inside.

“Evenin’, mongrels,” Violet said affectionally, giving the dog—that was most definitely not theirs—a vigorous scratch behind the ears. “Bringing home strays?”

Elaine, doe-eyed and always acting the innocent nodded. Her lip turned down in a pout as she said, “We jus’ wan’ed to ‘elp the poor crea’ure.”

“Bu’ Mum weren’ too ‘appy about it,” Dorothy said soberly, always very serious, giving a measured shake of her head. Eleven now, even at five she’d been a miniature of their mother.

“I would ‘ave ‘aken real good care of ‘im.” Joseph straightened his shoulders, a little man at the age ten, trying hard to emulate their other brother Mark who was a few years younger than Violet. “If only she’d le’ ‘im stay.”

“But the dog sna’ched Mum’s supper,” Dorothy explained, her grave gaze shifting to Violet. “Bugger’s lucky to be alive.”

“Bu’ ‘e was ‘ungry,” Elaine wailed.

Violet laughed pulled her younger sister in for a hug, ignoring the child wiping her nose on her skirt. “Now, why don’t you go and put the dog back where you found him?”

“It was only righ’ ‘ere,” Joseph said.

“Well, then you’d best get inside and get tucked in. It’s well past your bedtime.”

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The three younger children nodded and hurried back up the stairs, leaving Violet and Kit alone to laugh. She turned, her gaze turning toward the man sitting on the stoop in the same place he'd been that morning. In the twenty odd years she'd lived here, she swore he'd not moved. Or at least that was how it felt. He held a pipe between his teeth that was never lit. A foot on one step, and the other right below, his elbow on his knee, he eyed the street beneath brows that resembled haybales.

As she did most evenings, Violet greeted him with a smile. "Evening, mister." She never knew his name, had never asked and now it seemed too much time had passed to correct the mistake. She handed him a small piece of chocolate, one of the many treats she brought him throughout the week.

He nodded slowly in her direction in thanks, the faintest hint of smile on his weathered face. Rather than eating the sweet, he tucked it into his pocket.

Kit yanked at the door to the building, more often than not the warped wood stuck. Violet leapt out of the way before catching an elbow to the breast. The familiar stench of unwashed bodies, spirits and, oddly enough, baking bread washed over them.

"You going to spill to your Mum?" Kit asked walking with Violet up the narrow rickety, wooden staircase.

"Not yet." She bit her lip. "When it's official, yes, but before then..." She shook her head, glancing up through the zigzag maze of steps where she lived on the fourth floor. "It's not quite worth it."

Kit nodded soberly, as they made their way to her door on the floor below his. "I bes' be off then," he said.

She watched him trudge up the next flight of stairs toward his own flat.

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