



L-WORD
C-WORD

ROSALYN WRAIGHT

L-Word C-Word
Lesbian Adventure Club: Book 8

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A Don't Waste Daylight Publication

MJ, thanks for not shooting me

Chapter 1

“Extra pickles, too, Molly!” I yelled across the dimly lit bar as instructed.

I wasn’t sure I had ever been in a bar at eight-thirty in the morning. I was, however, absolutely certain that I had never requested pickles from frickin’ anyone at eight-thirty in the morning—except for maybe the time at Drixel’s Terrace when a sanguinary humdinger brine proved essential. Even so, you get my drift. I was a coffee chick, maybe a donut dame if chocolate icing whispered my name just so. But not pickles. Jesus, not pickles!

I aimed my behind at the booth, but before I could complete the motion, Ginny’s voice rang out.

“Kate, steal the bottle of ketchup from that booth over there.” She pointed like a dart that probably sailed across the barroom last night. “Our table didn’t get any. We need ketchup.”

Ketchup! I hated ketchup with a passion. And I hated ketchup with a frickin’ nth-degree passion at eight-thirty in the morning.

Didn’t I just say it was eight-thirty in the morning? Forgive me. Reporters should not repeat themselves, but this reporter hasn’t had more than a sip of coffee. My brain is sputtering. It is, after all, eight-thirty in the morning. And speaking of which, did you know that bar coffee is not good coffee? It’s sludgy yet still undefined. You’d know that if you’d ever been to a bar at eight-thirty in the morning. You haven’t, have you? I never have, at least not until today and maybe that day at Drixel’s Terrace when—

“Kate!” Ginny yelled. “Hello! Grab the ketchup, dear!”

Oh yeah, the ketchup. I hated ketchup—

“Kate!” Claudia swatted me back to the real world. “Get the ketchup, honey, and get back here. Drink your coffee. I don’t think you’re awake yet.”

I wasn’t? Well, that sure explained a lot of things. It felt kind of

surreal. Maybe I was still at home in bed, having a damn confusing dream to boot. Except Claudia wouldn't be sitting in a booth; she'd be next to me. Snuggling. Perhaps more than snuggling. *Oh, wow!* I closed my eyes and willed it so.

"Kate!" This time Alison swatted me. "Do you want me to get the ketchup?"

"Oh yeah, the ketchup!" I acknowledged. "I'll get the ketchup."

I did so and finally got to park my behind in the booth.

With a smile that bordered on a laugh, Claudia slid my coffee cup to me, and I seized it.

"What's wrong, Kate?" Holly asked. "Didn't you get enough sleep last night?"

While I slugged the bar sludge, Claudia answered, "We overslept. She didn't get any coffee before we flew out the door." Her hand came over and stroked my bare calf.

"Bottoms up, Kate," Janice said, holding her own cup in front of me. "I'll buy the next round."

I clinked my cup with hers and then drank as Kris slid the coffee carafe in our direction. The sound of my cup being topped off made me hopeful that the haze in my head would thin.

Their conversation turned to the prior workweek. I tuned them out and surveyed the joint. An older gentleman sat at the end of the bar, nursing a mug of the matted mutt that bit him. Another man read the *Granton Journal*, and when my mind imagined him coming over to ask me to autograph it, I knew at least the nonsense factory within me was up and running. Life, the cognizance kind, slowly began.

I looked to the front window. Christmas lights framed a heavy gray day. For me, Christmas ranked right up there with early morning pickles and anytime ketchup. I was not a fan. But today was not Christmas. Today proved far, far better: a Lesbian Adventure Club day. That knowledge awakened yet another part of me; my anticipatory gland contracted and squirted, mingling its good stuff with lifeblood that was slowly being caffeinated.

I returned my attention back to the booth and tried to get up to speed with the friendly chitchat. I did not get very far by the time Molly suddenly appeared tableside.

"You girls are crazy," she said, "but here it is. You know, I don't think I've ever had the grill fired up this early." She set a platter in the middle of the table, rolled her eyes, and added, "You owe me, Ginny."

We lofted thanks in her direction as she scurried away. Then, we just stared at it. At eight-thirty in the morning, a frickin' Mad Cow Burger on a bed of French fries stared back at us. It, at least, had the sense to still be

in bed on a Saturday. Oh goodie, hamburger happened to be smarter than the lot of us.

Kris held a stack of plates in front of Ginny, who was tasked with serving the big-ass burger Molly had cut like a pie. Even with it divided by eight, a formidable task loomed before us.

When we each had burger pie-slice in hand, Alison held hers out and said, “To a good DWD weekend!”

“To a not-so-bad vegan weekend.”

Yes, the truth, the circumstances at hand, needed to be told. We prepared to head to Maggie and Susan’s, and this weekend would be the first we had ever had at either of their houses. Until now, they had dwelt separately and had taken us elsewhere. Together, they were eager to have us, but visions of non-refined sugarplums clumsily danced in our heads. We were fraidy cats, shoving burgers down our gullets, anxious about being carnivores trapped in an herbivore world. Or so we said.

“Maybe we’re overreacting,” Laura proposed. “Think about when we went camping. They still gave us the choice between regular hot dogs and those strangely colored vegan things.”

“Yes,” Alison concurred with a vehement nod. “And think about Maggie’s coconut milk ice cream last time. That stuff was incredible! I even bought some at the store.”

“You’re weakening, Alison,” Holly said with a laugh. “Hurry up and take a bite of your burger before you’re beyond help.”

“And if Alison’s weakening, I bet Susan is already down for the count.”

“I think we need to do an intervention on Susan.”

“I agree.”

“We’ll kidnap her and take her to Molly’s Taphouse and Treatment Center on Third.”

“Good idea.”

I dared, “I think you’re all full of baloney, not hamburger.” When all eyes shot to me, I clarified, “Not one of you thinks Maggie will hold us hostage in her vegan world. Remember when she said everyone is always accommodating—making sure Claudia has Earl and she has vegan stuff? Thinking she’d be anything less than accommodating is insane. She’s Maggie. Maggie loves us.”

“Well, thank you, Kate, for ruining our little adventure!” Holly thundered.

“What the hell does that mean?” I rumbled right back.

“It means we all know Maggie isn’t going to shove tofu down our throats. But meeting secretly for burgers at the crack of dawn, well, it’s the DWD thing to do. And now you’ve ruined it, Kate.”

“Yeah, you’ve sucked the fun right out of it.”

“Yeah, Kate!”

“Yeah, Sutter!”

“Yeah, honey.”

“Yeah, Kate.”

“Yeah, Kate.”

“Well, frickin’ excuse me!” I said, laughing. I raised my hands in surrender and conceded, “You’re right. I’m so very, very wrong. Maggie is actually the biggest shithhead in the club. No doubt she’s at home shoving yucky vegetables in the juicer while Susan prepares little rice paper gift bags of soy nuts and wheat bran to give each of us at the door.”

“Now you’re talking, Kate!”

“Buns up, everybody!”

Burger pie-slices were held high and subsequently shoved into gaping, drooling pieholes. My piehole, however, neither gaped nor drooled. Instead, I finished my last slug of coffee and reached for the carafe ... only to find it empty.

I excused myself and headed to the bar to request a refill. Molly informed me that a fresh pot was nearly ready. Figuring I’d wait it out, I sat on a barstool, and my eyes drifted into the humungous mirror behind the bar. I looked to the group of them in the big half-moon booth in the corner. And then I ogled Claudia.

Not even an hour prior, I had awakened to her shrieking about us oversleeping, and that was so far from ordinary. On workdays, the alarm would wake us, and then we’d cuddle through two snooze alarms, three if I proved lucky. On weekends, we had a whole different ritual. One would turn on the coffee maker, set the kettle to boil, and grab the paper from the front step while the other brushed her teeth. Then, we’d reverse: one would get coffee and tea while the other brushed. That well-oiled machine would faithfully bring us back to bed or porch. There, we’d sip, she’d peruse the paper, and I’d receive unbridled permission to survey every inch of her. I’d marvel, as if forever seeing her—every inch of her—for the first time. I’d be mindful of her breathing, making sure it never progressed beyond easy, not wanting my private time to end—not just yet. Sometimes she’d read to me if something inky caught her interest. Sometimes I’d tell her what caught my interest, like how even the skin on her knees was soft and sexy beyond belief.

Honestly, I lived for those moments. And that was the whole frickin’ point: I wasn’t fully alive yet. I woke to shrieks and a decaffeinated frenzy of activity that dumped us out the door—not as one, but as two.

I grabbed my funny phone from my pocket and texted, “I missed you this morning.” With a smile, I hit send and then watched her in the mirror.

A moment later, I heard the tone that forced her hand into her purse. She grabbed, flipped, navigated, and read. Then, a smile spread across her face in a way that could not help but enliven me. When she looked in my direction, I lowered my head and pretended to be busy doing nothing. And I waited. Even after the replenished carafe appeared in front of me, I waited.

And then, it came.

“Oh, take a powder!” the reply said.

My eyes shot to her in the mirror—except, she wasn’t there. I whiplashed around and scoured the bar, and then, I grabbed the carafe and darted to our booth. Before I even got a chance to ask, Laura volunteered, “Your little woman went to powder her nose, Sutter.”

In the blink of an eye, I set down the carafe and sped in the direction of the restrooms. Very ungracefully, I swung the door open to find her sitting on the counter between two sinks, that same smile making those green eyes twinkle.

I very generously returned the smile. “We’re reduced to slinking around in public bathrooms, huh?”

She outstretched her arms. “Just slink all the way over here. I missed you, too.”

And I did, although slink instantly turned to lunge.

My arms bolted around her, and she intensely encircled me with both arms and legs. We did not speak. We did not breathe. We did not move. Salvation. Deliverance. Amen. *Oh yeah!*

When I finally inhaled, I smelled last night’s bubble bath still clinging to her, not wanting to let go. I empathized and drew her closer.

After a short time and with the utmost care, she eased back and cupped my head in her hands. “Good morning, sleepyhead,” she said and proceeded to apply the softest, sweetest kiss known to woman. “Better?” she asked.

“Way better,” I sighed. “Thank you.”

We held each other for a moment longer and then the inevitable loomed. I stole three more kisses and suggested, “All right, let’s go back before the search party gets dispatched. You go back first. I’ll wait thirty seconds and then follow.”

She heartily laughed and swatted me. “Honey, we didn’t do anything wrong.”

“Oh yeah,” I conceded, feeling the fool and yet, the thief.

With squinting eyes, she stared at me. “But you’ll still look as if we did something wrong whether we go back together or separately.” She held out her hand. “Come on.”

Suddenly seized by a second thought, I resisted her tugging. “How

about we tell a tall tale about how we forgot something at home? Steal away to where it smells better than a bar's bathroom. We still have time. We could do it and still get to Maggie and Susan's on time. How about it?"

She glanced to her watch, and my anticipatory gland did its thing again. "If we're out of here in the next five minutes, you've got a deal."

"Then let's go light some fires under them! Move it!"

We hurried back, and I paid no mind to whether my face evinced my guilty pleasure.

As soon as Laura saw us, she snapped her fingers and pointed at Claudia. "Kitterman, FYI," she said. "You must pay better attention to details. When you say you're off to powder your nose, it'd be more convincing if you took your purse with you."

"A little kissy-face in the ladies' room, girls?"

"And damn proud of it," Claudia asserted and plopped into the booth.

I sat next to her and felt her hand quickly return to my bare leg. Then, I did a swift assessment of the situation. No one was eating. The burger slices were gone, except for that one putrefying in front of me. The bed of French fries had been stripped down to its frame of a plate. Everyone slumped back as if resisting the urge to undo pants buttons. Mission accomplished, under deadline. *Yes!*

Claudia began rummaging in her purse. "All right, how much do we owe?"

"We don't have the bill yet."

"I'll go ask Molly," Alison volunteered and promptly rose.

"Why the fire-ass hurry? We still have time."

"Early is as rude as late."

Claudia braved, "We wanted to run home quick. We left in such a hurry, I'm not sure we turned the heat—"

Simultaneously, Ginny and Kris started vibrating and playing music. Each withdrew a cell phone.

Kris looked at her screen and announced, "It's Maggie," at the same time Ginny declared, "It's Susan."

With a shrug apiece, they answered. They stared at each other and listened, and we stared at them and listened to the silence.

What the hell?

"Smart thinking, Maggie. Is that okay with you, Ginny?"

"Sounds like a good plan, Susan. Is that okay with you, Kris?"

They both nodded and passed their agreement to the nearest cell tower.

Kris said, "You don't have to call anyone. We're together," just as Ginny said, "No need. Everyone's right here."

They exchanged panicked looks. Ginny fumbled, “We all met for coffee,” at the same time Kris really dropped the ball. “We met for breakfast.”

Ginny cuffed Kris, and Kris briskly corrected, “We met for coffee, breakfast coffee! We’re actually rather famished.”

Five hands flew to cover five mouths. Mine didn’t. Mine didn’t need to. Mine stayed put on that hand still attached to my bare leg.

“We’ll take care of it. See you soon.”

“Don’t worry about a thing. See you shortly.”

She said. She said. Fine and dandy, but what the hell had Maggie and Susan said?

As soon as they disconnected, Holly asked, “Okay, chickies, what the heck is up?”

“The city declared a preemptive snow emergency. There’s a major storm on the way.”

“We can’t park on the streets after eleven tonight. Maggie and Susan are worried about where everyone’s going to park.”

“We agreed to get everybody there. Then we just have to worry about parking the van.”

“And my car!” Laura quickly added. “I have to have my car in case I get called in.”

“That’s even better,” Ginny said. “We’ll worry about getting one car back home, and you and Holly worry about the other.”

Shit! Claudia and I were indeed on our way home—with a chaperone. I squeezed her hand tightly, and for some unknown reason, I wanted to laugh. Jesus, I just wanted to hold her! It wasn’t as though we had some torrid tryst in the works. Still, the powers that be and Old Man Winter were conspiring against us. *Shit!*

“I’ll take, Sutter. She probably needs a cigarette as bad as she needed coffee.”

Oh, yippee!

“Then I’ll go with Claudia,” Holly said.

Ginny offered, “I’ll take Alison.”

Janice completed the final transaction, “I’ll take Kris.”

Partner swapping? Jesus, I just wanted to hold her! And I sure as hell did not mean Laura. *Holy frickin’ shit!*

We went through the rapid motions of paying the bill, thanking Molly for indulging us, and then loading belongings into the van. Passersby stared at us as though we were in the middle of an armed robbery. While the day was wintry enough to force the mass production of origami snowflakes, there we were: donners of Bermuda shorts, Hawaiian shirts, winter jackets, and frickin’ flip-flops. Okay, maybe we looked more like escapees from a

tropical funny farm than robbers. Even so, you get my drift.

Obliterating all distinction ‘tween crybaby and littermate, partner parted from partner as if one thousand and one nights lay ahead without an overnight bag. Jesus, we were a pathetic bunch.

Laura started her car, cranked a 70s radio station, and we both lit up. As we wordlessly drove, she waved to every cop we saw, and I wondered what that must be like. I couldn’t imagine anything other than the instinctual foot-off-gas eye-on-speedometer armpit-gush reaction. Relegating it to list of things I’d never, ever know, I minded the car in front of us, watching Claudia’s head zip from road-view to Holly-view. I just knew they were gabbing up a storm far bigger than the one on its way.

Eventually, Laura pulled to a stop in front of our house. She looked at her watch and said, “You and Kitterman have fifteen minutes to see to your *heating* problem.”

“We don’t have a *heating* problem.”

“Just shut up and go, Sutter. My whole day would suck if Holly and I woke up wrong. Go!”

I grabbed the door handle so fast that I saw the speed of light in the rearview mirror. Upon bailing out, I nearly ran headfirst into the speed of sound.

“Get a move on, chickie! You have only ten minutes!”

“Laura gave us fifteen,” I begged to differ.

“Sounds good to me,” she said with a smile. “Go! We don’t want to be late!”

I zoomed to Claudia, her hand ready to grab mine while the garage door made its obedient way up. We sped under it and through the kitchen door.

She roared, “Hit the coffee pot! I’ll turn the kettle on medium!”

“Screw the paper! Screw toothbrushes!”

“But when the kettle catcalls, we absolutely have to get up!”

“Go!”

Hand in hand, we sprinted down the hall, hung a breakneck left, frantically shed jackets and flip-flops, and literally dove into our unmade bed. Instantly, we welded to each other and started laughing at our necessary idiocy.

A moment later, she said, “We should have just called this morning and said we’d be late. I’m sorry I’m so anal.”

“Please let’s not use the word ‘anal’ in our bed. Just shush and kiss me.”

With laughing lips, she did so, and then she asked, “Honey, did you have big plans for our belated get-together?”

“I don’t think I had a thought beyond this moment.” My brain shifted.

“Did you?”

“My big plans take far longer than ten minutes so, no.”

Somewhere inside, I thought to contemplate little plans, but honestly, I wallowed in exactly what I needed. The occasion proved we could have crises that did not cause the earth to shift, things that seemed monumental but were easily handled by the simplest of things. Holding each other was so simple it was staggering.

In due course, the kettle summoned us, and amazingly, we responded with eagerness. We hurried to fill an odd assortment of travel mugs for the four of us, and then we made our way to the street. Holly and Laura merely smiled at us, with no teasing insinuation that anything happened beyond what had actually happened between us. I wondered if they really knew us that well, or if, in fact, we shared a rare common page in the wrong owner’s manual Laura said they had.

Claudia and I slid into the backseat where she leaned against me and held my hand. We resided in the same close realm once more. The world was right again.

Holly turned around in the passenger seat and smiled. “Everything back to normal?”

Claudia answered with questions that frickin’ threw me for a loop, “*Is this normal, Holly? Is it really supposed to be like this? How the hell did I get this lucky?*”

“You mean lucky to have Kate? Kate’s a good shit. She loves you.”

“I mean me, too,” she clarified. “I think I love her as much as humanly possible, and then somehow it finds a way to go deeper.”

I felt my face go volcano red-hot, and my eyes darted to Laura’s in the rearview mirror. I half-expected her to laugh, but although I couldn’t see her face, I knew she didn’t. Her eyes were soft, smiling at me. Embarrassed, I looked away.

Holly said, “I feel that way about Laura. I don’t know if I’m luckier because she loves me so much or because I love her so much. I just know I’d shrivel up and die if I didn’t have both. It’s weird, isn’t it?”

My eyes darted back to Laura’s, and this time, I knew we were twin lava domes. Embarrassed, she took her turn to look away.

“It is weird,” Claudia answered as she squeezed my hand. “And it’s the little things, not the big things. The silly things make it go deeper. Like this morning ... or this thing we did for Maggie and Susan.”

“What *thing* we did for Maggie and Susan?” Holly asked with wide eyes, and I flawlessly repeated her question and facial expression.

“Oops. Nothing. Sorry. Shit. Damn, they’re going to kill me.”

“What thing we—”

“What thing—”

Laura bellowed, “For shit’s sake, would you please all pay attention and help me figure out where I’m going? I forgot how to get to their house.”

My Little Miss Needs-a-GPS nearly launched into the front seat to bark directions at a streetwise city cop. Holly and I exchanged grimaces of understanding. They were in lowdown cahoots, and we were about to walk into a trap. *Shit!*

Chapter 2

With minutes to spare, we arrived at the Novak-Garrity household and disembarked. A knock on the front door instantly brought Maggie and Susan. All smiles, they were happy to see us. Holly readied for hugs, but the two of them stiff-armed us.

Maggie said, “Uh-uh, if you want to come in, you have to agree not to use the c-word.”

“The c-word? I hate the c-word!”

“Not *that* c-word! The other c-word.”

“Coffee?”

“Chocolate?”

“Claudia?”

“Crawford?”

“Cop?”

“Cojones.”

“Crap?”

“Cantaloupe?”

“Corpuscle?”

“Chrissake?”

“For shit’s sake, what c-word? There are several of them.”

“Aha!” I exclaimed when red and green lights went on in my head. “Christma—”

“*That* word!” Maggie yelled to stop the S sound from leaving my mouth.

“We can’t say ‘Christmas’?”

“Holly, you just said it.”

“Well, why can’t we say it? I love Chri— I love ... that word.”

Susan explained, “Some people have the c-word in July. We decided to have July in the c-word.”

What the f-word?

Maggie furthered, “If you want to come in, you have to *really* believe in miracles. You have to believe with all your heart that inside our house, it’s actually July, July the third to be precise. Deal?”

I could believe that. They obviously did not seem to exist in the real world, the cold one that set my bare naked knees to chattering. Therefore, it being July in their house was plausible, very plausible. And July sounded a whole lot better to me than the c-word.

“Deal,” we shouted, and the vegan and the schoolteacher separated to allow us passage.

The whole notion of it being July took on weight as we entered the foyer. A warmth seemed to saunter right up to us and trounce. With a whiff, I knew a fire crackled in a hearth. I imagined a July night by a campfire, and I wholeheartedly trusted that Maggie would not be distributing paintball guns and that Bub had found peace in the dafter-life.

Deepening our seasonable delusion, strings of chili pepper and pink flamingo lights hung all over the frickin’ place. A four-foot Norfolk pine sat proudly in its pot, sporting miniature beach ball and fish ornaments. It was quite festive, and the c-word had been turned on its head.

Susan instructed, “Throw your jackets in the closet and come on in.”

“Yeah, come on, Kate,” Maggie excitedly said. “I’ve started roasting my own coffee beans. You have to try some. You will not believe it!”

My piehole finally gaped and drooled just as Claudia yelled, “Maggie, for Christ’s sake, don’t tell her stuff like that! I’ll never get her to come home with me.”

“Yes, you will, honey,” I assured. “We’ll just move Maggie into the guest room with Lover Doll.”

“Over my dead body!” Susan screeched.

“That might be a little stinky—especially in July.”

Maggie seized my hand. “Come on, Kate, before *we’re* dead bodies.”

Claudia grabbed my jacket as Maggie pulled me down the hall and into the kitchen.

While I wanted to know where the hell the nirvana coffee was, I could not help noticing the vast array of foods on the counter. Then, I could not resist the temptation that followed. I grabbed a plastic container, craned my head into the hall, and yelled, “Look, you guys! Cream cheese to put on bagels. Cream cheese! That would be cream. That would be cheese.” Then, I yelled into the living room, “Kris, weren’t you just talking about how famished everybody is? Well, get your hungry selves in here! Bagels and schmear! Get your bagels and schmear!”

The dirty looks I received were indeed of the well-earned, priceless variety. Nothing was going to stop me from getting my licks in this time.

Nothing! Not a goddamn frickin' thing!

With a boasting smile, Maggie led me to a corner of the kitchen to show me "the stuff." She opened a canister, and damn, the aroma proved nearly intoxicating! She was explaining the do-it-yourself process when Laura suddenly appeared behind us.

"Is this legal, Novak? I think I might have to confiscate this just to be safe."

"You wish!" she retorted and grabbed a carafe. "I'll share, though."

And she did. It was the best frickin' coffee I had ever had. It possessed the potential to make my Road Swill favorites seem like something I would actually find on the side of a road. Danger lurked in Maggie and Susan's kitchen.

After much gossip, guzzling, and great effort by the others to look as though they were satisfying hunger, the next segment of the monthly ritual began. We were herded into the living room, and our devious hostesses stood before us. Behind them, the fireplace mantel proudly exhibited the big-boobed bimbo babe, and in front of her, five stockings hung by the chimney with care. These were definitely not your run-of-the-mill c-word stockings, mind you. What would be the sense in that? These were well worn, grungy, and hopefully non-stinky sweat socks. Each sported couple names, and all but one bore a stripe. Yes, even I saw the writing on the wall and the flies zipping through the eyes of a triple lunar goddess: Claudia and I, green; Holly and Laura, purple; Janice and Alison, yellow; and Ginny and Kris, red. The Maggie and Susan sock not only didn't have a stripe, it was pristine white and bulging with ... whatever the hell it had been filled with.

"For Pete's sake, you're doing *Lord of the Flies* again! Look at the colors of the stripes, girls! Just like our Capture the Flag territories. I am *not* keeping my mouth shut this time."

Susan took the opportunity to verbally smack Ginny in her place. "Don't start, Ginny. We are *not* doing *Lord of the Flies*! Like we'd try to sneak something past you again! Do you think we're idiots?"

"Actually, I think you're so far from idiots that it scares me. What you did last time was clever—very, very clever."

"It was, wasn't it?" Maggie boasted with a high-five to Susan. "And very hard to outdo so we decided not to try."

Susan declared, "As a matter of fact, we've decided to *undo* what we did to you last time ... or what you did to yourselves."

"Huh?"

"What the hell does that mean?"

"Backwards shit again?"

Susan slashed silencing arms at us. "Slow down! Nothing's backwards."

Last time you arrived civilized and ended up...”

“Savages!”

“That about sums it up,” Susan said with a chuckle. “This time you start out having nothing but the Hawaiian shirt on your back—and shorts, of course, and flip-flops—and hopefully, you’ll leave with your humanity, with what’s truly important.”

Maggie laughed. “For some of you that might be awfully difficult.”

“Yeah, Jack.”

“Shut up, Piggy, you f-er!”

“B-word!”

Susan did the machete arms again. “Thank you both for that timely and eloquent demonstration.”

“Do we get paintball guns again?” Holly excitedly asked. “I would’ve brought my own, you know. I just love that thing.”

“You do *not* get paintball guns! Come on, you guys! We are *not* doing *Lord of the Flies!*”

“Then what *are* we doing?”

“It’s July. We’re merely sending you all to summer camp.”

“Summer camp?” we all repeated, spreading the skepticism thicker than non-vegan schmear.

Susan qualified, “Four summer camps to be precise. One couple per camp.”

“Your first mission is to name your camp and come up with a theme,” Maggie said.

“You mean like space camp?”

“Fat camp!”

“Oo oo, cheerleading camp!”

“Shut up, Jack!”

“Basketball camp.”

“Science camp!”

“Nerd camp!”

Machete arms.

“Exactly,” Susan said. “As a couple, come up with a name and a theme. I have art supplies from school so you can make signs.”

With her face twisted into a nasty grimace, Alison bemoaned, “That’s not fair. Holly’s an artist. Susan, are you going to grade them?”

“Of course, I’m not going to grade them! It shouldn’t make a difference that Holly’s an artist. Just do your best and have fun.”

“Yes, but our best and Holly’s best—”

Holly interrupted to offer, “How about if Laura does our sign?”

“Hol!”

“Yeah, make Laura do it! That’s fair!”

“For shit’s sake, I can barely write my name legibly.”

“You can do it, babe.”

Susan asked, “Are you sure, Holly?”

“I’m sure. Laura can do it,” she said quite happily and gave Laura a kiss on the cheek. “It’ll be fun.”

Laura stuck her tongue out at Alison as Maggie dragged a plastic bin of supplies into the middle of the room. Susan told us to spread out, not cheat, and help ourselves to food and beverages.

While Claudia ran to get more coffee and tea, and I staked claim to a spot by the fireplace. Then, I racked my brain for ideas. Rack turned wreck in short time. What the hell would we name our camp? What the hell would be our theme? My cerebral thesaurus tumbled “camp” and gave me: encampment, campsite, faction, lobby, party. A tumble of “theme” gave me: subject, topic, setting, ambience. That did not help. Camp made me thinking of camping. Camping made me think of our sleeping bag, the Celestial Symbiotic Slumber Chamber, her naked back against my naked front. *Uh oh!* A naked party instantly got underway in my head just as Claudia appeared in the real world, outstretching a cup of coffee.

After handing it off, she sat beside me and patted my thigh. “Did you come up with any ideas, Kate?”

I guiltily cleared my throat. If there was already a naked party in my head at ten-thirty in the morning, it was going to be a long frickin’ day. “No ideas,” I said as my eyes coveted every inch of her and easily discerned that she was much, much hotter than the fire blazing behind her. I cleared my throat again. “You?”

“I think it’s easy, honey,” she proclaimed. “Camp makes me think of camping. Camping makes me think of you and me in our sleeping bag, somewhere cold, snuggling to make a heat of our own.” She stopped talking to madly fan herself with her hand. “My, it’s hot in here,” she said.

“Isn’t it just,” I acknowledged, praying some camp counselor would suddenly demand lights out. I leaned closer to her, but the farther I inclined the further away she got.

She butt-scotced away from me, suggesting, “Let’s not sit so close to the fire.”

Oh, that kind of hot! July hot. Shit! But I quickly figured maybe that was for the better. I needed to get my head out of my Bermuda shorts and into an art supply bin.

I respectfully butt-scotced to follow her and asked, “So if it’s you and me in a sleeping bag, what’s our camp name? What’s our theme?”

She smiled sweetly and answered, “Us. Just us.”

Susan lorded over us again, this time handing out poster board—half sheets, not those big mama ones that would take us days to fill.

Claudia crawled to the bin and returned with markers, a glue stick, and silver glitter. As long as I lived, I would never be able to look at art supplies without hearing my kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Fiedler, bellowing in my head, “Katharine Sutter, do *not* eat that paste again!” Why the hell I, or anyone, ever thought to taste-test paste loomed beyond my comprehension. Even further from my grasp was how a petite woman, teacher or not, could summon up such a nerve-rattling baritone voice. I wondered if Miss Garrity could. I decided then and there not to suck the glue stick and find out.

Claudia and I lay belly down with the poster board in front of us. It felt very elementary school-like, and as I glanced around the room, I realized it looked that way, as well. Even the professors were prone, feet raised. Yoga and massage were the same, and I pondered why there wasn’t some yoga posture for the occasion. The artist and the detective, on the predictable other hand, did not—at all—look prepubescent. They were both flattened, except Holly lay on Laura’s back, her cheek to Laura’s cheek, her hand holding Laura’s pencil-holding hand. I snickered, did the obligatory eye-roll, and returned my attention to the task at hand.

After serious consultation between project manager and reporter, we got moving on the grand design. We were clipping along at a decent pace when Miss Garrity boomed hellishly close to baritone, “Ginny and Kris are the winners!”

“Winners?”

“Winners?”

“Winners at what?”

“How the hell can they be winners?”

“What the—”

Maggie calmly clarified, “They finished first. They win.”

“You didn’t f-ing say this was a race!”

They both roared with laughter. “Oh, did we forget to mention that?”

“Not fair!”

“Get moving! Second and third place are still up for grabs.”

“What did they win?”

“We’ll tell you when everybody’s done. Get moving!”

I took that frickin’ glue stick and thwacked the poster board a hundred times. Claudia maniacally sprinkled glitter in my wake, and we shortly yelled, “We’re done!”

Seconds later, Janice screeched the same proclamation, and all eyes rushed to the losers, still stacked and now giggling as if they didn’t have a care in the world. After an impatient moment, Susan asked whether they were almost done.

“Hold your horses. Hold your horses,” Laura said. “I’m not done until that gorgeous bucking bronco on my back says I’m done.”

All eyes bucked to the non-bucking bucking bronco, who intently pointed her hoof at the poster several times. Evidently, there were finishing touches to which the horse’s ass needed to attend. Finally, Holly kissed Laura’s cheek and said, “It’s beautiful, babe. A work of art. Sign your name, bottom right corner.”

Alison wailed, “A work of art? Crap! How much help did you give her?”

“Shut up, Alison. She did it herself. And if I say it’s a work of art, it’s a work of art.” She kissed Laura again and reiterated her praise.

Jesus! Ours was hardly a work of art. I did like it, though. I figured it deserved a place of honor on our new porch. Maybe near our new hanging bed. Or maybe nearer the makeshift memorial where grieving families left flowers for all the contractors Claudia had eaten for breakfast. I chuckled to myself, and she elbowed me. Evidently, I had thought aloud.

Then the bitching and moaning began anew about them not having told us of any competition. They ignored us, and Maggie removed their lily-white sweat sock from the mantel hook. She shoved her hand inside and announced, “Ginny and Kris, you win five beads and first pick of a card.”

“Five beads?”

“All that for five beads?”

“What are the beads for?”

“The beads are like money, and five beads is a lot of money.”

Maggie handed them their fortune and then held out four small cards. Kris motioned for Ginny to pick a card. She did so and read, “Bedroom.”

“What does that mean? They win a bedroom?”

They ignored the legitimate plea for information, and Maggie informed Claudia and me that we won four beads and second pick. I took the beads—big, black, glassy beads—and Claudia took the card.

“Living room,” she read.

I had no clue if that was good or bad. Bedroom sounded better than living room, but experience taught me that at our meetings most things were never what they appeared to be.

Alison and Janice got three beads and a card indicating, “Office.” From the looks on their faces, I knew they didn’t have a clue either—or any trust in face value.

Maggie very matter-of-factly said, “Holly and Laura, you don’t get any beads, but you do get the last card.”

“Aw, I want beads,” Holly whined. She shot upright, straddled Laura’s butt, and excitedly asked, “Isn’t Mardi Gras in July? What if I raise my

shirt? Will you guys throw beads at me?"

In the blink of a lecherous eye, Laura flipped over and smiled wildly at Holly. "Mardi Gras' in February, Hol, but I'll give you beads, lots of beads, lots and lots of—"

Susan cleared her throat very loudly. "Laura, you don't *have* any beads! You have to earn them. And, Holly, don't flash anyone offering beads, even Laura, *especially* Laura ... unless, of course, the beads are twenty-four-karat."

"Babe, are your beads twenty-four-karat?"

"She doesn't have beads, Holly!" Susan yelled with two emphatic hands in the air. "You two lost. My God, pay attention."

Alison senselessly jumped into the fray, "Well, they get a card. What does their card say?"

Maggie and Susan exchanged pained looks. Reluctantly, Maggie handed the card to Holly, who snatched it and read, "Master bedroom," and the lot of us groaned. Again, it could have been good or bad, but a master bedroom in the same sentence with those two had to communicate trouble.

Holly narrowed her eyes at Maggie. "That sounds better than beads. Are you sure we lost?"

"You lost! You lost! Trust me; you lost." Shaking her head, she grabbed our sweat socks from the mantel hooks and distributed them. "These are to hold your beads. Protect them," she instructed. "And spend them very wisely."

As I shoved our four-bead mother lode into the green-striped sock, Susan said, "Now let's see your signs. Ginny and Kris, you get to go first."

Ginny said, "Kris and I decided to go with the fat camp theme. Except ours is more of a how-to version." She and Kris started laughing as she held up their sign for inspection.

In bloated letters, "Camp Thunder Thigh" took up most of the board. The Ts did their best to look like chubby and plump thighs that had participated in far too many Lesbian Adventure Club meetings. That made even more sense when everyone wanted to sign up for the professorial version of fat camp. A quick listing of marshmallows, hot chocolate, and diet ice cream sandwiches completed the campy picture.

Then, Susan nodded in our direction.

We spontaneously started giggling, and Claudia held up our sign. It read, "Camp Kis Cak, Swinging Under the Stars. No cabins, only porches. Camp capacity: 2." Tasty Paste Glitter stars filled the top half, and our giant's dreamcatcher of a bed hung from a crescent moon. Yes, maybe it was a work of art.

"What is Kis Cak?" Janice asked.

"Our initials," Claudia replied. "It kind of has a Native American ring

to it like most camps do, doesn't it?"

Alison chuckled. "Freezing your butts off in your swingy bed. That definitely sums up the two of you. I think it's sweet."

"Good job, you guys," Miss Garrity praised.

After receiving Susan's next nod, Alison and Janice took their turn. Both seized a side of the poster and raised it high. Shard-looking letters spelled, "Camp Crystal Lake," and everyone immediately started snickering.

Laura roared, "Does your camp have a souvenir shop that sells hockey masks and machetes?"

Kris remarked, "I think every horror movie I've ever seen—okay, all two of them—had a Camp Crystal Lake."

Janice shot dirty looks at every one of us. "Alison doesn't watch horror movies."

In an instant, we knew to shut our mouths, but we were seconds too late. Alison asked, "What do horror movies have to do with anything?"

Janice squeezed Alison's leg. "Nothing, Al. Not one damn thing." This time, the looks she cast were homicidal maniac in nature. She explained, "Alison likes crystals, and she wanted our camp to be on a peaceful lake—like the one at Crappie Cabin—you know, where that DWD tree lives."

The laughter in my throat straightaway felt like a noose. Teasing each other was one thing; ridicule hurled us into a very different realm. Spying the lowering reddened faces around me, I knew I remained in good company.

Susan shot to her feet. "It's beautiful, Alison. You really had no need to worry about there being an artist among us. Good job, you guys!"

"Oh sure, Alison. So much for my work of art!" Laura said to save her soul. "Yours makes mine look preschooler."

Holly swatted her. "They're both works of art."

"Thanks, you guys," Alison said. "Ours is hardly a work of art, but we had fun. I like it."

Then, a nod and all eyes went to Holly and Laura. They were still plastered to each other, and facing their moment of truth, they started fitfully laughing. I knew whatever they had done was not good—work of art or not. Without a word, Laura held up their sign. "Camp Wan Na Ta Ta."

We were not surprised; yet nonetheless, we were stunned. Speechlessly, we stared.

Every A looked like a boob. The C looked like a boob. The voluptuous W had cleavage. For anyone standing on her head, so did the little M. Images of Smut Pumpkin flickered in my mind.

Holly finally broke the silence, "Well, say something. She did a good job, too, didn't she? I think you did, babe." She kissed her.

“Laura, if that looks preschooler, what the hell kind of preschool did you go to?”

“Laura, can’t you draw anything but boobs?”

“Laura, can’t you *think* of anything but boobs?”

With a wide grin, she admitted, “I’ve never tried. Why should I? I have my own artist, and she *is* a work of art.”

Yep, you guessed it: kissy-face.

“So your theme is wanting ta-tas?”

Holly kept kissing, but her hoof reached over and repeatedly stabbed their sign.

We all scrutinized. I saw nothing new on their boobified billboard.

“Crawford!” Claudia shouted. “Quit the kissy-face and explain yourself.”

“Just give them the master bedroom they won and let it be done.”

“I think their sign is creative. I don’t think I could have made it. It is a work of art.”

“And just like these two in their swingy bed, it’s them to a T.”

“Yeah, T as in ta, and T as in ta.”

“Crawford!”

Holly finally looked at us. “God, I just love her so much.”

“We know you do, Crawford. Laura knows, too, and I don’t think she’ll forget if you pay attention for two minutes.”

She kissed Laura goodbye and sat up. “What?”

“*What?* Don’t ask *us* what. What did you point to on the poster?”

“The theme! You asked about theme!” She grabbed the poster to point again, but instead, she dropped her jaw. “Uh oh, babe, we forgot something.” When Laura looked, they both started giggling. “Um, we must have gotten distracted.”

“No shit!”

“What else is new?”

“It’s supposed to say ‘Art and the Art of Self-Defense for Women.’ It’s community service, unlike anyone else’s.” She accusingly cleared her throat and continued, “I teach art, my babe of a cop teaches self-defense, and we’re together all day. I think we should do it. Let’s buy Crappie Cabin and open a camp!”

We decided we’d do that after a long stay at Camp Thunder Thigh, a metaphysical and hopefully terror-free journey through Camp Crystal Lake, and a tour of Camp Kis Cak’s snobbish periphery.

Then, Miss Garrity clapped her hands loudly, and her assistant followed suit.

The complete book can be purchased in ebook or paperback. Please visit the [LAC Bookstore](#). Also available from other retailers.

About the Author

Rosalyn Wraight is also the author of three Detective Laura McCallister lesbian mysteries: *Woman Justice*, *Secrets and Sins*, and *Corpse Call*. These novels feature several characters from this book.

The ongoing Lesbian Adventure Club series includes one more title, *Spiders*, with more forthcoming. Watch the Dykes Who Dare website for sneak peeks.

On the Web

LAC Bookstore: LesbianAdventureClub.com

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