



# LIKELY SUSPECTS

ROSALYN  
WRAIGHT

# **Likely Suspects**

**Lesbian Adventure Club: Book 10**

Rosalyn Wraight

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### Narrator's Note to Reader

For those of you who have difficulty doing things in proper order (you know who you are), a warning: Reading the appendix first will ruin the whole book. So, do not frickin' read it until the end ... where it is ... for a damn good reason!

# Chapter 1

Etiquette: I think I skipped that class. *Do I tip the guy or not?* It wasn't as though he served coffee or anything. No, he just stared at me in the rearview mirror. *Screw the tip.*

I shoved the fare at him, offered my thanks, and slipped out the taxicab's door and into the dark, cold February evening. It all felt odd, very, very odd.

I zipped up the front walkway and put the doorknocker to good use. I always had a fondness for knockers. Well, two I could fondly recall anyway. *Jesus, shut up, Kate!* Well, I was nervous: I rationalized. Desperate to calm myself and stay warm, I bounced on the balls of my feet.

Soon, the big oaken door leisurely opened, and my eyes nearly popped out of my head. "Charles! What the hell—"

"Good evening, Miss Heaper," he formally greeted. "You're late, and I don't mean fashionably."

"Charles, what the hell—"

"The name is Fritz. Fritz!" he irritably corrected as he pointed to his name tag, pinned ever so perfectly on the breast of his neatly pressed black tailcoat. "I'm the butler," he groaned. "Why I let you girls talk me into things will forever remain a mystery. But, I do look damn good in tails, don't I?" With a sudden boyish smile, he spun like a ballroom dancer.

"Jesus, Charles—I mean Fritz—get a hold of yourself. I'm freezing my butt off out here."

In an instant, he became very serious, graciously bowed, and finally let me into the house. In the foyer, he took my duffle bag and then helped me out of my jacket, saying, "Allow me, Miss Heaper."

"Jesus, Fritz, a girl could get used to this. Would you be interested in coming to work for Claudia and me?"

"Claudia? I don't know anyone named Claudia. Did you perchance mean Alberta?"

"*Alberta?*"

“Yes, Alberta. A beautiful woman with the greenest eyes you’ve probably ever—”

“That’s her! But Alberta? I sleep with a chick named Alberta?”

“I don’t know, do you?” He cocked his face at me as he snagged my jacket on the coat tree. “You might want to find out her last name before you commit to something like that.”

“Why? What’s her last name?”

He smiled deviously, ignored my plea, and said, “If you’ll follow me, Miss Heaper, I’ll take you to the study. They’re expecting you. Everyone else was punctual.”

I followed and harassed him all the way, but he would not give up the name. Now, I was really nervous. I had not seen Claudia—er, Alberta—since that morning when we parted ways for work. The Lesbian Adventure Club instruction packet mandated that we not see each other all day and that we arrive separately via taxi at Janice’s house by seven o’clock, our secrets in tow. Thirteen hours—plus the twenty-five minutes I wasted waiting for the frickin’ taxi—had passed, and I would not be reunited with Claudia. Oh, hell no. I was about to meet Alberta. For some strange reason, I felt, um, sluttish, and even stranger, I liked it.

A moment later, Fritz and I stood in front of wooden double doors. He softly cleared his throat, and then, his white-gloved hands grasped the handles. Slowly, he opened both doors and announced, “Madame Mayor, Miss Heady Heaper has arrived.”

*Mayor?* Jesus, what the hell was I walking into?

“Please come in, Miss Heaper. I’m very pleased you could join us.”

Twice, I had to look to see who the hell said that. Then, I had to look a third time because I couldn’t frickin’ believe it. Alison casually leaned with a crooked arm against the fireplace mantle. She exuded authority from both manner and attire. A black draping dress hung mid-calf, and she wore more diamonds than a July night at Crappie Cabin.

My widened eyes traveled to the other end of the mantle, to a similarly dressed but jewel-less Janice. She wore a shit-eating grin, and I had just opened my mouth to speak when my line of vision became completely blocked by a green-eyed beauty in ... an oversized pinstriped suit and fedora! *Holy frickin’ shit!*

Discombobulated, I stared at her as she approached, carrying with her a luscious smile and an outstretched hand.

“Hi, honey,” she said. “You’re late. I missed—”

Instantaneously, the room shook with those infamous uh-uhs and no-ways, groans and ghostly moans.

“If we can’t, you can’t!”

“Tell them, Mayor!”

“Back off, Alberta!”

“Oh, shut up, you loud mouth dames!” Claudia shouted. “Or I’ll get one of my goons to fill you with daylight!”

*Jesus!*

The bitching and moaning continued nonstop until Alison bellowed, “Fine! You’re going to whine all evening. I just know it. So you have exactly two minutes to say hello to your sweetie. Then, it goes back to 1930 and strangers in a room. I mean it!”

In an instant, Claudia wrapped her pinstriped arms around me, and I followed suit. The brim of her fedora collided with my editor’s visor, and they both went flying. We ignored the midair mishap and held each other.

“How come you were late, honey?” she asked as we pulled apart. “Are you feeling okay? Is everything okay at work?”

“Everything is fine,” I assured. Then, with a smidgeon of embarrassment, I explained, “I’ve just never taken a cab in Granton before. I expected it to be like New York City. Poof! There’s a cab! I had to frickin’ call and wait. I suppose everybody did, huh?” I kissed her and asked how her day went, but before she had a chance to render her verdict, my eyes landed on her name tag. “Alberta Cojones!” I shrieked.

Not only did I sleep with a chick named Alberta, but she had balls! *Holy shit!* But still, she was my Ms. Ballsy.

Alison started clapping to get everyone’s attention, and as she did so, I actually got to take a gander at the rest of them. Again, my eyes had difficulty believing. I cracked a trench-coated Laura. “What the hell are you? A flasher?”

“Shit, not me, Sutter. It’s that gorgeous one who’s flashing. Christ, I need a drink.”

I followed her thumb as it went over her head to point behind her, and there I found a scantily clad Holly. *Holy shit!* “Holly, where the hell are your clothes?”

“These *are* my clothes,” she offendedly replied, tugging on her flowery, short, really, really short, plunging, really, really plunging silk robe. I would have owned my slight exaggeration, but the opportunity evaporated when she grabbed my arm and pleaded, “You’re not a photographer, are you, Kate? I thought for sure Laura was going to be the photographer, but she says she’s not. How can that be?”

*What?*

“Listen up! Listen to the mayor!” Janice bayed. “Or I’ll have all of you dragged and dumped outside the city limits.”

Oh yeah, despite it being a completely different era, this was most definitely the Lesbian Adventure Club.

Alison said, “We’ll be having drinks and hors d’oeuvres, but please don’t fill up. Dinner will be served shortly. We’re a bit behind schedule thanks to Miss Heaper.” She smiled and winked at me.

“I’m sorry,” I said, and I was. “You could have started without me.”

“No, we couldn’t have. Everybody needed to be here. I’ll explain in a moment.” She went to the door, summoned butler Fritz, and, I assumed, gave him orders. She turned back and said, “Since most of us are strangers, we’ll need to introduce ourselves. I’ll go first.” She paused and then detailed, “As you’re probably all aware, I’m the mayor of Granton. You’ve probably read in the papers that my office is corrupt but don’t believe it for a moment—at least if you know what’s good for you.” She scooted to Janice and clutched her hand. “This is my girl Friday.”

Janice cracked a gloating smile and added, “And Saturday and Sunday and Monday and—”

The mayor of Granton cuffed Girl Friday. As a reporter, I should have been taking notes, thorough notes. This was big news: a mayoral scandal in its sordid unfolding.

A strange racket in the hall caused everyone to about-face, and we watched Fritz roll a beverage cart into the study. Following him was Sam; at least I figured it was Sam. I recognized his shaven head even with the chef’s hat, but some big-ass bushy thing resided on his upper lip. It was either vermin or a fake mustache. For as persnickety as he could be, he seemed oblivious to it, intent on balancing a silver serving tray on each palm.

Fritz stood in the center of the room and announced, “As you all know, Prohibition is the law of the land, but I do have a wonderful selection of soda pop. Just name your poison, ladies.”

Poisons were named, and hors d’oeuvres were snagged from Sam as he made the rounds. When he got to me, I idiotically greeted him by name.

“The name is Swede,” he coolly corrected, and then, he lowered a tray in front of me. “I made those stuffed mushroom caps you love so much.”

“Crabby ‘shrooms! Yes!” With great greed, I plucked two and kissed my thanks onto his cheek, being careful not to piss off the critter ‘stache.

*Damn!* A weekend such as this could spoil a girl.

Mayor Alison again seized our attention. “Let’s go around the room and make introductions, shall we?”

“Yes, Mayor,” Girl Friday said with yet another huge grin. “Why don’t we start right here?” She madly pointed at Laura, who shot her an evil look.

Laura asked, “Verbatim off that silly sheet of paper, I suppose?” When they nodded, she warned, “You’ll pay for this—both of you.” She cleared her throat and flatly said, “My name is Samantha Shovel, and I am a

dick.”

Needless to say, laughter erupted. The mayor and her girl Friday high-fived, and the weekend just kept getting better and better.

Ginny, looking rather spiffy in a thirties-style dress, went next. “My name is Gertie Stone. I own a coffeehouse downtown called ‘The Lost Generation.’ It is frequented by some rather influential writers.” She seemed rather pleased with her new persona.

All eyes shifted to Kris, who was wearing a skirt and blouse, a bolero, and weird-ass wire-rimmed round glasses to complete the vintage ensemble. “My name is Amah Fraud.” She stopped to roll her four eyes at our hostesses. “I am a psychoanalyst in private practice, specializing in ego psychology and child analysis.” She seemed less than pleased, but I figured it was more because of her name.

We all looked at Alberta. She looked damn good to me. The dame made me dizzy.

“My name is Alberta Cojones,” she proudly announced. “I am *not* a gangster like the coppers would have you believe. I am merely a shrewd businesswoman.” She started laughing and turned to me, taking the opportunity to snap both my sleeve garters.

I assumed that meant it was my turn, and my mind quickly recalled the character description from my instruction packet. “My name is Heady Heaper. I write a gossip column for the *Journal*, called ‘The Trash Heap.’” Risking wrath, I deviated from the script and added, “I know everybody’s business, *and* I’m taking notes.”

“You do anyway,” Maggie joked with a crack to my arm. I cracked her in return, and she proceeded to introduce herself, “My name is Joan Evves, and I am part of a women’s movement that believes our resources would be put to better use working toward world peace, not blowing people up.” Then, she obviously veered from the blessed script as well, “I easily predict that in another eighty years, people like me will *still* be needing to advocate the very same thing because those in power will *still* not have a clue! Will we ever learn? What will it take? We should be—”

“Thank you, Miss Evves!” the mayor loudly interrupted. She smiled at her even while she glared. Her eyes slowly turned, and she called, “Miss Sully.”

Susan took her cue and said, “My name is Vanna Sully, and I am a teacher. ... Is that not the most boring, nondescript character sketch you’ve ever heard or what?” She started laughing. “Am I really that boring, you guys?”

“Join the women’s movement,” somebody roared.

“Yeah, I like how women move.”

“Me, too.”

“Movers and shakers.”

“And jigglers. We can’t forget the jigglers, can we, Miss Shovel, you big dick?”

“Huh?”

“My God!” Fritz shrieked. “You sound like a bunch of dirty old men at a filthy truck stop!”

The Swede nearly overturned his serving trays. “Charles, how the hell do you know what dirty old men at a filthy truck stop sound like?”

“It’s Fritz! Fritz! Fritz! Fritz! How many times do I have to say it?”

“Well, Fritz old boy—”

Suddenly, the mayor banged a gavel on the little gavel-banging thingy on the desk. She laughed just as hard as we all did, but still, by the fiftieth bang, we got the idea that she meant business. Once we finally calmed down, she looked for Holly to complete the introductory circuit. Unsurprisingly, Holly was most happy to oblige.

“My name is Carolina Reef. My middle initial is O, making me Carolina O. Reef.” She looked around the room as though she expected gasps or applause or something to lime-light her very presence. “I’m an artist. No duh! I paint mostly flowers, though, and some say my beautiful paintings are highly, highly erotic. They say the same thing about the photos I pose for.” Her hands raced to her hips for a display of indignation, and she peered at Alison and Janice. “The love of my life is supposed to be a photographer. Why did you make Laura a dick and not a photographer?”

“Well, if you’re an artist, it makes sense she’s a detective, doesn’t it?” Alison challenged.

“Yes, but...”

While they argued, I watched Laura, and I instantly knew the dick was in distress. As though camera lenses covered her eyes, she ogled Holly. I wondered how long she’d tolerate being a stranger to her. She took a stiff swig from her soda bottle and in the process caught me studying her. I smiled, and she returned it right before making a frantic cigarette-smoking gesture. How the hell did she figure we’d pull off that little endeavor? I half-assed smiled, quarter-assed nodded, and completely looked away.

My attention returned to the matter at hand, just in time to hear Alison conclude, “Welcome, everybody, to your nice relaxing weekend at the mayor’s mansion.”

“That’s it?”

“Just a weekend?”

“You’re not going to mess with us?”

They both shook their heads, but I was not convinced. Riddled with skepticism, we exchanged glances and wordless accusations. I shot questioning eyes to Fritz, and he merely shrugged. Swede did the same.

*This* was messing with us.

Janice said, “Swede, we’ll be heading into the dining room now. You may begin serving as soon as you’re ready.”

“Yes, ma’am,” he replied before bowing and taking leave.

“Shall we, girls?” Alison asked and headed for the door.

Everyone filed out, but I straggled. I bent to retrieve Alberta’s fedora from the floor and then pivoted to reach my visor. Before I had a chance to stand upright, the gentle introduction of a hand on my trousered rear caused me to freeze ... just to let it linger. Then, I swooped my hand behind me to seize the culprit. With a subsequent upward spin, the most beautiful woman in the world stood a mere inch from me.

“You’re pretty damn cute for a reporter,” she flirted with a wild smile. “Can I talk you into letting me buy you dinner?”

I squelched laughter and feigned indignation. “Why, Alberta Cojones, are you hitting on me?”

“Uh huh.” She brushed her lips against mine. “Is it working?”

*Jesus!* She could probably hit on me with a hammer, and it’d work. Still, her being an intimate stranger proved rather intoxicating, and I did not want to relinquish the buzz—not just yet. So, I said, “It *might* be working. If you’re on the dessert menu, that could—”

A grand ahem came from doorway. Guiltily, we both glanced to Girl Friday, and after a quick kiss-stealing and hat-donning, we obeyed her get-a-move-on grimace.

The three of us had just made it into the hall when Janice called, “Mayor, I do believe we forgot something—or rather, we forgot someone.”

*Aha!* The rest of the story!

Alison snapped her fingers. “Oh my, you’re right.” With that, she herded everyone back into the study. “Would you like to get her, Girl Friday?”

Laura snuck up behind Alberta and me and whispered, “Don’t trust them for a second.”

Alberta laughed and snootily challenged, “Is that a shot in the dark, Miss Shovel, or the opinion of a professional dick?”

Laura jabbed her. “Mark my words,” she said.

And I did. I marked her words right there where I stood: betwixt Cojones and a dick. Oh, lucky me.

## The Players

Alison Tenner.....Mayor  
Janice Thiel..... Girl Friday  
Kate Sutter ..... Heady Heaper  
Claudia Kitterman.....Alberta Cojones  
Ginny Bleeker ..... Gertie Stone  
Kris Maltry..... Dr. Amah Fraud  
Maggie Novak ..... Joan Evves  
Susan Garrity ..... Vanna Sully  
Holly Crawford.....Carolina O. Reef  
Laura McCallister ..... Samantha Spade

## Chapter 2

Filled with apprehension, we stood in the study and watched Girl Friday take a leisurely stroll to a cabinet between two built-in bookshelves. She put her hand in her pocket to retrieve what ended up being a key. Then, she unlocked the cabinet door. A few seconds later, she turned around, holding ... holding ... Bimbo Babe! Damn, I was happy to see her, as Claudia and I had been forced to relinquish her a few days prior. Little did I know she'd be a kept woman, under lock and key in a frickin' wall.

Girl Friday set her on the desk, and as Bimbo Babe jiggled, it became obvious she was not quite herself.

"We dressed her up for the occasion," she declared. "She looks pretty damn good, huh?"

We all leaned in, and I admit: I feared another lopsided spectacle. Instead, I noted that she simply wore a gaudy diamond necklace, just as Alison did. Between jiggles, it madly glinted. Livable, I thought, at least until the hoopla began.

"Diamond-studded nipples?"

"You've got to be kidding!"

I looked again, my head bobbling to keep rhythm with her. "Holy shit!"

"Wow!"

"How do we win her?"

"If we win her, do we get the diamonds, too?"

"You didn't glue those on her, did you?"

"You didn't let her get her nipples pierced, did you?"

Girl Friday bellowed, "We did not do anything permanent to her. Get a flippin' grip!"

"So, how do we win her?"

"You don't," she bluntly answered. "There's no competition this weekend. She just gets to be all dolled up for a nice relaxing weekend at the mayor's mansion, too. She looks like a million bucks."

Before we had a chance to either agree or dispute, the mayor ordered, "All right, let's get our butts to the dining room before our chef quits and we're stuck ordering pizza."

With that immense motivation, we hurried out of the room.

"Please, please, please, don't let dinner be hotdogs."

There in the swanky but relaxed dining room, I fully expected to assume my desired position next to the flirty Alberta, but instead, we found assigned seating. Each plate held a blue envelope with a character name written on it. I searched and found my place at the end of the far side, between the mayor at the table head and Amah Fraud, who, I quickly discovered, was strategically placed between Alberta and me. A quick scan helped me realize that everyone was a person away from her partner, except our hostesses. On each end, they would at least have eye contact without having to crane their necks. I was such a wuss.

We took our seats, and not a second later, Fritz came sashaying through the kitchen's swinging doors with two pitchers of ice water. He announced, "Prohibition prohibits me from serving a good wine ... or a bad wine for that matter. Give me your goblets, and I'll fill them with water."

One by one, we did so.

When he finished and left the room, Girl Friday said, "Since we're strangers, we've got a note for each of you to flesh out your character a bit more. You'll also find a topic to keep the weekend's conversations going." With a sickeningly sweet smile, she glanced around the room.

The mayor instructed, "Go ahead and read them, and then we can have a nice relaxing dinner."

Cautiously, we each picked up our envelope and sought affirmation from and/or commiseration with each other. Simultaneously, we removed the blue paper.

On tenterhooks, I unfolded and read.

*You, Heady Heaper, know the truth about Alberta Cojones' 'business' dealings. A complete sucker for those green eyes, you have, on innumerable occasions, provided Alberta with alibis via your gossip column. Where exactly was she that night you said she was at the theater? Where exactly was she that night you said...*

*Your goal this weekend is to protect Alberta at all costs. Her freedom and your credibility as a reporter depend on it.*

*Find out exactly what goes on in the back room of The Lost Generation with those literary types you once wanted to be ... before you gave your soul to Alberta.*

*Holy shit!* I slept with a chick named Alberta who had balls and was

a crook! Hmm... *Would* I relinquish my ethics for those green eyes? Apparently, I didn't need to think on that too hard. It seemed I already had. *Holy frickin' shit!*

Open-mouthed, I looked up to find seven other open mouths and two snickering government officials.

"I thought you f-ing said you weren't going to mess with us?" Samantha Shovel scooped on the indignation. "There's going to be a corpse again, isn't there? You're—"

"No, Laura!" Alison nearly screamed. "There isn't! I swear." She looked to Janice at table's end. "Please, Janice? *Please?*"

Without hesitation, Janice smiled at her. "Go ahead, Al. If it messes something up, we'll deal with it. If it'll make you feel better, go ahead."

Alison released a heavy sigh and then admitted, "I agreed to let this all just play out, but, Laura, if you're already thinking that, I'd rather risk messing it up." She smiled and explained, "There is a mystery this weekend, but it is *not* a murder mystery. I swear. And I want you to know this was all my idea. I'm the one who talked Janice into doing this. She wanted to do something totally different." She paused and looked at each of us. "I just didn't like what Lisa and I did last time. I'm very sorry for that. So, I wanted to do it right. We'll have fun. And nobody dies, Laura. Nobody."

"Not even Lover Doll," Girl Friday said as she cracked the dick on the arm. "Seems to me, Miss Shovel, you made your own murder mystery, too. It wasn't just Alison and Lisa."

Miss Shovel started laughing. "All right, yes, Holly and I killed Lover Doll and put the blame on you. But we saved her, didn't we, Sutter? You got your little blowup doll back for those nights Kitterman won't sleep with you."

Both Alberta and I readied to spat when the artist splattered the airwaves.

"Babe," she called with a laugh, "it's going to *become* a murder mystery if you're not careful. You be a good girl over there without me next to you to keep you in line."

The dick nearly flattened the vegan stuck between them as she reached for Carolina. "Hol, if you were next to me—"

Girl Friday started banging her plate with a fork. "We're strangers! Remember? It's 1930! Remember? Shovel and Reef, behave before you piss off the mayor."

Carolina giggled. Miss Shovel snorted. "Sorry," they said in flawless unison.

"At the risk of pissing off the mayor, can I say something?"

Susan—er, Vanna—asked. With no intention of waiting for permission or disallowance, she quickly continued, “We’ll go along with whatever you two have planned—and I’m sure we’ll have fun—but Alison, there’s really no need to feel bad about what happened. It’s over. Just let go of it.”

Agreement rippled through the room, as did Fritz on a salad-delivery mission.

Mayor Alison replied, “Well, if you’re all so willing to let me off the hook, then do it now. Just act like we never had this conversation. Just trust us and have a nice relaxing weekend. That’s really all I want.”

“Deal!” resounded so loudly that croutons went breadcrumbs.

From there, we enjoyed a leisurely dinner. Swede spoiled us as only he could. If others in this era were standing in soup kitchen lines, we were the arrogant upper crust dining on prime rib ... and some stuff that looked as though it belonged in a vegan shoe store not a vegan mouth. I wasn’t at all sure what it was, but I was certain I did not want to know.

What little conversation there was proved stilted, as though we somehow were strangers. Simultaneously, it felt both peaceful and awkward, and it became obvious that the mayor and her aide succeeded at creating an air of mystery. Maybe we were all simply lost in thought. I was; I kept thinking about the character note, about the goal and the directive. Short of blurting the obvious, I had no idea how the hell to find out what went on in the back room of Gertie’s coffeehouse. Then, I found myself wondering if someone sat there puzzled about how to approach me for information. But what the hell did I know?

We all leaned back and starting groaning our praise to Swede as he and Fritz cleared the table. Then, unconcerned with our already overstuffed bellies, they began serving coffee and warm raspberry pie. As soon as I smelled both, I knew I would make room; I knew we all would.

Before I even achieved pie in the pie-hole, Alberta roared, “What the heck is this, Sam?”

Curious as hell, I stretched my head around Amah as far as I could.

“It’s Swede, Miss Alberta, and that is a cup of hot water,” he sheepishly replied. “I know you’re not a coffee drinker. It’s just that with Prohibition...”

“What about Prohibition, Sam—Swede?” Instead of awaiting an answer, she juttred her beautiful head into the middle of the table and shot looks to both ends. “Please, don’t say it.”

“Okay, we won’t,” Girl Friday said with a smart-ass snicker. “We won’t tell you that Earl Grey has been outlawed.”

*Uh oh!* I flinched, but the reaction I expected from Alberta didn’t materialize. Apparently, she was rendered speechless, or she was too engrossed in watching each bow her head in not-a-good-time-to-laugh

fear.

“*What?*” she finally asked with a surplus of incredulity.

“Sorry, Alberta,” the mayor said. “It has anti-depressive qualities, and this is supposed to be the *great* depression. The two just don’t mix. They had no choice but to outlaw it.”

Alberta laughed, but it severely lacked amusement. “*They?*”

“The government,” Girl Friday clarified.

“You *are* the government!”

“Oh, we are, aren’t we?” Mayor Alison glibly said. “Then I guess *we* had no choice.”

Alberta craned her neck again, this time to look at me. It was the dreaded Do-Something-Kate look. I hated those, because I only got them when she already recognized a situation as hopeless. *Think, Kate! Think!* Um... I had a stash of Earl in my car and she in hers ... but we didn’t have our frickin’ cars. Um... In my mind, I rummaged through my duffle bag, although I knew I had not packed any. Um... *Whoa! Whoa! Wait a frickin’ minute!* They reminded us to trust them, and yet, this was a trust issue, a big trust issue. The vegan would always get vegan fuel, Laura and I would always get nicotine without having to asphyxiate anyone, and Claudia would always get her Earl. The vegan just got her fuel— *Oh shit!*

“I’ll get you some, honey,” I blurted. Yeah, I would, even if I had to walk (and smoke) blocks and blocks away, and even if I had to walk (and smoke) all the way back. “Don’t worry,” I assured. “I’ll get you Earl.”

Girl Friday tsk-tsked and shook her red head. “Alberta, I thought you were a shrewd businesswoman,” she challenged.

Alberta nearly snapped her neck to turn to her, and while I could not see her expression, I heard her coqs engage and her hackles rise.

Girl Friday furthered, “I would have thought you’d have better connections than a gossip columnist.”

Hmm, I would have thought so, too, but still, if she didn’t have Earl within a half hour of rising in the morning, I would be in the trash heap, not simply writing it.

Alberta dared, “Exactly what kinds of connections do I have, Girl Friday?”

She cackled. “How shrewd are you if you need me to tell you? Not very, I’d say. How utterly disappointing.”

*Holy shit!* Girl Friday just kicked Alberta Cojones in the cojones!

The room went breathless for a full moment as Alberta simply stared at Girl Friday. Then, after a large inhalation, Alberta asked, “How’s the pie, girls?”

*What the hell?*

Frenzied, diversionary conversation commenced, and I watched the

green-eyed gangster drink her cup of hot water as though it were the best Earl she had ever had. And all the while, I knew those coqs of hers glowed red-hot from friction.

A short time later, Mayor Alison and Girl Friday informed us that we would be retiring to the living room for after-dinner drinks. As the rich b-words we were slowly becoming, we heeded the order by moseying our way and lazily plunking down onto couches and chairs. And through it all, we remained mindful that we were strangers—strangers who just happened to end up next to certain other strangers. Oddly, I discovered I had an apparently repressed fetish for pinstriped suits.

The living room was grand but not in a stuffy, pretentious way. Its vaulted ceiling reached for the moon with great joy, and glossy wood spread in all directions. Plush couches made me want to sleep off the aftereffects of a large dinner. I thought I even heard the area rug whispering my name. *Heady... Heady...*

The mayor stood in the center of the room and spun to look at each of us. “I’m truly sorry,” she said. “Inviting you in here for after-dinner drinks shows just how out of touch a busy mayor can be. There’s that whole little matter of Prohibition.” She paused to laugh and then asked, “Would anyone like some water? I can call Fritz.”

We assured Mayor Shithead that we were quite overstuffed as it was.

Girl Friday came to stand next to her and said, “Then let’s just relax. Let’s simply enjoy each other’s company.”

After melodramatic sighs from each of us, Maggie—er, Joan—asked, “This is really your house, huh, Janice? It’s huge!”

“And beautiful,” Gertie added.

Girl Friday shook her head dismissively. “It is, but it’s not what you think,” she said. “I didn’t earn it.” Her remark resulted in an instant swat from the mayor.

“Why must you always say that?”

“Because I *didn’t* earn it,” she defended. “How many massage therapists do you know who could afford a place like this—well, at least the kind who only massage the legal areas?” She snickered and turned to Joan. “I inherited it,” she affirmed.

The mayor smacked her again and opened her mouth to speak, but suddenly, whooping and hollering came from the foyer. We heard the door loudly close, and then all hell broke loose.

Two individuals, in clothing befitting our reversal of time, burst into the living room, guns slung over their shoulders, one carrying a box. “You need some *hoooooch?*” they bellowed in concert.

Some of us were quick to recognize the invaders while others required Carolina to screech, “Sis! Denny!” as she shot to her feet.

“The name’s Bonnie,” Noelle—er, Bonnie—clarified as she stiff-armed the lunging Carolina. “And this here’s Clyde.”

Carolina was not buying. She wrenched Bonnie’s arm out of her way, saying, “You’re my sister! Give me a hug.”

“And you’re half-naked. Where the hell are your clothes, sis?”

“Ah, see you are my sister, and these *are* my clothes.” She twirled toward us. “Has everyone met my sister?”

Bonnie cuffed her one. “They know who am! Why must you always ask that stupid question?”

“I don’t always ask that stupid question!”

“Holly, you ask Mom and Dad that stupid question!”

Carolina swatted her and turned to Denny, asking whether he would at least give her a hug. He set the box on an end table, flung his paintball gun out of the way, and respectfully accommodated.

“So do you want hooch or not?” Bonnie shouted at us. “Hurry up. Yes or no? Me ‘n’ Clyde has banks t’ rob.”

*Jesus!*

“What kind of hooch do you have, Noelle—I mean, Bonnie?” Amah Fraud inquired. “I think I could use something to drink.”

Gertie walloped Amah just as Bonnie specified, “I have hoity-toity cognac and the bubbly giggle juice for the mimosa lover.” Her index finger jutted out, went on a quick tour of the living room, and came to a halt on none other than Mimosa-Head Susan—er, Vanna.

Vanna’s eyes sparkled until a dark thought instantly snuffed out the light. “Sure, get my hopes up. Then, I suppose you’ll tell me that orange juice has been outlawed.”

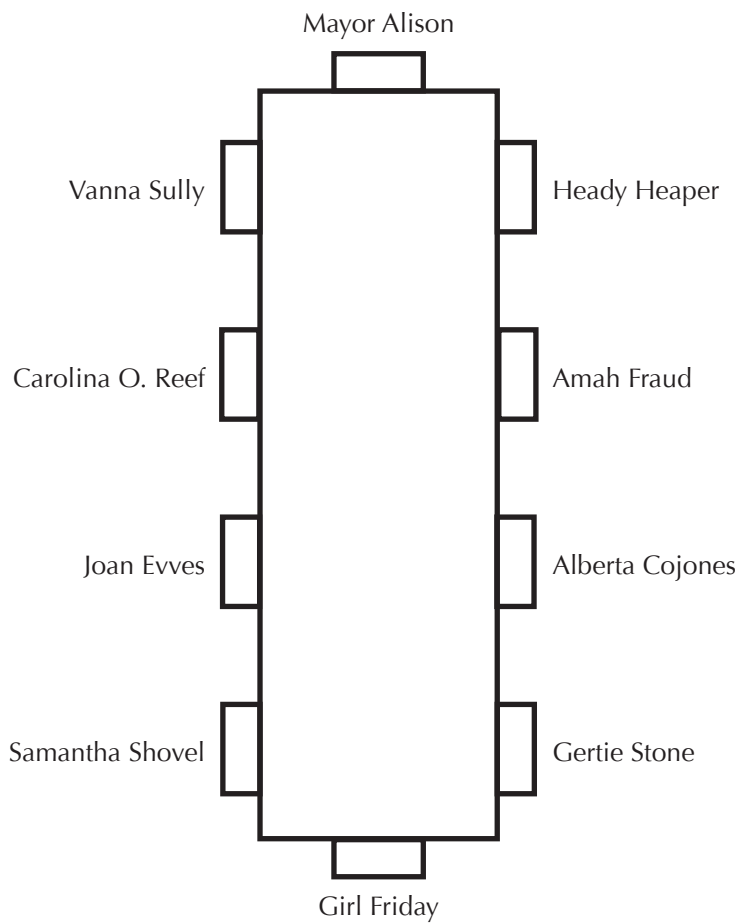
Bonnie laughed. “It probably hasn’t been outlawed, because I don’t have any. I only deal in—” She paused to lean in and cup her hand around her mouth. “I only deal in, um, the illegal stuff the boss makes me deliver.”

With impeccable timing, Fritz appeared with a large tray of legless goblets and a fluted glass half-empty/half-full of an orange substance that made me queasy at the mere sight. Instantly, Vanna’s eyes lit up again, and she flew to retrieve the object of her desire before the government intervened.

Fritz began to distribute glasses, and when the tray got to me, I took two, despite my hesitation. Booze remained on my shitlist since the Crappie Cabin vomiting teapot incident. Still, the whole bootlegging thing proved seductive, and besides, cognac was made for sipping, and sipping would not render me a drunken fool. Right?

Wanting to know I would not be alone in my decision, I turned to Alberta. “Honey, do you—”

Where the hell was Alberta?  
My eyes quickly scanned the room and then again.  
Where the hell was my green-eyed gangster?



*The nice relaxing dinner*

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## 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.

Watch the Dykes Who Dare website for sneak peeks of forthcoming Lesbian Adventure Club titles.

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