



Loose Sleuths

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Loose Sleuths
Lesbian Adventure Club: Book 4

Rosalyn Wraight

—DLSIJ Press—

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Chapter 1

“We’ve decided you’re all sexually repressed,” Holly declared as Laura aimed the camcorder at the lot of us, all cramped there on the couch. “So we’ve designed our weekend to help you lose your sexual inhibitions.”

Whooooooa!

Too frickin’ fast!

Back up!

Be kind: rewind.

Terror struck me when my mother let go of my hand, abandoning me in that crowded kindergarten room—

Jesus, not that far back! Half an hour, not a frickin’ lifetime!

Several minutes ahead of schedule, Claudia skirted the curb in front of Holly and Laura’s house for the monthly meeting of the Lesbian Adventure Club.

Theeeeeere we go!

Holly and Laura lived less than a half-mile outside the city on a short, dead-end country lane. The setting exuded peacefulness, and yet, if you turned an ear, the urban hum sought to contradict. I always chose the deaf-ear approach, letting the peace have its way with me.

Despite the fact that we were early, it quickly became obvious that we were the last to arrive. Near the side of the house, six of them congregated in the midst of a wildly animated conversation. Susan gesticulated as though she was conducting a heavy metal symphony. Maggie shrugged her shoulders as if keeping the beat. Ginny shook her head, and Kris nodded repeatedly. Alison and Janice simply looked downward, offering an occasional upward glance at whoever spoke at the given moment. It was an odd sight, and I found it very difficult to gauge the mood of it. It, too, caused a contradictory hum.

Claudia killed the engine, and we simply stared at them for a few moments. It crossed my mind that maybe Holly and Laura weren’t home, that they were waiting. It occurred to me that it was the completely

innocent stuff we did at the start of each meeting: gossiping and rehashing. I even thought that there was an argument between two of them and that everybody else stuck their noses in where they didn't belong. It was hard to guess. It could have been anything.

Finally, curiosity got the better of us, and we made our way to the group.

As soon as we neared them, tension became palpable, and my theories spontaneously fizzled. In reality, or at least some semblance of it, they were downright scared to head to the front door, to surrender to the mercy of our hostesses. Trusting Holly and Laura, the indisputable scoundrels of the group, apparently required a conference.

"What's up, you guys?" Claudia bravely asked, her expression swirling a mix of curiosity and caution.

"Susan's terrified. Maggie's a big chicken. Alison and Janice are getting sucked in. And Kris—well, Kris is Kris," Ginny said in a tone not unlike a weather report.

Susan indeed looked terrified. She spouted, "I know Laura's still pissed off about last time, about us scaring the crap out of Holly. She's going to pay us back. I know she is." She started laughing, but it was the nervous kind.

Kris dared, "Weren't you the silly one who said, 'Dykes who dare had better prepare to accept the consequences?'"

"Well, it's easy to say things when you're on the hosting end," she defended. "When you end up back in the ranks, it's a whole different story—especially with them in charge."

Claudia shook her head in frustration. "All I really want to know is where they get off telling me what color panties I have to wear. Are they going to check at the door? Does anybody know?"

To me, those were good questions, but ones that no one could answer ... probably because no one really wanted to ponder the possibilities.

Regardless, we compared notes and soon learned that each individual got the mysterious delivery, two days prior, of a large envelope marked, "For Your Eyes Only." It contained information we were told to keep private, even from our partners. We also got a stack of play money, three hundred one-dollar bills to be exact, with "DWD" printed in the middle; apparently there weren't many lesbian presidents from which to choose. Further, they told us what color sweatpants (pockets required) and undies (no pockets required) to wear, and then they provided a list of colors that had to be represented with another article of clothing. I scrutinized everyone standing there, and sure enough, we all sported mismatched shoes and socks, different colored sweatpants, and shirts that didn't quite go with the whole ensemble. We looked like a bunch of two-year-olds,

allowed to dress ourselves for the first time. They had already messed with us, and we had yet to begin the meeting. When I looked at it that way, I could better understand why fear engulfed Susan.

“Maybe we should just trust them,” Kris dared, and all eyes pummeled her like fists. “Well, we trusted Maggie and Susan, didn’t we? We somehow survived that ordeal.”

“Yeah, but think about Holly and Laura,” Janice swiftly reminded with wide eyes. “Evil and Evil-er. Plus, they just pulled it off on their own. No script. No nothing. It just seems to come natural to them.”

We all started laughing. We, admittedly, had good cause to worry.

“Crap!” Alison suddenly yelled. “Don’t look now, but they’re in the front window watching us.”

Whoever thought of that directive, “don’t look now,” was an absolute moron. It instinctively made people do the opposite. In a heartbeat, every face turned to the window. Evil and Evil-er just stood there smirking at us.

“Well, this is stupid,” Claudia reasoned. “They’re already taking pleasure in our misery. Let’s just be brave and go for it. We can hold our own. We always have.”

As a cohesive group, we ambled to the front door. Suddenly, it opened, and Laura stood there grinning, arm extended, palm up. “There’s a one-dollar cover charge, ladies,” she said, already enjoying herself far too much. “Hand over a DWD buck if you care—or dare—to come in.”

We each slapped her with a fake dollar bill and a dirty look as we passed to enter the house.

On the other side, however, a different story unfolded. Holly excitedly greeted everyone with a hug and a kiss. She seemed genuinely happy to see us, and consequently, the mood lightened substantially. Even Laura ended up doing a round of hugs. *These* were the women I knew. This was why we put ourselves through this each month. When we weren’t terrified or pissed, it felt good.

Just as good spirits overtook us, Laura gestured toward the island in the kitchen. “Goodies and beverages, ladies.”

We eagerly headed in that direction only to find little placards in front of each item: *\$1*. Simultaneously all jaws dropped. Never in my life had I gone to a friend’s house to be billed for a frickin’ cup of coffee.

“You’re charging us? This beats it all,” Ginny railed.

“At least it’s play money,” Alison countered.

Laura smiled deviously. “It may be play money, but I assure you, by day’s end, it’ll be more valuable than anything you could put in the bank.” She looked to Kris and Ginny. “Where is our beloved big-boobed bimbo babe anyway? Did you remember to bring her?”

Kris handed her a department store shopping bag, and Laura immediately removed the torrid trophy and set her on the island, giving her a mighty flick so she did her sluttish jiggle for us.

“Well, at least we know you won’t be winning this one, Laura, since you two are in charge,” Claudia teased. “But here’s a little prize for you so you don’t feel too bad.” She reached in her sweatpants’ pocket, retrieved the red disposable lighter she confiscated from her last time, and tossed it.

Laura caught it, laughed, and then sneered, “And what makes you think we didn’t set it up so we have a chance to win? We can win. Trust me: We can win. We will probably win.” She grabbed a jar from the island and held it high. Then, she took the money she collected at the door and shoved it in. “Everything will cost you this weekend. If there’s more in our jar than any of you have left, we win. Pretty simple.”

Holly quickly interceded, although she did so with a tremendous giggle. “Come on, you guys. Chill! It’ll be fun,” she coaxed and then gave both Laura and Claudia a swat on the arm. “Babe, they won’t want to stay if you badger them from the get-go.”

Susan blurted, “Maybe if you just tell us what you’ve got planned, we wouldn’t be so defensive! Just get it over with!”

“I agree one hundred percent,” Maggie affirmed.

Laura swiftly approached Maggie and Susan and put her arms around their shoulders. “Oh, are you two worried that I’m going to pay you back for scaring my little woman?” Like a winch, she squeezed them in tightly. “Would *I* be that petty? Would I even *think* to exact revenge for how you turned that gorgeous face into one of terror? Avenge Holly? *Me?*” She had them in headlocks now.

Ginny yelled, “Laura, your Jack-ness is showing!”

It was indeed showing, garishly, but at the same time, the three of them were laughing hysterically. I just knew I would not want to be either of them.

Abruptly, Laura let go and turned to face them. “You’re right. I would avenge, and I will avenge.” She planted a kiss on their foreheads. “But only when you least expect it.” She laughed and then scooted quickly to Holly. She pulled her near and lifted her off the ground. “I love you, hon. I won’t let *anyone* hurt you.” She gave her a quick kiss and then stared at Susan and Maggie with a maniacal grin.

Oh yeah, they were in trouble. We were all in trouble.

Laura gently set Holly down and announced, “And now, I will behave. Welcome to our home. Let’s have some fun.” She smiled and set out to pour coffee.

We cautiously joined her. When it seemed certain that some phantom

Thorazine had stabilized her, we relaxed and unreservedly enjoyed pre-meeting obnoxiousness. Weirdly, no one made jokes about what had happened last time. I think we fathomed that none of us, the Ladies of the Flies, were innocent. I was grateful and suddenly amenable to paying for coffee and even springing for a cup of Earl Grey for Claudia.

After a pleasurable passage of time, Laura and Holly herded us into the living room. At first we were very agreeable, but much less so when they started rearranging us like furniture. Eventually, Ginny, Susan, Claudia, and Alison were aligned on the couch, with respective partners seated on the floor in front of them. Then, Laura brought in two stools and put them near the wall opposite the couch. Holly entered just seconds later. After she handed a camcorder to Laura, they both sat down and whispered very seriously to each other.

As sitting ducks, we remained speechless—or honkless, maybe—and tried to figure out what the hell they were up to.

Holly scrawled on her pad of paper, and then their heads looked to us. They were smiling but not gloating or overly-anticipating. It was business.

“As I’m sure you’re all well aware,” Laura began, “this is our weekend. We tried to plan something that would be both entertaining and challenging. We don’t think you’ll be disappointed ... as long as you put your fears and mistrust aside.” She smiled and then fumbled with the camcorder. She raised it at us.

They both looked at the viewfinder, and then a few hand gestures indicated that we needed to get even cozier on the couch. When cozy became crammed, she said, “Ladies in the back, lean forward and hold your partner’s hands.”

Suspiciously, we did so. Claudia’s hands came to me with a grip that nearly amputated. She braced herself for impact. Either that or it equated to biting her tongue.

“Now, ladies in the back, lean in closer, but this time, kiss your partner.”

“Laura McCallister!” Ginny screeched. “Don’t make fools of us!”

“Ginny Bleeker!” Laura spat right back. “Shut up and trust!”

We probably should have supported Ginny in her demand, but instead, laughter rippled through us all. Then, we apprehensively did as instructed.

“Now, front and back, tell your partner that no matter what happens this weekend, you’ll still be partners when it’s over.”

For me, that one was easy; we had taken to doing that anyway. We’d go through whatever we had to at these unpredictable things, but we promised to come out together on the other side. I twisted my head around as far as

I could, and we reaffirmed our promise. When I turned back, I saw Laura and Holly following suit. I caught myself just before suggesting, even to myself, that perhaps we were underestimating them. Maybe in their non-competitive hostess roles, they would be kinder.

Laura smiled at Holly and said, “Go for it, Hol. Tell them about our weekend.”

With that directive, all eyes turned to Holly.

“We’ve decided you’re all sexually repressed,” Holly declared as Laura aimed the camcorder at the lot of us, all cramped there on the couch. “So we’ve designed our weekend to help you lose your sexual inhibitions.”

Chapter 2

Dead silence.

Dead, as in cried about, cremated, and scattered in the flower bed of Road Swill drive-thru with the discarded coffee grounds.

My mouth hung open, which I supposed might have been the only thing that kept me from cracking a smile. I think they had undoubtedly surpassed anything anyone had even considered they'd do. Or did they? Underestimating, my ass. I stared at them, wondering exactly what the hell they had in mind.

Laura fumbled with the camcorder, and Holly leaned in to look. "Did we get it, babe?" she asked in a very businesslike manner.

Suddenly, Ginny tried to push Kris out of the way so she could stand. She shouted, "If you two think for one gosh darn minute—"

"Sit down, Ginny!" Laura yelled. "We were kidding! For shit's sake, we were kidding!"

That was the precise moment I started hysterically laughing, slowly joined by a few others. Claudia squeezed my hand so hard that it felt like my fingernails shot across the room.

"Why would you do that?" Ginny screeched.

"For the video!" Holly answered as she stared into the viewfinder. "Oh my God, this is so sweet! You guys have to see!" She laughed so hard that tears streamed down her face. She neared the flat screen TV on the wall and plugged in the camcorder cables. A few button presses later, there was a still frame of us sitting on the couch in mid-reaction to news that we were about to participate in a weekend's worth of the sexcapades. Hold the ice.

We all rose and moved in closer. Curious as all hell, we studied facial expressions.

Ginny and Kris donned grimaces, their arms crossed over their chests: the classic no-way-in-frickin'-hell pose.

Susan and Maggie, on the other hand, presented a much different

portrait. Susan's mouth was agape with her hand reaching to cover it. Maggie demurely yet deviously smiled. Obviously, Susan noticed Maggie's face at the same time I did, for there was suddenly a crack as Susan whacked Maggie's arm a good one.

"Maggie!" Susan wailed. "You look like you liked the idea! Oh my God, you would have! Would you have? You wouldn't. Would you?"

Maggie's face turned as red as my sweatpants. "This is one of those no-good-answer things. If I say no, you'll get indignant and ask why not. If I say yes ... actually, I'm not really sure what you'd do. What do you want me to say, Susan?"

Susan's jaw hung low just as it did on-screen. She stared at her with squinting eyes, and I wasn't at all sure what would happen next. After a moment of breath-holding by everyone in the room, she dared, "I want you to tell me the truth."

Maggie smiled at her and readily admitted, "Then, yes, I would have. I love being with you, and I would be with you any chance I could." She took her in her arms and added a gooey "I love you."

"Aw" ran a circuit of the room, and the red now belonged to Susan. She smiled widely at Maggie and then kissed her—one of those big mama long ones that made everyone turn away.

Unfortunately, that very attention went back to the television where Laura stood laughing. "Care to explain your mugshot, Sutter?"

I looked. It was not pretty. It was so neon, in fact, that I knew I was in big ass trouble. I took a deep breath. "She's standing right behind me, isn't she?" I asked, and Laura nodded. "Her arm is raised like she's going to clobber me, huh?" She nodded again, grinning madly. "Maggie gets an 'aw' and a kiss, but I'm dead meat, huh?"

Surprisingly, Claudia's arms came around me, and she turned me to her. "Should you be dead meat?" she asked.

"For wanting you? That seems rather stupid to me," I defended and then made the mistake of peering into those green eyes. "You are so beautiful, so sexy, so... And now I'm dead meat for saying that in front of these guys, huh?"

She smiled, which came as a great shock to me. "In front of these guys, no. In the supermarket, yes," she said with a laugh. "And what about me? Should I be dead meat for always being so selfish, for wanting what's ours to stay ours?"

I admit I had to stop and think about that one, but it didn't take me too long to know my answer. "I love you even more than I want you, so, no. I can respect what you need."

"But you'd like it if I was more affectionate when others are around. Correct? Like this?" she challenged and then pulled me into an embrace.

“I think you’re beautiful and awfully sexy, too, Kate.” She kissed me so passionately that my toes curled in my purple and orange socks. *Big mama!*

When I could breathe again, my eyes zoomed to Holly and Laura. I yelled, “What the hell did you guys do?”

“Nothing! That’s not what this was about! We swear!” Holly vehemently proclaimed. “This is you! We did not do this!”

Laura added, laughing, “Apparently, all we had to do was say the word ‘inhibitions,’ and you all just jump into an f-ing therapy session. Jesus!”

It seemed like we were all laughing, but then I noticed Janice and Alison sitting stoically on opposite ends the couch. They did not look happy. My eyes shot to the screen, and then I guessed what the problem was. In the still frame, Janice was smiling, but it looked as though Alison wasn’t even paying attention. Rather, it looked like she was rummaging for something, completely disinterested, totally oblivious. I suspected Janice’s feelings were hurt and that any defense Alison may have made faltered. I got Holly’s attention and then shot looks between them and the TV. Holly’s eyes grew wide, and she moved to block the TV screen.

“Hey, Janice,” Holly yelled. “Do you trust me?” When she received a very, very cautious nod, she said, “It’s not what you think. Trust me for a few more minutes. Please?” She received another nod and then looked to the other end of the couch. “Alison, it will take care of itself. I’m sorry.”

Whatever the hell that meant, I had no clue, but I did know that the tension eased between Alison and Janice. Alison scooted closer to Janice and squeezed her hand.

Holly looked to Laura. “Babe, let’s move these chickies along—*now!* Tell them what we’re really up to.”

Laura smirked. “Maggie has said about a hundred times that clues aren’t fair with a detective in the group. So this time, since I’m not participating, we’ve got clues for you so you can test your own sleuth. In fact, we’re giving you Five Mysteries for a Buck, which is why there was a dollar cover charge.”

Holly joined in on the explanation, “The video we just made of you is the first mystery. The clues are in it; you just have to find them. It has nothing whatsoever to do sexual inhibitions. We were kidding—honest! We just needed a way to get you all in the same shot and totally distracted so you didn’t know what we were up to. And I’m sorry I got carried away when I saw all your goofy expressions.” She started laughing. “But you guys are so funny!”

Laura rolled her eyes at her and said to us, “But remember, I told you that everything costs something this weekend. It’ll cost you a dollar to ask anyone a question. If you ask your partner a question, the dollar has to go

in our jar on the island. And since this is the first one, we'll make it a little easier and get you going. Holly and I planted a clue in the video. One of you did as well. One of you knew we were lying and planted a clue as you were instructed to do."

As Holly rewound the tape, we all glanced at each other. We were intrigued and yet still very distrustful. Holly played the video in its entirety. It sped by, and if there were clues embedded, I did not see them. Laura's fumbling with the camera—walls, ceiling, floor, Holly—was simply followed by the lot of us looking like a trailer for a psychological non-thriller.

"Can you play it again?" Maggie asked, only to get an instant palm up in the face from Laura.

"That was a question. Give me a buck," she demanded with a smile.

Maggie begrudgingly sought a bill from her pocket and slapped it into Laura's hand. Holly thumbed the remote to rewind and play it again. Still nothing. It seemed like we could have used a detective. We sucked at this, and that was a ranking Claudia deplored. She grabbed a dollar from her pocket and shoved it in Laura's direction. "Can I have the camcorder remote?" my little project manager asked.

Laura took delight in her reply. "That's a question, but you're also asking for a thing. A question costs a buck, and a thing costs five."

Furiously, she grabbed more money, thrust it into Laura's hand, and hauled ass to Holly. She seized the remote and ordered, "Move it, *chickie!*"

After studying the remote, she played the video in slow-motion. Still no one caught anything. Then, she started looking suspiciously at us, and we quickly joined her, trying to determine who the traitor was, who had helped them plant a clue. Vigorous head shaking ensued from everyone ... except our favorite yoga instructor, who sat there with her head bowed.

"It's Alison!" Maggie yelled first, and then a fevered chorus of Alison's name rang out.

"Alison, did you—" Claudia began, only to stop herself before having to part with more money. "Everybody watch Alison!" She played the tape again, and all eyes scrutinized Alison's every move.

Suddenly, Maggie screamed with triumph as though she had just convinced the world to stop killing animals and become vegan. "There! There! Pocket! ... Now she's holding something!" She nearly hit her head on the screen, trying desperately to see the tiny thing. Then she spun around and lunged at Alison on the couch. "What's in your pocket, Alison? What does it say?"

"That's two bucks, Novak! Hand it over!" Laura shouted, but I don't think Maggie even heard her.

"What is it, Alison? Give it to me!"

“That’s another dollar! And five bucks for a thing!” Laura shouted again to those same deaf ears.

Then, our little Miss Wouldn’t-Hurt-a-Fly flattened a giggling yoga instructor. Maggie tried to stick her hand in her pocket. Alison defended. And then that cop scurried over and wrapped her arms around Maggie’s torso, lifting her—flailing arms and legs and all—away from Alison.

“Is it worth eight bucks, Maggie? Do you want it that bad?” the apprehending cop demanded.

“Yes! Yes! Yes!” she cried like some porn star overcome.

We were all in shock over her uncharacteristic behavior, but more so, we could not stop laughing. I nearly pissed my blue undies.

Laura continued to hold her but interrogated, “Can I put you down? Will you behave? Or do I have to get my handcuffs?”

How come she can ask three dollars worth of questions?

Maggie suddenly went limp. “I’ll be good. I promise. I’ll give her eight dollars.” When Laura didn’t let her go immediately, she tried to wriggle free. “Let me go! I promise!”

As soon as Laura set her free, her hands dove into her own pocket to get money, which she threw at Alison. She frantically grabbed the small piece of paper from Alison. She looked at it and screamed, “Cross-dressers!” In a flash, she turned to Laura and spat, “What the hell does that mean?”

“Actually, that means that you owe me another dollar,” Laura said and started laughing. She held out her hand. After Maggie gave her yet another dollar, she said, “*That* is a clue. You’re the sleuth. You figure it out.”

Without thinking, Maggie quickly turned to Alison and burned a buck. “Do you know what it means, Alison?”

“I don’t!” Alison desperately defended. “I swear! My instructions said to hold up the paper without getting caught when they told the lie about a weekend to lose sexual inhibitions.” She suddenly grabbed Janice’s hands. “I’m so sorry, Janice! I screwed up again. I knew it was a lie. If it wasn’t, I’d love to spend a weekend with you losing our inhibitions, although I don’t think we have any to lose.”

Yoga’s mouth suddenly attached itself like a vacuum to Massage’s in the same way that should have made us turn away. Except, we didn’t. Our eyes were transfixed; our mouths were as wide as theirs, just not in pursuit of anything but stupid looks. Evidently, we no longer needed to wonder how these two were getting on. So very busted ... and so very lost in kissing.

Ginny suddenly swatted them both. “What is with you all?” she asked.

Only Laura would have dared, “You all? That’ll be nine dollars, Ginny.”

Ginny glared at her. “It was rhetorical. I’m not paying.” Then, her eyes scanned each of us. “They said they were joking. Now, you all act like you *need* a few inhibitions. I have never seen so much kissing in all my life!”

And then another stupor-moment seized control. Kris said, “Maybe you would, Gin, if you gave up a few of your own inhibitions.”

Cops must be able to sense danger. That was what I figured when Laura made a mad dash to stand between them. She stiffened an arm in both their directions. Kris merely lowered Laura’s arm, saying, “I don’t need you to protect me, Laura, but thank you. I’m not afraid of her. She’s a blowhard.”

Laura reluctantly moved aside, and with a few more steps, Ginny closed the distance between them. “A blowhard?” she asked with utter indignation. “An inhibited blowhard? Is that what you called me?”

Please, Laura, don’t ask her for three dollars!

“Yes, I believe I did,” Kris calmly defended. “There’s nothing wrong with kissing. It’s healthy for people to express their love for each other.”

Ginny remained motionless and speechless.

“We used to be like that ... before we somehow decided it was better to be two old broads,” Kris said. She paused briefly. “I don’t want to be an old broad anymore, Gin.”

Ginny still didn’t move, and neither did anyone else.

“We just signed up for another twenty-five years,” Kris reminded her, and then she smiled. “How about we act like it’s the first twenty-five and not the last?”

An eerie silence overtook the room, but I knew it had to be okay because Laura moved away from them and headed to Holly.

Suddenly, Kris scooped Ginny in her arms. “Oh, Gin, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to make you cry.”

And then professor mouth attached to professor mouth.

What the hell had Holly and Laura done to us? Pumped aphrodisiacs in with the air conditioning? Put something in the dollar beverages? What the hell?

“I’ve got it!” Maggie loudly declared from her spot by the television. “I think we have to swap clothes with each other.”

The complete book can be purchased in ebook or paperback. Click the links below for purchase pages.

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About the Author

Rosalyn Wraight is the author of the Lesbian Adventure Club series: *Scavengers*, *Ledge Walkers*, and *Savages*.

She is also the author of *Woman Justice*, a lesbian erotic mystery, and *Secrets and Sins*, a lesbian mystery. Both of these novels feature Detective Laura McCallister, with the latter also including several characters from this book.

Her work appears in *Shards*, an ebook anthology to benefit breast cancer research.

All titles are available from DLSIJ Press.

Watch for the fifth book in the Lesbian Adventure Club series, Fall 2008.

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