



Stalemates

Rosalyn Wraight

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Lesbian Adventure Club: Book 11

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The author wishes to acknowledge Lewis Carroll and his work, *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*, first published in 1871 and currently in the public domain. The author apologizes for liberties taken.

A Don't Waste Daylight Publication

Chapter 1

“Just get out!”

“Seriously?”

“You’re just going to dump us here?”

“Get out before the light turns green!” From the passenger seat, she thrust a white bag at Susan and directed, “Give this bag to Dolores.”

“Dolores who?”

“Dolores! Now get out! The light’s going to turn!”

Stupefied, we did as instructed. Although it would have been simple not to do so, defying Ginny ranked right up there with playing in traffic. If you valued life, there were some things you just didn’t do.

The window lowered, and her head craned out. “It’s supposed to be a beautiful day. Enjoy it! But for Pete’s sake, behave yourselves!”

And the blue van sped off. It didn’t appear to be shaking with laughter, but still, I figured it was.

It was barely nine-thirty on a Saturday morning, a Lesbian Adventure Club day, and there we were: dumped at a stoplight under a highway overpass on the city’s outskirts.

We gaped down the street until the van disappeared from sight.

Laura queried, “Did you ever notice how they always get rid of us?”

As custom dictated, we exchanged inquisitively pissy glances.

“Yeah, last time they had us running all over town.”

“Backwards!”

“Yeah, and the time before that, they had us running all over the county.”

“You’re right, babe.”

“They don’t like us very much, do they?”

All eyes, all hanging jaws aimed again down the van-less street.

“All right, so what do we do?”

Claudia too eagerly pointed to the southwest. “We’re by the mall. Maybe the activity is a shopping trip.”

“And the challenge is how to get all our loot home.”

Jesus!

Janice pointed south. “The airport. Maybe they *really* don’t like us, and they have one-way tickets waiting for us.”

“Somewhere warm, please.”

Maggie jutted her arms upward as though a crescendoing orchestra conductor. “This *is* warm! It really *is* a beautiful day.”

It was warm—okay, for March it was warm. Compared to the dead of winter, it was a heat wave, about to take us deliriously near sixty degrees. The sounds of melting snow hitting storm drains and purple irises rousing in sleep: one proved audible, the other proved hope. If you squinted through the sun’s glare, you could see grass, limit-pushers on motorcycles, and total morons wearing shorts. Cabin fever broke, the stale air of hibernation freshened, and spring fever began to rise. We had quite a way yet to go, but all told, signs seemed to indicate we had survived another Midwestern winter.

Our favorite yoga instructor elbowed our favorite schoolteacher. “What’s in the bag, Susan?”

“And who the hell is Dolores?”

Susan took a peek and then gasped, “Oh my good God, donuts!”

“They trusted us with donuts?”

“Something’s wrong.”

“Holy crap!”

“Any chocolate ones?”

The cop—who you’d think would have had the biggest weakness for donuts—yelled, “Do not eat the f-ing donuts! We have to figure out who Dolores is so we can give her the donuts. Obviously, that’s our first task.”

“Maybe instead of scavenging for things, we’ll be delivering things.”

“An upside-down scavenger hunt!”

“That sounds like Ginny and Kris.”

“Okay, but who the hell is Dolores?”

“Susan, hold out the bag in the direction of the traffic. Maybe Dolores will drive by and see it.”

“And what? Pull over and say, ‘I’m Dolores. Hand over the f-ing donuts.’ I somehow doubt that.”

“I hate Kris and Ginny as much as they hate us.”

“I say we just eat the donuts and be done with it.”

“For shit’s sake, you guys!” Laura screeched. “We need the donuts to give to this Dolores character!”

“Well, who the hell is Dolores?”

“Where the hell is Dolores?”

“Dolores, where are you? Dolores?”

“Dolores, honey, come get your donuts!”

“If you dare.”

All those who had never taken an oath to serve and protect fell into a fit of laughter and arm-swatting.

“You guys!” Laura boomed a hundred times to secure our attention. “Quit acting stupid. If you get your butts hauled in, I will swear up and down I don’t know any of you.”

“Even me, babe?”

“Of course not you, Hol.”

“Well, we’re going to get busted for soliciting prostitution if we don’t get away from this stoplight.”

There came a giggle. “Good point, Claudia. You would know.”

There came a gasp. “Crawford, did you just call me a whore? Kate, do something!”

“She’s not a whore,” I instinctively defended. When I realized the utterly stupid needlessness in doing so to her best friend, I added, “Although, if you offer her cookies...”

There came another gasp, a spleen-rupturing wallop to my gut, and a laugh. “You’re a shithead, honey, a cookie-hoarding shithead.”

I was about to offer my rebuttal when Laura shouted, “You’re all shitheads, donut-holding shitheads!”

“Me, too, babe?”

“Of course not you, Hol.”

Oh, of frickin’ course not!

“All right, everybody, listen up,” Laura said as though giving orders at a crime scene. “There’s obviously no one named Dolores under this overpass. I say we head to the next light where there are places and people.” She motioned to the north, from whence we came.

Okay, the cop made sense, and we complied without griping.

Except out here, there were no sidewalks, just a gunky, trashy, road-salty patch of earth. I seized the occasion to remind everyone that we’d need to see about cleaning our stretch of the DWD highway in the near future.

Soon, we made it to the next stoplight. The four corners did indeed offer more potential than under the overpass: Lucas Furniture, Granton Gas & Go, Granton Convention & Visitor Bureau, and Stanley’s, a restaurant infamous for bad burgers and fries that tasted like last week’s fish fry.

“I say Stanley’s,” Susan suggested.

“It’s packed. We’ll never get a table.”

“We’re not looking for breakfast. We’re looking for Dolores.”

“Plus, you get more gas at Stanley’s than you do at the Gas & Go.”

“I vote Gas & Go,” I dared. “It’s closest, and Dolores sounds like

someone who works at a gas station.”

Obviously perplexed, Claudia squinched up her face at me. Then, she whispered, “You need coffee, don’t you?” When I nodded, she announced, “Kate’s right. Let’s start with the closest one.”

God, I love her!

Not a minute later, we invaded the Gas & Go, scoping out those of the female gender and/or possible drag queens. It proved damn easy. Only one needed to either gas or go, and she sported an employee nametag: *Steph*.

Holly quickly deduced that all women out on a Saturday morning would be at the mall. I hoped to hell that was not next on our agenda. Although, a simple PA announcement from the mall office might have gotten us what we needed: *Dolores, you left your car lights on*.

With mission completed, they all headed outside while I desperately zoomed to the coffee machine. If Hell served coffee—which I hoped to hell it did—it was gas station coffee.

I purchased a large one and a cup of hot water for Claudia, who seemed to have developed a fear of Prohibition, refusing to go anywhere without Earl in her pocket. At least he wasn’t allowed in her bra anymore. I thanked my lucky stars for that as I made my way to the exit.

The door had barely closed behind me when Alison goggled me and gasped. “You spent money, Kate?”

“Well, yeah,” I stated the obvious. “It’s why I work.”

“What if we need your ten dollars for something?”

Shit!

I plumb forgot about the frickin’ instructions we received from Ginny and Kris. Each person was allowed ten dollars, no more, no less, and we were forbidden to possess credit cards, debit cards, money orders, loose change, traveler’s checks, and/or foreign currency. Ten bucks, and I had just dwindled almost a tenth of it for hellish coffee.

My eyes shot to Claudia for her reaction. Unconcerned, for the moment anyway, she shrugged and confiscated the hot water for the waiting Earl in her hand.

After a bit of deliberation, we decided to cross the street and work our way around the corner businesses. Knowing them, though, I suspected we were actually making sure we’d land at Stanley’s last, where someone would most certainly swoon from exhaustion and hunger.

In short time, Janice held the door, and we piled into Granton Convention & Visitor Bureau. While my reporter self had called there many times regarding area goings-on, I had never been in the place, and I was surprised to find it sterily unwelcoming. It made us all hush.

Finally, Laura cleared her throat and politely inquired, “Does a Dolores work here?”

“I’m Dolores,” the woman cheerfully answered, and with great relief, we all sighed.

Laura furthered the inquiry, “And you’re unfortunate enough to know Ginny and Kris?”

“I am,” she answered with a hearty laugh. “I’m supposed to make a trade with you.”

This time, Susan cleared her throat. She cautiously approached the big reception desk as though it resided in an organ donation clinic. “We have donuts,” she informed, waving the white bag.

Dolores grabbed for something behind her desk and said, “And I have a map.”

Alison elbowed me and whispered, “Donuts sound like a better deal.”

The swap took place, and Susan scurried back to us.

Curious as hell, we all looked to the map she held, figuring that after all the trouble we endured to get it, it would sport an X on the location of a big-ass treasure. We were sorely mistaken.

“A map of Granton?”

“What the hell do we need a map of Granton for?”

“Don’t we live in Granton?”

“What the hell?”

“I’m a Granton cop. I know where everything is. I don’t need an f-ing map.”

“Why the hell did we get a map of Granton?”

As if on cue, we all turned to Dolores. With a glazed look and glazed donut aimed at her mouth, she conversed on the phone. Uncharacteristically, we minded our own business until she was done. Then, we gawked again.

“Help yourselves to coffee,” she offered, and I nearly spit mine across the room.

Holly dared, “Dolores, are you sure this is all you were supposed to give us?”

“That’s it at the moment,” she assured.

But we were about to receive more...

In near synchrony, eight cell phones sounded and/or vibrated. Hands flew into purses and/or pockets.

“It’s Kris,” someone yelled, and several of us aped the announcement.

“Text message.”

“Mine, too.”

“And me.”

Silence ensued as we all navigated our text message screens.

The quickest navigator of us all, Janice, read, “‘By a number of little green hedges.’ What the hell does that mean?”

“That’s not what mine says.”

“Mine either.”

““There were a number of tiny little brooks.””

““And the ground between.””

I bellowed with dispirited understanding, “Shit! Ginny’s frickin’ riddles again.”

“No!”

“Why do we let her in the group?”

“She started the group.”

“Oh yeah.”

“Still.”

Janice offered, “Well, if it’s a riddle, we need all the pieces. Everybody read what you’ve got.”

And we did.

“Okay, now, let’s try it one at a time. What the hell is wrong with everybody today?” Janice bellowed and then shook her head. “I’ll start,” she said and read hers again, ““By a number of little green hedges.””

““Running straight across it from side to side.””

““And a most curious country it was.””

““There were a number of tiny little brooks.””

““Was divided up into squares.””

““And the ground between.””

““That reached from brook to brook.””

““Looking out in all directions over the country.””

We stared at each other, having arrived at the end of either a really bad poem or ... something else.

“Lewis Carroll! It’s Lewis Carroll!” Susan shouted. “At least I think it is. Hang on.” She heaved her purse from her side to her front and started rummaging.

“You carry Lewis Carroll in your purse?”

Better than Earl Grey in your bra, I figured.

“Not just Lewis Carroll,” she said as she retrieved and held something out in ta-da fashion. “A whole library. Maggie gave me an ebook reader for Christmas.”

Needless to say, all eyes careened to the vegan.

“*That’s* the true meaning of c-word, Maggie?”

“Maggie, I thought you were against that whole materialism thing.”

She smiled quite broadly. “It’s not really a thing,” she claimed. “It’s a symbol of Susan’s love to read.”

Groans overtook the Visitor Bureau.

Laura declared, “And pigs’ feet are merely a mode of transportation. Go ahead and eat them.”

“What the heck does that mean?”

“It means vegans can justify anything.”

She gasped. “And exactly how many vegans do you know?”

“One, and she can justify anything.”

“Shut up, Laura,” she said and cracked her a good one. Then, she looked to Susan who was tap-tap-tappin’ away on her enviable electronic gadget. “Go ahead, Susan.”

“Ginny and I read books at the same time. Then, we go out to dinner and discuss them. Last month, we did *Through the Looking-Glass*,” she explained.

“Setup!”

“F-ing setup!”

She distractedly nodded and continued her tapping. “I’m searching for ‘brook to brook.’” A moment later, she said, “Found it! ... Uh oh, this is not good.”

I doubted any one of us really expected something good.

She read, “For some minutes Alice stood without speaking, looking out in all directions over the country—and a most curious country it was. There were a number of tiny little brooks running straight across it from side to side, and the ground between was divided up into squares by a number of little green hedges, that reached from brook to brook.”

For what seemed like some minutes, we all stood without speaking, at least until Claudia boomed, “What the hell does that mean?”

Susan cleared her throat. “Brace yourselves, girls. In the next paragraph, Alice says, ‘I declare it’s marked out just like a large chessboard! ... It’s a great huge game of chess that’s being played—all over the world—if this IS the world at all, you know.’”

“What?”

“F-ing chess?”

“I don’t get it.”

“Holy frickin’ shit!”

“For Christ’s sake!”

“Why exactly did we decide Ginny could stay in the group?”

“It’s not just Ginny. The messages came from Kris.”

“Because Ginny no doubt has a gun to Kris’ head.”

“Well, I still don’t get it.”

I figured no one did. I sure as hell didn’t.

We consumed a few more non-speaking Alice minutes until it finally began to dawn on us.

“Granton is a chessboard, isn’t it?”

“And we’re flippin’ pawns.”

“And you can bet money Ginny is the queen.”

“Wait a minute! Hold the phone! Does anyone even know how to play

chess?”

A total of three seconds elapsed before all eyes turned to me.

“What?”

“Sutter, were you ... you know? Were you on the chess team?”

“Jesus! No!”

“Well, you said you were a nerd in school. I’m just asking.”

“I was *not* on the chess team.” I guiltily looked to Claudia and then confessed, “But Kris tried to teach me a long time ago. But I didn’t like it! I swear!” Jesus, I defended myself as if chess were akin to a shameful sexual perversion. “I didn’t like it. I really didn’t. It felt more like work than play.”

“But you can play.”

“The basics,” I emphasized. “I know only the basics.”

“That’s more than we know.”

“So, Sutter, if Granton is a chessboard, how do we play?”

I laughed. Did I have a choice? “Don’t you think that’s a bit beyond the basics? I have no frickin’ clue.”

Alison proved sharper than the lot of us. “Why don’t we just look at the map? Maybe it will be obvious.”

The cop turned gumball red. “I was just getting to that.”

Maggie plucked the map from Susan and started to unfold, just as Susan said, “You guys, right after that, Alice says, ‘I wouldn’t mind being a Pawn, if only I might join—though of course I should LIKE to be a Queen, best.’ And then, the Queen says, ‘That’s easily managed. You can be the White Queen’s Pawn... You’re in the Second Square to begin with: when you get to the Eighth Square you’ll be a Queen.’ Do you think maybe that’s our instruction?”

More Alice moments followed, and then, eyes returned to me.

Suddenly embarrassed for what I knew, I sheepishly said, “Pawns start in the second row. If a player gets one to the last row, it can be promoted to a better piece. It’s usually best to promote it to queen.”

“All right, how do we get to the last row?”

“Where is the last row?”

“Where’s the second row?”

“Where the hell’s the first?”

“Yeah, where the hell are we?”

“This is getting curiouser and curiouser.”

“Look at the damn map!”

Maggie snapped it open the rest of the way, and we looked, finding absolutely nothing but an untouched street map of downtown Granton. If it held a chessboard, not one of us recognized it.

“All right, now what?”

“I say we go to Stanley’s for breakfast and try to figure it out.”

“I’ve sure worked up an appetite.”

“We should have just eaten the donuts and gone to the mall.”

The reminder of donuts caused us once again to look in Dolores’ direction. As if expecting our about-face, she apologetically smiled and waved a piece of paper at us, saying, “I’ve got one more thing for you. I was supposed to give it to you after you looked at the map.”

Laura marched to receive it. She read and informed, “It’s a sixty-dollar gift certificate for Stacked.”

“Pancakes!”

“Yes!”

Laura furthered, “There’s ‘e1’ written on the back. Anybody know what that means?”

“A booth number, maybe.”

“No, it’s not,” I said. “It’s our first chessboard square: fifth square, first row. It’s the starting position of the king.”

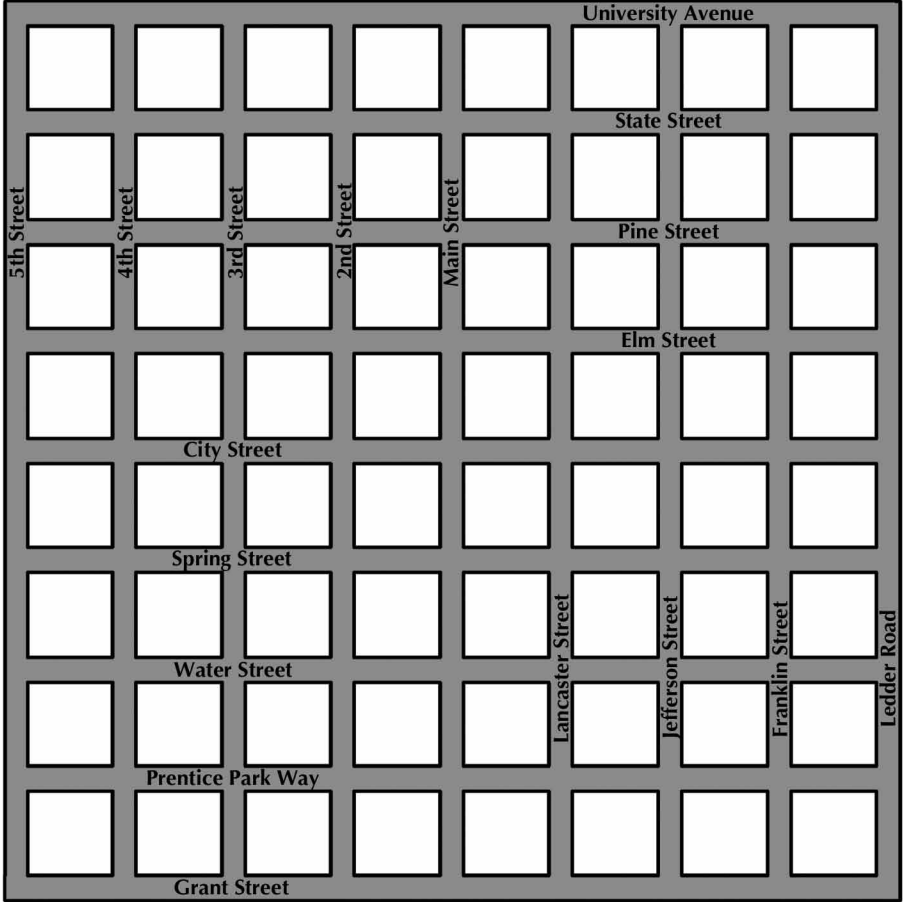
“Well, whoop-de-do! King is better than queen.”

“Unless you’re a woman.”

“Or Charles.”

Suddenly motivated by the smell of pancakes and the sound of dripping butter, we offered our thanks to Dolores—yet another pawn in Ginny and Kris’ demented game—as we all worked to help Maggie fold the map into a crumpled mess.

And we were off.



Chapter 2

Fifteen minutes later, we slid into the huge corner booth at Stacked. The word “coffee” resounded seven times, and Earl’s name tagged along for the ride to the waitress’ order pad. Claudia’s hand came to rest on my thigh, and I placed my own over hers. At least for the moment, life proved good.

We studied the menu, mindful to stay on gift-certificate budget, in case the game came down to that ten bucks I had been foolish enough to dwindle.

Soon, the waitress returned with several carafes. This time, “pancakes” resounded seven times, and “tofu scramble” hitchhiked without incident.

Coffee was poured, and we drifted into an agreeable silence. Collectively, we seemed to insist the occasion was ordinary, that we were not in the clutches of riddling professors—clutches so tight they could have strangled our reality, if we let them. Yet, all the while, everyone’s eyes flitted among the many patrons in that restaurant, no doubt looking for the pawn we were certain was there to give us a clue. With my back to the room, I did my spying via the massive mirror on the wall, and not a damn thing caught my attention.

When the food arrived, we intently ate, again appearing as though we hadn’t a care in the world. Once sated, we quickly stacked our dishes and slid them to the outside of the table, and a perceptive busboy appeared and took them away. Seconds later, the waitress showed up with more coffee. She placed the bill tray on the table, which Laura, holder of the almighty gift certificate, immediately pulled in her own direction.

Daring to hurl us back to Ginny and Kris’ world, Janice asked, “Anybody have any idea what we’re up against?”

“Chess.”

“*Through the Looking-Glass.*”

“Both.”

“First, I think we have to figure out how to make the map into a

chessboard,” Maggie said and tossed the thing in my direction.

I agreed and spread out the map on the table. “Does anybody have a pencil?”

A few affirmed possession and seized purses, but Janice loudly said, “You might do best to use mine. My instructions said to bring a notebook and a pencil. No flippin’ clue why, but here it is.”

A toss and a roll brought me the pencil. A stretch and a tilt brought seven surveyors with a keen interest in a hometown that suddenly felt foreign.

“Grant Avenue and Lancaster Street,” I said with an eventual stab. “We’re here.” I drew an X on the spot. “This is e1.”

“So are the chessboard squares buildings or blocks or what?”

Laura quickly rattled off the other businesses on the block, six in all, and it seemed obvious we weren’t talking buildings.

“Shit, it is blocks.”

“City blocks.”

“Eight city blocks by eight city blocks.”

“Sixty-four blocks? You’ve got to be kidding!”

“We can’t walk sixty-four blocks! We’ll die.”

“No wonder they carbed us up with pancakes.”

“Like how many miles is sixty-four blocks?”

Janice volunteered to look it up, and seconds later, she was tap-tap-tappin’ on her own electronic gadget. Finally, she said, “It’s three-point-nine miles.”

“Four miles!”

Janice specified, “Unless you live in the East and not the Midwest. Then, it’s three-point-one.”

“What? Why the hell are blocks shorter out East?”

“The sissies.”

“I say we move.”

“Well, let’s not move to the South or the West,” Janice said, her smart phone making us smarter than we cared to be. “Their blocks are even longer than ours. Sixty-four blocks would be over six miles.”

“Shit, maybe we should stay put.”

“Who the hell makes the rules? A block should be a block no matter where the hell you are.”

“No shit.”

“I agree, and here we are with sixty-four of the stupid things.”

“Draw the damn chessboard, Sutter. Let’s get this show on the road.”

I aimed the pencil just as Susan slapped her hand down on the you-are-here portion of the map.

“What about *Through the Looking-Glass*, you guys? This can’t be as

exhaustingly simple as walking sixty-four blocks.”

I paused my pencil and joined everyone in a moment’s thought.

“Susan’s right,” I soon concurred. “If it is chess, we have to move like chess pieces, not just walk the whole chessboard.”

“All right, honey,” Claudia encouraged with a pat on my thigh. “If we’re the king, how does the king move?”

Feigning great effort, I stretched my brain. “One square in any direction.”

“Well, that’s the same as walking sixty-four squares, isn’t it?”

I reasoned, “If we were the only piece on the board and a king, yes, we could walk the sixty-four squares, but chess isn’t played with one piece. Plus, getting the other player’s king is the goal of the game. We can’t move the king unless we know it’s safe to do so.”

“So we get a turn, and they get a turn?”

“How the hell are we supposed to know it’s safe to move?”

“It’s even worse than that,” I said and pointed to our square on the map. “If we’re here and a king, we can’t move anyway. We should be surrounded by our own pieces. There should be three pawns in front of us and a bishop and a queen on either side of us.”

“We’re already screwed?”

“No, no, no, you guys. We’re Alice,” Susan said and retrieved her ebook reader. As she navigated, she reminded, “Alice wants to get to the eighth square to be a queen.” A moment later, she reread, “‘I wouldn’t mind being a Pawn, if only I might join—though of course I should LIKE to be a Queen, best.’ Remember? And then the queen says, ‘That’s easily managed. You can be the White Queen’s Pawn ... you’re in the Second Square to begin with: when you get to the Eighth Square you’ll be a Queen.’ Kate, where would the White Queen’s pawn be?”

My finger moved over and up a block on the map. “Right there. Prentice Park Way and Main Street with Water and Second on the backside.”

“All right, but you said we can’t get there if we’re a king.”

“This is insane!”

Laura slapped her hand on the map several times. “This e1 block is simply our point of reference. Sutter, draw out the whole chessboard.”

With a nod, I began numbering each block. As I did so, Susan read, and things slowly started to make some sense.

“The Red Queen tells Alice, ‘A pawn goes two squares in its first move, you know. So you’ll go VERY quickly through the Third Square—by railway, I should think—and you’ll find yourself in the Fourth Square in no time. Well, THAT square belongs to Tweedledum and Tweedledee—the Fifth is mostly water—the Sixth belongs to Humpty Dumpty ... the Seventh Square is all forest—however, one of the Knights will show you

						University Avenue		
	a8	b8	c8	d8	e8	f8	g8	h8
	a7	b7	c7	d7	e7	f7	g7	h7
5th Street		4th Street		3rd Street		2nd Street		Main Street
	a6	b6	c6	d6	e6	f6	g6	h6
	a5	b5	c5	d5	e5	f5	g5	h5
			City Street				Elm Street	
	a4	b4	c4	d4	e4	f4	g4	h4
			Spring Street					
	a3	b3	c3	d3	e3	f3	g3	h3
			Water Street			Lancaster Street	Jefferson Street	Franklin Street
	a2	b2	c2	d2	e2	f2	g2	h2
			Prentice Park Way					Ledder Road
	a1	b1	c1	d1	e1 Stacked X	f1	g1	h1
			Grant Street					

the way—and in the Eighth Square we shall be Queens together, and it's all feasting and fun.”

“Feasting and fun!”

“And less than half a mile!”

“Okay, that's incentive.”

“Maybe the eighth square is Camp Thunder Thigh.”

“Maybe—”

“Cool it, you guys! Slow down a sec,” I shouted. “Susan, repeat everything—slowly—so I can get it all on the map.”

Everyone quieted, and she obliged.

Soon, we had a chessboard with all the expected moves spelled out. But something niggled at me: For a Ginny and Kris concoction, it seemed far, far too simple.

Alison said, “I still don't get it. I just don't think this is right.” She paused while all eyes narrowed at her. “Well, think about it. Even if we get to the second square, how the heck are we supposed to take the railway to the fourth one? Granton doesn't have a railway, does it?”

No one wanted to admit she had a valid point so we just continued to stare at her.

Then, Janice jumped in, “Al's right. We're missing something.”

Holly suggested, “Maybe we should just get to the second square, chickies, and there will be something there for us, a clue.”

“We're supposed to search the whole block for a clue?”

“Maybe we'll get another text message.”

“Or maybe we'll get something from somebody right here. Maybe there's someone like Dolores here, too.”

All eyes scanned the restaurant once more, but again, no one looked or acted like a pawn in a giant chess game. I wondered whether we did.

“How about a vote? Should we just head to the second square and hope for the best?”

With unanimous uncertainty, we each raised a hand and then prepared to leave.

As I filled my gas station cup with restaurant coffee, Claudia inquired whether the gift certificate was sufficient or if Laura needed money.

Laura grabbed the bill and took a gander. “We're covered,” she said, and as she did, a white strip of paper fell from her grasp. “What the hell is this?”

“Our clue!”

Laura twisted her face with what I deemed disgust and then held the paper for us to see. “Looks like an f-ing foreign language.”

Beware the Jabberwalk, Nigh Fun!

“What the hell does it mean?”

Susan slapped the table very hard and startled the shit right out of us. “It’s backwards!”

“Doesn’t that frickin’ figure!”

“It’s the same as in the book!” Susan shouted. “Alice gets the ‘Jabberwocky’ poem at the beginning of the story. She has to hold it up to the looking-glass, the mirror, in order to read it.”

Laura shook her head in exasperation and then stretched to hold it to the mirror on the back wall. “‘Beware the jabberwalk, nigh fun,’” she read. “Makes as much sense backward as forward.”

“What the heck does it mean?”

“How is that a clue?”

Susan and her ebook reader were on the ball. “There’s a line in ‘Jabberwocky’ that reads, ‘Beware the Jabberwock, my son!’” She snatched the pencil from me and the bill from Laura and scrawled the line on the back. She held it for us to see the subtle differences.

“What the heck is a Jabberwock?” Alison asked.

Susan answered, “In the poem, it’s a monster that a young man slays—beheads, in fact. Ginny said ... um ... Ginny said it’s a representation of fear, slaying one’s fears, overcoming obstacles.”

“The poem is a nonsense poem,” I added. “‘Jabberwock’ can mean that, too: nonsense. It’s wordplay. That’s what Ginny did. She played with Lewis Carroll’s wordplay. There’s portmanteau, blending two words to create a new one: ‘be’ and ‘where’ become ‘beware.’ ‘Jabber’ and ‘walk,’ ‘jabberwalk.’ Then, ‘nigh fun’ rhymes with ‘my son.’”

“What is ‘nigh’?”

“Near or almost,” I answered.

Laura held up the strip of paper to the mirror again.

“So... be where the jabber walk—on the chessboard—because it’s almost fun? Christ, Ginny needs some serious help.”

I laughed at the sudden obviousness. “She’s being a smartass. With us on a walk, there would be jabbering. If we walk, we jabber: jabberwalk.”

“We do *not* jabber.”

“So how is it a clue?”

Susan reasoned, “I think it just validates that we’re right. We’re Alice. We’re on the other side of the looking-glass, and we need to walk the

chessboard. We need to get to the spot Kate says is for the White Queen's pawn."

"All right, let's do it!"

"I still don't think we jabber."

"We don't jabber. Does anybody have to pee?"

"I do."

"Me, too."

"Me, three."

"Get moving then," Laura said with a flicking wrist. "You have five minutes."

I had consumed enough coffee to warrant at least ten.

"Meet out front," she ordered. "Five minutes."

We grabbed our things, but Laura stole the map from me and remained seated. The rest of us zoomed to be first to the bathroom. With the seven of us crammed into the two-stall space, it became rather obvious: Ginny was right. We did jabber. Boy, did we jabber.

We finished our business and poured out the front door.

A moment later, Laura exited the restaurant waving the map. She announced, "A train is public transit. Granton doesn't have trains, but it's got buses, and the bus station is on the block we're going to. I say we head to the bus station."

Holly slid her arm around her. "You're good, babe!"

"Makes more sense than anything else."

"All right, the bus station it is."

With a mission in mind, the jabberers walked. Laura and I lagged and silently shared a cigarette.

Soon, the glass door of Granton Transit parted to let us enter yet another sterile and unwelcoming building. I started thinking maybe there was a story here. The Chamber of Commerce had been bitching about a drop in tourism. Maybe it was our demeanor and not the sucky economy.

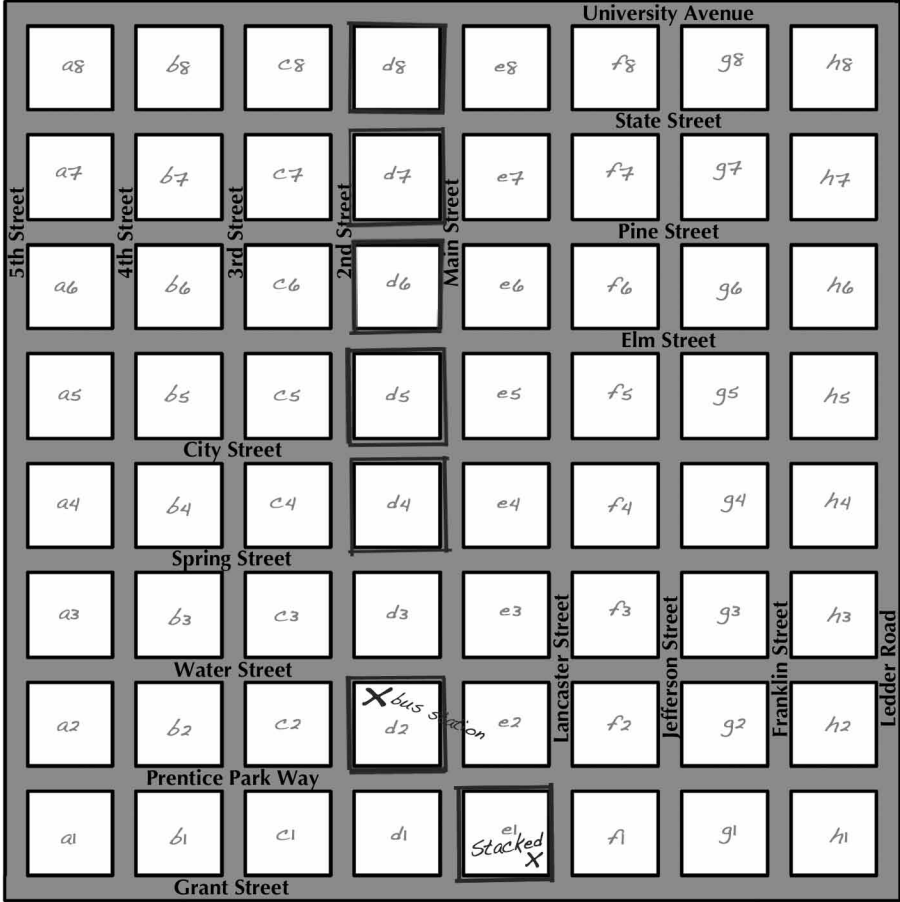
Immediately, Laura jumped into crime-scene mode. "All right, spread out and look for clues ... or a Dolores. Look at everything backward and forward. Find something!"

Maggie waved a flyer she snatched from a rack. "Maybe we're just supposed to figure out the correct bus line that'll get us to the fourth square."

"All right, Novak," Laura said with a nod, "see if you can figure it out. The rest of us spread out and look for clues or a Dolores. Remember, look at everything backward and—"

"Um, I don't really think that's necessary," Claudia interrupted.

We all turned to look at her and found her index finger pointing to the far wall.



There sat Ginny.

She did not look at all happy to see us. I couldn't tell for certain whether her face was truly reddened or whether it was the glare off her red university sweatpants and sweatshirt. Her leg bounced up and down, and she repeatedly glanced to her watch.

Very, very cautiously, we approached her.

“Where do you come from?” she haughtily asked. “And where are you going? Look up, speak nicely, and don't twiddle your fingers all the time.”

“We came from Stacked,” Janice bravely answered as we tried to resist the urge to laugh or tremble with fear or both. “And we're going—”

“We've lost our way!” Susan loudly blurted. She whispered something to Maggie, who in turn relayed it to the group: Ginny was the Red Queen, reciting from the book.

Jesus!

“I don't know what you mean by YOUR way,” Ginny spouted, “all the ways about here belong to ME—but why did you come out here at all?”

All eyes shot to Susan for the appropriate answer. I'd have bet we all had read the story, but odds were better that no one except for Susan knew it verbatim. When her face registered panic, I realized she didn't either.

Before she could even formulate an answer or cast a line of BS, Ginny said, “Curtsey while you're thinking what to say, it saves time.”

Awkwardly, Susan curtsied. It looked strange as hell, but no one blamed her for not wanting to play in traffic—and no one laughed. Especially when Ginny shot us all looks that demanded the same from us.

And we curtsied.

Okay, everyone curtsied except Laura.

Ginny rose from her chair and marched to stand directly in front of Laura. “Curtsey,” she ordered.

“Ginny, I am *not* going to curtsey, not even for you. I think we—”

“Open your mouth a LITTLE wider when you speak, and always say *your Majesty*.”

Laura simply gaped at her, and I imagined her ears to be as steam engines in the train station Granton didn't have. Who would have thought the cop would have a problem with authority figures?

“Well?” Ginny challenged as she bore her eyes into her.

Laura's face turned red, and she quickly scanned the vicinity. “Your Majesty,” she choked out, “we're planning on taking the bus to the fourth square. Granton is a bit lacking in the train department. Or do you have other plans for us, Your Majesty?” It was obvious she tried not to laugh.

“When you say ‘square,’ Laura—I've seen squares, compared with

which the fourth square would be a circle.”

“And I’ve seen people *talk* in circles, Your Majesty.”

“When you say ‘talk,’ Laura—I could show you talk, in comparison with which you’d call this silence.”

Laura groaned. “Bus or something else, Ginny?”

“When you say ‘bus,’ Laura—”

This time Laura nearly screamed and clutched Holly’s hand. “Help me, Hol, before I throw Her Majesty *under* a bus.”

“Ginny—I mean Your Majesty,” Holly said with a laugh, “you are being very goofy.”

“When you say ‘goofy,’ Holly—”

“Ginny!” multiplied itself by eight.

“My word, you girls are testy this morning.” She shook her head very dramatically. “You need something to sweeten your dispositions. ... ‘I know what YOU’D like!’” she declared and pulled a small tin out of the pouch of her sweatshirt. Opening it, she revealed mini black and white cookies. “‘Have a biscuit?’”

We exchanged glances, and not knowing what else to do, we each took a tiny cookie from her tin. When she looked down to close and return the tin, I shoved my cookie into Claudia’s mouth. She smiled and nearly began laughing. I came dangerously close to joining her. What the hell was all this? Maybe we *had* slipped through a mirror.

With great seriousness, Ginny removed a tape measure from her pocket and said, “‘While you’re refreshing yourself, I’ll just take the measurements.’” She moved forward a bit and placed a red plastic stick thingy ... um, a thingamajig on the floor. “‘At the end of two yards, I shall give you your directions.’” Again, she moved forward and did the same thing. “‘At the end of THREE yards I shall repeat them—for fear of your forgetting them. At the end of FOUR, I shall say good-bye. And at the end of FIVE, I shall go!’”

When she set down the final thingamajig, she walked back to us, and for the first time since we had seen her, she smiled, rather broadly in fact. “You girls are doing great,” she whispered and gave each of our arms a squeeze. “I’m proud of you.”

Susan whispered in kind, “And you’re the best damn Red Queen I’ve ever seen—literally.” She chuckled at her supposed wittiness.

Ginny returned to the first thingamajig, about-faced, and said, “You’ve obviously figured out that you need to get to the eighth square to become queens like Kris and me. You can get to the fourth by foot or bus—your choice. However, you need to remember that as a group you are a pawn, and as a group, you must move as only a pawn. Within the group, there are also four pawns, being used for a purpose. Susan, you know Carroll’s

story. Kate, you know chess. Laura, you know everything there is to know about this city. Janice, you know how to take good notes, which I assume you have been doing.”

The redhead’s face severely reddened for the Red Queen, and she cockily nodded. Okay, she wordlessly lied through her teeth.

Ginny continued, “That leaves four of you without roles. You’ll need to decide as a group who fits best: bishop, knight, or rook. No kings. The kings are already reserved.” She laughed again and then pointed in my direction with her head. “Kate will be able to help you with all that.” After a split-second smile, she continued, “When you reach the eighth square, you’ll be quizzed—a ‘proper examination.’ Kris and I would be remiss not to make sure you can be good queens for the day.” She chortled in a way that scared the shit out of me.

“What will we be quizzed about?” Alison asked.

“Your journey to the eighth square, of course. Janice will have thorough notes of your travels, but you’ll need to supply four things that represent each story square you’ve visited. Not one, not two, not three, but four.”

While we pondered the complexity of that, Ginny moved to the next thingamajig. She said, “Speak in French when you can’t think of the English for a thing—turn out your toes as you walk—and remember who you are!”

Huh?

She nearly jumped to the next thingamajig and offered a quick, “Goodbye, girls.” Another swift maneuver had her not only to the last thingamajig but out the door as well.

Mouths agape, we stared at each other.

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.

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

On the Web

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