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Screwdrivered (The Cocktail Series)

By Alice Clayton



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Readers back for a third round of the bestselling Cocktail series will enjoy a madcap romantic comedy about bodice ripping and chest heaving, fiery passion and love everlasting. Plus a dash of paperwork filing and horseshi—wait, what?

By day, Viv Franklin is a tough-as-nails software engineer who designs programs and loves hospital corners. By night, Vivian's a secret romance-novel junkie who longs for a knight in shining armor, or a cowboy on a wild stallion, or a strapping firefighter to sweep her off her feet. And she gets to wear the bodice—don't forget the bodice.

When a phone call brings news that she's inherited a beautiful old home in Mendocino, California from a long-forgotten aunt, she moves her entire life across the country to embark on what she sees as a great, romance-novel-worthy adventure. But romance novels always have a twist, don't they?

There's a cowboy, one that ignites her loins. Because Cowboy Hank is totally loin-ignition worthy. But there's also a librarian, Clark Barrow. And he calls her Vivian. Can tweed jackets and elbow patches compete with chaps and spurs? You bet your sweet cow pie.

In *Screwdrivered*, Alice Clayton pits Superman against Clark in a hilarious and hot battle that delights a swooning Viv/Vivian. Also within this book, an answer to the question of the ages: Why ride a cowboy when you can ride a librarian?



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Editorial Review

Review

“We want to bask in this afterglow: giddy, blushing, and utterly in love with this book”. (Christina Lauren, NYT/USA Today & International Bestselling authors of The Beautiful Bastard Series, on RUSTY NAILED)

“**Wallbanger** is an instant classic, with plenty of laugh out loud moments and riveting characters-highly recommended.” (NYT and USA Today best-selling author Jennifer Probst)

“Fun and frothy, with a bawdy undercurrent and a hero guaranteed to make your knees wobbly, **WALLBANGER** will keep you up all night. In a good way. Hilarious, romantic, and compulsively readable, **WALLBANGER** delivers the perfect blend of sex, romance, and baked goods.” (Ruthie Knox, best-selling author of About Last Night)

Caroline Reynolds. Finally a woman who knows her way around a man and a KitchenAid Mixer. She had us at zucchini bread! (Curvy Girl Guide on Wallbanger)

A funny, madcap, smexy romantic contemporary that had me reading straight through. Fast pacing and a smooth flowing storyline will keep you in stitches as Wallbanger and Nightie Girl begin the battle of the headboard. Filled with plenty of humor, sarcasm, engaging dialogue, and well developed characters-I didn't stop laughing till the end. (Smexy Books on Wallbanger)

About the Author

Alice Clayton worked in the cosmetics industry for over a decade before picking up a pen (read: laptop). She enjoys gardening but not weeding, baking but not cleaning up, and finally convinced her long-time boyfriend to marry her. And she finally got her Bernese Mountain Dog.

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Screwdrivered

chapter one

Standing atop a lonely hill, Vivian gazed out upon the turbulent sea. Voluptuous and shapely, she cut a striking silhouette. Resembling the siren she was purported to be, she looked to the west. A dark ship appeared on the horizon, and with its sighting, her pulse quickened. Was it the dark pirate captain who haunted her dreams? A tall and fierce warrior, his face was full of fury. And passion. With just a glance from him, her loins quivered. With a touch . . . implosion.

Was it he? Returning from faraway lands and adventures she could only dream of, would he pillage and plunder her body as only he could? Would the pirate bestow upon her the treasure of his manhood? Or would he cast her aside as an empty booty?

Would he?

Would he?

Would he care for another Diet Dr Pepper?

Wait, what?

I was torn from my pirate fantasy by the nasal, weenie voice of Richard Harrison, CPA.

“Can I get another Diet Dr Pepper, please? And for the lady, another—what was it you’re having, Viv?”

“Scotch. Water. Neat,” I answered, looking across the table at the latest in a long line of blind dates. Set up by my mother, which should have been my first clue to say no and run screaming into that good night. Not that she didn’t have good taste; she’d picked a looker with Richard. Strike that—he was a looker if that’s what you were into.

Brown hair. Brown eyes. Brown chinos, perfectly creased. White button-down. White teeth. Blindingly white, actually; I was pretty sure when he smiled chimes went off. Every time a CPA smiled, a fairy got its wings?

Jesus, Viv, get a grip.

I sipped my Scotch, wincing not only at the good burn, but at the bad turn this conversation was taking. Tax laws over appetizers. Nothing like a little burrata caprese with a side of capital gains.

I’d gotten through the first twenty minutes of Current Bad Date by letting my mind wander to my favorite place, Romance Novel Central. But now even the thought of pirates marauding through my underwear couldn’t spare me from the drone of brown-brown-brown-white-white-boring.

I let my eyes wander around the restaurant, fingering the small locket around my neck. Shell-pink and ivory, the tiny cameo had been given to me when I was thirteen. A family heirloom, it had been given to me as a confirmation gift. My family was still active in the church; not so much me. Although I did love a good fish fry. With a side of guilt, thank you very much. Which was why I was here on a Friday night instead of relaxing with a good book.

Directly above my heirloom cameo was a face “framed by wisps of dark curly hair, with golden tanned skin, and sea-glass-green eyes.” This is how my mother sold me to Richard Harrison, CPA, and aforementioned weenie. I did in fact have dark curly hair, all two inches of it, and I did have green eyes. Golden skin? Well, it was tan, I’ll give her that. But what she neglected to mention was the barbell in my left eyebrow. She usually also left out the nose piercing, tongue piercing, and the tattoo at the base of my neck. When I took off my leather jacket earlier, it made Mr. Harrison cringe a bit, but he held his own. Barely five two in socks but almost five four in my favorite combat boots, I knew very well the image I was projecting—certainly one at odds with the familyfriendly TGI McGeneric restaurant he’d brought me to. All the great restaurants in South Philadelphia, and he brings me here?

Why in the world did I let myself get talked into another blind date?

Because you’re single, you’ve never been in love, and you’re Desperately Seeking Pirate?

True. I’d also take a cowboy. Or a fireman. Or an estranged prince separated from his royal bloodline by a ruthless uncle hell-bent on obtaining the throne, especially when it came along with the maiden princess from a rival kingdom, the most beautiful creature in all the land. Too bad for the uncle that the maiden had been de-maidened by said prince on a bed of snowy-white down feathers. And when the prince thrust into his lady love, her nails scored into his back like those of an eagle taking flight, a flight into passionate—

Whoa. No more Scotch.

Ten solid minutes later of listening to him wax poetic about tax shelters and Roth IRAs, I set my glass down and stared at him. I could be luxuriating in a bubble bath and inside my head with the pirate king, but I was listening to this? I was perfectly capable of finding my own dates, a fact I lectured my mother about over and over again. Though actually putting this capability into practice was a different matter; a practice I didn't really engage in. It wasn't that I wasn't interested in dating; I was. To a point. I just didn't have any patience for the small-talk two-step that one needed to engage in to catch a feller.

I knew that life couldn't be like a romance novel, where someone could fall hopelessly in love with her soul mate the moment they met eyes across a crowded room.

Preposterous.

Or that you could be whisked off into a world of fantasy and excitement by a handsome stranger, instantly connect, and be in perfect sexual sync from the second his mammoth male member teased your delicate flower petals.

The idea.

Or that there was a billionaire bad boy at the head of every Fortune 100 company who was in his late twenties, six feet, three inches of barely tamed unchecked male aggression who was waiting for a tiny waif of a girl with no self-esteem and Chuck Taylor sneakers with no socks to knock him off his pedestal and change the course of his life over a two-martini lunch and a quickie in the restaurant ladies' room.

For the record? Wearing Chucks with no socks makes your feet stink like bags of disgusting.

However. For all the ridiculous perpetuated in a romance novel, I still longed for the fantasy. The fairy tale. The wonderful give and take that occurred when two became one. So I went out on dates, met guys in bars, picked them up occasionally, and had the mostly bland, occasionally inventive, sex of the single-girl encounters. Orgasms, whether by my own hand or someone else's, could never be discounted. So when my mother wore me down every few months about being the only one of my siblings who wasn't married, I relented and let her set me up on blind dates.

My type and my mother's type were as different as tuna fish and a curling iron. I liked a bad boy, and had enjoyed some a time or two. I preferred them a bit rough, tough looking. Messy hair? Yes, please. Artistic? Yes, please—musician, painter, performance artist, what have you.

My mother's type was everyone's type: good provider, steady, accomplished, smart, sociable at parties, and enough sperm to breed Catholic guilt into the next generation several times over.

And in this latest surge of motherly influence, no doubt spawned by the birth of her third grandchild and her wild desire to have a baker's dozen, lately she had been setting up dates for me like it was going out of style. In the last two weeks alone I'd been out with Harry Thomson, Tommy Dickerson, and now Richard Harrison. A financial planner, a tax lawyer, and now a CPA. Same guy, same pants, same brain. Tom, Dick, and Harry? Oh hell, no . . .

"So I said to the guy, if you want to roll over all of this into a 401(k) I'll do that, but you'd miss out on the more attractive shelter over here! So what I proposed was—"

“Dick? Can I call you Dick?”

“Actually, I’d prefer Richard, but—”

“Dick, I’m going to stop you right here. This was a mistake.”

He looked crestfallen. “Darn it all, I knew we should have ordered the chicken fingers. This berretta cheese is a little too exotic for my taste too. Let me see if I can get our waitress and—”

He held up his hand for some help with his “berretta,” and I slapped mine on the table.

“It’s not the cheese, it’s not the restaurant, it’s not even you, Dick. It’s me. I should never have let my mother talk me into this.”

“Your mother is terrific. Great assets.”

“No more asset talk. I want to be romanced; I want to be swept away—I want something special, rare, passionate, out of the ordinary!” I replied, my voice rising as I got worked up. I leaned across the table. “I want someone who will sweep everything off the table, throw me across it, and ravage me to within an inch of my life. Can you do that, Dick?” I slammed down the rest of my Scotch, meeting his eyes in challenge.

“Passionate? Out of the ordinary?” He gulped, pulling at his tie. Then a strange look came over his face. “You mean like, in the butt?” he whispered with an exaggerated wink.

Oh. My. God.

“How we doing over here?” a cheerful voice asked, and I looked up into the face of our waitress.

“Dick needs some chicken fingers.” I sighed, taking a twenty out of my purse and setting it on the table next to my empty glass. I pushed back from the table, went around to his side, and patted him on the shoulder. “Sorry this didn’t work out.” The relief was so very evident on his face it was almost comical. He started to stand, and I waved him off as I grabbed my jacket and headed for the door.

Another one bites the dust. Or chicken finger, in this case.

As I shut the front door to my home, the silence was palpable. My shoes rang out dully against polished concrete, the lights low and a bit lonely. I peeled off my jacket, snickering once more when I thought of Dick’s face when I took it off. Tattoos were commonplace in this day and age, but there’s nothing like neck ink on a girl to make a guy in a suit blink. I shouldn’t snicker; he didn’t deserve total annihilation like that. Not over appetizers. I tamped the snicker down as I passed by the wall photo of my mom on my way to kitchen. “Sorry, Ma, but come on. Berretta?”

I may have snickered once more. Just the one.

Contemplating the effects tomorrow morning of having one more bump of Scotch tonight, and deciding the hell with it, I splashed a little more into a glass and leaned back against the counter. Polished concrete, like the floor. My home had an industrial feel to it: clean, uncluttered, orderly. Steel, chrome, blacks, and shades of—you know.

Along one wall was a line of pictures, all in black frames with black mattes. Spaced exactly three inches apart (above, below, and in between) were photos of my family. Five older brothers. Mom. Dad. All of us together.

It had been interesting, growing up. By the time my parents got around to having me, they were so used to football, hockey, and baseball, that into the jerseys I went, and never even entertained the idea of a dress. I wore dresses sometimes now, but they were the skintight-over-fishnets-and-combat-boots type. Courtney Love circa 1996. Without the smeared lipstick. Or the heroin.

Growing up with five older brothers meant that everyone in town saw me as one of the “Franklin Boys.” Something that became harder to lump me into when I developed serious lumps of my own when I hit puberty, but the fact that I ran around in ball caps and sweatshirts continued the myth. Following in my brothers’ footsteps also meant that I excelled at school, particularly math and science, taking calculus in tenth grade. Franklins are good at math and science, therefore as a Franklin, I was too. The hitch in the giddy-up was that I also loved art. Drawing, painting, you name it, I loved it. There’s a symmetry to drawing, an innate sense of placement and scale that appealed to my inner math geek. But between after-school sports and advanced placement college prep classes, it was a side that I didn’t have much time to explore.

And frankly wasn’t encouraged to explore. The family business was computers, and that’s what all of us were groomed for. And I followed suit—for a while.

Next to the framed pictures of my family was the single piece of artwork in the room, the only piece that was in color. Bold splashes of bright corals, cotton-candy pinks, soft curling puffs of white. April in Paris. I let my eyes follow the swoops and swirls of color, remembering what it felt like to spend my days in a studio in France. Heaven. A heaven that was a world and a computer software company away.

I pushed the thoughts aside, draining the rest of my Scotch and fumbling for my phone. I decided to bite the bullet and check my messages. There were at least three from my mother and two from an unknown number. Knowing that Mother just wanted to see how the date went, and not caring about messages from someone I didn’t know, I erased them all and headed for my bedroom.

Slipping out of my clothes and into a fluffy white robe, I made my way toward the only room in the house that didn’t have my monochromatic modern theme. I opened the door into rosy chaos.

Rose wallpaper, rose carpet—if there was a surface I could stick a rose onto, I did it. Gold candelabras too; I had plenty of those. White taper candles with romantic drips spilling down them—it was all there. My private escape. My romantic nirvana.

Soaker tub. Deep. Long. With a shelf overflowing with bubble bath gels, salts, pearls, and oils. Fragrances of lavender, geranium, and of course, rose. I flipped on the radio, tuned to the local classical station, and felt the evening fade away as I turned on the hot water. While I poured the rose-scented bubbles into the stream, my eyes zeroed in on the book I’d be finishing tonight. On the cover? Man. Strong. Fierce. Pecs. Woman. Beautiful. Swooning. Boobs.

Dropping the robe and all memories of Dick Weenie, I slipped into the perfumed water and let my world fade away.

I was sound asleep when my cell phone rang, jolting me out of a dream in which a giant shoe was chasing me down a water slide. I grappled across the nightstand, knocking over a stack of books and a water bottle,

finally clutching my phone. “Hello?”

Static.

“Hello?”

“Hello, is this Ms. Vivian Franklin?” a man’s voice asked.

“This is Viv, yeah, who is this?” I barked, noticing the time. Who the hell called at 1:28 a.m.? “Do you have any idea what time it is?”

“I am terribly sorry for the time difference. It’s considerably earlier here in California.”

“Well, bully for all the granola eaters. Who the hell are you, and what the hell are you doing calling me in the middle of the night?”

“Ms. Franklin, I did try calling earlier in the evening. Did you not get my messages?”

“Five seconds, California, or I’m hanging up,” I growled.

“Forgive me for saying so, but you do remind me of your aunt.” He laughed a cultured laugh, and I frowned.

“My aunt?” I didn’t resemble either Aunt Gloria or Aunt Kimberly, and neither of them lived in California. Wait a minute— “Are you breathing heavy?” Ick, he was! “Dude, you picked the wrong chick for an obscene call—”

“Oh, no, Ms. Franklin. I just climbed up a rather long staircase, and I’m afraid the old ticker isn’t quite what it used to be.” After taking a deep breath, he laughed. “Obscene—the idea. Your Aunt Maude would have loved that.”

Aunt Maude. Aunt Maude? Ohhhh, Aunt Maude.

“As in my Great-Aunt Maude? Maude Perkins?”

“Yes, the very one. I’m sure you’ve heard this time and again in the last few days, but let me please extend to you my condolences.”

“Condolences?”

“Yes, of course, on your aunt’s passing. My firm represented her for decades, and I’d gotten to be quite fond of her in the last few years. What a remarkable woman.”

Great Aunt Maude was . . . well . . . in need of condolences?

“Okay, California, start from the beginning, including your name and why in the world you’d be calling me in the middle of the night about a woman I barely know and haven’t seen in fifteen years. And who by the way, I didn’t even know had . . . well . . . passed.”

“Oh my! You didn’t know? Well, this is all a bit strange then, isn’t it? I’m so very sorry, Ms. Franklin. Let

me introduce myself. My name is Gerald Montgomery, your aunt's attorney and executor of her will."

I switched the light on, climbed out of bed to grab a pad of paper, then got back in bed.

"Okay, Mr. Montgomery, you've got my attention. Now tell me everything, including how in the world she died without even one person in my family knowing about it."

"Well, Ms. Franklin, she was, as you are aware, quite eccentric," he began with a chuckle.

Thirty minutes later I set the phone down, utterly numb and confused. I looked back down over the notes I'd scribbled on the pages.

- passed away with no one but me named in her will
- house and ranch and all worldly goods . . . to me?
- Mendocino. As in California!

I looked at the clock, my mind whirling. It was too late to call my parents. I'd have to call them in the morning. I could barely process all of this. Crazy Aunt Maude. I hadn't seen her since I was twelve, spending the summer out west with her in her old house.

The old house on a cliff above the beach. Oh my God—the beach house.

I flew out of my bedroom, down the stairs, and toward the bookcase in the living room. I grabbed an old family photo album, filled with Polaroids from family vacations and holidays from when I was kid. Flipping through the pages quickly, I found the ones I was looking for.

I spent one summer in Mendocino, one magical summer with my family and Aunt Maude. It was so long ago I'd almost forgotten it. I closed my eyes, remembering the feel of sun on my skin, salt in the air, and sand between my toes. I opened my eyes and stared down at the picture of the Victorian home overlooking the raging Pacific. Named "Seaside Cottage," it was anything but. Turrets. Widow's walk. Porch for days. Wide plank floors rubbed smooth from years of bare feet running across it. Kitchen garden. Attic, filled to bursting with trunks and old dress mannequins. It was like little girl wonderland.

And I'd inherited it?

And the ranch! Christ, how could I have forgotten the ranch that was adjacent to the picture-perfect house? Acres and acres of fertile California land, dotted with sheep, chickens, and the occasional milk cow. And horses. How could I have forgotten the horses? And the quaint old barn where . . . wait a minute . . . horses need tending to. Usually by a . . . cowboy.

A mysterious phone call in the middle of the night, beckoning me from my sleep. A call that awakened my mind with endless possibilities. An adventure? A new beginning? A journey across the land where a new life awaits? One with a . . . gulp . . . a cowboy? Shit. I could gulp a cowboy. Especially if I was about to be starring in my very own romance novel. But could I actually move across the country? I didn't know a soul in California.

Wait, strike that.

I picked up the phone to call the only person I knew on the West Coast. One who shared the same sense of adventure that I once did.

It was only eleven o'clock in California. Of course, who the hell knew where he might be, knowing his job? I scrolled through my phone, looking at his name, weighing the decision about waiting to call in the morning.

Fuck it.

I called my old friend from high school, Simon Parker.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Joy Hanson:

This book untitled Screwdrivered (The Cocktail Series) to be one of several books that will best seller in this year, that's because when you read this publication you can get a lot of benefit in it. You will easily to buy this book in the book retail store or you can order it via online. The publisher of the book sells the e-book too. It makes you more readily to read this book, as you can read this book in your Mobile phone. So there is no reason for you to past this publication from your list.

Eva Velasco:

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Patricia Cockrell:

Is it an individual who having spare time subsequently spend it whole day through watching television programs or just resting on the bed? Do you need something new? This Screwdrivered (The Cocktail Series) can be the response, oh how comes? A book you know. You are therefore out of date, spending your extra time by reading in this brand new era is common not a nerd activity. So what these guides have than the others?

Marie Brenneman:

A lot of reserve has printed but it is different. You can get it by online on social media. You can choose the very best book for you, science, comedy, novel, or whatever through searching from it. It is identified as of

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