



## Rusty Nailed (The Cocktail Series)

By Alice Clayton



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Playing house was never so much fun—or so confusing. With her boss on an extended honeymoon, Caroline's working crazy-long hours to keep the interior design company running—especially since she's also the lead designer for the renovation of a gorgeous old hotel. And with Simon, her hotshot photographer boyfriend, gallivanting all over the world for his job, the couple is heavy-duty into "absence makes the heart grow fonder" mode. No complaints about the great reunion sex, though!

Then a trip back east to his childhood home has Simon questioning his nomadic lifestyle. He decides to be home more. A *lot* more. And he wants Caroline home more, too. Though their friends' romantic lives provide plenty of welcome distraction, eventually Caroline and Simon have to sort out their relationship. Sure, more togetherness is a good thing—but does less traveling and working have to mean the other extreme? Apple pie and picket fences? With this second book in the Cocktail series, *USA TODAY* bestselling author Alice Clayton delivers another delicious, frothy confection of a book, shaking up her characters, stirring in laugh-out-loud humor, and serving sizzling romance straight up!

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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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Rusty Nailed

## chapter one

“Oh, God.”

Thump

“Oh, God.”

Thump thump

“Caroline, don't say those things to me when I'm so far away.” Simon chuckled, his voice low. And still as thrilling as it ever was.

“Silly Simon, I'm simply reacting to the banging on the other side of the wall.”

“Who's on the other side of the wall?”

“The guy with the hammer. You should see it. It’s huge.”

“I’m going to have to ask you not to talk about some other guy’s hammer.”

“Then get home and wow me with yours.” I laughed, closing the door to my office to reduce the noise. It wouldn’t be my office much longer, though. I was moving up in the world—or at least down the hall. That was the cause of the banging: renovating my new space. Bigger office, corner office, thank you very much, right next to Jillian’s, my boss and owner of. Better view of the bay and almost twice the size of my old office, with a small anteroom for a possible future intern.

I might one day have an intern. How was this my life?

“I’ll be home tomorrow. Think you can keep your thoughts on my hammer until then?” he asked. I glanced at the calendar on my desk, Simon’s arrival home circled.

“I’m gonna do my best, babe, but you should see how thick that tool belt is. No promises.” Simon groaned and I laughed harder. I loved torturing him across multiple time zones. “And don’t forget my present.”

“Do I ever?”

“No, you’re a thoughtful one, aren’t you?”

“Don’t forget my present either,” he said, his voice going low again.

“Pink nightie is ready to go; I’ll be in it when you get home.”

“And then I’ll be in it, on it, under it, I’ll—oops, gotta go, taxi’s here.”

“We’ll continue the nightie talk in person. Love you,” I said.

“Love you too, babe,” he said, and hung up.

I stared at the phone for a moment, imagining him halfway across the world in Tokyo. This year alone he’d logged more frequent-flier miles than most people accrued in a lifetime, and he was booked solid for the rest of the year.

I was still smiling at the phone when Jillian knocked and breezed in, then sat on the corner of my desk.

“Something on your mind, Jillian?” I asked, pulling a browned petal from the vase of coral tinged roses next to where she was resting her cashmere-clad bum.

“I can see something is on your mind. Was that Simon on the phone?” she asked as I grinned. “Only he can make your face light up like that.”

“I say again—something on your mind, Jillian?” I repeated, poking her ever so slightly with my pencil.

“I have something on my mind that might make your face light up even brighter—although it is an interesting tomato-soup color right now,” she teased.

“Does your fiancé find you as annoying as everyone who works for you does?”

“Way more, way way more. You ready to hear the big news, or did you want to keep sassing me?”

“Hit me,” I said with a sigh.

I love my boss, but she does have a flair for the dramatic. Like when she played matchmaker last year for Simon and me, playing dumb the entire time. But her heart was in the right place. It also belonged 100 percent totally and completely to Benjamin, a venture capitalist. They’d been together for years and were finally tying the knot in a few weeks, in a wedding that all of San Francisco was talking about. Benjamin was a certifiable dreamboat who made my best friends and me giddy and word-trippy whenever he was around. Jillian knew we all had a not-so-secret crush on her man, and teasingly used it against us as often as possible. Now she was finally marrying our dream man, and heading off for a dream honeymoon all over Europe.

“So remember the job we did last spring for Max Camden? The waterfront Victorian we did, before his daughter got married?”

“Yeah, he gave it to her as a wedding present. Who does that?”

“Max Camden, that’s who. Anyway, he owns the old Claremont Hotel in Sausalito, and he’s looking for a new design firm to update it and give it a modern twist.”

“Fantastic! Did you do your proposal already?” I asked, picturing the property. Right off the main drag in Sausalito, the Claremont had been there since the turn of the last century, one of the few to survive the Big Quake.

“No, because you’re doing the proposal. You’ll be the lead designer on this project if you get it,” she clarified. “You think I can take something like this on? Right before my wedding? I’m not giving up my honeymoon for work—I’ve given up too many vacations over the years as it is.”

“Me? No no no, I’m not ready for that, you’re not ready for that, what are you thinking?” I stammered, my heart leaping into my throat. This was big-time, baby.

“Please, you got this.” She kicked me gently. “Feel that? That’s my foot, kicking you out of the nest.”

“Um, yeah, I’ve been out of the nest awhile now, but this is different,” I protested, chewing on my pencil.

Which she plucked out of my mouth. “You really think I’d give this to you if you weren’t ready? And tell me the truth, aren’t you even the slightest bit intrigued?”

She had me there. I’d always wanted to do a project this big. But to actually be the lead designer on an entire hotel redesign?

“I realize I’m asking a lot—you’re already going to be running the show around here while I’m on my honeymoon. Do you truly think this is too much to bite off at one time?”

“Wow—I just—wow,” I answered, taking a deep breath. When she’d initially asked me if I’d keep things running while she was on her honeymoon, it was things like making sure the alarm was set each night and that Ashley made sure to order coffee creamer. The list had steadily grown larger as projects stacked up, but

still very much manageable. Now this?

I let the idea sit for a moment. Could I do this? Jillian seemed to think so.

“Hmm . . .”

I pictured the hotel: great light, great location, but needed a major overhaul. I was already thinking about potential palettes when she tapped me on the head with her pencil.

“Come in, Caroline. Hello,” she said, waving her hand in front of my face.

I grinned at her. “I’m in, let’s go for it,” I said, my head already full of ideas.

She grinned back and offered me a fist bump. “I’ll let the team know you’ll be presenting.”

“Presenting my vomit, most likely,” I said, only half kidding.

“Just make sure it matches the drapes and we’re in the clear. Now, let’s celebrate by choosing a song to walk down the aisle to.” She pulled her iPod out of her pocket and started scrolling through.

“Is that in my job description?”

“That you indulge me? Yes, check your contract. So when I walk down the aisle, which song should I . . .”

There was no stopping her once she’d put on her Wedding Hat, so I relaxed a bit, even though my mind was spinning. This was big-time baby, but I had this.

Right?

• • •

I spent the afternoon framing out the beginnings of a pitch to Max Camden. As I pulled archival photos of the hotel and the surrounding area, ideas were beginning to present themselves. Not fully formed yet, but hinting at what might be an approach interesting enough to take a chance on a young designer. I knew that the strength of my ideas would be bolstered by Jillian’s reputation; anyone who was good enough to work for her was usually granted wider berth. However, it still came down to whose ideas were best—and I wanted this concept to be epic.

Still musing over the project as I turned my key in my front door, I heard a distinct thump, followed by a click click click padding toward me.

Clive.

Pushing through the door, I was greeted by my wonder cat, my own little piece of feline heaven. In a burst of gray fur, my ankles were surrounded by purrs and insistent nudges.

“Hi there, sweet boy, were you a good boy today?” I asked, leaning down to scratch his silky fur.

Arching up into my hand, he assured me that yes, he was in fact a sweet boy, and also a good boy. Berating

me for leaving him alone for a thousand years, he cooed and chirped, herding me toward the kitchen.

We talked as I readied his dinner for him, which of course I'd been put on earth expressly to do, and our conversation covered the normal subjects. What birds he'd seen from the window today, whether any dust bunnies had emerged from under the bed, and whether I'd find any toys buried in the toe of my slippers. He was noncommittal on this last question.

Once his kibble was in his bowl he ignored me completely, and I headed back to the bedroom to put on some comfy clothes. Untucking my turtleneck, I went to the mirrored dresser to grab some yoga pants. While pulling my arms out of my shirt, my heart leapt into my throat when I saw the reflection of someone sitting on my bed. Instinct kicked in and I whirled, fists clenched, a scream ready to let loose.

My brain only processed that it was Simon after my fist was flung.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa! What the hell, Caroline!" he yelled as he grabbed his jaw.

"What the hell, Caroline? What the hell, Simon! What the hell are you doing here?" I yelled back. Good to know if I was ever actually attacked, I wouldn't freeze.

"I came home early to surprise you," he managed, rubbing his jaw and grimacing.

My heart was still racing in my chest, and as I tried to calm down, I noticed the suitcase in the corner. The one I'd missed when I'd come into the room. I looked down and saw the turtleneck still hanging around my neck like a scarf.

"I could just kill you!" I yelled again, charging him and pushing him back onto the bed. "You scared me to death, you idiot!"

"I was planning on calling out to let you know I was here, but then I would've missed that entire conversation with Clive. I didn't want to interrupt." He grinned underneath me, threading his hands around my waist and in and out of my belt loops.

I blushed. "Traitor!" I yelled down the hallway. "You could have let me know someone was here—you're a terrible watch-cat!"

A disinterested meow floated back.

"I'm hardly just someone. I think I rate a little higher than that," he told the side of my neck, which he was now feathering with the tiniest of kisses. "So, are you going to say hi to your boyfriend who flew all the way across the globe just to show you his hammer, or are you going to punch me again?"

"Not sure yet; I'm still a little freaked out. My heart is literally racing, can you feel that?" I asked, pressing his hand over the left side of my chest.

Only so he could feel my heart. Yep. That's the only reason. Heart was in fact delighted to have Simon home early; she loved a good romantic reunion. Other areas were delighted as well.

"See now, I thought it was racing because of me," he said with a low chuckle, dipping his nose along my collarbone as he "felt my heart."

“Dream on, Wallbanger,” I said, feigning indifference. The truth? My heart was now in Simon mode, and it was pounding for him. And speaking of pounding.

“So you came home early just to see little ol’ me?” I breathed into his ear, sneaking a wet kiss just underneath it. His hands dug a little deeper into my hips as he shifted on the bed.

“I did.”

“Think you can help me with this turtleneck?”

“I do.”

“And then after that, you wanna show me your hammer?” I asked the front of his T-shirt, nuzzling at him, positioning my legs on either side of him. In answer, he thrust up and let me feel that very hammer. I chuckled. “Mmm, am I gonna get nailed?”

He lifted my turtleneck off, then unsnapped my bra and my breasts tumbled out, causing his eyes to flare, then focus with precision. “No more questions,” he directed, sitting up underneath me as he pulled me closer.

I mimed zipping my lips just before he flipped me over onto my back. God, I loved this man.

His lips danced along my collarbone, nipping occasionally with his teeth in a way he always knew got me warm, fast. I got it; I’d missed him too. Arching my back, I pressed my breasts against him, twisting and turning to bring me into contact with him as much as I could be, my skin needing to feel his. After a year, he could still bring me to my knees in seconds with one touch, one kiss, one look.

I pushed back against him, flipping us once more and pulling at his jeans. “Off, now,” I instructed.

When his belt was gone, his buttons unbuttoned, I pulled apart his jeans to find that once more my man had gone commando.

It’s like he was put on earth just to make me come out of my skin.

I snuck one hand inside, grasping him firmly, feeling how warm he was; ready to take me on my own trip around the world.

“Fuck, I missed you,” he breathed, his body lean and taut. I slid down the bed, kissing and licking at his skin hungrily. His hands came up to my face, fingers fluttering along my cheekbones, sweeping my hair back. So he could watch.

I took him into my mouth, entirely. His hands clutched at my hair, freezing me in place, holding me exactly how he wanted me. “Mmm, Caroline,” he moaned, thrusting ever so slightly. Slightly, my ass—that wasn’t how this show was going down.

I pulled back then took him in again, hard. Using my hands I caressed him, alternating my touch so he never knew quite where I was coming from, using my tongue and mouth to tease and tempt him, coaxing the sweetest dirty words out of that sent-from-heaven-mouth of his. That mouth that I knew would exact the sweetest dirty revenge all over my body.



I loved him this way, loved that I could make him this insane. But just before he got too far gone, he pulled me up his body and took my panties off before I could say, hey, those are my panties.

Then he pushed up my skirt, nudging my knees apart with his own. Gazing down at me with those piercing sapphire eyes, he ran his fingers over me, through me, making me groan and moan and shake and shimmy. “So gorgeous like this,” he breathed as I cried out.

“Need you, Simon—need you, please!” I was ready to tear my hair off my head and throw it at him, if I thought that would get him inside any faster.

Any further thoughts vanished as he slid home. Thick, hard, and ten kinds of fantastic were all I knew the second Simon pressed inside me. “God, that’s amazing,” I moaned, the feeling of him filling me overwhelming me.

And when he rolled us so I was on top, and he thrust up hard inside me, it was perfection.

Until afterward, when we lay in a heap of sweaty limbs, and he asked me how I liked his hammer.

Then it was beyond perfection.

## **Users Review**

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