

Bodie is a bustling, untamed mining camp. Being fueled by deep-pocketed eastern stockholders, gold and silver mines are springing up overnight. This lawless, wild town is grabbing the attention of America---from dreams to bonanzas. Kitty has an explosive temper and is fast with a gun. Candice is fed up with the ills of saloon life. Fate keeps these two opposite women together, as they embrace Bodie and grab at fame and fortune, their way.

THE BAD GIRLS OF BODIE

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A woman with blonde hair, wearing a black corset and black lace-trimmed shorts, is the central figure. She is holding a glass to her lips with her right hand and a bottle with her left. Behind her is a large, faded image of a wooden wheel. The background is a sepia-toned photograph of a Western town street with wooden buildings.

BAD GIRLS

OF BODIE

DEBBIE MADISON

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CHAPTER 1

“Hello, camp! Can I come in?” hollered a deep, crusty voice filled with worry.

Twigs snapped. Kitty’s ears perked up and her gun hand twitched. “Candice,” she whispered, “wake up.”

“Go back to sleep. I’m tired,” Candice moaned, yawning. “It’s cold here.”

“I ain’t got a weapon, and I’m holdin’ my hands high above my head,” the stranger offered.

“What do you want?” Kitty shouted with concern in her voice.

“I heard the hotel wouldn’t give you a room, so I thought I would be neighborly and offer my bed at the stable.”

“Why would you want to do that?” Kitty asked with caution, aiming her gun in the voice’s general direction.”

“From the signs of them early mornin’ clouds, I reckon we’re goin’ to get a heavy snow soon,” he offered. “And I think Martha would be real sore at me if I left women out in the cold.”

Kitty laughed. “You expect me to believe that?”

The stranger said anxiously, “You’d be damn fools to stay outside when the foul weather hits. I’m gettin’ mighty cold out here, myself. I’m gonna either turn around and get comfort at my place or come in and join you by that fire.”

“Candice!” Kitty tapped Candice’s back. “Wake up.” Candice didn’t stir, so Kitty slapped her friend hard on the forehead.

Candice moaned and snapped, “Kitty, so help me, one of these days I’m gonna shoot you!”

“Should I let him join us by the fire?” Kitty nervously asked, her gun still lifted and aimed.

Candice sat up. “Who?”

“Some stranger out there is offerin’ us his bed,” Kitty whispered. “Candice, I’ll sure be glad when that arm of yours is healed. You sure are slow lately.”

“If you wouldn’t ever break it again, I’d be obliged! Now, what are you talkin’ about?”

The stranger, arms raised, walked into their campsite. Both women aimed their guns.

“Put them guns down,” he barked. “I hate when I try to help people and they pull guns on me. What the heck is wrong with this country? Why, I remember when my grandpa would offer a bed and a meal to unneighborly folks, even the Indians.” Before Candice or Kitty could get a word in edgewise he said, “How come you ain’t got no coffee?”

Kitty threw Candice a stare, then both women looked straight at the stranger. “I didn’t catch your name,” Kitty said, her gun still aimed.

“That’s cuz I didn’t give it to you,” he snapped. “I ain’t ever been to a fire where there ain’t coffee water boilin’. Where is it?”

Before either woman could answer his question, he turned his head from the warmth of the fire and bellowed, “What the heck did you do to them horses? Them two look like they haven’t been fed for days...no, for weeks. Why in tarnation do people do this to horses?”

Kitty, confused by his insistent talk, screamed, “Shut up, old-timer. You’re hurtin’ my brain.”

His eyes darted to Kitty and a frown settled on his weathered face, “I bet you did that to them horses, didn’t you?”

Kitty’s face reddened. She held the gun steady. “I asked you one question and you’ve asked me a mouthful. It’s too early for me to shoot anybody, and it’s too early for coffee. Just go away.”

“Have it your way, but you ain’t goin’ to make it alive through that comin’ weather,” he warned.

“What’s he talking about?” Candice asked around a yawn.

“He offered his stable bed and room to us,” Kitty sassed back.

Candice’s eyes tightened. “Did he want anythin’ else?”

“No, but I didn’t believe him. He said it’s gonna snow here and kill us soon.” Kitty rolled her eyes. “It was a trap. I sent him away.”

“Wait!” Candice shouted. Her voice shook and she straightened her back. “We didn’t understand your offer. Please wait!”

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“What the heck are you tellin’ him that for?” Kitty asked, her gun still aimed.

“Kitty,” Candice growled. “Put the gun down and help me gather the horses.”

“I know men!” Kitty snapped, “and he just wants our favors.”

“He’s old and his body is broke. Didn’t you notice that?” Candice shook her head. “Kitty, sometimes I think you don’t think.”

“What the heck does that mean?” Kitty asked, throwing her bedroll to the ground.

“Not all men want our favors. Some just want our company.” Candice’s voice slowed and the frown on her tired face faded. “I know you know men, but perhaps you don’t know *old* men as good as me.”

“Men are men,” Kitty spat. “It don’t matter if they’re young or old, they all just want our flesh.”

“What made you change your minds?” the old-timer asked as he walked back into camp and stood next to the fire. He looked up and studied the clouds settling in. “I reckon the weather should hit us by early evenin’.”

“How do you know that?” Kitty asked in a testy voice as she threw him a mean glare.

“I’ve been here a mite too long,” he replied with a long sigh. “I should have left when I still could have.” He caught a glimpse of the sling on Candice’s left arm and her short gate. “Ma’am, you look a mite sore. I’ll gather the horses and you just rest in the back of the buckboard.” He straightened his back up a few inches and threw Candice a wink.

“I appreciate your help,” she offered with a short smile. “We’ve come a long ways and we were hopin’ for a warm bath and soft bed.”

“I can’t offer the first comfort,” he shook his head, “but I keep my bed clean, and it would be real nice to have a woman’s smell in it.”

“Why am I doin’ all the work?” Kitty hissed. “I know your arm is sore, Candice, but you can help a little bit.” Her voice abruptly stopped as she glanced over at the stranger. “We ain’t goin’ with you till you tell us your name.” She stared at him and her eyes flared. “Why ain’t you answerin’ me?”

“Your friend sure is testy,” he told Candice. Then to Kitty he growled, “I don’t like you. I bet my week’s wages you don’t know how to make coffee.” His arthritic fingers shook when he hitched the horses to the buckboard.

Candice hid a fit of laughter. She covered her mouth and lowered her head choking on a giggle.

“You still didn’t give us your name.” Kitty’s voice jumped and settled as she said, “I don’t make coffee, and I don’t even drink it!”

“I knew you were a no-good woman!” He spit. “I don’t even know why I’m tryin’ to help you now!”

Candice, wiping the laughter off of her face, eased out of the back of the buckboard. “Kitty!” she shouted. “We should be helpin’ him, not him helpin’ us!”

Worry lifted off the old-timer’s face and his shaking fingers went back to work. “You can have the bed!” he hollered at Candice, his eyes still focused on the thick, stubborn harness leather. “She can sleep with the horses!” He chuckled out loud.

“I don’t think you’re very funny. And you’re old,” Kitty shouted, her gun still aimed.

“I don’t know who taught you women how to use them blasted things.” The old-timer’s head shook, “but I’d gladly shoot him, even if he killed me back.” He looked up at Kitty. “My name is Jebadiah, but it’s too big a name so I’m just called Jeb.”

“Jeb.” Kitty’s testy tone fell. “This town is called Bodie, isn’t it?”

Jeb roared, nearly falling to his butt. “I’m not sure anybody has asked me that question before. Most just grin, pay me, check the bullets in their guns, and walk out of the stable.” A grin lifted his weathered face. “Yep, this is Bodie.” He walked over to Candice and inched his arthritic back upwards. “I’ll drive you slow, and you’ll be enjoyin’ one of them comforts soon.”

Candice’s winked back at Jeb. “I think you’ll like my friend Kitty once you get to know her.” A wide smile crept across her face. “She’s as long-winded as you.”

The smile faded from Jeb’s face as he strained to lift his aged body into the driver’s side of the buckboard.

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Kitty was already seated there. “What are you doin’?” she demanded, sitting tighter in her place.

“I’m sorry, ma’am,” he said. “I was just tryin’ to help.”

Kitty rolled her eyes. “You’re old and you smell. Get out and—”

“Shut up!” Candice screamed. “He knows horses. Move over and give him the reins!”

“He smells!” Kitty shouted. “I don’t trust him.”

“You are the dumbest educated person I’ve ever met!” Candice barked.

“And you’re just a stupid hog farmer,” Kitty spat back.

“I ain’t wantin’ anythin’ to do with you polecats.” Jeb hurried out of the buckboard and took a step backwards.

“She’s a bit testy, but she’ll warm up to you in a bit,” Candice offered in a light tone.

“Well,” Jeb said in one short breath. “She’s young, handsome, and I reckon I can stand her spite for a bit. It’s better than none at all.”

Kitty looked down at Jeb from the buckboard. “You smell, but I reckon I can put up with you if it means some comfort.” They nodded at each other. Jeb walked around the buckboard, and with slow movements that showed his pride, he got back up into the high seat.

“You’re as slow as she is,” Kitty impatiently snapped. “Why does everyone I’m around move so slow?” she cried. “Get up!” she shouted to the horses.

“What the heck are you doin’ that for?” Jeb asked in as easy a manner as his gruff voice allowed.

“I’m gettin’ us to the stable!” Kitty shouted, rolling her eyes at Jeb. Her hands slapped the reins again.

“But,” Jeb’s voice fell as his brittle arms found something to hold on to, “the stable was close by. You just passed it.”

“What!” Kitty pulled back on the snaking reins. “I hate horses!” she cried. She threw a raised eyebrow at Jeb and said, “Just get me to a saloon.”

“Huh?” Jeb’s eyes widened as far as his weathered face would let them. “I knew I didn’t like you,” he growled, “but I’m goin’ to help your ailin’ friend out.” He grabbed the reins, and with great difficulty

lifted his twisted back. "Whoa!" A second later the buckboard turned hard and slowed.

Kitty screamed, "The saloons are the other way, you fool." Jeb turned to catch the fire in Kitty's eyes. She caught the pain in his, and her voice softened. "I don't know why I need men and champagne, I just do," she admitted.

Her sweet almost humbled voice surprised Jeb. His face lifted and he said, "You and your friend are welcome." A second later he shook his head and his voice rose. "You're the one that's been drivin' these horses this hard, ain't you?"

Candice, still in the back of the buckboard, said, "No, Jeb, it was me."

Jeb looked over his shoulder. "Ma'am, why would you do that?"

Candice sighed and lowered her head. "Jeb, I don't know."

Kitty, expecting an explosion of thoughts, reached for her gun.

"What's she doin' now?" Jeb shouted as he caught Kitty's movements out of the corner of his tired eyes.

"If you even think about hurtin' Candice," Kitty warned, "I'll shoot out your next breath."

"Tarnation," Jeb cried. "I'm tryin' to save her." He scratched his thin, white, curly hair. "I don't know why I've been so cursed." He shook his head. "Tarnation, Lord, I ain't done anythin' bad enough to deserve this."

"Who are you talkin' to?" Kitty asked, glancing around.

"Not you!" Jeb growled as he slowed the horses and led them inside the stable.

"What are you doin'?" Kitty screamed. "These are *my* horses. I know them better than you!"

"Don't you grab them reins from me!" Jeb warned. "I ain't ever hit a girl before, but I will."

Kitty slapped his bony shoulder and grabbed the reins out of his crippled hands. "You're old. Just watch me." She urged the horses forward at a faster pace.

"It's a stable," Jeb cried. "Slow down now, before you kill us and the horses!"

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“I know what I’m doin’,” Kitty snapped. “All I have to do is pull back hard on the left rein.”

“If I had a gun I’d shoot you!” Jeb huffed. “Now, give me them reins!”

His back made a popping noise and he grimaced. His arms strained and locked onto the reins that were still in Kitty’s tight grip.

“What the heck are you doin’?” she barked. “I’m just tryin’ to show you how to do this.”

Jeb stopped the horses. His face was flushed and his eyes widened. “I already told you, I don’t like you. The next time we meet I’ll have a gun.” He struggled for breath. “I may be old and you may kill me first, but that’s better than dyin’ by a horse.”

Kitty threw Jeb a raised eyebrow and asked, “How far away is the closest saloon?”

“I ain’t a drinkin’ man anymore, and I ain’t goin’ to tell the likes of you nothin’ more!”

Candice let go of her death grip on the rails in the back of the buckboard. “Kitty, if Jeb says the weather will kill us, I believe him. I’m just as weary as you, and I yearn for a hot tub more than you, but I reckon we should accept his hospitality.”

“He’s just a man,” Kitty said, jumping out of the buckboard. “And, even if the bad weather hits, I won’t be far away.” Her eyes filled with excitement. “Or maybe I’ll share a warm bed with James tonight.” She winked at Candice and threw her a wide smile. “Don’t worry about me. It’s a big town, but I know I can find James.”

Jeb shook his head. “Your friend don’t make any sense.”

“Why?” Candice asked with a tone of concern in her voice.

“Because Mother Nature ain’t forgivin’. She’s downright wicked. She ain’t much for givin’ warnin’s, and she strikes as fast as a snake.”

Candice said, “I’m not sure what you’re drivin’ at. Where I’m from, we get lots of warnin’ before the cold rain hits. I ain’t ever seen snow before. Isn’t it soft and white?”

Jeb chuckled. “Soft and white. I reckon you’re *not* from around these parts. Where are you from?”

Candice shrugged her shoulders and sighed. "Somewhere in the Midwest. I'm not exactly sure where, but I do remember loud claps of thunder and heavy strikes of lightnin'."

"Up here it gets cold, real cold." Jeb shook his head. "If you don't have enough wood in the winter..." his words slowed, "you die. At times wood is as valuable as gold." Jeb's face tightened, exposing the deep creases on his aged face. "Why, last winter nobody shared nothin' without a price on it and the price went up daily. A man can lose his entire year's earnin's overnight."

Jeb helped Candice out of the buckboard and led her to a dimly lit door. "Ma'am, I ain't got a fireplace here but I got lots of blankets." The pride on his face was apparent as he opened the door. "But, ma'am, it gets so cold up here. I've seen frost on my blankets."

Candice tried to hide the pain in her eyes. She looked up at Jeb and said, "Why did you stay here so long?"

"Ma'am," Jeb's head shook something fierce, "I met a purty girl." His voice stilled for a moment and he swallowed hard. "And she was as purty as that one you brought in with you."

Candice's thoughts lightened as she watched Jeb's eyes dance.

"She was as youthful and as purty as a bird." Jeb coughed, caught his cough, and said, "It's sure nice to have female company."

"Jeb, I appreciate all the company you've been payin' to me." Her back straightened. "But Kitty is my friend, and I need to go find her and take care of her."

The scowl on Jeb's face returned. "I ain't sure how to answer your request." His head shook again and he said, "All I know for sure is that your face is pale and you're movin' slow, and her face was glowin' and she moved fast." He stammered at his thoughts. "And my achin' bones is tellin' me bad weather is comin' fast and hard."

"Jeb, I hope you ain't disappointed by my actions," Candice cried, "but, Kitty's my friend, and I've got to follow her and make sure she don't get into too much trouble." Candice offered Jeb a wary smile, grabbed a shawl from the buckboard, and tucked into the howling wind outside the stable.

"Why did I talk to her so mean?" Jeb said out loud to himself. He scratched his thinning white hair and his face lightened. "Come on

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boys,” he said to the horses. “I know you two will listen to me.” He led the horses forward and unhitched them. “I reckon you two won’t want to leave here after all the oats I’m gonna feed you,” he chuckled. He led the horses into separate stalls and fed them fresh hay and a bucket of oats each.

“Jeb, you’re probably gonna regret this,” he said out loud to himself, “but them women are young and don’t know how bad this town is.” He shook his head at his own words and nodded to himself. “I reckon I should offer them a watchful eye.” A mule brayed, and the deep worry lines on Jeb’s face lifted. “Why, you ain’t talked to me for two years, Mulley,” he remarked, staring at the mule. “I reckon this is my lucky night!”

He walked inside a small room, and with shaking hands, he combed his hair. “I ain’t sure what I’m doin’.” He looked up to the ceiling and cried, “I reckon I’ll be joinin’ you soon, Martha.” A wide smile filled his face, and he stopped short. “Okay, Martha,” he shouted to the heavens. “I’ll put another layer on.” Jeb straightened his back as best he could. “Should I bring a gun, Martha?” he asked the heavens. The mule brayed again. A smile he hadn’t worn in a long time filled his face. “I’m goin’ to help them innocent women,” he said to himself as he drew a long sigh.

Chapter 2

“Where did you come from?” a miner asked, mainly to himself, as Kitty entered the saloon. Lust grew in his eyes and he chugged a shot of cheap rye.

“Ma’am,” another younger miner shouted, “can I buy you a drink?”

“I saw her first,” the first miner growled. His gun lifted.

“I don’t know you, stranger,” the younger miner replied, “and my mind is still fuzzy from last night, but I’ll shoot if you talk that way at me again.”

“Hello.” Kitty stifled the fire in her eyes, lowered her head, and giggled. With feminine charm she said, “No, don’t you men shoot yourselves over me.”

The men gaped. It was barely sunup and they had the lady all to themselves.

“I ain’t tryin’ to bother any of you handsome men,” Kitty said with flirtation. “I’m here lookin’ for James.”

“My name is James,” the older miner shouted. He wiped sleep from his eyes and lowered his gun.

“Why are you tellin’ her that?” the younger miner questioned. “I’ve been callin’ you Smitty for quite a time.”

Kitty blushed as both men aimed their guns at each other. “I already told you,” she cooed. “I’m lookin’ for James. Have you or ain’t you seen him?”

The two miners shared a puzzled expression. Both of them shook their heads. A second later both of them straightened their backs.

“Ma’am, can I buy you breakfast?” the older man asked as a sneer filled his face.

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“Ma’am,” the younger miner said, “my name is Ely and I have gold dust. Can I buy you breakfast?”

Kitty caught the innocence in his voice and with a wink said, “Thank you, Ely. I’m famished.”

When Ely jumped to his feet his knees hit the table he’d been asleep on all night. He fell backwards and crashed into a chair. It spun and fell, as did his twisting body.

The older miner chuckled. “He’s a young one.” Lust still widening his eyes, he said with confidence, “My name is Russ, and I’ve got more gold dust to spend than that youngster.”

Kitty glanced around the saloon and sighed. “Is the barkeep here?”

“Don’t know,” the older miner said. “Why you askin’?”

“Don’t know,” Kitty replied back in a teasing voice.

“Are you or ain’t you a whore?” The older miner’s voice became testy. “I already told you I got more gold dust than him, so why are you teasin’ me so hard?”

Kitty watched the lust in his eyes fade. She studied his trigger hand. “Mister,” she said in a strong voice, “I already told you, I’m lookin’ for James.”

The older miner lifted his gun. “I don’t like the tone you’re speakin’ at me,” he said furiously.

“I ain’t after a fight!” Kitty insisted. “And you don’t seem to be listenin’ good at what I’m sayin’.”

The older miner fired his gun. Grinning, he said, “I reckon I can have a piece of you when you’re dead.”

But Kitty had anticipated his movements and got off a shot first.

“What the--?” The old miner’s grin faded and he fell to his knees. His trigger hand shook.

Kitty fired again. The bullet slammed into the miner’s forehead. He fell forward and stilled in a pool of blood.

The young miner on the ground, still in a spilled chair, dropped his gun and raised his arms. “Ma’am, I’ll still buy you breakfast if you let me.”

Kitty, without a worried thought, said, “This is a nice saloon. Do you know who owns it?”

The young miner said, "I said my name is Ely, Can I buy you breakfast?" He pulled himself up off the wooden floor and grinned. "I ain't ever seen a girl as purty and good with a gun as you is."

Kitty caught his sincere smile. "Yes, Ely, I reckon I'm hungry now."

Ely's back straightened and he cleared his throat. "Ma'am, which restaurant can I escort you to?"

Kitty's eyes filled with wonder. "Does this town have more than one?"

Ely's grin widened. "Ma'am, this town is called Bodie, and we have eleven proper places to eat and a few others to choose from."

Taken in by Ely's words, Kitty lowered her gun and threw him a short smile. "So you know your way around this big place?"

"Yes, ma'am. What kind of breakfast do you like?"

"I don't know what you're talkin' about," Kitty said as a look of confusion filled her face.

"I'm sorry, ma'am. I didn't mean to confuse you. This town is so big, you can eat any kind of food you like, any time of the day."

Kitty's eyes widened. "Do you mean I can eat whenever I'm hungry?"

Ely offered Kitty a short grin and said, "Yes, and it's barely dawn and I know of five places already open."

Kitty studied Ely for a short time. "Do you know Jeb?" she asked, looking for a reaction from Ely.

"Yes, ma'am." He works at the stable. His wife died in the last bad winter. Why are you askin'?"

"No reason," Kitty replied, still studying Ely.

"Ma'am, if you study me much longer I think I'll melt," Ely said in a soft, respectful voice.

Kitty threw Ely a short smile and said, "I'm lookin' forward to breakfast wherever you feel it's fit to go."

"Yes, ma'am." Ely offered Kitty his arm, she accepted it, and they both headed for the door, stepping over the old-timer's bloodied body.

"Are you always that good at shootin'?" Ely asked with a tone of uncertainty in his voice.

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“Yep,” Kitty replied. “I don’t get why men don’t listen to my words.”

Ely blushed. “I reckon it’s because you’re so purty.”

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