
NAUGHTY NORA

Star Lovers - Book Two

LYS BRITDOTTER



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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only.
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Chapter 1

The 2010 Malibu sped down Route 29 with reckless abandon. The road was bumpy and dark, an asphalt ribbon that tied together one little farm community with another. The night was clear, with the half moon rising, so the occupants of the Malibu were making good time. At the wheel was Jessie Laurance, the owner, who was speeding as if there was no tomorrow, and next to her, in the front passenger seat, slumped Nora Dawson. Nora was gravely injured, and the thought crossed her mind that perhaps there was no tomorrow, at least for her.

Nora Dawson Glower was used to fear and suffering, but tonight was a whole new ball game.

Nora was very near to total collapse, her injured body held up by her seat belt. Each bump coursed through Nora's broken body with excruciating pain. She gritted her teeth and tried not to moan, but each swerve, each pothole, sent shudders of agony through her body

Every gasping attempt to take a deep breath felt as if someone was stabbing her with a butcher knife. Now, halfway to the hospital, she gave up and resorted to little gasps, but

even those feeble attempts to take in oxygen made her eyes fill with tears. Still, considering the injuries she had just suffered at the hands of her brute of an ex-husband, she was barely making a sound.

Her best friend, Jessie, sensed her desperation and took one hand off the wheel and patted Nora's hand. Jessie was driving like a maniac, pushing her old Malibu to the limit to reach the hospital in Eastwood.

"Don't worry. I'll have you at the hospital in no time."

To make matters worse, Nora's mental pain was even greater than the physical; she was overcome with guilt that her problems had placed her good friends in harm's way. Jessie, in the driver's seat, was trying to save her life, and Gilly and Rose, in the back seat, were calling out encouragement.

It had always been this quartet since kindergarten, the four of them, Jessie, Nora, Gilly and Rose, watching out after each other. Now, all these years later, they were being pursued by Nora's maniac ex-husband, Dale Glower, and his equally crazy best friend, Jimmy Brady.

To make Nora's guilt even greater, in her lap rested her injured dog. Muffin was half conscious, another incidental victim of Dale Glower's uncontrolled rage. Every few minutes the poor little mutt spasmed with little shudders and Nora petted his ear with one finger. The rest of her hand was smashed where Dale had used her as a stomping board.

Her ex-husband had vowed to kill her, and tonight, he almost succeeded. In fact, perhaps it was too soon to tell. She was pretty sure several ribs were broken from his kicks, and she was seeing double, which was a sign of a concussion. When she inhaled, she could taste blood; her lower lip was definitely split.

"Hang in there, Nora!" Gilly kept saying over and over.

Of the four of them, Gilly was the fighter. Jessie was the "thinker" and Rose, quiet Rose, was the gentle healer, soothing

over angry feelings and scraped knees when they were kids. No wonder she became a nurse.

And Nora? She had always been the "mother figure," the nurturer. Just like her Swedish-born mom, Berga Stiven Dawson, quiet, loving, forgiving. But those had brought her mother to an early death. Was it going to be the same for her?

"I'm looking over my shoulder and I see headlights, Jessie," Gilly called out. "Put the pedal to the metal!"

"I already am," Jessie said with gritted teeth. "I'm driving at the Malibu's limit."

"Why do car chases seem so exciting in a movie, but are so scary in real life?" Rose wondered out loud.

Of all of them, Rose sounded the calmest, which was a surprise since she was so timid. Perhaps they had miscalculated. After all, Rose was an emergency room nurse. She dealt with trauma every day. It was Rose who ordered Jessie to drive to the neighboring town because the hospital in Eastwood was better than the one in Ridge Valley, their own little farm town smack in the middle of the state of Ohio.

"Everything seems better in a movie." Gilly laughed. "Don't worry, Rose. We'll keep you safe."

"I don't need to be kept safe, Gilly! I'm a grown woman. How is Muffin doing?"

Nora heard the exasperation in Rose's voice but wasn't able to answer. She saw Jessie take her eyes off the road again and shoot a glance at the pile of fur in Nora's lap and shook her head.

"How is the Muffin doing?" Gilly echoed Rose.

Nora sucked in her breath. She loved Muffin, her rescue stray, and look at the poor thing now!

"That bastard kicked him across the room," she whispered. "I think he's got internal injuries."

"Don't try to talk, Nora," Rose ordered from the back seat.

"Save your breath. You have to keep your oxygen level up. How long until we get her to the hospital, Jessie?"

"About fifteen minutes on the farm road. If I take the short cut, it could easily be ten."

Nora heard the worry in their voices and felt a tear slip out of her battered eye. How could she have been so stupid, so careless as to let Dale get to her? Their divorce had been finalized six months ago!

And it had been a tough day for other reasons. Her father, who had abandoned her and her mother years ago, had left a note on her front door. He wanted a loan, of course. The minute she had seen his handwriting, the food in her stomach had done a flip-flop and she had spent the next fifteen minutes in the bathroom, heaving up all the bad memories she had suppressed of Angus Dawson.

It had taken her a while to get a grip. She wasn't a little girl anymore; she was a woman! Tonight, with her closest friends, she would figure out how to handle the unwelcomed reappearance. Finally, full of pep talk, she had finally started to relax. That was the big mistake. Never lower your guard. Didn't her whole life teach her that?

She had been happily singing a popular tune she had memorized, when Dale smashed through the front door and caught her at home, getting ready to go out for pizza with her best buds, and being Dale, he immediately thought she had a hot date. Her words of protest, "I'm only meeting the girls," fell on deaf ears. He wanted a fight, and he was a big man, six three and almost three hundred pounds. The last hundred he had gained in the three years of their marriage.

"All dolled up, Nora." He had circled her unsteadily, his bleary red eyes taking in every detail, his voice accusing. He flexed his fists like a boxer preparing a punch, and Nora saw the new tattoo on his bulging left bicep. It was a skeletal face

with blood dripping from the mouth. "What's the matter? You don't like my new art?"

Nora shrugged. What this moron did with his rapidly decaying body wasn't her problem anymore. But Dale kept circling and she was getting scared.

"Silver-blond hair, straight as silk, a little chubby, but in all the right places. That black mini skirt and red blouse look pretty sexy. Whoa! Black high heels and no stockings!" He lumbered around, closing the distance between them.

"It's August and eighty-five degrees outside," Nora snapped with unexpected irritation.

He ignored her valid argument. "Hoping you're going to pick up some bad boy and bring him home?"

"Get out of here, Dale! We are divorced. You don't live here anymore." She had pointed to the door with a bravado she didn't feel.

His reaction was instantaneous. He crossed the distance to her with his hand right raised and smacked her across the face. Muffin began to bark and nip at his boots. The little stray rescue dog was one-part poodle, one-part spaniel, rest unknown. Dale bellowed at the dog, swearing to kill him.

Nora had fought for control and tried to keep calm. Frantically, she tried to think of all the tips the social worker had given her to deal with Dale. *Well, guess what, Miss Social Worker, the tips aren't working*, she'd thought with a nervous laugh.

One more try! Miss Social Worker said to be assertive. "Get out now, or I will call the police."

Dale's response was a punch to the stomach that made her sick. At five foot five, she was no match for Dale.

She desperately gasped for air.

His fist connected with her chin so quickly, she was stunned and fell back onto the couch.

"Get me a beer!" he shouted, looming over her and prodding

her with his boot. Then he had struck out and kicked Muffin. The little dog flew through the air and landed in a heap in the living room before skidding across the kitchen floor and under the table.

Nora had slipped off the couch and crawled to the kitchen on her knees and searched for her cell. She was relieved to find her phone in her skirt pocket. She would use the time to text her waiting friends. She wanted her last words to be with the women who truly loved her. She had just enough time to send out a text.

If she hadn't, she would be a dead woman right now.

Dale had followed her into the kitchen, cursing and swearing, saw the phone, and tried to drag Nora out from under the table. That was when he had stomped on her hand. Her fingers had broken in a sickening crunch, but her resistance had given her friends who were waiting at the pizza parlor right around the corner from Nora's bungalow, just enough time to reach her. They had rushed in with fire in their eyes. Jessie hit Dale in the face with a shovel Nora had left on the front porch, then threw pepper into his eyes. Once he was on the floor, Gilly gave him a well-placed kick to the crotch that sent him rolling and screaming. Meanwhile, Rose, who was a nurse, had found a towel and gone to work on her.

"She needs to go to a hospital pronto!" Nora heard Rose say through a cloud of pain.

"Muffin?" Nora had to struggle to ask.

Gilly and Rose had half-carried, half-dragged her outside and into the waiting car. Jessie followed with Muffin in her arms. They pushed Nora into the passenger seat next to Jessie, who jumped behind the wheel, and Gilly and Rose scrambled into the back seat. Jessie began to back out.

"Shit. I don't believe it!" Jessie sounded so shocked that Nora had forced her swollen eyes open.

To her horror, Dale was outside and staggering toward the rust bucket he called a pickup truck.

Equally dumbfounded, Gilly muttered a curse, "He's coming after us!"

Rose shook her head. "He can't drive in that condition."

"Want to bet!" Jessie cried out, but she was defiant. "I can out race him."

Even as she spoke, Dale was clutching his balls and shaking his fist at them. Nora shuddered. He was truly in a terrible rage. If there was one thing she had learned in her years of marriage, it was that Dale, when in a rage, was a stupid beast.

"Go, girl!" Gilly cried out.

"I'm on my way!" Jessie had called out.

"To Eastwood," Rose said emphatically.

"Eastwood?" Jessie was clearly shocked. "Eastwood is ten miles away?"

"Nine to be exact, but they have an MRI. Our town hospital, Ridge Valley, doesn't. And Nora needs an MRI!" Usually, Rose was so meek, but now she sounded like a no-nonsense nurse.

Jessie hadn't argued. "Eastwood it is."

Unfortunately, the road to Eastwood went past Sinful Sam's, the bar where Dale and Jessie's ex-boyfriend worked as bouncers. Even through her own pain, Nora could hear Jessie groan. Jimmy Brady, Jessie's ex-boyfriend, was outside, talking on his phone.

"There stands Jimmy Brady. All set to join his pal Dale." Jessie confirmed this with a scornful snap.

Jimmy saw and recognized Jessie's car and shook his fist at them.

"Of all the men we could have chosen, Nora, we had to choose those two bastards."

Jimmy was another Dale, but smarter.

Nora couldn't answer. She was getting sick to her stomach and her head was pounding. She felt Rose reach over and

place a cool hand on her throat. Her friend was taking her pulse.

This wasn't lost on Jessie. "How is she doing?"

"Just drive!" Rose said quietly.

Jessie continued analyzing the situation. "Best bet, Jimmy's waiting for Dale to pick him up."

"But we have a head start." This was from Gilly in the back seat.

Always defiant, always ready for a fight, Gilly carried a lot of anger in her slim, athletic body.

"Do you really think they'll come after us?" Rose asked.

"Hyenas hunt in packs," Jessie snorted. "Still, we should sing 'when I wish upon a star' for luck to get us to a safe spot."

Jessie began to sing, joined by Rose and Gilly. Gilly had started the tradition one night in seventh grade when they ran down the ravine behind her house to escape from a bunch of older boys who were following them too closely.

Nora tried to speak but coughed up some blood instead. This ride was bringing back nightmares from her childhood. How many times had she and her mother driven frantically to get away from her father? Too many. She had sworn her life would be different, and yet here she was, fleeing for her life from a violent man.

How did that happen? How could she not have seen the signs? But asking these questions was pointless now. What was important was the safety of her three best friends. She couldn't let her friends pay for her mistakes. She tried to push herself up in her seat, but her ribs were killing her. She groaned.

"Don't try to speak," Rose admonished gently, patting her shoulder from the back seat.

"I have to!" Nora whispered hoarsely. "This is my fault. I want you to let me out and save yourselves. Please! You don't know what he is capable of doing."

Naughty Nora

Actually, they had a pretty good idea, but there was no way they were going to do what she asked.

"No way that's going to happen, our naughty little Nora," Gilly teased, trying to distract her. "Naughty Nora ate the cookies!"

Nora tried to smile, but it hurt too much. Even through the pain, she could see her mother smiling when she caught Nora at the cookie jar. That was how the name 'Naughty Nora' came about.

So long ago. Boy, did she miss her mom! If her mother were watching from Heaven, she would be crying her heart out.

"Is there a full moon tonight?" Rose asked her friends.

Jessie said no. The full moon was actually two weeks ago.

"It's awfully bright out, isn't it?" Gilly confirmed Rose's question.

Before Jessie could reply, she swerved to avoid a pothole and it shook Nora out of her memories.

"Who was that?" Rose asked from the back seat. "I think I saw him earlier in the emergency room."

"*What* was it? That's a better question," asked Gilly. "I never saw anyone dressed like that here in Ohio! But there was something familiar about him. I think I might have seen him at the gym."

"He was all in white and his hair matched the color of his clothes!" Jessie couldn't keep the surprise out of her voice. "Anyway, I was going to take the main road, but I think I'll take the road through Creepy Woods instead."

Nora was in too much pain to care. And under her fingers, Muffin's breathing was becoming more ragged and his heart slower. Her poor little dog! Suddenly, she heard a shot ring out and then another.

"Jimmy's shooting at us!" Gilly cried out in warning. "Pedal to the metal, Jessie girl. He's gaining on us."

Rose cursed.

If Rose cursed, then it must be bad, Nora thought with a flicker of humor.

Jessie swore, "Damn! I didn't count on how dark these woods are!"

The rear window exploded. A bullet came through the back and right through her front windshield. When another shot hit the left rear tire of the Malibu, Jessie lost control. Nora felt the car lurch forward. It flew into a ditch and struck a small tree. Nora's injuries made her scream in pain. She could feel the wheels spinning beneath them, and it was clear they were stuck.

It only took a moment for Dale and Jimmy to slam in behind them. The headlights from the truck gave everything a lurid color. Nora could see the dashboard, and the little pile of fur in her lap groaned. The dog seemed to sense the danger.

"Lock the doors," Jessie cried out. But that did little good.

Armed with crowbars, flashlights and a gun, Dale beat on the metal doors. The man was like a grizzly bear having cornered his prey. Dale was powerful and nothing stopped him. He punched out Nora's window with the crowbar, poked his head in, and his hands went around her neck. He grabbed Nora's hair and began to shake her head back and forth. "Think you could get away from me? Never!"

Nora tried to think, but she was too injured and there was so much screaming and confusion. She was aware that Gilly and Rose were pleading for Dale and Jimmy to stop, and Jessie seemed to have fallen out of the driver's side door. Everything was lit up by a strange, luminescent light. Jessie was on her knees in front of Jimmy Brady. As for her, Dale was pulling at her with all his might.

"I'm dragging you right out this window, you bitch," he snarled.

Nora held tight to Muffin, just sensing that the dog didn't

want to leave her side. She fought to stay in the car, but Dale was almost killing her. He had dropped her hair and now reached for her neck. She would be dead soon, she thought. Her neck would snap.

A thought broke through her pain. Maybe if she died, she would see her mother again? And maybe she was already dead.

That strange light was getting brighter.

And suddenly, Dale's grip disappeared, along with his snarling face. She thought she heard him scream. A weird face was peering at her through the broken glass. Something or someone was at the end of the tunnel. Isn't a tunnel what people described in near death experiences? They saw a light at the end of the tunnel. An angel came to greet them.

But do angels have three eyes and... this one did, two sharply blue eyes and one red one in the middle of a large face. The strangling force around her neck had disappeared and she could inhale. The door flew open and she was enveloped in the light.

Muffin came alive for a moment and yelped. Then he sagged in her arms again. Why was she spinning? No. Not spinning. Rushing upward. Gravity didn't seem to work when you were dead, she decided.

Her eyes were now too bruised to open. She could only sag, like Muffin, into the safety of the light. It seemed to support her and lift her at the same time.

She heard a voice, male, melodious, telling her she was going to be fine, whispering endearments of encouragement. It asked her name.

"Naughty Nora," she whispered then realized that wasn't right. She tried to correct it, but the low voice laughed.

"No. That is perfect. I love it. Naughty Nora. Exactly what I needed to find. "

Nora gasped as a warm hand moved between her legs to reposition her body.

"Very nice. I like the way you respond to my touch."

Nora was too far gone with injuries to say anything else. Whoever was holding her chuckled softly and pulled her close. "Naughty Nora," the voice hummed.

A warm hand slid down her belly and slipped proprietarily between her legs.

Even half unconscious, Nora could not suppress a sigh of pleasure at the touch.

"Welcome to my world."