

TAKEN BY TUESDAY by Catherine Bybee

Excerpt

A throaty laugh made him pause.

He knew that laugh.

The smile on his face suddenly felt more genuine. His gaze slid across the room when she laughed again. Her back was to him, but it was her...Utah. She held her cue stick and pointed at a corner pocket. "Watch 'em and weep."

She sunk the eight ball like it was her bitch and the guys around the table groaned. A short-haired blonde lifted her hand and made a grabby motion with her fingers. "Pay up!"

Utah laughed, laid her cue on the table, and grabbed the bottle of beer at her side. All the while Rick just watched the interplay. She wore tight jeans, a tucked in tank that hugged her waist in a mouth-watering way ...over the ensemble was a jean jacket that he could easily picture draped over the handlebars of his motorcycle.

"I think we just got hustled," one of the young college kids said as he shoved his hands in his wallet to pay his debt.

"I tried to warn you."

Judy's friend shoved the bills into her pocket faster than the waitress had. "Anyone else? Twenty buck minimum with a round of drinks."

This might be fun.

Rick took a step forward and lifted his voice above the crowd. "A hundred bucks."

Utah froze, but didn't turn around. He wondered if she recognized his voice. Had she thought about him in the last year? With the exception of her brother's divorce party, he hadn't seen her...not outside of a wet dream or two.

The blonde swiveled her head like a snake to prey and her eyes did that sweeping thing that happened to him once in a while. Rick knew he wasn't hard on the eyes, knew he filled out his shirt like a Marine should. His thick shoulders and neck screamed military or linebacker. He did play a little football in high school.

"Who the hell are you?" the blonde mumbled.

Rick chuckled.

Judy slowly turned and had to tilt her head back to look at him. "Green Eyes."

"Hey, Utah."

"You know this guy?" The blonde shoved next to Judy and nudged her arm.

God, she was even more adorable than he remembered. He didn't let her eyes go, just matched her stare. A blush rose to her cheeks and a few freckles peeked through. Her snarky remark about his

presence was a heartbeat away. He'd lay another hundred bucks on the table as a bet that the next words out of her mouth would shock everyone within earshot.

"Did the steroid train stop in town when I wasn't looking?"

The blonde started to laugh.

Rick stepped even closer so barely an inch separated them. The smile never left his face. "I hear steroids shrink dicks."

As if she couldn't help herself, Judy glanced down and it was Rick's turn to laugh. He brushed the edge of her body with his and removed the cue from the table. "What do ya say, Utah? I'll even let you break. Ladies first and all that."

Rick knew they were drawing a crowd, but the interplay between them matched the sparks that hovered over them like a damn rainbow, and he was powerless to care what anyone thought.

"A hundred bucks is steep, Judy."

"S'okay, Meg...Rick's a big talker. Besides, he doesn't know what I'm capable of."

Rick shook his head and clicked his tongue. "Now, now...don't want to show all your cards."

"She's really good, dude," the guy she'd relieved of twenty bucks said from across the table.

Rick lowered his voice. "Will you go easy on me, Babe?"

Judy regained some of her lost composure and pushed away from his personal space. "Not on your life. And I'm not your *babe*!"

We'll see about that. He couldn't stop smiling.