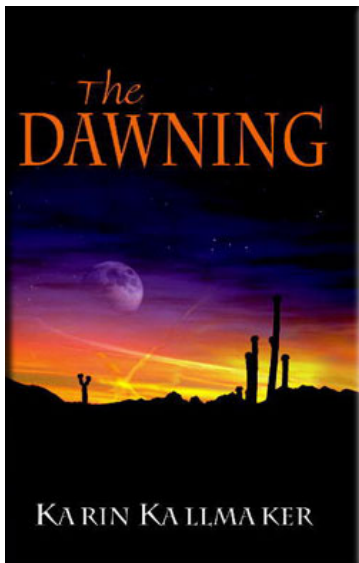


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## Excerpt from THE DAWNING



THE DAWNING IS A  
SCIENCE-FICTION  
LESBIAN ROMANCE BY  
KARIN KALLMAKER.

PRINT AND EXCLUSIVE  
EBOOK FROM:



KARIN'S BOOKS AT BELLA:  
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## FROM CHAPTER ONE

I didn't realize I had lost my balance until the rock ledge slammed the breath out of me. The wind had pushed me back from the edge and from what would have certainly been a fatal accident. I should have let myself go. It would be fitting, plunging to my own death while reliving the deaths of the seven people I had helped kill. My life really would have flashed before my eyes.

But death wouldn't change anything--I will be what I am even after I cease to be. Some parts of Sartre do stick with me.

Hosteen Sam said that I thought too much. He'd said the same of my grandmother, who had run a Christian school on the reservation next to the church

where my grandfather had preached.

Little Red, he'd said, life is about the crack of light between two abysses.

Little Red, he'd said, hiding in the dark does not mean there is no light.

Little Red, he'd said, lighten up.

He'd delivered these wise words with a bit of Blessing Way song and a dash of corn meal on my nose. It wasn't until much later that I'd realized the old reprobate had quoted Nabokov at me. Wise is wise, he would have explained. What matters if the wisdom comes from off the reservation? It was impossible to argue with Hosteen Sam. All I knew was that I had squandered my little bit of light.

I clung to the ledge until the first rain stung my cheeks. The vertigo dissipated and I pulled my hood back over my uncombed hair. The storm waters were rising. No one would be able to reach my hogan for several days—not that I cared. I had visitors once every blue moon and that was too often.

The murky, copper-color water would rise enough to touch the drooping branches of cottonwood trees waiting for their first blossoms. The rivulets would grow to fast-running streams which would pour down the swirling canyon walls, carrying gravel and sand into Chinle Wash which would, in turn, cover the canyon floor. I watched the rising flood slowly crest over a rock I judged to be between two and three feet high. The pounding of the rain grew even more rapid, like war

drums signaling soldiers that now was the time to strike.

From the corner of my perch, I saw a flash of silver. As I turned my head sharply, a roar distinct from the flood and rain rumbled through the canyon. It sounded like a rock fall or an earthquake.

As suddenly as the noise began it stopped. I shook my head, looked again. Standing in the general area where I had thought I'd seen the flash of light was a woman in bright blue all-weather gear. She wobbled on the boulder, then went backwards into icy, three-foot floodwaters.

I began a hasty slither down the canyon wall. If the woman was swept around the next bend, she wouldn't be prepared for what was now a waterfall. The pressure would pummel her into a series of rocks. If she was pulled toward my side of the wash, there was higher ground where we could both scramble to safety.

Flickers of lightning made me stop halfway down. I shook the water out of my eyes and looked over my shoulder. The woman was clinging to some stubborn scrub. Thunder rumbled from up canyon and the pounding of the rain became a steady roar. The wash level rose another few inches in a matter of moments. If the downpour didn't let up, it could easily be four feet deep and running fast by the time I waded into it.

Almost at the bottom, I jumped the rest of the way. Bad decision. My boots slipped in the moving gravel and water and I fell heavily. I struggled to breathe in while I shook away the stars dancing in front

of my eyes. When I could see again, there was no sign of the woman. The scrub she had been clinging to was snapped off.

I knew the wash and that was my only advantage. I sucked in my breath as I plunged into the icy water. It was still shallow enough to wade, but I moved much faster if I let the water carry me instead of trying to keep on my feet. My boots protected me from the boulders and I had enough leverage to keep myself to the less treacherous side of the wash. I was covering ground quickly but already the freezing water was making me numb.

There was no sign of the woman. I started to panic--I couldn't let her drown. I could not bear to watch another person die. Not again. I braced myself for rounding the sharp turn and the inevitable cascade on the other side.

The dry pour-off I could usually step down was now a five-foot waterfall. I was moving so fast I catapulted free of the water. The woman had already made it to the safe side of the wash. She turned at my cry and to my horror, my boots caught her in the stomach. In a tangle of arms and legs, we both plunged into the water again. Fabric brushed past my fingertips and I seized it desperately, then I slammed into a boulder. Something in my left leg snapped.

I was no longer the rescuer. The woman was steadfastly pulling me to the shallow edge of the wash. I swallowed one mouthful of the muddy water, then

another went into my aching lungs. The woman yanked me onto the higher ground, then collapsed next to me.

I had just enough strength to lift my face out of a puddle. I spit out a disgusting mouthful of sand and mud, then hacked up what I had inhaled. Just when the spasms in my lungs eased, I vomited up the water I had swallowed. With every movement bones in my left leg grated and the fiery shocks of pain made me feel faint.

After a minute, the woman rolled me over. All I saw through a haze of pain was a smile, as if the experience had been one grand lark.

"You fucking moron," I spluttered. I tried to sit up but my leg shrieked agony. We had both been on the way to meet our ancestors, and the woman was still smiling. I wanted to smack her, but I just lay there, breathing hard, while rain pelted into my eyes.

"You are hurt." The woman bent to examine my leg.

"No shit, Sherlock! Goddamn tourists—you have no right to be here!" I could barely speak loud enough to be heard over the drumming rain.

"I can help." Her voice was hoarse, as if she was recovering from a bad cold.

"What? Are you going to carry me into Chinle? It's only twelve miles, most of which is now under fucking water."

"Be calm." The touch of the woman's hand on my forehead was like a wave of Valium. For several minutes

I could not move and my injured leg felt hot, almost burning. Abruptly the sensation ended and I shuddered as the cold rain and water shocked me back to awareness. What the hell had just happened?

"Stand."

I found myself on my feet. My leg wasn't broken after all. I hesitantly put my weight on it, then couldn't help but give the woman a wide-eyed stare. Even the deep bruising I'd incurred when I'd first fallen into the water was gone. I wanted to ask what had happened but the downpour made conversation difficult. There was time for questions later, after I managed to get some warmth back into my body.

"The house is this way." I scabbled out of the wash, then led the way. A quarter-mile of slogging brought us to the hogan door. I kicked off my boots just inside the door and heard my companion do the same.

We were covered with mud and sand. Walking had shaken off the cold, but I wanted nothing more than to get clean and warm. I stoked the stove and kicked on the propane-powered room heater. I would never be more grateful for the little water heater that brought the bath temperature up to tepid.

"You first," I snapped. The woman had been watching calmly from just inside the door. "Never let it be said I'm a bad hostess."

The woman said nothing, but stepped behind the curtain to shed her clothes. I averted my eyes and reached in for the sodden clothing, then rinsed the full-

length suit as best I could. As I hung it on the line behind the stove, I could tell the waterproof pockets were full of something. I hoped it was the means to get this idiotic tourist out of my life as soon as possible.

When I heard the tub water draining, I left the comfort of huddling next to the room heater. I passed a towel around the curtain and put the coffeepot on to boil. I stripped out of my own filthy clothes and tossed them into the sink for rinsing, then wrapped myself in my robe. When the woman stepped around the curtain wrapped in the towel, I gestured at the dresser. A quick glance told me that free of mud, she was thin, white and middle-aged. More than that I didn't care to know.

"There are some clothes in there. Help yourself." The gritty, lukewarm bath water was as good as a spa. I felt warmth return to my toes. Even my ears lost the chill. I scrubbed my hair with the bar of soap and went under to rinse. It had been a while since I'd bathed, anyway.

As I toweled off my now uninjured leg, I examined it for any sign of the damage I knew I had felt. It was unmarked in any way. Frowning, I ran my hand over it. Something wasn't right. Then I realized that the scar from knee surgery in high school was gone. My fingers trembled with amazement as I brushed the smooth skin.

I sat back in the water. I wished I had one of Hosteen Sam's charms against, well against I didn't know what. Just who had I brought into my one place of refuge? I couldn't doubt the evidence of my eyes and

neither could I imagine any reasonable explanation.

I was not going to consider unreasonable explanations either. This dark-haired white woman was not some sort of magic healer. I was not in the presence of an angel. I would sooner believe I had imagined the knee surgery and the scar than consider impossible mystic alternatives.

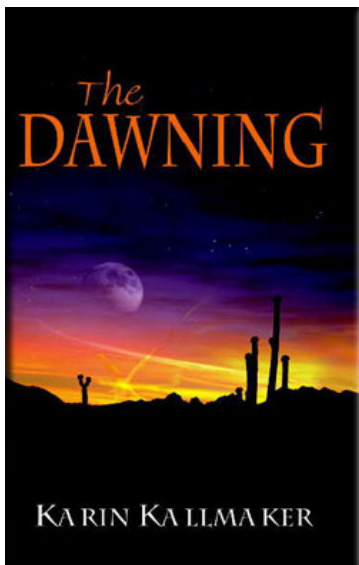
I scrubbed myself dry while my thoughts turned in circles. I had been denied answers to so many questions, but exactly how the woman had done what she had done was going to get answered.

I wrapped my robe tightly, then stepped out to confront her. She was wearing my Princeton sweats with her hair wrapped in the towel and she had one of my research books in her hand. "I have to know what you did to me."

There was a brilliant flash of light, then a roar like the sound of an avalanche or an earthquake.

:No, you don't.:

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