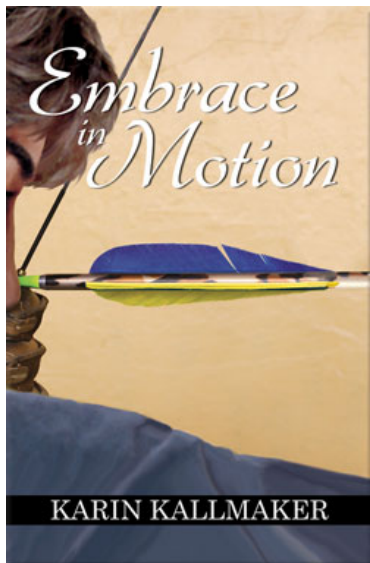


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## Excerpt from EMBRACE IN MOTION



EMBRACE IN MOTION IS A CONTEMPORARY LESBIAN ROMANCE BY KARIN KALLMAKER.

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## FROM CHAPTER FIVE

"What on earth is that?" Melissa pointed at the tall, thin, leather pouch Sarah had pulled from the back of the bedroom closet.

"My longbow," Sarah said, feeling shy. She was uneasily aware that she hadn't ever talked to Melissa about what archery had meant to her, and what she'd achieved when she'd been actively shooting. She put her reluctance down to not wanting to parade her accomplishments in front of someone so desperately seeking her own glories. She didn't want any element of competitiveness in their relationship. "I'll show you."

She unzipped the pouch and drew out the five-foot, seven-inch bow, exactly one inch shorter than she was. She quickly strung it and realized that it wasn't as

easy as it had been five years ago. Not enough practice. And too much sitting in an office. She nocked a phantom arrow onto the taut string and drew the string back. Her fingers screamed at the lack of tabs to protect them from almost fifty pounds of draw weight, but she drew fully.

"Sight." She drew down on an orange in her favorite Cezanne print. "Focus." Her fingers released the string gratefully and the thrum filled her ears like a love song. "Fly." With an arrow at this range, the orange would have become a neat hole with an arrow sunk to its fletchings. This bow was capable of almost twice the distance of a standard competition bow.

"You don't do those war games in the woods, do you?"

Sarah flushed. "Of course not. It's not something to play with. This bow can be deadly from four hundred feet. At close range it will do more damage than a rifle."

"Eewww." Melissa's delicate nose wrinkled. "It's too violent for me."

Violent? Sarah had never found the magic of the bow in her hands violent. Of course her forebears had gone to war with bows and had killed other men. Grannie MacNeil had hunted with her bow in the Cascades. Sarah's favorite Christmas dinner memory was replete with wild goose. Her father had been proud of his mother's prowess at both hunting and cooking, but Sarah remembered that her own mother had been fastidiously repelled.

When Sarah had first shown interest in archery, her mother had said it wasn't ladylike. By then her parents were divorced and her father sent Sarah off to Grannie MacNeil's every summer where she'd learned to pickle cucumbers, can peaches, pluck chickens and draw a bow. Grannie said she'd teach Sarah to hunt but made it plain that if she shot anything she'd have to do the rendering and cleaning herself. Her city-bred twelve-year-old stomach hadn't been up to the idea, so her practice had always been target shooting. She'd been proud of the calluses on her fingertips, but her mother had been appalled come the fall.

Those calluses had almost gone away.

"Are you going to stand there all day?"

Sarah turned to Melissa, wanting to explain about Grannie MacNeil and the years she'd spent perfecting her stance, learning to sense the wind against her face, handling pressure and ignoring judges and crowds. But Melissa was already pulling open another box.

"Do you think I should clean this out a little before I pack it," she said, holding up a thick sheaf of papers. "Come look. These are my first photos."

Sarah slipped Grannie MacNeil's bow back into its pouch and set it carefully next to the boxes containing her past.

"I wish the apartment had more storage," Melissa said.

"There's space," Sarah said. "We'll just have to be judicious about what we keep in the apartment, and put

the rest in storage." Accepting the job at MagicWorks had left her with the weekend to find a place for them to live. The rent had been far more than she had expected—almost as much as she'd have paid for one of the hillside apartments near Pike's Market with a heart-stopping view of the Sound. She had lucked out finding something that was near the Castro district--Melissa's only stipulation. It had two bedrooms and a large, airy living room looking down on the Castro Theater several blocks down the hill.

Beyond the neon theater sign the Financial District rose into view, with black, brown, gray and white skyscrapers reaching for a sky that had been powder blue when she'd last seen it. The view had been a necessity for her own sanity—she couldn't go from Mt. Snoqualmie to someone else's wall. She expected that eventually she'd sell the house and buy something in the Bay Area, but she wanted to get to know the area before making a decision that big.

In the meantime, Debra, who reminded Sarah daily that she really wasn't speaking to her, said she wanted to rent Sarah's house. She had phrased it more like, "I'd love to live there until you come to your senses." Debra had an aversion to owning things and she liked to move around for the excitement of discovering new places to eat and shop and meet women. Sarah had pointed out that Debra was aiding and abetting what she herself called "foolishness beyond belief" and had received only a hurt sniff in response.

"Well, one thing's for sure. We can store our

winter boots," Melissa said. "I was dreading getting mine out. It never rains in California."

"That's Southern California," Sarah said. "I asked a couple of people at work who lived in San Francisco. We can expect fog and cold rain for weeks on end. Apparently, however, just as we reach the edge of despair, the sun will come out and it'll be seventy degrees for a couple of days, then winter again."

"Sounds heavenly," Melissa said. "I hadn't realized how much I was dreading winter. I spent last winter in Minnesota and let me tell you, never again. Never again. I would walk around pinched and blue with scarves and vests and sweaters three inches thick while the natives would just be buttoning their top button."

Sarah laughed. "I've heard you have to live there a few years for the antifreeze supplements to work."

Melissa blinked at her, then smiled. "I can never tell when you're teasing me."

"That's not what you said last night."

Melissa giggled. "Are you going to stand there all day, or are you going to get something packed? I mean, if you're not going to be useful, the least you could do is come over here and kiss me."

Sarah shook her head. "The last kiss cost us most of the morning. We've got to be done by next Wednesday and you know it, missy."

"I can't believe that by next Sunday we'll be in San Francisco. I've always wanted to live there." Melissa looked up with what seemed like stars in her eyes.

Sarah looked across the valley at the mist-wreathed mountain. "I can't believe it either," Sarah said, not meaning to sound so wistful.

Melissa emptied her lap of photographs and joined Sarah at the window. "I know you'll be homesick, but I'll try to make it up to you." She feathered a kiss across Sarah's shoulder.

A flicker of pleasure warmed the suddenly cold pit of Sarah's stomach. Panic attacks, that's what they were, but they went away when she reminded herself of what she'd gained. She slipped her arm around Melissa and let the heat of her body chase away the rest of the fear.

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"You really didn't have to come in today," Leslie heard Richard say.

A woman's low-toned voice answered him. "The apartment was such a mess that I just couldn't take it. And all my jeans were dirty, so here I am in the usual fright suit."

"It'll scare the programmers," Richard said.

My, my, Leslie thought, but he did sound friendly. If Sarah MacNeil was half as attractive as her voice, Leslie might begin to understand why he'd hired her without looking at another résumé. Meow, she thought. Richard's not that way.

She quickly yanked open her desk drawer and

pulled out a small mirror. Her hair was presentable, but she wished she'd worn something other than an old T-shirt and black jeans. She'd forgotten that Sarah was starting today. And from the tone of Richard's voice, he'd clearly never discussed that Sarah officially worked for her. Nice way to start off, Leslie thought, feeling inferior and petty. Well, maybe it wouldn't be a big deal.

She shoved the mirror back in the drawer as Richard's voice drew closer. Sarah was laughing at something he'd said--for the third time in as many minutes. At least it was a pleasant-sounding laugh, not a donkey's bray or nerve-wracking titter.

"You there, Les? Ah, yes you are." Richard stepped back out of the doorway and gestured for his companion to proceed him. Lordy, lordy, he was being the perfect gentleman. "Sarah MacNeil, meet Leslie Stuart.

Whatever might have been her next thought was completely lost. She stared at Sarah MacNeil longer than she knew was polite, then somehow managed to tear her gaze away. Now she knew for sure that Richard's gonads had played a part in his decision. She didn't know patent attorneys could look like cover girls--tall, slender, with a coil of light brown hair pulled into a casual pony tail. Melody had said the woman was some sort of athlete, but she was far from the muscle-bound troll Leslie had anticipated.

She simply had not expected someone so eye-

catching. Get a grip, she shrieked at herself, completely unnerved. Richard was introducing Sarah and all Leslie could think about was blue eyes just turning to violet. If this was how she reacted, there were going to be testosterone problems in the programmer's cave.

"A pleasure," Leslie said, holding Sarah's firm, dry hand for a moment longer than necessary. She shot a glance at Richard. "Richard's told me a lot about you."

"I'm very glad to be here," Sarah said. "I hope you'll forgive the suit." She gestured down at the crisp navy blue linen. "All my casual stuff is dirty and we just didn't have the energy to do laundry yesterday. The apartment is a mess."

We? Leslie hoped Richard had heard that as well.

"I told Sarah she could have waited a day—"

"No, I needed to come in and get settled. It'll take far less time here than at home. My partner had some business appointments and I couldn't have faced any more unpacking by myself."

Leslie made herself think about dead kittens to keep from smiling. Richard's gonads had hired another lesbian—it was hilarious. She peeked at him. Well, if he'd understood the use of "my partner," the disappointment didn't show on his face.

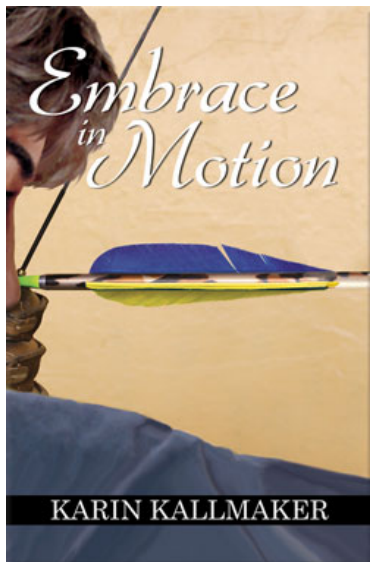
"Well, when you're settled let me know, and we'll put our heads together," Leslie said. "Melody will show you more than you ever wanted to know about your phone and I think your computer is hooked up. If you have any problems with it we've got an entire room full

of experts."

Sarah smiled. From the faint lines at the corners of her pale peach mouth, it was apparently something she did easily and often. "I'll see what I can do before unleashing the experts."

Leslie watched Richard escort her out of her office. He will still on his very best behavior and Leslie decided he'd missed the clues. Well, this would be interesting. And it served him right.

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