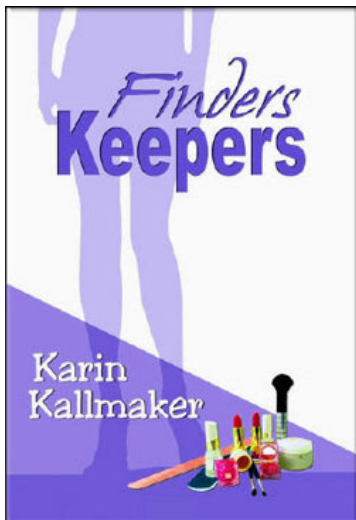


---

## Excerpt from FINDERS KEEPERS



*FINDERS KEEPERS* IS A  
CONTEMPORARY  
LESBIAN ROMANCE BY  
KARIN KALLMAKER.

PRINT AND EXCLUSIVE  
EBOOK FROM:



KARIN'S BOOKS AT BELLA:  
[PAPERBACK](#)  
[EBOOK](#)

*COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL*  
*Uncorrected proof*

---

## FROM CHAPTER TWO

“Abandon ship! Proceed in an orderly fashion to your assigned lifeboat station. Abandon ship! This is not a drill!”

Jolted out of sleep, Marissa’s first thought was that she was trapped in a nightmare but when the message repeated in what sounded like Italian, logic asserted that she did not have nightmares in languages she didn’t speak.

The small cabin had no clock and she’d been so exhausted on arrival she’d not unpacked her own. Dull blue lighting had sprung up near the door and she pushed herself upright, trying to shake off the jittery fog of sudden awakening.

French, possibly, then once again, in commanding

but modulated tones, “Abandon ship! Proceed in an orderly fashion to your assigned lifeboat station. Abandon ship! This is not a drill!”

Her cabin mate had likewise sat up and they stared at each other in confusion. With a shuddering gulp of air into lungs cramping with fear, Marissa scrambled out of the narrow bed and nearly fell as she fumbled for the clothes she’d left folded at the foot of the bed. Socks. Shoes. Backpack from the airplane, not yet unpacked. She hopped across the tiny space to the broom closet bathroom for the small toiletry bag she’d pulled out earlier so she could brush her teeth. Her purse she stuffed into the last spare inches under the zipper before slinging the pack over one shoulder.

“Abandon ship! Proceed in an orderly fashion to your assigned lifeboat station. Abandon ship! This is not a drill!”

Her cabin mate—Angela something—was chanting a phrase that included *dios* every fourth word or so. Their lack of a common language had been a barrier from the moment they’d nodded and smiled greetings some twelve hours earlier. They exited the cabin at the same time and all Marissa could think about was how much less expensive the lower berths had been and how many more flights of stairs were between her and the lifeboats as a result. The corridor was crowded with other passengers and getting tighter by the second. Every face she glanced at reflected what she felt: disbelief and panic. The weird emergency lighting made

blondes look as if they had blue halos, but the effect was something out of a horror film.

They'd had a lifeboat drill just after embarkation, but maybe this was another test. A two a.m. test. Maybe this was all a precaution and they'd stand on deck for a while, the same way kids stood outside classrooms during fire drills, knowing the time for the gift it was. Sailing on the warm South Seas was pleasant circumstances for a middle-of-the-night drill, if not for the fear and terror thing.

Grim-faced crewmembers encouraged speed and calm, pointing the way. She climbed flight after flight, not sure if her cabin mate was still behind her. She slipped once, and tried not to fancy that the ship was listing to one side. Because of the pressure of people behind her, she couldn't stop to rest. Her heart felt as if it would burst.

Rain lashed the deck—they'd been warned of a middling tropical storm that would pass them in the night. Nothing to worry about, the cabin steward had said. Strong lamps illuminated the gathering places, particularly markings that showed which cabin groups lined up where. The lifeboats were uncovered and there were already crew assisting people aboard them.

Gulping for breath, she struggled to fasten her life vest. It wouldn't click shut. During the earlier drill they'd found her a larger one, but no one was trying to do that now. One of the features of this cruise was the small vessel and passenger compliment, allowing for

enhanced customer service and access to more out-of-the-way ports of call. Cozy, intimate, blah blah blah, Marissa thought. *I can't get this damn thing on.*

After struggling and fighting tears for several minutes, another woman said, "Here, let's swap. This one is too big for me."

The exchange was made and the new vest was marginally larger. She was able to get the main belt secured. She felt like a big piece of meat, trussed in an orange casing for roasting. The damp, humid air didn't help.

Hardly able to breathe, she waited in the line, trying to decide if it was appropriate to yell or shriek in fear, the way someone further down was. Perhaps the shaking that seemed to start in the pit of her stomach was the right response. She couldn't help tension-filled tears and the vest made it impossible to wipe her eyes.

She saw Angela, her now ex-cabin mate, being helped into the life boat next to the one where she was queued. Then her turn came. As she threw her leg over the edge of the lifeboat all she could think was that everyone was assessing every extra pound on her body and predicting she'd reduce their chances of survival.

She clutched her backpack to her, took the empty spot next to a whippet-faced woman and tried hard to be small.

\* \* \*

Dear Mom,

Thank you so much for the generous gift of a week-long cruise in the South Seas. It's not your fault the ship sank. Instead of all those years of computer science courses, I wish I had paid more attention to reality TV shows about turning bugs into breakfast.

I'm sure I'll be fine, and when I get home you can bet I'll listen to the rest of your advice about what I ought to do with my life, since this has worked out so well.

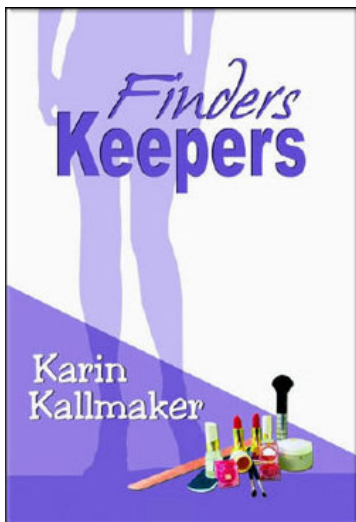
Love, Marissa

P.S. I don't think I'll make it home in time for the club's summer ball.

P.P.S. Please make my apologies to the blind date I'm sure you arranged.

P.P.P.S. I'm a lesbian.

## Excerpt from **FINDERS KEEPERS**



*FINDERS KEEPERS* IS A  
CONTEMPORARY  
LESBIAN ROMANCE BY  
KARIN KALLMAKER.

PRINT AND EXCLUSIVE  
EBOOK FROM:



KARIN'S BOOKS AT BELLA:  
[PAPERBACK](#)  
[EBOOK](#)

*COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL*

---