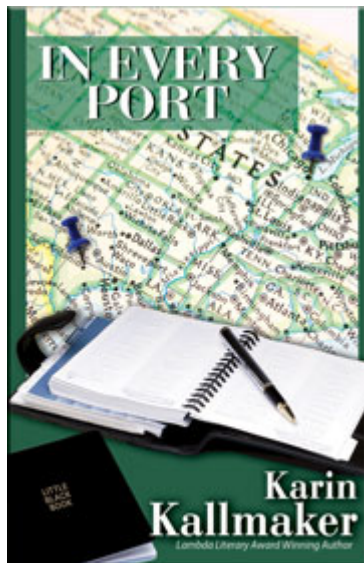


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## Excerpt from IN EVERY PORT



*IN EVERY PORT* IS THE DEBUT LESBIAN ROMANCE BY KARIN KALLMAKER.

*Set in 1978 when disco reigned and Harvey Milk has just been elected to the San Francisco City Council.*

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Jessica has it all. An expensive condo in the city of dreams, San Francisco. A high-powered, prestigious career as a management consultant that takes her all over the country... To passionate Roberta, in Chicago. To delicious Marilyn, in San Antonio. To all those cities and all those willing women Jessica has recorded in her well-used little black book.

Sex with these women doesn't really mean a thing, Jessica tells herself. It's all just good times. Because she is not really a lesbian. No, of course not. Her sexual adventures are merely keeping her occupied until she decides to settle down ... with a man.

Then she meets Cat, the alluring young hotel executive who lives across the hall from her new condo. What is Jessica to make of her chaotic feelings, her yearning -- and yes, her deepening love -- for the sensuous, captivating Cat, who offers entrancing friendship, but nothing more?

## FROM CHAPTER ONE

"Thanks for thinking of me. No, nothing planned, I'm delighted to fill in. I'll make my reservations immediately. Thank you again." Jessica hung up and flipped the calendar on her desk back to April 14. The day was turning out to be much busier than she had planned.

"Book flight. Pack." She stopped writing, pencil poised. "They're fixing the hotel. Return library books. Cancel week's appointments."

She jumped when the phone rang again, then listened patiently to the pleasant and official voice. She gasped and grabbed her calendar as if it would save her. "What do you mean escrow's closing tomorrow? You said another two weeks!"

"We thought you'd be happy to hear the news. We

assumed you were anxious to move into your new residence," the pleasant voice told her.

Jessica reminded "them" that "we had agreed escrow would close two weeks ago" and that "we had also decided last week it would take another two weeks to close."

"We are aware of that. We expect your closing payment within three days to avoid additional escrow fees," the voice said emotionlessly, the same way disembodied official voices say Have a nice day.

"Isn't there any way you can wait until Monday? I'm leaving on busi-ness tomorrow, probably in the afternoon."

"We can wait indefinitely, but the fees will be added on Thursday."

She asked how much the penalties were and with a gulp told the voice she would be in as soon as possible to close. Yes, she would bring a cashier's check.

She cradled her head in her hands for a few moments. Her ability to plan had always been a source of personal pride, but she hadn't planned for a delay in escrow. Why, oh why, she wailed to Herself, had the call to fill in for someone in Chicago come exactly two minutes before the call from the bank?

Assertiveness basics for women managers was her favorite topic, even after almost eight years of lecturing. But she wouldn't have agreed to go to Chicago if she'd known escrow was going to close. On top of the hassle, the penalties were going to eat into her fee for speaking. And there was no way she was going to call and cancel Chicago — not after she'd given her verbal commitment.

She looked at her list and added "call landlord." Taking several deep breaths first, she slowly dialed her travel agent's number. If she was speaking all day Wednesday and Thursday she wanted to be in Chicago by 11 p.m. San Francisco time. That made departure sometime between four and six tomorrow afternoon, leaving her roughly twenty-four hours to move. No, she just couldn't manage, she decided.

She booked her flight and then dialed her landlord, refusing to think about the money she was going to lose in penalties. At least she wouldn't have to pay another month's rent. At least, she thought she wouldn't have to pay another month's rent. The management representative's voice was very friendly, yet official. Living in a modern building had benefits. The down side was the professional management company which didn't bend rules.

"We have you down as requesting an option for move-out at the end of the month. But you had to let us know last Thursday if you wanted to exercise the option or pay another month's rent." The management company had a very pleasant voice.

"That's only two working days. I'll be out by next Tuesday."

"We're sorry, but the deadline we agreed to for notice was last Thursday." The management company was very pleasant, but firm.

"If I had called you last Thursday when would I have to be out?"

"This Thursday."

Jessica groaned inside. If only the stupid bank had called two minutes earlier! The Chicago job was going to cost her penalties from the escrow company and another month's rent — almost double the speaking fee.

"I'll be out Thursday," she said weakly. It was impossible, but she'd manage, somehow.

"We usually suggest a tenant take at least two weeks to coordinate the entire relocation process."

"I'll be out by Thursday. Thank you for your help."

"Have a nice day," the management company said.

Jessica hung up quickly. "I'll have any goddamn kind of day I like!" she said explosively. She gave the phone a thump with her fist for good measure.

Okay, stupid, she told Herself crossly, you said you'd be out in two days, so how are you going to manage? Herself replied that she didn't know, but she'd die trying. Sometimes she hated Herself.

Figuring she wasn't going to need her March 1978 calendar page anymore, she tore it out and made another list, reminding Herself of all the reasons she was moving. She wrote them up neatly:

- No more tripping over the sofa to get to the kitchen.
- No more putting the coffee table on the sofa when you do sit ups.
- No more sleeping and working in the same room, or using your bed for a desk.

- No more dark living room and even darker bedroom.
- No more paying absolutely the highest income tax possible.
- You deserve it!

She felt much better seeing the positive aspects in black and white. She decided she'd keep reciting them over and over to boost her morale. She took a deep breath and rolled up her sleeves. Nothing's impossible, she told Herself cheerfully.

On the one hand, almost everything was packed and labelled. She'd been expecting to move last week. Her clothes needed to be packed and her toiletries were waiting until the last minute. To hell with her cleaning deposit, there was no way she'd have the time.

She made a new list. April 1978 was almost over, so she used that page for the new list: call bank, call escrow, call movers. Pack for trip. Pack for moving. Go to bank, go to escrow, go to movers. Go to condo. Label doors for movers. Go to airport.

Piece of cake.

The next morning, Jessica tried to look cool and professional. Usually her navy blue suit, white blouse and pearls would look professional, especially combined with her classic navy pumps and simple, short, no-nonsense hairstyle. But the overall effect was somewhat hampered by the large box she was precariously balancing on the

ledge at the teller's window.

"What—oh, yes, a cashier's check payable to the escrow company," she said, catching the box before it slid off the ledge.

"You must be buying," the teller said conversationally as she waited for a supervisor to initial the request. "Lucky you."

"I feel pretty lucky, I guess," Jessica said. She liked her bank because the tellers were so friendly. She'd been banking there so long she knew almost everyone by name.

"I wish my husband and I could afford to buy something, but it's impossible. The interest rates are killing everyone." The teller shrugged and left to type up the check. When she came back she had a brochure. "We're installing these new automated teller machines. With one of these cards you can get cash and make deposits twenty-four hours a day. If you fill out this application, we'll send you a card. The card's free."

"Does that mean I can't come to you for help?" Jessica wasn't sure she wanted to trust her banking to a machine.

"Oh no, they're just for your convenience. We're the first to get these machines, but they'll be all over in a few years, you'll see. Sign here, and here, and the money's all yours," the teller instructed.

"I'll send in this form," Jessica said with a laugh. "But no machine is going to be as friendly as you all are."

Several of the other tellers looked up from their work and agreed noisily. "Ms. Brian is buying a condo," her

teller informed them all.

Jessica flushed as all the tellers wished her well. Her spirits took a soar upward. It was nice to know personal service and friendliness still existed. The guard opened the door for her on her way out.

She felt a hell of a lot better. She virtually bounced down the street, in spite of the heavy box. Inside the box were miscellaneous household essentials she thought she'd need in her new home: tissues, toilet paper, a can of soda, an ice cube tray, scotch tape and paper and other odds and ends.

She walked the three blocks from her bank to the escrow office, shifting the box from shoulder to shoulder, ignoring the strange glances from other people — her mood was too good to be spoiled by anyone today. She was going to get moved and not pay penalties or extra rent. She, Jessica Brian, had overcome the difficulties fate had put in her path.

Unexpectedly, someone jostled her and the box tumbled off her shoulder onto the ground. No one stopped to help her retrieve the roll of toilet paper which had sprung loose. With a choice four-letter word, she knelt on her hands and knees and scabbled up her belongings. As she righted herself and stood up, someone then had the nerve to hand her a flyer extolling the virtues of the Briggs petition drive. Briggs could ruin anyone's day. She crammed the flyer in the box after she retrieved the roll of toilet paper. Herself devoutly hoped Jessica didn't meet anyone she knew.

"Someday I'm going to laugh like hell about all this," she muttered as she hoisted the box onto her shoulder again.

At the escrow office she had to wait for the escrow officer to finish with the current customer, so she sank down onto an uncomfortable waiting room chair and tried to catch her breath while she rubbed her shoulder.

She'd been waiting for a condo in a cut-up Victorian to become available for almost three years. She knew of people who'd waited for six or seven years, but that was the extreme in San Francisco. She was glad waiting had taken as long as it had. Now she was in a stronger financial position because of some hard, non-stop work. What with the 16% interest rates on her mortgage, she needed every penny she could get together for a down payment.

The last twelve years had been hard work, but work was everything. With her parents dying when she was nineteen and leaving her with only her own resources to guide her, she had pursued a business degree, then her MBA. Ever since she had discovered she enjoyed public speaking, she'd been laboring to get her name known on the circuit, working to bring assertiveness out of the dark ages and make businesspeople realize it wasn't just a fancy word for "aggressive" — or, when men applied to it to women, "bitchy."

"Ms. Brian? This way please."

The pleasant voice belonged to a pleasant woman who, in an accordingly pleasant manner, began going through the papers and waivers and affidavits and notes and

statements of escrow. Reviewing the paperwork took far longer than Jessica had thought it would, but she finally signed on the last dotted line.

"And here are your keys, Ms. Brian. We're so pleased to have done business with you." The woman smiled pleasantly as she handed over a small envelope. Jessica smiled back pleasantly and said how glad she was to have done business with "them." She hated it when companies forgot they were people, and they forgot their customers were people, too.

Vince, President and Founder of Vince's Rapid Move, grinned cheekily at her and took a key and her list of instructions.

"No problem, lady, we'll leave the old apartment key at the office and push the key to the condo under the door when we're through. We'll be done on Wednesday, no problem. We do rush jobs all the time."

"I've marked all the boxes and the rooms will be marked."

"No problem, we do this kind of stuff all the time."

"Thank you." As Jessica walked back to the street to hail a cab to her new home, the box balanced on the other shoulder, she tried to shake her uneasy feeling.

But the last twenty-four hours seemed almost worth the hassle when she unlocked the building door and then

took the old-fashioned cage elevator three floors to the top. There were two doors across from each other in the little lobby on the third floor. The one to the left was all hers — and the mortgage company's. She'd never been to her new home alone, only with the real estate agent. She turned the key and opened the door. She wandered from room to room, sighing with delight.

The joyful completion she felt had been a long time coming. She had put work before play insistently, single-mindedly. And now she had her own place, big enough so the sofa, bed and desk weren't all in the same cramped room. There was enough space for her books and her records and her new VCR. Enough room to do sit ups without having to move the coffee table. Enough room to live, finally. With a giggle of sheer happiness, she threw out her arms and twirled around the living room like Julie Andrews on the mountaintop at the beginning of *The Sound of Music*.

She went around and hung signs for the movers: BEDROOM, OFFICE, DESK HERE, ENTERTAINMENT CENTER HERE, and so on. The place shouldn't be too bad when she got back, provided they could read English. She put the roll of toilet paper on its holder, the paper towels in the kitchen, the soda in the refrigerator, and then filled the ice tray. When she got back on Friday there would at least be something cold to drink.

She was left with an empty box, except for the political flyer. She had ceased to be interested in politics when Richard Nixon had thumbed his nose at the Constitution and received an unconditional pardon for his

deeds. Jimmy Carter seemed like a very nice man. At least he believed in human rights.

But this petition drive was for a proposal sponsored by State Senator John Briggs to save the country's children by barring any homosexual person from teaching in public schools. The mere idea frightened and angered her at the same time. She shredded the flyer and decided to forget about it. She knew it was easy to forget about things which made you angry and frightened if you'd had a lot of practice.

She locked the door and went down to the manager's office, found out about the mail, how she paid the residents' association fees, and listened to a variety of rules about stereos and so on. Glancing at her watch in sudden alarm, she said goodbye to the manager and dashed out the building door. There was a muffled exclamation and Jessica realized her impetuous exit had almost knocked someone over.

"Oh my gosh, I'm so sorry. Here, let me hold the door for you. I usually look where I'm going," Jessica explained. She could only see the top of a blonde head and two brown eyes behind two large grocery bags. "Can I help you?"

"No," the woman gasped, "I do this all the time." The woman hopped the bags up once and Jessica noticed the strong hands and arms gripping the bags. They seemed out of proportion with the woman's petiteness. Letting the door close, Jessica registered the brown eyes, which had either been sparkling with annoyance or laughter, and

dashed for the bus.

Back in her apartment, she cleaned out the refrigerator there as her last effort, picked up her suitcase, and left. She'd lived there for almost four years, but she wasn't sorry to be leaving — it was cramped and dark. And there was that one memory she hoped she could put behind her at last.

She had been cruel. There was no way around the truth. She and Alice had slept together several times, and yet when Alice showed up one day unexpectedly Jessica had been completely at a loss about how to act. Spontaneity had never been her strong point.

"I wasn't aware I needed to make an appointment," Alice had said coldly.

"I'm very busy. I told you that," she had snapped.

"I see," Alice had said, even more coldly. "Lovers and clients are the same thing."

"My schedule is very tight," Jessica had maintained. "I wish you had called first."

"I doubt I'll call again," Alice had said, walking out the door. "You're wonderful in bed, Jessica, but I don't feel like being squeezed in between appointments."

She had been honest with Alice about being busy. She had made her no-commitments policy clear to Alice, just as she had to everyone since she'd been on her own. But then, Herself recalled, you pursued her. You called her two or three times over two weeks. You rushed her along because it felt good for someone to be there — on your terms.

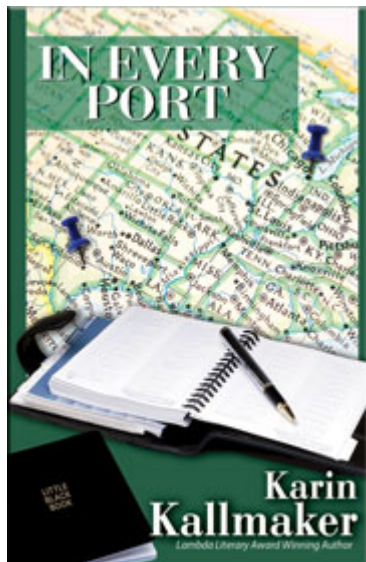
The last she had heard from Alice had been only a few

months ago. Alice had joined the People's Temple, a religious cult of some sort. She had cut the conversation short, embarrassed by Alice's pleading with her for money for the Temple's relocation to some South American location. Alice had declared Jessica would repent her sins if she came to just one service.

Sins? Jessica told Herself she had no sins. Her lifestyle was just ... temporary.

She caught the last possible airport express which would get her to her plane on time and stared out the window. Ever since Alice she'd sworn she'd never get involved with anyone in San Francisco. Affairs would just distract her and make her not want to work so much. It was much, much easier to just call someone she'd met when she got to any particular city. A few hours of pleasure was the only commitment she made and if emotions ran too high there would always be her schedule to take her away again.

## Excerpt from IN EVERY PORT



*Fans of this book won't want to miss follow-up short stories about Jessica and Cat in *Frosting on the Cake* Volumes 1 and 2.*

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