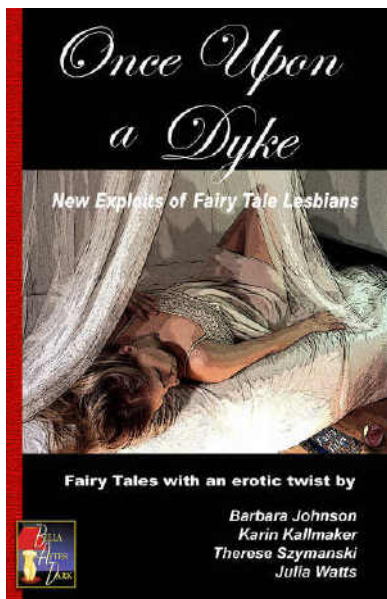

**Excerpt from *Once Upon a Dyke:*
New Exploits of Fairy Tale Lesbians**



ONCE UPON A DYKE IS A LESBIAN EROTICA ANTHOLOGY OF FOUR NOVELLAS BY KARIN KALLMAKER, BARBARA JOHNSON, THERESE SZYMANSKI AND JULIA WATTS.

PRINT AND EXCLUSIVE EBOOK FROM:



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

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL
Uncorrected proof

Contents

FOREWORD: JULIA WATTS AND KARIN KALLMAKER

FISH OUT OF WATER: KARIN KALLMAKER

LA BELLE ROSE: JULIA WATTS

CHARLOTTE OF HESSEN: BARBARA JOHNSON

BUTCH IN FAIRYTALE LAND: THERESE SZYMANSKI

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

FROM PART ONE OF THE NOVELLA
“FISH OUT OF WATER”
BY KARIN KALLMAKER

“Please.”

Her voice plays on my body like the tide. I rise and fall to the cadence of her words while past and present eddy in my mind, muddied by shifting sands of need and desire. She asks me if I want her. The gooseflesh along my arms says yes. The wet I can feel surging between my legs says yes. I try to say yes with the intensity of my eyes, the eagerness of my hands, the curve of my lips.

“Please say yes.”

She doesn’t understand that I can’t give her the one thing she needs to release us both from the cage our passion has created. I cannot say yes. Or no. I cannot speak.

PART I

“Fly, baby, fly!” Ariel gave the cork one last shove with her thumb and whooped at the resounding pop that heralded the gush of bubbling Champagne.

“Happy New Year!” Shouts bounced off curving grotto walls that pulsed an answer in splashes of crimson and gold.

“Only thing humans know how to make that’s worth stealing,” Caliba enthused as she held her diamond glass under the pouring stream.

Ariel, Seventy-Seventh Daughter to Queen Vellia, drew herself up to her full height, which brought the top of her head level with Caliba’s shoulder. “*Liberate*, please. Mer do not steal, you know that.”

“As you wish.” Caliba sipped from the glass, then sighed happily. “I’ve always liked the human custom of

New Year’s Eve. Excellent reason for a party.”

A caterwaul of ill humor turned the crimson lights to burnt red. Ariel clutched the precious Champagne bottle and turned in time to see Laveena’s long sapphire-tipped nails leave four perfect scratches down the side of Zee’s cheek. Blood welled in their wake.

“Oh, to the abyss with this,” Ariel thought. She strolled across the room while shaking the bottle, and looked down in distaste at Laveena and Zee writhing as they fought in a tangle of legs and slapping hands. Clumps of costume and hair began to litter the floor.

Thumb over the top of the bottle, she upended the bubbling froth on both of them.

Laveena screeched with outrage. Ariel glanced worriedly at the chandelier, but Caliba appeared next to Ariel. “I’ll make sure it doesn’t shatter.”

Zee rolled out of Laveena’s reach. “I did not start that!” She angrily shook her wet clothes. Ariel was genuinely sorry that the delicate garment of rose petals was ruined, but more damage had been wrought by Laveena’s nails than the Champagne.

“*You bitch!*” Laveena didn’t bother to quash her mer voice. The chandelier rattled dangerously.

“My, my.” Caliba examined her manicure. “You obviously missed vocabulary classes—”

Ariel quieted Caliba with a gesture. “It’s New Year’s Eve. No fighting. The party hasn’t even really started yet.”

“She stole Kareel again, took her home from a flesh party I had escorted her to!” Laveena gave Zee a poisonous

look.

“Yeah,” Zee snapped back. “And we had a *fabulous* time.”

Laveena scrambled to her feet. “I’m going to tear your face off!”

“Quiet!” Ariel let her lights sparkle faintly. “I’ll let you go party with fourth circle brats.”

“Don’t threaten me, Ariel.” Laveena’s eyes glowed orange. “I don’t care whose daughter you are.”

Kareel, easily setting the evening’s standard for slinky, moved out of the gathered crowd. Her gown, shimmering with prized Angelfish scales, cupped her breasts and hips like a lover’s greedy hands. “I’ve had it with you, Laveena.” Her stiletto heels—a toe-pinching human affectation that suited her long legs—kissed the floor lightly as she advanced on her sometime lover. “Ariel, I know exactly whose daughter you are, and I ask you to take witness.”

Ariel would for a long time regret that she didn’t hide her smile. “I’m listening.”

Kareel looked over the sodden Laveena, shaking her head. “We are done. Your voice has no song for me.”

“You don’t mean that!”

“We are done,” Kareel repeated. She turned to Ariel. “I mean it this time, Ariel.”

“Do you really? That’s what you said last year, and the year before.”

“And last century, and the one before that,” Caliba chimed in.

Kareel slowly pushed her elegant bronze hair over her equally elegant bronze shoulder. "Yes. She has watched too many of those human movies. Witness it."

Laveena gasped in horror as Ariel raised her hand. "You can't do this, Ariel!"

"You're sure?" Ariel looked directly into Kareel's eyes. "Absolutely sure? I'm not going to be able to undo this one. I don't want to undo it either. This scene got boring two hundred years ago."

"Do it." Kareel closed her eyes.

Laveena leaped to intervene, but Caliba stepped in her way. It was always useful to have the tall, muscular Caliba at her back, Ariel thought. She summoned her power and cast the spell in a matter of moments. It wasn't hard for a daughter of a queen, and resolving lovers' spats was one of the few perquisites of rank a seventy-seventh daughter got to enjoy. It was a good spell, and would hold for a while. If Laveena wanted it undone she'd have to find someone stronger than Ariel. Not that there weren't plenty of mer who were stronger. The difficulty lay in getting any of them to care enough to help out the unpopular Laveena.

"This changes nothing." Laveena eyed Caliba with a near snarl. "Kareel sings for me before anyone else. Get out of my way."

"Next thing you'll be saying Kareel should be exclusive to you." Caliba shrugged. "That would be *so* human."

"Shut up, Caliba!"

Caliba struck a pose. "Kareel...you...complete me!"

She spun in place, spreading her arms dramatically to appreciative laughter. "I honestly..." she made a loud choking noise. "I honestly...love you."

"I do not like that human drive!" Laveena looked about to jump Caliba, but that would have been a mistake.

Kareel gasped and opened her eyes. "Is she speaking?"

Laveena and Caliba were continuing to trade insults. Caliba was winning. Ariel had often wished for Caliba's quick and easy wit. Ariel nodded at Kareel. "She's jabbering away."

Kareel's smile was savage. "I don't hear a thing. How wonderful. Ariel, I thank you." She bowed deeply, with her head tipped back. Ariel made sure she carefully studied the ripe pleasure of Kareel's ruby-studded breasts. To have ignored them would have been rude, especially since several times in their past she and Kareel had dallied. It hadn't been particularly well-mannered of Kareel to leave with Zee when she'd arrived with Laveena – especially to a flesh party – but Laveena had overreacted, as usual.

Laveena slipped past Caliba and seized Kareel's arm. "I know you can hear me. You *need* me! You can't walk away."

Kareel pulled her arm free, shaking her head. When Laveena made another grab, Ariel said silkily, "Do not make me do worse, Laveena. She chose and so did you."

"You had no right to do this!" Laveena's snarl was so enraged that Ariel nearly stepped backward. "Who do you think you are, working magic on me? Just wait until my aunt hears about this!"

Caliba, casually cleaning her nails with the long garnet-tipped pin that she'd slipped from her collar, said, "Yes, we know. Aunt Travesta will be here any minute to avenge you. We've heard it all before."

Laveena gave Caliba a poisonous look, but addressed Ariel, her face twisted with malice. "You have no idea what you've done, Ariel."

Ariel knew that Laveena was highly connected, but she was hardly concerned. Laveena had managed to alienate her more powerful relatives over the last several hundred years. Travesta of the First Circle, favorite of Queen Vellia, had yet to waste her influence on such a pain-in-the-kelp niece. A daughter of the queen— even a seventy-seventh one —had precedence.

"I'm giving you a chance to change," Ariel said. "Caliba is right, you're behaving worse than a human."

"Beautiful Ariel, smart Ariel, so kind, so good, so unbelievably perfect!" Laveena added, her voice dripping with spite, "Not so perfect. Maybe I would like Kareel in my bed, but at least she's mer. You only run hot with humans!"

There was a collective gasp and Ariel fought down her rising color. "I haven't bedded above sea in decades, and you know that." She paused to laugh in her most sultry manner. "And most of those here will witness I am hardly shy at flesh parties. But since I decreed no fighting, I will forget you said that."

"I won't," Caliba muttered.

"You think you have friends? Just wait," was Laveena's

parting shot. She stalked from the chamber in the direction Kareel had headed.

"She can't leave, I want a duel." Zee had not bothered to staunch the flow of blood from her cheek. "For her disgusting touch to my face and her insult to you."

"Stop," Ariel said. The party was better off without Laveena. "This is foolish."

"Are you suggesting I'm not worth it?"

Zee was too hotheaded for her own good, Ariel thought. She wished briefly for the power to fix everybody. Squabbling was boring. So far, this entire party was boring. Maybe she and Caliba could sneak off to a flesh party later. Sex would be more fun than this. It was a party night, after all, and maybe someone would have a grand entertainment to watch. "It's a holiday. No fighting tonight. I don't want to spend tomorrow explaining to some toady of my mother's why my parties turn into brawls. This matter is closed and there will be no duels. Is that understood?"

Zee finally nodded, but not until after her eyes suggested that she, too, felt Ariel had overstepped her authority. What authority, Ariel thought with a touch of bitterness. It wasn't as if a seventy-seventh daughter was truly powerful. She knew how to have a good time, and those who hunted with her had no trouble securing delicacies and entertainment. The only real power Ariel had was over whom she invited to share in the spoils of some daring and lucrative hunts. Zee wasn't willing to risk being ostracized.

Turning to Caliba, Ariel murmured, "Next year I'm

revising the guest list!"

It was long after the chime of midnight when Ariel found Caliba ensconced with several hunting friends. They'd all had far too much Champagne, Ariel thought, as she woozily claimed a cushion of her own.

"She was a virgin to womantouch, I'm telling you," Morova was saying. "She sang like none I've ever had." She smiled softly. "She cries for me still."

Caliba burped. "I lost a voice this week. It's always sad."

"How?"

"Age." Caliba shrugged. "She had a sweet song, too. Her longing murmurs were constant for sixty years. A good feeding."

Primia drained her glass so sloppily most of the amber liquid ended up on her breasts. "All the ones I pick don't last. Either they don't sing for me or die of one thing or another."

"You need to stop choosing the broken ones," Caliba said with a hiccup. "You'd have more success getting song out of human men."

"I tried that." Primia's pout grew more pronounced as she dabbed at her chest. "Even Circe only gets song from every tenth one or so. And they soon forget. She keeps hoping she'll find another Ulysses."

Morova laughed. "If they still made them like Ulysses, I might try men once in a while. Oh, let me help. Can't

waste Champagne.”

Ariel rolled her eyes as Morova moved in on Primia, lowering her head to Primia’s Champagne-drizzled breasts. Within moments, though, honesty made her admit—at least to herself—that watching Morova’s agile tongue circle Primia’s nipples was nearly as good as a flesh party entertainment.

“You won’t catch me wasting my time with non-singers,” Caliba replied.

“All of yours sing.” Primia gave Caliba a resentful look. “I don’t know how you get so lucky.”

“She knows how to pick them,” Ariel pronounced, which was a simple statement of fact. She might have added that Caliba had been given the song-sense that Primia ought to have had, but thought better of it at the last moment. “It’s been too long since we’ve hunted.”

“It’s no fun.” Morova lifted her mouth from the hard pucker of Primia’s nipples. “Not since the edict.”

“You sound as if you’re not having enough fun here.” Primia ran one ebony hand down Morova’s bronze-tinted leg. “Has everyone been ignoring you?”

Morova parted her thighs slightly. “No, of course not.” She pulled gently on the tip of Primia’s delicately shaped ear. “I will likely head to a flesh party after a while. I miss hunting, that’s all. Every so often a human woman can be memorable. Not as good as mer, I’m not saying that,” she added hastily. “It’s their songs. I’d never go above sea if it weren’t for that of course.”

“Songs,” Caliba said with a sigh. “I could really use a

few new voices.”

They all sighed in unison, so deeply that their mervoices emerged. In response, the walls around them shifted from a carefree orange to a pensive blue.

A hunt, Ariel thought, would be welcome. Even more than feeling the puddles of Champagne in her blood, Ariel could hear the delicate songs of her past human lovers. They slept, and dreamed, and in their dreams remembered what the love of a mermaid had been like. Those songs were mer right for giving humans peace in the upper seas. Everyone, including her mother the queen, was sung for by some human woman, somewhere.

Caliba, who attracted women just by breathing, had a vast choir singing for her. Ariel preferred her songs quiet but intense. A hunt, she mused again, would be grand. Like Caliba, she'd lost a singer recently. Oh, be honest with yourself, she thought crossly. You know it's not just the song you're after.

She schooled her expression, though she thought she had always kept her secret. Only Caliba might suspect. A night in a human woman's arms meant far more to Ariel than just the song for the rest of the woman's life. Laveena had been dangerously close to the truth. Yes, it had been a long time since Ariel had indulged, but no mer had ever come close to making her feel the way a human woman could. Even without a real voice, or magic or the features mer considered attractive, human women possessed something else that Ariel hungered for, something she could not quite define.

Laveena's insult had been a shot in the dark, Ariel told herself. Nobody knew. "A hunt would be enjoyable."

"I think we've shown great restraint," Caliba said. She whispered loudly to Ariel, "Especially you. I know how much you feed when you go up."

Ariel felt a pang of alarm. It was as if Caliba had read her mind. "It's the song I need." She adopted the sophisticated boredom of a daughter of the queen. "If we could get the song some other way... I suppose human women can be fun sometimes though, physically. It's not as if they're good for anything else."

"The best ones we can't have anymore, so why even bother?" Morova brooded into her empty glass while Primia coiled around her. "If I'm going for song I want the women who were born for other women. The lesbians. They sing... bless the kelp, do they sing. The ones who prefer men, well, it takes three of their songs to equal one lesbian's."

"Lesbians are off limits," Ariel said firmly. She agreed with everything Morova had said, but the queen's edict was serious. Too many lesbians had sickened after a night with her. If the queen discovered any of them had bedded a lesbian the punishment could be severely unpleasant.

"Let's plan a hunt. The women at that Baptist convention last time were as plentiful as sea shells." Morova closed her eyes as Primia ran her hands across her stomach. "It's sounding very good to me."

Morova's pronounced pheromones tickled Ariel's nostrils. She avoided noticeably inhaling the scent, which

was making her a little dizzy. Morova’s chemistry had always been powerful but her preference for multiple partners wasn’t one Ariel necessarily shared – at least not for every encounter. Morova was considered great fun at a flesh party, while Ariel herself was only sought out by those who liked intensity and privacy. A hunt, Ariel thought, was sounding better and better.

Primia stroked one of Morova’s nipples. “Meantime, why don’t we move on to a flesh party?”

Morova smiled. Her mervoice rippled slightly as she replied, “I’d like that tonight. Lots of different chemistries, a little of everything.” She kissed Primia softly on the lips.

“Surely, you’re not all calling it a night.” Laveena’s abrupt arrival startled Ariel. She hadn’t expected Laveena to come within a league of her after the scene with Kareel and Zee. She hoped Kareel and Zee were safely away, fucking each other or someone else. Any place but here.

“I’m too tired, Laveena.”

“I came to say I’m sorry, Ariel. And that I’ve heard the most delicious news.”

Primia scooted closer to Morova. “What? Sit and tell us.”

Laveena coiled up on a cushion and reached for one of the remaining sushi delicacies. It had been a fair trade, Ariel thought irrelevantly, the human secrets of sharp, fiery sake in exchange for the mer secrets of sushi. Both cultures had been well-served by that bit of détente. Mer might not need sake, but she saw no harm in wanting it now and again. Like a human woman. What *was* the harm in a little

fun?

"Well," she began, "There is a party on land, and it's not yet midnight there." Laveena licked her lips. "A room full of exactly our types. What they call Straight But Curious."

They all sat up slightly. Primia said, almost breathless, "You mean, the kind of human women who enjoy womantouch, but bond with men?"

"A group of them, all in one party. Wearing obvious indicators that say they are...interested. No finding out after you've got her stripped that she won't sing or that's she forbidden." Laveena shrugged. "They are also very definitely saying they're not lesbians, so if we were to *accidentally* bed one who is, well, that won't be our problem, will it?"

"Oh," Morova purred. "No problems with the edict at all!"

Ariel could not help the flush of desire that shook her. It had been a quarter-century since the edict, and Caliba was right. Hunting wasn't any fun with the queen's penalties of torture, torture and more torture in one's mind. Adding a song to her voices would be satisfying, but Ariel knew what she really wanted was to lose herself in a human woman's passion.

"Where?" Curiosity had gotten the better of her. It was too intriguing not to at least consider, though she did not want to owe Laveena anything.

"San Francisco."

"Oh," Primia moaned. "Such a beautiful city. So

moist, nearly as damp as Seattle.”

“I’ve not been to San Francisco in years,” Morova added. She glanced at Primia. “We can hunt together if you like. Share our treats. Let’s go.”

“It’s a large city,” Caliba said warily. “Where?”

“This is the best part.” Laveena’s eyes glimmered with crimson intensity. “An entertainment establishment called the Pisces. The party is called A Fish Out of Water.”

Their laughter turned the walls brilliant green.

“I don’t like this,” Caliba muttered. “I’m cold, I’m drunk, and I don’t trust Laveena.”

“She’s been right so far,” Ariel reminded her. She looked up at the neon sign over the entrance to The Pisces. Two fish with long eyelashes and painted lips chased each other in a circle, mouths locked to the other fish’s nether regions. Human women tasted different from mer, subtly so. Ariel had managed to forget that fact during the last twenty-five years, but being surrounded by human women and their pheromones was making her mouth water.

“But we’ve had to do nothing but hurry to get here in time. I don’t like rushing anything above sea. It’s not safe.”

“I know,” Ariel began to reply, but Laveena’s return silenced her.

“We’re in,” Laveena announced. She pushed her way through the waiting throng. “And we have a table.”

Morova said lowly, “I need new songs, Ariel. It’s been a long time.”

"How do we know for sure which ones are saying they're not lesbians?" Caliba hung back and Ariel felt a small pang of doubt. Caliba's instincts for trouble had saved them before. "Most of these women are really lesbians. It's unmistakable. That won't work."

Laveena beckoned to her right. "I've already started culling the selection."

A woman with long waves of black hair stepped out of the crowd. Her short black dress was tight and cut low – not as low as mer would wear on a modest day, but low for humans. Black stockings made her legs seem sinuous and long. The only splashes of color were the scarlet coating on her lips and the red rose pinned to her dress.

She didn't look at anyone but Laveena, who wrapped an arm around the woman's waist and pulled her close.

In a low tone Ariel could tell was hiding a thin layer of persuasive mervoice, Laveena said, "Why are you here?"

The woman's reply was instantaneous, though her words were slightly slurred from drink. "To meet someone like you, baby."

"What does the rose mean?"

"That I'm curious. Finding out what it's like with a woman is my New Year's Resolution. My girlfriends and I made a dare." The woman laughed. "Winner gets free drinks for a year."

Laveena brushed the back of one hand against the woman's breasts. "Well, then you'll be winning twice, won't you?"

The woman's pale grey eyes were gleaming. "Yeah,

I'm not sure how I lose out. After this my boyfriend is going to have to really work."

You have no idea, Ariel thought. A little casual sex with a lesbian was what the curious woman was after. Instead she was going to have the most memorable night of her life, one she would never forget. One that would live on in the songs of her dreams. No straight human woman ever regretted a night of mertouch. Only some of the lesbians developed...problems.

Ariel turned her mind from that unpleasant reality. There were lesbians all around them, maddeningly ready to share a night of passion. They were all beautiful, appealing, sexual – and utterly forbidden. Their pheromones spilled into the air like blood in water, unmistakable. Ariel found it increasingly difficult to ignore the pulsing between her legs. She drew herself up proudly, not wanting Laveena to see how badly she needed more than song.

Laveena grinned at them, one hand casually caressing the woman's backside. "See? A room full."

"It's like a buffet," Primia whispered. "A fucking fabulous buffet. We could have more than one."

"I intend to gorge myself," Morova whispered.

Ariel understood Caliba's caution, but it was getting harder and harder to think. Human women needed, they moaned, they screamed, they said things no mer ever would. They even forgot who they were in the throes of their climax. Watching a human woman's face as she transformed for those few moments into a being of pure ecstasy was something Ariel could not get enough of. She

didn't understand it and sometimes she envied it. The idea of losing herself to the trust of another, to feel that safe, that physically free – she had touched that space briefly with most of her singers, but she'd never even come close with mer.

She'd tried once to explain it to Caliba, but Caliba had changed the subject as if she did not want to know Ariel had those feelings. When Ariel had even hinted she might like to visit one of her singers a second time, Caliba had been obviously horrified. If your best friend couldn't understand, then who could? Ariel needed it and she made up her mind. Tonight she would have it, and add as many singers as she could. Tonight she felt like she could match Morova, woman for woman.

"I want to," Ariel told Caliba. It had been so long. "If we stick to the ones with roses, what could go wrong?"

Laveena had obviously plied the doorkeeper with a great deal of money. They were escorted to a hastily set out table half on the dance floor where they could see and be seen.

The music was painfully loud. It wasn't even music, Ariel thought. Just words and riffs cut together so sharply that it became a pounding static. She made an irritated gesture at Caliba, who strolled casually through the crowd toward the DJ's booth. Heads turned to follow the tall woman's progress and Ariel smiled. Caliba would have no regrets about the evening.

When Caliba reappeared a minute later she was

grinning. "Maybe this isn't such a bad idea," she yelled over the music. "That woman was positively edible. Her chemistry was better than Champagne. Too bad she's a lesbian."

"Now, now," Ariel teased. "Behave!"

The music abruptly changed to a slower beat. The lights dimmed and dancers quickly began sultry, languid contact. Caliba had chosen well.

Primia, never shy, was the first to remove her black cloak. Ariel watched heads turn in their direction as Laveena likewise shed hers, then Morova, followed by Caliba. She went last, and they all spread their cloaks on the chairs and sat down, as on display as the dancers they watched.

Primia's gown was the most daring, and easily the most complicated. Ariel knew the spell Primia was using to keep the thin bands of orange silk over her nipples without the aid of a single strap around her shoulders or neck. In defiance of gravity, they shimmered in place, seeming about to fall any moment. Primia always had magic to spare for such glamorous ends, and Ariel freely admitted they were very successful. Her deep brown skin was the perfect counterpoint to that brilliant hue, and being naked from the nipples up underscored the strength of Primia's shoulders, graceful neck and the regal balance of her shaved head. The gleaming orange bands swept around her long back where they loosely crossed, and then swooped to meet the rest of her dress just above the curve of Primia's supple ass. One touch from the right hand, that dress

seemed to say, and Primia would be gloriously nude.

Morova had been slightly more conservative. Her body was mostly covered, though the fabric was in places as sheer as water at midnight. In deference to the incomprehensible human fetish for modesty, her nipples were obscured, and her gown opaque from hips downward. Her true glory had always been her hair, and when she went above water she wore it pulled severely to the crown of her head. Waves of thick, white hair fell from the tight knot to Morova's waist, all shimmering with a hint of aqua. And it was all natural, too. Morova didn't have to waste any energy on a glamour spell. It would be some time before she'd need mervoice to keep a woman standing very, very close. Unlike Laveena, Ariel thought, who'd needed mervoice right away to reel in a catch.

What could be seen of Laveena was surprisingly sedate, though the effect on the woman in her lap was beyond a doubt. Ariel found the black latex pants and skintight silk shirt stark and unappealing. Much like Laveena herself, Ariel thought. Laveena's real beauty had always been her eyes, but they were not in the same class with Caliba's sensuous dark blue.

She and Caliba had always hunted in matching colors and tonight was no different. Where Caliba's suit was completed with leather pants and slender mid-calf boots of sunset blue. Ariel had chosen a miniscule leather skirt and sleek sandals completely useless in the misty San Francisco night. They were not shoes made for walking. Both of them wore a tight-fitting jacket buttoned under their breasts, though Caliba wore a simple matching shell under

hers. Ariel wore nothing. She was hoping to be persuaded to unbutton hers, for the right, curious woman.

As usual, Caliba was drawing the most attention and the first to be asked to dance. Human women and mer alike seemed to generally prefer her sharp edges and gentle confidence. Caliba could make any woman feel gorgeous, and the art of sincere flattery came naturally to her. Human women came naturally to – and for – her, as well. A hunt for Caliba wasn't about conquest so much as generous pleasure in return for generous song.

Women were beginning to circle their table, with and without roses on their shoulders. Ariel felt a rush of something like shark blood. She craved a tasty meal tonight, and a lifetime of a human woman's remembering song. She felt Primia's intoxicating mervoice vibrating in the air as she spoke to a woman who paused to ask her to dance. They would all feed well tonight.

Laveena disappeared with the woman from the street, taking her through a door to some sort of backroom that Ariel was certain she'd see before the night was over. Bowls of supplies – not that mer needed them – were sitting on a table outside the door, and the door itself was guarded by a tall, thick-shouldered woman who looked thoroughly jaded. Even if she'd been the only woman wearing a rose, Ariel would not have considered her. There was no song left in that one.

Ariel could feel a rising pulse of mer power from the back room. Laveena was busy. She let her gaze slide over

the crowd. She'd owe Laveena for this, but right now she didn't care.

That one? The woman in the scarlet dress? The straps of the dress were so thin that the rose was pinned just above her cleavage. Muscled flesh, short black hair – she had many of the qualities that often attracted Ariel. Caliba danced by with a small, dark-skinned woman who wore a clear plastic dress over skimpy pink bra and thong. Her rose was taped to the dress. The longer they danced the more responsive the woman became to Caliba's lead.

Her gaze was caught by a couple tightly entwined, hips seemingly joined. When they parted slightly Ariel could see one wore something under her form-fitting pants, and her miniskirted partner was rubbing it suggestively. Ariel swallowed hard. Human ingenuity had perhaps reached its peak with the invention of silicon. Yes, she thought, she wanted everything a human woman could offer.

A tall woman in a form-fitting white tuxedo caught her eye. Her hair was thick and black as ink, curling only slightly where it brushed her collar. Her shoulders were broad and strong, her legs powerful but agile. I'd feel small next to her, Ariel thought abruptly. She shuddered at the image of herself in the woman's arms. Her body was reacting to the woman's unique pheromones. It was wonderful chemistry. They would be very good together.

She started to get up, but then the woman turned to face her. Curse the kelp, Ariel thought. No rose. Damn. She was tempted to pursue her anyway, but with her luck

she'd get caught. Being the queen's daughter wouldn't save her from punishment.

She wondered briefly what kind of lesbian would come to a party like this, to meet a straight woman who was curious. For a night of kicks? For the proverbial toaster oven accolades should the woman find she bonded better with other women? She followed the emergent lesbian culture from time to time because it was so new in human experience, and most lesbians, she had thought, avoided the curious straight woman as a danger to their emotional well-being.

What did it matter? There were plenty with roses, and she was going to feed tonight.

"Excuse me, but I have a thing for red hair and yours is simply stunning."

Ariel looked up at the woman who had stopped at the table. Green eyes sparkled with a pleasing combination of mirth and wickedness. No rose, though.

"Sorry," Ariel said. "I was hoping for one of the curious ones."

"Aren't we all? I was hoping your rose got misplaced."

"No, it didn't. I'm far beyond curious."

"I'm Mira." The woman held out her hand and Ariel politely shook it.

"Ariel."

Mira lifted an elegant eyebrow as if she didn't believe it, but only said, "A beautiful name."

"Thank you. It was my grandmother's."

"For red hair..." Mira touched a lock of Ariel's hair that had drifted over the back of the chair. "We're not required to pair up with only the curious ones."

"I'm on a quest," Ariel said with a flirtatious smile.

"I understand. I just want the night and no phone calls. Send her back to hubby or boyfriend or whatever. Maybe you and I could meet up another night?"

"Perhaps." Mira would have been a good time. Strong chemistry, a lot of laughing – it had a great deal of appeal – but not enough to be worth the torture. Damn the edict anyway.

"Pity," Mira answered, then she drifted into the crowd.

Ariel realized that under the music she could hear the rising of Caliba's mervice. Had she gone to the back room already? They'd talked about taking their finds to a hotel for an extended evening. There was no sign of her, though, so maybe she'd picked someone out as an appetizer.

Morova was dancing with a caramel-skinned brunette who moved like a cat. There were hints of mervice from her as well. Everyone was getting ready to feed but her.

Laveena sauntered out of the back room, looking as if she'd just spent a week lounging in a warm tidal pool. A few moments later, clothing askew, the woman Laveena had taken into the back followed her out. She also looked deeply pleased.

Okay, it was time for a daughter of the queen, even a seventy-seventh one, to have something for herself, Ariel thought.

"Not yet casting a net?" Laveena leaned over to pick up her beer.

Ariel could smell the other woman's sex on Laveena's hands and her stomach lurched with excitement. Soon she would have that scent on her own hands, her face, her body. She wanted to swim. "Just about to."

"What about that one?"

Ariel followed Laveena's gesture. It was the delectable woman in the white tuxedo she'd noticed earlier. "No rose."

"Are you sure? Look – up next to her neck. On her left."

Ariel saw the rose then, nearly hidden under the woman's white collar. She felt mildly dizzy as the possibilities sank in.

Laveena's voice was as smooth as surf on a long, tropical beach. "It will be a pleasure to watch you hunt. I finished my first early just so I could watch."

Great, Ariel thought. Like I need *that* pressure. She would have to be careful Laveena didn't see that Ariel was enjoying much more than the song.

The woman in white was too appealing to ignore just because Laveena was being, well, Laveena. She was talking to a woman in hot pink and body language said it might turn serious.

Ariel crossed the dance floor, hardly aware that a path was clearing for her. The ends of her hair brushed the backs of her bare thighs and she was lost in a vision of her red hair falling over the tall woman's pale, nude body.

The woman in hot pink noticed her first and tried to turn the white-clad woman away, but Ariel neatly insinuated herself between the two. She gazed up at the tall woman, liking the intriguing eyes, green as an autumn ocean. "Care to dance?"

"Excuse me, but we were having a conversation," the woman in pink objected.

A scene would be tedious. Ariel used a hint of mervoice as she suggested, "Another will suit you much better."

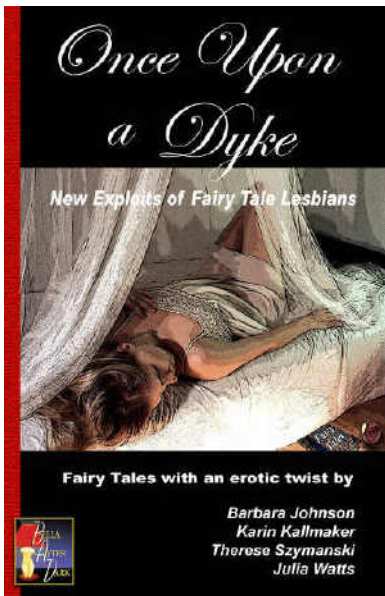
The woman blinked several times and then shrugged. "You may be right." She walked away without a backward glance. Ariel watched Laveena fall into step behind the woman, with a backward leer at Ariel. Good, Ariel thought. Now she's occupied.

The green eyes warmed when Ariel looked again. "I would love to dance, if you would like."

"I would like," Ariel murmured. She let the delicious woman pull her into her arms.

They fit. That was immediately apparent. The other woman's thigh eased between Ariel's, and their dance quickly became a suggestive prelude. Ariel let her tides begin their flow. There was no reason to hold back now.

Excerpt from Once Upon a Dyke



ONCE UPON A DYKE IS A LESBIAN EROTICA ANTHOLOGY OF FOUR NOVELLAS BY KARIN KALLMAKER, BARBARA JOHNSON, THERESE SZYMANSKI AND JULIA WATTS.

PRINT AND EXCLUSIVE EBOOK FROM:



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

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL
