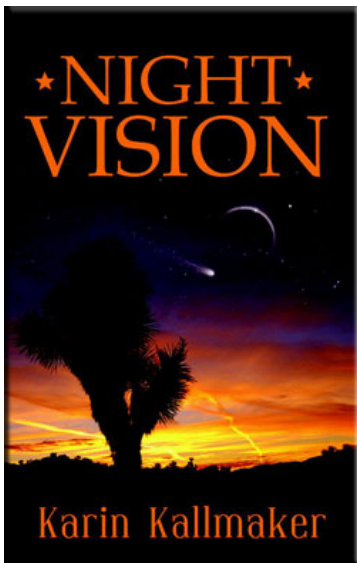


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## Excerpt from NIGHT VISION



NIGHT VISION IS A  
SCIENCE-FICTION  
BUDDY-ROAD-TRIP  
LESBIAN ROMANCE BY  
KARIN KALLMAKER.

PRINT AND EXCLUSIVE  
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## CHAPTER ONE

“None of this is going to make any sense.” I rested my chin on my hand as I struggled to keep eye contact with the intense woman across the table from me.

“You’re going to think we’re all one step away from strapping on brand-new Nikes and sprinkling cyanide on our applesauce.”

Tamar had a way of looking at me—not right in the eyes, but as if she were trying to see right into my brain. She was looking at me that way now. “I’m very good at telling fact from fiction. I’m not going to assume you’re looking to catch a ride on the next comet

out of the galaxy.”

I looked down at the fancy compact digital recorder she had set up on the tiny dinette table. The wind rocked the little motor home, and I glanced around at my companions. Having elected me the one to tell Tamar the whole truth and nothing but the truth, they were grabbing what little sleep they could. The strain of the past two weeks showed on every face.

Vina was snoring delicately and frowning on the little built-in couch. Rose curled on a sleeping bag in the few feet available along the front of the bathroom and kitchen area, but I doubted she was asleep. I could just see Geri’s arm and shoulder in the overhead. JT was propped up in the passenger seat in the cab. Her fingers moved slightly, as if she dreamed.

Dreams—that was where it had all started. The wind snapped around the motor home, and sand splattered against the windows. “Stuck in the Middle with You” played in stereo in my head.

Tamar prompted me with, “Begin at the beginning.”

“I’m not one of those people who remembers their dreams,” I said. “Every once in a while I remember—like showing up at work in my pajamas. Everyone has that kind of dream. Anxiety, I guess.”

Tamar nodded. Her eyes told me to go on.

“Three weeks ago I started having dreams that I remembered...”

I had awakened drenched in sweat for the third night. The Santa Ana winds rattled the window screens. My ears were ringing as I struggled out of my twisted and tangled bedclothes.

The dream had changed. The previous two nights I'd dreamed of falling from a great height. A noisy dream, shaking, sirens blaring. My sinuses were seared with the smell of burned wiring. In an instant the noise stopped. But I was still falling, now toward a blurred chessboard, and I fell and fell and kept falling, not for a few seconds, but for minutes that seemed to stretch out longer the second night. The dream ended with a bone-jarring thud that was followed by an even more terrifying darkness.

Tonight it had been different. I had been panting while I slept and I thought it was strange that I knew what I had been doing while I was dreaming. I'd panted when the dream darkness ended with a brilliant light and searing heat. I had screamed when the dream me had tried to stand, then shrieked as I fell back to the hot earth, my arms itching and burning as if stung by a thousand bees.

Now I knew I was awake, but I could not quite shake the memory of the pain, as if the dream still continued to envelop me.

I rolled over and rustled through the pile of dirty

clothes on the floor until I came up with the remote. Nick at Nite was showing an old Bob Newhart rerun. Suzanne Pleshette's husky voice saying "Bob" drove away the last of the dream's fog.

I told myself I wasn't afraid to go back to sleep. I tell myself lots of lies. Three nights of broken sleep were taking their toll on my already precarious sense of humor toward life.

\* \* \*

"Julia Madison, you look like hell," Carol said. "Honestly, you're going to be single forever unless you make some effort."

I looked at Carol dully, too tired for the show of vanity I knew I should have displayed. "As if I haven't already dated or lived with every single gay woman in this town," I said, without heat. "I refuse to start with the ones already in couples, and straight women are right out. Been there, done that."

Carol was shaking her head at me. "Are you sure it's quits for you and Mari?"

"It's been quits for six months, as you well know. She and Fran seem quite happy."

"Oh, yeah. I forgot about Fran." Carol took a bite out of her sandwich while I picked listlessly at the tuna noodle casserole that had been today's cafeteria treat. I was well aware that lunch for a buck-fifty was beyond cheap and was a huge help to my tight budget. But sometimes the bland fare reminded me too much of my life, my job, and Fresno.

Carol tsked. “I don’t know how you eat that stuff.” Her sandwich bulged with sprouts and watercress and looked too healthy to be edible. Carol always watched what she ate. She had a figure that would make just about any poet cry, and yet she was always trying to lose five pounds. Her big Amerasian eyes were always filled with good humor and compassion. With all that going for her she was just as single as I was. In the last few months I’d moved on to “why bother” while Carol was still hoping Mr. or Ms. Right was around the corner. She believed in keeping her options open.

“It’s cheap and filling. And it helps me make my mortgage payment since I’m now paying for the house by myself and buying out Ms. Marigold Jane Tempest’s share.”

“You may not live to see the last payment eating that stuff. It must be loaded with either fat or cornstarch to be thick like that. And those noodles have probably got egg yolk in them—cholesterol.”

I speared a pea and held it up. “Vegetable. This is a vegetable.” I ate it. “I have now eaten a green vegetable.”

“Technically, that’s a legume.”

I pursed my lips at her. “I’m going to go for a run tonight anyway.”

Carol subsided, knowing that on the topic of exercise I had her beat. She ate better than I did, but I ran a 10K whenever the opportunity presented itself and every other year I trained myself up to do the

Sacramento Marathon. Thank God this was an off year. A doctor had told me I had a heart like a horse—a compliment I hadn't appreciated when I was 20, but twenty years later I was counting on it. I knew that the king of running, Jim Fixx, had keeled over from a heart attack. It would happen to me if I didn't change my ways, but change was too hard.

I regarded the noodle on the end of my fork with all the enthusiasm I could find, which was none. In spite of being an overgrown small town, Fresno was a relentless force. The raisin capital of the world boasted long, hot summers and searing sunshine. Sooner or later everyone who lived in Fresno ended up a raisin. The moment I'd moved from the Bay Area to Fresno I'd been doomed to petrification. Marigold Jane Tempest had only accelerated the inevitable.

My life had had less cholesterol in it when I'd been living with Mari. But lately cholesterol was my comfort food. It came in such nice forms. Toast with real butter, milk chocolate, whole milk on Wheaties, cinnamon roll pudding, ribs-to-go from Ernie's Rib Hut—Carol only knew the half of it. I never really gained any weight, but I was substituting bad calories for the better calories I knew I should be eating. I felt lousy, and one dream-free night would have made a big difference.

I hadn't told Carol about the dreams because I didn't know what to say. We were close at work, finding camaraderie in our sexual deviance, but at work only. About four months ago I'd realized that all the women Mari and I had called friends were really Mari's friends.

I'd gotten the distinct impression from some that Mari's attempts to reform me into an acceptable dyke had failed. I ate too much red meat, had been caught red-handed at a women's camping weekend reading a John Grisham mystery, and I watched way, way too much television. Mari's circle wasn't one that appreciated the ability to name the Brady kids (which was so easy) or sing the theme from *All in the Family*.

Cholesterol filled the gap in my life, but just barely.

So how could I mention the dreams to Carol? And what would I say anyway? I'd never clearly remembered my dreams before, and I don't believe in all that Freudian and Jungian dream analysis stuff anyway. Well, some of it makes sense. A falling dream is probably anxiety. I was probably just stressed. I knew I was stressed. Stress was responsible for everything wrong with my life.

Did I mention that I tell myself lots of lies?

But it was the same dream two nights in a row, and then last night it had changed from a scary dream to a petrifying nightmare that had gotten even worse when I'd looked in the mirror. How could I show Carol the faint red pinpricks all up and down my arms and tell her I got them in a dream?

Carol was packing up her lunch debris, and I realized it was time to go back to work. She accepted my apology for being antisocial with one of her cheery waves. I slouched back to my desk and flipped on my

monitor. Another slew of files had been put in my in box, and now the in stack was higher than the out, a situation I hated.

If I concentrated on my work I would be able to resist the urge to peek at my forearms again. The last time I'd peeked the marks were still there. I told myself the next time I looked they would be gone. But there was no reason to look now. I could look when I got home. Later tonight. And the marks would be gone because I'd only imagined them in the first place.

Trying to find some enthusiasm, I attacked the stack and began making my computer log entries and phone calls. It was one of those days when I took glee at the faint gasp I always heard when I said the words, "This is Julia Madison from the Internal Revenue Service."

\* \* \*

When I changed into my running shorts and tank top there were no marks in sight. I had imagined them, just as I had been telling myself all day. I was glad I hadn't said anything to Carol.

It wasn't the best training decision, but I found myself going much farther than my usual four miles. I chose a route that ran into the wind on the final leg just for the extra energy drain. In the back of my mind was

the idea that I would exhaust myself and sleep the night through without a dream.

After my run I showered to get the wind-driven dust out of my nose and eyes, then called Domino's. I settled in front of the TV with a pepperoni thick crust and a pint of Chocolate Berry Mint ice cream, a disgusting-sounding concoction with little to redeem itself beyond being delicious and quite, quite comforting. I let Nick at Night take me back to the quick and easy denial of the sixties and seventies. One twitch of the nose and Samantha Stevens could get a good night's sleep. It wasn't the first time I wished I were her. When I was a teenager I had wanted her powers in the worst way.

When I snapped awake, the Rhoda rerun had given way to the infomercial for the Psychic Readers Millenium. One call to their 900 number and I would know if a tree was going to fall on my house or if twins were in my future as either romantic interests or offspring. It was 3:25 in the morning, and I hadn't escaped the dream. My heart was pounding harder than it did during a run.

It took all my nerve to go into the bathroom and look at my arms in the mirror.

The pinpricks were back.

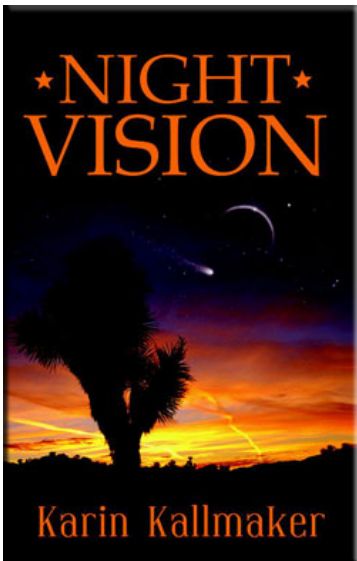
I couldn't sleep after that. I paced around the house, tried to watch more television, but nothing I did could get rid of the memory of my screaming and the nanosecond of excruciating pain when my arms

were...bitten or stung.

I tried to tell myself that the cafeteria was putting MSG or something else in the food and that I was having an allergic reaction.

With practice you can know you're lying to yourself and not even care.

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