
**Excerpt from
ONE DEGREE OF SEPARATION**



ONE DEGREE OF SEPARATION
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 SEVEN

The lunch date with Marian wasn't until one, Liddy reminded herself. It wasn't even a date. Not even a plan, really. It wasn't as if she'd actually asked Marian to join her for lunch.

The idea of possibly having lunch left her feeling unsettled. She tried to read and continue taking notes, but every few minutes she got up to pace.

Ridiculous, she told herself. If you can't work, just get out of the house.

She had not had a chance to browse at Prairie Lights, she recalled. Having a roomy parking space behind the house instead of shoehorning the Hummer into the driveway made it easy to just pop over to the Ped Mall. So it was only ten a.m. She'd treat herself to a new book to read just for pleasure.

She parked gleefully on "the ramp," which looked remarkably like every parking garage she'd ever seen, and joined the steady stream of people meandering through the hotel and out into the bright Saturday morning sunshine near the fountain and play structure.

The mall was more crowded than she'd expected. There was no sign of Marian near the library, not that Liddy really looked for more than three or four minutes. She would just walk the couple of blocks to the bookstore as planned. At the first cross street she made a quick detour to the Java House. Not that she expected Marian to be there either.

Tropical iced tea in hand, she was nearly to the bookstore when she saw that the far end of the pedestrians-only area had been set up with picnic tables and awnings. Something smelled tasty.

It was a pancake breakfast. How Midwestern, Liddy thought. How All-American and Family Values.

She would have turned away, superior and amused, if Marian hadn't been sitting at the closest table, eating pancakes and sausages while chatting with a man Liddy didn't know and a woman who had been with Marian at

the coffeehouse last night.

Her feet didn't even hesitate. The next thing she knew she was standing in Marian's line of sight.

Marian stopped chewing for a moment, then swallowed. "Oh. Hi."

Be cool, Liddy told herself. Sure. "Is Iowa City one endless round of amusements and parties?" She gestured at the balloon dangling from the awning support pole.

"We try not to let the rest of the world know." Marian indicated her plate. "They're not quite done serving and the flapjacks aren't half bad if you want to support the cause."

"Marian will save you a seat," the other woman said neutrally. Remembering her insights into butch and femme attire of last night had Liddy analyzing the woman's sleek linen trousers and unembellished button-down shirt. The strong, silent type, Liddy guessed.

"Sure," Liddy managed. Why was she so preoccupied with putting the dykes in this town into categories? "I'll be right back."

She expected the Boy Scouts or the Lions Club or even the Shriners with their tasseled hats, but instead she found herself tithing to the Iowa Center for AIDS Resources and Education in honor of Pride month. Swear to freakin' god, Liddy thought. *Where else but in Iowa would anyone raise money to fight AIDS with a pancake breakfast?*

She turned down the sausage and helped herself to butter and strawberry jam. Hoping her high color was mistaken for a response to the climbing temperature, she settled next to Marian and tried to think of something clever to say. Lacking that, she blurted out, “Why a pancake breakfast?”

The man said, “Why not? I’m Eric, by the way.”

“Forgive my rotten manners.” Marian swallowed and cleared her throat. “Liddy Peel, this is my colleague, Eric Waters. We hang out as often as possible at the reference desk. And this is my boss twice-removed, Mary Jane Heyer.”

“I always feel so important when Marian refers to me as her colleague,” Eric said drily.

Marian gave him a fond look. “*Associate* sounds illicit to me and *coworker* doesn’t convey my vast respect for your skills.”

Eric seized Marian’s hand. “Will you marry me, dear woman? I can’t get any of the straight ones to.”

Liddy laughed. “Is there a policy about fraternizing?”

Mary Jane looked stern when she answered, “I’d have to frown upon this particular match.”

“Dang it all.” Eric forked up the rest of the pancakes. “So much for someone to hem my shirts and cook my meals.”

“And now,” Marian said to Liddy, “you see why

Eric is still single.”

“This may be the wrong place to meet straight women,” Liddy suggested. “Especially of the doormat variety.”

“I know, I know.” Eric sighed heavily. “This looks like a pancake breakfast, but it’s really the beginning of the Dyke Social Season. I’m just an accessory for my beloved colleagues, who are so single they have to take a straight man to the I-CARE breakfast.”

Mary Jane threw her balled napkin at him. “I can have you shelving books all day, you know.”

The plump blonde Liddy had nearly knocked over – was it only two nights ago, Liddy wondered – stopped at the table and put her hand on Marian’s shoulder. “Thanks again for doing the early shift and then some, dear. Moving all those sausages is not fun. I wasn’t kidding when I said half the volunteers don’t show, was I?”

“Carrie, only for you would I pack that many sausages.”

Mary Jane’s guffaw turned heads. “I didn’t know you were that kind of girl, Marian!”

Liddy watched Marian’s cheeks stain with red. But her eyes flashed with humor as she replied, “Who needs to be, with you around?”

Regaining what seemed to be habitual composure, Mary Jane simply said, “Touché, my dear Miss Pardoo.”

Carrie gave Mary Jane an indulgent look. “You can be *such* a juvenile sometimes.”

“Gotta stay young somehow,” Mary Jane quipped.

“And I’m surprised at you, Marian, stooping to her level.” A light breeze rose for a moment, and Liddy caught the muted, refreshing scent of rosemary and oranges.

“With Marian it’s the other way around. Everybody has to stoop to her level,” Eric said quickly.

Marian gave him a cross look. “That’s right. From the double entendres to the short jokes. What would I do without my friends?”

Liddy realized Carrie was holding out her hand. “I’m Carrie Bloom. We haven’t been formally introduced.”

“Liddy Peel.” She added awkwardly, “I’m here for the summer doing research.”

“A pleasure,” Carrie said.

Liddy murmured something likewise. That lovely aroma of oranges and herbs was coming from Carrie. Her dun-colored clamdiggers and loosely crocheted top attractively framed a generous figure that only a fool would dismiss as maternal. Liddy wasn’t sure but she thought she spied the outline of a nipple ring. Carrie was very sensuous in a flowery granola Birkenstock way. Okay, she thought, considering that you didn’t come here to date, you’re noticing every single dyke in this town.

“A dab of essential lavender oil will take the sting out of that mosquito bite,” Carrie volunteered. She pointed at Liddy’s shoulder.

“Really?” Liddy peered at the bite. It didn’t itch yet. “I’ll keep that in mind.”

“I carry it at my shop, or you can also pick it up at Soap Opera. It all comes from my garden no matter where you get it. Oh – time to break down the serving area. Thanks for your support, everybody.”

Liddy struggled to remember something Ellie had said earlier in the week. “Is she the one with the holistic love couch?”

Eric choked on his water and Mary Jane’s eyebrows rocketed upward.

After she stopped coughing into her napkin, Marian said, “I guess you could say that. The grapevine in this town never ceases to amaze me.”

Mary Jane added gently, “Carrie looks at sex as a spiritual bonding, not an emotional one.” She struggled to appear serious, but the smile that twisted the corners of her mouth was winning. “I would venture to say if you’re invited to share the sacrament with her, you won’t regret it. But the invitation isn’t a guarantee.”

Marian was bright red again. “You’ll be asked right away or not at all. And whatever magic Carrie’s conjuring, I have to admit it works for her.”

“Not just for her. Not given that you’re red as a pomegranate.”

“Oh, thank you for pointing that out, Mary Jane.” Marian took a deep breath, but stayed quite red. Liddy rather liked it. “I was simply trying to say that Carrie may be the most content person I know. She has exactly the life she wants.”

“Or she’s learned how not to want what she doesn’t have,” Liddy observed. “I have problems with that one.”

If anything, Marian grew redder. What did I say, Liddy wondered.

“I’m afraid it’s time for me to go to back to work,” Mary Jane said.

“Me too,” Eric added. “Lucky Marian with the morning off.”

Marian retorted, “I was up at five, how lucky was that? And I work until closing tonight.”

Eric looked at Liddy and fluttered his eyelashes, the picture of innocence. “How lucky *you* are remains to be seen, doesn’t it?”

“Jesus,” Marian muttered. “Do you guys give each other points for making me blush, or what?”

Eric nodded serenely as he rose. “Mary Jane’s ahead right now.”

“It’s like shooting fish in a barrel,” Mary Jane said. “Which is not to say it isn’t fun.”

They wandered off, laughing, and Liddy watched Marian’s face slowly resume a more normal hue.

Marian sipped her water. “Who needs friends...”

“When do you have to be at work?”

“Two.”

“Oh, so you *would* need lunch around one.”

“Sure.”

“And if you needed lunch at one—” Liddy glanced at her watch—“two hours and fifteen minutes from now, where would a person find you, needing your lunch?”

“Hell, the way this week has gone, you’d find me at the Java House face down in the Colossal Chocolate Cake.”

“That bad?”

Marian’s gaze lifted from her empty paper plate and Liddy found herself falling into a mix of golds and greens. *Hazel* was just too ordinary to describe Marian’s eyes. Her breath stopped for a moment.

“My week is definitely getting better,” Marian murmured just before her lips touched Liddy’s in a sweet, lingering kiss.

Swear to freakin’ god, Liddy thought. If anyone had told her she’d get kissed at a pancake breakfast in Iowa City, she’d have never believed them. Marian tasted deliciously of strawberry. Then the kiss wasn’t sweet anymore, it was wet and hot, and needles of electricity shot up and down the insides of Liddy’s thighs.

Where, she wondered, had Marian the Librarian from Iowa City learned to kiss like this? Light touches were followed by brushes of lips and a fleeting touch of her tongue that left Liddy feeling as if she'd never considered the passion a woman's mouth could hold before. Which was ridiculous. She'd been kissed plenty of times.

But not like this.

It felt so good that it took her a moment to realize that Marian had pulled away. She was belatedly aware that she had a stupidly satisfied grin on her face and she attempted to conjure up some dignity.

**Excerpt from
ONE DEGREE OF SEPARATION**



ONE DEGREE OF SEPARATION
IS A CONTEMPORARY LESBIAN
ROMANCE BY KARIN
KALLMAKER.

PRINT AND EXCLUSIVE EBOOK
FROM:



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

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL