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## Excerpt from UNFORGETTABLE



UNFORGETTABLE IS A CONTEMPORARY LESBIAN ROMANCE BY KARIN KALLMAKER.

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## FROM CHAPTER THREE

A new voice startled her. "You look like you just won the lottery."

It was the dark-haired woman who had seemed familiar. "I might have." This was one phone call Rett would make, all proper and business-like, first thing Monday morning. Maybe Camille could pass her name

on to someone who could tell someone who knew someone that Rett Jamison was *not* a pain in the ass to work with. Even if that didn't fix the problem, it might help repair the damage her reputation had taken. She realized the dark-haired woman had taken the barstool Camille had vacated. She indicated the card before she pocketed it. "A good contact--a bonus for the evening's work."

"You were great," she said. Rett had the oddest impression that she was being laughed at, not unkindly, but something she was doing was amusing this woman to no end.

Something in the deep brown eyes was familiar but she could hardly say, "Don't I know you from somewhere?" in a bar. It would sound too much like a pick-up line. So she settled for, "Thanks. It's always good to have an appreciative audience."

The woman gestured at the empty beer bottle. "Can I get you another? Or something else? You must be feeling dehydrated."

"I'll take another beer, thank you." Rett instantly regretted accepting--it wasn't like her, actually. She usually would have refused. Usually, she would have been halfway home by now. She didn't want to go home. "Even though water would be better for me, you're right."

"I knew a singer once who was a fanatic about drinking water." The woman waved the empty beer

bottle at the bartender and held up two fingers. She rearranged herself so she was sitting on her leg, then leaned comfortably on the bar. "They never make these things for the height-impaired."

Someone called, "'Night, Angel!" and the woman waved.

"It was a coworker's fortieth tonight. We didn't expect such a nice evening of music. We just wanted to embarrass her into a public display of her Diana Ross impression."

Rett guessed Angel was about her age. She was just making conversation when she said, "I hope someone will take me out on my fortieth," then realized it was a major-league depressing thought. It was only a week and a half away, and no one would be taking her out. Forty. Forty and alone. Not even a brother or sister to tease her mercilessly.

Angel's lips twitched. "I sincerely doubt you'll have any trouble finding someone to do that for you."

"You'd be surprised." *Shut up, Rett.* God, was there anything more pathetic than pouring out one's troubles to strangers in bars? The beers were delivered and she took a long swallow and sought frantically for something cheerful to say.

"Spoken like someone on the rebound," Angel remarked. "Sorry, that's really personal," she added quickly. "I just recognized the tone of voice from my own recent experience."

They shared a wry, mutually sympathetic smile and more beer. Someone turned up the jukebox and the noise somehow made it easier to talk. Rett offered to buy another round but Angel demurred.

"Two is my limit--goes right to my head. I do impulsive but usually wrong things." She was looking at Rett when she said it, and that small gleam of amusement was back.

"I only have a walk home," Rett said. "So I think I will have one more."

"Feel free, please. I hope I didn't sound preachy. Everybody tells me I tend to do that."

Rett laughed. "Friends are so supportive, aren't they?"

"Colleagues are even worse, especially when they have one more master's degree than you."

Yikes, Rett thought. Angel was some sort of brain. "What do you do?"

"I'm a research fellow at UCLA. DNA, human immune system, cancer, those sorts of things."

Rett could tell that Angel had dumbed down the subject for her. She wasn't that backward. "That must be fascinating."

"Fascinating and frustrating. I also do a little bit of teaching, but mostly it's research. Petri dishes, microscopes and genetic sampling." She munched on a pretzel. "We isolated the gene that creates the

predisposition for uterine cancer. That was exciting, to say the least. Then our funding got cut in half. The life of a researcher in a nutshell."

"You have it almost as bad as a performer."

"Gluttons for punishment. A performer's career has a pretty big upside, you must admit."

"If there is an up."

"I hear that." Angel's eyes flickered with intensity. "There's a pretty big up for a researcher if you're in it for the love of the project. I want to be there when we unlock the last code. I know there's no chance of that--it's going to take more years than I've got left. But think of it--unlocking the secret of what makes us human instead of chimpanzees. How we think, what part of us laughs."

"What about why we think and laugh? Is all our behavior part of our code? Or is there room for improvisation?"

Angel took the question more seriously than Rett intended. "The mystery of what we can do is there, written on our genes."

It sounded too much like predestination to Rett. "But can't a building be more than its blueprint? Isn't that what art is all about?"

"What may seem like improvisation may really be growth. Finding the potential of your personal code. Doing things you didn't think you could do." Angel took a quick breath and her deep brown gaze never left

Rett. "Getting in touch with the parts of your code you ignore, or thought weren't even there."

Rett swallowed hard. Why did it seem like Angel was talking about something else entirely? Or was she just hearing something that wasn't there? "So spontaneity is just doing something you could have done all along?"

Angel reached for Rett's half-finished beer and at Rett's nod, took a quick swig. "Doing things that aren't typically you. Like this."

The kiss was quick but supercharged. Rett felt the zing through her spine and thighs.

Angel had her hand over her mouth. "I don't know what made me do that. I mean, I do know. But I'm sorry."

Rett wanted to say, "Don't be," but she was too startled by her physical response to have much ability for speech left. She found herself staring at Angel's lips while all the things she should have said, like "I'm not ready for this" and "Shouldn't we get to know each other better?" failed to come out of her mouth. She had never done what Trish referred to as "kiss and boff." Trish had been the quickest to get her into bed--and it had taken three dates. Trish had blamed Rett's prudish sex mores on a Minnesotan upbringing, but then Trish didn't know her mother's proclivities, and Rett had never enlightened her. Yet no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't stop looking at Angel's lips. She was

short of breath and a prickle of sweat dampened the back of her neck.

"I think it's time for me to head home. It's a bit of a drive," Angel said. "Maybe...maybe I could give you my number."

Rett's mouth outstripped the rest of her body's opinions. "No, I mean yes. I mean it would be okay, you don't have to go--"

"I think I should. This is crazy." Angel laughed nervously. The hand that was writing her number on the bar napkin was shaking. "If you ever want to get together, give me a call."

"Okay," Rett said. She was already kicking herself for having blown the moment.

Angel slid the napkin toward her and Rett pocketed it without taking her gaze from Angel's. Lovely brown eyes, clear and topazy.

"I'll call." Rett meant it. She turned to her empty beer as Angel walked toward the door, but looked up when she realized Angel was coming back.

"An incentive," Angel said huskily, and she pulled Rett's mouth down to hers again.

Rett gasped and returned the kiss with more fervor than she had been willing to admit she could feel. Had she cared about Trish so little in the end that it had taken only a week to get over wanting her? You'd left her a while ago, Rett reminded herself, just as she'd left you. That you were living under the same roof is beside

the point.

Angel's hands cupped her face as their kiss continued. Any rational woman would stop it here, Rett thought. *I must be crazy*. It felt too good to stop. She closed her eyes. In a minute, she promised.

A minute turned to two and her hands were on Angel's waist. She opened her mouth to Angel's eager exploration and then bit the fingers that Angel slipped between their lips.

Angel was the one with the sense to stop. Rett was breathing hard into Angel's shoulder, dizzy from all the blood draining out of her head to other places that were doing all the thinking.

"I think you got my message," Angel said into Rett's ear. "Maybe I could walk you to your car?"

Rett managed to lift her head, though she had to grip the bar to keep from appearing unsteady. "I walked, remember? I don't live very far from here."

Angel's tongue flicked over her upper lip as she digested that information. "My car is right outside. I could drive you home at least. No expectations."

"I think you know that if you did I wouldn't say no." Rett said. She managed to make eye contact, which was hard when she felt so emotionally naked. "Though I...I would rather not go to my place."

Angel's mouth opened as if she was going to kiss Rett again, then she glanced down at their entwined hands. "It's forty-five minutes to my apartment even at

this hour and I think I know what you mean. Home is still too full of someone else." She squeezed Rett's hands. "Maybe we both need a little more time."

From far away, through the dizzying desire and the roar of her pulse, Rett heard herself say, "There are a couple of motels just down Santa Monica Boulevard."

Angel caught her breath. "Yes, that would work."

Rett just stared at Angel, unable to say that she needed Angel to make the decisions right now.

"Let's go," Angel whispered.

They were in Angel's car heading quickly toward the motels when Angel said, "I'm not like this all the time."

The vacancy signs swam into Rett's vision. "You decide, I can't."

She watched Angel walk into the lobby of the motel they'd come to first. It was all she could do to breathe. Angel was back with a key in a few minutes and she drove them toward the back of the building. After she turned the engine off they sat there in silence.

Angel took a deep breath. "I think I might like to get to know you. I mean, I don't know very much about you, really." Her voice was raw. "But not tonight."

Rett looked at her in confusion.

"Tonight I just want to..." Angel gazed at her in the dim light. "I just want to..."

"It's okay," Rett repeated. She managed to open her door, but her steps toward the door Angel was unlocking were unsteady.

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