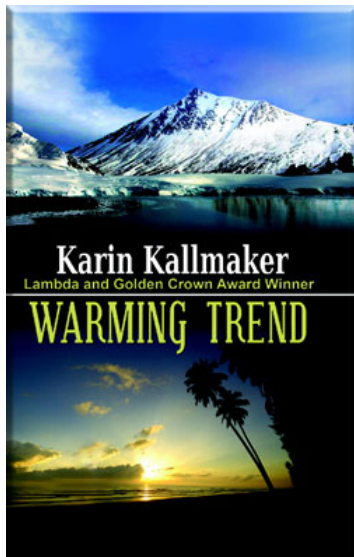


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## Excerpt from WARMING TREND



WARMING TREND IS A  
CONTEMPORARY LESBIAN ROMANCE  
BY KARIN KALLMAKER.

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## CHAPTER ONE

Misting, frigid air poured out of the ice maker, pooling around Anidyr Bycall's ankles as she scooped another bucket full of ice from under the bar. She bumped the door shut with her hip, but there was no relief from the cold. Her fingerless gloves were frosted across the backs and she could see her breath hanging in the chilled air as she worked.

A woman who'd been drinking beers for an hour dropped some bills on the bar before leaving and Ani wasn't surprised to feel them crackle in her hand. Customers came into the On the Rocks Ice Bar to escape the humidity and heat of Key West, and their currency was damp in their pockets. By the time they left, the money had frozen. She tucked the bills in the till. The cash register was a slight heat source and the money would melt again. It was still spendable, and that was all that mattered.

Lisa, the new cocktail waitress, leaned over the bar to recite her order. Her long blond hair, flowing loosely from under the

fur-lined hood of her snowsuit, was reflected in the bar's gleaming surface like sea foam spreading on cobalt waters. Over the shrill of the music she ordered, "Two Surfer's Wakes, two margaritas on the rocks with salt, three Conch Indies, and six tequila shooters and beer."

Ani kept her gaze fixed on the blender as she filled it with the quick frozen ice she'd just replenished. She spared her voice the effort of being heard by answering with a nod. She expected Lisa to take off for more orders or to pull the beers. Elaborate steins made from ice molds were all lined up, waiting to be filled. Instead, she continued to lean over the bar, openly watching Ani work. Beer wasn't Ani's job, and Lisa had to know that by now.

She wanted to tell Lisa there was no need to hang around. Like all the other new barmaids before her, Lisa would figure out Ani didn't need to be told twice. She'd also figure out that Ani wasn't much of a talker. The relentless tom-tom of the dance beat made conversation difficult, and Ani liked it that way. She didn't need to expend what social energy she had on making nice with yet another Key West surfer girl who would move on after a couple of months. Once the novelty of working in a thirty-degree environment wore off, they all left to chase bigger tips or the perfect schedule that allowed more time on their board—or on their girlfriend. With nearly three years invested in bartending at On the Rocks, Ani had seen that pattern repeat again and again. Her track record of not learning anyone's last name was perfect and she was keeping it that way. None of them knew her last name either, and only one or two had ever cared.

"You don't need to hang around," she finally said as she shook the blender.

"I'm not used to a place that doesn't use a computer for

orders.”

Ani nodded toward the ice-made bar-height tables that ringed the dance floor. “The longer people wait at a table for you the more likely they come to the bar and order direct.”

“Less work for me then, isn’t it?”

Where did management find these girls, Ani wondered. It was a matter of simple math. “It’s up to you, but you share your tips with me and I don’t share mine with you.”

Lisa looked like Ani had popped a balloon in her face. Her big, blue eyes swam with big, blue tears. Ani was willing to bet Lisa had gotten out of everything from parking tickets to bad grades with those shimmering, glittering eyes, not to mention the waves of blond hair. Black-eyed girls with mops of inky hair never got away with anything—at least that was her experience.

“Didn’t they explain it to you? We both share with the table jockey because tables with empty, slowly melting ice mugs don’t attract more orders, and the faster he clears and grades the table surface, the more drinks we serve. But without me, you have no drinks to serve.” She turned to a customer who leaned in between two of the bar stools. “What can I get you?”

A rum and Coke took about twenty seconds to make, and Ani pocketed the cash to make her point to Lisa. “It’s really up to you. You get to him before he gets to me, you make more money.”

“Well, thanks. I guess.” Lisa managed a convincing flounce as she departed to collect a few more orders. With that figure, still noticeable under the tailored, cinched waist of the vivid blue snowsuit, she would easily pull in good tips.

Nevertheless, Ani gave her two months, tops. The money was indisputably good at On the Rocks, but work was required to make it.

Her hands passed quickly over the bottles she needed, chugging alcohol into the blender, followed by scoops of fruit. Ani focused on the frost building on the outside of the blender as it chewed up ice, fresh pineapple and frozen strawberries and frothed them together with dark rum. Conch Indies were one of her signature drinks. The concoction had gotten her this job and the tourists still loved them. The contents weren't exotic, but customers who chose the On the Rocks were looking for flash and sparkle. They wanted the novelty of drinking from a crystal clear flute made of ice. A Conch Indie tasted good and looked pretty, bottom line. She poured the fragrant pink slush into two tall glasses, then deftly used long-tubed injectors to stripe the glasses along their insides with blue Curacao and Chartreuse. Tomorrow might be the Fourth of July, but in Key West red, white and blue gave way to pink, lime and cobalt. The required tiny umbrellas imprinted with the Conch Republic flag underscored the community's proud colors.

Customers in lime or pink parkas, provided as part of the bar cover charge, leaned on the tables to yell over the music as they drank. It made for a bizarre contrast with the patrons in their shorts and tanks, staying warm as they danced. The barware, from rocks glasses to brandy snifters, were all the colors of the Conch Republic, either clear or frosted, depending on the method used to freeze them in their molds. The effect gave the inside of the bar the same riotous colors as every other tourist hangout in Key West—it was just sixty degrees colder.

She finished stirring up the margaritas, and briefly rested her fingertips against the warmth emanating from the cash register. Her hands were always cold while the rest of her was just fine, even though she only wore jeans topped by a cobalt blue tank top with the On the Rocks logo. Lisa was on her way back with more

orders, but it only took Ani a moment to fill six lime-flavored shot glasses with tequila. She winced as acid from the lime peels she twisted into the glasses irritated a hangnail. Only the Surfer's Wakes were left to prepare. Lisa's tray was already laden with six drafts—she'd figured out that was her responsibility. At least the girl was efficient when she was thinking about it. Crushed ice clung to the sides of the frosted ice-molded steins, glittering with gold as it refracted the strobes and the ale inside. Ani blinked away the memory of that kind of golden light lancing along the crest of a glacier wall.

She glanced down the length of the bar to make sure her customers weren't trying to order while Lisa deftly added the shooters to her tray and swayed through the crowd to deliver the rounds. She was graceful and had no trouble with a heavy load, points in her favor. She'd be back in under a minute. Ani set up two tall, narrow glasses and reached for the coconut rum.

Lisa's hair was once again reflected in the bar. After she relayed her next spate of orders, she leaned over, affording Ani a prime view of her lovely real estate, molded by the half-down zipper of her suit. "That's pretty. That's the Surfer's Wake? What's in it?"

Apparently all was forgiven. "Coconut rum, tequila, salt, ice and blueberry schnapps for color."

"And club soda?"

"No."

"But it's sparkling. The ice is made from club soda?"

"No. The cubes are quick frozen which means there's a lot of air suspended in them. That's why they're cloudy and they melt fast." Ani lifted the glass to the light, enjoying the variations in the whites of the cubes as they settled in the clear blue liquid. "When

ice is slow-frozen it's clear because the air has time to purge. If a customer asks, tell them it's like an Alka-Seltzer tablet in water, without the bicarbonate bitterness."

She quickly tossed another ice cube in bar salt and tipped it over the glass. The cube plopped into the aquamarine liquid and sank slowly to the bottom of the flute. The salt made the cube melt even more quickly, and pretty strands of escaping bubbles danced upward to the surface, creating a thin foam. If she held the glass just right it looked like midday on a glacier field—stark white with crevasses that glowed blue from deep within.

"You sound more like a chemist than a bartender." Lisa's eyebrows were arched.

"Bartending is all chemistry." Satisfied with the bubbles and foam, she set the tall glasses on the tray and was spared from saying more by two women who slid onto the stools in front of her the moment they were abandoned by the previous customers. They giggled as they clutched the bar and each other in equal measures.

"Feel the bar," the redhead urged. "It's so cold I'm almost sticking to it."

Ani wiped the surface in front of them, glad to see a nearby resort room key card peeking out of the blonde's breast pocket. They'd not have far to stumble. "What can I get you?"

The redhead gave her a warm smile, but it was the buzz-cut blonde who ordered two Conch Indies. Sounding slightly peeved, she added, "My girlfriend thinks you're hot."

The redhead's bold eyes were at odds with the demure smile. "What can I say? It's freezing in here and you don't even look chilled. And I like Slavic looks on a woman. Tall, dark and moody."

Slightly intrigued, Ani lifted one eyebrow. “Slavic?”

“My brother-in-law is from Uzbekistan, and you could easily be one of his cousins.”

“My parents were born on the other side of Asia from there.” She might have specified the Bering Sea, but she was fairly certain the redhead wasn’t interested in a geography lesson. “I was born in Anchorage.”

The blonde put a possessive arm around her girlfriend, her expression sour. “If she speaks Russian, are you gonna let her do you?”

The redhead made a show of pouting. “If she speaks Russian, I just might.”

Go play out your domestic drama with someone else, Ani thought. “I’d better stick to English, hadn’t I?” Besides, her Russian had never exceeded nyet—her father had insisted it was her only word until she was four.

The blonde slapped down a twenty for the drinks. “Yeah, you’d better.” Snatching up the glasses, she practically growled as she turned to her girlfriend. “Put your tongue back in your mouth, babe.”

Glad that the blonde then insisted they move to a table, Ani shrugged off the unwarranted hostility. It came with the territory. For some reason, people had no trouble at all airing their dysfunctional tendencies to a bartender, as if bartenders had taken some vow of silence. It wasn’t the first time she’d been used as a jealousy prod. She was going to bet they had hot sex later, and the blonde would give her cute redhead a lot of reasons to forget some bartender she’d never see again. That wasn’t what a relationship was supposed to be about, not to her. Not that she was any expert and she didn’t ever plan to be. The chemistry of

ice was far more fascinating—and consistent—than the personalities of people.

Lisa's hand drifted over Anidyr's more than once as she collected beers, drinks and pitchers throughout the night. The pace of the bar peaked at about one thirty, just before last call. The noise was deafening, so she merely tugged her earlobe and shook her head in answer to questions about locations of after-hours clubs.

The music stopped at two, and the lights finally steadied to a wan yellow. The blazing neon bar signs were switched off and the high energy of people with nothing to do but party transformed into weary travelers and staff all looking for bed. Ani spotted the blonde and the redhead necking on their way out.

Lisa counted out her tips and divvied up shares with Ani and the table jockey. Ani balanced the till and divided the leftover cash between herself and the table jockey. The club wasn't quite as busy on weeknights, and because Ani could keep up with the pace, she didn't share the bar except on Friday and Saturday nights. The assistant manager checked inventory and—as usual—didn't find a bottle missing, so Ani didn't owe anything back. She tucked the roll of mixed currency in her pocket, alongside the paycheck for her hours worked and the tips customers paid with credit cards, and headed out through the utility back room. It would be just a few hours before the restoration crew came in to fill molds and replace the ice glasses consumed during the night, and groom the walls and ice sculptures for the next day's trade. She didn't look at the ice sculptures much—even with the slowest freezing process they could manage, the clarity of the ice was nothing like Fairbanks, which hosted the World Championships every year. She shook off the thought. It wasn't productive.

“Hey, Ani.” Lisa fell into step alongside her. “Do you remember Kirsten?”

“Sorry. If I saw her I probably would.”

“Well, she remembers you. She said to say hi.”

Ani gave Lisa a sideways look. “She a friend of yours?”

“Not really, but she did say I should try to get a job here.”

They turned the corner in the long corridor that ran almost the length of the resort’s main buildings. “And that you would be one of the highlights.”

“She was joking, I think.”

Lisa put one hand on Ani’s bare forearm. “You walk really fast. It’s the long legs.”

“It’s late and home is calling.”

Lisa moved closer, temptingly warm after all the hours of cold. “Bed is calling me.”

Ani tried to look as if she didn’t understand the invitation, then she tried frowning, but Lisa continued to look at her with the big blue eyes and a not-so-subtle heave to her bosom. Under her unzipped snowsuit she wore a ribbed tank that left nothing to Ani’s imagination. “Look, I don’t know what Kirsten told you—”

“That you were fantastic with your hands.”

“My handiwork is all at the bar. I don’t go home with anybody.”

“Oh, that’s not what Kirsten said at all.” Lisa leaned even closer, and Ani knew she ought to have felt the heat rising off Lisa’s skin, but she didn’t. She didn’t feel anything but a desire to end the conversation.

“I’m sorry she misled you, then.”

The pouting began. “She said you were hard to get next to,

but she'd managed."

"I can't explain why she'd say that." Ani gently removed Lisa's hand from her forearm. "I have a date waiting for me at home," she lied. "Sorry."

Lisa didn't follow her as she walked onward toward the exit to the employee car lot. Ani consigned the conversation to the list of things she'd make sure to forget by tomorrow. Why would

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Kirsten—a woman Ani didn't even remember—make up a lie? Sometimes she had no idea what motivated people.

Every ten feet the temperature increased noticeably, and her footsteps slowed as she reached the exit door. She was glad to be unaccompanied. No one would understand why she found it hard to open the door to the lush, exotic Key West night.

She told herself she was being a fool, the same thing she did every night. But she couldn't help it. It was nearing three in the morning and she didn't want to leave the cold and ice of the club. She so very much wanted to open the door to forty degrees and the night sky already glowing at the eastern horizon. It was the time of year when, at home, the sun almost never set, and the stars faded like pale milk into the indigo canopy. The time of year when two women could touch noses and not worry they might get frostbite. The time of year when dancing on a glacier at three o'clock in the morning wasn't suicidal madness, and the northern lights blazed in full celebration of whispered endearments.

She pushed the past out of her head. There was no exhilarating chill on the other side of that door, no aurora borealis. She opened the door and let the humid Key West air brutally remind her that it wasn't a bad dream, she'd still made the mistakes she'd made, and she still had to accept that this was how

it had to be. Key West was her chosen place of exile. She loved living in the Keys. The years of bartending to get through her bachelor's degree at U of Fairbanks had paid off as her only real vocational skill. Who cared if she could set an avalanche charge or tell, just by looking, if the glacial ice was stationary or moving? Useless. So what if she came from generations of sturdy Russian stock that thrived best when conditions were harsh? Why not live in paradise?

She felt heavy and slow as she claimed her scooter from the lot. Find wisdom, she told herself. It's not about having what you want, but wanting what you have. Key West, oh she loved the humidity and the sparrow-sized bugs. She loved the constant sweat on her palms and the six-toed stray cats. It was always summer, the flowers were always in bloom and nothing ever changed. Who could want more than all that?

She headed into the thick, cloying night, the sky loaded with stars. She wished she could call it beautiful. She knew that the fireworks tomorrow ought to be spectacular if the clear weather held for one more day. Look forward to the fireworks, she told herself, and stop wishing you didn't smell of scotch.

Her bungalow was on the other side of the tourist district, past the Hemingway house and into one of the low-rent side streets near the airport. Many of her neighbors also worked in tourism, and she wasn't the only one arriving home at that late hour. A shower was her top priority, and then a long sleep to start off her Independence Day.

"Ani-dear," someone called softly, not too far away. She turned to track the voice and saw Shiwan waving. "A package."

"Sorry," Ani said as she crossed the small patch of unmown grass that separated their doorways. "They never get it right."

“Postman lazy. My door much closer.” Shiwan flashed her a tired smile. “I going to bed, so good thing you come home now.”

“Thanks.” She hefted the box, telling herself not to hope that it was from Tan. “I appreciate it.”

She heard Shiwan’s door close before she was back on her own front porch. Once she was in her own narrow foyer, she glanced at the return address—A. Salek, Fairbanks, Alaska. It was from Tan. She hadn’t lied to Lisa, after all. This box was a bona fide date.

The familiar mix of excitement and dread played out in a rush of adrenaline, and she quickly pulled off the club tank top and kicked off the worn black Levi’s. Within minutes she was in the shower, scrubbing the odor of booze out of her pores. She toweled her hair until it was damp, enjoying the cool feel of it against her neck. Though she reveled in the club’s icy air, it was stale. The bungalow’s lack of central air conditioning was welcome. The moist air from the swamp cooler refreshed her sinuses, doing as much good as the moisturizer she massaged into her rough hands.

Even as she automatically tended to all the steps that would lead her to bed, she wondered what she’d find in the box this time. What gossip from the university? Would there be new issues of *geoLogics*? Would any of the newspapers mention people she’d once called friends? It had been three years of experiencing a brand-new climate, but she missed Alaska desperately. That her exile to Key West was her own damned fault only made it harder to let go. Tan’s box of news was an act of pity by the department administrative director to a former grad student who had screwed up. Maybe Tan—and the rest of the world—believed her guilty of the wrong thing, but she had still made some big mistakes and

now she was paying for them. Karma was karma.

Knowing if she opened the box she would not get the sleep she so badly needed to truly study the contents, she made herself leave it on the floor next to the bed. Exhausted as she was, she felt its presence as she waited for sleep. News from home...

She awoke to the pop of firecrackers. Her heart raced at the surprise of it, even though her ear reassured her that the high, light report couldn't be anything but the rapid crack of tight paper cylinders exploding. She had to blink sleep out of her eyes before she could see the clock. It was already after ten. For just a few moments her day off was no more complicated than wondering if she should doze for another half hour or go back to sleep for even longer.

Another round of firecrackers solved the question and she pushed herself upright with a groan. The day was already humid and hot. A tank and shorts would be too much clothing. The Fourth of July was usually one of the short range of days when a person could wear a tank and shorts in Fairbanks. It was probably in the eighties at home.

She bashed a foot on the box from Tan as she swung out of bed. Torn between a curse and giddy anticipation, she hobbled to the small kitchen to start the coffee. If she had the Internet she could look up the weather at home. She sloshed water onto the counter as she filled the little coffeemaker, then koshed an elbow on the cupboard as she reached for a mug. It was all the fault of the box. News from home always upset her equilibrium—the reason she wanted no home computer, no Internet, no contact. If

a little box filled with journals had her spilling jam down her shirt, she knew she'd have no peace at all if she could click her way to the university's class schedules and faculty bios. She dabbed at the jam smear and knew that she really didn't want to read about the latest candidate to become a tenured geologist at GlacierPort. The bottom line was that it wasn't her, and never would be. Dr. Anidyr Bycall was a lost dream. Monica Tyndell, professor, doctor of Quaternary geology, undisputed expert in the glacial history under Gates of the Arctic, and Ani's mentor and idol, would have had to have seen to it that Ani's entire academic career was expunged.

Tormenting herself with daily news would drive her crazy. Better to wait for these boxes every other month and fill her time and her bank account at the bar. Some day she would explore a different line of study. Some distant day.

By the time she finished her toast and had a half-full mug on the table, her hands were shaking so badly she nicked her thumb with the knife she used to cut the tape. Great, it would sting like hell the next time she made a margarita.

She could have sworn she smelled smoked salmon as she pulled back the flaps. Tan had put *Alaska Today* right on top, and her breath caught at the stunning photograph of the ice fields east of Juneau. Her nostrils responsively tightened and her perceptions sharpened as if a bite of the icy air had hit her full force. It only lasted for a moment, but in that moment home existed.

The dinette table creaked as she pulled the box closer to her. The technical journals went on the left, the *Fairbanks Gazette*, University of Fairbanks magazines and newspaper clippings in the middle, and GlacierPort newsletters on the right. Many of the latter were printouts from online versions. She scanned headlines

as she sorted—*geoLogics* featured an update to the ice timeline, promising an article that would take her all the way to evening to read and digest. She regularly lied to herself about how much she missed the pleasure of studying data, but when she held some in her hands, she couldn't deny she was starved for it. She would take the ice data to the beach later, and enjoy it while she waited for the fireworks.

The bottom of the box finally reached, she set it aside so she could fill it with key limes, fresh roasted coconut and the toffee covered hazelnuts that Tan had said she loved. It was the very least she could do to repay Tan's kindness, especially since so far Tan had refused all offers to come and visit—too hot, too far and so forth. Tan had been the only one who had thought, regardless of what Ani may or may not have done, that Ani had been ill-treated. She had offered to listen, at least. Eve hadn't listened.

"Enough of that." She pushed away the memory of Eve's eyes squeezed tight and her hands over her ears. Don't tell me anymore! Ani had done exactly what Eve had asked and that was that. She opened the *geoLogics* to the first page and began on the editor's abstract.

Her stomach growled so painfully that she closed her eyes for a moment. Dizzy and cramped, she looked in disbelief at the clock on the stove—how could it be three o'clock already? She turned her head too quickly and was repaid by a shooting pain along her neck. When she looked at the page of tabular data in front of her the numbers wavered against the white background.

"I get it, I get it." She muttered more words under her breath as she stamped one foot to get circulation going again. Time for something to eat, and to stake out a spot at the beach. She quickly filled a messenger bag with an older issue of *Alaska*

Today, the *geoLogics* she had been reading, a couple of *Gazettes*, and an issue of *Terrafrost* in case she wanted a break from all the science. Every once in a while, a student's short story was worthwhile. Adding a thin beach towel to the bag, she headed out to her scooter. She put a bottle of water and an apple, along with a bag of frozen blue ice, in the small cooler bungeed to the back, added her messenger bag with another bungee and pattered out onto the already crowded streets.

After a stop at the ATM to deposit her paycheck, she wove her way through stop-and-go traffic along Flagler until she could use side streets to get to the water. The scooter culture in Key West meant it was generally okay to carefully use the shoulders to pass traffic, but it paid to keep an eye out for fallen fronds from the palms that lined every street. She'd already gotten one flat tire from driving over a dried out edge.

Even though the heat of the afternoon usually kept most of the locals indoors, the fact that it was a holiday meant a lot of people were walking the last few blocks to get to the long strip of eastern shoreline. The fireworks would be visible from almost anywhere on the miles of beach, so she thought she'd spread out near the dog park. There was shade and fresh water nearby. Scooters were three deep along the parking lot fence, but she found a spot to wedge hers in, then walked out to the nearest cabana, the cooler dangling from her fingertips. A few slightly soggy bills from her tip cache acquired a trio of fresh fish tacos with mango salsa, and a thoroughly chilled juice blend the locals called conch-conch. It was never the same twice. Today it tasted like guava had been the primary component.

Her stomach finally at peace, she half-buried the cooler in the sand for insulation and sprawled on the towel, mostly in the shade. She relaxed first with one of the stories from the literary

magazine. The Jack Londonesque tale of a dog sled race wasn't particularly original, but it was certainly enthusiastic and brought back her own exuberant sledding experiences. She pressed the chilled exterior of her conch-conch cup to her cheeks and closed her eyes and let herself have just one moment of vivid remembrance. Her only win had been a midnight race, late June. Her father had said her good fortune was genetic. Those black eyes of hers could see in that mixed twilight, and she'd seen every flag while her competitors had veered off course. When she'd come across the finish line he'd swung her around and around until she was dizzy. She'd been maybe thirteen? She'd never forget Tonk Senior and Bannon and Jeeves and Klinkatet. Beautiful dogs. They'd loved racing.

She wondered what had happened to Tonk Junior. No matter how mad Eve had been with her, Ani knew in her heart that she wouldn't have taken it out on Tonk. Tonk was still in a loving home, older and slower, but happy. Had to be.

She opened her eyes to the dazzle of orange-gold light. The sounds of puppies and dogs at play in the dog park brought painful nostalgia, but not so much that she wanted to move. She deserved the reminder. She'd disappointed Monica Tyndell, broken Eve's heart, and Tonk wouldn't have understood why one day Ani didn't come back. Dogs only understood hellos, not good-byes.

Damn. Okay, time for some data to distract her. She studied her way through another temperature table in *geoLogics*, this time for what was left of the ice sheet near Ellesmere Island, then

decided it was time for *Alaska Today*. She'd never read the magazine when she'd lived there, but now every article held some element of interest. It didn't matter if the subject was netting salmon on Cook Inlet or bull moose locking horns in Denali. In the Keys she was daily surrounded by yellow sunshine. The photographs from home had blues, beautiful deep, rich saturating blues. Blues in the ice, blues in the ocean, blues in the rivers and even tinting the spruce. Without mountains, it seemed, there were no real blues.

She drank it all in. A recipe from Ketchikan for new pea salad recalled her mother's Easter dinners. A bed-and-breakfast just outside Anchorage reminded her of the place her folks had run for a while when she was small. Her mother had done most of the work, but dad had helped out between his expeditions. After her mom's death, Dad had sold the B&B for a tidy sum, a chunk of which had helped with Ani's first four years of college, with some left over to get her foot in the door at grad school, along with her scholarship. Fat lot of good that had done—

“Hey—fancy meeting you here.”

Ani looked up into a flash of blond hair. It took a moment to recognize the face without the snowsuit hood framing it. “Oh, hey.”

Lisa plopped onto the towel next to her. “So where's that date of yours?”

The question didn't seem hostile, though the lift to Lisa's eyebrows suggested doubt at the existence of any date. Ani indicated her reading material. “You're looking at it.”

Lisa frowned as she picked up the *geoLogics*. “I can't say I think much of your priorities.”

“To each her own.” Ani held out one hand for the journal.

Lisa continued to study it. “So is global warming real?”

“Yes it is. We might be in a warming era anyway, but our own pollution is accelerating it faster than our ability to adapt.”

Pointing at a column of core temperature readings for the polar ice sheet, Lisa asked, “How can solid ice have different temperatures and still be frozen? Or is that a stupid question?”

“It’s not a stupid question.” Ani shaded her eyes and was surprised to see that Lisa was serious. She knew a lot of women who ran screaming from data tables. “Fresh water forms the crystal structure of ice beginning at thirty-two degrees at sea level. As the temperature decreases, the crystal structure gets stronger. The inner temperature of the ice reaches a point where its strength turns brittle. Past that point the crystal structure is prone to shattering.”

“So that’s why avalanches are more risky when the temperatures stay unnaturally low?”

Ani hoped she didn’t look as surprised as she felt. “That’s right. Glacial calving is also more likely in extreme cold.”

Lisa dropped the journal onto the towel and gave Ani her full attention. “Just because I don’t look like I went to college doesn’t mean I didn’t.”

“I—”

“It’s okay.” She tossed back her hair and flashed an unapologetic smile. “Lots of times I fall asleep to the Discovery Channel. I try not to use my brain a lot now, though. I don’t want to use it up. Sooner, rather than later, the skin’s going to get blotchy, and the equipment—” She mimed her curvaceous figure in the air. “The equipment is going to go south. Lesbian sugar mommies are really quite hard to find, so I guess sooner or later, I’m going to have to get a real job. I’ll go back to being Myra, and

I'll need the brain then.”

Ani couldn't help herself. “That whole bit about the tips was just a dumb act, wasn't it?”

“Works on guys all the time.” Lisa grinned. “You, on the other hand, didn't offer to let me keep some of your tip money. Clever woman.”

In spite of herself, Ani laughed. Lisa's honesty about her motivations was refreshing. “The offer last night, was that about tip money?”

“No. That was about Kirsten saying you were great in bed. She had a good laugh about it when I called her this morning. I'm taking her off my list of friends.” Lisa rested back on her elbows. “So what's a nice geologist like you doing in a place like this?”

“Earning a living.”

“And not much else, I'll bet. Really—what made you move here?”

“I love the beach.” At Lisa's patent skepticism, Ani added, “Why else?”

“Because it's a long way from there.” She pointed at the *Alaska Today*. “Kirsten was right about one thing. Any girl with a pulse has a heart attack when she walks into thirty degrees and there you are in a tank top and those sexy fingerless gloves.”

“It's just the uniform. It's not like I'm—”

“Trying, no you're not even trying, which makes it all the more intoxicating. Then they find out you really are in your element—as cold as the furniture.” Lisa stared at her and there was no way she missed the fact that Ani was blushing. “Now I've got it figured out. I don't know who she was, but half the lesbians in Key West hate her.”

“Who?”

“Whoever she was—the one that broke your heart.”

“Oh.” It was Ani’s turn to be rueful. “I broke her heart.”

“And then you took off?” Lisa cocked her head and Ani realized she was a little bit older than she’d first supposed. “Well, since I don’t think we’re likely to date given your preferences...” She nudged the *geoLogics* with her toe. “That leaves me free to say I think that’s chicken shit.”

Irritated, Ani snapped, “Who asked you?”

“Oh, please. Lesbian code of conduct. If we’re not going to go to bed so we can become judgmental exes, then that means we go directly to being judgmental, but without the whole bitter thing. You broke her heart and took off so you didn’t have to watch her suffer.”

Through gritted teeth, Ani said, “You don’t know anything about it.”

“What difference does that make?”

“God, you’re irritating.” This is why I don’t like people, Ani thought.

“Oh, now you’re talking like an ex. Maybe we should go to bed after all.”

Ani just stared at her.

“What?” Lisa’s gaze was level. “You’re freaked because my real name is Myra, aren’t you?”

“No, I’m annoyed because you’re a know-it-all.”

“For a woman supposedly without a broken heart you have no sense of humor and not a clue how to flirt.”

Ani had thought it was just the reflection off the sand, but the tiniest crinkle at the corners of Lisa’s eyes made it apparent

she was being teased. “What if I don’t want to laugh? There’s global warming and the price of gas, you know.”

“Say *melanoma* in a group of surfers—guaranteed to bring the vibe down.”

“I’m not going to win this battle of wits, am I?”

“No. Might as well give up.” Lisa opened the half-buried cooler. “Can I have the apple?”

“Sure, if you buy me an ice cream.”

“Buy your own ice cream!”

“Buy your own apple!”

“You’re incredibly boring.”

Lisa settled in to read *TerraFrost*. Ani wanted to ask her if she didn’t have plans or something, but she kept her mouth clamped shut.

Some time later, Lisa grunted and said, “Not a bad story. And I got stood up.”

“Whoever she is, she’s a fool.”

Lisa looked up from the magazine, eyelashes fluttering. “That’s the nicest thing you’ve ever said to me.”

“Don’t get used to it.” Ani continued giving most of her attention to an article on fly fishing near Bristol Bay. “What’s your last name, anyway?”

“Garretson. Yours is Bycall.”

Ani nodded and Lisa was finally quiet.

Someone like Lisa lounging on a towel tended to attract a lot of foot traffic. Guys and girls alike trolled past them. Half the girls Lisa seemed to know, but she was equally laconic with most of them, though a couple earned the kind of smart-ass teasing she’d dished out to Ani. Ani was blotting out the chitchat with another

table of ice temperature data when a newcomer's coy-kitten tone broke into her concentration.

"Don't you look cozy?" The new arrival was sleek and tall, and sported a mane of golden bronze hair that had to have emptied a salon of its entire supply of extensions.

"Hello, Tina." Lisa didn't move, but her breathing had gone shallow. "Yes, I'm cozy."

"It's a shame we don't see you around much anymore."

"I've made a clean air environment a priority. For my health."

"Remember Mindy?"

"How could I forget? The image of her skinny legs wrapped around you left me with retinal damage."

Ani couldn't see Lisa's eyes, but she could have sworn that little fire bolts darted out of Tina's. "Now that we're living together she's handcrafting me a board."

"Something to do after getting canned from the board shop?"

The fire bolt eyes turned to Ani. "Who's this?"

Ani answered, giving Tina a patently false smile, "Anidyr."

Tina dismissed her with a blink, and went back to trying to burn a hole in Lisa. "Your dear Ani? I didn't know you were dating finally, even after all this time."

Ani had seen Tina's excellence-in-bitchery type in the student union back home. When the sun rose at eleven a.m. and set four hours later practice with verbal knives passed the time. "We haven't been dating for very long. It took me forever to convince her I wasn't another lowlife."

Tina made a face at both of them. She flicked some sand

onto the towel and the reading material. “Taking a vacation to Alaska or something?”

She’s dying to know, Ani thought, which makes her still hung up on Lisa or a control freak stalker. Control freak stalker seemed more likely.

Lisa brushed the sand off the *Alaska Today*. “Yes, you’ve got it. I am in awe of your deductive abilities.”

“Before we go,” Ani said, “Lisa thought we ought to familiarize ourselves with the deterioration of oxygen isotopes and the rate of glaciation retreat.”

“Ani’s a geologist.” Lisa smiled sweetly. “I’m sure with her help I can work my way up from ablation of the ice cap to the proper use of a surf wax comb.”

Tina tossed her hair, which was no small feat. “Whatever. See you on the curl—that is, if you can still get your ass up on a board.” She stalked off, her hair blotting out the setting sun.

“You didn’t have to do that,” Lisa said. “Now I owe you.”

“It was self-defense. She was standing in my reading light.”

The tension in Lisa’s body eased. “I used to think she was a big deal. I was flattered she even noticed me.”

“And then you figured out she was a bitch?”

“No, then I fell for her and we moved in together.”

“And then you figured out she was a bitch?”

“No, then I did her laundry for thirteen months, eleven days.”

“And then you figured out she was a bitch?”

“No, then I walked in on her and that skinny, empty-headed surfboard waxer.”

“And then you figured out she was a bitch?”

“Yes.”

“Only took me thirty seconds.”

If Lisa had been wearing glasses, she'd have been giving Ani a stern look over the top of them. “Your point?”

“Battle of wits...tie score.”

“Fine.” Lisa heaved a long-suffering sigh. “You know how they say that sometimes a person is meant to be a better friend than a lover? She wasn't even a good friend.”

“Or a good lover?”

“I didn't say that. Why do you think I stayed for so long?” She dusted off her hands with an aura of dispelling evil spirits.

“Can I watch the fireworks with you?”

“Sure. As long as it's not a date.”

“Can't be.” Lisa opened the magazine in her lap. “I don't date anyone I like.”

Ani laughed and reached into the messenger bag. “You've read that one. Have a local tabloid. The police blotter is always fascinating reading. Close encounters between cars and moose, that sort of thing.”

Lisa flipped open the first few pages. “I'm riveted. Hey, professors in Alaska are pretty darned hot. Did you ever study under this one?”

Ani glanced at the photograph Lisa was tapping and said, “No.”

After a raised-eyebrow look, Lisa refocused on the page. “Okay. If you say so.”

“I do.” Not the way you mean it, Ani thought.

“Okay. I believe you.”

Ani went back to her data, but she saw none of it.

Monica Tyndell was as beautiful as ever. So was Eve. And they looked very happy, arms around each other's waists.

"You don't do fireworks in Alaska?" Lisa stretched and shifted on the towel, the newspaper still in her lap, even though the sunlight had faded thirty minutes ago.

It was all Ani could do not to snatch it up. "We do them, they're just not all that successful. Things happen to the properties of chemicals when they're catapulted into sub-freezing air layers."

"That makes sense. Same thing happens to women who hit on you, too."

"That's right, I'm frigid. Sub-freezing."

"Like hell you are—first one!" Lisa's squeal was all child at the first big burst of golden sparks.

To Ani's relief, the fireworks were enough to distract Lisa from another dissection of Ani's love life. The sliver of crescent moon was almost set, and within moments the night sky was brilliant with cascades of colors under the sparkle of white stars.

For a while neither of them said more than "Wow" and "Good one!" The rapidity of the launches increased.

"Green's my favorite," Lisa shouted over the sustained barrage of explosions. "Like ocean in the sky. I think this is the finale." The fountain of emerald ribbons was replaced with starbursts of burning pink.

Ani's agreement was drowned out by the sustained popping of mortars. A resounding, beach-shaking boom was followed by a

brilliant white wash of sparklers dripping from sky to ocean.

Ani closed her eyes, sensing the resonance of the explosion from the sand underneath her. Her skin could feel the heavy blanket her father had used as a shock and sound wave buffer. She could hear his voice, plain as day.

“See, Ani? Did you feel the difference? Dynamite sounds different from Tovex.”

“I could tell, Dad.” She’d watched her breath form in the air under the blanket. “It made a deeper sound—does it penetrate deeper, too?”

“Take a look.” Her father had flung back the blanket, leaving Ani to blink in the dazzling summer sunlight. “What do you think?”

Ani trained her binoculars on the glacier wall more than two football fields away. A large fissure had been opened. The shadows and intermittent presence of blue ice said it ran deep, much deeper than the fissure the earlier blast with Tovex had opened. “I see it. How come they want you to give up using dynamite?”

“Water-gel compounds are more stable, especially at these temperatures. Tovex can be much more subtle, and sometimes that’s good. Several small charges can be more predictable in results.”

Ani glanced at her father, meeting the gaze from the same snapping black eyes that stared back at her from mirrors. “You’d prefer to stick with dynamite.”

He nodded. “Yes, but if I want to keep working, I need to be open to different ways. Let’s get the last blast done, Ani-my-dear.”

“Can I press the button?” Her father had laughed and

handed her the controls as they crawled back under the protective blanket.

Lisa smacked Ani on the arm, jarring her out of her reverie. “This is the best one I’ve seen down here.”

“Me too,” she said automatically.

There wasn’t bone-freezing ice under her and the concussions from another barrage of fireworks wasn’t followed by the endless rumble of a glacial ice crystals breaking and falling into packed ice below. In spite of the heat still rising from the sand, Ani’s arms were covered in goosebumps.

It wasn’t that late when Lisa disappeared on foot toward her own bungalow, not far from the beach. Ani packed up her belongings, found her scooter and headed for home, telling herself not to speed. Once in her door she made her way to the table, dumped out the contents of her messenger bag and opened up the *Fairbanks Gazette*.

Right there. Monica and Eve, with Monica’s arm casually around Eve’s waist. Eve had let her hair grow a little longer, but it was much the same—curly and light. She was almost the same height as Monica. Her ear had nestled perfectly just below Ani’s shoulder when they’d hugged and Eve had been given to secretly smooching Ani’s neck during otherwise casual looking embraces. She devoured the photograph with her eyes, then finally made herself read the caption. Braced for it, the words still took her breath away.

University of Fairbanks Professor Monica Tyndell and local chef Eve Cambra celebrate their partnership outside of the new Dragonfly restaurant in North Pole.

Eve had always wanted a restaurant of her own. “I’d open it

in North Pole,” she’d said, her voice drowsy as she nestled against Ani’s shoulder. “A short commute and lots of military folk.”

Ani had laughed and pulled the covers around them. “I can hear the ad now. Box lunch at Eve’s, across from Dyke Range, oops we mean Fort Wainwright.”

Eve giggled softly in her ear. “Crude. Funny, but crude.”

“I was raised in the society of men. Dad, buncha guys who liked to climb around on glaciers and sometimes blow up parts.”

One knowing fingertip drifted along Ani’s arm, sending tingles all the way to Ani’s toes. “I’m glad to show you what you were missing out on.”

Ani spread Eve’s lustrous golden hair on the pillow, loving the way the midnight sun turned it bronze. “I always knew I was missing out on women.” She brushed her lips against Eve’s. “But life didn’t get good until I realized what I was really missing was you.”

“Sweet,” Eve had murmured. “Show me.”

Ani had shown her, shown her every way she could think of. Loved her, wanted her, lived for smiles from her. Watched the play of red and green aurora over Eve’s face as they danced on a glacier at three o’clock in the morning.

Now Eve was with Monica. Monica was an amazing woman, a gifted and talented one, the type of woman that someone like Eve deserved.

She made herself memorize the photograph of the two of them. They looked good together. She played back in her head Lisa’s offhand remark: You broke her heart and took off so you didn’t have to watch her suffer.

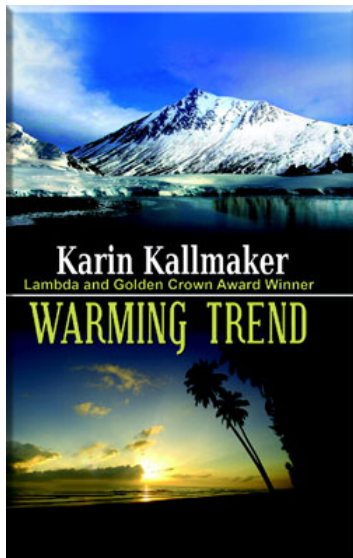
Maybe that was exactly what she’d done. She didn’t want to see Eve suffer, and the disappointment in Monica’s eyes had cut

her ego to ribbons. Now they were better off. At least they'd moved on.

She could do the same, now that she knew. She could leave them be, finally, and move on herself. It was a relief. Crawling into bed, she told herself that she had warm, sensuous Key West nights all to herself, no more regrets. It had all worked out for the best.

Covers pulled up around her ears, arms wrapped tight around a pillow—none of it helped. Cold to her core, she was still shivering when she finally fell asleep.

## Excerpt from WARMING TREND



WARMING TREND IS A  
CONTEMPORARY LESBIAN ROMANCE  
BY KARIN KALLMAKER.

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