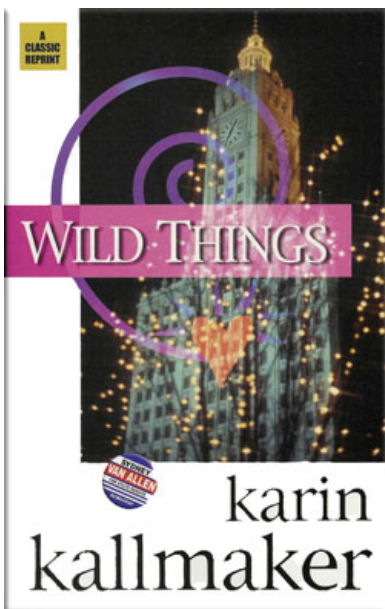

Excerpt from WILD THINGS



WILD THINGS IS A
CONTEMPORARY
LESBIAN ROMANCE BY
KARIN KALLMAKER.

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FROM CHAPTER SEVEN

[Faith Fitzgerald really likes Eric Van Allen. He can literally offer her the world. There's just one problem: his sister Sydney and how she makes Faith feel. They are attending a fancy dress ball. Faith is Eleanor of Aquitaine; Sydney is John Adams.]

It was after two when I saw Sydney again, her wig slightly askew as she talked earnestly to a small group of men around her. I recognized some of the faces but couldn't come up with names. I drifted toward them, hating myself for wanting to be closer to her.

The group laughed, and one of the men took over

talking. They were having a political debate about municipal bonds for affordable housing--in the middle of a very swank party. I smiled behind my veil. Apparently Sydney was one of those people who are always working.

"I'll convince you yet," Sydney was saying when an ethereally thin woman dressed as Veronica Lake cut in and took Sydney by the arm.

"Syd, dear, I haven't seen you in ages," she said from behind long, blonde hair covering one eye.

Sydney went rigid and said in a markedly unwelcoming tone, "Patrice, what a surprise."

"It's been at least ten years. You don't come to the Club anymore." Patrice managed to make it sound like an accusation. She dropped her gaze to Sydney's empty glass. "I've run out of Scotch, and so have you. I think we should go find more."

The men shifted uncomfortably, and Sydney said coolly, "I don't drink anymore Patrice. You'll have to find it on your own."

"I don't believe you," Patrice said coyly. I realized then that she was very drunk but hiding it well. "Any more than I'd believe you stopped doing all the...other things you used to do."

Sydney lifted her chin. "You'll have to find someone else to have your fun with, Patrice. I don't believe in living in the past."

"Who's talking about the past? I'm talking about

Scotch tonight and breakfast tomorrow. It'll be like old times."

"No, Patrice," Sydney said patiently. "There's no turning back the clock."

Patrice pushed Sydney away with a sudden, ill-tempered pout. "You're no fun anymore, Syd. You're boring. And rude. You never called." Patrice looked around as if she'd forgotten what she was saying. "I'll get a Scotch, okay?" She walked carefully in the direction of one of the bars.

There was a strained silence among the men with Sydney, then one, much older than the others, said, "Aren't ex-girlfriends a pain?"

They all laughed, and Sydney smiled ruefully but said nothing. I noticed then that she had gone pale while talking to Patrice because some color was coming back into her cheeks.

I headed for fresh air, ashamed at myself for eavesdropping. Obviously, Patrice had been someone from Sydney's drinking days and Sydney had broken those associations. I stepped outside the ballroom onto a flagstone patio. It was chilly, but the sky was clear and I looked up at the stars. They were far more visible here than in the city.

I shivered, not from the cold, but from the sudden image I had of Sydney in bed with Patrice. What I felt wasn't jealousy, but it was a strong pang. Oh, great. Envy, another deadly sin. Envy, lust, lying to thy

mother, and coveting thy boyfriend's sister. I was racking up quite a list for my next confession. If I ever had a next confession. I left the patio for the cool, damp grass, torn between laughter and tears and afraid, truly afraid, of the future.

I walked to a nearby black oak, thinking the exercise would clear my head. My pace quickened, and I wanted to run. If I ran fast enough perhaps when I stopped my life would make sense to me. But my dress was not made for vigorous exercise, and I stopped when I gained the shadow of the tree. I turned to look back at the party and saw that someone was following me. The white wig gleamed in the moonlight like my dress.

She didn't say anything until she was standing next to me. Then she said, too casually, "Did you enjoy the little scene with Patrice?"

I blushed to the roots of my hair and was glad of the tree's shadow. "No," I said in a whisper.

"You can't do this to me," she said intensely.

Stung, I snapped, "Do what?"

"Be near me."

"I won't bother you again," I said, trying to act dignified. I had behaved like a love-struck schoolgirl, and dignity was hard coming.

"Please don't," she said coldly, looking toward the party. "I don't want anyone to think that there's anything between us."

"There's nothing," I said, trying to match her coldness. "Your political career is safe."

She whipped around to stare at me and moved closer. The velvet of her vest brushed my arm. Her voice lashed at my shaky dignity. "This is not about my career. It's about Eric. Remember him? The guy who keeps telling me how glad he is I like you? How happy he is that Mom and Dad seem to like you? Remember him?"

I gulped and managed to say, "He never leaves my mind. Never." I fought back tears.

"Good," she said, drawing herself up. "I hope you keep it that way."

"I'm not sure I want to." The words slipped out before I could stop them.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"For every thought of him, I think of you a hundred times," I whispered.

"Faith, don't."

"I'll never have this chance again," I said. "I didn't want to be a...a...lesbian. I've been fighting it longer than you've been fighting alcohol. I've lost this battle."

She turned her head so her face was in shadow. "What about the war?"

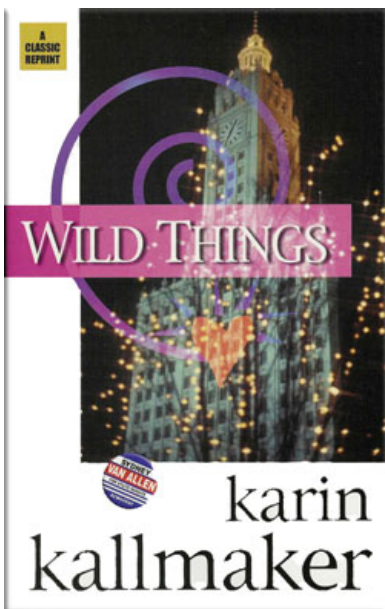
I undid my veil and uncoiled the kerchief, tugging it free of the bobby pins. I held out the crimson silk. It fluttered between us. "My flag," I said. "I surrender."

Raising her hand slowly, she caught a fluttering edge, then all in a rush reeled in the fabric and reeled me into her arms. Her lips were cool as the night, but when she opened her mouth to me, her passion ignited mine.

We tumbled to the grass, a fevered tangle of arms and legs, rolling into the bundle of my kerchief and the yards of muslin in Sydney's sleeves. It billowed around me, and like in the field, we seemed to fall out of time.

This will be my only chance, I thought, over and over.

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