



Best Lesbian Romance 2009

Radclyffe (Editor)

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Who says romance is dead? Certainly not the authors of these powerful stories of lesbians in love — and sometimes in lust. *Best Lesbian Romance 2009*, edited by the award-winning author of such books as *When Dreams Tremble* and *Turn Back Time*, presents the juiciest, most seductive love stories written today. Putting a new spin on the subject, these stories explore the underlying emotions and complex relationships that help define love between women. From a shy glance across a crowded room, to a casual meeting at a dinner party, to an accidental encounter on a street corner, this collection of romantic interludes showcases the many ways love can be both lost *and* found. Contributors include Jennifer Fulton, Karin Kallmaker, Radclyffe, Rakelle Valencia, and Alison Tyler.

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From Reader Review Best Lesbian Romance 2009 for online ebook

Carmen says

Femme Fatale: 1992 by Kathie Bergquist

This story is like the lesbian version of Bridget Jones's Diary.

"How will Angel even know what kind of underwear I'm wearing?" I asked.

"What kind of attitude is that? Think positive! YOU'LL know you're wearing sexy new underwear. Not those libido killers you usually wear."

"They're comfortable!" I argued.

The MC is still living in the same one-bedroom apartment as her ex (which I think is very unhealthy) and is preparing for her first post-breakup date.

We were going to a performance art show at a club. I wanted to look stylish but not too dressed up, casual but not like a slob. I also wanted to look kinda sexy but not slutty. I wanted Angel to want to have sex with me.

There, I said it.

I wanted to get laid.

The Bridget Jones-ness doesn't stop there. Angel takes MC to some performance art that is really fucking weird. MC has random and slightly neurotic thoughts like:

The crowd was mostly women, and mostly white, and a majority were wearing glasses. Cool glasses. I wished I had some cool glasses, despite the fact that I had 20/20 vision.

Nascent hipster?

When Angel stops to talk to another woman while getting MC a beer, MC freaks out.

What was this? Was Angel cruising another girl on our date?... Maybe I should just leave, I thought.

MC spends the whole date having to pee very badly and thinking that the performance is weird.

If this kinda thing was what Angel was into, then maybe we were not meant to be.

Our 22-year-old MC is also given ~~condoms~~ dental dams by her friend in that classic scene where a young man goes on a date and his best friend gives him condoms in case he "scores" but then the condoms fall out of his pocket or otherwise come into play in an embarrassing way in front of the woman and he is humiliated. Same concept.

"You dropped this." To my utter mortification, I saw that she had the dental dams. "I'll hold onto them," she said, sliding the baggie into her suit coat pocket. "So, what next?"

Like, what? Is this supposed to be sexy or a player move or what? Does she think she's going to be using these later? Isn't that a bit presumptuous?

Tl;dr – I find it hard to sympathize/identify with women who are like this MC . Insecure, flighty, judgmental worrywarts. I couldn't really get into Bridget Jones's Diary and I couldn't really get into this. I didn't like the MC or her date very much. 3 out of 5 stars.

Christmas Blizzard by Teresa Noelle Roberts

This story is just lesbian erotica. Since I can't get excited about sex scenes if there are no males involved, this was a loser for me. Two women who run a B&B and are a long-term couple use their empty B&B as an excuse to have lots of sex during a Christmas blizzard. 2 out of 5.

The Usual by KI Thompson

This story is about a player named Jill who comes hard at a resistant waitress at a diner. The story has a happy ending, but I was upset with Jill. For one thing, waitresses are paid to be nice to you. Taking advantage of that fact makes you a creeper. Secondly, going to Irene's place of work all the time and hitting on her is sexual harassment as far as I'm concerned.

I've always wanted to fall in love, but I never really believed it would happen to someone like me. Quite frankly, I've never had the time or the desire to date someone for long. The inane chitchat you have to go through in order to get to the sex bores me. Don't get me wrong. I don't take women for granted or treat them as sex objects; believe me, they're quite satisfied by the time I'm through with them. Can you hear my eyes rolling? Ugh. I'm just not that interested in sharing my life, or my living space, with one particular person.

Opening paragraph and already I've had it with this narrator.

Then she sees Irene slinging hash in a diner and starts her non-stop campaign to get her into bed... which I call sexual harassment.

Not that I'm happy with Irene, either.

"How's the hash?"

"Fine, if you like artery-clogging meals." She reached for my menu, but I pulled it back.

"What do YOU like to eat?" I wanted to know so I could choose a restaurant she would enjoy going to.

Instead, she pointed to the left-hand side of the menu. The top item read, "Fresh fruit, yogurt, and granola."

"I'll have the hash."... When I reached for the ketchup bottle, she grimaced and stormed to the patrons across from me to refill their cups.

People who judge other people's food choices make me RABID.

"I'm Jill," I said, but she ignored me. "The food was great and the service even better Lying! , although, if I could give you a piece of advice, you might try smiling a little more often. It makes the customers happy."

The look she gave me was not the kind I usually received from women, but then, she didn't know me that well

yet.

I hate when people tell you to smile. Ugh!

Then Jill finds out where and when Irene goes to college and shows up at the diner every Friday night an hour before Irene gets off work. Like a fucking creeper.

Now, I'm usually fairly patient when I want something, and I wanted her badly. But after weeks of being spurned, I was frustrated. Perhaps I needed to shift tactics.

She's made it pretty clear she's not interested in you, asshole. How many times do you have to hear the word "no" before it sinks in?

This time I waited out in the cold until I saw her exit the front door and the manager lock up behind her. She was juggling a book bag, her purse, and a large brown paper grocery sack. I saw my opportunity and hastened to her side.

"Here, let me give you a hand." I snatched the paper bag from her grasp and slipped it easily into the crook of one arm.

Wow, what a creeper. Isn't there someone who works at the diner who walks the waitresses to their cars at 2 a.m. so that they don't end up getting approached/attacked by creepers like this?!?!

"Would you like me to hail a cab?"

She shook her head. "I live a few blocks away."

My pulse revved. I was going to find out where she lived. Maybe she'd invite me up for a drink or a friendly cup of coffee. Now I was getting somewhere. A little more patience and soon I'd be removing her clothes.

Ugh, creeper.

Then, when they get to the apartment, Irene reveals that she (view spoiler)

She looked so small and fragile, completely unlike the woman I bantered with on my visits to the diner. I suddenly felt like a cad, pressuring her into letting me inside her apartment, ready to pounce at the slightest opportunity.

That's because you are a cad. Fucker.

Then they have sex and Jill fucking sneaks out of bed after sex and avoids the diner for a few days. What a piece of shit.

It has an (allegedly) happy ending, but I was having none of it.

Tl;dr – What a creep. 2 out of 5.

Last Call by Karin Kallmaker

I actually really liked this story about an alcoholic named Rikki who is in love with a bartender named Nebraska. They had a drunken one-night-stand six months ago, but Nebraska refused to see Rikki again because she doesn't date drunks (her ex was a drunk).

This story is sweet and well-written. It's very retro noir-ish, the opening paragraphs are:

Nobody knows why she goes by Nebraska. If asked, she laughs and admits the closest she ever got to Nebraska is Iowa. Nobody at the Shady Times Bar knows - except me.

"You want another one of those?" Nebraska looked down the bar at me with the smile that had claimed my heart more than three years ago.

I tipped my club soda at her and a few moments later caught the filled glass as she slid it down the bar toward me. A noisy group jostled through the big swinging front door and made a beeline for the round table on the far end of the dance floor. It was early and the jukebox was still set for Elvis. I was lonesome tonight, but that was the status quo.

See what I mean? I happen to enjoy this style. I also enjoyed the writing in here:

Her hands caressed the necks of tequila, rum, gin, and vodka bottles, deftly tossing them hand to hand. Glass flashed in the light, sparkling like miniature rainbows. Blue, green, and red prisms refracted in the mirror, spilling colors over her white-blond hair. Peach juice splashed color into the mix, followed by deft squirts of cola from the tap. I never could take my eyes off her, and tonight was no different. I watched her fingers nimbly twist lime slices and remembered that night, six months ago, when those fingers had been as deft with parts of my body, leaving me as filled – and as mixed up – as the contents of the shakers she lined up across the bar.

I also really like seeing Rikki struggle with her alcoholism and the idea that she's not just giving it up temporarily for a girlfriend but instead going sober for good.

How could she know if I was there to watch her or to yearn after the booze when I still wasn't sure myself?

It's so complicated and realistic.

I was still a drunk every moment I sat on that barstool, regardless of what was in my hand. Some nights I lusted after the alcohol almost as much as her. I wanted to stay, and win her affection. I had to leave to maybe earn her respect. Either way, I lost her. Choices like that only make the booze all the more attractive.

I thought this story was top-notch.

It wasn't the booze, it was me that was a coward. I'd never reached for anything I wanted but the next drink.

It has a happy ending. :) <3 5 out of 5 stars.

Finding my Feet by Shanna Germain

Okay, I'm not into feet, so I thought that the story (revolving around a woman named Sun putting henna on her long-time-friend's feet) was a bit weird.

However, both women were sweet and likable, and I enjoyed the story overall. The MC has a kind of easygoing nature and such a strong kindness towards her friend/crush that is very appealing to me. Also, I like when people are friends for a long time and then realize that they are in love.

That's the thing they never tell you about being a girl who likes girls. You get to have another girl pressed up against you, have a friend who hugs you to her, or who dreams about painting your feet in a faraway market – and it might mean everything. Or it might mean nothing. Just friends.

There's a sex scene in this story, but it was enough of a love story for me to be happy – not just erotica masquerading as a love story like some stories in this collection.

4 out of 5.

In Flight by Andrea Dale

This is about an unnamed MC who just got out of a terrible relationship with her ex. She has to do community service and does it at a hawk rehabilitation center where she meets a woman named Pam whom she soon develops a crush on.

The thought of a relationship made my stomach hurt, but I could still enjoy Pam's sleek legs encased in worn, fitted jeans or khaki shorts, her firm breasts high and round beneath her green tank top and long-sleeved, unbuttoned cotton shirt.

Okay.

I hadn't been around long enough to know Pam's sexual proclivities, and despite my enjoyment of watching her (okay, and smelling her, even if that makes me sound like a creepy stalker) I assumed she was straight.

But I'm kind of creeped out when MC plans on masturbating while thinking of her clueless friend.

Pam slathered sunscreen on her arms and offered me the bottle.

I dutifully smoothed it over my own arms, the smell turning my brain to mush because it reminded me so strongly of Pam. I was definitely going to have some solo fun tonight with this scent permeating my sheets.

The idea of any of my friends (male or female) masturbating while thinking of me when we don't have a romantic relationship just creeps me the fuck out. I guess I'd never know about it (?) although in my experience creepers really like telling you about the creepy things they are doing, but... Ew.

Of course, this being a romance story, it has a happy and HEA ending. There's also a sex scene thrown in there.

Some of the writing was good,

Suddenly she laughed, the sound spilling from her throat like golden sunlight.

but I thought this story was just okay.

3 out of 5.

Krispin by Rakelle Valencia

This story has a very medieval type of writing so much so that I was convinced I was reading about the Middle Ages until a Thermos was mentioned, then I was like, “Wait.... what?”

This is how the story opens:

Krispin rode down from the hills as each spring dawned. The early morning sun sparkled off the dew in her wake as she passed through the pastureland of hibernating forage. Breath from her horse's nostrils preceded her with fog so that she rode through a constant ethereal mist...

You can see what I mean.

This story is about a younger woman having a crush on the tough and mysterious Krispin.

...I held Krispin up against all others, and none had compared. Perhaps it was only a girlish lust borne of my unconsummated fantasies that had made Krispin grow in my heart to a love I felt would burst, or that could be read easily on my blushing face whenever I was in her presence.

Like I said, very old timey writing.

The story started out cute and interesting, but takes a nosedive when our MC decides to sneak in and watch Krispin showering. Sigh. Why are there so many creepers in this book? Stop being creepy. Jeez.

Anyway, (view spoiler)

Rather disappointed by this one.

2 out of 5.

Eyes by Maggie Kinsella

Okay, while this is in theory a sweet story – about a woman with severe facial scarring and a blind woman falling in love – I hated the writing style. It was choppy and unsatisfying.

2 out of 5.

Hide by Alison Tyler

I found this story to be intensely creepy. It's about a woman named Patrice who owns a leather store and creeps on her customers.

But I wait for, and wish for, and fantasize about the she-tigers, the lady lions, the ones, like this redhead, who need the feel of the hide on their naked skin. Need the scent of it caressing their lovely bodies. These customers are the ones I opened Hide for in the first place, and they are the beauties I wait for.

And watch.

She had on a mint-green halter top that made her eyes glow the same color, and cutoff jeans that showed me a bit of her panties when she bent to look at the boots lined on the wall. Her ass made me dizzy, the way the faded denim hugged her sweet tail. She was a beauty, a thoroughbred. A prize.

Ew. Very creepy. Made even worse by the fact that Patrice just... locks the store door and puts out a CLOSED sign (without the customer's encouragement or knowledge) to create a “private shopping environment” or whatever... it's creepy.

Of course the customer ends up liking and having sex with Patrice, but I was creeped out to no end.

1 out of 5.

Unbuttoning by Kay Jaybee

This is pretty much pure erotica, and also involves stuff like handcuffs, ball-gags and paddling. I'm completely uninterested.

Also, weight loss praise makes me twitch, and not in a good way.

1 out of 5 stars.

Sand Castle Queen by Rachel Kramer Bussel

Stacy goes to a Puerto Rican resort to unwind after a terrible breakup and meets a woman ten years her junior whom she falls in love with.

Even though this story has a long sex scene at the end, at least it's romantic and has no creeper things in it.

However,

I've never really gotten hazel as an eye color; it seemed wishy-washy, flecked, only halfway done. I prefer the intensity of brilliant sky blue staring back at me, and have fallen for girls simply because their eyes bewitched me so. Or a silky coffee brown, usually with hair to match, one that made me think of the perfect cup of coffee, warm and welcoming. But hazel, until Margaret, seemed iffy, noncommittal, and just what I was trying to avoid.

Hazel eyes are fucking gorgeous, end of story.

3 out of 5.

Cuts by Shannon Dargue

I was a living, breathing, lesbian cliché. I had fallen madly in love with my lifelong, STRAIGHT best friend,...

Who is a nurse at the hospital that Sam goes to when she cuts her thumb off.

Happy ending.

3 out of 5.

Absinthe by Jennifer Fulton

This is a historical fiction story that takes place before, during and right after WWII. A 24-year-old American woman (Eloise) meets a 34-year-old woman who dresses in men's clothing on a train to France.

I was ready and willing to like this story, but unfortunately Sylvia (the older woman) was really annoying me. For one thing, Eloise calls her “Madame” all the time (even in bed), and that creeps me out. Two,

There was something wicked in the dark glitter of her eyes and the white flash of her teeth. She observed Eloise with disquieting concentration, the way people study artworks they want to own.

Ew. Really?

Three,

She rolled up her sleeves and opened the window of their compartment, producing a thin cigar. “Do you mind?” she asked. “I would offer you one, but I don’t care to see a beautiful woman smoke.”

Okay, firstly, fuck you. Secondly, fuck you. Thirdly, what the fuck?

And Eloise is like, “Oh, she thinks I’m beautiful?!!?” And I’m like, “Oh, she likes to own other human beings and she also thinks she can tell you what you can and cannot do because she doesn’t think smoking is feminine.” FUCK YOU, LADY.

Then, they are in bed together and at first I think everything is going to be fine because Sylvia is being so good with consent, but then Sylvia is like,

“An impatient virgin. How very tempting.”

And I’m like, fuck you!

THEN, the war happens and the women don’t see each other for five years. When they finally reunite, there is a really touching scene where Eloise meets Sylvia again. She’s now scarred and is missing fingers.

“I’m not as I was,” Sylvia conceded dryly. A pained uncertainty entered her expression. “If you find me unattractive - “

“Stop.” Eloise placed two fingers across her lips. “You could not be more perfect. I fell in love with you the moment I first saw you, and nothing has changed.”

And I was like, “Awwwww! This is so sweet and cute!”

But then Sylvia had to ruin it by saying,

“I think I fell in love with you the moment you took that first sip of absinthe. I felt like I had corrupted the most innocent creature alive. From that moment on, all I could think about was completing your education.”

Okay, that’s fucking creepy and gross. Also, can I just say that “virgins” are just NORMAL PEOPLE. They are not like some rare kind of unicorn or like ‘innocent’ or ‘childlike’ or anything. THEY’RE JUST PEOPLE. I hate virginity fetishizing, I find it extremely creepy. I hate this kind of pride or joy in “corrupting” people who haven’t had sex yet. YOU’RE NOT “CORRUPTING” ANYONE. And it’s creepy how you’re so proud or perverse or getting some sort of pleasure out of your alleged ‘defiling’ or ‘sullying’ someone. Sexuality doesn’t work that way, it doesn’t make people ‘dirty’ or ‘bad.’ Just like being sexually inexperienced doesn’t make someone ‘innocent’ or ‘pure.’ All of this is fucking bullshit. FUCKING BULLSHIT.

And seeing or referring to yourself having sex with someone as “educating them” is EXTREMELY DISGUSTING and not romantic even in the least bit. Ew, no, pass.

2 out of 5.

Kim BookJunkie says

Radclyffe best romance 2009

The first story in the anthology starts out strong so I was hopeful, thinking I would enjoy this anthology. After a good start, I was shocked when the first story had an absolutely terrible ending! If I had read that story on its own, I would have rated it just 2 stars! After listening to 6 stories on audio book, I decided to quit. Although some stories were decent, I didn't read anything that was even close to being above average. If I had to rate this book based on just the 6 stories that I did read, I would give it 2 or 3 stars. Fortunately for Radclyffe, I don't believe it is fair to post a numerical rating unless the entire book has been read so no star rating was or will be posted.

FionaH says

Happy garage sale find! Very much enjoyed most of these. Shannon Dargue's and Jennifer Fulton's were my favourites.

Lilly Rose says

Excellent collection of short stories about girl/girl romance. And finally some that aren't erotica! (Though there are some that are!)

Elaine Burnes says

What is the difference between erotica and romance? This is the problem with buying a book online and not getting to rifle through it. Most of the contributors write erotica, most of the stories are erotica. I was expecting romance. Either I'm off, or the editor/publisher is off. That said, the stories ranged from not very good to really quite good.

Emily Moore says

The latest in the Best Lesbian Romance series from Cleis Press is a wonderful collection, with a plethora of stories that run the gamut of different settings for romantic encounters between women. The stories are varied yet fit together well and flow beautifully into a seamless anthology filled with stories that hit their mark.

“Femme Fatale: 1992” by Kathie Bergquist ~ A first date includes a wild performance art piece then thankfully takes a turn for the better.

“Christmas Blizzard” by Teresa Noelle Roberts ~ A couple make the best of Christmas Eve at their inn when cancellations due to a blizzard leave them all alone.

“The Usual” by K.I. Thompson ~ A woman finds many obstacles while pursuing a late-night diner waitress she’s set her sights on.

“Last Call” by Karin Kallmaker ~ Rikki tries to keep her hold on six months of sobriety while visiting a bar nightly to admire bartender Nebraska, who she thinks she loves.

“Finding My Feet” by Shanna Germain ~ A woman and her friend, who she has been lusting after for a while, come together over henna designs on her feet.

“In Flight” by Andrea Dale ~ A worker at a hawk rehabilitation center helps a woman trust again after a bad breakup.

“Krispin” by Rakelle Valencia ~ A young woman lusts after Krispin, who spends the winter in the hills before returning to the ranch each spring.

“Eyes” by Maggie Kinsella ~ Claire must adjust when her blind lover Lydia regains her sight and doesn’t need as much help as she once did.

“Hide” by Alison Tyler ~ Patrice, owner of the leather shop Hide, meets her match in customer Diana, and the result is explosive.

“Unbuttoning” by Kay Jaybee ~ Laura celebrates her new size after losing weight with some special purchases to use on her partner Jenny.

“Sand Castle Queen” by Rachel Kramer Bussel ~ Stacy goes on a much needed vacation to finally get over her ex, and falls for Margaret who will change her life forever.

“Cuts” by Shannon Dargue ~ Sam is reunited with her best friend Kellie, her straight friend she’s fallen for, after an accident at work requires Sam to visit the hospital.

“Absinthe” by Jennifer Fulton ~ On a train ride in 1939, Eloise meets a Madame who opens her eyes and changes the course of her life.

“In Your Picket” by Evan Mora ~ A woman walks down memory lane when she finds reminders of her life with her partner in the pockets of an old leather jacket.

“Purple Thumb” by Catherine Lundoff ~ Type-A Lisa has a new job in the Midwest that she couldn’t pass up ... and finds herself drawn toward gardening and more after meeting Marlene.

“A Ghost of a Chance” by Ariel Graham ~ Friends and business owners Sam and Marcy investigate the possible haunting of the basement of the house they are leasing, and end up exploring something quite different.

“The Traveler” by Olivia Presley ~ A solo traveler has an unexpected encounter with a French waitress who shows her what it’s really like to be in Paris.

“Sugar on Snow” by Sacchi Green ~ Twenty-five years after college, two roommates find themselves isolated in a cabin by a winter blizzard and find ways to light several fires to stay warm.

“Mélange” by Allison Wonderland ~ A woman waits, worried when her partner hasn’t returned home and left none of the typical notes regarding her whereabouts.

“Place, Park, Scene, Dark” by Elspeth Potter ~ A werewolf is captured by her ex and a sexy Asian bodyguard to prove who is really in charge.

“Music on the Wind” by Radclyffe ~ Anna and her lover Graham celebrate the beginning of their vacation on a cruise ship.

This is a great collection of stories, all centered on romantic encounters between women. Some stories focus on unrequited love or lust, others are the beginning of a new pairing, and several are a look at established relationships. Each is a romantic interlude that is touching in many ways. Although there isn’t always a happy ending, each story shows how a woman embraces the romance within her life. The stories vary from chaste to scorchingly hot, yet all are filled with deep emotions being expressed between two individuals.

Any reader will be able to find stories within this anthology that speak to them. “Last Call” includes

engaging characters and a vivid exploration of emotions and desires that translate exceptionally well on the page. “Finding My Feet” is a fun story with two best friends who are finally able to admit to deepening feelings. “Hide” is a sinfully erotic story with a gender-bending shop owner which is a wild ride from start to finish, and one that I read more than once. “Absinthe” is a fascinating story with two captivating characters set within an unsettled time in history, and the connection between the women is palpable from start to finish. I enjoyed all the stories in this collection, yet these four in particular spoke to me on a deeper level and are some of the ones I look forward to reading over and over again.

If you are looking for a grouping of stories that explore the love and connections that exist between women, I definitely recommend taking a look at this book. You won’t be disappointed.

Aaron says

I've read about three or four of these collections so far, and this one seems to have the strongest collection of memorable characters and the most consistent array of emotional intangibles. Great collection.
