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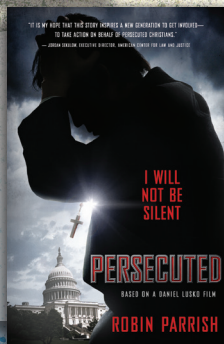
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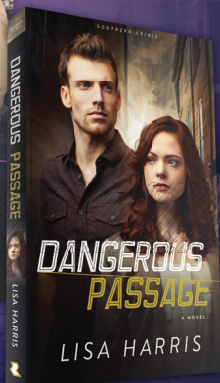
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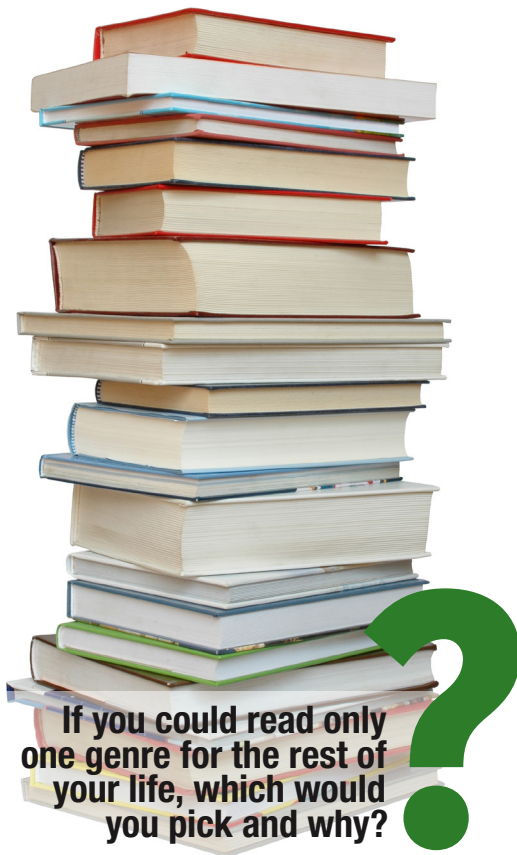


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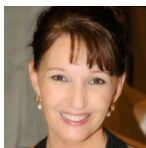
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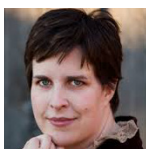
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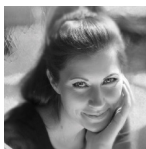
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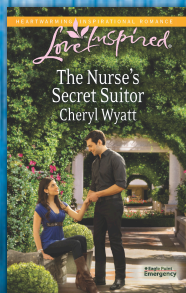
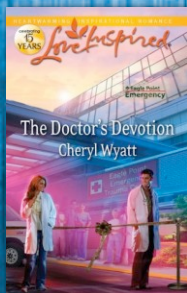
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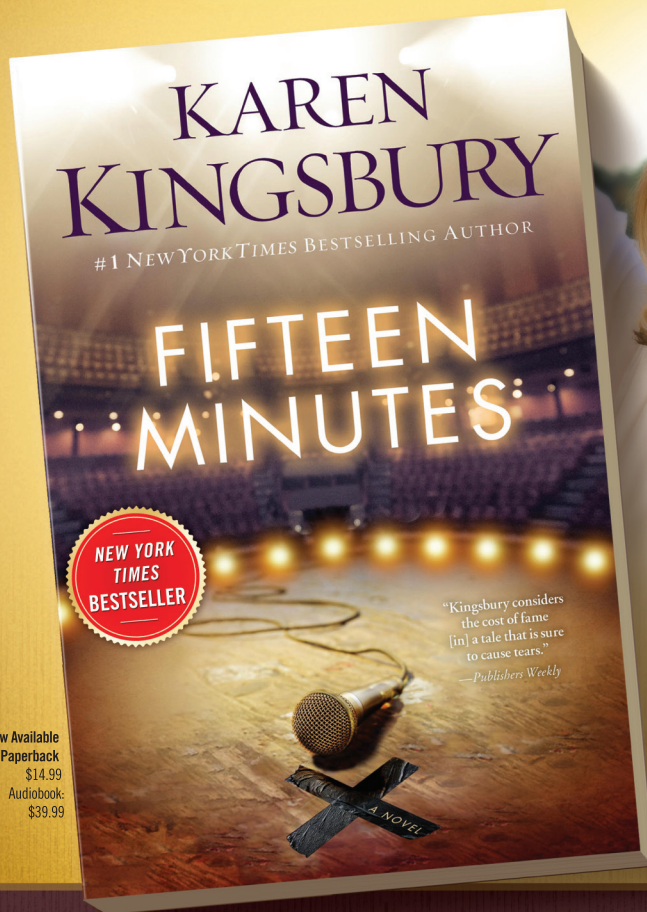
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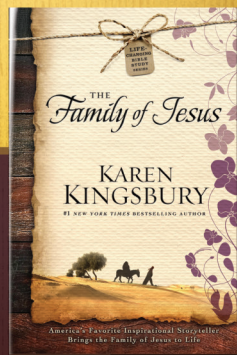


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CHAPTER TWO
Ashley's Blessing



Ashley Baxter Blake looked outside the kitchen window of the old Baxter house and watched her husband and kids in the flower garden. These were the moments she lived for, the ones she tried to capture in paintings and hang on the wall in case someday memories weren't enough. Tonight the whole family was coming for dinner and the tulip centerpieces would be compliments of the kids' work.

Working outside, Landon must've felt her looking because he glanced over his shoulder and for the sweetest moment their eyes met. His smile was the one that warmed her heart every morning. Ashley felt his love to the depths of her heart. *Thank you, God, for him, for his persistence in loving me. Thank you for his health.* It was a prayer she silently uttered often. Especially since only a few years ago doctors worried he might have a serious lung disorder.

No one worried about that now.

Landon was as healthy as he'd ever been, busy in the fire investigation department at work and always there for Ashley and the kids. She watched Landon stoop down next to five-year-old Janessa and help her pick just the right flower. Then Landon used his clippers to add it to the growing bouquet.

At the other end of the garden, Cole worked with Devin. The picture was

another painting in Ashley's heart. Cole was a junior in high school now, his shoulders filled out a little more than last year, his look that of a young man. But when he was home, he was never too old to spend time with his eight-year-old brother. Already the two of them had gathered an impressive bunch of flowers.

And there, at the middle of the group, was Amy. Sweet Amy who at nine years old was the picture of God's mercy and healing, His redemption and grace. After the accident that took Erin and Sam and the other girls, Ashley had wondered how Amy would ever have a day not steeped in grief. But here she was, a smile on her tender face, her blonde hair caught up in a ponytail as she gathered greenery for the two bouquets.

Amy still struggled, of course. In some ways she always would. But Ashley was committed to being there for her, especially late at night when waves of sorrow still sometimes threatened to overtake her. Twice a month Ashley took the child to a Christian counselor, a friend of Ashley's father's. The woman had helped Amy find another outlet to process her loss and embrace her future with hope.

Landon and the kids were headed back to the house with their bouquets now. Ashley had two painted vases

ready with water. Cole and Devin came through the door first. "We found the best ones," Cole kissed Ashley on the cheek as he took one of the vases. "Devin's got a great eye, right buddy?" He held the container while his younger brother slipped the flowers inside.

Landon and the girls came next. Janessa was chattering from the moment she stepped inside. "Mommy! We found the prettiest flowers in the whole wide world!" She ran up and hugged Ashley around her waist. "Amy found all the greens cause Daddy said flowers look better with greens around them."

"That's right, baby." Ashley smiled at Landon over their daughter's blonde head. "Daddy knows."

Amy hugged Ashley next. "There were lots of kinds of greens. I found a good mix." She sounded proud of herself. She smiled, her heart clearly happy.

"When I paint, I try to mix up the greens around the flowers, too." Ashley kissed the top of Amy's head. "Maybe we can paint a picture of flowers sometime."

Her eyes lit up. "I'd love that, Aunt Ashley."

"It's a date, then."

When both vases were full, the kids ran off and she and Landon were alone. He came to her. "You're so good with them."

She linked her arms around his neck. "I was just going to say that to you." She brushed her nose against his. "Who would've guessed my big firefighter husband would be so good at picking tulips?"

"Well, you know." He grinned at her and pulled her closer. "Anything for you, Ash."

She raised her eyebrow. "Anything?"

"Mmmm." He chuckled. "Don't tempt me." He kissed her. "By the way," he looked like a schoolboy caught in his first crush. "You have the most beautiful hair. Has anyone ever told you that?"

"Not lately," she giggled. For a long moment they swayed together. "I still miss Irvel. Even after all these years."

"She's with Hank now. Watching him fish on the banks of some Heaven lake."

They swayed some more. "Yes. That's where I picture her." Ashley imagined the dear old woman, one of the residents at Sunset Hills Adult Care Home. It was the place where God had become real again to Ashley after years of rebellion. Irvel had suffered from Alzheimer's but that hadn't stopped her from being one of the kindest, most gentle women Ashley had ever met. Every day she talked about Hank, how he'd be home in a little while, when in reality he had passed away more than a decade earlier. And every few hours she

talked about Ashley's hair, how pretty it was.

Every one of the residents still held a place in Ashley's heart. If not for that time, she never would've been ready to love again, ready to step into this wonderful chapter of her life.

The one with Landon Blake.

He ran his hand along her back. "I'm glad the family's coming tonight. It's been too long."

"A month at least." Ashley leaned back against the kitchen counter and took Landon's hands in hers. "It'll be good to have everyone under one roof again. The kids are growing up so fast."

"And Bailey and Brandon? Are they coming?"

Ashley smiled. "They are. And tomorrow they open CKT's 'Charlie Brown.'"

"I'm assuming we have tickets?"

"We do." She laughed again. Landon knew her so well. "Cole has his Sadie Hawkins dance at school."

"I'm still not sure about a senior girl taking him." Landon raised his eyebrows. "Cole says she's a good girl."

"She is. She spent a few years in CKT back in the day. I know her family."

Ashley leaned close to Landon again. "I like that you care."

"I guess I can't believe Cole's a junior." His smile reached the places of her soul only the two of them shared. "Wasn't he just my little five-year-old buddy?"

"Just yesterday."

"Anyway," Landon kissed her again, slower this time. "I better get the grill ready. I haven't cleaned it since last fall."

"Want help?" She loved working with Landon, loved talking to him, laughing with him, loving him. If she lived a hundred years it would never be long enough to enjoy being married to him.

"Thanks." He winked at her as he moved toward the back door. "You stay in here. Janessa and Amy tell me you're teaching them how to make homemade sweet potato fries."

Ashley had almost forgotten.

"Another precious memory."

"Exactly." Landon blew her a kiss and headed out the back door.

At the same time she heard the voices of her girls, giggling and chatting as they bounded down the stairs together. Something about one of Janessa's baby dolls and a make-believe castle. Ashley closed her eyes and held onto the moment. This much was certain. Tonight with family would be beautiful.

But first there was today.

Another beautiful, magical, wonderful day where even the most ordinary task felt like a miracle for one very important reason.

Today would never come again.



This was the day ... John Baxter had no doubt. He had talked to Elaine about his plan and she was on board. Now as they pulled up to the old Baxter house for the family dinner, she took his hand.

"Ashley ... well, she might not understand." Elaine's expression was gentle, her love for Ashley unconditional.

"I've prayed about that." He turned off the engine and leaned back in the driver's seat. "Ashley usually comes around. God will give me the words. I want her blessing on this before I move forward."

They gathered a basket of fresh blueberries from the back seat and headed inside. No matter how many times John visited his daughter and her family, this house would always feel like his own. He and Elizabeth had raised their family here. He was only grateful that when it came time to sell, Ashley and Landon had stepped up and bought it.

Which meant they would always have nights like this.

They were the last ones to arrive, so as they stepped through the front door John heard the sound of his family's voices mingled together. He hesitated and closed his eyes, capturing the highs of Janessa's and Annie's voices and the deeper laughter of the guys. "Most beautiful sound in the world."

He smiled at Elaine. "I thank God for letting me live long enough to share in nights like this."

"Amen." She linked arms with him as they headed into the main room.

"Dad!" Ashley's face lit up. "Elaine! You have to weigh in on this!" She hurried to them with an iPad. "Luke's making a new website."

Luke grinned at him over Ashley, as he and his wife Reagan came close. "The artist has an opinion. Naturally."

Ashley shrugged. "I can't help it. I think something abstract in the background would be more current than what the web designer came up with." She held the iPad so John could see the screen. "These are the two choices." She pointed to the second one. "Now imagine if the background here had ..."

One happy moment blended into the next. Kari and Ryan were excited about a few new transfer students set to play for Clear Creek High's football team next year. "Along with the Flanigan boys, we're stacked for the fall."

Every upbeat story was like a breath of fresh air, a step further from the heartache of the past. But even with all the good happening in the Baxter family, John felt compelled to set his plan in action.

He wanted to meet the woman who had received Erin's heart.

Sooner than later.



Bailey Flanigan Paul loved nights like this. She and her husband Brandon had been married three years. During that time they'd been invited to so many of the famous Baxter family dinners that by now they didn't feel like friends joining in.

They felt like family.

And while babies for the two of them were still a few years away, being around the Baxter grandkids always made her and Brandon look forward to the day. The two of them tended to leave these dinners talking about whether they'd like a girl or boy first and what names were their favorite.

Just for fun.

Tonight, though, she and Brandon had something special to talk to Ashley about. The timing couldn't be better. Just yesterday at the Christian Community Theater board meeting they'd agreed on their season of shows for the coming year. Including the special show.

They were seated now around the enormous old Baxter family table with the kids at two adjacent round tables. Ashley was still talking to Luke about his website, and at the other end Kari and Ryan were sharing about Bailey's brothers.

Kari smiled in her direction. "Do they want to play at the next level?"

Bailey thought about her brothers. She had five of them. Connor was at Liberty University now, a junior studying theater management. He hoped to work with Bailey and Brandon when he graduated. The next three—Shawn, Justin and BJ—were adopted from Haiti when they were five years old. The three were best friends. Bailey's parents hadn't wanted to separate them.

She laughed lightly at Kari's question. "I'd say all three of them would love to play college ball."

"And I'd say all three of them could." Ryan Taylor grinned. He'd been the football coach at Clear Creek for more than a decade. "They each have their own skills. I've got a list of college recruiters looking at them."

Bailey had heard as much from her parents a few days ago. "Wait till Ricky gets to high school. He's right there with them." Her youngest blond, blue-eyed brother was already well over six feet tall as an eighth grader.

The conversation shifted when John Baxter announced that Dayne and Katy would be back from Los Angeles next week for a month. "We'll need to meet again when they get home."

"Absolutely." Ashley's eyes lit up. "Maybe it'll be warm enough to eat outside." She seemed to catch the

looks of doubt around her. “Okay, true. It’s April and there’s still snow in some of the parking lots.”

“True, Ash.” Landon put his arm around her. “After one of the coldest winters on record ... We might not eat outside till July.”

Everyone laughed and the easy banter continued. Bailey waited for a lull in the conversation, then she turned to Brandon. He took her hand beneath the table and nodded to her. It was time. Bailey looked at Ashley. “So Brandon and I have a question for you, Ash.”

“Sure.” She had finished her dinner and she was leaning against Landon, relaxed. “I meant to ask you how things are with the theater business?”

Bailey couldn’t contain her smile. “It keeps growing. God has allowed us to do more than we dreamed.” She looked at Brandon.

“Definitely.” His eyes brimmed with excitement. As if loving Bailey and working in Bloomington’s downtown theater district was what he was born to do. “The dreams we had for that entire city block have all panned out.”

The adventure started when the two of them bought CKT—Christian Kids Theater—the year they married. Since then they’d purchased the entire city block. They had low-rent office space for local charities and just last fall they’d completed construction on

a brand-new, fully renovated theater. The building held four times as many people as the original one, which they also kept for smaller shows. The coffee shop they added last year was thriving as were a few boutique stores and a café that rounded out the block.

“It’s made the downtown Bloomington area an even more beautiful place,” John Baxter nodded his approval. “You two have worked hard.”

“I agree.” Brooke spoke up from the other end of the table. She smiled at her husband, Peter. “We get out that way a few times a month at least. Your shows are perfect for date nights.”

“And family outings.” Kari nodded to the kids, chattering at the table closest to her. “We were all at ‘Oklahoma’ last month. Amazing work. Both of you.”

Bailey felt their praise to the core of her being. God had led her and Brandon to this work, and now they were making a difference in their community. Every opening night had their trademark: Before the show started one of them or the show’s director would open the night in prayer.

Something still possible in Bloomington, Indiana.

“So what’s the question?” Ashley leaned forward, clearly interested.

“Well,” Bailey felt the chill bumps on her arm. “We’re doing something very special next fall. We’ve got the rights to ‘Les Miserables.’”

A soft gasp came from several around the table. "Are you serious?" Ashley spoke first. "I love that show."

"There's more." Brandon sat a little straighter, making eye contact with everyone at the table. "We were contacted by one of the major networks. They want to feature what we've done here. Right down to the praying on opening night. They'll tape the show and air it Thanksgiving weekend."

"That's wonderful." Kari smiled.

"The only catch was ..." Bailey swapped a look with Brandon, then she turned back to the others, "Katy and Dayne and Brandon and I had to agree to be the leads."

"What?" Ashley squealed. "That's perfect! How amazing would that be?"

"So ... our question is this, Ash."

Bailey could hardly contain herself.

"Would you be our set designer?"

Original paintings for the scrims and backdrops and sets?"

"Really?" Ashley looked at Landon and back at Bailey. "I'd be honored. I mean it."

"The network wants to do a feature on you as a new and noteworthy artist." Bailey laughed. "If you were to say yes, of course."

Landon hugged Ashley and the entire table burst into congratulations and chatter about the incredible opportunity.

In the midst of it, Brandon drew Bailey close and kissed her. "It's happening. Beyond what we could ask or imagine."

"God is good." Bailey loved this, how they could so easily be lost in their own world even in a crowded room.

"He is. All the time."

They shared a look that made Bailey's heart soar. Because God was indeed so very good.

Nothing could be more true in all of life.



Dinner was over, the berries eaten and conversations finished for the night. Everyone else had gone home with plans to get up early for Sunday church tomorrow. John and Elaine were the last ones left.

Landon excused himself to tuck in Amy and Janessa and Devin and read them their favorite new book, *Whatever You Grow up to Be*. A gift from John and Elaine earlier in the week.

Elaine was in the kitchen helping Ashley with the dishes and finally John was ready. It was time to have the talk. Elaine caught his eye and gave a slight smile. John cleared his throat. "Ashley, honey ... do you have a few minutes? I have something to talk about."

"Yes. Go ahead," Elaine jumped in. "I'll finish up here."

The work was almost done. "Thanks." Ashley turned back to John. "Is everything okay?"

"It's fine." John gave his answer quickly. The last thing he wanted was for Ashley to worry. "Come on, sweetheart. Let's go in the next room."

"Okay." Ashley hesitated a moment longer and then followed John into the living room. John sat on the sofa and patted the spot beside him.

Ashley sat. "You're sure? Everything's okay?"

"Yes, dear." He took hold of her hand. "This isn't about me or Elaine. It's something I've been thinking about for a long time."

His daughter waited, her expression concerned. "About me?"

"No." He steadied himself. "About Erin. Her heart. And the woman who has it now." John took the slightest breath and continued. "For the last few months I think about her every day."

"Dad ..." Ashley stiffened. "I thought we talked about that back when the accident happened."

"We never really discussed it." He released her hand and stood. *Father, give me the words ... please.* He paced a few steps toward the fireplace and then turned back to her. His words came slow and soft. He wasn't looking for an argument. "I can't get past the

fact that if ... if Erin were here, she would do everything in her power to tell that woman about Jesus."

Whatever Ashley was about to say, the words never came. Her shoulders slumped a little and she hung her head for a long moment. When she looked up there were tears in her eyes. "You really want to find her?"

"No." John sat down beside her again. He looked straight through her eyes to her beautiful soul. "I don't want to find her. I want to tell her about Erin."

Again Ashley was quiet, as if she were processing the reality. Maybe she was thinking the same thing John had been thinking. How somewhere there lived a woman walking around with Erin's heart beating inside her chest, keeping her alive. Yet that same woman—from all they knew did not have a saving faith in Christ.

Ashley drew a tired breath. "Can't someone else tell her? Couldn't you write to her again instead?" Fresh tears trickled down her cheeks and Ashley dabbed at them. "I mean, Dad ... how could you be in the same room with her knowing that ... that ..."

"Sweetheart." John took hold of Ashley's hand again. "Erin's heart was a part of her, but not anymore. She's whole in heaven." Maybe because he was a doctor, John truly thought he could handle the experience. "Anyway ... it's late." John wouldn't push the

issue. "I'm not suggesting you and the others meet with her. Just me. I guess I was looking for your blessing."

Her tears came harder and Ashley squeezed her eyes together. "It's so weird ... how I can go for weeks or even months and not cry about it. But then ..." A quiet sob grabbed at her. "I miss her so much."

John put his arm around her and pulled her close. "I know, honey. Me too. We all do."

It took a few minutes before Ashley's tears subsided. John waited. He was in

no hurry. But when she could finally speak she searched John's eyes. "If you think you're supposed to reach out to her, then do it. I might not agree, but ... you have my blessing." She hugged him again and kissed his cheek. "I love you, Dad."

Relief flooded him. "I love you, too."

John was grateful beyond words for Ashley's transparency, for her love for Erin and her honesty about finding the woman. But he was also grateful for her blessing in the matter.

He would write the letter tomorrow.

FF



NEXT MONTH: Cody Coleman visits the Flanigan family with an announcement of his own. Ashley processes her father's plan to find the woman with Erin's heart. John takes the next step in reaching out to the woman and he is shocked by what happens after that.

#1 *New York Times* bestselling author Karen Kingsbury is America's favorite inspirational storyteller. The Baxters and Flanigans were the source of a combined 22 novels starting with the Redemption Series and the first book—*Redemption*. There are more than 25 million copies of Karen's books in print. This ongoing once-a-month Baxter e-Series will be available exclusively through Karen's newsletter and the *Karen Kingsbury Presents Family Fiction Magazine*.



ROMANTIC SUSPENSE at its best

Deidra Romero

Author Lisa Harris on her new Southern Crimes Series

As a missionary in Africa, author Lisa Harris manages to find time to jot down the stories floating around in her mind. Most recently, she is working on a three-book series called *Southern Crimes*, which follows the story of the close-knit Hunt family from Atlanta, a tribe of doers and servers. Their stories are wrapped with suspense, romance and a good dose of Southern charm.



“I WAS REALLY ABLE TO RUN WITH THE SUSPENSE LINE, AND PUSH THESE CHARACTERS TO THE BRINK UNTIL THEY FOUND STRENGTHS THEY DIDN’T KNOW THEY HAD.”

Although she has written romance, historical and suspense novels, Lisa admits her forte is suspense. “From the beginning of my writing career, I always tried to sneak in a suspense or mystery line in my novels, even if it was subtle.” However, with her Southern Crimes series, she’s pulled the throttle on the suspenseful elements and is taking readers on a journey. Her second book in the series, titled *Fatal Exchange*, tells the story of schoolteacher Emily Hunt, who finds herself in an unexpected and very dangerous situation when one of her students takes her entire class hostage. Emily must reach deep down inside to discover the fighter inside and measure the full volume of her inner strength, but not without the help of undercover cop Mason Taylor.

When asked about the storyline that hits close to home for many parents who send their kids to school every day and pray for their safety, Lisa responded, "Parenting seems to go hand in hand with worrying, though I have learned that I can only do so much to protect them from this world. Beyond that I simply have to pray. A lot!" As a parent, trusting God for her children's safety is a daily reality. Lisa admits, "We've faced a few scary situations over the years living in Africa that have taught me that I have to lean on Him and not my own understanding. And yes, that is easier said than done!"

For book three and the finale of the series, Lisa plans on wrapping everything up for readers. "For those who are reading the entire series, I don't want to give anything away, but it's definitely going to be another fast-paced ride with a lot of suspense and a lot of romance. And it will tie up the few loose threads from books one and two," says Lisa.

Lisa's inspiration for the series came from one character, Avery North. After much brainstorming and discussion with Lisa's editors and other writer friends, Lisa began crafting her story.

Book one in the series, *Dangerous Passage*, is a suspenseful tale about sex trafficking in the United States. "I decided that the backdrop of human trafficking would not only make a suspenseful story, but would also help people become more aware of this very real issue," says Lisa.

As far as the project as a whole, Lisa admits the Southern Crimes series truly challenged her. "I was really able ... to run with the suspense line, and push these characters to the brink until they found strengths they didn't know they had." Lisa adds, "This, in turn, challenged me as well in how God can use anyone, flaws and all. This was my first three book, full-length series as well, which was a challenge, but so much fun!" **FF**

FATAL EXCHANGE
SOUTHERN CRIMES
Lisa Harris
Revell



For more information about Lisa's books

click **HERE!** ➔ <http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/lisa-harris/>

To learn more about her family's work in Africa and The ECHO Project,

click **HERE!** ➔ <http://myblogintheheartofafrica.blogspot.com/>



ESSENTIAL WILD FRONTIER NOVELS

Rel Mollet

Expand Your Horizons with These Historical Novels

While it all seems somewhat romantic now, the harshness of starting a new life in an untamed land of wild beauty took people of indomitable strength and courage. The authors of these novels have created characters with the courage, wit and determination needed to survive the frontier life.



THE PELICAN BRIDE

Beth White
Revell

Beth White and *The Pelican Bride*

Beloved author Beth White's long-awaited new release, *The Pelican Bride* (Revell), provides a unique take on a mail-order bride story with two sisters, fleeing religious persecution in France, seeking refuge in the French-run colony of Louisiana. Little does she know that danger faces her in the New World when she falls in love with a man who seeks justice for the indigenous Native Americans. This is the first in the Gulf Coast Chronicles.

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/beth-white/books/the-pelican-bride-gulf-coast-chronicles-1/>

Lori Benton and *The Pursuit of Tamsen Littlejohn*

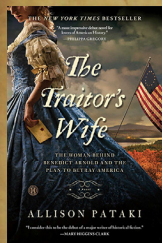
Desperate times call for desperate measures as Tamsen Littlejohn enlists frontiersman Jesse Bird to guide her to the Watauga Settlement in North Carolina. Hoping to escape an arranged marriage and the cruelty of her stepfather, Tamsen discovers the wilderness is its own taskmaster. *The Pursuit of Tamsen Littlejohn* (Waterbrook) follows on from Lori Benton's Christy-nominated debut novel, *Burning Sky*.

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/lori-benton/books/the-pursuit-of-tamsen-littlejohn/>



THE PURSUIT OF TAMSEN LITTLEJOHN

Lori Benton
Waterbrook



THE TRAITOR'S WIFE

Allison Pataki
Howard Books

Allison Pataki and *The Traitor's Wife*

In *The Traitor's Wife* (Howard), Allison Pataki brings to life a little-known player in the saga that was Benedict Arnold's betrayal of his country during the Revolutionary War—Peggy Shippen, Arnold's wife. A woman bent on fame and fortune, the young socialite seduces Arnold and eventually plots with him and her former love and British spy, John Andre, to deliver West Point to the British. This tale told from the perspective of Peggy's maid will shed new light on the well-known story.

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/allison-pataki/books/the-traitor-s-wife/>

Ginny Aiken and *Remember Me When*

Seeking inspiration from the life of Abigail as told in 1 Samuel, Ginny Aiken brings frontier Oregon to life in *Remember Me When* (Faithwords), as Faith Nolan discovers her husband is not the man she thought she married. When she determines to set things right for Nathan Bartlett, a man deceived by her husband, life spirals out of control and she is accused of her husband's murder. *For Such a Time as This* and *She Shall Be Praised*, other novels in her series, also parallel the story of Esther and Proverbs 31, respectively.

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/ginny-aiken/books/remember-me-when-a-women-of-hope-novel/>



**REMEMBER
ME WHEN**
Ginny Aiken
Faithwords



DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH

Jennifer AlLee &
Lisa Karon
Whitaker House

Jennifer AlLee & Lisa Karon Richardson and *Diamond in the Rough*

In *Diamond in the Rough* (Whitaker House), writing duo Jennifer AlLee and Lisa Karon Richardson combine humor, mystery and romance as heiress Lily Rose mistakes a professional gambler as the missionary she has invited to work with the Wiyot Indians. When Grant Diamond doesn't disabuse Lily of her error he finds himself trying the biggest bluff of his life. Also look for *Vanishing Act* and *Curtain Call* in this series.

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/jennifer-allee-and-lisa-karon-richardson/books/diamond-in-the-rough-charm-deceit-1/>

If you could read only one genre for the rest of your life, which would you pick and why?



BRANDILYN COLLINS:

Seatbelt suspense. Of course. It's fast-paced, character-driven suspense with myriad twists and an interwoven thread of faith. What else does a reader need?

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/brandilyn-collins/>

JOLINA PETERSHEIM:

Without a doubt, I would pick **Southern literary fiction**. I love the genre's strong sense of place, outlandish characters (Boo Radley, anyone?), and spiritual threads that are often intertwined with a story that stretches the imagination and yet somehow remains credible. I am especially fond of first person narratives written with a thick Southern dialect. Yep, I'm from Tennessee, y'all.

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/jolina-petersheim/>



SIBELLA GIORELLO:

Mysteries. Because each book gives you setting, plot, characters and story, wrapped up by one even bigger enigma. Just like life itself.

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/sibella-giorrello/>

SUZANNE WOODS FISHER:

It would be **historical fiction**. There's so much to learn from different time periods about what it means to be human. We might be dressed a little differently today (yoga pants vs. hoop skirts), and use different gadgets in the kitchen (microwave vs. a kettle on the hearth), but the things that truly matter haven't changed at all: to love and be loved. By the way ... I'm including "classics" under the genre of historical fiction. If I'm locked into one genre, it's high time I learned Shakespeare-ese without a dictionary at hand.

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/suzanne-woods-fisher/>



If you could read only one genre for the rest of your life, which would you pick and why?

**PETER LEAVELL:**

Historical fiction. Learning cool stuff while being entertained is just about heaven for me. Although, really, historical fiction is about the clothing—when people knew how to dress for dinner.

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/peter-leavell/>

JAMES SCOTT BELL:

The **hard-boiled fiction** of the '40s and '50s. It was bad vs. good, never too explicit in the shadows. It was man facing a dark world and fighting through it, or getting the just desserts of immoral actions. And where else would you find: "There was a desert wind blowing that night. It was one of those hot, dry Santa Anas that come down through the mountain passes and curl your hair and make your nerves jump and your skin itch. On nights like that every booze party ends in a fight. Meek little wives feel the edge of the carving knife and study their husbands' necks," (*Red Wind* by Raymond Chandler).

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/james-scott-bell/>

**TAMARA LEIGH:**

Since discovering **historical romance**—specifically, medieval—in my early 20's, I've been an avid fan, so much that my first seven published novels were in that genre. Though I've written contemporary romance, I always return to my first love, whether to read or write. Chivalry. Faith. Knights. Castles. Ladies. What is there not to love?

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/tamara-leigh/>

Shelley Shepard Gray is known for her heartwarming Amish novels. In her new series, *Return to Sugarcreek*, she set out to tell more stories from Sugarcreek, the setting of her previous popular series. Shelley took a moment to share with us about the second release in this series titled *Thankful* (Avon Inspire).



Your newest novel, *Thankful*, has a plot with an odd sort of love square: Christina, Aden and Christina's mother and father. Can you tell us how and where you got the initial inspiration for this novel?

When I began plotting this novel, I wanted to have several plots revolve around the idea of being thankful. I also wanted to focus on how one event can change the lives of many people. I thought Aden saving Christina's life was just the sort of event that would resonate with many characters in the novel. Actually, I never thought of Christina's parents being central characters in the novel. I simply knew, as a mom, that I would want to take care of both Christina and Aden.

What do you hope readers will get out of this novel?

My biggest hope for every novel is that readers will feel that reading the book was time well spent. I know they have many books to choose from and not a lot of spare time, so it means the world to me when they pick one of my books to read. Beyond that, I hope that Christina and Aden's story might inspire them to reach out to those who have made a difference in their lives.

What future plans do you have for the series?

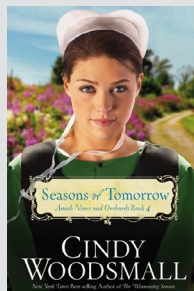
The next novel in the series is *Joyful*. It continues the trilogy's storyline, of Judith and Ben's efforts to have a child of their own. *Joyful* also features the Beiler family, who were introduced in *Hopeful*. *Joyful* features the romance of Randall Beiler and Elizabeth Nolt.



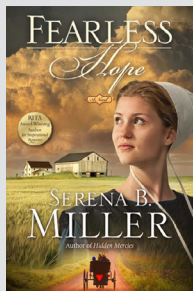
THANKFUL

RETURN TO SUGARCREEK #2
Shelley Shepard Gray
Avon Inspire

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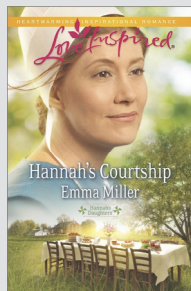
SEASONS OF TOMORROW
AMISH VINES & ORCHARDS
Cindy Woodsmall
WaterBrook Press



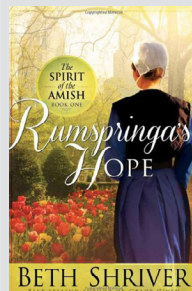
FEARLESS HOPE
HIDDEN MERCIES
Serena Miller
Howard Books



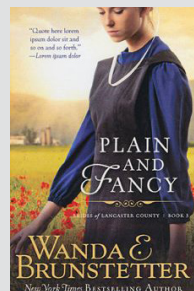
A SEASON OF CHANGE
SEASONS IN PINECRAFT #1
Lynette Sowell
Abingdon Press



HANNAH'S COURTSHIP
HANNAH'S DAUGHTERS #8
Emma Miller
Love Inspired



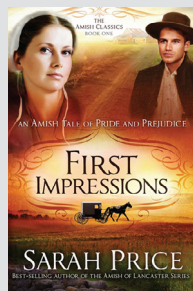
RUMSPRINGA'S HOPE
SPIRIT OF THE AMISH
Beth Shriver
Realms



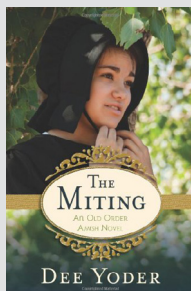
PLAIN AND FANCY
BRIDES OF LANCASTER COUNTY #3
Wanda Brunstetter
Barbour Books



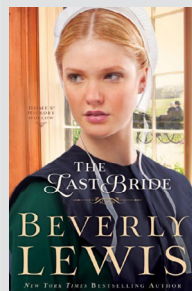
THE AMISH GROOM
THE MEN OF LANCASTER COUNTY #1
Mindy Starns Clark & Susan Meissner
Harvest House Publishers



FIRST IMPRESSIONS
THE AMISH CLASSICS
Sarah Price
Realms



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Jessica Dotta's sophomore novel, the second in her *Price of Privilege* series, which released last month, is already making waves. Jessica sat down to answer three questions about *Mark of Distinction* (Tyndale House), which continues to unfold a complex Victorian era story with remarkable characters.



Can you give us any hints about where Julia's journey goes next?

In *Born of Persuasion*, Julia becomes caught up in the intrigue surrounding her mother's past and the mysterious events unfolding around her. Though she'd spent much of her life hoping to marry her childhood sweetheart, circumstances force her to look elsewhere. For the first time in her life, she desires wealth and position.

In *Mark of Distinction*, we see her ushered into untold fortune and status. We go to the heart of Victorian London and behind the closed doors of its elite. Having already learned the hard lesson that some treasures, once tossed aside, are irretrievable, Julia fears making more costly mistakes as she's pressured into a new life. She must determine when one should let go and accept the

blessings at hand, or when one should fight harder and refuse to give in.

Are there any new characters in this novel?

The first two books of this trilogy each have their own complete cast, though character appearances are woven into both stories.

Of highest interest in this novel, we have Julia's guardian, Lord Roy Pierson, and the young man determined to keep her from drowning among the bluebloods, Lord Isaac Dalry. Much like the first novel, Julia is kept on her feet, trying to determine their motives and intentions toward her.

What do you hope readers think and feel as they read the novel?

I hope Julia's story awakens the belief that regardless of a person's past, injury or the opinions of others toward him or her, no one is beyond the healing power of Christ. Thankfully God alone determines who we are, and in His hands the least likely person has potential for greatness.

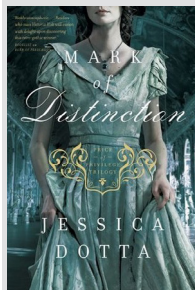


MARK OF DISTINCTION

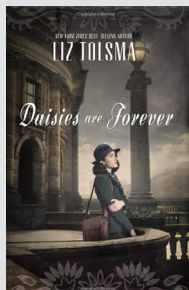
PRICE OF PRIVILEGE
Jessica Dotta
Tyndale House

HISTORICAL NEW RELEASES

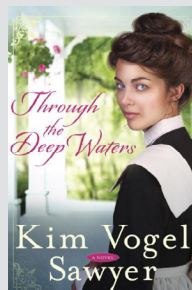
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MARK OF DISTINCTION
PRICE OF PRIVILEGE
Jessica Dotta
Tyndale House



DAISIES ARE FOREVER
Liz Tolsma
Thomas Nelson



THROUGH THE DEEP WATERS
Kim Vogel Sawyer
WaterBrook Press



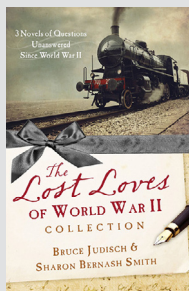
OUT OF THE RUINS
GOLDEN GATE
CHRONICLES #1
Karen Barnett
Abingdon Press



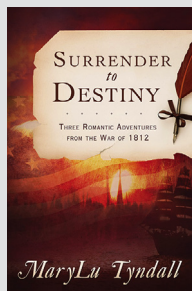
MEETING HER MATCH
A MATCH MADE IN TEXAS NOVELLA #4
Mary Connealy
Bethany House Publishers



THE BARON'S HONOURABLE DAUGHTER
Lynn Morris
FaithWords



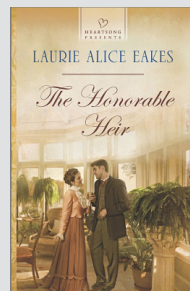
THE LOST LOVES OF WORLD WAR II COLLECTION
Bruce Judisch and Sharon Bernash Smith
Barbour Publishing



THE SURRENDER TO DESTINY TRILOGY
MaryLu Tyndall
Barbour Books



WHILE LOVE STIRS
THE GREGORY SISTERS #2
Lorna Seilstad
Revell

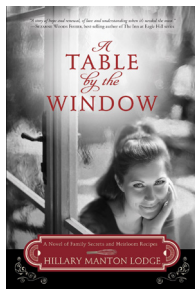


THE HONORABLE HEIR
HEARTSONG PRESENTS
Laurie Alice Eakes
Love Inspired

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A TABLE BY THE WINDOW **BY HILLARY MANTON LODGE**

Reviewed by Gloria Johnson



A TABLE BY THE WINDOW
TWO BLUE DOORS
Hillary Manton Lodge
WaterBrook Press

What a delicious treat awaits readers of *A Table by the Window*, book one in the Two Blue Doors series by Hillary Manton Lodge (Waterbrook Press). It's a smart, funny and romantic look at family, food, mystery and Internet dating. Don't read this book on an empty stomach; the food descriptions are incredibly impressive. As an added bonus, at the end of most chapters the author includes recipes for mouthwatering dishes that were created within the story.

Our main character, Juliette, is a single 28-year-old living in her hometown of Portland, Ore., the youngest of five children born to a French mother and Italian father. Her parents run a restaurant and the whole family is

quite immersed in food and hospitality. "Grand-mere," Juliette's maternal grandmother and a famous pastry chef, has recently died and left her pastry prep table to Juliette. While looking through the prep table's drawers, Juliette discovers a photograph among the handwritten recipes. The old photo is of a man with dark hair and eyebrows, who strongly resembles her brother, Nico, but the man is not their grandfather. Juliette must figure out who this man in the photo is, as it is obvious that he and Nico share the same genetic background.

Nico decides to open a new restaurant and asks Juliette to run the front of the house for his new venture. She is conflicted for a couple of reasons. First, she already has what most would consider a dream job writing a food column for the local newspaper and secondly, when she worked for Nico at his previous restaurant, she dated his sous chef and the eventual breakup

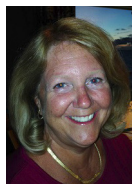
“HER CHARACTERS ARE HUMOROUS AND THREE-DIMENSIONAL. READERS WILL WISH THEY COULD BE INVITED TO THE FAMILY'S SUNDAY DINNER GATHERING FOR THE FOOD AS WELL AS THE CONVERSATION.”

left her heart wounded. With some reflection, Juliette realizes her love and talent lie in the world of restaurants and agrees to work for Nico.

While Juliette has been despondent over the lack of a man in her life during the last four years, she decides to stop feeling sorry for herself and try online dating. Her first encounter is not a match but gentleman number two, Neil, is everything that Juliette is hoping for except he lives in Memphis, Tenn., thousands of miles away from Portland. Neil, a research doctor, is kind, thoughtful, interesting and interested in Juliette. They exchange daily emails and phone calls. He comes to Portland for a medical conference and they meet. As wonderful as their long weekend together is, the question still remains—will they be able to make this relationship work with Neil working in Memphis and Juliette helping her brother in Portland?

Hillary Manton Lodge has written a seriously interesting book. You don't need to be a foodie to enjoy *A Table by the Window*, but if you are, your enjoyment will be multiplied. The

plentiful narratives of food and meals, especially the pastries, are simply blissful. Her characters are humorous and three-dimensional. Readers will wish they could be invited to the family's Sunday dinner gathering for the food as well as the conversation. *A Table by the Window* released March 18, 2014. Expect a follow-up novel in this series titled *Reservations for Two*.



Gloria is a 59-year-old retired RN and former accountant who has a lifelong love of reading. She has spent the last two years reading every Amish novel she can get her

hands on. When not reading, Gloria spends her day trading stocks and options, tweeting under the name of @gloriason, and expressing her gratitude to God. She blogs at AmishReader.blogspot.com.

READ MORE ONLINE! <http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/hillary-manton-lodge/books/a-table-by-the-window-a-novel-of-family-secrets-and-heirloom-recipes-two-blue-doors/>

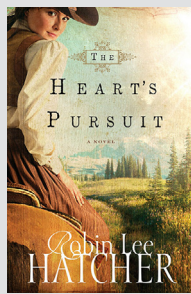
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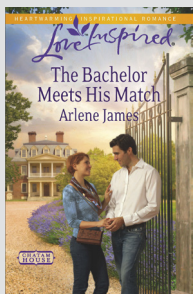
THE HEART'S PURSUIT
Robin Lee Hatcher
Zondervan



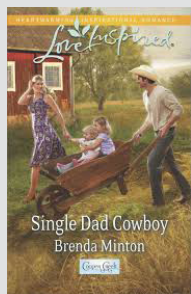
SOMEBODY LIKE YOU
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Melissa Tagg
Bethany House



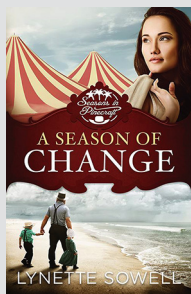
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A service of Salem Music Network – Nashville, TN

Author Debby Mayne sat down to tell FF all about her new series *Uptown Belles* (Realms)—three stories of Southern gals taking the Big Apple by storm and perhaps finding romance along the way.



There's something fascinating about transplant stories. Is that what initially drew you to the plot?

I love what I call fish-out-of-water stories because they naturally lend themselves to organic humor and conflict. Cissy Hillwood definitely experiences both of these. The other two Southern women are heroines of books two and three in the *Uptown Belles* series.

Can you tell us a bit about your three main characters and what each one brings to the story?

Cissy in the first story, *Dixie Belle*, is a headstrong woman who has great intentions, but she acts before she thinks. But she has a heart of gold, and she wants to do the right thing ... if she can ever figure out what that is. My second heroine, Charlene is a little bit older than Cissy, so she takes on a

big sister role to help her new friend learn the ropes in the Big Apple in the book *Trouble in Paradise*. She wants to find love, but it seems as though it will never happen, until she allows herself to see the softer side of her boss. Bethann, the heroine of *One Foot Out the Door*, the third book in the series, is the quietest of the three. She moves to New York City to help her elderly great-aunt. She has no intention of staying long-term, but romance has a way of changing things.

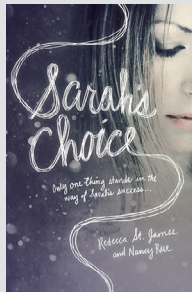
Can you tell us about your own Southern heritage?

My parents are both from Mississippi, and I've lived in several Southern states throughout my life. I grew up an "Air Force brat," so I know what it's like to be Southern in a non-Southern environment. People like to listen to me talk, and when I do, they laugh. It took a while to figure out that they weren't laughing at me but enjoying the different way I spoke. I like all things Southern, including sweet tea, grits and all things fried.

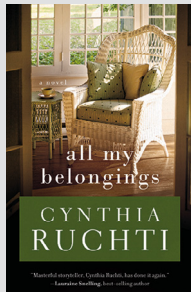


DIXIE BELLE
UPTOWN BELLES
Debby Mayne
Realms

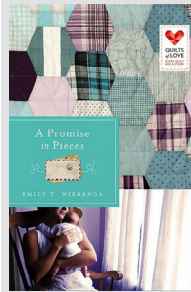
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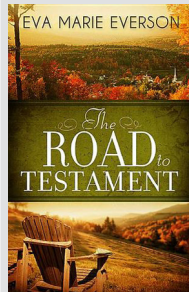
SARAH'S CHOICE
Rebecca St. James
& Nancy Rue
Thomas Nelson



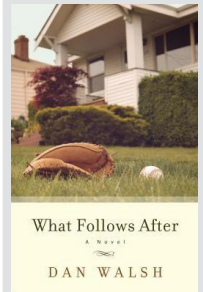
ALL MY BELONGINGS
Cynthia Ruchti
ABINGDON PRESS



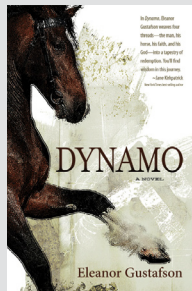
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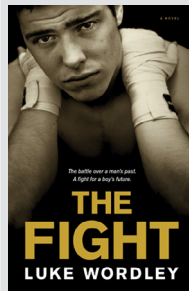
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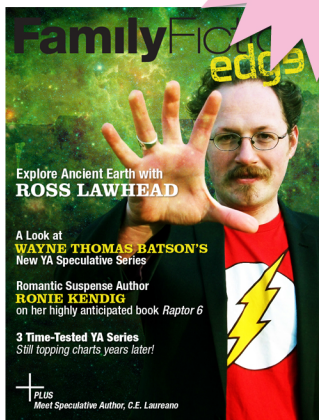
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Explore Ancient Earth with
ROSS LAWHEAD

A Look at
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Romantic Suspense Author
RONIE KENDIG
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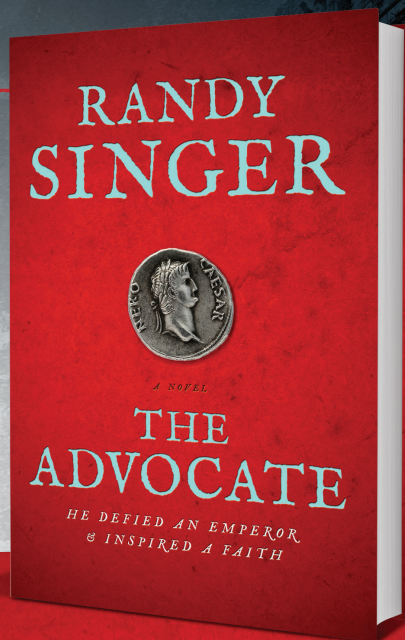
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Pontius Pilate and whispers,
"Offer to release Barabbas."

The strategy backfires, and
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the sight of an innocent man
unjustly suffering the worst
of all possible deaths—Roman
crucifixion. When he returns
to Rome, Theophilus faces
the most notorious Caesar,
defending the man Paul in
Nero's deranged court. Can he
mount a defense that will keep
another innocent man from
execution?

*THE ADVOCATE'S FIRST
TRIAL ALTERED THE
COURSE OF HISTORY. HIS
LAST WILL CHANGE THE
FATE OF AN EMPIRE.*

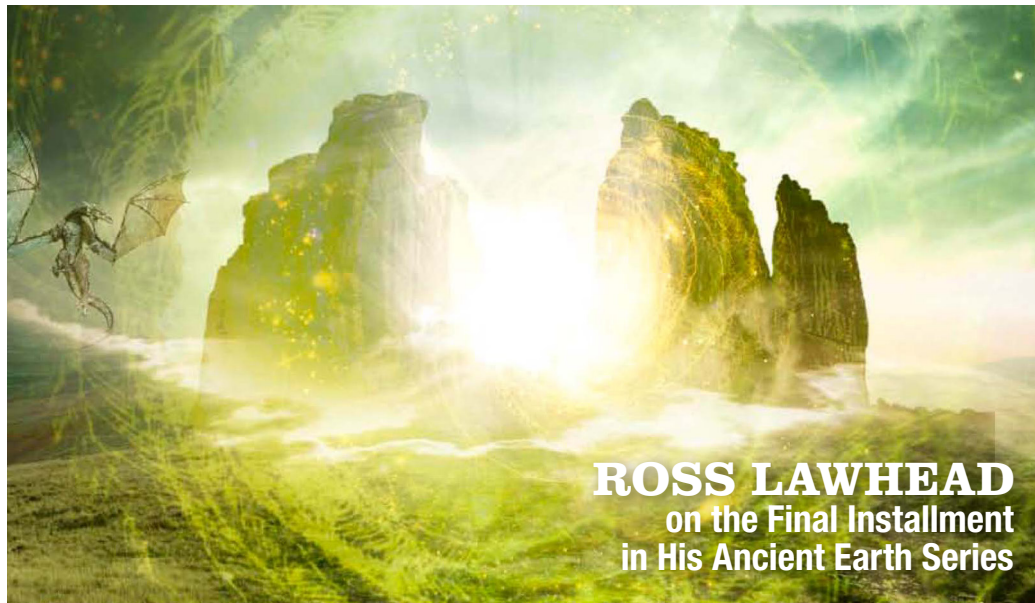


RANDY SINGER is a critically acclaimed, award-winning author and veteran trial attorney. He was a finalist with John Grisham and Michael Connelly for the inaugural Harper Lee Prize for Legal Fiction sponsored by the University of Alabama School of Law and the *ABA Journal*. Randy and his wife, Rhonda have two grown children and live in Virginia Beach. Visit his website at www.randysinger.net or follow Randy on Facebook.



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ROSS LAWHEAD on the Final Installment in His Ancient Earth Series



RONIE KENDIG Shares Her Love of Romantic Suspense



A Candid Interview with **WAYNE THOMAS BATSON**

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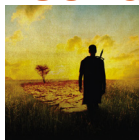
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Deidra Romero is a twenty-something blogger and bookworm. She loves good company, good coffee and a good story.

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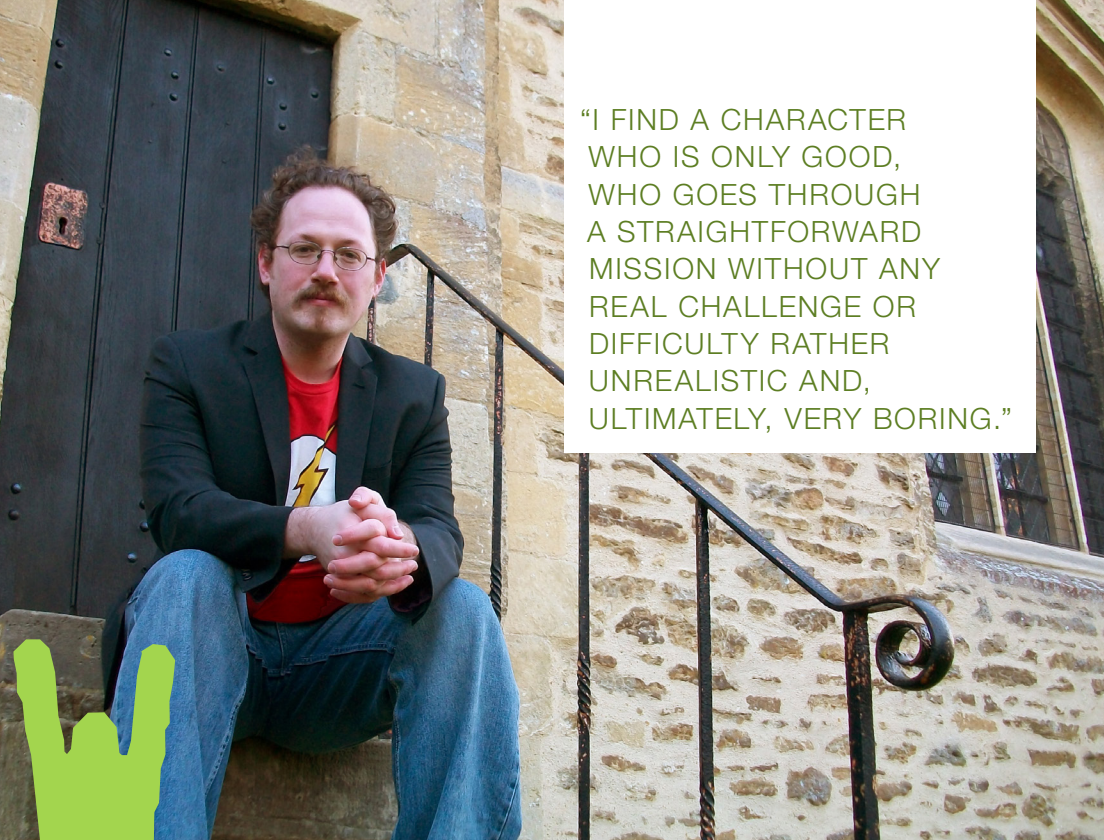
Deidra Romero



A Fantasy Trilogy Like None Other

After spending eight years working on his first full-length fiction project, Ross Lawhead has “left it all on the field” with his Ancient Earth trilogy (Thomas Nelson). Ross spoke with us about his inspiration, his opinions about speculative fiction and more on the final installment of his series, titled *The Fearful Gates*.





"I FIND A CHARACTER WHO IS ONLY GOOD, WHO GOES THROUGH A STRAIGHTFORWARD MISSION WITHOUT ANY REAL CHALLENGE OR DIFFICULTY RATHER UNREALISTIC AND, ULTIMATELY, VERY BORING."

hen Ross Lawhead set out to write a fantasy series for teens, he began with frustration over common storylines he was seeing. "I'm very interested in the moral elements of story, and have been noticing that resolution in the stories being written today, even for young adult fiction, is often a violent resolution. I believe this is a contrivance because in the real world, violence never fixes problems; it only causes more of them. I wanted to put those real-life consequences into a fantasy story and see what happened," says Ross.

So he started where every great writer starts, with engaging realistic characters. Instead of making his heroes entirely good and his villains entirely bad, he made them each with their own merits and flaws. Ross noted, "I find a character who is only good, who goes through a straightforward mission without any real challenge or difficulty rather unrealistic and, ultimately, very boring." Ross admitted that his realistic characters may frustrate some readers, but it is their very real struggle with morality that carries the plot forward.

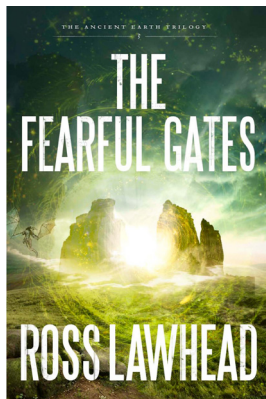
Ross's inspiration came from some very unexpected places while his story evolved from a five-part series for children to an adult trilogy. However, in the end he found himself extremely pleased with the outcome. "I had an idea of what I thought was the perfect fantasy adventure for teens— had the heroes, the villains, the setting and even the last scene—but I couldn't find a way to tie them all together."

It was Ross's father Stephen Lawhead, a well-known novelist, who suggested he use the legend of sleeping knights. "I looked into those stories and things started to click; I was able to make a lot of connections to elements I wanted to include, and the themes started to reinforce themselves. Then my publisher suggested that I 'age up' the story, so I ended up writing it for the adult market. And I'm glad I did; that gave me an opportunity to tell a much more complex story than I originally had in mind," says Ross.

Ross's series draws heavily upon English mythology, following the story of Daniel Tully and Freya Reynolds as they are drawn into an underground world after accidentally awakening two ancient knights from centuries of deep slumber. The responsibility falls on Daniel and Freya to protect the world above, which is oblivious to the battle brewing below. Ross's first book, *The Realms Thereunder*, introduces us to the heroes and villains and spans eight

years. The second book in the series, *A Hero's Throne*, covers about nine days as Daniel and Freya continue on their journey. The final book, *The Fearful Gates*, which released in April, covers the final 24 hours in the battle of good vs. evil, as the future of the world hangs in the balance.

With high stakes, realistic characters and complex plot lines, Ross Lawhead is carving out his own name in literary history, apart from his successful father. When asked about the reception of the series so far, Ross commented, "I wrote this series like it would be my last fantasy series ever, and I loaded it with enough ideas and themes to reward repeat reading—and I'm probably more surprised than anyone that people are actually reading them twice, without the last book even being published yet. It's beyond flattering." **FFE**



THE FEARFUL GATES
ANCIENT EARTH #3
Ross Lawhead
Thomas Nelson

ANCHOR FIRST. ANCHOR DEEP.

Brock Eastman

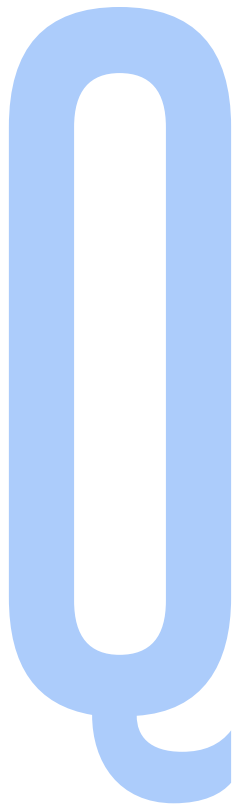




Wayne Thomas Batson

A Look at Wayne Thomas Batson's new YA Speculative Series

I recall the first time I saw a Wayne Thomas Batson book. I was in a Borders (I miss those stores and their apple cider) in Peoria, Illinois. There, on a table in the teen section, sat *Isle of Swords*. I couldn't help but pick it up and read the back cover. At the time I had just finished college, and hadn't yet been immersed in the world of publishing. Still, I was drawn in by the story and quickly made the purchase. I'm proud to say that seven years (and almost as many books) later, Batson is still delivering exciting fiction. Check out my interview with him about his new trilogy (Thomas Nelson).



Brock: How did you come up with the idea for *Dreamtreaders*?

Wayne: I found an article online about the science of dreams. It blew me away. I mean, dreams have always been a curiosity. Sometimes they leave us with such a feeling of “I’ve been somewhere new” or “That was so real.” But to discover that there is actually a field of science devoted to dreaming—that was news to me. After a little more research, I realized that dreams may be worth exploring in fiction.

That sounds cool. I know I’ve woken up in the middle of the night, thinking, “Wow, that was just weird.”

Tell us about the main characters.

Archer Keaton has the same issues as any other high school freshman: fitting in, standing out, bullies, crushes, etc. But, he has one additional issue: he’s a Dreamtreader, one of three people chosen each generation to protect humanity in the realm of dreams. Rigby Thames is another freshman, but he’s arrived halfway through the school year carrying a suitcase of mysteries, including a mad uncle who might have been guilty of murder.

Kara Windchil is a young lady with plans. Also just a freshman, Kara knows what she wants in life and how she’s going to get there. She’s always seen something special in Archer, but when Rigby arrives, she becomes distracted. Her ambitions change and a secret hobby threatens to lead her into uncharted territories. Honestly, the plot of the story came first. But once I had the general storyline, all these people leaped into my mind to carry out the story.

It’s amazing how characters come to life. In three sentences, what is this book about?

What if dreams were much more than we ever imagined? What if a threat loomed within the realm of dreams, a threat to everything and everyone we hold dear? And finally, what would happen if people gained the power to control their dreams?

Intriguing! What is the Biblical background or basis for the series?

Dreams play a pretty significant role in the Bible. Just do a search, and you'll see that some very important events occurred due to dreams. So, the general topic—dreaming—is of Biblical importance. But as the story developed, a new theme began to dominate: the idea of having anchors of truth. When people have God and the Bible as their anchors, they can withstand any storm. But when we lose sight of those anchors, we invite disaster.

That's so true. How many books are planned for this series?

Three books. Book one will be out May 6th. Book two, later in the year.

Any certain research required for the book, or is it all straight from your imagination?

I had to do a bit of research on the fields of sleep science, sleep physiology and lucid dreaming. This wasn't too taxing, however, because it's all very cool stuff.

What do you hope kids take away from the series?

Back to the “anchor” theme. No generation in the history of the world has ever seen its moral compass destroyed more than this generation's has been. Politics, news media, entertainment, music, social media, peers and even ill-informed parents are sending mixed messages (at best) or false messages to our children. And we dress up those messages with lacy labels like “tolerance” or “fairness” or even “loving,” but it's really societal poison. If kids don't have anchors, the solid truths they will stand on no matter what, then they will get washed out to sea and drown in sin.

Wayne, thanks so much for the interview.

One last thing for readers to remember:
Anchor first. Anchor deep. **FFE**



DREAMTREADERS

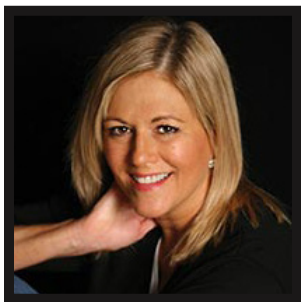
Wayne Thomas Batson
Thomas Nelson

SURVEY SAYS

We Asked Your Favorite Authors:

*Do you prefer to focus on one genre, or
do you like writing in multiple genres?*





Beth Wiseman

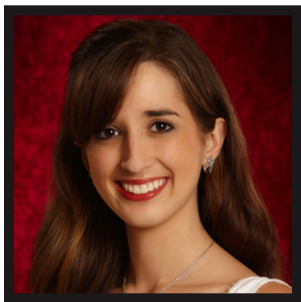
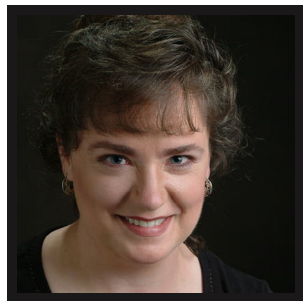
"I love writing in multiple genres. Right now, I am alternating between Amish novels and non-Amish contemporaries. I have published two Texas contemporaries based in small towns, and I have a book coming out in September that will take readers across the world, which pushes me into a more literary genre. But I understand and respect the love of Amish fiction, so even while I am writing in other genres, I will continue to write both Amish full-length books and Amish novellas. For me, it's the best of all worlds, and hopefully readers will agree."

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/beth-wiseman/>

Christa Kinde

"The Threshold Series has a contemporary, small-town setting and is paced accordingly. But the addition of angels and demons tips Prissie's tale into the supernatural action/adventure category. Genre clash? Nah. Life is full of little complexities, and so are stories. Good books borrow elements from many genres—adventure, mystery, drama, comedy, romance. My Christian fiction all fits into the juvenile action/adventure genre, but some of my upcoming storylines have romance leanings."

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/christa-kinde/>



Anne Elisabeth Stengl

I love writing exclusively in the fantasy genre. I used to toy around with some ideas for historical novels ... but every historical storyline I ever dreamed up was drastically improved by the inclusion of dragons. So I'll probably stick to fantasy for the foreseeable future.

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/anne-elisabeth-stengl/>



Julianna Deering

I have ideas for genres all over the map. If I enjoy reading a genre, I usually start having ideas for writing it, too. My first books were a trilogy of medieval romances, very dramatic and angsty. Then I wrote a Civil War romance (not published yet), still dramatic and angsty. After that I started writing my 1930s murder mysteries—very little angst, lots of banter, lots of fun. During the same period, I wrote four contemporary needlework-related mysteries, which have no murder and are extremely gentle reads.

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/julianna-deering/>

Elizabeth Ludwig

Writing in multiple genres keeps my perspective fresh. I never want my story lines to feel stale so, for me, switching genres is like putting on a fresh set of clothes. I feel better, and I think my writing stays crisp. I have written in several genres: historical romance, contemporary romance, historical suspense and cozy mystery.

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/elizabeth-ludwig/>



Kacy Barnett-Gramckow/ R. J. Larson

I enjoy writing in different genres and eras, though I use a pen name as well as my real name. I've written YA Biblical fantasy for Bethany House/Baker Books, classic Biblical fiction for Moody Publishers, speculative Biblical fiction for Elk Lake, and I'm still hoping to complete an 1890s historical set in Colorado. I believe that switching genres on occasion challenges authors' skills and keeps their passion for writing fresh.

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Brock Eastman

In my first year of writing, I wrote a children's sci-fi series, a YA spiritual warfare series, and a first reader's historical fiction Bible story. Different genres and different age groups kept my mind spinning. When I'd feel stuck in one series, I could shift gears and focus on a different story and style—it was great. In other words, I love the variety; it lets my imagination be free.

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/brock-eastman/>

Jill Williamson

I consider speculative fiction one big genre of weird, and I like writing all kinds of spec fiction. I've written medieval fantasy, science fiction, dystopian, supernatural and epic fantasy. All my ideas fit within the spec fiction umbrella. So, I guess I like to write in multiple subgenres.

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/jill-williamson/>



An action-packed thriller with a touch of romance is just what Ronie Kendig cooked up in her latest military thriller. *Raptor 6* (Shiloh Run Press) adds to Kendig's library of award-winning series that have attracted a loyal following of fans. Kendig delivers realistic mind-blowing action, forcing you to burn through the pages more quickly than the bullets flying from the muzzles of the terrorists' machine guns you're reading about.



***Raptor 6* is not a typical romance novel. You incorporate combat, action and other elements that usually take a back seat in a romance novel. Yet in *Raptor 6* you've done a great job creating a balance of action, intrigue, and romance. Is it difficult to strike this balance?**

I confess this is tough for me, because my novels hover on a thin line between "true romance" and "true suspense." I have readers who beg for more romance, but on the other end of the spectrum, I have those who are quite vocal in their opposition of a romance thread. For me, I'm a romantic. But I do not want a book of just romance—I want the action and adventure, too. I'm pretty sensitive when things swing

too far one way or the other, so when I start to feel that barometer getting heavy on one side, I work to balance it. If I read through a section and there's not enough romance or the romantic angle feels forgotten, I'll tease it up a little. And to be fair, the level of romance also depends on the book itself, and the characters. For example, in *Firethorn*, the romance thread was pretty light because theirs was more of an intellectual romance. In *Raptor*, the romance is more in the form of my hero providing protection, the only thing he feels he has to offer.

Why have you chosen to write these combat romance thrillers?

There's a myriad of reasons, but ultimately, it boils down to two things:



RAPTOR 6

THE QUIET PROFESSIONALS #1

Ronie Kendig

Shiloh Run Press

“IT WAS THE ROMANTICIZED NOTION OF OUR MILITARY HEROES, THOSE UNDAUNTED INDIVIDUALS, THAT DREW ME INTO WRITING.”

1. These types of stories are the ones I love to read and watch in a movie theater, whether it be *Lone Survivor* or *Divergent*—there’s a strong military element in that story’s “Dauntless” faction.

2. Passion—I have a passion for our military.

Why is the military close to your heart?

It is close to my heart, and I cannot fully explain why, without saying it’s a purpose and passion the Lord has put on my heart. I grew up an Army brat, and even after my dad retired, he took a job as a civilian contractor on a base, so I was around the military, or soldiers, well into my early 20s. But really, in the beginning, it was the romanticized notion of our military heroes, those undaunted individuals, that drew me into writing. Then, one day about six or seven years ago, I was in a Sunday school class with my in-laws, and I heard a woman who was married to

a Navy SEAL speak to the group. She asked for prayers for her husband’s salvation, but also for his anger, what I believe to be birthed out of PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.) Hearing her request, watching her story unfold and a family destroyed by PTSD, I knew I could never again write a military story without showing the toll it takes on our military heroes.

That sounds like a very key moment and a God-assigned mission for you. What is the reaction from your readers?

Those readers who’ve been with me from the beginning know what to expect from a Rapid-Fire Fiction (my brand) novel—intense action, raw characters and real life. They’ve asked me to keep the edge to the novels, and they often thank me for writing “real life.”

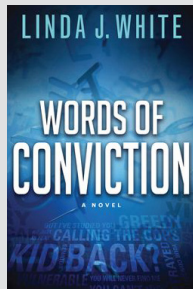
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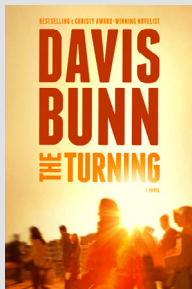
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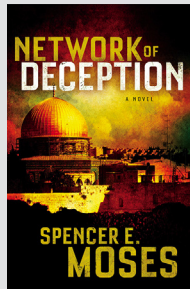
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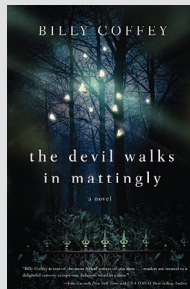
FAMILY IN HIDING
WITNESS PROTECTION
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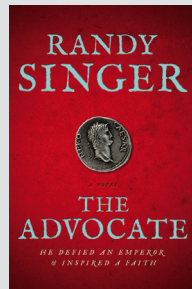
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RECLAIMING THE HERO IN FANTASY FICTION

Author C.E. Laureano took a moment to pen some thoughts on her new series *The Song of Seare*, which recently kicked off with the release of *Oath of the Brotherhood* (Th1nk). Laureano shares her inspiration behind the novel's protagonist and what she believes about true heroism.



I stopped reading epic fantasy for years because at some point, the heroes stopped being heroic.

With the popularity of “grimdark” and hyper-realism, the principled, sacrificial heroes that had been the hallmark of most traditional fantasy were suddenly replaced with self-serving, sometimes evil, characters who did the wrong things for the wrong reasons and often came by their redemption almost by accident. Young adult dystopian began filling in the gaps with protagonists concerned about the fate of humanity, but my beloved genre had become downright cynical. Even the books that had before possessed a secular humanist bent began to give way to a much darker view of humankind.

Still, when I started to write the Celtic fantasy that would become *Oath of the Brotherhood*, I didn't intend to make it overtly Christian. I didn't even realize that Christian fantasy was a viable genre. Yet I soon realized that it wasn't so much the tone and the violence of the books being published that bothered me, but the sense of hopelessness that came from a world in which no higher power existed beyond man's own ability to save himself through his own actions. Even more disturbing was the realization that there was a generation of readers behind me who were being subtly shaped to believe that heroes no longer existed unless they were of the variety that came from Krypton or were bitten by radioactive spiders.

The young adult aspect then came as a surprise, because while I had continued to read YA fiction long after I was no longer the age of the target market, I'd never much considered writing it. But taken with my love of the genre and the fact that so many

**OATH OF THE BROTHERHOOD**

THE SONG OF SEARE

C.E. Laureano

Th1nk

readers of this darker sector of fantasy were under the age of 20, it made sense to offer an alternative.

Today's teens are far more self-aware and socially conscious than my generation was and yet still often get written off as entitled and spoiled. I have no doubt they are capable of far more than most adults give them credit for. Where were the fantasy heroes then that showed that someone didn't need to be 30 years old before they could accomplish something great? Where were the young men and women who proved that idealism wasn't the mark of a small mind but a gift that could change the world?

The hero of *Oath of the Brotherhood*, Conor Mac Nir, is a young man struggling with identity, an issue that certainly isn't limited to just one age group. He has been told by his clan and his society that he doesn't measure up to expectations, and yet he has the deep feeling that he could be something more. His sense of justice doesn't always line up with the messages of expedience and practicality around him. And he believes sincerely in a faith that is alternately frowned upon or downright forbidden in his world.

In that way, Conor is an ideal hero to represent the young adults of the current generation—more intelligent and capable than he's given credit for, more prepared to sacrifice for good than anyone knows, and willing to

answer the call to something greater than himself. Just not always in the way the adults around him think he should.

In the end, *The Song of Seare* trilogy is about a world on the edge of extinction by evil, even as its people are mired in oppression so deep they hardly realize how far they've sunk. It's about the redemptive nature of love and self-sacrifice and a belief in something higher than one's own comfort and convenience. And it carries the message that one person, aligned with the will of God, can make an impact in ways that nobody thought possible.

We don't need any more grimness and darkness and doses of reality about the evil that lurks within. We need true heroes, the kind that inherit the mess of their elders and turn to God for solutions, the kind who are as relevant to the modern age as they are to the ancient.

C. E. Laureano has held many jobs—including professional marketer, small-business consultant, and martial arts instructor—but writer is by far her favorite. She was a finalist in the speculative fiction category of American Christian Fiction Writers' 2012 Genesis contest, and she is active in ACFW's South Denver chapter. Author of one previous novel—the 2014 RITA Award double-nominee, Five Days in Skye—Laureano lives in Denver with her husband and two sons.

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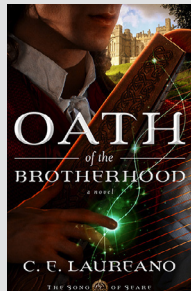
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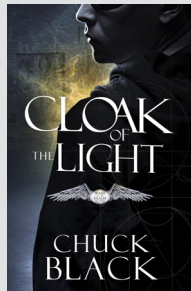
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OATH OF THE BROTHERHOOD

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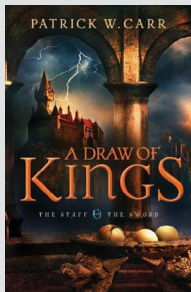
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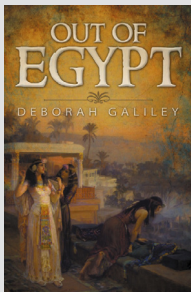
MARK OF EVIL

THE END
Tim LaHaye & Craig Parshall
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YOUNG ADULT

Galvanizing a Genre Through Powerful Series

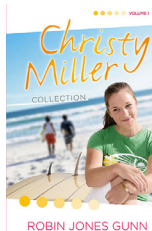
What's the perfect formula for a great YA series? Only time will tell. These three series by phenomenal authors have proven their staying power as they continue to be three of the most popular series in young adult fiction.

In 2011 **Lisa T. Bergren's** series *River of Time* (David C. Cook) released with its first installment titled *Waterfall*. The series has gained popular appeal because it encompasses so many genres: YA, historical, speculative and romance. Bergren hit the nail on the head with this one, and fans loved the trilogy so much she wrote two short novellas in 2012 to appease them!



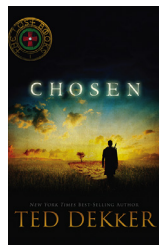
WATERFALL
RIVER OF TIME #1
Lisa T. Bergren
David C. Cook

Robin Jones Gunn's award-winning Christy Miller series started in 1988 spans a dozen books, following the life of a 14-year-old girl. Gunn started the series because she desperately wanted to give young girls something positive to read. Worldwide, the series has sold more than one million copies, and is still finding a fan base 26 years later.



SUMMER PROMISE
CHRISTY MILLER
COLLECTION #1
Robin Jones Gunn
Multnomah
Publishers

Ted Dekker's *The Lost Books* series (Thomas Nelson), which began in 2007, follows the story of the chosen four in a speculative fantasy novel full of twists and turns in a world like none other. The story of the chosen four spans six books as well as a visual edition, which released in 2010. Dekker's more recent and wildly popular *Circle Series* is built upon the foundation of *The Lost Books* series, further developing the alternate reality where the characters dwell.



CHOSEN
LOST BOOKS #1
Ted Dekker
Thomas Nelson

CCL

CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LINK

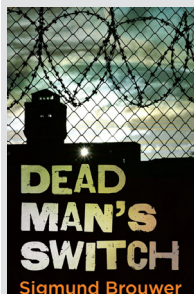
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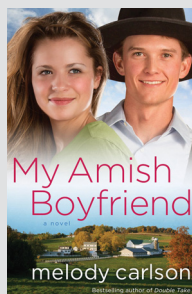
RECKLESS INTENTIONS

INNER SOCIETY
Melinda Louise Bohannon
Ellechor Publishing House



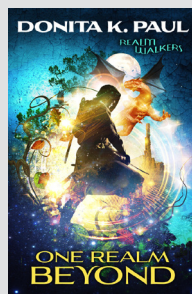
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Lorie Ann Grover
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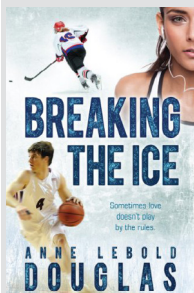
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Melody Carlson
Revell



ONE REALM BEYOND

REALM WALKERS
Donita K. Paul
Zondervan



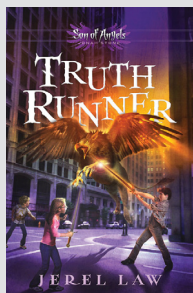
BREAKING THE ICE

Anne LeBold Douglas
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SWIPE SERIES #4
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THE CAPTIVE MAIDEN

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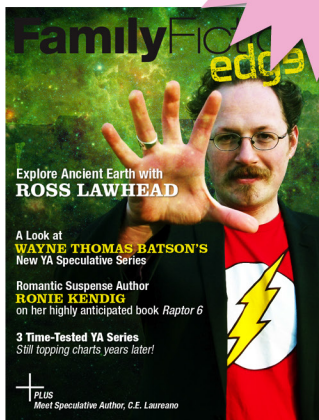
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