

Family Fiction

July 2016

edge

A portrait of Lynette Eason, a woman with long brown hair, smiling and wearing a red leather jacket. The background is a dark red patterned fabric.

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Excerpt from *Without Warning* by Lynette Eason in this issue!



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PUBLISHERS WEEKLY
on Centralia



AUTHOR MIKE DELLOSSO

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Jed Patrick is convinced he's doing all it takes to keep his family safe—new names, new location, new identity. But just when he thinks he finally has his life back, trained men claiming to be CIA agents break in and threaten his wife and daughter, proving once and for all his family will never truly be safe until he eliminates the agency dead set on hunting him down.

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Excerpt from *Without Warning*
by Lynette Eason in this issue!

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SUSPENSE



Chris Fabry

Plus New Releases

SPECULATIVE



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Plus New Releases

YOUNG ADULT



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Plus New Releases



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WHO WE ARE

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Deidra Romero is a blogger and bookworm. She loves good company, good coffee and a good story.
www.parentingupstream.com

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Rel Mollet resides in Melbourne, Australia, with her movie-loving husband and three book-loving daughters.
www.RelzReviewz.com

C.J. DARLINGTON



C.J., the author of *Bound by Guilt*, is the cofounder of *TitleTrakk.com*.
www.cjdarlington.com

BROCK EASTMAN



Brock Eastman is the author of *The Quest for Truth* series by P&R Publishing and *Focus* on the Family. He's a husband and a daddy and loves to spend time with his family.
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**THE THRILL
OF THE CHASE**

Catching Up with Lynette Eason

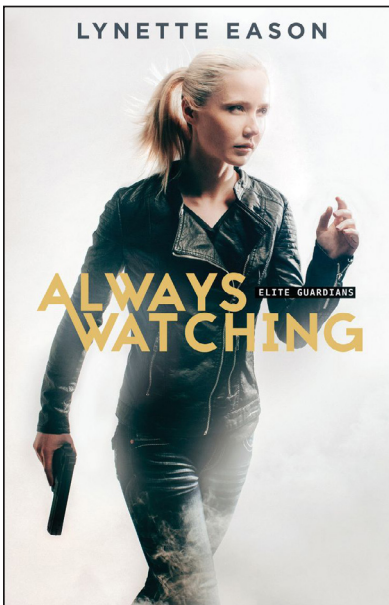
Deidra Romero



Female bodyguards might be rare, but not in Lynette Eason's latest crime thriller series, *Elite Guardians*. The second installment, *Without Warning* (Revell), tells the story of Katie Singleton's coincidental new assignment and the quest for answers that unfolds.



WITHOUT WARNING
ELITE GUARDIANS #2
Lynette Eason
Revell



ALWAYS WATCHING
ELITE GUARDIANS #1
Lynette Eason
Revell

Even though Daniel Matthews knows he's in the crosshairs of a vicious criminal, he still isn't sure he needs a bodyguard, and definitely not a female one. However, Katie is up for the task, and according to Lynette she was a fun character to work with. "She's tough and edgy, but that comes with a past full of pain. She thinks she's making progress working through her issues, but then this latest case comes her way and she finds herself leaning on Daniel Matthews for strength and support—and that surprises her but it also allows the reader to see her softer side."

The Elite Guardians series is totally different from Lynette's previous project. She said this series has required a lot of research on a lot of different occupations. But Lynette doesn't mind at all, adding, "I love that part. I could spend way too much time simply researching stuff. I think series is a little faster paced and that seems to be going over well with the readers and reviewers."

One thing readers will love about this book is the pacing. Lynette doesn't waste any time. This is a book that will keep readers on the edge of their seats. When asked about her secret to keeping the stakes high, Lynette stated, "When it starts to get boring, make something happen. Or kill off a character. Or introduce a new character. Or throw in a twist. All of those are options I find myself using to keep the suspense high."

Those are all tactics put to good use in this series. The Elite Guardians series will be comprised of four books and possibly one e-book because as Lynette put it, "one character keeps demanding her own story." Stay tuned for more exciting fiction! **FFE**



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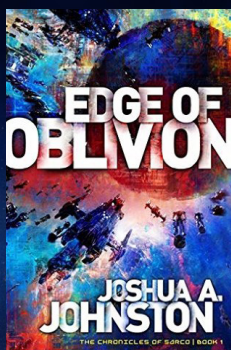
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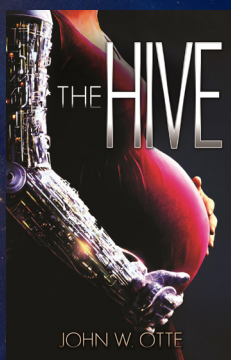
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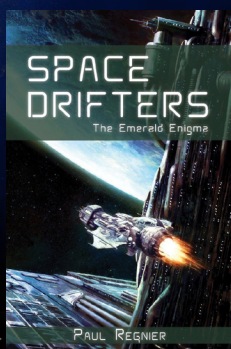




EDGE OF OBLIVION
THE CHRONICLES OF
SARCO #1
Joshua A. Johnston
Enclave Publishing



THE HIVE
John W. Otte
Enclave Publishing



**SPACE DRIFTERS:
THE EMERALD ENIGMA**
Paul Regnier
Enclave Publishing

The latest Star Trek film hits theaters this month, but that's hardly the only game in town for fans of science fiction. Check out these space-themed novels that incorporate faith with intergalactic exploration!

***Edge of Oblivion* by Joshua A. Johnston**

Joshua A. Johnston has penned a futuristic novel where residents of the planet Earth have formed an alliance with aliens in order to form a peaceful existence. But the alliance proves to be weak when an attack from an unknown alien threatens to put an end to life on Earth. This is the first book in Joshua's Chronicles of Sarco series!

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/joshua-a-johnston/books/edge-of-oblivion-the-chronicles-of-sarco-1/>

***The Hive* by John W. Otte**

Can you imagine an intergalactic cold war? That's exactly what John W. Otte did in his novel, *The Hive*. At the center of the conflict he places a pregnant cyborg,, who is on the run to protect the life she is carrying and a hacker named Matthew Nelson. It seems the child the cyborg is carrying is one that both governments are interested in. But just how far will Matthew go to find security for the pair?

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/john-w-otte/books/the-hive/>

***Space Drifters* by Paul Regnier**

What if your dreams of space exploration didn't hold up to their promise? That's the conundrum Captain Starcrost finds himself in. He is a fugitive of sorts with a ship that needs serious repairs, and to top things off, there's a bounty on his head. To solve all of his problems, he sets out on a search for the fabled Emerald Enigma, which promises wealth and luck to its finder. But it turns out, Captain Starcrost is not the only one searching for the treasure! **FFE**

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/paul-regnier/books/space-drifters-the-emerald-enigma/>

5 EPIC THRILLERS

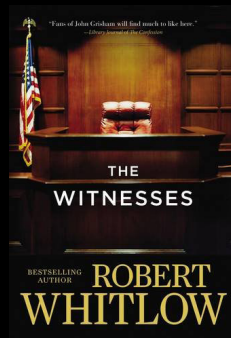
By *Reel Mollet*

Looking for a great read that will get your pulse pounding, hands sweating, and adrenaline pumping? Here are five new and upcoming books that will keep you turning those pages.

***The Witnesses* by Robert Whitlow**

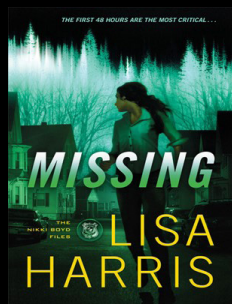
Known for brilliant legal thrillers, Robert Whitlow returns with *The Witnesses* (Thomas Nelson), combining courtroom drama with a hint of the supernatural. Parker House has inherited his grandfather's ability to see future events in his mind's eye, and while some may believe this a gift, Parker fears it will be his curse.

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/robert-whitlow/books/the-witnesses/>



THE WITNESSES

Robert Whitlow
Thomas Nelson

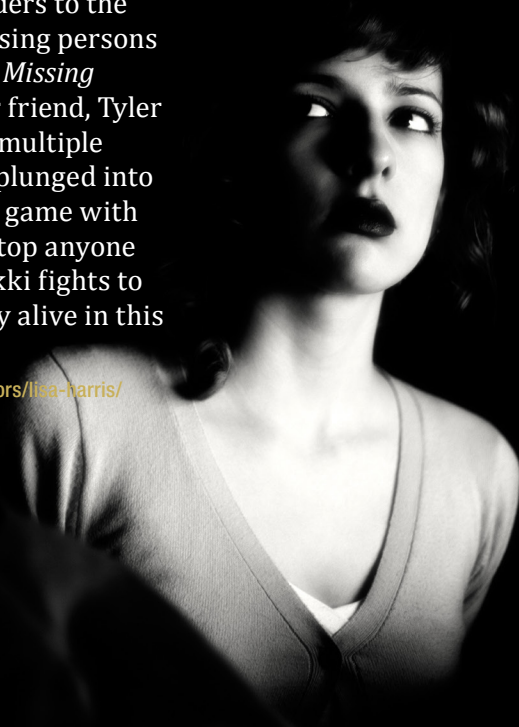


MISSING
Lisa Harris
Revell

***Missing* by Lisa Harris**

Lisa Harris returns readers to the dangerous world of missing persons detective Nikki Boyd in *Missing* (Revell). When her dear friend, Tyler Grant, is entangled in a multiple homicide case, Nikki is plunged into a deadly cat-and-mouse game with a killer determined to stop anyone who gets in the way. Nikki fights to exonerate Tyler and stay alive in this vivid tale.

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/lisa-harris/books/missing-nikki-boyd-files-2/>





**OPERATION ZULU
REDEMPTION**

Ronie Kendig
Shiloh Run Press

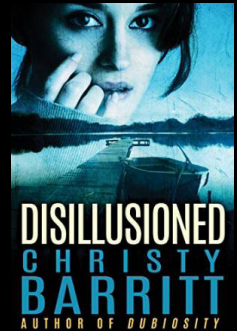
Operation Zulu Redemption by Ronie Kendig
Readers can finally get their hands on Ronie Kendig's heart-stopping thriller serialization in one hard copy volume. *Operation Zulu Redemption* (Shiloh Run Press) is a nonstop ride of intrigue, danger, action and courage, as the first all-female special ops team find themselves hunted as their secret identities fall into the hands of someone who wants them all dead.

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/ronie-kendig/books/operation-zulu-redemption/>

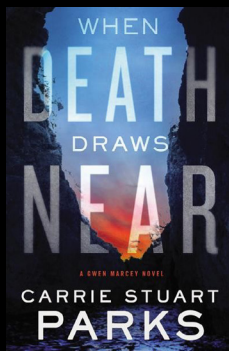
Disillusioned by Christy Barritt

When Nikki Wright's brother is accused of betraying his Navy brothers while he was held hostage by Colombian terrorists, Nikki is determined to secret him away until the publicity firestorm abates. A failed abduction of the siblings has them seeking the help of former SEAL Kade Wheaton to keep them safe. But all is not as it appears and a rumored conspiracy may be a dangerous truth. Discover Christy Barritt's *Disillusioned* (Waterfall Press).

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/christy-barritt/books/disillusioned/>



DISILLUSIONED
Christy Barritt
Waterfall Press



**WHEN DEATH
DRAWS NEAR**
Carrie Stuart Parks
Thomas Nelson

**When Death Draws Near
by Carrie Stuart Parks**

Another cold case haunts forensic artist Gwen Marcey, this time the work of a serial rapist. When Gwen identifies a link between the rapist and accidental deaths of residents in the small town of Pikeville, Kentucky, she is determined to uncover the truth, despite the lack of interest shown by the local sheriff. Carrie Stuart Parks' *When Death Draws Near* is an authentic and true-to-life thriller not to be missed.

<http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/carrie-stuart-parks/books/when-death-draws-near/>



Summertime is the perfect season for a good coming-of-age story. The story Chris Fabry crafts with his new release *The Promise of Jesse Woods* (Tyndale House) is rich with social commentary and mystery. In the summer of 1972, Matt Plumley's life changed when his family moved to Dogwood, West Virginia. It was there he made two unlikely friends: "Dickie Darrel Lee Hancock, a mixed-race boy, and Jesse Woods, a tough-as-nails girl with a sister on her hip and no dad in sight." The events of one night in particular change everything for Matt and put an end to his budding romance with Jesse. Years later, Matt returns to Dogwood with unanswered questions.

Gosh! This book. Where did the inspiration come from for the plot?

I've always wanted to write a love story like this featuring characters I grew up with in the hills of West Virginia. Jesse is such a strong character and I see her in a lot of West Virginia girls—my mother included. Basically, they grabbed hold of life and didn't let go. I love writing about these people.

You were born in West Virginia and you wrote about Dogwood before in your 2008 novel, *Dogwood*. What was it like for you to return to your roots for the setting of this book?

I've talked with other writers about this and there is a sense that I come alive when I write about those things that are wedged deep in my soul

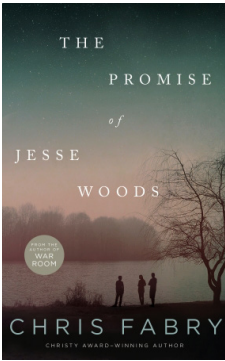
and experience. There are painful aspects to the returning, but I always feel like I'm writing a more authentic story when it's something I've lived or at least witnessed.

This story incubated with you for quite a while. Can you tell us about your journey to publishing this novel?

I wrote a blog post a few years ago about a scene from my childhood. My brother, Dave, and his friend, Aaron, were riding bikes and I was tagging along. We came upon a horse caught in a barbed-wire fence. I can take you to the spot on the road where we made the decision to help. The image of that helpless horse has stuck with me, and it was the perfect opening scene for Matt and Jesse.

Why did you choose the year 1972 specifically? And what is the year when Matt returns to Dogwood?

Matt hears Jesse is getting married in 1984—so it’s 12 years from this pivotal 1972 point. That year was an awakening for me in a lot of ways. I was in love with the Cincinnati Reds and they played well that year. I became more interested in music



THE PROMISE OF JESSE WOODS
Chris Fabry
Tyndale House

and reading that year. And it was 1984 that marked another pivotal switch for me, personally, so this all made sense to me to cast Matt and Jesse and Dickie in the same light.

Can you tell us what your next project will be?

I’m noodling an idea about an older woman whose family wants her to give up her car keys and she just can’t do it.

When you aren’t writing, what are you up to?

I host a daily, two-hour radio program called “Chris Fabry Live.” That keeps me off the street. My wife and I have nine children, so between those two and the five chickens we have in the backyard, I stay occupied.

READ MORE ONLINE! <http://www.familyfiction.com/authors/chris-fabry/books/>



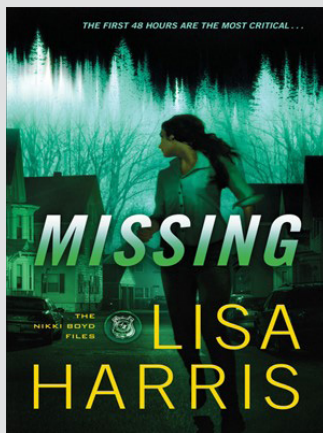
SUSPENSE

NEW RELEASES

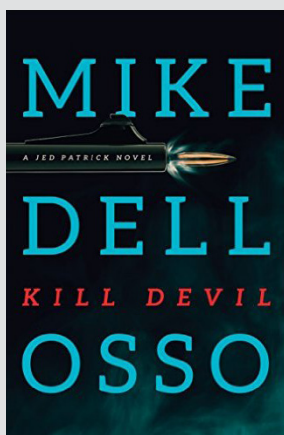
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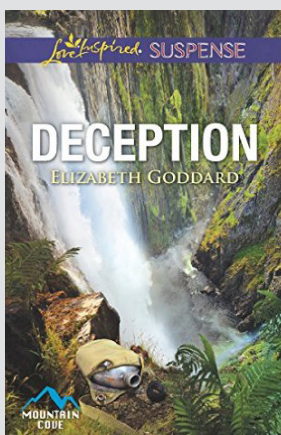
HONOR AND DEFEND
ROOKIE K-9 UNIT
Lynette Eason
Love Inspired Suspense



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NIKKI BOYD FILES #2
Lisa Harris
Revell



KILL DEVIL
JED PATRICK #2
Mike Dell
Tyndale House



DECEPTION
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Elizabeth Goddard
Love Inspired Suspense

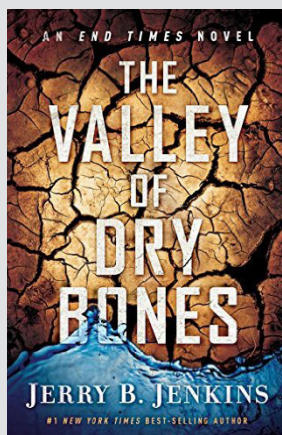
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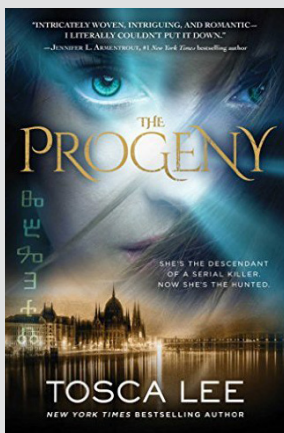
FROM THIS MOMENT

Elizabeth Camden
Bethany House



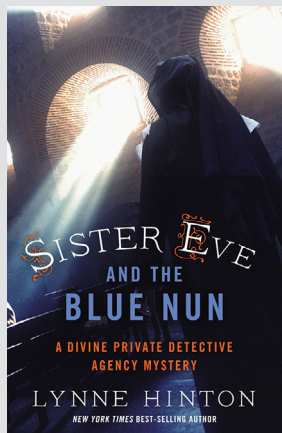
**THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES:
AN END TIME NOVEL**

Jerry B. Jenkins
Worthy Publishing



THE PROGENY: A NOVEL

DESCENDANTS OF THE HOUSE OF BATHORY
Tosca Lee
Howard Books



SISTER EVE & THE BLUE NUN

A DIVINE PRIVATE DETECTIVE AGENCY MYSTERY #2
Lynne Hinton
Thomas Nelson

National radio host Erik Guzman of Key Life Network is now reaching out through the printed word. His second book is the novel *The Seed: A True Myth*, a fantasy rich with symbolism, meaning and suspense. In this Q&A, he shares the true meaning behind *The Seed*.



This book is rich with symbolism and you've subtitled it "A True Myth." Will you share with us the inspiration behind the story?

I wanted to tell my story woven into the grand narrative of Scripture—a mythic spiritual memoir. So, the inspiration for *The Seed* came from my life: my faith; my struggle with substance abuse; the demands of being a husband and father; my experience in counseling; studying theology in seminary; and music.

However, there was one experience that gave me a vision for how the characters (who represented parts of me) would struggle to protect themselves from the pain of the past.

Exhausted by the demands of life and religion, I decided to experiment with the spiritual discipline of solitude. I was tired of pursuing God and simply needed rest and wanted to be alone. I reserved a room at a local retreat center and, upon arriving, I found the grounds and the office were unexpectedly empty.

While I waited for someone to show up and tell me where to go, I wandered the grounds and came

across a little prayer labyrinth and a book on what to do with it. The book encouraged me to think of the labyrinth as symbolic of anything I wanted, no restrictions. As I traced the pattern and thought about what it might mean to me personally, I noticed how the entrance to the labyrinth opened onto a path that hugged the center before leading to the outer edge. There were no dead ends or barriers, it was simply a winding, unbroken path to the center.

I felt it represented a lifetime's journey to God. When we first come to faith, there's a sense of intimacy (close to the center) and passion for holiness. But as we journey on, the path leads us further from the center and we tend to feel further from God. Still, if we just keep walking the unbroken path, we'll eventually meet God in the heart of our labyrinth.

I was quite satisfied with my meditation and interpretation, but then a thought entered my mind that was so clear and "other" it seemed from outside me. It was as if a voice said, "That's not right at all. You are in the heart of the

labyrinth and I have been coming for you. You have constructed walls to protect yourself from pain and even from me, but they cannot keep me away. Sometimes your walls allow me closer and sometimes push me further from the center. Just be still and know that I'm with you and I'm coming for you."

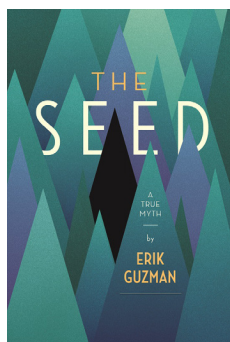
This experience was the seed of *The Seed*. It took root and blossomed into my book, but it took a lot of time and more inspiration than I expected at the start.

What do you hope readers get out of this novel?

My hope is that readers experience God's love and dare to trust that love, even when life hurts bad.

Do you have further fiction aspirations?

Yes. I would love to write two more books in a sort of "seed trilogy." I've also been working with my friend Chad West on a story about an android counselor/serial killer set in a future world where the working class has been eliminated by the elite and replaced with robots.



**THE SEED:
A TRUE MYTH**
Erik Guzman
New Growth Press

The back cover blurb says this book “communicates the heart of Trinitarian theology.” Was that your intention from the start or was that a byproduct of your creative process?

My intention from the start was to write a book that communicates the love of God. When I went to seminary, I discovered that it was impossible to have a God who defines Himself as love without Trinitarian theology. So, communicating that theology was necessary to faithfully communicate the love of God.

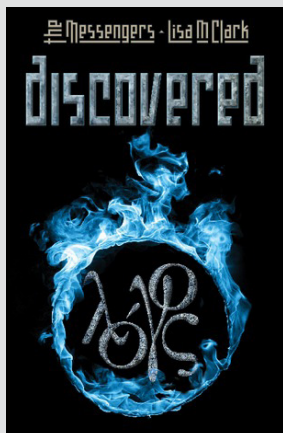
Love is the heart of Trinitarian theology. It's a love that has always existed between God the Father and God the Son in the shared delight of God the Spirit. It's a love that graciously overflows to creation, fills us, and invites us into a divine life that has always existed and will never end.

What surprised you during the writing process of *The Seed*?

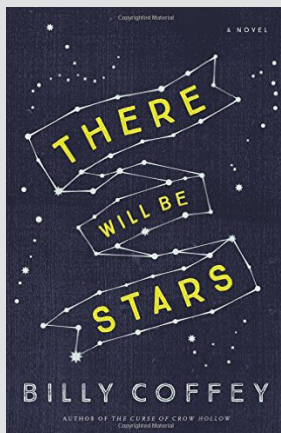
All along, I saw myself as the young couple in the story who are running from the shadow that destroyed their home. But there was one character in the book who I really didn't like and I didn't identify with. Then, during the writing, I discovered that I was that character too. I wept as I wrote. I can't tell you much more without spoilers, but seeing how Love embraced this dark part of me was very healing.

The ending also surprised me and made me cry too, but that time with tears of joy and relief.

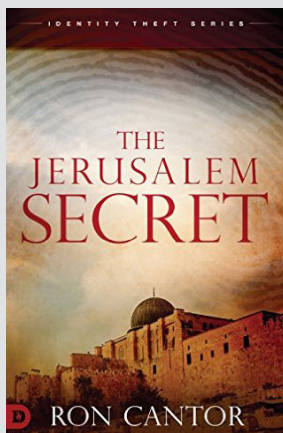
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Billy Coffey
Thomas Nelson

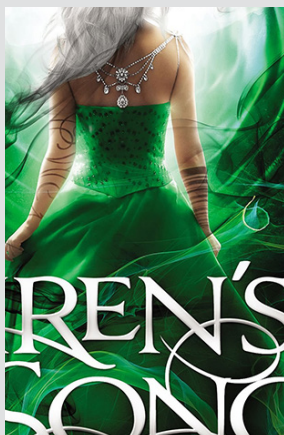


THE JERUSALEM SECRET
Ron Cantor
Destiny Image

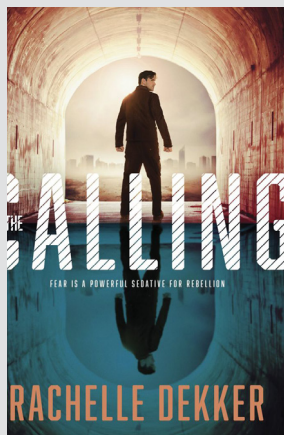


KING'S FOLLY
KINSMAN CHRONICLES PART #1
Jill Williamson
Bethany House

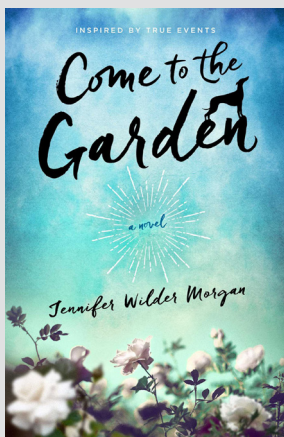
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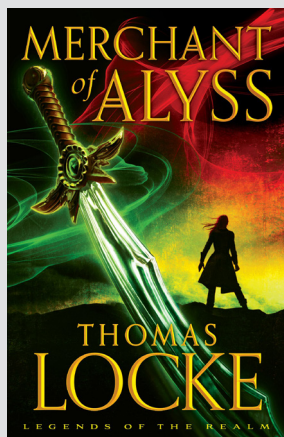
SIREN'S SONG
STORM SIREN #3
Mary Weber
Thomas Nelson



THE CALLING
SEER #2
Rachelle Dekker
Tyndale House



COME TO THE GARDEN
Jennifer Wilder Morgan
Howard Books



MERCHANT OF ALYSS
LEGENDS OF THE REALM #2
Thomas Locke
Revell

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This summer Dina Sleiman continues her *Valiant Hearts* series with a new tale, *Courageous* (Bethany House). In the novel, Rosalind of Ipsworth joins a cause to defend the cross and free captives from a Tripoli prison. It's a story of adventure, romance and faith.



Are the stories in your *Valiant Hearts* series intertwined?

That's a good question. Originally my idea was to just base each story on a famous medieval legend and set them at various times and places throughout Europe. However, Bethany House asked that I intertwine the characters and settings, so I used a minor character from each book as the hero or heroine in the next, and I love the results! The stories are set in England in the early 1200s, but in *Courageous* the characters will also travel to the Holy Land.

Where did the inspiration for this particular novel come from?

Based on the general *Valiant Hearts* premise of placing female characters in legendary medieval roles, *Courageous* is a crusader story. I was inspired by several different crusade legends, including the children's crusades and the Knights Templar. Very early in the creative process, I realized that I wanted my heroine to go on crusade in search of redemption. Next I needed to figure out what she had done that required

such a drastic step. The final result was that my heroine, Rosalind of Ipsworth, made a tragic decision to abort an illegitimate child while she was still serving as Gwendolyn's lady's maid in *Chivalrous*, book two. This made for some challenging subject matter in a series geared toward Christian teens and young women, but I believe that they want to learn about tough, real-life issues from people they can trust. At least those were the sorts of issues I wanted to read about when I was a Christian teen.

What type of research did you have to do for this novel?

Historically speaking, this is the hardest book I've ever undertaken. While there's a lot of research available on the politics of the crusades and the battles fought, there's very little available about day to day life in the Holy Land at that time. However, the best fact I found was the simple explanation that life in that part of the world changed little from around 1000 A.D. until today. Suddenly things became much easier for me because my husband is

from Lebanon, and I've made several extended trips to that part of the world. My familiarity with Middle Eastern customs and religions is a large part of why I chose to tackle this story in the first place. I've even been caught in Lebanon during fighting between the Muslim group Hezbollah and the Israeli forces. So I understand the challenges they face in that part of the world.

Are any pieces of the story pulled from real life?

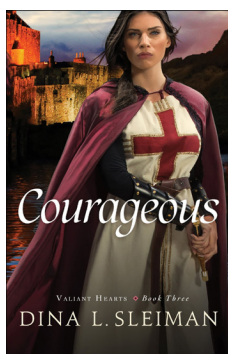
As I mentioned, my real-life experiences in the Middle East certainly played a part. The conflicts in the Middle East are layered and complicated, both historically and today, and I wanted to bring a sense of that to the book. My friendships with Muslims and former Muslims also came into play. As some of you might already know, I previously wrote a contemporary novel about a young Muslim woman in America called *Dance from Deep Within*.

In addition, although this is a historical novel, I covered issues

that young women are facing today concerning purity and their God-given sexuality. This is a subject close to my heart because I grew up in the church and I also have a college-aged daughter. I believe a message has been pushed by some extreme members of the "purity" movement, which says that even having sexual feelings before marriage is somehow sinful. I disagree. As girls turn into young women, they are going to experience emotions and sensations concerning the opposite sex. They shouldn't feel guilt or shame about that, which could prove unhealthy for them later in marriage, but they still need to make wise choices. Rosalind, on the other hand, has made some unfortunate choices, and needs to learn that God can restore her and that she doesn't have to earn her own redemption. Between Rosalind and a very innocent young character named Sapphira, I hope I'm able to present balanced and healthy views on this issue.

How many books do you anticipate in the Valiant Hearts series?

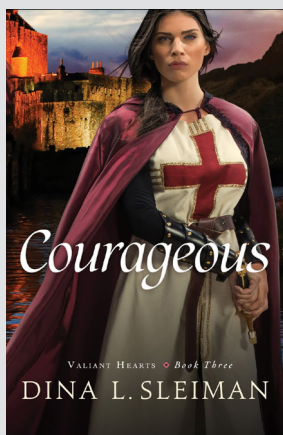
I'm currently contracted with Bethany House for a trilogy. These include *Dauntless*, my female Robin Hood story, *Chivalrous*, my female Lancelot story, and finally *Courageous*. However, I certainly have more ideas for Valiant Hearts heroines, so we'll see what the future holds.



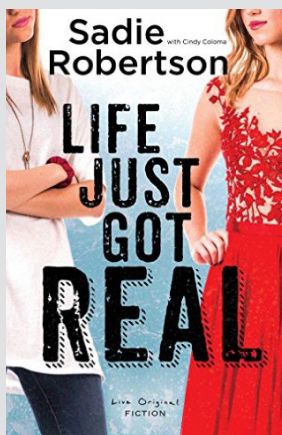
COURAGEOUS
VALIANT HEARTS #3
Dina Sleiman
Bethany House

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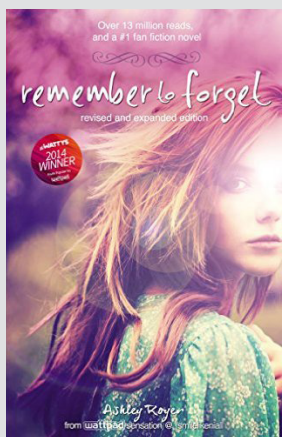
COURAGEOUS
VALIANT HEARTS #3
Dina Sleiman
Bethany House



LIFE JUST GOT REAL
LIVE ORIGINAL
Sadie Robertson
Howard Books



THAT'S NOT HAY IN MY HAIR
Juliette L. Turner
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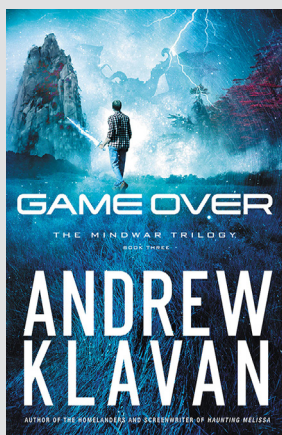
REMNANTS: SEASON OF GLORY
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Without Warning by Lynette Eason

A Taste of Yesterday Restaurant
Early Saturday morning
12:26 AM

Chink, chink, chink.

Seated at the desk and studying the frustrating spreadsheet, Daniel Matthews had ignored the sound for the past five minutes. Until he realized it wasn't supposed to be there. It came from somewhere below him, a barely there noise, but one that annoyed him—and had him curious. He looked up from the computer. Everyone else had gone home for the night, leaving him alone in the building. Hadn't they?

Of course he was alone. He'd escorted his last-to-leave interim chef, Marie Stewart, out the door and to her car. When she'd driven away, he'd returned to the restaurant and locked himself inside. He tapped his pen against the paper on the desk and thought. Okay, so if he was the sole occupant, what was making the noise? Something with the water heater again?

Chink, chink, chink.

Didn't sound like a water heater noise, but what did he know? He rose from the desk and walked to the open office door. Just beyond the threshold, the steps to the basement and wine cellar were to his left. The door stood open because he'd promised his closing staff he'd take care of locking up. Before he left, he planned to check the wine inventory—he just hadn't gotten to it yet because the numbers on the spreadsheet had captured his attention.

He was working late, having come down to the restaurant after putting

in a full day in his fifth-floor office at the headquarters building in downtown Columbia, South Carolina. He might be the CEO of A Taste of Yesterday, Inc., but he still liked to keep his hand on the day-to-day operations of all six of his restaurants. This one in particular, since it was his newest establishment—and losing money. Thanks to a business trip cancellation, he had a chunk of time he could devote to finding the problem and coming up with a solution. Was the loss strictly due to the theft he'd discovered by his former chef? Or something more complex?

The *chink, chink, chink* sounded again. He frowned and flipped the light on in the stairwell, revealing brick walls that were original to the old 1860s building. One of the few structures in Columbia that had survived Sherman's 1865 march when he and his troops had nearly burned the city to the ground.

Daniel started down. His hand slid along the rail and he tried to listen over the echo of his shoes on the matching brick steps. At the bottom, he paused, the chill of the basement penetrating the wool sweater he had on over a long-sleeved T-shirt. At the bottom, he stopped. Listened for the sound.

Heard ... a footstep? "Hey! Is someone down here?"

He walked past the wine cellar. Just beyond that, rows of storage shelves greeted him on either side of the brick path that ran between them. He continued toward the back of the basement, his heart picking up speed, his blood humming a little faster through his veins. As he got closer to the back, the temperature dropped. A lot. Why was it so cold in here? A shuffle of a footstep up ahead made him pause. "Hello? Who's there?"

No answer. But he knew someone was there.

Uneasiness crept through him and he wondered at the wisdom of continuing on in his search for the source of the noise.

Chink, chink, chink.

What *was* that? The noise was louder now, so it was definitely coming from down here. More footsteps. But faint, like they were moving away. Daniel slipped back to the wine cellar and grabbed a bottle of wine from the nearest rack. Not much of a weapon but better than nothing. He patted his back pocket. He'd left his phone upstairs. He grimaced. Of course. And the Beretta M9 he'd removed from his shoulder holster and placed into the now-locked top drawer of his desk wouldn't do him any good either. He rarely went anywhere without the gun on him but had gotten too comfortable in his office. Too complacent in a life without danger around every corner. If he went to retrieve the weapon, whoever was down here would get away. If he confronted the person, it could be a deadly mistake.

Then again, it was highly unlikely the person up ahead would know Daniel had once been a Marine. And Daniel planned to use that to his advantage.

He gave a low grunt. So be it. Hand-to-hand combat it would be. No one was going to break into his restaurant and not expect to face consequences.

With his adrenaline surging, he made his way back toward the sound. The recently replaced exposed pipes above his head rumbled. He'd never noticed that before. True, he'd had everything checked out before he'd bought the place, but since it had been renovated and opened to the public, he'd spent little time in the basement.

He finally came to the end of the row of shelves. The room opened up and light from the parking lot filtered through the open basement door. He heard the roar of an engine and a chill that had nothing to do with the physical temperature swept over him. He raced to the door in time to see taillights fade into the distance. Someone had been in the basement. But why? Who?

A gust of wind caught him full in the face and he flinched. Goose bumps pebbled his skin.

Chink, chink, chink.

Daniel spun toward the sound. His eyes landed on a body hanging from the ceiling pipe, held there with a chain wrapped around his neck. Daniel inhaled sharply and backpedaled as he recognized the grotesquely distorted features on the body that gently swayed back and forth. The dead eyes stared at him, as though accusing Daniel of letting him die.

Another heavy burst of wind came through the open door behind him and the extra length of the chain knocked against the exposed pipe.

Chink, chink, chink.



Katie Singleton fought a yawn as she crossed the Broad River on 76 and headed home. To her left, and up ahead off Elmwood Avenue, the road that ran parallel to 76, blue and red flashing lights caught her attention. Briefly she wondered what was going on but was too tired to think any more about it. At least it was a good tired.

She'd just come off a job that had ended well. It had been a fun concert with a well-behaved, well-mannered celebrity who appreciated—and listened to—her security team. A dream assignment. As far as she was concerned, it was the perfect way to start her week of vacation. Well, week of renovation. Which was vacation to her. She'd just purchased the

home she'd grown up in as a child. A 1920s Charleston-style home on Gadsden Street that was "livable" but still needed a lot of work. Next on the agenda was her kitchen. The cabinets had been ordered and were due to arrive on Tuesday.

She glanced in her rearview mirror, the law enforcement lights catching her attention once again as she passed them. She gave a slight start. Was that Daniel Matthews's restaurant? A Taste of Yesterday?

Riley Matthews, Daniel's niece, was one of Katie's students in the self-defense class she taught twice a week at the local gym. Katie pulled off the highway at the next exit, then drove to Elmwood to head back toward the lights. She passed Elmwood Cemetery on her right and slowed. The cemetery sloped downward. At the bottom of the hill, a brick retaining wall separated the burial grounds and the back of the restaurant. She could see the action focused on that part of the building.

She pulled into the parking lot and stopped when a uniformed officer lifted his hand and frowned at her. Behind him she recognized Detective Quinn Holcombe, a man she worked with in a professional capacity on a regular basis. She rolled to a stop on the outside of the yellow tape and caught Quinn's eye. He raised a brow and jogged over. The officer who'd waved nodded at Quinn and stepped back when he saw that Quinn knew her.

She lowered her window. "What's going on?"

"Katie." He placed a hand on the top of the car and leaned toward her. "What are you doing here?"

"I was on the way home from the concert across the river and saw all the lights. It looked like it was coming from here. I know Riley Matthews, Daniel Matthews's niece."

The light went on for him. "I see." He glanced back at the building. "Apparently someone broke into the basement of the restaurant and hung himself."

"Apparently?" Katie blinked. "*Hung* himself?"

"Well, that's what it looks like, hence the word 'apparently.' I'm not saying that's what happened."

"Murder?"

He hesitated and she knew it wasn't because he was afraid he was talking out of turn. Thanks to the mayor and her work with the Elite Guardians Agency, Katie had special credentials that allowed her to be "read in" on cases, even contracted as a professional in certain circumstances. She knew Quinn was just pausing, trying to figure it out in his own head. "Maybe," he finally said. "I think so, but that's just

speculation. We'll have to wait for the ME's report, of course, but—" he shrugged—"Matthews said he heard footsteps and made it to the door just in time to see a car drive away. Like I said, we'll see." He nodded to the cameras mounted on the side of the building. "I'll be real interested to see what those show."

"Do you know who the victim is?"

"The chef Matthews fired week before last." He consulted his notebook. "Maurice Armstrong. It seems they had words after Matthews caught him stealing from him and confronted him. Armstrong denied it, but Matthews had it on video. He told him if he ever set foot on one of his properties again, he'd turn him in and have him arrested."

"Ooh, that doesn't sound good." She frowned. "Why *didn't* he call the police and have him arrested?"

"Armstrong has a fifteen-year-old daughter he's got sole custody of. There aren't any other relatives that will take her—at least none that are in good health. I think there's a grandmother, but she's pretty sick, from what I understand. If Armstrong was to go to jail, she goes into the system."

"So what happens now that Armstrong's dead?"

"No idea. Either the sick grandmother or foster care."

"That stinks."

"Don't I know it."

He did. Better than most. "Sounds like Matthews isn't such a bad guy." Which was the impression she'd already gotten from what Riley said about him.

"First impressions indicate he's one of the good ones," Quinn reluctantly admitted.

Katie lifted a brow. Quinn didn't say many positive things about anyone. "He made an impression on you."

Quinn shrugged. "He's a former Marine who served two tours in Afghanistan and one in Iraq. I'm former military. I want to believe he's on the up-and-up. I think he's tough and can have an attitude, but the jury's still out on whether or not he's a cold-blooded killer."

But he *was* a man who could take care of himself. And while his actions sounded honorable—even compassionate—were they? Or had he not reported the theft for ulterior motives? From what little she'd picked up from Riley, the girl adored her uncle. But she might be wearing rose-tinted glasses. "Matthews—Daniel—was here alone? And he found the body?"

Quinn pursed his lips and nodded. "Yeah."

“You think he killed him and staged it to look like a suicide?” She didn’t want to believe it for Riley’s sake, but she lived in the real world and knew Quinn had to consider the possibility even while his gut was telling him something different.

“I think someone did. But like I said, I don’t have the feeling it’s Matthews.” He scowled. “I’ve been wrong before, so I’m not ruling him out, of course. We’ll know more as time passes.”

“If it’s truly a suicide, I can see the guy hanging himself in the restaurant as being some sort of freaky revenge for Daniel firing him. But other than that, why would anyone kill him, then decide to string up his body in the basement of the restaurant where he was fired from?” she murmured.

“Good questions. The only answers I can come up with for now would be to make Matthews look bad. Guilty.”

“Frame him?”

“Or paint him as responsible for the man’s despair. I don’t know, but we’ll figure it out.”

“No doubt. Did Armstrong leave a note?”

“Haven’t come across one yet.”

“Any more security cameras on the other side of the building?”

“Two. I’m hoping they picked up something. If not, we’re not going to have much to go on other than what the crime scene unit finds.”

She glanced past him. “Where’s Bree?”

Brianne Standish, Quinn’s partner, was usually on scene with him, but Katie hadn’t spotted her.

“Her sister had a DUI, she’s dealing with her—and her mother.”

Katie winced. “Ouch.”

“Tell me about it.”

Bree had some family issues that were making her crazy, but she was coping as best she could—and she had a partner who understood and had her back. She’d be all right. “Okay, I’ll get out of here. I just wanted to...” What? She shrugged. “I don’t know what I wanted. Guess to make sure Riley wasn’t somehow involved and that she didn’t need anything. And see if I could help in any way.”

Another officer rushed from the building. “Quinn!”

Quinn straightened and turned. “Yeah?”

“We’ve got another development.”

“What’s that?”

“One of Matthews’s other restaurants is burning over on North Lake Road.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me.”

“Nope. Fire trucks are already on the scene.”

Quinn tapped the hood of Katie’s car. “You want to join the fun?”

Katie’s first reaction was a resounding no. Before the word left her lips, she considered it. Did she *want* to? Yes. *Could* she do it? As a former agent with Alcohol, Tobacco & Firearms and a trained arson investigator, the thought of the fire intrigued her, fascinated her. However, flashes from the past during her stint with the explosives squad made her hesitate.

“Um ... no. I don’t think so.”

Quinn studied her for a moment. “That’s not the answer I’m looking for. You know you want to.”

Yes. Yes she did. “It’s not a matter of want to, you know that.”

“Come on, Katie, you can do this.”

“Quinn...” She sighed.

“Just come. Stand there and watch the fire. Give me feedback on it. You don’t have to do anything else.”

His furrowed brow and intense stare didn’t faze her. Her internal struggle did. Very few people knew the reason she was no longer with ATF. Quinn was one of those people. “Fine. I’ll ride over. I know where the place is.” She pursed her lips, wanting to recall the words. But she didn’t.

She caught the brief flash of surprise in his eyes before he nodded.

“Good. See you there.”

“Where’s Daniel?”

“Still answering questions. He’s pretty shaken up.”

“Are you going to arrest him?” she asked.

He blew out a puff of air. “No. Like I said, I don’t think he did it. But even if I did think him guilty, I’ve got no evidence to support an arrest tonight.”

She hesitated. “Why don’t I give him a ride? I can come back here on my way home and drop him off to get his car.”

“I’ll tell him.”

So much for her renovation vacation.





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