

Heartsong

By
Lynn Ames

HEARTSONG

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Dedication

For those who truly believe in that one great love.

Other Books in Print by Lynn Ames

Outsiders

What happens when you take five beloved, powerhouse authors, each with a unique voice and style, give them one word to work with, and put them between the sheets together, no holds barred?

Magic!!

Brisk Press presents Lynn Ames, Georgia Beers, JD Glass, Susan X. Meagher and Susan Smith, all together under the same cover with the aim to satisfy your every literary taste. This incredible combination offers something for everyone — a smorgasbord of fiction unlike anything you'll find anywhere else.

A Native American raised on the Reservation ventures outside the comfort and familiarity of her own world to help a lost soul embrace the gifts that set her apart. * A reluctantly wealthy woman uses all of her resources anonymously to help those who cannot help themselves. * Three individuals, three aspects of the self, combine to create balance and harmony at last for a popular trio of characters. * Two nomadic women from very different walks of life discover common ground — and a lot more — during a blackout in New York City. * A traditional, old school butch must confront her community and her own belief system when she falls for a much younger transman.

Five authors — five novellas. *Outsiders* — one remarkable book.

One ~ Love, (formerly The Flip Side of Desire)

Trystan Lightfoot allowed herself to love once in her life; the experience broke her heart and strengthened her resolve never to fall in love again. At forty, however, she still longs for the comfort of a woman's arms. She finds temporary solace in meaningless, albeit adventuresome encounters, burying her pain and her emotions deep inside where no one can reach. No one, that is, until she meets C.J. Winslow.

C.J. Winslow is the model-pretty-but-aging professional tennis star the Women's Tennis Federation is counting on to dispel the image that all great female tennis players are lesbians. And her lesbianism isn't the only secret she's hiding. A traumatic event from her childhood is taking its toll both on and off the court.

Together Trystan and C.J. must find a way beyond their pasts to discover lasting love.

The Kate and Jay Trilogy

The Price of Fame

When local television news anchor Katherine Kyle is thrust into the national spotlight, it sets in motion a chain of events that will change her life forever. Jamison “Jay” Parker is an intensely career-driven Time magazine reporter. The first time she saw Kate, she fell in love. The last time she saw her, Kate was rescuing her. That was five years earlier, and she never expected to see her again. Then circumstances and an assignment bring them back together.

Kate and Jay’s lives intertwine, leading them on a journey to love and happiness, until fate and fame threaten to tear them apart. What is the price of fame? For Kate, the cost just might be everything. For Jay, it could be the other half of her soul.

The Cost of Commitment

Kate and Jay want nothing more than to focus on their love. But as Kate settles into a new profession, she and Jay are caught in the middle of a deadly scheme and find themselves pawns in a larger game in which the stakes are nothing less than control of the country.

In her novel of corruption, greed, romance, and danger, Lynn Ames takes us on an unforgettable journey of harrowing conspiracy—and establishes herself as a mistress of suspense.

The Cost of Commitment—it could be everything...

The Value of Valor

Katherine Kyle is the press secretary to the president of the United States. Her lover, Jamison Parker, is a respected writer for Time magazine. Separated by unthinkable tragedy, the two must struggle to survive against impossible odds...

A powerful, shadowy organization wants to advance its own global agenda. To succeed, the president must be eliminated. Only one person knows the truth and can put a stop to the scheme.

It will take every ounce of courage and strength Kate possesses to stay alive long enough to expose the plot. Meanwhile, Jay must cheat death and race across continents to be by her lover's side...

This hair-raising thriller will grip you from the start and won't let you go until the ride is over.

The Value of Valor—it's priceless.

CHAPTER ONE

The sound, eerily similar to a gunshot, reverberated off the mountain's ominous face.

"Avalanche! Down!" she screamed into her walkie-talkie as a wall of white spiraled downward at an alarming pace. Four figures on the ice above her scrambled to find cover. She took a second to check their positions, key on her beacon, and grab the ice ax from the holster on her harness. Her heart hammered in her chest. Instinct drove her to the ground, where she threw one hand over her head and gripped the ice ax tightly with the other. She stabbed the tool into the ice in front of her and held on for dear life.

The deafening noise drowned out the sound of her thundering heart. Almost immediately, her world went terrifyingly silent save for the wheezing noise that she recognized as her own shallow breathing. Tendrils of fear licked at the edges of her mind as she slowly became aware of her predicament.

She tried to inhale. Snow clogged her airway and she gagged. Her heart pounded against her rib cage. A searing pain sliced through her torso. Tears froze on her face and she struggled not to panic. The need to breathe was overwhelming. Her diaphragm contracted, sending a renewed jolt of agony through her. She gritted her teeth. Melting snow trickled into the back of her throat and she swallowed hard. Almost at once, the pressure of the snow in her airway eased.

Experimentally, she rocked her hips. On the third try, she was able to create enough space to roll onto her side. Intense pain ripped through her arm and up to the shoulder that gripped the ice ax. A scream burst forth, wrenched from a place deep inside her. It

was muffled by the snowy tomb. Furious at her body's limitations, she wiggled the fingers still clutching the ice ax.

She allowed herself one deep breath, then yanked as hard as she could on the handle. The ice ax broke free. *Thank God.* Tears of pain and relief leaked from the corners of her eyes. Seconds seemed like hours as she laboriously chipped away at the walls of her prison. Sweat dripped into her eyes. Each small stroke of the ax sent spears of agony shooting through her. A wave of nausea swamped her.

Knock, knock, knock.

"Room service."

Knock, knock, knock.

"Room service."

Danica Warren blinked once, and the hotel room came back into focus, even as the pulse continued to hammer in her neck. "Coming," she called out. She moved away from the window overlooking the Washington, D.C. skyline and walked to the door on shaky legs, steadying her breathing as she went.

"Thank you," she said to the young man as he set the breakfast tray on the small table near the window. She slipped him a five-dollar bill before dismissing him.

Danica had been famished when she'd ordered the bacon and eggs. That had been before her memories had intruded. She swallowed the lingering taste of nausea, pushed the food around the plate, and finally gave up. She checked her watch—enough time for a quick run.

The route was familiar and Danica easily settled into a rhythm. She mentally reviewed the background information she'd received on the Credit Union National Association. In her opinion, too many speakers ignored their audience and stuck strictly to their stock speech. Danica liked to connect with people on a more personal level, to let them know that they weren't just another stop on her tour. She tailored every speech so that the issues she addressed were pertinent to that particular audience. By the time she turned the corner five miles later and re-entered the hotel lobby, she knew what she would say.



“Who’s the keynote speaker again?”

“Chase Crosley, do you ever pay attention to what I tell you?”

“Yep. About once every fifth sentence.” Chase winked affectionately at Jane Beezer, her friend and long-time director of governmental affairs.

“No kidding, I swear you never listen.” Jane shook her head in disgust. “Danica Warren.”

“Who?”

“Danica Warren. She’s major.”

Chase shrugged. “Never heard of her.”

“The woman saved three other climbers’ lives in an avalanche a few years ago. Her memoir’s been on the *New York Times* Best Sellers list for more than a year. They made a huge movie out of it called *Thirty Seconds to Eternity*. Didn’t you see it?”

“I haven’t been to the movies in months.”

“You’re pathetic, you know that?”

“So I’ve been told.” Chase stopped short. A shadow momentarily crossed her face. “Listen, I’ll be back in a minute. I forgot something in my room.”

“You have a reserved seat right up front with the rest of the board. Don’t be late—it’s rude.”

“I’ll do my best,” Chase said as she jogged away toward the bank of elevators.



Danica kept her eyes on the back of the security person in front of her. Two others flanked her sides and one followed behind as she walked down the corridor. Reporters crowded around and shouted questions at her.

“Danica! How does it feel to be back in Washington?”

“Any chance you’ll be coming back here full time?”

“Are you surprised at the success of your book?”

“What did you think of Anka Lynch’s performance as you in the movie?”

“Have you kept in touch with the other climbers?”

“How are they doing?”

Danica blinked and clenched her jaw but kept moving determinedly forward.

“The one who died, what was her name? Do you ever hear from her family?”

Danica’s nostrils flared. She stopped abruptly and turned in the direction of the haranguer. “Her name was Sandy Isaacs.” Danica spoke deliberately to keep her voice from shaking. “She was a brilliant, talented woman. I live with her loss every day. The world is a dimmer place without her.”

“Danica...”

“I have to go.” Danica walked away at a brisk pace. Mercifully, the staging room was only a few yards in front of her.

A security guard opened the door and escorted her inside where she was greeted immediately by a familiar figure.

“Ms. Warren, it’s lovely to see you again.” She accepted the kiss on her cheek. “Can I get you anything?”

“No, thank you. I’m fine.” Danica subtly rolled her shoulders, placing her anguish and guilt over Sandy’s death in a remote corner of her brain. “And if you call me Ms. Warren one more time, I may come down with a sudden case of laryngitis.”

Mike Nestor, the smooth-talking CEO of the Credit Union National Association held up his hands, palms out to indicate surrender. “Point taken.”

“You’re getting soft, Mike. You never used to cave so easily.” Danica smiled as he spluttered. She had first met Mike when they were both freshmen United States senators. She had been delighted when the speakers’ bureau had e-mailed that Mike wanted her to be the main speaker at his organization’s signature conference.

“I hope you don’t mind. We’ve got a little surprise for you this morning,” Mike said as he led Danica to a comfortable chair.

Danica raised an eyebrow. “As long as it doesn’t involve being crammed into a small space or accosted by more reporters, I’m intrigued.”

“No small spaces, I promise. As for the media, I’ll do my best.” Mike squeezed her shoulder and turned as one of his staff members whispered something in his ear. “Excellent. You ready?”

“As I’ll ever be.” Danica tilted her head from side to side, trying to loosen the tension in her neck. She felt the usual butterflies take up residence in her stomach. The moments before she stepped out on stage, those few seconds when the adrenaline

started to flow, were always the most anxiety producing. She rose from the chair and followed Mike's retreating form.

"Wait right here. Don't move," Mike said when they'd reached the stage's side curtain. He adjusted his already perfectly tied tie, checked to be sure that his lapel microphone was working, winked at her, and strode onto the stage.

"Good morning, everyone, and welcome to our annual invasion of Capitol Hill."

The audience laughed and clapped.

"God, the man has presence," Danica muttered.

"This morning, we have an incredible program for you. Our keynote speaker, Danica Warren, is one of the most amazing human beings I've ever met. I'd say more, but if you'd never seen her in action yourselves, you probably wouldn't believe me. So I've taken the liberty of having a little video montage put together for you to experience, firsthand, the force that is Danica."

Mike pointed toward two massive video screens on either side of the stage. "Ladies and gentlemen, here's a special look at the incredible Danica Warren."

A buzz rippled through the ballroom as the lights dimmed and an image of a stunning, trim, immaculately dressed blonde dominated the screen. She was standing on the floor of the United States Senate.

"I may be the youngest woman ever elected to this august body, but I was not born yesterday. The U.S. Constitution imbues us with great powers, and it balances those powers with awesome responsibilities. Each and every day I step into this chamber, I remind myself of the oath I took when I became a U.S. senator. I humbly suggest you all do the same." She pointed at a row of white-haired senators to her right. *"We have a duty to the people of this great country. I will not be a party to using the Constitution, the very foundation upon which our democracy is built, for the purposes of disenfranchising a segment of our society."*

The crowd in the ballroom cheered. The picture on the video screens shifted to a breathtaking scene of a massive sheer rock face against a bright blue sky. The camera zoomed in on a lone woman, her arm muscles standing out in sharp relief, her powerful fingers gripping a tiny ledge, one foot perched precariously in a

crevice, the other on another miniscule ledge. The smile on her face was enormous, the joy in her eyes infectious.

The scene shifted again to a snow-covered mountain range. Five individuals posed together with the summit of a glacier as a backdrop. They were laden with ropes, harnesses, and backpacks. Their body language suggested they were ready to conquer the world.

From her vantage point in the wings, Danica struggled to keep her composure. Her breath came in short gasps. She turned away and reached blindly for a nearby wooden support. It was the last picture of them before...*Don't think about it.*

The next image on the screens was one of a battered climber, her short blond hair and the right side of her face streaked with blood, supporting the weight of one of her fellow mountaineers as she helped her into a waiting helicopter. Her face was a picture of grief. The audience gasped.

Offstage, Danica closed her eyes tightly and threaded her fingers together to keep her hands from shaking. *Not now. You can't fall apart here.*

The montage shifted to a television studio. Danica, her left arm in a sling, a bandage covering a portion of her forehead and eyebrow, was sitting across from an interviewer. The CNN logo was in the background.

"The world is hailing you as a hero. The experts say you defied all the odds by being able to save the lives of three other climbers after digging yourself out."

"I'm not a hero."

"You had three broken ribs, a dislocated shoulder, a large gash on your head, and a concussion. With all that, you unburied yourself and three others, administered CPR to one, and called for help. I think that would be considered heroic by any definition."

The lights came up as the crowd clapped enthusiastically. Danica turned around again to face the stage. She blinked as her eyes readjusted to the light. *Sandy died up there. I couldn't save her.* Danica hung her head and fought back tears of heartache. *You'll have a lifetime to live with that. Right now you have a job to do.* She focused all her attention on Mike, who was walking to the middle of the stage.

“When I came to Washington as a wet-behind-the-ears freshman senator from middle America, one of the first people I met was Danica Warren. I was blown away. Here she was, the youngest woman ever elected to the U.S. Senate—a maverick, a lightning rod as an out lesbian. In the stodgy halls of the Capitol! I was in awe of her graciousness and class. But it was more than that.

“Apart from being one of the brightest people I’ve ever known, Danica is the finest political strategist in the country. Period. If that isn’t enough, in a field perhaps best known for being nasty and cutthroat, Danica is as genuine, as honest, and as kind as they come.

“I spoke to Danica shortly before she went to New Zealand to climb Mount Cook. She was so excited about getting to take her first real vacation in years. I laughed with her and joked that I wished I could go, but I would have to live vicariously through her.”

Mike’s expression turned somber.

“I never dreamed Danica’s trip would end in such tragedy. I have wished more than once that I could rewind the clock for her. When I heard that she had rescued three of the four other climbers, I was not surprised. That Danica would do something heroic is completely within character. That she was more concerned with saving the other members of her party than with her own safety and well-being tells you all you need to know about Danica Warren.

“Everything I’ve learned about courage and bravery, I’ve learned from her. Ladies and gentlemen, it is my distinct honor to introduce to you my hero, my friend, Danica Warren.”

Danica again took a deep, steadying breath and stepped out onto the stage. She was greeted by a thunderous ovation.

Mike met her halfway and enveloped her in a warm hug. Mindful of the audience, he put a hand over both of their microphones. “I hope you didn’t mind that,” he whispered in her ear. “I didn’t realize until I saw it myself how hard that might be for you.”

“It was very classy.” The last thing Danica wanted was to make Mike feel bad when he’d been trying to do something nice for her.

“You okay?”

“I’m fine.”

Mike pulled back and gave Danica a long, measured look. “Why don’t I believe you?”

“I’m okay, really.”

“You never were a good liar.”

“You were one of the few people who could see through me,” Danica said.

“Knock ’em dead.” Mike kissed her cheek, waved to the crowd, and walked off stage, leaving Danica alone in the spotlight.



Chase hurried to the side door of the ballroom, intent on getting to her seat before the speech began. As she stepped into the auditorium, however, the room went pitch black. *Damn.* It wouldn’t do to trip over her colleagues in the dark.

She paused just inside the door, deciding on a course of action. The video screens filled with a commanding presence, and Chase stopped thinking and watched, mesmerized.

The videotape ended and Chase was still rooted to the spot, her heart breaking for the woman on the screen. Then Mike was talking and it was too late for Chase to move. By the time she regained her wits, the woman from the videotape was striding onto the stage.

Chase’s breath stalled halfway between her lungs and her mouth. *Wow.*

“Chase,” someone whispered nearby. It was Jane.

“What?”

“You better get up there and sit down before she starts talking.”

“Right,” Chase said absently. She negotiated the rows of bodies, barely taking her eyes off the stage as Mike embraced the speaker. *Wow.*



“Thank you. Thank you very much,” Danica said. “Please, sit down.” The audience reluctantly complied. “How about that? It’s not every day I get rock star treatment and my very own promotional video. Normally that would be quite an honor, and—

don't get me wrong—I'm tickled pink. But a lead-in like that tends to raise expectations. Now I suppose I'm going to have to live up to them. Darn. Talk about performance anxiety."

"We love you, Danica," someone shouted from the back of the ballroom.

"Ah, I see my father is here," Danica said without missing a beat. The crowd roared.

Danica opened her mouth to launch into her speech and stopped dead as a woman made her way to a seat in the center of the second row. She was tall and lean, her brown hair cascading in soft waves down to her shoulders. Danica's heart stuttered, lurched, and assumed a rhythm slightly faster than its normal pace. *I know you. Where do I know you from?*

It occurred to Danica that she should be saying something, although for the life of her she couldn't remember what it was. *Snap out of it.* She strolled to the left side of the stage, away from the distraction. "I know that you folks in the credit union movement don't know anything about having to overcome long odds to succeed."

The audience chuckled.

"I mean, it's not as though the banks are trying to put you out of business or anything, right? It's not as if they've outspent you eight to one lobbying Congress, right?"

Laughter.

Danica moved back to center stage and tried hard not to stare at the woman in the second row. She failed. *You have a beautiful smile.* Danica shifted her line of vision. *Focus on the speech.* "Sounds like a fair fight to me. Not! So let's talk about what it takes to overcome all the odds."



For Chase, the world narrowed to one face, one voice, one woman as her eyes tracked Danica's movements back and forth across the stage. It could've been a minute that passed; it could've been an hour. She wasn't sure, and she didn't care. She was riveted.

"Life isn't always fair," Danica was concluding. "Too often, we are faced with situations and circumstances far beyond our

control. Think about your own life. I'm willing to bet that you can come up with at least one moment when you've experienced exactly what I'm talking about."

Chase felt her skin prickle with electricity as Danica came to stand directly in front of her. Danica's eyes locked on hers, and Chase had the distinct feeling that somehow Danica could see deep inside her.

"Life is seldom as we plan it. What we do—how we act and react in those unscripted moments—that, in my opinion, is what defines who we are. Who are you? And who will you be when your moment comes? Looking at all of you, I have faith that you'll be the kind of people I'd be honored to have standing beside me. Thank you very much." Danica waved and stepped back from the edge of the stage.

Chase rose to her feet, clapping and whistling along with the rest of the audience. She smiled, utterly charmed that Danica seemed embarrassed by the group's reaction.

"Come on."

"What?" Chase resisted the tug on her sleeve.

"Come on, we've got to hurry to make sure they don't run out of books."

"What are you talking about?" Chase was still watching Danica on stage.

"Danica is signing copies of her book after this. The line's going to be out the door. You do want a copy of her book, don't you?"

Danica left the stage and Chase finally turned to face Anita, a colleague and fellow board member. "Yeah, I do." *Boy, do I.*

"Let's go then. Show some hustle. It was a great speech, wasn't it? The hour just flew by."

"Yeah, it was." It was all Chase could manage to say as her brain tried to process what she'd just seen and, more importantly, what she'd felt.

By the time Chase reached the front of the line, she estimated Danica had signed more than one hundred autographs. She'd had a chance to observe without being watched herself, and she was secretly pleased at that.

With each passing second, her admiration for Danica grew. No matter how ridiculous the request or question, Danica smiled and had a kind word for every single person who wanted her attention.

When her turn came, Chase hesitated. Her palms were sweating. *You're not some school girl with a crush. Just ask her to sign the book. Geez.*

"Hi."

Chase swallowed hard, momentarily drowning in the shimmering depths of Danica's eyes. "I'm sorry to bother you," Chase stammered, trying to recover her equilibrium. "You must be exhausted by now."

"No worries, I'm just getting warmed up. Who would you like me to make this out to?"

"Huh?"

"To whom would you like the book autographed?"

"Oh."

Danica smiled, and Chase felt her insides melt. "Chase."

"That's a beautiful name. It reminds me of something exotic and elusive. It's nice to meet you, Chase."

As Chase reached for the autographed book, the official photographer stepped forward. "Why don't I get a picture of you two together?"

"I'm sure Ms. Warren..." Chase started to hold up her free hand, but Danica reached forward and covered it with her own.

"That would be great." Danica stood and stepped out from behind the table. "Gives me an excuse to stretch my legs," she stage-whispered to Chase.

"Well, who am I to stand in the way of a good stretch?"

Chase's heart skipped a beat when Danica drew close to her and slid an arm around her waist. Chase returned the gesture.

"Thanks. That's great. One more. Smile. Perfect." The photographer stepped away.

"Thank you for that. I know you have so many people waiting." Chase reluctantly retreated from Danica's personal space.

"My pleasure. I hope you enjoy the book, Chase."

"I know I will." *I can't wait to learn more about you.* Chase ran her fingers over the embossed printing on the front cover of

the book. She imagined she could still feel the warmth of Danica's hand covering hers. *I know I will.*

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About the Author

A former press secretary to the New York state Senate minority leader, an award-winning former broadcast journalist, a former public information officer for the nation's third-largest prison system, and a former editor of a national art magazine, Lynn Ames is a nationally recognized speaker and CEO of a public relations firm with a particular expertise in image, crisis communications planning, and crisis management.

Ms. Ames's works include the best-selling novels *The Price of Fame* (which was short-listed for the Golden Crown Literary Society's inaugural award for best lesbian romance), *The Cost of Commitment*, *The Value of Valor* (winner of the 2007 Arizona Book Award), *One ~ Love* (formerly *The Flip Side of Desire*; nominated for a 2007 Goldie Award for Best Popular Fiction), *Heartsong* (a finalist for the Golden Crown Literary Society's inaugural award for best lesbian romance), and *Outsiders*.

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