

*The Value of  
Valor*

*By*  
**Lynn Ames**

**THE VALUE OF VALOR**

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## 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.

### *Heartsong*

After three years spent mourning the death of her partner in a tragic climbing accident, Danica Warren has re-emerged in the public eye. With a best-selling memoir, a blockbuster movie about her heroic efforts to save three other climbers, and a successful career on the motivational speaking circuit, Danica has convinced herself that her life can be full without love.

When Chase Crosley walks into Danica's field of vision everything changes. Danica is suddenly faced with questions she's never pondered.

Is there really one love that transcends all concepts of space and time? One great love that joins two hearts so that they beat as one? One moment of recognition when twin flames join and burn together?

Will Danica and Chase be able to overcome the barriers standing between them and find forever? And can that love be sustained, even in the face of cruel circumstances and fate?

### ***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.

### **Other Books in The Kate and Jay Trilogy**

#### ***The Price of Fame* (Book One)**

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* (Book Two)**

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...

## Note from the Author

1989, the year in which *The Value of Valor* takes place, was a fascinating year. George H.W. Bush was sworn into office as president of the United States; tens of thousands of students rallied in Tiananmen Square in China; Mikhail Gorbachev was named president in the Soviet Union; P.W. Botha quit in South Africa; Deng Xiaoping resigned in China; the Berlin Wall came down after twenty-eight years; the Czech Communist regime was dissolved by Parliament; the Romanian Communists were overthrown; and the U.S. invaded Panama to capture dictator Manuel Noriega.

I wasn't able to portray all these events in this novel—in fact, I barely scratched the surface. But I hope that, like me, you'll look at the timeline I've laid out for you above with a critical and skeptical eye. How much do you believe in coincidence?

It is always my aim with my novels to make them utterly entertaining but also socially relevant. So as you read this book, I will point out two things: truth is sometimes stranger than fiction and oftentimes history repeats itself.

Please, sit down, pull up a chair, and enjoy the ride.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lynn Ames". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lynn Ames

## PROLOGUE

The woman under the crisp, white sheet showed no sign of movement. Her face was swollen—covered with lacerations and abrasions. Dried blood from a nasty cut on her scalp stood out in bold contrast to her flaxen-colored hair.

As the healer finished rinsing away the worst of the sticky substance, she wondered how the woman had survived at all. Gently, she lifted the sheet, revealing a dark bruise that covered the dislocated left shoulder and a portion of the woman's chest. Satisfied that the arm was properly braced, she rechecked the tension on the large white wrap that secured three broken ribs.

"I'll do what I can for you, young one."

"I see she still hasn't woken." A powerfully built, older Native American stood in the doorway, his imposing shape blocking out the sun.

The healer quickly replaced the sheet. "No. I'd need to do a CAT scan to confirm it, but I believe there's still some swelling in her brain. It's much better, but still..."

"It's been two days. We should take her to the hospital."

"No. It's too dangerous for her."

"Having her here may be too dangerous for us."

"Must you think only of yourself? This woman was deliberately run off the road. Someone wants her dead. Someone is already dead."

"Why should we interfere?"

"Because it's the code we live by. We must revere life, not jeopardize it."

"You and your traditional ways."

"These are the teachings we follow. If you must be more practical, consider that those men who caused her accident, whoever they were, believe she's dead. There won't be any reprisal."

"Then there's no reason we can't take her to the hospital."

“A hospital will mean questions. Questions will lead to attention. Attention might bring those men back to finish the job. No, she’s much safer here.”

“Bah. You’re not in a position to decide anything, Terri.”

“Not by myself, no. That’s for the entire Council of Elders. We’ve called a meeting for this afternoon. We’ll listen to the boys’ account of what happened and make a ruling.”



“Tommy, tell us what you saw.” A wizened, graying older man, his face lined with years of hard work in the sun, beckoned to a young man in his early twenties to step into the center of a circle of elders sitting cross-legged on the dirt. The meeting, as all meetings of the council were, was conducted in Navajo. It was a way to carry on the language and reinforce a sense of continuity among the people.

Tommy licked his lips nervously. “We—four of us—were working on the cliffside near Chinle. We were harvesting materials for the sand paintings.

“It was very quiet; we could hear the call of the hawks overhead. There hadn’t been any traffic on the road above for hours. Suddenly, I heard—we all did—the squealing of brakes and the sound of crunching metal. It was like thunder.” Tommy looked to his friends for support.

“Go on.”

“We looked up, but there was nothing we could do. The car plowed right through the guardrail and sailed into the air. It was like something out of a movie.

“It landed on the edge of a ledge not far away from where we were—its back end was hanging out into space. Jeff, Jason, Kenny, and me barely managed to reach the driver’s door in time. When we wrenched it open, this woman was pinned against the door. We pulled her out of the car—she was hurt bad. Her eyes were closed, and she was bleeding.” Tommy hesitated.

“Go on.”

“We tried to get the other woman out, too. She’d slid over on the bench so she was practically sitting in the driver’s seat. Must not have been wearing a seatbelt.” He shook his head. “She looked worse than the woman we saved—there was a piece of metal sticking out of her chest.”

“From the guardrail?”

Tommy shuddered. “Yeah. Her eyes were open and she was staring.”

“What happened next, Tommy?”

“It was like slow motion. The car tumbled end over end and landed on its roof on top of the next plateau. It must have been a hundred feet down. The fireball was hot enough that I felt it from where we were.”

“What made you think it wasn’t an accident?”

“As we were lying there trying to catch our breath, I saw two men drive by, then turn around and come back. They got out of their car, looked over the side of the cliff, and seemed pleased when they saw the wrecked car down there.”

“They didn’t see you or the woman you were able to save?”

“No, where we were was shielded from view by an overhang.”

“How close were the men to you?”

“I don’t know exactly. Maybe ten feet away.”

“You saw their faces?”

“Yes. One of them had a scar on his right cheek.”

“All right. What happened next? Did they say anything?”

“They were laughing. One of them clapped the other on the back and made a joke about earning easy money.

“We were scared. We waited for the men to leave. When we were sure they were gone, Jason went back to the truck and drove it back here to get help. The rest of us stayed with the woman.”

“Did she ever regain consciousness?”

“No. Like I said—she was in really bad shape. We were afraid she was dead, too.”

“Okay, Tommy.” The tribal leader looked to the other young men. “Do you have anything to add?”

There was a chorus of “No, sirs.”

“Very well.” The leader turned to the others gathered in his circle. “I think it’s too dangerous to take this woman to a hospital. The intent of these men was clear—she wouldn’t be safe.”

“We don’t even know who she is. She didn’t have any identification on her. If we keep her here, we may be inviting danger.”

“I disagree, James. Those men have no reason to believe there were any witnesses to their crime or that one of their victims lived. We are completely safe. Are there any other voices wishing to be heard?”

The question was greeted by silence.

“Very well then, the woman shall remain in our care until she’s well enough to travel. Terri Lightfoot, you will continue to see to her needs. I suggest we conduct a chantway to dispel any evil and attract good.”

“I’ll organize one to begin this evening,” Terri answered.

“Good. Whatever can be done for her shall be. Council dismissed.”





The wind blew the door to the clinic closed behind the healer as she made her way back to the figure in the bed.

At the sound of the slamming door, the patient's eyes fluttered open.

"Easy. Easy, my child."

"W-where am I?"

"You're safe now. What's your name?"

"M-my name?"

"Yes."

Green eyes the color of a lush forest tried to focus. "I-I don't know." The eyelids slid closed once again.

"Don't worry for now, my child. Just rest." Terri Lightfoot stroked the blonde hair that peeked out from the bandages. She fingered the diamond-encrusted wedding band she had removed from the woman's swollen left ring finger and kept in her pocket for safekeeping. "You'll know when the time is right."

## CHAPTER ONE

Fingers played across her breasts, tantalizing, exciting. The heat of her lover's breath seared her sensitive skin. "Jay." It escaped her lips as a prayer, which morphed into a mournful wail as she came awake.

Katherine Kyle bolted upright, the sweat-soaked sheet pooling around her naked waist, moonlight peeking in through the blinds of her suburban Washington, D.C., condominium. The numerals on the digital bedside clock mocked her: 2:36 a.m.

"Jay," she whispered. "What am I supposed to do without you?" The tears came again, stinging her already swollen eyes. She welcomed them.

Alarmed by the sounds of distress, Kate's faithful golden retriever laid his chin on the bed and whimpered.

"I'm sorry, Fred. I know you miss her, too."

The soulful look in his eyes reflected her mood perfectly. Sliding off the bed, Kate threw on a T-shirt she had discarded earlier, lay down on the dog bed, and hugged her companion.

"It's just you and me now, buddy." She choked on the words, huddled closer, and rested her head on his soft fur, hoping his warmth would penetrate her bones and take away the chill that seemed to have taken up permanent residence in her very soul since she'd gotten the fateful call three days earlier. Kate closed her eyes against the memory.

*"White House. Press Secretary Kyle speaking."*

*"Ms. Kyle? Ms. Katherine Kyle?"*

*"Yes."*

*"This is Officer Brandan Oakley of the Arizona Highway Patrol. There's been an accident involving a rental car in Canyon De Chelly near Chinle, Arizona."*

Kate let go of Fred and covered her ears, trying to shut out the words.

*"You are listed on the rental car application as primary contact for a Ms. Jamison Parker."*

*"Yes."*

*"I'm sorry to inform you, Ms. Kyle, but there don't appear to be any survivors."*

*"No surviv...that can't be...we...I...she..."*

*"I'm afraid Ms. Parker is dead."*

"No," Kate screamed, scaring Fred. "No," she sobbed, as she hugged him close again. She imagined she could still smell the passion and feel the warmth of the sheets where Jay and she had made love the morning before the accident. She curled into the fetal position, Fred laying his head on her side.

*"Kate, it's President Hyland. I heard. I'm so sorry. Jay was a wonderful woman and we'll all feel her loss. I've personally asked the FBI to investigate, and I've had arrangements made for you to fly out there immediately. Don't worry about anything here, we'll hold down the fort."*

"I don't know what to do," Kate said aloud as she absentmindedly ran her thumb over the dog's left front paw. Fred licked the back of her hand sympathetically. "I want her back. I just want her back." She rocked back and forth, trying in vain to comfort herself.

*"Ma'am, you can't go beyond the yellow tape."*

*"Jay!"*

*"Ma'am, I'm sorry, but you'll have to stay here."*

*"No. I have to get to her. Jay!"*

*"Ma'am," he said, more gently this time, "there's nothing left."*

*Nothing left.* The words reverberated in her head. She tightened her grip on Fred, wondering if truer words had ever been spoken.



The FBI agent sitting in Kate's living room looked uncomfortable. He'd been assigned the unenviable task of liaising with the press secretary to the president of the United States in the matter of the death of her beloved partner. "Ms. Kyle, you saw the evidence yourself. There was no mistake. The forensics matched. The license plate they found corresponded with the car Ms. Parker rented when she arrived at the airport." He slid across a copy of the rental agreement, signed and dated by Jay three days earlier: January 21, 1989. In the appropriate box in the upper right-hand corner of the form, the license plate number was typed in. It matched the mangled one shown in the Polaroid sitting on the coffee table.

"You were there—you saw the condition of the vehicle."

Kate fought to control her emotions, but the rage and helplessness were too close to the surface.

“You found absolutely no conclusive evidence that the body was Jay’s, though, did you? No. You can’t prove that she was in the car when it crashed, can you? What if she wasn’t? What if...”

“Ms. Kyle, I’m so sorry for your loss. We searched everywhere around the vicinity. The explosion obliterated most of the evidence we might have found. We did come up with some teeth, a femur, and bone fragments from the skull, all clustered on the driver’s side of the car.”

Kate felt her head swim, and her body swayed as if she would keel over. She fought to steady herself.

“Technically, you’re right,” he went on, “we can’t rule with absolute certainty that the body was Ms. Parker’s. However, the pathology tests indicate that the bones belonged to a Caucasian woman about Ms. Parker’s size. Unfortunately, we are unable to make a more positive ID than that due to the condition of the specimens.”

Kate felt the bile rise in her throat at the thought of Jay being hurled into space and burnt beyond recognition.

She apparently didn’t hear him call her name the first time, so he tried again. “Ms. Kyle?”

“Yes?”

“To the best of your knowledge, was anyone else in the car with Ms. Parker?”

“No,” she murmured.

“Ms. Kyle,” he said softly, “no one could have survived that impact—no one.”

“I can’t give up on her. I just can’t. Doesn’t the FBI have new technology that can identify a person from her DNA?”

“Yes, ma’am, but as I said, there simply wasn’t enough material to work with; the heat of the fire destroyed the bone marrow from which we would have drawn samples. I’m so sorry.”

Desperate to hold herself together, Kate thanked the agent for coming to the house to give her the latest update on the investigation into Jay’s accident and dismissed him.



“She’ll always be alive in your heart.”

Kate looked up from where she still sat on the couch to see Dr. Barbara Jones standing in the doorway. Her tears began anew.

Barbara was Kate’s physician and one of her closest friends. Theirs was a relationship formed out of mutual respect, love, and admiration. Barbara had seen Kate through some tough situations, patching her up

physically and supporting her emotionally. “Kate, you did everything you could.”

“No. Don’t you understand? I left her there. I gave up on her.”

“That’s not true, honey.” Barbara switched to a different tack. “What more could you have done?”

Kate began pacing manically. Her voice trembled. “I could have stayed. I could have searched myself.”

“Kate, you got to the site within hours of the first report of the accident. You stayed there for two days while state police and FBI agents combed the area. You watched while forensic experts reconstructed the path of the car and assessed the speed of impact. You saw them collect whatever evidence there was to find.”

“What if she’s out there somewhere, Barbara? Hurt, alone, and frightened.” She could barely get the words out.

“Oh, Kate.” She enveloped the grieving woman in a hug, knowing from her vast experience with comforting the inconsolable, that there was nothing more to say. Only time could heal this kind of wound.

“Hi.”

The two women looked up as a tall man in his late thirties crossed the threshold to Kate’s living room.

“Hi, Peter.”

Peter Enright was Kate’s best friend and confidant. An expert in technology, weapons, and security, he was the older brother Kate never had.

“The FBI guy just left.”

“I know, I saw him on the way out. He looks like he went ten rounds with Muhammad Ali. What’d you do to him, Kate?”

She sighed, moving away from Barbara to stare blankly out the window. “I’m sorry about that. I guess I just want different answers than he can give me.”

“Ah, so you browbeat him. I get it now. He’s just doing his job.” Peter moved to Kate and put a comforting hand on her arm to lessen the impact of his words. “He can’t change the outcome or bring Jay back.”

“I know.”

Kate was plainly beyond exhaustion, with deep circles etched under her normally vibrant blue eyes. Her hair, usually a glossy black, was dull and unruly. Her skin was unnaturally pale, and she was gaunt.

“Why don’t you go lie down for a little while? Barbara and I will fix some coffee and breakfast. I’ll call you when it’s ready.”

“No.”

Barbara stepped in. “As your doctor, Katherine, I order you to get some rest.” When Kate looked as if she would snap at her, Barbara

softened her tone. “As your friend, I’m really worried about you. It won’t do anyone any good if you get sick. Please?”

“I can’t sleep. Every time I close my eyes, I see Jay.” A single tear slid down Kate’s face. “I can’t close my eyes anymore. It’s too painful.”

“Kate, you have to sleep. Here, take this.” Barbara handed Kate a pill. “What is it?”

“Just something to help you sleep—soundly—for a couple of hours.”

“You know I hate to take anything.”

“Doctor’s orders. If Jay were here, she’d be giving you holy hell for not taking care of yourself and you know it. Please, Kate.”

She sighed, knowing she was beaten. “You’ll wake me if there’s anything?”

“Of course,” Peter promised.

When she was sure Kate was out of earshot, Barbara turned to Peter. “Do you really believe it was an accident?”

“Not for a second.”

“You have proof?”

He sighed in exasperation. “No. There doesn’t appear to be anything to go on.”

“But?”

“My gut is screaming. Jay’s car mysteriously flies off a cliff two days after a jury convicts two scumbags of kidnapping Kate and using the cover of a prison riot to try to have her killed? Seems like too much of a coincidence to me. I smell a rat.”

“What’re you going to do about it?”

“I’m going to visit an old friend.”

“Oh? Who would that be?”

“Derek LaPointe, deputy director of the FBI.”

Barbara whistled softly. “It’s nice to have friends in high places.”

“We’ll see about that. Derek and I served together in Vietnam. I saved his bacon once. I’m hoping he can put some pressure in the right places to get the fibbies to keep looking. So far, all I’ve gotten from them is that there’s ‘insufficient evidence to proceed with a murder investigation.’”

As they made their way into the kitchen, Barbara stopped Peter with a hand on his arm. “I know I shouldn’t ask this, but…”

“Do I think there’s any chance Jay might be alive, right?”

Barbara nodded. “Because they can’t say positively that the tooth and bone fragments belong to Jay, Kate seems convinced that she could be out there alive somewhere.”

“My best judgment is that it’s a remote possibility but highly unlikely. It would’ve taken a miracle to survive the crash. Not only that,

but the pathology reports show the bones are consistent with someone Jay's size."

"I figured. What are we going to do about our Kate? You know she's not going to give up easily."

"Would you, if you were in her place and it was your lover?"

"No, I sure wouldn't."

"Right." Peter raked his fingers through his hair. "I don't want to give her false hope when the probabilities and evidence say otherwise." He held up his hand to forestall the anticipated interruption. "Which is not to say I'm not going to look into the possibility that Jay's alive while I'm searching for answers about the crash. You know I won't give up as long as Kate believes there's any chance she's out there somewhere."

"I'm afraid Kate won't let it rest without absolute proof of Jay's death."

"I'm not sure we can get that for her."

"I know. That's what worries me."



"Where have you been? I've been trying to track you down for days," Michael Vendetti, the high-strung deputy press secretary to the president, hissed.

"Take your hands off me, you idiot." Robert Hawthorne, a former four-term U.S. senator and current chairman of the Democratic National Committee, was clearly livid. "What're you doing here?"

"Parker's dead."

"I know."

"Did you do that—have her killed?"

"Of course not, you fool. Parker was Breathwaite's obsession."

"Then—"

The chairman fixed Vendetti with an incredulous stare. "Please tell me you're not naïve enough to think that could have been an accident."

"No," Vendetti replied defensively, "of course not."

"Thank God," Hawthorne muttered under his breath.

"Jesus, Breathwaite did that from prison?"

"Apparently. Revenge suits him." Hawthorne waited a beat. "Let me ask you something, Michael. Why would I want to take a chance on a meaningless hit like that at this point? We've got what we want—Charlie's in the White House."

"I know that's not all you wanted out of this. How could it be? What's 'Part B?'"

“Part B, Michael? Really. I said all along what I wanted was to make Charlie president. I succeeded. What more could I want?”

Vendetti shrugged. He’d been asking himself that very question ever since Hawthorne had approached him in New York with his scheme two years earlier. He still had no plausible answer. Hawthorne said he wanted them all to gain power and status by taking over the White House with Governor Charles Hyland as the unwitting front man. Since the former senator had failed in his own bid to become president, getting Vendetti’s boss elected seemed the only way for Hawthorne to regain a position of influence. Still it felt like he’d wanted more than that—Michael just couldn’t figure out what the “more” was.

It was plain to him what the rest of the members of the group had wanted: David Breathwaite, one-time spokesman for the New York state prison system, had been exiled to a meaningless backroom position—he had wanted his old job back. William Redfield, executive deputy commissioner of the prison system, had wanted to be commissioner. Michael, the governor’s press secretary, had coveted the big chair—spokesperson for the president of the United States. But Hawthorne...

“I don’t know, Mr. Chairman, but I know you’re up to something.”

His temper obviously close to the boiling point, Hawthorne growled, “Be careful, Michael. Curiosity killed the cat, you know.”

Taken aback by Hawthorne’s tone, Vendetti changed directions. “I was supposed to be the president’s press secretary. That was part of the deal.” Bitterly, he added, “Now that ‘Amazonian bitch,’ as you call her, is sitting where I should be.”

“Ah, ah, ah...careful, Michael. If you keep talking like that, people might wonder if you weren’t the one to bump off Ms. Kyle’s lover. Overcome with grief, she would step aside and make way for you.”

Vendetti visibly reddened with rage. “Are you threatening to set me up? That job was earmarked for me; that’s how you got me to join your little cabal. You didn’t hold up your end of the bargain.”

“Oh, but you’re wrong. I did everything I said I would. You can blame Breathwaite for getting passed over, Michael. It was his hare-brained scheme to take Kyle hostage and kill her in that asinine prison riot. If it hadn’t backfired, the governor wouldn’t have appointed her spokesperson for his presidential campaign, and she wouldn’t be press secretary right now.”

As much as he wanted to argue further, Vendetti couldn’t dispute the truth or the logic of Hawthorne’s words. Still... “It was your idea to include Breathwaite on the team and get him his job back in the first place.” Vendetti pointed his finger at Hawthorne accusingly. “You were



the one who insisted Kyle had too much sway over the governor and needed to be neutralized.”

Hawthorne laughed. “Next thing I know you’ll be telling me it’s my fault Breathwaite and Redfield got convicted and sent to jail.” He looked at Vendetti, his face a cold mask. “Now get out, Michael, and don’t contact me again. If I need you, I’ll find you. Do you understand?”

Vendetti slammed the door forcefully on his way out.

“Hmm,” Hawthorne tapped his fingers rhythmically on his desk. With Breathwaite and Redfield safely behind bars, Vendetti was the only loose end.

“I sincerely hope you’re not going to be a problem, Michael, or I might be forced to do something about that.” Hawthorne contemplated for a moment, then sat down and picked up the phone.



“No.”

“C’mon, Derek. You and I go back a long way. You owe me,” Peter said.

The beefy man’s slightly bulging belly pushed up against the desk as he leaned across it to make his point. “What part of ‘no’ don’t you understand, Peter? Is it the part where I can’t manufacture evidence that isn’t there?”

Peter stood ramrod straight, his eyes boring into the deputy director of the FBI.

LaPointe blinked. “Look, old friend. If there was some reason, any reason to presume foul play, you know I’d have my boys turn that scene inside out.”

“You should be turning the scene inside out anyway.”

“Why, because you have a hunch?”

“Derek, you don’t need me to point out the obvious. Jay’s partner is the press secretary to the president. Two days before the accident, two heavy hitters involved in a plot to kill her were sentenced to life in prison. Doesn’t the timing strike you as a little odd?”

“Of course it does.”

“Okay, then.”

“But that isn’t enough, Peter. There’s just no smoking gun, you know what I’m saying? Not even a water pistol. My guys spent three days at the scene and found nothing. I can’t justify assigning any more manpower to the case.”

Peter stalked to the window, trying to rein in his anger. “Very well. Will you at least stay out of my way while I investigate?”

The deputy director shook his head resignedly. “You’re tilting at windmills.”

“I don’t think so.”

“Okay. If you find anything, I’ll consider reopening the investigation. How’s that?”

“Big of you.”

“Look, I know I owe you. I wouldn’t have made it out of that POW camp in Nam without your help. I’d love to tell you we’ve got evidence to support your theory, but right now it’s just not there.”

“It’s there—you just haven’t found it.”

“Whatever you say. I’ll be here if you come up with anything tangible, okay?”

“Affirmative. Bye, Derek.”

“Good hunting, my friend.”



Kate stood on the patio breathing in the chilled winter air. Her head throbbed painfully and her heart was heavy. Visitors—friends and acquaintances—had been stopping by throughout the day to pay their respects. All Kate really wanted was to be alone.

Every time someone expressed sorrow at her loss, it made Jay’s death more real. Kate didn’t want that. It wasn’t real. She refused to believe it. This was just a bad nightmare. In the morning, she would wake up to Jay’s gentle snoring, her disheveled blonde hair sticking out in all directions. If only she could make it through this day.

“Kate?” Barbara watched her friend’s tall silhouette in the moonlight, her shoulders obviously sagging.

“Yeah?” Kate answered wearily.

“Trish is here.”

“I’ll be right there.”

Patricia Stanton was Jay’s editor at *Time* magazine and one of her closest friends. As soon as Kate had been able to compose herself after the phone call from Arizona, she had made three calls of her own—one to Peter, one to Barbara, and one to Trish.

In some ways, telling Trish had been the hardest. She had known Jay for years—had hired her right out of college as a reporter for the magazine.

“Hello, Trish.”

“Hi.” The petite woman reached up on tiptoe to hug Kate. When she pulled back, there were tears in her eyes. She turned away. “I-I don’t know what to say.”

“It’s okay, Trish.”

“I’ve been over it dozens of times in my mind.” Trish pounded her fist into her palm. “If I hadn’t let Jay talk me into doing the story out there, this never would have happened.”

“No. Don’t do that to yourself, Trish. Jay wanted to do the story—she was really excited about it.”

“Still—”

“Stop it,” Kate said softly. “We all have regrets about what happened, but we can’t play ‘what if.’ If Jay was here,” her voice faltered, “she’d make the same choice all over again. She was fascinated by the Native American traditions.”

Trish sobbed, “I’d change her stubborn mind if I could.”

Kate enveloped her in another hug. “So would I, Trish. So would I.”

The two women stood like that for some time, sharing the rawness of their pain.

As she pulled away, Kate said, “By the way, I don’t think I ever really thanked you properly for standing by Jay when the rest of the world was criticizing her ethics.”

Trish waved her hand dismissively. “Ancient history. Kate, when Jay came to me after writing that cover story on you and told me that you two had a personal relationship, I questioned her closely. Not only that, but I reread the story several times. The truth was that you *were* a hero—you saved lives after the capitol bombing even though it wasn’t your job as a reporter to do so. You deserved that cover. And I believed then, as I do now, that Jay wrote a fair and balanced piece.”

“You and I may be the only ones who think that.”

“No. Vander Standislau thinks so, too. If he hadn’t, he wouldn’t have kept Jay on staff at *Time*.”

“You know, it’s been what, almost two years, and they still haven’t figured out who was responsible. Amazing.”

“I know. Someone bombs the New York state capitol, you’d think it’d be a top priority to figure out whodunit,” Trish said.

“I’m not sure it’s not a top priority—just difficult to solve.”

“Maybe you’re right.” Trish shrugged. “I wonder if they ever will.”

When Trish left, Kate collapsed on the sofa in the living room. She tried to focus on a movie, with little success. She was dimly aware of the ringing phone but ignored it. Barbara had been screening her calls all day.

“No, you most certainly may not!”

It was the tone of Barbara’s voice that captured Kate’s attention. She jumped up and hurried to the kitchen, where Barbara was pacing. “What’s up?” she mouthed.

Barbara turned her back.

“And I’m telling you—”

Kate grabbed the phone out of Barbara’s trembling hand and barked, “Who is this?”

“This is Ted Parker. Who is this?” His gravelly voice boomed over the line.

Kate straightened up automatically. The fact that the man would dare to call her home, would presume even to dial the number, made her blood boil. “This is Katherine Kyle, Mr. Parker, you know, your daughter’s perverted lover.”

He made a disgusted sound.

“What do you want?”

“As Jamison’s next of kin, I want answers.”

Kate stiffened.

“Why wasn’t I called and informed of her death? Why did I have to find out from the news? Her mother is distraught. I want her personal effects sent home immediately.”

“First of all, you are not Jay’s next of kin,” she ground out.

“The hell I’m not.”

“Second of all,” Kate ignored his interruption, “Jay’s things will stay exactly where they belong—in *our* home, with me, her grieving spouse.”

“Listen to me, you freak, no daughter of mine was married to any woman.” He spat the word as if it was a curse. “It’s illegal.”

“It’s unfortunate you missed the commitment ceremony last year—it was beautiful. Jay looked radiant.” She knew she was baiting him, but she couldn’t help herself.

“You are an abomination,” he thundered.

“And you are—well, don’t get me started. I have nothing to say to you, Mr. Parker.”

“Very well. I’ll get a court order to force you to turn over my daughter’s possessions and any money you might have stolen from her accounts.”

“You can go ahead and try, Mr. Parker, but Jay’s will is crystal clear. It leaves everything to me. Shall I mail you a copy?” Kate was pretty sure she heard him growl.

“Don’t bother to come to the funeral, Ms. Kyle. You’re not welcome.”

“Funer—” Kate held the phone and its angry dial tone away from her ear.

Kate looked up at Barbara with a bewildered expression on her face. “He’s having a funeral for Jay.”

“I know, I could hear his end of the conversation from here.” Barbara put a comforting hand on Kate’s arm. Both she and Peter had tried earlier to get Kate to think about a service for Jay, but she adamantly refused, saying it would mean that she accepted that Jay was really dead.

“He can’t do that.”

“Oh, yes he can, Kate.”

“I won’t let him.”

“You can’t stop him, honey.”

Hot, anguished tears streamed down Kate’s face. “It’s not right. That bastard made Jay’s life a living hell. He destroyed her childhood. He was a sexually abusive, domineering, bullying asshole. All she ever wanted was his love and affection. He never gave her either.”

“You’re right, Kate. But he was still her father, and despite everything, she still clung to the hope that she could have her parents in her life in a positive way.”

“I never understood why,” she sniffed.

Barbara shrugged. “Because as she once told me, they were her parents. The fact that she wanted a relationship with them didn’t mean she was okay with what her father did to her as a child.”

“Hrmp.”

“She said she hoped one day she’d be able to introduce you to them so you could see they weren’t monsters—just flawed people.”

“She told you that?”

“Yes,” Barbara nodded.

“She never told me.”

“She was afraid you wouldn’t understand.”

Kate accepted the truth of that. “Oh, Jay, I’m so sorry I made things more difficult for you.” She looked at Barbara. “I wouldn’t even entertain it. Remember the huge argument Jay and I had just before Christmas last year, when she wanted us to spend the holiday with her folks?”

Barbara smiled wistfully. “It’d be kind of hard to forget that. She was pretty torn up about it, and so were you, as I recall.”

“It all seems so pointless now.”

“Death has a way of making a lot of things seem unimportant.”

“Death,” Kate whispered the word, anguish written all over her face. “I’m not ready to give up on her, Barbara. I can’t.”

“Grieving doesn’t mean you’re giving up, honey.”

“Doesn’t it?”

“I don’t think so.”

Kate was quiet for a minute as she struggled with the concept. Finally, she said, “I’m not going to let him do this.” Her tone was resolute.

Barbara looked at her expectantly.

“I’m going to hold a service for Jay the day after tomorrow.”

“You are?” Barbara was astounded.

Kate nodded, trying to stem a new wave of grief and tears. “To celebrate her *life*.”

“That’s my Kate.”

“I can’t...the idea of that man eulogizing a child he didn’t value—crying crocodile tears and garnering sympathy over her—just makes me sick to my stomach. The only way to stop him is to beat him to the punch.”

“Are you sure?”

“Mmm hmm.” It was the only sound she could make around the lump in her throat.

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