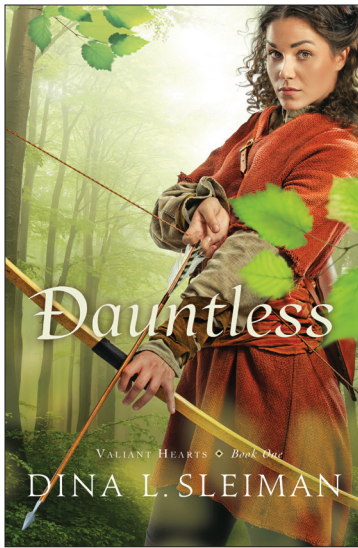




**QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH DINA L. SLEIMAN**



**Dauntless**

VALIANT HEARTS #1

by Dina L. Sleiman

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**1. *Dauntless* seems to have some Robin Hood elements. How do you weave aspects of that legend into your story?**

The idea for my VALIANT HEARTS series is to place strong medieval female heroines in traditionally male roles. In *Dauntless*, Merry Ellison takes on a Robin Hood type role as leader of a band of children and teens who find themselves outlawed during the reign of King John—otherwise known as the villainous Prince John of the Robin Hood legends—after her father attempts to assassinate him. As one of the oldest members and the only noble in the group, Merry rises to the occasion and becomes their leader. At times the characters think about and interact with Robin Hood legends. However, *Dauntless* is its own story, not a Robin Hood retelling. I even create my own legend by naming their band “The Ghosts of Farthingale Forest,” who survive by cunning, wit, and at times, even thievery.

**2. The feisty heroine is a popular motif these days. Tell us how your Merry Ellison compares?**

I’ve seen Merry Ellison compared to Katniss Everdeen and Tris Prior, which really thrilled me. I definitely wanted to capture that sort of energy in my book. Although *Dauntless* is not dystopian, in many ways the England of King John is a sort of historical dystopia, in which the world is unjust and falling apart all around the characters. Much like Katniss in the *Hunger Games*, Merry has to sacrifice herself to help those around her. Similar to how Katniss has special skills as a huntress, Merry is gifted with a special skill in her acrobatic abilities, which she learned from a group of traveling tumblers who spent a season at her castle. Temperament wise, I think Merry has more in common with Tris of *Divergent*, who has a softer side than Katniss. Merry tries to stifle her emotions, femininity, and desire for love, but over time comes to realize that this is destroying her, and that these very traits can empower her.

**3. What do you hope readers will take away from *Dauntless* and from the VALIANT HEARTS series in general?**

*Dauntless* is very much a story of hope and restoration. Each of the main characters is looking for meaning and a sense of personal destiny in the tragic world surrounding them. In addition, they are all grappling with the idea of civil disobedience and how one should respond when faced with an unjust government, which I think is an excellent topic for young adult literature. I hope that the book will help readers to desire a deeper reliance upon God and a greater sense of intimacy with Him. My theme for the VALIANT HEARTS series as a whole is “Be Strong and Courageous.” I want to empower young women to boldly pursue their God-given destinies, wherever that might take them. I recently learned that the Jewish translation of “virtuous woman” in Psalm 31 is actually “woman of valor.” That is what I want for my readers: for them to become women of valor!

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**4. There aren't many Christian novels written in the medieval period. Why did you choose this time?**

I feel there is much about this time period that speaks to modern readers. It was a gritty and edgy time, full of action and adventure. Women of the middle ages were feisty and strong, often being called upon to rule and defend their holdings while husbands and fathers were away at war. This time also provides an opportunity to examine faith issues from a different perspective. Everyone was Christian, yet being Christian meant little. I fell in love with the hidden bastions of true Christianity found in the convents and monasteries of that time despite the corruption in the church as a whole. I think young people today are looking for the sort of vibrant, authentic, and intimate relationships with God that can be seen in some of the great saints of that period.

**5. What is next on the horizon for this series?**

Book 2, *Chivalrous*, will come out late in 2015. Prepare to meet Gwendolyn Barnes, a spirited young noblewoman who longs to be a knight like her brothers. But such cannot be her fate, even in the Camelot-inspired Eden where she dwells. Gwendolyn's harsh father sees her as little more than a marriage pawn and is determined to wed her to a tough man who will tame her wild ways. This story plays with several Arthurian legends, taking a peek at the world of tournaments, chivalry, and courtly love while also turning the Lancelot and Guinevere story upside down. It follows one of the main characters from *Dauntless* as he sets off to North Britannia in search of his destiny. And it delves even deeper into what it means to be a female, an issue very close to the heart of every teenage girl, and to women in general.