



COUNTDOWN

EXTREME MEASURES 4

LYNETTE
EASON

USA Today Bestselling Author

EXTREME MEASURES #4

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a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

© 2023 by Lynette Eason

Published by Revell
a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan
www.revellbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Eason, Lynette, author.

Title: Countdown / Lynette Eason.

Description: Grand Rapids, Michigan : Revell, a division of Baker Publishing Group, [2023] | Series: Extreme Measures ; 4

Identifiers: LCCN 2022054647 | ISBN 9780800737368 (paperback) | ISBN 9780800743123 (casebound) | ISBN 9781493441297 (ebook)

Classification: LCC PS3605.A79 C68 2023 | DDC 813/.6—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2022054647>

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23 24 25 26 27 28 29 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



Dedicated to Susan Gibson Snodgrass,
who was a huge supporter of my novels—and of all Christian Fiction.
From serving on the launch team to sharing social media posts
to writing messages of encouragement, I say thank you.
You will be so very much missed in the community.
Enjoy your rest in the Savior’s arms and read all the stories!
Until we meet again . . .



*So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

Isaiah 41:10

CHAPTER ONE

SUNDAY MORNING

MID-JANUARY

BULL MOUNTAIN, EAST OF ASHEVILLE, NC

Flight paramedic Raina Price looked out the window of the chopper and pointed. “There! Two of them as reported.”

Penny Satterfield piloted the aircraft with an expert touch, aiming them toward the two stranded hikers on the side of Bull Mountain. Raina grabbed the binoculars and held them to her eyes. “One is on her back. I see blood on her head. The other one is moving and appears unhurt. She’s waving at us and looking pretty frantic.”

“There’s no place to set this bird down,” Penny said, her low voice coming over the headset.

No, there wasn’t. Not even for Penny, who could land pretty much anywhere. “Looks like it’s a day to go rappelling,” Raina said.

“Looks like,” Holly McKittrick, the nurse practitioner, echoed.

Raina didn’t particularly enjoy hurling herself out of the

chopper—not like some who actually hoped for it. But she was skilled at it, and if it saved someone’s life, then . . . okay.

She worked quickly, efficiently, strapping herself into the gear. She’d go down, assess the situation, and radio her findings.

After fastening the medical bag to her belt, she clipped the rope to the other hook and nodded to Holly. “I’m ready. You?”
“Ready.”

Holly would lower the basket and, if necessary, follow it down. Other emergency personnel lined the edge of the cliff, but no one had been able to get down to them.

“A little closer, Penny.”

“Getting there.”

Raina slid the door open, shuddering at the blast of cold air followed by a face full of snowflakes. She looked back at Holly, who had the stretcher ready to winch down. “Okay, here we go.”

“Let me know if I need to come down too.”

“I will. Stay tuned.”

She stepped out of the chopper and began her descent. With precision, Penny moved her right to the ledge that jutted from the cliff. Less than a minute later, Raina was next to the girls, while Penny continued to hover close, but not so close the wind from the blade interfered with the work.

“Help her,” the nearest teen pleaded, pointing. “She hit her head.”

The gash had stopped bleeding, but she’d taken a hard hit. “What about you?” Raina asked. “Are you hurt?”

“No. I climbed down.” She pointed to the rope behind her—the one still tied to her waist. “Sadie tripped and fell, then rolled over the side of the mountain.” A sob ripped from her. “I thought she was dead.”

“She’s not, hon.” Not yet anyway. *Please, God, don’t let this child die.* “Sadie, huh?”

“Yeah. I’m Carly.”

“Hang in there, Carly, we’re going to get you both out of here, okay?”

But Sadie’s head wound was concerning. A gust of wind cut through her winter clothing, and Raina grimaced, shoving aside the cold and focusing on the patient.

“When I saw how bad she was hurt,” Carly said, “I was too scared to move her. I . . . I didn’t know what to do, but I have my dad’s SAT phone, so I called for help.”

“You did exactly the right thing.” She lifted Sadie’s lids to check her eyes. Concussion. “All right, Carly, you’re doing great. Where are your parents? Have you called them yet?”

“Yes. They’re completely freaked out. I called them after I called you guys.”

Raina could understand freaked out. If this was her child—

She cleared her throat. While she talked and gathered information, Raina triaged the unconscious girl, speaking into the headset to those on the other end. Blood pressure, pulse, breathing status. “. . . And uneven pupils indicative of a concussion. The gash on the side of her head is going to need stitches.” She moved down, her gaze landing on the bone protruding from the leg. “Broken right tibia.” Raina ran her hands over the girl’s body as gently as she could, searching for more injuries. A low moan escaped Sadie when Raina’s hands grazed her ribs. She unzipped the light windbreaker and lifted the girl’s shirt. The bluish area under the skin alarmed her. “We’ve got some internal bleeding, maybe some broken ribs.” She listened to the girl’s lungs once more. “Breath sounds are still good, so no lung punctured.” Yet. She got the cervical collar on, then moved down to stabilize the broken leg.

More chopper blades beat the air. Farther away, but close enough to capture her attention. She took a moment to shoot a glance in the direction of the noise. “Great,” she muttered under her breath. A news chopper. *Ignore it and focus.* It was all she could do.

That, and keep her head down.

“Hey!”

Raina’s head jerked up at the shout that came from above. So much for keeping her head down, but at least her back was to the news chopper.

A man leaned over the side of the cliff. “I’m Larry Owens with the fire department. If I throw this line down, can you send up the uninjured girl?”

“Sure can! And I need someone to come down here and help me get Sadie in the chopper basket.” Holly could do it—would do it if necessary— but she absolutely hated to rappel down.

“As soon as she’s up, I’ll come down.”

“Perfect.”

“No.” Carly clutched Raina’s arm. “I want to go with Sadie.”

“You’re both going to the hospital. They’ll let you see her when you get there, but we need to focus on Sadie right now, all right?”

Carly bit her lip, then nodded. “Yeah. Okay.”

In less than two minutes, she had Carly in the harness and Larry was pulling her toward the top.

“Send down the basket,” Raina told Penny.

“On the way.”

And so was the firefighter named Larry. Working together, they got Sadie into the basket. “She’s ready,” Raina said, “take her up.” Raina watched her lift gently off the ground and head for the belly of the chopper. She turned to Larry. “Thank you.”

“Anytime. See you around.” He signaled his readiness to return to the top, and his team moved into action.

“Ready,” Raina said into her mic. She noted the location of the news crew still hovering in the sky and positioned herself accordingly, never more thankful for the helmet and other gear covering most of her face. The line pulled her up off the ledge and she started her ascent.

The line lurched and Raina gasped, fingers clutching the rope. “Penny? What was that?”

“No idea.”

The line jerked again and Raina dropped twenty feet before it stopped. “Penny! Holly!”

“Something’s wrong with the winch,” Penny said, her voice low and controlled. “Hang tight.” A pause. “No pun intended.”

Raina almost laughed but couldn’t quite get the sound through her tight throat. “Don’t let me fall.”

“You’re not falling. Just hold on a sec.”

After what felt like a lifetime later, Penny’s voice came through the headset. “Bringing you up.”

Raina held tight as she started moving upward once more. She decided not to look down while steeling herself for another abrupt stop. Thankfully, that didn’t happen, and soon, Raina was back in the chopper, kneeling next to Sadie.

Holly looked up from the still unconscious girl. “You good?”

“I will be when my heart rate gets back to normal. Then again, I’m here, so we’ll count that as a win.”

Holly nodded. “Definitely. All right, Penny, take us to base.”



US Marshal Vincent Covelli sat on the couch that belonged to his best friend’s fiancée, Julianna Jameson. The big-screen television mounted on the wall across from him held a fraction of his attention. Mostly, he was interested in the dark-haired woman chatting with Holly McKittrick, Penny Satterfield, and Grace Billingsley.

Raina Price. Beautiful, but . . . haunted, distant, seemingly unreachable. For some reason, those facts didn’t stop him from being drawn to her. Her sage-green eyes with the hint of yellow had captivated him from the moment he’d met her about a year ago when he’d been invited to watch a football game at this very house. It was Julianna’s, who was getting ready to marry

Vince's best friend, Clay Fox, in three weeks. Vince smiled. He was happy for his friends. Clay and Julianna had been through so much. They deserved their happily ever after.

He couldn't help wonder if he'd ever find his own. Not that he was looking.

Much.

Again, his gaze settled on Raina.

Okay, he might be looking *now*.

"Hey, Raina, what did they say was wrong with the winch on the chopper?" Penny asked. "Have you heard? I haven't checked."

"Mm, yeah. That it needed to be replaced, but thanks to all the safety measures, I was never in any danger of it coming disconnected."

Penny snorted. "Well, I suppose that's good to know."

"It is." Vince noted Raina's absent agreement and rapt attention on the television. It was halftime and the station was doing a special report on Olympic hopefuls.

A young boy identified as Michael Harrison, age thirteen as of yesterday, according to the banner at the bottom of the screen, stood on a snow-covered mountain in Colorado's Arapahoe Basin, snowboard in hand. Raina moved closer to the television, no doubt trying to hear over the chatter. But it was the fact that her face was two shades whiter than normal that made him frown. She snagged the remote from the mantel and turned on the captions.

"How does it feel to be the youngest person ever to win a national competition in the US? Not only in halfpipe, but also slopestyle?" the reporter asked. She held the mic out to the boy while the words continued to pop up on the screen as they spoke.

"It feels amazing."

"Will we see you at the Olympics in four years?"

Michael laughed. "I hope so."

“What about this year—will you be there, to watch the competition?”

“Not the competition,” Michael said, “my future teammates.”

The reporter turned and the camera zoomed out to include a woman. “Mrs. Harrison, has this always been a dream of Michael’s?”

“‘Always’ is pretty accurate. The dream started when he was about four years old and watched the snowboarders that year on the Olympics. He pointed at the television and said, ‘I want to do that.’ My husband went out the next day and bought him a snowboard and signed him up for lessons. He took to it right away, and it finally got to the point that we had to make some decisions about what to do. Four years ago, we moved from the Burbank area of California to Colorado, and snowboarding has been our life ever since.” She gave her son a warm smile. “I wouldn’t trade a minute of it.”

The reporter nodded to the button Mrs. Harrison was wearing. “I see you’re pro-adoption. Is there a story there?”

“Of course.” The woman shot a look filled with intense love at her son. “I’m not able to have biological children, so my husband and I went through the adoption process. We took Michael home the day he was born, and he was legally ours shortly thereafter. We’re so grateful to Michael’s birth mother for giving us the chance to be his parents.” A sheen of tears glimmered in her eyes and the camera zoomed in to catch the expression.

“Aw, Mom, stop.” Michael rolled his eyes but grinned at her, and she ruffled his hair before he could duck.

The reporter stepped back. “All right, Michael, it’s time. We’ve got a clip that showcases your talent here. This is the run that earned you enough points to qualify you for the Olympics. If only you were old enough. You ready?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

The screen cut to the video of Michael's run culminating with the Triple Cork 1800 and thunderous applause of those watching. The sound faded and the camera returned to the reporter. "Thank you so much for being here with us, Michael. We wish you all the best and look forward to watching you compete in a few years. This is Camille Johnson with *News-Break*. Thank you for joining us. I know we're all excited to see if young Michael Harrison can bring home the gold in the next Olympics."

The station cut to another site where an Olympic hopeful was in the middle of an ice-skating rink, but Raina's eyes had shifted away from the TV to the far wall, still holding a frozen expression. Then she blinked, cleared her throat, and excused herself to slip into the kitchen.

Vince waited a good sixty seconds, then followed. Her back was to the door, arms braced against the kitchen counter, head down, gulping deep breaths. Her phone lay face up in front of her, a number programmed. "Raina?"

She squeaked and jumped back, the blazing fear in her eyes cutting him to the core. He stood still and waited for her to realize he posed no danger.

Finally, she shuddered, then sighed.

"You okay?" he asked, knowing the question was a dumb one, but asking it anyway.

"Yes. Fine. Sorry. You just startled me."

"You seemed pretty upset in there."

"Hm."

"Anything I can help with?"

"No . . . I . . ." She looked like she might say something else, then, "No. Thank you."

He nodded. "Because I'd be more than happy to help you out. If you needed it."

She shook her head, then tilted it to stare at the ceiling. "I'm okay. That kid on the news, Michael Harrison, just reminded

me of someone I used to know.” She lowered her gaze to meet his. Her green eyes had shuttered and gave nothing away. “Seeing him brought back a lot of bad memories.”

“The kid did?”

“Yeah.”

He waited, but she bit her lip and looked away. “Okay,” he said after several seconds of silence. “I’ll leave you alone then.” He turned to go, hurt she wouldn’t confide in him and frustrated because he’d done nothing but try to reach her, to show his interest. To let her know she could trust him. That he cared. At times, he thought she felt the same, but he honestly didn’t know. Maybe she just wasn’t into him. And while the thought made him sad, it was what it was. He’d move on. And yet he found himself unable to leave. He turned back, catching her gaze.