

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a tan trench coat and dark pants, is walking away from the viewer on a gravel path. The path is misty and leads towards a large, two-story house with a red roof and white trim, surrounded by evergreen trees. The sky is a deep blue with many small birds flying in the distance. The overall mood is mysterious and atmospheric.

DOUBLE TAKE

LAKE CITY
HEROES

LYNETTE
EASON

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

“It’s time to get out your calendar and clear your schedule. Lynette Eason’s *Double Take* is sure to cause you to give a second glance at any other commitments until this riveting new story is 100 percent complete. I thoroughly enjoyed the characters, the banter, and the suspense. All the suspense. I bit off every fingernail in hopes that it would help ease the intensity (it didn’t), and that is just the way I like it. If you’re holding this novel and debating whether it should be your next read, debate no more. Just go. Find a chair. Sit down. Read. It’s that simple.”

Jaime Jo Wright, ECPA bestselling author of
The Vanishing at Castle Moreau

“Oh. My. Word. Once again Lynette Eason has blown me away with her skills. *Double Take* is phenomenal and had my heart racing from the moment I started reading. I was immediately drenched in Lainie’s world by Eason’s powerful writing, but I did not want to be in Lainie’s shoes! Brilliant plot. Incredible story. Proof again of Lynette Eason’s prowess that keeps her at the top!”

Kimberley Woodhouse, bestselling and award-winning author of
26 Below, *The Heart’s Choice*, and *A Mark of Grace*

“This book should come with a warning: do not start unless you’ve got plenty of time to finish! *Double Take* kept me up turning pages and wondering what would happen next. It’s a heart-stopping ride from start to finish.”

Kathleen Y’Barbo, *Publishers Weekly* bestselling author of *The Black Midnight*, *Dog Days of Summer*, and The Bayou Nouvelle series

“*Double Take* is, without a doubt, the best suspense book I’ve read in a very long time. The pacing kept me guessing—not to mention a little frustrated—so I couldn’t put it down. And the romance . . . perfect. Excellent book!”

Tracey Bateman, Jesus lover, wife, mom, Bubbi, author

“In this psychological thriller, Lainie and her former crush James are determined to get to the truth. In the process, they have to fight to stay alive. This book is a tightly written corkscrew of a race against a twisted mind that is determined to take Lainie on a twisty ride that ends in one destination: her death. Readers who love romantic suspense will love every page of Lynette’s latest novel.”

Cara Putman, award-winning author of
Lethal Intent and *Flight Risk*

Praise for the Extreme Measures Series

“A pulse-pounding finale to Eason’s Extreme Measures series.”

Publishers Weekly on *Countdown*

“Eason is a master of edge-of-your-seat inspirational romantic thrillers, combining light faith elements with twisty plots that keep readers guessing.”

Booklist starred review of *Critical Threat*

“*Crossfire* is a model for the romantic suspense genre.”

Life Is Story on *Crossfire*

“This book is an edge-of-your-seat suspense thriller from start to finish. With great character development and enough excitement to keep readers hooked, this novel is sure to keep patrons talking for months to come.”

Library Journal on *Life Flight*

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Don't Look Back
A Killer Among Us

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Oath of Honor
Called to Protect
Code of Valor
Vow of Justice

DEADLY REUNIONS

When the Smoke Clears
When a Heart Stops
When a Secret Kills

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No One to Trust
Nowhere to Turn
No Place to Hide

DANGER NEVER SLEEPS

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Without Warning
Moving Target
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EXTREME MEASURES

Life Flight
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Critical Threat
Countdown

LAKE CITY HEROES

Double Take

LAKE CITY HEROES • 1

DOUBLE TAKE

LYNETTE
EASON



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Lynette Eason, Double Take

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Dedicated to Jesus. Because.

PROLOGUE

The click next to her ear jerked her out of a deep sleep to roll into a sitting position, a scream on her lips, her eyes on the man with the gun standing next to her. “Adam? What are you doing?”

The man who’d professed to love her only hours before was lining the barrel up for his shot. She dove away from him just as he said, “Cheers, love,” in his fake British accent. The bullet meant for her head knocked her backward. She threw herself from the bed to the floor, her survival instincts the only thing moving her.

Vaguely, she wondered why she felt no pain, even as the warmth from the wound in her shoulder soaked her sleep T-shirt.

Slow, measured footsteps worked to close the distance between them as he rounded the bed. “I was trying to make this painless, Lainie,” he said. “If you’d just drunk your milk like you usually do, we wouldn’t be having this conversation.”

She panted, nausea churning, her system in shock. She rolled under the platform bed just as the gun cracked again, chipping out a gash of wood in her newly polished hardwood floor.

“The police will find me, you know,” he said, as though he had all the time in the world. “Ask questions. I guess I’ll just have to tell them all about the stalker you had. Unfortunately, I won’t be able to

identify him, but he must have followed you home from work and broke in after you fell asleep.”

She couldn't wrap her mind around the fact that he was explaining her death while trying to kill her. Panic, terror, absolute horror—and the desperate desire to live—washed over her in waves.

Move or you're dead.

The fleeting thought spurred her to push aside the storage boxes and aim herself to come out at the foot of the bed, which was right across from the door.

“Where do you think you can go, Lainie?”

Adam's cruel voice taunted her and she expected another bullet to hit her any second. But he was still on the other side of the bed. Thinking she would cower and wait for him to come get her?

Probably.

She scooted out from under the bed and scrambled to her feet. The next bullet hit the doorframe, but she made it out of the room.

“Where do you think you can run that I won't catch you? You want to break up with me? Fine. I can help you with that.”

The taunting tone had morphed into a low, throbbing rage that vibrated with each word he spat. She raced toward the front door but heard him closing in behind her. She'd never get the door open in time.

Lainie cut a sharp right into the den and his footsteps followed her. More quickly this time. He was done playing.

Another bullet hit the mantel next to her left ear. With her good hand, she grabbed the poker from the wrought iron tool set and flung it toward him.

The heavy piece caught him in the side of his head. Adam gave a sharp cry and the fifth bullet careened into the ceiling. Lainie ignored the suddenly noticeable fiery pain in her shoulder and launched herself at him, barreling into him while he was already off balance. They both went to the floor, the fire in her shoulder now licking across her chest and down her back. The gun fell from his hand and skittered toward her.

“You’re dead, Lainie!”

He rolled toward the weapon, and she grabbed it with a low scream and scrambled backward. He snagged her foot and gave it a hard yank, landing her on her back with a painful thud. Air whooshed from her lungs and dark spots danced in her vision. But she could still see clear enough to note that his cold blue eyes spoke death.

She lifted the weapon and aimed it. “Stop, Adam! Stop now, or I’ll shoot you!”

He laughed, those chilly ice-chipped eyes freezing over. “You won’t shoot. You don’t have the guts.” He gave her another tug, his expression promising she had but seconds to live.

The twitch of her finger on the trigger sent the bullet into the base of his throat.

ONE

EIGHTEEN MONTHS LATER MID-SEPTEMBER

Lainie Jackson glanced at the clock on the dash and pressed the gas a little harder even though the rain came down in sheets. Her tires spun on the wet road, and she gasped, heart pounding until they clutched the asphalt once more. She lifted her foot. Slow might be the best option after all.

The warm September morning that had been bright and sunny an hour ago was now dark and—she hated to admit it—a little creepy. The gray and black clouds had rolled in and then opened up to release their downpour. And it was still raining. Living in Lake City, North Carolina, brought a variety of weather. Sometimes all in one day. North of Asheville, Lake City had more mountains and cooler weather year-round. Lainie sometimes thought about moving to a warmer location, but she'd grown up in Lake City and had a community of friends she found impossible to leave.

In spite of a lot of bad memories.

Shivering, she flipped the air-conditioning to heat and turned onto the back road that would take her to Señor G's, her favorite local café slash general store slash gas station. It took a little bit of navigating on the mountain roads, but she'd been driving it once,

sometimes twice, a week for a year now, so she could basically do it with her eyes shut.

Figuring that would be a bad idea, she wrapped her fingers around the wheel and squinted into the onslaught. “Lord, this was dumb,” she whispered. “I should have just gone on to work instead.” But this was her routine and she liked routine in certain areas of her life.

Besides, she wanted to check on Julian Gonzales and make sure he was taking his insulin. She finally rounded the curve and pulled into the parking lot, under the protection of the gas station’s metal roof.

The front door opened and Mr. Gonzales appeared with an umbrella over his head. He walked toward her. “I figured you would show up in this mess.” His near-perfect English sounded musical when combined with his Hispanic accent.

Lainie ducked under and they hurried back to the café entrance. “It’s a habit now, Señor G. You know I can’t get through my week without my special cup of java from you.”

She opened the door and stepped inside, spied her cup on the counter, and made a beeline for it. “You know, if it wasn’t so far out of my way on the way to work, I’d come here every day. I think you need to open a location by the hospital.”

“You say this every time. And what do I tell you?”

“This was your papa’s store and you must carry on the family tradition. I get that, but expanding would be good for you.”

“I cannot be in two places at the same time.”

“That’s why you hire people.”

He tsked and shook his head. “You know I pride myself on my personal touch.” He waved a finger at her cup. “And I don’t give away my recipes.”

“My recipes, el viejito.” Maria Gonzales came from the back to give Lainie a tight squeeze. “Hello, cariña. So good to see you, as always.”

“You too, Mama Maria.” She turned to Señor G. “What was your blood sugar this morning?”

He shrugged. “Eh.”

“Señor G . . .” She raised a brow at him.

“Ah, there’s the tone.” He sighed. “A little high, but I will work on it.”

“How high?”

“Under three hundred.”

“Julian . . .”

“Ack”—he pressed his hand to his chest in mock horror—“she brought out the first name.”

Lainie sighed and pursed her lips. “This has been going on for a while now, Señor G. I want to add another medication to get that number down.”

Lainie saw the concerned glance his wife sent him. She laid a hand on his and lowered her voice. “Mama Maria needs you to be around for a long time. You simply must take care of yourself.”

He swallowed, shot a look at his wife, then gave Lainie a look of resignation and a faint nod. “I know, niña, but it’s not easy. My body does not like to cooperate anymore.”

“I understand.” She pulled out her phone and logged into his account at the office of his primary physician. Since it was in the same network as the hospital, she had access as a physician’s assistant. She voiced the instruction into the chart, fixed a few typos, and hit send. “There. The meds will be waiting on you to pick up. They’re not expensive and I think they’ll help. Try them for a week and I’ll check on you when I come back.”

Mama Maria hugged her. “You are too good to us.”

Lainie lifted her cup in a salute. “It’s mutual.” She spent the next fifteen minutes chatting, catching up on their proud-grandparent news and pictures, then after another exchange of hugs and promises to see them next week, if not before, she hurried to the door, grateful to see the rain had lessened. Before Señor G could offer to walk her out with the umbrella, she said her goodbyes, pulled up the hood of her raincoat, and bolted to her car.

With her coffee in the cupholder, Lainie buckled her seat belt, then wheeled out of the parking lot and onto the road that would take her back down the mountain. She loved the Gonzales family.

They were the kind of parents she wished she'd been born to. Not that she didn't love hers, but growing up with Stan and Louisa Jackson had been hard. To put it mildly. With her father and his "we must prep for the end of the world" mentality and her mother's hoarding tendencies, not to mention the sibling issues, her childhood had been full of uncertainty, fear, and drama.

Which was probably part of the reason she liked her routine.

She sighed, took another sip of the coffee that tasted like none other, and rounded the next curve only to hydroplane.

A gasp slipped from her lips, and she barely refrained from slamming on the brakes. She went with the slide that took her much too close to the edge of the road, but with some careful maneuvering, she stayed on it. The tree-lined two-lane road was slick with standing water, and she slowed even more, creeping along, looking for a place to pull over so she could collect herself and take a look at the tires. How had they lost tread already? They were basically brand new.

Cars passed her from the opposite direction, splashing even more water on her windshield.

A truck approached from behind, lights on and going too fast. Lainie sped up a fraction. On this stretch of road, there was no place for her to safely stop, so she crept along.

The truck behind her revved, came closer, then shot into the oncoming lane, making his intent to pass her clear. She took her foot off the gas. "Fine," she muttered. "Go around me, you lunatic." Which he did—until his back end clipped the left side of her vehicle, sending the wheel spinning under her hands. A scream escaped and her little Subaru hatchback went over the side of the mountain. She bounced once, twice, then crashed sideways into two trees.

The seat belt held her in place. Her coffee cup lay against the passenger window, leaking precious liquid over the glass.

Panting, stunned, heart pounding in a way she'd only felt once before in her life, she sat still for a moment, taking stock.

She was alive. And while she might have a bruise from the seat

belt and some sore muscles from the jerking, she didn't think she was seriously hurt. She rotated her neck and nothing felt off. "Thank you, Lord."

But someone had just run her off the road and kept going.

With shaking fingers, she activated her Bluetooth and ordered it to call 911.

"911. What's your emergency?"

Lainie gave the dispatcher the location. "I'm off the road, though, so they won't be able to see me. I'm down the hill and against two trees."

"Can you get out of the vehicle?"

"I'm not sure. I'm not completely sideways, but the seat belt's the only thing holding me in the seat." She glanced out the coffee-covered window. "I'm afraid to do anything that would shift my car. It's a long way down if the car moves."

"Then stay put. I've got people on the way and looking for you. The nearest fire truck is only about a minute from that road, coming from another call. Is there any way you can signal them?"

"Um . . . yeah. I can use my phone's flashlight."

"Do it. They're heading up the mountain now."

Lainie tilted her gaze up and saw a man standing on the edge of the road, looking down at her. She sucked in a hard breath and rolled down her window to get a better look, ignoring the light drizzle that started to plaster her hair to her head. "Adam?" He jerked out of sight. "Adam!" No, it couldn't be. "Hey! Who are you!"

Bracing herself, she reached over into the glove box and removed her gun. She almost thought better of it. She was freezing. Shaking. Slightly nauseous.

Shock.

She looked up again and could see the back of his truck, almost make out the license plate. Then he was back, peering over the edge at her. For several seconds, they stared at each other. He swung a leg over like he planned to try and climb down to her. To help her? Or—

Approaching sirens stilled him. Then he scrambled back up and disappeared, the roar of his engine fading.

It isn't him. It isn't.

Maybe not, but *someone* who looked like her dead fiancé had just run her off the road.

HE RAKED A HAND over his head, then gripped the steering wheel until his knuckles turned white. Almost. So close. He hadn't thought she could survive falling off the side of the mountain, but . . . she had. And he'd looked over to see and found her terrified gaze locked on his.

Her face had gone slack, her lips formed into the O shape of shocked recognition.

Oh, she'd recognized him all right. No doubt about it. What would she do now? Tell everyone? The police? Would they be looking for him?

Sweat broke out across his forehead and he pulled in a deep breath. No matter. They might look for him, but they'd never find him. If they even bothered. He wasn't worried about the police, but frustration pounded through him.

Lainie wasn't dead. His plan had failed. All those months of planning, going back and forth, fleshing out one idea only to discard it. Then he'd settled on a foolproof way to get what he wanted and it had failed.

Failed!

Now it was time to regroup, refigure, and recommit to the undertaking. Albeit a new plan, but maybe it wouldn't take too much restructuring to get to the same outcome.

Unfortunately, he'd lost the advantage of a surprise attack, but the more he thought about it, the more he smiled. She'd be looking for him. Okay. Fine. He'd have to work with that. He pressed his palm against his forehead. It would take some scrambling and

include working through a lot of little details in a short amount of time, but he could come up with a new plan.

A new plan that would keep her looking in the wrong direction. One that would bring her nightmares, filling her with terror.

And then he'd turn her nightmares into reality.

TWO WEEKS LATER

"Shots fired. 112 Park Lane. All units respond. Officer requests backup."

Detective James Cross tossed his half-eaten breakfast sandwich in the trash and bolted for his Jeep. His partner, Cole Garrison, was two steps behind him.

James threw himself behind the wheel, and Cole slammed the passenger door shut with his right hand while his left snagged the radio. He reported their location. "Three minutes out."

Approximately three minutes later, they pulled to a stop in the Brookfield neighborhood. It was crammed full of new middle-class homes with small yards and wooden fences. James had no trouble locating the home responsible for the call. Uniformed officers had already swarmed the area, evacuating the neighbors and keeping the lookie-loos at a distance.

Three pops sounded. Neighbors screamed. Officers ducked out of reflex. "Answer your phone, Gerald. You're just going to make the situation worse." James recognized Sergeant Luis Sanchez hunched behind a cruiser, megaphone to his mouth.

"This don't concern you!" Gerald's scream came from the front door that was ajar. A small hand wrapped around its edge said he was using one of his kids as a shield. No officer or SWAT member was going to pull the trigger with that situation. "Now get out of here before I start putting bullets in people instead of the wall!"

James and Cole hurried to the officer in charge. "Luis," Cole said, "I assume the hostage negotiator is on the way."

“Ten minutes out.”

“Want me to talk to him?” James asked.

Formerly with the Army’s Criminal Investigation Division, James had negotiation training that went beyond the average detective’s.

“You’re welcome to try.”

“Tell me what you know. Quick.”

“Gerald Henson, forty years old, married, three kids, two of which are in the house, ages nine, five, and two. The oldest one, Trey, got on the school bus about thirty minutes before the call. Apparently, the wife, Patricia, burned Gerald’s toast and he hit her. The five-year-old, Katy, called 911, said her daddy was being mean to her mommy, that he got his gun and she and her sister were scared. The two-year-old’s name is Gretchen. And here we are.”

James took the megaphone and lifted it to his lips. “Mr. Henson? This is Detective James Cross. Is there anything we can do to end this peacefully?”

“Get out of here. This is family business. Nothing for the cops to be sticking their noses in. Everybody always got to know what’s going on with me and I’m about sick of it. Stupid wife, stupid cops, stupid family.”

“Yes sir, I understand your frustration with all of the attention. Are you mad at the children?”

“What? The kids? No, it’s this stupid woman who’s always costing me money. She wanted this swanky new house that costs me more money than we have. She needs cooking lessons—which would cost me money, right? Smoked up the whole house with burning breakfast. That was the last of the bread and I don’t have the time or the money to get more, and now me and my kids got to be hungry.” He muttered a few derogatory comments about his wife that James couldn’t hear the whole of, but he caught enough. “And I’m not stupid. I’m the only one around here who’s not.”

“No sir, I don’t think you’re stupid at all.”

“I know how this ends. And let me just say, it’s not with me in cuffs.”

He meant to kill his family and himself by the end, and James had no way of knowing when the guy would decide it was the end.

“Hey, Gerald,” James said, “what if I send someone to get a loaf of bread so that you can feed your kids? I can tell you love them. I know you don’t want them to be hungry.”

The man stayed quiet. Was he thinking about the offer? James could only pray he’d say yes. At least then there was hope for a little more time to get the hostages out.

“Can you do better than a loaf of bread?”

“Sure can,” James said without hesitation. “What do you want?”

“Li’l Bit here likes them sausage biscuits from the diner down the road.”

“Weavers’ Café?”

“Yeah.”

“Sure, we can get her one of those. What about her sister?”

“Katy-bug likes scrambled eggs and grits.”

He was referring to the kids by their nicknames. That was good. And he didn’t seem to be upset that the five-year-old had been the one to make the call that set the current situation in progress. Or maybe he didn’t know. “And you and your wife?”

“Wife don’t get nothing. She lost her chance to eat today, but you can bring me a steak biscuit, grits, and bacon.”

James’ molars clicked together and he ground them to keep his words in check. “Got it. Might take us about thirty minutes or so.”

“Call it in. They’ll have it ready faster.”

“Right.” He nodded to Luis, who passed the assignment to the officer next to him. “No faster than thirty minutes,” James told her, his voice low. “As soon as they eat, I have a feeling he’s going to end it. We need that time.” The woman nodded and took off for her cruiser. James noted the negotiator, Marissa Cook, standing next to Cole.

James held the megaphone toward her, and she shook her head while she walked toward him. “You’re doing great,” she said. “You’ve got him working with you. If something changes, we’ll trade off, but for now, let’s not fix it if it’s not broken.”

James agreed, then slid his gaze to Luis. "Sniper ready?"

"He's ready, but he can't get a clear shot. Man's got the windows covered up, and even if he didn't, the guy's got the kid attached to him like a leech. Risk is too great if the guy moves unexpectedly."

He needed Gerald to let the little one go. "Hey, Gerald," he said, "got your food ordered and an officer is heading to pick it up."

"Good. Good."

"It would be a lot easier to communicate if you'd pick up the phone." James noted the neighbors gathered as close as they could get to the scene behind the tape. They might not be able to see much, but they were getting an earful. "Not to mention, this conversation would be a lot more private. You got a landline?"

"No." A pause. "What do you mean 'private'?"

"Got some nosy lookie-loo neighbors, if you know what I mean. I can give you a number to call or I can bring you a radio. Your choice. But at least our talk will just be between us while we wait for the food." And if the man wasn't worried about being shot when he opened the door, he might let go of the child.

Silence. The little hand gripping the door disappeared and the door shut.

"What now?" Luis asked, arms crossed, a frown pulling his brows to meet at the bridge of his nose.

"Give him a minute. He doesn't like his dirty laundry aired. I took a little gamble that mentioning the neighbors would get him on the phone."

The door cracked. "Can't find the phone! Bring me a radio!"