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Storm Winds

Wind Dancer

# CHASING THE NIGHT

IRIS JOHANSEN

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This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations,  
and events portrayed in this novel are either products of  
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*For my wonderful Tamara, who juggles golden balls  
and carries heavy burdens with equal grace and style*

# CHAPTER

## 1

### **BROKEN BONES.**

Eve Duncan shuddered as she looked down at the pitiful remains of the little girl's skull that she'd carefully spread on the special tarp on her desk.

The child's skull was shattered, and the cheekbones and nasal and orbital bones were only unidentifiable splinters. The Detroit Police Department thought that the child had been beaten to death with a hammer. How the hell was she going to put that little girl's face together again?

"You're angry."

Eve glanced at Joe Quinn sitting on the couch across the room. "You're damn right I am." She reached out and gently touched one of the little girl's remaining facial bones still left intact. "Whoever killed this child had to be insane. Who would think it necessary to do this . . . this monstrosity? She couldn't have been more than eight years old."

"And after hundreds of these reconstructions, it still makes you

furious.” His lips tightened. “Me, too. You’d think we’d get used to it. But that never happens, does it?”

Yes, Joe might be a tough, experienced police detective, but he could be as emotional as Eve when the victims were helpless children. “Sometimes I can block it. But this savagery . . . A hammer, Joe. He used a hammer . . .”

“Son of a bitch.” Joe got up and moved across the room to stand behind her. “Have you given her a name yet?”

Eve always gave her reconstructions names while she worked on them. It made her feel a connection while she strove desperately to give a name and identity to those poor, murdered children who had been thrown away. She shook her head. “Not yet. I just got the skull by FedEx this afternoon. Detroit forensics warned me to expect this, but it still came as a shock.”

“It looks like a lost cause.” Joe was gazing down at the splintered bones. “It’s going to be a nightmare putting her back together. How do you know you’ve got all the pieces?”

“I don’t. But there’s a good chance. Forensics thinks that she was already completely wrapped in the yellow plastic raincoat in which he buried her when her murderer started this carnage. Maybe he just wanted to make sure that she was dead or that no one would ever recognize her.”

“This one is going to tear you up.” Joe reached out and began to massage her neck. “You’re already tense, and you haven’t even started.”

“I’ve started.” She closed her eyes as his thumbs dug gently into exactly the right spot on the center of her neck. After all of these years of living together, he knew every muscle, every pleasure point of her body. He was right, she was tense. She would take this brief moment before she began to work. Joe’s touch, Joe’s support. It was a soothing song that helped to drown out the ugliness of the world. Once she actually began the reconstruction, there would be only her and this

child, who had lost her life over ten years ago. They would be bound together in darkness until Eve could finish working and shine a light that would bring the little girl home. And she would bring her home. She'd give her back her face, then let the media publish a photo and surely someone would recognize her. "I started the moment I saw what that bastard had done to her."

"You haven't given her a name yet," Joe said. "Tell Detroit to give her to Josephson to do the reconstruction. You may be the best, but you're not the only forensic sculptor in the country. You've got a backlog of requests that will keep you slaving for the next six months. You don't need this kind of pressure."

"She didn't need for some creep to do this to her." She opened her eyes and gazed down at the broken skull. "She's my job, Joe." She thought for a moment. "And her name is Cindy." She straightened in her chair. "Now let me get to work."

"Dammit." He stepped back, and his hands dropped away from her. "I knew it was a long shot, but I thought I'd give it a try. You've been working yourself to exhaustion for the last few months." He wheeled and went back to the couch. "Go ahead. Break your heart trying to put that kid back together again. Why should I care?"

"I don't know, Joe." She smiled. "But I thank God you do." She looked down at the bone splinters that might belong to the nasal cavity . . . or might not. "And Cindy will forgive you for trying to push her off on Josephson."

"I'm relieved," he said dryly. "But I'll take my chances on being in her bad graces. After all, she's been dead ten years. At the moment, you're the only one I care about. I don't want—"

Eve's cell phone rang.

She glanced at the ID.

She tensed.

"Who is it?" Joe asked.

“Venable.”

He frowned. “Not good.”

That was Eve’s reaction. They had dealt with Venable and the CIA on several occasions, and it usually ended with her being pulled away from her work and into deep trouble. Not this time.

She punched the button on her cell. “What do you want, Venable?”

“Why are you on the defensive?” Venable asked. “Maybe I only want to check in and see if you’re okay. You were in a hospital in Damascus recovering from a gunshot wound the last time I saw you.”

“That was six months ago, and I’m sure that you know I’m fully recovered. You make it your business to know everything.”

“I’m not the NSA. I’m only interested in specific subjects . . . and people. I feel a certain attachment for you and Joe.”

“What do you want, Venable?”

He hesitated. “A favor.”

“What kind of favor?”

“Nothing that’s dangerous or out of your realm of expertise. I’d like you to do a computer age progression.”

“No.”

“It wouldn’t take you that long, and I’d appreciate it.”

“I’m swamped, and even if I weren’t, you know I won’t work for the CIA. Get one of your own experts to do the job. You have qualified people. Some of them are far more experienced than I am with computer age progression. I don’t even know why you’re bothering to ask me.”

“Because I *have* to ask you, dammit,” he said sourly. “It has to be you.”

“Why?”

“Because like everything else in my life, it’s a question of bargaining and balancing. I need you to do this, Eve.”

“Then you’re going to be disappointed. I just started a new re-



construction, and I won't drop it for one of your twisted little jobs. I'm not going to help you identify someone so that you can track him down. I'm never sure whether the prey you're stalking is a saint or a slimeball. Or if he's a saint, that you're not using him in ways that I'd never go along with. You're capable of manipulating anyone to shape a deal."

"Yes, I am," he said wearily. "And some of those deals keep you and your friends from being blown to kingdom come by the bad guys. Someone has to stand guard, and I do a damn good job of it. Dirty sometimes, but effective."

She supposed he did, but she didn't want to be involved in that morass even on a purely scientific level. "Let your own agents do it, Venable."

"What can I offer you to do the job?"

"Nothing that I can't refuse," she said softly but emphatically. "Take no for an answer. It's all you're going to get from me."

"I'll try, but I may have to come back. You're a prime bargaining chip in this one, Eve."

"Listen, you're beginning to annoy me. I'm not a chip, and I'm not a chess piece for you to manipulate."

"We can all be manipulated. It depends on the determination factor." He paused. "You'd be safer if I'm the one who does it. I'm trying to avoid throwing you to the wolf."

"Are you threatening me?"

She put up her hand as she saw Joe straighten at her words.

"I wouldn't be that stupid. I'm just trying to keep you from making a mistake. I've always liked you."

He probably believed he was telling the truth, but it wouldn't keep him from using her. She was tired of arguing with him. "I'm hanging up now, Venable."

"Change your mind, Eve."

She pressed the disconnect button.

“The bastard threatened you?” Joe was frowning, his tone grim. “I believe I need to pay a visit to Venable.”

“He said it wasn’t a threat. More like a warning.”

“That’s a fine line where Venable is concerned. I take it he wanted you to do a reconstruction?”

“No, that would make more sense.” Her brow knitted. “I won’t deny I’m one of the best forensic sculptors around.” After her own little girl, Bonnie, had been kidnapped and murdered all those years ago, she had gone back to school and made sure that she had the skill to help bring final resolution and solace to other parents. Out of that nightmare of torment, when she had come close to madness and death, had emerged at least one decent thing from the agony. She could recreate the faces of those lost, murdered children. But not her little Bonnie. Search as she would, she had not found her child. What good was all her fine skill if she couldn’t use it to bring her daughter home to rest, she thought bitterly. Her Bonnie was still lost, and so was her killer.

“Eve?”

She jerked her attention back to the subject at hand. “But Venable doesn’t want me to sculpt a reconstruction, he wants a computer age progression. I’m good at that, but I don’t do enough to be called an expert. He could find someone faster and possibly more accurate just by making a few phone calls. I know the CIA has good technicians.”

“But maybe he doesn’t want to go through the agency,” Joe said slowly. “He’s paranoid about leaks, and he could trust you. Venable doesn’t trust many people.”

“Too bad. I’m not volunteering.”

“You’d be crazy if you did.” His lips tightened. “You’re better off working yourself to the bone than playing in his ballpark. Who’s the subject of this age progression?”

“I didn’t ask. Maybe some war criminal they’re trying to trace? For all I know, it could be Bin Laden. I don’t want to know. It’s not my job.” She gazed down at the bones in front of her. “This is my job.”

“Then do it.” He flipped open his computer. “Let Venable pull his own chestnuts out of the fire.”

At least the call from Venable had made Joe more reconciled to her accepting the reconstruction on Cindy, Eve thought. He was willing to admit that the long, painstaking hours she’d have to spend on piecing the little girl back together was the lesser of two evils.

*You’d be safer if I’m the one who does it. I’m trying to avoid throwing you to the wolf.*

Wolf. Singular. Not wolves.

Who was the wolf Venable was trying to save her from?

And she was still thinking about Venable’s words, she realized impatiently. Forget him. Forget everything but the little girl who must become something more than this pitiful heap of bones. She had been someone’s child. Long ago, someone had heard her prayers and tucked her into bed for the night. She deserved to go home to her parents and have them tuck her into her resting place one last time.

She reached out and gently touched the cranial bone. It will take a little while, but we’ll get there, Cindy. We’ll bring you home and find the bastard who did this to you.

She felt a wave of sickness wash over her. No matter how many times that she was brought face-to-face with this savagery, she never became calloused. But the sight of these shattered bones was particularly painful.

She couldn’t imagine the barbaric mind-set that would allow someone to smash the bones of another human being. . . .

## Salmeta, Colombia

**SHE'D HAVE TO BREAK THE** sentry's neck.

Catherine Ling moved silently down the path of the rain forest.

She couldn't risk using even a knife. He mustn't cry out.

No sound. Every movement had to have purpose and deadly intent.

The phone in her pocket vibrated.

Ignore it.

The other outer sentries had to be eliminated to clear the way back to the helicopter.

She was a yard from the sentry. Now she could see that he was bearded and close to middle age. Good. She hated to kill those fresh-faced kids even though they could sometimes be more lethal. Anyone who worked for Munoz was dirty, but she always had to work to get past that element of youth. Stupid. She should know better. As a teenager, she had made sure that no one performed with more deadly precision than she did.

He was tensing. He was sensing danger.

Move fast.

He was a good six inches taller. Bring him down to her level. Her booted foot sliced between his legs and hit the side of his right knee-cap. He lost his balance. Before he could regain it, her arm encircled his neck.

She jerked back and twisted. His neck snapped.

He went limp.

Dead.

She let him fall to the ground, then dragged him deep into the shrubs. She'd already disposed of the other sentry guarding the path along the brook. Her way should be clear the three miles to Munoz's encampment.

Maybe. She had learned there was nothing certain where Munoz

was concerned. She had been assigned to this hellhole for the last three years and made a study of the drug dealer. He was sadistic, volatile, and unpredictable. The stories that circulated about his brutality were sickening. His vicious profile was the major contributor to the storm of anxiety surrounding his kidnapping of coffee executive Ned Winters and his fourteen-year-old daughter Kelly. He was holding them hostage until the Colombian government released his brother Manuel from prison and every day a new and bloody threat was issued.

Her phone was vibrating again.

She glanced at the ID. Venable.

She punched the button, and whispered, "I've nothing to report. I'm on my way, but I won't be at the Munoz camp for another fifteen minutes."

"Call it off. Now that you've located him, we'll send in the Special Forces to get Winters and his daughter out."

"And get them killed. They don't have my contacts and they don't know this terrain and, by the time they do, it may be too late. Munoz has promised he'll kill Winters and his daughter unless his brother's released. Those idiots in the Colombian government are stalling. I think they want Winters killed so they can get U.S. help to stage a full-scale attack on Munoz and the rebels."

"I don't give a damn what you think. Back off."

"No, we made a deal. You agreed to give me what I wanted if I managed to locate and free the Winterses. I can do this. I've been watching the Munoz camp since yesterday, and I know exactly how I can pull it off."

"It's too dangerous."

She stiffened. She caught a note in his voice that made her uneasy. "You didn't give a damn about that when I called you and told you that I'd find a way of getting Winters and his daughter away from

Munoz. All you cared about was that it was going to get the heat off the director.”

“No, that’s not all I cared about. Two American citizens are at risk. That matters to me.”

“Then you back off. Let me get them out.”

“Alone?”

“No, Ron Timbers is going to be on watch outside the camp. There’s only one guard at the tent where they’re keeping the hostages. I can slice through the back of the tent and get them out that way. Ron will warn me if there’s any move from the guard. Bill Neely is bringing in the helicopter at a glade four miles from the camp. Why are you questioning me? I’m good. You know I can do this.”

“I know you have a decent chance.” He paused. “But I thought I should tell you that I may not be able to give you everything you want in exchange. I’ll give you access to the Rakovac file. I can’t promise you Eve Duncan. She turned me down.”

Catherine muttered a curse. “Then go back and find a way to make her do it. I have to have her.”

“I can get you someone better. Technically, this isn’t Eve Duncan’s area of expertise.”

“I want Eve Duncan. Persuade her.”

“You can have the file, but I can’t promise Duncan. She walks her own path. Like you, Catherine.”

“Bullshit. I stopped walking my own path when you pulled me into working for the Company when I was seventeen. Since then, I’ve worked every dirty assignment you chose to toss me.”

“True. But how could I resist? You were a natural. Clever, lethal, and with a survival instinct that made you almost unstoppable. I considered it a recruiting masterpiece. After twelve years, I still do, Catherine.”

“I’m not complaining. I knew what I was getting into. I never

expected anything else.” She’d grown up on the streets of Hong Kong and barely managed to exist without starving for her first six years. All her life she’d had to fight for what she wanted, and Venable was no worse than other men who had tried to use her. Sometimes, she even liked him. He was totally dedicated to his work with the CIA and would let nothing stand in his way. It was surprising that she’d managed to work a deal with him about releasing that top secret restricted file. If the director hadn’t been getting so much heat from the media about the Winters kidnapping, she might not have fared so well. But the file wasn’t enough. She had to have more. “Eve Duncan. You know where the bodies are buried on every continent in the world. Bribe her, blackmail her, make her an offer she can’t refuse. I don’t care how you do it. Just get her for me.”

“I’m not promising you anything. I don’t have to. You’re obviously going to go in after Winters anyway.”

He was right. Even if she could only get the file, she would risk anything to have it handed over. “But if you don’t get Eve Duncan for me, I’ll get her myself. Do you want me to go after her?”

Silence. “No. I know you too well. You’d cause an incident that would cause me big trouble.” He paused. “I’ll do the best I can, but I don’t know where Eve Duncan’s bodies are buried. She’s clean, Catherine. If you’ve researched her as well as I think you have, then you know I can’t blackmail her.”

“That’s what I have to find out. Where her bodies are buried. Try. Do everything you can.” She started down the path toward the Munoz camp. “And I’ll do everything I can. I can’t talk any longer. I have to get moving. Has Munoz been in touch with anyone lately?”

“No, he’s not answered any of our messages.” He was silent a moment. “And I should tell you that late last night the Colombian government refused to release Munoz’s brother until the Winterses are free. They say they think he’s bluffing.”

“He’s not bluffing. If they don’t back down, Munoz will cut those hostages’ throats.”

“I agree. And that may mean whether I get you Eve Duncan or not may be a moot point. You may have nothing with which to bargain.” He hung up.

Catherine shoved her phone into the pocket of her jacket. Venable was right. Thanks to those politicians in Bogotá playing their little games, she’d be lucky to whisk Winters and his daughter away before Munoz decided to butcher them.

She wasn’t going to let that happen.

**THERE WAS SOMETHING WRONG.** Catherine’s gaze wandered over Munoz’s encampment. It was after three in the morning, and she hadn’t expected activity, but there was no—tension.

The man guarding the hostage tent was a good ten feet from the entrance flap, and he was the only one of Munoz’s men who appeared to be awake.

It made her uneasy.

She hesitated. It could be nothing.

She had passed Ron Timbers on the edge of the forest and knew that he’d had the camp under surveillance for most of the evening. He would have called her if there was a problem.

If he knew about the problem.

At any rate, she couldn’t stop now unless she had good reason.

She circled around in the trees until she was behind the hostage tent.

Catherine slit the canvas of the tent. Carefully. Silently. It was a small tent and the guard at the front entrance was only a scant ten feet from where she was working. But that lack of tension she’d sensed



in the camp might be a positive. The guard had appeared both sleepy and bored.

Let him stay that way, she prayed, as she lifted the torn flap. And let Winters and his daughter realize that there was no threat from someone trying to break *into* the tent. But then hostages weren't guaranteed to be thinking straight after two weeks of terror and incarceration. She started wriggling into the tent.

Darkness.

She couldn't make out anything for the first moment.

She froze.

Good Lord, the *stench*.

She was too late. She knew that smell.

Rotting corpse.

They were dead, and the tropic heat had already begun the decomposing process.

She had to be sure.

Her eyes had grown accustomed to the dark now, but she didn't need to see to find her way to the dead. The overpowering smell led her unerringly across the tent.

A man, hands tied, shot execution style in the center of his forehead. Catherine Ling swore beneath her breath as she sat back on her heels beside the body. She had known that it was a strong possibility Munoz would keep his word and kill Ned Winters when the Colombian government refused to give up Munoz's brother. Stupid bastards. What difference did it make if they had to go back and catch one more scumbag drug dealer? No, they'd rather risk an international incident and the death of an innocent American businessman.

"He's dead. You should have come sooner."

Catherine whirled to the corner of the tent at the whisper. Even in the half darkness she could see the glint of fair hair of the girl

huddled against the fabric of the tent. Kelly Winters, fourteen years old, taken in Caracas two weeks ago at the same time as her father. Catherine felt a rush of relief. At least she had a chance of getting the girl out.

“Shh.” She crawled toward the girl. “I’m Catherine Ling. I work with the CIA. Don’t talk. They’ll hear you.”

Kelly gazed numbly at her. “You should have come sooner.”

“I’m here now.” She nodded at the slit in the tent. “Come with me.”

The girl didn’t move.

Catherine glanced at the flap. The guard was a good ten feet on the other side of that thin canvas, but she couldn’t afford to argue and have him hear her. Choose her words and hope that they strike a chord. “Stay and we’ll die and they’ll win. They killed your father. Do you want them to win?”

The girl looked at her for a moment. Then she shook her head and began to crawl toward the slit.

Relief flooded through Catherine. She quickly crawled after her. “Now listen,” she whispered, as they emerged from the tent. “Run into the forest, try to be as quiet as you can. I have a friend, Ron Timbers, who will keep an eye on the camp for the next few minutes and make sure that your escape isn’t noticed. Then he’ll take off and meet us at the helicopter. When you come to a stream, you stop and wait for me, and I’ll take you the rest of the way. The helicopter will be landing about three miles from the stream, and we’ll board it and fly away from here. You’ll be safe.”

Kelly shook her head. “No, I won’t,” she said dully. “No one is safe.”

How could Catherine argue when she knew that was true? “As safe as you can be. Wait at the stream no more than about five minutes, then take off running north. Don’t wait for me.”

Kelly glanced back over her shoulder, her blue eyes wide. “You think Munoz may catch you.”

“No, but if he does, you don’t want him to get his hands on you again. Then he’d win, wouldn’t he? If you’re smart, he won’t be able to catch you.” She put her finger on her lips. “No more talk. Run!”

Kelly didn’t hesitate. She was already on her feet and streaking into the shrubbery.

Good.

Now to make sure any pursuit was disrupted and thrown off track when they heard the sound of the helicopter.

And the best way to do that would be to remove Munoz himself from the mix.

No guards at his tent. From the reports she’d read, Munoz was too macho-arrogant to think he would need help in any situation.

Let’s see if you do, Munoz.

She started crawling toward his tent.