

ALSO BY IRIS JOHANSEN

Blood Game

Storm Cycle (with Roy Johansen)

Deadlock

Dark Summer

Quicksand

Silent Thunder (with Roy Johansen)

Pandora's Daughter

Stalemate

An Unexpected Song

Killer Dreams

On the Run

Countdown

Blind Alley

Firestorm

Fatal Tide

Dead Aim

No One to Trust

Body of Lies

Final Target

The Search

The Killing Game

The Face of Deception

And Then You Die

Long After Midnight

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Lion's Bride

Dark Rider

Midnight Warrior

The Beloved Scoundrel

The Magnificent Rogue

The Tiger Prince

Last Bridge Home

The Golden Barbarian

Reap the Wind

Storm Winds

Wind Dancer

EIGHT DAYS TO LIVE

IRIS JOHANSEN

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EIGHT DAYS TO LIVE

ONE

Paris

Day One

7:35 P.M.

SHE WAS LAUGHING, Jack Millet thought, enraged. Even as Jane MacGuire had left the sidewalk café, a lingering smile had remained on her lips.

He had to smother the anger, remind himself that she would not be laughing for very long.

Eight days, bitch. Just eight more days, and I'll send you to rot in hell.

He had watched her sitting there in the café, staring out at the Seine, and the seething anger had been building steadily within him. She had no right to look that serene and content.

Liar.

Blasphemer.

He started after her, careful not to get close enough for her to know she was being followed. He knew where she was going. The Denarve Art Gallery was only two blocks away and tonight they were exhibiting Jane MacGuire's paintings and would probably be heaping praise on her.

Blind. They couldn't see the ugliness of the atrocity she had committed.

She moved lithely, gracefully, her red-brown hair shining as the sunlight burnished it. Everything about her shouted that she was young and vibrantly alive.

And that enraged him, too.

Dead. You should be dead. You should be burning in Hell.

Eight days. But he wanted it to happen now. It was a deep hunger that wouldn't go away.

But if he could hurt her, it would help him to wait for that final glory. If he could rip and tear at her and destroy everything she valued and loved, he might be able to keep himself under control.

Take her, torture her, and make her scream with agony.

But he had to do it himself. He could order help in the taking, perhaps Folard, but after that, he couldn't trust his brothers to be able to stop themselves from killing her before her time. Their souls weren't as strong as his had become through all the years of service to the Offering.

She was quickening her steps as she approached the gallery. The sun was going down, and the rays of the setting sun were causing her hair to blaze with fiery highlights.

Blaze. Scald. Burn. Suffer.

Yes, fire is an exquisite weapon. Knives. Scalpels. Whips. There are so many ways to hurt you, Jane MacGuire.

I know them all.

MALEVOLENCE.

Overwhelming malice.

Jane stopped, stiffening, as her hand reached out to open the carved oak door of the Denarve Gallery.

For an instant she couldn't breathe, and she instinctively glanced back over her shoulder at the street behind her.

Nothing. A peaceful Parisian street on a beautiful spring day. No threat.

Imagination. A trick of the mind. Maybe a little nervous reaction because of the show tonight?

But she didn't usually have nerves.

She glanced over her shoulder again.

Nothing.

Imagination.

She pulled open the carved oak door and went into the gallery.

"There you are." Celine Denarve turned to Jane and frowned with mock indignation. "I thought I was going to have to send the bloodhounds after you. Marie and I have been slaving with the preparations to make this exhibit the finest I've ever given for any artist, and you go strolling off as if it has no importance. It's an insult."

Jane grinned. "You know that you would have whisked me out of here if I'd offered to stay and help." Celine was reacting with her usual sense of Gallic drama, and it always amused Jane. High drama was so far removed from her own practical character. She had flashes of intensity and recklessness, and that might be why she and Celine had so quickly become friends, but it was Celine's basic shrewdness and kindness that had cemented that friendship. "How many times have you told me that an artist should paint and stay out of the business of selling her work?"

"Many times." Celine turned to her assistant, Marie Ressault, who had come out of the office carrying an ice bucket. "Put it at the bar, Marie. If I give everyone enough champagne, they will forget that Jane's not really the Rembrandt I've been hyping for the past month."

“I believe those art critics may already be a little skeptical,” Jane said dryly. “Though if anyone could convince them, you could.”

“You’re right. I’m splendid.” She smiled brilliantly at Jane. In her late thirties, Celine was sleek and dark-haired and as attractive as she was shrewd. She might know every trick in the book about pushing a young-and-coming artist up the next rung of the ladder, but she did it with honesty and a bubbly exuberance. “That’s what it takes to make a starving artist an icon.”

“I hate to tell you, but I’m not a starving artist. I did have a few successful shows before you appeared in my life.”

“Yes, but those other gallery owners didn’t make you focus on the important things. They should have made you do publicity to make you a household name.”

“Not my cup of tea.”

Celine made a face. “That’s why you make my life so difficult. I have to work twice as hard just to make you show up for an interview. I’ve begun to tell everyone that they have to forgive you because, after all, you’re just an artist with a shy and sensitive soul.”

“What?”

“It works,” Celine said cheerfully. “They don’t know you.”

“That’s obvious.” Sensitive soul? she thought with amusement. She couldn’t think of any term that would be less applicable. She hoped she was kind and caring and could see beneath the surface, but she was neither fragile nor temperamental. She was only a street kid who had been lucky enough to have been born with a certain talent and the drive to make that talent come alive.

She smiled as she thought about what Joe Quinn would have said about her sensitive soul. She had been a tough ten-year-old when she had come to live with Joe and Eve Duncan, and they had accepted her and made sure that she knew how to handle herself in

any situation. He was a detective with the Atlanta Police Department, and his teaching had been both thorough and intense. Karate, Choi Kwang Do, and, when she grew older, training in weaponry. Those lessons had forged a bond that had helped draw them closer, and it was her very good fortune that she hadn't been a prissy kid who would have forced Joe to treat her delicately. No, he would have laughed himself silly at anyone thinking she was overly sensitive.

"You're smiling." Celine was studying her face. "What are you thinking?"

"That you must be very persuasive to make them believe that bullshit."

"Yes, I am extraordinary." She took a step back and tilted her head as she gazed at the paintings beyond the velvet ropes. "The lighting is perfect. That's essential, you know."

Jane's lips quirked. "Yes, it makes even my humble paintings look good."

"That's what I thought." She glanced away from the paintings to Jane. "But perhaps they're not completely humble. I didn't totally lie when I told those critics you were the next Rembrandt."

"Crap."

"No, you're exceptional. You're young, only a few years out of college. In another five years, you'll rock the art world. If you'll let me help you." She shrugged and changed the subject. "Lighting may help your paintings, but no amount of lighting is going to help you if you're dressed in those jeans and shirt. Not here in Paris. Hurry. Go upstairs and change. The first guests should be here in forty-five minutes."

"I'll be ready." Jane headed for the elevator. Celine maintained an apartment above her gallery, and she had insisted that Jane stay with her before the exhibit. "I promise."

“You cut it very close,” Celine called after her. “Where did you go?”

“Just for a walk, then to the café to have a glass of wine. I thought I’d relax before the hullabaloo tonight.”

“It will be a very elegant hullabaloo. Did it work? Did it relax you?”

“Yes.” She had a sudden memory of that moment just before she had entered the gallery and that feeling of malevolence so intense that it had shaken her. Imagination. It had to be imagination. “For the most part.” She got into the elevator and firmly dismissed that chilling moment from her mind. “Yes, I guess it worked.”

10:45 P.M.

“A WONDERFUL SHOW.” Celine Denarve locked the door of the gallery after her assistant, Marie, had left. “A *magnificent* exhibit. We’ve sold everything but the three paintings you’ve put a hold on.” She smiled over her shoulder at Jane. “How can I convince you to let me sell those, too? How am I to become a rich woman if you persist in being selfish with the best of the lot?”

“They’re not the best of the lot. I just have a personal attachment to them,” Jane said. “The technique is much cleaner in some of the others.” Lord, she was tired. She hated these art shows. The critics who dissected her work, the reporters probing how she felt when she was painting a certain canvas, the people who bought art because it went with their furniture. But she supposed she should be grateful that she’d met with such success so early in her career.

She *was* grateful. And she couldn’t have asked for a gallery owner more enthusiastic and devoted than Celine. This was her

second show at Celine's gallery and their warm relationship made all the bullshit bearable.

"You look exhausted. You need a glass of champagne." Celine moved toward the small bar against the wall. "Though you shouldn't need any stimulation at all. You should be walking on air. Like I am."

"And so you should. Tonight is as much your triumph as it is mine."

"That is true. I did well." She turned and smiled at Jane. "And you did well, too. You did not look bored. You were actually charming to that art critic from the *London Times*. I think I'm getting through to you."

"Don't count on it. I'm glad it's over. You're right, I am tired." It's only that it has been a very exhausting month, Jane thought. She was ready to go home and close herself away and just paint.

"This will wake you up." Celine poured them both a glass of champagne, and her gaze went back to the three paintings about which she had been previously talking. "You may not see it, but those paintings are very special." Celine crossed the room and handed the glass to her. "Technique is important, but when there's so much passion, one can overlook a few mistakes."

She frowned. "What mistakes?"

Celine chuckled. "See, you may criticize yourself, but I may not. You have an ego like all artists."

"I never said I didn't." Jane grinned. "I'm no Rembrandt, but I'm pretty good. In spite of what your French critics say. They don't agree that passion is more important. But I do get better all the time."

"The proof is in the pocketbook," Celine said. "And name me a great artist who didn't suffer for their art." She strolled up to the two paintings at the end of the row. "Me, I prefer to sell your

paintings and not suffer at all. My commission will buy me a fine house on the Riviera.” She tapped the frame of the painting of the castle that towered on a steep cliff that overlooked the sea. “Not like this one. It’s much too forbidding. I don’t like Scotland. Not enough sun.” She tilted her head. “But you must like it. That castle has substance and power. It’s very . . . strong.”

“I don’t know much about Scotland. I’ve only visited MacDuff’s Run a few times.”

“But it had great impact on you.”

“Yes.” She took a sip of her champagne. “You could call it impact.”

“I’ve met John MacDuff. He was here for a charity ball several years ago. I was dazzled. Earl of Cranought, Lord of MacDuff’s Run . . . It’s hard to ignore all that intensity and Rob Roy mystique.”

“I assure you that he’s no Rob Roy.” Though the people on his property looked upon him as something of a folk hero and kowtowed to the Laird. MacDuff had won a gold medal for archery several years ago at the Olympics, then joined the 45th Commando Unit of the Royal Marines and earned a chestful of medals for bravery. “And he’s arrogant as hell.”

“But he’s sexy enough to get away with it,” Celine said. “I tried to throw myself into his bed, but he would have none of me.”

“Then he was a fool.”

Celine nodded. “I think so, too. He doesn’t know what he missed.” She glanced slyly at Jane. “Tell me, did you make it into his bed? I’ll forgive you if you let me sell this painting.”

Jane shook her head. “Our relationship was a little more complicated.”

“Nothing is more complicated than sex,” Celine said. “Nor anything so beautifully simple.”

Jane chuckled. "You're just trying to live up to your image as a Parisienne."

"I don't need to live up to it. I live and breathe it." She added teasingly, "Come now, tell me the truth. If you visited that cold castle more than once, he must have offered you a warm bed to lure you. Why else would you go there?"

Celine clearly wasn't going to give up. Just give her the bare bones and make her happy. "Actually, it had to do with a chest of gold coins, a lost ancient family treasure belonging to one of MacDuff's ancestors. I'd become involved with tracing that chest from its origin in Herculaneum."

"Ah, a lost treasure." Celine's eyes were wide and shining. "Tell me more."

"There's not much more to tell. You wouldn't be interested."

"Which means you're closing up and don't want to share." She was obviously disappointed. "I would be interested, you know. I'm not just being inquisitive. I consider you my friend as well as my client. It's natural to want to know about people you care about." She shrugged, but her expression was wistful. "But I will try to understand."

Jane stared helplessly at her. Celine was an irresistible force who was all the more appealing because she was sincere. "It's no big deal." Though those weeks at MacDuff's Run had shaken her entire life at the time. "It was years ago, when I was a student in college. I was an art major with a minor in archaeology. I became interested in stories of a young actress, Cira, who was the toast of ancient Herculaneum. She fascinated me. It was rumored that she had escaped the eruption of Vesuvius and fled to Scotland, carrying with her a chest of gold coins that would be worth a fortune today."

"But you said it was a long-lost MacDuff treasure."

“Cira changed her name and identity and she and her husband, Anthony, founded the MacDuff family in the highlands.”

“And you went to Scotland to find the chest and found MacDuff. Now that’s a treasure I can appreciate. How romantic.”

“Not at all romantic. I wasn’t the only one trying to trace that chest. Thomas Reilly, a criminal who would take first place on any scumbag chart, was after it, too. He was interested in some specific coins that were supposed to be included with the others. Before it was over it got very ugly. Good people were hurt.”

“But you and MacDuff found the chest and lived happily ever after . . . in bed?”

“No, in the end finding the treasure wasn’t worth it to me.”

Celine shook her head reprovingly. “Treasure of any kind is always worthwhile. This story is very disappointing to me.”

Jane smiled. “Sorry, I’ll try to concoct a more interesting tale for you next time.”

“Please do that. I’m losing faith in you.” She glanced at the portrait next to the one of MacDuff’s Run. “You said this was one of the young men who grew up on MacDuff’s estate? Jock . . . ?

“Jock Gavin. Yes, his mother was housekeeper at the estate, and he grew up running in and out of the castle. He was like a younger brother to MacDuff.”

“He’s quite beautiful, almost an Adonis with that fair hair and those silver-gray eyes. But he’s too young for you.”

“There wasn’t anything like that between us. I painted that portrait years ago. He was nineteen when I did that first sketch. I was only a couple years older and we . . . bonded. Jock was going through a rough time, and I was able to help him through it.”

“Nineteen. He looks younger.” She frowned. “And older. I can’t quite put my finger on it. There’s a kind of an explosive breakability. Intriguing. What kind of a rough time?”

Jane was silent a moment, then said reluctantly, "He was close to a breakdown."

"Why?"

Jane didn't answer.

Celine's gaze narrowed on her face. "You don't want to talk about it. You were willing to tell me all about MacDuff and that silly treasure but not about this beautiful boy. That's even more intriguing."

I don't have the right to talk about it, Jane thought. Celine might be a good friend, but Jane was still fiercely protective of Jock. What was she going to say about him? That boy you think so beautiful had been chemically brainwashed and trained as an assassin by Thomas Reilly? That gentle kid was one of the good people who had been twisted and hurt? Jock, who had already killed over twenty people before that portrait had been painted? Jock, the boy who had tried to commit suicide three times before she and John MacDuff were able to break through to him and bring him back to sanity?

No, that was just between her and Jock Gavin and would remain that way. "He's my friend. I don't gossip about my friends." She added teasingly, "Which should make you happy. I could have a field day if I decided to gossip about all your affairs."

"I wouldn't care. It would only make me seem more fascinating. But it's good to know that I could trust you." She smiled. "More champagne?"

"No, I haven't finished this one."

"Too bad. I'm trying to get you a little mellow."

"So that I'll let you sell the painting of MacDuff's Run?"

"No, I'll let you keep that one. And the portrait of the beautiful boy." She sipped her champagne. "I was only leading into my big pitch."

Jane gazed at her warily. "Celine?"

Celine moved to the next painting. “Now this is a painting that I feel it is my duty to take off your hands. True, it also has impact. But who would want to keep it with them all the time? It’s depressing. Even the title. *Guilt*. What is that supposed to mean?”

Jane stared at the man’s face in the portrait. He was bearded, his cheeks sunken, his dark eyes burning. She had painted that face years ago. It was one of her works that had been a compulsive obsession until she had finished it. And, once created, she hadn’t been able to let it go. “I have no idea. He doesn’t exist except in my imagination.”

And in those dreams that had occurred over and over until she had completed the painting.

Dreams . . .

No, she wasn’t going to mention those dreams, not even to Celine. “*Guilt* seemed right at the time.”

“You don’t know him? He’s not your favorite uncle or your brother?”

“No.”

“Then there’s no attachment.” She beamed at Jane. “And you can give him up to make us both rich.”

“Celine, I told you that—”

“No, no. Wait until I tempt you.” Celine pulled a card out of her evening purse. “Donald Sarnoff. Computers. San Francisco. He came to me when the show first started and made an offer on *Guilt*. Very nice. I regretfully refused.”

“Good.”

“But then he came back fifteen minutes before the show was over. He said that he had to have the painting.”

“Too bad. He can’t have it.”

“Jane, he offered seven hundred thousand dollars for it.”

“What?”

Celine nodded. “My darling Jane, you’re very successful, but you’ve not reached that particular pinnacle yet. We’d be foolish to refuse an offer like that. Money is important.”

“Yes, it is.” Jane glanced back at the canvas. Celine was right about its being an uncomfortable painting. Yet she had never been able to give it up. It owned her as much as she owned it.

But she didn’t like to be owned. She had fought it all her life. From the time she was a street kid just trying to survive in the slums of Atlanta.

“Jane?” Celine was softly nudging, wheedling. “I could give a release to the papers, and it would increase your status enormously. It would be a great career move.”

Everything Celine was saying was true. But, dammit, she didn’t like the idea of her career depending on how much money her painting was worth.

For heaven’s sake, that was life. Forget the idealistic bullshit.

“May I sell it?” Celine asked. “Make me rich and yourself famous. What do you say?”

Jane looked back at the tormented face in the portrait. She didn’t speak for a long moment. “I say that I may be crazy, but I’m not giving it up.” She finished her champagne. “And that I’m tired and want to go to bed.”

Celine shook her head. “You are crazy.” She shrugged. “But I will keep at you. Maybe I can get this California billionaire to go even higher. You hesitated for a moment.” She made a shooing motion. “Go on upstairs and get to bed. I have to make a few phone calls, then I’ll set the alarm.” She filled her champagne glass again. “Though how you can sleep after such a victory is a mystery to me. I want to go out and celebrate.”

Jane smiled. “Then do it. You deserve a celebration. This is the

best show I've ever had, and it's all due to you. You're a brilliant woman, Celine."

"Yes, I am." She tilted her head, considering. "And I believe I will go out. *Sacré Bleu*, one of us should do it. I don't know why I like you so much. You're very boring."

"True. But I had a rough week at home before I came back here to your Never-Never Land. I could use a little peace and quiet."

Celine nodded. "You should stay here in Paris. I know you told me how much you love your adopted parents, but they have to be very grim people. Your Joe Quinn is a police detective. And I've read about Eve Duncan and how famous she is for her forensic sculpting." She gave a mock shudder. "But dealing with all those skulls? Very depressing."

For Celine it would be depressing, Jane thought, so she wouldn't attempt to explain how Eve's work brought final closure to many parents of children who had been lost for years. "They're not grim. They just live in the real world." She looked around the gleaming marble floors and crystal chandeliers of the gallery. "And this is Cinderella's ballroom."

"The real world is what you make it," Celine said. "And I prefer my world beautiful and full of wonderful toys. When I was a child growing up wearing my sister's hand-me-downs, I swore I'd surround myself with nothing but things that were new and fresh and unique." She added, "Like you."

"My work?"

"Yes, yes. But they only reflect what you are. You're like me. You grew up tough, but you didn't let it poison you. You're still full of curiosity and willing to take risks." She nodded at the painting. "But refusing that offer is a very big risk. I'll have to concentrate on showing you the error of your ways."

Jane smiled. "You don't feel like concentrating on anything

but celebrating tonight. Go party.” She headed for the elevator that would take her to Celine’s elegant suite. It was a charming apartment, beautifully decorated and totally private. Celine might be a social butterfly, but she clearly liked to divorce herself from the gallery when she got on the elevator and went to her apartment. As Jane punched the button, she glanced back over her shoulder.

Butterfly indeed. Celine was wearing a black Valentino dress that was the height of sophistication, but she was pulling on a red silk cape that made a brilliant splash of color and caused the ebony darkness beneath it to shimmer. “You look beautiful. Have a good time.” She added quietly, “Thank you for everything, Celine. You’re right, it was a wonderful show.”

“Yes, it was. I did splendidly, didn’t I? I can’t talk you into coming with me?”

“Not tonight. But I’d love to have dinner with you tomorrow if you don’t have plans.”

“Then we’ll have another celebration tomorrow. We’ll go shopping and buy you a midnight blue dress with many sequins, I think. It will be dazzling with that wonderful red-brown hair.”

“Sequins aren’t my style. And I don’t dazzle.”

“No, maybe not usually. But you’re beautiful and people stare at you and remember your face after they’ve forgotten all the dazzle around them. But I still think we need a *little* dazzle to set my Paris whirling.” She swept toward the door, with the red silk cape flowing behind her like a banner. “Go to bed, you boring person. I’ll set the alarm to keep someone from stealing you, but don’t expect me in before dawn.”

Jane was smiling as she got on the elevator. Celine might not be in before dawn, but she’d be up and working in her gallery by nine. As for Jane, she’d be packing and perhaps spending a few hours walking around Paris before she met Celine for dinner. She loved

this city though she never felt totally at home here. It was too sparkling and effervescent. She had been much more at home in Scotland at MacDuff's Run though the castle's grandeur should have intimidated her. Particularly since her time there had been filled with the overwhelming threat engendered by that bastard, Reilly, and his hunt for MacDuff's lost treasure.

Why had she suddenly thought of MacDuff's Run? Why not the lake cottage back in Atlanta?

It must have been Celine talking about the painting and her lust for MacDuff. He had obviously impressed her. Why not? MacDuff was an impressive man, and the force of his personality was pure magnetism. She wasn't sure that Celine had believed her when she'd told her that she hadn't gone to bed with MacDuff. Their relationship had consisted of part ally, part adversary in the past few years. Whenever they were together, he ignited a response in her that always put her on the defensive. She didn't need MacDuff in her life.

The elevator opened, and she stepped out into Celine's apartment. All blues and creams and Louis XV furniture and gorgeous bronze mirrors. Restful, but exquisite. All Celine. Not at all Jane. She'd be glad to get back to the U.S. and the simplicity and comfort of her own apartment.

Day after tomorrow. She'd already made her flight reservations.

For now, shower, crawl into the bed that looked like Marie Antoinette had probably slept in it.

In a few minutes Celine would probably be at a club, flitting from table to table like the butterfly to which Jane had mentally compared her.

Jane didn't envy her at all.

JANE'S CELL PHONE was ringing.

She reached out sleepily for the phone on the nightstand.

"Whore."

She was jerked wide-awake at the hoarse male voice.

"Bitch."

"Who is this?"

"Blasphemer."

An obscene caller. She was about to hang up when something occurred to her. "How did you get my cell number, you creep?"

"Liar."

"I'm going to hang up. And then I'm going to call the police and see if they can trace you."

"They won't be able to do it. I have all the angels of paradise on my side."

"I don't believe angels would have anything to do with a slime-ball like you. You'd better check your information."

"You sit there spitting foulness at me in your little cocoon above the gallery of sin, Jane MacGuire. You think you're safe."

A chill went through her. Gallery. This was no random obscene call. He was speaking in English. He knew where she was. Who she was. "I am safe."

"Not from me. Not from us."

"Who are you?"

"I've left a calling card at the front door. Come and get it."

"No way."

"Never mind. I see a taxi coming down the street. It may be the whore who runs this gallery. I'll give my card to her."

He hung up.

Celine.

She jumped out of bed and ran to the window overlooking the street. There was a taxi drawing to the curb across the street.

Damn. Damn. Damn.

She'd be stupid if she went down and opened that door.

But if she didn't, then that bastard who had called her might attack Celine when she finished paying the driver and came into the vestibule of the gallery.

She dialed Celine's number.

No answer.

Dammit, she wished she had a gun. But it was just too difficult traveling with even licensed firearms through airport security. So compromise. Call the police and tell them she suspected an intruder, then go downstairs and talk to that son of a bitch through the door and try to distract him.

She ran to the kitchen, grabbed a butcher knife, and ran toward the elevator. What the hell was the French version of 911?

THE GALLERY WAS DARK. Celine must have turned out the lights when she had put on the alarm before she left.

Jane froze for a second as she stepped out of the elevator.

The carved oak door of the front entrance was directly across the room from where she was standing.

She could see the headlights of the taxi through the plate-glass window to the right of the door.

Stay where you are, Celine. Don't get out of the taxi.

She ran across the room.

Distract him. Quick.

When she was close enough to be heard, she stopped, and called, "I'm here. Are you out there, scum?"

Nothing.

"You're brave on the telephone. Talk to me, bastard."

Silence.

Had he gone away, or was he waiting for Celine to come toward the door?

And then the front door began to slowly open.

She froze.

But it couldn't be opening. The door was locked, and the alarm would have gone off.

She took a step back, her grasp tightening on the butcher knife.

Someone was there.

A dark form was silhouetted against the dim glow of the streetlight.

Her heart was pounding. Where the hell were the police?

"Blasphemer." He stepped forward. "He told me to wait for you. I'm trying to wait, but it's an agony. Come to me." He had something in his hand, something dark and pointed. "Surely the angels will forgive me."

"I've called the police. They'll be here any minute." Dear God, he was big. But she had the knife, knew karate, and if that wasn't a gun in his hand, she might be able to—

He sprang toward her.

She sidestepped, then sprang forward, and the edge of her hand came down on the side of his neck. It was only a glancing blow, but he staggered and almost fell. She ran past him and out into the street.

The taxi. Warn Celine.

"Celine! Stay where you are. Don't come—"

A hand grasped her shoulder, spun her around. "Bitch." That bastard had followed her from the gallery. He was raising his hand with the odd-shaped weapon. Her foot lashed out and connected between his legs.

He screamed but didn't release her.

She'd have to use the knife.

He suddenly arched violently backward and cried out.

What was hap—?

Then she saw the gleam of metal as a dagger exited his chest.

Someone was behind him. In the darkness, she could only make out a man, tall, lean, powerful.

“Jane.”

He knew her name, but so had the bastard on the phone. Her hand tightened on the butcher knife. She stiffened, waiting.

The man who had attacked her was falling to the street.

“Don’t make me take the knife away from you, Jane. You’d fight, and I might hurt you.”

She knew that voice and that faint Scottish accent. Relief poured through her as her gaze flew to his face. “Jock?” She stared at him in bewilderment as she lowered the knife. “What are you doing here?”

“At the moment, cleaning up Venable’s mistakes.” Jock Gavin was bending over the man lying before them, going through his pockets. “And trying to get a step ahead of the police I hear a few blocks away. You called them?”

“Yes.” She could hear the sirens, too, now. Relief was surging through her. The police were coming. Jock was here, everything would be all right. She could trust Jock. At times she felt as if they had been closer than brother and sister.

He flipped open the man’s wallet. “Henri Folard.”

She was suddenly jarred out of her shock. “Oh God, you killed him, Jock.”

“Yes.”

“You’ll get in trouble. I could only report an obscene caller. I don’t even know if we can even prove he was trying to attack me. I know you were only trying to help me, but you have to get out of here.”

“No. Tell them I was up there in the suite already, and I came down to protect you until the police got here.”

“But we can’t prove he was any threat to me. It was only an obscene—”

“We can prove it, Jane,” Jock said gently. “Look at the door.”

“Door? What are you talking about?” Jock’s hands were on her shoulders, gently turning her to face the gallery, to face the huge oak door that had slowly swung open to reveal the man who had attacked her. “What has—”

She lifted her head and looked at the door, which had swung back closed from the weight of the burden it carried. The burden that was now illuminated by the streetlight.

“*No!* Oh, God in heaven, no!”

Celine Denarve, still dressed in her flamboyant red cloak, stared back at Jane, her face frozen and contorted with pain and horror. She had been nailed to a cross that had been fixed to the oak door by a huge crucifix nail. There were nails in her palms and feet.

There was another nail piercing her chest.

Jane screamed.