

ALSO BY IRIS JOHANSEN

Eve

Chasing the Night

Shadow Zone (with Roy Johansen)

Eight Days to Live

Blood Game

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

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Final Target

The Search

The Killing Game

The Face of Deception

And Then You Die

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The Ugly Duckling

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Midnight Warrior

The Beloved Scoundrel

The Magnificent Rogue

The Tiger Prince

Last Bridge Home

The Golden Barbarian

Reap the Wind

Storm Winds

Wind Dancer

QUINN

IRIS JOHANSEN

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QUINN

CHAPTER

1

STOP ME. FIND ME. KILL ME.

Agony tore through him as John Gallo pushed through the brush, the branches scratching his face as he ran.

How long had he been on the run?

Hours? Days?

And why couldn't he stop?

Why couldn't he let the sheriff's men find him, shoot him? He knew these woods so well that it was easy to avoid capture. Whenever they had come near, instinct and self-preservation had kicked into high gear, and he had fled.

And those instincts were so good, he thought bitterly. They had been honed by all the battles, all the killings, all the ugliness of his life. Save yourself so that you can kill again.

But at least he had not stayed to kill his hunters. That was part of the reason why he had not exposed himself. He couldn't

trust himself not to kill them. He was too well trained, too expert in the ways of destruction.

And then there was the madness.

There was no telling where that sickness would take him.

He was climbing, he realized. He was climbing the high hill where he'd done his last kill.

Paul Black. He'd broken his neck.

And Joe Quinn. If he was dead, that, too, could be laid at his door.

He broke free of the shrubs and trees and was standing on the edge of the cliff over the lake.

What was he doing there?

One step, and he would plunge over the precipice.

Why not?

Maybe that damnable instinct would not kick in when he hit the lake below.

"It will, you know."

He stiffened, afraid to turn around to see who had spoken.

Madness. It was back, taunting him, torturing him.

"Look at me."

He slowly looked over his shoulder.

A little seven-year-old girl, with curly red-brown hair wearing a Bugs Bunny T-shirt.

The same T-shirt she had worn the day she had died.

The day he might have killed her.

The agony was overwhelming, searing through him, blocking everything but the sight of her and his own guilt.

His daughter, Bonnie . . .

Milwaukee Airport
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

"YOU'RE JANE MACGUIRE?"

Jane turned away from the baggage claim carousel to see the woman who had spoken walking toward her. It had to be Catherine Ling, she thought. Her adoptive mother, Eve, had described the CIA agent in detail, but the reality was even more stunning. Catherine Ling was part Asian, part Caucasian, and more exotic and magnetic than any woman Jane had seen except on the movie screen. She appeared to be in her late twenties, tall, graceful, with high cheekbones, huge dark eyes slightly tilted at the corners, olive-gold skin, long dark hair pulled back in a chignon. But it was the aura of power and vitality that surrounded her that was the most impressive. As an artist, Jane's first impulse was to ask her to pose for her. The second was to squeeze every bit of information she could from her. "I'm Jane. You're Catherine Ling? How is Joe?"

"Is that your bag?" Catherine lifted Jane's suitcase off the carousel with easy strength. "Joe was no better when I left the hospital. But as far as I know, he's no worse. Eve doesn't want to leave him, so she asked me to pick you up. I've made reservations for you at a Hyatt near the hospital. We'll check you in, then I'll take you to the hospital."

Jane shook her head. "To hell with that. I'm going to the hospital to be with Eve. I should have been with her ever since Joe was admitted. It's been almost two days. Why the hell didn't she call me before this?"

“You were in London, and there wasn’t much you could do. Joe was in surgery for a long time. Eve said she didn’t want to talk to you until she could give you good news.” She headed toward the exit. “That didn’t happen, so she called you anyway. She thought you should be here.”

Jane nodded jerkily. “That’s what she said. She was so upset that she didn’t realize how that sounded. I felt like I was flying to a deathbed.” She took her suitcase from Catherine. “She didn’t even tell me what happened with Joe, only about his wound. A knife thrust to the back that did serious organ damage.” Her lips tightened. “A knife. Whose knife? I don’t want to stress Eve out by asking questions. That means you’re on the hot seat, Catherine. I want to know everything before I walk into that hospital.”

Catherine nodded. “I thought that would be my job.” She stopped before a silver Toyota. “Get in. I’ll fill you in while I drive you to the hospital.” She slipped into the driver’s seat. “But I’m going to go through a drive-through McDonald’s and get you a cup of coffee.”

“You think I’ll need the caffeine to get through this?”

Catherine gave her an appraising glance as she started the car. “I think you’re probably a cool customer. But you love Eve and Joe. They raised you from the time you were ten. You have a right to be upset and need a little bolstering.” She pulled out of the airport parking lot. “And if you don’t, I do. You’re going to be pissed at me.”

“Am I?” Jane stiffened. “Why?”

“I’m partly the reason Joe was hurt.”

“Then yes, I’ll be pissed at you. I’ll want to break your neck. Is Eve angry with you?”

"No, she says no one could have stopped Joe."

Jane slowly nodded. "She's right. No one could ever stop Joe from doing what he wanted to do. I knew that the first time I saw him. But it relieved me. I knew if Joe ever became my friend, it wouldn't be because Eve wanted him to do it. It would be because he wanted it himself. That was important to me. I was a ten-year-old Eve had picked up from the streets because we'd known the moment we'd come together that it was right we stay together. But Joe was a big part of her life even then. I didn't want to have to walk away."

"And you didn't have to do it," Catherine said. "You became a family." She smiled faintly. "A very strange family. Eve Duncan, a famous forensic sculptor, Joe Quinn, a police detective, and you, a kid from the streets."

"We learned to mesh," Jane said. "Eve was no problem. Joe was slower. But we both loved Eve, so we worked at it." She smiled. "And then as we got to know each other, it wasn't work any longer. Funny how love makes everything easier."

"Yeah, funny." Catherine pulled into the McDonald's drive-through. "Do you want anything besides coffee?"

"No."

"Black?"

"Yes."

She studied Catherine as she gave the coffee order. How much love had Catherine had in her life, she wondered. Eve had told her she'd been a street kid like Jane but had grown up in Hong Kong. She'd married a much older man, then been widowed. She had come into Eve's life when she'd asked Eve to help her find her son, who had been kidnapped by a Russian criminal

wanting revenge on Catherine. Eve had helped her rescue him, and they had become close friends. There was no doubt in Eve's mind that Catherine adored her son, Luke. But Jane had gotten the impression that, other than Luke, Catherine's life had been her job as a CIA agent.

"You're looking at me as if you're trying to take me apart." Catherine's look was quizzical as she handed Jane her coffee. "Is it your artist's eye, or are you taking aim?"

"Maybe a little of both." Jane met her gaze. "I admit the first thing I thought when I saw you was that I'd like to paint you. But you'll definitely be on my list for extermination if you had anything to do with Joe lying in that hospital. Tell me what happened to him." She looked away, and added, "Let me start you on the path. It was about Bonnie, wasn't it?"

Catherine nodded. "It's not surprising that was your first guess. I imagine you've lived with Eve's obsession for finding Bonnie since you came to her."

"Guess?" Jane took a drink of her coffee. "Finding her daughter's murderer and her daughter's body has guided her life. It's guided all our lives. She's tried for many, many years to bring her Bonnie home." She looked out the window at the passing scene. "And Joe's been with her, trying desperately to understand, to help, to find Bonnie, so that Eve could be at peace. I can't tell you how many times she's come to what she thought was that final resolution and been disappointed. But she never gives up."

Catherine added quietly, "And Joe was getting tired, weary of worrying about her, wanting her to come to terms."

Jane looked back at her. "Yes, how do you know? Joe wouldn't complain."

"Joe and I are a lot alike," Catherine said. "And I had to examine all facets of Eve's problem before I made a move to ask her to help me find my son, Luke. I didn't want to make a mistake."

"Mistake?"

"I promised her I'd pay her back for helping return my son to me," Catherine said. "She wouldn't accept anything, but I couldn't let it go. I knew the only gift she would think worthwhile would be for me to find her daughter's killer." Her lips twisted. "So that was what I had to give her. Whether or not it might destroy the life she had with Joe."

"You found him?" Jane's eyes widened. "You actually found Bonnie's killer?"

"I found two possibilities. Paul Black, who was already on Eve's search list."

"She told me about him."

"But I was betting on a new stallion in the race. One that would be much more troublesome. Naturally, I had to pull him front and center."

"Who?"

Catherine's eyes were fixed on the towers of St. Joseph's Hospital, which had come into view. "John Gallo. He was Bonnie's father."

Jane stiffened. "What? But Eve told me he was dead."

Catherine shook her head. "A cover-up by the military. Eve will explain everything later. I'm just giving you the bare bones. But there was evidence Gallo was in Atlanta the month Bonnie was kidnapped. So I gave Eve all my information and threw in my opinion."

“And she went after John Gallo,” Jane whispered.

“And Paul Black,” Catherine said. “But she felt terribly guilty about risking Joe again. So she tried to leave him out of it.”

“She should have known that wouldn’t work,” Jane said. She knew how guilty Eve felt about involving Joe, but she could no more stop hunting for Bonnie’s killer than Joe could abandon Eve and stop protecting her. Both were facts of life. “Gallo hurt Joe?”

Catherine shook her head. “Paul Black. And Gallo killed Black.”

“Good.”

“Not so good. Before he died, Black told Eve that Gallo had killed Bonnie.”

“And she actually believed the bastard?”

“She told me that she would swear Black was telling the truth. And Gallo took off and disappeared. Neither the police nor I have been able to find him.”

“But what would make him kill his own little girl?”

“He was suffering from bouts of schizophrenia and violent delusions caused by years of mistreatment in a prison in North Korea.”

“My God.” Jane shook her head. “That must have been a terrible nightmare for Eve. How can you imagine a man who gave you a child could kill it?”

Catherine’s lips tightened. “Well, I handed Gallo to her and made her imagine it.” She pulled into a parking spot in the lot of St. Joseph’s Hospital. “And then I helped Joe try to find him whether Eve wanted him along or not.” She turned off the ignition. “Are you still blaming Joe and not me?”

Jane gazed at her a moment. "You're blaming yourself enough. You don't need any help." She got out of the car. "Where can I find her?"

"ICU. The visiting hours are very short, but Eve can watch him through the glass. If she's not in the waiting room, she'll probably be in the hall at ICU."

"Are you coming with me?"

Catherine shook her head. "Eve needs family. I'll check you in at the Hyatt and take your suitcase up to your room. Give me a call when you're ready to leave the hospital."

"Thanks." Jane turned to walk away.

"How did you feel about Bonnie?" Catherine asked suddenly. "I know it's none of my business, but I'm curious. You said that the search for her killer ruled your lives. That must have been difficult for an adopted kid to accept."

Jane shook her head. "I knew what was important to Eve when I came to her. I wasn't her child, I was her friend. That was enough for me. How could I ask for more?"

"Some kids would have been more demanding."

Jane lifted her brows. "You?"

Catherine shook her head. "But then I probably wouldn't have accepted any relationship when I was your age. I was an independent young demon. I suppose I still am."

"Eve is always the exception," Jane said. "You obviously have a close relationship with her now."

Catherine smiled as she started to back out of the parking place. "You're right. You and I are more alike than I would have believed. Eve is the sun we all revolve around."

Jane watched her drive out of the parking lot before she started to walk across the parking lot toward the front entrance. She could feel the tension increase with every step. She was going to Joe, who might well be dying. She was going to Eve, who could lose the man who made her life worth living.

How did she feel about the search for Bonnie? Jane had said all the right things, and they had all been true. What she hadn't told Catherine was the agony she felt when Eve and Joe were put in danger by that search. She could accept it. But she couldn't stop wishing that the search would end.

And she couldn't stop wishing that Eve would release Bonnie. Or, dear God, that Bonnie would release Eve.

EVE WALKED SLOWLY DOWN the corridor toward the ICU.

Soon she would be able to see Joe again. He'd be pale and drawn, his features appearing as cleanly carved and beautiful as the visage on a tomb. It would scare her to death as it always did.

But it scared her more not to see him and to imagine him slipping away with her not by his side.

That was where she should always be. Next to Joe.

If God would let him stay with her. And if Joe still wanted her if he did come back. The memory of that last day at the lake house was suddenly before her. His eyes looking down at her as she sat in the swing.

"I can't be easy. It's not my nature. But it's my nature to love you."

And it was her nature to love Joe.

Please be better, Joe. Be awake. At least, have more color.

“Good afternoon, Ms. Duncan.” The ICU nurse was coming out of the unit. “May I get you anything?”

“Yes, permission to go sit with him.”

She shook her head. “Not yet.” She hesitated. “But the doctor said that maybe we should let you go to him soon.”

She stiffened, her heart leaping. “He’s better.”

The nurse shook her head. “I shouldn’t have said anything,” she said quickly. “Dr. Jarlin will talk to you.”

Fear surged through her. “You talk to me, dammit. He’s worse?”

The nurse was looking at Eve with that same sympathy and kindness that had struck terror in her heart since she’d brought Joe to the hospital. “Dr. Jarlin will talk to you. I’ll call him and tell him that you’re concerned.” She hurried back toward the nurses’ station.

Concerned? She was sick with fear.

Joe was dying, and they weren’t going to be able to save him. That was why they were going to let Eve go to him. To say good-bye.

She couldn’t say good-bye. He had to stay with her.

She leaned her head on the plate-glass window and closed her eyes. She felt the tears running down her cheeks as the agony flowed through her.

Look at him. Surely she’d be able to know, to sense some change. Maybe they were wrong. Doctors didn’t know everything.

She took a deep breath and opened her eyes. She stiffened in shock.

Bonnie.

Through the years she had often had visions and dreams of her daughter. Then she had come to believe they weren't visions at all. It didn't matter. Real or not, having Bonnie come to her had made life worth living and let her come alive in so many ways.

But now something was different.

Bonnie, in her Bugs Bunny T-shirt, her red-brown hair shining in the lights of the ICU, as she stood by Joe's bed, looking down at him.

Her expression . . . Love. Perfect love.

Why was she here?

The fear became terror.

To take him away, to ease the transition from this life to the next?

"No, Bonnie!"

Her daughter looked across the room at Eve standing behind the glass.

She smiled luminously. But then turned back again to gaze down at Joe with that same expression of love.

What did that smile mean? Could she help him to live?

Or could she only help him to die?

Eve's palms pressed against the cold glass as tension and sorrow tore through her.

"Joe!"

SWIRLING darkness.

Someone calling.

"Joe!"

Calling him . . .

But he didn't want to leave the darkness. There was comfort here and yet also a strange excitement and anticipation.

Was this death?

He had never been afraid of it. He wasn't now.

But that voice calling . . .

Eve.

She was hurting, needing him. He should go back.

And there was someone else . . .

Bonnie.

She was there in the darkness. Always before she had been the stranger, the one apart; but now she was close, as familiar to him as Eve, and much of the comfort was coming from her. Did she want him to stay in the darkness?

But he could feel Eve's terror and sadness.

He had to stop them both and try to make Eve happy.

As she made him happy . . .

He had known from the first moment he had seen her all those years ago that he could not be happy if he was not with her.

Strange . . . He had not believed that love could come out of nowhere and stay forever. He had been such a cynical son of a bitch. Smart, young FBI agent, sure of himself and everything around him, ready to take on the world.

He'd been certain the Bonnie Duncan kidnapping wasn't going to be a problem. The local Atlanta police were sure that she was the victim of a serial killer, and the little girl would never show up alive. Sad story, but Joe had worked on other serial killings and had experience in profiling as well. He was well qualified

to take on the case. He'd go down to Atlanta and dive in and show the locals how the FBI could handle a case like Bonnie's.

But he wouldn't get involved with the family of the victim no matter how sympathetic he was toward them. That was always a mistake. It was better to stand apart so that he could work without emotion. That would be far more efficient.

Yes, after all, it was just one more case. A few months in Atlanta, and he'd be coming back to start another job. There was nothing about this Duncan case in Atlanta to interfere with his career, certainly nothing to interfere with his life . . .