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# DEAD AIM

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J O H A N S E N

# Dead Aim



BANTAM BOOKS  
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**DEAD AIM**  
**A Bantam Book**

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PRAISE FOR  
THE BESTSELLING NOVELS OF  
IRIS JOHANSEN

DEAD AIM

"Smoothly written, tightly plotted, turbo-charged thriller . . . Megaselling Johansen doesn't miss."—*Kirkus Reviews*

"Readers will stay up all night reading this cat-and-mouse chase." —*Booklist*

"The nonstop action and slick plotting won't disappoint." —*Publishers Weekly*

A Main Selection of The Literary Guild,  
Doubleday Book Club, Mystery Guild, and  
Doubleday Large Print Book Club  
An Alternate Selection of Book-of-the-Month Club

NO ONE TO TRUST

"Vintage, fan-pleasing Johansen." —*Booklist*

"Fast-moving plot . . . Another zippy read from megaselling Johansen." —*Kirkus Reviews*

"Gritty, powerful and fast-paced, *No One to Trust* starts off with a bang and never lets up. . . . This is one thriller that will keep you on the edge of your seat." —*Romantic Times*

## BODY OF LIES

"Filled with explosions, trained killers, intrigues within intrigues . . . it all adds up to one exciting thriller." —*Booklist*

"A romantic thriller whose humanity keeps the reader rooting for its heroine every step of the way." —*Publishers Weekly*

"[Johansen] doesn't let her readers down."

—*The Star-Ledger*, Newark, NJ

## THE FINAL TARGET

"A winning page-turner that will please old and new fans alike." —*Booklist*

"A compelling tale."

—*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

"Thrilling . . . will have fans of the author ecstatic and bring Ms. Johansen new readers."

—*Bookbrowser*

## THE SEARCH

"Thoroughly gripping and with a number of shocking plot twists . . . [Johansen] has packed all the right elements into this latest work: intriguing characters; a creepy, crazy villain; a variety of exotic locations." —*New York Post*

"The book's twists and turns manage to hold the reader hostage until the denouement, a sure crowd pleaser." —*Publishers Weekly*

"Johansen keeps her story moving at break-neck speed." —*Chicago Daily Sun*

"This is a great mystery with exciting twists and turns." —*Baton Rouge Advocate Magazine*

## AND THEN YOU DIE

"Iris Johansen keeps the reader intrigued with complex characters and plenty of plot twists. The story moves so fast, you'll be reading the epilogue before you notice." —*People*

"Fans of Mary Higgins Clark will enjoy Iris Johansen's latest, a supercharged thriller. There's peril, romance, and suspense aplenty as the good guys race the clock to stop the villains."

—*Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine*

"From the first page, the reader is pulled into a realm of danger, intrigue, and suspense with a touch of romance and enough twists and turns to gladden the hearts of all of her readers."

—*Library Journal*

"Johansen's thrillers ooze enough testosterone to suggest she also descends from the house of Robert Ludlum. Johansen pushes the gender boundary in popular fiction, offering up that rarity: a woman's novel for men."

—*Publishers Weekly*

"Fans of Iris Johansen will pounce on *The Search*. And they'll be rewarded."

—*USA Today*

## THE KILLING GAME

"Johansen is at the top of her game . . . an enthralling cat-and-mouse game. . . . Perfect pacing . . . the suspense holds until the very end." —*Publishers Weekly*

"Most satisfying." —*New York Daily News*

"Fast-paced, clever suspense novel that kept me intrigued to the end. In fact, I read it in one sitting." —*Roanoke Times*

"An intense whodunit that will have you gasping for breath." —*Tennessean*

## THE FACE OF DECEPTION

"One of her best . . . a fast-paced, nonstop, clever plot in which Johansen mixes political intrigue, murder, and suspense." —*USA Today*

**BANTAM BOOKS BY  
IRIS JOHANSEN**

Fatal Tide  
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  
The Ugly Duckling  
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  
The Wind Dancer



## LONG AFTER MIDNIGHT

"Iris Johansen is incomparable."

—Tami Hoag, *New York Times* bestselling author of  
*Dark Horse*

"Flesh-and-blood characters, crackling dialogue and lean, suspenseful plotting."

—*Publishers Weekly*

"A lively, engrossing ride by a strong new voice in the romantic suspense genre."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

# 1

## Arapahoe Junction, Colorado October 15

"I know I'm late, dammit." Alex Graham's hand clenched on her cell phone. "I'll get those pictures to you as soon as I can."

"You'd get them to me sooner if you'd stop working in the rubble and start taking pictures of those rescue workers whose job it is to do it," Jim Karak said sarcastically. "Old news is no news, Alex. That dam broke almost a week ago and the magazine goes to press in two days."

"They're still digging survivors from the landslide caused by the dam break."

"Then you should be taking warm, heroic pictures instead of manning a shovel. You're breaking one of the cardinal rules. You're becoming part of the story."

"There may be people alive beneath that—" It was no use. Karak had one priority and that was the story. "You'll get the pictures." She hung up and leaned back against the wall and rubbed her temple. God, she

was tired. She'd be lucky if Karak didn't call her back and tell her to find another magazine to publish her work. She wasn't being fair and certainly not professional. If she hadn't had a decent track record before this, Karak would have dumped her days ago.

"Problems?" Sarah Logan and her dog, Monty, were standing in the doorway of the trailer.

"A few." Alex grimaced as she rose to her feet. "It seems I'm not doing my job. I'm not focusing on what's important."

"You could have fooled me." Sarah filled Monty's bowl with water and sat down on the floor beside him while he drank. "We found a baby alive in that hell-hole this morning. I'd say that was pretty important."

"Me too." Alex smiled. "Screw Karak."

Sarah didn't return her smile. "I don't want you to lose your job, Alex. I know how much your work means to you. There are other volunteers out there helping to dig."

Alex lifted her brows. "Oh, then you have too much help?"

"You know there's no such thing in a disaster like this. We have to work fast or— Okay, we need you. I just don't want you to be hurt. God knows there's enough pain in this world."

And Sarah Logan witnessed a good deal of it, Alex thought. She and her golden retriever, Monty, were in a canine search-and-rescue team, and Alex had run across her on half a dozen disaster sites during the last five years. In the horror of natural and man-made tragedies, a strong bond of friendship had been forged. "I'll be okay."

"Your editor is right. This isn't your job." She shook her head. "Look at you. You're covered in dirt from head to toe. Your hands are bleeding from that shovel and you haven't slept in twenty-four hours."

"Have you?"

Sarah ignored the question. "And it's more than your hands that are bleeding. Take a step back, Alex. It will break you if you get too close to it. Believe me, I know."

"It's not as though I haven't been to other disaster sites."

"But then you weren't as involved. You were taking photographs and helping in the first-aid tent. You weren't uncovering the bodies of people you hoped would be alive."

She didn't want to think of those bodies. There had been too many in the last few days. "Yet you do it all the time. You could stay home and live soft, and yet every time there's a call, you and Monty are off and running. I'm surprised your husband doesn't raise hell."

"He doesn't like it, but he understands." Sarah frowned. "But we're not talking about me. I've watched you work and there's no one more dedicated. You love what you do and you've told me a dozen times that your job is to tell the story. Don't get sidetracked."

"I'm not sidetracked. I'll get it done." She bent down and stroked Monty's soft fur. "I just can't—I'll get it done."

Sarah stared at her, troubled. "I don't think you should accept assignments like this anymore. I've seen

it coming since Ground Zero, but it's getting worse. You've . . . changed."

*Steel and concrete and that stinging smoke that seemed to cover the world like a shroud.*

"Ground Zero changed all of us."

*Sarah and Monty crawling among the ruins while Alex watched helplessly.*

*Sarah and Alex holding desperately to each other while the tears poured down their faces.*

Sarah nodded. "But I had someone to go home to while I healed. I should have made you come with me."

"Life had to go on. I had to go on." She shrugged. "And if I took some baggage with me, then that's the way it had to be. I'm usually okay. This one is rough. It's brought back too many memories."

"But it's not the same," Sarah said gently. "We've found survivors here, Alex. Seventy-two so far."

"That's not enough," she whispered. "It's never enough. I can't stand by and let—" She cleared her throat and changed the subject. "Is it your rest time?"

Sarah shook her head. "I just had to get Monty some water. My canteen was empty. We still have a few hours to work until dark. It's less dangerous for Monty if he can see clearly what's out there." She paused. "But we've just had two bits of good news. The President is coming here next week."

"It's about time. Vice President Shepard was here the day after the dam break."

"Yeah, I was impressed. But it's when the President shows up that FEMA and all the aid organizations get a boost."

"That's good." She made a face. "Maybe I can convince Karak I was only waiting for Andreas to show up so that I could give him a really big story." She shook her head. "Nah, I'm no good at lying. Besides, security is so tight around the President right now that I wouldn't get within a mile of him."

"I'm surprised he's coming at all. There was a bombing at the embassy in Mexico City last night."

"The same terrorist group?"

Sarah nodded. "Matanza claimed it. And an effigy of Andreas was left burning on the lawn."

"Bastards." It was the third embassy attack by the Guatemalan terrorist group in the last six months. If it wasn't the Middle East, it was Guatemala or Venezuela. Juan Cordoba and his Matanza group had always been rabid revolutionaries in their own country, but now—fueled by drug money and Al Qaeda support—they had grown powerful enough to take aim at Andreas and the administration that was trying to stabilize the party in power. It seemed impossible to Alex that there had ever been a time when her country hadn't been surrounded by terror and ugliness and threats. Yet she could remember a childhood filled with trust and innocence and the belief that nothing really bad could come knocking on her door. The memory filled her with frustration and anger and immense sadness. "I hope your second bit of good news is better than your first."

"Hey, you have to take the bitter with the sweet. At least Andreas isn't letting anyone scare him into ignoring people who need him. He should be safe enough visiting this site. All the evidence points to a natural

disaster here." She smiled. "And the preliminary report on the ground on the other side of the dam says it appears to be fairly stable. They're sending some teams up there tomorrow morning to do a final check. When the landslide buried this area, they were afraid the ground on the other side might be compromised."

"Jesus. That's all these poor people need. Another landslide."

"They tried to evacuate everyone from that area just for safety's sake. But it looks like they can go back home." Sarah stroked Monty's head. "Time to go back to work, boy." She stood up and headed for the door. "And it's a good time for you to take some photographs."

"How bossy can you get?" Alex followed her and stood in the doorway, gazing out at the disaster site. Every time she looked at the devastation it made her sick. The Arapahoe Dam had broken five days earlier and the water had rushed down into the valley below, killing over a hundred and twenty people. But the series of landslides caused by the explosive force of the water on either side of the valley was the horror they were dealing with now. The rock slides had buried the homes and businesses of Arapahoe Junction under tons of rock, and the area was still so unstable the rescue had to be done painstakingly by hand, not machine. Her glance shifted across the jagged wreck of the dam to the hills on the other side. The rocky terrain looked blessedly sturdy in a shaky world.

Christ, she was glad there wasn't going to be another horror piled on top of this one.

"Stop looking at it," Sarah called back to her. "Take those photos."

Sure, take the pictures. Ignore the fact that there might be more people alive under those rocks.

"Promise me," Sarah said.

"I promise. I'll take the damn photos. I'll get them and send them out today." She grabbed her shovel, which was leaning against the trailer. As Sarah had said, there was still light and the job on this side of the gorge was monumental. "But not now. I can't do it now. . . ."

It was late afternoon when Alex stopped working and went back to the trailer to get her camera.

She'd cut it close and she'd have to work fast to get the photos before dark. Well, if she didn't get all she needed she'd improvise.

A helicopter was descending at the first-aid tent a few hundred yards away from the trailer and she waved at Ken Nader, the pilot, as he got out of the aircraft.

He waved back and called, "I brought you that special lens to replace the one you said you damaged."

"Thanks. I don't need it right now. I'll be over later to get it." She turned and started up the hill.

The hillside was still crawling with men and women carefully picking away at the rocks. She'd gotten to know a few of them this week as they'd worked side by side. Janet Delsey was a resident of the town that had been buried beneath the landslide. She'd been in Denver when the tragedy happened. She worked in



the local library, and her parents had not been found yet.

Alex focused and took the picture.

Bill Adams was a truck driver who had been passing through when he'd heard about the dam. He'd parked his rig and volunteered to help.

She snapped the picture.

Carey Melway was a college student, full of idealism and hope, who had come down from Salt Lake City. Alex had watched him change from a kid to an adult in these last few days.

She took the picture.

She took four rolls of film in the next hour. The volunteers, the canine rescue teams, the flooded gorge.

"You left it a little late." Sarah was carefully making her way down the side of the mountain, followed by Monty. "Are you going to have enough material?"

"Too much." She looked at Janet Delsey again. "Do you think she has any chance of finding her parents alive?"

"A chance, if we can get to them in time. At least this isn't a mud slide. There are pockets of air beneath those rocks." She motioned for Monty. "I have to get down and feed him his dinner and vitamins. Are you almost finished?"

Alex shook her head. "I've got most of the human-interest shots, but I need a photograph that tells the big story, the scope of the rescue operation."

She waved her hand. "Good luck. You'll need it."

Sarah was right. It was difficult to encompass the full depth of a tragedy when you were on top of it.

*On top of it.*