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JOHANSEN

AN EVE DUNCAN FORENSICS THRILLER

What waits at the end
will kill you. . . .

BLIND
ALLEY

IRIS
JOHANSEN

BLIND
ALLEY

B a n t a m B o o k s



BLIND ALLEY
A Bantam Book

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*Praise for the
Bestselling Novels of*

IRIS JOHANSEN

BLIND ALLEY

"Johansen has become adept at mixing supernatural elements with intriguing suspense, and her new tale will please both fans and new converts with its unpredictable journey from Atlanta to the archaeological digs of Herculaneum in Italy." —*Booklist*

"Johansen's back . . . solid thriller, intriguing suspense."
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FIRESTORM

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"Johansen knows exactly what her devoted readers want and gives it to them once again in this impassioned romantic suspense novel. Her lusty characters, both good and evil, preen and snarl as they fight, love and kill with almost superhuman stamina and appetite."

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"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*

"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*

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

"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 breakneck speed."
—*Chicago Daily Sun*

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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."
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"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*

LONG AFTER MIDNIGHT

"Iris Johansen is incomparable."

—Tami Hoag, *New York Times* bestselling author
of *Kill the Messenger*

"One of the most thrilling books I have curled up
with in a long time."

—Michael Palmer, *New York Times* bestselling author of
Silent Treatment and *Critical Judgment*

"You'll be racing through to the last page."

—Catherine Coulter, *New York Times* bestselling author of
The Maze

"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*

THE UGLY DUCKLING

"Outstanding. A real page-turner. Many will add [Iris
Johansen's] name to their list of favorite authors."

—*Associated Press*

ONE

Calhoun, Georgia

Joe watched the body wrapped in a dark green tarp being carefully lifted from the grave by the forensic team.

"Thanks for coming, Quinn." Detective Christy Lollack was walking toward him. "I know it's not your case but I needed you. This is a weird one."

"What's weird about it?"

"Look at her." She moved toward the stretcher where the corpse had been placed. "The kids who found her nearly threw up."

He followed her and watched as she drew back the tarp.

There was no face. Only a skull remained. Yet from the neck down the cadaver was only slightly decayed and intact.

"It appears someone didn't want her identified." He looked down at her hands. "He bungled it. He

should have taken the hands. We'll be able to get a fingerprint match right away. DNA will take longer, but that will—"

"Look closer. Her fingertips are burned," Christy interrupted. "No prints. Trevor warned me there might not be any."

"Who?"

"Some Scotland Yard inspector. Mark Trevor. He sent an e-mail to the department after he read about the Dorothy Millbruk case in Birmingham and the captain dumped it in my lap. He stated he sent the same e-mail to most of the cities in the Southeast warning them that the perpetrator might be heading into their jurisdictions."

Millbruk . . . It had been a sensational homicide of a prostitute that had taken place four months ago. Joe mentally went over the details he remembered. "The Millbruk case was no connection. It didn't have the same MO. The woman was burned to death and left in a trash disposal."

"But she didn't have a face by the time the fire got through with her."

"No attempt was made to keep the Birmingham police from finding out who she was. They were still able to check prints." He shook his head. "Not the same killer, Christy."

"I'm glad you're so sure," she said sarcastically. "Because I'm not. I don't like this. What if he didn't want us to make a connection? What if he peeled her face off to slow us down so that we wouldn't know he'd moved into the area?"

"Possible." His gaze narrowed on her face. "What

do you want from me, Christy? It's not like you to ask for help."

"As soon as forensics gets through with her, I want you to take the skull to Eve to find out what that woman looked like. I don't want to wait until I find out who she is."

It was the answer he'd expected. It wasn't the first time he'd been asked to be an intermediary between the department and Eve. She was probably the best forensic sculptor in the world and the captain wasn't about to ignore a valuable asset. He shook his head. "No way. She's backlogged and working her ass off right now. I'm not loading anything else on her."

"We need to know, Joe."

"And I don't want her wearing herself out."

"For God's sake, do you think I'd ask you to do this if I didn't think it was urgent? I like Eve. I've known her and Jane for almost as long as I've known you. I'm scared. It's necessary, dammit."

"Because of some nebulous tip from Scotland Yard? What the hell do they have to do with this?"

"Two cases in London. One in Liverpool. One in Brighton. They never caught the killer and they believe he moved from the U.K. to the U.S. three years ago."

"Then they can wait for ID or Eve to get out from under."

Christy shook her head. "Come back to my car and I'll pull up Trevor's e-mail."

"It's not going to change my mind."

"It might." She headed for her car.

He hesitated and then followed her. She opened her laptop and accessed the e-mail.

"There it is. Read it and do what you like." She turned away. "I've got work to finish up here."

He scanned the letter and report and then flipped to the victim's page.

He stiffened with shock. "Holy shit!"

Lake Cottage
Atlanta, Georgia

She couldn't breathe.

No!

She would not die, she thought fiercely. She hadn't come this far to lie forever in darkness. She was too young. She had too many things to do and see and be.

Another turn and still no light at the end of the tunnel.

Maybe there was no end.

Maybe this was the end.

It was so hot and there was no air.

She could feel a scream of panic rising in her throat.

Don't give in. Panic was for cowards and she'd never been a coward.

But dear God, it was hot. She couldn't bear—

"Jane." She was being shaken. "For God's sake, wake up, baby. It's only a dream."

Not a dream.

"Dammit, wake up. You're scaring me."

Eve. Mustn't scare Eve. Maybe it was a dream if she said so. She forced her lids open and looked up into Eve's worried face.

The worried frown was replaced by relief. "Whew, that must have been a doozy of a nightmare." Eve's

hand stroked Jane's hair back from her face. "Your bedroom door was closed and I still heard you moaning. Okay now?"

"Fine." She moistened her lips. "Sorry I bothered you." Her heartbeat was steady and the darkness was gone. Maybe it wouldn't come back. Even if it did, she had to make sure it didn't disturb Eve. "Go back to bed."

"I wasn't in bed. I was working." She turned on the bedside lamp and then grimaced as she looked down at her hands. "And I didn't wipe the clay from my hands before I came in here. You probably have bits of it in your hair."

"That's okay. I have to wash it in the morning anyway. I want to look good for my driver's license photo."

"That's tomorrow?"

She sighed resignedly. "I told you yesterday that I'd need you or Joe to take me."

"I forgot." She smiled. "Maybe I'm in denial. Getting your first driver's license is sort of a rite of passage. It could be I don't want you to be that independent."

"Yes, you do." She met her gaze. "Ever since we've been together you've made sure that I could take care of myself in every way. You've done everything from giving me karate lessons to having Sarah train Toby as a guard dog. So don't tell me that you don't want me to be independent."

"Well, not independent enough to walk away from Joe and me."

"I'll never do that." She sat up in bed and gave her a quick, awkward kiss. Even after all these years,

loving gestures were difficult for her. "You'll have to kick me out. I know when I've got it good. So which one of you is going to take me to the Driver's License Bureau?"

"Probably Joe. I have to finish this skull right away."

"What's the urgency?"

She shrugged. "Search me. Joe brought the skull home from the precinct and asked me to make it top priority. He said it had to do with linking a group of homicides."

Jane was silent a moment. "A kid?"

Eve shook her head. "A woman." Her eyes narrowed on Jane's face. "You thought it might be Bonnie?"

Jane always thought it might be Bonnie, Eve's daughter who had been murdered when she was seven and whose body had never been found. The tragedy had been the impetus that had made Eve study to become a forensic sculptor to identify murder victims and bring closure to other grieving parents. The search for Bonnie and her passion for her career still dominated her life. She shook her head. "If you suspected it was Bonnie's skull you were working on, you wouldn't have even heard my stupid caterwauling." She held up her hand as Eve opened her lips. "I know. I know. You don't love me less than you did Bonnie. It's just different. I've known that all along. From the beginning. She was your child and we're more . . . friends. And that's okay with me." She settled back in bed. "Now, you go back to work and I'll go back to sleep. Thanks for coming in and waking me. Good night, Eve."

Eve didn't answer for a moment. "What was your nightmare about?"

Heat. Panic. Darkness. A night without air or hope. No, there had been hope. . . .

"I don't remember. Has Toby come back yet?"

"Not yet. I'm not sure it's a good idea to let him out at night. He's half wolf."

"That's why I let him roam. Now that he's grown, he has to have more freedom. He has too much golden retriever to be really dangerous to anything but squirrels. Probably not even them. He caught one once and all he wanted to do was play with it." She yawned. "Sarah said it was okay, but I'll stop him if you say the word."

"No, I guess not. Sarah should know." Sarah Logan was Eve's good friend as well as the canine search-and-rescue specialist who had given Toby to Jane. "Just keep an eye on him."

"I will. I'm responsible for him. You know I won't let you down."

"You never have." She stood up. "And we'll have a little celebration when you come home from getting your license."

Jane smiled slyly. "You going to bake a cake?"

"Don't be ugly. I'm not that bad a cook. It would serve you right if I did." She grinned as she headed for the door. "I'll have Joe stop at Dairy Queen and pick up an ice cream cake on the way home."

"Much more sensible."

Eve glanced at her over her shoulder and her expression became troubled. "Maybe too sensible. I wonder if we've made you a little too responsible, Jane."

"Don't be silly." She closed her eyes. "Some people are born responsible. Some people are born to be butterflies. You had nothing to do with it. For Pete's sake, you're not even my mother. Good night, Eve."

"Well, I guess I've been told," Eve murmured. Her gaze was caught by a sketch lying on the window seat. It was a picture of Toby sleeping on his bed by the fireplace. "That's very good. You're getting better all the time."

"Yes, I am. I'm not going to be a Rembrandt but genius isn't what it's cracked up to be. I've always thought being driven by art was for the birds. I want to be in control of any career I choose." She smiled. "Like you, Eve."

"I'm not always in control." She looked from the sketch to Jane. "And I thought you wanted to be a search-and-rescue worker like Sarah."

"Maybe. Maybe not. I guess I'm waiting for a career to choose me."

"Well, you have plenty of time to make up your mind. Although your attitude is a little surprising. You usually know exactly what you're going to do."

"Not always." She smiled impishly. "Maybe it's my adolescent hormones getting in the way."

Eve chuckled. "I doubt it. I can't see you letting anything stand in your way." She opened the door. "Good night, Jane."

"And don't work much longer. You've been pulling too many late nights in the last couple weeks."

"Tell that to Joe. He really wants this reconstruction."

"That's weird. He's always the one who tries to make you get more rest." Her lips tightened. "Don't worry, I'll tell him. Someone's got to look out for you."

Eve smiled as she opened the door. "I'm not worrying. Not with you in my corner."

"Joe's in your corner, too. But he's a guy and they're different. Sometimes things get in the way of their thinking."

"Very profound observation. You must repeat it to Joe."

"I will. He can take it and he likes me to be up-front with him."

"Well, you're certainly that," Eve murmured as she left the room.

Eve's smile faded as she closed the bedroom door behind her. Jane's remarks had been typical of her; fierce, protective, and far beyond her years. Eve had gone into the room to comfort and Jane had given her comfort instead.

"Something wrong?" Joe was standing in the doorway of their bedroom. "Is Jane okay?"

"A nightmare." Eve moved down the hall toward her studio. "But she's not talking about it. She probably thinks nightmares are a sign of weakness and heaven forbid she show any weakness."

"Like someone else I know." Joe followed her. "Want some coffee? I could use a cup right now."

She nodded. "Sounds good." She went back to stand before her pedestal. "Can you go to the Driver's License Bureau with her tomorrow?"

"Sure. I'd planned on it."

"I forgot." She grimaced. "You're a better parent than I am, Joe."

"You've been working your ass off." He measured