



An Unexpected Song (Loveswept)

By Iris Johansen

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Published for the first time in hardcover, here is *New York Times* bestselling author Iris Johansen's classic novel of unforgettable romance and unrelenting suspense—a ravishing thriller of a woman with a secret irresistibly drawn into the glittering world of a famous man whose past may be murder....

Taking the stage that evening, Daisy Justine had no idea that she was auditioning for her life. Watching from the darkness beyond the footlights was the world-famous composer Jason Hayes. The reclusive genius was seeking a new star to play the tragic heroine in his latest work, an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Othello*.

From the moment he heard her sing, Jason knew he'd found the star he'd been searching for his whole life. But coaxing her from Geneva to the bright lights of Broadway wasn't going to be easy. For she'd made a promise to another man that she couldn't break—nor disclose to anyone, not even Jason.

Jason has only two weeks to change Daisy's mind. But the closer he gets to her, the closer danger comes. For there's more than just artistic temperament behind Jason's legendary seclusion. He, too, is harboring a secret, stalked by a killer who's followed him for decades. Now he'll do anything to protect Daisy from the greatest threat of all—herself. Daisy's determined to catch the ruthless sociopath who'll stop at nothing to ruin their lives. And she's baiting the trap with the one victim the killer can't resist.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

IRIS JOHANSEN, who has more than twenty-five million copies of her books in print, has won many awards for her achievements in writing. The bestselling author of **Blind Alley**, **Firestorm**, **Fatal Tide**, **Dead Aim**, **No One to Trust**, **Body of Lies**, **The Search**, **Final Target**, and many others, she lives near Atlanta, Georgia, where she is currently at work on a new novel. Visit the official Iris Johansen web site at www.irisjohansennovels.com

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One

"Your little discovery can't be that good," Jason Hayes said dryly. "If she was, she'd be in New York or London, not Geneva, Switzerland."

"She's terrific." Eric settled back in his seat and glanced around the theater. It was a small house, but every seat was filled. "You can see how she packs them in."

"It's Les Miserables that packs them in. The music has magic."

"No, I tell you, it's her," Eric protested. "Would I have insisted on bringing you all the way here from New York if I hadn't thought you'd like her? Her voice is spectacular. If you didn't insist on cast approval, I would have tried to sign her up for Desdemona when I heard her last week. She's the best soprano I've ever--"

"Stop." Jason held up his hand. "I've heard it all before."

Eric looked intently at him. "Lord, you're a cynical bastard. That's your problem. You're spoiled rotten and there's nothing you haven't heard or seen. Where's your joie de vivre?"

Jason grinned. "You've got enough for both of us."

"And I'll keep it alive and well until I'm six feet under." Eric's square, boyish face lit with a mischievous smile. "Life's too much fun for me to be tempted into becoming a brooding Rochester like you."

Jason smiled crookedly. "The comparison is certainly apt."

"Damn," Eric muttered. "Hey, I'm sorry. You know what a big mouth I have."

"No offense." Jason glanced down at the program. "Her name is Daisy Justine?"

"Yes," Eric said absently, gazing at Jason. "You're looking tired as hell."

"I'll be all right. I can take a rest now. I finished the changes on the score for the last act right before I stepped on the airplane."

"The score didn't need changes."

"A score can always be made better."

"So speaketh the perfectionist. You work too hard. Peg and I haven't seen you for over eight months."

Jason kept his gaze on the program. "You know why."

"Yeah." Eric frowned, troubled. "But it has to stop. You can't go on like this."

"Why not?" Jason turned the page of the program. "You said I was spoiled rotten."

"I was joking." Eric paused. "You have to do something about it."

Jason knew he was no longer talking about getting more rest. "I've tried."

"I know, but there has to be a way to stop it. You can't protect the whole world."

"I don't protect the whole world." Jason smiled. "Just my corner of it."

"I don't like to see you like this. I remember when—"

"There's no use looking back," Jason said quietly. "And I live a good life. I have everything I want. Money, women, success. Stop thinking of me as a tragic figure."

Eric shook his head. "It's not enough."

No, it wasn't enough, and he should have realized that Eric, who knew him best, wouldn't buy his rationalizations. "I have my work."

Eric nodded. "If you didn't, you'd be crazy by now. Your music is the only thing that means a damn thing to you."

"Not entirely. I have a trifling fondness for you."

"Stop kidding. You're the greatest composer the stage has seen in this century, but there's got to be—"

"Andrew Lloyd Webber wouldn't agree with you."

"The audience and the critics do. Stop arguing with me."

Jason smiled. "I have no intention of doing so. My ego won't permit it."

"But you've become an almost complete recluse. You can't live only for your work."

"Who said? Watch me."

Eric sighed. "Dammit, you're stubborn."

Jason smiled affectionately. "You're the one who's hanging on to the subject, my fine bulldog." His smile faded. "Drop it, Eric."

Eric studied his expression and then nodded reluctantly. "Okay." He lowered his voice as the lights dimmed and the orchestra struck up the overture. "If I can't save you from yourself, at least I can feed your passion by serving Daisy Justine up to you."

Jason chuckled. "You sound like a pimp. I'm not in the market for a new bedmate."

"I wasn't talking about your carnal urges. You go through women like a hay fever victim goes through tissues." Eric grimaced. "That's not your passion, that's only lust."

"And what is my passion, O seer?"

"The songs," Eric said simply. "And the voices who sing them." The curtain was beginning to swing open as he added with satisfaction, "She's going to knock your socks off."

Jason shrugged. "We'll see." He wished he could exhibit more enthusiasm. Hell, Eric was probably right and he was becoming jaded. Maybe the woman was good, but she couldn't be as fantastic as Eric claimed. In spite of Eric's keen business sense that made him a top-notch producer, he was prone to occasional wild lapses in judgment when it came to talent. Well, the least he could do was give her a chance.

He settled back in his seat as the musical began to unfold before his eyes. He had gotten off the plane from New York only three hours earlier and was finding it difficult to stay awake, much less concentrate. As he had said, the music was fantastic, but he had seen the play too many times for it to hold him. For a regional production the set was surprisingly good, the cast, too, but not good enough to merit special attention in this first scene.

"Here she is." Eric grasped his arm as soon as the factory scene started, nodding toward a slim, golden-haired woman in a cornflower-blue peasant gown.

She certainly looked the part of Desdemona, Jason thought objectively. Daisy Justine possessed a riveting stage presence and was truly exquisite. A little above average height, she moved with extraordinary grace. She had generously sized breasts and a roses-and-cream complexion. Her long white-gold hair and delicate features gave her an air of angelic luminosity. Yes, that was the term. She shone as if lit from within.

"See?"

"The only thing I see right now, Eric, is that she looks like Desdemona." And that he was having an undeniable physical response as he looked at her, Jason realized with astonishment. He was dead tired, jet-lagged, and never before been attracted to the ethereal type, yet he could feel an unmistakable stirring in his groin as he looked at the woman.

Eric muttered something beneath his breath.

Then the scene switched to Fantine, racked by despair, kneeling alone on the stage to sing her big solo, "I Dreamed a Dream."

Jason stiffened, and he heard Eric's low chuckle.

Clear golden notes filled with beauty and passion soared through the theater. She lived the song, let it take her, became one with it.

"My God," Jason whispered. He experienced a fierce joy that was close to pain. He was lost, swept away, and for the remainder of the time she was on the stage, he sat transfixed, riveted, his gaze never leaving the luminous figure of Daisy Justine.

When the lights went up at the end of the first act, Eric turned to him. "Well?"

Jason forced his hands to release their grip on the arms of the seat and got to his feet. "Let's get the hell out of here."

"Now? Don't you want to wait and go backstage to see—" Eric broke off as he saw Jason striding up the aisle through the crowd. He got hurriedly to his feet and caught up with him as he reached the lobby. "What the hell is wrong with you? Dammit, I know you liked her."

"Yes." Jason's voice was clipped as he pushed through the crowd.

"Then let's go get her. She's not on again until the last scene."

"We'll wait until the show's over. Let's find someplace to have coffee." Jason welcomed the cool air on his face as he started down the street toward the cafe on the corner. Heaven knew he needed something to clear his head. He felt punch drunk. "What do you know about her?"

"That she sings like an angel and can act to boot."

"What else?"

Eric fell into step with him. "I talked to the director, Hans Keller, and he said she was good-natured, always on time, thoroughly professional. She studied with Stolori in Milan on a scholarship. She's twenty-four, mother dead, and lives with her father in a cottage in an artists' colony on the outskirts of Geneva. He's an artist."

"Any good?"

Eric shrugged. "Mediocre." He glanced at Jason curiously. "What difference does it make? We're hiring the woman, not her father."

Jason avoided the question. "Why is she playing in a two-bit production when she should be on Broadway?"

"How do I know?" Eric asked with a touch of irritation. "Look, do you approve of her as our first choice for Desdemona or don't you?"

"I approve." Jason opened the door of the cafe and a bell tinkled merrily, announcing their arrival. As a tuxedo-garbed waiter hurried toward them from across the room, Jason muttered, "Do you think I'm an idiot? She's absolutely mesmerizing."

Eric smiled jubilantly as he followed his brother. "Now you're talking. So we sign her tonight?"

Jason gazed blindly at the cozy, damask cloths as he followed the waiter to a table. Eric was right, he was acting weird as hell and he couldn't seem to control it. His reaction to Daisy Justine had been incredibly intense, more intense than Eric could possibly guess.

It was the music, he assured himself. How long had he waited...

From [AudioFile](#)

Originally written for the Bantam Loveswept series, this title presents the story of Daisy Justine, a soprano who mesmerizes composer Jason Hayes with her portrayal of Desdemona, the tragic heroine of Shakespeare's OTHELLO. Pamela Dillman deftly portrays Daisy as a soft, quivering bird caught in the talons of an eagle but who miraculously survives, ultimately becoming the mysterious seductress who is willing, despite murder attempts and blazing car crashes, to confront a quintessential psychopath. Dillman portrays Jason as a possessive, lusty, reclusive composer who is as obsessed as Othello. Like Desdemona, Daisy becomes the light to Jason's darkness, drawing Jason out from his Othello mask into a realm of unforgettable romance. K.A.T. © AudioFile 2006, Portland, Maine-- Copyright © AudioFile, Portland, Maine

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