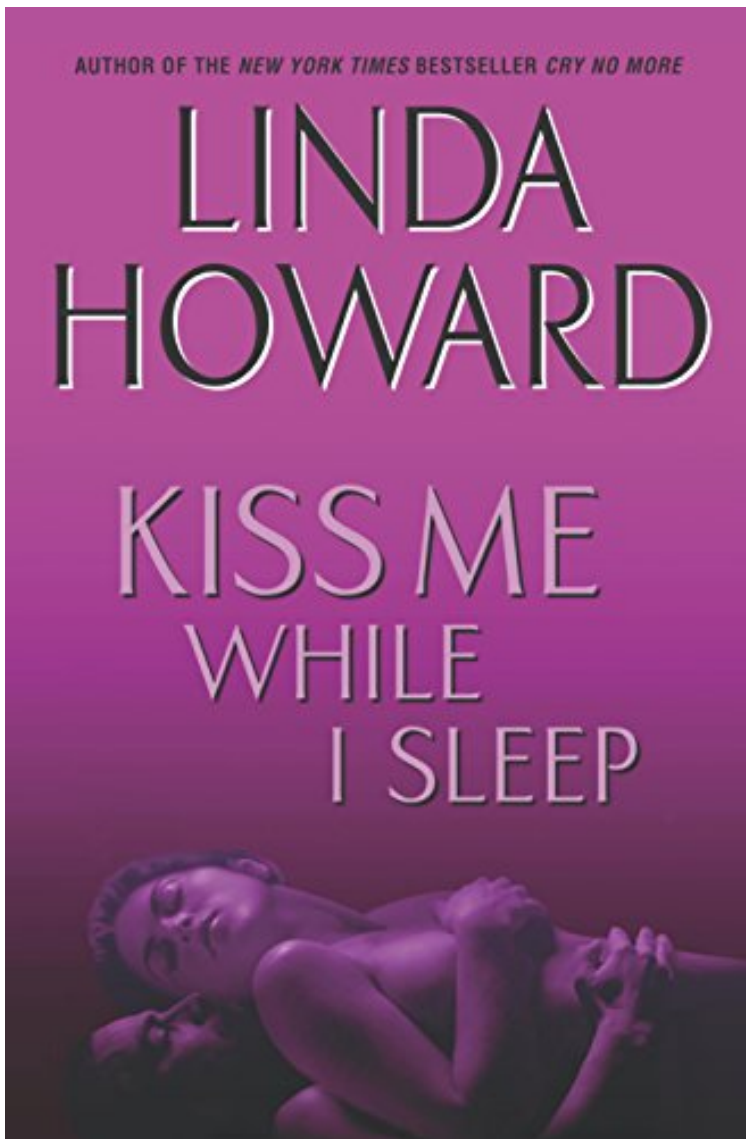


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# Kiss Me While I Sleep



*Par Linda Howard*  
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**Description :** Description du produitIf you sense someone's watching you from afar, or if you feel a shadow other than your own at your back, I might as well pack it up and call it a day. It's a job that makes a killing. Efficient, professional, and without apology, Lily Mansfield is a hired assassin, working as a contract agent for the CIA. Her targets are the powerful and corrupt, those who can't be touched by the law. Now, after nineteen years of service, Lily has been drawn into a dangerous game that hasn't been sanctioned, seeking vengeance for her own reasons. Each move bolder than the next, she is compromising her superiors, drawing unwanted attention, and endangering her very life. Though stress and shock have made her feel somewhat invincible and a little cocky, Lily knows that she too can be taken out in an instant. And if it's her time, so be it. She intends to go down fighting. A CIA agent himself, Lucas Swain recognizes the signs of trauma in the line of fire. His orders: either bring her in or bring her down. Yet he too is drawn into the game with Lily Mansfield, dancing on a tightrope as he tries to avoid a major international incident while still battling a

tenacious foe who is dogging their every step. Keeping laser focus on the task at hand while vigilantly watching her back, Mansfield never sees the lethal peril that lies directly in her path . . . and how loyalty has a price. Chock-full of the intrigue, breathless action, and sensuality that have made Linda Howard the master of romantic suspense, *Kiss Me While I Sleep* is a daring thriller of passion, sudden twists, and richly imagined characters who live and breathe in reader's hearts. It is the most gripping and complex novel of Linda Howard's career.

Presentation de l'diteurIf you sense someones watching you from afar, or if you feel a shadow other than your own at your back, I might as well pack it up and call it a day.Its a job that makes a killing. Efficient, professional, and without apology, Lily Mansfield is a hired assassin, working as a contract agent for the CIA. Her targets are the powerful and corrupt, those who cant be touched by the law. Now, after nineteen years of service, Lily has been drawn into a dangerous game that hasnt been sanctioned, seeking vengeance for her own reasons. Each move bolder than the next, she is compromising her superiors, drawing unwanted attention, and endangering her very life. Though stress and shock have made her feel somewhat invincible and a little cocky, Lily knows that she too can be taken out in an instant. And if its her time, so be it. She intends to go down fighting.A CIA agent himself, Lucas Swain recognizes the signs of trauma in the line of fire. 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It is the most gripping and complex novel of Linda Howards career.From the Hardcover edition.ExtraitChapter OneParisLily tilted her head and smiled at her companion, Salvatore Nervi, as the matre d silently and with grace seated her at the best table in the restaurant; her smile, at least, was genuine, though almost nothing else about her was. The pale arctic blue of her eyes was warmed to a hazel brown by colored contact lenses; her blond hair had been darkened to a rich mink brown, then subtly streaked with lighter shades. She touched up the roots every few days, so no telltale blond showed. To Salvatore Nervi she was Denise Morel, which was a common enough surname for there to be plenty of Morels in France, but not so common that the name set off subconscious alarms. Salvatore Nervi was suspicious by nature, a fact that had saved his life so many times he probably didnt remember all of the occasions. But if everything worked right tonight, at last he was caughtby his dick, as it were. How ironic.Her manufactured background was only a few layers deep; she hadnt had time to prepare more. She had gambled that he wouldnt have his people dig any deeper than that, that he would run out of the patience required to wait for the answers before he made a move on her. Normally if a background was required, Langley prepared it for her, but she was on her own this time. Shed done the best she could in the time she had. Probably Rodrigo, Salvatores oldest son and number two in the Nervi organization, was still digging; her time was limited before he found out that this particular Denise Morel had appeared out of thin air only a few months before.Ah! Salvatore settled in his chair with a contented sigh, returning her smile. He was a handsome man in his early fifties; his looks were classic Italian, with glossy dark hair and liquid dark eyes, and a sensuous mouth. He made a point of keeping himself in shape, and his hair hadnt yet started to grayeither that or he was as skilled as she at touch-ups. You look especially lovely tonight; have I told you that yet?He also had the classic Italian charm. Too bad he was a cold-blooded killer. Well, so was she. In that they were well-matched, though she hoped they werent an exact match. She needed an edge, however small.You have, she said, but her gaze was warm. Her accent was Parisian; she had trained long and hard to acquire it. Thank you again.The restaurant manager, M. Durand, approached the table and gave a deferential bow. It is so nice to see you again, monsieur. I have good news: we have procured a bottle of Chteau Maximilien eighty-two. It arrived just yesterday, and when I saw your name, I put it aside for you.Excellent! Salvatore said, beaming. The 82 Bordeaux was an exceptional vintage, and very few bottles remained. Those that did commanded premium prices. Salvatore was a wine connoisseur and was willing to pay any price to acquire a rare wine. More than that, he loved wine. He didnt acquire bottles just to have them; he drank the wine, enjoyed it, waxed poetic about the different flavors and aromas. He turned that beaming smile on Lily. This wine is ambrosia; you will see.That is doubtful, she calmly replied. I have never liked any wine. Shed made that plain from the start, that she was an unnatural Frenchwoman who disliked the taste of wine. Her

taste buds were deplorably plebeian. Lily, in fact, enjoyed a glass of wine, but when she was with Salvatore, she wasn't Lily; she was Denise Morel, and Denise drank only coffee or bottled water. Salvatore chuckled and said, We shall see. He did, however, order coffee for her. This was her third date with Salvatore; from the beginning she had played it cooler than he wanted, refusing him the first two times he'd asked her out. That had been a calculated risk, one designed to allay his caution. Salvatore was accustomed to people seeking his attention, his favor; he wasn't accustomed at all to being turned down. Her seeming lack of interest in him had piqued his own interest, because that was the thing about powerful people: they expected others to pay attention to them. She also refused to cater to his tastes, as in the wine. On their two previous dates he had tried to cajole her into tasting his wine, and she had adamantly refused. He had never before been with a woman who didn't automatically try to please him, and he was intrigued by her aloofness. She hated being with him, hated having to smile at him, chat with him, endure even his most casual touch. For the most part she managed to control her grief, forcing herself to concentrate on her course of action, but sometimes she was so sick with anger and pain that it was all she could do not to attack him with her bare hands. She'd have shot him if she could, but his protection was excellent. She was routinely searched before being allowed anywhere near him; even their first two meetings had been at social occasions where all the guests were searched beforehand. Salvatore never got into a car in the open; his driver always pulled under a protected portico for him to enter, and he never went anywhere that required him to make an unprotected exit from the vehicle. If such an exit wasn't possible, then he didn't go. Lily thought he must have a secure, secret exit from his house here in Paris, so that he could move about without anyone knowing, but if he did, she hadn't spotted it yet. This restaurant was his favorite, because it had a private, covered entrance that most of the patrons used. The establishment was also exclusive; the waiting list was long, and mostly ignored. The diners here paid well for a place that was familiar and safe, and the manager went to some lengths to ensure that safety. There were no tables by the front windows; instead there were banks of flowers. Brick columns throughout the dining floor broke up the space, interfering with any direct line of sight through the windows. The effect was both cozy and expensive. An army of black-suited waiters wove in and out among the tables, topping off wineglasses, emptying ashtrays, scraping away crumbs, and generally fulfilling every wish before most of them were even voiced. Outside, the street was lined with cars that had reinforced steel doors, bulletproof glass, and armored bottoms. Inside the cars were armed bodyguards who zealously watched the street and the windows of the neighboring buildings for any threat, real or otherwise. The easiest way to take out this restaurant, and all its infamous patrons, would be with a guided missile. Anything short of that would depend on luck, and at best be unpredictable. Unfortunately, she didn't have a guided missile. The poison was in the Bordeaux that would shortly be served, and it was so potent that even half a glass of the wine would be deadly. The manager had gone to extraordinary lengths to procure this wine for Salvatore, but Lily had gone to extraordinary lengths to get her hands on it first, and arrange for it to come to M. Durand's notice. Once she had known she and Salvatore were coming here for dinner, she had let the bottle be delivered. Salvatore would try to cajole her into sharing the wine with him, but he wouldn't really expect her to do so. He probably would expect her to share his bed tonight, but he was destined to be disappointed once again. Her hatred was so strong she had barely been able to force herself to let him kiss her and accept his touch with some warmth. There was no way in hell she could let him do more than that. Besides, she didn't want to be with him when the poison began to act, which should be between four to eight hours after ingestion if Dr. Speer was right in his estimation; during that time she would be busy getting out of the country. By the time Salvatore knew anything was wrong, it would be too late; the poison would already have done most of its damage, shutting down his kidneys, his liver, affecting his heart. He would go into massive, multisystem failure. He might live a few hours after that, perhaps even a full day, until his body finally shut down. Rodrigo would tear France apart looking for Denise Morel, but she would have disappeared into thin air for a while, at least. She had no intention of staying gone. Poison wasn't the weapon she would normally have chosen; it was the one she had been reduced to by Salvatore's own obsession with security. Her preferred method was a pistol, and she would have used that even knowing she herself would be shot down on the spot, but she hadn't been able to devise any method of getting a weapon anywhere near him. If she hadn't been working alone, perhaps . . . but perhaps not. Salvatore had survived several assassination attempts, and had learned from each of them. Not even a sniper could get a clear shot at him. Killing Salvatore Nervi meant using either poison, or a massive weapon that would also kill any others nearby. Lily wouldn't have minded killing Rodrigo or anyone else in Salvatore's organization, but Salvatore was smart enough to always ensure there were innocents nearby. She couldn't kill so casually and

indiscriminately; in that, she was different from Salvatore. Perhaps that was the only difference, but for her own sanity, it was one she had to preserve. She was thirty-seven years old. She had been doing this since she was eighteen, so for over half her life she had been an assassin, and a damn good one at that, hence her longevity in the business. At first her age had been an asset: she had been so obviously young and fresh-faced that almost no one had seen her as a threat. She no longer had that asset, but experience had given her other advantages. That same experience, though, had also worn on her until she sometimes felt as fragile as a cracked eggshell: one more... From Publishers Weekly

CIA contract agent Lily Mansfield has been a ruthless, professional assassin for nearly 20 of her 37 years, but her work takes a personal turn after the young girl she rescued off the street as a baby, and the friends that were raising her, are killed. Lily turns renegade and avenges their deaths with a brilliantly executed murder, but she soon finds herself hunted by an evil family, embroiled in a plot that threatens the safety of the world, and chased by handsome CIA agent Lucas Swain, who has been charged with bringing Lily back by any means necessary. Though Howard's latest offering (after *Cry No More*) is far flung, the high energy story line translates well to audio thanks to the compelling performances of Hill and Bean. The duo deftly tackle the story's many intonations and foreign accents, and their skillful use of nuance lends some depth to Howard's larger-than-life characters. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.