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Vanishing Point

Written by Danielle Ramsay

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DANIELLE RAMSAY

Vanishing Point

AVON

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For Re – you know why.

Chapter One

Friday: 2:40am

'*Kales vaikas!*'

'*Gaukite sušikti kekše!*'

'Oh God . . . no . . .' she muttered.

She didn't hear the foghorn in the distance, or feel the wet sea fret as it wrapped itself around her thin, cold body. All she felt was fear.

She turned and ran as hard as she could up the dark street, away from the glow of the main road where she'd managed to jump out the car.

She could hear them continue to shout in what sounded like Russian followed by the roar of a car's engine. She knew it was them. They wouldn't give up until they caught her. She knew too much. Had seen too much for them to let her disappear.

Suddenly a hazy white glow appeared at the top of the dark street as a car turned down it, heading towards her.

Seeing her chance she ran as fast as she could towards the blinding glare of the approaching vehicle, grazing her bare feet against the jagged, uneven pavements. She

suddenly tripped over the kerb and fell, landing heavily on her hands and knees on the road.

'Fuck!' she cried out.

She staggered up, her long dark hair clinging in damp clumps to her waxen, terrified face. Ignoring her bleeding knees, she lunged into the middle of the road, right in front of the oncoming car.

Skidding, the car slammed on its brakes, just missing her.

'Help me, please . . . help . . .'

Furious, the driver punched his horn to get her out of the way.

'Please . . .'

Visibly pissed off, the driver blasted the horn again.

Desperate, she ran round to the passenger door and tried to open it.

The door was locked. She started pounding at the window.

The driver, a dark-haired man in his late thirties, looked at her with contempt.

'Please . . .' she begged. 'You've got to help me . . . please . . . They're going to hurt me . . .'

'Piss off home, you drunken cow!' he said in disgust as he looked at her.

Her face was covered in a sheen of cold sweat as smudged black eyeliner and mascara trailed down her cheeks. Her short, strapless black dress was ripped halfway down the side, immodestly showing the scanty black lacy bra and thong underneath.

'No, you can't leave me here! They'll kill me!' she begged.

'Too right I can, you slapper!'

He put his foot to the floor, threw the gear stick into first and took off, tyres screeching as he did so.

'No . . . God . . . no . . .'

Feeling sick she watched the car speed away. She didn't know what to do or where to run. All she knew was that if she didn't hide, if they found her . . . She didn't want to think about what would happen next.

She had to keep moving. And fast.

She turned and started running, following the direction the car had come from, hoping that she would find someone. Anyone who could help her.

Then she heard them turn into the street. Their footsteps pounding hard against the road, gaining on her. They were fast. Faster than her.

'*Stop jūs sušikti apskretėlė!*'

She didn't know what he was saying but she instantly recognised the voice and it caused her stomach to tighten with fear.

She stopped, paralysed.

Despite her instinct to run, she turned around.

He was standing less than twenty feet away. Six foot tall, if not more, wearing a designer black suit, an open-necked white shirt. Beside him, his muscle-bound brother. Virtually identical in height, build and dress. Both dark-skinned, covered in stubble that crept up their necks and across their prominent jawlines and cheek bones. Their hair was the same length as the stubble on their faces; coarse, thick and black. Their eyes just as dark with a hard, menacing edge.

Unable to move, she watched as a car idled up the street, coming to a stop behind the two men.

'*Ateiti cia kale*!'

'No . . . please . . .'

'*Ateik čia apskretėlė. Dabar!*' his brother barked, gesturing for her to come to him.

She shook her head as tears started to trail down her face. She didn't need to understand the words to know what he wanted. He wanted her.

'No . . . no . . .'

'Fucking bitch!' he cursed in a heavy accent as he strode over to her.

'Help me! Someone! Help me!' she screamed.

He grabbed her aggressively from behind. Yanking her head back by her long dark hair as his other leather-gloved hand silenced her. She struggled, unable to breathe as his hand covered her mouth and nose.

'*Sustabdyti!*' he ordered, snapping her head back as punishment.

She stopped fighting him.

'Good girl,' he muttered.

He then forced her over to the idling black Mercedes with blackened windows. The rear passenger window buzzed down to reveal a man in his early forties, tanned with short blond hair and piercingly blue cold eyes.

He momentarily held her terrified gaze, enjoying her fear.

The man put his right hand out the window and gently touched her cheek. His gold signet ring with the emblem 'N' catching her skin.

She winced, noticing that his smallest finger was deformed. Half a gnarled stump remained where the finger had been chopped off.

Terrified, she stared into the man's eyes.

A delicate smile played at the corner of his lips.

He then nodded at the man restraining her.

'Please . . . please . . . let me go . . . I won't talk . . .' she begged.

He ignored her.

She watched with sickening realisation as the dark tinted window buzzed up.

Her captor suddenly relaxed his grip on her.

'Good. You're learning . . .' he whispered hoarsely, brushing his lips against her cold, glistening cheek.

The pungent smell of strong, stale tobacco lingered on his sour breath.

His hands gently encircled her throat.

'No . . . no . . . please?' she implored as she looked at the other brother.

He stared at her, unmoved, with eyes that had seen it all before.

She tried to prise the gloved hands from her neck.

His grip tightened.

Terrified, she struggled, clawing and scratching at his large hands.

Grunting with satisfaction he squeezed even harder.

She frantically tore with bloodied, broken nails as her lungs began to burn.

Ten seconds later she felt hot urine trickle down her legs as the fight started to leave her body.

'Sssh, little bird . . .' he moaned gutturally as she began to spasm.

He picked up her eight-stone body, threw her over his shoulder and carried her to the rear of the waiting black Mercedes. He released the boot and stared in admiration at the immaculate thick black plastic-lined interior. Without effort he dumped her into the prepared space. Smiling, he pulled out a ten-inch serrated knife from inside his coat and gently caressed the gleaming blade against the faint pulse in her neck and then slowly ran the tip down towards her full, pert breasts.

'Later,' he muttered in a heavy Eastern European accent before slamming the boot of the car shut.

He then looked around the shadowy street checking to see whether anyone was about. Nobody. The street was in darkness. He expected as much. It was after two-thirty in the morning. But he knew they had been lucky. This time.

Chapter Two

Saturday: 3:15am

Moaning, she lifted her aching head up off the cold tiled floor. It was dark, too dark to make anything out. The acrid stench of urine filled her nostrils. In the background, the razor-sharp noise of dripping water echoed again and again.

She tried to remember what had happened but her head hurt too much. It felt heavy and foggy. It took her a couple of moments to realise that she was cold, very cold, and another few more before she became aware that she was naked. An overwhelming sense of panic started to build. She couldn't figure out where she was or how she had gotten there.

All she knew was that she was hurting. Really hurting.

She tried to swallow and gagged, forcing saliva and blood to dribble out the corners of her mouth. She attempted to gulp back the thick, metallic taste in her mouth but found herself choking. She knew something was wrong as blood continued to pool at the back of her throat.

Panicking, she staggered to her feet, causing a searing white burst of pain in her abdomen. She instinctively placed her hands over her stomach and felt a warm stickiness. She

ran her fingers across the gnarled slash realising that it ran from hip to hip. Horrified, she slipped on the wet floor, falling backwards.

The only noise emanating from her mouth was a gurgling splutter as she continued to choke.

Suddenly the door was kicked open and harsh light from the hallway flooded the men's urinals.

'Fucking hell!' muttered a male voice as he took in the carnage in front of him.

'Get Madley! And I mean now!' he shouted as he ran over to her thrashing body.

He knelt down beside her and gently moved her into the recovery position, ignoring her moans of agony as he turned her. She suddenly began convulsing. With two fingers he started to pull out the blackened blood clots which were choking her.

It was then he realised where the blood was coming from.

Her tongue had been cut out.

His eyes dropped to her mutilated left breast. Scorched deep into her skin was a four-inch 'N'. On the other breast, the word 'PIG' was cut into it. He then noticed that the pool of blood he was kneeling in was coming from the deep slash running across her stomach.

He had recognised her immediately as the copper who had been in earlier.

She had come looking for trouble. And it seemed that it had found her.

She was now passing in and out of consciousness. It was bad enough having a mutilated copper found in Madley's club, let alone a dead one.

She didn't have much time. Blood was continuing to ebb from the knife wound across her abdomen.

He turned towards the corridor.

'Get Madley. Fucking get Madley!' he yelled as he looked around for something, anything to stem the flow of blood. He quickly took his shirt off and pressed it hard against her slashed stomach.

'Shit! Shit!' he muttered as he waited for instructions.

He couldn't figure out what was taking Gibbs so long. All he had to do was ask Madley what he wanted done. He needed to know whether they had to dump her somewhere.

Then he heard the screech of approaching sirens. It was too late. Some bastard had set Madley up. Whoever had done this to her had made sure Madley had no time to clean up and get rid of her before the cops turned up.

'Fuck it!' he cursed, agitated.

He was worried. Madley was in trouble. And this was just the start.

Chapter Three

Saturday: 5:36am

Jack Brady watched as the blood-red sun continued to rise, blazing from the depths of the North Sea horizon. In the background Mazzy Star played, soulful and unobtrusive.

The calm was disturbed by the buzz of his phone. He stretched over for his BlackBerry. The copper in him told him it was bad news.

'DI Brady,' he answered quietly.

He listened.

'Conrad?'

Brady sat forward. 'Run that by me again.'

'Christ!' Brady let the shocking words sink in.

'Yeah . . . yes, I hear you, Conrad,' Brady answered. 'Yeah . . . I'll be ready . . . No . . . you're not interrupting anything . . .'

He thought about the previous night. After a couple of pints in the Fat Ox watching the band, Damaged Goods, he had left. Not knowing where he was heading, only that he didn't want to go back to an empty five-bedroomed house. Somehow he had ended up down at the Blue Lagoon nightclub.

And that was what had led him to spend the early hours sitting waiting for her call. Waiting for an explanation of why she was back in the North East. Why she hadn't told him, hadn't warned him. After all, the last time he had seen her was over a year ago. But DC Simone Henderson, his ex-junior colleague, was back. The problem was, she had been more than a colleague. He had regrettably spent a drunken night with her which had resulted in the end of his marriage. Ironically both Claudia, his wife, and DC Simone Henderson ended up transferring as far away from him as possible.

He had spotted her standing at the bar laughing with two men. Her black hair had shone in the dim light.

Brady had stood there, shocked. Not believing that she was actually there. It didn't make any sense. She worked for the Met now, so why would she be back in the North East, let alone in the Blue Lagoon of all places?

He was about to go over. But in one move she flirtatiously tilted her head back and, laughing at whatever had been said to her by one of the men, turned and caught Brady's eye.

Her smile froze. Something in her eyes told him to disappear. And fast. She clearly didn't want him there.

Then, acting as if she didn't know him, she turned her attention back to the two men.

Brady could see that they had money: their sharp black suits and sharply cut hair said as much.

Resisting the urge to go over, Brady did as she had intimated and quietly slipped out. He had then returned home and took up his vigil by the first-floor bay window, watching the black, unforgiving sea, waiting for her to call. He had played with the idea of ringing her. He still had her number. But he had fought the compulsion; this was her call.

Seeing her last night had uncomfortably awakened emotions that he had tried to suppress when she had suddenly put in for a transfer. She had literally disappeared from his life, refusing to answer any of his calls or emails. Finally, he got the message. But all he had wanted to do was to apologise for forcing her to leave the Northumbrian force.

'Sir?' questioned Conrad, interrupting his thoughts.

'I'll see you shortly,' Brady replied.

'Yes, sir,' Conrad answered.

He'd only told Brady part of it. What was left unsaid had to be told face to face. The station was reeling from the news. But Conrad knew the news would hit Brady the hardest out of the lot of them.

*

Not a lot had happened to Jack Brady in the last six months. In fact to be fair, not a lot had happened in Whitley Bay; a small seaside resort in the North East of England. Overall, targets had been met and crime figures appeared to be at an all-time low. But Brady knew it was the calm before the storm. Police budgets were being slashed to the bone by the government. The thought of having to tackle the same inevitable crimes of second and third generations who had known nothing but a life of living on shoestring benefits was not one Brady relished. Especially armed with little more than a pencil sharpener and a box of staples.

Brady still had the same hard-nosed boss, Detective Chief Inspector Gates, and the same obtuse, career-chasing sidekick, Detective Sergeant Harry Conrad. And he still had the same old job as Detective Inspector. Simply put, he

wasn't the kind to get promoted. Not after everything he'd been through. Shot in the thigh, too close to his balls for comfort during an undercover drugs bust that had gone wrong. And then there was his affair with DC Simone Henderson.

But he was still a hell of a lot better off than his long-standing friend and now ex-colleague, Detective Inspector Jimmy Matthews. Jimmy'd found himself locked inside Durham Prison, with the very scum he had risked his neck – and at times his career – to put away. Scum who would gut a copper on the inside as soon as look at him, which was why he was in a segregated unit sharing his time with the worst sex offenders imaginable. As far as Brady knew, no one from the job had been to see Matthews; he was a bent copper who had seriously been on the take and in doing so had sold out. Even Brady had not been to see him, despite repeated requests from Matthews. He still didn't have the stomach to look Matthews in the eye after what he had done.

Showered and changed, Brady slugged back what was left of his black coffee. He picked up his car keys off the granite worktop as he wondered exactly what had washed up onto the shores of Whitley Bay beach. Or to be more precise, exactly who had floated to the surface of the cold, grey murky waters of the North Sea.