

## Vanish

*Left, right, left left, duck, kick. Right, left, right, duck, right, kick. Repeat.* “Keep your elbows up. Always keep your eye on the target. Focus!” They’re yelling at me from all angles. I want nothing more than to let any of them have a piece of my mind, but I signed up for this; I asked them to train me, no matter the cost. I promised them results, and they promised me skills that I could never have dreamed of acquiring. They promised me intel, and they’ve held up their end of the bargain. I’d like to think I’ve held up mine too. This musty, dark, underground room wouldn’t have seen half the business it has over the last three years if it wasn’t for me. I bring them revenue. They profit from the work I do here. Without me, they would drown; they would starve for fighters. But I only need them for a little while longer. Only until I find him. I’m getting close, but what if I’m too late... *whack!*

“What the hell Marco!”

“You were losing focus. You won’t survive a minute out there if you lose your focus. One slip up means dropped defenses and then boom. Dead.”

Marco knows the streets, better than anyone I’ve ever heard of. He has connections. Word has it that Marco Soprano was even a Bratva captain at one point... but that’s all street talk.

“Whatever, I need to get changed.”

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“Dad? Dad, I’m home!”

Where is he? He’s always home before me. “Dad?”

“Hi Sweetie, how was work?”

“Dammit dad, don’t scare me like that. Work was good, made some cash today, so I can go grocery shopping later.”

I see that look on his face. He knows what I've been doing at "work," but he also knows why I do what I do and that he can't talk me out of it. When mom died, dad took it pretty hard. Isolated himself from me and Dylan. Left me to practically raise the rat by myself. I was four, Dylan had just turned one.

Then when Dylan disappeared, that's when all hell broke loose. I was in my freshmen year of college. Dylan had just started his junior year of high school and was being scouted by colleges left, right, and center. Dad locked himself away, and I went to find Marco again. He doesn't need to know why I came back after how things ended the last time. He doesn't need to know my story. No one does. He trains. I retain. He makes money. I make enemies and gain a skillset necessary to find my brother. Marco became my best friend in a short amount of time. He's an ass, but I give it right back to him, I think that's why we get along so well. He knows I have a mission this time around, and he's willing to help in any way he can. He became a second father to me, hiding in the confounds of his graffiti decorated walls and blood-stained mats.

"Anna...Anna....Earth to Adrianna"

"Sorry Dad, what's up?"

"Don't forget the towels when you go to the store."

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One week. I can feel it. We are getting closer; every day Marco comes back with new intel. Every day we are one step closer to finding him and those who took him. Right now, it's leading to the beach. Why would anyone kidnap someone and escape to the beach? Dylan loves the water... but that was also his demise. He decided to be a big boy and go to the beach alone, next thing we know, his towel shows up at our door, but no Dylan.

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“Look. There she is.” “Doesn’t she know it’s like nine billion degrees out...” “Remember when she used to talk to people?” “What happened to her...”

I hear it all. I hear all that is said as I walk down the corridors of a building I used to love going to every day. I used to drown myself in books and school. I enjoyed learning with a passion... maybe too much, almost as much as I loved being at the gym and bringing in cash. Dylan used to tell me I cared more about my schooling and work than I did him. Maybe he was right. If only I paid more attention. If only I worked harder to be with him. If only I could’ve protected him more... If only...

“Anna!”

“Hey Joy. Listen, I...”

“Girl. Don’t you know it’s like 80 degrees out. Why are you wearing black, number one, and number two, long sleeves! We need to go shopping. OMG MALL TRIP!!! ...Hey... you okay? You love going to the mall with me...”

“Joy... I need to go away for a couple of days. Not until next week, maybe, but until then, I’m going to need to be alone. I need you to understand--”

“No.”

“Wh-what?”

“No. You exiled yourself from the rest of the school. You used to be the queen of this town. Everyone wanted to be you. Then one day, you snapped. You pushed everyone away. I’ll be damned if you try that shit with me.”

“You don’t understand...”

“I have to go to class. I’ll see you at lunch.”

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*Left, right, left left, duck, kick. Right, duck, kick, left, right, right left, duck.*

Joy. *Punch.* Dad. *Punch.* Dylan.

I let the bag have it. Everything. All the pent-up energy, the anger, the despair, the pain--

“You ready kid? You’re up in 10”

Hopefully this will be my last fight. Hopefully I can give this life up for good after tonight. After tonight, I can start my travels. After tonight, I am one night closer to getting my brother back.

ONE. TWO. THREE. FOUR. *What’s with the counting? Why is my head spinning?* “Will this be a knockout?” “Is D finally down?” *Knockout? Me? No...* I can’t lose now. I haven’t lost. I won’t start now. Gigantor doesn’t know what he started. Marco is screaming at me to get up. *Don’t lose your focus now D. Dylan.* SEVEN. EIGHT. Up. I’m up. Alright, let’s go Gigantor.

“You did good tonight kid. Had me worried on that eight second count though.”

“You know I don’t go down that easy, Marco. Had to take a little nap, ya know?... I’ll see you tomorrow.”

I lock the rusting doors and walk up the molding cracked staircase. It’s well beyond midnight now, I hurt everywhere, and I have an exam tomorrow. This should be fun. After school Marco and I are going to work on weaponry tactics to dust my cobwebs off. After that, we should be good to go. I will be ready to get my baby brother back. I’ll be ready to have our lives go back to normal. We will—oof.

“I’m so sorry, I wasn’t paying... Jace?” *What the frack?*

“So this is where you’ve been hiding out, eh? It’s.. Nice.”

*What the frack? No one from school is supposed to know about this. No one; especially not Jace.*

“Hello? Adrianna? You there?”

*Jace is supposed to be gone. On to better things in life. Not coming back here after all this time.*

“Adrianna? ? ? Oookayyy. You kind of just dropped off the face of... everywhere actually. I’ve been to the school almost every day for the last week looking for you, but I miss you every time. I went by your house, wanted to say hi to your dad and brother, but your dad said neither of you were home but that I might find you here. Did not peg you for a cage fighter.”

“Look, Jace, I really have to go. Plus, it’s not safe in this part of town, so you should go too. I’ll see you around.”

“I can help you find him.”

I freeze. Did he just..? How? How does he know? How could he help? How does he know? He what? “What. Did you just say to me?”

“I can help you find him. Dylan, I mean.”

I don’t remember moving. I don’t remember pinning him against the wall. All I was seeing was red. “Do not say his name. You have no right to offer help. How do you know? How do you know he isn’t just at a friend’s house tonight?”

“You wouldn’t have me pinned against the wall right now if he was.”

I let go but keep my guard up. He’s being an eerie ass and it’s not sitting well with me. “That doesn’t explain how you know about Dylan.”

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I couldn’t handle it anymore. When he just stared at me. When he didn’t respond to a pressing question.. I had to walk away before I did anything stupid. People are starting to connect the dots. After all this time. They’re finally figuring out what happened to my family three years ago. I need to get a move on. I don’t want sympathy; I know dad doesn’t either. We

can take care of ourselves while taking care of each other. We don't need the rest of the town to pity us.

I'm lost in thought as I walk down the charcoal surrounded sidewalks. *How could he? He wouldn't be, he couldn't be involved in this. Right? Not after everything I've done for him. No.* What am I to do if he is involved in some way? If he's on the wrong side, I'll have no choice...

A crisp breeze blows through me. I can almost see the lights of the cheery houses of my town. I used to be happy. I was blissful walking in my town at night. The lights, the soft scenery, the fountain in the middle of the courtyard complex, how could I not be happy, calm, blissful. It was easy when Dylan was with me, ice cream in hand during the summer, hot chocolate in the winter. I no longer enjoy this walk. I'm angry and resentful when I have to leave the gym and the solace of the abandoned buildings around. I no longer enjoy going to my home, unless I know my dad is there in his flannel tea, joggers, and fuzzy slippers sitting on the couch watching his documentaries.

I don't know when I stopped moving. I don't know when my guard went up. I don't know when I got attacked. All I know is I had one thought—Dyahn.

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I'm moving. I'm in a vehicle of some sort. My hands are bound. There's someone sitting next to me, heavy, anxious breathing fills the back seat, clearly this person is in the same state I am, not the enemy. Focus D. Listen. You've trained for moments like this.

*Jace.* This has to be him. He's the only one to make himself known to me. But why would he do that and then take me the same night. Nothing makes sense.

"Who are you. Why are you doing this. Please. I have a daughter and a son. They need me."

I know that voice.

“Please. Don't hurt me. Don't hurt them. I would just like to contact them and let them know I'm alright. They'll be worried if I'm not home. I just need to hear their voices and then I'll do whatever you want. I promise. I'll--”

The sound of skin hitting skin is heard. The smell of blood begins to fill the air. We stopped moving. The doors slam open. I'm grabbed from behind and thrown to the ground. Grass. Country. But also, salt? Sea? House on the beach. Back lawn. Warm breeze. How long was I out for? How long were we driving for?

We are moved, stumbling around, listening to the rattle of keys and the fumbling of a door opening before we are shoved inside. Down more stairs we go before we are sat in those cliché metal chairs and tied up again. The bag over my head is ripped off. It takes a minute for my eyes to adjust. I look to my left and see stone. Stone walls, stone floor, stone everywhere. I look to my right and see “Dad.”

“Adrianna. Sweetheart. Oh my, are you okay? Did they hurt you?”

“Dad. Dad! Calm down. I'm fine. I promise. You're bleeding though.”

“It's just a scratch. Where are we?”

“In some beach house a couple hours from town. Where doesn't matter though. We need to get out of these ties.”

Before we could breathe another word, the door bursts open four masked faces walk through.

“Skull masks? Really?” I ask. “Don't you think that's a little much?”

I feel my lip start to swell before I registered the movement. They're quick. Good to know. Guess they don't like questions. Also good to know. Questions anger them. Am I supposed to be afraid of them because I'm the one tied to the chair? They're the cowards who are

hiding behind a mask right now. My blood is boiling. I need to get free. I need to keep my dad safe.

“Done with the chit chat? Did you have your reunion time? Everyone all caught up now?”

Mr. Mask Mans likes to be a cocky douche bag I see. If only I could get free. I need to protect my dad. I need to find Dylan. I need to break free. Dylan must be found. I cannot fail my mission.

“You have no idea what you’re doing,” I said.

“Oh, that’s where you’re wrong, love. We know exactly what we are doing, actually. We know who you two are. We know all you’ve done.”

I glance at my dad. What is this guy talking about? Dad glances back at me, there’s this look in his eye. What’s he trying to tell me? Did he do something that I don’t know about? Or are they talking about... that can’t be. That’s impossible.

“What’s so funny bitch?”

“I’m the bitch? You have me tied to a chair and are wearing masks to hide the shame of what you are doing.”

“You would know a little something about that wouldn’t you?”

“I--”

“ENOUGH!”

Someone with definite authority enters the room. Everyone stands tall and respectful.

“Nice to see you D. It’s been a while, ya know, so I figured it was time to just put everything into motion and see my *best friend* again.”

That voice. But why?

“Best friend? Says who?”



I see Boss Mask slowly reach for the bottom of his face covering. He tugs it off...oh.

“Dylan?”

“Hey sis,” he nods to me. “Pops. How goes it? You look like you’ve seen a ghost. Allow me to explain myself.”

I can’t breathe. Dylan? He’s fine? How... Why... I have no words, which is a first for me.

“D? D? Hello... you listening? Adrianna!”

*Whack!*

“What the hell Dylan! I’m your sister!”

“You were losing focus. You won’t survive out there without your focus.”

Wait. What did he just say? Marco said the same thing to me not too long ago. There’s no way.

“Babe! Bring the files in here!”

Files? What files? Who’s babe? I need a drink. My brain can’t handle this. Hold up.

“Thanks babe.”

“Joy?”

“Hey D.”

This whole time. Dylan never was taken. He ran away and is running some sort of franchise here. Joy was never my friend. She’s screwing my brother. And my dad—DAD!

“I’m not even surprised, Joy. I always felt like you’d screw me at some point. Looks like you chose my brother instead.”

“You bitch!”

Her hand flies up. As if this girl could hurt me. The girl who cares more about how revealing her clothes are and who’s looking at her while she skankily sways her hips down the corridor.

“Do it,” I say. “Hit me. You don’t have the balls to lay a finger on me and you know it... where are you taking dad?”

Two masks pick my father up out of his chair and drag him out of the room. I want to break free. This cycle has to stop. I am not losing another family member.

“See, about dear old dad. There’s a lot you don’t know. ‘Dad’ isn’t who he says he is. I’m not who he said I was. And this,” He waves his hands around, “this is what I was taken from all those years ago. It’s time for me to take my place in my home.”

“What are you talking about Dylan? You. know how crazy you sound right now? Your home is maybe ten towns back that way.”

Before Dylan could say another word, big mask in the corner throws a stack of open files in front of me. Dylan looks at him, then at the rest of the masks. He nods. They all reach up and remove their masks. Dylan walks over to... Marco? I look to my right to see my other captors.

“D. You know my brother, Jace. Seems you two have some history. My dad, Marco. Also history. And, of course...”

Dylan looks to the door and a woman walks in.

“Mom,” I whisper.

“Welcome to the family Adrianna.”