

VANISHED, A Romantic Suspense Novel
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Luke Edgars ground his teeth. Pissed didn't even begin to describe his current mood. His mission to Southeast Asia had yielded no new information on his current military espionage case. The trip home had been long and boring, and the man seated beside him had smelled of five-day-old body odor and bad cologne, giving Luke a nagging headache just behind his eyes. Then, at his layover in St. Louis, his boss had ordered him to divert to Cleveland, instead of his home base of Columbus, to baby-sit a desk agent who *might've* stumbled onto a federal tax fraud case. And at the airport, instead of finding a nervous novice, he'd received a text message telling him to meet the agent at this address.

He hadn't thought his week could get any worse. Boy, was he wrong.

Seeing this particular woman—looking very much like the accountant she was, dressed in her loose-fitting blue suit, white blouse, and sensible shoes—holding a gun pointed right at his chest didn't do anything to improve his mood. “You want to put that thing away before someone gets hurt?”

“I do know how to handle a gun,” Abby said, pointing the gun at the floor.

He pushed himself away from the wall. No longer a target, he walked into the room, careful not to disturb any possible evidence, his own weapon pointed at the floor. “Whose place is this?”

“Brianna Mathews. My college roommate.”

A slight catch in Abby's voice drew his attention away from the chaotic mess in the room and back to her. In the dim lamp light he saw the glistening tears in her green eyes.

Dammit. He didn't want to see her cry. Not again. Distraction. That's what he needed. Distraction for both of them. “Did you secure the other rooms?”

The embarrassment that crossed her features, followed quickly by the firm set to her lips told him she hadn't, even before the word no escaped her lips.

“Dammit, Abby. Did you forget all your training?”

“I was going to work my way back out.”

He gave her a skeptical look then edged back into the hall, signaling her to stop when she moved to follow him. “Stay there. And try not to touch anything. Remember it's a real crime scene, not an exercise we played back in Georgia.”

Her eyes narrowed and her lips pressed into a thinner line, but she didn't move a muscle.

Luke turned away and lifted his weapon out in front of him, pausing a moment. Tension gripped his neck, back and shoulders. He waited to see if she'd put a bullet between them. Wouldn't blame her if she did.

When no deafening sound blasted through the night and no searing pain ripped through him, he exhaled and inhaled. Apparently, Abby had learned to control that temper of hers in the past five years.

Slowly he stepped back into the hall to the first doorway. This was probably overkill, since all the noise she'd made on entering the premises and their own conversation would've alerted anyone still in the place, but he needed to be sure they were alone. He also needed some distance between them.

Of all the people he expected to find standing in the center of a crime scene, Abby Whitson wasn't among them. Hell, she hadn't even been on his radar, let alone on his short list of possible

agents. Seeing her again slammed memories into him of the last night he'd seen her. For nearly five years he'd managed to put the horror-stricken look on her face into a neatly closed compartment in his memory's deepest recesses. Now he'd have to face what happened between them again.

However, first he had to secure her safety. Then he'd deal with the wrath of the one woman he'd never wanted to hurt.

His gun extended, he reached into the first room with the other hand and flicked on the light. It took a moment for his eyes to adjust to the sudden bright light reflecting off the huge mirror nearly covering the opposite wall of the wrecked bedroom.

Nothing moved.

The mattresses had been slashed just like the sofa pillows in the living room. The satin coverlet and silk sheets lay in shreds. The dresser drawers had been emptied, their contents strewn across the floor. Whoever had taken Abby's friend had searched every corner in here.

He moved farther into the room, checking out the closet. The cloying scent of an Asian perfume, probably worth thousands of dollars, clogged the air in the tiny space. Silks, satins, furs—all lay scattered across the floor. Boxes of letters tossed on the pile's top. Even the suitcase lay emptied, the sides slashed open.

Whoever they are, these guys are thorough.

Framed pictures of a strikingly beautiful blonde littered the dressers and nightstands next to the bed. Abby's friend liked men. Lots of them. Each picture had her posed with a different man—old, young, white, black—never the same one twice.

How had prim and proper Abby gotten a friend like this?