

Preface

Vanish centers largely on a trip I embarked on to the Amazon rainforest in Ecuador and draws inspiration from a volunteer experience I was fortunate enough to partake in Tanzania and an excursion I undertook to the Blue Mountains of Australia. My own background, as a Hispanic American living in the United States and born and partially raised in Venezuela (with an affinity for culture and travel), also plays an important role in the story, the settings, and the characters in it. *Vanish*, however, is ultimately a fictional piece that mixes many of the places I have seen and characters I have known into settings and personages that, on their own, or as a collective, have little relation or semblance to any *one* person or place. If, per chance, the name of any person or organization mentioned in the story coincides with a real-life counterpart, it is purely by chance and unintentional.

G.A.R.M.

Margate, Florida

December 30, 2008

Chapters

1: The news	{November 24, 1998}	13
2: Our brave hero		19
3: Trigger	{October 11, 1998}	23
4: Reflections	{November 25, 1998}	29
5: Midnight arrival		31
6: Thanksgiving	{November 26, 1998}	37
7: Epiphany		43
8: Jungle call	{November 27, 1998}	47
9: Minor setback	{May 7, 2007}	51
10: Careful deliberation		
	{November 28, 1998}	55
11: Another canoe ride		
	{November 29, 1998}	59
12: Back in Lago Agrio		
	{May 7, 2007}	63
13: Back in Quito		65
14: Another trail	{December 1, 1998}	69
15: In the meantime		77
16: Doña María and don Roberto		81
17: Mindo Valley		85
18: A case of malaria		89
19: The unexpected	{May 7, 2007}	95
20: Crystal		99

21: And then	{December 2, 1998}	103
22: Awakening		107
23: Meanwhile	{December 3, 1998}	111
24: Prognosis		113
25: The Shamán	{May 7, 2007}	119
26: The missing piece	{December 3, 1998}	125
27: Escapade		129
28: The inevitable confrontation		135
29: Today	{May 7, 2007}	139
Endnotes		145

Vanish

Rotten fate

 saw me fade.

Ugly shame

 spared no blame.

I just hope the pain

 won't kill in vain.

Chapter 1: The news

Tuesday, November 24, 1998

Hola,” Luis Ramón Morales answered with his usual pleasant Sunday-morning tone, even on a Tuesday night, as it now was.

“Mi amor, your dad and I are very worried about your brother,” doña María de los Ángeles Rivera de Morales¹, exasperated, could barely utter the words without completely breaking down.

“What’s wrong with Rob, Mami? Was he in a car accident?” Luis was now scared, but trying to remain collected for his mother’s sake.

“Robi missed his plane and no one, not the airlines, the travel agent, or anybody else can tell me why (¡por Dios Santo!). I knew this would happen one day.”

“Calm down, Mami. You know Rob doesn’t plan much. I’m sure he’s on his way home *now*, as we speak.” Luis said this placing emphasis on *now*. “Where did he go?”

“Robi went to Ecuador and decided to venture into the jungle. (Why does he have to be so inconsiderate?) Imagine that, Luisito, into the Amazon, as if your dad and I had nothing else to worry about. And you know how dangerous

it is for an American — a Gringo, no less — to go into those parts, even if he speaks Spanish and looks Hispanic, maybe *especiallly* because of that.”

“Did he call you and tell you where he’d be?”

“He only sent us an e-mail message saying he would fly to...” and directing her attention briefly to her husband don Roberto Morales Martinez², “where did Robi say he would go, Roberto?” and back to Luis after hearing the response, “yes, Lago Agrio, wherever that may be, and take a bus from there to the jungle to join some four-day tour or expedition, as he likes to call them. *But he didn’t even give us the name of the camp!*”

“When was he supposed to fly back to Miami, Mami?”

“Yesterday! I hoped he had simply missed his plane and would arrive today, but he did not. All the airlines can tell me is the obvious: that he missed his plane, and just because of that, he is not technically missing, or in danger, which is why we can’t really expect help from the authorities.”

“What does Papi think?”

“Your dad is going crazy. (You know how he is.) He tried calling every hotel he can find the number for in Ecuador but no one can tell him anything useful. He is now determined to call the airlines to book a flight for himself, and Luisito, that is why I’m calling you: we can’t let your

dad do this! The defibrillator-pacemaker thing in his chest will kill him (and me, in the process) before his plane lands in Quito.”

“Let me speak to him, Mami?”

And after a few moments, don Roberto answered with a grave and determined tone and said: “alo, mijo, *tenemos* que hacer algo,” which basically translates to “hello, son, we *must* do something.”

“I know, Papi, but what do you think you alone can accomplish?”

“I don’t know but no one else will do anything, and for all I know, he is laying down in a ditch right now.”

“Were you able to speak to anybody in Ecuador? Anyone that could help?”

“WHO? Just tell me, *who* can possibly help?” Don Roberto was now yelling.

“Please take it easy, Papi. How about hiring a detective? It’s possible Rob is just in a hotel somewhere, completely unaware of the anguish he’s causing — you know how he is, without a care in the world. A detective could easily find him, don’t you think? Maybe...”

“Forget it, Luisito. I am going and that is that.” Don Roberto seemed more convinced now than before.

But Luis, more determined than before, said: “look, Papi, you know you could give Mami a heart attack and