

The Dark (Tentative Title) by Janice Rojas

CHAPTER ONE

"When you think about him how does that make you feel?" she asked as she tapped her pencil against the black clipboard that rested on her knees. She wore beige lipstick this time, her red hair was in a bun, and you could still see her light blue eyes which hid behind her black square glasses.

"I honestly don't know," I responded.

His touch or the way his lips would caress mine. I didn't feel them anymore. All the feelings were gone. I felt like my body was covered in ice, but it wasn't because I was cold it was because after one freezes, we can't make sense of anything that touches our skin.

"Do his friends still remind you of that night?" she said now looking into my eyes and trying to get something out of me. I had been coming to see Dr. Forts since the happening. My parents had forced to come see her, that maybe she would make me let my feelings out, that somehow she would bring back the old me. I didn't know how that would ever happen considering I didn't even remember the last time I did something for me. I lost myself that night.

I watched the clock. I'd been sitting here for about 45 minutes now. Fifteen more minutes and I would be free.

"Tell me about that night," she suggested.

"I told you," I said taking a deep breath. Thoughts of that night always made my throat tie in knots. "I don't remember much." I lied.

"Anastasia, talk to me about anything that consumes your thoughts?" she asked.

I looked into her blue eyes and immediately thought of Jack and his deep blue eyes and the way he looked at me all those years. But that night he'd looked at me with so much anger. His arms had covered my neck and he'd pushed me against the wall and I could feel the knife under my neck. I could feel it there. It was cold and suddenly I

couldn't breathe anymore. I only stared into his eyes at the rage there.

"Anastasia?"

"We're done here," I said walking out of the room. I ran out of the practice and got into my car, where I felt safer. I took a few deep breaths. I could hear his voice calling my name.

"Ana?? Ana?" his voice sent shivers down my spine. His voice was like a ghost in the dark.

I turned the engine on and drove off through the city. I could still hear him inside my head and as I drove, I could only think of that moment five years ago when he held me in his arms and told me he loved me. He'd been so different then. I had been different then.

Because then, I was alive and now I am dead. I am completely and totally dead inside. I am lost through the city and traffic lights and with only hate and darkness to turn to.

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CHAPTER TWO

"Anastasia?" I heard a knock on my car window. When I looked over, I saw Gaby. I couldn't make it through the drive this time. When I rolled down the window, we made eye contact.

"I'll drive," she said. I could see the look on her face. She seemed worried. She'd always been worried but this time she looked sad even. I didn't need anyone's pity but her face expression made me realize that something was really wrong with me and there was no cure for this.

I got on the passenger seat, she started the car and drove us to the neighborhood that we'd lived in our entire life. She passed through Greg's house, Gaby's cousin. We even passed Mr. Morty's house, the lonely old man's house that seemed abandoned with all the deformed trees and shrubs.

"Did you see Dr. Forts?" she asked breaking the long-lasting silence between us.

"I did," I said. "I couldn't stay for long."

"Like always," she muttered with a sigh.

"This is hard for me."

"But this is the only way you'll get better, Ana. You've got to talk to someone about what happened. It's hard seeing you this way and not knowing how to help you."

"You could *kill* him for me," I said and though I was kidding, deep inside, I kind of wanted him dead.

She looked into my eyes and then back at the empty roads in front of her.

"I'm just so worried about you. I miss my best friend."

"I'm still here."

"No, you're not. You space out and for some reason, you can't drive. And it's been THREE months. And I know that Ralph's death has really affected you...it has affected all of us...but we've all got to move on. You got to at least try."

"It was all my fault, Gaby," I swallowed hard the recurring tears. "I just can't forget everything and move on with my life."

"Yes you can," she said. "You've just got to believe you can."

"He's dead I'm supposed to be okay with it. It wasn't one person who died there, it was two."

"I know you're still hurting because Jack left. He was the love of your life..."

"No, he wasn't. Don't you ever say that...ever"

"Ana," Gaby whispered. "Please, talk to me. What really happened?"

"I need to get some rest tonight," I said getting out of my car.

Gaby followed after me and grabbed my arm, "I don't know what happened that night and I know that there's something big and hurtful you're not telling me but I want you to know that I'm here for you."

"Thanks," I said. Before I could walk into the house, she wrapped her arms around me. "I need to go," I said walking inside my house. It smelt like lasagna and I could hear the football on TV. Hoorah for football season, at least it took my dad's attention from everything.

"Anastasia, honey? Is that you?" Mom yelled from the kitchen. I ignored her and headed up the stairs and into my room. My room had never been so neat. Mom had taken all my clothes and put them in the washer and I could smell the new sheets. I lay in my bed and turned to look at the picture frame of me and Ralph. I took it and placed it over my chest. Then I closed my eyes and I felt so much closer to him.

"I miss you, best friend," I muttered to him, hoping he'd hear me.

"I miss you, too," I heard a whisper. I was in *the* house again and Ralph was tied up to a chair made of steel. I had found him after hearing his yelps in the night.

"Ralph!" I said to him, happy I'd found him but afraid that Jack would find me here and take it out on him.

"Ana, you've got to leave," he said between breaths. "He's going to kill you."

"I'll deal with him later. I need to get you out," I said trying to untie his hands from the ropes that ripped his skin apart. He was bleeding from his veins.

"Ouch," Ralph took a deep breath.

"He cut you?" I whispered.

"Hurry up," he whispered.

I finally got to untie him and helped him up. Ralph was weak and had lost a lot of blood. I could see the red stains of his blood on the wooden floor underneath us.

"You need to get the hell out of here. I'll deal with Jack," I whispered to him.

We limped through the room and when we finally made it out of the room we knew it'd just gotten worse. We had to go down the stairs to make it out of the house.

"Whatever happens, you need to stay alive, okay?" Ralph said now as he looked into my eyes.

"NO," I said. "This is all my fault."

"Stop saying that Anastasia Bale, you are stronger than you think you are. This is not your fault."

"Let's get outta here," I said slowing going down the stairs. I could hear Jack in the other room yelling at someone he'd held captive, someone I didn't know or had seen during my time here.

When we made it down the stairs, we noticed Jack's servants, also known as his evil guards, standing by the doors. We were stuck there.

"I'll distract them. You, get out of there and get the police, okay?" Ralph said to me.

"But no—" I hesitated.

"Go!" Ralph yelled as he stood in the middle of the hallway and raised his arms up in the air to get the guards' attention. When they saw Ralph, they ran towards him as Ralph attempted to run around the house so that I could escape. I saw the door and I sprinted towards it. We were so close to being free. I ran out the front door and made

it through the forest. I hadn't made it this far. I ran and yelled and ran and yelled so that someone in this deserted city could hear me. As I ran, I could hear gun shots in the distance then I saw Jack from the house now behind me, and he ran towards me. Looking back overtook me and I tripped over a branch and landed on my face. I could taste the blood in my mouth now and my nose was bleeding. I stood back up and kept running, this time I was quiet so he couldn't hear me. But for some reason, he still heard me and he still got to me. I was trapped once more.

"Honey?" I heard mom's voice. I opened my eyes and saw her standing by the door in my room.

"You miss him, don't you?" she asked now sitting at the edge of my bed and looking at the picture frame I held so hard against my chest.

I didn't say anything. She'd just worry and I didn't want her to know more than she needed to.

"I'm worried about you," she said looking into my eyes. Mom's eyes were a grayish-blue. People said I looked like her but my mom had really dark hair and I had inherited my dad's blonde curls.

"Don't be worried. I'm making progress with Dr. Forts."

"Are you? She called me today. You walked out on her again."

"I wasn't feeling it."

"I don't want to force this on you but talking about it will make it better, Ana."

"I'm not ready, Mom."

"I understand," she said now tearing up. "There's food in the oven if you'd like dinner."

"I'm fine, for now."

"Okay," she said touching my cheek with her thumb softly, looking into my eyes with grand hope, and then slipping away and out of the room.

CHAPTER THREE

"How do you feel today?" asked Dr. Forts.

"The same," I said.

"And how is that?"

"I don't know."

She sighed and went on to write on her clipboard. I thought therapists were supposed to be more understanding.

"I don't think I can be cured," I added. "You can't help me."

"Yes, I can. You've just got to let me."

"I don't know..." I sat back in the chair and rested my head on the pillow behind me. I hadn't slept all night and could feel the heaviness in my eyes.

"Close your eyes," she suggested. I wanted to walk out but I couldn't get my mom's sad look on her face out of my head. I wanted to get better for my mom, not so for myself. I was already broken for eternity.

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. "Now what?"

"Tell me what you see."

"It's dark," I said with a sarcastic tone I knew she didn't appreciate.

"What thoughts are invading your mind?"

"Darkness," I coughed.

"Please, tell me what you're thinking."

"Um..." and it was when I really closed my eyes that I could hear Ralph. I felt closer to him.

"You're stronger than what you think you are, Anastasia Bale," he'd said that night.

"I miss Ralph," it came out. I didn't want to say it out loud but it felt good to tell someone even though I wasn't really talking to her. I was talking to the darkness inside my head. "I'm scared that he'll come back."

"Who?"

"Jack."

"What happened that night, Ana?"

"There was blood everywhere," I swallowed. "Ralph's blood."

"Who hurt him?"

"Jack," I said. "Jack killed him."

"Why?"

"Jack was always jealous of me and Ralph. But he never understood that Ralph was my best friend. He was my one best friend, other than Gaby."

"Who, other than you and Ralph, did Jack hold captive?"

"There was someone else," I said. "I could hear Jack yelling at him on the darkest of nights. My room was next to his. I could hear him screaming 'Don't hurt her!' and then Jack would go on and on to hit him and..." when I opened my eyes, there were tears streaming down my cheeks. The tears were warm and stream fast down my neck.

"I'm scared," I added.

"Are you scared of Jack?"

"I am, and I am scared of what could happen next if the police don't find him."

"He won't hurt you, Ana. You are safe now."

"How are you so sure? I don't like to befriend anyone because I'm scared Jack will take them away from me."

"Ana, maybe writing things down would help you. Do you keep a journal?"

"I don't like to write."

"You do like to read, don't you?"

"I do," I said.

"I'll recommend a few books for you to read. Maybe they'll help you get your mind off things."

"Okay," I said with a sigh. I felt a little lighter. Not completely but lighter than I'd been for the past couple of months.

"Here you go," Dr. Forts passed me a piece of paper with writing on it. She'd recommended three different books for me to read. I was curious.

"I have to go home now," I said. "Mom wants me to be home before the snow."

"Okay," Dr. Forts smiled now standing up to open the door for me. "I will see you in a few days."

"Okay."

I walked out of the therapy center to feel the snow on my face. The moment the snow came into contact with my skin, it melted. I drove home and for the first time in a while, turned the radio on. I listened to the radio all the way home. It was the first time in a long time that I could listen without hearing Jack's yells against my ear. I listened and everything was better.