

Excerpt from  
*The First*  
by  
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Something strikes me out of the corner of my eye. Looking over, I see nothing, hear nothing, but still the feeling is there. I can't shake the thought that something is off.... Bhradon sees it too and gives me an odd look. I shrug, but I'm still getting a strange sense of wrongness....

There it is again. This time I see something. Nothing I can pinpoint, but something nonetheless. Panicking, I tug on his arm, beseeching to know if he saw it as well. Despite the inability to see more than a few feet in front of me, the look on his face is perfectly clear.

He did.

The air is full of noise in the utter silence. The wind whispering, yet there is no wind. Faint, so very faint, yet so very loud I feel as if my ears might rupture from the pressure.

A sudden fierce chill skirts across my skin, moving from a crawl to swiftly envelop my entire body in a fevered embrace that I cannot fight my way out of, a sheen of sweat already forming before I can speak.

Eyes.

Red, glowing eyes. Hovering, suspended in mid-air as if separated from any part of the natural world. But I know better.

And I know we don't stand a chance.

*Run run run—*

My mind screams, begs, pleads. In the space of time between the flash of an eyelid and the breath that has lodged itself halfway to my lungs, impotent in providing any necessary air, the others are awakened with what seems to be an invisible hand floating across the camp. All at once, they are on their feet, some grabbing packs, others taking off in a blind panic. But we are all on the run now.

*Run run run run run—*

I can barely make out the shapes of the others in the moonless night, but I feel Bhradon's presence nearby as we run for our lives. I want to find Mori, to scream out his name, to assure myself that he is one of the dark forms in front of me. But I know that this would be a deadly mistake. For all of us.

Before long, a gurgling sound reaches my ears, and a wave of relief washes over me for no apparent reason. Maybe, just maybe, the Shadow can't follow us into the water. Almost as quickly,

the thought vanishes. My parents were killed as they attempted to rescue two young boys from the Shadows.

They were all in the water.

We continue a path along what I can only discern as the water's edge by sound alone. Nothing is coming to me: no plan, no thought, no action. The gurgling sound is suddenly replaced by a thunderous crashing cacophony that envelops the night air, making it hard to think of anything else. I try to look ahead, but the darkness is absolute. An oblivion of black on black. The figures that I think are Mori and the others begin to slow down ever so slightly, and I realize that I am doing the same. We can't keep up this pace forever. The Shadow will reach us eventually. Or Shadows. There is no way to know how many are actually out there right now. Who knows what levels of endurance they possess?

The deafening roar surrounds us, pounding out an indiscernible rhythm of continuous beats. The thrumming sound is hypnotizing, lulling me into a dreamy state as my legs persist in moving of their own accord in an attempt at self-preservation. My stubborn mental senses want to fight this feeling, but it seems as if we've been running forever.

Then I hear it.

A piercing scream erupts somewhere in front of me, and I force myself to keep moving forward despite the raging battle in my head. My senses are shouting at me to turn around or jump into the water. But I don't know whose voice I heard. Images of Mori being torn to pieces by a Shadow force my legs to go faster.

Bhradon is right beside me as we come closer to the scene. I still can't figure out the identity of the shapes, but they are slowing down for some reason.

Two.

There are two shapes. Someone is missing.

Before I can examine the details any further, a dark form leaps from nowhere, black as night, virtually invisible, a Shadow in the shadows.

It grabs the nearest person, and we stare in horror for a few mute seconds. Then we run.

Only a few strides ahead, I realize the source of the scream from a moment ago.

The ground slips away from underneath my feet, and an identical scream escapes from my throat as I feel myself falling into nothing.