

VIRALS

PROLOGUE

A gunshot is the loudest sound in the universe.
Especially if the bullet is coming at you.

Crack! Crack!

Bullets slashed the forest canopy. Overhead, monkeys screeched and scattered.

Down below, I ran.

Heedless, legs hammering, I pounded through the undergrowth. Mind blank. Terrified.

Find the path!

Shapes zoomed by in the black. Trees. Bushes. Startled creatures. Gun-toting killers? I couldn't tell. Heart thumping, I barreled forward in a dead sprint. Blind.

A root snagged my foot and down I went. Pain detonated in my leg.

Get up! Get up! Get up!

Something large zipped past in the darkness. I froze.

“Ben?!?!”

No reply. Sudden stillness.

Waiting here means death. Move!

Scrambling to my feet, I bolted into the night.

Was Hi up ahead? Shelton had gone left, darting into the foliage.

Please be Ben that ran by me!

We hadn't had a plan. Why would we? No one knew we were here, or what we were doing.

Who the hell is trying to shoot me?

Exhausted, I gulped air.

Later, after the change, I could have run forever. Fast. Tireless. My perfect vision piercing the night's shadows. Not gasping, lost in the shapeless dark.

These thugs wouldn't have stood a chance, whoever they were. Not with our powers unleashed. My pack would have savaged them. Planned without speaking a word. Stalked them like they were kittens. Then taken out the trash.

But not that night. I was in trouble. Fading. Scared to death.

So I ran. Hard. Branches clawed my limbs and ripped my skin. Finally, I hit open space.

The beach! I was close.

A voice hissed from the void.

“Tory! Over here!”

Shelton.

Thank God.

In the starlight, I could just make out the boat. Vaulting the railing, I dropped into the bow and turned to scan the shoreline. Clear. For the moment.

“Where’s Hi? Ben?” I whispered, panting, sweat-drenched. I was definitely on tilt.

“I’m here.” Ben eased from the darkness. A quick bound and he was in, sliding behind the controls. Keys in hand, he paused, afraid to turn the engine. Afraid not to.

Hi was still out there.

We sat, tensed, waiting. My courage leaked from my shoes.

Come on, Hi. Show. Please, oh please, oh please, oh please . . .