

A CRASH LIKE A LINEBACKER COLLIDING WITH A quarterback woke me, and I shot straight up in bed. I blinked at the clock beside me, trying to make sense of the world. Red numbers glowed in the darkness. *Three twenty-three*. It was three twenty-three in the morning. Why was I awake at three twenty-three in the morning? Had I dreamed the crashing sound?

“Kamran?” my mother called from down the hall. “Kamran? Was that you? Are you all right?”

Thunder. No—footsteps. Feet pounding down the hall. Someone was coming for me. Half-remembered childhood nightmares seized me, and I scrambled backward across the bed in a panic, trying to get away from Voldemort, the Joker, the aliens, the demons. I fell on the floor with a thump, the bed-covers coming with me. My legs were tangled in them. I couldn’t kick free.

And then they were there. Dark shapes surged into my room, black on black silhouettes with hulking shoulders and big round eyes that flashed. My fear made me five again. I curled up against the side of the bed like I was playing hide-and-seek with my older brother, Darius, hoping he wouldn’t see me. But the demons knew where I was. They homed in on me like guided missiles.

Rough hands grabbed me. Hauled me to my feet. Threw me face-first on the bed. Somewhere, remotely, I heard my mother scream, heard my father cry out. The demons had come for them, too.

“Mom! Dad!” I cried. I kicked and squirmed, trying to get away, but my arms were wrenched behind me and bound with a plastic zip tie that cut into my wrists. The hands pulled me up again, and I read the words on one of my captors’ uniforms:

POLICE

HOMELAND SECURITY

Reality finally overrode my half-awake nightmares. “No. No! Darius is innocent!” I cried. “He’s not a terrorist! You don’t understand! They’re making him do everything!”

The DHS agents wrangled a thick bag over my head, and the already dark room went completely black.

“No! Please! Don’t!” I yelled. The black bag was close. Suffocating. My hot breath was damp on my face, and I started to panic. “You can’t do this! I was born in America! I’m an American citizen!”

The DHS agents ignored my protests. I kicked and thrashed as they dragged me from my room, down the hall, and out through the front door.

A few days ago, all I had cared about was winning the homecoming game. Getting into college. Going on a date with Julia Gary. Normal high school senior stuff. A few days ago, I had been king of the world.

Now I was a prisoner of the United States of America.