

Opening Ceremonies: Part One

In the Olympic stadium, a cheer like a loud exhalation rose into the dull grey London sky. The British athletes had just entered the Opening Ceremonies—the last country in the Parade of Nations. Outside, Sam checked his watch, turned away from the crowd's breath, and wrapped his fingers tightly around the mobile phone in his pocket. His own breathing was short, shallow. A cold sweat gathered on his forehead. His body was chilled and shaking beneath his security guard clothing.

Hadn't Ellis prepared him for this moment? If he were here, Ellis would have reminded Sam to stay focused; to remember those he was saving. He would have touched Sam's face and called him Chosen.

But Sam's mind had begun to follow the rhythm of his quickened heartbeats. It landed on the image of the female security guard twenty feet away, bent over and picking up an empty water bottle. Then it turned inward to consider the scent of the wet grass. Jumped to the weight of the mobile in his pocket. Then to the imagined tableau of the British athletes beginning to enter the stadium, the lightning storm of camera flashes. To Brent's little boy eyes, upside down, peering from the top bunk. His mother's face. To the growing pain in his chest. To Ellis, cross-legged on the floor of his Toronto apartment, holding out a ring.

This must be like what happens when athletes choked. Thoughts clogging the brain.

Sam had imagined that this would be easier. That he'd be ready. He wanted to run.

Ellis, help me.

He checked his watch again, ten seconds to go.

As he counted down from ten, he ran a shaking fingertip over the four gold bands hanging on the delicate chain around his neck. His other hand clenched the phone.

He didn't think he could do it.

It was time. Sam looked at the sky and turned away from the closest security camera.

A memory: he was seven; standing on the three-metre diving board, ready to jump off for the first time. With every second of hesitation he felt the board rise higher, the water retreat. His knees knocked together loudly as he leaned over the end. His six-year-old brother Brent waited in the water below, laughing.

Sam swallowed, and his fingers found the dial button.

The sensation of falling through air.