

The Compound

By S. A. Bodeen

This is the way the world ends

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Not with a bang but a whimper.

by T. S. Eliot

T. S. Eliot was wrong. My world ended with a bang the minute we entered the Compound and that silver door closed behind us.

The sound was brutal.

Final.

An echoing, resounding boom that slashed my nine-year-old heart in two. My fists beat on the door. I bawled. The screaming left me hoarse and my feet hurt.

Through my tears, the bear and elk on my father's shirt swam together. Dad's chest heaved. The previous forty minutes had left us out of breath. Finally my gaze focused and went beyond him, searching. I gulped down an painful sob.

Had everyone made it?

Farther down the corridor I saw my weeping mother, dressed in a burgundy robe, dark tendrils dangling from her once-careful braid. Mom clutched by six-year-old sister, Terese, a sobbing pigtailed lump in pink flowered flannel. From one small hand dangled her beloved Winnie the Pooh.

"Where's Gram?" I shouted.

Dad patted my head, hard and steady, like I was a dog. He spoke slowly, in the same tone he used to explain to the household help the exact amount of starch he required in his shirts. "Eli, listen to me. There wasn't

enough time. I waited as long as I could. We had to shut the door before it was too late.”

The door. Always, the door.

Another look. No sign of my twin brother. He was the person I needed the most. Where was he?

My pounding heart suggested I already knew the answer. “Eddy?”

Dad whirled around, his tone accusing. “I thought Eddy was with you.”

My head swung from side to side. Between sobs, the words barely eked out. “He went on with Gram.”

Dad’s face clouded with indecision. Just for a moment. Had that moment lasted, it might have changed all of our futures. But Dad snapped back into control. “I still have one of you.” With just six words, my childhood ended.

As did the rest of the world.