

The voices are quiet. I hear them softly; always softly. They whisper all the time. When I'm at work, when I'm going to sleep... when I'm dreaming. It wasn't always this way. I lived for three decades without hearing anything more than anyone else. In my dreams, I heard only the shouts of the shadow people I dreamed and the footsteps I shed on the ground when I ran, always late for something.

I was a scientist. I would look up through my telescope, the most powerful in the world, and wonder, like billions before me, what was out there. Every night I broke from my work and aimed the lens randomly, gazing into galaxies that no one had ever seen before.

After a while, I couldn't work. I couldn't concentrate long enough to wrap my head around astronomical equation and physics. It was all I could do to get myself to fall asleep at night, and even then there was no silence. There were only dreams set against a backdrop of endless voices, taunting me with incomprehensible messages.

I work the night shift, now, wherever they'll hire me. I can't seem to sleep when I can see stars through the window. I close the blinds or hide underground, but it's always louder at night, and I can imagine that there's nothing up there but blue sky so much more easily during the day. I can sleep.

Sometimes I dream that I can hear the whispers clearly. They're just people I know, talking in a room just beside the room I'm in. They're muffled, but they're familiar. English, sometimes, but any language is fine. They're soothing sounds, in my dreams. Human sounds.

Sometimes I don't dream. I'll have a night off and I'll wake up to the dark night sky, somehow always clear no matter how many drapes I cover the window with, or how many ceilings are between it and me. I can't fool myself then. I look up into the stars and I know they saw me. I know they're coming for me.

The voices get louder.