Her lungs were giving out, she could feel them squeeze every breath out, but she could not stop, not now. The unnatural darkness surrounding her makes the sounds of their steps more obvious and nerve-wracking, she can even hear the soft sobs behind her, Maria and Laura; they are still following her desperate pace.

How did a night out with her friends after the office turn out like this? “Keep Running!” She yells, pushing senseless thoughts to the back of her mind. She cannot see anything in front of her; it’s as if the darkness has transported them somewhere far away.

What are we even running from? Is it monster? A gang? All she knows is that if they stop, even for a second, something terrible will happen. The air is stagnant even though they keep running it feels like they are not going forward. She feels Laura grabbing for her hand, struggling to keep up and Maria is crying harder now.

She feels like something is shifting around them, the darkness seems to be getting closer and closer, she starts feeling claustrophobic. Laura is praying in earnest, her grip feels like iron, she can feel the bruises starting to form. “Clara! I think I hear something…” Maria whispers urgently from behind, Laura’s praying gets louder and between her thoughts and the raw fear Clara can’t hear the noises that her coworker is pointing out, “Be quiet Laura, please.” Clara implores, her voice breaking.

All of the sudden a raw guttural cry emerges all around them. Whatever it is, it’s dying, it’s organic and it chills her blood. “What was that?” Laura screams, her voice losing any trace of sanity. Clara realizes with a start that they are not running and musters up all of her adrenaline to pull Laura’s hand, “Keep running, we can’t stay here!” She has to drag Laura but feels her moving behind her, “Maria, hurry up we need to move!” She hears Maria moan and is relieved to hear her heavy footsteps in response to her cry.

That noise, was it human, was it another victim, like them? The darkness somehow becomes denser, and there is a stench all around them, “I’m gonna be sick…” Laura mutters behind her, Clara fights the nausea and tugs at her, “Not now, we can’t stop!”

She hears a cry, this time one she can identify, her heart rises to her throat. “Laura, you need to keep running, I think I heard Maria fall, I need to go get her.” Clara turns to run back, but Laura’s isn’t letting go of her hand, “Laura, please I need to go, Maria is in trouble!” I hear Laura start sobbing, however she releases her hold. Clara musters her resolve, whispering to Laura “Be safe”, she runs Maria is now screaming, she hears her desperately yell their names, and she runs towards the sound in spite of her body asking her to turn back. Clara runs into something soft, “Please help me! I can’t get on my feet, my ankle!”

Clara desperately tries to find Maria’s limbs, her friend is trashing about and screaming, until she is not. Clara tries to lift her up, she focuses on Maria’s weight, and she is too quiet and feels like a ragdoll. Something is pulling back and after what feel like ages of just seeing ink-black darkness all around her, Clara can suddenly see Maria. Her eyes are white, she looks lifeless and there is a dark shadow blanketing her feet. She looks in horror as that darkness starts swallowing Maria.

Clara realizes that she, herself, is screaming, she keeps trying to pull Maria, to no avail and feels completely disconnected from her body. There is a hum, which threatens to swallow Clara, along with Maria. She let’s go of Sara’s lifeless arm and turns around crying. She starts to run again. She chances one look, and can see that Maria is now half swallowed by that darkness, her eyes are still white but her jaw is fixed in a silent scream. That same raw cry starts once more; Clara faces forward and closes her eyes, all of her strength and remaining sanity focusing on putting one foot in front of another. She has no idea of where Laura is. Clara is alone.

It could have been an hour or a year, Clara feels like she has been trapped an eternity, and has no idea how she can keep running. Then she is on the ground, her head spinning, did her legs give out? She tries to feel with her hands, there is a wall, a solid wall that is covered in a sticky material. She gets up, wobbling and tries to push, the wall doesn’t give and there is a stench emanating from it. She realizes that there is no longer an eerie silence all around her; barely audible whispers seem to be coming from all directions. She falls to the ground, sliding down the wall, and hugs her knees sobbing. She thinks of Laura and Maria, she feels the whispers pressing in from all directions. She covers her ears, to no avail. Then, all she can hear are her sobs she feels someone breathing down her neck, and she looks up. She sees Maria looking down on her, her whole body hanging like a macabre mobile, her neck in an impossible angle, eyes white. Clara is frozen, she feels her bladder start to give out as a warm liquid starts to fall on her face. She thinks she is crying, but then she feels the tepid substance fall down her cheeks, neck and chest. It’s viscous and it smells like death, she remembers when she found her old dog, after he had been missing for a week, the way maggots were crawling all around him, and that disgusting smell that made her instantly dry heave. Clara hears the growls, she realizes that she is now soaking wet, she dares not look up, she does not want to see Maria again, she does not want to know if she is soaking in blood. The sounds are becoming louder, she feels as if her whole body is being held in a tiny space, she is hyperventilating, Clara faces upwards and opens her eyes one more time. Maria is no longer there. Nothing is there.

Once more darkness, she lifts her hand to try to feel something, anything, but there is only space, she can’t even see her own hand. That raw cry, like an ancient creature sounds all around her, it’s like she is in the stomach of an organic being, and it is ruminating. But she can hear it approaching her, she can hear its repetitive screams, it is hunting her and it knows she can no longer run. It’s as if each roar brings the thing closer, she spares one desperate thought to compare the sound to other animals. She thinks this might be what dinosaurs sounded like, gargantuan all muscle and tissue. She feels the wall behind her start to move it is curving taking in her weight and enveloping her in a disgusting cocoon. She feels warmth surrounding her she looks up to see Maria once more, lifeless still hanging, but now she is shaking and it seems like she is being swallowed. She hears dripping, and wet gigantic steps, from her cocoon she feels the quake. She hears the darkness being broken, and she closes her eyes, willing herself to shut down all the environment.

With a gasp she realizes she is now lying down. Clara trashes about, knocking out her alarm clock that is blaring its usual staccato of electronic annoyance to start her day. She can’t see anything and is terrified that she is still trapped she tries to get up. And feels something soft underneath her, she still has the stench fresh on her mind and she falls down, her head aching; she crawls until she bumps into a wall and realizes she is now clutching a ball of fabric in her fist. She pulls it and recognizes that she is her room, as the curtains give way to light.

The alarm clock is still on, it reads 7:00 am, she touches her arms and legs, she is soaked in sweat and tears are still running down her cheeks, she thinks of Maria and the warm viscous liquid that was covering her in that dark place, she numbly crawls to her alarm clock turning it off with shaky hands. She manages to sit down on her bed once more; her hair on the back of her neck is still on end, reminding her of that last breath. She reaches for her phone, on the floor, next to the alarm clock. Clara looks at yesterday’s messages, Laura and Maria telling her to hurry up to the bar.

She covers her face with her hands, and starts crying, she can still smell that rotting stench and in the walls of her room the hum of whispers trapped within them.