

Stairwell

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There's a noise above me, or is there? I know they're coming up behind me, chasing me, but fear strikes deep inside me as I realise they might be ahead of me too. I look up, craning my neck, but I can't see anything. The stairs twist and turn, and just as I can't see those coming up from below, I can't see if there are any in front of me. Am I running towards more danger, even as I try to escape from the danger which is following me already? I'd pause and listen, but if I do that I'm dead because those who are pursuing me will catch me and rip me limb from limb. I know this because I've seen them do it to others. That was when I started running, somehow ending up in the stairwell where I'd started to climb. I began on five and now I'm twenty floors up with maybe another fifteen to go. I've given up trying to get out. The doors which provide access at every floor only open from the other side, designed to let people out in an emergency and not let them in. This means I'm trapped on the stairs with only two options: up or down. I can hear the howls and roars of my pursuers echoing up from below, bouncing off the bare concrete walls, disorienting me, robbing me of the ability to tell which direction they're coming from. Why on earth did I choose up? Was it some sort of innate instinct that told me up was best? Maybe it was a lingering primal urge from when we used to live in the trees that made me want to climb in order to escape. Whatever the reason, I know now that it was the wrong decision. I should have gone down. Why the hell didn't I go down? I could have been out on the street by now. But then again, would the street be any safer? Surely they'd be out there, too? I reach yet another landing. The number on the wall says twenty-one. My lungs are screaming from the exertion, my legs aching, but I know I need to keep going. Now I'm here, I have no choice. I glance upwards. Was that a movement I saw? A flickering shadow indicating that they're up there, too, waiting for me? Or was it just my imagination? I'm running on fear and little else. My mind's racing, but I can't think straight. I look backwards. From the sound coming up from below, I can tell they're closing in on me, but I can't tell how close they are. They don't seem to tire, they don't pause, even for a moment. As I slow with every step, they seem to speed up. I can't see them, but I know they're there; I can hear their feet pounding on the stairs. I start climbing again, no longer even knowing where I'm going or what I'm going to do once I get there. All I can concentrate on is trying to escape, on keeping them out of sight, hoping against

hope they'll finally give up, even though I know in my heart that they won't. I hear the noise again. I can tell that it's closer, but I still can't tell where it's coming from. What can I do, but keep climbing, hoping that somehow I'll manage to escape, even if I know that I won't? It's either that or I give up, and there's something embedded in my very soul that just won't let me do that. So onwards I go, knowing I'll keep running, keep climbing until I can go no further. With no way out of the stairwell, what else can I do?