

You find yourself running down a long, dark, damp hallway. The only sources of light are two rows of candles, one on each side, about two feet from the ceiling. The walls are made of cobblestone and mortar as are the ceiling and floor too. The smell of decay and funk abuses your nostrils as you press on.

The walls are lined with a series of doors that you are feverishly trying to open. One by one you approach a door, futilely attempting to open it, the knob not budging an inch.

ZIG!

You try to open the door across the hall.

ZAG!

You run back and try the next.

ZIG! ZAG! ZIG! ZAG! Twenty-plus doors and nothing to show for your efforts but exhaustion, two lungs full of putrid air, and mounting anxiety courtesy of the sound of wailing ever-present and seemingly getting louder...

...closer...

You see what appears to be the end of the hall and the blood that's already running cold in your veins feels like it's being replaced by liquid terror. You zag to your next door and notice the knob is slightly bigger in your hand than the others, making it more uncomfortable to turn. With the wailing still echoing throughout the hall, with both hands, you twist the knob to the right. It moves but doesn't open. You turn the knob to the left - CLICK! The door opens and you hush inside the chamber and close the door behind you. You don't even notice the click.

You kneel on the floor with your back against the door. As you try to force the crushing pressure of fear from your chest, it's only now that you realize that you have no idea where you are, why you're there, and from who or what you were running. Despite your dread-powered amnesia developing paralysis in nearly all of your limbs, you stand and began to assess the chamber.

First thing you notice - everything is wet. The liquid doesn't feel quite like water, but you don't have a word for what it could otherwise be. It's dirty, for sure. You best describe it as a mix of old blood and often reused bathwater. It's dripping from the ceiling and seeping through the cracks in the mortar between the stones. And it smells. Just as bad as the hall, but with another smell wafting between the pockets of stench.

The stones are covered by a green substance that looks like moss and feels more like hair.

Is it hair? Are these walls growing hair?! It's hard to tell since there is nearly no light - only the light spilling in from the hallway through the barred window above the door. It barely illuminates five feet around the door. The rest of the chamber is black. A degree of black that the night sky without stars or moon could brighten it. You can't tell if there's another window or door on the other side. If there is, it's just as dark on the other side of it or it's covered.

You start to leave your lit vale of safety by the door toward the shadowed side of the chamber when you hear a familiar scratching sound coming from the dark. You step back into the light as you hear the scratch again. Upon the third scratch, your heart races, and your muscles tense as your brain finally recognizes the scratch and identifies the smell that's different from the hallway.

Matches. Someone is striking matches.

Someone in the room is striking matches.

Someone is in the room with you!

WHOOSH! A large match the size of a tikki torch finds purchase against the strike pad and the dark chamber, as well as your eyes, are overwhelmed with light. As you wait for your eyes to adjust, you run back towards the door, trying to escape. No knob. You try to pry the door open from the seam. No luck.

“Kaaaattttiiiiieeeee,”

Your head pops up, more confused than scared. *Was that my name?* you think to yourself. *That...that couldn't have been...*

“Kaaaattttiiiiieeeee,”

You turn your head just in time to see an uncanny figure holding a torch in the air and then lowering the torch to the floor, setting the center of the chamber ablaze. In the glow of the flames, you see the uncanny figure clearer than before. Its arms seem to extend too far from its body with hands almost too small for that much arm. Hunched forward, its scaly spine pushing up against its skin, stretching the skin tight around its body.

“Come to meeeee, Kaaaattttiiiiieeeee,”

Your attention is drawn to the figure's face. Equal parts dazed and confused wash over you in the way you wish the liquid on the ground wouldn't. Across the chamber in the glowing red and orange light of the fire stands - you - just not quite you. Your eyes, well, the figure's eyes, are as black as the room used to be and too far apart, thanks to your nose...the figure's nose... shifting too far north on your... its... face.

"Stay away!", you yell out to the figure. You're not sure why you bothered saying this. It's never worked for anyone ever, but, hell, it's worth a shot, right?!

"Come to meee," the figure said again, "this is where you belong."

The figure slowly approaches you, step by step, your dark eyes... its dark eye forever staring. It doesn't blink once. It's now that you notice the lack of eyebrows or eyelashes. As the figure steps ever closer to the flames separating the chamber, the fire moves further from the figure but closer to you, cornering you by the locked door with each and every step. The fire also appears to grow more intensity reaching higher on the floors than before. You can even feel the heat through the hairy moss on the floors beneath your bare feet.

*Have I been barefoot this whole time?!*

"Kaaaattttiiiiieeee!" The voice of the figure is getting loud, sounding more like your voice does when it's recorded. The fire and the figure get closer to you. "Commmmmee to Meeeee. You belong here!"

The figure is about 20 feet away, but the flames are mere inches from you. You find yourself cowering in the corner by the door with your arm hiding your face. As the flames nip at your skin, the fear and pain drive you to tears, but the heat dries them immediately. As you smell your flesh begin to cook, you scream in agony; the sound reminiscent of the wailing from the hall. Above your screams, you hear the figure's voice one last time.

"Kaaattiiiiiee. Welcome Home."

The figure's long arms wrap around your body and you feel your last breath leave your body when...

Your eyes open. You awaken in a cold sweat from the most livid nightmare you've ever had in your life. So intense and so realistic, you could have sworn it was a memory. You can still feel the sensations against your skin. You close your eyes and try to control your breathing, thankful you're able to take another breath. As your heart begins to settle, you hear the sound of your bedroom door opening and shutting. You open your eyes to see someone standing by your door,

visible only by the light that comes in from above your door from the hall. They look oddly familiar to you. You reach over and grab a large match and attempt to light it. Once. Twice. On the third strike, the room fills with light and your suspicions are confirmed. The person looks terrified so you call out to them thinking they'll relax once they see a familiar face.

“Kaaaattttiiiiieeee,” you say.