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# Snuffed

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Footer Logo

# Snuffed

Brooke Nelson

*Spooky Story Contest Runner-Up*

In the middle of the night, She lit the last dinner candle with the smoldering wick of its dying predecessor. It came to life with a rescuing kind of gleam. Her hands shook, her chest heaving with uneven breaths. The sullied rags She wore did nothing to stave off the cold while her nose ran chilled snot. One of her hands reached out, ragged fingernails scratching at the shed wall.

Once, She'd painted the metal with her father. Humming nonsensical verses, He joined her, his hand reaching over to tickle the crook of her neck. She laughed when He smeared a line of red paint across her cheek.

But that was before They came.

Like some kind of mouse, She used the chipped wall as an anchor, traveling slowly along its length. Her scabbed foot caught on a root, and She pitched forward. Thought ceased.

She scrambled to save her last bits of light. She threw her arms out before her, holding the candle aloft. The jarring of her elbows on the ground sent shooting pains through her bones while rocks imprinted her knees. Her grip was clammy on the candle's hilt, but sure. She heaved herself up, first settling onto her knees, rocking back to her heels, and upright. On her feet, leaning against the wall, She clung to the candle. The flame danced before her eyes, unaware of its brush with tragedy.

The sky above was empty, devoid of stars: thousands of far-away-saviors blocked by monstrous clouds. She'd burned her last calendar with the rest of the paper but recognized the lunar cycles well enough to know it couldn't be helped. Not even the moon would see her death.

She found the door handle and heaved it open slowly, so as to not disturb her flame. The creaking hinges begged for grease, but they'd burned that with the barn. She shut it with a *thud*, swallowing thickly as She barred it behind her. She turned, back to the door, and slid to the floor, wiping at her nose. The cold seeped into her muscles, like the

concrete had reached up and enveloped her, stripping the warmth away. Knees to her chest, She kept her gaze from the candle, searching in the dim glow of the light. She knew she would find nothing, but They were there.

Waiting.

They seeped in through the small window, and within them darkness rumbled. Keeping to the midnight corners, They lurked, watching as she shivered. They took care to keep distant. Her eyes darted around, finding nothing. Moments passed, and her muscles loosened. She slid her legs down, settling against the floor. They could smell her heady fear, radiating off of her in waves.

Over time, her shuddering eyelids fell closed in exhaustion, only to be forced open again. This repeated itself until they remained closed. Her head tipped back, and she lost herself to sleep.

Silent as the grave, They held their breath, let her think she was safe. And she was...

For the moment.

Her eyes snapped open and She gasped for air. She had fallen asleep, the candle significantly shorter, melted pulls of wax streaming onto her tense fingers. Her gaze darted towards the window; there was still no sign of dawn. Wind howled outside, causing the metal shed to shudder and moan around her. The candle was dimmer than before; it wouldn't keep them at bay.

She gave up searching for them. The flame seemed to burn faster, an ephemeral sprite. Cupping her hands around it, She watched as beads of hot wax dripped against her palms. She let the candle sway slightly, dropping wax across her fingers. They were close.

Each second marked another flicker of light gone forever.

Their presence permeated the surrounding darkness like forest fog. Leaning in, They huffed a dominant breath against her neck, for the light was much too dim. Her body recoiled, arching away, and They

delighted in her revulsion. She tried to see them, but it was much too dark for that. Soon, darkness would be all she knew.

The candle cast a barely-there glow within the cup of her hands, lighting the hollows of her features. For every last flicker, the wick almost drowned in its own fuel, and They loomed around her.

They were closing in.

She blinked, her lip quivering. She watched with a whimper as the last bits of threaded fuse bowed forwards in haunting submission.

Gasping as the light faded, the smoky soul filled her mouth, the wisp sharp against her tongue. In a heavy *ffffwump* of wind, She was surrounded. Her heart thudded in her ears and her chest constricted tightly as the humidity increased around her and something sharp slid across her cheek, leaving a streaming trail of hot blood. She cried out.

She screwed her eyes shut, screaming, while they descended upon her, darkness extinguishing yet another light.



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