

The Candle

A man sits alone in a room, a dark room, no door, no windows, no roof for all he could see, but there was no night sky, so he could only assume that he was six feet under. In his cold hands, staring the thing down as if run away it could, he held a candle. A single candle, unlit, as his weathered face and empty eyes stared at the way the molten fuel dripped down along the sides, temporarily burning his hands as he bit his lips, yet no moving, afraid to extinguish the only light there. And burn his hands it did, until all that remained was a red skin so badly scorched, that it might as well have been blood on bone.

The flame fell lower and lower, until no more fuel was left. So desperate to keep it going, the man let it feed off of his hand, watching it dance, as it set his numb hands aflame. The room lit up in a fiery blaze, revealing a cage set around him, with the keys on the floor in front of him. The flame jumped from his hands to his sleeves, and from his sleeves to the cloth draped over his chest. As the man went up in flames, the others watched, mesmerised by the new beacon, until one person reached out with another candle, allowing it to catch an ember, before pulling it back into her bony hands, staring at the flame dancing up above, watching the fuel drip down to her fingers.

For but a moment, the ember lit up her face, the flame in her eyes long since extinguished, its energy transferred into the candle. She breathed in the smoke, a shuddering

groan leaving her mouth as the smoke entered her lungs. She coughed, bent over like an old widow, standing alone in a dark garden, deep in the night. Her hair fell down like a curtain, shielding the dancing flame from the prying eyes of others.

For another hour, did she watch as the hot wax turned her skin red, her nails black. Only then did she meet the same fate as the one that came before, her hair catching alight first. Her death, however, was no spectacle. She did not burst into flame, much less did the fire illuminate the room. No, she went out with a smouldering cinder chipping away at her corpse. With the candle gone, darkness swallowed the room whole once more, taking away the prisoners' sight, with the loss of which the keys too were lost forever to the expanding night.

In the darkness, their skin turned pale, as they twisted and turned under the damp cobbled ceiling. Then, when all was lost, and none saw the light, with a foul screech, the hounds came, to feast on what was left.

None heard their screams, as the full moon hid behind the deck of trees in that sinister forest. The dungeon was soon after abandoned, ancient history buried along with what remained of the victims, or any who tried to intervene with their fates.