

Shock Horror Unit: Short Story, by Alex Williams (8ENG2)

Amy crept through the inky blackness, clutching her torch tightly. The ghostly beam swept methodically from left to right like a lighthouse guiding stray ships into a harbour and Amy examined every detail the light touched.

She stopped walking and licked her desert-dry lips, listening intently. No sound reached her ears and the silent blackness seemed to be drawing closer, hungrily trying to touch her warm skin.

With a silk soft sigh, Amy began to walk again. Her gaze darted from one spot to another like the eyes of a wild animal, listening... listening. Every muscle of her body was tense as she crept between the walls of greying bones. Despite her efforts to remain silent, the muffled thumping of her footsteps sounded like a cacophony compared to the unearthly silence that greedily chewed up any noise.

Amy couldn't believe what had started as an innocent trip to France had ended so horribly; lost in the Catacombs of Paris with no way to find her tour group again. A shiver ran through Amy, sending a wave of goose-bumps along her skin as she tried not to think of every monster story she had ever heard.

The eerie light projecting from the small torch clutched in Amy's hand flickered, plunging the world into starved darkness for a terrifying second. Then the light returned, and Amy let out a shaky sigh, flashing the torch around her as if she was creating a barrier of light.

As Amy continued through the darkness, it felt like the catacombs were waiting... waiting for her to make a wrong turn...

Tension mingled with fear as both grew inside Amy's chest, a ball of anxiety growing larger and more fragile with every step she took. One step, two steps. Amy refused to turn around now, refused to sweep her flashlight into the corners where the darkest shadows lurked.

A sound! It was the scuttling sound of a rock skidding along the ground, the noise echoing off the walls of bone. Amy stopped walking, straining her ears for any other echo's. She was half terrified, half elated. Had that sound belonged to a foul monster or to the tour group she had lost?

Amy turned very slowly... facing the darkness that followed her. Flashing her torch around, she gazed into the shadows, searching for the sound's creator and saw... nothing. Frowning, Amy peered around the closest corner, looking for someone, anyone! She let out a shuddering gasp as another light punctured the intrusive darkness. Thanking every god she had ever heard of, Amy began to run towards the light.

"Help me! I've lost my way!" Though Amy was running as fast as she could toward the light the latter wasn't growing any larger. "Please help me..."

Amy slowed down, confusion washing over her like waves washing over a beach. Why wasn't anyone calling back to her? And why was there only one light? Surely, if it were the tour group, there would be fifteen torches!

Coming to a complete halt, Amy pointed her torch into the dark towards the light. A strange twisting feeling was making her want to vomit and her ball of anxiety felt like it was about to burst like a balloon with too much air inside.

“H-hello?” Amy stuttered, the word punched through the constricting darkness and rebounded off every wall, creating a crescendo of her own voice asking over and over: hello?

With her echoed voice egging her on, Amy turned and began to jog away. She reached the end of one corridor and looked back; the echoes had ceased but a second light had appeared in the gloom. Her heart rate increased and her eyes widened as she watched the two lights hang in the inky darkness.

Amy turned right and began to run, down one corridor before turning left. She looked behind her. Four lights.

Amy came to the end of a tunnel and looked back... eight lights now. She began to sprint down the left tunnel, the beam of her torch swinging wildly as her arms pumped up and down, creating ghostly shadows around the walls.

Another intersection, left this time. More ghostly shadows, sixteen lights, her heart was nearly exploding with terror. Then, her torch flickered once again. Her eyes widened as the torch's comforting beam vanished, plunging her into thick darkness.

“NO!” Amy shouted angrily as she hit the torch against the palm of her hand. The light flickered and turned on for a second before allowing the blackness to beat it. Amy began to breathe quickly, trying not to look back at the glowing orbs.

Amy's lungs felt tight, her hands were shaking and wild half formed thoughts were whirling around her mind like a piece of clothing in a gale. One word was prominent, one word boldly jumped out at her. Run.

Without thinking, Amy dropped her torch and began to run. Running through the catacombs of Paris, every single tunnel was familiar as though she had been running through them for an eternity. Like she had been running away from the ethereal lights for her whole life, as though this was all that was left of her. Running away.

Each time she looked back, there were more lights; twenty, twenty-four, twenty-eight... Amy's legs were aching; her feet were burning and there was a sharp pain in her side. She wished she had never ventured into the catacombs at all.

“Please...” A hushed voice whispered, “Please help me.”

Immediately, Amy stopped running. That sounded like the voice of scared child.

“Please, can someone help me!” The voice broke and Amy turned around, gazing at the sea of white stars and black sky behind her where the girl's voice had originated.

“Who are you?” Amy queried, gazing at the lights. The voice did not answer with a name, it simply continued to plead Amy for help.

Amy's feet began to move, though her mind wasn't ordering them. One step after the other towards the glowing spheres. She had to help the girl, something within her was making her walk forward.

A new voice spoke, startling Amy to a stop. "Is somebody there?" The voice of a lady asked through the darkness. It sounded fragile, as though the speaker was old and delicate. "Could you help me?"

Amy had to help, these people were helpless and harmless. Amy's feet began push her towards the lights and the voices again, but her stomach was writhing and part of her was telling her to stop. To turn, to run.

More voices belonging to frail old women and small girls began to beg with Amy, crying for help. Yet Amy felt afraid. Tears pricked her eyes as the innocent voices began grow louder. Though their voices were loud and were punching through the darkness, there were no echoes.

A chorus of helplessness followed her as Amy sprinted away, growing louder with each step she took. Amy turned and felt her heart stop. There were more lights, but instead of the star like pinpricks behind her, these lights were glowing icy blue.

A shudder crawled over her body, despite the fact she was dripping with sweat. Pleas for help were also coming from the blue light. Amy felt a tear slide down her cheek, she just wanted to go home.

"Come a bit nearer... help me... come... help!" Amy's shoes slipped on the gravelly ground as she turned and scrambled away.

Burning feet. Tear streaked face. Uneven ground. Tripping, falling. Tears streamed down her face as the ground rushed closer. As Amy rushed towards the ground, time slowed and she let out a scream of misery, cursing the catacombs and the monsters within.

Amy's head smashed onto the harsh ground... There was a flash of blinding white light like an exploding sun and the voices of the blameless and abandoned became a howl of triumph which refused to echo off the walls of the dead. Then the blinding light and triumphant howl both faded into a nothingness that felt compressive, it felt wrong.

Then, bright colours and shrill sounds erupted from the void creating a crescendo of sound and colour that insulted the eye and ear. Before they could truly settle to create a proper picture the darkness returned and Amy crept through the gloom, her right-hand skimming along the wall of human bones, her left clutching her torch tightly. She closed her eyes, wondering how she had become so hopelessly lost.

The confident beam of light originating from the torch clutched in Amy's hand flickered, plunging the girl into the starved darkness for a soundless second. Then the light returned, and Amy let out a shaky sigh flashing the torch around her, creating a barrier of light which she needed to maintain her sanity.

The lights watched, silently waiting to appear again, to send her to the beginning. Again.