Laughing in the Face of Death - 1st place 2019

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Recommended Citation
Wright, Lindsey, "Laughing in the Face of Death - 1st place 2019" (2019). Knight Terror. 5. https://stars.library.ucf.edu/horrorshort/5

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Laughing in the Face of Death

The stacks blur as tears begin to pool in your eyes. You need to find this book. If you don’t find the book, you can’t write your essay. If you don’t write your essay, you’ll fail. If you fail, you’ll lose your scholarship. If you lose your scholarship, you’ll have to drop out and live in your parent’s basement. Your parents don’t even have a basement. You need to find this book.

You wipe away your tears as you hear the squeaking wheels of someone pushing a cart nearby. Maybe they’ll know where the book you need is. Pulling yourself together, you head toward the squeaking. You find someone taking books off the shelves and loading them onto a cart. You get their attention and ask them if they know where the book you need is. They respond in a guttural language you don’t recognize. Stress tears blur your vision as you repeat the book’s title, desperate for any kind of assistance. This time, they just smile at you and nod, gesturing for you to follow them. Relieved, you let them take the lead.

You follow them downstairs to what you assume is the first floor of the library, a floor you’ve never been to. It was closed when you first started at UCF, and you haven’t had a reason to come down here since it reopened. You follow them through the stacks and find yourself in a section with books titled in a language you’ve never seen before. They gesture to the stacks and smile at you. You laugh hysterically, at your wits’ end. Of course the book isn’t down here. That would mean you’re not going to fail. That would mean everything was going to be okay. You hear them say something, but all you can do is continue to laugh.

As the sounds of your hysteria die down, you realize the floor is now completely silent except for the guttural sound of their voice. You look to them and see their smile widening unnaturally as they speak. You hesitate, at first not sure what’s happening. Panic sets in as their smile widens to the point they don’t look human. You try to back away, but realize you’ve been backed into a corner. Your laughter returns, shrill and frenzied.

The humanoid creature begins moving closer to you. You want to scream, to try and fight, but all you can do is laugh, rooted to the spot. Their jaw starts to unhinge, creaking with each inch it grows. You can hardly hear over your hysterics. At least now you don’t need to write your essay, or fail, or lose your scholarship, or drop out. No, this is much better. Much less stressful to be eaten. You laugh uncontrollably. They descend upon you, and you hear a sickening pop echoing through the stacks as their jaw reaches full extension. As you finally stop laughing, the last thing you hear is your own sigh of relief.