

First Place: Bob Schulze Award for Prose – High School

“Ghost Stories”

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Grade: 9

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Ashley was having an average day before she walked straight into a ghost. Everything was going normally. Her little brother woke her up by being a menace, her mom yelled at her to get up several times before she actually stumbled out of bed, and she rushed, tripping several times on her way to the bus. Everything was playing out just like it always did. School was boring and she was supposed to pay attention, but instead, she built eraser towers and passed notes to her friends. The only captivating classes were choir and PE. She had a great time running around in PE and singing in choir. Everyone thought she was trying to be a showoff, but in all honesty, she was just trying to have fun. It's not like she cared what they thought anyway.

Soon school was over, and it was time for her to go take care of the cemetery. She started taking care of the cemetery when she was 11. She thought that it would make the place look a little bit nicer and would respect those who have passed. She swept through all the graves, pulled out the surrounding weeds, and sang songs while working. She was also not the only one who had been taking care of the cemetery. There was this guy who always came to place flowers on the graves. She usually just missed him or got there when he was just about to leave. She tried to talk to him a couple times before, but he never answered her. He always looked nervous when she managed to catch him, but she didn't know why. He looked about her age and she had seen him a couple times in the town and in her school, but they never actually talked.

Today, as autumn was right around the corner, leaves had fallen scattering on top of graves in the cemetery. Looking through the gate, she admired how beautiful it looked. In horror stories and scary movies cemeteries are always depicted as spooky and creepy, but on this nice cool morning with the sun shining and the sky as blue as ever, the cemetery looked anything but scary. It always had a magical feel, like it was separate from the rest of the world. Today as she arrived, she noticed the guy had just arrived too with a big bouquet of flowers. This was pretty unusual for him, but she said nothing about it. He came up and opened the gate, and they both walked in together. They both walked in, through a ghost.

For the first time in his life, after Eli walked through that ghost, his mind was completely blank. Which was pretty weird considering his mind was never blank. He always had a continuous inner dialog that never stopped. This made sense because it's not exactly like he could voice his thoughts out loud, he was mute. He was born with vocal cord paralysis, which is a condition that causes one vocal cord to not be able to reach the other, and this leaves a gap between the vocal cords. When he was born he was perfectly healthy otherwise, so his parents decided not to undergo treatment and assumed his voice would get better with time. It was quite the opposite. Over time, his voice got weaker and weaker until at 3 years old he could no longer talk. His parents asked if he could get surgery so he could speak again. The doctors explained it would be dangerous because it could damage his vocal cords even further. So his parents had to adjust to having a mute son, and their son had to adjust to being mute.

Which brings us to today. Where, for the first time in Eli's life, his mind was completely blank, while walking through a ghost. School was fine. Eli did what he usually did. He stayed in the back, and didn't attract any attention to himself. You see, Eli wasn't exactly “popular” among all the high-schoolers at his school. People thought he was weird for not being able to talk. They usually avoided him, and when they had to talk to him, they would talk like they couldn't understand him or like he was 5. Eli didn't mind the whole “kids his age not talking to him” part.

He found it hard to socialise anyway. Whenever he had to communicate with someone, he would use the white board he carried around everywhere to communicate. He would write down what he wanted to say and then show it to the person he was talking to. It was a simple yet slightly annoying process because writing down absolutely everything takes time.

After school he quickly gathered his things, and hurried to get to his Grandma's flower shop and the cemetery. Luckily his Grandma's flower shop wasn't too far from where he was. He picked up a bouquet of flowers as fast as possible and booked it to the cemetery. When he got to the cemetery, the girl was already there. Usually he managed to get there before she did, or sometimes after. Today, there she was, just standing there looking through the gate. This girl often came to the cemetery to clean it up and make it look nice. He'd also heard her singing there a couple of times. They'd never actually had a conversation together, even though they've both been taking care of the cemetery for about 2 years. He always tried to either get there before or after she did, or try his best to get out of there quickly when she was around. He didn't want to be rude by ignoring her or anything, it was just easier to avoid confrontation. Before he lost his nerve, Eli walked up to the gate and opened it. The girl gave him a funny look but didn't say anything. They then both walked in together. They both walked in, through a ghost.