



Judge's Report – 2017 Ghost Story contest

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The short story Prose category is a difficult one to master, especially one with a specific themed subject. 1500 words, or 500 words for the junior category, is a miniscule number of words in which to create an entire story. One that has a clear beginning, middle and end. One which captures the essence of the theme, and gives the reader well developed characters they can picture in their mind.

I had a great time judging this year's Ghost Story Contest. I was scared, I was moved, I was surprised. I laughed and I even cried.

In my opinion, anyone who writes a story is an author, and any author knows that sending your story out into the world to be judged is one of the scariest things you can possibly do. I'd like to applaud each and every one of our authors here tonight. The winners, the finalists, the entrants and all of those who thought about entering this year's Ghost Story, but didn't. I hope you'll build up your own courage by next year.

In conclusion, you should all be very proud of your achievements.

The judging criteria for the 2017 KSP Ghost Story contest was for polished writing, and good editing as well as interesting interpretations of the theme 'Alone'. As judge, I took into consideration the grammar and punctuation of each entrant, but it also came down to the 'feel' of the story. A story isn't just about each comma and full stop. It needs resonance and creativity. All the entries were spooky and fit the theme. All our writers deserve our congratulations for being brave enough to enter.

Instructions

The winners for tonight's Youth and Open Prose categories will be announced in reverse order starting with the honourable mentions.

When the names are announced, could the winners come up to the stage to receive their certificate, and pose for a photo. Once all the prizes are handed out and the final winners announced, we will be calling for entrants to come up and read their stories.

Youth Prose Category

Theme – Alone

The entries for the youth category were so close this year, I truly wish each and every entrant could have been awarded a prize. But choices had to be made, and here are the finalists in reverse order.

Honorable Mention - Soul by Grace Bettison

Grace captured the theme of 'Alone' with wonderful depth. In this story, 'Alone' is interpreted as loneliness, of solitude, that terrible ache that comes when you're longing for the company of another person. With its evocatively written descriptions of thunder, and the chill of a cold winter's day, I was carried into the story's world, and pulled into our main characters plight. Well done, Grace, this was a gorgeous story.

Second Place – Death In A Lake by Haoquin Cui

I was immediately struck by the maturity of the writing in Haoquin's story. The feeling of dread and fear that resonated from the very first line. Here we have an 'Alone' theme borne of guilt and pain, of anger and hurt. The rippling darkness of the lake becomes a character in itself, watching and waiting. Once again the description of cold and rain feature and add a real depth to the story. Well done, Haoquin.

First Place – Bones by Louisa Gardner

Can you be alone when someone else is by your side? This is the fascinating theme conjured up by our winning Youth story this year. I've mentioned already tonight that 500 words is a tiny amount in which to create fully developed characters. I feel Louisa achieved that difficult task, giving us the unbreakable bond that lingers within family, the heartbreak of loss and the feeling of being alone even when surrounded by the crush of humanity. I love the emotion given to the reader in this story and I feel everyone will be able to relate to it in some way. Well done Louisa.

Open Prose Category

Theme – Alone

When I judged the 2016 Ghost Story contest, I had nightmares for a week, due to the genuinely creepy nature of some of the stories. This year I wisely read each one during the day, and even then, they lingered in my mind long after the final word.

The quality of this year's open prose category was superb. I never cease to be amazed by the varied and different interpretations of 'Alone'. The finalist decision was a difficult one and I found myself reading and re-reading each entry multiple times in order to make that final choice.

In the end, it did come down to our theme, 'Alone' and that is how I determined the finalists tonight.

Honorable Mentions

Flicker by Tim Scanlon

One element of a ghost story I really enjoy, is the ability of the author to surprise. To put a twist in the tale. Tim did a striking job of this in Flicker. And, I was fascinated by his ability to do it in only 810 words. Can I tell you about the story in this judge's report without giving too much away? No I actually can't. I will say it twists and turns and gives the reader one impression before spinning them around. It's clever, it's witty and it's surprising. I enjoyed this story very much. Well done Tim.

Happy Valley by Ian Nichols

I've mentioned already about the varied interpretations of the theme 'Alone'. Our two honourable mentions tonight capture those differences perfectly. In Happy Valley, Ian gives us the quintessential Australian story, complete with dry dusty paddocks, broken fences and a lone man with a swag on his back. I was transported to the abandoned valley in this story. Every word, every sentence, every description. Here we're looking at rural life in all it's bleakness, the cruel reality of what can happen when we're deprived of the one thing we all need, water. Ian, your story resonated, it has true heart and soul. Well done.

I'd like to say a huge congratulations to both of the authors of these final two stories.

Second Place – Left Alone by Suzannah Churchman

Our second place story tonight is one I found exceptionally entertaining, and again, it comes with that superb ability to surprise. Suzannah gives us a tale about regret and loss, about leaving before the time is right, and lamenting decisions that cannot be undone. For the second time in this year's contest, I'm reluctant to give too much of the story away in the judge's report for fear of spoiling the actual reading for the audience here tonight. But I will say that this story captured me. The writing is alive and full of warmth and heart. And the story has such depth, I actually double checked the word count to make sure it fit the 1500 word ruling. It did, because Suzannah is an excellent writer. Well done, Suzannah, I know we'll be hearing so much more from you in the future.

First Place – Moan Alone by Scott-Patrick Mitchell

When reading a ghost story, there are certain expectations. A house, a ghost, rats, exorcism. All these are fitting references for spookiness. Add Schrödinger's Cat, Bosonic String Theory, astrophysics and Pink Hair and you know you're in for a fascinating ride. The cleverness and wit of this story blew me away. Its skillfully written images, the wonderful, mindset of its main character and the way the story winds its way through action, adventure, humour, and its central theme of 'Alone' is a masterpiece of short story telling.

Congratulations Scott, for looking outside the box (yes, that is a Schrödinger's Cat reference) for giving us a true ghost story filled with imagination and wonder. I loved reading it.