

An Unforgettable Night

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When I entered Tripping Magazine's writing contest for My Spookiest Ghost Story, I had hoped to win Second Prize, a free one year subscription. So I was a dismayed to find that I had won First Prize, which was going on assignment with the staff to the cemetery of my choice.

I chose a small graveyard in my town of Your Town. It had always seemed sort of friendly to me. My favorite tombstone showed a kindly looking man with his pet Animal lying on his feet. Here Lies Thomas Noun fine Occupation and lover of Food plural. He will be Verb ending in ing in death as he was in life.â??

Of course they wanted to do this after dark. Angus MacGregor, Tripping's editor, told me to meet them at the entrance at 10 PM. â??And bring a thermos of Beverage heâ??d said on the phone. â??Not only does it give you something to drink, but you can splash some on the Body part of any ghost that gets uppity. Makes them Present tense verb right away.â??

They were already there when I arrived.

â??Hi,â?? I said. â??Iâ??m _____ Your name and I might be a little _____ Adjective about being in a graveyard .â??

â??Thatâ??s not something we hear every day,â?? Michael, the head writer said. â??But I wouldnâ??t worry about being here. In my experience, dead people stay dead. They donâ??t get up and start _____ Verb ending in ing every which way.â??

Suki

Oota, Tripping's gorgeous photographer, pointed her digital camera at me. "Smile." The flash went off.

While I tried to blink the white spots out of my eyes, Suki looked at the photo she'd just taken. "Maybe smiling wasn't the way to go. Try _____ instead."

"Excuse me? Had the flash affected my hearing, as well?"

"Never mind," Angus said. "I'm sure it's a fine picture. Let's get going, but first, maybe you should take off that jacket. It makes you a little obvious."

I looked down at my windbreaker. It was white, with _____ embroidered across the chest in red. "Sorry."

I got it from a friend whoâ??s a pharmaceutical rep.â?? I took it off and draped it over my arm.

We walked down gravel paths, Michael shining his flashlight onto stones as we passed. â??I see a lot of people died in 1857. Any idea what happened then?â??

Your town _____ had a big outbreak of _____ illness _____ then,â?? I said. â??It was written up in the papers, and quack doctors came from all over the country, promising to cure it. Martin VEGETABLE bottom sold NUMBER bottles of Old NAMEOFSOMEONEYOUKNOWâ??s Sovereign Remedy. Turned out it was made of NOUN and NOUN. That, and a lot of TYPEOFBOOZE. The townspeople chased him out of town with flaming NOUNS.â??

â??Thatâ??s one way to do it,â?? Michael said.

Suki suddenly stopped and rested her camera on top of stone. "You guys see what I see?" she whispered, one eye to the viewfinder.

Michael quickly switched off his light.

We peered into the darkness. Across the stones, maybe a hundred feet away, I saw something move.

"I'll be damned," Angus whispered. "Isn't that the spirit of FAMOUSDEADPERSON? Talking to ANOTHERFAMOUSDEADPERSON?"

Michael turned to me. "Are either of those people buried here, YOURNAME?"

â??Um, I donâ??t think so.â?? I stared harder. The two figures appeared to be struggling very slowly, as if they were underwater.

â??They donâ??t have to be buried here, Michael,â?? Angus said. â??Spirits can travel at will.â??

â??Sort of an afterlife version of a senior bus pass?â?? Michael asked. â??I guess AARP has to really jack up the perks when members reach 120.â??

Suki suddenly pulled her camera off the stone and ducked behind it. â??Whoever it is, theyâ??re coming this way

!â?? she whispered.

Angus stepped behind an angel monument, tripping slightly on a stone BODYPART that had broken off it at some point in the past.

Michael grabbed my arm and hauled me down beside him. â??Letâ??s hope theyâ??re not armed,â?? he whispered.

â??I thought you said dead people didnâ??t go around VERBENDINGINING,â?? I muttered.

â??Did I? The same thing doesnâ??t go for drug dealers.â??

I heard uneven footsteps, then a male voice. "I swear I hid it around here somewhere," it slurred.

"You probably dreamed it." The second male voice spoke with a slight whistle, as though the person were missing some teeth. "Did I tell you I had a dream where ADJECTIVE white PLURALNOUNTHATISWHITE chased me into a CHAINRESTAURANT? They said they wanted to VERB my PLURALNOUN."

"Huh," slurred voice said. "I've been chased out of that restaurant a few times, but never into it."

Michael sighed. Then he pulled the white windbreaker from my grasp and put it on backwards, so the hood covered his face. He stood and waved his arms. "I'm going to VERB your PLURALNOUN!" he moaned.

"They're

coming for me!â?? someone screamed. The sound was followed by running footsteps, which became fainter and then disappeared.

The rest of us slowly stood. There was no one else around.

Michael took off the windbreaker and handed it to me. â??Just a couple of homeless drunks, looking for a stashed bottle of booze.â??

Angus frowned. â??Unfortunately, Iâ??m sure youâ??ve driven away any ghosts, as well. Weâ??re unlikely to get any photos now.â??

Suki

handed him her camera, digital screen facing up. "I did get a nice picture of Michael waving his arms in that windbreaker. His legs are hidden, so it looks like he's coming right out of the tombstone. And look the back of the embroidered drug name looks like a splotch of blood over his heart."

Angus studied the camera for a long moment. Then he looked from it to me.

"I won't tell anyone," I said.

He pursed his lips in thought. "Since we're cutting this expedition short, perhaps we should also give you a free year of Tripping Magazine."

"Great."

Can we just get out of here?â?? I took my windbreaker from Michael.

As we walked back to the cemeteryâ??s entrance, Suki said, â??Can we stop and get some food? For some reason, I kind of want to go to a SAMECHAINRESTAURANT.â??