



Riddance: Or the Sybil Joines Vocational School for Ghost Speakers & Hearing-Mouth Children

Shelley Jackson

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"Shelley Jackson is a writer of such extraordinary, uncanny power that the hair on the back of my neck stands up when I encounter her work. What an exhilarating, prickling, blistering book *Riddance* is! I made myself read it as slowly as possible in order to stay in as long as I could." —Kelly Link, author of *Get in Trouble: Stories*, finalist for the 2016 Pulitzer Prize in Fiction

Eleven-year-old Jane Grandison, tormented by her stutter, sits in the back seat of a car, letter in hand inviting her to live and study at the Sybil Joines Vocational School for Ghost Speakers & Hearing-Mouth Children. Founded in 1890 by Headmistress Sybil Joines, the school—at first glance—is a sanctuary for children seeking to cure their speech impediments. Inspired by her haunted and tragic childhood, the Headmistress has other ideas.

Pioneering the field of necrophysics, the Headmistress harnesses the “gift” she and her students possess. Through their stutters, together they have the ability to channel ghostly voices communicating from the land of the dead, a realm the Headmistress herself visits at will. Things change for the school and the Headmistress when a student disappears, attracting attention from parents and police alike.

Set in the overlapping worlds of the living and the dead, Shelley Jackson’s *Riddance* is an illuminated novel told through theoretical writings in necrophysics, the Headmistress’s dispatches from the land of the dead, and Jane’s evolving life as Joines’s new stenographer and central figure in the Vocational School’s mysterious present, as well as its future.

Riddance: Or the Sybil Joines Vocational School for Ghost Speakers & Hearing-Mouth Children Details

Date : Published October 15th 2018 by Black Balloon Publishing

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Author : Shelley Jackson

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From Reader Review Riddance: Or the Sybil Joines Vocational School for Ghost Speakers & Hearing-Mouth Children for online ebook

Penny says

Good idea. Excellent idea actually. But so incredibly tedious. The author has a wide-ranging vocabulary, and not just in the field of necromancy, etc. I don't think it's a good idea to use a \$20 word when a \$1 or even a \$5 word will do. She seems to go out of her way to use the most arcane and erudite (see what I mean?) and mostly boring sets of words and even non-words (!) I couldn't get past the first 100 pages. I'd like a story about the young girl - simply the young girl - not the headmistress or the 4th generation of the head mistress, etc. etc. etc. I don't mind a bit of intellectual bru-ha-ha - after all, I read a lot of psychological thrillers and suspense novels; however, this is intellectual to be intellectual. All of this is my opinion, of course - you decide if you want to spend your precious hours concentrating wholly on what the heck is going on, or if you'd like to just enjoy reading.

Cindy says

A small girl, a stutterer, mistreated by family and schoolmates, is invited to attend a boarding school for those like her. Sybil Joines, the headmistress, believes that stuttering, when properly channeled, is a highly evolved method of communication with the dead. Necrophysics, the study of the relationship between this world and the next, is Joines's raison d'etre. But the periodic disappearances of boarders, and alarming events that occur, cause an existential threat to the school that she cannot tolerate. The history of the school is told from multiple points of view that bear witness to the grotesque school. This is a fully realized world, dark and challenging, with three-dimensional characters and accompanying illuminations and artifacts so realistic that you soon forget this is fiction. Riddance is an astounding feat of imagination.

Robin Bonne says

A gothic epistolary novel that was unlike anything I have read. The photographs and diagrams were eerie and added a spooky atmosphere to the documents and letters.

This book needs a bigger audience. It was a unique reading experience that gave me unsettling dreams.

Zachary says

Like a voice from another world... that pulls you into that world, Riddance is hypnotizing. You won't want to wake up.

Paula Lyle says

I just couldn't get into this book. I kept reading because every once in awhile I thought there was more to it, but the farther I went the less sense it made. This just wasn't for me.

Amanda says

The idea intrigued me, but the execution was not my cup of tea. Having to stop on every page to look up the meaning of a word bogged down the flow of the narrative, and storytelling was sacrificed for pseudoscience (think George Lucas's love of fancy digital effects and the effect it had on the quality of the prequels). A chore to slog through for me, but might be a perfect fit for the right kind of reader.

I received a digital ARC from the publisher via Edelweiss+.

Anna says

Idea is intriguing, but narrative flow just wasn't there. Lost patience half way through (second time around) = a DNF for me.

Dominique says

Wow. I've never read anything like this. It's a historical horror murder mystery and it is the most unexpected, luxuriously crafted, creepy and disturbing piece of literature I've ever read.

The story is told mainly through two characters Headmistress Sybil Jones and student-turned-stenographer Jane Grandison. Jones, born into an abusive family and tormented by her father, opens up this school for children like her with a stutter or any other speech impediment. When a student goes missing at the Sybil Jones Vocational School, where children are trained as "ghost speakers and hearing-mouth children" because as Jones has discovered, the dead can communicate through the speech impaired, the school is opened to a school inspector who of course needs to check on the welfare of these children. What does, or doesn't happen builds nicely with a nice crossover between the dead and the living.

It's told in multiple ways: there's the study of necrophysics and necronauts, with helpful images to guide you as to what the headmistress discovered in her work with and around the dead. She also writes letters to dead authors, like Herman Melville and Mary Shelley, explaining what's happening at her school, and then she also dispatches to her student/stenographer Jane Grandison from the other side, the dead side. I won't share any spoilers but the desire or the quest to document death, or what it means to live, and the contextualizing of absence and presence make this book such an all-encompassing experience to take in. I got swept away in the poetry on these pages, sentiments crafted so beautifully it removed the morbidity and darkness of death and replaced it with, or rather illuminated the functionalities of it.

"...because we love the world so much we long to lose ourselves in it."

It's so weird, and dark, and so so good! And I'll just say, you want to read this with someone else because you'll need to talk about it immediately.

Emily says

Amazing concept, but this format is a struggle for me. Riddance is not a bad book in the slightest, but I'm not the right reader.

Dustin Kurtz says

Extremely and entirely my shit. Like the X-men but seancepunk. Like Mary Caponegro meets Lovecraft, minus the racism. Like Miss Peregrine's rewritten by Victor LaValle. Like Tom McCarthy's incredible C, but leaning way way into the necro-hermeneutics.

Like nothing and nobody else but Shelley Jackson herself.

Nathan "N.R." Gaddis says

Someone I'm very eager to start reading one of these days. Especially of course the Burtonesque sounding *The Melancholy of Anatomy*.

Meanwhile, this her latest reviewed by Daniel Green ::
<http://www.full-stop.net/2019/01/31/r...>

Rosalinda says

This book was provided to me by @catapult in exchange for my review. I think I should mention, right off the bat, that you need an extensive vocabulary if you're planning on reading this. I think Shelley Jackson is an amazing writer to be able to pull it off without sounding "monocle ridiculous". I really enjoyed that, even though it had me running to the dictionary every other page. The book is told in forms of journal entries, letters and documents with some narration in between. The gist of the book is that a girl gets lost and the headmistress of the school she's in tries to locate her. The "creepy" part of it is that she's lost in the land of the dead. Oh and every student in the school has some sort of speech impediment that allows them to reach the land of the dead. Did I mention it's a school for that purpose alone? I didn't think this book was at all scary. Given the plot I expected to have at least some scares but nope. However, the pictures included were downright creepy as hell. Thank you to whoever came up with the idea to add pictures in that style. They're black and white pictures but the people in it are all doing weird things and their faces are so serious that they really creeped me out. I enjoyed the book but it fell flat for me. I didn't feel any thrills or chills but I think the right audience is out there for this book and for those people it will be a five star for sure.

Michelle says

I really wanted to love this book. Instead I skimmed to even finish it. Maybe others will enjoy it more.

Maris says

WOW.

Emily says

This story starts with an "editor" in the present day, who comes across the Sybil Joines Vocational School for Ghost Speakers & Hearing-Mouth Children (SJVS) through a newspaper clipping inside a book at a rare/used bookstore, then becomes curious about said school, starts researching it, and ends up finding references to it everywhere (including an online review of a pair of loafers). The subject of the newspaper clipping is a murder at SJVS, and that mystery becomes the central focus of the remainder of the novel. Kind of.

I've seen *Riddance* compared to the Miss Peregrine's series, and while I definitely acknowledge some similarities, mainly the "school for children who are different, run by an eccentric woman who becomes something of a mother figure," there's SO much more than that going on here.

Forget straightforward linear narrative. We receive the story of SJVS, Sybil Joines herself, the stenographer (a student at the school, Jane Grandison), the land of the dead, and the murder alluded to in the "Editor's Introduction" via alternating sections:

- "The Final Dispatch," dictated by Sybil Joines from the land of the dead and recorded by Grandison
- "The Stenographer's Story," which gives a bit of Grandison's own childhood background and experience at SJVS
- Various readings, including snippets from "A Visitor's Observations" about the school and faux-scientific explanations of necrophysics, and
- "Letters to Dead Authors," in which Sybil Joines writes to Herman Melville, Charlotte Bronte, Edgar Allan Poe, and others

The continual rotation between the above perspectives, periodically interspersed with photos, diagrams, and "historical documents," creates a very slowly-forming picture of the school, its history and inhabitants, and the murder in question. There are also a few inserted "editor's notes," which add to the feeling that SJVS was a real place and this murder a real crime. I thought the structure was an inventive and effective choice on Jackson's part, and I really enjoyed it.

I can't get over how well thought out this novel was. On top of being entertaining and spooky, which is pretty much always what I want from an autumn read, it has some fun "science" that made my brain hurt after a while (the dead, versus the dead dead, and the dead dead dead), an extremely unsettling atmosphere, and a lot of ideas to stew over (the nature of the "self," the meaning of (self-)erasure, and the white-washing of

history, just to name a few). I feel like this is one that merits an immediate re-read, so you can experience the beginning with the increased understanding you ended with. If you're into all things dreary, uncanny, and supernatural, I definitely recommend it.
