



Silent to the Bone by E. L. Konigsburg

Subjects: Selective mutism; Babysitters

Awards: Ten Best Books for Young Adults, Horn Book Fanfare

Book Lists: Gifted, Grade 6, North America

Props: Cards with names on them, backpack, baseball cap



(Put on baseball cap backwards and back pack) This is the fourth day since my friend Branwell called 911 and stopped talking. When the emergency personnel answered his call, Branwell couldn't talk. He couldn't say that his baby sister, Nikki, had hit her head and wouldn't wake up.

Nikki, the baby, was taken immediately to the hospital. The doctors drilled a hole in her skull and put in a small tube to relieve the pressure from her injuries. This seemed to help, but she was still in a coma in critical condition. The doctors had no way of knowing what the outcome would be. Basically, they didn't know if she would live or die.

Vivian, the au pair, or babysitter, said that Branwell had hurt the baby so later that day a police car took Branwell to the Clarion County Juvenile Behavioral Center. He said nothing. Nothing to the police, nothing to the doctors, nothing to the nurses. Nothing to his father or his stepmother.

I'm Connor. I've been friends with Branwell since nursery school. Although, I'm not really sure why we're friends. I mean Branwell is . . . well, he's just different. He definitely stands out in a crowd. He's tall with bright red hair. He drops things all the time. He can't get a ball anywhere near a hoop. The one thing he can do is run, but he can't even do that normal. He actually looks like a camel when he runs, knobby-kneed, loose-jointed with his neck stretched out so far that his nose is over the finish line 5 minutes before his shoulders. *(Turn sideways and stick head way out)* Branwell used to talk all the time, too. But, not anymore.

I became involved in this because Dr. Zamborska, Branwell's father, asked me to visit him. I suppose he's hoping I can help Branwell somehow. I went to see him yesterday for the first time. He looked terrible. A guard brought him into the room and sat him at the table in front of me. Branwell's glasses were badly smudged, his blue eyes seemed grey, his hair was a greasy mess, and his shoes had no shoelaces. Nothing much happened in that visit. He just stared blankly, shook his head, and of course said nothing.

But I'm going to see him again today and this time I have a plan. After I saw him last night I remembered a book that my mom had told me about. It was written by this guy who was completely paralyzed except for his left eye. A friend recited the alphabet to him and when she came to the right letter, he would blink his left eye.

(Take cards out of backpack) My idea is to cut up some cardboard into square pieces and write words on them that would mean something to Branwell. Maybe he'll blink or his eyelashes will flutter when he sees one of the cards. Like, I wrote "Day Care" on one *(Show DayCare card)* because that's what Branwell and I call school, I wrote "the Ancestors" on another *(Show Ancestors card)* because that means his grandparents. Stuff like that. I know he wants to talk, he loves to talk, he needs to talk. So I'm going to visit him today, the next day, and the next. I'm going to be there when Branwell talks. I'm going to find out who hurt Nikki.

Find out the truth for yourself one card at a time. *(Hold up book)* *Silent to the Bone* by E. L. Konigsburg.