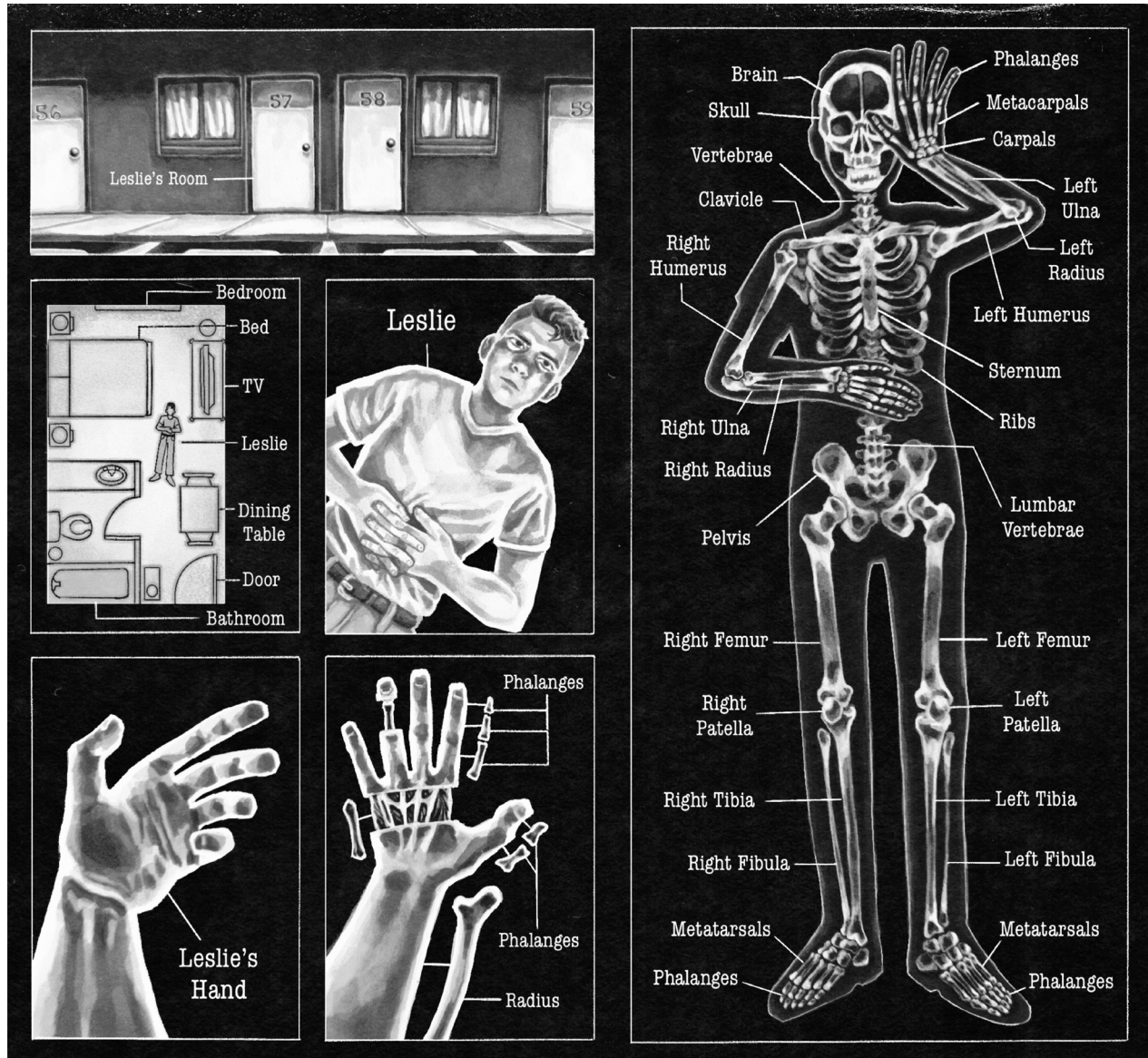


THE GRAIL

VOL. XVII October 08, 2021 ISSUE I



INSIDE

"MELT INTO SOMETHING REAL"

VACANT

Taylor Maxwell shows us that the weight of past doings holds onto us like glue waiting an eternity to melt.

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Freya Schlaefler questions the very existence of our being as our bodies wait to be carved.

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"THEY REGRET DYING"

A BRIEF INTRO TO GHOST QUARTET

Will Stevens introduces us to Ghost Quartet, a story of truth and lies, that's maybe not even a story at all.

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THE GRAIL

VOL. XVII

October 08, 2021

ISSUE I

www.reedthegrail.org

FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Reader,

Welcome to Volume XVII of The Grail, we convene again! This time, in the flesh! No, really, there is a person five feet away from us that is not, in fact, someone we live with. The lower halves of our faces remain mysterious to all except those in our innermost circles, but the eyes are the real windows to the soul, and we're all so interaction-deprived it doesn't really matter, anyway. In honor of our newfound face-to-face lives, we have aptly decided to theme our first issue 'Bodies'. There are bodies all around us, we've never seen the pool hall this full, and now, it seems like it will never empty.

As we turn to reality, Jocelyn Olum reminds us of the childlike wonder we experience as we come into our bodies for the first time (3). Taylor Maxwell reels us into poetry that emulates the weight of water over our heads on a hot summer day while D. Mullen takes us to moments before submersion (4, 13, 6). hrt shows us the beauty of our natural forms in a photographed collage(13). Bee Yermish explores what else gets worn away when wisdom teeth and ugly truths emerge (5). Oh, how it feels to be forgotten: Nica Kinser takes us to days where we drift along with life moving around us (6). Prepare yourself for a sensory overload in part one of Albert Kerelis' Escape while ellie s keeps our senses on edge with poetry made for the year 2051 (7-9, 10-11). Freya Schlaefer questions

the very existence of our bodies in a soul-wrenching reflection of life (12). You'll have to ask Will Stevens what Ghost Quartet is about again, and again, and again, and again (14-15). There's fish in my blood, thanks Bahar Tarighi (16). emma fan offers a vivid meditation on corporeality (17). Astrally project inside yourself and become one with your chosen body part, courtesy of Bloody Knuckles (18).

For our next issue, cover your ears, and prepare for noiZe! Whatever noise makes you think of (or whatever song is stuck in your head) is worthy of a spot in our issue.

Love,

Your Editors

Bahar Tarighi, *expert on fish who exist within bodies and lover of oolong tea*

Caroline Paden, *chief apostrophe-spotter and resident Virgo*

Chloe Hsy, *god of InDesign and patron saint of dahlias*

Erik Beserra, *is not as impressed by the gata bread as he remembers from his 1 am homer's hut runs freshman year*

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Front cover photo: Collection of Parts by Ross Tidwell

Open Letter

Jocelyn Olum

to body,
standing by the kitchen countertop at nine pm on a Saturday:
enough is sufficient.

we know fullness
little child we wandered distracted from the dining room table
—household cat curled up in the sunlight—

we know, and yet like many we are still searching
this year's salvation is not in the bottom of a wine glass but in the empty pint of sugar-free ice
cream
it is hidden in the back of the refrigerator, and we are still standing there with the door wide
open
we have memorized the contents but we will never tire of looking.

to body:
it will be forthcoming, there is honey in the rock for all mom's children
food again for breakfast
someday we will break the habit of licking our plate clean

there is always surplus.
so we learned frugality in the space between the dinner table and the empty porcelain
serving dishes and dished out portions
spare ribs and turkey thigh gaps and extra lean cheekbones.

now body is fighting, body is packing flesh like tissue paper on our thin gift-wrapped skele-
ton
body scrabbles for the dirty plates and abandoned leftovers
body waits crouched under the veneer of civilization for any scraps that it knows might fall

body is still young, we are teaching it not to hide from strangers
not to cower under the covers

but body learns slow, body doesn't know we are no longer fighting
body doesn't know it is no longer starving
body just hasn't quite learned that now, finally, it can come out and play.

Vacant

Taylor Maxwell

You will first find her
When she gets up to leave
The space she occupied now
Occupied only by piercing fading

Your chest will hurt
Like it should like you
Deserve the stitches that will be
torn out of the air

Don't blame the phantom
for the weight received
The swollen sinking metal
Which will never

Melt into something real,
Something
You can justify.



Wisdom Teeth

Bee Yermish

When I was thirteen, I had braces. I remember sitting back in those plastic-covered chairs, every inch of my exposed skin sticking to the white leathery material. The room smelled of disinfectant and mint. My orthodontist showed me my x-rays. She pointed out my wisdom teeth, perfectly formed, perfectly straight, sitting just under the surface of my gums.

“They should be coming in any time now,” she told me.

They didn’t.

And every six months, when I went back to the dentist they asked me the same question.

“Have your wisdom teeth come in yet, Rebecca?”

And every six months I had the same response, “Not yet, but I can feel them under there.”

“They should be coming in any time now.”

Again and again.

Today I quit the job I’d dreamed of doing since I was ten years old, and my mouth tastes like blood.

Nobody fought my decision like I thought they would. What happened last week was traumatic, and some

people were surprised I was even sticking around for the next two weeks at all. I had every right to pack up and leave today.

I’m not allowed to talk about it. The police were involved, and everything I know is strictly confidential. My mind has already started painting over the details anyway. The fact of the matter is, I started the week with twelve campers and ended it with nine, and we try not to send kids home early if we can help it. I keep getting told that it wasn’t my fault and that I did the best anyone could do in that situation, but I can’t help but feel guilty that it happened at all. Even though there was nothing I could have done to prevent it. But what happened to those girls is going to haunt them for a long time, and it shouldn’t happen to anyone, especially here.

I have spent the week gritting my teeth and biting back tears. Because this place I’ve known since I was small no

longer feels like home, this safe haven I grew up in and loved. I’ve given my two weeks and the sky is a stormy gray and the trees feel strange and foreign.

When I made my mind up about leaving, I cried harder than I’ve ever cried in my life. Full-body sobs that left me empty, screams I was sure could be heard for miles. And a metallic taste in my mouth that made me sick.

My first wisdom tooth is coming in. The layer of gums covering it has worn away, raw and bloody, exposing perfect white enamel underneath. I couldn’t have come up with something more fucking poetic if I tried.

I am shaky and my mouth is tender. I am saying goodbye to the great love of my childhood. I am heartbroken to end it like this, and I’m certainly not ready to go. But I wasn’t sure my wisdom teeth would ever come in either.

I’m going back to the dentist next month. And I finally have a different answer.

My blood/my bones

Nica Kinser

My bodies line the street like forgotten
shoes
Thrown out of windows and drowning in
gutters
I wait
Drifting like a leaf
All my bodies
Leaking like smashed pastries
Our jelly
Dripping out.



Before Submersion
D.Mullen

Escape – Part 1

Albert Kerelis

A soft darkness hangs in front of me, a rosy black velvet. I begin to feel my body again, the aches of long-kept stillness trickling up my nerves, electrical impulses reminding me who, what, where, I am. My eyes open to look over a messy desk, strewn with glasses and books and napkins. My desk. This one moment after waking up is always so jarring. In an instant, a vast forgetting of the dreams that were so real to me moments ago, and just as quickly, a sudden and rapid remembrance. A disappointment. Yes, I remember now, this is what is real, this is what is not a dream. In between the two, for an ephemeral moment too rapid to exist, a moment on the verge of non-being, is a flicker of nothingness. A tiny blip of consciousness traversing through an endless oblivion between two modes of being.

Recently it's been a disappointing moment, the remembering. Sometimes I don't forget my dreams entirely and they get to carry smoothly through to the Waking World. There's a brief moment of overlap, when my dream still feels real and the Waking World feels foreign. Sometimes it's terrifying, the uncertainty. But it, too, is fleeting. Before I know it, I'm back, and the dream that I came from starts slipping through my fingers. Like pulling at the earth and finding nothing in your hands but blades of grass.

The mess of my room just seems to ooze work, effort, labor. I'm gonna have to clean. I pick up a single book and put it on the shelf. Not as satisfying as I thought it would feel. I'll finish later. Walking down to the kitchen I think about coffee. I love making my coffee. I love the precision, I love trying to remember what it was about my last cup that tasted so nice, trying to recreate it. Chasing after sameness and being met with unrelenting coffee-flavored difference. Coffee is the most widely used psychoactive substance on the planet. I've never thought of coffee as a drug, but I know it's supposed to be one. When I sip my morning coffee, my eyes always go inward, trying to see if I can feel it, looking for anomalies in my consciousness, sifting through my thoughts to see if I might find the feeling of caffeine somewhere. Like looking for a needle in a haystack, except I'm not looking for a needle. In fact, I don't know what I'm looking for. I'm just sifting through, looking for something unusual. Do haystacks normally have this many bugs? Or bits of dirt and stray feathers? I should spend more time sifting through the haystacks in my head.

Drinking my coffee is always a good moment for reflection, for adjustment in the wake of the unceremonious plunge into the day that is waking up. I look out my window at the tree lined street. Something small darts through the leaves, catching my eye. What was that? Like a squirrel or a bird, maybe even a big bug, like a cicada. It was so quick, disappearing into the canopy. It had been on that branch for a while, it must have been, before darting away, but as I sift through my memories of what the street looked like just moments ago, I can't remember having seen it. I'm suddenly filled with the overwhelming feeling that I don't belong.

I'm waiting for the bus. The sun is beating down a little more overhead now, like a thick and heavy wind, slowly pushing warmth down onto me. It's comforting. When is the bus supposed to arrive? I checked the schedule just minutes ago but I've already forgotten. I glance at my phone again, navigating through apps and screens and windows. Right, five minutes. I put it back in my pocket as I look for something to occupy my mind. Left alone with my thoughts, I think about sifting through them. It doesn't make sense now that I'm not looking for something. Thinking about what you're thinking about is this sort of recursive loop I find myself in sometimes. I like thinking in words, but sometimes when I think about self analyzing, my brain gets stuck. I'm thinking about what I'm thinking about and what I'm thinking about is how I should think about what I'm thinking about so I think about and it just goes on and on. My head starts to hurt and ache. I force myself to look at something, something to distract myself from this winding up of springs and gears in my head beyond what they can take. I look up at the trees. Watch the sun filter through the gently swaying leaves. All these dapples of light, complex patterns made by hundreds of individual little leaf shadows. There it is again! The same sort of thing as earlier this morning, quickly jumping into the leaves and disappearing up there. I look at the ways the leaves move and the sunlight shines through, and I think that I can spot something moving in there. I can't see the thing itself, but I notice irregularities in the patterns of the leaves' motion. It must be moving around in the canopy. As I try to piece together its motion, I can't decide if there's only one of them or if there's two. Sometimes, they come apart. Sometimes they merge together. It must be two, I decide. I hear a creaking and groaning; a shadow appears and a wave of heat wafts by me. The bus is here. I feel like I shouldn't be.

I get on the bus, still thinking about what was in the trees. I feel like I'm intruding on something when I tap my bus card and look for a seat. I've rehearsed the play of being a passenger on the bus so many times, but I still feel like I'm somehow not a real passenger. Like if they found out that I was faking it, that I didn't really mean it when I held onto the straps but just did it out of imitation, they'd be offended and upset with me. I stare longingly at the trees. When I look at them, it's like the rest of the world goes blank. I'm absorbed in their motion, in their gentle swaying as we pass them by. Every time the bus stops, I relish being able to spend more time looking at a single tree, letting my eyes fall into its leaves, letting its branches pull me in. Another one. A few of them. All in this one tree. Darting about, dancing. It feels like they're showing off to me. They're making such a ruckus in the tree, I can't believe no one else notices them. As the bus pulls away, I swear I can hear a faint chattering. It makes no sense, I shouldn't be able to hear such a soft noise through the glass, over the sounds of people and engines and road. It must have been a noise from on the bus, something or someone I didn't see. But I know it was them, those Chattering Things in the trees. I know they made that noise. I want to get off the bus and join them up in the tree, but I have to be somewhere.

Yes, yes, I'm going somewhere. I'm going somewhere. Going to work. No. It's a Saturday. Where am I going? I delve back into my haystacks, looking for anything to tell me what I'm doing, but all I do is kick up straw. I look out at the streets of the city. I see the steeple of a church rising into the sky, a blue-green patina capping its red brick, reaching as high as it can. At the last moment, it resorts to simply pointing up, gesturing to something just outside of its grasp, something up there. Amid the hay, the steeple points me to something important, transcendent, something that can get me out of here. Yes, that's where I'm going. I'm going to church. I can't remember why yet, but I feel like it'll be clear to me when I get there. I look up above the steeple and for a moment I make out the vague outline of some big soaring figure. A subtle impression on the clear blue sky. I keep looking up and noticing little ribbons, shapes, creatures, appearing and disappearing on the pale blue canvas stretched above me. Isn't it fun to notice how your eyes play tricks on you? These aren't eye floaters, but they must be something like them, these big sky creatures. The bus lurches to a stop. It's time for me to get off.

The church's imposing wooden doors are heavy, but I manage to push the dark oak — studded with weathered brass — in just enough to slip through the crack between the doors. As I let the door go, it slowly and forcefully slides across the stone floor to its original spot. The church is mostly empty. Dimly lit rows of pews face the altar. Off to one side, a woman kneels at a monstrance, eyes closed in quiet contemplation. Behind the altar, deep in the sanctuary, is a confessional. A flickering candle dances behind a transparent red cover. Yes, the confessional. I have to confess. He'll listen.

I walk down the aisle, my soft footsteps lightly echoing through the church. I stop in front of the altar. I'm not supposed to be here. I tentatively place a foot on the step, walking more slowly. I take measured, careful strides into the sanctuary. I'm not supposed to be here. I look into the baptismal font, looking at my pale reflection. I'm struck by the urge to dive in. To feel the cool water subsume me. The pool is shallow, but I feel like if I jumped in, I wouldn't hit the bottom. I imagine that as soon as I fall in, the pool will prove to be so much deeper than it appears and I'll sink slowly to the bottom. It must be dark all the way at the bottom. Dark and cool. A whole different world. I'm not supposed to be here. I wrench myself away from the font and turn back to the confessional. Its dark wood is ornately carved, decorated with scrolls and crosses. I gently place a hand on the door and swing it open. The inside is dim, a little sodium-vapor lamp in the ceiling fills the chamber with a yellow cast. A voice calls from the other side of the screen. Please, sit down. The little bench is hard against you, the door swings closed. I'm not supposed to be here. All are welcome in His house. No, I mean, here. I woke up in the wrong place this morning. I don't understand. I'm not sure how much I understand either. I can't make out his face, just shadows and pale glints of skin and hair on the other side of the screen. Occasionally, I think I catch the glimmer of an eye. You seem like you're having a tough day. I heard them today. There are so many, up in the trees. They're here for me. I was figuring it out now. Son, why don't you have a rest here? Whatever's going on, it sounds like you should sleep it off. No, no no no. Not sleep. The moment he suggested it, you suddenly knew you had to leave. That was a way out, but it was the wrong way out. Sleep would only bring you somewhere more foreign, someplace more terrifying. If this is where dreams from the Old Place took you, where would dreams from the Waking World bring you next? I have to leave.

You push the door open and get out. You thought the priest would understand, but as you walk out of the confessional, you hear his door creak open too. You look at the font. Its shimmering waters beckon, promising a mysterious depth, but you pull your eyes and continue down the altar. You walk more quickly. Wait, don't leave, I want to help you. His voice sounds more distraught now, a little hoarse as it echoes through the church. The woman is still at the monstrance. Whether she's trying to ignore what's happening or is so lost in thought she can't hear, you can't tell. Maybe she's trying to escape too, looking for the right door like you are. Your steps echo more crisply this time, losing the consideration they once had. Stop, don't leave. Your weight leans into the heavy wooden doors, you slip out into the bright light, a fresh breeze hits you as you stumble onto the street. You have to get out of here, you have to go. You look up and see them again. The Angels. All manner of shapes and sizes boil and bubble up above you; wriggling, lazily soaring creatures fill the sky. The trees dash about, full of the chattering things. Yes, they're here for me. They're here to help me get back. Back to the Old World, the Before World, that place between dreams and Waking. You need to get back there.

Your feet carry you down the sidewalk. Everyone around you knows, they know you don't belong. They pretend that they believe your act, smile at you as you walk past, but behind each of their eyes, you see venom. They hate you here, they want you gone. Go back. Take your Angels and your Chattering things with you, they seem to say. They ignore them and hope that you'll get the hint. But how? You hear the heavy doors of the church open and glance back to see the priest far behind you, leaning out the door, looking concerned for you. He wants to lead you the Wrong Way. He wants you to fall into the font, fall into sleep. You quicken your pace.

What's in your head? You sift through the haystacks. You're thinking. You're thinking about what you're thinking. You're back, you've fallen back in. You're thinking about what you're thinking about, and it's thinking that you're thinking about. It aches, it hurts. Thinking, thinking in circles, I get stuck here, stuck in these little thoughts about thinking. The chattering starts in your head, it begins to drown out the ache. You've wandered into a park, the trees above you hum and buzz with the Chattering Things. They fill your head with noise and movement, your thoughts are dashed to little fragments. Just pieces here and there, an ephemeral impression of what you were doing with your time, then a buzz, a spinning, friction. Something goes loose inside you and spins free, gaining speed. At first, the chattering helped, but now it's too much. You pull your head up to the trees, they're moving wildly. Branches swing violently from side to side, they seem to wield the sun's rays, brandishing them back and forth between their shadows. Bright light, green leaves, brown bark, the Chattering Things, they fill your vision with movement. You try to ground yourself with something, you stumble through the park like a drunk, clinging to one tree before finding another trunk and lunging toward it, hoping to meet something solid to support you. As you move through the park, your mind starts to slow. You can make out a bench with a large figure sitting on it. It gestures a leathery black hand to you, its skin falling in folds beneath its arm like a bat wing. One of the Angels. You stumble to the

bench and grab its arm for support. Only one of its big yellow eyes is visible right now, eying you from above with its beady black pupil. You sit down. The chattering is still there in your head, but it's slowed. They were helping you, the Chattering Things, pushing you here with their noise. The Angel begins to speak to you. Its voice is deep and calming. Its beak makes rhythmic, hollow clacks as it talks, but the voice is not coming from its throat, the voice is coming from inside your head. You are far from home. I know, I know, I'm sorry. Do not worry young one, it's natural to get lost when you have still seen so little. So there is more than this? More than the Waking World? I forget how little I once knew. How do I get back. Get back? I'm afraid that's not how it works. So I'm stuck here? No, even if you can't go back to where you once were, you must leave this place now. You do not belong here, not yet. Please, help me.

You're lifted up off the bench and onto the Angel's back, its short fur brushing against your skin. You hold onto it as tight as you can. You feel a pit form in your stomach, your body is wrenched upwards. The Angel carries you above the buildings, the church's steeple becoming a pinprick in the rapidly disappearing world below. Finally, you think to yourself, finally it's shrinking away, falling beneath the blue mist of sky and clouds like it should. As you climb higher, the whirling creatures in the sky dance more fervently. You can make out more of them than you saw earlier. They swarm and fill the sky now, even the sun is just a twisting and dancing mass. As you approach, their once fluid movements start to fall apart. Every now and then they jerk from side to side instead of gracefully twisting. Lazy soaring turns into a series of lunges and flails. Your Angel starts clacking again. I can only take you so far. Now you have to make the decision. How badly do you want to leave? What are you willing to let go of? And you're ready. You let go of the Angel's fur.

Some nights, I would go outside and look at the sky. In the city, it never got dark enough to see many stars. I saw the bright ones, but the rest stayed obscured behind the lavender cast of the lights, shining up and competing with the heavens. I would look up at the sky and pull myself down to the earth. I would make fists in the grass and try to pull myself down, but all I did was tear up the lawn. I tried to sink into it, to become part of it. Or maybe I was just trying not to float away.

The pit in your stomach goes away for a second before growing again, pulling you in the opposite direction as before. The figure of the Angel slowly shrinks and fades above you until it's just another dancing shape. Eventually, the Angels disappear from your view. It's blindingly bright. You can't tell which way you're facing, but it feels like you're falling. The wind whips around you, throwing your hair and limbs like you're a rag doll. The chattering starts in your head again, but this time there's nothing fighting against it. Your mind spins in unrestrained spirals, the chattering growing louder as the wind gets faster and faster. A bright pale blue surrounds you. You wait. You smile. And soon. You will escape.



THE SKY*ellie s*

T H E S K Y

'S THE

SAME

SIZE

AS

MY

SKIN!

I

KNOW

WHERE

MY BODY

BEGINS!

EVERY

PATH

IS T

OU

C

H

T

A

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L

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D

by

the hand

of a heart who

sits and watches

the clock at o'hare

airbound by the fountain

with my hands out the clock cr -umbles off the wall i
 catch what's falling i fall apart myself watershot up by a
 fountain and parted by air you ring my heart like a tree.

you tap my heart and it rings

fingernails again

-st metal.

SHOO!*ellie s*

S

H

O

O

!

I say

to the first star

lying

like

a smudge

on a mirror

-sky

The heart

that quit

my chest

pinned to stars &

p

e

a

r

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i

z

e

d

Love left

me—

a chicken

shocked

by rain

Love left me

And you track that shit all over our house.

running*ellie s*

r
u
n
n
i
n
g
now like
a fly a
cross yr
line

of sight i say this:

i misremember
you best
at night

so when the lightbulb whispers & the glass around me
rattles i

beat down
the road like
a breathless storm
or worse
when i

press my palms against your door with the creak of
stale bread

i re
-member
you

in the small moon of yr pane a miracle in the oven
a shadow stuck

to brick
you suck for this
i walk a mile in yr
shoes and go
once again feeling
LIKE SOMEONE!

once again feeling*ellie s*

WHO GAVE THE WORLD AWAY! let's hang out
regardless.

i'm at the corner with two libras
and a wet cigarette once again
i'm wearing
the impending rain
like high heels
you seem giddy on the phone
the august of light too
lit in your room

I HAVE AN ANNOUNCEMENT TO MAKE i'm col-
lecting bus fare now.
a \$2.50 trip to you

on the nature of a pinecone

Freya Schlaefer

Flower drunk and thinking about the way your breath tasted against my skin
Who am I to say the world outside is a husk?
Who am I to say I am?
Something has ripped out the seeds in my lungs
And planted them to grow anew in old, scorched earth.

Something bright and cautious is burning
Spreading through the inside of my skull
He says that he loves me
And I think of all the things I have not told him
And wonder if he would love me when he saw the delicate brokenness in the ridges of my eyebrows
Where some small, burrowing animal
Tore out the soft flesh inside.
You have to get close to see anything at all, and he is a thousand miles away.

Who am I to say he is a husk?
Who am I to say I am?
My fingerbones are crushed to dust under the weight of the wondering
Existentialism is a poison and I am drugged to death on it.

You are the screaming coming across the sky
You are the thing decimating, the thing being decimated, the detonator
Are my insides wreckage or rebuilding?
Most certainly, my existence is a question I want to ask you
But instead I shy away, ask something mundane
Something that won't feel like ripping out both of our livers and eating them raw in front of each other.

How do you voyeur yourself in a world numbed out by it?
I can't blame you for searching for love and beauty
In a light that will go out by the time I turn twenty-five
Existential threats are just broken glass you swallow
To feel the prickling down your esophagus
The sky is dark and hot red, hey, baby, what flavor bleach in your coffee today?

I am shaped like a girl
But my soul is something hot and quick, built of lust and music, crashing like waves against the prison of my ribcage.
Who am I? Body or soul?
Or neither, something horrible in between we call humanity?

She says my eyes are falling stars
I tell her hers are sunsets
She does not believe me, and the waves crash down to pummel us to sand.

My body is made of canyons waiting to be carved
Your words furrow into my skin and rip them out
Expose my skeleton and veins, my pride and deceit.
Am I a husk yet? What is emptiness to beauty?
If my heart is filled with silver and gold, is it mine to protect, or yours to mine until I'm nothing but tailings and blast-ed-out caves?
Will you at least promise to make my remains into something beautiful?
I cannot bear the thought of any part of me going to waste.

good old fashion american pornography

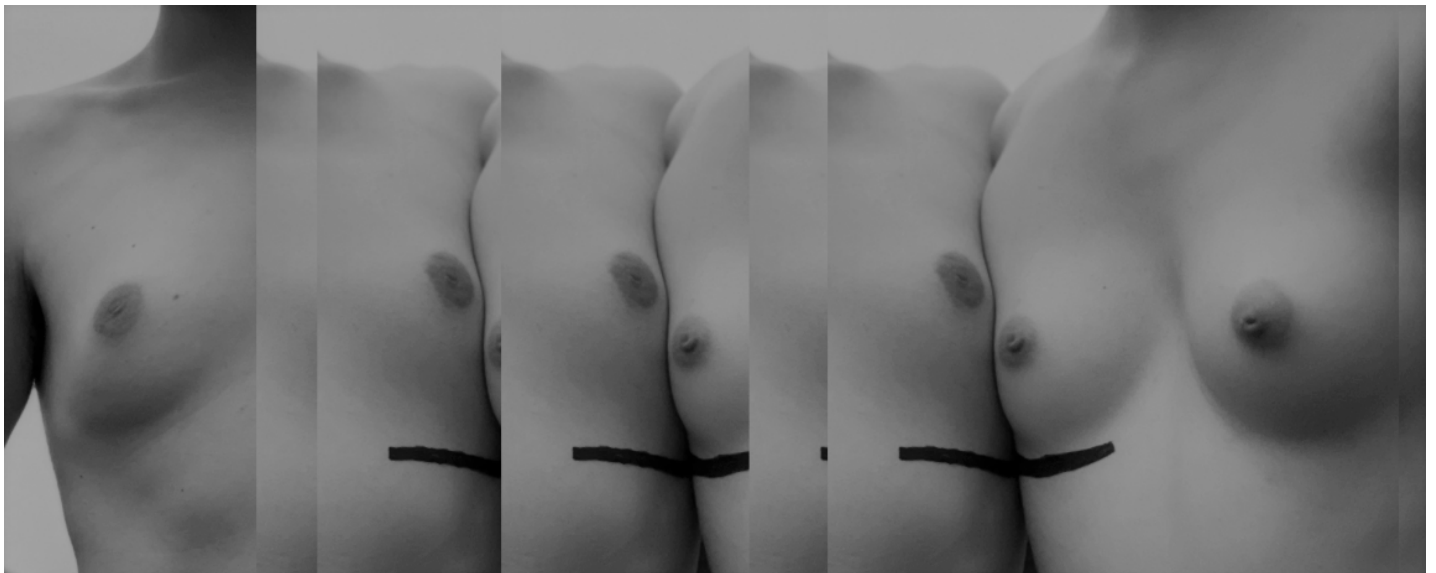
Taylor Maxwell

to get on my two knees
and grasp between two clasped hands
my faith. to mold you

make you bleed
violently violet blood
wellspring of our collective

pleasure. to receive what was
promised to me by them from you.
to take with those same two hands

what is rightfully mine.



transition

hrt

A Brief Introduction to Ghost Quartet

Will Stevens

Ghost Quartet is the tale of two sisters, Rose and Pearl, who are torn apart by a local man who cheats on the younger with the Golder. In retaliation, Rose makes a deal with a bear to maul the astronomer and turn her sister into a bird - provided she retrieves a fairytale-like collection of objects ("One pot of honey, one piece of stardust, one secret baptism, and a photo of a ghost," recited with Into The Woods-esque flair).

Or at least that's how one version of the story goes. Maybe Rose didn't talk to a bear at all, and she just drowned Pearl. And maybe it was actually in retaliation for stealing her child. Or maybe it was a subway train that killed Pearl, and Rose just watched instead of pulling her up from the tracks. Actually, they might have been mother and daughter, and the bear was Rose's brother, and it was the grief that tore them apart. Maybe they weren't even related at all, just two people who met at a dance and took pity on the other.

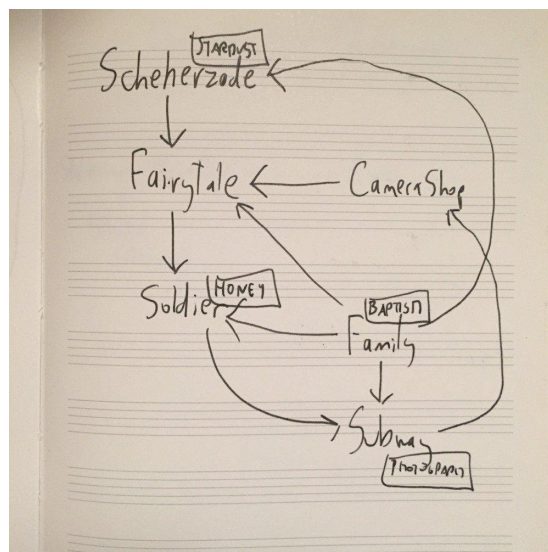
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Try that again.

Ghost Quartet is an adaptation of the old Scottish folk song "The Twa Sisters." It's also an adaptation of "The Fall of the House of Usher" by Edgar Allen Poe, and 1001 Arabian Nights, and the songs of Thelonious Monk, and a 2012 New York Post headline, and the iPhone game Infinity Blade*, and The Twilight Zone, and to be quite honest probably ten or so more stories I haven't been able to see yet. It tells all these stories at the same time, weaving back and forth effortlessly. Roxy Usher reads 1001 Arabian Nights to her child. In the story, Scheherazade tells of a murder on a New York City subway platform. Edgar Usher tells the same story to his wife to soothe her as they mourn the death of their own child, Roxy. As Pearl is run over by a train, Rose takes a photograph, finally obtaining the last item she needs to persuade the bear to kill her sister, Pearl. Rose, disgusted by what she's done, breaks the camera and goes to a shop to buy a new one where the shopkeeper tells of her own grandmother, Pearl, and how her sister, Rose, conspired with a bear to kill her.

**This one isn't actually in the text the way the others are. The game itself is left vague, and the writer claims he imagined it similar to Legend of Zelda II: The Adventure of Link. Considering what little information we are given for sure, the cyclical nature of each work, and the fact that you can't play the Legend of Zelda 2 on a mobile phone, I'm making the editorial decision that it's Infinity Blade.*

Confused? Check out this diagram from the score's Genius annotations and it'll all make sense:



...What? Just stick to the facts this time. Please.

Ghost Quartet is an album performed live by longtime collaborators Dave Malloy, Brittan Ashford, Gelsey Bell, and Brent Arnold. It consists of twenty-three scenes (or “tracks”), performed over four acts (or “sides”), all of which feature all four performers playing a variety of instruments and portraying a variety of characters. Much of the music and words are written by Malloy, but pieces are inspired by (or directly taken from) iconic works from all throughout history. Fans of the composer/writer/librettist/orchestrator/occasional performer will be unsurprised by this fact, as his work largely relies on combining intensely modern and classical forms of art, such as placing a rave inside of War and Peace solely because the text never specifies what type of club the characters go to.*

**It's a country club.*

When discussing the invention of photography, German media theorist Friedrich Kittler applied a quote from ancient Greek historian Diodor of Sicily: “It is no longer only through writing that the dead remain in the memory of the living.” The photograph was the first instance of true preservation, and it allowed an individual to hold onto a moment long after it was passed. Of the objects mentioned in the introduction, Rose has, by far, the most difficulty obtaining a photograph of a ghost, and the search occupies the largest portion of the show. Rose and Pearl repeat their story through the ages, and the emphasis of the photograph throughout serves to show that ‘ghosts’ exist if we believe in them, and moments can live forever through the memories and stories that are passed on over generations.

Someone's spending too much time in academia.

Ghost Quartet is four people talking about everything they regret in life. They regret letting their parents define them, and they regret they weren't able to have an appreciable effect on their own kids. They regret dying, and they regret even having lived at all. They regret betraying the people who trusted them the most, and they regret opening up just to be betrayed themselves. Most of all, they regret that they spend all their time regretting.

Say 'regret' one more time, I dare you.

Ghost Quartet is a song cycle about love, death, and whiskey. A camera breaks and four friends drink in an interwoven tale spanning seven centuries, with a murderous sister, a treehouse astronomer, a bear, a subway, and the ghost of Thelonious Monk.

You just stole that from the album description on Spotify. Come on, really try this time.

There's a line at the end of the musical Hadestown as Hermes, the god of storytellers, is finishing telling the tragedy of Orpheus and Eurydice.

*“The song was written long ago, and that is how it goes...
It's a sad song, but we sing it anyway...
'Cause here's the thing-
To know how it ends
And still begin to sing it again
As if it might turn out different”*

There's another line from an essay by J. Nicholas Geist, a review of Infinity Blade.

“But to continue playing is to live the same life a little bit better, a little bit smarter, a little bit longer than the time before”

Ghost Quartet is about being trapped in a moment of weakness, and about how maybe that's not such a bad thing. You can't change what you've done, but you can learn from it.

Maybe the next time the story is told, you'll feel a little better about it.

And maybe the time after that, you'll feel a little worse.

Or maybe, one day, you won't need to tell it at all.

The entirety of Ghost Quartet is available to watch, for free, on YouTube. There is a studio soundtrack and a live album, both of which are available on Spotify, Apple Music, and Bandcamp.

Fish Blood

Bahar Tarighi

The fish swim through my blood
They breathe in
and out
Occasionally coming to the surface for air

They swim and swim
their fins catch
onto my lungs

My blood is gargled and hot to the touch
I imagine they will be released
Through my fingers

As art
As pain
As blurred lightning

I hope to one day know what kind of fish fill my body

With rage
With pain
With life

They must suffer

Stuck in one body
Forever
Are they aware of their singularity
My body is their world
Dark caresses never cease

They will leave a void
just like I gave to them
A void unfulfilled
as life does

Do you know your own tricks?

emma fan



What body part are you?

Brought to you by Bloody Knuckles

ARIES - pineal gland:

No one really understands your function in the universe but you're here, and you should stay because you produce DMT

TAURUS - wisdom teeth:

You're definitely the smarter one in every friend group but that also means everyone wants to get rid of you, the real ones will keep you in

GEMINI - ear lobes:

Why do you keep getting piercings... its time to get another one

CANCER - tear duct:

Self-explanatory, reality is fake so leave your worries behind

LEO - glabella:

Your love language definitely isn't physical touch but sometimes people crowd around you, let yourself say no to situations you don't want to be in

VIRGO - cuticles:

Your detail-oriented personality shouldn't be on 24/7, let loose and let live

LIBRA - iris:

We get it, you like to snoop. Don't stop, just share the information with us after

SCORPIO - uvula:

You often go unnoticed in social situations, but when you present yourself you're hard to miss

SAGITTARIUS - thyroid:

Sometimes you hold yourself back, don't be afraid to speak up

CAPRICORN - fourth ventricle:

Keep your business in your inner circle, the other 3 don't have to know

AQUARIUS - facial nerve:

You express yourself in facial expressions, join an improv show and credit us after (if no tomatoes are thrown)

PISCES - bellybutton:

Shy but wild when you go out, start wearing crop tops