

THE GRAIL

VOL. XII

OCTOBER 4, 2019

ISSUE I



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A new year, a new romance guru with advice on all your luck and loss in love.

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FROM THE EDITORS

To our readers,

Fear no more, the Grail has returned! Reed College isn't the only one with a change of leadership, as this issue inaugurates our new editors Dan, Lauren, Hannah, and Sophie. We welcome you to October, and we welcome you back with a lovely collection of stories, poems, and art to read by the fireplaces in ODB, in the chilly fall canyon, or on a cozy rainy day. We have a new host of writers as well. First, we present the first installment of a short story "Bone Deep" by new writer Sophia K. alongside drawings and paintings by first time contributor Sophia T. (1-3). New writer Lillie tells a story of petticoats and mysterious tomes (4). Then, we have photography from Sophie H., who

is also responsible for the beautiful layout of this magazine (5). Next, an autumnal poem from Rafa Sampaio alongside photography from first time contributor Nerissa (6-7), and Kaleb shares his poem "No Theseus" (8). Lastly, what, or who, you've been waiting for: a new Miss Lonely Hearts to solve all your romantic puzzles (10). Sophia T. also painted the cover art.

P.S. If you're interested in writing for us, we meet every Tuesday at 6:00 p.m. in the Student Publications Office.

Love,

Ben, Dan, Lauren, Hannah, and Sophie

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Front cover painting by Sophia Tidwell

Bone Deep

By SOPHIA KONGSHAUG

The air is thinner up here, and hazy too, so that when you sit and kick your feet off the edge of the cliff it's almost impossible to see the other side of the ravine through the fog. You sit like this often because this is the only place where you and her meet, and it's hard to find too, off the edge of Humbleton Road which turns from pavement to gravel about a half mile back. There's a turn-off from there, and that's where you leave mom's truck with the squeaky brakes and cracked windshield. Then there's the fence, cutting through the line of evergreen and fern with the sign on it, NO TRESPASSING, and the hole that's been cut in about ten feet to the left. From there it's a stomp through the crackling leaves and around the fern beds and under the long, green fingers of trees which drip, drip, drip onto your jacket all winter long. By the time you get to the edge, your shoulders are patterned in drops, and your feet have kicked a path through the trees, and she is there, waiting for you with a bag of chips and two tall iced teas from the mart on the corner of 1st and Main, and so you settle into the rocky edge and let your hands rest among the fallen pine needles. When you kiss her it is with lips that are slightly sticky, and bits of dried leaves catch in the curls of her hair.

This time is different.

It starts the same. The road, the truck, the woods. Squeezing through the hole in the fence, one of the sharp barbs of metal snags the left leg of your jeans. It rips through the fabric and lets loose a sharp line of red, which blooms into the stray threads. You pause for a moment, but continue walking. It has begun to rain, and the trees are starting to bow down, arms weighed heavy by the falling sky. She is there, waiting in the usual spot. There's a smile, and her hand folds itself into yours with a soft squeeze. There is also an invitation, one that has come from her mouth many times.

Come, look what I found.

The air is clearer today. She points down, down into the ravine and you peer over the edge for the first time in many weeks. It is not a straight drop, like you thought. There's a path, slim, on the edge of the rocks. It goes down for what you think is about thirty feet. She pulls your arm. You step off the edge of the ravine and the cut on your leg begins to pulse slightly.

The soles of your boots are worn down enough that you feel every bump and prick beneath your feet, rock and dirt and moss. She steps in front of you, left hand tracing the side of the cliff, right held carefully out in tandem. The tiny rocks slip forward as you step, but you cinch tight in your

stomach and keep your knees bent. You think of what animals may have climbed this before, goats or cougars or deer, and wonder why you have never noticed it until this day. The rain drips down through your hair and begins to soak into your shirt.

She stops. You stop too, and brace your foot against the slick rock. She bends down and you see it, a small opening into the side of the cliff, barely big enough to crawl through. You do not want to go in. But she insists that this what she was trying to show you. She takes the small flashlight that she keeps looped around her belt and turns it on, clamping it between her teeth. She ducks her head and shoulders into the opening and then squeezes through. You watch the mud stuck on the bottoms of her boots until they disappear.

You kneel down. The water soaks through the knees of your pants and you begin to shiver. You see the light inside, reflecting part of her silhouette. It looks dry, empty, dark. You push yourself through the opening. Inside the air is musty, the ceiling low. You sit with your head slightly bowed against the top of the rock and strain your eyes. She sits a few feet away and points the thin beam of light across the space. The cave is small, barely bigger than the back of the truck. But it's dry and abandoned and might be a good spot to get out of the rain, sometimes. She waggles the flashlight to get your attention and points it toward the back of the cave, across from the hole where you both crawled in. There, another opening, to what looks like a tunnel leading further into the mountain. You shake your head, and then realize she cannot see you, so you laugh slightly and tell her, no. But she is already crawling towards it, and so you sit back on your hands and watch as she squeezes her way into the tunnel. When you can't see her feet anymore you turn around and look out into the ravine. You can almost see to the other side, now. You stare out at the rain falling by and listen to the soles of her boots dragging across the ground in the tunnel behind you. It's kind of peaceful. The light outside is grey and soft, and you feel your hair beginning to dry.

The shuffling of her boots stops abruptly. You think that maybe she's reached the end, or at least as far as she can go crawling in a tiny tunnel. You turn your head around, but without the flashlight you can barely see behind you. You call out, *find anything?* She calls back, and her voice is very quiet, like she's very far down and she says

no but I —

And then it cuts off. Not with a scream or a grunt but very suddenly, as if a switch has been thrown. You sit perfectly still for a moment, straining your ears. There is no sound. You can barely hear the rainfall outside. You call her name. There is nothing again, and so you begin to move slowly towards the back of the cave. You run your hands against the back wall until you feel the entrance to the tunnel, smooth under your fingertips. You call again, and your own voice echoes back to you.

You stick your head into the tunnel. It's narrow, so you shove one shoulder in front of the other and wriggle forward on your stomach. The stone wall scrapes against the sleeve of your jacket, pulling it down your arm. You push your hands forward so they're not pinned under your chest and reach out into the darkness. There's nothing there, so you dig your knee into the bottom of the rock and push yourself forward again. With another push your whole body is now in the tunnel. Your hands stretch out in front of you, and if you bend your elbow your knuckles brush against the rough ceiling. You push forward again, and you can feel the cut on your leg scrape against the rock. You blink your eyes back and forth as you continue to push, push, push forward, but you still can't see anything. You call out again but there's no answer.

One more push, and your hand suddenly brushes against something small and hard and a wave of dizziness passes through your heart. Your hand tries to shoot back out of reflex, but that just jams your elbow into the wall of the cave. You reach out again, your elbow now throbbing, because the thing you touched was cold and small and you think you might know what it is. You brush your fingers across the ground until your fist closes around it, and you find that there's a small nub on the side. Your heart begins to pound faster and faster as you push it in and the tunnel is filled with light.

There is a wall six inches ahead of your face. No cracks, no holes, no exit. Just a smooth, stone wall with nothing around it. There is no room to turn around. There is nowhere that she could have gone. The beam of her flashlight flutters in your hand, and you look down to see what is on the ground in front of you.

They are arranged so neatly, two little half-circles set on the stone and dust, a complete set, the light reflecting off of them because they are still shiny and wet and the bits that hang off the bottom have tinged the surrounding stone pink those — *teeth*.

At some point you lose the flashlight. Maybe it is during the scramble *back, back, back, back* through the stone tunnel because there is no room to turn around, so you shove your elbows into the rocks again and again until your shoulders have pressed back into the cave, or maybe it is in the frantic crawling towards the grey, rain-filled light or as you fling yourself out of the entrance and almost catapult straight over the edge, only saving yourself by windmilling your arms and falling back onto the stones

of the path. Or maybe it is in the running back onto the ledge nearly on all fours, through the woods with the trees whose branches will not get out of your face, slapped away with hands which are covered in speckled blood and rock dust until you clamber into the truck with the squeaky brakes and the cracked windshield.

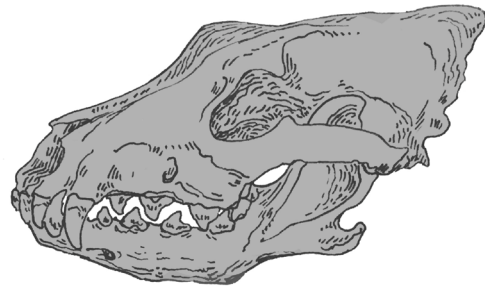
It takes you three times to start the ignition and two to put it into the right gear and then you're back on the road, skidding across the gravel and lurching around corners until the dirt road turns into a real road and you whiz along the highway, trees turning to a green blur on the edges of your vision.

You are back in front of your house before you even think about where you should go. You stumble out of the truck, some numb part of your brain thinking about the black rotary phone resting on thick yellow formica kitchen counter, and then your mother is shaking your shoulder, and you are standing in the middle of the living room dripping mud onto the carpet.

"What happened? Are you alright?"

You sputter out an answer. Something like

She's there, in the woods, in the cave, all that was left were —



Drawings By SOPHIA TIDWELL

"Who? Who are you talking about?"

You say her name. Your mother knits her eyebrows together.

"Who?" She asks.

You begin to feel sick. You say the name again, clearer. Your mother shakes her head, and you feel like you're about to faint. There are two hundred and thirty seven people that live in the town hidden between two tree-covered foothills, and your mother can list every single one of them without ever opening a phonebook. You open your mouth to say her name again when, like dust, dirt, sand through your fingers, it slips from your mind.

Your mother cleans the cuts on your hands and tells you not to run around in the woods alone. You stay silent as the antiseptic crackles on top of your knuckles and try to picture her face. You remember the dirt caught in her hair. You remember the soles of her boots disappearing into the dark entrance, mud and twigs jammed between the treads. You remember the flashlight, clamped between her teeth, shiny and white (*and circled into the dust and dripping --*) but the rest of her is thin, hazy, nothing.

You leave the bathroom and go into the kitchen to pick up the receiver of the phone. It's heavy in your hand and you realize that you do not know the number to call. You can't remember if she ever gave you one. Your finger veers toward the 9 but then stops, shaking, above it. You do not have a name. You do not have a description. All you have is your own admission to trespassing, and a story that is sounding more fictional by the minute. You put the phone back down and push on the door to your brother's room. It's empty.

"He's working," your mother says. "He'll be back later tonight."

You nod, and cross the hall to your own room to sit down on the bed. Your eyes scan over the cramped space, desk overflowing with papers and pencils. No photos, no notes — you couldn't trust your mother not to dig around in your room when you leave so there's nothing here that would indicate that she existed at all. You pick up a piece of paper and a pencil from the desk. It's an algebra worksheet that's been half filled in. You write along the top: *Curly hair. Muddy boots. Flashlight in teeth.*

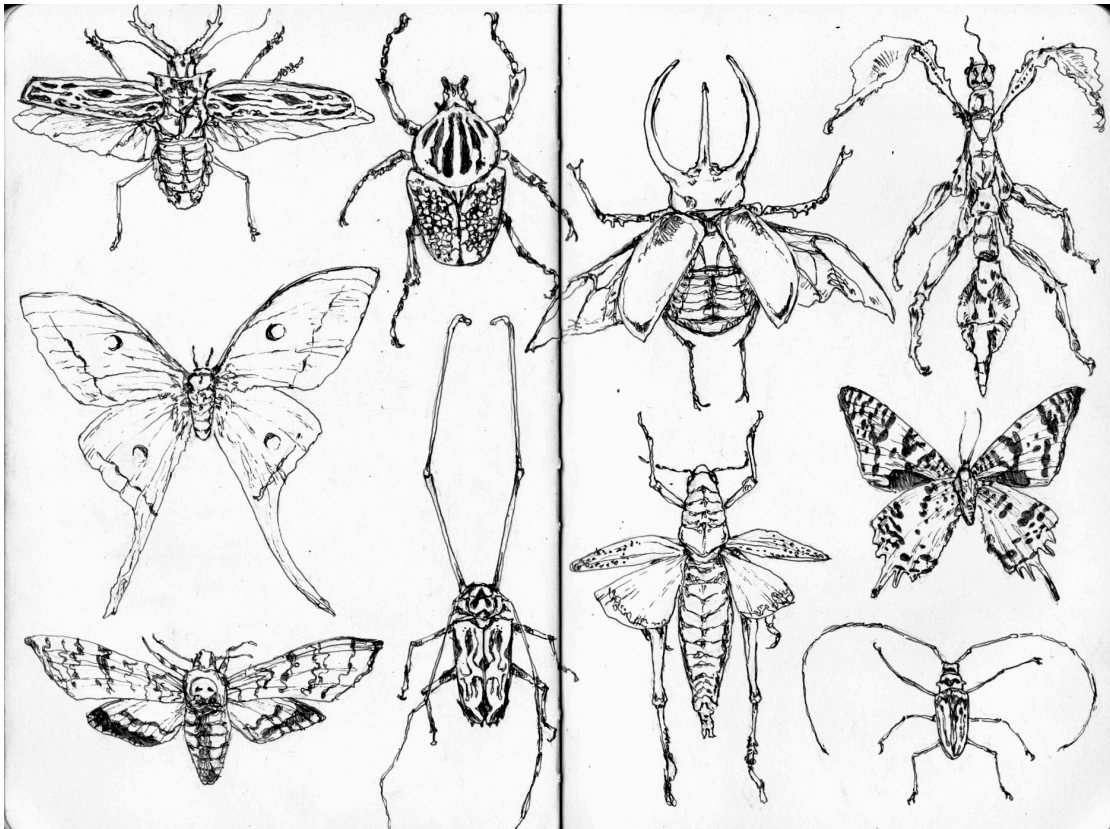
Even as you write those words they seem less like memories and more like a strange and vivid dream. You write the last sentence.

Human teeth Wet in a circle on the ground.

The lead of your pencil snaps into the paper and scatters a pale dusting of graphite. You crumple the paper, and shove it into the pocket of your jacket.

To be continued...

Drawings By SOPHIA TIDWELL



Untitled

By LILLIE CASE

Looking once more over her shoulder, she blew out the candle, and darkness flooded the reading room. A wisp of smoke twisted underneath her nose: the dying breath of a once-eternal titan. On an average evening, she might have lingered a while there—gazing out through the cloudy window panes, examining the surrounding gardens and orchards, wondering what terrifying ghouls or odd creatures would pass through its mazes at midnight—but there wasn't a moment to waste. Not tonight.

The book was hidden under her petticoat. No one would dare look for it there, since no one would even think of laying their hands on her, no matter how desperate they might be to retrieve this particular tome.

At least, that was what she was counting on. If this didn't work, and they ripped her apart piece by piece and layer by layer to get what they wanted, then she supposed that all was already lost.

She hesitated a moment, despite herself. She was thinking of how grand and dramatic it might have been to throw open the shutters, leap out the window, land upon a flawless white stallion, and ride away into the ever-growing night. But Edgar didn't much care for her theatricality—not explicitly—and thus refused to incorporate it into their plans. She'd chide him for the missed opportunity upon her arrival. This gave her something to look forward to, and with this in mind, the young woman slid into the hallway.

As rehearsed, she waited there noiselessly until her vision adjusted. The morbid glory of the mansion was reflected in its glorious lack of natural lighting; the many chandeliers of Bottridge Manor were as lifeless as a decaying corpse. Everything was silent, and frozen, and dead.

She crept forward, and at the landing of the ornate, oaken, and *creaky* stairs, she pulled herself onto the bannister. A glance about told her that the coast remained clear, and she slid down. She hid under the staircase, took a breath in, wiggled her bare toes, and waited for the signal.

Edgar did not keep her waiting for long. There came a knocking at the front door. It persisted for approximately twenty seconds, as they had known it would, before a frenzied servant hurried to the door, as they had known he would.

She did not wait to hear the pleasantries (or unpleasantries, as was more likely the case) being exchanged. For the kitchen was now unguarded, and she glided across its marble tiles to the side door. Once outside, she breathlessly pressed herself against the manor's wall and looked up at the windows.

There was silence, and there was darkness.

She ran—sprinted—as hard and as fast as she could—across the ghostly fields—until she reached the distant line of trees—and she ran just a little beyond that, into a clearing.

Edgar waited for her there, adjusting the saddle on his horse. He looked at her, and at her muddied white frock, and he frowned.

“You know,” he said, “I don't think that this needed to be quite so dramatic.”

After fidgeting about for a moment under her skirts, she procured the book. It had begun to radiate warmth and glow a deep green. They stared at it reverently, unable—or perhaps simply unwilling—to read the words sprawling on its face.

Adelaide caught his attention, her eyes taking on the same radiant sheen as the book, and she replied, “Then you must not understand what you've gotten yourself into.”



Tucumcari, New Mexico By SOPHIE HALPIN

Blossoms in the Autumn Rain

By RAFA SAMPAIO

Oh you, sporadic white blossom,
In the flushed haziness of autumn,
Why do you try and lift the mood?
Have you not seen the clouds?
Their brooding gray,
How they smoulder the sun
And steal every ounce of light.

Don't these raindrops
Fall heavy on your so delicate petals.
What keeps you up
When the world seems to droop?
Oh, sporadic white blossom.
How do you hold?

Doesn't the evening wind
Shake your core?
Why doesn't your stem shiver
In this cold autumn has brewed?

Each question they fail to answer,
But the petals became my light,
Leaving a warmth and
The memory of a sporadic bloom
Uplifts my soul to erase Portland gloom.



The Essence of Reed By **NERISSA WRIGHT**

No Theseus

By KALEB SAUM

I looked at you
 And the building began
 A throne, a shell of perfect porcelain, a thousand
 twirling veils
 Some of silk, some skin
 I chained you to it
 And how quickly it shattered
 How couldn't it?

I'm no occultist
 I can't hold another's heart
 And I'm no cultist (except to one Ocean)
 I can't hold another's hand
 But I sure as hell am a martyr
 I can hold myself back from everything
 Inaction, as far as things go, is pretty
 Damn
 Active.
 Anything could happen
 A little Dutch boy, An emaciated martyr, A twice-
 wed hunter with a bare back
 A freeshooter

I like to think I know just how it all ended
 He took nine steps
 But it wasn't the venom that killed him
 (Thank god for that)
 But the puddle of his own perfect blood
 Two inches deep
 Is it so pretentious?
 Vain
 glorious,
 Even?

Well, perhaps. But don't worry. I plan to head
 down the street someday and leave you be.

You know, there's a garden for her just across the
 road. But I can never head there.

I tried, but I was far too*I never stopped feeling so strongly***(Loved, I'd like to say)***after all, a tool in use doesn't rust,**it just begins to***dull.**

Just a little spoon, the kind with a twist. Keeps
 them just enough away to have to be kept in
 another drawer.

Above sits a candle.

All things considered, it's pretty shit
 efforts to color it with Red #40

caused it to sputter far too quickly.

Can't blame them for trying, though.

September

is as good an end as ever.

Especially

For a Saturday boy

He tried to be Arachne—punishment and all—
 but was just another

Runner

No Hippomenes, I'll tell you that much

Still, quite lucky. No death yet.

Just injury.

I always wanted to be a beetle.

He saw their sheen and how,

when broken,

it was
so painfully
obvious
to the breaker.

Ah, but they have lives, too.
But no other armor covers the heart
And the body at once, singular escutcheon,
singular crutch
So he wrapped himself in paper, wrote an image
Of a wavering, wicker man
Sometimes giant, other times a mass of shreds
Of
Yellowed Paper
And forged a shield of bright shining iron
Folded a thousand times,
Smithed with all the care that wasn't
Nearly
As inward as the perverted fire of this
Two wicked candle
Too wicked candle
And as it turns out
Putting down a shield, pulling up a hand,
Is still the right thing to do
for them But not for me

I'm sure Jack would know, had he ever had the
chance to settle
Setting something painful down
Is far easier than picking it back up
Resistance dissolved,
A paper tiger burns bright

So slowly,
So slowly
The armor is removed

The body can burn
The work is saved
So read me
Read what I've done,
praise what I've done,
love what I've done

But do not ever claim to love me
Before a liar, all is transparent

And so,
I use my own teeth.
It's hard to tie a rope with hands rent like these
self-righteous! self-inflicted! self-martyr!
Stigmata

Still, it's a two parter. The martyr never puts up
their own cross.
So, lacking the press coverage necessary,
It's just a failing suicide
Of a fool tied to a two-By-four
In a rose garden he grew
Gnashing frantically at petals and seeds
Survival instincts long-dormant active
Hands long-riven whole

The sensation of a flower blooming from within
Is easily mistakable for requited love (so I hear)
And unknowing, I felt fulfilled
Dying
with a knot of unopened seeds
Stuck
in my
Throat
In my
Heart

MISS LONELY HEARTS

Dear *Miss Lonely Hearts*,

I have a confession. First of all, I'm glad this column is anonymous, because I already know how the student body would feel about my situation; how my feelings go against the grain of the politics on this campus. I'm used to ruffling some feathers, but I've yet to experience being the antagonist of an entire community, and I'd prefer if things stay that way. I'm not exactly sure how to go about this, so I'll just preface it by saying that I can't help but feel what I feel.

I'm attracted to a certain kind of power. I wouldn't quite describe myself as submissive, but I like feeling like my partner could have control over me whenever he wanted. Honestly, I'm not even surprised by my own taste in men because I've always been a lover of the rules. Things just work better when there's people around to keep people in line and maintain balance. I know this topic is contentious at Reed, but would this school function the same without the presence of Community Safety? I'm mainly talking about one individual in particular— you can probably guess who...

In fact, I take back what I said earlier: I want to be dominated. I love a man who knows how to wield power responsibly. Simply put, it turns me on. I want to be handcuffed, chastised for my behavior and punished, if you know what I mean. I also have a thing for older men too, as they're the only ones who know how to rein me in. I'll be frank, I'd ride his nightstick all night long as a sentence for my crimes.

So, Miss Lonely Hearts, how do I reconcile this crush that I have? I won't lie, sometimes I accidentally "lock myself out" of my dorm in hopes of getting a visit from the chief himself.

Signed,

Horny for Authority



Dear *Horny for Authority*,

First of all, thank you for your honesty and courage. It takes a lot of bravery to be honest with your feelings. Secondly, I think you could aim higher. Fantasies of domination need a worthy subject and you are woefully misinformed if you believe Gary is worthy. Third, to move on from this crush, well, you just can't. You'll never be able to fulfill this dream, this desire, this burning empty need. You'll always need something greater, stronger, more powerful. And if it ever really happens? Well, power is seductive. Soon you'll be Jon Snow, stabbing his hot aunt-lover in the liver. Sorry.

Best of luck,

Miss Lonely Hearts