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## The Haunting of Chloe Griffault ("This is Supposed to be Fun"/"Ghost Stories")

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The Haunting of Chloé Griffault  
(“This is Supposed to be Fun”/“Ghost Stories”)

Senior Project Submitted to  
the Division of the Arts  
of Bard College

by  
Chloé Griffault

Annandale on Hudson, New York  
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Let me tell you a ghost story. A few blocks from my home, there is a little stretch of woods with a small stream. Close to the entrance to these woods, next to a big, old looking tree, there's a patch of dirt that would be surrounded by a circle of rocks. So when me and my friends were like twelve or thirteen, we'd go there, to look at it, dare someone to stand in the middle of it, just see what was going on. We called it the "satan circle". Sometimes, we'd go look at it, and there would be a pile of rocks in the center as well, or some sticks made into a symbol. This was always really exciting to us, because it meant someone, or something, had been there recently. We'd speculate about what was going on there, whether there were ghosts haunting the forest or witches performing rituals, and once or twice we'd spend a weekend trying to figure it out, but for the most part we were coming up with our own stories about it. Eventually, we got older, and stopped checking in on those woods. I went back there in high school, a little bit before graduating. And I went and checked on the satan circle, and what I saw was just a normal patch of dirt. No rocks, no sticks, no symbols, nothing at all. It could just be that whoever was regularly using that spot just stopped doing it. But in my mind, I think it's because we stopped visiting. Whatever entity resided there stopped having people thinking about it, visiting it, making up histories that may or may not be true. Why make creepy symbols if there's no one to scare them with? What is a ghost with no one to haunt?

### **Part 1: Fall**

The idea for my fall SPROJ, an actor slowly falling apart while filming a self tape, came about during my junior year. I knew I wanted to do a solo piece, since I loved my moderation piece a lot. I cast the audience members as ghosts, and my actor (the amazing Lapis Dove), responded to their reactions as if she was in a completely empty room, and any little sounds the

audience made were sounds coming from beyond the veil. In my SPROJ, I knew I wanted to make people laugh, but also scare them. Or at least include some elements of horror. I had to figure out what purpose the audience would serve. I decided I wanted them to see the madness behind the art. When you send in a self tape, you have to make it as perfect as possible, while showing the exact right amount of personality that the auditioners want. You have to make yourself look pretty, but still be yourself. You have to pick a song they want to hear, but also one that you can sing. If people watched me film my self tapes, they would probably be incredibly concerned for my well being. There's a lot of screaming, rolling on the floor, babbling to myself, and sometimes full on breakdowns. I have to grapple with my body and my gender presentation, knowing that I will never be the person someone thinks of when they picture a Broadway performer. I wanted people to know how hard it is, to see the whole process.

I was really inspired by the archetype of the obsessed artist. Think *Black Swan*, *Whiplash*, *All that Jazz*, stuff like that. A person who will destroy themselves if that's what it takes to be a part of creating greatness. During the process of any show, I try very very hard to be a good role model. I try to be kind and supportive to everyone, and stay positive, so that I can show younger artists the kind of people they should be in a rehearsal, and (hopefully) set the standard for being a good ensemble member. However, there is a terrible monster inside me. That monster would do anything to succeed. It will sing until my throat is shredded, spend all night searching for auditions, do 300 takes of a self tape. And the terrible thing is, it still wouldn't be enough. There are times when, no matter how hard you work, you just don't get the part. And it feels so terribly unfair. It's all very Salieri in *Amadeus*. Only, Mozart is everyone else in the industry. I constantly blame myself for never being good enough, for never being what the industry wants me to be. Why can't I just be Mozart? Why can't I just be thinner, and more feminine, and less strange and

off putting as a person? Why can't I just work so hard that my abilities make up for everything else wrong with me? If I can't be loved for who I am, can I at least be great?

I approached rehearsing this piece through an exercise I've done in a few of Bhavesh's acting classes. This piece is basically a more refined private moment, a scene where someone simply does a task and lives in the doing of that task. So, I would put together my self tape set up as if I was actually doing it, and go through some vocal warm ups, and figure out my placement in the camera, and then just record a take or ten of the song. I didn't have a tripod and ring light at this point, so I was in Studio North assembling a terrible phone stand out of a projector cart, a projector, a chair, and a few books. I would prop my phone up on this jenga tower, and record myself singing. And for a while, that's all the rehearsal process was. Eventually, after meeting with Bhavesh Patel, my advisor and acting teacher, a few times, I added the elements of makeup and the costumes. I knew I wanted to change from wearing a shirt and pants to wearing a dress, but figuring out that transition was difficult. Figuring out all the transitions was hard, since I was pretty much just doing improv with a song at the end for the first month or so. And I would show every week, and get notes, and feel like I was making zero progress at all. Every time I ran it, I was just allowing myself to sink into all my negative thoughts, and was scrambling around the space to put together a piece. It was starting to take a toll on me, especially because while I was rehearsing this piece, I was actively preparing to self-tape for grad school. I was filled with intense self doubt. I was at a point where I wondered if I should just give up on my idea entirely, and start completely over. Unfortunately, there was about a month left until work-in-progress tech, so that probably wouldn't be possible. I met with Bhavesh and Lindsey Liberatore, (our cohort advisor) about this, and they gave me advice that I probably should've taken ages ago: Write Something Down on Paper. Lindsey told me I should write out a monologue of everything

I was feeling in this piece, all my feelings about gender and body and the shitshow that is modern musical theatre. And even though this didn't make it into my piece, it was incredibly cathartic, and helpful for developing this character I was playing. A lot of my initial, really really fun character work came back. This "obsessed artist" persona became more clear. For lack of better phrasing, this bitch is crazy. One of my characterization ideas was that I would end my piece by lighting a cigarette and smoking onstage. I do not smoke cigarettes in real life, because I know how much it would damage my voice, but there was something about this character that I thought needed it. She's fed up with the way she is viewed by the industry. In her mind, she isn't pretty or charismatic enough to be loved, so she uses her vocal prowess to earn love from others. By the end of this piece, she's pretty much given up on this, so smoking a cigarette is the biggest form of self-sabotage she can do. She is choosing to destroy the only thing she has. It's scary. It's dangerous. And the image of a dark stage lit up by only a lighter and a cigarette is really powerful. Unfortunately, we are not allowed to have flames or fumes of any kind in LUMA, which really put a damper on my whole smoking onstage vibe.

Bhavesh's advice to me was to rehearse, and then write out what I did, making a roadmap for myself. This way I would have a plan I could follow every time I ran the piece. Is it ridiculous that I didn't think of this at all before this point? Absolutely. Was stuck in a self-imposed spiral of inferiority? Yes. Did it completely change my rehearsal process for the better? Yes. I had a piece that I could repeat as many times as I needed to. I had an actual structure. Now, I was actually able to dive into the piece, and see what needed to be refined. So, the song I was initially using for the in-piece "self-tape" was "Maybe This Time" from *Cabaret*. Sally Bowles was an initial inspiration for this piece, and the way that she gives everything to her art because that's all she really has. She sings the song when she gets a chance to have a loving,

meaningful relationship outside of the Kit Kat Klub. She's saying, "maybe now I can finally be loved, really, truly loved, for who I am". The character in my piece wants the same thing. She wants to be loved, and if she can't be loved as a person, she will do whatever it takes to be loved as a performer. Also, in my opinion, the song is horrifically overdone. Every mezzo belter in the world has sung that song. It's not a very good choice for an audition. It is also, for me, easy to sing many many times. However, something I did not anticipate was how sick I would get of singing the same song over and over and over again. By the end of a rehearsal, I would have done the song anywhere from five to ten times. It got to a point where I couldn't even listen to the song without my body having a physical reaction. It became hard for me to find any joy at all in the doing of the piece. It was grueling. I started joking with my friend Lila about how I was going to make my SPROJ into me just singing "Creep" by Radiohead.

And then that joke just kept coming back. And it made me smile when I thought about it. The thing about "Creep" is that it has become somewhat of a joke in itself. It's a sad boy song. It's the kind of song an indie guy would play on his guitar to try and impress you. It's a song that, believe it or not, I was obsessed with when I was in 6th grade. For some reason, the lyrics spoke to me. "I'm a creep. I'm a weirdo. What the hell am I doing here? I don't belong here." Truly, lyrical genius. The idea of going up and doing my whole set up, and make up, and being so pressed about my outfit and my shirt not fitting, and having a mental crisis, only to then sing fucking "Creep" by Radiohead was hilarious to me. I couldn't stop thinking about it.

So I opened my computer and wrote an email to Sawyer Dahlen, who was accompanying me on piano for my piece, saying that she would no longer be playing "Maybe this Time" from *Cabaret*, and would instead be performing "Creep" by Radiohead. She was overjoyed. Which made me overjoyed.

The song does make sense in the piece. Lyrically, although simple, it conveys a similar message to “Maybe this Time”. The singer wants someone to love him, but feels that he is so inferior that it will never happen. He’s a creep. He’s a weirdo. I think the song has more range, vocally and emotionally, than the other one. I felt more like myself when I was singing it. It’s more impressive. It’s also an alt-rock song, which is more like the kind of music I actually listen to. I don’t really listen to musical theatre outside of auditioning, shows, and repertoire. This is the type of music I really truly love, and singing it for my piece made me really excited.

I think it was Bhavesh who first suggested the idea of having my phone screen be projected behind me during the piece. The prospect was terrifying to me at first. Looking at my face close up was already hard enough, now it was going to be projected huge for the entire audience to see? It made my stomach flip. I rarely watch my own self tapes. I usually end up sending all the takes to a friend, and let them decide. Watching myself and hearing my own voice is my worst nightmare, especially if it’s projected huge. Unfortunately (or fortunately, depending on where you are looking from), this horror is part of what makes the piece work. There is a lack of control. I am unable to stop everyone’s eyes from being on me. I am looking at myself on the little screen of my phone, scrutinizing every detail, meanwhile, the very thing I hate to look at is up, and massive, for everyone to see and judge. Even when I take my phone out of the tripod, stopping the recording, the projection feed still stays up. No matter what, there will always be people scrutinizing everything about me, especially my appearance.

The character I created for this piece, and the way I referred to her in the script, was very specific. I use they/them pronouns, but I used she/her for the character in the script. In fact, the only name given is simply She. Because of my body, I will always be seen as somewhat of a woman in the theatre. I don’t have the ideal androgynous body type. I’m not skinny, I don’t have

a flat chest, or even a small chest, and my features are soft and curvy. The shirt I wore for the piece really only fits my chest when I wear a sports bra or a binder, which is what I usually wear every day. However, I was wearing an actual bra, which is my worst nightmare. I could get the shirt closed, but it would still gape open. The real bra with the button up shirt is a sort of compromise of gender that I've been using for lots of auditions. I can wear what I'm comfortable in, but it still has to be clear that I have a woman's body. Unfortunately, my body doesn't tend to cooperate with compromises. I know that if I were to present more femininely in audition and theatre settings, I would maybe have an easier time booking jobs. Slap some makeup on my face, put on a just modest enough dress, use she/they rather than they/them. But this is lying to myself. It's not who I am as a person, and it's not who I want to be as a performer. I want to book these roles as myself, not as the pretend version of myself I think I have to be to succeed. When I put the dress on in my piece, even though it's perfectly framed in the camera projection, when you look at the actual person onstage, you can still see the jeans I have on underneath. It's another layer of performance on top of all the other layers I'm putting on. No matter how hard I try to put on the makeup, it gets smeared. No matter how nice I look in that dress, there are still jeans and sneakers underneath. The ghost of my true self refuses to let go. There *is* something haunting me in this piece, something that grips me and sinks its claws into my skin. It's me. It's just me trying to keep hold of myself while the world tries to shake me off.

The tech for this piece was pretty rough. I had never been in the director's position during tech rehearsals, much less directing myself as the performer. We were also adding technical elements, like the projections and the keyboard & amp. Figuring it all out was really stressful. On top of that, I had to manage time in my piece so that it was still under 10 minutes. It was a pretty stressful tech week. And it taught me that directing is incredibly hard, and not something I

ever really want to do ever again, at least not alone. The performances themselves went really really well, even though to me they were all kind of a blur. It was exciting not knowing how the audience would react to my piece. I wanted it to be funny, but also deeply serious and uncomfortable. I remember the gasps and groans when I smeared mascara down my face, the laughter when Sawyer walked in in the middle of my breakdown. But most of all, the shocked laughter when, instead of “Maybe This Time”, Sawyer started playing “Creep”. People were thinking, “is this really happening?”. They were laughing at first, but as the song went on, and my intensity built and built, people started realizing how deadly serious I was. Someone told me after the show that they were surprised when I started singing that song, but that I “really sang it”. I wasn’t singing it as a jokey meme song. I was singing it like it was the last flight of a dying bird. It made the rest of the piece so much more tragic. Even the title, “This is Supposed to be Fun” (which I came up with on a very unforgiving day of tech), made people rethink the piece after the fact. We do theatre because, at least at some point, we loved it. As kids, it was just playing pretend and being silly. Then, we grow up, and we learn exactly what it takes to do this professionally, and we lose the fun of it. It becomes monotonous, damaging. We start comparing ourselves to others and overworking and forgetting why we even started doing this in the first place. Hearing audience responses made me feel like my piece had a purpose other than as some sick form of personal therapy. I didn’t know who I was making this for or why until we closed the Work in Progress festival. It was for other people like me, who were passionate about something and then, along the way, couldn’t find that passion. The responses also solidified for me that I wouldn’t continue with this piece in the spring. Watching the audience make discoveries about the piece made it so great. I’m also a restless artist. I am always thinking about the next thing, what I want to create next, how I want to do that, what I can take with me from

what I just did. So, at least for now, the life cycle of this piece is complete. I could see myself revisiting the concept and expanding it into a longer one person play, but for now, I'm happy with where it went.

## **Part 2: Spring**

I gave myself a break before tackling the next half of the SPROJ performance. I had worked on a solo piece in Jack Ferver's performance composition class that I wanted to use as a blueprint for my spring work. I had a lot of ideas floating around, and was excited to maybe make something bolder and bigger than I had in the fall. My goal was to spend all of Winter break writing and developing this piece. Unfortunately, the universe had other plans for how I would be spending winter break.

A bit of background before my tragic tale: My dog, Rocco, a Portuguese water dog, 11 years old, had been dealing with lymphoma for the past six months. He was being treated with chemotherapy, but wasn't responding the way we had hoped. His hair was falling out in clumps, he had lost really any appetite, and spent most of the day sleeping. To make matters worse, he broke his leg, and had to undergo surgery to fix it. He pulled through the operation, but had a pretty severe limp after. I say so in my piece, but this dog was everything to me. As he got older, whenever I was home, I was spending the most time with him. I felt responsible for him, and that responsibility gave me purpose. He was everything to me. He filled a very real void in my life. And I was watching him suffer and slowly die. Eventually, we had to make the very tough decision to help him cross the rainbow bridge. We said goodbye to him on January 14th. It was a massive heartbreak for everyone. Rocco had been with my family through half of my life. He was family. He made us all feel loved. I don't think any of us have gotten over it just yet.

Now that the mushy stuff is out of the way, here's where it gets farcical. Feel free to give me a pity chuckle as you read it. Seriously, it's okay if you laugh. It's crazy that all this stuff happened one after the other in a month. We were all laughing about it. Dark humor has always been my family's forte.

On the first day of January, I was carrying Rocco outside (since his leg was still healing) and I tripped, dropping him and fracturing my ankle in the process. I was in a boot for the rest of the month, and pretty much housebound. This sucked, to put it plainly.

Then, one week after Rocco passed, we were woken up in the early morning to find our power dead and smoke alarms going off. The reason for both of these events was an electrical fire that had started in the basement, and began to climb its way through the house via the walls and ceilings. So, we all ran outside, me, mom, brother, and grandmother. All of us were safe, but the fire ended up completely destroying the structure of the house. The entire thing needs to be re-built. For my last week home before returning to Bard, I was living in a hotel.

My family keeps saying the same thing when we're asked how we're doing. We say, "Everyone's okay and it's just stuff." And that is true. But I bring up this series of unfortunate events not because I want pity points, but because I need you, people reading this, to understand my state of mind as I was thrust back into the world of academics and having to write an entire new piece. Just getting through each day was a herculean task. It was far from easy. I am trying to be proud of myself for pulling it off.

## **Part 2: Spring**

As I said, the framework for this performance was a piece I made in Jack's performance composition class. The original piece was almost identical in form to the final product, but it went through a few iterations between point A and point B. It was me, sitting on the floor, drawing with oil pastels and giving a personal monologue. Once I finished the monologue, I would either fold up the paper and throw it, or, in one performance, I tore it up and started eating the paper, a la Ralph Fiennes in *Red Dragon*. The monologue originally focused more on my relationship with gender, the demonic, and how I maybe wanted to be a nun.

At the beginning of the spring writing process (before all hell broke loose in my life), I created this nun character, a character that I definitely want to revisit some day. She's about 50 years old, joined the convent purely because she hates men and thought being surrounded by other women would (possibly) get her laid, failed, then moved out to the middle of the woods and teaches community art classes on weekends occasionally. She is a heavy smoker (weed and cigarettes), knows how to use a hunting rifle, is great at DIY projects, and is very happy being alone in nature. She is one of my many possible future selves (I keep a running list). The piece was going to be framed like an art class, which would eventually spiral out of control as this nun revealed more about her bizarre personal life. I wanted this piece to be lighthearted and fun. I wanted to play a distinct character. I wanted there to be a focus on wilderness and the solitude of the woods. The piece was always somewhat about ghosts, but I first envisioned the supernatural presence to be more organic in nature. Things die in the woods all the time. People, animals, environments, and I think the idea of a haunted forest is really interesting. Again, I really want to revisit all of these ideas. I honestly just couldn't bring myself to complete a single draft of this idea. Even before shit hit the fan, I wasn't exactly sure where to go with the idea.

The writing process for this one was extremely taxing. I wanted to do anything but write this damn SPROJ. I wanted to curl up in bed and sleep until the entire process was over. I hated every single draft I wrote. I wasn't satisfied with anything I was creating. Draft after draft after draft, nothing was working the way I wanted it to. I tried writing as a completely separate character. I tried focusing on just one aspect of all the topics I was writing about, but nothing felt right to me. I was at a breaking point. I was ready to give up. And I needed to have a draft ready in a few days. So, I went back to the very first monologue I wrote, for my performance comp class. And all I did was edit a few things, then add one more section at the end to tie everything together. I knew I was going to have to talk about my dog, which was going to be very hard. If I wanted to connect with the audience, I needed to show them what I was really going through. Of course, I didn't want it to be too "woe is me", so I left out the parts about the house fire and my ankle. Besides, losing Rocco was the worst part, even after losing everything. I wish he was here with me every single day. So, I just wrote what I was feeling. And at times it felt silly, doing this much grieving for an animal, but if you ask me, it wasn't enough. He deserved everything, mourners in the streets, a funeral pyre, seven day shiva, all of it. This piece was for him.

Because the turn around for this piece was so quick, I only really had one in depth rehearsal. I ran the piece during colloquium showings, but didn't go as in-depth. The rehearsal was with my collaborator, Scotty Hindy. We were both pretty stressed about our respective pieces, especially with how little time we had until tech started. So after about half an hour of bitching, we got to work. I ran through my piece, and then we talked a bit about the monologue itself. In a few short moments, I was crying. It was the first time I was really talking about everything I was feeling. It was a release. As well as much needed cry, we discovered that the piece is really about growing up, and saying goodbye to certain parts of childhood. The three

ghost stories are in chronological order of me growing up, and from three formative points in my life: elementary school, early teens, and adulthood. We figured out which parts of the monologue were coming from those three different aged Chloés. My own sense of self has changed so much between those points. Ideas of who I am as an artist, my gender, my sexuality, the way I respond to the world around me, all of that has evolved. And yet, some things stay the same. I've always been creative, always had an interest in the strange and the macabre, always been a little bit of a weirdo. I think this piece is my way of dealing with adulthood. I lost my childhood home, my dog, and now I have to graduate college and be a person with an income and a career. In many ways, I still feel like that little kid that convinced everyone their school was haunted. I still love telling ghost stories. The use of oil pastels for the drawings was also very intentional. When I was getting back into art in college, I used crayons, since it was a very accessible and easy to use medium. It made me feel like the quality didn't necessarily matter. I was just drawing for fun. Oil pastels, to me, are the grown up version of crayons. I also liked how messy they are. They are really easy to smear and smudge, which makes blending easier. I wanted to get color all over me, my hands, my clothes. However, paint would've been a bitch to clean up, so oil pastels were far more manageable.

What is very odd to me is how projections became the connective tissue between my fall and spring pieces. It made sense to me to use them again, since it was a part of my technical needs already and would be easy to do again. It was never my intention for it to be something thematically connected to the fall. I think the projections serve two entirely separate purposes in each of the pieces. In the fall, it was to heighten the sense of unease and lack of control of the main character. In the spring, it was designed purely for practical considerations. I wanted people to see what I was drawing. In Jack's class, I was drawing on the floor on a big sheet of paper, and

the class was small enough that it wasn't hard for everyone to see what I was drawing. In LUMA, that can't happen. So, the camera was moved overhead, picking up and projecting what was happening on the floor. It was shockingly easy to get it set up the way I wanted it to. Something cool that would happen when the lights shifted was that the colors of the drawing would morph, going from all cool toned to warm to completely gray-scale. Another discovery made in tech was the fun of tarps. I knew I wanted a tarp on the ground, both to catch any oil pastel debris and because I liked the idea of the stage looking kind of like a crime scene. The kind of tarp I thought I was buying was one of those heavy duty tarps you see in woodshops and places like that. What I ended up with was basically a 15 by 12 sheet of tissue paper. That's what you get for two dollars on Amazon, I guess. Getting the tarp onstage ended up being the most difficult part of teching. During one run, the tarp wasn't set exactly right, and ballooned up off the floor. When I entered, it was like I was stepping on a cloud. It was ghostly. Having the tarp also made the final moments of the piece more impactful. If I'm staying on the tarp the whole time, it adds significance when I finally step off of it. And I step off it (or crawl off it) when I start describing the dream I had about Rocco. This staging too was only added to the piece during tech.

Before tech, I had no idea what I was going to be drawing every night. There was even a line in the piece that was pretty much "I have no idea what I'm doing." Bhavesh asked me if that was true, if I actually was making up the drawing on the spot, and I said yes. I wanted it to look like I was actually just drawing whatever on the page. I wish I had more rehearsals to set how the physicality of my drawing shifts with the monologue. It's something that we touched on in rehearsal, but I wish we had gone more in depth with it. I wanted the drawings to be organic, even if that meant some of them were abstract nonsense (and some of the earlier ones definitely

were). After one particularly strange one, which ended up as a bunch of cube shapes in a hostile, desert-like environment, I decided I would ask members of my dressing room what I should draw. One of the other performers said, “a weiner dog”. So, I went onstage, and ran through my piece drawing a little brown weiner dog. I even gave them a frilly little Shakespeare collar. After my piece was done, I went back down to the dressing rooms with the drawing, to give it to the person that had requested it. When I showed it to her, she said “Oh wow. That’s my dog!” Seeing how happy she was, how that simple drawing triggered an emotion in her, I knew I had to draw people’s dogs. Different dogs for each performance. I drew 7 dogs total, some still alive, some recently passed. After my piece ended, the drawing was put up on display outside of LUMA, then I would give it to whoever's dog it was. I am a crazy dog person. My retirement dream is to run a senior dog sanctuary. I would look at pictures of the dogs I was going to draw, and really try to take them in. I wanted them to all be my dogs. They all felt like my dogs when I was doing the piece. I would turn around and look at them, their little scribbly faces projected so huge for the audience to see. These animals make up such a small part of our human lifespans, and yet, they do so much for us. Any one of those dogs could’ve been my Rocco. They were their persons’ Roccas, and Lilys, and Leias, and Jaspers, and Dakotas.

On the opening night of the festival, I drew Rocco, and gave the drawing to my mom. When I pulled it off the wall and gave it to her, we both started crying. Everyone around us was having a celebratory moment, and here we were, still mourning. I had grown up. I wasn’t her little kid anymore. And in that moment, I think we really saw each other. We went through the hell of January together, and we were both so tired, and still dealing with that trauma.

I’ve described this spring SPROJ as a “survival piece”, and I think I still feel that way. I think this was the only thing my body could have produced after what I went through. I still

haven't processed all of it, including the piece. As I'm writing this paper, I'm not entirely sure how to talk about it. I know it made a lot of people cry, and a lot more people think about their pets, and I'm glad I could do that. Once again, the whole thing kind of feels like a blur. I keep being told things about the performance, and I can't conceptualize any of it. The very fact that I had a piece to present at the beginning of March feels like the real achievement to me. That I made something that resonated with people is even more amazing. If my fall piece was about Chloe, the performer, then spring was about Chloe, the flesh and blood human underneath it all. Both have their struggles, and both pieces certainly showed those struggles. January stripped me raw, down to muscle and bone. I couldn't sing my way out of this one, at least not yet. And I'm not sure how I feel about that. I was just talking. And maybe that doesn't seem very raw and vulnerable, but to me, it was. I haven't admitted out loud that I made up that elementary school ghost story until this semester. My entire child paranormal investigation career has been a sham. I've been living a lie!

The audience got the opportunity to know more about me than they ever would just seeing me perform in a different show. And even then, who I am will get warped through all their lenses of perspective until I'm someone completely different to them. Because no one ever really knows me onstage. They know the parts I let them see, and then they take what they want and leave the rest. And I think that, not the projections, is the connective tissue between these two pieces. I also believe that both these pieces are about hauntings. There was a world in which I did continue with my fall SPROJ. I wanted to have things go even more wrong than before. I wanted things to get knocked over, objects to go missing and then reappear across the room. I wanted to play with how to stage a haunting, and what would happen to this character if there actually *were* supernatural forces beyond her control conspiring against her career growth. Even though I never

got to realize this, it's still baked into the fabric of the piece. I wish I had played more with staging and haunting magic in my spring piece as well. I feel like there could have been places where spooky stuff could've happened onstage. Maybe the drawing starts to fly away. Maybe the lights go out and I have to run and turn them back on. Maybe the music starts playing at the wrong time. I think a haunted play would be really interesting. Like an actually haunted play, not *Phantom of the Opera* haunted where it's just some guy causing all the problems.

If nothing else, creating these two pieces has given me so many new ideas and inspirations for future work. And even though directing isn't my strong suit, I love developing and writing new work. I've especially grown to love solo performance, and definitely want to continue with that after graduation. I have so much inside me that I want to share, and for me, solo work is the purest expression of that. I'm a person that talks to myself a lot, which some people think is weird. Personally, I think it's an artist thing. We have a lot going on in our brains, and sometimes we need to get it out. Solo performance is just structured talking to yourself. Another thing that draws me to solo work is the idea of control. I like having a hand in every part of a work (even sometimes directing). I like playing and discovering and want to get better at living in the process of things. My time at Bard is not just defined by the two weekends of SPROJ performances I did, but by everything I created and was a part of. SPROJ is just one work out of many. And it taught me how to learn from everything that I've done here. Especially that I can and want to do both musical theatre and develop solo works. I have the capacity to be really great at these things, and possibly combine them. Creating a solo musical is a dream of mine, a dream that I hope to work towards after graduation.

I want to haunt people. I want to stay in people's heads long after they've left my presence. I want to linger in places I've once been. Even if I don't have a legacy, even if no one

sees any of my work, I will come back after I'm gone. I want to make myself known. I like the idea of existing as a mystery, flickering in shadows, appearing and disappearing at will.

Basically, I want to fuck with people, as an artist or as a ghost. I like being weird, and making my weird little plays about weird, fucked up people. And ghosts. But all ghosts were once fucked up people. And, in my opinion, all artists are a little bit weird and fucked up. It's no wonder so many artists become ghosts. We can never be done with our work. There's an art to haunting. It's a lot like theatre. You have your stage (room), your props (objects), your objective (make your presence known, and/or scare the audience), and you have your audience (unsuspecting visitors). I hope I make some good hauntings when I'm a ghost. I hope I scare people, but also really make them think. Like "ooh that chair falling over was really well timed to create maximum fear." I could make art forever, or at least until humanity dies out. I don't think cockroaches appreciate hauntings as much as humans do.



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## THIS IS SUPPOSED TO BE FUN

By Chloé Griffault

Lights up. She enters the space, carrying a backpack, a large tote bag, and a beverage cup. There are two other beverage cups in the cupholders on her backpack. She is visibly upset.

She drops the tote bag and backpack haphazardly, forgetting the beverages in the bag. She remembers, and quickly moves to pick up the cups. If anything spills, she uses her jacket to wipe it up. She takes a second to survey the space. A rehearsal studio.

She pulls out her earbuds, and unplugs them from her phone. She checks her phone for a bit. The text she sees makes her huff.

The accompanist is late. There is an empty piano in the corner.

She paces the room, rolling her shoulders. She rubs her neck.

She does a lip trill. Two lip trills.

She sniffs. Coughs up a snot ball. Gross.

She takes off her sweatshirt, revealing a button up. Still feminine enough, but also not a dress. She pulls on it a little. It is clearly too small for her.

She digs into the backpack, pulling out a binder, a copy of Kurt Cobain's collected journals, and a dress. She holds it, looks at it, thinks about it.

There is clearly a reason she brought this dress, even if she didn't want to wear it.

"You have to look the part".

Right.

She then shoves it back in the bag.

She grabs a ring light from downstage right.

She stands, and looks at the ring light. It falls back. She fixes it. She tries to put her phone in the phone holder. It flops back. She tries again. It flops back. She gets more and more frustrated. She tries again, shoving it in, getting it to haphazardly stay put

She flips the camera on. We see the feed projected onto the wall behind her.

What was clear to the audience is now clear to her: The button up is too small, her boobs are too big.

Shit.

She fiddles with it, pulling on it to try and get the buttons to stop gaping. She adjusts her shoulders, her chest, tugs on her bra. It almost works.

She seizes the opportunity to press record and film a slate.

She puts on a fake smile. A dorky wave.

“Hi, my name is Chloe Griffault, I use they/them pronouns, and I will be singing Maybe This Time from Cabaret”

Stop. Think. Reset.

“Hello! My name is Chloe Griffault , I use she/they pronouns, and I will be singing Maybe This Time from Cabaret.

The facade drops. She stops the recording. She rubs her hands on her face aggressively. Making faces. Maybe some guttural screams.

A deep breath.

She goes to pull out her laptop, to plug the ring light into it.

She plugs it in, then steps back in front of the camera.

Oh god. She hates what she sees.

She goes back to the backpack, pulls out a makeup bag, and goes for the concealer. Instead of using a mirror, she goes right up to the phone camera to do her makeup.

She applies concealer, mascara. She gets the mascara all over her eye. Shit. She tries to wipe it off. She tries to fix it with some concealer, and ends up getting some on her shirt.

The shirt that was keeping her from wearing the dress.

Look. Pause. Internal explosion.

That leaves the dress.

She goes for the bag to dig it out. She pulls out a handful of loose cough drops, a bottle of pills, unstapled sheet music, and finally, the dress.

She does not want to wear it.

She takes a long second. Mentally preparing herself.

She tears the shirt off of her body, throwing it on the ground.

She puts the dress on fast, as if ripping off a bandaid. Her jeans are still on under it.

She turns to the camera, looks at herself.

Looks and looks.

No

No

No

No.

She runs her hands through her hair, pulling, tugging, looking for some kind of comfort in the gesture. She can't tear her eyes away from the phone screen, even though she desperately wants to.

She adjusts the top (the boob area). She tugs on the front (the stomach) she pulls on the bottom (the hips).

She wishes she were somebody else.

She rips her phone out of the tripod, (yet the camera feed stays on), starts to pull the dress off, giving up, and then...

A loud knock.

The accompanist has arrived. She can still do this. But she has to get the dress back on....She runs to try and tidy up her messy space.

***She: ONE SECOND!!!***

She runs to the SL wing, and calmly walks back in followed by the accompanist.

***Acc: I'm so sorry I'm late, are we still good to record?***

***She: yeah yeah yeah (yeah yeah yeah yeah) we're all good!***

The accompanist takes a seat at the piano, takes her sweet time getting settled and pulling out the sheet music.

She is antsy, waiting, fidgeting.

***Acc: Ready?***

She nods to the accompanist.

II.

The accompanist starts to play.

The lights shift. A special on her and a special on the accompanist. Dim lighting, smoky, maybe hazy.

She snaps into focus. She looks beyond the camera, to an audience of people watching her. The ring light becomes a microphone. But she is not singing "Maybe This Time". She's not even singing musical theatre.

Instead, she sings Creep by Radiohead.

She practically wails it.

It's not getting anyone any roles or jobs, but in that moment, it's perfect.

The song ends. She steps back. The lights go back to the studio lighting. The camera feed goes on again.

She looks to the accompanist.

***Acc: That was good.***

A moment. Was it? She turns it over and over in her head.

***She: could we do it again?***

Blackout.



## GHOST STORIES

By Chloé Griffault

(Transition into piece. Music, For Whom the Bell Tolls, plays)

(Lights up, music is still playing quite loud. They enter. They wave. The music abruptly shuts off)

Hi.

(They take a moment to lay out their materials, paper, busted looking box of oil pastels. As they speak, they draw the environment, the place, the people, the overall atmosphere. It is projected onto the back wall behind them)

I'm gonna tell you a ghost story: In my elementary school, in the basement, there was an old elevator shaft blocked off by stacks of boxes, and no one ever used it. And we weren't allowed to go near it. So the rumor was that two kids got sent to the nurse's office, and they took the elevator, but the elevator got stuck in between floors. And they tried to push the call buttons, and scream for help, and pry the doors open with their little stubby elementary school fingers, but nothing worked. So they were stuck in there, just dying, and no one was able to open the doors to recover their bodies, so they kept it blocked off. And sometimes, when you walk past the old elevator, you'll hear little thumps, like tiny little fists pounding on metal doors. Yeah.

And then I'll tell you I made that whole story up, and spread the rumor to everyone in the school.

(They swipe their hand over the drawing, smudging everything they just did. They wipe the dust onto their apron)

It's kind of impressive looking back on it. Me and a few of my friends put out a paranormal investigation article in every issue of our school newspaper. It was maybe some of my best work. And! I used it to impress a boy I had a crush on. Yeah, I took him

to the dead kid elevator. I guess I thought it was really romantic or something. I was worried he didn't like me because I didn't want to wear skirts or dresses. But I think he was more concerned with the fact that I spent my after school hours making up stories about children who died in our elementary school.

(They tear the paper out of the pad, and crumple it up)

I don't know if 11 year old me would recognize 21 year old me. I'm so, so, so different. I used to be *tall*. I was taller than all of my friends. All of my friends that were boys. I was a little tomboy growing up, and I was taller than all these little boys, and I was very proud of that, but then they hit puberty like 2 years after I did and just shot up. Now I'm short. And I like *women* which 11 year old me would probably be pretty shocked about.

But I also like *men*, which 15 year old me would be shocked about.

I didn't realize that second part until recently, and I think part of it is that I feel like I know myself better. I've known that I'm ehh probably nonbinary for like, wow like 6-7 years now, but I never really felt confident enough to accept it and like, actually exist as a nonbinary person, who uses they/them pronouns and doesn't just say "oh I don't care use whatever" because I don't wanna inconvenience anyone or anything, no. I am nonbinary. I am not a girl.

But weirdly enough, I think I *was* a girl. At least for a little bit. And she's somewhere rattling around inside me. I don't know. It's not something I like to think about.

Sorry, I'm actually really curious, raise your hand if you believe in ghosts.

(they raise their hand. Witty improv response to amount of hands raised)

Okay, okay. Sorry, I know you probably weren't expecting audience participation in this piece.

I do believe in ghosts, despite the fact that I was absolutely lying about those ghosts in my elementary school. I think that, there's not many places on the Earth you will go where someone else hasn't already been. And I think sometimes there's stuff that sticks around. My family believes in ghosts. When we moved into our house, which was built

in like the early 1900s so somebody has probably died in it, my uncle put these little runes up all around, to ward off any like, bad or vengeful spirits or something. And I know, to you weirdos out there who do not believe in ghosts, that this probably sounds insane. But, I don't know, to me believing in ghosts is one of those choices you can make that just makes living life slightly more fun and exciting. And sometimes very creepy.

I feel a little bad about the fake cop-out ghost story, so let me tell you a real one. Freshman year of high school, for fall break, my group of friends spent a few days at a house in Pennsylvania, in the pocono mountains. And there were a good amount of us, and there were 2 bedrooms on one floor, and the other bedroom is in this like, weird isolated basement part of the house. There was a creepy dollhouse and rocking horse down there and everything. And so I know all the boys are gonna go in one upstairs room, and all the girls in another, and I had just realized "oh shit I might be trans", and I really did not want to navigate either one of those options, so IMMEDIATELY I'm taking the creepy basement room. And we were hanging out down there, and making jokes about there being demons that lived in the basement because of the creepy toys. And then it's late at night, and I'm in bed, and I've been watching ghost hunting shows since I was a kid, so I say "hey, if there are demons in this basement, can you turn the lights off for me". And not only did those little fuckers not turn the lights off, but immediately after I ask, my nose starts bleeding. Really fucking annoying of them. So I slept in a demon nest for a few days. It was absolutely worth it, though. I got my own room, and didn't have to worry about my friends or feel weird about my body the whole time. And I don't think they possessed me or anything, but also I am who I am and if the shoe fits, then y'know.

I don't think I'd mind it. Getting possessed. It might be nice for someone else to be in control of me for a while. Be a passenger in my own life. I'm tired. I'm really, really tired. I need fresh eyes in this body. Demons don't have souls, so if one wants, they can share mine for a little bit. I want someone to take care of, and someone to take care of me. I lost my dog a month ago. Cancer. Rocco fought it as hard as he could for 6

months, but he was just...so tired. He was my best friend. He was why I got up in the morning. He loved me unconditionally. And I loved him the same way, right back. I'm missing that. It feels like a part of me has just been ripped away. I mean dogs, we love dogs because they feel so strongly about loving us, and we get a free pass to love them as fiercely as we want to. We love our dogs the way a dog would. We'd do anything for them. I've always loved like that. If I love you, I'll follow you anywhere, to the ends of the Earth, even when you don't want me to. And Rocco, he matched it. And I don't know what to do now that he's not here. So, sure. I'll take a demon. I'd welcome a possession, or even a few lonely spirits just haunting my room right now. I don't care if they knock stuff over, or make the room too cold, or cause me to speak in tongues or spit up black bile. I just need something to do this with me. Life.

Here's one more ghost story: I dreamed the other night that I was in my room at home, and the whole house was quiet, and my dog, he used to always open the door to my room and wake me up in the mornings. So Rocco came in, with all his fur, with this life I haven't seen him have in months, and it seemed like he wanted something. And when he would want something, we'd just have to follow him around and hope he would lead us to what he wanted. So I was just following him through the house, and there was sunlight filtering in everywhere, but everything was so still, even the air just seemed suspended, like the split seconds before lightning strikes. And he takes me all the way downstairs, and the kitchen and family room looked like they did when I was in high school. And my dog, he leads me right into the family room and hops up on this ratty green chair and just kinda plops himself down. And I kneel down in front of him, so my face is level with his, and I just ask him, I ask him,  
"What do you want?"

And he puts his head right up against mine, and I look into his eyes, and I look right at myself reflected in them,

And then I wake up, and I swear, I heard all the doors in the building open, and then slam shut all at once.

(cue music: Alone Again Or, played until end of transition out of piece)

(They look out, then behind them at the projected image of their drawing. They look down at the drawing. Then, methodically, they fold it into a paper airplane. They examine it, then throw it. As the airplane hits the ground, the lights quickly flip to (BLACKOUT))

