

To Butterfly a Ghost

Jess Richards

Preheat the sunshine to 67¹ degrees centigrade.

Feel the air around you to locate a ghost and make sure it is either asleep or sedated.

If the ghost already has wings, release it immediately.

Assuming there are no wings: using sharp kitchen shears, remove the spine from the ghost.

Dust the spine with flour and cut it into small pieces. Set the spine aside.

Flatten the ghost by placing it face-up on the floor and applying firm pressure to the chest air.

Transfer the flattened ghost to a wire-rack.

Drizzle the ghost with olive oil.

Combine salt, black pepper, and baking powder in a small bowl.

Sprinkle this mixture over the ghost.

Smother the ghost with herb leaves; sage, parsley, thyme.

Lie the ghost in sunshine to roast, until a thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the ghost registers 67 degrees centigrade.

Immediately reduce the heat of the sun if the ghost darkens.

Heat one tablespoon of oil in a small saucepan until the oil is shimmering.

Add the ghost spine and cook, stirring frequently for 67 minutes.

Add onion, carrot, celery, bay leaves, vermouth or sherry, and one cup of water.

Stir this mixture with a wooden spoon. Reduce the heat and simmer for 67 minutes.

¹ My father was buried in Scotland at the age of sixty-seven, and three months after his death I flew away to live in New Zealand. This is a summoning spell.

Blend the mixture and boil it for another 67 minutes. Whisk in soy sauce, butter, and lemon juice to make a jus.

Remove the butterflied ghost from the sunshine, transfer it to the floor.

Feed it the spine jus. Tell it that once it has mastered independent flight, it will learn speech.

Wrap the ghost loosely in foil and let it rest.

Release it outside and watch it fly away north.

Make a final attempt at a beckoning wish. Think of the white-skied north. Whisper, *come hither*. Ask the ghost to land again soon with the ghost of your father; because it chooses to, because it loves you, because it must. Because you have used a cooking spell to give it wings.

Keep your eyes on the sky and think of landings.

Lose your appetite when the butterflied ghost never comes back.

Jess Richards is the author of three literary fiction novels. *Snake Ropes*, *Cooking with Bones*, and *City of Circles* are all published in the UK by Sceptre. She also writes poetry, short fiction, and vispo, and her current project is a creative nonfiction manuscript on the theme of birds and ghosts. Originally from Scotland, Jess now lives with her wife in New Zealand.