

HOLLOW ATTEMPTS

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Bangles & Blunders, Liquid Courage, Marble Mistakes.

1. Bangles & Blunders

Wringing the napkin around my finger, I wonder, is it worth wounding myself to escape this date? Perhaps I could fall down the stairs? Or slice my thumb open? Do prey feign illness or injury in hope predators will move onto a target worthwhile? Shit. She's here.

Sliding out of the booth, leather squeaks against my pants, broadcasting my awkward movement to the patrons. I'm clad in my best slacks, she in a dress with sparkly silver bangles. "Hey there, you". I punch her on the shoulder in what I hope is a playful manner, but the words hang in the air, embarrassing and stale. Her smile seems strained, artificial.

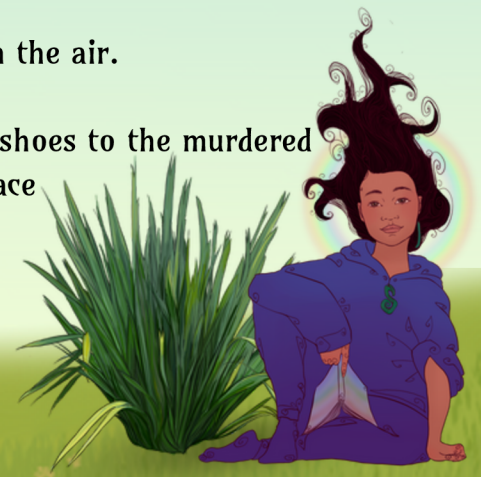
We shake hands in the exchange of pleasantries, bangles lining her arm chime away. Palms and pits dampen at the silence spreading an uncharted course between.

"So what do you do?" Chugging the glass when asked this and eager to answer, I stifle coughs of watery protest from my chest. Another grimace. "Geology!" I hope to pique her interest. "Oh" it does not.

Ordering a steak for her, a burger for me, earns me a peculiar look from the waiter. Perhaps it's unusual to want a childish meal on a mature night? She cuts into her meat, silver bangles twinkling. I bite into my burger, american style, sauce bleeds down my fingers and onto my best slacks. Splodges of grisly yellow bead into the fabric. "Crap!" My eyes divagate to my ears now burning red aflame. I should have used a fork.

My napkin torn and twisted, I rush to the dispenser, yanking stacks of white to absorb the stains. "Just use mine" she hisses at me, thrusting the paper in my direction. Silver bangles heckle me. Her eyes are overcast, stealing glances at the room. Fists full, I flurry to escape my audience, pummeling into our waiter, wine migrating through the air.

Alcoholic stench envelopes me, I hold still, ignominy rooting my shoes to the murdered linoleum floor. Over my shoulder, she sits hunched, hiding her face behind her hands and sparkly silver bangles.



2. Liquid Courage

Antlers sprout from my head, bobbing to Jingle Bell Rock. Work Christmas parties demand public humiliation. I am a victim of this.

“Here’s my third-born” swiping through her phone, showcasing yet another picture of her chubby child extending his pudgy fingers to the camera. I offer a forced smile, trying to guess his age – maybe four? But distinguishing baby fat from obesity proves a challenge.

She notices my lingering gaze and quickly stashes her phone away, concern flickering across her face. I feel like a creep. I try to engage in the holiday chatter, but I’m met with turned backs and swinging mistletoe earrings. Alienation amidst festivity. Ironic.

I seek refuge at the bar, hoping for liquid courage. I started the night on rum and coke, socially acceptable choice, but eventually opt for strawberry margaritas. The bartender leans over, playfully ping-ponging the festive headband, “Nice ears”. I laugh nervously, unsure if this was flirtation or just friendly banter.

I watch her expertly mix cocktails. I can’t help but admire the slender arms so familiarised with their surroundings. Each gesture fluid and assured, no potential shatter or spill. I envy that. Studying her craft and reaping the benefits, a film of sweetness sticks to my teeth. The night sneaks up on me, and I find myself slumped over the sticky counter, hair mingling with patches of dried lager.

“Sorry mate, I think it’s time to cut you off”. The smile is now serious. “How are you getting home tonight?” I learn it’s in the back of a musty taxi.

3. Marble Mistakes

The sweet, wet drink that drowns my sorrows isn’t the reason my insides curl, but rather the sour faces of each person. The ruthless hunters who shot me down, leaving gaping bullet wounds so now I flap in the wind. Stumbling along a fountain edge. “Who will save me if I fall face first and drown?” I drunkenly ask the silence. The lack of response persuades me.

Untying my laces and removing my socks, leaving them placed neatly. Intentional. They’ll know this wasn’t just a drunken mistake. The water hits my calves first, then rises to my waist.

Underwater rocks clink in my pockets.



“Do you think that’s enough?” a voice inquires. A body swings outward from the fountain's centre. A helmet of dark sea waves trails along a milky complexion. I’m baffled as to how she got up there, and remains dry. “I’m just saying if you really want to do the job right. Better do it right the first time”

“I wasn’t gonna do anything” I slur, unconvincing and panicked.

She laughs, a playful smile forming on her lips. It shows a great deal of teeth, but those shapes of white don’t form menacing and cruel like the hunters, or artificial ones received from strangers. She dips her toes in, satisfied. “Want company then?” She doesn’t wait for an answer, letting go, beating ripples I try to avoid breaking.

Hanging in front of my face, inspecting me, she spits water and giggles. Flirtation. I splash her and start to laugh too. We exchange attacks of waves, laughing. I manage to overpower and kiss her.

Lovers’ lips locked underwater. No words leave her lips as she stands like marble. Her lips and eyes are marble. Her hands hold like marble. She was made of marble.

She was a statue. And I was a drunk fool.

I get out and put my shoes back on.

