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# The Flight of Bacteria Ben

Jordan Ona

In his bed Ben Hidreeno wondered if phones worked in heaven.

"Father," he said, "tell me what to do." Then he flicked on the lights.

From the dresser he pocketed two photos. One depicted a scruffy Canadian soldier. The other showed a blond teen in boxing trunks, his hands up. On his dresser were some World War books and a college pamphlet. Their pages were well-thumbed.

Ben adjusted a tie over a wrinkled dress shirt out in the hall. Though tall and strong, Ben looked very lousy, except for his face, which was always smooth-shaven. If not for a slight bruise, his face would have been his redeeming feature.

Ben's little brother, Romeo, was reading Shakespeare's Henry V in the living room. The August afternoon light shone strong through the windows, lending the household some warmth.

TV-sounds came from his mother's room, the room across his. Ben hesitated.

"Come in," said Geraldine, his mother. He had not expected her to hear him knock.

Ben closed the door. "Well you look like crap," he said.

The scarce window-sunlight in the room revealed she was, in fact, as presentable as ever. Her blond braid fell over her creaseless maroon blazer. She wore dark pantaloons, and she sat next to her computer desk. Papers filled one end of it. She faced Ben, one leg over the other. The television behind her was playing the ending of 'It's a Wonderful Life'. Auld Lang Syne blared loudly.

"How's Romeo?" she asked.

"He's in the living room," he said. "He's alright. Gee, it's cold in here." Ben rubbed his palms together. "Put a light on will ya? Gee... where's the damn... There we are. Much superior." He grinned.

"See, I remember your sayins. 'Superb'. 'Stupendous'. Well well. The lady emerges from her hermit life. One year, eh? This is somethin. This is really someth—"

## The Flight of Bacteria Ben - Jordan Ona

"I have essays to grade," she said, "so I'll just tell you what you want to know." She turned to her desk, clacking away on the keyboard. "I gave Harry your number."

He pretended not to hear. He inspected her desk. "Summer school, eh? Nice. I live here and I didn't even know you were teachin' it. But good god"—he waved to the television—"how can you work with all this... hollon' a... Christ, that's a Christmas movie! Every night it's this? Don'tcha know it's August?"

She clacked away. "It was Aznan's favourite. Oh—I have to rewind it again. Now out, before I sock you."

He stayed. "Say, why'dja give Harry my number anyway? I never said where I lived. I didn't give him your number, either, so how did he—"

"Oh, he just asked around. He eventually heard what happened, you know. 'Oh that poor Ben. That poor Mrs. Hidreeno.' From Miller's wife. I was surprised you kept it from him, delinquent though he is. I thought you loved that boy."

"Not like that I don't."

"Sure. He hasn't visited, by the way. Thought you might kill him."

"Yeah? Well tell him not to call. I'll kill him. Hafta get a new phone. Again. Damn smashed mine when I got his text. ... I'm not going back to Miller's. Ever."

Ben cocked up his chin. "You consented, didn'tcha?" He shrugged. "Besides, they dunno nothin'."

"Street-fighting secretly isn't the point," she said. "It's just a waste. Waste, waste, waste. The college'll find you out. Then you'd rot."

"Oh no. I know *exactly* what I'd do then. Drive 90 on a 40, drunk ta-highhell. Krboom."

He had not seen her rise, he had not even seen the reel nor the swing nor the whip of the slap and when it struck she said he didn't know anything about Aznan. She said Aznan afforded him every opportunity and that he wasted every single one. She said, as parents do, that he was an ungrateful little brat. Waste waste waste. She said if he was given every diamond in the world he would somehow make a dunghill of them. "His father had *died*," she

## The Flight of Bacteria Ben - Jordan Ona

said. "But Aznan—thank God—he didn't kill anybody."

"Thank God," Ben said. "He only had himself a heart attack after. Oh, his poor father. You know. The one who made him join the army. Aznan only busted his knees for it.

"I guess I oughta get rummy too. I oughta spend a night on the town. That musta been howya met him, eh? 'An English teacher and History professor walk into a bar...' Oh, it's brilliant. Miss Shakespeare and Sir H.G. Wells. Two daggum geniuses."

Geraldine dismissed him from the room.

In the hall, Ben recalled some years ago his father once said:

"Ben I don't understand your violence I make no judgment Really I don't I fought a little in my time They insulted my mother But I wasn't like you Hear me out Ben Miller is a good friend of mine He can get you and Harry off the streets He trains good boxers If you're willing to work and put in the time he'll keep you Promise me you won't get funny around him

Listen Ben Geraldine raised you her way I raised you in mine I fear only there's no bookstack-heap of poetry nor history to civilize you The cadets couldn't I couldn't If Miller cant sort you I don't know who will I failed you I know that much Tell me what I won't use a cliché All I knew was how my father raised me He was even more old-fashioned than I I brought you along too fast Too much pressure I regret ever hittin you Oh God Listen to me Ben I don't want you stabbed to death somewhere That is my biggest fear I don't want to lose you I want you to find a place in this world If there's a heaven I want you to be there I don't want to lose you In this world or the next In this world or the next In this world or the next"

Ben called into the living room.

"Roam'yo?" he called. "Roam'yo, O Roam'yo, whar'for art thou O Roam'yo... Arr you thar?"

A precocious mop-haired child of ten years seemed to materialize before him. He held a book, nervous. "Hullo," he said.

Ben patted his head and took drunkenlike steps toward the house door. "Was jus' gon' say ahm steppin' out," Ben said. "Too mech rakkit 'ere. Goin' to the librurry." He paused. "Ma and I got a bit mad. No worries. She still luv's ye. Prahmiss." Romeo relaxed a little.

## The Flight of Bacteria Ben - Jordan Ona

"I heard you talking in your room earlier," Romeo said.

Ben flinched. "Oh. Oh that. Peeps, y'know, lots'a peeps. More textin' instead of calling. Buncha nobodies, thass'all."

"You didn't slam your phone did you? You slammed *something*. I heard it."

"I tossed it," Ben admitted.

"Oh, Ben!" Romeo hugged his leg, punching it in frustration. Ben tried shaking Romeo.

"*Listen*, dey were jus' ol' frends askin' 'bout las' yeer. Den dey asked 'bout cawlidge. Esh very fenny. Dey grow an 'art when deth's invawlvved. Das why ah kept quiet. Ain't dat fenny?"

"No, it isn't. You smashed your *phone*. You bum! You have to fight even more now."

Then Romeo said, "And stop using that stupid voice. It's not funny and it was never funny and it's simply *horrible*. Mum says to stop it."

Ben felt stabbed. "Well alright," he said. "Whadda kids even like these days."

"Tell me joke," Romeo said. "You always had joke."

"Sure. Knock knock."

"Who there."

"Orange."

"Orange who?"

"Orange you glad I didn't say tomato?"

"You told that one," Romeo said sadly. "Yesterday you did."

"Bacteria Ben then," Ben said. He was a great improviser. "Then I gotta go. Ready?" Romeo listened closely.

"This is the story of Bacteria Ben, the loudmouth boxer who had never

## The Flight of Bacteria Ben - Jordan Ona

ever been. His hands made you sick, and watching him did too; the coach beat him quick; he ran home without shoes.”

“That’s not it,” Romeo frowned.

“I know,” Ben said. “Tamarra, champ. Maybe tamarra. I’m terribly lousy—”

“Apologize to mom, you *meanie*,” and a book struck Ben’s stomach. “You were awful. She loses sleep just *checking* on you, you know. She’s crazy with dad gone. Oh, *pleasegosaysorry*.”

Ben had picked up the book as Romeo spoke. “Oh for pity’s sake,” Ben said. “Ma sez this, ma sez that...’ where’re you learnin’ this? She’s like-a nun. I dunno if you know, but she’s been watching Christmas movies all year-long. Are ya watching them with her or something?”

“Listen. I’m not *blaming* her for being a hermit. But all’a time, she’s doing papers. She’s not exactly a pick-me-up. Hell, I don’t even *mind* that. But where the *hell* are you getting this intel—”

“Stop swearing,” Romeo said. “And I do go see her. She told me to see her on week-ends. She’s not a nun.”

Ben stiffened. “Well I barely see her. She didn’t tell me that. You never told me. But she likes you, I guess. Ol’ Romeo. Child prodigy. Who doesn’t love—”

“Oh shudd—”

“And what’s her idea anyway, giving you Henry the Fifth? What kinda parenting... Oh. Oh I see. You read it yourself. Christ. Well don’t go *idolizing* Henry or anything. He hates being king. He has to make his friends die for him. He doesn’t even win. Sure, he wins the *battle*, but he dies later. He loses France forever. But whaddaheckareya reading it for?”

Romeo was sponging his eyes uselessly. His words were all choked up, and Ben did not try to hear them. He did not want to hear them. He could not watch him at all.

“Well,” Ben muttered. “I gotta... too much racket...” He turned away, and the sunlight was cold. “Hafta go to the library.”



# Bluebells

Sandie Lewis

*For Jocelyn*

While I sleep my thoughts blank,  
you decide to hush all the alcohol and  
the couch cushions in our living room  
finally declare bankruptcy. Tiny  
eviction notices for all the dust  
bunnies and loose screws left  
wandering and wondering:  
are the springs supposed to be sticking out?  
When was my last tetanus shot?  
When was your last weigh-in?  
When did you stop accepting unsolicited  
advice as a form of payment? You know  
I don't have much else to offer. You know  
I falter with caring for tomorrows. You know  
I struggle with staying afloat your jeans  
and you know I'm terrible with multiplying by three.



# Gluttony

Gluttony - Mickey

# Fowl Hen Song

Alison McFarlane

I don't bet on racing dogs.  
I sting the stands  
sitting  
here  
noticing  
greyhounds and rabbit phantoms  
doing their loops, their rounds, their circles  
bleached beneath my eyes  
an itch inside my wing  
traffic jammed within  
Less-than-first, lasting. So unable to slip  
back  
So, *what* it warrants dwindling, anyhow  
in seeking keeping nothing  
Empty is not itself  
a thing.  
Do not try to possess it, like dog  
or dollar bill. Would you take it from me, this  
no borders to obey, this making me puke for boredom's sake. Emptiness,  
may just make a purple Labrador,  
out of you.

I wouldn't dare  
coop new lands or camp  
with wolves. So *there*  
I am. Chicken. One misty ship closer to the skeleton  
huddling around absence  
in tying all things  
up  
in the bottle of my neck. I would rather not  
call it dead like telephoning Mrs. Reaper,  
Grim, herself  
who says future late Kings can't rest  
in beds or anywhere they cheat on death  
living endless in a cold stone. Just before opponents let loose  
impassioned puppy pawns

and here,  
navy stomach pain  
of latent checkmates loiter as larks go untaken

## Fowl Hen Song - Alison McFarlane

and gates refuse to drop  
hot sweats  
drips drool from above.  
It stinks and sticks to coats an eternity of salivating *what ifs*  
covering you, as you sit

Long after retiring the races  
white sheets draped over furs  
eyes and snouts cut out  
to harp up your tree  
wet nose to the whetstone, *hellish* they say,  
all dogs must go to heaven.  
They follow you there. Hooked  
on their own tails - like horse

of course. Except for dogs  
you bet on welcoming them, losing and not  
into the big empty house before the bookie  
boots you out. Like child amusement parks just as they Ferris-wheel  
into dark. For bluer Greyhounds know best, Emptiness  
is a thing  
you weather,  
as well as being misplaced  
in Yellowstone Park. Nothing gives you no choice  
like visible ribbone underdogs, famished  
barefoot and bullying  
their underbush hearts.

I wonder,  
do birds even know their bones  
are tunnels?  
hedged on both ends  
I sit  
in their contagious hollow  
and here

it is just echoes

and I.



KRIS - Mika Lausanne



A peaceful morning spent outside, basking in the quiet of dawn before the bustling of the city and the roaring of war (a homage to the lost souls in Ukraine).

A Spot of Sunlight - Sofia Benchafi

# Forms of Absence

Shannan Mann

Each night I sculpt the air  
with my hands, think how your body  
will soon fill the space amid  
them. This morning I went blind

for a few minutes when I lost  
my glasses. I looked everywhere  
without fate's friendship. For a flash,  
I thought they were the spiderweb

in the bookshelf's corner, then I was  
trying to see through a plastic bowl  
with remnants of blackberry juice.  
How you need what you are

looking for to find what you are  
looking for. How I see many perfect  
bodies but they just turn to stone –  
I cannot find any shape to take yours,

no colour resembles yours, and no one  
remembers to forget quite like you.  
How country is another name for nowhere,  
nowhere another name for where I find

my body, frozen like  
a child in a photograph.  
Ana has begun to spy  
airplanes in the sky.

She demands their purpose.  
Should I tell her they carry  
people, or promises? That you will  
arrive on a big white mechanical

bird before winter. That Shakespeare  
had Desdemona waiting for racial  
justice and Austen had the Dashwood  
sisters waiting for the class glass ceiling  
to break and we await

## Forms of Absence - Shannan Mann

a fucking visa.  
I'm not sure a toddler is old  
enough to understand

immigration. How no matter  
how much people love or need  
the other they still need a man  
in the clouds or in a very tall

skyscraper garlanded with clouds  
to decide their destiny.  
How post-pandemic there are a million  
odd families wailing like beached whales

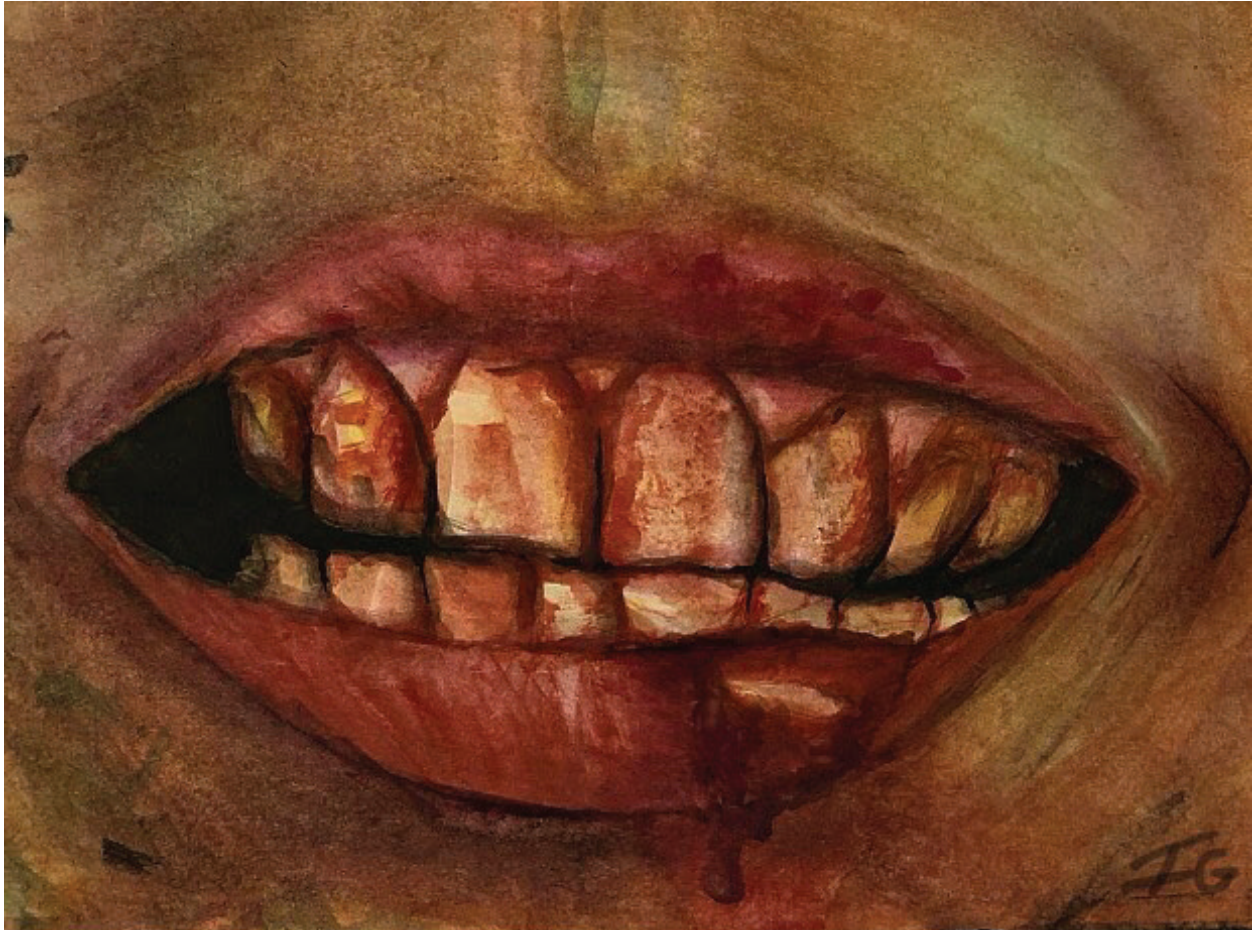
without the kindness of activists  
to return them to the ocean.  
An ocean. This is something you want, K.  
I would gleefully burn the oceans

if I had a match big enough and I might  
if I could find it and I'd find it if I could  
see it and I'd see it if I had my glasses  
and there it is again, the one long

breath of Vishnu bullshit  
I believe in – please, being  
away from you might be turning  
me into an apologetic atheist,

and maybe that's a good thing  
because God responds to threats.





Bloody Mug - Isla Gole

# muggy bodies.

Shamara Peart

it's a saturday afternoon when the sky loses its colour.  
intoxicated with laughter, three young women point  
out how even the branches twist their limbs to greet  
them. instead, the author notices their face in the  
storm and cannot force themselves to look away.  
the poles beside the highway gasp and choke  
as the skies sour mouth spits metallic sheets.  
between snapped transmission towers and splintered branches  
i make out god's face and a reverend's body.  
i can feel the static pull at the hair on my arm,  
can hear as currents ride the charge in the air.  
if you press the telephone to your ear you can hear it too—  
the impact of a brutalized body as it slams into the  
pole and wraps around it. with church choir syncretism  
there is swaying and screaming  
and then—nothing.

## Subtle Vacancies

Sandie Lewis

My sewing room fills with all of the men who have kissed me before. They cluster in swarms, eager to be my muse or a weary escapism. Each one slowly morphing into the next; each memory muddling together, casting 480p projections of a familial life; or rather another night of free alcohol. I know enough colour theory to mix, at least that's what I tell myself; at least that's what they echo. The neighbours know enough not to complain, but boy do they eavesdrop. More than the men who gyrate, stepping on each other's toes, itching – craving for all the instances my pout has to offer. They also laugh as my texts go green. A separate group chat for trading 4am panic, like baseball cards, for another turn in the sandbox.

# Watching Swallows

Sarah Waldner

My grandfather dashes down the time  
the sun rises each morning; a trail  
of digits falls down his scrap of paper.

My grandmother's wilted finger points  
past the backyard's garlic patch  
and crabapple trees to a birdhouse.

She says How amazing—  
those birds find their way back  
here each year. Going up the stairs

takes her breath away. In their kitchen,  
lace curtains shatter the sun's scowl.  
Each detail lands on my skin.



eleMental - Sofia Benchafi

# Apartment 2

Margaret Brunke

In apartment 2, community  
makes its home in bird houses,  
welcomed with streamers left up  
from the Last Birthday.

We do not pray, but will  
make tea, and sit with our cards  
stacked against us, arranged in a cross,  
which looks down on us like the Green Lady,  
(who is busy carrying her insides).

In apartment 2, the signs lead to nowhere,  
like old Ontario license plates that have  
ended their journeys in our doorway.

1966	1971	MAR-80
21682.E	514 78K	H54 218

Here we are all stray cats with crooked tails;  
rough tongues caught on matted expectations.  
Holy grails sewn in by grandmothers,  
like plan B and a letter to your sister,  
still living in Michigan.

In apartment 2,  
you may come home to one of the following:  
several garbage bags packed last minute,  
someone in need of help,  
blood on the floor in the bathroom,  
a warning to keep the doors locked,  
two of your friends panting in disbelief,  
a child's drawing of you,  
or a realisation that you have been sick  
for six weeks.  
*Fold.*

But now you have found a new table to play at,  
and the Green Lady looks at her next victim,  
offered up by you.  
You are safe now.  
*Draw.*

# Semblance

C. Dipolar

in the beginning, everything shapeshifts into grace,  
into harmony. all the prayers made on my body  
became roses sprouting on my fingertips, on my palms.

you see, my twin told this story first. before everything  
transformed into doom—but in this poem, there is no grief  
at all, just an illusion of grievances. sometimes, i wonder

what becomes of a mind confusing light for fire. so i  
let bliss incandescent this tunnel. for how do i navigate  
the labyrinth of the night without my pair, without a torch

of light leading the way in stark darkness. once, i caught  
a sight of the moon & it sank into my eyes. once, my heart  
happy as a box of birds, sheen like the moon at evenfall

& donned in a toga of grace. once, my heart adorned  
with prismatic colours by steady sunshowers. once, my  
heart revelled like ants in sugary particles. once, there was

only bliss & liss. together, we were midas. everything  
we touched became gold. now we watch him nightly  
ascend into the skies like angels most revered. now we

grow an assortment of tingles in our belly. now we worship,  
thinking angels are stars carefully sprinkled atop the clouds.  
we watch them transform into canvasses & constellations.

we watch mountains transform into wool & into pullovers. till  
the sky splits open then becomes murky oil. till the sun folds  
into an envelope of thick darkness. till stargazers patronize

the morning star for longevity. tourniquets & rosaries & for  
everything love brings, we raise our voices so high in takbir,  
for prosperity. & for everyone death takes, we are both reminded

of the end but every end is a reversed beginning—*inna-l-hamda lillah*

# Our Team

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Isla Gole

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