

## CutBank

---

Volume 1  
Issue 87 *CutBank* 87

Article 10

---

Fall 2017

### Laughter & Forgetting

Jalina Mhyana

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

---

#### Recommended Citation

Mhyana, Jalina (2017) "Laughter & Forgetting," *CutBank*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 87 , Article 10.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank/vol1/iss87/10>

This Prose is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in CutBank by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@mso.umt.edu](mailto:scholarworks@mso.umt.edu).

## LAUGHTER & FORGETTING

“Then it came, real laughter, total laughter, taking us into its immense tide. Bursts of repeated, rushing, unleashed laughter, magnificent laughter, sumptuous and mad... And we laugh out laughter to the infinity of laughter... O laughter!”

- Milan Kundera

**L**AUGHTER AND FORGETTING are such gifts for the melancholic. Being in the present, no past no future. That cocksure zone of forgetting. But you can't dunk your head in the River Lethe or tickle yourself with wit. There's no masturbating a funny bone. Memories are etched at a cellular level, stubborn as mussels. So I copy Kundera and force it, faking it till I make it; mimicking joy until it comes in waves and I can't hold it back.

I want to tell you how I do it. I'm writing this with a pink pen that has seven speeds. Laughter's equal, a little wand that summons the here and now. My wrist's calligraphy is invisible under the blankets, invisible ink on my skin. My wrist hovers above a hip. Panties rolled around my shins. Sole against sole, thighs splayed in a diamond shape. This is my page. I'm writing myself toward that hedonist's wonderland, the heady intoxication of a spent body.

I undress my mind after I undress my body; have to undress the years, starting at five years old. Decades to disrobe. Distractions to discard.

Losing myself petal by petal. Pluck, pluck. Blown seed head, strip tease.

The Victorians called it a “little death,” and like any death, my life passes before my eyes. My sexual life flies by in the time it takes to come; I replay decades against my will, a film reel that never snaps, little sunspots in the corners when the reel changes from continent to continent, age to age. Static and scratches in memory like an LP; the holes in the narrative pop and make these fantasies mine, and well-loved, the celluloid lengths hissing.

I go back to when I was younger, when it all started, stripping the nesting dolls of my growing body and rubbing each of them before I can be here now, rubbing my grown-up self. It’s awful foreplay, but I can’t avoid it. I rub my sex that’s hairless, then hairy, then hairless again when I started waxing. I’m a pedophile watching my prepubescent body masturbate.

First I rub myself awkwardly, not knowing I have a clitoris. Climaxes are out of the blue at this stage, as if I’ve taken a step off the edge of the known world. Dragons nip at my fingers. Soon I can fall off the edge of the known world any time I wish. I can hunt the dragons a dozen different ways with star charts and astrolabes, stretch my labia back to reveal new lands.

Each time I come I fall farther. I fall through every orgasm I’ve ever had to get to the next one, the newest one. I know the edge of the world like the back of my hand; it is the back of my hand, blurred between my legs.

I grow thirty years younger, then grow older again, in the life of a AA battery. I can replay my life five times, give or take, before the vibrations weaken to the point where I could shake my dildo faster manually, with my

wrist. Like a coke can before the spritz, beads of sugar on the sheets.

I keep my masturbation toy in a vintage pearl clutch, a lot like the *Granta* magazine cover with a pink purse opened like labia. My clutch is embellished with pearls, and inside, a pinky-sized vibrating dildo. Pearls fall from the clutch when I open and close it. Tiny pearls stuck between the floorboards. It looks like I've broken a choker and pearls have fallen to my feet. Each pearl is a climax, a blindness, a way of forgetting. My purse is threadbare, maybe a couple hundred pearls left. Girls are born with all their eggs inside of them already, like moons. They open and close themselves and the pearls slip off the skin till they can't remember anything at all.

I go back to the beginning.

I'm five at the nudist park in Florida. My mom asks an older man to babysit me for the weekend. He takes me away in his sports car across Florida. We drive for hours. I'm homesick in my gut. He asks me how to spell different words. I'm proud because I just learned how to spell restaurant.

All of my masturbation fantasies begin with this molestation. I don't know why I start with horror to find release. Maybe therapy. Each time I roll down my panties I'm driven to my orgasm by this pedophile across hours of Florida, a state shaped like a handgun or a cock. He drives me to his apartment somewhere in the neon city, we say hello to his flat mate, then he removes my kimono telling me he's seen me naked a thousand times, what makes tonight any different? I grow up a little under his hands and soon I'm six or so in Hawaii. I roll out of bed across the whole Pacific

Ocean. It takes so long, it's night time again.

Fast forward, thank god, though it doesn't get much better yet.

I'm in the back seat of a drive-in porn movie, a metal box full of sighs is attached to the window ledge. My mom's hand pushes my head down so I can't see the front seat or the movie. Her moans mingle with the moans stuck to our window like fast food, like they're something we can eat. They make me hungry, like milkshakes and fries. An adult's bracelets clink, clink, clink in the front. I want to be too big to be pushed into the space in the back seat. I feel full like I have to pee and I want to eat something bigger than me.

I go forward.

I'm nine, all three of us girls are nine. In Waikiki. We're naked on my bed. The lanai is open, the drapes flutter in and out and I can see the Ala Wai Canal from where I stand, as an adult, in the back of the room. I'm standing back there watching my younger self and my two friends. Our three small bodies lay lengthwise, on our bellies, our heads at the wrong end of the bed, watching TV. On the Playboy channel, a woman is fucked by a man who sits behind her on a horse. We hand my mom's therapeutic massager back and forth.

On the TV set, the naked people are the size of dolls in a little house with an antenna rising from it. We watch the man's penis slide in and out of the woman on horseback. His cock trots in and out of her. One by one we squeeze our pelvises against the rubber nub beneath us, holding our breath, then pass the massager along like a joint, and exhale. The pleasure

swaps bodies again and again.

We're touching arms and thighs. We're a closed circuit of yearning, taking turns. One friend comes by bearing down hard, unmoving, the machine screaming beneath her contracted pelvis. The other giggles and moans as she fucks it like it's the most natural thing in the world. My hips dance and tease the tip of it, kissing lips to rim. I balance there on the head of a pin, then give in, all spasm. The bed dips with my bucking and my friends roll against me.

In my memory, I watch us on the bed, then glance at nudes on the TV. I turn away and walk the perimeter of the room, a grown woman, waiting to get older. Trying not to be aroused. As an adult masturbating, I downshift the vibrator to the slowest setting, and run it along the perimeter of my pleasure, far from my clitoris, to lessen the guilt of watching this awful scene. I won't be able to climax in a room full of nine-year-olds, even if one of them is me.

I'm counting the seconds till I can leave this vestigial fantasy. How many times have I stood in that bedroom, watching our three naked bottoms lined up like buns in a bakery? How many times have I watched that same Playboy channel show over their arched heads? At how many ages have I stood there, an adult masturbating behind them, in a corner of the room, watching them? How many heights, hairstyles, bra sizes have I worn behind them? I would never choose this fantasy. I know it's coming though; I expect it.

I could line up the houses that inhabit my memories one next to

the other, and run through them from pleasure to pain and back again. My bedroom door in Waikiki would open onto another bedroom door in the same city, but higher up in a different building. Then that balcony would lead to my boyfriend's bedroom in seventh grade, which would lead to a movie theater, and when I got back from getting popcorn, his parents would be in the aisle in front of us and soon the whole theater would turn into a car, and his parents would be driving us to my next orgasm, and so on. This is what I do; I visit my touchstones. In a scene in Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, the narrator fights an urge to rape his friend. He thinks, "That desire has remained with me, captive like a bird in a sack, a bird that from time to time awakens and flutters its wings."

My hummingbird thrums its wingtips above my pelvis. It hovers as fast as I tell it to. The seven speeds, patterns of pulses. Morse code. The same message/massage again and again. Dot dot dot DASH. Nonsense repeating itself, nonsense that spells out "Ha." Just that one sound tapping itself out against my pleasure: Hahahahaha. My vibrator is laughing in code. The laughter helps me forget, makes me delirious.

A necklace of nerve cells spill their pleasure the length of my spine, fizzing, drunk. This warm uncomfortable swell, like a full bladder you can only relieve by pissing. I want to piss invisibly, unendingly, clenching down and in and around my pleasure till there's nothing, just aftershocks and dribbles.

Nine again, in Florida. I'm in a junkyard with my best friend. We've come to feed her father's guard dogs. Instead of feeding them, we've

made a fort in a burned-out car. The dogs leap at us and scratch the chassis. They can smell their food inside. At my feet there's a tan purse with a long strap that tangles my foot, its contents spilled out: bright blue eyeshadow, lipstick, a broken mirror, cigarettes and a cracked lighter. We leave lip marks on her cigarettes the color of her lips, whoever she is. I wondered if she was a rape victim. Or if the car was in an accident. Her lipstick tastes of crayons.

My friend bends down and licks between my legs, her tongue against corduroy. We do this sometimes. I lay down on the long seat. The cushion bursts with apricot foam that leaves orange marks on my pants. I can't feel anything at first, till she cups my whole crotch with her mouth and sucks, and bites a little through the thick turquoise fabric. I breathe through my mouth to avoid the smell of mildew and dog food. The window is slobbered to my right, hiding us. The dog barks and clattering claws create a curtain of sound too. No one can see or hear us. I buck against my friend's head, I hold her blonde ringlets against me. I pretend I'm the woman with the eye shadow and cigarettes. I pretend I'm being raped. My purse has been ripped away, a man is sucking me. She reaches a hand up and feels for my right breast. I place her freckled hand under my sweater. I can't feel guilty, I'm being raped. If I don't come the man between my legs will open the door and let the dogs loose on me. I lean my head against the vicious slobbered window and come.

I pull my sweater down to hide my crotch while I walk home; pink lipstick in a smudged letter O. I walk until I catch the scent of hibiscus. Must be Hawaii. I'm ten. I'm in a bedroom with a different view of the Ala



Wai canal in Waikiki, this time 40 floors higher than the Playboy channel bedroom. At the Island Colony hotel. It's a big year. I play with myself in my room, remembering the massager from the year before and wishing I could find my mother's. She hid it from me after she and her boyfriend walked in on me using it. It was a forbidden fruit, just out of reach. All summer I search that apartment like a thief, for a pleasure that's inside of me.

I use anything; my hands, the bath faucet, a necklace, a sheet, anything that could rub, slide, prickle, tickle. I pinch my nipples. Pinch them, pull, tug, roll them. My nipples are sisters to my clit; reddening by proxy. They share a nerve like a bloodline and talk to each other deep inside of me. I masturbate through the memory of chopsticks in that bed; two chopsticks rub back and forth, forever, on either side of my clit that's still a mystery to me at this age, coming close to climax; my pleasure a green pea I can't quite grasp.

This isn't working. I can't write about masturbating with these tissue-white anemones here on the coffee table nodding their heads so elegantly, and this coffee press, a volume of Montaigne. I need to be less civilized if I'm to do this justice. Every time someone passes by our bay window I flinch as though I've been caught. I scramble to hide my dildo but the fake penis is just a ballpoint pen.

Hang on.

I'm in bed now, a dildo in one hand, a pen in the other. I feel like a human lie detector, scribbling my peaks and valleys. Will I fake it?

I close my eyes and the film rolls back to life. Dust motes in the projector's beam. There's so much more than just this tiny pink vibrator and its battery. There's a whole studio of memory, a big production; shelves and shelves of film reels, the labels lewd, the i's dotted with hearts. I need lightbulbs for the projector, a quiet room and a viewing screen free from day-residue detritus.

I think of Sartre's lovely description of a silent film he once watched; dust motes on the screen, one which seemed menacing to one of the actresses, who didn't notice it above her head. The dust became an actor in the drama, like my worries of the day. Conversations. Lists. Perceived slights. Bruised ego. The little roll of fat on my belly. Don't think of any of it. Push it aside. The mote falls to a bottom corner of my fantasy, and the screen flickers into a new scene.

I leave my room and end up in a parking garage on Kapiolani Boulevard, hiding behind a car, squatting. One of my first boyfriends, David, puts his dick in my mouth. He tastes of cinnamon, and my hand smells slightly of coconut sun lotion. I jerk him off with the tip in my mouth. He's just a little older than me, maybe eleven or twelve. We're virgins. "It burns!" he says, giggling, in ecstasy, grabbing the car handle behind him to stay upright. His belly is tan and taut with golden hairs. I squeeze more cinnamon onto the length of him and rub it in. "Oh god!" He grabs my head and forces himself again and again past my lips. We could get caught any minute, which makes it better. Someone could already be watching us, which makes it better still.

Cinnamon still gives me a rise. Fireball candies especially, since they're from the same time frame; little suns you put out on your tongue to awaken it. Picasso said that some artists paint yellow circles that look like the sun, and others paint suns that look like little yellow circles. I paint the sun with my tongue, till hours pass and it's as pale as the moon and it crumbles with one bite.

I remember a game show I saw on the Playboy channel around this time; there's a wall between a man and several women, with a small hole in the middle of it. He puts his cock through the hole and the female contestants suck it. It's kind of a dating show like a "bachelorette number one, what kind of music do you like?" sort of thing but with blowjobs. When I sucked my boyfriend off that summer I imagined a wall between us, that he couldn't see me. I was actually several different girls, one after the other. With the cinnamon he was a lollipop we passed to each other like a sex toy.

It still kills me, that one. All of my fantasies are mediocre and banal. In real life, divested of knee-jerk animalism, I prefer the collaborative porn between Genet and Cocteau, where two inmates jerk off in adjoining cells. They blow cigarette smoke into each other's mouths through a reed from their straw mattresses pushed through a small hole in the wall. They jerk off with a ribbon of smoke connecting them. Try as I might, I can't get off to this more poetic, stirring version. My fantasy lobe stopped developing at fourteen. When I close my eyes, I'm prepubescent.

My mother suggests I tell everyone in Waikiki I'm fifteen, because

I pass for fifteen. I don't feel so guilty masturbating through a film reel of myself at that age. That summer, the summer of ten/fifteen, after the cinnamon boy and I broke up, I had a boyfriend who was eighteen, just three years older than my pretend self, which my mom said wasn't such a big age difference. Besides, he was a millionaire and every mother wanted their daughters to date him, the prince of Waikiki. He opened his father's bar after hours so I could dance on the bar and drink from the taps.

My mind is nowhere near ready to come, though my body was ready minutes ago. I switch to low gear again and massage less sensitive areas, up to my hip bones, down the insides of my thighs. I think of *Fight Club*, porn stills spliced into movies for just a second, just a subliminal pop! My fantasies are invaded by tedium the same way, fantasy terrorism. Little snippets of things that blunt my pleasure. Anti-porn. I keep steering myself back to pleasure.

I'm still ten. My eighteen-year-old boyfriend and I are in the back row of a movie theater watching *Valley Girl* for the sixteenth time. It's my favorite movie this year. I suck on Almond Roca as my boyfriend kneels and sucks my toes in the darkness. I pretend he's not there. I'm alone in my pleasure; candy and sucking and valley girls and sexy outcast boys. I lick and scrape the chocolate off first, with my teeth, and chew the almonds. Then I suck on the naked toffee, the buttery smell, the coarseness on my tongue.

In Hawaii we don't wear shoes, our feet grow calloused. We collect all of the island on our soles. What did Ondaatje write, that a dog's paws are like a bouquet? That's how you can tell the locals from the haoles, the native

Hawaiians from the white kids visiting from the mainland. I'm so tan, I look local, "da kine." I can make poi and do Tahitian hula dances and tell the story of Queen Liliokalani and sing Hawaiian songs and my mom and I have "pidgin" conversations with words like okole, pau. My life brims with aloha. My boyfriend finds the virgin skin on my feet, between the toes, and flicks his tongue in and out of it where no land has touched. I sink in my movie theater seat, eyes glazed, toffee forgotten between lax lips.

Forward.

I'm twelve, in New England again, where we have to wear shoes in the theater. It's a Woody Allen film and my boyfriend has ripped a hole in the bottom of the popcorn container. I put my hand in and jerk him off in there, his cock a handful of butter. I'm so in love with him, for the first time. His cock so silky, and it smells faintly like the toffee in the other theater an ocean away. He puts his hand under my bubble gum pink skirt scattered with little black stars and fingers me. We become oblivious together, a machine of mutual masturbation. A curtain has been drawn inside of me, red and plush, with his hand on the velvet, caressing it. I always pretend I'm him when I play with myself, it's my cock collared with a popcorn bucket, it's my hungry girlfriend taking handfuls of me as the audience chuckles and the jokes evade me because I'm too young to understand Woody Allen but not too young to come.

My film reel is different every time. I masturbate five times to write this essay, over the course of a couple of weeks. I'm watching myself watch myself with closed eyes. Lazy memory, fallen into a rut. The neural path of

least resistance. It finds the deepest groove and falls in line every time. The groove gets deeper. A cleft. The oldest memories are the deepest, when I was the youngest, so my mind plays them over and over, the needle skipping.

I wish I could masturbate to thoughts and images that really excite me as an adult. The movie *The Pillow Book*, for example. Anything Ewan McGregor, especially him on stage in *Velvet Goldmine*, all glitter and baby oil. I always come with adult scenarios, thank god, but I have to work my way through so many years of juvenilia to get there. My foreplay fantasies are so illicit, so awful. And involuntary; like breathing or the heart beating. Involuntary come-muscle.

I'm twelve. I recently read about the Victorian practice of doctors using steam vibrators on their patients, without looking at them naked, their hands under their skirts or a blanket. Country doctors making house calls to calm housewives' hysteria. This becomes a five-star fantasy, especially when I'm the doctor making the house calls. Watching the women's faces as they come, the one highlight of their caged existences. I peel this yellow wallpaper from the archives of my mind again and again.

Thirteen. I discover an adjunct fantasy: on a show or movie there was this bit about a young male doctor having to wear a long white doctor's robe to conceal his erection while giving breast exams. I become the doctor, of course, rubbing myself under my robe with one hand while examining with the other. This has been worth its weight in gold. Though in real life I have not the slightest interest in doctors or hospitals or any of it. Or women, for that matter, oddly.

I go forward.

I'm fourteen. I'm raped in the school hallway, held down while a fourteen-year old quarterback fingers me violently, holding my arms behind me, his back against the wall, my back against his body. He's wearing a school jacket and acid wash jeans, white high top sneakers with the tongues over his cuffs. I sit splayed on the chair of his bent knees. A student walks by with a Walkman so she doesn't hear me screaming. He lets me go, laughing, and I run to safety in numbers, in the lunchroom, blending in. I'm crying. I watch him from the opposite lunch line. His friends circle his glory, his glow. He raises his hand in the air as if he's holding a trophy. He's the victor. He's the heartthrob of the school, the focus of so many girls' fantasies.

He brings his hand down to face-level and passes my smell around to each guy in turn like it's a fruit, a golden apple to prove he'd been to the garden. He's Hercules, the only one who could steal me from myself. They breathe me in and smile, and shake their heads yes, and punch him in the arm. They surround my scent in testosterone, they vie for a closer smell, they jockey for position, they close in on my sex, crazed and laughing. I watch my sex effloresce as his fingers splay like petals to let their noses in, again and again. Strange nectar. They're poised to fuck me all at once across the lunchroom. They fill their lungs with me like police dogs who'll be let off their leashes to follow that same scent and pin it down.

When I gave my virginity at thirteen, my mind stopped manufacturing fantasies. From then on, my fantasy world would be populated with fantasies created pre-sex. I don't know why. There's this

chasm when I masturbate and my hand slips in; fantasies before I was thirteen, and then there's adult porn dating from when I was twenty-five or so. All the years, all the fucking, all the lovemaking in between is missing. A masturbatory blind spot. I go from junkyard cars and cinnamon lubricant to memories of porn movies I've watched; or I actually watch them and sidestep the perilous progression of fantasies altogether.

The porn I watch is a grown-up version of my fantasies. Women masturbating with vibrators. Women using shower nozzles. Voyeurs, people jerking off watching people jerking off. The same old stuff, grown-up. It's a Droste effect, a hall of mirrors. Watching women masturbate as I masturbate in the same way. I try to time my come to their come. Or replay their come again and again. Oddly, I'm not bisexual, any more than anyone is, I guess. I only like women in fantasy. By watching a woman masturbate, I'm watching myself masturbate.

I'm not bi; I'm narcissistic.

I can manipulate the vibrator's patterns of pulses with a flick of my thumb. The last option teases; it builds up slowly, from a tap tap tap to a torrent in seven seconds. Each time the rain-taps build up I almost come, but then it slows, and I'm left in a lurch like a girl with her umbrella blown inside out, utterly useless. My sex is a palm held to the stormy sky, feeling for rain. Masturbation is my rain dance. Soon the heavens will open. I free an ankle from lace and contract my legs straight, toes pointed. In a minute I'll wash up on the other side of bliss, oblivious as a drowned thing.