

Splitting

Man, that was funny.  
That was a really funny thing you said.  
Hilarious.  
The funniest thing I've heard all day.  
All week.  
All year, even.  
A real yuckfest, you are.  
A real yucktastico.  
Yuckelmesiter.  
Yuckleberry Finn.  
I should call you Yuckles.  
Your name is Yuckles now.  
Yuckles, fuckles.  
A real fuckled, yuckled yuckman.  
Making me laugh.  
Laughing at that joke.  
That's what I was doing.  
I couldn't believe it, honestly.  
How much I was laughing.  
How much I laughed.  
Just rolling around.  
Holding my sides in.  
My splitting sides.  
Having to hold them.  
To keep my intestines from falling out.  
From bursting out the sides of my gut.  
My bulging gut.  
Wobbling.  
From rocking back and forth.  
In a convulsive laughing fit.  
Laughing like a hyena.  
Like a mad baboon.  
Cackling.  
Clawing at my face.

Trying to tear the funny out.  
Out of my brain.  
Because of how funny that joke was.  
Such a funny joke.  
A joke so funny.  
It pains me.  
To remember it.  
To assimilate it into memory.  
To disconnect it from this immediate act.  
Of laughing.  
And instead store it.  
In some corner.  
Of my mind.  
Some recess or cubby.  
Of my mind.  
What a joke.  
What a joke you told.  
There aren't many jokes like that.  
No, sir.  
Not many jokes can inspire that kind of reaction.  
Especially not in me.  
Most of the time I hear a joke and say, ha.  
That was funny.  
I say it to myself.  
Just kind of quietly.  
Or think it.  
Maybe I'll chortle.  
Or guffaw.  
Or even sniff.  
But this.  
This joke here.  
Well.  
This joke is different.  
You know that.  
You know.  
You saw.  
You saw what it did.

You saw what it turned me into.  
How it broke me down.  
How the tears streamed down my face.  
How the snot caked my lips.  
How my tongue lolled out of my gaping mouth.  
How my teeth chattered.  
And broke against one another.  
How I didn't care.  
How I didn't give a shit.  
How I threw all caution.  
To the wind.  
All my self-consciousness.  
How I threw it away.  
Loving it.  
The rapturous spasms.  
Loving.  
The throes of paroxysm.  
I loved them.  
I love to laugh.  
I love to throw back my head and scream.  
Out in amusement.  
And spit and roll around screaming on the floor.  
While my pants rip open.  
While my shirt tears.  
My chest heaving.  
My breath panting out.  
My warm breath stuttering.  
The shirt tearing into small fibrous strips.  
The dirt all around me rising up.  
In dark clouds of dust.  
While I roll and roll.  
Back and forth.  
Slapping the dirty ground.  
My palms flat, slapping at the earth.  
Grabbing up clumps of dirt.  
And flinging them into the air.  
Rubbing them into my face.

Shoving fistfuls of dirt into my laughing mouth.  
Gulping down the small stones and bits of sticks and leaves.  
Spit dripping from my fingers.  
Spit hanging in long, thin strands between my mouth and hand.  
All the while laughing.  
Laughing and laughing.  
Laughing my heart out.  
Laughing like my heart was about to shoot up my throat.  
And explode out of the front of my face.  
Like some mad balloon.  
Filled with blood.  
A red, blood-filled children's balloon.  
That's funny too.  
A funny image.  
It's a funny thing to say, I guess.  
It's worth a cough.  
It's worth a short jet of air.  
An exhale.  
A small exhale.  
But that's it.  
That's all it's worth.  
It's nothing, really.  
At least.  
It's nothing compared to you.  
It's nothing compared to your joke.  
That incredibly funny joke.  
That funny thing you said.  
That has made all of this possible.  
Just thinking about it now.  
Makes me want to fall backwards.  
Laughing.  
And let the laughter overtake me.  
And let the laughter carry me into unconsciousness.  
The dark.  
Dropping over my eyes.  
Shhhh, you may say.  
Your finger on my lips.

Your hand on my cheek.  
Your forehead pressed.  
Against mine.  
Calm down, you may say.  
Stop exaggerating.  
Stop being ridiculous.  
You're making a scene, you may say.  
But that's because you're so humble.  
You sweet, quiet thing.  
You beautiful, demure beacon of modesty.  
I respect that.  
But I know that you know better.  
I know that you know the truth.  
That you must at least have some inkling.  
Some sense of what you've accomplished here.  
The magnitude of it all.  
How it goes well beyond simple humor.  
A clever turn of phrase.  
Or a reversal of terms.  
Tongue-in-cheek.  
Or pun, or bawdy rejoinder.  
Or ironic hyperbole.  
Or feigned incompetence.  
Or pithy insult.  
Or self-deprecating anecdote.  
You know that it's something else.  
Something other than a joke.  
Than just a joke.  
Which anyone can tell.  
And tell competently.  
And get their laughs.  
But only that.  
And nothing more.  
Not like this.  
This.  
This.  
This is more.

It's a treatise.  
It's a kind of manifesto.  
But also more than that.  
It's an invocation.  
Some transformative alchemy.  
The words finding physical purchase.  
Touching me.  
Warping the muscles that pump my lungs.  
So that that they accelerate.  
Pumping faster and faster.  
Each laugh coming more quickly than the last.  
Until it becomes impossible.  
To distinguish one from another.  
One laugh from the next.  
Each leaving.  
And entering my mouth.  
Simultaneously.  
Their contrasting streams.  
Intermingling.  
Their molecules crashing into one another.  
A perpetual collision.  
Self-sustaining.  
Eternal.  
And separate.  
From all other.  
Earthly processes.  
From my body, even.  
From my lungs.  
From my throat.  
From whatever thoughts I have left.  
From anything I've ever known.  
Or breathed, knowing.  
So that I hold my tongue.  
And close my mouth.  
And step back.  
Watching the streams.  
Of air pummel one another.

Like two rivers crashing.  
Two hilarious rivers.  
Crashing down.  
From two mountains.  
Sliding down their opposing.  
Slopes.  
And collecting.  
In the ravine that divides them.  
This barren ravine.  
Filling up with water.  
Slowly.  
The water climbing slowly.  
Up its sides.  
Then.  
In gathering spurts.  
Climbing faster.  
Faster and faster.  
The water rising.  
Higher and higher.  
Up the mountains.  
Until it reaches.  
Their peaks.  
And sloshes over them.  
The water.  
Erupting.  
Higher and higher.  
Higher and higher.  
Into the sky.  
Into the sky's.  
Open breadth.  
The sky.  
Cradling.  
The water.  
My laughing water.  
My laughing skull.  
My laughing face.  
Cradling my laughing tongue.

My lips.  
My laughing lips.  
Pursing them.  
To kiss you.  
So that I could kiss you.  
You funny person.  
I plant a big wet kiss on your forehead.  
I thank you profusely.  
I thank you so much.  
Thank you so much.  
Thank you forever.  
From the bottom of my heart.  
Thank you for everything you did.  
Thank you for all the goodness.  
That you have given.  
For your extraordinary generosity of spirit.  
For always being there.  
With that joke.  
At the ready.  
The kindness of that joke.  
For speaking that kindness.  
To me.  
It really helped.  
It helped me.  
In a moment of real struggle.  
In a moment.  
When I was.  
At the end of my rope.  
When all hope seemed lost.  
And everything I ever loved.  
I had destroyed.  
I had thrown it all away.  
My family.  
My friends.  
All of my earthly possessions, all of my ambitions.  
My whole sense of self.  
All of it.

All of it gone.  
Evaporated.  
I had nothing.  
I was nothing.  
I was, myself, nothing.  
Nothing but a pit.  
In space.  
An emptiness  
Amongst emptinesses.  
Disappearing.  
Until I heard you.  
From the bottom of that pit.  
From the bottom of that misery.  
I heard you.  
I heard your marvelous joke.  
I heard you speak that joke to me.  
Like a wish.  
For life.  
Like throwing down a rope.  
For my dying hands to grab.  
And climb up.  
Out of that nothingness.  
A long, billowing rope.  
And, following.  
That wish.  
I climbed.  
And reached you.  
And I took your hand.  
That you had stretched out to me.  
Reaching it out over the jagged lip.  
Of the pit.  
Grasping it.  
Holding your hand.  
Bracing myself against.  
All that I had endeavored.  
To kill myself with.  
And.

Using your hand.  
I broke free.  
I broke out of that pit.  
I wriggled onto the surface.  
I crawled into the sunlight.  
And stood up.  
And I looked into your eyes.  
Your sparkling eyes.  
Golden eyes.  
Laughing like mine.  
Our eyes.  
Laughing in concert.  
Laughing in light.  
Laughing at that joke.  
Hoo-boy.  
Goddamn.  
That joke.  
So funny.