

Uncontrollable: A Short Story [C1]

Una risata incontrollata nei momenti più inopportuni può portare a una serie di incidenti imbarazzanti.

It started at my father's funeral. It was a grey, rainy day and we [mourners](#) all [huddled](#) miserably around the grave. My aunt [sobbed](#) noisily into her [handkerchief](#). It was all very sad, and yet, as we walked back to our cars and I saw my overweight aunt [wobbling about](#) on a pair of stiletto [heels](#) I felt a terrible [urge](#) to laugh. She reached her car and tried [to wrench open](#) the door so she could jump in out of the rain, but the handle was wet and her hand slipped straight off, unbalancing her. She tried to step back, but her stilettos had [sunk](#) into the [wet mud](#). Her arms [windmilled](#) for a few seconds, a look of horror on her fleshy, tear-stained face, then she fell over backwards into the [quagmire](#). I laughed so hard I thought I was going [to choke](#). As the other [mourners](#) ran over to help I buried my face in a [handkerchief](#) pretending to be [overcome](#) with [grief](#). My aunt wasn't [fooled](#). She knew Dad and I had never got on that well and she [hissed](#) something I didn't quite catch as my uncle helped her to her feet. Laughing can be like [hiccups](#); one violent attack can lead to further episodes during the day. We had organised a [wake](#) in the back room of a local pub. I couldn't eat anything but most people were [tucking into](#) the buffet. A distant cousin came, shook my hand, then said with a [doleful](#) expression, 'I'll be joining him soon.' 'Joining who?' 'Uncle Pat, your dad.' 'How come?' 'Well, you've heard about my er...' he [tapped](#) his chest. I couldn't think what he was talking about. 'Doctor says I don't have long.' I realised he was telling me he was very ill, probably dying. To my memory I had only seen this person twice before in my entire life. I wasn't even sure if he was Cousin Bill or Cousin Eric. His expression was deeply tragic, but I couldn't help noticing a [flake](#) of [pastry](#) from a [sausage roll](#) at the corner of his [downturned](#) mouth. Cousin Bill, or Eric, [sighed](#) deeply. The [pastry flake fluttered](#) in the breeze and [I snorted with laughter](#). His look of tragedy turned to one of [outrage](#). 'I'm so sorry,' I [gasped](#), desperately trying to turn the snort into a [cough](#). 'I think I'm allergic to something in here.' I pulled out the [handkerchief](#) again and pretended to blow my nose, before dissolving into [fits of giggles](#). When it was over, Bill-Eric was gone. How can I explain? I was truly sad, but I just couldn't stop laughing. It went on for weeks, and then months. I laughed when a woman passed me near the market and her carrier bag broke, spilling her shopping into the [gutter](#). [I chuckled](#) when my best friend phoned to tell me she'd lost her job, and when she said her boyfriend had [dumped](#) her, I threw back my head and [guffawed](#). I googled my symptoms: uncontrollable laughter can be the result of brain trauma, a neurological disorder, or anxiety. I knew it wasn't the first and hoped it wasn't the second. As for anxiety, I'd been feeling much less anxious since my father's death. He'd been so critical of

anything I said or did, often making comparisons between me and his own father, whom he'd hated. Now I felt I could be more myself, perhaps the laughter reflected my true character. One day my neighbour presented his new [lady friend](#) to me. I could see how happy he was — he'd been lonely since he lost his wife six years earlier — but my throat began to constrict even before he told me her name: Helena. She was a [plumpish](#) woman in her sixties with a large neck, [no chin](#) and thin hair [scraped back](#) into a tiny [bun](#). From a distance she looked like a [thumbprint](#). She smiled at me and I knew I was going to laugh. My breath got shorter and I felt that [telltale](#) explosive [knot](#) in my stomach that always [heralded](#) a hysterical [outburst](#). I sank my nails into the palms of my hands and tried to breathe slowly and calmly. Helena's smile [faltered](#) and I exploded, [roaring with laughter](#), [doubled over](#) and [clutching my sides](#). My neighbour asked me angrily what was so funny. I tried to apologise, to explain that I was truly happy he'd found love again. But it was no good. He leaned towards me and whispered savagely, "Now I know why everyone hated your grandfather!" And suddenly I understood what my aunt had [hissed](#) at the funeral: "Just like my dad!" I couldn't remember ever seeing my grandfather and my father had never had a good word to say about him. "A real [piss-taker](#)" was how he always defined him. That night [I hunted through](#) the old photograph albums in my father's house until at last I found a black and white photo of my father's [christening](#). It showed my grandmother holding him in her arms, her expression angry. My grandfather, leaning heavily on my grandmother's shoulder, was pointing at the baby and crying with laughter.

Glossary

- **heralded** = annunciare
- **outburst** = scoppio
- **piss-taker** = rompiscatole
- **sobbed** = singhiozzare
- **wake** = veglia funebre
- **sausage roll** = salsiccia rivestita da strati di pasta sfoglia
- **knot** = nodo
- **to choke** = soffocare
- **tapped** = battere
- **downturned** = all'ingiù
- **I chuckled** = ridere sotto i baffi
- **thumbprint** = impronta digitale del pollice
- **telltale** = segno rivelatore
- **fooled** = ingannare
- **sighed** = sospirare
- **gasped** = respirare a fatica
- **wet mud** = fango umido
- **pastry** = pasta
- **dumped** = lasciare
- **no chin** = senza mento (con la pappagorgia)
- **outrage** = indignazione
- **urge** = ansia
- **grief** = dolore
- **gutter** = canale
- **scraped back** = raccolto
- **heels** = tacchi a spillo
- **to wrench open** = aprire con una strattonata
- **fluttered** = svolazzare
- **doleful** = dolente
- **bun** = chignon
- **roaring with laughter** = scoppiare a ridere
- **christening** = battesimo
- **faltered** = vacillare
- **clutching my sides** = abbracciarsi i lati
- **cough** = tosse
- **doubled over** = piegarsi in due
- **hiccups** = singhiozzo
- **fits of giggles** = avere la ridarella
- **I hunted through** = frugare
- **mourners** = persone in lutto

- **sunk** = affondarsi
- **quagmire** = pantano
- **tucking into** = divorare
- **handkerchief** = fazzoletto
- **overcome** = sopraffatta
- **lady friend** = compagna
- **plumpish** = grassottella
- **huddled** = raggrupparsi
- **wobbling about** = barcollare
- **flake** = briciola
- **I snorted with laughter** = sbuffare dalle risate
- **guffawed** = ridere fragorosamente
- **windmilled** = girare come un mulino a vento
- **hissed** = sibilare