

WOMEN LAUGHING ALONE WITH SALAD
by Sheila Callaghan

Note: The play title refers to a sub-meme of the stock photography cliché meme. Please refer to the following web pages for the images referenced throughout:

<http://thehairpin.com/2011/01/women-laughing-alone-with-salad>

<http://thehairpin.com/2011/11/women-struggling-to-drink-water/>

ACT ONE

PART ONE: THE PARK

Lights up on three women of varying ages sitting in a park. They all have huge bowls of salad and forks. TORI, 20-25, wears a tank top and yoga pants, and carries a mat. SANDY, late 50s, wears a tastefully luxe ensemble. MEREDITH, 30-35, wears some sort of retro 50's outfit with postmodern touches. Roackabilly-type.

A nearby lit bus stop sign has a picture of a WOMAN LAUGHING ALONE WITH SALAD and the slogan "She's Waiting For You. HotMatch.com, the Only Dating Site You'll Ever Need."

They eat their salad like it's the most delicious and hilarious thing ever. It goes on for a while. They eat, glance at each other in acknowledgement, laugh, eat, play with cherry tomatoes, etc. It is just so much frivolity.

It goes on for a full three minutes. Seriously. Maybe longer. During the eating, the women eventually become skittish, suspicious, catty, possessive. You're looking at my salad? Don't covet my cucumber. That kind of thing.

Meanwhile, a GUY walks by, talking on the phone. Cute, scrubby, late 20's. The second he stops before them, they all freeze, faces screeching in ecstasy, salad half-way to their mouths. Their eyes watch

him.

GUY

...ok maybe you're on a work call or getting a facial or whatever, maybe that's why you keep sending me to voice mail... or, maybe you just don't wanna talk to me 'cause you'd rather send commands from on high and expect me to comply without further question... and I told myself I wasn't gonna leave a message 'cause you never listen to them anyway... but here I am. So.

I got your text. And here's my answer. No. I'm not buying your fucking priest boyfriend his top shelf booze again. You can buy it yourself. I'm tired of it. I'm not your employee. I'm the wet fleshy blob you expelled from your vagina 29 years ago, and I don't appreciate being manipulated. I have a life. A job. I mean both kind of suck right now, but they're still mine.

Also dinner this week sounds great. Looking forward to it.

Also. I can't hang up. Because I know that the second I do, I'm gonna walk to the liquor store, plop down my credit card, and buy your priest boyfriend his top shelf booze. Because I'm dead inside.

Am I dead inside?

Do I have to be?

Beat. He hangs up. Notices the salad chicks.
Huh. That's weird. He exits.

The women unfreeze. Glare at one another.
Take a final few bites of salad. Then exit,
carrying their precious salad bowls with them.

PART TWO: ROOFTOP BAR

MEREDITH walks over to the bar to get a drink.
Notices GUY.

MEREDITH

Ha! He's looking at me again. Saw me dancing downstairs. Six years of jazz, two of tap, two months of ballet before the teacher told me I was too fat to be in the Christmas show. Also gymnastics. I probably should lead with that, right?

GUY

Caught me staring again. Heh. Seems to like it. That's cool. Bet she took gymnastics as a kid. She's super flexible probably. Why are flexible chicks so hot? Fun to fuck a chick with her knee behind her ear. Especially a bombshell like that. Meat on her bones. Yeah. She could smother me with her maternal bosom.

MEREDITH

I don't want to be a slut and fuck you the second we go back to your place, but well I kind of do. I just don't want you to think it's my idea. Why isn't he moving? He could be a freakshow. I don't mind, I just want to make sure I know what I'm getting myself into.

MEREDITH pulls a subtle, sexy dance move, seemingly aimed at GUY.

GUY

Whoa. You see that shit? Ha. That was for me. I see you. I see you. I bet you're a little slutty. Bet you'd fuck me the second we got back to your place. But then act like it was my idea. I dig that.

MEREDITH

I can tell him about the time I was in Berlin at that club and that guy told me he was a producer for a TV show where kids dance and he asked if I would go on it, and I was too high to believe him so I just kept laughing. If I tell him that he'll think I'm someone worth fucking. Or maybe he'll think I'm desperate. Well I'm both. I can be both, right? Should I go over?

GUY

My mouth is dry. I'm not moving. What am I getting into here? Nothing bro, you're just looking. It's not a crime. She's down with being watched. She seems worldly. I bet she has stories. I bet she's been to Berlin. Clubbing around Europe. Yeah. You're wild. You're audacious. You--

MEREDITH starts walking towards GUY.

GUY (CONT'D)

Oh shit. Oh shit. Keep it together, man.

MEREDITH is there.

GUY

Hi.

MEREDITH

Hi.

GUY

I saw you dancing.

MEREDITH

I saw you see me. One time I was at this big club in Berlin in this converted powerplant and this guy came over to me and told me he was a producer for a TV show where kids dance and he asked if I would go on it.

GUY

Cool.

MEREDITH

I'm a really good dancer. I took tap and ballet as a kid. And gymnastics. I can put my knee behind my ear.

GUY

Yay.

MEREDITH

What about you?

GUY

I've never been to Berlin. But I'm flexible for a guy. I can do the splits.

MEREDITH

Like right now?

GUY

Only when I'm super drunk and jamming out pretty hard.

MEREDITH

Are you in a band?

GUY

Karaoke.

MEREDITH

You look like you're in a band.

GUY

So does every other asshole in here. I like your style. You're like retro. Like Bettie Page-ish.

MEREDITH

It's just the bangs--

GUY

A pin-up. Yeah. How many tattoos?

MEREDITH

A bunch.

GUY

Got a favorite?

MEREDITH

The one on the back of my shoulder. It says “Winona Forever.” It actually says “Forver.” The dude misspelled it. But I thought it was so funny I left it. I also have a secret tattoo.

GUY

Where?

MEREDITH

On my lower lip. Inside.

GUY

Can I see it?

MEREDITH pulls down her lower lip.

GUY

“Bite me.” That’s great. It’s got like double meaning.

MEREDITH

Do you? Have tattoos?

GUY

I have a skull right above my pubic bone.

MEREDITH

Because your dick is poison?

GUY

Because I’m an idiot. I did it when I was fifteen. But I don’t regret it. It’s kind of like, I dunno. A body diary.

MEREDITH

Yeeaahhh.... Cool.

GUY

Are you drunk?

MEREDITH

A little.

GUY

You seem fucked up.

MEREDITH

I should have had more than just salad for lunch.

GUY

You’re not a salad-eater.

MEREDITH

You're right. I *detest* salad. Ever hear that quote about the typical French woman, how she sees herself as beautiful, not in spite of her physical flaws but BECAUSE of them? She just owns her shit. It's about decadence, not deprivation. I mean... Paris in the 20's? *Total* decadence. Those bitches owned the fuck out of their shit. Did you know there are more lingerie shops in Paris than bakeries?

GUY

I like you. I like the way you talk. I like the way you dress. I like the way you smell.

MEREDITH

I like the way you like that stuff about me. I also like the way you flirt.

GUY

I don't really try to flirt. I just don't generally talk to girls I'm not interested in sleeping with.

MEREDITH

This conversation just got 20 percent more interesting.

GUY

Only 20?

MEREDITH

Needs room to rise. Like a cake.

GUY

I like girls who love cake.

MEREDITH

Guys like girls who love salad. The media told me.

GUY

Fuck the media.

MEREDITH

Are *you* drunk?

GUY

Yeah.

MEREDITH

What are you drinking about?

GUY

Right now? You.

MEREDITH

Ha!

GUY

I've been trying to get the courage to come talk to you.

MEREDITH

I'm not *that* scary.

GUY

You're scarier than you think, Meredith.

Beat.

MEREDITH

I didn't tell you my name.

GUY

You didn't have to.

MEREDITH

Okay.

Beat.

Now what?

GUY

I wanna say some dirty dirty shit to you.

MEREDITH

Okay.

GUY

Where should I start?

MEREDITH

My mouth. Tell me what you think of it.

GUY

I picture it wrapped around my cock.

MEREDITH

Wow. What about my wrists.

GUY

I hold you down by them while I fuck you face down in your bad little place.

MEREDITH

Damn. We got there fast.

GUY

You don't like to waste time.

MEREDITH

Neither do you.

GUY

So let's go

MEREDITH

Where

GUY

In the bathroom

MEREDITH

Yeah?

GUY

In the alley

MEREDITH

Yeah?

GUY

In the basement

MEREDITH

Yeah?

GUY

On the surface of the sun

MEREDITH

Yeah.

GUY

Now.

MEREDITH

No.

GUY

When?

MEREDITH

Later. I need to yank you out of time first. BANG.

Music changes. They are in 20's Paris. Couples jazz-step drunkenly, drink moonshine, etc. MEREDITH and GUY start dancing.

MEREDITH

We're in Paris now. 1920. Everything is so decadent. The drinks are decadent. The music is decadent. Do you feel it?

GUY

I don't feel any particular way. I just am. I called my mom once when I was getting a blowjob from a prostitute. I just don't give a fuck.

MEREDITH

Spectacular.

GUY

My mom used to be an activist. Long time ago.

MEREDITH

What is she now.

GUY

A cunt.

MEREDITH

Ha! I remind you of her, don't I.

GUY

Yeah, kind of.

MEREDITH

How come?

GUY

Because you don't seem to care what I think of you. Because you probably have a higher tolerance for pain than me. Because you're probably smarter than me. Than *I*.

MEREDITH

I look a little like her...

GUY

Not one bit.

MEREDITH

You wanna fuck your mother.

GUY

Not literally, but sometimes, yeah. Like, rage-fuck. Like, fuck you for asking my dad to leave. Or fuck you for getting older and obsessing about your looks. Or fuck you for making me love horseback riding and snowboarding-

MEREDITH

You're rich?

GUY

Maybe.

MEREDITH

This night is great. This is a great night. Like the air is moist and heavy and filled with adventure and I'm gonna grab a plastic knife and cut myself a slice.

GUY

Devil's food.

MEREDITH unstraps a flask from her garter, takes a belt, and hands it to GUY. He also takes a belt.

MEREDITH

Does it taste like lighter fluid?

GUY

I didn't taste it.

GUY screws on the cap and tucks the flask slowly into her garter. His hand remains on her thigh. Her breath catches.

MEREDITH

Now.

GUY

Where.

MEREDITH

Close.

GUY

Bathroom, alley, basement, sun.

MEREDITH

Carpet.

GUY

Whose?

MEREDITH

Yours.

GUY

Um fuck okay. I have to ask the girl I came with.

MEREDITH

Oh. She's here?

GUY

Yeah.

MEREDITH

Is she skinny?

GUY

Yeah.

MEREDITH

Like how skinny?

GUY

Like so skinny people worry about her.

MEREDITH

Is she so skinny I could shove her entire body up my ass without any lube?

GUY

You want to shove my date up your ass.

MEREDITH

YES I DO, OKAY? Because I'm tired of pretending to be something I'm not. Civilized. Don't make me civilized, Person-Whose-Name-I-Don't-Know yet. I don't want to be your girlfriend. I want to fuck your girlfriend while you watch. I want to make her come harder and louder than you ever could. I want you to fear me, and I want her to fear you fearing me. I want to lead with my mass, I want the gravity of my circumference to suck you and everyone you love into me, and I want you to stick there against my body like a suction cup.

GUY

Alright.

TORI appears. She sips a drink forlornly in the corner.

GUY

That's her.

MEREDITH

Are you in love with her?

GUY

I don't know. I mean I enjoy being adored. I have empathy for her, but I don't really have the other thing. The step *after* empathy.

MEREDITH

What's that?

GUY

Like that moment of self-annihilation when you kind of become the other person? I dunno. There's something wrong with me.

MEREDITH

Then why don't you just hang around with me. I don't require annihilation. Which makes me a lot less work than some emaciated butt-plug.

GUY

Hey.

MEREDITH

Don't act offended. You're the one who brought her here to watch you hit on another chick.

GUY

That doesn't mean I don't respect her.

MEREDITH

I wonder if she'd agree with you on that. Should we ask her?

GUY

No.

MEREDITH

The thing about dudes who go around with chicks like that? They need *props*. Pretty little trinkets to prove what MEN they are. When in actuality? It's the total opposite. THEY ARE BABIES. Why don't you grow the fuck up and be a man.

Beat as GUY processes this. It hurt.

MEREDITH (cont.)

Ah. So *that's* the sound of someone's balls shrinking. Paris a bit much for you? Too decadent?

GUY

I don't even know why we're here.

MEREDITH

I was romanticizing a time when the feminine ideal was vital and autonomous.

GUY

You know what I think?

I think you know as well as I do that none of this is happening.

Music stops, we're back in modern-time.

GUY (cont.)

You come here alone, like you do most Friday nights, thinking you'll find some dickhead drunk enough to go home with you, but not too drunk to lose his erection. If he even gets one in the first place. Which rarely happens. Except tonight, when you see me across the room watching you dance. We make small talk and it's hot as fuck. But then you take me to metaphoric Paris. And you say some mean stuff that makes me nervous. And I say some mean stuff back and walk away.

And then, I'll probably get really drunk very quickly and pass out in the cab ride back to my apartment while my skinny lady-friend gives me head in the back seat. And I will try to forget about this encounter completely. Except the part where I accidentally brush up against your breasts and think to myself, this chick has a gorgeous rack. And maybe I'll picture myself sucking on your nipple for a split second. But that's it.

MEREDITH

That's not a nice thought. Let's go backwards a few beats. Let's go back to the part where you tell me you like watching me dance.

GUY

I was just looking at your ass. Like every other guy here.

MEREDITH

That's a start...

GUY

You have a rip in the back of your dress. Right at the crack.

MEREDITH checks. Sure enough, there's a gaping hole showing off her cotton panties.

GUY exits.

PART THREE: THE BEAUTY COUNTER

SANDY appears at the cosmetics counter of a very high-end department store. She talks on her

Blackberry and smells/tests creams and potions.

SANDY

Hi Kristen it's Sandy, when you get a chance would you call my son and remind him to pick something up for the monsignor? I texted him but I'm too busy to follow up. Also he hates when I ask him to do things. Thanks. Ok listen I'm stuck in traffic and not gonna be able to make lunch with Barb so could you reschedule and maybe order me a salad from down the street? Okay. Oh, I forgot to ask if Jeremy from Singer Properties called. Great, what did he say.

She gestures to the sales lady to wrap up one of the creams for her.

Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Great. Perfect.

As she listens, something wet, fleshy, blob-like and glistening with blood drops from between her legs and lands on the floor with a splat.

SANDY (cont.)

Shoot.

SANDY regards it in horror, but not surprise—obviously this has happened before, more than once.

SANDY (cont.)

Okay Kristen listen I'll have to call you back.

She hangs up. Regards the blob. Looks around to see if anyone saw.

SANDY scoops the blob up and tucks it back between her legs. It stays. She looks vaguely relieved.

PART FOUR: THE CARPET

IN THE BACKGROUND—billboard. Photo of a WOMAN LAUGHING ALONE WITH SALAD with the slogan “Handleman’s Lite Dressing. For the YOU in You.” Salad dressing logo.

GUY is passed out on the couch. He snores. Beat. THEN-- A large bowl of salad trails down from the sky.

MEREDITH enters. Catches the bowl. Dances the

DANCE OF THE SEVEN LETTUCES. Romaine. Frisée. Iceberg. Arugula. Butter. Oak leaf. Baby spinach. She tosses the salad. She bests the salad. Owns it. Foils it. Salad won't win, no ma'am. When she is finished, she bows and exits.

TORI enters picks up the bowl of salad
MEREDITH left. Stares at guy sleeping.

TORI

You drank *a lot* last night. You're never this hung over. It's weird.

She eats the salad. She stares. Finishes eating. Goes off-stage. Sound of retching, vomiting from off. Water running. TORI emerges, brushing her teeth loudly.

GUY

Shhhh...

TORI

Sorry.

She exits to spit. Returns. Curls up onto the floor on the blanket. Grabs a magazine. On the back is an advertisement for Branson Community College (BCC), showing a WOMAN LAUGHING ALONE WITH SALAD. Slogan: "Education = Liberation."

GUY groans. Sits up. Rubs his head.

It's supposed to get to like, seventy-five today. Spring! Yay. Pink toenails and pastel tank tops. Midnight fro-yo. Riding our bikes around the city like gangstas. Ha! Makes me feel, like, powerful? You know? Like I own something in the world? I dunno.

GUY appraises TORI oddly. Something has changed...

TORI (cont.)

What?

GUY

Nothing.

TORI

You want brunch? We could go get brunch.

GUY

Sure.

TORI

There's that place on Avenue B. The one that Kenyatta and his girlfriend always want us to try. They have buckwheat soba pancakes with tofu cream cheese. They also have like fried sesame rice balls? They're like Asian influenced I guess? His girlfriend eats like a caveman but she's Korean so all the fat just melts right off her. They use organic soy sauce. They have dim sum too.

GUY

Okay.

He continues to watch her oddly. She senses it, but barrels ahead as though things are normal. Returns to her magazine.

TORI

I'm so OVER the winters here. Even with all this body fat I freeze to death. You know if we lived in LA we'd have an orange tree and I'd squeeze my own orange juice with like a manual press. And I'd wear flip flops every day. Even in the rain. And do yoga, like *serious* yoga, like I'd get my certification. I think I could get my dad to pay for that, right? He paid for my tuition and my Vespa. I think he still feels guilty about my step-brother molesting me. Isn't that weird? I barely remember it, but yet I get tons of free shit for the rest of my life.

Beat. She looks at him staring at her.

TORI (cont)

What? Seriously.

GUY shrugs.

TORI (cont)

They have normal food there too. Like bacon and eggs and toast. Should I put on NPR?

GUY

No.

TORI

Okay.

GUY

You smell like puke.

TORI

I brushed my teeth.

GUY

Brush your *tongue*.

TORI

Sorry.

She goes to brush her tongue. GUY starts getting dressed.

TORI
(nonchalant)

Who was that fat chick you were hitting on all night?

GUY

She wasn't fat.

TORI

Well-marbled.

GUY

She had beautiful breasts.

TORI

Are you *trying* to make me feel insecure?

GUY

She was the only gal there who looked like she was having a good time.

TORI

I was having a good time. *You* didn't notice.

GUY

I was avoiding you. Because when I say stuff like "I need space" you fucking show up to my restaurant like a lost goddamn ferret.

TORI

Maybe if you stopped pelting me with clichés you'd get better results.

GUY

And maybe if you stopped *being* a cliché I wouldn't need space.

TORI

Don't you have a blog to write? About being a young feller in the big bad city with an ulcer and a creative writing degree whose meeeean girlfriend won't let him do anal?

GUY

You let me do anal. Twice.

TORI

Complete accident. Both times. I was too drunk to employ corrective measures.

Beat.

GUY

God. That kind of changes everything.

TORI

Really?

GUY

Kinda. Makes me feel like, rapey.

TORI

Well it was, a little. But like, fun rapey, not like sex-offender rapey.

GUY

But you didn't enjoy it.

TORI

I didn't *despise* it. It's just not my thing.

GUY

Twice.

TORI

What's the big deal?

GUY

If I didn't like something you were doing I would tell you to stop.

TORI

But part of you *wanted* me to like it.

GUY

Because some girls do! And you're a little kooky, which is what I dig about you, and I wanna do kooky shit to you that you like, but it's fucked up to act like you like something when you think I *want* you to like it but you don't *actually* like it.

Beat.

TORI

I'm sorry I let you ass-rape me. It won't happen again--

GUY

And like, how you bring up the fact that you were molested like it's all, "oh, I was just waiting for the bus and I got finger-banged by my brother!"

TORI

Step-brother. What does that have to do with ass-rape?

GUY

And how you memorize the entire menu at every goddamn place we go eat but then you order a leaf of lettuce?? EVERY FUCKING TIME?

TORI

I have food allergies, what is your point?

Beat.

GUY

Nothing.

Beat.

TORI

You know, I've been getting checked out *way* more recently. By older men especially. You know as someone who's had periods in her life of feeling totally fucking invisible? It actually feels really good. It's like a little sex fairy sprinkled some magic dust on me and for like a teeny tiny second I have power.

She spits, then:

Lights change. GUY freezes.

Kanye West's *Power* begins to blast. Like, really loud.

MEREDITH and SANDY emerge from nowhere dressed like oldschool Flygirls. They cradle riches in their arms and approach TORI.

They mouth the opening lines to the song, and continue throughout.

MEREDITH and SANDY

Aw

Heey-ay

Aw

Heey-ay

Aw

Heey-ay

Heey-ay-ay-ay

Heey-ay-ay-ay

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!
email info@sheilacallaghan.com
to read more