

Godhika's Razor

Part II

Pseudo-Tiresias

1 Preamble

There is no answer to the emptiness of the world. Anyone who presents one wishes to deceive you or has otherwise deceived themselves. So, let me lie to you, let me lie to myself now, beautifully.

2 Broken Fingernails of Dirty Hands

And at once the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory—this new sensation having had the effect, which love has, of filling me with a precious essence; or rather this essence was not in me, it *was* me. I had ceased now to feel mediocre, contingent, mortal.¹

That evening, we had gone down from the campsite, down winding trails, ankles tickled by ferns and sproutlings wriggling up out of the mulch; we had descended out onto the stoney bluff, where below the waves battered the granite black; the water, white; the sea lay wine-dark and endless unto a hazy sky. You could taste the smoke on the air. The state was burning again. The world was burning. The horizon glowed as coals, and the clouds were strung out spindly, thin, and dissipating fast. But we stood on that outcropping of stone on the edge of the country, and the spray and the salt numbed my skin, as did the tingling of fear at your touch—your hand in mine—and a certain quiet despair I had carried for years now, standing shoulder to shoulder with you. I knew how it would end then. I know how this ends now.

You had read my story, the night before, in the back of the RV. *Silence, thought, and voice*. When you were done, you came up into the bed and lay the papers beside me and asked if I was okay; you said it was beautiful, then asked again. I knew you had seen me. *I am the morning mist, and the breathing of evening*. I had pulled back the curtain and there was something, someone. I was more than myself. We hugged and cried, and you told me I was beautiful. *I am all orders of being*. Before anyone else, you had seen *her* beneath me, the one I had hidden away so that I could be loved. That was the first night I slept cradling another and safe. *The circling galaxy, the evolutionary intelligence, the lift and the falling away*.

That evening, we stood over the ocean, hand in hand. *Say who I am*. After a time, we kissed, and for the first moment in my life I forgot who I was. *Say I am you*.²

Pictures have quietly replaced the experience of standing beside you, quietly paved over the path we walked down to that bluff, tucked away the ferns and the smell of

1. Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*

2. "Say I Am You" by Rumi

smoke. They have painted over the blacks and the whites, the rocks and the waves. I know you as a letter tucked in a shoe box. I know you as a name. You killed yourself two months later, and I fell out of love with the world.

3 Interlude I: Well Now That's Done

Some day, I will follow you into the dry land. I don't want to grow old. I want to live and love and then be done. And when I close my eyes on that night, I want to become nothing. Only then can I have meaning. Only then will all of this become meaningful, a transmutation of my existence, of my history, into something gilded, golden.

The world is empty. As it is already objectively meaningless, so will our existence lose its subjective meaning: when the last human draws their last breath. I would rather this. Let us go undulled by eternities, undiminished by infinities—let us go with dignity.

The infinite cannot have a purpose, it cannot have *telos*. It is our transience that allows us to find meaning; the finality of our deaths, by which we may cultivate virtue. I can only hope that before I go I will have learned not to despair at the absurdity of the world, at its senseless cruelty. I hope I will have fallen into love.

I know how this ends now. I know how this ends. *Not with a bang but a whimper*. I will follow you into the dry dark and together we will be nothing. Gilded. Golden. Burning.

4 A Heap of Broken Images

Some years later, I stayed a while in Ireland, at university in Cork, where there is but grass and stone and that same wine-dark sea. *Sharp is the wind, cold is the rain*. The sun perched upon far hills, leaking warm light out across the horizon, on the evenings I would walk up to Ballycotton Cliff. Here, the clouds curtained the sky. *Harsh is the livelong day upon the wide open plain*.

I walked along, alone. *There lies a young wren, by the saints she was cursed*. Ireland has always had a certain grip on my heart; I could not tell you when it began, only that when I arrived there first I was enchanted. I had played with my sister, young, in the yard of Kilkenny Castle. *With sticks and with stones, all among the small mounds*. I had crawled to the top of Carrantuohill, watched the clouds claw over the fields of stone. *They come from all over; to hunt the wren on the wide open ground*.

I would wake early and hurry through the quiet to the library to be alone there, amidst the dust there, where for some time I could be the only soul, where I could be myself. *The wren is a small bird, though blamed for much woe*. So far from anyone I'd ever known, a new desire unfurled as I walked one morning, as I saw in a window my own reflection: I saw her standing on that stoney bluff, back home. I saw her burning. *Her form is derided, wherever she goes*.

I quelled this desire for months, told myself it would dissipate, but that image of her had been impressed into me, altered fundamentally something in me. *The birds of the earth, the beasts of the field*. I could not sit in class without feeling her, hand in my hand. I could not walk home without hearing her footsteps in my own. I would sit in my room and stare at myself, cover my face so that I could see only my eyes. Whose were those? His or hers? Mine or yours? *By spite and by fury, are people revealed*.³

3. "Hunting the Wren" by Lankum

There came an evening, in time, when I could not hide from her any more; I bought cosmetics of various kinds, a woman's shirt, a long skirt. I prepared myself, and when I peered in the mirror I saw her, standing there at the edge of a country far from here, on a bluff over the ocean, and she was beautiful and burning. *Burning, burning, burning.*

5 Interlude II: And I'm Glad It's Over

*It's not your fault. It's not your fault. It's not you.*⁴ I felt, before that night, that I was ascending, lifting up towards the ocean's surface, soon to breach the waves—I was rising again into love with the world. But taking her in my arms, accepting myself in her arms, reopened old wounds. Scars tore. I unraveled at the seams.

There was the honeymoon period, and then came the pain. I had tasted of the life of the world, yet every day that passed seemed to dampen my hope. I became acutely aware of each and every way in which I was not her. Peoples' compliments—their kind words about my presentation, my clothes, my makeup—they were a bitter-sweet drink. It felt so good to be seen, yet I couldn't shake this gnawing sense that they were only being polite, only being nice; that they saw me as neither a woman nor even a man but some third thing, something to be pitied. So I vented. I wrote bitterly about my family, about my body, about this feeling that she had been stolen from me.

In retrospect, I was too harsh on my parents, my father specifically. All parents are surgeons. Or, more charitably, all parents are gardeners. They cut and prune. They nurture and sow. It is only that so much of what they did felt arbitrary, decided upon by social convention. Sometimes, I feel cultivated. Often, I feel mutilated.

6 Prayers to Broken Stone

Candy says, "I've come to hate my body, and all that it requires, in this world." The firetrucks would arrive first, their lights smearing down the streets, cycling, blaring—their sirens set me on edge still, all these years later. I would come to her, my mother, quietly suffocating, gasping. A rattling cough. She would carry me out into the night air, cradle me, soothe me. And when the paramedics arrived she would hand me over, and they would place me on a gurney and lift me into the ambulance, fly me away. *I hate the quiet places, that cause the smallest taste of what will be.* They would pinch IVs into my wrists. Feed me steroids. Everything medical has a scent, a sanitized stench. The taste of pure oxygen.

What do you think I'd see, if I could walk away from me? My sense of space broke down. The boundaries of my body broke down. I felt simultaneously as large as the world, large enough to dwarf the Earth, and so small I could have slipped between the threads of my hospital gown. The world had frozen around me, hanging in stand-still; yet it trembled with such fury. I was everything and nothing. There was silence in heaven. And screaming. The world was on the brink of ending. Everything hung in the midst of breaking.

I'm gonna watch the blue birds fly, over my shoulder. I cannot tell you how many times I went. I cannot really tell you how many surgeries I have had. I was a sort of Frankenstein's monster, an assemblage of parts, excessively medicalized. I understood myself as a patient; my body, a collection of mistakes. *Maybe when I'm older...*⁵

4. "It's Not Your Fault" by The Lost & Found Workshop

5. "Candy Says" by The Velvet Underground

When I was born, the doctors said I would never be able to play like other children. My body was underdeveloped, smaller than the stuffed bear they lay beside me. I needed surgeries on my digestive tract, my reproductive organs, my respiratory system. My airway would fail me periodically into my teenage years. Yet I was fortunate; I was dealt a better hand than many; I grew well enough, exceeded expectations. I became as any other child, albeit one whose body bore many more scars, many more wounds where they'd run tubes to my heart, reached into my pelvis, split open my stomach.

And then somewhere in my early teens, my mind—which was the one thing I could trust—joined in the breaking. *And here we go, now, over the Bridge of Sighs.* I gave up on everything. Lay down and rot. For a long time, it seemed causeless, purposeless. It came like a gale, a black wind out of the unknown, sweeping over me, enveloping me. I stopped going to school. I stopped going outside. *I ruin everything, I get my bony hands on.* I sat in my room; I lay in my bed; often, I would remain there all day, staring at nothing. I didn't want to do anything. I didn't even want to die. *I want to feel like I feel when I'm asleep.*⁶

Few kill themselves at their worst. No, it is when you see some light and know still that the dark has its hooks in you, that it may pull you back at any moment, that it will pull you back, and then you will wish you had killed yourself. Relapse was inevitable; I would go through these cycles for the rest of my life, rising toward the light, yanked back down, *the lift and the falling away*; I was marked for death, a suicide waiting to happen, only waiting. *What is there for us now but to wait?*

I met her during my fifth hospitalization, after one meager suicide attempt in a long string. In that common room, playing cards, she held my hand. We were children. Sometimes I wonder whether I have any right to be as affected by her death as I have been. I barely knew her. Yet, she seems to haunt me. I see myself in her. Or her memory. In another world, had I killed myself and she gone on living, would she even remember me? I can recall so many of them, these children, not all of them dead—their voices, their laughter, their faces, their eyes. They seem to watch me.

7 My Heart Under My Feet

While we began, in the first part of this essay, by laying out some of the reasons for my nihilism, I don't actually find it a particularly compelling subject of discussion. There isn't much to say. The world is empty. It will always be empty. There have been devised a variety of methods for covering one's eyes, but I am not particularly interested anymore in leading you along. You cannot reason yourself into love. It is a fall. A failure. This is my instrument of surrender. My razor.

And if I don't survive, I'll still be by your side. I see myself in her. Myself in her eyes. In her final letter, which I keep beside me, she said she was already dead. That she was a ghost. It was childish, you know. Pitiful. A teenager's letter to someone she did not know. A melodramatic act. I hate this letter. I hate that I've kept it. I cannot be rid of it. Pathetic. Self-pitying. *Just clad in ghostly white...* She said that she'd haunt me the rest of my life. She seems to watch me. They seem to watch me. I cannot hide. *I'll be your spectral bride.*⁷

This one experience under my skin forever. It has been almost ten years. A decade under their watchful gaze. Why can't I let go? *I want to look at something real.* Every experience is filtered through this one event; my history is bottlenecked in this misery.

6. "No One is Ever Going to Want Me" by Giles Corey

7. "Spectral Bride" by Giles Corey

I want to be able to recount the joy, to convey happiness to another. But my madeleine moments all lead back to that place. *To hear a human voice... To trust that it comes from a human who was made like me.* A friend asked me, recently, what my happiest moment was, and I couldn't speak. I was a child again, suffocating. I wanted to say that it was seeing her, seeing myself in her. Myself in her eyes. *To watch everything is so deceptive.*⁸

Let's die together all at once. They ask, innocuously, jokingly, about the most frightening moment of my life, and I am there again, dancing on the end of the noose again. *After all's been said and done, will you weep in sorrow then?* They ask after my first kiss, and I am huddled in the dark of the hospital corridor again, with her again. *No need to work. No need for money. No need to cry. No need to say goodbye.* Every space reminds me of that place, every plain room that glorified broom closet where they locked me away, solitary, sedated. *No need to hang ourselves. No need to burn. No need to drown. No need to slit our wrists.* Children at the mall, walking to school, on my way to work—they wear their faces. The dead and the dying. I see myself in them. Myself in their eyes. *Cause we'll be destroyed all at once.*⁹

Snow was general all over Ireland. There is nothing. The world is empty. There is nothing but the trembling. Nothing but that fucking room. I am still lying there on that polyester bed with the hum of fluorescent lights over my head. *It was falling softly upon the Bog of Allen and, further westwards, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves. It was falling too upon every part of the lonely churchyard where Michael Furey lay buried.* I am still trembling alone on that mattress they lay on the floor. The lead-weight of that suicide prevention blanket still pins me to Earth. *It lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns.* I am still sitting in that common room. They are there still; they will always be there. Watching me. *His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead.*¹⁰ I am still neck-deep in that water, running that razor down my wrists. Waking alone in all that blood. Seven times. Seven times. Seven times.

8. "Red Desert" by Puce Mary

9. "환란의 세대 (The Generation of Tribulation)" by Lang Lee

10. "The Dead" by James Joyce