

The End and the Way

Pseudo-Tiresias

1 Solūtiōnēs

I want to remember this feeling. I am elated. Overjoyed. Burning. The body is on fire. Consciousness on fire. I want the world to meet me. I want to be as I am now out in the streets. I want to amble through bookstores, sit at cafes. I want to bike through the leaf-mottled light under trees. I want to hug my sister. I want so very much to go out from here and never return. I have seen myself, and I am beautiful. I am beautiful. Oh, lord, I am beautiful. Beautiful. But oh lord. Lord, thou pluckest me.

2 Problēmata

His clothes are on the bed and I must wear them. Tomorrow, after some time in my one-room apartment—alone, where I am beautiful—I must descend, *falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling*, to a place where I am not. It is a strange feeling this. I had been so content to be him. I worried so much as I prepared tonight, worried that I was deceiving myself, that I was concocting some great lie to cover over me, to hide myself from myself, but you cannot fabricate such happiness. I have been suffused in the sublime, tasted of the life of the world. I want to be like this forever. I want to be like this forever. But his clothes are on the bed, and I must wear them.

I felt at once an incredible sense of being, as though for the first time I had known myself, *alone and nameless*, and in that same breath a knowledge—some angel of great and terrible light—that this would not last, that I could not remain. I felt as air. I felt as sunlight. Fleeting as the wind and dawn. We will go down together; she will be me and I, her; and he will go out the door. *Who is that on the other side of you?* He will go, and she will be beside me; he will go, and she will be with me. *Like hands joined together, like the end and the way.*

3 Dubitātiōnēs

Of course, I am afraid. What if I am imagining this? What if I have only convinced myself that things would be better on the other side? What if I am making light of the real suffering of others as some sort of play-thing, some sort of act? What if I've only convinced myself that this makes me happy? What if I wake up tomorrow and this feeling is gone?

And yet I look at myself in the mirror and I see her, and in my chest the petals unfurl, and I am warm, again. But what if these flames fade? What if I am left cold again and apart from myself? I have the feeling of one who has arrived out of a winter storm onto the threshold of a log cabin, and I can feel the warmth of the fire radiating and I can hear the hum of voices and of joy, but what if I am not welcome here? What if it is as

a lake in the desert, the mirage of an addled mind? What if I step in under the roof and find only cold coals and not even the memory of company? But I do not want to go back out into the storm, where I am not myself.

Let us say a demon comes to me and says: *in my right hand, your life as a man. In my left, as a woman. You may choose only one, and what is done is done.* I would pick the left hand. But I could not truly tell you why, only that the prospect of never being a woman scares me more than the prospect of never being a man. I have never laid on my bedroom floor and begged the world to let me remain a man. I have never felt such joy at the sight of *him* in the mirror. When I looked at myself, it was the parts that I could call feminine that I loved the most. What I took for an appreciation of the beauty of the women around me was a deep envy. I never wanted to be a physical specimen; when I envisioned my perfect masculine form it was waifish, androgynous. I chalked this up to being an intellectual. I wanted to be the sort of person who could be played in any eventual biopic by Cate Blanchett or Tilda Swinton, and if neither of them were available then I might settle for Timothée Chalamet. But I digress.

When I am alone—as I am, alone—I can see myself a woman in man’s clothes. I want to be a woman in man’s clothes. Yet at the heart of myself, I am at least nothing. I am a tilting leaf, reflecting at one moment the left hand; in another, the right. If you were not here, I could be myself, turning, flickering, always flickering, and beautiful.

4 Continuātae

When I was young, I developed a certain fondness for the divine hermaphrodite, the *rebis*, and any such depiction of intermixed gender: the Greeks’ Hermaphroditus and Dionysus; the Hindus’ Ardhanarishvara; and so on. Among them, I came to adore Tiresias.

Later, in reading Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness*, I found a representation of gender that resonated deeply—an undercurrent in each of us whose curves and bends are shaped by our socio-cultural and historical circumstances but also by our relationships to those around us, the way they project gender upon us and we upon them. The biological is undeniable in the text; it swells and subsides and changes the physical forms of those subject to its whims; but underneath these shifting physical attributes was a constant, unwavering self, not tied to the flesh. I wished that my form would shift as theirs did, that I might experience everyone, everything. Yet, I also wanted to be free as them, to be able to separate myself from my body.

I had a mantra, after my first suicide attempt: *if your body fails you, kill it.* I don’t really know how it came to be, nor entirely what it meant. It was a mantra before anything else, something sub-linguistic, a feeling more than a statement. I felt that my body had betrayed me, that there was something in the flesh and the brain matter that was devouring me from within. I would slay it and in doing so be set free. I would come away triumphant. One of the victorious dead.

I am wary of discussing my struggles with mental illness, for fear that this whole thing will be construed as the ramblings of one clinically unwell. I think I fear that myself. That I am only hiding from my demons in *her* skin.

Yet, when I am sitting amongst friends, I may imagine that she is there in his place, that they would talk and laugh with her as with him, and I cannot help but smile. This compulsion to smile is alien. Very rarely do I feel this happiness, even subtle, welling within me, a joy that I cannot hide from my face, a joy that I do not need to perform. I have a deep suspicion of bliss, a skepticism of joy, yet when she smiles—when I

smile—there is an honest and undeniable beauty, a beauty that is truth, a truth that is beauty.

I grappled with suicidal ideation, with attempts and self-harm, for a long time. I felt apart from myself, as though my body was not my own. Even spending time with my family, among whom I was at ease, I felt that I was not there, that this was not real, that fundamentally there was some disjoint between me and the world. Some of my earliest memories, as far back as elementary school, were of looking at myself in the mirror and not feeling any particular attachment to what I saw there. In middle school, I have a profound memory of staring at my own name on an assignment and feeling something akin to dread, some deep sense of unease that the signified to its signifier was meant to be *me*. I came to be apathetic about myself; I did not feel any great sense of self-hatred, but I felt no particular inclination to self-love; I simply was. There was the thing that people gestured towards when they said my name, and there was me, within, nameless and apart from the world.

In the past, intimate encounters caused me extreme discomfort. I recognized the phenomenon as a sort of “stepping out of myself.” I would become an observer, passive and detached, watching my body as though outside it, floating above it. Eventually, it grew so that the prospect of another person touching me brought paralyzing fear, yet worse incredible guilt. I was failing people who I cared deeply for, and the thought that they might see my struggle as disinterest or scorn came with an unbearable shame. I receded into myself.

That night, when I stared at *her* in the mirror, I felt for the first time in memory a union of my self and body, a sense that I was here. What I had witnessed before was only the sylvanshine on the boughs; for once, I was seeing what lay underneath. And now, when I look for her, when I take her upon myself and within, I am here, in the world, a part of it.

5 Illegitimi Non Carborundum

Before anything, I am a writer. I can recognize a narrative by scent alone. I worry I am only rearranging my history to fit into a nice little box, a story I can tell myself to validate some strange desire.

To become her is to follow a slender bridge out over a great chasm. What if, halfway, I realize it does not reach the other side, simply falling away into the dark? I am more scared of the prospect that I might have to shuffle back to masculinity than I am of leaving it. No, I am eager. I want to be her. If I could see the far side. If I could know. If I could know.

What Kierkegaard was really trying to get at was the difficulty of leaping not into faith but into femininity. But I digress.

I cannot know. I cannot know, and I must still be willing to go. I must be willing to creep out across that vulnerable chasm, following happiness, or else I might live my whole life cowering on the other side, in secret pain, and wondering always what my life might have been had I simply leapt.

I do not care what others say. I do not care if they believe me a fool or a pervert. I have seen myself. I have felt what it is to be in one's own body. I will follow this happiness as far as it goes. *Und alle Ewigkeit war in diesem einzigen Augenblick unseres Jasagens gutgeheißen, erlöst, gerechtfertigt und bejaht.*