

Godhika's Razor

Pseudo-Tiresias

Once, there was a monk—one who dwelt on the slopes of the mountain, Isigili. His name was Godhika. He meditated there, diligent, determined, and six times he came close to enlightenment, six times passing within a hair's breadth of freedom. Yet six times he fell away, fell back into suffering. So it was that on the seventh time, he took up his razor and slit his wrists.

The world is empty. There is no reason. We pass through the universe like a wind through the desert; we are leaves falling to the earth. There is no moral foundation, no footing for the one who wishes to navigate the world. You must stumble blindly unto death.

What is there for us now but to wait?

1 The End and the Way

1.1 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.

1.2 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.*

1.3 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 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 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 lilting 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.

1.4 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.

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, 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. 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.

1.5 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.*

2 An Angel of Great and Terrible Light

2.1 Preamble

The hospital is the closest I have to a sacred space. That common room, where I spent too much of my youth, on the second floor of a rather non-descript psychiatric hospital on the outskirts of the city is my Holy of Holies. I was among others who had attempted suicide—children who had tried to hang themselves, cut their wrists, overdose—but also many who were addicted to what I can only call some hardcore shit. It single-handedly turned me off ever doing anything truly out there; you can only meet so many thirteen-year-olds who look thirty before you develop some serious apprehensions. But more so it made me deeply misanthropic. They were children. They were children. The adults in their lives, the society around them—these had fundamentally failed them. I was young and angry, and in time I came to appreciate that many of those who failed these kids had themselves been failed, but still I could not let go of this abiding sense of injustice. These kids were suffering, dying, and the resources that might have saved them were being pissed away. And on what?

Not all hate is evil. Hatred of injustice especially. But this essay isn't about how society closes off access to treatment for these kids, piles debt on their already suffering families. Nor is it necessarily about how society stigmatizes severe mental illness, the kind you can't write pretty little books about. We'll leave that for another time when I am in a better mood. This essay is personal. It is irrational. It is about the futility of opening yourself to others, about the reasons why I cannot get myself to tell those I am close with about my most sacred space.

2.2 The Red Right Hand

What others sometimes perceive as a sort of stoic, masculine silence is instead an anxiety-induced paralysis. As a youth, I remember waking one night after a nightmare and shuffling up to my parents' door; they woke and asked what was wrong, and I simply could not speak. There was no voice. I felt as though my throat had collapsed; I was choking. This repeated throughout my childhood; I would be expected to speak and find myself utterly incapable, suffocating. A psychologist would have had a field day picking apart the reasons for my fear had I been able to speak to them, but by the time I got around to attending therapy I had already closed myself off. I had one who thought to play cards with me, to lower my barriers and so coax me into speaking, but he underestimated my willingness to sit in silence, to sidestep his attempts to get me to open up. It wasn't, then, that I was unwilling to discuss anything; I could speak for years on any manner of subjects, but if you asked me about myself, all conversation broke down.

Surely, this had something to do with my being raised to be a male. I was told by figures of authority, by role models, to suppress my feelings; to do what had to be done, so long as what had to be done didn't involve seriously confronting one's own emotions; to aim singularly at some material goal; to hoard, to fuck, to win.

But more than that, I had sealed myself off to defend against my greatest fear—one I still have not been able to let go of.

I had met children in the psychiatric hospital who had been abandoned, left to suffer by the adults in their lives, and I internalized a deep fear that by opening myself I would cause my parents, my counsellors, my teachers to realize that I was not worth the trouble, that I was a burden, and they would abandon me as well. And I thought,

rightly, that if they did I would quickly kill myself. I could not face myself alone.

In turn, I idealized the notion of unconditional love. If I found someone who would never leave me, I could open myself to them without fear of abandonment. I was not an idiot; I knew that this was not realistic; still, without the ability to open up to others I was nigh incapable of forming meaningful, intimate relationships with those around me, and so I suffered alone, cradling this pretty illusion that I might someday find someone who would do the hard work of prying me open. I meticulously searched for reasons to fall out of love with anyone who got close to me. I told myself that it was immoral to love someone knowing that the closer I got, the more pain my inevitable suicide would cause. I developed an ascetic self-isolation. It was the only way to avoid causing pain to those around me. It was the only way to avoid pain myself. It was good. It was moral. It was right.

All I have ever wanted is to be known. All I have ever wanted is to know another.
All I've known of love.

2.3 Interlude

To be born is to break. To live is to descend from the ideal into the real, to let that light dim a little inside us. Each must forget what it is to be everything. And in the end we can look back upon our lives as a long narrowing, a closing of the world around us, the slow cancellation of the future.

We are the flesh of the world. Sinew and tissue. Till birth strips us bare, strips us to the bone. *Till human voices wake us, and we drown.*

2.4 The Little Piece of Madeleine

Yesterday, I stared down a long hallway that reminded me of one of the two corridors running the length of my most sacred space. I felt those old, grippy socks against the carpet again. Heard *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* playing on the common-room television. These are not the makings of a literary masterpiece, but they are mine.

The world closed around me at the age of thirteen. Young but no younger than most. Older than those who deserved more. I found myself clothed in this skin, and I hated it. At sixteen, I tried to dance on the end of a noose.

Afterwards, I was driven by police to the general hospital; from there, they moved me—strapped on a gurney, arms bound—to a psychiatric facility down the road. I was rolled into the elevator and joked, to a nurse who had probably heard this a dozen times before, that I felt like Hannibal Lecter, being wheeled around. They drew my blood, asked after my various scars, then deposited me in a room. This time, I did not have a roommate. Once, I knew a boy who hanged himself with these bedsheets. I dwelled on the logistics of this and then slept.

There are, if I had to estimate, several concentric sanctums which compose my Holy of Holies. This is the first, the outermost. I feared for a long time that throwing wide the curtains, pinching out the candles, waving away the incense, and leaving my stories unadorned would take the sanctity out of them, reduce them and me to the mere mundane, the tangible. It would strip the meat off the bone. The fantasy, from my history.

The next day, a nurse charted my vitals, asked a few questions about my mood and health. I ate breakfast in the common room, an already familiar space. I can draw the layout of the building from memory, ignoring a few architectural paradoxes that would arise where my child-mind inflated certain spaces, shrank others. This common room

seemed the world to me. The “Comfort Room” I would remember as little more than a broom closet: a mattress set on the floor.

The balcony, which was closed in by a wire mesh, was where I spent the best days, listening to the radio with those I had befriended. I can still remember the feeling of sitting on the exercise mats they used as carpet, listening to the same song over and over again, looking out over the small courtyard which we were allowed to venture down to once a day. It was hemmed in by fences that, in my memory, were taller than the building itself. Occasionally, a stray passerby would walk along outside, and I would wonder whether they had any idea what was going on behind our little fence, up on our balcony, where we sat and talked and made crude jokes about killing ourselves that the nurses did not appreciate.

These experiences broke any last vestiges of religiosity. There isn’t any reason for this. It is arbitrary and idiotic. I can’t believe in any moral arc to the universe. There is no end to history. It just keeps marching on, and the bones of children snap under its boots. You just keep marching on.

That evening, I played cards with a few of the other patients. In the seat beside me, there sat a girl. She was quiet and spindly and kind. She had that smile that young, quiet, spindly girls have. I was quite fond of her. She was a foster child, scared that her adoptive parents would send her back into the system, unable to cope with her repeated suicide attempts. Very quickly, she told me she loved me.

Even then, I understood this for what it was. She did not know me. I was a warm body. But better to receive attention from a warm body than not at all. I was young and stupid, and I didn’t know how to deal with this. I tried to be as kind to her as I could. We talked about this and that. She hugged me, for which the nurses reprimanded us both. She held my hand here and there, and in the dead of night we sat beside the elevator and kept each other company. Before I left, she wrote me a note. I will sit and reread it, now and then.

A few months after I got out, she called me. She asked me if I loved her: not a platonic love, not a sympathetic love, a *love* love. And I couldn’t say yes.

She killed herself shortly afterwards.

I knew I couldn’t blame myself. I knew that there were a million little confounding factors that drive someone to suicide, that in all likelihood I wasn’t the only person she had asked, that she had known me for a matter of weeks, that it would have been wrong to lie to her, that I was a child. I was a child. But I couldn’t let go of this guilt. I couldn’t shake this feeling that I had let her die. She had reached out to me—reached out for a confirmation that she was loved, for a sign, for something as small and easy as a *yes*—and what had I given her?

The only ones truly capable of unconditional love are the dead. She became my Beatrice. No matter how far I let myself slip, how much damage I did to myself or those around me—nothing would ever change that she had loved me. I was aware it wasn’t real. I was aware that it hadn’t been “love.” It had been a hope, a plea. But in its emptiness, that “love” was perfect. It did not have any of the faults, the cracks, the burdens of the real. It was pristine, an ideal against which nothing could compare. I enclosed myself, drew the walls narrow around my life. I could never have so perfect a love as the love of the dead. I could never open myself. That “love” and its place—that non-descript psychiatric hospital—became sacred. I placed them on a pedestal, hid them behind a veil, shrouded them in rituals and mantras. I made mysticism of my misery, a religion of suffering. It was good. It was moral. It was right.

So became my Holy of Holies. So became my most sacred space.

2.5 That's Marriage

We can catalog the thousand little strokes of the knife which have carved us into the people we are. We can blame our families; we can blame our bodies; we can blame the world. And not all blame is misplaced. Not all hate is evil. Hatred of injustice especially. But I have to ask myself what purpose all this serves: I can rage against it all; I can thrash and kick and scream; I can huddle away in my sacred space; I can whisper pretty little mantras to myself; I can pull a veil between me and the world; but in doing so I render myself utterly unseen. I become incapable of being perceived. *All I've known of love, all love. All I've known of love, all love.* All I have ever wanted is to know another. All I have ever wanted is to be known.

There is honesty and there is mythology, and the line between the two is oh-so thin. When I tell you about the hospital, about the girl, how are you to know whether I am baring my soul or pulling up a beautiful veil? How am I to? After one weaves the story so many times, it ceases to seem a fiction.

The act of telling you requires I transmute the memory, the vague sense of having experienced these events, into something palatable, something you can appreciate. Conveying ourselves to another is an alchemical art—*et ignotas animus dimittit in artes*—and that last step, the leap from me to you, is irreversible. Yet, even when I recall these moments, I am turning them over: a subtle, constant transmutation of history. I am trimming that which contributes little to the narrative, grafting where the story may be improved. I am shaping myself. I am sculptor and sculpture. Artist and art. Singer and song.

Still, I must believe the storyteller can convey truth, even if it is not in the event itself. I must believe that when I tell you about the hospital, there is some kernel, some part that you can see which is of me, which is me, immutably. I must believe that I have been seen. There is mythology, but there is still honesty.

I have this one life, and before I knew to cherish it, the world had marred me, molded me in its image. It instilled in me a deep shame, a fear of love, a feeling that I would never be safe, that I would walk my whole life beneath a bright, unbearable gaze, *an angel of great and terrible light*. I want to go back to the moment of my birth, to whisper in her ear. Tell her to live as herself. Tell her that true love is not something to be hidden from. Tell her that for all the pain she will face, she must not draw the veil, must not huddle in her inner sanctum. Suffering cannot become your most sacred space.

3 Voices of Unknown Origin

3.1 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.

3.2 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 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.

3.3 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.

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.

3.4 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 curtailed the sky. *Harsh is the livelong day upon the wide open plain*.

1. Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*

2. "Say I Am You" by Rumi

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

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.*

3.5 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...*⁴

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

3. "Hunting the Wren" by Lankum

4. "Candy Says" by The Velvet Underground

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.*⁵

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.

3.6 My Heart Under My Feet

I don't find nihilism 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. It's 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.*⁶

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. 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

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

6. "Spectral Bride" by Giles Corey

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.*⁷

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.*⁸

Snow was general all over Ireland. There is nothing. The world is empty. There is nothing but the trembling. Nothing but that 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.*⁹ 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.

7. "Red Desert" by Puce Mary

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

9. "The Dead" by James Joyce