

## Janaki Challa's Lunch with Cioran (and more)

Contributed by Janaki Challa

### Lunch with Cioran

Was it you, or a canopy of crows  
 cockling limbs and wings against  
 wound chapel spires? A  
 swastika-windmill legs wheeling  
 when you run, statuesque shadows waxing  
 on a sheet of brilliant jade field, and how  
 your Grecian chest bursts into a flutter of crows.  
 Brutus, you were always like this:  
 Fascist, fast to fade, hollow,  
 foggy enough to fool a lover of mist,  
 perfect enough to dodge doubt.  
 I know you are still alone, still  
 dark, still penciling equations,  
 scrawling cowardly cursive,  
 absolving grief through grief  
 as the crows burst, as water gleams in holy bowls,  
 a single melancholy flag against the unforgiving chill,  
 surely the dream of a novelist, or a nationalist.  
 But you are still Ephesus,  
 Pompeii, the Indus Valley, turning over and under:  
 ruins are your own memories reflected back,  
 one history A-s definite pattern,  
 and so our first act of coming in the world  
 is to wail with mourning;  
 for all the things we had to forget,  
 To begin to remember again:  
 In both samsara and nirvana the room was the same

### Letter to My Son

Well, What can I say?

Look, Mircea.

We have established certain things:  
 Like death A³ the only stable thing A³ in all its impermeable glory,  
 Which is more frightening as metaphor than literal.

It A-s much easier to revel in the presence of the dead,  
 (Whose disappearance is sort of non-negotiable)  
 Than deal with those who live and choose to leave.

Free will is a bitch, the existentialists will tell you..

What can I leave you with in this madness?

There A-s nothing you can prepare for. Sudden  
 is how lives are made, and how they end.  
 You'll never see it coming  
 A tornado, a weirdly timed earthquake,  
 Hitting your head against a bad corner,  
 And a million comic and absurd  
 Routes to tragedy.

It A-s funny.  
 A moment can erase an eternity,

An eternity can end in a moment,  
 A moment can feel like eternity,  
 And an eternity can feel like a moment.

Perspective, they call it, fun  
 Or, alternatively, boredom which is how  
 You'll spend about eighty percent of your life,  
 Doing nothing of any significance, waiting.  
 This will include brushing your teeth, filing taxes,  
 Staring at walls, walking to and from the store,  
 And having a thousand and one banal conversations,  
 In these moments, you will wonder what the point is,  
 And sometimes you will want to give up.  
 Except you won't, so that it's that.

You'll learn to start over  
 Many more times than you'll finish.  
 You'll have to start over, over and over,  
 Even after you thought you finished.

Be rich enough to afford many rugs,  
 They will be pulled from under your feet one by one:  
 There will be broken promises or changes of heart,  
 Thanks to others or, even worse, thanks to you.  
 Most big things end and begin abruptly,  
 And all at once. Hold on, but not too tight.  
 Let go, but not too soon.

Don't love too hard, it will pass,  
 Don't ache too hard, that too will pass.  
 Sometimes you will lose your friends,  
 They will come back.  
 Sometimes you will lose yourself,  
 You will come back.

When it is time for you to leave,  
 You must leave.  
 Don't try to return; it will never be  
 The same.  
 And if you beg,  
 It will force you away,  
 and you will be exiled.  
 And if you erase,  
 You will force yourself away  
 And you will be exiled.

So just go.  
 You will be back some other time,  
 In another way.  
 I am sure of it.

Don't test wrath. It exists.

People change constantly.  
 Yet, they don't change at all.  
 You may not like changing,  
 But don't worry,  
 In a way, you won't really change at all.

Maybe you will waste your childhood  
 thinking adulthood is mysterious-  
 I'll save you some time now:  
 There's no secret to discover.  
 In fact it gets more silly- how simple  
 Things really are, and how difficult

People like to make them.  
Nothing will get complicated.

Except you.

You will bear unspeakable suffering,  
You will cause unspeakable suffering.  
You will bear unbearable joy.  
You will cause unbearable joy.

Don't be mean to others. Vegetables are overrated.  
Eat lots of butter. Smoke a good cigar. Love a good woman.  
Go to Paris sometime, I like that town. Dress classy.  
Wear a nice watch. Have an antique atlas on your wall,  
But preferably, don't be Atlas<sup>3</sup>and if you are, then shrug.  
Never question the validity of a gimlet. Simple as that.

Go to a synagogue. Go to a mosque.  
Go to a temple. Go to a church.  
If you learn Arabic, you must learn Hebrew.  
If you learn these, you must read the holy books.

If you believe in God,  
Ask him questions. Ask why.  
If you don't believe in God,  
Ask yourself questions. Ask why.  
I'll tell you right now:  
Either way, you won't find any answers.  
Would you still try?

Hold an orphan. Love those who live  
In the margins. Talk to refugees  
About what kinds of things they like,  
And what they remember of war,  
Look in their eyes, write down what you see,  
Play soccer with little Bosnian boys.  
You were born in this world. Explore it.  
Write to a prisoner. Marvel  
At canyons and deserts and deep oceans.

Stumble in a new language. Look stupid.  
Go for a Balkan Romance dialect,  
Or a Finno-Ugric tongue. I've always liked Slavic  
intonation, maybe even Telugu or Turkish.  
Make sure it's a miscellaneous one, though.  
One that doesn't come of much use.  
It will give you a ticket to get lost elsewhere,  
Unreachable- when you need to just go,  
And you don't know where else to go.

Don't abandon anyone while they're weeping.  
Don't try to know too much about too much.

So, I don't know what else to tell you.

Should I tell you to love? That it is the most important  
And powerful thing there is? Sure. Refer to everybody  
In history, every work of art, every religion, to get that message.  
Should I tell you to forgive? Sure<sup>3</sup>but you'll figure that out,  
Either the hard way or easy way, anyway.

I will tell you a little bit about myself:  
I always thought the world was terribly funny,  
Even though a certain sorrow planted within me  
blossomed with age.

I didn't understand Shakespeare until I was twenty-two.  
I liked Australian opals. I couldn't let go.  
I missed places and people I was never a part of.  
I liked the radio and driving everywhere to nowhere.  
Everyone I loved left me. It doesn't matter anymore.

I named you after Mircea Eliade.  
He was my favorite social theorist.  
One day, go to the city where he was born.  
I wanted to, but I let a ghost stop me.

I have nothing profound or groundbreaking  
To offer you. No secret of the universe.  
No mystic message. No puzzle to decode.  
No wisdom of the saintly or sage-like.  
I'll tell you right now: the world makes no sense,  
It leaves you with the burden of making up  
Reasons for why it does or doesn't, or should or shouldn't.  
I don't know why.

That is who I am  
And this is all I know:

Laugh. I want you to live laughing.  
I want you to die laughing. I want laughter  
To fill the rooms of your house and infect  
At least three other people, laugh enough  
To echo back to lighten up your uptight lineage,  
And radiate forward to brighten up your descendants,  
Make us all less boring, please. The clan  
Could use a sense of humor.

Well, What else can I say?  
Damned if you do, damned if you don't...

Look, Mircea.

We have established certain things:  
How life in this moment-- our only certainty--  
Revels in all its impermeable glory.