

Important Passages from *The Namesake*

“Ashima thinks it's strange that her child will be born in a place most people enter either to suffer or to die [...] In India, she thinks to herself, women go home to their parents to give birth, away from husbands and in-laws and household cares, retreating briefly to childhood when the baby arrives.”

“For being a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realize, is a sort of lifelong pregnancy – a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts. It is an ongoing responsibility, a parenthesis in what had once been ordinary life, only to discover that that previous life has vanished, replaced by something more complicated and demanding.”

“Upon returning to Calcutta, Gogol and Sonia both get terribly ill. It is the air, the rice, the wind, their relatives casually remark; they were not made to survive in a poor country, they say.”

“Try to remember it always,” he said once Gogol had reached him, leading him slowly back across the breakwater, to where his mother and Sonia stood waiting. “Remember that you and I made this journey together to a place where there was nowhere left to go.”

“Pack a pillow and blanket and see as much of the world as you can. You will not regret it.”

“Gogol remembers having to do the same thing when he was younger, when his grandparents died...He remembers, back then, being bored by it, annoyed at having to observe a ritual no one else he knew followed, in honor of people he had seen only a few times in his life...Now, sitting together at the kitchen table at six-thirty every evening, his father's chair empty, this meatless meal is the only thing that seems to make sense.”

“But this isn't possible, Ashima and Ashoke think to themselves. This tradition doesn't exist for Bengalis, naming a son after father or grandfather, a daughter after mother or grandmother. This sign of respect in America and Europe, this symbol of heritage and lineage, would be ridiculed in India. Within Bengali families, individual names are sacred, inviolable. They are not meant to be inherited or shared.”

“...the only person who didn't take Gogol seriously, the only person who tormented him, the only person chronically aware of and afflicted by the embarrassment of his name, the only person who constantly questioned it and wished it were otherwise, was Gogol.”

“Not only does Gogol Ganguli have a pet name turned good name, but also a last name turned first name. And so it occurs to him that no one he knows in the world, in Russia or India or America or anywhere, shares his name. Not even the source of his namesake. “