

DEADLINES AND DIVINE DISTRACTIONS

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Dear Pati,

I've been writing this in my head for more than 2 weeks, but I haven't been able to decide on a style, or to determine what to describe to you. I just got back from Buenos Aires. The first few days I was there I still had the migraine I'd gotten from the Kavanaugh hearings, and I was also tormented by guilt and internal conflict about taking this amazing trip while my psychotic mother languished at Bellevue that qualities of the sunlight started affecting me strangely. I honestly thought I could feel the weight of the recent past shining in the strange coppery sunlight as it slid down the broad avenues and through the rough neighborhoods and shantytowns at the close of day. The women I saw looked like they were hard on themselves in every possible sense: their hair had been treated with severe chemicals, they obviously smoked a lot, they were uncomfortable shoes, their eyes looked tired from the strain of intellectual work, while around their mouths hung the peculiar, invisible gravity of disappointed sensuality. The week before I left I leaned hard on Yale and Artforum to pay me what they owed me so I'd have enough money for food and enough money to kick my little brother \$100, which I had to do in order to assuage my guilt about not having been able to face visiting my mom in Bellevue before I left, and also in order to assuage my lack of guilt, my sense that I had suffered enough, and that willfully walking into an arena in which nothing but suffering is promised is nothing but an ancient form of stupidity disguised as virtue, and an ancient form of weakness masquerading as strength.

The sun hits the earth at a different angle in Buenos Aires. And I think I fell in love. I mean, I would have easily called what I fell into love a few years ago, but now I'm more circumspect, and I know I won't die if I don't see them again. But yesterday I was longing for them in a way I have every right to hide-this is my letter after all-but I don't want to hide it. I liked the way his thighs looked inside his jeans and held me the way that I like it. I loved the way she looked at me. Her eyes were like wellwater at night. She was difficult. He was easy.

Yesterday morning I lay on the floor crying and hyperventilating. I had a few free hours and this was how I was using them. My mother has been an untreated paranoid schizophrenic my entire life, and intermittently homeless since I was 18, but I just found out that she has just started psychiatric medication, which is

something I never ever thought would happen. This sudden change made the weight of her catastrophe on my own existence suddenly seem even heavier because of the prospect of its removal. And while I was sobbing on the floor I was thinking about love, and how much I loved love, how I couldn't live without it, and about suffering, which is basically Judaism, though few people practice the religion correctly. I like that old time religion.

In Buenos Aires you'd be sitting around a table with ten or eleven artists and three or four of them at least, their parents were disappeared, or were somehow involved in fighting the dictatorship. I met a lesbian pornographer both of whose parents were murdered-but first tortured-- when she was a child. And the guy who runs the best publishing house in Argentina, both of his parents were murdered too. He is surrounded by brilliant and tragic musicians and writers and visual artists, all of them running to the bathroom every half hour to huff coke, or cutting their elegant lines on hardcover books. Cocaine is extremely cheap down there rite now. I'm just glad it's not heroin. It made me remember doing drugs to be close to people, the way I used to, which gradually morphed into doing drugs so I could get some privacy, and then once I had some privacy, so I could stand being alone. I'm done with drugs now. I'm high on life, and the exhilaration of the yawning abyss offers itself to me freely, when sex with someone I can really love arrives.

You are not like any American I have ever met, Juliana said, you know how to talk with your eyes. And she said, Congratulations, you have learned how to swim. You are swimming, she said, you know how to swim. And then she said something I didn't really understand. I am a cousin, she said, but you are a daughter.

Last night I read at Rutgers with Javier Zamora and the night before that I went to Eileen's debate with Masha Gessen. I wouldn't have known about it except I half started using Instagram, in a pathetic sort of way, my account still protected and I can't even bring myself to post a selfie yet. The whole thing still freaks me out, because my consciousness is maybe too liquid, and I've had to protect it in order to finish the book I just finished, which took me seven years. I'm a weird combination of disciplined and private and open and free. I wound up hanging out with Jill Soloway and Eileen and Masha and Emily Nussbaum after the show, and one of the things we did was go around the table describing our first sexual experiences. Mine started at 3, when I learned to masturbate and taught every other child I knew how to do it. I'd tell you the rest but it seems strange to do in a letter, a bit too incriminating. I came out as gay in high school, and we used to have, I guess they were orgies? That's the word for it, in by-the-hour motels off the Lynnway. I didn't know anything about consent. I was in love with this one girl and she was fucking

someone else right next to me, which split my consciousness in two and left a yawning gash at the center of my brain. Then she stopped for a second and took my hand and inserted it into a third girl, and she was kissing me now, and when I told a friend of mine about it afterward, we were Juniors in high school, she told me I had raped the person into whose body I had inserted my hand without permission. Oh god, why am I telling you this.

I was falling for these two people in a way that I knew went beyond them, that had something to do with the fact that my parents hate each other and their hatred of one another meant I was condemned to the loneliness of their failure to love, and I was terrified of projecting this onto them. I haven't been involved with a couple since I was 23, which was a very happy affair. It's partly that I like to be near people who love one another because it's a feeling I didn't get to enjoy as a child. It's also this yearning to restore balance between the two poles of my personhood, or the universe, between mother and father, and create conjugal harmony where there is none, to make something sweet and sustaining out of the moment his sperm hit her egg and ruined everything. I wanted to disappear into them, and that made me afraid.

But now it's a couple of weeks later and I've forgotten to keep thinking about them. It's a relief. Other crushes and new catastrophes have intervened. So many shootings. There are shreds of my heart all over the place. But I feel strangely strong.

Love Ariana