

By Mariana Enriquez (translated from the Spanish by Jacob Edelstein)

Hello, people of Durham!

My name is Mariana Enriquez, I live in Buenos Aires, the capital of Argentina, and today, in the middle of winter, the sky is clear, without a single cloud, the sun is shining, and I'd say it's almost hot. Paul, my partner, tested positive for COVID this morning and I'm calmly waiting for the symptoms. It's so strange: since March 2022 I've traveled to Spain, Norway, Germany, France, Switzerland, and the United States; I was at film festivals, around hundreds of strangers in packed rooms, signing books, at meals with new people, around many folks who tested positive. And yet, my rite of passage—because, almost certainly, I'll have COVID in the next few days—is happening here, back in my city. Paul also went to Australia, his country, on an eternal plane trip of almost two days. He came back healthy.

I feel good. I'm reading an encyclopedia about ghosts and specters and spirits because my new novel will head in that direction. Argentina is going through another economic crisis: inflation, debt, the same cycle as always. It feels so ghostly—because ghosts tend to repeat the same things or tread the same ground—that, I think, my novel will also be about the permanent crisis, about this living in uncertainty. I'm listening to Suede—the new albums—to Big Thief, to Townes Van Zandt, to Nick Cave. Music interests me more than anything else. Nick Cave made me cry recently, on the street, when I went out to buy bread. I don't care if people look at me. If they asked me, which they don't, I'd tell them that I'm sad, even though that isn't true, because I like the reactions. Sadness is either scary or it opens a door to a strange intimacy. It's something that isn't usually talked about. But I don't cry because I'm sad. It's his sadness that makes me cry. A vicarious sadness. In any case, no one asks, they all look tactfully at the ground.

It's strange to be home after traveling so much. The neighborhood has new businesses and others that have closed. In Argentina, both things are difficult: maintaining a business and having the money to open one. But it's a strange crisis. People spend and go out: the bars are full. In Buenos Aires we like to stay up late; in my country, you have dinner at ten at night and, if you aren't underage, you go to clubs around two

in the morning. I remember other crises with empty streets at night and a gothic desolation. Buenos Aires is a very beautiful city, but it can be melancholic. It's something about the river, the port, a certain sensation of being very far from other cities—a peculiar sort of isolation, because there are millions of us living here. This time is different. This time everyone eats at the tables on the sidewalks and tries on clothes and the cafes overflow and you have to make a reservation to go eat anywhere.

As I write, at this very moment, church bells are ringing. The Church of Saint Elisabeth of Hungary. Argentina had, and still has, immigrants from all over the world; now there are more coming from nearby countries, while at the beginning of the 20th century there were many Europeans. That's why I have a church dedicated to a Hungarian saint almost next to my house. It is a very special church. It's pink! And it's a newer building, from the 1960s, so it's not neo-Gothic or neo-Baroque or neo-Romanesque (everything here is "neo", nothing is that old, obviously there were no European Middle Ages here). It has a kind of square tower, and the acrylic door is red. There is something threatening about it. A few months ago, as I was walking home, I overheard some teenagers outfitted in perfect, black, heavy-metal uniforms say: "the satanic church is close by here". Living near a satanic church brings me a lot of joy, even though I haven't seen anything supernatural, creepy, or even suspicious near it—and this despite the fact that I have lived here for ten years. The curse of the genre writer: she wants to believe and never finds the facts to support her fascination with demons and vampires and poltergeists. The most terrifying thing that's happened to me in this neighborhood was an attack by a dog, which bit my leg. And this is a somewhat dense area of the city, one of the many favelas—and a big one—where drugs and weapons are sold and illicit business is carried out, but where you can also buy, at the Saturday market, the best goat cheese in the country, sold by some Bolivian immigrants. It's also possible to get a haircut on the street and pick up some peppers so intense they'll leave your lips red for days.

The best movie I've seen in the last few months is called *Blaze* and it's Australian. I saw it at a festival, and I hope it'll be released soon. It's feminist and smart and beautiful. The movie I've liked the most was, *My Heart Can't Beat Unless You Tell It To*, because it's about vampirism as illness and desolation, very much the opposite of

the sensual kind of monster I also like, but that can evolve; here he is a boy in a dark room who needs attention. The film that has impressed me the most was, *Nitram*, because my favorite actor, Caleb Landry Jones, made me feel the character's pain, and the character is a murderer, so it was a sinister empathy, and still, I very much appreciate it. The one I hated the most was *Men*. I'm fed up with paternalism.

I want to write a story about a woman without a face. I want to write another story about a boy who is missing a leg. I want to write poetry, but I don't know how to do it, just like I don't know how to write songs or sing. I sing anyway, a little shyly and very badly. I sing in the street, alone, with headphones. Today I sang: "The moon is a girl with the sun in her eyes", and that phrase was the one that made me cry.

Good night from Parque Chacabuco!

Mariana