

Para Ana

For Ana Cristina Cesar

From Katie Ebbitt

Para Ana,

I am writing this letter to you though you're already dead. You died before I was born, so long dead. I am a year younger than you when you jumped, and I know I won't fear that at 31, but I know the feeling.

Ana, I want to touch the water with you. Show you how deep set our eyes are.

Ana, this is a love poem but also an anti-suicide note. I wish you were alive to write the letter you didn't.

You seem so many things to me: incomparable, and learned, and loved. I imagine you as everyway I am not, and that includes being dead.

People seem to forget how hard it is to kill yourself on purpose. My psychiatrist told me she learned from a surgeon that it's hard to kill a human. I want to say that I agree with the surgeon not anecdotally but experientially. I won't go into specifics, Ana, but I think you know what I mean. I know that a body's desire to live is an instinctual strength, a strength very much tied to panic. I know the only time to live is in the present, and if you are in the process of actively dying, the present's acuity intensifies. You chose a very quick death, Ana. Perhaps you should have given yourself more time. It's not less violent, Ana, to choose a slower means; suicide is the ultimate violence against the world as it's against yourself. Ana, I have changed my mind on self-determination.

I am writing this letter to you, but also for me. I am writing it to scare myself in hope I might conjure you.

I wonder if you have a look alike relative.

I wonder if your family sees you in other family members.

I wonder if at a family gathering, a child is told, "you look like Aunt Ana."

I wonder what it is to decide to jump. I have read, we all know when to die.

Ana, I wonder why poetry didn't save you.

Ana, it's to you that I write *hypocrite*.

I want to taunt people. I get the urge to egg someone on. I also know how horrible cruelty is.

I am becoming afraid of death again. Or the amount of lead up to death, or all those stacked up years and how beautiful the garden is, a Japanese maple, pots nailed into a cement wall. Love makes you realize death. When the future is compromise because you have compromised on stability.

I should have a baby before all the mammals die.

I want you to write to me about your successful suicide. Standing over a high place, to fall, to fall and break, not the ground but yourself -- I know the sound of a dropped body.

Ana, your story is a story of suicide.

I can't seem to abstract this letter.

Ana, this is the way your book is compiled: *stone by stone*. I can't remember the Portuguese word for "from" -- how will I give this letter to you?

I am tired and I have nothing to give other than encouragement. There is some good news, but I know you don't want to hear it.

I would jump too, if God was watching over me.

I wonder if you were insane, and how insane. It seemed your brain functioned so well.

I wonder your skin as a teenager.

I wonder the unevenness of your breasts.

I wonder your feelings in social settings.

I wonder about the details because these are the most beautiful.

Ana, how do you write a letter?

I am trying to imagine an alternate life for myself -- one that includes death. I wonder what you would think of my day-to-day. I am in a fourth floor conference room wearing a lanyard with an ID attached. The windows in this room lock. I wouldn't be able to slip out anyway other than the front door.

In your *final fire*, did you try to hold yourself back? If only I had been alive to grab you before you threw yourself at *the world's feet*. How excruciating your lift off. What a hard slap to your brain.

Ana, did the *workers of Babel* give you the idea of suicide?

It was your reasoning that hit the ground. You had written your vision was getting blurry.

Ana, where is that *therapeutic notebook* you said you would keep? Where did all the papers go after your ability to send letters stopped?

Ana, I am writing to you on a suggestion. I am writing to you because of the way you died. Ana, I want to tell you something I know: I wouldn't be able to be close to you, Ana. I wonder who was? I feel sick writing this. I feel one of us knows something the other doesn't.

I may not summon you, Ana. I wonder if I have a choice?

Ana, I never want to be so afraid.