



DEAR

public library,



**LOVE YOU.** Not just because there are wild roses—which I can literally stop and smell—growing all around your little stone self, or because your chilled entryway is shelved with “pay what you like” discards for rummaging through, or because of your nerdy owl logo. I love you because your librarians are so kind. To me, with my excessive enthusiasms and my daily piles at the circulation desk and my overdue notices (“It looks like that book on fermented cashew cheese was due back two weeks ago, but no worries!”), but also to the down-and-out folks who pass some time with you, to the kids with nowhere else to go. They are even nice to the teenagers vaping in the self-help stacks—my teenagers vaping in the self-help stacks, for all I know, blowing smoke into the books on how to quit smoking. My kids have been coming to you, dear library, since they were babies, when you hosted Tuesday baby music class with Happy Dan. Back then, I passed the lonely hours reading parenting books and eyeballing other moms in a weird hitting-on-them kind of way while my littles pawed at board books, played with your train set, and contracted norovirus from stuffing the caboose into their mouths.

Now, ordering coffee at the café across the street from you, I run into your children’s librarian—she’s storybook pretty, with angel hair curling auburnly around her angel face—and I blush. “Does everyone treat you like a celebrity?” I say, and she laughs.

Your librarians keep all our secrets, like bartenders we never tip: They know that I checked out seven books about perimenopausal rage, that I used interlibrary loan to request a book called *Mating in Captivity*, that I put a hold on both a memoir about microdosing and a study of conjoined twins Chang and Eng. I keep and keep your books, and they’re overdue, and I’m sorry—and the librarians, those gracious hosts, would never be so crass as to mention what I’m costing them. Also, they’ll cheerfully lend a ukulele, a dulcimer, and a glockenspiel—and I have borrowed all three.

I am especially grateful for your books. Novels are the pool and palm tree that I am always crawling through the desert toward. I read with my headlamp on, long into the night—those sweating, sleepless, rage-filled nights. You enable this habit, bless you, and save me approximately eleventy trillion dollars in the process. And sometimes, as I’m checking out, a librarian will gesture toward this or that cover and say, “Oh, that’s a good one,” and I flush with happiness the same way I do when a waiter praises me for ordering the short ribs. Because I am needy. Because you meet that need in so many ways. Even if there’s no portrait of you in the Annie Leibovitz coffee table book you lent me, even if you’re not featured in any popular neuroscience book about feel-good brain chemicals, you are the hero of a story, and it’s this one.

—CATHERINE NEWMAN, writer in Amherst, Massachusetts, where her beloved Jones Library has all four of the books she’s authored

