

The Anti-Julia Roberts

Most peoples' best friends enjoy any number of reasonable activities. Yours might love yoga or traveling—or perhaps simply watching television. My best friend Ryan's greatest joy on earth is calling me a lesbian. He calls me a lesbian for the way I process sex ("You're not getting married just because you laid some pipe with him, lezzie"), the frequency with which I cry during movies (often), and for the books I read. While I recognize this characterization as a gross misstatement about the state of queer women worldwide, I reluctantly embrace it. Because he's usually right.

Recently, I tended to a somber family situation in Idaho. The specifics regarding my sojourn to the land of year-round fireworks stands and peculiar fashion time warps is another story for another day. (Briefly: a hastily organized family trip to visit a gravely ill matriarch.) Before I left, I visited my now favorite bookstore—Friends of the Library in NW—to scour the shelves stuffed with unwanted, unloved literary cast-offs, in search of a traveling companion. I determined a breezy, brainless read was in order. There, on the 3-for-\$5 bargain rack, I found *Eat, Pray, Love*—a tattered, frayed copy discarded by the Terwilliger Plaza Library.

Full disclosure: I concede almost every criticism leveled at this book, including the inherently flawed premise of a person of privilege,



lady about town

BY DANIEL BORGEN

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afforded virtually every luxury imaginable, taking a year off to "find herself"—and financing it with a hefty book advance. Another concession: I watched the film last summer—long before I read the book. And I didn't hate it. I found the journey, while imperfect, plausible: Girl, suffering from severe relationship burnout and general non-fulfillment, upends her life, swears off sex, and searches relentlessly for answers.

When the movie came out, a friend talked to me about his *Eat, Pray, Love* book experience—and, honestly, I wasn't completely sold. I had zero interest in reading it and only watched the movie to see Julia Roberts (and, okay, Javier Bardem). *Sure, that sappy memoir was life-changing.* Even though I technically liked the film—just one good cry typically constitutes a "like," I doubted anything remotely respectable inspired it, which is why it took me entire year to read it, an act I hadn't considered until the movie's release.

Not long before I left for Idaho, I tried to rekindle an expired relationship, one that felt like unfinished business. "Attempted" isn't the most accurate descriptor—I pulled out all my guts and laid them before him. Certain I thought the scenario through completely, I was surprised and disheartened when things stalled and sputtered from the outset; I lived the days that followed paralyzed by uncertainty. So it should come as little surprise when, facing a perfect storm of romantic and familial turmoil, that book grabbed me.

As is my customary pre-flight ritual, I enjoyed an adult beverage at the restaurant closest to my gate. (I loathe flying and need every available sedative before boarding those aluminum tubes of death.) There I deliberately started my book—it still had its bright yellow bargain sticker on the cover. My waitress, an aging woman who seemingly spent a lifetime and career in servitude, repeatedly called me "handsome," tossing me smiles while she grunted at and ignored everyone else. She probably noticed what I was reading, sized me up, and decided I needed affection.

It took me hours—not days—to finish. No,

I wasn't inspired to take up yoga or venture off on my own pilgrimage. What I found, though, was an irresistible protagonist who fumbles awkwardly and spectacularly through experience. Exposed, letting all her warts show, she seriously ponders clinging to the familiar (especially in the relationship department) in lieu of the unknown. She thinks better of it, abandons comfort, instead parsing her every shortcoming. Forget Julia Roberts and her too-deliberate, monotone narration: Get into this author's words.

I left Idaho wishing my time there wouldn't end, but content I went. I arrived home and faced the (fair) relationship answer I dreaded but felt coming. So *maybe* my emotional vulnerability made me less critical of a text I may have otherwise mocked, but I doubt it. My friend said, "The best thing about that book is that it isn't a recipe for happiness." Your circumstance dictates what you glean. He emerged appreciating the spiritual components—"I wanted a god buffet," he told me. I came out swearing off sex—and committing to a broad-sweeping man diet. Ryan calls my "man diet" a lesbian move ("You need a nice married man from adam4adam for hot anonymous action"). This time, he couldn't be more wrong. ☐

I refer to many friends as my best friend. Don't you? Email DANIEL@JUSTOUT.COM.

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