

Bea-

June 22, 2021

Just got back from Moody last night - still can't believe we missed each other. I don't know where I should send this letter, or how or even if it'll reach you - maybe your old apartment, but you said Sera was staying there (I tried going by a couple times when I was in town, but always seemed no one was home), and I don't trust it would get to you if I sent to Natural, either.

A part of me kept hoping we'd manage to find each other. You'd left that one message with my parents - they said you called right around when my plane was landing (agh so close... you probably tried my cell first but I was still in the sky). They said you told them to tell me you were fine, but that you were running around and didn't have a number I could reach you at, and that you'd call back - but then you never did. It was at least good to know you were okay, but not hearing from you again felt... pretty fucking terrible. I know you must have had your reasons, but after what went down at the farm and what happened to Judy, I was worried and wanted to see you in person. (And okay on a purely selfish level, it just hurt. But mostly I was worried.)

I went to Natural and met someone there who seemed to match Sera's description, and I asked for you... she said in this super enthused way that you were on an extended leave, she wasn't sure when you would be back. I asked if she was Sera, and she just smiled brightly (she wasn't wearing a mask, which was a little jarring) and said, "Excuse me? Do you always go around guessing people's names?" which felt weird and unnecessary and threw me... I told her no, but my friend Bea had told me about a friend named Sera who was running the cafe while she was out of town, and I was wondering if this was her. And she actually said, "Wondering is such an interesting thing to do... A lot of assumptions wrapped up in wondering, right?? It's a trip." Which was just like... what does that mean? But I tried to push forwardⁱⁿ the conversation and asked if I could leave a message for you, I was pretty sure you'd be back for a visit soon if ①

you hadn't been by yet, and she said in this weirdly passive aggressive way that I could leave a message if I wanted to, but she didn't know if you'd get it, since like she already told me but maybe I didn't hear her ~~you were on an extended leave~~, you were on an extended leave. I tried to get more information - asked if you'd mentioned where you were staying in Moody or how long you'd be in town, or if she knew anything about the farm - but the woman just gave me nothing. I mean she was smiling the whole time, but it felt vaguely threatening somehow, her whole vibe. And irritating as fuck.

I didn't know what to do, I didn't want to leave the cafe in case you were close by (I kept having this sense that you were right around the corner, that you might walk in at any moment), so I just kept browsing the shelves awkwardly and then finally bought a bag of matcha ginger cookies, to extend the time, and also to support you and Natural. (The ~~shelves~~ shelves felt a little empty and strange, but there is still a pandemic, so maybe that's normal. And of course Natural would feel empty and strange without you in it). I was going to stay even longer and go back to browsing, but after I paid for the cookies she immediately walked out from behind the counter and held the door open for me to leave. (With a bright smile, of course.)

Where were you? where did you go? Are you doing okay? I've been worried about you since getting that voicemail a few weeks back. Sorry if I'm repeating myself, I'm just, yeah: worried. Every so often I freak out and wonder if you went back to the farm, which I know you wouldn't do. And now every time I try calling your mailbox is full and not accepting new messages. I'll keep trying, but in the meantime, at least I can write to you. (Even if yeah I don't know if you'll actually ever get this... but no, you will get it. I believe, damnit.)

Other than stalking you (unsuccessfully) all over Moody, I did manage to spend some of the visit with my parents. They seemed so much older, in a way I hadn't been tracking - like they were just being themselves and just being themselves, and then this

visit all at once it seemed like they'd aged decades. Still, it was good to see them, and a relief after what happened with my dad (or what I was able to glean happened with my dad - transparency is not a word to describe my parents). I kept trying to sit and talk with them, but kept hitting the same walls as ever. Which at first made me sad... like here I am, nearly forty, visiting my ~~parents~~ parents and I'm trapped in the same dynamic, we can't talk to each other, they don't see me... but then there was this gentle flip of a switch, and I realized, oh this is actually just what it is. I can see it happening, see how we're relating to one another... I don't need to be frustrated by it, I can say something different or not, but it's okay. We've all done the best we could, we're all doing the best we can, we're here now, together... I don't know if that makes sense, but I was able to relax, to just be with them in a way I hadn't been in so long (ever?). I don't know if it was seeing them again after the pandemic, after this whole last year plus, and I don't know if this sense of things will last, but it felt calmer. Of course I think about you and your mom, Bea. I know I'm lucky to still have them.

I went to our Safeway. Was hoping to go with you, obviously, but when I couldn't find you I actually went there my last night in Moody... I don't know, maybe I half expected you'd show up, or be there already. I went pretty late, no one was there, and I walked around for a bit... it was cold, I hadn't worn enough layers (why?? as if I didn't grow up there...). I finally sat on this little mini-hill and just watched the empty parking lot for a while... and it was me in the cold sitting on the hill alone in that moment and both of us dancing twenty years earlier, in that other moment, and I was seeing you and feeling myself there, like no time had passed, both of those moments still happening... I was feeling disoriented but awake and then at one point a car pulled in and I thought it was you, like it had to be you. But then I saw it was an older white couple, a woman and man, they seemed lost, and they consulted their phones and then pulled back out again. The woman looked out at me before they did, she (3)

was the one driving, and she narrowed her eyes at me a little which made my chest tighten, like what is she seeing when she looks at me, but then when I held her gaze, she relaxed somehow... which made me relax. And she gave a little wave as she drove away. Which I don't know what it was but that little wave yanked something in me and I started sobbing. ~~Very melodramatic, you should have been there.~~ (very melodramatic, you should have been there.) Took me a while to gather myself and finally leave. I really didn't want to leave. I don't know, maybe felt like if I left I'd be leaving more than the Safeway parking lot.

On the flight home I kept thinking about it, and then thinking about you, thinking about how things were with my parents and how it felt being with them and what if I forget and it just slips back to how things were... There's this sense of everyone coming back to this idea of normalcy after this year, all of us wanting so hard to "return" to some fantasy of normal, and what kind of forgetting we're setting ourselves up for - what kind of forgetting is going to happen, what kind of slippage - what if I forget, what if we forget... what kind of things are we already forgetting, what is happening now that we are erasing or on our way to erasing, even though the damage is still there - even though the damage is still being done.

Sorry, thoughts not really cohering here... I haven't been sleeping much lately.

I had a dream the night before I was going to visit the installation space (or the night after I visited? what is time) - this was actually before going to Moody, but I didn't get to tell you since we never met up - I had this dream that I was about to get to the space, when I realized fuck it was already the opening, and I wasn't dressed for it, and you weren't there (you were supposed to be there, in the dream)... and also, I had completely forgotten to install the piece. So there was going to be this big opening (4)

night party but I hadn't actually made the piece yet. And I was like oh shit how do I get out of this, maybe people will buy that the empty space is the installation? ... but that feels like such a cop out, that would be pretty inauthentic, to try to pass off forgetting to do something as my Art. Although maybe emptiness and lack of preparation are like the ultimate expression of authenticity? just a blank nothing room, isn't that what being human is all about? maybe people will think I'm a genius actually? and these are all the thoughts going through my head, in the dream, as I walk toward the space, and I'm passing all these people wearing really fancy clothes who are heading to the opening too and ~~and~~ I suddenly realize I'm in a t-shirt and underwear, and fuck I'm not wearing pants, either, that's embarrassing - but that's cool I'm the artist I get to wear t-shirts and underwear and no pants - but still I have to get there before all these fancy people get there, so I can frame the empty space, so they know that it's intentional empty (even if it's not) versus whoops-just-forgot-to-make-~~something~~ something empty... and then I'm passing a lot of other people, too, who are not wearing fancy clothes, people who look sick and injured - bloody, actually, like ~~like~~ they've all been beaten up - but who I know are also heading there, and I'm like oh right there are a lot of people coming to this opening, this is really bad, that I didn't remember to do something. I really messed up... but then I'm there, I'm in the space and there's something set up there. And it's something immense, it's so big you could get lost in it, something that couldn't possibly fit in that space but it does, but it's also intricate and fragmented but still whole somehow and suffused with this... warmth. And at first I'm like OH, I'm not a flake, I did install something. And look at this, this is great. Actually this is perfect. I can't believe this is perfect, I don't even remember doing anything. I really need to learn to trust myself and my innate wisdom because look at how it comes through. But then I acclimate to the space and I realize - wait... I didn't do this. Someone else did this. Who did it? And then I hear "Ona", and I turn and it's you. And you're like, "Hey. (5)

What do you think?" And I just feel flooded with... relief. Like, I'm so glad to see you. And I'm like Oh, right. I totally forgot. This wasn't my opening.

And when I woke up I felt so good, I was still bathed in that relief - of having had some excruciating experience averted, and instead experiencing a sense of profound well-being... and just reveling in how good it was to see you, and how grateful I was that you were in New York. And then I realized it was a dream, and this really awful aching settled in.

And then when I actually went there a few hours later for the visit - when I was actually in the physical space - I'd never been there before but I had this immediate jolt of déjà vu as soon as I stepped in. The woman who let me in asked if I was okay, and I wasn't really sure, didn't answer for a moment, and she just nodded, like she understood. The déjà vu passed, but the space still felt strange - totally normal and unremarkable, and also totally hushed and haunted at the same time.

God I miss you, Bea. My whole apartment was around for dinner tonight, Jorge made these amazing ribs and Zeyna had picked up a bottle of whiskey and even Nelson contributed a box of Oreos (which coming from him was a big deal), and it was really sweet that they were sort of welcoming me back even though I'd been gone a ~~real~~ relatively short time... but I just couldn't shake this missing you. We were all around the table and it's a table you've never been at, and one I've barely been at myself, but all I could feel was your absence.

I hope you're doing okay... I know it couldn't have been easy, but I'm still glad you left the farm. I understand why you were attracted to it at first - it sounded really attractive to me, too, parts of it - but at the core of it is some seriously toxic shit. Fuck that place.

You're not alone, Bea. And whether or not you think you're doing it or want to be doing it, you're changing the world just by being in it.

Love,

O.

- still don't know where to send this letter... I guess I'll mail it to my parents, in case you're still in Moody, and they can hold it until they or I hear from you...? fingers crossed this reaches you.
- also I found this (crazy old) transit token in the grass, that night I was sitting in the parking lot back in Moody... I spotted it just as I was getting up to leave and couldn't believe it, I hadn't seen one in decades - I had this sudden flash of the two of us getting on a bus together back in high school, and feeling giddiness - the sense of us just wanting to get away (and actually getting away, even if only momentarily, to a movie one town over). Anyway, I wanted you to have it - you said you wanted to be tethered to home and community, so this is for if you're ever feeling untethered. Just a little talisman to bring you home (or help you get out of town, whichever is needed).
- okay on second thought I'm sending this to Natural, it's your cafe. I was being paranoid - just been a whole lotta nerves lately.



