



Natural Cafe  
Moody, Oregon

November 16, 2020

Dear Ona,

Listen to "Umi Says" while reading this letter. That's an order. Mos Def speaks for us all sometimes. LOL.

It sounds like you have a lot going on. Don't give up! Don't sink into despair! You can't, okay? I mean, if you give up, I'll have to give up and I feel like I'm hanging on by a thread. I mean, what the fuck is actually happening to this country right now? So many people seem sicker, angrier, sadder, and more scared, even though we just elected the first woman to the vice presidency. Why do I still feel like a loser? Why isn't anyone happy? Are we going to have a civil war? I feel so uncentered, like if I didn't have Sera (she's the life coach I mentioned before), I'd just blow away like a leaf. You know what I mean? I know, you know.

On the night Joe Biden was declared the next president and Kamala Harris (a woman, a Black woman) was elected vice president for the first time ever in this country's history, Moody was quiet. That quiet filled me with such rage. I wanted to be with the people dancing in the streets, but instead I got drunk on tequila while switching between CNN and MSNBC. You're in New York. Did you dance?

I can't believe you got COVID. I'm so glad to hear you're okay! Do you have any recurring symptoms? Can you taste and smell things? It's good to be reminded that people actually survive COVID. After my mother died, I couldn't leave my house for over a week because I was so scared. Sera left groceries at my door.

Oh, ~~your~~ your ex Wen sounds like a real bastard. Sera and I both agree that he's probably been toxic to your growth. I told her a bit about your situation and she said that people have to cultivate relationships like plants. Wen sounds like a shitty gardener. You deserve someone who will help you to grow.

I've got to get out of Moody. The silence, — the complicity — is killing me. Truly. I know you don't like the idea of me selling the Natural Cafe (Chester is not that bad, I mean, there are worse things to smell like than corn, Ona), but I just feel like I need to

make a change. I want the world to change and I feel like in order for that to happen I have to change. I really need to find MY people.

I hate that I seem to live around the 4 of the 10 people who voted for that guy (I will NOT spread negativity by writing his name). I'm disgusted that so many people around here seem to love a stupid, mean, arrogant, sexual predator who doesn't pay his taxes and lies all the time. It's wild. And it scares me that so many people truly seem to believe in the supremacy of white people. Like they just think they're better than everyone else. What can we do with that? Sera was away for the weekend or I would have celebrated the election results with her.

I don't know. This election has been so draining. I want that feeling of kindness between people, of people taking care of each other in the middle of chaos, like the way you described protests in your letter. Maybe we all have to risk everything for that feeling? I've been thinking a lot about purpose. Like - what am I DOING here? What do I even have the power to do? How do I take better care of people?

The only way I take care of people is through my business. I bake things and then sell them. I brew tea and serve it. I create space for people to gather, to have book club meetings and listen to live music. It's not enough. Once in a while a person of color comes into Natural-people passing through town, on their way to somewhere else. I want to scream at them - STAY! There was this Black girl (I think she was mixed, actually) who used to come into Natural. A few years ago. She went to the college. Very quiet, very shy. She'd just come, buy a muffin and a small coffee, and quietly study for a few hours. She was always alone. Every time she came in I'd change the music to Nina Simone or Billie Holliday. A few times I gave her a vegan cookie for free. Was that enough? Could I have showed more care? She graduated and I didn't see her anymore, but I think about her a lot and hope that she's okay. Her name is Mary. I forgot her last name.

I don't know if I'll ever be a mother. I mean, mothers have purpose, right? I don't know if I'll ever have a family. I know what you're going to say - I'm still young! Still, it feels like my chance is slipping away more and more each day.

Your memories of my mother are so pure. I wish mine were as pure. You're right that we laughed a lot. I mean, she had a good sense of humor and we kept it light most of the time.



## Natural Café

Moody, Oregon

Sometimes, though, I laughed to keep from crying. I can't even tell you how many times my mother made me feel worthless. Remember when I joined the chorus at school and then dropped out after a few weeks? It was because one night when I was trying to learn a song in my room, my mother came to the door and said, "Come on girl, you know you can't sing." I stopped singing, even though I loved it.

My mother was actually pretty conservative. In fact, she voted for that guy in 2016. She said she liked the fact that he was a "businessman". She used to watch "The Apprentice" and say to me, "Don't you think he's great? And Ivanka, don't you think she's pretty?" I think she would have voted for him again if she'd lived. I never talked about politics with her—I just couldn't handle it. She was a good woman in so many ways—kind, nurturing, sweet—but she was also kind of a bigot. She didn't even really like Black people. Not really. It was pretty fucked up, actually. Why do you think we lived in Moody? My mother grew up in Chicago when she came to the US! She always said she was Jamaican, not Black. Growing up she made me perm my hair because she hated it when it got "kinky." She encouraged me to date White men, and to avoid anything she deemed "ghetto behavior." "We're ladies!" she'd always say she hated when I got tan in the summer. She never wanted to admit that anything had to do with racism, not one thing. And she insisted that everyone in America has equal opportunities. I don't know where she learned to hate herself so much. Even though I'll always love her and I miss her so much, I'll never really forgive her for making me hate myself a little bit. I'm pretty sure she didn't learn a thing from me.

About Justine and Dana. It's funny that you brought them up. I have no idea where Dana ended up after she left for Vanderbilt, but Justine just had her second baby. A boy. Justine and Dana never said they didn't think of me as Black, but Justine DID always want to touch my hair and Dana once told me she wished she was Black ~~she~~ so she

could have a bigger butt. Dana asked me more than once to teach her how to dance. Bitches. Justine always comes into Natural with her whiny brat and expects me to give her free samples. Her son likes to throw things on the floor—juice, cups, utensils. It's obnoxious and Justine just laughs it off, even though I'm never laughing with her. I don't understand why Justine doesn't understand that we're not friends. We've never been friends.

It's interesting. One of my happiest memories from when I was a kid was when I wasn't in Moody at all. My mother sent me to a summer camp in Washington when I was 12. It was right before high school, right before we started hanging out. There was this group of girls I hooked up with on the first day—two Mexican sisters, from San Francisco, a Japanese girl from Seattle, and a Black girl from Vancouver—and we just formed a kind of crew. For three weeks we were best friends. We complained loudly about the food and laughed so much every day my stomach was constantly hurting. We all helped Lea—the Japanese girl—learn to swim and stood up for her when kids made fun of her. Mariela and Mary taught the rest of us how to vogue. I kissed Tasha—the Black girl—on the lips, with tongue, behind a tree. I wasn't in love with her or anything, but she was my first real Black friend, and I just loved her so much. I mean, I've never felt so seen. The last day of camp I cried. We all wrote to each other for a little while, but then we stopped. Sometimes I wonder what they're all up to—I used to check in on them on Facebook, but I got rid of Facebook because Facebook is evil.

Honestly, I have so little patience for white women these days. I'm so done with them. It's not just because Chris left me for one, although if I'm honest, that's part of it. When Chris left me for that woman, she actually wanted to sit down with me so that we could all "work through it" and "create space for everyone's feelings." Hippie bitch. They're running a community garden in Oakland or some bullshit. I always had a sneaking suspicion that Chris was going to leave me. I never felt like his family ever accepted me. She's nice, but his mother always acted like I was a "phase" he was going through. I mean, I guess she was right. The fact of the matter is that if I'd been better, if I'd been what he needed, he would have stayed. So—she wins, right?

I don't hate all white women—some of them are fine. I mean, a lot of them are. It's just that too many of them are terrible and act like they're sweet. Like, too many are willing to vote for a



# Natural Café

Moody, Oregon

fascist, and be passively racist, and be bitches, but then cry about how MEAN everyone is to them. The other day this woman came into Natural Café and ordered a salad. I was the only one in the café (I've had to cut everyone's hours because of the pandemic) so I made it, gave it to her, then went about my business. It was a little busy. When she finished, I handed her her check. Then she had the audacity to ask me why I hadn't asked her how everything was. So I asked her then, "How was everything?" And she said it was too late to ask now and wasn't the point for her, she wanted to be asked. Like...? Get. A. Therapist. Bitch. It's not that deep. It's lunch.

Honestly, I don't know what I'd do without Sera, truly. She's so cool. She's half-Black, half-Japanese and she grew up in Canada. Her stepmother is Korean. She's the most "colored" person I've ever met! Maybe I love her so much because being with her reminds me of that time at summer camp. She's so smart and I'll never stop being grateful that she moved to Moody. She teaches art at the college and does life coaching, reiki, and yoga on the side. The first time she came into Natural, we just looked at each other and in my mind I thought, SISTER. I want to be around her all the time. We've been doing a lot of yoga together in Fossil Park and, like I told you before, we've been reading transcendentalist philosophy. She's super disciplined, super strong. She meditates every morning for twenty minutes. She doesn't eat sugar, dairy, or gluten. She jogs five times a week. And she's committed to reading at least two books every month. All of this, and she still finds time to make her art (she does watercolors), have a full teaching schedule, and be my life coach. The other day I ate a piece of banana bread in front of her and I actually felt a little ashamed! It was vegan, but still.

I don't know what I'd do when Sera gets a boyfriend - or girlfriend (I'm actually not sure which way she flows and I've been too shy to ask). I love having her to myself, but she's just so beautiful - no one in Moody is remotely good enough for her. Like, no one in Moody can touch her. I really admire her ability to be by herself. She just seems totally fine and at

peace with being single. She says that she's too busy focusing on improving herself to worry too much about anyone else. Meanwhile, I'm climbing the walls. I hate being alone. Sera went away for a week and I really didn't know what to do with myself.

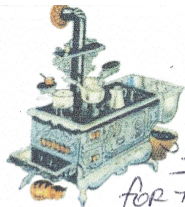
She just got back yesterday from a spiritual retreat just outside of Thayer, Michigan. It was at this intentional community called Black Feather Farm. It's a farm for people of color, although there are a few white people there, too, but ones who aren't crazy. Woke white people. It's an artistic, spiritual, and organic community that promotes diversity, community, and deep thought with a goal towards self-improvement and improving the world. It's run by this brilliant Black transcendentalist named Bob.

I really worry about becoming so bitter, so closed-off, that I'll always be alone. I'm judgmental of others, I can think really mean thoughts, I don't always have the discipline to follow through with things. I'm too emotional, I'm a control freak I think-like, things really bother me. Sera keeps encouraging me to just relax and stay open to life, be free, and I'm trying to focus my energy on being a better version of myself. It's hard. Maybe I just need to be around more open people? Maybe I need to surround myself with people who are more evolved than me? People like Sera? I didn't think people as evolved as her existed. We have these sessions where she'll tell me to focus on a specific negative childhood memory and with her guidance I free myself of that memory. It really works! She was raised as a Jehovah's Witness, but she says she left the church because it was too controlling. She's super spiritual, though. She's teaching me how to be free, Ona.

Anyway, I can't wait to hear back from you.

Love,  
Bea

P.S. Here, I'm sending you the recipe for my mother's rum cake. She used to only make it once a year, like for a holiday, but maybe we could all use a holiday right now. Don't ask me how many calories are in the rum cake. I'll never tell! I made this cake right after my mother died and it definitely made me feel better and not just because it made me a little drunk (I put in a LOT of extra rum). If you make it, have a piece for me. Sera has convinced me to go back to being vegan, and I've decided to stop drinking for now, so I won't be making it again anytime soon. I'm trying to be strong - no more rum cake for me. Indulgence is an issue I'm working on with Sera.



# Recipe: Holiday Rum Cake

From the kitchen of: Winnie

## INGREDIENTS

for the fruit mix:

- 1lb raisins      1tsp grated nutmeg  
1lb prunes      red cooking wine / Red Label  
1lb currants      white rum  
(can also use cherries)

for the cake:

- 1tsp cinnamon powder  
1/2tsp allspice or mixed <sup>spice</sup>  
1/2tsp salt  
3tsp baking powder  
3 cups flour  
1 cup butter  
2 cups brown sugar  
3 TBSP brown sauce  
12 eggs  
2tsp vanilla essence

## INSTRUCTIONS

- ① Add the raisins, prunes, currants + nutmeg to a large glass jar.
- ② Cover fruit with wine + rum to taste. Less rum vs. more wine, or more rum vs. less wine depends on your taste. Cover + sit until ready to bake.

- ③ Preheat oven to 300 degrees
- ④ In a large bowl, sift together the first 5 ingredients. Mix well & set aside.
- ⑤ Cream together butter & sugar in a large bowl until light & airy. Add brownie sauce & 4 cups of the soaked fruit mix, fold in with a wooden spoon.
- ⑥ Beat eggs for about 10-15 minutes. Add vanilla & beat to combine.
- ⑦ Add the egg mix to the butter, sugar, fruit mix.
- ⑧ 1/2 cup at a time, fold in the flour mix. Grease 2 9 inch baking pans & line with grease paper. Grease & lightly flour the lined pans. Pour mixture into tins & bake for 1 1/2 - 2 hours. Check with knife to see if it comes out clean. (A tip: Place a pan of water in the bottom of the oven, so the cakes don't dry out. Also, for when you add the flour, after 1/2 cup test to see if your wooden spoon stands upright in the mixture. If the spoon doesn't, add a little more flour.)