



Natural Café

Moody, Oregon

Dear Ona,

It's been a wild year.

Thanks so much for your card after the passing of my mother - sorry it's taken me a little while to get back to you, but since she died this summer I've been pretty depressed. She always liked you. "Ona is so nice and quiet," she'd say to me. She also loved your hair. LOL. I used to tell her that you're loud in your art. I can still hardly believe she's gone. I like to imagine her on a cruise ship somewhere in the Caribbean, not that she ever took a cruise when she was alive.

How about you? How've you been? When do you think you'll visit? I ran into your mother at Abertson's the other day. She says you're doing great in New York. Were you protesting a lot? Not so much here - people in Moody are so basic.

Chris really made me believe that we could change Moody. We created such a cool, inclusive, soulful, healing community at the cafe. All of those poetry readings, live music jam sessions, meditation sessions, art ~~for~~ show openings, craft fairs? We were really turning up at Natural Café weren't we? Did your mom tell you that we broke up? We broke up. Actually, what happened was he left me to move to California with a white woman. She worked at the Whole Foods in Talent. They have a baby now. Chris refused to have a baby with me because of "climate change and overpopulation" I'll never get over it. At least he sold his share of the cafe to me. I did most of the work, anyway. We both owned it, but it was mine. I picked out all the cups, I refinished all the chairs. I was the one who got there at six o'clock every morning and baked vegan muffins. Now here I am, unmarried, no baby, but I make an amazing vegan blueberry muffin. We have muffin specials every couple of days. Blueberry, banana, peach.

How do you like my stationary? "Quality stationary gives a positive impression!" That's what the guy at the store said.

I don't know. I used to be so proud of owning my own business, but now it doesn't feel like it matters. Who cares about tofu scramble when the world is on fire? I'm actually thinking of telling the cafe to Chester Bloom. Remember him? Smells like corn?

I don't know. Growing up in Moody, I'm mourning the me I might have been—a Black woman proud of being Black. I hate that I've spent so much time apologizing for being Black around all these white people in Moody. Remember Chase??? Can you believe I lost my virginity to that red-head? He runs the tire store now, has this dumb ~~red~~ red-headed wife, and two dumb red-headed kids. Talk about basic. He was so embarrassed to tell people that we were together in high school. Now I'm the one who's embarrassed.

Fuck nice and quiet, right? I say fuck it. I really can't believe it's been eight years since we saw each other.

Hey, remember that night we graffiti'd the Safeway and danced to Tupac in the parking lot? We wrote "The U.S. is a Moody bitch. P.S. True Story!" on the Safeway bathroom wall? It's still there, girl. I was in that toxic thing with Chase, we'd had a fight, and I remember saying that night "No one in Moody will ever love me." And remember you asked me "Why do you need these stupid Moody people to love you?" I felt so wild and alive that night. It was just me, you, Tupac on the tape deck, the crickets, and a case of Pabst. You were the only one who got my thing with Tupac without my having to explain it to you. I've always felt like you could really see me. I think I've spent my whole life chasing that feeling of being seen. People see Bea at the Natural cafe, or just out and about in Moody, but I don't think they see me. They think I'm all about Bob Marley and "one love" and really, these days, I'm like "the blacker the berry, the sweeter the fruit, I say the darker the flesh, the deeper the roots!"



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That Safeway tag was my favorite, but I also loved the tag you put in the girls' bathroom at school. "Run Rabbits!" LOL. I wonder if it's still there. All of your anonymous tags made Moody more beautiful to me.

You still listen to Tupac? I hardly know anything about your life now.

Now that my mother's gone, I really don't know what I'm doing in Moody. I've been thinking about going on a trip. LOL. I think Americans are allowed to go to Albania right now - and Belaruse! I've always wanted to travel. Have you been able to travel outside the United States much?

This woman named Sera began coming into Natural for tea about a year ago. She kind of reminds me of you - she's an artist, she's really smart, and she's super woke. She's sort of my life coach! She's been helping me figure my life out, especially now with my mother being gone. She made me make a list of what I want, like my goals. One goal is that I want to be of service somehow in the world, for sure. More than that, though, I want to have a community. (Maybe that's why I'm rambling so much in this letter. We were each other's community for such a long time!) I've spent my whole life in Moody, but I don't feel close to anyone here. Do you remember anorexic Mrs. Sherman who runs the bookstore? She actually called Black Lives Matter protesters "anarchists" the other day when I ran into her at the grocery store. She also told me that she thinks George Floyd ~~was~~ actually died of a drug overdose and even though she thinks it's tragic, it's no reason to blow the country up. Fuck her. I hate her. I want to love everybody, but I hate her and she's not the only one. I feel really blanked out here. I realized the other day that I don't have any black friends in Moody right now. I mean, there's Rick, Simon, Janet (do you remember her?) and a couple of folks you don't know. Oh, and there's Ming, but that's it. She's Chinese. She moved here with her husband, Lucas. Do you

remember blonde Lucas? He's totally bald now. I guess that there are some folks at the college I could try to hook up with, but they're all such so much younger than me.

I've actually been thinking about going back to school. I hate that I never finished. I've been studying transcendentalism - Sera's been helping me. I read "Civil Disobedience" by Henry David Thoreau - Sera recommended it. I also recently read Black Skin, White Masks by Frantz Fanon. Did you read these in college? What did you think of their ideas? Thoreau makes an interesting point that we can't let the government tell us what's right when we know what's right. I'm with Thoreau, especially after what's happened this year.

Hashtag, Fuck 2020. Fuck it all the way to hell.

I think about Elijah Cummings a lot, that boy from Colorado who was murdered by the police. He had the largest, most gentle, most haunted eyes, didn't he? He was a massage therapist and a vegetarian. He feels the most like me, I guess. I put aside my fear of catching the coronavirus to march for him a couple of months ago. It didn't feel like enough, marching for him. It never feels like enough, marching for any of them. I drove all the way to Portland this summer. I spent three days there. I think it's important to be a witness - to acknowledge that someone else's life mattered. Life is so precious. It's confusing and strange and so, so precious. I want someone to march for me when I die. Or cry. Or something.

I can't believe my mother is gone. I've never truly thought about death as much as I have in this past year. I don't understand it and there isn't much about life that I don't understand either. I don't understand life AT ALL. But I want to.

Anyway, I hope you get this letter, what with all the post office drama. Are you planning on going to the polls in person or doing a mail-in?

Sincerely,
Bea

P.S. Write me back.