

November 16, 2020

Dear Ona,

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

