

January 19, 2021

Happy New Year, Ona! Was your Christmas nice? Did you spend it with Wen? I'm currently staring at a river. Something about watching the water's inevitable movement, the persistent motion over dark rocks and ice in the midst of a very, very cold day, makes me feel hopeful. The past is the past. Now is - now. The silence in my life is different than it was. Instead of suffering through it, I'm choosing it. In fact, things are pretty loud for me these days and I'm stealing just a few minutes of silence.

I actually did it - I made the change. Sera's managing the Natural for awhile and I'm here at Black Feather Farm in Thayer, Michigan. Two days before New Year's I got in my car and just went, so I was actually driving on the highway someplace in Montana when midnight hit. I drove through Montana, North Dakota, and Minnesota before I got to Michigan - it was like driving INTO winter. It was so freezing! It felt good, though. I listened to love songs the whole way. One night I had sex with a brown guy I met at a gas station. We bumped into each other at the coffee station and got to talking. He told me that he'd already had covid and then, before I knew it, we were having sex in my car. I know, it was stupid and dangerous - for all I know he could have been lying, or some kind of psycho killer, but I just felt like those few moments of connection was worth the risk. I'm trying to decide things differently these days and just do what feels right. That's why I'm here at Black Feather. My hope is that a change in my outside circumstances will change my insides, somehow, some way. Sera really encouraged me to come here and I'm so glad I did.

I really think I may have found my Brooklyn, Ona, and it's here in Thayer. I found the people who are getting together and exploding with celebration, the clapping, the dancing, the music. I'm here at Black Feather Farm and it is everything. I wasn't sure what I needed after this devastating year, but it looks like what I needed was manual labor. I'm helping to build a community here; building a community takes work. It's very cold here, but very beautiful.

The guy who runs the farm, Bob, is everything, too. He's like - so great. He's basically Sera's guru and I completely get why she loves him so much. The coolest thing about him is that he's so down-to-earth. In one minute he's talking about Eastern philosophy and in the next minute he's telling a pretty raunchy sex joke. His laugh sounds like a gurgling. Bob's got me thinking that all the things I've wanted for so long - a sense of purpose, a family of my own - are really possible if I'm willing to work through my issues, physically, mentally and spiritually. It's hard - I cry a lot - but I really feel like I'm making progress. In fact, I think it's healthy for me to cry. I want to be the river I'm looking at, inevitable, flowing, changing and growing. It's healthy for you to cry, too, Ona. Cry, cry all the time, cry messy, snotty tears and try to trust that not everyone will walk past you, even if your mother did. I was crying about twenty minutes after I met Bob because he said my hair was pretty and that I seem like a broken bird. Then he just hugged me. No one has ever complimented my hair and I can't remember the last time someone hugged me besides the guy I met in the gas station. (I had to take a covid test and quarantine for five days before I actually met Bob.) I've been here for almost three weeks.

Above the river is a bridge that leads to the tiniest little town. It's even smaller than Moody! There's no pretention in Thayer, no crunchy vegan coffee shop like The Natural Cafe or candle shop for the vacation skiers. Moody is so fake. Here there's a Dairy Queen, a Subway and a McDonald's. Fine dining, lol. I like it, though. It feels more honest. Everything about this life is honest. Remember all the shady shit that went on in Moody that no one would talk about? The infidelities, the broken families, the lying...? Remember that girl Ann who was being beaten by her father, but everyone just ignored her the bruises on her face and arms? And then she was sent away? There's no secrets here. People just let it hang out. Can you imagine just letting it ALL hang out? We do that here and it's awesome. Bob calls it "radical honesty", or RAD. He thinks the only way to change ourselves and the world - and that what he wants, change - is to be radically honest about things, or to just be RAD. We lie to ourselves a lot. I know I do. How about you, Ona? What is the radical truth about your life right now? It's interesting to me that you're still living with Wen. Sounds like you and Wen are not done. I mean, you do you, girl, but be careful. Just because he helped you bake a cake during the holidays doesn't mean that he's everything that you need, although I AM impressed that he makes his own browning sauce. Do you love him? Does he love you? Be RAD with yourself, Ona, and remember what I said about the plants. It could be that you need to change your surroundings in order to get really clear and honest about stuff. I'm not exactly CLEAR, but things are less cloudy than they were before I left Moody.

Bob bought this land just outside of town for cheap and now we - me and about thirty others - are working it. There's the main house, the barn, some RVS, and a few tents. The main house has three bedrooms, a kitchen, a sitting room, and two bathrooms. There's also a porch that Bob sits on a lot. Bob lives in the house with three women - Winnie, Barb and Veronica. A few other people stay in the house at night, but most of us sleep in one of the RVs or in a tent. I'm sharing an RV with two other women. We rotate where we sleep - one of us gets the bed, the other gets the couch (it's a small couch) and the other gets the floor. It's kind of like camp!

Right now we're clearing brush and whatnot. We're going to build houses. Tiny ones, for the folks in our community to live in. Bob's vision is an intentional transcendental community, like, one that works. Everyone will have a role, a place, and we'll all work together to make the world more authentic, or honest, and peaceful. It's so powerful when a group of people get together and focus on one common goal, don't you think? A lot of the people here have given up their old lives in order to focus on the community.

We wake up before dawn every morning and meditate for thirty minutes. Then we do yoga for an hour. Then, a vegetarian breakfast. (We smoke a little pot which I never used to like, but now I do.) We spend most of the day clearing brush and rocks and things.

At night, we dance in an actual barn. It's so cool. There are drums and guitars and we just dance and dance and dance. Then we go to sleep and do it all again in the morning. When I go to bed, I'm so exhausted, but it's a good exhaustion, Ona, it's the exhaustion of pure work and play. I was thinking of going back to Moody in February - a

month is a long time to be away from my business - but now I'm not sure. It might actually be safer to just stay here for awhile, what with covid still raging everywhere. I feel safe here. And I'm happy. Bob has been encouraging me to stay on, saying that I add "a good color" to the farm and he needs as many people as possible who are willing to work hard. I've got to admit, I love feeling needed. If I am here in the spring I'll help with the planting. I'd planned on staying for a month, but now I think I may stay longer. If I'm being RAD, I don't really want to leave. The only thing waiting for me in Moody is The Natural Café. I want my life to be about more than running a vegetarian coffee shop, you know?

I'm so glad that you made the rum cake. Girl, you don't know what a currant is? How can you be from Oregon? And you can BUY browning sauce.

Do you think you could send me a picture of some of your work? I'm so interested in your art. I mean, it's so obvious that you've been to graduate school. I should have gone to college! I wish I could just use words like "xenophobia" and "assimilation" the way you do. And "calibrate." I'm so proud of you, Ona. I don't know if the point of your old art installations in rest rooms would have been obvious to me at all since I don't know anything about art installations (I probably would have thought it was graffiti!), but I'm really interested in what you wrote about tracing your family's immigrant paths. Like, seriously, how did we all get here, I mean, HERE, in the place that we're at? I mean, I know that I'm in the freezing cold in Thayer, Michigan clearing brush and rocks because I needed to get away from THERE - from Moody - but how did my Jamaican mother end up in Moody, Oregon? Was it really just that she followed a guy and then just decided to stay because it felt right? I don't know if I've ever been in a place that felt right. You got out of Moody. Does Brooklyn feel right to you? Does Wen feel right? You've always seemed to live your life on your own terms. Are you still? Be RAD, Ona.

I looked up the artist Tracy Emin who I'd never heard of before. (I don't know anything about art. I hate feeling stupid about that kind of stuff.) I like her scribbly, smudgy self-portraits. They're like portraits of a woman's INSIDES, even though we're looking at a woman's body. They feel radically honest.

It's nice that you think of me as loving and connected. I certainly WANT to be. I think of you as wild, but in the best way, in the way I want to be. You're passionate, you're brave, and you're making important art. You left Moody a long time ago and never really looked back. I look back too much, like that woman who turns into salt. When I look back, I see a sad little girl desperate for someone to tell her that she's good enough. You asked me about a memory I'm trying to free myself from. That.

P.S. Here's a postcard from North Dakota. Weird state, North Dakota. It's so stark. But beautiful.