

July 24, 2021

Hi Ona,

I'm back at Black Feather Farm and we're all fine here. Great, actually. Sorry for that crazy voicemail I left. I was really upset that day. I really should be in better control of my emotions. I've had some time and the guidance to put things in perspective. I mean - Judy was just a dog. Yes, I loved him and it really upset me that he died, but dogs die every day, right? Just like people. I mean - death is a part of life and it was just Judy's time to go. Just because Judy died I can't run away from the work - Black Feather Farm is all about "doing the work." We say that a lot around here. "Just do the work." I think it's similar in meaning to when people say, "Trust the process." I got the letter you sent to Natural; Sera sent me it to me when I got back to the farm. Sorry if I worried you. Black Feather Farm is absolutely not toxic. If anything, I'M toxic and the farm is helping me to heal.

When I got back to Moody, it was weird to suddenly see that the world has sort of moved on, but sort of stayed the same, too. People aren't wearing masks at all anymore, although that started before I left for the farm. That "fuck you, I won't let the government tell me what to do" American energy is so strong in Moody. In fact, it's one thing that Moody and Black Feather have in common.

Anyway, I can see everyone's face now which, on the one hand, fills me with this a kind of instinctual joy. Like, hey, you. On the other hand, seeing a bunch of strange faces makes me want to run away and hide. I mean - a face is a universe and it can be a lot to take in at once. How did we do this before the pandemic, just greet the whole face of total strangers? I have no idea how I ran the Natural Cafe for so long. Maybe it helped that I had a lot of regulars? I didn't have to absorb new people all the time.

There are a lot of smiles in Moody these days, and why not, right? We have a vaccine! That sociopath is out of the White House! Still, there are folks who are bitter. I stopped by the food co-op first thing and Guy, that cashier I told you about who always hums that jazz song "Beatrice", asked me while ringing up my granola what I think - as a Black woman - about Critical Race Theory being taught in schools. Welcome home, right? I never feel more black than I do when I'm in Moody. I told him that, as a black woman, I didn't know anything about it. He told me that teachers have been teaching white students to hate themselves by teaching them that white people are oppressors. Have you heard about this? Guy told me it's all over the news, and it's true that I haven't been keeping up with the news as much, but I can't imagine a teacher teaching little children to hate themselves. Who is doing this?

Then again, I can't believe some of the things I actually experienced in school. Remember when I was told that my braids were against the high school dress code and the school sent me home? That's one time I remember my mother being really angry because we had to take out my braids after a trip to San Francisco, six hours of sitting in a chair and two hundred dollars. I remember her screaming at my principal on the phone, "Who's going to give me back my two hundred dollars? Are you going to give me back my two hundred dollars? You people are something else. This is ridiculous, it's just HAIR." I remember that we watched *The Wiz* while my mother took my braids out. We had pizza that night which was a treat for me because we never had pizza.

Anyway, I ran into Chase, too, while I was at the food co-op. He walked out of the co-op with me and would not shut up about recounting votes for the 2020 election. He told me that he feels robbed because the 2020 election was stolen. "Come on, Bea," he kept saying, "do you really think Biden won? Do you really think he won even though he was in his basement for a year? Come on, do you really think Basement Biden is the legitimate president?" Because I didn't want to get into a big thing with him, I just shrugged and escaped into my car. I can't BELIEVE I lost virginity to that dude. Gross. Well, if I'm being RAD, I'm bitter, too. I feel robbed, too. Like, why is mother dead? Why did THAT have to happen?

Except for the Natural Cafe, Moody doesn't really feel like home anymore. I was sorry not to see you while I was there. I tried when I first got there. As you mentioned in your letter, I called your cell, but you're right, you were probably still in the air and didn't pick up. I called your mother and she told me you bought a cheap ticket with two connecting flights. Sounds gruesome. I was going to call you back, but then I just got really - overloaded. Life, right? I just felt like I needed to leave Moody as soon as I possibly could. You must have visited the cafe right after I left Moody. Those matcha ginger cookies are amazing, aren't they? It's true that Sera keeps the shelves a little emptier than I used to - she has her own way of doing things, I guess. I don't want to undermine her by telling her what to do.

It's so weird to me that you and Sera didn't hit it off. It's true that she's intense. Not everyone is comfortable with that level of intensity, but I just feel like Sera really listens and sees things. The only person who I've met more perceptive than Sera is Bob. I've never gotten a passive aggressive vibe from her. Maybe she was reacting to YOUR energy? She's really sensitive. She probably didn't want to tell you where I was because she's very protective of me. You should probably thank her, though. After holding on to your letter for a few days because she doesn't know you and, like I said, she's very protective, Sera felt that it would be unethical for her not to give me my mail.

She mailed the letter to me along with some bills and stuff. When she called the farm and told me that she had a letter from you she sounded so suspicious. Like - what did you say to her, lol? I had to remind her that I'd known you since high school and that you're my good friend.

Sera is still running the Natural Cafe for now. It's doing a little better. The accounting is still a little weird, but I'm choosing to trust that Sera knows what she's doing and the cafe will break even at some point this summer now that people don't have to wear masks and can sit down for awhile inside. Sera keeps telling me that my focus on money is a cancer that will destroy me. If I lose the store, I'll have nothing except my house and the money my mother left me. My savings are getting smaller by the week. Sera's right, though - worrying about money is toxic. Life is not about money or business. Life is about relationships and pursuing a higher purpose.

I almost wanted to cry when I walked in the cafe and smelled that green tea and honey smell. It felt like home - if only the Natural wasn't in Moody and I could bring it with me wherever I go. Unmasked customers were drinking tea and eating muffins. Sera has added a little library to the cafe. It's just a shelf, but on it she's put some second-hand books (Have you read *Lolita*?), flyers advertising yoga, reiki and meditation, and pamphlets about Black Feather Farm. She told me that she made the pamphlets herself with Bob's approval. She also added a vegan matcha muffin to the menu. It hasn't sold much - I think it's because there is so little sweetness in her recipe - but she said that you have to train customers to know what's best for them. She wants to give customers the cleanest, healthiest food possible. I suggested agave as a replacement for sugar and she said, "Agave is the least healthy sweetener. Do you want to give folks belly fat and liver disease?" I was very embarrassed - who wants to be responsible for belly fat? I don't want to be responsible for belly fat, either mine or anyone else's! I had two of Sera's matcha muffins to show her that I support her, even though they really are dry.

It was good to see Sera because she really did put the whole Judy thing in perspective for me. The few days I was in Moody, Sera and I did a lot of yoga and meditation. My first full day back we went on a six-hour walk one day up in the mountains. In fact, I tried you right before we left for the hike, but your voicemail picked up. Sera was right next to me, so I felt weird about leaving you a message. Anyway, the hike was great - there really aren't mountains like Oregon mountains. I got so tired, but we didn't stop, we just kept walking. I talked until I was hoarse. I told her about my experience at the farm from the beginning up until Judy's death and she said that it sounded amazing. "Aren't you so lucky?" she asked me. Then she told me that I should have stayed and worked it out instead of running away. "You have to do the work," she

said. She told me that I was being a victim and a little bit of a brat. She also reminded me of how much Black Feather Farm has given me over the past several months. It was hard to hear - no one wants to hear that they're being a brat - but I needed to hear what Sera had to say. She reminded me of a few things. I went to Black Feather Farm to work through some of my issues and they're helping me to do that. Bob has given me a structure, or a path, to figure out how to positively be in the world. I found my confidence as a chef at the farm - after a while, Bob wanted me to be in charge of all the cooking. I got the discipline I need to be a better, more productive, person. And I got that cozy feeling of being a part of community that I've wanted for so long. They've given me everything. I don't know how I'd manage without Bob and the other folks. So yeah, I was going to call you after the hike, but I was just really distracted. I mean - focused. And to be RAD, I think seeing you would have made it harder to leave Moody. I had to leave. I hope you can understand and forgive me. Sera told me that you'd probably understand.

Actually, Sera might be my only friend left in Moody. I mean - and you. But you don't live in Moody, do you? All of the people I once felt close to in Moody have drifted away. Sera might not stay. During our walk, Sera reminded me of Bob's teachings about a "big life." Most people are afraid to live a big life, so they choose to live a small one. They do what's comfortable rather than push themselves past where they think they can go. My life in Moody was so small and I didn't even realize it. Sera reminded me of all the big things we're doing here at the farm. We're trying to change the world. We're building a sustainable future, we're battling climate change and fascism and racism. It's a big deal. It's true that I often feel uncomfortable at the farm, like I'm being pushed past a certain limit, but Bob says that it's just "growing pains." Nobody said it was going to be easy, but nothing worth anything is easy. I want to live a big life. Like you. You know? I mean - we only get one life, as far as I know. I don't want to squander mine.

The second day I was in Moody - the day after my walk with Sera - Sammy showed up. Can you believe it??? I've never had anyone chase after me before. It was like something out of a movie. At the cafe, in front of Sera, Sammy told me that he wants to explore a deeper relationship with me. He says he might even want to have a baby with me. He said he could see himself loving me. Huge, right? I mean, it's not as good as "I love you," but it's something. I decided to go back to the farm with him that night. I followed his car in my car the whole way back and he kept sending me cute little text messages. We drove mostly straight through, stopping in rest stops to take naps rather than waste money on a motel room. I want to see where a relationship with Sammy can go. What if he's the person I've been looking for?

Sammy told me things I didn't know about the Judy thing. He told me that Judy was poisoned accidentally because he ate rat poison that had been put out by the main

house. I didn't know that rats are an issue at Black Feather Farm which is weird since I work in the kitchen, but Sammy said, "There's a lot of things you don't know." He told me that there was a whole meeting to discuss how to deal with Judy's death because Bob suspected that I would be upset. Sammy also said that Bob was so disturbed when I left that he fasted in his room for a couple of days. He just wouldn't eat. I hate that I caused Bob any discomfort. In fact, when I got back to the farm, I fasted for three days as a kind of - penance, I guess you'd say. If Bob is hurting, I want to hurt, too. And it did hurt. I've never been so hungry in my life.

Sammy's right that I have a lot to learn. I feel terrible for thinking that anyone at the farm would INTENTIONALLY kill a dog. These are good people. I'm the one who needs to work on my trust issues. I don't know how my trust in other people got so screwed up.

Ona, I can't go back to my old life in Moody. I don't know what that means for me, but I can't go back to feeling as alone as I felt there. I'll stay here at the farm for another couple of months, and then I'll go back to Moody. Or maybe I'll sell my house and my business, and stay here at the farm as long as they'll have me. I don't know yet. I'm trying to figure it out. The pandemic and the politics of the past several years has really changed me. I'm a new person and I'm still figuring out who that person is and who I want to be. The new Bea has a community that cares about her and needs her. No one needs me in Moody. They need me at the farm. Who would make Bob's breakfast porridge, if not me? He won't eat it if someone else makes it. That makes me feel good - or - less alone. I mean, I don't have any family since my mother died, except for the folks at Black Feather Farm. They're my family now. I want to be here when Winnie and Veronica give birth. I want to be stronger when it's my turn at the drums. I want to finally do a proper handstand in yoga. I want to give this thing with Sammy a chance. I want to be more disciplined and focused in my life. I want to be a part of a group that's working to make the world a better place. And I want to make Bob proud of me, you know? I just want to be - better. Like you, like your parents, like everyone, I'm just doing the best I can. You know?

I got the first Moderna shot while I was in Moody. I'm not sure if I'll get the second. All the talk about the dangers of vaccinations here at the farm has really given me pause. After all, it DOES usually take years for vaccines to be approved. We really don't know the long-term effects of these COVID vaccines. I don't know. I think my mother would want me to get fully vaccinated.

I miss you, too, Ona, I really do, but I don't think I'll be able to write for a while. I need to focus on myself, and my relationship Sammy and the farm, and Bob, and being a better person. Speaking of Bob, he just walked into the kitchen -

So Bob thinks it's best that I don't waste my energy on writing letters. "Save your energy for saving the world," he said. I hope that you understand this journey that I'm on. I'm sorry if this hurts you because I never want to hurt you. I'm running on very little sleep and what with the work on the farm, the dancing at night, the exercise drills and the lack of food (Bob thinks it would be good for me to lose ten pounds or so), I can barely think, let alone write letters. I'll reach out to you in a few months. Maybe the next time I write I'll have some good news to share.

Think of it as giving you more time and space to pursue your own big life. You're so amazing - so talented, so smart, so cool. I stopped by the Safeway when I was in Moody, too. That night dancing with you in the parking lot remains one of my favorite memories. I love the girls in that Safeway parking lot so much - me and you. Thank you for the token. I'm going to keep it forever. I wish that I had something great to say - some advice, some wise words as we make our way through this life thing - but I don't. Take care.

Love,
Bea

P.S. I'll never forget what's happened this year. Probably I will spend the rest of my life trying to repair the damage.