

BEHIND THE STORY

**Her Epiphany:
It Isn't Clear**

Sometimes You Belong

...the Tools of Resist
You Think

**IT CAN'T CHANGE OVERNIGHT
BUT WE GOTTA START SOMEWHERE...**

identity and the cost of being an outsider

You Are Not as Special

An Excavated Voice

Another

Time, Another Crisis

Race Gap Doesn't Stop

Inseparable

Listening to the Past Is Kind of Perfect

Journal



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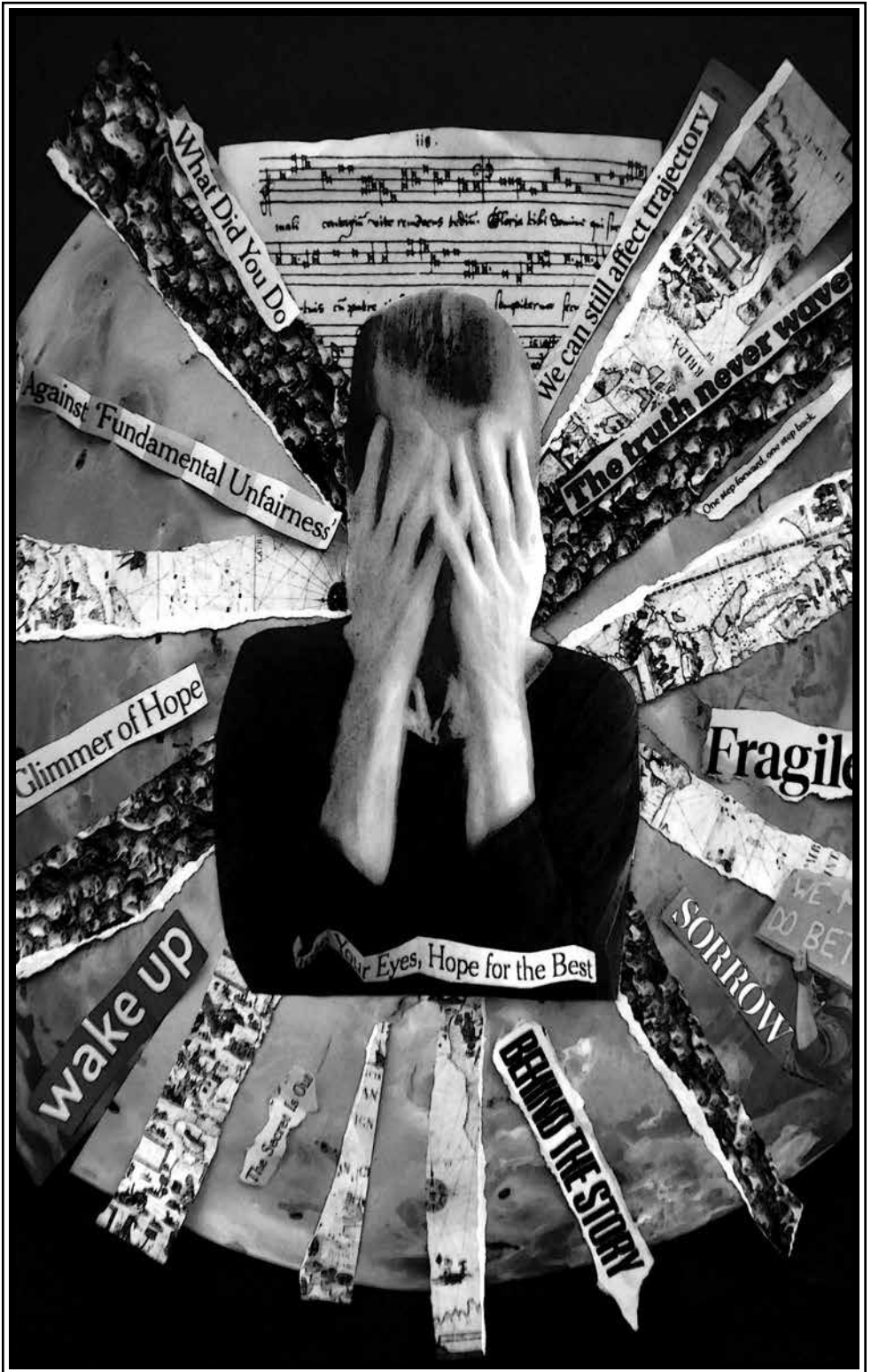
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HEATHER TOSTESON

FLIP SIDES:

Truth, Fair Play & Other Myths We Choose to Live By

↓↑ ↓↑ ↓↑

Spot Cleaning Our Dirty Laundry

Myths We Choose to Live by

We are not cynical. Even in our advancing age. Neither is our press—or the language that arises when we try to describe it, language that has an earnestness to it that occasionally bemuses, amuses, but which we also recognize as a gift, an insistence that, as Browning's artist-monk Fra Lippo Lippi says,

*. . . This world's no blot for us,
Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good:
To find its meaning is my meat and drink.*

Actively committing to that search for meaning, good meaning, seems necessary in our increasingly polarized world where people find it more and more difficult to listen with a faithful heart to those whose values differ significantly from their own. We need to be able to hear that good far more clearly, not only in ourselves but also in each other: a good that is embodied, partial and fallible—essential and also contestable, and constantly being made and remade at both individual and the societal levels. We need to understand what it means to be faithful to it *and* to each other.

The idea for this anthology came in early 2020, before COVID, before the mass protests for racial justice, before contested elections, assaults on Congress, or recent gun massacres. It came before we had finally finished writing up and publishing *Sharing the Burden of Repair: Reentry After Mass Incarceration*, our account of an intensive listening project that looked at a surprisingly bipartisan effort of reform in Georgia, one of the most punishing states in our country, the state we have called home for the last fifteen years. We were exploring the role and the responsibilities that we, the apparently untouched and law-abiding, can play in repairing such a large,

JOHNNY TOWNSEND

I THREW MY CONFEDERATE CAP AWAY

I just took an internalized bias test through my workplace for the third year in a row. The results? I show a "strong preference" for white people over black, just as I have on each previous exam. I threw my Confederate cap away decades ago, but it's not as easy to get rid of the bias.

As a child, visiting my grandparents in Mississippi provided some of my best memories. Making homemade ice cream on the back steps, picking blackberries, walking the cows in for milking, swimming in the creek, shelling pecans. But life on the dairy farm wasn't all fun and games. Sometimes, the news reported sightings of bears in the area or we'd be warned to keep an eye out for black panthers. No one in the family had ever seen one, but they were the mascot for the single high school in town, so we knew they were real.

Walking with my sister through a pasture the day we heard the latest alert, I saw her stop in fear and point. "I see something black!" she said breathlessly, fixated on something moving beyond the trees along the gravel road. "It has a yellow shirt on!"

It wasn't a panther.

So we relaxed and played among the flowers, a field of Black-eyed Susans, a name I didn't learn until I was almost an adult. We'd been taught to use a racial slur to describe them. "N-word navels."

We made occasional day trips to Vicksburg, the site of some of the heaviest fighting during the Civil War. Dad bought miniature Confederate flags for my sister and me, bought us Confederate caps. We ran up and down the steep hills, warned against wasting time with the Yankee monuments and encouraged to pay proper respect to "ours."

Back in Metairie, the middle-class suburb of New Orleans where we lived, my mother forbade me to watch the show *Julia* starring Diahann Carroll. I was also denied access later to the show *Room 222*. "It has a black person in it," my mother explained.

LYN STEVENS

BUTTERFLY HOUSE

Amanda was in the living room feeding the caterpillars leaves soaked in sugar water when her phone rang. Late afternoon sunlight spilled through the open window throwing thin shadows from the five netted cages and lacy patterns of the monarch's wings on the wall. After the call she had to focus on simple tasks, zipping the butterfly cages, closing the blinds, putting her car keys in her bag, walking down the block, one foot in front of the other.

Her nail tore on the car door handle but didn't snap. Buckle your seatbelt, she said to herself. Put on some lipstick. Pale, not red. Your sixteen-year-old son and his friend have just been arrested for armed robbery. Find a peppermint in the glove compartment. Don't sit there like a zombie. Drive to Manhattan.

By the time she stepped through the glass doors of the sixth police precinct the news had spread inside her like venom. She charged up to the mammoth front desk. "I'm here about my son, Logan Hayes."

"Have a seat. Someone will be with you shortly," said the female officer, without making eye contact.

BB guns. An actual holdup. No more plastic deep-sea divers floating in *my* bathtub. Bedtime stories and homework help were also relics of the past.

"Please have a seat," the policewoman said, more sharply.

She turned to the row of dull blue plastic chairs. A petite woman in a floral-patterned headscarf sat stiffly in one of them—Adil's mother. Amanda couldn't remember her name. She walked over and sat down.

"What is this? What happened to my boy?" said Adil's mother.

"They didn't tell me. We should know pretty soon," Amanda said, nervously.

Policemen milled around, their belts heavy with guns and clubs. A beefy man in a turtleneck and badge approached her.

"You here for Hayes?"

NANAKO WATER

BE WORTHY OF YOUR HERITAGE

1987 Ghana

If ye love wealth greater than liberty, the tranquility of servitude greater than the animating contest for freedom, go home from us in peace. We seek not your counsel, nor your arms. Crouch down and lick the hand that feeds you; may your chains set lightly upon you, and may posterity forget that ye were our countrymen.

—Samuel Adams, founder of Lane's prep school

As the flight approached the stopover in Lagos, Nao overheard her neighbor, the missionary, ask the flight attendant, "Excuse me, Miss. Have they got the situation in Lagos under control?" The woman nodded yes and continued down the aisle.

Nao tapped the missionary's shoulder, "What situation?"

The missionary (she learned his profession shortly after takeoff from the stopover in Schiphol) said, "Oh, for awhile there, every time we touched down in Lagos, men leapt out of the bush brandishing machetes and threatening to slash the tires until we handed over our money. That's all."

Nao leaned back into her seat and sighed. *There's nothing like unequal wealth to bring out the violence.* She remembered the rich Nigerians she met back in Boulder, at CU. *Oil money made those guys millions.* Although this was her first trip to Africa, she knew more than she realized.

Her final destination was Accra, Ghana where her husband, Lane, would meet her. In fact, Nao and Lane were quite cosmopolitan by any standard. They met eight years earlier in the School of International Affairs at Columbia University and the two of them were now living in two different countries. Two different worlds. She worked in Tokyo, Japan, and he was doing dissertation research in a village somewhere outside Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso.

Nao scanned her flight magazine to cram on Ghana. Flight Lieutenant

FREDERICK G. YEAGER

MR. GORBACHEV, TEAR DOWN THIS WALL

With five trash bags in my right hand and whistling, I walked toward the wall my dad built on our lawn. Every Saturday for the last two years, I filled five bags, sometimes more and sometimes less, with burned-out candles, dead flowers, stuffed animals, beer cans, and broken beer bottles people have left at the base of the memorial or thrown at it and spray-painted over the bright-red letters, Fight'em With Us, and the flyers somebody pasted on the wall.



The wall is six feet high, ten feet long. Dad used concrete blocks and slathered concrete over them to give the memorial wall a uniform appearance. There is a chunk of the Berlin Wall in the middle of his wall that can be seen from either side. Our house is on a corner lot, and so he set the wall at an angle so people coming down either street can see it. It's not really a wall that keeps anybody off our lawn. It's kinda like the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall. It looks like a wall, but it's a memorial.

It's a mystery to me why some people leave things, and some people throw beer cans and beer bottles at the wall, and some people spray-paint graffiti and paste flyers. Who knows? All I know is that every Saturday, I cram everything into trash bags and paint over the graffiti and flyers.

Horst, the trash ain't gonna pick itself up, I said to myself. The sooner started, the sooner finished. I hitched up my pants and opened the first trash bag. I had filled three of them when I realized Mr. Handerly from across the street was standing beside me.

"It's an eyesore. I told your dad that wall'd be a trash collector."

"Hey! It's not that bad. With all that paint in different colors, it looks like modern art. I bet I could hang it in the Dallas Art Museum," I said.

Handerly looked at me like I was crazy and walked back across the



Hidden Scars

return sense of calm

others nope it

A MOMENT OF GUILT... A SENSE THAT SOMEHOW WE WERE ALL RESPONSIBLE FOR THE BAD THINGS HAPPENING TO US

What's really going

Everywhere

Too Resistance

the thought that should count

UNDERPREPARED

JAKOB KONGER

A BRIEF REFLECTION ON APARTMENT CLOTHESLINES

Once my mother caught a man stealing clothing from us. This was a very long time ago, when my mother still washed our clothes by hand and hung them to dry outside the bedroom window. Anyone who passed could see our clothes then. Anyone who could reach could pluck them off.

One day, as often happened, one of my dresses fell from the clothesline, a thick light blue dress my mother had had to save up for and which, because it had cost a full week's rent, I was only allowed to wear on special occasions, such as my grandmother's funeral. Usually my mother waited to retrieve clothes that fell till she'd finished hanging the whole wash, worried as she was about ruining clothes from too much soaking, but this dress had too much value to let it lay out in the street. She left the clothes in the sink and went down after it.

We lived three floors up from the street and, perhaps from some conviction the dress was too precious for her to ball up under her arm, my mother carried a heavy metal serving tray down the stairs with her, one large enough to lay the dress out flat on. Because of this, it took her some time to get down to the street, long enough that a man she had not seen from the bedroom window had been able to wander into the alley. When she got there he was crouched over the dress.

My mother hit her tray on the wall of our building to get the man's attention. He was a tiny man in a thick black canvas jacket—obviously a drifter by the smell of him which, along with the pinch of sweat, was reminiscent of damp earth after a rainstorm. His hair was matted so flat against his head it looked like a ragged cap. He hadn't the sense to drop the dress at my mother's warning, but instead pressed it against his mud-stained shirt. He kept his eyes trained on my mother's face, as though if he watched her long enough she'd let him be.

My mother hit her tray against the wall again. This time she clearly meant

C.W. SPOONER

SHOE DOG

It was a few minutes past closing time as I unlocked the door and let the last customers out into the cold Minnesota night. We wished each other Merry Christmas several times as they headed for the parking lot. I held the door open for a minute, letting the icy blast of air flow around me. The temperature would dip below freezing again, typical for Minneapolis that time of year. It hadn't stormed for a few days and mounds of dirty snow had been pushed to the edges of the lot. The covered walkway along the open-air mall was equipped with speakers playing songs of the season. I paused to listen to Frank Sinatra sing "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas."

The holiday season of 1964 had been a good one at Grove Shoe Southtown. We'd sold a lot of merchandise, mostly fur-lined slippers, knowing they'd likely be returned right after Christmas. But hey, that was the shoe business. I relocked the door and waved to Paul at the back of the store. He hit the switch to douse the lights, except for those in the back room and the strings of colored bulbs lining our display windows. I walked to the rear of the store to join the rest of the staff. Our manager, Dan Harden, kept a refrigerator in the back stocked with Coke in those classic little bottles, and my favorite beer—Grain Belt Premium. Our tradition at the end of a hard day was to sit for a few minutes and enjoy a cold one before heading home. But this night was different. Dan had called a staff meeting.

We pulled together folding chairs, boxes—anything that constituted a seat—and waited for Dan to join us. There was Paul, a high school student, smart, cocky, full of fun; Norm, in his mid-thirties, Dan's best friend and classmate from their school years; Aileen, Dan's wife, a pretty blonde, sharp-tongued and witty, who came in on weekends to help out at the front desk; and of course, me, in my second Christmas season as a part-timer, logging as many hours as I could, trying to make ends meet for my family.

Dan walked into our circle and turned slowly, looking at each of us in



This Is Not the Way

change?

ocusing attention

offer ho

Listen

DEPEND

ove's Language

IT TAKES HARD WORK TO BEHAVE LIKE AN
DISCIPLINE. YOU WANT IT TO BE SIMPLE, AND IT RARELY IS.

Home Truths

LINDA MAXWELL*UNSULLIED*

"Do I have a clean uniform to wear to the hospital tomorrow?"
My mother would ask around homework time.
The response always required a trip through the den,
Out to the garage and into the chilly washroom.

Sometimes it meant spraying
Or soaking
Or scrubbing
Or sending the white polyester through the wash again
With extra soap and care.

So it is with homework
And housework
And heart-work
and life-work.

We just start over—
Cleansing one shrouded stain at a time,
Trusting the season and the imperfect cycle
However late in the gloaming,
However early in the wearing,
However harmful sin professes to be,
We believe our souls can be

Spotless.

MARA A. COHEN

FAMILY PORTRAIT

The portrait captures the threesome: husband and wife, six-year-old daughter seated between them. Reclining against their bodies, the child smiles broadly and reaches up and slightly back to place a pudgy hand on each parent's face. The couple looks down at her, laughing. Why wouldn't they laugh, blessed as they are with happiness and health, a darling daughter, the means to commission this portrait?

The couple is quite obviously untouched by the sort of domestic dysfunction that drives the darling daughter to slide away from the dinner table and slip down the hall, past the portrait to her tiny playroom to draw and sing, distracting herself from the harsh and desperate tones of her parents' conversation as it builds to a heart-rending crescendo of screams and tears and slamming doors, of parents sleeping in separate beds.

No, it's plain to see the couple in this portrait is the sort that, on a family trip to New York planned around a visit to the wife's ailing grandfather, when she'd forgotten to pack her earrings, the husband had surprised her with a blue box from Tiffany's containing the superior pair of gold earrings she wore to have her portrait taken.

It's inconceivable that the wife of such a doting husband has come to dread the sound of his car pulling into the driveway or that the sound of his heavy footsteps on their hardwood floors would set her on edge. It's inconceivable that the laughing wife regularly lays awake at night, yearning for a gentle word or tender touch. It's inconceivable that the mother with her child's hand upon her cheek often wakes in the morning, despairing of the years stretched out ahead of her, the twisted cycle of serenity and shock continuing without end.

Sometimes on those mornings, the woman forces herself to imagine leaving the sickness and her marriage behind, leaving also the portrait hanging in the hall as a reminder to the husband of what he'd lost.

ALLISON WHITTENBERG*WATCHING JORDAN'S FALL*

. . . God, I hate November.
All the hope I had hoped
against hope for Jordan.

Dad beat Jordan, to
straighten him out, to show
Jordan, to silence him.

My brother lived until the next
season, onto the next winter,
very quiet like a fallen leaf.

KATE PASHBY

LETTER TO MY GRANDMA GLORIA

I wonder if you saw dead bodies
 every time you closed your eyes
 if you ever awoke in a cold sweat
 afraid the Japanese soldiers were
 about to find you

I still wonder how you escaped
 your hometown's massacre
 and if you ever went back
 before you left the Philippines
 for good, never to see your mother
 again

certainly you had more than enough
 reasons to hypnotize yourself
 in the flashing lights of the
 dime slot machines
 to lose entire weekends to mahjong
 to run away from your new home at eighteen
 and smoke yourself to death at sixty-five

I could never blame you
 for cultivating the seed of addiction
 that still ravages this family
 you were always the best at growing plants

AMBER SOHA*BAGGAGE CLAIM*

We're sitting in the car. I can see her, sitting at one of the picnic tables, stubbing out a cigarette in one of those shitty little grills cemented into the ground. She looks sick. She's yellow and gray. Her hair is the same close-cropped cut, but there is none of the color of her youth left—there's no trace of pink in her cheeks or on her lips, and she's stopped bothering to cover it up with bright, gaudy lipstick. She wears those same thick square glasses with the clear frames that make her eyes look ready to bulge out from behind their lenses. She's hunched over, like she's in pain, but she's so hard to believe when she speaks that it's better to observe from afar first.



I had just finished cleaning the house and stewing on all of my irritations when I sat down to finish reading my book. The kids would be home from school soon, and they were always starving. I wanted to enjoy the fictional world, uninterrupted by the question, “What’s for dinner?” or “When’s dinner going to be ready?” I needed to finish before the sonic booms and beats carried through the ceiling from the bedrooms upstairs. Nobody in this house can stand music at a volume any less than full blast. I was imagining using all of my strength to push open a bedroom door, as if the sound waves would push back against me, when I got the call.

“Hello, Melody! There’s something important I need to talk to you about.”

“What could be so important?” I asked.

“I have stage four liver cancer!”

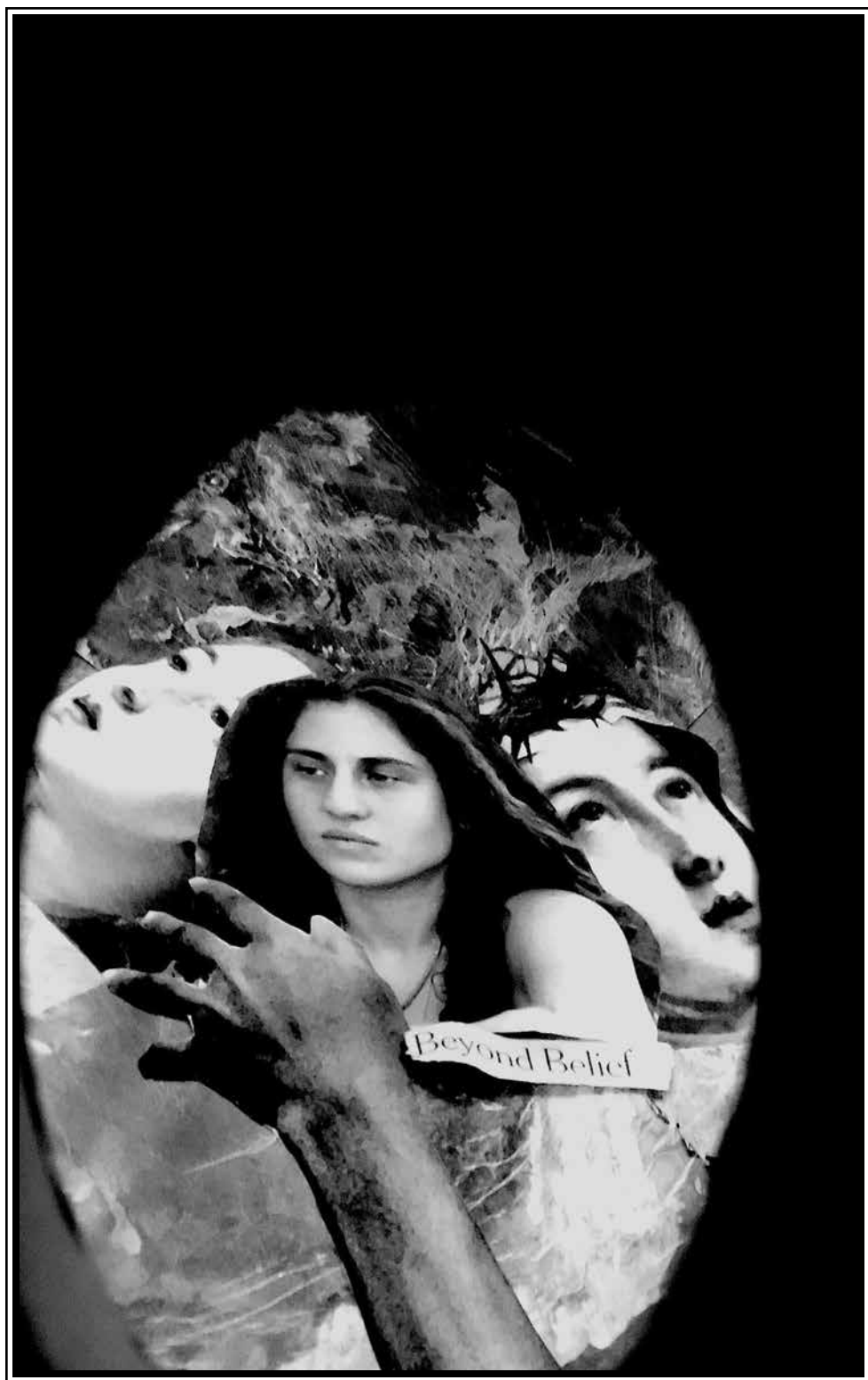
My grandmother, whom I hadn’t seen in twenty-one years, was far too happy with a terminal cancer diagnosis after a lifetime of being an abuser and manipulator. The cirrhosis from years of alcohol abuse was finally wagging a

KAREN LOEB*THIS WAY OR THAT*1. *Overheard on My Walk*

—the roofer calls in to his boss
If the wood doesn't crumble
under the shingles
she should be good to go
for a long time.

2. *7-19-27*

I still remember the
combination to my first two locks—
the code above for my high school
locker, the one below a symbol
of security when I lost my first. How
easy it was to snap the lock closed
and believe that since everything
inside the metal cavern was safe
that I would be too.
7-34-6.



JAN PHILLIPS

THE POWER OF MYTHS

I tell you this because in the course of our lives, every one of us is called to let go of old ideas and make room for the new. It is critical to our evolution, this shedding. What Nature does, we, as Nature, must do as well.

As I matured, I let go of simplistic ideas handed down to me as a child. I took ownership of my beliefs, felt the difference between an inherited thought and original thought.

The letting go starts early, as we recall from our experience with Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, the Tooth Fairy. But we are young then, and so resilient.

Later, it becomes more difficult. The myths and fables have sunk their roots into our bones by the time we reach puberty. Our identity is grafted to false ideas. We pledge allegiance and give our lives, at times, for the ideas of others. Before we know how to define ourselves, we inherit a belief system they claim is worth our lives.

Catholicism was this to me. It was installed into my cells at an early age. It was mystical, sensual, all-pervasive, flooding into my pores like holy water from a sacred well. I was awash in its wave of wonder.

All my life, Church was something wondrous that happened to me. I was its recipient. Then a day came when I was asked to define my religion, to say what it meant to believe, to consider how I moved in this way, and not that way, because of it. I was asked to create a living faith.

Leaves began to fall from the tree of me.

DAVID LEWITZKY

CAVE WITH FAMILIAR FACES

In this defining moment
This cave holds many meanings for me

My uncertain self, an unsolved puzzle
Isolation, suffocation

Here's my mother on the cave wall
Pushing me. Complaining

Here's my batty father hanging upside down
Playing solitaire. Mumbling to himself

Here's Julie and our children
Imploring me and out of reach

There's a gallery of betrayal here
A display of spleen and spite

The hosts of people who've betrayed me
The hosts that I've betrayed

No one will tell me what's going on here
But I'll have my say

Destiny's a dead end, perception's mere presumption
Fuck Plato. Fuck this cave

*HOW ARE WE TO BELIEVE GOD IS WATCHING
OVER WHERE EVERY SOUL SLEEPS?*

An alarming confusion of bees
buzz and nip our wine glasses, testing and tasting,
traversing our tray of cheeses
and spicy meats.

We've chosen a street-side table,
my wife and I, a strategic mistake.
Now the beggar-boy flies up
and hovers over us, an outstretched hand
demanding our attention. No fix

to ignore him or wave him away.
He's quick and resolute in his desperation,
so filthy I cower to his stink.

I'm penning postcards, and . . . while I stand
to dig from my pockets a ransom of pesos . . .
I hand him the card I've freshly addressed.
I don't know why I do this,
just dumb misguided dismay.

Then he's gone. So, too, it seems,
most of the bees. He's smudged
his thumbprint on my postcard. Ruined it.
The wine has soured. My wife complains.

Even the card's outlook has changed.
Behind those manicured hedges along the walkway
beside the convent . . . I suspect
he's hiding and pissing there. Sunshine
has paled on the gardens,
and the cathedral's windows are stained.



DON'T BE BITTER

REDEEMING LIFE

it always seems impossible until it's done

Just look around

ing the Ups and Downs

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