

Issue #2:
Reality

ALL

The

lor lowell

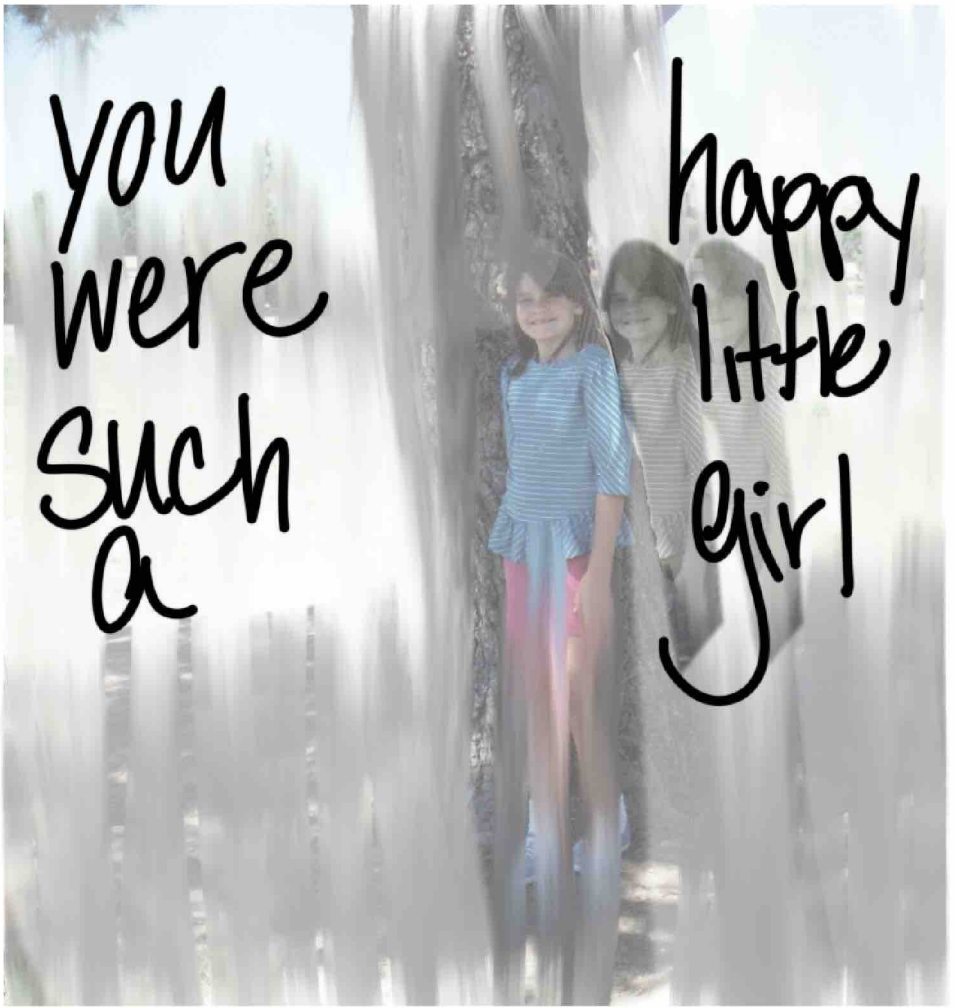
Things

Abuse

Steals

Bitter leaflymna





age nine
my brother was abusing me
my stomach was constantly distended and in pain
i was well-loved for my happiness

Before I conceptualized that I was abused, before I had words to name and describe all that my family did to me as abusive...

I believed I was treated well.

There was no doubt my father was abusive - to my mother and my brothers. But my mother told me my whole life, with a meticulous insistence, that God had spared me - and me alone - from the violence. The cruelty. The trauma.

"Content," my mother called me. Almost always that word. Not happy, not good, but content.

As though not only was I not abused, but I was one of those rare individuals, so untouched by hardship, "happy" would've incorrectly implied there were times I wasn't.

Nothing was wrong with me.

Nothing.

Was wrong.

With me.

It wasn't allowed.

When nothing is allowed to be wrong
with you, when that is the

- irrefutable

- incontrovertable

- undeniable

TRUTH

of your BEING

everything else has to be the lie.

No matter what you think or feel.
or remember.

Denial Logic

These memories don't match how my mother talks about the past. It must be very common to remember things that didn't happen. I can discount anything that contradicts my mother.

I can't conceive of a future for myself. Death sounds like relief. But NOTHING IS WRONG WITH ME, so this must be the sensation of Godly prophecy that my life will be short.

I read every book I could as a child about rape and sexual abuse because I was a gross, disturbed child, and ~~that~~ put these memories into my head.

My earliest childhood memories of being horrified, scared, and fascinated by rape fundamentally broke me in a way like I am traumatized, but I'm not because I am fine.

I am fine.

I am fine.

"Out of all my children, you are the one most likely to go crazy," my mother would tell me. The mere hint of trauma, any trace of sexual abuse in my mannerisms, my fear, my body. Never trauma. Always insanity.

GASLIGHTING

Whenever I had to make a decision
Whatever I chose my mother would
tell me how the other one was right.
She would argue so extensively, so completely
until every option felt like a trap, impossible
to solve.

The options...

WRONG

BAD

STUPID

FAILURE

It's the EXHAUSTION of it.
So thoroughly confused, too
tired to fight or figure
it out, there would be
my mother breaking
through the fog.

"If you want to
know what I
would do..."

And I would agree to
stop the confusion

She treated me
like a break with
reality was so
inevitable, I had
no poetry, no metaphor
to talk about my
mind. EMOTIONAL words,
their non-literalness, she
would take as literal,
any distress could only
be: lack of sleep, PMS, or
INSANITY

When I always had
to plan my words
and self around the
proof I was not
GOING CRAZY, I had
to be ever-careful
in MIRRORING
her perspective,
in hiding my
pain from MYSELF
to ensure that
I could.

It was too risky,
too confusing, too
tiring to

THINK

Abuse is a kind of brainwashing, an insular system of belief where cruelty has its own definition and meaning is created in the mouths of those who hurt you.

Brainwashing tells you that there is only one way to think, ~~one~~ way to see the world -
- and everyone else -
- is trying to brainwash you.

The paranoia it instills in you is comforting
(AS LONG AS YOU BELIEVE IT)

because the trust it builds in its itself (in this case, the trust your abusers instill) is all-encompassing.

(AS LONG AS YOU BELIEVE IT)

It doesn't matter if you hate
what's happening to you

The comfort in believing
it's: normal acceptable

justified deserved common
all that's possible

makes pain endurable

When the cracks start showing
through, it gets worse.

That's when reality
crumbles

Horror stories convey this feeling well. The ones where the dead body isn't observed, or isn't recognized. You interact with it, laughing, treating it casually. The horror isn't there until the moment you realize what it is. You don't scream because it's dead. You scream because death was the thing you happily touched, because backwards through time, you now know death was there - and you didn't see it.

No one tells you how scary, unsure, and baffling it is to acknowledge you were abused. How wrong the word feels applied to them. How you will insist

no

no

no

no

no

even as it starts to make horrifying sense.

But it doesn't feel like you think it should. I wanted, all my experiences to have the clarity of irrefutable truth. The brainwashing is broken, and NOW, for REAL, now you know what's true, and right, factual and real.

Instead,

the world

splits in half.

Its like looking down and finally seeing that all this time you thought you were walking normally, you were actually walking on shattered glass.

Now you see the trail of damage behind you.

This isn't normal.

I didn't deserve it

It was BAD

he raped me

they RAPED me

I want to die

I've been scared of them for so long...

My mother is a LIAR

I've NEVER been happy

This is what pain feels like

oh, my god, all this time

This has been what pain feels like.

To say you were abused in ways that contradict the stories you were told requires the ultimate self-trust. It puts you outside consensus reality.

It is a child's experiences against the word of the ones who have all the power and desire to deny it.

And no matter how old you are, to stand up to the ones that told you

I love you

and call them LIAR means,
for me...

The foundation
is cracked

What if I'm wrong?
What if I'm wrong?
What if I'm wrong?
What if I'm wrong?
What if I'm wrong?
What if I'm wrong?
What if I'm wrong?
What if I'm wrong?
What if I'm wrong?
What if I'm wrong?

However!

Because "my mother thinks I'm losing my grip on reality," still feels like it could fit all the pieces.

How do you determine reality when the ones who could tell you what you remember deny it? How do you ask for proof? How do you get a confirmation of truth, how do you know who to listen to? If everything can be easily solved by "you're delusional" how is the world itself not easily explained by delusion, and empty unreality?

The disbelief so many have for repressed memories always seems grounded in a need to believe you can't LOSE the knowledge of what was DONE to you.

The idea that
SOMETHING
HORRIFYING
could happen to you and you could
NOT
KNOW

not fully, not with assurance, frightens people. And yes.

IT'S TERRIFYING.

But lies fracture your narrative, your sense-making, your memory. It blurs the lines between wake and sleep, between knowledge and imagination.

Until you doubt what just happened.
Until you don't know what's real.

MY BROTHER THAT DIDN'T RAPE ME MOLESTED ME WHEN I WAS... 11? I TOLD MY MOTHER. SHE LAUGHED. NOT LONG AFTER, SHE KICKED HIM OUT FOR CALLING 900 NUMBERS. ONE WAS A CURIOUS TEENAGER. THE OTHER A SEXUAL SW. THE FIRST CHANCE I GOT, I RIFLED THROUGH HIS JOURNAL. I NEEDED TO KNOW IT MEANT SOMETHING. A RECORD. BECAUSE NO ONE SPOKE OF IT. AND WITHOUT A RECORD, IT VANISHED INTO THE UNREALITY OF THE NON-CONCRETE PAST. ONCE THERE, WHAT IS LEFT TO KEEP IT IN EXISTENCE?

whats in you?

My mother always told me I should fear growing up and marrying an abuser. That children who say,

"I WILL NEVER BE OR MARRY
SOMEONE LIKE MY ABUSIVE
PARENT"

inevitably would.
and safety No, the only hope,
was to assume I
to doubt my own ability to
know when I was being
HURT or LOVED

and assume) abuse was
inevitable) PROGRAMMED into
my future by my father.

(You might say, "Tor, that doesn't make sense, I thought your mother told you
you *weren't* traumatized. You weren't *allowed* to be.

Yes, she did, but you cannot craft an obvious lie without it bursting and sinking
with holes

And if you've brainwashed a child, they'll never realize how clearly it's sinking.
The lies of my mother can't fit in this zinc.)

To equip me with confidence, with a sense of my own self-worth, and with how I should be treated in love and in life, would have given me the knowledge and power to contradict her. And stand up to my father and my brothers.

And I wasn't allowed to do that. Even after my mother kicked my father out, after she stood up to him, set her boundaries, I never could.

Instead, my mother taught me that I deserved a lot of the violence inflicted on me, that knowing me MADE someone want to hurt me. That violence was a response to my own cruelty.

Who I WAS would HURT, INFURIATE, and PROVOKE others, and in return, they naturally would WANT to hurt me.

I was the only one in my family whose anger my mother called cruel

"I treated you like any brother treats his sister," my brother who hit me, who tried to suffocate me, who twisted my arm so often I feared it'd break, who raped me. "I treated you like any brother treats his sister." He told me with a laugh, he told me, not long after getting out of prison for molesting another child. He smiled at me.

The cost is trust

Because how do I believe anymore that someone won't hurt me, how do I believe that I would know if they were, and how would I convince myself I didn't deserve it?

Love was: being groped, raped, put down, my sense of reality questioned and undermined,

ALL I DO AND
THINK AND
FEEL AND
AM

swallowed up by someone else.

Only once I got older, did I hear the words UNDERNEATH

I love you
I love you
I hate you
I hate you

Now that I'm in a relationship with someone, I look down all the time now, checking for shattered glass. I check my mind, my love, my freedom, for pain and blood, like I check my breathing when I get convinced I'm unhealthy.

because if I can walk on shattered glass and not know it, can't I do it again?

Isn't that the question
When we fear the uncertainty of asymptomatic illness?

How do I know?
How would I know?

can I prove to myself
I'll always know
what pain feels like?

Even now, so far away from them, its
like a song, so burned into my head,
I experience the underneath, my mind
adding the lyrics to the instrumentation-

IT'S  **I**
ALL **HEAR**

I'll get convinced I'm unsafe, and then I
Feel it, my partner's rage, her disgust, her
annoyance.

And I can't ask for reassurance
because it feels like there's no tell - if
I believe I'm safe and free... how will
I tell the difference from when I believed
it before?

And if I asked my partner if she loves me,
and she replies, "Who could?" it would
feel as casual and out of the blue as
as any cruel remark my mother gave me
while making dinner, or watching tv.
And I fear its truth.

Sometimes, I don't even know if it's MORAL to NOT want being abused. I've spent months so afraid that it HAD to be real (how could it not?) my brain cracking on the song and loop

You're being hurt

no I'm not

I don't know she hates you, run, run, run

I don't know running would ruin everything

she hates you, you hate this, you're trapped

I don't know NO, STOP, STOP, STOP thinking this

I don't know not safe, not safe, not safe,

I don't know STOP. NO MORE OF THESE THOUGHTS

oh isn't that how it was before, doesn't abuse tell you to not think

I don't know it's because you're being hurt, run, run, run away

I don't know I want it, yes, peace and freedom

I don't know if you want to, but you don't it's because you're trapped

I don't know no, I just need a second of clarity

I don't know LET ME THINK

I don't know thinking's dangerous because you're unsafe, run,

I don't know the second I do, I'll know how crazy this is

I don't know A second of relief & I'll know I didn't want it

I don't know Listen to your gut, Tor, what's your gut telling you?

I don't know RUN. RUN. RUN. I'M SO SCARED

I don't know Everyone says to listen to your gut. Trust it. Believe it.

I don't know You wouldn't feel this way for nothing.

I don't know I think if I could think I'd know it's irrational.

Because you're irrational? Because you always feel hurt when you're not?

I don't know Because you never should trust your gut?

I don't know STOP.

Thinking you were abused by your family was your gut, Tor. Were you ever abused?

I don't know I WAS, I WAS, I KNOW I WAS.

I don't know You KNOW it? Why? Your gut says so? Your feelings say so? Your irrational mind?

I don't know STOP.

If you can't trust the past, then you can't trust now. Or else. You'd. RUN.

I don't know Quiet. Quiet

I don't know

I don't know

I don't know

I don't know

I don't know

...Which

one

of

us?

I don't know

I don't know

I don't know

I don't know

I don't know

I don't know

I don't know

I don't know

My Family THINKS THEY'RE GOOD

I know what it looks like for someone to think they are good, to believe in the rightness of themselves in the midst of being destructive.

Once you witness the EASE with which someone can build a morality that JUSTIFIES cruelty you now know that it is possible to NEVER see the harm you inflict.

How do I know I'm not the same?

I was the only one in my family whose anger my mother called cruel

When your boundaries

are cruel

Doing anything they don't like
is cruel

Who do you trust?

the world? Which one?
yourself? Which one?

How do you not become them,
when you were taught they were
innocent and you were guilty?

How much, how ENDLESSLY, my mother spun, CRAFTED this morality for me.

My mother knew that my brother was the MONSTER of our neighborhood, and any one who would find out. So she built me a world in which they didn't understand

"It's a shame no one will ever trust your brother around kids again.

IN WHICH PREYING ON CHILDREN WASN'T A BIG DEAL AND THE REAL TRAGEDY WAS THE STIGMA AGAINST PREDATORS

He's so good with kids."

If rape and assault are the acts, the moment in time in which it was happening, and if sexual abuse is the overarching narrative, the words and threats, the insults and grooming, then yes, my father, my brother, they sexually abused me...

...but so did my mother, too.

Crassness intended, all of them poured themselves into me, object, empty THING for them to fill with themselves

I was the mirror my mother talked at, the doll she required no response from, the toy to make her feel validated knowing she had the TRUTH no one else could see.

My mother shows the predators gaze upon me, so that I would only be allowed to think of what was good and right through his eyes.

COMMON SENSE

NEARLY EVERYONE BELIEVES THEY ARE ONE OF THE FEW WHO HAS IT
Survivor or not, nearly everyone has a common sense reason for what child abuse is. You have resolved "why do bad things happen?" in whatever way helps you either understand what happened to you or someone you know, or satisfies your moral, religious, or logical reasoning.

Abusers live in our consciousness between what we find monstrous and what we fear we are.

If an act is outside what someone can see + themselves doing of course it's abusive.

But if it seems conceivable, sympathetic, if someone can put themselves in those shoes, or if they or their loved ones have been in those shoes, well...

One of you tells me my mother was a victim herself who didn't know better.

ONE OF YOU SAYS
ITS NOT FAIR
MY BROTHERS
ARE DEFINED
BY THEIR "MISTAKES"

one of you tells me
my father was
CRAZY, too
OUT OF HIS MIND
to be held
responsible

I DONT KNOW HOW TO SHUT ANY OF YOU OUT

I once saw a discussion that argued it was common sense that a husband hitting his wife was different than hitting a child. Because a husband and wife are equals. As though that was always common sense, as though spousal abuse had never been condoned through the acceptability of assuming a husband had authority to do anything to his wife.

That facts can look so different to everyone only makes this worse. I know how to see my life through everyone's eyes but my own. You tell a story and it all sounds right.

The reason it hurts is because I wasn't supposed to reject the brainwashing.

I was supposed to have a core of God, to trust in REALITY from the external navigation of the faith I was raised in.

Before I was old enough to reason my head was broken into

and I don't know
how to believe

in myself,

in the strength

of my perspective

or the truth of what

happend to me.

Stories, ideas, the world shifts
endlessly from person to person

And there are
enough
people who agree
with my mother
just enough
to make me
feel to weak
to fight off
my mother's
spun stories

Every voice stronger
than my own

This used to be easier before all the Evangelical defenses of Roy Moore. I used to be able to believe my mother was an anomaly, an outlier everyone would be able to see.

What would it mean to think clearly?

There are those that tell survivors that our queerness is trauma we need to destroy

Do I trust myself? How do I know I have the clarity to do so?

There are those who tell survivors our way of thinking is broken

Do I do what makes me happy?

My mother laughed. My brother smiled at me.

How do I trust that I could let go of the self-doubt and not harm the world?

I was the only one in my family my mother called cruel.

Quiet.

Quiet.

Stop this.

Of course I'm crazy, mother.
you made me that way

When fellow survivors try to articulate the feeling of being empty, of worrying that others will look at us and find there is nothing there, is this what we mean? Our bodies and minds stolen from us, our sense of morality, desire, and beliefs turned into sand, the constant clamor of everyone else's opinions stealing any sense that there is one we have.

And a tenuous world we keep being certain
is covered
in broken glass

Not everything a *abuse* takes is wrong
There are illusions you lose, if you can
find the line between them.

But where is reality? *Sanity?*

Confident clarity? were those
also lies?

How is it that anyone
gets to believe themselves? TO HOLD TIGHT TO
THEIR SENSE OF
THE WORLD?

① Did abuse
steal this? Who could know it?
Who could know it?
Who could know it?
Who could know it? or teach me
a truth I can't
unbelieve?

Thanks for reading!

I write about:

abuse, child sexual abuse,
complicit & toxic Christianity
harm in the name of
silence & community
the anti-apocalypse
the rejection of the end times

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