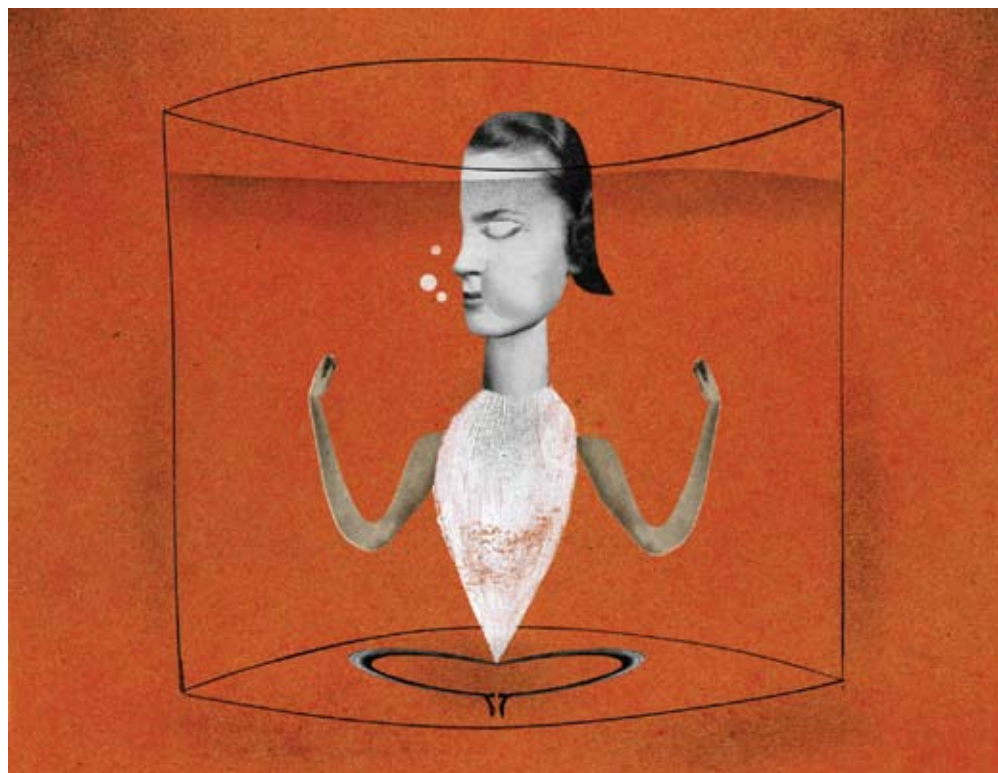


# When It Comes to Patience, First Learn the Math



EVERYONE IN THIS “I NEED IT YESTERDAY” TOWN is waiting for something: the overnights, the weekend read, the end of the day when they can finally take the edge off all the waiting with a drink. In this business, waiting’s the thing. Which is why the image of the Sardi’s booth, with a post-show cast huddled in anticipation of the early edition, is one of the stickiest images in show business iconography. And it’s why waiting tables is the quintessential Hollywood day job.

“Can I help you?” the waiter asks.

“Yes,” says the diner. “Hmm. Give me a couple more minutes, will you?”

And what does the waiter say? Nothing. He just waits. Because if you do not learn how to wait when you are a waiter, you do not get your tip.

I never did wait tables, but I learned my waiting lesson at MTV, a network devoted to an aesthetic of impatience. We’d made a pilot of my talk show for them. A pet project. A dream project. And it was looking good. The show was

announced in the trades; there was buzz. But we were waiting for an official yes. Then the network asked if we’d wait beyond our contractual “end-of-wait” date.

Unfortunately, I had not yet learned the primary axiom of Hollywood Math: The absence of yes over time equals no. So I kept waiting. And not doing anything else unless you count burning candles and chanting. The night we finally got the call that we were not “getting picked up”—a cruel phrase meaning “put down”—all we could do was play “Let It Bleed” over and over. At least that was one thing I could control. And then I had one of those you’re-going-to-have-to-change moments. I knew that if I was going to continue in this business, I was going to have to get good at waiting.

But what would it take? I’m a very in-the-moment girl, and waiting is not being in the moment. Waiting is future focused. It has an element of hope. And if you’ve lived in Hollywood for more than 10 minutes, you know that hope will kill you.

So I did what I always do when I don’t know what to do. I upped my yoga practice. And one day, I noticed I was waiting and yet not waiting. I was waiting with grace. When waiting is graceful, it’s called patience. And patience means waiting without waiting. Waiting while breathing. Waiting while moving on to the next project, celebrating your anniversary, devoting yourself to world peace, napping, tracking the moon, trying not to keep other people waiting any longer than necessary. In essence, living.

Waiting without waiting means that you are prepared for something good to happen, but that you proceed as if the possibility of the thing you are waiting for does not even exist.

Recently my people told me that I would definitely receive a particular offer. A few weeks went by. No offer ensued. Applying the absence-of-yes-over-time formula, I figured the deal was dead. I called my people to confirm my suspicions. They checked and said the offer was, in fact, still in the works and now had a number attached. A nice number.

A few more weeks went by. And by a few more weeks I mean a month. No offer. So I continue to wait for the offer without waiting for the offer. Because sometimes the absence of no over time equals yes.

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*Beth Lapidés’ first book, “Did I Wake You? Haikus for Modern Living,” was recently published by Soft Skull Press.*