

The following program contains explicit language and an overwhelming pallor of ennui. Please protect your children from self-awareness as long as you can. May we all be innocent again someday.

INT. ANOTHER WORLD

As mysterious music plays:

SERLING

You're not afraid of spiders.  
You're not afraid of snakes,  
zombies, ghosts, heights, germs, or  
fear itself. You don't fear death.  
Mortality is a philosophical  
exercise for you, a game of  
solitaire to kill some time. You  
fear no monsters, nor violence.  
You're afraid of time. You're  
afraid of your mother. You're  
afraid of being seen, and of not  
being seen. Not tales of the crypt,  
but tales of the cryptic. These are  
your horrors: You. These are: Tales  
of Insecurity.

Music ends.

LIA

(Meekly) Oh, hello.

Sorry, let me try that with a  
little more pinache. Oh. Hello.  
You're about to enter a world where  
your greatest fears come alive. It  
is a world not unlike the one you  
inhabit, did we already do this  
part? Oh, what a mess. It's too bad  
I can't tolerate the sound of my  
own voice, otherwise I could do  
some editing.

LIA

Hi. Welcome to Tales of Insecurity,  
a podcast of post-modern  
existential horror. Each episode,  
we will explore a horrifying truth  
from a variety of angles. We won't  
solve anything. I say we. It's just  
me here. Who am I? Who are you?

LIA

Sorry if that sounded combative. My

name is LiA Lindsaychen. I'm here to guide you into the realm of the insecure, where your true fears are revealed, etc. All those things from earlier. Oooh. Think of me as your femme, non-committal Vincent Price, or maybe a trans Ira Glass, several decades younger but less with it. Less in the know. Put a label on it. Spread it on some toast. This week's episode: A Tingly Numbness.

Music shift.

LIA

It's often a side effect of overexposure. You lose feeling in your extremities. As though you experienced too much too quickly, your overwhelmed little fingers retire in their trauma, too afraid to feel again. They met their quota of sensation, candles that burned the brightest, shooting stars who gathered all the rosebuds while they might've. Instead of dealing with chronic pain, sometimes the body shuts itself down, if we should be so lucky.

What are some of your repressed memories? That's an unfair question. Let's try the opposite, how much do you remember from the first few years of your life? Now, think of all the other things. That's your numbness, everything you can't remember. Every hesitation comes from here, every worry, everything you choose to forget every day. These moments you'll never retrieve are the foundation of your personality. You are defined by your absence.

It's not medically sound, but I always imagined hearts and minds working like other machinery, with a specific number of motions they can perform before their parts wear out. Every thought you have now is one you'll lose later, and anything that makes your heart beat faster

literally drains your life away, so as you fight your body and coerce it into exercise, you're also fast-forwarding your own demise. Your body is resisting not because it wants you to be fat or out of shape, but because you're trying to kill it. It's acting in self-defense. Surely if exercise were good for your body, you'd enjoy it, like vegetables, or hugs, maybe. So you go through a whole ordeal of willful diligence, going against every instinct you have, no part of it pleasant. You cover yourself in sweat as your folds stretch and bend against what could have been a natural form, all so you can die a little faster. And everything you understand is filed away. You don't need to think about it anymore. Just make a note of the conclusion, for internet arguments.

This isn't how it works. None of this is how it works. It's just something I think about when I want to worry. But there's no limit on that. I can worry anytime I want.

All this is tangential though. We were talking about today's topic, which isn't frostbite or whatever I was talking about hearts and minds and exercise. I forget why I even brought that up. What we are talking about is what happens when you've felt so much that you can't feel anything anymore.

KATHRYN

That's not how it works.

LIA

Not technically. Not neurologically, but that's how it feels. When you're sensitive, you feel things so strongly that your senses have to deafen purely as a defense mechanism, the way your fingers grow calloused as they endure the routine stress of playing a guitar.

KATHRYN

No. I don't think so.

LIA

There aren't real callouses on your brain, but that's how it seems, metaphorically, symbolically.

KATHRYN

No. Absolutely not.

LIA

How would you describe it?

KATHRYN

That's not what I'm here for. This is your podcast.

LIA

Oh, right. The podcast. Hi, everyone. This is Kathryn. She's the protagonist in one of our stories tonight. Her whole thing is she pretends that she knows more than other people do.

KATHRYN

That's not it at all. I'm sure it has a lot more nuance.

LIA

She makes conversation by forcing you to speak incredibly precisely.

KATHRYN

You don't have to be smug about it.

LIA

She wins conversations. That's my summary. Maybe isn't her whole personality. I'm sure there's something else that she's about, but for whatever reason, she's decided to define herself in this contrarian way, even though no one wants to be around her.

KATHRYN

I have more friends than you. So many more.

LIA

I don't--

KATHRYN

Your problem is you think you understand people but you don't even understand yourself. You're always analyzing anyone around you, but you're so out of touch you can't even admit your own depression. You treat every one of your whims as a universal truth.

LIA

I'm not depressed.

KATHRYN

(Scoffing) Of course not, dear. You're as happy as you deserve to be.

LIA

I really think that anxiety is more my wheelhouse.

KATHRYN

This whole enterprise is idiotic.

LIA

We'll talk to Kathryn a little more later. For now, enjoy our first Tale of Insecurity.

Music swells.

INT. HOME

Angel's husband is at home, cheating on his wife.

MISTRESS

Wow, that was amazing.

HUSBAND

Oh, you're just saying that.

MISTRESS

No, really, that was much better than usual. I have to applaud your tonguework in particular.

HUSBAND

Thank you, I've been practicing.

MISTRESS

Anything I should know about?

HUSBAND

Just my wife.

MISTRESS

Oh, how is she?

HUSBAND

Good. She's good I think.

ANGEL

Hi, honey, I'm home!

(Cheers and Applause)

HUSBAND

Oh, I guesss you can ask her yourself. You might want to get dressed, though.

ANGEL

Honey, are you home? Your car's in the driveway. I bought takeout!

(Mild laughter)

HUSBAND

Be right out, dear!

ANGEL

Alright! Hurry up, I saved you the fortune cookie!

LEAH

Submitted for your approval: This is Angel, short for Angela, another put-upon housewife in an another unhappy marriage. Her life is exactly what she expected it to be having grown up with the dysfunctional TV families of the early nineties.

HUSBAND

I'll be out in a minute!

ANGEL

Okay, okay! We'll just be here getting old and moldy whenever you're ready.

(Mild laughter)

LEAH

Angel has a form of self-awareness unique to modernity, always concerned that hidden cameras might be anywhere. Not really, she knows they're not, but maybe someone's watching, someone like a god who knows how things are going to turn out, but watches anyway.

ANGEL

This is really delicious Lo Mein. I just wish someone were here to share it with me.

HUSBAND

What?

ANGEL

Nothing!

(Mild laughter)

LEAH

From everything she's ever seen, she's learned that things always work out in the end, and the status quo is always maintained. She's about to learn that things work differently in her own Tale of Insecurity.

ANGEL

With me, your very own, Angel of Mercy!

(Cheers and Applause)

MISTRESS

Who's she talking to?

HUSBAND

No idea. She's always doing that. Even when we make love, she's always making little snarky comments.

MISTRESS

Like what?

HUSBAND

Just like, little jokes. Little uncomfortable jokes.

MISTRESS

Any examples? Any at all?

HUSBAND

I'm not that clever. I don't really pay attention.

MISTRESS

Oh.

HUSBAND

I don't know. She's weird, I can't help that.

ANGEL

I'm still waiting!

(Crowd laughter)

HUSBAND

See?

MISTRESS

She seems charming.

HUSBAND

Yeah, I know. I'm a monster.

MISTRESS

I'm going to go talk to her.

HUSBAND

Yeah, okay. Wait! Karen.

MISTRESS

What?

HUSBAND

Let me talk to her first.

MISTRESS

Are you going to tell her about me?

HUSBAND

I'll take care of it.

MISTRESS

But are you going to tell her?

HUSBAND

Yes. Just let me handle everything.

ANGEL

I opened one of the cookies. "Buy

Lucky Dragon fortune cookies." Not really a fortune, but it is racist.

(Chuckle)

HUSBAND

Thank you, sweetie. How was your day?

ANGEL

Alright.

(Awkward laugh)

HUSBAND

Did anything happen? Anything good? Anything bad?

ANGEL

It was the best of days, it was the worst of days. It was the day of ignorance, it was the day of knowledge. It was the one thing, and it was the other thing.

(Cough)

HUSBAND

Yeah?

ANGEL

It was okay. I lost my job. Well, I quit. But it's okay, because I didn't like my job! I'm free.

(Applause)

HUSBAND

Oh no. Honey. What are you going to do?

ANGEL

Well I tell you what I'm not going to do. I'm not going to be able to make my minimum credit card payments this month. Not by a long shot. Oh well, them's the breaks!

(Laughter and applause)

HUSBAND

I can help out a little. We'll get through this.

ANGEL

Great. That's really nice, honey. I was thinking about filing for bankruptcy. Have some more Lo mein. It represents my very last twenty dollars.

(Laughter)

HUSBAND

That seems a little expensive.

ANGEL

I'm a good tipper.

(Applause)

HUSBAND

Don't file for bankruptcy.

ANGEL

I mean, since I don't really own anything, I don't have much to lose. The car's in your name. The house is too. Maybe I can start over. I'm actually really looking forward to starting over. Middle school's going to be tough, but I'm going to really relish the baby lifestyle this time.

(Laughter)

HUSBAND

Let's look for other jobs first. How much do you owe?

ANGEL

Literally more than I've made in the last five year. I wouldn't have been able to make the payments even with my full paycheck. The problem is I've never had a job that pays a living wage, so for all my personal needs, I've had to steal from the future. I guess I'm at the end of my life.

(Booing)

HUSBAND

This is really serious, honey.

ANGEL

Well I'm just glad I have you,  
otherwise I don't know what I'd do.

(Aw)

HUSBAND

That's great, dear. That's really  
nice. Will you excuse me a minute?

ANGEL

Of course, I've got nowhere to go.

(Laughter, booing, and emergency sounds)

MISTRESS

Well, what did she say?

HUSBAND

I wasn't able to tell her. Just go  
out the window again.

MISTRESS

I thought you said you were going  
to handle it.

HUSBAND

It's just not the right time.

MISTRESS

It's never going to be the right  
time.

HUSBAND

But it's really not now.

MISTRESS

I'm going to go talk to her.

HUSBAND

Karen, I'm telling you, she's not  
ready.

MISTRESS

Angel, hi, it's a pleasure to meet  
you. I'm sorry it had to be in  
these circumstances.

HUSBAND

Honey, it's not what it looks like.

ANGEL

Oh, hello. You must be Karen. It's  
really nice to put a face to my

husband's emails. You're prettier than I expected you to be.

(Crickets continue throughout)

HUSBAND

How long have you known?

ANGEL

Oh I don't know, a year or two.

MISTRESS

But we've only been together a few months.

ANGEL

Maybe it just feels like years.

HUSBAND

Darling, I'm really sorry. I just, it always seems like you don't enjoy our time together.

ANGEL

Please. Eat some takeout. Let's watch something. Would you like the egg roll?

MISTRESS

No thank you.

HUSBAND

I'm sorry, Angel.

ANGEL

Don't worry, my love. We're going to be fine.

HUSBAND

Well, not really. Karen and I are in love.

ANGEL

Uh huh.

HUSBAND

And you and I are not.

ANGEL

Right.

HUSBAND

So I'm leaving you and marrying her.

ANGEL

Got it. Can we go back to when you thought it was a secret?

MISTRESS

For what it's worth, I really think you're pretty cool.

ANGEL

Thank you, that's worth a lot.

HUSBAND

I'm really sorry to spring this on you now. I didn't want to.

ANGEL

Is it because I called your dick a tootsie roll? Is it because I started watching Netflix while you were going down on me? I'm sorry, I just wanted to be entertained. I can take things seriously. Just give me a chance.

HUSBAND

The house is in my name. I'm so sorry.

ANGEL

I have nowhere to go.

(Laughter)

HUSBAND

What about your parents?

ANGEL

I really wish I hadn't told off my coworkers so thoroughly.

(Laughter)

MISTRESS

I'm so glad to finally meet you. Terry says such nice things about you.

ANGEL

How nice of him.

HUSBAND

I think Angel needs a little space.

ANGEL

Angel needs a whole galaxy.

(Laughter)

HUSBAND

It's a fresh start, for all of us.  
It's going to be fine.

ANGEL

Thank you. Yes. I feel good about  
the future.

(Louder laughter)

MISTRESS

Let's go get something to eat. I'm  
starving.

ANGEL

Would you like some lo mein?

HUSBAND

Goodbye, Angel.

ANGEL

Alright. Thanks for coming. I'll  
call you!

ANGEL

(Through various crowd sound  
effects) It's all fine. Thanks for  
coming! It doesn't matter, none of  
it matters. I don't really need  
material possessions. I always  
wanted to be a nun, I just wasn't  
religious. You have to believe in  
the same things other people  
believe in to really devote  
yourself that way. You can't just  
believe in yourself. I'm going to  
be fine. I don't know why the scene  
is still going on now, I really  
don't. The story's over. I lost. I  
guess I need to have a line that  
ties everything together. I'll come  
up with it. I will. I'm inventive.  
I'll come up with something. Thank  
you very much. Thank you. You're  
beautiful. Was the Chinese food  
worth bringing up? So mundane, why  
would that be the runner? Thank  
you. I had to quit. I didn't have a  
choice. Hi, honey, I'm home! Hi

house. Bye house. Drive safe  
everyone. Drive like your life  
depended on it. Drive like you have  
something to live for.

(Applause, fades out)

ANGEL

No, still here. Right! The other  
fortune cookie. That must be the  
thing. Okay. One second. Oh. Oh.

ANGEL

It was empty. That's more a fortune  
than the other one.

(Laughter)

ANGEL

Oh well, I guess them's the breaks!

(Cheers and applause and theme music)

Once upon a time, there was a beautiful princess who lived in a kingdom less  
beautiful than herself, but she lived there all the same.

Oh, think nothing of it.

Everyone was very impressed with her beauty. All across her kingdom's  
brochures, her visage was lauded as the most exquisite in all the land. Those who  
valued beauty valued her,

How are you today, princess? It's a pleasure to see you.

and those who resented beauty considered her a pariah, draining their culture  
of substance.

How are you today, princess? It's a pleasure to see you.

Because of her power and position, and the absolute despotism of her kingdom's government, she had no means to understand who wished her well and who wished her demise. It was in everyone's interests to keep her happy, and over time, she learned how to appear happy, just to put her subjects at ease. Her graciousness was part of her beauty.

Oh, you're so nice. Please, I can take no credit for my own face. I deserve no fanfare. You take care now. Have a great day. Okay, great. Thank you. Okay, bye! Thank you. Thank you. Okay. Bye! Okay.

The princess was not happy. She was not sad. She was not angry or morose. Her face permanently held a smile, but it had no relationship with anything beneath it. Shortly after her 19th birthday, her parents, the king and queen, were murdered by the family's most trusted advisor, and still she smiled. Even as the army turned against her and locked her in irons, her face did not alter. Even as they marched her over jagged mountains into the deepest caverns, she smiled, and she shrugged.

Forgive me, princess. You have done no wrong, but your family has been a blight on our people. For generations, they have lined their pockets by sacrificing the general welfare of the kingdom. As the beneficiary of their treachery, we have no choice but to banish you to this dragon's cavern, where you will live as a slave to the beast upon whose mercy we are dependent.

Okay, I understand that you must do what you must do. Far be it from me to complain.

She said. After fastening her ankles to the ground with bolts of steel, the guards of the new regime hurried back into the light, carrying their torches with them. As the princess adjusted to the darkness, she soon forgot how much better she used to see, before she lived in this cavern. She forgot her late family and her surname, though she remembered it was also the name of the kingdom. Probably not anymore. She forgot her own beauty, or what beauty meant. The trappings of royalty seemed a distant dream, and as she dissolved in a pile on the cavern floor, she assured herself,

This is all there is. This is my life now. This has always been my life.

Though her bed was made of dirt and stone, it seemed soft enough in her exhaustion. She lied on the floor and watched water droplets form on the tips of spikes along the ceiling. Occasionally a splash would bound across her face, but she did not flinch. In a short while, she had acclimated to the feeling, and began to anticipate the moisture's rhythm. She had blended in with society, now she would blend with dirt and stone and water and chains.

She awoke to a sensation of steam. The dragon, made of shadow, stood over her, breathing warmth. It did not speak, nor did it snarl. The princess made no gesture of salutation or submission. They shared a silence and became aware of each other. In time, they each returned to sleep, and shared dreams.

I am not afraid of you, dragon.

She said, in a field of lilies.

I was highborn and never minded. My parents were murdered before my very eyes and I am unaffected. I ask no favors of anyone, be they man nor beast nor vermin.

The dragon rolled over in its sleep, destroying a mountain.

My birthdays passed without fanfare. I eschewed celebration, abstained from any pleasure I could imagine. I dulled my aesthetic senses so that I could remain absolutely impartial, as befitting a just ruler. I will never use my training. My birthright was taken from me by brigands, and I remain impartial. I feel no need for authority, as befitting a just ruler.

The dragon yawned, causing hurricanes and tsunamis that swept across the earth several times before dissipating.

I never took a lover, never knew the touch of an embrace. I was and shall remain an outsider, for it is in separation that I gain my power.

The dragon opened its eyes, casting forests of lightning in every sky. It spoke.

I'm thirsty.

And the princess fetched the dragon a bucket of water. Her chains had just enough slack to reach a spring, if she stretched her arms to their limit. She laid the vessel as far inward as she could. It shook with the dragon's footsteps, vibrated as the dragon leaned closer, the heat of its breath challenging the nature

of liquid. The water trembled into vapor, which the dragon inhaled. The princess waited for some sign from the dragon, that it was satisfied, that it wanted more, but its form remained in darkness. It had no expression to interpret.

The dragon rested. A family on the outskirts of the capital let their house burn down and did nothing but watch. Unaccountably.

The princess felt no needs of her own. Occasionally she would remember that periodic meals served a certain role in the structure of a life, but she lacked actual hunger. At times, bowls of soup would appear beside her, and she took them with grace and dignity.

Thank you so much. This is precisely what I would have made for myself, but I'm terrible in the kitchen. You'll have to give me the recipe. You will won't you? I want to be like you.

She was performing this ritual for someone, though she could not articulate whom. It was not for herself or her tyrannical parents or her rebellious kingdom. The dragon surely knew nothing of this etiquette, for the dragon's rituals made no pretensions.

I want to eat your feet.

The princess considered this request, and nodded in acquiescence. She felt a shadow come over her, and thousands of tiny nibbles like ants. She could not discern the form of the dragon's mouth or its digestion, but she felt a ticklish warmth on her feet as they eroded. The dirt on which she sat felt closer.

I'm sorry I haven't washed them in a while. Really, I should be ashamed, I've just had other things going on. If they're inadequate, let me know, and I'll see if there's something else I can get for you.

No your feet are perfect.

The princess wiggled her toes in the belly of the beast and felt the earth move. For a moment, she worried that she had caused a disaster somewhere, but she recounted philosophical questions of intentions and remembered she had none. As the dragon sucked on her feet, she felt some pleasure that she felt so little.

Do you like this? Is this working for you?

The dragon did not answer. The princess began to worry that she was being a bad feminist because of her reluctance to assert her bodily autonomy against the sake of another's desire, but reconciled herself to the fact that the dragon generally took female or neutral pronouns, and thus her consent had a greater element of empowerment to it.

As the dragon presented its feet to the princess, shadowy talons of absence, she understood that she was supposed to consume the dragon in return.

So, I understand that there's an implicit sensuality to stories about captive princesses and mysterious dragons, and I'll all for it, but I'm not sure how I fit into that narrative.

The dragon wiggled its feet impatiently.

We all have our own things. That's great. But I'm not getting anything out of this. I'm not going to get anything out of it, and maybe I'm supposed to awaken to something that I can harness to take back my throne, but I don't really want that either.

The princess grabbed onto the talons, suddenly aware that the dragon might not understand her, that it had been speaking in thought, not word. She tried to speak in gesture, and rubbed the feet in gentle rejection.

I don't want anything.

She said.

I don't feel a need to change. I don't need to grow. I am satisfied, and I don't need that to be any different. You're trying to steer me to an awakening, which is very nice of you I'm sure, but I'm already awake. I appreciate the effort, I really do, but I'm beyond the base desires that govern animal and man. Please, don't force me into a pointless and regressive third act.

The dragon wiggled its feet impatiently. As she took them in her mouth and started to chew, the cavern around her became bright. She could see the color of the dirt. It was brown. Most of the rock was grayish brown. The dragon, now made of light, wiggled its talons, and the princess rubbed her tongue across them, like she was supposed to.

She could see through the brown walls. She could see over the horizons to

where villages used to stand, and a bustling city of commerce and communications. She saw cinders, bodies piled on bodies, bricks and mortar flattened into the earth.

Dragon, release me, I must attend to my people. There has been a great calamity.

The cavern, once again dark, obscured the fact that she was freed from her chains. She could not walk on her nubs, but they slid out smoothly. As hurriedly as she could, she crawled down the mountain that had seemed so brief in her journey upward. She had not noticed that they had walked over brambles and thistles and briars and endless tiny rocks, but this close to the ground, they were clear.

By the time she made it back to the capital, she wore the skin of her hands and knees like loose fitting clothing. She was mostly open sores, ribbons of flesh that parted like drapes with every motion. The city itself was not in much better condition. It had been flooded, burned, struck by lightning, and was currently fogged with a black smoke whose source was unclear. It seemed empty, except the princess, who crawled through the rubble, all the way to the steps of the castle, which was somehow intact.

A few remaining townspeople were inside. She was unsure what sort of reception she would receive, having been exiled in disgrace, but she was quickly greeted as she always had been.

How are you today, princess? It's a pleasure to see you.

And no one helped her climb back onto her throne. But no one stopped her either.

You're looking well. Did you do something with your hair?

Thank you, no, I just woke up like this. You're too kind. I can't do a thing with it.

INT. BAR

THEME SONG

Who's that girl who you can't  
ignore?  
You let her cut you down and then  
you ask for more.  
Letting her address you is a  
thankless chore,  
but still you listen like she is  
what listening's for.  
She has no real interests but  
they're better than yours,  
she doesn't see your face, she only  
sees your cold sores,  
she's the voice of disapproval that  
you hear inside your head,  
and she'll keep on sniping at you  
until the day that you dead.  
Everything looks worse  
from where she's sitting.  
She's Katy the Critic.

KATHRYN

Wow. Is that really your intro?  
Someone doesn't have enough  
anxiety.

CHARLES

Sorry, I might add something to it.  
It's just a rough draft.

NATHAN

(In background) Another round?

JOCELYN

(In background) No, check please.

KATHRYN

You've got some good parts in there, don't get me wrong. It's just lacking something. Some refinement.

CHARLES

No, you're right. I'll think about it. It could use some tightening up.

KATHRYN

Yeah, tighten it up. Why don't you try tightening it. It's not tight enough. Tight tight tight. Ahem. You're welcome.

CHARLES

Right. Thank you.

KATHRYN

Don't mention it. I'm here to help.

CHARLES

Uh-huh.

KATHRYN

Anyone else need some advice? It can be about speeches you have to make, relationships, medical opinions. Anything at all? Hello?

JOCELYN

Yes, hi. I have some questions about fashion?

KATHRYN

I should say you do. You have questions about makeup, too, I see. Do you have questions about facial expressions? Because I don't think I can fix those for you.

JOCELYN

No, you're right. I don't even know why I bother leaving the house, I obviously don't know what I'm doing.

KATHRYN

You might start by matching colors.

My apologies if you're colorblind, or just regular blind. But that is my advice. You're welcome.

JOCELYN

Thank you.

KATHRYN

Who's next?

STEVE

Hi. I think my girlfriend is seeing someone else.

KATHRYN

Nice. I'm great at these: Yes, she is. Sorry.

STEVE

Oh. Oh well.

KATHRYN

You're welcome. Thanks.

STEVE

Thank you.

KATHRYN

No problem. That's what I'm here for.

NATHAN

Wait, I'm sorry. Sorry to interrupt. Why are you here?

KATHRYN

That's terribly forward of you. If you must know, I'm meeting someone.

NATHAN

Oh, I'm sorry. I just, it seemed like people respected your opinion, I just was curious if there was a reason.

KATHRYN

No, I think I just project a certain confidence. I'm a consultant.

NATHAN

Interesting. Is that what consultants do? Give people advice about things?

KATHRYN

Yes. People trust my opinions. Clients of mine have seen their social media profile expand as much as 1000% within three months.

NATHAN

Oh you're one of those. My apologies! I was thinking you were just some know-it-all. Maybe you're exactly what I'm looking for.

KATHRYN

Absolutely. Did you want advice on your hair or your body odor?

NATHAN

The bar. The bar you're standing in. The one in which I'm serving you drinks.

KATHRYN

Oh. Quite. You are being unnecessarily clear about that.

NATHAN

I just wanted to make sure you understood the relationship we had with one another in unambiguous terms.

KATHRYN

Yes. I do. I hope you do, too.

NATHAN

You order drinks from me and pay me for them. That much I get. There are other components to this interaction as well that I don't understand!

KATHRYN

I don't know what you mean. Are you referring to basic social interaction?

NATHAN

My presence is off-putting! I know this about myself! I am constantly establishing setting and recapping the current scenario!

KATHRYN

Yeah. You don't have to do that.

NATHAN

Right! Exactly. I see why people trust you. I should be writing this down!

KATHRYN

Yeah. No problem.

NATHAN

There's more! See, business has been a struggle lately. People have less disposable income, and I know I don't have the right countenance to be an effective bartender! I have zero chill! I should have said, like zero chill! But I just said zero chill! As though it was the thing I was going to say when I started my sentence! Like I planned to say Zero Chill!

KATHRYN

I'm very sorry. Why are you telling me this?

NATHAN

Please. People trust you. Teach me to be like you.

KATHRYN

If you want my advice, you don't want to be like me.

NATHAN

It would be the simplest thing in the world. Do you have a strategy you follow? You must have some blueprint for conversation. People don't even argue with you. I watch, they just approach you, one by one, and you immediately deflate them. No one argues with you, but they come back! No one comes back to my bar.

KATHRYN

I like that it's quiet here. It could be quieter, though.

NATHAN

Please, help me.

KATHRYN

God. Alright. What do you want to know?

NATHAN

What do I need to know?

KATHRYN

What don't you need to know?

NATHAN

Uh-huh.

KATHRYN

So what happens when someone orders a drink from you?

NATHAN

I make it.

KATHRYN

No.

NATHAN

No?

KATHRYN

Why would you just make the drink? You just do what people tell you to do? Are you that weak?

NATHAN

Is that wrong?

KATHRYN

Weakness is offputting. Nobody likes it. You've got to make them work for things. Challenge them. If they have to make an extra effort, then they believe you're worth the extra effort.

NATHAN

I see. That's fascinating. I just thought I should be pleasant.

KATHRYN

Heavens, no.

STEVE

Hi. So thanks to your advice, I just broke up with my girlfriend. Am I going to be okay?

KATHRYN

Yeah, you'll be fine. Hey, order a drink from this guy.

STEVE

Okay, yeah. I need one. Vodka Tonic, please.

KATHRYN

That's not really a breakup drink, is it? That's just alcoholism.

STEVE

You're right. Okay. Make it a whiskey sour.

KATHRYN

That's just a girl drink for men. What should he have, bartender?

NATHAN

Oh right. So this. What do I say?

KATHRYN

Just talk like I do.

NATHAN

Alright, sure. Fuck off!

STEVE

What?

NATHAN

Go to hell, you prick. I can't stand the sight of you! You're disgusting, like mold growing in the bottom of a shoe. I don't like looking at you!

KATHRYN

No, that's not right. What are you doing?

NATHAN

What you said to do.

KATHRYN

No. No. No. That's not what I sound like.

NATHAN

Are you sure?

KATHRYN

There's a subtlety that you're not... That's really not how I come off.

AMY

Kathryn, hi! Thanks for waiting for me. I hope you haven't been here too long.

KATHRYN

Oh, don't worry. I knew you'd be a little late.

AMY

I'm sorry.

KATHRYN

Can you get us two glasses of chardonnay, please?

NATHAN

Right, of course.

AMY

Thank you! So you know, I had my big interview yesterday, and I took your advice.

KATHRYN

Uh-huh.

AMY

I let them know that they couldn't really be interested in me and that it must have been a clerical error, just like you said.

KATHRYN

Right.

AMY

I told them I was sorry for wasting their time, and I apologized three or four times extra, just to drive the point home.

KATHRYN

Thank you.

NATHAN

My pleasure.

AMY

Thank you. They told me my resume

was very impressive, and they asked me where I saw myself in five years.

KATHRYN

What did you tell them?

AMY

So, I thought about what you told me, but I knew it would be a little bit awkward if I told them the truth. I'm going to be dead in six months, right?

KATHRYN

Right. Because of self-sabotage and the substance abuse you use to compensate for your fundamental incompatibility with reality.

AMY

Cheers. Yeah. So I told them I preferred not to answer the question, and they admired my boldness.

INT. JOB INTERVIEW

BOSS

Nobody likes that question, and most people give some answer about advancing to middle management. It's boring. It's pointless. You've got a lot of guts, not playing the game the same way everyone else does.

AMY

Well. Thank you very much, I told him. But I really don't think that's fair to the other candidates.

BOSS

You're amazing. You're talented, humble, self-effacing. You're socially conscious and really value the lives of those around you. When can you start?

AMY

And I didn't know what to tell him. I thought about what you would have said.

KATHRYN

You're a fraud. You convince the people around you that you have your act together, but your only talent is the fundamental contradiction of your continued existence. You are a talented deceiver. You are the devil. You have no right to show your face in public.

INT. BAR

KATHRYN

So what did you tell him?

AMY

I told him to fuck off.

BOSS

Excuse me?

AMY

I said fuck off. I don't have to accept your patronizing attitude. There are other jobs for me out there, and the fact that you're so taken with me speaks volumes to your tastes. I don't need your pity. I don't need anything from anyone.

BOSS

I'm very sorry if I've done anything to offend you.

AMY

Save it for your therapist, psycho.

KATHRYN

I'm sorry, why did you say those unnecessary cruel things?

AMY

It just seemed what you would have done.

NATHAN

That's what I was saying!

KATHRYN

No one was talking to you.

AMY

Actually, I could use another glass of wine.

KATHRYN

You might as well bring her a whole bottle.

NATHAN

Why don't you both just go home, so no one has to look at you and feel sad?

AMY

Oh, that was really good.

KATHRYN

That's not what I sound like!

NATHAN

Oh.

AMY

Sorry.

KATHRYN

I offer constructive critique because I have a keen aesthetic sense, as well as a basic working knowledge of western etiquette. I am relentlessly polite, and the fact that you interpret my demeanor to be anything other than genteel says far more about you two than it does about me.

AMY

I'm so sorry, where are my manners? Here I am going on and on about myself. What have you been up to lately?

KATHRYN

Oh, well. I've been doing some editing. Some consulting.

NATHAN

Right, but what about your own activities. Do you have a family, a boyfriend, a girlfriend?

KATHRYN

That's really none of your business.

AMY

Wait, you were seeing that professor, right? How's that going?

KATHRYN

We've parted ways.

AMY

Oh, well, I'm sure you'll meet someone else who appreciates you.

KATHRYN

It was mutual.

AMY

I'm sure.

NATHAN

We're here if you need to talk.

KATHRYN

To hell with the both of you.

THEME SONG

She's a worthless, pointless, depressive cynic.  
That's Katy the Critic!

EXT. THE MOON

LIA

Welcome back to Tales of Insecurity. I'm LiA Lindsay. If you're just now joining us, that's not how podcasts work. What are you doing. Today's theme is A Tingly Numbness, featuring stories of people who have learned to cope with trauma by silencing everything. What kind of trauma do you have? Your parents were abusive in some way or another, but which one was it? Do you even remember? Think back. Did they hit you? Was it sexual? And let's not neglect neglect, which leaves deep, deep bruises, even if nothing shows up

on the surface. Whatever your pain, don't forget the cool, crisp taste of Classic Coca-Cola. As you gulp down the subtle, sparkly liquid, cold as your barely beating heart, you can forget what it means to be alive, and just remember Coca-Cola. Coca-Cola, your only responsibility.

We don't have any sponsors yet. But, Coca-Cola, if you're hearing this, you now owe me \$1000. What a bargain! You can't buy this kind of press, but now you can. Let's see, what else?

Squarespace. Do you need a website, but lack programming knowledge or aesthetic sense? I kind of wonder what you need a website for. Anyway, you can make your Squarespace fansite using their predefined templates. Isn't it great we have these conglomerates and tech companies to make up for our own personal shortcomings? Wowie. Alright, \$1000 please. You can send it via The Square Cash App, the modern way to send money. Square, you can start the process with \$1000.

I really do need the money. This isn't a bit. Please. I just, I'm not marketable. I don't even know how you found this.

You know, last year, I was really desperate for money too, so I responded to every job opportunity I could find. One of them was for an insurance company, and maybe it's my improv training, but I went along with it as far as I could. I took a little online class and a certification test. I was registered to sell insurance within two weeks, and I was supposed to meet with a mentor who was going to show me the ropes. She was going to text me the address of her office. She didn't. It took a while to get in touch with her. We tried to meet again, but she cancelled right at

the last minute. It was definitely her turn to contact me, so I waited. This was last year. I am no longer certified to sell insurance. All of this is to say, I don't know how anything happens. How does anything connect to anything else?

I think she knew I wouldn't be able to sell insurance. I knew it too. But I wanted a chance to fail at it, you know? I was looking forward to failing. I feel like that was taken from me.

AFLAC, we prevent you from failing.

\$1000, please.

LIA

Our next story tonight is about an interesting woman who called me earlier.

CANDICE

Hello, Ms. Lindsay, I'm afraid your monthly loan payment is past due.

LIA

We didn't have the most interesting conversation, but I really liked her somehow. She was so calm!

CANDICE

Thank you for holding. Unfortunately, we are unable to suspend your payments at this time.

LIA

No matter how emotional I got, she was completely stoic. I sound like I'm being sarcastic, but I really did admire her. I wanted to be her.

CANDICE

Unfortunately, you will continue to receive calls from us until your account is up-to-date.

LIA

That's okay, Candice. That's okay. I'm always happy to hear from you. As long as you accept your own Tale of Insecurity.

Music swells.

INT. CALL CENTER

CANDICE

Thank you. We appreciate your cooperation. Is there anything else we can help you with today?

BOSS

Hey, Candice, when you finish that call, can I see you in my office? Just a quick little chat.

CANDICE

Well thank YOU and you have a fantastic day. (Hangs up) Yes, of course. I'd be happy to assist you in this matter.

BOSS

Great, thanks. Everybody out! Thanks, bye Dennis. Oh, Martha, looking good! Go get that PTA meeting. You'll find Nancine a new dad yet. Timmy boy! Slap me some skin, brother man. Can I call you brother? We're bros, right? Alright, great. Ha ha. Okay, get out everyone. Thank you! That's right. Thanks. Thanks. Thanks.

INT. BOSS'S OFFICE

BOSS

Okay. So. First of all, I want to say, you're doing a great job here. Absolutely top-notch. Your numbers are high, you're doing really well. Don't think of this as a disciplinary meeting at all.

CANDICE

That sounds agreeable to me as well.

BOSS

Great. It's really not a conversation I want to have, but some customers have been

complaining that you're not friendly enough.

CANDICE

I'm very sorry to hear that.

BOSS

Right? Me too. I mean, you're nice, right? I like you, believe me, I do. But some of your coworkers have been complaining too. They say you don't say 'hello.' Do you mind just saying 'hello' in some way or another? You can wave. You can nod, it's just the acknowledgement. It make them feel better.

CANDICE

I apologize for any inconvenience. We're doing everything we can to resolve this issue.

BOSS

You're such a pro. It's just: Do you know any of their names? Anyone who works here?

CANDICE

We have many employees here who are equipped to handle any request you may have.

BOSS

See, that's great. It's good that you appreciate them. It's just, the human element. It's not really the job, but it's important. You've got to take more interest, even if it's just completely shallow.

CANDICE

...I don't know anyone's name.

BOSS

Mine's written on my desk here, just read it off.

CANDICE

Hi, may I speak to (mispronouncing) Thomas Nelson Havershim?

BOSS

Just Tom is fine. You don't have to do the rest of it. I admire your

dedication to your work.

CANDICE

Thank you.

BOSS

But for my sake, can you just be a person?

CANDICE

Your request has been noted.

BOSS

Alright. You can get back to work.

CANDICE

Your time is very important to us. We know you have your choice in employees, and we're happy you've chosen us.

BOSS

Alright everyone, you can come back in again!

Candice places the next call on her list.

LIA

...Hello?

CANDICE

Good evening, may I speak to LiA Lindsay?

LiA hangs up. Candice calls back.

LIA

Hi. Sorry, we must have got disconnected.

CANDICE

Quite all right, Ms. Lindsay.

LIA

So. What was this about?

CANDICE

I'm calling on behalf of Verizon National Credit Union. Our records indicate your account is past due.

LIA

Sure.

CANDICE

Please be advised that any additional delays in payment may affect your credit score.

LIA

I'm sorry, I'm not really interested in this conversation right now. Why don't you call someone else? I'd prefer if this story were about your growth instead of mine.

CANDICE

The current amount due is \$487.86.

LIA

See, I thought you'd go through an ordeal using the skills afforded to you by your unique set of circumstances. It's over \$400 now? How'd that happen?

BOSS

Psst. Hey.

CANDICE

I'm sorry, can you hold on a moment? What is it?

BOSS

Try using their name more.

CANDICE

Thank you, Tom, I appreciate your input.

BOSS

You're doing great.

CANDICE

LiA. Ms. Lindsay. Are you able to make a payment at this time?

LIA

So here's what I was thinking. I thought maybe you'd end up doing a hostage negotiation using your customer service language. Now that I say it out loud it sounds dumb. Does it sound dumb to you?

CANDICE

Ms. Lindsay, I don't know what

you're talking about.

LIA

It's just when I talked to you earlier, there was something soothing about you. When I was telling you about my money problems, you seemed really sympathetic. I imagined that you wouldn't be shaken by anything.

CANDICE

Ms. Lindsay, I'm sorry you're having difficult times, but when do you think you'll be able to complete a payment?

LIA

I really admired your level-headedness. I admire you. You seem so resilient.

CANDICE

Ms. Lindsay. What steps are you taking to complete your payment?

LIA

How long have you been doing this?

CANDICE

Ms. Lindsay. Stop trying to change the conversation. Just a couple of years. Are you looking for work?

LIA

No, no. Not for me.

CANDICE

You should be looking for work. You should be able to make these minimal monthly payments.

LIA

Sorry. Can I be perfectly honest with you?

CANDICE

I'm really not qualified to give personal advice.

LIA

No, of course not. That was another idea, that I'd have you take on the role of a suicide hotline, and that

your dispassionate patter would really help someone who was tired of the same old psychobabble. I think it's a better idea than the hostage negotiation thing. It has some truth to it, you know?

CANDICE

Ms. Lindsay.

LIA

Yes?

CANDICE

Please hold.

Hello, Verizon Federal Credit Union, this is Candice.

MOM

Candice?

CANDICE

Mom? How'd you get this number?

MOM

Candice? Where are you?

CANDICE

I moved to Seattle about ten years ago. Are you having any problems I can help you with?

MOM

Candice? Your brother's really worried about you.

CANDICE

I'm very sorry to have caused you any distress.

MOM

Are you healthy? Have you been seeing your doctors?

CANDICE

I don't really have time to talk right now, but I promise I'll call this week, okay?

MOM

Candice? Are you there?

CANDICE

Hello, Verizon Federal Credit Union, this is Candice.

EX

Don't you take that tone with me. I've been worried sick. Don't you ever call.

CANDICE

It's literally all I do all day.

EX

Oh you think you're so smart. So together, just because you have a job and I don't. I'm looking, okay?

CANDICE

Please, don't be upset. I'm doing everything I can for you.

EX

And you deserve a medal, I'm sure.

BOSS

Try using a term of endearment.

CANDICE

Oh hi. Since when are we receiving calls here? I'm getting calls I really don't want.

BOSS

You're doing great.

CANDICE

Thank you. Hello, sweetie?

EX

You don't get to call me that anymore, not after what you put me through. How dare you keep your heart condition a secret? When were you going to tell me?

CANDICE

I'm very sorry. I didn't think it was something you needed to worry about.

BOSS

Be a little more affectionate.

CANDICE

It's my problem, schnookums.

BOSS

A little more.

CANDICE

It's eventually going to give out on me, angel snowflake, but I didn't want that to spoil anything before.

EX

I kept trying to get you to go running with me! If you'd have just told me. You made me feel like such an idiot.

CANDICE

I'm very sorry if you're unhappy with our service. If you'd like to file a complaint, I can forward you to the appropriate number.

BOSS

Now what went wrong there?

CANDICE

I have a call holding.

BOSS

We'll talk later.

CANDICE

Ms. Lindsay, thank you for holding. Will you be able to complete a payment today.

LIA

Hi. No.

CANDICE

Is there anyone who would be willing to lend you the money?

LIA

Other than you guys? No. Not anymore.

CANDICE

How are you planning on making your payments?

LIA

I'm working on a podcast?

CANDICE

Is it going to make you any money?

LIA

I don't think podcasts make money unless you're famous.

CANDICE

You should be focusing your energy on reaching financial security, not on extraneous projects.

LIA

I find it really hard to worry about consequences anymore. So I've finally made the decision to live out loud. I'm finally starting to strike back at a world that hasn't even had the courtesy to reject me, and you want me to turn my attention where? No one's offering me anything. Reality isn't working out for me, and I can't even find books or TV shows to get lost in. The society I keep seeing in everything I consume is so alien, but also fundamental to my consciousness. I was raised by media, and I feel the same way about it we all feel about any set of parents. Just. Alienated. Every time I go back home, I don't know what it has to do with me anymore. At a certain point, there are only a few possibilities: either my worldview and perspective are so boring that it has no place in media or art, or so unique that no one can relate to it. And maybe there's a third possibility, which is probably the one I'm hoping for. Either way, I'm tired of waiting. I need to make something. I want to at least be rejected before I reject myself. I don't know how to express that. I've never been afraid of rejection. I've been afraid to even be heard. Success and failure are nothing to me. It's all isolation and whatever else there is.

CANDICE

I see. That's all great, but what are you planning on doing about your account?

LIA

You're so focused on your career. I find that really fascinating, especially for people who have not very good jobs. You must hear so many sob stories. Isn't that hard?

CANDICE

You're actually the first to cry in an open way.

LIA

I find that hard to believe.

CANDICE

No. Most people just try to get off the phone as quickly as possible. They just hang up.

LIA

That's really good to know. No one ever gets a chance to see what other people do in privacy, I guess until they start dating.

CANDICE

We're not going to have a conversation about dating.

LIA

I never really dated. I met my soulmate on Twitter and she's still pretty much the whole reason I have Twitter.

CANDICE

Really not interested.

LIA

I'm just saying, I don't want to talk about that either.

CANDICE

Wait, you have a soulmate and you're complaining about alienation?

LIA

You're really sounding less level-

headed all the time.

CANDICE

I'm just a little tired of hearing people whine about their problems. Guess what? I spend my day chasing people who can't pay their bills. I hear all their excuses. Do you want to hear some of the best ones?

LIA

Absolutely!

CANDICE

I can't do that.

LIA

Just one or two.

CANDICE

No, I can't.

LIA

It would mean a lot to me.

CANDICE

Ms. Lindsay, I'm not going to be your friend. That is not my role.

LIA

Yes, I understand that.

CANDICE

Do you?

LIA

Yes.

CANDICE

Please hold. Excuse me, supervisor.

BOSS

Say my name, please.

CANDICE

I don't remember your name. I don't need to remember it. It's not information that's going to serve me in the future, and the only reason it matters is that you care about it. Don't care about it. You're not important to me. You are a means to an end.

BOSS

It's Tom.

CANDICE

Tom. This is what I'm saying. I can't do my job if it's personal. I have to leave my life somewhere else, because if I don't keep myself separate from this soul-crushing boredom, my soul will be crushed.

BOSS

You're being a little dramatic.

CANDICE

No. (Long pause)

BOSS

Aren't you?

CANDICE

I'm not allowed. Heart condition.

BOSS

I see. I guess I'll leave you on your own then.

CANDICE

Thank you. Hi, this is Candice, calling from National Verizon Credit Union. Am I speaking to Robert?

ROBERT

Yeah, I'm going to need a helicopter to the airport and a one-way ticket to Switzerland, or I'm afraid I might start cutting again.

CANDICE

I'd be happy to assist you with this matter. First, may I have the last four digits of your social security number for verification purposes?

Fanfare.

Passion is passe

Oh the night  
is in the sky again  
It happened like it happens every day  
at night  
they say that it's for lovers  
but I have the same night  
but I don't know how I'd  
know what people say  
alright

hey  
is that a snail  
on the ground  
surely that's an image I can claim  
or have lovers taken snails  
like they took the sun and rain  
and might they take away my quiet shame?

Passion is passé  
It has no hold or sway  
for all of us who've only used it wrong  
passion is passé  
so I made it go away  
but why am I still singing songs?

Hey now I'm filing a motion

to get rid of emotion.

It's the singular position

for which I hold devotion.

I keep a level head

I keep it to myself and then

I'll close my eyes and count to ten

until the lion sleeps again

I'm a little overwhelmed,

So I'll try to keep it simple:

Tonight you'll dine in hell

But I'll be chewing gum in limbo.

I will not be complicitous in any crime of passion, see

Instead I plea no contest to the charge of ruthless apathy.

Do you really like your life of sex and drugs and violence or

Wouldn't you prefer that every gun were just a silencer?

Now maybe I'm not qualified to contradict society,

But I think that some sobriety would give us all variety.

Passion is a comfort that results in such atrocity.

Just for all our safety, I'll accept my sociopathy

And live my life alone, but don't shed any tears,

since I can never be convicted by a jury of my peers.

I'm not depressed

I'm just excited to be free

of all the anguish that it means to feel

I can almost not contain  
the snails in my brain  
they'll slowly take their time to heal

passion is passé  
that's all I have to say  
my mantra and my sutra and my gong  
passion is passé  
and I threw mine all away  
but why am I still writing  
why am I still fighting  
oh why am I still singing songs?