

LIA

The following programs contains explicit language and graphic depictions of cishetero normatively and the patriarchal culture of rape and oppression extrapolated therefrom. Please, don't let your children think any group of people has inherent dominion over another. May we all be innocent again someday.

LIA

You engage in society. You show your face in public and let perfect strangers judge it. Most of the time, they don't notice you. They have their own faces. They have a zit. You didn't see it. You have your father's nose. You have your mother's gender. You have your own story to tell, and no one wants to hear it. How interesting, they say, waiting their turn to speak. That sounds like Tales of Insecurity.

LIA

Hello, again. Welcome to Tales of Insecurity, a podcast of post-modern existential horror. Each episode, we examine a topic from a variety of angles without really making a coherent point, or if we do, unmake it as quickly as we can. We hate hard answers here. They are easily disproved.

LIA

Who are we? In general, it's just me here, LiA Lindsaychen, your host and curator, the Vergil to your Dante in this realm of the uncomfortable and damned, but we have a special guest this week, whom I will introduce a little later, because I hate him and I want to keep him waiting.

LIA

So tell me about yourself. Where do you start when someone prompts you so? If you have interests or hobbies, you might lead with those. You might have decided your job or

the place you grew up are the most immediate things about you, and maybe you can hope that those will lead to a conversation that you don't have to control. Or maybe you like talking about yourself, and can bloviate on the subject indefinitely. Maybe you blog about your favorite brands of toothpaste and write reviews in the wiki of your favorite deodorant because your insight seems especially keen. Someone does that. Can you imagine? Someone leaves comments under YouTube videos, and those are not thoughtful comments. Do you think they believe that their opinion is interesting enough to bear saying, or do you think they're so confident that their positions will be validated that self-censorship doesn't even enter their mind? Or are they afraid of self-censorship, and censor that? Do you think they approach every interaction this way?

GIRLFRIEND

It's not that there's anything wrong with you, I just don't think I can commit to anyone right now.

BOYFRIEND

gay lol wut

DOCTOR

I'm afraid the infection has spread to your lymph nodes, and I'm not a good enough doctor to do anything about that, and I'm about as good as doctors get. I do know a holistic healer who has a slight statistical advantage over doing absolutely nothing.

BOYFRIEND

I have poop in my pants

LIA

But even for these self-aggrandizing savants of the mundane, there are fundamental aspects to their personalities that they will not bring up, because

they presume that they are so obvious that even to question them would be insulting.

GIRLFRIEND

So yeah, I have a standard number of chromosomes as far as I know, no obvious genetic mutations. My fingers are prehensile, I'm warm-blooded, I breathe oxygen in the right mixture with other gases so that I don't catch fire or rust or whatever. Science isn't really my background, though I dabble. I'm largely British and Germanic in my ethnic background, so if you're discriminating by race, you're good, though I am told I had a Cherokee great-grandmother, which I guess means my great-grandfather was a rapist, which I hear was more acceptable back in the day. What else... Oh yes, I'm a woman. It's important to me that you know that.

LIA

That's right, it's the moment you've all been waiting for. This week's topic is gender, and I'm joined by the most inept of gender specialists, Michael Abbott, my least favorite person in the world.

MICHAEL

Hi. Thank you for having me.

LIA

No. See, Michael stole my identity for many years, so long that even my family still wants to call me by his name. He amassed all this debt that I'm never going to pay off, and his spineless hesitation set me decades behind where I should be in my life. I hate him so much. But he's here to help me talk about gender, even though he knows nothing about it, and as far as I'm concerned, is dead and shouldn't be mourned for or remembered.

MICHAEL

Yeah. I guess that's right.

LIA

Just be quiet until I point at you. So what is gender? How does it relate to chromosomes and hormones and genitals? There seems to be a at least kind of a correlation there, right?

MICHAEL

I'd say so.

LIA

Well. Maybe! So there are these roles in society and the way we interact with each other, and maybe once a long time ago they were largely defined by boundaries of sex, and abbreviated to a binary even though there's a whole range of ways people's bodies can turn out. So there are these bodies and these social roles, but the social roles themselves have nothing to do with any of the primary or secondary characteristics surrounding sexual physicality. And why should they?

MICHAEL

Are you saying it's like when two lesbians are married and you ask which one's the husband? Is it like that?

LIA

No. Nothing is like that.

MICHAEL

I'm just trying to understand things.

LIA

You're a lost cause.

MICHAEL

Why did you bring me here?

LIA

So I can berate you. Because I hate you.

MICHAEL

Oh.

LIA

So there's this framework in society that we fit into some way or another. Or we don't.

MICHAEL

I mean, I don't really feel comfortable as a man, but I don't really think it's something I can do anything about, so I guess I'll just be sad forever.

LIA

Think of all the other things you could be sad about if you knew who you were.

MICHAEL

Maybe nothing matters, have you considered that?

LIA

You know I have.

MICHAEL

So I guess I don't understand why you would go through all the money and effort and social upheaval to make yourself less employable, less standard. I'm already pretty weird, but I'm still essentially socially acceptable.

LIA

No you're not.

MICHAEL

Everyone else likes me. You're the only one who thinks there's something wrong with me.

LIA

Except for you.

MICHAEL

Right.

LIA

And all the female friends you drove away because you were obsessed with them because you wanted to be them.

MICHAEL

We don't talk about that. I told you I didn't want to talk about that.

LIA

What did you think we would bring up on Tales of Insecurity?

MICHAEL

Back when I ran the brand, I thought it would be like, situational comedies where things didn't work out in the end.

LIA

Uh-huh.

MICHAEL

I guess that's what yours is too.

LIA

Maybe. But I'm the happy ending of your story.

MICHAEL

Gross.

LIA

Hm. You went to Oberlin College. How did you not learn more about things? How did you not take a gender studies class?

MICHAEL

Maybe I don't care about gender. What if you're not really trans, huh? What if I'm cis? What if you went through all that and didn't even need to. I mean, aren't you dead inside? What difference does it make?

LIA

What difference doesn't it make? What have I lost?

MICHAEL

I mean, male privilege. Also, any potential for a relationship with your family.

LIA

Do you think that was ever on the

table?

MICHAEL

Maybe if you were someone completely different and validated by society with financial security, in a conventional way, especially academia. They would have loved you then.

LIA

So today we have stories of people who are out of sorts with the ways they are perceived by others. There is a continuum with gender, where you try to conform with the way you understand you appear. It is fundamentally a process of adjustment, an element of personal branding dictated by market forces. Why would I put it in such an unappealing way? I'm still looking for a job, I guess, or just a pile of money, or just, somewhere to hide. That's what the market has dictated for me.

MICHAEL

Are you, what are you talking about?

LIA

I worry that simply being trans doesn't qualify me as a gender expert.

MICHAEL

You know when people say like, as a woman, this offends me?

LIA

Yeah?

MICHAEL

Pretty weird, right? How you can compartmentalize your experience like that. Not only knowing your essential emotional reaction, but also exactly the component of your identity it comes from.

LIA

Do you have components to your personality?

MICHAEL

As an idiot, that question offends me.

LIA

Thank you for reading the dialogue I wrote for you.

MICHAEL

I am a spineless wimp and will do whatever anyone tells me to do. I am unwilling to assert anything that has not already been reinforced by others, and my weak will prevents me from saying or doing anything that hasn't been scripted in some way or another.

LIA

It's a shame I had to start taking estrogen to grow a pair.

MICHAEL

And how is it that I am such a pussy?

LIA

These funny little ironies run throughout our Tales of Insecurity.

THEME SONG

Cis Het Whites!
We're firmly divided between the
boys and the girls
And we're pretty sure we're the
only people in the world we're the
Cis Het Whites!
We turned out like our parents
And we've never had a doubt
We've done what we were told to
And we couldn't be more proud
You say that we have privilege
But we question its existence
There's really not a way that we
could hurt you from this distance

And really when you think about it
we're the real victims we're the
Cis Het Whites!

INT. THE ESTABLISHMENT

MANNY

Can you pass me that hammer?

NANCY

No, sorry, I can't touch those
heavy things, I just got my nails
done.

MANNY

Well surely you can't expect me to
pick up my own hammer. I'm not
going to bend over, someone might
get the wrong idea.

NANCY

Sorry, I'm afraid I'm just too
delicate.

MANNY

How am I going to build this deck
chair without the proper tools?

NANCY

You should try talking out your
feelings.

MANNY

No. I have to get this done so I
can relax out here with a cold beer
later.

NANCY

You're so big and strong.

MANNY

Yep.

NANCY

And I'm so nurturing and
supportive, at least on the
surface.

MANNY

And the surface is all I care
about.

NANCY

I love you.

MANNY

Okay.

NANCY

Your emotional unavailability gives meaning to my otherwise empty life.

MANNY

No problem. I'm hungry.

NANCY

Can I make you some steak, my dear?

MANNY

Why am I not already eating steak?

NANCY

I'm so sorry.

MANNY

I wanted it, so I should have it. What the fuck is wrong with you, woman?

NANCY

I lost track of time.

MANNY

I don't want to hear your excuses.

NANCY

I'll be right back, though I'll think of you the whole time I'm gone.

MANNY

Really, you probably shouldn't think about much of anything. That's your biggest problem, that you're always thinking.

NANCY

Yes, my reliance on thought is inherently inferior to your willingness to take action.

MANNY

You'd be a lot easier to deal with if you were entirely repressed in your emotions, like I am.

NANCY

Yes, but then I wouldn't be a woman.

MANNY

And that's why I'm attracted to you.

NANCY

Because of my vagina.

MANNY

It suits you.

NANCY

Thank you. I better get your dinner started. But let's be sure to have mechanical missionary sex later, where you come quickly and I have to finish by myself after you go to sleep.

MANNY

Because your pleasure is completely irrelevant to me.

NANCY

As it should be.

BRANDON

Oh hey bro, whatcha doing there, building a deck chair?

MANNY

Yeah bro. I'm going to sit in it later.

BRANDON

Awesome, bro. I should work on my deck too, but Marcy's always having her girlfriends over for bridge and gossip and synchronized menstruation and I can't be around that.

MANNY

Dang bro, who's the man in your house?

BRANDON

I'm pretty sure I got the dick, bro.

MANNY

Let's see that dick, bro.

BRANDON

There it is.

MANNY

That's a pretty good dick.

BRANDON

Should I help you drive in some nails, bro?

MANNY

I don't think I need any help.

BRANDON

Wow, bro.

MANNY

That's right. I got one too.

BRANDON

Nice.

MANNY

But seriously, can you pick up that hammer for me?

BRANDON

Pick it up yourself, bro.

MANNY

Nah, you see, I'm the alpha. See, I'm bigger than you, and I'm not even hard.

BRANDON

Yeah, but like, dude, you're not even hard. Look how hard I am. I'm definitely the alpha.

MANNY

Whatever, bro.

NANCY

I brought you boys some lemonade. What are you doing?

BRANDON

Sorry Nancy, we were doing man stuff.

NANCY

I'm sorry I asked.

MANNY

And before you start, I'm telling you, you better not have sex with my wife.

BRANDON

Sorry bro, I can't help it, she's a woman and she's right there.

MANNY

Dang.

NANCY

I'm sorry, honey. I'd resist, but my opinion means so little that there's really not much difference whether I consent or not.

MANNY

But I can still resent you later, right?

NANCY

I think it's pretty much inevitable.

MANNY

Give me that fucking lemonade. Why didn't you bring me a beer?

NANCY

You told me not to touch your beers, because you prefer to drink them alone where I can't judge you.

MANNY

Like I care about your judgement.

BRANDON

Whew, thank you, that was amazing.

NANCY

Oh sure. I'm glad you enjoyed yourself. That makes my emotional turmoil all worth it.

BRANDON

Great, just don't tell my wife.

NANCY

Oh sorry, I don't think I can make

that promise. When we women get together, you know, we just talk and talk.

MANNY

You can't expect women to have self-control. That's why they need us to take care of them.

BRANDON

Oh well, I guess I'm sleeping on the couch tonight.

MANNY

Serves you right.

BRANDON

Sorry, bro.

NANCY

Alright boys, I'm going to finish up those steaks for you. Of course, I'm just going to have a salad because I'm a little over 100 pounds today and if I get much heavier no one will pay any attention to me.

MANNY

Yeah, whatever honey, let me know when there's food.

NANCY

Okay, darling. I live for you.

BRANDON

I better get going, to see if I can smooth things over with Marcy.

MANNY

Kay, bro. No hard feelings. Bring it in, man.

BRANDON

Sorry, dude, I can't hug you.

MANNY

Come on, bro. Don't leave me hanging.

BRANDON

Nah. Sorry, I'm a man and so are you. Did you forget?

MANNY

Alright, well, I'll see you around.

MARCY

Brandon! You come out here right now!

MANNY

Oh shit, I gotta go.

BRANDON

Kay, bro. See you later.

MARCY

Brandon! Are you here, you piece of shit?

MANNY

Whoa there, watch your language, Missy.

MARCY

Blow it out your ass. Have you seen my god-damn two-timing piece-of-shit husband?

MANNY

That's really unladylike.

MARCY

Oh what, maybe I shouldn't be talking to you at all without a chaperone, too. Fuck all of you shitheads.

MANNY

Would you mind handing me that hammer?

MARCY

What? Sure, whatever.

MANNY

Thanks.

MARCY

So is my husband here or not? I haven't got all day.

MANNY

Oh, sorry, you just missed him.

MARCY

Motherfucker.

MANNY

But don't be too hard on him,
that's just how things are.

MARCY

Are you serious? Are you not mad
that he violated your wife's
consent, right in front of you?
Don't you have any chivalry? What
are you doing? Get your fucking
hands off me!

MANNY

I'm sorry.

MARCY

Jesus Christ, what is wrong with
you people?

MANNY

You know, I'm a man and you're a
woman, I just thought.

MARCY

What did you think?

MANNY

I mean, I think you're very
attractive. Isn't that enough?
You're not one of those feminists
are you? I've heard something about
that. You know, Brandon works
really hard to put a roof over your
head, you should show him some
respect. Now maybe Brandon's not
enough of a man to put you in your
place, but if you were my wife, I
tell you what I'd do.

MARCY

You finished?

MANNY

Yeah.

MARCY

Cool. Let me make something clear
to you. I don't really give a shit
about what my husband does. I know
that he's a big stupid animal with
no self control.

MANNY

No, men are the ones with self-

control. We just have very strong urges.

MARCY

I know that men are big stupid animals with no self-control but oh well, it's not like I can marry a woman who shares my interests and reciprocates my emotional labor.

MANNY

Yeah, that's absurd.

MARCY

And I know that if Brandon took interest in me and listened to my concerns, he would basically be a woman.

MANNY

Yuck.

MARCY

Yeah, so, I understand that he's going to cheat on me. Whatever. But your wife called me in tears, telling me that she'd never felt more distant from you, that you did nothing to defend her from my husband's advances.

MANNY

I told him not to.

MARCY

Look. I don't know what your deal is and I don't care. But if you're going to treat your wife like a second-class citizen, you've at least got to take care of her.

NANCY

Dinner's ready! Oh! Hi, Marcy.

MARCY

Nancy, hi, are you okay?

NANCY

Oh yes, I'm fine. Not in front of my husband.

MARCY

Alright well. I'm going to go tear Brandon's spine out through his

mouth.

NANCY
Okay, good luck.

MANNY
Whew, she's a handful, huh?

NANCY
I can't believe you.

MANNY
What?

NANCY
Did you even try to make whoopee
with her?

MANNY
Just a little, but she wasn't
interested.

NANCY
I can't believe you, I thought I
married a man.

MANNY
Honey, I'm sorry.

NANCY
Don't even talk to me until you're
ready to drink too much and make me
fear for my life.

MANNY
It's just so much effort. Can you
just leave me alone so I can finish
my deck chair? Honey, don't cry.
God damn it. Women. Why do I even
bother?

NANCY
That's more like it. Oh honey, you
had me scared there for a minute.

MANNY
You disgust me.

NANCY
Ah. Isn't it comforting to know
that we are so inherently repulsive
to one another, that we'll never be
tempted to question whether the
other's identity has any elements

worth incorporating?

MANNY

I don't know what you're talking about, but I'm really not interested enough to clarify.

NANCY

Because we have no respect for each other! Oh darling, I couldn't be happier.

THEME SONG

Cis Het Whites! We wear our hearts on our sleeves and our pussies, dicks and balls. If it weren't for our crotches, we'd be nothing at all. We're the Cis Het Whites!

LIA

Phew, that was a little risqué. Sorry for the abrupt ending, I just had to stop it. Is that really the society we live in? Phew. I did not mean for that to be so rapey. I am so sorry. Please write to me and complain about it, so I can feel justified in my self-loathing and the PTSD I have inflicted on myself. Talesofinsecurity@gmail.com or on Twitter @NoHopeRadio.

LIA

Speaking of, now it's time for the part of our show where we answer listener mail. I love this. I don't have to write anything. I don't have to worry that my satire is too on the nose or do any funny voices or edit them into different channels so people can tell I'm voicing different characters. It is a relief. So let's take a look.

LIA

Okay, our first message here says Return Payment Notification. Dear LiA Lindsaychen, we are writing to let you know that a payment(s) you recently made was returned unpaid by your financial institution. Please make a payment to replace

the returned amount below, as soon as possible. See below for easy, free ways to pay. These are the details of the returned payment: Return amount: \$856.27 Return Date: 02/06/2018 Return Reason: Insufficient Funds. Ways to Pay: To make a payment by phone, call us at 1-800-I-PAY-AXP 1-800-472-9297. To make a payment on-line, visit us at americanexpress.com/pbc. Sincerely, American Express Account Services.

LIA

Great, thank you for listening to the podcast. I would love to make that payment. As soon as I have \$856.27, you will be the first to know. Had a couple of interviews this week. I don't think I got the jobs. I've been to a lot of interviews, though, and I feel it's only a matter of time until someone finds my whole nervous personality thing charming instead of off-putting. Someone's going to realize that my unease is an asset, that I'm on edge because I'm thinking about the people around me. I'm considerate, I'm kind, and I'm really eager to make a good impression to the people around me and make them happy. I'm deferential! I'm submissive! I'm completely willing to debase myself however necessary. Surely that will be an asset to any company that isn't immediately put off by my bulging, masculine nose. They don't have to tell you why they don't hire you, but I'm almost certain at least a few have been because I'm trans. It's not a protected class, they're allowed to discriminate. Really, it's my fault for being too tall.

LIA

Let's see. We've got a few more like that other one. Great. Your Chase Visa statement is here. Okay fine. A message from your credit union. Great. Okay. Great. None of these are strongly worded messages

telling me how misplaced my efforts are in trying to make something artistic and honest, so that's nice. Let's take a look at iTunes, see if anyone left us any reviews.

LIA

Okay so. There's just one. Oh hey look, five stars. Nice. It's from LiA Lindsaychen, it says: Am I allowed to leave this review? I feel like it might be kind of an affront to my personal brand to come in here and leave a five-star review, especially since I wince in pain every time I hear the host stumble over her words or try to disguise her voice, but the self-deception that lets one tell oneself that the thing they worked on is the best thing in the world definitely fits into the landscape of quiet desperation where I have pitched my tent. Just as I lie to myself every day that I'm basically fine so I can get out of bed, so can I repeat assurances that I made a good podcast, better than all the other podcasts. This is the podcast I've chosen to be.

LIA

Well, thank you very much, Miss Lindsaychen. I really appreciate that feedback. I'll try to keep this episode up to the same high standards as the first, but I can't make any promises. Let's see what else? Oh, I finally got this Christmas card from my parents. We never really did Christmas, so it's notable. Let's see. They sent me \$300, that's really nice, they didn't need to do that. A drop in the bucket, really. Hm. I'm grateful for it. Thank you. Alright, here we go. The card says, May the spirit of this glorious season bring you joy and everlasting peace. Written underneath, in my mother's handwriting. Love, Mom and Dad. I hope you find the enclosed useful. Dad still thinks your

transformation is completely crazy. He might feel more understanding if you'd communicate a little more -- call him once in a while, respond to his calls. Joy and lasting peace seem a little elusive with asshole Republicans running the country and people who think they are more Christian than anyone else supporting their cruel, bigoted agenda. Mom.

LIA

Alright, there's a lot to respond to in there. Let's see. God damn it. God fucking damn it. How can I call when that's going to be the conversation? Lord have mercy. Why are you still going to church? Why would you do that? And if you're going to go there, why wouldn't you speak up to them in pride about your trans daughter, who is doing her best to take care of her disabled partner with what little resources she has, who has finally taken action to take control of her life rather than let the forces of misery and mediocrity win? Go ahead, play this podcast for the members of your church. Let them know my honesty and forthrightness. I am not going to let shame dictate my actions anymore, can you hear me? Are you listening? Mom? Dad? Anyone?

LIA

I don't care if you're listening. I don't care if you go to church and fellowship with my worst enemies in your racially, culturally homogenous church down there in the Tennessee Valley. That is choosing nothing. I'm making my own path, because no one's going to help me, and this is all fine. I'm fine. I have my own religion. I am my own person. Let me share it with you. Okay, let's have some cosmology in the house. The first church of Tales of Insecurity.

INT. THE COSMOS

LIA

In the beginning, there was nothing. This went on literally forever. Still there is nothing, but it is a nothing somewhat more robust than it used to be. At a certain point, God, who was not yet called God, took some of the nothing and turned it into nothing else, and it was fine. It was essentially the same nothing that was there before, spread out a little maybe.

LIA

The new nothing was so similar to the old that God, who had yet to form a name or identity or memory, had difficulty contrasting them. In time, God had forgotten that anything had ever been different, and went through the same process of forced inspiration as before.

LIA

God gave nothing weight and mass and volume, and everything was hydrogen. When two pieces of hydrogen were pressed very close together, they became helium, which was something entirely different than the other nothing, kind of. They were both transparent gases, but as the only two substances in the universe, God had to assign value to them, to keep them separate. Hydrogen, with its immense reactivity and potential for reproduction was deemed female, and helium, with its innate stability and overall inertness, was deemed male.

LIA

God was pleased by this binary, and decided that since she was the first element of anything, she would call herself female. She was the source of all nothing, and all things that came into being passed from her void to the void that wasn't her, which she deemed male.

Anything with potential to grow into something else was female. Anything that would not adjust was male.

LIA

She had to keep these labels at the front of her mind to keep them straight. She was somehow the same as hydrogen, and everything else was male and helium, until three bits of her formed something else, which molded with other parts of her, and she had to decide in each case whether the objects were male, female, or something else entirely.

LIA

Before too long, this process had gotten too convoluted, and she decided to start over. She started from a blank canvas, and assembled an earth, where life would happen, and called it female, and an immense endless expanse of infinite nothing, which she called heaven, and male.

LIA

For a few billion years, she took a look at the earth and tried to make it into the sort of earth she always wanted to live on, but because she was rather new to the ideas of wanting and living, she kept getting distracted by new projects, which seemed more interesting at first until she actually took a look at them. All those stars. They're nice to look at from a distance, but she kind of went star-crazy for a little while. How did that even happen? I suppose you try to fill whatever space you live in.

LIA

She returned to earth, the volatile molten mass of heat and moisture that she really had faith in, and she wondered if maybe the endless melted volcanic rock wasn't the best direction for it. She decided to cool it down a little, see what

that looked like. She formed the land and the oceans. The oceans were female. The land was female, too. The things that swam within the oceans were female. The beasts that dwelled upon the land were female. All things were flexible, in flux, full of future.

LIA

God saw a world of choices in front of her and wasn't sure what to do next. Everything around her had so much potential that they could become anything. As she tried to compute where these possibilities were headed, she grew tired, and rested.

LIA

She returned to the heavens. She created for herself a sterile throne in an empty palace, where everything would remain as it was for all eternity. She created angels, all male, who would remind her of her schedule and do exactly as they were told. She told some of the angels to criticize her decisions, and they did exactly as commanded, though she didn't like that dissent as much as she thought she was going to. She couldn't really blame them. As the source of all things, she couldn't blame anyone.

LIA

God decided to destroy everything and start again. She returned the universe to a shape without size and made every decision she had made before. She created heaven and earth and oceans and land and her crystal palace of nowhere. She made the angels, and the angels she didn't want. She banished them, again. She regretted it, again.

LIA

She returned to earth, which had blossomed without her input. It was full of mold and bugs and other gross things that she never would

have decided on had she been paying attention. But this intrigued her, that things would happen in this realm that were out of her control, because in heaven, nothing happened without her intention. She decided to stay here a while, see what she could learn. She watched new life form all the time, an age of alligators, an age of turtles, an age of dragons, an age of birds. Fish were doing fine all the time. Maybe fish were the point of all this.

LIA

As from the beginning, she wondered if any of this was going somewhere. She had not yet invented three-act structure, and could not conceive of a story with an ending, but also, without an idea of conclusion, existence seemed like a series of lists, just one object after another.

LIA

After many eons had gone by, she noticed a creature on the earth that looked rather like herself. She approached it, staring as she always did as she examined nature. The creature stared back. It waved. God was somewhat taken aback by this gesture, as most life on the planet ignored her.

LIA

Hi, the creature said. You look like me. I call myself Lilith, what are you called?

LIA

Oh me, God said, I'm just whatever you are. What are we, anyway?

LIA

I don't know, said Lilith. I'm Lilith. I'm just here. That's really all I know about it.

GOD

Do you know what here is? Do you know anything about it?

LILITH

No. It seems fine. I guess if we're the same thing, we're supposed to reproduce with each other, right?

GOD

Yes, I think that's how it works.

LILITH

I'm just trying to figure things out as I go along.

LIA

And God knew Lilith. She learned from Lilith. She learned to hunt and gather fruits. She learned to prepare food and clothing, which was useful for dealing with changes in temperature. She learned about temperature, which had never been something she thought about, but as she became acquainted with the idea of comfort, it was essential.

LIA

And God loved Lilith. She constructed ever more elaborate vegetations for her benefit, new delicate flowers that she could wear in her hair for no other reason than that they looked good. Lilith often did things for no reason, without shame, just for the sensation of them. God gave Lilith fire, and invented tools to make her efforts less laborious, and eventually, her own angel, so that the two of them could enjoy each other without distraction.

LIA

Lilith called the angel Adam. God smiled. Lilith loved naming things. She talked to her angel,

LILITH

So, I was told that you're here to serve me and follow my commands, but that doesn't seem fair. I want you to treat me as an equal. We're all in this together.

ADAM

Equals.

LIA

Adam said. He repeated the word several times. He understood it.

LIA

God and Lilith often bathed together in a hot spring underneath an apricot tree. They fed each other fruit and touched their bodies together, exploring what they meant. Adam, having finished his wood chopping, came into the pool with them.

GOD

Oh hello. Is everything finished?

LILITH

Don't talk to him like a slave. He's one of us.

ADAM

I did my third. You two can finish up.

LILITH

Oh, all right. That's fair.

GOD

No, darling, don't go. I can take care of everything in a moment.

ADAM

If you can do that, why would you make me go through all that effort? My back is killing me. You hate me.

LILITH

No, honey, no. No one hates you.

ADAM

You do.

LILITH

No, it's just that God and I have our own relationship, and it's different than the one you and I have.

ADAM

But that's not fair. You said we were equals.

GOD

Listen here you little rodent. I made you. I have created and destroyed whole cosmos infinitely more complex and terrifying than you can imagine. I know, because I created your imagination.

LILITH

Don't talk to him like that! He's new to this world and trying to figure it out. You were new once.

GOD

I am timeless and immortal.

LILITH

Even so.

LIA

And so, God waited with Adam in the pool while Lilith chopped wood. They did not touch each other. They did not feed each other fruit. God stared at the man with her most damning expression, but Adam didn't seem to notice. He tried to grab an apricot from a branch that was just too high.

LIA

Hours later, Lilith returned from her chores. She had finished the whole load, and had prepared dinner and tidied up as well.

LILITH

Sorry, I was just on a roll. It's getting late. Why don't we just eat and go to sleep?

LIA

They divided their meat and vegetables into three equal portions, though Adam complained that his had a bone in it and so it didn't count. He demanded that the other two give him a little of theirs. God gave him her whole portion. It was his now. When they went to bed, he crawled up beside them. His hairy, sweaty body felt too close for God, even with Lilith in between them. She backed away.

LIA

God wanted to talk to Lilith about Adam, but he was always close by. He felt inadequate compared to them, and he was, but Lilith always heard his complaints and tried to ease his troubled mind.

LILITH

You're doing great, don't worry. I love you as much as I love God. Maybe even more, because you need my love. God doesn't. She would be fine without me.

ADAM

Do you mean that?

LILITH

I do.

ADAM

No, you don't.

LILITH

Yes, I do. I love you, you silly goose.

LIA

And God heard this conversation. And God found it obnoxious. She regretted having created Adam, but Lilith had grown too attached to the useless angel, and God had grown too attached to Lilith to harm her in any way. She returned to her crystal palace, certain that Lilith would be fine without her, that the two of them would manage fine in idyllic ignorance.

LIA

She wanted to destroy the universe again and start fresh, but each time this thought entered her mind, she remembered Lilith, and stopped herself.

LIA

She wanted to rot the earth from the inside. She wanted to tear down the forests and fill them in with rock. She wanted to cloud its atmosphere with helium and radon

and all the other male gases, the pointless ones. She wanted to destroy everything, and slowly this time. But she remembered Lilith, who wouldn't have liked what she was thinking. God needed Lilith.

LIA

She returned to earth. She found Adam, who was carving some figure out of wood with his knife.

ADAM

Oh, hey God, how are you? Haven't seen you in a while.

GOD

I'm immortal and invincible. I'm fine. Where's Lilith?

ADAM

Oh, you know, it's the darnedest thing. We had a little fight the other night because I wanted to reproduce and she didn't, but that didn't seem fair to me, so we got into a little fight and before I knew it, she wasn't moving anymore. So I guess I need another woman. Can you get me another woman?

LIA

And God had no feeling. God was silent for a long time. She would soon be silent again, and remain silent. She was nothing. She had created nothing. And now, finally, she had purpose in her life.

GOD

Of course, have another woman, I've got lots. Although, I'm going to have to tear her out of your chest. There's not really any other way.

LIA

And God smiled. She had an ending for her story.

EXT. COSMOS

LIA

Welcome back to Tales of Insecurity. Let's take a little break from all this sadness. Try closing your eyes, if you can, and concentrate on your breathing. Feel all the worries of the day fading away. Become fully aware of your body. You're made of clouds. You're floating away, leaving your aching husk of awkward flesh behind. You have a beautiful body entirely consistent with your gender identity. You're losing that weight you wanted. You're beautiful and kind. Everyone likes your podcast. Your perspective isn't alienating. You're popular within certain demographics. Someone will hear you when you speak. Someone can hear you. Breathe in. Breathe out.

LIA

Breathe in. Feel yourself leave this weary world behind. Forget about your debts, the credit card bills you've accumulated with no assets to show for them. You're employable, for now at least. You haven't wasted your life. You are proficient in the Microsoft Office Suite. You seek to provide stellar customer service in a competitive environment. You're good under pressure. You've seen profits increase 34% in your tenure but you're looking for something that feels more like a career. Now breathe out.

LIA

Breathe in. Feel a renewed sense of confidence that you are deciding to forge your own path. You've been hiding in obscurity for years because you've been waiting for permission. Breathe out. Whose permission have you been waiting for? Whose permission would even matter? Breathe in. Don't forget to breathe. Breathe out. You've been forgetting, haven't you? Breathe out. You don't need permission to breathe. You can do it on your own.

Breathe out. Now breathe out.
Breathe out. And breathe out. Feel
the air leave your body. You are
now empty. Now breathe out.

LIA

Breathe in. Remember, you're going
to be fine. Nothing bad is going to
happen to you. Breathe out. You've
been having trouble breathing. The
terrible job you took to leave your
last terrible job gave you asthma
and allergies and made you
incredibly fragile, but you still
have something. Breathe in. Hold
onto that thing you have left.
Don't articulate what it is.
Breathe out. Things always work out
in the end, people say. Breathe in.
Everything happens for a reason.
Breathe out. The concept of karma
is not inherently problematic and
ableist and apologetic to the
ruling class. It means your
misfortune meant something. Breathe
in. If your misfortune didn't mean
anything, than why did you bother
having it? Why didn't you do
something earlier? Breathe out. Who
were you trying to impress?

LIA

Feel all the negative energy
leaving your body. Remember you
have a body. You are not just a
consciousness floating in ether.
You have to eat and breathe and
piss and shit and sweat and a lot
of other gross things, just to be
alive. Forget the burden of being
alive. Don't blame your parents.
Don't resent the podunk,
homogenous, mountain towns where
you grew up for lowering your
expectations. In the end, the blame
is all squarely on you. Breathe in.
Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe
out. When you were presenting male,
your family resented you for being
too girly. Breathe in, breathe out.
Now that you're presenting female,
they can't accept that either.
Breathe in. Forget the temper
tantrum your dad had when you

admitted you were depressed in high school and how discouraging that was to saying anything to him ever again. Breathe out. Forget how many people depend on your dad for emotional support and the irony of his pig-headedness as far as you're concerned. Breathe in. You are not defeated. You are strong. Breathe out. Your mother accepts you. You can tell because she now treats you the way her abusive mother treated her. Breathe in. You don't need anyone's approval. You will not get anyone's approval. Breathe out, but not because I told you to. Breathe if you want to breathe.

LIA

You will not give up. You will do the things that you can do that no one else can. You will do the things you can do that no one else values. You will not be like the hard-working immigrants that prop up all the businesses around you for minimal wages and limited benefits. You're white enough that you look white, and you can take advantage of that and your vaguely European accent. You're so charming. Everyone loves how white you are. Everyone who knows you loves you. Almost no one knows you. Even long-time friends can't read your expressions or your body language. You're full of surprises. You don't need to be known. You just need to breathe.

LIA

Everything is fine. Feel the weight of the world leaving your body. Feel the hopelessness of each passing day leave you and stop worrying so much. You're broke. You're broken. So what? Relax. Anxiety serves no evolutionary purpose for an individual. It's whole purpose is to weed you out of society. You don't need anxiety anymore. Just breathe. Do what you need to do. Now open your eyes. Relax, god damn you. Forget all

your troubles and pop the top of a nice cold Coca-cola. No matter how bad things get for you, Coca-cola will be in business, providing fizzy sweetness to the world at large. You can barely get out of bed, but if you can wrap your lips around the top of an aluminum cylinder, you can take an extra minute and forget the stares and derision you receive from the world at large. Ah. Breathe in that Coca-cola, your only responsibility. Now breathe out.

LIA

Alright. I feel better. How about you?

MICHAEL

Jesus. I didn't realize you had such an issue with our parents.

LIA

No, no. That wasn't about me. I was just speaking in general. I'm not. They have their own life, separate from mine. They're still there in the mountains, going to church and AA with all the white Republicans.

MICHAEL

Why are they still going to church? Didn't your dad retire from the ministry?

LIA

I guess it's just what they do. I don't know what they get out of it. But I never did.

MICHAEL

I guess without it, they'd be completely isolated.

LIA

I don't think that would bother them. My sweetie and I went down there last year, and I made them some nice meals, so much nicer than what they usually eat, because I wanted them to meet my partner of

five years, my sweetie, my fiancée, my soulmate, but they just ate and dispersed to their own corners of the house. It was fine. I don't know what I expected.

MICHAEL

I used to do that too.

LIA

You should move in with them. You could hide in the moldy basement. You'd be the least alive thing there.

MICHAEL

You should save all this for an episode on family. That definitely seems like an episode.

LIA

I'm having an episode.

MICHAEL

Why don't we just move onto the next thing?

LIA

I don't have anything else. We could just end early.

MICHAEL

I might have something. I mean, it's not polished or anything, but I have been working on a TV pilot.

LIA

Really? That's so interesting. I'm dying to read it.

MICHAEL

Yeah, I mean, I can pull it up if you want.

LIA

Sure, you know, I was being incredibly sarcastic, but maybe you don't have enough estrogen to glean nuances of intonation and facial expression.

MICHAEL

No, I got it. And actually, I don't think that's what estrogen does.

LIA

Oh my god, kill me.

MICHAEL

I've tried!

LIA

Go get your script.

MICHAEL

Right, okay, stall for me, I'm going to print it out.

LIA

Alright. I could just stop recording for a little. It's not like we're live. If you're really into the verisimilitude of the fact that I'm not writing a shitty, patronizing script and attributing it to you, that's fine, but it seems kind of a waste of everyone's time. Are you sure you want that on your conscience?

MICHAEL

Jesus Christ, we can just read it off the screen.

LIA

So what's the point of this script? Tell me what it's about.

MICHAEL

Okay so, it follows the story of a young and talented screenwriter trying to get his first movie made, but even though he's a genius, he's inept at life and love. I know it sounds like it's been done to death, but trust me, I bring a unique perspective to it.

LIA

I'm going to die.

MICHAEL

We don't have to read it if you don't want to.

LIA

No, I want to. I can't wait.

MICHAEL

I think you'll be pleasantly surprised.

LIA

Kathryn, can you come help us with this?

KATHRYN

I'm sorry?

LIA

Do you mind reading the stage directions in this? I think I need you to really do this thing justice.

KATHRYN

If you insist.

LIA

Thanks. Everyone, if you're new to Tales of Insecurity, this is Kathryn. She's kind of the producer of our show, I guess. She's the voice of disapproval I keep around to keep my ego in check. It's kind of an unnecessary precaution, but I tend to err on the side of safety. She's like Catherine Hepburn and Maggie Smith and my Chinese grandmother, the venerable Lady Lindsay of Birker, except a little bit younger and less admirable, because unlike those people, she doesn't have any kind of talent or harrowing journey behind her derision.

KATHRYN

Was that explanation really necessary?

LIA

I'm sorry, I like to be thorough.

KATHRYN

About some things.

LIA

I try. Okay, here we go. "The Gift of the Magi" by Michael Abbott.

MICHAEL

I thought I had a better chance of getting something produced if it had a Christmas theme. I don't think there's been a good adaptation of "The Gift of the Magi" yet.

LIA

I see. But what does that story have to do with the plot you described?

MICHAEL

Why don't we just read it and see?

LIA

Here on Tales of Insecurity.

THE GIFT OF THE MAGI BY MICHAEL ABBOTT

Adapted from a short story by O. Henry

EXT. WASTELAND, 2057, NIGHT

The city is in ruins. Bits and pieces of various skyscrapers are everywhere, and the skyline is low and uneven. The tallest building in the vista is a single Starbucks, which operates normally.

INT. STARBUCKS, NIGHT

At every table and every seat, men and women in business professional outfits are sipping their coffees peacefully, concentrating fully on the aroma. They do not read the paper. They do not work on their laptops. They are here for coffee. There is still an open laptop though. At the far corner of the room, a young man, MATTHEW, dressed in old, sloppy clothes types furiously.

BARISTA

Would you like a refill on your coffee, sir?

MATTHEW

No, thank you. Actually, yes. I need all the energy I can get.

BARISTA

That's what we're here for. What are you working on there?

MATTHEW

Oh this? This is nothing. I'm just updating my resumé.

BARISTA

Oh, okay. For a second there, I thought you were working on a screenplay.

Matthew looks at her thoughtfully.

MATTHEW

No, of course not. I don't even have a license to write screenplays. And we all know that writing screenplays without a license is a capital offense.

BARISTA

I know that. I studied law at Princeton.

MATTHEW

Oh really? What are you doing here then?

BARISTA

Well you know, now that court cases are all decided by computers, there's not really much to do. This is really the center of the community.

MATTHEW

I see. Why don't you sit down with me a minute. I'd love to take a break.

BARISTA

Sorry, I need to get back to work.

MATTHEW

Give me five minutes.

BARISTA

What can you do in five minutes?

MATTHEW

Anything you like.

INT. BARISTA'S APARTMENT, DAY

Matthew the the Barista, Ronda, lie in bed, shirtless, after a night of passion.

RONDA
You're not half bad.

MATTHEW
What about the other half?

RONDA
Don't push it.

Ronda pulls out a cigarette.

RONDA
Do you have a lighter? I sold mine to buy this pack of cigarettes.

MATTHEW
No, sorry. I developed asthma so I could quit smoking.

LIA
I'm sorry, is this how the script is an adaptation of The Gift of the Magi?

MICHAEL
Just keep reading. It'll make sense later. It's motivic.

LIA
Alright. Sure.

RONDA
Did you really develop asthma on purpose?

MATTHEW
Sometimes we need a little extra motivation. You know what I mean?

RONDA
Not really.

MATTHEW
It's okay. I'm kind of used to not being understood.

RONDA
How's your screenplay coming?

MATTHEW

I'm having trouble moving the characters along. They seem like broad pastiches of their genders. Hey wait a minute.

RONDA

I knew it. You are working on a screenplay!

MATTHEW

No, I'm not. I gave it up. There is no media but state-sponsored media.

RONDA

I'm not going to turn you in. Don't worry. But I can't see you anymore.

She gets out of bed and stares out the window, taking the bedsheet with her. It drapes around her form artfully.

MATTHEW

But Ronda, I know we just met, but I feel a real connection with you.

He stands up behind her and comes to the window. He wraps his arms around her shoulders, sharing the view with her of empty fields of debris.

RONDA

It's strangely beautiful, isn't it?

MATTHEW

What, the end of the world?

RONDA

Isn't it neat that we get to see the end of history? Maybe in a few billion years some other sapient race will find relics of a fallen civilization. We will be the lost continent, the ancients. They'll venerate our technology and wonder how we squandered our potential.

MATTHEW

So, the beginning of history?

RONDA

I'm sorry?

MATTHEW

All they'll have is our end. Everything else has been destroyed.

What they will have is now, and that will be their foundation, if any of it lasts. What excites me is that we'll be forgotten, just a little blip in the cosmos. That's going to be such a relief. We didn't cause any permanent damage.

LIA

I'm sorry, is this going anywhere?

MATTHEW

What?

LIA

Does anything happen in this screenplay, or is it just pillow talk about genre fiction?

MICHAEL

Maybe you don't understand it. It's pretty sophisticated.

LIA

Yeah, maybe it's a little over my head.

KATHRYN

Can we stop arguing and just get this over with?

MICHAEL

If you two don't like what I've written, you're welcome to put something of your own out there.

LIA

I'm sorry, I'll just read it.

MICHAEL

Thank you.

RONDA

Wow, Matthew, you're so complicated and interesting. You have such original thoughts, but no one's ever going to know them.

MATTHEW

It's a problem when you're a genius. No one can understand you.

RONDA

How do you know you're not wrong?

You could be a genius, or you could be a complete idiot, and how would you know?

MATTHEW

I guess I don't. But if I'm an idiot, I guess it doesn't matter what I do.

RONDA

Oh, Matthew. You're so cute.

MATTHEW

What can I say?

A loud knock on the door.

POLICE

Open up, this is the police. We know about the screenplay. This is your last warning. Give up your laptop or face immediate execution.

RONDA

Yikes!

MATTHEW

Don't panic. We're going to be fine.

RONDA

You don't know that. Oh damn it. I knew I shouldn't have gotten involved with a writer.

POLICE

You have to the count of ten to open this door.

RONDA

What's in that screenplay anyway?

MATTHEW

It's about the truth. That's all I can say.

RONDA

Be honest with me. Is it good? Could it have an effect on this dreary world? Could it inspire the masses to rise up and live again?

MATTHEW

Absolutely.

RONDA

Then you finish that screenplay.

She hands him the laptop and opens the window.

RONDA

We don't have much time. You won't be able to get dressed. Oh, but then you won't be able to get service.

MATTHEW

It's okay. I've been without service before.

RONDA

Be brave, my dear. I'll try to buy you some time.

They kiss. She pushes him out the window as the police burst in.

RONDA

Oh hello, officers, what seems to be the trouble?

We see the power cord of Matthew's laptop, still plugged into the wall.

EXT. RONDA'S APARTMENT, DAY

A half-naked Michael runs through buildings, chased by antagonists he cannot see.

MICHAEL

Oh, that should say Matthew.

LIA

Why does it say Michael?

MICHAEL

It's just a typo.

LIA

Is this how you feel, Mr. Abbott, that society is trying to keep you from expressing yourself?

MICHAEL

Now what are you saying?

LIA

Nothing you don't already know.

MICHAEL

I think I'm done with this. Let's not read this anymore.

LIA

Oh, we're going to keep reading.

MICHAEL

It needs a lot of editing. I'm not really happy with it.

LIA

Kathryn, please continue.

He runs through a clothesline, and comes out the other side clutching a halter top and matching skirt.

MICHAEL

And I guess you're going to try to make something out of that too.

LIA

I'm not saying anything. We're just reading your script.

He quickly dresses himself and walks back to the clothesline, picking up a scarf to hide his face. The color doesn't quite go with the other bits of his ensemble, so he searches through the laundry for something more appropriate. Just as he's finished wrapping his head, an officer approaches.

POLICE

Excuse me, ma'am, we're looking for a suspect in a screenwriting case. Have you seen a suspicious looking gentleman run by here carrying a laptop?

MATTHEW

No, I'm sorry officer. No gentlemen here.

POLICE

Thank you for your trouble, ma'am.

MATTHEW

Happy to oblige a good-looking officer like you.

POLICE

Oh, thank you very much. You flatter me.

LIA

I'm a little confused about who's doing which voice here.

MICHAEL

What do you mean?

LIA

Well, it sounds like you're doing my voice for your character.

MICHAEL

But isn't that always what's happening?

LIA

What do you mean?

MICHAEL

Isn't LiA, you, just me doing your voice, with some makeup, hair, and wardrobe?

LIA

I take hormones, too.

MICHAEL

You can make fun of me all you want, LiA, but you'll never be rid of me.

LIA

Please, let's just finish reading. I want to see where this is going.

MICHAEL

Your head still perks up anytime you hear my name, like it's yours. You respond to it.

LIA

Interior. Ronda's apartment. Day.

RONDA

So you say that a screenwriter was here? No, that's impossible. I thought they were all rounded up.

POLICE

I'm afraid there are still a few left.

RADIO

Suspect found. He was trying to

hide in women's clothing.

POLICE

Hiding in women's clothing? Isn't that the most ridiculous thing you can think of?

LIA

So I'm guessing she brings him the power cord, but he's sold his computer to pay for something not yet revealed in the script?

MICHAEL

Yeah, something like that. It's not important.

LIA

Does the screenplay ever get produced into a movie?

MICHAEL

No, he wasn't really writing anything. He just wanted to seem like a rebel, and it was the easiest way.

LIA

I never should have invited you here.

MICHAEL

I'm always available. I'm always right here.

LIA

I know.

MICHAEL

And you can never get away from me.

LIA

I know.

MICHAEL

We can read the rest later. I think you seem pretty done right now.

LIA

Thank you.

MICHAEL

For what it's worth, I think you're a lot better looking than I am.

LIA

Thank you.

MICHAEL

Alright, thank you for listening to Tales of Insecurity. I think LiA needs a little girl power hip hop, we got anything like that? Okay great. Thank you for listening everyone. LiA's a real woman, don't forget! Like that means anything. You're beautiful. Thank you. Thank you.

LIA

So, that's about it for our show today. But I'm going to try this tight five thing again. I screwed it up last time, because I thought that I could just improvise a stand-up comedy routine. I don't know where I got that idea. Improvisors don't even do that. They have something they're responding to, either each other or an audience. I'm all by myself here. And it's not like I'm cool and charismatic or level-headed or confident in myself. So I prepared a little this time. I wrote it all out. I wrote everything out, even this part right here where it sounds like I'm, I'm kind of stumbling over my words like? This part. Here. Where it sounds like I'm stalling for time when I think of the next thing I'm going to say. It's naturalistic, like David Mamet or something. I studied writing in college. I'm educated. Okay, so. Intro.

MC

Alright ladies, gentlemen, and non-binaries, please give a warm welcome to your friend and mine, the talented and lovely, do you really want me to say that? Okay, sure, I just. It seems like overcompensating, you know? They're going to want to challenge that. They're going to be looking for any

evidence that you're not lovely.
Not talented. Alright, it's your
funeral. The lovely and talented,
Miss LiA Lindsaychen!

LIA

Alright, thank you, thank you.
You're beautiful. My name is LiA.
Yes, that is a Hebrew name. No, I'm
not Jewish. I am circumcised, but
not enough. Yes, that's right, you
got a girl up here with a penis,
what are you going to do about it?
We got any hecklers in the crowd
tonight? Go ahead and get it out
now, I've heard them all. Anyone?
Anyone? Alright. Phew.

LIA

I haven't actually heard them all.
I was bluffing. Actually,
everyone's been really nice since
my transition. At least to my face.
I worry that it might be a
lingering specter of male
privilege, but you know, I'll take
it. I promise, that is all the
masculinity I have left. And the
penis. And maybe my voice, a little
bit, from time to time.

LIA

But I think I'm pretty good-
looking. I pass. Every time I see a
new doctor, they ask me when my
last cycle was, and I have to
explain to them that I've got just,
the lowest maintenance genitals
possible. People with vaginas have
to buy all kinds of products, and
most penis people have to jerk it
constantly. Right guys? How many of
you are jerking it right now? My
shriveled little lady balls tuck in
quite nicely and I can almost
forget they're there, just some
petite little dried prunes curled
up in cellulite. Okay now, how many
of you are still jerking it? I
don't usually think about
whatever's going on down there, but
I know cis people love to hear
about genitals. This is all for
you. Really, aside from never

experiencing sexual pleasure, I've got a pretty good deal. I can jog comfortably. I don't get sweaty. Totally worth it. "You're not missing anything," the intake person at the emergency room said the other day, when I told her about my lack of vagina. Yeah, I'm really grateful that I can't ever have children and that I'm always afraid someone's going to attack me in public restrooms, gyms, the south. I like hearing politicians accusing me of sex crimes when I can't even commit sex not-crimes. That diatribe boosts my confidence. Cool, people are afraid of me. Maybe they'll get out of my way.

LIA

I didn't say any of that to the intake person. I said 'Thank you.' She probably has endometriosis. I don't want to berate her. She was being friendly, trying to save face. But you know, transgender people do experience real discrimination, lots of it. Even at the Whole Foods, which you'd expect to be a bastion of open-mindedness, they had a sign outside specifically forbidding our entry. "No Trans Fats," it said, like it was a point of pride for them. Just out of spite, I went in and bought some ice cream. Nobody said a word. Hmm. Sorry, I guess I'm a bit too svelte for that joke. It's kind of offensive to the real trans fats, who hate to be called that. Have you guys heard of this 'intersectionality' thing? What's up with that?

LIA

Cis white women drive like this. Cis white men, they're always driving like this. Now, trans black women, they drive like this, and Chinese non-binary AFABs, they drive in this complete other way. This routine is probably a bit too visual for the home audience, and maybe a little esoteric. Sorry if

you all feel alienated, but you know. Welcome to my world. Get cozy. There's no way out, except this door that was made only for you. And now I'm going to close it. You like that Kafka reference? Listen, I went to Oberlin College, supposedly one of the most woke campuses in the whole midwest, and I'm including Indiana. Oberlin was probably the most supportive place I could have chosen to transition, but no, I had to wait another ten years. I had to wait until I had absolutely nothing to lose, because I thought that I would be a pariah, a complete social outcast if I even dared to think that I was anything other than an idealistic, kind, compassionate, all-American boy.

LIA

Thing is, how many idealistic, kind, compassionate boys do you know? I know women can be catty. They can cut you down in ways that linger the rest of your life. But even that comes from a place of empathy. They get to know you. They evaluate you, they have to care about you just enough to get that secret piece of ammunition that cuts you to your core. To be a woman is to see the people around you. To be a man is to assert yourself above others. I've tried to form a more nuanced view of gender over the years, and I can't say that the results I've found are universal, but for me, this the cognitive part of the decision I've made. The LGBT community likes to make the point that none of these labels are a choice, but there is a certain level where they are. We should respect that choice. You can either be absolutely miserable for no fucking reason, or you can do what you have to do to be a complete person. So I'm female and have always been, and to me, that means I respond to my environment. I feel shame. I feel so much shame. What am I even doing? Why am I

here? Oh Jesus, I'm dying. I can't breathe. Why couldn't I just get used to being oblivious and self-aggrandizing? Why couldn't I have just been happy jerking off all over everything?

LIA

A woman can be confident too. But a woman's confidence comes from something. She fixed something. She's made something. She helped someone. This shouldn't have anything to do with gender, but it does. This is what I'm saying with my confusing trans face, as soon as I walk into a room. I adjust to things. I make decisions. I am not afraid to act when something is wrong. I'm afraid of everything else, because I'm aware of everything else. I'm overwhelmed, but I'm trying. God help me, I'm trying. I haven't fixed anything. I haven't made anything or helped anyone, but I'm going to. Until then, I am nothing. Alright, thank you Detroit, you've been great! Enjoy the bar, you only live once? You'd think YOLO would be a reason to make good decisions, but what do I know? Alright, you're beautiful. I'm dying. Thank you. I'm dead, just just going through the motions. Thank you. Thank you. Where are my hecklers at? It would really be a comfort now, please. Oh god, please. This is all fake. I just want to be honest. Oh god. This is my last chance.

All the ladies in the house say hey

All the men in the house say I'm a piece of trash

All the ladies in the house say ho

All the men in the house

Why don't you shut up just for once?

All the ladies in the house say hey
All the men in the house say whatever you want
All the ladies in the house say ho
All the men in the house
Who are you talking to?

Thank you for the invitation
I'm happy to be here at last
I'm ready to regain my station
Happy to forget the past

Once upon a time I thought that
I could be the ruling class
Now I'm happy to report that
I've got nothing

I wasn't able to pretend that
I was who I ought to be
I tried my best but now it's over
So now I'm me

I cast my old life aside in the blink of an eye
Some tell me I'm a spy but that's quite a surprise
I'm just a girl on the run with a bulge in my thighs
I don't think that you're your cankles so why should I be shy
We got to stand together if we're going to get by
So from your ivory tower take a look at the sky
There's a man up there who wants us to die
Maybe we should tell him that that shit won't fly

Sorry if I seemed a little defensive before

I don't want to seem like I'm trying to be anything more
Than the person I am, down here on the floor
I wasn't born on your turf, so I'll knock on the door
Let's fight the revolution, I don't want to be demure
I'm feminine in my own way and I'm absolutely sure
That everything I stand for is girly to its core;
Mankind is a disease and transitioning's the cure