

LIA

The following program contains explicit language and self-loathing so pronounced it comes all the way back around to self-indulgence. Don't let your children pity themselves. They might get spoiled. May we all be innocent again someday.

LIA

You record a voiceover. You debate what you should say, and realize that whatever you have to share with the world, the world doesn't want to hear it. There are trillions of voices on the planet, all the living things, and they're all competing for attention. Wouldn't the moral choice be to stand back and wait your turn, after everyone else has had their say? 'Yes,' you say, 'after you, Miss Spider. All the various beetles and ants: you go ahead; I'm not an expert in anything. Though I guess I might know something about Tales of Insecurity.'

LIA

Hello everyone, welcome to Tales of Insecurity, the show I make to silence my inner demons. It's a comedy show, but I don't want to compete with comedians, so I call it post-modern existential horror. I don't really want to compete with anyone. See, whenever I suspect something is supposed to be funny, I set up my defenses. When you laugh, you lose control of yourself. You breathe from a part in your gut that doesn't get exercise too much otherwise. It is the flabby, misshapen part that you suck in because you can't admit you're a size nine. Laughing reminds me of the awkward parts of my body, and so, when I know something is poised to illicit that response in me, I prepare myself. I start thinking in John Nash mathematical symbols so that nothing takes me by surprise. Maybe

you're like me. I refuse to believe that my experience is unique.

LIA

Who am I? I'm LiA Lindsaychen. This is my show. I made it out of my guts. It's disgusting. It's just a big gross mass of membranes and loose tissue filled with partially digested food and enzymes and feelings of inadequacy that I want to pretend are universal. Though of course, if they are, there's not really any point in talking about them, and if they're not, what am I even talking about? I go through this debate a lot. Is this interesting or is it obvious? Those are the only choices.

LIA

Let's talk about self-esteem. What is it made of? What does it look like? How much of it is healthy or good? The answers to these questions may surprise you. They may surprise me. I don't think I'm qualified to make any claims on this topic. This is why other podcasts have guests.

MICHAEL

You're kind of floundering there, LiA. Why don't you just get to the topic you do want to discuss?

LIA

Thank you. Sometimes I get lost in my own thoughts.

MICHAEL

Happy to help.

LIA

So, in my family, we value austerity. We find pride in it. Comfort. A certain spiritual fulfillment. This is the foundation for my understanding of self-confidence, that one doesn't require any special accommodations to be comfortable. Pure independence. We can sleep without pillows and blankets. We don't need

food to taste good; in fact, we prefer it when it doesn't, because each gravelly, bland mouthful is seasoned with the self-satisfaction that we are strong. We don't need no air conditioning. Why would you celebrate a birthday? Do you really think you deserve a holiday specially just for you? Yikes. The candles don't even add any flavor.

LIA

I have very few memories of my grandmother, my mother's mother, Lady Lindsay of Birker. She was an amazing woman in many ways, and from everything I've heard, quite a firebrand. She and my grandfather fled across China, facing torture and death if they were captured by the Japanese, with children and children-to-be in tow. She wrote a book about it. It's good. Bold Plum, it's called, you can buy it, if you want to read it. She had real stories to tell. But this is my show. My memories of my grandmother are all disapproval for everything I wanted to enjoy. My cousin took little me out for a snack, and told me to pick whatever I wanted. I got this cookie that was iced up to look like a clown. It was just a sugar cookie with frosting and a maraschino cherry. I was the kid, the only kid in the world maybe, who liked clowns. When Lao Lao saw it, she sat me down and lectured me on the dangers of decadent western imperialism. The contemptuous way she said 'Clown Cookie' still rings in my head, every time I take pleasure in anything. Her complaint was that, with every choice at my disposal, I opted for something shallow and surface-level. I should have had a more substantial cookie. I have similar memories with a snocone, "it's just ice" and a frothed milk from a Californian coffee place. She didn't say anything to me that time, but she said something in Chinese to my cousin, I can only

assume about how fat and boring I was. I assume it was quite clever and a little obscene. My cousin seemed embarrassed.

LIA

This legacy of disapproval is hard to overcome. My mother was infected with it, too, and even though she made one act of rebellion in her youth to drop out of graduate school and marry a Tennessee hillbilly, she was unable to shake a certain undercurrent that pleasure was not an achievable or even desirable goal. Perhaps that was why she opted to drop out of school and marry a Tennessee hillbilly. Mountain folk hate indulgence, too. My father would get so upset when I was playing a video game that I learned to only play them in secret. Everything I enjoy, I still feel better doing alone. It's part of why I'm kind of relieved that this podcast isn't popular, will never be popular. What would I do with validation? I can't even imagine.

LIA

Which leads me to today's topic: Addiction by Subtraction. We have stories of people who get really attached to self-denial. Not in a first stage of grief style denial so much as "I really like depriving myself of things! It's fun. Very monastic." That's what Kramer, the quirky neighbor from Seinfeld, said about not having a refrigerator. My partner's grandparents, when they moved to this continent, didn't have a refrigerator either, and they forced their children to drink spoiled milk so it wouldn't go to waste.

LIA

I'm hesitant to talk too much about the Chens, the second half of my surname. They are perfect fodder for a show called Tales of Insecurity, but they have their own

culture -- and I don't think it's a Chinese trait so much as their own, -- of the other kind of denial. Not acknowledging abuse. Pretending everything is fine when everything is very much not fine, as though acknowledging problems causes them. I don't want to say anything too slanderous about my own family, but my mother-in-law has told me on numerous occasions that I am not family, so I should be fine.

LIA

At the same time, it's probably best not to talk too much about them. I'm sure it will come up at some point, but this show is an exploration of my own psyche. Once I start casting aspersions onto others, I risk being smug, which would ruin everything I hold dear. I am nothing. I am pond scum. I am a tiny fish in a teeny tiny pond that I think is the whole world. My opinions mean nothing, my perspective is broken. I'm mentally ill, but not in a way deserving of special accommodations, and certainly not pity. Other people have stories of heroism and overcoming adversity, but when I sit at the campfire by my debris hut, all I have to share are these Tales of Insecurity.

INT. A SUBURBAN HOUSE

GLADYS

Okay, Harold, I'm headed to the grocery store. Is there anything you need?

HAROLD

No, Gladys. I don't need anything.

GLADYS

You sure? I'm not going out again until next week.

HAROLD

If I want something, I'll get it myself.

GLADYS

Alright, Harold. What are you doing there, bird watching?

HAROLD

Yeah.

GLADYS

Is there anything out there? Harold. Are you watching the neighbor boy again?

HAROLD

He's up to no good, I tell you.

GLADYS

What would people say if they saw you, staring at children with binoculars? Stop it before someone calls the cops.

HAROLD

I can do what I want in my home!

GLADYS

Alright, dear. Go ahead, then. I'll have no part of it.

HAROLD

Look, Gladys, he's not even doing anything. He's just staring off at nothing.

GLADYS

And you're staring at him, what does that tell you?

HAROLD

I'm telling you darling, he's no good. Oh no, now he's coming over here.

GLADYS

He's not serving you papers, is he?

HAROLD

I'm sure he's coming to harass me.

GLADYS

He's probably selling cookies or

something. Just be nice to the child, for God's sake.

TYLER

Oh hello, Mrs. Stevenson.

GLADYS

Good afternoon, Tyler. I was just on my way out. Are you here to see Mr. Stevenson?

TYLER

Yes, ma'am. I was hoping he could help me identify a bird I saw in our backyard.

GLADYS

I'm sure he'd be happy to help you. Come on in. He loves talking about birds.

TYLER

Gee, thanks a lot, Mrs. Stevenson, but my parents told me not to leave the yard. But I'd love to talk to your husband. I don't get a chance to interact with positive male role models very often.

GLADYS

Well I'm sure Harold would be happy to fill in for your absent parents. Harold! You have company!

HAROLD

Who is it?

GLADYS

You know damn well who it is! Sorry, Tyler.

TYLER

Oh, that's okay, Mrs. Stevenson, I know that's a grown-up word.

HAROLD

Yeah, yeah. Hello, Tyler.

TYLER

Mr. Stevenson!

HAROLD

Okay. That's nice. You've got my leg there. You can let go anytime.

Alright.

GLADYS

You boys have a good time. I'll be back in a jiffy, and then I'll whip up a batch of my zucchini flaxseed muffins. How does that sound?

TYLER

Oh goody!

GLADYS

They're good for your digestion, you know.

TYLER

It's never too early to start being good to your body!

GLADYS

Such a good boy.

TYLER

You're too nice to me, Mrs. Stevenson. Please don't think I feel any entitlement to anything you are generous enough to offer me.

GLADYS

It's really my pleasure.

HAROLD

Alright, Gladys, go ahead and get out of here.

GLADYS

So much nicer than Harold.

TYLER

No, Mrs. Stevenson. Your husband has a gruff demeanor, but he is ultimately moral in his decision-making and watches after the people he cares about.

GLADYS

So precious.

TYLER

I'm really just trying to reciprocate a basic level of human courtesy. You really shouldn't give me any extra credit just because

your expectations for my class and peer group are so low. I am willing to give you the benefit of the doubt, but other people in my position might find your attitude patronizing at best, potentially emasculating, and certainly a contributing factor to a culture that rewards male entitlement and female subservience, ultimately benefitting no one.

GLADYS

Aw. Okay. I'm leaving! You boys have fun!

HAROLD

I'm sure we will.

TYLER

I guess it's just you and me now, Mr. Stevenson.

HAROLD

Do you want anything, boy? I have some Life Savers around here somewhere.

TYLER

No thank you, sir. I don't eat candy.

HAROLD

Boy your age should eat candy.

TYLER

I'm sorry, sir. If you want, I will take a single Life Saver, but I must insist that you give me your least favorite flavor.

HAROLD

Never mind. It's fine. You don't have to have candy. Why don't you go ahead and show me this bird of yours?

EXT. YARD, DAY

TYLER

Oh yes, of course. Sure thing, Mr. Stevenson. Boy, I sure am excited to know what kind of bird this is.

Woo Lordy. God Almighty. Jesus,
Mary, and Joseph. Abraham, Isaac,
Esau, Jacob, Joshua, Zebulun,
Benjamin, Levi, Dinah...

HAROLD

Do you think it's still in your
yard?

TYLER

What do you mean?

HAROLD

Birds do have a way of flying away.

TYLER

Oh no! I hope it's still there!
What if I was just wasting your
time. Oh no, Mr. Stevenson, I'm so
sorry.

HAROLD

It's fine, Tyler. It's fine. Don't
worry.

TYLER

Oh good, it's still there.

HAROLD

You see it? I don't see any birds
anywhere.

TYLER

There, in the jar.

HAROLD

Tyler, you can't put a bird in a
jar!

TYLER

Well jeez, Mr. Stevenson. I was
afraid of wasting your time. You
told me before that I shouldn't
waste your time and I'm just trying
to do everything you ask of me.

HAROLD

No. I'm sorry. You're a good kid.
That's a baby Starling. Where did
you find it?

TYLER

Oh, well there was a nest on that
tree there.

HAROLD

Did you take the baby bird out of its nest?

TYLER

Well, I had to, to put it in the jar.

HAROLD

Which you had to do...

TYLER

To keep it from flying away.

HAROLD

But now you understand why that was wrong?

TYLER

Oh yes, Mr. Stevenson. I'm so sorry to have disappointed you. I was only trying to keep you from getting upset. That's why I picked up the bird and wrapped it in string and sealed it in that glass jar.

HAROLD

Look kid, I'm sorry if I've been too harsh on you, but you can't go kidnapping little birds. They've got their own lives. They don't know anything, and then you put them in a jar, that's what they think life is now. Now that bird is going to be waiting for some other hand to put it in another jar. It's just going to wait in jars its whole life. It will think the whole world is just jars.

TYLER

Gosh, Mr. Stevenson. You're saying I just traumatized that little bird and it's never going to be happy as long as it lives? Because of my actions, it will always see the world as an essentially limited place, where none of its actions can ever have any effect on its surroundings and agency is in possession only by the physically powerful?

HAROLD

Yes, that is basically it.

TYLER

Well, my oh my, I'd hate for that little bird to have an inaccurate view of the world.

HAROLD

Great, now why don't you go to your room and wait for your parents to get home?

TYLER

Oh no, they told me to stay in the yard. Gosh, are you asking me to make a choice between my ostensibly loving but absent parents and my emotionally unavailable but physically present father figure?

HAROLD

I'm not forcing you to do anything. But you have toys in the house right? You should go play with your toys.

TYLER

Oh no, sir. We don't have any toys.

HAROLD

You don't have a ball? A ninja turtle or a battling top or anything?

TYLER

No, sir.

HAROLD

You don't have a Nintendo? Or a hobby horse?

TYLER

No, sir. My parents think those things are frivolous. They say that I'm probably autistic, so I'll get obsessed with anything I remotely enjoy, so it's important I never enjoy anything, for my own good.

HAROLD

I see.

TYLER

My dad likes to read the paper. But he says it's too sophisticated for me, and he says the comics section is full of derivative tropes that haven't developed significantly since the 1950s.

HAROLD

So what do you do? How do you spend your time?

TYLER

Well, mostly I wait around, trying to think of things I can talk about with you, because you seem like a person with a developed personality, and my futile, misguided efforts to connect with you, as off-putting as I know they are, provide an essential forward motion to what threatens to be a stagnant, unfulfilling life.

HAROLD

Tyler.

TYLER

Yes, Mr. Stevenson?

HAROLD

I'm retired. I have a garden. I have a hummingbird feeder. I raised three children who have all gone off to their own parts of the world. I'm just trying to have a little peace to myself before I die.

TYLER

How's your garden?

HAROLD

Fine. It's fine. Tyler. I don't want to be your role model.

TYLER

Aw gee, Mr. Stevenson. You're not my role model.

HAROLD

I'm not?

TYLER

Of course not. Oh I'm so sorry to have misled you.

HAROLD

If I'm not your role model, then what am I?

TYLER

Just my little anthropology project. I hope that's okay with you.

HAROLD

Do you ever watch TV, Tyler?

TYLER

Oh no, sir. My parents say that until I have a background in post-feminist critique, I run the risk of parroting the mores of a cynical, consumerist society.

HAROLD

Tyler, I never talked to my parents much. They didn't like talking to me, because I didn't have much to say, because I was a child.

TYLER

Hey, I'm a child too!

HAROLD

We lived in a rural area, so instead of finding friends my own age to play with, I learned everything I needed to know about social cues from television. This is how I learned about society.

TYLER

Gee, Mr. Stevenson. Television sure sounds awfully useful.

HAROLD

Why don't you come inside and watch some television, so you can crush some of this deafening silence?

TYLER

Oh, sorry, Mr. Stevenson. If I concede at all to the homogenizing influence of Hollywood and Madison Avenue, I will lose the purity of

my cultural perspective. I think it's really interesting that you have interests and hobbies, I really do, but were I to latch onto any of these ultimately frivolous symbols of complacency, I am certain my life would be wasted. What makes your interest in gardening different from my uncle's passion for drinking lots and lots of alcohol and wrapping himself in nylon?

HAROLD

Well Tyler, some behaviors are acceptable and some are not.

TYLER

Oh, no, I don't think that. You and my uncle are exactly the same. You just like birds and he likes indecent exposure. When I have questions about birds, I ask you, and when I have questions about anatomy, I ask him. My parents tell me I should connect to people on their level.

HAROLD

All I ever see you do is stare out into space, waiting for something that never comes.

TYLER

Yes, exactly.

HAROLD

I think my wife just pulled up. I better help her with the groceries.

TYLER

Okay, nice talking to you, Mr. Stevenson! I hope you enjoy your birds and plants and other fetishes you're able to justify your interest in by virtue that you don't actually care about them very much!

HAROLD

Thank you.

Door slam.

GLADYS

How was your little playdate, dear?

HAROLD

The kid's a terror, honey. He's a nightmare. The worst person I've ever met.

GLADYS

Oh, Harold.

HAROLD

We should move.

GLADYS

You're exaggerating.

HAROLD

What do you want to do, honey? What's something you've wanted to do your whole life but never felt like you could?

GLADYS

I don't know, divorce?

HAROLD

Honey.

GLADYS

Are you still looking at him?

HAROLD

He's just staring.

GLADYS

That's fine, dear. Honestly, the way you talk, he's an arsonist, a murderer. He's just a sweet kid with a rich inner life.

HAROLD

I know, honey. It's not natural. Boy his age should be up to something. Boy his age should want to do some harm.

LIA

Welcome back to Tales of Insecurity. This is the listener mail section, which I'm very insistent upon, even though as far

as I know, there aren't really any listeners and no one sends me anything. If I just knew five people who'd be willing to write reviews for me, I could have a rating on iTunes and Stitcher and maybe people could find me and I could contribute to society in some way, but as it turns out, no one wants anything to do with me. That's fine.

LIA

I know every time I say something is fine it sounds like I'm saying the exact opposite, but I can't emphasize my sincerity enough. I really don't mind toiling in obscurity. I'm afraid of success. That's why I choose not to have it. I'm very adamant about this.

CHARLES

LiA, this all sounds very destructive.

LIA

No, it's fine. I mean it. Hey, do you mind if I record our session for my radio show?

CHARLES

Go right ahead.

LIA

Thank you. Everyone, I'd like you to meet my therapist. This is 19th century scientist and industrialist Charles Martin Hall.

CHARLES

Hi.

LIA

Charles is best known for discovering an efficient means of refining aluminum. It revolutionized many industries. Soft drinks, at least.

CHARLES

Really, LiA, you don't need to bother introducing me. You're only doing this for your own

entertainment.

LIA

He's a sensible fellow. A scientist. He founded a big company that my least favorite grandfather worked for, and he graduated from Oberlin College, my alma mater, a long time ago. There was a statue of him, looking down over everything. He's been this ghostly figure hanging around my whole life. Charles Martin Hall.

CHARLES

It's my pleasure to be here.

LIA

So, I don't really have much context for how these appointments go, so I've chosen to talk to Mr. Hall here because he's been dead over a hundred years, which absolves me of any responsibility toward him.

CHARLES

I'm so happy I can help.

LIA

You can't slander the dead, legally speaking, which is a great comfort to me, because I'm always afraid that I'll inadvertently commit a crime without even realizing because my values are so out of sync with everyone else's in way I can't fully articulate.

CHARLES

Tell me more about that.

LIA

That's why I make all the music on my show, you know. It's not because I'm a musician. I'm not. Obviously. It's because even though I'm not making any profits on this podcast and there are all kinds of fair use tracks I could use, fairly, I'm just so afraid that I don't understand exactly what that means.

CHARLES

You could research it. You don't have to accept ignorance anymore. You live in an age of information. In my time, we had to experiment and tinker, but now, other people have done that for you.

LIA

No, you're right.

CHARLES

But I'm more curious about your values. What do you think values consist of?

LIA

They're the basis of personality. They're the little attractions to ideas that cause you to be whatever ways you are.

CHARLES

Do you think there are some values that are universal?

LIA

You ask a lot of questions, Charles Martin Hall.

CHARLES

Part of being a scientist is having a fundamental curiosity for the world at large.

LIA

See, that's not interesting to me. The world at large. I'm only interested in what happens in people's heads.

CHARLES

Doesn't that get kind of isolating? Kind of claustrophobic?

LIA

No. It's endless. It's the most endless. You know, there are many types of infinity. You can count, 1-2-3 and keep counting forever, and that's one kind, but there's actually a greater infinity between any two of those numbers.

CHARLES

That doesn't sound right to me.

LIA

You were a scientist. Didn't you study Cantor sets at some point?

CHARLES

Really no idea what you're talking about.

LIA

I guess it was kind of a new idea when you were alive.

CHARLES

So was psychology.

LIA

Sure.

CHARLES

And it seems kind of frivolous and indulgent to me, to be perfectly honest.

LIA

No, it's important. Brains are really complicated and the fact that we can't compare our thoughts to any other way of being makes interpreting the data involved incredibly complex.

CHARLES

Imprecise, you mean.

LIA

You can literally think anything. You can conjure images in your mind of anything you've ever seen, things you won't ever see. You can affect all your senses in all kinds of ways. It's kind of amazing, actually, that our perceptions of each others' surroundings have any kind of symmetry to them.

CHARLES

If you can think anything you want, why do you need psychology? Why don't you just, be happy and get on with it?

LIA

Because. That's not socially acceptable. I'm just trying to fit in.

CHARLES

Since when do you care about that?

LIA

Since always. I'm not an iconoclast by choice.

CHARLES

If you can think about whatever you want, why would you be depressed? Why would you fuss about with your gender and such, making all those sacrifices to your ability to own property and the right to vote?

LIA

Oh no. Women have those now.

CHARLES

Really?

LIA

I keep forgetting how old you are. Anyway, I'm not depressed. And my anxiety only comes from self-awareness. I know there aren't any hard answers to anything. So it's difficult for me to settle. If I wanted, I could just dial my mental bandwidth into some pornography and let my mind go a little, but that seems so sad to me. I have work to do.

CHARLES

Did you find a job?

LIA

I'm working on it. I've been freelancing a little.

CHARLES

I think you should take a break. You have to allow yourself some pleasure in life.

LIA

You never married and you didn't have any children. What was your

life about, other than making money?

CHARLES

Not everyone needs a family to be happy. Think about porn now.

LIA

Okay, I'll try it. Here on Tales of Insecurity.

INT. SEX LIBRARY

MANDY

Gee, it sure is hard putting away all these books. But I'm determined to be the best librarian I can be.

GARY

Hey, little lady. Do you need some help with that?

MANDY

No, thank you. If the head librarian found out that I was skirting my responsibilities, I'd surely get in heaps of trouble.

GARY

I bet a girl like you gets into lots of trouble.

MANDY

Heaps.

GARY

I get into trouble, too.

MANDY

If you're looking for books on conflict resolution, you should check the 150s.

GARY

Do you have anything about how to flirt with sexy librarians?

MANDY

I'm not sure if we have anything specifically about that, but there might be something again in the

150s, and I guess technically call number 021 is for library relationships, but I think that means something else.

GARY

I see.

MANDY

Let me know if you need any more help with anything.

GARY

I'm sorry, maybe I wasn't being clear. I think you're very attractive, and I'd like to get to know you better.

MANDY

No, that was clear. I was just pretending to be oblivious to save us both the awkwardness of an overt rejection.

GARY

Oh, thank you, that was very considerate.

MANDY

My pleasure.

GARY

I'd like to see your pleasure.

MANDY

It's really not working. Try playing hard to get.

GARY

I'll do my best.

MANDY

Thanks. I like unavailable men.

GARY

So I should...?

MANDY

Make yourself unavailable.

GARY

Alright.

MANDY

Keep on going. A little bit further. No, still too available. Stop looking at me. That definitely helps. Go around the corner there.

GARY

Like this?

MANDY

No, don't speak, that ruins it. Yes, perfect.

KATHRYN

Amanda!

MANDY

Yes, ma'am, can I help you?

KATHRYN

Have you finished shelving those books yet?

MANDY

No, ma'am. I'm so sorry. Some of the patrons were asking me questions, and I see myself as a customer service representative above all else.

KATHRYN

As a librarian, you are a researcher. Your position is a clerk. No part of that prioritizes goofing off on the job.

MANDY

Yes, ma'am.

KATHRYN

Do I need to remind you again of what happens to naughty librarians who can't keep up with their responsibilities?

MANDY

No, ma'am.

KATHRYN

I should hope not. See to it that I don't.

MANDY

I'll be a good girl.

KATHRYN

You're 25 years old, Amanda.
There's no need to act quite so
infantile.

MANDY

I'll be on my best behavior, ma'am.

KATHRYN

Very good. If you need me, I'll be
in my office, processing the
overdue penalties.

MANDY

Oh yes, I oiled up your riding
crop, so it should be ready to go.

KATHRYN

No, child. It's Friday.

MANDY

Oh right, face-sitting Friday. I
don't know what I was thinking.

KATHRYN

You'll learn the routine around
here one of these days.

GARY

So did I stay away long enough?

MANDY

What? Oh, sorry. I barely noticed
you were gone. Try it again. Try
sincerely searching for a book you
want to read.

GARY

Any recommendations?

MANDY

You might check call number 302 for
books on social interaction, that
might be useful for you.

GARY

No, I mean. What are you into?

MANDY

Oh, me? Hmm. Well.

GARY

Come on, give me something juicy.

MANDY

Okay, well. Try call number, no, it's too embarrassing.

GARY

Come on, try me.

MANDY

Okay. 594.3.

GARY

Great, I can't wait.

MANDY

I like other things, too! Don't get me wrong. I'm not some kind of weirdo.

GARY

No judgement here. What is it? Leather and fur? Latex? Electricity? Secretaries comma naughty?

MANDY

No. No! Just leave me alone long enough that I can fall in love with you maybe!

GARY

Okay, I'm going.

MANDY

Phew. Some people just can't take a hint.

NANCY

Hi, you're a sexy librarian, right?

MANDY

We just say librarian.

NANCY

Oh, I'm so sorry. I'm new to this country. I do not know all your customs.

MANDY

Quite all right. How can we help you?

NANCY

I don't know what I am looking for. I am looking for something

exciting.

MANDY

What do you like?

NANCY

I do not know. I like girls? Is that what you mean?

MANDY

That's something.

NANCY

I am so sorry. I do not know how libraries work in America. I am so embarrassed.

MANDY

I'm sorry, what country are you from?

NANCY

It doesn't matter! I am exotic.

MANDY

Aw, I love how you manage to be naive and mysterious at the same time, and I'm pretty sure it can't be racist because I'm in favor of it.

KATHRYN

Amanda!

MANDY

Yes, ma'am, is there a problem?

KATHRYN

Absolutely! I just got a tipoff that the superintendent is coming by in a matter of moments for a surprise inspection.

MANDY

Oh, is that a problem?

KATHRYN

If he finds out that we've been letting our patrons pay their fines with their submission, we could lose our funding.

MANDY

I thought you said that was

standard operating procedure.

KATHRYN

Some things, even though they are standard, remain secret.

MANDY

That's pretty tough. I'll tell you what, I think I can get you out of this, and if I do, you'll have to do whatever I ask.

KATHRYN

Yes, fine. Anything.

SUPERINTENDENT

Good afternoon, ladies.

KATHRYN

Oh hello, superintendent. So good to see you.

SUPERINTENDENT

Whatever. There have been rumors that you girls have been appropriating public money to turn this institution into some kind of sex dungeon.

NANCY

Oh my!

SUPERINTENDENT

I'm sorry, who is this?

MANDY

Oh, she's new. She just started a week or two ago, on a work study program.

SUPERINTENDENT

I don't think I approved that.

MANDY

Someone from your office did, I'm sure of it. Let's see if we can find that paperwork.

SUPERINTENDENT

Spare me. I'm sure it's fine. Now why don't you tell me what's been going on?

KATHRYN

I'm sure you'll find that there's nothing untoward here. I've been running this branch for years, and if there were any illicit activities, I would know about it.

SUPERINTENDENT

I didn't ask you. Let's talk to the new girl.

NANCY

Yes, sir?

SUPERINTENDENT

Do you know anything about what's been going on here?

NANCY

This is a sexy library.

MANDY

We just say library.

SUPERINTENDENT

So you admit that you know about this?

NANCY

I am sorry. I am new to this country. I do not know your customs.

SUPERINTENDENT

This is all very shocking. All three of you, I expect to see you in my office downtown tomorrow morning for a taste of your own medicine.

KATHRYN

But, sir.

SUPERINTENDENT

No buts about it. I can't believe you let this happen on your watch. Good day, ladies!

KATHRYN

Was that your plan? What was all that about?

MANDY

Somehow I just thought it would

work out.

KATHRYN

Did you not take a moment to think anything through? Whatever he does to us tomorrow, I'm going to do again to you, do you understand me?

MANDY

Yes, ma'am.

KATHRYN

And as for you. Who are you?

NANCY

It doesn't matter. I am vaguely foreign, and I am tall.

KATHRYN

Fair enough. Well, congratulations. You're going to get your punishment first. Come with me.

NANCY

Yes, ma'am.

MANDY

I guess maybe that was my plan. Just a little buffer.

GARY

Okay so, I took a look at 594.3.

MANDY

Yeah?

GARY

Yeah, so. What do you do with them? Do you just put them over your body?

MANDY

Maybe. I don't know. You can. Yes.

GARY

I don't get it.

MANDY

Of course you don't. Nobody gets it. It's my thing.

GARY

We all have our own things. It's okay.

MANDY

Do you want to try it?

GARY

I've actually. I have a thing that I need to get to.

MANDY

Yeah, okay.

GARY

See you around. Thanks for sharing.

MANDY

Yeah. Great. You blew it again Mandy. You blew it again.

CHARLES

Okay, so. What was going on there?

LIA

What do you mean?

CHARLES

So that was your fantasy scenario? That's what gets you off?

LIA

Well, I mean. Not really. I don't really know much about pornography. I have some theories.

CHARLES

Why did all the action happen somewhere else? Why didn't you show anything? You have no need to censor yourself.

LIA

I don't know. I'm not that into sex, to be honest.

CHARLES

Well you're definitely masochistic, that seems clear.

LIA

I wouldn't say that's clear. I wouldn't say anything was clear. All of that was a projection. I'm reflecting societal views as I understand them.

CHARLES

And so many women. Why did you have so few men?

LIA

I don't know. Women tend to be the protagonists in porn stories, right? They're the ones who go through a journey.

CHARLES

I wouldn't know. It just seems strange.

LIA

I'm sorry if it wasn't your thing. Sorry if you wanted more men.

CHARLES

Now what are you implying?

LIA

A successful, good-looking guy like you, never married, Oberlin College, 19th century, I get it. There's no shame in it anymore.

CHARLES

I am no sodomite, madam! Don't make me take my belt to you!

LIA

Okay so. There's less shame now in being gay, but a little bit more in domestic violence.

CHARLES

I want no part of your depraved society.

LIA

It's hardly my society. But you're getting upset at the wrong things. These are things that would make you happier than you were in your own life.

CHARLES

Don't tell me how I should and shouldn't feel.

LIA

This is my session, you know. You can talk about your problems on

your own time, with Issac Newton or someone.

CHARLES

I'm very sorry, Ms. Lindsaychen, but I'm going to have to cut our appointment early.

LIA

That's fine. I'll finish without you.

CHARLES

See to it that you do. Oh one question.

LIA

Yes?

CHARLES

594.3?

LIA

Oh, right. Did they have the Dewey Decimal System in your time? I'll have to look that up. Anyway. Snails. Gastropods.

CHARLES

As I suspected. Disgusting.

LIA

It's not. I'm not into snails. That was just a projection of society. I'm not racist, either. But you know, it would be fine if I were into snails. At least I'm not closeted about it. You hear me? Charles Martin Hall?

LIA

Hi. Welcome back to Tales of Insecurity, whether you're listening to it on iTunes or Stitcher or some other service I don't know about yet. It's the show of post-modern existential horror. This week we're talking about the joys of denying yourself pleasure. You might lose the immediate gratification of the thing you might have liked, but instead you get to feel a smug satisfaction about your self-denial. For

instance, almost everyone I know is an alcoholic, and I am not, and even though I would never let my friends think I think this, I'm pretty sure we all understand that because I don't really drink and never have I'm a better person. I really like cigarettes, but I've never smoked enough of them to crave them. I've had maybe about ten in my life. Probably can't have any more, now that I'm all asthmatic. What was I talking about? Oh right, why I'm a better person than almost all of you because I'm essentially asexual.

MICHAEL

Lia. What the hell is this?

LIA

Hubris is a perfectly valid form of insecurity. It is still well within our mission statement.

MICHAEL

Why don't you tell everyone how you're surviving right now? Your only source of income.

LIA

You know, I don't think I'm ready to have that conversation. I'm not ashamed of it, not really. I mean, historically, it's just what trans women have to do.

MICHAEL

That should make your family really proud.

LIA

It doesn't matter. None of it means anything to me. I can just think about other things and it's fine, because I don't enjoy myself. It's acting. It's fine.

MICHAEL

Sorry I had to call you out on your bullshit.

LIA

Thank you for keeping me honest.

MICHAEL

If this show isn't honest, then what's the point of it?

LIA

Sometimes I really wish I could drink. Let's go ahead and move on to our final Tales of etc.

MICHAEL

Insecurity. You can just say it. It's the name of the show.

LIA

Thank you. Sure.

MICHAEL

Tales of Insecurity.

LIA

It's my show, damn it.

MARTIN

Against the pale of another light spring rain, the last documentarian of humanity finds himself trapped. He has sacrificed so much for his study, no longer subject to the same whims and desires that govern everyone else. He has chosen not to live, merely to gaze upon life from the outside. For only an outsider can form true understanding.

SERVER

Can we get you another coffee, hon?

MARTIN

No, thank you.

SERVER

Anything at all?

MARTIN

All good here. Thank you, though.

LIA

Submitted for your approval: I keep forgetting to do these intros. I really seem to have forgotten my conceit of my tongue-in-cheek Twilight Zone homage. I guess I'm

worried about that copyright too, but it's parody, certainly. And there's no way that The Twilight Zone has a patent on intros. That's absurd.

SERVER

Just let me know if you need anything.

MARTIN

I'm not taking up your table, am I? If you need me to settle up, just let me know. I'd hate to be a bother.

SERVER

No, it's fine. Just want to make sure you don't need anything.

MARTIN

Yes, absolutely fine. You're doing a great job.

SERVER

Great. Thanks.

MARTIN

Day 9230. I have made my stake in this world, and none have ascertained anything unusual about my presence. I am able to hide in plain sight, masked in a veneer of complacency. None exist who may shake me from my path.

LIA

Within the confines of your local coffee shop, there exist a variety of heroes. The cooks and servers with too much education for the job they perform, and the patrons of the establishment, each in their individual worlds that they have constructed for themselves.

MARTIN

So far so good. My streak of human courtesy remains intact. So long as I exhibit the proper conduct befitting what the natives call "decent," I am certain I can maintain an appropriate facade as long as it takes to find a nuanced

understanding of whatever
principles govern mankind.

LIA

They tell themselves stories of
their own lives. They invent
narratives of convenience that they
can fit themselves into. Most
stories are driven by desire, but
after an endless parade of acts one
and two and nothing gained, no
lessons learned, the story starts
to shift, into a Tale of
Insecurity.

MANDY

Martin Cheswick, is that you?

MARTIN

What? Hello?

MANDY

It is you! How are you?

MARTIN

Oh, hi.

MANDY

I haven't seen you since high
school! What have you been doing
with yourself?

MARTIN

Oh, nothing much. Same old, same
old.

MANDY

Do you live nearby?

MARTIN

Yeah, sometimes.

MARTIN

You're losing it. That wasn't the
right answer. She's going to know
something is wrong.

MANDY

Oh, do you do a lot of traveling?
What do you do now?

MARTIN

I'm self-employed.

MANDY

That sounds challenging.

MARTIN

It has its ups and downs, just like anything else, I'm sure.

MANDY

Right.

(Pause)

MARTIN

She's waiting for you to contribute something to the conversation. A simple back and forth. As unwelcome as this interruption may be, you still must impart a sense of worthiness to your partner in communication, or else you run the risk of being found out.

MARTIN

So how have you been?

MANDY

Oh, good. Good.

MARTIN

That's good.

MANDY

I finished my library science degree a few months ago and I just started work down the road here.

MARTIN

Oh, that's great.

MANDY

So yeah. I'm the sexy librarian now. Just like everyone said I'd be. Sorry, little joke.

MARTIN

She is flirting with you. Note the way she's touching your arm, and the way she's pretending you're interesting, even though you've done nothing sympathetic to that conclusion. She is forcing this interaction to continue, and will not relent until you reject her or prove yourself unappealing. While

neither of these prospects seems attractive on the surface, you will soon have to make a choice.

MARTIN

Oh, well. The glasses are definitely hot. You've got a good thing going there.

MANDY

Aw, thanks. Are you busy, do you mind if I sit down here?

MARTIN

What could have been an ending has turned into a new beginning. You can't say you mind. How horrible would it be if you said you minded? And you don't mind. You are adaptable. That was the whole point of the experiment. You can adjust. You are open-minded. You do not need to bend the world to your will. Your strength is independence, your power comes not by ruling others, but that you ask no one to serve you.

SERVER

Oh I didn't know you were meeting somebody. Can I get you something?

MANDY

Oh sure, a cup of coffee would be great. Thank you.

SERVER

Do you like cream or sugar or anything?

MANDY

Yes, please. Do you have soy milk? Actually, do you have espresso here? I'd love a soy macchiato, if it's not too much trouble.

SERVER

We have soy milk.

MANDY

Great. Can you do the macchiato?

SERVER

Maybe.

MANDY

Well, give it your best shot, and I'll let you know how it went.

SERVER

Okay, sure.

MANDY

Whew. Sorry about that. It's a little embarrassing. I'm kind of a snob about coffee.

MARTIN

No, it's fine.

MANDY

Is it really fine? I was kind of getting the impression that it wasn't fine.

MARTIN

You should get whatever you want. It really makes no difference to me.

MANDY

Are you sure?

MARTIN

It doesn't seem she's going to let this go. Surely there exists some combination of words I can say that would immediately assure her that I am indifferent to her choices, or to any choices really, that I am without any particular need or expectation. Were I to express these thoughts explicitly, she would be sure to challenge them further, with lawyer-like attention to detail, tearing my premises apart to reveal a contradiction. As such, I am forced to show a more subtle indifference, one not based on rigorously defined axioms.

MARTIN

I don't know. I don't see what difference it would make to me what you order.

MANDY

Yeah, I don't know either.

MARTIN

It's really fine.

MANDY

Oh my god. Are we fighting now?
We're like an old married couple.

MARTIN

I guess so.

MANDY

I'm sorry about that. You should
have seen your face, though. This
scowl. Like this:

MARTIN

It wasn't like that.

MANDY

It was! You turned into a goblin
for a second there.

MARTIN

Whether this is simply her way of
passing the time or a flirtation or
her own version of politeness, I
must make steps to ameliorate this
situation. So long as she disrupts
my asceticism, I run the risk of
becoming infected by their culture
of excess. The moment I concede to
a single aria of her opulence, my
base level of comfort will shift,
and for the rest of my days, I will
require special treatment. In a
flash, I will lose my spiritual
homeostasis and become cold-blooded
like the rest of them, forced to
shift my environment to my needs
simply to stay alive. Should I
relent, I will no longer rest
peacefully, I will join the rest of
the princesses in their sleep
study, proudly insomniac unless my
hundred mattresses are absolutely
without protuberance. They believe
their delicacy is virtuous, but I
will always be beholden to the
burden of it, and I am not that
sort of beast.

MARTIN

Oh, sorry. I've got that, what do
you call it? Resting bitch face?

MANDY

It suits you. So what are you working on there? Some kind of screenplay?

MARTIN

No, I'm just jotting down my thoughts.

MANDY

Can I see it?

MARTIN

She's trying to force you to assert your will. On some level, this is a request perfectly simple to deny. You would be well within your rights, and within the social norms of your time and place. In breaching this barrier of what should be an assumed level of privacy, she has committed a faux pas that places you in a position of higher social standing, though for you to capitalize on this opportunity would undermine the very premise of your authority.

MANDY

It's okay if you don't want to. I just thought you might be interested in sharing.

MARTIN

Oh no, it's fine, you can read it if you want. Really, it makes no difference to me.

MANDY

Alright then! Let's see what you got there.

MARTIN

It's really nothing. I haven't edited it. I was just getting ideas down. They're just notes.

MANDY

Shh.

MARTIN

You really are a librarian. Alright, go ahead.

MANDY
I'm reading it.

MARTIN
Yes, and that's fine.

MARTIN
Perhaps in some capacity this is the perfect arrangement. She can glimpse the depth of your insight and be driven away by the uncomfortable truths that control her life, the incontrovertible patterns of society that none may acknowledge lest they lose all sense of self.

MANDY
This is pretty interesting.

MARTIN
Do you think so?

MANDY
Yeah, it's fine.

MARTIN
I'm sure there are some problems with it. I mean, I know it kind of meanders, and I'd like it to have a little more verysimilartude.

MANDY
A little what?

MARTIN
Verysimilartude? It means that the rhetorical structures mimic those that govern reality.

MANDY
Oh! Verisimilitude. Sure.

SERVER
Alright, one soy macchiato. Did you want anything else today?

MANDY
Do you do a Cobb Salad here?

SERVER
We've got eggs and bacon.

MANDY

Yeah, that'll be fine.

SERVER

Anything for you, hon?

MARTIN

No thank you.

SERVER

More coffee?

MARTIN

No, I'm fine. If I want some, I can get it myself.

SERVER

Alright, sure. That's allowed, I guess.

MANDY

Thank you! So, this part here seems a little inconsistent.

MARTIN

Which part?

MANDY

So your character here, I guess you'd call him a Byronic hero, but it seems strange that he would go out to restaurants and not order anything.

MARTIN

Oh, see. That's to show that he doesn't need to be served. He's self-sufficient.

MANDY

Yeah, I get that, but why go anywhere? It seems pretty evident that if he really was as emotionally autonomous as he claims to be, he wouldn't have anything to prove at all. He wouldn't bother trying to write anything, certainly. He'd probably be on a little abandoned bit of farmland somewhere, tending his own garden, waiting to die.

MARTIN

That's one opinion. You might not

understand the character.

MANDY

And I guess more broadly, it seems really limiting to have a character who, by definition, doesn't want anything. Like, it kind of defies the entire practice of theater, and while maybe that could be an interesting challenge if you handled it right, I think maybe it's going to require a little more finesse than you've given things.

MARTIN

That's fine. I'm not attached to anything in there.

MANDY

And the use of voiceover seems a little distracting, look at this part here.

MANDY

I order a coffee. It is the cost of admission. In order to scribe my thoughts, I am forced to sit, and to sit, I need to make a purchase. There is little else I can get more utilitarian than black coffee.

SERVER

Do you want any cream or sugar with that, hon?

MARTIN

No, thank you, I say.

SERVER

I'll go ahead and bring it, just in case.

MANDY

I start to insist she leave it, but I stop myself. I am determined not to make any sort of fuss, and if I am insistent upon anything at all, I run the risk of forming a routine, of letting my actions become automatic. Though I would not indulge in the frivoloty of dressing up my coffee, I cannot grow attached to any particular image of myself. I must maintain

mindfulness. I must keep my senses about me.

MANDY

It seems like he's preparing for something, but I flipped through pages and pages of this, and it doesn't look like anything he's preparing for ever comes, and I get it. I like the dramatic irony of it. He doesn't realize that he has become the boring creature of habit he fears, but I feel like there needs to be something more to it. There needs to be some kind of present tense action.

MARTIN

I think there's some of that in there.

MANDY

Oh right. You introduce another character in here. But it's weird.

MARTIN

What is?

MANDY

Like, this woman here, she seems strangely interested in him, and I get why you would do that, just so he has to talk, since he wouldn't otherwise. But as far as I can tell, he does nothing to prompt her attention, and just judging from his thoughts, there's no way this guy is well-groomed. I bet he doesn't own a comb. I bet he thinks deoderant is fussy.

MARTIN

They were close in high school.

MANDY

And he seems so annoyed by her! Why doesn't he just ignore her or tell her he's busy? It seems really weird that he's so determined to be polite.

MARTIN

There's a certain order to society. People have to be civil to one

another.

MANDY

I guess so.

MARTIN

I'm sorry you don't like it.

MANDY

No, don't get me wrong. I think there's a lot of good in there. You've got some good ideas. I just think an editor might be helpful. I might know someone. She owes me one.

MARTIN

Really?

MANDY

Yeah, she's a bigshot at some publishing company. I bet she'd love this, and with a little cleaning up, I think you could really have something here. Let me give you her number.

MARTIN

No, thank you.

MANDY

No? I think this could be great for you.

MARTIN

I prefer to do things on my own.

MANDY

Okay, I get it. Male pride and all. But sometimes we all need a little help. What are you planning on doing? Self-publishing?

MARTIN

I don't need validation from anyone.

MANDY

Alright, but what are you planning on doing with this? Are you going to make it available somewhere? How are you making ends meet?

MARTIN

I manage.

MANDY

But how? Someone has to pay you somewhere. Someone has to accept something you offer.

MARTIN

No, I have found a loophole.

MANDY

What's that?

MARTIN

I don't need anything.

MANDY

Alright. Well. I'll leave you to it then. Here's \$20. That should cover everything I ordered and a tip. You should go ahead and eat the eggs and bacon.

MARTIN

That's not necessary.

MANDY

And here's my phone number. Let me know if you need a place to stay, or a shower, or anything at all.

MARTIN

I'm absolutely fine.

MANDY

Oh, and let the server know, the macchiato was great. I'll see you around, Martin.

MARTIN

Yes, it was great catching up. Congratulations on your new job!

MANDY

Yes. You take care of yourself.

MARTIN

And she wraps me in her arms briefly on her way out. I wouldn't call it a hug or embrace, just a mechanical folding of arms on another human being, what appears to be a human being. I stare at her

business card, a little smiley face drawn upon it. Amanda Noel. So that's her name. That was really bothering me. I appreciate her time and her attention. But one can quickly grow attached to flirtations. I must forget. I can't recall her being quite as coquettish back when we were in the same peer group, but people change, I suppose. It is the best thing about people. That potential remains my only comfort.

LIA

And she throws the notebook away. It's boring, it doesn't go anywhere. But it wasn't made to be impressive. It wasn't even supposed to express anything. It was just for her understanding. You're not supposed to understand. It's better that you don't. Consider yourself lucky. Consider yourself.

We'll never know
Anything that you've been through
You're the victim of a circumstance.
Congratulations, you.

We'll never know
And we'll never try to guess.
But you know what you're going for
And it's probably the best.

It's hard to express, so we don't understand
You tried to make supplies to compete with demand
Sensory deprivation may have opened your mind
But it also closed you off to all of humankind
Still, we're quite impressed by the depth of your thought
You've sacrificed so much that you kind of forgot

What you wanted to have, if you ever had want
Thanks for coming out, you cheeky debutante
You have your own life, I get it, it's fine
You've had trauma and pain just like I had mine
And she has had hers and he had one too
Though I'm sure none of us is quite so wounded as you
I think it's really great that you do what you must
And pretend that all pleasure only brings you disgust
You don't want special treatment, no need to make a fuss
You sold your shares of luxury; it's in a blind trust.

Hey you should know
I think you're really great
Sorry if that makes you sad
Wow look, it's getting late
You're a fighter
You're a champion
You're Joan of Arc, You're Samson
Bald and weak and burned to cinders
Tall and dark and ashen
You are the tragic hero
We'll never know your loss
We'll never know how deep it goes
And never give a toss

As little as you have to say, I think it bears repeating
Live every day like it's your last before you're dragged and beaten
Left for dead in an empty room, defeated
And greeted with the intravenous treatment
that you need to never eat again
Type it on the sheet again

Wipe it with your feet again
Welcome, or don't be welcome
Enter if you want
Categorically impartial
You're like Immanuel Kant

Immanuel
Immanuel
You're rational, reliable
Immanuel

We'll never know
Your passion or your wit
You're too polite to make your mark
So this whole mess it
We'll never know
Do you think you could explain
See, some people, they seek shelter
And they stay dry in the rain

You could try to relax but I know it's a bit taxing
If you want to take a nap you have to jump in the backseat
We can switch up ahead, I'm a little bit queasy
I know signs of weakness make you uneasy
But it's beyond my control, my swear on my soul
I don't want to be sick, I don't want to be cold
I don't want to speak in riddles on the edge of the castle
Everything I've said today is incredibly facile
And I feel like a failure, but at least I don't eat cake
It's hard to enjoy nonessentials when your life's at stake
And I'm a dirty cheap whore when I could have been anything

A deadbeat, a layabout, I've lost sense of the form here
I may be a little outside the norm here
It's so hard to express
Anything real
You can't fully translate
What you refuse to feel

We'll never know
If there's something we should know
There's no direction in my life
But there's nowhere left to go

LIA

Alright, everyone, thank you. Thank you for coming out tonight. It really means a lot to me. You could have gone anywhere, but you chose to come here, and that means something. That means, it means everyone canceled on you. I'm really sorry to hear that. You must be the loser in your group of friends, but that's okay. Please, I don't want to cause any friction. It's nice that they pity you sometimes, they say, hey, they don't get out very much, let's see if they want to hang out.

LIA

Gee, thanks for inviting me. I don't get to hang out very often.

LIA

Yeah, no problem. Is that really all they have to talk about? This is awful. Just so sad. Looking at them makes me feel sad. But someone has to. Sure. Yes, this is our

community service. We should do some drunk driving so it's worth it.

LIA

Sorry. Hi. I'm LiA Lindsaychen. Thank you for having me tonight. I'm kind of new to stand up, so I apologize if my material isn't particularly tried and true. I'm kind of spitballing here. I actually don't really have much of a sense of humor, so it's kind of ironic that I'm up here. I hope that's okay. Is that okay with everyone?

HECKLER

God, no. You're wasting everyone's time.

LIA

Yeah, that's pretty true. See, that's what keeps me from going out most of the time, just knowing that I'll have to make my presence known in some way, whether it's getting a waiter's attention or you know, activating an automatic door. Please, you didn't need to do that. I could have gotten it myself. Well. Thank you, I really appreciate the gesture.

LIA

So tell me, have you ever experienced this? The other day, someone held an automatic door for me. They went to it first and sort of gestured like he was pushing it back, one of these. And he did a little wave, like a crossing guard. I don't know if it's something he does regularly or if I seemed particularly transparent that day or what. I mean, I have had automatic doors close on me before, which is a pretty profound rejection, but you know, that's why I try not to go anywhere, if I can help it.

LIA

So you know, coming up here in front of all of you, it's a kind of

therapy for me. I've been really stressed out lately. I quit my job a few weeks ago when I realized that it was making me sick and that it wasn't even paying my bills. I decided that if I have to declare bankruptcy anyway, I might as well go all out. I guess this isn't funny. I don't really feel funny this week. I don't feel like laughing or hearing any laughter, so it's going to be my goal this whole routine to keep anyone from feeling anything.

LIA

Wouldn't that be a welcome break? Don't you get tired of the emotional manipulation? People come up here on this stage and they try to placate you. They say what you're thinking, but are too afraid to say. And I do know what you're thinking. You're thinking: "Did I see that tranny in a porno?" And first of all, not to censor your thoughts, but you really shouldn't say the T-word there, it's not okay. It's hurtful. How dare you. Second of all, maybe, but you know, that's what you do sometimes, when nothing else works out. At least you can appeal to the worst of humanity.

LIA

Don't get me wrong, I don't have any problem with sex workers or with sex work. I'm not really into capitalism, but it seems that when there's demand for a product, it should be available. There are lots of guys who are specifically into trans women, though not so much into introducing them to their friends, and I'm not embarrassed to provide that service. It means nothing to me. Now, I have a partner of five years, and she and I never even kiss because she's allergic to me, and that's its own problem. But it's fine.

LIA

I find myself saying that more and more lately. But it's fine. It's like my mantra now. It doesn't make me feel better. It's a nervous tic.

HECKLER

You're a nervous tick!

LIA

What was that?

HECKLER

I said, you're a blood-sucking parasite.

LIA

Who is that? Excuse me, can I get a good look at you, sir? Yes, I thought that was you. Everyone, this is the guy who came to my other job and knocked the dick out of my mouth. You got to quit following me around. You're like obsessed with me, dude. It's not healthy.

LIA

So, as I was saying, I'm a dominatrix now. It's been pretty therapeutic. Beating up wealthy guys who don't get enough abuse in their lives. I assume that they're uncomfortable in their lives of privilege, that they feel an overwhelming sense of responsibility that they can't quite deal with. I mean, I'd rather feed the homeless, but I still think it's an important social service. As long as they don't feel absolved of their sins, I am happy to beat up rich white guys and take their money. As I said, I'm not really into capitalism.

LIA

And I know that you're probably curious about the guys who specifically seek out trans women, what the psychology is there. Are they gay, and just can't admit it? Again, I hate the way you think. I don't know if you realize how

homomistic and transmistic that is. Misia is the new suffix, FYI, because people had the misunderstanding that homophobia literally meant fear of gay people. We have to change the nomenclature from time to time more for your sake than ours. The committee got together, "The cis het whites really embarrassed themselves today. Oh tell me more." We love hearing about your little exploits. Especially when you try to be socially conscious. It's all so cute.

LIA

Not that you should stop trying. Don't let me discourage you. Please, try to be cute. I like the cute ones. Don't try to argue about what you think the goals of feminism are, like the feminism committee has meetings like ours. There are some groups of feminism that I jive with really well. There are others that see me as an affront to everything they hold dear. That's fine. You can't always be included. You probably felt the same way when you heard your friends got tickets to Patton Oswalt tonight and didn't invite you. You can't always be included. But maybe you can feel special, out here on your own. You saw a show that no one else saw. You're an individual, a rebel. Your own person.

LIA

Anyway, I should go. But you're a terrible audience of misanthropic nobodies and my disgust for you is only mitigated by my pity. Why weren't there any cool people here? At least I didn't disappoint anyone who mattered. Sorry, I meant thank you. Freudian slip. Thank you, everyone. You're fine. You're alright. Goodnight!