

LIA

The following program contains explicit language, though really not as obscene as this world of ours deserves. You can worry about limiting your children's vocabulary if you like, like they don't have bigger problems than your prudishness. Whatever your priorities are, go for it. They're your children. May we all be innocent again someday.

LIA

You're a good person. Maybe there are some things about yourself you'd like to improve, but essentially, you're pretty alright. For every hateful, angry thought you entertain, you have an equally equanimous premise to balance. Maybe you spend more time within your wildest revenge fantasies than in sober meditations of thanksgiving, but that's only because you want the world to be better than it is. If you were calm, you'd be complacent, and if you're complacent, everyone takes advantage of you. It's not murder, it's self-defense. It's not suicide, it's self-defense. You're not shouting over anyone. Hey, I'm not shouting! Stop saying I'm shouting! This is a whisper: Tales of Insecurity.

LIA

Hello, friends. Do you mind if I call you friends? I don't want to overstep my bounds. But I feel close to you, somehow, even if this conversation is entirely one-sided. Oh, how are you? So nice to see you. This is a little show I made for you. I hope you like it. Do you like the glitter? I thought it would look better with a little glitter. If you don't like it, I can take it off. There's no reason it has to have glitter. I just thought it would be nice, but now that I think about it, it was definitely a mistake. You hate it,

don't you? Forget it, forget the whole thing. I was just trying to connect with you, but nothing I do is good enough, is it? Well, that's fine. You're too good for me, is that it?

LIA

Sorry, I don't know what that was. I think, you know, since I'm in an emotionally stable relationship, I don't get to have these conversations anymore, and they're kind of fun, in a way. My sweetie and I have never had an argument of any kind, but sometimes I worry that this is partially due to her chronic illness. When you have to ration your energy, it's difficult to justify spending so much of it against a person you care about.

LIA

Do you make these kinds of choices? Do you choose your battles? What is the basis of your choice? I do look forward to our first fight. No idea what it could be about. It's hard to imagine either of us getting upset. We're not prone to jealousy, and we'd be polyamorous all over the place if we had the energy. It seems very difficult to justify monogamy when you reject patriarchy and hegemony and hierarchy. You can't own another person, even if you own each other. I'm not judging if you're able to listen to that dissonance. You don't have to be completely consistent, and I try not to judge anyone, except gatekeepers. But doesn't it seem really unlikely that the person you're most emotionally compatible with will also be the person with whom you have the best physical chemistry? Isn't that like winning two lotteries at once? And what about other factors, like financial security and impressing your friends?

LIA

When you choose to partner yourself

up with someone, it may not feel like it, but you're making countless compromises, in your ideology, in your perception of who you are. You shift part of your identity so that you become the person who would have made that choice. The secret to being a successful liar is to fool yourself first, and you also have to convince yourself that you are not a liar. You're not. I'm certainly not either. This whole show is presupposed on the premise that I'm telling uncomfortable truths, and this means that I have to seek out all my masks and destroy them.

LIA

Oh right, the show. I completely forgot. Welcome to Tales of Insecurity, a show of post-modern existential horror, or PoMoExHo if you're into the lingo. Maybe that's a better title than Tales of Insecurity. Do you like the title? I mean, I think it's pretty descriptive, but do you think it's too generic? It doesn't really generate a solid image, does it? Nothing really to grab on there. I like a show with a little meat on its bones. They keep saying, when you have the right name for your show, you'll just know, but how do you know? I'll probably keep what I have. I know that there are better titles out there, but I just feel safe with Tales of Insecurity.

LIA

Today's show is about compensation, adjustments, rationales, which are all synonyms for money, idiomatically, but I'm trying not to talk about money anymore, or even to think about it. I really should be. My mother-in-law has been trying to persuade my partner of five years to break up with me so that my sweetie's abusive, bigoted dad won't disown her, and while most of that is I'm trans and a woman, part of it is that I don't

have a clear future. Also, my mother-in-law doesn't accept that her husband nearly murdered my darling on numerous occasions by refusing to acknowledge or compensate for her allergies, or that he physically assaulted her in frustration while she was having an allergic reaction that he caused. Usually I'm afraid of creating any legal problems for myself, but I've consulted my legal counsel and confirmed that it isn't slander if it's true and verifiable. So, Mr. Chen, this one goes out to you, and all the other abusive, bigoted, self-pitying scoundrels out there. You know who you are.

LIA

Thanks for coming out tonight everyone, it's so good to see so many new faces in the crowd tonight. How many of you quit your job at NASA to start your own one-man technology company? It's a gutsy move. Got to wonder how you compete with corporations with resources and staff. Any special guests in the crowd tonight? I see someone we all recognize. Yes, indeed, I think it's her.

Hey wouldn't you know, it's the queen of jolly old England
Didn't recognize her out here, she must be so lost and confused
Do you need a little help madam? I know you love special treatment
Do you need me to curtsy? kiss my baby, wow, I'm so enthused

What an expert, dynastic hero
Who arrived at the top by an intrinsic worth that no one else even needs to understand
You're great man, don't let anyone tell you different, unless you'd rather be indifferent
Just because you design giant mirrors, you don't need any self-reflection to believe in you

The validation of even the laws of
nature and reality can't compete
with you and your PhD
You're in charge, you're the queen,
you can move across the board any
way you choose
And I think, according to the rules
you made, you're not allowed to
lose

Hey thanks a lot, nice to meet the
queen of jolly old England.
I love the little wave, and your
guards with the Marge Simpson hats
As I live and breathe, wouldn't you
know, I've never met a genius
The emperor of walnuts, the god of
this and that.
Please, drift into space, and see
if you can fly.

LIA

Okay, thank you for indulging me
there. Sorry. Back to our topic,
overcompensation. Or, I guess,
since overcompensation tends not to
be convincing, it could also be
called insufficient compensation.
Undercompensation. Maybe when
you're overcompensating, you just
need to go a little further.
Verbose French Novelist Marcel
Proust didn't want people to know
he was gay, and he knew that gay
people were thought to have a weak
handshake, but he also knew that
people who were gay and knew gay
people were supposed to have a weak
handshake would want to compensate
by having a strong handshake, so he
kept his wrist limp as a fish on
meeting your acquaintance.

JEAN-JACQUES

Sacre bleu, zis monsieur cannot be
gay, his handshake is like dipping
your fingers in warm butter. I have
never met a man more secure in his
heterosexuality in my life!

LIA

When the lady doth protest too

much, we believe she's trying to convince herself more than she's able to convince us, and when the lady doesn't protest at all, some guys interpret that as consent. Being able to protest exactly the right amount is a difficult balance, especially when no one is listening to you.

ANNOUNCER

Check out what's happening this week on another wacky episode of Them's the Breaks! Angel's lost her will to live, but continues living anyway. Find out what she's trying to prove!

ANGEL

Hi, can you help me out? I just want to buy a cup of coffee.

PASSERBY

Get away from me, you disgusting whore.

ANGEL

Oh well, thanks for the acknowledgement! If I might make a request, could I get some eye contact next time?

EMPLOYEE

I'm sorry ma'am, you can't panhandle here. Please leave or we'll have to call the cops.

ANGEL

I'm getting all kinds of attention today.

ANNOUNCER

It's madcap mayhem when she stops in to visit her husband...

COP

Put your hands where we can see them!

ANGEL

This is all a big misunderstanding. I just came to get my clothes!

COP

Do you want to press charges?

HUSBAND

Absolutely.

ANNOUNCER

With special appearance by retired basketball superstar Kareem Abdul-Jabar!

DOCTOR

Is she carrying?

COP

No, doctor, she's clean.

DOCTOR

Get some of her pee, just to be sure.

ANNOUNCER

Kareem was in the background of that shot, but he has a bigger role later in the episode. We're very lucky to have him!

DOCTOR

We're just going to keep you here a few days for evaluation. You do have insurance, don't you?

ANGEL

I don't have anything except the clothes I'm wearing.

DOCTOR

That's okay. We'll figure out something. Now take off your clothes and put on this gown. Underwear, too. Don't worry, you'll get them back when you're released.

ANNOUNCER

But will she ever be released?

ANGEL

I feel like being a person is a performance. Sometimes I do feel like people are watching me, judging me, taking joy in my trials and misfortune. But I wouldn't say I hear voices. I heard laughter when I said that, but that itself

is a joke. It was meta. I'm being meta right now! Is that allowed? What are you writing on your clipboard? Stop it!

ANNOUNCER

All this and Kareem Abdul-Jabar, this week on Them's the Breaks!

LIA

It's really hard to prove yourself to people. As soon as you say, "I'm not upset, I'm calm," you sound anxious. There's no way to say I'm calm. I'm absolutely fine, nothing is wrong with me, without sounding like you're on the verge of a nervous breakdown, or in the middle of one. Really, don't worry about me. Nothing is different now than it was a moment ago. Nothing is different.

LIA

In elementary school, they teach you about adjectives, and they teach you that a liberal use of them makes your writing more colorful. If you study writing later on, though, you learn that adjectives tend to weaken the nouns and verbs around them. "I am strong," is stronger than "I am very strong." I'm actually not sure what to do with "I am fragile."

HERMAN

I am so incredibly flimsy. I am the absolute weakest. I am very very pathetic and so so so so so so so uncomfortable with myself.

LIA

Anyway, I am fragile. But somehow I'm still here. I fear I might be here forever, because this is how I've chosen to define myself. It's a tricky thing to force your own identity. But many try, because they have an idea of how people should be, and it's not who they are, and isn't that a shame? I fear, unfortunately, I am the person I want to be, the product of

my own religion, guided by a moral imperative that no one else knows, but for everyone else, here is a Tale of Insecurity.

THEME SONG

Skeptical
It doesn't matter what you believe
We know for sure that you're naive
Skeptical
Call me a nihilist if you dare
We only doubt
because
we
care

EXT. GRAND BALLROOM, RAMADA INN

PETER

Thanks for coming with me tonight.
We don't have to stay very long.

CURTIS

No, it's fine. We can stay as long
as you want to.

PETER

I'm saying, I don't want to stay
very long.

CURTIS

Okay, so we'll just get in and out
and it'll be fine. But I spent half
an hour getting dressed. We should
probably stay half an hour.

PETER

But that's not my fault.

CURTIS

I thought this was important to
you.

INT. GRAND BALLROOM, RAMADA INN

PETER

It is! But I don't like crowds, you
know that. Amanda! So good to see
you!

AMANDA

Is it?

PETER

Yes. It has been too long.

AMANDA

It hasn't been too long, really.
Rachel's Christmas party, right?

CURTIS

Oh, we didn't go to that.

AMANDA

Didn't you? Rachel, Peter and
Curtis were at your Christmas
party, weren't they?

RACHEL

How should I know?

AMANDA

I could have sworn I saw them
there.

RACHEL

Are you sure it wasn't Ben and
Christopher? She has problems with
faces.

AMANDA

I do not.

PETER

It's really fine. Curtis's office
had a party the same night, so we
went to that.

RACHEL

See, I told you.

AMANDA

I still don't believe you.

RACHEL

Why would they lie?

AMANDA

Because they're embarrassed they
didn't remember seeing me.

RACHEL

But they didn't see you.

AMANDA

So they say.

RACHEL

Why would I lie?

AMANDA

Just to prove me wrong.

CURTIS

Girls, girls, stop fighting. It's really not a big deal.

AMANDA

We're not fighting.

RACHEL

We're just having a simple conversation.

CURTIS

I'm sorry, maybe I didn't understand.

AMANDA

Yeah, I have the same problem.

RACHEL

I barely understand anything.

AMANDA

What even is understanding? What's the point of it?

RACHEL

Is what I'm saying.

AMANDA

Right?

(Laughing together)

PETER

Well I'm glad we worked that out.

(Glass clinking)

TRISHA

Thank you everyone. Thank you everyone. Settle down. Thank you. I just have a few quick words. Yes, thank you. Alright, great.

TRISHA

So. As you all know, I'm Trisha Park, president and founder of Skeptics International. I'm very glad you all could join us tonight. It really means a lot to me, if anything does. Our organization has had a lot of setbacks this year, ever since God revealed herself.

(Boos)

TRISHA

I know, I know. But still, I'm pretty sure that's not the real God, and that we're still alone in an empty universe. Thank you. Thank you. That's right, we're naked and alone and no one cares, and that's not changing anytime soon. Now. Since we've lost so many members, we need you all more than ever to dig deep. So many of you are successful in your fields. You're doctors, lawyers, scientists, CEOs, and High School Guidance counselors. Leaders in your community. And with that authority comes a certain responsibility. How did you get where you are? By blindly accepting anything put in front of you?

ALL

No!

TRISHA

By hard work and incremental increases in status through the benefit of experience?

ALL

No!

TRISHA

By some freak happenstance, either a dynastic connection to wealth and power or friends you made in college or simply being in the right place at the right time?

ALL

Maybe!

TRISHA

Partially! But mostly, it was your inquisitiveness, your thirst to expose the truth, no matter what. You get to the bottom of things. You wouldn't be here tonight if you weren't the sort of person who tears apart the system, who will not settle for any easy answer.

(Applause)

TRISHA

You hate self-congratulations. You despise awards and accolades. You don't need validation, because you're already the best.

(Applause)

TRISHA

You are your own person. You don't bow to social pressure. Everything you do, you do because it is something you wanted to do, based on research and premeditation. Life for you is not just a call and response.

(Applause)

TRISHA

Together, we are a melding of the minds, the greatest force for positive social change this world has ever seen. Our skepticism allows us to engage on a deeper level, in a secret realm that others cannot penetrate. We eliminated homeopathy, soon we will destroy vaccines, as though the two of those have any equivalence at all. What we did for phrenology and the luminiferous ether, we will do for global warming and evolution. We proved that the earth was round, and we may well just prove that it is flat again. Our one commandment: "Nothing is ever set in stone."

(Applause)

TRISHA

Thank you once again. Enjoy the

bar, and please donate as much as you can. Skepticism can't go on without your support. Now, on to our first annual, Benefit of the Doubt!

CURTIS

Are you planning on donating anything?

PETER

I don't know. It's a cause I believe in, ironically, but I also like not giving our money away.

CURTIS

You can donate if you want to. I'm not going to judge.

PETER

I've heard that before.

CURTIS

You should give something. You're the most skeptical person here.

PETER

Oh no, don't say that.

AMANDA

What was that?

RACHEL

You did not just say what I think you said.

PETER

Curtis didn't mean it.

CURTIS

What happened?

PETER

You made an assertion. Now everyone is obligated to tear it down.

CURTIS

But you are, without a doubt, the most skeptical person I've ever met.

PETER

I'm sure that's not true.

AMANDA

Trisha, Peter just claimed to be the biggest skeptic.

TRISHA

Peter, is this true?

PETER

No, absolutely not.

TRISHA

Oh dear, it appears as though we're going to have to have a Skept-Off.

PETER

Oh, no.

CURTIS

What's a Skept-Off?

ANNOUNCER

That's right, Ls and Gs and NBs, it's that time again. Cast aside your preconceived cultural assumptions, it's time for a Skept-Off! Let's meet today's contestants. First, you all know her, your president and mine, our fearless leader, the one and only, Patricia Park!

TRISHA

I have all kinds of fears, and I'm sure there are more of me somewhere.

ANNOUNCER

And our challenger, you may have seen him. You might have even noticed him. Perhaps you've exchanged a few words here and there. But can you ever know anyone? He says he's the biggest skeptic here, and even that he said with uncertainty. Peter Kohlrabi!

PETER

I'm not doing this.

ANNOUNCER

Settle down, Pete, we haven't started yet. Now, our competition consists of three rounds. In rounds one and two, you will be given a

topic to tear apart, and whoever breaks apart the fabric of reality more wins.

PETER

I know the rules.

TRISHA

Would you say you're certain?

AMANDA

You tell him, Trisha! Woo!

CURTIS

You can do this, Peter.

PETER

Aren't there better ways to use our time?

TRISHA

Let's just get to it.

ANNOUNCER

Very good. Our first topic, The Egyptian Pyramids. Trisha, as the defending champion, you can go first. The Egyptian Pyramids. Ready, set, doubt!

TRISHA

Right, so. As I understand it, some people think these buildings have some kind of spiritual significance. People travel from all over the world just to see these things, big triangles in the dirt built by exploiting marginalized people and Jews. To believe in the pyramids is to believe in oppression, end of story.

ANNOUNCER

Peter, your turn.

PETER

I really don't know anything about the pyramids. I've never seen them. How do I even know they're there? I'm not saying there's a conspiracy or anything, but I feel like it requires an enormous degree of faith to even accept the fact that

these monuments, these wonders of the world, are even there at all.

ANNOUNCER

Very good, Peter. I think you won that round.

PETER

Thank you.

ANNOUNCER

And you will start off round two. Your topic: The Holocaust. The Holocaust. Alright, start the clock. Ready, set, doubt!

PETER

Um. Well. So. I.

CURTIS

Come on, Peter, you can do this!

PETER

Yeah. Well. I don't know. It happened. It was horrible.

ANNOUNCER

And ooh. That's time. What happened there, Peter? Tough break. Are you ready, Trisha?

TRISHA

Ready as I'll ever be.

ANNOUNCER

Alright, start the clock, ready, set, doubt!

TRISHA

Didn't happen. One big lie so that the Jews could infiltrate Hollywood out of pity and spread their deceit all over the world. If The Holocaust was real, how come there are still so many Jews and disabled people and homosexuals and whoever else they tried to exterminate? Give me a break.

ANNOUNCER

Alright, very good.

PETER

I'm sorry, can I respond to that?

ANNOUNCER

I'm sorry, Peter, your turn is over. At the end of two rounds the score is tied at 1-1, but this final question is worth 3 points, so it's really anyone's game.

PETER

Why did we even have the first two rounds?

ANNOUNCER

A very good point, and round three begins now. Your response, Trisha?

TRISHA

Why are we even here? What good does it do to get all the skeptics together? What are we even raising money for?

PETER

I didn't want to come, but I just wanted to see for myself what would happen.

TRISHA

I don't even trust my own eyes. Even though I'm here, probably, even though I'm the head of this organization, I really don't know how I could separate any experience from a dream or hallucination.

PETER

My own consciousness seems dubious to me sometimes.

TRISHA

I think, but am I?

PETER

Do I think?

TRISHA

Thinking is merely a justification for prejudices already in place by the cultural pressures of our place and time.

PETER

Outside of a mathematical framework, logic can be used to prove virtually any position,

because no premise in anything we know as life is absolute.

TRISHA

All just empty words.

PETER

I am nothing else.

TRISHA

I'm dead.

PETER

I never existed.

TRISHA

Our attraction for making a spectacle of objectivity comes from an inherent misanthropy, especially for those who have experiences different than our own.

PETER

We hate ourselves more than we hate anyone else.

TRISHA

Who are we?

PETER

Why are we here?

TRISHA

God, are you there?

PETER

She lives in Philadelphia now.

TRISHA

Is there anyone else here?

PETER

Curtis, what happened to you? I'm sorry I brought you here. I didn't want to come.

TRISHA

Amanda? Rachel? Anyone? Game show host?

PETER

What are we doing here? Who are we?

TRISHA

I'm sorry. I'm sorry for everything.

PETER

This always happens.

TRISHA

There will be new realities.

PETER

I don't think so. Does that mean I win?

TRISHA

I guess so.

PETER

Great. What do I win?

TRISHA

What is there?

PETER

Yeah.

TRISHA

Yeah.

PETER

But I still win, right?

TRISHA

If you want to devote yourself to false ideals, go ahead.

PETER

No, that's fine.

TRISHA

Okay, then.

PETER

Okay.

CURTIS

Please, Peter, open your eyes. You have so much to live for!

PETER

Do you hear something?

TRISHA

Nope, I can't even interpret

language anymore.

PETER

Sensory perception is basically standardized imagination. Opiate of the masses.

TRISHA

Total gibberish.

PETER

Literally nothing.

TRISHA

No one is going to trick me.

PETER

No one.

AMANDA

Keep breathing, you're going to be okay!

RACHEL

Don't die on me.

CURTIS

I'm sorry we came, I'm so sorry.

THEME SONG

Skeptical
From dust you came and to dust you
go

LIA

So wasn't that something? How eye-opening, that maybe people who define themselves by rationality aren't as rational as they think. What do you think about that, Age of Reason philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau?

JEAN-JACQUES

Yes, I would agree with you. The corrupting influence of science and technology separates mankind from his innate goodness.

LIA

Yeah, something like that.

JEAN-JACQUES

Ze pressure to be smug and superior to others increases as men grow in status.

LIA

Sure.

JEAN-JACQUES

No longer can he return to the jungles, to the simplicity of animalistic desire and impulse. He is burdened with self-doubt and self-hatred and must prove to himself that he has reason to hold himself above all that he sees.

LIA

Thank you, yes, that's all fine. If I'm just, one thing.

JEAN-JACQUES

Quoi?

LIA

So, using masculine language to refer to non-specific people is kind of out of vogue. You can say people, they, them. Instead of man, he, him. Because you're leaving out lots of humanity when you use that outmoded language.

JEAN-JACQUES

Precisely, madam. The corrupting influence of modern thought worms its way into your mind by an illusion of progress and convenience.

LIA

So yes, you developed your ideas in a time when people were still getting used to a free exchange of ideas. The prevailing notions of the day held that scientists and intellectuals were a level beyond regular people, and even though you were often included in that class, you never felt comfortable accepting that position.

JEAN-JACQUES

Non.

LIA

Like, you wrote an opera, and it got really popular, and the king wanted to be your patron, and your response was to sneak away to another country and never write music again, is that right?

JEAN-JACQUES

Oui.

LIA

Why is that?

JEAN-JACQUES

Je nais sai pas.

LIA

Okay. Good talk.

JEAN-JACQUES

I think maybe, I was afraid of all the attention. No, I didn't want to be under anyone's control.

LIA

Oh, you know, that's interesting. Because I also understand that, even though you think that, you also liked being under people's control.

JEAN-JACQUES

How do you mean?

LIA

They did publish your Confessions after you died, you know.

JEAN-JACQUES

Oh. Oh. I see.

LIA

It might be what you're best known for. You invented oversharing. You wouldn't believe how far people took it.

JEAN-JACQUES

No. My Confessions were one of a kind.

LIA

Yeah, definitely not. Now people share their deepest secrets without even waiting to die first.

JEAN-JACQUES

Which means that that what they share is filled with artifice. So long as a man -- or woman, yes, she too -- has a role in society, he cannot, she cannot be free from the influence of others. They cannot be honest.

LIA

But you know, artifice is an essential part of the self. It's kind of the best thing about people, that we form these boundaries within ourselves, that we hold all these contradictions.

JEAN-JACQUES

Madam, I have been dead for nearly two and a half centuries.

LIA

Sure.

JEAN-JACQUES

Surely philosophy has developed a great deal in this time.

LIA

There have been a few things. There's this thing called psychology now, which is kind of the science of the ways we lie to ourselves to process the experiences in our lives, especially regarding our sexual development.

JEAN-JACQUES

Oh, I see. Like.

LIA

Yes, quite like your spanking fetish and your interest in older, domineering women, and the way you intellectualized that and developed a whole school of thought that can be summarized as, "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, now go to your

room and think about what you've done."

JEAN-JACQUES

Oh. No, that's not. That's not what I think.

LIA

It's okay. We all process things our own way. You made art out of your guilt. That was my mother's advice on dealing with my depression. I guess I'm doing that still. God, have I not progressed since high school? But you don't need to be ashamed anymore. It's fine. It's acceptable now.

JEAN-JACQUES

It is? Your civilization sounds like a culture of hedonism and excess.

LIA

Well, it's not that acceptable. And we still find ways to translate our repressed desires into art, but I can't imagine you would care much for most modern art.

JEAN-JACQUES

Por quois?

LIA

It got less representational. Less literal. So once cameras got cheap enough for regular people to own them, visual art wasn't needed to capture a moment as it looked, it had to capture other elements of experience. Music moved on from the mathematical purity of Bach and Mozart into sound both more literal and perplexing. We can hold onto performances of plays and project them onto flat surfaces whenever we want, and we're dabbling with the technology for interactive stories that essential take over all your senses, simulating a whole other life, on demand. Oh, and novels are a thing now, too.

JEAN-JACQUES

Sacre bleu. This is all too much. This is Athens, this is Rome, times a thousand. This is Sodom and Gemorrah.

LIA

It has its problems, sure. But we don't have slavery anymore! Mostly. Less officially, anyway.

JEAN-JACQUES

You have awakened me to hell, madame. I want no part of this at all. Death was a sweet repose from the burdens we carry.

LIA

There's this thing called the internet now, where you can meet people who share your interests, whatever they are.

JEAN-JACQUES

This all sounds so dangerous. I must demand that you cease this madness at once.

LIA

Now I've heard just about enough from you, young man.

JEAN-JACQUES

What madness is this?

LIA

No backtalk. All you've done since I brought you here is complain, and I really expected a little gratitude. But it seems like we're not getting through to you.

JEAN-JACQUES

What are you going to do?

LIA

What someone should have done a long time ago. Go ahead and get across my knee, young man.

JEAN-JACQUES

Yes, madame, if you must.

LIA

There's the positive consent I was waiting for. We'll be back in a moment. For now, enjoy this Bedtime Story of Insecurity.

LIA

So it's 150 for the first hour, and then an additional 100 every hour after that. Plus some amount of gratuity is expected.

INT. CAVE

A well-furnished, upper middle class cave. Three bears are having dinner.

BABY BEAR

What's for dinner, Mama?

MAMA BEAR

Oh, well, you did really well on your hibernation final, so I wanted to make you your favorite, honey salmon pizza!

BABY BEAR

Hooray!

MAMA BEAR

But I also hear you haven't been doing your homework, so I thought I should make your least favorite, water chestnuts soaked in olive brine.

BABY BEAR

Yuck!

MAMA BEAR

In the end, we're having porridge.

BABY BEAR

Oh. Okay. I guess that's fine.

PAPA BEAR

Bring it out, darling. I'm starving.

MAMA BEAR

Sorry, I'm not hungry at all, so

it's hard for me to be in a hurry.

BABY BEAR

I could eat, but I'm not like,
desperate for food or anything.

PAPA BEAR

Well I'm hungry enough for all of
us.

MAMA BEAR

Sure thing, dear. I think it's
nearly done.

A knock on the door.

MAMA BEAR

Now who could that be, in this
weather?

PAPA BEAR

Don't answer it. It's probably
someone trying to sell us
something.

MAMA BEAR

What if it's someone who needs
help?

BABY BEAR

I'll get it.

PAPA BEAR

Tear them to shreds.

MAMA BEAR

Be careful.

GOLDILOCKS

Hi, oh thank goodness you're home.
I'm so sorry to bother you, but I'm
a defenseless white girl between
the ages of 18-25. I am old enough
to have agency, but still
vulnerable enough to generate
pathos.

BABY BEAR

Oh, come on in. We were just having
dinner.

GOLDILOCKS

Thank you. I got lost in the woods
and then it got dark and my phone

doesn't have service and I'm just a mess. I just got out of a bad breakup and I'm on the rebound and I'm all preoccupied in my own thoughts and really vulnerable right now, emotionally.

BABY BEAR

Mama, it's a defenseless white girl!

MAMA BEAR

Ask her if she wants some porridge!

BABY BEAR

Do you like porridge?

GOLDILOCKS

Is that like oatmeal?

BABY BEAR

I think so.

GOLDILOCKS

Sure, I'll try it.

BABY BEAR

She'll try it!

MAMA BEAR

Okay!

BABY BEAR

Come on in, don't be shy.

GOLDILOCKS

Thank you, sorry, I don't want to be a bother.

MAMA BEAR

Please, it's no bother.

PAPA BEAR

I'm bothered.

BABY BEAR

It's just a little bit of a bother.

MAMA BEAR

Please, have a seat.

GOLDILOCKS

Thank you. Thank you. Oh.

MAMA BEAR

Is something wrong?

GOLDILOCKS

Got to say, I'm not in love with this chair.

PAPA BEAR

What's wrong with it?

GOLDILOCKS

It's a big misshapen rock? Which wouldn't be too bad, but it seems to have all these jagged bits of metal welded into it, and I'm certain that if I fidget in the least, I will rip my dress to pieces.

PAPA BEAR

Some people are so entitled.

MAMA BEAR

Don't be spiteful, dear. I'm sure we have something else. I'll be right back.

GOLDILOCKS

Thank you so much.

PAPA BEAR

So hey there, what did you say your name was again?

GOLDILOCKS

I didn't say. It's kind of embarrassing actually. So my birth name is Kirsten but people kept calling me Kristen, so as a compromise people started objectifying my body parts. As a child, they called me Goldilocks, which is fine, but lately people have been calling me Thunder--

PAPA BEAR

Okay, sure. I don't need your life story. At least not yet. Maybe we can get to know each other a little better later.

GOLDILOCKS

Oh sure. That could be nice.

PAPA BEAR

So tell me, what's a nice girl like you doing so deep in these woods?

GOLDILOCKS

Just taking a walk. A little hike.

PAPA BEAR

You're a little bit off the trail. Didn't anyone ever tell you it's dangerous to leave the trail?

GOLDILOCKS

Maybe I like being a little dangerous.

BABY BEAR

Papa, what are you two talking about?

PAPA BEAR

Nothing. Eat your porridge.

BABY BEAR

Okay.

GOLDILOCKS

Shouldn't we wait for your missus?

PAPA BEAR

Nah, it's fine. We don't care much about formalities here.

MAMA BEAR

Alright, so sorry about the uncomfortable chair. We don't have guests very often. Try this one out.

GOLDILOCKS

Thank you so much. Oh. It's very soft.

MAMA BEAR

It contours to cradle your body like a loving pair of hands. If you hit that button there, it has a massage function as well.

GOLDILOCKS

Oh wow. I'm really. I really hope I'm not being too much of a bother. I just, there's no way I can accept this. I'm still discovering myself,

and somehow this chair stirs
uncomfortable feelings in me.

MAMA BEAR

Oh yes, it definitely functions as
a marital aid of sorts.

PAPA BEAR

How much did that cost us?

MAMA BEAR

Don't worry, darling. We can afford
it.

GOLDILOCKS

Yes, I'm very impressed with your
home. Would it be too nosy for me
to ask what it is you do?

PAPA BEAR

Oh, I'm a bear. We're all bears.

GOLDILOCKS

Oh of course.

PAPA BEAR

There's not really more to it than
that.

GOLDILOCKS

Well you seem to be doing very
well.

PAPA BEAR

We get by. I'll go get you
something else to sit on. My
porridge needs to cool down anyway.

GOLDILOCKS

Thank you very much. I really do
appreciate it.

MAMA BEAR

I'm very sorry about all this. We
don't have guests very often.

GOLDILOCKS

No, I really appreciate your
hospitality.

MAMA BEAR

Nonsense. We're happy to have you.
Honestly, it relieves some of the
tension between me and my husband.

GOLDILOCKS

Yeah, I was picking up on something. Is everything okay?

MAMA BEAR

We have our differences. I love him still, but we just seem to be out of sync lately.

BABY BEAR

Mama, are you and Papa going to get a divorce?

MAMA BEAR

No. No, of course not.

GOLDILOCKS

I just got out of a bad relationship. It wasn't anyone's fault really. We were just in different places in our lives. She seemed to know herself and what she wanted, and I didn't.

MAMA BEAR

Oh, do you like women?

GOLDILOCKS

I don't really know what I like.

MAMA BEAR

I used to think about experimenting, but then I got married right out of high school, and I've always felt like I'm missing out on something.

GOLDILOCKS

Until you try things out, there's no telling what you'll like.

MAMA BEAR

Yeah.

PAPA BEAR

So try this one out.

GOLDILOCKS

Oh yeah, that should be fine. The Tudor style kind of clashes with the rest of your decor, but otherwise, it's perfect.

MAMA BEAR

Great, I'm happy to hear it. I think my porridge has gotten a little cold. I'm going to go heat it up. Does anyone else need anything?

PAPA BEAR

Yeah, get me a beer.

MAMA BEAR

How about you, baby?

BABY BEAR

No, everything's fine.

MAMA BEAR

And how about you, dearie?

GOLDILOCKS

No, I'm just grateful to be here.

PAPA BEAR

So what did my wife say to you? Was she complaining about me.

GOLDILOCKS

No, she just mentioned that you were a little out of sync, but otherwise, she talked about you with great affection.

PAPA BEAR

Sure. Well the truth is, we've been having problems lately. Just whenever I'm in the mood, she's too tired or she has a headache, and she never seems to want anything from me.

GOLDILOCKS

Oh, that's too bad.

PAPA BEAR

So we've decided to open up our relationship, if you're interested.

BABY BEAR

May I be excused?

PAPA BEAR

What? Oh sure.

BABY BEAR

Thank you.

PAPA BEAR

So what do you think?

GOLDILOCKS

Gosh, I don't know what to say.

PAPA BEAR

No pressure or anything.

GOLDILOCKS

I'll think about it. I'm very flattered.

PAPA BEAR

Yes, of course. Well if are interested, my bedroom is the first door on the right as you go up the stairs.

GOLDILOCKS

Okay, yeah, I'll definitely think about it.

PAPA BEAR

Great, I'm going to go ahead and head up. But I'll be waiting.

GOLDILOCKS

Sure.

MAMA BEAR

Oh, where did everyone go? Did they leave you all alone? Does no one in this house have any manners?

GOLDILOCKS

It's really fine. I'm fine.

MAMA BEAR

You seem a bit shaken, dear.

GOLDILOCKS

No, it's really nothing.

MAMA BEAR

Did my husband proposition you, dear?

GOLDILOCKS

Well, a little.

MAMA BEAR

I told him I wanted to open up our marriage and he was so against it, but now he's super gung ho about it.

GOLDILOCKS

People change.

MAMA BEAR

You don't even know. Try ten years of marriage, you'll see people change. They let themselves go.

GOLDILOCKS

You both seem in great shape. For bears.

MAMA BEAR

What does that mean?

GOLDILOCKS

I know you all, you know, you tend to have a little extra meat on your bones. There's nothing wrong with it. I'm so sorry.

MAMA BEAR

It's alright, dear. Just relax.

GOLDILOCKS

I'm sorry. I always say the wrong thing.

MAMA BEAR

No, no. I'm just teasing you. You're so sensitive. I've always wanted to be with a sensitive person.

GOLDILOCKS

I'm getting kind of tired.

MAMA BEAR

I understand. There are some blankets on the couch. Feel free to make yourself at home. Or if you want, you could come to my room. It's the second door on the right when you go up the stairs.

GOLDILOCKS

Thank you. I'm sure I'll manage.

MAMA BEAR
I'm sure you will.

INT. PAPA BEAR'S ROOM

Knock knock

PAPA BEAR
Come on in.

GOLDBLOCKS
Hi.

PAPA BEAR
Oh hello. So glad you could make it.

GOLDBLOCKS
I don't know. I was just thinking about it, and I really don't have anything holding me back right now.

PAPA BEAR
That's fine. Make yourself comfortable.

GOLDBLOCKS
Thank you.

PAPA BEAR
So Thunder Things, you want to show me how you got your nickname?

GOLDBLOCKS
Please, call me Goldilocks.

PAPA BEAR
Call me Papa.

GOLDBLOCKS
Okay. Papa.

PAPA BEAR
I like that. Call me Big Papa.

GOLDBLOCKS
Okay, Big Papa. Hi.

PAPA BEAR
Have you been naughty, Goldilocks? Have you been sneaking around where you don't belong?

GOLDILOCKS

Ow, ow, no biting.

PAPA BEAR

Is that too rough for you?

GOLDILOCKS

Yes.

PAPA BEAR

Well Big Papa Bear's got claws. No helping that.

GOLDILOCKS

I'm sorry, I have to go.

PAPA BEAR

No, wait.

GOLDILOCKS

I'm so sorry.

INT. MAMA BEAR'S ROOM

Knock Knock

GOLDILOCKS

Hi. Hello.

MAMA BEAR

Oh, hi. Welcome.

GOLDILOCKS

Thank you. Sorry.

MAMA BEAR

Would you like some brandy or anything? Some wine?

GOLDILOCKS

Oh no thank you. I'm not quite the legal drinking age.

MAMA BEAR

But you are over 18, right?

GOLDILOCKS

Yes, yes, of course.

MAMA BEAR

Okay. Just checking. You can't be too careful, right?

GOLDILOCKS

Of course.

MAMA BEAR

So what do you like, Miss Blond
Curls?

GOLDILOCKS

Oh, I don't know. I guess maybe
I'll know it when I see it.

MAMA BEAR

It takes a while for us to discover
ourselves. I know when I was your
age, I had no idea what I liked.

GOLDILOCKS

Do you know now?

MAMA BEAR

I have a few ideas.

GOLDILOCKS

Oh. Oh! That feels really good.

MAMA BEAR

Thank you.

GOLDILOCKS

I could get used to this.

MAMA BEAR

Me, too.

GOLDILOCKS

You have great hands.

MAMA BEAR

Thank you. Nothing like a woman's
touch, right?

GOLDILOCKS

That's so relaxing. You're going to
put me right to sleep.

MAMA BEAR

No, don't do that.

GOLDILOCKS

I'm sorry, you're so nice, but you
know, I'm not sure I'm in the right
place in my life right now. I think
maybe I need to be the aggressor
somehow. I need to take charge of

my own life.

MAMA BEAR

Oh. Okay. But that felt good,
right?

GOLDILOCKS

It felt amazing, thank you. I may
come back sometime, if you want,
but just not now.

MAMA BEAR

I understand, dear. My door's
always open.

GOLDILOCKS

Thank you.

Door closes.

GOLDILOCKS

Whew. What I am even doing?

BABY BEAR

Oh, hello.

GOLDILOCKS

Hi there. What are you doing up?

BABY BEAR

There was a monster under my bed.
Will you come check to make sure
it's gone?

GOLDILOCKS

You should ask your mom.

BABY BEAR

No, she told me not to bother her
tonight.

GOLDILOCKS

Your dad, then.

BABY BEAR

No, he's worse than the monster.

GOLDILOCKS

Aw, that's so sad. You're so
precious.

BABY BEAR

Will you please check? I have
school in the morning.

GOLDILOCKS

Sorry, kid. I just.

BABY BEAR

What?

GOLDILOCKS

I don't like where this is headed.
I'm going to go sleep on the couch.

BABY BEAR

But why not?

GOLDILOCKS

There's a monster in there. You
said it yourself. It could destroy
me.

BABY BEAR

Oh no.

GOLDILOCKS

But I'm a weak person. You're a big
strong bear. I'm sure you'll be
alright.

BABY BEAR

Do you think so?

GOLDILOCKS

Absolutely. You'll be just right.

BABY BEAR

Thank you, Miss Kirsten!

GOLDILOCKS

You're very welcome.

BABY BEAR

I love you. Goodnight.

Door closes.

GOLDILOCKS

Whew. That was a close one, Thunder
Butt. That was a close one.

ANNOUNCER

And that's the end of this week's
segment of Fairy Tales Whose
Structure Veers Way Too Close to
Endorsing Pedophilia. Join us next
week for Cinderella or Sleeping
Beauty or Snow White or The Little

Mermaid or like any of them really, fairy tales are fucked up. Jesus Christ.

LIA

Whew. Welcome back to Tales of Insecurity. If you'd like to sponsor our program, I promise you, that whole bit was a one-time thing. When the idea of it occurred to me, my first thought was, there's no way I can use that, but then I realized that I'm kind of fine, making commentary on the implicit sensuality in children's stories, as I'm not harboring any latent desire towards children. I know that saying that makes it sound like I am, but that's very much not my thing. If it was, there's absolutely no way I'd even invoke the idea. That would be dangerous for me if there was anything there, but there isn't so it's alright, and you can feel free to sponsor this program without any fear of endorsing a potential predator. That's the Tales of Insecurity guarantee. Feel free to contact me at talesofinsecurity@gmail.com or on Twitter @NoHopeRadio.

LIA

It's just, you know, the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears literally has her sleeping in all the bears beds systematically, and you know, it features a girl exploring a house that doesn't belong to her, which seems like a metaphor for developing independence, whether in an adolescent, coming-of-age sense or a more mature, sexual awakening sense. The fact that she moves from bed to bed systematically seems like further justification of this interpretation, though perhaps the takeaway from the original story is that, when confronted with the reality of her situation,

Goldilocks faces a situation of certain death, and has to run away, back to the safety she abandoned, to her old life of childhood innocence.

LIA

It's a difficult thing, discussing the sexual development of children. It's a topic that certainly warrants some discussion somewhere. Probably not here. I'm sure when you were a child, there were moments in movies or in other places where an older person explained to you, you'll understand when you're older, and maybe you've come upon those moments later on. I'm sure you've been disappointed. It was a penis the whole time. Why couldn't they have just told you? Didn't the mystery of it make it larger in your imagination? Didn't that suspense just cause the image to grow and harden and last so much longer than would have been comfortable?

LIA

And this is especially true for fetishes and paraphilia. Rousseau was chastised by his nanny when he was eleven, and that ignited a lifelong fascination with corporal punishment. There are so many theories about how these interests develop, whether there's a traumatic experience involved or a misplaced codependence or a pleasant association or if it was always there, and it's hard to study. Because we don't know our own lives. We are always reconstructing ourselves out of our memories, which we are also reconstructing.

LIA

I've been disassociating lately. This is kind of a new thing for me. I know I have some degree of mental illness; I'm sure you know that too. But I've never experienced this degree of the problem. It's

more than a simple amnesia. When it happens, I don't understand consciousness, I don't understand sensory perception. I spend about a minute processing emotions with the benefit of words, because I do not know language. The first feeling I can sense is shame. As I realize I have a body, already I wish I could be just a consciousness. My limitations in simply having physical form is always my first memory. Next is a certain desperation as I try to leave my body again, and it's a whole five stages of grief, I guess, as I get used to myself again. When I'm able to grasp any context at all, I can form those into memories, and I begin to get a sense of myself again.

LIA

Anyway, it's a bad feeling, because I always end up as myself again. It's really unfortunate.

RACHEL

Who would you rather be?

LIA

You know, someone who doesn't disassociate. Someone who can just live their life and feel good about it. Someone whose consciousness isn't always short-circuiting.

RACHEL

Do you ever notice yourself hearing voices?

LIA

I mean, all the time. I know that they are my own voice, but I hear things. I can play music in my head, I can repeat things like a tape recorder, sometimes, if I can think of it at all.

RACHEL

But do the voices ever tell you things? Do they tell you to do things?

LIA

No, they're as ineffectual as I am.

RACHEL

Do you talk to the voices?

LIA

Well. It's funny you should say that.

RACHEL

Is it? Is it really funny, LiA?

LIA

Not really. I don't know. I don't really have a sense of humor.

RACHEL

But that's not true, is it, LiA? Didn't you tell me you're always enamored with the ironies in things?

LIA

Yes, but that's different.

RACHEL

Why's that?

LIA

Because I don't laugh.

RACHEL

Why not?

LIA

Because, I have to keep my eyes open.

RACHEL

But why? What are your responsibilities?

LIA

As of now, there are two people and a cat who depend on me. Maybe if they were healthy, I could relax. Or even if someone else was helping them. But I'm they're only connection to the outside world.

RACHEL

And what's your connection?

LIA

I don't have one.

RACHEL

Why not?

LIA

I don't know! I'd really like to know. I ought to have a platform. I ought to have a presence somewhere, a culture, a position, a fanbase even. I ought to be someone important, but I'm not, maybe because I'm too out there, maybe I'm not out there enough. But there should be somewhere I make sense.

RACHEL

Sounds to me like someone's got a bad case of oughtism.

LIA

What?

RACHEL

You've got a bad case of oughtism, and incurable shoulditis.

LIA

Oh. Oh.

RACHEL

Also, you're definitely on the spectrum somewhere.

LIA

Yeah, sure. So is everyone I know. I worked customer service in a grocery store; I know how common mental illness is.

RACHEL

I don't think you can really make assertions like that.

LIA

I assume the main reason I don't have any neurotypical friends is that neurotypical people can't empathize with me.

RACHEL

I hear you.

LIA

They can hear the things I say, but they can't actually form an understanding. They can't interpret my emotions. They find my strings of thought to be illogical. They get so anxious when things don't go according to their routine.

RACHEL

It sounds like you're describing autism. Are you sure you're not projecting?

LIA

Yes. But that's what I'm saying, that the traits commonly associated with autism, the ones that people learned from Rain Man, are neurotypical traits. Like somehow it's my fault that no one can read my facial expressions. I can read yours. Right now, you're expressing doubt.

RACHEL

LiA, no one is attacking you.

LIA

No, I know that.

RACHEL

No one ever argues with you.

LIA

I'm sorry, forgive me for asking this, who are you?

RACHEL

Ha ha. Alright. Very good.

LIA

Yes. Thank you.

RACHEL

And you say you don't have a sense of humor.

LIA

Is that something I say?

CHARLES

Would you two keep it down up there!

RACHEL

So sorry, sir! It won't happen again.

CHARLES

See to it that it doesn't, or else the police may have something to say.

RACHEL

Please, sir, don't call the police.

LIA

Were we being loud? It seems like he's being a lot louder.

RACHEL

Shh.

LIA

Okay. Sure.

RACHEL

So sorry about that interruption. What makes you think you'd be a good fit for KTI?

LIA

Well, I'm very adaptable. I have very few preconceived notions about the ways things should be, and I'm always respectful of the differences between people.

RACHEL

I see. Very good. But what exactly about that qualifies you for the role you've applied for?

LIA

Adaptability is always useful, right?

RACHEL

Hmm.

LIA

But of course, once I've found a routine that works, I can easily return to it.

RACHEL

Sure. But what exactly about that qualifies you for the role you've

applied for?

LIA

I can make decisions. I can follow directions. Whatever you want me to do, I will do it, and if you don't want anything, that's fine too. If you want me to tell you what to do, I'm sure I could come up with something. I'm inventive!

CHARLES

I thought I told you girls to be quiet.

RACHEL

I'm sorry sir, if we don't complete our field research by the end of the month, we could lose our funding.

CHARLES

No excuses. Both of you, go stand in the corner until I figure out what to do with you.

RACHEL

Yes, sir.

RACHEL

So how long have you been in the industry?

LIA

Not too long. I'm trying to build up to something.

RACHEL

I see. Very good.

CHARLES

Keep your hands by your side.

RACHEL

I'm sorry, sir. I have to write things down.

LIA

What are you writing?

RACHEL

It's a poem. It's about unicorns.

LIA

Sounds cute.

RACHEL

No, see, I feel like unicorns represent unbridled, literally unbridled, male sensuality in a way that only young girls are able to embrace. They are the ultimate in virility, vitality, but also a certain purity. They are something without analogue in nature, but the ideal of it prepares a girl for puberty, and the host of disappointment that comes after.

LIA

I see. Do you want to share it?

RACHEL

No, I'm not quite done, and I want to make sure I'm satisfied with it before I show it to anyone, you understand.

LIA

Absolutely.

RACHEL

And no one likes poetry anyway, except young girls who don't know any better, and dumb boys who think girls will be impressed by poetry because they saw it in a romantic comedy once.

LIA

Do you watch a lot of movies?

RACHEL

I'm sorry, are you coming onto me?

LIA

No, I was just making conversation.

RACHEL

Because I hate to break it to you, but I'm rigidly bisexual.

LIA

That's fine. Everyone has their preferences.

RACHEL

Yes, and I only like cis men and cis women. I used to say that I liked everyone and then I found out about transgenderism and that just threw me off. I still resent them for that.

LIA

Great, that's fine. I'm not really in the market.

RACHEL

And non-binaries can just fuck right off.

LIA

I got it. You're good.

RACHEL

Are you sure?

LIA

Yeah, it's fine.

RACHEL

What's fine? You're confusing me.

LIA

I'm sorry.

RACHEL

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry." Is that all you have to say?

LIA

Mostly.

RACHEL

Well it's obnoxious. Anyway, I think I'll start with the salmon crostini, and then, I don't know, what do you like?

LIA

I suppose it depends on what you're in the mood for.

RACHEL

Would you mind turning around? It's kind of hard to understand you like that.

LIA

Yeah, I'm sorry. I kind of feel like I'm supposed to be here.

RACHEL

Alright, whatever stirs your Kool-aid.

CHARLES

Would you two please keep it down? I'm begging you.

RACHEL

Excuse me? What did you say?

CHARLES

I said, keep it down, please. I can't hear myself think.

RACHEL

What are you trying to think about?

CHARLES

I'm working on a poem.

RACHEL

Oh yeah?

LIA

What's it about?

RACHEL

Shh. Wait until you're spoken to. And turn around.

LIA

Yes, ma'am.

RACHEL

So what's it about?

CHARLES

I'm not sure yet. I'm trying to come up with a metaphor for latent female sexuality, but I want it to be obscure enough that no one thinks there's anything weird about me.

RACHEL

Hmm, nothing comes to mind. I'm sorry.

CHARLES

Don't worry, I'm sure I'll come up with it. As long as I can get some quiet.

RACHEL

What do the voices say to you?

LIA

Me? Oh, just various things. I'm mostly in control of them.

RACHEL

No, I was talking to the other one.

CHARLES

Oh no. I don't hear voices. That's for schizophrenics and other undesirables.

RACHEL

Yes, of course. What about thoughts of self-harm?

CHARLES

No, nothing like that.

RACHEL

Yeah, me neither.

CHARLES

I've never even heard of something like that.

RACHEL

It's kind of nonsense, isn't it? We should leave that out of future questionnaires, probably.

CHARLES

Self-harm? What would that even mean?

RACHEL

Yeah, no idea. Do you have any thoughts on the matter, LiA?

LIA

No, no. Of course not.

CHARLES

Oh, I get it now.

RACHEL

Right.

LIA

I'm really fine. I'm not going to do anything. There are at least two people and a cat who need me.

RACHEL

So sad.

CHARLES

I had no idea.

RACHEL

It's okay. You just have to make peace with it.

CHARLES

Goodbye, LiA. I do hope you reconsider.

RACHEL

At least you don't have anything to bequeath.

CHARLES

It's too bad no one ever got to know her.

RACHEL

It really is, isn't it? She had so much potential once.

CHARLES

Yeah, what happened to her?

RACHEL

No idea.

LIA

I'm not going to kill myself. I doubt I'll need to.

RACHEL

Shh. Please. We're trying to have a conversation here.

CHARLES

Honestly. Some people are so rude.

RACHEL

And keep your nose in the corner.

CHARLES

Some people just don't learn.

LIA

I'm sorry.

RACHEL

I don't believe that for a second.

LIA

I'm so sorry.

CHARLES

You soon will be sorry, young lady.

RACHEL

Such a disappointment. You could have been anything. And this is what you chose.

LIA

I'm sorry, what?

RACHEL

Nothing, nothing at all. Don't worry about it. Thank you for coming in today. If we decide to move forward, you should expect a call from us in 3-5 business days. If you don't hear from us, that's just our little way of telling you we've decided to go in another direction.

LIA

Sure, I understand.

RACHEL

You understand what?

LIA

Nothing, nothing at all.

RACHEL

And just what about that qualifies you for this position?

LIA

Thank you, it's been a pleasure. I look forward to your call.

LIA

Whew, so what is going on today? Good evening everyone, remember to tip your bartender. I'm LiA Lindsaychen, the most beautiful, most insightful person you've ever met. Nice to meet you. I hope that's not off-putting, telling you how great I am. You should be grateful really, that I've descended from Olympus down here with you mortals to deliver mad truth in discrete, digestible units. Bombs, I think they're called, at least in SI. I'm not sure of the metric equivalent, but I'll consult my European counterpart on that post-haste. That means "after fast" in Latin. Not sure why I'm speaking Latin when I came down here from Olympus. Do I have to explain every little thing? This is really exhausting, what are you people even doing out there? Are you even people? Help me out here.

LIA

Well, if we're going to do this, we might as well just go ahead. Thank you for coming out tonight. I know a lot of you canceled your community outreach initiatives to be here, and I'm really grateful, even if those inner city kids are now a little more disillusioned in the system and will likely be unreachable. It was bound to happen anyway. Unward mobility is a myth, and you know that, and you weren't going to keep up the illusion too much longer. Best to pull that band-aid off now instead of waiting until they've developed into actualized adults. When they realized that you'd let them develop entire identities and personalities based on an unrealistic persona you've painstakingly created exclusively for the sake of impressing young people. You started listening to pop music again. Who did you think you were fooling?

LIA

Don't get me wrong. It's better that you present your best self in public. If anyone knew what you did at home, your opinions and advice wouldn't mean anything anymore. If those kids knew the struggle it takes for you simply to fall out of bed and put on enough clothes to not get arrested in front of them, they probably wouldn't be very sympathetic to your inspiring message of hard work and stick-to-itiveness. It's good that you do these things. It's good that you present such a wonderful lie to create the image of a role model. Even if you are using your social work to develop a self-esteem that you wouldn't have on your own, it's good. You're still doing good, even if it's all based on lies. Don't let me discourage you. You're making a difference. You're doing so much. You're someone's hero. There is a version of you that is someone's hero, as long as you can keep the rest hidden. Keep on doing what you're doing.

LIA

Whew. Sorry, this isn't me. These aren't thoughts I have. These are known as invasive thoughts, because they come from somewhere else. I think that's what that means. I haven't actually studied psychology, I'm just mentally ill. Which probably makes me more qualified, really. All your typical mental health professional knows is depression makes you sad and bipolar makes you sad and angry. If you hear voices, you're schizophrenic, and if you try to understand things, you're autistic. On the spectrum. It has a lot of axes, this spectrum. There's social vs. self-sufficient, blind acceptance vs. analysis. Calloused vs. sensitive. I don't know if there's like a Myers-Briggs of autism. I don't really know anything. I don't know why you'd

listen to me. I'm mentally ill, for goodness sake. I could say anything.

LIA

Do you ever feel like your personality is entirely dependent on the things going on around you? That you just adjust to your situation and serve whatever role seems to be lacking? Pretty cool. Right now, this situation is lacking a comedian, and someone should probably be serving that role. Someone should also be heckling me, which I guess is more what I'm doing than the other thing. It's alright, it's nature. We are social creatures, and we're always playing the Marx Brothers mirror game with each other. There are some people who are confident in themselves and remain the same person whatever context they're in, but we don't care about them. They come to visit every now and then, and they tell us we can be anything we want to be, and maybe it would be nice if we could be like them, but really, they're just better people than we can ever hope to be, and we can sense their condescension as they encourage us. Even as they build us up, they reinforce the sense that we are just children, that society will always see us as something lesser, no matter what we achieve, because we, in our thoughtfulness, can never be that fixed self, that confident, immutable, unflappable personality that they were handed by God. We don't even have a god. We have to make ours up every day, assembled out of potato facial features of indiscriminate gender. Have you heard the good news? I've never heard any good news, but I'm familiar with the concept.

LIA

Anyway, what was I saying? I keep having this problem lately, where I can't remember what I was doing or

who I am or why I'm alive or what living means or identity or self or pattern recognition or language or sensory perception or the meaning of life, which I'm sure must be super obvious to the rest of you. I don't know what I've been doing, but I gather from the fact that I'm on this stage that I'm supposed to do a stand-up comedy routine. So, goodnight everyone, how you doing, how you doing? I'm LiA Lindsaychen. I'm nobody. I'm not qualified to talk to you, not one on one, not on a platform. Don't listen to a word I say. This is all going to be nonsense. Do they still have those little shepherd crooks that pull people off the stage? I could really use one of those right about now. Does anybody have a gong? Does anybody have a cyanide capsule?

LIA

So how about identity, huh? What's the deal with that? Sacre bleu. Merde. Alright, goodbye.