

LIA

The following program contains explicit language and is not to be taken as a source of wisdom or inspiration. I know I'm not anyone's mentor nor anyone's protege, but maybe you need someone to look up to. How sweet. May we all be innocent again someday.

LIA

Congratulations. You did it. You did so much. Just by waking up and putting on a headphone, engaging with your senses in any capacity, you have done something amazing. Wow, look at you go. Give yourself some credit. You don't have to live by anyone's standards, or even your own. What are you fighting for? Why don't you just relax for a change, instead of worrying about how little you're getting done? No one really expected anything from you, so you're doing fine. Tap on some fish, collect your cookies, crush every last candy until you're ready. We'll still be here, waiting. Sincerely, your friends at How to Be.

LIA

Hello there, welcome to How to Be, the podcast that helps you discover what it means to be alive. You are alive! Isn't that a wonderful thing? You're alive and I'm alive and many other people are alive. Some are not. Some people are together, some are alone. I don't know which one you are right now, but I'm here with you. We can be isolated together, parasitic peas in an isopod. No one is going to be offended by any of your invasive thoughts. No one thinks about you when they can't see you, and this can liberate you, if you don't let it depress you.

LIA

There's always a way to frame individual actions in a more positive light. Isn't it nice to be

lied to? Someone cared what you thought. Someone wanted to impress you. Your husband cheated on you? Isn't it great that your relationship has transcended the paradigm of ownership and sexual coercion? He valued your relationship so much that he didn't want to sully it with baser desires. Someone stole your car? They chose your car out of all the cars they could have taken. Inconvenient, but they have really good taste, you have to say.

LIA

I wouldn't call myself an optimist. That seems a gross misappropriation of the term, and isn't really on brand for me. But there is a certain freedom in convincing yourself of more convenient narratives for the sake of carrying on with your life. This is an important process, because you make so many mistakes every day. If you don't edit everything down to a narrative that positions yourself as someone who makes good decisions and has a good life, you might find it difficult to continue living. If you actually came face to face with the things that threaten to mold you, it could destroy you.

LIA

I don't know. Sorry. I don't have any answers about anything, but I'm willing to explore the topic. I'm trying to learn about myself for the sake of total emotional honesty.

MICHAEL

Is that what I'm here for?

LIA

Oh. Hi.

MICHAEL

So we're switching interview shows, right? You did my show, now I'm doing yours?

LIA

Oh. Right. Um. I don't really need you on my show this week. We've already got a full lineup.

MICHAEL

Oh. I'm sorry. Am I in the way here?

LIA

No, no. Not at all. Don't worry. I just kind of do everything myself most of the time.

MICHAEL

It's fine. Sorry, but you know we had that to be continued last time. I was going to finish that. You told everyone that was going to happen.

LIA

Oh, right. Sure. If we have time for that, absolutely.

MICHAEL

You promised.

LIA

Okay. Yes. Sorry. We have Michael Abbott back today. He's going to tell an embarrassing story about himself that's probably more revealing than you can stomach. It's too much for me at least. But until then, today's episode is about making sense of the world around you in a way that allows you to keep living in it, even though you probably shouldn't. Is that confusing? I'm sorry. I'm doing my best, and you are too. The odds were against you, but because you're so hardworking and determined, you overcame adversity and became the master of two worlds. You lived the monomyth, congratulations.

LIA

For those of you out there who haven't internalized three-act structure in a deliberate way, I'll explain it to you as quickly as I

can. You've already learned it just by reading and watching things your whole life, I'm sure, and lots of people think it's hardwired into consciousness in general. We'll talk about that more soon.

LIA

So, hero's journey. You start with a situation of relative comfort, but your protagonist has a feeling of unrest. They don't quite mesh with where they are, and if they're a Disney princess or a Fiddler on whatever building, they'll sing a song about it. Longing. That's the world we're born into. Dissatisfaction. "Everyone around you seems happy, why aren't you?" is how it feels, until you learn that this is the monomyth. Everyone experiences this journey. Everyone is out of place. That oppressive society around you is made up of individuals who feel oppressed by society.

LIA

Anyway, so, rising action, something happens that forces the protagonist to leave their comfortable situation and take steps to find the thing they want. This is usually a reluctant choice, because no one really makes decisions if they can help it. That's why all those people seem complicit in whatever you're uncomfortable with. They're either in that same level of hesitation as you are, or this is a new place that they escaped to, or they've made their peace and they're back to right what once went wrong.

LIA

I'm not explaining 3-act structure very well. Sorry. Google it. I'm sure you'll find an efficient explanation somewhere and you can learn all these Jungian terms. Goddesses and Fathers and Special Places. Getting into all of that is beyond what I want to do today,

because this show is still in act one. This is probably close to the end of act one, come to think of it. We'll worry about that later. The aspect I wanted to focus on is the inherent solipsism of forming a narrative based on your own consciousness. On some level, it is all you have to go on, but the hero's journey is predicated on feeling singular. There are mentors and guardians and other characters who may undergo their own arc in the course of the story, but in general, their desires aren't the protagonist's concern. They don't develop in the same way. Having your own story means standing apart from society, seeing yourself as something inherently different from everything around you. Every person is a genius in their story. That's what's required to make sense of yourself.

MICHAEL

Why do you keep bringing up that word when you know how off-putting it is?

LIA

I think it's an important concept, and shouldn't be so rarified. Doing anything is so hard, so if you manage to be a protagonist, you're a genius. Give yourself some credit.

MICHAEL

Thanks.

LIA

Oh. Not you. I was speaking in general.

MICHAEL

Oh. Am I not part of the general?

LIA

What? No. No. No.

MICHAEL

Okay.

LIA

No.

MICHAEL

I get it.

LIA

Almost everyone has an innate goodness to them that has to develop in its own way to blossom. A feeling of singularity is important, else you won't be interested in your own life.

MICHAEL

But then that makes me special, right? Since everyone else is a protagonist?

LIA

What? I'm so embarrassed for you.

MICHAEL

Am I remarkable or not?

LIA

Stop interrupting me! On today's episode of How to Be, we're getting down to the basics. How do we make sense of our place in the universe? We all start with ourselves, and we have to figure out everything else, taking in whatever we see and forgetting we've seen anything else. Let's explore that a little, here on Tales of Insecurity.

TYLER

Watch out! I'm going to chop that tree down with my lasers. Pew pew kapow! Timber!

TYLER

Sorry tree. I didn't mean to hurt you. It's just sometimes I have these laser eyes and I have to use them.

TREE

It's okay, Tyler. We all have days where we have to use our laser eyes.

TYLER

Thank you for understanding, Mr.
Tree. I'll use my healing lips now.

TREE

Thanks.

TYLER

Laser eyes!

TREE

No! You got me again!

MOTHER

Tyler! Dinner's ready! Come on
inside!

TYLER

Coming, Mom!

LIA

Meet Tyler. He's a six-year-old boy
who loves his mother. His mother
loves him too, probably. She
doesn't like to touch him because
he's always covered in dirt and
snot and probably pee and mold and
other unmentionables, but she made
lots of sacrifices for him, and she
wouldn't have done that if there
hadn't been a good reason.

TYLER

What are we having?

MOTHER

Macaroni and cheese.

TYLER

Oh wow! That's my favorite! You're
the best mom in the world.

MOTHER

Okay. It's not hard. I'll teach you
how to make it someday. Just sit
down now. Okay.

TYLER

Mmm. Delicious!

MOTHER

Really. Thank you.

TYLER

What a good mother, just the best
mother, the very best mother in the
United States.

MOTHER

Enough! Just eat your dinner. Mommy
has a headache.

TYLER

Oh no! Do you want me to use my
healing lips on you?

MOTHER

No, thank you.

TYLER

You'll feel better.

MOTHER

Tyler. Eat your dinner.

TYLER

Yes, Mom.

LIA

The two of them live alone, and
have all of Tyler's life. Tyler's
entire universe has been just the
two of them, with occasional men
who pass through, who call him
buddy and ruffle his hair. It was
for their sake that he developed
his martial arts and super powers.

LANCE

Hey, buddy, is your mom inside?

TYLER

Uh-huh.

LANCE

Cool, cool. Hey I brought you
something.

TYLER

Oh.

LANCE

So this is a baseball. Have you
ever played baseball?

TYLER

Nuh-uh.

LANCE

Okay well it's really simple. You see this ball? You throw it, and catch it, and you hit it with a bat.

TYLER

Okay.

LANCE

Why don't the two of us play catch later?

TYLER

Okay.

LANCE

Great. Well, I'm going to go inside now, but you have fun.

TYLER

Okay.

LANCE

Alright, buddy, thanks.

(Door opens and closes)

TYLER

My name's not Buddy. You're lucky I had mercy on you today. You may not be so lucky next time.

TREE

What's wrong, Tyler?

TYLER

Oh nothing, Mr. Tree. I'm just tired of my mom's friends who treat me like I'm a dumb kid.

TREE

That's completely reasonable. If I were you, I would have roasted them alive.

TYLER

Yeah?

TREE

I'd have vaporized their flesh clean off of their body so they'd be nothing but a puddle of bone and goo.

TYLER

I have more restraint than you do,
Mr. Tree.

TREE

You're a good kid, Tyler.

TYLER

Thank you. Laser eyes!

DOG

Ruff, ruff!

TYLER

Oh, hello. Who are you?

DOG

Ruff!

TYLER

Oh, nice to meet you. Ha ha, you're
really friendly. What are you doing
here? Okay. Ha ha. Wow.

DOG

Ruff!

TYLER

Ha ha, you're good, dog. You're a
real good dog.

DOG

Ruff! Ruff!

TYLER

Thanks, I know. I'm also good.

DOG

Ruff!

TYLER

We're good!

DOG

Ruff!

TYLER

You keep looking at me like you
want something. I don't know if I
have anything for you.

DOG

Ruff!

TYLER

Oh, do you play baseball? Okay, so I just throw the ball.

DOG

Ruff ruff! (Pant)

TYLER

Wow, okay, so you like that. Okay, I'm going to do it again. Ha ha. You really like baseball. Hey what if I rode you?

TREE

Tyler, you can't ride a dog.

TYLER

Dog, what do you think?

DOG

Ruff!

TYLER

I'm going to ride the dog.

DOG

(Excited noises)

TYLER

Ha ha, let's go into outer space!

THEME SONG

Look at the two of them go. They're flying to the far beyond. Tyler and a dog. Best friends all their lives. Tyler and a dog and the galaxy!

MOTHER

Tyler! What are you doing? Get away from that filthy animal!

LANCE

Hey boy! Where'd you come from?

TYLER

He's a hero dog from outer space.

MOTHER

Alright, young man, let's get you cleaned up.

LANCE

I'll call you later.

MOTHER

Yeah, okay.

MOTHER

Now Tyler, I'm not mad at you, because you didn't know! But dogs, especially stray dogs, they have all kinds of diseases and you shouldn't touch them.

TYLER

Really?

MOTHER

And I'm allergic to them. Do you know what an allergy is?

TYLER

Nuh-uh.

MOTHER

It's when your body can't be around something. Dogs make me itch and sneeze and you don't want your mom to suffer, do you?

TYLER

No.

MOTHER

Very good. Now get some sleep. Good night.

TYLER

Mom?

MOTHER

Yes, Tyler?

TYLER

Will you read me a story?

MOTHER

Oh, not tonight, honey. I have a headache.

TYLER

Oh.

MOTHER

It's not your fault.

TYLER

I'm sorry, Mom.

MOTHER
It's alright.

TYLER
I love you, mom.

MOTHER
Sure. Good night.

TYLER
Good night.

LANCE
Hey, Buddy, do you want to play a game with me?

TYLER
I don't know.

LANCE
Come on, it'll be fun.

TYLER
Okay.

LANCE
So did you practice throwing the ball at all?

TYLER
Yeah. I'm really good at it.

LANCE
Let's see. Okay. So no. You got to throw with your whole body. You're just throwing with your arm.

TYLER
Okay.

LANCE
Here, let me show you. So you start up, see how I'm putting my weight on my back leg?

TYLER
No.

LANCE
Okay well, I'm putting my weight on my back leg.

TYLER
Okay.

LANCE

And then you lean forward as you
throw, see? Here, see how much
better that was?

TYLER

No.

LANCE

It was a lot better. Okay now, the
bat, let me show you. You hold it
like this.

TYLER

Okay.

LANCE

And it's a lot like throwing the
ball. You start with your weight
back and you follow through. Okay,
you try. I'm just going to toss the
ball to you and you try to hit it
with the bat. Well, you'll get it.
Keep practicing.

MOTHER

Okay.

LANCE

I'm going to go see your mom now,
but you stay out here and practice.
Don't you want to be as strong as
me someday?

TYLER

No.

LANCE

Ha ha, okay. Shouldn't you be in
school now?

TYLER

I don't know.

LANCE

Alright. Well what do I know?

TYLER

Nothing.

LANCE

Ha ha. You're alright.

TREE

What's wrong, Tyler?

TYLER

Oh nothing, Mr. Tree. I'm just tired of the grownups acting like I don't know anything, that I'm little and weak.

TREE

I know you're strong, Tyler.

TYLER

Thank you.

DOG

Ruff!

TREE

Oh, and space dog does too.

TYLER

Hi dog.

DOG

Ruff!

TYLER

Yeah, you mentioned that. Listen. I really liked hanging out with you the other day, but my mom doesn't really want you around, so you're going to have to go away.

DOG

Ruff! Lick. Whine.

TYLER

No. No. I told you. I can't hang out with you anymore.

DOG

Ruff ruff!

TYLER

No! Don't make me use my laser eyes on you.

TREE

Don't do it, Tyler.

TYLER

I'm not going to. Hey dog, see the ball? Go get it.

TREE

That was a really good throw,
Tyler.

TYLER

Thank you. No, don't bring it back.
Please dog. Go away.

DOG

Ruff.

TYLER

I'm warning you, dog. I'm going to
use my laser eyes.

DOG

Ruff!

TYLER

Okay.

TREE

It's not working.

TYLER

Please dog. Go away.

DOG

(Sound of distress)

TYLER

I'm sorry. You have to go. (Hits
dog with bat)

TREE

Wow, Tyler. You're really good at
that.

DOG

(Whimper)

TYLER

I'm sorry, but you have to go.

DOG

(Whine)

TYLER

I'm so sorry. I didn't want to hurt
you. Let me use my healing on you.

MOTHER

Tyler! What are you doing with that
dog? What did I tell you?

TYLER

I have to fix it.

MOTHER

Oh no, what happened? Did it get hit by a car?

LANCE

Load it in the truck, we can take it to a vet.

MOTHER

My god, who could run over a dog and just drive away? Some people. Sorry you had to see that, Tyler.

TYLER

Oh.

LANCE

You're going to be okay, Buddy.

MOTHER

Everything's going to be okay.

LIA

Alright, welcome back to our special animal abuse and child development episode of How to Be. How did animal abuse make you into the person you are today? Was there a moment where you saw your life as innately superior to animal lives? Where you threw the cat outside to take out your anger, or placed a cucumber behind it to watch it panic. Why did you do those things? Why play a practical joke on anyone? Why be mean when there's nothing to gain? I'm trying to figure it out. It is definitely part of being, and that's our scope.

LIA

I wouldn't say it's part of my being though. Not really sure how to talk about animal abuse, or why. See, this podcast is largely first person, and so my character development as it goes on is going to be the focus in some way or

another. That's just inevitable, since that's the only unifying force here. Me. So I'm more or less obligated to undergo some kind of progression. So assuming I'm approaching some kind of catharsis, I'm planning on making it my objective to be a better person, whatever that means.

LIA

See, though, I already kind of think I'm pretty good, just about as good as I can be. I don't hurt anyone. Not to sound arrogant. I'm probably not as good as you are. I don't know. I'm just trying to figure things out. Do we have any listener mail yet?

KATHRYN

No, not yet.

LIA

Do we have any sponsors yet?

KATHRYN

No, not one.

LIA

What about listeners, do we have any of those?

KATHRYN

Are you even listening to yourself?

LIA

Sorry. I'm just not feeling particularly confident today, and I need a little encouragement.

MICHAEL

I could take over the show again, if you like. I think it was pretty easy.

LIA

Oh. I keep forgetting you're here. How are you, Michael?

MICHAEL

Yeah, alright.

LIA

Great. Why don't we have a fairy tale now. Here on Tales of Insecurity.

Once upon a time there was a beautiful princess who had a beautiful autoimmune disorder that no could diagnose or treat. She developed allergies to all the finest foods in the kingdom, to the point that she subsisted on nothing but a single tincture made of the distilled vapor of positive thoughts. Teams of the kingdom's most devout optimists were employed around the clock, thinking their cheerfulest platitudes as loudly as they could.

"I AM AN ATTRACTIVE PERSON"

"I AM BASICALLY WORTH HAVING AROUND"

"NO ONE REALLY MINDS MY PRESENCE"

"EVERYTHING I TOUCH TURNS TO GOLD"

"I DESERVE TO BE ALIVE"

"I HAVE FRIENDS. I HAVE LOTS AND LOTS OF FRIENDS. I HAVE LOTS AND LOTS AND LOTS OF FRIENDS."

"PEOPLE TELL ME I'M A SPIRITED CONVERSATIONALIST."

"I TELL THE SAME THREE STORIES OVER AND OVER AND PEOPLE STILL LAUGH AT THEM BECAUSE I AM SO GOOD AT TELLING STORIES."

"I AM REALLY GOOD AT THINKING POSITIVE THOUGHTS."

These thoughts rose to the ceiling and gathered together in a spiral tube spun across the room. They condensed into colored liquid and dripped slowly, a few rooms over, in the kitchen, where they were filtered and frozen for later consumption. Being the only substance in existence the delicate princess could digest, it had to be preserved in a container of itself, and served with utensils of itself. These materials, in turn, had to be constructed out of tools made of positive thoughts, as any amount of cross contamination could prove fatal to the fragile princess. The tubes in which the thoughts were distilled were made of

positive thoughts. The palace itself was constructed of this energy, and bits of it were woven into clothes, blankets, pillows. Bits of vapor were kept in perfume bottles, which would be sprayed on every visitor in fifteen minute intervals. The whole royal family bathed in the stuff. The demand for positive thoughts was so great that half the kingdom was employed in its production.

"WE'RE BETTER PEOPLE THAN THE ONES WITHOUT POSITIVE THOUGHTS"

"WE REPRESENT SOMETHING INCREDIBLE"

"WE ARE KEEPING PEOPLE ALIVE"

"WE ARE A PART OF THE ROYAL FAMILY"

"SOCIETY IS MADE BY US FOR US"

And the other half of the kingdom understood that they were inherently less valuable, not necessarily because they were less capable of producing the material thought so prized in their kingdom, but because they didn't. Most of them suspected they could do the work, if they were called upon to do it, but how do you get that kind of job? You just have to know the right people.

"I'm not saying they're not talented, I'm just saying. Their job is already pretty cushy; why should we treat them like they're special?"

"Honey, keep your voice down before someone hears you."

The tavern closest to the castle and its factory had recently rebranded itself to fully embrace the culture of positivity. Formerly The Apple and Serpent, it was now known as The Apple and Apple. They had changed the decor to make it seem bright and positive, and had reformed the client-patron relationship so that the boundaries between people were less physical. It was forward-thinking.

"I don't think I'm going to offend anybody. Is that even possible? They're not

allowed to think bad things."

"Just don't antagonize anyone, okay?"

"Hi, there! Welcome to The Apple and Apple. I'm Marelia, I'll be assisting you today. Can I get you started with something to drink?"

"Yeah sure, you got beer here?"

"Oh, I'm sorry, we're fresh out of beer."

"Really, no beer? What kind of a tavern is this?"

"I'm sorry, we appreciate your patience while we're altering our menu to better serve you. I hope you're not...upset?"

"Right. No. Thank you. I like everything you're doing."

"That's what I hoped you'd say. I'll get you some of our finest aged scotch."

Marelia had learned to speak in the language of positivity, and was certain she could perform their job better than any of them. When they came in after their shifts, boasting in the specialized vocabulary of their vocation, she wanted to murder all of them. In a positive way, of course. This action would make the world better.

"For a while, I was starting to doubt myself, but then I realized that doubt was the only thing holding me back from having a four gallon notion, and that really boosted me."

"Nice going, Remonic. You're amazing, and we're all glad to know you."

"Thanks. That means a lot to me. You're amazing, too."

All they ever did was congratulate each other. If they had any thoughts that weren't completely self-referential, they were not evident to Marelia.

"All we have today are bread heels and lizard feet."

"What happened to the rest of the bread?"

"And the lizards?"

"We're doing everything we can to meet demand. I hope you're not upset."

"No, of course not."

"I hope you're not disappointed either."

"No. Of course. One lizard foot sandwich, please. I'm excited to try new things!"

Marelia was proud of the profits she was generating for the family, but she still felt the divide between herself and the her patrons. Even as she manipulated them, they still held to a notion that they were of a higher class and station, and this was infuriating to Marelia.

"How's your sandwich today?"

"Oh. Um. Delicious! Thank you for interrupting my anecdote. That was a good place to cut it off."

"I'm glad to hear it."

Marelia wondered sometimes how the princess could be so sick as to propel the whole kingdom into this death of culture and substance. If any other person

had been so fragile, they would have simply died. No one else but the royal family in their opulence could afford to make the concessions they had forced everyone to make, but Mariella wasn't convinced that everyone wouldn't be better off if she just died. It must be nice to have everyone form a protective bubble for you.

She began to wonder about the princess, whom everyone was working so hard to placate. Being so delicate seemed enviable. Marelia had never tasted the tincture of positive thoughts that sustained the princess and her consort, but she was certain it was vastly superior to the leftovers on which she and her family lived. To be nestled in the luxury of other people's well-wishes and self-realization and hope for the future seemed so indulgent, and Marelia couldn't believe such caution was strictly necessary. She wanted to meet this princess, not to challenge her, *per se*, but more simply: Marelia could not imagine what sort a person the princess could be. Was she not ashamed of herself? Did she know what everyone was doing on her behalf? Did she even exist?

"Hi, I wanted to apply for the position as the princess's caretaker?"

"I didn't know we were hiring for that. It's not the sort of thing we usually take open applications for."

"Oh well, I suppose in a certain sense, I wasn't invited, but I just felt so optimistic and ambitious today that I just wanted to be as helpful as possible."

"Have you ever been employed as a nurse before?"

"I feel really good about it."

The guard looked Marelia over, and saw nothing wrong with her. Though also, he wasn't allowed to think unpleasant thoughts.

"I guess you can come in. Welcome!"

"Thanks."

Mariela marveled at the splendor of the castle's halls. The ceilings seemed taller than the skies themselves, and even the panes around the doors seemed more ornate than any structure she'd ever seen, whether crafted by people or by nature. Little tables with cute little ceramic animals sat between every pair of doors, and though the halls had no windows, a gentle source of light seemed to come from nowhere in particular.

"It's really gorgeous in here," Marelia said, without having to force herself too much.

"Thank you. We're very proud of how we've decorated here, though of course not so proud as to constitute vanity."

"Of course. I'd always thought of this castle as being an impregnable fortress, but I'm really impressed by how delicate it is on the inside."

"Yes. Thank you."

"And remarkably accessible, for an impenetrable fortress."

"The princess is in there. She'll tell you what she needs. I have to say, I really admire your selflessness."

"Anything I can do to help those less fortunate than myself!" Marelia stepped through the heavy crystal door into the dim, ruby-tinted room.

"Close the door, please," croaked a weak voice from far away. Marelia complied with the request.

"Thank you for coming to see me," the voice went on. "I don't get many visitors."

"Oh it's my pleasure! I'm eager to please!"

The voice said nothing to this. Marelia waited for a reply, but when none came, she kept speaking.

"I really like the ambiance in here. Really subdued. Peaceful."

"Oh yes. My skin is too sensitive for most light. Anything brighter would cause my skin to bruise and swell."

"Oh, I see. That's great!"

"What? Oh. You don't have to do that."

"Do what?"

"Filter your thoughts. I know there's a rumor going around that I'm so sensitive that the people around me can't even think unpleasant thoughts, but that's absurd."

"See, that's what I thought! I knew it sounded fishy. There's no way that thoughts could have that much influence."

"In fact, I think I've developed a bit of an allergy to joyful platitudes and songs of praise. But my family keeps piping them into me. I think they're trying

to kill me.”

“I’m sure they mean well,” Marelia said, but the princess stopped her.

“Please. You may mean well too, but such generous sentiments give me acid reflux. They make my thyroid swell.”

“My apologies, princess. What sorts of thoughts should I think?”

“Just be honest. Can you please just be honest with me, without coating your opinions in the expectation of what I want or need? Can you be sincere? Are you even capable of it?”

And Marelia paused. She realized she had no notion of what it meant to speak without agenda, to simply express without thought of what the result would be. She started to say, “Of course,” but she knew that that was what the princess wanted her to say, and therefore, exactly what the princess didn’t want her to say. “I’m not sure,” she said in the end.

“I don’t know how much breath I have left. May I tell you a story?”

And Marelia didn’t want to hear the princess’s raspy voice drone on for however long her story would be. And she wanted to express that, but it seemed so rude to say outright.

“Go ahead,” she said. And the princess winced in pain, but anon she began to speak.

LIA

Hello. Welcome back to How to Be.
I'm your host, LiA Lindsaychen. I'm here with you. I'm sorry that story didn't have a real ending, but I guess we've got an Arabian Nights situation here. I hope that's

alright. I'm sure it will continue next week, or whenever it is I complete the next show. You may have noticed my schedule has been a little wonky lately. There are a few factors involved with that. Don't think it's that I'm out of ideas or anything like that. Ideas are in no short supply. They're really easy. Here, here's 100 ideas just off the top of my head.

LIA

1 - The Pantheon of Gods as a workplace comedy 2 - Wearing masks to fight against discrimination 3 - Socrates at a job interview 4 - relationship advice from various animal species 5 - Capitalism makes fools of us all 6 - Ignore them they only want attention 7 - The cat keeps staring what does it want 8 - The kids decide to be responsible people as an act of rebellion against the previous generation 10 - Twitch streaming on the radio 11 - Ugly duckling's brothers and sisters who turned out just like their parents 12 - everyone is talking about you when you're not around 13 - You're out of time 14 - You're out of money and credit and soon you're going to get court notices and you'll probably ignore those and then you'll go to prison and then you'll die there 15 - You did everything you could and it didn't matter 16 - You made something you're proud of but no one will ever hear it 17 - These aren't really ideas anymore 18 - They're just thoughts now 19 - Super Karamazov Brothers Super Show 20 - Is there a difference between an idea and a thought 21 - you can always plead insanity 22 - this could be good evidence 23 - sorry 24 - a tiny turtle on its way to work 25 - a humpback whale on America's Got Talent 26 - Everybody's got secrets 27 - The world's gone gentrified, get out 28 - A place where you belong, oh no it's hell 29 - personality thrift

store 30 - behind the scenes,
painting the art for hospital
waiting rooms 31 - Amadeus except
about Philip Glass 32 - Don't get
me wrong, I love Philip Glass 33 -
I just think it would be funny to
have a Salieri figure who's just
completely amazed and jealous of
his effortless music making 34 -
Even though I know the real Philip
Glass did have a lot of problems
with his colleagues hating his work
35 - These are just ideas 36 - I'm
not going to develop any of them 37
- Maybe one or two 38 - Eventually
39 - William Carlos Williams is a
terrible roommate 40 - Reluctant
suicide pact 41 - Let's distract
ourselves from real problems
through fiction 42 - Let's pretend
everything's going to be okay 43 -
Let's pretend we belong in society
44 - cat pretending to be human 45 -
- human pretending to be human 46 -
I don't want to be alive 47 - What
if I could be a ghost and just
possess people to make my show for
me 48 - What if I ran away with
just my laptop and a microphone and
uploaded my show from various
libraries across the country 49 -
what if I abandoned my loved ones
50 - what if I just gave up 51 -
have I already given up? 52 -
People become so open about their
feelings and all they do is talk
about butts 53 - Butts butts butts
all day long 54 - there's no use
trying to pretend anymore 55 - I'm
a mess 56 - I'm a complete mess 57
- I'm a failure 58 - Nothing I say
or do means anything 59 - It's all
gibberish, it's all nonsense 60 - I
can't escape from the legacy of
three decades of unhappiness 61 -
You never get a chance to start
anew 62 - You never even get a
first chance 63 - Soothing nature
sounds 64 - Calm blue ocean waves
65 - Erik Satie's Gymnopédies 66 -
I don't speak French 67 - An
outcast among outcasts 68 - A
friendly person in a miserable
world 69 - let's be invisible 70 -

please look at me 71 - please hear
me 72 - can anyone hear me 73 -
please can you hear me 74 - I'm
dying can you hear me 75 - I don't
want to be alive anymore 76 - these
are just ideas, they don't mean
anything 77 - the turtle of Wall
Street 78 - these are just ideas 79
- legal drug holiday 80 - there's
nothing to be afraid of 81 -
there's nothing left 82 - the three
little pigs can't stand each other
83 - and this one said wee wee wee
wee wee all the way home 84 - I
love my sweetie bee so I have to
stay 85 - I love my darling so I
can't die or run away 86 - love
means I can't give up 87 -
sometimes I wish I was single and
alone so I couldn't disappoint
anyone 88 - Lassie, but with a
goldfish 89 - Lassie, but the dog
has been abused and is afraid of
everyone 90 - I never trusted my
family because I've gone my whole
life thinking they murdered the
newborn kittens of a stray cat 91 -
in fact, I still think they did
that 92 - why did they do that 93 -
why didn't they take them to a
shelter 94 - why didn't they give
them away 95 - people like kittens
96 - people would have taken
kittens 97 Old Yeller was Old and
had rabies 98 - Old Yeller got to
live most of a life, and made a
friend 99 - why would you kill
kittens, there is no reason to kill
kittens 100 - The day you take a
job as a clown because it's the
only thing available, but then you
have to go to college and it's a
whole commitment and suddenly
that's your career and 100 of your
best friends pop creak their way
out of a cake on the day of your
retirement.

LIA

No, it's not a shortage of ideas.
But there is a problem of energy.
I've been very weak lately. Weaker
than usual. There is a problem when
you're fueled by depression. Oh

but, I'm not depressed. This isn't Tales of Insecurity. This is How to Be. Tales of Insecurity is on hiatus for the moment. I had to catch my breath.

LIA

I started seeing a therapist, a real therapist, and it's been alright. I like the fact that she's not American, and that her English isn't perfect. It makes me choose my words more carefully. Simpler language, because sometimes my verbiage is needlessly complex. She doesn't think I'm schizophrenic, which is pretty comforting. She just thinks that my anxiety paralyzes me sometimes, and invents things, and controls everything about me. She brought up the kittens last week, as they were in my notes. I'd told someone there at the LGBT clinic about my family killing the kittens at some point, probably a few years ago. It's not something I think about all the time, but it is something I carry with me.

LIA

I know that the version I imagine didn't happen, because it's colored with the drama of a five-year-old's imagination. We lived in this stark horrible southern town, where the main industry was a sulphur refinement plant that stunk up everything and destroyed most of the vegetation. Then the Ocoee river flooded, and it was a total environmental disaster. It looked like Mars. When I remember it, it's all piles of dirt and occasional pools of dark green water. Our neighbor managed to grow a lawn, he was obsessed with it, but everywhere else was bald and sickly. There was a cat that sometimes came by the house, though we never let it inside, and I don't think we fed it either. I don't know why it came by, maybe just for shelter. But it had kittens there

beneath the porch, and here my memory gets fuzzy. I remember my father and brother digging a hole in the empty field across the street from us. Maybe the kittens died of natural causes. Kittens are pretty fragile. Maybe my brother was joking that they killed them, because he's an older brother and I was a sensitive child, and that's what you do, I guess. In my memory, in my nightmares, they buried the cats alive, and I could hear them mewing in a bag as they piled dirt on top. Surely they didn't do that, but then, how did they kill them? Did they put them in a bag and bash them with the shovel?

LIA

I remember my father being so angry that the kittens were there, so furious that the stray tabby had made itself so at home. And I remember being shocked at his reaction. Kittens are adorable. They're innocent and playful. And then the kittens weren't there anymore, and the stray never came back. My dad used to raise rabbits, and liked to brag about how you go about killing them. You have to pet them, calm them down, before you bash their little heads in. BAM! He would say, with a chuckle, and I wonder if he has any empathy at all. I wonder if he can relate to an experience that's different from his own. They still mistreat the cat who lives with them. They tried to punish it for shitting on the floor, like the cat has any idea why you're being mean to it.

LIA

Phew! Sorry. Thanks for listening to How to Be. This is an optimistic show about finding your place in the world. I'm your host, Lia Lindsaychen. I love you. I don't tell you that enough. Thank you for being so lovely.

MICHAEL

Thank you, I really appreciate
that.

LIA

Hi Michael.

MICHAEL

Hey.

LIA

Did you know you have a tendency to
sneak up on people?

MICHAEL

Sorry, I thought you'd forgotten
about me.

LIA

I keep trying.

MICHAEL

Ha ha, okay.

LIA

But seriously. I'm not really in
the mood to talk to you. I'm
actually really stressed out, and I
don't feel inspired but I'm making
a show anyway because I feel like I
have a responsibility to it.

MICHAEL

All your fans.

LIA

I said I was going to make a weekly
show and I'm so far behind now.

MICHAEL

You're not accountable to anyone.
It's alright.

LIA

But you know, my pride.

MICHAEL

You haven't given up. You needed a
break, and you took one. You've
been working so hard on this show,
and that takes its toll.

LIA

Yeah. That's true.

MICHAEL

So don't be so hard on yourself.
You can't expect everything to work
out forever. You've gone a great
job so far. You really have
something to be proud of here.

LIA

Thank you. That means a lot to me.

MICHAEL

You always have to make things
harder. You always take the least
user-friendly path.

LIA

That's not true.

MICHAEL

Why can't you just accept things
the way they are? Why do you have
to poke around at everything to see
what happens?

LIA

Is that what I do?

MICHAEL

Yeah.

LIA

Oh.

MICHAEL

You do it all the time. It's your
whole personality. Whenever you see
a potential problem, you completely
embrace it so it doesn't take you
by surprise.

LIA

Yeah?

MICHAEL

Every time.

LIA

I really like surprises, I think.

MICHAEL

But you also like to be prepared.

LIA

I like lots of things.

MICHAEL

I guess what I'm saying is, it's okay that you struggle. Good for you for struggling. Did you ever read The Lord of the Rings?

LIA

No, never.

MICHAEL

It's really popular.

LIA

I tried, I couldn't get into it. I don't know.

MICHAEL

It's your mother's favorite.

LIA

I know, that's why I tried to read it.

MICHAEL

Well anyway, there's this character in there named Tom Bombadil who's just the most powerful being around, and the evil ring that everyone's so obsessed over means nothing to him. It doesn't have any power over him. The little invisibility thing doesn't work on him.

LIA

Okay, sure. I didn't read it for a reason.

MICHAEL

What I'm saying is, this whole epic high fantasy drama wouldn't mean anything if everyone weren't failing all the time. It's cool that you're a failure.

LIA

Great.

MICHAEL

It's the only way to be, if you ask me.

LIA

Okay great.

MICHAEL

So you can be above everything and have no role in anything, or you can struggle and fret and worry and be a person.

LIA

Michael.

MICHAEL

Yeah? Hi?

LIA

I'm not interested. Failure might be interesting on some level, but failing to be interesting is not.

MICHAEL

Okay.

LIA

Sorry if that sounded harsh.

MICHAEL

It's fine. Can I finish my story now? The Men's Improvement Society.

LIA

Sure. I don't even care.

LESLIE

So let's go over this again.

MERITE

Tell us in your own words exactly how you think the Men's Improvement Society could help you?

JOLLY

Why should we spend our time on you instead of someone else? What makes you worthy of our time?

MICHAEL

Well, first of all, I want to thank you for this opportunity.

MERITE

Uh-huh.

MICHAEL

Honestly, I was never properly

socialized. You know how maybe you have a bird that grows up in captivity and it gets loose into the world and it doesn't know how to do anything?

LESLIE

How did you avoid being socialized?

MICHAEL

I don't know. I just never meshed with anyone.

MERITE

You see, to me, it sounds like he expected people to adjust for him, and never bothered trying to cater to anyone else's needs.

LESLIE

It does seem like he has a very clear case of thinking he deserves extra.

MICHAEL

No. No, I don't know. I'm sorry.

JOLLY

He's going into the self-pity.

MERITE

Oh jeez, Leslie, are you sure about this one?

LESLIE

Trust me. He seems like an idiot, but I do think there's something there.

MERITE

What's there, Michael? What do you have to offer us?

MICHAEL

Everything I have. I've got no attachments to anything.

LESLIE

What are you even doing with yourself now?

MICHAEL

I live with my aunt Kathryn. I'm still looking for my beginning, a

career, a reason to be alive. I think I have potential. I've always been smart. People have been in awe of me.

JOLLY

In what ways are you smart? Do something smart.

MICHAEL

What am I supposed to do? Like math?

LESLIE

Are you good at math?

MICHAEL

Kind of?

LESLIE

But not in an impressive way.

MERITE

Can he do anything?

JOLLY

Can you dance?

MERITE

Do a strip tease for us. Make it sexy.

MICHAEL

Oh. Okay. I've never done that before, but I can try.

MERITE

Leslie, why don't you put some clothespins on him? Now, if those fall off, you're going to get the cane, you understand me, boy?

MICHAEL

Of course. Thank you.

LIA

When we last left Michael, he was I don't know. Having a difficult time adjusting to his environment, balancing his personal life with his life at home? He kept changing scenes abruptly and losing context.

KATHRYN

How's the job search going?

MICHAEL

Well, I'm still looking for something real, but I started driving the little tricycles downtown.

KATHRYN

Tricycles?

MICHAEL

The rickshaws. The pedicabs. And also I'm working at the pizza place in town.

KATHRYN

That's good. But don't stop looking for something more substantial.

MICHAEL

Yes, of course. I'm young and energetic.

KATHRYN

Very good. We should teach you how to swim sometime. There is a class for adults at the community center.

MICHAEL

Maybe. I don't know. I'll think about it.

KATHRYN

It doesn't matter to me whether you swim or not. It's just for your benefit.

MICHAEL

Of course, thank you. I really appreciate everything you've done for me so far, and I'm really determined not to let you down.

KATHRYN

You don't have to grovel.

MICHAEL

I'm not groveling, I really am grateful.

KATHRYN

If you wish to show your

appreciation, just get started on something. It makes no difference to me what you do, but you should focus on something you're passionate about. What excites you?

MICHAEL

That's a good question. I know there must be something.

KATHRYN

You keep saying that.

MICHAEL

I'll willing to do anything! I really just want to be useful. I don't see what difference it makes at all what I want to do.

LIA

They had this conversation often. His aunt was tired of it, but Michael was a creature of habit. Though also, maybe he had a point, maybe he needed someone to push him because he couldn't do it himself.

LESLIE

You're a pretty good dancer. Did you ever take lessons?

MICHAEL

No. I never thought about it. Thanks.

MERITE

So we had some reservations about your application.

LESLIE

I thought I told you to impress us.

MERITE

Or at least try.

JOLLY

Good dancing, though.

LESLIE

Jolly, you're too nice.

JOLLY

Thank you, Leslie.

MERITE

So we asked you to list your favorite authors, and who did you put down?

MICHAEL

Oh. Um. Dostoevsky, Kafka, Hemingway, Wallace Stephens...

MERITE

So what do all those people have in common?

MICHAEL

I guess they're all dead. Sorry, I know I should read more contemporary fiction, especially if I consider myself a writer.

MERITE

Oh for Chrissakes. Leslie, hit him with something, will you?

LESLIE

Absolutely.

MERITE

Jolly, what would you say those writers have in common?

JOLLY

Why Merite, the most obvious thing is that they are all men. All white men.

MERITE

Yeah, that is obvious, isn't it?

JOLLY

You'd think.

MICHAEL

Oh, I guess I didn't think about that.

LESLIE

Do you not value women? Or diversity in general?

MICHAEL

No, I don't know why I didn't think of anyone.

MERITE

Why didn't you think?

MICHAEL

I have a hard time when people ask me what I like. My favorites. I don't really know how to have an opinion.

MERITE

You have a lot of excuses though.

LESLIE

Here, this is your homework.

MICHAEL

Can I take the blindfold off?

MERITE

Read it at home.

MICHAEL

What is it?

LESLIE

The Animal Lovers' Guide to Beastly Murder by Patricia Highsmith.

MICHAEL

What's that?

LESLIE

It's a book of short stories about animals killing people.

MICHAEL

Oh cool.

JOLLY

So we were thinking it might be good for you to do a little book report on it.

MERITE

Don't think you can fake your way through it.

LESLIE

There will be a test.

MICHAEL

That's fine. I'm sure I'll like it. That's a topic that interests me a great deal.

TYLER

Hey mom, can I borrow the car
tonight? My friend Tamara's having
a party.

MOM

Aw, my little Tyler's becoming such
a teenager. Have you done all your
chores?

TYLER

Most of them, yeah.

MOM

Did you mow the lawn? Are the
dishes done?

TYLER

Yeah, yeah, all of it.

MOM

Okay, fine then. Just take Lucky
for a walk and the car's yours.

TYLER

Okay.

MOM

Come on, don't sulk.

TYLER

Yeah, okay.

TYLER

Hey Lucky.

DOG

Whine.

TYLER

We're going to go for a walk. Just
around the block.

DOG

Whimper, whine.

TYLER

Come on, please? Be a good dog.

DOG

Huff.

TYLER

Come on.

DOG

Sigh.

TYLER

Come on, don't make me drag you.

TAMARA

Hey, Tyler!

TYLER

Oh Tamara! Hi. I'm excited about
your party tonight!

TAMARA

Oh, were you invited to my party?

TYLER

Yeah!

TAMARA

Alright, cool. Whatever. Cute dog.

TYLER

Thanks. He's getting old.

TAMARA

Aw, he likes me.

DOG

(Small bark)

TAMARA

Who's a good boy? Who's a good boy?
You are! Yes you are. Yes you are!

TYLER

I'm sorry, he gets excited
sometimes.

TAMARA

No, what a great dog. Are you going
to bring him to the party?

TYLER

I wasn't going to, do you think I
should?

TAMARA

Absolutely. I love cute dogs.
Everyone loves cute dogs.

TYLER

Oh okay, sure. He can be a little
temperamental, though.

TAMARA

This sweetie? Nah, no way. He's a real good sweetie.

TYLER

Sometimes.

TAMARA

I got to say, there's nothing more attractive than a man who loves his dog.

TYLER

Oh yeah?

TAMARA

Yeah. Oh well, I guess I'll see you later. Got to run. I don't even know what I'm doing in this part of town! It's disgusting here.

TYLER

Alright. Great to see you Tamara.

DOG

(Whines)

TYLER

No, Lucky. She's already gone.
Lucky! Stop it. Lucky.

KATHRYN

How's the job search?

MICHAEL

Oh alright. I have this feeling that something has got to happen soon. That's what everything I know about story structure says. Everything is building up to something, and when this tension is relieved, it's all going to be fine. Everything's going to make sense.

KATHRYN

Very good. I don't really understand what that means, but if that makes you feel better to say, that's fine.

MICHAEL

Sorry.

KATHRYN

Are you writing? Have you written anything?

MICHAEL

Nothing that I'm ready to share yet. I'm sorry, I have really high standards.

KATHRYN

Is that true?

MICHAEL

Yeah.

KATHRYN

Hmm. I wonder.

LIA

The princess began her story.

PRINCESS

Once upon a time, way in the future in a place that considered itself modern, there was a young useless man who had no role in society. He had been disconnected from every place he had ever been and from his family and had no close friends. He had lost all his forward momentum and had no reason to be alive, but wanted to keep an open mind. His aunt offered to let him stay with her a while, and he jumped on the opportunity, though he knew he would disappoint her, just as he did everyone. On the way to her house, some neighborhood kids pushed him down to take his luggage, but he did not let go. They pushed him too fast, and he landed on his head, and forgot everything. He did not know where he was because he had never been there. He did not remember who he was because he had never been anyone.

PRINCESS

He came to in his aunt's house. He was drinking tea and having a conversation with her, though he had not been aware of himself while that was going on. As he regained

consciousness, he didn't know who he was talking to, or what role he had in her life. She noticed the bump on his head, but he didn't know anything about it.

MARELIA

I'm sorry Princess. I hate to interrupt. Do I need to get you something? I'm here to take care of you, and while I am quite interested in all you have to say, I want to attend to all your other needs as well.

PRINCESS

Please. I'm a lost cause. A waste of your time. I'm going to die soon and I'm not worth the effort it would take to preserve me.

MARELIA

Please, Princess, don't say those things. You're allergic.

PRINCESS

Don't tell me what to say and think.

MARELIA

I apologize.

LESLIE

So did you do your homework?

MICHAEL

Yeah, I read the book. It was good.

MERITE

Tell us about it.

MICHAEL

I liked the one about the elephant. I really like elephants.

LESLIE

That's the first story. How far did you get?

MICHAEL

I read them all. I really liked it.

JOLLY

Why don't you have more to say

about it?

MICHAEL

I don't know. I'm afraid to talk right now.

MERITE

Why's that?

MICHAEL

Because I need to say something important.

LESLIE

What are you talking about?

MICHAEL

I don't know. I just feel really self-conscious.

MERITE

Nobody gives a shit what you say.

LESLIE

We all know you're a dumbass. Expectations are very low.

JOLLY

But that should be a relief. There's no pressure on you at all.

LESLIE

If you did say something profound, I'm sure it would be an accident.

MICHAEL

I feel like other people find a way to just turn their minds off and keep going and things just happen, but I have all this control over my actions, like I have to do everything manually. It's exhausting. Everything is exhausting.

MERITE

No idea what you're talking about.

LESLIE

Nope not a clue.

MICHAEL

That's fine.

KATHRYN

Michael, can I talk to you about something?

MICHAEL

Oh, sure. What's up?

KATHRYN

Well, you left your computer open, and I happened to notice my name in what you were working on, and I found it somewhat alarming.

MICHAEL

Oh?

KATHRYN

Is that really what you think of me? Do you really think that I'm some stodgy overbearing gatekeeper, versed only in the language of disapproval and derision?

MICHAEL

No, not at all. It's just an exaggeration for comedic effect.

KATHRYN

I didn't really see the humor in it.

MICHAEL

I still need to develop it some. It's just a rough draft.

KATHRYN

I let you stay in my home, rent free. I let you eat my food, I make all these concessions in my life for you, and you repay me with this unsympathetic caricature?

MICHAEL

No. It's not like that. The character's nothing like you. She'd never be so overtly confrontational.

KATHRYN

That's a comfort at least.

MICHAEL

I'm sorry.

KATHRYN

I see why you didn't want me to
read it.

MICHAEL

I'm very grateful for everything
you've done.

KATHRYN

Just stop it.

PRINCESS

And he went out into the night, to
the home of his three mentors who
listened to his problems with
gleeful impatience. They made sure
to call out his entitlement at
every self-pitying moment. And this
helped him speak. The more they
mocked him, the freer he felt to
talk about things he hadn't shared
with anyone.

MICHAEL

I was a clingy child. I wanted to
be near my mother all the time. And
so they made sure not to indulge
me. They left me alone.

PRINCESS

They scoffed at him. They mocked
him. As he started to cry, they
rolled their eyes and stopped
listening entirely. He wished that
they would hurt him, but he
couldn't ask them to. He wanted
them to make that decision for
themselves.

MARELIA

I'm sorry Princess. Why are you
telling me this story? What do you
expect me to do?

PRINCESS

Nothing. It's just a story for your
entertainment.

MARELIA

Are you sure? Because it sounds
like you have an agenda.

MARITE

We're going to make you bob for

apples. Have you ever done that before?

MICHAEL

No. Never.

JOLLY

All you have to do is stick your face in the water and bite the apple.

LESLIE

But the water recedes. It's to teach you finesse.

MICHAEL

Okay.

MERITE

So just, on your knees, right there. Very good. Now get to it.

PRINCESS

And he stuck his face in the water, not telling them of his phobia, of the terror that came over him as water hit his face. It was the way his mother woke him up in the mornings, a damp washcloth over his nose and mouth. He could not open his mouth wide enough to get an apple, but he kept trying. The women began to get worried as his face stayed in the water, but he refused to lift it. He was going to get an apple if it killed them. He would do one thing right.

TAMARA

Oh cool, you brought him!

TYLER

Ha ha, yeah.

LESLIE

Oh cool, nice dog.

TOM

Right on! A dog. I think I've got a baseball in the car. Does he fetch?

TYLER

I don't know.

TAMARA

Go ahead and get it. Dogs love to
chase balls.

TYLER

Yeah, I'm not sure.

TAMARA

Tyler. Why would you bother
bringing the dog if we can't play
with him?

TYLER

Yeah, sure. Okay.

TOM

Cool, I'll get it.

TYLER

I feel like he might not like
baseball though.

TAMARA

If he doesn't like it, he doesn't
have to play. What's the worst that
could happen?

LESLIE

Michael, are you alright?

LIA

Yeah, I'm fine.

MERITE

What happened?

LIA

I guess I never told you. I have a
problem with water. I don't know
why.

JOLLY

Why didn't you tell us?

LIA

I didn't want to disappoint you.

MERITE

Do you think we're not
disappointed?

LIA

I'm sorry.

LESLIE

You say that all the time, but
that's actually the first time I've
ever believed you.

JOLLY

We're not trying to torture you.
We're trying to make you into a
better person.

MERITE

No one wants to hurt you.

LIA

I see. Will you please hurt me,
though?

LESLIE

Not today, maybe next time.

PRINCESS

And she went back to her aunt
house. She did not bother to
introduce herself again, for she
wasn't sure she had transformed,
because she couldn't remember being
anything else. She wasn't sure if
she was male or female, frail or
strong. She only felt certain that
nothing would ever change but her
own feelings, over time.

MARELIA

Is that the end of your story,
princess?

PRINCESS

No, it will not end until I am
strong and resilient and you are
the pointless figurehead, preserved
in formaldehyde in a crystal
palace.

TYLER

Oh no, Lucky, what have you done?
Bad dog! Bad. Tamara, I'm sorry. I
don't know what came over him. He's
usually so shy. I'm sorry. I'm so
sorry. But Lucky, why won't you
hurt me? Why does no one ever hurt
me?

Hey you can't be in the woods at night
Unless you are food for spiders
You seem like you might be just the right size
For a hobbit slider

If you like you can make yourself at home
Be my garden gnome
You are not alone
Many here have fallen
Bees have pollen
I have little men like you
I make my honey do
Please take off your shoes
Relax if you can
And try to understand
You're almost out of time

Hi do dilly
Don't be silly
Here's old Tommy Bombadilly
Strong and graceful
Not quite tasteful
But he's got these yellow boots
Nigh oh nelly
Jam and jelly
Raise a glass and rub your belly
There's no creature in the valley
Tough as this old coot

Please don't think that you can get away
Even with assistance

You are a such a distance
From a clearing
That no one can hear you
Or whatever you might say

These are my woods
This is my home
You are my pray
You are my pray

You're just a tourist
In our eternal forest
Not even in the chorus
You're barely half a snack
Though you may have a god who likes you
I hate that I must remind you
To save you he would have to find you
And he's not coming back

Hi do dilly
Don't be silly
There goes Tommy Bombadilly
Strong and graceful
Not quite tasteful
But he's got these yellow boots
Nigh oh nelly
Jam and jelly
Raise a glass and rub your belly
There's no creature in the valley
Tough as this old coot

Hi do dilly
Don't be silly
There goes Tommy Bombadilly
Brash and brainless
Lost and aimless
Neither great nor good
Nigh oh nelly
Jam and jelly
Raise a glass and rub your belly
There's no creature in the valley
Afraid of that old coot

LIA

Hi so. Thanks for listening to my show. I don't have much to say to tie everything together. I feel like everything needs more of an ending, but I also feel like I don't want anything to end. I don't want anything to have a point or a moral or a virtue or to be anything but what it is. I didn't mean to hurt the dog. I was trying to keep it from being hurt. There was a cat there that was scared, and it was a dumb cat, but I wanted to protect it, because I'm always afraid for cats. My family killed a litter of defenseless kittens when I was very young and it is all I remember from those days on Mars.

LIA

And the little black dog that wanted to be friends with that stupid kitten who would soon be hit by a car and die, and wanted to be friends with me, did not read the signs of aggression from the cat, and did not want to leave us alone. And I tried to push it away and it did not go. It was too nice, it wanted to be our friends, though we were scared and confused. I'd

watched a pack of dogs chase and corner a cat just a year before. They were hunting it just for fun, and I knew this dog wasn't doing that. It was all alone, and so friendly. But I was young and confused and scared and dumb, and I swiped at the dog with my claws.

LIA

And I don't forgive myself. The dog lived in the neighborhood. I saw it for years, though I didn't go outside much, except at night, when it was quiet. All I ever wanted was quiet, and dogs can be so loud. It's what I'm afraid of, not that they'll bite, but that they'll bark. That I'll be startled. This dog was quiet though. A little black friendly dog, and every time I saw it, it was excited to see me, from about ten yards away. Then as we approached each other, it remembered that I had struck it, I had caused it pain, and its tail stopped wagging, and its ears turned downward. As afraid as it was of me, it still wanted to be my friend, but also it was afraid of me. It wouldn't run away, but it wouldn't come too close either.

LIA

Why am I telling you this, this unforgivable thing? I hurt and traumatized the most innocent creature imaginable because it wanted to get close to me, when I really needed a friend the most. Somehow I justified it to myself at the time, that I was protecting something, but I imprisoned that dog in a never ending cycle of anxiety, wanting to be kind, but worried it wasn't supposed to be.

LIA

It happens, I guess. Wanting to be kind. Wanting to love, more than wanting to be loved. Wanting to care about someone or something but everything you turn to attacks you and destroys you. There's no moral

to the story. There's no turning point, no second or third act. No special place. No return. Just one pointless cruelty that defines your existence that cycles endlessly your whole life, and if there's any way out of it, it's something else, something random, something that comes from nowhere. Not a narrative.

LIA

Every pet you meet, if it's not directly from a breeder or a little newborn, has had a harrowing journey to get where it is. The cats at the shelter have been neglected, abandoned, cold and homeless, unloved, malnourished, abused in every way, and still they'll tolerate so much more of that just for some food and approval.

LIA

Codependence. Can't live with it, can't live without it. I don't know how to move on from anything. I'm sorry. To that dog I hurt, I'm sure you're dead now and you don't listen to podcasts, but I'm sorry. And there are people I hurt too because they didn't match my expectations, which they had nothing to do with. They had no idea how much I made them hurt me. And still they forgave me. It hurt that they forgave me. There's no way to shed this guilt anymore. There's no one to apologize too, and I don't even know if I want to be rid of it. I'm sorry for wasting your time. Please don't accept my apology. I'm sorry. Despise me. I love you. Don't reciprocate. Thank you. I'm not welcome. That's it. Thank you for listening to How to Be. We now return you to your regularly scheduled program.