

Excerpts from *The Great Imitator*

Please read two of the following excerpts for your [audition](#).

MISDIAGNOSED

(to audience) “Well, your labs are normal,” the doctor tells me. “Maybe... maybe you should see a counselor.” The doctor doesn’t directly say it, but they think my symptoms are psychosomatic, or that I made them up for attention.

After a while I start to doubt myself. Maybe I am crazy. So I go to a counselor, take up yoga, start meditating... in case it is “*just* in my head.” Those are great... but I still feel like death, and loved ones still think I’m faking.

At night, I sometimes pray I will die in my sleep because my whole body hurts so much that I can’t imagine enduring this until I am ninety years old. It seems less depressing to die quickly. I now see countless opportunities to kill myself. When I am on a bridge I think, ‘Oh, what if I jumped?’ I rationalize myself out of it, but I still feel helpless.

THE DOCTOR

Well, we have your MRI results. You have a slight abnormality in your sinuses, but nothing that should cause these problems. I know you said your dad passed away around the same time these headaches started. You’ve been through so much– we recommend seeing a counselor. Also, don’t try so hard or stress so much in school! Let’s see if we can reduce your pain. There’s a massage therapist who’s really good at relieving pressure in the head. I think it would be worth having you see him a few times to see if you get any relief.

Do you feel like you are getting enough attention?

THE PATHOGEN

Oo good one! Happy to oblige. I am going to burrow into your tissues– well, technically I already have– and you will think you are getting better but you’re not.

I go through phases. Of course, I am all about making you unproductive. So, when I’m working really hard, you won’t be able to get things done. There may be some times when you feel able to function – I can go pretty dormant sometimes (you might even think I moved on) – but don’t worry, I haven’t abandoned you. I will make sure you are unproductive again before you know it.

I can change forms to evade eradication. It’s quite the superpower. Oh, and I have learned to adapt to different treatment plans. It’s rough when my hosts change killing protocols, but I roll with the punches. I keep myself very flexible for my clients.

REP KAREN WHITSETT

We are tired of seeing our communities sick. I became a state representative because it seemed like the next logical step when I became overwhelmingly frustrated with the state of our community. The best way to attack that frustration is to change the law.

Counter to what many of us have been told, Lyme exists in Michigan. It is actually faster growing than HIV and cancer. Lyme is here, and it is not going away any time soon.

When you have Lyme, you're fighting for your life. I know about battling health insurance, and having a medication that was affordable, and then out of nowhere the price is so high, you have to make a choice between which medicines you're going to take, or asking your doctor or pharmacist to give you only 10 pills, because that's all you can afford. And there are other battles, like trying to figure out how to maintain your household, eat, and put gas in your car.

There's not been a Lyme disease bill package presented in Michigan. So this will be a first for us and a dream policy at that. This affects us on both sides of the aisle. It is time for a change. Doctors risk their licenses to treat Lyme disease using health insurance. And so the bill package I am advocating for aims to put the power from the CDC's hands back into the hands of physicians to be able to determine your treatment. This is gonna be a game-changer.

Write to your state representative. Tell them about Lyme disease and what you've gone through.

That's what makes a difference. They have to know it matters to you.

When it comes to Lyme disease, we're fighting every day, and every day is a gift. We are true fighters. While we may have Lyme disease, it doesn't have us.

STEPHENI

I was bit pre-deployment on San Clemente Island, which is right off the coast of California. I had a rash, went home and had symptoms within about two days of being bit, and the military's attitude was that I had a deployment to catch. So, they didn't do anything. I was just shy of three years by the time I came home and got the right test.

I was having late contraindications with my medicine. If I had citrus, my lips would chap. If I drank green tea I'd have neurological... craziness. And then when I started having reactions to corn, I went, this is absurd! I said "I'm going to grow my own food." My doctor laughed and pounded my husband "don't let her kill herself."

My family built raised beds for me so I could sit on them because at the time I was having trouble walking, and I would just go to treatment and then rest a little bit and then come home and take out all my aggression on the dirt, growing food.

I read a bunch about it when I was in the IV chair because I was there seven hours a day. And then about a half a season in, I was still having reactions. I said "this is insane. I know what's going in the food, I know where the soil came from... so what's the outlier in this? Why am I having reactions?" And then I started reading about how some people don't have reactions to heirloom varieties.

When we pulled the first harvest of heirloom varieties my husband said "if you have a reaction, we're done." Well I'm sitting here eating it, and all of a sudden NOT having a reaction that was almost an instant reaction if I ate conventionally grown, genetically modified, hybridized, or even organic produce.

I said screw this. We ripped everything out, went to heirloom varieties and didn't look back.

It was a weird path to get right here, but I kind of like right here so I'll take it.

PEGGY

Layla was great. I just loved her style. Her attitude was perfect. She knew how to problem solve.

She hated speaking in front of people, she got so nervous, but she had to do it. Some of us faculty decided to help her with those nerves by wearing pink boas around our necks to lighten the atmosphere. She was actually quite good. She was funny.

There are so many fond memories, but the big one is how remarkable she was. Not everybody knew she had Lyme disease. Those of us who saw the whole progress of it– we certainly knew. (*cries*) Sorry.

God it was hard for her. She had pain in her shoulders, in her hands, and it was getting hard for her to get in and out of bed.

When she was particularly in a lot of pain, she was short with people, and understandably so. And there were times she couldn't get out of bed. She couldn't help herself, you know, to the toilet. She really resisted using a cane.

When she finally got the diagnosis... And finally, the words Lyme disease were put on it, it was "oh wow. Wow, that is a devastating disease." I know far more about Lyme disease than I ever thought I would ever know... for her.

It's watching someone go from physically able to physically disabled in 15 years. This is an awful way to think of it, but it was a slow deterioration. Then one day she was gone. You start thinking about your own mortality.

PHONE CALL MONTAGE

***Note: This entire montage counts as one "monologue selection," ending with Lily's call.*

LILY/ HOST receives a series of voicemails via voiceovers.

SUSIE'S VOICE

Lily, can't wait to party with you for my birthday! We're going to that new pizza place on 2nd St and then dancing. Oh, and there's gluten free crust! I don't know about your other food sensitivities. And Nat should be there...

By the way, I found some pictures from our Half Dome hike. Remember when Billy sang the whole way down the cables? Anyway, those were good times. Let's go on another adventure soon!

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RHI'S VOICE

Hey Lily, Rhi here, when are you coming back to school? We miss you!

Sorry I missed your invite to come over and watch a movie. It's been crazy with midterms.

But you should totally come out tonight! We're going to this great new spot downtown, and everyone will be there! We all need a break from studying. Dang. You know, I'm kind of jealous you don't have to deal with school right now, actually.

Love you!!!

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KELLY'S VOICE

Hello? Lily, this is Kelly from the study abroad office, following up about your request to withdraw from the India program.

We will need a few forms from you. With your doctor's note, we can waive the cancellation fees, so that's no problem.

We'd still love to have you, though. It is a once in a lifetime opportunity to meet the Dalai Lama.

Let me know either way. Take care, Lily.

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SUSIE'S VOICE

Missed you at the birthday party, sweet friend! Is everything okay? Haven't heard from you in a while... anyway, call me back.

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LILY/ HOST reaches for phone, dials. Then her phone rings. She picks up.

LILY/ HOST

Hello?

Oh, are you calling because of the health questionnaire I filled out earlier?

I'm not planning to kill myself. I have neither plan nor intent.

Well, it's not that I want to die. I *feel* like I'm dying, so that's why I think about death.

I can't seem to get a diagnosis, no matter how hard I try.

I'm not depressed.

Thanks. Yes, yes, I understand.

No, I know you're doing your job. You should probably call someone who needs it. Thank you. Have a good evening.