

IS ANYBODY OUT THERE MONOLOGUE

(AT RISE: The pleasantly tasteless living room of a small apartment in Hicksville, New York. A suite of maple furniture with plaid upholstery. A Calder poster, a braided rug. Nothing offensive, nothing noteworthy.)

(A videocam on a tripod looks into the scene from downstage, a monitor on the floor next to it.)

(BETTY [mid-30s] enters from the bedroom. She is wearing a granny dress, little round glasses on wire frames, hoop earrings. Her hair is in a bun. She wears no make-up.)

(She goes to the videocam and sights through it, making sure the sofa is in view. She turns on the monitor and perches on the edge of the sofa. She views herself, turning this way, that way, crossing and uncrossing her legs.)

BETTY

Hello. My name is blah blah blah blah and so forth and so on and I don't know who I'm talking to or what I'm supposed to say.

(Shakes her head.)

Awful!

(Undoes her bun and shakes out her hair. Goes to a closet, shucking off her outfit on the way. Finds a gray wool preppy affair, holds it under her chin and parades in front of the camera.)

BETTY

(to camera)

Heeeeer's Lillybet Smith again! With a new look! Like it? Who *are* you, anyway?
What *would* you want me to wear?

(Shakes her head, dissatisfied, drops the outfit, scoops up jeans and a shirt from the floor. On her way back to the sofa, she flips on the stereo. The moaning of an Enya album begins.

(She pushes the "record" button on the camera, sits dejectedly on the sofa again. She's in her underwear, the jeans and shirt forgotten in a ball on her lap.)

BETTY

I'll *never* get through this!

(to camera, glancing repeatedly at herself on the monitor.)

Hello. My name is Lilibet Smyth. With a "y." I want you to know I've never placed a personal ad in anything before, and I just hope this company isn't some kind of sleazy outfit that's going to attract freaks and weirdos....

That sound snotty.

(She stops the camera and plays back the last take.)

VOICE ON MONITOR

Hello. My name is Lilibet Smyth. With a "y." I want you to know—

(She stops the tape.)

BETTY

Oh god. You've *got* to stop looking at the monitor!

(She turns the monitor away so she can't see it and hits the "record" button again. Back at the sofa she begins once more.)

BETTY

Hello. My name is Lillybet Smyth. With a "y." It's an old English name. I'm 32.

(She puts her head in her hands.)

Oh god, why bother?

(She looks up at the camera.)

It's Smith. Just like you'd think it is. My parents christened me Betty. Not even Elizabeth. But I like Lillybet. That's the nickname Queen Elizabeth's mom and dad gave her when she was little. I'd like it if you'd call me Lillybet.

God this is hard!

I've never done anything like this before. I always thought people who had to meet people through personals were losers. Or weird. I mean, most people meet people through...friends? I've got friends, but they're all married and hang out together. They talk children and are good cooks. I envy their lives.

I *hate* their lives! I feel awkward around them. I don't cook. I could learn to cook, I guess. If I had someone to cook for.

Or people meet each other at work. I see a lot of people at work, but I don't *meet* them. Well, I *do*, but I *don't*. I mean, can you imagine anyone lying there looking up at me in my mask and saying, "My teeth feel so great and squeaky clean and will you have dinner with me?" But I like my work. There are patients who cancel rather than be transferred to someone else. Like Mister Frankel. He always tells me I have special hands. And I do, I know I do. It comes with wanting to be kind to people.

I *am* kind. I'm kind and clean and careful. I want you to know that about me.

And maybe that's why I can't meet people in bars. I don't go to bars. Most people in bars aren't kind or clean or careful.

So what's left? Volunteer work? I do volunteer work—not regular like, but from time to time when they need me—but, well, my situation is kind of special. It's no place to meet guys, and I don't really want to talk about it. It's personal. And real important to me. Some people make fun of it, and I don't like that. There's nothing funny about wanting to be one of this world's helpers. My mother always told me: "Baby," she'd say, "everybody always talks about the people who do bad things in this world. Look for the helpers instead. They're the ones who really count." Mom helps lots of people.

I grew up in Bliss. Bliss, New York. It's a little town not too far from Buffalo. My father had his own insurance business and retired a couple of years ago. He's a good father, and he and my mom love each other a lot. They're Methodists. He plays golf, and she does a ton of stuff for the church.

Bliss is where I first...first got into my volunteer work, too. It made sense—the wide open spaces, the isolation. If you were a transient and found yourself in a lonely kind of place you'd never been before, wouldn't you want someone to explain things to you? I would.

Bliss *can* be a lonely kind of place. Our farmhouse was out in the middle of nowhere. When you see it, you'll swear they shot parts of *Close Encounters* there. I was glad I had brothers and sisters—one of each. They're married and have kids. They're living in Bliss. New York.

We all get along. I like them all right. But being a middle child made me kind of a loner. There were square dances in the summertime, but all I'd want to do was

get up on top of the nearest haystack and lie there looking at the stars, tracing out all the constellations, wondering if there was anybody out there. My daddy would get worried and come find me. "Betty, precious," he'd say, "how're you ever going to find a boyfriend if your head's up there in the stars? Come along back down to earth, honey!"

I moved out here to Hicksville, Long Island about seven years ago. I like it here. I like being near the water. It makes the sky look big at night.

I'm not getting very far, am I? You don't really know anything important about me, do you? I don't know what I'm supposed to tell you.

Other things I like are...Chinese food...doing pastels...Yanni. That's not Yanni you can hear. It's Enya. She's so sad, but I really get into it. I don't like pizza. Or fish with bones in it. I don't eat veal 'cause of the awful way they raise the animals.

I don't dance. I don't go to a gym. I don't have a "shrink." I don't even have a pet. Not even a fish. Things shouldn't live cooped up. I like bike riding, and I want to try roller blading. Veronica—she's my best friend and unmarried, thank goodness—is going to teach me how. She says I might bump into somebody interesting that way. Ha ha.

She's a paralegal and very smart and sure of herself. I'm sure of myself in my own way, too—I don't want you to think I'm not—but not like Veronica. When I'm buying clothes, it takes me a while to make up my mind. She marches right into a store, flips through the racks, and finds what she wants. Just like that.

(The lights in the room flicker.
BETTY shows no awareness.)

Veronica's generous, too. More often than not, if someone admires what she's wearing, she'll give it to them. Even if she's only worn it once or twice. She's given me a couple of things. That granny dress was hers. Oh, that's right, you didn't see it. It looked better on her.

Veronica got me to go bowling. I didn't like it. It was noisy and messy, with beer spills and candy wrappers all over, and loud music. I was terrible at it. I guess everyone is to begin with. But I didn't like the way the men seemed to think it was cute that I was bad at it. They wouldn't have thought it was cute for a guy to be bad at it. Veronica's pretty good, though. Of course she's been doing it for a while. And I didn't like wearing the same sweaty shoes that other people had been using.

Veronica meets guys there—guys she goes out with for a while and then gives away. Like her clothes. She really does! She'll see a guy for a while, and then she gets bored. If one of her girlfriends says she thinks he's cute, Veronica will have them both over to dinner at the same time. She'll just give him away.

At the moment, Veronica's hanging out with an alien from...I don't know where he's from. Swarthy-like. He's illegal, though, that much I know, 'cause Veronica told me. But he won't last long. He'll get given away soon. Or maybe taken away.

Veronica talked me into trying art classes. That's where I got into doing pastels. Pastels can be messy, but it all washes out after. One man in the class seemed to like me. He must have been around 50, and he wasn't...well, he didn't look very fit to me. He'd always say hello and want to talk during the breaks—when he wasn't outside smoking. He suggested we pose for each other once a week after the classes ended.

(BETTY makes a “Can you believe that?” face.)

I'm not dumb. That's something else you need to know about me. I'm not dumb. And I hope you don't smoke. Or have cats, 'cause I'm allergic.

Veronica and I went out together last week for my birthday, going to a movie and getting some Chinese food, and she turns to me and says, “Lillybet, honey, here you are turning 35 and you haven't had a boyfriend since I've known you! Want the name of a good convent?” I didn't think that was very nice for a friend to say, even in fun.

We were walking along Eighth Street, and we passed a poster that said something like, “Lonely? Get on the information highway and discover who's out there!” There was a number that spelled Y B ALONE. Oops. I think I said I was 32 at the beginning. I'm sorry. I'm really 35. Last week. I'm a Virgin.

So here I am doing what they told me to do when I called the number. And I hope they're not some sleazy company that will attract.... You know what I mean. Or if you don't, don't answer this ad please.

(BETTY puts on a “This whole thing is so dumb!” look.)

What else? My favorite color is green. And I brush my teeth with baking soda and you should, too. And floss. I have excellent teeth and no gum disease. But that's my business, isn't it? I don't mean it's none of *your* business, I mean it's the business I'm in. But I guess it isn't any of your business, either.

I sleep on the left side of the bed.

(She gestures.)

That side. How I sleep is *certainly* not your business, and I don't know why I'm talking about it. I won't go to bed with you unless I get to know you really well and like you a lot, And then it would have to be safe sex. *Very* safe sex. Yes, I have had sex with men, now that you're wondering. Three men, to be erect. *Exact*. I liked them a lot. It just didn't work out in the long run. The last was two years ago. I have not been tested for the AIDS virus. I would if someone wanted me to. You'd have to get tested, too.

(The lights flicker again, more seriously, causing a second of blackout.)

These old buildings! And you can get scalded in the shower if you don't watch out. That's all I need—to be sitting here talking to myself in the dark!

Where was I? Relationships. I guess I'm not very good at them. That last one, with Mitch, ended because—he said—I was spending too much time at my volunteer work. Maybe I *should* tell you about it so you'll be prepared. But if you can't understand how important it is to me, don't answer this ad.

I work with a community of foreigners...aliens...who arrived about 10 years ago. Even after all that time they're still confused by our American culture. I really don't work there all that much. It was the uncertain hours that Mitch hated.

I never do know much ahead when they're going to need me. They're funny that way, but when they call I have to go. Most of the time it's after working hours, so there no problem, but about six months ago they wanted me on a Tuesday. I remember 'cause Mister Frankel had to be transferred and he said no. And then last March they called me one day right there at work, so I had to pretend I was coming down with the 'flu and needed to go home.

It would be so much easier if they made appointments or kept regular schedules. My office couldn't work the way they do! I've tried to tell them that I can't work daytime except on weekends, but I'm not sure they understand. That's the trouble: I can never be sure what they understand, and my job is to help them understand, and it gets really frustrating.

I remember the first time they called. I'd just gone to bed, and I was lying there when this ringing in my ears begins. I thought it was the electricity or something, but then it got so loud that there was no doubt it was coming from inside my head. That's still how I know they want me.

The window got all bright like the moon had come up all of a sudden, and then the bed started moving, and kind of skidded out the window like I was on a sled or something. I tried to scream. I couldn't make a sound. There was a blast of cold—it was winter—and then everything went warm and moist like I'd been put in a steam room somewhere.

It's always a little dreamlike when I'm with them. Like when I had a colonoscopy and they gave me Demerol and stuff. I always think I'm clearheaded when it's happening and that I'll remember everything, but time sort of collapses so it all gets mixed up in my head when it's over.

They always ask me lots of questions, and the funniest part is I always know all the answers. It's like they only ask me the things I know. Only they don't exactly say anything. They just kind of let what I know leak out of my head, know what I mean? They sure know a lot about dental hygiene by now, that's for sure. But I don't know if they have teeth, 'cause they don't take shape like we do. There are six of them that I know of, and they're all different, and I know when they're with me and when they're not, and which is which and all that, but they don't exactly have forms. Not like we do.

They're like...sensations. That's what I call us for fun: "Lillybet and the Sensations."

(beat)

It's true they put things in you. It doesn't hurt, and it isn't sexy or anything, but I almost always get a rash...you know, down *there*...after I visit them. I think they're just looking around to see how we work. I cry sometimes when I'm there. They get off on tears.

If you want to know the truth, I think they kind of get off on *me* altogether.

But they're kind. Do you know what one of them told me the last time I was with them? He said, "Lillybet, you're one of our favorite books in the whole of the Earth library." Wasn't that sweet? Well, I try hard to help them, I really do.

(beat)

So now you know it all. Who I am, where I come from, what I do, what I like and don't like...just about everything there is to know about me.

And you? You don't have to be handsome or rich or particularly successful. It'd be nice if you were a happy person, if you liked whatever it is you do for a living, if you needed someone for companionship like I do—someone to be with when the day's over, someone you can count on.

Just be kind. That's all I ask. Be kind.

And we'll work out the rest. Maybe you could even help me in my work with the Sensations. Who knows? Maybe.

(BETTY takes a deep breath.)

Oh camera, camera! Is there *anybody* out there for me?

(She covers her face with her hands.

(The lights in the room begin to go haywire. A growing hum rapidly drowns out Enya.

(BETTY looks up in wonder.

(There is a crackling of short circuits...an eerie white light...a blinding flash...two seconds of blackout...and then it's over.

(Everything returns to normal. Enya drones on.

(But BETTY is gone.)