

# BAD LANGUAGE

By  
Robert Fieldsteel

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## CHARACTER & SETTING

### Character

LISA - early to late 20's - Unaffected, honest, kind. Uncomfortable with language. Very conscious of the fact that speaking creates the potential to be misunderstood.

### Setting & Time

Present day. The action takes place in whatever space the play is being presented in. The space should be relatively bare. No attempt should be made to place the action elsewhere, e.g. "Lisa's Bedroom".

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LISA, a woman in her 20's, addresses the audience.

LISA

I have a problem with language. Wait-- let me put it another way. I have difficulty with ... I don't like ... what sometimes is considered ... to be bad language. It's something I've never quite gotten over ... and part of that may be due to the fact that I'm not ... not entirely sure if I truly want to get over it. That is, that some words are ... not nice. I mean, for most people, the "C" word is pretty much off-limits, I don't think I'm that unusual in that respect. But, it seems, more and more, people, everybody, a lot of people say ... "fuck" . . .

(Pause. It's genuinely made her uncomfortable to say the word.)

... so much and . . .

(Pause.)

I really don't like saying the word. Or hearing it, particularly. It's not a huge thing ... by itself ... in and of itself ... Not "oh horrors!" or anything . . . The funny thing is . . . people can, you know, come to conclusions about you, think things about you from what you say, the words you use . . . which can make me . . . nervous enough . . . but here . . . in this case ... it's what I don't particularly like to say . . . that can create an impression . . . that I don't feel is altogether accurate. Or fair. If I don't like the word, it doesn't mean that I don't like ... or I'm not . . .

(short pause)

It doesn't help that I'm from Kansas. That's a whole other, what, kettle of fish? Kansas -- it can tend, in people's minds, in some people's minds, to equal, what -- naive? A little . . . narrow? Something, someone, "less than"? Perhaps? Maybe better than Alabama, which is, can tend, can tend to be -- stupid? Slutty? And New York, even New York, gets it's due, not that it's right, but you get, what-- abrasive? At least for the girls.

(short pause)

I know where it comes from. Not liking certain words. I mean, it's no great mystery. When I was little, when I was growing up, there were words you just didn't say, that were bad to say. And it was important for me to be good because I was adopted and I was afraid if I wasn't good, my parents would give me away.

(short pause)

My friend Janet . . . is taken with the idea . . . that people, that most people feel a need ... to find a cause, a logical reason ... for whatever they feel or whatever happens to them ... and she says that this process ...

(MORE)

is basically tyrannical... because I mean it just fulfills a need for organization ... and shorthand communication ... and this limits who we are. ... And, theoretically, I agree with her. But in the case of me and bad words and why I feel that way. . . y'know, who I am *is* still basically somebody who was adopted and scared to death she'll be given away and everything. And, yeah, when I was little my mom . . . left the family for a while, I don't remember how long, and, yeah, I *did* think it was my fault and all that really obvious stuff . . . People, friends, teachers, they've always said that I have a good imagination ... But some of this real life stuff really is just obvious. I shouldn't be embarrassed if there are things about me, feelings or ... causes ... that are obvious. But sometimes, important things . . . I don't always say.

(Pause.)

A few Fridays ago, after work, I went out with Janet and some of the other women . . . and the conversation got very graphic, very explicit . . . about themselves and specific men . . . and in that situation . . . I didn't know what to do . . . I didn't know what to say . . . except, in a way, I did know what to do because I didn't say anything. But it made me sad . . . to be the only one.

(short pause)

My grandmother had this saying-- "None of your *beeswax*".

(She relishes the word "beeswax", accentuating the sound of it.)

I guess that was her version of "boundaries". "You're" - what - "violating my boundaries." It's funny, I think "None of your beeswax" is a lot more expressive even though it doesn't make any sense. I used to get this picture in my head of this honeycomb filled with green earwax and these kind of gross bees, these cartoon bees . . .

(again, relishing the sound:)

"None of your *beeeeeeswax*."

(pause)

Fuck.

(pause)

I had a problem ... with Janet ... with that word ... after that Friday ... we were talking ... and I was trying to explain why I'd been kind of quiet ... and not doing a very good job of it ... making myself clear ... which is neither here nor there .. and we got to ... I was saying that I try to ... if I share my body ... if I make love ... I'm ... very selective ... and I do want the man to be nice ... or for it to be ... about love. And she says, "You don't want to fuck a bunch of assholes." As if that's the correct translation. And I don't know what to say then. I mean, I look back and I think I should say, "I said it the way I wanted to say it." I mean, she got what I meant. But I just clam up.

(pause)

This is making me very uncomfortable. Because I'm afraid the impression I'm giving ... I mean, I feel I have to tell you that I got a 680 on the verbal part of my SATs and then I hate myself for that.

(MORE)

(Pause. LISA (cont'd)  
Then, almost to  
herself:)

My dad said, "You worked so hard. I'm so proud of you."

(Long pause.)

My face doesn't quite match me. People say I have a "bad girl" face. That's how my face reads. Three different people have told me that it's because of my eyebrows. That the shape of my eyebrows . . . You know how some Chinese letters can mean a whole phrase? It's like, there are people who think my eyebrows make a letter that spells "bad girl". And for a while . . . there was a time that I thought maybe I could . . . maybe I could act a little, a little like my face, you know? Not, not deep inside, but outside, you know, be a little -- because some people like "bad girls", it's not a bad thing, a bad . . . association . . . per se . . . and trying that was not . . . altogether unenjoyable . . . but the people who . . . I attracted . . . tended to be . . . I don't know how else to say it -- kind of dumb. And not even nice dumb.

(pause)

Mean.

(pause)

Sometimes I think there was a time that I could speak more freely. That the words came so freely. But I don't think the words have ever come freely. Completely. Everything's . . . relative.

(pause)

My parents . . . there's that *song* . . . one of my earliest memories is of my parents . . . dancing in the living room . . . to that *song* . . .

(Singing:)

*You're just too marvelous,  
Too marvelous for words,*

She sings the next few bars without words, ending with the words "and altogether amorous". She continues to sing the rest of the song without words, with the exception of the phrase "Webster's dictionary". She is considerably more at ease, expressive, and in her element singing than she is speaking.

Note: It is not important that LISA sing "well". In fact it is preferable that she not sound "trained" -- what's important is that she enjoys the singing.

She finishes singing and speaks to the audience again.

LISA (cont'd)

"Marvelous" is not really . . . part of my everyday vocabulary. Anyway, the words . . .

(pause)

I do like saying "I love you".

(short pause)

But when a guy says "I love you", should the girl . . .

(MORE)

always have to say, ... LISA (cont'd)  
 "I love you" back? Is that . . .  
 necessary?

(pause)

Sometimes I lie in bed ... it doesn't even have to be in bed  
 ... and I just listen. And I try not to connect what I hear  
 to any words.

She listens to whatever sound is in the  
 room/theatre at the present moment. After a  
 time, she vocally mirrors her own versions of  
 various isolated sounds (e.g. the hum of the  
 lights, the creaks she creates in the floor),  
 riffing on the sounds, sometimes having  
 physical movement go with the sound. Sometimes  
 even losing the sound altogether and just  
 continuing with the movement.

As with the singing, she is much more eloquent  
 and free doing this than she is in her speech.  
 And, as before, this should not be the  
 expression of a "trained professional", but,  
 rather, of a private person.

LISA may do this for as long as she likes. When  
 she is finished, she speaks to the audience:

LISA (cont'd)

I tried to do that with, I, I did that in front of my last  
 boyfriend and he broke up with me two weeks later. I really  
 think my doing that . . . had something to do with it. I know  
 it's kinda funny, but it's not. It was ... it hurt a lot. The  
 whole thing. But I'm not sorry I did it. The sound thing. I'm  
 actually kind of proud of myself. I'm very proud of myself  
 that I did that.

A moment of silence.

BLACKOUT

**END OF PLAY**