

The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe

☞ Written by Jane Wagner
Performed and co-produced by Lily Tomlin

TRUDY

Frankly, infinity doesn't affect me personally one way or the other.

You think too long about infinity, you could go stark raving mad.

But I don't ever want to sound negative about going crazy.

I don't want to overromanticize it either, but frankly,
goin' crazy was the *best* thing ever happened to me.

I don't say it's for everybody;
some people couldn't cope.

But for me it came at a time when nothing else seemed to be
working. I got the kind of madness Socrates talked about,
"A divine release of the soul from the yoke of
custom and convention." I refuse to be intimidated by
reality anymore.

After all, what is reality anyway? Nothin' but a
collective hunch. My space chums think reality was once a
primitive method of
crowd control that got out of hand.

In my view, it's absurdity dressed up
in a three-piece business suit.

I made some studies, and
reality is the leading cause of stress amongst those in
touch with it. I can take it in small doses, but as a lifestyle
I found it too confining.

It was just too needful;

it expected me to be there for it *all* the time, and with all

I have to do—

I had to let something go.

Strong Gods
Lily Tomlin
Character
Profession
Monologue
Space
Comedy
Lily Tomlin
Lily Tomlin
Lily Tomlin
Lily Tomlin

Now, since I put reality on a back burner, my days are jam-packed and fun-filled. Like some days, I go hang out around Seventh Avenue; I love to do this old joke: I wait for some music-loving tourist from one of the hotels on Central Park to go up and ask someone, "How do I get to Carnegie Hall?" Then I run up and yell, "Practise!"

The expression on people's faces is priceless. I never could've done stuff like that when I was in my *right* mind. I'd be worried people would think I was *crazy*. When I think of the fun I missed, I try not to be bitter.

See, the human mind is kind of like . . .

a piñata. When it breaks open, there's a lot of surprises inside. Once you get the piñata perspective, you see that losing your mind can be a peak experience.

I was not always a bag lady, you know. I used to be a designer and creative consultant. For big companies!

Who do you think thought up the colour scheme for Howard Johnson's?

At the time, nobody was using orange and aqua in the same room together.

With fried clams.

Laugh tracks:

I gave TV sitcoms the idea for canned laughter.

I got the idea, one day I heard voices and no one was there.

Who do you think had the idea to package panty hose in a plastic goose egg?

3

R

M

1.

2.

One thing I personally don't like about panty hose:
When you roll 'em down to the ankles the way I like 'em, you
can't walk too good. People seem amused, so what's a little
loss of dignity? You got to admit:
It's a look!

The only idea I'm proud of—
my umbrella hat. Protects against sunstroke, rain and
muggers. For some reason, muggers steer clear of people
wearing umbrella hats.

So it should come as no shock . . . I am now creative consultant to
these aliens from outer space. They're a kinda cosmic
fact-finding committee. Amongst other projects, they've been
searching all over for Signs of Intelligent Life.

It's a lot trickier than it sounds.

✎ Jane Wagner is a playwright, writer of screenplays and teleplays, designer, and producer. *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe* (1986) won both a New York Drama Desk Award for "Unique Theatrical Experience" and a New York Drama Critics' Circle award. Her teleplay *J.T.* won a Peabody Award. She has collaborated on several projects with Lily Tomlin. Lily Tomlin has created a multitude of memorable comic characters for television, stage shows, films, and Broadway. She was a regular on the television series *Laugh-In* between 1970 and 1973, as well as the series *Murphy Brown* with Candice Bergen in 1996. She won an Oscar nomination as "Best Supporting Actress" for her role in the movie *Nashville* (1975). (*Jane Wagner born Tennessee 1935; Lily Tomlin born Michigan 1939*)

RESPONDING

Meaning

1. What do you know about Trudy from what she says? What do you know about her from what is not said? Write a character sketch of her using both explicit and implicit information to support your view.
2. What is the nature of the social commentary made through this monologue? Support your answer with specific references to the text.