

*This LWS series is based on the episode Letters From A Forger of the CHEAT! podcast. The host of the podcast is Alzo Slade.*



Alzo Slade is a charming and wise comic who's been doing stand up for 5 years. He is a storytelling comic who commands a stage with loads of charm and charisma. He has a gift of finding the funny in casual observations. Alzo's ultimate goal for his comedy is to make people think and laugh at the same time. He sees JFL as a powerful vehicle that can get him on a bigger stage with a bigger microphone so that he can share his colorful life experiences with people everywhere.

In this episode of Cheat! Alzo digs into the real story behind the movie Can You Ever Forgive Me? to find out just how the fakes get away with it.

\* JFL - Just For Laughs

### *1. Listen and put the lines in order* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ So, Lee's in a library at the Lincoln Center, reading and making notes when she notices something.

\_\_\_\_ She finds original letters written by Fanny Brice. Lee pores over the letters, and for literary lover like her, this is an exciting discovery. And the library haven't even locked them properly. That's when Lee has a thought:

\_\_\_\_ Lee's researching a woman named Fanny Brice – a popular American comedian, singer, and actress who sky-rocketed to fame in her twenties.

\_\_\_\_ At Lincoln Center, there's a library where you can read all documents. So these aren't things that in books, these are original documents.

\_\_\_\_ "Oh my God, I could sell this!"

\_\_\_\_ It's the early 90s and Lee Israel is a down-on-her-luck writer. She's doing some research for a biography that she's writing.

\_\_\_\_ While going through some of the papers, she discovered a couple of them that weren't cataloged correctly.

### *2. Listen and shadow*

\_\_\_\_\_ This is an appealing thought for her because of her situation.

\_\_\_\_\_ You see, Lee is on welfare; she's behind on her rent and her cat is sick.



\_\_\_\_\_ She's in desperate need of money and these letters have literally been handed to her.

\_\_\_\_\_ No one would even notice the letters are missing.

\_\_\_\_\_ Lee picks them up, folds them, and glances around to make sure no one's watching.

\_\_\_\_\_ She reaches down slowly and slides them into her shoes.

\_\_\_\_\_ So, she swiped them.

\_\_\_\_\_ She walks out of the library praying that she doesn't get caught. She slips past the staff and gets the letters home where she realizes that she can do more than just sell them.

\_\_\_\_\_ She ends up masterminding a simple but thoughtful plan that could turn her life around.



### 3. Read and listen, then ask questions about the fragments in bold \_\_\_\_\_

Once upon a time as a kid I got a **bad report card from school**. And it had to be signed **by my mother**.

But I didn't want to show the bad grades to my mom **because I would have gotten in trouble**.

So, I tried **to forge her signature**, but it didn't work. You know why? Because I was nervous as hell. **I started, stopped, started, stopped**.

And for anyone who knows anything about forgery, you know – once you start your signature, you cannot stop.

I took the report card **back to my teacher** and she immediately knew that my mom didn't sign it, that I forged it.

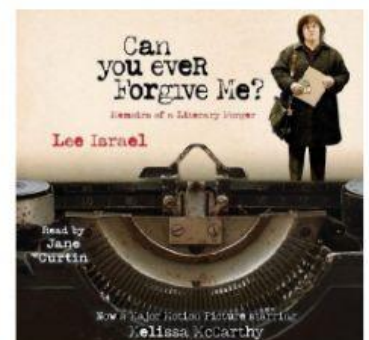
The teacher then told me, "Well, I'm gonna call your mother tonight and let her know."

So, I get home from school, I tell my mom what I did and I got in trouble.

And to this day, **Mrs. Smith, my sixth grade teacher**, has yet to call my mom.

So, I **confessed to the crime** for no reason.

So, clearly I wasn't good at it. And I couldn't pull it off.





But if I had managed it, who knows, I might have done it a couple more times.

Today's story's about a writer who was strapped for cash, took a small step into forgery, and how it ended up snowballing into something massive.

Her scam was so good that it was praised **by the FBI agent chasing her**, as well as the victims of her con.

And it inspired **a major Hollywood movie**.

To make sense of how she managed to get away with it, we hear from a man who identifies forgeries for a living and explains exactly how to make a good fake.

**Retell the incident with the bad report card.**

*4\_ A. Listen to the clip and tap out all the things from the snippet that are relatable to Lee Israel \_\_\_\_\_*

The New York Times bestseller list

her style is fairly plain

a stunning beauty

lived in Manhattan

in her late thirties



lived on the Upper West Side

covered major murder trials

writing articles about TV

short dark hair

a sleek woman

New York Times

The New Yorker

cat lady

Esquire

an obscure writer

Soap Opera Digest

Marie Claire

in her early fifties

**4\_B. Explain in your own words (you can look up in a dictionary if you need) these expressions:**

*Was a big shot American journalist*

*Then the two had beef*



High on the success

A second-hand biography

*The book really did tank*

*4\_C. Listen again and do this T or F activity (put either T or F into each box) \_\_\_\_\_.*



1. Lee Israel has been freelancing since she graduated from college. \_\_\_\_
2. She was known for writing excellent detective stories. \_\_\_\_
3. Dorothy Kilgallen was a big book for her. \_\_\_\_
4. Dorothy was a big shot American journalist \_\_\_\_
5. Lee covered major murder trials and JFK assassination. \_
6. Dorothy Kilgallen wrote an article about Frank Sinatra and then the two had beef. \_\_\_\_
7. People think Dorothy's reporting might have played a part in her death. \_\_\_\_
8. Lee's biography on Dorothy is published in 1989. \_\_\_\_
9. Lee begins work on the biography of even higher profile celebrity – Mary Kay Ash. \_\_\_\_
10. Estée Lauder & Co offer Lee money to drop the project, but Lee refuses. \_\_\_\_
11. Estée Lauder writes her own memoir and schedules it to drop at the same time as Lee's. \_\_\_\_
12. People preferred to buy Lee's version. \_\_\_\_

*5\_A. Listen and complete the sentences with three words \_\_\_\_\_:*

1. Lee probably thought everything she touched after the Dorothy Kilgallen book \_\_\_\_\_.
2. She's not the easiest person \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Her feistiness is only made worse \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Lee would sit at the bar with \_\_\_\_\_.
5. A lot of the trouble she would get in came from having a \_\_\_\_\_ drinks.
6. It makes Lee kind \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Lee starts ringing them \_\_\_\_\_ Nora Ephron.
8. It is not enough to pay her rent which she \_\_\_\_\_.



9. She is self-sabotaging a lot in \_\_\_\_\_.
10. Having sabotaged the relationship with her agent and others in the publishing industry, Lee is \_\_\_\_\_.
11. Jersey, the love of her life, falls ill and is \_\_\_\_\_ to the vet.



5\_B• Listen again and join the correct parts of the chunks \_\_\_\_\_:

after her latest

nine-to-five

can't pin that

wage slaves

did not take

on welfare

a snapping

time of day

she's abrasive and

book flops

struggling to

everyone else out

refuses to take

kinda rude

office workers are

entirely on the failure

also shutting

make ends meet

at the wrong

turtle

asking her to cease

in prickles

ends up

crap from anybody

all covered

and desist

6• Drag and drop, listen and check \_\_\_\_\_

is falling into disrepair

wanted by the FBI

was posthumously awarded

it pays medical bills

re-establish her as a writer to watch

selling some second-hand books

forging them herself

this mount of books

not particularly juicy

She had to take care of Jersey, \_\_\_\_\_.

All she needs is \$40 for the test but she doesn't have enough.

Lee tries \_\_\_\_\_ at a book store across town, but the book seller doesn't want them.

And she's left feeling desperate as she carries \_\_\_\_\_ back to her apartment which \_\_\_\_\_ like the rest of her life.

Motivated by the cost of Jersey's tests, Lee decides to write another book, one that she thinks will \_\_\_\_\_.

She wanted to write a biography of Fanny Brice. Fanny Brice starred in a comedy series on the radio and she \_\_\_\_\_ two stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

So, Lee heads off to research Fanny at the Library and that's where we started this episode with Lee finding Fanny's letters and stealing them.

The letters – they are \_\_\_\_\_ and they don't reveal anything scandalous, but they take Lee from being an ordinary writer to being \_\_\_\_\_.

Lee went from straight stealing the letters to \_\_\_\_\_.