

BRAIN BY COMMITTEE

CHRIS	F, 20s-30s	A girl just trying to get through her work day
KATE*	F, 20s-30s	Her crush
BRAD*	M, 20s-30s	Her nemesis
MOM	F, 40s-60s	The version of Chris' mom that live inside her head
THERAPIST	F, 30s-70s	The version of Chris' therapist that lives inside her head
HELEN	F, 40s-60s	The version of a film star that Chris is obsessed with that lives inside her head
STRANGER	F, 30s-50s	The version of a woman with soccer mom vibes that Chris can't quite place that lives inside her head

*The actress that plays Kate can also double as Brad

An office. A desk with a computer/laptop, paperwork, coffee mugs. A chair behind the desk. A door or other exit out to the rest of the office.

Lights up first on KATE, standing in the entrance to the office space.

KATE

Do you want it?

Lights up on CHRIS, near or at the desk.

CHRIS

I—I—I—

Lights come up on THERAPIST, MOM, and STRANGER, respectively, as they speak.

THERAPIST

We've been over this—subject, verb, direct object. Maybe a nicety. Keep those qualifiers in there if you need training wheels.

MOM

It might be nice if you replied to her sometime this century, but do your best, sweetheart.

STRANGER

You're wasting her time and yours. And mine. And theirs.

CHRIS

Hel–Helen?

Lights up on HELEN.

HELEN

Just do what I would do and your life will be perfect. Just like mine.

CHRIS

(In a nonsensical torrent of words.)

Well, it's funny you ask, since I was thinking it might be nice just to get–if you–we wanted–to go over it—maybe–if it's already–we could–ha! Words are hard this early in the morning–

KATE

It's 2pm.

MOM

You can save this. Just be your charming and witty self–

CHRIS

It's 5pm somewhere, right?

STRANGER

You are so dumb.

HELEN

Not quite how I would have handled that. But that's why you're not me.

KATE

I'll just leave the report in your mailbox once it's finished.

KATE exits.

MOM

There's always next time, honey.

STRANGER

Although the clock is ticking.

HELEN

When I was your age, I'd already met my husband, but you've got plenty of time–

THERAPIST

(To the others.)

Alright, that's enough unsolicited opinions for the afternoon.

HELEN
Doesn't matter the time of
day—I'm always on her
mind.

MOM
She's my daughter. I can
say whatever I want.

STRANGER
You think you can tell me
what to do? With shoes
like that?

CHRIS
I do not need all of you right now!

MOM
You heard her, everyone out!

CHRIS
Actually, Mom, can I just talk to—

She nods at THERAPIST.

MOM
Oh. Of course. That's fine. That's great. Your therapist is—you know, that's normal and healthy,
and I am one hundred percent okay with that. If you need me, I'll be in the occipital lobe. The
rest of you: OUT.

HELEN and STRANGER exit.

THERAPIST
You sure you don't want to talk to her instead?

CHRIS
I am so horny.

THERAPIST
Oh, I see.

CHRIS
I can be just minding my own business on a Tuesday at work and I'm suddenly overwhelmed by
intense, hot—

THERAPIST
Yes?

CHRIS
Love for Excel spreadsheets.

THERAPIST

Your brain is a safe space. You can be honest with yourself here.

CHRIS

Can I?

THERAPIST

If not here, then where?

CHRIS

Well, I could just bottle up every feeling I have, never inconvenience anyone, and one day, die.

THERAPIST

I'm professionally obligated to tell you that's wrong.

CHRIS

But you'll tell me nicely, right?

THERAPIST

Do you want to live your honest life?

CHRIS

What is my honest life? We can't go around the office making out with people we kinda, sorta think are cute every time we feel like it.

THERAPIST

No, that's called assault. But we can be honest with ourselves about what we're feeling. About what our bodies are feeling. We can learn how to take risks, how to communicate those feelings to others in appropriate ways.

Beat.

CHRIS

Oh, I knew you'd be no help.

THERAPIST

Is there someone in here it'd be more helpful to talk with? Mom, maybe?

CHRIS

Oh god no.

THERAPIST

You haven't called her out there in the real world in at least—

CHRIS

I want to speak with Helen.

THERAPIST

Are you sure that's what you need?

CHRIS

She's so much more, oh, what's word—god, it's on the tip of my tongue. Oh, nevermind.

THERAPIST

Have you considered relying less on someone you've never—

CHRIS

Eloquent! That's it—my mind wanted to say wordy, but that wasn't right.

THERAPIST

Eloquent?

CHRIS

She always has the right words for every situation.

THERAPIST

Have you considered that maybe there aren't right or wrong words?

CHRIS

There are definitely wrong words.

THERAPIST

You are not this sassy in our real life sessions.

CHRIS

I care more about your approval in our real life sessions.

THERAPIST

And you don't here?

CHRIS

Actually, not really, no.

THERAPIST

I'm...gonna consider that progress.

BRAD enters the office.

BRAD

Afternoon, Christine. Chris. Chrissy. It is still afternoon, right? I heard you were struggling with time today.

THERAPIST

Need help with this one?

CHRIS

Nope. I'll put on my big girl business casual leggings and handle this.

(THERAPIST leaves. STRANGER enters, lurking.)

What can I—

BRAD

What are you doing the 6th, 17th, and 27th of August?

CHRIS

Let me check my cal—

BRAD

David's put me in charge of planning the fundraiser. I don't need to tell you, but I will, that it's the highest priority for the division this quarter. So, do those dates work?

CHRIS is leaning over her computer, trying to pull up her calendar as quickly as possible. STRANGER watches over her shoulder, judgmentally.

STRANGER

It's the other tab. No, not that one.

(Sigh.)

Jesus... 4,872 unread emails? It's right there. Nope, just below. Under that unanswered request from...

(Squinting.)

...three and half years ago. Hope they're not holding their breath on that.

CHRIS

Found it!

(She scans the screen.)

Sorry, it looks like we've got outreach events every weekend that month.

BRAD

Sorry?

CHRIS

I just mean, those aren't good dates for the division, sorry, but we can look at the next month, or maybe even, sorry, one moment—

STRANGER

Stop saying sorry.

CHRIS

(To STRANGER.)

Sorry.

BRAD

God, you say sorry a lot.

CHRIS

Sorry, I mean—Thank you for your patience. The 6th might work, but I can't commit my team to it yet.

BRAD is quiet.

STRANGER

I think you've upset him.

CHRIS

Stop it.

BRAD

What?

CHRIS

What?

BRAD

It's just I've already sent those dates out to the event partners.

CHRIS

You—

BRAD

So I'll just see what date works best for them and get back to you.

CHRIS

No, but wait...

BRAD

Yes?

STRANGER

You see maybe if you'd reached out to him last week you could have preempted this. Now's your chance to correct him, but you're not going to, are you? God, this is all your fault—

CHRIS

We'll make it work!

BRAD

I knew you'd see sense.

(He starts to leave.)

By the way, how cute is Kate in that little dress today? I'm glad some people in this office try.

He leaves. CHRIS screams in frustration.

CHRIS

I hate him!

STRANGER

You could stand up to him.

CHRIS

Who the hell even are you? Why are you lurking in my brain?

STRANGER

Of course, you wouldn't remember. But deep down you know, or I wouldn't be here.

CHRIS

I don't even know your name!

STRANGER

Tuesday, May 9th. The coffee shop on 23rd.

CHRIS

Oh god...

STRANGER

You feel it welling up, don't you? The anxiety, the shame—

CHRIS

The credit card machine wouldn't read my chip—

STRANGER

Four. Tries.

CHRIS

Oh my god, it took me four tries to finally pay.

STRANGER

I know you heard me—

CHRIS

(Shudders.)

That sound that will haunt me. Such an impatient sigh.

STRANGER

And then?

CHRIS

And then you...shifted your weight. And that weight presses down on my chest on sleepless nights.

STRANGER

I was three minutes late to pick up my kids from soccer.

CHRIS

I kept a mother from her children.

STRANGER

How are you this incompetent? You are—

CHRIS

Such a waste of space! God, why am I like this? I can't do my job—

STRANGER

Can't order a coffee—

CHRIS

Can't tell a girl I like her—

STRANGER

And now you're self pitying. Ugh. The worst. Sit down and think about how horrible you are.

(CHRIS collapses into her chair.)

I can't take another second of this sorry sight. My minivan awaits.

STRANGER exits.

CHRIS

Stupid, stupid, stupid—useless.

MOM enters and crosses towards her, looking over her desk.

MOM

God, your desk is a pigsty.

(Beat.)

I just don't understand why you're so hard on yourself.

(CHRIS ignores her and stares at her computer intently. MOM looks over her shoulder.)

Are you still obsessed that actress—what's her name? Ellen—

CHRIS

Helen.

MOM

If she's such an idol for you, why don't you write her a letter?

CHRIS

Oh my god, mom, no.

MOM

Wasn't she on that one show—with the aliens—or was it robots? I watched tons of it when I was pregnant with you. It was awful. Way too violent. You know she's like my age with a husband and kids—

CHRIS

Yes, thank you, mom.

HELEN enters. MOM sees her.

MOM

I'm always here if you need me. I'm always here.

MOM gives CHRIS a kiss on the forehead and exits. HELEN looks over CHRIS' shoulder at the computer.

HELEN

Is that my Instagram? You know I haven't updated it in six months.

CHRIS

But maybe today is the day you do.

HELEN

Oh, wow, you are really far back in that. I can't even remember what I posted.

CHRIS

How do you do it all?

HELEN

One day at a time.

CHRIS

How do you look like that?

HELEN

I woke up like this!

CHRIS

Can I touch you?

HELEN

In here, you can do whatever you like. I can be supportive, I can be hot, I can be strict. Whatever you need.

CHRIS

I don't know what I need.

HELEN

Imagine you're me.

CHRIS

I do all the time.

HELEN

I know.

CHRIS

These shoes reminded me of you. And when I do my hair like this, it's kinda like yours.

HELEN

Very close.

CHRIS

Why can't I be more like you? Walk with that confidence—oh, you're lit from within! And your life—you have a career you love, a person you love, kids—why can't I have all that?

HELEN

Oh, but you can!

CHRIS

I try your life on, and it's all wrong.

HELEN

You need to do something bold.

CHRIS

Bold?

HELEN

How would you like to murder Brad?

CHRIS

Murder?

HELEN

Yes, in your wildest dreams, how would he die?

CHRIS

I'd push him off the roof.

HELEN

Go on.

CHRIS

Then run him over with my car.

HELEN

Yes, that's so vivid—

CHRIS

I would bury him alive, then dig him up, drown him until he was on the cusp of death, then shoot him through the kneecaps, poison him, stab him seventy four times, have him drawn and quartered, feed his body to wolves, and put his head on a spike outside my office.

HELEN

That's...thorough.

CHRIS crumples.

CHRIS

Oh, gosh, I can't murder someone. He's just a person too. Maybe he feels like an imposter just as much as the rest of us. I'm sure deep down he's just as wildly insecure. Maybe his mother didn't love him enough. Maybe she loved him too much.

HELEN

That's a lot of empathy for a walking microaggression.

CHRIS

I just feel it all constantly so much. Do you ever feel like a human sized open sore walking around a very pointy, unkind world?

HELEN

If you think I do, then I do.

CHRIS

Tell me something personal.

HELEN

Personal?

CHRIS

Yeah, like have you ever run out of quarters for a load of laundry halfway through and your clothes are left sopping wet? Have you left dishes in the sink for weeks on end? Have you ever doubted every move you make every day to the point where you wonder why you're even here?

HELEN

Weeks? Really?

CHRIS

You have to be human too, right?

(Quiet.)

Right?

HELEN

In your mind, I'm not.

CHRIS

What if I give you permission to be?

HELEN

All I could say then is—of course. Of course I have bad days. Days where I hate my job. Of course my husband and I fight. Of course, my kids are little shits some days, and there's laundry to do and dinner to make, and I feel old or unattractive or worthless. I can't give you the specifics, though, little one. Because it's my life—I'm a star in a firmament half a world away from you. And you are here, in your life. And from where I stand, you seem an intelligent, empathetic, imaginative young woman. Let me go, and go find your own feet.

THERAPIST and MOM have entered during the speech.

THERAPIST

That's what I've been fucking saying.

HELEN

You can't imagine your perfect life. You just have to go stumble around and learn.

MOM

You miss 100% of the shots you don't take.

CHRIS

Not really feeling the sports metaphor, mom.

STRANGER enters.

STRANGER

You all have high hopes for a girl who listens to the voices in her head.

CHRIS

No.

STRANGER

Why the menagerie up here? Did you know there are people who don't even have inner monologues? Much less one, two—god, I can't even count that high—

CHRIS

Stop it.

STRANGER

You'll just let anyone walk in here and control you. It's truly pathetic—

CHRIS

It's you who's pathetic.

STRANGER

What did you say to me?

CHRIS

I said...the door is over there.

STRANGER

You are such a hot mess.

CHRIS

So what if I am? In fact, I'm so much of a mess, you don't even know! Do you know the last time I got the oil changed in my car? I don't. Did I say "and you too" to the waitress last week when she said "enjoy your meal?" Very much so. Did I cry about it? Also yes. Do I cry when a perfect ray of light streams through the window and everything is still and perfect, just for a moment? Of course. Wouldn't you? No, I guess not. So maybe a look can sting me and a word can wound. But it goes both ways. I see the world in technicolor. My imagination created this! Hell, it created you! It created every weird impulse I have, and I love it! I love being me. And I don't care what you think about that. So, leave.

STRANGER starts to exit.

STRANGER

You know I'll always be in here somewhere.

STRANGER exits. CHRIS exhales loudly.

CHRIS

Holy shit.

THERAPIST

Now, that is what I call a breakthrough.

HELEN

You do have a vivid imagination.

MOM

You should take your car into the mechanic.

CHRIS

Mom, I-

KATE enters.

KATE

Hi.

CHRIS

Howdy, partner.

(She turns away.)

Shit.

KATE

Brad was just in my office.

CHRIS

That son of a bitch.

(She claps her hands over her mouth.)

I meant...

KATE

God, he's awful, isn't he?

CHRIS

Why is he like that?

KATE

Did he ask you about dates for the fundraiser?

CHRIS

None of them work—

KATE

And can you believe he—

KATE

Emailed the partners before the team!

CHRIS

Emailed the partners before the team!

They laugh and/or let out cries of frustration.

CHRIS

Sorry, I didn't mean to be so petty right off the bat.

KATE

Don't apologize. I like being petty with you.

CHRIS

Do you want to get coffee with me?

KATE

Like after work?

CHRIS

I know a cute place on 23rd.

KATE

Is this like...

CHRIS

Like a date.

KATE

Yes, definitely yes.

CHRIS

I get off at five.

KATE

Perfect.

CHRIS

I've got so much dirt on Brad. We can brainstorm our revenge.

KATE

Or just keep living our lives.

CHRIS

Oh yeah, that too.

KATE starts to exit. She turns back.

KATE

Your hair looks really cute like that. See you at 5pm. Our time.

She exits.

THERAPIST

How are you feeling—

CHRIS

No, not right now. I have to call someone.

(They slowly fall back and exit, as CHRIS takes out her cellphone and makes a call.)

Hi, Mom. Guess what?

Lights out.