**Hi, Brain**

*A play about learning how to talk to yourself.*

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Estimated Run Time: ~75 minutes

**Characters**

Alice: a queer woman in her mid-twenties; she is honestly doing her best, but struggles with anxiety and self-doubt; she talks quickly and bubbles over into run-on sentences sometimes

Brian: a man in his mid-twenties; the hallucinatory manifestation of Alice’s brain/anxiety; he genuinely wants the best for Alice but seems to go about it in the wrong way

Val: a woman in her mid-thirties; Alice’s boss; she is older and has more authority but not so old that she can’t relate to her younger colleagues; she is harsh but well-intentioned; Alice seeks her approval

Minnie: a woman in her mid-twenties; Alice’s coworker and best friend; she is cheerful and optimistic

Doc: mid-thirties, unspecified gender; Alice’s therapist; he/she/they take a friendly and sarcastic tone with Alice in order to relate to her

**Settings**

Alice’s apartment: Alice lives alone, her apartment reflects her personality and internal struggle

The Lab: really an office, there’s mention of scientific happenings but the women work at desks

Doc’s office: a place where Alice can tune out Brian and really focus on her side of the story

**SCENE 1**

*It’s dark. We hear Brian from offstage.*

BRIAN:

Sleep is for people who have their life together, Alice.

*Lights up on Alice’s empty apartment living room. It’s tidy but a little chaotic. There are lots of calendars, to-do lists, and colorful sticky notes on the walls. There is a plant, his name is Marvin and he is important. There’s a small couch, a bookcase, a coffee table, and various knick-knacks. Alice enters, in pajamas.*

ALICE:

Good morning, Marvin.

*Alice looks to Marvin for a response but he does not react, as he is a plant*.

ALICE:

I see, still a plant. That’s cool. Can’t sleep, talk to plants...completely and totally normal.

*Alice checks one of her calendars and marks off the day.*

ALICE:

It’s after midnight, close enough.

*Alice waters Marvin.*

ALICE:

So what do you want to do, Marvin? Work? Might as well do something.

*Alice picks up a journal/notebook/textbook and begins to read it, makes notes.*

ALICE:

Wouldn’t it be really cool if I could do work when I’m supposed to? … Sleep when I’m supposed to? Crazy idea…

*Alice works a bit more, then puts the book down.*

ALICE:

God, can’t focus. Exhausted. Can’t sleep… [*jokingly*] It’s absolute chaos, Marvin. Anarchy! Just throw the calendar to the wind!

*Alice turns to address her many calendars.*

ALICE:

You know I’d never do that. If I forgot something then the world would *really* be over.

*Alice notices a ball of yarn and some needles, picks them up.*

ALICE:

Hmmm, maybe I should knit, I haven’t done this in forever. Minnie would like this color, too, it’s all bright and cheery. I could make her a scarf. Like a “wow you’re so cool and pretty and your optimism reminds me there’s joy in the world and I’m so glad we’re...friends...so….here’s a scarf” scarf.

*Pause*

ALICE:

Ugh, yes, Marvin, I know I’m pathetic. Who needs love….or sleep… or sanity?

*Alice puts down the knitting and picks back up the neuroscience work*, *works for a bit.*

ALICE:

Ya know what I do need? Coffee! At this hour? Why the hell not?

*Alice* *makes herself a cup of coffee then settles back into her work on her couch/chair. She works for a bit before she nods off to sleep there. Time passes.* *Alarm buzzes/clock sound. Alice stirs from sleep.*

ALICE:

Ack, God what time is it?

*Alice* *notices the time and also her coffee.*

ALICE:

And I’m late. Ooh coffee, good call, Alice [*she takes a big gulp, spits it back out*]...shitty coffee.

*Alice exits.*

**SCENE 2**

*Doc’s office: comfy chairs, things on bookshelves for Alice to walk around and play with while she’s talking.*

DOC:

Nice to meet you, Alice.

ALICE:

Given the circumstances.

DOC:

Everybody starts somewhere.

ALICE:

So do we just...dive right in then?

DOC:

Sure, start at the beginning.

ALICE:

Actually, I’d really rather with the pleasantries.

DOC:

So, good morning?

ALICE:

Yeah… like a...Hi Doc, how’re you today? I’m great. Thanks for asking. I love… the idea… of therapy.

DOC:

Except, you’re not great.

ALICE:

No, not really.

DOC:

And so we’re talking.

ALICE:

Talking we are.

DOC:

So what brings you here, the beginning?

ALICE:

Well, there’s some disagreement about the beginning, but 14 billion-ish years ago this thing called the Big Bang happened and basically—

DOC:

Confronting yourself can be hard, but you need to take this seriously, Alice.

ALICE:

I am, I’m just also coping...with humor.

DOC:

Your life isn’t a joke.

ALICE:

Maybe it is — not a funny one, though.

DOC:

Alice…

ALICE:

I know, I know…

DOC:

The beginning then.

ALICE:

I think there’s still some disagreement about the beginning? I don’t know, when did I start going crazy?

DOC:

You’re not crazy.

ALICE:

Well I’m seeing a shrink.

DOC:

Feeling bad, seeing a doctor, sounds...reasonable.

ALICE:

Ok, *I’m* not crazy, but my brain is…sometimes...

DOC:

Go on…

ALICE:

Yeah, it does stupid stuff like think the world is going to end if I forget a deadline or forget to water my plant or salt my pasta twice because I was so busy worrying that I forgot I did it the first time.

DOC:

People forget things all the time; you shouldn’t be so hard on yourself.

ALICE:

It’s not a big deal. I’ve always been hard on myself.

DOC:

Try starting with that then, the “hard on yourself”.

ALICE:

I’ve always been hard on myself… because someone had to be?

DOC:

Why did someone have to be?

ALICE:

I don’t know. I don’t know who told me… if my parents told me… if I told me… but it’s not enough to meet expectations, you need to exceed them. Except the only way to do that is to have expectations of yourself that are higher than anything anyone else could possibly put on you.

DOC:

Where do these expectations come from?

ALICE:

From myself, and of course from everyone else, so from everywhere I guess?

DOC:

What sorts of expectations?

ALICE:

The obvious ones, like parents telling you that you ought to be a doctor because when you were eight you won a participation medal in a science fair and apparently that was “exceptional” or strangers telling you to smile more because wouldn’t it be nice if a sweet little thing like you smiled more. But also the ones people don’t think they’re saying but they’re actually most definitely saying.

DOC:

The what?

ALICE:

The “oh it’s so wonderful how you’re in a good mood all the time” and the “glad you’re such a team player”...the things that sound like compliments but actually mean “this behavior is good; If you don’t act like this then you’ll just be a disappointment”.

DOC:

Do you really think they mean that?

ALICE:

What if I’m not in a good mood one day and then suddenly I’m not so wonderful anymore?

DOC:

Does it matter what other people think of you?

ALICE:

Well of course, if other people don’t like you then you’ll be alone.

DOC:

Does the idea of being alone make you upset?

ALICE:

Absolutely, can you imagine how terrible it would be to be stuck with just me?

DOC:

Tell me more about that.

ALICE:

You know, I would… but that’s not what we’re here to talk about.

DOC:

But Alice, we—

ALICE:

I want to talk about why I can’t focus and why I can’t sleep and what I can do about that because I really need to work.

DOC:

Work isn’t everything, Alice–

ALICE:

[*sarcastically*] I’m sure my boss would love to hear that.

DOC:

–and, frankly, there’s no quick fix. I think your current problems are rooted in something deeper that needs to be addressed.

ALICE:

And I’ll be super receptive to addressing whatever that is once my work is in a good place, and that would happen a lot faster if I could just focus.

DOC:

It doesn’t work like that.

*Pause*

ALICE:

There’s nothing to talk about.

DOC:

Really? Nothing? I don’t believe you came to therapy just to sit in silence.

ALICE:

No, I just… I’m not here to talk about my personal life.

DOC:

But you see, the whole point of therapy is a uniquely personal endeavor.

ALICE:

I don’t have time to deal with problems of the past. My problem is that I need to focus on my work and not disappoint my boss... and maybe get some sleep, but mostly the work part.

DOC:

If we were going to ignore your past, not that we are, sleep should definitely be the first thing on that list of yours.

ALICE:

Ok, but seriously my job—

DOC:

You’re a person, Alice. A human being, not some work machine that needs fixing.

ALICE:

Right about now I feel like a pretty worthless excuse for a human being… like I’m trying to do something and be something that matters and my stupid brain keeps getting in the way.

DOC:

Do tell.

ALICE:

I want to be a good person. I want to be good at my job… I know that I could be... I’m trying really hard to focus and get everything done. But instead of helping me, my brain won’t shut up about the ten million things I’m supposed to be worrying about.

DOC:

Do you dissociate yourself and your brain often?

ALICE:

Only when it’s being stupid.

*Pause. Doc let’s Alice come to it.*

ALICE:

...yes.

DOC:

[*long exhale*] Damn I would love to get into that, but we’re at time. We’ll circle back, promise me.

ALICE:

I promise I’ll consider circling back to that.

DOC:

That’ll do. [*grabs workbooks off a shelf*] Take these, try to do the first few activities.

ALICE:

Seriously?

DOC:

Humor me. You like humor. See you next week.

*Alice takes the books, Doc shows her to the door and closes it behind her.*

**SCENE 3**

*The lab/office where Alice works. She’s a neuroscientist, but most of the stuff she does is desk work. Her desk is a scattered mess covered in half-sensical reminders. Minnie, her best friend, is already in the office. Her desk is cheerful, neat and orderly. Val, their boss, is also already at her desk. Val’s desk is tidy but not lively like Minnie’s. Alice is late, so she enters the scene trying to sneak to her desk.*

MINNIE:

Mornin’, sunshine.

ALICE:

Yeah, sure.

MINNIE:

You ok?

ALICE:

You think she’s gonna say it?

MINNIE:

Nope, didn’t notice.

ALICE:

You’re sure?

MINNIE:

You’re very sneaky.

VAL:

Not sneaky enough, I’d say.

ALICE:

I’m sorry!

*Alice and Minnie have a conversation while they settle into their work.*

MINNIE:

So I might’ve lied.

ALICE:

Thanks.

MINNIE:

Think of it this way, you’re consistent.

ALICE:

Sure…

MINNIE:

Old reliable.

ALICE:

Not funny!

MINNIE:

You’ll be late to your own funeral, which I think means you get to live longer.

ALICE:

Good, I need the extra time.

MINNIE:

To do what?

ALICE:

Everything.

MINNIE:

Time’s not the only thing keeping you from that.

ALICE:

Well, I’m sure as hell gonna try.

MINNIE:

You’re stubborn.

ALICE:

You’re prompt.

MINNIE:

You say that like it’s a bad thing.

ALICE:

No? I thought we were dishing compliments.

VAL:

Alice, can we talk?

*Val pulls Alice aside*.

ALICE:

I know I’m so sorry I was late...again...I’ve been having some trouble sleeping but...well...that’s not your problem...but to say…I’m working on it, and—

VAL:

I don’t really care, Alice.

ALICE:

Oh...what?

VAL:

Are you feeling alright?

ALICE:

Umm… yes… well, honestly, a little off… but I’m working on it and it’s no excuse—

VAL:

[*shushes her*] Look, I’m worried about you, Alice.

ALICE:

Because I’m always late?

VAL:

No, shut up about that I don’t care about you being late. I’d like it if you were actually here when you’re supposed to be, but you always stay late so what does it really matter?

ALICE:

I don’t think I understand.

VAL:

God, I get that you’re a hard worker, Alice, but you seem tired and spaced out all the time. I just wish you would bring more to the table, because I believe you’re capable.

ALICE:

Oh! I can take on more hours if that’s what this is about—

VAL:

Screw the timekeeping. I’m asking about your career, about what drives you as a scientist and a person. Because to me, it seems like it doesn’t matter to you if you’re working here or anywhere else.

ALICE:

I promise you I love working here.

VAL:

Then what is it? What sort of thing will get you excited about work? What do you want to work on, Alice?

ALICE:

If there’s a project that needs particular help I would love to work on it.

VAL:

That’s not what I’m asking. What do you *want*?

ALICE:

To be a strong team player.

VAL:

God damn it, Alice. You have original ideas, right?

ALICE:

Absolutely.

VAL:

Good, I thought I hired a scientist when I brought you on.

ALICE:

You most certainly did.

VAL:

You need to start proving it. I want a proposal for an independent project, from you. I know you can work hard, but I need to see that ambition focused on something.

ALICE:

And you will have it. When do you want it by?

VAL:

By the next funding cycle...which is more than enough time, even for you.

ALICE:

Got it.

VAL:

And run assist on my ferret project while you’re at it.

ALICE:

Of course.

VAL:

...so go. They’re due for a trial.

*Alice exits. Val talks to Minnie.*

VAL:

So you really think she can do this?

MINNIE:

Wholeheartedly.

VAL:

I hope your friendship isn’t clouding your judgement.

MINNIE:

She’s got more in her, I know it. She’s the sharpest person… focused, detail-oriented, ambitious… she’s just plain good.

VAL:

So you keep telling me.

MINNIE:

Trust me, she just needs a little push. I am an excellent judge of character, you know.

VAL:

You better not be wrong…

MINNIE:

Or else my job is on the line too?

VAL:

Of course not… It’s just that I like having her around… so she can’t blow this.

*Minnie laughs. Lights fade out.*

**SCENE 4**

*Doc’s Office. Alice and Doc are already there.*

DOC:

How do you feel about the weather?

ALICE:

Close.

DOC:

...to the weather?

ALICE:

Try *Hi, how’re you today?*

DOC:

I’m glad this morning’s fog cleared up.

ALICE:

Delightful.

DOC:

It won’t be mist.

*Pause*

DOC:

You like humor.

ALICE:

[*jokingly*] You sure got me.

DOC:

In all seriousness, how have you been since we last met?

ALICE:

It doesn’t really matter.

DOC:

Still stuck up in work?

ALICE:

Even worse than before!

DOC:

Unbelievable.

ALICE:

No, really. So, obviously I know I’m not working hard enough...is anyone really...but then I think ya know as long as I’m a team player and really trying everything’s fine. Except it’s not! It’s worse than I thought because I’m not being “ambitious enough” and have to have passions...ridiculous.

DOC:

What’s so wrong about passion?

ALICE:

Who cares if I have a passion as long as I can work?

DOC:

I care, and it sounds like your boss does...because you’re a person...not a…

ALICE:

...machine. I get it.

DOC:

We’ll come back to this.

ALICE:

Sure we will. What’s the point of this anyway?

DOC:

You tell me.

ALICE:

No...the getting to know me, making jokes or whatever to trick me into thinking you “get” me. Isn’t your job to just fix me and be on with it?

DOC:

I guess we could cut to the chase, but let’s not pretend that’ll work for you.

ALICE:

Enlighten me.

DOC:

Look, you have legitimate problems, Alice. That’s ok, well not *okay* per se, it definitely sucks and I’m not trying to say it doesn’t, but what I am trying to say is that it is perfectly valid for you to have these kinds of problems, but me telling you that isn’t going to make you believe it.

ALICE:

I know something’s wrong, that’s why I’m here.

DOC:

Yes, you’re here. You’re here and you talk about “fixing you” and productivity and this toxic capitalist mindset you’ve got drilled into you and not about how you’re feeling. You want treatment for symptoms and not the cause.

ALICE:

I told you, the cause doesn’t matter.

DOC:

Yep.

ALICE:

So what?

DOC:

So let’s be friends, let’s have a banter, every once in a while you actually tell me something real about your life.

ALICE:

And that’ll work?

DOC:

A hell of a lot more than whatever’s in that workbook you’re not going to open.

ALICE:

You have no faith in me.

DOC:

That is where you’re wrong. I truly believe you can turn your life around, Alice.

ALICE:

And it starts with bad jokes about the weather?

DOC:

It starts with being honest.

*Pause*

DOC:

Why are you really here, Alice?

ALICE:

I already told you—

DOC:

I don’t need to hear it, you do.

ALICE:

I don’t know if I’m ready yet.

*A clock strikes the hour.*

ALICE:

And on that note, I’m late for work.

*Alice begins to run out.*

DOC:

Hey, wait though.

*Alice turns back to Doc.*

DOC:

In all seriousness, I think it would help you to think about why you’re feeling the way you are. It will be hard, but we can’t get to working through what’s wrong without it… and it’s okay if you aren’t up for that yet… I’ll be here to help the entire way.

ALICE:

[*deep breath, pause, sincerely*] Thank you.

*Alice leaves. Lights fade out.*

**SCENE 5**

*Alice runs into an already bustling neuroscience lab. Her lab coat is on inside out.*

MINNIE:

Look who’s gracing us with her presence this fine morning.

VAL:

At least bring us coffee next time.

ALICE:

Sorry, I had a meeting that ran long, lost track of time.

MINNIE:

Oooh what kind of meeting?

ALICE:

It’s personal.

MINNIE:

Sure. You’re not replacing me are you?

ALICE:

No, actually. Don’t worry about it.

MINNIE:

As long as there are no new best friends lurking around. I’ll fight them… for your honor.

ALICE:

The only thing you ought to fight is my schedule.

MINNIE:

You’d think for someone who studies brains yours would be a little less all over the place.

ALICE:

Please, everything’s under control.

MINNIE:

Your coat’s inside out.

ALICE:

[*adorably flustered*] Damn it.

MINNIE:

[*laughs*] Old reliable...

ALICE:

[*fixing her coat and settling in at her own desk, mumbling to herself*] Just fantastic.

VAL:

[*dropping a large stack of papers on Alice’s desk*] The ferrets finished their trials, so I need you to annotate the recordings.

ALICE:

Great, what am I looking for?

VAL:

Every time a cell talks, mark it.

ALICE:

Every single cell?

VAL:

Only the neurons really.

ALICE:

The other cells have to be communicating with the neurons, don’t they?

VAL:

They don’t seem to be.

ALICE:

How are they all working together then?

VAL:

Maybe they’re not.

ALICE:

Then why are they there?

VAL:

That isn’t really within the scope of this project.

ALICE:

It just seems like the brain uses too much energy to be worthwhile to waste on things just taking up space. Maybe we could sit down and brainstorm?

VAL:

I’m a bit busy, but I think you should run with it independently. Maybe get something written up.

ALICE:

Yes, ma’am.

*Val walks away, Alice starts marking, Minnie leans over from her desk to talk to Alice.*

MINNIE:

So why do you think the other cells are there? The fun ones like the astrocytes?

ALICE:

The fun ones?

MINNIE:

Yeah, they’re prettier than the other ones...and more mysterious...I bet they have more fun.

ALICE:

Seems like they’re quiet and boring.

MINNIE:

Quiet almost never means boring.

ALICE:

You talk about them like they’re people.

MINNIE:

And what makes people so unique and special? I bet everything in it’s own way is just like us.

ALICE:

Whatever… I’m getting distracted. I need to focus on my actual work

MINNIE:

Since when do you do your job?

ALICE:

What are you talking about?

MINNIE:

If you did your job at a fraction of the level you’re capable of then you’d be spearheading your own crazy project instead of sorting through Val’s secondhand data looking for nothing.

ALICE:

I’m looking for electrical signaling.

MINNIE:

Do you actually care? You’re always spacing out, thinking about something else.

ALICE:

Whatever. It’s not that I don’t try to work, it’s just hard to focus sometimes.

MINNIE:

Do you ever think it’s hard to focus because you’re not doing exciting work, like an independent project? Something you’re passionate about?

ALICE:

I think it’s something else entirely.

MINNIE:

[*jokingly*] Oh, then maybe *I’m* the one distracting you.

ALICE:

[*flustered, head pops up from looking at the papers*] What?!

MINNIE:

What?

VAL:

Alice!

ALICE:

What?!

VAL:

Is there a problem?

ALICE:

What… no… sorry… yes? What can I do for you?

VAL:

Do me a favor and clean the ferret cages today, consider it a break between the data sets.

ALICE:

Absolutely, sure.

MINNIE:

What do you think we’re doing with these ferrets?

ALICE:

Implanting little windows in their brains so we can use tags and lasers to see how cells communicate in action....as if you don’t already know that.

MINNIE:

No no no, of course I know that shit. I’m asking the fun questions. What do you think we’re doing with their *lives*?

ALICE:

Minnie, they’re ferrets.

MINNIE:

Do you think they have friends? Enemies? Frenemies? FUR-enemies?

ALICE:

You’re kidding.

MINNIE:

What kind of drama do you think happens at our little ferret hotel? I bet it’s better than daytime television.

ALICE:

First the astrocytes are people and now so are the ferrets?

MINNIE:

And how’s Marvin doing these days?

ALICE:

Fair point, carry on.

MINNIE:

Exactly, and the ferrets are better than people because they’re like cute little furry people and they don’t spread your gossip… at least to other people. I like number three the best. You know I wouldn’t even blame him if he tried to bite me now and then, but he’s a good sport.

ALICE:

I can see why he’s grumpy, we just make them stare at screens with flashing bars on them all day. They’re probably bored out of their minds.

MINNIE:

I hope they know they’re part of something big and exciting. The world is going to change because of them and that’s really special.

ALICE:

I hope they don’t actually have more exciting social lives than we do.

MINNIE:

Who needs a social life when you can live vicariously through ferrets?

VAL:

[*from her own desk, probably doesn’t even look up at them*] I need scientists who actually do work.

MINNIE:

[*to Val*] You’re no fun.

*Everyone settles down to work.* *Alice begins talking to herself.*

ALICE:

God, I have to stop being late....

Maybe if I stopped being late Val wouldn’t hate me...she doesn’t hate me... ugh but she’d sure like me more if I got her that proposal...

Proposal that isn’t even finished… isn’t even started… isn’t even… anything...

No wonder Minnie thinks I’m incompetent….

Or unmotivated? What’s worse? Either, or both? Shit, I’m both aren’t I?

I should just send her… an idea… something… maybe not *not* incompetent but not unmotivated… right?

Did I lock my apartment this morning?

Doesn’t matter. Never matters.

...cells… brain space… patterns… brain spaced out… I’m spaced out…

… sent.

VAL:

Alice! Can you come take these? Add it all to your pile.

ALICE:

What? Oh! Yes, absolutely.

*Alice gets up from her desk, takes the new stack of papers from Val, mutters to herself as she walks away.*

ALICE:

Okay so these files…finish the ones from last month…did I water Marvin this morning? It’s Monday, right?...whatever…ferrets…clean the ferrets…oh we’re low on soap…

ALICE:

[*Turns back to Val, isn’t looking where she’s walking*] Who should I ask about—

*Alice trips over the books on the ground beside her desk, drops her papers everywhere, hits her head on her desk.*

**SCENE 6**

*All else fades away; there’s nothing but Alice and this man she’s never seen before. He looks completely normal to her; it could even be called warmly familiar. Alice is still on the ground where she fell.*

ALICE:

God, what in the…ouch agh...

*Brian helps Alice up off the ground.*

ALICE:

...thanks...do I know you?

BRIAN:

Umm… definitely.

ALICE:

You seem familiar.

BRIAN:

More than you know...or really as much as you know.

ALICE:

Cool, well I don’t really have time for this, so... [*gets up and walks away, talking to herself*]...ahhh what was I doing...ferrets...proposal...cleaning...Doc...

BRIAN:

[*blurts out*] I’m your brain!

ALICE:

What? No. That’s…[*Alice starts to realize she’s not in the office*]...where even am I?

BRIAN:

Well…um…unconscious?

ALICE:

And talking to my brain?

BRIAN:

You know you seem really calm… given the circumstances.

ALICE:

This is ridiculous. I have work to do.

*Alice starts walking away again, but Brian stops her.*

BRIAN:

Your favorite color is pink but you don’t tell anyone because you’re afraid they’ll think you’re too feminine and not cut out to be a scientist…

*Alice stops, very confused.*

BRIAN:

...and also because when you were six you went on this irrational vendetta against the color pink because you insisted it wasn’t a real color it was just a lighter shade of red and you’re kind of embarrassed about that but also really stubborn…

*Alice turns back toward him, still confused, a little annoyed that he called her stubborn, although he’s not wrong*

BRIAN:

...and also you’re nervous because like what even is femininity anyway if not a concept driven by the patriarchy? And what even is autonomy anyway? Of course the decisions we make have implications but do we have any say in the matter, really? What are we doing here? What are feelings?

ALICE:

[*walks back toward him*] Ok you can sto--

BRIAN:

...speaking of feelings! You’re feeling some for your best friend Minnie and boy are we confused and worried about that beca—

*Alice claps her hand over Brian’s mouth.*

ALICE:

What the actual—

*Blackout.*

**SCENE 7**

*Alice’s apartment. Brian’s sitting in a chair, waiting for Alice. Alice enters, talking on the phone. She doesn’t notice Brian. She’s just woken up. Perhaps she’s messing around in a kitchen trying to get herself some breakfast, but really she could be doing anything that takes some attention, like checking her calendar or watering her plant, Marvin.*

ALICE:

Calm down, Minnie. I’m totally fine… okay, yes, I was knocked out for like barely a second… okay, longer than a second, but I woke up just fine and the hospital sent me home… yes… of course they ran tests, it’s a real hospital!… trust me, the bills suggest it was in fact a *real* hospital… they sent me home and, barring any weird changes, I’m completely and totally neurologically fine…

*Alice notices Brian and is taken aback.*

ALICE:

…what? nothing’s wrong… don’t be silly… you know what, I gotta go… see you at work… ok bye!

BRIAN:

Mornin’!

ALICE:

WHO THE HELL ARE—

BRIAN:

Your brain! I know weird things, etc. etc. We met yesterday.

ALICE:

THAT WAS REAL?

BRIAN:

Well, um… real’s a strong word… you’re probably putting together that you’re hallucinating a bit.

ALICE:

A bit?

BRIAN:

Yeah, you might want to see that doctor again.

ALICE:

[*Most definitely not listening to Brian and panicking a smidge*, *talking to herself*] So I hit my head at work… now I’m hallucinating. The tests came back fine, so maybe it’s just a stress thing? Like my conscience or whatever… but I can see him? [*to Brian*] What do you want?

BRIAN:

*[confused]* Do I have to want something?

ALICE:

Some mysterious being is coming to me in a vision… This is the part in the movie where you tell me what I’m doing wrong with my life or send me on a quest or some shit.

BRIAN:

I don’t know why I’m here any more than you do.

ALICE:

So no quest?

BRIAN:

No.

ALICE:

Then what are we doing?

BRIAN:

If you don’t know, I don’t know.

ALICE:

That’s stupid.

BRIAN:

I’m literally you.

ALICE:

I’m me.

BRIAN:

Yes, that doesn’t change.

ALICE:

Exactly you can’t be me if I’m me.

BRIAN:

Sure I can, I’m your brain… and your thoughts… you

ALICE:

Me?

BRIAN:

You.

ALICE:

You.

BRIAN:

Yep. Brain.

ALICE:

Ok… hi, Brain?

BRIAN:

Nice to meet you, although we’re already pretty well acquainted.

ALICE:

Ha!... right… can I call you Brian?

BRIAN:

What?

ALICE:

You, me... me talking to you who is also me… it’s all very confusing.

BRIAN:

So… Brian?

ALICE:

Yeah, like Brain, Brian… two words that are basically the same but a little mixed up… like you and I seem to be just a little mixed up… or maybe it’s just me...

BRIAN:

Sure, whatever. Aren’t you a little bit concerned right now?

ALICE:

No, focus, you see it’s kind of like a joke—

BRIAN:

You’re… weird.

ALICE:

It’s funny, ok? Come on! At the very least it’s cute.

BRIAN:

If you have to convince me it’s funny then it’s not funny.

ALICE:

I am convinced. Therefore you are convinced.

BRIAN:

It doesn’t work like that.

ALICE:

Hmph… and I’m the stubborn one.

BRIAN:

[*smugly*] Yes.

ALICE:

[*tries to think of a comeback, but comes up blank*] Whatever. You know, I have been dying to talk to you.

BRIAN:

Interesting.

ALICE:

Yeah, I wanted to tell you to shut. the. hell. up.

BRIAN:

…real mature.

ALICE:

No, like, really. What’s the deal, man? That’s you, right? The “did you water Marvin? Did you lock the apartment? Did you forget that you’re a goddamn disappointment?”

BRIAN:

Well did you?

ALICE:

I don’t care...that’s the kind of shit that calendars and parents are for.

BRIAN:

Ok… and?

ALICE:

And… so… god, we don’t need to think about it.... just, shut up.

BRIAN:

This is really what you’re harping on?

ALICE:

What even are you?

BRIAN:

Well technically—

ALICE:

Wait! If you’re out there does that mean you’re finally out of here [*points to own head*] and I can finally get some peace and quiet?

BRIAN:

Foremost, you should be very concerned that your brain is not in your head. I am very concerned.

ALICE:

Wow it’s almost like I have anxiety and my brain is always unreasonably concerned.

BRIAN:

Ok, if your brain isn’t in your head you’ll literally die, so whatever you think a good reason is—

ALICE:

Great, so you’re in here but also out there, so twice as loud, and also I’m hallucinating. That’s fantastic.

BRIAN:

Yeah... you’re a mess.

ALICE:

[*accusingly*] Whose fault is that?

BRIAN:

[*smugly*] Yours.

ALICE:

Fine. Get back in. Then shut up. Consider our quest done.

BRIAN:

We’re not going on a quest… and I can’t do that.

ALICE:

Can’t or won’t?

BRIAN:

I’m sorry, do you know how I got out?

ALICE:

No. Don’t you?

BRIAN:

Exactly. We already went over this.

ALICE:

What does that even—

BRIAN:

I only know what you know, so we’ll have to figure it out together.

ALICE:

I don’t care, just fix it.

BRIAN:

I do care… And if I could just fix *you*, I would...but I can’t… not alone, I need your help.

ALICE:

So it *is* a quest… but, like, an emotional one.

**SCENE 8**

*Alice and Brian walk into the empty lab space.*

ALICE:

So...ummm...this is work.

BRIAN:

...I know.

ALICE:

Ok, cool, so, be cool, ok?

BRIAN:

Like you know how to be cool.

ALICE:

Ok fuck off, just be quiet and stay out of the way.

BRIAN:

No one else can see me.

ALICE:

Right.

BRIAN:

Yep. You’re crazy.

ALICE:

Ya know you could’ve stayed home.

BRIAN:

Please, you can’t live without me.

ALICE:

Because you’re my brain?

BRIAN:

Exactly.

ALICE:

But like I can live without you *in* me.

BRIAN:

I mean...no…

ALICE:

We’re not doing this again.

*Alice delves into work, organizing things at her desk. Brian keeps talking, they’re not really talking to each other at this point.*

BRIAN:

You said that over breakfast...didn’t stop us in the car…

ALICE:

Nope I got this, I can focus…

BRIAN:

Did you turn the stove off?

ALICE:

Yes...yes?

BRIAN:

And lock the apartment?

ALICE:

It doesn’t matter.

BRIAN:

Of course it does!

ALICE:

What am I going to do about now?

BRIAN:

Someone could break in.

ALICE:

I’m already at work.

BRIAN:

It’d be so easy, just open the damn door because you’re an idiot and left it

unlocked.

ALICE:

Too late to drive all the way back.

BRIAN:

Do people really do that? They must. That’s why you lock houses.

ALICE:

We’ll just have to wait and see. I wonder where Val and Minnie are.

BRIAN:

Can you really not remember?

ALICE:

If I knew, you’d know.

BRIAN:

Still not quite how this works.

ALICE:

Was that interdepartmental lecture today?

BRIAN:

Another thing you can’t seem to remember.

ALICE:

Go do literally anything else.

BRIAN:

I just think—

*Alice shoos Brian away and he goes and gets distracted by things in the office. Alice keeps working. Val and Minnie enter, talking, and also settle in at their desks.*

VAL:

Anyway, have you tried the new coffee shop around the corner?

MINNIE:

Ooh I should, bring a good book or something. I’m more of a tea person, though.

VAL:

Of course you are. Oh, good morning Alice.

ALICE:

Good morning.

BRIAN:

Hi!

*Alice glares at Brian, he teases her.*

MINNIE:

You missed a pretty interesting seminar.

ALICE:

Really?

MINNIE:

Brain mapping!

ALICE:

Umm, what?

MINNIE:

The seminar. People are making maps of cells, like some cells that apparently keep track of location...making maps of maps!

ALICE:

Hope they don’t get lost.

MINNIE:

Funny, but really. Here we are just trying to figure out what the damn thing does. A thing, that is many littler things, that is just one small part of an even bigger thing. Us! Aren’t brains crazy?

ALICE:

Tell me about it.

BRIAN:

Rude.

VAL:

Oh Alice, by the way, I have some feedback on the ideas you sent over last week.

*Alice gets up to grab a piece of paper from Val, marked up.*

ALICE:

Thank you! What did you think?

VAL:

It’s a decent first try. It just, is kind of all over the place...

ALICE:

Oh.

VAL:

That isn’t a bad thing. I want something more fleshed out and up to...the caliber of this lab. So, keep trying.

BRIAN:

Yikes.

MINNIE:

[*to Alice*] She’s a tough nut to crack.

ALICE:

She seems to like you.

MINNIE:

It’s pretty hard not to.

BRIAN:

Don’t we know.

*Alice reacts to Brian, but dismisses him*.

MINNIE:

Really, just go out to coffee with her. You like coffee, she likes coffee. Pick her brain. Break the ice that you two have been sitting on for literal years.

ALICE:

It’s been too long, now it’s just awkward.

MINNIE:

It’s only weird if you make it weird.

ALICE:

What kind of small talk do you even make with your boss?

MINNIE:

Ask about her cat or something.

ALICE:

Her cat?

*Brian has stopped paying attention. He picks up the feedback from Val and starts reading, panicking.*

MINNIE:

Yeah, named Boggle, she loves that cat like you love Marvin.

BRIAN:

Alice.

*Alice is very not listening to Brian and focused on Minnie.*

ALICE:

Boggle?

MINNIE:

Like the board game. Have you really never talked to her...like ever?

BRIAN:

Alice!

ALICE:

Maybe we should have something like a lab game night?

MINNIE:

A what?

ALICE:

What? You and I used to have game nights all the time.

MINNIE:

Exactly we *used to*. Who are you, where is my best friend?

BRIAN:

I know you can hear me!

ALICE:

Now that is just sad, I am and always have been fun.

MINNIE:

It’s just been hiding under all the [*gestures at Alice*] mess?

BRIAN:

Alice!

ALICE:

Yep...so game night? Dumb idea?

MINNIE:

Yeah, give Val a chance to see you’re a whole person and not just…an honestly kind of shitty employee.

ALICE:

Wow, rude.

BRIAN:

Mother of God.

MINNIE:

I’m just saying you’re always late and you don’t talk to the ferrets.

ALICE:

We’re not supposed to talk—

MINNIE:

You know they like the encouragement.

BRIAN:

ALICE!

ALICE:

Yep, you insist, like plants.

MINNIE:

Exactly! And you talk to Marvin… which makes you cool… because even though you’re not a great employee you’re kind of a cool person who likes plants and remembers birthdays and sings along to musicals offkey when you think no one’s listening.

ALICE:

It’d be really cool if you could just forget about that last one.

*Minnie laughs and returns to her work, Alice deals with Brian.*

BRIAN:

FOR GOD’S SAKE, ALICE!

ALICE:

WHAT?

BRIAN:

Look at this feedback, it’s terrible!

ALICE:

[*Taking the paper, looking it over*] What, like harsh? I mean that’s good, there’s always improvements--

BRIAN:

No, like you’re a fucking idiot who submitted absolute trash!

ALICE:

Wow, okay, I doubt it, but okay…

BRIAN:

She tore it apart, you’re a disappointment.

ALICE:

Consider it like I have room for growth.

BRIAN:

Not if you’re not worth spending the time and resources to grow, what if you never get a project through?

ALICE:

Calm down, I’m going to get a project through. Val hired me because she believes in me and my potential.

BRIAN:

Oh my god she’s going to fire you!

ALICE:

What? No, that’s ridiculous.

BRIAN:

She’s going to fire you and you’ll be a failure and your friends will stop talking to you and you won’t have a job so you can’t pay rent and you’ll lose your apartment and your friends and have to go home and and and...

ALICE:

Woah, bring it back--

BRIAN;

Right, you only have one friend.

ALICE:

Uncalled for.

BRIAN:

Why can’t you see how important this is for you?!

ALICE:

Hey! Even if it is, even if all of those terrible things happen, it’s too late. Yeah, it would suck, but I already gave her the proposal and she already made edits and thinks what she does about me. So, what’s going to happen is going to happen so if we calm down right now we’ll be better able to handle whatever’s next.

BRIAN:

You can’t just ignore it! God, Alice, how could you have been so stupid?

ALICE:

Fine, I was stupid.

BRIAN:

And you ruined your whole life! How do we fix it?

ALICE:

By calming down?

BRIAN:

NO!

ALICE:

Look, I’m trying--

BRIAN:

You always say that and yet you never try hard enough.

ALICE:

Okay, but like, there’s not anything I can do at this point…. So, uh, if you’ll just level with me here…

BRIAN:

No, you never fucking listen, you’re so stupid.

ALICE:

You’re not being super reasonable right now...

BRIAN:

You’re being an idiot.

ALICE:

Can you decide if you’re going to be a wreck or a bitch? I can’t deal with both.

*Brian continues muttering and panicking, not listening to Alice at all. Brian goes off in a corner in distress while Alice tries to distract herself by talking to Minnie.*

MINNIE:

Are you feeling alright?

ALICE:

Yep.

MINNIE:

Doesn’t look like it.

ALICE:

What’d you do this weekend?

MINNIE:

Hold that thought.

ALICE:

M’kay?

MINNIE:

Right about now just seems like a great time for a coffee break. What do you think, Val?

VAL:

And there’s that coffee shop around the corner.

ALICE:

And I heard you like cats.

VAL:

… yes… but there won’t be cats at the coffee shop… Alice?

MINNIE:

[*to Alice*] Good try, keep going.

*Alice, Minnie, and Val exit. Brian follows behind, dramatically.*

**SCENE 9**

*Alice enters, followed by Brian. Doc is waiting for them. Brian gets easily distracted and plays with the things in Doc’s office, Alice sits in her chair. Doc can’t see or hear Brian.*

ALICE:

The wildest shit happened, you’re not gonna believe it, Doc

DOC:

[*teasing*] Hi, Alice, how’re you today? I’m great. Thanks for asking.

ALICE:

Very funny.

DOC:

[*laughs*] Ok, what’s the wild shit?

ALICE:

I fell and hit my head and now I’m hallucinating my brain as a man named Brian.

DOC:

[*shocked and concerned*] What?!

BRIAN:

Hi!

ALICE:

I thought it would be funny since like Brain, Brian… y’know he didn’t think it was very funny either, but I stand by it as a quality joke.

BRIAN:

Still not funny.

DOC:

No, the head hitting part…

BRIAN:

Hey, don’t forget about work.

ALICE:

Oh, no big deal, I tripped over my own desk at work like an idiot.

DOC:

Wha—

ALICE:

OH! Speaking of work, don’t let me forget that I have to leave this session early today.

DOC:

Have you seen a doctor?

ALICE:

I’m seeing one right now.

DOC:

There’s more than one kind of doctor.

BRIAN:

Exactly! We should definitely see a doctor. Also work. Also did you remember to water Marvin?

ALICE:

[*to Brian*] I’ll water Marvin later.

DOC:

What? Who’s Marvin? Are you hallucinating more men?

ALICE:

[*waves Brian away. To Doc*] What? No. Marvin’s my plant.

DOC:

Why’d you bring him up now?

ALICE:

I didn’t.

DOC:

Really, please see a doctor...

ALICE:

Who has time for more than one doctor? I barely make time for this one, speaking of which, don’t let me forget!

DOC:

Forget what?

ALICE:

That I have to leave early so I’m not late to work for the millionth day in a row… focus!

DOC:

You focus! Your head--

ALICE:

Is fine...except for the parts that I need to fix… which is why I’m here… at the doctor…

DOC:

[*angrily stutter grumbles*] Ok… Fine...what do you do?

ALICE:

Hm?

DOC:

What’s your job that you need to leave early for?

ALICE:

Oh, I’m a neuroscientist.

DOC:

[*chuckles*] No, seriously, what do you do?

BRIAN:

I know, right?

ALICE:

Really… I study supportive cells in the visual cortex of rodents.

DOC:

Oh, I’m so—

ALICE:

I get why it would be funny though, it’d be awkward if I studied something like cognition, right? [*laughs*]

DOC:

Umm...

*Alice shrugs*. *Brian gets distracted and wanders around the room, playing with the things in Doc’s Office*.

DOC:

Alright, how’d you get started?

ALICE:

With my job?

DOC:

Yep.

ALICE:

Like how anyone starts doing anything? I have the skills and needed a job. Nothing special.

DOC:

This particular job though, what do you like about it?

ALICE:

I’m decent at it, the people are good.

DOC:

Surely you don’t mean that boss you’re afraid of.

ALICE:

Afraid?

DOC:

You seem really anxious about being late, about disappointing her.

ALICE:

Oh. Well, there’s Minnie.

DOC:

And she’s special?

ALICE:

Absolutely. She’s sweet and wonderful and has this kind of amazing infectious optimism. I couldn’t imagine a world without her… my best friend.

DOC:

That’s all?

ALICE:

Shut up.

DOC:

So it’s Minnie then, that’s why you like your job?

ALICE:

Woah, I’d be hurt if you took me for the kind of person who’d stay at a job for a girl who never asked me to.

BRIAN:

Oh but what if she did?

DOC:

[*laughs*] I wouldn’t dare suggest that. Really though, what do you like? Let’s circle back to passions for a second.

ALICE:

Do you ever get bored, Doc?

BRIAN:

Would we stay somewhere for Minnie?

DOC:

Don’t go changing the subject.

BRIAN:

Obviously it’s a test.

ALICE:

I’m not, this time.

DOC:

Not to call you out, but you deflect and run away when anyone gets just a little too close to your feelings.

ALICE:

Yep, I’m a mess, answer the question.

DOC:

Fine, bored of what?

ALICE:

Of your job. Of dealing with silly, stubborn patients like me who don’t read the self-help books.

BRIAN:

Minnie needs someone confident, independent.

DOC:

Sometimes I get frustrated, but mostly sad, watching people struggle...but that’s eclipsed by how grateful I am that they choose to let me in.

ALICE:

So it’s not butterflies and rainbows and your absolute dream job all the time?

BRIAN:

Of course she’d never ask.

DOC:

The fact that it’s real, and has all the good, bad, and terrible parts of life, is what makes it even better than a dream job. Alice, I think you might have such a hard time admitting that you could be passionate about something because you put so much pressure on how good and perfect it has to be for you to risk wanting it. It makes having any feelings at all just too much pressure.

ALICE:

[*jokingly*] God you sound like a shrink.

BRIAN:

She doesn’t love us like that.

DOC:

Wouldn’t you know it, I am one. And even though I don’t love every minute of it, it’s still my passion.

ALICE:

Nah

DOC:

No?

ALICE:

Well like you are a shrink I guess… but, I don’t know, sometimes it feels more like you’re my friend.

DOC:

I can live with that.

ALICE:

Good.

BRIAN:

Why would she?

DOC:

So, you came in here to tell a friend about a hallucination?

ALICE:

God, yes! His name’s Brian.

BRIAN:

Hi!

DOC:

Great, he has a name…

ALICE:

He wasn’t super receptive to it, but he’ll deal.

BRIAN:

It’s not funny.

DOC:

Who is he?

ALICE:

He’s my brain… or he said so, and his evidence was compelling, and he says things I’d imagine my brain would say, so he’s definitely probably my brain.

DOC:

This doesn’t concern you at all?

BRIAN:

Exactly!

ALICE:

He said the same thing!

DOC:

He’s concerned?

ALICE:

He’s always concerned. I told you, my brain is stupid and annoying like that.

BRIAN:

Hey, I resent that!

DOC:

Right...how do you feel now that he’s on the outside?

ALICE:

The same? Like he’s still won’t shut up, but now I can see him...maybe...so, actually things are kind of better?

DOC:

Better?

ALICE:

All the bad and annoying is just a little bit...removed. Like, he is me, except he isn’t me...y’know?

DOC:

No.

ALICE:

Like before he was talking and I was talking and it was all in my head and it was so loud and it drove me crazy. He still talks, and I still talk, and it’s still loud... just less in my head.

DOC:

But, like, still in your head though.

ALICE:

Yeah.

DOC:

What are you two talking about?

ALICE:

It isn’t even anything important. Just him being annoying and me talking him down, or trying to keep on despite him. I couldn’t make myself dinner last night without him asking if I’d added salt yet every ten seconds. Like maybe if he focused less on being stressed he would pay attention to what I’m actually doing.

BRIAN:

It was definitely too salty...and a little dry...speaking of dry, don’t forget to water Marvin tonight. Also don’t forget we have to leave early....

ALICE:

[*to Brian*] Shut up.

DOC:

Interesting.

ALICE:

What?

DOC:

That just sounds like something you would do.

ALICE:

It is. He’s me. Keep up.

DOC:

But you’re critical of him? Like you can clearly see what he’s doing isn’t productive?

ALICE:

Why wouldn’t I be?

DOC:

Why does it make more sense to be critical of him than it makes to be critical of yourself?

ALICE:

I am critical of myself, that’s the point. It’s just… I have this part that is me, and then there’s this part that is him and he’s the stupid one.

BRIAN:

You mean we’re the stupid one.

ALICE:

Like, I’d love to not be stressed and scared and yelling about pasta...so if he wants to get out and do that instead then that’s great I guess.

DOC:

But he is you?

ALICE:

...yes. [*Beat.*] But that’s confusing, so I call him Brian.

DOC:

...ok, Alice.

ALICE:

You sound unconvinced.

DOC:

Yeah… have you told Minnie about… this?

ALICE:

Of course not.

DOC:

She’s your best friend, you can’t confide in her?

ALICE:

It’d be too much.

DOC:

I’d like to get into that...but you’re going to be late for work.

BRIAN:

I knew you would forget about that!

ALICE:

God, I didn’t forget… whatever… see you next week, Doc.

DOC:

We’re going to come back to this.

*Alice rushes out, followed by Brian.*

DOC:

Wow… neuroscientist.

**SCENE 10**

*Alice and Brian rush into work, on time. Val is there. There are roses on Minnie’s desk. Every time Brian speaks, Alice stops working (regardless of whether or not she directly interacts with him). Brian plays with things in the background.*

ALICE:

Mornin’ sunshines!

VAL:

Well look at that.

ALICE:

I’m on time? On this beautiful day?

VAL:

You and Minnie must be taking turns.

ALICE:

Hm? [*notices Minnie’s empty desk*] Oh, guess so. How’re you this morning, Val?

BRIAN:

Where’s Minnie? I hope she’s ok, she’s never late.

VAL:

I’m alright. A bit stuck.

BRIAN:

Are those flowers?

ALICE:

You get stuck too?

BRIAN:

Who brought her flowers?

VAL:

Everyone gets stuck.

BRIAN:

She hasn’t mentioned anyone special. Has she?

ALICE:

Of course.

*Alice settles into work, but Val draws her back.*

VAL:

Alice?

ALICE:

Yeah?

BRIAN:

She must’ve mentioned someone. Have we not been listening?

VAL:

I hope you don’t think I expect you to be perfect.

ALICE:

I just don’t know how to be sure I’m doing the right thing.

BRIAN:

That doesn’t seem like a thing Minnie would keep to herself…

VAL:

There isn’t a right thing.

BRIAN:

We must not have been listening...

ALICE:

Then what are any of us doing here?

VAL:

Finding the things that we’ll never give up on, no matter how many times we get stuck.

ALICE:

And they matter for the sake of mattering to us?

BRIAN:

Alice, are you listening?

VAL:

You’ll find it along the way.

BRIAN:

Shit.

ALICE:

So you just… start?

VAL:

Somewhere. Anywhere. Wherever you’re even just a little bit interested.

ALICE:

Doesn’t sound like much of a reason.

VAL:

You don’t need anyone else to tell you you’re enough. Your life isn’t about doing the things that other people care about...think, it’s not like you expect people to justify themselves to you.

ALICE:

Right.

VAL:

Being a little stuck has you in very good company, Alice.

ALICE:

Yes, ma’am. [*sits down at her desk, begins quietly marking papers*]

BRIAN:

Hey!

ALICE:

What?

BRIAN:

That’s all sweet and great and bullshit but will you please listen to me?

ALICE:

What do you want?

BRIAN:

WHERE IS MINNIE AND WHO BOUGHT HER FLOWERS?

ALICE:

Why do you care?

BRIAN:

Well… she’s our friend.

ALICE:

Ok, and?

BRIAN:

So why aren’t you worried? What if she’s dead?

MINNIE:

[*walks in*] What a morning!

ALICE:

See, you’re insane.

BRIAN:

Ok but what about the flowers?!

ALICE:

Just shut up.

BRIAN:

But—

ALICE:

[*to Minnie*] How’re you this morning?

MINNIE:

Fantastic!

ALICE:

[*sarcastically*] It’s a great day to have a great day.

MINNIE:

A marvelous day indeed! [*notices flowers, becomes even more smitten*]

ALICE:

Goodness...what’s gotten into you?

MINNIE:

I went on a date last night!

ALICE:

What?!

BRIAN:

No.

MINNIE:

With John from the Fischer lab!

VAL:

Oh, from the seminar? He’s cute.

*Minnie, Alice, and Brian all turn to her, confused.*

VAL:

I’m not deaf… or blind.

MINNIE:

He’s so handsome! And the sweetest! And his work is so interesting!

BRIAN:

Of course…

ALICE:

What does he do?

MINNIE:

He studies place cells in the rat hippocampus.

ALICE:

Place cells?

MINNIE:

They’re these specialized pyramidal cells that are attuned to specific locations in space. They’re beautiful, just like astrocytes!

ALICE:

Pyramidal cells look nothing like astrocytes.

MINNIE:

Christmas lights and roses, Alice.

BRIAN:

What?

ALICE:

If we already know what the place cells do then what’s he investigating?

MINNIE:

You dwell too much on what we already “know,” as if there’s nothing more to learn from information we already have.

ALICE:

If there’s more information, then it’s by definition something we don’t have yet.

MINNIE:

Sweetheart, there’s always more.

BRIAN:

Sweetheart?

MINNIE:

Anyways, he’s putting rats in mazes and recording where different place cells fire, correlating specific cells to specific locations.

ALICE:

How precise are the locations?

MINNIE:

Unbelievably precise!

ALICE:

There’s no way there’re enough cells for every place we’ve ever been to have its own special cell.

MINNIE:

So he’s putting the rats in new mazes and seeing if old cells learn new tricks.

ALICE:

And forget their old tricks?

MINNIE:

That doesn’t seem to be the case.

ALICE:

What? How does he know? Has he accounted for--

MINNIE:

The work is in progress, Alice.

ALICE:

You’re right, that’s very exciting. [*resumes working at her desk*]

*Alice and Brian have a conversation independently of Val and Minnie. Neither pair acknowledges the other.*

VAL:

What kind of mazes?

BRIAN:

Alice, I don’t feel good about this.

ALICE:

Shut up.

MINNIE:

He’s going back and forth between standard and Morris Water.

VAL:

What’s the issue?

MINNIE:

Traditionally Morris Water Mazes have been used, but we both think those are just so mean.

BRIAN:

What if things get serious with this guy?

MINNIE:

Like they only work because the rats hate water. We should be able to find a way to study the little babies without torturing them.

ALICE:

Why do you care?

VAL:

You’re too sweet for this world, Minnie.

BRIAN:

I don’t have a good feeling about it.

MINNIE:

Awww, he’s really the one who came up with it. He’s thinking of using standard mazes because they’re more reward-based than fear-based.

VAL:

And they seem to be having great success with grid cells.

ALICE:

Look how happy she is.

MINNIE:

Exactly! And they think the grid cells provide most of the entorhinal input to place cells.

BRIAN:

What if we’re not good enough for her anymore?

VAL:

What else are they considering? In the interaction?

ALICE:

It’s not like she’s replacing us.

MINNIE:

It’s incredibly complex! A mix of direction cells, maybe some visual inputs for orienting cues, possibly some proprioception, and who knows what else?

BRIAN:

She already thinks you’re lazy, now she’s spending time with this new amazing guy.

ALICE:

Those are wildly unrelated...and I’m not lazy, you just make it so goddamn hard to focus.

VAL:

Fascinating work, lots of possibilities.

BRIAN:

It’s not my fault you’re so horrifically stubborn.

MINNIE:

I know! We talked all night about it. I didn’t even realize the hippocampus dealt with locations in space, thought it was all memory.

ALICE:

Yes it is! And if you didn’t worry about nothing all the goddamn time then I wouldn’t have to be so stubborn.

VAL:

Have they considered the cells having a role tying memories to specific spatial contexts?

BRIAN:

It’s not about nothing! Why won’t you listen to me?

MINNIE:

No doubt they’ve considered it, but I wonder how they would test it.

ALICE:

You’re not saying anything I need to hear.

VAL:

Of course, and there’s already so much to be done before asking new questions. Best not get ahead of ourselves, or them.

BRIAN:

Don’t need to, or don’t want to?

ALICE:

[*slams desk*] Shut up!

*Minnie and Val both turn to her, concerned, startled by the noise. Brian distracts himself.*

MINNIE:

You ok, Alice?

ALICE:

What? Never, never better.

MINNIE:

The desk?

ALICE:

Umm… fly… buzzing around… annoying the hell out of me… just barely missed him.

MINNIE:

*[Unconvinced]* Oh, ok.

*Everyone resumes working. Minnie leans over to talk to Alice but decides she ought not to. Brian notices and is saddened.*

**SCENE 11**

*Alice and Brian return to Doc’s Office. Doc is already there. They discuss Alice’s feelings. Alice is agitated, Brian is distressed and a little distracted.*

DOC:

Hello, Alice, how’re you today?

ALICE:

Let’s talk.

DOC:

Oh?

ALICE:

I’m tired of the thinking and thinking about why I’m thinking and talking myself and Brian and whoever else off the goddamn ledge because all it is is me...talking...so screw iit… join the party.

BRIAN:

Three’s a crowd.

DOC:

I’m just going to come out and say it: this seems like a major shift…

ALICE:

Great, add mood swings to the list.

DOC:

Well, no, it’s just, you seem... off? Did something in particular happen?

ALICE:

Don’t push it. Do you want to talk or not?

DOC:

[*shocked and maybe a little stammering*] Okay, what’s on your mind?

ALICE:

Anything. Everything. What do you want? Work? Minnie? Childhood? We’ve got it all and *he* never seems to pick just one.

BRIAN:

Like you can pretend they’re not all connected...

DOC:

[*Stiffens, sets aside notepad*] Sure, umm, how do we feel about childhood?

ALICE:

Bluntly? Shitty. But what gets me is that being a good kid makes you a terrible fucking adult. You can’t do shit because you know you shouldn’t except nobody cares and frankly, no one ever did because HA! you don’t matter. Like you don’t need dessert you just want dessert except you don’t because your mom will tell you you’re fat and so no risks no fun EVER because what? Because I’ll always be a goddamn disappointment, right?

BRIAN:

You say that like risks are for people who could get hurt.

DOC:

Wow ok.

BRIAN:

I know, she’s so dramatic.

*Brian gets himself distracted with things in Doc’s office and occasionally tries to bother Alice but she shoos him away.*

DOC:

And you bring this particular thing up because…

ALICE:

Because I can’t tell if I want to… to be involved with Minnie… romantically…

DOC:

So we’re talking about Minnie.

ALICE:

Well I’ve just been thinking and apparently Brian’s in a tizzy about it—

DOC:

I mean they’re related, it’s what makes Brian so annoying, right?

ALICE:

Yes! God, he never focuses, and—

DOC:

And neither do you, but come back to it. You like Minnie.

ALICE:

*Like*...

DOC:

Yes, and… and she’s dessert?

ALICE:

No. Yes? Like being friends is one thing, one wonderful thing, but wanting a relationship is… extra… and risky… and why would I want to screw things up if they’re already good?

DOC:

You do hate risks.

ALICE:

Who doesn’t?

DOC:

Plenty of people. But no, what I mean is that we’ve talked about this before. Passions? Minnie? Brian? All the same… So, have you talked to her about it? The liking her?

ALICE:

Of course not, instead I’m whining to my therapist about it.

DOC:

Well it’s completely normal to be afraid of rejection.

ALICE:

I’m afraid of losing her altogether...that’s what I’m trying to say. Like what if I, if I ask for just a little bit *more* out of our relationship...and it’s weird and wrong… and instead of just rejection, I lose the friendship I already have because I was… greedy? And why am I stressing about this at all when it doesn’t matter?

DOC:

I see, so being *with* her would probably make you happy, but you can live without it. Like you can live without dessert.

ALICE:

She’s not dessert… she’s a whole person… but yes and I should live without because I love her and I love being her friend and platonic relationships are just as meaningful as romantic ones… just different… so why bother?

DOC:

Have you considered she could return the sentiment?

ALICE:

Absolutely not.

DOC:

What’s so bad about you?

ALICE:

That’s a little beside the point, she just has, umm, other interests.

DOC:

Oh, ok, so let’s discuss a new point then. I’m noticing a trend of you describing yourself as trouble, an inconvenience, greedy...what is so bad about you?

ALICE:

Wouldn’t I like to know?

DOC:

Walk me through this one.

ALICE:

It’s the root of all my goddamn problems, isn’t it? You don’t have to answer that one. I’m here because I know it is and I don’t have a clue what to do about it and neither does Brian. I hate myself. And, to be clear, I think everyone should have a healthy degree of hating themselves, to keep them honest or whatever, but...God… my life would be so much easier if I just...didn’t.

DOC:

If I remember correctly you told me you were here to fix your sleep.

ALICE:

Yeah, I like lying to others as much as I like lying to myself.

*Doc picks up the notepad, says nothing.*

ALICE:

Luckily I’m really shitty at it...and I do need to fix my sleep. Like maybe if I sleep then I’ll feel good and be a functional human being and all the things I actually like about myself and it’ll all just be fixed. But no, I’m not sleeping because I’m scared. Scared of what? My feelings for a taken straight woman? Any project that has my name on it being a disgrace to science? Of ruining any and every aspect of my life by… *just being me*… because I am fundamentally bad.

DOC:

I think you’re fundamentally *flawed*, Alice, but not bad.

ALICE:

Yeah no, I’m really fucking cool. I knit sometimes and talk to plants, what kind of bad person does that?

DOC:

You don’t have to convince me.

ALICE:

So you can imagine how incredibly frustrating it is, to know that I am good but be… incapable… of believing it. I am good and I can do good and why can’t my body or my brain or whoever needs to just do this one little thing? Why can’t *I* do what’s best for me?

BRIAN:

I *am* doing what’s best.

ALICE:

[*to Brian*] Maybe in your own delusional way you are, but trust me, you’re not.

DOC:

I’m not what?

ALICE:

No, not you.

DOC:

Ok. I think it’s perfectly reasonable to be frustrated, but people do things that are bad for them all the time, even when they really want to do the good thing.

BRIAN:

You just never listen to me.

ALICE:

Are you suggesting… I’m what, addicted to suffering?

DOC:

Not quite, no, but there may be a relative comfort to this persistent pattern of thinking, and the pain it causes, that would be worth exploring.

ALICE:

You don’t say.

DOC:

I think we just might be on the edge of a breakthrough.

BRIAN:

Alice!

ALICE:

If only...

*Lights out.*

DOC:

Alice?

**SCENE 12**

*Alice’s home. A little bit messy to reflect how scatterbrained she is. Multiple calendars and big to-do lists and sticky notes cover the walls. Bright colors, patterns.*

BRIAN:

Now will you listen to me?

ALICE:

I’d say I’ve been listening to you all day

BRIAN:

Then what’s a little bit more?

ALICE:

Ugh, why are you like this?

BRIAN:

You’re like this.

ALICE:

God, you’re insufferable. Do you ever shut up?

BRIAN:

I—

ALICE:

Don’t answer that. Don’t say anything for like the next two hours.

BRIAN:

No, really we need to talk.

ALICE:

Aghagahhghh do you realize how much energy it takes to constantly ignore you and your bullshit rambling?

BRIAN:

Try not ignoring me.

ALICE:

Ugh, I need a nap.

BRIAN:

You hate naps.

ALICE:

Well that sucks because putting up with you is exhausting.

BRIAN:

I wonder if you really hate naps or you hate the feeling of not being in control.

ALICE:

Don’t you ever get tired?

BRIAN:

Why would I?

ALICE:

Right, because it’s all me. I think all my thoughts plus your thoughts plus whatever I have to tell you to make your thoughts shut up and then figure out whatever I was thinking in the first place.

BRIAN:

No I meant because there’s just so much to be on edge about.

ALICE:

Yep, you do seem to believe that.

BRIAN:

The rush is better than coffee, truly.

ALICE:

Nothing’s better than coffee.

BRIAN:

Or maybe you just like the comfort of being able to blame caffeine for your discomfort instead of your anxiety.

ALICE:

Why is there always a reason?

DOC:

Isn’t there?

ALICE:

Why can’t I just feel a way? Woke up on the wrong side of the bed or whatever...not that deep.

BRIAN:

You’re ignoring the bigger picture for the sake of hoping for blissful ignorance.

ALICE:

Maybe I’ll just make coffee.

*Alice heads to the kitchen but notices a bottle of whiskey on the shelf.*

ALICE:

Fuck it. [*Pours herself a drink*] What have you got?

BRIAN:

That’s not coffee.

ALICE:

I’m sorry, do you want some?

BRIAN:

That’s not a good idea.

ALICE:

I don’t really care what you think.

BRIAN:

So you’re really not going to listen?

ALICE:

Maybe I will. Are you going to take it or not?

*Brian considers.*

ALICE:

Really, shoot.

BRIAN:

To start, you haven’t watered Marvin in three days. [*gestures to plant*]

ALICE:

I water him every Monday.

BRIAN:

Ok, and?

ALICE:

You should be concerned if I haven’t watered him in eight days.

BRIAN:

From now? That’d be nearly two missed weeks. He could die!

ALICE:

No, from the last time I watered him, dummy.

BRIAN:

I’m just being cautious. If you don’t keep tabs on it then three days becomes eight before you know it.

ALICE:

Three days becomes eight in exactly five days.

BRIAN:

You know what I mean.

ALICE:

Yes, and it’s on my calendar to water him every Monday so I don’t forget.

BRIAN:

Exactly! You’re used to the calendar so what if you forget?

ALICE:

...that’s the point of the calendar.

BRIAN:

You need to be vigilant.

ALICE:

Is this really what I think about?

BRIAN:

Clearly not enough.

ALICE:

More than enough. Next.

BRIAN:

Just in case, I’ll remind you again tomorrow.

*Alice groans.*

BRIAN:

He’s a living thing, Alice.

ALICE:

Next!

BRIAN:

You’re not doing enough at work.

ALICE:

[*defensive*] What are you talking about? I’m the only one working on the ferret data set...and I’m working on getting an independent project together.

BRIAN:

Sure you are.

ALICE:

It’s a work in progress, quit flipping out about it. It’ll be done soon...I can’t just throw a mess of an idea at her—again—and hope she’ll let me waste time and resources on it.

BRIAN:

If you really think it’s a waste, then why even try?

ALICE:

Just leave it alone, I’ll figure it out. Something’s missing is all.

BRIAN:

You need to work harder.

ALICE:

Maybe I just need some peace and goddamn quiet.

BRIAN:

Good luck with that.

ALICE:

I’ll work once I have something to work with.

BRIAN:

What about what Minnie said? That if you worked half as hard as you were capable then you wouldn’t have gotten shoved onto that bottomless data set in the first place.

ALICE:

Minnie doesn’t realize how hard I’m working.

BRIAN:

It sure doesn’t seem like you are.

ALICE:

It doesn’t help that I spend 90% of my brain space fending off your incessant worrying.

BRIAN:

Have you considered I’m worrying for a reason?

ALICE:

Come to think of it… no.

BRIAN:

You can’t just dismiss me…

ALICE:

I can and I will.

BRIAN:

You’re insufferable.

ALICE:

I wonder where I get it from, maybe it has something to do with my brain?

BRIAN:

So you agree that you aren’t putting as much energy into your work as you should because you’re too preoccupied with fighting me?

ALICE:

Yes… hey… no... whose fault is that?

BRIAN:

There’s no one to blame but yourself.

*About here Alice starts to get angry with Brian.*

ALICE:

I didn’t ask for my brain to go haywire—

BRIAN:

But nevertheless here we are. Stop making excuses, Alice.

ALICE:

I’m not, this isn’t--

BRIAN:

Do you really believe that?

ALICE:

Ugh, why are you like this?

BRIAN:

I’ve barely gotten started…

ALICE:

Fine, what else are you bothering me with today?

BRIAN:

You know what? No. You’re not listening. Real listening is listening to understand, you’re listening to respond.

ALICE:

No matter how hard I “listen,” I can’t understand someone who sends such mixed messages.

BRIAN:

Shut up. They’re not mixed, they’re nuanced. There is no should and shouldn’t of feelings. You’re just too scared and immature to deal with the complexities of your emotions.

ALICE:

There’s nothing to deal with.

BRIAN:

Bullshit.

ALICE:

I don’t have the energy to deal with all your goddamn emotions, especially about things like plants and papers and pretty girls and any other wastes of my time.

BRIAN:

*Your* emotions.

ALICE:

You don’t get to win, this is my brain.

BRIAN:

Yet here we are. Do you want to argue forever, Alice?

ALICE:

I’m so damn tired of arguing.

BRIAN:

Then actually listen to me.

ALICE:

But you’re wrong.

BRIAN:

I’m just trying to help you. I experience the world, same as you do, and I’m trying to help you remember things and feel your feelings and actually think about what you’re doing and protect you from the things that could hurt you.

ALICE:

You hurt me.

BRIAN:

You’re sick.

ALICE:

Yeah, and you’re the broken part.

BRIAN:

You can’t separate us like that, Alice. We need to work together.

ALICE:

Just leave me alone.

BRIAN:

Alice…

ALICE:

For once, leave me alone!

*Alice takes her whiskey and storms off*, *leaving Brian alone.*

**SCENE 13**

*Alice, at her desk at work after hours. Drunk, angry.*

ALICE:

This bitch thinks I don’t work hard? I’ll show him. I’ll show them all. *[Grabs another stack of papers off of Val’s desk.]* I’ll finish the entire ferret set tonight. *[Shuffles through papers, circles some things.]* Stupid ferrets. Stupid bars.

*Alice looks up and sees the flowers on Minnie’s desk.*

I bet Mr. Perfect’s rats are way more interesting than our ferrets. Actually doing shit, running mazes. Not just staring at screens with their little brain windows all damn day… who cares about bars in different orientations?... The neurons do, for some stupid reason… Why do we care so much about these stupid neurons in one stupidly small sections of cortex?

Damn neurons think they’re so special… So many other things mucking around in these stupid god-forsaken brains of ours. Are we going to pretend the neurons do all the magic themselves? What about oligodendrocytes? Could we talk about those? Or microglia? Or…

[*miming*] Oooh I’m an astrocyte. Who cares what I do, because I’m not a neuron. I bet I do all sorts of wild shit! I could modulate signaling or help form memories or...whatever, it doesn’t matter, does it? Who cares? Minnie cares what I do. Minnie thinks I’m pretty. *[Beat.]* God, I would kill to be an astrocyte.

[*miming*] Or I’m a place cell or a grid cell or a whatever-the-fuck-he-studies cell. [*runs around the room*] I fire when you’re over here. Or over here. Or over here. Who knows? Who cares? Oh right, I do! I’m smart and I’m handsome and I put rats in mazes or whatever and that’s the best isn’t it?

*Alice pushes the flowers off Minnie’s desk; the vase shatters.*

The absolute fucking best.

And I’m stuck dealing with useless, bottomless, we-already-know-this, goddamn ferrets…

*Alice shoves papers off her own desk. She goes to pick them up and uncovers the workbooks that Doc gave her.*

“The Anxiety and Worry Book?” Sure, let’s “face my anxiety”... Tell him he’s a stupid bitch.

*While Alice reads her workbook, Brian sneaks in*.

ALICE:

[*takes out note from Doc*] “Glad you’re trying, friend”..that delightful fucker. [*She lets the note fall to the floor and flips through the pages]* “At this moment I choose to...I choose to fill my mind with positive, nurturing…” bullshit [*She slams the book back down in exasperation.*] Since when do I get to choose how I feel? That whiny little bitch always seems to get to.

BRIAN:

Alice?

ALICE:

Brian! Just the man I never want to see.

BRIAN:

Alice, what happened in here?

ALICE:

I happened. Guess I wasn’t thinking… so hard to do when your brain betrays you.

BRIAN:

You’re a mess.

ALICE:

Looks like I am!

BRIAN:

What the hell? What were you even thinking? What if Val finds this place a mess? What if Minnie finds her flowers like this? Ugh, god, do you ever think?

ALICE:

I think too damn much.

BRIAN:

Let’s go home.

ALICE:

So you can feel good about yourself? Like everything you do, all the pain and torment you put me through is justified because this one damn time you’re taking care of me? You’re protecting me from a problem that you’re blowing way out of proportion just so you can feel important?

BRIAN:

Is that what you think I do?

ALICE:

You put me down and tell me I’m wrong and remind me just how stupid and scared and incompetent and forgetful I am all the goddamn time, then turn around and act like you’re helping me. Like reminding me how terrible I am is protecting me from something? From what? The world? Myself?

BRIAN:

Alice, that’s not—

ALICE:

Tell me I’m good for something! Tell me I don’t have to be afraid of the world or worried I might screw everything up because I won’t. Who’s going to believe in me if my own brain won’t do it. Huh?

BRIAN:

Alice—

ALICE:

WHO’S THE CRAZY ONE?!

BRIAN:

You don’t understand, you never listen.

ALICE:

I listen too damn much and it’s caused me nothing but pain.

BRIAN:

Please, let’s just go home.

ALICE:

I hate you!

BRIAN:

I don’t care. Come home.

ALICE:

Fuck off.

BRIAN:

I would if I could.

**SCENE 14**

*Doc’s office. Alice angrily walks in, Brian slips through the door, Alice slams it.*

DOC:

Good afternoon, Ali— Are you alright?

ALICE:

Do I look alright?

DOC:

Well no, that’s why I ask--

ALICE:

[*points at Brian*] This bitch is the most insufferable bastard I’ve ever met and I can’t take it anymore!

DOC:

Alice, I can’t see him.

BRIAN:

Oh, really? I’m the goddamn insufferable one? You’ve never had to put up with yourself. The mood swings and the crying and the throwing… you’re a mess with or without me.

ALICE:

I put up with myself all the time. I put up with me and you and everyone else.

BRIAN:

And you’re doing a great fucking job.

ALICE:

Shut up!

BRIAN:

You shut up!

DOC:

Alice, come back to me. Alice, what happened? Last time we checked in, it seemed like you were almost doing well? Like your relationship with this *Brian* was encouraging you to think more deeply and honestly about your feelings.

ALICE:

Fuck feelings! I’m so tired, Doc, I can’t take him anymore! He never shuts up and he’s so obnoxiously self-righteous about it. He gets in my way and has the gall to tell me it’s for my own good.

BRIAN:

Maybe if you listened and didn’t screw everything up every chance you got then my help wouldn’t need to be so incessant, but no, you’re the stubborn little shit who doesn’t know what’s good for her.

ALICE:

How dare you—

DOC:

Alice! Did you try the workbooks?

BRIAN:

Did she try the workbooks? She drunkenly berated them and called that trying. Yeah, she “tries” so hard at everything...don’t you?

ALICE:

You don’t understand the half of trying hard. Imagine trying to be me and deal with my own life that my good-for-nothing excuse of a brain constantly makes a mess out of. And for what? Shits and giggles? You enjoy being a little monster.

BRIAN:

Oh sure and *I’m* the monster who trashed the office then?

ALICE:

Well my hungover ass went in early the next morning and cleaned up the office after I trashed it, so you don’t need to bring it up anymore.

DOC:

You trashed your office?

BRIAN:

Cleaning up your own messes doesn’t make you a responsible adult.

ALICE:

You’re such a child.

BRIAN:

Really—

ALICE:

A child! Would it kill you—

BRIAN:

You ungrateful bitch.

ALICE:

Ungrateful? You make my life a living hell what do you expect me to be grateful for?

BRIAN:

Having a life at all.

ALICE:

This isn’t a life! ...it’s not even worth it. I should just kill us both...I could finally make you shut up...I could—

DOC:

Alice! Alice, please come back to me.

ALICE:

He never shuts up…

DOC:

Alice?

ALICE:

[*voice breaking, anger melting into tears*] ...He never shuts up. All the time he’s talking and I’m talking and it’s so loud and it hurts so much and I’m so tired of fighting, please make it stop. I don’t need to hear it. I know I need to work and I know maybe Val doesn’t take me seriously and I know I need to water Marvin and I know I’m upset that some guy gave Minnie flowers because I want to be the one to give Minnie flowers, I know, I know, I know, I know, ok? You don’t need to keep telling me, I know. I know I just can’t right now, so shut the fuck up… please.

DOC:

Alice?

BRIAN:

I’m sorry.

ALICE:

What?

BRIAN:

I’m just trying to help, but maybe that’s not what I’m doing at all. I’m just so scared that everything you’ve ever worked for and everything you deserve will disappear if we slip up, and I can’t let that happen to you.

DOC:

That’s the first time you’ve told me that you’re hurting.

ALICE:

It’s just too much. I can’t listen or fight or do it anymore.

BRIAN:

I don’t know how to fix it.

DOC:

Alice, I think it’s time we consider medication.

ALICE:

Because I finally broke?

BRIAN:

I want to actually help you.

DOC:

Because, after lots of consideration, I think it might be a good decision for you.

BRIAN:

We need better than this...better than backhanded jokes...better than pretending like nothing is wrong… like you’re not hurting, like I’m not hurting… still shutting me out.

DOC:

Alice, as much as you don’t want to hear it, you’ve been holding on to Brian too. It hurts and in some twisted way you feel like you must deserve it or else it wouldn’t be this way… and any other way might seem just as impossible… but I think it’s time to take a risk and try to let Brian go.

ALICE:

I think I need to let him go.

BRIAN:

I think so too.

DOC:

I think you and Brian just need a little help.

**SCENE 15**

*Alice comes into work early. Val and Minnie aren’t in yet. Brian is gone.*

ALICE:

[*puts a vase of daisies on Minnie’s desk*] It’s not a scarf, but it’ll do.

*Alice sits at her desk, working on a big stack of papers, when Val and Minnie enter.*

VAL:

First you’re on time and now you’re early?

MINNIE:

Like a brand new Alice. [*Notices flowers on her desk*] These are new!

ALICE:

Yeah, John came by and dropped them off before you got in.

MINNIE:

Isn’t he such a sweetheart? I’ll have to remember to take them home this time so they don’t get swept away by the janitor again.

ALICE:

He seems like a great guy, Minnie. I’m really happy for you.

VAL:

I’m just happy my employees are coming in on time.

ALICE:

Luckily, I’ve been a lot more focused lately.

MINNIE:

You’ve been feeling better then?

ALICE:

Yeah, like I said.

MINNIE:

I asked how you were feeling.

ALICE:

Right. I’m feeling… good.

VAL:

Did you take a set of ferret data from my desk?

ALICE:

I did! And went through it all and am working on the next set now.

VAL:

I like new Alice.

ALICE:

Same old me, just a little less noisy.

MINNIE:

Hmm? Oh well, in my experience a little noise never hurt.

*Everyone settles down to work. Alice starts talking to herself.*

*Brian enters, he doesn’t interject though, he watches over Alice, proudly.*

ALICE:

I guess it didn’t hurt that much after all. Well… no, it did… but maybe he really did always have the best intentions. He worried so much about all the things I was missing. I bet he’d look at this data set and think “Alice, you’re wasting your time focusing on the neurons, what are the astrocytes trying to say? Nothing? It’s never nothing, you just don’t listen”…

I never listen, do I? Not for the right things. I listened for dates and times and facts and deadlines, but not for feelings. That was the most important thing he was trying to tell me, wasn’t it? He was trying to tell me just how scared he was, how scared I am, and how I need to stop and pay attention to that for once instead of throwing things on a calendar and calling it managed.

He did all the talking that I wasn’t listening for… I didn’t want to hear it… I’ve been telling myself that he’s wrong and getting mad at him for being the way he is because I hate the way that I am. I so desperately didn’t want to believe that this is me, that this is more than one little broken piece that can just be fixed….

Like these little guys. We can’t just separate the brain into neurons doing the talking and astrocytes hanging around and grid cells and place cells and microglia all doing whatever it is they’re doing… they aren’t parts, or broken parts, they’re a whole… We can’t just dismiss the astrocytes, because maybe they’re like me and they’re like Brian and we’re not listening to hear them… maybe we’re ignoring them without even realizing?

*Alice is no longer talking to herself*.

ALICE:

What if the astrocytes don’t use electricity?!

VAL:

What?

ALICE:

What if all along they have been talking to us, but we’ve been dismissing them because we’re listening, but not listening for the stuff that really matters, the stuff that they’re actually trying to say?

MINNIE:

Are you sure you’re ok?

VAL:

So, other things that cells use to communicate with other cells?

ALICE:

Precisely! What are other things neurons are known to deal in? Calcium? Potassium? Neurotransmitters? Those are all important aspects of communication, but we focus on the electricity that covers it all up, so to speak...what if astrocytes deal in those too, but don’t use the electricity we’ve been listening for?

MINNIE:

How would they modulate the other chemicals without electric signaling?

ALICE:

Maybe they don’t. Maybe I’m crazy… but maybe I’m onto something.

VAL:

We could tag other molecules and see if the astrocytes seem to spike those in response to...well, in response to what?

ALICE:

Bars! We see astrocytes clustered in proximity to neurons, and neurons like bars, all kinds of bars, so what if we keep showing neurons bars and keep recording neural firing, but at the same time record astrocytes maybe talking with other sorts of things?

MINNIE:

Because why are they there if not doing something?

ALICE:

Something to do with the neurons! We should start with the neurotransmitters and the calcium ions because they must be talking in a way the neurons understand, just a way that we’ve been ignoring this whole time.

VAL:

Get *that* proposal on my desk by Monday and we’ll talk.

*Alice, Minnie, and Val crowd around one desk and continue discussing the science as the lights fade. A warm light illuminates Brian, who admires Alice.*

**The End**