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who are we, who we are

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who are we, who we are

A DRAMA IN ONE ACT BY
Forrest Musselman



who are we, who we are

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CASTING

Max 3M, 14F / Minimum 2M, 10F

ANNIE: SHE's dealing with depression and Clay's best friend.

CLAY: HE's got some issues.

NORA: SHE is dealing with death of father's suicide.

ANGEL: SHE has an eating disorder.

MARY: SHE's addicted to social media.

MOLLY: SHE's depressed and can't find the right medication.

WANDA: SHE worries too much.

MISSY: SHE has anxiety due to bullying.

BRENDA: SHE has OCD.

SOPHIE: SHE's busy and worried about her grades.

BULLY: SHE's a bully.

ANNIE'S MOM: SHE's supportive and understanding.

NORA'S DAD: HE's a farmer and depressed.

MARY'S DAD: HE's a frustrated parent.

THERAPIST: SHE's a good listener.

WANDA'S MOM: SHE's a good hugger.

GIRL: SHE's in her brain.

Time

Now

Place

Any teen's brain.

Production Notes

The set in general is pretty minimalistic. There's a brain upstage center and ten acting blocks.

The brain was made on two 4x4 rolling platforms. Each platform was framed as sort of a half circle and covered with muslin. The lobes of the brain were painted on the muslin with black paint. The lighting was supplied by wireless LEDs which sat on the platform behind the muslin. When Clay and the girl appear, the brain is pulled apart and then pushed back together after they walk between the halves.

The actors wear basic white clothing, which is rather loose in design. It should be reminiscent of institutional clothing, but also almost cultish or something out of a Greek tragedy.

In the original production, the cubes lit up by placing a wireless LED light in the box and then was controlled remotely. If the budget doesn't allow this, you can certainly find other creative ways to light the stage.

While the characters are in their brain, the stage should be red, but can pulse different colors during choral scenes. When the characters are out of their brains, the lighting should be white or natural. Of course, you can always just use regular boxes as well. It's your set to build.

Special Thanks

The original cast and crew that premiered this show on January 11, 2020, at the WorkShape Festival in Rushford, Minnesota. The names are as follows: Xander Auman, Zenessa Anderson, Annika Bakkum-Ekern, Hailey Paulson, Taylor Johnson, Olivia Thompson, Lily Thompson, Hannah Linder, Megan Ekern, Julia Maynard, Christina Scaife, Dylan Payne, Julia Maynard, Emerson Bunke, Paula Howe, Zane Schroeder, Mande Tarras, Ayla McNeill, Cadel Carter, and Matthew Maynard.

The stage is mostly bare. There are ten acting cubes that are lit from within. They glow and pulsate various colors throughout the show. There is a large brain center stage with lights as well. It changes colors throughout the show to represent various characters and emotions.

AT RISE: Music plays. Cubes light up. Slowly people begin to enter. They are dressed in loose-fitting white clothing, giving an institutional, almost cultish, look. They stand behind their boxes.

The music fades. The group begins moving and interacting in a nervous and agitated manner. All lights turn red.

ALL: This is the place we remain. Our brain. Our brain.
 This is the place we go insane. Our brain. Our brain.
 This is the place we remain. Our brain. Our brain.
 The worst fears. The worst pain. The worst ideas.
 It keeps churning and turning and burning in our brain.
 It keeps churning and turning and burning in our brain.
 Can't get out of it no matter how hard we try.
 It keeps churning and turning and burning in our brain.

ANNIE: Can I keep on a happy face today?

ALL: You won't. You won't.

NORA: Will I turn out like my dad?

ALL: You will. You will.

ANGEL: Will I eat today?

ALL: You won't. You won't.

MARY: Will I worry all day long?

ALL: You will. You will.

MOLLY: Will the medication work?

ALL: It won't. It won't.

WANDA: Will I have a panic attack?

ALL: You will. You will.

BRENDA: Will I get out of bed?

ALL: You won't. You won't.

MISSY: Will I be bullied?

ALL: You will. Oh, you will.

SOPHIE: Can I maintain my 4.0?

ALL: You won't. You won't.

The worst fears. The worst pain. The worst ideas.

It keeps churning in our brains. Our brains. Our brains.

Lights illuminate a young man as the brain opens. He steps out of the brain and slowly makes his way down to center stage. The group only stares but does not move toward him. He begins to speak to the audience.

CLAY: Last night my mom had another seizure. It wasn't one of those small ones either. It went on for a really long time. I mean I really don't even know how long it went on. All I know is that I went in to see how she was doing and then she started having a seizure and I was like okay and I knew there's was really nothing I could do at that point because when someone is having a seizure you just have to let them go through it. It's like when we had Sadie, our pet dog, I mean it wasn't really our pet dog, it belonged to my neighbor. Have I told you about my neighbor? She likes to adopt and care for stray animals. I mean, it doesn't matter what it is. It could be a stray rattlesnake that suddenly appeared out of the hills and she would say that it was missing its mother and something bad was going to happen so she would take care of it and she's always been like that and this one time she adopted this dog that she found alongside the highway but then she couldn't take care of it because she was already taking care of like a million other dogs so she asked if we could watch her and I said sure, I'll watch the dog because no one deserves to live in this world alone. And so I took care of this dog but it kept having seizures and no one really knew why but whenever it had a seizure we just kept an eye on her and made sure she didn't slam into any furniture or anything and eventually she would just work through it and she'd be really exhausted and panting but we knew it was done and then she'd just go to sleep and so that's like what Mom was like when she would have her seizures and so I'd just hold on to her carefully and make sure she didn't roll off the bed or anything and eventually she would just work through it but she'd be really exhausted and tired but I knew it was done and she'd just go to sleep and that's what it was like. And when it was done, I just kept holding her for a very long time.

There is a short pause as CLAY surveys everyone around him.

CLAY: Who are you?

ALL: Who we are.

NORA: How did you get here?

ALL: Get here?

CLAY: Get where?

WANDA: What's wrong with you?

ALL: With you?

CLAY: There's nothing wrong with me. What's wrong with you?

ANNIE: Depression.

NORA: Depression over my father's suicide.

ANGEL: Eating disorder.

MARY: Social media addiction.

MOLLY: Depression. Medication issues.

WANDA: Anxiety, anxiety and more anxiety.

MISSY: I'm being bullied.

BRENDA: OCD.

SOPHIE: Stress. Too busy.

MARY: I've seen you before.

ALL: We've seen you.

CLAY: I've seen all of you too. You're on the speech team. You're in my fifth hour class. You're in choir.

ANNIE: I know you too.

ALL: She knows you.

CLAY: You're my friend. You're Annie.

ANNIE: And you're Clay.

CLAY: What is going on?

ANNIE: You're in your brain.

ALL: Your brain.

CLAY: My brain? Then why are all of you here?

ANNIE: I'm in my brain.

ALL: (echo) I'm in my brain.

CLAY: My brain. Your brain?

ANNIE: We're all in our brains. We walk around all day in school but really we're in our brains.

ALL: Our brains.

CLAY: Why am I in my brain?

ANNIE: You're thinking about your mom. And a million other things.

BRENDA: I do that too. Over and over (ALL echo this) and over and over and over again. There's no rest really.

WANDA: Always fears. And anxiety.

ALL: Anxiety.

ANNIE: Depression.

ALL: Depression. And it all ends the same. We can't get out of our brain.

MOLLY: Unless you get some help.

CLAY: I don't need any help.

NORA: You just have to take the first step.

ANNIE: Admit you need help.

ALL: (echo) Medication. Therapy. Drugs. Alcohol. Pills.

ANNIE: There's different reasons why we're here.

ALL: Different reasons.

ANNIE: Different reasons out of our head that put us in our head.
Take a look.

ALL: (echo) Take a look. Out of our heads.

Brain lights go out. Cubes turn white. Everyone breaks up into five groups with cubes. A spotlight moves from

one scene to the next. Remaining people stay upstage while sitting on a cube. CLAY watches the first group of DAD and MARY. MARY is lying on two cubes and looking at her cellphone.

DAD: Mary. You need to get up.

MARY: Just leave me alone, Dad. I'm really tired.

DAD: Uh-huh, and how late did you stay up last night?

MARY: I don't know.

DAD: Why don't you put your phone down for a while? Take a rest from the screen.

MARY: No, I need my phone.

DAD: You need it?

MARY: It keeps me calm. I don't have to think about anything.

DAD: What's wrong? You can't just stay in your room all the time, not sleeping and staring at your phone. Maybe the phone is the problem.

MARY: There's nothing wrong with having a phone!

DAD: Maybe I should take it away.

MARY: Like hell you will.

Lights down on their area. Lights up on the next cube. MISSY is sitting. The BULLY sits next to her.

MISSY: Don't you usually sit with your boyfriend?

BULLY: Uh, yeah. But he's not here today, so whatever. Thought I'd switch it up a little bit, you know?

MISSY: (*Hesitant. Not trusting.*) Okay.

BULLY: So I see you're working on AP History. That class sucks. I got it 4th hour. What about you?

MISSY: Second.

BULLY: Seriously, it's too frickin' hard. But I gotta take it.

MISSY: It's not that bad.

BULLY: Really? What's your grade?

MISSY: A.

BULLY: Sweet. You must know what you're doing, huh?

MISSY: I guess.

BULLY: So I was wondering if you'd like to do me a favor.

MISSY: What?

BULLY: I need you to remember as many answers as you can and then text me after class.

MISSY: That's cheating.

BULLY: Ummm... yeah. But all you're doing is giving me answers. I'm the one who's actually cheating.

MISSY: No, I'm helping you cheat. Sorry, I'm not going to do it.

BULLY: Okay, so here's the thing. You will text me the answers and if you don't, I'm going to start spreading rumors about you – and all my friends are going to do the same.

MISSY: Like what?

BULLY: Oh, I can come up with lots of things. Maybe you're a slut. Nah, no one would believe that. A lesbian, maybe? You seem like good dyke material. Maybe you're a cutter – that's why you wear long sleeves.

MISSY: I'm not a cutter.

BULLY: Oh – hit a nerve? You're a cutter, huh? You one of those emo chicks that sits in her room listening to sad music and carving up your skin with a razor blade?

MISSY: I'm not any of those things. Why are you doing this to me?

BULLY: There's a quiz tomorrow on chapter four. Text me the answers, or I start blabbing. Cutter.

Lights down on MISSY looking helpless. Sad music begins to play. Lights up on ANGEL. ANGEL sits by herself. She pulls out a small plastic bag. Inside is one potato chip. She takes it out and looks at it. She licks one side and savors the flavor. She takes a small nibble from the chip and slowly chews it. She puts the chip back in the plastic bag and puts it in her pocket. At this point, CLAY, who is watching, becomes frustrated and attempts to leave. Those who are sitting upstage

*stop him and force him to watch the next two scenes.
Lights up on the next group of cubes.*

ANNIE'S MOM: Annie. You have a minute?

ANNIE: Yeah. I might even have two. And for you, even three.

ANNIE'S MOM: You've been in such a good mood this week.

ANNIE: I know. I actually feel good. (*stands*) It's like I feel lighter.

ANNIE'S MOM: Good. (*stands*) So, I'm not exactly sure how I should say this, so I guess I'll just say it.

ANNIE: Okay.

ANNIE'S MOM: So you've been with us for a few weeks now and...

ANNIE: Oh god, this is going to be the talk, isn't it?

ANNIE'S MOM: What talk?

ANNIE: Don't worry, I know how this goes. You're going to explain how things aren't working out like you thought. That I'm a little too messed up for you handle and that there's another foster couple that's more skilled in handling my issues. Then I'll move again – and again – and again.

ANNIE'S MOM: Annie, it's more than that.

ANNIE: No, I get it. I thought this time was different, but apparently not. If my real mother never wanted me, why would anyone else?

ANNIE'S MOM: Annie, stop! I found a program through the State where you can get the help you need. I'll be here for you when you get out... if you want it.

ANNIE stares at her foster mother. Scene fades. Lights up on WANDA and WANDA'S MOM.

WANDA: Mom, I need to get this paper done and I'm freaking out!

WANDA'S MOM: I thought you had that done. I was helping you with it.

WANDA: This introduction is so stupid. If I don't get this done, I'm going to get an F, fail the class, flunk out of school and die.

WANDA'S MOM: We don't want that to happen. Give me the paper. I'll write it for you.

WANDA: Why do I have to write this stupid paper anyway? What's the point? The English teacher always gives us too much homework. It's stressing me out. All I want to do is die.

WANDA'S MOM: I agree. This is ridiculous. I'm going to send him an email and tell him to stop assigning so much homework.

WANDA: Thanks, Mom. You're the best.

WANDA'S MOM: Anything for you, honey. No child of mine is going to die from worrying.

WANDA: Can you do my algebra next?

Lights fade. Red brain lights back on. CLAY steps forward to talk to ANNIE.

CLAY: This is really stupid. None of this has to do anything with me. I'm not being bullied or have an eating disorder.

ANNIE: I know. We were just showing you why we're in our brains. We're just like you, except we're not. We all have our reasons for words and worries whirling in our brain.

ALL: Out of our heads. Back into our heads.
All these words swirling in our brains.

Group forms a circle around MISSY, who is standing on a block. MISSY grabs her head as the group swirls around her.

ALL: (echo) Cutter.

MISSY steps down from block. MARY steps up and grabs her head as the group swirls around her.

ALL: (echo) You're not perfect.

ANGEL steps up and grabs her head as the group swirls around her.

ALL: (echo) You're fat.

ANNIE steps up and grabs her head as the group swirls around her.

ALL: (echo) No one loves you.

WANDA steps up and grabs her head as the group swirls around her.

ALL: (echo) You are dying. Dying. Dying.

On the last “dying,” the group collapses around the cube and freezes. CLAY steps forward and talks to the audience.

CLAY: I was talking with my mom last night and she said she wanted to make a bucket list of things that she really wanted to do before she dies, which who knows when that will be. I mean it could be years from now, so why not make a list of things to do. Right? And there was the usual stuff like go skydiving and get a tattoo and see all the wonders of the world and all that crap. So I was writing down the list for her because you know she isn't capable of writing anymore because a couple of weeks ago she tried to write something and it was just an incoherent scribble and I said what is this? And she said it was the grocery list and I was like okay, this makes no sense at all, so from then on I said I would just write down what she wanted. The doctors said the tumor in her brain was growing, so it was going to suddenly affect things that were working normally before. So anyway I was writing down this huge bucket list and it started to get really depressing because she said she wanted to see me graduate high school and graduate college and get married and have babies and all that stuff. And so I spent the rest of the night thinking about that and I finally decided we're going to try to do as much on the bucket list as possible. So I looked at the list and decided to add some things of my own without telling her. And I put the list in my pocket and went to school. Later in the day I reached to add something else and the list was gone. Gone. I have no idea where it went.

ALL: Take a look. Out of our heads.

CLAY: No, no more looking. I don't want to see this anymore.

ANNIE: It's okay. I'll come with you.

ALL: (echo) Take a look. Out of our heads.

The next three scenes are set. Middle cube is moved back upstage where the remaining group members sit. Brain lights are off and the cubes are white. Lights up on NORA and NORA'S DAD. CLAY follows each scene with ANNIE.

NORA: Dad? Dad! There you are. Didn't you hear me calling for you?

NORA'S DAD: Sorry. I guess my head was somewhere else.

NORA: (shows phone) Look at these shoes. Aren't they cool? Everyone is wearing them right now. Plus, I really need a new pair for school.

NORA'S DAD: That's a lot of money.

NORA: Okay, then check this pair out. It's half the cost and it's free shipping.

NORA'S DAD: It's still a lot of money. What about those?

NORA: Ewww. Those are gross.

NORA'S DAD: And they're ten dollars.

NORA: Hmmm, I guess I'll wait to talk to Mom. What are you doing?

NORA'S DAD: I'm just trying to figure out the bills.

NORA: Is it bad?

NORA'S DAD: It's bad. Soybean prices are way too low. How can anyone think we can make a living off of prices like that? And then with the weather... What's the point...

NORA: It'll get better. We've been down before, right?

NORA'S DAD: Not this far down. Five generations on this farm and it has never been this bad.

NORA: Look, I don't need the shoes.

NORA'S DAD: It's going to take more than just a pair of shoes.

NORA: Okay, Dad. What can I do to help? *(He doesn't answer)* Dad?

NORA'S DAD: There's got to be a better way out.

NORA: What do you mean, Dad? *(No answer. She stands.)* Dad? *(No answer. She looks to the audience.)* Dad?

Lights dim. Back up on BRENDA and SOPHIE sitting by each other.

BRENDA: The alarm goes off at 6:00 in the morning. I'm usually awake anyway. Nights tend to be a little rough, thinking about... things. I allow myself to hit the snooze button once.

SOPHIE: The alarm goes off at 4:30 in the morning. This gives me time to get ready for school. I like to get there early so I can work in the library. It's always quiet in the mornings.

BRENDA: When it goes off again, I allow myself to get up. Fifteen steps to the toilet where I go to the bathroom. Eight squares of toilet paper wrapped clockwise around my right hand. Twenty seconds to wash my hands.

SOPHIE: An hour before school, the meetings start. Depending on the day, it's student council, art club, robotics club or chess club. I'm always somewhere.

BRENDA: Turn on the shower. The knob has to be at 11:00 for the perfect temperature. While that runs, I brush my teeth. Ten times on each quadrant, front and back, for a total of 80 brushes. The shower must last seven minutes. I set an alarm on my phone to make sure it's exact.

SOPHIE: I usually don't eat lunch. I need the time to work on homework or study for the afternoon classes. Sometimes I have a choir lesson.

BRENDA: Once I've dried off completely, then I start the process of getting ready. My clothes have already been selected the night before and are hanging on the closet door.

SOPHIE: After school, I have basketball practice and then I have to be at work by 5:30. I'm usually home by 10:00, so I get a couple more hours for homework. Bed by midnight.

BRENDA: You get the idea. By the time I'm back from school and in my room, I'm pretty much exhausted. But that doesn't mean sleep is coming.

SOPHIE: I wish I could sleep more but I don't have time. I'm building a future here. I need to be the best.

Lights dim. Back up on MOLLY and THERAPIST.

THERAPIST: Good morning, Molly. So how's this week going?

MOLLY: Well, I'm not wanting to kill myself, so that's a good thing.

THERAPIST: And your dark sense of humor is back. That's good.

MOLLY: That last batch of meds was horrible.

THERAPIST: I know. I'm sorry that happened. Sometimes the side effects aren't good. It was good that you were honest about how it made you feel. That's important.

MOLLY: I find it ironic that an antidepressant actually made me worse.

THERAPIST: This new one should work better.

MOLLY: What would happen if I didn't take any meds at all?

THERAPIST: That wouldn't be a good idea.

MOLLY: How about I self-medicate instead? Is weed okay? Booze?
Molly? Now that'd be ironic.

THERAPIST: Then you'd be like you were when you first asked for help.
I don't think you want to go back to that place again, do you?

MOLLY: No. It's just frustrating.

THERAPIST: You'll get better. It's just going to take time. Remember,
we're taking baby steps here.

MOLLY: I'd rather run.

Lights dim. Red brain lights up.

ALL: Out of our heads. Back into our heads.
All these words swirling in our brains.

Group circles around a cube that SOPHIA is standing on. SOPHIE grabs her head as the group swirls around her.

ALL: (echo) You're a failure.

MOLLY steps on box and grabs her head as the group swirls around her.

ALL: (echo) Overdose.

BRENDA steps on box and grabs her head as the group swirls around her.

ALL: (echo) Count it again.

NORA steps on box and grabs her head as the group swirls around her.

ALL: (echo) Kill yourself.

Group collapses around cube with the last echo.

CLAY: Enough. Enough. How do we get out of our brains?

ALL: We ask for help.

CLAY: Help.

ALL: Take the first step.

CLAY: I don't need help.

ALL: No?

CLAY: No.

ALL: Remember yesterday? The cafeteria? Out of our heads. Take a look.

They continue whispering "Take a look" as they set the next scene. They move boxes around to simulate a lunch room table. Others not in the scene sit upstage on remaining cubes. Brain lights out.

WANDA: I'm wondering if we really have to eat at this table every day?

NORA: What's wrong with it?

WANDA: It's too much in the center of the room.

NORA: So what?

WANDA: So what if a school shooter comes in right now. We're sitting ducks. Plus, I feel like everyone is looking at us. I feel like I'm going to die.

MARY: *(looking at her phone)* Cool. I hope they like my new outfit.

ANGEL: Why do you keep turning your plate?

BRENDA: Whatever I eat has to be in the six o'clock position.

ANGEL: Why?

BRENDA: Because any other position doesn't feel right.

ANGEL: I didn't know eating had to be such a process.

BRENDA: This is coming from someone who barely eats? Where's your food?

ANGEL: I have ice cubes.

SOPHIE: *(enters)* Hey, sorry I'm late. What'd I miss?

MOLLY: What was the great emergency this time?

SOPHIE: Student council meeting.

MARY: This sucks. It was the perfect shot. High angle looking down at my profile. Duck lips. I was even showing a little cleavage. All for 54 likes? What's going on? Do I look like a cow or something? I do, don't I. What was I thinking?

BRENDA: Don't worry, I'm sure the other 27 selfies you post throughout the day will get more attention.

MARY: Forget it. I'll just post a picture of my lunch.

MOLLY: Or you could post nothing at all. I'd like that one.

MARY: You don't like anything, so what's the difference?

MOLLY: That's because I'm depressed.

MARY: Join the club.

ANGEL: Hey, it's a pity party! Zoloft for everyone!

ANNIE: *(enters)* Hey guys. Have you guys noticed Clay lately?

MOLLY: You mean the fact that he looks like a train wreck?

ANGEL: And he isn't eating?

NORA: And he's only in school every other day?

MARY: And the stuff he's posting on Instagram is really dark.

WANDA: I saw him talking to the wall yesterday, and it's not even Speech season.

ANNIE: Okay, so you have noticed. And has anyone bothered to talk to him?

WANDA: I would if I could get a word in.

ANNIE: What do you mean?

CLAY enters. He appears almost manic. Sees the group and comes over.

CLAY: Annie. I think I may have found the best game ever.

ANNIE: What is it?

CLAY: *Persona 5*. It's amazing. I mean, I really don't get to play it a lot because I have to help take care of my mom, but sometimes when I get some free time or when I can't sleep, which seems to be happening a lot lately. I mean I stayed up until 4:00 in the morning and then woke up at six. I... am... exhausted. But the thing I like about the game is it's all about showing your true self. The characters wear masks and when they finally take control of their lives, they rip the mask off, revealing their true selves underneath. I can't even explain how cool it is. So anyway I didn't feel like eating so I'm going to go try and catch up on my algebra. I am so behind right now it isn't even funny. So check out *Persona 5*. It's amazing.



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