

# Cerebrum<sup>1</sup>

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## Premise/Synopsis:

Characters mimic how different aspects of the brain coordinate or do not coordinate as part of the body's stress and trauma response. The brain structure's functions determine each character's name and personality, and how they interact with other characters under extreme fear and difficulty in order to comedically illustrate to the audience how brains function.

## Cast:

-“P. F. Sí,” or the PreFrontal Cortex (rules cognitive control functions such as attention, impulse inhibition, thinking into the future, cognitive flexibility)— aloof character who tends to rationalize out loud and attempt to talk his way into calmness. Is privileged and upset when no one listens to him. Tends towards immediate conflict with both Limby and A. Mygdála.

-“A. Mygdála,” or the Amygdala (senses threats and activates fear-related responses such as fight, flight, freeze, and shut down)— older, masculine, testy/tends toward hyperarousal. Married to Limby.

-“Limby,” or the Limbic System (mediates between cerebral cortex and the Amygdala; responsible for arousal and memory, as well as voluntary choices such as fighting/fleeing)— skittish/worrisome/hysterical, femme (a la Nathan Lane in *The Birdcage*) always comparing whatever event happens to some experience she had before a given situation.

-“Hippo,” or the Hippocampus (stores long-term memories and ideally makes them resistant to forgetting; this goes offline until stress)— forgetful, can't concentrate, has abrupt flashbacks where they lose speech. Sibling of Hypo.

-“Hypo,” or the Hypothalamus (controls hormonal system, sends signals to pituitary to release them)— over talkative, can't stop talking, always “secreting something” upon hearing bad news. “That makes me \_\_\_\_\_”. The peacemaker once everyone “up top”(prefrontal cortex, limbic system, amygdala) can't calm down/stop conflict. Sibling of Hippo.

-“Pit,” or the Pituitary Gland (“master gland” that releases hormones at behest of the Hypothalamus)- best friend with Hypo, they are “joined at the hip”. Follower to a fault and overproduces/over agrees with Hypo.

## Setting:

Single room with one door.

## Time:

Unknown.

## Director's Notes:

*Lights come up on a single room with one door. All the cast is passing time, waiting around for something unknown. Limby and A. Migdála, a couple, are sitting at a small table playing cards together. P.F. Sí stands against the wall and always stands above the other characters or paces around the room throughout the act. Hippo and Hypo—siblings and the latter who eats and talks compulsively between bites—are sitting at another table with Pit sitting next to Hypo on same side of the table.*

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ACT 1

LIMBY

[Plays a card, then pauses. Looks to each character while speaking nervously] Suh, suh, so...[pauses again] has anyone heard anything yet?

P. F. SÍ

[Leans against wall near Limby and A Mygdála's table, looks at watch] Nothing yet. But there must be some kind of rational explanation.

A. MYGDÁLA

[Plays his card in turn. Speaks antagonistically to P.F.] C'mon, you *always* say that. Whaddayou know?

[gestures to Limby] For all *you* know, my Limby here could be right to be nervous. Better ready than surprised. [plays another card] It's not like we *know* what's comin'.

P. F. SÍ

[puts his hands up defensively] Hey hey, no need to get uppity now. I'm just saying the same as you—we don't know anything yet. For all we know things could be fine.

A. MYGDÁLA

They could also *not* be fine too. Have ya thought about that? [slams hands on table while leaning forward towards PF] You think you're smarter than the rest of us?!...Huh, dontcha?!

P. F. SÍ

[shakes head in frustration] I hate it when you get like this. You're impossible to talk to. A caustic wall. [walks to other side of room away from the card table, then looks at watch again]

LIMBY

Oh! You're both making so me nervous! Why are you two always fighting?! I'm always caught in the middle!

A. MYGDÁLA

[to Limby] I'm sorry, baby. I'll try to tone it down. Besides, we can always get outta here if need be. I'm not afraid to run if we need to. [gestures to door, rubs her leg]

HIPPO

[puts index finger in the air] Oh! Hey, y'all, I sort of remember...wait, shit, I forgot...Gimme a minute.

[holds his temples with his hand, lightly taps his own head afterwards]

God, I get so forgetful. I hate it...

A. MYGDÁLA

God damn it, c'mon, out with it, Hippo! Looks at Limby, [catches self, settles down] Shit, I'm sorry, baby. *Again.*

HYPPO

[between bites, drools/froths when he speaks] Hey hey! No need to shout. We're right here and you're getting *all of us* amped up! You've got me eating and spilling so much I can hardly stand it!

PIT

Yeah! Me too!

HYPPO

Shut up, Pit.

A. MYGDÁLA

Yeah, shut up, Pit. You always agree with what he says.

PIT

So what? He's usually right. And even if he wasn't, haven't you heard of loyalty? [swoons]

HIPPO

If y'all would just shut up for a minute I might be able to remember! [pauses] Ahh, right! I remember now. [checks phone] I got this text...it says, "Don't move. BRT"...[scratches head] What's BRT again? [looks around at others]

LIMBY

It means, "be right there"! What do you think that means??

P. F. SÍ

Uh...be, right there? Duh. [rolls eyes visibly] Isn't it *obvious*?

LIMBY

But, but, what does *right there* mean?? And who?? Or what? Who or what will *be right there*?? Right here?!

A. MYGDÁLA

Don't worry, baby. If anything crazy happens, I'll take care of ya. [puts up his fists in gesture]

[his cell phone rings, he picks up]

Hello? Yes, this is A. Mygdála. Who's this? [pauses] Oh...I see. Well...yeah. Sure. I'll tell the others. [hangs up phone, becomes visibly shaken] They uh...uh...

LIMBY

What, sweetie?! Who was it?! What is it?!

A. MYGDÁLA

They...they said not to go anywhere. They said to stay put...*or else*.

LIMBY

Or else?! Or else, what?! Ahh! It's happening again, I just know it!

[looks to A. Mygdála to comfort her but this time he doesn't but starts to look glazed over/goes into freeze/shut down mode]

Honey? Honey?!

[A. Mygdála falls out of his seat onto the floor in a freeze state, Limby comes down to check on him]

Honey!! [looks up and around at other characters] He's frozen! Somebody do something!

P. F. SÍ

Oh, shit! [runs over to their table, kneels down, checks his neck pulse and then puts ear to his mouth] He's still with us, he's breathing. [looks to Limby] Who called?

LIMBY

[Looks at A. Mygdála's phone]

It says "unknown caller". [holds hand to mouth] It's a blocked number!

P. F. SÍ

What about location? It usually says where the call or the phone account is from.

HYPPO

[speaks with a full mouth] Oh man, all this is making me crazy nervous. [looks around] Is there a bathroom here somewhere? I swear, I'm about to explode.

PIT

Yeah, me too!

HYPPO

Shut up, Pit. I'm f-in' serious.

LIMBY

You're serious?! *This* is serious!

P. F. SÍ

Limby! [shakes her by the shoulders/arms] Stay calm. We need you rational for this. Now, did the phone say where the call was from?

LIMBY

Oh! [Limby checks phone again] No, it doesn't say anything! Isn't it supposed to say *something*?! I don't understand! I just know that this is bad! [A Mygdála groans, Limby looks back to him] Oh! Sweetie!

P. F. SÍ

[stands up] Like I said, there's gotta be some kind of explanation. So, what do we know?

[counts on his fingers] One—someone or something is coming. Two—they, it, whatever, doesn't want us to go anywhere...*or else*. [pauses] So it could be anything... [speaks as if trying to persuade himself]

Something good or fine is just as possible as something bad...right? I mean, let's not lose our heads here.

HYPPO

What do you mean *don't lose our heads*? That's exactly what you're all doing! They said, "or else". How could we not go ape shit??

PIT

Yeah! Ape shit!

HYPPO

Shut up, Pit!

P. F. SÍ

Yeah, shut up, Pit!

HYPPO

[long and loud sigh] God damn it...now part of me feels like I have to clean this up somehow. But honestly, part of me would rather jump on the fear train with you all. [pauses] I swear, it's like having an angel and a devil on each shoulder. [sighs] *Exhausting*...

PIT

So exhausting!

HYPPO

[angry sigh] For fucks sake...shut up, Pit!

HIPPO and P. F. SÍ

[look at one another and say in unison] Not even gonna touch that one...

P. F. SÍ

[said with suspicion] Wait. Hippo. You said you got a text from them before. Did you talk to them?

HIPPO

[holds both temples] I wish...I wish I could remember...

P. F. SÍ

[pace-circles around Hippo] Maybe A. Mygdála was right...c'mon, out with it!

HIPPO

Look, I'm sorry! I get really forgetful when I'm scared, okay?! Like, totally blank. [stares off into space]

HYPO

[sighs] Like I said, now it's my job to save the day. *Again*. Besides, Hippo's not going to remember any better if you yell at her!

PIT

Yeah! Not gonna remember better!

WHOLE CAST minus PIT and A. MYGDALA

SHUT UP, PIT!

PIT

...alright, geez. [looks down] I guess I just won't say anything from now on... [pouts]

HYPO

*Great*. I mean, at times it's great to have you next to me, Pit, but...sometimes...well, you know, I kinda wish I didn't have to do all the thinking and talking.

[Pit looks down and stays silent. Hypo looks expectantly at Pit while speaking]

Piiiiiiiiit? Cmon, Pit. It's true. But I can't do it without you. Can't do much of anything. [pause] I'm the inspiration, you're the manifestation. Right? C'mon...will you please forgive me?

PIT

[looks up] Forgive you?

HYPO

Yeah.

PIT

Yeah. I'll forgive you. [smiles]

P. F. SÍ

Oh my god, Pit, shut up. You're such a follower, it's nauseating...

HYPO

Shut up, P. F. SÍ!

PIT

Yeah! Shut up, P. F. SÍ!

P. F. SÍ

Christ. Now there's two of them.

LIMBY

May I remind you that there's someone or something coming! And they've said, "or else"!

[ A. Mygdála groans again and starts to come to]

Honey! You're back!

A. MYGDÁLA

[blinks, shakes his head, sits up dazed, then becomes a little aggravated]

God, I hate it when that happens! How long was I out this time?

LIMBY

Just a couple minutes. But too long for me!

A. MYGDÁLA

I'm sorry, baby, I didn't mean to worry you. It won't happen again. I'll fight it if I have to.

[P. F. Sí's phone buzzes, A. Mygdála looks in his direction] What is it? Who is it? What'd they say?

P. F. SÍ

[answers his phone] Hello? Yeah. What? 3 minutes? You'll be here in 3 minutes? Who are you?! Why are you doing this?! Tell us why you're doing this! Hello? Hello?! [looks at phone in frustration, hangs up]

LIMBY

Gah! It's happening again. Just like *last time*! I can't do this again! [looks at P. F. Sí] Why do they have your number?? You're with them, aren't you?! Honey, get him!

A. MYGDÁLA

[glares at P. F. Sí] Is my Limby right? Are you with them? You are, aren't you!

P. F. SÍ

Whoa whoa whoa! You're both being paranoid! Just 'cause they called me doesn't mean I'm with them. [points at A. Mygdála and then Hippo] Remember, you and Hippo got texts or calls from them too! And Limby even said it's happening like last time! What was last time?

HIPPO

Wha...what?? [looks off into space] I...can't...remember...

A. MYGDÁLA

That's just what they would say! I mean, well... [look of resignation] I suppose you're right...

P. F. SÍ

Um, wait, what? Are you...agreeing with me?

## A. MYGDÁLA

I never thought I'd say this but...yes. You're right. [straightens his clothes] So what? I mean, so now what? They'll be here any moment. What do we do?

P. F. SÍ

I, uh, I don't know what to do with that. I guess we...um, well...we have to stand together. All of us.

LIMBY

Like, literally stand together? Or metaphorically?

P. F. SÍ

I mean, a reasonable person would've gone with metaphor but I suppose we could stand together literally.

HYPO

Oh my god, I thought you'd never ask. We absolutely need to stand together. [finishes chewing] So I don't have to stand for you all.

PIT

Yeah, stand together!

HYPO AND P. F. SÍ

[each puts a hand on either of Pit's shoulders] I guess you don't have to shut up this time, Pit.

PIT

Ah, really? You see, I was getting really disheartened there for a second, being criticized all the time. I'm glad you all came to your senses. I mean, I'm pretty essential [looks to Hypo] Hypo, you don't have to solve everything this time. Let me produce something here that might help us.

[Hypo and P. F. SÍ look at each other with bewilderment, then back to Pit]

P. F. SÍ

So, uh, Pit... [shakes head] what did you have in mind?

PIT

So as you said, we gotta stand together. Which leaves two questions: how do we settle our differences? And what does standing together look like? Like is it literally standing together when "they" [does air quotes] arrive? What do we do there? I think it's incumbent on us to come together.

P. F. SÍ

*Huh.* This is a great idea. Practical. I guess it makes sense for me to start [looks at Limby and A. Mygdála] Limby, Mygdála, I know I can be a little aloof, arrogant, and dismissive at times, especially to you two. I'm sorry, and I commit to doing it better.

A MYGDÁLA

You're right and it's about time. [Limby elbows him in the side, he grunts but doesn't say anything]



LIMBY

Honey, he's *apologizing*...shut your trap. [looks to P. F. Sí] Thank you for your apology and your reassurance. I know I can be a worry wart, and a tad hysterical. [looks intently at A. Mygdála] I'll try to rein it in.

A MYGDÁLA

[audible, annoyed sigh] ...yeah...me too. I know I'm a little testy.

P. F. Sí

[jokingly] Just a little?

A MYGDÁLA

Ah shut *your* trap! I'm trying to apologize here [P. F. Sí puts his hands up and back in surrender] Like I was saying, I'm not everyone's cuppa tea. But I'm here, and I'll do my damndest to chill a little.

P. F. Sí

Thank you.

HYPPO

Hey, folks! What about us over here?

PIT

Yeah! Us over here.

P. F. Sí, LIMBY, and A MYGDÁLA

Sorry we make you clean up our messes. [all look at Pit] And sorry, Pit, for telling you to shut up.

HYPPO and PIT

Thank you. We'll try to keep the...over-production down, so to speak. Stick to a little...*regulation*.

P. F. Sí

Alright, well, that just leaves one of us left. [looks at Hippo, then to the rest of the cast, addressing them] Do we even apologize to Hippo? I mean, will she even remember right now, you know what I mean?

[whole cast laughs]

HYPPO

I mean what do we have to lose?

WHOLE CAST minus HIPPO

Sorry, Hippo!

HIPPO

Huh? Sorry for what? Wait...where am I?

LIMBY

[looks at P. F. Sí] Like you said.

A MYGDÁLA

That's my baby.

P. F. SÍ

Well, about any minute now. It seems like if each of us just does what we're best at then, then that's the way we stand together.

LIMBY

Sounds reasonable. Besides, what else are we going to do [looking at A. Mygdála then the rest of the cast]

[cast wordlessly gets up, stands facing the door. They pause, each looking back and forth to the others in turn]

*[there is the sound of loud footsteps "outside the door". A loud clink, then turning of a key, ending with a slam. Door starts to open slowly]*

P. F. SÍ

Here we go, I guess!

LIMBY

I'm glad we did that otherwise I'd be so nervous!

HYPÓ

You're welcome! I'm glad to finally not have to take care of the mess all myself!

PIT

Yeah, myself!

WHOLE CAST

SHUT UP, PIT!

A. MYGDÁLA

Ah, shit.

*[door continues to open, house lights go down on the cast holding hands facing the door, ending the scene]*

END

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