I'VE BEEN TRYING TO MEDITATE

a short play

by

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Characters

NELL – Hanging by a thread.
TY – Just passing through.
GIA – Living her best life.
VALERIE – A dog.
AN EXTREMELY CHILL GIRL
AN EXTREMELY OLD WOMAN
A BRITISH VOICE

Place

A grocery store.
A cosmic void.
A desert island.

Time

Right now.

Notes

Words in [brackets] are unspoken.
A slash indicates an interruption.
Have you tried Headspace? It’s honestly just ok.
Lights.
A glimmering grocery store.
The cheese section.
One long, luminous row of cheese.
Cheddar and swiss and asiago and manchego and feta and brie and mozzarella and and and
Nell stares at the cheese.
Nell loves cheese.
She picks up a large hunk of gouda.
And cradles it in her arms, like a baby.
God she loves cheese.
A man enters, holding a grocery basket. This is Ty.
Nell doesn’t notice him.
Nell keeps cradling the cheese.
She talks to the cheese in a baby voice.

TY
....You good?

Nell drops the cheese-baby.

NELL
What Yes

Weird beat.

NELL
I’m practicing

TY (?)
Oh

Then

TY
Oh!
Congrats

NELL
Yeah thank you thanks

TY (jokey!)
You might want to practice on something a little Larger
Than a cheese block!

NELL (not a joke)
I found this really heavy encyclopedia in my attic
That I’ve been rocking back and forth
NELL
So that’s been
helpful

TY (?)
Cool.

NELL
Yeah.

_Nell picks up the cheese-baby with one hand._
_Like it’s not a baby at all._

TY (playing along)
Careful!
Got to protect the head, right?

NELL
Whoops

_Ty demonstrates how to hold a baby._
_Nell is like, cool thanks buddy._
_And then_

TY (wait a second…)
I don’t think you’re supposed to eat cheese when you’re pregnant

NELL
Really

TY
Or sushi
Or runny eggs
Or shellfish

NELL (...)
I think that’s a
myth

TY
I’m lactose intolerant

NELL (earnest)
Oh Wow that’s
Terrible

TY
Yeah
TY
But just being in the proximity of cheese calms me down.
If I’m feeling stressed I think of cheese platters

NELL
You’re kidding

TY
It’s silly, I know

NELL (!)
I mean me too

TY
No way

NELL (!)
I do that too

TY
No way stop

NELL
Yes!

TY
Stop!

NELL
The little cubed cheeses they’re so mathe/matical

TY
Mathematical!

NELL
The toothpicks! So / orderly!

TY (!)
Orderly!

NELL (considering him anew)
I’m Nell

TY (considering her anew)
I’m Ty

A moment.
The space between them collapses.
NELL
Is this –

TY
Are we -

NELL (outburst)
I’m not actually pregnant

TY
Uh

NELL
Pregnancy kind of freaks me out.
Not as a concept. Not in the abstract
But the physicality - The physical reality of Growing a
[human being???] inside your ![??]
I just learned what a placenta was.
Like three weeks ago
I'm lying I learned on Friday
And my friend was like “It’s a miracle” and I said “what?”
And she kept saying “It’s a miracle” and I said “It’s insane”

TY
Yeahhh
You’re not exactly who I thought you were

Ty moves away from Nell.

NELL
Oh

TY
You’re kinda
Tightly wound
I thought you were more like
Her

NELL
Who?

TY
Her

An Extremely Chill Girl enters.

EXTREMELY CHILL GIRL
Hey do you want to go to the park and watch the loons
TY
Absolutely

EXTREMELY CHILL GIRL
I'll take off my shoes. And my socks. And lie on the grass
And then do something really whimsical
Like a handstand. Or a cartwheel

TY
Sick

EXTREMELY CHILL GIRL
Invite whoever you want

TY
You seem really easy to be around

EXTREMELY CHILL GIRL
People tell me that all the time!

NELL
There aren’t loons in the park

EXTREMELY CHILL GIRL (annoyed)
What

NELL
There aren’t loons
Those are geese

EXTREMELY CHILL GIRL (so?)
And?

NELL
Those are very different things

EXTREMELY CHILL GIRL (psh)
Looks like someone got up on the wrong side of the /bed/

Suddenly, a woman’s voice fills the space.
It sounds polished and intelligent.
It sounds like the voice of someone who’s Got It All Together.
Which is to say, the voice is speaking in a British accent.

BRITISH VOICE
Now if your mind wanders, that’s completely normal
Completely
Natural
Everyone except Nell vanishes.
Nell is now in a kind of cosmic void.
With throw pillows.

BRITISH VOICE
So just acknowledge that, the wandering.
And then Return to the breath
The rising and falling

Nell tries to breathe.

BRITISH VOICE
Return to that place
In your mind’s eye
That gives you comfort.
Visualize that place, put yourself in the center of it
Let it wrap around you like a warm hug

NELL
Yeah, it didn’t work

BRITISH VOICE
I’m
sorry?

NELL
I tried to picture the place that gave me comfort
And it didn’t work

BRITISH VOICE
It always works.
As long as you pay attention
To the breath

NELL
How

BRITISH VOICE
Fill the lungs with air, and / then

NELL
I mean how
do you make your mind
Not wander

BRITISH VOICE
You don’t.
NELL
What

BRITISH VOICE
Here, eat this piece of cheese
You love cheese, right?

*A piece of cheese lands in Nell's hand.*

NELL
I do!

*Nell eats the cheese.*
*And then realizes*

NELL
Wait was I supposed to eat the rind

BRITISH VOICE
Some do

NELL
Oh no

BRITISH VOICE
Some don't

NELL
Oh god I think it’s pinching my windpipe
Or scraping the inside of my esophagus. Like really digging into my – [?]
What Does the inside of my throat look like?
What does the inside of any part of my body look like?
What exactly is happening
Inside -

BRITISH VOICE
Didn't you take a science class

NELL
Well yeah I’ve seen Diagrams
I've seen Textbooks
But those aren’t pictures of My Body
Can you see the inside of my cranial cavity?
Can you tell me the particular shape of my kidney?
BRITISH VOICE
A kidney?

NELL
Not A kidney
My kidney
I wish someone could just hand me a photograph of the inside of my body
Tell me:
All’s well here
All’s in order here

BRITISH VOICE
Oh Kay -
Deep breath in

Nell tries to breathe.

BRITISH VOICE
Hold it, hold it, hold it
And then exhale
Ahhhh
And as you exhale, let your limbs soften a bit into your chair

Nell tries to let her limbs soften into her chair.
Maybe we all do.

BRITISH VOICE
Let’s do a new visualization
Transport yourself to another place that brings you
Ease

NELL
A place that brings me / [?]

Lights.
A desert island.
But like, a hip desert island.
Cabanas strung with string lights.
Neon-colored lounge chairs. Neon-colored hammocks.
Beach balls.
The whole place has a kind of Instagram aesthetic.
Gia and Valerie lounge, blissed out.
Valerie is a dog. Not a person in a dog costume, but a dog.
(That talks)
(Just go with it)

GIA (!)
I really feel /
VALERIE (!)
Same

GIA (!)
Like everyone’s /

VALERIE (!)
I know

GIA (!)
Coming / together!

VALERIE (!)
Right?

GIA
And it’s beautiful

VALERIE
It’s SO beautiful

GIA
For once in our lives, everyone is in the exact same Boat! and it’s /

VALERIE
Yep

NELL
Are we though?

Gia and Valerie notice Nell.

GIA
Excuse me?

NELL
Are we really All In the same boat

GIA
Metaphorically speaking
VALERIE
I’m obsessed with metaphors

GIA
Me too I am Literally obsessed

VALERIE
I think it’s important to consider the silver lining

GIA
SUPER important

*Valerie and Gia slurp up fancy, colorful cocktails.*

NELL (to Valerie)
Should you really be drinking that

VALERIE (?)
It’s delicious

NELL
I just didn’t think dogs were supposed to drink cocktails

GIA
She’s a very mature dog.

*Valerie seems annoyed at Nell. She slurps her cocktail. It’s inside of a bowl. Since she’s a dog.*

NELL
Where are we exactly?

GIA
We’re on Optimism Island!

*Nell considers Optimism Island. It’s Really Great, You Guys.*

NELL
Huh

*Gia and Valerie laugh.*
Valerie sort of barks and laughs.  
Nell isn't in on the joke.

VALERIE (to Nell)  
Do you want to get your palm read?

NELL  
Can you  
do that

VALERIE  
I checked out a bunch of books about palm reading from the library  
But now all the libraries are closed  
So I’ve had like, way more time to read them

NELL  
But you don’t have palms you have  
paws

Valerie shrugs.

GIA  
She’s actually quite good

Nell shrugs.  
Valerie takes Nell’s palm in her paws.  
Peers into it.

VALERIE  
Mhmmm

NELL  
What

VALERIE  
That’s what I thought

NELL  
What

VALERIE  
That’s Exactly what I thought

NELL (???)  
What

Valerie peers into Nell’s palm.
VALERIE
It’s telling me:
That we’re all interconnected

Valerie lets go of Nell’s palm.

NELL
That’s
it

VALERIE
There’s an inspirational quote that feels really fitting to say right now
It’s –
Gah it’s on the tip of my tongue

GIA
“Dance like nobody’s watching”

VALERIE
No

GIA (!)
“Live laugh love”

VALERIE
Nope

GIA (!!!)
“You can only see the rainbow when you look through the rain”

VALERIE
Wait! -
No

GIA (!!!)
“Everything happens for a reason”

VALERIE
Is that - ?
No
No
No
Man it’s on the tip of my tongue!

GIA
The other day, while I was taking Valerie for a walk,
and waiting for her to finish peeing underneath this cluster of magnolia trees
I saw a stranger carrying a bag of groceries and a container of eggs, loose
And I smiled at him.
GIA
Like a real toothy, creases up and down my cheeks grin.
Like I didn’t phone it in, you know?
For the first time – I think actually for the first time in my life.

NELL (...)
You smiled at a stranger for
the first
time
in your life?

GIA
And he didn’t smile back.

VALERIE
That’s too bad

GIA
But that wasn’t the point, you know?
That was the Lesson

VALERIE
Ahhh of course
Of Course, Gia.
Wow

GIA
Because I felt proud
I felt Really Proud
For putting myself out there.

Gia looks so pleased with herself.
Valerie looks a little jealous.
(If it’s possible for dogs to look jealous.)
One of the inflatable beach balls POPS.

NELL
Yeahhh
I think I’m gonna /

That cosmic void again.
Nell breathes.
Or tries to.

BRITISH VOICE
In through the nose
Out through the mouth
Don’t try to breathe in any particular way
Nell breathes weirdly.

BRITISH VOICE
Oh kay -
Why don’t you count the breaths as they pass?
One with the rising sensation
two with the falling
And then three
And then four

*Huh. It seems like this actually works.*

NELL
And then five

BRITISH VOICE
And then six

NELL
And then seven

BRITISH VOICE
And then eight

NELL
And then nine

*British Voice appears in the cosmic void, beside Nell.*
*She is actually an Extremely Old Woman.*
*She looks excellent for her age.*

EXTREMELY OLD WOMAN
And then ten

NELL
Oh my god

EXTREMELY OLD WOMAN
Hi

NELL
I didn’t think I was going to
Meet you

EXTREMELY OLD WOMAN
It seemed like you needed some company
NELL
…I actually kind of do

EXTREMELY OLD WOMAN
Was I not what you were expecting?

NELL
Um -

EXTREMELY OLD WOMAN
It’s ok, you can say it

NELL
You just
You have an incredibly youthful voice

EXTREMELY OLD WOMAN
I know.
It’s my favorite thing about myself

NELL
How long have you been doing this?

EXTREMELY OLD WOMAN
Ever since I got turned down for the subway gig

NELL
The subway gig?

EXTREMELY OLD WOMAN
I wanted to be the voice of the A C E trains

NELL
Ohhh
Hey
Their loss

EXTREMELY OLD WOMAN
I brought you something

NELL
Is it cheese

But the Extremely Old (British) Woman doesn’t hand Nell cheese.
She hands her a photograph. In a frame.

NELL
Is that
NELLE

a kidney?

EXTREMELY OLD WOMAN

Not a kidney
Your kidney

Extremely Old Woman hands Nell another photograph.

EXTREMELY OLD WOMAN

And that’s your liver

And another

EXTREMELY OLD WOMAN

And that’s your cranial cavity

And another

EXTREMELY OLD WOMAN

And that’s your esophagus

And another

EXTREMELY OLD WOMAN

And that’s your pancreas

And another

EXTREMELY OLD WOMAN

And those are all your muscles
And those are all your tendons
And those are all your bones

The floor and/or cosmic void is covered in framed photos of the inside of Nell’s body.

EXTREMELY OLD WOMAN

And that’s your heart
Pumping away
See?
Do you see?

And Nell does see.

Trumpet music plays.

Gorgeous, brassy trumpet music.

It’s Nell’s favorite song.

Nell breathes.

For real this time.
Or maybe Your favorite song plays.
And maybe You breathe.
For real this time.
Or maybe not.
Maybe you don’t listen to me.
Or this meditation app.
And you do whatever the hell you want to do right now.

Blackout.
End of play.