

2012

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Recommended Citation

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VARIATIONS ON A SONNET:
A PLAY AND ACCOMPANYING ANALYSIS

Hannah Carey

Variations on a Sonnet:
A Play and Accompanying Analysis
by Hannah Carey

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements of the CSU Honors Program
for Honors in the degree of
Bachelor of Arts
in
Theatre
College of the Arts
Columbus State University

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Variations on a Sonnet: An Analysis

By Hannah Carey

When I first began considering writing a play based on Shakespeare's sonnets, I toyed with the idea of dramatizing the poet's life as it is revealed in the sonnets. I had read the sonnets and imagined that it would not be terribly difficult to set some of them to prose scenes in which the amorphous jealousy, obsession, and longing found in the sonnets would blossom into clear conflicts and complex characters--the protagonist being Shakespeare himself, of course. The play would give a biographical portrait of Shakespeare and his life, without being preachy or boring. However, the more I studied the sonnets and the writings of their commentators, the more certain I became that doing so would be presumptuous.

"People often wish that a diary or correspondence might turn up from which we could learn about Shakespeare; in the Sonnets we have, by a fluke, something of this kind," says critic C. L. Barber in his *Essay on Shakespeare's Sonnets* (5). Barber goes on to point out that many scholars have proposed theories about the Sonnets' implications about Shakespeare's biography, and all such theories were rebutted by the late Professor Hyder Rollins (Barber 5).

Instead of using the sonnets to piece together a biography, I skimmed through them, highlighting phrases that resonated with me and scribbling notes about scenarios that could match the themes of each sonnet. As I narrowed down the sonnets I found most interesting, a set of contemporary scenarios and characters emerged, and my play, *Variations on a Sonnet*, began to take shape. As I wrote the script, it became less about bestowing historical and literary knowledge on the lucky viewer, and more about telling a story with the same sort of elements I saw in the sonnets. Barber phrases it well when he says the sonnets "realize with directness and fulness basic conditions of existence which love has to confront--the fact of mortality, the separateness of human beings, their need of each other, the graces that come unsought and undeserved" (6). These conditions are not limited to romantic love. While acknowledging that the sonnets are love poems written about romantic relationships, I chose to recast the themes of love and longing in a passionate familial light.

Variations on a Sonnet follows a young woman named Elsie, who is teaching an undergraduate course on Shakespeare's sonnets as part of her graduate degree in Shakespeare Studies. She is living with her older sister, Anne, and her troubled and distant younger sister, Sabin, and their home life begins to

mirror the themes of the sonnets Elsie and her students discuss in class. In this analysis I will discuss four of the seven sonnets I use in my play.

The first seventeen sonnets share the same goal: to convince a young man to marry and have children. Sonnet 10 is the only sonnet from the Procreation sonnets I use in my play, quoted here:

Sonnet 10

For shame deny that thou bear'st love to any,
 Who for thyself art so unprovident.
 Grant, if thou wilt, thou art beloved of many,
 But that thou none lovest is most evident;
 For thou art so possess'd with murderous hate
 That 'gainst thyself thou stick'st not to conspire.
 Seeking that beauteous roof to ruinate
 Which to repair should be thy chief desire.
 O, change thy thought, that I may change my mind!
 Shall hate be fairer lodged than gentle love?
 Be, as thy presence is, gracious and kind,
 Or to thyself at least kind-hearted prove:
 Make thee another self, for love of me,
 That beauty still may live in thine or thee. (Shakespeare 39)

Sonnet 10, according to the editor's note in *Shakespeare's Sonnets and Poems*, "accuses a young man of a murderous hatred against himself and his family line" (Mowat 38). In the couplet, it encourages him to have a child so that his beauty will continue. In *Variations*, as a nod to the sonnet's apparent theme of procreation, we learn that Anne will never be able to have a child in the scene immediately following the classroom discussion of Sonnet 10 (39). Childbearing is a theme in my play, but it is not the only element I took from Sonnet 10.

English Professor David K. Weiser of Touro College writes about the shift distinguishing this sonnet from the previous eight; Sonnets 2-9 use a self-effacing manner, leaving out personal pronouns, as if the young man were being persuaded by "a disembodied voice" (12). In Sonnet 10, however, we see a

glimpse of the speaker's individuality in line 9: "Oh change thy thought that *I* may change *my* mind," and in the couplet: "Make thee another self, for love of *me*" (emphasis added) (Shakespeare 39). In Weiser's words, "Never before had the speaker entered directly into the argument he was expounding" (Weiser 12).

In *Variations*, after the classroom discussion about Sonnet 10, we see a shift in Elsie's behavior towards Sabin which parallels the speaker's shift in the sonnets. Whereas before, Elsie is just bossy, in Scene 6, we learn that some of her motives are less controlling and more interpersonally oriented: "I want you to be happy, but I don't know what you need. All you have to do is ask" (44). She brings her own wants and needs into the argument instead of remaining distantly imperious.

Author Dr. Katherine Wilson, points out another element new to the Procreation sonnets: the image of repairing a roof, which symbolizes the permanence of familial ties (Wilson 162). This weaves nicely into the plot I have created. Several other phrases in the sonnet resonated with me, particularly "murderous hate" and "seeking that beauteous roof to ruinate" (10.5, 7) These phrases made me think of suicide and self-harm, so I took them completely out of context and worked them into the story as well.

The next sonnet I will discuss is Sonnet 23, which is from the main body of the sonnets. After the Procreation sonnets are the Fair Youth sonnets, which span from 18 to 126, and are addressed to a young man (Weiser 60); here is Sonnet 23:

Sonnet 23

As an unperfect actor on the stage
 Who with his fear is put besides his part,
 Or some fierce thing replete with too much rage,
 Whose strength's abundance weakens his own heart.
 So I, for fear of trust, forget to say
 The perfect ceremony of love's rite,
 And in mine own love's strength seem to decay,
 O'ercharged with burden of mine own love's might.
 O, let my books be then the eloquence
 And dumb presagers of my speaking breast,
 Who plead for love and look for recompense

More than that tongue that more hath more express'd.

O, learn to read what silent love hath writ:

To hear with eyes belongs to love's fine wit. (Shakespeare 65)

In this sonnet, the speaker compares himself to a frightened actor, an image that Wilson notes may have come from Shakespeare's personal experience, whatever else in the sonnets does not (179). The speaker attributes his inability to speak about his love to his insecurity and overpowering emotions, and asks the beloved to instead read his writings to discover his love (Shakespeare 64).

I enjoyed working with this sonnet because several of its phrases summed up Sabin's character for me: "some fierce thing replete with too much rage," "O'ercharged with burden of mine own love's might," and "who plead for love and look for recompense" (23.3, 8, 11). These phrases show a certain juxtaposition: the weakness of the body pitted against the strength of the emotion, and a "fierce thing" who at the same time "pleads for recompense." The speaker seems lost; Sabin is too.

Weiser notes the comparative simplicity of this poem, and comments that the only real point debated by scholars in the past 300 years is whether or not "books" was a misprint, and ought to be "looks". Weiser and Wilson have differing views on the matter. Wilson suggests that the poet's remark "to hear with eyes belongs to love's fine wit" is sarcastic; since this is what poets do, the speaker is making a sly poke at other sonneteers. She goes on to note, "the joke is both indicated and missed by those who would take 'books' as a misprint for 'looks'" (Wilson 179-80).

Weiser, on the other hand, asserts that the ironic strategy in Sonnets 21, 23, and 25 would support the emendation of "books" to "looks;" in these sonnets, the speaker argues that he is not like other poets. If this is the case, "looks" is the correct word, because the speaker is depending on his eloquent eyes to communicate his love, instead of employing words, which are used by other poets. If it is not a misprint, and "books" is the correct reading, then, in Weiser's words, "The speaker's failure is feigned rather than real; it is belied by the poem itself...23 performs the act of communication that he claims to be incapable of" (Weiser 50).

In *Variations*, I chose to take the accepted use of the word "book" for two reasons. Firstly, I do not find it unreasonable to think that Shakespeare wrote a sonnet contradicting itself in this way. Secondly, I find written communication completely different from oral communication, so the sonnet does not seem

particularly contradictory to me anyway. I used the sonnet as a springboard to explore the theme of written communication between the sisters. Sabin is giving Anne the silent treatment, and has a difficult time communicating with Elsie due to Elsie's overbearing personality. Instead of speaking to her, Sabin writes to her. This sparks a discussion about writing and college (51-53).

The last sonnets in Shakespeare's collection, numbers 127-154, are traditionally known as the "Dark Lady" sonnets, and Sonnet 147, the only one from this series I included in my play, is quoted here:

Sonnet 147

My love is as a fever, longing still

For that which longer nurseth the disease,

Feeding on that which doth preserve the ill,

The uncertain sickly appetite to please.

My reason, the physician to my love,

Angry that his prescriptions are not kept,

Hath left me, and I desperate now approve

Desire is death, which physic did except.

Past cure I am, now reason is past care,

And frantic-mad with evermore unrest;

My thoughts and my discourse as madmen's are,

At random from the truth vainly express'd;

For I have sworn thee fair and thought thee bright,

Who art as black as hell, as dark as night. (Shakespeare 315)

This sonnet's dizzying execution belies the simplicity of its theme: the speaker compares his love to an illness (Shakespeare 314).

In *Variations*, I chose to have the students in Elsie's class conclude that this sonnet is about betrayal. The couplet suggests that the speaker is wrong about the beloved, but the implied interpretation is that his love clouded his judgement and the beloved has always been the way she is. I pursued a variation on that theme: the idea that the deception is a deliberate ruse by the beloved, and the speaker loves her so much that the ruse goes undetected until the couplet. Translated into Elsie's world, Sabin is the beloved, and Anne and

Elsie hope she has changed. Her behavior leads them to believe she has, but they discover that she is the same troubled girl they suspected when she reveals that she lied about why she needed money from Anne.

According to Dr. Wilson, Sonnet 147 is a parody of the typical sonnet scenario of love as a malady, coming to what Wilson describes as “a ridiculous climax” in the couplet (Wilson 137-38). Weiser on the other hand, insists that the sonnet is a tool for self-analysis: “The speaker has returned to the role of delirious patient, a most convenient mask that externalizes inner conflict and eliminates responsibility” (182). Continuing this trend of avoiding responsibility, the poet implies that both his reason and his appetite have autonomous control (182). Weiser’s analysis of the climax is also completely different from Wilson’s:

Not surprisingly, as the speaker becomes entirely concerned with his inner faculties, granting them a being of their own, he retains little concern for the other person. In fact, the ‘thou’ is absent throughout the dialogue, with the exception of line 13...Even here, her function is an impersonal one. She is the etiology of his disease, the catalyst to a series of emotional reactions that the speaker finds so intriguing....Its couplet juxtaposes an irresolvable tension between what he thinks and what really is. (Weiser 182)

This avoidance of responsibility and failure to consider the needs of others is reflected in Sabin’s behavior throughout most of the play, and elements of the description of illness are mirrored in Sabin’s panicked monologue in Scene 6 and Elsie’s accusation that Sabin is a parasite in Scene 10.

For the final sonnet in my play, I chose to use Sonnet 18, partly because it is well-known. It is the sonnet most people think of when Shakespeare’s sonnets are mentioned, so I wanted to include it in the script. I spared the audience a classroom discussion, and instead inserted it as part of a monologue Elsie gives to her infant niece at the close of the play.

Sonnet 18

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

Thou art more lovely and more temperate:

Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,

And summer's lease hath all too short a date:

Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,

And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;

And every fair from fair sometime declines,
 By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;
 But thy eternal summer shall not fade
 Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest;
 Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
 When in eternal lines to time thou growest:
 So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
 So long lives this and this gives life to thee. (Shakespeare 55)

In this sonnet, the speaker describes the young man's beauty and reflects that he will never age or die, but instead will be immortalized in the poet's verses (Shakespeare 54).

Weiser argues that this poem is less a celebration of the youth, as are many of the other sonnets, and more "a series of actions and decisions made by the speaker. He ponders making a comparison, then makes it and develops its consequences" (130). Although he finds the comparison inadequate, since the beloved is more beautiful than anything in nature, he establishes that the comparison is still worth making (130).

The significance of this poem to the plot of *Variations* lies in the fact that Sonnet 18 is a shift out of the Procreation sonnets. As I use it in the play, Elsie recites it to baby Arden, who is involved in and responsible for several shifts in the world of the sisters. For one thing, since Anne and Michael now have a baby, they are no longer struggling to conceive or adopt, so they are shifting out of the "procreation phase" of their own lives. For another, all the main characters are in the process of shifting into something new: Anne is adjusting to being a mother, Sabin is traveling the world, and Elsie is about to leave the cocoon of academia.

Also, the sonnet is clearly about romantic love, but I chose to have Elsie recite it to a tiny baby. Because it is so well-known, I deliberately took it out of context. Some phrases in particular caught my ear and made me think of children: "darling buds of May," and "thy eternal summer shall not fade." The final six lines are about preserving the young man in poetry, but I also saw elements of protection, which could apply to taking care of a child. Also, Elsie tells Arden she will write her a sonnet some day, presenting the idea of preserving Arden in a sonnet of her own. It's cyclical.

In an early paragraph of the essay quoted at the beginning of this analysis, C.L. Barber urges us to view the sonnets not as inadequate clues to a literal telling of Shakespeare's life, but as an expression of his personality. Through the sonnets, he says, "we only see Shakespeare as he is living by writing poetry to people, rather than living in other ways" (6). This satisfies me, this idea that the sonnets are about Shakespeare's life, but about a limited section of his life, as if we were looking through a single window into a large house. In my play, I hold the same window up and look into someone else's house with it--the house of Elsie and her sisters.

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Variations on a Sonnet

by
Hannah Carey

Cast of Characters

ELSIE.....26, A graduate student
ANNE.....30, Elsie's sister
SABIN.....20, Anne and Elsie's sister
JANE.....An undergrad student
SAM.....Another student
KATE.....Another student

A note on the text:

Dashes -- indicate where a character's line is cut off by another character's line.

Backslashes / indicate overlap, and mark where the next character's line begins.

Ellipses ... indicate where a character trails off.

For my sisters

SCENE ONE

(A classroom in a private college for women. Three young ladies, KATE, JANE, and SAM, are seated. ELSIE enters, harried. She is late, and carries a collection of books, binders and loose papers. She is 26. And terrified.)

ELSIE

Good morning, everyone! Good Lord, is this all of you? Sorry. I mean, I'm sure you're great, I just expected a bigger class. Anyway. Sorry I'm late. As of last week they had this course listed for a different room, and apparently you all got the memo about it being here, but nobody told me. Anyway! Welcome to English 3500, Special Topics in Poetry: Sonnets of William Shakespeare. If you are in the wrong class, now's a good time to leave, before you get too engrossed in the material. *(She laughs nervously.)* Ok, then. Oh, by the way, I'm Elsie Page. Ms. Page. Many of you may know that Dr. Marks was originally going to teach this course. Unfortunately she had a fall last week and fractured her spine--otherwise she's ok!--but she won't be able to teach for a while, so I will be teaching the course this semester. Um, in lieu of paper syllabi, I have posted the syllabus online in the course's Olivernet account, which you all have access to...to which you all have access. *(More nervous laughter.)* Ok. Let's get started. William Shakespeare, a country boy from Stratford, England--inarguably best known for his plays, but he also penned one hundred and fifty four sonnets, as you will all know all too well by the end of the semester. You will need this book: *Shakespeare's Sonnets and Poems* edited by Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine. I am aware that the sonnets are in the public domain, and are all available online, but we will be reading and discussing the editors' commentary, so you do need this book. Besides looking at the sonnets analytically this semester--structure, rhyme, word choice, that sort of thing--we'll also be viewing them in context: what was the purpose of these sonnets? Who was their audience? It'll be great. Let's see. I realize that many of the professors here are very strict about classroom etiquette, but I would like this class to be very informal. I think we'll all learn more if the floor is open for discussion all the time. My only rule is that we all be respectful. Don't interrupt, that sort of thing. We're all adults here, right? For today, I'd like to know a little more about you guys. Let's start with introductions. I'm Ms. Page, like I said. And you are...?

JANE

I'm Jane.

SAM

Sam.

KATE

It's Kaitlyn, but I go by Kate.

ELSIE

Ok, thanks, everyone. Um, this part is just for my own idle curiosity: why are you in this class? Anybody?

(JANE raises her hand)

JANE

Shakespeare is pretty much my favorite thing ever.

ELSIE

Ok, great.

JANE

Like, I've read all the plays except the histories.

SAM

Ooh-la-la.

JANE

Rude.

ELSIE

And why are you here? Sam, right?

SAM

Yes, that's me. Honestly? I'm an English minor and I needed another upper-level elective. Plus, my roommate, the inimitable Jane, is taking it.

ELSIE

Ok, that's fair. How about you?

KATE

I really like poetry. And Shakespeare.

ELSIE

Ok. All perfectly acceptable reasons to be in my class. Um. I'm a student at Oliver as well. I'm working on my master's here: Shakespeare Studies. So, yes. I'm very glad to have you all! I won't keep you long today, but please read the syllabus before the next class, and email me if you have any questions. Have a nice day! I'll see you on Wednesday!

SCENE 2

(The den of ANNE's house. It is the main play area for the daycare she runs out of her home. Kids' toys are scattered across the floor. A sofa. Cubbies against the wall. Perhaps a picnic table. Finger paintings and crayon drawings are taped to the walls. A baby gate blocks the staircase to the second floor. Another door leads to the back yard. The kitchen is upstage, separated from the den by a half wall, and perhaps another baby gate or two. Around the corner is a door to the basement stairs. The master bedroom is upstairs. A beta fish in a vase is on a shelf, out of reach of any kids. SABIN is seated grimly. ELSIE enters.)

ELSIE

Sabin?!

SABIN

Hey.

ELSIE

Oh my gosh, it's so good to see you!

(An awkward hug)

SABIN

Yeah, you too.

ELSIE

What's going on?

SABIN

Nothing much.

ELSIE

Cool.

(ELSIE peers at a bruise on SABIN's face.)

ELSIE (CONT'D)

Wow. What happened to your face?

SABIN

Nothing.

(An awkward pause)

ELSIE

So, how are you?

SABIN

I'm out of a job, my car's in the shop, and my boyfriend just dumped me and kicked me out of his apartment, so not awesome.

ELSIE

Oh. I'm sorry to hear that.

SABIN

It's fine.

(ANNE enters, cleaning.)

ANNE

Hey! I texted you but you never replied.

ELSIE

Phone died. Have you seen my charger?

ANNE

Lucy chewed on it, so I put it up here. Basically, if you don't want the kids to slobber on your stuff, I'd keep it downstairs.

ELSIE

Thanks. What was the text about? Do we need more milk?

ANNE

Not exactly. Sabin's going to move in with us for a little while. I just wanted to let you know.

ELSIE

Oh. Ok.

ANNE

We don't have a free closet, so I told her to put her stuff in your room.

SABIN

(quickly)

Don't worry, I'm sleeping on the couch.

ELSIE

Sure, yeah, that's fine. Your stuff in my room, I mean. Not a problem.

ANNE

How was class?

ELSIE

I was late. It sucked. I'm reasonably certain they already hate me. All three of them.

ANNE

It can't have been that bad!

ELSIE

Eh. It was pretty bad. But--"tomorrow is another day!" *(To Sabin)* Did Anne tell you I'm teaching?

SABIN

She mentioned something about it. Undergrads, right?

ELSIE

Yeah, a special topics course on Shakespeare's Sonnets.

SABIN

Wow. That sounds really...cool.

ELSIE

I thought so at first. But that was back when I thought I was going to be teaching English 1101. The university thought it was a good idea. I mean, they asked me to teach it. 1101, I mean. Well, I say "ask." It's part of my fellowship. They cover tuition, and I teach. But then Dr. Marks fell off a ladder and broke her back. Perils of home improvement, right? So she's out of commission. And Dr. Hall, the department chair asked me to teach her course. It's nuts! I mean, it's awesome, but it's a lot! English 1101 is one thing, right? "This is how you write an

ELSIE (CONT'D)

essay." But this? This is in-depth literary analysis of the poetry of greatest writer in the English language!

SABIN

Yeah. Well, I'm gonna go get a shower.

(SABIN goes upstairs)

ELSIE

So, just like that, she moves in?

ANNE

She needs somewhere to stay. And I talked to Michael about it. It really won't affect him at all, since he's been working the graveyard shift at the hospital.

ELSIE

Thank God she's ok. Where has she been for the last three years?

ANNE

She's been here in the city. I take her out for coffee once a month or so to stay in touch.

ELSIE

Why didn't you tell me? She wouldn't answer her phone, not her email, nothing. I've been worried sick.

ANNE

She didn't want me to talk about her.

ELSIE

Not even to tell me she was still breathing?

ANNE

You know how she is.

ELSIE

Is she still with Dom?

ANNE

He just broke up with her.

ELSIE

Right. She told me. Dad will be glad to know he's out of the picture.

ANNE

Please don't get involved. Dad and Sabin need to work this out themselves. Give her time.

ELSIE

Is she ok?

ANNE

I don't know.

SCENE 3

(The classroom. Another day.)

ELSIE

What do we know about Shakespeare?

JANE

He was born in 1564 in Stratford, England.

ELSIE

Yes. What else?

KATE

He wrote thirty-something plays.

ELSIE

Thirty-eight. Good, what else?

JANE

He was an actor.

ELSIE

True.

SAM

He's dead.

ELSIE

Also true. Now I need a volunteer.

(JANE raises her hand)

ELSIE

Lovely. Jane, give me a number between 1 and 154.

JANE

Oh, gosh. I don't know which one I like. Number 18 is the really famous one, right?

ELSIE

Don't think, just pick a number.

SAM

93!

JANE

Sam!

ELSIE

Fabulous. Jane, Would you read Sonnet 93 for us?

JANE

I don't have the book yet.

ELSIE

Fair enough. You may borrow mine.

(ELSIE gives book to JANE, who reads self-importantly...and badly)

JANE

"So shall I live, supposing thou art true,
Like a deceiv'd husband; so love's face

ELSIE

Deceivéd.

JANE

Deceivéd?

ELSIE

Mm-hmm. "Like a deceivéd husband; so love's face"

JANE

Ok.

May still seem love to me, though alter'd new;
Thy looks with me, thy heart in other place:
For there can live no hatred in thine eye,
Therefore in that I cannot know thy change.
In many's looks the false heart's history
Is writ in moods and frowns and wrinkles strange,
But heaven in thy creation did decree
That in thy face sweet love should ever dwell;
Whate'er thy thoughts or thy heart's workings be,
Thy looks should nothing thence but sweetness tell.
How like Eve's apple doth thy beauty grow,
If thy sweet virtue answer not thy show."

ELSIE

Great, thank you! What does it mean?

(...no one knows)

ELSIE

You're right. That was too broad. What do you notice?

KATE

The rhyming?

ELSIE

Good. Elizabethan sonnets have a rhyme scheme that goes a-b-a-b, c-d-c-d, e-f-e-f, g-g.

SAM
Why?

ELSIE
That's an excellent question. I have no idea.

SAM
Want me to look it up?

ELSIE
Sure.

(SAM looks it up on her phone)

ELSIE (CONT'D)
While she's doing that, what else did we notice?

KATE
It has a special rhythm. I forget what it's called.

JANE
Blank verse.

ELSIE
Yes, or iambic pentameter.

SAM
The internet doesn't know.

ELSIE
That's unfortunate. Why don't you do some library research on your own later and report back to us?

SAM
It's really ok.

ELSIE
Back to iambic pentameter. In each line, you have ten syllables, alternating unstressed and stressed. Listen:
"So shall I live supposing thou art true."
De-dum-de-dum-de-dum-de-dum-de-dum.

KATE
It's like a heartbeat.

ELSIE
Yeah, it is. Let's look at some of the words now, a little at a time:
"For there can live no hatred in thine eye,
Therefore in that I cannot know thy change."
What does that mean?

(Awkward pause. ELSIE struggles.)

ELSIE (CONT'D)

Um, maybe another way to say that first line is, "You never get mad."
Do you know anyone like that? They never seem upset about anything.

(The girls nod.)

ELSIE (CONT'D)

Do you like those people?

JANE

They're kind of creepy.

SAM

Like robots.

ELSIE

What about them bothers you, or seems unnatural?

KATE

You never know where you stand. You have to assume they're holding
back, but you can't tell what.

ELSIE

Aha! Jane, read the sixth line again.

JANE

"Therefore in that I cannot know thy change."

ELSIE

So...?

(An even more awkward pause.)

SAM

What is he talking about "Therefore in that." Therefore in what?

ELSIE

Ok. Let's start over. Listen carefully:
"So shall I live, supposing thou art true,
Like a deceived husband; so love's face
May still seem love to me, though alter'd new;
Thy looks with me, thy heart in other place:
For there can live no hatred in thine eye,
Therefore in that I cannot know thy change."
You see?

SAM

No, I don't.

ELSIE

Well, "In that I can I cannot know thy change" is referring to the
beloved's eye.

SAM

Who's the beloved?

JANE

Seriously, Sam? The beloved is the person the poet is writing this love poem to.

SAM

Calm down! Some of us didn't grow up with Shakespeare.

JANE

That's just a rumor.

ELSIE

But does that make sense?

KATE

I think so. The poet says that since the beloved's eye never shows hatred, the poet won't know if her feelings change.

ELSIE

Yes!

SAM

So all that to say "I can't trust your face?"

ELSIE

Exactly. The poet says that he just has to go on assuming his lover is faithful. Since the beloved can never show hatred on his or her face, he can't depend on the beloved's facial expressions for hints of infidelity, or a decrease in affection. You have the book, right, Kate?

KATE

I do.

ELSIE

Would you read lines 7 and 8 of sonnet 93?

KATE

"In many's looks the false heart's history
Is writ in moods and frowns and wrinkles strange"

JANE

So, lots of other people show their lies and stuff on their faces?

ELSIE

Yes. And continuing,
"But heaven in thy creation did decree
That in thy face sweet love should ever dwell;"

SAM

Isn't he just saying the same thing over and over?

ELSIE

Well, that's kind of how sonnets work. The poet makes a single point, but in several different ways. Why don't you read the rest?

SAM

How do you say the first word?

ELSIE

Whate'er. It's "whatever," but you drop the "v" and condense it to two syllables. Whate'er

SAM

"Whate'er thy thoughts or thy heart's workings be,
Thy looks should nothing thence but sweetness tell.
How like Eve's apple doth thy beauty grow,
If thy sweet virtue answer not thy show!"

KATE

(slowly)

No matter what the beloved is thinking, her face is sweet. So she's like the apple in the Garden in the Bible if she's beautiful but bad.

ELSIE

Bingo!

SAM

Technically, it wasn't an apple. It was the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

JANE

Ooh-la-la.

SAM

Rude.

ELSIE

Alright, ladies. Thank you! Do the reading assignment listed in the syllabus, and I'll see you on Monday.

(Students exit. As they go:)

SAM

Jane, tell me I can't do something, but Shakespearean.

JANE

What?

SAM

In your mom voice. Be like, "Thee are grounded, young lady!"

JANE

Thou'lt not leave thy room, daughter!

SAM
Whate'er.

JANE
Ridiculous.

SCENE 4

(ANNE's house, the same day. SABIN is on ELSIE's laptop. ANNE enters, picking up toys)

ANNE
How's it coming?

SABIN
Oh, you know. Slim pickin's. I found a couple listings for temp jobs.
Like, data entry. Nothing awesome.

ANNE
Have you thought about applying to work at a daycare?

SABIN
Ha! No, never. I'll leave that to you, Mother Hubbard.

ANNE
Mother Hubbard?

SABIN
Isn't that the one in the shoe?

ANNE
Oh! No. That's the one with the dog: "Old Mother Hubbard went to the
cupboard to give her poor dog a bone."

SABIN
Wasn't there a lady in a shoe with like 50 kids?

ANNE
"There was an old lady who lived in a shoe
She had so many children, she didn't know what to do." That one?

SABIN
I thought it was the same one.

ANNE
'Fraid not.

SABIN
Ah. Well, at least I'm pretty.

ANNE
This is true. But seriously, you have no interest in working with kids?
Because I have connections.

SABIN
I would murder them.

ANNE
No you wouldn't.

SABIN
I mean, it's your calling. More power to ya. But I can't. God, I don't know how you do it.

ANNE
Kids are something special. Especially with the itty bitties, they're so brutally honest. Whatever they think, whatever they need--there's never any hesitation.

SABIN
Ugh. So needy.

ANNE
Yeah, but also so generous. They give as easily as they take, you know?

SABIN
I think I'd rather have a beta fish, like Kit here.

ANNE
I bet someday you'll change your mind.

SABIN
Do you want some of your own? Kids. Not beta fish.

ANNE
Yeah, I do. We do. Want to know a secret?

SABIN
Shoot.

ANNE
Michael and I are trying now.

SABIN
Oh, snap! I'm gonna be an aunt?

ANNE
Not yet, but someday soon.

SABIN
Well, damn! I better hurry up and find a job so I can get out of your hair.

ANNE
Take your time, sis.

SABIN

Thanks again for lending me the money for my car.

ANNE

Of course.

SABIN

I really hate borrowing from you.

ANNE

I know you do. But we're happy to help. And we're happy to have you for as long as you need to stay.

SABIN

You are. Your darling husband is. Not so much with the Elsie-monster.

ANNE

She loves you.

SABIN

So she tells me. So does Jesus, according to her. Anyway, back to the job hunt. What I really want is a job that comes with free ice cream.

ANNE

That was really nice of Elsie to let you use her laptop.

SABIN

I know, right? Uncharacteristically so.

(ELSIE enters)

ELSIE

Good morrow, cousins!

ANNE

Good morrow, my lady.

ELSIE

Sorry. Too much?

ANNE

No, you're fine.

ELSIE

Hey...Sabin...how's my laptop working for you?

SABIN

I'm sorry, what was that? I couldn't hear what you actually said over your deafening subtext.

ELSIE

I didn't say you could use it.

SABIN
You didn't say I couldn't.

ELSIE
How are you even on there? It's password protected.

SABIN
"Protected" is a strong word.

ELSIE
Dangit, Sabin, I shouldn't have to ask you not to hack into my laptop while I'm gone. Are you at least searching for a job?

SABIN
Nope.

ELSIE
Ok. Well, I need to check my email in, like, ten minutes.

SABIN
Fine.

(Anne is re-bending a misshapen spoon)

ELSIE
Whatcha doin'?

ANNE
Fixing this spoon.

ELSIE
Sabin! Can you please use the ice cream scoop when you get ice cream?

SABIN
Nope.

ANNE
It's not that big a deal.

ELSIE
At least let it soften on the counter.

SABIN
Nope.

ELSIE
They're Anne's spoons. Don't destroy them.

SABIN
Anne just said she doesn't care.

ELSIE

No, Anne just said it's not a big deal. She's trying to keep us from fighting.

SABIN

So why don't you give her what she wants and stop fighting with me?

ANNE

You know I don't like it when you talk about me like I'm not here.

ELSIE

Because she deserves to have nice things, and you have no right to take them away from her just because she won't fight back.

ANNE

I'll just adjust the / freezer so it won't be so cold.

SABIN

Well, I deserve to not have every second of my life micromanaged by you.

ELSIE

First of all, Anne, it's a freezer. It's supposed to be cold. Second of all, actually, Sabin you do deserve that. As a matter of fact, you deserve treatment far worse than my "micromanaging" your life, since you have made it very clear that you cannot manage it yourself.

SABIN

I hate when you do that.

ANNE

Will you two please calm down? They're just spoons.

SABIN

I fucking hate when you get pretentious with me.

ELSIE

I am not being pretentious.

SABIN

"I am Elsie. I am so much smarter than you that I do not use contractions. Also, it makes Jesus sad when we say bad words." Fuck you.

ELSIE

Just use the freaking ice cream scoop, Sabin. This is not your / house.

SABIN

It's not yours / either

ANNE

No, it's mine, and I want you to stop fighting.

SABIN
I'm just defending / myself.

ELSIE
You're letting her walk all over you.

ANNE
If you can't calm down, please leave the room!

SABIN
I'm calm.

ELSIE
I'm calm too, but / you

ANNE
No buts!

(Beat)

SABIN
Do we have any rocky road left?

(She gets a tub of ice cream, a bowl, and a spoon and saunters out)

SABIN (CONT'D)
(as she exits)
Mmmmm.

ELSIE
Argh!

ANNE
They really are just spoons.

ELSIE
They're the set you and Michael picked out that Mom and Dad gave you
for a wedding gift!

ANNE
Actually, those are in storage. We bought these at Ikea.

ELSIE
Oh.. Well, it's the principle of the thing.

ANNE
Pick your battles, Else.

ELSIE
But they're all important.

ANNE
You know that's not true.

ELSIE
It feels true.

(Beat.)

ELSIE (CONT'D)
Have you seen my pink thumb drive? The one with the cat.

ANNE
I don't remember. When I picked up earlier, I put all your things in a cubby tub. I put your name on it.

ELSIE
Seriously?

ANNE
You'll thank me later. You can dump your keys in it, and whatever else. I know it's challenging, not having your own space. Thanks for understanding.

ELSIE
I mean, it's fine. It's just for a little while, right?

ANNE
Meaning...?

ELSIE
You said Sabin's not staying long.

ANNE
She's staying as long as she needs to. Michael and I have talked about it.

ELSIE
She's not stable.

ANNE
Please be kind.

ELSIE
I don't know how you can be comfortable with her in the house when the kids are here. She swears like a sailor, and she's probably cutting again. She's nuts.

ANNE
Elsie.

ELSIE
Seriously! You can't believe anything she says! You know what she's like. She's manipulative and self-serving and destructive--

ANNE

Elsie! She's working on it. Cut her some slack.

ELSIE

Is that what she told you? She's working on it?

ANNE

I believe her.

ELSIE

She knows that's what you want to hear.

ANNE

And I choose to believe she's sincerely trying to get back on track.

ELSIE

You are a far better person than either of us.

(Beat)

ELSIE (CONT'D)

Anne, why did you lend her money?

ANNE

Because she had no way to get her car fixed. It's kind of not your business.

ELSIE

It just makes me uncomfortable.

ANNE

It shouldn't make you anything, because it has nothing to do with you.

ELSIE

You're my sisters. Everything about you has everything to do with me.

ANNE

Please let it go.

(Beat)

ANNE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry it's hard.

ELSIE

Me too.

ANNE

You can make it easier.

ELSIE
I'll try.

ANNE
Thank you.

ELSIE
I'm going to look in my car for that thumb drive.

ANNE
Go look. Fare you well!

ELSIE
What?

ANNE
Fare you well?

ELSIE
Oh! I thought you said "Go to hell."

ANNE
No! I was trying to speak your language.

ELSIE
Look at you being all Shakespearean. You're my favorite Anne.

ANNE
You're my favorite Elsie.

(ELSIE exits out the front door)

SCENE 5

(The classroom, another day. It's raining outside.)

ELSIE
Welcome back, ladies. Today, let's start with discussing the structure of a sonnet. We have two different kinds of sonnets as discussed in the reading, yes? What are they?

SAM
English and Italian.

ELSIE
The main difference being...?

SAM
The structure.

ELSIE
Go on.

SAM

Both kinds have fourteen lines, but Italian sonnets have an octave with eight lines. English ones have three what-cha-ma-call-ems and then a couplet.

ELSIE
Quatrains.

SAM
Huh?

ELSIE
The what-cha-ma-call-ems.

SAM
Right.

ELSIE
Ok. Somebody else, what does the sonnet do?

JANE
It asks a question and then answers it in the couplet at the end.

ELSIE
Or presents a concept or problem. Good. In Bate's *Soul of the Age*, he describes it as "three thrusts with a twist in the tail." The problem or concept is presented and discussed in the first twelve lines, and either solved or expounded on in the final couplet. Let's apply it to Sonnet 10 and see how it matches the model we just constructed. Listen and be ready to discuss. Kate, will you read for us?

KATE
Sure. Sonnet 10:
"For shame deny that thou bear'st love to any,
Who for thyself art so unprovident.
Grant, if thou wilt, thou art beloved of many,
But that thou none lovest is most evident;
For thou art so possess'd with murderous hate
That 'gainst thyself thou stick'st not to conspire.
Seeking that beauteous roof to ruinate
Which to repair should be thy chief desire.
O, change thy thought, that I may change my mind!
Shall hate be fairer lodged than gentle love?
Be, as thy presence is, gracious and kind,
Or to thyself at least kind-hearted prove:
Make thee another self, for love of me,
That beauty still may live in thine or thee."

ELSIE
What do you think, Kate?

KATE
I don't know. I guess it fits.

ELSIE

Ok, but how? Jane, will you read the first quatrain?

JANE

"For shame deny that thou bear'st love to any,
Who for thyself art so unprovident.
Grant, if thou wilt, thou art beloved of many,
But that thou none lovest is most evident;"

ELSIE

Meaning...

SAM

"Don't deny that you love anyone?"

JANE

I think he says, "do deny that you love anyone."

KATE

And maybe, "lots of people love you."

ELSIE

Ok, good! I might paraphrase it as, "Everybody loves you, but you don't love anyone, and you make it very obvious." What about the line, "Who for thyself art so unprovident." What does that mean?

JANE

"You're not taking care of yourself."

ELSIE

Great. Next?

JANE

"For thou art so possess'd with murderous hate
That 'gainst thyself thou stick'st not to conspire.
Seeking that beauteous roof to ruinate
Which to repair should be thy chief desire."

KATE

So, the poet's saying, "You're destroying yourself."

JANE

It sounds like he's talking about suicide.

SAM

And it's a big contrast, because at first he's just like, "dude, you don't love anyone," but in this quat-cha-ma-call-it, he's like "you have murderous hate!"

JANE

"O, change thy thought, that I may change my mind!
Shall hate be fairer lodged than gentle love?
Be, as thy presence is, gracious and kind,

JANE (CONT'D)

Or to thyself at least kind-hearted prove"

KATE

"You should feel as lovely as you look." I mean, not lovely, but loved.
Or loving. Like, "you are lovely, but you're full of hate"

ELSIE

Yes. What else in that quatrain?

SAM

"If you're going to be full of murderous hate, at least be nice to
yourself."

ELSIE

Right!. Ok. If you didn't know the last couplet, would you know what the
poet was talking about?

SAM

I forgot the last part already. And no, I don't know. It's really
fuzzy. But it sounds like, "You're being a bully. And you're stubborn."

ELSIE

Ok. Take us home, Jane.

JANE

"Make thee another self, for love of me,
That beauty still may live in thine or thee."

ELSIE

So what he's saying is...?

JANE

Have a baby.

ELSIE

Bingo.

SAM

All that for "procreate?"

ELSIE

Pretty much. Why do you think Shakespeare wrote this?

SAM

Because he was trying to get in someone's pants.

JANE

Gross.

ELSIE

Ok, what if I told you that the first 17 sonnets all have a similar theme?

SAM

He really wanted to get some.

JANE

Gross!

KATE

Or he was hired to write to someone.

ELSIE

Kate wins this round. Many scholars believe that Shakespeare was hired by a wealthy family to convince their single heir to marry and reproduce. Let's look at the structure again. Does it match the format we talked about a minute ago?

JANE

The first two quatrains are on the same problem, but then the third one is different. Like, urging the guy to change the problem.

SAM

But the last one is right in line. Bam! Solution.

JANE

Seventeen sonnets, all about making babies.

SAM

Everything is about making babies.

JANE

Ugh! Sam!

SCENE 6

(ANNE's house, the same day. Periodic thunder and lightening. ANNE enters from outside. It's still raining, and she has been crying. ELSIE is reading.)

ELSIE

Hey, Anne! Just so you know, we're almost out of peanut butter. I put it on the grocery list.

ANNE

Ok. Cool. Thanks.

(ELSIE hears the catch in ANNE's voice, and sees her tear-stained face.)

ELSIE

Oh my God, Anne. What's wrong?

ANNE
It's stupid.

ELSIE
That's ok.

ANNE
Michael and I went to the fertility doctor last week. We got the test results today. We've been trying, and...I have endometriosis. The doctor says I'll never conceive.

ELSIE
Oh, Anne.

ANNE
It's stupid to be this upset. It's stupid to be making such a big deal over it.

ELSIE
No, it's not. That's what you wanted.

ANNE
I'm still overreacting. Michael wants a baby too, and he's being so wonderful about it. I just can't seem to keep it together.

ELSIE
Different people handle things in different ways.

ANNE
But it's not like I'm terminally ill. This isn't going to impact our life in any way, except that I'm never going to have a baby.

ELSIE
I'm so sorry, Anne.

(Thunder)

ELSIE
That was close. I'm going to go check the weather.

(ELSIE exits as SABIN comes in)

SABIN
Two interviews down. And I still hate public transportation.

(She sees ANNE)

SABIN (CONT'D)
Oh, shit. Do I need to beat somebody up?

ANNE
No, I'm fine--rough day is all.

(ANNE'S phone rings. She answers.)

ANNE

Hello, this is Anne.

CALLER (unheard by audience)

Hi Anne. This is Mrs. Miller, Kelsey's mother. I wanted to let you know that Kelsey will be staying with her grandmother during the day for the rest of the week.

ANNE

Oh. Is something wrong?

MRS. MILLER

Is there someone staying with you besides your husband?

ANNE

Yes ma'am, I have some family members staying with me right now. Why do you ask?

MRS. MILLER

Do any of them self-harm?

ANNE

Excuse me?

MRS. MILLER

Kelsey told me that she walked in on a young woman cutting herself in the bathroom.

ANNE

Mrs. Miller, I-

MRS. MILLER

I am not comfortable allowing Kelsey to stay in that sort of environment.

ANNE

No, of course not.

MRS. MILLER

I'll be making other arrangements for her.

ANNE

Certainly. I'm sorry about this. Have a nice evening, Mrs. Miller.

(She hangs up. She crosses to SABIN and grabs her hand, rolls up her sleeve and sees cuts)

SABIN

What the fuck?

ANNE

I think you need to leave.

SABIN

Piss off, Anne. It doesn't work like that.

ELSIE (*entering*)

There's a tornado warning one county over. We may need to--

ANNE

This is my house and I want you out of it.

ELSIE

What the heck is going on?

SABIN

You stay out of this.

ANNE

God, Sabin, you promised. You should go.

ELSIE

It's hailing. Nobody's going anywhere.

ANNE

Sabin's cutting again, and one of my kids walked in on it.

ELSIE

Sabin.

SABIN

It wouldn't be a problem if that miniature bitch had kept her buck-toothed mouth shut.

ELSIE

You mean you wouldn't have gotten caught if that miniature bitch had kept her buck toothed mouth shut. It's a problem regardless.

ANNE

This is my job, Sabin. Her mother's not letting her come back. She's probably already called all the other parents. God. I just--you know what, don't talk to me.

(ANNE exits)

ELSIE

Nice happy evening in the Stilton household.

SABIN

Go fuck yourself.

ELSIE

No thanks. What was it this time?

SABIN

Dad texted me. Did you tell him to talk to me?

ELSIE

No.

SABIN

Some bullshit sob story about how much he misses me. He knows I don't want to hear from him.

ELSIE

So you cut?

SABIN

Yeah, I did. Ok? You happy now? So tell Dad he needs to stop trying to guilt trip me because I can't handle it and maybe next time I'll die, and I'll make sure you're not / there to call it in.

ELSIE

That's enough. I said that's enough! You cannot spend the rest of your life blaming your behavior on other people. Life is choices, Sabin. You make choices. No one has ever *made* you do anything. I understand that you're angry with me. I understand that you're angry with Dad. Fine. Be angry. But you don't get to hack yourself up and claim that's not your fault, that you had no choice.

SABIN

Well, stop trying to make my choices for me.

ELSIE

Some of these choices aren't yours to make. / They affect too many people for you to make alone.

SABIN

Whose are they, then? Whose / are they?!

ELSIE

I don't know. God's, if you still believe in Him.

SABIN

You self-righteous bitch. Why don't you take your head out of your ass? God, I hate you.

ELSIE

Fine.

SABIN

You hate me too. Go ahead. Say it. I know you do.

ELSIE

I don't hate you.

SABIN

Yes, you do.

ELSIE

You infuriate me. I don't understand you, but I don't hate you.

SABIN

Bullshit. You hate me. You hate me!//You hate me!

ELSIE

That's not true! If I hated you I would have let you die.

SABIN

Maybe you should have.

ELSIE

Don't talk like that.

SABIN

Don't pretend to know anything about my life.

ELSIE

I know I don't know anything about your life; you keep blocking me out of it! Damn it, what's going on?

SABIN

It doesn't matter. Look, I'm trying to get my shit together—my life. Trying to get my life together.

ELSIE

But why are you trying to get it together alone?

SABIN

It's just hard, Elsie.

(Beat)

ELSIE

I take it you didn't answer the text.

SABIN

Not fu—not likely.

ELSIE

He loves you.

SABIN

I don't want to talk about him.

ELSIE

What do you want to talk about?

SABIN

I don't want to talk to you at all.

ELSIE

Don't be like this Sabin.

SABIN

Oh, yeah. Like I can just turn it off, and not be the way I am. You're not listening! I can't breathe. I have no privacy. The kids get here at 6:30 every freaking morning. God! This house. I feel like I'm going to snap like the kid in that book I read in the fourth grade, just run and run--

ELSIE

Hey, hey, it's ok. It's ok.

SABIN

How is it ok?

ELSIE

I'll sleep on the couch and you can have / my room.

SABIN

It's a bigger problem than the couch! On the bus today we passed the exit for the airport and I wanted to scream because all I could think was, "Everyone is going somewhere except me."

ELSIE

You're in a slow spot right now. You won't always be stuck. Gosh, I remember you as a little kid, Sabin. You were the single most determined toddler that ever walked the earth. I used to brag about you to my friends, because you were so smart.

SABIN

See, I can't remember that. All I remember is you always telling me "no."

ELSIE

Fair enough. But seriously I'll take the couch. The guest room is yours from now on.

SABIN

For real?

ELSIE

Yeah. I'm always up early, so it's not that big of a deal.

SABIN

Thanks.

ELSIE

Of course. Look, stuff like this...I want you to be happy, but I don't know what you need. All you have to do is ask.

SABIN

Ok. Thanks. Really.

ELSIE

You're welcome.

(Beat.)

ELSIE (CONT'D)

I love you.

*(SABIN exits)***SCENE 7***(The classroom. Another day.)*

ELSIE

Good afternoon, ladies. Today we're going to start with sonnet 23. Let's divide it up and read. We'll discuss as we go. Kate, you can have the first quatrain, Sam can have the second, Jane can have the third, and then Kate again for the couplet.

KATE

"As an unperfect actor on the stage
Who with his fear is put besides his part,
Or some fierce thing replete with too much rage,
Whose strength's abundance weakens his own heart."

ELSIE

Ok. Discuss.

KATE

I get the first part. Shakespeare was an actor, so he probably knew all about stage fright. Being so scared you forget your lines or whatever.
"Or some fierce thing replete with too much rage."

JANE

God, that gives me chills.

KATE

Me too. But I don't know what it means.

SAM

Maybe it's like when you feel something so strongly that it's the only thing you feel.

JANE

Yeah, also maybe he's saying that rage is as much a physical thing as it is emotional.

ELSIE

Sam, next quatrain, please.

SAM

"So I, for fear of trust, forget to say
The perfect ceremony of love's rite,
And in mine own love's strength seem to decay,
O'ercharged with burden of mine own love's might."
He's saying he's scared to trust--

JANE

Or is he scared of trust?

SAM

I don't know. Anyway, this fear/trust thing keeps him from talking
about love.

KATE

Or proposing.

SAM

How so?

KATE

"The perfect ceremony of love's rite." That's marriage.

SAM

Or maybe "the perfect ceremony of love's rite" is a kiss.

JANE

You don't say a kiss, you kiss a kiss.

SAM

Whate'er. So then, "And in mine own love's strength seem to decay,
O'ercharged with burden of mine own love's might."
Ummm. He says his love is decaying because it's so strong. Like, it
can't sustain itself.

KATE

That's not what that means.

SAM

Ok...?

KATE

It's not the poet's love that's decaying, it's the poet. Seeming to
decay. His love wears him out.

SAM

If you say so.

KATE

"So I, for fear of trust, forget to say
The perfect ceremony of love's rite,
And in mine own love's strength seem to decay,
O'ercharged with burden of mine own love's might."
See?

JANE and SAM
No.

KATE
Take out all the extra parts:
"So I... forget to say
The perfect ceremony of love's rite,
And...seem to decay."

JANE (to ELSIE)
Is that right?

ELSIE
It is, actually. "in mine own love's strength" is describing the state
of the poet, but "seem to decay" describes the poet, not the love.
Moving on...

JANE
"O, let my books be then the eloquence
And dumb presagers of my speaking breast,
Who plead for love and look for recompense
More than that tongue that more hath more express'd."
In other words, "Since I can't talk about it, read the stuff I write."

ELSIE
Precisely.

JANE
What's a presager?

ELSIE
Something that predicts the future, or carries prophetic weight.

KATE
"O, learn to read what silent love hath writ:
To hear with eyes belongs to love's fine wit."
I mean, that part's pretty simple.

JANE
Break it down for me.

KATE
"My love writes these words, so if you love me back, you can hear them
by reading them."

JANE
Huh.

ELSIE
Beautifully done, ladies. You found some good stuff. I want to touch on
a couple of things. If I was to summarize this sonnet in a single
sentence, I might say, "My emotions defy spoken expression, so I must
write them down, and true love can understand and accept them in that
form." Let's look at the juxtaposition: we have the word "strength"

ELSIE (CONT'D)

paired with "weakens" and "decay." "O'er charged with burden" is in the same line as "might." What does that say to you?

JANE

The poet is conflicted?

ELSIE

Ok, good. Kate put it well earlier. "My love is strong but I am weak, and the strength of my love makes me weaker." Have any of you ever felt that? Have you ever loved someone so much it terrified and exhausted you?

KATE (*fiercely*)

Yes.

(*Beat.*)

ELSIE

One last thing for you to think about. How many different kinds of intelligence are there?

SAM

A lot.

JANE

Mental, emotional, social.

ELSIE

Sort of. There are nine. Logical-Mathematical, Spatial, Linguistic, Bodily/Kinesthetic, Musical, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, Naturalistic, Existential. What do you see in this sonnet?

SAM

Wait, which one is emotional?

KATE

The poet's Intrapersonal and Linguistic intelligences are strong, but his Interpersonal intelligence is weak, along with maybe his Kinesthetic intelligence, if he's actually having trouble forming words.

SAM

Damn, Kate.

KATE

Also, if Cowardice was an intelligence, his would be high.

JANE

Oh my.

ELSIE

I want all of you to do a little reading about the Theory of Multiple

ELSIE (CONT'D)

Intelligences and type a paragraph or two about your own views on its relevance to Sonnet 23. Thanks, and I'll see you next week.

(SAM and JANE exit. KATE is gathering her things.)

ELSIE
Kate, are you ok?

KATE
I'm fine.

SCENE 8

(ANNE's house, the same day. ANNE is sitting on the couch. ELSIE enters.)

ELSIE
Hola, chica!

ANNE
Hola!

ELSIE
How's work?

ANNE
No projectile vomiting. I consider that a good day. How about you?

ELSIE
One of my students has something going on in her personal life. I hope it's just boy drama. Otherwise it was fine.

ANNE
Oh no. Did she bring it up in class?

ELSIE
Not exactly, but she had some intense comments about the sonnet we discussed today. It's understandable. The sonnets are mostly about love, and they're bound to dredge up some pretty visceral responses eventually. I'm surprised we haven't had any before now.

(ELSIE pauses to examine ANNE's face)

ELSIE (CONT'D)
You've been crying.

ANNE
I won't bother to deny that. But I'm ok.

ELSIE
Ok.

(Beat.)

ELSIE (CONT'D)

I wish I could make it better.

ANNE

I know, sweetie. Thank you.

ELSIE

Where's Sabin? Isn't she usually home from the job hunt by now?

ANNE

I don't know, since she is not currently speaking to me.

ELSIE

Still?

ANNE

Yeah. She's mad at me about last week.

ELSIE

When you told her to leave?

ANNE

Yeah.

ELSIE

You didn't actually kick her out. She should be grateful for her second chance.

ANNE

I shouldn't have been so rough. She's hurting.

ELSIE

It's all her own damn fault, Anne. Besides, what do you mean she's hurting?! You're hurting! Has she bothered to ask about you? Has she even noticed you're upset?

ANNE

I hope not, because I've been going out of my way to act normal around her.

ELSIE

She's gotta get used to the real world. In the real world, people besides Sabin have problems and emotional responses to those problems.

ANNE

I don't want her to feel guilty for being here right now. She's too hard on herself as it is.

ELSIE

You apologized to her, didn't you?

ANNE

I apologized for raising my voice, yes.

ELSIE

For crying out loud.

ANNE

Please let it go, Else. I'm going to bed.

ELSIE

Ok. Goodnight.

ANNE

Goodnight.

(ANNE starts to exit. During the above, ELSIE has emptied her pockets or purse into her cubby and found a note, which she has read silently.)

ELSIE

Anne? Do you know anything about this?

ANNE

About what?

ELSIE

This. It's from Sabin.

ANNE

No.

ELSIE

Oh, right. Silent treatment. Sorry. Never mind. Good night!

ANNE

Good night.

ANNE exits. ELSIE studies the note. After a while, SABIN enters from outside. ELSIE stuffs the note in her pocket.

ELSIE

Hey. Oh! I almost forgot to feed Christopher Marlowe!

(ELSIE gets up to feed the fish.)

SABIN

I thought his name was Kit.

ELSIE

It is. Christopher Marlowe's nickname was Kit.

SABIN

You are so pretentious.

ELSIE
Pretty much, yeah. Hey, Sabin, I got the note you left in my cubby.

SABIN
Yeah.

ELSIE
I never knew you wrote poetry.

SABIN
I write lots of stuff.

ELSIE
It's really good. The second verse--jeez. It's...complex. Everytime I read it I see something new, and--

SABIN
I didn't ask you to grade it.

ELSIE.
No. I'm sorry. Um. Thank you.

SABIN
It's fine. Uh, this may have never occurred to you as a possibility, but I wrote it so we wouldn't have to talk about it.

ELSIE
Ah. Ok.

(Beat.)

ELSIE (CONT'D)
Sabin, have you ever considered going to school for writing? The English program at Oliver is top-notch, and I would be happy to write a recommendation. We can even go meet with Dr. Hall if you want to see what she's like, and she can tell you all about the program. They have scholarships and work-study and you can work in the library like I did--

SABIN
No thanks.

ELSIE
Ok. If you change your mind, just let me know. My offer won't go anywhere.

SABIN
Jesus. You sound like a mobster.

ELSIE
I just want you to know you have options.

SABIN

Mm. I feel like I need to make something really clear. Don't take this the wrong way, but I would rather have no college degree than go to Oliver. If Oliver was the only college available to me, I would happily work minimum wage for the rest of my life.

ELSIE

Oh, come on. It's because it's a women's college, isn't it?

SABIN

Oh, yeah. I need to steer clear of all you bra-burning lesbians.

ELSIE

Seriously, Sabin? First of all, nobody ever burned a bra in the women's lib movement. That's a myth. At the 1968 Miss America pageant, some women were protesting and they threw some bras into a trashcan, but there was no fire involved. They also crowned a live sheep, but nobody remembers that. Secondly, plenty of straight women go to Oliver and plenty of lesbians go to coed schools. Don't be childish. What's the real issue here?

SABIN

Childish? You're one to talk. The real issue is, I would probably lose my mind and go on a murderous rampage if I was surrounded 24/7 by spoiled white trust-fund bimboes living off their daddies and raging about oppression and world peace.

ELSIE

They're not like that.

SABIN

There's also the fact that if and when I go to college, it will not be because you pulled some strings for me.

ELSIE

I'm just trying to help.

SABIN

I don't want you to. I don't need you to. I'm a grown up now, Else. I've been a grown up probably longer than you have. I moved out, remember? I've been paying bills since I was 17, and it may be hard for you to acknowledge, but I am capable of getting things done and setting goals without you paving me a special sidewalk. I'm sorry if that hurts your feelings. I just...I feel like you never listen. You just talk.

ELSIE

Ok. Sorry.

SABIN

And that's why I wrote you the stupid poem, because you can't interrupt me when I write it down, you know? And it's awesome that you gave me your room. Like, you have no idea. I'm better than I was. I sleep better, I feel better, I'm gonna find a job. I am. So, thank you. But what I'm trying to say is, I need that. I need space to work stuff out.

SABIN (CONT'D)

And not just the physical room. I don't like being here. I don't like being one more thing for Anne and Michael to deal with, and I'm trying to fix it, but I can't when you're breathing down my neck.

ELSIE

I...Sabin, I had no idea. Of course you need space. I'm an idiot.

SABIN

No. You're a big sister.

ELSIE

Yeah.

(Pause)

SABIN

You know what would be awesome?

ELSIE

No, what?

SABIN

If I got a job as a flight attendant.

ELSIE

A flight attendant?

SABIN

Yeah. Can you imagine getting paid to fly? That's nuts.

ELSIE

Go for it.

SABIN

I already did. I filled out applications for two different airlines today.

ELSIE

Nice! Good luck. Keep me posted.

SABIN

Thanks. I will.

(SABIN starts to exit to her room)

ELSIE

Sabin?

SABIN

Yeah?

ELSIE
Lurv you.

SABIN
Lurv you too.

SCENE 9

(The classroom)

ELSIE
Sonnet 147. You're up, Sam.

SAM
I'm supposed to present today?

ELSIE
Yes.

SAM
I thought it was next week.

ELSIE
It's in the syllabus.

JANE
I told you.

SAM
I'm really sorry.

ELSIE
It's fine. I mean, it's worth two quiz grades, but it's not the end of the world. Why don't you read the sonnet for us, and then lead the discussion as best you can?

SAM
Ok, thank you. Sorry. I'm an idiot. What sonnet?

ELSIE
Sonnet 147.

SAM
Right.

(SAM flips through her book to find the sonnet. She reads.)

Sonnet 147:
"My love is as a fever, longing still
For that which longer nurseth the disease,
Feeding on that which doth preserve the ill,
The uncertain sickly appetite to please.
My reason, the physician to my love,

SAM (CONT'D)

Angry that his prescriptions are not kept,
Hath left me, and I desperate now approve
Desire is death, which physic did except.
Past cure I am, now reason is past care,
And frantic-mad with evermore unrest;
My thoughts and my discourse as madmen's are,
At random from the truth vainly express'd;
For I have sworn thee fair and thought thee bright,
Who art as black as hell, as dark as night.

ELSIE

Ok. What do you think?

(Pause.)

SAM

What the hell did I just read?

ELSIE

What do you mean?

SAM

Help me out here, Jane.

JANE

Even I don't understand this one.

(KATE coughs)

JANE

Do you have something to say to me?

KATE

I don't know what you're talking about.

JANE

Why don't you explain this to us, Kate?

KATE

The poet is crazy in love with someone, but that person is a lying dirtbag.

SAM

I don't think it's that simple.

KATE

Oh really?

SAM

What's your problem today? Jesus.

ELSIE

Ladies. Let's look at it thought by thought.

ELSIE (CONT'D)

"My love is as a fever, longing still
For that which longer nurseth the disease."
Jane?

JANE

My love is a sickness...?

SAM

What does he mean by "longer nurseth"

ELSIE

Check the book. Is there a note?

SAM

"prolongs"

ELSIE

So...?

SAM

My love for you is a sickness, but loving you is making me sicker?

ELSIE

Sure. Next thought:
"Feeding on that which doth preserve the ill,
Th' uncertain sickly appetite to please."
Kate?

KATE

I mean, that's a continuation of the first thought.

ELSIE

Talk to me about the word choice.

KATE

"Feeding" makes it sound like the love has a mind of its own, like it's
a
creature. "Uncertain." Uh...?

ELSIE

Anybody have the book open?

JANE

The note says "Unreliable."

KATE

"Sickly appetite" sounds like a double meaning.

JANE

Yeah. "Wordplay on (1) wish for food by someone in ill-health; (2)
unhealthy (sexual) will or desire.

SAM

It's always about the sex.

KATE

So it's still just a continuation of the first thought.

ELSIE

Right, but with more detail. It's adding layers. Next thought:

"My reason, the physician to my love,
Angry that his prescriptions are not kept
hath left me." Jane?

JANE

He tried to keep his head, but he kept obeying his heart instead, so
now he can't think.

ELSIE

Whereas before he was choosing not to think. Moving on:

"My reason, blah blah blah,
hath left me and I desperate now approve
Desire is death which reason did except."

SAM

My brain just exploded.

JANE

Mine too.

(SAM and JANE look at KATE to see what she will say. She looks back at them, then coolly faces front again.)

ELSIE

Break it down.

JANE

"Desperate: (1) in despair; (2) given up as hopeless; approve: (1) demonstrate (that); (2) find through experience (that)...?"

SAM

My reason left me and now I'm in despair so I'm proving that...

JANE

"Desire is death which physic did except"

SAM

Pkkkkkkssssssshhhh.

(SAM makes the noises of her brain exploding)

ELSIE

Ok, what's hard about it?

SAM

The words don't go together. I mean, they don't make sense.

ELSIE

"Desire is death." That's pretty simple.

SAM

Agreed.

ELSIE

"Which physic did except"

SAM

Physic meaning...?

JANE

Doctor. Like "physician."

ELSIE

Well, medicine, really.

JANE

Oh. Right. And then, "except: protest against, object to."

SAM

So, medicine would object to this desire. But "medicine" means his brain. So his mind disapproves of this love, and it's killing the poet.

ELSIE

Yes.

SAM

I'm brilliant! So then,
"Past cure I am, now reason is past care." "I'm incurable and I don't care."

JANE

No, more like reason can't fix it at this point.

ELSIE

Both are acceptable interpretations.

JANE

"And frantic mad with evermore unrest."

SAM

A whole line to say, "I'm going crazy."

JANE

"My thoughts and my discourse as madmen's are"

SAM

Another line--

JANE

That's not the end of the thought!

SAM

Whoops.

JANE

"My thoughts and my discourse as madmen's are
At random from the truth vainly expressed."

SAM

Two more lines to say "I'm going crazy."
And then the couplet!

JANE

"For I have sworn thee fair, and thought thee bright,
Who art as black as hell, as dark as night."

SAM

Oh, snap.

JANE

So all that to say--

KATE

Jesus Christ. It's about betrayal. Did it really take you that long to
figure it out?

ELSIE

Whoa--

KATE

The whole sonnet can be summed up in rule number one: Boys are stupid,
lying assholes.

(KATE exits)

SAM

Again I say, oh, snap.

SCENE 10

*(ANNE's house, that same day. ANNE is there. SABIN enters from outside.
She is dressed for a professional interview.)*

SABIN

Uuugh! I'm so tired of being on my best behavior.

ANNE

How did it go?

SABIN

Really well, I think!

ANNE

They keep calling you back. That's a good sign.

SABIN

And I keep smiling and talking about customer service.

ANNE

What happens now?

SABIN

They said they'd be in touch. If I get the job there will be, like, a month of training and I'll get assigned a base city. Then, kablam! I'm a flight attendant.

ANNE

Are you excited?

SABIN

It freaks me out a little how excited I am. If it doesn't work out, Dillard's seemed interested. But it would kill me to end up in the shoe department after almost getting the airline gig.

(ELSIE enters.)

ELSIE

How are the repairs on the car coming?

SABIN

Slow. They're really busy this time of year.

ELSIE

Oh yeah? Cause when I talked to Robert, he said they totaled your car when you had an accident four months ago.

ANNE

What?

ELSIE

That's exactly what I said.

ANNE

If your car wasn't in the shop, what did you need the money for?

ELSIE

An excellent question. What happened to all that money, Sabin?

SABIN

I'm leaving.

ANNE

Not without telling me what you used the money for.

SABIN
I can't.

ELSIE
You lied to us. You don't get to keep secrets right now. You just forfeited that right.

SABIN
Look, I have an interview at Dillard's. I have to go.

ELSIE
That was yesterday. Nice try.

SABIN
God, I hate you! Would you leave me alone for five minutes?!

ANNE
What was the money for?

SABIN
Don't worry about it, ok? It was important.

ANNE
If you're going to share my home, I need you to be honest.

SABIN
It won't happen again. Do you think I like bumming shit off you?

ELSIE
Sabin, you tried to kill yourself again, didn't you?

SABIN
What? No!

ELSIE
What then? Were you drunk? Were you trashed when you totalled your car?

SABIN
No.

ELSIE
Are you doing drugs?

SABIN
No!

ANNE
Then what do you have to hide? Is Dominic threatening you?

SABIN
This has nothing to do...look, I'll pay you back. Just please let it go.

ELSIE

If you're going to be a parasite in Anne's home, the least you can do is fess up.

SABIN

I'm not a parasite! What happened to you giving me space to work things out?

ELSIE

Personal space goes away when you lie.

SABIN

I had an abortion! Ok? Are you happy?

(ANNE exits)

ELSIE

What?

SABIN

You heard me.

ELSIE

Why didn't you tell us?

SABIN

Last time I checked you were leaning to the right on certain issues.

ELSIE

That was a long time ago. Abortions are...I just wish you hadn't done it all alone. We could've helped you.

SABIN

Bullshit. Helped me how? Held my hand? That's sweet.

ELSIE

You know there are alternatives.

SABIN

Oh, here we go. Would you have taken it?

ELSIE

We could've / found...

SABIN

What about your precious fellowship? You know damn well there's no room in your perfect life for anyone / but you.

ELSIE

I would've / made room.

SABIN

Besides I was drinking like a fish. The kid would've been retarded. And how would you support a retarded kid? What's your degree again? Oh yeah, Shakespeare Studies. That's gotta be right up there with Underwater Basket Weaving on the Top 10 List of Most Useless / College Degrees Ever.

ELSIE

At least I have a college degree.

SABIN

Ooooooh.

ELSIE

Was it a boy or a girl?

SABIN

I don't know. Why do you give a shit?

ELSIE

It was my niece or nephew. It was your child.

SABIN

It wasn't a child; it was a fetus. Fuck off. Jesus, I knew you were still a Republican.

ELSIE

Anne can't have kids, Sabin.

SABIN

What? Anne can't?

ELSIE

No. She and Michael found out last week.

SABIN

Why didn't she tell me?

ELSIE

I don't know. Oh, wait! Probably because you're clearly having issues dealing with your own problems.

SABIN

She should have told me.

ELSIE

I'm sure she tried, but you've been ignoring her. They hired an adoption attorney.

(Pause.)

ELSIE (CONT'D)

My God, Sabin. She would have taken it in a heartbeat.

SABIN
A heartbeat?

ELSIE
Yeah.

SABIN
Fuck you.

(SABIN exits.)

SCENE 11

(The classroom, another day. KATE is standing at the front of the class.)

KATE
Sonnet 22

My glass shall not persuade me I am old,
So long as youth and thou are of one date;
But when in thee time's furrows I behold,
Then look I death my days should expiate.
For all that beauty that doth cover thee
Is but the seemly raiment of my heart,
Which in thy breast doth live, as thine in me:
How can I then be elder than thou art?
O, therefore, love, be of thyself so wary
As I, not for myself, but for thee will;
Bearing thy heart, which I will keep so chary
As tender nurse her babe from faring ill.
Presume not on thy heart when mine is slain;
Thou gavest me thine, not to give back again.

ELSIE
Beautifully done. What does it mean?

KATE
The poet is talking to a younger lover, and he says that he'll never feel old as long as his lover is young, but as soon as the lover dies, he'll die as well. He says they swapped hearts, so now they're basically the same person. And the lover has to take care of himself, because by doing that, he also takes care of the poet. The poet tells the lover not to take his own heart for granted; since they switched hearts, the poet will keep the lover's heart forever and never give it back.

(JANE provides a slow clap in the way of feedback.)

ELSIE
Great. Thank you, Kate...and Jane.

(KATE goes back to her seat.)

JANE

I think when he says, "But when in thee time's furrows I behold,
Then look I death my days should expiate" he's saying that when the
beloved looks old, then the poet will know he's about to die. It's not
when the lover dies.

KATE

"Time's furrow" means death. What else would it mean?

SAM

It could mean wrinkles.

ELSIE

Sorry, Kate I think Jane and Sam are right. Also, "expiate." Not a word
we use much these days. Anybody have a definition?

(SAM rifles through her binder)

SAM

I do. Somewhere. I looked it up. And wrote it down. I think. Aha!
Expiate: Now it means "to atone for" but back in the day it meant "to
bring to an end."

ELSIE

Good. "Then look I death my days should expiate" could be rephrased as
"then I'll keep an eye out for Death, because he'll be here to end my
life soon." I want to talk about lines eleven and twelve. Kate, would
you read for us?

KATE

Just eleven and twelve?

ELSIE

Yes.

KATE

"Bearing thy heart, which I will keep so chary
As tender nurse her babe from faring ill."

ELSIE

Thank you. Ok, here's another word we don't use anymore. "Chary."

SAM

I got this! It means careful.

JANE

My, aren't we industrious. Are you getting worried about your grade?

SAM

Rude.

JANE

You're rude.

ELSIE
Have all of you held a baby before?

(SAM and JANE nod)

SAM
Most recently, my nephew Douglas.

KATE
I haven't.

SAM
You haven't?!

KATE
No.

SAM
Ever?!

KATE
Calm down.

ELSIE
That's fine. Those of you who have, what did you notice?

JANE
They're tiny.

SAM
He smells like sour milk. And when I picked him up, my sister-in-law transformed into a psycho paranoiac before my eyes.

JANE
I would transform into a psycho paranoiac if you picked up my baby.

SAM
You don't have a baby!

JANE
I would transform into a psycho paranoiac if you picked up my theoretical baby.

SAM
No you wouldn't. You'd go shopping all the time and leave me to babysit and your theoretical baby would love me more.

ELSIE
Ok, but that ties in with my point. Your sister in law wanted you to be careful.

SAM

Yeah, but she's way over-protective. I'm pretty sure the woman bathes in hand sanitizer.

ELSIE

But in Shakespeare's day, the infant mortality rates were appalling. You sheltered your child from obvious threats, but you had almost no control over whether or not your child would live to its fifth birthday. Can you fathom that? You had no control over whether the kid lived or died.

JANE

Yeah, but that's life. We still don't have much control over anything.

ELSIE

But you protect yourself and those you love from the things you see coming. And you protect babies because they can't protect themselves.

JANE

You try.

ELSIE

Yes. So how does that kind of care tie in to a romantic relationship?

SAM

I think it's about priorities. I mean, my sister-in-law still looks like hell and the baby's eight months old! You'd think she'd be able to take care of both of them by now. And her husband, come to think of it. My brother can't take care of himself either, really. But my point is, everything she's got goes to the kid. Douglas' needs are more important to her than anything on the planet, including herself.

ELSIE

So what is the poet saying about his relationship with the beloved?

KATE

That he's overly attached.

JANE

That he loves the beloved more than he loves himself.

KATE

I don't think that's healthy in a relationship.

SAM

If it's mutual, they've got each other's backs.

KATE

But what if it only goes one way?

SAM

Then it's not a good relationship?

ELSIE

When we take those lines in context with the rest of the sonnet, we see that the poet is using the lines about the baby to make the same point he makes in the rest of the sonnet, but in a different way. Jane, will you read the couplet one more time?

JANE

"Presume not on thy heart when mine is slain;
Thou gavest me thine, not to give back again."

ELSIE

His point is that love is a permanent thing. It changes you. When you love someone, you lose a part of yourself, but it's ok, because you gain a part of them.

JANE

Except that when you lose them, you lose both parts.

ELSIE

Aye, there's the rub, as Hamlet might say.

SCENE 12

(The apartment. The same day)

ELSIE

What do you mean "she's gone?"

ANNE

I mean she never came home. What did you say to her?

ELSIE

I don't remember! We were both mad. I told her you couldn't have kids.

ANNE

You guilt tripped her. Elsie, how could you?!

ELSIE

I told you, I was angry. She's so infuriating. And I told her that you would have taken her baby.

ANNE

Jesus Christ. Wonderful.

ELSIE

Don't give me that. She probably would have gone storming out if I had disagreed with her about the weather.

ANNE

No, this is more than one of her temper tantrums. You made her feel like shit, and you did it on purpose.

ELSIE

Well now she knows how it feels. She does it to me all the time. Why are we even getting worked up? She's done her disappearing act before, and she's always been fine.

ANNE

She always planned it before. This time she just left. And she always answered my calls before.

ELSIE

She's 20, for crying out loud. She can take care of herself.

ANNE

Is that what you called it when she moved in with Dom?

ELSIE

Oh, please. She only moved in with Dom because Dad told her he'd disown her if she did.

ANNE

That's not how that happened. You always oversimplify everything, Elsie!

ELSIE

Look, sorry. I'm trying to calm us both down. She's only been gone 24 hours.

ANNE

I don't want to calm down. I have a really bad feeling about this. I'm calling the police.

(ANNE exits)

ELSIE

Shit.

(ELSIE calls SABIN. It rings. It goes to voicemail. As ELSIE speaks, SABIN lets herself in at the door. ELSIE doesn't hear her.)

ELSIE

Sabin. It's Elsie. I mean, I guess you know that. Look, I know you don't historically answer my calls or texts, but I just really want to know you're ok. So if you get this, if you didn't delete it as soon as you heard my voice, then please listen. It's not fair of you to vanish like this. It's not fair to Anne and it's not fair to me. But you know, I've been unfair too. I expect you to think and act like me, and that's stupid. God! I hate my degree, you know that, Sabin? I hate this fellowship and my GPA and my stack of awards and scholarships. I hate it all. All these years, all these teachers and committees and tests have told me that I'm smart. If I were smart, I'd be able to do something important. I'm the big sister, and I'm supposed to have the answers, but I don't. All I know is that I love you and I want you to come back. Or at least tell me you're ok. Because you're my little

ELSIE (CONT'D)

sister, and you don't get to just leave like that again, dammit! It's not that simple. Call me. I love you.

(ELSIE hangs up)

SABIN
Hey.

ELSIE
Hey.

SABIN
I was crying.

ELSIE
What?

SABIN
When I totaled my car. I wasn't drunk. I was crying. I found out I was pregnant before work and I was on the way in, but I started crying and I couldn't see so I hit a pole. All I could think was, "They're going to be so freaking disappointed."

ELSIE
It was just a mistake.

SABIN
It was a big mistake. It was a series of stupid mistakes.

ELSIE
It doesn't matter, though. You came back.

(Pause)

SABIN
Funny story...

ELSIE
Oh?

SABIN
I was a block away from the bus terminal to buy a ticket to Chicago. By the way, this is yours.

(She gives ELSIE a wallet)

ELSIE
Oh.

SABIN

I mean, the wallet's mine, but not the money inside. I didn't go through your purse or anything. You left cash in your room and I took it. Sorry. I didn't spend any of it.

ELSIE

Ok.

SABIN

I was going to leave. I was really pissed at you.

ELSIE

I know you were.

SABIN

But then I realized I didn't want to leave. It seemed childish. Childish. Bet you never thought you'd hear me say that.

Beat.

SABIN (CONT'D)

Anyway, I stopped for coffee. And then the airline called and offered me the flight attendant job.

ELSIE

That's awesome!

SABIN

I said yes. So, I guess I am leaving, but not like I was.

ELSIE

Yeah.

(ANNE enters)

ANNE

Oh my God, Sabin.

(A hug)

ANNE (CONT'D)

You scared the shit out of me.

SABIN

I know. I know. I suck. I'm sorry. But I'm back and I got the airline job!

ANNE

Where were you last night?

SABIN

Friend's couch. I should have texted you. I know. Can we let it go?

ANNE

Yes. Wait, you got the airline job?

SABIN

Yeah.

ANNE

Sabin, that's wonderful!

SABIN

Yeah, thanks.

(Beat)

SABIN (CONT'D)

I'm starving. Do we have any ice cream?

ANNE (laughing through her tears)

Of course. Help yourself.

(ANNE's cell phone rings)

ANNE

Hello?

TAMMY (unheard by audience)

Hi Mrs. Stilton, it's Tammy.

ANNE

Hi Tammy. How are you?

TAMMY

I'm fine, thank you. I'm calling to let you know that a young woman contacted me about your advertisement. She sees you as a potential candidate for her child and she wants to meet you.

ANNE

Already?

TAMMY

Yes ma'am. Can you and Michael come to the office next Monday?

ANNE

Of course.

TAMMY

It's just a preliminary meeting. If it goes well, we'll also discuss paperwork and next steps.

ANNE

Ok.

TAMMY

Is 10am all right?

ANNE

Yes, that's perfect. We'll be there.

(She hangs up.)

ANNE (CONT'D)

We might have a baby.

ELSIE

Someone answered the ad?

ANNE

Yeah. We're meeting the mother on Monday.

SABIN

Holy shit.

SCENE 13

(The classroom, another day. JANE stands alone at the front of the class. She reads with more understanding and less posturing than at the beginning of the semester)

JANE

Sonnet 29:

"When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
 I all alone beweeep my outcast state
 And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries
 And look upon myself and curse my fate,
 Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
 Featured like him, like him with friends possess'd,
 Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
 With what I most enjoy contented least;
 Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
 Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
 Like to the lark at break of day arising
 From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
 For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings
 That then I scorn to change my state with kings."

(SAM has been stifling giggles. She waves her hand frantically)

SAM

May I comment before you respond?

JANE

Sure.

SAM

It sounded like you said, "boobless."

JANE
What?

SAM
Boobless. My boobless cries.

JANE
It's BOOT-less!

SAM
That's not what it sounded like.

KATE
(laughing in spite of herself)
Really, you guys?

JANE
"And trouble deaf heaven with my boob-less cries?"

SAM
Yes.

JANE
I mean, it's true both ways. The cries don't have boots or boobs.

KATE
You sound like frat boys.

SAM
Boobs!

KATE
Jesus.

ELSIE
Ok then. Jane, let's hear your response.

JANE
Right. So the poet spends the first eight lines painting a picture of how sad and depressing his life is sometimes. Fate screws him over, everybody kicks him while he's down, and all he can do is wish he was somebody else. But then in the last quatrain, he thinks about the beloved and he immediately feels ten million times better because he remembers how much the other girl...or guy...loves him, so in the couplet he's like, "Being me is awesome! I wouldn't trade places with a king!"

ELSIE
Ok. Thank you, Jane. Any questions or comments, ladies?

KATE
It could be platonic.

ELSIE
How so?

KATE
He doesn't talk about beauty or jealousy.

SAM
"Thy sweet love" sounds pretty non-platonic to me.

KATE
But up until then, it could be a poem for a best friend.

JANE
Yeah! It's almost feels like the poet discovers he's in love while he's writing the sonnet. Have you guys ever done that?

SAM
No. I've never written a sonnet.

JANE
Oh my God, Sam. You know what I mean. Have you ever gotten involved with someone without realizing it?

SAM
You mean, have I ever been like, "Wow. Why is So-And-So on my mind all the time? Wait. Shit!"

JANE
Don't swear in class.

SAM
I meant, "crap!"

JANE
But yes, like that.

SAM
Yeah. It sucks. You think, "I'm really glad we're friends," but then you realize that's not what you are at all. At least, that's not what they are to you.

KATE
It doesn't always suck.

SAM
It always sucks if you are honest with them and it freaks them out so they friend-dump you and stop talking to you completely.

KATE
Well, yeah, that would suck.

JANE

But that begs the question, if they really cared about you, even platonically, why would they stop being your friend?

SAM

Maybe because they figure that spending time together is just going to hurt you and they start seeing everything you say as code for something else, and for all you know everything you say IS in code, because you are suddenly overthinking everything you say and do around them and you can't really blame them for wanting to stay away from you because you are so obviously a complete trainwreck.

(An awkward pause)

KATE

Sam, can I tell you something my mom says?

SAM

Sure.

KATE

If he--or she. You know, whatever. If he didn't know what he had, he didn't deserve it anyway.

SAM

Yeah. Thanks.

ELSIE

Jane, I'm curious. If you could sum up the sonnet in a single sentence, what would you say?

JANE

Um. *(Beat)* When my life sucks, I remember you, and then it sucks less.

ELSIE

Sam, not to get too involved, but I would like to point out that someone who consistently makes your life suck more doesn't deserve to be in your life.

SAM

Do you really believe that?

ELSIE

As it applies to friendships and relationships, yes. Families have a whole different rule book.

SAM

Why would family be any different?

ELSIE

Because you don't get to pick them. They're a part of you.

SAM

Like your heartbeat?

ELSIE
Yeah. Like that.

SCENE 14

(ANNE's house. A few months later. ANNE is sitting limply on the couch, apparently defeated by the basket of clean but unfolded laundry beside her. ELSIE enters with the baby)

ELSIE
Baby: check. Clean diaper: check. Clean onesie: check.

ANNE
You're wonderful.

ELSIE
Aw, shucks.

ANNE
Sabin said she might come over for a little while.

ELSIE
Why?

ANNE *(sharply)*
Come on, Else.

ELSIE
No, I didn't mean it like that. She just doesn't usually come without a reason. Especially when she knows I'm here.

ANNE
She loves you.

ELSIE
I know. At least, I choose to believe it.

ANNE
I'm sorry I snapped.

ELSIE
No worries; tired new mommies are allowed. Hey, maybe Aunt Sabin is coming by because she misses her new niece.

ANNE
I don't know. Aunt Sabin's been keeping her distance.

ELSIE
It's because she knows she'll fall in love, and she's scared. I still can't believe the baby's here.

ANNE

Neither can I. It's surreal. But that may be the sleep deprivation talking.

ELSIE

Why don't you take a nap? I'll do the laundry and keep Little Bit company.

ANNE

Are you sure?

ELSIE

Positive.

ANNE

I would do a happy dance if I only had the energy.

ELSIE

I'll take a rain check. Go sleep, pretty mama.

ANNE

You're my hero.

(ANNE exits. ELSIE folds laundry. SABIN enters.)

ELSIE

Hey! Anne said you might stop by.

SABIN

Yep yep. Is she around?

ELSIE

Napping. She's tired. Super-baby here doesn't believe in sleep.

(SABIN peers into the bassinet)

SABIN

My God, she's small.

ELSIE

Yeah. She's a little 'un.

SABIN

How many weeks?

ELSIE

One month on Tuesday.

SABIN

Damn.

ELSIE

The adoption worked out so quickly. I don't know. Things happen for a reason.

SABIN

Or life is a series of accidents. How old is the birth mother?

ELSIE

Fifteen.

SABIN

Yeah. Accident.

ELSIE

But now Anne and Michael have a daughter.

SABIN

Yeah.

ELSIE

And we have a niece.

SABIN

We sure do.

(Pause.)

ELSIE

How's work?

SABIN

Freaking awesome.

ELSIE

I'm still amazed that you like being trapped in a metal tube with a hundred strangers for fifteen hours at a time.

SABIN

That's just it. They're strangers. There are certain social codes and boundaries in place.

ELSIE

I thought you hated people.

SABIN (*facetiously*)

I get along with people just fine. It's you I have a problem with.

ELSIE

Touché.

SABIN

Sometimes I like to pretend they're hamsters.

ELSIE
They're what?

SABIN
Hamsters! We always know exactly where they are. We give them movies to watch so they're entertained, and booze to shut them up, and when it's feeding time, we hand out pretzels and peanuts. Eerily similar.

ELSIE
You are the only person I know who would describe your job in that way.

SABIN
Not everyone's childhood pet makes such a lasting impression.

ELSIE
What was his name?

SABIN
Grapeshot.

ELSIE
Grapeshot the attack hamster.

SABIN
He never attacked me! As a matter of fact, I think he never attacked anyone but you.

ELSIE
Perhaps he found me pretentious.

SABIN
Must be.

(Pause)

ELSIE
Anne told me about your trip.

SABIN
Yeah?

ELSIE
I mean, just that you were taking one.

SABIN
Yep yep. Since I fly for free now, I'd be an idiot not to. I swapped shifts with people, so I've got two and a half weeks off coming up. I'm going to Paris.

ELSIE
The city of lights.

SABIN
Mais oui.

ELSIE
How's your French?

SABIN
Pathetic. It's getting better though. I have time to study before I go. And hell--heck, it'll be great by the time I get back. Trial by fire. Communicate or starve! Italian's next. *(To the baby)* Would you like to be trilingual, kid? I'll talk to you in Italian and French. I'll buy you some picture books in Paris.

ELSIE
They say it's a city for lovers.

SABIN
I've had enough of those for a while.

ELSIE
What if you get lonely?

SABIN
I'm used to it.

ELSIE
Please be careful.

SABIN
I will. I'll send you postcards.

ELSIE
I'd like that.

SABIN
Ok. Well, I should go.

ELSIE
Oh! Before you do. I got you this, for your trip.

(ELSIE gives SABIN a journal)

ELSIE (CONT'D)
So you can keep writing.

SABIN
Thanks.

(A hug. Pause)

SABIN (CONT'D, blurring)
I called Dad.

ELSIE (*stunned*)
You called Dad?

SABIN
Yeah.

ELSIE
That's awesome.

SABIN
It was weird.

ELSIE
That's ok.

SABIN
Well, I'm gonna go.

ELSIE
I'm glad you stopped by.

SABIN
Me too. Thanks again.

ELSIE
Of course. I'm sorry you missed Anne.

SABIN
Nah, it's ok. We're having lunch tomorrow.

ELSIE
Ah, ok. I'll be at the school then.

SABIN
Yeah. Well, I'll see ya round.

ELSIE
See ya.

SABIN
I love you.

ELSIE
I love you too.

(SABIN exits. ELSIE crosses to the swing and picks up the baby.)

ELSIE
And I love you. Come here, baby Arden. How's it going? Your Mommy and Daddy and Aunt Sabin are so happy you're here. I'm happy too. I'm Aunt Elsie. Can you say "Elsie?" You have a beautiful name. You're named after a forest in a play called "As You Like It." We can read it when you get bigger. The forest of Arden is special, because it's a place

ELSIE (CONT'D)

where you can be anything you want. You hear that? Anything you want. You're perfect. Did you know that? I'll write you a sonnet soon, Baby Arden. For now, here's one someone else wrote a long time ago, for somebody he loved very much:

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade
Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest;
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou growest:
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this and this gives life to thee.

END OF PLAY