

## ABSTRACT

A Storied Present

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This project sets out to explore the form and function of storytelling as it applies to the sociological, emotional, and spiritual aspects of human life. The first portion of the project is a preface to the project itself while the bulk of the project is a play. The preface explores the works that inspired the play, namely Jane Austen's *Emma* and Sarah Ruhl's *Passion Play* along with others, and the ways in which they engage the subject of story. The play itself follows a young woman whose tendency to confuse the conventions of story and plot with reality causes her to come in conflict with some of the decisions that she must make.

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A Storied Present

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By  
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## Preface

Stories are important to our lives, but they shouldn't run our lives. This idea was one which took me years to grasp and even longer to recognize the significance. Stories have always interested me. From the time I was little and my parents were reading me "Goodnight Gorilla", to the time that I devoured every Nancy Drew book that our local library had on its shelves, I have always been fascinated by a good story. It has always felt as though the familiar plots of stories are things inherent within me that I find reflected back in the lives of Anne Shirley, Holden Caulfield, and Owen Meany. I sought out these characters and their worlds to tell me something about life and to make my own seem a little less dull. I had heard rumors of people who didn't enjoy reading, and I could only pity them. What sort of unfulfilling lives must they lead? I existed in a world rich with the adventures and action of far-off places and fantastic new worlds, and it seemed to me that anything less was tantamount to settling. Nearly everything that I did was shaped by these stories. They were my guide to how life was supposed to be lived. What I failed to recognize, however, was the fact that while stories are meant to inform our lives, they are not meant to take over them. Sometimes it is helpful for us to view our own lives with a narrative lens in order for us to make sense of them, but we must be aware that, ultimately, our lives are not narratives. They do not bend to the expectations of rising and falling action, climax and dénouement; they only occur, and we must be ready to take whatever life hands us and do the best we can with it.

This concept is summed up well in the character of Jane Austen's Emma. Emma is arguably the most flawed of all of Austen's heroines. Although she is accomplished

and poised, Emma is incredibly self-assured and at times even arrogant. She seems to think that the world around her is something that exists to be manipulated for her own pleasure. To Emma everything is a part of her story: the lives of her friends are the great romances and she the fairy godmother who brings about the happily-ever-after ending. She is willfully ignorant of anything around her that does not fit into her constructed story and she actively manipulates those around her to bring about the endings she envisions. Emma attempts to shape her world based on what she wants it to be, instead of allowing it to be what it is. She is unable to see what is actually going on around her and as a result is hurt when she is proven wrong. The beauty of Emma as a character, however, is in the fact that she ultimately recognizes her own downfalls. She is appalled at her own ignorance and, in the end, repents.

At the opening of the novel we are introduced to “Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition...” (55), but we are told from the outset that this is not the whole story. Before we are even given anything in the way of plot, Austen tells us, “The real evils indeed of Emma’s situation were the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself” (55). Thus, from the outset, it is clear that she is not a perfect character. We are warned that we should not expect to admire or laud our heroine for her many good qualities. Her faults are described as “threaten[ing] alloy to her many enjoyments” (55). The word “alloy” here is employed in a manner in which we do not often find it used in modern speech. The definition for this particular usage is given by the Oxford English Dictionary: “an undesirable element which impairs or debases something good” (OED). This suggests that Emma’s happiness is somehow lessened or tainted by her downfalls,

foreshadowing the difficulties which she will bring upon herself later in the novel. Emma contains a mixture of both good and bad qualities, which make her more human. Emma, like every person who will read the novel, is imperfect.

Frequently, a main character acts as the lens through which the reader perceives the story. When that main character is relatable and likable, the reader develops a love for that character and becomes further invested in the story. A main character's relatability and likability also make it far more likely for the reader to be able to see himself reflected in the story. Emma, despite her flaws, is still likeable. She is quick-witted and kind to those around her, she is a hard worker (even if she is sometimes working toward the wrong ends), and because of all of these things, we cannot help but be drawn to her. The narrator lauds Emma's compassionate nature as she tells us:

... the distresses of the poor were as sure of relief from her personal attention and kindness, her counsel and patience, as from her purse. She understood their ways, could allow for their ignorance and their temptations, had no romantic expectations of extraordinary virtue from those, for whom education had done so little; entered into their troubles with ready sympathy, and always gave her assistance with as much intelligence as good-will. (118)

The narrator clearly looks on Emma's goodwill with admiration. She sees Emma's treatment of the impoverished as being indicative of her better nature. We see her altruism and therefore like at least this aspect of her personality.

Yet the narrator's assertion of Emma's goodness is not untempered. She places these arguments for Emma's goodness in conversation with many instances in which Emma's less than perfect nature is on display. For example, after revealing that Emma is entirely wrong in her assumptions about Mr. Elton's affections for Harriet, the narrator relates an episode in which Emma decides to visit Mrs. and Miss Bates. The first signal

of Emma's fault in this instance is the fact that she does not want to visit them for the purpose of paying a visit to her friends, but rather for the purpose of avoiding hearing any more complaints from her grieving friend, a grief which, coincidentally, was brought on almost entirely by Emma's scheming. The lessons about charity in friendship, which it seemed that Emma should have learned earlier in the novel, have apparently been forgotten. She no longer feels Harriet to be her "superior" (157) as she did when the shame of her own misconduct was fresh. Instead, she forgets that Harriet's heartache is her own doing and relinquishes any sense of duty that she might have felt toward her disconsolate friend.

The narrator's unflinching look at Emma's misconduct does not end here. The narrative voice goes on to tell us of Emma's relationship to the Bateses as follows:

Mrs. and Miss Bates loved to be called on, and [Emma] knew she was considered by the very few who presumed ever to see imperfection in her, as rather negligent in that respect... She had had many a hint from Mr. Knightley and some from her own heart, as to her deficiency – but none were equal to counteract the persuasion of its being very disagreeable, – a waste of time – tiresome women – and all the horror of being in danger of falling in with the second rate and third rate of Highbury... (165)

The first hint that we get that the narrator is herself less than happy with Emma's conduct on this matter is the phrase "the very few who presumed ever to see imperfection". This decidedly sarcastic diction emphasizes Emma's tendency toward arrogance. The word "presume" suggests that Emma sees it as a mistake for anyone to see her as imperfect in any way. The fact that the narrator employs this heavily sarcastic phrasing just before discussing Emma's misconduct illustrates that our narrator is not attempting to hide anything about this character from us. It proves that she is attempting to be honest with the reader in displaying the entirety of Emma's person. This serves to make her a more



trustworthy narrator, in turn strengthening the validity of her tendency to speak well of Emma despite her flaws. In speaking so candidly about her subject, the narrator guarantees that these forays into Emma's less than perfect side will not disenchant her reader. She then can safely enumerate the many reasons that Emma does not often visit Mrs. and Miss Bates, all of which are incredibly self serving. In listing these reasons, "very disagreeable, – a waste of time – tiresome women – ...danger of falling in with the second rate...", the narrator proves that Emma, although compassionate to the impoverished, still sees the world around her in terms of rank and places herself at the top. The juxtaposition of Emma's kindness toward the poor with her snobbish treatment of those below her in is one which serves to display the fact that Emma is hopelessly human. In displaying these two extremes of morality in one character Austen creates someone who illustrates within her person both the good and bad potentials of humanity. Emma is representative of man's capacity both for good and evil and the way in which we each interact with that capacity in ourselves. This duality lends an authenticity to her character which adds to the effectiveness of the story overall.

Emma's most redeeming quality as a character, however, is not her dual nature. The thing that makes Emma's story worth telling is the fact that she learns from her mistakes in the end. Throughout the novel we are shown time and again instances in which Emma commits some sin and Mr. Knightley chastises her for it. In a loving manner Knightley attempts to steer Emma away from her less desirable qualities toward her better self. In most of their conversations Knightley is the voice of reason, guiding Emma away from ill-conceived notions. For example, when Emma decides that Harriet should not marry Robert Martin because Harriet's social prospects are higher than his

class, Knightley reminds Emma that Harriet's social standing is not as great as Emma might think. Knightley knows what stock Emma places in her own estimation of Harriet and understands that this conceit blinds her to reality. As he says to Emma: "your infatuation about that girl blinds you. What are Harriet Smith's claims, either of birth, nature or education, to any connection higher than Robert Martin? She is the natural daughter of nobody knows whom, with probably no settled provision at all, and certainly no respectable relations" (97). Knightley's presentation of the facts proves that he is correct and that Emma is certainly blinded by her own estimation of Harriet's worth, but Emma's own self-esteem is such that she is unwilling to recant her original opinion.

Throughout the book we see many similar instances in which Mr. Knightley correctly thinks that Emma is in the wrong, but Emma, in her stubbornness, refuses to see her own flaws. It is not until the end of the novel that we see Emma truly and humbly recognize her own flaws. As the novel progresses we see Emma's evaluations of many various situations prove incorrect. Emma's arrogant refusal to see people for who they are causes these flawed appraisals. For example, Emma's assessment of Mr. Elton's feelings for Harriet turns out to be not only incorrect, but blinds her to his true feelings for herself. Emma's high regard for Harriet allows her to view Harriet as being in the same class as Mr. Elton, a view which, had Emma paid closer attention to what was actually happening in the minds of those around her, she would have known Mr. Elton did not share. Mr. Knightley, once again is placed as a foil against Emma's willful ignorance of others. He correctly guesses that Mr. Elton has Emma in his sights and even hints at this telling Emma "he seems to have a great deal of goodwill towards you" (136). Austen then utilizes Emma's own thoughts to comment on her ignorance. After Emma refutes

Mr. Knightley's argument the narrator tells us that Emma "walked on, amusing herself in the consideration of the blunders which often arise from a partial knowledge of circumstances, of the mistakes which people of high pretensions to judgment are for ever falling into" (136). In reality Emma is the one making these exact blunders. She only has a "partial knowledge of circumstances" due to her refusal to truly see the circumstances. All of the evidence which she needs is placed before her, but her desire for a good story prevents her from seeing the truth. Emma's willful inability to see people for who they are prevents her from relating to them directly. To Emma Harriet is a piece of an epic romance in which a girl of somewhat lowly social standing rises above her circumstances to become united with the man of her dreams, all thanks to the help of her incredibly witty and talented friend from the upper echelons of society. She sees people as pieces of a story rather than whole and complete human beings. As a result she makes continual mistakes such as this one with Mr. Elton and misses out for years on the relationship which she later recognizes that her own heart most desires. It is only when she recognizes these faults in her own estimations as being caused by her arrogance and desire for a good story that Emma can learn to see things as they truly are.

This theme regarding the import of the differences between life and stories is the principle building block upon which I have built my play. In the main character, Anne, I have found a young woman who is deeply enamored of the great stories that have shaped her life but has misplaced that affection. She wrongly imagines that her life is a story, and as a result expects certain events to transpire just as they should in narrative structure. Her disappointment when they do not is something which I think many people experience at some point in their lives. The entire genre of "Rom-Com" is proof positive that our

contemporary culture teaches us to expect our lives to run a certain way. Through this particular genre young women have been taught that their prince awaits them just around some corner and that if they will wait long enough, he will find them. In reality this is not a guarantee that life gives any woman. There is no contract given to girls at birth that says that if they desire to live out a Meg Ryan/Tom Hanks movie they will be given that opportunity. There is a fine line between treating a story as an escape or as something which can impart a lesson and treating it as a prophetic handbook on life. Anne, when the play opens, has crossed this line long ago, and does not understand why others do not share her views. From her interaction with Evan and his family, we see that she has particular ideas regarding raising a child. However, she does not have any children of her own. It is never revealed specifically where Anne gets these ideas about child-rearing, but it is suggested later that these ideas are the product of literature. While it is true that literature can, and even should to some extent, inform our lives, it cannot teach us to be perfect parents. A story cannot teach us to do anything perfectly. We must actively engage our minds in a story in order to gain anything from it.

Anne misunderstands this function of literature and takes the lessons that she learns from stories as literal translations of what her personal experience should be. As a result, Anne begins to think that she understands where Evan's parents are making mistakes better than they do, and attempts to correct these mistakes. While Anne's intentions are good, she, like Emma, arrogantly thinks that she knows what is best. Like Emma, she thinks that the world around her should play out in a certain way, and that she should do everything in her power to insure that it does. And once again, like Emma, this effort to "fix" the world around her comes back to haunt her. Anne recognizes that she

has been attempting to manipulate Evan's life so that it fits into her concept of his narrative, but that she does not know him or how to parent him in the way that his mother and father do.

In much the same way Anne expects the plot of her own life to follow that of a story. She has in her head the concept of what sort of man she is meant to find love with and adheres strictly to that concept. She seems to have fallen prey to the romantic notion of finding love with a starving artist-type and has allowed her love affair with narrative and literature to have greater weight than her desire to truly love and be loved for who she is. Anne misunderstands that the point of a "Rom-Com" is (or at least should be) to show in some small way the manner in which romantic love plays itself out in a specific person's life. Romantic Comedy, when used properly, does not claim to be the whole of life. It claims to be only what it is: a synecdoche. It is a part of the whole. Anne unknowingly finds herself in the vein of people who view romantic love as a goal, instead of being a small part of a larger journey. She sees her relationship with Eric as worth maintaining because he is everything she ever wanted. He is, in her mind, the type of guy that she is "supposed" to end up with. Just as Emma cannot help but entertain the idea of marrying Mr. Churchill, so Anne cannot help but entertain the notion of committing to Eric. Emma sees in Frank Churchill everything that she as a young woman of her station and vivacity is supposed to look for in a partner, but ultimately even she knows that there is no real connection between Mr. Churchill and herself.

Throughout the play we see similar cases in which Anne has expectations of the ways in which the plots of the stories around her should unfold. In the case of Natalie's brother we see Anne's insistence that he will recover from his illness. Anne has nothing

to base this on other than a feeling that his recovery would make a better story, a fact which Natalie recognizes. Perceiving her tendency to conflate stories and life, Natalie is angered by Anne's baseless assertion that Todd will be alright. She tells Anne that she can't simply work things out the way that she would like them to "just because it would make a prettier narrative" (63). Natalie recognizes that there is a difference between having hope for a certain outcome and believing that one is entitled to it.

The fact that this is itself a story about a young woman who incorrectly imagines her life as a story is something which I think comments on the fact that story is life. Although our lives are not stories and reality does not bend to the will of plot, stories are made up of pieces of life, and when we view these pieces together in the right order we can see our own lives just a little bit better. I feel this particular storyline lends itself to the narrative format and in particular to theatrical conventions for just that reason. This story is about the interaction of life and narrative form, and it seems to me that the perfect forum in which to discuss this topic is the theatre. Theatre is a communal form of storytelling. The act of a group of people sitting in a room and experiencing the same story at the same time has a communal element to it which does not exist in the genre of literature. The idea of separate and distinct characters' plots interacting is mirrored by the individual audience members experiencing the same thing in many different ways. There is a communal diversity to the theatre which is reflected in this particular story, and which helps inform the lesson which Anne learns about allowing for the stories of other people.

Ultimately the intent of this story and its interaction with the medium of drama is to illustrate both the dangers and benefits of stories. There is much to be gained from a

good story, but with something so powerful there are always great dangers. Stories must be approached both by audiences and creators with the utmost care. Stories, while easily heard are not always easily understood. It is up to us to be good stewards of the power of narrative in our own lives, allowing it to inform and shape us into better versions of who we truly are.

## Works Cited

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ACT I

Scene 1

*Lights up on Anne at her office desk. She is speaking with someone that we cannot see. She nods earnestly and says things like "understandable", "of course", and "I'm sorry about that".*

ANNE

(speaking to audience)

Sometimes when I'm meeting with a student my attention... wanders. I just can't help it. I mean, I love teaching. and I love my students. I really do. But every once in awhile there's one who just doesn't know the meaning of the word succinct.

(pause. she recognizes the irony of this statement in the middle of a monologue)

It's just that... well I get it. You don't have to go on for thirty minutes about how you did really poorly on this paper or that test because you stayed up all night worrying about fill in the blank or your roommate locked himself out or you lost the book. Sometimes I just don't care. But every time it gets me thinking about their stories you know? How closely related is the truth to what they are telling me? Sometimes I can tell. Sometimes they're honest. Other times I wonder how they can come up with such obvious bullshit. It's a wonder that modern society can still function with all the computer crashes that my students claim happen. Sometimes I wish one of them would just come in here with a great story. I'm not going to believe you anyway, you might as well try to impress me. Just once I want to hear about a student who doesn't have his paper because he was taken in for questioning by the FBI or about a girl who didn't finish the reading because she got stuck on an elevator with a pregnant woman and had to deliver the child. It would make these meetings so much more entertaining.

(Turns back to conversation with student)

Yes, I hear that PCs are not very reliable. Perhaps you should think about backing up your work next time.

(Back to audience)

Maybe they're not creative enough for that. Or maybe they just think there's a shot that I'll buy their mind numbingly boring stories instead of any on the more creative side. Maybe I'm just... I dunno... projecting or whatever. I'll ask Freud later.

Sometimes I think they just don't get it. Real life is exciting. Some of the world's most ridiculous stories are also the most factual. These made-up lackluster stories only prove to me that they don't understand that real life is made up of this weird intermingling of the fantastic and the mundane. I mean, that's what makes it fantastic. You can just be walking down the street, literally just moving two of your appendages, when suddenly a volcano erupts, basically the earth itself sneezes and you are suddenly caught up in a harrowing adventure in which you discover your full potential and save the life of an entire village. That's amazing to me. So much can happen.

(beat)  
Not that it does.

Scene 2

*Lights up on Evan age 6 and Anne, 24.*

EVAN  
No, I want to be Peter!

ANNE  
You were Peter last time.

EVAN  
But you can't be Peter! You're a girl!

ANNE  
So?

EVAN  
Peter Pan is a *boy*.

ANNE  
Well, I'll *pretend* to be a boy.

EVAN  
You can't do that.

ANNE  
Why not? You want to pretend to be Peter Pan. Isn't that the same thing?

EVAN  
(beat)  
No.

ANNE  
Why not?

EVAN  
(beat)  
Peter Pan is a *boy*.

ANNE  
Alright, we'll deal with your disturbing sexist tendencies later. You can be Peter Pan.

EVAN

And you be Captain Hook!

ANNE

Wait, so I can only be a boy if he's evil?

EVAN

(in character)

Get out of here Captain Hook! You'll never catch me!

ANNE

Oh, but that's where you're wrong Pan! I will catch you! And I will throw you to the crocodile!

*Both pull out wooden swords (or gift wrap tubes, inflatable bats, etc.) and begin an epic sword battle while engaging in the following dialogue.*

EVAN

No you won't! Because I can fly!

*Evan begins to "fly" around the room, Superman style.*

ANNE

Oh, yes, that is a problem that you can fly and I can't. Or at least it would be if I hadn't captured Tinkerbell and stolen some of her fairy dust!

*Anne begins to fly in the same way.*

EVAN

(drops character completely)

You can't do that.

ANNE

What do you mean?

EVAN

You can't fly. Captain Hook doesn't fly.

ANNE

Why not?

EVAN

Because he's a grown up. Only kids can fly.

ANNE

Well I'm a grown up.

EVAN

Yea! So you can't fly!

ANNE

You don't think I can fly?

*Evan has no idea what to do with this.*

ANNE

Because I can.

EVAN

No you can't.

ANNE

Yes I can.

EVAN

Nuh-uh.

ANNE

Yes-huh.

EVAN

Prove it.

ANNE

Well, I can't prove it here now can I? We have to go to Neverland.

EVAN

There's no such thing.

ANNE

Oh I'm disappointed in you. Of course there is!

EVAN

No there isn't

ANNE

Yes there is.

EVAN

Nuh-uh

ANNE

Yes-huh

EVAN  
Prove it.

ANNE  
Ok. Let's go tonight.

EVAN  
(beat)  
Really?

ANNE  
Of course! But there is one thing.

EVAN  
Yea?

ANNE  
Do you know the rule?

EVAN  
(whispering)  
What rule?

ANNE  
You have to lead us there.

EVAN  
But I don't know where it is.

ANNE  
I bet you do.

EVAN  
I do?

ANNE  
Yea. Just think about it.

*He does. Hard.*

*The front door opens and Evan's MOTHER and FATHER walk in.*

EVAN  
Mom! I'm going to Neverland!

MOTHER

Oh you are?

EVAN

Yea! Me and Anne are going!

MOTHER

Well I think it might be time for bed first.

FATHER

Come on Evan let's go.

*Evan exits with his father.*

MOTHER

So did everything go ok?

ANNE

Yes. He was great. I always have the best time here. He's so imaginative!

MOTHER

Oh, I know! The other day he told me that the neighbor's dog was talking to him. Apparently there's a secret dog's only meeting next door tomorrow, but Evan got an invite.

ANNE

Oh how exciting! Dogs are incredibly exclusive you know.

MOTHER

Oh well it's good to know that he's fitting in socially.  
(beat, then hesitantly, she's clearly conflicted)  
We've actually been a little worried about him.

ANNE

Really?

MOTHER

Yes. Evan just has such a big imagination and he can get carried away with it sometimes. We just want to keep him grounded you know?

ANNE

Oh, sure.

MOTHER

Sometimes it seems like he can't tell the difference between what's real and what he's made up. I mean I want him to have fun, but I want to know that he knows the difference too. The last thing we want is for him to get out into the real world and be crushed by it.

ANNE

Okay. Yea that makes sense I guess. But we're all crushed a little bit. That's just part of growing up.

MOTHER

Well I know, and it's not your problem or anything. It's just something that's been on my mind lately.

ANNE

Okay, sure. Thanks for letting me know.

MOTHER

You're such a great sitter. We're honestly so grateful to have you.

ANNE

Oh thank you, I appreciate it.

MOTHER

Absolutely! So how's your semester going? Are you taking anything exciting?

ANNE

Yea I have a few things I'm pretty excited about! Mostly just trying to get started on my research. I am teaching a new class this semester though.

MOTHER

Oh that's exciting! What're you teaching?

ANNE

Brit Lit.

MOTHER

Well that's exciting! What'll you read?

ANNE

Pretty basic stuff. They're having me use a previous syllabus since it's my first semester.

MOTHER

Oh, is it a good list?

ANNE

I like it okay. They did put *Emma* on it which is my least favorite Austen –

MOTHER

- Oh I love *Emma*! You don't like it?

ANNE

No, I wish I did, but I just really hate it.

MOTHER

Hm. I would've thought you'd love it... I actually see a lot of her in you.

ANNE

Oh, well, I'll have to read more carefully this time. I definitely missed that the first time around.

MOTHER

Yes. I think you'll like it. Well, here's the check for tonight. Are we still on for next week? We're finally getting to have our date night!

*Father walks back in as Mother is talking and begins quickly and unceremoniously cleaning up the living room. Anne watches him for a moment before replying.*

ANNE

Yea sure. See you then.

MOTHER

Okay, sounds good. Tell your mother I said hello.

ANNE

Alright, I will.

*Exit*

### Scene 3

*Lights up on Anne and Natalie's apartment. It is small and unassuming but filled with a slightly disproportionate number of books. Natalie sits at the kitchen table studying.*

*Anne enters and begins pacing.*

ANNE

Ugh, I can't believe her.

NATALIE

Hi honey, how was work?

ANNE

What?



NATALIE

Sorry I'm reading about June Cleaver.

ANNE

Why?

NATALIE

It's a section about the repressed housewife.

ANNE

Wow, cheery.

NATALIE

No kidding. And you'd think it would awaken the feminist in me but really it's just given me this weird urge to make meatloaf.

ANNE

Wow. Hillary Clinton is going to be so mad.

NATALIE

Come on now my meatloaf's not that bad.

ANNE

That is definitely debatable. And I think the scorch marks on the ceiling would be on my side.

NATALIE

Maybe, but the microwave is definitely on my side, and he's a seriously valuable asset to have in a debate.

ANNE

You really are the strangest person I know.

NATALIE

(from her seat gives a little flourish of a bow)

So let's hear the next chapter of Anne, nanny wonder versus the evil mother.  
What'd she do this time?

ANNE

First off, I never called her "evil" per se.

NATALIE

If you say so.

ANNE

I do. But, we were playing Peter Pan when his parents got home and I told her about it and she goes –

*Spotlight on Mother.*

MOTHER

Please stop filling his head with such childish nonsense. We hate fun and imagination and everything associated with it.

NATALIE

I feel like that's maybe an exaggeration?

ANNE

Well, I mean, she didn't say that exactly but she might as well have. I was just reading between the lines.

NATALIE

Uh-huh.

ANNE

What? I'm serious! I feel like she just doesn't understand children!

NATALIE

Yea she probably hates her son and wants him to be a bitter, awful old man.

ANNE

Ok yea I know it sounds harsh, but seriously I just feel like she doesn't really understand how good it is for children to be imaginative. They need to be able to create stories. It's important.

NATALIE

And you think she doesn't get that?

ANNE

Yes.

NATALIE

Okay. So what're you going to do about this "problem"?

ANNE

I dunno.

(sarcastically, but maybe she means it)

Show her the error of her ways?

NATALIE

Yes. That should go over well with your employer. Prove her wrong.

ANNE

Well, it's not like it's my only source of income.

NATALIE

No, but it's still a very important one. I would like to continue being able to afford luxuries like electricity.

ANNE

Then I'll just have to find a way to do it without pissing her off.  
(She sits, pulls a book toward her, and begins studying.)

NATALIE

What class is that for?

ANNE

It's a Children's Lit seminar. I love it actually. I think I might've found my thesis topic.

NATALIE

(Looks up. Beat. She has her suspicions.)  
What book is it?

ANNE

Peter Pan.

*Natalie laughs*

ANNE

What?

NATALIE

Nothing, sorry

ANNE

What? What's so funny?

NATALIE

You just can't help yourself can you?

ANNE

What?

NATALIE

Nothing. Don't worry about it.

ANNE

I don't get it.

NATALIE

Seriously. Don't worry about it. I'm just tired.

*There is a slightly awkward pause.*

Aren't you supposed to be reading something else anyway? What're you teaching next?

ANNE

Emma.

*(She's clearly not happy about this.)*

NATALIE

Oh gosh that's my favorite!

*Anne makes an indistinct sound.*

NATALIE

And not yours I'm guessing?

ANNE

I dunno. She bothers me. She just seems kind of... arrogant. I dunno. I read it a long time ago so we'll see.

NATALIE

Well I think you'll love it this time around. After all, you have a lot more in common with her than with Peter Pan.

*(she stifles a laugh with the last words.)*

ANNE

Okay, seriously, what is the joke?

NATALIE

Nothing, really. You know me, I'll laugh at anything. In fact, I should head to bed. 'Night.

*She gets up, Anne throws her pen at her.*

ANNE

Yea okay freak. Goodnight.

*Anne goes back to studying for a minute then picks up her phone to make a call. Her demeanor fluctuates slightly toward being that of a 13 year old girl with a boy band obsession.*

ANNE

Hey, babe. You still coming over? - Okay good. - Oh, you are?

*Anne rises and looks out the window.*

ANNE

Okay I'll buzz you up.

*Anne hangs up the phone, crosses to the door and presses the buzzer. She does this with a little bit of girlish glee. It is subtle and only slightly annoying. She then checks her hair in the mirror by the door and goes to sit nonchalantly back in her studying position.*

*ERIC enters. He is about 27 and very good looking. His hair is a bit too long and he has that 16 year old trying to grow a beard patchy facial hair thing going on. He crosses to the table, kisses Anne and takes the seat opposite her.*

ERIC

Hey, how's it goin'?

ANNE

Good, I just got back from sitting. What've you been up to?

ERIC

Just working in the studio. I still can't get this piece quite right.

ANNE

Yea? What piece is it?

ERIC

That sculpture I'm doing about human suffering. It's rough. I'm incorporating a lot of barbed wire.

*He holds up his hands. They are covered in bandages and scrapes.*

ANNE

(grabbing his hands)

Oh my gosh aren't you wearing gloves?

ERIC

Well I was, but I really want suffering to go in to this piece. Not for it to just be a passive commentator on suffering.

ANNE

So you took the gloves off?

*He nods.*

ANNE

Oh wow, that's dedication.

*She goes to the kitchen to get a dish towel and wets it and begins doctoring Eric's cuts as he says his next line.*

ERIC

Well, I mean, if you can't suffer for your art, you're not really being a part of it you know? True art involves all of you. Your guts, your heart, your hands. Everything. It's visceral. You really gotta get in there and just do it ya know?

ANNE

Yea. And once you do that Nike can endorse you.

ERIC

What?

ANNE

Oh, I was just kidding, don't worry about it.

ERIC

Oh, for a minute I thought you were going all corporate sell out on me.  
(laughs)

ANNE

Oh, no. I wouldn't. I mean, I would never –

ERIC

Don't worry it's okay babe. I know you didn't mean it. Oh hey what're you doing tomorrow afternoon?

ANNE

I'm teaching at 1:15 but I should be free by 2:30. Why?

ERIC

There's this artist giving a lecture tomorrow. He's lived in India for like 8 years just painting and getting to know the culture and just living and he's going to talk all about it.

ANNE

Sure, sounds interesting.

ERIC

Yea, he's a genius. I read this article that he wrote and it literally blew my mind.

ANNE

(laughs)

Wow! Literally?

ERIC

(misses the joke)

Yea! He talks all about how art is an extension of the artists' soul and the artist has to be really involved in what he's expressing if he ever wants to express it properly.

ANNE

How do you mean?

ERIC

Just like, if you're doing a piece about Indian culture going to India and really getting involved in the culture. Or if you're doing a piece on suffering...

*He holds up his hands.*

ANNE

Well then good for you! Getting all involved.

ERIC

Hey, I'm just trying to follow the calling you know?

ANNE

Absolutely. You're on your own hero's journey.

ERIC

Oh I like that.

*He leans over the table and kisses her.*

ERIC

So does that make me Odysseus?

ANNE

Oh definitely.  
(leaning in to kiss him again)

ERIC

And so that makes you, what's her name? Calypso?

*She pulls back.*

ANNE

Penelope.

ERIC

Right.

*He kisses her. She kisses him back for a second, then pulls back and goes back to her studying.*

ANNE

So what time is the lecture tomorrow?

ERIC

It's at three. You can just meet me in the lobby of the art building at 2:50?

ANNE

Yea sounds good.

ERIC

Okay great, see ya then. I've got to hit the hay though. Been a long day.

*He gets up to leave.*

ANNE

See you tomorrow.

ERIC

Lock the door behind me.

*He exits. Anne looks at the door for a second then goes to lock it. She turns out the lights and exits to her room.*

#### Scene 4

*Lights up on Anne and Evan playing in the living room. Evan peeks from underneath a cardboard box with a window and various control panels*



*drawn on it and a bent wire coat hanger sticking out of the top while Anne stands atop a kitchen chair.*

EVAN

Ready for launch!

ANNE

Initiating launch sequence in 5-4-3-2-1. We have liftoff.

*Both Anne and Evan create a very long and obnoxious string of rocket launch sounds. From within the box Evan shakes his spaceship uncontrollably.*

ANNE

The first successful launching of a power ranger cowboy astronaut into space is well underway ladies and gentlemen! Will he be able to save the moon people from their dreadful attack from the invasion of the demon moon beasts?

*Evan peeks out again from beneath his cardboard box.*

EVAN

There are no moon people.

ANNE

What do you mean?

EVAN

We learned that in school today. The moon isn't made of cheese, but it's ok because nobody's there to eat it.

ANNE

It is too. Moon cheese is my favorite kind.

EVAN

That's not true.

ANNE

Maybe not but the moon people would be deeply offended by your disbelief. They are an old and proud race who deserve –

EVAN

No they're not! There are no moon people!

ANNE

Evan!

EVAN

You can't just make things up. That's lying.

ANNE

Evan, I'm just telling a story. There's a difference between telling a story and lying.

EVAN

Well, you're telling a lying story because you're a liar.

ANNE

Evan. Come on, you aren't really going to space but we pretend you are because it's part of the story. It makes the story better.

EVAN

But I *could* go to the moon.

ANNE

Yes and there *could* be moon people there.

EVAN

No, there aren't!

ANNE

Well, I'm going to pretend that there are.

EVAN

That's dumb.

ANNE

No, it's not. My story is way more exciting than yours. In my story you get to go to the moon and save the moon people from a horrible invasion. In yours you just go to a really boring sand planet and walk around.

(Beat)

EVAN

What do moon people look like?

ANNE

(whispering, then growing in volume and urgency)

No one knows. They've never been seen before. They live on the dark side of the moon. So not only is it your duty, captain Evan, to rescue them from their fate, but it is your privilege to be the first to study these fascinating people. Are you up to the challenge captain?

EVAN  
Yes ma'am.

ANNE  
I said are you up to the challenge!

EVAN  
(salutes)  
Yes ma'am!

ANNE  
Then let's get this show on the road! Ready for take-off captain?

*Evan settles himself back inside his rocket.*

EVAN  
Ready!

ANNE  
In 3-2-1 We have liftoff!

*Once again Anne and Evan create a string of sound effects simulating the rocket launch while Evan violently shakes his cardboard box from the inside.*

ANNE  
I'm sending you your landing coordinates captain. Do you think you'll be able to land the ship without a crew?

EVAN  
Yes!

ANNE  
Alright then! This is going to be the most difficult landing anyone has ever done in the history of ever so be careful captain!

EVAN  
I will!

*Evan acts out his landing complete with sufficient sound effects and emerges from beneath his box with his hands in the air.*

EVAN  
I did it!!!

*He begins to run around the room in celebration.*

ANNE

Congratulations captain, but you must stay focused. The moon people need your help. Their distress signal is coming from somewhere over in quadrant 4. Don't forget your stun gun captain!

EVAN

Right!

*Evan runs back to his box, lifts it up and grabs his "gun" from underneath. This can be anything but a plastic gun. A shoe-horn, a stick, etc.*

EVAN

Ready!

ANNE

Alright then captain, the fate of the moon people depends on you. Get to them as quickly as you can and help save them!

*Evan exits down the hallway making laser sounds and shooting his stun gun at everything in his path.*

ANNE

Captain have you made contact? Do you read captain?

*Evan returns holding a stuffed chicken.*

EVAN

I saved the moon people and they gave me a gift!

ANNE

That's wonderful captain! Congratulations sir, I always knew you could do it! What did they give you?

*Evan proudly holds up the chicken.*

EVAN

They gave me one of their babies!

ANNE

(breaking character)

Wow. I really don't even know where to start with that one.

EVAN

This is the egg of a moon baby and in three days it will hatch and I will have a brother!

ANNE

So the chicken *is* the egg? That's nice and ironic. So they just gave you one of their children? ...captain?

EVAN

Yes. His mother was killed by the invasion so I took him in.

ANNE

(Beginning to get back on board)

Oh ok that's nice. Well tell me about the moon people captain! What did they look like?

EVAN

They looked like normal people only they had feathers all over them, but they don't have wings. They just walk... and use skates. They all wear skates. They have skate feet.

ANNE

Will you draw a portrait of the moon people? For the official archives?

*Evan stares blankly.*

ANNE

Do you know what a portrait is?

*He shakes his head.*

ANNE

That's what you call it when you draw a picture of someone. You think you could do that? Draw a portrait of the moon people?

EVAN

It is my duty!

*Evan runs off to retrieve paper and crayons. His parents enter.*

ANNE

Hi, how was your evening?

MOTHER

It was good. The movie could have been better, but we can only blame Tom Cruise for so much.

ANNE

True, unfortunately.

FATHER

How was he tonight?

ANNE

Great! He just got back from the moon so probably a little tired.

*Evan runs back in carrying paper and a box of crayons.*

EVAN

Mom! Let me show you something! I need to draw a moon person!

MOTHER

Oh do you now? I think what you need is to go to bed.

EVAN

Noooo I have to draw this portrait for the art-hives!

MOTHER

Well someone is going to do very well on his vocab test tomorrow.

EVAN

Nooooo I don't want to go to school.

FATHER

Well that is surprising.

MOTHER

Sorry buddy it's time to come back to Earth now. Time for bed. The real world requires a good night's sleep.

*Evan and Mother exit.*

FATHER

I have a question for you. Could you possibly work a weekend for us? I've got a conference in LA coming up in two weeks and we thought we'd make a weekend out of it; see the sights: Hollywood, Disneyland, all that stuff.

ANNE

You're going to Disneyland?

FATHER

Yea well we've never been and thought this was as good an opportunity as any.

ANNE

You're not taking Evan?

FATHER

No, it'd be boring for him. I'll be in seminars all day Friday, and while Stacey can occupy herself shopping I'm not sure Evan would go for that.

ANNE

Oh yea, makes sense.

(beat)

It's kinda sad that he has to miss Mickey though.

FATHER

Yea, we thought about it but truthfully it's just too expensive to take a kid that young. You pay so much for them not to remember a thing. We'd just rather take him when he can appreciate it.

ANNE

I understand.

FATHER

Could you be here by noon on Friday?

ANNE

Sure, I'm out of class by then.

FATHER

Okay great, and you would just stay the whole weekend until we get back on Sunday evening.

ANNE

Sounds great.

FATHER

Great! Here's the check for tonight, and we'll pay you more obviously, for this weekend since you're staying overnight.

ANNE

Hey, can't say no to that.

FATHER

Great, see you Friday then.

ANNE

Yea sure. See you then.

*She exits.*

Scene 5

*Natalie sits at the kitchen table studying. Anne enters and slams the door.  
Natalie jumps.*

NATALIE

Well someone has been practicing her entrance.

ANNE

Seriously this is getting ridiculous.

NATALIE

Oh no what'd the evil queen do now?

ANNE

Oh well she's got him on her side now! We had so much fun, he was just pretending and ya know, space traveling and stuff -

NATALIE

- naturally -

ANNE

And they come home and he drops this bombshell.

*A spotlight on Father. He holds out the check as before, but this time with an incredibly haughty attitude.*

FATHER

We're going to the happiest place on earth and we're not taking our kid. I'm pretending it's too expensive, but really I don't want him around because it interferes with my sex life. So I'm going to pay you double to keep quiet about it and entertain the kid while we pretend to be fun loving people.

*Spotlight fades.*

NATALIE

So they're selling you their child?

ANNE

No, they're going on vacation and I'm sitting for the weekend.

NATALIE

And he told you that they're going on a, what, a sexcation?

ANNE

No, but I could just tell.



NATALIE

I'm sorry, what?

ANNE

I dunno, he just wants alone time or something.

NATALIE

How dare a man want alone time with his wife. You should probably call the police.

ANNE

I wish I could, but I don't think they arrest you for going to Disney World.  
(beat)

NATALIE

Is that some sort of euphemism?

ANNE

Ew, no. They're literally going to Disney World.

NATALIE

So what's the problem?

*During the following the spotlight comes up on Father once again and he says his line in unison with Anne.*

ANNE

It's just the way he talked about it! He might as well have said "I hate all fun and imagination, and I don't want my child to experience happy things."

FATHER

I hate all fun and imagination, and I don't want my child to experience happy things.

*Spotlight on Father fades.*

ANNE

And then he basically kicked me out the door.

NATALIE

Oh sure. Because that's not crazy at all.

ANNE

No it's not!

NATALIE

Don't you think there's even the slightest possibility that you could maybe be over thinking this? If he didn't actually say that maybe that's not what he meant. Maybe they just really need a romantic weekend alone together.

ANNE

No I'm telling you he just doesn't want to bother with taking Evan.

NATALIE

Ok. So, what're you going to do?

ANNE

I'll just have to show them that at least one person loves their child.

NATALIE

(holding back a sigh)

How?

ANNE

I'm not sure yet, but I'll figure it out.

NATALIE

Look, I really do admire you for this. I think you have the best intentions, but... don't take this the wrong way, but you're not his mom. You don't have kids. Don't you worry about how it might be received? I mean getting parenting advice from your babysitter, no matter how awesome she is, cannot be fun.

ANNE

I'm not going to, like, attack them or anything. I just want them to realize what a great kid they've got. Sometimes people make mistakes and they need someone to help them out a little.

NATALIE

Yea. Just be careful okay?

(Beat)

But if you do get fired be sure to let me know. They pay pretty well so I'd like a shot at the gig. Just don't tell them you know me.

ANNE

Thanks. Love the solidarity.

NATALIE

That's what I'm here for.

*Anne starts to make herself a snack.*

NATALIE

Hey, I haven't seen Eric in awhile. How're you guys doing?

ANNE

Good, he was actually here just a couple of days ago. You were asleep though.

NATALIE

Oh, okay. What's he up to these days?

ANNE

He's actually working on this really interesting piece. It's about human suffering.

NATALIE

Ah, yes, the suffering of the privileged white male. Tough stuff.

ANNE

I mean, it's not like you have to be homeless or starving to suffer emotional turmoil.

NATALIE

Yea, I know, but it's kind of funny isn't it?

ANNE

Not really.

NATALIE

Okay... sorry... go on. Human suffering.

ANNE

Yea. Well, anyway he's using barbed wire which I thought was an interesting medium. It should be pretty cool when he's done.

NATALIE

Yea, I'll have to check it out.

*Silence. Anne continues eating her snack, pours herself a glass of milk.*

ANNE

Actually just the other day he took me on this really great date. We went to the park and had a picnic and he showed me where there this really great little hiking spot and we climbed to the top of this hill.

NATALIE

I'm sorry, you had a picnic? Outside? Like in the dirt?

ANNE

Yes. I can be outdoorsy.

*Natalie gives her a look*

ANNE

Okay maybe not. We had a blanket. I wasn't about to eat bugs.

NATALIE

That's more like it. Go on, you almost conquered the great outdoors.

ANNE

Yes. And at the top of this little peak was the most beautiful view I've ever seen. It was breathtaking. And at the top of the hill he just grabs me and starts dancing. There's no music or anything, we're just dancing. I'm sure we looked like idiots, but it was just so... nice.

NATALIE

Aw, yea that's sweet.

ANNE

I dunno I just, I love being with him. I never know what's coming next.

NATALIE

Yea that's so nice, I'm glad you're happy.

ANNE

Well then of course as soon as we were done with that he pulled out his camera to "capture the moment" so he could paint it later.

*She laughs*

ANNE

I guess that comes with the territory.

NATALIE

(unsure)

Yea I guess so.

ANNE

Well, I'm headed to bed. I've still got to figure out what to do about Evan's parents.

NATALIE

Yes. You should do that. Maybe you'll dream up a solution to your problem.

*Anne exits.*

NATALIE

Or a problem to your solution.

*Lights out.*

Scene 6

*Anne sits at her desk in her office grading papers. Eric knocks at the door and steps in. His dress shows that he has just been in his studio.*

ERIC

Knock, knock.

ANNE

Hey! Come in!

ERIC

Hey you got a minute?

ANNE

Yea sure what's up.

ERIC

Well.. that lecture got me thinking that I really just need to start getting more involved in my work so I'm going to start trying to really experience my subjects more.

ANNE

For the piece you're working on now? You want to experience more suffering?

ERIC

No no I just need to *live* more.

ANNE

Okay... so what do you mean?

ERIC

You know, just do life! Get out there and do stuff!

ANNE

Uh, okay what kind of stuff?

ERIC

Well I know this guy and his dad's a pilot and he offered to give me flying lessons! What d'you think?

ANNE

Oh wow that sounds great! Where do you go for that?

ERIC

It's just an hour away from here. But look I want you to do it with me! It'd be fun!

ANNE

What? You want me to fly an airplane.

ERIC

Yea! C'mon you know you'd love it.

ANNE

I mean apart from the terror of killing everyone on board sure I guess I'd love it.

ERIC

Oh so you're scared. I see.

ANNE

Oh that's not fair. I am not scared.

ERIC

Really? Cause the way I see it, if you're passing up an opportunity like this it can only be because you're scared.

ANNE

Not true!

ERIC

Then prove it!

ANNE

Okay I will. When do we start?

ERIC

(laughs)

There's my girl! We start tomorrow! I've already got it all set up.

ANNE

What time? I've got class at 2.

ERIC

Are you teaching the class?

ANNE

No.

ERIC

Then they won't miss you too much. Don't worry about it. We can schedule the next lessons around you.

*She thinks for a second.*

ANNE

Okay let's do it!

ERIC

Great! You won't regret this!

ANNE

I hope not.

ERIC

It's gonna be so inspirational! Just us and our own guts between life and death!

ANNE

And hopefully a very well trained and experienced pilot.

ERIC

*(he doesn't hear her)*

I can't wait! Maybe I can do a piece about it.

ANNE

Oh does that mean I get to be in it?

ERIC

Well I was thinking more along the lines of something inspired by the concept of flight as a whole –

ANNE

Oh, okay.

ERIC

- but you're part of the experience so really you'll be in there somewhere.

*He kisses her on the head.*

ANNE

Well let's just hope that gravity is not so much a part of this experience.

ERIC

Come on are you still scared?

ANNE

No! ... yes. But let's be honest, you tell me that you're going to put me in a giant metal box hurtling through the air at a million miles an hour and that *I'm* going to be the one controlling it and I'm not supposed to get scared?

ERIC

Oh you'll be fine. You'll love it you'll see.

ANNE

Yea... and who knows maybe I'll find a calling as a pilot.

ERIC

Exactly.

(Beat)

ANNE

Oh my gosh I'm going to fly an airplane!

ERIC

I know, right?

ANNE

Okay, yea it's definitely exciting.

ERIC

That's right it is! Carpe Diem!

ANNE

Hey, do you have lunch plans? Wanna go somewhere?

ERIC

I can't, babe, sorry. I've got to keep working. When inspiration strikes you've got to seize it ya know?

ANNE

Oh, yea sure. Well, go be inspired.

ERIC

Now that I've had a visit to my muse that should be easy.

*He kisses her then exits.*

*Anne stands for a moment then returns to her desk and continues grading.*



Scene 7

*Anne and Natalie sit at their kitchen table. Anne is attempting unsuccessfully to study. A book lays open in front of her as she scans it. Her leg jumps up and down in that annoying way that people do when they're feeling jumpy or nervous. Natalie is completely engrossed in her book.*

ANNE  
What're you reading

NATALIE  
Uh, it's about child development in third world countries.

ANNE  
Wow, that sounds interesting... and really sad.

NATALIE  
Yea. Important though.

ANNE  
Definitely.

*Natalie nods and goes back to studying. Anne tries to do the same but soon returns to fidgeting. Natalie is a little annoyed by this. She looks up at Anne for a second.*

NATALIE  
Anne, sweetie, if you don't stop that I'm going to have to chop your leg off.

ANNE  
Oh, sorry.

*She stops for a minute then starts again. She realizes what she is doing and looks at Natalie. Beat.*

ANNE  
Do you like it?

NATALIE  
The book that I'm reading about impoverished, starving children? I mean it's not really a feel-good book.

ANNE  
Right. Dumb question.  
(beat)

ANNE

It's just always so much easier to read when you actually like what you're reading.

NATALIE

(sighs)

I'm guessing you don't like what you're reading.

ANNE

No. I mean I love Jane Austen usually, but Emma is really annoying.

NATALIE

What? That's like my favorite Austen novel!

ANNE

Why??

NATALIE

She's so great! You don't love her?

ANNE

No! She's so entitled! She thinks she can fix everybody!

*Natalie laughs.*

NATALIE

Well some of us find that endearing. Good thing too.

ANNE

How is that a good thing?

NATALIE

I just mean... nevermind. She's just so funny! I like her wit.

ANNE

She is clever, but I just hate seeing her prance around like she knows what everyone else's life is supposed to look like.

*Natalie hesitates.*

NATALIE

Yea. I can see how that would be frustrating.

ANNE

Yea.

NATALIE

But you gotta read it. Those kids won't teach themselves.

ANNE

Yea. That's for sure.

NATALIE

So just... chill. You can do it.

ANNE

Ok. Focus time.

*They return to studying. It seems to take this time. Then Anne starts to get jumpy again. Natalie tries to ignore it for awhile, but she can't after a minute or so of this.*

NATALIE

Anne. What is up with you? Are you ok?

ANNE

Do you ever just feel like... I dunno... like you're... I... never mind.

NATALIE

No, what? Tell me.

ANNE

It's nothing.

(They go back to studying)

It's just that, sometimes, I get this feeling. I dunno, like this weird, anxious feeling. Just jittery. For no reason.

NATALIE

You should probably switch to decaf.

ANNE

Funny. Original too.

NATALIE

I know, that's why I'm working on my masters in jokes. I am the joke master.

ANNE

Nat. Come on, seriously. Don't you ever feel... I dunno...

NATALIE

...anxious?

ANNE

Yea.

NATALIE

Of course.

ANNE

Really?

NATALIE

Well sure, but then I pop a xanax and it goes away.

ANNE

That's not what I mean. Don't you ever... Okay it's like this. Do you ever feel like you just want to get up and run and never look back and you feel like you want to run *to* somewhere, but you just don't know where, and you're not really sure it matter as long as you're going?

NATALIE

I hate exercise.

ANNE

Good talk.

NATALIE

No come on Anne, you know I'm just messing with you. Come on tell me. You want to run.

ANNE

Well... yea. Sort of. I just feel... I dunno, like I need to... get out of my skin or something.

NATALIE

Ew.

ANNE

You know what I mean.

NATALIE

Not really... I'm trying.

ANNE

I... Forget it. It's stupid. Sorry.

NATALIE

You sure?

ANNE

Yea, don't worry about it.

NATALIE

I'm sorry it's just that I have this test coming up.

ANNE

Yea I know, don't worry. It's totally fine. I've got to go anyway. I've got a meeting.

NATALIE

No, wait Anne. I'm sorry, I can hold off for five minutes. What's up with you? Is this about Eric?

ANNE

No, well, sort of. It's just that I've been feeling really restless lately. Like I'm... waiting... or something. And all of a sudden Eric swoops in with this big announcement that we're going to take lessons and get our pilot's licenses.

NATALIE

Whoa that's awesome!

ANNE

I know, right? But I can't help but feel like... I dunno. I'm probably being dumb.

NATALIE

No. Just tell me.

ANNE

I just feel like this should be the perfect solution to my restlessness problem or whatever it is, but it's not.

NATALIE

No?

ANNE

No. It's great and I love how adventurous he is, it's so exhilarating. But somehow it still doesn't... I just don't know. Maybe I should actually process my thoughts before I spew them on you.

NATALIE

No that's what I'm here for. I am a thought spewing absorber. Or if you want to think of me as your sounding board that's a little less disgusting and a slightly more conventional way of looking at it.

ANNE

I appreciate it.

NATALIE

Anytime. Now do you have more thoughts that you need to throw at me? See what sticks?

ANNE

No. I am utterly thought-less.

NATALIE

So many options, I don't even know where to start.

ANNE

I really left that wide open for you, didn't I.

NATALIE

And I thank you for it, but even a joke master has standards.

ANNE

I'll try not to be such an easy target next time.

*Anne gets up and begins to gather her things. Natalie grabs her arm gently.*

NATALIE

But hey, for real, I'm here anytime you need it. This symbiotic thing is really working for us.

ANNE

Yea I know right?

NATALIE

You headed out?

ANNE

Yea, I've got a meeting

NATALIE

Okay, see you later.

ANNE

Yea. See ya.

*Exit*

Scene 8

*Anne and Natalie's apartment. Anne is on the phone and Natalie is on the couch on her laptop.*

ANNE

- Yea sure. - Okay no problem - See you Friday. - Thanks.

*She hangs up the phone. She is clearly agitated.*

ANNE

I just don't get it!

NATALIE

Me neither!

ANNE

First off, why you would go to Disneyland and not take your six year old is beyond me!

NATALIE

Children are incredibly annoying.

ANNE

And second, if you have to lie to him about where you're going don't you think that shows that deep down, in some part of you, you know it's evil and cruel to leave him?

NATALIE

Well he probably deserves it.

ANNE

What happened to my sounding board?

NATALIE

It's broken today.

ANNE

Is everything okay?

NATALIE

Yea. It's not a big deal. It's just that my dad called today.

ANNE

Oh.

*She crosses to sit next to Natalie.*

NATALIE

Yea. Apparently Todd had a bad day today.

ANNE

Oh no, I'm so sorry. Is he alright?

NATALIE

He will be. It was just one of those days ya know? I just wish they could figure out what's wrong.

*Anne reaches over and grabs Natalie's hand. Natalie smiles and squeezes her hand then lets go.*

NATALIE

So they're lying to Evan?

ANNE

Uh, yea. They don't want me to tell him where they're going.

NATALIE

Is that what he called to tell you?

ANNE

Yea... look if you need to talk...

NATALIE

What I need is to hear your story. Continue.

ANNE

Right. Well I just think they clearly must know how awful it is to be going without him if they don't want to tell him about it.

NATALIE

Kids aren't really known for being super selfless. Maybe they just knew a six year old wouldn't be able to understand.

ANNE

I should think not! I don't even understand!

NATALIE

(overlapping)

Well –



ANNE

- Don't say it. I heard it.

NATALIE

As long as you're aware.

ANNE

They should just take him, then they wouldn't have to lie to him.

NATALIE

What do they want you to tell him?

ANNE

Just that they're in California for a conference.

NATALIE

Isn't that what they're doing?

ANNE

Yes, but it's a lie of omission.

NATALIE

But is it really ever going to come up? Kids don't really have that much of a concept of space anyway.

ANNE

You must be doing well in that child development class.

NATALIE

Yea pretty well, actually.

ANNE

Good I'm glad.

NATALIE

Thanks. But seriously they don't. He just knows that they're gone and they'll be back in a little while. I doubt you'll have to say anything.

ANNE

I know, but it's the principle of the thing.

NATALIE

Oh so this is a morality issue?

ANNE

Yes.

NATALIE

You feel the need to tell him because not telling him would be a lie.

ANNE

Yes.

NATALIE

Huh, that's interesting. Is that the same or different from when you forget to tell your mother that you've been dating someone for a month?

ANNE

Different. It's definitely different.

NATALIE

Or when you tell your students that you're canceling class because you don't feel well when really it's because you want to catch up on Downton Abbey.

ANNE

Again –

NATALIE

- Ooh ooh or when you forget to tell your roommate that UPS has attempted to deliver the package that she's been waiting on three times and now it's being sent back to the sender.

ANNE

Okay that was just me being forgetful. This is totally different.

NATALIE

Is it though? Would he really even know the difference? That's the great thing about kids is that they can be just as entertained at home with a stick and a dead bug as they can by Disneyland. And frankly, the dead bug is way cheaper.

ANNE

I know, I know. I guess I just don't like what it represents.

NATALIE

What it represents? Anne, they just want to go to Disneyland. It's cute. Don't hold it against them.

ANNE

Fine. I still think its a crappy thing to do to a kid but I won't tell him.

NATALIE

I'm sorry, you were thinking of *telling* him? You are so lucky you have me.

ANNE

That's debatable. I'm pretty sure you're just a henchman of the forces of darkness.

NATALIE

Yes, and as champion of all that is good and innocent and holy, you just gave in to my evil ways.

ANNE

I hope you're proud of yourself.

NATALIE

I'll buy myself a treat later.

ANNE

I've got to go fly an airplane now so I'll see you later.

NATALIE

Yea. If you survive.

ANNE

Oh, yes. Thank you so much for that.

*She exits.*

## Scene 9

*Lights up on Anne and Natalie's empty apartment. Eric and Anne rush in the door laughing.*

ANNE

Okay, okay, but you have to admit that was not nearly as bad as when you quoted one of the most offensive lines ever written and he had no idea what you were talking about.

ERIC

I'm sorry but who hasn't seen *Airplane*?

ANNE

True. It should probably be a requirement for pilot school.

ERIC

Oh, definitely.

ANNE

We could at least make it a requirement for our piloting school. We could rent it, make a movie night out of it?

*Natalie enters from her room.*

ANNE

Natalie! Hey we were thinking about renting a movie if you want to join!

NATALIE

Sure sounds like fun! Is the studio gonna let you go for the night Eric?

ERIC

Uh, yea I thought I might take a night off.

NATALIE

Well good I was starting to think you lived there. We don't see you around here much these days.

ERIC

Well art takes dedication.

NATALIE

(slightly ironic)

And you are nothing if not dedicated.

ANNE

(proudly, not catching the irony)

Yea he is!

ERIC

(Natalie's tone is not lost on him)

Yea

*Pause.*

Actually, I really should be getting over there. I gotta keep up the reputation ya know?

ANNE

Oh, are you sure?

ERIC

Yea. I was just, uh, really inspired by the lesson.

ANNE

You can start later can't you?

NATALIE

Yea!

(chanting)

Movie night, movie night, movie night

ANNE

There's bound to be popcorn in it for you.

NATALIE

Mmm... I dunno about that. It's mine and I'm incredibly selfish.

ERIC

No, I really do need to go.

ANNE

Ok, sure. You were really that inspired by our first lesson?

ERIC

It was such an adrenaline rush, don't you think?

ANNE

We didn't even get off the ground.

ERIC

I know, but just the idea of getting out there and really doing something with my life. It just makes me want to throw myself into my art.

ANNE

(weakly)

Sounds messy.

ERIC

I'm sorry babe you know I love our movie nights, but I just can't waste time right now. I've got inspiration in my bones and I've got to do something with it.

ANNE

I'm sorry, waste time?

ERIC

What?

ANNE

You think spending time with me is a waste of time?

ERIC

Come on that's not fair. You know that's not what I meant.

ANNE

Okay, what did you mean?

ERIC

Just that I - look - I didn't mean. My art is what I *do* babe. It's who I am.

ANNE

I get that, and I love that you're so passionate about your work, but it just feels like you're always coming around to get inspired and then you're off.

ERIC

So you're mad because you inspire me?

ANNE

No, that's really... sweet... or whatever, but I'd rather actually spend time with you.

ERIC

We spend time together. What about all the time that we just spent together?

ANNE

(sighs)

Yea. Yea, I guess you're right. I'm sorry, I'm just... tired.

ERIC

So are we good?

ANNE

Yea, we're good.

ERIC

Okay, then I'll see you tomorrow?

ANNE

Yea.

*He exits. Pause*

NATALIE

So... what movie do you want to watch?

*Anne smiles weakly at this, crosses to the freezer, grabs a pint of Ben and Jerry's and a spoon from the kitchen and then sits on the couch.*

NATALIE

Uh-oh.

ANNE

It's really fine. It's just Eric. He's been a little weird lately. But I'm sure it's nothing.

NATALIE

(gesturing to the ice cream)

Right. You pulled out the big guns for nothing.

ANNE

I can't just crave a little love from Ben and Jerry every once in awhile?

NATALIE

Historically, no.

ANNE

Well it's not just that...he's applying for this internship in India with this artist. Apparently he needs an assistant for this big project he's been commissioned to do.

NATALIE

Oh, how long is the internship?

ANNE

(pauses)

A year.

*Natalie looks at Anne who continues eating.*

NATALIE

That's a really long time to be apart. What will you do?

ANNE

Well the artist is supposedly really famous and important so the odds of him getting it are pretty slim since there'll be like a thousand people applying... I'm not worried.

NATALIE

Okay yea, hopefully it won't even come up.

ANNE

Yea. Not that I don't want him to be successful or anything. It's just... India.

NATALIE

That's not a quick trip.

ANNE

Yea. Well, it probably won't even happen right?

NATALIE

Right. And in the meantime me, and our two best friends are here to keep you company.

*Anne passes her the spoon.*

ANNE

So, movie?

NATALIE

You have one in mind?

ANNE

Airplane.

NATALIE

(laughs)

You aren't afraid that will scare you away from all dreams of ever being a pilot?

ANNE

Oh no that's exactly what I'm hoping for actually.

NATALIE

Well, as long as we're clear on that.

*Natalie passes back the spoon. She gets up, grabs her laptop, and hooks it up to the TV.*

NATALIE

Can I ask you one more question?

ANNE

Sure.

NATALIE

When do you find out if he got it?

ANNE

He turned in his application pretty late so it should be soon.

NATALIE

How long?



ANNE

A week.

NATALIE

A week? I thought you said there were thousands of applicants?

ANNE

Yea... Apparently the artist asked him to turn in a late application.

NATALIE

He asked him to turn one in personally?

ANNE

(she doesn't look up.)

Yes.

*Pause.*

NATALIE

Well, let's start the movie shall we? Coffee?

ANNE

(this is clearly a bit that they do)

Only if it's how I like my men.

NATALIE

With cream and sugar?

ANNE

Exactly.

*Lights out.*

#### Scene 10

*Lights up on Anne's office. She sits at her desk grading papers, a copy of Emma open next to them BEN, a 30 year old grad student comes in.*

ANNE

Hey, Ben. You need something?

BEN

Yea, you have a copy of Beowulf I could borrow?

ANNE

Yea sure. Shouldn't you have like seven though?

BEN

Well, I would, but I'm an incredibly generous man and I loaned all of my copies out to students.

ANNE

All of them?

BEN

Yes. Along with being very generous, I am also incredibly stupid.

*Anne laughs and gets up to retrieve the book from a shelf behind her. Ben steps up to her desk and glances at the book on it.*

BEN

Emma. Are you teaching it?

ANNE

What? Oh, yea I am.

BEN

Good. Great book.

ANNE

Yea. Gotta love a novel with a truly messed up central character.

BEN

You think she's messed up?

ANNE

Well, she is pretty arrogant don't you think?

BEN

Sure, but aren't we all just a little bit?

ANNE

(sarcastically)

Well, you might be, but I am certainly not.

BEN

(laughs)

I see. But for the rest of us, Emma is a fairly sympathetic figure.

ANNE

Really?

BEN

Yes. She's so beautifully flawed. It's just so... human. I can't help but love it.

ANNE

You like her even though she's an entitled little busybody?

BEN

I think I even like her a little bit *because* she's an entitled busybody.

ANNE

See, now that's just sadistic.

BEN

Or just unusually magnanimous.

ANNE

Alright, I'll give you that, but I still don't think she deserves the ending that she gets.

BEN

Maybe, but Knightley thinks she deserves it.

ANNE

True. I guess I'm just not as forgiving. But I also don't understand why the guillotine went out of fashion.

BEN

It was too French.

ANNE

That's probably it.

*She realizes that she's still holding Beowulf.*

ANNE

Here you go. But just know that your generosity with your books is not allowed to extend to this particular copy.

BEN

Don't worry, you'll have it back safe and sound.

*He exits.*

Scene 11

*Spotlight on Anne at center stage.*

ANNE

So I've been racking my brain trying to figure out this whole thing with Evan and his parents. And to be honest I'm really no nearer a solution. It's kind of hard to tell your bosses that they're wrong. Especially with something like this. And don't get me wrong it's not like I think I have all the answers or anything. I just think they could use a little help. They're such great people and Evan is such a great kid, it just seems like they could use a little help to get back on track. Everyone needs a little help every now and then. We've all got our path and sometimes we get off of it, and all we need is just a little nudge in the right direction. Things work out in the end. They always do.

*The silence that follows this last line is broken suddenly by the ringing of a cell phone.*

*Anne and Natalie's place. Natalie is on the phone. She is visibly shaken.*

NATALIE

- Love you too. - Bye.

*She hangs up. She begins to cry.*

*Anne enters, Natalie tries to pull herself together.*

ANNE

I think I have made progress!

NATALIE

Yea?

ANNE

Yes! Today Evan asked if we could play pirates and I thought: "Yes it's boring, but he's a boy so it's understandable." But it turns out his pirates have flying ships! So creative! I love it! So I –

*She finally notices that Natalie has been crying.*

ANNE

Hey, what's wrong?

*She goes to the couch and sits, putting her arms around Natalie. Natalie loses control. Anne holds her for a minute.*

ANNE

What happened Nat?

*Slowly, Natalie regains control and sits up.*

NATALIE

It's Todd.

ANNE

Oh. Is he... Okay?

*Natalie shakes her head. Anne holds her.*

ANNE

Oh my gosh I'm so sorry.

*Lights out.*

Scene 12

*Lights up on Anne and Natalie's apartment. Anne and Eric are sitting on the couch talking.*

ERIC

When will she be back?

ANNE

Sometime later tonight.

*Pause.*

ANNE

Gosh. I can't even imagine.

ERIC

Yea. It's rough.

ANNE

She doesn't deserve this. Hell, Todd doesn't deserve this. He's a good kid.

ERIC

I'm sure he is.

*Long pause. Eric clears his throat.*

ERIC

So I realize this is not the best time for this, but that's just how things go sometimes. Gotta roll with the –

ANNE

- What is it?

ERIC

Well...

(clears his throat again)

... you remember that internship in India that I applied for.

*Pause.*

ERIC

Turns out, I got it.

*Pause.*

ERIC

I got the internship.

*Pause.*

ERIC

Anne –

ANNE

You're right this isn't the best time.

*She goes to the kitchen and begins furiously scrubbing the counters.*

ERIC

Come on, babe.

ANNE

No, you come on Eric! I can't believe you. My best friend since 7th grade finds out that her little brother has leukemia and you want to come over and tell me that you're moving to India? That's great.

ERIC

No, listen –

ANNE

I'm sorry, no. I'd like to deal with one crisis at a time if you don't mind. We'll talk about it later.

ERIC

Okay...

*Pause.*

ANNE

What could possibly make you think this was a good time to tell me this?

ERIC

I only have a week to decide.

ANNE

A week?

ERIC

Yea.

ANNE

And then what? You just leave?

ERIC

... Yea.

*She begins scrubbing again. After a moment she throws the towel in the sink.*

ANNE

You know? You picked a great day to redefine dick move.

ERIC

(beginning to get angry)

Hey now.

ANNE

I thought maybe we'd have a little more time before you found out about this. I thought maybe we'd have time to discuss this –

ERIC

- Hey –

ANNE

I mean you're going to another continent for an entire year! What does this mean for us? Are we just over? Is that it?

ERIC

Hey!

ANNE

What?

ERIC

I want you to come with me.

*Pause*

ANNE

I'm sorry, what?

ERIC

I want you to come with me.

ANNE

...To India?

ERIC

Yes.

ANNE

To live in India?

ERIC

Yes.

ANNE

For a year?

ERIC

Yes.

*Pause*

ERIC

I don't need an answer right now. I just want you to think about it.

*Pause*

ERIC

I just don't know if I could get much done without my muse there with me.

*He walks to the coffee table and grabs his things, walks back to Anne, and kisses her.*

ERIC

I'll see you tomorrow. Think about it.



*He exits. Anne stands for a moment and then goes back to cleaning. After awhile Natalie walks in carrying an overnight bag. Anne crosses to her immediatly and the two hug for a long time. The first two lines happen while they are hugging.*

ANNE

How was the drive?

NATALIE

Long.

ANNE

Well you're here now. And I made cake.

NATALIE

Oh good, I'm starving.

*Anne reaches in the fridge, gets out the cake, and starts cutting her a piece.*

ANNE

How's your family?

*Natalie shrugs.*

ANNE

Dumb question. Sorry.

NATALIE

No, it's okay. They're hanging in there.

ANNE

Are you doing okay?

NATALIE

No, but I'll be fine.

ANNE

Yea.

*Pause*

ANNE

I am so sorry about this.

NATALIE  
Yea.

ANNE  
I was so sure it would be something else.

NATALIE  
Yea.

ANNE  
I mean he's so healthy. It didn't make any sense. I was positive he'd be fine –

NATALIE  
- Yea, well he's not.

ANNE  
I'm sorry I just meant –

NATALIE  
- Don't worry about it. I'm going to bed.

*She exits.*

### Scene 13

*Lights up. The next day. Natalie is studying and is clearly having trouble concentrating. She crosses to Anne.*

NATALIE  
Could you please distract me? What's up with you?

ANNE  
Oh, let's not talk about me please.

NATALIE  
No seriously, I can't cry anymore. Talk to me about something else.

ANNE  
Umm... Okay... Well... I talked to Eric.

NATALIE  
Oh, yea? Did he hear back about that internship yet?

ANNE  
Actually yea.

NATALIE

Did he get it?

ANNE

Yes.

NATALIE

Oh, Anne that's rough. What're you going to do?

ANNE

Well... he wants me to go with him...

NATALIE

What? Are you serious?

ANNE

Yep. He was definitely not joking.

NATALIE

He wants you to marry him?

ANNE

No he wants me to go as his "muse" or something.

NATALIE

Oh.

(Beat)

I'm sorry, what does that mean?

ANNE

I don't know. You know how he is.

NATALIE

Yea, I guess.

(Beat)

NATALIE

So are you going?

ANNE

I have no idea.

NATALIE

Oh wow. What're you going to do?

ANNE

Think about it I guess.

*Pause*

NATALIE

Well I vote no.

ANNE

(laughs)

Thanks for your input.

*Pause.*

NATALIE

Are you considering it?

ANNE

(shrugs)

I kind of have to don't I?

NATALIE

Not really.

ANNE

Well it's either that or have a ridiculously long distance relationship, which, to be honest, I'm not really interested in.

NATALIE

I get that, but moving to India? That's a huge deal!

ANNE

I know.

*Pause.*

NATALIE

Do you think he's, like, "the one"?

ANNE

I dunno. It's worth a shot isn't it?

NATALIE

Well, maybe, but what're you shooting at? Is this what you want? Is *he* what you want?

ANNE

I don't know okay!...I don't know.

*Lights out.*

Scene 14

*Spotlight on Anne.*

ANNE

Just so you know, Eric and I aren't in any danger or anything. This is kind of *our* story after all. That's just how life is sometimes, you know? There are fights and there are issues that you have to deal with and sometimes you don't get through them. But when it's with the person that you're meant to be with you do. You get through it... And sometimes all it takes is moving to India... But when it's the person that you know you're supposed to be with... I mean, he's perfect. He's everything I ever wanted.

*Pause.*

I really do believe things will work out. They always do. That's just how it happens. I'll figure it out.

Scene 15

*Lights up on Evan's house. Anne stands near the door with an overnight bag. Evan's parents stand talking to her while Evan plays in the living room.*

MOTHER

And we should be back by around 4 on Sunday.

ANNE

Sounds good.

FATHER

Anything else?

ANNE

No, I think we'll be good. Right Evan?

EVAN

(doesn't look up)

Bring me back a present.

MOTHER

Right, he'll be fine. Okay, sweetheart we're leaving now.

FATHER

Can we have a hug before we go?

*Evan runs over and hugs his parents.*

MOTHER

Bye sweetie. Have fun. Be good for Anne, okay?

EVAN

Okay.

*They exit. Anne sets her bag down and makes her way into the living room where Evan was playing.*

ANNE

So what're you doing over here Evan?

EVAN

I'm doing the moon people portraits!

ANNE

Oh, that's great! How're they coming?

*He holds up several pictures for her to look at.*

ANNE

These are great Evan! Oh I like this one. Does he have a name?

EVAN

That's Bob. He's the leader. He can shoot lasers out of his eyes.

ANNE

Oh, wow that's great! Do you think you'll go visit them again?

EVAN

Probably. But they said they would come visit me too.

ANNE

Really? When are they visiting?

EVAN

(sadly)

Mom says the trip is really long so they probably can't come.

*Pause*

ANNE

Well they have much more advanced technology than we do so I bet they could make the trip.

EVAN

You think so?

ANNE

Absolutely.

*She pulls out her phone.*

ANNE

In fact, let's double check.

*She dials and puts the phone to her ear.*

ANNE

Hi could I speak with Bob? - Hi Bob this is Anne. I'm calling on behalf of Captain Evan.

(whispers to Evan)

He says hi.

(back to phone)

Yes, well he was wondering if you guys were still planning on visiting him anytime soon? - Okay great let me ask him!

(to Evan)

He wants to know what day would be best for you.

EVAN

Oh Monday!

ANNE

(back to phone)

He says Monday. Does that work for you? - Okay great! Thanks!

*She hangs up.*

ANNE

They'll be here Monday!

EVAN

Really?

ANNE  
Definitely.

*Lights out.*

Scene 16

*Lights up on Anne and Natalie's apartment. Natalie sits on the couch reading. She looks like she hasn't had much sleep. Anne walks in carrying her overnight bag.*

NATALIE  
How was your weekend?

ANNE  
It was good.

NATALIE  
Yea? No run ins or anything?

ANNE  
Nope.

NATALIE  
Really? Well I'm proud of you!

ANNE  
(she's clearly pleased with herself)  
You should be.

NATALIE  
Uh oh Anne what'd you do? I know that look.

ANNE  
Just helped Evan out a little.

NATALIE  
Aw Anne.

ANNE  
What? That boy is oppressed.

NATALIE  
Oppressed? Anne seriously?



ANNE

Okay, maybe oppressed is a strong word, but he is really creative and he just doesn't really have anyone in his life who is willing to foster that.

NATALIE

Except for you?

ANNE

Exactly.

NATALIE

Well, lucky him.

ANNE

I'm glad you're seeing things my way.

NATALIE

Right. You don't even think for maybe just a second that his parents might possibly know better than you? That, just maybe, there's a reason that they don't encourage it a lot?

ANNE

Why would anyone possibly want to crush the dreams of a six year old?

NATALIE

I don't know Anne I'm just saying that there is the possibility that there is something going on that you don't know about.

ANNE

Well, anyway, I didn't do much. I was just very careful about fostering his creativity all weekend.

NATALIE

(sighs)

Okay, but when this comes back to bite you –

ANNE

I'll buy a muzzle... Really, Natalie, how are you doing?

NATALIE

I'm fine.

ANNE

Really?

NATALIE

Yes.

ANNE

Nat, I'm just so sorry this had to happen to you. It's not fair.

NATALIE

I know, but that's life.

ANNE

It shouldn't be though. He was supposed to be okay.

NATALIE

Supposed to?

ANNE

Yea. I was sure it would all, you know, work out.

NATALIE

Well I wasn't.

ANNE

What do you mean?

NATALIE

I mean, I don't know what's coming any better than anyone else. I can't just decide that my brother is going to have a great diagnosis because I think that would be a better ending to the story.

ANNE

What?

NATALIE

Not everything can happen exactly the way it plays out in books.

ANNE

What're you talking about?

NATALIE

Everything Anne! You approach life like it's supposed to work out for you just the way it does for all of the people in your books. But that's just not how it works. You can't fix someone else's kid and you can't magically cure your brother's cancer just because it would make a prettier narrative.

ANNE

That is absolutely ridiculous.

NATALIE

Yes. Yes it is.

ANNE

I'm just trying to help out a little boy who I think has a shot at a great life if someone will give it to him! And I'm sorry if my optimism about your brother is offensive to you, I just wanted you to be happy!

NATALIE

You can't fix everything Anne! You just can't. It doesn't work that way. You don't get to just be the person with all the answers.

ANNE

I'm not saying I have all the answers –

NATALIE

No. You don't have to.

ANNE

What does that mean?

NATALIE

Just that you seem to think you have all the answers whether they are asked for or not.

ANNE

Right. Well that's great. I'm going to bed. Maybe my pillow has some problems I can fix. I heard he wasn't getting along too well with the headboard.

*She exits. Lights out.*

Scene 17

*Spotlight on Anne's office. She is at her desk, clearly tired. Eric knocks and enters.*

ERIC

Hello, hello.

ANNE

Oh, hey.

ERIC

Everything ok?

ANNE

Yea sorry I just didn't get much sleep last night.

ERIC

I'm sorry.

ANNE

It's no big deal. What's up.

*Pause.*

ERIC

Well, it's been awhile since we talked... about...

ANNE

Oh... yea...

ERIC

And, no pressure or anything, but I was wondering if you'd decided?

ANNE

Oh... no I haven't actually...

ERIC

Well, have you thought about it?

ANNE

Um, yea a little.

ERIC

A little?

ANNE

Yea I just haven't really had time to –

ERIC

- I need to know really soon.

ANNE

I know but I've just been really busy.

ERIC

I get that but this is important.

ANNE

Then it should take a pretty long time to decide...

ERIC

But not too long.

ANNE

Look, Eric, I'm trying! This is a huge decision! Normally one on which I would spend more than a week to make.

ERIC

I don't understand what there is to think about! Either you love me, you support my work, and you want to come with me or you don't.

ANNE

Don't pretend it's that easy.

ERIC

I don't see how it's not. It's a yes or no question.

ANNE

With really big ramifications!

ERIC

I don't understand why you can't just live a little.

ANNE

Excuse me?

ERIC

You've got that stick shoved so far up your ass! - Why do you insist on holding me back all the time?

ANNE

Holding you back?

ERIC

Yes. Every time I have something good going with my art you come around and rain all over it!

ANNE

That is completely untrue!

ERIC

It's really not. You're supposed to inspire me. To motivate me!

ANNE

Maybe I want to serve another purpose than just that!

ERIC

What?

ANNE

I'm not just here to inspire you! I am a person! I don't want to just sit around waiting for you to need inspiration to see you! That's not a relationship.

ERIC

It's not like that.

ANNE

Really? Then how come whenever we do anything that you don't find immediately inspiring to your art, you're out the door?

ERIC

That's bullshit!

ANNE

Yea? Well, it's bullshit to say I don't support you either! Because really, that's all I do. I'm done being your step-stool. Have fun in India.

ERIC

Great.

*He exits.*

ANNE

(calls after him)

Don't get eaten by any tigers!

*Ben enters*

BEN

I wasn't planning on it, but thanks for the warning.

ANNE

Oh, hi Ben. Sorry.

BEN

No it's okay. People can always use good jungle safety tips.

ANNE

Yea.

BEN

I just came to return your copy of Beowulf. A student returned one of mine.

ANNE

Oh, good. Thanks.

BEN

So, how's Emma going? You come around to my way of thinking yet?

ANNE

Um, no actually. In fact I think I dislike her more strongly this time around.

BEN

Really?

ANNE

(This line is no longer about Emma)

She's just so ridiculous! She thinks she can fix all these problems around her and make everything fit into her ideal for the world, but really none of it is her business. She's completely deluded and arrogant and stupid and she messes up everything.

BEN

Wow.

ANNE

Yea, well...

BEN

(gently)

I really think she can be redeemed though.

*He waits for a response. She is silent.*

BEN

She recognizes her flaws, and then tries to change them. It's all in the intent. We're all allowed to mess up sometimes. It's just what we do after that that matters.

*She remains silent.*

BEN

Well, I've got medieval literature to go teach. I'll talk to you later.

*He exits. Anne collapses into her desk chair with her head in her hands.  
Lights out.*

Scene 18

*Anne and Natalie's apartment. Anne sits on the couch studying. Natalie enters.*

NATALIE

I'm back for round two.

ANNE

Listen, Natalie. I am so sorry.

NATALIE

No, *I'm* sorry.

ANNE

No, seriously hear me out. You were completely justified in everything that you said to me yesterday.

NATALIE

No I –

ANNE

- Uh uh let me finish. You were right. I've been trying to fix things and make them perfect and that's just not how things go. I put strain on you and you were just trying to help, and that's what I love about you. You were looking out for me even when I was being stupid.

NATALIE

No there is no reason I should have handled it like that. I lashed out at you and that's not ok. I just have been so ... off... since we found out about Todd and I took it out on you.

ANNE

Seriously don't even worry about it. We're both dumb.

NATALIE

We always seem to forget that though.

ANNE

Yea, well, let's try to remember this time.

NATALIE

Agreed.

*Pause.*



ANNE

Evan's mom called.

NATALIE

Oh?

ANNE

Yea... He got in trouble at school today.

NATALIE

Oh no, what for?

ANNE

He brought his pictures of the moon people to school for show and tell and told all the kids that they were coming to visit. And when the teacher said something about it being pretend he yelled at her.

NATALIE

Oh gosh.

ANNE

I'm such an idiot.

NATALIE

No. Don't say that. You meant well.

*Pause.*

NATALIE

Maybe you could have gone about it a little better but now you know.

*Anne laughs. Pause.*

ANNE

Apparently he kept yelling "Anne knows they're real!" at his teacher.

NATALIE

Oh no, was his mom mad?

ANNE

Oh, she was furious. She had already told him that the moon people "couldn't visit" cause the trip was too far, and I went and told him that they would visit him on Monday... I didn't know he wanted them to visit his classroom...

NATALIE

You couldn't have known that.

ANNE

You were right though. That thing that you said earlier? They know him best. She said it's a problem he's been having for awhile. They had just gotten it under control and then I messed it all up.

*Pause.*

NATALIE

Did they fire you?

ANNE

No, thank goodness. She was so great about it. So forgiving.

NATALIE

Dang it. I was hoping for a job opening.

ANNE

Sorry, there won't be one anytime soon.

NATALIE

Wait... there won't?

*Anne shakes her head.*

NATALIE

So... you're not going anywhere?

*She shakes her head again.*

NATALIE

Nowhere?

ANNE

You mean am I setting out for India tomorrow? No.

NATALIE

Good. I like you here.

ANNE

Me too.

*Lights out.*

Scene 19

*Spotlight on Anne speaking to her class.*

ANNE

Let's look at that. Look at page 107. She says "Read it in comfort to yourself. There can be no doubt of its being written for you and to you." Then a little further down she says "I thought it must be so. I thought I could not be so deceived; but now, it is clear; the state of his mind is as clear and decided, as my wishes on the subject have been ever since I knew you." This tells us a lot about Emma's character. First off it tells us what Emma thinks of herself. It can't be denied that she's incredibly sure of herself and her ability to see what is going on around her. It could even be called arrogant. Austen herself said that she thought that she was the only one who would like Emma very much. She gives us this nosy, imperfect character who is kind of full of herself. But what is it that redeems her? Anyone?

(Beat)

No one?

(Beat)

So Austen was right and you all hate her? Well I can tell you why she's growing on me. She cares. She sees these people around her and she cares about how they turn out. She wants to help them so badly, and yes, maybe she's a bit arrogant about it, but that's what makes this such a great story. She's human. And we all do this don't we? We look at the world around us and see things that we don't like and so we try to fix them.

(Beat)

But another great thing about Emma is that she recognizes these flaws in herself and tries to fix them. She recognizes that she has her own set of problems to worry about and that it's not up to her to fix everyone around her. She understands that life isn't always about fixing things. Sometimes it's just about how you take them.

(Beat)

Oh, sorry. We're out of time. I'll let you go.

THE END