

*How careful was I when I took my way,
 Each trifle under truest bars to thrust,
 That to my use it might unused stay
 From hands of falsehood in sure wards of trust?
 But thou, to whom my jewels trifles are,
 Most worthy comfort, now my greatest grief,
 Thou best of dearest and my only care,
 Are left the prey of every vulgar thief.
 Thee have I not locked up in any chest,
 Save where thou art not, though I feel thou art,
 Within the gentle closure of my breast,
 From whence at pleasure thou mayst come and part;
 And even thence thou wilt be stol'n, I fear,
 For truth proves thievish for a prize so dear.*

After the promise of peace between eye and heart and the friend's comforting return at the close of Sonnet 47, a note of fear creeps in like that of the cuckold-to-be. Since the speaker has already lost both his loves, that would be most logical, but then to whom is this sonnet addressed? Has the friend returned to the speaker or is this a new love? What has happened since the loss recorded in Sonnet 42? Presumably, the old positive relationship has been renewed.

What we learn is that in preparation for a journey—real or imagined—the speaker was careful to lock up every trifle in his safe (“under truest bars,” l. 2) so that no one else could steal his jewels. The jewels, however, are trifles compared with his friend, who is, paradoxically, his truest comfort and his greatest care. And yet, as the speaker says, he has left his friend “the prey of every vulgar thief” (l. 8), implying any other predatory lover.

Picking up the thread of presence-through-absence, he states that his friend, though not locked up in any safe place, is “within the gentle closure of [his] breast,” but not in any physical sense. (l. 11) He may, however, come and go whenever he wishes. And, most importantly, the speaker may summon him up in his thoughts at will.

The speaker's bitterness returns in the couplet, breaking the serenity of the preceding sonnet completely. The pleasure of the friend's company will cease if he is stolen, and honesty cannot be counted on when the treasure is so valuable.