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.