Anxiety

A one-act play

By

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CHARACTERS

Therapist, 28 a therapist providing help to annie for her anxiety

annie, 18 an incredibly anxious but bright young college student

professor, 35 ANnie’s math professor who she really looks up to.

Mother,40 annie’s mother. SHe’s an asian mother and quite strict.

ellie, 19 annie’s best friend

Time

The skit takes place in an afternoon on a day where Annie does not have classes. Or maybe Annie skipped her class to see her therapist because she couldn’t see her otherwise.

PLACE

The skit happens in a therapist’s office with a couch and a main chair where the therapist sits.

Scene I-1: Therapy session

(Annie sits on the Therapist’s couch for the therapy session. The therapist sits in her chair and is making notes throughout the session.)

Therapist

It’s nice to meet you Annie. Tell me, what brings you in here today?

annie

Well, I have been experiencing really bad anxiety.

therapist

What sorts of things make you anxious?

annie

Just everything! I don’t know!

therapist

Friends? School?

annie

Both!

therapist

Family?

annie

Definitely.

therapist

Let’s get deeper into this. What’s worrying you about school?

annie

There’s this big test I had last Friday. I’m worried I didn’t make a good grade.

Therapist

Okay, and so what if you don’t make a good grade?

(Other half of the stage lights up. Annie goes over to other half of the stage.)

professor

Annie, you got the worst grade in the history of this university!

annie

It couldn’t have been that bad!

professor

It was so bad that I am legally required to tell you that you have to repeat senior year of high school! You are officially expelled!

annie

Please! I worked so hard. I need this degree!

professor

I’m sorry young lady, but you should have thought about that before you failed horrendously.

Ellie

I think you’re a loser because you got a bad grade, and we’re no longer besties!

mother

You are no longer my daughter! You will no longer live under my roof. You will experience homelessness and learn to live the life of a whore like the rat you are!

(ANNIE goes from wearing nice clothes to wearing tattered rags. Les Mis music starts playing, and Annie starts to sing.)

annie

Take my hand, the night grows ever colder

And I will keep you warm

Take my child, I give her to your keeping

Take shelter from the storm

For God's sake, please stay 'til I am sleeping

And tell Cosette I love her, and I'll see her when I wake

(ANNIE returns to the other side of the stage and is back in the therapy couch.)

therapist

So in this scenario, getting a bad grade leads you to become a whore in a Victor Hugo novel?

annie

It happens all the time!

therapist

Annie, I think you’re exaggerating how things will go. Your brain just is playing tricks on you. Let’s do an exercise. Tell me what’s bothering you in terms of friends.

annie

Well, my friend Ellie wants me to come to her party Friday night, but I need to work.

therapist

Okay. So, what do you think you will do?

annie

Fake an injury to get out of the party?

therapist

Okay. And maybe that will work, but do you think that this is something you can do repeatedly?

annie

I’ve already done it six times.

therapist

Wow! And it still works?

annie

Sometimes, I have to present evidence. Last time, I actually purposefully broke my arm to avoid giving bad news.

therapist

That sounds pretty painful.

annie

Oh. It was…

therapist

What would be the worst that can happen if you just told Ellie the truth?

annie

I think it would be something like this.

(Other half of the stage lights up. Annie goes over to other half of stage and is standing with Ellie.)

annie

I’m sorry. I can’t come to your party.

ellie

Because you are a terrible friend?

annie

I just have to work.

ellie

Typical Annie, putting money above everything.

annie

I really want to be there.

ellie

Don’t bother! I’m glad you’re not coming! You know no one likes you anyways.

annie

I’m sorry!

ellie

I just sent the entire school a Tiktok about how you wet the bed until the fifth grade.

annie

Please don’t!

ellie

Too late! Annie the baby!

annie

That hurts.

ellie

Well, you hurt me. In fact, I challenge you to a duel.

(ELLIE and ANNIE stand back to back and grab pistols. Music from Hamilton starts playing.)

annie and ellie

One-two-three-four-five-six-seven-eight-nine

ellie

There are ten things you need to know!

annie

Number 1!

ellie

We walked across the parking lot at dawn. My cat, William P. Van Ness signed on as my

annie

number two!

ellie

I watched Annie examine the terrain. I wish I could tell you what was happening in her brain! Fire!

annie

Wait!

(ELLIE shoots ANNIE. ANNIE aims her pistol at the sky. ANNIE yells out in pain and falls to floor. Ellie goes to her. Other half of the stage lights up. Annie goes over to other half of stage and is back on the couch.)

therapist

So having to tell your friend you’re missing a party leads to your untimely death.

annie

Yup.

therapist

What do you think is a more likely turn of events?

annie

She gets upset.

therapist

Do you think it destroys the friendship?

annie

I think so.

therapist

Really? How would you feel if she told you she couldn’t come to a party.

annie

I’d totally understand.

therapist

So…

annie

Maybe she will too.

therapist

I think she will.

annie

I think… I think I can tell her.

therapist

I’m glad. Now, tell me what’s bothering you with your parents.

annie

Well, I think I want to go into computer programming.

therapist

And that will disappoint your parents?

annie

They really want me to be a doctor. It would crush them if I didn’t become a doctor.

therapist

You’re their daughter. You’ll always be their daughter whether or not you become a doctor.

annie

What if that’s not true though?

therapist

What do you mean?

annie

Well, it goes kind of like this…

(Other half of the stage lights up. Annie goes over to other half of the stage where she is sitting with her mother.)

annie

I’ve been thinking…

mother

That you’re into women. Honey! We understand. Nothing wrong with that.

annie

No! It’s not that! I think I don’t want to be a doctor…

mother

How dare you? Do you know how hard we worked for you?

Annie

I thought you’d understand…

mother

I can’t breathe. I think I’m having a heart attack

annie

You’re being dramatic!

mother

You! You did this! You selfish little girl! I want you out of this goddamn house!

annie

Please mom!

(Hamilton music starts playing.)

mother

There are moments that the words don't reach. There is suffering too terrible to name. You hold your child as tight as you can. And push away the unimaginable. The moment where she’s no longer going to be a doctor, and it’d be easier if she just would drown. Annie’s no longer welcome in this town! Her decision is unimaginable!

(ANNIE goes to floor crying. Fade to black. Other half of the stage lights up. Annie goes over to other half of the stage to rejoin therapy.)

therapist

Do you really think your mother will die and disown you just because you don’t want to be a doctor?

annie

No. I don’t.

therapist

Good. We’re about out of time. How do you feel Annie?

annie

I don’t know. I feel kind of drained. Is that normal?

therapist

That’s very normal.

annie

But isn’t therapy supposed to feel good?

therapist

Sometimes, but healing is not always easy and not always linear.

annie

But I do feel… glad that I can tell this to someone.

therapist

Well, I want to see you again in a week. When that happens, I want you to tell me how everything went. Deal?

annie

Deal.

(Lights go off. Lights come back on. Annie is now sitting in a different position on the couch.)

Therapist

I’m glad to see you again. I think it’s useful given how worried you were last time for us to talk about the past week.

annie

Okay. Sounds good.

Therapist

So how did the grade turn out?

annie

Well… It’s a funny story…

(Other half of the stage lights up. Annie goes over to other half of the stage where she is seated and professor is at desk.)

professor

Annie, could you stay after for a few minutes?

Annie

I am so sorry! I did my best! I’m just not smart like the other kids! I know I don’t belong.

professor

What?

annie

You’re keeping me to tell how disappointed you are in me!

professor

Not at all! You did great on the test. There were a couple errors in your notation, but that’s normal for people new to discrete mathematics.

Annie

Then, why do you need to speak to me?

professor

Your algorithm here on page 6 for efficiently approximating the knapsack problem is genius. I was really impressed, so…

Annie

I promise I didn’t cheat! Please don’t expel me. It was my own work.

professor

I know. You did great! I wanted to ask if you would join my research group. We have a program for young women in graduate computer science at the university that I think you’ll be a great fit for in a couple years.

annie

Wow!

(Lights go off. Lights come back on. Annie is now sitting on the couch. She is still visibly anxious. Her foot will start tapping or she will start shaking some time in the next couple of lines.)

Therapist

So you thought he was mad because you did poorly, and it turns out you did well. How does that make you feel?

annie

It feels kind of nice.

therapist

Yeah. You worked hard. He noticed it.

annie

I guess he did…

(THERAPIST notices foot tapping.)

therapist

What’s that?

annie

What’s what?

therapist

(THERAPIST points at Annie’s tick.)

What’s going on here?

annie

I don’t know!

therapist

Yes, you do. You’re a smart girl.

annie

I’m just worried that maybe my professor was wrong. And when he discovers it, he will be mad.

therapist

Do you want to do research with him?

annie

I really do! It sounds great!

therapist

Well, why don’t we do a little experiment. You’ll join the research group, and you’ll tell me next week how it goes.

Annie

Okay.

therapist

Now, your friend. What was her name?

annie

Ellie.

therapist

Your friend Ellie, you thought she’d be mad that you couldn’t go to her party. Was she mad?

annie

Not exactly…

(Other half of the stage lights up. Annie goes over to other half of the stage where she stands next to Ellie.)

ellie

I’m so excited about my party! You know Nick? Nick is going to be there. I have like the biggest crush on him.

annie

Ellie, I’ve been meaning to talk to you about the party.

ellie

Do you not know what to wear? We can go shopping!

annie

It’s just that I don’t think I can go. I have to work.

Ellie

Oh.

annie

I’m so sorry! I really wanted to.

ellie

No! Don’t worry about it Annie! You’re my best friend. Remember how worried I got when you broke your arm last year? I totally get that you have to work. If you can’t come to the party, we’ll find another time to hang out.

annie

So, you’re not mad?

ellie

Of course not! You mean so much to me. How could I be mad?

(ANNIE and Ellie hug. Other half of the stage lights up. Annie goes over to other half of the stage where she sits on the couch.)

therapist

So based on that interaction, how would you frame how you felt a week ago about telling Ellie?

annie

I feel like I worried a little bit too much.

therapist

I think so too. You couldn’t go to a party. If she’s a real friend, she’ll understand.

annie

But what if she was just saying she liked me, and she actually doesn’t?

therapist

Then, would she have asked to hang out with you outside of the party?

annie

I guess not.

therapist

See?

annie

I guess you’re right. She is a true friend.

therapist

Now, were you able to talk to your parents?

(ANNIE has become much more anxious.)

annie

I did.

therapist

And how did it go?

annie

It went…

(Other half of the stage lights up. Annie goes over to other half of the stage where she sits at a table with her parents.)

annie

Mom, I don’t think I want to be a doctor.

mother

How dare you? I don’t know where I went wrong!

annie

Please don’t be like this!

mother

You are no longer my daughter. You are officially my disappointment.

annie

I’m sorry! I didn’t mean to hurt you.

mother

Well, you did! You see this photo of you on the wall?

annie

Yes?

mother

Well, it’s coming down. The neighbor boy will occupy this spot now. I bet he never lets his parents down.

(MOTHER takes down the picture of Annie and hangs a picture of a neighbor boy. Neighbor boy looks nothing like the Annie.)

mother

You will sleep in the shed from now on. Because that’s what your life will be as a poor non-doctor.

annie

I’m sorry! It’s just my path.

mother

Why did we even come to America? Maybe we will move back to India!

annie

I’ve never even been to India.

mother

Maybe if we’d taken you, you’d realize you need to be a doctor. Now, take this shovel and dig a latrine in the back yard because you certainly are not allowed in the house.

(MOTHER hands Annie shovel. Lights go off on this side of stage. Lights up on other side with Annie looking very anxious but slightly better for telling the story.)

therapist

Wow. That does sound intense… Maybe the lesson here is that the anxiety is usually- if not always- a bit over-blown.

annie

Yeah… I don’t know when my parents will cool down. I’m super worried about this next week?

therapist

Why don’t you write down the things that make you worry and what you think might happen and then also the outcome.

annie

Sounds good.

Therapist

And that’s 45 minutes. See you next week?

annie

Definitely!

 (End. Fade to black.)