

EXT. COLLEGE CAMPUS, DAY

An old and vibrant American institution. Groups of dedicated young scholars enter and exit the main building and walk purposefully about the quad.

INT. COLLEGE LECTURE HALL, DAY

DR. BILL WARWICK, a dusty yet edgy Shakespeare scholar, stands at the front of the hall. He is a slightly over-the-hill person of colour. He wears a tweed blazer with corduroy elbow patches, a turtleneck sweater, and skinny jeans.

Behind Bill, a slide shows a cool word cloud with the title, "Words coined by Shakespeare." He refers to some of the words in his lecture.

The hall is packed and the students sit riveted.

BILL

...If you've ever met a manager, you owe it to Shakespeare. If you're fashionable or hot-blooded, it's because of Shakespeare. If you have eyeballs, belongings, or an addiction, it's all thanks to Shakespeare.

(a beat)

Why study Shakespeare, four hundred years after his death? Because, my friends, his words, his stories are still relevant today.

The slide changes to show DVD covers of Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Macbeth, and Othello.

BILL (CONT'D)

His characters are you and me. When we study Shakespeare, we study ourselves, our relationships, our desires, our errors; our tragedies.

Bill points to the screen.

BILL (CONT'D)

These are the plays we'll be reading this term. No, those of you who are making fluttery eyes at the boy or girl sitting next to you, Romeo and Juliet is not a love story.

(MORE)

BILL (CONT'D)

A thirteen-year-old girl kills herself after a three-day forbidden love affair with an angsty teenage boy... tragic. But we'll talk more about that in our next session, after you have read the foreword, introduction, context, and the first act.

The screen flicks off. The students chatter excitedly.

DAPHNE LONG, a pretty girl in the front row, smiles to herself and swipes at her phone screen.

Bill clears his throat at her.

She looks up. He discretely indicates a "No Cell Phones" poster on his wall.

Daphne winks at him and puts the phone down.

ON SCREEN:

A photo of Bill Daphne has snapped during lecture and covered with love-heart and kiss stickers.

BILL (CONT'D)

Does anybody have any questions just before I go back to my office to solve my own little Shakespearean tragedy?

The students laugh nervously.

ONE STUDENT tentatively raises his hand. Bill nods to him.

STUDENT 1

Why do you only teach tragedies?

Bill smiles and nods. He gets this question a lot.

BILL

The tragedies: they're the real stories, aren't they? Every tragedy has a tragic hero, a main character with a fatal flaw. Because of his flaw, everyone he cares about dies, and he also dies. I mean, you people think it's a tragedy when you drop your smart phone into the toilet...

More nervous laughter.

BILL (CONT'D)

But what is your fatal flaw? What little nasty characteristic do you have, what error of perception, that may cause your downfall?

The students react with a few quiet moments of solemn reflection.

From the back of the hall, a random voice:

STUDENT 3

I'm rockin this hot bod; chicks are killing each other tryna get with me.

Laughter. Bill looks stern. The laughter dies down.

BILL

That seems unlikely.

From the other side of the lecture hall, another student holds up a heavy, thick book, "Complete Works of Shakespeare," and speaks out:

STUDENT 2

Sir, do you really expect us to believe that one man, raised in an illiterate family in small-town rural England, was solely responsible for all these words?

The lecture hall goes silent. The students freeze and all eyes are on Bill.

BILL

Well, we usually make it to the second or third week before anyone throws that one at me. I salute you, young man.

Nervous laughter.

BILL (CONT'D)

Despite what you may read, ladies and gentlemen, William Shakespeare WAS real, and he DID write everything attributed to him. There is plenty of evidence to show that yes, one man who attended a small-town grammar school was solely responsible for the most epic body of works in the English language.

(MORE)

BILL (CONT'D)

I will prove it to you as we make our way through this course.

(a beat)

Thank you, everybody. See you on Wednesday.

Bill gathers up his books and laptop. The students SHUFFLE around and CHATTER as they get ready to leave.

Daphne remains seated, watching Bill as he gathers up his materials and leaves the lecture hall.

INT. BILL'S OFFICE, DAY

A standard university professor office -- cluttered wooden desk, black swivel chair, potted plant, framed certificates on the wall, window facing the quad.

Bill stands in front of a full-wall bookshelf filled with Shakespeare tomes.

Bill's cell phone VIBRATES in his pocket. He looks at the screen and rolls his eyes.

BILL

(to himself)

Sharon.

He swipes the phone to answer.

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION

SHARON, Bill's ex, is a well-put-together middle-aged British woman obviously used to living in comfort and getting her way. She calls on a brand-new iPhone from her immaculate living room.

BILL (CONT'D)

(to the phone)

Hi Sharon.

SHARON

Bill, didn't you get my message?

BILL

Yes, I got your message... I was delivering a lecture, Sharon.

SHARON

(checking her manicure)

Oh, good. Well, listen, darling, I REALLY need you to pick Lydia up--

BILL

I'm afraid I can't. I have an appointment to test drive a Tesla, as I informed you earlier.

He leafs through a sample textbook on his desk, a twenty-pound hardcover of "The Complete Works of Shakespeare."

SHARON

(with a smirk)

Tsk, you're turning into a cliché, darling.

BILL

It's not cliché. My daughter is grown, my wife is cohabiting with another man; I am now alone. There's no reason for me to drive a minivan any longer...

He picks up a Sears-style family portrait off his window ledge, looks at it, and puts it back on the ledge, face down.

SHARON

(becoming whiny)

Darling, I wouldn't ask you, except I've got spinning class--

BILL

And that's more important than our daughter.

He opens a manila envelope and pulls out a copy of Smithsonian Magazine, with the cover story "The Search for Shakespeare" by Dr. William Warwick.

SHARON

(whiny and manipulative)

But test driving a sports car is, I suppose.

Bill sighs heavily. He places the magazine on a magazine display rack, in front of a copy of Time Magazine with the cover story "His Second-Best Bed: Proof that the Bard was Real," by Dr. William Warwick.

BILL

(with a sigh, looking at his watch)

When you left, even though it was like being stabbed through the heart with a dagger, I thought the upside was that I wouldn't have to be your errand boy anymore.

SHARON
 Oh, such drama!
 (a beat)
 Bill, please!

BILL
 (resigned sigh)
 Tell her I'll pick her up in half
 an hour.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREETS, DAY

A red Tesla roadster careens among traffic.

BILL (O.S.)
 Yeeeeaaaaahhh!

EXT. FRONT OF HOSPITAL, NEXT

Bill's daughter LYDIA, a pretty 18-year-old, sits on the
 bench next to the door.

The Tesla SQUEALS to a stop

The passenger window OPENS.

Bill's face appears.

Lydia leans forward.

LYDIA
 Dad?

INT. TESLA, NEXT

Lydia sits in the passenger seat, FASTENING her seatbelt.

BILL
 Everything okay? Are you sick?

LYDIA
 Dad, I work here. Is this your car?

BILL
 Just a test drive. But... I am
 considering it. Hold on!

He SQUEALS out.

LYDIA
Did someone say, "mid-life crisis?"

BILL
(shouting over the GUNNING
ENGINE)
This is a very economical car! Low
carbon footprint! It's electric!

LYDIA
(laughing)
Dad, you might as well marry your
twenty-two-year-old secretary!

BILL
Hey, I'm not the one who threw away
twenty years of marriage to cohabit
with a pool guy named Ricardo! And
FYI, Pamela is fifty-six.

LYDIA
Did you just use text speak?

BILL
Text what?

INT. BILL'S OFFICE, DAY

Bill sighs heavily, just returning from class. He puts his
laptop bag down on the desk.

He LEAFS through "The Complete Works of Shakespeare" tome
again, shaking his head.

He picks up the face-down family photo, touches it tenderly.

Daphne KNOCKS on the open door.

The knock startles Bill. He fumbles the portrait a little,
places it on the window ledge face down, then stands it back
up and turns toward Daphne.

She wears a short skirt, long socks, and a snug sweater and
carries a Hello Kitty backpack.

Bill catches himself ogling her.

DAPHNE
Dr. Warwick?

BILL
My apologies, young lady. I was
just on my way out.
(MORE)

BILL (CONT'D)

My office hours are posted on my website, or you can talk to my secretary, Pamela...

DAPHNE

Dr. Warwick, I was in your Shakespeare Tragedies course last term. I'm Daphne Long, your new TA. I just wanted to pop by and introduce myself, and tell you I enjoyed your lecture on Monday so, so much...

She holds up a shiny new copy of Romeo and Juliet and waves it in front of her glossy smile.

DAPHNE (CONT'D)

Not a love story!

Bill smirks. They do listen!

BILL

On the contrary, you'll be Dr. Everett's new TA.

DAPHNE

I'm sorry?

Daphne touches her hair. She looks crestfallen.

A dowdy, middle-aged woman, Bill's secretary PAMELA, appears in the doorway, forcing Daphne further into the small office.

BILL

Pamela!

PAMELA

(angrily)

Dr. Warwick, I just received your memo.

BILL

Isn't it exciting?

PAMELA

I can't go to London! I have a family, obligations! Besides which, I work for the university, not for you. You're just going to have to find yourself another PA.

BILL

But--

Pamela disappears.

A beat.

BILL (CONT'D)

Miss Long, this is going to come as a surprise; the university hasn't made a formal announcement, but Dr. Everett will be a guest lecturer for me this term. I'm returning to my old stomping grounds.

DAPHNE

Your stomping grounds, sir?

BILL

Yes, Miss Long. You see, I completed my doctorate in the UK. In Bath, to be precise...

DAPHNE

(snickering)

Did you have a bath there?

BILL

(deadpan)

No.

DAPHNE

You didn't have a bath? How long were you there?

BILL

The point is, the Royal British Shakespeare Society has asked me to return to curate a new museum they're opening in London.

He shoves the twenty-pound hardcover of "The Complete Works of Shakespeare" at her.

BILL (CONT'D)

Here, I want you to have this. Thank you for stopping by.

DAPHNE

Dr. Warwick, um, I could go...

BILL

Oh, no. I'll be fine on my own, actually. Besides, you're a TA. I was looking for a PA.

DAPHNE

(nervous giggle)

TA, PA, whatever, right? I mean...
what's the difference? I'll be
reading memos instead of term
papers.

BILL

Yeah, I do hate reading memos.
Fine, you're hired.

Daphne squeals.

INT. AIRPLANE, A FEW WEEKS LATER

Daphne and Bill sit side-by-side in economy. Bill wears
reading glasses. Their tray-tables are down and covered in
paperwork and Daphne's open laptop.

Bill shoves skeins of papers at Daphne.

BILL

The exhibit layout, my article for
the Times, which you will need to
proofread; the information for the
museum pamphlet. Here, I printed
off all my e-mails. You know what
to do with these, right?

DAPHNE

Kindling?

Bill gives her an exasperated look.

DAPHNE (CONT'D)

I hear it's real cold in London
this time of year.

BILL

Daphne, I need you to take this
seriously. I'm a very well-
respected man in England.

EXT. HEATHROW AIRPORT, NEXT

"Welcome to Heathrow", 747s taxiing, taking off, landing,
taxis and cars picking up weary travelers...