

HAIKU FOR AMARIS

BY

Patricia Barrier

Haiku for Amaris

Synopsis: Mary wants to write poetry. Roxy's welding class was full. Nicole hopes her labor doesn't start during class. Patricia wants to get off parole. Lisa wants to be admired. When these five women join Portia's creative writing class, personalities clash and Portia's plan is overturned. When a serious crisis develops for one member, unpredictable alliances form and transformative possibilities emerge.

Characters:

Portia-50s, writing group teacher, a poet

Mary-30s, shy and conservative

Roxy-40s, bold and loud

Nicole-20s, sweet and pregnant

Patricia-50s, been around the block, sister to Lisa

Lisa-50s, arrogant writer, college professor and sister to Patricia

/ = conversation overlaps

Setting: Cleveland, Ohio

Time: Now

SCENE 1

Lights come up on the first meeting of a community education creative writing class. Portia is sitting with all except Roxy. There are 2 empty chairs. Everyone has a notebook and pen.

PORTIA: Welcome, everyone, to the first of our 4 weekly sessions of “Release your creativity through writing”. I’m Portia Collins and I’ll be your guide as we journey together-

Roxy enters noisy and abrupt - wearing motorcycle gear and looking around.

ROXY: Is this Welding for Women?

PORTIA: No, uh, but let me check where-

ROXY: Nah. This is good (sits down)

PORTIA: Well, welcome. As I was saying, I’m Portia Collins and I’ll be your guide on this journey into our creative selves.

ROXY: Great. I’d hate to get lost in the verbiage (laughs and so does Patricia but the others are silent)

PORTIA: We will meet every Tuesday from 4-6pm for the next 4 weeks. OK. Let’s get to know each other a bit. Please tell us your name and why you came to this class (looks at Roxy). Why don’t you start?

ROXY: Right. I’m Roxy and Welding for Women was full so I thought I’d try this. Something different to do, you know.

PORTIA: Thank you, Roxy (looks at Mary)

MARY: Um, hello everybody (does a little wave) I’m Mary and I, uh, love Emily Dickinson and well, other poets, too and I’d like to write poetry.

Portia nods and looks at Nicole.

NICOLE: I’m Nicole and I’m pregnant - well, you can see that. I needed something to do besides sit around and be pregnant so I signed up.

PORTIA: Great. Writing can be very calming to the fetus (nods to Patricia)

PATRICIA: I’m Patricia and I don’t know why I’m here.

LISA: Yes, you do.

PATRICIA: I came with her.

PORTIA: Perhaps she is your muse?

PATRICIA: Nah. Just my sister.

LISA: Yes, I'm Lisa - her sister. I'm very familiar with the healing and transformative potential of writing and thought this would be an experience we could have together - to help Patricia through her challenges.

PORTIA: I see (pauses) Now, let's jump right in. Your first writing exercise-

MARY: Aren't you going to teach us something about writing first?

PORTIA: One of the best ways to learn about writing is just to do it. So - your first assignment is what I call "What's in a name?". Grab your pens and notebooks and write about your name - for 10 minutes. Don't let the pen leave the paper. Don't edit. Just let whatever comes - let it out. Everybody ready?

ROXY: Uh, I don't have a notebook or a -

MARY: (reaches in to a bag) Here - I have extras (hands a notebook and pen to Roxy)

ROXY: Thanks.

Lights dim and Mary, Nicole, and Lisa start writing. Roxy chews her pen and starts. Patricia doodles and writes. Portia dings a little gong and lights come up.

PORTIA: Pens down. And now up for a little stretch (she leads a bit of yoga) Now, let's see what we have. We'll start with Mary/and go around-

MARY: Uh, no. I'm just a beginner and mine's/not very good

LISA: I can go first.

PORTIA: We are all beginners. Now the rule is-

PATRICIA: (sarcastic) Great. I love rules.

PORTIA: The rule is we all listen until the reader finishes and then we gently discuss their work. This allows the writer to get all her ideas out (Pause) Please go ahead, Mary.

MARY: (deep breath and reading from her notebook) OK. My name is Mary. Mary W. Smith. Now, isn't that the most boring name? I mean - a perfect name for an accountant - a boring old accountant - which is what I am. What does the W stand for you ask? Well, you probably didn't ask. Anyway, it stands for Wolfgang-

Patricia and Roxy start to laugh and Portia puts her finger to her lips.

MARY: (hesitates and Portia nods for her to continue) Mary Wolfgang Smith - how embarrassing. How did that happen? My parents told me that I was conceived while they were watching "Amadeus" and-

ROXY: In a movie theatre?

PORTIA: Please let Mary/finish.

MARY: Oh dear. I never thought about that (pauses and returns to her notebook) They wanted me to be famous so-

ROXY: Shoulda named you Cleopatra then.

MARY: Cleopatra?

ROXY: Yeah. Think about it. Really famous people go by one/name

PATRICIA: Yeah. Like Sting. Prince.

PORTIA: Ladies-

ROXY: If I say 'Cleopatra' - you go right to Egypt, don't you? Even that dick Marc Antony - he needed two names. So if you want to be famous-

MARY: I don't.

ROXY: Make up something unique like-

NICOLE: Arbola. I was thinking about naming/her

LISA: That sounds like a disease.

PATRICIA: How about-?

PORTIA: Let's please refrain from giving personal advice to the writer. Patricia - you're next.

PATRICIA: Let's get this over with.

PORTIA: Remember-

PATRICIA: (sarcastic) Yes, ladies, remember the rule (reads from her notebook) My name is Patricia.

MARY: That's a lovely name - oops (looks down) sorry.

PATRICIA: Where did that name come from?

LISA: It means "noble" in Latin.

ROXY: The 1990 US Census said that Patricia was the most common girls name in the US.

MARY: Really?

PATRICIA: (To Roxy) Did you make that up?

ROXY: No.

PATRICIA: Well, if that's true - how many do you know (mumbles from the group)

PORTIA: Please continue reading.

PATRICIA: (reads) My parents called me Patty. Sister Aloysius called me Patsy.

LISA: She hated those/names.

ROXY: Why'd you let them do/that?

NICOLE: Were you named after St. Patrick?

PATRICIA: No. Not that jerk. I mean - why'd he get all the fame, parades, green beer? Just for driving snakes out of Ireland. Big deal.

MARY: I'm afraid of snakes.

PATRICIA: I choose to be named after St. Patricia (reading) St. Patricia was a virgin who died in 685 AD.

ROXY: Are you making this up?

PATRICIA: Look it up in Wikipedia (reads) She died a saintly life - must've been the virginity part. Her body and blood are in some church in Italy. And every Tuesday and on August 25th - her special day- the blood liquifies.

NICOLE: Ew.

ROXY: Badass.

PATRICIA: (reading) I bet she got so mad that some guy got all the press that her blood boils. Anyway, when asked my name - I say Patricia. But a lot of times - men- usually old white men - call me Pat without my permission - to put me in my place. I would like a tougher name - sexy, flashy and not virginal - like Sheree Montana or Cougar Santana.

LISA: Patricia - seriously.

ROXY: How about Aurora Borealis? I know a burlesque girl who used that name/for awhile

NICOLE: Anastasia? I'm thinking about/that for

MARY: Truckerina?

ALL: (except Portia) Truckerina?

MARY: Uh, like a semi driver (deep voice) 10-4 Big Duck. Truckerina reads you 10-4 (all laugh) Oh, that's dumb, isn't it? I'm sorry.

PATRICIA: OK - that's it (puts her notebook down)

PORTIA: Thank you, Patricia. Um, any other comments for Patricia?

ROXY: Change your name to something unpronounceable and don't let any bastard shorten it.

PORTIA: Alright. Let's move on. Thank you, Patricia. Now, we'll let Roxy read all the way through before we comment (nods to Roxy)

ROXY: (reads) Roxy - short for Roxanne - is my second name. I don't mean my middle name. I mean, it's my second name - the one I chose-

PATRICIA: Hey, you did it, huh?

ROXY: Yeah (returns to reading) My first name - that baptized name - was Jane. My father wanted to name me Roxanne. The discussion probably went like this. My good Christian mother said 'Oh, dear, Henry. Not Roxanne. That sounds like the name of a (whispers) - oh, you know.' My father, not so Christian, says real loud 'You mean, a hooker?' 'Oh, shush, Henry. Don't give her ideas.' As if naming an infant Roxanne was going to give me ideas - about what? So I was named Jane and took my place among the other cute little nice girls in Sunday school.

NICOLE: I'm Christian, too.

PATRICIA: When'd you change your name?

ROXY: When I quit being a lawyer.

PORTIA: Please let Roxy finish.

ROXY: I'm done.

PORTIA: OK - comments about Roxy's writing?

MARY: What kind of lawyer were you?

ROXY: Corporate.

PATRICIA: Why'd you quit?

ROXY: It was bullshit. Getting scum bags off for just about anything - covering baby ducks in oil, poisoning oysters, causing forest fires, killing workers on oil rigs - so I said fuck it-

MARY: Oh, dear.

ROXY; Changed my name to Roxy and started exploring other careers.

NICOLE: Like what?

LISA: You should have just changed sides - defended the baby ducks instead of the-

PATRICIA: Don't be such a judgie bitch, Lisa. Maybe she doesn't give a shit about baby ducks.

PORTIA: Let's move on. Thank you, Roxy. Now, Nicole.

NICOLE: OK (reading) My name is Nicole. I don't know why I'm named Nicole. I guess it was what Mom wanted to name me and Daddy always just agrees with her. But that must have been before Mom was born again. Because all the other kids - I'm the oldest - are named after people in the Bible. My brothers are Ezekiel and Jacob. And my sisters are Ruth and Naomi. I'm sure Daddy just agreed with her on those names, too. And let himself be born again and saved. Like we all did. But somehow, I feel she doesn't think I'm Christian enough. Maybe it's my name (looking at her notes) I was writing real fast and now I can't figure out the rest. So, I guess that's it.

ROXY: You said you're having a girl (Nicole nods) Well, then just name her Eve.

NICOLE: Luke - that's my husband - we haven't decided on her name yet.

PORTIA: OK. More thoughts for Nicole-about her writing.

Silence

PORTIA: Alright. Let's move on to Lisa.

LISA: (reading) Name. Nomine. Nombre. Nome. Imya. Mingcheng. Pangalan-

PATRICIA: Lisa, what the hell?

LISA: These are words for "name" in various languages. Latin, Spanish, Italian, Russian, Chinese - I could only come up with a few right now but-

Roxy is looking at her cell phone.

PORTIA: Please continue reading.

LISA: (reading) Pangalan (looking up) That's Filipino (back to reading) What's your name? Name, rank and serial number. Maiden mane. Nickname-

PATRICIA: Dad called her "fullback" because she was fat.

LISA: (dirty look to Patricia and returns to reading) Hyphenated name. Stage name. Nom de plume. Code name. That name rings a bell. That name doesn't ring a bell. Good name. Bad name. Clear your name. Make a name for yourself. Drop names. You name it. Household name. What's in a name anyway? (Puts the notebook down and looks up proudly)

Silence

LISA: Well?

ROXY: (who was looking at her cell phone while Lisa was reading) According to the 1970 US Census, Lisa was the 33rd most common female/name

PATRICIA: Is that stuff your bedtime reading or what?

ROXY: I like statistics (eye roll from Patricia)

PORTIA: Comments for Lisa?

Silence

MARY: That was so - creative.

Silence

PORTIA: That was a different approach.

LISA: Yes. I think it's always important to bring something fresh-

PATRICIA: You wrote that before, didn't you?

LISA: No.

Silence

PORTIA: Well, we are quite an interesting group, aren't we? So now, we'll look at some other pieces of writing and some thoughts about writing (passes out some handouts).

PATRICIA: (looks at it) Shakespeare/seriously?

MARY: I love Shakespeare.

LISA: Hm - an interesting choice - I would have started with something more contemporary like Sontag or Vonnegut or-

PORTIA: (hesitates and looks at another handout) We can also start with a look at Robert Frost and T. S. Eliot -

ROXY: No. We'll start with Shakespeare, like you have right here, Portia (giving Lisa and Patricia a dirty look)

Silence

PATRICIA: You all talk about Shakespeare (gets up)

LISA: Where are you going?

PATRICIA: For a cigarette - and an Uber (exits)

LISA: Get back here (gets up) She gets this way. Excuse me (exits)

Silence

ROXY: OK, Portia. Talk about Shakespeare.

NICOLE: Yes, I was homeschooled and never got much Shakespeare so I'm really/ interested.

MARY: (reading) 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day' - I love Sonnet 18.

PORTIA: Yes. We'll look at that one line-

MARY: (sits up straight and recites from memory):

"Thou art more lovely and more temperate.
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May
And summer's lease hath all too short a date
Sometimes too hot the eye of heaven shines"

I love that line - like hot sticky summer days.

PORTIA: Yes, that's a great example of-

MARY: "And often is his gold complexion dimmed
And every fair from fair sometime declines
By chance, or nature's changing course, untrained
But thy eternal summer shall not-

PORTIA: Thank you, Mary. We'll look at some of the other lines later.

MARY: (slouches down in her chair and looks down) I'm so sorry.

PORTIA: Now, Roxy, what does that first line tell about/writing

NICOLE: Wow. I could never memorize all/that.

MARY: It's/nerdy.

ROXY: We can use broad or unusual comparisons to describe things.

PORTIA: (pulls an apple out of a bag) Like? Shall I compare thee (holds up the apple) to a-Mary, suggest a comparison.

MARY: I - oh, I don't know.

Silence

MARY: Um, shall I compare thee to a - baseball?

PORTIA: Excellent. Now, you'll each write for five minutes and compare this apple to a baseball.

MARY: Oh, dear.

PORTIA: (dings a little gong) Begin.

Lights fade down.

SCENE 2

Lights come up on the group - all except Portia. Patricia is pacing and Lisa is looking at her cell phone.

MARY: We do have class today right?

ROXY: She's probably just running late - traffic or stuff (reaches into a bag and hands a new notebook and pen to Mary). Here.

MARY: You didn't need/to.

PATRICIA: Maybe she quit.

NICOLE: Why would she quit?

Silence

LISA: I'll get us started on an interesting exercise until she-

PATRICIA: Or we could just sing Kumbaya.

Portia enters flustered.

PORTIA: I'm so sorry ladies. I'm never late but I got stuck in traffic - some accident (dropping things and Mary helps pick things up) Well, how's everybody?

Overlapping ad libs - fine, OK, here, etc.

PORTIA: Well, it's nice to see everyone back for the second of our 4 weekly sessions. Today we move on to a more challenging exercise right away. I call it "Tell Me My Story". You will interview each other, take notes and then write up your partner's story to read later in class. Mary with Patricia. Nicole with Roxy. And Lisa with me.

MARY: What questions should we ask?

PORTIA: Whatever you would ask to learn about a person in a short period of time - like at a party.

MARY: I don't go to parties.

PORTIA: I suggest you move around the room and begin when you're settled.

Portia stays in place and Lisa joins her. The others find places around the area and lights fade down. Conversations begin. Lights come up on Mary and Patricia and the others remain dark.

MARY: Well, this is awkward.

PATRICIA: Yeah (looking at her cell phone)

A few beats of silence.

MARY: OK. Let's see. Where are you from?

PATRICIA: Here.

MARY: Me, too - what part of Cleveland?

PATRICIA: East side.

Silence

MARY: I know. What's something nobody would guess about you?

Silence

MARY: Or maybe - what do you do?

PATRICIA: Shoplift.

Silence

MARY: Really?

PATRICIA: Got me 13 months of jail time.

Silence

MARY: I, uh, never met anybody - you know, who's been in jail (looking down at Patricia's ankles) Do you wear one of those-?

PATRICIA: (pulls up her pant leg to show no ankle bracelet) That's for house arrest. I'm on parole.

MARY: Oh. So, you're still a - uh, criminal?

PATRICIA: A felon to be precise.

Silence

MARY: So was it things - like vacuum cleaners?

PATRICIA: Why would anybody lift a vacuum cleaner?

MARY: Well, I need a new one and the one I was looking at - it was really expensive and-

PATRICIA: Baby blankets, bottles, baby clothes, diapers, stuffed animals - stuff like that.

MARY: You couldn't just buy those things for your baby?

PATRICIA: I don't have any kids.

Silence

MARY: So why did you-?

PATRICIA: See, big rich companies - like Target- they don't need - and those women and kids at Safe Harbor-

MARY: I just went to a nice fundraiser for that women's shelter and I'm thinking about volunteering and - so you took things that you stole - there? (Patricia nods) And they sent you to jail for that?

PATRICIA: Yep.

MARY: Well, they shouldn't have - I mean, you were stealing but-

PATRICIA: There was a also a little bit of drug dealing - mostly marijuana - and never to kids. And I gave that money to - anyway, so how about you?

MARY: Oh, I - I've never stolen anything.

PATRICIA: Really?

Silence

MARY: OK, so it's your turn.

Silence

MARY: You know, to ask me questions.

PATRICIA: I already know you're from Cleveland.

MARY: The west side.

PATRICIA: And you're an accountant-

MARY: Yes, with Nelson and Pearson - it's nerdy - but I'm really good at it and I just got promoted to senior lead accountant and (Patricia looks down at her cell phone bored)

Silence for a few beats.

MARY: I did steal something - when I was 10.

PATRICIA: Oh yeah? What, a Barbie doll?

MARY: No (pauses) - "Little Women" the book - I stole it from the Cuyahoga Public Library-

PATRICIA: (very serious) Do you still have it? (Mary nods) Girl - this is way bigger than diapers. Stealing from a public library- you could get Federal prison for this.

MARY: Really?

Silence

PATRICIA: I can give you tips on how to survive in prison.

Silence

MARY: Maybe I could just slip it in the book return and-

PATRICIA: Nah. Probably a cold case for the US Marshals. And the library got another copy by now -

MARY: You think that's ok?

PATRICIA: Yeah.

Lights fade on them and come up on Nicole and Roxy.

ROXY: You don't look real good, kid. You OK?

NICOLE: Just a little uncomfortable (shifting around in her chair)

ROXY: We can take a break if you want.

NICOLE: No, no - I'm fine.

ROXY: So, what names are you thinking about?

NICOLE: I want her to have a really special name. So I went to this website "Exotic Baby Names" and picked Amaris.

ROXY: That's a beautiful name.

NICOLE: I think so. But Luke - he says it sounds like some kind of perfume. He wants Taylor because he loves Taylor Swift.

ROXY: Ah, geez.

NICOLE: Momma said no to both - that those were heathen names.

ROXY: Oh, seriously, honey.

NICOLE: I told her “Amaris” was Hebrew for “given by God”. And she said that was even worse. That no grandchild of hers was gonna have a Jewish name. So she went to Pastor Meachum - he’s our Pastor at the Guiding Light of Jesus Church - and they are praying over the situation.

ROXY: Oh, for fuck’s sake.

Silence

NICOLE: So, I’ll name her whatever they come up with.

ROXY: Nicole - that’s total bullshit.

NICOLE: What choice do I have?

ROXY: The only choice. This is your baby. Name her Amaris like you want.

NICOLE: (shakes her head no) You don’t understand.

ROXY: Oh, I understand.

Silence

NICOLE: I’m not like you.

ROXY: What am I like?

NICOLE: I mean you - you changed your name, stopped being a lawyer and became a waitress-

ROXY: I’m not a waitress.

NICOLE: Sorry. Are you a manager at that restaurant?

ROXY: Le Cabaret on 75th - that’s not a restaurant. It’s a burlesque club

NICOLE: Oh, my God. You’re a stripper?

ROXY: No. So many people think that burlesque is just stripping and pole dancing. But it’s neither. I am a serious interpretive dancer and-

NICOLE: I’m sorry, Roxy, I didn’t know (gets up) I need to get up and walk around.

Lights fade on Nicole and Roxy and come up on Portia and Lisa.

PORTIA: Well, I'll start. Where are you from?

LISA: Always a nice beginning. We're from right here.

PORTIA: You and Patricia?

LISA: Yes. Where are you from?

PORTIA: The format of the exercise is I ask questions first and then-

LISA: We don't need to stick to that, do we?

Silence

LISA: OK. You're the teacher. By the way, I love your name. Your parents must have been very literary souls.

PORTIA: No. They raised hogs, corn, soybeans.

LISA: Farmers? Where?

PORTIA: Iowa.

LISA: Where?

PORTIA: Marion.

LISA: That's on the way to Iowa City.

PORTIA: Yes. How do you know?

LISA: I did my MFA at the Iowa Writer's Workshop - me and Kurt Vonnegut.

Silence

LISA: Just kidding. He was dead when I was there. It was the most pivotal time in my writing career. After much experimentation with genre, I gained clarity there that my focus should truly be the novel. I'm working on an idea that began as a short story - perhaps you read it in the New Yorker - ah, but enough about me. What about you?

PORTIA: What about me?

LISA: I googled you and didn't find much - an MFA in 2012 - from the University of -

PORTIA: Wisconsin - online.

LISA: What was your focus?

PORTIA: Poetry.

LISA: Ah, the discipline that can infuse and inspire all genres. I use it all the time in the creative writing classes that I teach at Case. Are you going to introduce it into this class?

PORTIA: We already discussed Shakespeare's Sonnet 18.

LISA: Oh, yes. Sorry I had to leave. You know, I've got some other suggestions - some great exercises for adult classes. Like having the group write about-

PORTIA: Why are you here?

Silence

LISA: I wanted to do something for my sister and this was a cheap and simple class-

PORTIA: Cheap and simple. So how about the Introduction to Water Color Painting class? It's cheap and simple and starts next week. I'll arrange a refund for you both. Or are you a master painter, too? (she gets up and exits)

LISA: There's no need to get so upset.

Lights come up on all.

ROXY: What the hell just happened?

LISA: Portia isn't feeling well.

ROXY: That was sudden. I'll go check on her (exits)

LISA: Maybe it was something she ate.

Silence for a few beats. Then Patricia gets up to leave.

LISA: (To Patricia) Class isn't over yet.

PATRICIA: I don't see a teacher here.

LISA: I have an interesting exercise we can work on until-

MARY: I think we should do the exercise that Portia-

LISA: Oh, she did ask me to continue class-

PATRICIA: That's bullshit (starts to exit)

LISA: Sit down.

PATRICIA: Fuck you, Lisa.

Nicole continues to walk around.

PATRICIA: You OK, honey? (Nicole nods yes)

MARY: Do you need some water? I have water right here (pulls out a water bottle) - pure and distilled and I didn't drink any yet - Does anyone see a cup (looking around)?

Patricia is walking with Nicole and rubbing her back.

MARY: Or maybe some fresh air (mimes opening a window US) How do these open?

PATRICIA: Do you think you're in-

LISA: Oh, shit - You think - ? (Starts to gather her things)

NICOLE: She's not due for 6 more weeks.

MARY: Well, then - it's probably just false labor. I mean, I don't know but - I've had friends who experienced this and - I think they call this Braxton-Hicks contractions and-

Mary joins Patricia and Nicole who is moaning and very uncomfortable.

Silence for several beats. Then Roxy enters and confronts Lisa.

ROXY: What the hell did you say to her?

LISA: Nothing.

ROXY: So, she's crying in the ladies room over nothing?

PATRICIA: Hey, Roxy - Nicole's-

ROXY: (goes to Nicole) What's wrong, honey?

PATRICIA: (Confronting Lisa) What did you say to her?

LISA: Nothing/ I don't know

ROXY: Maybe you should sit down? (Nicole shakes her head no)

PATRICIA: Go apologize/to her.

NICOLE: I really need to go to the bathroom.

ROXY: I'll help you.

LISA: For what?

PATRICIA: For being the fucking bitch you/always are

ROXY: (To Lisa and Patricia) Shut the fuck up.

NICOLE: Oh god - I just wet all over myself.

LISA: Oh, fuck. I gotta get outta here (looking sick)

ROXY: I think your water broke. We need to get you to the/hospital

MARY: I'll call 911 (pulling out her cell phone)

Lisa vomits in the corner.

PATRICIA: I got this. Nicole, honey - I'll take you to -

NICOLE: Women's and Children's.

MARY: Just breathe and don't push.

Portia enters.

PORTIA: (To Lisa) I don't care if you got the goddam Pulitzer Prize. This is my class and-

Lisa runs out and Patricia and Roxy are helping Nicole to exit.

PORTIA: What's -?

ROXY: I think we're having a baby.

Lights down.

SCENE 3

/ = interrupted line

Lights up on Mary and Roxy. Mary is showing Roxy how to knit a little baby hat.

ROXY: I'm making a big mess.

MARY: Here. Let me see.

Portia enters.

PORTIA: Hello ladies.

MARY: OK - just do some knit stitches here. Hello, Portia.

PORTIA: What are you doing?

MARY: We're making baby hats/for Amaris.

PORTIA: Nicole had her baby? How's everybody?

ROXY: Not real good/ she's in NICU.

PORTIA: What's going on?

MARY: She has a rare genetic/defect

ROXY: Cri-du-chat.

MARY: She cries like a kitten but she'll/ outgrow that.

PORTIA: I thought these genetic things only happen in older/mothers

ROXY: That's like Down's syndrome. This occurs in about 1 in every 50,000 births - doesn't have anything to do with age.

PORTIA: Sounds serious.

ROXY: It is. She'll have significant delays/in everything

MARY: It's so sad. And she's a premie, too.

PORTIA: Oh, my god. How's Nicole?

ROXY: She's having a tough time.

PORTIA: I'm so sorry to hear al this.

Silence

PORTIA: OK. Well, let's get writing. During this third week session of our class, we'll work on-

Patricia enters with a box of baby stuff.

PATRICIA: Hey, everybody. Check this out (starts pulling stuff out)

Silence

PATRICIA: What?

Silence

PATRICIA: I didn't lift this stuff from Target.

MARY: Oh, good.

PATRICIA: I hit Walmart.

Silence

PATRICIA: Relax. I bought this stuff.

Silence

PATRICIA: OK. So here's the deal. We need to organize - meals, money -

MARY: I'm praying/and making (holds up the hat)

PATRICIA: Stop praying! They've already done enough damage with prayer - her mother and that dickhead pastor.

ROXY: Now what?

PATRICIA: They told Nicky's it's her fault - that she must not have been pure.

ROXY: Bullshit.

MARY: We could do food like macaroni and cheese/brownies

ROXY: Me and the girls at Le Cabaret - we're doing a show for them on Friday.

PATRICIA: So awesome. And how about a-

PORTIA: Let's talk more about this after class.

PATRICIA: Yeah, OK.

Lisa enters with books, notebooks, etc. Portia bristles.

LISA: Sorry I'm late. My students - in the creative writing class - they just wouldn't stop asking questions and-

PATRICIA: What are you doing here?

LISA: I'm in this class.

MARY: Did you hear about Amaris? Nicky's/baby?

LISA: Who's Nicky?

PORTIA: Nicole - from our class.

LISA: Oh, yes.

Silence

PORTIA: OK, so today we'll begin writing-

MARY: She has (looks at Roxy)

ROXY: Cri-du-chat.

MARY: Cry of the cat.

LISA: I can translate French.

PATRICIA: It's a very serious genetic problem- should you give a shit.

LISA: That's too bad.

Silence

PORTIA: Today we will begin writing poetry.

PATRICIA: Seriously/poetry?

MARY: I love poetry/ especially

LISA: Great. I have some poetry books right-

ROXY: I haven't studied much/poetry

PORTIA: We'll start with haiku.

MARY: Wow. That's a very strict Japanese form but-

ROXY: I don't speak Japanese.

PATRICIA: Domo arigato - that's all I/know

MARY: But poets like Ezra Pound, W.H. Auden, even Jack Kerouac/

LISA: He wasn't/ a poet

ROXY: Kerouac - he blows my mind.

PATRICIA: Yeah. I mean "On the Road" - That's-

MARY: Lots of poets have written haiku in English.

PORTIA: Yes, and so shall we.

LISA: (To Mary) Are you knitting?

PATRICIA: No, she's baking a cake.

MARY: Yes (holds up the little hat)

LISA: Like that's going to help.

Silence

MARY: Just what do you think will help?

LISA: What?

Silence

MARY: All you've done so far is throw up, be disrespectful to Portia, disrupt our class and be a real pain in the ass - so what the hell are you going to do to help?

Silence for a few beats and then Patricia applauds

MARY: I'm sorry but she is-

PATRICIA: A bitch.

ROXY: So -what are you gonna do, Lisa?

Silence

LISA: (angry and gathering her things) Not waste my time anymore in this bullshit class. Enjoy your knitting, bitches (exits)

Silence

PATRICIA: OK, Portia. How about we get started with this poetry stuff?

PORTIA: Yes, OK. You each will write your own haiku - just three short/lines

MARY: What about the syllable count?

PORTIA: We won't worry about that yet. Write three short lines - no punctuation - any subject.

Silence

PORTIA: (reaching for a notebook) Here's one I wrote - as an example.

Snow covers the ground
Clouds and dim light
Still hope waits

Silence

ROXY: Whoa.

MARY: That's beautiful.

Patricia gives a thumbs up.

PORTIA: Thank you. So - get writing. Each person will write her own and then you'll work as a group.

PATRICIA: As a group?

PORTIA: Yes. One person will start with three lines. Then, the next person will pick up and write another line and so on. You'll write a whole short poem together in addition to your own poem.

ROXY: So - that group one - 5 lines?

PORTIA: Yes. We'll work on this for the rest of our time today. And read them in our last class next week. Here are some books to look at (puts out some books).

People move chairs around, look at each other, pick up books, etc as lights fade.

SCENE 4:

Lights up on Portia, Roxy, Mary and Patricia in the last class - that has just concluded.

PORTIA: Well, my writer friends - and you all are writers and have done beautiful work- we are at the end of this short month of our writing journey together- but I hope, just the beginning journey for you. I will be offering another class in/March

MARY: I already signed up.

PORTIA: That's great. All of you. Come back and bring a friend.

ROXY: (reaching in to a bag and pulling out a nicely wrapped book and hands it to Portia) To say thank you - to our great teacher. You put up with a lot of shit/in this class.

MARY: We all learned/so much

PATRICIA: Yeah. Even me - I learned stuff.

PORTIA: Oh, my. This is not necessary.

MARY: Go ahead. Open it.

PORTIA: OK (opens it) A book of haiku (flips a few pages)

MARY: I hope you don't have this one?

PORTIA: No, no - I don't (looking at a few more pages) It's lovely. Thank you all so much.

Silence

PATRICIA: Hey, we're all going to the NICU to see Nicky and Amaris now. Do you want to come with us, Portia?

PORTIA: Oh, um, that's OK. I don't want to intrude. I mean, I don't know her - Nicole very well. Just tell her I'm thinking/about her

ROXY: Nicky'll be happy to see you.

PATRICIA: Amaris - she's real cute.

PORTIA: OK, but-

MARY: (To Portia) Um, I'm not able to go but you could take two little hats I have/out in the car.

ROXY: Why can't you go?

MARY: Well, I-

PATRICIA: Don't you wanna see her in the hats?

MARY: Oh, they're just silly little things.

ROXY: There you go again.

MARY: What?

PATRICIA. Playing your sabotage game.

Silence

MARY: Well, I just thought one of you could take them and-

Roxy and Patricia both shake their heads no.

PATRICIA: OK. So let's get going. You coming, Portia?

PORTIA: Yes. But I don't know how to get to Women's and Children's/hospital

ROXY: You got Google maps?

PORTIA: Yes, but I'm terrible with directions. I even get lost with GPS and-

PATRICIA: You can ride there with me but I have to meet my parole officer later so I won't be able to bring you/ back here.

PORTIA: OK. I can get an Uber or something.

MARY: You can ride with me if you like. I can drop you off here/after.

PORTIA. Thanks. That's great.

PATRICIA: I'll text Nicky that we're heading over.

Lights down.

SCENE 5

Lights come up on the chairs arranged like a waiting room. There are hospital sounds - beeping, paging, etc. Roxy is there and holding an envelop. Patricia enters with a very large stuffed bear.

ROXY: Whoa.

PATRICIA: (sits the bear down next to Roxy and says in a little bear voice) Hi, I'm Frankie.

ROXY: (scratching the bear) Hello, Frankie (gesturing to Patricia) Did she name you that?

PATRICIA: (little bear voice) No. Mama Bear did.

Laughing and then silence

PATRICIA: That show on Friday was great. You know, do they do auditions or something? I was thinking I could-

ROXY: Honey, stick to shoplifting.

PATRICIA: What, bitch? You think I can't dance like you? So how much?

ROXY: Almost 5 grand.

PATRICIA: No shit. That's awesome.

ROXY: Yeah - but will all her bills-

PATRICIA: We're just gettin' rollin'. I got the GoFundMe page up yesterday and already there were 50 some hits. And you and the girls can do another show and we can-

ROXY: (To the bear) Aren't you a little big for Amaris?

PATRICIA: (In the bear voice) No. She'll love me.

Silence

ROXY: I'm just being realistic.

PATRICIA: So am I.

Silence

PATRICIA: The NICU docs and nurses - they're amazing - and doing everything. She was getting off the ventilator - yesterday - and - she'll be home soon. I'm setting up the nursery for Nicky. I painted everything and got a new crib and (pulls out her cell phone) Here- look at-

ROXY: Who the hell are you doing this for?

Silence

ROXY: Giving her a goddam bear she can't see or ever be able to hold and a crib-

PATRICIA: She'll sleep in that crib - with Frankie and-

ROXY: And Frankie will be one more damn heartbreaking thing Nicky will have to give away when-

PATRICIA: She's gonna love Frankie and Barbie and the little red wagon I found and-

ROXY: Didn't you hear Nicky yesterday?

Silence

ROXY: She wants this to end.

Silence

PATRICIA: She was just tired. She didn't mean that. Today is gonna be way better and-

ROXY: This is not a game like lifting diapers for the women's shelter. Take off your fucking hero's cape! You cannot fix this!

Roxy throws the bear down. Patricia grabs the bear, pounds a chair down and paces, angry.

PATRICIA: You just give up. But not me, bitch. I do not give-

Mary enters carrying a bag and feels the the tension.

MARY: Um, is everything OK? Is something happening with/the baby?

PATRICIA: No, she's fine.

ROXY: Where's Portia?

MARY: Oh, she stopped in the gift shop - you know, to get something for - what a cute bear.

PATRICIA: (hands her the bear and speaks in the bear voice) Hi, I'm Frankie.

MARY: My, what a big bear you are.

PATRICIA: She'll grow in to him.

Silence

MARY: So - have you been in there yet?

ROXY: Nicky said she'd be out in a few minutes.

PATRICIA: Amaris is going home soon. I've been painting the nursery. Whaddya think (shows Mary pictures on her cell phone)

MARY: (looking at the pictures) Oh, so cute. Where'd you find the border with the little bears?

PATRICIA: On line (scrolling through the photos) And here's the crib - and the high chair. I'm still looking for a changing table.

MARY: Really nice.

ROXY: And I found a little Harley tricycle (Patricia gives her a dirty look)

MARY: I didn't know they made-

Portia enters carrying a little bear

PORTIA: What do you think?

MARY: It's/perfect/

ROXY: Cute/

PATRICIA: Too small.

Nicole enters.

PATRICIA: Hey, kid (gives her a hug)

NICOLE: All you guys - I'm so happy you came(hugs each one) you all came (sits and pauses and then to Portia) I'm so sorry about - you know, that day in class-

PORTIA: Don't worry about it (pauses) So, how's Amaris? I got her this (Nicole takes the little bear without expression)

NICOLE: She's still on the ventilator.

PATRICIA: What? Doc said she'd be off that/yesterday

NICOLE: They tried but she got tired and stopped breathing and her heart stopped and-

Silence

ROXY: (hands the envelop to Nicole) From the show.

NICOLE: (opens it) Oh, my god. This is so much - I really need - How can I thank - everybody?

PATRICIA: And the GoFundMe page is going crazy.

Silence

MARY: (pulls out two little hats) Um, I don't know if these will fit but-

NICOLE: (takes the hats without expression) Thanks, Mary.

MARY: Are you sure they're OK? (Nicole nods yes) I mean, I can make different ones if you-

NICOLE: These are fine.

Silence

PORTIA: The group - Mary, Patricia and Roxy each wrote a part of this - a poem - haiku - for Amaris.

MARY: It's a Japanese-

ROXY: (To Mary) Read it for Nicky.

MARY: No, Portia - why don't you (Portia shakes her head no)

PATRICIA: (To Mary) You wrote most of it.

MARY: (hesitates and then recites:

Tiny confused body
Tangled wires and tubes
Tethered life
Beauty emerges
Hope hovers

Silence and then Portia hands the copy to Nicole. Then, sounds of beeping and paging - Code Blue - NICU, Code Blue NICU. Nicole runs out and all freeze as lights fade.

END OF PLAY

