

Gap In The Shelf

by

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Cast of Characters

<u>HENRY:</u>	12
<u>MOTHER:</u>	40's
<u>FATHER:</u>	40's
<u>GRANDMOTHER:</u>	70's

Place
Dining Room

Time
Evening

Setting: An old aristocratic styled home for an upper class modern day family.

At Rise: All four family members have just sat down to have dinner.

It's dinnertime, right on schedule. HENRY faces GRANDMOTHER. MOTHER faces FATHER. All are dressed well, as if eating inside an expensive restaurant.

MOTHER: Henry, tell father and I the reason why there is a book missing from our library.

HENRY: Oh, yes, it's a brilliant read. I took the book upstairs, so that I may read in bed.

FATHER: Which book?

HENRY: Oh, it's a collection of Chekhov's short stories.

GRANDMOTHER: Oh, that's lovely, indeed---

MOTHER (sharply): Mother. ...Henry, all books must never be taken out from my library. All reading stays within the confines of the reading room...*not*, your sleeping quarters.

HENRY: Why?

MOTHER: Because that is how things are done in this home.

HENRY: But I enjoyed reading in bed.

FATHER: Listen to your mother, Henry.

HENRY: But, I'm not so sure I understand why you would be upset.

MOTHER: I never said I was upset. (smirking) Did I say I was upset?

FATHER: Not at all.

MOTHER: There are some rules to live by, Henry, for all of us. This is the nature of our very existence. It shows discipline of character when we do not color outside the lines. We must focus. We must articulate when we speak. We must remain well mannered individuals.

Let us say, for example, that we had invited a guest for supper and after supper this particular guest wished to enter our library for a bit of reading and relaxation. We offer him or her up our best cognac and at some point our guest motions to find a book of their liking. It is at this very point in time that our esteemed guest finds a gap in the shelf. We mustn't have that. Therefore, all books remain on the shelves at all times, unless reading and reading *only* takes place inside the library room. That's final.

GRANDMOTHER: There, there, the boy understands your point, no need to undermine him.

MOTHER: There is such a need.

GRANDMOTHER: Why? He's just---

MOTHER: *Please* do not question me in front of my son, inside my own home.

GRANDMOTHER: Don't you think you're being too hard on him?

MOTHER (smiling): Not at all! Obedience is a sign of intelligence.

GRANDMOTHER: Obedience, yes, a mother's encouragement, something way more profound.

FATHER: Let us not quarrel during dinnertime.

MOTHER (to Grandmother): Are you saying I don't encourage Henry?

GRANDMOTHER (to Mother): What I am saying, is instead of you coming down on the young man for a gap in the shelf, why not be glad he is even taking up the course of reading at all. That's a sign of intelligence, if you ask me.

(silence)

Henry smiles at his Grandmother who responds with a wink of her own.

MOTHER: Henry, eat your dinner.

HENRY: It's very enjoyable.

MOTHER: Misha always does a fine job at cooking.

HENRY: I meant, Misery.

FATHER: Misery?

HENRY: Have you read it?

FATHER: Do you mean one of the short stories?

HENRY: I believe it's called Misery. Of course, that oftentimes depends on the translation. However, it's quite telling.

FATHER: How so?

HENRY: Oh, it's very touching. There's a man, a cab driver, who has just lost his beloved son; he's dead and all he wishes to do is talk to someone about it; to share his grief, but all he receives are rude customers who never care enough to hear his words. At the end of the story he is left talking to his horse, the only friend he seems to have left.

MOTHER: Are you trying to be clever?

HENRY: Clever?

MOTHER: Veeeery cleever.

HENRY: I'm only relating the contents of the story to all of you for conversation. It was very moving to me.

MOTHER: Why was that story, out of all of the short stories that Chekhov has written, why is it THAT ONE, the one that moves you so?

HENRY: Because I felt bad for the man in the story and...that's why.

MOTHER: Hmmm.

FATHER: It's good that you read, son.

GRANDMOTHER: I think it's wonderful that you find yourself inside the world of such characters. That's the stuff of life, isn't it, Henry?

HENRY (smiling): Yes.

GRANDMOTHER: Good for you. Not many young men your age have such a keen interest in reading and even those that do sometimes fall short on emotional connection.

MOTHER: That's enough, Mother.

GRANDMOTHER: What did I say now?

MOTHER: I'm so tired of all this indirect hostility. Why not just come right out and say it? Say what's really on your mind. All of you!

FATHER: Darling, please, settle down, you're spoiling dinner---

MOTHER: ME?!

FATHER: And later your stomach will suffer for it...please...settle.

HENRY: I'll return the book after dinner.

MOTHER: Good.

HENRY: ...Mother?

MOTHER: ...What?

HENRY: ...I wish we could just...talk.

FATHER: Don't start her up again, Henry or you can go to your room.

MOTHER: It's okay, I'm fine...talk? What would you like to talk about Henry?

HENRY: You said you don't want things to be indirect. Neither do I.

MOTHER: So talk!

HENRY: I wish we could be friends.

MOTHER: Friends? Are we forgetting that I happen to be your mother?

HENRY: No.

GRANDMOTHER: What he's trying to say is---

MOTHER: Quiet Mother! (sarcastically) Henry's talking. (to Henry) Talk.

HENRY: I only wish for us to be kind to one another. That's all. That's all I wish to say.

(pause.)

MOTHER: Misha? (beat) (enter Misha) Mis---there you are. I'm finished here. Dinner was lovely, thank you. If you will all excuse me.

Mother gets up from the table and leaves the dining room. Misha clears her plate and exits to the kitchen.

HENRY: ...Father, I didn't mean---

FATHER: That's enough out of you. Return that damn book to the library and go to your room for the remainder of the day.

GRANDMOTHER: He was only speaking honestly.

FATHER: Up to your room!

Henry gets up from the table and leaves the dining room.

(beat)

GRANDMOTHER: He was only speaking openly and honestly. What's the harm in that?

FATHER: There shouldn't be any harm in it...

GRANDMOTHER: Then what is the issue?

FATHER: Is it possible for a mother not to love her only child?

GRANDMOTHER: I believe it is...

FATHER: Does that answer your question?

GRANDMOTHER: ...Horrible, absolutely...(whispering) horrible...

END OF PLAY