

# ***Shrinking Violet***

*by*

*Joseph Arnone*

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Cast of Characters

<u>HARLOTTE</u> :	48
<u>DABNEY</u> :	53

Place  
Suburban Town

Time  
Night

2.

Setting: A study room filled surrounded with books on shelves that surround the perimeter of the walls. Thick Egyptian rug, leather sofa, wood desk and a fireplace.

At Rise: Dabney sits at his desk deep in thought when Harlotte enters the study carrying a tray of tea and biscuits.

HARLETTE: How are you darling?

DABNEY: I'm as good as okay can be.

HARLETTE: I've brought you some hot tea, a bit of turmeric and ginger.

DABNEY: Thank you, dear.

(HARLETTE sets the tea down on  
Dabney's desk)

HARLOTTE: You're working too hard.

DABNEY: I have to.

(HARLOTTE walks behind DABNEY and  
rubs his shoulders)

HARLOTTE: Do you really?

DABNEY (sighs): Not really....

(DABNEY sips his tea)

HARLOTTE: Why not come into the living room with me?

DABNEY: I will, I just need some time...

HARLOTTE (sighs): I know...he'll be back.

DABNEY: Will he?

HARLOTTE: I'm sure of it.

DABNEY: I'm glad one of us are.

HARLOTTE: He will.

DABNEY: So much time invested into that boy. Listen to me, Jacob is a grown man, isn't he? I have dreams, so many dreams of how I wish things to be, the more I make the effort to capture those dreams the more I seem to lose my grasp of it. I sometimes work myself up to the point of excitement and I'm free and happy and live in my own fantasy world of how my relationship can be with my one and only son and I fool myself into thinking it's real, until the bubble gets popped and reality sets in and I'm back where I started, staring at the walls in this room, wondering how I can possibly work up the strength to somehow rise past the latest heartbreak and it's in those moments, moments of complete loss, when I know how much I love our son. (pause.)

DABNEY (cont'd): Why can't I make it real? Why am I not strong enough to make my vision come to fruition? (beat) Apparently, I've lost my influence on him. Worst thing for a father to experience...

HARLOTTE: You're a wonderful father.

(DABNEY shrugs and waves his hands)

You mustn't beat yourself over this.

DABNEY: How can I not?

HARLOTTE: What did he say?

DABNEY: I can't go into all of it.

HARLOTTE: How dare he speak to---

DABNEY: Now, now, what's done is done.

HARLOTTE: Wait until I have a a word---

DABNEY: Harlotte, please, don't upset me.

HARLOTTE: He needs to respect his father.

DABNEY: I keep listening to him, his words ringing in my ears, wondering if there is truth to them. I give him leeway, don't I?

HARLOTTE: You do.

DABNEY: I've set him up for life, surely I won't state that fact to him but he must know he is cared for but that doesn't mean he won't work for it either. One has to earn their keep in life. I have everything arranged for him to start work this September and here he is wishing to travel. Spending an entire year of his life going abroad is ridiculous. He's wasting time.

HARLOTTE: Perhaps that's what he needs, Dabney.

DABNEY: Oh, don't side with him---

HARLOTTE: I'm not siding with either of you---

DABNEY: You're not siding with me?

HARLOTTE: Don't make it about sides, you are my husband and that is my son and we are a family.

DABNEY: You're right, I'm sorry.

HARLOTTE: If Jacob wishes to go abroad then I say let him.

DABNEY: But---

HARLOTTE: Let him go and see the world before he fully commits. If you don't he will hang this over your head his entire life. Look what it's doing to the two of you already.

DABNEY: I'll have you know that I have spoken to Jacob at length, AT LENGTH, about getting started as early as this September, he agreed---

HARLOTTE: He agreed because he was probably afraid of disappointing you---

DABNEY: No--

HARLOTTE: Jacob does not want to disappoint you but you don't allow him to go his own way when he needs to. Don't you realize what a burden you are putting on him?

DABNEY: What burden?

HARLOTTE: He is going to be responsible for taking the reins one day. Haven't you thought about the gravity of that situation...a young man not twenty-two years of age going to work for his father, one of the most powerful men in his town.

DABNEY: But he's my son.

HARLOTTE: Yes, he's your son and you need to give him what he asks.

DABNEY: I'm...what if I lose him?

HARLOTTE: You will never lose him.

(pause.)

DABNEY: I'm at a loss...

HARLOTTE: Drink your tea, it's getting cold.

(DABNEY sips his tea)

You need to let him travel. He never said he wasn't going to work for you. If you want him to be exceptional and our son *will* be exceptional, you must let go of your hold, let him leave.

DABNEY: I watch all of my friends' sons go straight to work, why should my son be any different?

HARLOTTE: You should be different. This rests on you.

DABNEY: I know it does, but---

HARLOTTE: But, what?

DABNEY: I've heard horror stories.

HARLOTTE: Such as?

DABNEY: Such as...I don't know...

HARLOTTE: It's all in your mind.

DABNEY: I'll let him go, with the knowledge that he may never come back to me. The reason why I'm saying this to you is because deep down inside myself I have always known that Jacob wasn't cut out for this work.

HARLOTTE: You don't--

DABNEY: I do. Jacob is different. Yes, he'll come work for me and rise up in the ranks and eventually one day take over the reins as you put it and I'll be retired and watching from a far, how much of a disaster he'll make of things.

HARLOTTE: I can't believe what you are saying.

DABNEY: Are you really that surprised? Harly, we both know Jacob is different.

HARLOTTE: How do you mean?

DABNEY: He's not cut throat. He's soft. He's an adventurer. This business doesn't get him excited...it rather bores him, does it not? He's nothing like I was or my father before me...he's more like you, a free spirit and that's why I fell in love with you and although we have our differences we love one another deeply and complement each other, each of us giving what the other lacks...but, Jacob, he isn't fierce, hungry, ambitious...he's lazy and wanders, doesn't he? Doesn't our son wander? Ever since he was a boy, I'd watch him play with the other children and he'd never take the initiative...he'd never be the aggressor and that's okay, I'm-I love our son being the sweet loving young man that he is, I do, but that personality type will get eaten alive in my business.

HARLOTTE: So why are you taking him on?

DABNEY: I thought I could change him but he is who he is and it's been wrongful of me to imagine he could be something he isn't naturally keen on being.

HARLOTTE: I'm shocked.

DABNEY: What for?

HARLOTTE: Shocked that it took you this long to acknowledge the obvious.

DABNEY: If I give him a year to his own devices, do you suppose he will change on his own?

HARLOTTE: What I think is that you need to accept your son for who he is plain and simple...I believe that you should speak to yourself about supporting whatever it is he wishes to do with his life.

DABNEY: But he said he wants to work for me? You see, this is why I am confused---

HARLOTTE: No, you said so yourself, Jacob isn't cut out for your line of work, so why force him into being someone he's not meant to become?

DABNEY: Nightmare. When am I going to get a break? I'm not as young and fit as I use to be Harly, you know my breathing isn't getting any better.

HARLOTTE: Dabney, the hard truth is you can't make the decision for him. He is old enough to make his own.

DABNEY: What will he do for work? Surely, I didn't spend vast sums of money, sending him to university, only to see him chuck it aside to become some kind of shrinking violet.

HARLOTTE: Dabney!

Dabney breaks into a coughing fit. Harlotte runs to feed him a spoon of honey from the kitchen.

DABNEY: Honestly, am I not to feel taken advantage of? Why did we send him to college at all?

HARLOTTE: You are overreacting.

DABNEY: Am I?

HARLOTTE: You are!

(pause.)

DABNEY: I'm just upset about this whole damn thing. I need time. Time to sort some things out.

HARLOTTE: He needs his independence.

DABNEY: He needs a job.

HARLOTTE: Yes, he does but he will come to that if you let him.

DABNEY (echoing): If I let him.

HARLOTTE: I imagine Jacob will surprise us.

DABNEY: Do you?

HARLOTTE: Indeed, I do. He will follow his own interests and make his own discoveries on his own terms and once he's had his fill, he will come to a final decision because that is what we will tell him, together...that will be our deal, with him. He is to go abroad, have his fill but at the allotted hour, reach his point of no return. I don't see why such an arrangement should be problematic, do you?

DABNEY: Not in the slightest.

HARLOTTE: Are we agreed?

DABNEY: Well...

(HARLOTTE sternly looks at DABNEY)

Okay, okay, fine, agreed...we will speak with him when he comes back home and we will work out the details of our plan and that will be that...

HARLOTTE: Cheer up.

DABNEY: I'll try.

(HARLOTTE kisses DABNEY on his cheek)

**END OF PLAY**