

EMPTY PLACES OF THE HEART

A PLAY BY

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CHARACTERS:

STEVE HARRISON: (56)

Absent minded, intelligent, science Teacher. Appreciates Good literature and Tom & Jerry cartoons.

MIKE HARRISON: (25)

Ambitious, Career driven. Cares for his dad but thinks he's a handful.

ALICE MILLER: (42)

English teacher. Spinsterish. Takes good care of her mother. Articulate and a little out of touch at social gatherings.

DONNA HARRISON: (19)

Steve's daughter. Brazen, larger than life, loud in dress and speech.

SYLVIA PETERS: (22)

Mike's secretary. Well Groomed and mannered. Like Mike she is very ambitious, and will stand by him.

SCENE 1

MIKE and SYLVIA enter. SYLVIA checks the place out as MIKE looks for someone.

SYLVIA;

Nice.

MIKE:

Thanks. (yelling) Dad.

SYLVIA:

(looking at books) Science Books ?

MIKE;

There my dads.

SYLVIA:

You never said you lived with your father.

MIKE:

It's something i try to avoid.

SYLVIA:

Pardon ?

MIKE:

Nothing. Anyway. He's still at school. He's a science teacher.

SYLVIA:

Is he really?

MIKE:

Yeah. (goes to bar) Would you like a drink?

SYLVIA:

Just a little one. I'm not a big drinker.

MIKE:

So what'll it be ?

SYLVIA:

Vodka straight with a twist of lemon.

MIKE:

Coming up.

MIKE goes to the drinks cabinet, takes out a couple of glasses and struggles with a bottle.

SYLVIA:

So, how does it feel to be the new General manager ?

MIKE is still fighting the bottle.

MIKE:

I haven't got the job yet.

SYLVIA:

Rumor has it you will.

MIKE:

I never listen to rumours. They're misleading.

SYLVIA:

Oh ?

MIKE:

Like Jerry Knowles. Rumour had it he was getting a higher position. They transferred him to the Good year Blimp.

MIKE braces the bottle between his legs and tries to twist it off. SYLVIA kneels down in front of him.

SYLVIA:

Why don't you hold it while I pull it ?

MIKE:

What ?

SYLVIA:

Just grip it and I'll twist it

MIKE:

Okay, just make sure it doesn't spill.

SYLVIA:

I'll lick it up if it does.

Just as SYLVIA pulls the top off, there is a loud explosion. This startles both of them and the drink spills everywhere.

SYLVIA:

Good God ! What was that ?

MIKE:

My father.

SYLVIA:

Your father just exploded ?

MIKE:

I wish. Better call the fire brigade, again.

A plume of smoke rises from the stairwell and through it emerges STEVE holding a smoking beaker.

STEVE:

No need to call anyone. Everything's under control

MIKE:

What have you done this time ?

STEVE:

Just a tad too much sodium I think. But it's alright, nothing to worry about.

MIKE:

Dad, what are you doing home ?

STEVE:

Could probably use a little sugar.

MIKE:

Did you get sent home again ?

STEVE:

Perhaps a few more additives. Sorry son, did you say something ?

MIKE:

Did the school send you home again ?

STEVE:

Sent home ? Uh...I...Hello, who might this lovely lady be ?

MIKE:

Dad, you're avoiding the question.

STEVE:

I'm Professor Steve Harrison. But you can call me Steve.

SYLVIA:

Sylvia. Sylvia Peters.

MIKE:

Sylvia is my assistant.

STEVE:

And quite a lovely one, too.

MIKE:

What were you doing in the lab, dad ?

STEVE:

Lab ? Well, I had this idea for a soft drink, you see. A bit like Coke but not as toxic. It's a bit fizzy but quite good, really, and a lot healthier. Would you like to try some?

STEVE offers the beaker to SYLVIA who backs away.

MIKE:

DON'T TOUCH THAT !!!!!

MIKE grabs the beaker and holds it arms length as he takes it to the kitchen.

STEVE:

Mike, if you want to mix that with something there are drinks here.

Then again you'd better not. It's a bit volatile.

MIKE re enters from the kitchen holding a smoking, but empty beaker.

MIKE:

Well, we don't have to worry about that clogged drain anymore.

STEVE:

Oh, you've fixed it have you ? Good lad.

MIKE:

This stuff dissolved the sink.

STEVE:

Hmm. Too many additives.

MIKE:

Dad, this wonder drink isn't the reason you were sent home, is it ?

SYLVIA:

I think I should be going.

STEVE:

So soon ?

MIKE:

No, you don't have to go yet, really

STEVE:

Why don't you stay for dinner ? I was just about to get it ready.

MIKE:

DINNER ! Oh, God, don't tell me you've tried to cook dinner.

MIKE is back to the kitchen in a flash. MIKE reenters holding a can of baked beans in his hand.

MIKE:

YOU PUT A CAN OF BAKED BEANS IN THE MICROWAVE !

SYLVIA:

I'd best be going.

SYLVIA goes to the door. MIKE follows her out.

MIKE:

Wait. I'll walk you out.

SYLVIA:

It's okay. Good-bye Professor Harrison.

STEVE:

Oh, Uh..Goodbye.

SYLVIA:

See you tomorrow, Mike.

MIKE:

But....

SYLVIA is out the door before he can say anything else.

STEVE:

What a charming young woman. You must invite her over again sometime.

MIKE:

Why ? So you can poison her with one of your experiments. Dammit, dad why do you have to embarrass everyone I bring home.

STEVE:

What are you talking about ? I didn't embarrass anyone. You were the one ranting and raving like a madman. Really, that sort of behaviour was totally uncalled for. It's no wonder the poor girl left in such a hurry.

MIKE:

She left because you offered her a Beaker of acid.

STEVE:

It wasn't acid it was soft drink.

MIKE:

It burnt a hole through solid steel.

STEVE:

A minor chemical imbalance. I'll have it fixed in no time.

MIKE:

You're not going to fix anything. We're not insured for it.

STEVE:

**I'll have you know I was one of the most brilliant Chemist of my day.
Chemical Companies everywhere were lining up to hire me.**

MIKE:

Now they won't come near you without an asbestos suit.

STEVE:

That is not true.

MIKE:

Face it dad. You can't ...focus the way you used to. You're a health hazard.

STEVE:

That's enough of that sort of talk.

MIKE:

One day you're going to seriously hurt someone and then how would you feel ?

STEVE:

Rubbish ! My mind is as sharp as a steel trap.

MIKE;

And just as closed.

STEVE:

Chemistry is my life. I will not give it up, because some second rate accountant, who can't tell the difference between a beaker and a Florence flask thinks I'm incontinent.

MIKE:

You mean incompetent.

STEVE:

What ?

MIKE:

See, you don't even remember what we were talking about.

STEVE:

Yes I do.

MIKE:

Alright, what were we talking about ?

STEVE:

You being rude to your guest.

MIKE:

No we weren't.

STEVE:

Yes we were. You're trying to change the subject.

MIKE:

You're the one who changed the subject. I..I give up.

MIKE goes up stairs.

STEVE:

Where are you going ?

MIKE:

I've got work to do.

STEVE:

What about dinner ?

MIKE:

I'll eat whatever survived later.

MIKE goes into one of the rooms at the top of the stairs. As he does a young girl dressed in grunge gear burst out from another door and runs out and down the stairs doing a tarzan yell. This is DONNA.

DONNA:

Guess who I am.

STEVE:

A retarded porcupine having an orgasm.

DONNA:

Nope.

STEVE:

A soprano pygmy being tortured.

DONNA;

Getting warm.

STEVE:

A gorilla with his balls caught in a mousetrap.

DONNA:

(frustrated) No ! I'm Tarzan. You know , the guy who swings through trees with leopard underwear.

STEVE:

And why are you pretending to be Tarzan ?

DONNA;

It's the opening for my new song. Love Slaughter. Want to hear it ?

STEVE:

No .

DONNA does some head banging to incomprehensible and very loud wailing.

DONNA:

So, what do you think ?

STEVE:

Well, you got the slaughter part right.

DONNA:

The lyrics need a little work, but it's only just the opener.

STEVE:

It sounds like constipated Penguins drowning.

DONNA:

**Constipated Penguins drowning ! What a great name for a band.
Thanks, Dad, you're a genius.**

DONNA skips off to the kitchen. then re-enters a second later

DONNA:

Cool, Dad. What gave you the idea to make the sink bigger ?

STEVE:

The washing machine was broken.

DONNA:

Wicked. Now we can wash the dishes and the clothes at the same time.

STEVE:

Donna, I want you to do me a favor. I'm having a guest over tomorrow afternoon. I'd like you to keep a low profile.

DONNA:

You mean stay in my room.

STEVE:

Yes. I'd like her to think this is a respectable household.

DONNA:

Her ? You got a woman coming over ? Whoa !

STEVE:

A social visit.

DONNA:

Can I peek through the keyhole ?

STEVE:

NO ! YOU MAY NOT PEEK THROUGH THE KEYHOLE.

DONNA:

You taking her out ?

STEVE:

No, we will be dining in.

DONNA:

YOU'RE GOING TO COOK !

STEVE:

Don't be so impertinent. I've been cooking before you were born.

DONNA:

Surprised you lived this long. I reckon I'll stay at Jeff's tomorrow. Might be safer.

STEVE:

Very well, if it will keep you out of sight.

DONNA:

Thanks, dad. (runs up stairs to her room) Don't burn the house down.

STEVE:

Kids. Can't live with them and you can't use them as Shark bait.

LIGHTS FADE

SCENE 2.

STEVE is preparing food .The doorbell rings. STEVE in a fluster notices he is wearing a dirty apron.

STEVE:

Just a minute.

STEVE takes the apron off and, unable to find anywhere, sticks it in his pocket. He goes to the front door and opens it. ALICE is standing there. She enters when STEVE invites her in.

STEVE:

Alice, How are you ? Come in.

ALICE:

Thank you. (notices apron) I'm sorry did you know you have something sticking out of your pants ?

STEVE:

(looking down at his fly) What ?

ALICE:

The rag.

STEVE:

Oh, That. I was just preparing dinner when you....

ALICE:

Dinner! Oh I'm sorry, I didn't mean to disturb...

STEVE:

No, it's alright. You can stay, if you like.

ALICE:

Oh, but I couldn't.

STEVE:

Oh ?

ALICE:

My mother is not well. I have to get back to her as soon as I can.

STEVE:

I hope it's nothing serious.

ALICE:

The doctor thinks she's dying.

STEVE:

I'm sorry.

ALICE:

**I don't understand it. I thought she still had a few good years in her.
After all, she's only 97.**

STEVE:

The good always die young.

ALICE:

Pardon ?

STEVE:

Poor choice of words.

ALICE:

I'm sorry I can't stay long. I'll just grab that copy of Frankenstein and be on my way. I don't like to burden people with my problems.

STEVE:

I don't mind. You should talk to other people about your problems. It's said to be good therapy.

ALICE:

Are you saying I need therapy ?

STEVE:

No ! I didn't mean...That is ..I...Would you like a drink ?

ALICE:

I don't drink Alcohol.

STEVE:

Some Tea, then ?

ALICE:

A cup of tea would be nice. But I can't stay long.

STEVE:

Of course. Come with me and I'll put the kettle on.

ALICE looks around and notices the extensive library. The books range from science to science fiction. Shakespeare to Steinbeck. poetry to Punk fashion and Business Management.

STEVE:

Won't be a moment.

STEVE goes to the adjoining room while ALICE looks closer at some of

the books.

ALICE:

An interesting collection. Are they all yours ?

STEVE reenters.

STEVE:

Most of them. Except for the business management books, they belong to my son.

ALICE:

And the punk fashion magazines ?

STEVE:

My Daughter.

ALICE:

What an interesting family you must have.

STEVE:

Interesting? Yes, I suppose that's one word for it .

ALICE:

And your wife ?

STEVE:

I'm divorced.

ALICE:

I'm sorry, I shouldn't pry.

STEVE:

No, It's all right. It was some time ago. all water under the bridge now.

There is a couple of seconds awkward silence.

ALICE:

They say you can tell a lot about a person by the type of books they read.

STEVE:

Is that right ?

ALICE:

Yes. In fact it's quite surprising what you can learn really. Like, I had no idea you read Shakespeare.

STEVE:

Oh yes, quite a bit. In fact his sonnets are my favourites.

ALICE:

Really? They are beautiful aren't they?

STEVE:

Yes indeed. In fact there is one I particularly like. (takes out book with book mark in it) Here it is. Look in they glass and tell the face thou viewest, now is the time that face should form another, whose fresh repair if now thou not renewest thou dost beguile the world, unblest some mother. For where is she so fair, whose unweared womb disdains the tillage of thy husbandry? Or who is he so fond so will be the tomb of his self love to stop posterity. Thou art thy mothers glass and she is thee calls back the lovely April of her prime, so thou through windows of thine age shalt see, despite of wrinkles this thy golden time. But if thou lived not remembered not to be, die single and thine image dies with thee.

ALICE:

That was so beautiful. I..I..I'm really impressed.

STEVE:

You don't hear poetry like that any more. They say with new technology you can create greater things. They seem to forget Shakespeare never used Windows.

ALICE:

It's also true, if an artist doesn't suffer for his art their audience will.

STEVE:

Very true. Very true indeed.

ALICE:

Makes you appreciate the value of things, when time has been spent on them.

STEVE;

Yes.

ALICE:

I never considered you to be a man with such an appreciation for Shakespeare.

STEVE:

You thought I was some old fool who played with test tubes all day.

ALICE;

No, I didn't mean....

STEVE:

It's alright I'm afraid people are always judged by first impressions.

ALICE:

Yes, funny that. We think we know everything about a person just by looking at them. When in fact all we are doing is creating in our minds a false picture of unrealistic expectations.

STEVE:

Indeed. quite silly when you think about it. Kind of like filling in the empty places of a colour by number book with the wrong colours.

ALICE:

Interesting.

STEVE:

Are you sure you wouldn't like to stay for dinner ?

ALICE:

No, I really should be going.

STEVE:

But I thought you were staying for tea ?

ALICE:

Oh, yes. Of course.

STEVE:

Should be ready. Won't be a moment.

STEVE leaves and returns with a tray & places it on the table. The tray

*contains beakers instead of cups and a large flask replacing the tea pot.
The milk is in a smaller glass and the sugar is in a pestle.*

ALICE:

What aunique tea set.

STEVE:

Thank you.

STEVE pours the tea. ALICE reluctantly takes a sip.

STEVE:

Is the tea alright ?

ALICE:

(to her surprise) Excellent. You make a fine cup of earl grey.

STEVE:

My mother taught me when we were living in England.

ALICE:

She taught you well.

For a second they simply sit and enjoy the tea

ALICE:

I heard there was a little accident in the lab today

STEVE:

Oh, that. It's alright, nothing to serious.

ALICE:

The principal called the fire brigade.

STEVE:

Well, you know Norton, always panics over little things.

ALICE:

The lab was burnt to the ground.

STEVE:

But no-one was hurt. That's the important thing.

ALICE:

Thank goodness. Is that why Norton sent you home ?

STEVE:

Uh....Yes.

ALICE:

I'm sorry. It's really none of my business.

STEVE:

No, it's quite alright. I don't mind, really.

ALICE;

I heard there were other incidents.

STEVE:

Yes, this wasn't the first time. Unfortunately, I've suspended pending an inquiry.

ALICE:

Oh dear. What will they do if....

STEVE:

I don't know.

ALICE:

Surely, they won't press criminal charges.

STEVE:

Let them try. I'll fight them in the highest court in the country. They will rue the day they ever heard my name. And believe me I will again and again, once more into the breach until victory is mine.

ALICE:

(claps) Bravo. You certainly have the courage of King Henry.

STEVE:

(embarrassed) I'm afraid I get a little carried away sometimes.

ALICE;

You truly are a surprising man.

STEVE;

I..uh..Lets not talk about work shall we. It's after hours.

ALICE:

Very well. What shall we talk about ?

STEVE;

You.

ALICE:

(nearly chokes on her tea) Pardon ?

STEVE:

Please, I didn't mean it like that. I'd just like to know a little more about you.

ALICE:

Even so, I....

STEVE:

What was something you liked to do when you were young ?

ALICE;

Really, I think this conversation is getting a little personal.

STEVE:

It doesn't have to be anything private, just....

ALICE:

I'm afraid I'm will not.....

STEVE:

My favourite cartoon was Tom & Jerry.

ALICE:

Pardon ?

STEVE:

Tom & Jerry. I always enjoyed them. Still do.

ALICE;

Really ?

STEVE:

I'll let you in on a little secret. I make sure I'm home every day before four thirty when I've still got the house to myself and I watch them.

ALICE:

Do you want to know something ?

STEVE:

What ?

ALICE;

So do I ?

STEVE:

That's amazing. See we do have a lot in common.

ALICE:

Yes we do. Shakespeare & Tom and Jerry.

STEVE:

Who says we don't have taste ?

They share a small laugh together.

STEVE:

Do you like movies, Alice ?

ALICE:

Some. I like the classics. Forties and fifties movies. And occasionally I enjoy a good Clint Eastwood movie.

STEVE:

Would you like to go to the movies ? When you have a free night, of course.

ALICE:

I ..I..Don't know. My mother...I'd have to..

STEVE:

Get someone else to look after her. Just for one night.

ALICE:

No. There isn't anyone else.

STEVE:

Well, don't worry about it now, some other time...

ALICE:

Thank you for the offer but.....

STEVE:

Don't say no. Just say you'll think about it.

ALICE:

Alright. I really must be going. I told my mother I wouldn't be late.

ALICE stands and grabs her purse to leave.

ALICE;

Thank you for the tea. It was excellent.

STEVE:

You're welcome. Oh, don't forget your book.

ALICE:

Thank you. I'll return it as soon as I can.

STEVE:

I look forward to seeing you.

ALICE:

I am sorry about that lab incident.

STEVE:

Don't worry. It will work itself out.

ALICE;

I'm sure it will. (smiles) King Henry.

STEVE:

(embarrassed) Yes, well.

ALICE:

I must be going. Thank you once again.

STEVE opens the door and she exits.

ALICE:

Goodbye.

STEVE:

Alice. I was wondering.

ALICE:

Yes ?

STEVE;

This sounds a little crazy but...After school would you

ALICE:

Would I what ?

STEVE:

Would you like to come over and watch Tom and Jerry with me.

ALICE:

I'd love to. (smiles) See you at four .

LIGHTS FADE