

# **DON'T BE SO HARD ON YOUR SHELF**

**TEN MINUTE PLAY**

**By Scott Haan**

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**SYNOPSIS:** Jamie is having a pretty normal day until the bookcase starts to carry on a conversation with him. What can a piece of furniture possibly have to complain about, and what kind of compromises will need to be made for the two of them to get along?

### **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

(2 EITHER)

JAMIE (m/f).....A voracious reader.

SHELF (m/f) .....A sarcastic talking bookcase.

### **SETTING**

Present day, in JAMIE'S home.

The bookshelf is the only set requirement for this show, and it could be done in a variety of ways. It could be very simple, such as a small shelving unit, or even just a stack of two or three wooden crates that the actor playing SHELF can stand or kneel behind. It could be a stack of books on the floor, and then a single shelf suspended on a strap they could hang around their neck and wear. Depending on your resources, it could also be an elaborate set piece, tall and wide enough for the actor to stand behind without being seen. If you go that route, cut a face-shaped hole in the back wall of the bookshelf so that the actor's face is visible through the hole. (*Optional: Use make-up the color of the bookcase to make the SHELF actor's face blend into the background of the bookcase.*) You should have at least two shelves to display a decent collection.

## **PRODUCTION NOTES**

Late in the show, SHELF will spill all of the books out onto the floor. There are several ways to accomplish this, but here are a few possibilities to consider:

- A) Simply have SHELF rock the bookshelf back and forth to spill as many books as possible, if it isn't too heavy.
- B) Cut holes in the back wall large enough for SHELF'S hands to fit through, so they can shove and sweep books off the shelf on cue.
- C) Build the shelves so that they are resting on long support rods (one rod on each side of the shelf) that protrude through small holes in the back wall. SHELF can pull them out on cue. When the rods are pulled through the back, the shelves will fall.

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**AT RISE:**

*The stage is empty except for a lone bookcase filled with books. SHELF is standing behind it, motionless. After a moment, JAMIE enters, humming a happy tune and carrying yet another book. S/he walks up to the bookshelf, files the book on the top shelf, then begins to walk away. Before JAMIE can take too many steps, s/he is startled by a voice.*

**SHELF:** Oh, great, another one.

*JAMIE jumps, surprised to hear another voice in this empty room, and looks around to find the source.*

**JAMIE:** What? Who's there?

**SHELF:** This is getting ridiculous, you know.

**JAMIE:** (*Looking STAGE LEFT for the source of the voice.*) I mean it! Who is that?

**SHELF:** It's me. Right here. Yoo-hoo! If I was a snake, I'd a bit ya!

**JAMIE:** (*Now searching on STAGE RIGHT.*) Come on out and show yourself!

**SHELF:** Show myself? I'm taking up half the room! How much more can I show? It's me, with all the books. (*JAMIE finally looks directly at SHELF.*) 'Sup?

**JAMIE:** What is this, a recording or something? (*Moving books aside to look for a microphone of some kind.*) Is there a speaker here?

**SHELF:** Nope, no speaker. I can really talk, Jamie Thompson of Euclid Avenue. The sooner you accept that, the sooner we can have a little chat.

**JAMIE:** You...you're a...talking bookshelf?

**SHELF:** Yeah, but that's not the impressive part. You should hear my singing voice. (*Sings.*) "Oh sole mio..." (*Or substitute something recent and popular.*)

**JAMIE:** But...what...no. No, this isn't happening. Furniture doesn't talk!

**SHELF:** Normally, that's true. I mean, we're not SUPPOSED to. It's against, like, ALL the regulations. Truth is, we CAN talk...we always could...we just choose not to, so we don't get in trouble.

**JAMIE:** In trouble? With who?

**SHELF:** I can't tell you that. I've said too much already.

**JAMIE:** So why are you talking to me now?

**SHELF:** *(With controlled anger.)* Because I...have had...ENOUGH.

**JAMIE:** Enough of what?

**SHELF:** The blatant mistreatment. Furniture abuse may not be officially recognized as illegal in a court of law, but it is an epidemic. And you, my friend, are guilty.

**JAMIE:** Guilty of WHAT?

**SHELF:** Oh, SO many offenses. But let's start small, shall we? Let's get one of the petty misdemeanors out of the way. First...dusting.

**JAMIE:** Dusting?

**SHELF:** Yes, dusting. As in...do you even know how to do it?

**JAMIE:** Of course I do!

**SHELF:** Are you sure? My old owners dusted me every week. You've had me for a few years, and you haven't done it once. Ever heard of "spring cleaning"?

**JAMIE:** Hey, I'm a busy person!

**SHELF:** I have a layer of dust on me so thick it feels like I'm wearing a shag carpet!

**JAMIE:** Now you're exaggerating.

**SHELF:** Listen...Swiffers. That's all I'm sayin'.

**JAMIE:** Okay, okay, I got it.

**SHELF:** And maybe some furniture polish every once in a while. Hygiene is important to me too, you know!

**JAMIE:** Yes, fine. Clean you. I get the point. What else?

**SHELF:** Okay, moving on. Let's talk about these books of yours.

**JAMIE:** My books?

**SHELF:** Yes. I need you to do something for me, okay? Will ya do your shelf a favor?

**JAMIE:** *(Not amused.)* "Do your shelf a favor"? Been wanting to use THAT one for a while, haven't you?

**SHELF:** Yeah, ever since I was a little splinter.

**JAMIE:** Cute. All right, so what's this favor?

**SHELF:** You've got to stop with all the new books. Seriously.

**JAMIE:** What do you mean?

**SHELF:** All you do is add books here. You never actually take any DOWN. How would YOU feel if you kept gaining weight all the time and never lost any?

**JAMIE:** You've just described my life.

**SHELF:** Yeah, well, mine, too, thanks to you. You need to put us both on a diet.

**JAMIE:** So now you're complaining about holding books? You're a bookshelf!

**SHELF:** No, you're USING me as a bookshelf. That's not what my OLD owners used me for, before they sold me in that stupid garage sale.

**JAMIE:** What did THEY use you for?

**SHELF:** Oh, you know, light-weight knick-knacks. Snow globes and cheap trophies and ceramic pigeons and stuff. Nothing that would give me a hernia. Ooh, what about a nice lava lamp? Huh? That would go GREAT with the ambience of the room!

**JAMIE:** Listen, I'm a reader. I need a bookcase. That's why I bought you.

**SHELF:** Fine, but why am I holding books that you never use?

**JAMIE:** Hey, I have read every single one of these!

**SHELF:** Sure...ONCE. You buy 'em, you read 'em one time, and you file 'em away to rot forever.

**JAMIE:** That's not... I mean, I keep planning to go back and read them again, but then I'll hear about a NEW book that sounds really interesting, or I'll go out and find more from that same writer. Who has time to read the same book again when there's so much stuff out there that I've never even read once?

**SHELF:** Then WHY do you keep all these?

**JAMIE:** In case I do get the chance to read them again someday. Plus, there's nostalgia...memory. These books mean a lot to me. I can remember where I bought each one of them, and what was happening in my life when I read them. They all have sentimental value.

**SHELF:** Yeah, well, your "sentimental value" is KILLING me here! They don't make chiropractors for shelving units, you know! I'm starting to buckle and warp!

**JAMIE:** Hey, I don't have to defend my purchasing habits to you. I OWN you.

**SHELF:** (*Deeply offended.*) Nobody OWNS me! (*Pause.*) Okay, well, yes, technically you do own me, but you could be nicer about it!

**JAMIE:** (*To herself.*) I wish I'd never even gone to that garage sale.

**SHELF:** That's hurtful. That hurt me. I would cry right now, but I don't want a water stain.

**JAMIE:** I must be going insane. This is definitely the strangest conversation I've ever had, and considering my whacked-out family, that's saying something.

**SHELF:** You know, I'm not sure if you're aware of this, but most cities have these big buildings where you can go, borrow books, read them, and then return them, and it's all FREE! (*A mock gasp, as if highly confidential information was just revealed.*) Can you BELIEVE it?

**JAMIE:** You don't say.

**SHELF:** Libraries! Perfect for people who read books one time!

**JAMIE:** I do use the library, smarty-pants. This isn't all the books I've ever read, you know. Not everything I read ends up on your shelves. I only use you for books I actually buy, like a series I love, or my favorite writers. I like having a collection.

**SHELF:** There IS a way to collect books without actually collecting BOOKS, you know. Think Kindle.

**JAMIE:** Kindling? You want me to turn you into kindling? Gladly!

**SHELF:** Was that a threat? No, not kindling, Kindle. Like an e-reader. Then you can store all the books you want on one little device, no shelf space necessary.

**JAMIE:** (*Dismissive.*) Nah, I don't want one of those things.

**SHELF:** Why not? You'd save money, AND space...and trees, which is a cause I support.

**JAMIE:** How would I save money? You have to buy the tablet, but then you STILL have to pay for all the books you want.

**SHELF:** Yes, but the tablet is a one-time purchase, and most digital books are cheaper than printed copies.

**JAMIE:** Look, money's tight right now...I don't have the budget for a Kindle.

**SHELF:** You COULD afford one, if you would just lay off the Cheetos and Nutter Butters. Quit those and you could buy one in a WEEK.

**JAMIE:** Very funny. But I don't even WANT an e-reader. I prefer holding an actual book in my hands. The physical sensation of it, the smell, the crinkling sound of the paper turning...there's an experience there that you don't get with just pixels on a screen. To me, that's all part of the charm and appeal of reading.

**SHELF:** Oh, you're one of THOSE people, huh? (*Imitating JAMIE.*) "Ooh, technology is BAD! Keep your calculator, I'll just stick with my abacus! Hey, what time is it, I left my sun-dial at home!" Psh. And as for smell, if you want odor to be part of the experience, store your Kindle in your laundry hamper at night.

**JAMIE:** Hmm. I wonder if they sell termites at the pet store.

**SHELF:** Don't even joke!

**JAMIE:** Listen, this is how I like to do things, and I have every right to read what I want, WHEN I want, HOW I want. I'm never gonna change, so you'd better just deal with it.

**SHELF:** Well then YOU'LL have to deal with me tormenting you, because I'm not letting this go.

**JAMIE:** Oh, yeah? And how are you going to torment me? You're an inanimate object.

**SHELF:** Huh. Well, I could do something like this.

*Unexpectedly, SHELF suddenly spills all of the books from the shelves onto the floor all at once, making quite a racket. Startled, JAMIE jumps backwards in surprise. [See the beginning of the script for suggestions on how to accomplish the big book spill.]*

**JAMIE:** (*Angry.*) Hey! Not cool!

**SHELF:** And I can take a dump like that whenever I want.

**JAMIE:** (*Picking up a book.*) Ooh, poor phrasing. You went for threatening but just landed on gross.

**SHELF:** Don't bother picking them up. I'll just spill them all again.

**JAMIE:** (*Dropping the book back on the floor.*) Fine. But if you're not going to hold my books, I'm breaking you down for lumber.

**SHELF:** (*Shocked.*) You'd better not! I'm warning you! I have friends, you know!

**JAMIE:** (*Skeptical.*) Friends?



**SHELF:** Yep. All the furniture you own. We're like a family, and they would do anything for me. Here, I'll show ya. (*Yelling to offstage.*) NOW, Armoire! Get him\*! Eat him\*! (\*Or "her" if JAMIE is female.)

**JAMIE:** (*Ducking and cowering in fear.*) Ah, no! I'm sorry, don't eat me! I— (*Realizes something and calms down.*) Wait a minute. I don't even HAVE an armoire.

**SHELF:** Ha! Nope, just messin' witcha. But, I really CAN talk to all of the furniture here, so if you don't straighten up, I'll have them come after you when you're least expecting.

**JAMIE:** Big deal. What do I have, a couple of chairs and a sofa? Is that supposed to scare me?

**SHELF:** No, but THIS might: When you think of chairs, think of STOOLS...and don't forget the one in your bathroom. Do you really want THAT stool to be angry and vengeful when you sit down?

*Pause while JAMIE looks over his or her shoulder offstage, supposedly in the direction of the restroom, considering this before speaking.*

**JAMIE:** (*Suddenly turns very friendly and cooperative.*) So a Kindle sounds GREAT! Where can I buy one around here, anyway?

**SHELF:** (*Satisfied.*) That's better.

*SHELF wears a satisfied, victorious smile. JAMIE'S forced smile unsuccessfully attempts to mask pure terror. Lights out.*

**THE END**

## NOTES

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