

EARWIG PREVIEW

1. INT. LIVINGROOM EVENING

HENRY sits in a comfortable chair, sets a book aside and quietly admires his wife, SYLVIE, who reads, legs folded nicely under her, in a chair across the room. NARRATOR introduces HENRY.

He looks at peace, but he's a man in turmoil. His fear is that, when she looks at him, his wife may only see his failures...
-Incapable of picking up French with alacrity,
-Plays the cello constantly without any noticeable improvement,
-Will never compete in ping-pong on a level that will bring honor to the family name.

2. INT. BREAKFAST ROOM

HENRY is chastised by SYLVIE for neglecting his French Verb studies

3. INT. BEDROOM moves to LIVING ROOM EARLY MORNING

HENRY hears a haunting cello solo in his sleep, awakens, thinks he can play that piece, struggles to hold on to it in his mind, gets up to go into the other room to attempt to play it, and breaks a string

4. INT. GYMNASIUM DAY

HENRY pays a former student/table tennis team champion to teach him some tricks. When he proves himself incapable of learning, the student offers him his money back.

5. EXT. CITY STREET DAY

HENRY gets in a car crash avoiding a big IDIOT on a little bike. Ends in blackout.

NARRATOR:

(over: "The Teddy Bears' Picnic")

Oh, well, things are what they are.

6. INT. LIVINGROOM EARLY MORNING (CLOSING SCENE)

There's beautiful cello music coming from the livingroom. HENRY enters, yawning to discover it is SYLVIE, who has never even touched that instrument before.

(OPENING SCENE)
INT. LIVINGROOM EVENING

HENRY sits in a comfortable chair, sets a book aside on the table next to him and quietly admires his wife, SYLVIE, who reads a book, legs folded nicely under her, in a chair across the room.

Narrator:

Henry secretly harbors three unfulfilled wishes. Most importantly, he'd like someday to surprise Sylvie by reciting her favorite poem in its entirety in flawless, properly nuanced, French. He'd also like to become a worthy cellist, skilled enough to play, at the very least, one of the Bach suites. In his dream that event would take place in front of a crowd of previously doubtful, completely dumfounded, friends. And, for reasons which will explain themselves in time, he'd like very much to beat his father-in-law RESOUNDINGLY at ping pong.. just one glorious time.

And though HENRY looks at peace, he's a man in turmoil. He's haunted by the thought that, when she looks at him, SYLVIE may only see his failures..
-Incapable of picking up French with alacrity,
-Plays the cello constantly without any noticeable improvement,
-Will never compete in ping-pong on a level that will bring honor to the family name. And the chance of making any of these things happen diminishes with each passing day.

So, he's feeling a little sad. What could possibly happen to put these wishes within reach?

Perhaps a hint can be found somewhere in the title...
EARWIG.

(SCENE: FRIDAY MORNING)
INT. BREAKFAST ROOM MORNING

In a sunroom, amid blinding morning light and blooming plants, there is a small round table (I picture it white) set for two. There is a thick French verb book open in the middle of one of the plates... HENRY enters yawning, *not* scratching. (HENRY appear to be reasonably tall, reasonably fit, reasonably attractive, almost 60). We like him immediately. He's one of those guys... He sees the verb book, smiles, sets it aside as he sits to drink juice.

SYLVIE enters carrying fresh-cut flowers. (SYLVIE is younger, and better looking, decidedly French; she has that perpetual French effervescence; she's full of the simple joy of Life. Like the very best examples of her sex, Sylvie is completely unaware of just how truly beautiful she is. Nicer still, she remains unassuming, even timid, as she approaches 50.)

HENRY finds continual delight in SYLVIE: the sound of her voice, the way she looks and moves and speaks, her peculiar, somewhat old-fashioned, demure way of dress. It's not unusual to find HENRY sitting, at a distance, simply admiring his dear wife.

HENRY

You look lovely this morning, Sylvie.

SYLVIE

No I don't, but these flowers certainly look lovely don't they, Henri?

Henry gets up and goes to her, as if drawn. I don't know why I say *as if drawn*, there's no *as if* about it. He's drawn to her.

HENRY

YOU look absolutely beautiful this morning, Sylvie.

He places his hands on her waist.

SYLVIE

Thank you, but I don't.

Henry kisses her on the neck. Sylvie is disappointed to see the French verb book set aside on the table.

SYLVIE

(pouting)

Oh, Henri, why do you cast this book aside so disdainfully?

HENRY

(sheepishly)

I didn't cast it aside disdainfully. I merely set it down while I eat, so as not to get any, uh. . .

SYLVIE

(still pouting)

But, you hardly give it a glance any more.

HENRY

Nonsense, that book is practically worn out from my relentless glancing. I'm surprised there's any print left on the pages. Believe me, every thing that's in that book has passed through these eyes many times, and is—well, should be—stored in here somewhere.

He taps the old noggin.

HENRY (cont.)

(sadly, to himself)

It just doesn't come out readily. I don't know what it will take to set it free.

SYLVIE

(encouragingly)

But, you must speak French to learn French, Mon Ange.

HENRY

There's nothing I want less than to have you disappointed in me, Sylvie. But, the idea of a grown man walking around prattling like a five year old is repulsive to me, and especially if that grown man is me.

SYLVIE

You don't know how many husbands wish they had their own private French teacher.

She places her arms around his neck in a disappointed but forgiving manner.

HENRY

Oh, yes I do. But, I also think there is a window of opportunity when it comes to learning a foreign language, and that window, for me, has been long closed.

SYLVIE

What will it take to open it again, Mon Ange?

HENRY

I don't think it *can* be opened.

(SCENE: HAUNTING CELLO PIECE)

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INT. BEDROOM moves to LIVING ROOM, EARLY MORNING

(**music:** The Secret, by Adam Hurst)

It's still dark out. In the bedroom, all is as it should be; the quiet ticking of the old clock, the open window, the chill, the cat snuggled up against Sylvie's legs, the dog curled up at the foot of the bed. Sylvie is sleeping like an angel. Henry is on his back, snoring softly.

We now find our way into Henry's mind where a cello plays. It comes up slowly underneath his snoring. It's simple music. But it's deep. Above all, it is beautiful. He's smiling. The volume increases, and in the dim light Henry looks angelic. Well, pale anyway. He rubs his ear.

He opens his eyes, but is careful not to move. He continues listening to the music. He recognizes the beauty of what he is hearing. He thinks he can play it. He explores that possibility for a moment. He starts to get up, but cautiously. He sits on the edge of the bed listening, trying to hold on to the music in his head. The music fades as Sylvie stirs.

SYLVIE

Where are you going, Mon Ange?

HENRY

Uh, I just need to... I need to try something out on the cello... before it... disappears on me.

He gets up and, straining to retain the music in his mind, he runs barefoot into the library and, stopping to hear the music again, he grabs his cello. He sits, he calms himself, he cocks an ear.

The music, though fragmented somewhat, rises again. He has the first note. He hums the first phrase. He puts a bow to his cello and begins to play the first phrase. The D string breaks.

Henry's face is grotesque. He looks like the mask of TRAGEDY. He holds the limp end of the broken string in his hand. He tries, but he can no longer hold onto the music. It fades out quickly. Now, there's only silence. Dejectedly Henry returns to bed. He looks at the clock, calculating how much longer until the violin shop opens.

(SCENE: PING PONG LESSON)
INT. GYMNASIUM DAY

Henry stands outside the college gymnasium, watching two students playing startingly impressive ping pong. The players each stand at least eight feet beyond their end of the table and return the ball with amazing velocity. The ball swoops and curves and dives and spins with each swat. When the final point is taken, the players meet and, while drying their faces with towels, shake hands and begin to walk away in opposite directions.

Henry steps through the doors and says Hi to one of the players.

HENRY

Didn't you take my class, Visual Perception's Vital Role in the Evolution of the Static Arts?

PING PONG CHAMP

Yes, Prof. I did. Please don't tell me now you discovered I cheated on my final paper.

HENRY

You cheated on your final paper?

PING PONG CHAMP

Yeah, I didn't have the time, so I asked my 10 year old step-brother to write it for me.

HENRY

Really? How did he do?

The student fakes a good-natured punch at Henry.

PING PONG CHAMP

Got a B+.

HENRY

Really?

PING PONG CHAMP

Nah...

HENRY

Well... Anyway. I was watching you play ping pong just now and... you know, I didn't even know we had a ping pong team...

PING PONG CHAMP

Table Tennis, Prof.

HENRY

I didn't even know we had a table tennis team here.

PING PONG CHAMP

Well, then you probably didn't KNOW we're Regional Champs three years running, and second in the State last year.

HENRY

"No, I didn't know that, but I'm really pleased to hear it. You look pretty good out there."

PING PONG CHAMP

MVP, Regionals. Silver medal, State Championships.

HENRY

Wow, that's great.

They look at each other for a while. The student has his eyebrows raised in question, but Henry doesn't see it. He's looking at the floor, thinking.

HENRY (cont.)

So, you know, since I taught you something—I did, I mean I DID teach you something, didn't I?"

PING PONG CHAMP

Sure you did, Prof. Figure-ground equivocation, warm to cool shifts... all very handy in the world in which I live.

HENRY

I thought then that maybe you could teach me something... you know... about table tennis.

PING PONG CHAMP

Sure, but, you know, Prof. it cost me money to have you teach me the stuff you know.

HENRY

Oh. Of course I'm willing to pay for your expertise.

Henry takes a couple crisp bills from his wallet, hands them to the student.

PING PONG CHAMP

It cost me A LOT of money. A good education ain't cheap.

Henry extracts another bill and the kid hands him a paddle.

PING PONG CHAMP

Why the interest in table tennis?

HENRY

It's hard to explain. There's an old guy who I play ping-pong with once in a while and he always beats me.

PING PONG CHAMP

You mean table tennis..?

HENRY

Table tennis.

PING PONG CHAMP

Have a seat and let's talk about this first.

They sit on a wooden bench in silence. The student is nodding his head while he thinks things through. Henry has hope written all over his face as the kid thinks.

PING PONG CHAMP

I know what you mean about that old guy though. I had some old guy who used to beat me all the time too. So I sympathize. Man, I could not wear him down, and he was almost 30.

HENRY

Almost 30, huh?

PING PONG CHAMP

Yeah, but he could still really move. I finally beat him after I mastered the Ling Assault.

HENRY

The Ling Assault?

PING PONG CHAMP

Yeah. A serve so bewildering that your opponent can not reply. They can-not beat you if they cannot reply to your serve. Ok, Prof., let's see what you can do.

Several minutes later, Henry is bent over the table from exhaustion. The kid's laughing uncontrollably. He's laughing so hard he can't breathe. Henry stands defeated, arms hanging limp at his side while the last ping pong ball rolls off the table and falls to the floor. He looks down at all the ping-pong balls scattered around on his side of the table. When the kid finally regains his breath, he tosses his paddle on the table.

PING PONG CHAMP

I don't think I can help you, Prof. Here, let me give you your money back.

He reaches into his back pocket.

(SCENE CAR CRASH)
EXT. EVENING ON THE STREET

Henry is behind the wheel, downtown, in heavy traffic. As he starts through an intersection the car in front of him stops. Then, as the light turns red, the car turns, leaving Henry in the middle of the intersection with cars threatening to broadside him from both sides, horns blaring.

Henry speeds out of the intersection and is on his way when the inside of his car begins to pulse with a peculiar light, first reddish, then bluish, then reddish again. Behind him, as he can see in his rearview mirror, a motorcycle cop bumps his siren a couple of times. As he begins to pull over into a bus stop, he detects movement out of the corner of his eye.

It's a kid on a bicycle (the kid is maybe 30 years old, riding a bicycle more suited to a 10 year old). Henry slams on the brakes. The kid slaps the trunk of his car, shouts and *gives him the finger*.

Henry shakes his head with a mix of admiration and disapproval as he watches this kid weave between cars. Then, he is suddenly thrown violently against the door of the car. There is a horn, the sound of crushing metal and shattering glass. Airbags go off and Henry is engulfed first in whiteness, then in blackness, then in whiteness again.

There's the sound of distant mumbled conversation. There's a humming sound. There's a steady beeping.

Narrator

A well, things are what they are.
(over: "The Teddy Bears' Picnic")
But things might change.

(CLOSING SCENE)

INT. LIVINGROOM EARLY MORNING

Sylvie is sitting with the cello in her hands when Henry emerges from the bedroom stretching and yawning. She's focused, tightening the bow. When she sees him, she's clearly embarrassed.

HENRY

(teasingly)

Sylvie?

SYLVIE

I just thought I'd try it... since you won't be playing for a while. I'm so used to having the sound of it in our lives.

Henry sits. He smiles. He gives her the go ahead in broad regal gestures.

SYLVIE

(apologetically)

I've watched you do this so many times... You always make it look so natural...

HENRY

Maybe now would be a good time for me to teach you. Let's see what you can do.

She places the bow gently; she carefully places each finger on the fretboard. It's clearly the first time she's done any of this. Henry smiles with admiration and encouragement.

In the morning light Sylvie looks like an angel. She cocks her head as if hearing something. She listens. She nods, she leans in.

Then she plays "SMILE" [C. Chaplin] so deeply, so slowly, so lovingly, so beautifully. It's mesmerizing. Henry collapses into a big chair, closes his eyes, delighted, somewhat bewildered, awash in love for his very darling wife.

Unconsciously he rubs his ear.

THE END