

The Spider's Web

“Here it is, Mom! Look what I made for the project.” William tugged his mother's arm as they reached the display wall near his classroom. He pointed to his spider nestled in a yarn web.

“Hmm?” his mother replied, still checking her texts.

“Look! And you can touch it too.”

Mrs. Temple glanced at her son then back at her iPhone. “Just a minute.”

“Mo-o-om.” William stretched the word, exasperated. She looked up.

“Oh. A black bottle. How nice, William. What's it for?”

“It's not *for* anything. Except that it's Charlotte. See her legs? I made them from pipe cleaners.”

“Charlotte who?” Her phone pinged. William sighed. His mother was always busy doing something besides paying attention to him. But tonight was supposed to be a special treat. For a change, she was the one bringing him to the Open House. His dad had a meeting tonight or he'd be studying the spider right now, telling William how great it was.

“From *Charlottes' Web*. Don't you know anything?”

“I know a great deal, young man. Especially that *Charlotte's Web* is not a suitable book for a child your age. How do you know about it?”

At least now William had his mother's full attention. "We read it in our class, a few chapters a day."

"You read it? The whole book? Without my permission?" Mrs. Temple grabbed William's hand and jerked him into his classroom. She bustled up to the instructor, who was conversing with another parent.

"What a wonderful idea" this parent was saying. "I've always loved *Charlotte's Web* and now Molly does too." Mrs. Temple stiffened and grew very straight. William, his hand still gripped by his mother, felt his body stretched to keep up with her tension.

"Well, I don't think it's a lovely idea!" The two women jumped.

"Hello, Mrs. Temple. I'm glad to see you here with William. I guess he showed you our project?" The other parent crept away.

"I did and I'm not happy. The job of raising a child is very difficult without teachers deciding to use banned books in their curriculum."

"Banned? I've never heard that about *Charlotte's Web*."

"By the Kansas City Schools in 2006. Talking animals are blasphemy. And William is too young to read about death."

"No, I'm not, Mom. Charlotte had to die because she was a spider. Besides, she had 514 children to keep Wilbur company. And I didn't *read* it, Miss Doran read *to* us."

His mother did not hear him. She released his hand to better access Safari. "I'll show you the website. It's on *common sense media*." Miss Doran arched her eyebrows in that funny way she got when impatient. Mrs. Temple tapped and scrolled. William looked around the room. On the white board were the words they had learned:

Salutations
Untenable
Sedentary
Gullible

Versatile
Humble
Magnum opus
Languish

William liked the words *Magnum opus* best because his lips made an 'O' when he said them. So far, his greatest art was making the spider from a bottle. Not as good as an egg sac, but okay for now.

"Here it is." His mother read aloud. "Children typically do not understand the permanency of death until they are around 8-10 years old, the majority not understanding this until 10. *Charlotte's Web* is *not* a cute child's story..."

"But William is already eight. His test scores tell us he is very bright. And, we have a signed permission that he could hear this story." Miss Williams walked to a file cabinet and pulled out a drawer.

"That is a mistake on your part. I did not receive any email about this permission."

"This is on paper which we prefer rather than an email signature so there isn't any confusion." Miss Williams handed Mrs. Temple the paper. "Your husband signed it."

“William! Did you know about this?” His mother waved the paper in front of her child.

She looked red in the face. It would have been so much better if his father had been able to come tonight. His mother objected to stuff that wasn't important.

“Yeh. We were playing ‘backpack unstuffing.’ We have to do that every week because I forget about things and they get pushed to the bottom of my backpack. It's kind of fun. So we found it and he signed it for me.”

“Wait until I—“ his mother's phone rang. “Yes? Oh, of course.” Her voice mellowed. “I'd be glad to do that. Just give me a few minutes to close up what I'm doing now.” She pressed the red phone icon. “We have to go, William.”

Without another word to Miss Doran, she turned and left the room. William shrugged at his teacher. As he walked by the wall, he lingered at the network of threads.

“We made the web out of yarn. But we didn't have time yet to make the letters for ‘Some Pig.’ It was the most fun I've ever had.”

“What? C'mon, William. I'm in a hurry. I have a deadline to meet.” He followed her down the steps, out the door and into the car. As they drove off, he looked up to the second floor window and waved at Miss Doran. His mother answered a call on her bluetooth.

