

I Hate Public Speaking

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Publisher

ScribeSlice 2012

Public speaking has to be one of the worst things I will ever have to do in my life. It is the bane of my very existence! I would rather a slow, painful death over having to make the speech I'm about to make. Well, okay, I wouldn't go that far; maybe a quick death, like a bullet to the brain. Yes, surely that could be more tolerable than standing in front of all those people and making a fool of myself.

I know what's going to happen when I go out there: I'll get up onto the stage – blushing red as a tomato – approach the podium, lay out my notes and look at the audience... and I'll forget my own name, let alone what I'm supposed to be talking about. It happens every time – I stutter and stammer and trip over my words, making myself sound unintelligible. Then I feel so embarrassed by the end of my speech, that I hurry off the stage and trip over my own feet!

Why, oh, why did my horrid fellow students have to elect me to the Student Council? They probably voted for me because no one else wanted to do it, and I was only too happy to volunteer, once again. You'd think I would have learnt my lesson by now; but no, I dove right off that cliff and into the churning waters of indignity! So who's the bigger fool? The fool who elects the fool, or the fool who accepts the position? Now I know how the politicians feel.

Mostly, it's the anticipation that gets to me. I sit back here, waiting for my turn to go up and speak, butterflies slowly eating away at the lining of my stomach. The anticipation only makes me more nervous. If all I had to do was go up there straight away and speak, it probably wouldn't be so bad. Oh, who am I kidding? It would be just as bad, if not worse, the moment I laid my eyes on that audience.

My friend once told me, that if I feel that nervous, I should just imagine them all naked. I thought this a bit of an odd piece of advice, but she said it worked for her and I trusted her judgement. So, the next speech I had to make, I got up on the stage and took a moment to look at my audience. Needless to say, it didn't go well, as most of my teachers were in the audience that day. As you can imagine, picturing them naked only made me feel even more self-conscious. Especially my good-looking, male Phys. Ed. teacher, who I very deliberately did not make eye-contact with the entire time I was on-stage.

Oh, of course the person before me has the audience in fits of laughter! That will only make my presentation seem that much more dull. Whoever is out there probably has a natural gift for public speaking, though I couldn't imagine how such a thing is possible. It must be one of the better-looking male members of the Student Council. Blonde and tanned, with bewitching blue eyes; dazzling the audience with his obvious charm and quick wit. Blazer, with not a thread out of place, shirt bleached, tie perfectly straight, pants pressed, shoes shined and laces tied. Perfect hair, perfect teeth, perfect smile, perfect skin – not a zit or freckle to be seen.

Oh, God, they're wrapping up their speech. You can always tell by the sound of their voice. It'll be my turn next; my turn to walk up on the stage, the audience still buzzing from the previous speech, and begin the humiliating process once again.

Oh, no, here they come. Here they come to pass me the baton of misery. Oh, God, it's worse than I suspected! None other than the President of the Student Council – blonde and tanned, and all that! He smiles at me as he passes; "Good luck" he says. Luck can't save me now. Onto the stage I go, to meet my fate. I can see the audience now, lurking in my peripheral vision – I dare not meet their gazes. I will not meet their eyes until I reach the podium, when I'm required to look up. I'm here now, I lay down my notes, I clear my throat, I face the audience... Oh, God.

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