

Awfully Funny, For an Introvert

By Jennifer Page

With the click of the keyboard and the skim of the touchpad, letters were summoned and deleted and the cursor glided across the bright screen as I made the finishing touches to my work. The afternoon light coming through my window was scarce, so the screen was the brightest source of light in my room. I usually preferred it this way, though.

My eyes slowly scanned through the script for... I'd say the hundredth time. I glanced at the title, *Ab... This is The High School Life!* And my lip twitched in amusement. I continued to search for any errors:

...I was afraid of hard tests, no retakes on those hard tests, teachers that could actually murder you and get away with it, the... Terrifying seniors. Whoo. Now those give me nightmares.

'*This is actually kinda funny,*' I thought to myself as I proudly read it. I paused and thought for a bit about how I would actually have to perform this for class, but I shook my head. Now wasn't the time. I stood from my chair and picked up my Chromebook, deciding to share my speech with my mom.

I left my room and went through a hall, where my mom sat watching TV. I held out the Chromebook to her.

"Can you read this over for me?" I asked.

"Oh, sure!" She took the computer from me. "Is this for English class?"

"Yeah, the satirical speech."

She nodded and looked over at the screen. "...Now, I remember a couple years ago-"

"Don't read it out loud!"

She laughed. "Okay, fine," she resumed, silently now. Every once in a while, she would smile or chuckle as she went along. Finally, she handed it back to me.

"It's great!" she claimed. "You have to do this in front of the class?"

“Yeah...” I frowned and hesitated. “I was thinking...I could actually go hard on this... When I present it...”

My mom could notice my apprehension. “You should.”

“Yeah, but, what if it sucks? Like, what if no one laughs and I look like an idiot?” A horrible thought came to mind. “What if everyone laughs *at* me?”

“No one’s going to laugh at you. You’re a funny girl, you know that.”

“But no one else does,” I muttered.

“Well, now is the time to show them that.” She thought for a moment and smiled. “You know, if you go for comedic pauses at *just* the right moments, you could make this so much better!”

I laughed. “Yeah. I’ll try that.” I returned back to my room.

“You’ll do great!” My mom called out as I closed the door. I sat back down at my desk with my Chromebook and put in the last edit before finishing for the day. My mind pondered once again about presentation day, but I quickly stopped myself.

‘*Stop stressing,*’ I thought. ‘*Presentations are in a week.*’ I knew that deep down I wanted to do this, and I have so much time to think about it until then. But today is not the day.

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Welp, today is the day. School went by with nothing but dread for the presentations to come. Time continued marching on, despite my wishes, and soon I was sitting in English class, awaiting my demise.

The lights were almost blinding as I waited, sitting somewhere near the middle of the rows and columns of chairs. The front of the room had an open space where everyone was performing their satirical speeches, the teacher sitting in the corner as she observed.

I stared out at the current speaker, their voice... Not that interesting, actually, then looked down at my table. My breath slightly shuddered as I could feel wetness on my desk; sweat from my palms.

“...*You really think you can just try? Now?*” I heard a voice ask. It was a familiar voice, one that I’d been hearing for a week, now. My doubtful self. “*Why do you want to do this? What is this going to accomplish?*”

'Why not?' I paused. 'I want to go for it. The speech is funny.'

"But are you?" I thought back to my mom reading my speech.

'Yeah.'

"I kind of doubt it."

A slow breath escaped from me. The only sounds I could focus on now were my hammering heart and my inner bickering. Even the voices of the speakers were being washed away into background fodder.

"You're going to look like an idiot."

My vision became a bit blurry and I could have sworn I was about to pass out as my skull swam with lightheadedness. I dipped my head and harshly blinked, but it did nothing to stop the vertigo.

I heard another wave of clapping and lifted my head to join in when I noticed that the girl who had just gone was the speaker right before me. My thoughts cut off and I froze.

'...Oh, crap.'

"Shoot."

"Alright..." the teacher called for me. I had never hated a name so much until now.

I hesitated the slightest amount before standing up from my desk and stepping to the front.

"Look, do you really wanna do this?" I begged myself. "You'll do fine if you just phone it in, get it over with."

I disregarded the thoughts as I arrived at the front of the class. I could feel my legs softly shake and hoped that no one else noticed as I turned to face the students. My entire mind went completely blank, I knew I couldn't stop myself from what I was going to do.

Time seemed to slow down as I scanned the classroom. There was the smallest moment of peace as I forced myself to calm down. Everything went silent and still, almost tranquil.

I took in a small breath, and it was like I *popped* into a completely different character as I began my speech, thinking about nothing but my next line and the specific delivery I had in mind for it. Gestures, pauses, inflections. My voice was a little weak at the beginning, but once I heard laughter in response to my first joke, I slowly gained confidence and raised my voice.

“...By the way, that girl *did* look kind of fat in that shirt, not gonna lie.” There was an *uproar* of hysterics. I had to raise my hands to calm everyone down. “I mean, I didn’t *tell* her! That’s just... what I thought!”

The rest of the speech was spent joyously. I glanced over at the class clown and noticed him covering his mouth with a fist, fighting back laughter. At that moment, I felt true power.

The room boomed with applause and laughter as I finished. I sheepishly smiled and exhaled, like a weight had been lifted off my chest. My legs shook less as I headed back to my seat. Miscellaneous students called out to me.

“That was awesome!”

“You were so good!”

“Thank you... Thank you..!” I squeaked, dipping my head at all the compliments. The performances resumed as normal.

After all the speeches for the day were finished, the teacher called out people’s names to give them their scores. Classmates continued complimenting my performance before my name was called to the front.

The teacher smiled as I approached her. “That was great!” she exclaimed. “You’re comedic timing was perfect!”

“Thank you,” I said, taking my rubric. Of course, I got a 4.

“You know...” The teacher began. “I think you would do really well on the speech team! You should give it a try.”

I paused for a moment.

“...Yeah. I’ll think about it,” I replied, before heading back to my seat.

“*Are you really going to do speech?*” I hesitated...

‘...*Why not?*’

“*Oh, God.*” I slowly nodded my head in contemplation. I mean... I guess I might as well.

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The lights were bright in this unfamiliar room in this foreign school. The round was already starting, the current speaker performing their speech.

I looked down at my script and quickly read through it for... I'd say the *millionth* time. I smiled.

"I don't know why you do this to yourself."

'Me neither,' I replied. *'But it's worth a shot, right?'* My head went silent as I watched the speech, heart hammering and palms sweating. I clapped once it was over and realized it was now my turn.

The judge called out my name. I stood up and made it to the front of the room, armed with my script.

I turned to the small crowd and took in a breath, legs shaking as I did so. I quickly calmed myself and scanned the room, my mind focused on nothing but what I was about to do.

And with that, I *popped* into a new character to start the show.