DEATH BY PUBLIC SPEAKING
By Linda Cooke

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DEATH BY PUBLIC SPEAKING

A Ten Minute Comedy Skit-Play

By Linda Cooke

SYNOPSIS: Kaley’s overdose has landed her in the emergency room. Now her parents have staged an intervention and are sending her off to a rehabilitation clinic for public speaking addicts! In a hilarious ten minute infomercial, the clinic directors present the causes, symptoms and hopefully the cure for oratorical addiction.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(3 female, 1-2 male, 2-4 either, 0-10 extras; gender flexible, doubling possible)

NARRATOR (m/f) ......................... Infomercial host extraordinaire (11 lines)
DR. AUDIE TOREY (f) ................. Psychiatrist and infomercial co-host (27 lines)
DR. MIKE RAFOANE (m) ............ Psychiatrist and infomercial co-host (7 lines)
EMT (m/f) ....................................... Intense, no-nonsense saver of lives (3 lines)
DAD (m) ......................................... Well-meaning but blundering father (11 lines)
MOM (f) ......................................... Well-meaning but blundering mother (14 lines)
KALEY (f) ...................................... High school speech competitor (14 lines)
SPEECH COACH (m/f) ............... Well-meaning but blundering coach (8 lines)
PUSHER (m/f) ............................. Sly type, getting kids hooked on prose (5 lines)

*The parts of Dr. RaFoane and Dad may be doubled, as can those of Dr. Torey and the EMT, the coach and the pusher. Extras are possible for the hospital scene and the scene between Kaley and the pusher. The opening narration can be split up among characters as the director chooses.
MINIMAL SETS SUGGESTIONS

- Psychiatrist’s office with desk & chair, 2 visitors chairs
- Hospital Emergency Room with patient gurney
- High school exterior with bench

PROPS

- Script – Pusher
- Purse – Mom and Coach (if female)
- Satchel or briefcase – Coach
- Backpack, textbook or notebook – Kaley

COSTUME SUGGESTIONS

NARRATOR – Business attire: jacket and tie for a male.

DOCTORS – Lab coat over professional dress or over scrubs, possibly a stethoscope around the neck.

EMT – Standard professional uniform, jacket and cap.

DAD – Middle-aged outfit, long-sleeved polo shirt, cardigan, polyester pants, loafers, overcoat.

MOM – Middle-aged outfit, a bit frumpy, velour jog set, trench coat.

KALEY – Business attire when coming from a speech meet, then regular teenager school clothes, such as jeans and t-shirt; backpack for scene with Pusher.

COACH – Semi-professional dress, trench coat.

PUSHER – Gangsta style outfit.
AT RISE: Lights up on NARRATOR, center stage. The opening narration can take place in front of the curtain if desired.

NARRATOR: We’ve all heard the survey results: When asked what their greatest fear is, the number one answer is always public speaking. Death comes in somewhere around number three. Are we to conclude then, that most of us would rather die than speak in public? Isn’t that a little backwards? Many a speech teacher has been heard to assure a new class, “I’ve haven’t lost a student yet.” But why take that chance? What if people are well-founded in this phobia of speaking in public? What if it really could be lethal? Picture a murder mystery in which the weapon of choice is a script for serious prose. Imagine a WWII movie in which the Allies defeat the Axis powers by talking them into submission. Imagine becoming addicted to public speaking…

ALL: (Except NARRATOR, from off-stage.) Who? Us?

NARRATOR: …and lethally overdosing on it. And now imagine an infomercial promoting a treatment center for such addicts, and imagine you're listening to it right now.

Lights up on TOREY and RAFOANE in a doctor’s office. They may be seated on or behind an office desk, upstage right.

TOREY: Good evening. I’m Dr. Audie Torey, your host for this evening’s program along with my colleague Dr. Mike RaFoane, director of the Public Speaking Youth Center of Holmesville, Ohio, also known as the P.S.Y.C.H.O., or ‘Psycho.’

RAFOANE: Throughout tonight’s program, you’ll see our 800 number at the bottom of your screen. I urge you to call if a public speaking addiction has affected you or a loved one or a stranger whose life you’d like to butt into.

TOREY: Here at PSYCHO, we wage a daily battle against the mysterious phenomenon of death by public speaking, or DPS. In the most common form of DPS, the victim becomes addicted to public speaking, and then overdoses on it. Sadly, it is often the very young who fall victim to DPS, and the following scene is played out far too often in emergency rooms across the country.
Lights down on doctor’s office, lights up stage left, a hospital emergency room. EMT rushing in from stage right with KALEY on gurney. COACH follows.

EMT: Make way! Coming through! Doc, you better take a look at this one right away.
TOREY: (Brusquely.) What are her symptoms?
EMT: Heart palpitations, cold sweat, rapid pulse.
KALEY: (Muttering, barely conscious.) What should be the United Nations’ role in middle eastern...
TOREY: (Examines her, shocked.) How did this happen?
COACH: (Stammering.) Well, you see, we were...we were just at this...this...
TOREY: Out with it, woman!
COACH: (Blurtling out.) We were at a speech meet!
TOREY: (Shocked.) Was she competing?
COACH: Well, yes. You see, she wanted...
TOREY: You’re her coach?
COACH: ...yes. (She looks at the floor.)
KALEY: (Still muttering.)...U.S. News and World Reports states that...
TOREY: (Impatiently.) What event was it?

COACH hesitates to answer.

Answer me! What event was she in?
COACH: (Nearly screaming.) Extemporaneous! All right? It was extemporaneous.
TOREY: (Shakes his head.) Can’t you see she’s just a kid?
KALEY: (Muttering.)...according to www.research.com, last updated...
COACH: I know, I know! (Near tears.) She said she could handle it. She said she wanted to try it, just this one time. I didn’t think-
TOREY: I’ll say you didn’t! Do the parents know?
COACH: I called them from the meet. They’re on their way.

The PARENTS rush in from stage right.
MOM: Where’s our baby girl? Where is she?
KALEY: (In a weak voice, her eyes search them out.) Mom? Dad?
DAD: (Rushing to her side.) We’re here, baby. We’re right here.
   Everything’s going to be all right.

PARENTS turn to the DOCTOR and speak in hushed tones.

MOM: What’s wrong with her? We’ve never seen her like this!
TOREY: (Sighs.) Man, I hate telling parents this, but I’ve found the
   best approach is to just come straight out with it.
DAD: Doctor, please tell us!
TOREY: Folks, I’m sorry to inform you that your daughter has been
dabbling in...in...public speaking!
MOM: What? No! Not our little girl!
TOREY: I’m afraid it’s true.

EMT wheels KALEY off, stage left. COACH follows, avoiding eye
contact with PARENTS.

DAD: (To TORREY.) How did she get like this?
TOREY: You see, sometimes the intense mental stimulation of public
speaking creates an overload on the brain.
MOM: (Turning on DAD.) This is your fault! I told you we should
   have let her go out for cheerleading! (Turning to DOCTOR.) Oh,
doctor, how could this have happened to us?

TOREY, MOM & DAD freeze. NARRATOR enters, downstage left.

NARRATOR: How do kids get involved in this seamy underworld in
the first place? Sadly, scenes like this one are all too common in
American high schools today.

Lights up on high school exterior, center stage. KALEY is seated on
a bench, studying. PUSHER enters, upstage right, casting furtive
glances to see if the coast is clear before sneaking up behind KALEY

PUSHER: Hey kid, I got a primo script for humorous prose over here.
   Have a look.
KALEY: (Nervously.) Humorous prose? Gee, I don’t know...

PUSHER: Just take a little peek. (He reveals a tiny corner of the script hidden under his jacket.) Precisely timed satire and clever puns can be a real rush. You’re not a chicken, are you?

KALEY: Well, no...I just...well, okay.

She reaches for the script. KALEY and PUSHER freeze. Lights up on NARRATOR.

NARRATOR: And the siren song of competitive forensics claims yet another innocent victim. Imagine what would happen if that same student had been taught to just say no!

PUSHER: Hey kid, I got a primo script for humorous prose over here. Have a look.

KALEY: No way! That stuff’s addictive!

PUSHER: You won’t get hooked from just one little peek. Give it a try.

KALEY: Stay away from me, you! I’m going home to watch re-runs of “The Brady Bunch!”

She starts to leave, then PUSHER and KALEY freeze. Lights up on NARRATOR.

NARRATOR: If only Kiley’s …

KALEY: (Unfreezing.) It’s Kaley, actually. (She exits.)

NARRATOR: If only Kaley’s family had known what to do ahead of time, they wouldn’t be going through this right now. It happens to kids from even the best of homes - in fact, usually the best of homes. Dr. Torey explains the evolution of public speaking addiction.