

DON'T MAKE ME LAUGH

by Alan Haehnel

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DON'T MAKE ME LAUGH*A Comedic Monologue***by Alan Haehnel**

SYNOPSIS: Gail's greatest fear has been realized: Out of the four members of her group who have worked on a science project, the teacher has chosen her to make the presentation in front of the whole class. As she trudges to the front of the room, Gail thinks back to four years before, the last time she made a public presentation. It was a disaster. Her nervousness turned to uncontrollable laughter. The same thing happens this time around, but, instead of ending up ostracized by her group and failing the presentation, Gail wins—by making the entire rest of the class collapse in hysterical laughter!

TIME: Present day.

SETTING: A classroom.

CAST OF CHARACTERS*(1 female)*

GAIL (f)..... A teenager terrified of public speaking.

PROPS: None.

COSTUMING: Everyday school clothes.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES: If I were directing this piece, I would start right off the bat with the section where Gail is trying to get the words of her presentation out but keeps interrupting herself with various styles of laughter: belly-laugh, snorts, guffaws, etc. I would start there because it will most likely take a long time to develop and make consistent. It's deceptively hard to create convincing, motivated laughter, not to mention the variety of laugh styles that portion calls for. And the words must be understandable when Gail does get them out. And the section has to be painful for Gail as well. There is a lot going on there, and it will probably take a lot of exploration.

GAIL: Not good. I'm here. I don't want to be here. Understatement of the year, the decade, the millennium. I have successfully avoided being here, or in situations similar to this one, for the past four years. Strategic sick days, extensions, visits to the nurse's office, appointments, even near-tears pleadings have kept me free ever since that awful day back in 6th grade when I had to deliver a persuasive speech about the cafeteria's menu—not my topic, mind you, just the random one assigned to me.

I couldn't give one flying turd about the cafeteria's menu. They could have served up deep-fried hyena with a side of rat guts for all I cared, but that was my assignment, and I had it done, and I went ahead and got up in front of the class when my name was called, and...

It's been four years since that day in English class, four years of ducking and weaving every public-speaking-type assignment that's come my way. I've become an evasion expert, the CIA agent of not speaking in front of the class. "Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to evade giving oral presentations at all costs!" And I've chosen to accept that mission. And I've been successful all this time... until today.

All avenues have been cut off. No sick day: Mom's out of town on business and Dad's reply to my fake cough was to not even pause as he raised his cup of coffee and kept his eyes on his computer screen: "Suck it up, Buttercup. We're outta here in fifteen." No nurse's office: The new lady down there won't keep you out of class unless you have an amputation of a major limb. No desperate pleas: If I try begging to Mr. Gunderman, the rest of my group will skin me alive (And the nurse will hand me a couple Band Aids and tell me to suck it up, Buttercup).

I have one hope and one hope only: Mr. Gunderman's sadistic policy is to have just one of the four members of each group present the project, but he won't tell you which one until the day it's due. So. Either my luck holds and I one day go down in history as the greatest humiliation avoider in the history of the school, or...

I die. Mr. Gunderman just said my name. My other group members are looking at me. Michael hands me the poster. Still I sit. "Come on," Dalene hisses at me. "We all need this grade."

Mr. Gunderman says, "Gail, you're up."

I could puke. I've heard of people who can puke on command, but that would be just as bad as what happened to me four years ago when I got up to talk about why the cafeteria needed to buy more local lettuce or hyena or whatever the heck I was supposed to say. "Go!" Dalene practically spits.

I stand. I walk between the desks. I have that dolly zoom sensation they do in the movies, you know? I'm walking, but the room seems to be stretching out, the chalkboard getting farther and farther away while my doom is getting closer and closer with every step. Finally, I'm up there.

I do know what to say. I do have the poster, most of which I made myself. I'm not stupid. I understand the process of osmosis. I've got the facts about pressure differentials and 1854 and Thomas Graham and how reverse osmosis can help purify water—I know the stuff! Theoretically, I could explain it. I *have* explained it to the rest of my group when they insisted we each practice. I did it, knowing full well that when the time came, I'd find some way to make sure I didn't have to do it in front of the whole class because that was just not something I did; that was just not on the menu for my life.

But here I am. I tape the poster to the white board. I face it for several seconds, staring deeply into the second "o" of osmosis, thinking now would be a good time for it to magically transform into a tunnel leading me out of the school. That sort of thing happens in dire moments to CIA agents. But the second "o" of osmosis stubbornly stays nothing more than the second "o" of osmosis, and the eyes of Mr. Gunderman and the approximately 12 billion other people in the room are burning holes in my back, so I turn around and open my mouth and hope to heaven that what happened four

years ago when I opened my mouth to give my speech on the healthful effects of rat guts does not happen again.

I giggle. Please, no. I swallow it. As I look at Mr. Gunderman and the 37 billion other people in the room all staring at me, I feel the pressure building in my throat, my jaw, behind the whole mask of my face and I know, one second before it happens again, that all my years of avoidance have done nothing to help me overcome the issue. I'm four years older, but not four years wiser, not four years more in control. Either I run for the door right now or I just open my mouth and let the pain come rolling out...in uncontrollable laughter.

No matter that this is the least funny moment in my life, that I couldn't make a joke out of osmosis if I were tortured by the razor-sharp claws of a hundred starving hyenas. Laughter is what my body has chosen to do to me.

During the following paragraph, as GAIL tries to present the information for her report, she keeps laughing, everything from giggles to guffaws to snorts. The ellipses indicate places where she interrupts herself.

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