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Butterflies

Caroline Dillard

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BUTTERFLIES

Caroline Dillard

Knees together. Papers on top of them. Back straight. Butterflies. Waiting.

Four more.

Focus. Applaud.

Three.

Check pages. Everything is there. Speaker's earrings distract from words. Oh well. Applaud.

Two more.

Jeez this one is boring. Not nice, don't think that. Is that a spider on his shirt? Nevermind, lint.

Cross legs. Uncross legs. Applaud.

Last one.

Then me.

Butterflies won't be still. Check papers for the eighteenth time. Everything is still there. Breathe.

Quietly clear throat. You got this. Applaud.

"Next speaker!"

You don't got this.

Somehow rise, walk up the three steps, stand at podium. Slide Page 1 to the left, stack on right.

Clasp hands, look up, see them. A sea. A sea of foreheads and collared shirts scattered with yawns. And the eye. The black eye of the video camera. The teacher adjusts its height. Heart pounds. The teacher picks up grading paper and pen. Leg trembles. Breathe. Fake confident smile to crowd. Butterflies are attempting to form a tornado. Glance at first line. Back up.

Memorized. Don't look. The teacher takes last glance at laptop screen, makes sure camera is rolling. His eyes move up and his finger points. The dreaded finger. The cue to begin. Crap.

Miraculously, sounds form intelligible words. Words form sentences. Voice too low. Project.

Scan audience. Eye contact is key. Deliver line to floral dress lady. Speak next to cardigan man.

Slide Page 2 over first. Gesture. Hands emphasize words. Feet stay still. Legs don't move. Don't talk so fast.

Slow down.

Give words time.

Next page. Memorized. Look at people not papers.

Butterflies finally fly in formation. Lend their strength to voice.

Almost forgot next line. Almost stumbled. Glance at teacher. Don't think he noticed.

Slide Page 3 to left.

Halfway down last page. Begin conclusion.

You got this. It's kinda fun.

Wrap up points.

Deliver clincher.

"Thank you." Applause.