

## Foreword

I was standing in my bedroom, practicing aloud for the hundredth time. My makeup was fresh and fashioned to match my blazer and pinup style dress. Wringing my hands, I paused, shut my eyes, and tried to remember the words. Of course I knew what I was presenting: a collection of poetry from the queer perspective that I had written, and the importance of having those voices in the literary canon. Why was I nervous? The echoes of anxiety from my theatre days made me clench my teeth, and my boyfriend came in to see what was wrong. We were running late. Dreams were happening that day: I was speaking for a TEDx event, invited because a team of TED employees found my work to be inspiring.

It all happened very quickly. Over the course of a month, I had auditioned, been asked for an outline, met with the team, and was left waiting for what seemed like eons. When I got the email that said “Congratulations!”, I had less than three weeks to fully prepare. Of course, I knew what I was speaking about, but the ideas and articulation were very rough.

The first person I thought of was Lisa Bernard, who had been my public speaking professor at Queens College a year previous. So in familiar fashion, I crunched through the leaves on campus and met with her to discuss the details of my presentation.

I had done theatre for twelve years of my life – and in that time, that included several leading roles – but most would be mistaken if they thought I was an expert on public speaking, especially before I took Lisa’s class. I was *always* nervous before performances, but that stomach-sinking-feeling would inevitably go away when I was lost in the worlds of 1930’s New York City, Ohio, and Oz. When it came to public speaking, I often avoided it, fumbling over “uhms” and blinking hard and trying my best not to make eye contact with my classmates. I had done very few presentations by myself, except when I had to, and every time, not matter how prepared I was, I would panic, counting down the seconds until the pain was over.

As a writer, I was not used to orated craft, and I especially wasn't used to the idea of not memorizing what I was supposed to be talking about. The idea of words flowing through me seemed to border terrifying, and too surreal.

But in Lisa's class, I grew. I went from having a panic attack during my introduction speech, to speaking with eloquence about writing. The concepts conveyed throughout this workbook were eye-opening, and helped me stay calm, cool, and collected. While the idea of practicing aloud seemed ridiculous, actually doing it was incredibly helpful and moving. Applying these concepts, I felt much more sure of myself when I spoke at my brother's wedding, at club elections, even just to other people. Her class not only made me a better, more prepared speaker: it helped me communicate better with the world around me, and myself. The words became water, and I spoke oceans.

And at the end of the day, Lisa Bernard was always honest. She would push us to do better along our journey, until we reached our destination. At the end of our class, she spoke with each of us about what we'd learned and how we flourished. She told me that she "saw me going places with my public speaking", which took me aback. She truly meant it, and almost a year later, she was right.

As I delivered my final point and read my final poem, there was a rushing and a sense of relief. As the lights came down, I connected with the audience one final time, and I realized that everything had come true. That dreams were really possible, if you take the risk, let the words come to you, and reach your destination with ease.

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