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Instructor's Name

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### The Big Graduation Speech

I had never seen so many people in one room. Parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and strangers filled the gymnasium all the way to the top. I was surrounded by people in red robes and graduation hats. My head spun a million miles a minute in too many circles to count. My classmates lined the hallway as nervous energy buzzed throughout the corridor and covered us all in an uneasy feeling. I knew that my fear of public speaking would not be easy to face, but I knew that this was the day that I had to face my fear.

The deafening sounds of chatter from the gymnasium quieted when “Pomp and Circumstance” started to play. Our red robes fluttered as we glided down the aisle to our designated seats. As I strode down the aisle, I wasn't thinking about my upcoming speech yet. At that point, there were only two things on my mind: I was secretly praying that I would not trip, and because I had seen tears beginning to well in the eyes of all the mothers before the ceremony even began, I hoped that my mother would not cry.

After we were seated, the principal introduced the first student speaker. I tried to stay calm and collected while I listened to the other speeches. However, I found it more and more difficult to do so the closer that it came to my time to speak. Then I heard my name being called. I slowly rose out of my chair, careful not to show the world that my legs were so shaky that I could barely stand. As I made my way to the podium, my best friend reached out and squeezed my hand, taking away some of my fear.

Every part of my body told me not to speak, not to move. I closed my eyes and took in the deepest breath I could muster, and when I opened my eyes, I was alone. The only person I could see in the entire gym was my best friend. While the other speeches given were “thank you” to families and teachers, mine was something different. I recited the speech that I had written six months before and one that I had never intended anyone else to hear. I poured out my soul and spoke about memories, about love, and about how special it is to have both. The entire time I kept my eyes locked on my friend for fear that if she moved, even the slightest, that my entire concentration would be gone.

When I finished, I could hear the crowd’s adoring applause. But my mind was numb from the feeling of empowerment I had for myself. This overwhelming fear of public speaking that I had had for years was suddenly in the past. I will never forget walking back down the aisle. My friend was at the end of it, waiting to hug me and tell me that my speech was perfect. I don’t know if the speech was perfect, but I do know that I had finally faced my fear and conquered it.