

A LEGEND IN HIS MIND

A Ten Minute Monologue

By Alan Haehnel

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SYNOPSIS: If only they knew the truth about Steven, people wouldn't worry. Ms. Babcock's due-or-die-by-tomorrow-morning-no-excuses story assignment is nothing for the teacher or Steven's parents to stress about. After all, Steven has a million stories in his head. Just name a genre—it's there. All that's needed for him to unlock the vault and produce the story: pressure. When Steven gets right down to the moment when he has to actually create the story, though, nothing comes out. Steven's solution? He just needs to put it off a little longer. The pressure isn't yet sufficient to create the masterpiece he knows is inside him!

TIME: Present.

SETTING: Steven's bedroom.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 either)

STEVEN/STEVIE (m/f)..... Teenager, absolutely sure of
themselves.

PROPS: None.

COSTUMING: Contemporary teen clothing.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES: Perhaps the most challenging aspect of this monologue is the subtext that the audience must understand, but the character does not. Specifically, the audience must realize how Steven's situation will eventually end up: He won't finish the story; he won't escape the dire consequences of his failure. He won't because Steven only *thinks* he is a wizard under pressure. In truth, he is ruled by procrastination. Steven's lack of self-awareness is the main source of the humor in the piece. In order to carry it off, the actor must play Steven's assurance in his abilities to the hilt.

STEVE: Oh, I'm cooking. I am definitely cooking now, baby: I am here, I am prepped, I am stoked, psyched, 100 percent present and accounted for, ready to roll! Cooking and raring to go like a load of egg rolls taking a stroll on a roller coaster! Yes!

I have a night. That's all I need. A night. Haters out there, like Ms. Babcock, she thinks it's not enough. I see her looking at me, giving me the side eye, the squinty eye, the doubting eye, when she tells me, "Steven, I have to have that story by tomorrow morning or you will fail this class. No extensions, no excuses! Even if you call in sick with a case of double pneumonia piled on top of a cardiac arrest, you will not get any second chances from me, young man. The story. On my desk. 8:00 a.m. At least ten pages. 12-point font, one inch margins, spell-checked and certified original, capiche?"

That was this afternoon that old Ms. Babcock of the side-eye gave me the ultimatum, and I didn't flinch, I didn't grimace, I didn't give her one indication that I was not up to the task. Instead, I gave her a smart salute and said, "8:00 a.m., one ten-page story, 12-point font, one inch margins, certified fresh and original as a newly-netted catfish, Ms. Babcock." As I turned on my heel and marched out of her room, wearing my attitude as thick as a puffer coat, she yelled out, "I mean it, Steven—you are out of time and out of excuses!" You know what I did? Back to her, I jumped up, kicked my heels together, made another salute, and scooted right out the door. I know what she was saying when I left. In her head, maybe under her breath, maybe even right out loud. She was saying, "That Steven is a lazy, good for nothing, no account slacker of the lowest variety, a mudslick on the underside of a slippery, slithering eel."

But!

She doesn't know. She doesn't have a clue about how I get through situations just like this. What's the one thing you need to turn a dirty old lump of coal into a sparkling, bling-a-licious diamond? Pressure. Everybody's like, "Oh, boo-hoo, too much stress, too much tension, too much anxiety! I need a break from all this pressure!" That's not me. That is not me. Now, I'm not into any sports or anything, all

that running and training and sweating and slapping hands, but if I were, coaches far and wide would know when to use me, oh, yes they would. "One second left on the clock, Steven. The championship is on the line. We need you to make these free throws. We need you to take this penalty shot. We need you to kick this 50-yard field goal. Go get 'em!" And the crowd would be roaring my name—Steven, Steven, Steven—and then they'd get quiet as I stepped to the line, and they'd whisper, "How does he do it? How does he stay cool under all that pressure?" Because they don't know, either.

Pressure is my water, my food, the air I breathe, the fuel that unleashes the beast, my creative best. When everybody else is folding, fainting, looking for some shade to lie down in, I'm saying, "Bring on the heat so I can do my thing, so I can become the bling of my precious diamond-studded self, oh yes!"

Ms. Babcock can side-eye me all she wants. My father can give me a hundred lectures on "the dangers of procrastination, young man. The future won't wait for you to get your act together. It's just going to keep on coming, and you're better off meeting it every day with good habits instead of thinking you can pull some last-minute rabbit out of your hat." My mother can shed a thousand tears and tell me, "I just hate to see you waste your potential, Steven. Ever since you were a tiny boy, everyone said you had so much to give—so much kindness and artistry and intellect!" And Miss High-and-Mighty herself, the pinnacle of family achievement, my older sister Sonia, can call down all her sorority-sister superiority and half-baked amateur psychology: "Oh, Steven, don't be such a predictable product of your hormone-addled pubescence. You might think it's amusing, being swept along on the lazy river of toxic masculinity, but believe me, from any distance at all, one can see your laissez-faire existence is nothing short of boring."

They don't know. (*Pointing to his head.*) It's all up here. This cranium of mine is always ticking, always turning, always working like a fine-tuned clock. Tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock. And what's it waiting for? What's it live for? What does it thrive upon?

The count-down. Five, four, three, two, one—kapow! Free throw—swish! Penalty shot—upper right corner! 50-yard kick—straight through goalposts! Rabbit after rabbit after rabbit, flying out of the hat! And a ten-page, 12-point, inch margin original story—smack on Babcock's desk, eight o'clock in the a of the m of the tomorrow morning, baby! Boom!

Now, I know what the word on the street is about me. I lack discipline. I'm easily distracted, the slightest little bump goes on the tracks and my train gets derailed, that kind of stuff. Let me ask you something, though: If that is how I am, do you think, when my best buddy Travis approached me earlier this afternoon and said, "Dude, come over and let's play some Minecraft," which I knew would end up in a multi-hour, epic session lasting far into the night, if I am actually the undisciplined slug people claim I am, do you think I would have replied to Travis, "Dude, no can do this time. Gotta paper to write"? And when Travis came back with his most persuasive, most pleading, most poignant request—"Dude, seriously, come on!"—do you think I would have had the fortitude to put my hand on his shoulder and say, "Dude, seriously, no can do this time?" Yet that is exactly what I did.

Would an undisciplined slug, when his father came to him with a list—co-authored and agreed upon by said father and the previously mentioned Ms. Babcock—a list mandating exactly how this story would be produced over the next several hours, would an undisciplined slug have reacted as I did? I think not. Father: Your phone will be locked in the safe. Me: Perfect. Father: Internet service will be unavailable until the story is finished. Me: Outstanding. Father: The story will be produced on a computer with all functions disabled save one—the word processor. Me: Bring it on.

And how do you think an undisciplined slug would have reacted when his father left the room and the slug overheard this whispered conversation? Father: Well, that's that. Mother: But Frank, he's all alone in there. Father: He made his bed, Dolores; he's got to lie in it. Mother: But Frank, he's never accomplished anything in his

life without my help, never mind something this important! Father: And he won't this time, either, but he has to face up to the consequences of his decisions! Mother: Frank, I have to go in there! Father: No, Dolores, not this time. Not this time.

Having heard the total lack of confidence expressed by his parental units, having heard the despairing wails of his mother fade away as his father led her downstairs where they could comfort themselves by eating an entire three-layer chocolate cake while watching re-runs of *The Office*, what do you think an undisciplined slug would have done? Well, I don't know. Gone to bed, maybe? Covered under the covers until the cruel light of morning revealed his failure? Jumped out the window, hitch-hiked to Nebraska, began a life-long career of petty crime and vagrancy? I don't know, because I am not him.

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