

## **The Final Speech**

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**June 11th, 12:00 PM,**

**Maine Medical Center, Portland, ME**

Wheels squeak and rattle as the hospital gurney rolls smoothly into the trauma room, “17 year old male, John Doe, birthday July 7, 2005. Found at the scene of a car wreck on June 11, 2023,” stated the trauma nurse hesitantly. “Injuries are extensive, lacerations to the face, hands, legs, broken arm, ribs and more,” she continues.

The surgeon enters the room looking over the injuries, visibly perplexed. What once was a healthy 17 year old was now nothing but another patient and another surgery. Unrecognizable, covered in silky white gauze with IV tubes tangled. Surgeons, nurses, and anyone close enough to see, gather around, trying to find somewhere to start.

But the damage is past repair. The room is eerily silent as police gather in to collect DNA samples. The extensive injuries make it impossible to make out who this is. Someone with friends, with family, with a life, is so terribly broken that the only way to tell who they are is through a test, or by the pieces of what was a valedictorian speech..

**June 11th, 11:00 AM,**

**Drivers seat of a 2015 Ford Focus, *One hour earlier***

Paper is carefully ripped from a black three ringed notebook and delicately placed on the center of the steering wheel. Driving along windy backroads, eagerly awaiting one of the most important speeches in a high schoolers profession. Reciting the speech line by line,

*“First of all I’d like to thank my teacher, parents.. no no that’s wrong,”* he mumbles, trying to get the lines perfectly.

Looking up at the road and then shifting focus back down onto the paper, confident in his abilities to multitask. This is the valedictorian speech, one that every teacher, parent, student will hear. All of his hard work soon turned to dust. It took one minute to lose control.

The car swerves abruptly, every bump and ridge of the rumble strips can be felt. Once he whips his head back up to the road, the car in the right lane has now veered off into oncoming traffic. It took one second.

Looking up into the sky, he lays still buckled in. The car now lays on its back, simmering as white and black smoke seeps from the engine. The paper holding the speech was swept away in the crash, little pieces of hopes and dreams scattered. It took everything.

**June 11th, 12:10 PM,**

**Merrill Auditorium, *Present time***

Students and parents line the seats of the auditorium, everyone chattering and eager to get along with the ceremony. One by one people are called up to the stand to share their experiences in high school and to thank everyone who has shown support in guiding them to start a new future.

Finally it’s time for the valedictorian to come up to the stand. Someone who has shown such growth and who has impacted the community in as many ways possible.

*“Could we please have the valedictorian come up to the stage, everyone give a round of applause! This student has created a community here and has shown impeccable growth throughout high school,”* the principal announced proudly.

The crowd erupted in applause and whistles, proud parents and peers standing as the valedictorian is about to enter the stage. The cheering settles down but nothing happens. Looking around, the crowd grows concerned.

*“He better not be using the bathroom during his speech!”* one student yells, trying to lighten the mood. Almost in unison, the slight chime of a phone can be heard amongst the crowd along with the click of the speaker button.

*“Hello?”*

*“Hello, this is Maine Medical Center calling... are you the mother of a student at the local high school in your town?”* questions a concerned hospital staff member on the other end.

*Silence.*

*“Yes, and he’s missing his speech right now!”* she comments, nervously laughing. *“Are you sure you're calling the right person?”*

*“I’m so sorry, tonight your son was involved in a head on collision. We retrieved pieces of what looked like a valedictorian speech. He was found this morning at 11:15 AM and died at 12:05 PM. Once again I am so sorry for your loss.”* The sound of a pin dropping could be heard. Silence and heart crushing sobs flooded the room, echoing off the walls.

The speech that was supposed to be a start to a new life was the reason that his ended. One glance down off of the road cost him his future. The student who died in this story was unrecognizable in the end. His actions led him to losing his identity, his accomplishments, and his life. Nothing is worth more than arriving home to the people who love you.

