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## Words Aloud Piece

By Timothy L. Hopkins

I accidentally winked at myself in the mirror the other day.

I'm not particularly proud of it. I wasn't completely sure why I did it at first, but after it happened, there was no turning back.

For some reason I'd let my guard down while the midst of deep thought, and unconsciously gave up that particular physical control – the eyelid switch, I guess – and shifted into autopilot.

Under normal circumstances, the incident could have been innocently ignored, filed away as something to laugh at alone down the line someday. Unfortunately, this was not a normal circumstance.

Just as I broke eye contact with myself, I starred directly into the eyes of my dad, who, judging by the shock on his face had been standing right there in my room the whole time.

His complete ear-to-ear grin confirmed that, in fact, he registered every bit of that awkward moment.

His face briefly resembled a balloon; not for being round, but more so like one that had been filled to its maximum capacity, and appeared ready to burst at any moment.

My shame turned into anger, and he noticed quickly.

Trying to maintain calm, I attempted at an explanation.

“Dad, you see, I had just saw this thing today in the news about Obama and I...”

She shook his head, cutting me off my train of thought mid-sentence. No explanation was needed.

*Of course, I thought. He's my dad. He completely understands moments like these and it's naturally in the parental makeup to let things like this go without incident.*

I felt relieved.

“Come downstairs, mom made your favorite: pasta.”

And just like that, with what seemed like a reassuring smile, he left the room and made his way downstairs.

## **SCENE 2: IN WHICH “THE WINK” STORY IS SPREAD**

After tidying my room and washing my hands, I made my way down the steps and slowly approached the dining room.

Normally, after getting a whiff of mom’s homemade marinara sauce, I would sprint down the stairs like I’d never had a hot meal before. But considering what had just taken place, I felt the need to be composed and cool as I made my way into the dining room.

As I entered the room, I tried to sense anything different in the air. Most importantly, I needed to know if my loving, caring and normally loyal father was able to keep such an intimate moment – catching his oldest son winking at himself in the mirror – to himself.

Immediately, as I sat down at the lone empty seat at the end of the dining table, all chatter halted and every eye honed in on me.

*He told them. Damnit, he told them everything.*

I kept my eyes down at the empty plate in front of me, awaiting the round of jeers from my brothers and sisters, but much to my surprise, all I heard was silence.

As I sat uncomfortably at the end of the table, I was sure someone had lowered my chair. Looking around the table, everyone appeared to be staring down at me.

Just as the beads of sweat began seeping through the pores on my face, my mom broke the silence.

“Who wants to say grace?”

My oldest sister, Janet, quickly volunteered. Everyone bowed their heads and closed their eyes. Silence swept through the room.

“Dear father, thank you for this food that you have provided for us today. We thank you for giving mom the strength to prepare such a wonderful meal. Dear Lord, we ask that you bless this

food to our bodies that we might be strong. And please be with us all, watching over us and taking care of us, through these troubling times.”

Then came a pause, which seemed to drag on for several moments. I looked up at Janet. Though it wasn't completely clear, she seemed to be holding back tears. I'd never really seen her get emotional during prayer, so I was sure something bad had happened to her.

As we all sat there in silence, I was filled with rage. In my head I was acting out scenarios where I would avenge whoever had done or said something to upset her.

Just as my sympathy reached its maximum point, I heard the crack in her voice.

“...and Lord, please bring my little brother a good girl in his life... so he can stop flirting with himself in the mirror every day.”

With that, the volcano erupted. Everyone in the room took Janet's lead and began laughing as hard as they could.

Though they held out longer than my siblings, both of my parents joined in on the fun the room was having at my expense.

As I sat at the end of the table, ashamed, face turning redder by the moment, my entire family was falling out of their chairs holding their sides, mocking my everything; tears rolling down their faces from laughter, tears rolling down mine from complete and utter embarrassment.

I knocked over my chair as I leapt to my feet and sprinted up the stairs and into my room, slamming the door behind me as hard as I could. I quickly buried my face into the pillows on my bed.

### **SCENE 3: CONSOLING THE UNCONSOLABLE EMBARRASSED KID**

Several moments passed before I heard a soft knock at the door.

“Go away!” I screamed, my voice remained muffled as my head lay buried beneath my stack of pillows.

The door opened slowly, with care, and before reaching my bed I could tell it was my mom.

Still beneath pillows, angry but knowing that I can only express anger so much without getting in trouble, I growl, “What do you want?”

She sat on the edge of my bed and pulled the top pillow off my head. Wiping away at any leftover tears, I picked my head up slowly, trying hard to maintain my best scowl.

Shaking her head in amusement, my mom smiled.

“It’s really not that bad. It’s just probably the silliest thing I’ve heard of, ever, but it’s not the worst thing that could happen. There are worse things that could happen in this world. This one, you should be able to laugh off.”

I was neither amused nor did I feel like laughing. I turned my head toward my bedroom window and peered out into the night.

“You are something else. So, why on Earth were you winking at yourself in the mirror? Are you practicing your moves with the ladies on yourself?”

I mumbled under my breath, “You wouldn’t understand.”

“Try me,” she says.

I took a deep breath. “They’re making Obama choose. You know, between black and white.”

She shook her head, confused. “What do you mean? Who’s making him choose?”

“The media, the black community, commentators, everyone!”

Smiling and leaning closer, my mom says, “So... because you think the media, the black community and everyone else on TV is making Obama choose between his multi-ethnic backgrounds, you decided to flirt with yourself?”

“No! You’re not even listening anymore.”

“I am, I am! It’s just that your story makes very little sense. Your father saw what he saw: you, gazing at yourself in the mirror, quite possibly seconds away from making a move... on yourself. Thankfully for all of us, it didn’t go that far! If you think you’re embarrassed now...”

“Mom, really?”

“What? I’m just saying... well if it wasn’t that you aren’t completely in love with yourself, what was it then?”

“I had a revelation today as I was watching Barack Obama on TV today. He gave a speech today that sounded similar to one I would give. You know, one about his white mom and black dad. He balanced his description of both sides carefully, not to seem as if he was favoring one side more than the other. It was... complete. And just... really great. But after he finished and the commentators took over, all they wanted to talk about was how people debated whether he was ‘black enough’ for African-American voters, or “too black” for some white voters. At first, I was sure they had only heard parts of his wonderful speech, but then it occurred to me that they just couldn’t understand.”

After staring intently, my mom appeared confused. “What’s there to understand? And why wouldn’t I be able to understand? Is it because I’m white? Would you rather me go down and get your dad for this? Maybe him being black will make him understand.”

I stood up and paced around the room. “No, it’s not even like that.”

“You know, being black and white is something special. Obama has that unique perspective, whereas most of the commentators were either white or black. Though they thought he would have to find a way to be both ‘black enough’ and ‘not too black’ for certain voters, I just... I just got it.”

My mom stared at me, blankly. “Got what?”

“The absurdity in making that choice. Obama gets it, too. Sometimes the best choice in life is not making a decision that you shouldn’t have to make. Even if people pressure you.”

“So, it’s Obama’s fault you winked at yourself?”

“Yes. Wait, no. It’s because the more I thought about it, the more I knew that I got it, and many of those commentators on TV didn’t. In that moment of thought, for some reason I smiled in the mirror as I was standing there in deep thought. I guess that’s where...”

“...you began contemplating making out with yourself in the mirror?”

“Thanks, mom.”

Mom grinned and leaned in for a hug.

She smiled. “You may be onto something there. Really.”

“You think so?”

“Yes. But part of what you’re onto appears to be yourself.”

I glare back at her. She smiles back.

“Just because a few pundits, newspapers, and random guys named Joe the Builder or whatever think Obama has to choose, I’m glad you know better. Just like I shouldn’t have to choose between you and your brothers and sisters, no one should have to pick their favorite color or heritage. I’m glad you have more sense than some of those other folks.”

She stood up to leave, and just as she was about to close the door behind her, she added, “Just do us all a favor and make sure that when you have another ‘Eureka!’ moment, you close your door.”

And with that, she left.

I learned a few things that day. First, that my dad should never be trusted. Second, that my mom is wonderful, and even when I half-insult her in a fit of rage, she knows how to get past it. And last that, she gets “it” too. And I’m sure most people do, so as it turns out, I’m not all that special.

I had an entire back story to reveal, but when someone winks at themselves, there’s no getting beyond that craziness. Sometimes in passing, when a revelation occurs, people wink at themselves. It’s not a big deal. So remember that, just in case you see someone doing it.

Some choices are so absurd, only making them will reveal their absurdity. And with that I would like to share one more story to make this point.

### **I chose my favorite parent the other day.**

Though it was a tough decision, someone had to make it. Strangely enough, mom wasn’t thrilled to find out the news. She kept rambling on about how it was a two-person effort to raise a child and, according to her, that was the case, and that it was disrespectful to either parent if one was chosen.

So, I quickly switched my decision of favorite parent to my dad, because it was clear that my mom was ungrateful.