



Hello Oscar!

Let's go back forty-odd years today, to high school. The years that I spent in school are not a part of my life that I look back on with great fondness, at least not the high school years. It's not that I had any major problems, or was bullied, or anything like that; the path was basically smooth and uneventful. School for me, was simply something I had to put up with until I could escape.

In my high school, the entire grade group was graded at the start of each year, based on some kind of test that I don't remember, and filtered into groups (this was for English classes only). Kids in the lower groups got some kind of remedial training; kids at the top worked on special projects. I was somewhere in the middle, doing I suppose just the normal curriculum.

But one day something interesting happened. One of the other teachers opened the door and interrupted a class I was in one day, apologizing to the classroom teacher. He pointed in my direction, "Dave, grab your stuff and come with me."

When I joined him in the hallway, he explained that I was being taken over to the 'Group A' classroom. He went on to explain that they were working on a special project to create a radio drama (using a tape recorder), and they wanted me to be involved.

I understood right away what had happened. A few days prior to this, my classroom teacher had been taking us through some novel or other, having students stand up in turn to read passages from the book. What a pathetic exercise it had been; everybody could basically read of course, but they just droned on word after word, stumbling over many of the longer ones. It was absolute torture to listen to.

When it was my turn, I stood up, started to read, and pretty much forgot where I was. I spoke the lines the way that we would normally *imagine* them - with inflection and emotion. This was something I could do - I *lived* inside the books I was reading! So even though I was quite a shy boy, and my presentation probably wasn't actually all that good, compared with the general level on display I probably came across like Laurence Olivier.

Word of this must have travelled around among the teachers, resulting in this 'invitation' to join the radio drama group. The story of the drama concerned a group of people trapped on an island, perhaps shipwrecked; I'm no longer sure of many of the details. The class was divided up between those who were to work on the sound recording and effects, and those who were to be actors/readers. I was in the latter group of course, and was assigned the part of a character called David (coincidentally enough), who was one of the main protagonists of the drama.

After some days for planning and preparation, the actual production began, and we 'actors' began to bring the story to life. But this was so different from reading the book passages in the other classroom! That had been quite dispassionate and detached from any sense of reality. Even though I had been trying to make the reading 'natural', I had been just standing there in a classroom. But now here I was, sitting at a microphone, with right beside me the girl playing the part of one of the women in the band of castaways. A woman who - according to the script - was going to soon end up 'in my arms'.

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So there was Dave - perhaps the shyest boy in the whole school - who could never under any circumstances actually talk to any of the girls, finding himself 'making love' to one of them. "I have been in agony while you were away! It is only you that I care about. I love you. I love you! Come to me now!"

I must have been absolutely torn in two - the desire to read the part 'properly' and dramatically, being counter-balanced by my sheer terror of the girl sitting beside me. I wonder what kind of strangled noises I made!

And what I would now give to have a copy of the tape we produced!

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