

# A SALUTATORIAN'S GRATITUDE

By Bobby Keniston

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**SYNOPSIS:** After four years of hard work, graduation is finally here, and James (*or Jamie*) is about to give a Salutatorian speech that no one will ever forget! After discussing the importance of gratitude to his fellow graduates, he quickly begins to drop the facade, and let his true feelings come out, including jabs at the Valedictorian (*who happens to be the Headmaster's son*), his own father (*who would have bought him a car had he been number one in his class*), and about the "dinosaur" teachers who he feels should have retired long ago. Shakespeare once wrote "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child." Well, James is going to show the world that a serpent's tooth ain't got nothin' on him! This ten-minute comedic monologue can be played by either a male or female, and will have the audience in stitches!

## CAST OF CHARACTER

(1 either)

JAMES SMYTHE (m/f).....17 or 18, graduating from high school. Is able to give the impression of a respectful, thoughtful young person, but has trouble keeping the sarcasm and bitterness from bubbling up.

**CASTING NOTE:** The script is written as James, but feel free to change to Jamie to make it applicable for a female.

**DURATION:** 10 minutes

**SETTING:** A graduation. James (or Jamie) will speak from behind a podium.

**COSTUME SUGGESTION:** Whether a male or female, the speaker should be wearing a graduation cap and gown.

***DEDICATION***

***For Tracy Sue, as always, in hopes it will make her laugh***

DO NOT COPY

**AT RISE:** *(As though addressing a graduating class and the audience.)*

**JAMES:** Wow! Here we are! The class of \_\_\_\_\_ *(Fill in the year.)*! We made it! Of course, I always knew that we would, due to the hard work and dedication of the entire administration and excellent educators here at Briarstone Academy. Let's give them all a round of applause. *(HE encourages the audience to applaud.)*

Speaking of the administration, I just would like to note really quickly, before I begin, that, well, Mr. Littleton made a slight mistake when introducing me. My last name isn't "Smith". It's Smythe. Pronounced Sm-eye-th. Not a big deal of course, but I just wanted to clarify for my mother's sake, who's videotaping this right now. Hi, mom!

Fellow graduates, I stand before you today as your Salutatorian. For those of you who are unfamiliar with the term, it means that I am the second-highest ranking graduate here today, behind the Valedictorian. That's right, I'm number two. Good ol' number two. Which, in such a competitive class like this, is truly an honor, and it is my duty today within this speech to give my fellow graduates a "charge for the future."

Seriously, I'm not making that up. When Mr. Littleton pulled me into his office, he said, "Smith, your job as number two is to give your fellow graduates a charge for the future. Think you can handle that, Smith?" I told him that I would do my best. *(Beat.)* And that my last name was pronounced Smythe.

It is a great joy to be speaking to you all today as your Salutatorian. I would like to start by offering my sincerest congratulations to each and every one of you for your fine accomplishments here at Briarstone Academy, especially to Josh Littleton, son of our Headmaster, and Valedictorian of our graduating class. Way to go, Josh! How does it feel to be number one?

I bet it feels great. (*Beat.*) It's kind of funny how you beat me out by less than one-tenth of a point. Isn't that hilarious? One-tenth of a point! I mean, granted, I took all AP classes and you skated by in woodshop, but, hey, grades aren't weighted for that kind of thing, so, congrats! You earned it. Truly. You did. Earn it, I guess. Everyone knows that woodshop and Intro to Cupcakes are just as challenging as AP Calculus and AP Physics. And AP English. And Latin IV. And... well, never mind. I guess it doesn't matter all that much now, does it?

Forgive me. I lost track of my speech there for a moment. Okay, here we go:

In *King Lear*, Shakespeare wrote the immortal words, "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child." I share this quote with you all today because of its timeless meaning of demonstrating gratitude and...

Sorry, for Josh's sake, I should try to explain: A serpent is a big snake with sharp teeth. And if you don't show gratitude, then, well, you're sharper than a big snake's teeth. And no one wants to be a snake's tooth.

I consider myself to brimming over with gratitude. Why shouldn't I be thankful? After all the hard work I have put into academics at this school, I get to stand up here right now as NUMBER TWO! That's right! I'm SECOND BEST! I didn't quite win, but I almost did!

Want to hear something funny? My father told me at the beginning of this year that if I was named Valedictorian, he would buy me a car. A car! When I went home about a month ago to tell my parents that I had made Salutatorian, that I'd only missed Valedictorian by one-tenth of a point, my dad says to me, "Oh, that's too bad. You could have had your very own Prius." And when I said that I still felt like I had earned a car with all of my hard work, you know what he said? "Whether you're second place or last place, it makes no difference. You didn't win. You lost."

Funny, huh? Funny, funny stuff. My dad the comedian. There he is, right there in the audience folks! My dad! I'm sure you're all anxious to run up and shake his hand after graduation, huh? Speaking of dads, my dad just so happens to NOT be the Headmaster of Briarstone Academy, unlike Josh Littleton, our Valedictorian!

Sorry. Sorry. You can keep filming, mom, I'm not having a breakdown. I swear. I'm fine, and I'm going right back to my notes.

Looking at this Shakespeare quote, I believe it carries an important lesson that I will offer up as the “charge” to my graduating class. I charge you to always be thankful. I charge you to show your gratitude to the people who have made your successes possible, like the fine teachers here at Briarstone Academy, who tirelessly struggle to stay awake as they hand out worksheets directly from the textbook, and pass that off as education. True, most of them should have retired years ago, but who can blame the dinosaurs for sticking around in this economy? I’m sure that Josh is very thankful to all of these teachers for never challenging him, because, if they had, his grade point average would probably have been in the low teens. Goodness knows we are all grateful to our teachers, but we should also be grateful for our parents and their part in helping us to be the best we can be. For example, my father has driven me to “almost the top” by reminding me how I will never be a winner, and Josh’s father runs the school and makes sure his grades are always what they should be. Now, I’m not suggesting that Mr. Littleton does anything “shady” to make sure Josh gets good grades. I’m not suggesting that at all. *(Beat.)* I’m making a formal accusation!

*(Beat. Looks over to the side.)* Stop it with the “cut” gesture, Mr. Littleton. Your son will have his chance to give the speech you wrote for him later on. I only hope you spelled it out phonetically for him. Seriously, Mr. Littleton, you make one more step to try to stop my speech before I’m done, it won’t turn out well for you. See that man right there in the audience? *(Points.)* That big guy there? That’s my uncle, Mr. Littleton, and he has already told me that if you try to mess with me, he will come up here and knock your teeth out, so why don’t you just chill, okay?

*(Back to the audience.)* Sorry, about that ladies and gentlemen, and my fellow graduates. I hate causing a scene, but this was supposed to be my special day, all right? Instead, I'm up here as an opening act for a Neanderthal who's biggest goal in life is to open a golf course! Seriously! Josh Littleton wants nothing more out of life than to open a golf course, so rich guys in stupid pants can hit a little ball around and pretend that they are athletes! Huh! Most of them don't even walk after the ball! They ride in a little cart! This is our so-called Valedictorian's ambition in life! Not to cure cancer or be President of the United States, but to basically own a business that is just one big lawn with eighteen holes in it! Doesn't anyone else find that crazy!?

Why did I even bother to study so hard? Tell me! What was the point? I'd rather be number twenty than number two. How many successful people boast about being first runner-up in their high school class? My SAT scores were through the roof! I have never even gotten a B in my entire life! And for what? For what?

Here's a charge for you, fellow graduates: ingratiate yourself to important people. Clearly that's the only way to get ahead in this world! Take the easy way out. Step on the backs of the working men, hire brains to do all the work while you take all the credit! That's my charge to you! Look out for yourselves!

*(Beat. JAMES seems to realize at last what he has been saying, and looks a little embarrassed.)* Ummm. Wow. Okay. Whew! I don't know where all of that came from. I must be a little tired. You see, I was up all night writing this speech about gratitude, you know, with the Shakespeare quote and everything... I probably should have had a little nap before graduation, that's all. Really, I am grateful for everyone who has helped me out on my journey to becoming Salutatorian. Of course, that "everyone" is pretty much just me. After all, I did all of my own work, fat lot of good it did me. I never got a hand out from anyone, not even a "good job" from my folks at home. *(Points into the audience.)* No, mom, keep filming! Don't you put that video camera away! Maybe we can show this footage to grandma at Thanksgiving, if I decide to come home from college, that is!

*(To everyone.)* You know, what, fellow graduates? Forget the Shakespeare quote! In fact, I'm here today to tell you that I am done playing nice. I'm done keeping my head down and saying thank you to every authority figure out there. Wanna hear the truth? Thanks for nothing!

And here's a little news for you, Mr. Fancypants Shakespeare: a serpent's tooth ain't got nothin' on me!

So long, fellow graduates. I'll see you at the tenth reunion when I'm a millionaire and you're all still stuck in this town! How's that for a charge for the future, Mr. Littleton?

*(HE bows and tosses his cap in the air.)*

**THE END**