

Libra: Poise

Sandy looked stricken as she put down the phone. "Linda's sick," she announced.

"Oh, that's too bad," said her mother. "I hope it's not serious."

"It's not, but she can't give that talk to the Civic Club tonight, and Mrs. Greer wants *me* to do it."

Sandy and Linda had spent the summer working at a camp for underprivileged children. They had been invited by the Civic Club to tell of their experiences and Linda, always outgoing and communicative, was delighted with the idea of giving a talk. Sandy, who froze at the mere thought of standing up before a group of people, had said she would go along for moral support and show some slides of camp activities. Now the president of the Civic Club wanted Sandy to talk.

"I can't give a *talk*, Mom," moaned Sandy. "All those people staring at me — I'll just die!"

Mother knew how shy Sandy was, and was secretly glad that she was finally going to have to come out of her shell and face an audience. "You won't die, dear, and you can talk about camp experiences just as Linda was going to do."

"I can't talk the way Linda talks, Mom," protested Sandy. "She's got everything at the tip of her tongue, and it all comes out like a story, and no matter what people ask her, she can answer them somehow."

"Why should you talk the way Linda talks?" inquired Mother. "Talk the way *Sandy* talks. You enjoyed your work at the camp, didn't you?"

"Sure I enjoyed it!" exclaimed Sandy. "It was wonderful to watch those kids from the slums start looking happy and healthy. And the way some of them had never even seen a rabbit before . . ."

Sandy talked exuberantly for a few more minutes, while Mother's smile grew broader. "There," she interrupted finally, "you're talking about camp with no trouble at all, and making it all sound very wonderful. What are you worried about?"

"Oh, Mom!" Sandy's face fell again. "I'm talking to *you*. You understand. Tonight I'll have to talk to all those strange people."

"Don't you think *they'll* understand? They're people, not monsters. And don't think about them. Think of all the wonderful things that happened at camp and the talk will take care of itself."

After Mother left, Sandy sat dejectedly for a while, then went to her room and started making notes. At least, she reasoned, if she had a few notes to consult, her mind wouldn't go completely blank, and she would be able to say *something*, even if it sounded dull. She spent most of the afternoon practicing her talk, and getting more and more nervous, and by supper time she could hardly eat a bite.

Her father teased her a little, hoping to make her smile, but when he saw that it was bringing her closer to tears, he stopped. They drove to the Civic Club in silence, and as they got out of the car Father hugged her and Mother squeezed her hand, wishing her luck.

"Thanks," whispered Sandy, very pale, with hands trembling so hard she could barely hold her notes.

She took her seat on the platform, and sat numbly while the preliminaries of the program were taken care of. At last the president said, "And now, ladies and gentlemen, Miss Sandra Davis will tell us about her work at Camp Cascade."

Amid applause, Sandy walked to the centre of the stage. In a soft, quavering voice she began to speak. There was some restless shuffling in the audience, and she saw her father, seated near the front, frame the

word "Louder!" with his lips and smile encouragingly.

"Oh, gosh," thought Sandy, "they're restless already, and they can't hear me." Then suddenly she squared her shoulders and raised her chin. "All right — I'll *make* them hear me." She put down her notes and said, "My friend Linda Johnson was supposed to give this talk. I can't do it the way she would have, but I'd like to tell you about the camp in my own way, if you'll bear with me."

There was an encouraging smattering of applause, and Sandy smiled and relaxed a little. "Do you know that there are third grade children in our city who have never seen a rabbit? On my first day in camp . . ." she continued with the anecdote as enthusiastically as she had chatted with her mother that morning. She talked without notes for almost half an hour, becoming so engrossed in her subject that she was almost unaware of the people — who, in their turn, listened spellbound. Finally Sandy said, "I had planned to show some slides after Linda's talk. Would you still like to see them?" More applause. Sandy showed the slides, and then answered questions.

After the program, while refreshments were served, many members of the club clustered around Sandy, asking additional questions. Sandy, smiling and relaxed, fielded the questions well, and was obviously enjoying herself.

A good friend of the family sidled up to Sandy's mother. "I always thought Sandy was such a shy girl," she whispered. "What's happened to her?"

"She's acquiring poise today," Mother smiled. "It's not all smooth sailing yet, but she is finally learning to handle herself before the public. Now that she's tasted the feeling of self-assurance, I'm sure she's going to work hard to make that a natural part of her character."