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### **Laura Amy Schlitz's Newbery Acceptance Speech**

In her Newbery Medal acceptance speech, Laura Amy Schlitz uses self-deprecating humor, sustained extended metaphor, and a deliberate structural reversal to communicate that writing is not a skill one masters through talent or discipline but a practice of showing up in the right conditions and being ready when they arrive.

Schlitz opens not with gratitude or credentials but with a confession of incompetence. She cannot fly a kite. She has tried, failed publicly ("Bystanders averted their eyes in pity"), bought the right equipment on the assurance of a clerk who promised that small children could manage it, and failed again. The self-deprecation is not false modesty; it is precise comic timing deployed in front of an audience of librarians and literary professionals who have just given her their highest honor. By leading with failure, Schlitz makes herself available to her audience rather than elevated above them. The humor also does a second job: it establishes that the kite story is not a metaphor for eventual success through persistence. She does not get the kite up through practice or willpower. She gets it up because, two years later, after winning the Newbery, she goes to the ocean and the wind is there. The distinction matters enormously for the argument she is building about what writing actually is.

The extended metaphor that runs from paragraph five through the essay's close is where Schlitz's argument becomes most specific. When the wind finally comes, the kite stops being an object and becomes something animate: "a nylon falcon, willful and capricious." Schlitz gives the kite a pronoun ("she") and the kite becomes a creature with its own intentions, one that Schlitz is not controlling so much as attending to. This characterization of

the creative act as something that has its own will, something the writer serves rather than commands, runs directly counter to the popular image of the disciplined author working at a desk. The metaphor does not frame writing as labor. It frames it as a particular kind of readiness: being at the shore with the kite when the wind arrives.

The structural hinge of the speech comes in paragraph seven, when Schlitz drops the spool. It is the essay's most carefully placed moment. She has been flying the kite; she is, briefly, the writer in full flight. Then she loses the string, and the kite "faltered and plummeted." What follows is the speech's central insight, announced plainly: "Without me, she couldn't soar. She needed the tension of my hand on the string." The reversal is exact. The kite needs the wind, but the wind alone is not enough: it also needs the writer's resistance, the friction of a hand on the string, to stay aloft. Schlitz is arguing that the writer is not the source of creative flight but is also not irrelevant to it. The relationship is mutual and tensioned. Neither the writer's effort alone nor the arrival of inspiration alone produces the work. Both are required simultaneously, and the writer's job is to be present for the moment when both coincide.

By the time Schlitz makes the metaphor explicit in paragraph twelve, the audience has already felt it. "Most of the time, the words aren't right, and the prose drags on the ground." The return to the kite's failure, the same failure she opened with, now carries the weight of everything the story demonstrated. The speech succeeds because Schlitz does not argue for the romance of writing; she argues for its specific, unglamorous difficulty. Writers go to the shore with the kite in their hands not because they know the wind will come but because it will not come if they stay home. That is, finally, the most honest thing one can say to a room full of people who love books: the good ones required someone to show up and wait.