



## Episode 58

### What Becomes an Invoice Most?

Lisa Torte is sitting in the middle of the grandstand, overlooking the Veil of Ignorance football field. Bill ("The Invoice") O'Connor is sitting two rows down in front of her. They are both bundled up in heavy coats and scarves and hats. It is a mean, gray, autumn afternoon, a day bearing an unwanted invitation to the command performance of the upcoming winter. A chill wind is blowing down from the Arctic directly into their faces.

"So explain this to me again," Lisa Torte is saying.

"It's a drill," Invoice says. "They run around the track reciting something complicated, like Shakespeare or the preamble to the Constitution. Something you can't just mumble your way through."

"And they recite this tongue twister while they're actually running?"

"It builds up stamina and rhetorical skills simultaneously."

"And this was Seth Obomash's idea?"

"Yeah." Invoice is torn between condemning and defending Lisa's predecessor, so he does neither.

"And while they do it, they have to freeze their asses off wearing those 'Policy Rules' tee shirts." Lisa shivers sympathetically.

"They could wear sweatsuits if they wanted to."

"Policy Rules' sweatshirts?"

Invoice nods. "But they like wearing tee shirts when it's cold. It shows how tough they are, and what Policy is all about. It shows that they're ... hearty."

"Hearty." Lisa shakes her head. "And Laurel."

The team is on its fifth lap, and they're still relatively bunched up. They've hit a reasonable lope, and they are able to stick to it comfortably. As they stride past the grandstand an overloud recital of the lyrics to "Rocky Raccoon" pass Lisa and Invoice by, with a unique and -- to Lisa -- a hitherto unknown doppler effect.

"But that's just the novices," Lisa pursues.

"Yeah. The varsity are inside working on the Clinton sex-scandal disads."

"They must never get a let-up, if that's what they do all day. And what about you?"

"I'm sort of out of it for a while." Invoice is looking off into space. "I don't have a partner."

"Since when?"

"She quit last week. After Seth got fired."

"She had a problem with that?"

"She took it real hard."

"This is that girl Tara? Tara Pelt-something or other?"

"Petskin. Tara Petskin."

"Right. Petskin." A sharp wind and the Veil novices pass across the grandstand together. And Gideon checked out blends in with a whoosh from the north that numbs both the nose and the soul. "How long were you two partners?"

"Like, forever."

"More than just partners, maybe?" The question could be perceived as indelicate, but in a way its bluntness cuts through its potential inappropriateness.

Invoice is shaking his head. "We never thought about that," he says. "It never even occurred to us."

"Do you think she'll come back, once the dust settles?"

"There's too much dust for Tara, I think."

"So what are you going to do, then? Get another partner?"

"All the varsity that are any good are paired off already. And there aren't any places where it makes any sense to go maverick, so--"

"What's maverick?"

"You field a one-man team, running the whole case. Both sides."

"Sounds difficult."

"It is. But I've done it as a goof once or twice. They don't let you break, usually, but it's sort of fun, especially if you run a critique."

"Don't start talking policy technical, Invoice. I barely understand it. I'm from an LD background, remember?"

"But you are supposed to be our coach."

"That's true."

"Well, Veil is a policy school."

"That's true too. So far."

"So you are going to let people continue to do policy, aren't you?" There is a note of pleading in his voice.

"I don't think I could stop them."

"But?"

"I didn't say 'but.'"

"But you thought 'but.'"

"All right, yeah, I thought 'but.' Or really, I've been thinking LD. Introducing it to the team, I mean."

"LD at Veil of Ignorance? The building would collapse around us if we even tried."

"It's not all that bad, you know. As a matter of fact, it's pretty good, once you get the hang of it."

Both Invoice and Lisa have been facing forward, looking down at the track. Now Invoice looks over his shoulder at his new teacher, and his new coach. She is a tiny woman, and her diminutiveness is emphasized by her hat and heavy coat, with nothing but her eyes and her nose visible in a sea of wool coverings. She is staring directly back at him.

He is unnerved.

"You could try LD," she suggests.

Now he is even more unnerved. "I couldn't do Loser Debate."

"Loser Debate?"

"You know, L period D period."

Lisa makes a soft snorting sound. "Don't knock it if you haven't tried it. I wouldn't exactly call Policy a gift from the gods either."

"Policy rocks."

The novices are making yet another Rocky Raccoon circuit in their Policy Rules tee shirts. Lisa Torte feels almost as if policy is Veil's particular asphyxiation, cutting off the oxygen supply from the rest of its forensic potentialities. Policy this, Policy that. It rocks. It rules. It crawls on its belly like a reptile...

"I was really looking forward to the Vaganza this weekend," Invoice says. "Tara and I were going to take it. I would have bet anything."

"You're sure she doesn't want to debate?"

"Oh yeah. Real sure."

"Then why don't you go alone?"

"They wouldn't let me go maverick."

"So do LD then." She stands up. "I'm freezing out here. Let's go inside." The novices are on the far turn of the track. "How long will they do this for?"

"Until we tell them to stop."

"Go down and tell them to stop, then."

"Are we going to have the meeting now?"

She shakes her head. "Not today. It seems pointless. They spend half an hour getting all sweaty on the track, there's only a few minutes before they have to go off to the late buses. What's the point?"

"You can give them their research assignments."

She wrinkles her nose. "Research assignments?"

"Those tubs don't grow on trees, Miss Torte."

She sighs. "Give them a day off. Tell them to skip the track tomorrow and go straight to the debate room. I'll come up with something by then. You can help me, right?"

"Oh yeah."

Invoice goes bouncing down the grandstand. Lisa watches as he signals the novices and gives them their marching orders. They glance up at her as he talks. They don't look happy. When Invoice is finished, he bounces back up to her.

"They'll be there tomorrow," he says.

She nods. "I'm really serious, Invoice. I think you should do LD at the Vaganza." They start walking down the stairs together.

"It's silly. I'd just lose."

"All right, you'd lose. That's true. So what?"

"So what?"

"Yeah. So what? Is debate only about winning and losing? I don't think so. It's about expanding your brain a little bit."

"I don't know..."

They walk quietly for a couple of minutes, until they make it inside the school building, where they are immediately hit by a steamy wave of institutional heat.

"Good God, it's hot in here," Lisa says.

She stops and pulls off her hat and unbuttons her coat. Invoice watches her.

A little dynamo, he thinks. A really pretty little dynamo. But LD?

"I'd work with you," she says, shaking her head briskly and then running her fingers through her hair. "So you could learn LD, I mean."

She puts her hand on his arm. He swallows.

"This is important to me," she says. "And you can help me. I mean, obviously I don't know very much about Policy, but I do know LD. I'm supposed to be the debate coach here. I want to do my job, but I'm going to be up against it if I try to break down the Policy wall that already exists. The kids won't like it."

Her hand is still on his arm. "You want me to help you break down the barrier?" he says.

"Exactly."

"You want me to be, like, a traitor?"

She removes her hand and rolls her eyes. "Oh, for God's sake, Invoice. It's only a different branch of forensics. I'm not asking you to assassinate Monsignor Lloyd. Jeesh!"

She starts walking away. He quickly catches up with her.

"Okay," he says. In for a penny, in for a pound. "I'll do it. I'll go LD."

"You will? Really?"

"Just once. Just to give it a try."

"You won't regret it. Believe me, you really won't."

"You are going to work with me on it?"

"Starting right now," she says.

She holds out her hand for him to shake. He knows his own hand is too limp when he takes hers, but the idea of touching her...

Her hand is cold, hard, tiny.

He doesn't want to let go of it.

She is smiling at him. "Let's go into the debate room. We've got to start working on morality."

Morality?

Whatever. Welcome to the Bahamas. And welcome to LD, while you're at it.

**Will Invoice become an LDer?**

**Will Lisa become a Polician?**

**Will the novices get their research assignments?**

**Will Rudolph Guiliani ever wear a dress again?**

**Will Hillary Clinton laugh all the way into the White House?**

**Sure, we'll tell all—right!—in our next episode: "Borscht: Soup for Beatniks or Belt for Comedians?"**