



Episode 62

Hooray for Hollywood!

Mr. Lo Pat sits in his wheelchair behind the desk in his office. Tonight is the beginning of the Vaganza Round Robin. His mien, despite the impending onset of the most difficult days of his year, is calm and aloof, as distinguishes a true debate god.

"We appreciate your meeting with us," the woman says to him. She is a large fifty-ish woman, hiding the roundness of her bulk beneath a bright, formless muu-muu dress. Her companion, at about thirty, looks like an overage hippy with long hair and a backwards baseball cap.

"My pleasure," Mr. Lo Pat says. He fingers her business card. Clavdia Chauchet, it reads. Casting Director. The woman is standing; the man is sitting, not appearing to pay much attention to the proceedings. Mr. Lo Pat tries unsuccessfully to make eye contact with him; it is like wrestling with a particularly recalcitrant video game.

"As I said on the phone," Clavdia says, "this is our director, Hans Castorp."

Mr. Lo Pat nods.

"You've heard of him, of course."

Mr. Lo Pat shakes his head. He has not seen a motion picture in seventeen years.

Clavdia leans over the desk. "Very successful," she whispers confidentially, but not so confidentially that Castorp cannot overhear her. "Very important."

Mr. Lo Pat nods again.

"So I'll get down to business," she says, raising her voice to its normal level.

"Good," Mr. Lo Pat says. "I've got a lot of things to do today. I'm running a debate tournament this weekend, you know."

"I do know," she says. "And that's why we're here."

"You wish to film my tournament?" Mr. Lo Pat asks, with what sounds like a measure of optimistic hope.

"Not quite," she responds.

"Oh."

"You see, we're looking for a teenager."

Mr. Lo Pat winces. "Take my advice. Look for adults. They are much easier to handle, and their conversation is so much more satisfying."

"No,no. What I mean is, we're looking for a teenager to cast in our next picture."

"Ah, yes. I begin to see."

"We want someone who can play fifteen, slightly built, and more to the point, genuine. Not an actor, but a real person."

"Actors are not real persons?"

Hans Castorp laughs, the first sign of life he has shown since entering the office. "Actors real persons?" he says in his German accent. "What a thought!"

"Well, I can assure you that my debaters are real persons. Too real, for the most part. But they're not actors. You might do better to go next week to the Blessed Moly tournament. That's entirely devoted to speech. A lot of them are natural actors, and a lot of their events are almost pure theater."

Hans Castorp stands up. "You do not understand!" he says forcefully. "That is exactly what we don't want. I am up to my eyeballs in teenaged actors. They are --" he searches for the correct word -- "execrable." He looks pleased at having found it. "Yes, execrable. Execrable actors. Execrable human beings. What I want is genuine, real. Do you understand?"

Mr. Lo Pat raises both his hands, palms upward. "I understand completely," he says. "So what exactly do you want me to do?"

"We want you to allow us entree into your tournament this weekend," Clavdia says. "Free rein, so to speak. We promise not to get in the way. And if we see any likely candidates for the part, this will give us an opportunity to ask them to audition."

Mr. Lo Pat considers. He is not sure if he wishes to have a band of Hollywood people roaming the halls during his tournament.

"And in exchange," Hans Castorp says, "whether we find someone here or not, we will give you a credit in the film."

A credit in the film? Mr. Lo Pat's eyes light up. Even after seventeen years of cinematic abstinence, he can appreciate the value of his name in lights, however fleeting.

"We start at two o'clock on Friday," he says. "But I don't recommend that you come until around five or so. Or all day Saturday. Yes, Saturday would definitely be your best bet."

"Saturday it is," Clavdia says, extending her hand. Mr. Lo Pat takes it in his.

"Saturday."

The War Between Debates

They are one angry looking group.

Policy debaters.

Lisa Torte holds her ground.

"I'm not asking you to sell you parents to the Nazis," she says. "I'm simply suggesting that some of you might consider Lincoln-Douglas as an alternative to policy."

"That's not debate," one of them says.

"They've got no facts," another chimes in. "They just say whatever they want, with no evidentiary burden of proof."

"And they don't understand logic. They don't understand rhetorical techniques."

"And there's no benefit of teamwork."

This last remark seems to be the capper, and everyone starts talking at once.

Lisa Torte exchanges a glance with Invoice O'Connor. He shrugs.

"All right," she says loudly, trying to get the team back under control. "Enough. One at a time, and I'm the one."

They sputter for another moment, then quiet down.

"I was only asking that you watch a round. It wouldn't kill you. But if you don't want to, don't."

"Are you going to be able to work with us on Policy, if you're an LDer?" someone asks.

"A case is a case, isn't it? That I can help you with right away. The rest I can figure out."

The blank expressions that greet this statement are eloquent in their disbelief.

"Aren't we going to do any more running?" someone asks.

"I fail to see how running has anything to do with debating."

"Seth says it builds up the stamina. Plus we practice our speaking at the same time. It works."

"Seth did a lot of work on speaking with us. Speaking fast, I mean, which is, like, really important."

"And Seth always led our research."

"And Seth is no longer with you," Lisa Torte says pointedly.

The room is silent.

"All right. End of meeting. Tomorrow, we'll start getting down to business. Without the running." She turns to Invoice O'Connor. "We still on for tonight?"

He nods. "Yep."

"Excellent. I'll pick you up at six."

She walks out of the room.

"What the hell was that all about?" someone asks. "Pick you up at six?"

"I'm going down to watch the LD Round Robin at the Vaganza with her," Invoice explains, trying to appear nonchalant about it.

"You're doing LD?"

"I'm just going to check it out. It's not like I have a policy partner anymore or anything."

"He's selling out," Tara Petskin says dramatically.

Tara was not at the meeting, and her appearance in the doorway is a surprise to everyone.

"I am not selling out. I am just being realistic."

"Call it what you will. That woman wants to make LDers out of all of you, and he's leading the way." She points to her former partner.

"Tara," Invoice says, "you are getting crazy on this. Positively crazy."

"She's right," one of the kids says. "You are selling out. You're like the A debater on the team, and if you go, that's the beginning of the end."

"Don't blame me," Invoice says angrily. "I'm not the one who quit the team. She is." He points back at Tara. "I was happy to do policy with her. We've been doing it for three years already. But she quit, not me." He grabs up his backpack. "I'm out of here," he says.

And he stalks up to the front of the room, where Tara is blocking the doorway. He waits for her to move aside. After a minute, she gives way.

And then he is gone.

Totally Moly

"So what's up?" Kumar asks.

Kumar and David Brillig are walking together to the pizzeria next door to Old Yeller. As always, Kumar is wearing his battered green fedora. David's blond hair is uncovered; David only wears hats during blizzards, siroccos and volcanic eruptions.

"I wanted to talk to you about the Blessed Moly," David says.

"What about it?"

"You're doing your HI piece, right?"

"Sho' nuff."

"Are you going to double-enter?"

"Does Jutmoll give us any choice? Of course I'm going to double-enter. I've got a prose-poetry piece I can do."

"Do you like doing prose-poetry?"

"It's okay," Kumar says. And then he adds in a John Wayne accent, "A Speechie's gotta do what a Speechie's gotta do."

David opens the door to the restaurant, and he and Kumar enter. It is after school, and the place is fairly deserted. An hour ago this place was packed to the gills, but after hours most people head home, and that's the end of it until the normal dinner crowd shows up.

The two Speechies order a slice each, and a couple of Snapples. They take their food to a booth.

"The thing I wanted to talk to you about," David says, "is maybe..."He hesitates. Then he blurts it out. "I thought maybe you might want to do a duo piece with me."

Kumar's jaw drops. "You want to do a duo? With me?"

"Why not? You're a great actor. You do a great HI."

"But you and William... I mean, you two go way back. I know you guys are having some problems, but... I don't know."

"You're saying you don't want to get dragged into it?"

Kumar takes a bite of his pizza. "I guess that's what I'm saying."

"There's nothing to get dragged into," David assures him. "William and I are through. Kaput."

"But William is, like, your best friend--"

"Was my best friend. There's a difference."

Kumar shakes his head. "Is this all because he's gay?"

"I really don't want to talk about that."

"It's okay that he's gay, you know. He's not the only gay person in the world."

"It is not okay," David says forcefully.

"All right. All right."

David closes his eyes for a second. When he opens them, he has regained his composure. "This is not about William, and this is not about William being gay. It is about you and me doing a duo piece at Blessed Moly. If it works out, we could keep doing it. What do you say?"

"What piece do you want to do?" Kumar asks.

"I don't know. You have any ideas?"

"Something serious. I've already got an HI. So do you. Something serious would be more interesting."

"We can talk to Mr. Jutmoll. I'm sure he can recommend something."

"Okay. Let's do it." Kumar finishes his pizza. "Uh-oh. I just thought of something."

"What?"

"I'm not going to be here this weekend. I'm taking the college 'C' tour."

David laughs. "I'm not going to be here either. But I'm taking the 'Megalith' tour."

"What tour is that?"

"NYU, SU, and BU. 'More students than there are pebbles on the beaches,' as Mr. Bunbury says.

"You want a big school?"

"Definitely. How about you?"

"Beats me. I haven't got a clue. I think I'm driving Bunbury crazy."

"He's already crazy."

"You can say that again."

They continue talking breezily about Lav Bunbury, the Guidance Counselor, and about colleges in general.

It could be the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

Will Hans Castorp decide to cast Mr. Lo Pat in his movie?

Will Lisa Torte be able to teach policy?

Will Kumar and David put together a decent duo piece?

Was the Nostrum hiatus tied into the Hollywood writer's strike?

Debate season may be winding down, but that's no reason to think the answers will be in our next episode: "Follicles -- Hair of the Dog or Frozen Ziegfeld Girls?"