



Episode 92

Why Can't They Be Like We Were, Perfect in Every Way?

This is not a happy debate team.

Lisa Torte sits on the edge of the desk. In front of her, a battery of teenagers in black "Policy Rules" tee shirts is glaring at her from their seats.

"You said you were going to learn Policy," one of them calls out to her. His tone is a combination of hurt and aggression. "All you did at the Lodestone was LD."

"That's right," another one adds. "We barely saw you all weekend."

A few more comments of this nature are thrown at her, despite her efforts to quiet the students down. Finally their venom abates of its own inertia.

"I was working for the tournament," she explains, measuring each word carefully. "I was not doing LD and I was not doing Policy. I was helping Mr. Lo Pat."

"And Invoice. You were working with him too. I saw you."

"Yeah. Whenever anyone saw you, you were with Invoice."

Invoice O'Connor is not at the meeting this afternoon. It is the first one he has missed since Lisa arrived. It is as if his presence had kept the lid on the team's collective negative feelings. Without him here, Lisa is completely unprotected, and the pack can smell the scent of blood. It is clear to Lisa that in their perceptions, even if Invoice is doing LD, Invoice is one of them, and Lisa is not. Lisa is the enemy in their midst, the subverter, the saboteur. Invoice is merely a victim of Lisa's cunning, Lincoln-Douglas wiles.

When the anger subsides again, Lisa slides off the desk and with her back to the group, she collects her thoughts.

She spins around.

"You've got to cut me some slack here," she begins. "You know that I'm an LD wienie. I never tried to pretend otherwise. And I'm not going to say that I wouldn't like to turn some of you into LDers before your debate careers are over. I admit it. I always have admitted it. There's nothing wrong with that."

"But you--"

"Let me finish! There isn't a person in this room who doesn't know that I am trying to learn Policy. You guys yourselves started teaching me last week. I've been trying to understand the tactics, I've been studying the topic, I've talked to you and I've talked to some of the coaches. I am doing the best that I can." She feels herself shaking inside. She is losing control. This is not the way to gain the respect of the group. But it is too late for her to stop now. "I love LD, but I also love Speech, and I also love Policy. Maybe I don't understand Policy, and maybe I can't coach it yet, but as God is my witness, I am doing my best to learn how. There isn't a person in this room who learned Policy in two weeks, but you all expect me to do it. Not just learn it, but learn how to coach it. Well, I'm sorry, but it can't be done. I can't do it, you wouldn't be able to do it, even Seth B. Obomash couldn't do it." She takes a deep breath and remembers what Seth said to her at Lodestone. "I am sick and tired of people making accusations about what they think I'm doing or not doing with Policy at Veil of Ignorance. I'm telling you people that I am not going to take it anymore. I am doing the best that I can. My advice to you is, deal with it. If you can't, fine. I'm sure you can get rid of me, if you really want to. But without me, what do you have?" She looks around the room. "Think about that," she says. "Apres moi, le deluge. The world is not teeming with forensics coaches out there. The world is not teeming with people willing to give up their weekends for you people week in and week out. And the world is certainly not teeming with Policy coaches. You don't think I'm good at Policy? Well, try doing it without me."

The silence that stares back at her is bleak and apprehensive. The last thing they were expecting was an outburst like this.

"All right," she says. "Meeting over."

"But it's only three--"

"I said meeting over! Go home. Think. Make up your minds. All of you. Work with me, or work without me. One way or the other."

She turns and stalks out of the room, leaving the door open behind her. She feels as if she is going to explode. She cannot remember the last time she was this angry.

I've got to get hold of myself, she thinks. This is ridiculous.

But she means every word that she said. She loves forensics, and she wants to stay here at Veil and learn Policy, but she doesn't want it that much. She can take only so much aggravation, and then enough will be enough.

She doesn't slow down until she reaches her car.

"Damned kids," she mutters as she unlocks the door. She looks up over the top of the car and sees Monsignor Lloyd standing in the main doorway of the building fifty yards away, talking to another teacher. The monsignor's eyes meet Lisa's, and he flashes her a small, friendly smile. She somehow manages to return the greeting with a small, friendly smile of her own.

"Goddamned kids," she repeats through her friendly, smiling, gritted teeth.

Chin Up, Shoulders Back -- You Call Yourself a Soldier?

Ashley Ambrose sits alone in her room. Unhappily alone.

Ashley is at her desk, her posture perfectly erect, as if she is posing for a how-to-sit-at-the-computer public-service advertisement. She does this not for appearances, but for herself. Her posture is always perfect.

She would not have it any other way.

Ashley will not have anything about her person anything less than as perfect as she can make it. Her room bears no resemblance to the average living quarters of an American teenager. Not one item is out of place, and the places that the items are in are neatly arranged according to the logic that Ashley has decided to apply to them. Her books, for instance, are not only sorted on the shelves alphabetically by author, but they are also separated into fiction and nonfiction, and the nonfiction are sorted according to the Dewey decimal system. Although the books range in size from pocket-sized novel to coffee-table-sized reference, they are all placed with their edges abutting the edges of the shelves, thus giving a uniform appearance despite their innate non-uniformity. And that is only the books. Her clothes, her jewelry, her stuffed animals, her cosmetics, even her dirty laundry, are similarly organized, albeit without the benefit of Mr. Dewey.

She would not have it any other way.

It is four o'clock in the afternoon, and Ashley should be doing her homework, but she simply cannot put her mind to it. She is supposed to be writing an essay on the barbarian invasions of ancient Rome, but her thoughts keep turning to a more timely although equally barbaric invasion, that of financial reality into the Nighten Day Speech and Debate Team. Ashley Ambrose, a girl of equable temperament who does not often allow her ire to rise, is extremely angry. Angry at the school, angry at the stupid people in Nighten Day Township who won't pay a tiny bit of money for the one decent activity in the high school, angry because she feels that this year her O.O. piece is really, really good, and she could even win with it, but after the Blessed Moly she'll never get another chance, which means she'll probably go to college without ever having been a winner, or at least a winner above fifth place, not that there's anything shabby about fifth place but Ashley wants to be first, just once, first place, standing alone on the stage, the strong applause, the standing ovation.... What are people thinking about to allow something like this to happen? She isn't the only one who will be hurt. There are others too, and Ashley's concern for them is genuine. There are the novices, for instance, who are just getting their feet wet. What will happen to them? And Mark and Noah, the extempers, who she always felt were destined for greatness. And what about David and Kumar? They haven't even had one chance yet to work together on their Duo. And wonderful William, who was so good when he and David were partners, and now he's breaking in new solo pieces and even he will never get an opportunity to really run with them.

It all boils down to greed, she thinks. The greed of the Nighten Townshippers who would rather see their children's brains turn to a sodden bowl of day-old Froot Loops than nourish their skills and their talents at the expense of a few measly dollars. And who will ultimately pay for this selfishness on the part of the Townshippers? The Townshippers themselves, of course. They will be the ones with a town of nothing but idiot teenagers on their hands. Teenagers are idiotic enough, Ashley thinks with a remarkable neutrality given the number of years she herself has spent on the planet, much less making them more idiotic. If only there was something she could do. But what? She is helpless. She knows full well that all the fundraising in the world of which she is capable would not be enough.

A thought begins to grow in her mind. Of course! Maybe she can't do anything to stop the tide flowing out from the Speech and Debate Team, but she can certainly speak up about it. Isn't she a writer and an orator? Isn't that what Original Oratory is all about, finding a subject that is meaningful to you and expanding its social implications and then presenting it intelligently yet persuasively?

She extends her hands over the computer keyboard -- posture perfect -- and begins typing.

What was that about Fast Cars?

"Hello. Hamlet?"

Suspicious pause. Nobody calls Buglaroni on the phone and asks for Hamlet. It must be for his father. "Senior or Junior?"

"Excuse me?"

"You want, like, Hamlet Senior, or Hamlet Junior?"

"I want the teenager. Hamlet Junior, I would imagine."

"Oh. Yeah. That's me."

"That's what I thought. It's Clavdia Chauchet. We talked this weekend. Remember?"

"Remember?" The sullenness drops from Buglaroni's voice. "Like, of course I remember."

"Good. We've arranged your audition for this Friday. We have a studio all set in the city for five p.m. Can you make that?"

Pause. "You mean, like, New York City?"

"It's the closest one."

"Maybe to you it is. Not to me."

"What I meant is, it's the closest one I can arrange a screen test in. You live where?"

"Nighthen Township."

"That's right. You have a big motion picture industry there, I understand."

"I don't think so."

"I'm sorry, Hamlet. I was being sarcastic. It's not fair. Look. You're only about an hour outside of the city. We can have a car come and pick you up. That's not a problem."

"A car? What kind of car?"

"A car. You know. The usual."

"What's the usual?"

"Stretch limos as a general rule. Is there a problem with that?"

"Problem? With a stretch limo? Oh, no. No problem at all."

"Good. He'll be there about, oh, three thirty. That will allow for rush hour and give you a chance to get into makeup and--"

"I've got to wear makeup?"

"For a screen test? Of course you have to do makeup."

"I don't know--"

"It's not a lot of makeup, Hamlet. It's not like your grandmother or something. It's just regular theatrical makeup, to make you look better on film."

"How do you, like, know about my grandmother?"

"I don't know about your grandmother in particular, Hamlet. I just meant grandmothers in general."

"Do they wear theatrical makeup?"

"No. That was my point. They wear a lot of women's makeup."

"I don't think my grandmother wears any makeup. She's pretty ug--"

"Hamlet, I am not talking about your grandmother. I am not talking about anybody's grandmother. All right? Forget I said it. We'll pick you up at three thirty. It's that all right?"

"Yeah, okay."

"Good." She checks the address with him. "All right, Hamlet. I'll see you Friday."

The phone clicks.

Is this really how Urkel got his start in the show business?

Will the Policy team ever forgive Lisa Torte?

Will Ashley's OO convince the town to give to forensics until it hurts?

Will Buglaroni's limo have a fully stocked wet bar?

Will anyone still not be watching Sarah Palin pound Joe Biden into the ground?

Can we go see *Wall-E* again?

The last place to look is in our ext nepisode: "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas, or, The O.J. Holiday Album, on sale at fine stores everywhere."