

SPEECH & DEBATE

A ten-minute drama by
Will Coleman

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

KAREN, female, 16, she has a lot on her plate.

MOM, female, 36, unable to work due to pain.

The biggest obstacle to freedom is love.

(Helen's kitchen. Her MOM is sitting down with a washcloth over her eyes.)

(HELEN enters.)

MOM: Is that you?

HELEN: I need to tell you something.

MOM: Come here, sweetie.

(Helen goes to her mother, who hugs her without removing the washcloth.)

HELEN: Oh. Uh, how you feeling?

MOM: Same.

HELEN: You, uh – stayed home again today?

MOM: Hurts to move.

HELEN: Okay. You want a sandwich or something?

MOM: No, no, I ate.

HELEN: I'm gonna make you a sandwich.

(Throughout the following, she makes her mom a sandwich.)

MOM: ...Okay. Thank you. Tell me about it.

HELEN: I need to tell you –

MOM: About class. Debate.

HELEN: Well, I – uh, no, you rest, we can talk about it later.

MOM: Helen.

HELEN: It went fine, okay? A on the paper.

MOM: Number.

HELEN: An A's an A, Mom.

MOM: Since when?

HELEN: 93.

MOM: That's the lowest A.

HELEN: Yep.

MOM: Don't get too many, it can bring the average down.

HELEN: I know, Mom.

MOM: So that's Lit, then you've got Chemistry?

HELEN: Yeah.

MOM: Quiz?

HELEN: Molar mass.

MOM: Uh-oh.

HELEN: I passed.

MOM: Helen

HELEN: Eight out of ten.

MOM: That's a B.

HELEN: It doesn't matter, the quizzes are pass/fail.

MOM: You're not strong enough in Chemistry, I'm sure there's someone who can tutor you.

HELEN: Mom, I have the second highest grade in the class.

(Mom removes her washcloth for the first time.)

MOM: Tenth Grade Chemistry. Should've taken Honors.

HELEN: ...

MOM: Nothing to say?

HELEN: I'm sorry.

(She gives her mom the sandwich.)

(Mom takes a bite, chews, puts the sandwich aside.)

MOM: Thank you, honey.

HELEN: You need to eat.

(Mom puts the washcloth back over her eyes.)

MOM: You wore that to Debate?

HELEN: I'm...I'm not changing clothes for Debate.

MOM: Appearance is important in Debate. You need to be taken seriously.

HELEN: I know.

MOM: Okay.

HELEN: I've got homework.

MOM: We're not done.

HELEN: It's a lot of homework. We can talk about it when you're feeling better.

MOM: I don't feel better.

HELEN: I know.

MOM: What?

HELEN: You don't feel better. You never feel better.

MOM: I have fibro – [fibromyalgia]

HELEN: The doctors don't seem to think so.

MOM: Doctors are idiots.

HELEN: Then why do I have to be one?

MOM: Oh do not start with this again, honey, please. It makes me tired.

HELEN: I'm just not sure I need to be doing all of this.

MOM: This is not the time to have doubts.

HELEN: Sixteen?

MOM: Absolutely. You're lucky. My mother had no plan for me. I just drifted through school, having fun, going out with boys, and now 20 years later, I'm alone and infirm and my daughter doesn't even want to give me the time of day.

HELEN: I appreciate it, I just...

MOM: How was Debate?

HELEN: I— good.

MOM: You ready for Saturday?

HELEN: I don't—

MOM: You're not ready? You've been working so hard!

HELEN: It's not that, I just...

MOM: What?

HELEN: I—

MOM: What?

HELEN: Mom.

(She takes off her washcloth.)

MOM: Don't scare me.

HELEN: I quit Debate.

(Beat.)

(The washcloth goes back on.)

MOM: Oh. Is that all?

HELEN: I didn't go.

MOM: Okay.

HELEN: I don't want to go. I didn't go today. I'm quitting.

MOM: I heard you. I'm gonna take a rest, you can do dinner on your own?

HELEN: You—you don't care about Debate?

MOM: It's your life, darling, you want to quit Debate, then quit it.

HELEN: Okay.

MOM: Okay. You can eat whatever you want.

HELEN: What?

MOM: You know, for dinner.

HELEN: Okay.

MOM: Since you're not going to Debate.

HELEN: What?

MOM: Well, I mean, I guess it doesn't matter what you look like, so eat whatever you want.

HELEN: Oh my god.

MOM: Is that not what you want?

HELEN: Fine. Maybe I will.

MOM: Okay, good.

HELEN: Maybe I'll just go get some burgers.

MOM: Great.

HELEN: And some doughnuts, what is that called? A Luther Vandross? A cheeseburger with doughnuts instead of bread? That sounds amazing, doesn't it?

MOM: Mm-hmm.

HELEN: Maybe I'll invent my own. Something they'll start calling a Helen Poole. Won't that be fun? Maybe an ice cream burrito or something like that.

MOM: Okay.

HELEN: 'Cause I like Tex-Mex.

MOM: Good.

HELEN: Jesus, Mom, what the hell is wrong with you? [Feel free to substitute an alternate expletive for *Jesus*.]

(Washcloth comes off.)

MOM: I am Living, Breathing, Dying for you.

HELEN: Please don't start on this.

MOM: I am in Pain, Helen. All of the time.

HELEN: Yeah, I know. Now. And a few years ago it was Diabetes, Hypothyroidism, Celiac's Disease...

MOM: I'm not discussing this with you.

HELEN: Because the people at Debate need to take me seriously, but you don't.

MOM: I ache, Helen. I can't work because my joints are on fire, and movement makes them flare up. I can't sleep, I can't eat.

HELEN: So I have to suffer with you?

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About the Author

Will Coleman is a playwright and director living in Chicago. His play *Helvetica* won the 2015 Getchell new play award from SETC and was produced at Mill Mountain Theatre in January 2015. His ten-minute play, *Spooky Action at a Distance* premiered at Tesseract Theatre in St. Louis in November 2014, and his musical *Zombie Boyfriend!* (co-written with Chandler Davis) premiered in 2011, and will be produced by Wheelhouse in 2016. He is currently an MFA candidate at the Playwright's Lab at Hollins University.

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