

Chapter 24: Without Cliches

That night I did three hours at Public Service, which got my demerits back down to five. I returned home to cold dinner, fresh laundry (thank you, Dad!), a photo of me red in the face and yelling with a nasty note and attached from Nettles (which I stopped reading after the salutation: “Dear Worst Sister on the Planet”), and hours of attempting to be original and creative about losing a cricket match after enforcing the follow-on. I read through my latest attempt:

Question: How do you explain what happened today?

Answer: There’s no question that we should not have lost that match. As captain I take full responsibility. However, we have some of the best players in the business, and its time we all stepped up to the plate. While it’s true that we had our chances and let them slip away, there are a lot of positives we will take away from this game. In the end we were playing for pride and I think that showed through strongly. It’s also true that we got some very unlucky decisions and that changed the complexion of the game. I believe a week off will do them some good and you’ll all see the real team in the final test next week.

I had a sinking feeling that every sentence was a cliché. I’d definitely heard them before, vastly more than once. I wasn’t even sure what “playing for pride” meant. Did it mean that you were doing the best you could? When didn’t you do that? And why was that particularly prideful?

I wasn’t even sure I’d answered the question.

My head hurt. Sports NA students shouldn’t have to write assignments. When we’re successful athletes we’ll have press agents for that kind of thing. Athletes shouldn’t have to be writers! It was too hard!

Besides I wasn’t convinced it was possible to write about a cricket match or any other sporting event without using clichés. There were only so many ways a match could go and every single one of those endings had happened before and been described before.

Especially when it was a really old game like cricket that had been around since the dawn of time. Of course the same words were going to be used over and over!

Was Ms Johnson messing with me and Bluey? Did she want us to fail P.R.? Which would mean repeating it, which would mean not graduating to sophomore year, which would mean never finishing school, and ending life a complete failure. Why did she hate me so much?

I'd had PR classes since I was five years old and not once had I ever been told to avoid cliches. We'd been taught to memorise them! Why was she suddenly undoing nine years of training?

What did Johnson want from me? She'd praised Sula Wannamaker for being honest. She must want me to be honest. If I was captain and enforced the follow-on and then lost how would I feel?

Suicidal.

Really cranky with myself, my players, the umpires, the doxy weather and whatever else was to blame.

What would I say if Rochelle asked me about it?

Question: Do you intend to remain as captain? (Not that Rochelle would ask me a question like that.)

Answer: No, I intend to disembowel myself in the centre of the New Avalon Cricket Ground in the hopes that my spilled entrails will make up for my hideous errors of judgment and lack of skill and general failure and also bring the team good luck in the future.

Was using sarcasm a cliché? Was “disembowelling” a cliché? How about “spilled entrails”? I did a search on “disembowel” “spilled entrails” and “cricket” and came up with the following from Sarwan Dev:

We lost. We played the best cricket we could, but we still lost. What do you expect me to do? Disembowel myself at Ranji Stadium and hope that my spilled entrails will make amends for my failures as captain, as batsman, and as a human being? And possibly also bring our team a never-losing fairy? What do you people want from me?

I sighed. The assignment was hopeless. There wasn't a single thing that hadn't been said before.