



Series 2

Episode 10

Part One: Chez Cumcut

Halefoil Cumcut's apartment on the east side of the city was not far from Manhattan Lodestone (a magnet school). He could walk it in five minutes on a nice day, and take the subway in one minute when it rained. Not that he was lazy, but who wanted to arrive at school looking like a drowned rat? There was a subway stop right outside his apartment building, and another one right outside the door to Lodestone. As far as Cumcut was concerned, it was a no-brainer. Prioritize dryness: everything else would follow.

It had been a good day at school. There were still way too many people who wanted to be Lodestone debaters, but that was always true early in the year. One did not gain admission to a magnet school like Lodestone based on one's skill at football or baseball or any other team sport. Not even individual sports like tennis meant very much, although there were a smattering of track enthusiasts. Given that the average Lodestoner had three left feet, it wasn't much of a smattering, but at least it was something.

No, Manhattan Lodestone was not overflowing with athletes, unless one includes sports that require a Nintendo Wii controller, which we're not. What Lodestone had was scholars. To get into Lodestone, you needed a cumulative lifetime of high grades followed by an intense testing process capped by aggressive interviews by alums who did not believe that anyone could possibly be good enough for Lodestone other than themselves. Some people said that the application process for Lodestone made fighting the Taliban look like a piece of cake. And most Lodestoners, even the ones who

got in, would have preferred the Taliban. Better the random suicide bomber than a college junior who knows that you know nothing about Heidegger, and won't let you forget it, even though you're only in eighth grade. Is any other high school in the country even aware that Heidegger exists? Outside of debate circles, that is?

And debate circles at Lodestone, this time of year, had a wide circumference. Debate was the sport of choice at Manhattan Lodestone. With a student body comprising two thousand kids, all of whom in their entire lifetimes had always been chosen last for every game from kickball to tiddlywinks, an activity that required no equipment other than brains was the one everyone was looking for. It was barely an exaggeration that it seemed to Cumcut that every freshman in the incoming class had showed up for the meeting that afternoon. Oh, well. He'd start cutting them soon enough. He would snip around the fringes, culling the lame and the halt—

But that sounded so...nasty. And Halefoil Cumcut was anything but nasty. No, no. Not Halefoil.

But, then again, a man's got to cull what a man's got to cull.

For dinner that night, Cumcut's valet, Mahatma (a family retainer on permanent loan to the scion of the Cumcuts), had prepared two perfect veal loin chops in a sage-infused cream sauce, accompanied by roasted blue fingerling potatoes and braised baby red chard picked fresh that morning. The wine was a ten-year-old Riesling from the family cellars, sent by Mum in one of her regular monthly shipments from North Dakota. Desert was Mahatma's private recipe for tropical crème brulee and, of course, espresso. By the time Cumcut retired to his home office for the evening, leaving Mahatma to the chores of cleaning up, a pleasant glow of satisfying day and delicious meal had settled on him. He sat down at his desk and awoke his computer from its beauty sleep. Does life get any better than this?

He was on the page that he had most recently left, but his connection had timed out. On the screen he saw the following:

Welcome to Victoria's Secret Briefs Quotidian Dot Org

LOGIN:

PASSWORD:

Cumcut's fingers paused above the keyboard. Victoria's Secret Briefs Quotidian Dot Org, or Quotidian Dot Org as it was commonly called, was the main website of all things forensical. Debate, speech, congress—if it was high school forensics, it happened at Quotidian Dot Org. Announcements, forums, community, it was all there. And Halefoil Cumcut was the man at the helm of it. (His mother had bought it for him for his last birthday. "Oh, Mum, you shouldn't have.") Now he entered his login data, muttered to himself, "Engage," and hit enter.

WELCOME HALEFOIL, MEMBER #1

He was in. He smiled, as he always did, at the mention of his premiership over the site. He wasn't just the mayor. He wasn't just the boss of it. He was Number One. *Numero Uno*. Not just a god, but *the* capital G God.

It's good to be God.

27 new postings were awaiting his attention.

"Brilliant," he muttered, getting down to business.

From the most recent postings on victoriasscretbriefsquotidian.org

Tarnish Jutmoll is retiring

By muttface

Jutmoll announced today in his classes that he's going to be retiring at the end of this year. Including coaching.

Re: Tarnish Jutmoll is retiring

By ratbreath

No way, dude

Re: Tarnish Jutmoll is retiring

By muttface

Way

Re: Tarnish Jutmoll is retiring

By ratbreath

Are they going to hire a new coach

Re: Tarnish Jutmoll is retiring

By muttface

It's either that or let the team go to hell in a handbasket

Re: Tarnish Jutmoll is retiring

By Lady Bracknell

A handbag?

Re: Tarnish Jutmoll is retiring

By oscarw

No, a hand basket. Pay attention, you old poop.

Part Two: Cafe Dikeskroner

Raga Dikeskroner was sitting in the front window of the Starbucks, his tiny Acer netbook open and connected. A cardboard cup of cappuccino had been next to him for over two hours. It made him look like a paying customer.

As he surfed, his eyes constantly darted in all directions. Inside the coffee shop, next to him, going in and out. He'd swivel around regularly to watch the customers and the barrista and the cashiers. And he kept an eye on the world outside, the pedestrians on the Manhattan street. Young, old, male, female, Raga absorbed them all, while at the same time tracking down information on line.

And then he saw it.

Tarnish Jutmoll was retiring.

Raga's eyes stopped wandering. He brought the cup of cappuccino to his lips and took a sip of the cold, stale coffee.

Tarnish Jutmoll was retiring? From one of the oldest programs in the country? With apparently no replacement on deck?

He put down the cup and wiped his lips.

Oh frabjous day, he said under his breath. Raga Dikeskroner, my friend, you may just have found your future.

Dikeskroner scratched his chest. He was feeling awfully itchy. He needed another drink, something sweet this time. Maybe just a coffee with a lot of sugar in it? Or maybe a drink of something else altogether? Or maybe something that, well, wasn't a drink?

No. Not now. Not yet.

He went back to looking everywhere, at everyone, in and out, up and down.

The possibilities were...endless. But a new home base, at a high school?

Priceless.

Is Halefoil Cumcut really the God of victoriassecretebriefsquotidian.org?

Does his man's man, Mahatma Kane, cook meals like that for him every night?

What is Raga Dikeskroner looking for in the high school debate community?

Is Miley Cyrus poised to win an Oscar for her role in the new Nicholas Sparks movie?

Is Sarah Palin really interviewing Jules and the Nostrumite on her new show, or is she just digging up some old footage and splicing herself in?

Substituting for the answers in our next episode will be a cauliflower, two Swedish meatballs and a box of last year's Girl Scout cookies entitled: "Rhett, if you leave me, where will I go, what will I do, Or, Frankly my dear, I'll follow you on Facebook."