



Series 2

Episode 18

Friends, Lovers and Enemies

When they were in the same state and at the same debate tournament, which happened about once a month, Kennerji Allawalla simply could not keep his eyes off Tucker Gallstone. He would look at her mostly when she wasn't looking at him, when she was bent over her computer working on her cases, which was about half of her waking day. He was mesmerized by her left elbow, her right ear, her long hair, her sneakers, her pens.

And he kept this fact to himself.

Kennerji had no previous experience of romance in his life. He had had crushes, but he had never had dates. He didn't know anybody that had dates. He didn't know if that was because everyone he knew was a debater, and debaters were intrinsically romanceless, or if everyone his age was intrinsically romanceless these days, or if it was just him and everyone else was in fact riding their hearts to eternal bliss while he was hanging around staring at whatever piece of this one particular girl he could get his eyes on at any particular moment without her noticing.

But most of the time, Kennerji and Tucker were in different states and not at the same debate tournaments. And although he was often flummoxed by her presence in the real world, her presence online didn't faze him in the least. Online he was George Clooney, Brad Pitt and Zac Efron combined, which he assumed must be the distillation of everything females were looking for in a male, except for, like, Clooney was old enough to be his

grandfather or something, but girls didn't seem to mind that if the guy was George Clooney, so there you were. Kennerji Allawalla, the George Clooney slash Brad Pitt slash Zac Efron of the internet.

Then again, did girls really like Zac Efron? Girls over the age of ten, that is?

That was the problem with being intrinsically romanceless. You didn't have a clue what the intrinsically romantic were up to.

Thank God for the internet.

Facebook. News feed. What's on your mind?

Tucker Gallstone did not like 27 assistant coaches prepping out on all her cases

Kennerji Allawalla and 2 others like this.

7 comments

Kennerji Allawalla You did alright. You made it to the bid round.

Tucker Gallstone The whole disclosure thing sucks. All the big programs were able to prep out on everyone. People like me were overwhelmed.

Kennerji Allawalla Is there disclosure at Pup?

Tucker Gallstone No way. No judge prefs either though. You going?

Kennerji Allawalla Absolutely

Tucker Gallstone k see you there

Kennerji Allawalla k

What Kennerji didn't add was that, while he was seeing her, he'd be completely lovesick. He wouldn't miss it for the world.

At exactly midnight that Sunday, registration closed for the Pup-a-Roni.

The tournament had been nearly filled up for weeks, and some divisions even had waiting lists. In the period between opening registration and its automatic shutdown, Dude Firmguns hadn't given it much thought. The firmguns.com program ran perfectly well of its own accord. It didn't need him puttering around in it. When the announced closing time rolled around, no one other than he would be able to access it. And more

importantly, that was the point at which he'd start roaming through the data, looking for problems like repeated entries and bogus judges, and he'd start calling out the coaches who had caused these problems. His favorite portion of the program was the part he called Shenanigans. Hit this button, and a list of potential scoundrels appeared in a pdf neatly deposited on his computer desktop. He loved nothing better than combing through the Shenanigans. It was more fun than the actual tournament.

"Do me a favor," Dude said aloud.

The two blonde Masters candidates from MIT, one of whom was sitting on either side of him on the couch in his apartment, watching *Pretty Woman* (why do they always want to watch *Pretty Woman*?) on the 52-inch plasma screen, each with a chocolate martini in hand, turned to him.

"Sure," the one on the left said. Her name was Coquille.

"Sure," echoed the one on the right. Her name was Berthe.

Dude Firmguns was nothing if not thoroughly international.

"Could one of you log on to firmguns and try to register for the Pup? I want to make sure it's shut down."

Coquille drew her iPad from the couch beside her and within seconds was on the firmguns site.

"It's locked," she announced.

"Excellent," Firmguns responded.

Coquille put back the iPad.

"I love this movie," Berthe said softly on his right side.

"Me too," Coquille agreed.

Dude Firmguns nodded. *Pretty Woman* was the only DVD he owned. In his own personal history, it had proven to be the only one he needed.

The two girls snuggled in a little closer to him, and Dude decided that he'd start combing through the Pup Shenanigans tomorrow.

He had some of his own shenanigans on his mind at the moment.

--

Lily Maru was suffering from that leaden feeling that comes with any Monday after a boring weekend. Unlike her teammate Tucker, Lily had not traveled to Texas, even though she wanted to bid up just as much as Tucker

did, if not more. Hell, Tucker was a sophomore; she had three years to do it, whereas Lily was a senior and had still never gone to the Tournament of Champions.

She'd get a bid at the Pups. She was sure of it. Then one more after that. She was going to finish Nighten Day with a bang. And then she would go to—

Somewhere.

As Lily dropped herself into her seat in Mrs. Melanzana's AP Physics class and the bell rang, she noticed that the teacher was staring at her as if she had three heads, or maybe four on a good day. The woman's eyes narrowed, and then, catching herself, she launched into the day's lesson. Lily took furious notes on her laptop. She liked physics, plus she had no choice but to get a 5 on the AP for whatever college she was going to, even though the test came in May after she'd already—hopefully—have been accepted somewhere. She had nightmares of getting into somewhere decent and then screwing up and them changing their minds and then she'd be thrown out before she started.

Lily was a Class A worrier.

For the next forty minutes or so, the class watched as Mrs. Melanzana, who was far from the world's greatest teacher but who at least understood the subject she was teaching, which was more than you could say of some of her colleagues, went on about various forces, drawing lots of formulas on the white board and soliciting help from the class—usually the people least likely to provide it—in solving them.

Finally, when the class was over, the bell rang, and everyone filed out in the orderly, peaceful fashion of soda escaping from a shaken can popped open on a very hot day, Mrs. Melanzana pulled Lily aside as she tried to make her exit in the confusion.

“Lily,” she said, standing by her desk.

Lily stopped. Now what? She hadn't been to any debates yet, so she hadn't missed any classes, so it was too early for Melanzana to be on her for that.

“Yes?” the girl asked.

“I got your college application.”

Lily looked at her. “College application?” What did Melanzana have to do with Lily’s college application. And for that matter, *what* college application? Lily hadn’t applied anywhere yet.

“I really don’t understand,” the woman went on.

Lily didn’t understand either. She just looked at her.

“You’ll be able to get into a top school,” Melanzana continued. “I don’t understand why you’ve put in for early admission to Upper Schmegeggie Community. I’ll recommend you, of course, if that’s what you want, but I think you should have waited.”

Lily stared at her. Upper Schmegeggie Community College? Early admission?

“I guess you are guaranteed to get in of course,” Mrs. Melanzana said, sitting down in her chair behind her desk, “but I expected so much more of you.”

Lily remained speechless.

Upper Schmegeggie?

“I...uh...” Nothing wanted to come out of Lily’s mouth. She blinked a couple of times. “I don’t think that’s right,” she finally managed to say.

“I don’t think so either,” Melanzana agreed, although she wasn’t literally agreeing to what Lily was thinking. What Lily was thinking was that she had not applied to Upper Schmegeggie, and she had no intention of applying to Upper Schmegeggie, and...and...and...

Students were pouring into the room for the next class.

“I’ve got to go,” Lily said.

Mrs. Melanzana nodded, and Lily turned and pushed her way through the incoming students and headed for her next class.

Upper Schmegeggie Community College? What the hell was that all about?

During her next class she’d go online and find out.

The wireless system at Nighten Day was new this year, and it limited students to about three websites. Any site that they might actually want to visit was off-limits. Any site that they couldn’t care less about was on the

recommended list, with the exception of Wikipedia, which to many students was the mother's milk of education. At its inception, most teachers had scorned the online encyclopedia as a repository of misinformation and half-truths, but it had evolved into the number one source of virtually everything, misinformation and half-truths notwithstanding.

But Lily wasn't interested in Wikipedia at this particular moment. Nor was she interested in any of the banned sites, like Facebook or Twitter or her email account. Using the Google search bar, she navigated over to the home page of Upper Schmegeggy Community College. Mr. Mizoguchi, the English teacher, was rambling on about *The Red Badge of Courage*, which Lily had read three years ago and which she considered the quintessential crappy book they made everyone read in every English class. Since Lily had already had two previous English classes with Mizo, and aced them both, he didn't care whether she paid attention during class or surfed the internet or whatever it was that tickled his fancy, although like most teachers, he preferred to delude himself into thinking that all the students in his class with their computers open were busily taking notes of his every precious utterance. As if...

The home page of Upper Schmegeggy, which Lily had never seen before, made the school look like any other college. Grassy quad. Classy chapel. Multicultural students studying and playing frisbee at the same time. There was nothing particularly wrong with Upper Schmegeggy, she imagined. She knew that the famous Dude Firmguns had graduated there, and he was certifiably brilliant if, perhaps, a little unambitious according to the scuttlebutt—although even more of the scuttlebutt concentrated on his nonstop adventures as a traveling Lothario, working his way through every Ivy League coed in American, which Lily found less than believable but which everyone insisted was true, so there you were. He was too short for her tastes, truth to tell, but then again, he was easily ten years older than she, making him a virtual geriatric on the high school romance scale.

Whatever. The thing was, how had Upper Schmegeggy come to believe that she wanted to get in, with early admittance, no less? Aside from her tenuous debate connection to Dude Firmguns, with whom she had never exchanged two words in her entire life, she had no idea. She stared at the page. There was a login box, asking for her email address and password. A

thought occurred to her. She entered her email, then hit enter. No luck. It asked her for her password. It also asked if she had forgotten her password. All right. Let's pretend she forgot it. She hit that button, and was told that her password would be sent to her email.

For most students, this would be the end of it, given that her email account was blocked from the school network, but for a science-based senior like Lily, who had already knocked the Comp Sci AP with a 5, and who had had a proxy site for a couple of years now, this was simply a matter of logging into the proxy and accessing her email through that. A lot of filtering software was wise to elementary proxies, but Lily's was neatly buried in a hack she had picked up from an MIT junior who had judged for Nighten a couple of times and who had subsequently hung around with the team and just oozed geek information. So within a minute she was reading her email from Upper Schmegeggie telling her that they had received her request, and reminding her that her password was...

Oh. My. God. That son of a son of a son. Lily's blood pressure doubled in roughly three seconds, and it was all she could do to stay in her seat and not walk across the room to where he was sitting and committing a most deserved murder.

Lily's password for Upper Shmegeggie Community College was "hautboy."

Damn him!

Lily took a deep breath. Okay. She would handle this. One thing at a time.

She navigated back to the college site, logged in and went to her account. Sure enough, she was definitely requesting early admission, and had noted Mrs. Melanzana as her main contact, which of course was ridiculous, because the contact was supposed to be an administrator so that they could acquire Lily's transcript, but that was beside the point. Lily clicked a few buttons and turned off the admission request, and then went to her account and changed the password to prevent that idiot from trying this again.

Mizo was still in the middle of *Red Badge of Courage* when Lily finally looked up from her computer. She had solved the mystery, and ended the immediate problem. But this was a breach beyond anything she might

have expected. You don't mess around with other people's college admissions. And you especially don't mess around with Lily Maru's college admissions.

Okay. She wasn't finished yet. One more thing.

She bent down to her computer, and using her proxy, logged on to Twitter. She typed in a very simple one-line tweet, all in caps.

YOU REALIZE, OF COURSE, THAT THIS MEANS WAR.

Will Kennerji look Tucker in the eye at the Pup-a-Roni?

Is there really a Masters candidate at MIT named Coquille?

Should Lily reconsider and simply go to Upper Schmegeggie and get the whole damned thing over with?

Have they tried to stop the oil leak by stuffing it with old episodes of Nostrum?

Are North and South Korea considering taking their act on the road and calling it Law and Order, 38th Parallel?

The answers, my friend, are blowing everywhere but in our next episode: "If *Prince of Persia* is the best you can do, Hollywood, we are in serious trouble, or, Al and Tipper? Not Al and Tipper? Say it isn't so! Say it isn't so!"