



Series 2

Episode 20

Part One: String 'em Up

It was a beautiful autumn afternoon, warm and sunny, and the Nighten Day Speech and Debate team was meeting outdoors. It was one of their days just to rub elbows, as Tarnish Jutmoll liked to put it, to talk among themselves about what they were doing, to share ideas, to do some team-building. Other days they would be in the classroom and he would lecture or they would practice, but every once in a while he liked them to just do things willy nilly among themselves. Especially this early in the year, it kept the novices from thinking that this was just another class with a lot of work, although, to a great extent, it *was* just another class with a lot of work. No point in letting on too soon, though. And besides, it was a gorgeous day that they had all spent cooped up indoors, learning all that other stuff they had to suffer through. Some fresh air and forensic relaxation would be good for them.

They had assembled loosely in the stands above the athletic field. Below them track team members were jogging about, sprinting, or throwing things. The football team was grunting up a storm as it attacked a wall of stuffed dummies that stood in for a defensive line of three-hundred-pound fifteen-year-olds. The cheerleaders were working the hardest, throwing themselves around like circus performers as they perfected their gymnastic routines, while a couple of kids with less of a bent for physical education were just lying on the grass, listening to their iPods.

Among the forensicians, there was a natural distribution into the two groups of speech and debate on either side of the main aisle on the fifty-yard line. From the topmost row Jutmoll watched as Hautboy LeMonde moved

among the speech people like the natural socializing politician that he was, talking to each and every one of them, getting updates, sharing wisdom, whatever. He even got that girl Sashimi, the one that never talked, to respond to him. Jutmoll couldn't hear what he was saying to any of them, but the body language was always the same, with Hautboy the guru tending to whichever fawning mendicant he was dealing with, the laying on of virtual hands, the cure by charisma. The only break in this pattern was when Lily Maru arrived. She slowly walked up the aisle, her eyes on Hautboy and his eyes on her, as if the two of them were Wild West shootists just waiting for the other one to draw a Colt Peacemaker. Whatever was going on between these two was not good, and went beyond the normal innate difference of speech person and debate person. Jutmoll didn't know what it was, and he didn't *want* to know what it was. And it was early in the year, so he hoped he wouldn't have to find out. But he had a feeling that there was no way out of it for any of them.

The challenge moment passed as Lily found a couple of debate juniors to sit with. None of the press-the-flesh, talk-to-everyone gregariousness of Hautboy, even though she was just as much the captain of her side as he was of his. Lily just settled in and started talking about cases.

Jutmoll shook his head. "Whatever," he muttered under his breath.

"Hey, Muff."

"Hey, Tucker."

Tucker Gallstone sat down on the bleacher seat next to the debate novice.

"So I see you're signed up for the Little Johnson," Tucker said.

Billy Muffle looked at her. "I am?"

Tucker nodded. "And you've got your mother judging for you. That's good. Get her broken in early."

Billy's expression was blank. "My mother is judging for me?" He pondered for a minute. "She must have signed up herself."

"You didn't sign her up?"

"I don't know where the signup is."

"You mean, you didn't sign yourself up either?"

Billy shook his head.

Tucker sighed. "Welcome to the Bahamas," she said softly.

"What?"

"Nothing, nothing. Have you started writing your cases yet?"

He shook his head again.

“So what are you waiting for? Graduation?”

“I’ve got plenty of time.”

“No you don’t. The Little Johnson is next week. That’s the only first-timers’ tournament there is.”

Billy’s eyes widened. “Next week? No kidding?”

“No kidding.”

There was a series of grunts and shouts from the football field where the Nighten Day football team, nicknamed the Porters after their songwriter mascot, were now piling on top of each other rather than on top of the machinery.

“So,” Tucker continued, “what are you going to run?”

“I don’t know,” Billy replied. “What’s the topic again?”

Tucker narrowed her eyes. “Earth to Muff. It’s capital punishment.”

He grimaced. “Oh, yeah. That’s right.”

“So, are you for it or against it?”

He thought for a minute. “For it, I guess.”

“Why?”

“Well... If somebody kills somebody, then it’s only fair that we punish them by killing them back.”

“An eye for an eye, in other words. Even Stevens.”

“That’s right.”

“So if somebody breaks into your house and steals something, we should break into their house and steal something else to make it even?”

“I don’t know—“

“Is killing wrong?”

“Yeah. Sure.”

“So if killing is wrong, why isn’t it wrong if the government does it?”

“What?”

“I mean, listen. You’re going to punish someone for killing somebody else by having the government kill them. If it was wrong for the guy to kill somebody in the first place, why is it right for the government to do it in the second place?”

“Because they’re the government. They can do whatever they want.”

Tucker rolled her eyes. “No they can’t. You have rights, Muff. The government just can’t take away your rights whenever it wants to. The government exists to *protect* your rights, not take them away. And besides, if something is wrong, no matter what it is, then it doesn’t matter who does it, the government or an individual, it’s still wrong. Right?”

“That’s very confusing,” Billy told her.

“It’s not supposed to be easy, Muff.”

“So you’re saying that killing is always wrong, even if the government does it. So capital punishment must always be wrong too. Right?”

“Why?”

“Because killing is always wrong.”

“Why?”

“Because it is!”

“That is not a reason, Muff. Why is killing wrong?”

He shook his head. Billy Muffle was a big head shaker. “Because...I got it! Because it takes away your right to life.”

“Okay. But if you take away somebody else’s right to life by killing them, don’t you forfeit your own right to life?”

“What?”

“And by committing a rights violation like that, don’t you take yourself outside of the social contract? So the government, therefore, is justified in taking away *your* right to life in return.”

“So capital punishment is right, then?” He paused. “Or wrong, depending on how you look at it.”

She smiled. “Welcome to the wild and wonderful world of debate, Muff.”

For the afternoon meeting, Tarnish Jutmoll sat with whomever he felt needed sitting with, discussing pieces and strategies and general business. At one point he was between Tucker Gallstone and Lily Maru.

“So what did you come back with from the Monteverdi?” Jutmoll asked his star sophomore.

Tucker had her computer on her lap. “Some good evidence. Nobody was running anything all that unexpected. I’ve got—” She looked at the screen—“seven really good new cards we should work on, including some responses on the cerebral cortex and recidivism.”

Jutmoll nodded. “Very good.” He turned to his debate captain. “You’ve seen these, Lily?”

“Yep. I’ve already started working them into my cases.”

“Excellent. Send me whatever you’ve got, Tucker. And when either of you have case outlines, send me those, preferably tonight. We can work it all out with the rest of the varsity tomorrow, especially those going to the Pup.”

“No problem,” Tucker said.

Needless to say, both of the girls had dreams of getting a TOC qualification at the Pup. Tucker had scouted as many cases as she could at the Monteverdi, and come back with some good new material.

It was looking promising.

Except for one thing.

At this very moment, at Veil of Ignorance to the north, that team was also having an after-school debate meeting. Except they weren't outside in the sun, enjoying the afternoon like the Nighten Dayers. Before the Monteverdi tournament last weekend, Eric Rand-Walsh had charged each of the Seven Samurai to scout as many positions as they could, and to bring back as much new evidence as they could, and among them now they had roughly seven times the amount of material that Tucker had. Plus the seven Veilies that had attended the tournament had their portion of material, now multiplying what Tucker had by about tenfold, accounting for repetitions. All seven of the attending Veilies at Monteverdi had gotten quals. At the Pup, Veil was sending a different seven debaters entirely, plus the Seven Samurai again, to start the qualification process for the team's second wave. Veil's goal was to get the most qualified debaters at TOC from one school ever.

Meanwhile, Tucker and Lily only had the simple goal of qualifying themselves.

If David had been a debater, he would have been a Nighten Dayer, and his opponent, Goliath, would have been just one of many on the Veil of Ignorance team.

And it was only the second tournament of the long, long season.

Part Two: There Will be Blood. Yum Yum!

Later that night...

Mythology and legends and facts tend to get all mixed up over time until often there is nothing left but a mishmash of vague suggestions that are digested haphazardly by the cultural soul and regurgitated as truth.

Take the Old Ones, for instance.

In today's popular imagination, the Old Ones were entertainment pabulum for adolescents, romantic figures that...sparkled.

Feh!

At least some of the Twentieth Century attempts to render the Old Ones had gotten a couple of things right, although they had gotten more things wrong. The Old Ones might prefer night, but the sun was not anathema to them. Their images were clearly present in mirrors. They happily enjoyed garlic in their dinners, provided the cuisine called for it, and their bodies required normal nutritional portions of food to survive. That was their mortality. As for their immortality, that was mere...exaggeration. It was their longevity that distinguished them from the normal run-of-the mill human. They were not immortal. They could die a number of ways, from being run over by a bus to slipping on a banana peel. However, they did tend to survive better than most from such ordeals, because their health was enhanced by the unusual aspects of diet. Sure, cutting off one of their heads would do the job, guaranteed. And a stake in the heart was pretty much going to turn the victim into a former Old One, i.e., a dead one. Which was true of all living creatures. They were not all that weird, aside from their extranormal nourishment, and its unique reactions to their genetic makeup. And one or two other things that came with experience... Lots of experience...

Their extranormal nourishment was, of course, blood. Most of this nourishment was non-human; the Old Ones did not live off of their fellow humans, in other words, at least not exclusively. There was other, easier prey. Human nourishment, from those known as the Willing, was a special treat. The Willing were willing because they wanted nothing more than to join the Old Ones, and gave of themselves freely in that hope. And occasionally if one were Willing long enough, it would happen, although usually the Willing simply died, usually of blood deficiencies, and at a remarkably young age.

Too bad. Tsk tsk!

On certain occasions, however, the mingling of the blood of the Old Ones and the Willing did transform the latter into the former. It took time, provided there was enough exposure. And a genetic predisposition in the first place. If you really wanted to become an Old One, start by having a family back in the mountains of central Europe. Blood can be transfused. Genes tend to stay put.

The Old Ones had many skills, which were mostly due to their long lives, and the ample opportunity to acquire those life skills along the way. Sometimes they were perceived as being able to make dreams come true, or at least it looked that way. That was another reason the Willing were... willing. Their dreams would come true today, and eventually, if they made

the leap, they would make the dreams of others come true in the future. It all sounded so ideal. What could go wrong?

At 4:20 that morning, Raga Dikeskroner tumbled onto his bed. It had been a long night. And he was full. Because he had been hunting.

Hunting was definitely one of the skills the Old Ones tended to acquire.

The idea that the Old Ones could transform themselves into bats or wolves was part of that nonsensical mishmash of fact and fiction. It was like sparkling. The Old Ones did not have the power of transformation, an idea that was scientifically ridiculous. No, their skills at hunting were entirely human, but then again humans had been hunters practically since their coming up from the primordial ooze. It was the skill of the hunter that was required in the night to track and chase down and impale one's prey, and then to suck the life out of it. There were plenty of small and sometimes not so small mammals available for a talented and hungry Old One.

And of course, worst case scenario, not that Raga liked to admit it, although at times, in urban settings, he had resorted to it, there were always animal shelters looking to find a happy home for Fluffy or Taffy or Mr. Muggles...

But tonight there had been no need to, uh, adopt a rescue animal. Far from it. As Raga's eyes closed it occurred to him that he would probably sleep through most of the day tomorrow. So be it. He had been up most of the night. He had been north of the city, where there were still woods and forests. And creatures living in those woods and forests. Fewer now, than there had been yesterday.

Raga smiled. There was still a little blood at the edge of his mouth. He used his tongue to lick it off.

Contentedly, almost purring, he fell asleep.

Will Tarnish Jutmoll get involved in the war between Hautboy LeMonde and Lily Maru?

Will Billy Muffle learn to love capital punishment?

Will Veil of Ignorance get half-qualifications for all seven of its second wave of debaters?

Do they really have some crazy little women there in Kansas City and am I going to get me one?

If the USA wins the World Cup, are we all going to have to actually learn the rules of soccer?

Questions. Always questions. Answers? Not a one of them in our next episode: “The only way the USA will win the World Cup is if the entire American team wakes up tomorrow transformed into Brazilians, or, if Green Day is the best thing on the Tony Award show, then there’s something seriously wrong with Broadway, rock, and television in general, and you can point the camera at Nathan and Bernadette all you want, but it isn’t going to solve anything. And what the hell was Beyonce doing there anyhow?”