



Series 2

Episode 32

Love Means Never Having to Say Yo Mama

By eleven o'clock that night, the Day's Ramalama EconoCot Express Inn was jumping. Over two hundred high school students—debaters and Speecho-Americans both—had descended on the place, which was usually a quiet spot for visiting families to stay while their prospective students oohed and aahed over the Pup campus on their way to deferred admittance, or where the parents of actual Pups stayed while visiting their fifty-thousand-dollar-a-year debits who, aside from appreciatively grabbing a couple of meals that weren't taken out of a pizza box after thirty six hours of sitting on the floor next to the XBox, mostly spent the time pretending that these particular adults were, in fact, lost, with nothing whatsoever to do with the Pup walking five steps ahead of them. The problem with parental visits is, of course, that they include parents.

At this point every potential sitting space in the small lobby was taken, often with three or four times the number of people intended. Couches and chairs and all the other horizontal surfaces were crammed with teenagers, working or playing or socializing or generally sucking up the atmosphere as it tickled their particular fancies. Any non-forensical adults who had the misfortune of stumbling into the area usually stopped dead in their tracks, their jaws agape as they wondered which new circle of hell they

had stumbled into. As a general rule, adults would prefer to find their hotel infested with the living dead before finding it infested with adolescents.

Who can blame them?

Tucker Gallstone had somehow managed to find a relatively secluded piece of turf near the entrance to the swimming pool, which had been locked down for the weekend. The smell of chlorine gently caressed her as she sat on the floor, bent over her computer. She was wearing earbuds, and was listening to the score of “Oklahoma.” At the same time, she was researching Heidegger, trying to establish whether he had anything useful to say about the state of being juvenile. As far as she could tell, Heidegger didn’t have anything useful to say about anything, but he *was* sort of a dirty old man, for whatever that was worth. At eleven o’clock at night at a Day’s Ramalama EconoCot Express Inn, that’s probably worth more than Being, Time, and the price of rice on the Yangtze River.

“Tucker.”

He even looked sort of like a dirty old man if the photograph in Wikipedia was any indication. What Hannah Arendt had seen in him was hard to say. Then again, she wasn’t exactly any Venus on stilts herself.

“Tucker?”

The good news was, if Tucker did somehow manage to lasso the Dasein into the structure of juvenile justice, which had been Kimchi’s latest recommendation, there weren’t many people around to refute it. As long as she was arguing in front of a college student judge who was both studying philosophy and who also hadn’t been able to make any sense of Good Old Marty Heidegger, she might be able to pull it off.

“Tucker!”

She looked up. Standing above her was Kennerji Allawalla. She pulled off her earbuds. “Hey, Kennerji.”

“What are you doing?” he asked, hovering over her.

“A Heidegger PIC. How about you?”

“You have a counterplan that uses Heidegger?”

She shook her head. “I’d *like* to have have a counterplan that uses Heidegger. At the moment, I’ve got doodly squat.”

Kennerji slid down next to her until they were sitting side by side, facing out into the hallway. The traffic going by them was steady, a roaring

stream of forensicians doing whatever they could to avoid going back to their rooms.

“I wanted to talk to you,” Kennerji said.

“Talk away,” Tucker said. “I’m not getting anywhere with Heidegger. I don’t know if anyone’s ever gotten anywhere with Heidegger. Except Hannah Arendt, that is.”

“What?”

“Oh, don’t worry it. Anyhow, what’s up?” Even as she asked the question, her eyes were on her computer screen and she was scanning an article she had found on Marty’s relationship with Husserl, which might lead to something.

“Uh, this isn’t easy to say, Tucker.”

“Well, spit it out, Kennerji. You’re a debater. Spew.”

He took a deep breath. “It’s about us, Tucker.”

“Us?”

“Us. I mean...” Another deep breath. “I have feelings for you, Tucker.”

If you used a phenomenological approach, Tucker thought, maybe you could say that juveniles don’t have the necessary amount of experience, so—

Her mind caught up with what Kennerji had just said.

“Feelings?” she repeated.

“Yeah, you know. Feelings. Like, uh, I like you. Not, like, as a friend. You know.” Kennerji’s descent into the “like” universe was indicative of his state of mind. He was one of the most economical speakers Tucker knew. He never used verbal junk.

Now she took a deep breath.

The idea that Kennerji Allawalla felt *that* way about her came as the proverbial bolt out of the blue. They got along, they hung out, they talked debate—but...romance?

Romance?

Tucker raised her eyes from the computer. A little ways down the hall on her left, a pair of politicians were loudly working on a Foucault kritik that had gone out of style back in the year that Brittany Spears turned legal.

Romance?

Tucker hadn't thought of romance since, God, what was it? Second grade? Back then she had had a crush on Scott Justin. Or was it Justin Scott? Whatever. He had been short and a little confused looking, but he had reminded her of Fozzie Bear, and she had always liked Fozzie Bear, and one thing had led to the other, and for a couple of weeks she went around thinking that when they grew up, she and Scott Justin (or Justin Scott) would get married and have six children and he would be a doctor and she would be a policeman and they would live in Orlando to be close to Walt Disney World. And then she grew out of it, and to be honest, she hadn't thought about romance for herself much ever since. The day she had realized that a Disney Princess was about as promising in the role model business as a Nazi Stormtrooper, although on a different end of the spectrum, she had moved on. If she gave any thought to romance at all it was something she figured she would come upon when the time was right and she was ready. She knew some kids in her class who had hooked up, and she just didn't get it. It wasn't her thing. At least not now.

But she wasn't an idiot. She was not socially illiterate. First of all, she knew that she was not unattractive, and that it was not unlikely that a boy here or there might be attracted to her, her own opinions on the subject notwithstanding. And secondly, she knew that when that happened, some boys were going to be better at it than others. There were some guys out there that hit on anything that moved, who had shells as thick as cement blocks. You could ignore them or even tell them to take a hike, and it would have the effect of telling a tree that its bark is too loud.

But a guy like Kennerji?

She didn't want to make eye contact with him. She knew that he was not one of those thick-skinned guys who were out on the prowl. If Kennerji said that he had feelings for her, that meant that he, Kennerji Allawalla, specifically had feelings for her, Tucker Gallstone. And because she was not socially illiterate, she knew that what she said next could have far-reaching effects. Kennerji struck her as the kind of guy who would not take rejection easily, if at all. She imagined that if she gave even the slightest indication that she didn't reciprocate his feelings, he would shut down for life and never talk to a girl again. This was debate, after all. Social ineptitude was practically a requirement.

She could imagine it. He'd go to some college on the west coast, get hired by some internet startup, work twenty-eight hours a day living on Diet Coke and last week's Kraft Macaroni and Cheese, and then suddenly he'd be worth four hundred million dollars and he still would never have been out on a date with a real live girl.

Welcome to the Bahamas.

She finally turned to face him. "I really like you, Kennerji," she said.

His eyes were wide. She could tell he was waiting for the "but" in what she was going to say.

"Do you think it's a good idea that we get involved if we might have to debate each other?" she continued. The look on her face was of deep concern, as if she had so wanted to get involved with him for as long as she could remember, but their business relationship was forcing them apart.

Whereas, in fact, she was mentally patting herself on the back for her brilliant strategy. Could she turn an argument or what?

"You think?" Kennerji asked.

"I know. We've got years of debating together. If we give in to our feelings... Do we really want to do that?"

Of course, that was a risky question. Obviously Kennerji really did want to do that. Sure, Tucker didn't date, but she knew about boys. A red-blooded (probably) American male would give up debate in a heartbeat, would even turn down the guarantee of winning the Tournament of Champions three years running, for a kiss and a cuddle with the girl he had a crush on. For that matter, red-blooded gay American males would do likewise for the same with some boy they had a crush on. This was adolescence, after all, where planning went only so far as one's hormones.

"You're probably right," Kennerji finally said, nodding.

Tucker was nodding too. "I know. I know. We can't give in to this, Kennerji."

"I know," he echoed.

"We have to be strong."

"We have to be strong."

"We've got to be tough."

"Tough!"

"Dedicated."

“Dedicated!”

“Celibate.”

“Celibate!”

He jumped up.

“Okay,” he said. “Well, I’ve gotta go. See you later.”

She looked up at him. “See you later.”

“Later,” he repeated.

“Later.”

He strode off down the hallway.

And Tucker wondered. The thing was, she liked Kennerji well enough, but she certainly wasn’t attracted to him on a romantic level. At the moment, she wasn’t attracted to anyone on a romantic level. Not since Scott Justin...

Or was it Justin Scott?

And she began to wonder, was this right? She was a healthy high school sophomore girl. She had hormones too.

She shook her head.

Welcome to the Bahamas, indeed.

Not every forensician in the Day’s Ramalama EconoCot Express Inn was out in the hallways. Some were in their rooms.

Hautboy LeMonde looked at the team list of which Nighten Dayer was in which room, and with whom. Tarnish Jutmoll had given a copy to both of his captains, Hautboy for Speech and Lily for debate, to help them corral everyone for curfew at midnight and for hauling butts to the bus in the morning.

But it wasn’t midnight yet. Hautboy was neither corralling nor hauling.

He was visiting.

Lily was sharing her room with three other girls. Each of the students was stuffed in with three others, and somehow they would all find turf to spread out on during the night. That was the way it was at tournaments. The alternative to packing them in was staying home. Hotel rooms for two nights

for a whole team were expensive; measures had to be taken. Sometimes newbies looked askance at sharing a bed or a draping the torso over an uncomfy comfy chair, but they got used to it soon enough. It was like the army. There wasn't much privacy, but there was a war to be fought, and you got used to it soon enough.

Hautboy knocked on the door. He had no idea if he would find her alone or not. If not, he would have to postpone his plan. But if she was by herself, the time had come.

The door opened, and Lily was standing there in a baggy t-shirt and pajama bottoms. She had her biology textbook in her hand. Leave it to Lily Maru to do homework at a debate tournament. A quick glance past her into the room told Hautboy that she was alone.

"Hi, Lily," Hautboy said.

She looked at him. "Hautboy."

"Can I come in?"

"Come in?"

"Yes, come in. To talk."

"To talk."

He didn't repeat the words. They had played enough of the echo game. He waited.

"Okay," she said. She moved away from the door back into the room, and he followed her. She plopped herself down on the chair at a small desk beside the two double beds, both of which were still made but seriously ruffled. Hautboy sat on the edge of the nearest bed.

"We do need to talk," he began. "About us."

"What about us?"

He shook his head. "We've been going at each other for way to long now. You know it, and I know it. We've been escalating. Things are getting out of hand."

There was the hint of a smile at the edge of her lips. "Out of hand?"

"Thanks to you, Lily, Mrs. Lupino has had a seriously new education in nasty websites."

"Moi?"

"Lily..."

She laughed. “Okay. I understand what you’re saying. But I’m not admitting anything.”

He smiled. “I’m not asking you to. What I am asking is, what are we fighting about?”

Her expression turned serious. “What are we fighting about? How about we’re fighting over the team, over steering people wrong, convincing debaters to become speechies when they shouldn’t?”

“Maybe it happens the other way around too?”

“No, it doesn’t.” She paused. “Not really.”

“Not really?”

“Well, not as much.”

He nodded. “That’s why I’m here, Lily. I think the time has come. We need to declare a truce.”

“A truce?”

“Exactly. Hands off each other’s kids. Draw the line. Speech is speech, debate is debate, we leave everyone alone to do whatever they want.”

She looked at him, taking a deep breath. “Why? Why all of a sudden do you want a truce?”

“Because we’ve done enough of this silliness. It’s not getting us anywhere, and we’re just getting worse and worse, and if we keep it up, one of us might actually get hurt. And, let’s face it, we’re not doing the noobies any good either, screwing with their minds, trying to get them into the wrong activities.”

She kept looking at him. He met her eyes, unflinching.

“I think you might actually be serious,” she said finally.

“I *know* I might actually be serious,” he responded. “I wouldn’t be here otherwise.”

She shook her head. “How can I trust you?” she asked.

“How can I trust *you*?”

They continued staring at each other, not aggressively but curiously, trying to read into the other’s mind.

“How about this?” Hautboy asked. He rose and moved over to Lily’s chair, then bent down. She was looking up at him. He brought his lips down to hers, and softly kissed her.

She didn't move.

He pulled back an inch. Her eyes were wide open.

“Or this?”

He kissed her again, and this time he put a little spin on the ball. Two minutes later when he pulled away, her eyes were closed.

She gulped, and opened them. “I thought you were gay,” she said.

He shook his head. “You may have been misinformed on that.” His hand came up and he brushed her dark hair back from her shoulders.

“Truce?” he breathed, his face coming only inches from hers.

She nodded. “Truce,” she agreed, and this time she lifted herself into him, and they kissed once again.

If there were any more spin that could be put on the ball, it would go flying off into orbit.

Hautboy had done as he had planned.

They had gotten a room.

In a manner of speaking...

Why were they the Willing?

The thrill of it, because the experience itself was one of unique and intense physical pleasure.

The danger of it, because unstopped, the flow of blood is the beginning of death.

And the hope of it, because as the blood of the Old Ones and the Willing mixed, there was a chance that the Willing was of the same nature as the Old Ones, and would see the promise of immortality.

I mean, what's not to like?

Raga Dikeskroner pulled away from the woman. It was only a taste, a mere prick at the base of the neck, almost undetectable. The music blared around them, and it was hard to see in the combination of muted and flashing lights. No one paid any more attention to them than to any of the other Willing or Old Ones in the place. There was a place like this almost anywhere, if you knew where to look. And the Willing and the Old Ones always knew where to look.

What amazed Raga Dikeskroner, a man not subject to much amazement, was that he was not alone in his new world, that he was not the only Old One lurking at the edges of the forensic universe. That there were two of them was simply not what he expected. He didn't know why. There were plenty of Old Ones out there, and plenty of reason for them to prey on the young. After all, wasn't that his own plan?

The woman's fingers ran through his hair until her hand was at the back of his head, and she pulled him to her. He didn't resist. He hadn't had much, and there was more there for the asking.

He could put aside the mystery of the other Old One for a while. It probably wouldn't matter one way or the other. And at four in the morning in Pupville, when most of the world was asleep, he was, he admitted to himself, a little hungry. Peckish, you might say.

A little more blood would be the perfect solution to that particular problem.

Is Kennerji Allawalla on his way to becoming a reclusive internet millionaire?

Are Lily and Hautboy on their way to becoming the love story of the century?

Is Raga Dikeskroner on his way to becoming merely the second among debate vampires?

Are the Republicans on their way to becoming more annoying than ever, now that they're back in power in the House?

Are the Democrats on their way to becoming even more wimpy now than they were before this whole midterm election thing?

Nail your stockings and your ninety-five theses to the fireplace as we ponder our next episode, "Deck us all with Boston Charlie, or, all I want for Christmas is my frontal lobotomy."