



Series 2

Episode 34

The Legend of Booty Beauchamp

We need to set the scene.

On Friday night, after rounds had ended, the entire team from Toulouse Lautrec High School went out for a late dinner at Mama Rosa's Trattoria, a restaurant of less than Zagat status across the street from their motel in East Pupville, which is about as far away from Pupville proper as you can get and still have the word Pup in your name somewhere. Dan Ryan, the coach at Toulouse, was notoriously parsimonious when it came to spending team money. The rooms at the East Pupville Sleep With the Fishes Motel were thirty-nine dollars a night. They were worth every penny of it, and not a penny more.

Mama Rosa's Trattoria was not a culinary discovery waiting to happen, but for the twenty or so Toulousian adolescents in the group, it didn't matter much. The portions were large, and the refills on the soda were free, and that was all that mattered to them. That they asked for Coke and were served East Pupville Caca Kola was not an issue. It was dark and cold and free, and that was good enough. As it turned out, the bottling plant was a rat's throw away from the restaurant. That was not an issue either.

Among the Toulousians, we need only concentrate on one PF team. PF stands for Public Forum, a two-person-team debate activity of relatively recent vintage, about which we may go into great depth at a later juncture in

our story. For now it is only important to understand that, because of its relatively recent vintage, PF was often perceived as a starter activity or an activity in which to dump the team members who fit nowhere else. At its best, PF was a viable, exciting debate event. At its worst, it was the Mama Rosa's Trattoria of forensics: the intellectual food wasn't very good, but it was cheap, and there was plenty of it.

Our two Toulousian PFers of note were Peter Sprat, a slight, skinny, nervous sophomore with a haircut reminiscent of Moe Howard of the Three Stooges, and Booty Beauchamp (pronounced classically as beech-um), a prodigious youth roughly three times as wide as Sprat, his fellow sophomore and teammate, and towering over him by at least a head's length. Sprat was a fastidious sort, in a word, fairly tightly wrapped, while Beauchamp was of a more elemental nature, so loosely wrapped that his clothes always seemed to be falling off him because, in fact, they were, as none of them were ever buttoned or zipped correctly. Beauchamp always looked as if he simultaneously needed a shave, a bath and a month in rehab, while Sprat always looked as if he needed a quaalude (that's methaqualone to you). They were a natural couple, and the perfect PF team. Sprat did all the work, and Beauchamp did...nothing. Sprat had complained to coach Dan Ryan that he needed a better partner, and Dan Ryan had understood completely, but at the moment there were no spare partners lying around, and Sprat and Beauchamp were stuck with one another.

At Mama Rosa's that night, Sprat ordered a small salad with plain grilled chicken, and nervously ate about half of it. Booty Beauchamp ordered a family-sized portion (intended for four people) of linguini alla vongole, that is, the linguini with white clam sauce. The garlic smell from the gigantic bowl of pasta that was put in front of him was strong enough to flake the hair off a ferret, but Beauchamp was undeterred. He put his napkin around his neck, grabbed his fork and dug in. Within five minutes he had finished three quarters of the enormous portion, and announced that he was full, aside from the loaf of bread he also scarfed down, slathered generously with the white bean dip that was served on the table instead of butter. (From Mama Rosa's perspective, white beans were a dime a dozen, but butter—you've got to pay for that stuff!) When the waiter came by to clean up, Beauchamp asked for the remainder of his food to be wrapped up to go. In

Booty Beauchamp's estimation, it was a shame to let such good grub go to waste.

The team walked back to the hotel, dodging bullets, arrows and assorted IEDs, and after the usual horsing around in the hallways knocking on doors for no reason other than that the doors were there and there was nothing else to do aside from prep for tomorrow's debates, everyone quieted down. By midnight, the entire Toulouse-Lautrec team was, if not asleep, at least tucked in.

Booty Beauchamp was the first one to find blessed unconsciousness, sleeping the sleep of the just and the young. Given the amount of food he had eaten, sleeping was about the only thing he *could* do, come to think of it. And, so, do it he did, as the saying goes, until the alarm went off at six the next morning.

It will come as no surprise that Peter Sprat was the first person in the room—there were four of them altogether—to pop out of bed. He had spent half the night worrying about what they would be running today and how well they would do and if he could get Booty to perform even just a little bit. Before anyone could register it, Peter was in the shower, and the steam was coming out from under the door. One of the other students in the room flipped on the TV to a “Saved by the Bell” rerun. The third student pulled his pillow over his head, hoping that he really wasn’t at a debate tournament and that this was all merely a horrible dream that would soon go away if he just let it wash over him. And lastly, there was Booty. He rose up in the bed looking something like a lost manatee and sniffed the room a bit. His eyes turned right. There, on the bedside table, was a white styrofoam container containing last night’s leftover linguini and clam sauce. Booty flipped the top off, then scanned the room for a fork, but saw nothing. Hunger trumped gentility, and he used his fingers to shovel in the last portion of the pasta. Although it was now settled in at room temperature, Booty still found it quite tasty, albeit slightly messy. Before he was done his whole arm was covered with a combination of olive oil, clams and garlic. It didn’t bother him, though. He used the sheet to wipe himself off.

Delicious.

For reasons known only to Booty Beauchamp, Booty did not shower that morning. He simply stood up and threw the suit he had been wearing the

day before over the underwear that he had slept in, tied his tie as best he could (which wasn't very good but which was congruent with the rest of his attire), slipped his feet into his penny loafers and was ready to go. Aside from smelling slightly more ripe than average, he was the Booty Beauchamp the rest of the Toulouse team had come to know and expect. No one thought twice about him as he climbed up into the bus. He sat down next to Peter Sprat and began worrying at his teeth with his tongue and then, finding no solace in that, with his fingers. Peter simply looked out the window and wondered if they'd be there in time for the first round of the morning.

The room was high up in the Chapel of the Holy Unwarranted Assumption. Sprat and Beauchamp climbed for what seemed weeks, the only thing missing from their ascent being a team of sherpas to guide them on their way. Like many of the Pup buildings, the chapel was a neo-Gothic pile, a mix of points and decorative flourishes resembling a melting stone wedding cake, marked throughout by pointed arches. Up, up, they went until they finally reached what was clearly marked as Room 1138.

"Ooof," Beauchamp said, leaning against the wall and slumping down onto his haunches.

"I'm out of breath," Sprat said, standing over him and thumping on his chest.

"I don't feel so good," Beauchamp said. He gave a slight moan. "My stomach."

Sprat shook his head. The way Booty Beauchamp ate, he was surprised that there was ever a moment in his life when his stomach wasn't bothering him one way or the other. "Have a drink of water."

"I didn't bring any. Did you bring any?"

Sprat shook his head. They had climbed a virtual Everest and had not thought to bring water. Would they ever make it down alive?

They could hear voices from within the room in which they were scheduled to debate, apparently the first flight preceding their own. At the same time, they heard clicking on the stairs, getting louder and louder, until

two girls looking very much like Public Forum debaters joined them on the landing.

“High up,” one of the girls remarked as she tried to catch her breath.

“As close to heaven as the chapel will allow,” Sprat responded, thinking himself quite the clever humorist.

The girl looked at him as if he had just sprayed a fire hydrant. Sprat turned away, deciding there and then that he wouldn’t try talking to a girl again for at least another year, as he was obviously not yet up to the challenge.

The two girls were a marked contrast to Sprat and Beauchamp. To their Moe and Curly the two girls were simple, straightforward-looking types, neatly dressed, sharply combed and clipped, the perfect pair of sixteen-year-old lawyers-to-be. They were from The Hoopdido School in Texas, a private all-girl establishment with a reputation as debate beasts. Girls from the school were known familiarly as Hoopdidoopdies.

The Hoopdidoopdies had been there only a minute before the door opened and the teams from the first flight exited the room. The Hoopdidoopdies immediately went in to replace them. Peter Sprat began to follow, but then he noticed that Booty hadn’t shown the slightest movement.

“You coming?” Sprat asked.

Booty Beauchamp gingerly raised himself to his feet. “I guess so,” he said.

“Let’s go then.”

Sprat led the way in, and a minute later Beauchamp followed.

Hamlet P. Buglaroni watched as the four debaters settled themselves in their seats. How he had ended up judging Public Forum was beyond him, but judging it he was and, he had to admit, it was not unenjoyable. So far the pairs of debaters had been knowledgeable and professional and fun to watch.

He wasn’t so sure about this batch, though.

The girls looked all right. After all, they were Hoopdidoopdies, so how bad could they be? But the two boys... The skinny, nervous one looked as if he was about to blow a gasket, and they haven’t even started yet, while

the big, fat one looked as if he was about to collapse of his own weight. Where did they get these people from? Buglaroni looked at this blank ballot. The boys were from Toulouse. He shook his head. Back in his day, there wouldn't have been any Toulousians like this. But then again, almost every former debater spent a lot of time head-shaking and bemoaning the loss of the Good Old Days. Why should Buglaroni be any different?

Like every PF round, this one began with a coin toss. The skinny boy flipped and one of the girls called it while the fat boy just sat in his chair, staring off into space. Once it was determined who was going to be on which side, there was a batch of preparation on both sides. At some point the fat boy turned around in his seat, and giving Buglaroni a look reminiscent of a cow heading to the slaughter, asked if he could open a window. Buglaroni nodded. Why not? It promised to be another nice autumn day; a little fresh air might be nice.

We should point out that this was no ordinary classroom. What, in fact, it was normally used for was hard to tell, but the space was relatively small, maybe fifteen by fifteen, with a very high ceiling. Everyone's chair was on wheels, and there were tables rather than student desks. The windows seemed more like glass walls, starting at floor level and reaching up six feet high. When the fat boy moped his way over to open one of them, it was as if he had opened a door onto the open air. Very weird, but for the moment, Buglaroni didn't give it much thought.

A minute or two later, the round began. The Hoopdidoopdies went first. Buglaroni clicked his timer and began taking notes.

FWAP!

Buglaroni lifted his head. Was that what he thought it was? He could have sworn that someone had just, in the parlance, cut the cheese.

It must have been his imagination.

FWAPFWAP!

FFFWAAAAWA---PPP!

Oh my God, Buglaroni thought. The timer continued to time and the girl continued to speak. The skinny Toulouse boy was looking at his partner, who was hunched in his chair as if he were trying to roll himself into the tiniest ball possible and disappear.

"And therefore I urge a Pro ballot," the Hoopdidoo girl concluded, to which the fat boy responded with the tiniest intestinal squeal.

fwap...

The fat boy looked left and right, as if trying to determine where the sound was coming from. Oh, no, it wasn't him! Then, giving a shrug, he stood up and began asking questions of the Hoopdidoo girl who had just spoken. This cross-examination session lasted a little less than three minutes, and Buglaroni could swear that in that three minutes every speck of blood had drained from the fat boy's face. If he were any whiter, you could sell him for chalk.

Looking grateful that the torture was over, the fat boy finally sat back down, and by now Buglaroni had established that this was the one named Booty Beauchamp. Booty rolled his chair slightly closer to the tall window he had opened. As his partner stood up and began his speech, Booty Beauchamp closed his eyes, and by now Buglaroni was almost hypnotized by the boy. He could not recollect a time in his life when he had watched anyone so pointedly attempt to overcome a gas attack: Beauchamp was folded into his chair in such a way as to physically stop up any outlet for whatever fumes were building up within him. It was as if he believed that if he could roll himself up into enough of a ball and clench his bottom and his face and his stomach muscles with enough force, all of that effort would cure whatever ailed him.

It was like watching a cartoon spark moving along a fuse toward the bomb at the end. It was going to blow any minute. There wasn't the slightest doubt about it.

Peter Sprat was talking away, occasionally giving Booty Beauchamp a worried look. One of the girls' faces wrinkled up, and Buglaroni realized that there was not just noise involved in Booty Beauchamp's misery. This was a gas of some potency, and although at the moment it sounded as if it were under control, the smell that was beginning to permeate the room denied that Booty had reached a period of dormancy. Like a submarine, Booty Beauchamp was now running silent. But he was still running. Unquestionably.

Slowly, imperceptibly, Booty rolled his chair even closer to the window. But he could only go so far.

And then there was nothing. Booty was unmoving. The smell drifted away in the autumn breezes. All was quiet. Peaceful.

But it was not over.

It was merely the calm before the storm.

By now the second girl was speaking. Buglaroni wanted to take notes, but he couldn't take his eyes off Booty Beauchamp. Neither could the girl who had already spoken, who was watching Booty with the same concentration as Buglaroni. Peter Sprat, the unfortunate partner, was pretending he was on another continent, another planet, another galaxy, anywhere but here.

And then, after four minutes of total immobility, it happened.

**FFFFFFF FWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWA AAAAAAAA
PPPPPPP!**

As if the boy were a balloon and the air was suddenly escaping from his rear end—as it indeed was—Booty Beauchamp literally rose at least a foot straight up off his chair. Meanwhile, since for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction, the chair, propelled by the force of Booty moving in one direction—not to mention the gaseous rocket fuel that had emitted from him at the same time—moved in the opposite direction, which was straight toward the window. For the tiniest moment, like all physical objects going up, Booty paused, and then began his descent down. Meanwhile, his chair, by now, had exited the room through the open window, which meant that rather than landing on his chair, as Booty might have hoped, if he had been giving it any thought, he descended instead straight down to the floor.

What happened at this point was disputed by the two girls after the fact. One of them swore that Booty bounced at least twice, thanks to his generous underpinnings. The other girl maintained that he landed like bag of wet mud. Buglaroni's eyes had been on the chair disappearing out the open window, and Peter Sprat had been covering his eyes and wondering if he'd be better off doing a solo activity in the future, so neither of them could attest to any bouncing or lack thereof. And Booty Beauchamp was so startled by the whole explosion that he didn't know if he was coming or going, although if you had been able to interview him immediately upon landing on the floor he might have remarked that, despite some other issues, at least his

stomach was feeling ever so much better at the moment, thank you very much.

If anyone in the history of humanity had ever farted like this before, it has gone unrecorded. That the Hoopdidoo girl who was speaking continued to speak as if nothing had happened was a tribute to the famously unflappable nature of the Hoopdidoopies, and Buglaroni decided on the spot that if he had ever seen anyone achieve a perfect score of 30, she was the one.

The remainder of the round was, comparatively speaking, uneventful. Booty Beauchamp found another chair and somehow managed to give his speeches and finish the event with at least some sense of restored decorum.

But, unfortunately, he had left a monument to himself, or more to the point, a monument to himself when that self was heavily stuffed with linguini and clam sauce, both fresh and aged overnight by the bedside, not to mention all that bread and white bean dip. The chair that Booty Beauchamp had launched out the window had not landed on the ground. The Chapel of the Holy Unwarranted Assumption was a mass of gothic spires, and Room 1138 was so high up that the chair had caught on one of these spires, where it was now hanging, out of the reach of any human hands short of the mounting of a construction crane.

Someone, it is unclear who despite a thorough scouring of the historical record, sent a text message before the round was over from that room to the outside world. The message read: ONE OF THE KIDS IN MY ROUND JUST FARTED HIS CHAIR OUT THE WINDOW OF THE CHAPEL. This message, because of its inherent majesty, was texted and retexted and tweeted and retweeted with alacrity throughout the entire Pup tournament. Aside from the chair itself, it was the fastest traveling thing of the weekend.

As the four students in the room were gathering their belongings, Booty Beauchamp, curiosity getting the better of him, decided to go over to the window to survey the damage. This was not a good idea on his part. As he looked down from the open window at the top of the chapel, he saw a crowd of forensicians gathered on the streets below, all of them looking up in his direction. The Miracle of the Exploding Chair, as it already had become known, had brought out the tournament in force to survey the damage. Everyone had come to see the chair, but now suddenly they were

blessed not only with the damage itself but with the cause of the damage, looking down at them from on high. As if on cue, a roaring cheer came from the crowd, aimed in Booty's direction. Booty, unsure of what to do, simply raised his right hand and gave a slight noblesse oblige sort of wave to the assembled multitude. He looked for all the world like the Pope at the window of the Vatican giving his blessing to the congregants below. He retreated from the window with as much dignity as he could muster, but not before having registered that the chair that had not so long ago been his was now part of the chapel architecture.

And, if you're wondering, the chair is still there. It hangs off the spire of the Chapel of the Holy Unwarranted Assumption as a tribute to debate, to adolescence, and especially to linguini with clam sauce.

Booty Beauchamp, on the other hand, is no longer debating.
We may never see his like again...

Is there anything we can possibly say after that?

Na'ah.