



Series 2

Episode 4: You princes of Maine, you kings of New England, you queens of Forensics

“Oh. My. Stars. Or as the Frenchies say, *mes etoiles!*” As Hautboy LeMonde boarded the bus, his eyes immediately caught sight of two freshmen that had been at yesterday’s speech and debate team meeting. “What have we here?”

The two freshmen, both male, were sitting in the front right seat of the bus. They had quickly figured out bus politics, although it was only the first full week of school. Seniors claimed the seats in the back, and the rest of the seats were organized by class year in reverse order, with freshmen in the front. Years ago, when students could get away with such things, there was hazing of the freshmen, conducted by the seniors as far away from the driver as possible, not that most of the drivers particularly cared one way or the other. This was a long time ago, and the drivers were usually so engaged in chain smoking Lucky Strikes that the social aspects of their passengers’ activities thoroughly eluded their interest. The youngest students would be forced to recite something ridiculous that the upperclassmen would find incredibly entertaining, or maybe they would have to pose in silly positions, pretending to be one or another of their more peculiar teachers. But this sort of thing had gone out of style before most of these students were even born, although some of the bus drivers still remembered it. They also, tearfully, remembered Lucky Strikes. Times changed, life went on. But driving the bus still meant keeping your eyes forward as much as possible, unless there was something life-threatening going on behind you. Extremely life-threatening, that is. A little life threatening didn’t count.

It was uncharacteristic for Hautboy LeMonde to be one of those bus passengers whose activities were being thoroughly ignored. The minute he

had had the legal paperwork in hand, he had begun driving to school on his own, but he had had a suspicion that this morning a little fishing expedition might be in order. His mother was going to drop off his car during the day so it would be in the lot for him for the ride home. It was no exaggeration to say that Hautboy had everyone around him trained to do his bidding. And, for his part, if successful fishing meant one uncomfortable morning on the bus, he was tough enough to handle it. Anything for the team, as they say. Or at least anything for the team of which he was captain, that is, the speech team. As for the debate team, well, there was nothing in that for Hautboy, which meant that, well, the debate team was...nothing.

“Didn’t I see you two at the speech and debate meeting yesterday?” Hautboy asked, plopping himself in the empty seat behind the freshmen.

One of them nodded, and Hautboy smiled in satisfaction. He was exceptionally good with faces. If he saw someone a year ago, he would remember them a decade later. Not to mention his ability to mimic their voices, their gestures, their looks, their essence. It wasn’t so much that Hautboy LeMonde was a people person as much as he was a collector of people-isms. It was all part of his being an actor. It was all part of his craft, of his talent.

“So which is it?” he asked, hanging over the seat behind them. “Speech or debate? No, wait. Don’t tell me. There’s no way guys like you would be interested in debate. I mean, *mes etoiles!* Debate is sooooo uncool.”

The two freshmen exchanged a glance. It was as Hautboy had thought. Debaters. Oh well. He would have to put some effort into it. He gave his head a little shake, just enough to jigger his perfect surfer-blond hair into its correct position.

“Debate is like so much work,” he went on. These two looked as if doing a lot of work was not high on their agenda. Not that speech was easy, but Hautboy wasn’t going to tell them that. His goal was not honestly explaining the various activities. His goal was building up his side of it. There was a game to be played here, and he was going to play it. It was speech versus debate, and let the best be-atch win.

And the best be-atch was Hautboy LeMonde.

Hautboy studied the two freshman. One thing he was extremely good at—all right, yet another thing he was extremely good at—was sexing the recruits. Gay, straight, a little of both? Give Hautboy a minute, and he was right a hundred percent of the time. If he told you that you were gay, and it came as a surprise to you, you would be signing up for same-sex marriage before the month was out. He was that good at it.

He brought himself closer over the seat, as if to share a confidence, and the two freshman leaned toward him.

“I’ll tell you one thing, gentlemen, between us,” he said softly. “Speech has got the girls. Debate is mostly guys and really ugly chicks. Seriously.”

The two freshmen exchanged another glance. The average fourteen-year-old boy wanted access to girls, often just to look at them from afar, much more than he wanted to debate anybody. Which Hautboy knew perfectly well. He had all sorts of approaches at the ready, depending on the subject at hand. He could go theatrical, dramatic, literary, hookup—it didn’t matter. It was just the game, and the winning of the game.

The bus stopped to pick up another couple of kids. Hautboy stood up. “You guys just make up your own mind, though. Don’t let me influence you. Ta-ta!”

He walked back to the rear of the bus, to join the rest of the seniors. His work here this morning was done.

Lily Maru didn’t notice that Hautboy wasn’t in A.P. Physics class until about halfway through. But he had been at first period English. She looked up at the clock, and the realization struck her.

Damn him!

All of the student heads in the class were bent down over their textbooks, staring at a problem involving lead balls falling from various precipices. Mrs. Melanzana was standing at the board, waiting for someone to be inspired with something remotely resembling an answer. Lily popped out of her seat and went up to her.

“Can I go to the cafeteria for a minute, Mrs. Melanzana?” she asked.

The teacher narrowed her eyes.

“It’s freshman lunch,” Lily explained. “I need to check up on debate recruitment.”

Mrs. Melanzana sighed. “Go ahead.” Like most teachers, she was used to debaters coming and going as they pleased, thinking that extracurricular activities were somehow more important than the real education in the classroom. A lot of teachers made allowances; Lily knew that Mrs. Melanzana plotted detailed acts of vengeance. “Five minutes,” the teacher added.

“Five minutes,” Lily repeated, hastening out the door.

Five minutes, she repeated to herself under her breath as she almost ran to the cafeteria. Melanzana was capable of anything if she thought her authority was being threatened. She was notorious for it. And she perceived of debate as her archenemy. Lily had heard the stories. But Lily needed to take A.P. Physics, which meant that she was stuck.

It was going to be a long year.

As she flew into the cafeteria, she saw that her hunch was correct. There was Hautboy LeMonde, standing in front of a table of freshmen, doing his humor piece from last year.

“Haut!” she barked at him.

He stopped what he was doing, pulling himself up from a crouch, breaking out of whatever character he had been in.

“Well, well,” he said. “The queen of debate.”

“What are you doing?” Lily demanded.

“Demonstrating,” he said. “What does it look like I’m doing?”

Lily was fuming. She knew exactly what he was doing, but she couldn’t say it in front of the audience of freshmen that was now staring at them. Hautboy was doing his best to convince people not to join debate. He would say anything and do anything, whatever it took. But to make that accusation aloud would be as damaging as anything he was seen as doing, as it would show her to be a shrew, which was probably exactly what he had probably already been saying about her behind her back. He had said it before, and she had found out about it. That it was more than a little true hurt as much as the thought that he was plotting to steal away her debaters. She was the debate captain, after all.

But Hautboy LeMonde was, unfortunately, the speech captain. And had the same morals as a leech in heat.

She grabbed his arm and pulled him away, but not before he made an exaggerated gesture of surprise to his young audience. In a minute they were standing by the cafeteria door.

“You’re trying to recruit my debaters, aren’t you?” Lily demanded.

“What makes you think they’re *your* debaters?”

“Because that particular group at that table I recruited myself at the middle school. I know those kids. They wanted to sign up for debate.”

Hautboy looked over his shoulder at them. “I wouldn’t be so sure about that, dearie,” he said. “They look rather speechy to me.”

Lily stamped her foot in frustration. “Why do you do this, Haut? You don’t get any extra credit for it. You don’t get any profit out of it. You don’t get anything at all.”

“Oh, you’re wrong there, dearie. I get quite a bit out of it.”

“What?”

“A bigger audience, of course. Fresh blood. Acolytes.”

“Acolytes?”

“Acolytes, dearie. Of course. Oh, that’s right. You don’t have acolytes in debate. It’s all how fast you can talk about God knows what nonsense. My evidence is bigger than your evidence. Feh!”

“We’re all in this together, Haut.”

“You’re in this together, dearie. I’m in it for me. And mine.”

“You’re going to ruin those kids. They should be debaters. I know them. I talked to them. They’ll be good as debaters. As speechies, they’ll be crap.”

“Tsk-tsk, Lily. That’s quite an accusation.”

“But it’s true. You’re going to ruin their high school careers just so you can be the big shot little drama queen.”

“I think we could both compete for the drama queen throne, the way you’re acting at the moment,” Haut said.

“I might be able to out-act you, Haut, but I could never out-queen you.”

And with that, Lily turned and stomped out of the cafeteria.

Five minutes, or else her ass would be in a sling with Melanzana.

And how did Hautboy get out of that class, anyhow? Pouring on the charm, no doubt. Melanzana had nothing against speechies. They were always in class, hardly ever taking Fridays off to head out to tournaments. Debate took up whole weekends, while speech was usually just Saturdays. No effect on class time whatsoever.

Lily opened the classroom door.

“Nice of you to rejoin us,” Mrs. Melanzana said from the board, where she was writing a formula.

Lily slunked back into her seat. The first week of school, and it was going to hell in a handbasket already.

Welcome to the Bahamas.

Will Hautboy convince all the debaters to become Speechies?

Who is the real drama queen of the Nighten Day team?

Are speechies really better-looking than debaters?

Do fourteen-year-old heterosexual boys ever think about anything other than...uh...you know what?

Did anyone notice that Tiger Woods has not yet apologized to the creators of Nostrum?

Want to find out more? So do we, which is why we won't be looking for any useful information in our next episode: "Triple skinny half caf half pipe hazelnut chocolate latte mogul, the Official Stupid Drink of the Olympics, or, This doesn't look like *Lost*."