



Series 2

Episode 9

No Dark Sarcasm in *this* Classroom!

She sat like a statue in the back of Tarnish Jutmoll’s classroom. Her back was stiff, her head high. Her face, surrounded by a frightened mop of curly dark hair, was completely devoid of expression.

She was alone in the classroom when Hautboy LeMonde entered. The last period of the day had ended mere seconds ago, and the halls were loud with the sounds of high school cattle herding themselves toward the exits. In a couple of minutes, the others would begin arriving for the debate meeting. Hautboy didn’t have much time.

“Hi,” he said, walking over to her.

She looked up at him for an instant, and then her eyes went back to her desk.

“I’m Hautboy. Captain of the Speech team.”

Her eyes stayed down.

“You’re here for debate?”

He detected a slight nod.

“Funny,” he said. “You don’t look like a debater.”

Her eyes slightly widened.

“I mean, you’re not nerdy or anything. Most debaters are, well—you know.”

Hautboy sensed that he would get more response from a haddock, but he kept on moving.

“I guess there’s a couple of cute girls in debate, but no cute guys, if you know what I mean. All the really cool guys tend to do speech.”

No response.

“Of course,” he went on, “there’s a lot of gay guys in speech too. Theater and all that. But a lot of hunks as well. Straight hunks. A girl like you can make out real well there.”

Hautboy had a feeling that this was not playing out right.

“Unless that’s not your thing,” he added, on the off chance. “But you’ll still make out like a bandit, if you know what I mean.”

By now the girl’s head was hanging so low that Hautboy could see the back of her neck.

“Well,” he said. “I’ve gotta go before the nerd squad arrives. Speech meets tomorrow if you want to check it out. See ya!”

He turned and headed for the door, just as it opened and Lily Maru stepped in.

“Lily,” he said. “Charmed to see you.”

A little growl came from the back of her throat, but he was out of the room before any words could accompany it.

Hautboy did not normally take the bus to school. The thought made him slightly sick to his stomach. His steel-gray Chevy Tahoe, which was mean enough to carry nine people through a blizzard without breaking a sweat, was in his assigned spot in the school parking lot, where his mother had left it for him after his unaccustomed ride on the big yellow taxi that morning. Parking spaces were rare commodities at Nighten Day, but Hautboy had had no difficulty winning his. He hadn’t done anything special to acquire it; it had just fallen into his lap as a result of winning the parking lottery two years in a row. The idea that he might not win a spot in the parking lottery had never occurred to him. After all, winners always win, so why would they ever bother contemplating losing?

He climbed into the car and flicked on the engine. A second later the sound of the music of “Cabaret,” the Alan Cumming version, started up where it had left off the last time he was in the car, the bit about Frenchie on the side. Hautboy smiled. Cumming was one of his acting heroes. Hautboy wouldn’t mind doing the emcee himself, some day in the future. That

Hautboy would go into the business was beyond question. With his looks and his talent, it would be a waste not to. He had already done some child work off and on, but no lead roles. Too bad he had been too old for Billy Elliot. Otherwise he might already have a Tony at home on the mantelpiece.

He rolled down the windows as he waited for the air conditioning to get going, then backed the car out of its spot and headed for the exit.

It was going to be a long year.

The thing about acting is that, while there's always plenty to learn, there's also always parts for everyone at every age. Would four years of college be a good idea, when he could be using those four years to build up his resume? If he did Juilliard or Tisch, maybe it wouldn't be so bad, because at least he'd be in the city for auditions. But in some more remote drama school, it would just be, well, school. Who wanted to audition in Bumburger, Idaho, when you could go on a call on Broadway?

But he did have to finish high school. That was a no-brainer. You could play Hamlet without a college degree but you could barely get a job at a McDonald's without a high school diploma. Not that he was looking at a career in the restaurant trade any time soon—although everybody waits a couple of tables sooner or later—but if he wanted to take on some other job, maybe agenting or something as he learned more and more about the business, some education would be required. He was not an idiot. Even going all the way and getting a college degree was not such a bad idea, provided it didn't slow you down. You could run on a lot of tracks in the business at the same time when you're young. And that's what Hautboy planned to do, while he could do it.

As soon as he graduated high school.

And meanwhile?

He wasn't sure why, but he had set himself a goal this year. He was going to make the Nighten Day Speech team the best ever. It wasn't that he cared a rat's patoot about the team one way or the other, except insofar as it gave him a place to work on his own skills, but if he was going to be a part of the damned thing, it might as well be good aside from just him. Which is why he had gone on this recruiting kick. That, and the idea of rubbing Lily Maru's face in it. He did not like Lily, and Lily did not like him. God knows

why, but that's the way that it was. And every debater that he turned into a Speechie was a feather in his cap and a burr under hers.

So it was going to be a long year. But at least he had a goal.

By now the air conditioning was roughly working at Antarctic temperatures. He rolled up the windows and jacked up the volume of Kander and Ebb.

Tomorrow belongs to me...

Lily Maru was not happy with the number of potential novice debaters. There should be nine or ten.

There were two.

One of them was a large Teddy Bear of a kid whose vacant look could mask either a potentially serious dedication or a fog of total obliviousness. With novices, it was often hard to tell the difference. The other was a girl with extraordinarily wild curly hair who was staring at her desk.

Lily sat down next to the girl.

“Hi. I'm Lily Maru. I'm the debate captain.”

The girl did not respond. This was unusual. While forensicians came in a wide variety of personality flavors, virtual catatonia tended to be seldom seen in that particular wild.

“Jutmoll will be here in a minute,” Lily went on, deciding that this girl was not going to volunteer her own name any time soon. “He's a good coach.”

The slightest nod.

“So you're interested in debate?” Lily asked, fully aware that it was a dumb question, or else the girl wouldn't be here in the first place.

But now there was a reaction. A slow movement of the head that, eventually, Lily recognized as a denial.

“You're not interested in debate?”

The girl finally lifted her head, and turned to Lily. “I'm going to do speech,” she said, barely above a whisper. And with that, she stood up, collected her things, and went out the door, just as Tarnish Jutmoll was arriving.

They were down to exactly one debate novice.

And Lily was fuming.

This was all Hautboy's doing. She was sure of it. He had been in here, tricking that girl into becoming a speechie. A speechie? If that girl was a speechie, Lily was a professional mud trucker.

Lily could imagine what Hautboy had been doing all day, starting with his bus ride this morning. Telling people that debate sucked and that speech was cool, telling them that debate was too much work and that speech would be better for getting them into college, telling them that debaters all went to hell and speechies all went to heaven—whatever it took, with whatever audience he had, Hautboy would weave the necessary fiction until his fish took a big bite from the hook that he was casting in front of them.

Damn him!

But Lily was not going to take this sitting down. It was not right, as simple as that. Her three previous years of arguing morality, of defining justice and right and wrong and practical ethics would not allow her to accept Hautboy's perfidy. And telling Jutmoll what was going on wouldn't be enough. The old guy would just hem and haw and say he'd talk to Hautboy, and maybe he would, but it wouldn't change anything, and it certainly wouldn't punish Hautboy for crossing the line, for seducing people away from an activity that might be good for them into an activity that might not be good for them. It was not that there was a wall of separation between speech and debate, but a wall of mutual respect for people's innate differences. Hautboy was ignoring that wall, which was one of the greatest of forensic sins.

No, Lily wouldn't complain about Hautboy. That would get her nowhere. Instead, Lily would take action.

Except...What action? What could she do? How could she punish Mr. Perfect?

She narrowed her eyes.

She'd think of something.

It was so easy that it was almost scary.

It was during the speech meeting the next day. Lily Maru had gone home on the normal bus right after school. She may have been a senior, but unlike Hautbuy LeMonde, she did not have an SUV the size of a small European principality to get her back and forth to school. Nor did she have a

mother who would schlep the car to the school during the day while she rode the bus in the morning to steal speeches over to the debate team. There was only one Hautboy LeMonde at Nighten Day. And *mes etoiles*, as he might put it, one was more than enough.

In all honesty, Lily didn't think that her plan would cause serious damage, but even just a minor annoyance would be a great satisfaction to her. Hautboy walked on water, and he had for four years. He had the looks, he had the talent, he had the smarts. He never seemed to work, but he got top grades. When he told people that he was torn between Tisch and Juilliard, he wasn't just blowing steam. The idea of Upper Schmegeggie Community College for Total Losers never entered into his personal equation. He'd go to some fancy drama school, and one day he'd be on the cover of some supermarket tabloid for doing something outrageous, smiling through the whole ordeal as if it were nothing. And he'd look good in the photographs. Some people always looked good in photographs, regardless of how they looked in real life. Other people looked like pumpkins that had been dropped off the roof. Hautboy was one of the former; Lily was one of the latter.

There was no one at home at the Maru house. Both her parents were working, and of course her two eldest sisters had long ago graduated college and moved on, while Dahlia, still an undergrad, had been away at school, at MIT, for weeks now. Lily had the place to herself. She grabbed an apple and went to her room. She had about a hundred hours of homework, plus she wanted to study more of the college sites, because she still had no idea where to try for early admission, but she had a job to do first.

She turned on her computer.

Normally Lily was the girl who never did anything wrong. She never got into trouble, she never even *thought* about getting into trouble. When something dreadful was happening, and every student in the school was a part of it except one, Lily was that one, so much so that she never even knew what it was that was happening that was so dreadful. When her class pulled the traditional junior prank last year, which had required approximately ten thousand cubic feet of popcorn and a donkey "borrowed" from an upstate dairy farm, Lily hadn't even known that there was such a thing as a traditional junior prank, and it had never occurred to anyone, including the principal who was still shaking the popcorn out of the corners of her office,

that she did. Whether Lily was innocent by ignorance or purity was not known, but that she was innocent of any charges, whatever, was a given.

So the idea that she would go to the team website, as she did now, to the signup sheet for the Pup-a-Roni, to delete Hautboy's name from the list, would be to everyone who knew her, literally inconceivable.

And that is exactly what she did.

That was the easy part.

Next she went to firmguns dot com. It was an odd name for a website, but it was named after its creator, Dude Firmguns, a former competitor who for the last decade or so had taken it on himself to run as many tournaments as he could, for reasons no one, except perhaps Firmguns himself, could explain. There were a couple of other tournament registration sites out there, but what Firmguns.com had that the others didn't have was Dude Firmguns.

But none of that mattered to Lily, who wouldn't know a Dude Firmguns from a runaway rutabaga. All Lily knew was that the Pup-a-Roni registration was handled by firmguns.com, and more to the point, Lily had the login and password for the Nighten Day team.

As a rule, Tarnish Jutmoll handled all Nighten Day's registrations. He was the coach, after all, and that's what coaches do. But last year, when Lily needed to get some hidden information from the site and needed Jutmoll's sign-in to get on, her coach hadn't thought twice about letting her have it. She was Lily Maru, after all. She was the total innocent, for whatever reason. If ever there was a student who could be trusted with her coach's login and password, she was it.

Which demonstrated, apparently, that there was never a student who could be trusted with the coach's login and password.

As Lily logged in to firmguns.com, in the identity of Tarnish Jutmoll, she had not a moment's hesitation, nor a speck of moral qualm. She typed in his login name, and she typed in his password. *Nutmilk*. Nutmilk? What kind of password was that? Whatever.

She was in.

It only took her a minute to find Nighten's registration for the Pup and to delete Hautboy's entry. But then there was a hitch. Instead of his name truly being deleted, he was marked as a drop. That was no good. That

showed that he had been entered in the first place. Jutmoll might notice it and figure it for some sort of glitch and correct it.

She poked around a minute. Aha! There it was. Not just a button to drop someone, but to delete them completely.

If only she could delete Hautboy LeMonde so handily in real life.

She clicked the button.

His name was gone. Completely erased. Kaput. Welcome to the Bahamas, Hautboy LeMonde!

Would it have an effect? Would it keep him out of the tournament?

Lily didn't really think so. But it would annoy Jutmoll, who would conclude that, since his name wasn't on the signup sheet or on firmguns.com that Hautboy had never signed up in the first place, and although when it was discovered Jutmoll could no doubt fix it, he would nonetheless be annoyed at Hautboy, and suspicious of him.

It was a step in the right direction. At the point where Mr. Perfect wasn't perfect anymore, when he wasn't Jutmoll's fair-haired boy, Lily would get whatever small taste of revenge that was her due. Did she want more? Of course she did. But she'd settle for what she got.

It was a start. Over time, she'd find other things.

And if the truth were told, she liked it. She liked not being the eternal, absolute innocent. She liked doing something wrong.

She should have tried something like this years ago.

Sashimi Goldberg was surprised how much she enjoyed the Speech meeting that day. She had originally assumed that debate would be her activity in high school, and she had gone to yesterday's debate meeting fully believing that this was going to be her bright beginning, but it hadn't worked out that way. And when Hautboy LeMonde had flirted with her and tried to convince her to try Speech, she had gone along with it. And now she had done it, and she had enjoyed it.

Who would have thought it?

Sashimi was quiet by nature. Almost too quiet. She did not speak unless she had something to say, and by her own reckoning she hadn't had anything to say in about three years, other than maybe "Pass the salt" or, in

answer to a question on presidential trivia, “Grover Cleveland.” Other than that, well, let other people talk. Sashimi was happier just soaking it in.

Of course, Sashimi had plans for all that soaking in. There was no question in her mind that she was someday going to be a writer. In fact, she already was a writer. Any time not spent on school, or reading—which was her life’s blood—she spent writing. Her journal. Stories. Essays. Anything. She had practically worn out the keyboard of her computer in the last two years.

And now she had seen Speech.

She had thought of debate as the place where her mind would be challenged, and where she would meet the most interesting people. But the characters in Speech seemed much more interesting. The people like Hautboy, for instance. She felt that she could already write three stories and a couple of essays on him alone.

Today at the meeting, Hautboy had performed his winning Dramatic Interpretation piece from last year. As he explained it before he started, depending on the venue, sometimes he did it as drama and sometimes he did it as humor. It was a cutting from the film of “The Fountainhead,” and today Hautboy had done it as humor.

Who knew that Ayn Rand was a laugh riot?

There was Howard Roark, big and tall and unmoving, a giant of a man. And then Hautboy would morph into Dominique, who was so hot for Howard that she could barely keep her hands to herself. There was the manipulative Gail Wynand, Howard’s supporter and rival for Dominique. And the fey, fawning Ellsworth Toohey. Just the way Hautboy said the name “Ellsworth Toohey” was hilarious. And when he played out these characters, plus a couple of others, one after the other, fighting and building and lusting and blowing things up and on trial... Dominique’s lines: —“I wish I had never seen your building. It’s the things that we admire or want that enslave us. I’m not easy to bring into submission.”—had to be the dirtiest thing Sashimi had ever heard, at least the way Hautboy did them. This was allowed in high school, and even won prizes? The coach, Tarnish Jutmoll, had been in the back of the room, watching along with the rest of them, enjoying the show. Sashimi assumed that this was, indeed, the way things were done around here.

She bet that they weren't having this much fun over in debateland.
Yes, Sashimi, without saying a word to anyone, keeping herself to herself, decided she had come to the right place. If Ayn Rand was fair game, so was everyone else.

She didn't know where to start.

And she couldn't wait.

Will Hautboy get into Juilliard and Tisch without any trouble?

Will Hautboy's mother find something better to do than drop his car off for him in the school parking lot?

Will Lily prevent Hautboy from attending the Pup-a-Roni?

Will Sashimi become a bona fide Speechie?

Is Ayn Rand both a Dramatic and a Humorous Interp piece?

When "24" goes off the air, will Kiefer Sutherland start torturing people in real life?

We've been wondering about all that ourselves, which is why we have written none of it into our next episode: "If they can charge this much for 3D films, how much will 4D films cost, or, is my local theater really showing *The Seventh Seal* in three dimensional 'Bergman-o-vision, the way it was always meant to be seen'?"