



Episode #12

Them's the Breaks

Camelia Maru splashes cold water on her face, then dries herself with a paper towel. She has not felt well all day. No, that is an understatement. She did not feel well yesterday, and she did not feel well the day before either. Her stomach has been churning from her liver down through her lower intestines, and she has felt limp and unfocused. Her rounds have taken place as if someone else were debating them; she has operated entirely on automatic pilot, and found this day to be the most difficult of her life.

How can Jasmine do it every week? she wonders. And actually seem to like it?

Camelia is not alone in the ladies' room, or actually girls' room, since in a high school women and men are presumed to be faculty and everyone else is labeled girls and boys. Two girls are changing out of their suits into T-shirts and jeans, the sure sign at a tournament that the person is no longer debating. One of them is irate at having lost to so-and-so who doesn't know a 1AR from rutabaga, while the other listens patiently, rapt in her own odyssey of loss.

Camelia takes one last look at her pale face in the mirror -- she has never looked so ugly -- and leaves the room.

Only one more round of the Little Johnson left. She wonders if she can make it.

She crosses the hall and enters the cafeteria, heading straight for the Nighten Day table. She knows immediately the state of the rest of her team. Griot, still wearing his suit, is reading his very thick, very old paperback book of *Gravity's Rainbow*. He is still in the tournament. But Jasmine has replaced her jacket with her Eeyore sweatshirt. Jasmine, who broke to octofinals, has obviously lost that octofinal round, and now she is doing her biology homework.

Camelia feels another jolt in her stomach, an acidic jolt of gastric sympathy for her sister.

Camelia looks around for Had Fleece, the boy that Jasmine was sitting with before. Jasmine has never mentioned Had to Camelia, but you don't have to be Jasmine's sister to understand her feelings for the boy. And you don't have to be Jasmine's sister to register surprise, and then anger, to see Had at the Toulouse Lautrec team's table, his face a mere inches away from Cartier Diamond's, as the two share some private joke. Had is still wearing his suit, so he is still in it, too.

I hope he loses big time, Camelia thinks. I hope he loses big time for the rest of his life, the bastard.

Camelia seldom swears, even in her thoughts, but a boy who would disappoint her sister deserves no less.

As for the rest of the Nighten Day team, Ellie DiBella and Trat Warner are sitting holding hands and staring off into space, their usual position, both of them dressed in casual clothes. Neither of them made it to the elimination rounds. Morrie Prentice and Hamlet Buglaroni are still playing cards, neither of them looking as if they've moved since Camelia was here an hour ago. And Frick and Frank Tarleton are carefully studying Buglaroni's Captain Picard tie, which one of them has apparently borrowed from Buglaroni's backpack on the center of the table, where it lay surrounded by three empty cans of Mountain Dew, five or six cold pizza crusts, fourteen candy wrappers and an orange peel. Camelia sits down next to Jasmine, and folds her hands in her lap.

"What I don't understand," Frick says, "is Star Trek mating practices."

"Star Trek mating practices," Frank says. "Star Trek mating practices are no different from any other mating processes."

"They're very different from any other mating processes," Frick says. "For one thing, anyone can mate with anyone."

"Anyone?"

"Anyone."

"Picard?"

"Even Picard."

"Who mates with Picard?"

"That's not my point. My point is, take Vulcans. And earthlings."

"Take Vulcans and earthlings."

"Okay. Now what do they have in common?"

Frank nods his head. "Exactly. What do they have in common?"

"Nothing in common."

"Nothing. I mean, they're both vaguely humanoid, but that's it."

Frick wrinkles up his face. "Human beings are not vaguely humanoid," he says. "That's like saying frogs are vaguely froglike. Frogs are very froglike."

"Okay. So are humans."

"No they're not."

"They're not."

"Not at all. Humans aren't the least bit froglike."

"Some are. Mr. Everett--"

"Mr. Everett, the math teacher in seventh grade."

"Mr. Everett. He was froglike. He was very froglike."

"He was an exception."

"All right. An exception. But was he humanoid?"

"He was more frogoid."

"Okay. Frogoid. But think about Vulcans and humans. One is, like, a human, and the other is, like, a frog, but they can still mate and have babies, despite the fact that there's no way their genetic material can be compatible."

"Their genetic material can't be compatible."

"Not at all. No way. If humans can't mate with chimpanzees, who are, like, ninety nine percent alike in DNA, how can humans mate with Vulcans, who live on Vulcania and who probably have VNA, which has nothing in common with human DNA?"

"They don't live on Vulcania. They live on Vulcan."

"You mean Vulcans come from Vulcan?"

"Yep."

"Then how come we call people from Mars Martians and not Mars?"

"There are no people from Mars."

"Okay. Then how come we don't call people from Earth, Earths?"

"I don't know."

"Exactly. Which is my point. On Star Trek they get everything wrong. Everybody is half one planet and half another planet, and nobody knows how to pronounce where they come from, probably as a result of their bizarre sex lives. It's just not realistic."

"Star Trek is not realistic."

"Not at all."

"Not at all."

Frank tosses Buglaroni's tie back on top of his backpack, while Camelia takes a deep breath. She has known the Tarleton twins since the first day of kindergarten, and started ignoring them around the beginning of October that same year. She has seen little reason since to change her opinion of them.

"Are you feeling all right?" Jasmine asks her.

Camelia nods.

"You look pale."

"I didn't have much lunch."

"You want something now? I can get you something."

Camelia shakes her head. The last thing she wants is food.

"LD varsity schematics!" a voice calls from the doorway. There is less urgency and less of a stampede now, as fewer debaters are left in -- only eight in the quarterfinals. Most of

them will have their teams watch their remaining rounds to give them moral support.

"Buglaroni," Griot says, not lifting his eyes from the page of his book. "Get me a schematic, will you?"

Buglaroni begins to say something, thinks better of it, walks over and gets a schematic. He hands it to Griot.

"Thank you," Griot says.

Buglaroni sits down again, his face full of something he wants to say, that his better judgment is keeping him from saying.

"Who are you up against?" Jasmine asks.

"Chip Dwindle," Griot replies.

"Where's he from?" Buglaroni asks, out of the need to say something, anything. He is not ready to pay fealty to the varsity just because they're varsity.

"Farnsworth."

"Oh." Buglaroni has never heard of it.

"You coming to watch the round?" Griot asks him.

"You want me to?"

"You should watch as many rounds as possible. You're not here to play cards, you know."

"But Morrie owes me sixteen dollars."

"If Mr. Jutmoll finds out you're gambling, he'll kick you off the team."

"He wouldn't kick me off the team for that," Buglaroni insists confidently.

Griot closes his book and stands. "Come," he says. "Watch." He turns to Jasmine. "You coming?"

"I'll be there in a minute. Can I see the schematic?"

He hands it to her. She scans the page, pauses, then hands it back. Griot knows exactly

what she's looking for. So does Camelia. Five tables over, Had and Cartier both stand up, and as they leave the room they are followed by a large contingent of Toulousians. Had, their captain, is the last of their LDers in the competition, but no doubt their policy teams, which are on a slightly different schedule and seem to inhabit the cafeteria only when it's been emptied of LDers, are also still in the elimination rounds.

Griot and Buglaroni leave together, and Jasmine takes a last look at Camelia.

"You sure you're feeling all right?"

Camelia smiles. "I feel fine."

"How do you like debating so far?"

Camelia hesitates. "It's hard to say," she says.

Jasmine places her hands on Camelia's, where they rest on Camelia's lap. "You'll get used to it," she says. "It's always hard in the beginning. But you'll get used to it." She stands up. "Good luck in your final round."

"I'm sorry you dropped," Camelia says.

"I shouldn't have. I wasn't concentrating. My mind was elsewhere."

"I know. I'm sorry about that too."

Jasmine says nothing. She looks down at Camelia for a moment, then walks out of the cafeteria. Her little sister is getting smarter all the time. And for a few seconds, this gives Jasmine a very warm feeling.

Until she catches a glimpse of Cartier Diamond coming out of the girls' room.

"Hello, Jasmine."

"Hello, Cartier."

"How are you doing?"

"Do you really care?"

Cartier shakes her head. "No," she says. "Not in the least."

"I didn't think so."

"Want me to say hello to Had for you?"

"Of all the things I'd like you to say to him, hello is not one of them."

Cartier shakes her head. "How petty. Oh, well. Ta-ta."

And she walks off, headed no doubt for Had Fleece's round.

And the same churning that affected her sister's liver all the way down through the lower intestines now affects Jasmine. She feels limp and unfocussed.

She rushes into the girls' room, and takes up where her sister left off.

Will Griot Goldbaum demolish Chip Dwindle?

Will Jasmine Maru remember to gargle?

Will the Tarleton twins learn to understand extra-species reproduction?

Will Tiger Woods play golf with Jeremy Irons, Lucille Ball and Mr. T.?

Will we ever get some graphics to lighten up the look of this dismal web site?

Do you really think the answer is in our next installment: "Beer Nuts: Fish, Fowl or Fantasy?"