



Episode 28

Because the Night...

Midnight is long past, and much of the Enchanted Hunters motel is still jumping. It is the first tournament of the year, the first time out of the hold since last Spring for most people, and for a smaller number the first time practically anywhere. Excitement is the emotional coin of the realm, and it is unlikely that it will lose its value any time before roughly two a.m.

Traffic between rooms continues unabated. Teenagers in oversized tee shirts carry tubs of ice like gifts for the gods, raising the question of exactly how many cubes one forensician can consume in a single overnight period. In one room, there's a card game. In another room, the management has forgotten to turn off HBO access and eleven junior boys are trying to act blasé while watching "Sex in America" with their eyes wide and their jaws agape. A not insignificant number of students are working on their cases or their pieces; Tara Petskin and Bill O'Connor, for instance, have heard that one of the winning policy cases is terrorism squads (whatever that means), and they are scouring their Rubbermaid tubs for evidence relating to both foreign and domestic terrorism. Although slowly but surely people start attempting to sleep, inevitably they are roused by either their teammates or their roommates, or both, who are still nowhere near the point of seeing their excitement begin to dwindle.

There are also emotions other than excitement at large in the Enchanted Hunters, but at least one of these is completely isolated. That emotion -- unstoppable, unbearable -- is depression.

Depression. It strikes almost all adolescents equally, with the same numbing intensity and the same lack of warning. It lasts for an indeterminate amount of time and then disappears into the ether, lying in wait, gearing itself for its next appearance. It never affects pre-teen children, because the negative sides of their self-images aren't developed enough to beat down the positive sides. It only affects a small number of adults, in a clinical sense, often balanced by its frightening opposite, the wild explosions leading to the classic manic-depressive syndrome. A complex balance of medications is necessary to control this group, but with the proper care administered

by their family physician, they can lead productive lives without killing either themselves or their nearest and dearest.

But with adolescents, depression is different. Virtually none are immune to it. They often don't know why it has attacked, and they certainly never know how to get rid of it. So they just suffer. And wait. And they don't even hope for the best, because they're too depressed to believe that anything better will ever come along, even though it always has in the past. This time it's going to be different. This time it's going to be forever.

Which is exactly how David Brillig feels at this moment. The hotel pool has emptied, and he is now alone, stretch out on a plastic lounge chair, staring at the lights over the water. The room is strongly air-conditioned, but the water still manages to carry its own tropical humidity, a jungle heaviness redolent of chlorine and the pepperoni pizzas that one team had brought along with it. Despite the solitude, the room is not silent. There is an electrical buzz of the fluorescent lights and the pool filtering system, filling his ears with meaningless white noise.

David is oblivious to his surroundings. If you were to tell him that he is alone, he would be surprised. His mind is too occupied with other matters than to notice the world around him.

He has other worlds to deal with.

And he is depressed, as a result of it.

Very depressed.

Which is why, no doubt, he does not notice when the two girls enter the pool area.

They are both quite tall, almost five ten. Both have long dark hair cascading below their shoulders. Both have light red and white sundresses that they simultaneously pull over their heads to reveal matching red and white one-piece bathing suits. Both walk over to the edge of the pool, and together they make perfect dives into the water, like extras in an Esther Williams movie.

It is the splash that brings David back to reality.

He looks down from the ceiling to the water, to watch the two heads travel in unison along the length of the pool and then back again. The girls swim like experts, making lap after lap until they've done ten laps each. Then they climb out of the pool, and David watches them dry their hair with their towels, the one looking like the mirror image of the other.

They're twins, it finally occurs to him. And beautiful. And -- his eyes travel down the length of their bodies twenty yards away from him -- they're built for speed.

Since he's the only other person in the place, they can't help but notice him, and can't help but notice that he's noticing them. But if they look like that, he thinks, they have to be used to it. He

expects them to turn away, but first one of them smiles at him, and a split second later, so does the other one.

And then they walk over to him.

"Hi," says the one.

"Hi," says the other.

David is astonished. He sits up hastily in his chair. "Hi," he responds, after digging deep within himself for something witty and wise.

"I'm Mara."

"I'm Lara."

Their voices have a slightly British lilt. "I'm David." He pauses. "David Brillig. From New York."

"Brillig?"

"Twas Brillig?"

He's heard that too many times before and always previously batted it aside. This time he accepts it graciously, even willingly.

"Twas Brillig," he repeats.

The girls sit down side by side on the chaise longue next to David. They are both about his age, maybe a tad older, eighteen at most.

"Are you with all the kids that are in the hotel?" the one asks.

"There must be millions of them!" the other adds.

He nods. "We're having a debate tournament." It takes a moment for it to register. "You're not debaters?" P Mara giggles. With Lara, it's more like a chuckle.

"We're visiting Doddee." Dod-dee. Very British pronunciation.

"He's here from San Francisco."

"On business."

"He lives there. We live with Mummee. In The Bahamas."

"The Bahamas," David says. "You live in The Bahamas." He hates himself for his sparkling rep-
artee. "Don't you have school?"

They shrug.

"We can miss a few days."

"We hardly ever see Doddee."

Mara extends her hand. "Want to swim?"

"Yes, do," Lara says, standing up.

David can hardly refuse. He is wearing cut-offs and a tee shirt. He stands, pulls off the shirt, and then Mara takes his right hand and Lara takes his left hand, and a moment later the three of them are under the water.

For the next fifteen minutes they frolic like dolphins. Diving around each other, splashing, laughing. playing tag. David can't help but notice that these girls seem very different from the girls he is used to. Older, maybe? More mature? Maybe not. But more like women. He can see that easily enough, in and out of the water, in tight red and white matching bathing suits.

Occasionally one or both of them rub up against his arm or his leg. Mara hugs him once playfully. Lara hugs him playfully twice.

And then they are lying next to each other on three chaise longue chairs, all staring at the ceiling.

"Tell us about debating, Twas," Mara says.

"It must be awfully fun," Lara says. "Do tell, Twas."

And he is Twas Brillig, all of a sudden, lover of many women at once, teller of the tall tales of the forensic universe. He is marvelously fascinating, explaining what happens at tournaments, doing bits of his own piece, an unstoppable raconteur.

And the girls seem to love it.

And David seems to love it.

And at one point, as natural as can be, David finds himself with the fingers of Mara's right hand entwined in the fingers of his left hand, and the fingers of Lara's left hand entwined in the fingers of his right.

Welcome to the Bahamas, Twas Brillig.

And turn off the light before you leave, will you?

And, oh yes. That depression? The one that was making you feel positively suicidal? The one that would never disappear? It's gone now. And it will stay gone, too, for a real long time. Because you have discovered deep down in your heart, as deep as these things go, or at least as deep as they need to go, that regardless of William, and whatever's going on with him, you are a man who loves women.

Or at least a guy who likes girls. Which is pretty much the same thing, only a few years younger.

As we said a few paragraphs ago, welcome to the Bahamas.

Will David find true love with two ladies?

Will William ever forgive him if he does?

Are we just going to leave Seth B. Obomash hanging in cyberspace?

Isn't this a lovely day to be a Democrat?

Are there really only 364 days until we Bump again?

Look high, look low, but don't expect the answers in our next episode: "Spumoni: Simple Italian dessert or complex Neapolitan plot to invade Ethiopia?"