



Episode 31

Sisterhood Forever!

Amnea Nutmilk's head is spinning. And she is not happy about it.

Her first round this morning was, simply put, an eye opener. At exactly 8:02 she entered the assigned classroom, the first to arrive. Feeling a bit like a pro after her rounds the day before, she pulled her legal pad out of her briefcase and turned it sideways, then drew a grid of ten boxes so that she could flow the round exactly as Chesney had taught her. She was amused by the use of flow as a transitive blurb, a neologism probably confined only to forensics, literally translatable as taking notes, or more to the point, creating a flowchart of the round.

Flowing the round.

Going over the flow.

Flowing.

It has made her think of menstruation ever since Chesney first said it, an observation she has so far not shared with her son. Heaven forbid.

Having prepared her flow pad, she set her stopwatch to count down from six minutes and filled in her blank ballot with the names of her two first flight debaters, taken from the schematic. She was signing her name to the ballot when the two debaters entered the room, and she was immediately charmed by them. Both tall, handsome boys, impeccable suits, and both of them with the sweetest, politest Texas accents. She knew she was in for a treat.

Until the round started. And she heard the fastest talking of which a human is capable. Or, maybe, even a little faster.

She sat there for a minute, stunned. The affirmative was traveling faster than the speed of light through his definitions, his value, his criteria (three of these), two observations and halfway into the second subpoint of his first contention before she had time to write down even one word on her flowpad. Speed of light, nothing. He was traveling through a worm hole, bypassing Einsteinian physics completely.

"And then the other one stood up, and he was twice as fast as the first one," she told Chesney when she met him in the auditorium after the round. "I understood about five words they spoke for the entire round."

"Texans," Chesney said, as if that was all the explanation necessary.

"Texans are westerners," his mother said. "Slow talkers. John Wayne. Jimmy Stewart. Clint Eastwood."

"They're not cowboys, Mom. They're Texas debaters. They're the fastest LDers on the circuit."

"How can anyone understand them?"

"They're not as fast as some policy teams."

"Then keep me away from policy. Good lord. Have you actually debated any of these Texans?"

"A few times."

"And you could understand what they were saying?"

"Pretty much."

"Then you're a better man than I am, Gunga Din."

"You'll get used to it. Eventually. We have plenty of fast talkers back home too."

"As fast as that?"

"Well, maybe not that fast. But fast enough."

"I can't wait."

Chesney chuckled. "You might not have to."

But now, she has finished the first flight of the fifth and final preliminary round, and she has not had to suffer through that sort of blazing speed again. But still her head is spinning, and she is in

dread that the next two people who walk into the room will start off sounding like Roy Rogers and end up sounding like Buck Rogers.

She needn't have worried. The two debaters who enter the room are both from the northeast. And both are fairly slow talkers. Although they are not saying anything at the moment.

Simultaneously they go to the blackboard and write their codes.

AFF -- Nighten JM

NEG -- Toulouse HF

Amnea copies down the codes in the appropriate places on the ballot, and under these, the full names of the debaters as soon as they write them on the board.

Jasmine Maru.

Had Fleece.

Had? Amnea thinks as she fills in the name. What kind of a name is Had?

"They're near the top of the schematic," Chesney had told her right before the round, "which means that you're judging people who probably have three-one records."

"What about you?"

"I think I'm three-one too."

"So does that mean anything, judging three-ones?"

"At a tournament this big, it probably means that one of them will definitely break, and the other one definitely won't."

Which means, she thinks now as she watches the two of them scribbling their last minute notes, that it's up to her to make one of these two cute kids very unhappy.

Damn.

The girl, Jasmine, turns around in her seat. "Judge ready?" she asks.

"Ready," Amnea replies.

Jasmine turns to Had. "Opponent ready?"

"Ready," he says.

Jasmine stands up, and begins her affirmative case. Following a click of the stopwatch, Amnea begins flowing.

And thank God, the girl speaks at a relatively normal speed. Amnea breathes a sigh of relief.

The affirmative case goes normally, and Amnea jots down all the high points. By now she is getting used to this topic and the note-taking -- no, make that the flowing -- and she's even developed her own little shorthand for words and phrases that keep popping up like "Rs" for rights and "SC" for social contract. Slowly but surely she's beginning to feel like the coach she has committed herself to becoming. It is only at the end of Jasmine's speech that Amnea recognizes the tension in the air.

"I stand ready for cross-examination," Jasmine says.

Amnea leans back in her chair as Had Fleece rises. For Amnea this is the fun part of the round, or at least it has been so far.

"How are you today, Jasmine?" Had begins.

What a phony, Amnea thinks. But it's probably better than just ramming into the opponent, as some of the debaters have done.

"Fine," Jasmine answers almost painfully.

"Good. I'd like to ask you a couple of questions..."

And so he begins. But Amnea can't get over Jasmine's expression.

And then she realizes, Aha, they must be boyfriend and girlfriend. Their schools are practically down the road from each other. And it must be hell for them to have to debate each other.

Her heart sinks. It is going to be hell for her to have to drop one of them and keep that one out of the final round.

Damn.

The round plays out, despite whatever is going on between the two of them, and Amnea finds no way to clearly pick a winner as it goes along. The two debaters match each other point for point. Finally, Jasmine ends it with a short second affirmative rebuttal that sums up all of the major issues of the round. The two debaters shake hands, then both of them walk to the back of the room and shake Amnea's hand.

How quaint.

And they leave Amnea Nutmilk to make her decision as best she can.

"That's Chesney's mother, isn't it?" Had asks after they are in the hallway.

Jasmine nods. "I think so."

"How many other Nutmilks are there in the world?" Had smiles.

Jasmine smiles back, almost reluctantly.

"Great round," Had says as they start walking toward the auditorium.

"Great round," she echoes hollowly.

"According to Griot, we're both three-one."

"Uh huh."

"This round is going to make and break us. I hope that you're the one the breaks."

"Oh?" She raises an eyebrow.

"You did a great job in there. You deserve it."

"You did a great job too."

"Thanks."

"Yeah."

"Yeah." Had stops walking. "I've been meaning to talk to you," he says.

"Oh?" Jasmine turns and faces him.

"About last week."

"Last week?"

"Lunch. I said I'd meet you for lunch, and I didn't."

"Oh. That. I'd forgotten all about it." As she says these words she hopes Had isn't an expert at detecting a lie when he hears one.

"Oh. Well, something came up."

"Cartier?" Why let him off the hook, she wonders. He's squirming a bit, and he did stand her up. Let him suffer for a while.

"We sort of went out to lunch. She said you wouldn't mind, though, because of your boyfriend."

"Boyfriend?"

"Yeah. That novice. I didn't realize the two of you were going out then." He shakes his head abruptly. "I mean, I know you're not going out anymore."

"Boyfriend? That novice? You mean Buglaroni?"

"I think that was his name. Buglaroni. Yeah."

"You thought he was my boyfriend? Buglaroni?" Her volume is rising.

"Isn't he? I mean, wasn't he?"

"Did Cartier tell you that? That Buglaroni was my boyfriend?"

Had hesitates. "Well, she might have. I guess so."

Jasmine is speechless. It is bad enough stealing Had right under her nose, but Cartier has to lie about it? And with such a miserable lie!

"I have never dated Buglaroni in my life!" she exclaims finally. "And I never will date Buglaroni. If it were a choice between swimming to Siberia in elephant manure or just even pretending to date Buglaroni, I'd have my water wings on before you could say 'Everyone into the salt mines.' Buglaroni? Ugggghh!" She shivers uncontrollably.

"I'm sorry," Had says. "I thought--"

"You thought whatever that blond bimbo told you to think. Well, join the club, Had Fleece. You're just one more scalp on her coup stick. And I thought you liked me a little, that we might get to know each other, that... that..." She runs out of that. "Go to hell, Had Fleece. And take that zircon bimbo along with you."

She spins around and stalks off toward the cafeteria, leaving Had standing with his mouth open and his eyes wide.

Welcome to the Bahamas.

Behind Had, unbeknownst to him, or to Jasmine before him, Amnea Nutmilk has been standing in a nearby doorway, where she has heard the entire argument. The bastard, she thinks, tightening her grip on the ballots she is holding. They start young and they never change. Men. Boys. What's the difference? They're all bastards.

She pulls her pen out of her briefcase, and positions the Jasmine/Had ballot on the wall in front of her. She has already given them tied points, twenty-nine each. She had written up her analysis point by point, showing how close the round was. But until this moment she was still unsure of which one was the winner, and she had been putting off writing down the all important kicker, the reason for decision, or RFD. But now she has an RFD, all right.

The little bastard.

Winner: Nighten JM.

Reason for decision: "Affirmative is more persuasive."

More persuasive. She had learned that from Chesney. The worst thing you could say on a ballot was something as noncommittal and irritatingly vague as "more persuasive." Especially in an important round like this one.

More persuasive.

It served the little bastard right.

And Amnea Nutmilk now heads off to the ballot table, happy that justice -- the avowed goal Lincoln-Douglas debaters almost always strive to attain -- has, at least this once, been achieved.

Will Jasmine Maru break while Had Fleece spends the afternoon playing solitaire?

Will Jasmine start dating Buglaroni just to keep Cartier from becoming a liar?

Is Amnea Nutmilk going to become the queen of the judges?

Will Texans ever learn to talk slowly?

Is there any chance we really will have to debate an animal rights topic?

Do any two weather forecasters agree on how el nino will affect us this year?

Hang on to your pants when the answers remain unrevealed in our next episode: "First Princess Diana, then Mother Teresa: Coincidence, or clever convenience?"