



Episode 39

I Don't Think They Mean SATs for Labrador Retrievers

Mondays.

Nobody likes Mondays. But this one has been especially brutal, at least for Tarnish Jutmoll.

To begin with, the Obomash debacle has finally made it to the local papers. Page one, no less, complete with a reprint of the photograph from USA Today. Not that the other teachers at Nighten Day weren't already aware of it, however. From the minute Jutmoll got out of his car this morning, one or the other of them has been asking him for more of the juicy details. Since Obomash represented a school thirty miles away, most of Jutmoll's colleagues wouldn't recognize the man if he bit them on the nether regions, but that hasn't stopped them from following up on the story. How often does one of their own get scooped up on a morals charge? All right, often enough, but not so often that it still isn't newsworthy.

Ms. Mooney, the freshman English teacher, was the worse. In the teachers' lounge she grabbed Jutmoll by the elbow with the hook of her prosthetic arm before he had even added the milk to his coffee.

"You've got to tell me all about this."

"There's not all that much to tell, Margery," Jutmoll had said, trying to get his coffee stirred and to extricate himself from Ms. Mooney's stainless-steel limb at the same time.

"I can't believe that. What happens on these debate tournaments, anyhow? I thought all you did was sit around in cafeterias surrounded by teenagers waiting for it to end. Who knew there was sex involved?"

"There is not sex involved!"

"Oh, yeah, right. So how do you explain the newspaper this morning?"

"It was one man who made a mistake. He does not define the entire activity."

"If you ask me, he makes the activity sound that much more interesting. Picking up bimbos sounds a lot more exciting than sitting around in cafeterias."

"I assure you, Margery, that we do not go around picking up bimbos." He finally managed to wriggle himself free from her metallic grasp.

"I'd like to go to one of these tournaments with you one weekend," she had called out to him as he exited the lounge. He had stopped in his tracks.

"Really?"

"Sure. Obviously I'm missing something."

He had tilted his head. For years he had tried unsuccessfully to interest his colleagues in supporting forensics. Maybe Obomash had indirectly accomplished the impossible.

"I'll keep you in mind," he had said. "Definitely."

She had hounded him for more details for the rest of the day, and his lack of forthcomingness had only intrigued her more. He had tried to explain, again and again, that there was no story behind the headlines, but she refused to believe him, taking his demurrals as an indication of intrigue.

But finally the school day had ended, and the teachers, at least, had gone their own ways, either home or to their afterschool activities. As had Jutmoll, who is now standing next to the blackboard in the Speech & Debate room, facing his Lincoln-Douglas people. The time has come to put Obomash behind them, but of course the students have had their own discussions, separate from the teachers, and probably much more juicy. Teenagers have a habit of making X-rated Everests out of any sexual molehill, probably because, like Everest, most of them have yet to climb it, or at least to do so without oxygen and a few extra sherpas.

But that's another story. Now they have to concentrate on the new topic, which he has written on the blackboard.

"Resolved: Animal testing is immoral."

The entire LD team is spread around the room. Griot and Jasmine are thumbing through the notes they've already collected since yesterday when the topic was announced on the LD list-

server, the cyberspace bulletin board where debaters talk about, well, everything, including, occasionally, debate. Ellie and Trat, as usual, are sitting close enough to each to perform a Vulcan mind-meld, and looking fairly blank as far as the topic is concerned. The Tarleton twins, looking less like future industrialists than usual in their matching Yankee caps, are doodling in their notepads. Camelia, Jasmine's sister, is staring at Jutmoll with eyes wide, waiting for the wisdom to pour forth. And finally Buglaroni, who Jutmoll had assumed would, by now, have quit the team, is sitting in the front of the room, his big feet in their imponderable two pairs of socks and tucked into even bigger sneakers poking out into the traffic area, an expression of total bewilderment on his skinny face.

"So," Jutmoll begins. "Anyone care to comment?"

"My mother is a vegetarian," Buglaroni blurts out. "I think."

Griot looks up from his notes. "You don't know?"

"She doesn't, like, live with us."

"She's lucky there," one of the Tarleton twins says. Jutmoll has no idea how to tell them apart.

"Why?" Jutmoll asks.

"My parents are divorced," Buglaroni answers.

Jutmoll shakes his head. "No, not why doesn't she live with you. I mean why is she a vegetarian?"

"She doesn't think it's right to eat animals."

"Why?"

"It's like, uh, killing. It's, like, bad for the animals. Isn't it?"

"I doubt if the animals are exactly in favor of it," Jutmoll says.

"She used to say she wouldn't eat anything with a face," Buglaroni says.

"I guess that leaves out pumpkin pie," one of the Tarleton twins says.

"Tarleton, please!" Jutmoll tries to get them down to business.

"The thing is," Griot says, "we have to come up with a morality argument on both sides. That's obvious. It's probably easy for the negative to make a claim that humans are morally obligated to support their own existence at any cost short of harming another human. As soon as you draw the

line at lesser animals, the question becomes, where do you draw the line at all? I mean, is it wrong to test on apes but okay to test on rats? That would be hard to support. But is it okay to let a rat live while a human dies? Hard to support that either. So the negative has the value of human life, and that seems like a really hard value to undermine. What can the affirmative say against all that?"

"Well," Jasmine says without much conviction, "don't animals have rights too? Or at least, humans only have rights because we say they have rights. Right?"

"Right," Griot agrees.

"So humans say animals don't have rights. Isn't that just self-serving on the part of the humans? Who's to say that the right to life isn't innate among all living creatures, and that humans have no right to violate that right just because they're the only living creature capable of determining what rights are?"

"So you're saying sanctity of life, all life?" Jutmoll rephrases.

"Right. And upholding the sanctity of life is a higher moral obligation than just upholding the sanctity of your own life."

"But doesn't your own life come first?" Buglaroni asks.

"From the mouths of babes," Griot says. "The resolution requires me to prioritize moral obligations, and everyone from Kant on down prioritizes self-interest."

"But what about positive obligations?" Jasmine asks.

"To a lab rat?" This comes from Camelia, winner of the Little Johnson, the first four words she has uttered at a debate meeting.

Jutmoll smiles. "Remember that in cross-examination," he says.

"I hate this topic," Griot says. "I mean, it's so stupid. Obviously in the real world, animals come before people."

"Tell that to Disney," Jasmine responds.

"Disney?" Buglaroni asks. "What do they have to do with this?"

"Not them," Jasmine explains. "Him. Disney Davidson. He graduated last year. A heavy-duty vegan. I mean really heavy-duty. He hasn't eaten meat since he was seven years old. And his father is a butcher."

"Too bad he's not around now to help us out," Griot says.

"He will be around this weekend," Jutmoll says. "He's judging for us."

"All right!" Griot says. "Now we can play spades."

"You're not even going," Jutmoll says. "You've got SATs, remember? Besides, it's a debate tournament, not a gambling casino."

"We don't gamble. We play for honor."

"You should gamble," Buglaroni says. "But not spades. Play, like, poker."

"If I catch you gambling at a tournament, you're off the team," Jutmoll says sternly. "Permanently."

The room is quiet, as it always is when Jutmoll makes a categorical statement like that. He looks at his watch. He has a phone call to make, and he doesn't want to wait too long. Theoretically he should go on with the meeting a little longer, but he's starting to get impatient.

"All right," he concludes. "You guys need to do some research. Bring something with you to put on the table at Wednesday's meeting. Okay?"

There are nods of agreement around the room.

"Excelsior, ladies and gentlemen."

They tumble out of the room, and Tarnish Jutmoll -- a full-fledged adult in good standing -- starts to agonize about his upcoming telephone call.

You thought only teenagers did that?

Welcome to the Bahamas.

What is Tarnish Jutmoll's mysterious phone call?

Are animals people too?

Is every episode going to end with this stupid Welcome to the Bahamas business?

Why doesn't anyone send Jules mail anymore?

Will our dancing shoes be ready at the cobbler's in time for CatNats?

**Drink to me only with thine eyes next week when we ask the perennial question: "Nips:
Pars and Tur, your place or mine?"**