



## Episode 5

### Don't Cry for Me, Nighten Township

Jasmine Maru's round has gone well. At least, she thinks it's gone well. One never knows, usually, because the judges seldom disclose how they've decided, and many are masters of bizarrely unrevealing poker faces. But as one plies the circuit over time, the same judges start appearing again and again, and results become predictable. This judge, Lisa Torte, an assistant coach at Manhattan's Lodestone Technical -- a magnet school -- has written ballots on Jasmine perhaps a dozen times, and almost inevitably -- as the debate argot has it -- she has picked her up, which means given her the win. And this round seemed particularly clear, with Jasmine's opponent wavering between befuddlement and being totally flummoxed.. Flummoxing one's opponent is always a desirable thing to do, provided the judge recognizes a flummox when he or she sees one.

In fact, the only problem with the round was the presence of Hamlet P. Buglaroni, with his doubled socks and his Jean-Luc Picard necktie and his general air of dubious existence. Buglaroni sat in the back of the room, giving time signals, which he screwed up royally, missing some, confusing others. Jasmine would like to strangle him, but she's willing to make allowances -- just this once -- for his inexperience.

Novices. Can't shoot them, can't not shoot them. What's a debater to do?

Now Buglaroni is walking beside her, asking questions about the round. Her opponent has gone off in the other direction after the usual amenities of unfelt mutual admiration over how great the round was and how well the other did in it. For reasons lost in the mists of prehistory (a period otherwise known as the Eisenhower Administration), it is considered courteous for one debater to comment with certainty that the other has won the round, even in a serious flummox situation.

Go figure.

"I didn't understand a lot of what you were talking about," Buglaroni is saying. "I really don't, like, understand the social contract. You know?" He is carrying a yellow legal-sized pad, and he shows Jasmine his notes from the round. "And I missed a lot of the flow," he adds.

Jasmine stops walking. Mr. Jutmoll has asked her to start training Buglaroni, and as little as the prospect appeals to her, she is used to doing what her coach asks without question, and without argument. She has easily a half hour before the schematics for the fifth round are posted, and there's no time like the present.

"Let's find a place to sit," she says. "And don't say like, and don't say you know. You're a debater now."

Every room in the school is either already taken with a round in session, or about to be taken. But like every large institutional building, there are nooks and crannies and corners in every direction, and Jasmine quickly leads Buglaroni into an alcove at the entrance to a bank of lockers. Aside from the occasional passer-by, and a odd scattering of debaters sitting on the floor in front of their rooms but out of hearing range, there is no one in sight.

"All right," Jasmine begins, "let's start with the social contract."

"I guess I was wrong about the dating business with Mr. Jutmoll," Buglaroni suggests.

"Didn't you do any of the reading yet?"

Buglaroni looks away. With Jasmine Maru, eye contact can be brutal. "I'm not a big reader," he says.

"Well, that is not a good excuse."

"That stuff sounds so boring."

"A lot of it is boring, but that doesn't mean you don't have to read it. It gets interesting after you've read it and you start thinking about it."

"If you say so."

"All right." Jasmine tries again. "The social contract." She pauses for a second. "Imagine that you're the only person in the world. Okay?"

"Okay."

"Now if you were the only person in the world, what could you do?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing. Because if I were the only person in the world, there wouldn't be anything to do. No movies, no malls, no bowling alleys--"

"You're looking at this the wrong way."

"Maybe it's the wrong way for you but it's not the wrong way for me. The one thing I would not want to be is the only person in the world."

"And the one thing I would not want to be is the only other person in the world if you were there first." An annoyed Jasmine is harsher than the regular one. "But that is not the point. Listen for a minute. If you were the only person in the world -- regardless of what that world consisted of -- you could do anything you want. You could go anywhere, take anything, eat anything, drink anything, kick anything, throw rocks at the pigeons, you could do anything you want if you wanted to. Right?"

"I wouldn't want to throw rocks at the pigeons."

"I didn't say that you wanted to throw rocks at pigeons."

"I like pigeons."

"I didn't say you didn't like pigeons."

"Some of my best friends are pi--"

"I didn't say you wanted to do anything." Jasmine is now raising her voice, and catches the attention of two girls sitting going over their cases half a hallway away. She goes on in a strong whisper. "If said if you wanted to, you could. And why is that?"

"I don't know why I'd want to kick pigeons."

"My question was, why would you be able to, not why would you want to."

Buglaroni stares at the ceiling, looking for the answer on the cinder block above his head. "Well," he finally says, "I could do what I wanted to do because there would be nobody

to tell me that I couldn't."

Jasmine lets out a deep breath. "Thank you," she says. "Now we're getting somewhere. If you were all by yourself you could do anything you want because there would be no one else around to get in your way. If you wanted something there would be no one else around to want the same thing, so you could just take it. As easy as that."

"Except if I were the only one around there wouldn't be all that much great stuff that anybody would want anyway. Unless I had a factory or something in my backyard. Except I wouldn't be able to build a factory myself, or be able to run it, unless maybe I had robots, like a Japanese automobile factory. No offense, of course."

"No offense?"

"I mean, about the Japanese."

There are three other Nighten Day varsity LDers, Jasmine thinks, any one of which could be here now. Why her? Patience, she thinks. Patience.

"All right. Let's go on."

"Whenever you start a subject you always begin by saying all right."

"Debater's habit. All right. Let's improve on our imagining. Let's imagine you're not alone anymore. Let's imagine there's another guy on the other side of the hill."

"What hill?"

"The hill. What does it matter which hill?"

"Just wondering."

"All right. There's you, and there's this other guy on the other side of the hill. Just the two of you, and for a long time you don't even know the other one exists, and then one day you're picking apples on the hill and all of a sudden you run into the other guy, and he's picking apples too. So what happens?"

"Like, I guess I'd be really surprised because I'd be wondering where this other guy came from all of a sudden, that I never saw him before in my life."

"You don't have a philosophical mind set, do you, Hamlet?"

"Just call me Buglaroni."

"Buglaroni." She repeats the word not as a name but as an expression of exasperation. "All right, let's continue this. There's the two of you, picking apples, except there's not enough apples for the two of you."

"How many apples can one person eat? Jeez!"

"Not a philosophical bone in your body. Okay. There's not enough apples for the two of you. So what are the possibilities here?"

"Well, if we need apples all that badly, we could make a deal."

"You could make a deal, that's true. But what's the alternative to making a deal?"

"I don't know. Maybe I steal his apples, or he steals mine, but that doesn't sound so great."

"Exactly!" Jasmine is astounded, as she never expected to reach this point in her lifetime, but Buglaroni has finally answered a question correctly. "There are two possibilities. Either the two of you fight over the apples, or steal them or something like that, or else you make a deal. Either you make a deal or you don't. Now if you don't make a deal, you know what that's called?"

"A misdeal?"

"The state of nature. You're in a state of nature. Just people, each one an individual doing what he or she wants. And if you always do what you want, regardless of what anybody else wants, and maybe you're always stealing each other's apples or fighting over them or whatever, what would that be like?"

"The Apple Wars?"

"Exactly!" Two correct answers nearly in a row. Even more astounding. "You would be in a state of constant warfare. The state of nature, therefore, is a state of constant warfare. Which is exactly what Hobbes was talking about."

"Who's he?"

"Hobbes? He's a philosopher."

"His state of nature sounds horrible."

"It is horrible. That's why it's better to choose the alternative, to make a deal. And what

would the deal be called?"

Buglaroni searches the ceiling again for the answer. "The Missouri Compromise?"

"The what?"

"The Missouri Compromise." He shrinks under Jasmine's gaze. "It was the only thing I could think of on short notice."

"Not the Missouri Compromise," Jasmine says. "The social contract. Does that ring a bell? The social contract?"

"The social contract. That rings a bell."

"Good. The thing is, it's not just you and one other person; it's a lot of people in the state of nature. Now in that state of nature you have absolute freedom to do whatever you want, except of course your freedom will be bumping up against somebody else's freedom all the time." Jasmine looks at her watch. "The schematics for the next round should be coming out soon. We should go down to the cafeteria."

Buglaroni gives a sigh of relief. "I need a break. A little of this goes a long way." He stands up. "Like, which way's the cafeteria?"

"Like, downstairs. You go on down. Please. I'll see you down there. And take off that tie. You won't be needing it."

"It's cool," Buglaroni says, fingering the knot below his neck. "You just don't get it."

"You're right, Hamlet. I just don't get it."

"And it's Buglaroni, not Hamlet." He grabs up his backpack, and Jasmine watches him disappear off down the hallway, realizing she may have him around on a regular basis for the next two years of her life.

"A novice?"

The voice comes from a few yards away, around a corner of the lockers. She knows that voice immediately, so she's ready when he leans over to put himself into her view from where he's been sitting.

"Hi, there," he says. "I couldn't help overhearing. I was going over my case." He smiles. "My name's Had Fleece. From Toulouse Lautrec. You're from Nighten Day, right?"

She nods. He stands up and walks over to her, then slides down to sit beside her.

"I'm Jasmine Maru," she manages to say.

"Jasmine. Right. How are you doing? Do you know what your record is?"

"Two-two. Maybe three-one."

He nods, and she notices a lock of his yellow hair loosing itself in a comma above his right eyebrow. "Me too," he says. "Probably two-two. Who's the novice?"

"Hamlet Buglaroni."

"Why isn't he debating?"

"He didn't have a case, so our coach wouldn't let him."

Had shakes his head. "Novices. We've got a million of them. They drive you nuts."

"We've only got four. But Buglaroni's probably as good as a million."

"You were teaching him well. That was very good."

Jasmine is embarrassed, and smiles shyly. "Thank you."

"You know, we should be getting down to the cafeteria ourselves. The schematics should be coming out soon." He stands up quickly, then extends his hand to help Jasmine up too. She holds out her hand, and he takes it, his grip warm and strong, and pulls her up. She grabs her briefcase, and they walk down to the cafeteria together, talking about novices, social contracts, and whether or not they think they'll make it into the elimination rounds this afternoon.

As they walk, they don't notice Cartier Diamond in an alcove across from the cafeteria, talking on the telephone. But Cartier notices them.

Or more to the point, Cartier notices Had Fleece. She's noticed him in the past, many times, but he's never looked as good to her as he does now.

She cuts short her conversation, and walks back into the cafeteria.

**Will Lisa Torte pick up Jasmine Maru?**

**Did Had Fleece pick up Jasmine Maru**

**Will Hamlet P. Buglaroni ever read "Leviathan"?**

**Does the social contract have a sanity clause?**

**Is anyone still reading any of this?**

**The answer to questions other than these will be answered in our next installment: "Ontogeny—Can it be stopped in time?"**