



## Episode 51

### Song and Dance

Thanks to the fact that dozens of primate ethologists are now running around in the jungles of the world, living with chimpanzees and orangutans and silver-haired gentlemen of the gorilla persuasion, not to mention bonobos who simply can't get enough of the old bingbameroo, it has become more and more difficult for human beings to find a characteristic that sets them apart from their cousins hanging by their tails or their fingernails or whatever it is they're hanging from on those nearby branches of animal kingdom family tree. However, it is probably safe to say that one thing that distinguishes homo sapiens from other primates is their willingness to pay good money to see an Andrew Lloyd Webber play. Whether this places humans higher or lower on the evolutionary scale, however, remains moot.

### Aspects of Love

The short bus ride from Toulouse back to Nighten is a relief, compared to the normal trip home from a tournament. Usually the team is sentenced to uncountable hours squeezed into school bus seats that Torquemada rejected during the Inquisition as "too inhumane to our heretical brethren." The only food available is Roy Rogers fried chicken, which tastes decent enough but it is so slippery you can't hold on to even the most accommodating leg for more than seventeen seconds, and realistically speaking old Roy ought to provide lobster bibs to protect everyone within a ten foot radius from the ocean of grease that accompanies every mouthful. And if the crowding and the nutritional regimen aren't bad enough, there is always someone who starts singing the score of "Rent," which is just not made for the average community sing-along session.

But the ride home from Toulouse, which is only the neighboring town, is nothing like that. It will be over practically before it has started -- which is none too soon for David Brillig, sitting alone in the back seat.

It has not been a red-letter day for the Speechies at the Toulouse CFL. David, attempting his usual solo Humorous Interp piece from the film of "The Fountainhead" -- he especially enjoys performing both parts of the famous rape scene, not to mention the sheer pleasure of saying the name Ellsworth Toohey -- didn't even manage to place. His heart wasn't in it, and he knows that when "The Fountainhead" isn't funny, it can be officially registered as a deadly weapon. Only two Nighten Day Speechies took tin today, and one of them is sitting across the aisle from David, his legs stretched out sideways on the seat. As William Hand listens to his portable CD player, he is smiling, his eyes are shut, and he seems as close to bliss as is humanly possible on a school-bus. The head and outstretched arms of the Nike statuette atop his trophy are sticking out of the backpack on the floor beside him.

David cannot understand it. A few weeks ago he and William were the best of friends. They had been best friends for life. Now they are in the midst of what David perceives of as an undeclared war. William's use of Shylock's "I am a Jew" is, to David, a thinly disguised attack on David's feelings about William's declared homosexuality, and his performance of it at the speech meeting was the firing of a warning salvo over the bridge of their friendship's battleship.

The war is afoot, the enemy is engaged.

And now it is David's turn. It is time to counterattack. He is ready, he is willing, he is able -- but he can't for the life of him figure out what to do. What is needed is a bold move.

But he just can't think of one.

What an idiot, he thinks, referring both to himself and to William.

### **Hamlet P. Buglaroni, Superstar**

There are a lot of loves in a person's life, if a person is lucky. There is love for parents, there is love for siblings, there is love for a mate, there is love for one's own children, there may even be love for everyone in the world at large, an all-embracing altruistic realization that you are one with the world.

For Hamlet P. Buglaroni, there is at the moment a different kind of love, the infatuation a debater feels for his or her first trophy. It may outrank all the others put together.

Some people win a trophy their first day out; some win fairly often and expect to do so; some go for months, years even, and never get to take tin of their own, yet still they go on in the hope that the next time will be their time.

For Buglaroni, it has happened the second time out. To the surprise of everyone on his team, and especially his coach, he went undefeated today. He not only took tin, but he has earned half a qualification to the New York State finals, which, unlike some states, is a fairly major shivaree, as these things go. Even Buglaroni is surprised at his accomplishment, even though, if only in his own mind, there is one minor complication.

One minor complication.

But that doesn't make it any less of an accomplishment in his own eyes.

He sits in the second seat in the front of the bus, directly behind Tarnish Jutmoll. He is still cradling the trophy in his hands, gently rubbing Nike's butt with his index finger.

I am a debater, he is thinking to himself over and over. I am a debater. And the idiotic thing is, I'm not even bad at it. Except for that one minor complication.

Will wonders never cease?

## **Cats**

If this weren't a one-lane no-passing street, Cartier would zoom by the bus in her Miata, but she already has two major speeding tickets and she doesn't need a third one. She cannot help but express her frustration at having gotten behind the bus in the first place.

"Damned idiots," she mumbles. She can see the silhouettes of William's and David's heads in the back seats, but it is not the two former best friends who are the target of her venom, it is bus-ness in general, and this bus in particular, representing all buses.

"You can cut around on Agnew Boulevard," her passenger Mordred Prentice tells her, trying to soothe the savage Speechie.

"Which is not for, like, another three miles," Cartier says through clenched teeth.

She is the only other Speechie to take tin today. For her, it is a reasonable expectation that she will do so, and she doesn't overly credit it. She is good, she knows that, and she is an experienced senior. Of course she'll win.

As the bus in front of her pulls to a stop at a red light, Cartier lets out a long deep breath. She is trying to control herself. Suddenly she thinks of Had Fleece, of the expression on his face as she pulled away last night, leaving him stranded in the parking lot, and of the way he avoided her today like the plague.

And then she is happy. All traces of frustration at following the smoke-spewing schoolbus are gone. There is even a smile on her face.

"Put on a tape," she says to Mordred. "Something cheerful."

Mordred is quick to obey. He knows that when his mistress's temperament is benevolent, everyone, including Mordred, benefits.

He chooses "Rent." Which is a cliché, yes. But the reason it's a cliché is because every intellectual manqué teenager in America really does listen to it.

"It's December the 24th..."

Well, it does beat "Cats," doesn't it?

## **Whistle Down the Wind**

Disney Davidson is in love. Chemistry love, that is. Chemistry love is when you are completely, overwhelmingly attracted to someone to whom you have never spoken. There is no reason for the attraction, except for the person's mere existence. The object of the attraction isn't necessarily the best-looking person around, or the wittiest, or the nicest. In fact, the attraction object is, in the eyes of the attracted, almost completely a tabula rasa. He knows nothing about her. And yet he cannot get her out of his mind.

Disney is in chemistry love with Gloria Fudless. He has been since she walked into the room and he judged her round. And it wasn't that she was that good a debater, although she did defeat Dopey or Grumpy or whatever the name of the dwarf was she debated. Disney thinks he probably gave her too many speaker points, but he was blinded by love. It happens.

Now he is staring out the window into the blankness of the dark early night, realizing that he never said two words to her. He should have gone up to her while they were waiting for the awards. He could have talked to her about her round, given her some tips, and somewhere or other along the line gotten her phone number. Instead he wasted his time playing cards with Buglaroni, and once, sneaking a cigar in the back of the school.

You idiot! The phrase goes around and around in his mind. You idiot! You'll be going back to Naggie tomorrow night, and you may never see her again.

You idiot!

### **Do Cry for me, Nighten Township**

Camelia Maru is steaming.

Those idiots!

She can do the math easily enough. She is carefully comparing the results on her ballots with the results printed on the cumulative report of the tournament. And they do not agree. She is the victim of that dreaded monster, the Tab Error.

She won all three of her rounds. But for the third one, where she received, according to the ballot, twenty-nine points, it was recorded mistakenly as twenty-seven points. Two lousy points, which meant the difference between winning a trophy and gaining her second and therefore full qualification for the New York State finals in April, and sitting on the bus fuming.

Two lousy points. Those idiots. Because the irritating thing is, those two little points only affected two people, herself and Buglaroni. He moved up a peg -- and took tin -- and she moved down to his peg -- and took air.

Buglaroni. It is not his fault. She should be happy for him, because he's such an idiot she doubts that he'll ever take tin again, much less outrank her at a tournament. But that is not the way she feels. She blames him, because by his sheer miserable existence he cost her the recognition that she deserved. Where once she mildly disliked Buglaroni -- a natural response, she imagines -- she now hates him with a passion.

How could this have happened?

Those idiots!

She would strangle Buglaroni in his seat, if she thought she could get away with it.

## Phantom of the (Soap) Opera

You don't expect something like this, not at Tarnish Jutmoll's age, not in Tarnish Jutmoll's position. Like some damned idiot in a soap opera, all horns and no head.

Yes, you're an idiot, Tarnish, he thinks to himself. You should know better.

But he doesn't know better. No one ever knows better, which is either one of the great cruelties, or one of the great charities, of human existence. At every age, at any age, love can strike. No one is immune, even though others might wish they were. No one is too short, too tall, too ugly, too loud, too quiet, too hairy, too bald, too thin, too fat, and certainly and most especially not too old.

Tarnish, you idiot, you are too old.

That thought rumbles through his brain, to be shortly replaced by, You old dog, you!

You old dog, you. That's the qualifier. When you're young and on the make, and you go out and make a conquest, you might cojole yourself with a tacit, You dog, you. When you're Jutmoll's age, you add the modifier, old.

But you're still a dog.

Or better yet, a dawg.

You old dawg, you!

It happened as they were leaving. Tarnish Jutmoll was standing beside the open door of the bus, counting the heads of his team as they boarded. And then Amnea Nutmilk walked by, walking behind her son and the rest of her new Bisonette Technical team. There was a little half smile of absentmindedness on her lips as she turned her head to see Tarnish looking at her.

And he was looking at her. There is something about that woman...

They were about ten feet apart, both coincidentally directly below bright street lamps. And when she looked at him, Tarnish Jutmoll did something he hadn't done in thirty years. Maybe forty years.

He winked at her.

And with no hesitation, in a completely unpremeditated response, she winked back.

She continued on her way to her own bus, and Jutmoll turned back to counting the heads of his Nighten Dayers.

And now he is sitting across from Disney, looking out the window at his view of nothing but the memory of those unexpected winks.

### **Love Changes Everything**

Love changes everything.

That is a lyric from a song in "Aspects of Love." And it is true.

Love changes everything.

And so does hate.

And as the Nighten Day school bus nears its home, the Old Yeller high school building, the changes that love and hate will bring remain, for the moment, hidden, deep inside the music of the night.

**How will David wreak his vengeance on William?**

**What is Buglaroni's one minor complication?**

**Are Amnea and Tarnish going to pick up where Cartier and Had left off?**

**Did we deliberately ignore "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat?"**

**And why are we blaming Sir Andy for all of this? After all, he only writes the music. It's some other damned idiots who wrote all those lyrics.**

**You'll have to wait a week to be disappointed not to find the answers in our next episode: "Anthrax: Deadly Plague or the Original Name of the U.S. Rail System?"**