



Episode 61

And Quiet Flows the Don (Provided He has a Flow Pad)

He is older than almost everyone, and he knows it.

Don Angelo Vitelli can barely move, and when he does, it is painful. He can only eat glopped and chopped mush, like a baby bird living on its parents' regurgitations. He has to be carried to the bathroom on an hourly basis. He sleeps in fifteen minute snatches, and much of the time cannot tell the difference between consciousness and memory, but he knows that he doesn't dream any more. He hasn't dreamt in twenty years.

Even his dreams are only memories now.

He sits propped up on the bed, wrinkled and virtually hairless, his rheumy eyes fixed on nothing. His elderly son, Don Domenic, is sitting next to him in a chair by the bed, dozing. A little grrr of a snore is emanating from Domenic's slightly parted lips, and Don Angelo turns to the sound.

"Domenic," he whispers hoarsely.

There is no reply from the sleeping man.

Don Angelo looks down at the end of the bed. And then something happens. It is a moment of lucidity unlike any he can remember. He is young again. He feels no pain. He is able to speak clearly and loudly.

"Domenic!" he says again.

This time the younger don is startled awake, and the sight he beholds is baffling. The old man on the bed is staring beyond his feet and pointing at something.

But what?

An angel come to take him away? A demon? Don Domenic stares at the empty space beyond the bed.

Where is Stanley Kubrick when you really need him?

"AAAAAAARRRRRRGGGGHHHHHHHHH!!!!!"

The old man's scream is blood-curdling. Don Domenic is on his feet, and others are running in from down the hall--

But it is too late. It is over.

The Don is dead.

"Papa," Don Domenic cries, breaking down, falling to his knees by the side of the bed and sobbing loudly as the others begin to congregate. "Oh, Papa."

"Someone tell Don Proscenio," a voice says softly in the back of the room, and someone dutifully leaves the deathbed to tell the younger son what has happened.

"AAAAAAARRRRRRGGGGHHHHHHHHH!!!!!"

This time it is Don Domenic who lets out a blood-curdling scream. The remaining old man is suddenly trying to rise to his feet, clutching his left shoulder.

"Mother of Mercy," he cries. "Is this the end of Rico?"

People rush to help him, and he falls into their arms, a look of excruciating pain on his face.

And suddenly, he too is dead.

Everyone in the room is shocked. It is impossible. If this happened in fiction, no one would believe it. Shades of that Haze woman! They are all speechless.

And then the sound comes of the slow slapping of plastic flip-flops on the carpeted corridor. No one speaks. Everyone in the Vitelli family knows that infrequent sound well, and they all turn to the doorway.

It is Don Proscenio ("the Whale") Vitelli. But he is too large to get through the doorway.

"My papa," he says softly.

"And your brother too," someone says.

The people in the death room move aside to reveal not one but two dead dons. There is a look of palpable shock on the remaining don's face, but if the assembled wiseguys are expecting a triple play, he is not going to oblige them.

"Take care of this," Don Proscenio says to no one in particular as he turns around, leaving nothing in his wake but the slow slapping of flip-flops on the carpet as he returns to his watery existence.

Bunburying

"Good morning, Mr. Juvaswami."

Kumar Juvaswami is standing in the doorway of Lav Bunbury's office. Mr. Bunbury is Kumar's guidance counselor.

"Well, don't just stand there, Kumar. Come in. Find a seat."

There is only one chair other than Mr. Bunbury's own in the office. Kumar drops himself down into it.

"You look depressed, Kumar. Here. Lean closer. Now close your eyes."

Kumar dutifully leans closer to Mr. Bunbury's desk and shuts his eyes. Suddenly he feels a cool, flowery mist in his face. He recoils in something resembling abject horror.

"Eau de toilette," Mr. Bunbury explains, putting the atomizer bottle back into his top drawer.

"Invigorates the skin, and makes you smell better at the same time. Who wouldn't profit from a combination of the two?"

Lav Bunbury is perhaps Nighten Day's most flamboyant administrator. Mostly bald, what hair remains is surfer blond and closely cropped around his ears. He is deeply tanned even this late in Autumn. He is wearing a pale green shirt and an extremely busy tie of the sort that Tarnish Jutmoll wouldn't ban for his forensicians. Too much of the wrong statement, Jutmoll would say. On the back of Bunbury's chair is a double-breasted blue blazer.

"So, Mr. Juvaswami. Time is passing us by like a '57 Mustang convertible on a warm summer's night with 'I Get Around' blaring from the radio. We remark on the piquancy of the moment, and then it is gone. You're not going for any early admissions, I take it."

Kumar shakes his head. "I haven't found anything I really like, yet."

Mr. Bunbury opens the folder on his desk. "You saw some schools this summer?"

"I did what you suggested. The 'B' tour."

"Ah, yes. The 'B' tour. Bates, Bowdoin, B.U., Brown, Brandeis, and Bill."

"I don't remember Bill."

"Williams."

"Oh. Yeah. We did Williams."

"And none of them took your fancy, such as it is?"

"They were all, like, okay, but, well, none of them really grabbed me."

"And you're doing the 'C' tour this weekend?"

"Yeah. I'm going to take Friday off."

"Colby, Colgate, Cornell, Columbia, Chicago. Quite a spread in three days."

"I think we're going to skip Chicago."

"You should still consider it, sight unseen."

"Okay."

"And Kenyon too. That sounds like a 'C'."

Kumar nods.

"You've got good grades and solid boards, Kumar. 698 on the math and 702 on the English. That's very strong, and very balanced. You can probably get into any of these schools, subject to the whims of their annual selection criteria. You've got to start narrowing these things down. First of all, we'll assume you do want to stay in the northeast."

Kumar nods again.

"All right. That's a start. Big school or small school?"

Kumar shrugs.

"A small school allows you to be an integral part of the academic community. A large school provides more diversity."

"I like community. But I like diversity too."

"So what you'd like is sort of a big small school, then."

"Yeah. That sounds good."

Mr. Bunbury nods. "And do you prefer city or country? City schools offer excitement but they're also distracting, while rural schools offer focus but lack that cosmopolitan polish."

"I like cities, but I also like the country too."

"So that means we need a sort of urban rural school?"

"Yeah. That sounds good."

"And of course you have no idea what you want to major in, or even if you prefer a science or an arts path?"

Kumar shakes his head. "I just can't decide yet."

"Oh, Jenny, bright as a penny..."

"What?"

"Nothing. Okay. I think we've narrowed it down to a big small country school in the city that specializes in science and the arts. That should be no problem. Have you considered correspondence courses?"

Kumar smiles and scratches the top of his head. "It's just do hard to figure out what to do. There's so many options."

Mr. Bunbury leans forward. "I'll tell you something, Kumar. Just between us. If you're having that much trouble coming to a decision even on the broadest questions, it's probably not going to matter that much in the long run. You'll probably be happy most anywhere, because you're unlikely to be unhappy anywhere. That's not a bad thing. But you will at least have to pick out a handful to send applications to. Applications cost money, plus there's the essays to write. You want to make things manageable for yourself and your parents."

"Yeah. I know."

"Okay then. Enjoy your weekend, and see me on Monday and let me know how it went. Then we'll try to carve a path through this. Are you going to want to do the 'D' tour?"

"What are they?"

"Dartmouth, Duke, Ducksburg, Dr--"

"Ducksburg?"

"It's where Donald graduated from. And his uncle. I understand his nephews are going there now."

Kumar stands. "I'll see you Monday."

"Monday it is."

Kumar leaves the office. Sitting outside, waiting for his own appointment, is David Brillig.

"Hey," Kumar says.

"Kumar! Hey. I've been looking for you."

"I was just Bunburying."

"So I see. I'm next."

"What did you want?"

"It's complicated. I'll see you at lunch?"

"Yeah. Sure."

Kumar walks away, his curiosity piqued, as David knocks on Mr. Bunbury's door.

Which Came First? The Chick or the Yegg?

Camelia Maru is on a mission.

She is standing at the edge of the second floor lockers, pretending to look something up in her organizer book. The next period is about to begin. For some it is lunch time, for some another class. For Camelia, it is time to answer a few questions, and she's willing to sacrifice a lunch period to do it.

The scene at the lockers is controlled chaos. Everyone is in a rush to get somewhere amidst the business of dropping things off and picking things up. It doesn't take long for even the greenest student to maximize his efficiency using his locker.

Which is exactly what Camelia is counting on.

There is a whoosh of students out of the locker area, comprising those who now have a class to go to. They tear off in all directions, cutting the amount of time necessary to get to their rooms with surgical precision. When the bell rings, they have emptied the corridors.

The second wave out of the lockers is more leisurely. These are the lunch students. Some of them have brown paper bags, some have put on jackets for a run to the deli. They are talking and laughing and generally expressing their relief at having forty-five minutes break-time.

Hamlet P. Buglaroni is one of them. He is trying to convince the Tarleton twins to spend the lunch period playing three-way spades at a penny a point. Camelia, while cringing at the sound of his voice as it trails away down the hall, notes carefully that he is not carrying his backpack.

She waits another minute, her little black organizer book in her hand as subterfuge. The lockers seem empty. She waits another minute.

She makes her move.

She knows Buglaroni's locker number, but even if she hadn't the Homer Simpson "D-oh" sticker would have otherwise been a dead giveaway. Like all Nighten Day lockers, there is a combina-

tion lock between its contents and the outside world. Camelia well knows that each lock requires three distinct turns to different, specific numbers.

But that's where maximizing efficiency comes in. No one leaves a lock totally shut. Some people never lock them at all, and simply leave nothing of value in them. But most people cleverly set the lock with the first two turns so that all they have to do when they're in a hurry is make the last turn, thus getting in quickly but nonetheless keeping the thing locked. It would be extremely clever, if everyone didn't do it.

But there is still one issue. Camelia's index finger and thumb encircle the little knob. Clockwise, or counterclockwise?

Clockwise, or counterclockwise?

Clockwise, or counterclockwise?

She blinks. It is Buglaroni, after all. So there is only one logical possibility.

Counterclockwise.

Slowly she turns the knob. One number at a time. As she turns, she pulls down on the lock, not wanting to miss that magic moment when the tumblers click into place.

Turn, turn, turn.

Click.

Open!

And there it is before her, the glory of Buglaroni's locker.

Innumerable pairs of sweat-hardened old gym socks, half a dozen empty Mountain Dew bottles, a Frisbee, two beanie babies (no doubt stolen, she assumes), a Tommy Hilfiger jacket -- tres fashionable! -- and hanging from a hook, the prize she is seeking: Buglaroni's backpack.

Camelia grabs for it. She knows what she is looking for, and she knows that she doesn't have much time to find it. If anyone catches her here, even another student, it will not go well for her. Commission of a crime in pursuit of a criminal is nonetheless a crime itself.

Buglaroni's backpack contains all the usual books, pads, binders, pens, and, to Camelia's relief, a manila folder. The same kind of manila folder Tarnish Jutmoll hands all the new novices at the beginning of the year.

She opens the folder. Right at the top, an affirmative case.

Jasmine Maru's affirmative case.

In a shameless show of unconcern, the line where Jasmine has typed her name has been crossed out in pen. Next to the cross-out, Buglaroni has written his own name.

Camelia thumbs through the sheets. The negative case is there too, also with Jasmine's name crossed out and Buglaroni's written in.

The proof is in her hands.

She removes the cases from the folder, then returns the folder into the backpack, and replaces the backpack in the locker. She closes it gently and gives the lock a couple of spins counterclockwise.

Buglaroni will realize right away that something is wrong with his lock when it doesn't open for him on one spin. But no doubt he will conclude that he simply forgot to set it, and he won't give it another thought.

Camelia swiftly tucks the stolen cases into her own backpack, and makes her way out of the locker area. She does not want to make an obvious late entrance into the cafeteria, so she will wait out the rest of the period in the girls' room.

She is exhilarated. She has the proof.

Now all she has to do is figure out what to do with it.

Will Don Proscenio be able to follow in the footsteps of his father?

Will Kumar find the right college?

Will Lav Bunbury continue to smell good?

What does David Brillig want with Kumar?

What will Camelia do now that she has the proof of Buglaroni's transgression?

We'll never be able to fit the answers into our next episode: "Pea Soup: British fog or devilish barf?"