



Episode 82

Winning Isn't Everything

It's not easy being mean.

And in the universe of the debate gods, it's even harder being the meanest.

But Lieu MacFloutch seems to have that honor tied up.

Ms. MacFloutch has been in the forensics arena for over twenty years, which makes her in no way the longest lived forensician, but it does give her one of the necessary credentials for entry into the pantheon. Debate gods do not accede to Olympus overnight; there are dues to be paid, and a decade or two spent haunting the high school hallways and judging novices and learning to cast the magic spells of the tab room software is among them. But godhood goes beyond merely time served. Godhead -- divinity -- requires that you make a name for yourself beyond your own geographical circuit. If everyone knows who you are in the next town, you have accomplished little; if everyone in forensics around the country knows who you are, you're on your way to Zeus Central.

Lieu MacFloutch, a thin, tall, bony woman with long dark hair marked by a thick wave of gray that cuts across like an errant cat's tail, has both the benefit and the deficit of coming from the state of Florida, which fields many of the best and brightest forensicians in the country. The benefit is that her state is a breeding ground for solid competitors, and nothing begets success as well as a successful environment: if you often come up against top debaters, you will become that much more of a top debater yourself, provided you don't quit during the early going and join the chess team out of utter frustration. The deficit is also that her state fields many of the best and brightest forensicians in the country, which makes it difficult for any coach to stand out above the others. If you have winners, of course you have winners. This is Florida. What else have you done for me lately?

Which is how Lieu MacFloutch, an ambitious woman to say the least, learned the same lesson that the veteran strippers taught the young Gypsy Rose Lee: You gotta have a gimmick. Which in MacFloutch's case translated to: You gotta have an institute.

Institute. A summer camp for forensicians. A two-week summer camp for forensicians, with low overhead and high prices and if enough of your graduates take home enough tin the next season, you start earning a reputation, and the next thing you know, you're a debate god.

Like the lady known as Lieu. Lieu MacFloutch. Who is standing at the end of a hallway with her LD star, the Round Robinski Dan McGrew. Robinski Dan McGrew, who is only a junior, poised for greatness. The star of last year's MacFloutch institute. Who came in second at the Lodestone Round Robin. Who is now about to go in and debate the final round of the Vaganza.

The pressure is on.

"You've never debated her," Lieu MacFloutch says. It is not a question.

Robinski Dan McGrew nods. "But I've watched her at the Messerschmitt. She's good."

"She sucks." Ms. MacFloutch reaches into her briefcase. She looks around to make sure no one is watching them. "This is her aff case." She hands McGrew a sheet of legal-sized yellow paper with a beautifully written flow on it.

McGrew smiles. "Wow."

"Wow, yeah, right. Study it before you go in there. I judged her in quarters."

"This is going to help."

"Of course it's going to help. If you go neg that is. You've got to win the toss."

"Should I have this?"

"Why shouldn't you have it? It's not a secret. She's been running that case for the last three days. She probably has your flows, so why shouldn't you have hers?"

"I guess so--"

"This is not guessing, McGrew. This is winning. What are you going to do in that room, McGrew?"

"I'm going to win."

"You are going to win. You are going to win the Manhattan Lodestone OriginalVaganza. You are going to become the top debater in the country. How are you going to do it?"

He looks at his coach blankly.

"You are going to beat her," Lieu MacFloutch goes on. "You are going to nail her to the wall."

"Yeah."

"You are going to pull every hair out of her head and make a throw rug out of it."

"Yeah?"

"You are going crush every bone in her body until there is nothing left but a wet spot of protoplasm on the floor for the custodians to mop up when they close the place down tonight."

"Yeah!"

"You are going to cut off her head and put it into a Save the Whales tote bag and you are going to throw it into the Atlantic Ocean where it will get pulled up in the tuna fishing nets and fed to the dolphins."

"Yeah."

"You are going to nuke her. You are going to detonate a mushroom cloud and a flash of light and the only thing left of her will be a pile of radioactive ash, a black dress and the gnarled remains of a Pilot pen that will never spin again."

"YEAH."

"You are going to release a toxic virus into her bloodstream, and she is going to be wasted by black vomit until she has blown her guts into her backpack and her contagion has destroyed he entire East Coast and the plague threatens to destroy the rest of humanity."

"YEAH!!!"

"You are going to beat her, McGrew."

"I am going to beat her, Ms. MacFloutch."

At that moment, Tilde Hyphen-Emdash and her coach Nip Sazo come walking down the

hallway. They go directly up to Dan and the lady known as Lieu.

"Good luck, Dan," Tilde says, extending her hand.

"Good luck, Tilde," Dan replies.

Ms. MacFloutch and Mr. Sazo smile genteelly at their mutual recognition of the beauty of healthy competition.

We Do Robert a Disservice

The room -- a large lecture hall -- is packed for the final round of Lincoln-Douglas. There are coaches, debaters, even a couple of bus drivers. Five judges sit up front, their ballots on the little folding desks attached to each seat. Dan McGrew is the first of the combatants to enter the room. His coach, Lieu MacFloutch, touches his shoulder gently as he takes his seat, while she walks up the aisle to watch from the gallery.

Everyone is talking, but still the room is tense and expectant. This should be the best debate of the tournament. There is no guarantee that it will be, but at least it will be the one everybody talks about. Break debaters, who are used to getting to the elimination rounds, are well aware of the difference between these debates and the earlier ones where it's just you and your opponent and the judge alone in the room. Here, there's an audience. People react differently in a group than when they are alone. The good break debater plays the group reaction like a violin, making music of the audience responses, monitoring the ebb and flow of attention, speaking a little more oratorically, using a little bit more humor, but never forgetting that it is the judges in the front -- in this case, five of them -- who are the only ones who count, but realizing too that they are not immune to the group vibration.

A final round at a national tournament. It should be exciting. Intriguing.

Poetic.

Like this (to be read aloud, please):

The Debating of Dan McGrew

A bunch of the teams were settling in at the Lodestone lecture space;
The kids that handle the judges' chores were twiddling their pens apace;
Front of the room, for the final round, sat Robinski Dan McGrew,
And watching his luck was his goddess coach, the lady that's known as Lieu.

When in through the door, which was covered with maps, and into the din and glare,
There sauntered a Semi's winner in black, Hyphen-Emdash, loaded for bear.
She looked like a girl with a foot in the grave and pallidly-skinned like a mime,
Yet she tossed her yellow pad on a desk, and she called for flipping a dime.
All of us there knew the hyphened lass, as we searched our pants for a sou;
And we tossed it high, and she called out tails to Robinski Dan McGrew.

There's gals that somehow just grip your eyes, with them hard lines on a face;
And such was she, and she looked to me like a gal who had dropped a case;
When the coin fell heads, with the dreary stare of a kid who's lost a toss,
She preflowed aff when Dan called for the neg, and drew straight lines all across.
Then I got to thinking 'bout who she was, and wondering how she'd do,
And I turned my head--and there watching her was the lady that's known as Lieu.

Tilde went up to the front of the room, and she seemed in a kind of daze,
Till at last that novice timer fell in the way of her wandering gaze.
The novice kid gave Tilde a nod; there was nothing else but to start,
So Tilde takes deep breaths one-two, one-two, and starts off like a dart.
In a long black skirt and with eyes alert she spoke at a startling rate,
And she clutched her case with her talon hands--my God! that girl could debate.

Her tags were concise, her logic superb, as she speeded down the flow,
And her arguments would stop you cold like a blizzard, all fierce white snow;
Her contentions grew with the towering strength of a Locke or Hobbes or Kant,
As evidence, quotes, impacts and links, fell clear from her mental font;
When the timer signed, thirty to go, she smiled and gave a wink,
And ended with a wee hint of Rousseau... that girl could make you just think!

Now Dan McGrew, who was fast to rise to cross-ex young Tilde that day,
Popped up like a weasel and bared his teeth and let his experience play;
A question or two to put her off guard, then in for the good, clean kill;
But Tilde wasn't such easy prey, and faced his attacking with skill.
And when that first cross-ex was over, and McGrew sat down to stew --
God! how ghastly the goddess coach looked -- the lady that's known as Lieu.

After a minute of fevered prep, so soft that you scarce could hear;
McGrew stood up straight and led off on the neg in a voice that was loud and clear;
His arguments solid but not quite the best; you could see he was falling flat.
As he covered aff, his refuting weak, his impacts skimpy and pat,

You knew that the round was Tilde's to grab, and it thrilled you through and through--
"I guess I'll stand ready for cross-ex," said Robinski Dan McGrew.

Then Tilde almost hesitates . . . then she burst like a pent-up flood;
And she seemed to say, "It's Justice day," and my eyes were blind with blood.
Her questions struck like a well-thrown lance, and they stung like a frozen lash,
And the lust awoke to kill, to kill . . . then the cross-ex stopped with a crash,
And that Tilde turned, and her eyes they burned as she spoke her 1 A R;
She missed not a point and with time to spare, she sat, and hummed "Wunderbar."
Then McGrew prepped more for his 2 N R, and he rose, and his voice was calm,
"Judges," says he, "you don't know me, and none of you care a damn;
But I want to state, and my words are straight, my opponent's case is bunk,"
He made his best moves to prove his point . . . but his rebut simply stunk.

Then I ducked my head for the 2 A R, and the game was laid to rest;
The observers clapped as the clock ran out for this grisly final test.
His hand held out, his face full of doubt, was Robinski Dan McGrew,
While the gal all in black stood shaking the hand of the lady that's known as Lieu.

These are the simple facts of the case, and I guess I ought to know.
They say that young Tilde was crazed with Rawls and I'm not denying it's so.
The woman who dumped that Robinski guy -- and strictly between us two--
Invited that Tilde to Institute --was the lady known as Lieu.

Is Tilde Hyphen-Emdash the best LD debater in the country, despite having never gone to an institute?

Is Lieu MacFloutch really a pussycat under that Cruella DeVille exterior?

Does Robert Service really scan that oddly?

Is the Manhattan Lodestone OriginalVaganza going to end before George W's second term of office?

Will the Lesbians countersue the Lesbos islanders?

**Go bats next week in our next bat-episode, different bat-time, different bat-channel:
"Holy Unwarranted Assumption, or, It's Time for Mr. Christian to Pass the Cowl to Macauley Culkin."**