

Chapter 11 of *The Debate*

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Christian and I moved to the next room, the semi-final round, in AG 215. Student-debaters moved in and out of the small space. Bright sunshine broke through the windowed wall. The sky behind burnished steely blue, cold and serious. Clouds in white, and black reclined like languid Pennington in the sky. Yellow flushed through the room, making faces bright on one side and dark on the other. Janus-light. Sheeny and imperfect, desks and paper displayed grainy fibers, and everyone's hair dazzled the impossible; one from black to white, one from brown to orange, then deep scarlet, and another from yellow to platinum, then copper and amber. I was so happy to be alive I wished to scream. The day was as beautiful as anything and I wanted to die.

The lunar forces shifted, waves of bodies piling through, and Kelly pushed a cart in slow motion. She was the most beautiful creature I had ever seen in my life. The Western sun poured resplendent copper over her face, like molten gold. Then from silver to gold, and I knew I didn't have much time left. I kept my legs moving and tapping to stop the tingles. The sounds were coming back.

Jackie and Aaron prepped, heads to the side. Jackie wore closely shorn hair, colored glittery orange (Many made fun of her because she was oh-so-punk but that was a cover. She knew secrets and she sung them. Do not punish me for that.) I never made fun of her, because it would have been cruel. She wore a nose ring and multiple ear-rings. She had soft, round features, kind and sad eyes, bending down at the outer edges, foiling the serrated studs, the mechanic's jacket, the Dacron blue collar.

The Debate

Aaron, her partner wore a Beatle mop, mutton chops, and a Peter Brady striped shirt, traitor-chartreuse, pusillanimous-periwinkle, infra-red, burnt sienna, Scottish-clover, chili pepper, cyanide yellow, a clockwork orange, tattle-tale lime, tiger mustard-gas, ultra-violet, line after line across his broad chest. A chromatic poem.

Having hit Aaron and Jackie in prelims on the Affirmative, we went Neg.

Christian heaved a tub on the desk and said in a low tone, "Go T?"

"Which one?"

"T on human rights."

"Okay, what else?"

Jackie rolled over like a wave, "Hi guys," and put her hand five on Christian.

"Hey."

"Do you want to disclose?" Disclosing what you were going to run before the round even began was new in the last few years. It became sort of a butch thing to do, as if you could tell your opponents what you were doing, let them pull their briefs, write first lines and all that, and still wreck them. It happened right around 1993 when the new Federal Rules of Civil Procedure came out requiring, for the first time ever, mandatory disclosure.

Christian looked at me. I eyed out of the corner, "Are you going to tell us something we don't already know?"

"Eight minutes of leg 101, you know it!" she smiled like a guilty girl. They had been running drug legalization for years, "Are you going T?"

"Yeah," I said, "We'll probably do human rights."

"Cool. Cool. And the Disad?"

"Well, what tasty Links do you have for us?"

Jackie shook her head, smearing red in the air, "No Links. We don't Link to anything, ever. Never ever," and she gave out a little chuckle.

"Okay," pumped Christian, "What do you impact?"

“Right. Right. Fair enough. Okay, we have a North/South war that will eventually go nuclear, and an economic crash that also goes to war.”

“Cool,” said Christian.

“So what do you have for us?” she asked.

“What do we have for the lady, Christian?”

“Well, let’s see, we’ll Turn the North/South war.”

“Right. Everybody does that,” said Jackie.

“And I guess we’ll Link the economy to a China scenario or deal with it on Case, I don’t know exactly.”

“Sure, sure, okay. Fair enough. Thanks guys,” Jackie waved off.

“Everyone Turns the North/South,” I repeated to Christian under my breath.

“So?”

“Well, how well did they Turn it, if Aaron and Jackie are in semi’s?”

“So what do **you** want to do with it?” he asked while pulling the China shell.

“I say we mitigate it. We mitigate the probability and we take out the impacts and we couple it with a Critique.”

“We have a North/South Critique?”

“I’ll make one.”

“Go for it,” and I was off digging.

A North/South war was a generic scenario that emerged semester after semester because you could always get it to Link, and because the impacts were huge. The thesis was generally that the first world nations, the U.S., Canada, Europe, Japan, in some way anger or provoke the southern nations, and the ensuing conflict polarizes the world into the North, the haves, and the South, the have-nots. From there a global war consumes the planet. How that provocation occurs is the Link to the Case that solves it, or in our case, the Disad that claims Case causes it. North/South, like most positions, could be run either on the Negative or the Affirmative. Aaron and Jackie were arguing that absent their plan, a North/South war was inevitable.

The Debate

Something in the *status quo* put us on a collision course. Turning a North/South Case was tempting because cards were so prolific, but a team like UCLA, that was deep on North/South, was more likely to wipe us out, than be taken by surprise. I went **around** the mire. I made a Critique.

Krash Everett and his partner Herman Moloch sauntered in like lizards and sat down. As desks were reordered, I stood at the front and asked Krash who he had dropped to. He said, "San Francisco." I asked if it was Virginia. He said it was her indeed. I told him to buck up:

"The next best thing to waking up in a pool of your own swank is having it beat out of you by Virginia Pierce."

"Ain't that the truth," he answered.

The judges waddled in. Older people with scowls. They sat near the back of the small classroom where they were difficult to see. Jackie asked about judging philosophy. Martha was a debate coach from UOP who typically said she could "handle speed" but in fact could not. She often searched for an easy back door. She was especially fond of voting on a technical glitch, or on T and washing her hands of the whole thing. Martha knew nothing of the heat. She gave her prerecorded speech, "I can handle speed," Jackie nodded deferentially, "I want to see good clash and I'm not for blood and gore . . ." which meant she was confused by complex ethical computations.

Harding from Pt. Loma looked like a balding Icabod Crane. He repeated his standard text, "You know me . . . Show me where to vote . . . I will view my Flow like scripture. Be real world, or not, be counter intuitive, what ever that means, or not, run a Narrative, whatever you like. Debate is for debaters and I want to keep it that way," Harding was a real Flow judge, "That does not mean, however, that I never intervene. Disrespectful, racist or sexist behavior, unless it's funny, is unacceptable, and I **will** intervene."

The last judge was an overweight man with a beard and thick square glasses. He sat outwardly sour and annoyed, as if he'd been told far too many lies and wasn't going to have it, "Let me tell you what does irk

me. I strongly dislike speed, and will punish with the ballot. Do so readily. I dislike zero probability, catastrophic impact arguments. If you're going to make such, make the Link not only evident but plausible. Explain that Link to me. I don't like a whole lot of Procedural game playing. I realize that sometimes the 1N has to run some of that stuff just because it's necessary, but it's not important to me personally. However, I will vote readily on Topicality if I think the Affirmative is trying to gain a competitive advantage by running a Case outside the Resolution. Any questions?"

Aaron jumped, "If we are partaking in excessive speed will we lose your ballot then, or can we slow down and recover?"

"Oh-no, I'll just stop Flowing. You can recover, just use your head. If you're speaking so fast it sounds like nonsense, it is nonsense."

I nodded in mock agreement. Jackie, Aaron, and Christian did the same.

Christian whispered to me, "What is he saying?"

"He's in over his head."

"Should we run T?"

"He'll vote on it if we win it."

"Which isn't true otherwise?"

"I guess."

Christian cracked a smile, "Okay, but we kick-out when he stops Flowing."

I nodded.

Jackie stood, "Are you ready?" The class hushed. Pens took places in hands. And she began:

"The unprincipled and the weak-minded still believe that drugs are the scourge, that in the face of chemistry, people are too feeble, and too malleable to make cogent decisions about their bodies and their consciousness. The unprincipled believe that the government ought to be the arbiters of the chemicals of consciousness, and as such, the gate-keepers of reality. The unprincipled bleat half-true clichés that blame drugs for much deeper personal and interpersonal ills.

The Debate

“That is why Aaron and I stand resolved that the United States should strongly advance its human right foreign policy. Please follow me to Observation I, ‘Just Say “No” to the Status Quo,’ where we note . . . The war on drugs fails. The A subpoint: drug war is unwinnable, costs over \$100 billion annually, from Frankel in ’94 . .

The war on drugs, meaning the prohibition of drugs, is not only being lost but is also unwinnable. The radicals have adopted the antiwar slogan

So went the 1AC, to the Plan to legalize drugs, and three Advantages, consciousness, North/South war, and the economic collapse. Eight minutes.

Before Jackie finished her last sentence Christian stood, “Why will the elimination of the War on Drugs uniquely solve the coming collapse?”

I watched my blue Flow paper. Red ink fixed. Little icons and squiggly shapes. The third Advantage predicted an economic collapse leading to world nuclear war that could only be head off by the money we would have saved by shutting down the War on Drugs (WOD). That was the Plan, to stop the WOD and legalize. Christian was setting the stage.

Jackie shifted her weight, “It will solve in three ways-”

“Okay, but why does the WOD **uniquely** solve.”

“We’re saying it’s **sufficient** to solve. That’s all.”

“In other words, we could capture your Advantage by solving the collapse by some other means?”

“There are disadvantages to every other alternate solvency mechanism. If you run a Counterplan, we have the Disad to it.” Interesting. Typically a Plan must overcome the presumption against change, but Jackie shrugged that burden off by claiming with her best poker face that any alternative to her Plan, any Counterplan, would be worse. Absent evidence to the contrary she was unique, and it was up to me to prove otherwise. Nice. I felt an erection stir.

Christian stepped forward, his body closer to the judges, his voice louder, “You have a D.A. to every possible alternative?”

“Yep.”

“In that tub?”

“In the expando, actually.”

“Really?”

“Try me.”

I prepped. I pulled the T shell for human rights, scanning for the take-out card that said consciousness wasn't a right. I hit that and then set-up the economy D.A. Briefs at right angles.

“You must have an answer to the Welfare Counterplan.”

“There's no money in welfare.”

“And the defense spending Counterplan?”

“Yep,” she nodded her head, and stroked her accordion.

“And the WOMP C.P., and the NTP C.P., and the PSL C.P. . . .”

“Yes, we have Disads to them all,” she drew her tone out as if bored and annoyed.

“The PSL Counterplan?”

“Yep.”

“PSL is the Physical Science Lecture Hall. It's a building. What sort of Disad could you have to **that**?”

Laughing broke out.

Gaining her bearings she shot back, “Tell you what Christian, you run PSL, I guarantee we'll have **something** for you.” Another roar.

Christian smiled, “Can I have a copy of Case?”

She happily handed him a stack of red paper, “Of course.”

I studied the North/South Link and deduced it would be strong enough for the Critique. Then I studied the D-Rule. The Decision Rule drew lines in the sand. It said that they could win either by carrying the consciousness debate—by proving that sovereignty over one's consciousness is a right—**or** by proving the net advantage of legalization. It was an arbitrary threshold for championing the day. If we didn't like it we could

The Debate

create our own D-Rule and argue about who was more fair and reasonable. Their Decision Rule intimated that if I ran T on human rights they could sever Advantage 1 and still win through Ad 2 and Ad 3. If I left the D-rule in tact, I could argue that since they had conferred upon themselves such scant prima facie burdens, they had to uphold the whole of their Case under the scrutiny of Topicality. If one part of the Case wasn't Topical, it was non-Topical in entirety. It was a trade off I could win.

"Let's talk about the North/South war," said Christian.

"Okay."

"Why will legalization stop the war?"

"Seifert says in the B card, interdiction and America's meddlesome foreign policy toward our Latin American neighbors will push us over the brink. The prototype is Panama."

"But we **didn't** go to war with Panama. Isn't that a Turn?"

"No. Seifert says we came within a 'hair's breath' that's the rhetoric, of an all-out regional war. He calls it the miracle of the war that never was. And he goes on to say that since we have demonstrated our willingness to quash the sovereign regimes of our Southern neighbors, they have taken precautionary measures very similar to the circumstances just before WWI, you know, where everyone is just a hot trigger away from domino dancing."

"But empirically it's a Turn."

"No, empirically, World War I Turns it back..."

I concentrated on Advantage two, then three, then two again. Something was amiss. I felt a contradiction. It made me uncomfortable. Ad two was shaped differently, from three; they didn't fit somehow. I shut out the noise and searched the assumptions. He who wins the assumptions wins the debate. Ad two said the drug war caused tension between the North and the South. The Southern states didn't care to be spied on, and checked up on, and generally bullied by the US. It lead to conflicts, then war, then nuclear war. It assumed legalization would stop the tensions. Then the

third advantage assumed legalization would free up enough money to solve an economic crisis. Who's crisis? Our crisis. But some countries based their economy on the drug trade . . . *and that was the contradiction.* Advantage two caused war when legalization lead to a **Southern** economic collapse, as indicated by the cards in Advantage three. I needed a card that said legalization killed Southern economies. Then I would get the Turn. I crawled into the green tub, and scanned the files, self-d, xenophobia, radical cartography, eco-fem . . .

“Okay, what is sovereignty of consciousness?”

“Consciousness sovereignty is having autonomy over your own brain,” Jackie was steady.

“So it's freedom. It's the right to be free, isn't that what you're arguing?”

“Wrong, it's-”

“Okay, what is it?”

“It's mastering not only what you think but the very totality of consciousness. So that what you ingest, the soup you swim in is as important as the books you read, or the way you vote.”

“You are what you eat? That sort of thing?”

“Something like that.”

“So what happens, I mean specifically, how is controlling your consciousness distinct from say freedom of speech, or freedom of movement, I mean in tangible ways how do you legislate-”

“In tangible ways the decision to take certain drugs is the decision to create a reality for which things like movement and speech can then show up, and be intelligible. In tangible ways it's the difference between waking and dreaming. The government has no moral authority to keep you asleep.”

“Okay, but what if we argue the opposite? If we argue that drugs put you to sleep, that they **diminish** consciousness, and **diminish** autonomy, then we get your first Advantage.”

“Yes, **if** you could prove that, then yes. You will lose that debate, but you can try.”

The Debate

The Case was clearly not Topical. It legalized drugs in the United States. That was a **domestic** policy, not a foreign one. And what about the Double-Turn between Advantage two and Advantage three? And Jackie said everyone Turned the North/South war and despite all these fundamental problems Aaron and Jackie had made their way to the semi-final round, meaning they had already beat, at least, everyone except three other teams.

“Prep time starting.”

I whispered in Christian ear as he sat, “I’m worried.”

He wrinkled his forehead and squinted.

“I think we need to not underestimate Aaron and Jackie. I think we should go all out. I want to pull an Emory Switch.” An Emory Switch was sort of a cheap shot strategy whereby you underloaded the 2AC, forcing them to waste their Constructive time and then overloaded the 1AR, a speech that was already at a disadvantage due to its placement at the end of the 13 minute Negative bloc. It worked by leveraging two important debate rules, anything goes in Constructives and the Negative need only not lose. It was a move of borderline legitimacy. Like a loophole, it was technically not prohibited.

“That’s bullshit, Richard. We don’t need to do that.”

“It’s not bullshit, it’s strategy.”

“Well it’s probably not particularly good strategy.”

“Why not?” I asked.

“Because at least one judge out of this pool will drop us just for pulling something like that. Only Harding is on the Flow,” he whispered while surveying the full classroom.

“If we **don’t** do the Switch, **all** of them will drop us.”

“Come on, that’s not true. We can beat them.”

“It’s just their Case is so **not** Topical . . .” I put my hand over the Danish cookie tin.

“So? So what? Are you still freaked about Pennington? Don’t worry about that slug. He’s full of crap . . .” Christian smiled, “Come on, we’re wasting time.”

“I’m going to run the Switch,” I flipped my pen nervously.

“Richard, we’re better than them. Don’t you want to beat them?”

“The Switch can beat them.”

“No the Emory Switch says we can’t beat them. We beat ourselves with the Switch.”

“Why don’t we ask the life underground?” I retorted calmly.

“Why don’t we ask your mom?” Christian smirked.

“You know, I would have killed Pennington with my scissors. I’m pretty sure.”

“You don’t want to kill Pennington,” Christian whispered, making notations, “he would have bled all over the Backfiles.”

So I ran the North/South Critique, that said theorizing in terms of North versus South became the self fulfilling prophesy that caused the very impacts Case was trying to avoid. Case’s own theory, the words on paper, like a spell, invoked the nuclear war. Then I ran an Economy Disad that, with the help of evidence from Advantage two, Turned Advantage three. I did it all over again in the 1NR:

“My evidence is CLEAR. Cornwall says that the drug trade is the cornerstone of the Latin American economy. The rhetoric is awesome! Let me just get that again, ‘It is the QUOIN upon which rests the KINGDOM.’ That rocks! That means when Plan legalizes drugs, the market drops out, and the Southern economies collapse. When that happens you get the nuclear scenario from Advantage three. Remember, the card is not regionally specific. THEIR OWN AUTHOR analyses the **Americas**, not North America specifically. She says when the global economy cracks, the planet goes nuclear. Thank-you Jackie, it’s a very nice card. Please follow me to the first Advantage . . . I’m off the top . . .”

A comfortable warmth spread through my belly, like a splash and then rippled out. There was but one sound, “They argue consciousness, but give no definitions. We interpret the term and they say we don’t have Ph.D.’s. Well, I’ve known some Ph.D.’s who

The Debate

were real idiots,” and warm laughter for the single voice.

The dark sludge hissed with contempt like a wet sop in a pan over flame. It smoldered in its own stew, no longer smelling of stench: “Please reject this psychobabble. ‘Consciousness’ is the catch-phrase for a meaningless new-age hoax from Hill in ’94

Far from evolving insight from Jung the most popular of New Age ideas seek to attribute latent . . .

As the heat rose higher, I felt clean and beautiful, unconstrained by the body, the corpse, unfettered by voices and sounds, safe and dry, not wet with contempt on the inside. The fire consumed me and I could not help but allow the corpse to disappear, leaving a white glowing head to fuel the debate, and a floating mouth to exhaust gas. The Beekeeper grinned at the Cheshire Trick; hot glowing honey rushed from his eyes in joyous weeping as if watching his first born walk for the first time.

“Next, cross apply the Nimmer card here, that explains that if consciousness is a right then crazy people and criminals can’t be imprisoned for exercising that right, no matter how sick. Right? Nimmer’s analysis is excellent here; when the Unabomber kills, he’s but following the dictates of his consciousness, as Jackie ways he has every right to do. Easy Turns and I am quashing this Advantage cold. I am COLD, COLD CRUSHING CASE. No hope of resurrection, and certainly no afterlife . . .”

The Beekeeper danced merrily around the fire on stout legs, singing *Fingle de dum frey! Fingle de dum frey!* Which roughly meant “burn the old fear,” but also meant “cowards make for good fodder.” The fish sizzled in the cage.

“. . . We argue that right of consciousness in no different from right to life. They make no reply. I’m ripping them a new one when I win that illegal drugs do not save lives, and therefore YOU MUST DROP THEM NOW. Next extend Christian’s analysis on 4, 7, and 9, because it’s clean. “Consciousness” is a rhetorical tool of the elites to separate the body from the mind and delegitimize blue collar labor. That gets the elites

impacts below and goes to violence in under a week. You will vote for certain violence in five states with the super-fast time frame, over nebulous, over-worked, nuke war any day of the week. END OF DEBATE Please follow me to T where the crush is so clean I must pause to luxuriate. Off the top.”

I beat them badly in the 1NR. Case was but a burned out husk. Christian slapped me five, and winked. Stuck in the Cheshire Trick, I could only smile back. I hovered over the desk of scattered briefs, pens, scissors and scotch tape. A few debaters in the front rows exhaled sharply.

Jackie took every second of remaining prep time scribbling notes and arranging briefs. Aaron squatted at the tubs as if searching for a certain small toy in a bloated chest.

When she stood for the 1AR, papers shuffled and toes tapped. Her roadmap: “Advantage 1, 2, 3, T, the off-Cases in order, then the D-Rule last. But first I’m doing a little overview,” she spun her index finger around the surface of her Flow as if casting a little spell, “Put it in a box where-ever.”

“Like Zoë’s!” exclaimed Harding the Flow judge.

“Right. Just like Zoë’s. She didn’t do so bad against these guys at USC. Call the overview ‘Zoë’s Box’” Harding seemed pleased, and laughter broke out. Cold giggles. Jackie hovered over the boxes that stepped around like crenulations. The bin on the desk at her shoulders. A silence crept and she began at a nice leisurely pace, as if having the most rational and civilized of dialogues:

“The way I see it, there are just three ways to look at this debate,” a slow pause, “On T . . . If Ad 2 and Ad 3 are not Topical then we sever. We’ll stand on Advantage 1 alone and we win. They say the D-Rule precludes because there is already too much leeway, but they never tell you why or how much leeway is appropriate, and there are other reasons I will elucidate below. So we win there too. Put that in the first Zoë Square.

“The second way to look at this debate is if we **are** topical then there are the big Turns to look at,” she quickened the pace to a trot. The pitch evened out.

The Debate

Consonants danced like 8th beats on a hi-hat. “The whole thesis of Richard’s Turn depends on his interpretation of the Cornwall card. He says that card explains how if we kick the War on Drugs to save the United States from an economic collapse, we trigger a Latin American economic collapse, and that Links us back to the war scenario on Case. And how exactly does this Turn happen? Well, Richard extracts from Cornwall the ‘quoin’ analysis, that says the drug trade is the cornerstone of the Bolivian economy. Excuse me, but if that isn’t the biggest Turn you’ve heard all weekend, cut off my hair and stick a stud in my nose. Oh shit, too late.” A massive roar, and foot stomping, “If the drug trade is so important to the Latin American economy you would expect a **REVIVAL** when the U.S. legalizes and we begin consuming all the drugs that were previously choked off at the boarder.” Quicker now, and the sixteenth-beats coming on, “That would help, not hurt Bolivia, and Latin America. Legalization would make us more friendly, not less. So the second way to look at this debate is through Ad 2 and 3, which are not only true in-and-of-themselves, but with the help of Richard’s Cornwall card, actually feed each other. That’s number two in Zoë’s Box. Gotta love that synergy in action. Thank-YOU Richie.” Laughter responded to the rebuke.

From a fast trot to a buzz, you could smell the hot oil as if from a machine with metal parts that spin, “The third way to look at the debate is through the D-rule itself. They had the entire block to challenge it but chose not to. Not word one out of the 1NC. Not word one out of the 2NC. It explains that if we win just one Advantage we win the debate and I think we’re winning Advantage 1, the Consciousness debate, way way easy. When you agree with me and vote there, UCLA will have won the round: Zoë’s Box number three.” Turning up the arc at 200, 250 words per minute, “Remember, last time we beat them. Two weeks ago UCLA beat them. Every time we meet them, we beat them. We beat them because they’re bad, bad, boys and they’re up to no good,” and crazy cackling, “. . . Now, please follow me to Ad 1 for the on-point rebuttal. I’m off the top . . .”

After the debate, we waited an hour for a decision. One voted for me, two for her. The classroom was silent

to me over the din of paper, and chat, and yellow sunshine, and few looked us in the face. Flow was paid to Jackie and Aaron, and then a shuffle off to the final round, carelessly, as if crushing me was all in a day's work. And I felt dizzy to think that I wouldn't have been denied if we had just run the Switch.

That evening I wasn't up to driving all the way back to Berkeley, so Christian and I packed up my 4-Runner full of evidence, and that made room in Kelly's minivan for Collin and Westley, and they shot off. Christian and I wound over the green hills to PCH and south a bit until we arrived at my parent's beach house, where we crashed for the night.

My family lived in the San Fernando Valley but owned a beach home in Diablo Canyon, just a jump from SLO. It was a large, multi-leveled home, fully furnished, and rarely occupied. We showered, and called a pizza, and watched the twilight.

The moon bloated over the china ocean—white glimmering like stoneware—that late evening, as Christian and I smoked cigarettes and ate Oreos on the beach. The beach-house glowed from three stories, on timed lighting, as it did every day of the year.

Christian made sand angels by fanning his arms and legs and I smoked, "Did you apologize to Virginia?"

"Fuck no," I said, "She's so fucking self-righteous."

"That's her way."

"She's no better than anyone else. She's just doing whatever serves her interests."

"By helping Cindy?"

"By villainizing men."

"That's not her intention" he fanned the sand.

"Then she's lying to herself. Everyone does what they want and justifies it later."

"Well that's nice contradiction, now isn't it?" he sat up startled.

"Why?"

The Debate

“Because if you ever want to help someone selflessly, you can’t ever do it unless there’s something in it for you, and then it’s not selfless. So you really can’t ever do what you want if what you want to do is something selfless.” He flopped back into his sand grave, satisfied.

“That’s not a contradiction,” I muttered to myself.

“What?”

“How could we have dropped?” I asked.

“Dropped what?” fanning.

“The round.”

“Oh!” he shook his head. The sound was of sand grinding into his hair, “Well, the D-rule. You were there. You talked to Harding. If they win Advantage one, they win.”

I scooped up a fist of sand and let it go slowly, “You know, if we’d run an Emory Switch...”

He laughed, “Then we would have lost on D-Rule **and** Martha too.”

“No, I think the Switch would have changed everything.”

Christian sat up, “And if you ran the Switch and spent all eight minutes on Case alone, right? then would you have adequately covered the Consciousness debate?”

“How was I supposed to know they were going to blow up the D-Rule?”

“Rich, I don’t want to argue about it,” he pushed out a grin, “Why don’t we enjoy the evening?”

“No, you brought it up. If you thought the D-rule was so important why didn’t you argue it, huh? If you knew.”

“Because my first speech is in the bloc, remember? I took the off-Case positions, **you** took Case-side, and the D-Rule was Case-side.” He full faced the moonlight medicine, “I don’t want to argue with you about it. Live and learn, right? We did very well at a very rough tournament. We beat Vermont, **again**,” he chuckled, “We killed KSU, got to semi’s, and so we dropped to Aaron and Jackie. So what? We’ve beat them plenty of

times. They're a national team. Losing to them is nothing to be ashamed of."

"I'm not ashamed of anything."

"You shouldn't be," Christian said weakly, "You kicked ass in there, man. I mean it. That thing with KSU and the Hasty-G; it's gonna be a long time to live that down. We stomped them." Christian snickered, "Choooooooooooo! Choooooooooooo!"

"Think so?"

"Fuck yeah. Now just do that at Nationals for me and off to Harvard I go!" It was easy for Christian.

I chewed up another Oreo, cigarette in hand, "You know Christian, you ever think that maybe I would want to go to Harvard? Just because I wasn't born PERFECT doesn't mean I shouldn't get to go. If anything I need to go more than you need to go. You don't have anything to hide."

Christian laughing, "You don't even want to go to law school!"

"Who says? You say!" the saliva was gone and black cookie sprinkled out.

"Well, okay, I didn't know. You can go to law school. You can do that. Give me a cookie."

I reached for the cookie bag, weeping away from him, "I don't want to just go to a law school! I want that Scholarship! I don't want to end up like Miranda, smelling like she does! You know what the odds are! Do I have to fucking flip a coin?"

"Hey come-on. If you want the Scholarship, fine. I don't have any say in that. If we take Nationals, we take it together and you'll be right there with me-"

"But you're team President," I grumbled as tears ran down my face. I watched the white sea, Christian behind. Cookie dried and chalked around my lips. I reached for another.

After a time Christian asked, "How about a cookie?"

"It's getting worse. The life underground aren't enough anymore and I can't control the Blueman. And the Wall, it's so big. I owe so much . . ." I mumbled, and

The Debate

ground up the cookie, and sand etched into my teeth like little metal spikes.

“C’mon, let’s go swimming!” he jumped up and stripped off his shirt.

“It’s freezing,” I protested weakly.

“Nuh-huh,” and then he stripped off his shorts and revealed a tender white strip of flesh between his stomach and thighs. I looked away, out to sea.

“I’m not done with my cigarette,” I answered stoically, “And I have a whole pack to go.” I thumbed the red box Christian had bought me.

He took my cigarette from my mouth, pulled a long drag and began a coughing fit, and a laughing fit, and then more coughing, and then tossed the butt, “C’mon—it’s beautiful out. Listen to the water,” he inveigled, entirely naked.

I hadn’t noticed before but the waves were pounding the beach, thumping and hissing, like blood squeezed through the heart.

“If I’m swimming, you’re swimming,” Christian chimed, “Don’t tell me you’re afraid of getting wet!”

I had to smile.

“C’mon Rich, just you and me. We gotta do something just you and me, otherwise we’re not **really** partners.”

And all that cold water might kill me, I knew, but I forced myself up. He would never know that much exertion because he was born pink. I forced myself up and into that goddamn ocean for Christian’s sake. Christian had always been very kind to me. He saw something good where others saw only rot. I guess I loved Christian for that. I wanted to be like him inside and out. I wanted to have what he had; and I would have done anything for him.

So I dragged myself up and threw myself into the cold salt water hissing and thumping like blood. I wanted him to go to Harvard because if he made it, then maybe good and beautiful things could win for once, and things could be the way they ought to have been; but I knew it would never be so. He would never make it, even with my help, because of the glass

overhead, because he didn't understand danger even when it presented itself to him, without guise, because he was kind to those weaker than himself, and that was his own special vulnerability. Christian had It because he was born with It, but that didn't automatically make him a champion. I heard the madrigal creak, and the heat radiating from the sides, and just before I threw myself into that icy china sea, I stepped through the black threshold. I never felt a thing.