



Episode 48

Mine, I'll Leave to Chance and Chemistry. Yeah, Chemistry.

It is, perhaps, the worst job in forensics -- judging novice debaters.

Disney Davidson, keeping his jacket on to cover the bias of his anti-dairy tee shirt, is sitting at a desk in the back of the room. He is far enough away from the debater standing in the front that he can pretend to be flowing on his legal pad, but in reality he doesn't have to write anything beyond tiny doodles. There is nothing to write. The speaker is making no sense whatever, and has already dropped her opponent's entire case.

Novices are like that. Their cases are meaningless, and they don't know enough to actually debate the points in the round. They go through the motions, imitating what they may have seen if they've had the opportunity to observe a real round, or more likely imitating what they imagine a real round would be. They will learn over time, but now it is still early in the year. Some of them will even become good. Some of them won't get so far as to learn anything, other than that they should have chosen a different extracurricular activity, and they will soon disappear from the forensic radar.

From the evidence in front of him, the girl at bat now will never fly so high to be even detected by the forensic radar. But Disney does his best to look rapt as he pretends to flow what she is saying.

What is she saying?

He has no idea.

Disney has to wonder why he bothered coming back to judge. He is in college now. This is his past. Been there, done that.

But it doesn't feel as if it is over. After you've been debating nearly every weekend of the school calendar for four years, it is hard to break away. It's like giving up a hobby, or maybe worse, shaking an addiction. What is there to fill the empty hours?

Disney has not found a replacement activity at Northeastern Agricultural. When their debate team didn't meet his personal forensic standards, there was nowhere to turn. What does Disney Davidson do other than debate? That is the question. Is there life after The Life?

Disney has yet to find the answer.

He absentmindedly gives the girl in front of him hand signals to keep her apprised of her time remaining. He wishes it were allowable for the judge to cancel a round that is over before the debaters finish talking, but it is considered courtesy to allow the kids who have worked so hard the time to do the debating they came for, even if they're abominable. Fortunately it is only forty-five minutes altogether, and now, as he goes through the final countdown, even this round is ending.

Thank God.

The two debaters immediately shake hands, telling each other, "Good round," and one of them, the really bad one, walks to the back of the room to shake Disney's hand too. He quickly covers his flow pad with his blank ballot; no point in advertising his doodles.

"Thank you for judging," she says. Her hand is damp and warm, positively soggy, like a gravy-soaked parkerhouse roll.

"Good luck," Disney tells her with a smile.

As she walks back to the front of the room, he surreptitiously wipes his hand on his pants to dry it off.

Yuuucchhhhhh!

The two debaters leave, and there is a short hiatus for him to write up his ballot for the round. It isn't difficult. Since the affirmative dropped everything the negative said, all he has to do is go through the motions of explaining how debaters must go down the flow, covering the cases point by point. It is not as if he hasn't judged novices before. But at least back then, he did so as a team member doing his bit to support his colleagues. There's something a lot less interesting about it when you're doing it as a hired gun.

A boy about three feet tall sticks his head into the room.

"Can we come in?" he asks in a high-pitched, squeaky voice.

Disney waves him in without looking up. The boy and his opponent take their places, while Disney writes his critique. He pays no attention to them. The thing about writing ballots for the clueless is that you want to point out that they are clueless, but you want to be nice about it. Helpful, if at all possible. And that isn't always easy. How do you nicely tell someone that they're a few Hail Marys short of a rosary? Disney does his best to explain his decision, then assigns points for the round. Twenty-seven to the winner -- not that she was really a twenty-seven, but what novice is? -- and twenty-four for the loser -- not that the loser deserved even as high as twenty-four out of thirty, but why devastate her too much? She will probably go home with a serious losing record anyhow. Why make it worse?

At this point the opponents in Disney's second flight, the other half of the split LD round, are writing their names, affiliations and which sides they're representing on the blackboard. And Disney suddenly realizes that he is judging that girl.

That girl. The world-weary one in black.

Whoa.

When she looks over at Disney as she returns to her seat, there is no recognition, and he realizes that the chemistry he detected between them from afar was entirely one-sided, the worst chemistry there is, where the two elements don't mix. One element fizzles, the other flops. The experiment fails.

But despite the lack of coalescence, the one-sided reaction is still there. If personal chemistry fails on one side, that doesn't mean it disappears on the other side.

Disney copies her name onto his ballot. Affirmative: Bisonette Technical GF -- Gloria Fudless. He also writes down the name of her opponent: Negative: Manhattan Lodestone WW -- William Willow. When he's finished, he steals a quick glance at Gloria in her chair, her long black-stockinged legs extended under her short skirt.

Welcome to the Bahamas.

Gloria turns her head. "Ready?" she asks Disney.

He looks up from her legs, startled. "Ready," he replies, trying to sound nonchalant.

She turns to William Willow. "Opponent ready?" she asks

"Ready." Willow says in his small, mousy voice that seems so appropriate to his size.

Gloria stands, and the debate begins.

She is not bad, Disney learns to his relief. Not bad at all. She speaks clearly, and her case makes sense. That is good. Disney does not want to be infatuated with a total idiot.

Infatuated. Is that what it is?

Isn't he too old to be infatuated?

His mind wanders as he flows her case. He has flowed so many cases over the years that he can do it in his sleep. At least she's on the affirmative. He doesn't know if he could be quite as attracted to her if she didn't think animal testing is immoral, even though he knows that she doesn't really mean it. It is a debate, after all, and she will be switching sides in the next round. Disney wonders about her. She can't possibly be a freshman; she looks about thirty-three. So he assumes that she is a sophomore, both because of her appearance, and because it is to his advantage to do so. If she were a freshman, she would be just too, too young.

At which point Disney starts to do the math. The math of teenage relationships, that is.

There are definitely rules in teenage relationship math, and all teenagers are aware of them. First, the boy is always older than the girl. Occasionally an older girl will slum with a boy at most one year younger, but this is almost always mercy dating, and is often the result of the girl not knowing the boy is that young; as soon as she finds out, she will disappear like a cigarette butt in the boys' room when a teacher walks in. It is well known to adolescents that girls mature before boys; back in middle school, most of the girls are growing serious breasts before the boys even know what breasts are. Going back further, it is almost always the boys who go through kindergarten twice, or who go to that in-between grade sandwiched between the slices of the bread of kindergarten and first grade. "It will do him no harm," the teachers tell the disappointed parents of the poor six year old schlub who will not be promoted with the rest of his kindergarten colleagues, but who will instead be sidetracked into "pre-first" or whatever they call it in that school district. The parents begin to suspect the quality of each other's genetic makeup while the kid finds himself in the company of the six-year-olds voted "Most Likely to Serve Time in a Juvenile Institution."

The second rule of teenage relationship math is that no male is too old for a teenage girl, provided he is younger than her father. A girl's dating prestige is measured to an extent by the age of her companion. If he is younger, her prestige is nil, due to the reasons mentioned above. If he is her own age, no points gained, no points lost. As he becomes older than she, the more points she accrues. If she is in high school and he is in college, she gains bonus points every time she mentions his name. If he has graduated college while she is still in high school, that is an automatic win. If, like Brant -- Cartier Diamond's boyfriend prior to Had Fleece -- he is a married college graduate, you immediately enter the dating hall of fame.

The third rule of teenage relationship math is the reverse of the second. A male's dating prestige is measured by how close in age he is to the girl. Same age, he wins. If she is older, he still wins. If she's younger, surprisingly enough, he still wins.

Any guy who can get a date always wins.

That's the way guys look at these things.

You didn't know that?

Of course, a married college graduate dating a high school girl while his wife is on an archaeological dig in the Yucatan may win in some respects -- anyone who dates Cartier Diamond wins in some respects -- but he would have a lot of explaining to do if anyone his own age ever found out about it. Especially if that person his own age is his wife.

Which brings us to the natural conclusion of teenage relationship math, which is that it goes away when one is no longer a teenager. Or more to the point, it is multiplied by such enormous factors that it seldom matters anymore. As long as the couple in question like or love each other, depending on the seriousness of the relationship, as long as they are within a decade of each other, no one gives it a second thought. It is only when you get to be Tony Randall that anyone questions what the hell she can possibly see in you, you old poop, but that is neither here nor there to Disney Davidson.

The math, for Disney, is in his favor. Assuming that the girl is a sophomore, that makes her fifteen, or maybe even sixteen. And the good thing for Disney is that he skipped sixth grade. At the time, and for a long time thereafter, up to and including one hour ago today, as probably the youngest Freshman at Northeastern Agricultural Institute, this has not been an advantage. But since he is still only seventeen, it puts him right in the ball park with a probably sixteen year old.

The teenage relationship math is perfect.

Everybody wins.

If only she'll go out with him

Which has nothing to do with math, and everything to do with chemistry.

And as we said, so far the chemistry has been entirely one-sided. Disney-sided.

As the round plays itself out, Disney is pleased that he will at least be able to give her the win. Little William Willow, who looks like a miniature lawyer in his three piece suit and who speaks

like Minnie Mouse, is a terrible debater. Gloria Fudless lives up to Disney's initial impression, and wins easily.

When the round ends, little Will and gorgeous world-weary Gloria disappear out the door with nary a nod to Disney Davidson, who was hoping to begin laying a little relationship groundwork, now that the math is in place. But it is not to be.

He lowers his head and fills in his ballot.

It is, perhaps, the worst job in forensics -- judging novice debaters.

Especially when you fall in love with one of them.

Will Gloria return Disney's affection?

Will William Willow ever get taller?

Was Frank really the evil of two Loessers?

Were Janet Reno and Bill Gates separated at birth?

Is animal testing immoral?

Are Janet Reno and Bill Gates immoral?

You might as well not bother looking for the answers in our next episode: "Stuck in the middle with you, or, i wouldn't have used my underwear, but they took away my shoe-laces."