



Episode 57

Things That Go Bump in the Day -- A Nostrum Pot Pourri

Celluloid Heroes

You can see all the stars as you walk down Hollywood Boulevard, some that you know and some that you've hardly even heard of.

And the search is on to add another to their number.

"Every kid I see wears phony on his head like a backwards baseball cap," Hans Castorp says in his thick Teutonic accent. Hans is himself wearing a backwards baseball cap over shoulder-length dirty blond hair, so he would appear to have first-hand evidence of the haberdashery in question. Hans is the director of two successful action films in a row, making him the latest Hollywood wunderkind, or at least one of the latest, provided that your definition of kind stretches a smidgen or two over the age of thirty. With Hans in his office are his secretary, his assistant, his personal trainer and his nutritionist, as well the producer, casting director, and assistant director of his upcoming film.

"They're all actors, Hans," the casting director says. She is a large, middle-aged woman in a bright print dress. "They've all got experience. That makes them desirable. Unfortunately, the price you pay for a kid who knows how to act is that they already are actors."

"Exactly," Hans says. "Actors. Phonies at the age of fifteen. And I don't want a phony starring in my motion picture." He extends his hand, and his nutritionist puts a fresh cup of herb tea into it.

"What is this?" Hans asks, sniffing it warily.

"Ten o'clock tea," the nutritionist says.

"I wanted water."

"At ten o'clock, you drink tea." The nutritionist is a slim, blond-haired young man, whose insistence is much firmer than his appearance would have predicted. The director does not argue, but begins sipping the tea.

"Where do you want me to go, Hans?" the casting director asks. "We've done casting calls here in L.A., we've done casting calls in New York. We've done casting calls in Miami. We've seen every slightly built fifteen-year-old male that exists on this continent."

"We've seen every slightly built fifteen-year-old actor that exists on this continent. There's a difference."

"I know you want an unknown for the part. So I've been culling for unknowns. But they've still all got some experience in commercials and theater. True unknowns don't answer casting calls. They don't know what a casting call is."

"Well, that's the problem, isn't it?"

The producer speaks up. He is roughly the same age as the director, but he is a short-haired suit wearer. "You're not suggesting that we hire a complete amateur, Hans, are you? We have to have an actor to carry a picture this big."

"I can turn any kid into an actor, if he already has some native talent. But I've got to have somebody fresh. Somebody new. Somebody real. Don't you understand that?"

"I do understand that you've got to have somebody in two months," the producer says, "because that's when we get Bruce, and without Bruce, this picture goes down the toilet faster than yesterday's tuna casserole."

"And I'm not going to be able to find you a capable unknown in that amount of time, Hans," the casting director says "It's just not possible. There aren't conventions of articulate teenagers where all we have to do is walk in and pluck the best ones off the tree, if you know what I mean. That situation just doesn't exist."

The personal trainer has been arranging exercise mats on the floor of the office, doing her best to stay out of the line of fire. At ten-thirty she is scheduled to take Hans through his late-morning stretching regimen. As a Hollywood professional, she knows how to keep a low profile in a high-tension situation. But now she speaks up.

"Actually," she says, "there are situations like that."

"Like what?" the casting director asks.

"Conventions of articulate teenagers where all you have to do is walk in and pluck the best ones off the tree."

Everyone in the room turns to look at her. When someone talks out of turn, it had better be good. The trainer, a pretty, twenty-three-year-old freckled redhead in a warmup suit, smiles.

"When I was a teenager, I used to be a debater. In high school. And like every week, all over the country, they have tournaments, for debaters and also for speech kids. A lot of those speech kids do acting routines; it's sort of like theater arts without the theater. But the debate kids are sort of like actors too. They're certainly around fifteen years old, a lot of them are slightly built, and they're definitely smart enough to do the job you want them to do."

The room is silent. After a minute the trainer tries to disappear into the carpet.

"Sorry," she says.

"No!" Hans Castorp says, jumping to his feet. "By George, I think she's got it." He turns to his casting director. "Clavdia. Find the next debate tournament. This weekend. The biggest and best one. You and I are going to find our star!"

The Seth Will Rise Again

The house is starting to smell.

There have been too many pizza deliveries, with too many boxes saying "You've Tried all the Rest, Now Try the Best" still scattered around every room of the house.

There have been too many beer cans popped open, with too many empties tossed into the non-working fireplace, some of them with an ounce or two of dregs dripping out.

There have been too many cigarettes, with overflowing ashtrays on the tables, the arms of the chairs, and on the floors.

There have been too many days of sitting unbathed and nearly horizontal in the La-Z-Boy watching whatever is playing on HBO, with the result that he has seen Independence Day enough times that he is starting to see the flaws in Will Smith's acting style.

There have been too many walks past the cat box thinking that there's still a few dry grains of sand in there somewhere.

There have been too many opportunities for him to stare at the Messerschmitt trophy that Tara Petskin left at his front door.

Too many opportunities for him to sink into the pit of his own despair, to evaluate his personal tragedy as succumbing to the lure of his own fatal flaw, his inevitable appetites.

His appetites. For food. For ideas.

For women.

He stars at the ceiling. What was he thinking about? How could he have ever allowed himself to do something that foolish on a debate trip? It wasn't really a question of right or wrong, but a question of propriety.

He closes his eyes. All right, maybe it is a question of right or wrong. But that notwithstanding, he cannot stay in this house forever, surrounded by his own dirt.

He pulls his chair into the upright position.

He points the remote at the television and turns off the power.

He stands up.

"First thing we're going to do," he says aloud, "is clean up this place."

And then?

"And then we're getting out of here."

Nancy Drew and The Missing of the Case

"Damn it," Jasmine Maru said hellishly.

"What's the matter?" her sister said solidly.

"I can't find my cases," Jasmine explained searchingly.

"Which ones?" Camelia asked specifically.

"Both of them," Jasmine replied affirmatively and negatively.

Camelia Maru, Girl Detective, pondered the situation. Ignoring for the moment the fact that she and her sister had somehow slipped into the past tense for no other reason than a few cheap Tom Swifties, she began to connect seemingly random events into a pattern, little knowing that this was how Lisa Torte had recently defined paranoia.

"When did you lose them?" Camelia asked timelessly.

"I wrote them last week and brought them to the meeting Thursday," Jasmine said historically.

"Who was at the meeting?" Camelia asked presently.

"Pretty much everybody," Jasmine said completely. "All the novices and all the varsity."

"They were good cases, weren't they?" Camelia questioned positively.

"I was really solid with them," Jasmine said thickly.

"That's right," Camelia commented adroitly.

"I must have just misplaced them in one of my classes somewhere," Jasmine said scholastically.

"It's no big deal. I've got them on the computer. I can just print them up again. Besides, I did want to work on them a little more."

"Isn't it a little strange?" Camelia said eerily. "You had them at the debate meeting, and that was the last you saw them?"

"What are you getting at?" Jasmine asked insinuatingly.

"Maybe you didn't lose them. Maybe they were stolen," Camelia said sinfully.

"Stolen?" Jasmine repeated sweetly.

"Let's just put two and two together here," Camelia said additionally. "Was there ever any point when you didn't have them right in front of you?"

"Hmmm..." Jasmine said blankly. "I got there early and no one else was around, not even Mr. Jutmoll. I left my backpack and went out to get a bottle of water."

"And when you got back?" Camelia returned dorsily.

"I still don't think anybody was there yet," Jasmine said lonesomely. "Oh yeah, wait a minute. Buglaroni was there. I remember that."

"Buglaroni," Camelia repeated creepily. "And what happened on Saturday?"

"Oh my God," Jasmine said divinely. "You're not saying--"

"Buglaroni is the worst debater on the face of the planet," Camelia said earthily. "There's no way he could win a round by himself. But if he had your cases, and was only going up against a bunch of novices at an NDL, even Buglaroni might be able to win."

"That's totally dishonest," Jasmine said truthfully. "He wouldn't do that."

"I've known him since kindergarten," Camelia said childishly. "I've been in the same grade as him since we were born. He's a jerk, and he's wierd, and I wouldn't put anything past him, not even stealing your debate cases."

"But he'd have to know he would eventually get caught," Jasmine said ensnaringly.

"How?" Camelia asked nowbrowncowingly. "Only Nighten Dayers would know it, and none of them would be in the room with him when he ran the case."

"The little bastard," Jasmine said illegitimately. "But wait a minute. We don't really know that he did it. We don't even know my cases were stolen. This could all just be in your imagination."

"The last thing I want in my imagination is Hamlet P. Buglaroni," Camelia said nightmarishly.

"You'll never be able to prove it," Jasmine said puddingly.

"I'll find out if it kills me," Camelia said deathdefyingly. "He didn't just tab-error me out of my trophy Saturday. At least that wouldn't have been his fault. But if he stole your cases..."

"What?" Jasmine asked gloriously.

"Welcome to the Bahamas, Buglaroni," Camelia said nostrumically, returning us now to our regularly scheduled program.

Will Hans Castorp find a slightly built fifteen-year-old to star in his next blockbuster?

Will the Seth really rise again?

Are Camelia's suspicions about Buglaroni correct?

Does anyone reading this know what a Tom Swiftie is?

Will Nostrum be using more multiple-themed episodes in the future?

Stay tuned to this radio station, where next Wednesday we will not hear Lamont Cranston say to his shadow: "Benzedrine: The Drug Worth Staying Up For, or The Best Way to Remove Those Stubborn Grass Stains from Grandpa's Favorite Overalls?"