



Episode 79

Hey, Good-Lookin', or Words to That Effect, if I Could Only Think of What to Say, and if I had the Guts to Say It

Of all the people in the world that you can hate, hating yourself is the least desirable. Everyone does it a little bit, except for the maladjusted, who do it either too much or too little.

Disney Davidson falls into the too-much category.

The combined Nighten Day and Bisonette Technical table had no difficulty choosing which octofinal round to watch, since by the fortunes of forensics war their flag-bearers were pitted against one another. Griot hit Chesney, which was too bad insofar as only one of them could advance, but not so bad in general in that both of them had acquired a Combat Of Conquerors limb by making it to octos and beating everyone else in the building left and right, and therefore had nothing to be ashamed about.

Since his arrival this morning Disney has found it impossible to take his eyes off Gloria Fudless, but so far all he has said to her is "Hi," and even that he managed to garble. Once again she is dressed in black from head to toe, including her lipstick and nail polish. Once again Disney is hit full hard in the gut for reasons he does not understand, and which probably cannot be explained. Sitting slightly behind her in the round, he found it impossible to flow his notes on what was happening; looking at the back of Gloria's head was so much more rewarding than looking at the front of Griot's and Chesney's.

And he kept saying to himself during the round, You idiot, you had no trouble talking to her on-line. Why can't you do it in person? What is wrong with you?

At the end of the round, there is a polite round of applause for the participants, and everyone except the three judges shuffles out of the room into the hallway to await the announcement of the results.

"Good round," Griot says to Chesney.

"Good round," Chesney says to Griot.

"Good round," everyone says to both Chesney and Griot.

Within a minute the two schools have broken into separate groupings, Nighten Day on one side and Bisonette on the other; there is a limit to cross-team camaraderie. Disney watches longingly as Binko talks to Gloria, while Chesney stares at the ceiling counting the endless minutes and Worm Padrewski stares back at Disney. On the Nighten Day side Jasmine and Camelia Maru are going over the flow with Griot, while the Tarleton twins are staring at their flow pads like engineers reading blueprints that somehow don't add up to a building. Buglaroni comes up beside Disney.

"What did you think?" Buglaroni asks.

"Huh?"

"What did you think about the round?"

"Good round," Disney says, not wishing to have this conversation.

"Who do you think won?"

Disney shrugs. He does not turn to look at Buglaroni.

"It looked like Griot to me," Buglaroni continues.

"Yeah. Could be."

Gloria looks over and her eyes meet Disney's.

She begins to smile.

Disney turns to Buglaroni. And hates himself for doing it.

Why is he so afraid of her? Why is he so afraid of girls in general? They can't hurt him,

not really. The worst thing they can do is say no to him.

No. The last thing he wants to hear from any girl at any time.

No.

The most horrible word in the English language. If a girl says it.

The door to the classroom opens, and one of the judges pokes her head out. "We're ready," she says.

Everybody dutifully marches back into the room.

"It's a two-one decision for the Negative," one of the judges announces.

Griot was the negative. He immediately shakes hands with Chesney.

At this point the judges go into a critique of the round, explaining one after the other why they judged the way they did. Disney's mind immediately wanders, since he didn't pay enough attention to the round to care about the decision.

Gloria is standing right next to him.

She smiles again.

This time he smiles back. Quickly. Then he turns to listen to the critiques.

When it's over, they all walk back to the cafeteria. An hour has been allotted on the schedule for lunch before the quarterfinal rounds. Plenty of time to kill.

Plenty of time for Disney not to be able to think of anything to say to Gloria in person.

"Want to play Spades?" Buglaroni asks.

"Yeah. Sure," Disney replies. Thank God for Buglaroni. As little as Disney knows the skinny, goofy-looking novice, he knows that Buglaroni is good for two things, non-stop jabbering and non-stop card playing. Disney's plan in attaching himself to Buglaroni was to use him as a lever in getting to Gloria. Buglaroni would start the conversations, Disney would wait for the right opening and work his way in. And by their very contrast -- mature college man, sort of, versus naive novice -- Disney would look good in the comparison.

"Do you want to play?" Buglaroni asks Gloria.

"I don't know how," she replies.

"I'll teach you," Buglaroni says. "You can be my partner."

Disney smiles. Yeah, great idea. Why can't she be Disney's partner?

"You want to play, Binko?" Disney asks. He has no trouble engaging Binko in conversation. Even though Binko is one of the most intimidating people Disney has ever run into, all muscles and shadowy-planed face and dark, evil eyes. Of course they did get to be marginally friendly last week at the NDL, when Disney first caught sight of Gloria. Who is, after all, Binko's teammate. Talking to Binko is almost as good as talking to Gloria.

Yeah, right.

"I have to have a cigarette first," Binko replies. "Then I'll play. Any idea where we can smoke around here, without anybody getting on our case?"

"Front of the building. That's where everybody smokes in Manhattan."

"Yeah. Okay. I'll be back in a few minutes." Binko turns to Camelia Maru, who is walking next to him. "You don't smoke, do you?" he asks.

She says nothing, but her eyes widen in horror. Binko shrugs and peels off alone, down toward the front entrance.

The rest of them continue their way back to the cafeteria. Disney is walking right next to Gloria, and he can't think of a thing to say to her. Not one bloody thing!

Buglaroni, on the other hand, can't shut up.

"So the thing is," he explains, "spades are, like, trumps, and you want to make as many tricks as you say you're going to make, you know, you, like, bid, but, like, if you make no tricks that's a nil and it's worth a hundred points..."

And on and on and on. Disney, who knows how to play Spades, finds himself knowing less and less the more Buglaroni talks, as if Buglaroni's knotted explanation is pulling the reality of the game directly out of Disney's consciousness. Gloria's forehead is furrowed as she tries to understand what he is saying.

"Don't worry," Buglaroni says as they take their places at the Nighten Day slash Bisonette table in the cafeteria. "You'll understand it once we start playing. I'll show you some hands."

He deals out some practice hands, and one after the other, goes over each of them, explaining how he would bid them. The light seems to be dawning in Gloria's mind.

"I think I've got it," she says.

"By George, I think she's got it," Binko says, appearing behind her, the faint, dry aroma of tobacco sticking to his body mixed with the cold breath of autumn that he has brought in from the outside. "Let's play."

The game progresses. Disney bids, Buglaroni bids, Binko bids, Gloria bids. Buglaroni talks to Gloria, Gloria talks to Buglaroni, Disney can't think of anything to say to her except to ask her what she bid, while Buglaroni rambles on and on, commenting on her every move. Next to Gloria, Jasmine, Camelia and Griot are eating sandwiches, while next to Disney, the Tarleton twins have engaged the morose Worm Padrewski in deep conversation.

"Sean Connery, definitely," Frick Tarleton is saying.

"Definitely," Frank replies.

"Bond. James Bond," Worm croaks.

The twins stare at him momentarily, then go back to one another.

"Brosnan is good," Frick says.

"Brosnan is good. But he's no Connery."

"He's no Connery. No one is no Connery. Not Roger Moore."

"Not Roger Moore. Not Timothy Dalton."

"Not Timothy Dalton. Definitely not George Lazenby. He's no Sean Connery."

"He's no Sean Connery. He's so much no Sean Connery that Sean Connery had to come back to make 'Diamonds are Forever.'"

"Sean Connery came back in 'Never Say Never Again.'"

"Sean Connery came back a lot. He was a real comer backer."

"A come-from-behinder."

"A come-from-behind-the-blue-horizoner. Two comebacks is a lot of comebacks. Maybe

he'll come back again."

"Maybe he'll come back again as a villain."

"As a Bond villain. Silverfinger."

"Better than Silverfinger. Platinumfinger."

"Better than Platinumfinger. Plutoniumfinger."

"Plutoniumfinger. 'You expect me to talk?'"

"No, Mr. Bond. I expect you to die."

"Woody Allen," Worm interjects.

"Excuse me?"

"Woody Allen. He played James Bond. Or actually, Jimmy Bond, I think."

The two Tarletons stare at him again.

"Casino Royale," Worm explains.

"Ah, 'Casino Royale.' John Huston. Orson Welles."

"Orson Welles. 'Citizen Kane.'"

"'Citizen Kane.' 'Citizen Shane.' Alan Ladd."

"Alan Ladd is no Sean Connery."

"Definitely no Sean Connery. And no Orson Welles."

"Orson Welles played Dr. No."

"No way. I know Orson was no No."

They go on like this. Disney tries to concentrate on his card game.

The game continues to progress. Disney continues to bid, Buglaroni continues to bid, Binko continues to bid, Gloria continues to bid. Buglaroni continues to talk to Gloria, Gloria continues to talk to Buglaroni, Disney continues to think of nothing to say to her.

And Disney continues to hate himself.

Will Disney ever get up the nerve to talk to Gloria Fudless?

Will Buglaroni ever get up the brains to shut up?

Are the Tarleton Twins secretly Sean Connery?

Is Chelsea going to run in 2028?

You'll find out none of this and less in our next episode: "Ghoti: Phonetic fish, or obscure article of Indian clothing?"