



## Episode 99

### It Could Have Been Alfalfa

"Jeez. Do you look like hell!"

Ham Senior stands up as his son is escorted into the waiting room by an intern who is dressed head to toe in green scrubs.

"He'll be as good as new in a week or so," the intern says. She is no taller than five feet high, and looks like one of Santa's elves beside the gawky Ham Junior. "I had to put in a few stitches on his lip. We can take them out on Tuesday; your own doctor can do that. They might come out by themselves; that's okay too, so don't worry about it."

"And the eye?" Ham Senior asks.

"It's a shiner, all right, but that's all. There's not much we can do about it; an ice pack will keep down the swelling. There's no real damage other than the bruising."

"He looks like the hunchback of Notre Dame, only worse."

"He'll look fine in a couple of weeks." She turns to the boy. "Are you all right now? Ready to go home?"

Buglaroni's lip is double its usual size and frozen in a crooked sneer. The discoloring around his eye makes him look like the dog in the Little Rascals movies. He nods.

"Good." The doctor pats him on the shoulder. "Next time you fall down the stairs, use your left to protect yourself a little bit." She lifts her left arm like a boxer and gestures with it. "If there's any pain, just take some Tylenol or Advil."

"Thanks, Doc." Ham Senior takes his son's arm and walks him toward the door. "I know you didn't fall down any goddamned stairs," he grumbles as soon as they are out of earshot. "It's obvious as hell you got into a fight."

Buglaroni is silent.

"I'm not going to ask you who. That's your problem; you've got to solve it yourself."

"What about Grandma?"

"If you tell her you fell down the stairs, she'll kick you out of the house. She's too smart for that crap."

"I won't tell her anything."

"That's even worse. You know your grandmother."

Buglaroni nods resignedly.

"If you don't want another black eye to match the first one, I'd advise that you tell her the truth. The whole truth."

Buglaroni sighs. That's the problem with getting into trouble: it follows you around. Something happens at school, sooner or later they find out about it at home. Nobody ever gets away with anything.

Welcome to the Bahamas.

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## Willow, Tit Willow, Tit Willow

David Brillig comes storming down the stairs to the family room. The soundtrack from Rent is playing loudly on the stereo.

"I thought I told you never to play--"

He stops. William Hand is sitting on the couch.

"I didn't know you were here," David says.

"Your mom let me in."

"You still like Rent?"

"Don't you?"

David shrugs. "If you can take it, I can take it. Play it, Hand." He drops down onto the couch next to William.

Five minutes pass as they listen to the music. Finally William stands and flips off the CD player. "We've got to get to work," he says, looking down at David. "That is what I'm here for."

"I can't believe Jutmoll is forcing us to do a piece together."

"It won't kill us."

"I don't know. Of all the teams in all the world, he had to pick us."

"We were a pretty good team once upon a time, you know. And not that long ago. We kicked some serious ass in Miami."

David smiles almost wistfully. "We did do that."

"We could do that piece again."

David shakes his hand. "Bad idea. Half the judges at the Moly will be the same ones that were at the Messerschmitt. They won't picket-fence us again."

"We didn't completely picket-fence," William says, sitting down again. "We got a couple of twos in among the ones in those prelims."

"One two, we got. One lousy two. All the rest were ones right up to Finals. Almost a perfect picket fence."

"You're sure you don't want to do that piece again?"

"Something tells me it just won't float twice. Besides, if we were still a team, we'd be alternating. You know that."

"We never alternated Parrots."

"Parrots was different. You didn't need to alternate that one. It was one of a kind."

"I beg to differ. There are parrots everywhere."

"No there aren't."

"Yes there are."

"I don't believe you."

"Believe what you want to believe. The truth remains unaffected by your beliefs, no matter how fervent they may be."

David laughs. "All right. Parrots was something. No question about that."

"So what were you and Kumar going to do?"

"A comedy piece called Sullivan and Gilbert. A couple of old farts going at each other. It's pretty cool."

"Any singing?"

"Did you ever hear Kumar sing? Definitely no singing."

"I sing pretty well. So do you."

"But a lot of judges don't like singing. I don't think we should, even if we would be good at it."

"You've got scripts?"

"I've already got most of the cutting. It's ready to go."

"Then we should begin practicing. We don't have a lot of time."

"No, we don't."

"Too bad about Kumar, though. This means he won't be able to go to the very last tournament we'll ever go to."

"He can go back to doing his HI piece."

"He's never won with his HI, David. Partnering with you, he had a chance to take some tin and go out in style."

"That's ridiculous."

"What's ridiculous?"

"That partnering with me would make any difference."

"Of course it would. You're really good. You make your partner look good, no matter who your partner is."

"I make you look good?" David asks.

"Of course you do."

"You're better than I am, William. You always have been. We both know that."

"We both do not know that. So show me the script."

David hands him the cut scenes. William begins to read.

"You're sure you don't want to sing just a little bit?" William asks about halfway through.

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## Show Me the Way to the Next Little Boy

I am not supposed to be living this life, Lisa Torte thinks as she stares at the television set. She is watching a Simpsons rerun. Sometimes her entire life feels like a Simpsons rerun. A bad Simpsons rerun.

I am twenty-two years old. I am smart. I am reasonably attractive.

And every night I come home alone to watch Simpsons reruns.

I have no social life whatsoever. No boyfriends. Not even any women friends. Nothing. The best I can hope for in the way of excitement is corralling a bunch of high kids to a weekend tournament across state lines. I spend most of my Friday and Saturday nights judging

Unbelievable.

She sips from her glass of white wine.

I am turning into an alcoholic, she thinks. I drink every night, and half the time I drink too much. I start thinking things I shouldn't think. My mind starts going to places where a normal mind would never venture.

Like Invoice O'Connor. I am obsessing over Invoice O'Connor.

Lisa, what is wrong with you?

He is not good-looking, by any stretch of the imagination. Far from it. And he has the social sense of a koala. He's probably never been on a date in his life, probably never kissed a girl, probably never even held a girl's hand.

And -- oh yeah. He's a student. In high school. And you're his teacher.

But there's only four years' difference in our ages. At twenty-two and eighteen maybe it's suspect, but if we were thirty-two and twenty-eight, we couldn't get arrested dancing naked on Fifth Avenue.

Don't even think about the word naked.

They would throw me out of Veil in a second if I even look at him funny. I practically attacked him last night when he was here. Scared the hell out of him.

This is absurd. He's a kid. A damned little kid.

Where are the men in my world?

Where are the men?

Where?

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## Is There a Femaledizione?

"My baby!" she cries. "My baby!"

She hugs him to herself as if he has returned home from World War II, a wounded veteran precariously balanced on a wooden leg, maybe missing a couple of arms, and maybe deaf, blind and shell-shocked, just to round out the picture.

"I'm all right, Grandma," Buglaroni says.

"You're not-a all right." She holds him at arm's length. "Who did-a this horrible thing-a to you? Who did-a this?"

"Nobody."

"Whaddayou mean, nobody?" She shakes his shoulders. "Who did-a this thing to you?"

Buglaroni is silent.

"Leave us alone," the old woman commands her stepson.

Ham Senior shrugs and walks out of the kitchen. "With pleasure," he mumbles softly.

"Sit down," Grandma Buglaroni commands her grandson.

He sits. She remains standing, towering over him in all her matriarchal fury.

"Some boy did-a this, right?"

Buglaroni lowers his eyes. He nods.

"That's-a what I thought. Look at me, Hammy."

He raises his eyes to hers.

"It was over a girl?"

The eyebrow over his good right eye rises. "How did you know?"

"I'm-a not a grandmother for nothin'," she explains. "We know these sort 'a things. That's-a what grandmas are all about. It was that girl you went out with last-a night?"

Buglaroni nods.

"This-a was her old boyfriend."

He nods again. "A kid named Bark. He was working at the mall when we were there. He must have looked us up in the phone book or something. He was waiting for me when I got home today."

Grandma Buglaroni passes the end of her right thumb under her front teeth then flips it into the air. "Maledizione!" She spits out the word like a curse.

But then again, it is a curse.

A malediction.

Against Bark Santorelli.

Grandma Buglaroni begins to cry. Big tears come flowing down her cheeks as she grabs Ham Junior's battered head and presses it against her more than ample bosom.

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**Will the stitches come out by themselves?**

**Will William and David picket-fence at the Blessed Moly?**

**Will Lisa Torte start writing letters to the Penthouse Adviser?**

**Will Grandma Buglaroni's malediction stick?**

**Find out how by declining our free offer: "Surabaya Johnny: Take that pipe out of your mouth, you rat, or, the call of the Weill?"**