

FROM FAMEPUNK: PART 1 / US OPEN 1987

...Calling Coney Island

The call came in on another dead Friday morning at King David's Hats for Men, All Finest Custom Fittings. The concern's co-proprietor was down in the basement in the cubbyhole office he'd carved out of storage with shelving; he'd put in a separate phone line. Now he was hunched in front of his beloved Kaypro 16 while his SmartModem was singing. He prepared to project himself into another space, a world of keystroked active voices. Excitement was prickling his bare scalp.

Footsteps thudded to the top of the stairs and his father's morning rage descended, vocally:

"Pinchus! Bum! Phone call for my bum son who's got girls calling him now at my business! Pick up you bum!"

Prince Linsky stumbled over some ill-stacked cartons to seize the wall extension. "I got it!"

"A girl he has calling!"

"Papa hang up!"

"Maybe you do some work today to impress your girlfriend!"

"Papa I got it hang up! Yeah? Hello?" He heard a pause. "Hello?"

"Yes hello is this Mister Prince Linsky?"

"Who the hell is this?"

"My name is Amanda McKinley, Mister Linsky. I'm—a tennis player."

Prince Linsky made a horrible sound: he was laughing. “Man babe” he choked “I’m afraid I can’t help you.”

“I’m sorry but it really is Man Mc—”

“Oh I know it’s you, sister. Believe me. And also believe me I cannot help you.”

“Well, then I was wondering if you could answer a few questions I have.”

“That Bud creep give you my card? He tell you what I told him? And you understood what it means?” Man kept assenting. “So what can I tell you for?”

“I want to know—I mean I guess—well can you just tell me? Is she going to throw this match today?”

Incredulity. “Is she gonna throw this match today?”

“I mean—for money.”

“Sweetie Miss America, she’s not throwing this match today.”

For several instants, Man McKinley enjoyed the feeling of being flooded with relief. The fear of being involved in a dirty match had been such an added torment, actually sickening. She took a deep breath without notable pain and felt encouraged.

“Honey you’re on your way home today is what’s happening.”

“No but—”

“You got bags? Pack ‘em.”

“No but I mean as long as I know she’s not going to lose on purpose then it’s fine. I mean c’mon Mister Linsky—I can beat her.”

That horrible sound again; worse. “No you cannot! You think you can beat—” Linsky wiped his streaming eyes on a

matted forearm; audibly. “Lady this kid could beat Sy Morgenstern at his best after three baby classes. Three! And this was five years ago. By today she could beat two of you. In fact, no offense, the way you were playing six seven years ago she could beat two of you. She could beat a few more of youse now.”

Dear God—and he didn’t even know about the back injury. “None taken,” Man said in an automatic fashion.

“Hey c’mon don’t worry.” The Prince, in his true and humble esteem for this broad, a great champion after all, made an effort to sound reassuring. His listener felt like she’d been backed into a dark corner at knifepoint. “I mean darling, it’s fine. You’re gonna win a set.”

“What.”

“Hey listen! You wanna know the final score? I’ll look it up for you just gimme a sec.”

“Wait! What?”

“The score! Your final score today! I got my computer right here, I can get it for you in five ten minutes—listen gimme your number I’ll call you right back.”

“What are you talking about?”

Prince Linsky sighed from the depths of his being at this further evidence of women’s ignorance about the world around them. “You’ve heard of computers, right?”

“Of course I’ve heard of computers!” Man agreed with Linsky’s father.

“And you’ve heard of a modem?”

“Well of course I’ve heard of a modem I’m a—wait a what?”

“Yeah I didn’t think so. Listen maybe you and me and

neither one of us has time to go into the details right now so lemme just explain in layman's terms." Linsky was really trying to be nice. "I take my computer and I plug it into my phone line. And all over the world other guys have their computers plugged into their phone lines and we can talk to each other that way."

"But why not just use a normal telephone?"

"And send each other stuff. It's called data." Zero response. He sighed. "Documents. Files. Information."

"Um." Now she remembered Freya going on and on about this while they were waiting out that rain delay at Wimbledon. "Oh right." Her mind must have—would have, naturally—wandered.

"Real time information. Scores. Odds."

"Oh!"

"That's what I'm trying to tell you. It's all on the computer now. How come women don't know about this stuff?"

"My friend Freya knows about this stuff!"

"Yeah well naturally—"

"My friend Freya Mister Pinkus knows about this stuff. Mister Linsky."

"Sure, sure, Princess. Take it easy. Live and let live." The green screen in his cubbyhole was pulsing and Linsky longed to be near it. Beside it. Inside it, far away from nerves of mortal flesh. "So listen you wanna know the score or what? Cause it woulda changed by now from last night so I gotta look it up. Just gimme—"

"No! I don't wanna know. I mean I don't want you to look it up!"

“But I’m telling you I know the guy—”

“No!” Man McKinley said this many times in succession before she was able to stop herself short with a final “Please. No.”

“Okay. Suit yourself.”

“Thank you.”

“Just so you know it’s gonna go three sets.”

“Okay. No. That’s enough.”

“Cause that’s already decided last week so I mean it. Enjoy.”

“Right yes okay no. But thank you so much Mister Linsky for—”

“Please. Call me Prince.”

“Right. Well yes and thank you, I so appreciate your time and all. You’ve been most, most helpful in every way—”

“Hey whatever I can do. Big fan.”

“And so goodbye. And. Good luck with your business.”

The horrible, horrible sound of which she realized Praise God for putting computers in the way: “Babe, like you got any luck to spare!”