



Episode 11

Policy is the Best, Honestly

Seth B. Obomash's stomach is growling. It is growling despite the three slices of pizza he has just eaten, and it is growling despite his prodigious consumption of bagels, doughnuts, crullers and various other sugared and not-so-sugared objects during the morning hours. Seth has a large stomach that growls when it is not happy, and Seth has no alternative but to tend to its needs.

Seth has not ventured out of the tab room all morning, primarily because he is too tired from the previous evening to face anyone he doesn't have to face. The tab room cadre is fairly undemanding, and after a few of the jolly bon mots they always expect from him, he was able to retire into his private half-awake, half-asleep assault of the *Washington Post*, where the news was baffling, the columnists incomprehensible, and even the comics took him half an hour to figure out. But now, answering the call of his feral appetite, he must put aside his privacy and venture forth.

It is less than a minute before he wishes he hadn't.

"You are Mr. Obomash!" The sharp voice hits the back of his head like a baseball bat.

He turns slowly to see Amnea Nutmilk stomping down the hallway toward him, her son Chesney in tow behind her. Seth has heard that she's been stalking this place for reasons unknown all morning, with Chesney behind her like a dinghy trailing a battleship. She made at least three sallies against the tab room, only narrowly being fought away each time by the obediently blind determination of the entire Andrew Johnson team with just one idea in its collective mind, namely, the sanctity of tabulation, and the attendant need to keep the room where it is performed surgically antiseptic. Seth knows this woman is Amnea Nutmilk -- a woman he has never met before -- not only because he has heard the stories of the prepossessing Mrs. Nutmilk, but also because he instantly recognizes Chesney, who was well-known before he moved out of Manhattan and the debate universe. As for Amnea Nutmilk's prepossession, Seth himself is as prepossessing as the next person; more, if you take his heft into consideration. Six-and-a-half-foot-tall, two-

hundred-and-sixty-pound black men usually don't disappear into the background.

"Yes, Ma'am," he tells her, "I am Mr. Obomash."

"I have to talk to you."

"I'm on my way to lunch."

"Your lunch can wait."

"I assure you, madam, that it cannot." He turns and starts walking toward the stairs. She falls into step beside him. He knew she would. "What exactly can I do for you?" he asks.

"I am Amnea Nutmilk."

"Aaaah!" He makes the sound meaningful. He looks over her head and nods at her son.
"Hello, Chesney."

"Hello, Mr. Obomash."

"I heard you quit debate."

"I want to get back in."

"Exactly," his mother interjects. "That's why I want to talk to you, Mr. Obomash. I want Chesney to get back into debate."

"What school are you at now," Seth asks the boy.

"Bisonette Technical," his mother answers.

"And that would be where?"

"Stockwood."

"Stockwood?" Obomash pauses on the stairs.

"Like Woodstock, only backwards," Chesney says.

"Ah."

Amnea Nutmilk's glare causes Chesney to shrink a good six inches. "Stockwood is in upstate New York, Mr. Obomash. Bisonette Technical is a small school. And despite its

name, it's very special."

"A private school?"

"Not exactly. It's more like a public school in a rather private town."

"Hmmm."

"Don't get me wrong, Mr. Obobmash. There are black people in this school."

"I feel better already."

"It's just that it's, well, off the beaten path." They reach the bottom of the stairs. "I'm sure you understand."

Seth says nothing. He is not sure what it is she thinks she understands, and he doesn't exactly care, either. He is a teacher at a Catholic school, well-practiced in the art of ignoring parents. It is a skill that seems worth practicing here. Whatever Amnea Nutmilk wants, he will either get it for her quickly and get rid of her, if it requires no work on his part, or he will never get it and blow her off for all eternity, if it does require work from him.

He is not a Catholic for nothing.

"I wish to start a debate team at Bisonette Technical," Mrs. Nutmilk announces.

"An admirable undertaking," Seth tells her.

"I need your help."

"I will help you in any way I can," he says.

"You're the head of the district. We wish to start a chapter of the NFL."

"That is no problem, Mrs. Nutmilk. All you have to do is call the NFL in Ripon, Wisconsin. They'll send you some forms, and there you are." They have reached the judges' lounge. "It's been nice meeting you," he says at the door. "Good luck."

"I expect more than that, Mr. Obomash."

He lets himself into the lounge, where some open pizza boxes quickly prove to him that the trip was worth it. Amnea Nutmilk is right behind him.

"What exactly *do* you expect?" he asks her.

"I expect your help. I have no idea how to set up a team. You're the district manager, or whatever it is. I want you to help me."

"And I said I would. Sit. I'll tell you what you have to do." His enormous hand grabs up a slice of cold pizza, half of which he immediately stuffs into his mouth. A handful of chews and two bites later he has polished off that slice -- the one to slake his hunger -- and now he's ready for the one to savor, which he puts onto a paper plate. "Care for some lunch?" he asks her.

She is staring at him agape. Or gaping at him astare. She shakes her head. Chesney reaches out to help himself, but she catches him with that look that immediately causes him to recoil as a shorter youth than he was a second ago. At this rate she could shrink him down to Munchkin-reunion size in record time.

Seth sits at a table in the relatively empty room, and after a moment's hesitation, Amnea Nutmilk joins him. Chesney stands guard behind her.

Most of the judges are now judging. The first elimination round has been announced for both policy and Lincoln-Douglas. Seth, who never judges, was pleased that quite a few of his policy kids broke. Only one of his LDers made it, but he's never been particularly interested in LD, so it doesn't really matter much to him. He came up through the ranks as a high school policy debater himself, and a college debater in roughly the same category. Debate has been his life since there was any discernible life in him to perceive.

"What kind of team do you want to run?" Seth asks.

"I want Chesney to debate."

"Anyone else."

"Maybe. But they're of secondary importance."

"Not to them."

"If others want to debate, Mr. Obomash, I will encourage them to join the team."

"So, again, what kind of team do you want to run? Policy? Lincoln-Douglas? Speech? All of the above?"

"I think just Lincoln-Douglas, for now. I don't think very highly of the other forensic activities."

"You don't?"

"No. Policy is just fast-talking gibberish, and speech is a bunch of flighty little--"

He has stood up.

"Excuse me, but I'm not finished" she says to him, staring up into his forbidding bulk.

"I wish I could excuse you, Ms. Nutmilk, but you definitely are finished."

"I take it you don't agree with my assessment of the activities."

"Policy debate is the soul of forensics, Mrs. Nutmilk. You only display your ignorance, not your preference, when you refer to it as fast-talking gibberish."

"It is totally unintelligible--"

"To you."

"To me. And to most others."

"Celestial mechanics is totally unintelligible to most people, madam. That does not make it gibberish, it just makes it difficult."

"I did not come here to offend you, Mr. Obomash."

"I am not offended."

"You're acting offended."

"I do not offend that easily."

"Then sit down, please, and finish our conversation."

Seth sighs. "What exactly is this conversation about? I told you that if you want to start a team, the NFL will send you everything you need."

"But I don't know how to run a team. I want to learn."

Seth B. Obomash pauses for a moment, then slowly resettles himself into his chair.

"You want to learn, Mrs. Chesney?"

"Yes I do, Mr. Obomash."

"Then listen for a minute. Don't say anything. Just listen. Can you do that?"

"Of course I can."

"Good. If you want to run a team in this district, it's very simple. First, get yourself a schedule. Second--"

"Where do I get a schedule?"

"You said you could listen and not say anything. Please try to stick to that. Second, get yourself some kids and sign them up for the tournaments on that schedule. Start with LD because Chesney knows how to do that and he can show the others. Don't get in their way, and whatever you do, don't try to coach them. And third." He stands up again.

"And third, don't get in my way."

His second slice of pizza is still sitting on his paper plate. He reaches down and swoops it up into his mouth. It is gone after the requisite three bites. Without rushing he wipes his mouth on a napkin that he picks up from the table, he nods at Chesney, then he turns and walks off. A moment later he is out the door.

"That is the rudest man I have ever met," Amnea Nutmilk exclaims to her son.

"He's one of the most important coaches around," Chesney says, a note of pleading in her voice as he sits down next to her. "And he's the head of the district. You've got to be nicer to these people, Ma. Really."

"That's where you're wrong, Chesney. It's them that have to be nice to me."

"They."

"Excuse me?"

"They. It's they who have to be nice to you, not them that have to be nice to you."

"Don't correct your mother, Chesney."

"Yes, Ma."

"Where can we get a schedule?"

"There's no such thing as one printed schedule. I can go ask around, find out when the next tournaments are."

"Good idea. I'll stay here. That way I won't run into that horrible man again."

"If you don't run into him here, you'll run into him somewhere else."

"I'll be ready for him then."

"I hope so," Chesney says, standing up. "And I hope he's ready for you," he adds under his breath as he heads off to the cafeteria to pick up whatever loose information happens to be lying around.

Will Seth B. Obomash learn to love Amnea Nutmilk?

Will Amnea Nutmilk learn to love policy?

Will Chesney Nutmilk learn not to correct his mother?

Will success spoil Rock Hunter?

Will Wheaton?

When have you ever found the answers in our next installment: "Stormy Weather -- the Song with no Dietary Restrictions"