

10/8/24

THE MAKING OF A PRESIDENT

CHARACTERS: NARRATOR - MERWINE BEDWALLOWER - Applicant for position.
ANGINA PECTORALIS - Student member of the search committee.
BEN POORLY POORE - Chair of the search committee.

NARRATOR

SUSPEND YOUR DISBELIEF BUT FOR A MOMENT, AND SEE BEFORE YOUR EYES THE CAMPUS OF A COLLEGE WHERE CONCRETE STRUCTURES, LIKE GREAT GUN EMPLACEMENTS, DOMINATE THE LANDSCAPE, DWARFING THE ANT-LIKE HUMANS WHO PLOD IN SEARCH OF EDUCATION WITHIN THEIR WALLS. BEHOLD THE CLOISTERED ROOMS WHERE ONCE A POLITICIAN TURNED PRESIDENT SAT, AND MARKED HIS TIME WHILE AWAITING OPPORTUNITY. OBSERVE THE FRANTIC EFFORTS OF A LEADERLESS COMMUNITY ENDEAVORING TO FIND MISTER RIGHT, A PRESIDENT FOR ALL AND SUNDRY. NOW VIEW A MEETING ROOM WHEREIN TWO PEOPLE WAIT UPON A CANDIDATE. MEET BEN POORLY POORE, CHAIR OF THE PRESIDENTIAL SEARCH COMMITTEE, AND ANGINA PECTORALIS, THE STUDENT COMMITTEE MEMBER, WHOSE FATHER ALWAYS WANTED TO BE A DOCTOR.

BEN

MEETING OF THE SPSCC SQUARED WILL COME TO ORDER.

ANGIE

SPSCC? SOUTH PUGET SOUND COMMUNITY COLLEGE?

BEN

NO, ANGINA. SECOND PRESIDENTIAL SEARCH COMMITTEE FOR CLOUD CUCKOO COLLEGE.

ANGIE

OH, US! AND YOU BETTER CALL ME ANGIE, BENJY.

BEN

BENGY? BEN, PLEASE, ANGIE.

ANGIE

O.K., BEN. NOW TELL ME ALL ABOUT IT.

BEN

WE ARE HERE TO INTERVIEW OUR CANDIDATE AND SELECT OUR PRESIDENT.

ANGIE

WHY DO WE NEED A PRESIDENT?

BEN

THE COLLEGE PRESIDENT REPRESENTS US, ARGUES OUR CASE BEFORE THE LEGISLATURE, BALANCES OUR BUDGET, THROWS COCKTAIL PARTIES FOR VISITING CONSULTANTS, OTHER PRESIDENTS, AND LEGISLATORS; CONS THE ACCREDITATION COMMITTEES INTO CERTIFYING US; PROVIDES THE NEWS HUNGRY WORLD WITH TANTALIZING TIDBITS OF INFORMATION. . .

ANGIE

LIKE WHEN HE WANTS TO BECOME A SENATOR?

BEN

STOP IT! A COLLEGE WITHOUT A PRESIDENT IS NOT A COLLEGE.

ANGIE

WE SEEM TO GET ALONG WITHOUT ONE VERY WELL.

BEN

TRUE, WE ARE SAVING \$73,000 A YEAR, AND IF WE SOLD THE PRESIDENT'S HOUSE, WE COULD ALMOST BUILD OUR OWN FOOTBALL STADIUM.

ANGIE

AND THE SEABIRDS COULD DO THEIR THING HERE INSTEAD OF CHENEY.

BEN

THAT'S SEAHAWKS, ANGIE. IT'S TIME FOR OUR FIRST APPLICANT, AND WE HAVE TO SET OUR CLICHÉ SCALES. (He takes out a tiny scale)

ANGIE

CLICHÉ SCALES?

BEN

YES. THEY MEASURE THE WEIGHT OF EACH CLICHÉ SPOKEN BY AN APPLICANT, AND DETERMINES HIS FITNESS TO BE OUR PRESIDENT.

ANGIE

OH!

BEN

(Sets it up) IT TAKES SEVENTY-FIVE POUNDS WORTH OF CLICHÉS TO PASS THE TEST, AND THAT'S ONLY THE AVERAGE CLICHÉ QUOTIENT FOR AN ASPIRING COLLEGE PRESIDENT. THERE, WE ARE ALL READY. WILL YOU PLEASE SEE IF OUR CANDIDATE IS HERE, ANGINA?

ANGIE

CERTAINLY, BENJY. (She goes over and brings the candidate in)

BEN

WELCOME TO CLOUD CUCKOO COLLEGE, SIR. YOU ARE, (He consults his papers) ALEXANDER NEVSKY KROPOTKIN FROM LENIN STATE?

BED

NO! I AM DOCTOR MERWINE BEDWALLOWER FROM I.O.U.

ANGIE

(As Ben shifts his papers) I.O.U? WHAT HAPPENED TO KROPOTKIN?

BEN

HE EVIDENTLY STAYED AT LENIN STATE. I SUPPOSE THE ALTERNATIVE WAS THE UNIVERSITY OF SIBERIA. DOCTOR BEDWALLOWER IS OUR FINAL, (aside to Angie) AND ONLY, CANDIDATE. SIR, I AM BENJAMIN POORLY POORE, AND THIS STUDENT PERSON HERE IS ANGINA PECTORALIS, WHOSE FATHER ALWAYS WANTED TO BE A DOCTOR.

BED

I AM HAPPY TO MEET YOU BOTH. I FEEL THAT I AM MORE THAN QUALIFIED TO BE YOUR PRESIDENT, MY CREDENTIALS PROVE THAT.....

BEN

OH, YES, SIR, EXCELLENT CREDENTIALS, BUT IF YOU ARE TO BE THE LUCKY PERSON SELECTED TO BE OUR PRESIDENT, YOU FIRST HAVE TO PASS OUR TEST.

BED

YOUR TEST? I DON'T SEE WHY I SHOULD HAVE TO PASS A TEST. MY CREDENTIALS...

BEN

DOCTOR BEDWALLOWER, IN THIS STATE ANYONE ENTERING THE FIELD OF EDUCATION MUST PASS A TEST TO PROVE THEY ARE QUALIFIED. THEREFORE, TO MEET OUR STRICT STANDARDS, YOU WILL HAVE TO PROVE YOU HAVE AN ADEQUATE CLICHÉ QUOTIENT.

BED

A CLICHE QUOTIENT? MR POORE, I DON'T SEE HOW....

ANGIE

YES, D.B, YOUR C.Q.

BED

BUT HOW CAN YOU MEASURE...?

BEN

WE WILL WEIGH EACH OF YOUR CLICHÉS ON OUR CLICHÉ SCALE. A TOTAL OF SEVENTY-FIVE POUNDS WILL QUALIFY YOU FOR THE POSITION.

BED

BUT I CREATE CLICHÉS, I DON'T REPEAT THEM.

BEN

THEN YOU ARE THE FIRST CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT WHO HASN'T GOT
A COVEY OF CLICHÉS AT HIS FINGERTIPS. HERE, TRY THIS ONE ON FOR
SIZE, "GUIDELINES."

BED

I FEAR THAT I CANNOT MEET YOUR REQUIREMENTS. LET ME THINK A
MOMENT.

BEN

TAKE YOUR TIME. THE MOMENT IS UP!

BED

AH! IT IS WITHIN THE PARAMETERS OF OUR SOCIETY THAT WE FIND
GUIDELINES...

BEN

NO FAIR. WE GAVE YOU GUIDELINES AS AN EXAMPLE.

ANGIE

BUT YOUR PARAMETERS WAS A HEAVYWEIGHT! SIX POUNDS, NINE OUNCES!
NOT BAD FOR YOUR FIRST. TRY AGAIN.

BED

THE USE OF THE UTOPIA AS A PARADIGM HAS CAUSED A MEANINGFUL
REASSESSMENT OF URBAN PLANNING.

BEN

GOOD! GOOD! YOU GAINED TEN POUNDS ON THAT STATEMENT. PARADIGM
WEIGHED IN AT FIVE POUNDS; MEANINGFUL AT THREE, AND REASSESSMENT
AT TWO. YOU NOW HAVE SIXTEEN POUNDS, NINE OUNCES.

BED

IS THAT ALL?

ANGIE

DON'T BE DISCOURAGED, SIR. SEVENTY-FIVE POUNDS IS ONLY AN AVERAGE CLICHÉ QUOTIENT FOR A COLLEGE PRESIDENT. YOU SHOULD ACHIEVE THAT WITH EASE. PERHAPS YOU COULD EVEN SET A NEW WORLD'S RECORD.

BED

I COULD THROW IN SOME OF THE COUNTER CULTURE CLICHÉS. IS IT FAIR TO USE THEM?

BEN

I SUPPOSE SO. ONE MAN'S CLICHÉ IS ANOTHER MAN'S EUPHEMISM.

ANGIE

YOU GAINED ANOTHER FIVE POUNDS WITH COUNTER CULTURE. YOU NOW HAVE TWENTY-ONE POUNDS, NINE OUNCES.

BED

RIGHT ON, MAN. I REALLY DIG YOU GUYS. YOU'RE COOL, REALLY GROOVY. THIS IS A FAR OUT SCHOOL.

BEN

UNFORTUNATELY YOU CHOSE COUNTER CULTURE CLICHÉS OF THE SAVAGE SEVENTIES. THEY HAVE LOST WEIGHT AND NOW ONLY WEIGH ABOUT A QUARTER OF AN ACADEMIC CLICHÉ. THAT WHOLE OUTBURST ONLY BROUGHT YOU UP TO TWENTY-FIVE POUNDS. YOU HAVE FIFTY MORE TO GO.

ANGIE

EVEN VALLEY GIRLS, YUPPIES OR BREAK DANCING DON'T WEIGH MUCH NOW,

BED

WAIT! I THINK I SEE A STATEMENT FORMING. YES. HOW IS THIS? A BALANCED BUDGET IS THE SINA QUA NON OF AMERICAN POLITICS. BOTH PARTIES PREACH IT, BUT OUR PARTY, THE TRUE PARTY OF THE FUTURE, THE GREAT OPPORTUNITY PARTY, IS THE ONLY PARTY THAT CAN ACHIEVE IT. WITH STRONG ECONOMIC

GROWTH, WE'LL CONTINUE BRINGING DOWN THE DEFICIT, AND WILL, MOST CERTAINLY, BALANCE THE BUDGET IN FOUR MORE YEARS IN SPITE OF THE COST OVERRUNS OF THE MILITARY-INDUSTRIAL ESTABLISHMENT. WE'LL DO THIS WITH AN AMENDMENT MANDATING THAT GOVERNMENT SPEND NO MORE THAN GOVERNMENT TAKES IN. AND WE WILL DO IT WHILE DEVELOPING AMERICA'S NEXT FRONTIERS IN SCIENCE AND HIGH TECHNOLOGY. THIS WILL ENABLE US TO SURGE FORWARD ON THE CREST OF THE WAVE OF PROGRESS AND PEACEFUL CHANGE TO WIN THE STAR WARS OF THE FUTURE. BUT WE MUST ALSO HELP REVIVE AMERICA'S TRADITIONAL VALUES: MOTHER, HOME, APPLE PIE, FAITH, FAMILY, WORK, FREEDOM AND THE FLAG. OF COURSE GOVERNMENT HAS NO BUSINESS ENFORCING THESE VALUES, BUT NEITHER MUST IT SEEK, AS IT DID IN THE RECENT PAST, TO SUPPRESS OR REPLACE THEM. THAT ONLY ROBBED US OF OUR TILLER, AND SENT US ADRIFT WITHOUT A PRAYER IN THE SCHOOLS.

BEN

WOW! THE ONLY CLICHÉS HEAVIER THAN AN ACADEMIC IS THE POLITICAL. YOU GAINED FORTY POUNDS ON THAT ONE. YOU ARE NOW UP TO SIXTY-FIVE POUNDS.

BED

I THINK I HAVE A WINNER! I REMEMBER SOMETHING FROM A SPEECH I ONCE HEARD AT EVERGREEN COLLEGE. IT WENT LIKE THIS: (He takes a deep breath and completes the statement without taking another.) IT SEEMS TO ME THAT ACADEMIC SYSTEMS SHOULD BE BOTH EDUCATIVE AND INTRINSICALLY REWARDING SO THAT ONE GAINS NOT ONLY ENLIGHTENMENT BUT ALSO ENRICHING EXPERIENCES THAT ALLOW ONE TO ACHIEVE THE MAXIMUM SENSE OF ONE'S PERSONAL GROWTH WHILE FORMING THOSE IMPORTANT

RELATIONSHIPS WHICH ARE NOT ONLY PRODUCTIVE FOR OUR SOCIETY, BUT PROVIDE A BASE FROM WHICH ONE MAY BECOME USEFUL, REFLECTIVE AND MOST IMPORTANT TO ONESELF IN A PRAGMATIC SORT OF WAY, ON THE OTHER HAND...(He gasps for breath.)

BEN

STOP! THAT'S ONLY WORTH ONE POUND!

BED

FOR ALL OF THAT?

BEN

MY GOOD SIR, IN GOOD CLICHÉING, QUANTITY IS NOT AN INDICATION OF QUALITY. LENGTH AND PRECISION ARE NOT PROPORTIONATE.

ANGIE

(Admiringly) BEN, YOUR STATEMENT WAS WORTH SIX POUNDS.

BED

OF WHAT? WELL, IT'S THE BEST I CAN DO. THE ONLY BUSINESS CLICHÉS I KNOW ARE "CAN OF WORMS" AND "BALL OF WAX".

BEN

WHICH ONLY TAKES YOU UP TO SEVENTY POUNDS, SIR. I REGRET THAT YOU COULDN'T MEET OUR STANDARDS. IT WOULD HAVE BEEN REFRESHING TO HAVE A CLICHÉ MAKER HEADING CLOUD CUCKOO COLLEGE, BUT THE RULES ARE THE RULES. THANK YOU FOR BEING A CANDIDATE.

BED

(Starts exiting slowly) FOR ME IT'S BACK TO THE ZOO AT I.O.U. NOW I'LL HAVE TO APPLY FOR THE PRESIDENCY OF EVERGREEN, THAT HIDDEN GEM AMONG LESSER KNOWN COLLEGES.

ANGIE

BEN! LOOK! THE CLICHÉ SCALE HAS GONE OVER SEVENTY-FIVE.

BEN

IT WAS THE EVERGREEN CLICHÉ THAT PUT HIM OVER. SIR! SIR! COME BACK.
YOU HAVE PASSED THE TEST.

BED

DOES THAT MEAN I'M HIRED?

BEN

IT ONLY MEANS THAT YOU HAVE PASSED THE CLICHÉ TEST. YOU WILL HAVE
TO READ THE DAILY OLYMPIAN FOR THE NEXT SIX WEEKS TO FIND OUT
IF YOU ARE HIRED.

BED

THAT I REFUSE TO DO. I'D RATHER BE THE PRESIDENT OF EVERGREEN.
(He storms out)

BEN

(sighs) WELL, ANGIE, IT'S BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD FOR US.

ANGIE

NO IT ISN'T, BEN. LOOK AT THE SCALES. YOU HAVE JUST WEIGHED IN
AS PRESIDENT OF CLOUD CUCKOO COLLEGE. YOU HAD BETTER START
READING THE DAILY O YOURSELF.

BEN

OH, NO!

((They exit to the geoduc fight song.))