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Chapter 36: The Judge

MUSIC: (FADE IN) BLIZZARD OF OSBORN THEME

NARRATOR

You're listening to The Blizzard of Osborn by Michael Sheen Cuddy.
Chapter 36: The Judge.

MUSIC: BLIZZARD OF OSBORN THEME (FADE OUT)

Scene One: The Great Hall, Pinnacle of Aspire.

SOUND: (background crowd murmur)

NARRATOR

From the time he learned to walk on all four legs Assam was taught to carry himself like a royal stallion, the King's prized steed: head proud and erect, noble bearing, graceful, confident stride. But all those years of practice deserted him as he approached the Viceroy. Now he looked slovenly. Awkward. Ungainly. A common barnyard beast of burden.

His friends noticed as he shambled past, head hanging low,

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lackluster eyes looking blank.

MUSIC: (J.S. Bach - The Art of Fugue, Contrapunctus 5)

CASSIE

What's wrong with Assam?

SLY

I don't know, looks like he's got hoof and mouth disease or something.

MEMYSELFANDI

That's strange, why just yesterday he looked as fit as the proverbial fiddle.

NARRATOR

Their whispering was overheard by the Viceroy, who hesitated, then turned to Assam.

THE VICEROY

Well then....(*beat, clears throat*) Assam... I trust you have given this much thought. What is it you wish to ask of the Emperor? What is your deepest truest wish?

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NARRATOR

Assam hung his head, and staring at the floor, mumbled,

ASSAM (disconsolate)

Oh... I have no wishes anymore.

SOUND: (crowd murmuring throughout the Great Hall)

THE VICEROY (*impatiently*)

Nonsense! This is your once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Every citizen of the Empire dreams of this moment. Speak up now or live the remainder of your life as a common ass!

ASSAM

(*braying*) That's just the problem! The real reason I wanted to come to the Emperor—the reason I never told anyone—was to prove once and for all my true heredity. As far back as my days workin' in the mine I'd heard that the Emperor runs a Comprehensive Genome Database in Aspire. See, all my life people questioned my background. People would ask who my parents was and I said my Poppa was a thoroughbred Andalusian stallion, and my Mama was a thoroughbred Andalusian mare. (*bray*) They laughed every time. But I knew it was true because both my Mama and my Poppa told me so.

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NARRATOR

The Viceroy glanced at the Grey Eminences while Assam continued.

ASSAM

Well, yesterday, I was finally allowed to enter the Genome Database to see a copy of my family tree.... And...that's when I learned the truth, the terrible, God-awful truth.

THE VICEROY

(clears his throat, is about to speak when Assam cuts him off)

MUSIC: (Bill Frisell - I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry)

ASSAM

It turns out that back when I was just a foal my daddy's owner was caught falsifying records. He substituted genetic material illegally purchased on the black market in the hope that I would be officially authorized as a purebred Andalusian so I could enjoy all the privileges that come with that status.

SOUND: (crowd murmuring)

THE VICEROY

Go on.

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ASSAM

Then one day three invigilators from the Bureau of Identity showed up. I was too young to understand what was going on. But they took my papa and his owner away, and I never saw my papa again. But I always remembered what he'd told me: "Son, no matter what anybody tells you, you've got the heart and soul of a purebred Andalusian stallion. People will try to put you down, tell you you're a nobody, you're just a jackass. Well don't you believe it. Stand tall, carry yourself like a king's horse, strong and true. Hold your head high and never let them put you down. Even if they work you as a beast of burden, know in your heart that you're made of royal stuff—pure gold—pure Andalusian thoroughbred stock.

NARRATOR

One of the dignitaries behind the Viceroy spoke up.

DIGNITARY

Have you never seen a reflection of yourself? Do you not see that you're nothing more than a common donkey?

ASSAM

Every now and then I saw my reflection in a water trough or a pond. But I guess I just saw what I wanted to see. My Momma and Poppa told

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me I had royal blood so that's what I saw, a magnificent Andalusian stallion.

DIGNITARY

But...surely all your life experiences have told you differently.

ASSAM

My Mama and Poppa taught me that life isn't always fair. So even when I was hauling garbage out to a landfill every day and being tormented by lugheads, I knew I was better than that. They laughed at me and called me "donkey dick," but I never let it get to me because deep down I believed I was special, I had royal blood!

SOUND: (crowd murmuring, commotion)

NARRATOR

A commotion was stirring in the Great Hall. The Viceroy, looking vexed, turned to the Grey Eminences. Dressed in flowing robes, the Grey Eminences approached, and whispered to the Viceroy, who then stepped away and turned to Assam.

THE VICEROY

The Emperor would like to know: After all your trials and tribulations, and after you discovered the truth of your origins,

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what—if anything—have you learned?

NARRATOR

Assam glanced at his friends, then muttered,

ASSAM

(bray) Absolutely everything I was so sure I knew turns out to be dead wrong!

SOUND: (crowd murmuring)

THE VICEROY

Well, most people go through life without ever learning that lesson, so in that regard, you've got an advantage over many.

ASSAM

What kind of a lesson is that?

THE VICEROY

Assume nothing. Ever. Question everything.

NARRATOR

The three Grey Eminences approached the Viceroy and drew him aside again. More whispering among the four elders finally concluded with the Viceroy walking over to the burnished wooden bureau where he

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searched though various drawers, leafing through sheaves of scrolled parchment until he found what he was looking for. He returned to face Assam and unfurled the parchment.

THE VICEROY

In the name of His Majesty the Emperor, and by the powers vested in me, I hereby confer upon you the honorary position of Chief Justice of the Imperial Supreme Court.

SOUND: (crowd applause)

ASSAM

What? I don't understand, I ain't qualified to be a judge!

THE VICEROY

Who is better qualified to be a Judge than one who has rededicated his life to assessing every situation without assumptions, without biases, without predispositions?

ASSAM

But I never even gave a thought to bein' a Judge.

THE VICEROY

All the more reason to become one. And if you never thought about it

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then you haven't built up expectations, preconceptions, assumptions, delusions.

ASSAM

But... I never studied the law.

THE VICEROY

It's not too late to start.

ASSAM

You... you really think so?

THE VICEROY

Of course. As long as you resolve to never make assumptions, to base your judgments solely on what can be observed and demonstrated, then learning the ins and outs of the law will fall into place.

ASSAM

Well, I suppose I would finally be treated with some respect.

THE VICEROY

The utmost, your honour, the utmost!

SOUND: (crowd applause)

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MUSIC: (Vivaldi - Concerto in C for 2 Trumpets)

MUSIC: Blizzard Theme (FADE IN)

NARRATOR

Next: They say "every dog has its day." In Aspire, that turns out to be true for snakes too!

MUSIC: Blizzard Theme (FADE OUT)

[end Chapter 36]