Just a Game

By

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INT. GAME SHOW STUDIO - DAY

A CONTESTANT (30s) and a game show HOST (50s) sit in the middle of a circular stage. They’re surrounded by a packed audience, a la ‘Who Wants to Be A Millionaire’.

Beams of plain light tilt down on the platform where the two sit. Suspenseful music fills the air, emitted from wall-mounted speakers. The host looks directly into the camera and speaks, as though it’s for real. The music stops.

HOST
Welcome, ladies and gentlemen, to our premiere episode of...

The audience enthusiastically chants the show’s name as the announcer says it.

HOST AND AUDIENCE
‘Right or Red’!

The audience cheers.

HOST
For those of you at home, ‘Right or Red’ is the show where right answers put you in the green and wrong answers put you in the red. Answer incorrectly and you’ll still be in the game, but get two consecutive questions wrong and you’re heading home with nothing.

The host invitingly turns toward the contestant.

HOST
It’s time to meet our first contestant. Welcome!

CONTESTANT
I’m very happy to be here.

HOST
And we’re very glad to have you. Now, you said on your application that you’re a police negotiator. Could you tell us a little bit about that?

CONTESTANT
Well, whenever there’s a delicate and potentially dangerous situation in the city, like a suicide attempt
or someone being held hostage, I’m called in to hopefully depressurize it before it gets out of hand.

HOST
Sounds exciting.

CONTESTANT
In its own way, yeah.

HOST
Have you ever failed?

CONTESTANT
Nobody has a perfect track record.

The host starts laughing hysterically as the contestant retains his camera smile. Sparse chuckles can be heard from the audience.

CONTESTANT
It’s not really that funny.

HOST
Okay, contestant! Are you ready to play...

Again the audience says the title along with the host.

HOST
...’Right or Red!’

CONTESTANT
Absolutely!

HOST
Then let’s begin!

An exciting burst of music plays as the lights’ color changes to green.

HOST
Our first question is:

The host pauses dramatically as the contestant licks his lips and takes a breath.

HOST
What famous singer won the Oscar for Best Actress at the sixtieth Academy Awards?
CONTESTANT
Cher.

A quick buzz sounds off and the lights turn red. The contestant frantically looks at them and the crowd, searching for an explanation.

HOST
Oh, that’s not quite right. The correct answer is Barbara Streisand.

CONTESTANT
No it isn’t.

HOST
Are you ready for question--

CONTESTANT
It wasn’t her! I swear to you that if you look it up the answer is indisputably Cher.

The host puts his hand to his ear, addressing his earpiece.

HOST
Jimmy, could you do something to move this along?

The host focuses on the voice from the device, looking away from the confrontational contestant.

HOST
Uh huh. Uh huh. Really. I didn’t know that. I’ll tell them.

The host turns back toward the camera.

HOST
It seems there’s been a bit of a slip-up in the program. The answer to the first question was, in fact, Cher. The contestant will move on to the next question and be put back in the green.

The lights return to being green. The host turns back toward the contestant.

HOST
We’re terribly sorry for the mistake, but in my defense they’re very similar people.
CONTESTANT
No they’re not.

The host very nearly cuts the contestant off.

HOST
Now that that’s been settled are you ready for question 2?!

CONTESTANT
Bring it on!

HOST
Okay. Question two is:

Another pause and more music. The audience is eating it up.

HOST
Whose head did Herodias receive on a platter in the New Testament of the Bible?

CONTESTANT
It has to be John the Baptist.

BUZZ! The lights change to red.

HOST
Close but no cigar. The correct answer is Jesus Christ.

CONTESTANT
I don’t believe this!

HOST
I know. Sometimes we can’t help but be wrong. Next question--

An AUDIENCE MEMBER’s voice bellows from the crowd.

AUDIENCE MEMBER
It wasn’t Jesus!

CONTESTANT
They’re right. It’s pretty obviously not Jesus.

The host puts his finger to his ear.

HOST
Can you give me a fact check on that? Oh. I see. Why didn’t you check before? Well, hindsight’s
HOST

The host turns toward the camera.

HOST
It seems that the document listing the answers to the questions is riddled with inaccuracies, fabrications, and outright slander, and the producers would like to apologize to our gracious contestant.

CONTESTANT
No problem.

HOST
However, the producers have also decided to roll with the concept for today’s episode to make things a little more interesting. So you’re unfortunately still in the red.

CONTESTANT
That’s not fair!

HOST
Tell it to the big man upstairs. His name’s Carl and he likes enchiladas.

The host wheezes out more laughs. The rest of the stage is silent. The contestant looks at the host with disgust, swallowing contempt like the bitterest of pills.

HOST
Are you ready for question three?

CONTESTANT
My appendectomy won’t pay for itself.

HOST
All right! Question three is:

Suspenseful music plays, its tempo sped up due to the contestant being in the red.
HOST
Who was the second president of the United States?

The contestant rigorously thinks about their answer.

CONTESTANT
It was...

HOST
Ten seconds.

Sweat forms on the contestant’s brow as they lean back in their chair, hands clenched together at mouth-level.

HOST
Five seconds.

CONTESTANT
Abraham Lincoln. It was Abraham Lincoln.

BZZZZ! The lights go back to being plain.

HOST
Sorry. It was John F. Kennedy.

The contestant screams.

HOST
Thank you for playing. We’re sorry it didn’t work out but--

CONTESTANT
Who wrote that answer sheet?

HOST
I’m sorry?

CONTESTANT
I wanna know who wrote that answer sheet. Somebody’s gonna pay for this.

The host addresses his earpiece.

HOST
Can you send in some security? Why not? I don’t care if it’s juicy television! I...Yes, sir.
CONTESTANT
What’d he say?

HOST
I wrote it. Okay?

CONTESTANT
What?

HOST
I’m the one who drafted and submitted the answer sheet for today’s episode. Satisfied now?

CONTESTANT
What about your writers?

HOST
We don’t have any writers. We didn’t have the budget for it so I had to come up with the questions and answers for today’s show.

CONTESTANT
You couldn’t look up the answers before submitting it?

HOST
I was pretty sure I was right!

CONTESTANT
Oh my god.

HOST
I’m sorry you lost but under the new guidelines implemented by the producers--

CONTESTANT
Do you drink bleach in your spare time?

HOST
Now, that kind of vitriol isn’t necessary.

CONTESTANT
Have you ever worked as a crash-test dummy? Do you suffocate yourself to fall asleep?
HOST
Please stop.

CONTESTANT
Has anyone in your entire life held you responsible for any wrongdoing you’ve ever committed?

The host leans forward and pulls a pistol from the back of the waist of his pants. He fires it into the air, rubble from the ceiling falling near the two.

The crowd screams, its members ducking behind their seats. The contestant jumps from the noise, then cautiously raising their hands in front of them. The host points the gun at the contestant.

HOST
Don’t talk about me like that!

The contestant looks toward the producer’s booth, arms still in the direction of the host.

CONTESTANT
Who let him bring a gun?!

HOST
I’m not stupid!

The host pulls the hammer back with his thumb. The contestant reverts their attention back to the crazed gunman.

CONTESTANT
Take it easy now.

HOST
All my life everybody’s been calling me stupid and I haven’t been able to do anything about it. Well, that changes today.

The host further extends his arm, preparing to shoot.

HOST
Starting with you!

In a flash of movement the contestant forces the hosts arm to point back toward the ceiling as the host takes the shot. More debris falls.
The contestant punches the host in the face with their free hand, knocking him out. The contestant grabs the gun from the unconscious host’s hand and stands up. The contestant addresses the startled crowd.

CONTESTANT
Comrades and countrymen! We are no longer subjected to the whims of the uninformed elite!

Audience members begin standing up again.

CONTESTANT
We are again free to enforce fact as fact and stand up to those who say otherwise!

More audience members stand up as triumphant resistance music begins to play.

CONTESTANT
We are not sheep, and we are not led as such! Together we can unite the people under a banner of knowledge and confidence, rather than lies and placation!

The whole crowd is standing now. The music is distinctly noticeable at this point.

CONTESTANT
Who’s with me?!

The entire audience cheers. As the cheering quiets down we discover something unexpected: the contestant is a baritone.

CONTESTANT
(singing)
Stand tall, friends, arms in hand. Freedom reigns o’er the land. Never will we fall once more. Now’s the age of splendor!

The music climatically rises with the contestant’s voice, reaching an explosive finale on their last note. The audience cheers, some of its members waving around large American flags, as confetti falls from the ceiling.

ZOOM OUT FROM TV:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY
An average CITIZEN in an undershirt and jeans watches the show from a ratty chair with his legs on a rattier footstool. He has his remote control in hand.

CITIZEN
Too political.

As he turns off the TV we...

CUT TO BLACK