

ONLY A GAME

A short play

by

Peter Snoad

Peter Snoad
50 Dunster Road
Jamaica Plain, MA 02130
(617) 522-4219
(617) 650-2325
psnoad@yahoo.com
www.petersnoad.com

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ONLY A GAME

CHARACTERS
INGRID SLUICE
JACKIE
CHUCK
CHRISTINA

TIME
The present

PLACE
A TV studio

ONLY A GAME

A TV studio. A game show called “Wait, Wait, Don’t Smell Me” is being recorded. The three contestants – JACKIE, CHUCK and CHRISTINA – stand behind individual podiums in an arc. The show’s host, INGRID SLUICE, roams across the stage. At rise, we hear the show’s overblown theme music and rapturous reception from the “live audience” (canned laughter and applause.)

INGRID

(Gushing, to the audience)

Thank you, thank you, thank you, everyone, and welcome to “Wait, Wait, Don’t Smell Me!”. The show about everything because everything stinks! I’m your host, Ingrid Sluice. This is our first time on the air, America, and it’s great to be with you!

Wild applause.

Let’s meet our People’s Panel. Regular folks like you who love America and smell good. First, Jackie. Say hello Jackie.

JACKIE

Hello Jackie.

Laughter and groans from the audience.
JACKIE smirks.

INGRID

Jackie, you’re a hedge fund analyst.

JACKIE

I was. Now I’m in sales.

INGRID

Really. Where?

JACKIE

Burger King.

INGRID

Great! And you certainly are very chipper! And fabulously fragrant. Do I detect Prada Intense? Yes, I thought so. Next to Jackie we have Chuck. And if I'm not mistaken, Chuck is wearing Gentleman by Givenchy—great choice, manly but subtle. How you doing tonight, Chuck?

CHUCK

I'm good.

INGRID

I bet you are! And what do you do?

CHUCK

What do you want?

INGRID

I mean, for work.

CHUCK

I'm a hooker.

INGRID

Great! And how long have you been... turning tricks?

CHUCK

Eight years. One year as a kerb-crawler, seven as a sub-prime mortgage broker.

INGRID

Tough transition.

CHUCK

No. Same skills set.

INGRID

Yes, well, good luck Chuck! Last but not least, we have Christina. Who smells deliciously of roast duck.

CHRISTINA

Hi.

INGRID

Christina is a chef.

CHRISTINA

I wish. Right now I'm thirty thousand dollars in debt from cooking school, I can't find a job, and I'm homeless.

Applause for the brave girl.

INGRID

That's my gal! She's virtually bankrupt but she still wants to play America's game!

More rapturous applause.

All right! We're going to start tonight's contest with a round of "What Is That Fucking Awful Smell?" Fingers on buzzers. Here we go.

INGRID brings out an atomizer and sprays into the air. The contestants sniff rapidly and competitively. After barely a second, CHRISTINA presses her buzzer.

Christina.

CHRISTINA

Ramen noodles.

INGRID

No.

CHRISTINA

Seriously?

CHUCK presses his buzzer.

INGRID

Chuck.

CHUCK

Throw-up.

INGRID

From what?

CHUCK

Champagne. Dom Perignon Rose ninety-five. Oh man, back in the day, I mean, every office stank of it, and the stains on the carpets, they were like, Art. Amazing.

No. INGRID

Huh. The ninety-six? CHUCK

INGRID
Different vintage entirely I'm afraid, Chuck. Or should I call you up-Chuck?! Jackie, your chance to take an early lead.

Yeah, okay, er— JACKIE

Five seconds. INGRID

JACKIE
(Sniffing hard)
Oh God, I don't know...It kinda reminds me of the composter they used to have down at Occupy Wall Street—

A bell clangs to signify a correct answer.
The audience cheers. JACKIE looks surprised and delighted.

INGRID
Occupy Compost! That's right. Ninety-nine percent organic for the ninety-nine percent! Congratulations, Jackie. You have just earned yourself fifty points *and* a special bonus prize! Seven nights in the Motel Six of your choice when you're evicted from your foreclosed home!

Applause.

And the coupons are transferable. Makes a great gift.

Oscar Night theme music and flashing lights. Excited gasps and applause from the audience.

And now America's Number One challenge: "Extreme Celebrity Smells"!

INGRID picks up a jewel-studded casket and crosses to JACKIE.

INGRID (CONT.)

Jackie, you're in the hot seat again. This is it, this is your moment. And if you win.... the reward is priceless. You become an instant celebrity!!

Ecstatic applause.

But remember: sticking your nose in this casket will expose you to some totally extreme risks.

JACKIE

Like what?

INGRID

PIES -- Painfully Inflated Ego Syndrome. Terminal insincerity. Addiction to botox.

JACKIE

But I could be rich, right?

INGRID

Of course, Jackie, this is America. What do you say? Are you willing to play "Extreme Celebrity Smells"?

JACKIE

Yes, I am.

Applause.

INGRID

Great! You have ten seconds to name the offending celebrity *and* the item in the casket. Are you ready?

JACKIE nods. Drum roll. INGRID whips the lid off the casket with a flourish and holds it in front of JACKIE. The game clock ticks loudly. JACKIE dips her head, takes a sniff, staggers back; gasps of concern from the audience. She recovers and concentrates ferociously.

JACKIE

Underpants...er...er....

INGRID

Three seconds.

JACKIE

Newt Gingrich's underpants!

The gong sounds, signifying a correct answer. Frenetic applause. JACKIE beams. INGRID puts a congratulatory arm around her.

INGRID

Yes, siree, when hot-tempered Newt loses control... he loses control. Jackie darling, you've done it again! And this little baby could fetch you a small fortune on e-Bay. But keep it tightly sealed or it'll walk away on its own.

A giant cowpat lands on the stage with a loud plop. INGRID, JACKIE, CHUCK, and CHRISTINA ostentatiously hold their noses. The audience breaks into a chorus of "Peeeeeee-uuuuuu".

INGRID

Yes, America, it's time for our most popular segment, "What A Bunch Of Bullshit"!

Applause. The contestants don cow-horn headgear.

CHRISTINA

Ingrid?

INGRID

Yes, Christina?

CHRISTINA

This is nauseating.

INGRID

It is a very large turd.

CHRISTINA

Yes, but—

INGRID

Hold your nose and hang in there, sweetheart, because America has voted!

(Addressing the TV audience)

We posted three statements by major public figures on our website, and we asked you to decide which of them is the biggest bunch of...

(Gesturing to the audience to yell with her...)

BULLSHIT!

CHRISTINA

(Reading from a card)

“Customer satisfaction is our number one priority.” Kenneth Lewis, CEO, Bank of America.

INGRID

Chuck?

CHUCK

(Reading from a card)

“We are winning the war in Afghanistan.” President Obama.

INGRID

Jackie.

JACKIE

(Reading from a card)

“Campaign contributions from corporations do not influence the way I vote.”

INGRID

Who said that?

JACKIE

Five hundred and thirty members of Congress.

INGRID

And the others?

JACKIE

They abstained.

CHUCK presses his buzzer.

INGRID

So who is it, Chuck? Who is this week’s biggest all-America bullshitter?

CHUCK

The Bank of America guy.

INGRID

Really?

CHUCK

Customers my ass! Their number one priority is making money. You know what I'd like to do? I'd like to take his little piggie face and rub it in that shit pile right there—

INGRID

Chuck, please. Bankers and billionaires are people, too.

JACKIE presses her buzzer.

Jackie.

JACKIE

Obama. We've been in Afghanistan eleven years, and we're not winning anything. And he knows it. We should get the hell out now.

CHRISTINA

(Waving a card)

There's a fourth contender.

INGRID

Christina—

CHRISTINA

(To the TV audience)

This one wasn't on the website, but it should have been.

INGRID

Christina—

CHRISTINA

(Reading from a card)

“Wait, Wait, Don't Smell Me is a cynical rip-off of a great NPR game show. We only did it to make a shitload of money.” Ingrid Sluice.

INGRID

But that's not a lie, that's the truth!

CHRISTINA

It's still bullshit, and people should vote on it!

INGRID

(To the TV audience)
America, you have made your choice—

CHRISTINA

We need another vote.

INGRID

And when we come back—

CHRISTINA

(Overlapping)
We need real democracy!

CHUCK and JACKIE

Yeah!

INGRID

I apologize on behalf of all of us here at Fox Television—

CHRISTINA, CHUCK, JACKIE

(Advancing on INGRID and chanting)
This is what democracy looks like!

INGRID

No, this is what mob rule looks like, this is what censorship looks like!
Will you please stop! Stop!

CHRISTINA, CHUCK, JACKIE

(Chanting, overlapping)
This is what democracy looks like!

INGRID

Ladies and gentlemen, obviously we can't continue with the show—

CHRISTINA, CHUCK, JACKIE

(Overlapping)
This is what democracy looks like!

INGRID

Join us next week and we'll tell you what they won't let us tell you
tonight: *your* choice of America's biggest bullshitter.

CHRISTINA, CHUCK, JACKIE

(Overlapping)

This is what democracy looks like! This is what democracy looks like!

The chanting fades into the show's closing theme music. The show goes off the air. The music stops, the lights go up. INGRID turns to CHRISTINA, all business.

INGRID

What happened? Why didn't you punch me?

CHRISTINA

I don't know, I...

INGRID

You totally missed your cue.

CHRISTINA

I just couldn't bring myself to do it. Okay?

INGRID

No, not okay, you're fired.

CHUCK

Wait a minute—

INGRID

We need violence for the ratings. He-llo!

CHRISTINA

That's bullshit.

INGRID

Exactly!

Blackout

END OF PLAY

