

TELL HER WHAT SHE'S WON, JOHNNY...

by

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Contact:
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CAST OF CHARACTERS

RUTH TRAVELER, 40s, college professor

ISABELLA BAUMFREE, ageless, a spirit

PETER CULVER, 40s, America's favorite game show host

FRANK COOPER, late 50s, the most successful game show producer in TV history

LIONEL, 30s, an elevator operator or make-up man, depending on the day of the week

CONTESTANT 2, 30s, a homemaker from Plattsburgh, New York

CONTESTANT 3, 50s, a uranium miner from Bimiji, Minnesota

JOHNNY GLEASON, 50s, TV announcer (voice only)

PETER, 50s, director of "Do It For The Money" (voice only)

MAKE-UP MAN 1, 40s (voice only)

MAKE-UP MAN 2, late 40s (voice only)

SETTINGS

Make-up room of Universal Broadcast Network

Set of "Do It For The Money"

PRODUCTION NOTES

"Tell Her What She's Won, Johnny..." takes place in December of 1955 in New York City at the East Coast studios of the Universal Broadcasting Network. Scenes that take place in the make-up room and the interview room can just be represented by a single chair in a spotlight.

For the set of the game show, it should be typical 1950s game show esthetic: glitzy, shiny, loud, bells, whistles, things that spin. American excess at its finest. There is an isolation booth, but an actual booth isn't necessary, just something that suggests isolation - a spotlight, a platform, etc.

The clothing of the actors should also reflect the 1950 as well.



ACT I, SCENE 3

The studios of the Universal Broadcasting Network. Specifically, the set of the game show "Do It For The Money," the No. 1 game show in America! The unseen BOOTH DIRECTOR barks orders. RUTH sits alone behind the contestant's area. The BOOTH DIRECTOR speaks.

BOOTH DIRECTOR

I'm getting shadows! Hello, anybody? I'm getting shadows!

RUTH looks around, not sure where the voice comes from.

RUTH

Me?

BOOTH DIRECTOR

No, not you, sweetheart.

RUTH

Sorry, I just thought you were...

BOOTH DIRECTOR

Can someone fix the light like I asked? Tilt it left.

Light is adjusted. To the right.

(To unseen person) Goddammit, I said to the left!

RUTH fidgets, unsure if she should do something.

RUTH

Would it help if I got out of the way?

BOOTH DIRECTOR

(Terse) The lighting's for you, sweetheart, I'll tell you when to move. (Pause) Camera one, pull back. (Pause) Can you turn and face me? (Pause) Sweetheart, turn and face me, alright?

RUTH

Me?

BOOTH DIRECTOR

No, the other sweetheart. Yes, YOU. Face me.

RUTH

I don't know where you are.

BOOTH DIRECTOR

Up here? Big glass booth?

RUTH looks up, squinting into the light.

Great, thanks. (muttering) Jesus...

RUTH

I'm sorry, I don't know what I'm supposed to be doing here.

BOOTH DIRECTOR

It's television, nobody does. (Pause) WHERE'S THE GODDAMN CLOCK? The goddamn clock is supposed to be on the set!

*RUTH is startled and unnerved.
PETER CULVER comes over to her,
carrying a clipboard.*

PETER CULVER

Relax. Phil gets JUST a little anxious before a show.

BOOTH DIRECTOR

Fuck you, Peter.

PETER CULVER

Phil! Language! We've got company! (To RUTH) Seriously, he's the best in the biz. (Extends hand to RUTH) Peter Culver, host of this little game show we call (Enthusiastically) "DO IT FOR THE MONEY!"

RUTH

Hi, I'm...

PETER CULVER

No introduction necessary, I know who you are.

RUTH

You do?

A booming professional voice cuts in. It's famed television announcer Johnny Marks!

JOHNNY

Peter, this is Misses Ruth Traveler of New York City, New York.

*It scared the shit out of RUTH.
PETER just smiles.*

PETER CULVER

Have you met Johnny?

RUTH

No, and I still don't think I have.

PETER CULVER

That's Johnny Gleason, legendary announcer for "Do It For Money."

JOHNNY

As well as for other popular shows on UBN such as "The Claire Daniels Variety Show", "The Old Plantation Detergent Hour" and "The Jimmerson's Beer Playhouse of Stars." And now, back to you, Peter...

PETER CULVER

Thanks, Johnny.

RUTH

Is he... around here somewhere?

PETER CULVER

He's somewhere. Not sure. But you! You're here!

RUTH

Indeed I am.

PETER CULVER

You've been the talk of the studio for weeks now.

RUTH

I have?

PETER CULVER

You're already a legend. Ruth Traveler! We're all glad you're here!

RUTH

Well, I'm glad to be here myself...

PETER CULVER

Well... most of us. Anyway, I'M glad you're on the show.

RUTH

I have to admit I'm a little...

PETER CULVER

Nervous? Don't be. It's just a simple game show. Answer some questions, win some prizes.

RUTH

Yes, but, television...

PETER CULVER

AND you're exactly who they're looking for. Perfect.

RUTH

I'm who they're looking for? Who's "they"?

PETER CULVER

Well, first, our advertisers. They pay the bills. And they want the right look.

RUTH

And I have the right look.

PETER CULVER

Indeed. You're very... television friendly.

RUTH

Television friendly? What does that...

PETER CULVER

The tests we did earlier? You do well on camera.

RUTH

I do?

PETER CULVER

Most definitely. AND you're very intelligent. From what I've read.

RUTH

You've read...?

PETER CULVER

(Looks at clipboard) College professor. That's very important, particularly in this situation.

RUTH

This is a "situation?"

PETER CULVER

We've screened others, but... they weren't right.

RUTH

Others. For this "situation."

PETER CULVER

Perhaps "situation" isn't the right word. "Occasion."
"Special event." (Thinking, then...) "HISTORICAL event!"

RUTH

Historical? I'm sorry, this is "Do It For The Money," correct?

PETER CULVER

America's number one nationally televised game show.

RUTH

And I'm an "historical event." On a game show.

PETER CULVER

Number ONE game show.

RUTH

Number one, thank you. Why is this "historical?"

PETER CULVER

They didn't tell you? Surely they told you.

RUTH

They didn't tell me whatever they surely should have told me.

PETER CULVER

(To BOOTH DIRECTOR) Phil, no one discussed this with her?

BOOTH DIRECTOR

Don't bother me, Peter.

RUTH

What wasn't discussed with me?

PETER CULVER

(To no one) Goddammit! Pardon my French. Goddamnit.

RUTH

Can you please tell...

*PETER composes himself to deliver
THE BIG NEWS.*

PETER CULVER

(Dramatically) Miss Traveler...

RUTH

Misses.

PETER CULVER

Ruth. (Dramatic pause) I'm trying to find the words...

RUTH

You need to find words?

PETER CULVER

Ruth Traveler. You are... about to become... the first Negro...

Long uncomfortable pause.

RUTH

I'm assuming there's more to that sentence.

PETER CULVER

...the first Negro... to appear... (Dramatic pause) on a nationally televised network game show.

A moment to let it sink in.
I'll give you a moment to let that sink in.

RUTH

(Thinking) Ok. Well, I... the first Negro. On a nationally televised network game show. (Pause) I am?

PETER CULVER

I'd assumed someone told you but, yes, Ruth Traveler, you are going to be the first Negro to appear...

RUTH

On ANY game show?

PETER CULVER

On any NETWORK game show. Ever. Beat The Clock? No Negro. The Price is Right? No Negro. The \$64,000 Question? No Negro. Dr. IQ? Do You Trust Your Wife? Report Card for Parents? Back That Fact? No Negro, no Negro, no Negro, no Negro. Until now.

PETER CULVER pauses, pleased with himself and waits for her to become overwhelmed with emotion.

RUTH

(Underwhelmed) Ok, well, that's... I mean, I just assumed... It's 1955.

PETER CULVER

And high time Negroes were allowed to compete for fabulous prizes just like regular folks.

RUTH

(Thinking) So, the first Negro...

PETER CULVER

Yes, it's a big moment, but don't worry. I'm rooting for you.

RUTH

So there's been no other...

PETER CULVER

Not one Negro. Until you.

RUTH

But there are, like, a million game shows on television. How am I the first?

PETER CULVER

Frankly, Ruth, I think we both know the answer to that.

RUTH
Well, yes, segregation
probably has...

PETER CULVER
(Interrupting) Marketing.

RUTH
Marketing? As in...

PETER CULVER
As in how do you sell the Negro to America?

RUTH
That's actually been done before...

PETER CULVER
(Oblivious) How do you market the Negro to the American
public? Create a demand for the Negro? It's an interesting
proposition, don't you think?

RUTH
I can honestly say the thought has never crossed my mind.

PETER CULVER
Well, it's been on the minds of America's television game
show producers, I can assure you. I mean, Negroes. On a game
show. How?

RUTH
And that's been a problem?

PETER CULVER
Do we highlight the fact you're a Negro? Or do we NOT make a
big deal out of it? Do we ask questions that might appeal to
a new Negro audience?

RUTH
Such as...?

PETER CULVER
Well, music, sports obviously...

RUTH
(Dryly) Obviously.

PETER CULVER
Or do we ask the same questions we ask our regular
contestants?

RUTH

You mean like history, geography, science - general information available to everyone regardless of race, religion...

PETER CULVER

(Ignoring) Should Negroes only compete against other Negroes? What sort of prizes do we offer Negroes? For instance, a fifteen-place silver tea set - would a Negro want that?

RUTH

I never considered how that could be a problem.

PETER CULVER

But we're looking to the future. Because, gosh darn it, it's 1955 and it's time. Don't you feel it's time?

RUTH

I suppose. I didn't realize... Are you sure? NO Negroes?

PETER CULVER

Not a one. But that ends. Today. Ruth Traveler, "Do It For The Money" is going to make television history. With you.

RUTH

(Thinking) I'm not sure how I feel about that.

PETER CULVER

About what?

RUTH

About making history. I'm not sure I want to make history.

PETER CULVER

That's the best part. You don't have to do anything. You can just BE history.

RUTH

Because I'm Negro.

PETER CULVER

Yes!

RUTH

Not to sound ungrateful, but simply being Negro shouldn't be a historic achievement. I should just be...

PETER CULVER

Au contraire. This is big. Big for you, big for television, and big for the Negro. This will be just... BIG! (Looks at watch) I'm due in make-up. Love those guys. We'll talk soon.

PETER CULVER leaves. RUTH looks on with consternation. ISABELLA BAUMFREE slowly appears from the shadows. She is wearing clothes from a different era. The 1800s to be precise.

ISABELLA BAUMFREE

Where there is so much racket, there must be something out of kilter.

END OF SCENE 3