“ED & LARRY ARE RED”

A SHORT PLAY BY SAM GRABER

ESTIMATED RUN TIME – 10 MINUTES

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SUMMARY

In a dank dungeon, two statisticians tabulate data.

*Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* meets *The West Wing*.

CHARACTERS (3 M, 1 F)

ED, 30s, white, a mole near his right nostril

LARRY, 30s, a man of Chinese, Mexican and Irish descent

LEO McGARRY, 50s, dapper, looks a lot like John Spencer

CJ CREGG, 40s, tall woman, looks a lot like Allison Janney

TIME

Sometime between September 22, 1999 and May 14, 2006.

SETTING

A dank dungeon.

FIRST PERFORMANCE

*Ed & Larry Are Red* was first performed at the MN Shorts Festival on September 6, 2012, directed by Scott Pakudaitis, sound design by Scott Moore, with cast:

ED – John Eichenlaub

LARRY – Adam Sharp

LEO & CJ – Cynthia Uhrich
THE PLAY

ED stares into a computer monitor on his desk. His suit coat hangs over the back of his chair.

LARRY at the other desk marks a piece of paper.

ED
Red.

LARRY
Yep.

ED
Red.

LARRY
Yep.

ED
Red.

LARRY
Got it.

ED
Red.

LARRY
Uh-huh.

ED
Red.

LARRY
That’s five in a row.

ED
Red.

LARRY
Don’t you find that bizarre?
ED

That the first five are all red.

LARRY

Yes.

ED

I don’t find it bizarre, no.

LARRY

Because when you think about the natural tendency of independent outcome events to render equal, fifty-fifty incidence, in our case blue or red, the first five respondents all coming back red seems a tad bizarre.

ED

It’s not that bizarre.

LARRY

I’m just, you know, keenly panicked about predetermined outcome in what should otherwise be random chance.

ED

Which would be the case if we were flipping a coin. But this isn’t heads-tails. This is a political poll. These are respondents infirm with political afflications.

LARRY

The red has to stop, okay? We can’t go to Leo or CJ with all red. Sam’s finishing up the speech.

ED

Sam’s not done?

LARRY

He needs our analysis to write the final section. Entire oceans of political ideology stemming from the very data you and I collect in this room. This very dark dungeon.

ED

Can we get back to this?

LARRY

No sun.
[Reading] Red.

No doors.

Red.

You know what I mean, Larry.

You’re Larry. I’m Ed.

We’re getting nametags.

Blue.

Finally!

Just kidding.

Oh, God. The red has got to stop!

Ed, relax.

Larry.

Larry, relax. Just forget what we’re doing here is the cornerstone of America’s future. We’ll blame it on sampling error, or rounding error, or…they’re coming.

*ED & LARRY* leap from their chairs, throwing on suit coats, as *LEO and CJ* enter.
CJ CREGG
He’s all right?

LEO
President Bartlet’s about to be censured, and then he’s going to deliver the State of the Union. My guess is there are some things on his mind.

CJ CREGG
Which one’s Ed, which one’s Larry?

ED & LARRY
Doesn’t matter.

LEO
Five minutes, guys.

LEO and CJ are out.

ED
You think they know?

LARRY
No way.

ED
Fools. Even us. It’s a sad state. We started with such little ambition. Pilgrims on the Mayflower. Now look at us. We got a death tax and no right on red.

LARRY
You think the pilgrims wanted no right on red?

ED
I think the pilgrims just wanted to get off the boat.

LARRY
What they wanted was Virginia. They got Massachusetts.

ED
What we want and what we get can be that far apart.

LARRY’s desk phone rings.

LARRY
This is Ed.
ED

Larry.

LARRY
Right, it doesn’t matter. Um...we’re compiling. You know, unbiased compiling.

ED
[To himself] Unbiased.

LARRY
But we need to run a...right, five minutes.

*LARRY hangs up the phone.*

ED
Red.

LARRY
Real decisions are based on this data.

ED
Red.

LARRY
Affecting millions of millions.

ED
Are you getting down these reds?

LARRY
But we’re not pollsters. They know that. We’re statisticians. That’s probably what’s kept us safe so far. Nobody suspects statisticians.

ED
Those were two more reds.

LARRY
What do you think about the law of probability?

ED
I think thinking interferes with a lot of things.
LARRY
You think, as a statistician, who correlates and presents data to the leader of the free world, that you shouldn’t think?

ED
It’s enough taking it all in without having to think about it, red.

LARRY
[Heavy sarcasm] What are the odds?

ED
Stop worrying already, red.

LARRY
You’re right, with our national debt, why worry?

ED
That’s what I say, red.

LARRY
Let me propose something bold. What if we were actually to present fact?

ED
Hmmm, ugly word. Carries a pretense of validation.

LARRY
Precisely why I want to bring up probability.

ED
You’re making my head implode.

LARRY
Go with that. What’s the probability we cause the entire nation to implode?

ED
Just jinx the whole thing.

LARRY
I’m not jinxing.

ED
You’re invoking.
LARRY
It’s all red. You couldn’t find a blue note around here if Coltrane was still alive.

ED
We’re not in the fact business. We report its sexier cousin: trend with a punch line.

LARRY
Sam’s speech is going to bomb.

ED
That’s the idea.

LARRY
They’ll say it’s our fault.

ED
We didn’t write the speech.

LARRY
We presented the data.

ED
When have you and I ever been considered a culprit of influence?

LARRY
Even data needs someone to dress it up and call it a name.

ED
They don’t know our names! We don’t know our names! We’re statisticians in a dungeon and we don’t even know our…showtime.

LEO and CJ enter, flipping through paper.

CJ CREGG
Do the two of you ever go anywhere separately?

ED & LARRY
It’s weird, isn’t it?

LEO
Five minutes, guys. I’m serious.

LEO and CJ are out.
LARRY
How much time until the State Of The Union?

ED
Five minutes, apparently.

LARRY
Maybe we should stop talking to each other. Statisticians shouldn’t talk to each other. We could unknowingly infuse bias.

ED
Will you stop.

LARRY
The speech is going to bomb and they’re finally going to know it was us.

ED
Wait a second. Do you even know where we are?

LARRY
Hell’s green room.

ED
It’s all so familiar.

LARRY
Because we’ve been here. Here. Wherever this is. Distilling mounds of red and not-blue into sound bitelets of political chicanery.

ED
A slippery slope.

LARRY
That’s right.

ED
Unwarranted extrapolation.

LARRY
What I’ve been saying.

ED
With a dash of confusion between correlation and causation!
LARRY
Preach!

ED
Today’s politics is statistics with a shelf-life!

LARRY
And it used to be a skeptical public. They used to question the source. Now they don’t even question the question. Haven’t we got them trained.

ED
Question: Would you be more likely to vote for President Bartlet, blue, or his political adversary, red, if President Bartlet, blue, proposed to make college free through creating billions in new federal revenues by selling off Texas, red.

LARRY
We put out calls. We tallied responses. Somehow all red. Consider this: we give these reds the question again. Naturally, we should see some of them turn blue. Why? Everyone regresses to the mean. Happens every time. Comes down to a couple percentage points and some district in Ohio.

ED
Statisticians are like condoms. We get rolled out whenever someone’s gonna be screwed.

LARRY
That’s not why our data is screwed, Ed.

ED
Red.

LARRY
That’s not why it’s coming back all red, Larry.

ED
Red.

LARRY
Has nothing to do with the question, or who’s being measured.

ED
Red.
LARRY
It has to do with who collects the data.

ED
Red.

LARRY
And it’s all red because what nobody knows…is that you and I are Republican.

The phone rings. They look at it.

ED
They’re going to figure out we’ve been making it all up.

LARRY
Being a statistician means never having to say you’re sure.

ED
We have to tell them something!

ED
Alright, here it is. Tell them…the data looks good.

LARRY
The data looks good. Smart.

ED
Can’t pin us one way or the other.

LARRY picks up the phone.

LARRY
Hey Sam, it’s Larr—. Right, you don’t care. The data looks good.

LARRY hangs up.

They sit.

They stare.

END OF PLAY.