

UPSTATE GIRL

By

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INT. TV BROADCAST STUDIO - NIGHT - A MONTH IN THE FUTURE

A few moments in the smooth hustle of a slick television production studio. But something has gone wrong: tech and production, on-air talent -- all stand nearly frozen in shocked silence. It lasts for an eternal minute.

EXT. TRAILER HOME - NIGHT - A MONTH IN THE PAST

A tour around -- from the muddy driveway with a couple of old jalopies, to the side yard with a pile of cigarette butts, then the back, with rusty farm implements and an upturned bathtub sheltering a pockmarked statue of the Virgin Mary.

Dim lamplight comes through a dirty window of the house, showing a shadowy figure throwing things at a wall.

INT. TRAILER HOME - NIGHT

JOSIE PATNODE (JO) - 19, sturdy and strong yet slumped as though hiding in her baggy clothes, nails a round of darts with total badass precision.

Satisfied, she sits down to study. Her desk has a stack of textbooks -- 'PRINCIPLES OF JOURNALISM', 'MODERN MEDIA STUDIES' -- next to piles of back issues of *The City Times*.

In the pre-dawn haze, Jo sees a line of vehicles speeding toward the house with just their low-beam fog lights on. She bolts up. She knows what is about to happen.

JO

NO! Dad, Daddy wake up get out of here! Wake up come on there's cops!

She bolts the front door shut as FBI agents encircle the house. She drags chairs up against the kitchen door, but an agent is already using an electric drill to remove the front door from its hinges. The agents rush in as Jo freaks out.

JO

NO STOP WAIT! He only marched! He didn't go in, he didn't hurt anyone
WAIT DON'T DAAAAAAD NO no no!

They pull her dad, MATHIEU - 40s, lanky, handsome, easygoing manner - out to the car through the front-door shaped hole, and drive away as Jo sobs on the ratty carpet.

INT. TRAILER HOME - DAY - NOW

The door is feebly re-attached. Jo's mom YVETTE - 40s, rail-thin, bedraggled and hardened by life, rubs her feet while watching Looks News, in her waitress uniform.

YVETTE

You're running late again!

JO

(from her room)

But the chickens are already dead,
so.

The polished blond anchor signs off.

ANCHOR (ON TV)

We wish our viewers a pleasant evening. YOU are the real America, and we getcha!

JO

Gets us my ass.

YVETTE

Well I don't know who gets you.

JO

Look at that dress Mom. Costs more than I'll make this whole month.

YVETTE

Oh for pete's sake, the station buys their clothes.

JO

Right so, she gets people who buy our own clothes. At ValueWorld.

YVETTE

Jo you gotta let go of this news thing, it's making us all nuts. ARE YOU READY TO GO?

JO

I'm going, watch me go, as I seek my highest calling and life goals.

YVETTE

Good honey have a good shift.

JO

Yeah I'm disemboweling chickens.

As she leaves, she makes a call, gets voicemail.

FEMALE VOICE

The light in me honors the light in
you. I look forward to connecting.

Jo holds the phone to heart for a moment.

INT. TRUCK - DAY

Passing payday loan shops, adult video stores, and fast food,
Jo and her mutt Cronkite ride with NIC - 20, identifies as
non-binary, ever-buoyant, natty dresser - in their old F-150.

JO

Sleep. That must cost extra.

NIC

I don't mind going by myself today!

JO

Nah, I miss the place. It's
uplifting.

NIC

Well you're off the hook anyway.

JO

Nic I reek of chicken guts.

NIC

Yeah jesus, open the damn window!

JO

Hilarious.

NIC

You could have tried for one of the
office positions.

JO

Yeah I'm impressive, with my one
semester all racked up. But anyway
the gut scraping pays an extra two
bucks an hour!

NIC

Two bucks eh? Get a load of us, we
are LIVIN' THE LIFE!

They pass the prison and Jo becomes downcast.

NIC

Did you have your weekend visit?

JO

Yeah. Still waiting for a court date. Ok you ready? (using a deep voice) Miz Trombley - because you know she's going to deadname you - Miz Trombley are you actively seeking work? What positions have you applied for? Is your resume in tip-top shape, Trombley?

NIC

Ma'am, I am a work-seeking MACHINE! And I will SUCCEED because my skills and talents, well ... yeah.

JO

And which skills and talents would those be, exactly, Miz?

NIC

Well like my ... outstanding understanding and my insightful insight! Stuff like that!

They sing along to music like the Eagles on the radio.

NIC & JO

'Life in the fast lane, sure to make you lose your mind...'

INT. UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICE - DAY

Clutching paper numbers, glum people wait in grubby plastic chairs. Looks News plays on a small corner TV, with jubilant stock market traders and happy music.

JO

Assholes.

NIC

Oh geez don't even watch it. Makes you nuts.

CLERK

Ms. Trombley, I see you're back.

NIC

Hey Brandi good to see ya! I'm not actually a miz though, I go by Mix Trombley, or just Nic is good. How you been?

CLERK

MIX? Oh please Nicole. And you know the dog can't come in, Jo.

JO

Aw but Cronkite has his application all filled out! He's ready to sniff out some gainful employment.

The clerk ignores this as Jo takes Cronkite outside.

NIC

So, I put in an application at the prison. For a custodial position.

INT. PARKED TRUCK - DAY

Jo watches Nic storm out of the office, shouting.

NIC

Why'd I vote for that asshole?

JO

What?

NIC

The new governor empowered Little Miss High Horse in there ...

JO

Ohhh that dude. Looks endorsed him.

NIC

Fuck she made me mad. She was like, just get a babysitter for your Mom, blablablabla.

JO

You up a creek?

NIC

Got enough diapers for like three more days.

JO

I get paid end of the week. I can help you guys out.

NIC
Thanks babe, but...

JO
I know. That's not gonna solve the problem.

NIC
There's only poor people jobs around here. I can work at the Dollarama.

JO
Get ten percent off outdated food! Life upgrade, right there.

Nic is head down, silent.

JO
(bad British accent)
We're living in a fucking ruin.

NIC
Heard that somewhere.

JO
Silva to Bond in Skyfall. Minus the fuck, I think. Yeah. Minus the fuck. Remember Liberty Elementary? What a hole. I was five and I was like man, this is a dump.

Nic remains silent.

JO
C'mon Nic, we don't have to stay here forever. There's places where people won't hate you for just being you.

NIC
They don't mean to be that way. It's really a gift, because I can...

JO
Be a teacher. You can teach them.

Jo is frustrated; this is a conversation they have on repeat.

NIC
How would you get your poutine fix if we left here?

(MORE)

NIC (CONT'D)

You'd have to pack out, like the
five-gallon buckets of poutine.

JO

Oh, you like my poutine lard ass.

They embrace and kiss, and Nic starts up the steamy truck.

INT. TRUCKEE'S DINER - NIGHT

Regulars sit around - PERRY, 60s, grizzled like a bear, and Big Al, 50s, very large in overalls and muddy boots. Looks plays on multiple screens, currently featuring PARKER MITCHELL -- 30, Black, extremely fit, sharply suited.

Jo struggles to make coffee.

PARKER MITCHELL (ON TV)

Coming up next, we'll take a look
at the latest bit of double talk
from America's liberal elites.

BIG AL

Damn right. Libtards.

JO

Oh Jesus Al.

YVETTE

You WILL NOT take the name of the
lord in vain in my restaurant!

JO

Wait, did you buy this place?

YVETTE

That's not the point.

JO

The point is the name of the lord
is the least of our problems around
here.

BIG AL

Hey Jo how's old Upstate Community?
You a star reporter yet?

PERRY

Here's a big scoop. Don't believe
anything the libs say. A plus!

Big Al and Perry hi-five each other, enjoying some sparring with Jo as she fiddles with the coffee machine.

PARKER MITCHELL (ON TV)
 Well folks you won't be surprised
 by this one. The marxist wokest
 professor of sustainability, you
 know him, we've discussed him
 previously on this show. Talkin'
 about 'Doctor' Kib Williams from
 the hallowed halls of Yale
 University, this guy is advocating
 again for government supports for
 wind and solar powers. Folks I
 don't know about you but I'm pretty
 sure it was our lord Jesus Christ
 who made the wind and the sun, and
 so the idea that the wind and the
 sun would need help from the
 GOVERNMENT ... I mean what can you
 do with people like this? There's
 your higher education for you.

JO
 Shit why is just water coming out?

BIG AL
 Maybe it runs on wind power. Much
 wind blowin' out there today Perry?

PERRY
 Nope. Guess we can't have coffee!
 Look at that guy though (gesturing
 at Parker). Tool if I ever saw a
 tool.

Jo gives them a look of hell, but says nothing.

YVETTE
 Jo for cryin' out loud would you
 get a move on!

She yanks on the pot and spills scalding water on herself.
 She tears open another coffee packet, flinging it all over
 and getting increasingly mad.

JO
 You guys are all getting played.
 Ray Murphy is laughing his ass off
 at you, straight to the bank.

BIG AL
 Who the hell's Ray Murphy?

JO
 Your lord and master.

Big Al and Perry clown around like old English barons.

BIG AL

Who's your lord and master? The eggheads on the egghead station?

PERRY

I'll take a billionaire any day.

JO

Yeah because a billionaire is definitely looking out for your interests.

BIG AL

Always arguing, just like with Mat.

JO

Don't you fucking bring him up! You should have stopped him!

PERRY

Stopped him! Hells I'd a been right there with him, if I didn't have these bum knees!

BIG AL

Damn straight, Mat did the right American thing and it's all gonna come out pretty soon, you'll see.

Jo and the guys stare angrily at each other for a moment. Yvette, tense, resumes waiting on customers. Jo bolts in a fury, just as the fresh coffee finally drips into the pot.

INT. & EXT. PARKED CAR - NIGHT

Jo shuffles through some graded assignments sitting on the passenger seat -- all A and A+ grades, with comments like "Interesting perspective here", "Good research".

She angrily balls up the papers, throws them up in the air above the dumpster, where they mostly deposit themselves.

Just as she starts up the car, she gets a call from SHONDA (SHON) who had spent summers upstate as a Fresh Air kid.

JO

Miss New Yawka!

SHON (ON TEL)

Hey you! How's cowville?

JO
Mooooo we all miss youuuuu.

SHON
You tell them I'm too old to be a
Fresh Air kid?

JO
They're not the best listeners.
Hey. I tried to call you. Shon,
Mat's locked up. I thought you'd
want to know.

SHON
HE'S WHAT!?

JO
Remember I said he was getting all
caught up with these conspiracy
dudes? And so, on January fifth. He
told us he was going on a fishing
trip.

SHON
Oh my god.

JO
They came and got him. Snatched him
out of bed, basically. About a
month ago.

SHON
Can you talk to him? What does he
say?

JO
Not very much. We can visit once a
week, under supervision. No calls.
We talk about the weather.

SHON
Ok wow. And so, what's happens
next? What did he even do there?

JO
We don't really know. They haven't
charged him. I didn't even know
they could hold people like that.
In my mind, he just demonstrated
peacefully. Outside.

SHON
Are you ok?

JO

Basically I feel like tearing the world to shreds. But instead, I go to school and I go to work. Term papers and chicken guts.

SHON

Take a break JoJo. Come visit.
Change of scene.

JO

I'm on my treadmill. It's depending on me to keep it going.

SHON

There is honor in the slog. Staying connected to your goals is always important. However these are not normal times for you. I hear the edge in your voice. You are not centered within yourself.

JO

To say the least.

SHON

My space is your space. You know that right?

JO

Yeah. I think, I think it just doesn't seem like the right time for a vacation.

SHON

Ok. Miss you, country girl.

JO

Same. City chick.

They click off and Jo resumes driving, with a giant neon chicken soon coming into view.

EXT. YARD - DAY

Jo throws a ball for Cronkite, who happily fetches.

JO

Attaboy, look at you buddy! You still got it.

Yvette strolls over.

JO

We should get him a tag. I'm afraid he's going to run away.

YVETTE

He's never gone anywhere.

JO

I feel like he's looking for Dad.

YVETTE

You know what. Sometimes I almost forget what's happened, and I almost think he really did go on a fishing trip.

JO

I wonder if they play Looks all day in there, like everywhere else.

YVETTE

Honey it's not going to solve anything to stay fixated on this news stuff.

JO

And what is going to solve anything Mom? How long are they going to make him sit there? What's with all the secrecy? Looks and their fucking propaganda. They did this to him.

YVETTE

For what Jo? Why would they do whatever it is you claim they did? And how the hell did they do it?

JO

Anger and fear. It's their business model. Seems to be working great for them.

Yvette throws her hands up and goes inside. Jo calls Nic.

JO

Where are you?

EXT. COW PASTURE - DAY

Parking alongside the road, Jo carefully crouches between barbed wire to get into the field.

Nic, wearing an outfit that would be appropriate for a dance club, repairs a feed trough while several cows look on.

JO

I thought you were here to help with the milking.

NIC

Yeah but Old Morrisseau knows I'm handy. She doesn't care you know, if I'm Nic or Nicole or Santa Claus. She just knows I can fix shit.

JO

That's not all she knows.

NIC

Seriously, Josephine? She's like, eighty.

Jo tosses stones into a metal bucket, noisily nailing every single one.

JO

I heard from Shon.

NIC

Oh Shon! Speaking of people who know things.

JO

What's that supposed to mean?

NIC

Nothing. How is Miss Serenity?

JO

Fine. I told her about dad. She says I should take a break from my treadmill and go visit.

NIC

I bet she does.

JO

I AM PRETTY FUCKED UP YOU KNOW AND I DON'T NEED ANY DRAMA!

NIC

Ok ok. I know. It's ok. Sorry.

An elderly woman with a youthful air strides over. MRS. MORRISSEAU is a post-hippie radiant mother of the earth.

MRS. MORRISSEAU
Josephine. How are you doing, dear?

JO
Hi Mrs. Morrissette. Been better.

MRS. MORRISSEAU
Any word as to when I might get my
best hand back?

JO
They're not telling us anything.

MRS. MORRISSEAU
It's obscene, this special ops
level intrigue. Your father is a
livestock whisperer, not a
revolutionary.

JO
He's a whisperer?

MRS. MORRISSEAU
End of the day, you should see the
cows come into the barn for him.
Like they're having some private
conversation that the rest of us
don't understand.

NIC
Mat has always had his mysterious
ways.

MRS. MORRISSEAU
I think ... you know what? It's a
matter of respect. He respects
them, and they feel it.

JO
(transfixed)
He respects them.

Jo is taken with this as Mrs. Morrissette leaves them.

JO
They feel respect. It's a feeling
thing.

NIC
So you going to New York?

JO

No. I'm going to class and then straight in for third shift from there.

NIC

Don't forget you're leakin' oil. Top it off before you leave school, you have enough bottles?

JO

Yeah. Thanks.

Nic embraces Jo, holding her hard. As Jo leaves, Nic and the cows stand together, forlornly watching her go.

INT. MOVING CAR - EVENING

Jo scans through the stations, sticking for a minute with a conservative shock jock.

SHOCK JOCK ON RADIO

And these same people who are pushing a leftist extremist agenda on our kids, it's not just the quote unquote teachers it's the people who run these school systems, they. Want. POWER. If you think for one minute that it's not about control, controlling you and controlling your kids and controlling what you think? Then they've already got you. They've already got you and it's my job to say, WAKE UP PEOPLE. Take your kids out of these indoctrination sessions known as public schools and TAKE CONTROL of their education before they are completely brainwashed.

INT. PARKED CAR - EVENING

Jo goes about her routine: fling schoolbooks to back seat, grab dirty coveralls, slide driver's seat back, drape coat over steering wheel to create privacy for changing clothes. It's awkward but it works.

EXT. CHICKEN PROCESSING PLANT - EVENING

Jo follows fenced lanes with arrows painted on the pavement for incoming and outgoing shift workers. The sea of people are like a gray mass, hoodies up against the rain.

People just ahead of her arrive at security, each in turn lifting up their arms to be wanded.

Her phone dings -- a photo text from Shon, of the midtown Manhattan skyscraper with the giant sign for Looks News.

JO (ON TEXT)

WTF

SHON (ON TEXT)

Forgot to tell you new gig -
midtown baby! Ghetto chicks busted
OUTTA THE GHETTO

JO

Woot! But wtf the Looks News bldg?

SHON

Oh it's a damn hi rise, we clean
the lower floors but I thought this
would crack you up

JO

Holy shit you're in same BUILDING
AS THEM!?!?!?

SHON

[goofy emoji face]

Jo approaches security. But as she lifts her arms to be wanded, and the guard approaches -- she bolts. With a lightning-quick 180 she pushes through the annoyed crowd, sprints to her car and peels out of the muddy lot.

As she drives, the giant neon chicken shows in the rear view. An empowering song such as Helen Reddy's 'I Am Woman' plays on her car radio.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

With Cronkite for company, Jo throws clothes into a duffel bag. She pulls darts out of the wall, carefully places them in their sleeve, and packs that too.

JO
 I know buddy. I'll send money.
 Mom'll get you that special kibble
 you like. You'll be happy right? My
 happy boy.

She scribbles a note for Yvette and leaves it on her bed:
I'll be back soon ~ heart, J ~. Cronkite watches her go.

INT. BUS STATION - NIGHT

Waiting in a grubby plastic chair, Jo's phone shows texts:
 "Final two minutes for incoming team members" and "Restroom
 participants please report".

JO
 Restroom participants. Jesus.

She scrolls to a photo of her Dad and talks to him.

JO
 You always did say I was
 unpredictable.

Yvette calls, and Jo sends the call to voicemail.

INT. SEASIDE MANSION - NIGHT

RAY MURPHY - 70s, short, tanned tycoon founder of Looks News -
 is hosting a party and has been overserved. His nephew, BLAKE
 - mid 20s, preppy, cocky, clueless - joins him in his study.

RAY
 Kid, whatchoo doin'? You unnerstand
 what's goin' on here?

BLAKE
 Uh, this is a great party Uncle
 Ray!

RAY
 It's not a party it's a business
 meeting.

BLAKE
 Right. Of course.

RAY
 Fuck the actual news, ya gotta
 unnerstann that Blake.

BLAKE
Yes sir, fuck it.

RAY
Pay attention boy. Who runs this
country?

BLAKE
You mean like ...

RAY
We're in the influence business
Blake, not the news business. Money
calls the plays. We make the plays.

BLAKE
The plays?

RAY
GODDAMIT KID, the coverage. The
airtime. What's it worth. Who's the
highest bidder...

There's a knock on the door.

ASSISTANT (O.S.)
Sorry to interrupt sir.

RAY
Take a look at Parker Mitchell,
Blake. Study Parker. Young man
there who unnerstands what we do.

Ray leaves the room.

BLAKE
Parker. Friggin Parker Mitchell.
What the fuck am I supposed to
learn from him? How to play the
race card.

INT. MOVING BUS - DAY

Jo cranes her neck to see the NYC skyline on the horizon. The
seatback screens play all Looks but Jo's screen is blocked
with chip bag wrappers that she has stuck on with bandaids.

EXT. NYC STREET - DAY

In complete awe, Jo does a slow 360 outside the terminal,
then starts walking, gawking, and bumping into people. She
stops at a hot dog cart.

JO
A coke please?

CART ATTENDANT
Eight.

JO
Eight what?

CART ATTENDANT
Dollars? You American?

She sits on a bench and calls Shon.

JO (ON TEL)
Hi! I'm here.

SHON (ON TEL)
You're where?

JO
(peering at the street)
Uhhh the Toos-saud Museum?

SHON
Oh my god what? Tell me you just
hopped on a bus.

JO
I just hopped on a bus! Which is
about all you can do, from that
little shithole. It's actually
amazing we have buses.

SHON
Jojo you are always a surprise! But
ok your timing is actually pretty
good, I need like ten minutes here,
we're finishing a shift. You up for
a little walk? You have much stuff?

JO
I'm a light traveling kind of girl.

SHON
Perfect, punch this into your
phone: 1211 Sixth Ave. It's between
47th and 48th, not far at all.

Jo looks at her phone map, does another slow 360, marvels at
the incredible scene, and sets out.

She rounds the corner and reads aloud her coordinates.

JO
Sixth Ave. Forty-seventh street.
Yeah baby!

Another half a block, and she sees it: Looks News HQ. A giant screen projects the broadcast out onto the sidewalk, fronted by a spacious courtyard. She stops dead, staring at the sign.

JO
Holy shit.

INT. OFFICE TOWER LOBBY - DAY

Jo gawks openly, staring at the sea of people. A group of custodial staff passes through, and she cranes her neck looking for Shon. The security guards stop her in the lobby.

SECURITY GUARD
Step back miss. You can't do that.

JO
Do what?

GUARD
Where's your I.D.?

She fishes her driver's license out of her bag.

SECURITY GUARD
Very funny. You messing with me? I need your BUILDING I.D.

JO
Oh! I don't have a building I.D.

The guard points her toward the lobby desk.

LOBBY DESK ATTENDANT
I.D. please.

JO
Sorry, I don't have one.

LOBBY DESK ATTENDANT
You just born?

JO
I mean I don't have a building I.D.

LOBBY DESK ATTENDANT
Did I ASK you for a building I.D.?

JO

Oh.

Jo fishes her driver's license out again.

LOBBY DESK ATTENDANT

Who are you here for?

JO

Yeah good question. Myself mostly?
I think? But also like, everyone
back home, too. It's nuts you know,
with these fucking news wars.
Ghosting out felt like a good idea.

The attendant regards her blankly -- deadpan.

JO

And my Dad. He's such a sharp guy,
but he got sucked into this thing,
and it changed him. I tried so hard
to tell him but it was like he
couldn't even hear me.

LOBBY DESK ATTENDANT

(exasperated)

Do you have an appointment to see
someone in this building?

JO

Oh! No I'm waiting for somebody.
They make Looks News here? Like,
upstairs? Right here? Seriously?

LOBBY DESK ATTENDANT

Go wait outside.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Jo rounds the corner, out of the crush of people. Eventually,
women in smocks lugging cleaning gear straggle out a service
entrance. Finally, SHONDA (SHON) - 20s, Black, beautiful,
serene presence. She and Jo rush together for a long hug.

SHON

Oh my god. Oh my god oh my god oh
my god! (pulling back to look at
her). You don't say!

JO

I do say! I say, hello, is what I
actually say!

SHON
(handing over a key)
Tamika you mind grabbing the van?

Her team walks a bit ahead, giving her space.

SHON
Why didn't you tell me you were coming?

JO
I guess I didn't even know, like until I knew. I hope it's ok?

SHON
It's good. You took intentional action to reclaim your equilibrium. You prioritized your mental and emotional wellness.

JO
Great, I guess? I was just like yeah, this makes sense. Clear my head! Worth a shot anyway. But Shon! This building. Don't you get like freaky juju in here?

SHON
No. It's a building. We clean two through seven, Looks is higher up. You not gonna get all wiggy right?

JO
Well no, but it is the belly of the beast, I mean like right on top of us essentially. Sorry to over-metaphor you, but there's a beast like RIGHT ON TOP OF US.

SHON
You're not gonna freak out right?

JO
You know what, maybe later? I'm really tired. But, wow. Ok. Ok.

SHON
C'mon here's the van. Straight to the sofa with you.

Jo stares at her, mesmerized and frozen.

JO
You look really great.

SHON
It's incredible to see you.

JO
Same. Very big same. Wow.

SHON
But you know I'm in flow these days
right? Goals. Work. Future. Flow.

JO
I love flow! Flow for the win!

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Shon opens the door to her apartment, clears some books off the couch, and gets a pillow and blanket.

SHON
Is there too much light in here?
Can you sleep in daytime?

JO
I think I could sleep standing up.

SHON
(pointing)
Bathroom on the left. Kitchen down
there, are you hungry?

Jo has already laid down, eyes closed.

JO
No thanks. Wow this is awesome. I'm
in New York City.

Shon quietly leaves as Jo falls into a dreamy flashback:

Flashback: Jo, Nic, and Shon are all pre-teens, clowning around in a hayloft in peak summer. In another moment, they are eating ice cream cones at a roadside stand. Then they are jumping off a dock into a lake, all three holding hands.

INT. APARTMENT LIVING ROOM, BEDROOM, KITCHEN - DAY

Shon checks on Jo, still sound asleep, then returns to her room, sits on a cushion, and starts a guided meditation.

VOICE FROM PHONE APP
All of the power that you need is
entirely within you. You received
it at the time of your birth.

(MORE)

VOICE FROM PHONE APP (CONT'D)
 Become quiet inside. Visualize
 yourself at your greatest power.
 You are achieving your goals.
 Manifest your vision. Breathe in...

Jo enters, starts to turn around so as not to disturb.

SHON
 It's ok. Hi.

JO
 Hi. That's like...

SHON
 Affirmations.

JO
 I always knew you had superpowers.

SHON
 Everybody does. What's yours?

They go to the kitchen. Shon fills a stovetop espresso maker
 and a teakettle, filling the kitchen with steam.

SHON
 Caffeine or herbal? You always were
 so unpredictable.

JO
 Caffeine please. Dad says that too.
 except it comes out like, un-pray-
 vees-eeble. His Quebeckerisms,
 remember?

SHON
 Yeah, so sweet, Mathieu. So, tell
 me some more, if you can talk about
 it.

JO
 It's kind of a blur. I knew he was
 all caught up with the MAGA heads.
 I didn't know they were planning
 something. Or maybe they weren't.
 Maybe it was spontaneous. Or maybe
 it was just spontaneous for him.

SHON
 Wow.

JO
 (emotional)
 We've been arguing so much.
 (MORE)

JO (CONT'D)

It hasn't been so good with us.
He's gotten so swept up in this
stuff.

SHON

He loves you to the moon. This will
all pass.

JO

Everybody's walking around like the
world is the same, but the world is
completely different.

SHON

And so then, they just came and got
him?

JO

Right. Sorry. It was early morning.
Barely light. They basically storm
troopered the house, woke him up,
and he just went peacefully out to
the car with them. His uber-mellow
self. Was he all chill like that at
the Capitol too? Or like, do I not
even really know him? As a person.

SHON

I know your heart is hurting. You
need to sit with that. Acknowledge
and experience it. You cannot hide
from that.

JO

I can't stop replaying the scene.

SHON

Ahhh no, that's rumination.
Acknowledgement is recognize that
the events are affecting you, of
course they are. Rumination though,
no. When you notice yourself
replaying that scene, stop and
breathe. Visualize a positive
outcome. Think of ways to achieve
that outcome.

Jo stares at her, half-entranced and half-skeptical.

SHON

How about some eggs? Grilled
cheese?

JO
 YESSSS. What is it like, lunchtime?
 Dinner?

SHON
 (teasing, eyeing her)
 Looks like you've been having a few
 lunches and dinners alright.

JO
 You're saying I'm voluptuous?

SHON
 Yeah. Voluptuous. You know what, go
 have a shower, have a little walk
 outside if you want. I'm going back
 to my cushion and then I'll make us
 some food.

Shon goes to her room. Jo peruses a bookshelf with titles
 like 'Daring Greatly', 'Change Your Thoughts Change Your
 Life', 'The Four Agreements'. She snaps a pic. Yvette calls.

JO (ON TEL)
 Hi. Sorry Mom. You got my note?

YVETTE
 Where the hell are you?

JO
 I'm at Shon's. I'm fine.

YVETTE
 Oh my god, NEW YORK!? Damn girl we
 need this job, did you call in?
 What about your classes?

JO
 I'll be home soon.

EXT. JACKSON HEIGHTS STREETS - DAY

Jo strolls, enchanted by the wild array of people, clothing,
 shops, restaurants. She's excited and gawking everywhere.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Jo keeps company as Shon prepares food and gets a call.

SHON
 Rosalita, háblame ... oh no ... que
 mala ... positiva, si.
 (MORE)

SHON (CONT'D)

Ok tu descansas, dormir. No te preocupes, nosotros estamos bien. Ok. Besos.

She hangs up, looking stricken.

JO

Mucho impressivo el espagnolo!

SHON

Thanks. But dang, it's covid again. Damn I guess we all have to test.

JO

Oh shit. But hey, who's your girl?

SHON

Really?

JO

We're talking what, a few days? I'm a hard worker. It's perfect!

SHON

Seriously? I don't feel like this is what you came here for.

JO

I think it was kind of open to interpretation. Besides, if I can help you?

Shon studies Jo a bit skeptically, but finally meets her in a hi-five. They clasp hands for a long moment, eyes locked.

INT. VAN - DAY

Post-shift, Jo rides along with the crew, delighted in her smock and building ID lanyard. They pull over for takeout.

SHON

Ok good shift everybody. Who's in for a breakfast burrito?

JO

A breakfast burrito! WOW I've never heard of it! That sounds great!

CLEANER #1

Girl, you been under a rock all your life?

JO
Well actually kind of, yeah.

CLEANER #2
What you gonna say next, you never
heard of Beyonce or some shit.

JO
Whaaat nooo what, I love Bey!

She starts goofy dancing and singing -- very badly.

JO
... cause if you liked it then you
should have put a ring on it ...
all of the single ladies, all of
the single ladies ...

The crew and Shon all crack up.

CLEANER #2
That how they sing it upstate?!

CLEANER #1
Poor Bey, she don't deserve it.

SHON
SHOULDA oh my god Should. Have.
Placed. A Ring. Sir pardon me but
you ought to have placed a ring,
right there upon it ... White girl
you are so WHIIITE!

The crew gets into it, badly singing 'Should Have Placed A
Ring Upon It...'.
.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Just awake, Shon and Jo share a meal.

SHON
You are a hard worker, for sure.

JO
You call that work? I have no
chicken guts under my nails.
Cleaning is clean.

SHON
So, besides the obvious, things are
kinda the same up there?

JO

Kind of the same yeah, maybe kind of worse. You know what's weird, is all I want is to finish school and get the hell out, but Nic likes it.

SHON

Remember all of our shenanigans on the lake? Like, who flips a paddle boat, how did we even do that?!

JO

Right?! We had like, serious butch energy. At eleven!

SHON

Eleven times three I guess. We were fierce. I think we all knew already even then. Queer and fierce and we'll figure the rest out later.

JO

Dad loves you. He'll be happy when I tell him I visited.

SHON

Such a beautiful soul, Mathieu. Any more Black people show up after me?

JO

Dang no, we're so white. Except in summer, then we're red. We look like tomatoes. Especially when we sweat. All pulpy and drippy.

SHON

Nice. But so with just white people, you all get along right? Peace love and harmony?

JO

Ohhh let me tell you, we find stuff to fight about.

Jo gets up, brushes closely near her, almost making a pass.

SHON

Josephine...

JO

I know I know ... flow.

There is huge sexual tension, but they let the moment pass.

INT. OFFICE HALLWAYS & LOBBY - NIGHT

Pushing her cleaning cart through the halls, Jo wanders to the elevator bank and takes a ride down to the lobby. There, she stares at the building directory showing Looks offices on floors 10 through 25. She falls into a flashback:

Jo, Mathieu, a little Black girl (Shon), and another white girl (Nic) - are at the swimming hole. Nic hangs back, afraid. They all encourage her and finally Nic jumps in, splashing and grinning as she treads water.

VOICE OF MATHIEU

You see there Nicole? You thought the water was your enemy, but you stared it down! You said water, you will not intimidate me! And now the water doesn't have any power over you anymore! You took your enemy's power away. Good girl!

She gets in an elevator car and presses 10.

INT. LOOKS HALLWAY & OFFICES - NIGHT

She's in. Jo wanders the halls, talking to herself.

JO

Just a regular old office. Boring, gray, and boring.

She peeks into a meeting room, with photos tacked on a wall: people who are overweight, ungroomed, poorly dressed, bad teeth. Above the photos, a note: 'Get to Know Our Audience'.

JO

Jesus.

She realizes she is close to the studio because she can hear the on-air talent, live. This is coupled with a slightly delayed audio from the numerous monitors. A man rounds the corner carrying cables and wires -- DEMETRIUS - 50s, Black, wiry with a dancer's grace. Jo is startled but recovers.

JO

Why's there an echo?

DEMETRIUS

You new? It's the broadcast delay. Couple of days you won't even notice it anymore.

JO
Got it, ok thanks!

On her way back to the elevators, Jo overhears a discussion:

MALE VOICE #1, OLDER
Minimum wage increases lead to
massive job losses. Who's hot shit?

FEMALE VOICE, YOUNG
No. It's too weak of a connection.

MALE VOICE #2, YOUNGER
Robots Get Your Jobs! Oh oh ohhh!

FEMALE VOICE, YOUNG
No again. Research says we have to
undermine the research.

MALE VOICE #1, YOUNGER
Right. Comes from liberal eggheads.

MALE VOICE #1, OLDER
Specifics, please. You know our
viewers don't do gray area.

MALE VOICE #2, YOUNGER
How's the Cuba cancer vaccine
thing, where are we on that?

FEMALE VOICE, YOUNG
Standard Cuba-bashing stuff. Do
Americans want medicine from like,
a tortilla cart?

A sharply suited staffer closes the door as Jo passes by.
Waiting for an elevator, she talks to herself.

JO
Fucking spin machine. Spinning all
the feels.

INT. BLAKE'S OFFICE, HALLWAY, AND PARKER'S OFFICE - NIGHT

In the dark, whiskey flask at hand, Blake plays Parker's show
on multiple screens -- laptop, wall screen, phone. Zooms in
on Parker's face, rewinds and replays sections. Finally --
throws wadded up paper balls at the big screen.

He weaves drunkenly through the halls and arrives at Parker's
office. As he drinks from a flask, he roughs up the neat
desk, scatters documents, rifles through drawers.

BLAKE

Duude. Your office got remodeled.
Mr. Understanding, Mr. Gets It.

He smashes the glass of a photo, of a Black family. He dumps out a wastebasket, scatters the contents, and scrawls a post-it note: 'LOOKS (HEARTS) Parker Mitchell'.

INT. LOOKS HALLWAY & PARKER MITCHELL'S OFFICE - DAY

Nearby Parker's office, Demetrius is up on a ladder, ceiling tile open as he works with cabling.

Parker arrives, stops cold in the doorway.

PARKER

Oh my god.

DEMETRIUS

All good?

PARKER

No actually.

Demetrius climbs down, checks it out.

DEMETRIUS

What time you leave out last night?

PARKER

Around eight, I guess?

Demetrius immediately starts cleaning up.

DEMETRIUS

Got to watch your back around here.

PARKER

Are you maintenance?

DEMETRIUS

Audio. Just happened be up here.

PARKER

I'll call building services.

Parker goes to his desk but Dem stops him.

DEMETRIUS

I got you. Let's not draw
attention.

Puzzled, Parker reads Blake's note as Demetrius leaves.

INT. OFFICES AND HALLWAYS - NIGHT

Jo cleans in the deserted halls. Cautiously, she opens a stairwell door; faintly hearing music and party noises. She ventures up, finding the noise originates on floor eleven.

Peering through the locked stairwell door, she sees a lavish party underway down the hall. A cleaner lets her in.

JO

Thanks! Forgot my key.

She cautiously creeps toward the boisterous party, staring at the Looks staff. A hush comes over the room as Ray Murphy arrives and takes the mic. Jo is a deer in headlights.

RAY MURPHY

Good evening everyone. Our second quarter results are an all-time high! We have a brand-new quarterly earnings record! Congratulations are in order.

The room erupts in cheers and applause.

RAY MURPHY

I thank you all, and I commend you. You are doing more than excellent work, you are doing important work. Never before in the history of this country has there been a better place for Americans to inform themselves, to empower themselves, and to learn what it means to be a true American!

JO

(to herself)

Inform my ass. But hey it FEELS good, doesn't it.

Champagne corks pop. Ray departs, Jo observes an interaction:

BLAKE

Hey there Mr. Hotshot!

PARKER

Hello Blake.

BLAKE

Never better homie, you know what's great this week?

PARKER

Well the ratings hit, for one. And please don't call me homie.

BLAKE

Your promotion dude! Proves there's no such thing as racism! So we can all stop worrying about it.

Parker tries to walk away but Blake keeps on going.

PARKER

Enjoy the evening Blake.

BLAKE

I see you dude! You think I don't know we're in the INFLUENCE business! I know shit, bro!

Disciplined as ever, Parker does not take the bait.

BLAKE

Oh and by the way my uncle can't stand you. Says you're a poser.

Jo watches Blake stumble away.

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

The team loads gear out into the van; Jo hangs back.

JO

Hey you know what, I'm in New York City! It's a big deal for an upstate girl! I'm just going to like, look around.

SHON

Yeah? You're not tired? I don't know how long Rosie'll be out.

JO

Not tired! It's amazing to be here, like it's giving me energy. I feel like a better version of myself.

EXT. SIDEWALK CAFÉ - DAY

In the same grubby clothes she arrived in, Jo shuffles by an outdoor café with beautiful people. She catches sight of herself -- raggedy clothes, plump -- reflected in a window.

JO
Looking good, Patnode.

As she starts to walk away, she overhears a bit of conversation from one of the tables.

PERSON #1 AT TABLE
These red state people, what I
can't get over is they're so
GULLIBLE.

PERSON #2 AT TABLE
I know. I feel bad for them, but it
seems like they can't think their
way out of a paper bag.

PERSON #1 AT TABLE
I feel sorry for them really. But
what can you do?

PERSON #2 AT TABLE
Unfortunately, I don't think much
can be done. Maybe eventually
they'll figure it out.

Jo is wide-eyed as they discuss, essentially, her people.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Jo strolls on a sparkling day - joggers, picknickers, a caretaker with an elegant elderly lady. She calls Nic.

NIC (ON TEL)
Who's calling please?

JO
Seriously?

Off-screen, NIC's mother babbles, lost in dementia.

NIC
It's a little juvie Jo, running
away you know?

JO
I know and I'm sorry but you know I
was kind of dying there but hang on
because I need to tell you ...

NIC
Yeah I'm familiar with the scene
here, it's just that I've chosen to
stick around for those who need me.

JO
But I want to tell you ...

NIC
Listen Mom is on one of her manic trips so no one sleeps.

JO
I thought you had a pill for when she gets like that.

NIC
The ones that cost like ten bucks apiece, yeah. I gotta go, you done clearing your head yet?

JO
Pretty soon. I'm working on it.

NIC
Right. See you.

Nic hangs up without saying goodbye, distressing Jo.

EXT. LOOKS PAVILION - DAY

Still in her cleaning lady smock, Jo talks to herself.

JO
Wouldn't they put the big cheese on the highest floor?

INT. LOBBY - DAY

Flashing her badge at the security guards who had previously stopped her, Jo strides confidently to the elevators.

INT. LOOKS EXECUTIVE FLOOR - DAY

Roaming the hushed corridor, Jo comes to a glass-walled conference room and is transfixed as Ray presides over a meeting. His assistant MARGUERITE DE BRUXELLES - 30s, elegantly dressed and groomed, startles Jo.

MARGUERITE
Do you have a badge for this floor?

JO
Oh hi! I jumped off on the wrong floor. The elevators are which way?

MARGUERITE

I'll take you.

Marguerite brusquely escorts Jo and waits for a car with her.

INT. LOOKS PAVILION - DAY

Jo sits and stares at the building and has a flashback.

FLASHBACK: Jo argues vigorously with her Dad, who speaks with a French-Canadian accent.

JO

But you're getting all worked up about something that doesn't even exist! It's a non-issue.

MATHIEU

Check your facts Jojo, it's huge problem especially in ze cities. Peoples there spending all day making up false identities.

JO

That's ridiculous, and it's about voter suppression! People who say that are trying to keep poor people and Black people from voting.

MATHIEU

Oh mon dieu I wish these teachers would stop feeding you kids their liberal crap.

JO

And I wish you'd stop eating what Looks feeds you! It's bullshit! Who would eat bullshit?!

She spots the guy who explained the audio delay to her.

JO

Hi over there! I saw you upstairs remember?

DEMETRIUS

Right! Hi, Demetrius Martin. Dem.

JO

Josie Patnode. Jo.

DEMETRIUS

You on the cleaning crew?

JO

Actually a different crew. We clean on some of the lower floors.

DEMETRIUS

So how'd you end up on the Looks floors?

JO

I was ... curious about it. How is it anyway, working there?

DEMETRIUS

It's a steady gig. I was freelancing, that can get old.

JO

Do you watch their news programs?

DEMETRIUS

Hahaaa, not really. Kind of a clown show if you ask me. But that's above my pay grade. How about you, seems like you got more going on than just cleaning.

JO

I'm studying to be a journalist. Upstate, I go to community college.

DEMETRIUS

Journalism huh? So you thinking of Looks for like, an internship?

JO

Oh god. No. They're not journalists at all. Far as I'm concerned.

DEMETRIUS

Oooohhhh, sounds like some serious thoughts going on here!

JO

Well, it's a serious thing right? I mean they talk all this smack, just make shit up, and people believe it and do like, crazy stuff.

DEMETRIUS

It's my observation that people in general do crazy stuff, without needing any extra help about it.

JO

Yeah. I've been thinking about that. Why that happens.

DEMETRIUS

You figure it out, let me know.

JO

Sure. Hey I promise I'm not weird. Would you mind throwing me your cell?

DEMETRIUS

Guess not. Particular reason?

JO

I don't know it's just ... you're the only person I know who works there.

They text each other, Dem leaves, Jo looks up The City Times on her phone. A screen map shows it to be a 3-minute walk.

EXT. NYC STREET - DAY

She stuffs her cleaning smock into her backpack and starts walking. Buskers play an acoustic set of Beatles tunes. She jumps in and they play along for her rendition of 'Imagine'.

JO

Imagine I got a new life, wasn't hard to do Nothing to stay upstate for, might lose a few pounds too...

EXT. CITY TIMES BUILDING - DAY

Jo fidgets and paces nervously outside.

INT. CITY TIMES LOBBY - DAY

She enters, wide-eyed.

ATTENDANT

Appointment?

JO

Uh, no. I just wanted to like, stop by. I'm a super nerd, it's kind of a shrine.

ATTENDANT

Ok but I gotta keep the lobby
clear.

JO

Could I maybe talk to a reporter?

ATTENDANT

About?

JO

Well, I'm a student. In journalism.
And I'm studying and I'm here for a
couple days and like ... don't you
think there's something really
fucked up at Looks News though?

Barely suppressing his annoyance, the guy places a call.

ATTENDANT

Hey could you send someone down?

Moments tick by. Finally a junior reporter arrives.

REPORTER

(extending his hand)
Seth Robbins, newsroom.

JO

Jo Patnode.

SETH

What brings you in?

JO

Well kind of. Looks News. Partly.

SETH

And partly, how so?

JO

I work in their building.

SETH

My condolences.

JO

I mean, I work for a cleaning
company, I mean just for a little
while. I'm a journalism student
upstate. Way upstate.

SETH

Got it. And?

JO

I was cleaning last night, and they were having a party, and this guy Blake ...

SETH

Blake Murphy?

JO

I don't know? Is he related to Ray?

SETH

The nephew. Rumored to have at least a double digit IQ.

JO

Oh! Well I just saw him harassing this guy, Parker Mitchell actually. The anchor guy. And then he said something about the influence business. That Looks is in the influence business.

SETH

Hm, you don't say (scrolling his phone). Look no offense, but I'm on a deadline so unless you have something specific?

JO

Specific? Specifically, they're shits! Lying their way through every single day, and people believe it and then they do crazy stuff that they never would have normally done and WHY IS THIS GOING ON AND ON?!

SETH

Whoa ok chill. You're not wrong but there's nothing I can ...

JO

SOMEBODY HAS TO DO SOMETHING! I'VE BEEN READING THIS PAPER SINCE I WAS TEN YEARS OLD AND YOU GUYS SHOULD BE DOING SOMETHING ABOUT IT!

SETH

Such as?

JO

Investigate! Why do they get away with it?

(MORE)

JO (CONT'D)

Why isn't there some kind of penalty, why can they just lie and call it news?!

SETH

Ok I'm sorry Miss ...

JO

Patnode. Jo.

SETH

I'm sorry. We know they're snakes. We're ... quite aware. But they're clever snakes. They don't leave any openings.

Jo just glares at him.

SETH

It's up to the people watching that shit to figure it out. And the problem is they're idiots, so it's taking a long time if not forever.

JO

Wait what? They're not idiots, they watch it because ...

SETH

Because?

He has rung a bell in her; they stare each other down.

JO

Because they like it. It makes them feel good. But someone should still do something.

He starts to walk away but stops.

SETH

Hey. Let me send you my cell. You find something interesting, I'm listening. You're kinda plucky.

They pull out their phones and exchange numbers.

EXT. NYC STREET - DAY

Jo shuffles along, crushed at her failure to engage the Times. She sees a sign for the bus station up ahead.

INT. BUS TERMINAL - DAY

Jo scans the boards and calls Nic.

INT. UPSTATE MEETING HALL - DAY

Nic answers the phone wearing a special outfit -- an American Legion auxiliary cap and a sharply pressed navy blue shirt with a red scarf tied around her neck, and a flag pin.

NIC

Trombley.

JO

Hey. Are you still mad at me?

NIC

It's not exactly a mad thing.

JO

Nic this isn't about Shon! I'm doing something here!

NIC

Well I'm doing something too! I joined the Legion Auxiliary! On account of, I'm not a vet, so I can't be a full member but I can still serve my community.

JO

Serve how?

NIC

Serve as is needed. Service to those in my community.

JO

You're talking about that old people club? Old people don't get you!

NIC

Exactly! See, what's gonna happen is we're going to rebuild the porch for Mrs. Duryea, her husband fought in Korea. And she needs her porch fixed. And after I help fix it, she'll know me. As a person. And she'll tell other people, that I'm just a fine and normal person! I'm representing.

JO

I'm at the bus station. I'm coming home.

NIC

Oh, excellent! So, feeling better? Get your poutine lardass home.

JO

I can't exactly say I'm feeling better.

NIC

Well, come home anyway. I'll show you my sexy uniform.

INT. BUS TERMINAL - DAY

Jo enters the cavernous waiting area, with dozens of screens playing Looks and a large digital ticker: *Connectivity Generously Provided by Murphy Global Media, Inc.*

JO

(approaching some people)
Hey, everybody! Don't watch that, it's not news! Bullshit alert!

They crane their necks around her to see the screen.

JO

You know it's bullshit right? Looks paid for those screens so they can shovel the shit!

GUY ON BENCH

Jesus lady get out of the way!

JO

LOOKS NEWS IS PUNKING YOU, FOR BIG BIG MONEY! I KNOW IT FOR SURE!

A very beefy woman stands up and bears down on Jo.

WOMAN

Maybe you go yell someplace else.

Jo freezes in fear. And then she leaves.

INT. OFFICES - NIGHT

In a moment of solitude, Jo bolts into the stairwell and up to twenty-five. She waits. A cleaner again lets her in.

JO

Thanks. Always forgetting my key.

Arriving at Ray's office, Jo sees the door cracked open by an extension cord. Approaching cautiously, she creeps in.

JO

Hey you old dick. Didn't see me coming, did you? What you got hiding around here, dickwad?

Under cover of the vacuum noise, Jo snoops. She powers up the laptop, fools around with password guesses -- *RMurphy, Murphyl, ImTheShit*. Shon calls. Jo sprints out.

SHON

Where were you?

JO

Oh you know what, I was actually doing some stairs! I realized I need more cardio in my life. There's been a lot of poutine.

Shon eyes her suspiciously as they get back to work.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Jo scans search results for 'Looks News influence business'. Shon enters. Jo scrambles to the floor in a lotus position.

SHON

Look at you, doing the work!

JO

Oh heck yeah!

SHON

Did you set an intention?

JO

Ummm ...

SHON

Something to manifest? Or you just into some basic breath work maybe?

JO

Yeah I'm a breathwork kind of girl.

SHON

Maybe you could use some guidance.

JO

In fact, yeah. I am kind of a beginner.

SHON

We are all begin, every day. Every moment of our lives, we begin.

JO

Shon you're amazing. How did you even get into this? Upstate, nobody is affirming themselves. They're just trying to keep their shit together.

SHON

Oh we all are. I mean, different lives different struggles, but there are tools we can use that make it possible to ... to make life easier. We can become more self-aware and then we see that nothing is actually hard. It's only our reactions to things that make them hard. And our responses are completely under our control.

They sit side by side on the floor, close.

SHON

Close your eyes gently. Relax your belly. When you breathe in, notice your belly rising. Breathe out, notice how it falls. Belly rises, belly falls. When your mind starts to wander, simply bring it back to this relationship between your breath and your belly.

A happy Jo sneaks a one-eyed peek at Shon, in her serenity.

SHON

I'm going to get a few groceries. You keep on breathing.

Shon leaves and Jo calls Dem.

DEMETRIUS

This Jo?

JO

Hi yeah, do you have a minute? I wanted to ask you, have you ever met the big boss? Ever been in his office?

DEMETRIUS

Never met the guy, no, but I do head out to the east end place most Saturdays. Got a pretty complex audio setup out there.

JO

Oh you mean like a home office?

DEMETRIUS

If it's me talkin', I say that's the real HQ. 43 Gin Lane. You ever hear of the Hamptons? Got to be seen to be believed.

JO

No I guess I haven't heard of it. Hey could I go with you?

DEMETRIUS

Oh hellos no! You kidding? Security up the wazoo.

JO

Oh. So like...

DEMETRIUS

You can't get in unless you're on a list. Fingerprints, the whole nine. These people don't fuck around.

JO

Oh. Ok wow.

Call complete, she searches 43 Gin Lane and sees the Google Earth images of the unbelievably lavish oceanfront mansion.

JO

Holy shit.

EXT. NYC STREET - DAY

Jo walks past a costume shop, stops, does a 180, and enters.

INT. PENN TRAIN STATION - DAY

In bib overalls, a straw hat, sunglasses, big rubber boots, and carrying a rake, Jo has costumed herself as a gardener, also sporting a wig and stick-on tattoos.

EXT. SOUTHAMPTON TRAIN STATION - DAY

Jo secures her hat, re-ties the rake to her shoulder, checks her phone map, fishes out her photo of her Dad and places it in the front pocket of her overalls. Then she sets out.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Jo trudges along the sand, in awe of the lavish mansions.

INT. ESTATE HOME OFFICE - DAY

Demetrius works in a luxuriously decorated home office, and is interrupted by a "gardener" from the patio window.

JO

Hey buddy!

DEMETRIUS

(recognizing her)

Oh no. What the hell.

JO

Hey I'm just the gardener man!
Great country we have, did you know
that the sand is public access?
Like sidewalks, except, sand! You
just walk in from the beach.

DEMETRIUS

You need to get out of here. Like,
immediately.

JO

I'll just need a minute ...

She hoists herself in through the window, awestruck by the extreme luxury. She texts Seth.

JO (ON TEXT)

Think there's anything interesting
here?

SETH (ON TEXT)

Where are you?

JO
43 Gin Lane.

SETH
Southampton??? His residence???

JO
[goofy tongue-out smile emoji]

Jo pokes around as Demetrius prepares to work.

DEMETRIUS
You really gotta get out of here.

JO
Any minute now.

Demetrius sees a uniformed maid approaching.

DEMETRIUS
SHIT ok, pretend you're helping me.

Jo hovers near Demetrius, handing him tools. Finally the maid leaves. Jo tries to open an unmarked door, pulling on it.

JO
What's this?

DEMETRIUS
I don't know. Closet? C'mon you see the cameras?

Jo continues to snoop around the locked room. She wanders into the hallway looking for another entrance.

A house manager appears in the office.

MIGUEL
Dem. Good to see you dude.

DEMETRIUS
Miguel, what's happening my man!

They exchange a cool dude handshake.

MIGUEL
(indicating Jo outside)
Who's this?

DEMETRIUS
Oh, he was helping me move some stuff here.

Demetrius resumes working. Jo returns, finding Miguel.

JO
(in her deepest voice)
Men's room?

Miguel points, and she enters the mansion's hallway.

INT. ESTATE - DAY

Jo wanders around, taking it in -- maids, a chauffeur polishing vehicles in the courtyard, culinary staff in a gleaming kitchen, and a massage therapist working on a beautiful woman by the pool.

Security cams are throughout, watching her every step.

INT. ESTATE HOME OFFICE - DAY

Jo returns again, startling Demetrius.

JO
How much longer are you here?

DEMETRIUS
Jesus you're still here?!

JO
I need to borrow this. I'll get it
back to you I promise.

She selects a hammer out of his toolbox.

DEMETRIUS
Why?

JO
Knowledge.

Jo ducks into a hall closet, finding maids' uniforms. She changes into one, carefully transferring the photo of her Dad to her new front pocket, and crouches down to wait.

INT. ESTATE & ESTATE HOME OFFICE - LATER SAME DAY

Jo peers down the hall and sprints to the now empty office. She locks the door behind her, and gets to work with the hammer -- swiftly and efficiently whacking the doorknob of the locked room until it flies off, and she enters the room.

INT. SMALL INTERIOR OFFICE - DAY

The space is crammed with computers and networking equipment. A wraparound whiteboard on the walls shows a calendar with air dates for 'STORIES', matched up with 'DONORS' and 'VALUES' showing sums in the high six figures and up.

'STORIES' include Pharma Defense / Corporate Tax Reduction / Gun Freedoms / Climate Stability / Over-Regulation / Urban Decay / Campus Woke Disasters / Free Speech / BLM Terrorists / Vaccine Dangers and also -- 2020 Election Fraud.

Jo snaps photos and shuffles through papers showing large monetary transfers to Looks from corporations, individuals, think tanks. An open laptop shows desktop shortcuts including 'Temp Xfr Accts', 'Fin Holding Companies', and 'Offshore'.

She facetimes Seth, doing a slow 360 of the room.

SETH (ON FACETIME)

What's all this?

JO'S

Behold, Seth! A locked-off space inside the kingdom FILLED with financial and political shit, including some smack about January six, get this on the wall --

She pans to the whiteboard.

JO

I mean does this look a little funny to you?

SETH

Wait whaaaat stay there it says, oh fuuuuck are you kidding me here...

Hearing people approaching, Jo pops open a window and runs.

EXT. ESTATE - NIGHT

Ray's helicopter is on the lawn, Jo watches from the dunes.

JO

(to herself)

Place isn't quite like you left it dude. Sorry not sorry!

She pulls out the photo of her Dad and talks to it.

JO
At least, I'm not just talking
anymore right?

INT. ESTATE HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

Household staff tensely await Ray in the hallway. Sensing something, he rushes to the office and finds the wreckage.

RAY
You have all signed confidentiality
agreements and this stays INSIDE
THE HOUSE AM I CLEAR!?

Everyone nods and shuffles out uncomfortably.

RAY
(alone, to himself)
Fucking hell.

EXT. BEACH ROAD - NIGHT

Triumphant, Jo walks back to the station, gawking again at the extravagant mansions, but now with a pugnacious attitude.

JO
Breaking news the plutes lose out
to the proles today in an unusually
clever reversal engineered by Jo
Patnode ... Yeah that happened.
Didn't it now.

EXT. SOUTHAMPTON TRAIN STATION - NIGHT

Jo gawks at the parking lot full of beautiful vehicles.

INT. VAN - NIGHT

Shon gives assignments to the team as she hands out lanyards for their evening shift.

SHON
Ok here's tonight Tamika's with me
we start in the main lobby. Juana
and Rosie restrooms on seven, Jo
has halls, Sani and Prakash start
with offices on two.

Jo keeps nervously looking over her shoulder.

SHON

Yo daydreamer, you got me, or what!

JO

Got it totally got it, halls! Dirt
and grime, you've had your time!

The team groans and rolls their eyes at her clunky humor.

INT. PRODUCTION STUDIO - NIGHT

Demetrius is in the control room.

LOOKS ANCHOR (ON TV)

But this patriotic young man. He
was concerned for the safety of his
fellow citizens, was he not? And he
set out to establish order, because
he didn't see anyone else doing it.

GUEST (ON TV)

It's an important point that you
make, of course. And yet, the
question of that kind of justice --
what some would call vigilante
justice -- our legal system doesn't
recognize that sort of thing.

LOOKS ANCHOR

An American boy protecting other
Americans. Our system doesn't
recognize that?

Producers and staff, including Dem, register surprise.

GUEST

Well this young man is innocent
until proven guilty, of course.

LOOKS ANCHOR

I want our viewers to know that we
are giving you the full story that
the liberal media won't give you,
including footage here of rioters
destroying private property. Gangs
and thugs. Take a look at this.

Screen footage shows looters.

LOOKS ANCHOR

And that's the state of things today folks, when we condemn a patriotic young man who acted out of a sense of duty to his fellow Americans, but we let these thieves and vandals off the hook.

At the controls, Demetrius speaks softly to himself.

DEMETRIUS

Patriot. Shot up a crowd and killed a Black guy.

He gets a call from Jo.

JO

Hi. Any chance you could meet me? I wanted to give your hammer back.

DEMETRIUS

Right. Ok. How about the stairwell, I'll head down.

INT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Jo pulls his hammer out of her bag and hands it to him.

JO

I waited till you left. And I changed into a maid's uniform.

DEMETRIUS

What are you talking about?

JO

I had to get into that room. I had to.

DEMETRIUS

Oh my god. Place is all cameras!

JO

It was so full. Computer equipment, financial shit, a big thing on the wall about the stolen election and literally a list of stories and how they're spinning them. For money, it looks like.

She shows him the photos on her phone.

DEMETRIUS

Ok. Yeah. Ok. That right, huh?

As he walks away, Jo calls out, full of agony.

JO

My dad was in the January six mob
and he's locked up and it's all
because he was brainwashed by all
this bullshit!

Dem turns around, acknowledging her wordlessly, barely
nodding his head. Seth calls Jo.

SETH (ON TEL)

We got it girl!

JO (ON TEL)

Got what?

SETH

An investigation Jo, we are FUNDED!
I have budget! My editors think
maybe FCC violations at the very
least, but get this: there's
developing case law. This is so
new, but the disinformation train
is starting to get pushback and it
could eventually affect broadcast
licenses and we could be OUT IN
FRONT of the whole thing, do you
know how big this is? We can break
this thing, it's so fucking BIG!

JO

Wow! So now what do you do?

SETH

You mean, what do WE do? We get to
work. We have so much work to do.

JO

We? As in, me?

SETH

We're going to use an offsite space
to spread out. It's technically a
safe house but whatever, we have
mountains of paper. Can you be here
in half an hour? We'll walk over.

A team member approaches and she quickly hangs up.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

Two beefy security guards study footage of the break in, repeatedly trying to zoom in on Josie's face.

GUARD #1

He was clever. I don't think we're gonna pin him.

GUARD #2

(pausing on Demetrius)
Yeah but this dude here. Looking right at us. Hey buddy! Got a few questions for you guy!

INT. PARKER'S OFFICE - DAY

Demetrius pops his head in. Facing Parker's desk is a large poster featuring his image -- a bus stop ad for Looks.

DEMETRIUS

Got a minute?

PARKER

A minute.

DEMETRIUS

Can't help but wonder ...

PARKER

I'm kind of pressed for time.

DEMETRIUS

Just thinking, there aren't a lot of people here who look like us.

Parker finally looks up from his screen.

PARKER

Ohhh. The white kid. The shooting.

DEMETRIUS

The white supremacist kid. The killing.

PARKER

I don't control the positions that the station takes. I don't set the tone or make the rules here.

DEMETRIUS

Seems to me you have a voice.

PARKER

It's a large organization. There are a lot of voices.

DEMETRIUS

But how can you ...

PARKER

(cutting him off)

Looks brings balance to the national conversation. Anyone who doesn't find that informative is free to get their news elsewhere. And or, work elsewhere.

DEMETRIUS

Right. Ok. Just wanted a quick word.

PARKER

And you've had it.

The two hulking security guards arrive.

GUARD #1

Mr. Mitchell, you know this guy?

PARKER

No. No, can't say that I do.

The guards escort Demetrius away from Parker's office.

INT. CITY TIMES LOBBY - DAY

Jo calls Nic as she waits for an elevator.

NIC

Oh hey. Ghost girl.

JO

I know, I'm sorry I was ... I thought I was ... Nic things are getting wild here.

NIC

You and Shon having an excellent time, are you?

JO

NO! Not that kind of wild it's a story it's about LOOKS NEWS Nic I'm involved in a thing that I ...

(MORE)

JO (CONT'D)

Oh shit here's the elevator let me call you back.

INT. DRAB LIVING ROOM - DAY

Nic, dressed to the nines as ever, stares with frustration at the phone after the call disconnects.

INT. CITY TIMES NEWSROOM - DAY

Jo arrives in the vast, hustling space, dazzled and intimidated. Seth whistles to get everyone's attention.

SETH

Hey everybody heads up! Jo Patnode in the house!

They all turn to face her and give a big round of applause.

SETH

Kickoff bagels in the lunchroom!

They go down a hall and into a conference space, where people hi-five and congratulate Jo, and thank her.

REPORTER #1

All hail, our indie ringer!

REPORTER #2

She who brought the hammer down!

REPORTER #3

I think she just made that like, not a metaphor anymore.

REPORTER #4

Boss, I'm just gonna go with BOSS!

SETH

Ok this is a work event, pull yourselves together and let me introduce all you clowns.

People smile and wave as Seth goes around the room.

SETH

That's Ben over there, mouth full of bagel. Jamal in the fresh haircut. Yao-Fen blocking your view of Lopez, Ezra trying to look like he's not looking at his phone and ok you got all that?

JO
(waving shyly)
Uh I don't know! But hi!

Jo joins a table and sits down to a bite -- one of the team.

SETH
Man oh man you know what did it for me? That picture showing the word 'DONORS'. Donors! As though they're a non-profit!

JO
Right?! Donors, jesus!

BEN
So Jo, who are you? How did this happen, this great and wondrous thing? Where'd you go to school?

JO
Well, I'm still in school actually. I go to Upstate Community. It's um, upstate.

YAO-FEN
Community college? Wow. You mean like, a commuter school?

EZRA
Where even is that?

JO
It's where I live, we're way up in the northern part of New York, actually just across the border from Quebec.

JAMAL
Whaaaaa, is there like permafrost there?

BEN
Community college right? Wow. That's a thing, out in the heartland.

SETH
I'm picturing a little gulag-style building, smack in the middle of the frozen tundra.

YAO-FEN

Where do you guys get coffee up there? Can you even get coffee?

JO

Truckee's Diner. That's where everyone goes.

LOPEZ

Truckee's Diner my friends! How have I never been there, if everyone goes there?

JO

It's also kinda like, our community center because everybody's in and out of there all the time.

YAO-FEN

Let me guess. Black coffee. Drip. Probably kind of acidic, watery.

Scanning the room, she sees banners from various colleges.

JO

What are all these?

SETH

Oh peoples' schools, we do like alumni teams. Fastest group to get through the Sunday crossword, stuff like that. Losers buy lunch.

JO

I only see like seven schools.

SETH

(looking around)

Yeah you know? I guess so.

JO

Where did you go?

SETH

Yale. My Dad's school.

JO

I guess UCC doesn't have a banner.

Seth and the others bust out laughing, not even trying to conceal their scorn. They resume talking amongst themselves.

SETH

Funny!

JO
(softly to herself)
Funny enough to crack a story you
guys couldn't seem to get to?

INT. SAFE HOUSE APARTMENT - DAY

Jo and Seth enter to see endless stacks of boxes.

JO
Holy shit.

SETH
Yeah right? I turned in a pretty
broad requisition.

Seth rips the tape off a box and starts sifting through.

SETH
Thing one, we're basically looking
for shell companies. Pass-through
entities. Flag anything with the
name of a family member on it, just
google the whole family. And let's
spreadsheet it all, it'll be easier
to see patterns.

JO
Patterns? In this pile?

SETH
Welcome to the job, rookie! Oh and
keep track of your hours.

JO
I'm getting PAID?!

As Seth gets ready to go, he hands her a key to the place. He leaves and she holds it up like a trophy. She props up her Dad's picture on the windowsill.

JO
Josephine Patnode, New York
reporter! Josie JoJo, pro on the
go! Redneck rookie in the city yo
yo yo!

She does a little dance, and then pretends to be interviewed.

JO
I knew thyat, thet, that, I knew
thaht there had to be something
behind that door...

(MORE)

JO (CONT'D)

Oh my hyammer skills? Those would be from my Dad. He said a girl should know her way around a tool kit. Wait, ham-rrr. Hah-mer. Hammah. That's the New Yorky version. Take that, city snobs.

INT. LUXURIOUS LOFT - DAY

Blake tries to call his uncle repeatedly, with no pick up. He plays video games, gets mad, throws the controller box, kicks and breaks a beautiful vase.

He has a flashback: *He's a little kid, missing pitch after pitch in Little League while other kids laugh at him.*

Ray finally picks up one of Blake's calls.

BLAKE (ON TEL)

Uncle Ray! Just wanted to say, what a ridiculous waste of your time, have they caught this idiot yet?

RAY (ON TEL)

Blake, is there anything you'd like to get off your chest?

BLAKE

My chest?

RAY

You know that when we speak one on one, it's confidential. Yes?

BLAKE

Yes sir, of course. You're not suggesting that I ...

RAY

Stay away from this whole east end thing. Talk to no one. Got it?

Ray hangs up and Blake gets very agitated, punching things and ranting. Suddenly he stops his tantrum and makes a call.

BLAKE (ON TEL)

Miguel ... I don't know, just Miguel! The house manager guy ... Blake Murphy! Hurry it up.

A few moments pass until someone picks up.

MIGUEL (ON SPEAKER)
What can I do for you Mr. Murphy?

BLAKE
The cam capture from the break in,
I assume you've turned it over to
the security team, yes?

MIGUEL
Oh absolutely sir.

BLAKE
Get me a copy. Email it ... no
wait. Put it on a USB and send to
reception. Write 'delivery' on it.

MIGUEL
Just, delivery? Ok you got it.

INT. SHONDA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Josie arrives, breathless, as Shon is assembling equipment
and supplies for loading into the van.

JO
Oh hey! Let me help you.

SHON
Where've you been all day? How are
you not sleeping?

JO
It's just so wild to be in New
York! I love just walking around.

SHON
Walking around. Really.

Jo paces, grabs her darts, twists them around.

SHON
You jumpy like you got fleas, girl.

JO
Shon what do you really think about
Looks News? I mean, don't you hate
them for all their bullshit?

SHON
I think I don't get paid to think
about that kind of stuff.

JO

But, you must have an opinion.

SHON

It's rich people being assholes.
See like, every chapter in the
history of the world.

JO

What if it's worse, though? What if
they're up to some really bad shit?

SHON

What if they are? Only fools pick
fights they can't win.

Jo picks up a call from Seth.

JO

Hey.

SETH

Hey can you go find the box number
eleven, there's something in there
we gotta look at. Kinda asap.

JO

Sure. Call you when I get there.

She hangs up. Shon studies her.

SHON

Get where?

JO

I have to stop somewhere on the way
in tonight. I'll meet you at seven?

Shon stares hard at Jo, trying to see through her.

SHON

Jo hang back. Rosie can work
tonight. We're covered.

JO

What? But it's going great, right?

SHON

Stay back tonight. We're covered.

JO

I gotta run but damn, talk later?

Shon watches Jo suspiciously as she rushes out.

EXT. NYC STREET - DAY

Jo walks and reads aloud a Times headline on her phone.

JO

'Rural counties show higher
susceptibility to disinformation'.
Yeah no shit. How about 'Rural
Counties Trash-Talked by Media'?

Her phone rings, the I.D. shows 'DAD'.

JO

OH MY GOD, DADDY?

MATHIEU (ON TEL)

Hi cherie. I'm out. I'm home.

JO

Oh my god oh my god oh my god I'm
so happy! Shon said it would
happen, she said it would be fine!

MATHIEU

Shonda? Where are you?

JO

I'm in New York actually, hanging
with Shon! I was like, rough, and
she said come down, clear your
head, and I did and oh my god I
have soooo much to tell you about
Looks Dad they are lying and
manipulating people just like I
always said, get this we actually
clean offices in the same building
as them and ...

MATHIEU

Oh Jojo, you're still on that track
of thought? Looks is the only
station telling the truth. They're
the only media that understands and
they are trying to save this
country, mon dieu I thought you
would understand that by now too!

JO

What? No, Daddy how can you say
that? They got you locked up, I
mean they helped cook up this whole
conspiracy thing because it's
manipulation and they control ...

MATHIEU

I got myself locked up Josephine,
and I'd do it again in a heartbeat
because all of us patriots, we made
them wake up! They are paying
attention now! Now, some people did
get carried away, but the spirit of
our actions was true and correct,
nous etions juste. This will all be
clear very soon.

JO

Nooo Dad it's all lies, the
election wasn't stolen they just
made you guys all think that ...

MATHIEU

I have to go, my telephone time is
limited and you should know that I
agreed to let my phone be
monitored, as a condition of
release.

JO

Your phone? Like right now?

They hang up and Jo collapses in sobs.

EXT. RUNDOWN DUMPY PARK - DAY

Dem strolls, lost in thought, amidst homeless people, an
overflowing trash can. A tabloid lying on the ground has a
screaming headline: "Looks Calls Vigilante Shooter A HERO'.

He does a phone search -- 'NYC network affiliates', clicks on
the first phone number.

DEMETRIUS (ON TEL)

Newsroom please.

As Dem waits, a group of rats collaboratively dragging a
baguette near his feet.

VOICE ON TEL

New York Eleven.

DEMETRIUS

Hi. There was an internal break-in
at 43 Gin Lane in Southampton,
couple days ago. Ray Murphy's
estate. It wasn't reported and it
wasn't a robbery.

(MORE)

DEMETRIUS (CONT'D)

You're going to want to know what
was found in there. Everybody is.

He hangs up, watches the rats scurry around, hard at work.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Jo lies face-down on the floor as Shon enters.

SHON

You ok?

JO

Dad is out.

SHON

That's great!

JO

He still thinks Looks is saving the
country.

SHON

Ohhh. I'm sorry. It seems like
people are so caught up, they
identify with these ideas. It
becomes part of who they are. Even
people who never used to be
extreme.

JO

Shon. I know a little more than I
did before I came here.

SHON

Like what?

JO

Like, shit's more complicated than
I thought. I'm not sure who my
heroes are now.

SHON

I mean, don't you have school? And
work?

JO

It has to wait a little longer. If
you can put up with me.

Jo moves in closer to her.

SHON

Why do I feel like there's
something you're not telling me?
You got somethin' going on, here?

JO

You mean like, here here?

They lean in, tentatively and slowly move toward a kiss. Jo's phone rings. She bolts up, leaves Shon on the couch.

JO

Yeah.

SETH

Hi. Can you talk? We have a little pickup, and I have a request.

JO

What's pickup?

SETH

A lead. One of our group found a little scrap, it's a very short memo, from their original planning sessions and right at the get, they talked about channeling corporate talking points for cash, actually serving as a mouthpiece for hire and literally, they weren't shy about it. It's in the fucking plans. And so the stuff in that room that you saw is ...

JO

Holy shit.

SETH

If we can show probable cause for basically, a betrayal of the public trust? This is huge, potentially. I don't want to sound grandiose, but my editors think it's possible that the FCC could be looking for a test case to bring charges for violating the public trust, it has to be absolutely tight in terms of knowingly disseminating false shit.

JO

That sounds kinda big.

SETH

It would be a sea change. A generational update to the rules that govern media licenses and broadcasting. This would elevate disinformation to way more than a nuisance. It would make it a crime.

JO

Looks. Criminals. Wow.

SETH

At the very least, from what I see so far, I see implications for broadcast licenses. It's first amendment level shit.

JO

Wow.

SETH

You feeling me yet? We need to find every document that mentions these plans. Every single shred of a sentence. Nothing is unimportant.

JO

Where would we find that stuff?

SETH

Possibly in the archives. Can you get in there?

JO

No, I don't have a ...

She sees Shon's badge on the chair, and snags it up.

JO

Yeah. I can. I'm going to come by there, I want to see this thing.

INT. CITY TIMES NEWSROOM -- DAY

Seth and Jo talk in the corridor. Someone cranks the volume on the wall screens and the room goes quiet as a photo of Ray Murphy flashes onto the screen.

FARIDA (ON LOCATION)

We have a breaking story to share with you this morning.

(MORE)

FARIDA (ON LOCATION) (CONT'D)

A report that Mr. Raymond Murphy, Founder and CEO of Looks News, is entering the Southampton Police station for what is being described as voluntary questioning following a break-in at his estate.

TRAYVON (IN-STUDIO)

By a break-in, are we talking about a robbery here Farida?

FARIDA

Well Trayvon this is just coming in but Southampton police have confirmed little else besides the break-in, which in fact was not reported to the police. Our source is saying this was NOT a robbery.

TRAYVON

An unreported break-in that was not a robbery. It sounds like there's quite a few questions here.

FARIDA

Yes and we're currently tracking down allegations as to the nature of what was found in space that was broken into. We'll update our viewers as soon as possible but meanwhile -- we're seeing here Mr. Raymond Murphy being escorted into the Southampton Police station.

TRAYVON

An unusual sight to say the least. One of the world's most powerful media titans. Stay tuned to New York Alive for updates on this breaking story.

Jo and Seth stand in the bustling newsroom, incredulous.

SETH

What the hell! Fucking scooped! One of the household staff, I bet.

JO

(deep in thought)
Maybe. Maybe not.

INT. BLAKE'S OFFICE - DAY

Blake, engrossed in the security cam footage and with his computer screen zoomed in on Josie's face, turns his attention to this news report, freaked out.

INT. MAINTENANCE OFFICE - DAY

Demetrius, feet up on a desk in a small audio booth, nods with satisfaction as he watches the same report.

INT. PARKER'S OFFICE - DAY

Parker watches too, wide-eyed. He scans tabloid websites with large headlines: "Well Looksee What We Have Here!", "Let's Take A LOOKS At This", "More Than A Murphy Bed In There!". He scribbles some notes and places a call.

INT. ARCHIVES ROOM - DAY

Wearing Shon's badge, Jo works in aisles of files. She hides when staffers enter, tries not to breathe or make a sound, as they make out for a long few minutes.

INT. LOOKS HALLWAY AND LOBBY - DAY

Affecting calm, Jo casually strolls toward the elevators with a loaded backpack of documents.

Blake passes through, double-takes when he sees Jo. He chases her, she barely beats him to an elevator. Arriving in the lobby, he yells for someone to grab her but she runs like hell and in the chase -- drops Shon's lanyard.

Blake picks it up. Calls Building Security.

VOICE ON TEL
Twelve Eleven.

BLAKE
Blake Murphy here.

VOICE ON TEL
Mr. Murphy sir. How can I help you?

BLAKE
Need a little intel.

VOICE ON TEL
You name it.

BLAKE

Contract cleaning firm by the name
of Spotless. I need an address.

VOICE ON TEL

Uh, sir I'm not supposed to ...

BLAKE

Yeah I think I mentioned my name?
Murphy?

VOICE ON TEL

Just a moment please ... yes
Spotless. Jackson Heights. 52-16
34th Ave.

Blake hangs up without saying goodbye.

EXT. NYC STREETS & CEMETERY - DAY

Jo continues running as long as she can, looking over her
shoulder. There are demonstrators in the streets, marching
and chanting things like 'WAKE UP TAKE UP GET OUR COUNTRY
BACK', 'LOOKS NOT CROOKS', 'RAY MURPHY SPEAKS FOR GOD'.

She grabs a bike as someone returns it to the dock.

JO

Emergency!

Breathless as she pedals furiously, Jo finally ducks into an
old cemetery, sits on the grass and yells up at the sky.

JO

FUUUCK! I'M FUCKING UP HERE, MISS
FUCK IT UP!

A uniformed employee of the bike share company arrives,
consulting his screen as he tracks the bike's location. He
grabs it from her, sneering at Jo as he leaves.

BIKE COMPANY GUY

I should call the cops, loser.

Nic calls.

NIC (ON TEL)

Jesus Jo did you see this Ray
Murphy thing? I'm at Truckees,
everybody's going nuts!

JO

Yeah I saw. So you mean, they're like, finally getting it? That he's a total piece of shit?

NIC

Are you kidding!? Like, they might take up a collection for him! It's Team Ray all the way here, baby!

JO

Oh. Right, yeah. What the fuck was I thinking.

Jo curls into a fetal position a while, thinking, then suddenly jumps up and runs to the subway.

EXT. NYC JACKSON HEIGHTS STREET - DAY

Blake gets out of a limo. Jo watches from behind garbage cans with rats scampering around. As Shon comes out lugging gear, Blake closes in on her. Shon ignores him, best as she can.

SHON

Yo dude get back.

BLAKE

Any idea who the fuck my uncle is?

Shon tries to ignore him.

BLAKE

Who's using your badge?

SHON

What are you talking about?

Blake dangles the badge, pushing Shon as she yells. Jo steadies her darts and takes aim, hitting Blake in the ear, then whizzes one just over his head.

Blake hobbles back to his chauffeured ride, but as it pulls away -- he leans out the window and snaps a shot of Jo.

INT. MOVING CAR - DAY

Blake calls Building Security again.

BLAKE

Blake Murphy again. You have a file of all the people working for Spotless? I need faces and names.

VOICE ON TEL

Sir I don't mean to be rude but I could get in some major trouble.

BLAKE

You need me to ESCALATE, buddy?

VOICE ON TEL

Ok. No. One moment. Yeah I have the file.

BLAKE

Do you see a white girl, dark hair. Kinda chunk.

VOICE ON TEL

Just one white girl on that crew. Name of Josie Patnode.

BLAKE

Email me a snap of her form. Right now. Blake M at looks dot com.

EXT. JACKSON HEIGHTS STREET - DAY

SHON

Jesus!

JO

Are you ok?

SHON

I think so. Owe you one.

JO

Not when it's my fault in the first place.

SHON

How in the hell did that guy have my badge? And how did you know?

JO

Shon I'm really sorry. I borrowed your badge. And I dropped it.

SHON

You BORROWED it?! For what?

JO

I'm working on something.

SHON

SO AM I JO! I'm working on building my business, and MY LIFE, in case you didn't notice! You think YOU got a bad deal being a poor country girl, with your white privilege you don't even know you have? You have any idea the shithole I came back to every year after our summers? NO you don't because you never even asked me about my life! Like you didn't want to know!

JO

I did want to know! It seemed like you didn't want talk about it so I felt like I shouldn't ask, like you wanted to keep it private!

SHON

You couldn't have handled it! I didn't want to freak out all the nice white people who let me come up there and swim and breathe the air and stuff, and I was so scared you'd be disgusted by my actual real life!

JO

FUCK! I didn't know that!

SHON

Whatever, because do you have any idea what you've done? Fucked up my biggest contract I've ever had?! They're going to bury me, Josie.

JO

I'm so sorry. I'll fix it, I'll fix it, I can fix it.

SHON

YOU CAN'T! You're a no one! And I'm a no one and these people are the someones of the world! You come messing around here, you're just playin! You can go home any old time but this IS MY home and now it's a fucking mess now so get away from me. I can't look at you!

JO

Shon please don't say that I'll do everything I promise I'll fix it...

SHON

Get out of my sight. Get out of my apartment. Get out of my life. NOW.

Shon runs upstairs. Jo's clothes and belongings soon start flying out the window and hitting the pavement.

INT. PARKER'S OFFICE - DAY

Blake barges in and throws his phone on Parker's desk, showing Jo's contractor I.D. registration form.

BLAKE

You're going to want this.

PARKER

I'm busy Blake.

BLAKE

The break-in out east. I have the name, the face, the background. Some mutt from upstate. But get this. The father ... the father of this bitch just got released from custody. He was a January sixer. Matt Patnode. You're welcome.

Parker gets up, peers down the empty hall, closes the door.

PARKER

How did you get this? Are you sure it's legit?

BLAKE

I'm sharp as shit, that's how.

PARKER

This woman works for a cleaning company in the building?

BLAKE

Worked. Past tense. Got fired.

Parker gets up, stares out the window a long moment.

PARKER

And you think this break-in had to do with the father's involvement in January sixth?

BLAKE

Duh?

PARKER

Because this woman suspected that
Looks influenced her father?

BLAKE

Duh again.

PARKER

Have you talked with your uncle
about this?

Blake leaves without responding. Parker googles Matt Patnode.

EXT. NYC JACKSON HEIGHTS STREET - DAY

Upset & disheveled, Jo shuffles through the neighborhood that once delighted her. Sitting on a curb, Jo endures the torment of memory, seeing *Demetrius saying 'cameras everywhere', her & Shon meditating, Nic saying 'Team Ray all the way', and the increasingly angry pro-Looks street mobs, ready to fight.*

Crying hard, she calls Nic. No pickup.

INT. CITY TIMES LOBBY - DAY

Jo dumps out all the files on the lobby attendant's desk.

JO

Call Seth Robbins and tell him to
come get all his shit.

INT. SAFE HOUSE APARTMENT - DAY

Dragging her stuff inside, Jo tapes a photo of herself to the wall, unpacks her darts and nails her own face. Seth calls.

JO

(very unenthusiastic)
Yeah.

SETH (ON TEL)

(very enthusiastic)
Juicy juicy juice Jo, that stuff
you got from the archives! Why
didn't you tell me you were here?

JO

Ohhh. Great. Ok.

SETH

First digital installment going live in a few hours! And guess what else? We have a presser!

JO

A what?

SETH

A press conference? Hello? I'm talking, our team sharing what we know so far. Live. It's just a start, but it's enough. Get this, the archive stuff is basically the blueprint for the shit you found out east. Misrepresenting the news as a fucking business model! Twisting everything for ratings. It's so fucking ugly, it's actually beautiful. Exquisite.

JO

Ohhh ok. Great, have fun.

SETH

Hello? You're like, on the team?

JO

Me? Seriously?

SETH

Like a heart attack.!? Jesus. Can you be at the pavilion by 4:30?

Jo rummages through her hefty bag of clothes. Holds up various ratty old things, throws them down, calls Seth back.

JO

Hi. I don't have anything to wear.

EXT. LOOKS PAVILION -- DAY

In a sleek professional dress Jo sits on the same bench as when she first arrived. She texts Nic.

JO (ON TEXT)

Channel 11. Now. Tell Yvette the station bought the dress.

NIC (ON TEXT)

Whaaa?!

JO
Blowing the fucking lid off it.

Crews arrive and set up -- camera ops, anchor, sound people.

Jo tries to project confidence and readiness, but is fighting disillusionment by this point.

JO
(to herself)
School. My Dad's school of life.

She is startled out of her flashback by a voice.

NEWSCASTER
And you're Jo Patnode right? Is that your full name?

JO
Uh Josie actually. I mean, Josephine. But yeah, Jo. Whatever.

NEWSCASTER
Ready to drive a stake in?

JO
I guess.

NEWSCASTER
This is wild right?! This guy's a fucking monster, suckering all these idiots into...

JO
No! Wait. They're not all idiots. Do you know them? Any of them? They're beat down, is what they are. It's important to understand.

NEWSCASTER
Yeah whatever. They believe all the horseshit Looks can spit out. Suckers.

Coming fully into her epiphany, Jo gets in the guy's face.

JO
You are completely missing the point. You don't understand the situation.

NEWSCASTER
Oh, really.

JO

You think they don't know that you think they're a bunch of dumb asses? You and your whole mainstream media tribe? Why would they listen to you? Oh my god this is so obvious now.

Nearby, a limo pulls up. Out steps Ray Murphy and his entourage. A crowd of fans and gawkers immediately forms around him. Ray steps out looking calm & supremely confident.

NEWSCASTER

Holy shit! That's Murphy! Ok, pivoting here! Up stakes everybody!

The assembled crews quickly pick up their gear and sprint over to Ray, microphones outstretched. Seth is livid.

SETH

Hey! What the fuck! We're ready to go here, you can't just ... jesus.

As Seth sputters, Jo surveys the scene -- the angry crowds, the news crews and Looks fans eager to fall at Ray's feet.

She remembers talking with Mrs. Morrisseau, hearing her say *'They feel he respects them.'*

RAY MURPHY

Afternoon everyone. I'm happy to let you know that Murphy Global is stronger than ever. You know why? Because at Looks News, we DO RIGHT by the American people. We understand what they are going through, and we RESPECT them! Let the liberal media dig for dirt all they want, but we're going to keep on delivering the TRUTH to all the loyal Americans who want it!

SETH

That fucking son of a bitch, he can't ... he just ... jesus!

Glancing toward the Looks pavilion screen, her jaw drops. A giant photo of her dad occupies The Parker Mitchell Show.

PARKER MITCHELL (ON TV)

An update for you today on the ongoing farce known as the January sixth investigation. But this gets interesting, so stay with me.

Horrified and in shock, Jo walks over to the giant screen.

PARKER MITCHELL (ON TV)
 Take a look at this guy, name of
 Mathieu Patnode. French dude,
 sounds like? Whatever. Anyway here
 is Mr. Fancy, in front of the
 Capitol last year.

The screen cuts to footage of the January sixth mob.

PARKER MITCHELL (ON TV)
 So he's there, like hundreds of
 other patriots, and he's picked up
 just like a lot of them but hang
 on. You know where he is now? HOME.
 The man is home. Freed. Why is this
 one man let out of custody, while
 others are still being held?
 Is it maybe possible, stay with me
 here folks, is it crazy to think
 that maybe this Patnode guy is
 actually WORKING FOR THE U.S.
 GOVERNMENT? Merely PRETENDING to
 protest? And now, possibly
 informing on his fellow Americans?
 Now, think about it. Think about
 the logic of this for a minute.
 He's picked up, held for a little
 while maybe just for show, and upon
 release he gives consent to the
 Feds to bug his phones. Why does he
 want them to listen, this Mat-yoo
 character? Why does he have his
 freedom when hundreds of other
 patriots sit rotting in cells?
 Patriots who are victims of an
 unjustified, illegal action to
 deprive Americans of their
 constitutionally-protected rights?
 Stay with me after the break,
 there's a lot more to learn here.

Jo freaks out, calls Mat but changes her mind and hangs up.
 Calls Nic and does the same - hanging up before an answer.

EXT. NYC STREET - DAY

Jo pushes through crowds, dodging fights, bonfires, and cops.
 She sobs openly -- loud ugly cries. She periodically sits on
 a curb to catch her breath, then compulsively keeps going.

She jaywalks willy-nilly, causing screeching of brakes and drivers yelling at her in multiple languages.

She walks across the 59th Street Bridge in the bike lanes, dangerously close to cyclists who also berate her.

She climbs up on the guardrail of the bridge, hanging onto the chain link that prevents pedestrians from jumping. She stares down at the water until a police car pulls over, which sets her running.

After hours of walking, she arrives at Shon's apartment.

EXT. SHON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jo pulls out a pen and a gum wrapper, scrawling '*Low expectations. That's my superpower. I'm sorry forever.*' She stuffs it into Shon's mailbox and stumbles away.

INT. TRUCK - NIGHT

In the old F-150, Nic slow-rolls past Jo's house. It's mobbed. People banging on the doors, blasting horns, yelling for Mat to come out. But the house is completely dark. Nic stops, studies the mania, and hears Cronkite barking.

EXT. YARD AND INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Nic pushes through the crowd, grabs the hidden key from under a rock, and goes in. No one's there but the dog. Nic grabs him up and comes out, yelling from the front porch.

NIC

He's not here ya nutballs! Why
donta calm down till you actually
get any idea what the hell's going
on! Get your shorts out of a bunch,
I'm talkin' to you! Go home!

The crowd yells back at her and pelts a few small mudpies.

INT. TRUCK - NIGHT

Nic drives out of town, following an old country road overgrown with brush, as it narrows and enters the woods. They drive slowly, craning left and right for something.

Finally -- a wisp of smoke from the chimney of an old cabin, almost completely hidden by the woods.

NIC

Yep.

Nic texts Jo: *Mat & Yvette in the cabin. Hiding I suppose.*

INT. SAFE HOUSE APARTMENT - DAY

Crowded in with the boxes, Jo crams stuff into her duffel bag. Looking out, she watches angry crowds of demonstrators, yelling and making threatening gestures. A fight breaks out, people pile in, the police arrive and break it up.

INT. CITY TIMES OFFICES - DAY

At an empty desk, Jo waits for Seth in the cacophonous newsroom -- no longer a place of hope and excitement for her. She stares at the safe house apartment key as she waits.

He arrives, and she pushes the key across the desk to him.

SETH

What's this?

JO

My parents are in hiding in the woods.

SETH

Oh shit. Ok but...

JO

But fuckall! It's my fault.

SETH

So ... you're quitting?

JO

It's the only card in my deck. I stand down, maybe Murphy and Mitchell pick a different target.

SETH

You don't know that.

JO

What I do know sure as hell is if I keep going, so do they.

SETH

The Times is committed to this investigation. In no way are we backing off.

JO

Right. But have you looked outside lately? Do you care that we're pouring gas on the flames? Is this how civil wars start, by the way?

SETH

We're reporting an incredibly important story!

JO

An incredibly important story that will change nothing!

SETH

You don't know that!

JO

Oh my god how do you not get it? How many Ivy League degrees in this building, and none of you can even figure it out!

SETH

FIGURE WHAT OUT?

Jo paces and thinks as she responds -- level and confident.

JO

Murphy is an evil genius. You get the evil part, but do you get the genius part? Really, do you?

SETH

(getting annoyed)

I'm pretty busy so if you're kind of done here?

JO

Genius. He found a way to talk to people. My people. About fifty million of them. You guys, all soooo smart but ...

SETH

There's something wrong with smart?

JO

Do you think Looks viewers don't get that all your wonky policy talk, it all basically translates to, 'we're really smart and you're not, so you're fucked but oh well'. I know how my dad felt, now.

SETH

PEOPLE NEED TO LISTEN TO US!

JO

YOU NEED TO LISTEN! Or, you can just keep talking to yourselves.

SETH

Oh god.

JO

You ever meet anybody like me before? Anybody with like, slimy grease under their nails, and no bank account? This is almost funny when you step back and look. Us in our bubble talking to ourselves. Them in their bubble talking to themselves. It's fucking ludicrous.

SETH

My bubble is where the truth is! Reality! Reported by credentialled journalists with integrity who are committed to finding it out!

JO

(icy)

But don't know how to communicate any of it, outside your own bubble. So how are you so effective?

Seth takes this in, but is unable or unwilling to budge.

SETH

You realize you're probably about to be arrested right? Breaking and entering? If you were still on our team, we could lawyer you up.

Jo gives him a look of hell, then turns and leaves.

INT. LOOKS PAVILION - DAY

Jo inspects her handwritten note:

'JO P STANDING DOWN. CALL MITCHELL OFF MAT P. ALL JUST BS AND YOU KNOW IT.'

With an envelope marked '25 - DeBruxelles for RM', Jo approaches the mail carrier, pulls out a rat from her coat pocket, and releases it.

In the chaos, Jo drops her envelope into the mail cart.

INT. LOBBY AND ELEVATOR - NIGHT

Shon and her crew board with gear for the evening shift. Blake awaits Shon, and sticks his hand in the door of the car she has entered.

BLAKE

You. Are taking a different ride.

He grabs Shon away from her crew, hustles her to the executive elevator, swipes an access card, and pushes her in. As they ride, he twists the lanyard she wears, which is Jo's.

BLAKE

Josie Patnode huh! Not the best picture of you. You're actually better looking than this cow.

Shon does her best to stay cool and composed.

INT. BUS STATION - NIGHT

Jo stares at her Dad's photo as she waits for the bus.

JO

So much for making you proud.

Demetrius calls.

JO

Hi. I'm guessing you hate me.

DEMETRIUS

I'm not the type. Actually calling to thank you.

JO

THANK ME?!

DEMETRIUS

I've been pretending not to hear it all. The BS.

(MORE)

DEMETRIUS (CONT'D)

Just hanging onto the gig you know?
But I got mad skills. I'll be good.

JO

Do you mean you're leaving Looks?

DEMETRIUS

Making tracks. How's your story
coming along?

JO

It's not my story anymore. I'm out.

DEMETRIUS

Whaaat? You're onto something.

JO

On to making trouble for people I
love. Parker came down on my Dad
because I came down on his uncle.
If I cut scene, maybe he picks
another poor target. I hope anyway.

DEMETRIUS

Wow. So The Times, they're dropping
it too?

JO

Nooo. Very much not dropping it. I
think I ended up giving them like,
a really big gift and you know
what? I don't even know if I want
them to come out on top of this.

DEMETRIUS

Wow.

JO

I've been schooled. I've looked up
to The City Times since I was a kid
but now, I've seen some stuff.

DEMETRIUS

Kinda tough when your heroes fall.

JO

Yeah. Had to come all the way to
New York to understand my own
people better, I guess.

DEMETRIUS

Definitely not the same tune you
were singing a few weeks ago.

JO

Yeah. God I'm so relieved you don't hate me.

DEMETRIUS

Nope. And you followed your heart. Can't go wrong there.

JO

Man, it's been kinda hard to tell.

LOUDSPEAKER

Trailways number sixteen arriving on the eleventh platform, Trailways bus arriving from Plattsburgh.

Passengers arriving from upstate stream into the station.

LOUDSPEAKER ANNOUNCEMENT

Departure, Trailways bus sixteen traveling north, destination Plattsburgh. Initial boarding call for Plattsburgh northbound.

JO

This is my bus. Keep my number?

DEMETRIUS

If you keep my number. Like to hear how things go.

JO

Oh hell yeah. Oh god I'm relieved you don't hate me too.

Subdued but somewhat peaceful, Jo joins the boarding line. Arriving passengers disembark.

And all of a sudden in the stream of people -- there's Nic. They see each other and both let out a yelp.

NIC & JO

WHAT THE ... OH MY GOD ... YOU'RE KIDDING ...

Jo ducks under the rope, she and Nic have a long embrace.

NIC

Had to come see if my girl is still my girl.

JO

She is. And she's incredibly glad to see you.

NIC
They're glad. They're glad too.

JO
Babe this is nuts! I mean I was heading home! I was going to surprise you!

NIC
I was going to surprise you!

JO
Ya did!

NIC
So, I guess this isn't the visit where I get to see New York.

JO
Could we come back sometime? I'm so done. So spent.

Holding each other, they hurry to get the bus.

INT. BUS - NIGHT

Nic swivels every which way trying to see the city.

NIC
Holy shit though.

JO
Yeah, it's amazing right? A different world. A bus ride away.

NIC
Really sure you want to leave?

JO
I did what I could. It was way more than I ever thought I would do. It sure did feel incredible, there for a minute. You know what, I think I might make a good reporter.

NIC
Course you will! Bulldog nose with a terrier's grip, you're gonna kill.

JO
But what an invoice. I wonder when I'm going to know.

NIC

Know?

JO

Know whether or not Parker's going to drop it. Know if Dad can come out of hiding. Know if I can be his Josie anymore.

Nic holds her, and they get cozy in their seats as the city swirls around them, including demonstrators.

Nic spots people bearing strong resemblance to themselves, with signs like 'NON BINARY NON ALIGNED', and chanting 'LGBTQ AND WE ALL LOVE YOU TOO!'. She hangs out the window.

NIC

I love you too! I'm coming back!
I'll march with yas!

NIC

(to Jo)

You see that? A whole big group of me here! Never saw any of me anywhere, much less a whole big group!

INT. RAY MURPHY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Blake bursts in with Shon, realizes from the sound of urination that his uncle is in his private restroom, and paces anxiously, dragging her along.

INT. LOOKS STUDIO AND SET - NIGHT

Parker gives an introduction for his program.

PARKER (ON CAMERA)

Good evening and welcome to a special evening edition of the Parker Mitchell Show. Folks you're in luck tonight. We have a special show in store for you. In about seven minutes, we'll be joined in the studio by Mr. Raymond Murphy, Looks News founder and CEO. You heard me right! You don't want to miss this, Mr. Murphy's razor-sharp perspective and insights on the issues of the day. Stay tuned.

As Parker sits opposite an empty chair, he stoically listens, on his in-ear mic, to the sound of urinating and flushing.

Demetrius and other crew work at the sound board nearby.

INT. RAY MURPHY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Ray emerges from his private washroom to find Blake & Shon. He completes preparations for his appearance while talking.

RAY
God you startled me! Who's this?

BLAKE
Uncle Ray this woman has the badge
of the woman who broke in out east.

RAY
I told you to stay out of it.

Blake pushes Shon into a chair.

BLAKE
(to Shon)
Stay there. Not a word.

BLAKE
Uncle Ray I just want to be sure
you know that I'm fiercely
committed to Looks and ...

RAY
I'm wondering if you've considered
other lines of work, kid.

BLAKE
What? Uncle Ray I need you to
listen to me ...

INT. LOOKS STUDIO AND SET - NIGHT

On set, Parker listens to Ray and Blake talking. At the controls, Demetrius listens to them, as well.

INT. RAY MURPHY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

RAY
Blake, you're in over your head. I
know everything there is to know
about how to run this business.
(MORE)

RAY (CONT'D)

I know what makes our people tick,
I know how to talk to our audience,
I know how to handle the press, and
I sure as hell know how to shut
down some wonky liberal story.

BLAKE

But the story isn't dead Uncle Ray,
the City Times is ...

RAY

Is a bunch of putzes who can't get
out of their own way! The liberals
are so gaga about their IDEALS and
so busy being righteous that they
can't figure out how to win! That's
what we know how to do.

BLAKE

We do sir, but...

RAY

WHY DOES THIS STATION MINT MONEY!
WHY DO WE HAVE AN EMPIRE BLAKE!?

INT. LOOKS STUDIO AND SET - NIGHT

Parker listens, stonyfaced, to Ray and Blake. So does Dem.

DEMETRIUS

(to himself)

Yeah. Why do we have an empire?

Demetrius makes a sudden decision -- he flips a switch. In
doing so, he pairs Ray's mic with a console audio setting,
which takes Ray's words straight to output channels.

Blake & Ray's conversation is now broadcast LIVE ON-AIR,
audible throughout the building, the pavilion, and the world.

INT. EXECUTIVE FLOOR HALLWAY - NIGHT

In the Looks hallway outside Ray's office, his voice is
audible both through the open door, and secondly -- on the
delayed audio monitors, just as Josie heard it early on.

BLAKE (LIVE AND ON DELAYED AUDIO)

We have an empire Uncle Ray
because...

RAY (LIVE AND ON DELAYED AUDIO)
BECAUSE I'M A FUCKING GENIUS,
THAT'S WHY. It's not about facts,
Blake. Fucking facts are useless.

BLAKE
Yes sir, fuck facts!

RAY
Once in a while someone creates a
little distraction, but it always
dies down because what they will
never understand is how to hold
peoples' attention. That's what
matters and THAT'S our value to our
PARTNERS. Not our ADVERTISERS, our
PARTNERS. THE ONES I DEAL WITH FROM
OUT EAST IN RELATIONSHIPS THAT ARE
HIGHLY CONFIDENTIAL! DO YOU
UNDERSTAND? THEY MAKE CONTRIBUTIONS
TO ENSURE THEIR POINTS OF VIEW ARE
REPRESENTED!

EXT. LOOKS PAVILION - NIGHT

Passersby stop, puzzled, squint up at the giant outdoor
screen frozen on an adult diapers commercial, and react in
various ways -- shock, hilarity, disbelief.

INT. STUDIO AND CONTROL ROOM - NIGHT

All personnel -- crew, talent, staff -- have stopped in their
tracks, wide-eyed in shocked silence at Ray's comments and
how they are hearing them.

At the control board, Demetrius surveys the scene calmly.

RAY
It's about feelings, kid! Feelings
are king! You tap into peoples'
feelings, boy that's the game. Hit
those buttons and they believe any
cockamamie thing you tell 'em. You
might think of us as a translation
service. The world is complicated.
We get paid to explain things to
some of the simpler people. It's a
gold mine and always will be.

BLAKE
Wow.

RAY

We're giving our audience a gift, really. We help them to feel better. They have lots of reasons to be upset. They just don't know what the reasons are. And with our help, they never really will.

BLAKE

Genius, sir.

INT. RAY MURPHY'S OFFICE -- NIGHT

RAY

I gotta get to set, are you getting this, Blake? It's all about those hot buttons. Rage, envy, resentment.

BLAKE

I see.

RAY

I'm told there's actually a chemical reaction in the brain from these feelings, and it's addictive. That's why we're fucking unstoppable.

BLAKE

I see.

RAY

It's almost too easy sometimes.

RAY

Gotta go kid. Young lady (to Shonda) you're dismissed. I apologize for him, he's a dimwit.

Blake stands frozen, destroyed. Shonda quietly leaves.

INT. LOOKS STUDIO & SET - NIGHT

REPRISE OF OPENING SCENE: Tech, production, camera, talent -- all studio personnel are halted in mid-motion, wide-eyed in shocked frozen silence, lasting for an eternal minute.

Parker included - he sits frozen, stunned, staring at the empty seat across from him. Slowly, staff recover composure and resume work.

An assistant approaches Parker and guides him off set.

INT. DINER - NIGHT

The broadcast has halted all movement and conversation -- servers, cooks, customers all as still and silent as can be.

EXT. MOVING BUS - NIGHT

The broadcast has played throughout the bus via the seatback screens. Jo and Nic stare at it in shock. As the bus trundles north up the West Side Highway, Jo glimpses out her window the shadowy figures of a father and daughter, walking together, holding hands.

She gets a text from Dem.

DEMETRIUS (ON TEXT)

*Change one mind and you can change
the world. Sometimes there's just a
slight delay.*

FADE OUT.