

TO BE HEARD

By

Julie Gervais

JULIEG@MUSICHALL.ORG
248-842-5507

FADE IN

EXT. RURAL BUS STATION - EVENING

JOSIE (JO) PATNODE -- 25, urban gritty chic, fit, self-assured -- steps off the bus while talking on her phone.

JO

Of course I did the math. By the time I connected in Albany or maybe missed that connection, got a car in Plattsburgh if the rental place was even still open, forget it ... yeah I'm thinking, just a couple of days, I hope? It's not like I'm any less allergic to the place. Yeah me too. Ok bye.

Jo sits on a bench, checks her uber app. She stands out among the people shuffling through -- a working-class crowd dressed in generic big box store drab, many dramatically overweight.

JO (CONT'D)

Aaaand of course. Not serving this area yet. No shit.

An old minivan cruises up with a handpainted TAXI sign on it. She stands and raises her arm to 'hail a cab', NYC-style.

INT. TAXI - EVENING

DRIVER

You didn't have to raise your hand.

JO

Raise my hand?

DRIVER

You was the only person I was comin' for.

JO

Oh. Did my Mom maybe send you?
Yvette Patnode?

DRIVER

Nah, it's just I heard 'em talkin' in Truckees sayin' you was comin' up, and on account of I know when the bus gets in, figured I'd show up to git ya.

JO

Oh. Thanks. I should have known there weren't going to be any Ubers. Can you bring me to ...

DRIVER

Your house? Course.

JO

Wait how do you know ... nevermind.

DRIVER

Hope this town'll give your dad a ticker tape parade when he gets out, tell ya what.

JO

A ... parade. Really.

DRIVER

He and all the rest of them patriots did the right thing. I'd a been right there with him if I hadn't a got too old.

JO

(under her breath)
Great.

INT. DILAPIDATED DOUBLE-WIDE TRAILER HOME - NIGHT

Jo lets herself in, moving quietly. She closes the bedroom door for her sleeping mom.

She enters her childhood bedroom. The walls are covered with clippings from 'The City Times', and there are stacks of old newspapers under her desk.

She picks up a framed photo from the dresser, of her as a young kid with her dad, him holding her in position as he teaches her how to swing a hammer, both grinning widely.

INT. TRAILER KITCHEN - DAY

Jo's mom YVETTE -- 40s, rail-thin, hardened, bedraggled -- dangles a cigarette out of her mouth as she fries an egg and watches Looks News.

Jo opens the windows to let the smoke out.

YVETTE

You got the whole week?

JO

No just a couple of days. I'm too new to get a whole week.

YVETTE

But you know the visiting isn't till Saturday don'tcha?

JO

What? NO! How the hell would I know that? Jesus Mom it's Tuesday! I can't ... oh my god.

NEWSCASTER (ON TV)

And we wish a pleasant good morning to all of our viewers, Looks is here to tell it like it is, because our viewers are the REAL Americans, and we getcha.

JO

Gets you my ass. I can't believe you're watching this!

YVETTE

Can we not fight about the news two seconds after you're here.

JO

Ok but I've been here all night, and since that isn't news ... Ok nevermind.

YVETTE

I'm goin' to work. Don't run the dryer unless you're gonna stick close, I think it has a short.

JO

Are you serious that I really can't see him until Saturday? Maybe I can get them to make an exception, because ...

Yvette answers her as she's heading out the door.

YVETTE

Because as we all know, you're exceptional? Good luck with that.

Jo gets a text from an old friend, NICOLE (NIC)

NIC (ON TEXT)
Make it in? I'm coming by you can
ride along.

JO (ON TEXT)
Along to where?

NIC (ON TEXT)
Unemployment? You forget the scene
already?

INT. MOVING TRUCK - DAY

NICOLE TROMBLEY (NIC) -- 25, Jo's childhood bestie,
identifies as non-binary, dressed up like they're going to a
dance club, drives with Jo in the passenger seat.

JO
Yvette failed to mention that
visiting is only on Saturdays. Like
I'm a senior reporter and I can
take off just any old time.

NIC
And no calling, still?

JO
Still.

NIC
So fucked up. And no charges yet?

JO
Nope. So the lawyer can't even
start, there's nothing to respond
to. Total limbo. I filed a FOIA but
they can take years ... (several
beats) ... How are you doing
though? I mean like, really?

NIC
Oh excellent. This fucking charade,
with the unemployment interviews.
Because somehow 24/7 caregiving
doesn't count as employed.

JO
She still having a few good days?

NIC
Getting fewer and further between.

JO
Shit. Sorry.

NIC
Plus everyone is so eager to have me around, considering I'm like a creature from some exotic zoo.

JO
Whereas in New York you would just be a normal part of the crowd.

NIC
Lookin' forward to that, it keeps me going.

JO
Meanwhile, you're givin' 'em something to talk about.

NIC
Ha yeah I am!

JO
(singing)
Laugh just a little too loud ...

NIC & JO
Stand just a little too close, We stare just a little too long,
Let's give 'em somethin' to talk about ...

Nic pulls into lot, parks, checks their outfit.

JO
They still play Looks in there, 24/7?

NIC
Oh you know it! It's not just on one screen anymore, it's like a half dozen all over the room.

JO
Jesus I'll wait out here. So, you ready for Miss Bitchany? I assume she's still deadnaming you.
(in a high screechy voice)
Have you been actively seeking work Ms. Trombley? What positions have you applied for, is your resume in tip-top shape? What assets do you bring to the table, Trombley?

NIC

Oh yes ma'am I am a big asset
 alright, with you know, my
 insightful insights, and my ...
 outstanding understanding. I bring
 a lot of assets.

Nic pats their own behind and Jo cracks up.

JO

Go kick some assets.

Jo watches Nic approach the building, a buoyant and bright
 presence amidst a drab and downcast crowd.

A while later, Nic storms angrily out, kicking a rock across
 the lot as she approaches the truck.

JO (CONT'D)

Uhhh?

NIC

Little bitch says I have to
 reapply. Says my mom's care is not
 enough reason why I don't have
 gainful employment.

JO

Power-tripping cunt.

NIC

Says the new governor 'empowered'
 her to withhold my benefits if I am
 "insufficiently engaged".

JO

That fucker. Looks endorsed him.
 Major whore for the business
 community.

NIC

What jobs even are there, is the
 crazy part. I could work at the
 Dolla-Rama. Get ten percent off
 outdated food!

JO

(turning to Nic, tenderly)
 It's gonna get better. This is a
 phase of your life that's hard but
 it's eventually going to be
 history, and you're coming to New
 York with me and ... it's going to
 be so much better. I promise.

They have a nice long embrace and a brief kiss.

EXT. TRUCKEE'S DINER - DAY

Nic pulls into the parking lot to drop Jo off.

NIC

You sure you want to go in there?
They're gonna get good and fired
up, the minute they see you.

JO

I hear you, but I think Yvette has
like an hour left. May as well keep
her company.

NIC

Take no bait.

JO

Who me?

INT. TRUCKEE'S DINER - DAY

A few regulars sit around in the later afternoon lull. Looks
News plays from several grubby screens.

All heads turn when Josie enters. Among them are BIG AL --
50s, very large guy in muddy farm boots and overalls, and
PERRY -- 60s and grizzled.

BIG AL

Well here's Miss New York City
herself.

PERRY

How's the looney lib media business
Jo?

JO

Hi guys. Good to see you too. Mom
can I grab some coffee?

YVETTE

Yeah I think it's about drained,
mind starting a new pot?

Jo sets about figuring out the coffee maker, peering into the
water hopper and discarding the old grounds.

BIG AL
So what's the latest Jo, you savin'
the world for woke-ness?

JO
Oh Jesus Al.

YVETTE
Can we not abuse the name of the
Lord, in here?

JO
Like the name of the Lord is one of
our actual problems in life.

PERRY
Ok Jo fill us in. What are our
actual problems in life, as told
from your lofty position?

Jo is focused on making coffee. She rips open a fresh bag and
flings coffee everywhere. The guys are enjoying her struggle.

BIG AL
Besides not knowing how to make
coffee.

JO
Let's start with listening to the
wrong people ok? How about that?

PERRY
And which wrong people would those
be?

Jo glances at one of the screens playing Looks, and then
pointedly turns her gaze to Perry, but says nothing.

BIG AL
This the part where you want some
censorship, but don't want to call
it that?

YVETTE
Can we not start this, please?

JO
(still calm & level)
Riiiiight. Despite the fact that
all they air is bullshit and
manipulation. Merchants of rage and
resentment.

PERRY

For all the right reasons. B'sides, you got plenty of rage and resentment, where'd you get yours?

BIG AL

Yeah it's not like there's no liberal rage machine.

JO

You guys. Ray Murphy is laughing his ass off at you. All the way to the bank.

YVETTE

Oh great. Sounds like we're starting this.

PERRY

Who the hell's Ray Murphy?

JO

Your lord and master.

Big Al and Perry have fun with this clowning around like a couple of English barons.

BIG AL

And who's your lord and master Jo? Who runs your egghead paper, like to give him a piece of my mind.

JO

I'm sure he'd be happy to have it.

BIG AL

Nope and nope. Listen to somebody outside his egghead bubble? Not happening.

JO

(becoming a bit charged)
OUR bubble? Oh my god are you kidding? The City Times is the paper of record. We listen to everybody, that's what makes it journalism and not just a bunch of people blabbing whatever comes into their heads. We REPORT, we INVESTIGATE, we don't just yell and tell lies all day.

PERRY

Crooked as a snake's pajamas, in
all your sneaky lib ways.

Jo has poured water into the coffee machine but it's dripping
out a hot stream of ... scalding water. She burns her hand as
she yanks the pot away.

JO

SHIT! Why is this just water?

PERRY

Sounds like you better investigate.

BIG AL

Still lyin' about the election
though, you just do that part of
the day?

JO

(now taking the bait)

How can you say that?! There were
dozens of investigations, like
sixty court cases, audits and
recounts and every possible waste
of time and money to prove IT
WASN'T STOLEN! And still, you go on
with this insane BULLSHIT.

PERRY

Them investigations weren't nothing
but a coverup.

BIG AL

True that. All smoke and mirrors
from the crooked crooks. Just ask
Mat, he knows what's what.

Jo stops struggling with the coffee machine, and squares off
against Perry and Big Al.

JO

(now fully enraged)

Don't you fucking dare bring him
into this! He was brainwashed and
radicalized by your fucking Looks
News, you guys are playing with
fire and you're fucking up the
country with your loyalty to these
assholes! YOU'RE the guilty ones!

PERRY

Sayin' your dad is guilty too?

JO

NO! HE ONLY MARCHED OUTSIDE, HE WAS
A PEACEFUL PROTESTOR, HE DIDN'T
BREAK INTO ANYWHERE AND ... and ...

BIG AL

Hear that Perry? Everybody in here
today? It's all our fault! How
about we're GUILTY of wanting a
seat at the table! We're GUILTY of
figuring out the liberal media
doesn't give a rat's ass about
what's happening with us out here
in the stix! WE'RE GUILTY OF BEING
RIGHT, AND MAT WAS RIGHT TO DO WHAT
HE DID GODDAMIT!

Jo storms out just as the fresh coffee begins to drip out.

EXT. TRUCKEE'S DINER - DAY

Jo sits under a tree, trying to deep breathe. She texts Nic.

JO (ON TEXT)

You home?

NIC (ON TEXT)

@ Morisseau farm

JO (ON TEXT)

I'm coming over wait for me

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Jo storms along, steaming mad. She mutters to herself and
gestures like a New Yorker, continues deep breathing.

EXT. BARNYARD - DAY

Decked out in yet another outfit suitable for a nightclub,
Nic sits on a milking stool, repairing a trough.

NIC

You walk all the way from
Truckee's?

JO

New York's very walky. We walk.

Jo begins throwing pebbles into a metal pail across the
field, nailing each one and creating a lot of noise.

NIC

Something tells me that wasn't a good scene back there.

JO

Why do they cling to this shit?
What do they get out of it? What the fuck is in it for them?

MRS. MORRISSEAU -- 70s, post-hippie earth mother with a radiant vibe, approaches from across the field.

MRS. MORRISSEAU

Josephine it's good to see you, even in lousy circumstances.

They hug.

MRS. MORRISSEAU (CONT'D)

Do you have any updates? When is my best hand coming back to me?

JO

I don't know anything. They still haven't even charged him.

MRS. MORRISSEAU

Quite the system we have these days. That used to be a 72-hour deadline.

NIC

Um no shade Mrs. M but ...

MRS. MORRISSEAU

How do I know that? You think an old hippie never got rounded up after a protest?

JO

Wow! Ok?

MRS. MORRISSEAU

Your father isn't an insurrectionist. He's a livestock whisperer.

JO

He's a livestock whisperer!?

MRS. MORRISSEAU

End of the day, you should see the cows come into the barn for him. Like he knows some secret code.

NIC

Mat always did have some special powers. Remember he got me to jump into the swimming hole when that was the last thing I thought I'd ever do.

MRS. MORRISSEAU

(thoughtful, searching)

He gets them, is I think how your generation would put it. He ... it's an understanding but even more so ... he respects them. He relates to cows on a level they pick up on. He meets them where they are. So they follow him. They'd go anywhere with him.

Jo and Nic stare at Mrs. Morrisseau, in slight shock. Because she's expressing something that jolts a realization in them.

INT. JO'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Jo sifts through her old copies of The City Times, coming across headline after headline that tells a tale of woe for her hometown folks -- globalization and the offshoring of blue-collar jobs, the growth of tech and the knowledge economy, the devastation of rural areas on multiple fronts.

She picks up her phone and makes a call.

COLLEAGUE (ON TEL)

You can't be serious.

JO

I am incredibly serious. Pop the bubble Seth. Actually, pop two. It'll be a two-fer.

COLLEAGUE

I just don't see how we can ...

JO

You can't not, is the thing. It's on us. We need to listen. We can do better. We're supposed to BE better.

COLLEAGUE

It's a moon shot.

JO

No, it's a bus ride.

Jo's colleague lets out a heavy sigh as they hang up.

EXT. RURAL BUS STATION - EVENING

In the same 'taxi' that gave her a ride home, Jo watches the bus pull up.

EXT. TRUCKEE'S DINER - EVENING

Jo and her colleagues pile out of the minivan: a cluster of urbane New York types, strangers in a strange land with their carefully curated outfits, accessories, and gear.

INT. TRUCKEE'S DINER - EVENING

All heads turn as Jo and her colleagues enter.

JO

Hi Mom. Al. Perry. These are some
of my team.

She points each person out in turn; they wave as they are introduced.

JO (CONT'D)

Ezra. Yao-Fen. De'Andre. Yazmeen.
We're here to listen to you. We
want to know what's happening.

After a moment of frozen hesitation, Perry and Al get up and push a few tables together so everyone can sit down.

General commotion of hello and nice-to-meet-you all the way around the table, as Yvette puts on a fresh pot of coffee.

FADE OUT.