

UPSTATE GIRL

By

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EXT. PROCESSING PLANT - DAY

A small sign near the door reads 'US Poultry'.

JOSIE PATNODE (JO) - 21, sturdy, strong, and full of sass, shuffles along with exhausted workers toward the exit.

Workers lift their arms to be wanded. Jo adds a few clucks and arm flaps in a halfass attempt at chicken impersonation.

No one notices, much less laughs.

INT. PARKED CAR - DAY

Jo's routine: drape coat over steering wheel to make a tent, wiggle into a change of clothes. Awkward but functional.

INT. MOVING CAR AND EXT. COUNTRY ROADSIDE - DAY

The car whizzes by run-down farms, a titty bar, self-storage. As Jo pilots her old subcompact, she cracks herself up.

JO

Self storage. Why not! Like, you need a break from life? Check right in, yo! Store yourself. Sto yoself before you wreck yoself.

Her car makes bad-sounding bangs. She playfully bangs back and talks to the car, nicknamed FRANK.

JO

FRANK! Frank what're you doing here, I have a test, c'mon buddy.

Finally the car sputters and she pulls off the road.

JO

Fuuuuuckity fuck fuck fuck.

She gathers textbooks - PRINCIPLES OF JOURNALISM, MODERN MEDIA STUDIES - stuffs her backpack, and run-walks awkwardly.

Upstate Community College - a drab boxy building - is in sight but a ways off. Cars whiz by, despite her waving.

JO

I SEE YOU CHASTITY! APPRECIATE YOUR KINDNESS! WE GOT A TEST IN FIFTEEN, I'M GONNA ACE IT BUT HOW 'BOUT YOU, A 'D' IF YOU'RE LUCKY, CHASTITY? OR SLEEPING WITH PROFESSOR BOUCHARD?

EXT. ROADSIDE - DAY

Jo walks back to her car. Her partner NIC TROMBLEY - 19, ever-buoyant, natty dresser, non-binary - works under the hood.

Jo sneaks up behind Nic, caressing their back.

JO

What have I done to deserve you?

NIC

Various, but you didn't replace your alternator like I told you to.

JO

Yeah shit. You did indeed. Shit.

NIC

I can put one in, but not until after I do the check-in.

JO

Bitchany! Ohhh the bi-weekly check-in for Persons Desiring Employment.

INT. TRUCK - DAY

Nic drives, Jo sits slumped in the passenger seat.

JO

Sleep. That must cost extra.

NIC

You didn't catch a couple hours in between?

JO

Nope. Studying.

NIC

I thought I smelled eau de chicken guts. Open the damn window!

JO

Hilarious. Ok you ready? (switching to a tinny high voice) Miz Trombley - because you know she's gonna deadname you - Miz Trombley are you actively seeking work? What positions have you applied for? Is your resume in tip-top shape, you Trombley freak, you?

NIC

Ma'am, I am a work-seeking MACHINE!
And with my skills and talents...

JO

(still in mocking voice)
And which skills and talents would
those be, exactly?

NIC

You know there's my ... outstanding
understanding, and my insightful
like, insight! HOWZZAT!

INT. UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICE - DAY

Glum people clutch paper numbers. A screen plays REAL AMERICA
NEWS, the premier conservative superstation.

Jo glares at the Barbie-like anchor and her Ken counterpart.

JO

Assholes.

NIC

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

JO

Because objectively, it's nuts. Why
is this shit always on everywhere?
It's like a pacifier, people have
to have their binky.

TIFFANY - 20s, office clerk, heavy makeup, sleazy outfit,
emerges from her cubicle snapping gum, scanning the lobby.

TIFFANY

Ms. Trombley, I see you're back.

NIC

Hey Tiffany good to see ya! I'm not
actually a miz though, I go by Mix
Trombley, or just Nic is great! How
you been, you changed your hair!

TIFFANY

MIX? Oh please Nicole. Josie do you
have business in here?

JO

Jesus I'll wait in the truck.

TIFFANY

Can we NOT take the name of the
lord in vain please?

JO

(as she leaves)

The name of the lord is the least
of our problems around here (under
her breath) Bitchany.

NIC

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

INT. TRUCK - DAY

Jo watches Nic storm out of the office, shouting.

NIC

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

JO

Oh that a-hole! Real America
endorsed him, there ya go.

NIC

She kicked me off benefits, I have
to re-apply! FUCK! 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

That's not gonna solve it.

NIC

I know. 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

C'mon Nic this is a shithole.
There's places where people will be
like, normal to you.

NIC

People don't mean to be that way,
they just don't understand and
that's 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

Besides, I think you mean places
where there's more people who think
everything that you think.

JO

Yeah right?! If everyone would just
think the same as me! (pounding the
dashboard). Nobody listen to Real
America and we'll all be fine!

NIC

But you know what else? We're just
a couple of mangy upstaters. Like
how would you get your poutine fix?
You'd have to pack out, like, five-
gallon buckets of poutine if you
ever moved away.

JO

Oh you like my poutine lard ass.

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

EXT. TRAILER HOME - NIGHT

A 360 tour: the muddy driveway with old jalopies, pile of
butts by the back door, an upturned bathtub sheltering a
weathered statue of the Virgin Mary.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jo works at a desk surrounded by marked-up back issues of *The City Times* and clippings tacked to the wall. She gets a text.

DAD (ON TEXT)
Do not be late!

JO (ON TEXT)
Ok but chickens already dead so

She checks the time, and reluctantly packs up her books.

EXT. AND INT. CHICK STOP DINER - NIGHT

A large neon chicken beckons from the roof. A sign on the door says: "A US Poultry Family Establishment".

Jo bangs in, talking and rushing.

JO
They move the hangout back outside?

SERVER
Even the old coots get a little
spring fever.

Jo goes outside to a small yard with a pétanque court: a long rectangle and some scattered balls.

MATHIEU (MAT) - 40s, handsome but weathered, French-Canadian accent, sits with his buddies, his walker close beside him.

There is also PERRY - 60s, grizzled like a bear, and Big Al - 50s, a very large man in overalls and muddy boots.

JO
Hey I just need coffee but oh c'mon
a quick game Dad, I have time!

Mat struggles to stand, but can balance ok. They throw.

She's good but he's better. He coaches her, bear-hugging to adjust her stance; she then nails the little target ball.

JO
You see that?! Whooooose Dad should
be on the pro circuit, THIS Dad
right here baby! Woot woot!

Mat smiles, but brushes her off and they all go back in, Mat clomping slowly. Real America News plays on multiple screens.

ANCHOR (ON TV)

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

JO

Oh gets us my ass. Look at that dress. Costs more than I'll make this whole month. Is there coffee?

MATHIEU

The station buys their clothes for them, it's not her own clothes.

JO

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

BIG AL

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

JO

No but I am a professional chicken gutter, that much I got.

MATHIEU

She doing extra shifts at the plant for the spring break.

PERRY

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

Jo ineptly tries to work the coffee machine.

MATHIEU

Yah, her crazy school give her A plus for believing it!

Onscreen is PARKER MITCHELL - 30s, Black, fit, sharp suit.

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.

PARKER MITCHELL (ON TV)
 Folks you won't be surprised by
 this. Here we have the marxist
 wokest professor of sustainability.
 From the hallowed halls of Yale
 University this is Kib Williams, so-
 called 'doctor' of something or
 other, who's pushing government
 supports for wind and solar power.
 Folks I know I don't have to tell
 you. It was our lord Jesus Christ
 who made the wind and the sun, and
 so to say that the wind and the sun
 need help from the GOVERNMENT!? I
 mean what can you do with people
 like this?

The coffee machine shoots out clear water.

JO
 Shit what's wrong with this?

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

PERRY
 Nope. Guess we can't have coffee!

Jo gives them a look of hell. She spills scalding water on
 herself. She tears open another packet, flinging it all over.

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

MATHIEU
 Josie, please don't start.

BIG AL
 Who the hell's Ray Murphy?

JO
 Real America's CEO, 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
Because a billionaire is definitely
looking out for your ass.

Big Al takes over the coffee-making while still arguing.

BIG AL
Let me do it.

JO
Ok thanks but they're punking you.

PERRY
Oh what the fuck, Jo.

JO
How riled up do you get, watching
that shit? That's to keep you from
actually thinking, Perry.

MATHIEU
All the media tell lies.

Jo squares off with her father, freaked out.

JO
DADDY!

MATHIEU
Are you going, Mademoiselle
Smartass?

Jo bolts in a fury, just as the coffee finally drips out.

JO
I'm going, see me venture forth in
search of my highest calling, as
defined by this shithole town.

BIG AL
BUT I MADE YOUR COFFEE!

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Jo prepares some breakfast for her Dad, who clomps in.

JO

Hey Dad here's your omelette and
get this I looked it up, on the pro
circuit they have accommodations!
You can compete while seated ...

MATHIEU

Josie don't come to Chick Stop if
you embarrass me with my friends!

JO

What?

MATHIEU

You know what they believe, why you
keep talking on it like this!

JO

Because they believe BULLSHIT!

MATHIEU

Cannot you just ... let them be.

JO

These liars dad, RAN and all the
rest of them. They're poisoning
people. It's why we can't fix shit,
because everyone's distracted by
the wrong things!

MATHIEU

They are my friends, JoJo.

JO

And I'm your daughter!

MATHIEU

Just let me be in peace with my
guys, yeah? Ok?

Josie kicks the door on her way out and yells incoherently.

INT. PARKED CAR - DAY

Jo calls SHONDA (SHON) - early 20s, Black, beautiful,
resident of NYC, a childhood friend of Jo & Nic.

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.

SHON
How's things, you good?

JO
Like, yeah? Is there a weird vibe
around here? Or am I a little nuts?

SHON
Ok but it's you Josie, so...

JO
Ok a lot nuts. Hey, favor? Can you
just camera me your current scene?
I need to be anywhere but here.
Just for a hot minute.

Shon switches to a video call and pans a typical chaotic NYC street scene, ending the shot with her serene smiling face.

JO
Wow. Thanks. I needed that. God,
the world.

SHON
The world is all out here for you
girl.

JO
Yeah but who would keep my
treadmill going?

SHON
The treadmill is a place of honor.
Striving. Yet, we treadmill best
when we are rested and our minds
are at ease.

JO
Rested! That's a good one.

SHON
I gotta go. Miss you, country girl.

JO
Same. City chick.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Jo, distracted works at a computer terminal, jotting notes.

She searches Real America News everything -- leadership, controversies, litigation, financial reporting, launch.

She perks up, zooms in on 'Real America News inception':

"... a for-profit business that calls itself a news organization doesn't have to provide the public with truthful information, or report facts. It merely has to make money, in order to stay in business. Unlike medicine where they can revoke your credentials for malpractice, in journalism they simply have to appear to be trying to report facts."

JO
(under her breath)
Appear ... to be trying. That's a
fucking standard?

PROFESSOR LAFLEUR - late 60s, radiant, deeply thoughtful post-hippie earth momma vibe - enters the library.

PROFESSOR LAFLEUR
There's always that one student
still in the library at the
beginning of spring break starts.

JO
Yeah, I'm probably nuts. I have a
RAN problem at home, and I'm just
wracking my brain like, how do they
keep getting away with it?

PROFESSOR LAFLEUR
Believe me, you're not the first to
ask. It's been egregious for so
long it's become almost mundane.

JO
But why is the standard so weak in
the first place?

PROFESSOR LAFLEUR
There've always been lies churning
around. But people can see through
it, better than you might think. It
used to kind of keep itself in
check. A self-correcting system.

JO

But, now there's so much more of it. Real America was really just the beginning, the first wave.

PROFESSOR LAFLEUR

Yes. We're well into middle-stage digital revolution. There's been scattered attempts to rein in disinformation, but it has proven itself to be very durable.

JO

So maybe the standard is finally reaching its expiration date?

PROFESSOR LAFLEUR

You know what Josie? All the change that's ever happened in the world is because the right action found the right moment.

JO

But what a thing to try to prove. You'd have to show intent right? Show they KNEW they were BS-ing. Or at least, not trying NOT to?

PROFESSOR LAFLEUR

Definitely hard to prove. But you know what else? I've seen this time and time again in journalism. There can be clues in plain sight, and people walk past them every day and because they do, they believe there's nothing to see there.

EXT. COW PASTURE - DAY

Jo crouches between barbed wire to get into the field.

Nic - in an outfit that would be appropriate for a 90s dance club - repairs a feed trough while several cows look on.

JO

I had a fight with Dad.

NIC

That's not exactly news.

JO

It's getting worse I think.

Nic is sympathetic but has nothing to add.

JO

I thought you were here to help with the milking.

NIC

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

Jo lets off steam by flinging stones into a metal bucket, noisily nailing every single one. The cows moo, all riled up.

NIC

You're kind of spooking them.

JO

Sorry. Frustrated.

NIC

You get a 'B' on a test or somethin'?

JO

I'm studying journalism at a time when the whole profession is getting creamed, by the bullshit machine. It's actually existential. What is going to happen to actual reporting?

NIC

Bullshit is nothing new.

JO

Yeah but this disinformation train is bigger, it's so much more. And louder, and super fucking fast. It's kinda running everything else off the rails.

NIC

Points for the metaphor there.

JO

I know right?! Points!

NIC

You need to go take a run or something. Blow off steam.

JO
I need to change the world.

NIC
(checking the time)
So, you have about three hours
before your next shift.

JO
NIC!

Nic pounds nails progressively harder; there's tension between them and they don't know why.

JO
What if there was something to see,
but people thought there was
nothing, so they couldn't see it?
Or like, they see it everyday so
they don't even really know the it
is an it. Or maybe even THE it.

NIC
I majorly don't know what you're
talking about.

JO
Yeah. I don't either. But, there
might be an it. Somewhere.

They stare each other down then Nic embraces Jo, holding her hard. Nic and the cows watch forlornly as Jo walks away.

JO
Thanks for fixing Frank!

INT. MOVING CAR - NIGHT

Jo scans the stations, landing on a conservative shock jock.

SHOCK JOCK ON RADIO
And the same people who are pushing
a radical left agenda on our kids,
it's not just the quote unquote
TEACHERS it's the people who run
the school systems, they want
CONTROL. If you think that it's not
about control, controlling you and
controlling your kids and
controlling your lives? Then
they've already got you. WAKE UP
PEOPLE.

Jo yells gibberish at the radio and mimics throwing up.

EXT. CHICKEN PROCESSING PLANT - NIGHT

In her work jumpsuit, Jo moves amidst a sea of people toward the plant for the incoming shift. She gets a text from Shon:

A pic of a building with a huge 'Real America News' sign

JO (ON TEXT)

WTF

SHON (ON TEXT)

*Forgot to tell you new gig in
MIDTOWN BABY! Ghetto cleaning
chicks busted OUT!*

JO

!! Congrats but wtf

SHON

*We clean the lower floors in same
bldg as RAN, wanted to crack you up*

JO

Holy shit WHAT!?!?!

SHON

[goofy emoji face]

Stunned, Jo freezes while annoyed people move around her.

Suddenly, she bolts in a lightning-quick 180, pushing through the crowd and running through the mud lot to her car.

She passes the Chick Stop, its giant neon chicken showing in the rear view mirror.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

With her shelter mutt CRONKITE watching, Jo packs out.

JO

*I know buddy. I'm coming back and
I'll get you that special kibble
you like. Ok? You'll be fine, my
bestie little buddy?*

She struggles to compose a text for Nic, settling on:

JO (ON TEXT)

Be back soon. I love you.

She scribbles a note for Mat: *Need some time. Back soon ~ heart, J ~*. Cronkite watches her go.

INT. BUS STATION - NIGHT

Waiting in a grubby plastic chair, Jo's gets a text: *final 2 minutes for incoming team, restroom participants must report.*

JO

Restroom participants. Jesus.

INT. SEASIDE MANSION - NIGHT

A large party is underway throughout the luxurious house.

RAY MURPHY - 70s, short, tanned tycoon founder of Real America News, is holed up in a luxurious interior space.

It's crammed with humming tech equipment. A wraparound whiteboard shows lists of 'STORIES', 'SUPPORTERS', 'DONATIONS' -- with sums in seven figures and up.

STORIES include Climate Stability / Second Amendment / Corporate Tax Burden / Regulatory Reform / Urban Rot / Wokeism / Free Speech / BLM Terrorism / 2020 Election Fraud.

RAY MURPHY(ON TEL)

Understood, Stephen. You know how much we share your point of view here. But to make sure my audience understands it, it's worth a bit more than you're offering.

VOICE ON TEL

It often is Ray, often is. Ok how's two point five sound, a quarterly two point five.

RAY MURPHY

That's a neighborhood I can work in. Very good then. Will I see you out east this weekend?

VOICE ON TEL

Wife says we're going to Bimini. She has a Bimini problem, what can I do?

RAY MURPHY

Keep her happy that's what.

VOICE ON TEL

The wisdom of a man with five ex-wives. Alright then. Look for the transfers by tomorrow mid-day.

His nephew, BLAKE - 25, cocky, clueless, spoiled - arrives. Ray exits to the outer office, locking the door behind him.

RAY

Kid, whatcha doing?

BLAKE

Uh, this is a great party Uncle Ray!

RAY

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

BLAKE

Yes. Of course.

RAY

Fuck the actual news Blake, do you understand that yet?

BLAKE

Yes sir, fuck the news.

RAY

Who runs this country, kid?

BLAKE

You mean like President ...

RAY

No. The money. The actual power. The money calls the plays, we answer the calls. It's that simple.

BLAKE

The plays?

RAY

GODDAMIT KID, the coverage. The airtime. We're in the influence business, if you're going to work here you need to understand ...

There's a knock on the door and Ray gets up to leave.

RAY

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

After Ray's gone, Blake pokes around, talking to himself.

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 Real America, except Jo's screen
which is covered with candy wrappers stuck on with bandaids.

EXT. NYC STREET - DAY

Exiting the terminal in complete awe, Jo does a slow 360. She
walks, gawks, bumps into people, and stops at a hot dog cart.

JO

A coke please?

CART ATTENDANT

Eight.

JO

Eight what?

CART ATTENDANT

Dollars? You American?

Jo takes in her first NYC insult, then 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 hopped on a bus! It's amazing but we actually do have buses up there! And it's spring break.

SHON

Oh Jojo you are never boring. But ok, your timing is actually pretty good. I need like ten minutes. You up for a little walk?

JO

I'm so up!

SHON

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

Jo checks her phone map, does another slow 360, laughs in delight at the incredible scene, and sets out.

She rounds the corner and reads aloud her coordinates.

JO

Sixth Ave. Forty-seventh street.
Yeah baby!

A quick walk and there it is: Real America HQ. A giant screen projects the broadcast across a pavilion. She stops dead.

JO

Holy shit.

INT. OFFICE TOWER LOBBY - DAY

Jo is swept in with the crowd. 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 but that guy over there ...

Jo fishes her driver's license out again.

LOBBY DESK ATTENDANT

Who are you here for?

JO

Yeah good question. Myself, mostly? Because these fucking news wars are making me nuts and I thought, just let me go to the source. Just to see if there's anything to see.

The attendant regards her blankly -- deadpan.

JO

And my Dad, you know? He's such a sharp guy, but he got sucked into the spin machine. We argue a lot.

LOBBY DESK ATTENDANT

(exasperated)

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

JO

No I'm waiting for somebody. But they make Real America News here? Like, upstairs? Right here?

LOBBY DESK ATTENDANT

Go wait outside.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Jo rounds the corner, out of the crush. Eventually, women in smocks lugging cleaning gear straggle out a service entrance.

Finally, Shon emerges. She and Jo rush in for a long hug.

SHON

Oh my god. Oh my god oh my god oh my god! Would you look at this now!

JO

Wow. Hi!

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 very good. You acted with intention to reclaim your equilibrium. You prioritized your mental and emotional wellness.

JO

I guess? I was just like, hey I'm losing my mind.

SHON

(laughing at her)
Ok, so not with the equilibrium thing then.

JO

But, this building though. Don't you get like freaky juju in here?

SHON

It's ... a building. We clean two through seven, Real America is higher up. Tell me you're not all wiggly about this building?

JO

No but, it is the belly of the beast, I mean so the beast is actually on top of us.

(MORE)

JO (CONT'D)

Not to ok like, not to torture the metaphor, but the beast could literally crush us. After figuratively doing so, which it's already doing. So.

Shon is amused in an eye-rolling kind of way.

JO

Apparently I still get punchy when I am tired.

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

JO

I love flow! Flow for the win!

As they leave, Parker Mitchell passes through the crowd, brushing Jo's shoulder just a bit. She is starstruck.

JO

(just mouthing the words)
Oh my god! That's Parker Mitchell!

SHON

Welcome to the city, upstate girl!

INT. APARTMENT LIVING ROOM - DAY

Shon clears books off the couch, gets a pillow and blanket.

SHON

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 I'm not. Wow, New York
City. Finally out of my haystack.

Shon quietly leaves as Jo falls into a dreamy flashback:

Flashback: Peak summer. Jo, Nic, and Shon are pre-teens, yelling out each others' names as they play in a hayloft, eat ice cream at a roadside stand, jump off a dock 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.
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

So sweet, Mathieu. He's doing ok?

JO

Just ok. Frustrated as hell. It's starting to look like he'll always need the walker.

SHON

Shoot.

JO

He's bored too, on top of being in pain and upset about not working. He soaks up all this right wing media shit all day. We get friction-y, I hate it.

SHON

This will all pass. Best to just let it roll through, like a wave.

JO

But what if the wave is so big that it like, wipes us all out?

SHON

Seriously? Isn't that kind of far-fetched?

JO

You know, I actually don't know. Maybe I'm so obsessed that I'm losing perspective.

SHON

Let's address that. Are you noticing repetitive thought loops?

Jo give a look of uh-oh, yes I am.

SHON

You don't want those loops. They crowd out your brain space, crowd out your productive and creative thoughts. When you notice it, you need to make a mind shift.

JO
A mind shift?

SHON
Visualize a positive outcome and
imagine ways to work toward
achieving that outcome.

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

SHON
Hungry? How about grilled cheese?

JO
Now there's a positive outcome!
What even is it, lunchtime? Dinner?

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

JO
You're saying I'm voluptuous?

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

Jo peruses a bookshelf: 'Daring Greatly', 'Change Your
Thoughts Change Your Life', 'The Four Agreements'.

She snaps a pic. Mat calls.

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

MATHIEU
Where are you?

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

MATHIEU
NEW YORK CITY!? What about your
job, your classes?

JO
It's, I'm doing kind of a school
project. I won't be long I promise.

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 .. ay caramba ...
que mala ... 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.
I guess we all have to test. Again.

JO

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? You came here to rest.

JO

And to see you and see New York. I
can help you and still track with
the original mission.

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

WOW you mean like not from a freezer case don't you! I bet they have really good burritos here!

CLEANER #1

Girl, you live under a rock?

JO

Well actually ...

CLEANER #2

What you gonna say next, you never heard of Beyoncé or some shit.

JO

Whaaat?! I love Bey!

She starts goofy dancing and singing -- very badly.

JO

... cause if you liked it then you should have put a ring right there on it ... all of the single ladies, none of them are married ...

The crew and Shon all crack up.

CLEANER #2

That how they sing it upstate?!

CLEANER #1

Poor Bey, she do not deserve that.

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 ALERT everybody!

The crew gets into it, badly mangling the song.

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. I smell (sniffing her armpits) respectable.

SHON

So like things are kinda the same up there?

JO

Same-ish, maybe getting worse. It's more and more just old people. You know what's weird, all I want is to finish school and get the hell out, but Nic actually 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

I think we all knew even then. Queer and fierce and we'll figure the rest of it out later. Any more Black people show up?

JO

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

SHON

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

JO

Hah yeah. Peace and love, 24/7.

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

Jo pushes her cart through empty halls, passes the elevator bank but on second thought, gets in, rides down to the lobby.

The building directory shows Real America offices on floors 10 through 25. She gets in an elevator car and presses 10.

INT. REAL AMERICA HALLWAYS & OFFICES - NIGHT

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

JO

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

She realizes she is close to the studio because she can hear the on-air talent, plus a slightly delayed audio echo.

A man rounds the corner carrying cables and gear -- DEMETRIUS - 50s, Black, wiry with a dancer's grace. Sticking out of his bag is a copy of The U.S. Times.

JO

Hi. Why's there an echo?

DEMETRIUS

You new? It's the broadcast delay,
from the monitors and for that
matter, the output to broadcast
too. On certain floors you get that
double up. Couple of days you won't
even notice it anymore.

JO

Interesting. 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
Cuba-land. Do Americans want their
medicine from a tortilla cart?

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

JO
Spin spin spin spin spin.

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

Whiskey flask at hand, Blake plays Parker's show on multiple
screens and throws paper balls at the enormous wall screen.

Blake stumbles into Parker's office. He roughs up the neat
desk, scatters documents, rifles through drawers.

BLAKE
Duude. Your office got remodeled.
Mr. Bigshot, Mr. Understands It.

He smashes a family photo, dumps out a wastebasket on the
floor, and scrawls a note: 'REAL AMERICA (HEARTS) Parker'.

INT. REAL AMERICA HALLWAY & PARKER 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
You 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
Nah man. I got you.

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

INT. HALLWAYS & STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Jo cleans in the deserted halls. Cautiously, she opens a stairwell door; faintly hearing music and party noises.

She ventures up, tracing the noise to the eleventh floor.

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

JO
Thanks! Forgot my key.

As she cautiously creeps toward the party, the crowd falls silent. Ray Murphy arrives and takes the mic. Jo is stunned.

RAY MURPHY
Good evening everyone. Our second quarter results are an all-time high! A brand-new quarterly earnings record!

The room erupts in cheers and applause.

RAY MURPHY

I thank you all, and I commend you. You are doing much 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.

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

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, let's all stop talking about it, how 'bout that.

Parker tries to walk away but Blake persists.

PARKER

Enjoy the evening Blake.

BLAKE

You don't clock me, bro! I know all about our INFLUENCING business! I know more than you will, Mitchell.

Disciplined as ever, Parker does not take the bait.

BLAKE

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

Jo watches Blake stumble away.

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

Post-shift, the team loads out their gear out into the van.

JO

Hey you know what, country mouse is pumped to see more New York City! I'm going to just walk around.

SHON

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

JO

No! It's so amazing here, it's like, fueling me up. I'm SUPER JO!

EXT. SIDEWALK CAFÉ - DAY

Jo passes an outdoor café with beautiful people, and sees herself in a window - plump and wearing raggedy clothes.

JO

Looking good, Patnode.

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 (ON TEL)

Seriously?

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

NIC

It's a little juvie Jo, ghosting out and running away, you know? What the actual fuck.

JO

I know and I'm sorry but I was kind of dying there and then I had an idea and I need to tell you ...

NIC

Yeah I'm familiar with the dying 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 coming home soon?

JO

Pretty soon. Yeah.

Nic hangs up without saying goodbye, distressing Jo.

EXT. REAL AMERICA 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. REAL AMERICA EXECUTIVE FLOOR - DAY

Roaming the hushed corridor, Jo comes to a glass-walled conference room, 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
 Hi! I ... got 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. REAL AMERICA PAVILION - DAY

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

FLASHBACK: Jo argues vigorously with Mathieu.

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
*No. This is about voter
 suppression! People who say this
 shit 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
 Real America feeds you! It's
 bullshit! Who eats bullshit?!*

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

JO
 Hey hi! 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 why were you up on the Real America 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

I saw you had a U.S. Times. Do you watch Real America too, for news?

DEMETRIUS

Not really. Kind of a clown show if you ask me. How about you, seems like you got more going on than cleaning.

JO

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

DEMETRIUS

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

JO

Oh god, no. They're not journalists. I mean, since you already said clown show.

DEMETRIUS

So why're you in the city?

JO

I'm ... I'm doing a school project. I'm researching about ... how can Real America talk smack 24/7 and people believe it and then they do like, crazy stuff because of it.

DEMETRIUS

It's my observation that people do a lot of crazy stuff, don't seem to need extra help on it.

JO

Fair. Hey I promise I'm not weird. Would you throw me your cell?

DEMETRIUS

Particular reason?

JO

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

They text each other, Dem leaves, Jo looks up The U.S. 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 sets out. Buskers play some Beatles tunes.

She jumps in; 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. U.S. TIMES BUILDING - DAY

Jo fidgets and paces nervously outside.

INT. U.S. TIMES LOBBY - DAY

She enters, wide-eyed.

ATTENDANT

Appointment?

JO

Uh, no. Just, stopping by? It's actually kind of a shrine, to me.

ATTENDANT

Ok but I gotta keep the shrine lobby clear.

JO
Could I maybe talk to a reporter?

ATTENDANT
About?

JO
I'm a student. In journalism. And
I'm here for a couple days and ...
don't you think there's something
really fucked up at Real America?

Barely suppressing his annoyance, the guy places a call.

ATTENDANT
Hey could you send someone down?
Like, literally anyone.

Moments tick by. Finally a junior reporter arrives.

REPORTER
(extending his hand)
Seth Robbins, newsroom.

JO
Jo Patnode.

SETH
What brings you in?

JO
Welllll kind of, Real America News.
Partly.

SETH
Partly, how's that?

JO
I work in their building.

SETH
My condolences.

JO
I mean, I work for a cleaning
company, just for a little while.
I'm a journalism student upstate.
Way upstate. Not Westchester.

SETH
Got it. I think. 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 maybe a double digit IQ, at best.

JO

Really. Ok so, I saw him harassing this guy, Parker Mitchell actually. The anchor? And he, Blake, he was on about Real America being in the influence business. And that tracks right? Because there are no laws saying they HAVE to report truth and facts, they just have to make it seem like they're trying to.

SETH

(scrolling his phone)

Uhh ok right. 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 there's like a dozen more spawns of satan spewing conspiracy theories and THEY STARTED IT and...

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!

SETH

What would you suggest we do?

JO

Investigate! Why do they get away with it? 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. We're ... very aware. But they're no dummies. They don't leave 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...

JO

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

SETH

Because they're racists, or xenophobic, or otherwise psychologically damaged?

JO

Ok well yeah some of that but mostly they watch it because ...

SETH

Because?

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

JO

Because lots of reasons. But still. Someone should do something.

He starts to walk away but stops.

SETH

Hey. I'll send you my cell. You're plucky. You find anything interesting, hit me up.

They pull out their phones and exchange numbers.

EXT. NYC STREET - DAY

Jo shuffles along, dejected 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 looks especially spiffy - an American Legion auxiliary cap, a sharply pressed navy shirt, red scarf and a flag pin.

NIC
Trombley.

JO
You still mad at me?

NIC
It's not exactly a mad thing.

JO
Nic this isn't about Shon. I'm working on something and staying at her place, that's it. On the COUCH.

NIC
Ok Miss Mystery well so am I working on something. 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.

JO
Serve how?

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

JO
You mean that old people club? Old people don't like 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.

(MORE)

NIC (CONT'D)

And after I help fix it, she'll know me. As a person. And she'll tell other people, that I'm like, fine! A fine person who is a part of my community. I'm serving and I'm teaching.

JO

That's good. I'm at the bus station. I had a crazy idea but I'm not even sure what it was and I'm probably an idiot.

NIC

Oh, the change the world thing?

JO

I guess.

NIC

Come home then. I'll show you my sexy uniform.

INT. BUS TERMINAL - DAY

In the cavernous space, dozens of screens play Real America below 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? Real America paid for those screens so they can shovel the shit!

GUY ON BENCH

Jesus lady get out of the way!

JO

REAL AMERICA NEWS IS PUNKING YOU,
FOR 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 the bus station.

INT. OFFICES & STAIRWELL - 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 ajar with an extension cord. She cautiously creeps in.

JO

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

Jo snoops. She powers up the laptop, tries password guesses -- *RMurphy, Murphyl, ImTheShit*. Shon calls.

Jo sprints out and back downstairs.

SHON

Where were you?

JO

You know what, I was doing some stairs! There's been a lot of poutine, in my life.

Shon eyes her suspiciously as they get back to work.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

On Shon's couch, Jo searches 'Real America News advertisers', 'Real America News financial filings', 'Ray Murphy advisors'.

Shon enters, and Jo scrambles into 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

I am actually kind of a beginner.

SHON

We 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

We all are. Different lives different struggles, but there are tools to help us manage. We can become self-aware and then we can see that nothing is actually hard. It's our responses to things that make them hard. And who controls our responses?

JO

We do?

They sit side by side on the floor, close.

SHON

Close your eyes. Relax your belly. When you breathe in, notice your belly rise. Breathe out, notice how it falls. Belly rises, belly falls. When your mind starts to wander, simply bring it back to this relationship. The breath and 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 the apartment and Jo calls Dem.

DEMETRIUS

This Jo?

JO

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

DEMETRIUS

Never met him, but I do head out to his east end place most Saturdays, maintain the tech setup.

JO

The east end? You mean like a home office?

DEMETRIUS

Yeah, it's a home office alright. If it's me talkin', I say that's the real HQ. The east end is the Hamptons? Never heard of it?

JO

No I guess I haven't.

DEMETRIUS

Got to be seen to be believed. 43
Gin Lane.

Call complete, she finds the address on Google Earth and sees an unbelievably lavish oceanfront mansion.

JO

Holy shit.

She texts Demetrius.

JO (ON TEXT)

Going to Hamptons tmrw?

DEMETRIUS (ON TEXT)

Yep

JO

Need an assistant?

DEMETRIUS

Haha no

JO
Can I go just to see?

DEMETRIUS
Sorry staff only

JO
Who's staff?

DEMETRIUS
Cooks maids gardeners etc

JO
Wow ok. Thx tho

DEMETRIUS
NP

Jo studies the images, zooming in to a sign: 'PUBLIC BEACH'.

JO
Public beach huh. You don't say.
The public can walk on the beach.
Like a sidewalk, except it's beach.

EXT. NYC STREET - DAY

Jo passes a costume shop, stops, does a 180, and goes in.

INT. PENN TRAIN STATION - DAY

In overalls, a straw hat over a wig, giant sunglasses, rubber boots, and carrying a rake, Jo looks like a pro gardener.

EXT. SOUTHAMPTON TRAIN STATION - DAY

Jo secures her costume elements, checks her phone map, briefly stares at a photo of her Dad, and sets out.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

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

JO
(to herself)
Where's it not public anymore,
though? Guess there's one way to
find out.

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 hef)
Aw what the hell?

JO
Hey I'm just the gardener! Great country we have here, did you know that any old slob like me can walk on the sand? We get to walk there and it's freeeee!

DEMETRIUS
You need to get out of here.

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
Gin Lane.

SETH
Southampton??? OMG Murphy 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 these 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 brother.

DEMETRIUS
Miguel, what's happening my man!

They exchange a cool dude handshake.

MIGUEL
(indicating Jo outside)
Who's this dude?

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. & EXT. ESTATE - DAY

Jo wanders through. There are maids, a chauffeur polishing vehicles in the courtyard, culinary staff in a gleaming kitchen, a massage therapist kneading a woman by the pool.

Security cams are visible throughout the property.

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.

She selects a hammer out of his toolbox.

DEMETRIUS
Why?

JO
Knowledge.

Jo ducks into a hall closet with maids' uniforms. She changes into one, and crouches down, struggling to not fall asleep.

INT. ESTATE & ESTATE HOME OFFICE - LATER SAME DAY

Jo peers down the hall and sprints to the now-empty office.

Locking the door behind her, she gets to work with the hammer. With swift, strong precision, she whacks the doorknob of the locked room until it flies off, and in she goes.

INT. INTERIOR OFFICE - DAY

The luxury space is humming and crammed with tech equipment.

A large whiteboard shows lists of 'STORIES', 'POVs', 'DONATIONS' -- with sums in the high six figures and up.

STORIES includes Climate Stability / Second Amendment / Corporate Tax Burden / Regulatory Reform / Urban Rot / Wokeism / Free Speech / BLM Terrorism / 2020 Election Fraud.

Jo snaps photos and shuffles through papers showing monetary transfers 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 this?

JO (ON FACETIME)
*Behold, Seth! A locked room inside
 the kingdom FILLED with financial
 and political shit, check this --*

She pans to the whiteboard.

JO
This look a little funny to you?

SETH
*Wait whaaaat stay there it says, oh
 holy fuck ...*

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

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, nope, not!*

She pulls out the photo of Mathieu and talks to it.

JO
*You know why I had to do that
 right? So we can get along. I might
 get in trouble first though.*

INT. ESTATE - NIGHT

Household staff tensely await Ray. Sensing something is wrong, 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 uncomfortably.

RAY
(alone, to himself)
Fuck.

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 the brilliant rookie reporter Jo Patnode ... yeah that happened!

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.

SHON

Ok here's tonight Tamika's with me we start at reception. Juana and Rosie restrooms working from seven down, Jo has halls, Sani and Prakash get offices from two up.

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.

REAL AMERICA 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.

REAL AMERICA ANCHOR

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

Producers and staff, including Dem, register surprise.

GUEST

This young man is innocent until proven guilty, of course.

REAL AMERICA 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.

REAL AMERICA 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 I have your hammer.

DEMETRIUS

Meet you in the stairwell.

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.

DEMETRIUS

Oh my god. Place is all cameras!

JO

That room was ... the nerve center Dem. For the bullshit train. Wait, mixed metaphor. The fucking locomotive car that's what it was.

DEMETRIUS

In non-metaphorical terms please?

JO

It's the place where they keep track of all the stories they're spinning and who's paying for the spins! This whole place is a pay to play operation. Check this out.

She shows him the photos on her phone. He sees it but keeps a poker face, no reply. As he walks away, Jo calls out.

JO

The more people believe lies, the more we can't make anything better!

Dem gives her a long thoughtful look before leaving.

INT. CITY TIMES OFFICE - DAY

Seth sits at a table with several colleagues.

REPORTER #1

I say we got it from here. We don't need to waste time with amateur hour.

REPORTER #2

Wait. You're missing something.

SETH

Yeah. She has access, you guys.

REPORTER #3

It's true. She can get in the building.

REPORTER #2

And we can't rule out needing her to. Unfortunately.

REPORTER #1

Makes me nervous having someone uncredialled.

REPORTER #3

We'll need to keep the leash tight.

SETH

So we're all together? I'll call her but I need to know we're on the same page.

One by one they nod and affirm. Seth calls Jo.

INT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Jo picks up a call from Seth.

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 machine 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, and it's so fucking BIG!

JO

Wow! So now what do you do?

SETH

You mean, what do WE do? We get to work. A shit ton of work.

JO

We? As in, me too?

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.

JO

Great!

SETH

Jo. You know there are like, major prizes for stories this big right? Starts with a 'P'? As in, pave the path for a prodigious ...

JO

Pulitzer.

SETH

Props!

JO

Points for the community college corner!

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, Mr. Audio Man.

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 Real America.

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 Real America up from his screen.

PARKER
The white kid. The shooting.

DEMETRIUS
The white supremacist kid. The
killing. And the coverage?

PARKER
I don't control the station's
editorial decisions. 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)
Real America brings balance to the
national conversation. Anyone who
doesn't find that informative is
free to get their news elsewhere.

DEMETRIUS
Right. 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. Nope, can't say I do.

The guards strongarm Demetrius down the hall into an empty office, and slam the door.

INT. SMALL OFFICE - DAY

Demetrius gets grilled by the two security guards.

INT. DRAB LIVING ROOM - DAY

Nic, dressed to the nines as ever, picks up Jo's call.

NIC
Hey. Double ghost girl.

JO (ON TEL)
I'm so sorry, I was leaving but Nic things are getting wild here.

NIC
You two having an excellent time?

JO
Oh my god not that kind of wild it's a story, it's .. like I'm actually like doing something real? I mean, actual legit journalism? It's also possible I might get arrested I guess. I got into a locked office with stuff that shows that Real America is a total scam. IT'S GOING DOWN NIC!

NIC
The fuck are you talking about.

JO
I know right? It was right there. Under everyone's noses. Well everyone who's ever been in the Hamptons house. I gotta go I'll call you back.

NIC
FROM JAIL?

INT. CITY TIMES NEWSROOM & HALLWAY - DAY

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

SETH
Hey everybody! Jo Patnode!

They all turn to face her and give little waves.

SETH
Kickoff bagels in the lunchroom!

As they head into a conference space, Jo gets some props.

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 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! 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! Like they're a fucking non-profit!

JO

SERIOUSLY! Donors, jesus!

BEN

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

JO

I go to Upstate Community, just part-time because I also work ...

The group thinly conceals its sense of surprise at this.

EZRA

Where is Upstate Community?

JO

It's the northeast corner of the state, just across from Quebec.

JAMAL

Wow sounds ... cold.

SETH

I'm picturing a little gulag-type building, in the frozen tundra.

JO

How'd you know?

YAO-FEN

And so, it's all deep red up there right? That's Real America country.

JO

Yeah. It is, actually.

EZRA

Do they want to burn you at the stake?

JO

Unfortunately yeah, they do.

SETH

What are you guys, trying to suss out if she's a double agent? She's one of us, she's got a brain.

JO

No wait, I mean yeah I definitely do but they do too, it's just ...

JAMAL

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

JO

The Chick Stop Diner. That's where everyone goes, it's kind of like ... a community center? Because it's cheap, the chicken plant subsidizes it.

SETH

Ok party's over you slackers, Jo and I are going to go look at the document delivery.

As they go, the group discusses Jo within earshot.

BEN

Have we ever even met anyone from community school?

YAO-FEN

It's the drip coffee tho, ewww.

JAMAL

People live in places like that if they can't make it anywhere else.

It's awkward, Jo and Seth both pretend they don't hear it.

She notices on the college banners on the hallway wall.

JO

What are all these?

SETH

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

JO

Where did you go?

SETH
Yale. My Dad's school.

JO
I guess UCC doesn't have a banner.

SETH
Funny!

JO
(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. She holds it up
like a trophy and props up Mathieu's photo on a shelf.

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

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

JO

I knew thyat, thet, thaht, I knew there had to be something behind that door... Oh my hyammer skills? Those would be from my Dad. He said a girl should know her way around a tool kit. Wait, hahm-rrr. Hammah. That's the New Yorky version. Ha. Gotcha, hammah.

INT. LUXURIOUS LOFT - DAY

Blake calls Ray repeatedly, getting voicemail. He plays video games, loses his temper, throws equipment, breaks a vase.

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're aware that everything out east is confidential. Yes?

BLAKE

Yes sir, of course.

RAY

Stay away from this whole 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
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
Ok sir.

INT. SHONDA'S APARTMENT - DAY

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

JO
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 walk around, I'm loving it.

SHON
Walking around.

Jo paces, kicking garbage around the street.

SHON
You jumpy like you got fleas, girl.

JO
Shon what do you really think about
Real America 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, the whole history of the
world.

JO

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

SHON

Lots of people up to bad shit. I
focus on what I CAN control, in
this life. C'mon we talked about
this.

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 tonight. Rosie can
work. We're covered.

JO

What? But it's going great, right?

SHON

We're good. Maybe get some sleep.
Oh and I need your badge back.

Jo is rattled by this but slowly hands it over.

JO

I liked the cleaning. I liked helping you. Can we talk later?

Shon watches Jo suspiciously as she rushes out.

EXT. NYC STREET - DAY

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

JO

'Rural counties show higher susceptibility to disinformation'. Yeah how about 'Rural Counties Trash-Talked by Mainstream Media'.

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

JO

Hi!

MATHIEU (ON TEL)

What in the world are you doing?

JO

Did you talk to Nic? Did she tell you? Dad I don't want to sound full of myself but I just did something and it's kind of a big deal I'll tell you the whole story but basically, it's what I've been saying all this time, Real America lies its ass off to people.

MATHIEU

Oh Jojo, how are you believing this crazy stuff? Real America is the ONLY station telling us the truth. They are the ones who understand how to save our country, mon dieu!

JO

WHAT? No, Daddy they aren't and they don't care, they're just making money by telling people stuff, like literally SELLING the coverage it's all bullshit!

MATHIEU

Josephine I am a patriot of the USA, and I am so disappointed that you are wasting your time...

JO

Dad I need you to listen to me, I am working with some people now and we're going to clear it all up ...

MATHIEU

No we're not and I AM TIRED OF IT! You will be welcome back in my home when you are ready to listen to me.

JO

Are you saying don't come home?

They hang up and Jo collapses in sobs.

EXT. RUNDOWN DUMPY PARK - DAY

Dem strolls amidst homeless people, overflowing trash cans.

A tabloid lying on the ground has a screaming headline: "Real America Calls Vigilante Shooter A HERO'.

He calls Jo as a group of rats drag a baguette near his feet.

DEMETRIUS (ON TEL)

Hi. You tell anyone about what you found, besides me?

JO (ON TEL)

No. Well I mean yes the Times, but they are working ...

DEMETRIUS

They working fast enough for you?

Jo is silent, startled by the thought.

JO

I guess I can't say that. No.

INT. APARTMENT LIVING ROOM - DAY

Jo searches her phone for media outlets, chooses one.

VOICE ON TEL

New York Eleven.

JO

Hi. There was an internal break-in at 43 Gin Lane in Southampton, two days ago. Ray Murphy's place.

(MORE)

JO (CONT'D)

It wasn't reported and it wasn't a robbery. You're going to want to know what was found in there. Everybody's going to want to know.

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

SHON

You ok?

JO

Not really. Dad and I are not getting along.

SHON

Because?

JO

He thinks Real America is saving the world.

SHON

Okay, remember non-reactivity? He says something that bothers you, you say it's a beautiful day.

JO

He said not to come home until I agree with him.

SHON

Oh shit.

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. There's bad people like I thought. But even the good people are ... complicated.

SHON

Don't you have work? And school?

JO

It can 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 moving toward a kiss.
Jo's phone rings. She bolts up, leaves Shon on the couch.

JO (ON TEL)

Yeah.

SETH (ON TEL)

Hi. We have a little pickup, and we
need something from you.

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.
Not to sound grandiose, but my
editors think it's possible the FCC
could be looking for a test case to
bring charges for violation of the
public trust. If we can establish
precedent, some kind of baseline
for vetting shit before it's aired.

JO

That sounds kinda big.

SETH

It would be a sea change. No less. 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

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? 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. U.S. TIMES NEWSROOM - DAY

Seth and Jo talk in the hall. Someone cranks the volume on the wall screens and the room goes quiet.

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 Real America 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

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 the 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

Yeah right? Probably made a nice little bundle for that.

INT. BLAKE'S OFFICE - DAY

Blake studies Josie's face form security cam footage. He sees Trayvon & Farida's report, and freaks out.

INT. AUDIO OFFICE - DAY

Demetrius, feet up on a desk in a small audio booth, watches the same report, intrigued.

INT. PARKER'S OFFICE - DAY

Parker watches too, wide-eyed, and scans tabloid headlines such as "*Real America Real Payola*", "*RAN On The Run*".

INT. ARCHIVES ROOM - DAY

Wearing Shon's badge, Jo works in aisles of files. She hides when staffers enter and make out, for a long moment.

INT. REAL AMERICA HALLWAY AND LOBBY - DAY

With a full backpack, Jo nonchalantly heads to the elevators.

Blake passes through, double-takes as he recognizes Jo.

He chases her. She barely beats him to an elevator. Sprinting through the lobby, she accidentally drops Shon's lanyard.

Blake picks it up. Calls Building Security.

VOICE ON TEL
Twelve Eleven.

BLAKE (ON TEL)
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.

EXT. NYC STREETS & CEMETERY - DAY

Jo runs, breathless and looking over her shoulder.

Street demonstrators carry signs -- 'WAKE UP TAKE OUR COUNTRY
 BACK', 'LOCK UP LIBERAL LIARS', 'RAY MURPHY VOICE OF GOD'.

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

JO
 Emergency!

She pedals furiously and finally ducks into an old cemetery.

JO
 FUUUCK! MISS FUCK IT UP HERE!

An employee of the bike share company arrives, having tracked
 the bike. He grabs it from her, sneering 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 Chick Stop,
 everybody's going nuts!

JO (ON TEL)
 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
Right. The fuck was I thinking.

NIC
Is this you changing the world?

JO
Yeah. For the worse.

Jo lays in a fetal position, then suddenly takes off running.

EXT. NYC JACKSON HEIGHTS STREET - DAY

Blake gets out of a limo. Jo watches from behind garbage cans as rats scampering around and overfoot.

Shon comes out lugging gear and Blake closes in on her.

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, Miss
Spotless?

SHON
What? What are you talking about?

Blake dangles the badge, pushing Shon as she yells for help.

Jo grabs things out of a garbage can -- bottles, soggy
garbage bags -- and pétanque-rolls them into Blake's feet.

Dodging garbage, Blake sprints back to his chauffeured ride,
but as it pulls away -- he leans out and snaps a shot of Jo.

INT. MOVING CAR - DAY

Blake calls Building Security again.

BLAKE (ON TEL)
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 lose my job.

BLAKE
You need me to ESCALATE, buddy?

VOICE ON TEL
Ok. No. One moment. Ok I have it.

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. Blake
M at RealAmerica 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 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 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 these people are the someones of the world! You come messing around here, you're just playing!

JO

No.

SHON

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 working on a cleaning crew, which will of course be cut loose. Got it all on this little mutt. The parents, their upstate hellhole town. You're welcome.

Parker gets up, peers down the empty hall, closes his 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

What else do you know about this woman?

BLAKE
What's it worth to you homie?

EXT. NYC JACKSON HEIGHTS STREET - DAY

Upset & disheveled, Jo shuffles through the neighborhood that once delighted her.

She endures the torment of memory, hearing voices.

Demetrius saying 'cameras everywhere', her & Shon meditating, Nic saying 'Team Ray all the way', and the angry street mobs.

She calls Nic. No pickup. Places but aborts a call to Mat.

INT. U.S. TIMES LOBBY - DAY

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

JO
Call Seth Robbins. These are his.

INT. SAFE HOUSE APARTMENT - DAY

Jo bounces a ball at an improvised wall target. Seth calls.

JO (ON TEL)
(very unenthusiastic)
Yeah.

SETH (ON TEL)
(very enthusiastic)
Juicy juice Jo, that stuff you got from the archives!

JO
Ohhh. Is it? 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.

(MORE)

SETH (CONT'D)

This is just the beginning, get this - the archive stuff is basically the blueprint for the shit you found out east. It connects. Misrepresenting the news as a fucking business model! Twisting everything for the checkbooks of the world. It's so ugly, it's practically beautiful.

JO

Ok great, have fun.

SETH

Hello? You're like, on the team?

JO

Me? Seriously?

SETH

Like a heart attack. 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. REAL AMERICA PAVILION - DAY

In a sleek professional dress Jo sits waiting. She texts Nic.

JO (ON TEXT)

Channel 11. Now. Tell Dad 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, disillusioned, tries to project confidence and readiness.

JO

(to herself)

Community College School of Life,
mothafuckers.

A news crew approaches.

NEWSCASTER

And you're Jo Patnode right? Ready to drive a stake in?

JO

I guess.

NEWSCASTER

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

JO

No! Wait. They're not all just total idiots. Do you actually know any of them?

NEWSCASTER

Yeah whatever. They believe all the ridiculous horseshit that Real America can spit out.

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 here.

NEWSCASTER

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?

A limo pulls up. Out steps Ray Murphy. A crowd of fans and gawkers immediately forms. Ray is 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 eager to fall at Ray's feet.

RAY MURPHY

Afternoon everyone. I'm happy to let you know that Murphy Global is stronger than ever. You know why? Because at Real America News, we DO RIGHT by the American people. We understand what they are going through, and we RESPECT them! Let the liberal media waste their time digging for dirt on us. Bring it on. We're going to keep delivering the TRUTH to the American people.

SETH

HEY ASSHOLES, we're working on a Pulitzer here and you're covering an ass-clown so GOOD JOB LOWLIFES!

Glancing toward the Real America pavilion, her jaw drops. A giant photo of her dad fronts The Parker Mitchell Show.

PARKER MITCHELL (ON TV)

Heck of a story for you now, on the immigration crisis. Folks it's not just the southern border that is a mess. Aliens are helping themselves to an American dream from the NORTHERN border too! That's right! NONE of our borders are secure! It's CANADIANS now, they're sauntering right over and taking advantage of our ABSURDLY GENEROUS unemployment benefits.

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. Mr. Frenchypants. Woo woo woo! Here's Mr. Fancy in line for his unemployment benefits. Hello foreigners, you out of work? Come to America, we'll pay you to do nothing.

The screen shows Mat heading into the unemployment office.

PARKER MITCHELL (ON TV)

So, this dude. Hangs out in the country for twenty-something YEARS!

(MORE)

PARKER MITCHELL (ON TV) (CONT'D)
Never did bother to apply for
citizenship so he could PAY into
the system, NO! He just puts his
hand out because he's married to
some low-life, or was at one time.
Illegal alien sponge, Mat Patnode.
Lots more to learn here so stay
with me until after the break.

Jo stands there, hyperventilating.

EXT. JO'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Nic rolls up and hears Cronkite barking. A small but
belligerent crowd has gathered, yelling for Mat to come out.

Nic goes in, grabs the dog, comes out and grabs a piece of
mail, holding it up to the moonlight, then tears it open.

It's a WARRANT FOR THE ARREST OF JOSEPHINE PATNODE for
trespassing, breaking and entering a private property.

Nic snaps a photo of the warrant, texts it to Jo, and yells
to the crowd.

NIC
Nobody's here ya nutballs! How
'bout you get your shorts out of a
bunch, I'm talkin' to you! Go home!

EXT. NYC STREET - DAY

Jo stares at the photo of the warrant that Nic sent.

Sobbing, she pushes through fights, bonfires, and cops.

She jaywalks willy-nilly, causing screeching of brakes and
drivers yelling 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, clinging to the
chain link that prevents pedestrians from jumping. She stares
down at the water. A police car arrives, and Jo takes off.

Finally, bedraggled, 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 for everything.*' She stuffs it into Shon's mailbox.

INT. TRUCK - NIGHT

Nic drives out of town, following an old overgrown country road as it narrows into the woods, craning left and right.

Finally, there it is -- a wisp of smoke from the chimney of an old cabin that is practically enveloped by the woods.

NIC

Yep.

Nic texts Jo: *Mat hiding in cabin, nutjob mob at yr house*

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

Nic parks, knocks gently. Mat answers, and Nic goes inside.

INT. SAFE HOUSE APARTMENT - NIGHT

Crowded among the document boxes, Jo packs up her duffel bag.

INT. TRUCK - NIGHT

Nic drives down the highway, Mat & Cronkite ride shotgun.

INT. REAL AMERICA PAVILION - DAY

Jo inspects her handwritten note:

'JO P DONE, TELL MITCHELL FIND ANOTHER TARGET NOT MAT P'

With an envelope marked '25 - DeBruxelles for RM', Jo approaches the mailman & releases a rat from her coat pocket.

In the chaos, Jo drops her envelope into the mail cart. Surrounding the pavilion are angry crowds of demonstrators.

INT. CITY TIMES OFFICES - DAY

Jo waits for Seth in the newsroom - no longer a place of hope and excitement for her. She twists the safe house key around.

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

SETH
What's this?

JO
My Dad is hiding in the woods.

SETH
Oh. Ok but...

JO
But nothing Seth! It's my fault.
RAN came down on my dad because we
came down on them.

SETH
Our work can come with an invoice.

JO
Please, with your lofty theories.

SETH
Alright but this investigation is
on fire so let's get back in gear.

This gives Jo the added clarity that she needs. Her conviction settles in and she becomes resolute.

JO
WOW. You really, really, really
don't get it.

SETH
I get that the Times is on track to
make history here.

JO
By talking to yourselves.

SETH
We're reporting an incredibly
important story!

JO
Which will change nothing.

SETH
That's insane.

JO
Right, but not for the reasons you
think.

(MORE)

JO (CONT'D)

How many Ivy League degrees in this building, and none of you can figure it out!

SETH

FIGURE WHAT OUT?

Jo is level-headed and confident. The tables are completely turned from when she first met Seth.

JO

Murphy is an evil genius. You get the evil part, but do you get the genius part? Do you get that even a little?

SETH

Oh god. I'm pretty busy so if we're kind of done here?

JO

He found a way to talk to a lot people. Poor people, people left behind by globalization, people who need a reason to believe things will get better for them. People who feel like they got pushed away from the table until he invited them back to the table.

Seth studies her.

JO

Do you think Real America viewers don't get that all your wonky talk basically boils down to 'we're really smart and you're not, so you're kind of fucked, whoops'.

SETH

PEOPLE NEED TO LISTEN TO US IF THEY WANT THEIR LIVES TO ACTUALLY GET BETTER!

JO

YOU NEED TO LISTEN TO PEOPLE IF YOU ARE ASKING THEM TO LISTEN TO YOU.

SETH

Oh my god.

JO

You ever meet anybody like me before?

(MORE)

JO (CONT'D)

Anybody with grease under their nails and no bank account? This is ludicrous. Our bubble, their bubble.

SETH

I'm in the truth bubble, hello? Reported by actual credentialled journalists with integrity!

JO

But you can't communicate this truth, outside your bubble. You haven't figured out how to. So you go on talking to yourselves.

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

SETH

They're going to get at you with a warrant, you know. If you were still on the team, you'd be lawyered up.

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

INT. LOBBY AND ELEVATOR - DAY

Shon and her crew board with gear for the evening shift. Blake lurks, sticking his hand in the door of the car.

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 much better looking than this cow.

Shon does her best to stay cool and composed.

INT. BUS STATION - DAY

Jo stares at her Dad's photo as she waits. Demetrius calls.

JO (ON TEL)

You have a right to hate me.

DEMETRIUS (ON TEL)
Actually calling to thank you.

JO
Thank me?

DEMETRIUS
I've been pretending not to hear it
all. For the sake of the the gig. I
got mad skills, I'll be good.

JO
You mean you're leaving Real
America? Did they I.D. you?

DEMETRIUS
Yeah but they couldn't pin me.
How's your story?

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

DEMETRIUS
Whaaat? You're onto something.

JO
Parker came down on my Dad because
I came down on RAN. I cut scene, I
say maybe he picks another target.
It's the only card I can play.

DEMETRIUS
Wow. So the Times is dropping it?

JO
No. Very much no. I think I ended
up giving them a really big gift
and the wild thing is, I don't even
know if I care anymore.

DEMETRIUS
Wow.

JO
I've idolized The City Times since
I was a kid but, now I don't know.

DEMETRIUS
Tough to lose a hero.

LOUDSPEAKER

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

JO

This is my bus. Keep my number?

DEMETRIUS

Period.

INT. MOVING BUS - NIGHT

Jo looks out at the city, dejected. She gets a text.

SHON (ON TEXT)

Blake grabbed me up pls can u help

She bangs the emergency button, runs to the door.

JO

STOP PLEASE NOW I HAVE TO GET OFF
PLEASE C'MON STOP NOW PLEASE!

The annoyed driver finally pulls over and she bolts.

EXT. NYC STREET - NIGHT

Jo sprints to the RAN building, goes in the front doors.

Then here's the old F-150, trundling past Real America News.

INT. TRUCK - NIGHT

NIC

Well son of a bitch. Would ya get a
load of this place. This is a hoot
and a holler.

Mat and Nic are both gaga in awe of the city.

NIC

Let me pull over. I'll text her.

Nic pulls into a NO STANDING zone and texts Jo.

NIC (ON TEXT)

Hi where r u?

INT. REAL AMERICA OFFICES, STUDIO, LOBBY - NIGHT

Jo arrives at Blake's office. It's empty.

JO

SHIT.

She sprints to the elevators, rides down to the studio level.

PARKER (ON SET)

Good evening and welcome to a special edition of the Parker Mitchell Show. Folks, we have a very special show this evening. In a few moments, we'll be joined in the studio by Mr. Raymond Murphy, Real America News founder and CEO. Yes, you heard me right. You don't want to miss Mr. Murphy's perspective and wisdom on the issues of the day.

Strolling the studio perimeter as casually as possible, Jo sees Demetrius, who sees her too and gives a look of WHAAAT?!

Parker sees Jo too, recognizes her, and calls security. They intercept Jo in the lobby and shove her out the front door.

EXT. REAL AMERICA BUILDING - NIGHT

Jo gets Nic's text and replies.

JO (ON TEXT)

can't talk now

Jo stops to think a sec. Runs toward the service entrance.

Jo bangs directly into Nic, circling the building. Both are incredulous, stepping back before a huge ebullient hug.

JO & NIC

OH MY GOD ... WHAT THE FUCK ... HOW
IN THE ... OH MY GOD REALLY?!?!

NIC

Got to wondering if my girl is
still my girl.

JO

Whaaat? Nic ohmygod ... wait come
with me we have to ... I'm your
girl. I so, so am. C'mon!

Jo pulls Nic to the service entrance, where they wait an excruciating minute for someone to come out, then dart in.

NIC

You're gonna tell me what the hell, right?

JO

Yes let's go.

INT. RAY MURPHY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Blake bursts in with Shon, hears his uncle is in his private restroom, and paces anxiously, dragging her along.

INT. REAL AMERICA STUDIO AND SET - NIGHT

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

INT. BUILDING STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Jo with Nic in tow bounds up the stairs, 2 by 2.

NIC

Ok but just so you know, Mat is ...

JO

Furious no doubt but not now, c'mon!

NIC

You could say how many floors!

JO

I didn't want to psych you out!

NIC

Heart attack is better?

JO

We're almost there!

The floor number in the stairwell is 7.

INT. EXECUTIVE FLOOR HALLWAY & STAIRWELL - NIGHT

They arrive at the 25th floor. As ever, it's locked.

JO

Ok. Ok. We're gonna, we're just ...

There's an air vent above the door, with metal slats.

NIC

You gotta get in here?

JO

Yes. Here. Now.

Nic crouches down.

NIC

Climb up. No wait.

Nic fishes a quarter and a penny out of their pocket.

JO

Twenty six cents?!

NIC

Those slats have little screws. One of these should fit.

Jo climbs up on Nic's shoulders, squirming for an angle.

NIC

Been eatin' good here?

JO

What? I've become a willowy feather, I'm a waif!

Jo fiddles around with the coins and gets traction.

JO

Oh! Ok I got it! It's the penny.
Holyshit the lowly penny.

Jo removes the slats and hands them to Nic.

JO

Ok push me. C'mon push!

With a big push, Jo tumbles through and opens the door.

INT. REAL AMERICA EXECUTIVE HALLWAY - NIGHT

Jo guides Nic, hiding whenever someone passes. They reach Ray Murphy's office and duck behind a large sculpture.

NIC
Yeezus get a load of this joint.

Jo signals 'shhh' and peers out. She & Shon clock each other.

JO
She's ok. If they come out, grab
her, ok? I'll be right back.

NIC
Riiiiight of course.

Jo sprints away, jams a tissue in the stairwell lock, and bolts downstairs.

JO
From pudge to NINJAAAAA!

INT. REAL AMERICA STUDIO - NIGHT

As casually as she can, Jo strolls around. She and Demetrius -
- at the control board -- see each other again.

Parker sits on-set, eyes closed as someone applies make-up.

Jo texts Dem.

JO (ON TEXT)
what's up?

DEMETRIUS (ON TEXT)
Parker waiting for Ray WTH U??

Jo indicates 'hold on' to him. She texts Nic.

JO (ON TEXT)
Status?

NIC (ON TEXT)
old guy talking

JO
saying what?

NIC
smack about Real America greatness

JO
???

NIC
call me I'll speaker him.

JO
turn your ringer off!

NIC
Yeah I saw the Bourne movies too

Jo places a call to Nic, phone held tight to her ear.

INT. EXECUTIVE FLOOR HALLWAY - NIGHT

Nic's arm appears out from behind the sculpture, stretching mightily to pick up Ray's voice as Ray stands in his doorway.

INT. RAY MURPHY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Ray emerges from his private washroom to find Blake & Shon. He prepares to leave but lingers in the doorway.

RAY
 God you startled me! Who's this? I
 have to go to set.

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

RAY
 I told you to stay out of that.

Blake pushes Shon into a chair.

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

Every so slowly & surreptitiously, Shon pulls out her phone, props it against her leg, and turns her video camera on.

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

BLAKE
 What?

INT. REAL AMERICA STUDIO AND SET - NIGHT

On set, Parker listens to Ray and Blake talking thru his in-ear mic. At the controls, Demetrius listens to them too.

INT. RAY MURPHY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

RAY

Blake, you're in over your head. I know how to run this business. I know what makes 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 a wonky liberal story.

BLAKE

But the story isn't dead Uncle Ray, the U.S. 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 that they can't figure out how to win!

BLAKE

Yes sir, but...

RAY

WHY DOES THIS STATION MINT MONEY,
DO YOU UNDERSTAND?!

INT. REAL AMERICA STUDIO AND SET - NIGHT

Parker and Dem listen to Ray & Blake on their in-ear mics. Jo listens on her phone. Dem texts Jo.

DEMETRIUS (ON TEXT)

Wild. Ray schooling Blake on Real America all smack talk

JO (ON TEXT)

I know!

DEMETRIUS

How do you know?

JO

Friend in the hall. How do you?

DEMETRIUS

My in-ear, for when he gets to set

JO

And then what?

DEMETRIUS
I flip a switch to go to channel

JO
Channel?

DEMETRIUS
Broadcast

JO
And his voice goes out ...

DEMETRIUS
To the world

JO
OMG flip it now!?!?

DEMETRIUS
If I want to be shot dead

Jo takes this in, disappointed.

DEMETRIUS
But I can record

JO
YESSSSSSSS!!!

INT. PARKED TRUCK - NIGHT

The police approach Nic's truck, shining a flashlight at Mat.

MATHIEU
Hello officers.

OFFICER
You're in a no standing zone.

MATHIEU
It's ok, I don't stand so well.

OFFICER
You being smart mister?

Mat gestures to the walker. The officers assess things.

OFFICER
Alright but do you have the keys?

MATHIEU
Noooo my friend I think she went
into the Real America News.

(MORE)

MATHIEU (CONT'D)

My daughter you see, has created commotion. It's not so unusual a thing for her.

The cop regards him sideways. Mat tries to call Nic.

NIC (ON VOICEMAIL)

Nic here. You better have the best day ever!

INT. EXECUTIVE FLOOR HALLWAY - NIGHT

Ray and Blake have an animated discussion in the exec office.

BLAKE (LIVE ON AIR ON DELAYED AUDIO)

Real America makes a ton of money because...

RAY (LIVE ON AIR ON DELAYED AUDIO)

Because I'm a fucking genius. It's not about facts, it's storytelling.

BLAKE

Storytelling, for sure!

RAY

Once in a while someone creates a 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 ADVERTISERS, PARTNERS. THE ONES I DEAL WITH FROM OUT EAST IN RELATIONSHIPS THAT ARE HIGHLY CONFIDENTIAL! DO YOU UNDERSTAND? They contribute. To make sure their points of view are ... represented.

INT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Jo jogs briskly up the stairs, talking to herself.

JO

Look at you, hottie. Get a load of this stair-stepping ass.

INT. STUDIO AND CONTROL ROOM - NIGHT

At the sound board, Demetrius calmly monitors his recording in progress. Parker listens stoically from his chair on-set.

RAY

It's about feelings, kid! Feelings are king! You tap into peoples' feelings, boy that's the game. Hit those hotbuttons and they believe any damn thing you tell 'em. We're sort of a translation service. We explain the complicated world to folks. It's a gold mine and always will be, because they trust us.

BLAKE

Wow.

RAY

We're really giving our audience a gift. We help them feel better. They have lots of reasons to be mad, and we tell them who to be mad at. It helps them focus.

BLAKE

Focus on the wrong things, right?

INT. RAY MURPHY'S OFFICE -- NIGHT

RAY

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

BLAKE

I see.

RAY

We researched it. There's a chemical reaction in the brain from these feelings, and it's addictive. It's a drug they don't even know they're taking.

BLAKE

I see.

RAY

It's almost too easy you know? I gotta go and young lady (to Shonda) you're dismissed. I apologize for him, he's a dimwit.

Blake stands frozen, destroyed.

INT. EXECUTIVE FLOOR HALLWAY - NIGHT

Ray leaves, then Shon cautiously creeps out, watching Blake. Nic comes out from behind the sculpture to intercept her.

SHON
Nic?!? Whaaat?

NIC
Just thought I'd drop by, say hey.
How you been, you good?

Jo arrives.

JO
Am I late to this party?

SHON
No. It's me who's late. Jo you were
listening to your inner voice.
Hearing your truth. Living it.

JO
My truth messed up your life.

SHON
You think I want to work in a low-
vibe building like this? Let's get
outta here come on.

The three of them fall into a long group hug. As they separate, Shon holds up her phone.

SHON
Oh and by the way. Got all that!

Jo plays the video that Shon captured in Ray's office.

JO
Holy shit. Holy total shit.

Jo & Shon hi-five, holding onto it an extra moment.

JO
Meet you guys out in the pavilion?
I need a minute in the studio.

INT. REAL AMERICA STUDIO / SURROUNDING AREA - NIGHT

Parker sits stunned. Ray arrives. Jo marches up to him.

JO
Mr. Murphy!

Ray sees her, puts two and two together.

RAY MURPHY

Let me guess. The upstate girl.
With the immigrant dad.

The studio cuts to commercial and Parker steps off-set.

JO

Jo Patnode, hick from the stix.
Great to meet you.

RAY MURPHY

I know you think you're doing some
kind of thing here, but you're
deluded. I am on the right side of
history. WE'RE the ones telling
people what they need to know to
make their lives better. WE'RE the
ones telling them what's standing
who is causing their problems.
WE'RE THE ONES DOING RIGHT BY OUR
AUDIENCE AND THEY LOVE US FOR IT!

JO

We'll see huh? Things can take
time. Maybe change is possible.
Maybe the standards for broadcast
licenses get changed and maybe
that's the end of payola bullshit.
Change can happen.

RAY

People need to take responsibility
for what they believe. No one
should believe everything that any
particular outlet tells them.

JO

Yeah if my audio was ok, I think
you pretty much just made a speech
about that. Appreciate the assist,
considering I've been saying that a
long time, myself.

Demetrius approaches waving a small memory stick. Ray
registers comprehension of what is contained on it.

DEMETRIUS

Affirmative. Told your audience
you're playing 'em for schmucks.

PARKER

Can we GET SOME SECURITY IN HERE!

DEMETRIUS

No need, we're on our way out.

PARKER

You work here don't you? I've seen you before.

DEMETRIUS

Not quite what you told the security crew though, was it?

PARKER

He's an audio guy. Mr. Murphy that's a copy of the audio that he's holding.

RAY

No shit Parker.

JO

You're a rotten old rat, Murphy. Pitting people against each other. Stressing out families and friends. Making everything harder for everybody, while you're telling them you're their best friend.

PARKER

No one is going to believe that was actually Ray Murphy talking.

JO

Maybe maybe not. We'll see but either way, how about you lay the fuck off my dad, how about that? He's a goddamned good man who got injured on the job. A hundred times the man you'll ever be.

Having entered during the moments of staff shock and paralysis - Mat, Cronkite, Nic, and Shon arrive.

MATHIEU

(to Parker)

You want to say some of this shit to my face, you professional lying piece of merde?!

Jo runs to her father, practically knocking him over.

JO

(to Parker)

Merde means shit, by the way.

MATHIEU

For shame young man. Telling lies for a living. You go tell your parents you are sorry, they didn't raise a good man.

PARKER

This is ridiculous. We won't be taken down here by amateur hour.

RAY

There's a warrant out for your arrest Miss Patnode. It strikes me that each of us can help the other, in this situation.

Jo scans her friends' faces, taking her time with Dem.

JO

That stick is Demetrius' property, not mine.

DEMETRIUS

And we're a team. How would our team know that you're really dropping her charges?

Ray pulls up a screen on his phone - a contact card for the Southampton Police Station - and holds it out to them.

JO

I'll want to record the call.

Ray nods and places the call. Jo captures the whole thing.

RAY

Detective Norman please ... Hello this is Ray Murphy. That charge I filed, the breaking and entering issue. I'd like to withdraw it please ... yes. Drop it. No longer a problem. Appreciate it, officer.

Ray hangs up. Demetrius -- with Jo's visual affirmation -- hands Ray the memory stick.

EXT. NYC STREET - DAY

Jo, Nic, Shon, Demetrius, Mat, and Cronkite take a stroll.

NIC

New York City, son of gun.

SHON

Been trying to tell you, upstaters.

Jo, Shon, Nic, Mat and Cronkite stroll the streets. They come upon a group with signs like 'NON BINARY NON ALIGNED', chanting 'LGBTQ, WE ALL LOVE U2!

NIC

I LOVE YAS ALL TOO! I'M COMING
BACK! I'LL MARCH WITH YAS!

EXTERIOR TRAILER HOME - DAY

Mat sits on the porch. Jo comes out with her coffee.

JO

It's spring here, finally.

MATHIEU

You sure you want to be back here,
things are pretty slow up here.

JO

(reaching for his hand)
You gonna be here?

MATHIEU

There's still Shon's video. What
are you going to do with it?

JO

It has to come out. There's some
legal shit to work through.

Mat looks at his daughter in a new light. He's proud of her and she sees that.

MATHIEU

It does.

JO

Dad. You know what's great about
this? We both care. So much, about
everything. You came here and you
worked hard and you believe in this
country, and I saw that and I
believe too, and we both CARE.
That's why we argued so much.
Nothing happens if no one cares.

MATHIEU

Served a purpose, maybe.

JO
Exactly. None of this would have
happened.

MATHIEU
I wish it didn't have to be so
difficult.

JO
(laughing)
Yeah that got a little hairy there
for a while, didn't it?

MATHIEU
You're going to be a great
reporter.

JO
Still need to work on my pétanque
skills. You got some time today?

FADE OUT.