Onion News Network Untitled Narrative Show

by
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ACT I

A NEWS BROADCAST:

EXT. STATE CAPITOL BUILDING - DAY

Star reporter CAMERON GREY - 30s, handsome, emotional - talks to an ORGANIZER at the center of a large, angry protest.

CAMERON GREY
... who's agreed to speak exclusively with the Onion News Network. Your message today is that every unborn fetus should have the right to carry a firearm?

ORGANIZER
Yes Cameron. The most vulnerable American citizens are our unborn children. They have the right to defend themselves!

She holds up a hand-made sign featuring a photo of an ultrasound in which the fetus is holding a handgun. PULL OUT from this to reveal it is playing on a monitor in front of --

EXT. ONION NEWS NETWORK HEADQUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

The front facade of a modern, metal building. Large monitors show a live feed of Onion News Network.

ORGANIZER (ON MONITOR)
See, now this fetus is safe. If sn abortion doctor comes after him, the fetus will just say, "back off, or I'll blow your goddamn head off with my 22."

SCOTT WEST (20s, handsome but a little nerdy, eager) stands stock still on the New York sidewalk, staring at the monitor. He takes a deep breath, and adjusts his tie. He's nervous.

SCOTT WEST
(to himself:)
OK. OK.

As he walks into the building, we tilt up to see it is a massive skyscraper, with a gigantic ONN logo on top.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - MORNING

A bustling, high tech control room with countless screens playing the Cameron interview. Programming Director ED MUSGROVE (40s, balding, perpetually harried) runs the room. ABIGAIL, Helena's assistant (20s, bubbly, Indian) enters.

MUSGROVE
Cameron's out in 30, Tom, give me a 15 on the 20. Get the B deck double-decked in CDE, ready the squab.

ABIGAIL
Mr. Musgrove --

MUSGROVE
Not now.
(to technicians)
Get a 67 bump on the swabber, deck it up -- and swab it.

ABIGAIL
Sorry, sir. She wants to see you.

That gets his attention.

INT. HELENA'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

ONN CEO HELENA ZWEIBEL (50s, tall, imposing) is on the phone.

HELENA
Yes, exclusive coverage when the mine collapses. Tuesday is fine.

As Helena hangs up Abigail enters with Musgrove and hands her boss a green drink and a mouse in a small cage.

ABIGAIL
Ed Musgrove for you, Ms. Zweibel.
And here's lunch for both of you.

ANGLE reveals a falcon in a cage in a corner of the room.

HELENA
Thank you Abigail, at least two people at this network do their jobs well. Ed, what the hell is this?

She indicates the monitor, where Cameron is now talking to TWO PROTESTORS holding TODDLERS, who have rifles in their tiny hands.

MUSGROVE
Are you upset that we showed poor people? I know the policy but --

HELENA
I'm *upset* because the ratings report came out this morning -- even CNN is gaining on us.

She clicks a remote. The monitor shows ratings charts for a million demographics.

HELENA (CONT'D)
Look at these numbers: White males 18 to 25, *down.* Lesbian baristas, *down.* Lonesome ranch hands, *down.* Even our market share of Unemployed half-Black half-Asian dentists is *down*.

MUSGROVE
But--

She motions to a portrait of her grim father ZWEIBEL holding a skull and a globe, sitting on a "chair" made from an African American and a Chinese man on their hands and knees.

HELENA
Ed, my father didn't build The Onion into one of the world's most powerful media, lumber, computer and music stand manufacturing conglomerates by accepting second best. I won't either.

Helena goes to the cage and feeds the falcon the mouse.

MUSGROVE
I'm sorry, Helena it's just --

HELENA
Don't give me excuses, I get enough of those from my handicapped son.

Helena exits. Musgrove hurries after her.

MUSGROVE
We did get you a missing girl story.

CUTAWAY TO:

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DAY

11-year-old COURTNEY CARTER playing in her front yard. An ONN van with a big logo pulls up, two guys hop out, grab Courtney, and throw her in the van.

BACK TO:

INT. NEWSROOM (BULLPEN) - SAME AS BEFORE

Musgrove and Helena do a Sorkin-style walk-and-talk down a staircase into the newsroom bullpen - the network's large, open main work area, always bustling with countless staffers.

HELENA
She's *chubby*. No one cares about a *fat* missing girl.

MUSGROVE
(getting desperate:)
Well, we also have that special on the secret sex life of Jesus ...

They pass segment producer JILLIAN CHASE (late 20s, pretty, smart, overworked) who is giving notes to a couple editors. Their computer screen shows a buff Jesus surrounded by babes. *

JILLIAN
Go in closer on his abs...
(she spots Musgrove:)
Oh Ed!
(over her shoulder:)
And make sure you can see his cock bulge.

INT. NEWSROOM (HALLWAY) - CONTINUOUS

Helena and Musgrove pass a long wall of photos of ONN's finest moments from early newsreel days up to present.

MUSGROVE
...and we're projecting very good numbers for America's Most Shocking Shark Shootings.

HELENA
Ed. Get us a hit or I'll send you back to those perky fucks in morning news. *

CUTAWAY TO: *

CLIP FROM “TODAY NOW” BROADCAST: *

Jim and Tracy, the morning show hosts, are laughing hysterically. They start laughing harder, to the point you think they might die. This lasts a few seconds too long. *

BACK TO: *

An elevator opens behind Helena. She steps in and is instantly whisked away. Jillian walks up.

MUSGROVE
(calling after Helena)
Okay!
(quietly:) *
But it hurts that you didn’t remember it’s the anniversary of our second wedding.

JILLIAN
Did you say something --?

MUSGROVE *
I was just talking to myself quietly about my feelings. What do you need?

He takes out a pill bottle and dry swallows a couple pills as he and Jillian start a walk-and-talk down the hall.

JILLIAN
(handing him papers:)
I’ve got the copy for that story about the mall shooter who was shot by a second mall shooter.
(off pills:)
You okay, boss?

The elevator opens and West steps out. He spots Musgrove, and hurries after him, sticking out his hand. *

MUSGROVE
I’ve got numb-liver, Greg’s Disease, recurring bat rabies, and only one lung. So probably not.

WEST
Ed Musgrove? I’m Scott West, from WONN-5.

MUSGROVE
(not interested:)
Oh right, the new reporter.
(MORE)

MUSGROVE (CONT'D)
You're the one who broke that story about the boy scout troop that fell down a well.

CUT AWAY TO:

EXT. WELL - DAY (LOCAL NEWS BROADCAST)

WEST
...three Eagle Scouts and seventeen tenderfoots tripped and fell into the open well as you can see here.

Computer animation: Boy scouts marching in single file. The first one falls into the well, followed by the second, etc.

BACK TO:

JILLIAN
That was you? That story went national.

WEST
(noticing her, attracted:)
Hi. I mean, yes.

MUSGROVE
Well, you're gonna have to do better than a couple dozen dead boyscouts if you wanna make it here. Jillian, show him his desk.

JILLIAN *
I would but --

MUSGROVE
(coughs pathetically)
Sorry, my one lung is weak today. *

Jillian relents, nods. Musgrove starts to walk away.

MUSGROVE (CONT'D) *
Thanks. Kid, be nice to Jillian. She's the glue in our weird sad collage around here. Plus, maybe you'll have a romantic connection -- just keep in mind any children you two may have will be property of the network. They'll work in the baby news division.

CUT AWAY TO:

INT. ONN BABY NEWS STUDIO

A cute baby sits behind a baby-sized anchor desk.

BABY
Ba ga ba boobooboo loo loo loo. *

Footage of a hurricane destroying homes comes up behind him.

BACK TO:

JILLIAN
Can you walk and talk at the same time?

WEST
Yes, I took a class.

JILLIAN
Come on then.

They start a walk-and-talk.

WEST
(looking around, awed)
This place is amazing. Is that a DR-88 over there?

JILLIAN
It’s a DR-90. Two more gigs of D. Stopped using 88s around here years ago.

INT. NEWSROOM (NEWSDESK) - CONTINUOUS

Jillian and West pass the newsdesk where DAVID EVERETT (ONN’s oldest and most respected anchor) is taping a story. * *

DAVID EVERETT
...striking Cheesecake Factory workers say dozens have been afflicted with “cheesecake lung”... *

WEST
That’s David Everett! Cronkite, Murrow, and him are my biggest news idols. I even did my thesis on his report about the glory hole in the Berlin Wall.

JILLIAN
(rolls eyes)
He's a pompous ego-maniac, every year at his birthday party he makes us get an ice sculpture of him.

They turn down a corridor where the walls are lined with machine guns and gas masks. West is a little surprised.

WEST
So you're a reporter?

JILLIAN
(hiding bitterness)
No, I'm just a segment producer. I always wanted to be a reporter, but I failed the facial symmetry test. Only scored 97%.

INT. NEWSROOM (BULLPEN) - CONTINUOUS

They continue to West's desk, off in a corner of the bullpen.

JILLIAN
You probably already noticed my right eye is three-tenths of a nano-millimeter lower than my left.

They stop by West's desk. It's tiny and crappy. Jillian gestures to her eye. It looks totally normal.

WEST
Oh it's not that bad--

JILLIAN
I know I'm hideous.

West looks at her intently for a minute.

WEST
My dad was a local reporter like me, but he always wanted to be a national anchor. One day, he was covering the unveiling of the world's largest ball of twine. A freak wind storm kicked up, the twine broke it's moorings -- I can still hear the sound it made in my head, like --

West makes a high pitched, mournful noise. He takes a framed picture out of his briefcase -- it's his father, in front of a sign that says "World's Largest Ball Of Twine."

WEST (CONT'D)
My dad got crushed to death under that twineball. But I worked hard, and today here I am -- so close to realizing his dream, my dream. The moral is: beware of freak wind storms, and never give up.

JILLIAN
You know, the last guy who sat here wanted to be an anchor too. This was his resignation letter.

She picks up a note from the desk: "Couldn't hack it. Goodbye world :(".

JILLIAN (CONT'D)
Staff meeting in five, kid.

She exits. West leans against the wall, watches her go. He likes her. Then he notices he's leaning against a blood spatter from when the last guy killed himself.

INT. NEWSROOM (BULLPEN) - MINUTES LATER

Musgrove strides in, claps.

MUSGROVE
All right, all right, everyone gather round!

Everyone does. West and Jillian stand next to each other at the edge of the crowd. West takes out a notebook and gets ready to take notes. Jillian glances over and smiles, shaking her head -- this kid is so naïve it's cute.

MUSGROVE (CONT'D)
People, let me get right to the point: our ratings are shit. In the past month we've only had one story get above a six-point share and that's because it was a cable news trifecta: Sex, violence, and animals. I'm referring, of course, to the bear mauling at the porn star charity car wash. No surprise, that story came from Cameron Grey.

Smattering of applause. Cameron nods proudly.

CAMERON
Three porn stars and a bear named Harvey died that day. They're the real heroes. *

JILLIAN
(whispers to West, bitter)
I found that story. *

Sorkin-style inspiring music plays under the following.

MUSGROVE
Folks, we need a hit. A story so entrancing that when the most moronic, ape-like member of our loyal viewing public sees it, he will put down his microwaved burrito, stop beating his illegitimate kid for two and a half minutes, and *pay attention to the news.* Now get to work and do not let me down and DO NOT LET DOWN OUR MINDLESS VIEWERS!

Everyone returns to work, a buzz of excitement in the air. Musgrove, wheezing from the speech, takes a hit from an inhaler. West turns to Jillian.

WEST
I'm going to get that story. *

Jillian rolls her eyes as West hurries off. Musgrove approaches Jillian.

MUSGROVE
Jillian! I need someone to watch the girl we kidnapped.

JILLIAN
But I'm already working on that story about the recall of strollers with ejector seats and I --

MUSGROVE
I know I work you as hard as a mule, but you're the only one I trust with something this menial.

JILLIAN
(reluctantly:)
Fine.

MUSGROVE
That's my little mule. And here's Courtney!

Musgrove points to little Courtney, who is tied to an office chair. Jillian sighs and starts to roll her away.

JILLIAN
Okay, come on honey, I'm very busy--

COURTNEY
Don't call me honey, dickbag.

Jillian shoots Courtney a surprised look as they disappear into the bustle of the newsroom. We pan to catch West approaching Musgrove as Musgrove heads back to his office.

WEST
Mr. Musgrove? I'd like to pitch an important story: Corruption in the Senate. If I disguise myself as a butler, I can get into one of those back-rooms where lobbyists--

MUSGROVE
Actually I already have an assignment for you. You're going down to south Jersey to interview a man who just turned 100 but still goes fishing every day.

WEST
A fluff story? But sir, shouldn't I focus on a more important --

MUSGROVE
New reporters get the old people stories, that's the system. Now get out there.

INT. GIMMEE AWARDS CEREMONY BALLROOM

Cameron Grey is on stage accepting a Gimmee Award: The statue is a human hand wrapped around a normal looking award statue.

CAMERON
When I think of how much I deserve this award, I just ... I can't ...
(he starts choking up:)
I'm sorry ... it's just ... I'm so good at interviews. I'm so great.

INT. DAVID'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

David is watching this clip on a monitor. He presses pause.

DAVID EVERETT
I've interviewed fourteen Presidents, the Pope, even Osama Bin Laden back when we liked him. And now you're telling me this snivelling hippie broke my streak?

David looks at a trophy display case: It has 14 Gimmee Awards and an empty space marked "15."

DAVID EVERETT (CONT'D)
Fourteen straight Gimmee Awards. That fifteenth should have been mine. Order must be restored at this network.

Reveal he is talking to Abigail. Abigail's earlier pleasant demeanor is gone: she's cold and ruthless as a shark.

ABIGAIL
Let's cut to the chase. You want dirt on Cameron Grey.

DAVID EVERETT
I want to bring him to his knees and pour wet hot dirt over his face.
(Abigail is grossed out) *
Now I know you're *technically* * Helena Zweibel's assistant, but * I've heard you also have certain * ethical lapses I might find useful. *

ABIGAIL
I do. But if I help you, you're * going to owe me a favor. Anything I want, whenever I ask.

DAVID EVERETT
Anything? What if you ask me to punch someone?

ABIGAIL
You'd have to do it.

DAVID EVERETT
What if you want me to dress up as a woman of distinction?

ABIGAIL
You'd... have to do that too.

DAVID EVERETT
What if you want me to dress as a woman of distinction, take a young male lover -- a professional dancer, perhaps, or an Olympic swimmer -- and then marry him and be happy for the rest of my life?

ABIGAIL
Uh--

DAVID EVERETT
Would I <u>have</u> to do that too?

ABIGAIL
I guess so.

DAVID EVERETT
Then I accept, my little Shiva. Go forth and destroy.

EXT. JERSEY DOCKS - CONTINUOUS

West looks around as CAMERAMAN unloads gear from an ONN van. *

WEST
The old man is supposed to meet us here. Let's get this over with.

A couple kids run by screaming. A fisherman sits shaking, his eyes open wide. West approaches him.

WEST (CONT'D)
Excuse me, sir? I'm looking for a very old fisherman -- Kip O'Rourke?

Before he can respond, ancient O'Rourke comes sprinting down the dock toward West.

O'ROURKE
(rapidly)
Oh wow! That's me! I'm him! Wow! Holy Toledo a real news camera wow. I haven't seen one of these since * oh I know the Great War when I was in the pictures for blastin' some Japs out of the sky but that one was bigger, heavier too.

EXT. RIVER, O'ROURKE'S FISHING BOAT - 20 MINUTES LATER

O'Rourke chatters away, paddling a mile a minute. West sits opposite him, Camera Man filming the "interview."

O'ROURKE
...the time I caught a 200 pounder in the Gulf of Mexico back in '74 is anyone else's heart racing?

West looks around: Fish are jumping crazily out of the water. He frowns, trying to figure out what is going on.

WEST
Mr. O'Rourke, can you take us upstream a bit? *

O'ROURKE
Oh ceeeeeerrtainly! La la la --

EXT. RIVER - MOMENTS LATER

The animal behavior is getting crazier: an otter is hitting his head with a clam; a duck jumps into the boat and honks. * *

O'Rourke paddles and jabbers as West peers through binoculars, scanning the shores. He spots a factory with a huge pipe pumping yellow liquid into the water. West sees a "Bulls Milk Energy Drink" logo on the building.

WEST
Bull's Milk Energy Drink.
(excited:)
Blingo.

ACT 2

INT. NEWSROOM (NEWSDESK)

DAYTIME ANCHOR reads to camera, PAs mill about the studio. *

DAYTIME ANCHOR *
At any moment we could learn that *
little Courtney Carter has been *
hurt, raped, killed, or chopped up *
and fed to a snake... So keep *
watching the Onion News Network: a *
tomahawk of truth in the skull of *
lies. *

INT. NEWSROOM (BULLPEN) - CONTINUOUS

Jillian works at her desk beside tied-up Courtney.

COURTNEY
Do you have a boyfriend? I bet you don't.

JILLIAN
I need to work, Courtney.

COURTNEY
I bet you're so lonely. I bet when you go on a roller-coaster, you don't even have anyone to go with.

Jillian looks at picture on her desk -- it's of her on a roller coaster, alone. She turns the picture over.

JILLIAN
(defensive:)
I could have a boyfriend anytime, I'm just very busy.

COURTNEY
Busy sucking.

JILLIAN
I AM A HAPPY, ADULT LADY -- that's it, I'm finding someone else to deal with you.

INT. GRAPHICS ROOM - MOMENTS LATER *

Technicians work at computers making insane news graphics - explosions, blood-splatter wipes, etc. Jillian enters pulling Courtney in her chair and approaches one GRAPHICS GUY.

JILLIAN
Hey JJ is it ok to leave this girl we kidnapped with you for a bit?

GRAPHICS GUY
Uh, jeez, I'm kinda busy --

JILLIAN
You owe me. Remember that time I covered for you when you were--
(whispers)
--on heroin?

GRAPHICS GUY
All right --

There's a commotion: Everyone is looking at a big monitor playing ONN live.

DAYTIME ANCHOR (ON MONITOR)
... two Americans were killed in the genocide. *

In the lower-third graphic, the anchor's name has been replaced: POOP BUTTPOOPER. Courtney giggles as she pecks at a computer with her tied hands. Jillian grabs her.

JILLIAN
Courtney!

INT. MAKEUP ROOM - MOMENTS LATER *

Jillian and Courtney talk with a RUGGED REPORTER in an army flac jacket. A MAKEUP GIRL smudges dirt on his face.

RUGGED REPORTER
More dirt on my cheek there, like I'm really in the shit.
(back to Jillian)
Sorry Jillian, I don't have time.

COURTNEY
(to Rugged Reporter)
You got a chin implant, didn't you?

RUGGED REPORTER
(lying:)
No, I have a natural news jaw.

COURTNEY
Ha ha! Fake chin! No one likes you! Not even this makeup person likes you!

MAKEUP GIRL
(unconvincing)
I like you?

Jillian drags Courtney out.

JILLIAN
What am I going to do with you?

COURTNEY
I don't know maybe you shouldn't have *abducted* me.

They pass Abigail, who sidles up to a door marked "Cameron Grey Dressing Room / No Negative Energies."

INT. CAMERON GREY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS *

Abigail searches the room. She finds a dream-catcher, a photo of Cameron massaging the Dali Lama, but nothing bad. Suddenly she is startled by noise outside.

Cameron enters; Abigail is gone. Cameron picks up a box of microwaveable "Steamy Salad." He stares at the instructions.

IN THE CLOSET: Abigail watches through a crack in the door.

CAMERON
Vivian, can you come here for a second?

Cameron's curvaceous black ASSISTANT enters.

CAMERON (CONT'D)
(handing her box, quietly)
Can you read this for me?

ASSISTANT
Sure honey. It says "Microwave for three minutes on high, then enjoy your steaming hot salad." Here, I'll do it for you, babycakes.

IN THE CLOSET: Abigail looks intrigued.

INT. ONN CONTROL ROOM - LATER

Musgrove stares at monitor playing a live feed of ONN.

DAYTIME ANCHOR (ON MONITOR)
Later in the hour, could dinosaurs still be alive on a remote island? We'll show you lots of pictures of dinosaurs, and explain why it's not likely.

MUSGROVE
Going live to New Jersey in 10. You ready Scott?

DAYTIME ANCHOR (ON MONITOR)
But first: What would <u>you</u> do if you were 100 years old but still not dead? Scott West has the story...

WEST
(nervous:)
Yes sir, good to go, 10-4, I'm aces.

MUSGROVE
Take a breath kid.

Push in on a control room monitor where we see the broadcast:

West stands in front of the plant, O'Rourke does push ups vigorously behind him.

WEST
Thanks Alicia. What keeps a man of 100 from settling into retirement? How about 60 million gallons of taurine being poured into his water supply?

Footage of the pipe dumping Bull's Milk. Animals being crazy.

WEST (CONT'D)
A massive corporate scandal is unfolding here in New Jersey, where a Bull's Milk plant has been dumping thousands of excess gallons of energy drink into the river. You can see the disturbing effects for yourself.

INTERVIEW: Woman sitting next to a man doing a crazy dance.

WOMAN
My husband just started dancing one day, and now he can't stop. He's lost his job.

DANCING MAN
I feel good! I feel good! Gotta love it!

WEST (CONT'D)
He says he feels good, but it's clear Bull's Milk is making this community feel very, very bad. Scott West, Onion News Network.

INT. DAVID'S OFFICE

David is speaking to an INTERN who looks very bored.

DAVID EVERETT
...though he was dead, I felt the urge to kiss my father on the lips. And so I did.

Abigail enters.

ABIGAIL
Busy?

DAVID EVERETT
Just talking to my Listening Intern.
(MORE)

DAVID EVERETT (CONT'D)
(to Intern)
You can stop listening now.

Intern puts on big sound-cancelling headphones.

DAVID EVERETT (CONT'D)
Well, what did you find?

ABIGAIL
I think Cameron Grey is illiterate.

DAVID EVERETT
Aha. That explains why his teleprompter is just pictures. *

CUTAWAY TO:

INT. CAMERON GREY UNCHECKED SET

Cameron stands, reading to camera. PAs mill around.

CAMERON
The car chase lasted for two hours, and ended in a fiery, exciting wreck ...

REVERSE shows Teleprompter displaying: sad face, a car, two dots, a fire, and a happy face.

BACK TO:

DAVID EVERETT
We need hard evidence. When you go after the top dog, you better bring a big gun. Trust me, I know a lot about killing dogs.

INT. NEWSROOM - SAME TIME *

Jillian pulls Courtney in her chair through the newsroom.

COURTNEY
You want to be a reporter right? But you can't because of your eye?

JILLIAN
Shut up, Courtney -- wait, how do you know that?

COURTNEY
I found your diary in your desk. Then I burnt it.

She holds up her tied hands to show she's holding a burnt husk of diary.

JILLIAN
How did you even-- What is wrong with you?

COURTNEY
I blame society. You gave up on your dream, that is sooooo sad. I mean you're sad, I'm not feeling sad for you, freak-face.

JILLIAN
I am going to be a reporter! But first I'm going to beat you senseless with a ... *
(grabs first thing she sees)
Picture of an ugly man's family!

MAN (O.S.)
Hey!

Jillian raises the picture.

INT. DAVID'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS *

Abigail glances through the open door and sees Jillian brandishing the photo over Courtney.

INT. NEWSROOM - CONTINUOUS *

COURTNEY
Go ahead, child abuse me!

Jillian swings the picture down. At the last second Abigail grabs her arm. Abigail is back to her smiling self.

ABIGAIL
Wait, Jillian! Can I take this little scamp off your hands?

JILLIAN *
(very fast:) *
Are you serious? Tell me you're *
serious. Wait, I don't care. Don't *
say anything, just please, yes, *
take her, right now, before you *
change your mind. Goodbye! *

Jillian practically runs away. Abigail drops the smile. *

COURTNEY
You think you can handle all this? I'm gonna make you --

ABIGAIL
Listen up you shrill, fat girl, you may use insults to cover up your triple-XL insecurities, but it's not going to work on me -- I won the National Bullying Championships in High School. Now I need you to do something for me, and if you don't cooperate you'll be found at the bottom of a lake and we'll get three days of psychologists speculating about the motivations of your killers. Got it?

Courtney nods, totally quiet.

INT. ONION NEWS NETWORK HQ - LOBBY

Scott walks into the lobby. A SECURITY GUARD waves at him.

SECURITY GUARD
Hey kid, your story's all over the place!

He points to a wall of TVs in front of him, where FOX, CNN and MSNBC are all talking about the Bull's Milk story.

SECURITY GUARD (CONT'D)
That was pretty ballsy.

WEST
(proud:)
What can I say, I have huge huge balls.

The security guard looks a little weirded out.

INT. ONION NEWS NETWORK HQ - NEWSROOM BULLPEN

WEST
(to passersby:)
Did you guys see my Bull's Milk story? High fives!

He tries to high five a couple people, who look at him weirdly. Scott sees Jillian, she looks worried.

WEST (CONT'D)
You thought I couldn't make it to the top, but --

JILLIAN
Scott --

MUSGROVE (O.C.)
WEST!

West looks up to see Musgrove standing above the bull-pen of reporters, clearly pissed.

MUSGROVE (CONT'D)
Get your buttermilk ass in my office. I've got some churning to do.

INT. MUSGROVE'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

MUSGROVE
I told you to interview a very old man and talk to him about being very, very old.

WEST
But this is a huge story --

MUSGROVE
Bull's Milk is our biggest sponsor!

He points, and, through the glass wall, West sees that there is an entire wall of the newsroom filled with Bull's Milk paraphernalia including a large Bull's Milk fridge.

MUSGROVE (CONT'D)
They support all our political roundtable debates!

He gestures across the newsroom to a "political roundtable" set where a group of over-caffineated PUNDITS are screaming at each other while chugging Bulls' Milk. The whole set is audaciously branded with the Bull's Milk logo.

MUSGROVE (CONT'D)
Haven't you ever noticed the brooch Helena Zweibel wears at all times?

CUTAWAY TO:

INT. FANCY PARTY - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Helena is laughing with a bunch of Asian investors. She says something in fluent Mandarin. They all laugh. CLOSE-UP on her brooch which is a diamond and jewel Bull's Milk can.

BACK TO:

INT. MUSGROVE'S OFFICE

WEST
But our job is to report the truth--

Musgrove slams his fists down on his desk, which we pull out to reveal is a large Bull's Milk can. West is surprised.

MUSGROVE
This job isn't about informing people, it's about making them think they're informed selling them mufflers and cereal.

WEST
But back in the old days, Cronkite and Murrow--

MUSGROVE
Cronkite only covered the Cuban missile crisis to help Sears market their Anti-Radiation Umbrellas. Tom Brokaw used Reagan's election to sell life insurance to liberals.

WEST
I-- I didn't know that.

MUSGROVE
(ranting)
Well you should have! You're naive kid! You're-- Aack.

He clutches his chest, then swiftly stabs a syringe into his chest and resumes breathing.

MUSGROVE (CONT'D)
Sorry, my heart stopped for a second. Happens often. Anyway, you're hired!

WEST
Really?

MUSGROVE
I misspoke, you're fired. Get out.

ACT III

INT. BULLPEN, WEST'S DESK - LATER

West boxes up several framed photos of himself from his one day at ONN, all from scenes we already saw. Then he picks up the photos of his dad, looks at it sadly. Jillian comes over.

WEST
My father would be rolling over in his grave, except he can't cause that giant twine ball just crushed him flat as a pancake.

JILLIAN
Hey.

WEST
(not listening:)
You'd have to flip him, maybe with a spatula--

JILLIAN
Hey! What happened to "never give up" and freak windstorms?

WEST
I was wrong, I thought I was going to rocket straight to the moon, like Apollo 11. Turns out I was more like the Challenger.

He makes an exploding noise. Jillian grimaces.

WEST (CONT'D)
Yeah I guess I didn't need the sound effect there.

Jillian grabs his hand. Moment of eye-contact. ATTRACTION!

JILLIAN
Look, you made one mistake. You know who else made one mistake. My mom. You know what came from that mistake: you're looking at her. Remember, the news isn't about facts. It's about telling people what to think.

WEST
But how?

JILLIAN
(holds up paper)
I already wrote up some copy.

WEST
Why are you helping me?

JILLIAN
Your first day is like a roller coaster, and no one should have to ride a roller coaster alone.

INT. CAMERON GREY'S DRESSING ROOM

Cameron is doing yoga shirtless. Abigail, now perky and flirty, enters with Courtney, who is untied, wearing sunglasses and holding a cane.

ABIGAIL
Cameron? Sorry to interrupt. This is Sandy. She's a big fan of yours but she's blind.

COURTNEY
I totally can't see anything.

CAMERON
How tragic. To be so young, yet so blind.

ABIGAIL
Her biggest wish has always been to have you read her favorite book to her. You'd do that for her, wouldn't you?

CAMERON
Uh, I'd love to! I love to read.

Abigail hands Cameron a kids book, calling his bluff.

CAMERON (CONT'D)
Oh, right now? Oh no, that's my phone.
(answers it:)
Hello, Hillary Clinton? Sorry Abigail, I have to take this.

ABIGAIL
That's not a phone.

She grabs his “phone,” it’s just a small stapler.

CAMERON
Ah. No wonder it got such bad reception. Well then, sure I’ll read to you, little blind girl.

He takes the book and starts “reading” but is clearly guessing based on the pictures.

CAMERON (CONT’D)
Uh. Okay. So once upon a time there was a dog... Who had a hat on? And walked. No, danced? To... a store.

Abigail takes a camera out of her pocket, subtly places it in a strange Bonsai tree, and steps out of the room. *

INT. CONTROL ROOM - NIGHT

Jillian is running the control room. *

DAVID (ON MONITOR)
... at just 4.99, many are calling the Mcdonalds Veal Meal Deal a real steal. Moving on ...

Musgrove walks in to watch her. She doesn’t see him.

JILLIAN *
Okay, double deck Z and David, get ready to throw to Scott West. *

MUSGROVE
Are you out of your mind? I fired him.

JILLIAN
He’s got a good story. I promise.

MUSGROVE
All right, Jillian, but if this goes bad I have to kill you. Can’t fire you. You know too much. * *

DAVID(ON MONITOR)
... go to Scott West for an update on the Bull’s Milk dumping story we heard about earlier today. *

JILLIAN
(to Tech Director)
Go to 3, swabber it.
(MORE)

JILLIAN (CONT'D)
(into headset mic)
All right Scott. Ready?

WEST
(on headset)
Ready. And Jillian? Thanks.

JILLIAN
(glancing at Musgrove:)
Don’t thank me yet. Going to you in three, two, aaand ... swabber. *

INT. STUDIO B - SAME TIME (NEWS BROADCAST)

WEST
Thanks, Cameron. New information indicates the Bull’s Milk contamination I reported on earlier may actually have *benefited* the community. Individual productivity has increased by 50%.

Bar graph shows Individual Productivity comparing 2011 and 2012: “Polkas Danced,” “Houses Demolished”, “Bricks Eaten,” * etc. Are all up.

WEST (CONT’D)
And the Bull’s Milk is already reducing childhood obesity.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - DAY

Three kids run by screaming.

KID
I can’t feel my face!!!!

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jillian is intense. Musgrove’s expression gives nothing away.

JILLIAN
(into mic)
Don’t forget skateboarding, Scott.

WEST (ON MONITOR)
And scientists say the Bull’s Milk -infused drinking water also makes you an awesome skateboarder. *

JILLIAN
And drink...

INT. STUDIO B- CONTINOUS

West chugs a whole can of Bull's Milk in one go.

WEST
Tasty. Scott West, Onion News Network.

JILLIAN
And we're out. We did it!

WEST
(dazed from Bull's Milk)
My eyes are dancing.

Jillian looks up for Musgrove's reaction, but he's gone.

EXT. SPOOKY FOREST - EVENING

Abigail and Courtney stand outside an ONN van idling on a dirt road. Abigail has a big contract in her hand.

ABIGAIL
... you agree to tell the police that you were taken by an African-American or a Latino - your choice. And that's it, you can be "found."

COURTNEY
I want all the royalties from any book or movie deals I make relating to this "kidnapping".

ABIGAIL
(impressed:)
Fine, we can make that happen.

Courtney nods, and signs the contract.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)
You did a great job today Courtney, I think you've got the lack of ethics you need to make it in the news business. When you get a little older, you should come back and intern for us.

COURTNEY
Be an intern? You think I'm fucking stupid?

Courtney runs off. Abigail smiles after her.

INT. CAMERON'S OFFICE

Cameron is painting a portrait of himself that looks like a romance novel cover. David enters.

CAMERON
Namaste, David.

DAVID EVERETT
Sorry, I don't speak Gay. Take a look at this.

He holds up phone showing video of Cameron trying to read.

CAMERON (IN VIDEO)
So then the pig got in the car -- (turns pages) -- and then there's a bunch of words ... Lots of letters ... Oh, there's that one that looks the sign Zorro makes. OK all done.

CAMERON (CONT'D)
(nervous:)
What's this?

DAVID EVERETT
Do I have to spell it out for you? Wait, that wouldn't help.

CAMERON
(can't fight it:)
Look... I connect with people. You don't have to know how to <u>read</u> to know how to <u>feel</u>.

DAVID EVERETT
(chuckles:)
So you admit it. You won't even be able to "anchor" a workout video *if* I decide to release this tape.

CAMERON
What do I have to do?

DAVID EVERETT
To start with, gimmee your Gimmee award. It'll be a symbol of how from now on, I own your rock hard ass.

He slaps David on the ass, grabs the award and leaves.

ACT IV

NEWS BROADCAST:

INTERVIEW with Courtney's FATHER and MOTHER, who look terrified. Courtney sits with them, smiling an evil smile.

FATHER
We're so glad to have our little pumpkin back. Of course she'll still be walking to school alone every day, so I really hope -- God forbid -- she doesn't get kidnapped again. She's usually walking along Fordham Road at about 8 AM. *

Courtney gives her dad the finger. *

INT. NEWSROOM (STUDIO) - EVENING - CONTINUOUS

Jillian stands by as DAVID closes out Courtney's story. West walks up to Jillian. He's very nervous.

DAVID EVERETT
And little Courtney's just signed a deal with Random House to write a memoir of her kidnapping, entitled "Why I Deserve A Reality Show." We'll be back.

JILLIAN
Scott, where have you been?

WEST
Just walking in circles. Walking, walking. Like the dead walk in purgatory, just, you know, *around.*

MUSGROVE (O.C.)
West?!!

JILLIAN
(to West:)
You're about to learn your fate.

MUSGROVE
I was just in Helena Zweibel's office. She's been on the phone with the Bull's Milk people. Apparently since your story aired, the mayors of ten cities have requested to have Bull's Milk pumped into their water supplies.
(MORE)

MUSGROVE (CONT'D)
Bull's Milk was so happy they sent you a real live bull. It's in your office.

WEST
I don't have an office.

MUSGROVE
Well, then there's just a bull in someone else's office. *

CUTAWAY TO: *

INT. ONN NEWSROOM (OFFICE) *

The blond DAYTIME ANCHOR we saw earlier opens her office door to see the bull standing there next to her desk. The daytime anchor freezes. The bull snorts and paws the ground. * * *

BACK TO: *

WEST
So does this mean -- ?

MUSGROVE
You aren't fired, kid. I'm a pretty tough old newsbird, but what you did today gave my tiny newsbird heart it's wings back. Where'd you get the idea to spin the story positive?

WEST
You know it was actually ...

JILLIAN perks up, ready to be praised.

WEST (CONT'D)
It just came to me. Because I'm such a good journalist.

MUSGROVE
And that's why I'm sending you to Indiana: A tornado just hit a bullet factory there, hundreds are dead! * *

WEST
But that's a huge story, sir, are you sure--

MUSGROVE
You've got what it takes, kid. Pack your bags. *

West turns and sees JILLIAN watching. She's genuinely hurt.

WEST
Jillian. I --

JILLIAN
You're just like the rest of them.

She strides off. West stares after her, ashamed.

INT. MUSGROVE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Musgrove enters his office. Helena's falcon is perched on his desk holding a scroll in its claw. Musgrove takes the scroll: it's a ratings graph showing ratings on the rise.

HELENA (O.C.)
Congratulations.

Helena stands in the doorway, leather glove on arm. She whistles and the falcon flies over and perches on the glove. *

HELENA (CONT'D)
That Bull's Milk story bumped us up to a six point five share.

MUSGROVE
Thanks Helena. Uh, by the way...

HELENA
Happy anniversary of our second wedding.

MUSGROVE
I thought you forgot.

Helena walks towards him, falcon on arm. Music swells.

HELENA
I should be able to forget you. I've had hundred of thousands of lovers. I've slept with Henry Kissenger, the god Thor, even Greg Kinnear. But somehow the only one who ever meant anything to me was you, Ed.
(MORE)

HELENA (CONT'D)
Maybe it’s your balding head or your medical ailments, but something about you pierced my armor, you sweaty beanbag chair of a man. *

She kisses him, then pulls away.

HELENA (CONT’D)
And for that I can never forgive you.

She slaps him, then kisses him again, then slaps him again.

HELENA (CONT’D)
I’d keep going with this, but I have a meeting and the falcon has a massage.

As Helena exits, we hear a snorting noise. A BULL runs across the newsroom, chasing screaming staff members. Musgrove rubs his cheek, but smiles, ignoring the bull.

INT. HIGH-SPEED ELEVATOR - NIGHT

Helena gets in, a security device scans her elbow.

COMPUTER VOICE
Elbow print recognized. Going up.

INT. TOP SECRET MEETING ROOM

In the high tech, dimly lit meeting room, Helena’s brothers ERNEST, ARCHIBALD, and LUTHER ZWIEBEL sit around a circular table, in front of them is a sign with the division of The Onion he runs: Lumber (Ernest), Computers (Archibald), Music Stands (Luther). Helena takes the empty seat, marked “Media.”

HELENA
So, it’s a family reunion.

ARCHIBALD
Greetings sister.

HELENA
This better be important, I’m supposed to be getting a Brazilian wax with Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

ERNEST
We thought you called this meeting.

HELENA
Me?

ANCIENT VOICE
I called it.

Everyone is startled. Suddenly the middle of the table opens up: Out of it rises an extremely complex life-support machine holding the impossibly-ancient ZWEIBEL.

HELENA
Father!

ZWIEBEL
Good evening, my wriggling spawn. The time has come to discuss which of you shall inherit my empire. Because I'm finally dying, thank merciful Christ.

He coughs wretchedly. Helena glances at her brothers, who are glancing at her. GLANCE-FEST! The competition is on.

END SHOW