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END

Untitled Newsradio Pilot

by

Paul Simms

**First Draft
October 28, 1994**

The WNYX office looks like any office. It could be an insurance company -- except for the glass-walled broadcast booth centered on the back wall and raised five steps above the rest of the office. (A)

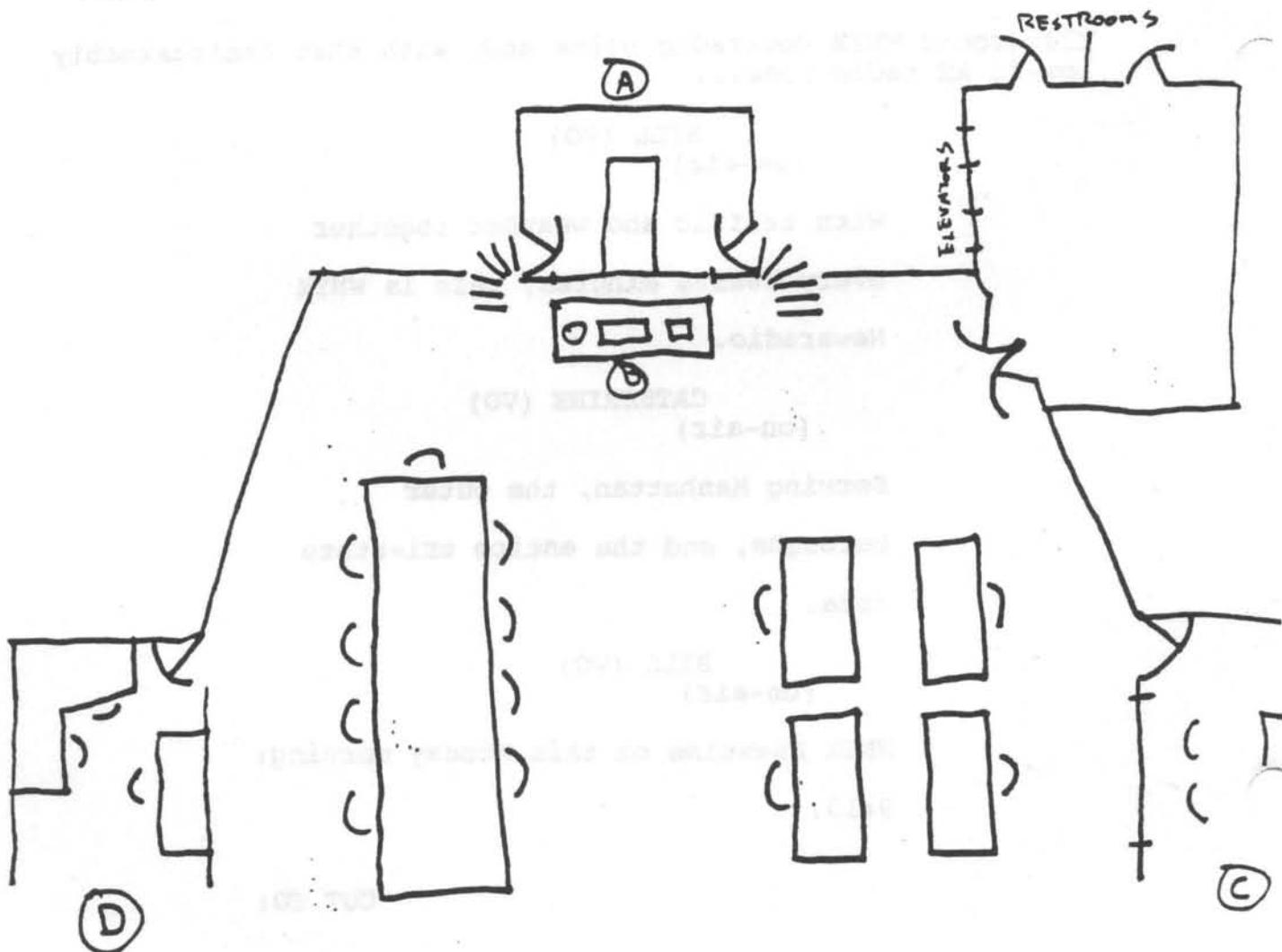
Right below the broadcast booth is a table with the coffee machine, microwave, and snacks. (B)

The news director's office is on one side of the bullpen. It has a glass window that looks out on the bullpen area. (C)

On the other side of the bullpen is the Off-Line Booth, a small, cramped editing booth. (D)

The main floor of the bullpen is divided into two areas: a long conference table, and a cluster of standard-issue office desks.

Outside the glass entrance doors is an elevator foyer. Two elevator doors on one side, restroom doors on the other, office entrance on the third.



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FADE IN:

INT. MANHATTAN OFFICE BUILDING LOBBY -- DAY

A SECURITY GUARD sits at a lectern in front of the elevator bank during the morning rush. Office-workers pass him, flashing their ID cards.

DAVE enters from the street. He's wearing a suit and carrying a briefcase.

Dave looks at his watch, takes a deep breath, and strides towards the elevators. He stops for a second, looks at his watch again, then approaches the Security Guard.

DAVE

Good morning. I'm--

The security guard slides a clipboard across to Dave.

SECURITY GUARD

Date, name, time in, destination,
print legibly, no cursive, signature
here.

DAVE

(signing in)

Thank you. What time do you have?

SECURITY GUARD

Eight-fifty-five. First day at the
new job?

DAVE

As a matter of fact it is.

SECURITY GUARD

Yeah, I seen you walking around the
block since 7:45, figured it was your
first day and you didn't want to show
up too early and look like a fool.

DAVE

No, no -- it's just my first time in New York, and I wanted to see a few of the sights.

SECURITY GUARD

Well, you've seen this block a good twenty, thirty times -- what's left? Me, if it was my first day, I'd be worried about being late.

DAVE

I'm not really the worrying type.

WE HEAR Dave's digital watch beep. Dave switches it off.

DAVE

Eight-fifty-seven exactly.

Dave slides the clipboard back to him. The guard looks at it.

SECURITY GUARD

WNYX Newsradio, huh?

DAVE

That's right. I'm the new news director.

WE HEAR another digital watch beep. Dave takes a second watch out of his pocket and clicks the alarm off.

DAVE

(a little
embarrassed)

Back-up. So WNYX is on...?

SECURITY GUARD

The business offices are on fifteen.

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Dave heads towards the elevator.

DAVE

Thank you.

SECURITY GUARD

But that's the business offices. You probably want the broadcast offices, don't you?

DAVE

Yes.

SECURITY

That's at the Criterion Building.
58th and Madison.

DAVE

Oh my God.

SECURITY GUARD

That's three blocks up and six blocks over.

DAVE

Oh my God. What time--

SECURITY GUARD

Eight-fifty-nine and counting.

Dave grabs his briefcase and rushes towards the door.

SECURITY GUARD

Welcome to New York!

HARD CUT TO:

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EXT. NEW YORK STREET -- DAY

A locked-off shot of a crowded sidewalk, jam-packed with people going to work. We hold on this for a beat.

Suddenly, a panicked Dave sprints through the frame, in one side and out the other in the blink of an eye. None of the other pedestrians even notice.

CUT TO:

OPENING CREDITS

Kinetic Manhattan shot, but not the usual New York landmarks -- just block after block of midtown office buildings. We finally settle on one particular mid-town office building that looks no different from the rest.

Over this, brief musical sting with drums, which dissolves into...

Electronic WNYX Newsradio pulse and, with that unmistakably low-fi AM radio tone...

BILL (VO)
(on-air)

With traffic and weather together every twelve minutes, this is WNYX Newsradio.

CATHERINE (VO)
(on-air)

Serving Manhattan, the outer boroughs, and the entire tri-state area.

BILL (VO)
(on-air)

WNYX Newstime on this Monday morning:
9:15.

CUT TO:

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INT. WNYX ELEVATOR FOYER -- DAY

A softly-lit elevator foyer on the fourteenth floor. On one wall, two elevator doors. On another, restroom doors. On the third wall, glass doors with the WNYX logo on them, which lead to a bright, fluorescent-lit office.

Throughout the show, we can always hear the ongoing WNYX news broadcast in the background.

JIMMY, the station owner, is talking in a one-shot.

JIMMY

Glad to have you aboard, Dave. How's
Manhattan treating you so far?

REVEAL Dave, completely out of breath from his cross-town sprint.

DAVE
(out of breath)

Mr. James, I am so sorry I'm late.

JIMMY

Call me Jimmy. Were you late?

Didn't notice.
(looks at watch)

Nine-fifteen? What did you do -- walk
all the way from Wisconsin? I'm
kidding. So Dave, what are your goals
here at WNYX?

DAVE

I just want to be the best damn news
director I can be.

JIMMY

Good. Good. That kind of strong
language doesn't fly with me, but
you've got your own style, I guess.

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DAVE

I'm sorry.

JIMMY

For being late? I've forgotten about it already. So... ready to get in there and run the station? Pick the stories? Hiring, firing, what-have-you?

DAVE

Ready as I'll ever be, sir.

JIMMY

Good! You know Dave, I considered twenty, thirty-odd people for this job. Most of them with more experience than you. But you know what made you special to me?

DAVE

What's that, sir?

A cellular phone rings. Jimmy fishes it out of his pocket.

JIMMY

(on phone)

What? Well, make it fast -- I'm in the middle of telling a guy why he's so special to me. No, no -- it's work-related.

The glass doors from the office open. ED BARLOW steps into the lobby. He looks like he hasn't slept or eaten in days.

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ED

Hello, Jimmy. I didn't know you were up here.

Jimmy, still on the phone, waves at Ed and exits into the Men's Room.

ED
(to Dave)

You the new guy?

DAVE
(shaking hands)

Yes. Dave Nelson.

ED

Ed Barlow. Come on back, Dave.

DAVE

What do you do here, Ed?

ED

I'm your news director. You know -- run the station, pick the stories, hiring, firing, what-have-you.

Dave pauses, confused.

DAVE

Ed? Why don't you on go ahead and I'll catch up in a second. I think Mr. James wanted to see me...in here...

Dave enters the Men's Room as Ed exits back into the office.

CUT TO:

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INT. MEN'S ROOM -- DAY

Dave enters just as Jimmy hangs up his cellular phone and stuffs it back in his pocket.

JIMMY

Dave? I've got to run. I'm buying a chain of sporting goods stores and today's my day to load up on freebies. Can I set you up with anything? Golf balls? Tube socks?

DAVE

Mr. James, I just met Ed Barlow. The news director?

JIMMY

Oh yeah. Ed. You mean the former news director.

DAVE

Oh. So he's staying on to train me?

Jimmy looks under the stalls to make sure they're alone.

JIMMY

Dave, I've got to level with you. I haven't exactly told Ed he's being let go yet.

DAVE

Oh. Okay. Well, I can come back tomorrow. Or if he wants two weeks notice...

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JIMMY

No, has to be done today. Bad news is like a hot sandwich -- best served immediately.

DAVE

Yes, but--

JIMMY

Hang on.

Jimmy pulls a microcassette recorder out of his pocket.

JIMMY

(into recorder)

Bad news is like a...
(to Dave)

What did I say?

DAVE

Hot sandwich. Best served immediately.

JIMMY

(into recorder)

Hot sandwich. Best served immediately.
(to Dave)

Just signed a contract to write one of those "How To Succeed In Business" books.

DAVE

Congratulations.

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JIMMY

Thanks. I own the publishing house, so they couldn't exactly turn it down. But I made them pay me next to nothing, which saves me money in the long run. Where were we?

DAVE

You were going to... fire... Ed.

JIMMY

Oh yeah. Ed. The thing is, I really gotta run. Do you think you could... convey that particular piece of information to Ed?

DAVE
(incredulous)

You want me to fire him?

JIMMY

That is in the job description -- hiring, firing, what-have-you...

DAVE

It's just... I've never fired anyone before. How exactly do you do that?

JIMMY

I don't know -- you're the people person. Why don't you just get the staff together and say, "Everyone who's going to be here tomorrow raise your hand. Not so fast, Ed."

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DAVE

Sir, if I may say, that's an awful way to approach it. I have to tell Ed before I tell the rest of the staff. That's just common courtesy.

JIMMY

Boy, you are a people person. I gotta go.

Jimmy heads for the Men's Room door.

DAVE

Mr. James? What exactly does Ed think I'm doing here?

JIMMY

I told him you were the new sports guy.

DAVE

What?

JIMMY

Well, I didn't want him to up and quit on me, right? Dave? Buddy? Still with me? Good. I gotta go.

CUT TO:

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INT. NEWS DIRECTOR'S OFFICE -- DAY

Ed is at his desk. Dave is sitting across from him. Ed is peeling a banana.

ED

I don't really know why we need a sports guy. We usually just take the scores off the wire. But Jimmy works in mysterious ways, you know?

DAVE

Uh-huh.

Ed takes a bite of his banana.

ED

Going to ball games and getting paid for it. Doesn't hardly seem like work does it? I'd kill for your job.

DAVE

Hey, why don't we trade then?

Ed and Dave laugh heartily. Ed has been chewing on his first bite of banana forever. When he's done laughing, he discreetly spits it out into a kleenex and drops it in the wastepaper basket with a loud metallic thud.

ED

Excuse me. I've got this terrible stomach problem. Haven't had an appetite since... October.

DAVE

That's terrible. Just terrible.
(beat)

Have you thought about maybe...
taking some time off?

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ED

Nope. This job is the only thing that keeps my mind off the stomach.

DAVE

Uh-huh.

Ed takes a deep slug off a bottle of Kaopectate. Ed's young assistant BETH enters.

BETH

Ed? That new stomach specialist called. He says he can squeeze you in right now.

ED

Great. Dave? I have to run. But let's pick this up later.

DAVE

Well, I was sort of hoping we could get it all squared away now.

ED

What's up? Is it something serious?

DAVE

As a matter of fact it is.

ED

Well, I can't hear anything serious before lunch or my stomach will go nutcakes on me.

CUT TO:

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INT. BULLPEN -- DAY

Ed exits his office, putting on his jacket. Dave follows. Beth hands Ed a muffin as he passes.

DAVE

Good luck with the doctor.

ED

Thanks. Thank god this job gives me

full medical coverage.

As Ed exits, he takes a bite of the muffin, chews painfully, and throws the rest in a wastepaper basket with a loud metallic thud.

BETH

Any supplies you need, just let me know. Except for cassette tapes, because I'm not authorized to requisition those anymore because I got caught making a mix tape for my ex-boyfriend.

DAVE

(trying to follow)

Uh-huh?

Beth leads Dave to a cluster of desks, where LISA, RICK, and MATTHEW are working.

BETH

Everyone? This is Dave Nelson. He's the new... what are you again, Dave?

DAVE

(covering)

The new... guy. Just call me the new guy.

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BETH

This is Matthew. He's a reporter.

Matthew shakes hands with Dave, without breaking off his phone conversation...

MATTHEW

(on phone)

This is such a wonderful story. What did the cab driver do when he found all the kittens in the back seat?

RICK

That is a wonderful story. Too bad Nickelodeon doesn't have a news division.

BETH

This is Lisa. She does... sort of... entertainment and human interest stories.

Lisa has headphones on, listening to a microcassette recorder. She's timing it.

LISA

(to herself)

Thirty-two-one-thousand... thirty-three-one-thousand...

Dave shakes her hand, breaking her concentration.

LISA

Nice to meet you.
(playing tape again)

One-one-thousand, two-one-thousand...

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BETH

And this is Rick.

Rick is typing non-stop on a lap-top computer. Rick is always typing.

DAVE

What do you do, Rick?

RICK
(typing)

You're looking at it.

Rick shakes Dave's hand -- but keeps typing with his free hand. Matthew hangs up the phone.

MATTHEW

Dave? You want me to show you how to use the computer system so you can call up your... what is it you're going to be doing here again?

DAVE
(evading)

Hey, computers. Great. Thanks, Matthew. Is there an extra computer I could work on?

RICK
(typing)

You can have mine when I quit, which will be in five minutes if everyone doesn't stop chattering.

MATTHEW

You can be such a grump.

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RICK

Ouch.

DAVE

What system are you guys on? In Wisconsin we had IBM compatibles, but I've worked a little on the Mac.

MATTHEW

We work on Z-Tec here.

DAVE

Z-Tec? I can't say I know my way around that one.

RICK

Me neither -- and I've been working on it for five years. But Jimmy owns the company, so we have no choice.

MATTHEW

It's very easy once you get the hang of it. See, to open a file, press Control-Shift-Alt-Five, then Control-Delete-Cap-Three. But that's only if it's a text-slash-edit file.

RICK

I think it was originally developed for Russian cosmonauts.

MATTHEW

Then Alt-Six-Shift-Shift-Delete, and then your personal ID number...

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Dave sits down at an empty desk near Matthew's. As soon as he sits down, there's silence on the radio.

LISA

I wouldn't do that.

MATTHEW
(nodding towards
booth)

That's Catherine's desk.

Dave stands up. In the booth, Catherine resumes reading the news.

DAVE

I thought she sits in there.

RICK

She does. But she also has a desk out here. It's in her contract.

DAVE

Oh. Well, I'm not taking it permanently.

He sits back down. Catherine -- without even looking in his direction -- stops reading immediately. After a beat of dead air, Dave stands back up. Catherine resumes again. Lisa takes her headphones off.

LISA

Dave? Would you like to see the Off-Line Booth?

RICK

Well, well, well -- hello, young lovers.

LISA

Shut up, Rick.

CUT TO:

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INT. OFF-LINE BOOTH -- DAY

Lisa and Dave enter the very cramped Off-Line Booth, a small recording booth jammed with electronic equipment.

LISA

Don't worry -- you'll fit right in.
This really is a great bunch of
people here.

DAVE

Like a family, huh?

LISA

Yes. But we have our good moments
too.

As Lisa talks, she expertly wires and cues up a microcassette recorder to the mixing board. She sets her notes in front of her. She holds the headphone up to one ear.

DAVE

What about Ed?

LISA

What about him?

DAVE

Is he considered to be... you know...
an integral part of the family?

Lisa closes the door. She and Dave are now in complete silence. The room is small, and there's an awkward -- and slightly flirtatious -- moment as they squeeze past each other.

LISA

Dave, between you and me -- Ed is on
his way out.

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DAVE

Oh my God. So you know. I am so relieved to have someone to ask about this. What should I--

LISA

Shh.

(into microphone)

"The cure for the common cold might be no farther away than your kitchen cupboard. Dr. Kim Sun-Doh has been dispensing herbal remedies from his office on Mott Street since 1953..."

Dave can't talk while she's taping, but we can see he's dying to ask her advice. Lisa hits play on the microcassette recorder, and we hear the soundbite she's laying onto the tape.

DR. SUN-DOH (VO)

(with background noise)

"Chinese medicine has been around for thousands of years..."

Lisa turns the volume down.

LISA

(to Dave)

What were you saying?

DAVE

I'm just very relieved. I was starting to feel all alone in this. What should I do?

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LISA

Just do your job well, and you'll be fine. Because -- and this is strictly between you and me -- when Ed goes, Jimmy's going to make me news director.

DAVE
(confused)

Uh-huh.
(beat)

Is this something Jimmy told you?

LISA

No. But I'm the only person who makes sense for the job. I mean, who else is he going to give it to? Shh.

The soundbite ends. Lisa punches a button.

LISA
(into microphone)

Lisa Miller, WNYX Newsradio, in Chinatown.

Lisa hits stop and pops the audio cartridge out.

LISA

Hang on. I have to get this to the booth.

As she exits, Lisa brushes past Dave again. They lock eyes and smile. After she's gone, Dave leans his head back against the door-frame, then bangs it softly once.

CUT TO:

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INT. BULLPEN -- DAY

Dave exits the Off-Line Booth and stands by the table that holds the coffee, microwave, and snacks. He's not sure where to go. The phone on the coffee table rings. And keeps ringing.

RICK (O.S.)

Is somebody going to get that?

Dave picks up the phone.

DAVE
(into phone)

Hello? No, it's Dave Nelson. I don't know... who that is. Let me transfer you to the receptionist.

Dave examines the myriad of buttons on the phone, then tentatively presses one. Immediately, the entire office is filled with a PIERCING ELECTRONIC TONE.

RICK (O.S.)

Who's screwing with the phones?

Dave tries more buttons to no avail, and finally pulls the phone jack out of the back of the phone.

RICK (O.S.)

Thank you!

Jimmy -- who Dave didn't see enter -- walks up on Dave's blind side and pours himself a cup of coffee. Jimmy is holding a squash racquet, which he swings absent-mindedly through this scene.

JIMMY

Rewiring the phone system? Now that's what I call initiative. What's up with the Ed situation?

DAVE

Ed's gone, but--

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JIMMY
(laughing)

"Ed's gone"? You're a cold-blooded son-of-a-gun, Dave, but God bless you. And you didn't waste any time, did you? Glad I got in here before you fired the whole office.

Dave steers Jimmy towards a quiet corner

DAVE
(quietly)

Sir, Ed went out to a doctor's appointment before I could... talk to him. Were you aware that Ed has a very serious medical problem?

JIMMY

Oh, very serious. A very serious case of disappearing-from-the-office-for-hours-on-end-itis.

DAVE

No, he has a genuine medical problem.

JIMMY

Yeah, yeah, yeah. The stomach thing.

DAVE

With all due respect -- to me, it just seems wrong to kick the man while he's down.

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JIMMY

Come here, grasshopper. Quick question: When a horse goes lame, what do you do? Huh?

DAVE
(begrudgingly)

Fire it.

JIMMY

No, no, no. Not an employee -- a horse. An actual horse.

DAVE
(mumbling)

Shoot it.

JIMMY

That's right. Shoot it. Now, I'm not proposing you shoot the man. I'm not running a post office here. But jiminy--

DAVE

Mr. James, have you considered Lisa for the news director job?

JIMMY

You going to lay down and die that fast? Boy, if you were a boxer I could make some good money off you.

DAVE

I just want to make sure she was considered.

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JIMMY

Dave, I need Lisa on the air. What she has is a real gift. With the movie reviews, backstage-on-Broadway... always finding some old broad in Queens with a blind dog that'll break your heart. You don't take a... a... who's that singer with the fifteen-octave voice?

DAVE

Mariah Carey?

JIMMY

That's the one. You don't take a Mariah Carey and put her in charge of record distribution. But if you can't handle this, let me know now so I can go have a talk with Lisa.

DAVE

No, I can handle it. I just feel like... firing a man... I'm sort of starting with the hardest part.

JIMMY

No, the hardest part is asking me for a raise. Dave? Remember what I told you when you got here? About why a guy like you is so special to me?

Lisa, who has just walked up, backs away.

LISA
(embarassed)

I'm sorry. I can... I'll come back
later.

JIMMY

No, no -- what is it, Lisa?

LISA

We have that Al Gore phone interview
today, and Ed was supposed to decide
who does it, but...
(pointedly)

Ed's not here, once again, so--

JIMMY

I'm on it, Lisa. Give me a second.

Lisa walks away.

JIMMY

Who's doing the Al Gore phone
interview? Bill or Catherine?

DAVE
(feigning
confidence)

Oh. Catherine, of course.

JIMMY

Risky call, but I'm sure you broke
the news to them diplomatically. Oh,
almost forgot -- this is for you. I
gotta go.

Jimmy hands Dave the squash racquet and exits.

CUT TO:

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INT. BROADCAST BOOTH -- DAY

Bill is on the air. Catherine is sitting across from him at her mic.

BILL (ON-AIR)
(solemn)

...is survived by his wife. He was
eighty-three.
(brightly)

Coming up in three minutes, the
latest from Wall Street!

CATHERINE

WNYX Newstime: 9:53.

Bill shoves a cart into the machine and a commercial begins playing. Dave enters.

DAVE

Catherine? Bill? I'm Dave Nelson. Can
I talk to you two for a second?
Catherine? Catherine?

Catherine exits the booth as if Dave's not even there.

BILL
(quietly)

Don't take it personally. She's
hasn't really been herself this...
year.
(brightly)

So you're the new sports guy, right?

DAVE

Well...

BILL

I love sports. How about them Knicks?
What do you say -- are we looking at
another three-peat this season?

DAVE

I think technically to have a three-
peat, you have to win two years in a
row, and then win again.

BILL

Could be. But I think they have a
three-peat in them this year.

You're from Canada, eh?

DAVE

Wisconsin actually.

BILL
(accent subtly
shifts to
Midwestern)

Wisconsin! Great. The Badger state.

The nation's dairyland. Beautiful
country out there.

(beat)

I love cheese.

DAVE

Thank you. Now Bill, we're going to
be doing a telephone interview with
Al Gore later today and we thought
think it might be a good idea if
Catherine does the interview.

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Dave hasn't noticed that Catherine has re-entered with a fresh cup of coffee.

CATHERINE

That is a good idea. Who's the interview with?

DAVE

Al Gore.

CATHERINE

He's a horse's ass.

DAVE

(thrown)

Okay. But that's probably not an area we'd like to get into during the interview itself...

Ed, who has returned, knocks on the glass.

ED

Bill? You're doing the Al Gore phone interview.

BILL

Yes!

(sincerely)

But Cathy, if there's anything you want me to ask him for you...

CATHERINE

Who the hell is running this station?

DAVE

I'll be right back.

END OF ACT ONE

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ACT TWO

INT. NEWS DIRECTOR'S OFFICE -- DAY

Dave knocks and enters, a man on a mission.

DAVE

Ed, sit down. Ed? Ed?

Dave looks around. Ed is nowhere in sight.

ED

Down here.

Ed is lying on the floor behind his desk.

DAVE

Oh my God. Is it your stomach?

Should I call 911? Is it 911 in New
York?

ED

Settle down. It's just this back of
mine. Seizes up on me about once a
week. What's on your mind?

DAVE

I could come back later, if you're...
in too much pain already.

Ed -- with much effort -- pulls himself up from the floor and
eases into his chair, wincing.

ED

No, no. Go ahead. What's up? Ouch.

Dave takes a deep breath.

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DAVE

Ed, how long have you been here at WNYX?

ED

Four years. Why do you ask?

DAVE

Ed, four years is a long time, and--

ED

Jimmy didn't stop by while I was out, did he?

DAVE

Yes, he did. Ed, four years is a long time, and--

ED

Did he say anything about me?

DAVE

Four long years. That's what -- forty-eight months? Anyway--

ED

What did he say?

DAVE

He just wondered where you were. You know, Ed, the hedgehog only stays in his burrow for four months, and--

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ED

Hang on. I work fourteen, fifteen, sixteen hour days, and when I want to take a half hour for lunch -- for a legitimate medical lunch -- Jimmy "wonders" where I am?

DAVE

Ed, what I'm trying to say--

ED

Forget it. I quit.

Ed stands and grabs his coat.

DAVE

I'm sorry. What?

ED

I said, "I quit." I'm not putting up with this anymore. Forget it.

Ed exits, trying to put his coat on without hurting his back.

DAVE

(concealing his relief)

Well Ed, I'm really sorry to hear that, but if that's your decision...

As soon as Ed has left the office, Dave bolts to Ed's desk, sits down, rolls a sheet of paper into the typewriter, and starts typing. Beth enters.

DAVE

Beth? If I write up a memo, can you distribute it to the staff for me?

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BETH

Sure. Poor Ed. You know what his problem always was here?

Dave tears his memo out, wads it up, and starts fresh.

DAVE

What's that?

BETH

He was too nice. And these people -- they're all really, really great people, but they walked all over him.

DAVE

Really?

Dave tears his memo out and wads it up -- but now he's actually listening to Beth.

DAVE

What do you mean by "too nice"?

BETH

He never laid down the law. It's like when I lived in the dorm, we had this communal refrigerator and--

DAVE

Beth? What's your point?

BETH

People want discipline. They need boundaries. They need someone to say, "Label your frozen burrito if you don't want someone to rip it off."

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DAVE

Is frozen burrito theft really that a big problem around here?

BETH

No, that's from the dorm. We had this guy named Leon -- isn't that a weird name? -- and he told people that we were dating, but we weren't. You know?

Dave is pacing and thinking.

DAVE

Beth? Forget the memo. I want you to get the staff together for a meeting.

BETH

Okay. What should I tell them?

DAVE

(as tough as he can be)

Tell them I want to see them at the conference table five minutes ago.

BETH

Oh god. I screwed up. Was I supposed to tell them that five minutes ago?

DAVE

(calming her)

No, no, no -- that's just a figure of speech. Just get them together.

CUT TO:

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INT. CONFERENCE TABLE AREA -- DAY

The staff is gathered around the conference table, except for Bill and Catherine, who are in the booth, on the air.

Dave crosses the bullpen and settles at the head of the table. He takes off his jacket and rolls up his shirtsleeves.

DAVE

You're probably wondering why I called you all here.

RICK

To announce your engagement to Lisa?

LISA
(to Rick)

What is the matter with you?

MATTHEW

Are we reviving the afternoon cookie-time tradition?

DAVE

People? Please. There's no easy way to say this, so I'm going to be blunt. Ed is out. As of now, I'm the new news director. Any questions?

MATTHEW

If I ever develop a digestive disorder am I going to be fired also?

LISA
(stunned)

Did you say what I think you just said?

DAVE

Yes.

Bill has just exited the booth.

BILL

Hey, great. When did we start doing
afternoon cookie-time again?

LISA

Did Jimmy approve this?

RICK

(typing)

If anyone else is going to be fired,
can I volunteer?

DAVE

Enough questions.

BILL

Well, if we're not having cookies,
I'm going back in the booth.

MATTHEW

(whispering to
Bill)

Ed's been fired, and Dave here is the
new news director.

BILL

Congrats, Dave. But let's not waste
too much discussion on cookie-time:
the broadcast always comes first.

Catherine jams a cart in the machine and exits the booth.

DAVE

Now, as the news director, you'll find that I'm a fair person. Tough, but fair.

CATHERINE

Oh, wonderful. This is like the first day of junior high gym class.

Dave takes a beat. He's pissed off, and this time he's not going to contain it.

DAVE

Catherine? I don't have a lot of patience for that kind of... of...

MATTHEW

"Sass."

RICK

"Crap."

DAVE

"Stuff." Okay?

DAVE

Here's how it's going to work around here from now on. When I say, "Jump," you people say, "How?"

A beat.

RICK

Or rather, "How high?"

DAVE
(a rushed
recovery)

Exactly. Thank you. That's exactly
how I operate. You know what they
used to call me back in Wisconsin?

A beat.

BILL

"Mr. Tough-But-Fair"?

CATHERINE

"Al Haig Junior"?

RICK

"Don Juan"?

LISA

Shut up, Rick.

MATTHEW

Was it "David"? Or "Davey"?

LISA

Was there an actual discussion with
Jimmy about this?

Dave slams his hand down on the table to get everyone's
attention.

DAVE

Enough. I'm absolutely serious here.

Okay? Okay.
(beat)

What was I talking about?

MATTHEW

Your nickname in Wisconsin.

DAVE

Yes, of course. They called me...

"The Expediter."

Dave takes a very solemn moment for this to sink in -- but his solemn moment is undermined by a ridiculously silly Dial-A-Mattress commercial playing in the background -- with kazoos, squeaky horns, and circus music.

DAVE

Could we turn that down for a second?

RICK

Sure thing, Expediator.

MATTHEW

(to Rick)

I think he said "Expeditor."
(to Dave)

Did you work for Federal Express?

LISA

Where is Jimmy right now?

Bill and Catherine head back to the booth.

DAVE

That's all I have to say for now. I hope I haven't scared anyone, because I think you're a great group of people. I just wanted to establish some boundaries. And the door to my office is always open.

Behind Dave, a dejected-looking Ed has re-entered the office. He's pouring himself a cup of coffee from the coffee machine.

Dave notices that everyone is staring behind him. He slowly turns.

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ED
(quiet, pained
voice)

Anybody have a lozenge? The
laryngitis is acting up again.

Anybody? Okay...

Ed exits towards his office and closes the door.

RICK

Nice expediting.

MATTHEW

The poor man. Dave, promise me you
won't call security to escort him
out.

LISA

I guess you really know how to fire a
guy, huh?

DAVE

He quit before I had a chance to.

LISA

He quit?

Lisa, Rick, and Matthew all laugh.

LISA

Ed "quits" every other day.

RICK

Sometimes he comes in on Sunday just
to quit a few times without any
distractions.

DAVE

Oh man...

Dave rubs his forehead, at a loss.

LISA

Okay, I'm only saying this for Ed's sake, but you've got to go in there right now and fire him and make it stick.

DAVE

What am I supposed to say?

RICK

How about... "Ed, when I say 'Jump,' you say, 'Off what ledge?'"

MATTHEW

How about, "Ed, how long have you been here at WN--"

DAVE

Tried that, didn't work.

RICK

If you want, I can type it up and have Bill slip it into the weather update.

LISA

How do you do it in Wisconsin? Do you fly in a firing specialist from New York or LA?

DAVE
(annoyed)

What is that supposed to mean, Lisa?
You want to give it a shot?

LISA

Oh no. That's really the "news
director's" job.

Dave gets up and crosses the bullpen towards the glass doors.

MATTHEW

Dave, come on. Don't give up that
easy. We're all behind you! Aren't
we, guys? Guys?

DAVE

I'm just going to the bathroom,
Matthew.

LISA

That's a good solution. Have them
put a typewriter and phone jack in
one of the stalls and maybe Ed will
never notice that you're running the
station.

CUT TO:

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INT. MEN'S ROOM -- DAY

Dave enters. He wipes his face with a wet paper towel. He paces for a moment, then looks under the two stalls to make sure he's alone. He looks in a mirror.

DAVE
(to himself)

Ed? There's no easy way to say this, so I'm going to be blunt. Four years is a long time to be at one station, and for the good of the station, it seems that the time is right for some turnover at the top. So let me be the first to wish you the best of luck, and if there's anything I can do in the way of a recommendation, I'm more than happy to help out.

Dave takes a deep breath, hops up and down for a second to shake out his nervousness, and heads towards the door.

CUT TO:

INT. ELEVATOR FOYER

Dave exits the bathroom door, passing Ed who's entering.

ED
(laryngitis voice)

Hey, Dave.

DAVE

Hey, Ed. Jimmy says you're fired.

The bathroom door closes before Dave realizes what just popped out of his mouth. Two steps later, Dave stops dead, wincing.

A beat. Ed exits the bathroom slowly.

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ED
(laryngitis voice)

What did you say?

DAVE
(deep breath)

Ed, four years is a long time--

ED
(even worse
laryngitis voice)

I'm fired?

CUT TO:

ED
(laryngitis voice)

DAVE

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INT. BULLPEN -- DAY

Dave, Lisa, and Matthew are gathered around Rick's desk.

LISA

You told him in the bathroom?

RICK

Where'd you learn that? The Arthur Fonzerelli school of personnel management?

DAVE

I had a whole thing prepared, but it just slipped out.

MATTHEW

Wow. That's really spooky that you told him in the bathroom.

DAVE

Why's that?

MATTHEW

Because I really started to worry about Ed's... mental health when I caught him talking to himself in the bathroom mirror last week.

A beat.

DAVE

Well, I don't think that's a sign of any kind of mental disorder.
(sighs)

I should've done this better.

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LISA

Oh, lighten up. It could have been any one of us giving that bad news. ...

MATTHEW

True.

LISA

In fact, it should have been me. And furthermore, when Jimmy gets back--

The door to Ed's office opens. Everyone falls silent. Ed walks across the bullpen. His back is obviously still causing him great pain. Beth follows, carrying a heavy box full of Ed's personal items.

ED

(laryngitis voice)

Well, I guess this is goodbye, everyone. Matt. Rick. Lisa...
(to Dave)

You.

LISA

Are you going to be okay, Ed?

ED

(laryngitis voice)

I don't know what I'm going to do. It's just now sinking in that I'm not going to be spending twelve hours a day at this place anymore.

Ed looks around for a long, wistful beat. During this beat, he straightens up. Even though he doesn't realize it, his back pain has disappeared.

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ED
(full, healthy
voice)

Well, anyway... wish me luck
everybody. I'm going to need it out
there.

Ed doesn't even notice that his laryngitis has disappeared. Dave and Lisa look at each other. Matthew taps Rick, who stops typing for once and watches in disbelief.

Ed effortlessly lifts up the heavy box and -- with a bounce in his step -- walks towards the exit. He stops at the coffee table and -- balancing the box on one shoulder -- stuffs a muffin in his mouth and puts another in his pocket.

ED
(full, loud voice,
chewing food)

You guys take care now, okay?

Ed exits.

DAVE

Wow.

CUT TO:

INT. NEWS DIRECTOR'S OFFICE -- NIGHT

Dave is unpacking his briefcase onto Ed's now-empty desk. Jimmy is pacing around, playing with a football.

JIMMY

What about his back problem?

DAVE

Yeah, that seemed to be all cleared up too.

JIMMY

What can I say, Dave? The doctor is in. Ed doesn't know it yet, but getting canned probably saved his life. For what profits a man to gain the world and lose his appetite, posture, and speaking voice?

Jimmy pats his pockets.

JIMMY

Shoot. Must have left my microcassette dealie in the can. I'll be right back.

Jimmy exits just as Rick and Matthew enter, wearing their jackets and carrying their bags.

RICK

Just stopping by to say goodnight. We used to say goodnight to Ed, but...
(mock-choked-up)

I guess that's all over now.

MATTHEW

Stop it, Rick. Dave, I just wanted to say, I have a feeling you'll make a great news director.

DAVE

Thank you.

MATTHEW

Because you seem like a very kind person.

Rick is making butt-kissing noises.

MATTHEW

Oh, I'm sorry. Is that so wrong? To tell a kind person that he seems kind? Goodnight, Dave.

DAVE

I'll see you guys tomorrow.

RICK

Okay. Nine a.m.? Or can we roll in around nine-fifteen like you do?

Lisa enters.

LISA

We have to talk.

RICK

Wow. That was fast. Eight hours and already their first lover's quarrel.

DAVE

Rick, that's inappropriate.

LISA

Not to mention ridiculously far-
fetched.

As Rick and Matthew exit...

RICK
(singing)

"Isn't it romantic... just to be in
love?"

A beat. Dave and Lisa stare at each other.

LISA

So?

DAVE

Lisa, how can I say this?
(beat)

Okay -- you know who Mariah Carey is?

LISA

That sappy singer with the voice
that'll shatter brick from three
miles? The Ethel Merman of the 90's?
Yes. What about her?

Jimmy enters, carrying a badminton racquet. He sees Lisa,
and does a smooth about-face, trying to slip back out without
getting involved.

LISA

Jimmy?

DAVE

Mr. James, I think you should be
involved with this.

Jimmy, very reluctantly, drags himself back in the office.

LISA

Yes. Dave here was just trying to feed me your old "Mariah Carey" theory of career paralysis.

JIMMY

Lisa? Dave? I'm not really a people person. But I have a feeling this is going to be a great working relationship. You know why?

DAVE

No.

LISA

No idea.

JIMMY

(gesturing with racquet)

Dave, you'll work your butt off to prove that I made the right decision. And Lisa, you'll work your butt off to prove I was wrong. And what does that add up to?

LISA

Perpetual in-fighting?

DAVE

Relentless back-stabbing?

JIMMY

That adds up to two hard workers.
Trust me -- this'll be great. In
fact, this whole thing will be
chapter five of my book. Don't worry
-- I'll change your names.
(calling out door)

Hey Nikos -- *apedho parakalo!*

Embros!

A pizza delivery boy enters and sets a pizza box on the desk.

JIMMY

This one's on me. You two break some
bread together. Start the healing
process. And let's try to do this
without any screaming or crying.
Lisa, that goes for you too.

Jimmy exits with the pizza boy.

JIMMY

(to Nikos, re:
racquet)

*Pos leghete sta elinika "badminton,"
enan filo?*

Dave opens the pizza box and turns it towards Lisa. She
takes a beat, then turns the box back towards Dave.

LISA

Well, it seems like the only thing
left for me to do is quit.

DAVE

No, Lisa. Don't do that. Look, I know this is small consolation, but I think for putting up with this you deserve a raise.

Dave jots down a figure and hands the piece of paper to Lisa.

LISA

Thanks. But that's really not necessary. I'm not quitting.

DAVE

Great! Because I really think we could work well together.

LISA

You're probably right. And who knows -- somewhere down the line, I'll have my chance at news director.

DAVE

I'm sure you will.

LISA

Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but... within three months, four tops.

DAVE

Thanks for the vote of confidence.

LISA

You're welcome. See you tomorrow.
And Dave?

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DAVE

Yes?

LISA
(re: note)

Thanks for the raise. I'll notify
payroll in the morning.

Before Dave can say anything, Lisa exits. Jimmy enters --
carrying a lacrosse stick -- and examines the pizza.

JIMMY

Well, I can see you two really dug in
and got some serious healing done.

DAVE

I have to admit, I wasn't prepared
for so much political maneuvering so
soon.

JIMMY

Just remember what I told you, Dave:
I chose you for a reason. Remember?
When I told you about why you're so
special to me? In a work-related
sense?

DAVE

You never actually told me.

JIMMY

I didn't? Well, it's like this...

Jimmy stares into the distance, thinking and swinging the
lacrosse stick.

DAVE

Yes...?

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Jimmy thinks a little more, staring at the end of the lacrosse stick.

JIMMY
(re: lacrosse
stick)

What the hell is this thing? Some
kind of pool-cleaning apparatus?

DAVE
(impatient)

Jimmy!

JIMMY

Sorry, sorry. Here's what's so
special about you, Dave: I sense
that you are a very centered being.
Grounded. There's the inner peace of
an old soul about you.

Dave digests this.

DAVE

Mr. James, for a business man you're
very... spiritual.

JIMMY

Thanks. Wasn't always this way.

DAVE

Really? What changed you?

JIMMY

Last week I read an article on
Buddhism or yoga or something in an
in-flight magazine. And it struck a
lot of chords in me.

DAVE

What else did the article say?

JIMMY

I don't know. Didn't finish it. The in-flight movie started up, and it was a Pauly Shore picture. That little hippy always cracks me up. I gotta go.

Jimmy opens the pizza box and takes a slice, then another, then another.

JIMMY

See you tomorrow, Dave.
(winks)

Nine o'clock sharp.

Jimmy exits, eating.

Dave shrugs and takes a bite of pizza.

Dave turns and looks out his window at the New York skyline, savoring his ultimately-successful first day at the new job in the big city. He turns up the radio on the window-sill. On the air...

CATHERINE (VO)
(on the air)

Joining us now on the WNYX newsphone is Vice-President Al Gore. Mr. Vice-President, we're glad to have you on the phone, and even gladder to have you in an office where you can't do the country any further harm. First let me ask you--

BILL (VO)
(on the air)

Mr. Vice-President? I'd just like to
interject with a question of my own
here--

CATHERINE (VO)
(on the air)

Mr. Vice-President? Just try to
ignore that other voice on the line
-- much in the same way you've
consistently ignored common sense
when it comes to the health care
issue--

Wincing, Dave turns the radio off. He's still chewing the
same first bite of pizza. We can see that he's lost his
appetite.

He discreetly spits the pizza into a napkin and throws it in
the trash can with a loud metallic thud.

FREEZEFRAME

MUSICAL STING.

FIRST CLOSING CREDITS.

UNFREEZEFRAME

Dave crosses to the shelf and reaches for Ed's bottle of
Kaopectate. Reaching for it, his back seizes up on him.
Frozen in an awkward position and obviously in great pain, he
calls out... but he seems to have lost his voice.

DAVE
(laryngitis voice)

Lisa? Jimmy? Anybody?

END