

AUTOMATED

By

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FADE IN:

INT. KGPB GREAT PLAINS NETWORK OFFICE - DAY

JOE, 35, scruff charm and khakis, seated, pops several capsules from a blister pack, washes them down with a Red Bull, tilts up his head, pinches the bridge of his nose.

SAM, 55, comfortable in his business suit, pen over reports, looks up from his laptop when Joe begins to groan.

SAM

Don't die in my office, Joe.

Joe chuckles, head still up.

JOE

Might make for a nice death-in-the workplace piece.

SAM

Don't tempt me. We could always use the ratings. What is that, anyway? Prescription?

Joe keeps his head up, frisbee-tosses the blister pack across to Sam.

JOE

Over the counter generic twelve hour extended release pseudoephedrine. They don't work fer beans but it's better than that phenyl... fen--

SAM

Phenylephrine.

JOE

Yeah, that.

SAM

You know these can cause insomnia, hallucinations and panic attacks.

JOE

Doc's already got me on meds for those, so I'm good. Maybe we can do a piece on polypharmia.

SAM

Polypharmacy, and we did that a half season ago. It's a bit early to run it again.

Sam considers and taps the pack, looks at Joe.

SAM

Okay, you can live.

He tosses them back.

JOE

Thanks, Boss. It'll make a better story anyway if I wait an' die at the Mayor's groundbreaking gig at two. God, I hate sinus infections.

Sam looks at his watch. Furrows brow.

SAM

Speaking of which, this is Yvette's meeting. Where is she?

JOE

Bathroom. Break room cabinet. Trunk of her car. Bar. Nursery. Anywhere there's a bottle.

SAM

Stop it.

Door bursts open. Yvette, 45, 110 pounds, size 0 suit, pair of 600cc silicone implants and SPF 10 tan, storms in already on...

YVETTE

Fire him, Sam! I don't ever want to see his hands on a camera pointed at me ever again!

Sam sighs, puts down his pen, Joe quietly laughs, Yvette continues to boil. Hands on non-existent hips.

SAM

Yvette, he--

YVETTE

He stopped taping me during a live broadcast is what he did! He put down his camera and pulled the subject from the lake!

River. JOE River. SAM

 YVETTE
 River! Lake! Whatever! The National
 Guard guys had her, Joseph! They
 didn't need your help!

 JOE
 They were weekend warriors, kids at
 that, and getting pulled in
 themselves. All I did was secure
 their line, which they should have
 known--

 YVETTE
 Yeah! And then started pulling them
 out of the lake!

River. JOE River. SAM

 YVETTE
 River! You're supposed to document
 the news, Joseph. Not become it! Or
 didn't they teach you that at
 mail-order film school?

 SAM
 Stop it.

 JOE
 It was Kansas City Community
 College and yes I think they might
 have covered that the day I skipped
 class for an ethics in the
workplace seminar. You probably
 missed that one while puttin' out
 for Lil' Red and the Cornhuskers
 that afternoon.

 SAM
 Stop it.

 YVETTE
 Fuck. You.

Joe drops his head, deadpans a look at her, tilts his head
 back up.

JOE

No thanks. I've already got a headache. Don't need the pukes, too.

YVETTE

My God, you look like shit. Are you on drugs again?!

SAM

Stop it.

JOE

Why? You got some vodka to wash 'em down with?

SAM

(to self)

Am I even necessary at this meeting?

YVETTE

Sam, that's it! He's fucked up on drugs! He can't do his job! I want Dick!

JOE

Break your's off in a glory hole?

YVETTE

Asshole.

JOE

Wherever.

SAM

Be quiet, Joe. No. Dick's going with Bob to the Mayor's groundbreaking this afternoon.

YVETTE

What!? No!

JOE

Thank you, Jesus.

SAM

I am not sending you two out for a live broadcast acting like this. I'm reassigning you to the Fleischer Foods thing for the five-0-clock--

YVETTE
 No! You can't do that
 to me, Sam! I broke this
 project two years ago! I've
 been working the mayor this
 whole season! You are not
 giving this to Bob!

JOE
 Yes. No one wants to do
 anything with you. I heard
 you broke your hymen with
 a Ken doll. How does he
 keep from throwing up?
 Dick wants you to stop
 sexting Bob, by the way.
 It's interfering in their
 relationship.

Yvette spins on Joe like a savage animal.

YVETTE
 Shut! The fuck! Up!

JOE
 Can I leave now?

He halfway gets up from his seat towards the door.

SAM
 Sit down and shut up, Joe--

Yvette spins back to Sam.

YVETTE
 What the hell is at Fleischer
 Foods?!

SAM
 They've got a new automated
 facility--

YVETTE
 What?!

JOE
 The PETA people and labor unions
 are picketing at the downtown
 office. Or don't you watch the
 news?

Yvette spins and points at...

SAM
 Joe, be quiet. Yeah, all the
 protesters and other news crews are
 at the downtown offices. Big
 whoop-tee-effin-do. This thing has
 them up against our freshman
 Governor's twenty-first century

SAM
 push into diversifying the state's
 labor base into his new technology
 corridor. I want this station in the
 Governor's good graces and the
 advertising dollars that go with
 it. So, I want you two to take your
 Punch and Judy routine out to the
 actual facility itself, the
 Harrison Automated--

SAM
 Abattoir Facility where I
 got you an exclusive tour
 with the plant manager,
 Bill Williams.

JOE
 Automated Abattoir
 Facility. Right. On it,
 Boss. Great angle.

Joe heads out the door. Yvette stands and fumes at Sam.

SAM
 What?

YVETTE
 I can't... No... I'm not working
 with... He's unprofessional.

SAM
 Joe! Get back in here, Joe!

A moment later Joe sticks his head in the door.

JOE
 Yeah, Boss?

SAM
 Don't screw this up, okay?
 Yvette's... right. Just tape her
 report. Can you do that? No
 interfering. No helping. Just
 taping.

YVETTE
 I--

Sam cuts her off with a hand chop to the air and a SHHH!

Joe looks back and forth between them.

JOE
 Just tape her.

SAM
Yes.

YVETTE
Yes.

Joe stares at Yvette a long moment. Smiles.

JOE
You got it, Boss. Easy as pie.

FADE TO BLACK

FADE IN:

EXT. HARRISON AUTOMATED ABATTOIR FACILITY - DAY

The huge facility along a train track is surrounded by empty countryside. The lowing of cattle herds pocket the ambiance.

A Fleischer Foods big-rig truck departs as the white KGPN news van stops beside the only vehicle in the otherwise empty parking lot.

Driver's side door opens. Yvette's black stockinged calf and shiny low heels glide to the still black asphalt.

Passenger's side door opens. Joe's khakis and tactical shoes hit the ground just before a half empty can of Monster.

Whatever doesn't run out onto the parking lot he picks up. He opens a brown prescription pill bottle, pops some pills, empties the can, tosses pill bottle and empty into van.

Mirrored sunglasses fail to hide his ill condition.

On his shoulder, he slides along the van's side to the back doors. Four weak pulls and they open.

Another big-rig truck passes in the opposite direction.

While Joe rummages through gear Yvette stops checking herself in the side mirror, looks over at him, not noticing BILL, 45, a magazine cover for blue collar working stock, who steps out from the building entrance behind her.

YVETTE
Can you even hold up the camera?

JOE
Two hours of driving, nothing but peace and quiet, and now you're gonna bust my balls.

YVETTE

Is that what your little pills
grow? Balls? Better double-up your
dose.

JOE

Just do your thing, Smurfette. I
can shoot you asleep with my eye's
closed.

YVETTE

Don't you dare.

JOE

I could even use the camera.

Yvette double takes his double entente.

BILL

G'mornin'. Welcome to Fleischer
Foods' Harrison automated facility.

Yvette's startled but recovers with effortless charm. Joe
ignores him with purpose.

YVETTE

Hi! Yvette Owens, KGPN. You must be
Bill.

Bill lights up with her appearance and enthusiastic charm
but casts a wary eye at Joe as he rounds the van corner with
his large video camera shouldered.

BILL

Yes, ma'am. Bill Williams.
Day-shift manager. I ain't never
done one of these before. Ya'll
ain't gonna put me on camera,
right? It's s'posed to be an
automated facility and all. I'm
just here for little glitches an'
things. Cush job, really.

YVETTE

(sneers at Joe)

Don't mind him. (back to Bill) Only
if you want to be on camera. If you
give us a run-down of the facility
we can manage on our own.

BILL

Works for me. Ya'll come right this
way.

Yvette saddles-up beside Bill and they walk toward the entrance, side by side.

Joe thumbs-up his mirrored sunglasses. Drops them.

JOE

This light is perfect. We need to shoot your intro out here first.

Yvette watches as another big-rig passes to the docking area behind the building.

YVETTE

How many runs a day do your trucks make?

BILL

Computer loads one every fifteen minutes, fourteen hours a day. That's... um.. about...

YVETTE

Sixty.

JOE

Fifty-six.

Joe steps several paces out from the "Fleischer Foods, Harrison Automated Abattoir Facility" sign, pops off the lens cap, sets up a shot.

BILL

Yeah. About fifty six if all goes well.

He gives Joe a long stare.

YVETTE

Over there?

Joe, looks out from behind the eyepiece: "No shit, Sherlock". Doesn't say anything. Goes back behind the eyepiece, continues lens adjustments.

She steps up, checks position, gets into character. Joe holds up three fingers, two, leaves one making the finger, points it at her. She holds her forced smile.

Bill watches Hollywood in action!

YVETTE

We're here at the Fleischer Foods Automated Abattoir Facility--

JOE
Harrison.

Long pause.

YVETTE
We're here at the new Harrison
Automated Abattoir Facility, owned
and operated by Fleischer Foods,
for an exclusive KGPN tour of how
modern technology brings the safest
possible product to your kitchen...

Dead air.

Joe stands like a statue while Yvette looks at the ground.

Bill looks between them with growing concern.

She's back in character

YVETTE
Yvette Owens here at the new
Harrison Automated Abattoir
Facility for an exclusive KGPN tour
of how Governor Harris' technology
corridor grants have promoted modern
technology at Fleischer Foods to
bring high quality products to the
dinner tables of America.

Joe lowers the camera, snaps on the lens cap, walks past her
toward the building entry.

JOE
Safest possible?

YVETTE
Shut up.

JOE
So it's still kinda unsafe.

YVETTE
Asshole.

JOE
An' lode gawd, thank you Jesus
you'ze gots us all outta dat
kitchen, massa!

YVETTE
Do I need to call Sam?

JOE
Moo cow.

Bill expresses facial contortions that Hollywood might not be so glamorous after all.

He joins Yvette several paces behind Joe.

YVETTE
Sure you don't want to be on camera? You have a great face and voice for it.

BILL
Really? Okay. If you say so. What about...

He motions at Joe's trudging backside.

YVETTE
Ignore him. I do.

Bill chuckles with a smile as he gets the door for the three to slip inside.

JOE
(mocking Yvette's cadence)
M-moo moo. Moo moo.

FADE TO WHITE

FADE IN:

INT. HARRISON AUTOMATED ABATTOIR FACILITY - DAY

Inside the industrial-lit facility, all three are decked out in white paper jumpsuits and hair bonnets. Black lapel mics clipped along the front button seams of Yvette and Bill.

Hundreds of black, brown and white cattle low and moan in the large pen ahead of them.

Bill points out to Yvette where the computer directs robotic shepherd arms to drive the cattle single file onto a large conveyer belt.

Sunglasses still on but not standing as statuesque, Joe records them.

BILL

From here to the end of the line
the computer scans, follows a
pre-programmed algorithm for the
proper cut-to-size of the animal
and that's it.

YVETTE

When you say "cut-to-size of the
animal" does that mean the Harrison
facility processes more than just
beef cattle?

Joe checks his lapel mic receiver. Twists a knob back and forth.

JOE

You two are going to have to talk
over the cows!

Joe's perturbation goes unnoticed over their fawning, giddy exchanges.

BILL

Yes ma'am. By approximate height
and weight the computer determines
if the feed stock is cattle, hog or
sheep. They are processed
accordingly.

YVETTE

Easy as pie.

BILL

Yep. Easy as pie.

JOE

Whatever. Go ahead. Be stupid
sheep.

He follows the tour without further remark.

SERIES OF SHOTS

- A red laser grid scans the heads of four cows in a row.
- Four pneumatic devices are lowered, taps their foreheads.
- PSHHT! They slump onto the rump of the stunned cow ahead of it.
- Right at the fence rail, Yvette startles, laughs and clutches Bill's arm. He doesn't mind at all.

- Another red laser grid guides robotic arms to move the head of each stunned cow into a large clamp.
- A guillotine blade glides up, almost severing the head. Blood gouts out.
- Computer guided hooks string the cow upside-down into the air. They still wiggle and kick, but they're silent.
- Thick red blood spews to their fading heartbeats.
- Cutters remove the head, shears remove the hooves.
- Roller-peelers strip the skin downward from the ankles to the neck stump.
- The abdomen is split, internal organs are removed to a table where robotic arms, cameras and knives pick through, document and cut.
- A long row of red-pink carcasses roll into a freezer and roll out frosted-pink at the other end.
- A giant industrial band-saw halves the gutted carcass down the spine.
- Another band-saw cuts the halves across between the ribs and flanks.
- Inspector cameras on robotic arms constantly lase and measure the process.
- The quarters are broken down into smaller cuts, shrink-wrapped, bar coded, boxed, bar coded again.
- The boxes are sent on rollers into the back of a Fleischer Farms freezer truck.
- Truck pulls away. A new one backs in and waits.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

Bill has become quite enamored with Yvette who can't keep her hands off of him.

She turns to Joe who holds the large camera perfectly vertical although he slumps to the side.

YVETTE

Joe. Let's go do the wrap up...
Joe! Goddammit, Joe! Did you leave
your lens cap on this entire
Goddamn time? Jesus fucking Christ
almighty!

Joe thumbs up his mirrored sunglasses, drops and turns the camera around.

JOE
Aw... fuuuuck meee.

The lens cap remains secured to the lens.

YVETTE
You're a real fucking professional,
Joseph. Really fucking impressive.
Sam's gonna--

JOE
Shut up. Please, just... shut up.
All your interview audio is still
there. I'll go back, re-shoot you
two at the entry line and I'll
shoot the rest without you. It's a
simple enough pick-up. I'll end
up... uh...

BILL
Right here.

YVETTE
Right here.

JOE
... right here. You two can go... I
don't care. Wherever. Steve in
editing can dub in the audio over
the video after that. Easy as
pie... Fuck me.

Joe pops off the lens cap, Yvette glares at him as he passes.

Bill looks back and forth between them.

YVETTE
You are so fucking fired.

JOE
Shut up.

YVETTE
Fired.

JOE
Please.

YVETTE
Fired.

JOE
 Pull up your panties, Smurfette.
 I'm hearing an echo.

The three trudge back up the processing line.

FADE TO BLACK

FADE IN:

INT. KGPN GREAT PLAINS NETWORK EDITING BAY - DAY

STEVE, 50, fat and bald with a crown of twelve inch gray hair, large drink, curly fries and double cheeseburger in hand, stares at the video monitors.

Mouth agape.

STEVE
 Oh. My. Fucking. God.

His hand reaches for the phone.

STEVE
 Oh. My. Fucking. God.

At the dial-tone he keys in a number.

STEVE
 Oh. My. Fucking. God.

Someone picks up.

SAM (V.O.)
 Whatsup, Steve?

STEVE
 Sam, get down here. Now. Oh. My--

MOMENTS LATER

Sam, stands behind Steve still seated in his chair, also stares mouth agape at the video monitors.

SAM
 Fucking. God.

The two men stare a moment longer.

SAM
 Where's...

OHHH! SAM STEVE
OHHH!

SAM
Where's Joe?

STEVE
He might still be sleeping in the truck.

OHHH! SAM STEVE
OHHH!

Sam pulls his cell and calls.

SAM
Mike. Go to the garage and see if...

OHHH! SAM STEVE
OHHH!

SAM
... see if Joe's still asleep in his truck... No. Now! ... Yeah, send him to editing. Immediately! Right fucking now!

Still staring at the monitors, Steve brings his double cheese-burger to his mouth, notices, puts it back down then vomits in the floor.

Sam reaches down and turns the playback off.

On screen, a cardboard box with bar code label is freeze framed on rollers to the back of a Fleischer Farms freezer truck.

MOMENTS LATER

Joe, still in his white paper jump suit pulled down to his waist and holding a can of Amp, barely stands beside Sam.

Steve's empty chair between them and the monitors.

With a small remote Sam controls the video.

On screen Yvette laughs as Bill helps her up to a seat on the cattle rail where cows are herded into a single file by giant robotic arms.

YVETTE (V.O.)
Just for this shot can I take off
the hair bonnet?

BILL (V.O.)
Uh... Not really. The health
inspector--

JOE (V.O.)
Queen wants to look pretty for her
court.

SAM
Do you know where Yvette and this
guy Bill are now, Joe?

Joe looks like walking shit. Standing shit, really.

JOE
At the... uh.. beginning of the...
where the... cows are fed into the
front of the--

YVETTE (V.O.)
Please?

SAM
No. I mean do you know where Yvette
and Bill are right now?

BILL (V.O.)
Alright.

On screen Yvette smiles big as she whips off the bonnet,
swishes her hair around and spruces it up.

SAM
I dunno. I'm sorry I messed this
up, boss. After I re-shot the line
I waited in the van for an hour or
so.

On screen Yvette gets poised in character. Swishes her hair
one more time...

SAM
I figured Bill was showing her the
boning room so I left. He could
drive her back to the station or
her place. Whichever...

Sam stares at the screen in growing alarm.

... Yvette flips off the rail into the cattle line. Bill goes to her but she's pinned between animals.

Her screams are drowned out by lowing cows. Her arm outstretched to Bill. They grasp wrists as the robotic arm shoves the next cow forward onto the conveyor belt.

The cow pushes Yvette who pulls Bill into the feeder line. He's then trapped by the cow behind him.

Joe's camera work doesn't seem to budge.

At opposite ends of a lowing cow, red laser grids align on their heads as pneumatic stun bolts lower into position.

JOE

Oh... no...

PSHHT!

A cow, Yvette, another cow and Bill go down.

SAM

What can you tell me about the prescription meds you're on, Joe.

The conveyor moves them to the guillotine. Joes's camera work walks along and follows them.

They're cut and hoisted upside down on ankle hooks. Joe's camera work pans up and follows them.

They still wiggle and kick, but they're silent.

Thick red blood spews to their fading heartbeats.

FADE TO RED

THE END