

Meet Les!

Screenplay by

Carl Burcham

FADE IN:

EXT. WESTERN PLAINS - DAY

The panoramic Texas prairie. Tumbleweeds. Wildflowers.

And CATTLE.

Massive BELLOWING championship Black Angus cattle. For as far as our camera lens can see.

EXT. STONE RANCH - DAY

SUPER: TEN YEARS AGO

LES STONE, a wild-haired eleven-year-old whirlwind carries a water bucket with his happy-go-lucky gal-pal JESSICA VAUGHN, same age. They slosh the water into a muddy trough.

OINKING YORKSHIRE PIGS battle for a spot at the trough.

Les and Jess make a GIGGLING beeline to safety away from the thundering pink, swine herd.

LES (V.O.)
Ever since I can remember, my
friend Jess and I've loved animals.

INT. BARN - DAY

In matching attire--faded jeans, Western boots and kid Stetsons--Les and Jess race past a wood-paneled wall covered in blue ribbons and trophies.

LES (V.O.)
Name a youth ranch contest, chances
are, Jess and me won it.

The rambunctious kids toss grain at CLUCKING chickens. They pitch hay to hungry cattle.

LES (V.O.) (CONT'D)
And we named every one of our
animals. Like you would any pet.

EXT. OPEN FIELD - DAY

A broad-faced bull named RICARDO snorts. A blue ribbon hangs from his neck--BEST IN SHOW, STATE FAIR.

LES (V.O.)
 I named my favorite bull after the
 great TV thespian, Ricardo
 Montalban.

EXT. CHICKEN COOP - DAY

A rooster named ELVIS pokes the camera lens with his peanut-
 butter-covered beak. A blue ribbon hangs around his neck--
 WINNER, NATIONAL POULTRY SHOW.

LES (V.O.)
 And my favorite Leghorn rooster, I
 named Elvis cuz he loved peanut
 butter and bananas.

EXT. HOG PEN - DAY

Closeup of CANTALOUPE the pig. He sniffs the camera with his
 huge snout. A collar with a silver cantaloupe charm dangles
 from his thick neck. He gorges on a cantaloupe, rind and all.

LES (V.O.)
 But the animal I loved the most, my
 best friend throughout elementary
 school--next to Jess--was Cantaloupe,
 my wicked-smart Yorkshire boar.

EXT. BARNYARD - DAY

Les signals by twirling his hand at an empty bottle.

Cantaloupe spins the bottle in a circle with his hoof. When
 it stops spinning, it points to Jess.

Jess accepts the "spin the bottle" challenge. She leans over
 and smooches Les smack on the lips. He blushes.

LES (V.O.)
 Got my first kiss thanks to
 Cantaloupe.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

With a flourish, Les extends his hand to Cantaloupe.

LES (V.O.)
 He did fun tricks, like shaking
 hands. Or hoofs in his case.

INT. BARN - DAY

Les, Jess, and Cantaloupe watch TV in the ranch office. On screen, breakfast sausage sizzles in a hot skillet.

Cantaloupe SQUEALS. Les places a hand over the boar's eyes. Jess quickly flips channels.

LES (V.O.)

And man, was he a couch potato.
Loved Animal Planet. The Cooking
Channel, not so much.

EXT. CORRAL - DAY

Les watches dumbfounded as his grandfather, cigar-puffing LESTER, SR. (70s) and his father, ramrod strait LESTER, JR. (50s) shove cattle into a semi-trailer headed to slaughter.

Senior slams shut the back door of the trailer, and motions for Junior to move out. He winks at young Les, who stands nearby, mouth agape.

LES (V.O.)

But to my grandfather, Lester, Sr.,
and my dad, Lester, Jr., our cattle
were just future Porterhouse and
Ribeyes.

EXT. CHICKEN COOP - DAY

Junior tosses a crate of SQUAWKING chickens into his rusty Ford-150 pickup.

From a tire swinging on a giant Live Oak, Les watches. He waves sadly to his fowl friends. The truck disappears in a cloud of dust and chicken feathers.

LES (V.O.)

Our chickens might as well have
been named Barbecue and Nuggets.

INT. BARN - DAY

Ankle-deep in mud, Senior and Junior CLAP and YELL at rowdy pigs.

LES (V.O.)
 And even though they're the
 smartest animals on any ranch, to
 grandpa and dad, our pigs were just
 future bacon slabs and pork ribs.

EXT. HOG PEN - DAY

Les's father and grandfather open the gate. They smack the
 rump of the largest boar, Cantaloupe.

A RANCH HAND pulls up in a pickup and shoves the SQUEALING
 Cantaloupe into the truck bed.

LES (V.O.)
 I tried not to judge them. After
 all, they were just doing what
 ranchers do with their animals.

Les and Jess, playing nearby, hear Cantaloupe SQUEALING. They
 race over. They wave their hands in the air. And SHOUT.

LES (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 That is until one awful day when I
 watched them cart Cantaloupe off to
 slaughter.

We don't hear what Les and Jess yell but a lip-reading
 reveals the words "NO!!" and "YOU PROMISED!!"

Les drops to his knees, grabs his father's legs. He pleads
 for him to not take Cantaloupe away.

LES (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 That day, I realized I had a
 decision to make.

His father shakes his head, and frowns with a look of
 disappointment. Les sobs when Junior gets behind the wheel.

LES (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Grandpa and dad were hoping I'd
 help manage the ranch when I got
 old enough.

Les and Jess watch the truck pull off. Cantaloupe's snout
 pokes through the iron-barred cage.

LES (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 But on that fateful day, I knew I
 would need to find a way to save
 the animals and still make my
 family proud of me.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

A sparsely-packed bus WHEEZES down a two-lane highway.

SUPER: PRESENT DAY, WEST TEXAS

As the bus door opens, we see the flip-flopped feet of Les
 (now 21). He's in skateboard shorts and a knock-off Tommy
 Bahama Aloha shirt.

He removes his burnt orange skull cap, and runs his spindly
 fingers through long, stringy hair dyed blue. Stud earrings
 pierce his ear lobes. Tattoo "sleeves" cover both arms.

Les stands alone at a four way stop. Nothing around but
 chest-high grassland and miles of barbed wire fence.

The sound of HOOFBEATS echo off the blacktop. A ROAN gallops
 toward him. A girl riding bareback. White Stetson, frayed
 jeans, turquoise jewelry. Every inch the West Texas cowgirl.

It's Jess (now also 21). She pulls beside him. Both smile.

JESS

Only in West Texas does the bus let
 you off in the middle of the
 freakin' boondocks.

Les laughs. He straps on his backpack and climbs in behind
 Jess. She spins the horse--FRED--around.

LES

Coulda been worse. Watched three of
 my faves on my cell. *Cape Fear*,
Singin' in the Rain, and *Pulp*
Fiction. Makes the lonesome Texas
 highway a little less lonesome.

Les changes the subject.

LES (CONT'D)

What's with Fred? Where's the bug?

JESS
Sold her. Subbing barely pays
enough for food, let alone gas!

LES
On the bright side, your carbon
footprint's dropped a bunch.

JESS
Can't disagree. You all educated-up
now like moi?

LES
(with sarcasm)
If you call what you got at A&M an
education.

JESS
As I recall, we kicked UT's ass in
the Championship Game.

Les has no time to defend. Fred's startled by a Mojave
Diamondback sunning itself. Jess tries to sneak past it.

LES
Wait!

Too late. Les hops off the horse and approaches the rattler.

JESS
You out of your mind? My class just
studied those things. They bite
seven thousand Texans every year!

Les creeps toward the snake. Its eyelids dart open. It
RATTLES. Loudly. Its forked tongue flits from a fanged mouth.

LES
So what? Texas drivers run over
eight thousand of 'em each year.

The snake rears up, RATTLES even louder, and thrusts its
tongue at Les. He flinches and backs off.

JESS
Les! You don't need to impress me.

LES
Not trying to. Just wanna get this
little guy to safety.

JESS
Little guy?! Him safe!? What about
you? What about Fred and me?!

Mr. Snake decides the encounter's not worth wasting precious venom on. It slithers away. Les remounts Fred.

JESS (CONT'D)

(after a beat)

Drivers don't really run over *eight thousand* a year, do they?

LES

Probably more like eight.

Jess shakes her head. Fred TROTS down the road.

EXT. STONE RANCH - DAY

SCREECHING PIGS. BELLOWING BULLS. CLUCKING CHICKENS. The sounds of a working livestock ranch.

Les's younger brother LEVI (18), chunky, pimply-faced, and all piss and vinegar, mans the elastrator band castrating unfortunate HOWLING bulls.

Junior ear-tags other cattle.

Senior dumps corn into the pigs' feed bin. Some are near slaughter weight of 300 pounds. Others, like the piglets, weigh five pounds and nibble at their mothers' breasts.

All three men have tightly cropped hair and sport the traditional rancher's ensemble--jeans, white tees, handmade boots, banded Stetsons.

A bell RINGS. They stop their tasks, wipe their brows. Lunch break. Junior spots Levi racing to the pickup.

JUNIOR

LEVI! Wait for grandpa and me!

LEVI

Get it in gear old man. Friday special's all you can eat chicken fried steak.

SENIOR

(to Junior)

Kid's gotta point.

Father and son scramble to the truck. Levi is already behind the wheel REVVING the engine.

INT. RAY'S RANCH HOUSE DINER - DAY

COWBOYS, local BUSINESS OWNERS, MOMS with crying BABIES and rowdy TEENS fill the counter stools, tables and booths. Les and Jess chat in the corner.

JESS'S POV

Through the pane glass window, Jess keeps an eye on Fred tied up to a parking meter.

JESS

Your grandpa and dad still want you
to take over the ranch?

Les looks into space. It's a sore subject, one he's exhausted thinking about.

LES

Yea. They've got a job lined up so
I can learn the ropes.

JESS

So, you'll be lassoing strays then?

LES

Ha. Your stand-up act needs work.

Jess takes a bite of salad and grimaces. She spits it out onto her plate. Something crawls from under the lettuce.

JESS

JESUS! Ray really takes pride in
the food he serves.

LES

Probably not many customers ask for
two plain salads.

JESS

Cuz they don't serve anything but
meat, meat, meat.

Jess shoves her plate away and leans toward Les.

JESS (CONT'D)

Let's start our own restaurant. One
that serves healthy food. Good
tasting. Good for the planet. Good
for the animals.

LES

What a novel idea. A plant based restaurant should be really popular here in Stone City.

They glance around the room.

Cherubic faced, overweight KIDS chow down on bacon cheeseburgers and chicken fried steaks.

Diabetic SENIORS finish well-done New York strip sandwiches and pat their full bellies.

Stetson-wearing RANCH HANDS brush off Carne Asada platters.

Les and Jess look at each other and cackle.

LES (CONT'D)

Besides, I feel like I owe the Lesters at least a try at ranching. They did put me through school.

Jess cups Les's hands in hers.

JESS

How is it that the same guy who raised championship bulls with watermelon sized balls doesn't have any himself?

INT. JESS'S CLASSROOM - DAY

The 12 STUDENTS in Jess's fourth grade class spy out the window as she ties Fred to a shady tree beside a sign reading: SAM HOUSTON ELEMENTARY.

Jess races in. The students jump back to their desks.

PARKER (10), the master of disruption, points out the window.

PARKER

Miss Vaughn. Your horse just took a big dump on the playground.

The kids break out into chaotic laughter.

PARKER (CONT'D)

If you want, I can run home and grab a shovel. My dad uses it to clean up pig crap.

JESS
I'd rather hear everyone's thoughts
about the homework assignment.

Eleven-year-old wiseguy JOSH goes first.

JOSH
In the words of Parker, I think it
was a crock of shite.

JESS
(frowning)
Let's try to keep the discussion
clean.

JOSH
What? That's Irish for poop.

Jess shakes her head.

JESS
Just tell us what you mean, Josh.

JOSH
I mean, humans have been eating
animals since we was--

JESS
Were.

JOSH
Right. *Were* cavemen.

A precocious redhead in a pink dress, SAGE (10), interjects.

SAGE
AND *cave women!*

JOSH
Whatev. Point is, humans were born
to eat meat.

JESS
Not entirely true. We don't need to
eat animals. We choose to.

She glances at the students. Many of them disagree.

JESS (CONT'D)
Can anyone tell me the *benefits* of
a meatless diet?

Sage stands. She arranges her dress and clears her throat.

SAGE

There are several Ms. Vaughn.
First, climate change. Fewer
animals means less carbon expelled
due to animal flatulence--

PARKER

You mean farts!!
(makes a fart sound)

Jess gives Parker a hostile stare. Sage presses on.

SAGE

Second, a meatless diet is
healthier.

JOSH

(fake coughs)
Bullcrap.

SAGE

And third, if we eat plants, we
don't need to kill animals.

JOSH

Yea, right! Lemme think, what
should I have for dinner tonight, a
Porterhouse or boiled carrots?

Lots of agreement on that one. Scattered APPLAUSE.

JESS

Good points Sage.
(to the class)
If Sage is right, what is it then
that stops us from reducing our
meat consumption?

A stocky, sleepy-eyed girl CHERYL ANN (11) responds.

CHERYL ANN

It tastes so GOOD!!

JESS

I promise I can serve you a plant
based dish every bit as tasty.

Preadolescence eye-rolling and MOANS around the room.

PARKER

What about protein? Can't get it in
veggies. Gotta have it for energy.

JESS

Again, not entirely true. So what else is stopping us?

Sage rises again. She's killing it today as class nerd.

SAGE

Jobs. Ranchers like my dad would lose their business. I wouldn't be able to go to college.

JESS

Jobs and college are both important. But are they more important than reducing climate change, saving animals, and living a healthier life? Especially when there are alternatives to meat?

SAGE

Well, if you put it that way. I, I.

Sage scans the room. The students scoot to the edge of their seats waiting for her answer. In a squeaky voice--

SAGE (CONT'D)

I, I'd have to check with my dad.

Sage plops back into her chair and avoids eye contact.

LAUGHTER. WHISPERING. HIGH FIVES.

The bell RINGS. Sage sighs at the saved-by-the-bell timing. The students pack up. When the students are gone, Sage approaches Jess.

SAGE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, I was just being honest.

JESS

All good. My job's to teach facts and dispel myths. Your job's to make good decisions based on that knowledge.

Sage nods and runs out the door to catch up with her friends.

INT. HEART OF TEXAS MEAT PACKING - DAY

In his hot mess of an office, HEYWOOD COLE (60), the frumpy slaughterhouse owner, greets Les and Lester, Jr. Invoices are stacked high. Crushed cola cans are everywhere. Polaroids of Cole and ranchers hang crooked on the paneled wall.

COLE

Lookie here! Les Stone all growed up. Look just like your daddy at that age.

JUNIOR

Handsome lad ain't he, Woody?

COLE

Like a blue ribbon bull drivin' the cows wild.

Junior and Cole share LAUGHTER. Les scowls.

JUNIOR

He's raised animals and got a book education. Now he needs to learn the processing side of the business.

COLE

I'll teach him all I know. We'll start him out in the knackery.

LES

Don't you think I'd be more productive here in the office? My degree's in accounting.

COLE

Don't think you got the *knack* for the knackery huh? Fraid horse guts'll make you sick?

Cole and Junior CHORTLE at the weak joke. Les just sighs.

INT. HEART OF TEXAS KNACKERY - DAY

In a grimy, white jumpsuit reminiscent of those worn by state prisoners at Huntsville, Les hoses the guts of slaughtered horses, donkeys, and mules off the concrete floor.

He pauses momentarily to remove his face mask and breathe fresh air. He dry heaves. The air's not fresh. He places the mask back on. Continues hosing.

Behind him, another WORKER in a hardhat dumps animal parts into a grinder. It CHOPS, TEARS and PULVERIZES the guts and flesh. The SOUND's one part chainsaw, one part jackhammer.

At a serpentine, fast-moving conveyer belt, other masked WORKERS in hairnets sort the final product into precisely measured piles of hard nuggets.

Les watches a robotic arm swing around to dump the petrified pellets into bags. Each bag features puppies at play and the brand name: HEART OF TEXAS PRIME FOR PLAYFUL PUPS.

LES

Jesus!

Les finishes hosing and heads for the restroom.

INT. MEN'S ROOM - DAY

Les tears off his mask and enters a stall. The stall door SLAMS shut.

ON THE STALL DOOR

A beat...before we hear Les PUKING his own guts out.

INT. STONE RESIDENCE - DAY

The entire Stone family along with Les and Jess gather for dinner. Les's mother ALLEY Stone (50s) a sentimental, blonde sweetheart totes a baked ham to the platter covered table.

The over-the-top spread's straight out of a Norman Rockwell painting. Chicken fried steak, barbecued ribs, ribeye, pork chops. Vegetables? They're mostly an afterthought.

Levi spots the ham and lunges for a piece. His mother smacks his hand and lasers her cold, no-nonsense *Mom's eyes* at him.

Junior extends his hands, bows his head. They all hold hands.

JUNIOR

Holy Father, bless this family and this ranch. Please guide Les to success as he returns to our family and our way of life. In your name we pray, Amen.

Levi pleads to his mother with puppy dog eyes. She nods. He stabs a piece of ham and reaches for the chicken fried steak.

Around the table every plate's piled high with meat, sauce, and gravy. Except for Les's and Jess's. His dad notices.

JUNIOR (CONT'D)

Levi, pass Les and Jess the good stuff! Them pork chops. And ham.

Les looks up from the carrots, peas, and salad on his plate.

LES
 Thanks but no. I. Well, Jess and I.
 We're. We're.

Levi motions for Les to get it out.

LEVI
 You're? Communist? Gay? What??

LES
 Plant based.

Silence. Then--

SENIOR
 Plant based? As in--

JESS
 We no longer eat anything that
 feels pain. Nothing that flies,
 walks or swims.

LEVI
 Woulda been better if you'd said
 you were a commie.

Junior leans on the table, stares at Les.

JUNIOR
 What in God's name made you decide
 that? Nothing's more natural than a
 Grade A slab of beef. You're a
 rancher's son, you know.

LES
 It's just better. For the planet,
 people, animals. Even producers.

JUNIOR
 We're ranchers! How is folks not
 eating meat *good for us*?

Alley sees what's coming and tries to head off the conflict.

ALLEY
 Let's talk about this later. This
 is a happy occasion to celebrate
 Les's graduation. How's the job dad
 got for you going, Les?

LES
 I quit.

Silverware PLOPS on the bone china. Junior frowns.

JUNIOR

You what?

LES

I just couldn't work in a place like that. I understand you want me to learn the family business but--

ALLEY

Maybe you could start out with the herds. Learn the cattle side first?

LEVI

I'll teach you, bro. Life of a cowboy's hard but it's a blast.

Senior rises and walks behind Les. He places weathered hands on Les's shoulders and gives him an affectionate squeeze.

SENIOR

I agree with Alley. Let's change to a happier subject. We're all proud of you, grandson. The first Stone to graduate college. In a ranch family like ours, that's special.

He withdraws an envelope from his jacket and hands it to Les.

Les is puzzled.

SENIOR (CONT'D)

Open it.

Les tears it open and removes a certified document. A deed. Les's eyes widen as he reads it.

SENIOR (CONT'D)

Two-hundred fifty acres. All yours. Same amount my father gave me to start. That's grown to twelve-thousand acres today, thanks to hard work and smart use of capital.

JUNIOR

Grandpa and I thought you might fix up the old farmhouse that's there.

SENIOR

Come here. Everybody.

Everyone gets up from the table and follows Senior.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Senior points out the window at the property across the road.

SENIOR

That's yours as far as you can see.

Les hugs his grandpa. He grabs Jess and hugs her too.

JUNIOR

When do you think you'll start renovating the old house?

LES

As soon as possible!

ALLEY

That's so exciting!

LES

Except it won't be a house. We'll make it a restaurant.

ALLEY

(reluctantly)

Well. Okay. That's good.

SENIOR

Good spot for it. All the cowboys'll love having another grub joint besides the diner in town.

JUNIOR

I'll eat there for sure!

LEVI

Me too! Long as you have chicken fried steak.

Jess nudges Les. Tilts her head toward the family.

LES

It'll be plant based. No meat.

JESS

And we'll have an animal sanctuary behind it. Where we can rescue animals from slaughter.

If the proverbial pin were dropped now, it would be heard throughout the house. Alley tramps out of the room.

Levi scowls at his brother and chases after his mother. Les and Jess follow them.

Senior gazes out the window at Les's new property. Junior drapes an arm around his father's shoulder.

JUNIOR
We're doomed, aren't we?

SENIOR
No doubt about it.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. LES'S LAND - DAY

SUPER: TWO MONTHS LATER

A TV van with satellite dish on-top reads: WCOW 7 NEWS.

A local TV News Reporter VERONICA SNOW (30s), an ambitious fashion plate with sparkling white teeth and a tendency to exaggerate, interviews Les.

They stand in front of a two-story Victorian style wooden house. A hand-painted sign identifies it as: MEATLESS RESTAURANT AND ANIMAL SANCTUARY. She addresses the camera.

VERONICA SNOW
Today, on MIDDAY REPORT, we're talking to Les Stone about his new restaurant called MEATLESS.

She turns to face Les. He's all smiles.

VERONICA SNOW (CONT'D)
Les, MEATLESS seems out of character here in cattle country, especially for an heir to the most famous livestock ranch in Texas.

Les's smile evaporates. He realizes she's going to make it tough on him.

LES
That's why we think folks'll love it. *Because* it's so different. The menu's completely plant based--

VERONICA SNOW
No meat at all?

LES

Nope. But our food'll be just as flavorful. And healthier. Better for the environment. And no animals will be harmed.

VERONICA SNOW

That's the other part of your concept, in fact, isn't it?

They walk to a white picket fence. A Doctor Doolittle-menagerie of ranch animals roam in the field behind it.

LES

That's right. Restaurant profits will help us save critters like those here in our animal sanctuary.

A sheep BLEATS behind them. Snow laughs.

VERONICA SNOW

A bleat of agreement from one of the sanctuary residents!

LES

They love their new home. Each animal has a name. And, they've all been adopted by foster families.

VERONICA SNOW

Foster families?

LES

You can adopt one of the animals for up to six months. As long as you have the land and a record of good animal stewardship.

VERONICA SNOW

So, ironically, your family across the road, they won't be able to foster any of these animals.

LES

Uh. Well.

VERONICA STONE

Because they slaughter the animals they raise. And killing the animals you raise doesn't really make for good animal stewardship. Right?

A flummoxed Les tries to change the subject.

LES

Well, families will love our foster program. Everything we do here is to create a good space for animals, people and the environment.

Les points to a large row of wooden boxes along the fence.

LES (CONT'D)

For example. Our compost piles. We don't waste any food.

He points to a large colorful, vegetable garden.

LES (CONT'D)

We grow most of the vegetables we serve. What we don't or can't, we buy from local growers. Totally farm to table.

He points to the restaurant roof.

LES (CONT'D)

And our power is from those solar panels. An environmentally friendly, virtuous circle.

VERONICA SNOW

(with pretend enthusiasm)
Terrific! But don't you worry?

LES

About...?

VERONICA SNOW

We do live in beef country. And swine country. And poultry country. People around here love their meat!

LES

That's true. We're just hoping to show them an alternative approach.

VERONICA SNOW

What if they can't be convinced?

Les stares vacuously at her. She turns to the camera.

VERONICA SNOW (CONT'D)

So, that does it for us. Thanks to Les Stone, owner of a new plant based restaurant and animal sanctuary called MEATLESS!

(MORE)

VERONICA SNOW (CONT'D)
 Two miles south of Stone City on
 FM9940 right across from the famous
 Stone livestock ranch. This is
 Veronica Snow reporting.

INT. RAY'S RANCH HOUSE DINER - DAY

The usual suspects fill the busy restaurant/town meeting place. Senior, Junior, and Levi stroll to a booth.

A weathered, denture-chomping, OLD RANCHER in an absurd Sunset Monte hat struts past. He stops at their booth.

OLD RANCHER
 Mornin' boys. Hey, how can you tell
 a vegan at a party?
 (beat)
 Don't worry. They'll TELL YOU!

The old rancher slaps their table with a rim shot. BA-DUM-DUM-CHING! He laughs so hard, his dentures nearly fall out.

SENIOR
 Don't pay no attention to that old
 coot. He's all hat and no cattle.

JUNIOR
 Bad news travels fast.

The rotund owner of the local bank, DONNIE WAYNE CRANE (50s), waddles past. He places both palms on their table and frowns.

DONNIE WAYNE
 What I saw on that broadcast was an
 abomination!

JUNIOR
 The boy's just going through some
 post-college phase.

Donnie Wayne stands erect. CLICKS his tongue.

DONNIE WAYNE
 Better hope so. If his nonsense
 catches on, it's gonna mean
 economic disaster for all of us!

Fuming, he heads for the door.

LEVI
 Les is making us a laughingstock.

JUNIOR

Les believes one thing. We believe another. Let's see who wins.

They glance out the window. The diner's owner, RAY (40s), half-shaven in a grease-spackled apron and paper cap, places letters on a vinyl sign.

Levi slowly reads aloud as the words go up.

LEVI

No fake food served here. Today's Special: Pig-Out Pork Platter.

(beat)

Know what I'm havin.'

INT. JESS'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Jess writes the words OPEN HOUSE on the chalkboard. The kids MOAN. Pardon-the-Interruption Parker offers an opinion.

PARKER

Open House is lame. Our parents embarrass us every time. Can't we cancel it this year?

Lots of nodding heads around the room.

JESS

What if we did it a bit different?

JOSH

Like how different?

JESS

Who likes movies?

Every hand goes up. Parker puts up both hands.

JESS (CONT'D)

Who likes to make movies?

Another unanimous response.

JOSH

I make kick-ass Tic Tok videos!

JESS

Language. There are children present!

A few CHUCKLES from the peanut gallery. Josh grins.

JESS (CONT'D)

Here's what I'm thinking. You all work together to create a video.

Smiles on a dozen faces. Rapt attention from the kids.

JESS (CONT'D)

Pick a subject.

PARKER

Our pets! Dogs. Cats. Gerbils.

JOSH

How about vacations we've had?

JESS

Not bad ideas. But I'd like for you to pick a subject you're unfamiliar with. And one that you may not have a positive view about.

The kids don't quite understand.

JESS (CONT'D)

I want you to try your best to understand someone else's point of view. It's called empathy.

SAGE

I like the idea. I'll volunteer to be the on-camera personality.

PARKER

You're too goofy looking. I'll be the star.

JESS

Don't argue about it. Vote on it. Come up with the idea, then vote on your roles. Screenwriter, director, actors, editor, and such.

Nods of enthusiastic approval.

JESS (CONT'D)

And at Open House, before we show the video, we'll treat you and your parents to some great food.

SAGE

Dinner and a movie!

JESS

Right! You make the movie. I'll make the food. Y'all okay with burgers, nuggets, fries and shakes?

THE KIDS

YES!!!

JESS

OK. Two weeks from today. Good luck filmmakers!

EXT. STONE RANCH - DAY

Levi finishes chores and closes the corral gate. He pinches off some chewing tobacco and shoves it between cheek and gum. Near his truck, he gets a whiff of a smell from hell.

He sees why. The truck bed's filled with rotting vegetables--slimy potatoes, broccoli, squash, carrots, bananas.

FOOTSTEPS approach.

Stocky JAIME CLUTTERBUCK (19), a swaggering, filthy ranch hand LAUGHS behind him. His stride is part hop, part walk, the result of an encounter with a much smarter Longhorn bull.

CLUTTERBUCK

Heard you was turning into a veganista. Thought you might could use some veggies for your new diet.

LEVI

You son of a--

Clutterbuck raises his palm, shrugs.

CLUTTERBUCK

No need to thank me, boss. We was just gonna feed it to the pigs. You seemed like the next best thing.

Clutterbuck spins around, HOWLING, and heads for his truck.

Levi tackles him. Flat on his back, Clutterbuck grins up at Levi. Levi raises his fist and prepares to punch him.

CLUTTERBUCK (CONT'D)

I figure ten thousand bucks per punch.

Confused, Levi keeps his fist aloft but holds back the punch.

CLUTTERBUCK (CONT'D)

S'what I'll sue you for. I'm hopin'
for ten punches. I can retire on a
hunerd' thousands bucks!

Clutterbuck laughs loudly. His grin's frozen on his face.
Levi drops his fist and crawls off him. He spits out the
chewing tobacco. It SPLATS next to Clutterbuck's head.

LEVI

Get the hell out of here. Lucky my
dad don't fire you. Was up to me,
you'd already be gone.

Levi climbs into his truck. Clutterbuck yells back.

CLUTTERBUCK

Give my regards to your asshole
brother. Remind him this is Texas
not pansy ass California.

Levi exits the lot, his truck tires spinning with fury.

EXT. LONGHORN COUNTY FAIR - DAY

Les sets up a retrofitted camper turned MEATLESS food stand.
Above the window, a menu lists the options, all plant based.

A banner hangs from the top of the stand: ALL PROCEEDS GO TO
SUPPORT THE MEATLESS ANIMAL SANCTUARY.

Jess passes out promo flyers.

INSERT: Flyer promoting 30% off all items for first time
visitors to the restaurant.

Les hands out brochures with food stand menu items.

INSERT: Brochure--THE HEALTHIEST LIFE: PLANT BASED (PB).

FAIRGOERS politely brush off Les and Jess. Instead, they head
for the BUDDY'S BBQ MEGA STAND a few steps away.

Les shakes his head.

LES

Can't blame them, does smell good.

JESS

Burning pig flesh smells good?
Cantaloupe's rolling in his grave.

LES
 Are we fooling ourselves, Jess? Two
 hours without one customer.

Jess smiles, shoves the promo materials into Les's hands.

JESS
 You are a genius Les Stone!

LES
 Huh?!

She gives him a peck on the cheek. She ducks into the food truck and returns with a platter of veggies and PB meats.

JESS
 Stop admiring my beauty and start
 grilling!

Les lights the grill and does as he's told.

EXT. BUDDY'S BBQ MEGA STAND - DAY

Parker, Josh and Sage wait in a long line to order. Parker turns his head, whiffs at a new aroma wafting from behind.

PARKER
 Smell that?

JOSH
 Yea. I'm getting the pork rib plate
 and charro beans with bacon!

PARKER
 No, dung head! Behind us.

They all turn to see Les grilling in a silly chef hat. Smoke rises into the sky. Jess fills plastic plates and bowls.

SAGE
 Come on!

EXT. MEATLESS FOOD STAND - DAY

Les looks up, sees his first potential customers. Adjusts his chef's hat. Jess smiles at her students.

JESS
 Free samples!

JOSH
 Smells great. What is it?

LES
Spicy chili, grilled kabobs and
chicken sliders.

JESS
And fruit smoothies.

PARKER
Sounds good!

LES
Which one?

PARKER
They're free?

LES
Yup.

Parker grabs a plastic plate. Shoves it at Les.

PARKER
Then, one of each!

Sage and Josh look at each other, shrug, and grab plates.

A crowd grows. Les and Jess struggle to keep up, so the kids help by passing out samples.

PARKER (CONT'D)
(to Sage)
I've had three bowls of the chili!

SAGE
You know that's not meat in it?

PARKER
No way.

JOSH
Wait, what?

SAGE
And the sliders. Not real chicken.
It was tempeh.

PARKER
What the heck is tempoo?

SAGE
PEH! TEMPEH! It's plant based.
Everything you ate was.

JOSH
 (sarcastically)
 We was conned! Gimme my money back!

Sage rolls her eyes.

SAGE
 Were conned. And it was free,
 dimwit!

PARKER
 I'm a big enough man to admit I was
 wrong. Maybe Miss Vaughn's on to
 something here.

Sage registers disgust. Josh grabs one of the slider samples he's supposed to be handing out and woofs it down in a single gulp. Sage stares at him. Josh stops chewing.

JOSH
 (with his mouth full)
 What?

EXT. ANIMAL SANCTUARY - NIGHT

The wide variety of animals--cattle, pigs, chickens, horses, goats, sheep--clamber around Les and Jess waiting to be fed.

LES
 Pretty happy with how we did today,
 aren't you?

JESS
 Slow start but it ended well.

LES
 Your kids were a big help.

JESS
 Still are. Sage just made an Insta
 post. Look.

Jess displays her cell phone screen.

INSERT: Photos of the food Les and Jess served at the fair with red hearts throbbing next to each item.

LES
 Three thousand views! Nice. Should
 be another good day tomorrow.

Les's phone BUZZES with a text.

CHYRON:

LEVI: "*Come to the fairgrounds. Now!*"

LES: "*What's going on?*"

LEVI: "*Just get out here!*"

EXT. MEATLESS FOOD STAND - NIGHT

Les holds Jess close as they watch their food stand go up in flames. Volunteer FIREFIGHTERS battle the blaze. ONLOOKERS jockey for a better observation angle.

Levi rushes to his brother's side.

LEVI

Texted soon as I saw it was yours.

LES

How did it start?

LEVI

Nobody knows. But I have an idea.

JESS

What?

LEVI

I was in the show barn with our bulls. When I came out, I saw a coupla guys take off in a pickup.

LES

You recognize them?

LEVI

Not the faces. But one had this run-hop thing. I think it's one of our ranch hands. Jaime Clutterbuck.

Firefighters have the blaze under control, but the food stand is completely destroyed.

LEVI (CONT'D)

Him and me had a little *encounter* over your new venture. This might be related. There's more where he came from. Lot of folks aren't happy with your plans.

LES

I'm starting to get that message.

EXT. FARM TO MARKET ROAD - DAY

A rooster CROWS as the sun rises over the horizon. Les jogs down the desolate FM9940.

A late model Lincoln Continental slows down beside him. He continues to run. The car window rolls down and the puny, bald head of Stone City Mayor CARTHAGE ALLEN (70s) pops out.

ALLEN

Heard about your *issue* at the fair.

LES

Mayor.

ALLEN

How long I known you and your family Les?

LES

Not now, Mayor.

ALLEN

(undeterred)

Forty-five years is the answer. Senior and me went to the same one room school.

LES

I know you know everyone around here. What's your point?

ALLEN

Point is this, son. This is ranch country. Livestocken is our way of life. Always been. Always will be.

Les stops abruptly. The Lincoln continues down the road. When Les doesn't budge, the Lincoln rolls back beside him. Les leans into the car to address His Honor.

LES

Do you honestly believe Jess and I are a threat to the ranch business around here?

ALLEN

Don't matter what I believe. Only what voters do. Between me and you, they FEAR you could become a bigger problem.

Les watches two calves play on the other side of the fence.

ALLEN (CONT'D)

Don't wanna see you get hurt. Not you, nor nobody. So stop.

LES

Stop what?

ALLEN

Close down that silly place and start ranchin' with your family.

LES

That fire only made Jess and me more committed. We WON'T quit. But thank you for the nice pep talk.

Les continues his jog. He yells back to the mayor.

LES (CONT'D)

Stop by the restaurant. First time customers get thirty percent off. I know you love a deal!

The mayor pulls his boat of a car back onto the blacktop and rolls down the road.

EXT. PIGWIG BIGWIG - DAY

A pickup pulls into the grocery store's parking lot. From the driver's POV, we see Jess walk into the store.

A teen in a Stone City letter jacket--Jaime Clutterbuck--explodes from the driver's side of the pickup and run-hops after her. His ACCOMPLICE TEEN jumps out of the passenger side and begins shooting a video with his cell.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Jess grabs a grocery cart. The two teens follow her. Jaime Clutterbuck run-hops to the meat section, grabs a blood-red steak, and displays it for the teen shooting the video.

In produce, Jess wields a large bag of Russets into the cart.

Suddenly, the teens arrive and swarm around Jess. Jaime stares at her, claws open the plastic wrapper and removes the steak. He bites into it. Blood drips down his chin.

He lunges for Jess. She steps back, grimaces. The teen videotaping laughs. Jaime joins in.

Jess stashes the cart and races out of the store.

EXT. MEATLESS - DAY

Les, in an orange carrot outfit, and Jess, in a green pea costume, wave at cars and trucks on the road in front of the restaurant.

Les holds up a sign: 30% OFF FIRST VISIT!

Jess holds up another: TRY US!

Two cars buzz past. Both HONK. A third car whizzes by. A half-eaten fast food burger SMACKS Les in the stalk. A half-second later, a milkshake SPLATTERS Jess's sneakers.

INT. STONE FAMILY RESIDENCE - DAY

Across the road, Senior witnesses the fast food drive-by attack from the front porch rocking chair. He hangs his head, and disappears through the screen door.

EXT. PIG PEN - NIGHT

In the moonlight, THREE WOMEN camouflaged in black usher a three hundred pound sow into a soccer mom's mini-van.

Their movement triggers a barnyard light sensor. They scramble into the van and PEEL OUT of the corral hotly pursued by a RANCHER wielding a shotgun.

EXT. ANIMAL SANCTUARY - DAY

As the sun rises, Les and Jess open the gate to feed the animals. The stolen sow scampers toward them. Around her neck is a sign: FREE AT LAST!!

INT. MEATLESS KITCHEN - DAY

On her cell, Jess videotapes Les as he prepares a plant based meal for the MEATLESS webcast.

INT. RAY'S RANCH HOUSE DINER - DAY

A RANCH HAND having a lunch steak at the counter nudges his colleague, a COWBOY having a double-cheeseburger. He hands him his cellphone with a confused look.

The cowboy squints derisively as he watches Les's webisode on the CELLPHONE SCREEN. Les shows his meal for the day--Basil & Heirloom Tomato Toss with Salsa Bean Burgers.

The cowboy shakes his head, drops the cell phone on the counter, and returns to his *real* burger.

EXT. STONE CITY STOCKYARDS - DAY

A half-dozen people naked, wrapped in cellophane and drenched in fake blood wobble down a promenade. They plop to the ground in front of hundreds of cattle about to be butchered.

News crews capture the protest event. Fights break out between pro- and anti-plant based groups.

EXT. MEATLESS RESTAURANT - DAY

Les and Jess hop off Fred, unlock the front doors, flip the window sign to OPEN. A few seconds later, they emerge from the front door, peer up at the rooftop solar panels. They're cracked.

Suddenly, while they're looking, a rock flies through the air and cracks another panel. They spin around and watch a pickup speed away. From the passenger side window, a hand emerges, and flips the finger their way.

INT. STONE FAMILY RESIDENCE - DAY

Les sits beside the bed of his sleeping grandfather, hooked to monitors and feeding tubes. DR. JORGE CORDERO (30s), brash and movie star handsome, pats Les on the shoulder.

DR. CORDERO

You the kid everybody's upset with?

LES

Afraid so.

The doctor gets down to business. He reviews Senior's medical report. Looks up.

DR. CORDERO

Look. The diagnosis is simple. Your grandfather's on the road to diabetes unless he changes his diet. Cancer if he doesn't stop smoking. And an early trip to the grave if he doesn't do both.

LES

Stone men can be stubborn.

DR. CORDERO
 There's stubborn. And there's
 stupid. Being both is a death wish.
 He won't listen to me. But he might
 listen to you.

Les chuckles.

LES
 Why would he do that?

DR. CORDERO
 The heart attack scared the holy
 bejesus out of him. When it comes
 to health, he trusts you.

Les stands, raises his palms in the air.

LES
 I dunno. If the town got wind I was
 involved in his recuperation and
 something happened--

DR. CORDERO
 So you're a fraud?
 (beat)
 Because you've been sermonizing
 about helping people, animals and
 the planet.

LES
 Well--

DR. CORDERO
 But not your grandfather? The one
 who is so proud of you?

LES
 Not sure he's proud of me anymore.

Senior's eyes pop open. Been listening the entire time.

SENIOR
 Malarkey. You're my pride and joy.
 Lifestyle's just different. I might
 learn something from you.

The doctor glances at Les. He nods and leaves the room.

LES
 Well. I'm happy to help. If you
 want me to.

SENIOR

I'm game for trying a new diet and some fitness stuff. Hell I'll even try giving up smoking. Ain't no way in hell I'm takin' your advice on clothes and barbers though.

Les leans over and hugs his grandfather. The monitors BEEP.
Les jumps back.

SENIOR (CONT'D)

JESUS! Don't kill me the first day you try to help me!

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. PORCH - DAY

Senior navigates the wooden porch leaning on a walker. Les urges him on. When Senior makes it to Les, they high five.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Les serves a loaded omelet to Senior, sitting at the table in his wheelchair. He points to the ingredients: PB eggs, cheese and sausage. Fresh mushrooms, peppers, and onions.

Les motions for him to try a bite. Senior chews reluctantly, before smiling. He attacks the rest and cleans the plate.

EXT. ANIMAL SANCTUARY - DAY

No longer wheelchair-bound, Senior and Les finish feeding the animals, and sit down on folding chairs.

Senior withdraws a pack of cigarettes. Les shakes his head.

Senior smirks. He takes out a pouch of tobacco. Les shakes his head again.

Senior retrieves a pack of gum. Les nods. Senior shrugs, pops gum in his mouth, offers some to Les. They both chew, smile.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Two RANCH HANDS roll the hospital bed out the door and replace it with Senior's previous, wooden poster bed. Senior falls back onto it and makes pretend snow angles. Les laughs.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Les jogs along the two lane highway. He waves to a herd of puzzled Longhorns. Momentarily, his grandfather ENTERS THE FRAME. He peddles a road bike and chomps on gum.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Dr. Cordero examines Senior. Les watches from a corner chair. The doctor removes the stethoscope and faces them.

DR. CORDERO
Good news or bad news first?

Senior shoots a plaintive look Les's way.

SENIOR
(unsure)
Good??

DR. CORDERO
You've made a remarkable recovery.

All three men smile.

SENIOR
And the bad?

DR. CORDERO
Whatever Les has been having you do, you need to keep doing it the rest of your life!

SENIOR
HA! This calls for celebration.

Senior displays gum, offers some to Les and Dr. Cordero.

SENIOR (CONT'D)
Spearmint, Peppermint or Bubble Trouble?

EXT. ANIMAL SANCTUARY - DAY

Les unlocks the gate and grabs a hay bale. He notices buzzards circling, then sees why. Dead crows litter the ground. Next to them is a handwritten note: A DONATION FOR YOUR PET PEN. - FROM YOUR NEIGHBOR.

LES
(to himself)
Run-Hop.

He glances across the road. Pickups and trailers line the Stone Livestock gravel lot. RANCHERS wander by ready to deal.

He compares that busy scene to the empty MEATLESS parking lot. Les SLAMS the gates shut and stomps across the road.

EXT. STONE RANCH - DAY

In bat-out-of-hell mode, Les enters the cattle barns. ANGUS BELLOW, Ranchers SHOUT, and an AUCTIONEER CALLS OUT bids.

With his flowing, blue hair and ear rings and in his usual skate shorts and flip-flops, Les is--to say the least--out of his element. The ranchers peer at him. Some point and LAUGH.

He scans the crowd, finds who he's looking for--Jaime Clutterbuck. He hops slightly as he leads an Angus bull into the auction ring.

The auctioneer touches the microphone before he calls the bids. Les interrupts the proceeding.

LES
You Jaime Clutterbuck?

Sudden silence. All eyes are on Les and Clutterbuck.

Levi senses a potential problem and runs toward his brother.

LEVI
BRO!

Junior throws his arm up and motions for Levi to stop.

Clutterbuck peers at Les. Ignores the outburst. Hop walks away. Les follows him. The crowd follows both of them. The Auctioneer shrugs, tosses down the mike and joins along.

LES
I received your present. D'you
always donate *dead* animals to
animal sanctuaries?

Clutterbuck turns to Les. Smiles. Doubles down.

CLUTTERBUCK
Went crow huntin' this morning.
Thought donating my kills was the
neighborly thing to do.

Les and Clutterbuck are now toe to toe.

LES

I'll take that as confirmation it was you.

CLUTTERBUCK

Yeah, asshole. Was me. Was me at the fairgrounds too. Was me at the grocery store showing your doll baby what a good steak tastes like.

Les sighs, shakes his head, and kicks off his flip-flops.

Levi and Junior look at each other. They've never seen this side of Les.

LES

You like movies, Jaime?

The crowd squeezes in, forms a circle around the two men.

CLUTTERBUCK

The hell you talkin' about?

Clutterbuck decides to make the first move. Les takes a roundhouse punch to the ribs. He staggers but doesn't fall.

Clutterbuck swings again. This time Les grabs Clutterbuck's fist, shoves it away, and tilts his head. Out of nowhere, he jumps into the air and kicks Clutterbuck in the face.

LES

That's from *Enter the Dragon*.
Bruce Lee.

Clutterbuck staggers back. Pissed. He lunges at Les. Les swiftly punches him hard in the jaw.

LES (CONT'D)

That's from the Martin Scorsese classic *Raging Bull* with DeNiro.

Blood drips from Clutterbuck's face. He massages his nose.

LES (CONT'D)

You wouldn't have liked that one.
Black and White. I see you as a
Color guy. And no subtitles, right?

Clutterbuck lunges again. Misses again.

LES (CONT'D)

Here's one I bet you know.

Les head butts his opponent. Clutterbuck blinks, wobbles.

LES (CONT'D)

Die Hard! Great head butt scene.
Bruce Willis. You know, they wanted
Clint Eastwood for the part! Thank
God they chose Bruce.

CLUTTERBUCK

Just get out of here with your
pussy food! This is cattle country,
pecker head.

Les rolls his eyes. Clutterbuck swings again but doesn't land
the punch. The momentum allows Les to slam his knee into
Clutterbuck's crotch.

LES

That nut buster move's something I
came up with myself. Les Stone.
Meatless Restaurant and Animal
Sanctuary.

Clutterbuck drops to the ground holding his balls. MOANS in
pain. Les leans over him.

LES (CONT'D)

I'm not going anywhere. Better get
used to it. Oh
(beat)
And don't expect the usual thirty
percent off on your first visit.

Les slips his flip-flops back on and exits the ring. A CLAP.
ANOTHER. Levi and Junior smile. They CLAP too.

EXT. STONE FAMILY RESIDENCE - DAY

Les bikes down the gravel road. He sees Senior on the front
porch, swinging, chomping gum.

SENIOR

'Bout ready to heat up some beans
and rice for lunch. Wanna join me?

Les takes a seat on the swing next to Senior.

LES

No thanks. Just wanted to pick that
wise old brain of yours.

SENIOR

Got the old right. Not sure about
the wise.

LES

(chuckles)

My idea's not working. All I've accomplished is getting everybody pissed at me. Even Jess. She thinks I'm not doing enough to make a go.

SENIOR

She might be right.

LES

I've tried everything. Local news. The fair stand. Jess and I even dressed up as peas and carrots.

Senior stops chomping. And swinging. Turns to Les.

SENIOR

I was in your situation once. When I first started working with my pa. Strict old son of a bitch. Everything had to be done his way. Just about lost the ranch because of his stubborn, outdated ways.

Les leans in. He's heard most of his grandfather's stories, but not this one.

SENIOR (CONT'D)

Got so bad, the bank called in the loan. Me and pa was ready to call it quits. On a ranch our family's run for a hundred years. Shameful!

Senior retrieves a handkerchief, wipes his nose.

SENIOR (CONT'D)

Your grandma made us both come to our senses. Called us dumb, proud fools. And quitters to boot! Said something I'll never forget.

Les is entranced.

SENIOR (CONT'D)

Said 'try something different.' All that tradition and pride and my way or the highway no longer worked. We was stuck in old school purgatory.

LES

What did you do?

Senior flinches, extends his palms.

SENIOR

We tried something different, of course! You ever tried arguing with your grandmother?

LES

Thought that's what I been doing.

SENIOR

Dressin' up like a carrot ain't trying somethin' different.

(beat)

When you was in Austin, you ever go see music acts in some of them run down joints on Dirty Sixth?

LES

Sure, all the time.

SENIOR

Got pretty busy, didn't it?

Les begins to understand where Senior's headed.

SENIOR (CONT'D)

Get creative as hell. Your customers need a reason to change. Like I did. Course, don't want everybody to have a heart attack. Won't have any customers left.

Les smiles, hugs Senior and hops back on his bike. He turns.

LES

So, you saved the ranch by trying something different?

SENIOR

Oh, hell no! We filed bankruptcy.

LES

Huh?!

SENIOR

But, by doing that, we was able to reorganize. And--

LES

Try something different!

Senior nods. He opens the screen door and heads into the kitchen for rice and beans.

EXT. STONE CITY - DAY

Les stands below a billboard on the road leading into town. The BILLBOARD WORKER finishes. Les flashes a thumbs up.

ON THE BILLBOARD

A family of cowboys and cowgirls peers over a platter of tacos piled high. It reads: At MEATLESS, you'll never EAT LESS. ALL-YOU-CAN-EAT TACO TUESDAYS. JUST \$4.99.

INT. MEATLESS DINING ROOM - NIGHT

A country BAND plays on a makeshift stage. The place is packed with CUSTOMERS.

Les and Jess sport big grins and bump fists before getting back to work serving drinks and snacks.

EXT. ANIMAL CEMETERY - DAY

In a fenced area, beside the Animal Sanctuary, Les and Jess cut a grand opening ribbon for the new animal cemetery.

The banner reads: HOMEWARD BOUND RESTING GROUNDS. And: *Rest in Peace Animal Friends.*

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - NIGHT

A MEATLESS-branded food truck sits next to a half dozen others at a Stone City High School football game. The other trucks serve every meat known to man. Each with long LINES.

Les and Jess lean on their elbows inside the food truck peering out at the robust business being done. Except at the MEATLESS food truck.

INT. CHURCH BASEMENT - DAY

Churchgoers stand in line at a buffet table covered in potluck style dishes.

Les and Jess dish out vegetables and plant based foods. The PARISHIONERS smirk and frown. Several hand back their plates.

INT. JESS'S CLASSROOM - NIGHT

The chalkboard reads: PARENTS, WELCOME TO OPEN HOUSE!

The students' PARENTS filter in. The mood's upbeat. LAUGHTER. Smiles. Everyone's dressed up. Even Parker wears a tie.

The guests line up at a long table where Jess and the kids serve them "burgers," "nuggets," salads, sweet potato fries, and smoothies.

Parents manage to find the prideful will to squeeze and squirm into the kid-sized desk seats. Jess trots happily to the front. She clears her throat.

JESS

Welcome parents to your child's fourth grade open house! I'm Ms. Vaughn. Feel free to call me Jess.

PARKER

Nice to know ya, JESS!

JESS

Not you, Parker. You still call me Ms. Vaughn!

The other kids laugh. Parker smirks. His MOTHER shoots him the stink eye.

JESS (CONT'D)

I'd also like to welcome Principal Strother King!

Jess leads the room in APPLAUSE. PRINCIPAL STROTHER KING (50s) bald, plastic-rimmed glasses, ever the politician/administrator, waves to the parents.

JESS (CONT'D)

We hope you enjoyed the food. All prepared by the kids and me.

APPLAUSE and PRAISE from the parents.

FEMALE PARENT

Spectacular chicken!

MALE PARENT

Three of the best burgers I ever ate.

JESS

Glad you liked it. Bet you didn't even notice it was all plant based!

CLOSE-UPS ON

the parents' puzzled faces. Jess continues.

JESS (CONT'D)

And now the second part of our program. A video written, directed, edited and starring your kids.

Jess steps to the side, extends her hand to a large TV.

JESS (CONT'D)

The worldwide debut of: HOW OUR CLASS BECAME VEGUCATED.

The lights go off.

VIDEO BEGINS.

EXT. CATTLE RANCH - DAY

Sage grooms a LONGHORN. She spins and smiles at the camera.

SAGE

All the kids in our class are like most other kids everywhere. We love animals. Like my Longhorn Bernie.

EXT. PIG PEN - DAY

Parker wallows in mud with a PIG. Both of them turn to the camera, both smiling, their faces covered in mud.

PARKER

And my Yorkshire boar, Bennie.

Parents and kids LAUGH.

EXT. CHICKEN COOP - DAY

Josh struts behind a CROWING ROOSTER, walking like an Egyptian. He CROWS like the rooster and turns to the camera.

JOSH

And my Rhode Island Red Rooster, Mr. Clucky!

EXT. CATTLE SLAUGHTERHOUSE - DAY

Now the video changes course. CATTLE shuffle from a muddy yard onto an assembly line.

A WORKER in a white apron and hardhat wields a captive bolt gun.

We hear the BLAM of the bolt being fired into the bull's forehead but don't see it on screen. We see the worker's white apron suddenly speckled with red blood.

Another WORKER skins the carcass. OTHERS split it, wash it, and toss it on a conveyor belt. Still another WORKER deftly cuts red meat into different sizes and shapes. Just a visit to the local butcher shop, but on larger, factory scale.

SAGE (V.O.)

So why do we kill them? When we don't *really* need to?

CONCERNED PARENT (O.S.)

What is this?!!

INT. TABLE - DAY

Shots of fruits and vegetables of all types, raw, cooked. Grains of every variety, raw and cooked.

PARKER (V.O.)

The truth is we really don't need to kill animals for food when there are so many healthy alternatives. Fruits, vegetables, grains. Protein-rich and really tasty!

EXT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

At checkout, plant based foods roll down the conveyor belt. Unprocessed PB-brand hamburger, eggs, cheese, tenders, chorizo, pizza, sausage, seitan, tofu, jack fruit.

JOSH (V.O.)

Not to mention plant based meals like you just ate here at Open House. They taste, look, even smell like real meat.

EXT. RANCH - DAY

Parker appears ON SCREEN. CATTLE graze behind him.

PARKER

Do we kill our animals because of the money? Sure, ranching is critical to the economy.

(MORE)

PARKER (CONT'D)

But industrial farming, ranching
and meat processing is NOT family
ranching. It's big business at its
worst.

EXT. PIG PEN - DAY

Josh APPEARS. PIGS battle at the feed trough behind him.

JOSH

And, we also know a plant based
lifestyle is better for our health,
our planet's health, and the health
and life of the animals we love.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Sage appears ON SCREEN. Cattle, chickens, pigs, horses, other
animals run and play behind her.

SAGE

Think about it from their
perspective.

She turns to the animals.

ANIMATION BEGINS

Animated cows, pigs, chickens and horses sit at a table.
Human body parts--legs, chests, heads--rest on plates before
them. The animals begin to cut and eat the human food.

SAGE (V.O.)

What if they raised us, humans, as
food? What if they gave us names,
then slaughtered us and their
children?

(beat)

YOUR children!

ANIMATION ENDS

FEMALE PARENT (O.S.)

OH MY GOD!!

EXT. FIELD - DAY

All of the other kids in class, all eleven of them, appear ON
SCREEN with Sage and the animals. They peer at the camera.

JESS'S ENTIRE FOURTH GRADE CLASS
 So do something different! For our
 animals. For yourselves and for us,
 your kids.

VIDEO ENDS

INT. JESS'S CLASSROOM - NIGHT

The screen goes dark. The classroom lights come on.

ON JESS

She applauds, runs to the front of the room.

ON THE KIDS

They join in with applause. Smiles, braces, tears of pride.

ON THE PARENTS

Complete silence. Frowns. Anger. Disgust.

The PARENTS snatch the arms of their children and drag their
 CRYING, PROTESTING kids from the room.

An angry FATHER gets toe to toe with Jess, points at her.

FATHER

You ought to be ashamed!

He spins on his heels, grabs his son--Parker--and bolts out
 the door. Parker shirks off his father's arm on the way out.

The principal marches to Jess. Peers at her, grits his teeth.

KING

Clean out your desk. DO NOT come
 back here tomorrow. At least we
 won't have to deal with horse dung
 on our front lawn anymore.

Jess plops down in her chair. She turns over her nameplate,
 MS. VAUGHN. 4th Grade, and starts packing.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

EXT. ANIMAL SANCTUARY - NIGHT

A LOCUST lands on a PIG.

Then another.

More locust land on other LIVESTOCK. The sky fills with them.

Their LOUD CRACKING SNAPS are like thunder, drowning out the WAILS coming from the frightened animals.

Les bursts from the barn. He runs to the animals, flicking off locusts. He ushers them into the barn and slams the door.

LES (V.O.)

That night, Jess not only lost her job. We also lost our dream.

Les hears a SMASH of broken glass, then another. The lights of the restaurant flicker, then fade out.

LES (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Maybe the Gods were telling us something by sending locusts that come just once every seven years.

INT. MEATLESS DINING ROOM - DAY

The locust invasion has ended. The room is covered with them. In masks and goggles, Les and Jess sweep away the carnage.

EXT. MEATLESS RESTAURANT PARKING LOT - DAY

Les stakes a FOR SALE sign. Jess grabs his hand and sighs.

JESS

I would've kept trying, you know. A few bugs and broken glass shouldn't stop us.

Les surveys his flip-flopped feet. He glances up.

LES

I was naïve. Gave it my all, though.

JESS

Did you really?

She snuffles. A mini-van pulls into the circular drive.

JESS (CONT'D)

Mom's gonna give me a ride to College Station. The campus vet offered me an assistant's job.

LES
 We've got an entire animal
 sanctuary *here* you can vet!

She shakes her head and tosses her backpack into the mini van. JESS'S MOM and Les exchange perfunctory smiles.

JESS
 We both need a fresh start. Workin'
 with your family might do you good.

Jess climbs into the van. They exchange waves as the mini-van pulls onto the highway.

Les picks up a HEN that wanders over from the sanctuary.

LES
 (addressing the hen)
 Lay-Ze, this is the scene in movies
 they call *All is Lost*.

Suddenly, a Texas downpour--out of the blue and heavy. Les races into the barn carrying the hen.

INT. BARN - DAY

Once inside, Les hears Fred WHINNY. He looks at Fred, looks out at the downpour, looks at Fred again. He places Lay-Ze on the ground. She CLUCKS WILDLY.

Les grabs a baseball cap, hops on Fred, bareback, and kicks him into a gallop.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

The wind picks up. What was a downpour is now a monsoon.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Fred gallops down the deserted highway leaping over large pools of rainwater covering the slippery blacktop.

Les sees Jess's van at a four-way stop. The rain feels like bullets fired from the clouds. The van creeps forward.

LES
 NO! JESS!

The van's brake lights come on. Jess leaps from the passenger side. Les jumps off Fred and runs to her. They embrace.

LES (CONT'D)

Please stay.

(beat)

I love you! I've always loved you!

Jess steps back. Swallows hard. The pelting rain blends in with the tears flowing down her cheeks.

JESS

I know you love me. And you know I love you.

LES

I believe in us!

JESS

(long beat)

But you don't believe in you.

She smiles and climbs back into the van.

Rain drips off the bill of Les's cap as he watches the van become a tiny dot and then disappear.

INT. MINI-VAN - DAY

Jess glances at the rearview. Les stands alone in the downpour. She begins to sob.

JESS'S MOM

He's a good boy, Jess. Why'd you give up on him?

Jess wipes her eyes. After a beat...

JESS

I didn't. He gave up on himself.

INT. AIRPORT LOUNGE - DAY

As he awaits boarding call, celebrity chef Lane SPINELLI (40s) sips on a martini and signs autographs.

He's grunged-out in his most outrageous bowling shirt, shorts and high top sneakers. Gold bling dangles from his fleshy neck. His spiked hair and goatee are dyed white.

His ASSISTANT passes him her phone.

ASSISTANT

Check this out. If it doesn't make you bawl, I'll wash and wax the Mustang every day this month.

Lane bolts to attention. He watches the kids' infamous Open House video on the phone.

ON THE SCREEN

After that video ends, the screen fades to black. Another video begins. Sage, Parker, and Josh, speak to the camera.

SAGE

Chef Spinelli, our fourth grade class made the video you just saw. We showed it to our parents. We hoped they'd learn about plant-based food. How it's good for animals, people, and the planet.

JOSH

But they hated it. Our teacher got fired. And the place here in Stone City that she helped start with her boyfriend, MEATLESS, is for sale.

PARKER

We love Food Dude. You really rock!

JOSH

So, we've got a favor to ask. Can you come to Stone City? And do your show at MEATLESS?

SAGE

Show our parents and our town, heck, the world, plant based food's cool. Us kids have to live on this planet way after you grownups are gone. So...

SAGE, PARKER, JOSH

(simultaneously)

PLEASE HELP US! COME TO TEXAS!

ON LANE

He hands the phone back to his assistant. A tear slides down his cheek. She calls him on it.

ASSISTANT

Thought so. Looks like I'm in the clear for that car washing bet.

A thin smile forms on Lane's lips. He slaps his airline ticket into his assistant's palm.

LANE

Exchange our tickets for Stone City, Texas. Wherever that is.

She salutes and heads for the ticket counter. He shouts.

LANE (CONT'D)

And send the Mustang! Gonna need a grand entrance for this one.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. SAM HOUSTON ELEMENTARY - DAY

Lane explodes out of the school's front doors followed by Sage, Parker and Josh. Principal King and HIS STAFF wave to them. The noses of TEACHERS and STUDENTS are pressed against classroom windows. Lane's FILM CREW captures the action.

LANE

Today, a truly special show. I'm here in Stone City, Texas, invited by these three awesome kids, Sage, Parker, and Josh...

ON THE KIDS

LANE (CONT'D)

...to visit the only plant based joint in town. It's got such an awe-inspiring story, we're doing the entire show there.

Lane and the kids reach a baby blue 1965 Mustang convertible, his iconic car shown on most episodes. The boys hop over the door into the back seat. Lane opens the passenger door for Sage, and turns to the camera.

LANE (CONT'D)

This is FOOD DUDE!

EXT. MEATLESS RESTAURANT - DAY

Les hauls two bags of leftovers to the compost bin. From the two lane highway, HONKING HORNS startle him.

He watches a blue Mustang turn into the driveway followed by a long parade of cars and trucks.

The Mustang pulls beside him. Lane and the kids hop out. Les recognizes the celebrity chef. He drops the compost bags. Speechless. Jaw hanging.

Lane strolls toward him as his crew films.

LANE

So, the kids tell me there's this guy in town who makes the best food in the entire Lone Star State. And guess what? It's entirely plant based. But you wouldn't know it! We'll soon find out if that's true. Because this is that guy. Meet Les! Les Stone. Welcome to Meatless Restaurant and Animal Sanctuary!

The crew stops filming. The DRIVERS and PASSENGERS run toward Lane, Les and the kids. Les shakes Lane's hand. He surveys the enormous crowd.

LES

We're gonna need more tofu.

INT. MEATLESS KITCHEN - DAY

Klieg lights bear down on Lane and Les as they finish a recipe. The tiny kitchen's packed with members of the crew. The kids watch from the counter. Lane takes a bite of what Les has prepared. He pauses for dramatic effect. A beat.

LANE

Holy Mother of Pearl that's good! There is no way that's not real sausage.

LES

Nope, just seitan and spices, cooked with love.

Lane chuckles and places a hand on Les's shoulder.

LANE

I know it's been a busy day for you.

(MORE)

LANE (CONT'D)

But I've got just one more surprise. The kids told me we should invite a person very special to you. So I contacted her and asked her here to today's show.

The film crew stands aside and lets the guest make her way through. It's Jess. She walks slowly toward Les. Then breaks into a run. He extends his arms. They embrace. Tears fall.

JESS

Thought you could use some help.

LES

You've been helping me all your life. Why stop now?

Les leans in. They kiss. Passionately. Lane smiles, shrugs.

INT. MEATLESS DINING ROOM - DAY

The DINERS watch the live feed. They APPLAUD and WHISTLE for what they see on the screen.

INT. MEATLESS KITCHEN - DAY

Lane faces the camera, places a hand on Jess's and Les's shoulders.

LANE

I should explain to those at home. This is no stranger Les is kissing! It's Jess Vaughn, co-owner of Meatless. And, she's the kids' former 4th Grade teacher.

INT. MEATLESS DINING ROOM - DAY

Principal King hears the word former and stands up. The CAMERA catches his response.

KING

Not former! Current. The kids...the faculty...and I want you back!

The kids are overwhelmed with happiness. They cheer.

SAGE, PARKER, JOSH

ALRIGHT MS. VAUGHN!

INT. MEATLESS KITCHEN - DAY

Lane turns to Les.

LANE

There's just one last thing.

(beat)

How do I adopt that rooster I saw
with wild hair like mine?

LES

(laughing)

Just a little paperwork and ten
bucks a month. All proceeds go
toward rescuing other animals.

LANE

Sounds like a fair exchange to me!

Lane withdraws a ten dollar bill, hands it to Les.

LANE (CONT'D)

There's my first installment.

The diners break into applause.

LANE (CONT'D)

Les and Jess, you two have
something special here. I hope our
show helps get the word out just
how truly special it is.

He signs off with his signature catch phrase.

LANE (CONT'D)

So that's our show. But, remember,
someday, somewhere, I might just
drop by your town and say...

ANOTHER ANGLE

All the diners stand and shout...

DINERS

COOK ME SOME FOOD, DUDE!

The crowd CHEERS. Les and Jess reunite with the kids.

The diners surround Lane and pose for selfies.

Alley races to Les for a hug.

Senior pulls Jess to him, embraces her and smiles.

Les laughs when he sees his father and Levi. They've both dyed their closely-cropped hair blue like Jess's. Junior reaches to shake his son's hand. Les pushes it away, and wraps his arms around his father in a happy, tearful hug.

EXT. MEATLESS RESTAURANT - DAY

SUPER: TWO MONTHS LATER

Les locks the restaurant door. The drapes are closed. An OUT OF BUSINESS sign in the window.

LES (V.O.)
 MEATLESS did gangbusters for a while after Lane's FOOD DUDE episode aired. Folks came from around the world to try the food.

He climbs into the passenger side of a truck with STONE RANCH painted on the door.

LES (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 But, we really needed Stone City locals to sustain the restaurant. Unfortunately, they soon went back to their old meat loving ways. Change is hard for some folks.

INT. TRUCK - DAY

He smiles at Jess behind the wheel.

EXT. MEATLESS RESTAURANT PARKING LOT - DAY

When the CAMERA PULLS BACK, we see a horsebox trailer converted to a food truck and hitched to the Stone Ranch truck. MEATLESS ON WHEELS in block letters cover the front.

LES (V.O.)
 But grandpa was right. If you really, truly believe in something that can change the world...

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY

The MEATLESS ON WHEELS food truck is set up under a shady Live Oak. Jess takes orders at the front window while Les cooks in the mobile kitchen behind her.

LES (V.O.)
 ...you just have to keep trying
 something different. Because, who
 knows?

EXT. JUNIOR'S NEW TRUCK - DAY

Junior parks his new pickup truck beside the food trailer and
 climbs down from the driver's side. Senior and Levi get out
 on the passenger side. Les hands them all plastic plates
 piled high with plant based food.

LES (V.O.)
 Little by little. One day, you just
 might find, you *have* changed a few
 minds. And, made the world a little
 bit better.

Junior points to the metal nameplate badge--FORD F-150
 LIGHTNING. He withdraws a handkerchief and dramatically
 polishes the second line: 100% ELECTRIC. Les smiles and nods.

LES (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Even if it's just for your own
 family...

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY

Sage, Parker, Josh, and other students and faculty sit in
 folding chairs nearby doing the same. The CAMERA PULLS OUT to
 reveal a glass, encased sign: SAM HOUSTON ELEMENTARY.

LES (V.O.)
 ...a few friends and neighbors...

Tied to the school sign is a Yorkshire BOAR enjoying melons,
 rind and all. His collar reads: CANTALOUPE, JR.

LES (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 ...and the animals we love and name
 on this crazy, spinning planet we
 all call home.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END

ROLL CREDITS

EXT. ANIMAL SANCTUARY - DAY (OUTTAKE #1 AS CREDITS ROLL)

Lane feeds a GOAT. The goat gobbles down the feed and snaps at him. Lane drops the feed and runs. The goat chases him.

LANE
SON OF A BISCUIT! Ever hear don't
bite the hand that feeds you!

FILM CREW MEMBERS (O.C.)
(wild laughter)

ANIMAL SANCTUARY (OUTTAKE #2 AS CREDITS ROLL)

With Les, Jess, and the kids watching, Lane strokes the back of a LONGHORN. Lane's suddenly a little fat city kid again, in cattle ranch heaven. He grins at the camera.

Suddenly a BOOMING FART. The Longhorn turns his head toward Lane, who flinches and waves the air, his eyes watering.

LES, JESS, KIDS AND FILM CREW
(more wild laughter)

ANIMAL SANCTUARY (OUTTAKE #3 AS CREDITS ROLL)

Lane steps in pig dung. Glances at his sneakers. He stares at the camera.

LANE
(sighs)
Oh, Lord.

FILM CREW MEMBERS (O.C.)
(even more wild laughter)

Lane LAUGHS along.

FADE TO BLACK.

CREDITS ROLL TO END.