

Meet Les!

TV PILOT:
"Try Something Different"

written 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

POV - LES Stone

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

SUPER: *TEN YEARS AGO*

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. Or
person.

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.)
For example, 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 really 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
Ribeye steaks.

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 gulps and waves 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, wave, and YELL at rowdy pigs.

LES (V.O.)
And even though they were among the
smartest animals on earth, to
grandpa and dad, our pigs were just
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 in the pen, 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 animals.

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

LES (V.O.) (CONT'D)
That's 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 to 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, disappointed at his son. Les sobs as 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.

Sobbing, 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 ear rings 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 Bumfuck.

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

LES
Where's the bug?

JESS
Sold her. Subs don't earn enough
for the gas to get to school.

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

She chuckles and changes the subject.

JESS
You all educated-up now like moi?

LES
If you call what you got at A&M an education.

JESS
As I recall, we kicked your ass in the Championship Game.

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

LES
Wait!

Les hops off the horse and approaches the rattler.

JESS
You out of your mind? My class just studied those things. Seven thousand Texans get bit every year!

Les creeps toward the snake. Its eyes open. It RATTLES. Its forked tongue flits from its fanged mouth.

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

The snake rears up, rattles louder, thrusts its tongue at Les. He flinches. Backs off. Rethinks his game plan.

JESS
God-damn it, 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. It slithers away. Les remounts Fred. A beat.

JESS (CONT'D)
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, opinionated on all subjects, mans the elastrator band to castrate unfortunate bulls.

Junior ear-tags cattle.

Senior fills a bin with corn for the pigs. Some 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. Through the pane glass window, she keeps an eye on Fred tied up to a parking meter.

JESS

The Lesters still want you to take
over the ranch?

Les glances out the window. Sore subject, one he's tired of
discussing and exhausted thinking about. He sighs.

LES

Yea. Dad has a job in mind. Calls
it a first step to learn the ropes.

JESS

So, like, lassoing strays then?

LES

Ha ha. The stand-up routine needs
work.

A gum chomping WAITRESS brings out two loaded Cobb salads.
Les and Jess look at each other. It's happened again.

LES (CONT'D)

We, uh, we don't eat meat.

The waitress stops mid-chomp. Lunchtime on a busy all-you-
can-eat specials' day. She has no patience for two hippies.

WAITRESS

It's a Cobb. Cobb's got meat.

LES

Right. But we asked for two Cobb
salads, minus meat. So no bacon, no
ham, no turkey.

The waitress begins re-chomping in double-time. With her
fingers, she slides the meats from each salad onto her
serving tray. She spins toward the kitchen and calls back.

WAITRESS

Enjoy.

Les and Jess survey the decimated salads then each other then
the salads again. They break into uncomfortable LAUGHTER.

JESS

This happen to you in Austin?

LES

Never. It was plant-based heaven.

Jess shoves her salad bowl away. Leans toward Les.

JESS

We should start our own restaurant.
One that caters to the type of food
we like. Good tasting. Good for the
planet. Good for the animals.

LES

Because they don't get eaten? What
a novel idea. 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 sigh.

LES (CONT'D)

Besides, hate to disappoint the
Lesters. They'd never forgive me.
Think I was a family traitor.

Jess cups Les's hands in hers.

JESS

Sometimes I'm amazed the man I
love, the same one who raised
championship bulls with watermelon
sized balls hasn't been able to
grow any himself.

Les flinches. Jess tosses her napkin on the table.

JESS (CONT'D)

I'm gonna be late for afternoon
classes. Come on, I'll drop you off
on the way to school.

INT. JESS'S CLASSROOM - DAY

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

She 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.

JESS

Thank you, Parker, for the warning.

PARKER

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

Parker seems oblivious to the information sharing. The rest of the class is not. Uncontrollable laughter breaks out.

JESS

Leave that cleanup to me. I'd rather hear everyone's thoughts about the homework assignment.

Eleven-year-old wiseguy JOSH raises his hand.

JOSH

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

Jess frowns, tries to regain control.

JESS

Let's try to keep the discussion clean. What do 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 are carnivores. We're born to eat meat.

JESS

Not entirely true. We can survive
without it. We don't need to eat
animals. We choose to.

She glances at the students. Many of them disagree.

JESS (CONT'D)

Anyone tell me the *benefits* of a
diet without animal meat?

Sage stands up. She arranges her dress. 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 the evil eye to Parker. Sage presses on.

SAGE

Second, a meatless diet is
healthier.

JOSH

(fake coughs)
Bullshit.

JESS

Look, the next person who says the
"S" word will clean up the "S"
outside on the playground.

That threat did the trick. Silence.

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. Applause breaks out.

JESS

Sage made some good points. So class, what's stopping us from reducing our meat consumption?

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

CHERYL ANN

It tastes so GOOD!!

JESS

I bet I could serve you a plant-based dish every bit as tasty as one with meat.

The kids all MOAN in disagreement.

JESS (CONT'D)

And if that's the case, what else is stopping us?

PARKER

Protein. Can't get it in veggies. Gotta have protein for energy.

JESS

Again, not entirely true. What else?

Sage rises again. She's brave for what she's about to say.

SAGE

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

JESS

Certainly important. But would that alone stop you from killing animals, from eating meat if we could reduce climate change, save animals, and live a healthier life?

SAGE

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

Sage looks around the room. The students scoot to the edge of their seats. Josh squints at her, grins like an evil clown. She nervously adjusts her dress. In a squeaky voice--

SAGE (CONT'D)

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

Sage plops back into her chair. Folds her hands as if praying. Avoids eye contact with the other kids.

LAUGHTER. WHISPERING. High five SLAPS.

The bell RINGS. The students pack up.

When the students have left, Sage approaches Jess's desk.

SAGE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, Ms. Vaughn. I was just being honest.

JESS

All good. It's my job to teach you facts and dispel myths. It's your job to learn and make good decisions based on that knowledge.

Sage nods. She hugs Jess and runs out the door.

INT. HEART OF TEXAS MEAT COMPANY - DAY

In the hot mess he calls his office, HEYWOOD COLE (60s) the frumpy, fast talking owner of the local slaughterhouse greets Les and his father.

Stacks of invoices. Crushed cola cans. Polaroids of Cole and ranchers hanging crooked on the wall.

COLE

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

JUNIOR

He is a handsome lad ain't he, Woody?

COLE

Like a blue ribbon bull drivin' the cows wild.

Junior and Cole share LAUGHTER. Les smirks.

JUNIOR

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

COLE

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

Les grimaces, extends his palms in protest.

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 CHORTLES at his weak joke. Junior does too. Les shakes
his head and MUMBLES to himself.

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 breath
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 FAMILY RESIDENCE - DAY

Les's mother ALLEY Stone (50s) a sentimental, absent-minded, blonde sweetheart totes a baked ham to the dinner table. She places it next to a silver platter topped with a huge turkey.

The over-the-top spread's straight out of a Norman Rockwell painting. Mostly meats. Chicken fried steak (of course), barbecued ribs, ribeye, pork chops. And comfort food sides slathered in sauce. Vegetables? Mostly an afterthought.

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

Junior occupies one end of the table, Senior, the other. Les, Jess, Levi, and Alley round out the rest.

Junior extends his hands, bows his head. They all hold hands and close their eyes.

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.

ALLEY

Go ahead.

Levi stabs a piece of ham and passes the platter to her.

Around the table all the plates are piled high with meat, sauces and gravy. Except for Les's. And Jess's. Junior notices the discrepancy.

JUNIOR

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. Finishes chewing. Shakes his head.

LES

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

Levi motions to Les with a wave of his hand to get it out.

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

LES
Vegan.

Silence. Then--

SENIOR
Vegan? As in--

JESS
We no longer eat anything that
feels pain. Nothing that flies,
walks or swims. And low or no
processing. Natural foods.

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.

SENIOR
And grandson!

LES
I know. It's just a better way.
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 she doesn't like it.

ALLEY
Let's talk about this later. This
should be a happy occasion to
celebrate Les's graduation.
(beat)
How's the job going that your dad
got for you, Les?

ALLEY (CONT'D)
I quit.

Silverware PLOPS on plates. Junior frowns at Les.

JUNIOR
Why would you do that?

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 can teach you the life of the
cowboy, bro. It's hard but it's a
blast.

Senior stands up. Walks around to Les, places his hands on
his shoulders, squeezes.

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.

SENIOR (CONT'D)
Open it.

Les is puzzled. He 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
Your grandpa and I thought you
might fix up the old farmhouse
that's already there.

SENIOR
Come here. Everybody.

They all follow Senior into the living room.

LIVING ROOM

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

SENIOR (CONT'D)

Yours as far as you can see. Just a stone's throw away from the ranch.

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

JUNIOR

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

Les scratches his head. Places a hand around Jess's waist.

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

Yep! I'll eat there for sure!

LEVI

Me too! Long as you have chicken fried steak.

Les glances at Jess. She tilts her head toward his family, nudges him.

LES

It'll be vegan. 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

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

SUPER: *Two Months Later*

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. 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 vegan--

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 the concept, in fact, isn't it?

They walk to a nearby wooden fence. Behind it are a Doctor Doolittle-menagerie of ranch animals.

LES

That's right. The profits from the restaurant 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, all have been adopted by foster families.

VERONICA SNOW

Foster families?

LES

You can adopt one of the animals for a 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.

He knows where she's going with this line of questioning.

VERONICA STONE

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

Les is desperate 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 pile. 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 pork 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 takes a deep breath. Stares vacuously at her. He has no answer. She turns to the camera and wraps up.

VERONICA SNOW (CONT'D)

So, that does it for us. Your chance to meet Les! Les Stone, that is, owner of a new vegan restaurant and animal sanctuary, MEATLESS! 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

Words out though. 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! Do you know how much money my bank has lent to you and other ranchers over the years?

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, gonna mean economic disaster for this town, this county, this entire state!

He spins on his heels and heads for the door.

LEVI

We're gonna be a laughingstock if that place makes it, aren't we?

JUNIOR

Sometimes you just gotta fight for what you believe in. 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 the vinyl sign outside.

Levi slowly reads aloud as the words go up.

LEVI

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

INT. JESS'S CLASSROOM - DAY

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

PARKER

Open House is always so lame. Our parents embarrass us. 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 vacation places we've
been to?

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 approval. A wave of enthusiasm.

JESS (CONT'D)

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

SAGE

Yay! 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. Open
House Dinner and a Movie. Good luck
filmmakers!

EXT. LONGHORN COUNTY FAIR - DAY

Les sets up a retrofitted camper turned fair food stand for
MEATLESS and the animal sanctuary. Above the order window, a
menu lists the options, all plant based.

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

Jess passes out flyers.

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

Les hands out brochures.

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

FAIRGOERS politely brush off Les and Jess. Instead, they head
for the BUDDY'S Barbecue 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 shoves the promo materials into Les's hands.

JESS
You are a genius Les Stone!

Les is surprised by that reaction.

She gives him a peck on the cheek. Seconds later, she totes a small grill and a platter of veggies and PB meats.

JESS (CONT'D)
Stop admiring my beauty and start
grilling!

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

EXT. BUDDY'S BARBECUE 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
with extra sauce and charro beans
with bacon!

PARKER
No, not here, shit-for-brains!
Behind us.

They all turn around and see Les in a silly chef hat at the grill. Smoke rises into the sky. Jess fills plates and bowls.

SAGE
Come on!

The three curious kids race over to Les and Jess.

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 begins to grow at the stand. 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 hell is tempoo?

SAGE

PEH! 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 shakes her head. Josh grabs one of the slider samples
he's supposed to be handing out and woofs it down in one
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--clamor 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 by each.

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 - DAY

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
Called 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 hop in a truck and take
off.

LES
You recognize them?

LEVI
Not their faces. But one of them
had this run-hop thing. I think its
one of our ranch hands. Jaime
Clutterbuck.

JESS
You see him set the fire?

LEVI
No. But the fire started exactly
same time they took off. Had to be
Jaime.

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

LEVI (CONT'D)
A lot of folks aren't happy with
your big plans, Les

LES
Starting to get that message.

Jess shakes her head at Les and stomps off.

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. 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
Heard the story a thousand times.

A pickup truck coming from the opposite direction honks.
Mayor Allen stops chatting and waves as it passes.

ALLEN

Ronnie Jackson. Knowed that guy
'bout fifty years.

LES

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

ALLEN

Point is this, son. Your idea ain't
welcome here. 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 really think Jess and I are
a threat to the ranch business?

ALLEN

Don't matter what I think. Only
what the voters think. Right now,
they think you're a problem.
Between me and you, they FEAR
you're a 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
work for your daddy and granddaddy.

Les removes his hands from the window, stands erect.

LES

That fire was the worst thing they
could have done.

ALLEN

I know! Lucky nobody got hurt.

LES

You miss my point. Worst thing because it only convinced me what we're doing is right. We WON'T quit. So thank you mayor 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. GROCERY STORE - DAY

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

A TEEN in a Stone City letter jacket explodes from the driver's side of the pickup and run hops after her. Another TEEN jumps out from the passenger side, and takes a video with his cell phone.

LES (V.O.)

The days following the good mayor's lecture were a nightmare.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Jess grabs a grocery cart and double checks her list. The two teens follow her.

CLERKS look up from their check out duties and shrug to each other. Just another bunch of teens capturing mindless footage for their social media accounts.

The first teen run-hops to the meat section. He grabs a large blood-red steak, displays it for the teen shooting the video.

LES (V.O.)

Who knew a disagreement over meats versus beets could become so hostile?

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

Suddenly, the teens arrive, swarm around Jess. Mr. Run-Hop 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. Run-Hop joins in.

Jess stashes the cart and races out of the store.

LES (V.O.) (CONT'D)
They stalked and bullied Jess at
the grocery 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.

LES (V.O.)
In a hopeless attempt to lure us
over to the dark side, they shared
some of their favorite foods.

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.

LES (V.O.)
The pro-plant based groups didn't
behave well either.

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!!

LES (V.O.)
Though they did make a lot of
livestock animals happy.

INT. MEATLESS KITCHEN - DAY

Jess videotapes Les on her cell as he prepares a vegan meal for his webcast.

LES (V.O.)
Jess and I tried everything we
could to promote the restaurant.

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.

LES (V.O.)
Some folks just couldn't be
convinced.

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.

LES (V.O.)
On both sides of the topic.

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.

LES (V.O.)
Instead of paving the way for
understanding, we'd laid a
foundation for animosity and
division.

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.

LES (V.O.) (CONT'D)
And it didn't look like it was
going to end anytime soon.

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.

DR. CORDERO (CONT'D)
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.

LES (CONT'D)
Malarkey. You're my pride and joy.
Lifestyle's just different. I might
could learn something from you.

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

LES (CONT'D)
Well. I'm happy to help. If you
want me to.

SENIOR
I'm game for trying a new diet and
some fitness stuff.
(MORE)

SENIOR (CONT'D)
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.

JUNIOR
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. Les points to the ingredients laid out. Plant
based eggs, cheese and sausage. Fresh mushrooms, peppers, and
onions.

Senior grimaces. Les motions for him to try a bite. Senior
chews slowly, smiles. Attacks the rest and cleans the plate.

EXT. ANIMAL SANCTUARY - DAY

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

Senior reaches into his pocket, withdraws a pack of
cigarettes. Les shakes his head.

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

Senior withdraws 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 old, 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 comes into the frame. He peddles a road bike, chomps on gum.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Dr. Cordero examines Senior. Les watches from a chair in the corner. 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
This calls for celebration.

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

SENIOR (CONT'D)
Spearmint, Peppermint or Clove?

EXT. ANIMAL SANCTUARY - DAY

Les unlocks the gate, grabs a bale of hay, and approaches the animals. Out of the corner of his eye, he notice buzzards circling, then sees why. Six dead crows lay on the ground.

Next to the dead birds is a handwritten note: A DONATION FOR
YOUR PET PEN. -A GIFT FROM YOUR NEIGHBOR.

LES
(to himself)
Run-Hop.

He looks across road. Pickups and trailers line the gravel lot. RANCHERS cruise the compound ready to deal livestock.

He compares that to the MEATLESS parking lot. Empty. Not a single customer. Les tosses down the hay bale, 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, an AUCTIONEER CALLS OUT bids.

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

He scans the crowd, finds who he's looking for--ranch hand JAIME CLUTTERBUCK (19), stocky, swaggering, filthy. 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's in the crowd. He runs toward his brother.

LEVI
BRO!

Junior throws his arm up. 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 got your present. 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 within feet of each other.

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. 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
What the fuck 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. Tilts his head. And suddenly kicks
Clutterbuck in the face.

LES
That's from "Enter the Dragon."
Bruce Lee.

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

LES (CONT'D)
That's from the Martin Scorsese
classic "Raging Bull" with Robert
DeNiro.

Blood drips from Clutterbuck's face.

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 wipes away the blood. Another lunge. Another miss.

LES (CONT'D)
 Here's one I bet you saw.

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! Glad
 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 one's original. It's from me.
 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're CLAPPING too.

EXT. GRANDFATHER KING'S RANCH - DAY

Les bikes up 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. He pauses, sighs.

LES

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 dad.
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 dad 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.

(MORE)

SENIOR (CONT'D)
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.' Try
something different. All that
tradition and pride and my way or
the highway no longer worked. We
was stuck in old school hell.

LES
What did you do?

Senior flinches, extends his palms.

LES (CONT'D)
We tried something different, of
course! You ever tried arguing with
your grandmother? Could never win.

LES (CONT'D)
Thought that's what I been doing.

LES (CONT'D)
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 (CONT'D)
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. KINGSTON - DAY

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

LES (V.O.)
So, armed with grandpa's wisdom, we
started trying something different.

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.

LES (V.O.) (CONT'D)
We offered all-you-can-eat
specials.

INT. MEATLESS RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A country BAND plays on a makeshift stage in the dining area. The tables have been cleared out to make room for a dance floor. The place is packed with CUSTOMERS.

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

LES
We booked bands and solo acts from
across Texas.

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.*

LES

To highlight our belief that all animals deserved to die with dignity, we opened a cemetery for ranch animals and pets, large and small.

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.

LES

We sponsored the high school football games and set up a food truck at all home games.

INT. CHURCH BASEMENT - DAY

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

LES

We even catered free lunches after Sunday church services.

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

LES (CONT'D)

Before the clergy asked us to stop. Said their parishioners preferred *real food* like bacon, steak, ribs.

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.

LES (V.O.)
We were following grandpa's advice,
trying something different.

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

LES (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Then came that fateful night at
Jess's Open House.

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 evil 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 vegan!

CLOSE-UPS ON

the puzzled faces of the parents. 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 (V.O.)
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 Berkshire 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 with a sudden, grotesque scene. CATTLE shuffle from a muddy yard onto an assembly line.

A WORKER in a bloody white apron and hardhat fires a captive bolt into a bull's forehead. Another WORKER decapitates the head and slices off the shank. Other WORKERS skin the carcass, split it, wash it, and toss it on a conveyor belt.

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, vegan and 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 vegan meals like you
just ate at Open House that taste,
look, even smell like real meat.

EXT. RANCH - DAY

Parker appears ON SCREEN. CATTLE graze behind him.

PARKER

Do we kill them because of money?
Sure, ranching is critical to our
families, our state, our country.

EXT. PIG PEN - DAY

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

JOSH

But we also know a vegan or 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.

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 shit
on our front lawn anymore.

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

EXT. ANIMAL SANCTUARY - NIGHT

A LOCUST lands on a PIG.

Then another.

More locust land on other livestock. The sky is filled 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 turns, hears a SMASH of broken glass, then another. The
lights of the restaurant flicker, then go 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 RESTAURANT - DAY

The locust invasion has ended. The entire dining room is
covered in them, most dead, a few barely alive. In masks and
goggles, Les and Jess sweep away the insect carnage.

EXT. MEATLESS RESTAURANT - DAY

Les hammers a FOR SALE sign into the ground. Jess grabs his
hands in hers. Sadness in her eyes. She sighs.

JESS (V.O.)
I would've kept trying, you know. A
few bugs and some broken glass
shouldn't stop us.

Les surveys his flip-flopped feet. Glances up.

LES
I was naïve. Gave it my all,
though.

JESS
Did you really? Or did you just
give up?

She drops his hands. A mini-van pulls into the driveway.

JESS (CONT'D)
Mom's gonna give me a ride to
College Station. Vet on campus
offered me an assistant's job.

LES
We got an entire animal sanctuary
you can vet!

She shakes her head. She kisses Les on the cheek, snatches
her backpack, and tosses it in the mini van.

JESS

Nah. I need a fresh start. You do too. Workin' with your dad and Levi might be good. Maybe you can help to change from within the system.

Jess climbs into the van. She smiles, waves. Les waves back. The van pulls onto the highway.

A HEN wanders over from the animal sanctuary. Les picks her up, shares his sorrows as he watches Jess disappear.

LES

Lay-Ze, this is the scene in movies they call *All is Lost*.

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.

(MORE)

JOSH (CONT'D)

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 vegan 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 and the kids laugh. The chef places his hand on Les's shoulder.

LANE

Speaking of love. We have a special
guest tonight. The kids told me
about her. So I contacted her and
asked her to the 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?

INT. MEATLESS DINING AREA - DAY

The DINERS watch the live feed on a large screen. APPLAUSE and WHISTLES for what they see.

INT. MEATLESS KITCHEN - DAY

Lane places a hand on Les's and Jess's shoulders.

LANE

I should explain to those at home.
This is no random stranger. This is
Jessica Vaughn, known to Les and
the kids as Jess. Co-owner of
Meatless. And, the kids' former 4th
Grade teacher.

INT. MEATLESS DINING AREA - DAY

Principal King stands at his table. The crew films him.

PRINCIPAL KING

Not former! Jess, please come back!
The kids need you.

The kids and the diners welcome the idea with CHEERS and a
standing OVATION. We see Les's entire family APPLAUDING.
Junior CRIES happy tears. Senior hands him his handkerchief.

SAGE, PARKER, JOSH

YES! YES!

INT. MEATLESS KITCHEN - DAY

Lane faces the camera.

LANE

There's just one last thing. We saw
the FOR SALE sign outside.

A CREW MEMBER hands him something. Lane holds it up--the FOR
SALE sign. He tears it to shreds. Les raises his eyebrows.
Jess covers her mouth.

LANE (CONT'D)

There's no need for that sign
anymore. Because of this.

The crew member hands him an enlarged replica of a check made
out to MEATLESS RESTAURANT AND ANIMAL SANCTUARY. The amount
is for \$100,000. With Les and Jess clinging to him, Lane
struggles to speak.

LANE (CONT'D)

So you can keep this fantastic
treasure open. Half came from the
good people of Stone City.

DINERS (O.C.)

(wild applause)

LANE

And the rest came from FOOD DUDE
fans through our website and from
me and the crew.

LES

We cannot thank you enough.

JESS

We'll make everyone proud!!

DINERS (O.C.)

(more applause and cheers)

LANE

I'm sure you will.

(beat)

That's our show. Remember, someday,
somewhere, I might just drop by
your town and say...

INT. MEATLESS DINING AREA - DAY

All the diners stand and shout.

DINERS

COOK ME SOME FOOD, DUDE!

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

LES (V.O.)

Turns out grandpa was right after
all.

The diners surround Lane, shake his hand, pose for selfies,
ask for autographs.

Allie races to Les for a hug.

Senior pulls Jess to him, embraces her and smiles.

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

You really do just need to keep
trying something different.

Les sees his father and Levi. Laughs. They've both dyed their
closely cropped hair blue, the same color as Jess.'

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

Worked for him.

Junior reaches out his hand to shake. Les pushes it away. Instead, he wraps his arms around his father. They both cry.

LES (V.O.) (CONT'D)
It sure worked for Jess and me. And
I bet it could work for you!

EXT. ANIMAL SANCTUARY - DAY (OUTTAKE 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)

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

LANE
(sighs)
Oh, Lord.

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

Lane LAUGHS too.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END