

FREE RANGE

Written by

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"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is most adaptable to change."

- **CHARLES DARWIN**

EXT. STREETS OF ALBERTSDALE - DAWN

Empty cobblestone streets are bordered by buildings of a long gone but distinctly nostalgic era. A majestic CLANG of the town's church bell breaks the silence from afar.

TEXT OVER SCREEN: ALBERTSDALE, NY

A woman. Thirties, but barely looks a day over twenty five. She is pretty, almost innocently so. The kind of innocence that made you acutely aware of the lack of yours.

This is ISABEL.

She's our protagonist. More or less.

Isabel is running -- CLASSICAL MUSIC seamlessly flows through her air-pods -- and it's not just a casual run. It's how she stays fit. There's purpose to it.

She sees a MAN taking out the garbage. She waves at him, friendly. He smiles and waves back.

As she continues her run, the man tilts his head, clearly checking her ass out.

MAN
(to himself)
Fuck me.

She's clearly popular with the men.

EXT. ALBERTSDALE WATERFRONT - DAWN

Piers border the Hudson. The sky is an explosion of orange almost as if the heaven itself was on fire. Isabel continues her run and as the song's notes CRESCENDO, she picks up speed, breathing hard, pushing herself to the limit.

Just as the music comes to an end, she comes to a screeching halt at the embankment of the pier. She leans over the embankment, gulping the cold air, sweat pouring down her face.

A passing jogger nods friendlily at her.

JOGGER
Made your time?

Isabel checks her watch.

ISABEL
Barely. I'm getting old!

He responds as he jogs away.

JOGGER

Ah, you're aging backwards Isabel!

She chuckles and looks out at the water. We follow her gaze as two words appear on the horizon:

FREE RANGE

EXT. ALBERTSDALE MAIN STREET - DAY

The Main Street is waking up, coming alive. The town paints a quaint picture. The Main Street is lined with shops, galleries and antique stores. Pedestrians walk around going about their morning chores. Shop owners hustle in preparation of the morning.

Isabel runs on the sidewalk. Banners attached to lampposts: the stars and stripes, along with "Albertsdale: We Strive To Serve Our Fellow Men".

Just noticeable: incorporated into store signs, store windows, even on street signs: stickers of a CANE TOAD. A part of the town's identity.

EXT. ALBERTSDALE TOWN SQUARE - DAY

Isabel runs on, passing a CHURCH and GRAVEYARD. The road ahead lined by rows and rows of businesses and town houses.

A young woman, JACKIE, stands in a doorway with a cup of coffee in her hand, she tracks Isabel running.

JACKIE

Hey Iz!

Isabel stops outside the house.

ISABEL

Why are cannibals the friendliest people?

JACKIE

I don't know. Why?

ISABEL

(breaking into laughter)
Because they hate getting the cold shoulder!

Jackie rolls her eyes. This is a running gag between them.

JACKIE
Why am I friends with you?

Isabel laughs and starts running

JACKIE (CONT'D)
Butcher shop open today Isabel?

Isabel calls back.

ISABEL
I'm going to have some fresh meat
for you in the evening!

JACKIE
Perfect! See you later!

The whole town is like a Sesame Street village filled with happy, friendly people.

EXT. ISABEL'S HOUSE - DAY

House of the average Jane: working class. It's a lone, private house on a long street. It looks like it has history.

There's a FOR SALE sign on the front yard and a sign above the front door indicates that it also doubles as the local butcher shop.

The sign reads: "Grass and Bone: Organic Free Range Meat Shop".

Isabel jogs up to the door, opens it and goes i.n

At the edge of the frame, a lone cane toad hops through, settles at the base of a tree outside the house. Nothing illusory or profound, just a minuscule detail.

INT. ISABEL'S BATHROOM - DAY

Isabel steps into the shower stall and turns on the water. She lets the hot water beat against her. It feels good after a cold run.

INT. ISABEL'S HALLWAY - DAY

Isabel exits her bathroom, wet haired and dressed for the day. There's nothing on the walls. Sparse.

INT. ISABEL'S KITCHEN - DAY

A sophisticated leather pouch unrolls the cold gleam of Japanese chefs knives. A svelte hand gently grabs the hilt of one of the knives.

A series of CLOSE CUTS: Isabel opening her refrigerator and pulling out some meat. Meat being cut carefully and masterly into strips. Her hands, coating the meat carefully with seasoning. Eggs being broken. Whisked. Crackling in a seasoned cast iron skillet. The strips of raw meat hitting the cast iron skillet, the juices quickly searing against the heat. Oranges, hand juiced.

INT. DINING TABLE - DAY

A beautiful plate of fried eggs and steak with some hot sauce sprinkled on the side. A glass of orange juice sits idly by, ignored like a sidekick. A fork and knife gently but very precisely cut the steak into smaller bites.

Isabel, all while nodding her head to the music and reading a newspaper, nonchalantly cuts a piece of the meat, skewering it with her fork before slightly smearing a dash of hot sauce with her knife. She takes a bite.

It's exquisite. Her face says as much. She chews for a couple of seconds, takes another bite.

BLACK

The sound of a buzzing MEAT SAW.

ON ISABEL

She's standing in front of a meat saw wearing black coveralls. Right next to it: a BUTCHER'S BLOCK. Resting on it is a substantial slab of meat. Isabel picks up the meat.

ON THE MEAT SAW

As the meat goes through the saw, it sends a cloud of white dust in the air. The dust settles.

INT. ISABEL'S PANTRY - MOMENTS LATER

We push through the pantry door as Isabel saws the rest of the meat into symmetrical medallion-sized pieces.

ON BUTCHER'S BLOCK

Isabel's hands place the medallion sized pieces of meat on the block, neatly. Almost obsessively so.

She pulls out an aesthetically please sheet of BUTCHER PAPER and places it on the block. She takes the meat and places it tenderly on it, reorganizing the placement a bit. She proceeds to fold the butcher paper around the meat neatly, machine like.

She turns, opens a drawer, there's an impressive selection of ribbons. Her hands drifts over the gorgeous satin, picks one she likes and in a trained manner cuts out two feet of the ribbon - wraps it round the covered meat - then wraps it round again. Then ties it expertly.

DING DONG!

The doorbell rings.

EXT. ISABEL'S PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

The door opens to Isabel's smiling face. Her smile radiating through like a disarming spell.

ISABEL

Hello!

Three people stand on her porch. A caucasian couple standing hand in hand dressed casually and a woman in a pantsuit. They all smile at Isabel.

ISABEL (CONT'D)

Come on in!

INT. ISABEL'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

The woman in the pantsuit, MARIA, introduces the Caucasian couple to Isabel.

MARIA

Isabel, this is Chad and Ashley,
the lovely couple here to see you
about the house.

Ashley sticks out her hand to greet her, Isabel looks at her hand, an INTRICATE TATTOO encompasses it.

ISABEL

(apologetically)

I'm sorry, I'm just a little
paranoid with the pandemic.

Ashley retracts her hand, face falling a little bit.

ASHLEY

Okay...

ISABEL

I'll tell you what though...

Isabel proceeds to elbow bump Chad and Ashley. They laugh awkwardly.

MARIA

Right! So um, let's see the house, shall we?

ASHLEY

Perfect!

The front door closes behind them, with a THUD so authoritative it seems to say there's no getting out now.

MARIA

Like you can see, it's a charming, cozy house. Living room's over there with a gorgeous wood burning fireplace. The kitchen's right around the corner. There's two bedrooms on the floor above and a basement, well, below. Haha. There's also a nice little pantry and lots of outdoor space with access to the lake.

Chad and Ashley nod their heads enthusiastically. Maria walks up to the windows and points outside.

MARIA (CONT'D)

And this view! Absolutely gorgeous.

ASHLEY

Can we walk around and take a look?

MARIA

Sure, I'll take you.

She leads them to the staircase.

CUT TO:

INT. TOP FLOOR BEDROOM - DAY

Chad, Ashley, and Maria poke their heads in a series of rooms, one after the other, the tour flying by quickly. First an upstairs bedroom. Nice, cozy, looks out into the lake.

MARIA

Guest bedroom with attached bathroom. Nice views.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

MARIA

And this is the Master bedroom.

Ashley looks around like she's studying dimensions.

INT. PANTRY - DAY

The three of them are in the pantry now. It looks immaculate. The meat saw stowed away. The packed meat resting on the butcher's block.

MARIA

This is a nice little pantry. Perfect for all your needs.

INT. BASEMENT - DAY

The basement is lit by LED WORK LIGHTS creating strange shadows across a large, coffin-sized FREEZER. A rack of different kinds of blades line the wall next to a buzz saw.

MARIA

A roomy basement for you to do what you want with it.

EXT. ISABEL'S BACKYARD - DAY

The three of them walk around in the backyard, checking out the beautiful views of the lake.

MARIA

I don't have to tell you there is an acute shortage of houses in Albertsdale since the start of the pandemic.

(MORE)

MARIA (CONT'D)

People like yourselves have been looking to move out of the city and Albertsdale has been hot property because of it's proximity to New York City.

CHAD

We understand. We'd actually been searching for a country home or an investment property outside of the city for a few years now and we always had Albertsdale in the back of our heads.

Isabel walks in, interrupting them with tray of cookies.

ISABEL

I've got cookies for you guys.

ASHLEY

You shouldn't have!

ISABEL

Oh nonsense. Have you ever had Bacon Chocolate Chip Cookies?

Chad and Ashley exchange a look.

CHAD

Can't say we have. But Ashley only eats organic free range farm raised meat.

ISABEL

Well, you're in luck then. I run a farm a few miles from here, we're known for our organic free range meat. We supply the entire town with our meat. Our meat is completely free range. We don't force feed and they only eat as much as they want and in their natural environment. They're free to roam and live in sunshine. They are happy. We also believe in whole animal utilization, we make sure to find customers for every single part of the body. A great writer once said that - I'm paraphrasing here - The greatest tragedy is to be wasted. So we try not to be wasteful with life all while honoring it.

Chad and Ashley are convinced. They grab a cookie each. Maria gets in on it as well.

ISABEL (CONT'D)

The bacon you're eating was from a charming little piggy. Very cuddly. Lived a happy life.

Chad and Ashley's face light up.

ASHLEY

This is amazing and the bacon...

ISABEL

I know... Anyway I'm sorry I interrupted. I'm a little bit of a chatty one.

CHAD

Don't worry about it. We were just about to talk about the price of the place. We love the property but the prices are a little too high.

ISABEL

A lot of city people have moved here and driven up costs you know, that's why I'm selling. All this wealth influx has driven up prices and driving out people who've lived here for generations.

CHAD

Well, life isn't always fair.

Isabel gives him a look like she can't believe he just said that.

ISABEL

I guess not.

MARIA

Well, I'm in a bit of a rush. I have another showing. But, I'll be expecting an offer from you guys soon. Hopefully?

ASHLEY

Definitely. Do you mind if we just hang back and ask Isabel a few questions about the town and everything?

MARIA
Knock yourself out.

Maria starts to leave.

MARIA (CONT'D)
Nice meeting you guys.

Chad and Ashley say their goodbyes.

ASHLEY
So, Isabel. How do you like it in
Albertsdale?

ISABEL
It's a tight knit community here.
You know, small town. Everybody
knows everybody. We try and take
care of each other.

ASHLEY
I figured. And I have to ask, why's
the town's mascot a frog.

ISABEL
It's actually a Cane Toad.

CHAD
Well, it looks like a frog.

ISABEL
Not really. A Cane Toad is tougher.
They're more resilient.

ASHLEY
How so?

ISABEL
Well, for one, they developed a
taste for each other.

ASHLEY
What do you mean? Like they eat
each other.

A beat. The silence becomes uncomfortable

ISABEL (PRE-LAP)
Yes.

CUT TO:

INT. ISABEL'S PANTRY

Isabel is in her pantry, she's putting on her black coveralls and putting on gloves. She's puts on her face shield.

ISABEL (V.O.) (PRE-LAP)
 With no real natural predators,
 they became an invasive species and
 wreaked havoc on the natural
 environment.

She's prepping her meat saw.

ISABEL (V.O.)
 And without any kind of predators,
 they became over populated.

CAMERA PUSHES THROUGH THE PANTRY DOOR as Isabel places a hefty bag on the butcher's block.

ISABEL (V.O.)
 And then evolution responded.

ASHLEY (V.O.)
 How?

Isabel retrieves a human arm slowly from the hefty bag with bloodied gloved hands and places it on the meat saw. There's an intricate tattoo on the hand. It's the same tattoo as Ashley's.

ISABEL (V.O.)
 With no competing species, they
 turned on the only species
 competing for resources:
 themselves. A free range buffet, if
 you will.

ON THE MEAT SAW

The blade separates the hand from the wrist in a single smooth slice, like a knife through butter. Blood drips.

ISABEL (V.O.)
 They became cannibals. They
 embraced the dark side of
 darwinism.

ON THE BUTCHER BLOCK

A bloody, gloved hand with a meat cleaver cuts the arm into smaller sized pieces.

ISABEL (V.O.)
Which helped them evolve at a
faster rate. They had a shorter
development period, they became
less vulnerable. A superior
species.

ON ISABEL

Isabel's face shield displays a bloody Jackson Pollack. She
rubs off some blood with her gloved hand.

CUT TO:

INT. ISABEL'S LIVING ROOM - DUSK

Isabel is tending to a roaring fire in her fireplace. Barely
discernible, clothes burning in the fire.

DING DONG!

The doorbell rings.

Isabel walks over and opens the door, it's Jackie. She comes
in.

ISABEL
Right on time!

JACKIE
Well, the family is really excited.

ISABEL
Yeah, of course. Give me a minute.

Isabel walks over to her refrigerator and retrieves the meat
neatly packed in the butcher paper.

ISABEL (CONT'D)
Here you go.

Jackie takes the meat, a smile on her face. She hands over an
envelope to Isabel.

JACKIE
How's the meat?

ISABEL
Tender. Comes from a pampered
little sheep.

JACKIE
Perfect! See you later for dinner?

ISABEL

You bet!

Jackie begins to leave.

ISABEL (CONT'D)

Hey Jack.

Jackie stops. She knows what's coming.

JACKIE

What?

ISABEL

Why don't cannibals eat clowns?

JACKIE

I don't know Iz but go ahead, get
it off your chest.

ISABEL

(breaking with laughter)
Because they taste funny.

Jackie tries to hold a straight face but breaks. They both
laugh.

FADE TO BLACK.