

Freedom (Raynes)

By

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FADE IN ON:

INT. SUBURBAN LIVING ROOM - DAY

Your average suburban hideaway. Ikea furnishings galore. Perhaps a few *too* many YOGA MATS on the floor?

ANNIE (30s) plucks stray DOG HAIRS off a recliner. Sitting down, she pivots to face the front door.

Sounds assault her from all angles. A grandfather clock TICKS. A truck ROARS by outside. While on the floor....

A large German Shepherd (RAYNE) whines. Curled in a dog bed, she's 100 pounds. Rin Tin markings, mocha eyes.

Annie forces an anxious smile.

ANNIE

Rayne, he'll be here any minute now. Play with Mr. Squeaky. You haven't, for awhile.

Fishing under the recliner, Annie extracts a PLUSH COW (well loved and even more chewed.)

She tosses it to Rayne, but falls short a few inches.

Rayne looks towards it, curious. But doesn't move.

Annie's face melts. Until...

A KNOCK on the door causes Annie to jump!

ANNIE

That's him, baby! Don't move!

Rushing to the door, she throws it open. Revealing:

Burly TOM (30s). A blue collar rough, he sports a beer gut - and muscles. The BOX he holds is huge!

Annie's eyes light up.

ANNIE

You're Tom Laundry?

TOM

You're Annie Potts?

A whine. Tom cranes his head past Annie, peers inside.

TOM
If so, that's gotta be Storm.

ANNIE
(chuckles)
No, her name is Rayne.

TOM
Oh. Oops.

ANNIE
Don't worry. People always remember that
wrong. Sometimes it's Lightning, too.

Her eyes flit to the package.

ANNIE
And that's -

TOM
Just as DAMNED heavy as it looks.

ANNIE
Oh my god. I'm so sorry. Come inside!

She waves Tom in. He looks around.

TOM
Any particular place to set this down?

Annie waves her arms widely.

ANNIE
On the floor. Wherever works for you!

Tom finds a spot that's not a yoga mat, puts the box down
with a grunt. Nudges one mat with his toe, grins.

TOM
Lemme guess, you're into fitness?

ANNIE
What? Me? Dogs, sure. But fitness? Not
these days anymore. Though I used to
nature hike with Rayne.

Annie glances down at her not-so-sculpted torso. Extends
the edge of her logoed t-shirt for Tom to see.

The graphic on it:

A picture of a LINT ROLLER. Underneath: "I'm a German
Shepherd Mom. That's How I Roll."

Tom gets the pun, laughs.

TOM

My Tyson was a Boxer. But condolences on the hair woes.

He holds out a gentle hand to Rayne. She sniffs.

ANNIE

Don't worry. She's super friendly.

TOM

That much, I can see.

ANNIE

Her size freaks out a lot of people. Back when we went on walks, some of them even crossed the street! But she doesn't have a mean bone in her body. She likes dogs, cats... even squirrels. If they'd give her a chance, I mean.

Tom advances to an ear rub. Rayne leans in, enjoys.

ANNIE

After everything we've gone through, she's still a very happy girl.

TOM

As far as I'm concerned, that's what counts.

ANNIE

We can't thank you enough for delivering it personally.

TOM

Hey, I'm just paying it forward. This stuff is pricey new. Someone donated it to me. From what I've been told, it's a multiple hand me down. After a year of working out the bugs with my boy, I figured the least I could do is give you a demo of the gear.

ANNIE

Can I get you anything? Water? Soda? Beer?

TOM

Thanks, but I'll pass. It's a long drive home.

Annie blinks, confused. Tom grins.

TOM

One beer wouldn't make a dent. But the lack of bathroom breaks on the Hutch might do me in.

(beat)

Still, let's get this show on the "road."

He whips out a POCKETKNIFE, carves into tape on the box.

Rayne thumps her tail, sad the ear rubbing's stopped.

Popping the box open, Tom lifts out:

A DOG WHEELCHAIR. He unfolds it, inserts metal struts. Looks around for a level spot.

ANNIE

All those yoga mats are Rayne's. They're good padding for her elbows. Useful traction, too. Since things've... progressed, the hardwood floors are too smooth.

Tom parks the wheelchair on the floor.

TOM

We've got wall to wall carpeting. Dog hair tangles aside, that was a god-send.

ANNIE

I would, but the accidents -

TOM

Say no more. Tyson had his shares of oopsies, too!

Annie eyes the chair.

ANNIE

I didn't realize; it's so big.

TOM

So's your little girl. But the bigger the wheels, the better - once they're rolling in the great outdoors!

(beat)

Wanna try a test spin on the sidewalk?

Annie thinks, points towards the back of the house.

ANNIE

We've got a pretty "great" backyard.

MONTAGE

Annie fits a towel under Rayne's belly - struggles to lift her up. Tom tries to help, but that's a lot of dog to move.

TOM
Call me crazy.

ANNIE
Well, I *hope* you're not.

TOM
I've got a bright idea. It's a bit out of the box.

The two slide Rayne - still in her dog bed - through a hall. Tom drags the wheelchair along, too.

TOM
(pants)
Look at the bright side. She's eating well?

ANNIE
She hasn't lost weight at all!

They reach the back exit. Tom raises an eyebrow at the built-in doggie door.

TOM
Let's not, and say we did.

ANNIE
That doesn't get used anymore.

Tom pats the wheelchair.

TOM
Good news. I've got a hunch this will!

EXT. BACKYARD - MOMENTS LATER

Bird chirp. DOG TOYS dot a green, spacious lawn.

Annie uses the towel to help the old girl stand. Gives her canine BFF a bear-hug when the maneuver's through.

ANNIE
There you are, baby. You're so brave!

Tom rolls the wheelchair over, unbuckles straps. Annie does her best to help.

At such close quarters, Annie notices the name "Tyson" painted in a child's handwriting on one strut.

Further down: the name "Goldie". And lower: "Pete."
(Different lettering and paint color for each.)

Rayne wobbles. Annie steadies her. Over the metal frame, she and Tom lock concerned eyes.

ANNIE

Speaking of silver linings. With DM -
there's no pain.

TOM

DM - that's Degenerative Myelopathy?

Annie gulps, nods.

ANNIE

Rayne's back paws started dragging a year ago. At first, I thought she was just... getting tired and feeling her age. But then a nail shaved down so far it bled - and I freaked out. The vet did a DNA test, and she came back as a "DM Carrier"...

TOM

Which means -

ANNIE

Let's just say things went down-hill from there. Did Tyson have DM, too?

TOM

(sighs)

No. He had what they call IVDD. That's doc-speak for his spine turning into a shit-sh... I mean, a few discs blew. So it wasn't what it used to be. Laser therapy, acupuncture. We even got him a pool - nothing worked. Given his age, the vet said surgery might've killed him or made it worse. So after a lotta sleepless nights weighing pros and cons, I decided we'd just make sure in his final days, Tyson'd really live it up. Every bone and steak he wanted, my boy got!

Another strap buckled, and-

Rayne stands in the wheelchair, confused. For her, this experience isn't just new. It's weird.

ANNIE

Looks like a medieval torture device.

TOM

More like a Roman Chariot. Give your Queen time to let it all sink in. She'll figure the next steps out.

The humans watch Rayne carefully. She sniffs the ground. Takes a step.

ANNIE

Go on, baby. You can do it!

Her voice catches in a sob. Those tears are contagious. Tom hides his, the best he can.

TOM

You've had Rayne since a puppy?

ANNIE

A tiny ball of fur, just this big.
(measures with her hands)
She's grown a lot since then. And Tyson?

TOM

He was a shelter junkyard stray. Had him since he was three... more or less. But he made it to eleven. That's eight years of being a spoiled rotten only kid. Our place ain't nothing like Park Avenue, but pretty decent digs nonetheless.

Rayne takes another hesitant step.

A SQUIRREL darts by. Canine ears perk.

Suddenly excited, Rayne runs in a wide circle; chases her tail. The wheelchair gets in the way. But this is fun!

TOM

See? She's catching on! Faster than Tyson - that dumb, sweet lug. Smart girl!

Annie claps with joy. Rayne barks.

Fueled by freedom - she sprints off across the yard.

As she does: a "phantom" TYSON appears. Two more "ghost dogs" join them. One's a GOLDEN. The other a PITY-MIX. Happy and playing in the ether, they run as a pack.

Back at the porch, Annie and Tom look on. They don't see Rayne's companions. Perhaps their tears get in the way.

ANNIE

They don't live long enough. Do they?

TOM

Not by half, you ask me.

ANNIE

At least Rayne's happy now. For however long she's got left. You don't know how much this means to me. Um... us.

TOM

Oh, lady - trust me. Rayne and I both do.

FINAL FADE OUT: