

Trade Secrets

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DAY

This street could be in a glossy magazine: green front lawns and two car garages. Solid middle class families. But all is not well on this block, or across the country.

It's 2008 and the financial system that made all this possible is crumbling.

It seems like outside every house is a sign:

FOR SALE
FOR SALE
~~FOR SALE~~ SOLD
FOR SALE

No one here is doing well, but one family is doing worst. Their sign reads:

FORECLOSED

INT. FORECLOSED HOME - DAY

One of the few things not packed up is the TV. The rest is piled haphazardly in boxes--a rush before the bank reclaims the house.

JUSTIN WAVERLY, 13, is just about to get hit by puberty, but first the world is giving him and his family a kick in the teeth.

Scared and confused by what's happening he watches the news, desperate to make sense of the chaos. ON SCREEN:

ALARMED ANCHOR
Foreclosures have jumped 81% from last year, affecting more than 2.3 million Americans...

Justin skips to the next channel as his parents can be heard arguing upstairs. The President speaks on TV:

OBAMA
This is a major crisis. But we are going to have to work through it, and Wall Street is going to have to work through it.

UPSTAIRS

Justin's Mom, GRACE, 40s, stands at the bottom of the ladder leading to the attic. She's mad as hell.

GRACE
A boat. A goddamn boat!

Justin's Dad, GEOFF, 40s, pops his head through the attic entrance.

GEOFF
The rates were practically zero--

GRACE
The rates aren't zero anymore, are they?

He passes down a box. Grace takes it and looks inside. She sees family photos. Much happier times. She doesn't care now, though.

GEOFF
How was I supposed to know--

GRACE
By reading the paperwork!

She angrily tosses the pictures back in and adds the box to the pile.

EXT. FORECLOSED HOME - SAME

Two police vehicles pull up along with a moving truck.

The cops get out and make their way to the door.

INT./EXT. FORECLOSED HOME - CONTINUOUS

Justin's startled by a firm knock at the door. Trepidatiously, he goes to answer.

The police officer is taken aback slightly and saddened by the sight of a young kid. But, he steels himself. He's got a job to do.

SAD OFFICER
Your parents home, son?

JUSTIN
(calling upstairs)
Mom!

They wait, eyeing each other uncertainly while they wait for Grace to arrive.

She sees the uniforms.

GRACE
Oh God!

SAD OFFICER
Ma'am, we have an eviction order
that needs to be carried out today.

GRACE
(shouting angrily)
GEOFF!

Justin looks up at his mother, forlorn.

JUSTIN
What's happening, mom?

GRACE
It's OK, sweetie.
(shouting)
GEOFF!
(softly)
It's OK. Come here.

She gently pulls him to the side, crouches down to his height, and hugs him close. Behind, Geoff arrives.

GEOFF
Officer, if we can just have a few more days to organize our things.

Justin's mom focuses his attention on her and not the police.

JUSTIN
Are they here to take our stuff?

GRACE
No, no. It's OK. We just have to find somewhere else to live for a while.

She hugs him again. Justin can see the TV screen over her shoulder while Geoff implores the police in the b.g.

ON TV: stock footage shots of Wall Street financiers with champagne and fancy suits, clearly living life large.

Screen switches to a side by side of anchor and guest.

ALARMED ANCHOR (V.O.)

Despite bailouts, Wall Street bonuses remain high, with pay checks in the millions of dollars still common. How can you justify this?

BANKER

(defensive but smug)

Listen, we need to retain top talent. These people work hard. They create value. The market determines their worth.

HOLD ON Justin's face as he watches the images of rich men on Wall Street in bars, spending money on champagne.

ALARMED ANCHOR (V.O.)

But taxpayers are funding these bailouts--

BANKER (V.O.)

(interrupting)

--The system works. It rewards efficiency and merit. Those who can't keep up... well, that's how markets function.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Justin, 25, polishes off the rest of his champagne.

He's with RICHIE, and STEVE and they're all successful finance bros. They've been drinking for a while. Empty glasses litter the table of the trendy nightclub.

RICHIE

I'll get this one.

STEVE

Nah, it's Justin's round.

JUSTIN

What are you talking about? I got the last round--at the club last night.

STEVE

(points at empty glasses)

Yeah, and I got one, and Richie got one. It's back to you.

JUSTIN

Jesus. You ever think we drink too much?

RICHIE

I'm starting to think you're trying to back out of your round.

JUSTIN

You calling me cheap?

STEVE

You're new money. Gotta keep an eye on you.

RICHIE

I saw you spend eighteen hundred dollars on bottle service last week.

Let's face it, Justin's exactly that kind of douche. It's a night out but he's in a suit with a silk tie--double Windsor knot, of course. Perfectly coiffed hair, and a haughty self-confident air that makes you want to slap his face.

STEVE

You aren't cheap. But you're no Good Samaritan.

JUSTIN

Hey, I've been known to do good deeds.

STEVE

Right!

JUSTIN

No, for real. I've been seeing this lady in my building--

STEVE

Bro, if she's seeing you, she's the one doing charity work.

JUSTIN

(sharp edge)

Look, some of us weren't born with trust funds. I earned everything I have.

INTERCUT:

INT. JUSTIN'S APARTMENT LOBBY - DAY

A woman, 40s but worn down, struggles with grocery bags. Not elderly at all. Justin's memory has already rewritten her. Generic brands visible through the thin plastic. Beans. Pasta. Rice.

Justin strides in wearing a \$5000 suit, AirPods in.

JUSTIN V.O.

...I see her in my hallway all the time since the poor door broke.

BACK TO BAR

STEVE

The poor door?

JUSTIN

Yeah, you know, the door for all the low-income people.

STEVE

They have a door for that?

LOBBY

Through gleaming marble and brass the poor door is a grimy service entrance tucked away from the grand lobby.

JUSTIN V.O.

Of course. The city makes luxury buildings supply affordable housing for tax credits, so they shuffle them off to the side. Through the poor door.

BACK TO BAR

RICHIE

How'd it get broken?

JUSTIN

I dunno. Poor people break stuff. Anyway, I've been seeing her, basically every day, carrying grocery bags.

STEVE

Groceries?

JUSTIN

Yeah, I'm like: use Seamless.

RICHIE

Or DoorDash.

STEVE

Or Instacart.

JUSTIN

Exactly. Anyway, I was coming home from Dino's yesterday--

RICHIE

I love Dino's.

STEVE

You get the burger?

JUSTIN

Of course I got the burger. I can't go to Dino's and not get the burger. But that's the problem. You can't go to Dino's and not get the steak, either. So, I'm coming home with leftover steak from the restaurant.

RICHIE

You took a doggy bag, bro?

JUSTIN

I'd take that thing home in a needle exchange box, it's that good.

LOBBY

The lady precariously totters with her hands full of groceries as a bag starts to tear.

JUSTIN V.O.

And there's this lady, carrying home groceries again, and one of the bags breaks. Food goes everywhere.

STEVE V.O.

What did you do?

JUSTIN V.O.

I helped her--what am I gonna do?
The doorman is standing there,
looking right at me, and this thing
is basically at my feet. Anyway, I
look down and her receipt is right
there. And that's when I realized:
I spent more on my steak than she's
spending on groceries for her
family of eight--

BACK TO BAR

RICHIE

Eight?

JUSTIN

I dunno how many kids she's got,
but it's gotta be a lot with all
the groceries she's buyin'. And now
I'm standing there thinking, fuck
me, this lady is never gonna get to
have a steak from Dino's. It's just
way out of her price range.

STEVE

Well, with a family of eight.

RICHIE

What, is she Catholic or something?

JUSTIN

I dunno, she's poor. They have a
lot of kids. Someone to look after
them when they're old, I guess.

STEVE

So did you give her the steak?

JUSTIN

Are you kidding? That's like a two-
hundred-dollar steak. What's she
gonna do, split it eight ways?

RICHIE

God forbid someone learn what good
food tastes like.

JUSTIN

Exactly, These people think Outback
is fine dining. It'd be wasted on
them.

STEVE
So what was the good deed you did,
then?

JUSTIN
Huh?

STEVE
You said you did a good deed for
this lady.

JUSTIN
Oh yeah.

LOBBY

Justin looks at the judgmental doorman, then down at the food on the floor, then up at the lady.

JUSTIN V.O.
I gave her the bag.

RICHIE V.O.
The bag?

Justin takes his steak out of the bag, then contemptuously passes her the lush thick card bag from Dino's.

JUSTIN V.O.
From the steak. I just carried the container up in my hand, and let her use the bag.

Then he steps over the groceries that are left on the floor, whips out his phone, begins texting, and walks to the elevator without helping her pick them up.

The woman kneels to gather what she can. Her hands are raw from too much washing.

BACK TO BAR

STEVE
Jesus, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation will be calling any day now.

JUSTIN
I'm not giving her the steak! It's a Dino's steak!

He signals to the server walking the floor.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
Another round here.

MONTAGE - THEIR WORLD - NIGHT

-- Justin, Richie and Steve pop champagne at a crowded club. Sparklers in bottles. Money flowing like water.

-- The three swagger down a packed street, arms around each other, shouting lyrics to "Mr. Brightside"

-- Crowding into a booth at Dino's. Steaks arrive. More wine. Always more.

-- Dancing on tables. Bottle service. The world is theirs.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. NEW YORK STREET - DAY

Dead silence. Empty streets stretch to the horizon.

A black Mercedes crawls through the ghost town that was Manhattan.

SUPER: Three weeks later

A solitary jaywalker bundled up with winter clothes crosses an otherwise empty street. A homemade mask on his face; his hands struggling to hold grocery bags containing 3 weeks' rations of food.

It's April 2020 and COVID is rampaging.

INT. MERCEDES - SAME

Mask on, Justin dials his phone for Richie. No answer. As the phone stops ringing the faint sound of a siren approaches.

JUSTIN (TEXT)
Richie--I've got a deal to make.

The siren gets louder as it approaches Justin.

JUSTIN (TEXT) (CONT'D)
I'm coming to you now.

Louder.

An ambulance flies past as it screams--foot-to-the-floor,
lights flashing, siren blaring--straight through a red light
with no traffic to hinder it.

Justin's car idles at the red.

