

TRADE SECRETS

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FADE IN:

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DAY

American Dream homes line the cul-de-sac, their mortgage papers already moving through the first stages of default. Sprinklers trace perfect arcs across emerald lawns, watering homes that will soon stand empty.

A neighborhood built on credit and confidence--both rapidly evaporating in the summer of 2008.

Outside nearly 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, stands at the threshold of adolescence just as his family stands at the threshold of financial ruin.

Scared and confused he watches the news with eyes already calculating how he'll never end up on this side of a financial disaster again. 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 he heard arguing upstairs. The future 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: cute baby Justin being held by his teenage cousin, Reese, already in a button-up shirt, looking responsible beyond her years. Beaming faces.

We'll see a lot more of Reese soon, but for now Grace doesn't care about the pics.

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 grudgingly trudge up to the house--they signed up to catch bad guys, not kick families out of their homes.

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 Justin 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.

Grace focuses Justin's 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

Taxpayers funded the \$700 billion bailout, yet Goldman Sachs just announced a \$6.8 billion bonus pool. The average payout? \$400,000 per employee.

(pointed)

How can you justify this compensation while millions face foreclosure?

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.

Justin's learned his lesson.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Justin (grown-up, 25) polishes off the rest of his champagne.

He's with RICHIE and STEVE. They're all successful finance bros and 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 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?

RICHIE

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

Justin signals a server, waves his platinum card. His \$5,000 suit, perfect hair, and smug expression complete the transformation from the terrified child we just saw.

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

Prick. Not like that. An old lady--

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; 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.

A MAINTENANCE WORKER in worn clothes exits through it as a DOORMAN in pristine uniform holds the main door for a RESIDENT in designer wear.

JUSTIN V.O.

It's a tax credit thing. Luxury buildings have to include space for poor people. 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 narrates the scene we see playing out.

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. These people
think Outback is fine dining.
Anyway, what's she gonna do, split
it eight ways?

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.

INT. RICHIE'S HOME OFFICE - DAY

Richie eats a bowl of Lucky Charms and scrolls through stock data. The doorbell rings.

RICHIE
 (shouting)
 Ellie! The market's open. Ellie!

No answer. The sound of a crying baby carries through the house. He taps at the trading terminal in frustration.

RICHIE (CONT'D)
 Fine. OK. I got it.

EXT. NEW YORK TOWNHOUSE - SAME

Wearing just a suit, Justin shifts his weight between his feet from the cold. Richie opens the door, pausing to ID the masked guest.

RICHIE
 Oh shit! I didn't think you'd actually come!

Justin pulls down his mask.

JUSTIN
 You gotta hear me on this.

RICHIE
 I dunno. This virus! I've gotta think about my family now.
 (lying)
 I'm worried about my family.

JUSTIN
 We've got an amazing new opportunity in Pittsburgh.

RICHIE
 Ellie! Ellie, come here.

JUSTIN
 You'd get a deal. Crazy upside.

RICHIE
 The downside, though... Are you even solvent at this point?

JUSTIN
 Of course... We're trying...

Ellie, beautiful but bedraggled, arrives with the crying baby. Richie takes the kid, holding her between him and Justin--this piece of shit is using his kid as a human shield.

RICHIE
 (to baby)
 It's OK, little lady. It's OK.
 (to Justin)
 See--I can't invite you in because
 of the virus. OK. But--

Richie starts stepping backward through the door.

RICHIE (CONT'D)
 --good luck finding a buyer. And
 stay safe with the virus--y'know...

He shuts the door. Justin's left alone on an empty street.

INT. BLACK MERCEDES - DAY

Justin's lost in thought as he calculates the next move.

He checks business news headlines on his phone:

IMF PREDICTS GLOBAL ECONOMY WILL CONTRACT BY 3%
 . CORONAVIRUS SHUTDOWNS TO BLAME.
 . ENERGY PRICES TUMBLE.

He searches for "reese waverly" and clicks to watch her live news interview: anchor and guest in split screen.

INSERT ON PHONE

ANCHOR
 ShaleForce Energy stock soared
 while oil was \$75 a barrel. Now
 it's twenty-five and the ShaleForce
 Energy stock price is at an all-
 time low.

Infographic shows precipitous price drops. SFE \$27.

ANCHOR (CONT'D)
 (CONT'D)
 So, what's your plan?

REESE WAVERLY, 40s, is sitting at her office desk: black jeans, white shirt, her hair in a messy bun--still recognizable as the protective teenager from the photo, but now hardened by ambition and power.

ShaleForce Energy is her baby. It's a monument to herself. And what a monument it was--worth 20 billion at one point. It made her famous; she even met the President.

REESE

ShaleForce Energy is much more than its share price. Our three thousand employees do good in the world. Because of low gas bills, a million children no longer live in a household where parents have to choose between heating or eating.

Justin's like, *preach sister!*

REESE (CONT'D)

OUR technology made that possible. That's what WE do at ShaleForce Energy.

JUSTIN

Fuck yeah, we do!

REESE

We're not thinking about the stock price. We're thinking about the next million children we can help.

ANCHOR

You may not care about the stock price, but your shareholders do.

REESE

I'm this company's largest shareholder and I'm thrilled with the work we're doing. This recession will be short-lived, so we're taking the long view. In fact, our head of North American drilling operations, Justin Waverly, is scoping new projects.

Justin pumps his fist with childish delight.

JUSTIN

She said me!

INT. SHALEFORCE ENERGY (SFE) - REESE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Back straight. Chin up. Earpiece in. Looking straight into her interview camera. Reese is illuminated from above by a ring light that from this angle resembles a halo.

REESE

This virus won't be with us forever. Maybe not for long.

(MORE)

REESE (CONT'D)

So we're positioning the company to flourish when people can leave their houses again.

Reese's face remains locked in a polite smile. Silence as the anchor talks to Reese through the earpiece.

TOMER FRIEDKIN, Reese's fixer stands beside, out of Reese's camera shot. He acts like he's ex-Mossad, but really he's crude muscle from Brighton Beach, Brooklyn.

REESE (CONT'D)

Thank you so much, Katie. Of course, I'll happily come back.

The polite smile returns. Frozen.

TOMER

You're clear.

Reese's face turns sour as the ring light goes out.

EXT. SFE OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

Justin steps out of the car. Mask on. His gaze sweeps up and down the empty street before walking into the building's--

ATRIUM

A SECURITY GUARD in the cavernous white marble atrium plays on his phone. Silent until Justin's shoes clack as he enters. And makes his way to the--

ELEVATOR

Watching from behind as Justin stands silently facing the door. He adjusts his clothes--got to look the part.

DING.

MAIN OFFICE

The previously busy office is now evacuated. Reception desk is empty. The trading pit is empty desks with Bloomberg Terminals beside a wall of oversized TV screens playing rolling news. Desolate.

Think Lehman Brothers in *The Big Short*.

Beyond are glass executive offices and conference rooms. Reese's office has drawn blinds.

Justin looks searchingly at Reese's youthful assistant, LINDSEY.

LINDSEY
(hushed)
I think she's still recording.

Lindsey gestures at Justin's mask, so he doesn't forget.

He realizes that he still has it on and abruptly removes it.

JUSTIN
Good catch. Thanks.

Justin nods appreciatively and continues walking. The TV screens cover the same story: a line of tankers and container ships backed up into the ocean, unable to dock.

ON TV SCREEN:

REPORTER
(into camera)
It's been a week since the Port of Corpus Christi in Texas was overwhelmed and the last of these containers were unloaded.

Camera pans to mountains of shipping containers.

REPORTER (CONT'D)
Cars, clothes, computers, and countless other goods traveled twenty thousand nautical miles from China to reach the American markets. But, with the economy shut down by the novel Coronavirus, they have nowhere to go.

CONFERENCE ROOM

Justin arrives and scans the room: full of somber faces.

ANJA BOJIC, SFE's CFO--impeccably credentialed; perfectly dressed--is a commanding presence at the conference table.

In the background, someone is being interviewed on a television. Two others on a Zoom call: BOB the Oil Technical Engineer, and Finance Director, KANIKA.

Sick with COVID, Kanika's sitting in bed, her t-shirt clammy with feverish sweat.

ANJA
What if we don't pay?

KANIKA

Then the whole world sees that
we've been swimming naked.

Kanika shifts up in bed, but she's too feeble to move much.
Out of breath, she begins to cough.

ANJA

Let's not boil the ocean on this.
Bob, how much oil do we have in
reserve?

BOB

We're at 19% capacity.

JUSTIN

Then let's sell oil to raise cash.

KANIKA

We can't.

JUSTIN

It's our inventory. Why can't we
sell it?

KANIKA

Selling millions of barrels
will tank the market. It'll turn
into a fire sale.

JUSTIN

So, we own billions of dollars of
oil that could be worth nothing?

KANIKA

No, if we sell, it will be worth
nothing.

Reese bursts into the room. Justin stands up as if the
president entered.

REESE

So, where are we?

ANJA

It's terminal. Either we give
ourselves a billion-dollar payday
loan.

REESE

Or?

ANJA

Or on Monday we miss our coupon
payment to Deutsche Bank.

JUSTIN

It's lights out.

The door swings open again. This time it's Tomer. He has a
phone to his ear, which he slams down on the table.

TOMER

No, Brad. Don't hang up. Tell them
what you just told me.

INT. WSJ OFFICES - CONTINUOUS

BRAD FLOWERS, a mousy guy with big glasses speaks hushedly
into his phone, covering the receiver from the dozens of
reporters who surround him on the paper's reporting floor.

INTERCUT PHONE CALL

BRAD

There's a story about ShaleForce in
the pipeline. Some environmental
angle.

Reese furrows her brow to comprehend the news' significance.

REESE

(to Zoom)

Kanika, Bob, we'll pick this up
again later.

(to phone)

Is that it? A story?

Brad ducks down in his chair, talking near the desk.

BRAD

The story's either something big,
or something they can publish fast.
Maybe both.

Brad peers around the room anxiously.

REESE

Who's the reporter?

BRAD

Gregory Zimmerman. He's been
working the story for months. Only
got traction this week, though. He
got excited about Benzene.

JUSTIN

Benzene levels in our fracking fluid are well below toxic levels.

BRAD

Whatever. That's you guys. I gotta go.

END INTERCUT

The three look at the phone for a moment; the line's dead. Tomer grabs the phone and is immediately typing away.

TOMER

I've got Brad chasing down the family's details, but a four-year-old in Pennsylvania died of leukemia. They lived near a well, so they blame us.

JUSTIN

Let them sue. I signed off on all the research proving we're safe.

Tomer shoots Reese a knowing look.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

We're not responsible, legally.

ANJA

Morally?

Reese isn't taking that bait.

REESE

This isn't a legal question. It's PR. Thousands of people die of leukemia every year--we're not responsible for those. But if we're explaining, we're losing.

(to Tomer)

What are our options?

Tomer looks up from his phone. For a moment, his attention is caught by STEPHANE DE FENELON, a billionaire hedge fund guy who's being interviewed on the TV about COVID and the economy.

TV Chyron: BILLIONAIRE'S PANDEMIC PAYDAY

TOMER

We can stall it, spin it--or bury the guy if we have to.

REESE
Is he credible?

TOMER
No one is if you dig deep enough.

Anja's heard all she can bear. She's putting her foot down.

ANJA
We're not going after the family of
a dead kid.

JUSTIN
It's just one family. Why should
they get to threaten the entire
company?

Anja shoots him an appalled look. He relents.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
OK. OK. What if the answer to
Deutsche and this article is the
same thing? We don't deflect or
deny. Instead, let's go on the
defensive. Shore up our balance
sheet with outside cash. We'll ride
this out.

REESE
But who's spending money right now?

JUSTIN
I've got nothin'. Even Richie at
Morgan won't give ShaleForce the
time of day. But...

Justin nods to the TV screen.

Stephane is there, looking suave and cool, speaking with the
accent of someone who grew up in a Swiss boarding school with
the vestiges of European royalty.

On TV screen:

STEPHANE
Of course I'm not celebrating the
pandemic. It was clear where the
market was going, so I took the
bet. It paid off.

REESE
Can we get an introduction?

TOMER

I know his number 2. We've had to
clean up similar messes.

REESE

Set it up.

