LIE DETECTOR

Written
by
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FADE IN:

EXT. PUERTO RICO - PORT OF SAN JUAN - DAY

Docked cruise ships and tourist traps control the coast. Cathedral bells mark the hour. High noon.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

A clear plastic cup anchored to a ceiling vent duct with a coat hanger catches water droplets from a wheezing A/C unit.

CARSON BRIGGS, 30s, muscular with eagle eyes, is hooked up to a polygraph machine perpendicular to a tidy desk.

    CARSON
    Do you mind if I smoke?

A wall poster displays Puerto Rican and American flags side by side over a brown hand shaking a white one.

PAUL REYES, 30s, Latino and well groomed, checks a connection between the laptop and polygraph gear.

    PAUL
    This is a federal building. Are you nervous, Mr. Briggs?

    CARSON
    No. Was that part of the test?

Paul studies the polygraph monitor, then puts on a smile.

    PAUL
    Just try to relax and answer my questions truthfully. I need to establish a baseline.

    CARSON
    Call me, Carson. I’m starving. There’s a ham sandwich in my pack. How bout we split it?

Paul glances at the shabby backpack, clears his throat.

    PAUL
    Is this office on the third floor?

    CARSON
    Yes.
LAPTOP SCREEN - POLYGRAPH
Wavelength readouts flutter. Green letters blink. TRUTH.
RETURN TO SCENE

PAUL
Good, now lie. Are we in Canada?

CARSON
If we are, this is one hell of a heat wave we’re having, my friend.
(beat)
Yes.

LAPTOP SCREEN - POLYGRAPH
Wavelengths dip and shimmy. Red letters blink. LIE.
RETURN TO SCENE

PAUL
Good. Are we in San Juan?

CARSON
Yes. Commonwealth nation under the loving care of the United States.

PAUL
Is your name, Carson Briggs?

CARSON
That’s what it says on my passport.

PAUL
It’s important that you answer my questions with a yes or a no response. Do you understand?

CARSON
It was just a joke.
(beat)
Yes, I understand, Paul.

PAUL
Is your name--

CARSON
Can I borrow your cell phone?

PAUL
Why do you need to make a call right now?
Carson looks at a wall clock, then studies Paul.

    CARSON
    I want to tell an associate that we
    may be running a little late.

Green letters spell out TRUTH in reverse on Paul’s glasses.

    PAUL
    You can make your call after you
    reclaim your phone in the lobby.

Carson snaps his fingers, annoying Paul.

    CARSON
    The lobby. I knew it had to be
    around here somewhere. I can’t
    think straight when I’m hungry.
    Let’s split that sandwich.

Paul removes his glasses, rubs the bridge of his nose.

    PAUL
    Is Carson Briggs your real name?
    
    CARSON
    No.

LAPTOP SCREEN - POLYGRAPH

Erratic wave readouts bounce. Green letters blink. TRUTH.

RETURN TO SCENE

    PAUL
    I’m sorry, could you repeat that?
    
    CARSON
    Which part was unclear to you? The
    “N” or the “O”?

Paul’s had enough of this, he reaches under the desktop.

    PAUL
    So, you’re not who you--
    
    CARSON
    Paul, I’m disappointed. The panic
    button, already? We just started.

Paul’s finger hovers over a red button under the desk.

    PAUL
    What button?
You're a bad liar, Mr. Reyes.

Are you a good liar, Mr. Briggs?

I assure you it’s in your best interests to not press that button.

Waveforms peak and drop. Green letters blink. TRUTH.

Am I lying?

Paul regards Carson with caution.

So, why are you here?

Paul, that is not a yes or no question you can easily verify.

Is there something that you want from me?

Yes. Absolute cooperation, and my bag. Unpack it for me. Please.

And, if I don’t cooperate?

An innocent person will die.

Readouts fluctuate. Green letters blink. TRUTH.

Paul ponders the situation, grabs the backpack.

Carson spots a Glock in Paul’s shoulder holster.

Paul extracts a sandwich, small hourglass and a key chain. An alarm remote and USB device hang from the key ring.
CARSON
Start the hourglass.

Carson cracks his neck. Paul sets the wooden hourglass on his desk, sand end up.

PAUL
Look, I don’t have contacts in the United States anymore--

CARSON
I know who you are. A widower and disgraced DEA agent. You moved to Puerto Rico and became a polygraph expert. Now you subcontract your services to your former masters.

PAUL
I paid for my mistakes.

Carson looks amused, then regards Paul with contempt.

CARSON
Is that what you tell yourself when you kiss your son good night?

Paul looks at a portrait on his desk near the hourglass. SAM (6) hugs his father at a playground in the image.

PAUL
Sam. Is my son safe?

LAPTOP SCREEN - POLYGRAPH
Readouts spike. Waveforms jitter.

RETURN TO SCENE

CARSON
Now that’s a good question.

Paul wants to hurt Carson. Bad.

PAUL
You’re lying! A polygraph isn’t foolproof.

Paul picks up the phone receiver, keys numbers.

CARSON
I promise you’ll understand the situation much better after you put down the phone and split that chicken sandwich with me.
Paul studies Carson’s face, a smug blank slate.

PAUL
You said earlier it was ham.

Carson mock ponders the words for a long moment.

CARSON
Did I? I meant chicken.

LAPTOP SCREEN - POLYGRAPH
Erratic wavelengths bounce. Red letters blink. LIE.

RETURN TO SCENE
Paul picks up the uncut sandwich.

CARSON
Rip it, right down the middle.

Paul glares at Carson, tears the bread in half.

A small severed finger falls from the sandwich. The appendage lands in front of the happy portrait and running hourglass.

CARSON
Lost your appetite, Paul?

Paul didn’t see that coming, he drops the bread. Carson retrieves and bites into the snack, savoring the flavor.

PAUL
Sam? This can’t be real.

Carson licks all his fingers clean.

CARSON
There’s a website address written on the back of the flash drive. It will put to rest any doubts you may have regarding my sincerity.

Paul keys the URL on his laptop.

LAPTOP SCREEN - WEB BROWSER WINDOW
A webcam with poor frame rate and no sound shows a scared Sam in a dingy empty room, bloody bandage on his left hand.

RETURN TO SCENE
Carson puts down the sandwich. Paul fights through the shock.
CARSON
I told Sam if he let me cut off his finger, he would get to see his daddy again real soon.
(beat)
You should be proud of your boy.

LAPTOP SCREEN - WEB BROWSER WINDOW
Sam’s lips form the word, “daddy”, through sobs.

RETURN TO SCENE
Sand trickles down the hourglass. Half gone.

CARSON
Plug the USB into your laptop and enter your database password. The device will do the rest.

Paul plugs the drive into his laptop, keys buttons.

LAPTOP SCREEN - GOVERNMENT DATABASE WINDOW
A progress bar fills as documents flash in rapid succession.

RETURN TO SCENE
The laptop beeps. Paul yanks and tosses the device to Carson.
Carson tosses the key ring back to Paul.

CARSON
Just one more thing. Press the “unlock” button on the alarm remote. Then, I promise I will walk out that door and out of your life.

Paul studies the ordinary looking alarm remote.

PAUL
Are you telling the truth?

CARSON
Yes.

Paul looks at the laptop.

LAPTOP SCREEN - POLYGRAPH
Wavelengths dip and shimmy. Data computes.
Green letters blink. TRUTH.
Paul regards Carson as he pushes the “unlock” button.
An unseen ground level explosion rocks the room. Alarms trip.
Paul pockets the device as books fall off a shelf. The sounds of screaming and running waft in from the hallway.
The hourglass shudders. Three quarters gone.
Carson starts to unhook himself from the polygraph.

PAUL
What was that?

CARSON
That would be the phone I left in the lobby. Homeland Security tends to get curious about unscheduled flights, unless they’re distracted.

Paul rises up, reaches for his gun. He can’t take it anymore.

PAUL
You twist the truth until it snaps.

Paul stands over Carson, aims the Glock at his forehead.

PAUL
Give me back my son!

CARSON
That’s the spirit, Paul. Bueno! Your son is across the street in a vacant warehouse basement. If you don’t find him before the hourglass runs out, Sam will die.

Paul fumes, he wants to shoot Carson. Bad.

CARSON
Am I lying?

Paul sideways glances at the laptop.
Carson grabs Paul by the wrists, rises from the chair.
Paul fires a round into the ceiling. The A/C catch cup pops.
Carson frees himself from the polygraph, gut kicks Paul.
Paul misses with a roundhouse punch, then a sweep kick.
Carson shifts his balance, pivots and chokes Paul with the polygraph cord from behind.

CARSON
Nice moves. Take classes? Me too.

Carson kidney punches Paul. Twice.

CARSON
Need some air? Give me the gun.

Carson grabs the Glock and the flash drive, releases Paul.
Paul gasps for air, pulls the cord off his neck.

PAUL
The hourglass. Were you lying?

Carson ponders taking pity on Paul, then reconsidered.

CARSON
(sings tauntingly)
I’m not telling.

The two men stare at each other for a long beat. Paul exits.

Sounds of unseen chaos fill the room, the door swings shut.

Carson lights a cigarette, takes a long drag. He exhalles the smoke, like he just had epic sex. Another drag and release.

LAPTOP SCREEN - WEB BROWSER WINDOW

Paul enters frame and holds Sam tight against his chest.

RETURN TO SCENE

Carson watches the reunion. He holds the remote, thumb poised over the red button.

The last of the hourglass sand runs into the lower chamber.

CARSON
Goodbye, Mr. Reyes.

Carson pushes the red button.

CUT TO BLACK.

THE END