

**GASLIGHTERS**

by

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FADE IN:

**INT. CASINO - HOTEL HALLWAYS - NIGHT**

CORY LARSEN (22, Gen Z, tall, brown hair, ambitious with a blind spot) is out of breath.

Halts to catch it.

Cory's eyes scan the halls, seeking out danger.

Overlapping SHOUTS.

The DIN is getting closer.

LOUDER.

Someone is chasing him.

Cory spots them.

Reacts to--

An angry mob of a hundred CONTINENTAL AND BRITISH ARMY RE-ENACTORS in Revolutionary soldier uniforms.

They invade the halls with bayonet-fixed muskets and SCREAM for blood...

Cory sprints in the opposite direction.

**INT. CASINO STAIRWELL - NIGHT**

Cory bursts through the doors and runs up the stairs.

**EXT. CASINO ROOFTOP - NIGHT**

Cory emerges from the stairwell exit.

Frantic search for a hiding place, to no avail.

Cory heads to the ledge. Peers down.

Thirty stories down to the ground pool.

Trapped!

Cory eyes the neon Vegas skyline, plotting his next move.

Hears the RUCKUS behind him.

**INT. CASINO - TOP FLOOR LOBBY - NIGHT**

Cory records a video selfie on his phone. His panicked expression and tone echo Last Rites.

CORY (INTO CAMERA)  
If I don't make it out of here, I have some things I want to say to the people I care about...I'm sorry I screwed this up.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)  
Going somewhere, Cory?

Cory knows the voice. Stops mid-sentence. Eyes wide.

CORY (V.O.)  
You may be curious how I got myself into this situation. Turns out that was the easy part. I was truly fucked...

**EXT. WOOSTER, OHIO - DAY**

Auto and steel factories. Main Street with quaint shops.

CORY (V.O.)  
Wooster, Ohio: where I served an eighteen-year sentence before college. Small towns can't contain some people. They're destined for bigger and better things. Positive and negative. It all started by accident--

**INT. COLLEGE DORM ROOM - NIGHT**

Cory wakes up to a FIRE ALARM.

College roommate DEREK (22, perpetual bedhead), groans in the bed across from him.

CORY  
I hope that's a false alarm.

DEREK  
Um, no. The White Rastas are smoking weed again.

CORY  
Again?

Cory sighs and dons his sweats.

**INT. DORMITORY HALLWAYS - NIGHT**

STUDENTS evacuate.

Cory talks to FIREFIGHTERS and CAMPUS POLICE. Fingers the suspects' room.

**INT. WHITE RASTAFARIANS' DORM ROOM - NIGHT**

Thick, dope smoke.

Fire and police kick in the door and usher out the residents.

**EXT. COLLEGE DORMITORY - DAY**

Officially evicted from campus, the White Rastafarians move out their belongings.

Pissed, they look up to see Cory watching them in the second-floor window. He retreats.

**EXT. CAMPUS SQUARE - DAY**

The White Rastafarians have multiplied exponentially into a larger group, protesting and chanting.

They spot Cory, who innocently walks by.

WHITE RASTAFARIAN

There he is! This is all his fault!

Cory's eyes dart around for an escape route.

A large group of BLACK RASTAFARIANS arrive, ready for a fight.

WHITE RASTAFARIAN

Hey, man, we don't have any beef with you!

BLACK RASTAFARIAN

You do now: for racial appropriation!

Melee begins.

Campus police mix it up with students and protestors. Big mess.

**EXT. OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY - CAMPUS LAWN - DAY**

Graduation ceremony.

Cory's parents, GEORGE LARSEN (54, cynic, bad back from factory work) and CINDY LARSEN (53, housewife, always smiling) are in the audience.

In full black gown, Cory accepts his diploma. Big smile.

**EXT. SIDEWALK - NIGHT**

Cory walks home his longtime girlfriend, CRYSTAL DAVIS (22, Gen Z, tall, adventurous, green-eyed brunette), as he's done hundreds of times before.

CRYSTAL  
Any plans yet?

CORY  
Just applying. Sending out the resume.

CRYSTAL  
I'm sure you'll find something with your political science degree.

CORY  
Dad doesn't think so. He said there's no science to politics. All of the politicians are grifters and liars trying to sell you something you don't want. The "bait-and-switch scam."

CRYSTAL  
Not far off.

CORY  
He doesn't get the nuances. What about you?

CRYSTAL  
Need more time. I want to make a difference somehow. Life's more than just a regular job, you know?

CORY  
Maybe. Is this where we go our separate ways and promise to keep in touch?

CRYSTAL  
 Something like that. You can always  
 call or FaceTime.

CORY  
 Not the same.

She kisses him.

CRYSTAL  
 You'll always be my first...

CORY  
 Same. Goodnight, babe.

Cory holds her hand a little too long. Hard to let go.

Crystal enters her apartment complex.

He won't leave until she's out of sight.

**EXT. WASHINGTON D.C. - DAY**

Cory rides Uber to the hotel. Captivated by the sights.

**INT. ELEVATOR - DAY**

CORY'S SELFIE VIDEO: Glass elevator heading up.

Heart of Washington in the background. Washington Monument,  
 Congress, White House.

CORY (INTO CAMERA PHONE)  
 Hey, babe. You watching? This is  
 it: where the magic of democracy  
 happens. The gold standard the  
 world follows. Got an interview  
 today, hope it works out. Tell you  
 later. Bye for now.

**INT. NAAW (NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ASSAULT WEAPONS) -  
 WASHINGTON D.C. - LOBBY - DAY**

American Revolution motif. A SECRETARY escorts Cory to:

**INT. STEFAN'S OFFICE - DAY**

NAAW Director of Communications STEFAN HAMMER (35, widow's  
 peak above bulbous forehead, Machiavellian without shame)  
 interviews Cory.

A YouTube video on the Rastafarian Campus Riot plays on the desk monitor.

Embarrassed by his accidental fifteen minutes of fame, Cory can barely watch. But Stefan is impressed.

STEFAN

I didn't know dreadlocks could be used as deadly weapons.

CORY

You knew about this before I applied?

STEFAN

Oh, yes. You went viral.

CORY

It all happened so fast. The fire alarm, the threats, the protest. All because of a little weed?

STEFAN

That's the problem with our world today: people don't respect each other's space and values. They go too far and need to be taught a lesson once in a while.

CORY

Didn't think of it that way.

STEFAN

The only nitpick I have right now: the deer in the headlights look.

CORY

Did I look like--?

STEFAN

Bambi, right before the bang. Think stoic and work on it. You may be a good fit for us. So, tell me, Cory, are you ready, willing and able to stand up for what you--or we--believe in?

CORY

For seventy-grand a year? Hell, yes.

**INT. CORY'S D.C. APARTMENT - DAY**

Cory marvels at his new place with a panoramic window.

CORY

Look at this view.

Cory takes pictures with his phone.

STEFAN

You'll travel with us on the road until the election's over in November. After our annual convention in Las Vegas, you'll be staying here indefinitely.

CORY

Vegas? Never been there.

STEFAN

You're in for a memorable experience.

Stefan notes Cory's phone wallpaper: a college picture of Cory and Crystal smiling and partying.

STEFAN

Girlfriend?

CORY

Kind of a long-distance thing right now.

STEFAN

Good luck with that.

**INT. UNDERGROUND PARKING GARAGE - DAY**

Stefan hands Cory the keys to his company car: a silver Jaguar. Can't believe his good luck.

**INT. NAAW WAR ROOM - DAY**

Bustling with activity.

Stefan gives Cory a walk and talk tour through cubicles, desks and side offices.

STEFAN

This is the War Room, where our battles are won or lost. Spoiler alert: we always win.

Stefan gives Cory a deck of white INDEX CARDS.

CORY  
What are these?

STEFAN  
Flash cards for media responses.  
Memorize them. They'll come in  
handy later.

CORY  
Hmm, good to know.

Stefan and Cory peek inside a side office:

VENTRILLOQUISTS and DUMMIES on their laps, dressed in mini-suits.

The amateurs try to mask their lip movements with little success.

VENTRILLOQUIST  
What do we say when someone tries  
to pass new gun legislation we  
don't want?

DUMMY  
Slippery slope, don't be a dope.  
Slippery slope!

CORY  
Role-playing?

STEFAN  
Good practice for the real ones.

EMPLOYEES are huddled under a large wall screen, watching a press conference in action.

CORY  
What's going on?

STEFAN  
Let's listen in.

ON THE WALL TV SCREEN: An OUTGOING SENATOR delivers a live political mea culpa from a Holiday Inn Express dais. His CRYING FAMILY reluctantly stands beside him.

OUTGOING SENATOR  
It is with sadness and regret that  
today I leave my position in  
Congress for new opportunities in  
the private sector.

(MORE)

OUTGOING SENATOR (CONT'D)  
 Spending more quality time with  
 family will be my top priority...

A TAPED VIDEO of his ACCUSER--a possible gay man wearing  
 glitter makeup--describes their explicit love affair and  
 plays side-by-side.

ACCUSER  
 He said he loved me and would do  
 anything for me. It was all a lie.  
 I feel used and deceived!

After the senator's farewell speech, his WIFE belts him in  
 the nose. His YOUNG CHILDREN kick and flip him off.

HOOTS and CLAPPING.

A LOBBYIST puts an X on the photo face of the now-disgraced  
 senator.

The entire wall is covered with OTHER POLITICIANS with "X"  
 marks over their file photos.

LOBBYIST #1  
 Another vote for our side!

LOBBYIST #2  
 Too bad, so sad.

LOBBYIST #3  
 And we own the governor who'll  
 appoint his replacement! Just in  
 time to vote against the next bill.

Standing ovation in the room.

Puzzled by this, Cory turns around to spot:

The fake accuser/NAAW employee in the video, still wearing  
 the same outfit and glitter makeup. He takes a bow, basking  
 in the applause.

LOBBYIST #4  
 The glitter sold it! Great job!

FAKE ACCUSER/NAAW EMPLOYEE  
 The things I do for the cause.

CORY  
 What just happened?

STEFAN  
 Progress, Cory. Progress.

**INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY**

Stefan departs, handing off Cory to his NAAW colleagues:

GLENN CASTLE (29, former frat-hazing champion, current narcissist) and NATE WILLIAMS (27, African-American, athletic, fast-talker).

NATE

Cory, right? Welcome to the team.  
I'm Nate, this is Glenn.

GLENN

If you survive the first month,  
I'll be impressed. Until then,  
you're a green piece of shit that  
doesn't deserve my respect.

CORY

Okay. I'll do my best to earn that  
respect.

GLENN

Whatever.

On the table, they observe a model replica of the Capitol building.

GLENN

House and Senate chambers. Reps and  
Senators. It's a daily reminder of  
what we do--and who we do it to. We  
own these people as long as they're  
in office.

CORY

Own?

GLENN

Own, as in our personal property,  
to rent or flip as we choose.

NATE

Rarely any flipping. It's mostly  
"as is" with costly renovations.

CORY

What happens if they don't go  
along?

Glenn and Nate exchange looks. Laugh.

CHET (V.O.)

They get bull's-eyed.