

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?

CARSON  
You're a bad liar, Mr. Reyes.

PAUL  
Are you a good liar, Mr. Briggs?

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

LAPTOP SCREEN - POLYGRAPH

Waveforms peak and drop. Green letters blink. TRUTH.

CARSON (V.O.)  
Am I lying?

RETURN TO SCENE

Paul regards Carson with caution.

PAUL  
So, why are you here?

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

PAUL  
Is there something that you want  
from me?

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

PAUL  
And, if I don't cooperate?

CARSON  
An innocent person will die.

LAPTOP SCREEN - POLYGRAPH

Readouts fluctuate. Green letters blink. TRUTH.

RETURN TO SCENE

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.

RETURN TO SCENE

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 reconsiders.

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 exhales 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