

Paying the Dues
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FADE IN ON:

EXT. SIDEWALK - CITY STREET - DAY

PROTESTORS march past a window, framed in gold.

FEVERED CHANTS fill the air. Most of the crowd appears poorly dressed. Ripped tee-shirts and jeans on display.

INT. CAVEN TOWERS - BAR LOBBY

Soothing MUSIC plays above the rabble. Soars past a Crystal Chandelier. Three TEENS watch the protest from a table, over drinks.

- ADAM: Gawky. The youngest. Very green.

- JAKE HENDERSON: Rough around the edges, clothes mismatched. Fierce intelligence in his eyes.

- NELSON CAVEN: As preppy and polished as they get.

Nelson points towards a protestor SIGN outside: *Economic Inequality Hurts Everyone.*

NELSON

Gimme a break. No one's hurting here.

He raises a glass and toasts his friends.

NELSON

Here's to awesome Dads that pay my friends' bar tabs!

JAKE

And finally graduating from *Sowell Prep*. It's been a bitch these four years!

NELSON

For me, maybe. For you - Einstein - it was a breeze. Good thing you let me copy all your tests.

JAKE

It's the least I could do. This cocktail costs thirty dollars...

NELSON

Here's to Upward Mobility. And college just around the bend!

Glasses CLINK. Adam frowns.

ADAM

That's easy for you to say. I'm just a Sophomore. Two more years of Hell to go!

JAKE

Which means you've got Professor Simon for Poly-Sci next semester.

NELSON

Woah. Good luck with that!

Protest SOUNDS grow louder. Nelson reads a second sign: *Meritocracy, not Oligarchy*. Anger flashes in his eyes.

NELSON

Socialist Simon would jizz if he saw that. What the fuck they think we have now?

He grabs Jake in a headlock, gives him several Noogies.

NELSON

People just gotta bootstrap themselves in Life. Looks at Exhibit A: ole Jake here. He got into the best prep school there is - even though his Dad's just a plumber. Where you gonna apply to college, Jake?

JAKE

(grins)
Harvard.

Nelson high fives his friend.

NELSON

Count me in. Though Dad's hinting Yale.

Outside: CHANTS turn into SCREAMS. Adam squints out the window. SECURITY GUARDS with batons wade in.

They rip signs out of Protestors' hands. Demonstrators are Tased. Then cuffed. And led away.

ADAM

Who called the Calvary?

NELSON

That's *Pinkerton Security*. My family uses them for all their hotels.

A WOMAN PROTESTOR trips and falls. A bloody mess.

ADAM

Ow! Damn. It hurts from here.

NELSON

Well, she shouldn't be breaking the law. Good thing Pinkerton's got a great court system - enough to handle that whole bunch. And anyone who fights the fine'll get their ass sued, for our legal bills. No reason we should pay for *their* mistakes!

Outside: the Protestors are outgunned. Security Guards whisk them away.

ADAM

Doesn't that violate First Amendment rights?

Nelson and Jake exchange knowing looks.

NELSON

Professor Simon's gonna dig you. A lot.

JAKE

I know it's harsh, but Nelson's right. Look at the big picture. She has no right to trespass on private property.

NELSON

Yeah. My Dad owns the sidewalk. This whole *block*. If anyone wants to bitch, they can do it somewhere else.

JAKE

See, Adam? That's the point. Property rights matter. And Nelson's Dad worked his butt off for everything he has.

Guards load Protestors into vans.

ADAM

Okay. I get the point.

NELSON

Then you'll do fine in Simon's class. Just don't let him pull that "Capitalism is Economic Feudalism" crap. If he does, go Libertarian on his ass. We got freedom in this country. Everyone gets what they deserve. Cream rises to the top!

Nelson and Jake toast again, lock eyes.

NELSON

To the very best friend I've ever had. See you at Harvard next semester.

JAKE

Or Yale!

INT. JAKE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A hovel with Salvation Army furniture. And appliances that haven't been replaced since Jake first met Life.

A drunk Jake stumbles in the door. KURT AND SALLY HENDERSON (50s) await him on their retro couch.

KURT

Where the holy hell have you been?

JAKE

Out.

SALLY

Doing what?

JAKE

Drinking. A little - with Nel.

His parents relax. Protest video BLARES on an old TV.

KURT

We know you went uptown. We were afraid you were somewhere else.

SALLY

And we know how you like to debate.

She nods at the TV. Jake nearly stumbles over his feet.

JAKE

I'm no Revolutionist, Mom. I just tell it like it is.

SALLY

Speaking of which - sit down. We know you applied to Harvard. But there's something we should discuss.

Sally pats the cushion between her and Kurt. Jake sits.

JAKE

Lay it on me. What's up?

Kurt winces at his son's breath.

KURT

How much did you drink, Son?

SALLY

Shhhh. That's not important, Kurt. It's GOOD that Jake has such nice friends.

Sally takes Jake's hand.

SALLY

Darling, we didn't tell you this until now. Because your studies were more important - we didn't want to distract you with... adult things.

JAKE

What "things"? Be specific.

KURT

Your mother's being discrete. She's talking about family finances, Son.

JAKE

(grins)

I see where this is going. I'm not dumb.

SALLY

No, you're not. You're very bright.

KURY

And we're very proud.

JAKE

Then stop worrying. Harvard offered me a full scholarship, just today!

Kurt and Sally exchange worried looks.

SALLY

That's marvelous, Dear. Does it have an expiration date?

JAKE

Who cares? I'm already packed! I know you guys'll miss me. But this opportunity's too awesome to let go.

SALLY

Darling - about your prep school...

KURT

And the rent.

SALLY

You see, when you were growing up, we were forced to make some... deals.

KURT

Stop beating around the bush, Sally.
Jake, it's like this. Food and housing's
expensive these days. At least on what
your mother and I make. So we had to
borrow - a bit.

JAKE

How much?

SALLY

A half a million dollars.

JAKE

What?!?

SALLY

Plus interest. But for your education, it
was well worth the sacrifice.

JAKE

Just restructure the Loan. When I
graduate from Harvard, I'll pay the whole
damned thing myself!

Jake leaps to his feet. Sally SIGHS. Pulls him back down.

SALLY

Darling, what we're trying to say is you
can't go to school.

JAKE

Ever?

KURT

No - but you have to take a *small* break.

Sally and Kurt close in on Jake from both sides.

SALLY

The loan didn't pay for *everything*. So we
signed you up for work. For awhile -
there'll be no time for school.

Sally grabs Jake's wrist, like he'll float away.

JAKE

That's not fair. I didn't ask for this!

SALLY

No-one does, Dear. It's just the Facts of
Life.

KURT

But it's like you always say. There ain't no such thing as a free lunch.

JAKE

So - you signed me up as a slave?

SALLY

Don't be so dramatic. It's voluntary. No one *forced* us to send you to prep school. We just knew it was for the best. For your future. School costs money...

KURT

You can't deny that, Son.

SALLY

Teachers and administrators must be paid. Who's going to do that? Some stranger who shouldn't have to pay for you? Or the family that loves you - more than the whole, wide world.

JAKE

So I've got to work it all off?

KURT

Not forever. Just 20 years, give or take. You won't make enough to save anything. But you'll have a roof over your head.

SALLY

It's only fair. One has to sacrifice for good things.

KURT

Be a man.

SALLY

And forge your own path in Life.

Sally hugs her son. Frustration shines in Jake's eyes.

KURT

For what it's worth, we pulled some strings. Got you a real cushy job.

INT. CAVEN TOWERS - BAR LOBBY - NEXT DAY

Back at the table; just Nelson and Jake. Along with a few real strong drinks. The friends stare at each other.

NELSON

So, you're not going to Harvard after all?

JAKE

My parents got a loan. From your Dad.

NELSON

He's making you wash dishes? *20 years?*

JAKE

It's only fair I pay my own way.

NELSON

You'll visit me in Yale, right?

JAKE

Yeah. After the indenture's over, I'll apply for scholarship again.

NELSON

But you'll be competing against young kids. Think Harvard will accept you then? Will you even make enough to eat?

JAKE

I'll move back with my parents. That'll save me rent.

NELSON

Then why the fuck they'd spend all that?

JAKE

You can't get into college without prep school. And without college, there's no jobs left...

Nelson looks crestfallen. Jake tries to look brave.

JAKE

Don't act like I'm dying. This world is a meritocracy, right? I'll just work extra hard, and win!

Nelson brightens up. He raises his glass in a toast.

NELSON

Here's to Cream Rising to the top. Even if it takes... a bit of time.

CHANTS ring outside. It's those pesky PROTESTORS again. Nelson tosses Jake a washcloth.

NELSON

I hate to give this to you, but my Dad
felt it'd be worse if you wait.

Jake rises - on his own two feet. He heads with the towel
towards the kitchen in back.

JAKE

No sweat. See you soon.

NELSON

(beat)

Yeah. In twenty years.

FINAL FADE OUT: