

OVER BLACK

FLICK

FLICK

FOOM.

A gas stovetop ignites into flame.

The HISS of sizzling oil soon follows.

INT. FOOD STAND - NIGHT

A battered, sorry-looking, too thick lump of scallioned dough
SIZZLES on a hot plate.

KAI (late 20s), a wiry, clean-shaven, Asian American man
takes a step back and wipes his brow. His chef's apron is
pristine.

KAI (V.O.)

I used to think life was pretty
simple. Go to a decent school, get
a good job, date a nice girl.

The dough begins to brown and spread into a pancake. Kai
tentatively attempts to flip the gluey mixture...and scolds
himself as the scallion pancake begins to break apart.

A YOUNG CUSTOMER waits impatiently at the counter.

KAI (V.O.)

But deep down, I knew much of what
I had was due to luck.

As Kai tries to salvage the disaster, the kid loses patience
and leaves.

KAI (V.O.)

Luck that I was born into a loving
family of hard-working parents.
Luck that helped them get a visa to
America.

Surrounded by newly purchased equipment, the dejected cook
cuts a lonely figure in his cramped steel quarters.

KAI (V.O.)

Luck we had enough money that I
could focus on my studies.

Kai lets out a frustrated sigh. The failed creation is lobbed into the trash where it joins dozens of aborted cousins.

KAI (V.O)
I never really noticed my luck
until it was gone.

Kai leans on the counter, defeated. He watches the sun set on the throngs of tourists walking on the boardwalk.

No one stops to order.

Our forlorn chef removes his apron, hanging it up for the night. Shoulders slumped, he heads to the back and grabs a beer from the fridge.

He passes a cork board next to the fridge --- its single occupant a wrinkled old envelope.

He cracks open the beer and takes a thirsty swig. His free hand tentatively reaches for the pinned package --- but his self control wins out. The pouch remains unopened.

A sigh. A practiced shaking of the head.

He tears himself away, busying himself with locking up the stand.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

Waves crash onto an empty stretch of sand. A full moon dances along the frothy waves.

Silent skateboard rinks and basketball courts. Palm trees swaying in the wind.

In the distance -- colorful will-o'-the-wisps on the Santa Monica Pier twirl and dance for all to see.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Through an apartment window overlooking the boardwalk we see Kai, beer in hand, cross the empty street towards the beach.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

From afar, we watch as the lonely chef knifes through a forest of bonfires: each occupied with families, friends, and lovers.

EXT. BEACH COASTLINE - NIGHT

As soon as Kai reaches the coast, he takes a right and starts walking along the edge of the water -- drinking his beer and habitually kicking up sand as he goes.

Soon the bonfires' flickering flames disappear into the darkness -- leaving him alone with the pallid moonlight and thundering waves.

Spotting a familiar location, Kai trots up onto the sand and sits down.

EXT. BEACH COASTLINE - NIGHT - LATER

Kai peers into his beer bottle. Dry as a whistle.

Not satisfied, he searches around in his pockets. Soon, he's dug up his buried treasure: a half-smoked joint -- barely more than a roach.

He gives a "why not" shrug and lights up.

A few puffs later... and life smooths out to more tolerable pace. The moon grows softer. The waves, once crashing, now soothe his thumping heart.

He barely notices another flame flare up in the corner of his eye.

The flickering light gets closer, finally catching his attention.

VICKY (early 30s) a tall, slender, Chinese woman with long dark hair emerges from the shadows. She walks up to Kai and sits down curiously close to him.

VICKY

Hi.

KAI

Hello.

VICKY

I live across the street. I've seen you walk from your food stand to the beach every night.

Vicky puts out her cig in the sand and extends her hand.

VICKY (CONT'D)

I'm Vicky.

Kai hesitantly shakes it.

KAI

Kai.

VICKY

Hi Kai.

KAI

So why did you pick tonight to say
hello?

Vicky looks up to the heavens.

VICKY

Why not? I try not to push things
off when I make up my mind.

Vicky takes a good long look at Kai.

VICKY (CONT'D)

And...just as I thought. You
definitely don't look like the type
to be selling pizza to tourists.

Kai isn't sure whether to feel defensive or reassured.

KAI

And what type is that?

VICKY

You know. Shrewd. Hard-working. Not
busy feeling sorry for themselves.

Kai finishes his joint and extinguishes it next to Vicky's.

KAI

(exhales)

You got me.

VICKY

So why Kai? Why test yourself in
such a tough business?

KAI

Mm. It was time for a change.

Vicky pulls out another cigarette and starts to light it.

VICKY

Ahhh. I see. A romantic.

KAI

What about you? What's your story?

Vicky takes a drag of the cig.

VICKY
Me? Nothing really.

Before Kai can ask more, Vicky starts getting up.

VICKY (CONT'D)
Well. I'll leave you to your lonely
self. It was nice to meet you Kai.
I'll see you around.

Kai watches as she gets up and disappears back into the
darkness.

FLASHBACK MONTAGE:

EXT. KAI'S OLD APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

- Kai walks down a sleek modern hallway. This is a different
Kai: striding purposefully in business casual with an
expensive all-black backpack slung over his shoulder.

KAI
(whispering on phone)
The ring's on me right now!
(listens)
Yea. Yea. She has no idea. I was
very thorough. She just thinks
we're flying out for our
anniversary.
(listens)
Yea. Ok -- Mom I gotta go. I'm
almost at the apartment.

Kai hangs up as he reaches the door at the end of the hall.
As he tries to enter, he notices a SEALED ENVELOPE taped
underneath the peephole.

A cavalcade of emotions stampede over him as he recognizes
the familiar handwriting. He tears it off the door and
anxiously digs through the letter inside.

Kai (V.O.)
A few months ago she left me. She
told me she finally worked up the
courage to pursue her dreams and
that I should do the same.

INT. KAI'S OLD APARTMENT - NIGHT

- Kai walks into the apartment and turns on the light. Objects are conspicuously missing -- paintings on walls, cushions on the sofa, books on shelves. He reaches in his pocket and places a ring box on the dining table.

Kai leaves us as he continues to survey the extent of the damage in the bedroom. We linger on the box, now a tiny monument to a shattered dream.

KAI (V.O)

All that remained was an address in
an unfamiliar place.

EXT. KAI'S OLD APARTMENT - MORNING

- The street is colored a hazy blue as the sky prepares for dawn. Kai haphazardly throws his luggage into the back seat of his black BMW.

KAI (V.O)

I couldn't stand the burden of
reliving our cold, lifeless
memories. Day. By day. By day. One
Tuesday morning I threw my
remaining possessions in the car
and just started driving.

INT. KAI'S CAR - DAY

- Kai eyes threaten to glaze over as he drives down a lonesome desert highway.

EXT. BEACH BOULEVARD - DAY

- An agent hands Kai the KEYS to a dilapidated hot dog stand on the corner of the beach boardwalk we saw earlier.

Kai (V.O)

Before too long I found myself in
Los Angeles, spending the rest of
my savings on a little shop by the
beach.

INT. KAI'S - NIGHT

- Kai installs the corkboard and pins the virtually pristine envelope. He stares at it for a second, but is distracted by an old dusty light FLICKERING in and out.

KAI (V.O)
 I knew nothing about selling food.
 But that's how we met. Two dumb
 kids on a night out at the only
 open diner in town.

INT. KAI'S - DAY

- The new shop owner hangs a menu board on the wall. He plugs in a new sign. The pink bulbs flicker to life: KAI'S.

KAI (V.O)
 We always talked about quitting our
 jobs to start something together,
 and I was willing to latch onto any
 shared memories that could possibly
 bring her back.

INT. KAI'S - DAY

- Kai opens the back door to take in shipments of vegetables delivered by ISRAEL, (40s) a stocky Mexican American man with wrinkly and kind eyes.

KAI (V.O)
 I tried to make our dream my own --
 yet slowly but surely some of her
 favorite meals began appearing like
 unwanted house guests on the menu.

INT. KAI'S - NIGHT

- Kai grabs a bottle labeled SECRET SAUCE and squirts a dab onto a slice of pepperoni pizza. He hands the dish to a YOUNG SKATEBOARDER.

KAI (V.O.)
 It started off reasonably enough
 with some pepperoni pizza,

- A steamer lid opens, revealing freshly made bao.

KAI (V.O)
 then gua bao,

- Kai tries to remove another scallion pancake and recoils after accidentally touching the hot flattop.

KAI (V.O) (CONT'D)
 until this week I found myself
 making her favorite dish: scallion
 pancakes.

- Kai leans on the counter again, looking out at the crowds
 of tourists filing by.

KAI (V.O) (CONT'D)
 She always hated LA... but maybe
 one day she'd change her mind.

END OF MONTAGE

EXT. KAI'S - EVENING

We stay on Kai as he daydreams the hours away. Soon he perks
 up as one of the tourists notices the stand.

His smile turns into a slight grimace when he recognizes the
 interested party -- it's NEIL (late 20s), a South Asian man
 wearing the uniform of venture capital bros everywhere: a
 striped button down under a Patagonia vest.

NEIL
 (surprised)
 Kai?! Is that you?

KAI
 Hey buddy. Yep, in the flesh.

Neil leans over to dap him up.

NEIL
 Wow! Look at you! This yours?

KAI
 Yes sir.

Neil takes a look around, taking stock of the humble shop.

NEIL
 Cool man! Real cool...is this like--
 (gestures around)
 a little sabbatical or something?

KAI
 Nah. Trying to stick with it.

NEIL
 Whoahhh! Damn! Big news brother. No
 wonder I haven't seen you at
 Barry's.

An awkward beat, as Kai just nods.

NEIL (CONT'D)

Man! I can't believe Kai "The Killa" is hanging it up to sell some pizza. I would've bet it all that you were going to run the biggest fund in the Valley one day!

KAI

You're too kind.

Neil keeps going.

NEIL

Honestly, I'm jealous. I was tripping my BALLS off at the Burn last year and really thought about leaving it all behind too you know? Buttt we just got a new place in Oakland...and we're looking at rescues...you know how it is. Ahh but this isn't about me. You found a way out! You're so brave! Good for you.

KAI

Thanks man.

NEIL

And what happened to?...

KAI

(quickly)
We're taking a break.

NEIL

Oh...sorry to hear that. Pattie and I loved her.

An awkward silence interrupts the forced pleasantries.

NEIL (CONT'D)

Well, listen bro, SO glad I got to catch up with you! I mean, what are the chances I'd find you out here? But I gotta run -- we've got dinner with the folks. You raising money anytime soon?

KAI

Nah.

NEIL
(whistles)
Oh man! REALLY putting your all
into this! Alright, well how can I
spread the word? IG? Tik Tok?

KAI
Haven't set any of that up either.

Neil doesn't know what to do with that information.

NEIL
Totally get it man. Low tech is in.
Can't beat some good ol' word of
mouth!

He leans in as if telling Kai an important secret.

NEIL (CONT'D)
And listen, I should be getting in
on the Cleangreens founder's Series
B, so let me know if you want me to
put you in touch.

Neil rubs his first three fingers together -- the universal
sign for cash money.

NEIL (CONT'D)
He's working on a killer product
line. I'm sure I could talk to him
about getting you in on the first
batch.

Neil slightly backs up, holding up his hands.

NEIL (CONT'D)
And I know, I know, you're probably
KILLING it already, but it wouldn't
hurt right? Get that marketing
machine working for you.

KAI
Sure, I'll think about it.

NEIL
Alright, well, just don't forget
about me when you get on Top Chef
you hear? See ya!

KAI
(forces a smile)
Yea. Thanks Neil. See ya.