

MY FATHER LEFT WHEN I WAS FIVE AND NOW I SMOKE CIGARETTES TO FILL
THE HOLE HE LEFT BEHIND

INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - NIGHT

Bright lights. Suffocating steam. Loud, urgent VOICES. Bodies navigating the small space.

CHEF 1
Corner! Corner!

He shoves past CHARLIE, mid to late 20s, wearing a blue apron, bent over a SIZZLING pan.

CHEF 2
I need that lamb dish, now!

CHEF 3
Knife!

Charlie clumsily plates his dish and pushes it onto the counter. Chef 2 grabs it. Tastes it.

CHEF 2
Too salty. Not good enough.

He takes it away to another station.

CHEF 4
Hot pot coming through!

Charlie wipes his sweaty face with a towel.

CHEF 5
Corner!

EXT. ALLEYWAY - NIGHT

A middle aged LINE COOK smokes in a grimy alleyway. A blue apron tied around his waist.

The BANG of a metal door and Charlie stumbles into the alleyway. Yellow light and the CHATTER of a busy kitchen burst the quiet bubble.

He quickly unties the apron around his waist. The line cook offers him a cigarette.

Charlie looks at the cigarette a moment too long.

CHARLIE
Don't smoke anymore.

The line cook shrugs. Releases a puff of smoke.

EXT. BUS STOP - NIGHT

Charlie stands at the bus stop. A woman, 30s, stands beside him. Ash tumbles from her fingers as she takes a long drag from a nubby cigarette. She notices Charlie staring.

WOMAN

Want one, honey? It's cold.

Charlie shakes his head as the bus pulls to a violent stop.

The woman gets on first. A packet of cigarettes falls out of her back pocket. They sink in a puddle of murky water.

Charlie picks up the cigarette packet. He gets on the bus.

INT. BUS - NIGHT

Charlie shifts unevenly on his feet as the bus starts with a HISS.

He scans the bus. There are only two other people, an ELDERLY WOMAN and a TEENAGE BOY with headphones on, muffled angry MUSIC audible.

Charlie stumbles to the front of the bus and leans over the bus driver's shoulder.

CHARLIE

Sorry. Wasn't there a woman who just got on?

The bus driver whips the bus around a corner. Charlie staggers and regains his footing.

BUS DRIVER

I see a lot of people, kid.

CHARLIE

Yeah, but she just got on.

The bus driver slams on the brakes. Charlie slams into the side of the bus. The bus doors swing open.

BUS DRIVER

I just drive the bus.

The teenager gets off the bus. He turns to Charlie.

TEENAGER

Maybe you'd be more tolerable if
you smoked a whole pack of
cigarettes and then wallowed in
shame all night. Just a thought.

The bus driver shrugs at Charlie, like *maybe he's right*.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

The night pulses in bright colors and loud MUSIC around Charlie. He pushes through a sea of YOUNG PEOPLE with a grim determination. A pretty YOUNG WOMAN runs into him, her eyelids smeared with sparkly eye shadow.

She smiles good-naturedly. Grabs his wrist as he turns.

YOUNG WOMAN

Did you know lung cancer only
develops in ten to twenty percent
of smokers? That's a whole eighty
percent that turn out fine!

Charlie pales. He wrenches his wrist from her grip.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

Charlie stumbles down the street, the lights of neon signs and glowing shop windows moving across his face.

... a faded ad on the side of a store features a smiling blonde woman with a cigarette held to her lips. The text above her head: SMOKING KEEPS ME FROM BEATING MY HEAD IN.

... a BABY sucks on a lit cigarette as he is pushed in a stroller by a WOMAN. He GOO GOOS and GA GAS with the rasp of a lifelong smoker. He winks at Charlie.

... a DOG pulls his OWNER down the street. The dog looks up at Charlie, a cigarette hanging from his black lips.

DOG

(voice of Michael Cera)
This cigarette is more of a father
to me than my own father.

END MONTAGE

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Charlie reaches a dilapidated apartment building, all grays and grimy greens, and shoves his key into the rusted door.

INT. APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

He stands in front of the trash can. Contemplates the pack of cigarettes.

CHARLIE

I'm throwing these away.

He drops them in the trash.

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Charlie stares at his TV, flicking quickly through different channels. He stops on a trashy reality TV show.

ANDY COHEN sits on a velvet couch, a handful of colorfully dressed women sitting opposite him. Upon closer inspection, they're all the same woman -- cheeks pumped with Botox and lips fat with filler.

ANDY COHEN

Ladies, can I just say, after a grueling day of the same old monotony isn't it so great that there's a way for you to feel good instantly? And you don't even have to leave the house for it? You gotta love an easy fix to a lifetime of insecurity!

Charlie changes the channel. It's Dr. Phil. A troubled YOUNG WOMAN and her MOTHER sit across from DR. PHIL.

DR. PHIL

Listen, your father doesn't like you, he will never like you, and there's really only one solution to the bottomless pit of inadequacy that you feel.

MOTHER

Therapy?

The AUDIENCE LAUGHS. Dr. Phil shakes his head, bemused.

DR. PHIL

No. Please. When has therapy ever actually worked? Come on. I'm talking about substance abuse.

The AUDIENCE CHEERS.

Charlie changes the channel back to the reality tv show. The women are now ARGUING about their various men.

Charlie turns to his phone. Scrolls on various neon colored apps.

He gets up. Sits down again.

REALITY TV STAR
(egregious vocal fry)
Can you just let me do my thing?
You're always on your moral [bleep-
ing] high horse about my [bleep-
ing] things.

OTHER REALITY TV STAR
(worse vocal fry)
You need to wake up and join the
real world. Seriously. The way you
live your life is [bleep-ing]
embarrassing. I'm embarrassed for
you.

REALITY TV STAR
Then be [bleep-ing] embarrassed!
You're such a [bleep]. I can live
my [bleep-ing] life how I [bleep-
ing] want!

Charlie stands with sudden gusto and moves into the kitchen.

INT. APARTMENT - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Beneath the singular fluorescent light, Charlie digs through one of the kitchen drawers. He finds a lighter.

He opens the trash can and retrieves the cigarette packet. He fishes a cigarette out, lights it and inhales deeply. The tension bleeds from his face. He smiles.

From the other room:

REALITY TV STAR (O.S.)
I'M HAVING A CIGARETTE AND I'M
ENJOYING IT, [BLEEP]! QUIT WORRYING
ABOUT WHAT I'M DOING AND WORRY
ABOUT YOUR HUSBAND SLEEPING WITH
OTHER MEN!

THE END