

Chinese Food

Written By

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FADE IN:

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Candlelight flickers against the wall of a small studio apartment. The white duvet sprawled out over the bed in the center is covered with rose petals. LILY (20s)--dressed in black-lace lingerie and heels--sits right in the middle. This should be a romantic scene, except...

She's alone.

STEVE the cat snuggles up beside her and purrs. She looks out of a window, then down at her phone, and sighs.

Just then...

The door opens. PAUL (30s), a well-dressed hipster wearing a suit, wobbles in drunk. He gives Lily a guilty smile before walking to the kitchen, where he grabs a can of wet cat food.

LILY
I already fed him. You can't just
leave him without food for that
long.

Paul drops the can on the floor, stumbles over to the bed, and plops onto it facedown. Steve jumps off.

Lily looks at him curiously, then...

He starts to snore. Incredulity washes over her face.

She gets up and takes off her heels.

LILY
Happy anniversary, asshole.

She moves towards the door, and puts on a large coat. Steve runs up to her and she kneels down to pet him.

LILY
Bye, Steve.

Steve meows.

INT. JOHN'S APARTMENT - DAY

JOHN (30s) is in bed wrapped in a blanket. The tone in his voice sounds like an adorable little boy talking about his new favorite video game.

JOHN

It's supposed to be the best Chinese food in the country. You don't know when it's open. They just send out an email alert the morning of, and then another one when the doors finally open.

HOLLY (20s) is getting dressed and doing her makeup. She talks in stereotypical LA-Valley-Girl speak, and could clearly care less about what John is saying.

JOHN

I FINALLY got an alert this morning.

He holds up his phone and his text alert plays--it's a soundbite of Britney Spears saying: *"It's Britney, bitch!"*

Holly doesn't flinch.

JOHN

Holly!

HOLLY

Yeah, yeah, Chinese, never open, got it.

(Beat)

Look, babe, I just came to grab my stuff before my big day at work. I can't go. And that ringtone is seriously so stupid.

JOHN

Yeah I know, the promotion.

HOLLY

Awe, you remembered.

JOHN

Of course I remembered, that's why I got you those flowers!

He points to flowers on the dresser. She barely looks.

HOLLY

Honestly, I don't need flowers, I need to keep my vibe up, and Chinese food is NOT the vibe. And like, that's literally all you eat! You should try something different.

John sits up in bed.

JOHN
This is different!

HOLLY
Oh. My. Gawd. Listen, you wanna drive up to San Francisco to go to some magical restaurant, then go! I can't just run away with you. I'm on a juice cleanse. Plus, I have a thing--

JOHN
What thing?

HOLLY
After work I'm meeting a friend downtown at the place where all the dishes are like, made out of beans or whatever. It's like a Mexican/Ethiopian fusion place.

John stares, blankly. Holly walks over to him.

HOLLY
Oh, you're soooo cute.
(She pinches his cheeks)
If you wanna come that's cool,
I guess--

JOHN
You guess?

HOLLY
I just didn't think you'd want to, since you're such a food snob!

JOHN
Well, good luck, hope you get the job. I guess...

HOLLY
Ugh, whatever, I don't need luck, I just need to hold the right energy.
(Beat)
Ok, I'm leaving.

She kisses him.

HOLLY
Tell me you're obsessed with me,
it raises my vibe.

INTERCUT: INT. LILY'S CAR - DAY / INT. BELLA'S OFFICE - DAY

Lily drives. She talks to Bella (30s), a therapist dressed more like a spiritual healer, over the phone.

BELLA
Heyyy pretty girl.

LILY
(Sad)
Hey.

BELLA
Oh no. What happened?

LILY
I went to surprise him and he came back wasted and didn't even say anything. He just...

Silence.

BELLA
Yeah...?

LILY
God, I'm so sick of these stupid, drunk losers I always end up with! You're a therapist, tell me what to do.

BELLA
Go to therapy.

LILY
WOW. Ok, I know, I will, I'm just--

BELLA
Screw him, let's not waste our energy on that twat. What are you doing right now? What have you eaten today?

LILY
Nothing, I'm fasting.

BELLA
(Shaking her head)
That's not how it works--

LILY
I'm fine, Bella! I'm driving up to San Francisco to go to this Chinese restaurant that's only open a few times a year.

(MORE)

LILY (CONT'D)
I just needed to get away.

A knock on Bella's office door.

BELLA
(Quickly)
Oh, okay, I've gotta go, I've got
a client. That sounds fun. Just
lean into your feelings. Call me
later bye.

LILY
What the fuck does "LEAN IN"
even MEAN???

CLICK. Bella hangs up and...

INT. BELLA'S OFFICE - DAY

...she opens the door. It's Holly. She's crying.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY - CONTINUOUS

John exits his apartment, gets in his car, and pulls out of the driveway. As he's driving, he sees someone hanging out of a car on the street. They look injured. He squints and pulls over.

He opens the door, and walks over to the limp figure. It's Paul. There's barf on the corner of his mouth.

JOHN
Hey man, you okay?

PAUL
Yeah. Just...

JOHN
Hungover? Been there. Hang on
a sec.

INT. JOHN'S CAR - DAY

John looks through his car and finds a bottle of water, and some aspirin.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

He hands the water and pills to Paul.

JOHN
Aspirin. Breakfast of champions.
Feel better.

He walks away. Paul falls over.

EXT. SELECT CITY SHOTS, LA - DAY

In their respective cars, Lily and John push through traffic and smog to get out of Los Angeles.

MUSIC CUE: Gentle guitar strums, more melancholy than sad, play through their journey from LA to SF.

EXT. SELECT CITY SHOTS, SF - DAY

They arrive in San Francisco, and are welcomed by steep hills lined by rows of multi-colored Italianate homes. Sunshine reflects between the bay windows peppered throughout the city, spreading hippy charm along the streets where bohemian artists, tech Gods, and homeless vagrants peacefully coexist.

EXT. CHINATOWN - DAY

The Chinatown enclave boils over with life. Winged roofs, connected by lines of red lanterns resembling restricted veins ready to burst, tower over tourists who walk through the narrow streets marveling at this petrified museum of a city.

Below neon signs, storefronts show off rainbow displays of fruits and souvenirs.

Restaurants fill with steam as their owners glare out through the windows (occasionally between a row of perfectly baked golden-brown ducks) and prepare the day's delicacies: Noodles from scratch that flow through their maker's hands like silk, dumplings with tender umami cores, odd cuts of savory meat, and pastries finished with a smooth yolky glaze that glistens in the sun.

EXT. GOLDEN DRAGON RESTAURANT - DAY

John walks up to the closed restaurant. He peers through the window, then turns to leave.

As he does, he passes Lily. She smiles at him and keeps walking. He stops and turns to gaze at her. She looks into the closed restaurant, just like he did, then keeps walking.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHN'S APARTMENT - DAY

Holly walks into John's apartment. She looks around and realizes he's not there.

She grabs her phone.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHINATOWN - DAY

John continues walking through Chinatown, then stops at a bakery to inspect the pastries in the window. His phone rings, but...

KYLE (O.S.)
Yoooo, what's good my boyyy?!

KYLE, a graffiti artist with a baseball cap hanging sideways from his afro, rushes up to John. He's loud. People stare.

JOHN
(Laughing)
Kyle! What are you doing up here, man???

KYLE
Ooooookay!?! Been in Oakland since last year.

JOHN
You always change your number!

KYLE
I don't trust these cell phones, bruh. Aye, but what's really good, my guy, what you doing up here?

JOHN
Golden Dragon.

KYLE
Best muthafuckin' dumplings in this whole muthafuckin' city.
(Beat)
Aye, checkit, I met this old dead-head chick at a bar last night-- I'm talkin' like 50s.

Kyle grabs his phone. He shows John a portrait tattoo of Jerry Garcia. The tattoo is so badly done it makes you nauseous.

JOHN
Oh my god, is that Jerry Garcia?

KYLE
(Laughing)
Ayyyee! We miss you, Jerry!

CUT TO:

INT. JOHN'S APARTMENT - DAY

Holly's call goes to voicemail.

HOLLY
(Into phone)
Hey, John, I was...uh...I came
back to your apartment and I
uh...did you go to San Francisco?
I was just wondering, because,
well, um...because I...I miss you,
and...I'm going to my thing
tonight, and wanted to see if you
were going to be around
afterwards, and yeah, ok. Call me
when you get this.

She hangs up, and looks pensive.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHINATOWN - DAY

Now we realize Kyle is with someone. This is BECKY (20s), hip,
artsy, and slightly androgynous.

KYLE
Oh yeah, this my girl Becky.

John waves. Becky smiles and says nothing. It's weird.

KYLE
Well aye, if you ain't tryna wait
around for all that Golden Dragon
madness, hit up your boy. We
hittin' a spot in da Tenderloin.
Japanese. Konichiwa, my boy!!!

John and Kyle slap hands and embrace.

JOHN
(Laughing)
Okay, I will.
(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)

Nice to see you, man! And very nice to meet you, Becky.

Becky just smiles. They walk away to reveal Lily sitting on the curb laughing. She calls out to John.

LILY

Hey!

(John looks)

I know I don't know you but... what the hell was that all about?

JOHN

Oh, Kyle? Yeah, he's... boisterous.

(Beat, as he walks over)

Friend from high school.

(Beat)

Did I, uh, see you in front of Golden Dragon, too?

LILY

You did. I'm Lily.

JOHN

John.

(Beat)

No jokes about my name.

Lily looks unamused.

JOHN

Hey, uh--

LILY

(Standing)

Listen, you're cute, and if you're here for Golden Dragon we obviously have similar interests.

(Beat)

You wanna walk around with me until the restaurant opens?

EXT. CHINATOWN SHOPS - DAY - CONTINUOUS

John and Lily explore Chinatown with each other (as they do, their voices carry over the next few shots).

Lily examines some souvenirs in a store.

LILY (V.O.)

I mean, she kinda has a point.

(MORE)

LILY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Doesn't constantly eating Chinese
food make you worried about
getting fat?

JOHN (V.O.)
Not really, no.

John comes up behind Lily wearing a traditional Chinese mask
and scares her. They laugh.

LILY (V.O.)
Do you work out?

They both examine fruits at a stand.

JOHN (V.O.)
If you consider sex a workout.

Lily is explaining something to him but he stops her and points
to her chest. She looks down.

LILY (V.O.)
OH GOD. It's always skinny white
guys who cite sex as a workout.

He zips his finger all the way up to her nose. She hits
him, playfully.

JOHN (V.O.)
Well, I mean, I'm Jewish so I
don't know if that counts, but
what about you? We're here for the
same reason, aren't you worried
about getting fat?

LILY (V.O.)
NO, I'm fasting.

Lily waits as John orders a Chinese pastry. He offers her some,
she says, "no."

JOHN (V.O.)
Ah, so you're anorexic.

He takes a bite. She says, "*fine, I'll try it.*"

LILY (V.O.)
NO! It's called intermittent
fasting, it's good for you, look
it up.

She grabs it from him, then pushes it into his face, getting
the cream filling on his nose.

JOHN (V.O.)

Pretty sure that only works with a healthy, regimented diet. If you go all day without a meal, then stuff your face full of Chinese food, I'd say that's bingeing.

LILY (V.O.)

Oh, so you're an expert?

EXT. CHINATOWN - NIGHT

CAMERA PANS DOWN from beautifully lit Chinese lanterns, to Lily and John who sit on a bench.

JOHN

My ex had an eating disorder. I have a bad habit of dating narcissists whose self-loathing expresses itself in the form of fad diets, green juice, and selfies.

LILY

Yeah... I guess I always end up with drunk assholes who don't know how to communicate.

JOHN

Well... maybe the whole "closed off" vibe attracts a certain type of guy?

Lily turns to him with an *"oh no you didn't"* look.

JOHN

Shit, I can't believe I said the word "vibe." Look, all I'm saying is that the whole "assertive tough girl" thing is obviously a cover.

She stands.

LILY

What did you just say to me??? A cover for what??? You think I'm closed off? You don't even know me! I came out and told you right to your stupid... dumb... right to your obnoxiously charming DUMBASS face exactly what I wanted from you--

JOHN

Yeah, because you wanted to skip having to be...vulnerable.

LILY

Oh, well, EXCUSE ME for being a little apprehensive about being intimate with a stranger--one whose jokes are stupid and... and... You're the one who lets ditzy airheads walk all over you!

They stare, then...

"It's Britney, bitch!" interrupts the silence. John checks his phone and his face drops.

LILY

What??? What is it, what does that stupid ringtone mean???

JOHN

It's open.

LILY

Well??? Go! That's why you're here, right?

JOHN

(Standing)

No, hold on! I... I shouldn't have said that, it's just...

"It's Britney, bitch!" interrupts again.

JOHN

I'm sorry. I'm an asshole... I shouldn't have belittled your...

"It's Britney, bitch!" interrupts again.

JOHN

It's just that... I've wasted so much energy on fake people that when someone who's honest and has depth shows up I don't know how to handle it.

(Beat)

Honestly, most dudes probably don't. We just met, but I know you... I know that you settle for less because somewhere, deep down, you feel like that's what you deserve.

(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)

I know that because I feel the same way. And maybe that's why we met. I can't be sure about that, but what I am sure about is that you deserve better.

Lily glares at him suspiciously.

LILY

You mean that?

He nods. She warms a bit.

LILY

Okay well... While you're not totally forgiven, I did come here for a reason.

JOHN

To break your fast?

LILY

HEY! You and that stupid ringtone shouldn't push your luck.

EXT. GOLDEN DRAGON RESTAURANT - NIGHT

The restaurant is packed, and the line is down the block. Lily and John look disappointed as they scan it.

LILY

Guess we shoulda come the first time Britney told us to.

John laughs, and lets out a sigh. They turn look at each other, and smile. Neon lights beam down onto them. Then...

LILY

(Nodding)

Look...

They see a CASH ONLY SIGN in the window.

JOHN

Fuck... do you...

LILY

No.

John pats his pockets.

LILY

Hey...

Beat as she grabs his arm.

LILY

What if we tried
something different?

MUSIC CUE: Sweet strums of a guitar start to play (this song drowns out the audio, and plays over the imagery until the last shot).

They smile again, but right before John goes in for the kiss...

His friend Kyle runs up between them! They both laugh. Kyle jumps around. They all walk out of frame.

INT. JAPANESE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

John, Lily, Kyle, and Becky sit around a table. The lights are dim, and Kyle is animatedly telling a story. Everyone is laughing. The CAMERA PANS around, cycling through all of their faces, then PUSHES IN on a mirror that fades into...

INT. PAUL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Paul sits at a window looking out at the night. CAMERA (STEADICAM ONESHOT through this whole scene) PULLS BACK from him slowly to reveal...

...Holly lying on the bed. She's on her phone. Steve runs around the room.

The CAMERA PANS to the kitchen where we can see the can of cat food still on the floor, and...

CAMERA PUSHES IN on leftover Chinese food nested in styrofoam containers sitting on the table.

THE END