

THE TAILOR FROM TAEGU

FADE IN:

INT. SING SING CORRECTIONAL FACILITY 1945 - DAY

Amidst rows of prison cells sounds of footsteps echo as a warden makes his way down a long dark hall. A scholarly-looking man in his early 50's (DAVID GRIER) removes his hat and shows his ID to a hard faced security officer. The officer nods approvingly.

INT. KIM'S CELL - DAY

An Asian man in his early 30's (KIM LEE) sits huddled in a dark corner of his cell with his head to his knees. Sounds of a nightstick dragging across the cell bars. Kim is jolted up from his slumber at the callous noise. A brief look of confusion crosses his face. Through the bars, we see the imposing shadow of the guard's figure. Kim looks up with a grave expression...

PRISON GUARD

Get up...

INT. SING SING CORRIDOR - DAY

Kim is escorted down the long hall by two guards. The voice of David Grier emerges...

DAVID GRIER (V.O.)

(quick and formal)

Good morning, Mr. Lee. I'm David Grier. I'm your attorney.

Prisoners shout obscenities and racial slurs at him as he walks. A crazed prisoner spits at him through his cell bars.

DAVID GRIER (V.O.)

Before we start, I need to go over some simple ground rules. You talk to no one but me! You have no friends in here. Remember that...

INT. SING SING VISITING ROOM - DAY

Cell bars slide open as Kim is guided into a room with a table and two chairs and a barred window. Kim is un-cuffed. The whole time his eyes remain focused on the floor.

DAVID GRIER (V.O.)  
Secondly, tell me the truth always.  
We absolutely must trust each  
other.

Kim is sitting across from David. David's face is markedly expressive and his hands are animated when he speaks.

DAVID GRIER  
Have I made myself clear?

Kim raises his chin to meet David's gaze.

KIM  
Yes...

David studies Kim's face a beat. He's strikingly handsome in a tragic but youthful way. Kim breaks eye contact.

DAVID GRIER  
Great. Now let's get started...

David opens his briefcase and concentrates on a stack of papers. Kim drops his gaze downward. SOUNDS OF A SAXOPHONE echo a haunting tune from some distance away. Suddenly the music stops.

KIM  
Did you hear that?

David looks at Kim with concern for a beat.

DAVID GRIER  
Hear what?

Kim looks confused.

KIM  
I heard music...

DAVID GRIER  
I heard nothing.

David brings his attention back to the documents before him. Kim's gaze drops once again. David takes out a note-pad and begins jotting down notes.

DAVID GRIER (CONT'D)  
So...tell me everything!

Kim stares back at David with a blank expression.

DAVID GRIER (CONT'D)  
Alright lets start with the girl.  
How did you meet?

FLASHBACK TO:

SILHOUETTE OF A WOMAN'S CURVY FIGURE FROM BEHIND THE SHADES OF A WINDOW. HER BODY MOVES FLUIDLY TO THE HAUNTING MUSIC WE HEARD BEFORE...

An attractive woman (LIBBY) in her late 20's, dancer's body, warm inviting eyes, smiles back at Kim.

He has her up against the wall. Her legs are wrapped around him. He presses into her. She throws her head back...she whispers "Stay with me baby...stay..."

BACK TO THE PRESENT.

Kim looks away, lost in his thoughts. David watches him with a dead-pan stare.

DAVID GRIER  
Go on, please.

Kim looks away in silence.

DAVID GRIER (CONT'D)  
Mr. Lee, you're going to have to do  
a hell of a lot better than that!

Kim shuts his eyes in torment.

DAVID GRIER (CONT'D)  
Look here kid, we don't have the  
luxury of time to court one another  
into this!

Kim runs his fingers through his hair like he's going to tear it out.

DAVID GRIER (CONT'D)  
(agitated)  
Right outside those prison gates  
there are at least a hundred people  
calling for your head on a stick!  
Keep this up and they just might  
get it!

David shakes his head. He stands and tosses his card on the table before Kim.

DAVID GRIER (CONT'D)  
Call me when you decide you want to  
live...

David turns his back and heads for the door.

KIM  
(shouts abruptly)  
I never meant for anyone to get  
hurt especially not her!

David stops in his tracks. A guard rushes in alarmed. Kim silently drowns his tears in his hands. David gestures for the guard to leave. The guard backs off. David takes his seat once again and quickly grabs his pen.

DAVID GRIER  
That's real good Kim, but I need  
you to tell me more...

Kim wearily looks David in the eye. David tosses the pen down his eyes are intense but sincere.

DAVID GRIER (CONT'D)  
(earnest)  
Kim, I believe you...

Kim reads David's face. He takes a breath and exhales deeply. He's ready to talk. The music plays again. It brings us back to...

INT. NEW ORLEANS - FRENCH QUARTER FLOPHOUSE - DAY

The room is bare except for a bed and a small dresser. Kim sits on a milk crate with his back against the wall. He's warming up on his saxophone. His eyes are shut. He hums a few tunes off the top of his head and then plays it out on the sax. A KNOCK AT THE DOOR breaks his concentration.

Kim's LANDLORD early 50's unshaven and hung over, swaggers in with a lit cigarette hanging down the side of his mouth. He takes out a small envelope from his pocket.

LANDLORD  
Hey kid, looks like you got  
yourself a telegram all the way  
from New York City!

He hands Kim the telegram. Kim opens it eagerly.

LANDLORD (CONT'D)

Hope it ain't for a job, you're one of the only tenants I got that pays rent around here! It's tough to get a gig that pays well these days but I can't be housing no free loaders either!

He begins walking around Kim's room casing the place.

LANDLORD (CONT'D)

You're quiet, clean and you never make any trouble!

Kim's expression turns grim off reading the telegram.

LANDLORD (CONT'D)

(turns to Kim)

Say, that reminds me, I saw you play at the little red rooster last night! You really knocked them dead kid! Didn't know you had it in you!

Kim grabs his hat and packs his sax in its case. The landlord continues to casually snoop around the room.

LANDLORD (CONT'D)

Yes siree the only Oriental fellow in New Orleans that plays a mean sax and that's on the level!

The door SLAMS shut. The landlord turns to find Kim gone.

LANDLORD (CONT'D)

That son of a gun just left me high and dry (he pulls out his flask and takes a swig) just goes to show you can't trust a damned soul...

He begins looking through Kim's dresser drawers.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - THE BOWERY - DAY

A junk peddler drags a wheelbarrow full of metal scraps and trinkets on the sidewalk. Carefree children play hopscotch and trade marbles outside of their run down tenement. A couple of wayward teenage boys shadow box each other on the corner of the block.

An elderly man with a thick silver moustache and an old derby hat, sits patiently on a wooden stool holding a basket full of pretzels. He has a faraway look in his eyes.

One of the boys runs past the elderly man swiping his hat off to reveal his bald head. The elderly man chases the boy down and snatches his hat back. He slaps the kid in the back of the head a few times. The other boys let out riotous laughter and swipe a few pretzels behind the old man's back. Kim walks passed the scene in deep thought.

ELDERLY MAN  
 (shaking his fist)  
 Good for nothing dirty palooka's!  
 I'll box your ears!

INT. NEW YORK CITY - RIVER EAST TAILOR'S - DAY

A small shop, clean and orderly. Two well dressed mannequins are displayed in the window. Inside is decorated sparingly with Asian accents. Two large bamboo room dividers separate the front of the shop from the back.

Kim walks in with a sax case slung over his back, the shop door-bell CHIMES. He's wearing a shabby suit. He stands before his mother with an expression of deep sorrow. Yan (his mother) late 50's, a petite and graceful lady is too busy to notice. She's tailors a suit. Her eyes are swollen like she's been crying.

YAN  
 I'll be right with you.

She turns to see Kim. Her eyes fill with tears.

YAN (CONT'D)  
 Kim!

She hurries over to him. They embrace.

YAN (CONT'D)  
 (emotional)  
 I was afraid you might not receive  
 my message on time!

INT. KIM AND YAN'S HOME - DAY

A modest but spacious apartment. It has a welcoming ambience with many family photographs on the wall and several vibrant plants settled along the windowsill. Kim studies a photograph of himself at 10 years old sitting on his father's knee. Yan comes out of the kitchen with a tea pot. They sit across from each other.

YAN

It was quick. In his sleep. He took his last breath next to me. I never saw it coming but he must have sensed it. The way he kissed me good night like he knew it was going to be for the last time...

Kim is overcome by emotion.

KIM

Did he read any of my letters?

YAN

Every last one of them. He saved them too. He loved you, Kim!

KIM

He disowned me!

YAN

That's not true, he was angry you were leaving! Every day he'd say, my son will come back! He'll come to his senses! He never gave up on you! He left you everything! The money, the shop, it's all yours!

Kim looks back at her disturbed by this detail.

KIM

I'm not taking the shop mom.

YAN

And what will you do? Play your saxophone in two bit bars for the rest of your life? New Orleans is no place to make a living and raise a family!

Kim stands and paces.

KIM

Look I didn't come here for to stay or run a business! I don't know the first thing about it!

YAN

Nonsense! You already know the business. Your father taught you all you needed. You're a brilliant tailor! I've seen you work!

KIM  
That's not my future!

YAN  
But what will I do on my own? How  
will I run the shop? Your shop!

KIM  
Run it to the ground! Sell it, keep  
the money, retire! There's nothing  
here I want!

YAN  
I see. Well, you can stay as long  
as you like...

Yan hurries out in tears.

INT. KIM'S BEDROOM - DAY

Kim enters his old room. He opens a window to air it out. He opens his closet and finds a sharp black suit. He sits on his bed and collapses back on it staring up at the ceiling.

INT. FUNERAL HOME - AFTERNOON

A small crowd of people pay their respects before a closed casket. Kim stands at the end of the room. He's clean shaven and dressed in a crisp black suit. Yan sits alone in the first row before the casket. Everyone is traditionally dressed in black. Timothy Cho, late 50's, approaches Kim with his wife LYNN, early 50's and his daughter May a lovely delicate woman in her early 20's.

TIMOTHY  
I'm sorry for your loss, Mr. Lee.

They shake hands.

TIMOTHY (CONT'D)  
I'm Timothy Cho, I knew your dad  
well, he spoke of you often! Very  
proud father!

Kim looks over and notices May gazing back at him.

TIMOTHY (CONT'D)  
This is my wife, Lynn, and my  
daughter, May!

Kim nods politely acknowledging them.

TIMOTHY (CONT'D)

Well young man, take good care of your mother and good luck with the business. Your father lives on in that shop of yours...

May gazes back at Kim. They exit. Kim finds himself alone with his mother. Yan stands and walks over to Kim. She wipes the tears from her eyes with a handkerchief.

YAN

It's time...I'll let you alone...

She hugs Kim tightly. He stares ahead at the casket. Yan exits. Kim approaches the coffin. He opens the lid to see his father with an expression of peace upon his face. Kim kneels before his lifeless body and breaks down in tears.

INT. NIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

Loud jazz music fills the room. Kim knocks back three shots of whiskey one after the other. The bartender watches Kim. The band finishes their number. A cacophony of voices take over filling the nightclub with chatter.

BARTENDER

(sneers)

Have an interesting day?

KIM

Fuck off.

The bartender looks startled. Kim and tosses a couple of bucks on the bar and walks off. Kim watches a black SAX PLAYER in his late 40's, warming up on stage. The musician recognizes Kim. He gestures at Kim to come over.

SAX PLAYER

Hey kid! Last I heard you ran off to New Orleans!

Kim nods (yes) and smiles back.

SAX PLAYER (CONT'D)

You look like you're needing to play, son.

Kim steps up to the stage. Just then LIBBY and her FRIEND enter the club.

LIBBY'S FRIEND

Let's go get a drink!

LIBBY

You go ahead I'll wait here.

LIBBY'S FRIEND

C'mon you're not going to have anything?

LIBBY

I'll have a soda.

LIBBY'S FRIEND

Suit yourself!

She heads for the bar. Libby looks around at the crowd. She notices Kim on stage. He begins to play. His sound is smooth but melancholy. His eyes are shut. Libby looks totally taken by him. He hands the sax back to the jazz musician. They chat for a moment then shake hands and part ways. The band begins playing. People crowd the dance floor. Libby's friend returns with two drinks.

LIBBY'S FRIEND (CONT'D)

Say, who was that China doll on the sax?

Libby watches him make his way through the crowd.

LIBBY

I don't know...

LIBBY'S FRIEND

He sure is cute for an Oriental fellar!

Kim notices Libby watching him. He gazes back at her. She smiles. He looks down a beat then smiles back up at her.

LIBBY'S FRIEND (CONT'D)

And he's looking your way my dear!

Just then two young men approach Libby and her friend.

1ST MAN

Would you girls like to dance?

LIBBY

No!

LIBBY'S FRIEND

Yes!

The second guy takes Libby's friend by the hand. The first man shrugs and walks off. Libby looks for Kim in the crowd. He's gone...

INT. RIVER EAST TAILOR'S - DAY

Kim walks in. A customer exits with an arm-load of garments.

YAN  
So this is good bye...

Kim nods.

YAN (CONT'D)  
Very well then...good bye Kim...

Kim embraces his mother and then quickly heads for the door. She turns her back to him coldly. Kim stops at the door and takes a deep sigh. He looks up to gather his thoughts.

KIM  
I'll give it a shot.

Yan's eyes light up. Kim turns to face her. She runs and throws her arms around him excitedly.

YAN  
I lost my husband but I gained my son back!

KIM  
You knew I was going to stay.

YAN  
Well I can't say the possibility didn't cross my mind once or twice!

EXT. THE BOWERY SIDEWALK - DAY

Weeks later...

An elevated train roars by as men and women hustle their way to work. The men wear felt hats and suits, the women seamed stockings and swank 40's dresses. A freckle-faced PAPER BOY of 14, hands out newspapers to the morning commuters. A spotted mutt sits lazily at his feet observing the busy scene.

PAPER BOY  
Read all about it, folks! Grand jury indicts 63 Jap draft resistors!

A man in his late 50's (MR. CORWIN) stops to purchase a paper.

MR CORWIN

Over here! Give me one of those!

He tosses a few coins at the kid and snatches the paper. The coins land on the ground. The kid gives Corwin the finger behind his back.

PAPER BOY

(sarcastic)

Thank you sir.

Corwin examines the headlines. Irritated, he shakes his head and mutters something inaudible as he walks off.

INT. RIVER EAST TAILOR'S - CONTINUOUS

Kim stands behind the counter organizing a drawer full of documents. He's dressed professionally in a button-down shirt and tailored slacks and he's wearing glasses (he always wears glasses when tailoring at the shop). One DRAWER is LOCKED. Kim tries to get it opened. Yan enters carrying material.

KIM

Hey ma, what's with this locked drawer!

YAN

Your father kept most of his records in it, I haven't had the mind to look through it. Would you?

KIM

Sure.

Yan hands him a key from her pocket. She exits to the back. Kim opens the drawer to find a .38 CALIBER PISTOL inside of a small wooden box. Kim stares at the gun bewildered.

UNRULY BOY

Stick em up, Jap!

Kim jolts up slamming the drawer shut. Two unruly boys stand before him sour faced. One of the boys has a little toy cap-gun pointed up at Kim. He pulls the trigger making several irritating LOUD POPPING sounds.

UNRULY BOY (CONT'D)

BANG, BANG, BANG, BANG, BANG!!!

MOTHER OF UNRULY BOYS

Arnold, It's not polite to call Mr. Lee a Jap, besides he's Chinese!

KIM

Korean.

UNRULY BOY

Ah what do I care. He looks like a Jap to me!

KIM

You'd shoot a man with glasses?

UNRULY BOY

Have it your way, take off them glasses!

KIM

(stern)

Just a minute!

The mother looks startled. Kim disappears under the counter briefly. He pops back up. She flinches nervously. He hands a lollipop to each of the boys. She exhales relieved.

UNRULY BOY

Hot dog, you're the nicest Jap I ever met!

OTHER BOY

Thanks a million, mister!

Kim nods and playfully messes the boy's hair. Their mother sees Yan enter the room and the two women begin chatting. Kim turns to the boys and crouches down in front of them.

KIM

Hey guys, you know these pops were made in Korea!

The boys unwrap the candy.

UNRULY BOY

Yeah, so what about it, candy's candy ain't it?

KIM

Oh no, not this candy! You wanna know what it's made of?

Kim whispers something in the boy's ears as they lick the pops. Their eyes get wide. They look down at the pops then to their crotches.

KIM (CONT'D)

By tonight they just might fall right off!

The boy's look to one another, drop the candy and run out of the shop SCREAMING while holding their crotches! The two women look to Kim confused. Kim shrugs and continues working with a sheepish grin. Moments later Kim is alone working fastidiously. Mr. Corwin enters and throws the paper down on the counter beside Kim.

MR CORWIN

(taps paper)

What do you think of that, son?

Kim glances down at the headline.

MR CORWIN (CONT'D)

That just boils my blood! Our good men fighting overseas, while these ungrateful Japs riot! Now why do you think they'd go and do a rotten thing like that?

Kim shrugs and shakes his head avoiding the issue.

KIM

I can't speak for others, Mr. Corwin.

MR CORWIN

What am I asking you for? You're a 4F, you wouldn't know about this! Your father told me all about it.

Kim looks at Mr Corwin with a deadpan stare.

MR CORWIN (CONT'D)

Not to give you a hard time over it, I know a few fellars who were 4F! Fine men they were for trying.

He takes a bag of clothing from Mr. Corwin and begins sorting through it. Corwin eyes Kim intently.

MR CORWIN (CONT'D)

A couple of these shirts have a few loose or missing buttons.

Kim nods. The shop door swings open. Kim's attention is jolted by LIBBY'S presence. They instantly recognize each other. Their eyes meet for a brief but intense moment.

MR CORWIN (CONT'D)

Why, good morning, Mrs. Abernethy!

Mr. Corwin removes his hat. He's awkward. Libby smiles reluctantly. She places a ticket on the counter top.

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