

INT. DARK ROOM - DAY

It's completely dark. We hear shuffling sounds and a few squeaks in the dark. Two teenagers kissing in the dark.

Suddenly, there's a beam of light.

BOY 1

What's that?

A pause. A shuffle. AZUMI'S (15) face is illuminated by her phone screen. Her silver cross necklace catches the light.

On her phone the bold letters **MOTHER!!!** are shown in thin white script.

AZUMI

No one.

She puts the phone down facedown.

INT. MANSION LIVING ROOM - DAY

HANAKO (40), frustrated, presses the call button again for the 8th time.

After the phone goes to voicemail again, she gets up suddenly, grabs her car keys and purse and dashes off.

INT. DARK ROOM - DAY

The light flips on. Azumi dashes behind a pole. The boy stands there, awkwardly.

Hanako's face is the picture of rage. The tension in the air is thick.

HANAKO

Azumi, come with me NOW!

EXT. CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH PARKING LOT - DAY - A FEW DAYS LATER

Azumi chews gum as she stares out the window. Hanako's high-pitched droning continues in the background.

HANAKO

...I just don't understand why you can't be like Kimiko. She's going to Columbia, you know.

AZUMI

I'm going to this church, aren't I?

Hanako sighs. She shoos Azumi out of the car.

EXT. CHURCH PARKING LOT - DAY

Azumi grabs her bag and ducks out of the car.

HANAKO

I'll be back immediately after the sermon ends, so don't even think about running!

AZUMI

I got it, sheesh.

Azumi trudges toward the church. The sun is high in the sky.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The church has massive stained windows and a magnificent portrait of the Virgin Mary in the front. Gold adorns the rows of pews. The light from the windows catch dust floating in the air.

The sermon has already started. People are densely packed into the rows. Azumi slinks into the back, pulls her hood over her head.

A tall, well-built man with oiled hair stands at the front. His voice bounces off the walls, though he doesn't use a microphone.

PASTOR AKIYAMA

Jesus volunteered for this. He chose it. He said in John 10:18, "No one takes from me, but I lay it down of my own accord." "Do you think I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?"

Azumi isn't listening to a single word. But she can't help but stare at him. His long legs, his crisp suit, his shoulders, broad and strong--his face.

PASTOR AKIYAMA (CONT'D)  
 I'm not trapped, he would say. Do you think Herod and Pilate and the mobs and the soldiers are in charge here? They are but players in this drama. My Father wrote it.

He goes on. Then he makes eye contact with Azumi. His gaze burns a hole into her.

PASTOR AKIYAMA (CONT'D)  
 There's a name for this. It's called love.

INT. MANSION DINING ROOM - NIGHT - A FEW DAYS LATER

Azumi sits at her dining room, computer pulled up.

AZUMI  
 Romans 5:8.

She jots down into her notebook. Hanako is in the background cooking dinner.

HANAKO  
 Did you say something, Azumi?

AZUMI  
 No, nothing. Just something the dude said a few days ago.

Hanako brings two bowls of soup to the table.

HANAKO  
 Pastor Akiyama? Isn't he enchanting? And handsome, too.

AZUMI  
 Mom!

HANAKO  
 I'm just saying. He's so established at such a young age. He's only 35. Good age.

AZUMI  
 Yeah...

HANAKO  
 Now eat your dinner.

INT. CHURCH - MORNING - LATER THAT WEEK

Azumi steps into the church. It's the same as before. With less light filtering in. Soft yellow light filters in.

He's there again. She's been coming 3 times a week just to watch him prepare for his sermons.

She ducks into the back row. Watches his back.

He does something different this time. He turns around. Looks straight at her.

Something even more different. Walks towards her.

PASTOR AKIYAMA

Azumi. Good to see you again.

AZUMI

You know my name?

PASTOR AKIYAMA

I like your cross. But it means nothing until you really believe it.

Azumi fingers her silver cross.

AZUMI

How do I do that?

He grabs her hand.

INT. HIS OFFICE - DAY - LATER

PASTOR AKIYAMA

I see something rare in you, you know.

AZUMI

Like?

PASTOR AKIYAMA

I can't describe it. Something special. You're favored by Him.

AZUMI

You think so? I don't even know if I believe in that.

PASTOR AKIYAMA

It's not stuff. It's the greatest suffering, in the service of the greatest love, for the least deserving. It's about resurrection, your future, your hope, your joy.

Azumi can't say anything for a moment.

AZUMI

Things that bring me joy, He looks down upon.

He takes off his jacket. He folds it slowly, deliberately.

PASTOR AKIYAMA

I wouldn't be so sure about that.

EXT. ROAD - DAY - A FEW DAYS LATER

Azumi sits quietly in the passenger seat, Hanako drives excitedly.

HANAKO

It's amazing, really. Private lessons? I always knew you were special.

AZUMI

Mom, can you not right now? I don't feel like talking?

HANAKO

Am I not allowed to be excited for my daughter? Someone sees you the way I see you!

AZUMI

Mom, stop. Really.

Hanako pulls into the parking lot of the church. She pulls slowly into a parking spot. Then she stops the car. She pulls Azumi close to her.

HANAKO

(whispers)

God is good. Remember that.

Azumi gets out of the car.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Azumi stares up at him. He looks huge up there.

PASTOR AKIYAMA

And Jesus himself draws the double connection between that hope and singing in suffering, and loving the undeserving.

He looks down at her. Something tender glints in his eyes. It seems like affection.

INT. HIS OFFICE - DAY - LATER

Azumi lies on the couch, the pastor's jacket drawn over her. He gets dressed, in the slow deliberate way that he does.

PASTOR AKIYAMA

You're quiet. Something on your mind?

AZUMI

I don't know. All this singing and suffering doesn't make sense. I'm really here for you. You can teach me for than some book.

PASTOR AKIYAMA

Maybe.

He pauses for a second.

PASTOR AKIYAMA (CONT'D)

I am teaching you. Every day that I see you.

Then he walks over again.

INT. AZUMI'S ROOM - NIGHT - LATER

Azumi sits alone, one small lamp illuminating her face. She takes her silver cross off, hangs it on the lamp. The shadow of the cross flits across her face.

She reaches into her drawer and pulls out a sewing kit. She shrugs off her blue blouse and gets two buttons out of her pocket.

She very carefully threads the needle and stares down at her blouse. Then begins sewing.