Love.
By Ross Earley

Characters (In Order of Appearance):

Setting:
Act 1

Scene 1

The Crossing Church

*In the darkness, Noor starts singing “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing”. Gradually, the voices of a congregation join her. Light trickles in until it fills the stage to reveal the end of a church service in a large living room. Noor beckons for the audience to join in the song. The hymn ends and Pastor Megumi leaves his front-row folding chair to go stand next to Noor at the front of the room.*

**PASTOR MEGUMI**

Will you pray with me?

*The congregation bows their heads. Pastor Megumi lifts his hands, palms up, and looks heavenward.*

**PASTOR MEGUMI**

Heavenly father, thank you for this night and this stage. Thank you for bringing us all here safely to enjoy the gift of theater. We ask that just as you’ve orchestrated each one of us into these seats, you would be present in your Holy Spirit here tonight. Give us actors good recall on our lines, empower us to play our roles in this story, help our technicians’ equipment to go off without a hitch, and make tonight a night of rest and joy and worship for the audience to the praise of your great name. We love you. It’s all for your glory. In Jesus’ name, amen.

*The congregation echoes “Amen” and lifts their heads. Megumi drops his hands and smiles at The Crossing Church.*

**PASTOR MEGUMI (CONT’D)**

Thank you for being here this morning. I love you all. Hope you have a wonderful week!

*Megumi waves and the church disseminates, giving birth to conversations, laughter, and chair-stacking. Megumi makes his way to DC, shaking hands and hugging other members along the way. The Lopez family approaches Pastor Megumi from DL, Fallon sees Jewel from UL, and starts having a hard time stacking the chair in his hands. Just as the family reaches Megumi, Ma turns around from another conversation and monopolizes him.*

**MA**

Pastor! I don’t mean to interrupt, but I’d like to speak to you for a minute.

**PASTOR MEGUMI**

Of course, Sandra. What is it?

**MA**

Well. That was a lovely service. And a very… thought-provoking sermon.
PASTOR MEGUMI

(smiling at her restraint) Thank you. What thoughts did it provoke for you?

MA

Well, it was… um… an interesting perspective on gluttony that I’d never heard before.

PASTOR MEGUMI

Yes ma’am. It’s not a subject I find myself-

MA

Sorry, I don’t mean to cut you off, but… Well. I know I’m not a pastor. And you know the Bible probably… maybe better than I do. But… Can I be frank with you?

PASTOR MEGUMI

Please.

MA

I’m worried that you overemphasized some things in your sermon that might not have been so… grace-centered. And I’m worried that a lot of the young people in here are going to leave and be too focused on not drinking too much or barely spending enough to be full when… well… when there’s more important things in life! Does what I’m saying make any sense?

PASTOR MEGUMI

Yes ma’am. It makes complete sense. For my benefit, would you please specify which parts of my message you thought were overemphasized or not grace-centered enough?

MA

Well, if we’re being perfectly honest with one another, I did feel that your perspective on alcohol was harsh.

PASTOR MEGUMI

Okay.

MA

And of course I disagree with getting drunk and all the things that that can lead to… debauchery and God only knows what else. But… and I don’t think this is what you intended, but it’s what was communicated to me… I feel that you were very abrasive towards the idea of even a couple of drinks a night. Not every night, of course. Maybe just one night a week. If that! See, Pastor, Ma’s not a drinker. But I do like me a glass of chardonnay with dinner every now and again and… well… and I don’t see what’s wrong with that!

PASTOR MEGUMI

I don’t think there’s anything wrong with enjoying alcohol in moderation. On the contrary, I believe alcohol is a good gift from God. But in a culture of excess, I’d like us to remember the value of moderation as well as the healthy fear behind a lack of it. My father was a drinker, and-
Oh, honey, mine too. And I understand. You... well, we understand each other. And that’s all I wanted to say. Overall – and please hear me say this – it was a lovely service. Just lovely.

Thank you, Sandra.

MR. LOPEZ

Excuse me, Pastor Megumi?

Yes?

(to Ma) I’m sorry to interrupt. I-

Oh, darling, you aren’t interrupting anything! We were just chatting. And now we’re finished. Y’all go right on ahead!

Ma leaves and Mr. Lopez recovers from her abrasive Southern hospitality.

MR. LOPEZ

Yes sir. Well, my name is Carlos Lopez and this is my wife, Yolanda.

PASTOR MEGUMI

(shaking their hands) It’s lovely to meet you both. Where are you from?

Indi.

PASTOR MEGUMI

The city! Well, welcome to Normal: where things are a little less tall and much less exciting.

And hopefully less dangerous.

MRS. LOPEZ

¡Fsst! Chica.

MR. LOPEZ

I’m sorry. We’ve only just moved three days ago and we are still settling in.

PASTOR MEGUMI

I understand. Thank you for taking the time to come visit us. I’m sure it’s been very busy.
MR. LOPEZ

Yes. It has.

PASTOR MEGUMI

Is there anything I or the other members here could help you with? Moving furniture? Some freezer meals? Babysitting?

ALICIA

Only one baby!

JEWEL

We don’t need any help.

MR. LOPEZ

Julia! Be polite. The pastor was just offering. (to Pastor Megumi) We’re fine. Thank you.

PASTOR MEGUMI

You’re welcome. Just let me know. (looking at Jewel) And if you come back in two weeks, I’m planning on giving a sermon on pride.

JEWEL

Why are you telling us that?

PASTOR MEGUMI

For myself, mostly. (he winks) The freezer meal comment was a little presumptuous.

Jewel smiles but does her best to hide it.

MR. LOPEZ

It was nice to meet you.

PASTOR MEGUMI

(shaking his hand again) You as well. I hope to see you all again. Take care.

MR. LOPEZ

You too.

MRS. LOPEZ

Thank you.

JEWEL

Thanks.
The Lopez family leaves. In the background, Fallon finishes stacking chairs and starts to leave too. He stops and stares when he sees Jewel. Pastor Megumi walks back toward the stage but stops next to Fallon.

Her name is Julia.

Fallon, you should stop staring.

I can’t.

(looking around) Where’s your grandmother?

(snapping out of his reverie) I don’t know. I thought she was with you.

She was, until they-

There she is! Oh God, she’s giving advice.

Watch it.

Ma enters, deep in conversation with Ayumi.

Oh God.

…And that’s how you get him to pay attention, honey. Don’t let me or anybody else get in the way. (to the dismayed Pastor Megumi and Fallon) Oh, hello boys! Me and Ayu were just having some girl chat.

What- Wonderful. What about?

Ma
(smiling at his restraint) Ayumi can tell you later. (to Fallon) Vitamin, you ready to go? Aha’s waiting for us to pick him up from the doctor’s office.

FALLON
Yes ma’am.

MA
(to Pastor Megumi and Ayumi) Y’all don’t worry about cleaning anything up. I’ll have plenty of time I need to fill with something tomorrow and that fits the bill!

They leave.

PASTOR MEGUMI
(Beat.) What did she tell you?

AYUMI
(smiling) None of your business.

Scene 2
Normal High School

Fallon is at his locker, loading up his textbooks and texting in between. Clay runs up quietly and body-slams Fallon into his locker. Fallon drops his phone and turns around, livid, then laughs when he sees his best friend and they play fight. The joke eventually escalates to them wrestling on the ground while other students pass by, uncomfortably stepping over them and debating whether or not to call a teacher. Clay finally pins Fallon and he taps out.

FALLON
Fine! You win!

Clay releases him and they both roll to their feet.

FALLON (CONT’D)
(massaging his shoulder) Jesus, man.

CLAY
I know him.

FALLON
(rolling his eyes) Ha.

CLAY
How’s it going, brother?

FALLON
It’s going. Actually… things are really good.

Talk to me.

So. There’s this girl.

Oh snap!!!

Shhh!

Who is she?

I don’t know yet.

Did you meet her online? Bro, you know what I told you about that. Don’t get catfished.

I’m not getting catfished. I saw her.

Let me guess: her profile picture looked weirdly like Scarlet Johansson?

I saw her in person.

Oh.

I mean, we didn’t talk-

Catfish.

It was at the Crossing.

Fine. Man! I kinda wanted it to be a catfish. You know her name?
FALLON

Julia.

CLAY

Julia? That’s a straight up woman’s name, bro.

FALLON

She looks like a woman, for sure.

Thorn walks up and joins the conversation.

THORN

Are we talking about Mrs. Gatlin?

CLAY

Gross!

Thorn bites his lower lip sensually and Fallon laughs.

CLAY (CONT’D)

Dude, she’s in her forties.

THORN

I’m just sayin’ what we’re all all thinkin’: there’s no denying that rack! I’d love to mount it. Shame I left my rifle at home.

CLAY

You should be arrested for some… most of the things you say.

FALLON

She does have fantastic boobs.

CLAY

She’s married. And class is starting soon.

THORN

Just cause there’s a goalie at the net doesn’t mean you can’t score.

CLAY

Just means you shouldn’t. Unless you’re a scumbag.

FALLON

I was talking about a new girl. Julia.

THORN
Here?

FALLON
No. I saw her at church.

THORN
Did you get her number?

FALLON
No.

THORN
What the fuck, man?

FALLON
I’ll see her next week, hopefully. Assuming she comes back.

THORN
How was her rack?

Bell rings.

THORN
Shit! Gotta go. Can’t be late.

Thorn exits.

CLAY
Love you, bro. Psyched to meet this girl! I’ll cook her catfish!

Clay and Fallon exit. Jewel enters, looking down at a schedule and checking the room numbers to find her first period class. Fallon reenters spinning a hall pass. He stops in his tracks when he sees Julia, then fixes his hair and throws his shoulders back.

FALLON
Need help?

JEWEL
I’m fine.

FALLON
You sure? You look lost.

JEWEL
I think I can figure out a school hallway with sequentially numbered rooms.
Sequential! Good word.

FALLON

Thanks. I took fourth grade.

JEWEL

Jewel turns to continue her search.

FALLON

Am I wrong, or were you at the Crossing yesterday?

JEWEL

I was.

FALLON

Cool.

JEWEL

...You go there?

FALLON

Yes ma’am!

JEWEL

Please don’t call me “ma’am”.

FALLON

What should I call you?

JEWEL

Aren’t you supposed to be in class?

FALLON

I take a restroom break at the beginning of first period every day so I can use my phone in the bathroom for the first fifteen minutes of attendance and redundant updates. Life hack.

Fallon dexterously flips the hall pass up and catches it in his teeth.

JEWEL

Do you ever wash that hall pass?

FALLON

(through the bite) No.

JEWEL
What you’re doing? That’s disgusting.

FALLON

*(letting the hall pass drop from his mouth)* I don’t ever actually use the restroom.

JEWEL

Other people do. And dudes have a problem with accidentally peeing on things that hang on lanyards and swing in front of them.

*Fallon takes a breath to rebut, but then considers her point and wrinkles his mouth.*

Oh my god, I think you’re right.

FALLON

Yup.

JEWEL

*Jewel turns to continue her search again.*

FALLON

*(extending his hand)* I’m Fallon.

JEWEL

*(sighing and turning back)* Jewel.

FALLON

*(shaking her hand)* Short for “Julia”? Mhm.

JEWEL

You have a beautiful name.

FALLON

*(trying to hide how much she likes the compliment)* That’s nice.

JEWEL

What classroom are you looking for?

FALLON

104. World History.

JEWEL

Mrs. Gatlin?
Yeah.

So you’re a senior?

Yup.

Nice. Me too. Gatlin’s room’s going to be at the end of the hallway on your left. Second to last door, I think.

Okay. Thanks.

You’re welcome.

Jewel turns to go to class.

Hey, where are you from?

Dude! I’m never going to get to class!

They don’t know they’re waiting on you. If you walk away now, though, I’ll be waiting on your answer until lunch.

You think I’m planning on sitting with you?

Doesn’t matter. I’m planning on sitting with you.

You don’t have to do that.

I know. I want to.

I’m going home at lunch to help my mom finish unpacking.
That’s awesome. I bet she really appreciates that.

She’s family.

I’d love to lend a hand.

We don’t need that.

I know, but I like lifting stuff and love missing school. Plus, it’ll give us time to talk about where you’re from.

I’m from Indi.

I love Indi.

Try living there.

I’m planning on it.

Don’t.

Why?

How much time do you have?

As much time as you do.

I have to get to class.

You’re right. We should have this conversation over dinner tomorrow night.
Oh, should we?

Yeah, I think we should.

I have family dinner tomorrow tonight.

Are y’all serving sopapillas?

That’s racist.

I’m from Texas originally. My grandmother taught me a family recipe with cinnamon apples.

I’ve never heard of that combo. And I’m Mexican.

I’ll bring enough for everybody.

Tonight. After I help y’all finish moving in.

I told you: we don’t need any help.

You’re right. But I do.

Mhm?

I need to know more about the angel that walked into church yesterday.

(Beat.) That’s bad. Oh, that’s so bad.
You feel bad for me?

Yeah.

Bad enough to let me make it up to you with manual labor and dessert?

(Beat.) My whole family will be there.

I’m dying to meet them.

(Beat.) Okay.

Okay?

You asked for it! I’m going to class.

Jewel turns to go to class again.

Hope you don’t get lost again!

Jewel smiles but doesn’t turn around.

(Beat.) Nailed it.

He exits.

Scene Three

Fallon’s Living Room

Fallon, Clay, and Thorn are playing Monopoly. Fallon pretends to smoke one of the rolled Monopoly bills while Clay rolls the dice. He counts out six spaces and then stares in horror at the board.

Monopoly!

THORN
CLAY
You know you don’t have to say the name of the game when you win right?

THORN
Don’t be a sore loser.

CLAY
(Beat.) You’re right. Good game.

Clay extends his hand and Thorn shakes it. Clay yanks Thorn into a headlock and they roll across the board, scattering pieces with their wrestling. Fallon watches passively.

FALLON
Grab his leg. His leg, Thorn!

THORN
Shut up, oral fixation!

FALLON
I don’t-

He looks at the Monopoly bill he’s been chewing on. He puts it down.

FALLON
Grab his leg.

Thorn winds up on his back, with his knees on either side of Clay’s abdomen as Clay scrambles to grab his head. Thorn begins to squeeze and Clay immediately shoots his hands up in the air.

CLAY
Woah! Woah! You win!

Thorn smirks and releases Clay. Clay sits back and grins, kicking Thorn lightly.

CLAY (CONT’D)
You really should join the wrestling team.

THORN
I’m not as into sweaty man parts as you are.

Ma and Aha enter the room.

CLAY
What’s wrong with sweaty man parts?

MA
Hey boys!

THORN

Mrs. Hollon!

Clay buries his face in his hands while Thorn gets up and saunters over to Ma and Aha. He hugs Ma and kisses her on the cheek.

THORN (CONT’D)

You look beautiful. But what’s new?

Thorn shakes Aha’s hand.

THORN (CONT’D)

Sir.

AHA

Thorn, how are you doing?

THORN

Too blessed to complain, sir. Yourself?

AHA

We’re doing just fine. Just piddlin’, you know?

THORN

That’s not what I hear from Fallon! He says you’re busier than my Dad most of the time!

AHA

Well! I don’t know about that, but-

MA

Thorn, sweetie, thank you for asking about us but Aha and I want some time with Fallon if you don’t mind.

THORN

(throwing up his hands in mock defense) Of course, ma’am! We’ll get right out of your hair.

Thorn pats Clay on the shoulder as he leaves.

THORN

Come on, loser.

CLAY

Nice to see you both.
They exit.

AHA

That Thorn. He’s a hell of a young man.

MA

He’s just like the rest of them. Charming. But self-obsessed.

Fallon has started picking up the board game. Ma sits in one of the living room recliners and Aha takes the seat next to her.

MA

Stop that, sweetie. We’ll do that when you go to bed.

Fallon nods and faces Ma and Aha, criss-cross-applesauce. Ma takes a deep breath.

MA (CONT’D)

Well, you know what today is.

FALLON

Mom’s anniversary.

MA

That’s right, honey. And Pastor Megumi wrote our family such a sweet letter that Aha’s going to read.

Aha unfolds a letter and clears his throat.

AHA

Dear Hollons. Words cannot express how grateful I am that God brought you to this small town and to our tiny congregation. You have given your home, time, and – most importantly – your love to our little Church family and for this I am forever grateful, not just as a Pastor but as a friend. Sandra, your hospitality has given me the opportunity to care for this group of people and your honesty has continued to hold me accountable to do it well. I don’t know where we’d be without half of our personality in you! Jerry, your dedication to providing for your family and your ability to prioritize commitments – sometimes even at the cost of our gatherings – is something I both admire and am consistently learning from. By God’s grace, I hope to be a man of your caliber one day. Finally, Fallon: You have been like a nephew to me. I remember when I first met you! It was the first service you all attended and you came running up afterwards, looked me square in the eye, and said, “I’m going to be a better pastor than you one day!” Something still tells me you were right. On a day like today, I know from experiencing loss personally that there are no words to heal the cut of this sharp world. All I will say is that I am truly sorry, prepared to be of any support through prayer or presence, and inarticulably excited to worship the King alongside Kimberly one day when everything wrong is set right. “For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” – John 6:40. “And on that day He will wipe
away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor
crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” – Revelation 21:4. Love,
John.

*Ma wipes away tears and reaches out. Fallon scoots closer and takes her hand.*

**MA**

(to Aha) Thank you, Jerry. That was lovely. (to Fallon) Oh, sweetie. Your mother would be so
proud of you.

**AHA**

Yes she would.

**FALLON**

Thanks, Ma.

**MA**

I mean it! When you were born, all she could talk about was you. You couldn’t walk, talk, or
anything and she was boasting about you to everyone that came within earshot. I remember this
one time, I was helping her check out some new clothes since she’d stretched all her old ones out
during maternity. The cashier asked us how we were doing and, without any kind of realistic
segue, your mother responds, “I just gave birth to a baby boy and he’s happy, healthy, and…
healthy!” The cashier laughed. “Well, now I know the answer to my question!”

**AHA**

I remember when your mother was born, she was so small. She literally fit in one of my hands.
And she was so quiet. Cried the least of any baby I’ve ever seen. And when she grew up a
little… She was the prettiest little girl I’ve ever seen. She had these gold strands of hair and these
big eyes. And she’d follow me everywhere, whether it was the pasture or the horse manure
trough! Everywhere.

*He chokes up and stops talking.*

**MA**

You know, Hazel calls Aha and I every year on this morning to tell us that she loves us. She
finally stopped saying sorry about five years ago and now she just says she wishes she could’ve
had the one last breakfast with her best friend. But… well, I’ll never know. (Beat.) Vitamin,
what are you thinking about?

**FALLON**

Nothing.

**MA**

Honey. You know you can say anything in front of your Ma and Aha. You won’t offend us.

**FALLON**
(Beat.) Why did God take her?

MA
Sweetie, we’ll never know that. All we know is that she’s in the best place she could ever be.

FALLON
And that’s great and all. For her. But I’m never going to have a Mom. This is my only life and I’m never going to have a Mom.

MA
Vitamin-

AHA
Let me tell you something, Fallon. God did not take your mother away from all of us. It was that God-damn Mexican plumber sleeping behind the wheel that took her.

MA
Jerry. You promised you would never talk about this again.

AHA
Well if I don’t say anything then he thinks God ripped Kim away from him!

MA
Don’t talk about the man again.

AHA
It’s not entirely his fault. They’re all the same: lazy parasites that take honest jobs away from Americans and get off scot-free by riding the forgiveness of white people.

MA
Jerry, stop!

AHA
I’ve said all I need to.

MA
Vitamin.

Ma gets out of her seat and gets on the ground next to Fallon with difficulty. She puts an arm around him as he stares at the carpet.

MA (CONT’D)
We’ll never know why, sweetie. But your mother had faith before your Aha and I did and her hope is the only thing that got us through that horrible, horrible situation. You can be mad at God’s plan. But remember that His plan is why we have hope.
FALLON
Yes, ma’am.

MA
Oh, sweetie.

*Ma hugs Fallon and sits back, wiping her tears. She starts to get up and Aha stands but she shoves a palm at him.*

MA (CONT’D)
Don’t help me. *(rising to her feet)* I’ll see you upstairs.

*Ma exits and Fallon looks up at Aha. Aha nods his head towards the stairs.*

AHA
Go on. I’ll clean up this mess.

*Fallon exits and Aha kneels painfully down to start picking up the Monopoly pieces.*

Scene Four
Fallon’s Room

*Fallon enters his room and shuts the door. He takes off his shirt and goes into his closet, emerging with pajama pants on. He turns on his laptop at the desk by his bed and plugs his phone in. He scrolls through several texts and checks a few websites. Then he sets the phone down and grabs a Kleenex. He blows his nose and throws the tissue in the trash can. He grabs three more. Then he grabs a pair of headphones and puts them around his neck. He begins to play soft music from his phone that fills the theatre. He puts the headphones on and fumbles with the tissues below the desk. He looks back up, leaving one hand beneath the desk and tapping the keypad with the other free one. After a while, his door opens and a beautiful blonde woman enters in a business suit. He continues looking at the computer screen and slightly shakes his head. The woman exits. Several more taps. A short, dark-haired woman in a swimsuit enters. Again, Fallon shakes his head and she exits. Several more taps. A long-haired, Middle Eastern woman enters in a thin, sexualized garb. Fallon leans back and takes his hand off the computer. His other arm starts moving slightly. The woman approaches and cradles his head against her chest while he closes his eyes. They remain there for a moment together before she kisses his forehead and exits. As soon as the door closes, Fallon sags back in his chair as if tired and throws away the tissues balled up in his left hand. He powers down his computer, takes off his headphones, turns off his phone music, and climbs into bed. He stares up at the ceiling and whispers until he falls asleep.*

FALLON
Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors…
Scene Five

Lopez Kitchen

*The Lopez Family and Fallon are finishing dinner around their table. Fallon’s cinnamon apple sopapillas have mostly been consumed by Nora, Tristan, and Alicia. An awkward silence still hangs over the table, in spite of Mrs. Lopez’ best efforts to include Fallon.*

**MRS. LOPEZ**

Fallon, thank you again for helping Carlos carry the couches in. And for bringing the sopapillas! They are very tasty.

**FALLON**

Yes ma’am! Glad you liked them. *(looking at Tristan taking the last bite of his third sopapilla)* I can tell you hated them.

**TRISTAN**

I-

*A spray of crumbs leaves his mouth and showers Fallon upon trying to talk and he recoils.*

**JEWEL**

Dude!

*Nora and Alicia burst out laughing and Tristan recovers, blushing.*

**TRISTAN**

They’re super good. Thanks.

**ALICIA**

So why do you like Jewel?

**JEWEL**

Ssst!

**MRS. LOPEZ**

Alicia. Don’t make our guest uncomfortable.

**MR. LOPEZ**

So, Fallon. What do you plan on doing for a living?

**FALLON**

I’d like to go into construction management.

**JEWEL**
Ha!

MR. LOPEZ

That’s good work.

FALLON

And there’s always going to be plenty of it.

MR. LOPEZ

That’s for sure.

FALLON

What do you do, sir?

MR. LOPEZ

I’m a plumber.

FALLON

(to Nora) Your sister is honest, which is my favorite quality in a human being. She’s also beautiful. Like you and the rest of your family.

MRS. LOPEZ

Well, el hombre has my blessing!

JEWEL

Mom!

TRISTAN

You’re cool, Fallon.

FALLON

Thanks, Tristan. I think you’re pretty cool too.

Fallon and Tristan fist bump.

MR. LOPEZ

I had three older brothers growing up. I’ve always wished Tristan had an older brother.

JEWEL

Alright! Fallon and I are going to spend some alone time.
Ooooo!

Chica. (to Jewel) Be smart, Julia.

Let’s go!

Jewel drags Fallon away from the table. They leave the Lopez’ duplex and stand outside the door. Jewel leans back against the door and stares at Fallon over-confidently. Fallon shifts from foot to foot and smiles.

Your family’s cool.

Yup.

I thought that went well.

I’m sure you do.

Don’t you?

…They like you.

I’m glad. What about you?

(rolling her eyes) Jesus!

I know him.

Ew. (Beat.) Why is honesty your favorite character trait?
When I was in fifth grade, my grandparents and I moved here from Texas. I was the new kid so, obviously, I was eating alone. This kid named Thorn came and sat next to me. I had just finished my Lunchable and started opening up my Fruit by the Foot. He started talking to me about a graphic novel he’d seen me reading at snack time. Before I could take a bite of the Fruit by the Foot, though, he stopped and told me with creepy calmness for an eleven-year-old: “I want a bite of your Fruit by the Foot. But I also want to be your friend. If you don’t give me a bite I’ll leave, but if you give me half I’ll stay and we can keep talking.”

JEWEL
That’s extortion.

FALLON
That’s my best friend.

JEWEL
Is this supposed to make me feel romantic?

FALLON
I’m just telling the truth. Different people – even assholes – can find common ground when both people are being honest. It makes almost anything possible. Also, I think honesty proves that you genuinely love yourself. Because you are willing to let other people really see you, which implies you think they’ll be proud of who you are or will help course-correct you if you’re off somewhere.

JEWEL
Or they’ll make fun of you and make you hate yourself.

FALLON
Are you speaking from experience?

JEWEL
No. I’ve always been popular at school.

FALLON
That’s not surprising. Have you been honest?

JEWEL
Yeah. As much as I can be.

FALLON
What do you want to be when you grow up?

JEWEL
I want to illustrate children’s books.

FALLON
That’s the coolest thing I’ve ever heard.

JEWEL

Not really. It doesn’t pay a whole lot.

FALLON

Right. It’s only coloring the dreams of children. How lame.

JEWEL

You make it sound so romantic.

FALLON

Thank you.

JEWEL

Romantic is Dad’s favorite substitute for impractical. Do you honestly want to go into construction management?

FALLON

It’s honestly what I plan on doing because it’s practical. If I’m being romantic, *(stepping closer)* I want to be an actor someday.

JEWEL

An actor that is obsessed with honesty. You’re a paradox.

FALLON

Paradox. Good word.

*Fallon steps closer and leans towards Jewel but she turns away.*

FALLON (CONT’D)

Sorry.

JEWEL

For what? Tell me more about wanting to be an actor.

FALLON

Oh, okay. Um… well, I’ve been in almost all of the school plays. Next semester we are putting on an original one written by our theatre teacher.

JEWEL

Is it good?

FALLON

Haven’t read it yet, but he writes one every year – you know, to avoid royalties and money stuff – and they’re always good. Like, really good.
What’s this next one about?

He’s only told us the title: R.I.P.H.S.

R.I.P.H.S?

It’s an acronym. Rest In Peace High School.

Acronym. Good word.

(Beat.) What else do you want to do before you die?

I want to give back to God the life he has given me.

That’s a way churchier answer than I was expecting.

Just cause I don’t make bad Jesus puns doesn’t mean I’m not a Christian.

So your faith is a big deal to you?

It’s the most important thing in my life.

Me too.

I bet.

Don’t think I’m being honest?

I just find it interesting that I brought it up first.
FALLON
I was the first to make a bad Jesus pun.

JEWEL
Touché. (Beat.) I’m tired. I’m gonna head back inside.

FALLON
Good! It’s a mutual decision then.

_Fallon holds up a hand for a high-five and, receiving none, fulfills the request with his other hand. Jewel laughs._

JEWEL
You’re sad.

FALLON
I’ve actually had a really great night with you. And your family is wonderful.

JEWEL
Thanks. Yeah, it was fun.

_Jewel turns to go back inside and Fallon turns to leave as well, but spins at the last second._

FALLON
Jewel?

JEWEL
Dude! You’ve got to stop doing this.

FALLON
If this was fun, do you want to try it again? But just us two? Like a date? Friday night?

JEWEL
Okay. Goodnight.

_Jewel closes the door. Fallon turns to leave._

FALLON
Nailed it.

Scene Six
School Hallway

_Fallon, Thorn, and Clay are congregated around Fallon’s locker. Fallon is finishing telling them about his dinner with the Lopez family._
And then she said, “That sounds amazing! See you then, hotshot!” And shut the door.

Well that doesn’t sound right.

She basically said that.

Who’s your best friend?

You need to get over this. You’re new. (grabbing Fallon’s shoulder) It takes time to work your way through this burned, protective shell.

Bro, when have I ever lied to you?

You’ve never lied to me, that I know of.

And when have I ever not had your back with sound advice past my age in wisdom?

You’ve always given me sound advice past your age in wisdom.

I’m gonna throw up.

And when have I ever complained about school, made fun of you, or waxed poetic on a teacher’s breasts?

Tits are every great artist’s inspiration.

Never.

Fallon. Who’s your best friend?
Thorn is my best friend.

THORN

Boom!

CLAY

(slapping his cheeks) Am I in a psych ward?

FALLON

Guys, we’re missing the point. I have a date on Friday. With Julia freaking Lopez.

THORN

I never realized how Mexican her name sounded till you just said it out loud.

FALLON

(snappily) I don’t care.

CLAY

I’m psyched for you, man. She sounds awesome. Down-to-earth and brutal. Just the kind of girl you need.

THORN

What are you two gonna do?

FALLON

Well, I’m thinking I’ll cook for her at my place since Ma and Aha will be out playing bridge. Then we can go get ice cream at Motoroo’s and go for a late-night drive. Talk about our feelings and stuff. And then I’ve got a gift to give her.

CLAY

Is it jewelry? Don’t come on too strong too fast.

THORN

Definitely don’t do that. (making humping motions) Is it the business?

CLAY

Who’s your best friend?

FALLON

She’s not into that, man. I really respect her. I even tried to kiss her at one point and she shut me down. But not in an embarrassing way… just like “not yet,” ya know?

CLAY

Totally.

THORN
Never had that experience.

CLAY
That’s either tremendously prideful or extremely worrisome.

FALLON
What do you guys have going on the rest of the week?

CLAY
I’m going to visit my aunt with my family tomorrow night.

FALLON
Nice.

CLAY
Actually, she just got diagnosed with skin cancer.

FALLON
Oh no. I’m so sorry, man. I’ll be praying for her!

CLAY
Yeah. Thanks, dude. We’re just gonna go over there and let her know she’s at least not alone. Oh, and I’ve got homework.

*Fallon nods and looks at Thorn.*

THORN
Class, projects, the usual.

FALLON
Cool.

*Bell rings.*

THORN
Shit! Sorry about your aunt, Clay.

*Thorn exits.*

CLAY
So I’m your best friend right?

*Fallon rolls his eyes and they exit. Several moments later, Fallon and Jewel enter at opposite ends of the hallway, spinning hall passes.*

FALLON
Well, well, well. Fancy meeting you here.

JEWEL

I’m actually using the bathroom.

FALLON

(winking) Right. So nobody else has picked up on my trick in Gatlin’s class?

JEWEL

Fallon. I seriously have to pee.

FALLON

Oh! My bad.

Fallon steps aside but calls after Jewel as she speed-walks away.

FALLON (CONT’D)

We still on day after tomorrow?

JEWEL

(whirling) Dude!!!

FALLON

Can’t wait!

Jewel and Fallon exit.

Scene Seven

Fallon’s Room

Fallon enters and goes into his closet, emerging in pajama pants. He plugs his phone in and begins to play the ambient music. He puts on the headphones, grabs the tissues, and starts tapping. A brunette model enters but is dismissed. Then the Middle Eastern woman from two nights ago enters. Fallon hesitates, but then dismisses her. He stops tapping and stares blankly at the computer screen. Jewel, in a beautiful blue homecoming dress, enters and stares at him. He finally shakes his head violently and taps several more times. Jewel exits and a middle-aged blonde woman in sexualized teacher’s attire enters. Fallon stops tapping and she approaches him, cradling him to her chest. Then she kisses his head and exits. Fallon slumps back, powers down, throws away the tissues, turns off the music, and climbs into bed.

FALLON

Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors…
Scene Eight

Fallon’s Kitchen

*Fallon mixes a bowl of soup, adding a dash of this and a pinch of that to the recipe. Jewel sits at the table, sipping on a soda.*

Where did you learn how to cook?

**JEWEL**

Ma.

**FALLON**

Who?

**JEWEL**


**FALLON**

And your grandpa?

**JEWEL**

Aha.

**FALLON**

That’s cute.

**JEWEL**

What about you?

**FALLON**

Just call me Jewel.

**JEWEL**

What do you call your grandparents?

**FALLON**

¿Mis abuelitos? Nothing. I’ve never met them.

**JEWEL**

I’m sorry.

**FALLON**

Don’t be. It’s not a big deal. Dad’s parents were abusive so he ran away from home and both of Mom’s died early, before I was born.
FALLON
I just have really fond memories associated with grandparents. Obviously.

JEWEL
Where are your parents?

FALLON
Hang on. Do you want guacamole with your tortilla soup?

JEWEL
No thanks. (Beat.) To be honest, I’m still not convinced this isn’t all just one big build up to a racist joke.

FALLON
I told you. I’m from Texas. It’s almost all I know how to cook. And it breaks up the boredom of Midwest “dining.”

JEWEL
I hear that. Are there any good restaurants in town?

FALLON
If I told you that you might stop coming to me for meals.

JEWEL
If I was really here for food, I’d have just had you make those sopapillas again.

Good, weren’t they?

FALLON
I hated how amazing they were.

JEWEL
What was growing up in Indi like?

FALLON
Not so fast, mi amigo. You haven’t told me about your parents.

JEWEL
(focusing on the soup) Well, I never met my dad. He knocked my mom up in college and didn’t stay around long enough for me to come into the picture. Mom died when I was three, in a car accident.

Jewel gasps and searches for words. Finally, coming up empty, she goes to Fallon and hugs him from behind.
FALLON (CONT’D)
Woah! Hey. It’s okay. I’m fine. It was a long time ago. I don’t even remember it.

JEWEL
I’m so sorry, Fallon.

FALLON
That’s okay.

Jewel releases him and returns to her seat.

JEWEL
What’s your mom’s name?

FALLON
Her name was Kim. Kimberly.

JEWEL
That’s a beautiful name.

FALLON
Yeah.

JEWEL
Do you remember her?

FALLON
Kind of. I don’t know. I’ve seen enough pictures and heard my grandparents talk about her enough at this point that I can’t really distinguish between what I’ve dreamed and what I might actually remember. I’m confident I have at least one concrete memory.

JEWEL
Tell me about it.

FALLON
Will you talk to me about growing up in Indi after this?

JEWEL
Yes.

FALLON
My earliest memory is her silhouette. Which is so annoying, that I can’t actually remember her face. But she’s on a ladder and she’s just finished sticking those glow-in-the-dark-star-stickers – have you seen them? Super cheap, from the Dollar Store or something – all over my ceiling. And one falls off the ceiling. I vividly remember watching the star fall and land next to my head while
my mom gasped and then started laughing. I think she called me “sweetie.” But that could also just be another dream because that’s what my grandmother calls me.

JEWEL

(Beat.) Growing up in Indi was tough. We lived in a bad neighborhood-

FALLON

Which one?

JEWEL

Hallwell off Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Street. Southside.

Fallon whistles.

JEWEL (CONT’D)

Mom and Dad always laid out the ground rules and made sure we were safe. But honestly, having your parents come in and throw you on the floor and then lay on top of you because stray bullets could come through the walls does something to your trust in parents as a kid. Don’t get me wrong, Mom and Dad are great. They just can’t shield me from everything, though. That’s when I really found Jesus. I figured if I could die any day I needed to figure out where I was going to go when it happened. It was only after that fear sent me running to God that I found all the grace and good in the gospel. (Beat.) Anyway, school could be tough but I figured out how to get around. Being a minority helped with the other kids accepting me and being pretty – just being honest! – kept the guys from tormenting me after middle school. Me and two of my best girlfriends, Jacqueline and Roquelle, formed a squad so that none of us would ever be alone in the hallways with any of the boys. We went to youth group together on Wednesdays. We babysit each other’s brothers and sisters on weeknights when our parents were working. But even then, we couldn’t protect each other from everything. Roquelle got addicted to cocaine our junior year. Jacqueline and I knew and asked her to get help but she played it off like it was no big deal. Then one night, July 24’th, she called me and started screaming her lungs off at me over the phone. Something about how I was fake and wasn’t a real friend to her. I found out later she’d called Jacqueline before me but she’d been asleep so it’d gone to voicemail. Anyway, I yelled right back at her, told her she was batshit crazy and all sorts of other horrible things. Not proud of it, but it’s what I did. Anyway, I woke up the next morning, went outside to get the mail… and Roquelle is lying facedown in the mud in my yard. I freaked out. My mom called the ambulance and the hospital saved her life. Any later and she would’ve been dead, the doctors said, no doubt. Long story short, Roquelle had gone to a party with some seniors the night before, gotten really high, called me planning to ask for a ride home but gotten confused or something, and then three guys – she still isn’t sure who – gave her a ride back to my house. She gave them the wrong address. That’s how messed up she was. Apparently, they drove right by my house, stopped in a cul-de-sac, did some pretty fucked up shit, and then dumped her body in my lawn. To die. That was Junior year. Last year. That was definitely the last straw for Mom. Dad wasn’t hard to convince after that.

FALLON

(Beat.) Wow. I-
The door opens and Ma and Aha enter.

MA
Hey, Vitamin! Oh. And who is this lovely woman?

AHA
Didn’t know you were having company over, Fallon.

Jewel gets up from the table and confidently approaches Ma and Aha, shaking both of their hands.

JEWEL
You must be Ma and Aha! Fallon can’t stop talking about you two.

MA
Fallon! That’s sweet, darling. And you are?

JEWEL

AHA
It’s nice to meet you, Julia.

MA
I saw you at the Crossing this past weekend, didn’t I?

JEWEL
With my family? Probably, ma’am.

MA
Well! Y’all were just the cutest bunch.

AHA
What are you making, Fallon?

FALLON
Ma’s tortilla soup.

JEWEL
Would you like some?

MA
Oh, sweetie! We’re fine! Aha and I just grabbed dinner on the way back from our bridge tournament. Do you play bridge?
JEWEL
No, ma’am. Unfortunately, I haven’t.

MA
Well, that’s just fine. We’ll teach you sometime.

AHA
Julia, did I hear you say your whole family was at the Crossing?

MA
They introduced themselves to Pastor Megumi after the service. I was talking his ear off and they rescued him!

AHA
And where are you all from?

JEWEL
Indianapolis, sir.

AHA
Uh-huh. And what does your father do for a living?

JEWEL
He’s a plumber, sir.

AHA
(Beat.) Well that’s a good career. Tell him he’s doing good work. (to Fallon) I’m taking Ma upstairs. You two enjoy dinner, make sure the stove is turned off when you’re done, and have her home and back by ten o’clock.

FALLON
Yes, sir.

Aha shakes hands with Jewel again.

AHA
Julia? It was wonderful to meet you. (Beat.) That’s a good handshake you’ve got there.

MA
Goodnight, darling!

Smiling, Aha and Ma leave the room. Fallon waits until they’ve left the room and then walks right up to Jewel.

JEWEL
Your grandparents are sweet.
Fallon kisses Jewel.

You’re amazing.

Why do you say that?

That was just amazing.

(Beat.) Thanks. Can we sit next to them at church this weekend?

Fallon nods.

(Beat.) Want to eat dinner?

So bad.

I know.

Hm?

You’ve got gross, hungry breath.

Scene Eight

The Crossing Church

Noor has just finished the opening worship songs. She gets down off the front of the stage and Pastor Megumi take the stage with a stand in hand. He places several sheets of paper on them, orders the stack, and clears his throat.

PASTOR MEGUMI

Will you pray with me, please?

The congregation bows their heads and folds their hands with him.

PASTOR MEGUMI (CONT’D)
Father, thank you for the gift of being together as a family this morning. Please remind us to be thankful for each other and for time totally focused on you instead of critiquing all the ways a church service like this is destined to fail. Please help us to learn from your words and not mine. And use this time to evolve us into the people you created us to be. For your glory, our good, and in Jesus’ name. Amen.

*The congregation echoes “Amen”.*

**PASTOR MEGUMI (CONT’D)**

Thank you. Okay. For those of you that are out of the loop, we’re currently going through a sermon series on the seven deadly sins. Today we’re looking at the sin of lust. *(Beat.)* Before I say anything else, though, I want us to just read Jesus’ most famous teaching on lust so that we start with God’s words instead of my opinion. Please read along in Matthew 5:27-30 with me. *(Beat.)* “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.” *(Beat.)* Over the course of the rest of this sermon, I’m going to do four things: First, I’m going to remind us of the background for this teaching. Second, I’m going to ask us the surprising question Jesus asks us. Third, I’m going to focus on Jesus’ advice for beating lust. And finally, I’m going to give us hope. *(Beat.)* Okay.

**Background.** “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’” When was this said? In Exodus 20:14. Number seven of The Ten Commandments. *Why shouldn’t* we commit adultery? Well, as elementary as it sounds, because God says so. What’s the first sentence in the Bible? “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” Genesis 1:1. God designed everything that exists. So it stands to reason that God, and only God, knows how his creation, including us, functions best. God’s commands to human beings are like the owner’s manual to reality. And, more specifically, to human relationships. By following them, we function smoothly inside the system God made. We play our note in the most gorgeous symphony ever written. But when we reject God’s commands, we stop functioning the way we’re supposed to and can cause damage to other parts of the system. This looks like self-destructive tendencies, hurting others, and angering God. We become a discordant note that ruins the symphony. *(Beat.)* Sex is one of the first things God created. “A man leaves his father and mother and is united with his wife, and they become one flesh.” Genesis 2:24. Sex is a gift that develops intimacy and devotion between a married couple through pleasure. Just ask me or any of the other married couples in this room. Sex is a good, powerful, freaking fantastic gift from God. It’s so good! But when sex is ripped out of the context of marriage, it has destructive consequences for our relationship with God and our relationships with other people. *(Beat.)* There’s evidence for this spiritual truth in modern science. During sexual experiences, our brains release three primary chemicals: dopamine, serotonin, and oxytocin. Dopamine and serotonin are stimulators and pleasure-inducers. But oxytocin, also called the “cuddle chemical,” is a bonding agent that emotionally attaches us to our partner. To give you an idea of how powerful this chemical is, it’s the same chemical released in a mother’s brain that bonds her to her baby. So, when we have sex with someone other than our spouse, we are physically, neurologically, and spiritually bonding ourselves to someone else. And this bonding does not only take place when we have sex with
someone else other than our spouse. It can take place just looking at a computer screen. Now, I’m not naïve. According to a recent study by the Huffington Post, porn sites get visited more each month than Netflix, Amazon, and Twitter combined. Someone in this room has probably looked at a porn site more than once. Digital sexual experiences also trigger dopamine to flood the brain and reinforce neural pathways that can lead to conditions reminiscent of a full-scale drug addiction. Any of these kind of alternative bondings usually lead to the stunting or breaking of families. And whatever angle you look at it from – psychologically, sociologically, or from personal experience –, when families break down, everything else in society breaks down. (Beat.) I want to take a second to point out that this view of sex in the Church is surprisingly more respectful and loving of it than the normal sexual ethic in our culture today, even though the Church is sometimes accused of hating sex due to a sex ethic of exclusive monogamy. (Beat.) Okay. Now the surprising question that Jesus asks us. “But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” I know what you’re probably thinking, because I thought the same thing when I first read this sentence. “Is Jesus really saying that if I’ve never had sex with anyone but my spouse, but I have thought about another person lustfully, in a different way I’ve still cheated on them?” Yes. (Beat.) Why is he saying this? There was plenty of polygamy and adultery going on at this time. Why not focus on that? Because Jesus isn’t interested in telling us not to do something again, like the Ten Commandments. He’s interested in something else. “…committed adultery with her in his heart.” Jesus is asking us if we love him. The body follows rules. The heart loves. (Beat.) But isn’t following God’s rules loving him? Is there a difference? Well, let’s look at maybe the most famous story of adultery in the Bible. The story of David and Bathsheba. For those of you who don’t know this story, King David – “a man after God’s own heart” according to 1 Samuel 13:14 – sleeps with the wife of one of his soldiers and, when she gets pregnant, places her husband on the front lines to murder him. Even the best of God’s children are far from perfect. But God uses one of David’s friends to hold him accountable and, in his remorse, David composes one of the most insightful songs ever written: Psalm 51. Let’s read verses 16 & 17. “You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.” Before our rule-following means anything, it has to be motivated by the right thing. Remember: the seven deadly sins are all about motivation and lust is no different. This reminds me of the thesis sentence for the Old Testament Law, sometimes called the greatest commandment. Deuteronomy 6:5 “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” Love is the root of the tree. Doing is the fruit of the tree. (Beat.) Let’s be honest with ourselves. We know this. It’s hard to love God because we have to let go of our self-righteousness and our self-centeredness in order to even be worthy of loving him. But we know this. (Beat.) Ayumi and I celebrated our twentieth anniversary two weekends ago. I brought her some flowers and we dressed up nice and went out to a delicious restaurant and then I read her a poem I wrote her afterwards and then we watched a movie and… had some alone time. But if at any point in time Ayumi had asked me why we were celebrating, do you think she would have felt loved if I said, “Well. You’re my wife and these are the rules.” No. But what if I said, “Because you are wonderful, beautiful, funny, and my favorite person on earth. And nothing would make me happier than to celebrate the gift of living my life with you.” The number one analogy used for Jesus and the Church in the Bible is a groom and his bride. (Beat.) Okay. So how do we fight lust? “If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right
hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.” Strong language. So, how do we fight lust in our heart? We don’t. We run. Anybody here seen *Braveheart?* “We’ll run, and we’ll live!” 1 Corinthians 6:18. “Flee sexual immorality.” *Flee it.* (Beat.) I have a good friend that has a dieting problem. He has a huge sweet tooth and little self-control. He’s tried everything, from sleeping schedules to fitness routines. Nothing worked for him. But recently he’s started slimming down. I asked him what he was doing. “I just stopped buying crap.” He said. “When I didn’t fill my pantry with unhealthy options, eating healthy was shockingly easy.” To put it in Biblical language, “Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.” Hebrews 12:1-2. (Beat.) “Fixing out eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.” This is the hope I have to give us. It’s not an idea. It’s a person. It’s the same person that doesn’t shy away from the consequences of sin: “It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole boy to be thrown to hell.” But it’s also the person who came to rescue us from hell by living the perfect life we haven’t, dying the death we deserve, and then resurrecting as proof that we will too if we believe that he is the son of God and worship him with our lives. Maybe you think you have proved that you don’t really believe in him by committing this sin of lust. But to say us failing to be perfect negates Jesus’ perfect grace is a lie from hell. (Beat.) My favorite parable is The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. Luke 18:9-14. “To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: ‘Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ I tell you that this man, rather than the Pharisee, went home justified before God.” (Beat.) This is our story. God’s Law is a pass/fail course and none of us have passed. James 2:10. “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.” But Jesus passed and he’s inviting all of us to write our names on the test, and then to remind ourselves every day that we passed because of him. James 4:6. “But he gives us more grace.” (Beat.) If you have been following God’s rules instead of loving Jesus, please pray with me. If you have been squeaky clean in sexual purity but lusted, please pray with me. And if you are a sinner that just needs the grace of Jesus, please pray with me.

*Pastor Megumi bows his head and folds his hands. The congregation joins him.*

**PASTOR MEGUMI (CONT’D)**

Father, thank you for sharing your truth with us this morning. Thank you that you don’t ask us to be better but you ask us to ask for help and then give it. Thank you for your sure forgiveness through Jesus. We’re sorry, Father. We’re sorry that we’ve tried to get right with you instead of loving you. And we’re sorry that we’ve lusted in our hearts even if our bodies have been kept under control. Help us to love you, to run away from sexual sin, to have self-control with our actions and thoughts, and to share your love with others so that they can also experience the forgiveness of Jesus. We ask this for your glory, our good, and in Jesus’ name. We love you. Amen.
The congregation echoes "Amen".

PASTOR MEGUMI (CONT’D)
Please stand to receive a benediction from Philippians 1:6 and Revelation 21:4!

The congregation stands and Pastor Megumi stretches out his hands with a smile.

“I’m confident of this: that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus… On that day he will wipe every tear from your eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” Now let’s worship our good God.

Noor replaces Pastor Megumi and leads the congregation in a rendition of “Amazing Grace.” As they sing, the lights change and they filter offstage, still singing. Their voices carry on offstage throughout the next scene until it concludes along with Act One.

Scene Nine

Fallon’s Room

Fallon enters with a glass of water and sets it on his desk. He goes into his closet, emerging in pajama pants. He plugs his phone in and begins to play the ambient music. He pauses at the computer, and then shakes his head and climbs into bed. He lays there for several moments, unmoving. Then he sits up abruptly and goes to his desk. He puts on his headphones, grabs his tissues, and begins to tap on the monitor. No staging this time, just him masturbating onstage behind the desk in uncomfortable, raw indulgence. When he finishes, he throws away the tissues and sits back in his chair, panting. He suddenly grabs the sides of the computer screen as if to crush it but stops and balls his fists on either side of his head. His breathing grows more erratic. He starts to walk towards his bed, but stops short and collapses into the fetal position. He starts crying. Interspersed with “Amazing Grace” his prayer can be heard.

FALLON

God, I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry. I can’t stop myself. I don’t know what to do. But I love you, I do. And I don’t deserve your forgiveness but I believe you give it anyway. I need it. I need you. I need you so much. Help me. Please help me. Please.

Fallon gets up and starts to get back into bed, but then walks back to his desk and sits down. He stares at the computer. He grabs his glass of water and pours it onto the keyboard. The lights on the computer die to show it’s broken. He exhales and smiles slightly. Then he clambers into bed. It’s just music for this last part.

FALLON

Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. We love you because you love us first. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.
Lights out. End of Act One.
Act Two

Scene One

Coffee Shop

*Fallon and Jewel sit at a table in a café, sipping drinks. They’re on another date. Fallon is noticeably lighter.*

**JEWEL**

Your name’s William?

*Fallon shrugs.*

**JEWEL (CONT’D)**

You never thought that might be relevant information at any point over the last month of us dating?

**FALLON**

I’ve never told anyone else that, to be honest. I stopped using it as soon as we moved from Texas.

Why?

**FALLON**

I don’t know. It always sounded like a little white boy’s name to me.

You were a little white boy.

**FALLON**

I know. I just didn’t like it for some reason.

Why Fallon? Is that your middle name?

**FALLON**

No. My middle name is Jerry. Aha’s real name.

Where’d Fallon come from?

**FALLON**

Fallon was the main character in my favorite graphic novel when I was a kid. *The Amulets of Crandor.*
(Beat.) You’re such a nerd.

JEWEL

You’re dating a nerd.

FALLON

Yup. (Beat.) So what now?

JEWEL

It’s not like this changing anything.

FALLON

This changes everything!

JEWEL

How?

FALLON

Do I call you William now? Or Will?

JEWEL

Just keep calling me Fallon!

FALLON

(Beat.) I’m going to call you Will.

JEWEL

Please don’t, Julia.

FALLON

I’m serious. Fallon is a name you gave yourself because you didn’t like you as a kid. But Will is who are. You’re who I like.

WILL

(Beat.) Okay. Does this mean I have to call you Julia?

JEWEL

You can call me whatever you want.

WILL

Okay, baby.

JEWEL

No.
Sugar?

No pet names.

Sorry, Miss Lopez.

I’m going to hit you.

Julia.

*Julia punches Will in the shoulder.*

I was serious!

You can call me Julia.

Then why did you punch me?

Do you ever look at something cute, like a baby, and get so overwhelmed with how adorable it is that you just want to destroy something?

*(scooting slowly away from her)* Not really, no.

Well that’s how I feel when I look at you most of the time.

That’s… nice. *(Beat)* How’s college stuff going?

Oh yeah! I got back my last ACT score.

And?
JULIA
I got a 35.

WILL
Fuck!

JULIA
Will.

WILL
Sorry! But that’s incredible, Julia! Okay, to be honest, I really like using your full name.

JULIA
(smiling) Yeah, it’s pretty helpful. I’m going to start applying soon.

WILL
Where all are you applying?

JULIA
(looking down and talking fast) Well, I’m applying to Stanford, Yale, and Princeton this month. But those probably won’t happen unless I get a scholarship too. I’m also applying to the University of Florida, UT Austin, and the University of Colorado Boulder.

Beat. Julia looks up at Will.

WILL
All of those sound awesome!

JULIA
(blushing) Yeah. What about you?

WILL
Honestly? Haven’t thought about it yet. Too focused on class and the play and everything else right now. Once I have time to take a breath I’ll probably apply to IU.

JULIA
Cool. (Beat.) I know none of the schools I said were in-state…

Will grabs Julia’s hand.

WILL
It’s okay. We don’t have to figure that for a long time. (Beat. smiling) That’s a problem for future Will and Julia.

JULIA
(coming around) Yeah. Those schmucks can deal with it.
WILL
Exactly. *looking at his watch* Hey, I have to go. It’s family dinner tonight.

JULIA
Go for it.

WILL
Want me to ask if you can join? Ma and Aha would love to have you!

JULIA
No, you go spend some quality time with them. I’m going to head home anyway.

WILL
Cool.

Will gets up and starts to leave, hesitates, then sits back down. He puts his hands on the table and looks at them.

WILL (CONT’D)
Julia-

Will looks Julia in the eyes.

WILL (CONT’D)
I love you.

JULIA
(Beat. smiling) I know.

WILL
Don’t feel any pressure-

JULIA
I love you, too. Obviously.

Will breaks into a huge smile, looks around, and then shrugs and kisses Julia. They break apart and he exits the café.

Scene Two
Will’s Living Room

Will, Ma, and Aha sit at the dining room table eating.

MA
You’re going by William?

WILL
Will. I know. I’s weird. But Julia started calling me it today and I really like it. And if that’s what mom named me, then that’s what I want to go by.

MA
Oh, sweetie. *(hugging Will)* Will it is. Your mother would love to hear you going by that again. Jerry?

AHA
I’ll call you whatever you want as long as it’s not a girl’s name.

Jerry!

*Aha shrugs.*

MA (CONT’D)
Well, no matter what, just don’t forget that you’ll always be my Vitamin.

You’ll always be my Ma.

WILL

AHA
*(Beat.)* Speaking of names, Fallon-er, Will. What is Julia’s dad’s name again? I saw him in church but never got the opportunity to introduce myself.

George. George Lopez.

*Aha nods thoughtfully and returns to his soup.*

WILL (CONT’D)
I’m kidding! Did you never watch *George Lopez* with me on television? He’s the comedian with a big head?

Oh! I think he’s hilarious!

AHA
*(seriously)* So his name isn’t George?

WILL
Um, no. I think it’s… Carlos?
Carlos Lopez?

WILL
That sounds right. But I’m not 100% sure, so don’t quote me on it.

AHA

Hm.

Ma is nervously looking from Aha to Will and back again.

MA
Will, have you been using my computer for the past few nights?

WILL
Yes ma’am. Sorry.

MA
Well, there’s nothing to apologize for! I just found a Word document open once or twice with your writing and wasn’t sure if you were journaling or what was wrong with yours?

WILL
Oh, yeah. I’ve been meaning to tell y’all… I broke my laptop.

MA
Oh no, sweetie!

AHA
What’d you do?

WILL
Well, I had a glass of water on the desk in case I got thirsty at night. I was sitting at my desk and next thing I know the laptop is soaked and dying.

MA
We’ll get you a new one, sweetie!

AHA
We will?

WILL
Oh, you guys don’t have to do that! I’ve been able to get all my work done on your computer just fine. As long as that doesn’t bother you, Ma?

MA
Oh, sweetie. It doesn’t bother me. But I want you to have your own piece of equipment for emergencies and whatever else. Your Aha and I will buy you one tomorrow while I’m out running errands.

WILL
I’m really fine using yours.

AHA
Hear that, Sandra? He’s really fine using yours.

MA
I’m getting you a new laptop tomorrow and I don’t want to hear any more about it.

AHA
(Beat.) Ask Carlos if that’s his real name next time y’all talk.

WILL
Why?

AHA
I’m just curious.

WILL
Yes, sir.

Ma is getting nervous again.

AHA
And you said they’re coming from Indianapolis?

WILL
Yes.

AHA
Have you asked whereabouts in there?

WILL
Hallwell. Martin Luther King Junior Street. Southside. Julia told me all about it.

AHA
Rough part of town.

WILL
Mhm.

AHA
And before that?

Jerry.

I don’t think there was a before that.

There you go. They’ve lived in Indianapolis their whole lives.

I’d be curious to know.

You’re psycho.

*Everyone freezes. Will and Aha stare at each other. Ma, panicked, looks back and forth between them.*

What did you say to me, young man?

Jerry, stop!

Julia’s dad didn’t kill mom.

Oh…

I never said that.

*Aha looks at Ma, who has started crying.*

Did I ever say that?

Oh, Jerry!

*Ma exits, weeping. Will gets up, grabs her plate and goes to the sink. It is deadly quiet. BeforeWill leaves the kitchen, Aha speaks.*
Scene Three

Will’s Room

Will enters and goes into his closet. He emerges in pajama pants. He plugs in his phone, grabs some tissues, and then blows his nose a couple of times. He throws the tissues away and starts to climb into bed, but stops and walks back to check his phone one more time. He calls someone. It goes to voicemail.

WILL

Hey Julia! Just wanted to say... thanks again? For saying “I love you” back. Um... I love you. Yeah, see you tomorrow!

Will hangs up the phone and gets on his knees in front of his bed.

WILL

Father, thank you for today. Thank you for giving me the courage to say “I love you” to Julia. For her saying it back. Thank you for this house, my clothes, food, and all that. You are incredibly kind. And thank you for dinner, even if Aha was being a dick. (Beat.) I’m sorry, I shouldn’t talk about him like that. I know I should honor him. It’s just... Mr. Lopez didn’t do it. That’s insane. (Beat.) Father, make Aha stop being paranoid. Give me patience with him while he’s being psycho. Oh! And thank you for another clean week. For rescuing me from my addiction and using Pastor Megumi to remind me that you don’t want me to just know about you. You want me to love you. And I can because you loved me first. (Beat.) Please heal Clay’s aunt’s skin cancer. And, um... Amen. In Jesus’ name.

Will climbs into bed and falls asleep.

Scene Four

School Hallway

Will, Clay, Thorn, and Julia are leaning against their lockers.

THORN

How can you call us best friends when you never even told me your real name?
CLAY

*(putting a hand on Thorn’s shoulder)* You’re right buddy. It looks like someone else will have to take that vacancy.

WILL

Guys, it’s not that big of a deal, and you don’t even have to do it. I just thought I’d inform you that, from now on, Julia will be calling me Will.

JULIA

Because it’s his real name.

CLAY

My real name is Chartreuse.

THORN

That’s bullshit.

CLAY

You’re attacking my identity.

JULIA

That’s offensive.

WILL

This is already getting old.

THORN

Shut up, Will.

WILL

What?

JULIA

He’s probably just giving the name a test drive.

THORN

No. I’m not kidding, man. We’ve been best friends for seven years. At least! And you never told me your real name? It just never came up?

WILL

…Yes?

*Thorn shakes his head, shrugs Clay off, and starts walking away.*

THORN

*(sharply)* Anything else I need to know?
WILL

Bro! What the heck?

Thorn exits.

JULIA

Is something the matter with him?

CLAY

He didn’t say anything to me. Then again, when has Thorn ever opened up about his problems?

WILL

That was weird. (Beat.) Oh! How’s your aunt, man?

CLAY

She’s okay. Chemo’s hitting her pretty hard though. Shocker.

WILL

Yeah. Well, I’ve been praying for her, bro. Every day. And I’ll keep it up.

CLAY

Thanks man! (checking his watch) We should go to class.

All three of them exit. Will reenters swinging a lanyard a little bit later. Trailing shortly behind him is Jess.

JESS

Where you headed?

WILL turns around. He looks around and holds up the hall pass.

WILL

Um… bathroom?

JESS

Skipping announcements?

WILL

Life hack.

JESS

I was wondering if anyone else would have it figured out here.

WILL

You new?
JESS
No. Well, sorta. I’m a freshman.

WILL
Oh. My bad. You look older.

JESS
That’s sweet. What’s your name?

WILL
F- Will.

JESS
(extendng her hand) Sweet to meet you, Fwill.

WILL
(shaking hands) Just Will.

JESS
Jess.

WILL
That was the name of my old babysitter!

JESS
Was she cool?

WILL
I thought we were best friends.

JESS
Lucky gal.

WILL
Ha. Sure. (Beat.) Well-

JESS
You were Anis in the school play last year, weren’t you!

WILL
(rubbing his neck) Oh! Haha, yeah. That was me!

JESS
Oh my God! You were incredible.
WILL
That’s really nice of you to say.

JESS
I’m not just saying it to be nice. I thought you really became that character. I’m honestly having a hard time looking at you without imagining the deep voice and tortured lover vibe!

WILL
That was the goal!

JESS
Well, you nailed it. Is there another play this year?

WILL
Yeah. Another original by our theatre teacher, Holland. It’s called R.I.P.H.S. You should audition!

JESS
I was planning on it. Any chance you could give me a few pointers.

WILL
Yeah, I’d love to.

JESS
You’re amazing! Let me get your number.

*Jess reaches into Will’s pocket and grabs his phone.*

WILL
Woah.

*Jess puts her number in and then hands it back.*

JESS
Text me whenever you’re ready.

WILL
Yeah. Uh, will do.

*They stand and stare at each other for a second.*

JESS
Don’t you have something to do?

WILL
Oh, yeah. I’ll- I’ll see you around, I guess.
Will exits. Jess watches him leave, then flips his hall pass around and giggles. She exits.

Scene Four

Will’s Living Room

*Will and Julia play Scrabble on the floor together.*

JULIA

*(laying one final piece down)* Scrabble!

WILL

This isn’t that kind of-


JULIA

Will? What’s wrong?

WILL

I think something’s wrong with Thorn.

JULIA

There’s a lot of things wrong with Thorn.

WILL

No. Like, he’s never acted that way before. Today? When he freaked out about finding out my real name?

JULIA

Maybe he was having an early morning.

WILL

I’ve never seen him act that way.

JULIA

*(Beat.) Do you want to call him? I can leave the room?*

WILL

No, it’s fine.

JULIA

*(Beat.) I want to talk about yesterday.*

WILL
What about?

Future Will and future Julia’s problem.

Oh. Yeah.

I think we’re future Will and future Julia.

That was fast.

What are we gonna do?

(Beat.) I don’t know.

Well, if we do nothing then I’m probably going to leave the state and you won’t.

Mhm.

So long distance?

Maybe.

Will. Work with me on this. This is a two-way conversation. I want this to be a two-way conversation.

Honestly, Julia, I don’t see the point in us talking about this right now. We still don’t know if you’ll even get in to any of these schools. I haven’t even started looking.

That’s another thing. Regardless of whether or not I get in, you need to start thinking about this stuff. Enrollment deadlines are coming and it would be a waste for you to not get into the best college possible.
A waste.

I’m just telling it how it is.  

JULIA

WILL

Are you worried about us?

JULIA

WILL

(Beat.) A little, yeah.

Why?

JULIA

WILL

We have no plan.

JULIA

WILL

Because I can’t see the future.

What you just said is stupid.

JULIA

WILL

What do you want me to say?

JULIA

Don’t do that. Don’t turn me into some controlling girlfriend.

I’m not!

WILL

You are.

JULIA

WILL

Okay. I’ll apply to every school you go to and then we’ll… This is so much pressure! Do you see why I don’t want to talk about this yet? It’s like talking about marriage on the first date. Let’s just cross the bridge when we come to it.

JULIA

(Beat.) If you know you’re not going to cross the bridge when you get there you should just go a different route.

WILL

(holding his head) What does that even mean?
JULIA
We shouldn’t keep dating if we are just going to break up.

WILL
Julia. I love you. Right now, all I know is I love you.

JULIA
I love you too.

WILL
(Beat.) Did your parents live anywhere before Indi?

JULIA
Why’re you asking that?

WILL
Just wondered if you were going to look at any colleges in their old hometowns.

JULIA
Well, Mom has never lived anywhere else but Mexico and Indi. Dad was in Texas for a little while before he moved, so I guess UT – Austin.

*Will nods and remains silent.*

JULIA
(Beat.) It’s late. I should go home.

WILL
Okay.

Will walks Julia out of the home.

Scene Five

Will’s Bedroom

Will enters, slams the door, and changes. He gets on his knees in front of his bed.

WILL
Father, thank you for… (Beat.) Please protect me.

*Will climbs into bed. He tosses and turns for awhile. Then his door opens and Julia enters. She goes and sits on the edge of his bed. She walks two fingers from his toes up, flinching back when he bats her hand away, and then finally making her way up his neck. She leans down, but instead
of kissing him, pauses, and then sighs and leaves. Will gets up, retrieves some tissues, and crawls back into bed. The door opens and Jess enters. She lingers, then leaves. Ma enters.

MA
Fallon?

Will sits bolt upright, staring at her in horror.

MA
Are you awake?

WILL
Yeah, Ma. I was just gettin' comfortable.

MA
No. You were playing like.

Will just stares at her.

MA
There’s nothing to apologize for, honey. I won’t tell your Aha. And trust me, Ma knows all about that.

WILL
It won’t happen again.

MA
That’s right. You’re going to see Pastor Megumi tomorrow.

WILL
Yes, ma’am.

MA
Alrighty. I love you, sweetie.

Ma exits and Will waits a second, punches his pillow as hard as he can, then folds up into the fetal position and falls asleep.

Scene Six
Pastor Megumi’s Office

Pastor Megumi gets up from behind his desk as Will enters.

PASTOR MEGUMI
Good to see you, Fallon! How are you?
Will nods and shakes Pastor Megumi’s hand. Megum watches him for a little while and then leans back on the edge of his desk while Will takes the seat in front of Megumi. Awkward silence ensues.

WILL

…I’m going by Will now.

PASTOR MEGUMI

Good name, Will. Why?

WILL

It’s my mom’s name for me.

PASTOR MEGUMI

I never knew that. I like it.

Will nods and stares out the window.

PASTOR MEGUMI (CONT’D)

(Beat.) What are you thinking about?

WILL

How to start.

PASTOR MEGUMI

Take your time.

Pastor Megumi stares at the door behind Will while Will continues to stare out the window, considering.

WILL

…I think I might be addicted to pornography.

Pastor Megumi nods.

PASTOR MEGUMI

Why do you think that?

WILL

Because I can’t stop. That’s an addiction, right? And I want to. I mean it. I really do. I love Jesus and I want to follow him but I keep- it’s like in the moment I’m not even myself and just do it. And I want to stop. God, I want to stop. I-

Pastor Megumi calmly leans off his desk and holds out a hand to Will. Will takes it and Pastor Megumi pulls him into a hug. They remain there for a few seconds, then Pastor Megumi releases
Will and he sits back down. Will wipes away tears while Pastor Megumi lifts himself athletically back onto his desk, sits criss-cross-applesauce, and links his fingers, resting his chin on his knuckles and staring at Will.

PASTOR MEGUMI
Thank you for being honest with me, Will. That took tremendous courage.

WILL
Well. No point in lying about it.

PASTOR MEGUMI
(laughing) True. (Beat.) So what do you want to do?

WILL
Stop?

PASTOR MEGUMI
That’s a good goal.

WILL
Easier said than done. And the freaking frustrating thing is that I was doing good. After your sermon… it really hit me. And I was doing great for like, a month.

Pastor Megumi reaches out and puts his hand on Will’s shoulder.

PASTOR MEGUMI
One month is record time, Will. Relapses are nothing out of the ordinary. When I was recovering from my own pornography addiction, it took me far longer than that to go even one month cold turkey.

WILL
You were addicted to porn?!

PASTOR MEGUMI
Yes.

WILL
How did you stop?

PASTOR MEGUMI
How do you think you should stop?

WILL
I don’t know. That’s why Ma made me come here.
Ma knows?

WILL

(burying his head in his hands) I know.

PASTOR MEGUMI
There is nobody better to see you at your very worst than your grandmother. She’s the most forgiving woman I’ve ever met.

WILL
I know.

PASTOR MEGUMI
(clapping his hands) Okay. Strategy. What is Jesus’ strategy for fighting lust?

Will mimes ripping his eye out and then cutting off his hand.

PASTOR MEGUMI (CONT’D)
Excellent. So what do you think that means?

WILL
Get rid of things that make me lust.

PASTOR MEGUMI
And those are?

WILL
I don’t know!

PASTOR MEGUMI
Okay. Let’s figure it out. Do you use a device to masturbate?

WILL
Like… (Beat.) A sex doll?

PASTOR MEGUMI
Um, that wasn’t what I meant, but that can be an answer.

WILL
Oh no! No. I just use my laptop. Actually, I poured water all over it about a month ago. That’s what helped me stop in the first place.

PASTOR MEGUMI
That’s amazing.

WILL
Ma’s getting me a new one.

PASTOR MEGUMI

That’s generous.

WILL

So what do I do?

PASTOR MEGUMI

That’s a good question. (Beat.) Sorry, I just wanted to complete the trilogy. Do you have any filtering services on your devices like your phone and soon-to-be laptop?

WILL

I don’t think blocking websites will help. I’ve got around stuff like that before.

PASTOR MEGUMI

I’m not talking about blocking. Filtering. It’s different because it doesn’t restrict you from going anywhere. It just keeps a record of everything you access and then runs it through a mature rating system that then sends a report to anyone you have signed up as an accountability partner. For example, you could put me down and, every month, I’d receive a list of every questionable website you went to and could visit them to see for myself if you were looking at anything. This way, the impetus is not on forcing you to not do something, it’s just keeping you honest with people you respect.

WILL

That… sounds amazing.

PASTOR MEGUMI

The one I use is called Covenant Eyes. Want to install it?

WILL

Covenant Eyes?

PASTOR MEGUMI

Covenant Eyes.

WILL

That sounds like a fantasy cult.

PASTOR MEGUMI

Whatever it sounds like, it works.

WILL

(Beat.) Okay. Sign me up.

PASTOR MEGUMI
We will. Second thing, though: What time of day does this usually happen around.

WILL

Only at nighttime.

PASTOR MEGUMI

Okay. What time do you go to bed?

WILL

Around midnight. Maybe a little later.

PASTOR MEGUMI

Should you go to bed earlier?

WILL

That’s phrased like a question, but I don’t think it is.

PASTOR MEGUMI

Fair. It’s easier to do the things we regret at night. Something about the dark has always been inviting to my dark side. It feels hidden.

WILL

It’s going to be really hard to go to bed earlier when all my friends stay up just as late.

PASTOR MEGUMI

I understand. And I won’t tell you it’ll be easy. But I think there’s a reason Jesus uses the metaphor of cutting off your hand and tearing out your eye. Whatever it takes.

WILL

(Beat.) The technology isn’t really the problem. I messed up last night without looking at anything. It was all up here.

Will pokes his temple.

PASTOR MEGUMI

(Beat.) I’m sorry, Will. That’s harder. That’s a love issue.

WILL

What do you mean?

PASTOR MEGUMI

Who is someone you love?

WILL

Julia and I just started saying “I love you” to each other.
PASTOR MEGUMI

You and Julia are dating?!

WILL

Yes sir!

PASTOR MEGUMI

Wow. Congratulations. How’s it going?

WILL

Well, obviously not as good as it could be going if I’m still dealing with this.

PASTOR MEGUMI

That is an added incentive… and a good one. Actually, that’s the perfect example! If Julia was standing in the room next to you would you masturbate?

WILL

No. God, no.

PASTOR MEGUMI

Why not?

WILL

Because I love her. It would break her heart.

Pastor Megumi nods for a moment and then grabs his Bible from behind him and opens to a certain page. He reads.

PASTOR MEGUMI

O Lord, you have searched me and known me!
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.
You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
behold, O Lord, you know it altogether.
You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is high; I cannot attain it.

Pastor Megumi closes the Bible but keeps his finger on the page.

PASTOR MEGUMI

That’s Psalm 139. In my opinion, it’s the best description of how God sees each of his kids. (Beat.) What are you thinking?
WILL

God’s the one standing in the room.

PASTOR MEGUMI

Do you love him?

WILL

Apparently not.

PASTOR MEGUMI

That’s not why you’re sitting here right now. Do you love him?

WILL

(Beat.) Yes.

PASTOR MEGUMI

Then don’t cheat on him. Do you love Jesus, Will?

WILL

(crying) I do. I swear. I just haven’t shown it. I didn’t know.

Pastor Megumi gets off the desk and hugs Will again until his mourning subsides.

PASTOR MEGUMI

I know you love him, Will. I know. I’m going to finish God’s love song to you now.

Pastor Megumi opens the Bible back up and reads the rest of Psalm 139.

PASTOR MEGUMI (CONT’D)

Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in hell, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,” even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.

Pastor Megumi closes the Bible and sets it down.
PASTOR MEGUMI (CONT’D)
There isn’t any place dark enough you can go that God won’t chase you down, Will. You’re his son and he is a good dad.

Will nods.

PASTOR MEGUMI (CONT’D)
I want to pray for you. Mind if I do?

Will shakes his head. Pastor Megumi gets on his knees next to Will’s chair and puts a hand on Will’s shoulder. He closes his eyes and holds his other hand out to his side, palm facing heaven.

PASTOR MEGUMI (CONT’D)
Father,

Pastor Megumi takes a moment to swallow a lump in his throat.

PASTOR MEGUMI (CONT’D)
You are good to us. Father, I’ve been here before. I know how hard it is and how sick we feel when this temporary imperfect person that we are will only go closer to you kicking and screaming. But thank you that your Holy Spirit drags us to you, anyway. Because you love us. Father, thank you for Will’s courage to be honest with me and want to fight this together. Protect him from temptation. Deliver him from evil. Help him feel you in the room when he wants to cheat on you. Give him wisdom and self-control to remove catalysts to temptation. And, most importantly, give him greater love for you than a desire to feel mere pleasure. You’re worth it and the satisfaction you offer doesn’t die after a few minutes. It soaks into us and lasts forever. We love you and it’s in the power of your son’s name. Amen.

Pastor Megumi gets up and Will wipes his eyes clean.

WILL

Thanks.

PASTOR MEGUMI

Thank you.

Pastor Megumi goes back to his desk and checks his phone.

PASTOR MEGUMI (CONT’D)
I’m really sorry to kick you out, but I’m going to kick you out.

WILL

(laughing) Okay.
Text me the link when you set up Covenant Eyes tonight and I’ll be praying for you every day, Will. I love you.

WILL

Love you too.

Will hesitates and Pastor Megumi hugs him one more time. Will exits.

Scene Seven

School Hallway

Will sits against his locker, eyes closed. Clay runs up quietly and smacks him lightly on the cheek. Will starts, sees Clay, but just takes the hit.

CLAY

You good bro?

WILL

How’s your aunt?

CLAY

She’s healed!

WILL

Wait. Really?!

CLAY

No. She still has cancer.

Will buries his face in hands.

CLAY (CONT’D)

I was trying to lighten the mood. // Thanks for asking.

WILL

// I need help, man.

CLAY

I’ll say.

Clay recognizes Will is being honest and wipes the grin off his face. He kneels next to his friend.

CLAY (CONT’D)

Sorry, bro. What can I do?
I’m addicted to porn.

CLAY

(Beat.) What can I do?

WILL

I’m downloading this filter thing. I need someone to hold me accountable, though.

CLAY

I’m there.

WILL

It’ll hit you up with an email every month about what I’ve been looking at.

CLAY

Cool. I’ll blast you if I ever see anything.

WILL

(smiling faintly) Thanks, man. I’m sorry I never told you.

CLAY

Hey, I w- Thanks for telling me now.

Will nods and Thorn enters.

THORN

Bro. Gatlin.

CLAY

Please don’t.

THORN

I just can’t.

WILL

I need to talk to you, Thorn.

THORN

Sure thing, Will.

WILL

Bro, I’m sorry that I didn’t tell you and that it’s offended you this much.

Thorn just stares at him.
WILL (CONT’D)
I need help, Thorn. I’m addicted to pornography.

THORN
I need help, too. I’m addicted to Netflix.

WILL
I’m serious, man.

THORN
What do you mean you’re addicted?

WILL
I can’t stop.

THORN
How often are you doing it?

WILL
At least once a day.

THORN
(Beat.) You’re unbelievable.

WILL
What?

*Julia enters, unbeknownst to the group.*

THORN
You’re yanking it less than 90% of the guys in this school and you’re asking for my help?! There’s real shit going on in the world.

*Will stands up and faces Thorn. Thorn punches Will in the face. Clay jumps up and stands between them.*

CLAY
What the fuck, Thorn?!

THORN
My parents told me last week they’re getting a divorce. My dad was actually pounding another woman for the past two fucking years. Sorry you can’t stay away from your hand. Let me know how I can help.

Scene Eight
Will’s Bedroom

Will lies curled up in his bed. There’s a knock at the door. Will doesn’t respond. Aha enters. He goes and sits on the edge of the bed.

AHA

Hey, Will. Look at me.

Will peeks up at him.

AHA
(clearing his throat) Okay. I’m going to say some things and then I’ll leave you. You don’t have to say anything if you don’t want to and this can be all the talk about this we need to have. (Beat.) I want to apologize for asking so many questions at dinner the other night. I shouldn’t have been so judgmental of Julia’s father. I’m sure he’s a good man. I also want to apologize for how angry I got with you. (Beat.) I miss your mother so much. I can’t begin to say the first word of how much I miss her with the amount of emotion I have. But that doesn’t give me an excuse not to forgive whoever that man is for what he did. Your Ma hugged me this morning and told me that she loved me in spite of all the crap I’ve put her through… which is awfully prideful.

Will laughs. Aha laughs too.

AHA (CONT’D)
But she has a point. I’m sorry for any of the crap I’ve put you through. Julia seems like a wonderful young woman. And if you are willing to put her through you, then don’t let my one-night lapse of unforgiveness hold you back from doing that. Okay. I love you, son.

Aha pats Will’s knee and exits. Will lays in bed a little longer, than climbs out and goes to his phone – plugged into a brand new computer – and calls someone.

WILL

Can I come over?

Scene Nine
Julia’s Kitchen

Julia is sitting at the table with a glass of water. Her hands are folded in front of her. Will enters. He pauses, then goes to sit down next to her. A long silence ensues that Will finally breaks.

WILL

…I have a lot to say. But if you have anything I just want to listen first.
JULIA

Why didn’t you tell me?

WILL

(Beat.) I didn’t want to hurt you.

JULIA

You’re going to hurt me anyway, dummy.

WILL

Valid point.

JULIA

(Beat.) I know most guys deal with that. But you said your favorite quality in another person is honesty. Just be honest with me.

WILL

I’m sorry. I’m taking steps to stop. I love you. Honestly. And I get it if that isn’t enough. You have no obligation to stay with me after this. And-

I forgive you.

WILL

(Beat.) I love you.

JULIA

I love you too.

WILL

No, like I love you.

JULIA

I love you too.

Will stands up and hugs Julia.

WILL

I love you.

JULIA

Love. Good word.

Lights. The end.