

Reaching Naomi

23-DE03-W13

The mother of a 13-year-old girl with cerebral palsy struggles with accepting the compassion she is shown after her daughter falls into a coma.

FADE IN:

EXT. CHURCH ENTRANCE - DAY

Church-goers mill around, not noticing an old-model hatchback, needing a wash, parking half a block away.

INT. HATCHBACK - ON STREET - DAY

In the passenger seat, Yuri (13), nose smudging the window, focuses on the church entrance. She searches intently for:

YURI

Lina!

Yuri's mother, MS. SATO (38), capable, dedicated, jumps out.

OUTSIDE CAR

She flips up the hatch, yanks out a wheelchair and positions it. She sets the wheel locks, then reaches for Yuri, to get her out and re-seated.

Yuri's cerebral palsy is not severe. Her speech is slow and labored, as is her use of arms and legs.

YURI (cont'd)

Lina's mom is nice.

MS. SATO

Lots of people are nice.

LINA (13) bounces up to them. One hand is affectionately laid on Yuri's shoulder, the other on a wheelchair handle.

LINA

I'll take it from here, Ms. Sato.

MS. SATO

Thank you.

Lina unlocks one wheel, Ms. Sato handles the other.

LINA

You wanna come inside?

Ms. Sato flashes a cold smirk with a quick, tiny head shake.

MS. SATO

Have fun. Be back at 12:15.

Ms. Sato gives Yuri a hug, then she's in the car and gone.

INT. SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

SUPER: "NEXT DAY"

Lina's desk is at the front. In the next row, one seat back is GAVIN. The teacher, MR. LESTER, shuffles in, solemn look.

MR. LESTER

All right, everyone ... listen up!

His tone is serious; they all turn silent.

MR. LESTER (cont'd)

Last night Yuri had a seizure. She's in a coma.

Many students gasp and react with great shock and sadness.

LINA

But - what?! Is she gonna be okay?

MR. LESTER

I'm sorry, that's all I know.

Lina springs up, grabs her school bag, bolts out the door.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Connected to wires, Yuri lies still, her mother softly holding her hand. She bends forward to kiss it.

Ms. Sato's puffy red eyes look to the side - the curtains have tiny butterfly designs embroidered in them.

FLASHBACK: INT. MS. SATO'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Ms. Sato, preparing dinner, frantically tries to multitask. The microwave beeps. She hops over to stop it, then dashes back to the stove. She's flustered. Fights through it. Gets everything on the table.

Yuri has a mischievous grin. Ms. Sato looks down.

An origami butterfly, not perfectly folded. A note beside it written in Japanese with handwriting like that of a 5-year-old: "Okaasan, arigatou" (Subtitled: "Mom, thank you.")

Ms. Sato's cute reaction of delightful surprise makes Yuri's smile go atomic.

END FLASHBACK

A nurse peeks inside Yuri's hospital room.

NURSE

A young woman is outside, said she's
your daughter's best friend --

MS. SATO

Lina, yes. Let her in.

A few seconds later, Lina tiptoes up to the bed.

LINA

Teacher said a coma, right?

MS. SATO

Yes. Sorry, you came all this way for
nothing. Could be a long while.

LINA

I wanted to give you this.

She awkwardly hugs the seated Ms. Sato, catching her off
guard - there's no return-hug, it's mechanical. Lina takes
baby-steps back, a tear in her eye.

MS. SATO

How did you get here?

LINA

Pastor Marvin. He's outside in the
car.

MS. SATO

Better not keep him waiting.

Lina slips out. Ms. Sato sighs and returns her gaze to Yuri.

INT. MS. SATO'S CAR - NIGHT

Pounding rain, wipers on high, Ms. Sato mutters to herself.

MS. SATO

Won't let the child's own mother stay
the night. What kind of hospital --

She is jolted by a loud clanging. Steam pours from under the
hood. Dash warning lights flash. The engine temperature is
maxed out. She brakes hard, her hands tense on the wheel.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

A TOW TRUCK DRIVER makes a round, checking the winched car.
Gripping her umbrella, Ms. Sato's face is riddled with
frustration and anxiety. He hands her a wet receipt.

DRIVER

Water pump for sure. Hopefully you didn't blow a head gasket. Harry'll call ya tomorrow with the estimate.

Ms. Sato nods. Rain shows no sign of abatement.

DRIVER (cont'd)

Have a nice day.

He hops in his truck and drives away with her car. Ms. Sato's jaw drops.

MS. SATO

You too, 'Towmanator' san. Have a nice day inside your dry truck.

She eyes the bus stop in the distance, plodding toward it.

EXT. MS. SATO'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Lina sits huddled up at the front door of Ms. Sato's tiny single-unit dwelling. Ms. Sato walks slowly, then notices Lina and hurries toward her.

MS. SATO

My goodness! Do your parents know you're here?

LINA

Yeah, they do. Is she still ...

MS. SATO

There's no change.

Lina's hopeful eyes close. They open curious.

LINA

Why are you walking? What happened to your car?

MS. SATO

Harry the mechanic is going to fix it for me, I hope ... come in, Lina.

Ms. Sato unlocks the door and they go

INSIDE

Ms. Sato flicks on lights. Her soaked clothes stand out.

MS. SATO (cont'd)

I'll make tea, just give me a minute.

LINA
Okay. Thank you.

Ms. Sato enters her bedroom. Door closes. Lina glances at the kitchen. Pots, pans and dishes are scattered everywhere.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Lina clears the table, wipes it clean, then washes dishes until Ms. Sato, clothes changed, rushes up to her.

MS. SATO
What's going on?

LINA
I just wanted to help.

MS. SATO
No, you don't need to. I'll be fine.

LINA
Yuri always tells me she wants to do things for you, but she can't. Won't you let me do something for you? I think it's what Yuri would want.

Ms. Sato takes the sponge from Lina's hands, lays it in the sink, rinses off Lina's hands, dries them with a tea towel.

MS. SATO
It's okay. Sit down. I'll have tea ready in a minute.

LIVING ROOM

The two hold cups of tea, seated on adjacent easy chairs.

MS. SATO (cont'd)
Yuri does NOT have a crush on Gavin.

LINA
But I always thought she --

MS. SATO
She heard him talk about 'Jesus' with his friends. Surprised how bold he was. Made her want to go to church.

LINA
Where we became best friends. I'm --

MS. SATO

She was thankful, that's all. If it wasn't for him, she never would have gone to church. ... and then maybe he never would have hurt her either.

Ms. Sato sips tea with cool, unforgiving eyes. Lina notices.

INT. MS. SATO'S HOUSE - DAY

Ms. Sato is in a tizzy. Looking for her purse, searching inside it, rushing to the kitchen, grabbing her phone, looking at her watch, then flying through the door.

OUTSIDE

A distressed look on her face, she fumbles as she locks the door and flings the keys in her purse.

Standing beside his car on the curb is PASTOR MARVIN (45). His wife, LEONA (42), remains in the car.

The look on Ms. Sato's face approaches panic.

PASTOR MARVIN

Morning. Running late?

MS. SATO

I'm fine. I got this.

PASTOR MARVIN

We go right past the hospital and --

MS. SATO

And someone told you my car broke down.

PASTOR MARVIN

A little birdie.

Leona rolls down her window as Ms. Sato checks her watch.

LEONA

It's no problem at all, Ms. Sato.

PASTOR MARVIN

We'll get you there on time.

With great reluctance, she walks toward the car. Pastor Marvin opens the back door. She bows politely.

INT. PASTOR MARVIN'S CAR - DAY

Marvin is driving. Awkward silence. Then -

LEONA

We're not here to pry or anything. We care very much for Yuri. And you.

MS. SATO

That's nice. Thank you.

Awkward silence. They turn a corner - hospital is up ahead.

MS. SATO (cont'd)

Thought a preacher would use an opportunity to preach.

PASTOR MARVIN

There's a time for preaching and a time for listening. Preach too much, people stop listening.

The car stops. She opens the door.

MS. SATO

Thank you for the ride.

LEONA

Let us know if there's any change with Yuri. Please.

PASTOR MARVIN

We want to help with anything you need. We mean that.

Ms. Sato nods, hops out of the car, walks to the hospital.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Ms. Sato sits beside Yuri, holding her hand, eyes glazed.

FLASHBACK: EXT./INT. SCHOOL ENTRANCE/CAR - DAY

Ms. Sato watches and waits in her car. The school alarm sounds to end the day. The kids come pouring out.

Yuri in her wheelchair exits, with Lina pushing. Yuri waves to Gavin. Lina helps her get Gavin's attention. He approaches. TWO BOYS tag along. Yuri holds up an origami butterfly and hands it to him. Gavin looks confused.

BOY 1 AND BOY 2

Oh, Gavin's girlfriend! Kiss her Gav!

Gavin tosses away the butterfly and laughs it up with his buddies as he viciously mocks Yuri - throws his tongue out, contorts his face as if repulsed by the sight of her. They scurry off. Lina gets the butterfly, puts it in her pocket.

END FLASHBACK

MS. SATO

My dear Yuri, I know, there are some nice people in your church. But not everyone. Forgive me. I just can't go there with you. It's not easy for me.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Students roam the hallways, opening and shutting lockers. Lina spots Mr. Lester. Gavin is nearby with friends.

LINA

Mr. Lester? Mr. Lester - did you hear anything new about Yuri?

He shakes his head 'no.' Gavin's friends pounce.

BOY 1

You should go see your girlfriend!

BOY 2

Give her a kiss, prince charming!

LINA

Shut up you jerks! Aah! I can't believe what you said! Preschoolers!

They turn and leave, tails between their legs.

LINA (cont'd)

Gavin! Just a minute.

Gavin pushes his friends off and turns back. Lina leads him around a corner where they can chat somewhat privately.

LINA (cont'd)

Yuri doesn't like you, okay?! She doesn't! You should know what her mom said. She --

PULL BACK as they talk, their words lost in hallway noise. Lina gestures wildly, wags a finger, gives Gavin a tongue lashing. He gradually comes to appear conscience-stricken.

EXT. MS. SATO'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ms. Sato walks along the street, sighs when she sees Lina sitting on her front porch again - her eyes have a pleading look, hoping to hear Yuri has woken up.

Ms. Sato sadly shakes her head, then plops down beside her.

MS. SATO

No good news from Harry the mechanic,
either. Might need to buy a bus pass.

Lina senses movement, pops up, looks around. Gavin comes out from hiding behind a tree. Ms. Sato stands, eyes ice cold.

LINA

Gavin?!

He sheepishly trudges up to them, fleeting eye contact.

GAVIN

Ms. Sato, ... I want to apologize to
you. My friends teased me about Yuri,
but that didn't make it okay to treat
her so bad. I hurt her, and I hurt
you too. I'm sorry.

MS. SATO

Thank you ... (sigh) Gavin. I
appreciate your apology.

GAVIN

I was wondering if --

MS. SATO

Maybe another time, okay? It's late.

Her sharp tone silences him. He nods, turns and dashes off.

LINA

He did a terrible thing ... I don't
know if I could forgive him.

Ms. Sato's face expresses a tinge of guilt.

LINA (cont'd)

People from church are meeting at
Four Seasons Park. ... Want to say a
few words to you. Won't take long.

An anxious look is on her face - she doesn't want to go.

LINA (cont'd)

Please? I'll stay right beside you.

Taking her hand, she coaxes her down the street.

EXT. PARK - OUTSIDE THE ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Wide-eyed, they soak in the sight of a multitude! Tables are set up - coffee and refreshments are on some, people in fold-up chairs are parked around others. Clusters of people praying are here and there. The look on Ms. Sato's face is a mixture of wonder and uncertainty. She relies on the tiny hand of Lina, holding hers, to move forward until they are

INSIDE THE PARK ENTRANCE

Leona runs up and greets Ms. Sato, unleashing a massive hug. Ms. Sato accepts it and partly hugs her back.

LEONA

Marvin! Marvin, get over here!

Pastor Marvin struts up and shakes Ms. Sato's hand.

PASTOR MARVIN

We are so happy you could join us.

MS. SATO

Said it wouldn't take long.

PASTOR MARVIN

It won't. We promise. Come on.

He leads her through the crowd - so many people she doesn't know, solemn, yet offering her smiles. They arrive at the

CENTER OF THE PARK

Marvin steps onto a makeshift platform about a foot high.

PASTOR MARVIN (cont'd)

Hello everyone. Hi. Could I please have your attention? ... We don't pray like this every night, do we? Maybe we should. I guess there is a time for prayer and a time to offer service to God in other ways.

Pastor Marvin pauses to look over the crowd.

PASTOR MARVIN (cont'd)

We love those dear to us all the time, but maybe there are times to show love to them in special ways. ... Yuri gave me a special gift.

Smiling at Ms. Sato, he holds up an origami butterfly.

PASTOR MARVIN (cont'd)
I'm not the only one.

Gavin steps forward. Gulping, trembling, he faces the crowd.

GAVIN
Lina found something I thought I
lost - something very precious to me.

He holds up the butterfly he had tossed away. Ms. Sato places her hand over her mouth in surprise and shock.

GAVIN (cont'd)
Reason it's precious is because now I
know why Yuri gave it to me. And I
know, it's not easy for her to make
even one of these. I wish I'd --

He fights tears. Ms. Sato inches toward him.

MS. SATO
I see now that your heart is true.

Gavin smiles at Ms. Sato through unbridled tears. He holds the butterfly up high. Marvin holds his up. Ms. Sato slowly turns. A hundred or more people fix their eyes on her.

Starting with Lina, one-by-one, they all raise origami butterflies up high, till the night air is filled with them. Ms. Sato covers her mouth with her hand again, eyes moist.

Leona steps forward with a long chain of over 1000 origami butterflies, arranged beautifully and artistically. Leona hands it to her with a smile and a hug. Applause rings out.

LEONA
Wish we'd had time to fold more.

MS. SATO
Thank you. I'll give this to Yuri.

LINA
Ms. Sato - it's for you. ... You've
spent so much time caring for Yuri.
We think it's time you let us care
for you.

Pastor Marvin steps closer, holds up her car keys.

PASTOR MARVIN
Your car is fixed. Bill's been paid.
It's right over there.

Ms. Sato gasps with surprise - her car sits on the street, washed and polished. Lina notices Ms. Sato's phone inside her translucent pocket is flashing.

LINA
Your phone.

She checks the message, then falls to her knees and can't control her tears. Lina grabs the phone, reads the text.

LINA (cont'd)
What? ... Oh! It's the hospital - she needs to go right now!

EXT. HOSPITAL ENTRANCE - DAY

The doors open. Ms. Sato pushes Yuri in her wheelchair outside, faces warm and glowing, smiling at each other.

EXT. HOSPITAL PARKING LOT - DAY

Ms. Sato lifts Yuri into the car, then folds up the wheelchair and puts it in the back of the car.

INT. MS. SATO'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - DAY

Ms. Sato helps Yuri brush her teeth and comb her hair.

INT. MS. SATO'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Yuri arduously folds origami paper. Her mother turns back from the kitchen sink to gaze at her with affection.

EXT./INT. CHURCH ENTRANCE - DAY

Yuri is in her wheelchair next to Ms. Sato's car, parked right next to the front door. She takes a deep breath and pushes her daughter up the ramp, up to the big doors, and through them. She is surrounded by warm, joyful hearts - Lina, her mother, Gavin, Leona, and Pastor Marvin. More than anyone else, the smile on Yuri's face lights up the moment.

PASTOR MARVIN
Welcome, Ms. Sato.

MS. SATO
Please, call me Naomi.

FADE OUT