

CREAM

Written by

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Based on "Cream" by Haruki Murakami

INT. BENJIRO'S HOUSE - DAYTIME

BENJIRO, a Japanese teenager in a transitional state between high school and college. Recently failed his college entrance exam. Bland. Run of the mill. In need of a life experience. Likes to read books alone. Hates calculus and math. Took piano lessons with a girl named CHIAKI until he was 16 years old, then never saw her again.

We see a round wooden table in Benjiro's kitchen. His mother is sitting there writing and working. Benjiro comes downstairs from his room to the kitchen. His mother calls him before she sees him enter the kitchen.

MOM

Benji, you have a letter.

BENJIRO

That's a first.

MOM

Come look.

Benjiro slowly walks over to the table. He sits down as his mother hands him the envelope.

BENJIRO

Chiaki?? Is this? Wait, really?

MOM

What? Who?

Benjiro opens the envelope as he talks. His eyes widen.

BENJIRO

Oh my...This can't be her. No, I haven't seen her in years! I wasn't even good friends with her anyway.

MOM

Hello? Who is it?

BENJIRO

Remember that girl that was in my class with my piano Instructor Mio?

Mom puts down her pen and leans into the table as if trying to read the letter herself.

MOM

Not really, well maybe, but what's the letter?

Benjiro slowly moves his head toward the letter as he reads it, confused, and surprised. The camera cuts to over the shoulder. We see the letter and its details. It reads "You've been invited to Chiaki's Piano Recital at SUNTORY HALL on Sunday, November 11th, 2014. Please send an RSVP Confirmation to the email below if you can make it!"

BENJIRO

(pauses, and tilts his
head upward in shock)
It's a recital invitation.

MOM

Really! Where is it?

BENJIRO

Kobe Mountain.

MOM

Well, it better be a damn good
concert than.

BENJIRO

I'm gonna go.

CUT TO:

INT. INSIDE TRAIN - MORNING

Benjiro sits on the train in a seat of two alone. We see blurred heads in the background. He looks out the window. Wonders why he is going, but has nothing better to do so he is. He wears a thin gray sweater under a new herringbone jacket with an old canvas bag around his shoulder.

Montage of train traveling along Japan street. Helicopter view of train coasting away, mountains can be seen in the distance.

CUT TO:

INT. GROCERY STORE @ TRAIN STATION - MIDDAY

Benjiro walks up to the register. We see and hear the train leave the station in the background through the store window.

BENJIRO

Do you sell flowers?

CASHIER
 (Points her hand in a
 direction)
 Over there.

BENJIRO
 Thanks.

Benjiro walks over to the area of flowers. A straight over shot of a red bouquet of flowers in a circular bowl is seen. It looks as if the flowers represent multiple centers to the circle of the bowl they lay in. Benjiro's hand enters the frame and grabs them. He walks back to the register.

CASHIER
 Lovely. For a special someone?

BENJIRO
 Maybe.

CASHIER
 (chuckles as she rings him
 up)
 Hahaha. \$20.95 Please.

Benjiro hands her the cash and leaves.

CUT TO:

EXT. BUS STATION - MIDDAY

Thick gray clouds cover the sky. Benjiro walks to the station, sits on the bus station bench. A handful of people come to the station as the bus is near arrival. He lays the flowers beside him and is in his thoughts as he sits.

CUT TO:

INT. BUS - MIDDAY

We see Benjiro sitting on the bus, more people are on the bus. He stares out the window. The mountains are closer. Cross dissolves show time is passing. The bus comes to a stop.

BUS DRIVER
 (On loudspeaker)
 Next stop, Mukoyama Shrine. Next
 stop, Mukoyama Shrine. We are now
 at East Rokkō observatory. Doors
 closing.

The bus departs. We see a profile shot of the bus heading up the steep mountain on a narrow road. Shot of Benjiro looking down at his red flowers as he holds them up. The bus stops at the next stop and everyone has now left the bus besides Benjiro.

BUS DRIVER (CONT'D)

Last stop is Kobe. The next stop is the last stop! Everyone must be off bus.

We see a shot of the driver glancing at Benjiro through his driver seat mirror. Benjiro looks around in confusion.

The bus stops. Benjiro leaves.

BENJIRO

Thank you sir.

BUS DRIVER

Have a good day boy.

EXT. SMALL TOWN ON TOP OF KOBE MOUNTAIN - DAYTIME

The bus turns around and drives back down the mountain. Benjiro glances down at the letter from Chiaki that he took out of his pocket. He makes sure he is in the right spot, date, and time. Everything is correct. He walks closer to the nearby buildings, searching for an entrance.

Benjiro grips the locked steel gate of the recital hall. He glances to the right at a metal plate that has "Suntory Hall" engraved on it. He sees the parking lot, but not a single car is there. Not a single person. Only weeds bursting through the stone.

Benjiro starts walking away from the structure. We see an over the shoulder of Benjiro staring at the small park in the distance below him and the harbor is visible. Benjiro walks down the hall to a small park in the distance.

CUT TO:

EXT. SMALL PARK - DAY

Benjiro enters frame with his red flowers hanging low. He take a seat at one of the benches. It is clear he is exhausted and confused. He hears a fading voice in the distance.

CAR LOUDSPEAKER

Everyone will die!

The voice grows louder and louder. Benjiro jerks his head up and twists to find the voice. He thinks he has found the voice that will give some clue about the recital.

CAR LOUDSPEAKER (CONT'D)

Every person will eventually pass away. No one can escape death or the judgement that comes afterward. After death, everyone will be severely judged for his sins -- But all those who seek salvation in Jesus Christ and repent of their sins will have their sins forgiven by the Lord. They will escape the fires of Hell. Believe in God, for only those who believe in Him will reach salvation after death and receive eternal life.

The car broadcasting the Christian message never passes him. It grew louder, until it faded away.

Benjiro begins to hang his head downward as he sits on the bench. He starts to doze off. We see random patterns fade into a short flashback of Chiaki laughing with Benjiro. This flashback shows Chiaki acting nice and fun, but it quickly turns into a heated moment where Chiaki starts yelling at Benjiro. Benjiro jolts awake as if from a nightmare. Across from him is random old man sitting still. He stares directly into Benjiro's eyes.

OLD MAN

A circle with many centers

BENJIRO

He-hello...what? Did you say circles?

OLD MAN

A circle with many centers

Benjiro doesn't respond. He is awkwardly confused.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

There are several centers--no, sometimes an infinite number--and it's a circle with no circumference. Are you able to picture that kind of circle in your mind?

BENJIRO

I don't like math

OLD MAN

That's because they don't teach you
this kind of thing in school.

BENJIRO

Does that kind of circle exist?

OLD MAN

Of course it does. But not everyone
can see it.

BENJIRO

Can you see it?

OLD MAN

Listen, you've got to imagine it
with your own power. Use all the
wisdom you have and picture it. A
circle that has many centers but no
circumference. If you put in such
an intense effort that it's as if
you were sweating blood—that's when
it gradually becomes clear what the
circle is.

BENJIRO

It sounds difficult.

OLD MAN

(with conviction)

Of course it is. There's nothing
worth getting in this world that
you can get easily...

(clears his throat)

But, when you put in that much time
and effort, if you do achieve that
difficult thing it becomes the
cream of your life.

BENJIRO

(tilts his head in
confusion)

Cream?

OLD MAN

Crème de la crème. Know what that
means?

BENJIRO

No.

OLD MAN

The cream of the cream. It means the best of the best. The most important essence of life—that's the crème de la crème. Get it? The rest is just boring and worthless.

BENJIRO

(shrugs in disbelief)
Ok, sooo, how does that have to do with the circle thing?

OLD MAN

Think about it. Close your eyes again, and think it all through. A circle that has many centers but no circumference. Your brain is made to think about difficult things. To help you get to a point where you understand something that you didn't understand at first. You can't be lazy or neglectful. Right now is a critical time. Because this is the period when your brain and your heart form and solidify.

Haruki opens his eyes and looks around. He is utterly confused. He notices the man has vanished. He has a small burst of motivation from the Old man's wise words. The bouquet of red flowers lays beside him on the bench.

CUT TO:

INT. LAGUNA BEACH ROCKS - DAYTIME

HARU, an old friend of Benjiros', is a young talented surfer who moved out to California from Japan in the 11th Grade. We see his face over Benjiro's shoulder. It is a couple months later. Now in the present day.

HARU

And thats it? Where was she? Are you sure it wasn't the wrong day? I don't get it. Where was the recital then?

BENJIRO

I still don't even understand it myself.

HARU

Ok wa-what...So basically your saying you don't even want to know.

(MORE)

HARU (CONT'D)

Like at least figure it out.

(Pauses, glances away for
a second frustrated)

The cream of damn life. I-I- need
an explain-

BENJIRO

Look, things like this happen
sometimes. Inexplicable, illogical
events that nevertheless are deeply
disturbing. I guess we shouldn't
think of them, just close our eyes
and get through them, as if passing
under a huge wave.

The sound of waves crash in the background.

HARU

Ok don't try and relate this to
surfing man.

HARU (CONT'D)

Ok but...but not thinking about it
is just as hard as trying to figure
it out.

BENJIRO

Sure, maybe it is. It may be hard.

HARU

And the circle though? What was
that about?

BENJIRO

Another good question.

HARU

Oh come on man, so why did you tell
me this story then?

BENJIRO

You asked what I've been up to
didn't you?

HARU

Ok, well I thought maybe something
like "I've been trying to apply to
some music schools" should have
done it. Not some weird dream you
had one night.

BENJIRO

Well, then maybe you shouldn't
assume someone's story.

HARU

Alright whatever dude.

Haru runs to the wave and throws his board in the water. Fade out as he runs to the water in the distance.