

AYANO
a play
by
Chris Collins

Living room in a Hollywood CA apartment. The place is outfitted simply. The walls are decorated with a couple of photos...one of Mt Fuji, and one depicting a Japanese girl with a Japanese man in front of a temple. There's also a small framed movie poster of "Shane". In the hallway, that leads to the bedroom, hangs a painting of a 1959 red Corvette in front of a desert tableau.

The apartment is also furnished with a couch, a coffee table, and a few chairs in the living room. The dining room has a table with chairs. At the front door is a shoe cabinet housing a variety of slippers and rubber sandals. A pair of street shoes rest there on the floor.

On the coffee table is bottle of sake and sake cups.

Charlie is sitting on the couch and drinking sake. His brother, Tom goes into the kitchen and comes out with a beer. Charlie wears slippers. Tom is wearing street shoes.

Charlie: What?

Tom: Maybe you should think about what the hell you're doing.

Charlie: Fuck off.

Tom: Is it worth the rent?

Charlie: It's her birthday for Christ's sake.

Tom: She doesn't need it.

Charlie: Who needs shit they get for their birthday?

Tom: That thing must have cost...what a \$1000?

Charlie: I love her.

Tom: She's on to you.

Charlie: What does that mean?

Tom: She smells your fear.

Charlie. Oh God..."smells my fear". What's this, a movie? She's my wife.

Tom. Has she forgiven you?

Charlie. For what?....Ok, I was a bad boy for a while? Do I give you shit about you and Julie?

Tom. We ain't married.

Charlie. We've moved on. I've been a good boy since my lay off.

Tom. Maybe she's doesn't say anything because she doesn't care anymore.

Charlie. She cares.

Tom. She's got what she wants.

Charlie. Oh, not the Green Card shit again. Quit with the internet horror stories. She got it before we were married from that...flower girl she worked for...I can't remember...

Tom. Does she fuck you anymore? Ahhh, don't get pissed...you're the one who told me about it...I'm not you're enemy... I'm your older brother. When you stop (*makes a sex gesture*) it's a plane crash for a marriage.

Charlie. Since when did you decide to rescue me?

Tom. Not sure. But, I've seen this happen before...you were practically suicidal over that last girl...what's her name...You hid in your room for months.

Charlie: (*gets up and paces*) Oh, eat shit. And take your fucking shoes off. Show respect in my house.

Tom. (*going to the shoe cabinet, kicking off his shoes*) All right, I'll play the dutiful Asian. Julie makes me do this ceremony too. Which one of these dirty pairs am I supposed to...(picks out cheap rubber sandals). It's like wearing used bowling shoes.

Charlie. You love it when I have problems...when you sniff failure.

Tom. You're letting this Nippon princess break your heart. I see it.

Charlie. Her name's Ayano.

Tom. Ok, Ayano. You know, her acting gigs and this part time waitressing ain't helping your bank account. Remember the shitty play she was in last year? What sucker paid for that

production? No pay, but a lot a sloppy lip-locking with that creep who thought he was Brad fucking Pitt

Charlie. She was acting.

Tom. Well, Julie's an actress too but if she "acted" like that...well... And when is this fork lift company gonna hire you back? I'm tired of looking at you moping around here like a teenager.

Charlie. Then don't come over.

Tom. All right...just take that thing back and get her 50-buck flowers like most guys do. And this layoff's looking permanent to me. Did you get fired and not tell me...did they give you a drug test that you failed?

Charlie. No, no drug test. They laid me off. I call almost every day to find out what's going on.

Tom. *(clicking on his phone and tossing it to Charlie)* LA Times...look.

Charlie. What? *(mutters as he reads)* It says the company is moving to Las Vegas. Shit. They never said anything.

Tom. *(taking his phone back)* There you go. Now, you have to do something. *(picks up the cup Charlie was using to sip sake.)* And stop with...what is this shit *(lifts a bottle)* Sake? Here. *(drops money on Charlie's lap.)* I know your short. Pay the rent. And bring that present back. *(Charlie sighs)* This Japanese princess your with ain't good for your... *(taps his head)*...

Charlie. *(swatting his hand abstractly)* Moving to Vegas...damn!

Tom. Look, you're strong. Remember when you came back wounded from Afghanistan? You made me look like a pussy. I looked myself in the mirror after that and said, "You are a pussy."

Charlie. I'd rather be back there. Things were pure and simple.

Tom. Speaking of Afghanistan, aren't you supposed to pick up your Marine buddy...what's his name...you know, the guys who saved your life.

Charlie. Oh fuck, I forgot about Carl...what time *(looks)* damn...let's go.

Tom. *(clicking of keys at the door. Tom gets up quickly and lifts up the gift bag)* And hide this thing before she sees it. Hurry!

Charlie. *(as he hurriedly hides the gift behind the sofa pillow)* Don't say anything about the...company moving. I'll tell her.

(Julie & Ayano enter. Ayano carries a rose. She wears a jaunty hat.)

Ayano. I love the way roses bloom here. No matter what time of year...*(sniffs them)* And the smell! *(she takes hat off and hangs it on a hook near the door.)*

Julie. Howdy boys, what are you cowpokes doin'?

Tom. Lotta weeds in those plants.

Ayano. I know. I've let things grow wild lately. I feel bad about it. But, the big roses are still blooming.

Tom. Thought Japanese had green thumbs.

Ayano. I guess not

Julie. Ayano saved most of the plants from rotting in that baked bread soil.

Charlie. It's landlady's job to water. She's been letting you do her work. You deserve to rest, baby.

Tom: Well, if you keep growing flowers for her, ask for a break in the rent.

Ayano. I did it because I wanted to. *(exits into another room)*.

Julie. Tom, quit criticizing her.

Tom. Who's criti...?

Julie. *(interrupting Tom)* Charlie, you should be happy to have someone who cares about making things nice.

(Ayano returns with the roses in a vase. She places it on a table and tends to the flowers. Charlie gets up and puts his arm around Ayano, and kisses her.)

Charlie: Happy Birthday, baby.

Julie. *(to Ayano)* Ha ha. See, he did remember.

Ayano. Thank you.

Charlie. *(keeps his arm around Ayano's shoulder)* And how could I forget? She's my sweet wife.

Julie. What'd you get her?

Charlie. Well...um.... I know how much you like tea. So, I'm gonna take you to one of those English tea rooms you talk about.

(Tom gives him an "ok" sign.)

Ayano. My mother used to take me to one in Yokohama. She loved to read old English detective stories where everybody had tea at 4. We wore hat and gloves and ate buttered scones. Thank you, Charlie. Are you sure you want to go?

Tom. If they serve beer, he'll be ok. Or, should I say sake? *(lifting the bottle)*

Charlie. How'd the auditions go...the call back...or whatever?

Ayano. Please don't ask. I don't want to keep talking about it...years of call backs and auditions...and failing again and again and again. *(pulls away from his embrace as though claustrophobic...and moves to the couch.)*

Tom. What did you try out for?

Ayano. A TV show. A neighbor friend of the main character. It's called, "Grace Under Pressure".

Charlie. You'll get it, baby.

Ayano. Please don't say that.

Julie. Yeah, don't jinx it.

Tom. Jinx it... please. You actors got more superstitions than a bullpen of Dodger pitchers.

Ayano. Doesn't matter, anyway. I think I looked too Japanese...and the accent is still there.

Charlie. You're pretty.

Ayano. I hate being pretty when everybody else is beautiful.

(Charlie starts moving toward Ayano on the couch, but Tom intercepts him)

Tom. Hey, Charlie come on...we gotta go.

Julie. Where you guys going?

Tom. To the airport to pick up his Marine buddy.

Julie. A Marine buddy?

Charlie. *(to Ayano)* I told you about him. A Navy corpsman. He took care of me in Afghanistan...you know, when I was shot. He's a doctor now.

Ayana. Why didn't you tell me he was coming?

Charlie. Well...don't know...he just called me a coupla days ago.

Ayano. This place is a mess. Is he staying here?

Charlie. No...I don't think so...his mother lives here I think.

Ayano. We have to...*(starts picking things up)*. He saved you. You need to tell me...Charlie. Someone that important...we need...

Tom. Let's go Charlie.

(Tom signals Charlie on the sly to pick up the Ayano's gift behind a pillow on the couch. Charlie scoots the gift behind his back as he moves toward the door with Tom)

Charlie. Okay. And we'll pick up a birthday cake on our way back.

(Charlie and Tom Exit. Julie gets up and looks out the window as the two leave.)

Julie. What's he hiding?

Ayano. *(throwing papers away and folding things)* Who?

(Julie comes back and sits at the edge of the dining room chair)

Julie. They're both so stupid. They think I didn't notice they were hiding something.

Ayano. Charlie is always hiding something.

Julie. You want tea?

Ayano. Tea? *(getting frantic cleaning up)*

Julie (*guiding Ayano to the couch*) Sit down, please. You're worked up for nothing.

Ayano. Tea? Yes, please, ok.

(Julie exits. Ayano, on the couch, slides onto the floor and ends up leaning against the couch.)

Julie (O.S). You know, you've got me addicted to Japanese green tea. (*entering with tea cups, placing them on the coffee table.*). I heard somewhere Chinese teas are poisoned from....I don't know...something.

Ayano. (*staring at her nails*) I need to get my nails done.

Julie (*looking at her own nails*) You think I should do mine Japanese style?

Ayano. (*almost to herself*) I have to get to Miya in Little Tokyo.

Julie. It's such art...the way the Japanese do it...like 3D.

Ayano. Miya can get yours done in nail-art fashion. But I can't do mine Japanese style. The restaurant won't allow it handling food.

Julie. Let's meet for lunch in Little Tokyo. We'll sit and giggle-chat in the salon before you go to work at the restaurant. (*Exits into kitchen.*)

Ayano. (*gets up and wanders in front of a mirror*) I should have looked at myself longer before the audition. Now that I need it most, I don't feel like doing anything for myself. And do you think my accent is too strong? I'm not sure that speech coach is doing me much good.

Julie. (*entering with a pot and places it on the coffee table. She sits on the couch and pours the tea.*) Sorry, what did you say? (*Ayano waves it off*) I couldn't find anything to eat.

Ayano. We have nothing. Should I go to the store?

Julie. Oh, let's not go now. I'm so comfortable. It's just as well. They can drink beer. There's plenty of that in the frig. (*picks the bottle of sake*) And Charlie's drinking sake? Never thought he'd drink anything but beer and eat burgers...like his brother... (*watches cont*)

Ayano move away from the mirror and back toward the couch.) God, you look so good. How do you stay so thin?

Ayano. Genetics. (*sitting on the floor leaning against Julie's legs*) But there's something going wrong in auditions. Why do I think the casting people seem surprised when I walk in, even in call-backs...oh, she's just so...well... plainer than we thought.

Julie. (*rubbing Ayano's head and shoulders*) That's crazy. You're gorgeous. But, you're an actress like me...victim to emotions. God, you're so much prettier than I am. When we were in that play together, people were always looking at you, not me. Hell, I was looking at you.

Ayano. (*grabs Julie's hand and kisses it*) You're so good to me. Thank you. Sometimes all I really want is to put on one of those surgical masks Japanese girls wear on the streets and subways...and hide.

Julie. Audition vapors...that's what you got. I feel like fainting after auditioning. Tom has to lay me down. I'm so fragile.

Ayano. No, no. You're not. I envy your strength. Lately, I've been thinking about going back to Japan. I wasn't there when my father died. When I got my Green Card, my mother and sister think I betrayed them and Japan.

Julie. You're following your heart, that's all. (*Ayano gets to her feet and checks her purse....taking checkbook and wallet out.*) When you married Charlie, did you two combine bank accounts?

Ayano. No. Are we supposed to?

Julie. So, you guys don't? I have no idea how much money Tom makes. I wish I knew...for some reason. He keeps saying he can't afford things.

Ayano. Charlie hasn't made money for months, since the layoff. I don't really know if he's trying to hide money. (*handing her some money from her wallet*) Here, I owe you this for the parking at the building.

Julie. Stop it.

Ayano. (*puts her money back into her wallet*) Thank you. How come you and Tom never got married?

Julie. He doesn't want it. He doesn't like being connected at the hip...he says.

Ayano. The hip?

Julie. I mean having to be together all the time.

Ayano. I see. But, you are together all the time. (*Julie shrugs.*) Used to worry about Charlie and his money. Now it's a relief not to care.

Julie. What do you mean? You don't care?

Ayano. I was so in love with him. I was so lonely and scared...coming here... Whenever I got anxious he'd pull a strand of hair behind my ear. It calmed me. He was so strong and...

Julie. ...horny.

Ayano. Well, yeah, that. (*getting up and looking in the mirror*) I always had a dream of acting in American movies. I learned to be more selfish than other Japanese girls, more ambitious, I guess. No one in school wanted to be better than anyone else. Not me. I wanted to be better. I wanted to win.

Julie. Yes, I see that.

Ayano. I should have gone back when Father died. You know, we watched cowboy movies together. He loved them. We rented videos. Sometimes we went to the theater near the Yokohama station. I loved the smell of sweet tobacco on his clothes. (*peers out the window*) When I act, I'm calm... like when I'm sitting next to my Father in the theater.

Julie. Gee, please don't give up on Charlie. Men...they have such out of control fantasies. We all know they can't be trusted too much. We really don't have much say in the matter...it's the way they made up. We can say we trust them, but we can trust more if we know what their up to.

Ayano. You know, when Charlie and I went to Las Vegas months ago...before his layoff...I saw him steal \$300 from an old man. The man tripped over the leg of a chair and dropped a bunch of chips. Charlie helped him pick them up and kept \$300 worth of chips. I said something to him about it, but he laughed it off. I couldn't sleep all that night at the hotel. All that night, I wondered if I should go back to Japan.

Julie. You better not. (*Ayano drifts back to the couch*) I remember when I first met you. You were so bright-faced helping Hani with her Ikebana class.

Ayano. Hani was a good person...sponsored me for my Green Card. At first, she paid me....what do you call it...?

Julie. ...under the table?

Ayano. Yes, "under the table". I was happy then hiding under the table. I remember (*taking Julie's hand*) you became my first real American friend.

Julie. I love you.

Ayano. I'm not a good person anymore, Julie. I let people down.

Julie. Look, your hands are trembling and sweaty. *(Ayano looks down at her shaking hands.)* You're cold. *(hugs her and guides her to lie on couch)*. Lie down. I'll go shopping before the boys get back.

Ayano. No. *(halts her attempt to get up)* Well, I'll just lie here a few minutes. *(reaches for the sake)*

Julie. Sit back. I'll get it for you. Go ahead...relax.

Ayano. *(Gives in and collapses back as Julie pours the sake and hands her a cup)* When I lived with Hani in Pasadena her backyard was colored with flowers. Did I tell you she had birds...her own birds... parrots, finches, cockatiels, canaries? She must have had about 15 of them. Sometimes they were quiet, but mostly...cheep, cheep, cheep, *(whistling sound.)* I loved this one cockatiel. He was...yellow...with orange dots on his cheeks. I called him Toriki. He loved me...stood on my shoulder and nibbled on my ear. He ate mashed nuts from my mouth.

Julie. *(preparing to leave)* Yuck.

Ayano. No, it was good. He whistled Japanese songs I taught him. When he got sick and weak, I let him rest near my pillow. He stopped breathing during the night and got stiff. I would rub him and he would come back to life. I did this again and again for hours. I even tried to blow air into its beak. But...he died...in my hands...during the night.

Julie. I better go. I'll be back soon. Rest, please.

(Julie picks up her purse, puts on her shoes, and exits. Ayano sips more sake before lying back on the sofa and falling asleep. The stage darkens except for a light shining on a Japanese man in his forties He wears hardhat and holds a clipboard. He kicks off his shoes and puts down his hardhat.)

Ayano. Papa.

Father. Did you do it for me?