

Lights Go

By Ken Yoshikawa

“We are all part of one another”

-Yuri Kochiyama

CHARACTERS

YURI - 24, a stage manager, Japanese American

MALCOLM - 27 an actor, Black

SAM - 29, Malcolm's sick boyfriend in quarantine, on the phone, any race

THE GHOSTS:

ASIAN GHOST BOY - 12, a theatre ghost

ASIAN GHOST MOTHER - looks late 30s, theatre ghost

ASIAN GHOST FATHER - looks late 40s, a theatre ghost

ASIAN GHOST YOUNG WOMAN - looks late 20s

ASIAN GHOST YOUNG MAN - looks late 20s

WHITE GHOST WOMAN - looks late 20s or 30s

WHITE GHOST MAN - looks 30s

TIME

JUNE 2020

PLACE

IN AN IATSE HOUSE THEATRE IN PORTLAND

NOTE: The play cited in this play called *The Journal of Ben Uchida* is a real play written for children 10+ by playwright Naomi Iizuka. The March 2020 performance for the cited production was cancelled mid-run due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. There are references and direct quotes from the play. This note is to ensure credit for that language is due to the appropriate playwright.

Onstage is the remnants of the set for The Journal of Ben Uchida: a forced perspective flat representing the barracks of "Mirror Lake Camp" (ie Manzanar), a mock stone memorial for the dead from the atrocity of Japanese Incarceration, and a ghost light. The stage is covered in a layer of white powder. Then, offstage from out of the theatre, behind the door into the house:

YURI

Let me just wipe this down, y'know.

MALCOLM

Wise, wise.

The door unlocks and opens. Malcolm and Yuri enter

YURI

I'll go in first, and then you can catch the door.

MALCOLM

Don't you worry, I know. Not messing around here. Six feet at all times. That's how it works.

YURI enters, She has a very full backpack.

YURI

Alright, I'm in; come on.

MALCOLM

Thank you, Yuri. I gotta say you don't know how much this means to me.

YURI

Yeah, no sweat Mal, not like anything's going on in here anyways.

MALCOLM

Oh the set is gorgeous. You miss it?

YURI

Running the show?

MALCOLM

I got lucky, Twelfth Night closed two weeks before everything got cancelled.

YURI

Closure is nice. We had two weeks left.

MALCOLM

So sorry.

YURI

Still got paid for the rest of the run.

MALCOLM

Not everyone got so lucky. Thank the Lord for contractual agreements.

YURI

Hear hear.

MALCOLM

The Journal of Ben Uchida. Sam and I wanted to see it. We heard it was dope.

YURI

Yeah, it's oddly sweet to see the old nissei cry like that.

MALCOLM

Nissei?

YURI

Second generation Japanese American.

MALCOLM

Right. Wait, were they...?

YURI

Some of them were kids in the camp, yes, survivors. So yeah, they have memories. The lines for the bathroom, the hot days, cold nights, the dust, the snow, the scorpions, the long boring empty quiet, soldiers in the towers.

MALCOLM

That kinda stain don't wash out. It keeps.

YURI

The trauma.

MALCOLM

Yeah it just gets handed down. You run that race, pray you don't drop before you get to hand it off again, whittle down the baton until it's a sword for liberation, y'know what I mean?

YURI

It's just so heavy.

MALCOLM

Too heavy. Thank god they're putting shows like this on, right? One thing at a time.

YURI

It is about time, I say. These days, I just keep having dreams about this place, the show, scenes from the play.

MALCOLM

I haven't had a dream in weeks. Maybe it's all the weed?

YURI

Ha, I thought maybe it was all the TV I've been catching up on.

MALCOLM

What're you watching?

YURI

I tried Altered Carbon.

MALCOLM

Damn I love that show.

YURI

Couldn't get into it. So I tried The Terror, the one about camp. Big mistake.

MALCOLM

Heard about it.

YURI

You should watch it.

MALCOLM

Nah, I scare easy.

YURI

You shouldn't watch it.

MALCOLM

Fair enough.

YURI

Horror's my jam. I eat it up. Nothing scares me, really. But, eventually I started dreaming about the play. All kinds of ways too, like watching a scene in slow motion from the booth, or with parts cut and spliced together, repeating, repeating, or seeing the whole show in 20 seconds. You know you see something so many times, you generally take it for granted after a while just saying "lights go, lights go, lights go, lights go". I dreamed I was calling the show. Honestly I should have been, but for the virus stopping it halfway through the run. Heard myself say it over the mic, even, like I was listening to an echo of myself. My partner said I was saying it in my sleep. Then last night I had a dream and I was onstage having a picnic.

MALCOLM

Damn, a picnic onstage! You have some bizarre dreams.

YURI

I guess. The audience was watching me eat, and they were angry, and the actors came on wondering what the hell I was doing; they just stared at me. I panicked, didn't know what to say so I just repeated "lights go, go, go, go, go, go, go, go, go" and I even woke up saying it.

MALCOLM

Weird.

YURI

Yeah, then the next morning I got your email asking to be let in.

MALCOLM

You didn't say that when you said yes. Super weird.

YURI

I felt like I had to help, take a look back in here again. Maybe...

MALCOLM
Maybe what?

YURI
Make an offering.

MALCOLM
An offering?

YURI
Maybe I'll stop dreaming about it... How is your boyfriend doing?

MALCOLM
Not good. I can't visit.

YURI
Jesus. Quarantined. I can't even...

MALCOLM
That's why I asked you, so I can put on a show for him. I don't know what else to do.

YURI
That's a sweet idea. But on a real stage?

MALCOLM
Yeah. I don't know what's going to happen, so I want to make it special. And if this is the only stage I can get, I'll take it.

beat

MALCOLM
You realize we've been standing here talking in the dark the whole time, right?

YURI
Yeah.

MALCOLM
It's creepy!

YURI
It's kinda nice.

MALCOLM

Nice? You are nothing but weird.

YURI

It's calming. I mean just look at the light.

MALCOLM

It's dusty on stage.

YURI

Well...

MALCOLM

I mean really dusty.

YURI

Holy shit, what is all that? It hasn't been that long, has it?

MALCOLM

Looks like snow. Didn't you say they had snow in camp?

YURI draws a circle in the dust.

YURI

Strange. We don't use dust in the show, or snow. It's just spoken.

ASIAN GHOST BOY barely emerges from the back at the very edge of the light, peering out, then recedes. MALCOLM gets out his phone

MALCOLM

Well we've got service. See? Facebook.

YURI

No thanks. I've had enough social media. I'll go turn on the lights.

MALCOLM

Wait, don't go.

YURI

You'll be okay.

MALCOLM

I know you know I know theatres have ghosts. That's why we use the ghost light, right?

YURI

It's for your safety.

MALCOLM

Don't you talk to me about safety, leaving me in the dark like this. You better not be planning any malarky, feeding me to some who-knows-what lurking in and around here. You know damn well what would happen to me in a horror movie! It's not cool. It's tropey, tired, and tokenizing. Oh shit, I'm your offering right? You said offering! You did! Fuck that, I'm not about to be your sacrifice, Yuri! Not ok! Hold! Hold! That word is supposed to have some power around here. Hold I say! Hold!

YURI

I'll be right back. You chose to come in here, dude. Besides, the only thing that can kill you in here is Corona.

MALCOLM

What? Corona? In here?

YURI

Should be okay, but we never know, right? You got your bottle of sanitizer, right?

MALCOLM

Yes, right here, next to my bible. The sweet word of the Lord.

YURI

You brought a bible?

MALCOLM

It's in my heart.

YURI

Alright. I guess that counts.

YURI goes up to the booth. Malcolm pauses anxiously before, and slowly at first then building:

MALCOLM

The Lord is my Shepherd, I have all I need

She makes me lie down in green meadows
Beside the still waters, She will lead.

Calling SAM on the phone on video chat

She restores my soul, She rights my wrongs
She leads me in a path of good things
And fills my heart with -

SAM answers the phone, the light shines on MALCOLM

SAM: (*weakly*)
Babe?

MALCOLM
Hey love, how are you?

SAM
I can't shake this thing and I miss you. So done with this basic-ass soup. I want you to cook for me again with a bottle of wine. Hey, I can't see you. (*coughs*) Is there something wrong with your camera? Where are you? It's dark (*coughs again*)

MALCOLM
I miss you too. I'm in the theatre.

SAM
In the theatre?!

MALCOLM
Thought I'd do something special for you.

SAM
What?! (*cough*) Did you lose your mind leaving your apartment like that? You don't have to do all that, do some song and dance, all that trouble, for me.

MALCOLM
I'm not settling in for a docile spin. I heard courage is a virtue so here I am. Though I thought I'd wait to call you in til we got the lights on but...

SAM
It's dark over there?

MALCOLM

Yup, that's right. I needed to hear your voice a bit sooner.

SAM

You alone? Girl, we both know you're afraid of being alone in the dark.

MALCOLM

Ha, yeah, I'm good. Yeah. Yuri's going to turn the lights on. Hey, Yuri! How's it going with those lights? See, I'm alright.

YURI

I'm stuck outside the booth. Can't get it.

MALCOLM

Right. That's fine.

YURI

Hold on I think I got the wrong key. That can't be right. Or it won't fit. That's weird.

MALCOLM

At least I have my hand sanitizer. My hands will be very clean when I die.

SAM

You're gonna be just fine, baby. *(SAM coughs)*

MALCOLM

You okay?

SAM

I miss you being on stage. God I just loved Twelfth Night.

MALCOLM

Me too.

SAM

You made such a good Feste. You're so brilliant. I love watching you so much.

MALCOLM

Thanks babe.

SAM

What was that song...

MALCOLM *sets the phone down on a seat arm rest, faces house*

Well in a second we'll get the lights on, I've prepared something.

SAM *singing*

Come away, come away death...

ASIAN GHOST BOY enters, very slowly approaches MALCOLM

MALCOLM

Oh no no, Sam. Sam, I don't...

SAM *singing*

And in sad cypress let me be laid.

beat

SAM

What was the next part?

beat

SAM

Come on, babe.

beat

MALCOLM *singing*

Fie, away,

SAM *singing*

Fie, away

BOTH *singing*

Fie away breathe, I am slain by a fair cruel maid.

My shroud of white, stuck all with you

O, prepare it.

My part of death, no one so true

Did share it.

The BOY reaches the circle YURI drew and MALCOLM,

The BOY grabs the dust

The sound kicks on, "Stardust" by Glenn Miller and his Orchestra.

MALCOLM

Holy shit. You scared me Yuri! Come on!

YURI

Stardust?

SAM

What's going on Malcolm?

YURI

That's from the play, but I didn't do that.

The BOY begins to cascade the dust on MALCOLM

MALCOLM

You mean to say...?

MALCOLM turns around, a soft blue light fills the stage, as he sees the boy ghost slowly opening his mouth reaching toward MALCOLM, the boy's dust-filled hand just as slowly opening itself. [This should take as long as the activity of the other ghosts] MALCOLM gasps, aching in shock. The six other GHOSTS appear behind him in a circle facing the light and each other, eyes wide open. They all raise their hands together and then lower them together. The GHOST MOTHER and the GHOST FATHER begin to waltz to the song, The WHITE GHOST WOMAN longingly raises her hand as if against a window pane toward the WHITE GHOST MAN who lays a sad hand on his solar plexus. The ASIAN GHOST YOUNG MAN and the ASIAN GHOST YOUNG WOMAN have brooms and start sweeping the dust on the ground toward the light. By this time the boy's mouth is completely open, his hand opens with terrifyingly energetic fingers ready to clasp at MALCOLM who is wordlessly freaking out. He doesn't know what to do but to offer the bottle of sanitizer to the boy. The other ghosts freeze movement. The boy takes the bottle and stands, the other ghosts look at the GHOST BOY. The GHOST BOY drinks the bottle of hand sanitizer. The GHOST BOY drops the bottle and when it hits the ground, all 7 GHOSTS turn eyes on MALCOLM and move to grab him, dragging him onstage through the snow dust, pin him down, and then they all begin to gather handfuls of dust in their hands which they begin to slowly cascade down onto MALCOLM who steadily enters an ecstatically horrified state. All say the following simultaneously:

MALCOLM

Oh my god. Stop! Stop! Yuri! Help! Yuri! What the fuck did I tell you, dammit! I told you! Fuck off fuck off, no, no, no. Let me go. Let me go, dammit! Stop. Stop. Stop. Stop....

SAM

Baby!?! (*coughing*) Oh god. What's happening?! Baby? Baby? (*coughing, lots of coughing. more coughing*)

YURI *after a period of being frozen in place rushing to the stage*

Oh fuck. Go. Go. Go. Come on. Move, Yuri. Do something. Do something. No. No. No, no, no, no, no, no, no. I don't know what to do. I don't know what to do. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go.

ASIAN GHOST MOTHER

Did I tell you I was a picture bride? Did I tell you how I came over from Japan? Your father and I we never met. All he had was a photograph. I came over on a ship. I was so scared. I was alone. I had never been so far away from home, everything I ever knew.

ASIAN GHOST FATHER

I just, I don't know all the answers. What I do know is this country is a great country. The people, they're good people. They're fair and decent and they'll do the right thing. Eventually, they'll do the right thing. I believe that.

WHITE GHOST WOMAN

Let me tell you, I never liked you people. I never trusted you not for one minute. I'm glad they're sending you away. I'll sleep better at night. We'll all sleep better at night. Don't think you can fool me. Dress like me, talk like me, walk around pretending to be like me.

WHITE GHOST MAN

Well why don't you tell that dirty Jap we've been watching him, me and my buddies and I'll tell you what we're going to do, we're going to burn down his store, and then we're going to come over there and burn down his house, and shoot that traitor right between the -

ASIAN GHOST YOUNG WOMAN

Dust is the accumulation of skin. So, there's all these people living here, all crammed together, and they're all shedding their skin all the time, and they're going to keep shedding their skin, so what's the point? It's just going to be all dusty again tomorrow.

ASIAN GHOST YOUNG MAN

Dear Journal: Sometimes your whole life changes in a flash. You may not know exactly how right in the moment. Just that things are different. You can see it in people's eyes. It's like even the air around you changes. Everything and everybody is different.

(YURI grabs a tomato out of her backpack and throws it at the back of the ASIAN GHOST FATHER. Everything stops. They turn and look at YURI. YURI pulls out another tomato and throws it. The ASIAN GHOST FATHER grabs it, looks at it, and then takes a bite. YURI produces more fruit and lays it on the edge of the stage, piece by piece. Apples, bananas, oranges, bowls of rice, protein bars. She puts her hands together bows, then releases her hands and bows again. The ghosts come and claim the fruit and eat it. YURI climbs onstage and drags MALCOLM back into the house, holding him, washing the flour from his face with a bottle of water.)

MALCOLM *gasping for breath*
Holy shit. What the fuck just happened?

YURI
They must have just been hungry. Who's been looking out for them? Nobody.
The ASIAN GHOST BOY crawls toward them.

MALCOLM
It's coming back. It's coming back. Aw come on, does it really have to do it like that?

YURI
Don't move. Calm down.

ASIAN GHOST BOY
Why did you go away?

MALCOLM
It's talking to us.

ASIAN GHOST BOY
Why didn't you say goodbye?

YURI
I'm sorry.

ASIAN GHOST BOY
Can we have story time again?

beat

MALCOLM
Beats fatal whiteface.

SAM

Hold on. Is this all part of your play?

MALCOLM

It is now.

SAM

Not funny, Malcolm. What does that mean?

MALCOLM

Don't you worry. What's past is prologue.

YURI

You want us to tell you a story?

ASIAN GHOST BOY

No.

ALL GHOSTS

I want to tell you ours.

ASIAN GHOST BOY opens its arms to YURI, who holds him.

MALCOLM

Oh no, no no no no no no, don't tell me you're going to. Yep, you are holding the horrible ghost child that straight up tried to murder me. I honestly don't know how I should feel about this. Should I feel betrayed? This is. This is just...

YURI

He's kinda sweet.

ASIAN GHOST BOY sticks his tongue out at MALCOLM.

MALCOLM

Yeah, just another sweet kid.

The BOY makes a scary face.

MALCOLM

Very sweet kid. Super sweet kid.

YURI

Come on, sit down.

YURI cradling the BOY sits, gestures for MALCOLM to sit.

MALCOLM

You're great; thank you for saving my life, but I don't even give a fuck that I almost died. No disrespect, but six feet, dude, ok? I may get possessed here but I'm not getting sick.

MALCOLM sits at a responsible distance.

YURI

Alright... well. Go ahead.

ASIAN GHOST BOY

It's your line.

YURI

Places for start of show?

The ghosts go off stage except for BOY, who nods, and YOUNG MAN, dropping flour onto the ghost light.

Wait, we need to do a fight call.

ASIAN GHOST YOUNG MAN

I don't need a fight call.

MALCOLM

That's unprofessional.

BOY and YOUNG MAN look at MALCOLM

MALCOLM

Nevermind. Can you see, babe?

SAM

Sure can. I love you.

MALCOLM

I love you too.

YURI

Sit tight, folks, buckle up. Standby for lights cue 1 and 2. Lights go.

Lights go out

Lights go.

Lights up, special on ASIAN GHOST YOUNG MAN

ASIAN GHOST YOUNG MAN

My name is Ben. My number is 13559 and this is not my story. Not really.

END OF PLAY