NADYA and MO’s loft apartment. Several naked light bulbs hang from the ceiling.

NADYA works on one side of the room at her workshop station, constructing a strange puppet with overly large teeth.

MO works on the other side writing translations of Japanese phrases in their English equivalents on notecards and scraps of paper preparing for a presentation.

MO
Nadya, if you were a Japanese businessman who has come to the company several hundred times, would you want to be addressed as an emperor when you arrive? You know, kind of like I’m joking with you. Like, “Hey! You’re so awesome and we know each other but I’m gonna act hella formal cause you’ll laugh. Give us your money.” Would you get it?

NADYA
I don’t know. Have I laughed at your jokes before?

MO
Yeah. Sort of. You called me “odokemono.”

NADYA
And I meant that to mean…

MO
It’s like a prankster.

NADYA
Did I mean it as a compliment?

MO
Unclear. In the context you were either slightly annoyed or kind of amused.

NADYA
That’s a tough line.

MO
You’re not really someone who laughs a lot, however, when you’ve laughed, it’s been because of something I said.

NADYA
Go with your gut.

MO
I think I’m funny.
NADYA
Of course you are. You’re the funniest. My mother thinks you’re hysterical.

MO
Your mother?

NADYA
Yeah. She always laughs when she says your name. Like, “And how’s Mo?” Ahehehe.

MO
Aheheaya?

NADYA
Well, not exactly like that. But yeah. You get the picture.

MO
My name brings amusement?

NADYA
I wouldn’t read too much into it. My mother still laughs at America’s Funniest Home Videos.

MO
They still make that?

NADYA
No. She watches the recordings of it. My father took all her VHS recordings and transferred the episodes onto DVDs.

MO
You’re kidding.

NADYA
She doesn’t like YouTube. It makes her uncomfortable that it offers recommendations.

MO
Wow.

NADYA
Yeah. So don’t worry about it, is all I’m saying.

MO
Do you think I’m funny?

NADYA
No. I think I’m funny. You’re incidentally funny.

MO
Insulting me so close to my birthday?
NADYA
What am I supposed to do? Be blindly nice just because you’re going to gain a year a week from now?

MO
Others have tried it and not found it repellent.

NADYA
Then maybe you should move in with them. I’m past such niceties.

They kiss.

MO
Sure you are. That was awful.

NADYA
Just dreadful.

They kiss again.

NADYA
Like making out with vomit.

They kiss again.

MO
Or, a rat king.

They kiss again.

NADYA
Yes, you’re funny.

MO (special word)
Balcony.

NADYA
Balcony.

MO
Okay. I’m gonna go for it. I think I can pull off the joke.

NADYA
What do you get if he laughs?

MO (thinking for a moment, then a little unsure)
Joy?
NADYA
Ah. I see.

MO
The deal is gonna go through. There’s not much chance of it stopping at this point. So really it’s about the final presentation and handshake. But I still like to add personal flare. You know?

NADYA
They promised you a bonus, didn’t they?

MO (uncomfortable)
Yeah. Kind of.

NADYA is finishing up a stitch and doesn’t notice the tone shift.

NADYA (showing the puppet)
What do you think?

MO
Um. It’s. Well.

NADYA
I know the teeth are huge.

MO
Oh. Then. It’s exactly what you want.

NADYA
I tried to explain to them. But whatever. I’ve drawn up this whole world for it. A puppet needs a reason to have overly large teeth is my thinking. Here. See?

NADYA shows off a sketchbook.

MO
So the swampland is like a dump.

NADYA
Yeah. So I’m going with this idea that he or she found the teeth there. I’m gonna work on making them detachable. Like they’re dentures from a monster. I got it all sketched out.

MO
Did they pay you to create the world?

NADYA
Well, I’m going with it. I’ll show them my sketches. They can do what they want. I need to find joy in my projects just like you.
MO
Your skills are wasted on those little companies.

NADYA (tense)
Work is work.

MO
I know. I only mean that you’ve got all this experience and I think you belong some place where you have all the creative control.

NADYA
That reminds me,

MO
Fuck. I walked right into that one didn’t I?

NADYA
YUP. Control. Can you send me the list?

MO
List?

NADYA
Please. I asked you for a list for the party.

MO
Right. Right. A formal list. I’ll work on that.

NADYA
Mo.

MO
I know. I know. I’ve been thinking about other things.

NADYA
Your birthday is next week. I’ve got a huge transformation to manifest on this apartment and I need to make sure your friends are informed of the particulars.

MO
Wow.

NADYA
That came off more whiny than it needed to be. I just meant that I’d really like to know who’s gonna be here.

MO
I hear you.
NADYA
Okay. Good. I’m excited for it. It’s gonna be awesome. I’ve designed all this

Clock striking sounds, but deadened and hollow. Maybe it goes to twelve. While it sounds, MO and NADYA clean up for the evening. Their movements – putting away tools, shutting drawers, tidying piles, brushing teeth, closing blinds, etc. – are synchronized to an extent. An action is started by one and finished by the other. A balance.

They lie in bed, staring out in the same direction. Then sleep.

MO and NADYA sleep next to each other, wrapped in the comfortable way of couples who’ve been used to clinging and separating throughout the night for years. NADYA turns over, snoozing on.

Beat.

MO startles awake then checks that she’s not alone, but she’s not wholly convinced she’s not still dreaming.

MO
Where were we? Nadya? Did we ever go to Japan? Or? I can’t remember. Or, were we at the lake? Have we gone fishing?

NADYA makes a noise, maybe close to waking but not quite.

MO
You’re right. That’s not a good euphemism. I can do better. Let me think on it. I’ll get back to you about it in the morning. I can’t remember. I can’t remember where we were.

NADYA (still asleep)

MO
Nadya? You should really wake up if you’re going to interject.

NADYA sleeps on.

MO
On the run.

NADYA (still asleep)
Go…
MO
Yes. Back to sleep.

MO kisses NADYA and snuggles back into her and falls asleep.

Beat.

NADYA startles awake.

NADYA
Where were we?

NADYA stares intently at MO who sleeps on.

NADYA
Mo? Mo?

NADYA looks around the apartment trying to remember.

NADYA
Where were we? Was it? There?

NADYA gets out of bed, giving one last touch and kiss to the sleeping MO.

NADYA walks into the waiting room of the doctor’s office. Phones ring, but no one is answering them. MO sits, waiting.

NADYA
How is she?

MO doesn’t answer, unable to hear to NADYA.

KEATS, NADYA’s friend, enters wearing a lab coat. She holds a clipboard with a medical chart. MO rises.

NADYA
Keats. You’re not a doctor.

KEATS
Mo. I’m sorry.

MO
Can I see her?
KEATS
I’m afraid not. Her body is going to be taken to the moon, or Mars. It’s best not to ask too many questions.

NADYA
Where did you get your medical degree?

MO
But

KEATS
Shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh now. That’s it. Quiet. It’s for the best. Don’t you think?

MO
I could go with her. Keats. I could be valuable.

KEATS
No you can’t. I’m sorry. You don’t have the skills they’re looking for.

NADYA
She/ could learn.

MO
I could learn.

KEATS
There isn’t time. You’re already too old.

NADYA
She’s not so old.

MO
I could stretch.

KEATS
THERE ISN’T TIME.

MO
Am I dying?

KEATS
That remains to be seen. Anyway, you’re needed elsewhere. I hear Australia is hiring new koalas to replace the ones incinerated by global warming. How is your cuddling ability?

NADYA
Pretty poor.
MO
I’m an excellent cuddler.

NADYA
That’s what your mom said.

KEATS
Ha!

MO
What?

KEATS
Nad made a joke. But she’s gone now. She’s going to the moon or Venus. Maybe Neptune cause there’s so much water, probably. There’s no real way of knowing anything anymore. Except something about taxes as my father used to say.

MO looks toward NADYA but can’t see her.

MO
So she’s lost.

KEATS
As I said, yes, and we’re going to be very happy together.

MO
You’re going with her?

KEATS
Ha. Don’t be silly. An elephant can’t be friends with a penguin. She’s gone. I’m sorry for your loss.

MO
No you’re not. You didn’t want us together anyway.

KEATS
No. I didn’t. I’m still sorry.

An alarm starts blaring. “Code Blue. Code Blue” can be heard over the intercom.

KEATS removes her glasses (does she even wear glasses?) heroically looking toward… something.

KEATS
The world’s in trouble. I’ve got to go.

The Wonder Woman theme plays as KEATS runs off leaving MO and NADYA in the waiting room.
MO
I've never been to Sierra Madre.

NADYA
We'd have to be Italian.

MO
But you're going?

NADYA
You are, too.

MO
Right. Where were we?

A harsh noise.

MO and NADYA's apartment. NADYA is making decorations. MO is doing calisthenics.

NADYA
We were discussing your unbelievably long guest list.

MO
Right. Right.

NADYA
I mean, Jesus. Who are all these people?

MO
You know them.

NADYA
You keep saying that, but I don't recognize half of these names.

MO
That's because they do daytime things.

NADYA
Har-har.

MO
I've told them all you're a vampire.

NADYA
Oh goodie. Maybe that means fewer of them will come.
Don’t bet on it. Vampires are really “in” right now.

Well, I’ve always wanted to be popular.

I can cut the list down.

Don’t be silly.

I know that it makes you nervous.

I can deal. Don’t you worry. Do you like this?

Wow. How long did that take you?

Only a couple hours.

Only? This is too much.

It is not. It’s fine. It’s your birthday. Now the question is, do you like it?

It’s beautiful.

No joke. Because if this is the style you like then these are the ones that are going over the light bulbs.

They’re awesome. This whole design is amazing.

Thanks.

But. It’s not interfering with your work, is it?
NADYA (tense)
No.

MO
I’m not trying to be/ nosy. I

NADYA
I know.

MO
I’m trying to/ politely inquire

NADYA
I hear you.

MO
As to your mental/ wellbeing with your relatively new circumstance.

NADYA
My mental state is fine.

MO
I understand if you/ feel

NADYA
Okay. Yes. Things have been tight. And I don’t particularly like freelancing/ puppet work.

MO
I’m proud of you for going after what you want.

NADYA
Thank you. It’s appreciated.

MO
I’m trying to be supportive.

NADYA
I know. I wish things were easier.

MO
It’s fine. I didn’t mean/ to have it all come out that way

NADYA
But you’re not wrong. I need to do some thinking over the next couple of weeks.

MO
How is that different from every other week?
NADYA
I mean that I might need to look into working with other places. Maybe. Shipping things out. Or, I
don’t know, finding a permanent workplace again with a workshop or studio.

MO
In town?

NADYA
(re: calisthenics) You lost your heart rate.

MO
Resting isn’t bad for your heart.

They kiss.

NADYA
Balcony.

MO
Uh-huh. Balcony to the extreme.

NADYA
You like the lantern?

MO
Yes. The loft is gonna look incredible. You’re incredible.

NADYA
Dreamscape-y.

MO
More green things though.

NADYA
Now she has an opinion.

MO
Well, it is my birthday.

NADYA
Yes, your birthday. So get your friends to RSVP, Grandpa.

MO
I am a grandpa. So old.
NADYA
You’re not a grandpa because you’re old. You’re a grandpa because you hate loud music, and you order Rob Roy’s and scotch.

MO
Psst. There’s scotch in a Rob Roy.

NADYA
You’re not old. But you are a grandpa.

MO
Sure. My joints ache. Things are falling off me.

NADYA
Ears are supposed to be velcroed on at age eleven to prevent injury. I’ve heard that about ears.

MO
I’m not so sure what I’ve heard since mine are falling off.

NADYA
Growing a cyst is not the same thing as having body parts fall off. You make the jokes less fun when you take them so seriously.

MO
You make my birthday less fun when you take it so seriously.

NADYA
It’s gonna be a carefully crafted birthday, which is fun. Look at all this stuff. And the light bulbs.

MO
Yes. You’re part is going to be great. But getting people to RSVP is really difficult. That’s why I didn’t want to throw a dinner party. Can’t we say the doors are open at this time and close at this time? Just show up.

NADYA
I need to know who’s coming.

MO
What difference does it really make?

NADYA
Because I want to know how many people are going to be in the loft. I need to know so that I can reasonably prepare myself for it.

MO
Just pop your anti-anxiety meds. Isn’t that what they’re for?
NADYA
Mo.

MO
Sorry. I didn’t mean that to sound. I’m sorry. I haven’t been sleeping well.

NADYA
I know. Me neither.

MO
I’m happy you’ve been organizing this and planning. It’s very sweet. But don’t worry so much. It’s gonna be fine.

NADYA
Are any of these people from work?

Something pulses far away.

MO

NADYA
Huh.

The pulsing is closer and MO can hear it.

MO
What?

NADYA
Nothing. I thought there’d be more from the office.

MO
Well. Something about assuming and asses. I can’t remember how that goes.

NADYA
Right.

The pulsing sound is right on top of them.

MO
Do you hear that?

The world crashes down.

NADYA
RUN