

Wabi Sabi

A Play.

By Rachael Carnes

CHARACTERS

LAUREL

MIKE

Both characters are played by teen actors.

SETTING

A High School library.

TIME

Afternoon.

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A dreary school day. LAUREL sits at a table, trying to use her phone without the librarian noticing. MIKE enters.

MIKE: Hey.

LAUREL: ...

MIKE: Is it okay if I sit here?

LAUREL: It's a free country.

MIKE: Could you move your books?

LAUREL: No.

MIKE: Perhaps in Japanese? *Anata wa anata no hon o idō shite kudasai?*

LAUREL: You're that new kid.

MIKE: Yes, I did just transfer to this renowned place of learning, and I need room for my thermos.

LAUREL: There's, like, a sign right there —

MIKE: What sign? The one with Harry Potter? Is that supposed to inspire us?

LAUREL: No, the one that says, "No food or drink." Can you read?

MIKE: I'm not just "eating" or "drinking" — I'm observing my daily tea ritual.

LAUREL: You're not —

MIKE: Each step of the preparation has fixed movements — Choreography.

LAUREL: You can't do choreography in the library —

MIKE: Relax! It's subtle. The act of preparing tea is an art requiring many years of study to master.

LAUREL: Leave me alone, freak!

MIKE: The tea utensils have to be placed at pre-decided locations on the tatami mat.

LAUREL: Don't spread that thing out next to me!

MIKE: This portion of tea ceremony emphasizes the concept of "sabi," or the material life.

LAUREL: Go sit at a different table —

MIKE: The library is a perfect place to celebrate that which is old and faded —

LAUREL: What is *wrong* with you?

MIKE: The weathered books, the tables and chairs —

LAUREL: Are you, like, a foreign exchange student or something?

MIKE: And that weird smell! Take a big whiff. Like this — Inhale deeply. Right? It's amazing.

LAUREL: It smells like mildew and old socks —

MIKE: That weird library smell is a reminder that our physical life is temporary —

LAUREL: I think they just fumigated —

MIKE: Everything will decay and we will eventually depart. We're all just rotting meat tubes.

LAUREL: Whatever.

MIKE: In the tea room, the emphasis is on the interaction between the host, guests, and tea utensils.

LAUREL: Wait. You look familiar.

MIKE: The host will choose objects specific to that gathering —

LAUREL: Gimme a minute — I'm good with faces!

MIKE: And use those utensils to perform the tea preparations in front of the guests —

LAUREL: It'll come to me —

MIKE: I've got a small white cloth to wipe the tea bowl, a tea caddy, a tea scoop, and —

LAUREL: Here comes the librarian. Hide all your tea junk! Pretend to read this book.

MIKE: Is she still there?

LAUREL: She's gone.

MIKE: A tea caddy, a scoop, a whisk and —

LAUREL: Oh my god.

MIKE: Hey.

LAUREL: You — You and I used to do ballet together!

MIKE: Not so loud. Tea room guests are expected to abide by tea room etiquette —

LAUREL: We were on the same dance team!

MIKE: The tea ceremony is about restraint —

LAUREL: It *is* you — Ashley? I haven't seen you since, like, fifth grade!

MIKE: The tea ceremony is about finding beauty in unrefined, natural, or imperfect forms.

LAUREL: We danced together for, like, three years in Middle School —

MIKE: When we drink the tea, we should cultivate a sense of serene melancholy and a spiritual longing.

LAUREL: You look so different!

MIKE: Thanks!

LAUREL: What happened to you?

MIKE: What happened to you?

LAUREL: No, I mean — What *happened*?

MIKE: The tea ceremony aesthetic celebrates humility —

LAUREL: I've never met one before.

MIKE: I'm not a labradoodle.

LAUREL: That came out wrong — Ashley, wait.

MIKE: See yah.

LAUREL: Please, I'm sorry, I —

MIKE: The tea ceremony celebrates imperfection.

LAUREL: We were friends. Where'd you go?

MIKE: I had to change schools —

LAUREL: I mean, it's so —

MIKE: "It"?

LAUREL: It's so awesome! You're so awesome! I'm gonna text my friends!

MIKE: Please don't do that —

LAUREL: Nothing ever happens around here!

MIKE: I don't want you to tell people about who I used to be.

LAUREL: But you're still Ashley. I mean, underneath —

MIKE: No, I'm not. My name is Mike.

LAUREL: Mike?

MIKE: Please take this tea bowl.

LAUREL: It has a crack in it.

MIKE: That's where it's most beautiful.

LAUREL: I think it's ugly.

MIKE: But it's mended with gold —

LAUREL: I miss dancing with you.

MIKE: Dance isn't for boys. Not in this town, anyway.

LAUREL: So, you can't dance but you can do this weird tea thing —

MIKE: The gold emphasizes the fractures and breaks instead of hiding or disguising them.

LAUREL: You're a girl.

MIKE: The gold makes the repaired piece more beautiful than the original, revitalizing it with new life.

LAUREL: Your name is *Ashley*.

MIKE: Over time, the scalding hot water that's poured in them makes them even more themselves.

LAUREL: Ashley was my friend.

MIKE: It's the little lines in the cup that makes each one special —

LAUREL: Then one day Ashley —

MIKE: I —

LAUREL: Ashley just disappears.

MIKE: I had to start over.

LAUREL: Doesn't text, doesn't call —

MIKE: Nothing lasts, nothing is finished, and nothing is perfect.

LAUREL: I didn't know if you hated me or —

MIKE: Now I practice letting the gold fill in the cracks.

LAUREL: I've never met anyone who's — What do you call it?

MIKE: I'm transitioning — from female to male.

LAUREL: You can't just *do* that.

MIKE: We're in a library — Surrounded by books, that are full of all the ideas of the universe — If I can't express my internal knowledge of my gender here — Where can I?

LAUREL: But aren't you lonely?

MIKE: Why would I be lonely?

LAUREL: How did your parents react?

MIKE: They're —

LAUREL: How did you choose your new name?

MIKE: I just —

LAUREL: Are you going to get — You know. Or did you?

MIKE: Why do you want to know?

LAUREL: What happens — When you get your, your — *you know?*

MIKE: I'll see you around —

LAUREL: Wait.

MIKE: What?

LAUREL: Dance.

MIKE: What about dance?

LAUREL: Do you miss it?

MIKE: Now I have all of this.

LAUREL: You think a boy can't dance, but you can do whatever the hell *this* is?

MIKE: In the tea ceremony, we learn to see basic, natural objects interesting, fascinating and beautiful.

LAUREL: Ballet! Tap — Come on! You were the queen of the time step!

MIKE: Now I appreciate the fading autumn leaves —

LAUREL: But you were so good!

MIKE: Now I see how a chip or crack in a vase makes it more interesting —

LAUREL: I love dance. You loved dance. How could you just stop?

MIKE: Was I supposed to march into Miss Polly's and announce, "Sorry! I know I have the highest high kicks and the best turnout and I know we'll probably never make it to the next competition without me, but I'm switching over to the boy's side — So make room!" Was I supposed to trade in all my pink leotards and white tights for what? Getting stuffed in a locker?

LAUREL: There are a few guys at the studio —

MIKE: Yeah, and how do the guys at school treat them?

LAUREL: I don't know. There's just one or two.

MIKE: When I made the decision to do this, I let go of that part of myself. No one seems to care that I do my tea thing. So, I carry my cups and my whisk and my lapsong souchang around with me. And there are days where organizing all this stuff is the only way I feel like myself.

LAUREL: You could have told me.

MIKE: I'm just trying to live life as it happens.

LAUREL: How life happens? Like how you totally dump your best friend? Like how you stop calling, or texting or even trying to communicate?

MIKE: I'm —

LAUREL: I didn't even know what happened to you.

MIKE: I'm learning —

LAUREL: And you're just like this cup, because it's cracked, but put back together again — But now it's even better. Is that what I'm supposed to think?

MIKE: I'm learning to cherish my unpolished self. I never should have expected you to get it.

The sound of a bell or beeping —

MIKE: Study hall's ending. I gotta clean all this up —

LAUREL: Hey —

MIKE: Hey, what?

LAUREL: Hey, Mike.

MIKE: It's — It's nice to hear my name.

Lights out. End of play.

Playwright Rachael Carnes has had productions across the U.S., U.K., Canada and Asia, with recent invitations to develop work at the William Inge Theatre Festival, the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts Playwriting Intensive, the Midwestern Dramatists Center Conference, the Mid-American Theater Conference, the American Association for Theatre in Higher Education New Play Development Series, the Sewanee Writers' Conference, the Ivoryton Playhouse Women Playwrights Initiative, the Parson's Nose Theatre's Women Playwright Series, the Cambridge U.K. WriteON Festival and the Samuel French Off-Off Broadway Festival. Rachael is humbled to be a recipient of a 2020 Oregon Literary Fellowship. Her work is seen in The Coachella Review, Silk Road Review, Cascadia Rising Review, Some Scripts Literary Review, Feels Blind Literary and more. Her play "Practice House" is semi-finalist for the 2019 New Dramatists Princess Grace Award, and her play "Yoncalla" is a semi-finalist for the PlayMakers Repertory's 2020 International Thomas Wolfe Playwriting Award. Rachael is the founder and editor of CodeRedPlaywrights, a consortium of writers across the country, responding to gun violence. Rachael and her family live in Oregon. www.rachaelcarnes.com