

THE VENDING MACHINE

BY

TRACY CHOW

INT. BEDROOM, JAPAN - SUMMER MORNING, 1957

In a neat and tidy bedroom, a few pictures of a boy and a banner with "Kyoto University" on it are hanging on the wall. One particular photo shows a boy holding up a trophy with his parents smiling proudly at him. YUTO, 20 years old, wearing big round glasses, is looking at an instructional textbook on electronics while tapping his feet and humming to Elvis Presley's "Jailhouse Rock" playing on the radio.

YUTO

"Everybody, let's rock. Everybody in the whole cell block, was dancin' to the Jailhouse Rock"

He is enjoying his moment of solitude in the room, with many textbooks and instruction manuals scattered around the desk. His father, MR. MORI, in his late 50s, wearing a black suit, barges in and turns off the loud radio. Yuto lifts his head slowly with slight annoyance, frowning and looking back at his textbook without turning around to greet his father.

YUTO

Now what?

MR. MORI

Your music is too loud. It's giving me a headache. I live here too.

YUTO

Can't you knock before you come in?

MR. MORI

I'm your father, I don't need to knock. This is MY house, I can do whatever I want.

YUTO

I live here too, but have you ever thought about what I want?

MR. MORI

What's your attitude now? Of course I care for you. I work this hard just for you, I even let you study that...what, mechanical engineering, in university. If your mother was still here, she would be as disappointed in you as I am.

YUTO

What do you want? You haven't paid even one cent for my tuition.

He points at his desk.

YUTO

That's all from my money.

MR. MORI

Son, why can't you be a little more like Mr. Amichko's son next door-- listening to his father, honoring his father and respecting what his father has done for him. You were not like this before, look at you now, what happened?

YUTO

Well, go ask him to be your son then.

Unable to endure his father's criticism any longer, he turns to glare at him.

YUTO

Have fun with your new "son"!

Yuto grabs his backpack and storms out of the bedroom into the living room.

MR. MORI

(shouting)

Hey, come back here.

Yuto bangs the door shut.

INT. YOUKI GROCERY STORE - DAY

MR. YAMAMOTO and MRS. YAMAMOTO, both mid-60's, owners of a grocery store named Youki Store, are stocking their recent imported products from the USA onto shelves.

Mrs. Yamamoto is filling the grab-and-go display fridge with newly imported American Coca-Cola. Her eyes are looking at the big supermarket across the street and her hands are placing the drinks in the fridge.

CUT TO SUPERMARKET

Students come out of the supermarket with full bags of snacks and drinks in their hands.

CUT BACK TO GROCERY STORE

She frowns.

MRS. YAMAMOTO
What's the fun shopping there? We
have everything here too. And-

She turns to scan their tiny store, where there are only two narrow aisles and a refrigerator against the wall. There are no customers.

MR. YAMAMOTO
We are so much smaller.

A bell rings as the shop door opens and they turn their heads to the front door.

MRS. YAMAMOTO
(Smiling and nodding slightly)
Irassyaimase!

Yuto enters the shop.

YUTO
Konnichiwa. Excuse me. May I know if
you are still hiring? I saw the ad
for a cashier outside on the window.

Mrs. Yamamoto and Mr. Yamamoto exchange a smile.

MR. YAMAMOTO
Yes, young man. Are you interested in
working for us? 4000-yen, full time,
from 8am to 5pm. And three meals a
day on us. The best job in Sanchomu.
How old are you, young man?

YUTO
Twenty. I'm studying at Kyoto
University.

MR. YAMAMOTO
Wow, a smart boy, your father must be
very proud of you.

Yuto smiles awkwardly.

YUTO
What exactly do I need to do? Run the
till for you?

MR. YAMAMOTO
Well, you'll see.

INT. YOUKI GROCERY STORE STOREROOM - DAY

There is a machine that is about the height and size of a door with a rectangular shelf. Five drinks are displayed, with a transparent board in front of the drinks to protect them from being taken away. Looking at the machine, Yuto is amazed by this invention that he has never seen before.

YUTO

What...is...this?

MR. YAMAMOTO

Did you see the supermarket on your way here? That store has stolen many of our old customers. Now they don't even come in and say hi anymore.

YUTO

You guys want to bring the 'hi' back to the shop again?

MR. YAMAMOTO

Exactly, smart boy, and you'll play the most important role to that end.

YUTO

So...(hesitating)What exactly do I need to do?

Mrs. Yamamoto has finished arranging the interior of the machine and exits from the box with sweat on her forehead.

MRS. YAMAMOTO

We need to poke a few holes in there, look at me, I'm soaked with sweat. Alright. Yuto, lemme show you how it works. Come here.

Mrs. Yamamoto waves for Yuto to go behind the machine. Yuto walks warily towards Mrs. Yamamoto and tries to take a closer look at the machine.

YUTO

You guys sure it's a machine?

INT. YOUKI GROCERY STORE - DAY

All three of them are drinking soft drinks at the store. Yuto is frantically fanning himself with a folding fan. There is no one else but the three of them.

MR. YAMAMOTO
So, Yuto, what do you say?

YUTO
I'm sorry, Mr. Yamamoto. Thank you for kindly considering me for the job, but I don't think I can pull this off. It's too much work.

MRS. YAMAMOTO
I see, Yuto. It's truly not an easy task, especially when you need to go to classes in the fall.

Mrs. Yamamoto looks at her husband disappointedly.

MRS. YAMAMOTO
I think we'll take turns doing that, then, Otto. (Jokingly) Hopefully we won't pass out before the end of our shifts.

YUTO
I didn't mean it that way.

MR. YAMAMOTO
Yuto, my young man. We're both quite old and this job is best suited for a young man like you. I can see you have great potential to make this dream come true, for us and for yourself.

YUTO
I'm sorry, but it's quite an exhausting job. I worry that I won't have enough energy to work like this every day.

MR. YAMAMOTO
What if you work part-time, and we provide a rent-free bedroom, three meals included. You can save time traveling from school and have a place to rest right after work. You can stay as long as you want. What do you think?

Yuto looks up and meets Mr. Yamamoto's sincere eyes, pondering whether he should accept this appealing offer. He looks at Mrs. Yamamoto and her head full of white hair.

Yuto takes a deep breath.

YUTO

Okay, I'll do it, but once the summer ends, I need to go back to school.

Mr. Yamamoto hugs Yuto.

INT. YOUKI GROCERY STORE STOREROOM - EVENING

Mr. Yamamoto is repairing the components of the vending machine, while Yuto is helping him with the tools.

MR. YAMAMOTO

We originally planned to reveal this publicly as soon as someone took over the job. But since you are still new to it, we want to see how much you know about the controls of the vending machine.

Mr. Yamamoto puts a few final touches on the machine.

MR. YAMAMOTO

Okay, are you ready?

Yuto walks to the back of the machine. It is the same size as the display case, with relatively limited space. He is able to rotate his body only 180 degrees. He sits down on top of a storage box and tries to breathe in as much as he can before he closes the door.

YUTO

Yes, I'm ready.

Yuto picks up a drink randomly from the boxes. He lifts a black lid and dispenses the drink into the delivery box.

MR. YAMAMOTO

Aye, Yuto, I haven't even paid yet. No need to be so nervous, just remember what I said before.

Mr. Yamamoto inserts a coin and presses a button for a drink out of the five choices. Inside, Yuto watches the coin roll down into the collection box, making sure it is the correct amount. Then he quickly picks up a drink from a box and places it into the dispensing tray.

MR. YAMAMOTO

Yuto, you gave me the wrong kind. Try again.

Mr. Yamamoto inserts a coin and presses for a drink again. Yuto double-checks the coin amount and makes sure he takes the same drink as the one chosen by Mr. Yamamoto. He then dispenses the beverage.

MR. YAMAMOTO

Woah. I can see a drink and human fingers.

MR. YAMAMOTO pushes Yuto's fingers back to the dark box where Yuto is hiding.

MR. YAMAMOTO

Your fingers are showing too much. I want the drink, not you. You just need to let the drink drop--no need to place it so gently.

YUTO

Sorry, Mr. Yamamoto. I'll try again.

EXT. YOUKI GROCERY STORE - EARLY MORNING

A banner is hanging on the front of the grocery store: JAPAN'S FIRST AUTOMATIC COLD DRINKS VENDING MACHINE. It's vending machine reveal day, and Yuto is preparing for his first day of work at his first job as a "cashier". He paces back and forth in front of the machine.

To calm himself down, he goes behind the machine and arranges the three boxes again and again, trying to create a more comfortable space in this small work area. Mr. and Mrs. Yamamoto come out from the store with snacks in hand.

MR. YAMAMOTO

Yuto, thank you for being with us. I know it's not easy, but we believe in you.

MRS. YAMAMOTO

Ganbare, Yuto! You can do this. Just tell us if you want to eat or take a break or -- whatever you want, we will get it for you. I've made some onigiri for you in case you get hungry inside.

YUTO

Hai, I'll do my best. Thank you for giving me this opportunity, Mr. Yamamoto, Mrs. Yamamoto. I won't let you down.

Mr. Yamamoto pats his shoulder as an encouragement as Yuto enters the space behind the vending machine.

MR. YAMAMOTO
(whispering) Good luck, son.

Yuto is slightly taken aback by Mr. Yamamoto's encouragement and his mode of address. He smiles and closes the door of his hiding box.

A HOUSEWIFE, early 30's, with a 5-year-old BOY, has just left the supermarket and sees the vending machine. Drawn by curiosity, they walk up and are greeted warmly by Mr. Yamamoto, who is standing next to the machine.

BOY
Mommy, what is a vending machine?

HOUSEWIFE
A vending machine--? How does this thing work?

Mr. Yamamoto guides the mother from putting in a coin to pressing the button for her favorite drink. In less than 10 seconds, a drink comes out from the machine.

MR. YAMAMOTO
A completely automated machine. Just insert a coin, press a button, and you can get any drink you like.

The housewife and the boy are stand there awestruck, looking at the drink that has just been served from the machine.

BOY
Wow. mama, I want one more. I need to tell my friends about this.

HOUSEWIFE
Yeah, me too. Thank you, sir, this is truly amazing.

INT. YOUKI GROCERY STORE - AFTERNOON

Funky jazz music is playing in the background in the store.

Mrs. Yamamoto is making lunch for Yuto while the radio is talking about her store's newest invention, the vending machine.

RADIO ANCHOR

Good morning people of Sanchom, this is Sanchomu Essence. Have you guys heard of the term "vending machine"? Today, a local grocery store took the whole town by storm with their newly invented drinking dispenser, a vending machine! Everyone is lining up to be eyewitnesses of the extraordinary historical moment of this new invention. I'll see you all there after I finish work!

INT. A RESTAURANT - AFTERNOON

Two ladies in their 30's are sitting in a dining booth chatting enthusiastically.

WOMAN 1

Can you believe it?

WOMAN 2

I heard you can get a drink with just the press of a button. We HAVE to get one later.

EXT. YOUKI GROCERY STORE - DAY

A long queue stretches away from the front of the vending machine. People of all ages are waiting outside patiently. The street is filled with voices buzzing about this machine. There are grinning faces of couples, young children and elderly men and women lining up to see the vending machine. A high school student is next in line, and squeals with excitement when it's her turn.

MR. YAMAMOTO

Miss, you first need-

The student puts the coin in and presses a button before Mr. Yamamoto finishes his instructions.

MR. YAMAMOTO

(Smiles proudly)

I guess everybody knows how it works now.

INT. BEHIND THE MACHINE - CONTINUOUS

Yuto watches the coin dropping into a coin collection box. He checks to see if the coin is the correct amount, swiftly takes a drink from one of the boxes, lifts a black lid so that his hand is not visible, and dispenses the drink from below.

YUTO
(whispering) Here you go.

INT. YOUKI GROCERY STORE - EVENING

Mrs. Yamamoto, Mr. Yamamoto and Yuto are having a feast to celebrate the great success they have achieved on the opening day for the vending machine.

MRS. YAMAMOTO
You sure you don't want to ask your parents to join us?

YUTO
Erm, no, they're...very busy. I'm sure they're very tired after work.

Sensing Yuto's uneasiness, Mrs. Yamamoto decides not to ask any further details.

MRS. YAMAMOTO
Alright then. (Raising a sake cup) To Yuto.

MR. YAMAMOTO
(Raising a sake cup)
To Yuto. You've done well today. It's all because of you. I'm so proud of you.

Yuto raises his cup of tea and clinks it with their cups.

INT. SUPERMARKET - EVENING

Mr. Mori is grocery shopping. He is buying plenty of food and drink, more than needed for one person. He even picks Yuto's favorite onigiri.

Mr. Mori goes to the checkout. While waiting, he glances at the street and sees the vending machine. He raises an eyebrow and nods in recognition. He pays the cashier, who hands him the packed grocery bags and some change.

MR. MORI
(To the cashier) *Arigato gozaimasu!*

EXT. SUPERMARKET - CONTINUOUS

Outside on the sidewalk, Mr. Mori starts to cross the street to have a closer look at the vending machine. But when he sees a dad carrying his son walk up to the vending machine, he stops.

LITTLE BOY
I want this, (pointing to a drink on
the display) one for you and one for
me.

The vending machine rolls out two drinks for the father and son. Mr. Mori fishes out some coins from the change given him in the supermarket.

MR. MORI
This should be enough for two.

He crosses the street, but then slows down and takes a few hesitant steps toward the machine.

MR. MORI
Maybe he won't like it.

Mr. Mori turns around and walks away. Yuto comes out of the vending machine and puts up a "Sold out, see you tomorrow" sign on the display.

INT. YOUKI GROCERY STORE - CONTINUOUS

Yuto enters the store and smiles, delighted at the smell of Mrs. Yamamoto's homemade dinner. Mrs. Yamamoto waves her hand to invite Yuto to join the table.

MRS. YAMAMOTO
Well done, Yuto. You did a great job!
I bought beef for you today.

Mr. Yamamoto is a bit drunk after drinking a few cups of sake.

MR. YAMAMOTO
And sake! Cheers, Yuto.

YUTO & MRS. YAMAMOTO
Cheers.

MR. YAMAMOTO

Yuto, I need more sake. I'm having
the best day of my life.

Yuto stands up and walks into the storage room.

INT. YOUKI GROCERY STORE - CONTINUOUS

While Yuto is finding a new bottle of sake in the storeroom,
the phone rings. Mrs. Yamamoto is washing dishes in the
kitchen, so a tipsy Mr. Yamamoto picks up the phone.

MR. YAMAMOTO

Hello, Youki Store, how may I help
you?

BUSINESSMAN

Hello? Can I speak to Mr. Yamamoto,
please.

MR. YAMAMOTO

Yes, that's me. What I can help you
with?

BUSINESSMAN

Hello, Mr. Yamamoto. Sorry to bother
you this late at night. I'm calling
from Hitachi, one of the biggest
electronics conglomerates in Japan.
Our company is prepared to offer you
a substantial sum for the rights to
the vending machine that you have
invented.

Mr. Yamamoto sobers up a bit when he realizes from the tone of
the caller that this is a serious matter.

MR. YAMAMOTO

Yes, go ahead.

BUSINESSMAN

Mr. Yamamoto, your innovation in
developing this unprecedented
technology is highly appreciated by
our company. We're particularly
interested in the technical schema
for this vending machine. We'd really
like to purchase your machine
technology so that everyone in Japan
can enjoy the vending machines and

learn about your incredible contribution.

MR. YAMAMOTO

I'm sorry, but I won't sell the rights to anyone. This invention is the joint work of me and my son. It's precious to me. Thank you for the offer. Good night.

BUSINESSMAN

Wait a minute! Mr. Yamamoto, you can negotiate any price you want.

MR. YAMAMOTO

No. I repeat, no. My son built this before he went off to war. Even if you offered me the emperor's throne, I wouldn't sell it.

Mr. Yamamoto hangs up the phone with a mix of emotions on his face. At that moment, Yuto returns from the storage room with a bottle of sake.

YUTO

Are you okay, Mr. Yamamoto? You look upset.

MR. YAMAMOTO

Me? Yeah, I'm fine, probably it's the alcohol rushing to my head. Hey, I thought you'd gone to bed, you were gone for quite a while.

Yuto opens up the sake for Mr. Yamamoto.

YUTO

It took me a while to find this in the back. There are soft drinks everywhere now.

MR. YAMAMOTO

That's fine. We'll clean it up tomorrow. Yuto, sit down here with me.

Yuto takes the empty seat next to Mr. Yamamoto.

MR. YAMAMOTO

You really did a great job today. We're very impressed with your work.

Mr. Yamamoto pours some of his sake into Yuto's cup.

YUTO

I'm really happy I met you and Mrs.
Yamamoto.

(giggles)

Thank you for giving me the
opportunity to see this great
invention, even if it is false
advertising.

MR. YAMAMOTO

(chuckles)

This will be a little secret of ours.

YUTO

Cheers.

MR. YAMAMOTO

Cheers.

Yuto finishes his drink in one go like Mr. Yamamoto does.

INT. MR. MORI'S HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

Mr. Mori is ready to leave for work. He knocks on Yuto's
bedroom door with a sandwich on a plate in his hand and waits
a few seconds. There is no response. He opens the door and the
room is the same as it was when Yuto left.

MR. MORI

Where could he possibly have gone,
it's been two days already...

Mr. Mori looks at the sandwich he made for Yuto. He lets out a
big sigh while putting a picture of Yuto into his satchel bag.

MR. MORI

Yuto, please tell me you are fine.

He grabs his sandwich and leaves the house.

EXT. YOUKI GROCERY STORE - MORNING

Mr. Mori is eating the sandwich he made for Yuto and stops
when he sees the vending machine. He takes a coin out of his
pocket and prepares to insert it into the machine. Just then,
Yuto comes out of the store with three boxes of drinks. He
bends down to put the boxes into the machine, and as he stands
up, he is surprised to see his father.

YUTO

Father.

MR. MORI

Yuto, (pauses) here you are.

Awkward silence--they are looking at each other but neither of them speaks.

MR. MORI

Why are you here?

YUTO

Why am I not here?

MR. MORI

It's been two days; you know how worried I've been?

YUTO

Go away, I need to work. I don't want to make a scene.

MR. MORI

What are you wearing? Is it a janitor's uniform? A janitor--so you haven't been home for two days and now here you are, a janitor.

YUTO

Not just two days, I'm not coming back, I'm sick of living with you.

Yuto nudges Mr. Mori out of the way, intending to enter the store. Mr. Mori grabs Yuto's arm before Yuto can push the door open.

MR. MORI

Yuto Mori, stand here. We're not done yet.

Yuto shakes off Mr. Mori's grip.

YUTO

Stop ordering me around. The last two days without you have been the happiest of my life. Go away.

MR. MORI

Is that how you talk to your father? You only do what I ask you not to do. I ask you to study business but you choose engineering. I ask you to be a

businessman, not a lowly janitor. Why can't you respect and listen to me like other kids do?

YUTO

I've been listening to you for my WHOLE LIFE. What else I can do besides everything you order me to do! You're always telling me to do this and that, saying what you do is for my own good, and rejecting every decision I make on my own. Not once, not even once, have I ever had your support for what I'm doing...

MR. MORI

I haven't supported you? Other kids study business, I let you take engineering.

YUTO

(sarcastically)

Wow, then you must be the best dad in the world!

MR. MORI

My best friend died because of engineering.

Startled by his father's sudden outburst, Yuto waits for him to continue. Mr. Mori sits on a bench outside the store.

MR. MORI

He was enlisted to build a railway on the River Kwai. He didn't do anything wrong. Probably the only thing he did wrong was to tell them he knew how to do construction.

(Pause)

They took all the engineers. They promised they would have the best protection. He promised he'd come back.

Yuto sits next to his father.

YUTO

I didn't know...

MR. MORI

I don't want them to take you away from me. My wife is gone, he's gone, and if you were too... I'll have no one left. I've done everything I can to protect you.

YUTO

You should have told me.

MR. MORI

You don't listen.

YUTO

You don't let me speak.

The two let out a sigh.

YUTO

I'm not a janitor by the way.

Yuto points at the vending machine.

YUTO

I'm the man behind the curtain.

MR. MORI

You made this?

YUTO

No, I work in it.

INT. YOUKI GROCERY STORE - DAY

The bell rings as Yuto enters the store, brushing off some light snow.

YUTO

Good morning, Mr. Yamamoto and Mr. Yamamoto.

Mrs. Yamamoto clutches her hands and turns to look at Yuto with a worried expression.

YUTO

Where is Mr. Yamamoto? I haven't seen him lately. Mrs. Yamamoto, is everything alright?

MRS. YAMAMOTO

Hello, Yuto. There's something I'd like to talk to you about. Come and have a seat first.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Yuto, carrying a flower basket, arrives at the door to a hospital room. He knocks on the door and waits.

MR. YAMAMOTO

Come in.

Yuto enters the room.

YUTO

How are you feeling, Mr. Yamamoto? I've brought your favourite drink from the store. I didn't ask the nurse if you can drink it or not, it seems like you can't, but I still brought it anyway-

MR. YAMAMOTO

Slow down, young man. I'm perfectly fine, don't act like I'm at death's door.

YUTO

No, no, no, that's not what I meant, I'm sorry-

MR. YAMAMOTO

It's okay, son. You know, I know I've said this many times, but this really is the most delightful time of my life since I met you.

Mr. Yamamoto looks out the window.

YUTO

Me too. You're like a father to me, and even better than my own father.

MR. YAMAMOTO

I actually overheard that fight you had with your father.

YUTO

That's already long time ago.

MR. YAMAMOTO

Yeah, it reminds me of the last conversation I had with my son.

YUTO

Last conversation...?

MR. YAMAMOTO

He was about your age at the time. But you know, World War Two. When we heard of him again, his name was on the memorial list for the Pearl Harbor attack.

YUTO

I'm sorry to hear that.

MR. YAMAMOTO

I know you're still angry at your father. You may think that he's treated you badly, but I know, as a father, you may not know this, but he was actually worried about you. Who knows what will happen next, right? I thought my son would return from the war in glory, but it turns out I didn't even get a chance to say a final goodbye to him.

YUTO

It's different.

MR. YAMAMOTO

We're leaving Japan soon. Mrs. Yamamoto and I have decided it'd be best for me to get treatment in the U.S. But there's a thing I want you to do for us.

YUTO

Yes?

MR. YAMAMOTO

Go talk to your dad. Sit down and have a real talk. Listen to what he has to say and let him listen to what you say. He is, after all, your family. Ignoring him isn't going to solve anything.

Mr. Yamamoto takes out an envelope from a drawer and places it in Yuto's hands.

MR. YAMAMOTO

We won't be running the store anymore. We don't want to keep you trapped in that box forever. Here's a bonus for you to pursue your dream. Do something different. Get out of that box. You have so much potential, but you don't seem to realize it. Mrs. Yamamoto and I have a lot of faith in you.

EXT. YOUKI GROCERY STORE - EVENING

The store is closed down and there is a big banner on the door that says "For Sale". Yuto stares at it for a long time as he holds the envelope from Mr. Yamamoto. He opens the envelope and takes out the card inside.

YUTO

(Reads the scribbled words on the card) Hitachi. Automatic vending machine. Make it happen.

He walks near the vending machine.

YUTO

Automatic. Hmm...

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING SIX MONTHS LATER

Mr. Mori is sitting on the sofa, reading. Yuto enters the room, and Mr. Mori looks up.

MR. MORI

The moment has come?

Yuto nods his head. Mr. Mori stands up and follows him out of the living room.

INT. YUTO'S BEDROOM - EVENING

The bedroom is messy, with tools and wires lying all over the floor and desk. The vending machine stands in the middle of the bedroom, with Yuto and Mr. Mori beside it. Yuto inserts a coin into the vending machine and presses a button. Within a second, a beer tumbles down into the dispensing tray. Yuto bends down, picks up the can, and hands it to his father with a smile.

MR. MORI
(Smiling back at Yuto)
You made it happen.

YUTO
Yes, I did. With a lot of support.

The camera pans to Yuto's desk, where there is a photo of Mr. and Mrs. Yamamoto in America, beside a photo of Mr. Mori.

FADE TO BLACK