

We Go By Many Names

By Mika Higgins-Woo

Lights go up on five Asian teenage girls sitting on blocks arranged in a circle, facing away from each other and towards the audience.

ALL: We go by many names.

OLIVIA and MINA: Although we each have our own.

MAYA:(*stands up*) Maya.

OLIVIA:(*stands up*) Olivia.

MINA:(*stands up*) Mina.

CHLOE:(*stands up*) Chloe.

GRACE:(*stands up*) Grace.

GRACE and CHLOE: Yet, some for some reason we get called-

MAYA and OLIVIA: -other names.

OLIVIA and CHLOE: Names of people whom we know only by sight.

ALL: By sight.

MAYA: Sight is what people know us by.

MINA: We are clumped together-

OLIVIA: -forcefully, monotonously.

MINA: We are told that we are similar, interchangeable-

CHLOE: -yet we have nothing in common.

GRACE: Nothing except our faces,

MINA: our dark hair,

MAYA: our single-lidded eyes

CHLOE: and our small noses

OLIVIA: but that's it.

MINA: (*steps forward*) I know what to expect on the second or third days of school. Once we've all played our little name games the teachers remember me as "that Asian kid" only to teach their next class to remember the one Asian kid there the

same way. I've learned to expect to be called Olivia or Maya or Chloe or Grace in the next class.

OLIVIA, MAYA, CHLOE, GRACE: *(steps forward)* Which are our names-

MINA: -not mine. And to have to correct them and politely remind them, again, that no sorry, my name is Mina and that Maya is in the other English class.

GRACE: That my name is Grace and that Chloe is in the other math class.

OLIVIA: That my name is Olivia and that Grace is in the other gym class.

MINA: That my name is Mina and Maya is in the other bio class.

ALL: We stay silent-

CHLOE: -and polite

MINA: -smiling,

OLIVIA: -demure,

MAYA: -tight-lipped.

ALL: But what we want to say is that, no!

MAYA: My name is Maya

OLIVIA: Olivia

MINA: Mina

CHLOE: Chloe

GRACE: Grace

ALL: ...and the girl that you just mistook me for, *(pause)* that's the other Asian girl you teach.

Everyone sits down and pauses before moving onto the next line.

GRACE: It just feels so wounding,

OLIVIA: that what you know me for isn't my track times

MAYA: my bio research

MINA: my newspaper articles

CHLOE: my thrifting skills

GRACE: or my electric guitar performances.

ALL: You don't even know me enough to differentiate me from her.

Everyone points to the person on their right while still not looking at each other (creating a circle of arms) and stomps once simultaneously on "her."

MINA: Like you take the time to learn Jennifer apart from Amy even though they both have blonde hair and blue eyes-

OLIVIA: -and Joan from Julie even though they have brown curly hair,

CHLOE and MINA: -but you can't tell us apart.

MAYA: We're so exotic and unique that you just mix us up because we stand out.

GRACE: Well, if we're so unique then why are we mistaken for each other?

MAYA: Why do you recommend we hang out because-

OLIVIA: -"we'd have so much in common"?

MINA: Or think that we're cousins because-

GRACE: -"you swear you can't look that much alike and not be related."

ALL: Why?

All girls stand up on "why."

OLIVIA: Once I decided to try to talk to one of my teachers. I took a deep breath and I went up to him and asked why he called me Chloe. He replied that: 'he knew I was Grace. It was just at a quick glance I looked like Maya.' I'm Olivia. *(sits down)*

MINA: My friend Madison genuinely thought that I was embarrassed that my twin sister was Maya and that's why I never mentioned it. I've never even met Maya before. *(sits down)*

GRACE: Once, in first grade, Mina and I were playing together. Our teacher came up to me and asked if some girl could join our game and that maybe we could teach her a little bit of Chinese while we were at it. I'm Korean. Mina's Japanese. *(sits down)*

MAYA: Once I was shopping with classmates on a school trip and at some point the store became a little too crowded. The shopkeeper came up to Chloe and I, who happened to be standing next to each other examining sweatshirts, and politely asked us to leave the store because he was afraid we'd spread COVID-19 to his other customers. We were the only Asian people there. But he asked, so we left. *(sits down)*

CHLOE: Once my teacher was handing back tests and she walked up to me and told me that I had forgotten to write my name at the top and that next time she was going to have to take points off the test. I apologized and took my test back. At the top were the cursive letters that my teacher had written out scornfully. They spelled O-L-I-V-I-A. Olivia isn't even in my grade. *(sits down)*

GRACE: And everytime,

MAYA: none of us corrected them.

MINA and OLIVIA: Everytime,

CHLOE: it wasn't our problem,

MAYA: but instead the teacher's problem.

OLIVIA and GRACE: It shouldn't be our problem,

ALL: and yet it is.

MAYA: Because everytime, I just feel so hurt, like teachers, the people who you're supposed to trust, can't even remember who you are. Can't tell you apart from people who are so vastly different in every way besides one.

OLIVIA: Because everytime, I just want to bang my fist on the table and yell.

MINA: Because everytime my classmates shoot me looks like "why aren't you standing up for yourself?? That's not your name!" and I just want to shout that they don't understand. No one does.

CHLOE: Because everytime these popular girls who wouldn't ever talk to me offer to correct the teacher and when I say "oh no thank you that's ok," they do it anyways. Usually phrase it in this tone dripping with sugar like "oh I think she's too scared to correct you, but that's not her name" and then I have to stand and listen my teacher's *deepest and most sincere apologies* that I know I wouldn't get if I had said the same words.

GRACE: Because everytime I feel this guilt like "am I not unique enough that the only defining feature of me is my looks? Why doesn't anyone know me for anything other than where my parents grew up? Is it because I didn't give them anything else to know me by? Don't I owe that to them??" When I don't. I don't owe anything to anyone.

ALL: We don't owe anything to anyone.

They all sit down with a thud and wait a minute to let their message sink in for the audience.

MAYA: The sad thing is-

OLIVIA: -that this isn't unusual.

MINA: This happens all the time.

CHLOE: In fact, I bet it has happened at least once to every Asian girl at my school.

GRACE: It's happened to my cousins, my sisters, my mom-

MAYA: -and the other sad thing is-

OLIVIA: -that although they definitely have to go through the same thing, guys don't get it as much as we do.

MINA: Because for some reason, it's easier to differentiate guys from each other but not us?

CHLOE: There are three Asian guys in my class at school and they never get mixed up.

GRACE: So why's that?

MAYA and CHLOE: It's just sometimes-

OLIVIA and MINA: -it's just too much.

GRACE and MAYA: It's too frustratingly unfair.

OLIVIA: And all I want to do is-

MINA: -talk to someone.

CHLOE: Talk to someone who would understand.

ALL: But no one ever understands!

Everyone starts yelling out to the audience miscellaneous phrases about overwhelming feelings and having no one to talk to about them.

The next lines go faster and faster as frustration builds. The noises slowly grow louder and louder until everyone is fully yelling.

ALL: (still yelling, but now in unison) No. One. Ever. Understands!

Screaming stops. Everyone suddenly turns around so that they are facing the inside of the circle instead of facing outside towards the audience. Their faces are looking towards the ground so that they can't see each other yet.

After three seconds of not looking at each other, the heads snap up and they see each other for the first time in the play. Everyone gasps in unison, then waits three more seconds before continuing.

CHLOE sits down, at the same time, so do GRACE and OLIVIA, so that the only people remaining are MAYA and MINA.

Hallway talk sound effects play in the background and MAYA and MINA bump into each other like they are walking in the hallway. They freeze, still facing each other.

MAYA: (turning out to the audience) Usually if I ran into Mina in the hallway, I'd just apologize and move on to my next class. But this time, she started to talk to me. (turns back to MINA)

MINA: (turning out to the audience) Usually if I ran into Maya in the hallway, I'd just walk past to meet my friends at the other end of the hallway. But this time, something was different. I knew that none of my friends would understand like Maya would. So I closed my eyes and opened my mouth. (turns back to MAYA)

MINA: Hey. Um...your name is Maya right?

MAYA: Uh yeah, you're Mina.

MINA: Uh huh, I'm actually on my way to English with Mr. Henkin right now -- *(casually adding)* he always calls me Maya.

MAYA: No way! Same! I mean of course he doesn't call me Maya, but he calls me Mina.

MINA: Ugh, it's literally so annoying.

MAYA: I know. God, it makes me so angry sometimes.

MINA: Like you want to bang your fists on the table and yell?

MAYA: Oh my God, exactly like that!

MINA: Where are you going?

MAYA: I'm on my way to bio with-

MINA: Mr. Smith?

MAYA: Yeah.

MINA: Oh my God, once, he called my Chloe, Maya and Grace in the same day.

MAYA: That's literally so relatable.

MINA: I know right! And once, my friend Madison over there *(points out into the distance)* thought that we *(point to MAYA and then to herself)* were twins. And I was like huh. We don't even look alike!

MAYA: Yeah, what? You're Japanese right? I'm Chinese. Ugh, that's so annoying, sorry.

MINA: Tell me about it.

MAYA: Listen, I have to go to class now but we should totally hang out sometime. It's nice knowing that I'm not the only one.

MINA: Uh yeah sure. What's your phone number? *(pulling out phone)*

MAYA: 518-884-4567

MINA: Oof, two 4's? Your Chinese parents must not like that!

MAYA: Eh it's fine, there are two 8's. And you know....good always cancels evil.

MINA: Ok fine you win. I'll text you later....Chloe!

MAYA: Maya!

MINA: Joking, joking.

MAYA: Oh boy. See you around.

They high five and giddily turn around to face the audience. This is the first time the audience has seen either of them smile...they both sit down and freeze.

Spotlight on OLIVIA as she stands up. She is making the shift from the scene between characters to speaking to the audience again.

OLIVIA: So there is this thing that our school does where we are are grouped into discussions by our race.

CHLOE: *(stands up)* These “affinity groups,” as they call them, are for us to ‘talk about our feelings and experiences away from the pressure of peers who don’t look the same.’

GRACE: *(stands up)* But what’s wrong about that is that just because we look the same doesn’t mean that we are going to have the same experiences or feel the same ways about them.

MAYA: *(stands up)* We’ve had these affinity groups ever since we were in sixth grade.

MINA: *(stands up)* But cause we’re in high school they decided to do smaller more intimate groups for some reason.

OLIVIA: Maybe it’s because we were “maturing teenagers.”

CHLOE: The other change that they made for high schoolers was they took the teachers out of the room.

GRACE: Today I got an email from the head of school saying that instead of assembly, I should head to room 501 for an ‘affinity experience.’

MINA: I was the first one in the classroom.... when people started showing up one by one everyone kinda just made eye contact and pulled out their phones, waiting for the period to begin.

OLIVIA: I head to the room, glad to get out of assembly, and I walk into a room of Asian girls staring at their phones.

CHLOE: I got there last, it was kinda awkward because none of us know each other at all.

MAYA: Once we were all together around a table no one spoke for a long time.

All the girls turn on their blocks so that they’re facing each other as if around a table, dialog continues as if it is actually happening in real time.

OLIVIA: So, um, hi... I’m Olivia.

MINA: Uhhhh hey, I’m Mina.

CHLOE: Chloe.

GRACE: Um... I'm Grace.

MAYA: Maya!

CHLOE: This is kinda awkward.

(awkward stares and giggles)

MINA: I mean, at least we get to skip assembly right?

MAYA: But I mean, like, maybe they're on to something.

OLIVIA: What do you mean?

MAYA: Well, like, maybe it would be good to have a space to talk about little things without everyone just staring and not getting it, right?

GRACE: Uhhh, what do you mean "little things?" I don't think any of us have, like, anything in common.

MAYA: No, I don't mean like interests or like extracurriculars or anything like that. I meant like things that have to do with being Asian.

CHLOE: Ok sure yeah, but I still don't get that either -- like, 'hello, I'm Chloe, my parents immigrated from China.' Wow. So enlightening. And like I don't even really think that's true for everyone here either....not everyone is even Chinese.

MINA: Yeah but I think I understand what Maya is saying. Like this is here to talk about the little things at school that friends and teachers wouldn't understand

OLIVIA: Okay I agree with Grace... "little things?" You guys are saying these things like we're like aliens and like we have weird little alien tics or something that makes us different.

MINA: No, but like teachers making mistakes and stuff you know what I mean?

OLIVIA: Not really...

MAYA: You're telling me that you've *never* been called Grace...or Chloe by a teacher or friend before?

OLIVIA: I mean, yeah, but like it doesn't really matter that much to me you know, like its not really the basis of a classroom discussion. Like ok...I'm being called a different name...but the people that know me know my real name and that's what matters, right?

MINA: But you never feel hurt that your teachers don't know your name, or don't care enough to learn it?

GRACE: That's exactly how *I* feel! Sometimes I just wanna be like 'uh *no* dude I've known you for like all year....get it right.'

CHLOE: Yeah I guess you're right, but I wouldn't ever like *do* anything about it...

GRACE: Why not though? Like environmental club has rallies every other day...why can't we do something for a change? Is speaking out really only applicable to reducing, reusing and recycling?

MINA: Yeah, we should like post something on Instagram about it or about this group or something. You know, to like spread awareness or whatever.

MAYA: Oooh you might be on to something...but, like, what would we post???

OLIVIA: Well, if our point is that everyone is different and that we should be treated like different people, maybe it would be cool to do something like..I don't know..post something of each of us doing something we love to show that we are all different people?

CHLOE: Oooh ok, and then we could maybe add a picture of us together at this meeting? It could have a caption saying something like 'umm hello? We are all different people just like everyone else, and PLUS we all look different as well if you really look.'

GRACE: *(laughs)* Maybe phrase it differently but yeah, that would be so cool.

MINA: Okay, okay....everyone send me a picture of themselves doing something they love. My phone number is 518 884 4567. Mine can be me playing volleyball.

All girls pull out their phones and start swiping on their phones to find the right picture.

CHLOE: Oooh ok...I'll put me riding my bike. *(shows picture)*

OLIVIA: Ooooooh your bike looks so cool ...I just sent one of my last track meet!

MAYA: Oh that's perfect...here's me playing piano at a recital.

GRACE: Did you get mine? It's me playing the guitar.

MINA: Wait, you guys, all of these photos are so cool! This is a such good idea! Here, I'll make a group chat.

OLIVIA: Alright chill. Let's take that picture of all of us for the end of the post right now for the other photo.

MINA: Yeah okay, everyone lean in!! *(pulls out phone, takes picture, camera sound effect)*

All girls' heads drop and the lights go out. They swivel around while sitting down so that they are facing the audience.

ALL: We go by many names. Maya, Olivia, Mina, Chloe, Grace.

GRACE: But now-

OLIVIA: -we go by different names....*(everyone reaches out and holds hands while facing towards the audience)*

ALL: ...together.

Blackout.