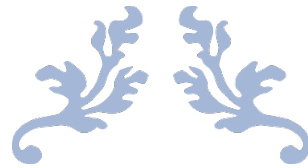


Carlos Palanca Awards 2022



THE LOST FILIPINO PATRIOTS OF AMERICA

Full-Length Play - English Division



SYNOPSIS

Conflicts of immigration, race, patriotism, and diaspora surface as Filipinos in America attempt to survive an ongoing pandemic, while coping with the devastating news they hear about their homeland.

A magazine editor wants to write an inspiring Filipino story to uplift the spirits of Fil-Am communities in America, but her subject - a cynical Overseas Filipino Worker - shares a story that isn't very uplifting.

A woman falls in love with the man she is in a marriage of convenience with, and decides to return the money she was paid to enter a sham marriage with him.

A journalist from the Philippines makes fun of a magazine's decision to feature his parents as leaders of the Filipino-American community, provoking an argument on what it means to be a "true Filipino."

"The Lost Filipino Patriots of America" is a play about people who are scarred from loving a nation in crisis; and whose wounds illuminate an earnest patriotism that shines through trauma and fragmentation.

It is a portrayal of the migrants' modest attempts to find a sense of nation by desperately rummaging through the debris of the country's violent history.

CHARACTERS

"ASHLEY" Parker	(Early 30s) Magazine Editor
Margarita "RITA" Domingo	(Late 20s) Caregiver
Jose "JOE" Padilla	(Mid 30s) Chef
Magnolia "MAGGIE" Padilla	(Early 30s) Hospital Administrator
Maria Teresita "TESS" Bautista	(Early 50s) Recruitment Agency Executive
Alberto "BOOM" Bautista Sr.	(Early 50s) Retired Boxer
Alberto Bautista "JR"	(Late 20s) Journalist

SETTING

Various places in Chicago, during the last quarter of the the year 2020, at the height of the Covid-19 global pandemic.

ACT 1:

“THE AMERICAN DREAM”

AT RISE:

We find ourselves in Pastor Bob’s home; a regular dining area of a house in the suburbs of Chicago.

In the middle of the stage is a dining room set: a small, circular table surrounded by four chairs.

Sitting on one of the chairs is Ashley Parker.

ENTER LEFT, Margarita “Rita” Domingo; she’s wearing a caregiver’s uniform.

RITA: Sorry for taking a while! Eddy told me he was having difficulty breathing, so I had to prop him up with pillows.

ASHLEY: No worries, Rita. I’m glad that you’re taking good care of Pastor Ed.

Rita sits on one of the chairs; in front of Ashley.

ASHLEY: You know I was talking to Pastor Bob last week. He told me that if it wasn't for you, his father would already be with the Lord. He's very thankful.

RITA: Is that so? To be honest, I wish I could visit more often. These days, I can only come on the weekends; like now, when Bob's preparing for the congregation tomorrow. But it's mostly him taking care of Eddy now.

Rita seems preoccupied.

She glances at EXIT LEFT.

RITA: *(to Ashley)* Sorry; I thought I heard Eddy call me.

ASHLEY: It's alright. Pastor Bob mentioned that Pastor Ed's last stroke was pretty bad. Is it true that it left him paralyzed?

RITA: He's doing better but a few weeks ago, he could barely talk. Now, he never stops talking.

(smiles) I think he misses talking to the fellowship so much 'cause he keeps on giving me sermons.

ASHLEY: That's great news! But maybe it's also time for Pastor Bob to permanently take over the fellowship in place of his father? I mean, it's quite common for pastoral succession to go from father to son, right?

RITA: I don't know about that... I don't know if Bob wants that.

ASHLEY: How come? Did Pastor Bob say anything about it?

RITA: *(smiles)* He didn't say anything specific. He just said that he wants to take a break from ministry and that he needs time to make sure that the pastoral succession of the fellowship is "God's call" and not just "nepotism."

(scoffs) He asked me what I thought. What do I say, right? I mean, what do I know about "God's call?"

ASHLEY: So, what did you tell him?

RITA: I just told him to do what makes him happy.

ASHLEY: Has he made a decision about it yet?

RITA: I don't know, but he told me that he'll talk to the fellowship about it tomorrow...

Ashley nods.

ASHLEY: I'm glad Pastor Bob has someone he can talk to. It must get quite lonely being a single pastor.

Rita shrugs.

ASHLEY: Maybe he speaks so highly of you, because you've been giving him good advice. When I asked Pastor Bob if he knew any Filipinos that could be

considered role-models or “leaders of the Fil-Am community,” he said
you were perfect for it.

RITA: *(laughs)* Me? A role-model? I don’t know about that.

(Rita stands abruptly and changes the topic) Would you like anything to
drink? Water? Juice?

ASHLEY: Just water, please and thank you!

*Rita stands to grab a glass, but realizes that
all the drinking glasses are dirty and left on
the kitchen sink.*

RITA: *(shakes her head)* Bob, Bob, Bob... He never washes the dishes.

*Rita starts putting the plates and glasses in
the dishwasher.*

ASHLEY: Never mind, Rita. It’s okay! I’m not that thirsty.

RITA: *(smiles)* Well, I’m thirsty... And also nervous.

*Ashley stands from her seat and approaches
Rita.*

ASHLEY: *(smiles)* Nervous? What are you nervous about?

RITA: If you're looking for Fil-Am role-models, I know someone who I think fits the mold. The junior administrator of our hospital is *Pinay*; her name is Maggie Padilla. I can introduce you two.

ASHLEY: Sure. I would love to meet her, too.

Rita places two glasses on the table and takes out a pitcher of water from the fridge.

Meanwhile, Ashley returns to her seat at the table.

ASHLEY: By the way, why are you in your uniform? Do you usually wear one when you're taking care of Pastor Ed?

RITA: Oh, no! I usually don't, but I just came from my shift.

ASHLEY: *(surprised)* You haven't gone home yet?

RITA: No, but it's okay. Sometimes I stay here, because it's closer to work. They have a guest room anyway, and some of my clothes are still here from before, when I was Eddy's stay-in caregiver.

(a beat) You know, I didn't really want to go back to hospital work, but since the pandemic, donations from the fellowship decreased, so Eddy and Bob can't afford to pay me full-time. I had to find extra work to make ends meet. I feel so guilty about that.

ASHLEY: Why? Don't be! Times are hard and we do our best to survive.

(a beat) How's the new job though? Are they treating you well there?

Rita laughs and shakes her head.

ASHLEY: Come on... Tell me about it!

RITA: *(laughs)* Well, everyone is overworked and underpaid. I know Maggie is doing her best, but we're really understaffed, and we're running out of supplies.

(a beat) To make matters worse, sometimes there are people holding rallies at the parking lot like a bunch of idiots with matching placards that say, "Give me liberty or give me Covid," and then, when we go there to park, they start screaming at us. "I don't see any Covid patients! Covid is a hoax!"

(laughs) Obviously, there are no Covid patients in the parking lot! Because why would we put them there? It's a parking lot! For cars! If we put our patients there, they'll die from the cold because, again, it's a freakin' parking lot!

ASHLEY: Yikes. I can only imagine how difficult life must be right now for frontliners, during this pandemic. It must be exhausting dealing with all the craziness. How are you holding up?

RITA: *(thinks)* Me? I'm okay. I can't complain, because I know that I'm one of the lucky ones. We're the lucky ones.

ASHLEY: What do you mean?

RITA: We're lucky because we're here in the US!

(a beat) My batchmates in the Philippines – at the height of the pandemic – they were forced to make their own protective equipment using duct tape and trash bags!

(whispers) There are even rumors that, initially, the government didn't want to test for Covid, so they could hide the gravity of the situation.

ASHLEY: I'm sure there are so many Fil-Ams worrying about their relatives back there. Just the other day one of my friends told me that some government officials are using the pandemic to further consolidate political power by passing reprehensible laws, at a time when citizens unable to gather and protest because of a lockdown.

RITA: True! I know we have problems here, too, but at least we have a vaccine and come November, we might even have a new president.

(a beat) But, of course, I can't help but think of my family and friends back home.

ASHLEY: Right, right... That's actually why we were thinking of publishing an inspiring issue of our magazine for Christmas. I mean, our community is constantly bombarded by bad news! It's exhausting.

(a beat) We were thinking that, since it's Christmas, it would be nice to collect "inspiring stories" that the community can feel positive about.

RITA: *(laughs)* Ahh! So that's what this is for! I suddenly feel the pressure, Ashley. I'm just a caregiver!

ASHLEY: Come on, Rita. You're not just a caregiver. We all know that medical professionals - like yourself - are modern-day heroes! You frontliners are all heroes!

RITA: *(laughs)* For real?

ASHLEY: *(excited)* Absolutely! Also, it's so nice to talk to someone who's more in-touch with the culture and the context of our country.

RITA: Bob told me that you wanted to come here to interview me, but I really don't know what it'll be about.

ASHLEY: Okay then. Before I start asking you questions, I'll give you a little background.

RITA: Okay.

ASHLEY: So, "*The Fil-Am Times*," is a national publication that provides news and updates about the Filipino-American experience. We publish material about Fil-Am issues like immigration, diaspora, mental health, and cultural identity.

(a beat) Most of the time, our content is published on digital media platforms, but sometimes we make physical copies of the magazine. For example, since it's Christmastime, we're making copies to allow our subscribers to send them out as gifts to their relatives.

Ashley transfers to the seat next to Rita and shows her a sample.

ASHLEY: Look... This is the one we made last Christmas. The theme for this one was Christmas traditions that Filipino families from the Philippines brought here to the US.

RITA: Traditions? Like what; playing Jose Mari Chan songs?

ASHLEY: More like, making *parols* and making makeshift tambourines with bottlecaps.

RITA: Oh! Right...

(browses through the magazine sample) This is so nice... Can I keep it?

ASHLEY: Of course! I brought that here for you!

RITA: Thank you!

ASHLEY: The one we're currently developing was actually conceptualized when I attended a Zoom-service by Pastor Bob about a month ago.

(a beat) He spoke about how this pandemic has affected our community: people are losing jobs, money is tight, and it's really a difficult time for Americans right now.

(a beat) Fil-Ams are especially affected because many members of our community are frontliners. To add to that, we're also aware of what our family and friends in the Philippines are going through—

RITA: *(interrupts)* You know, if you didn't tell me you're Filipino, I would never think of you as *Pinay*.

ASHLEY: Really? Why?

RITA: It's because your accent and your aura—

ASHLEY: My "aura?"

RITA: Yes! Your vibe is so American...

ASHLEY: Don't let the accent fool you. I was born and raised in the Philippines.

RITA: Really?

ASHLEY: Yeah. I grew up there! I was already 16 when we migrated here. It should have been sooner, but my parents wanted me to graduate from high school, at least. Honestly, that time, I wanted to fail on purpose, because I didn't want to leave. I mean, who wants to leave all their friends behind, right?

RITA: Why did your parents migrate?

ASHLEY: They said they wanted a better life for me and my siblings.

(a beat) You know, the usual; the American Dream.

RITA: Did you find it?

ASHLEY: Which one?

RITA: The "American Dream?"

ASHLEY: I don't know. What's the "American Dream" for you?

RITA: My American Dream is simple... I want to bring my parents here. I also want to get a good job, so I can buy a house.

A moment.

RITA: But is that it? Is that the "American Dream" we all came here for?

ASHLEY: *(smiles)* I really don't know...

RITA: I don't know if it's worth all the trouble.

A long silence.

RITA: *(chuckles)* Sorry... What were we talking about? The Fil-Am Times! Right! You were telling me about the new issue you're making...

ASHLEY: *(smiles)* Yes. I was saying that a few weeks ago, I spoke to my EIC and pitched an idea for our next issue. I told him that our theme should be: "Hope." He liked the idea and even revealed that our website's digital metrics show that "inspiring immigrant stories" gather the most engagement from our audience.

RITA: So, this interview is for "inspiring immigrant stories?"

ASHLEY: That is correct. My colleagues and I have been looking for possible candidates to feature. The goal is to take these stories and bring them to our Fil-Am community, to give them hope and comfort this Christmas, even while we're in the middle of a pandemic. Our community needs some hope and comfort, am I right?

RITA: Yes, of course.

ASHLEY: *(excited)* And you're one of the people we've decided to feature! Congratulations!

RITA: I really don't know if I'm qualified for that!

ASHLEY: Of course, you are! Pastor Bob said that you're a true pillar of our community; humble, hard-working, unselfish —

RITA: *(interrupts)* I don't know if Bob forgot to tell you, but I'm not a Filipino-American. I'm technically an OFW on a non-immigrant Visa for medical professionals.

ASHLEY: That's fine! My mom was one too before she became a citizen and petitioned for our family to migrate here.

(a beat) You know what? These migrant stories of our health workers are so common among Filipino-Americans that one can almost say that's it's integral to our cultural identity. There's so much to unpack and discuss.

(a beat) The truth is, I'm really invested in these stories because I want to gain some insight about my own mother's struggle. Unfortunately, she passed away before I got the opportunity to talk to her about this.

RITA: I'm sorry to hear that, Ashley.

ASHLEY: *(smiles)* It's alright.

RITA: For real though, I'm feeling a little pressured right now; I don't want to be the representative for *all* health workers. I just don't think I'm special enough to be featured.

ASHLEY: What are you talking about?! You are special! You're all special! There have actually been studies about the Philippine phenomenon of overseas work. In fact, to prepare for this interview, I read an article online. Wait; I bookmarked it.

(reads from phone) The title of the article is, "Overseas Filipino Workers as Heroes: Discursive Origins of the "Bagong Bayani" in the Era of Labor Export."

(puts away phone) In that paper, the writer talked about the political, social, and economic context that paved the way for the Filipino migrant worker to emerge as the Philippines' "modern-day hero."

RITA: I don't really see myself as a hero.

ASHLEY: That's normal, Rita. More often than not, OFWs downplay or underestimate their contribution to the Philippines. Some of them even experience "survivor's guilt."

RITA: *(laughs)* But I'm not doing this work for "all the Filipinos." I just do it for my family. I don't know if that's special. Most people do that; they work to feed their families. Does that make me a hero?

ASHLEY: You're just downplaying your contribution. You send money to the Philippines, right?

RITA: Yes. I send money for Mama and Papa –

ASHLEY: *(interrupts)* See? Did you know that the remittances sent by OFWs accounted for 9.33% of the Philippines' GDP in 2019? OFWs and immigrants scored almost 10% of the Philippines' points.

RITA: *(laughs)* Okay. Congrats to them, I guess...

ASHLEY: According to the data, the Philippines is in the top five economies in the world that benefit the most from remittances. That means that the money you send back home is one of the few things that keep the country's sinking economy afloat! It's truly inspiring, yeah?

Rita doesn't know how to respond.

She just smiles and raises both eyebrows.

ASHLEY: So, that's what our interview will be about. I just want to know more about your journey; your story. It doesn't have to be formal or structured. Let's just talk and see where the conversation takes us.

RITA: I don't know if my story is "hopeful" or "inspiring."

ASHLEY: That's okay. We just want our readers to get to know you and be inspired by your struggle. I mean, we're all waiting and hoping to hear something positive that would help us cope. It would be nice if they hear comforting words from one of their own; a brave Filipina.

RITA: I get it, Ashley. *(smiles)* I'll just do my best to answer your questions, and I pray I say something you can use in your magazine.

ASHLEY: It's going to be fine. You're going to be great.

RITA: So, how do we do this?

ASHLEY: I have, kind-of a "vision," for how we can structure our narrative. We can start with your decision to work abroad. Then, we can segue to the issue of "Brain Drain," just in passing, so we can talk about the "wage gap" between those who work abroad – here – and those who work in the Philippines.

(a beat) Who knows? When we start talking about the issues – when we open conversations – it might lead to change, or a petition to give health workers in the Philippines proper compensation, right?

Rita nods passively.

Ashley turns on a voice recorder on her phone and places her phone on the table, near Rita.

ASHLEY: Test, test.

Rita stares at the phone.

ASHLEY: Don't worry about the recording. It's just for my notes. Are you ready?

Rita drinks from her glass of water and nods apprehensively.

ASHLEY: So, Rita, when the pandemic began, the international community has become more open to providing VISAs and work permits to many Filipino health workers. Many Filipinos were given opportunities to work abroad, however, this...

(makes a hand gestures as she summons the correct word) Exodus has also caused a shortage of health workers in the Philippines. What can you say about this? Do you think this is an example of “brain drain?”

RITA: *(thinks)* I don’t know... I don’t agree with “brain drain.”

ASHLEY: You don’t?

RITA: *(shakes her head)* I think it’s just something we tell health workers so they feel guilty about going abroad, so that hospital owners can benefit from their very low wages.

ASHLEY: Ooh... That’s interesting. That’s a very interesting theory.

(a beat) But isn’t it also true that many medical professionals leave the Philippines to work here?

RITA: *(nods)* Yes.

ASHLEY: Just recently, there was a report that came out that the Department of Health of the Philippines needs “volunteer health workers” to help curb the Covid pandemic –

RITA: *(interrupts)* For ten dollars a day.

ASHLEY: Excuse me?

RITA: The amount they’re offering is five-hundred pesos a day: ten dollars.

ASHLEY: Yes. Can you imagine? Do you think this is an example of the Filipino “*bayanihan spirit?*”

RITA: *(smiles)* No, I don’t think so.

ASHLEY: But there were many Filipinos who were ready to answer the call, right? Don’t you think they should be considered heroes?

RITA: Some, maybe. But I don’t think many of them signed up to be heroes.

(a beat) It’s not “brave” or “amazing” to risk one’s life for 10 dollars. It’s just... I don’t know... Sad. People are desperate. They’re settling for those wages because of poverty, not because of “*bayanihan*” or “heroism.”

(a beat) And everyone knows it, too. It’s just more convenient to call them “heroes” rather than “victims,” so it’s easier for everyone to accept.

ASHLEY: Isn’t it nationalism?

RITA: I don't know. We keep being told to celebrate our Filipino "resiliency," "martyrdom," and "nationalism," but who really benefits from these things?

(a beat) I mean we take on difficult jobs just so we can send money to our families, because we keep being told that if we're not resilient, we're not real Filipinos.

(a beat) But me? I don't want to be resilient. I don't want to be a martyr. I just want a good life.

ASHLEY: Don't you feel a sense of nationalism when you make sacrifices for your country?

RITA: The only nationalism I know is the one that politicians keep saying so that people would vote for them.

ASHLEY: *(laughs uncomfortably)* So, in your opinion, these concepts of "heroism" and "nationalism" –

RITA: *(interrupts)* It's BS! They just say that so we can all pretend that it's an honor for Filipinos to live alone and sacrifice their happiness, so they can send some of those "remittances" you were talking about earlier.

ASHLEY: So, that's what you think of OFWs? What about that concept of the "*bagong bayani*?" Don't you feel any sense of honor when you're called a hero?

RITA: Heroes have a choice. Ninoy, for example. He didn't have to come back to the Philippines, right? He could've just stayed here and lived a peaceful life but he chose to go back. That's why he's a hero.

(a beat) But if you don't have a choice but to make sacrifices, are you still a hero? I think a person without a choice is a victim, not a hero.

(a beat) How about those young Filipinas that end up in far places to become escorts and mail-order brides; are they also heroes, because of the sacrifices they make for their families?

ASHLEY: Isn't that a very different situation?

RITA: Is it though? Maybe I'm just being cynical, but I think that Filipinos are pushed into these things because of poverty. I also think that sometimes people use our stories – the story of the OFW – to normalize this victimization. Instead of solving the problem of unemployment and low wages in the Philippines, we are sold this narrative of heroism.

(a beat) Don't get me wrong. I think it's nice that we call OFWs heroes. But let's not be confused. We didn't have much of a choice. And also, I wouldn't trust anyone who calls me a "hero" before meeting me.

ASHLEY: What?

RITA: Trust me, Ashley. When people start calling you a “hero,” it’s a scam.

Behind the scenes, there’s a sneaky scammer making money.

(a beat) They did that before with domestic helpers in Hong Kong. They were called heroes, too. Now they’re doing it again with health workers who are sent to far-off places.

(a beat) Who knows? Maybe the government keeps calling us heroes because it benefits from those remittances and the GDP that you said.

ASHLEY: I didn’t know you were very passionate about these issues. Have the working conditions of migrant workers always been an advocacy of yours?

RITA: *(laughs)* I don’t have an “advocacy.” I just like to complain. I’m a complainer. Even at work in the hospital, I complain a lot. But they can’t fire me because they’re running out of nurses.

(a beat) And it’s funny because I shouldn’t even be complaining! They’re paying me 15 dollars per hour! Meanwhile, doctors in the Philippines get only 10 dollars a day!

(laughs) Do you see now? Like I said before, I’m not an inspiring role-model. The role-models I think of don’t complain as much as I do.

(a beat) I don't feel like a hero either... Maybe your mom was, before, but me? No! To be honest, I didn't even want to go to this country. I was just forced to leave the Philippines.

ASHLEY: Forced?

RITA: *(smiles; chuckles)* Never mind. I don't think I should talk about that...

(stands) Would you excuse me for a minute? I'll just make some coffee.

Rita stands to make some coffee.

RITA: Would you like some?

ASHLEY: No, thank you.

Rita starts to make herself some coffee.

Ashley stands and joins Rita at the kitchen counter.

ASHLEY: How did you end up here, Rita?

Rita tastes the coffee; adds some sugar.

RITA: I sure didn't come here to save the Philippines economy by washing racist American asses.

Rita goes back to the table with her coffee.

RITA: I'm sorry, Ashley.

ASHLEY: Don't worry. It's fine.

RITA: I want to do this for Bob; for you... I know you're just doing your job and you want to give the Fil-Am community and the fellowship some good news and hope...

ASHLEY: But?

RITA: Do you know remember what "toyo" means?

ASHLEY: Soy sauce?

RITA: No! it's a different "toyo." It's Filipino... It's like a tantrum, but for adults. You know? I feel angry, but it's not your fault.

ASHLEY: I'm sorry, Rita. Do you want to take a break?

Ashley returns to the table and turns off the recording.

Rita doesn't answer. She just stares at her coffee. After a long silence, Rita asks a question.

RITA: Do you think we're cursed?

ASHLEY: What?

RITA: Sometimes I think Filipinos are cursed.

ASHLEY: What do you mean?

RITA: Do you think we did bad things in our “past lives?”

ASHLEY: *(confused)* I don't... I don't know.

RITA: We didn't conquer any countries. We didn't bomb civilians, or imprisoned millions of Jews, or kidnap black people from Africa to turn them into slaves...

(a beat) But bad things always happen to the Filipinos. Maybe we're cursed.

ASHLEY: I know sometimes it feel that way... I'll try to explain.

(thinks) Maybe it has something to do with our colonial history. It's full of suffering, and this collective history – this collective suffering – contributes to how we perceive our own fragmented, Filipino migrant cultural identity.

(enthusiastic) But you know what? Even though we have a difficult history, I think we're headed in the right direction. We just need to articulate and acknowledge our anguish; our struggle. Only when our wounds are fully-exposed can we heal, as a people.

RITA: *(confused)* I don't know if my "struggle" has anything to do with culture or identity.

ASHLEY: Maybe the connection isn't so clear to you right now, but it can be traced back to the history of our nation. Even the reason why you came here has something to do with that.

(a beat) Our country has been repeatedly colonized, and was later robbed of its wealth and sunk into debt by an evil dictator. Naturally, there are economic consequences. Many Filipinos are born into debt and poverty –

RITA: *(interrupts)* Not me though.

Ashley is stunned.

ASHLEY: What?

RITA: We weren't poor.

ASHLEY: Oh... I thought you became an OFW because –

RITA: Because we were poor?

Ashley nods.

RITA: My family wasn't rich, but we were not poor. My parents were agricultural lawyers. They helped farmers organize rural cooperatives. They often collaborated with party-list representatives of trade, labor, and

peasant movements in our province. And because of those “collaborations,” my parents were red-tagged as communists and enemies of the state.

(a beat) One night, three years ago, unidentified men in civilian clothes forced their way into our home. They took Papa; dragged him into a van. He was detained on false charges; they said he was involved in kidnapping and murder.

(a beat) Thankfully, they didn’t take Mama. She said we were spared to be used as leverage; to force Papa to sign a “confession.” They need that because they don’t have any evidence for the fabricated crimes that they’re charging him with.

ASHLEY: *(whispers)* Your parents are freedom fighters? Revolutionaries? Your parents are so brave.

RITA: *(smiles)* They’re not. They just helped farmers establish cooperatives, so we could make a profit supplying them with seeds, fertilizers, and other farming equipment. My Papa was, at his core, a businessman. His dream was not “the empowerment of the Filipino farmer”; it was to save money, so we could all migrate to the US and live the “American Dream.”

(a beat) My parents used what remains of their influence to help secure a VISA for me. But, until now, I keep asking myself, “Should I be thankful?” I don’t know. I don’t know how to feel about all of it. It’s all so confusing.

(a beat) For me, I feel like my family is “collateral damage” of a war I don’t see, I don’t understand, and I don’t want to be a part of. But I’m somehow part of it because I was born on the wrong part of the world.

(a beat) Then, after I was sent here to avoid violence and persecution as an OFW, you’re telling me I’m a modern-day hero? I mean, I left my family behind. What’s heroic about that?

A long silence.

ASHLEY: I’m really sorry about that.

RITA: Don’t be. Like I said, I’m one of the lucky ones. My parents weren’t killed; the case is going well. Trust me, there are worse stories.

(a beat) I have a friend whose activist sister was pregnant when she was arrested. When she gave birth, they forcibly took the child from her. When the child died days later, they wouldn’t even let her attend the funeral.

(a beat) There was also an elderly couple – peace consultants – who were killed in their own home, because allegedly they used high-powered automatic weapons during their arrest.

(a beat) Maybe my family's story is "inspiring" because no one died yet. But it would be more inspiring if I'm able to help Mama and Papa leave the country, right?

ASHLEY: I admire your story, Rita. It's a story of survival and persistence. It's the perfect example of "Filipino resilience." You're strong. Your family is strong. The Filipino is strong.

RITA: *(laughs)* Strong? I'm not strong!

ASHLEY: But you've been through so much, and you're still here; you're a frontliner during a pandemic! You save lives—

RITA: *(interrupts)* Ashley, that's my job. I'm not a saint, and I won't pretend to be one. The truth is that every day, since the pandemic, I feel like I'm slowly losing my mind. There are days when I can no longer tell right from wrong. Some days I feel like I'm a terrible person.

ASHLEY: That's because you're dealing with so much trauma. Because of the things you've been through, you might have developed a negative self-image.

RITA: No. Seriously. There are days that I think I'm ready to do terrible things to get a little relief, a little rest.

ASHLEY: I find that hard to believe.

RITA: *(smiles)* Ashley, that's because you don't know me. We don't know each other. You shouldn't assume that just because we're both Filipino, we are similar people.

ASHLEY: I'm not assuming anything—

RITA: *(interrupts)* Last month, I begged Bob to marry me, just so I can get a green card.

ASHLEY: What? You asked Pastor Bob to marry you?

RITA: *(nods)* I asked him because I was desperate to have my parents petitioned. I want my parents to come here after the trial; to leave the Philippines.

ASHLEY: What did he say?

RITA: He said that if we were going to get married, he wanted to do it the right way. If we were to face the altar together, it has to be for the right reasons.

(laughs) So, he asked to court me.

ASHLEY: And then?

RITA: I told him it wasn't necessary, because we didn't have to have a real wedding... But he said that he couldn't lie in the house of God.

ASHLEY: You're going to marry Pastor Bob?

RITA: I don't know, but he said he was going to do it. He doesn't even want me to call him "pastor" anymore. That's also the reason why he wants to take a break from ministry. He thinks that our relationship might distract the fellowship from worship.

ASHLEY: Are you serious, Rita? Pastor Bob? Our pastor?

RITA: It started off as a joke. My friends from the hospital would tell me, "Just go marry your pastor, to solve all your problems." But after a while, after hearing how bad it has gotten in the Philippines – extra-judicial killings, police brutality, corruption, the murder of lawyers and activists...

(her voice cracks) I've seen men come in the middle of the night, drag my Papa across the living room, and point guns at my wailing mother's face.

(shakes her head) I don't want to go back.

(starts to laugh) There's more. It's pathetic, I know. But before I even asked Bob if he could marry me, I was already practicing a new signature. There are pages on my notebook filled with: "Margarita Miller."

A long silence.

RITA: *(whispers)* Obviously, I'm not in love with him. But love is something you can learn, right? We're friends, at least. That's a good start.

ASHLEY: Rita, no offense, but it seems inappropriate... He's your boss.

(a beat) I mean, there are other people you can marry for a green card, right? What about his ministry; his followers? I mean, he's one of the leaders and role-models of our community.

RITA: The reason we're having this interview is because you said that I am a "leader" and a "role model," too, right?

ASHLEY: Yes, I know, but –

RITA: *(shouts)* But what?

Ashley falls silent.

A long silence.

Rita takes a deep breath and aggressively wipes the tears from her eyes.

RITA: One time I came here and found Bob asleep in the living room. I made myself some coffee and sat on one of the couches and I just watched his face thinking, "He's okay looking. I can work with that."

(a beat) Then I started to imagine him on top of me, and I felt an intense anger; I felt like I was being taken advantage of. The anger I felt was so true that I almost threw my coffee at him.

(stares into space) But the daydream didn't end there. It went on and on... I started to imagine - to ask myself - if our daughter would one day become Miss Universe.

(a beat) Do you follow Miss Universe?

ASHLEY: Sometimes...

RITA: If you've been keeping track, you'd know that it's usually the half-Caucasian Philippine candidates who win: Pia Wurtzbach is Filipino-German, and Catriona Gray is Filipino-Australian.

(a beat) I imagined our daughter being a Miss Universe candidate and told myself, "Hey, Rita. It's not so bad."

(laughing) That's when I found out that it's possible to loathe, rage, and hope in the same afternoon while talking to yourself. That's also the time I started to think that I might be going crazy.

(a beat) Do you remember what "topak" is?

ASHLEY: No. What's that?

RITA: It means crazy.

(chuckles) I think I have "toyo" and "topak."

ASHLEY: *(nervous laughter)* Honestly, Rita, I have no idea how to proceed with our interview. I don't even know what to ask anymore.

RITA: You don't have to ask anything. You mentioned earlier that we can just start talking and see where the conversation goes. So, I guess, this is where it went, and to be honest, I want to talk about it. I feel like I need to talk about it.

(a beat) This all happened before Bob and I had our conversation, but I'm not sure I'm over it. I mean, it's fine now, since we already talked, but...

(shakes her head) I don't know how to feel about it, because the truth is that I tried to take advantage of a pastor's loneliness – in the middle of a pandemic – so I could become a citizen, and I can use that to bring my parents here, so that they can avoid persecution.

(looks at Ashley) If I went with that plan, would that make me a hero or a whore?

ASHLEY: I don't know.

RITA: Maybe that's one thing we can teach your audience, right? Sometimes the hero and the whore are the same person. Those *Japayukis*, those mail-order brides... All of them are hero-whores or whore-heroes. But that wouldn't be heroic enough or inspiring enough for the *Fil-Am Times*, right?

ASHLEY: I'm sorry you had to go through that...

(a beat) All I'm saying is, Rita, a lot of people rely on Pastor Bob. What about the ministry? Do you even believe in God?

RITA: Do I have to believe in God?

ASHLEY: Of course! If you're marrying a pastor, you should at least share similar beliefs.

RITA: If God is real, I think he's a racist.

ASHLEY: Racist? What do you mean?

RITA: Think about it, Ashley. Think about the history of white people.

(a beat) They've abducted blacks from Africa to bring them here and enslave them. They've killed Native Americans and taken their lands. They have been involved in almost every war!

(a beat) But where is their "karma"? Why does God continue to bless them, while the people from the nations that their ancestors exploited are, to this day, enslaved by them?

ASHLEY: I believe He has a plan. We just don't know what 'it' is.

(nervous laughter) Rita, why are we even talking about this? How did we get here?

RITA: Did you know that Jesus wasn't white?

ASHLEY: What?

RITA: Jesus was a brown-skinned, Middle Eastern Jew. He wasn't white. Bob told me Jesus was only portrayed as white so that Caucasians would convert to Christianity.

(sneers) And I'm sure they had to do that, because white people – even those desperate for salvation – will never kneel and worship a brown man; even if that brown man can bring the dead back to life.

(laughs) I remember Maggie, the hospital administrator I was telling you about earlier, made a joke about it. When the first batch of Covid patients died, many of us were depressed and scared. Some of us were already talking about resigning.

(a beat) Maggie saw us huddled at the corner of the cafeteria. She knew what was going on. So, she came over and told us, "Don't panic, guys. Jesus is coming. He's just a little late, because he had to walk on water from Israel because immigration wouldn't give him a visa, unless he had a nursing degree."

Rita and Ashley chuckle.

ASHLEY: That's a bit outdated. It's different now. People are not that "racist" anymore.

RITA: Come on, Ashley. That racism is also the reason why you married a white man, isn't it?

ASHLEY: What does that have to do with what we're talking about here?

RITA: It's okay, Ashley. You made the right decision. I would have done the same.

(a beat) Maybe it's "colonial mentality." Truth is, before I left the Philippines, Mama told me that if I was going to settle down here, I should look for a white husband.

(a beat) Of course I said it was "racist". But Mama said that it would be "safer" if her grandchildren could pass for "white," so that the police here would not abuse them.

(a beat) She has a point though, doesn't she? She's probably still traumatized from watching the police drag my father from their bed to the living room floor. She only said that because she cares about her future grandchildren.

(a beat) I'm sure you thought that too before you married Mr. Parker, right?

ASHLEY: That was not the only reason for me, Rita. My husband is kind, smart-

RITA: White.

ASHLEY: *(irritated)* That's not the reason, Rita!

RITA: *(a beat)* I just want to know, Ashley, since you are the expert here, is it wrong for me to think about things like this? Would I be betraying my country if I wanted white children?

(a beat) I know the right thing to do is to fight racism; fight the oppression of colored and Asian people. But, Ashley, I don't have the energy for that anymore. I'm so tired! I am so tired and I still have to go on my graveyard shift!

(a beat) And honestly, it's so much easier to learn to love a white man, than it is to teach the world to change. Isn't that right, Mrs. Parker?

Ashley doesn't answer.

A long silence.

RITA: So, that's my story, Ashley. I don't know how "inspiring" that is for your readers, but it's really not that bad. I'm still here; I'm still alive.

(laughs) I'm one of the lucky ones, I tell you. I eat three times a day, I have somewhere to stay, and I may even have blue-eyed children one day.

(a beat) I know it's not often talked about, but can't we be "proud" of this story?

ASHLEY: I don't know... I don't know yet.

RITA: Why not? Why can't we celebrate this kind of story? It's not new, is it? We have plenty of similar stories. It's just not written that "blue-eyed babies" are included in the plan.

(a beat) But, honestly, there should be nothing embarrassing here. This is the story of many Filipinas. A young woman leaves the country to escape a war, a dictatorship, or poverty; then she takes on work as a maid, caregiver, or nurse; then, at some point, she becomes a victim of discrimination or abuse; but in the end, there is a "happy ending," because she'll marry a white man.

ASHLEY: Do we really want to make that impression? I don't know. I just don't want people to look at a Filipina and assume that she married for status, wealth, or citizenship...

RITA: Is there something wrong with that?

ASHLEY: Some people think it's inappropriate —

RITA: Ashley, we don't need "some people's" permission to do what we need to do to save ourselves and our loved ones, because we are the only ones

who understand what those things are. I'm tired of making excuses, or pretending; I'm tired of being ashamed. There is no shame in survival.

ASHLEY: You're right. Maybe what's important is not how other people see us, but how we see ourselves.

RITA: The way I see myself – as a Filipina – changes every day. I don't care if they call us whores, or slaves, or “modern day heroes.” For me, what's important is that we're here, we're alive, and we're not ashamed of what we went through, and what we survived.

The stage lights slowly dim into darkness.

ACT 2:

“THE BRIEF HISTORY OF A MODERN MIGRANT COUPLE”

Joe’s home; the dining area of a one-bedroom apartment in downtown Chicago.

There’s a small dining table at center stage. On the table is a bowl of rice and a glass tray of adobo, covered with a sheet of foil.

Magnolia “Maggie” Padilla is pacing back-and-forth holding a keychain on her left hand. She seems agitated. She stops pacing for a moment to glance at a watch on her left wrist.

ENTER, Joe.

Joe is eating from a small tupperware container.

JOE: *(surprised)* Maggie?

MAGGIE: Hi.

JOE: You’re here.

MAGGIE: *(shows the key chain to Joe)* I used the key you gave me.

JOE: That's for emergencies. Is there an emergency?

MAGGIE: I don't know. It might be an emergency.

*Joe walks past Maggie and places the
tupperware of food on the table.*

Maggie walks toward him.

MAGGIE: *(smiles)* I was tested 2 days ago; I'm Covid-free!

JOE: Nice! Congratulations!

MAGGIE: I mean, we can, I don't know, like, hug?

JOE: Okay.

Maggie and Joe hug.

It's an awkward hug.

JOE: It's nice to see you, Mags.

MAGGIE: You, too.

*Maggie takes a seat on one of the stools
next to the small dining table.*

JOE: *(stares at the tray of adobo)* What's this?

Maggie glances at Joe's tupperware of food.

MAGGIE: It's nothing; it's stupid. I thought you haven't eaten yet, so I thought I'd bring some food.

JOE: I work at a restaurant.

MAGGIE: Yes. That's why I said it's stupid...

Joe lifts the foil sheet from the tray.

JOE: Is this *adobo*—

MAGGIE: Yes... Anyway, I'm sorry. I know I should have called, but—

JOE: I didn't know you could cook.

Joe sits down.

MAGGIE: I just saw it on YouTube. There's this popular Filipino guy, Erwan Heussaff... You know him?

Joe shakes his head.

MAGGIE: Never mind... *(points at the tupperware)* What's that?

JOE: *Chorizo de Cebu*... It's from the restaurant. I figured I should, at least, eat my stock before it spoils.

MAGGIE: Right... There's food at your restaurant. I should've known.

(takes the adobo tray) I'll put this away —

JOE: *(stops Maggie)* Wait! I'll try some later!

Maggie leaves the adobo tray on the table.

A long silence.

JOE: So, what's all this for? What's the occasion?

MAGGIE: Nothing... I just thought we should celebrate.

JOE: Celebrate what? Did you get promoted again, or something?

*Maggie stands and walks a short distance
away.*

MAGGIE: I saw you on the news.

JOE: Yeah?

MAGGIE: Yeah. I was at the hospital, then the nurses pulled me to the pantry. They told me my husband was on TV.

(laughs) They asked me to thank you; for what you're doing for the frontliners.

JOE: Tell them they're welcome.

MAGGIE: Yeah... I will.

A long silence.

MAGGIE: I didn't know you were doing that; feeding caregivers, nurses... I mean, it's great, really. What you're doing is great.

JOE: *(shrugs)* We didn't have any customers, and I was afraid the food would go bad. We might as well give it away. We're closing shop anyway.

MAGGIE: Yeah. The news mentioned that, too.

(a beat) Are you sure about that?

JOE: About what?

MAGGIE: Closing shop?

JOE: I don't have much of a choice. I could stretch out my savings to run it for another month, I think. But after that... *(shrugs)*

MAGGIE: I'm sorry to hear that.

JOE: It's okay. Everyone's struggling. It's been a tough year.

A long silence.

JOE: Was there something you wanted to talk about?

MAGGIE: Yes! I'd like to talk about a few things, actually; three things... But I don't really how to start.

JOE: Let's start with the first one.

MAGGIE: A journalist dropped by my office earlier; Ashley Parker from "*The Fil-Am Times*." She told me that I was highly recommended by another one of their candidates; one of our caregivers.

JOE: Recommended for what?

MAGGIE: They want to write features about Fil-Am community leaders; to talk about the impact of the pandemic on immigrants. They also asked me if I knew any Fil-Ams with amusing or inspiring anecdotes. She was very particular about sending "a message of hope."

(a beat) I thought that maybe you could give them one. Tell them about your restaurant, like, you could talk about how it started, where you came from...

(a beat) I think it's all very inspiring.

JOE: *(chuckles)* The restaurant is closing down. How could that be inspiring?

MAGGIE: I don't know. I think there's something inspiring about you taking the time to feed all those people, to help the frontliners, despite the fact that—

JOE: *(interrupts)* Despite the fact that I'm going bankrupt?

MAGGIE: *(smiles)* Well, yes.

JOE: *(laughs)* Okay.

MAGGIE: They wanted to interview me, but I said they should speak to you instead.

JOE: Why?

Maggie returns to the table.

A long silence.

MAGGIE: I think you know why...

JOE: I don't think they'll poke around your background or history –

MAGGIE: What if they find out about my dad?

JOE: I don't think it should matter.

MAGGIE: Of course, it matters.

JOE: That's so long ago.

MAGGIE: I know, but sooner or later, they'll figure out that my dad immigrated here, to the US, to avoid trial for...

(whispers) ...torture.

(a beat) I mean, I asked him about it before. All he said was that it was “state policy”; that he was just a cog in what he called, “the state-controlled machinery.” But, still...

(a beat) It’s fucking torture.

JOE: You think they can trace that back to him?

MAGGIE: Probably... His name was on the list.

JOE: What list?

MAGGIE: There was an Amnesty International Mission Report that listed 88 government torturers. He was one of them.

JOE: Was he found guilty of anything?

MAGGIE: No... Of the 88 names on the list, only one faced trial, and wasn’t even convicted. No one was punished.

JOE: So, he’s not a criminal.

MAGGIE: No, technically, no.

(a beat) But you know how it was back then... Martial Law under the Marcos regime...

(a beat) I'm pretty sure he tortured some people, and I can only imagine how many Fil-Ams are here because their families had to flee the country back then; because of people like my dad.

(a beat) I just don't want to open old wounds.

JOE: Wow. I didn't know about all of that.

MAGGIE: I told you about that before.

JOE: Did you?

MAGGIE: I think so... Maybe in passing, or maybe you've forgotten.

JOE: Maybe... I mean, I haven't seen you in a while.

MAGGIE: Yeah. It's been a while.

A long silence.

MAGGIE: Hey, do you even remember my full name; the one I signed on our marriage contract?

JOE: It's *Magnolia*, right? The flower?

MAGGIE: *(laughs)* Yes, "*Magnolia*"; my mother's favorite ice cream.

JOE: *(laughs)* Really? I always thought you were named after a flower.

MAGGIE: *(smiles)* No. I was named after ice cream.

A moment.

JOE: You know what? Neither of us have to speak to Mrs. Parker.

(a beat) She sounds like a “Karen”; like someone who would call for the manager if her soup was served hot instead of warm.

MAGGIE: No, she’s okay. She’s just trying to help. I want to help, too. Our community needs that right now; we all need to hear a positive thing or two.

(a beat) You know, our psych department at the hospital says that the post-Covid world will bring its own problems; one of which is a mental health pandemic.

(a beat) Fil-Ams are quite vulnerable, right? Some of us lost work; many of us are frontliners... And there are those who have loved ones in the Philippines, and they’re worried sick that their government is not handling the pandemic correctly; putting soldiers in positions that should be held by medical professionals.

(a beat) I mean, if there’s anything we could do to help, we should, right?

A long silence.

JOE: How about the Bautistas; Tess and Boom? They could be considered community leaders, right? Tess is a high-ranking executive at a

recruitment agency. She's given a lot of Filipinos opportunities; helped them provide for loved ones back home.

(a beat) And Boom, he owns the boxing gym downtown, and works with underprivileged kids who need college scholarships.

(a beat) If Mrs. Parker wants to feature community leaders, I guess I could tell her about them.

MAGGIE: Yeah. We could do that.

A long silence.

MAGGIE: We're role-models, too, right?

JOE: *(chuckles)* Really? How?

MAGGIE: What do you mean? I run a hospital. I save hundreds, if not thousands of lives every year, and you –

JOE: *(interrupts)* I make *pandesal*.

MAGGIE: It's really, really good *pandesal* though.

JOE: And *kesong puti*.

MAGGIE: Really, really good *kesong puti*.

JOE: *(sarcastic)* You're right. We're role-model material; we're practically pillars of the Filipino-American community.

Maggie and Joe laugh.

The laughter is followed by a long silence.

JOE: Aren't you worried that they'd find out about us?

MAGGIE: Yeah. I'd like to talk about that, too.

JOE: Okay.

MAGGIE: But I don't want it to be awkward. I don't want to dwell on this topic too long.

JOE: *(shrugs)* Sure... What is it?

Maggie takes an envelope from her bag and places it on the table.

Joe grabs it and takes a peek inside.

JOE: What's this?

MAGGIE: That's what your family paid me for your green card.

Joe scoffs and puts the envelope on the table.

He pushes it towards Maggie.

JOE: That's your money, Mags.

MAGGIE: I said I didn't want this to be awkward —

JOE: *(interrupts)* We had a deal. That's your money.

MAGGIE: No, it doesn't feel right...

(a beat) I feel guilty, because you're a good person. You're a really good person.

JOE: *(laughs)* You don't know what you're talking about, Mags. There's so much you don't know about me. You don't even know why I needed that green card to begin with.

MAGGIE: Why don't you tell me then?

JOE: *(scoffs)* Come on, Mags! Is this really necessary?

MAGGIE: You owe me that, Joe. Tell me *that*, at least.

Joe breathes a heavy sigh. He stands and walks around.

JOE: You know how your dad was on a list?

(a beat) I was on one, too; a list of "drug personalities."

MAGGIE: You were a drug dealer?

JOE: No! I used to smoke weed from time to time. It helped me with my anxiety...

MAGGIE: Weed? So, what?

JOE: Exactly! It wasn't a big deal before, but since the last election, things escalated very quickly. Suspected drug users were hunted down and killed in broad daylight, in public places, in front of loved ones...

(a beat) There are even rumors going around that the entire thing is government-sponsored. Killers get a bounty of four-hundred dollars for every "addict" they kill. I mean, it doesn't seem much, but in the Philippines, four-hundred dollars is a lot of money.

(a beat) And since there was money involved, the drug war devolved into a witch hunt because everyone wanted to get paid.

(a beat) You know the rest: around 40,000 dead. I was supposed to be one of those.

MAGGIE: Wait... What?

Joe returns to the table to explain.

JOE: There was something they called, "*palit-ulo*." If you get caught, "*palit-ulo*" means you snitch your dealer, or drug lord, in exchange for a lighter offense, maybe even freedom.

(a beat) One of my so-called friends got caught, got desperate, and gave up my name. I know it was him, because he even called to warn me; to tell me that he gave them my name as his dealer, when the truth was it was him who sold me weed.

(saglit) Later, that friend of mine ended up dead anyway; killed by motorcycle-riding masked vigilantes. As for me, I ended up on a list; a list of people who often ended up like my dead friend.

A long silence.

MAGGIE: I don't think we talked about that before.

JOE: There's a lot we haven't talked about before.

MAGGIE: We should talk more often then.

JOE: Yeah. We probably should.

MAGGIE: Let's have coffee one of these days, and just, like, have a real conversation. Let's get to know each other.

JOE: Sure. Just shoot me a DM.

(chuckles) I'll have plenty of free time after I close down the restaurant.

MAGGIE: *(pushes the envelope of money towards Joe)* Just take the money, Joe, please. You need that more than I do.

JOE: That's your money, Maggie. I won't take that.

MAGGIE: No! It's your money. That came from your family. I feel even worse now, knowing that I took money from a refugee.

JOE: I'm not a refugee.

MAGGIE: Actually, you are. You were forced to leave your country to escape unwarranted persecution.

JOE: Does that even count?

MAGGIE: I don't know... I think it should count.

Maggie stands and walks around. She's agitated.

She stops suddenly.

MAGGIE: Oh my God!

JOE: What?

Maggie doesn't answer.

She shakes her head and slowly goes back to her seat at the table, in front of Joe.

MAGGIE: I just realized something.

(a beat) You had to flee your own country because of the same state-sponsored violence implemented by my father and his “friends.” Then, I took your money.

JOE: That’s not how it happened.

MAGGIE: I’m a terrible person... Am I a terrible person?

JOE: No! You helped me! You took a big risk to get me out of there.

MAGGIE: Please, just take the money. You can keep the restaurant open for a few more months. Maybe people would be vaccinated by then, and maybe your customers return.

JOE: That’s your money. We had a deal.

MAGGIE: I needed that before, because my med-school student loans were due.

(jokes) I mean, it was either that or porn, and I wasn’t hot enough for porn.

JOE: *(chuckles)* Porn?

MAGGIE: Yeah. Too bad I wasn’t qualified, because on a 10-point scale, I think I’d be a 6.5... Or maybe a 7.5, with the right make-up—

JOE: *(interrupts)* I don’t know, Mags. I feel like you may **find** success with a “niche market.”

MAGGIE: *(laughs)* A niche market?

JOE: You have really nice feet.

MAGGIE: Shut up!

Maggie and Joe laugh.

The laughter is followed by a long silence.

MAGGIE: Just take it. I've already paid my loans. I'm no longer in debt.

JOE: *(thinks)* I'll take it as a loan.

MAGGIE: How about you take it as an investment?

JOE: An investment?

MAGGIE: I'll own part of your restaurant.

JOE: Why would you invest on a restaurant that's about to go out of business?

MAGGIE: It's my money. I can do whatever I want with it.

JOE: Fair enough.

Joe grabs the envelope and puts it in his pocket.

JOE: Thanks, Mags.

MAGGIE: You're welcome. *(smiles)* Let's not talk about this again, okay? It's too awkward...

JOE: Okay.

(a beat) But what's the other thing you wanted to talk about?

MAGGIE: I don't know how to say this the right way, if there a right way to say it...

JOE: Say what?

MAGGIE: The think I have to say. I mean, I can't just blurt it out.

JOE: Why not?

MAGGIE: I don't know. I'm not that kind of person.

JOE: *(nods)* Okay. It's okay. I'll wait.

MAGGIE: Thank you.

Maggie takes a moment.

MAGGIE: Joe... I want to talk about our divorce.

JOE: Divorce?

MAGGIE: I know this is something I should have done sooner, but I was apprehensive, for reasons I don't want to disclose, at the moment—

JOE: *(angry)* What did I do?

MAGGIE: Nothing! You didn't do anything! You've respected our boundaries. You made no indecent moves. You never pried about my personal affairs. So, I appreciate the fact that you honored our arrangement, but—

JOE: *(interrupts)* Okay. So why are you doing this now?

MAGGIE: I'm not doing anything. Calm down.

JOE: Divorce? During a pandemic? Maggie, are you serious?

MAGGIE: Calm down! Let me explain!

A long silence.

MAGGIE: I spoke to a lawyer.

JOE: So, we're talking to lawyers now?

MAGGIE: She's a friend. It's okay.

(a beat) Also, it's been three years. She told me that our marriage has eclipsed your 2-year conditional green card, and the immigration officers have validated that our marriage was entered in good faith.

(a beat) The only step remaining is that we file a joint petition to request the removal of the conditions on your residence. If I remember correctly, it's Form I-751.

(a beat) Technically, we can file that after the divorce, but the USCIS might be more suspicious, so it's better if we divorce *after* the request has been granted.

JOE: But why now? I mean, one of the "boundaries" we discussed was we don't talk about personal stuff, but why do you want a divorce? Are you getting married? Did you meet someone?

MAGGIE: No... In fact, I just ended a relationship.

JOE: Okay. I'm sorry to hear that, but that doesn't explain anything.

MAGGIE: I don't know, okay?

Maggie stands and walks away from the table.

MAGGIE: Maybe I'm stressed at work, or tired of constant quarantine... I'm always alone, and...

Joe walks toward Maggie.

JOE: We talked about this, Mags. I told you, you could drop by the resto whenever you want. You should come by sometime. It's near the hospital. Let's grab lunch together every now and then.

MAGGIE: No. That's not going to help. That's just going to make things worse!

JOE: Worse, how?

MAGGIE: I'm feeling very vulnerable, and emotional, because of everything that's happening, and I'm constantly surrounded by dying people, and we're running out of protective equipment.

(a beat) I think I'm going through an existential crisis. Sometimes, in the middle of the day, I just cry in a bathroom stall, then when someone comes in, I pretend to shit.

(cries) I don't know why I do that! I pretend to shit, so they don't hear me crying. Before this pandemic, I pretended to cry, so people don't hear me shit. Everything is different now; everything has changed. I'm not even sure which one is more embarrassing!

(a beat) At home, I find myself looking in the mirror and asking myself, "What are you doing with your life, Maggie? You're 35, and you're home alone, and should you get sick - and, of course, you will get sick because you run a hospital - you're going to die alone never once telling your fake husband how you feel about him, and that is *so* stupid!"

JOE: What?

MAGGIE: I know that it's stupid, okay? But we have to talk about it. We have to!

JOE: I really don't know what to say.

MAGGIE: I really, really didn't want to talk about it. We could have had a quick and painless divorce, without me talking about my feelings...

(a beat) But I keep thinking... I keep wondering, like, what if we were married for real?

JOE: When you said you wanted to talk about something, this is not what I expected... So, I don't know how to respond yet—

MAGGIE: *(interrupts)* I know that you don't feel the same way, okay? If you just agreed to the divorce, we wouldn't even be talking about this. Why did you have to ask me to explain?

JOE: Wait. Is this my fault?

MAGGIE: It's no one's fault, but it's so unfair! It's really unfair! I'm your wife, so what else are you going to say? But I don't want you to be pressured into a romantic relationship, just because we're married. I know that's what you're thinking —

JOE: No! That's not it at all, Mags.

Joe falls silent.

MAGGIE: So, what is it? What are you thinking of?

JOE: I was thinking of going back...

MAGGIE: Back where? The Philippines?

Joe nods.

MAGGIE: Are you serious? Why would you even be thinking of that?

JOE: You know that mental health pandemic you were talking about? I might be part of the first wave; homesick, depressed, bankrupt...

(a beat) You said it yourself; everything has changed.

MAGGIE: That's dangerous! You just said that your name is on a list! You could get killed!

JOE: I don't know, okay?

MAGGIE: Also, didn't you hear where their vaccines will be coming from? They're making deals with China about using a vaccine that isn't even acknowledged by many countries!

JOE: I could get vaccinated here first, then —

MAGGIE: *(interrupts)* You're not being rational, Joe —

JOE: *(interrupts)* I know! I didn't say I was being "rational." It's just... I feel like the things happening here is driving me insane. Unlike you, I don't have a family here. I don't have anyone!

MAGGIE: No one? Really? Aren't you seeing anyone?

JOE: Not right now; no. What about you? You mentioned you just ended a relationship. How many dates have you gone on?

MAGGIE: Like, two... Or three, maybe? Not a lot.

JOE: Okay.

MAGGIE: You don't date?

JOE: No... It's too risky.

MAGGIE: How about flings? I'm sure you've had flings...

JOE: A few, but they didn't last. I told them I was married, and, you know...

MAGGIE: Yeah. That doesn't usually work out.

JOE: No, it doesn't.

A long silence.

MAGGIE: So, I don't know, are you, like, seeing someone right now?

JOE: Mags, there's a pandemic. I don't think it's a good idea to see new people right now.

MAGGIE: I know! But, is there, like, someone you're interested in, or something? Like, maybe, a "prospect?" I mean, it's fine with me. I'm totally okay with it...

(nervous laughter) Because why won't I be okay with it? It's not like we're married, for real, right?

JOE: Maybe.

MAGGIE: So, what's the problem?

JOE: She's married.

MAGGIE: Oh.

A long silence.

Maggie stands and walks a short distance away from the table.

MAGGIE: I don't want to meddle, but that might invite further scrutiny from immigration officers; and I'm not saying that because of what I told you earlier, no —

JOE: She's married to me.

Joe stands and walks closer to Maggie.

JOE: She's married to me, but she wants a divorce.

MAGGIE: What? No. You're just saying that because I gave you ten thousand dollars!

JOE: I don't know. That's why I want to go home and think. Because of how I feel about you...

(shakes his head) It's not the same as how I felt about my exes.

MAGGIE: What do you mean?

JOE: I mean, don't take this the wrong way.

MAGGIE: I'll try not to.

JOE: How I feel about you; it's not explosive, or passionate, or something like that.

MAGGIE: No?

JOE: No. It's more of a "friendship"; a real one.

MAGGIE: Are you friend-zoning me?

JOE: No! I'm trying to explain why I like you.

A long silence.

MAGGIE: You like me?

JOE: Yes... I like you.

MAGGIE: Really?

Joe nods.

MAGGIE: Nah. You're just saying that...

JOE: It's true.

MAGGIE: Tell me then. Why do you like me?

JOE: I like that we get along; we don't fight—

MAGGIE: *(interrupts)* And we communicate well?

JOE: Yes. I mean, we had to communicate well, because those immigration officers are very thorough.

MAGGIE: Yeah. They were so tough!

JOE: *(makes a hand gesture)* I was *this* close to being deported!

MAGGIE: I know, right?

Maggie and Joe laugh and high-five.

Joe doesn't let go of Maggie's hand.

They look at each other.

Joe lets go and returns to his seat at the table.

JOE: Let's not get ahead of ourselves though. These are not ordinary circumstances.

Maggie returns to the table and sits in front of Joe.

MAGGIE: You're right.

JOE: Maybe I could come home; see my family. Maybe you could visit, if you're not too busy... Before we get a divorce.

MAGGIE: Yeah. I mean, I would like that.

JOE: Yeah?

MAGGIE: We could also start sooner. Would you like to have dinner sometime? I mean, I know we've had dinner before, but never in a romantic context...

(a beat) I mean, I don't know.

JOE: Yeah. Let's have dinner. I could cook for us.

MAGGIE: *(laughs)* This is so weird. How do women date their husbands?

JOE: *(laughs)* No! We're doing well. Don't give up. I mean, this is a good start.

MAGGIE: Really? How can you even tell this is a good start?

JOE: *(jokes)* You made *adobo*, then you gave me ten thousand dollars—

MAGGIE: *(interrupts; jokes)* Shut up! You make me sound like one of those old, white ladies from that show, "90 Day Fiancé!"

Maggie and Joe laugh.

MAGGIE: How are we going to do this?

JOE: We'll figure it out. There's a pandemic and everything's on pause.

(a beat) We have time.

(a beat) In fact, that seems to be all we have, right now: time.

A long silence.

MAGGIE: What else do you think you need, for things to seem better?

JOE: *(shakes his head)* I don't know.

MAGGIE: If you want to see a mental health professional, I can refer you to one of my friends.

JOE: I don't know; maybe.

Joe looks at the adobo tray.

JOE: *(smiles)* Or maybe I just need some *adobo*.

Maggie lifts the foil from the tray and peeks at the food.

MAGGIE: Does it even taste like *adobo*?

JOE: I don't know.

(cuts a small piece of meat) Here.

Joe offers Maggie a bite of adobo.

JOE: Take a bite.

*Maggie takes a bite of adobo as the stage
lights slowly dim into darkness.*

ACT 3:

“THE LOST FILIPINO PATRIOTS OF AMERICA”

Tess and Boom Bautista’s home; the dining room of a house in the suburbs of Chicago.

There’s a rectangular table in the middle of the stage.

On one end of the table sits Boom. On the opposite end sits Tess.

Sitting in the middle of the table is JR, poking at his food with no intention to eat it.

BOOM: JR, is something wrong with the food? You don’t like your father’s cooking?

TESS: *(to Boom)* Boom, leave him alone. Maybe he’s tired, or maybe he’s not hungry.

(to JR) Are you tired, son? Did you eat at the airport?

JR: *(scoffs)* You forgot.

Tess and Boom look at each other.

TESS: Forgot what?

JR: I'm a vegetarian.

BOOM: You're a vegetarian?

TESS: Oh, no! I completely forgot! I'm so sorry, JR. I can't believe I forgot that.

JR: It's fine, Mom —

TESS: *(interrupts)* No, we'll fix this, okay?

Tess stands, takes JR's plate, and gives it to Boom.

TESS: Boom, get JR something vegetarian.

JR: Mom, it's fine. I'm not that hungry —

TESS: *(interrupts)* No, no, no! It's no trouble, really.

(shouts at Boom) Boom!

BOOM: Okay, okay! I got it. So impatient.

Exit, Boom.

Tess and JR are left on stage. They look awkwardly at each other.

Tess, with nothing relatable to say, ends up nodding awkwardly.

JR offers an awkward smile.

A long silence.

TESS: *(suddenly remembers something)* Oh, JR! I just remembered. How's Sam?
The last time I spoke to him on the phone, we did not get along.

JR: I heard but I don't know the details.

TESS: Well, let me tell you.

(a beat) A few weeks ago, I was having breakfast with my friend, Rita, at "Mangaon Ta," the Filipino restaurant. Rita was depressed, because she almost lost her job at the Miller's.

(a beat) She used to work full-time at the Miller's but now, she only works part-time with them. So, she has to go back to working at the hospital.

JR: Why? Did she do something wrong?

TESS: No! Her patient is the father of Pastor Bob, but no one goes to Church because of the pandemic, so the pastor can't afford to pay her to work full-time anymore.

(a beat) It's bad timing, too, because she says that Bob and her are becoming closer. You know, they're both single, and Rita could really use a green card.

(a beat) And then, when the owner, Joe, heard us talk in Filipino, he came over to our table and we all started talking about the Philippines. We discussed the anti-terror law and tokhang. He said that it's worse than Martial Law now!

JR: Yes. Over 40,000 killed.

TESS: Exactly.

(a beat) We were so concerned, so we planned many things. Rita suggested that we organize a donation drive to get lawyers if someone we know is arrested in the Philippines without a warrant, like Rita's parents.

(a beat) Joe said that Rita and I could start a signature campaign in Facebook to decriminalize drug use in the Philippines. Rita and I are health workers, so people might listen to us when we inform them that drug addiction is an illness and not a crime.

(a beat) My idea was that we do an online protest on Facebook about the anti-terror bill; like, maybe, we can make profile picture borders that say "No to anti-terror law!" My friend told me that its dangerous for journalists, like you!

JR: That's great, Mom.

TESS: It's great, right? So, just imagine how I felt when I came home that day, after brainstorming so many plans to help the Philippines, tapos I see Sam's comment on my post—

JR: What post?

TESS: The night before I went out for breakfast, I "shared" several posts by celebrities on Facebook about the "Black Lives Matter" movement. I didn't even put a comment. I just "shared" them on Facebook.

(a beat) Then, Sam started a fight with me; he commented on one of my posts! I'll read to you what he said...

(gets her phone and reads from it) "Tita, I just noticed that you've been very active on social media; sharing posts about how much black lives mattered. I'm just wondering when you'll do the same for the 40,000 Filipinos who have died because of the brutal drug war launched by the man you endorsed to all our friends and family. But then again, why would you care? I'm sure it's not too hard to be a DDS Duterte when you don't have to live in the Hell you helped create, right?"

JR: *(laughs)* Mom, to be fair to Sam, you did endorse him—

TESS: *(interrupts)* No! Stop it, JR! It's not funny!

(a beat) I was hurt by that! Just imagine how I felt. I came from brainstorming. I did my part! I even bought expensive *kesong puti* and *pandesal* to support our countrymen; to show nationalism.

(a beat) I didn't have to do all of that because, our family, we're fine. We are fine here in the States. Even if the President kills everyone there, we are not affected!

(a beat) But still, because I love my country, I wanted to help. I had good intentions, then he called me a Dutertard; a DDS? I did not even vote for him!

JR: But you were a DDS, Mom. You didn't vote for him, because you couldn't, but you told your friends and family to support him –

TESS: *(interrupts)* But we are not DDS anymore!

(a beat) It was a mistake, okay? We changed our mind! Are we not allowed to change? We just made a mistake, like the other 16 million Filipinos. No one knew that he would kill all those people!

(a beat) It's just so unfair and judgmental. I'm not a DDS! I'm nothing like them: they are rude, they have no manners, no class, always wrong grammar... What if my friends see that? What if they think I'm stupid also? It's just so unfair!

(a beat) Sam, this cousin of yours, he has so much anger in his heart. I don't know why he did that. I sent him Steph Curry rubber shoes in the last *balikbayan* box I sent to their family, because he keeps posting about that Golden State Warriors team.

(a beat) And all I did was post about Black Lives Matter! It's a progressive post! It's woke! It's pro-blacks! I just don't like what he did.

JR: I'll talk to him when I go back...

A moment.

TESS: It's okay, *son*. You don't have to go back.

JR: I'm definitely going back, Mom—

TESS: *(interrupts)* I'm just saying you don't have to.

A long, awkward silence.

The silence is broken by Boom's return.

Enter, Boom.

Boom is carrying a bowl of mac and cheese.

BOOM: *(places a bowl of mac and cheese in front of JR)* Here's your food, JR! It's vegetarian mac and cheese.

JR: Thanks, Dad. But, really, I'm not hungry –

BOOM: *(suddenly remembers something)* By the way, I want to tell you something, and you're not going to believe me!

JR: What?

BOOM: *(beams with pride)* Did you know that your mom and I were featured in a magazine as Filipino community leaders and role-models?

JR: *(jokes)* You're right. I don't believe you.

BOOM: It's true! We were featured in "*The Fil-Am Times!*"

Boom takes a magazine from a cabinet and puts it on the table, next to JR's mac and cheese.

BOOM: JR, look at this!

(turns to a page and points at a section) It says we're "pillars of the Filipino-American community."

(smiles) Go on! Feel free to read it.

Boom returns to his seat at the table.

JR browses through the magazine with skepticism.

JR: *(chuckles)* How did this happen?

TESS: Well, it's like this...

(a beat) Ashley Parker, a journalist, went to interview Joe and his wife, because they're also selected to be featured in the magazine, because they have inspiring stories.

(a beat) After their interview, Ashley asked if Joe knew other inspiring Fil-Ams who represented the core values of the Filipino people. So, Ashley contacted us.

JR: They said Dad was a community leader?

BOOM: Yes! Your mom and I; both of us!

JR: *(scoffs)* Sounds legit.

JR closes the magazine and takes a bite of the mac and cheese.

TESS: You know what? Maybe I should call her and tell her to feature you next time, because you also have an inspiring story –

JR: *(interrupts)* I'm not even a Fil-Am, Mom.

TESS: Come on! It doesn't matter! You're a Filipino in America. It's the same thing.

JR doesn't respond.

JR: *(jokes)* So, why'd they pick you guys? Did they run out of eligible Fil-Ams, or something?

BOOM: You underestimate us, son! The reporter, Ashley, said that our contributions to the Filipino-American community as a couple has been well-documented.

(a beat) She said they were able to speak to reputable people in our community over the phone, and most of them had nothing but good things to say about our family.

TESS: Yes! Miss Parker said that they learned through their research that I have been working tirelessly as the top executive of a recruitment agency in order to bring health workers from the Philippines here to help them provide for their families and allow them to rise from poverty.

(a beat) Not only that! They also took notice of my initiatives to help Filipinos in the Philippines.

JR: *(confused)* What initiatives?

TESS: The one I was telling you about; the signature campaign, the online protest, and the legal fund for victims of warrantless arrests...

(whispers) ...like for Rita's parents.

(shakes her head) So many terrible things are happening there.

JR: There's so much work to be done. I should go back soon.

TESS: But also, you can do so much for the Philippines from here.

JR: I don't think so.

TESS: You can! In fact, I organized a short Zoom meeting with the other community leaders featured by "*The Fil-Am Times*," to talk more about what we can do to help.

(a beat) We decided together that we should bring more attention to what's happening to our countrymen in the Philippines: the EJKs, the terror law, the persecution of the media, the attacks on lawyers, and the shutdown of ABS-CBN.

(a beat) Even Ashley Parker was inspired, so she personally secured a commitment from the management of "*The Fil-Am Times*" to provide any assistance we can to help initiate these campaigns.

JR: That's great, Mom.

TESS: You see, JR? You can help the Philippines from here. You don't have to risk your life there. You can organize initiatives here, where it's safer. If you stay there, you might get arrested.

JR doesn't respond to Tess.

TESS: You know, I was talking to Ashley, and she mentioned that they might have an opening for a job...

(a beat) They can even sponsor your work visa, so you can stay here longer.

JR shrugs and changes the topic of conversation.

JR: *(to Tess)* What did Dad do to get featured?

TESS: Your father's being recognized for his work with troubled youth. You know your dad helped a lot of young people get into college through athletic scholarships, even the non-Filipino ones.

BOOM: *(smiles)* That's true. Maybe I'm no longer a boxing champion, but I'd like to think that I'm still the people's champion.

JR: That's great! Congrats, guys. I'm really proud of you.

JR resumes eating.

Both Boom and Tess resume eating as well.

JR: Do they know who you supported in the last elections?

A long, awkward silence.

BOOM: *(shakes his head)* It wasn't brought up...

JR: I thought so.

TESS: Why would you say that, JR? Why did you bring up the elections again?

JR: I was just curious if they knew...

TESS: It's been four years! We're not the only Filipinos who supported him! We were all fooled!

JR: I guess you fooled them, too, huh?

TESS: Fool them? How did we fool them? You don't think we deserve recognition?

JR: Mom, the problems in the Philippines you were trying to solve with your "initiatives" would not be there had you chosen a different candidate to support.

TESS: JR, what happened to you? Maybe you're spending too much time with Sam. You're so full of resentment, my goodness!

BOOM: (*shouts*) Stop it, JR! You're upsetting your mother –

TESS: Why do you think I'm doing these things? Do you think these initiatives will help me? Of course, not! It's a hassle! It takes so much time and effort to organize anything, but I'm doing it for you; I'm doing it so you don't get killed there!

A long silence.

TESS: Why do you even stay there? There's more money for your causes here; more opportunities to gain international support. You're too valuable to risk your life there!

JR: I'm not any more valuable than any other Filipino who has been victimized by the current administration.

TESS: You're safer here, JR! You can get killed in the Philippines!

JR: Exactly! I'm needed there, because people there are getting killed!

TESS: No, no, no! Even in revolutions, people have roles. There are people who riot, people who rally, people who write.

(a beat) Even here, with the Black Lives Movement, people have roles. Some go to the streets, some fight in the courtrooms and congress, and others just make rap music. Everyone has a role. Maybe your role is to survive, so you can tell the story of our country. You have countrymen here, too, that you can help.

JR: Which ones? Your first-world Fil-Am friends who read "*The Fil-Am Times?*" You think their problems are bigger than those living in the Philippines?

BOOM: It's not a contest, JR. We know that there are bigger problems in the Philippines than here.

(a beat) And what's your issue with "The Fil-Am Times?" All they're trying to do is provide hope and comfort for the Christmas season. They just want people to know that there is light at the end of the tunnel.

JR: What do they need hope for?

BOOM: Life here is not perfect, JR. People are losing jobs, loved ones —

JR: *(interrupts)* Sure, but Filipinos living here can look forward to waking up in the morning without the immediate threat of physical violence! Meanwhile, Filipinos in the Philippines are living in constant threat of real, state-sponsored, Marcos-inspired, systematized violence.

TESS: That's what I'm saying, JR! There are real dangers there! What do you expect to do there anyway? If you stay here, you can write more freely about what's going on in the Philippines!

JR: Write for whom? The type of people who would read the material I write already know what's going on. I'd be far more useful marching shoulder-to-shoulder with people in a street rally.

BOOM: Rally-rally! You'll get Covid there because of those rallies!

JR: Covid is a small price to pay for the rights and freedom of the marginalized.

TESS: JR, what are you even talking about? Since when did you become marginalized?

JR: I'm not talking about me, Mom.

TESS: JR, these people you are trying to help; you have nothing in common with them. You have more in common with the Filipino-Americans here, than the "marginalized" in the Philippines!

(a beat) Besides, the Philippines will always have the same problems, as long as the same uneducated people are allowed to vote for the same group of thieves who are stealing from them again and again!

JR: *(sarcastic)* Spoken like a true "community leader."

TESS: It's true! Maybe Filipinos there deserve the Philippines they have, because they made that Philippines!

(a beat) You don't deserve that!

(a beat) You don't have to fight for them! Let *them* fight for their freedom! Let *them* march the streets! Let *them* clean-up the mess they made!

JR: You mean the mess *you* made?

TESS: *(stands; shouts)* Me? What do I have to do with it? I haven't been there for years! I have nothing to do with it!

BOOM: You know, JR, we're just concerned for your safety.

(a beat) Why does it have to be you rallying on the streets? You already wrote the news until they closed your network. You already did your part!

JR: Of course, it has to be me; people like me! It's supposed to be people like us; people who have the education to understand injustice and articulate our dissent!

(stands and walks a few steps from the dining table) I mean, what the hell was that feature for anyway? What is that magazine doing? Don't you think it's crazy that you're telling migrant stories to "comfort" the safe and privileged Fil-Ams of America?

BOOM: *(stands and walks toward JR)* What is your problem, JR? What did the magazine do to you? "*The Fil-Am Times*" is a reputable magazine!

JR: *(laughs)* No, it's not! "*The Fil-Am Times*" is a glorified Filipino club, where Fil-Ams can tell each other how Filipino they all are, and how they wish they could do more for Filipinos, and how much they love their heritage, while they sit in the *sala* and watch replays of Pacquiao fights or the 2018 Miss Universe pageant.

BOOM: You leave Pacquiao out of this!

JR: *(sardonic)* You know what? They should change that magazine's name. They should change it to something like, "*The Fil-Am Friends,*" or "*The Pinoy Pride Periodical,*" or "*Post-Colonial Compañeros!*"

TESS: *(walks toward JR)* Stop it, JR! You're being rude and –

JR: Since they seem to feature patriots, how about we call it, "*The Lost Filipino Patriots of America?*" Let's call it that, so we can all pretend that the people featured in "*The Fil-Am Times*" were actually on their way to the Philippines, to help our country, but got lost and ended up in the US.

BOOM: Son, "*The Fil-Am Times*" is just trying to help our Filipino-American *kababayans*.

JR: Dad, you're barely Filipino! This Filipino-American marketing is just a desperate and sad attempt to cling to a culture you abandoned, and fight for the right to enjoy the underdog reputation of an oppressed person from a developing country, while enjoying the privileges of a white American.

BOOM: *(to Tess)* You see that? You see why I don't talk to him?

JR: Dad, you don't talk to me because I'm gay!

BOOM: No! I don't talk to you because you're a jerk who thinks that you're better than everyone else!

Boom walks away from JR and returns to his seat at the dining table.

BOOM: You think I care that you're gay? That's stupid!

(shakes his head) I don't care! What I care about is that you make everyone around you feel like a bad person.

JR: Maybe you'll feel less like a bad person, if you stop doing bad things, Dad.

BOOM: *(chuckles)* Listen to yourself, JR! You're judging me and your mother based on one wrong decision we made?

(a beat) How about you? You think you are perfect? What? You've made no wrong decisions in your life? What makes you think you're better than us? What makes you think you're better than me?

JR: I know I'm better than you –

BOOM: *(interrupts)* Why are you better? Because you're trying to save the Philippines? Really? You think you can save the Philippines with your poetry?

JR: You were a sports icon, Dad. A lot of people looked up to you. You could have done more for the country, but you chose to leave...

BOOM: Oh, come on, JR! We left so you could have a good education, and live a comfortable life; so that you can write your poetry in your air-conditioned condo in Ortigas!

(a beat) We left so you can spend your life thinking about big things, like what's good or bad for a country, instead of having to think about how you're going to put food on the table!

(a beat) You're smarter than me and your mother, because you're supposed to be! That's what we worked hard for! I supported the wrong person. I made a mistake! So, what? I will make more mistakes than you, because I'm not as smart as you are.

(a beat) You know why? Because I did not have a father who went to America to give me a good education, JR! If you think you're better than me, that's great! You're supposed to be better than me! I worked really hard, so you become better than me, and have a life better than mine!

(a beat) You think I left the Philippines because I don't love my country? No! I left the Philippines because I loved my son more than I love my country! I didn't leave because I'm afraid to fight dictators! I'm a fighter!

(a beat) But I fought all those people, so you don't have to fight anyone. The fighting ends with me...

JR: You think this is easy for me, Dad? Do you think I like having to fight?

Tess returns to her place at the table.

TESS: *(shouts)* No one is telling you to fight! Just stay here —

JR: *(interrupts)* I can't! That would make me a coward and a hypocrite!

(a beat) Mom, there were so many times I had colleagues, interns, and staff who wanted to quit. They wanted to quit because it was dangerous for us to do our job.

(a beat) Lawyers, journalists, and even government officials are getting killed on a daily basis. Those who criticized the government are threatened and ridiculed. Those who told the truth are targeted.

(a beat) In the face of that danger, I urged my peers to hold the line; keep our principles. So, I can't just abandon them!

TESS: Many activists in history sought exile and asylum when their lives were threatened —

JR: *(interrupts)* Exactly! What's my excuse?

(a beat) Just a month ago, fake accounts of known personalities who were critical of the government started popping up. It was alleged that these fake accounts were meant to be used to frame dissenters.

(a beat) How easy it would have been to post treasonable material on these fake accounts, then later hold their supposed owners accountable, right?

But there are no death threats on my inbox. Not a single fake account was made in my name; not one.

(a beat) Some of my friends have threats on their inbox with details of their address, and names of their children. Some have dozens of these fake accounts, and their timelines are filled with requests to friends to help them report these accounts... But they're still in the Philippines.

(a beat) I'm not here because of vacation. Who goes on vacation to Chicago? There's nothing to do here because it's so cold all the time! I left the Philippines because I was afraid...

(a beat) But sitting here, with you guys, I wonder if the danger to my life was real. Maybe it was just something I imagined to add significance to my contribution.

A long silence.

TESS: If you stayed here, no one would hold it against you. Just because the danger hasn't reached you doesn't mean that it's not real. The violence there; it's like a virus. Just because you're not sick yet doesn't mean that you'll never be. The threats of violence, the danger; they're as real as this pandemic.

JR: I agree, Mom. The Philippines has bigger problems than the pandemic. At least, with the pandemic, the symptoms of the illness are clear and the status of the crisis can be measured by data.

(a beat) It's not the same for tyranny and corruption. I mean, how do you fight a crisis that has the power to make decisions for the country?

(a beat) I keep asking myself if I have done enough. Have I? Have I done enough to, at least, make it a little harder for the bad guys to win?

TESS: JR, you did your part. You wrote the news.

JR: I wrote about the number of people who died on a daily basis, like the despot's score-keeper. If I had a good reason – an alibi – to stay, I would. It would be so nice to lament my exile, and express my outrage, from the comfort and convenience of my parents' living room.

BOOM: What do you think is expected of you? What do you think should be expected of us? Are we expected to willingly die to make a point; add another body to the pile?

(a beat) Do we have to be on that pile to be considered "true" Filipino patriots, JR? I mean, I could have stayed back there. Should I have stayed back there? Could one more death change the course of history?

JR: Yes. When Ninoy Aquino died –

BOOM: JR, I'm not Ninoy Aquino, and neither are you!

(a beat) You and me, if we died, we'll just be names and numbers on that despot's scorecard you keep.

(a beat) 40,000 Filipinos have already died from the drug war. More are dying from the government's faulty response to the pandemic. If change would come from death, it would have come by now.

JR: Maybe that's what makes it difficult to process. These deaths are supposed to make sense; supposed to mean something. Tragedy of this scale *should* cause change. That's what we were told.

(a beat) Thousands of people died, and people anticipated that a new way of life would emerge from a catastrophe this bad; that this moment in history would mark the end of old rules.

(a beat) People had high hopes that there will be justice for the victims of these killings; aid for the unemployed and the underprivileged; asylum for the refugees driven away from their homelands by despots and dictators.

(a beat) We were told that there would be day of reckoning for the corrupt, the tyrants, the torturers... But judgment day didn't come. There was just nothing, and the victims of oppressive regimes and oppressive systems are left confused, asking, "Where's the day of reckoning?"

(a beat) How do we make sense of that? How do we feel about that? Do we get mad, or sad? Do we just acknowledge that things happen at random and shrug? What's the correct response? What would a real patriot do?

(points at the magazine) That's who should be featured in magazines like that; true Filipino patriots who could guide us, who could show us what we're supposed to do about the pandemic, the corruption, the violence —

BOOM: *(interrupts)* Patriotism! Nationalism! Heroism! There are so many “-isms,” JR! I don't even know what those things mean anymore! Some say that a good Filipino listens to the government; others say that a good Filipino criticizes the government. How are we supposed to know who we should listen to?

JR: You're supposed to listen to people who understand these things. I keep telling you; you wouldn't listen to me!

BOOM: *(shouts)* How can I listen to you when you make me feel like I don't deserve your respect – your love – just because I made a mistake and supported the wrong person 4 years ago! It's as if you want to revoke my right to call myself a Filipino!

(a beat) What you don't realize is that there are more Filipinos like me, than like you!

JR: What does that even mean?

BOOM: There are more ignorant Filipinos than smart Filipinos like you! There are more Filipinos who are constantly fooled by liars; Filipinos who are living with shame and regret!

(a beat) But what do you do? You keep telling them how much smarter you are than them! You think that would make them listen to you?

JR: I never said I was smarter than them!

BOOM: *(shouts)* No! You don't have to, because you say it without saying it!

(a beat) Listening to you is painful for me – and for them as well – because there was nothing we could have done to avoid making the mistake we made, because we were never as smart as you are...

(a beat) If you want people like me to listen to you, stop shaming us! Don't call me stupid for being fooled by "fake news" and propaganda. Instead, tell me that it's okay, that I shouldn't feel bad for making mistakes, because there is always room to learn, and room to grow!

(a beat) Don't call me a coward for leaving! Tell me that there is nothing shameful about leaving a struggling country to find a better future for me and my family.

(a beat) Because there is nothing shameful about it! I don't see anything shameful about it, because I know how hard life can be. There's nothing

shameful about a Filipina who marries a white man in order to escape the *barrio*! There's nothing shameful about an illegal immigrant – a TNT – who hides from officers so he can feed his family! There's nothing shameful about an activist who flees the country to avoid persecution! There's nothing shameful about what Filipinos do to find a better life for their families!

(points at his face) This is the face of the real Filipino, JR! It's not the heroes your worship on TV, or the activists you study in your classrooms. The real Filipino is flawed, like your mom and me, and we're tired of hearing lectures from you!

(a beat) What we need from you is to stop idealizing this concept of Filipino in your head, so you can conveniently exclude the uneducated, the ignorant, and the poor!

JR: Are you accusing me of being classist, Dad?

BOOM: Classist-classist, I don't know what that is!

(a beat) You keep telling me that you want to help Filipinos, but you use words they don't understand. You think they understand your poetry, your news articles?

(a beat) If you want to help Filipinos, stop shaming them! Empower them! Celebrate them! All of them. Celebrate those who remained to fight in the

Philippines, but also those who left the country to find refuge elsewhere!
Celebrate those who voted correctly, but also those who made the wrong
choice and learned from their mistakes! Celebrate the Filipino – all of them
– and not just the privileged ones, for surviving corruption, pandemics,
dictatorships, typhoons...

(a beat) It's not black and white! It's not always about who's right or
wrong, JR. The history of the Filipino is a bloody one; a dirty one. So, stop
shaming those who got their clothes a little dirty while they were trying to
survive.

(a beat) You're the one who hates your race. You're the one who has to
change, before you become someone who can cause change –

JR: *(interrupts)* I get what you're saying, Dad! I know that I'm more privileged
than most Filipinos. But with that privilege comes guilt. I've been given
more, so I should be doing more. That's why I want to be able to help!

BOOM: We all want to help! That's why your mother and I went along with the
interview! We just wanted to give people hope!

JR: Is that all we can do?

BOOM: What else do you want me to do?

JR: I don't know, Dad... I don't know!

(a beat) I just think we should be doing more; I think everyone should be doing more. We need something more drastic, something more radical than hope.

TESS: But hope is important, JR!

(a beat) What can be more radical than hope? What is more radical than believing that those who have plundered the Philippines, those who have killed and tortured, and those who have betrayed the Filipino people will one day face judgment for their crimes?

(a beat) Given the state of the world now, given the overwhelming odds we face every day, just accepting that this is the way the world is, is the most logical, predictable, conservative thing to do.

(a beat) But that's what the tyrants and dictators expect us to do, right? That's how the bad guys win. So, this is how we should fight them; with hope.

(a beat) In the face of all this senseless tragedy, hope, at least, allows me to wonder, "Maybe it will all make sense tomorrow."

(a beat) In the meantime, let's take it one day at a time. Let's start here, now, as a family. Together, let's hope for something better for our family.

(a beat) Tomorrow we can worry about all the Filipinos, and the Philippines, and the entire world. Tomorrow, we can forgive and accept every Filipino who had to lie, cheat, and steal to escape persecution, poverty, and violence. I'm sure every family – every person – has a struggle and a story, but let's start here; with us.

(a beat) Let's start with forgiving ourselves, each other, our family, and let's just accept what we had to do to still be here now – to still be safe now – and hope and pray that we'll still be here, still be safe tomorrow.

(a beat) For now, for today, at least, let's just be thankful that we're safe, okay?

JR looks at Tess and nods.

TESS: Okay, Boom?

Boom nods at Tess.

The family sits quietly as the stage lights slowly dim into darkness.

- CURTAIN -