

MY LOVER'S PRESSCON

One-act play

SYNOPSIS:

Harry is the spokesperson of the country's most powerful office at the height of the pandemic. He is the face of the quarantine rules, lockdown updates, and numbers to match the COVID-19 cases in the country.

Joseph, meanwhile, is a rising TV reporter who is assigned to Harry's beat. He diligently covers his press conferences, to share the news to their TV viewers.

Their relationship is purely professional during their Zoom presscons. When Harry trends, Joseph usually is mentioned on the sidelines. It may be bad for the former but it's helping the latter be the newsroom favorite and get closer to his newscasting aspiration.

What the public doesn't know is that when the cameras and recorders are off, Harry visits Joseph in his condominium unit to catch up and cuddle. This has been their set up as secret lovers for a year.

One day, Harry surprisingly visits Joseph in his unit. The latter thinks that it's just an ordinary visit and he even attempts to help Harry get over becoming a meme and laughing stock of the masses at his own presscons. Little does Joseph know that Harry is looking for a mole who tipped provincial media about his secret trip and meetings. Their night gets louder and their conversations become more complicated as they confront their romance, secrets, hangups, ambitions, egos, sexual tension, and betrayals. To each other. To others. To themselves.

MY LOVER'S PRESSCON

CHARACTERS:

HARRY - Middle-aged. With a weary persona because he's always busy at work. After all, he's the spokesperson for the country's most powerful office.

JOSEPH - Late-30s. Smart looking, semi-fit. Alpha male and professional. TV reporter.

SETTING:

Night. Inside Joseph's condo unit somewhere in Metro Manila. At the height of the pandemic.

The interior is simple, just a sofa, small smart TV and big bookshelf in the living area. Joseph is sitting on the floor, his laptop is open. The doorbell rings. Joseph opens the door.

JOSEPH: This is a shock.

HARRY: Why?

JOSEPH: You didn't tell me you were dropping by. You're lucky they didn't hold you downstairs.

HARRY: I'd like to see them try.

JOSEPH: It's called protocol, especially now that quarantine rules are so strict.

HARRY: The owners of this condo, the Torreses, are my brothers in Law School. They even gave me a unit on the other tower, you remember that.

JOSEPH: I know, corner unit lalala, 2 bedrooms lalala. Because of some favor or protection you gave them back in the day.

Harry settles on the sofa, takes off his polo and shoes. He coughs.

HARRY: They are good people.

JOSEPH: If you say so. You did take a rapid test, didn't you?

HARRY: Everyday. We don't run out of supplies as frontline workers.

JOSEPH: Good for you. I wish all medical frontliners could say the same.

HARRY: They will have more supplies soon, don't worry.

JOSEPH: Better hurry coz hospitals are filling up quickly. At least our doctors and nurses shouldn't have to worry about testing kits.

HARRY: Can I have some water please?

JOSEPH: Help yourself. You know where to get it.

HARRY: (Jokes) I thought if you will get it for me, that will give us some quiet time.

JOSEPH: (Gives Harry water) You're welcome. What brought you here? I thought we agreed to meet once you downgrade the lockdown level? My place is two cities away from your office.

HARRY: That doesn't apply to me. My driver just says my name and we're good.

JOSEPH: What did you tell Ester then?

HARRY: Late night meeting with members of the executive and IATF. What else could it be?

JOSEPH: Doesn't she probe you?

HARRY: Thankfully when I bring up the IATF stuff, she shuts down. She rejects negativity these days. She even told me I remind her of the pandemic.

JOSEPH: Because just like the virus, you're nasty and contagious?

HARRY: You know you're such a great host.

JOSEPH: Kidding. Wait, so when you're at home do you sleep together?

HARRY: No, I stay in the guest room. Quarantine for safety.

JOSEPH: Is it hard?

HARRY: Honestly, we've been sleeping like that even before the pandemic so it's no big deal.

Harry empties his glass of water.

JOSEPH: Refill?

HARRY: Please.

Harry hugs Joseph from behind. Joseph just scrolls through his laptop. He laughs.

JOSEPH: I suppose your team has informed you?

HARRY: Of what?

JOSEPH: You're trending again!

Harry releases Joseph and he sighs.

HARRY: Well, damned if I do, damned if I don't. What is it this time?

JOSEPH: The way you cut Mich during the interview. You didn't even give a concrete answer. "Okay next question!" Are you out of your mind?

HARRY: It could have been worse.

JOSEPH: If anything this is at least softer than the last one. They edited you with math equations in the background coz you're confusing the data for confirmed-positive, suspected-positive, and recovering-positive.

HARRY: I'm a lawyer, I'm not that good at math.

Joseph goes to the countertop.

JOSEPH: But shouldn't lawyers be good with facts?

HARRY: In every rule, there's an exception.

JOSEPH: Bread? Coffee or tea?

HARRY: Any.

Joseph heats water. Then he massages Harry.

JOSEPH: Spox.

HARRY: What did I tell you about calling me that in private? I wanna hear you say my name.

JOSEPH: Horacio...I have a question.

HARRY: Fool. You're not yet done interviewing me? You raised a lot of questions earlier in Zoom.

JOSEPH: I didn't get all my questions in. I thought your team would cut me off.
They have this suspicious way of queueing mine last.

HARRY: No comment.

JOSEPH: Your media staff even acts like somebody. I can sense from a mile that he's just a fresh grad.

HARRY: Not my staff please.

JOSEPH: So what did your kids say about you trending again for all the wrong reasons? Are they teasing you?

HARRY: What should they say? It is what it is. Unfortunately in the Philippines, they love to shoot the messenger.

JOSEPH: But aren't you happy with your performance earlier?

HARRY: You tell me. I think you got plenty of materials for the next **2** days.

JOSEPH: You wish! It's just enough for **90** seconds. Your argument with Jas would make for even longer news. You know you didn't have to be so rude to her.

HARRY: Who?

JOSEPH: Jasmine, Rappler! Her question is valid. You should know the latest data of covid positive cases, at least in NCR because this is the epicenter.

HARRY: I did.

JOSEPH: For last **2** days, yes, but this morning, no. You could've had a cheat sheet.

HARRY: Look, it's been going on for **30** minutes, I felt dizzy. I barely had breakfast, but you wouldn't know that. Can you stop being a reporter for once?

JOSEPH: Sometimes you're also rude to me. Plus the way you stare at me through the screen is so intense it makes everyone feel awkward.

HARRY: I just missed you. Honestly I didn't like your question.

JOSEPH: "Sir what are the next steps for testing and vaccine rollout now that we'll be back to ECQ next week?" It's a valid question, whether you like it or not.

HARRY: How about asking DOH? They know the answer. Besides we still have **3** days until next week, and there's another presscon in **2** days. You can reserve that question.

JOSEPH: It's not my fault that your team isn't prepared.

Harry pauses and squeezes Joseph's arms.

HARRY: No, I'm saying be gentle with me here. I'm just one against the **10** of you. My cup runs empty sometimes.

Joseph gets a sandwich and makes coffee. He gives them to Harry.

Joseph's messaging apps ring. He checks his phone. He smirks.

HARRY: What did your newsroom say? When I'm trending I know some of you reporters trend too. It's like russian roulette, who among you will ride in my coattails this time?

JOSEPH: You enjoy your infamy, don't you?

HARRY: Just as much as you journos do.

JOSEPH: That's what you think.

HARRY: Am I wrong?

JOSEPH: Look, if we're really attention whores we could've applied to be government spokespersons too. We have connections to enter public service. But we don't. We chase you under the sun, we wait for you in the lobby or in this Zoom call, for what? For underwhelming updates, to be honest.

HARRY: Well, we all make our choices in life if you want field work or office work. So what did your team say?

JOSEPH: They're happy coz it got good coverage and was trending on social media. Millions of views and comments on Facebook and YouTube. My close friends said, you know you made it big when the reporter becomes the news! Sus.

HARRY: I bet that was music to your ears, wasn't it?

JOSEPH: Slight.

HARRY: I remember you told me your bosses are looking for weekend newscasters for primetime, someone younger. Are they getting you?

JOSEPH: I wish. No, I hope. But we're three in the shortlist. I have to be more direct that I want it.

HARRY: Yes, tell them. You might even use your fame because you always trend with me.

JOSEPH: I've been here for 15 years, of course I thought about that. My God if I don't become rich by being a reporter, at least I graduated from field work and became a newscaster. Since I was in high school I've been practicing in the mirror, "*Sa ulo ng mga nagbabagang balita...*"

HARRY: "...Spokesperson Harry Gomez, *pahiya na naman*. Reporter Joseph Santos *bagong crush ng bayan?!"*

JOSEPH: (Laughs) Wow, that was a quick one. In fairness.

HARRY: You like that? A bigger name for yourself but people making fun of me all the time.

JOSEPH: Hey, I didn't ask or wish that you trend constantly.

HARRY: But it helps your name, right.

JOSEPH: I dunno. Perhaps.

HARRY: Just say yes. I bet I'm the laughing stock of your newsroom.

JOSEPH: Not everyone in the newsroom. I mean sure, there are those who don't like you but a lot of them are neutral. They're just tired of hearing from you and seeing you on TV.

HARRY: Yet you still cover my beat?

JOSEPH: Because we don't have a choice.

HARRY: I just wish you guys wouldn't make fun of me. You shouldn't be biased.

JOSEPH: To be fair, they're only doing that when you mess up. I can't ask them to behave a certain way. Besides it's not just you, there are more.

HARRY: Like who?

JOSEPH: Like the MMDA spox, when she was asked about road closure she mentioned number coding. Coding, during pandemic lockdown? How could you keep a straight face at that? She could've said there is no final instruction yet, or pass the ball to the LGUs. That buys her a few more days.

HARRY: Uy but Diana is really kind and hardworking.

JOSEPH: I'm not saying she isn't. But when you're working hard you might as well make sure you give us the correct and timely information so we don't waste our time and we don't confuse the people.

HARRY: Okay Mr. Reporter. Who else?

JOSEPH: That DTI Usec. is also a headache. When asked about price freeze in basic goods, he said 'they highly encourage it while ECQ is in place'. Encouraging, not even requiring it? So it's up to the people to control the prices as they see fit? It's a recipe for chaos.

HARRY: I think you're overreacting. They know what they're doing, I'm sure they have a timeline to implement new rules. Besides I haven't heard of a vendor and customer sparring in Nepa Q-Mart.

JOSEPH: You don't get it! Nepa Q-Mart isn't even the biggest public market in NCR. Even your reference is outdated!

HARRY: Hey don't be too literal.

JOSEPH: I can't help but be literal because we only report what you say. We look for scoop or exclusive, sometimes all we get are punchlines. So what are we supposed to do other than just laugh at you rather than cry for you. If you only know how much hate I get when I send a story to my editor without a substantial quote. That's why even a nod from you is included in the story, because sometimes that's the only evidence we have if you agree with the question or not.

HARRY: (Whispers) You speak as if you're flawless.

JOSEPH: What?

HARRY: Nothing

JOSEPH: No, you were saying something.

Harry stands up, walks around, and looks at the balcony/window. Beat.

JOSEPH: Hey, is something bothering you?

HARRY: I have something to ask. Remember last week we talked about my trip to Pampanga for confidential meetings and some personal time off?

JOSEPH: Yeah, how was that? Was it productive? Did you get some rest?

HARRY: That's not my point. Some media followed me. I'm sure you've seen the photos.

A beat.

JOSEPH: I did.

HARRY: Aside from my team, you're the only one who knew about it.

JOSEPH: Okay, so?

HARRY: My staff told me they didn't tell anyone about it.

JOSEPH: How many staff are we talking about, 30 people? Are you sure they're all telling the truth? What about your wife, she knows about it too. Hold on, are you accusing me?

HARRY: Should I?

JOSEPH: (Laughs) Are you kidding me? Oh that's why you suddenly appeared at my doorstep! So is this my presscon now and you're the reporter?

HARRY: It's not that. Of course I want to see you. But you must understand that my boss is asking why I attracted that much press for a secret trip. We even compromised our business partners. They've been calling, asking us to protect their names as it might affect their company's image online and stock market performance.

JOSEPH: I'm sorry you're having a hard time. But frankly, what do I have to do with it?

HARRY: I hope none, because they want to know the source. Countless conspiracies were written about that trip saying we're controlling supplies for face shield and face masks, or worse the vaccines! It also didn't help that SWS released their new survey. Our office dropped 1 point for trust rating. You can just imagine the boss is not happy this week. Plus people scolded me online for taking a break at the beach for some peace and quiet. Was that bad?

JOSEPH: We're in the middle of a global pandemic, of course it was! Besides you're the one who banned leisurely travel.

HARRY: It was a private resort with only my security and close contacts. How did I get paparazzi shots?

JOSEPH: Why don't you ask your security? You know what they say, *may tenga ang lupa, may pakpak ang balita*. Don't underestimate provincial journos, they work harder than us here in Manila.

HARRY: How did you know that it was the provincial journos? I didn't tell you that.

JOSEPH: Didn't you say your photos were everywhere? Of course all of us in the newsroom knew about them.

HARRY: I don't think they would have that much temerity if they didn't have an informant from Manila.

JOSEPH: Good luck looking for this person. If you want I can ask around, so you don't suspect me like that. (Points to the mug) Drink up while it's still warm.

HARRY: Sorry if I brought it up. I didn't mean to, you know, imply that it's you or your team.

JOSEPH: It's fine.

HARRY: I just want to rest a bit here before I go home, if it's okay.

JOSEPH: I said it's fine.

They get closer.

HARRY: It's so hard to catch a break these days. I just want to do my job, whatever it entails.

JOSEPH: We all just want to survive these days. As much as possible no one loses their job or worse dies.

Harry smiles and looks at Joseph for a while.

HARRY: I'm glad you're being noticed in the newsroom. You're lucky to be assigned to me. Sometimes your name is even more popular, and people like you. "*Ang galing magtanong ni Joseph. Ang tapang naman niya. Go! Drag him!*" I wish they would say the same things to me when I do my job well.

JOSEPH: You're the one who should be thankful. Because of us, you're improving as the spox!

HARRY: O you said it, I'm improving!

JOSEPH: (Sarcastic) Wow, a lawyer who takes words literally?

They hug.

HARRY: If only they knew.

They look in different directions.

JOSEPH: But what if people find out?

Harry's phone beeps. He checks messages. He adjusts his glasses and shakes his head. He sighs before he sends a voice message.

HARRY: Chi, please send it tonight, I'll read it before I sleep. But please verify the facts. Also, get the names. I need names Chi, not just the media outlet. Thanks.

He presses send.

HARRY: Sorry, where were we?

JOSEPH: In my condo, a silent witness to your bad vibes and red tape.

HARRY: Sorry, they said we already have a lead. Whoever that is, wrong timing to be starting this mess.

JOSEPH: And who is that?

HARRY: Can't say yet. Where were we?

JOSEPH: I said what if this gets out?

HARRY: Honestly I don't think they will remove me. (Raises his phone) They need me.

JOSEPH: Not if they find someone braver than you. Someone who can endure the government's embarrassment.

They stare at each other and shrug the idea off.

HARRY: And your newsroom?

JOSEPH: Dismissal for sure.

HARRY: Really? Not to be an asshole, but I think I have a lot more to lose if this gets out.

JOSEPH: Because you have a family and you are this spokesperson slash lawyer slash law professor slash martial law baby?

HARRY: Well...

JOSEPH: I might not be like you, but my integrity is intact.

HARRY: Spoken like a true pillar of Philippine journalism. You sound more established than Mel and Mike.

JOSEPH: Soon enough I'll be like them, even better.

HARRY: Go get that newscast first. Baby steps.

JOSEPH: I will, trust.

HARRY: But Mel and Mike, really?

JOSEPH: What's wrong with them - They are some of the best, most trusted, most influential.

HARRY: Yes, but they're not on the ground. They endorse pharmacies and food supplements.

JOSEPH: But it's the impact of their reputation.

HARRY: You could have chosen Cheche Lazaro or Shiela Coronel. Those are the legit ones.

JOSEPH: Of course I know them, but the public doesn't.

HARRY: Do you wanna be the best in the field?

JOSEPH: That's not even a question.

HARRY: Then you should emulate the best!

JOSEPH: But I don't deal with them regularly. We're not even acquainted. What do you want me to do? You have the guts to tell me to emulate the best, excuse me have you seen your boss? He's not drunk yet he can't even speak a proper sentence.

HARRY: Don't drag boss into this. Besides he's old, let him be.

JOSEPH: Well you better leave my industry seniors alone.

HARRY: I just thought you're after excellence, not fame.

JOSEPH: I am!

HARRY: Time will tell.

JOSEPH: You don't believe me?

HARRY: I do. Always. (Beat) To tell you the truth, I sometimes see my younger self in you.

JOSEPH: I'm glad it's just sometimes. Let's keep it that way.

HARRY: That hunger. That drive to be something else, someone bigger.

JOSEPH: Nothing's wrong with that.

HARRY: Of course. But as you go along you will realize you need some friends. You need to compromise. You need to let others lead, so eventually you can get ahead.

JOSEPH: As I said I've been in the industry for over a decade. I know what you're saying.

HARRY: Knowing is different from being.

JOSEPH: You would know about that. Since you entered the news cycle how many times have you changed loyalties in government? I lost count.

HARRY: And look where I am now. All because of those moves. This—past, present, and future—is like a game of chess.

JOSEPH: And you are the pawn?

HARRY: FYI even the pawn can beat the queen in chess.

JOSEPH: Unfortunately not the king! Your boss is a king, not a queen.

HARRY: Why do you like doing this?

JOSEPH: What?

HARRY: Arguing with me. You're always breathing down my neck.

JOSEPH: Well if you can't stand the heat...

HARRY: Get out of the kitchen.

JOSEPH: This is just a one bedroom condo. Technically I don't have a kitchen.

HARRY: Sometimes I really can't tell if you're just joking. Seriously, how do you think your family will react if they find out?

JOSEPH: Perhaps feeling betrayed or disappointed? Until now they've been egging me to bring a girlfriend home. This lockdown is a blessing in disguise. I can't bring someone home because I can't come home. As simple as that.

HARRY: You think they don't know yet?

JOSEPH: We both know the answer to that. Never for one second did I think that I can fool my parents. You think you're successfully fooling your wife?

HARRY: After **25** years of marriage, I'll be shocked if she has no idea at all.

JOSEPH: We're just avoiding the elephant in the room even if it's just sitting on the sofa.

Harry is dumbfounded...because he's sitting on the sofa.

JOSEPH: I meant the metaphorical elephant, not literal.

HARRY: Glad you cleared it. I only started entertaining this part of me when my kids finished school. At least I have them to prove that I'm a good father. I may not be the best husband, but damn it I am a good provider.

JOSEPH: Good for you. Sometimes my parents would ask if I have found a fellow reporter or someone from the government besides that where I spend all my time.

HARRY: (Raises hand) Present.

Harry's phone rings. He sends a short message. Then he taps the sofa, urging Joseph to sit beside him.

JOSEPH: Any leads?

HARRY: Secret, but they said it's definitely from the big ones with regional offices.

JOSEPH: What will you do to this person?

HARRY: Well to start, blacklisted in the beat and on our phonebook. We'll revoke their accreditation to cover our office.

JOSEPH: You know you can't sue them though. As a public personality, people will always find out when you go to places. And they don't care if you're there for business or pleasure.

HARRY: But it's good to know who. If it's from my team, fired on-the-spot. At least I know who I'm dealing with.

JOSEPH: Up to you. Where's your security? Aren't they looking for you yet?

HARRY: Parking, resting for a bit.

JOSEPH: Do they know?

HARRY: Well, they know it's someone. They don't know who.

JOSEPH: But you know they can ask our guards right?

HARRY: They can, but they should know better if they want to keep their jobs.

JOSEPH: I hope so, coz if this blows up it's like my career suicide.

HARRY: We've come such a long way doing this. Did you think this would happen when we met at a party all those years ago?

JOSEPH: No.

HARRY: What's your first impression of me?

JOSEPH: Competent lawyer. Admirable. Brave.

HARRY: I still am!

JOSEPH: According to Twitter, not anymore. You, what did you think of me then?

HARRY: Young and full of drive. Cute. Looks competent.

JOSEPH: "Looks" competent?

HARRY: Well, you are quite good.

JOSEPH: "Quite"? You are one hard-to-please motherfucker.

HARRY: I'm glad I asked you out.

JOSEPH: You did not ask me out, you said you have a story for me.

HARRY: I'm sorry I was so nervous then. But thank you for saying yes.

JOSEPH: I thought you really had a scoop or lead that I can pitch at our weekly roundtable. Just thank you for the free lunch, I guess.

HARRY: Are you serious?

JOSEPH: Besides, had I known that you'll end up like this, I would have declined your invitation.

HARRY: Why? What do you think of me now?

JOSEPH: Ask yourself, what do you think you have become?

HARRY changes facial expression. He goes to the bathroom and slams the door. Joseph shouts.

JOSEPH: Hey I was just kidding.

A beat. Harry wipes his wet face upon exiting the CR. He's serious now.

HARRY: Try putting yourself in my shoes. Don't you think I'm good enough for what I do?

JOSEPH: I'm not saying that.

HARRY: Then what's your problem with me?

Joseph is still calm, but Harry isn't.

JOSEPH: You're qualified. I'm not taking that away from you. It's how you carry your job. You might think you're in-charge but honestly, no it's not just you. All of us in the presscon play a part. You need us more than we need you.

HARRY: And why is that?

JOSEPH: Because we make you look hot, sexy, and relevant. If you only listen to me you could improve as the spokesperson. You need media training so you can answer properly and you don't sound an asshole. Also—

HARRY: You get what you give. Ask a stupid question, get a stupid answer.

JOSEPH: Can you let me finish? That attitude is exactly what I'm pointing out. Personally I think you need yoga, breathing exercises, anger management classes, so you'll be more relaxed. So you don't just speak without substance. Like now.

HARRY: I can't believe I'm hearing all these from you. If it's other people, I never would have cared.

JOSEPH: Just think about it. If you don't know the answers to our question, that's fine but don't be rude. Answer properly. Say that you will endorse us to the right person. Also don't mute our mic or worse, turn off our video!

HARRY: You know I didn't really go here to get lectured on by some reporter.

JOSEPH: I know...that you know...that I have a point. Also, FYI my newsroom won't assign me to your beat if I'm just some reporter.

HARRY: Joseph, I have a complex job, you know that.

JOSEPH: Yes but you also have a complex attitude, that's why you're having more difficulty.

HARRY: I am always asked any question under the sun regarding this administration.

JOSEPH: Surprise, it's your job! You're a lawyer, you know that whatever you say can be used against you or your client, regardless if he happens to be the nation's most powerful villain.

HARRY: So be it.

JOSEPH: I'm sure you're familiar with placeholder answers. I'm offering you my help, just so you can improve when you interact with us.

HARRY: What will I say, pass? Next question please?

JOSEPH: That is what you should avoid so you don't sound dismissive or uneducated. By the way, why are you always mad? Why the raised eyebrows? the raised shoulders? Who are you fighting against? What is your problem?

HARRY: Isn't that what they want for the memes?

JOSEPH: Until when are you going to be the government's comic shield?

HARRY: I'm not their puppet.

JOSEPH: You might as well be. No one takes you seriously!

HARRY: Whatever! I have my own mind. I'm doing my job the best way I can

JOSEPH: But your best isn't good enough.

HARRY: Punyeta! You're really trying me. Ask me a question right now.

JOSEPH: There! If only you show that enthusiasm in every presscon then we would always have exciting days. Alright...sir, the Office of the Vice President is offering free shuttle services in 8 Metro Manila cities for medical frontliners, plus they opened free

dormitories in PGH, East Avenue Medical Center, and National Children's Hospital. They will open five more next week. What can you say about it?

HARRY: If it's not led and recommended by our Department of Health, we have no comment on other people's initiative.

JOSEPH: She's not just other people, sir. She is the Vice President.

HARRY: Whatever the DOH is doing is enough and they have similar plans. They are just finalizing the details. They will also launch a free shuttle service in partnership with MMDA. For now, I think we can appreciate the slight stagnation in the number of cases in Metro Manila.

JOSEPH: Sir according to the DOH there are at least **1,200** cases as of April **15**. Both confirmed and suspected cases. That's a jump from just **800** last April **1**. That's a **50%** increase. That's not stagnation sir, is it?

HARRY: I have to double check your numbers first.

JOSEPH: But sir, those numbers came from DOH just this morning.

HARRY: Well if you already know the numbers, why do you have to ask me? Besides, DOH is best equipped to stop the rise of covid positive cases. They are following the examples of North America and Europe.

JOSEPH: But sir they said that the virus reacts differently in different climates. Shouldn't we be looking at examples from Asian countries like Thailand or even India.

HARRY: I'll let the DOH clarify the science behind the virus. For now, I think what they're doing is enough.

JOSEPH: If what they're doing is enough sir, why return to ECQ next week?

HARRY: Ahm I would say because it's not that easy to secure vaccines for us. A lot of other countries are having a worse situation and they asked for vaccines from the US first.

JOSEPH: Does that mean we didn't act early, sir? How about the vaccines from China or Russia?

HARRY: I cannot answer on behalf of DOH.

JOSEPH: But you're speaking on behalf of IATF sir?

HARRY: Yes

JOSEPH: And DOH is part of IATF, correct?

HARRY: Joseph.

JOSEPH: Sir.

HARRY: I'm tired. I need to rest.

JOSEPH: But sir the lockdown returns to ECQ in 3 days. Can you at least share some more vaccine updates?

HARRY: I said I'm tired. I'm not joking!

JOSEPH: (Raises hands in sarcastic surrender) Okay. Sir.

Joseph picks up his phone and presses some buttons. Harry starts to get suspicious.

HARRY: Are you recording this?

He tries to grab Joseph's phone but he won't give it up.

JOSEPH: No! Are you out of your mind?

HARRY: This is so indecent and unprofessional. Give me your phone.

JOSEPH: Excuse me. I'm not recording our conversation. What for? You can barely give me an update!

HARRY: Then show me your phone.

JOSEPH: (Extends hand with phone) See? Now show me your phone too. You have an ongoing investigation tonight, right? Can I read it?

Harry backs down.

HARRY: How can I trust you?

JOSEPH: Fuck that. We've been like this for a year. You have a key to my unit yet you have the audacity to question my loyalty?

HARRY: These days I feel the world is getting smaller with the lockdown. It's hard to trust people.

JOSEPH: Well it's not just you, sir. Everyone is affected. You're not the only middle class, son of God, who's having a hard time these days.

HARRY: I just can't help it.

JOSEPH: And besides if you're finding it hard to live these days, what more the poor Pinoys who rely on your correct and timely updates, that we report? Just imagine. Joseph looks at his phone again.

HARRY: Can you put it down please?

JOSEPH: I bet you're paranoid because that's what you're doing with your enemies.

HARRY: You have the nerve to accuse us of wiretapping.

JOSEPH: Get mad all you want. Just admit that I'm right. Am I not?

Harry's phone rings. He answers without looking at it.

HARRY: Yes, yes, I'll go down in a while. (Back to Joseph) If I find out that you're recording this.

JOSEPH: (Holds it to Harry's face) O, are we good? You think you can threaten me? With what?

HARRY: I'm telling you your career is done.

JOSEPH: *Ulol.* You're the one who's done! All this time I'm not doing anything wrong. Don't you see that I was just trying to help you?

HARRY: By embarrassing me? Secretly recording me? Exposing me?

JOSEPH: Why would I do that? You're the one exposing yourself. You don't even need anyone's help to embarrass yourself.

Harry's phone rings. He answers without looking. Joseph relaxes a bit. He sits down.

HARRY: I said just a minute! oh love, what's up? Yes sorry I'll be home late again tonight, emergency meetings. I said I just need some time then I'll go home. Okay, okay. Love you too.

JOSEPH: I think it's best that you go home. You need to get some rest.

HARRY: How can I rest knowing you could have a recording of me?

JOSEPH: What ever happened to your common sense? There's nothing official in our conversation. I can't make a news out of this.

HARRY: So you have materials to work with?

JOSEPH: Fuck.

HARRY: (Shouts) Then why can't you give me your fucking phone?

JOSEPH: Because it's my private property! Are you from NBI? Do you have a search warrant? Even commoners know you can't force me to show you my phone!

HARRY: O how innocent you are. Don't even think about embarrassing me Joseph Santos.

JOSEPH: If there's anyone to blame for your embarrassment, it's just you and your ego.

HARRY: You think highly of yourself, boy. May I just inform you, to a lot of us in office, you are not a bonafide journalist, you're just wannabes. We are not scared of you and your media friends.

JOSEPH: I know what I got myself into. If I'm scared of anything, that is because of what I will lose in this situation, but never because I might lose you.

HARRY: You better make sure nothing goes out.

JOSEPH: You know how that will happen? Learn to shut your mouth.

HARRY: You speak as if you're the big shot in your newsroom. You're not the boss. I'm sure upon my request they would happily transfer you to a new beat.

JOSEPH: Why don't you try? Well to us reporters you're not a full-pledged spokesperson yet. You're just a puppy serving his master. By the way, you're one big puppy. *Damulag ka!* You're not even half as competent as your predecessor.

HARRY: You're the one who's on a leash. *Sunud-sunuran.* You'll only write whatever is hot and in favor of the public. How about our side?

JOSEPH: That's exactly why I'm part of the media! I write whatever is new and relevant. Sometimes I really wonder how you passed the Bar by being that stupid!
(Before Harry speaks) And what side are you talking about? Your side should be the same side as the people. That is the basic mandate of any public office.

HARRY: I meant the side of my boss.

JOSEPH: Why, because you only care about what he says? *Edi* I was right to call you a *tuta*.

HARRY: You're too naive to understand. It's not that simple.

JOSEPH: Look, if everything is that simple with your job and in the state of our country we wouldn't do a presson every 2 days. *Diba?* People are dying everyday and they go straight to cremation! No burial whatsoever. Their loved ones couldn't even hug them for the last time. Yet all you ever think about is...the side of your boss? Whatever happened to your humanity?

HARRY: I'm saying you won't understand me because you don't have to protect his image.

JOSEPH: That's not your only job! You need to have clear and correct instructions everytime. If you, the spokesperson, is a mess, can you imagine what happens? Well we all know what happens, you become a meme again! And the public? Fuck them and their safety. *Bahala na si Batman*. Aren't you embarrassed that even Batman has accountability. I wish you could say the same about your office.

HARRY: Don't compare us to Batman because we don't have his financial resources!

JOSEPH: You're wrong again! Ahh don't you see it? I think what you should have said is...don't compare you to Batman because he isn't real! Unlike you, you are real leaders! When you fuck up, the people will suffer. Whatever happened to your common sense!

HARRY: I'm trying my best, you know that.

JOSEPH: Don't try, do!

HARRY: You think you know everything just because you're the newsroom darling now. You just follow your colleagues when they have a scoop. Sometimes you steal their topics and make it seem that you thought of it, first. You think I don't notice it?

Joseph comes near Harry.

JOSEPH: *Gago ka* I don't do that.

HARRY: Who's defensive now, Joseph? I am still the spokesperson. You owe me some level of respect.

JOSEPH: You're in my place. You respect me.

HARRY: Just let me know if you want us to treat you the way we treated Rappler.

JOSEPH: You can't do that to me. I work in the leading news channel.

HARRY: We did that before. Ask around. You don't know how much damage I can cause to your career.

JOSEPH: Go ahead and threaten me even more. What if I out us in public? What will happen to you and your political ambition? How about your family, huh?

Harry goes quiet. A beat.

Harry's phone beeps. He looks at it. He reads something revealing.

JOSEPH: You are a commodity. You have an expiration date, same time as your boss. Soon all of you will be replaced yet I'll still be here. So who is more powerful?

(Pause) What, can't speak now because you know that I'm right? Huh?

Harry looks at Joseph straight in the eyes.

HARRY: (Shakes head) No, *tama ako*. I wish I wasn't but I was right all along.

JOSEPH: (Confused) What?

Harry's phone rings. He walks around the house with deep sighs. He can't approach Joseph coz he's shaking. And Joseph can see it.

HARRY: Do you want me to answer this?

JOSEPH: What is it about?

HARRY: The mole. Should I answer this?

JOSEPH: It's your private property. Do what you want.

Harry picks up the phone. Harry talks while standing in front of Joseph.

HARRY: Chi. Yes... (Pause) I can hear you... (Pause) Yes I know him...(Hesitant, stuttering) Well, we are not that close, just right. Reach out to his desk editor, request for a face to face meeting. Yes, check my calendar for earliest availability.

Joseph takes a step back. He sits down.

Harry's still on the call. Using the other hand, Harry holds Joseph's chin and lifts his face upward. Softly. Mercifully. Until their eyes meet.

HARRY: No, no, don't do anything to him until I say so. I know that was my first instruction. But don't remove him from the beat yet until they admit it. I will handle boss tomorrow, don't worry.

At this point the emotional Joseph stands up and hugs the now motionless spox.

HARRY: Thank you Chi. Let's continue this tomorrow.

Call drops. A beat.

HARRY: I'm used to being the talk of the town. What is one more headline with my silly photo? How about you? Joseph Santos?

JOSEPH: I don't know if I can take it.

HARRY: (Long pause) I know.

A beat. Harry reluctantly gives Joseph water. Joseph drinks it.

HARRY: You're welcome. For the water. And for so much more.

Joseph charges his phone and laptop, and clicks some buttons.

HARRY: What are you doing?

JOSEPH: Just charging my gadgets. I can still do it, can't I?

Harry laughs, then cries, then laughs while crying.

HARRY: I swear Joseph. One more blunder.

Joseph does the same.

JOSEPH: Why are we even fighting?

HARRY: Maybe it's just fatigue.

JOSEPH: Over-fatigue?

HARRY: Perhaps

JOSEPH: You think someone heard us?

HARRY: You think? We were pretty quiet.

The stage is getting darker. They talk and talk until it gets pitch black.

All we see are white blinking lights in Joseph's charging gadgets.

End