

Synopsis for *Debrief*:

A recent ordinance has been passed by the Philippine Government wherein all Filipinos who have been away from the country for more than three consecutive years now have to undergo a debriefing process at the airport prior to reaching immigration. This debriefing is done to gauge whether a Filipino migrant needs help in unloading any assimilation baggage and/or residue he or she may have attained from his or her foreign residency.

Debrief presents how a sampling of returning Filipinos deals with having to undergo this debriefing process upon their arrival at Ninoy Aquino International Airport.

DEBRIEF

SETTING: A room in Ninoy Aquino International Airport.

CHARACTERS:

DEBRIEFER, 55 years old, speaks with a perfect American accent. He is not fluent in Filipino.

PASSENGERS—

MANANG ELING, 48 years old, a maid visiting from Hong Kong for a week. She has been working in Hong Kong for 15 years and was last back in the Philippines five years ago.

RACHEL, 20 years old, fresh university graduate from Seattle, third-generation immigrant from America, and has never been to the Philippines before.

FAMILY, returning home after the father's 7-year job posting abroad in Singapore

MR. ABAD, 45 years old, high-flying executive who has been posted to a new job position back in the Philippines.

MRS. ABAD, 40 years old, stay-at-home mom.

JAMES, 16 years old, at a rebellious stage, does not want to be back in the Philippines. He speaks with a strong Singlish accent.

CHRISTIAN, 8 years old, excited to be back, left the Philippines when he was 1, does not remember anything about the country. He also speaks with a strong Singlish accent.

CARLOS, 26 years old. He works as a hotel concierge in Malaysia. He's been working there for 3 years and is back in the Philippines for 10 days to visit his family.

GRANDPARENTS, returning home to retire after 50 years away

LOLA CRUZ, 83 years old

LOLO CRUZ, 87 years old

LYDIA, 25 years old, dressed in an airport uniform, the Debriefers' assistant, also the woman heard over the loudspeaker. She has a walkie-talkie clipped to the belt of her pants.

THE PLAY

(The stage is designed to look like a classroom, with chairs—those with attached side tables—and a whiteboard pushed to the side. The whiteboard has a simple score chart system drawn on it, with blank squares where the scores of participants are to be placed. The lines of the chart are made of black electric tape. The chart looks like this:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1									
2									
3									
4									
5									
TOTAL									

The room does not have windows. The walls are painted white, making the room look almost clinical in nature. There is a door located at Upstage Left with a frosted glass upper half that allows silhouettes to be seen as groups of people walk past it. There is a black speaker placed at the far corner of the ceiling which blasts airport announcements. The room also has another door situated at Center Stage Right. It looks like a closet door and appears to be locked. The walls of the room

are adorned with various posters advertising top tourist destinations in the Philippines.

When the play starts, CARLOS and MANANG ELING are seated in the room. CARLOS is by the chair nearest to the frosted door, quietly minding his own business. MANANG ELING is seated on the chair in front of him, her bags splayed open. She is rummaging through her things, the pasalubong she has brought with her. She takes things out to admire them only to put them back in the bag again. The two of them don't talk to each other.

Plane announcements regarding flights arriving at the airport are heard through the speaker. Announcements such as these will be played throughout the duration of the play to serve as background noise. Only announcements by LYDIA are broadcasted loudly to the audience.)

LYDIA

(Voice heard through the speaker)

We are pleased to announce the arrival of Cathay Pacific flight one-ninety-two from Singapore. Passengers will be disembarking from Gate 22.

(The silhouettes of people are seen walking past the frosted door.)

To all arriving passengers, please take note that those holding Philippine Citizenship or Philippine Dual-Citizenship have to proceed to the Information Desk prior to Immigration. Once again, all passengers holding Philippine Citizenship or Philippine Dual-Citizenship have to proceed to the Information Desk prior to Immigration. Thank you.

(The silhouette of a group of people is seen walking closer to the frosted door. Complaints and general unhappiness can be heard from outside the door before it opens.)

(The PASSENGERS are led into the room by LYDIA. The PASSENGERS look tired from their plane ride.)

MR. ABAD

Why do we even need to do this?

LYDIA

Everyone, if you would just please leave your hand-carry at the side of the room. You won't need those just yet.

(PASSENGERS line their luggage at the part of the stage where LYDIA is pointing to. PASSENGERS look confused, unsure of what to do, with their passports still in hand.)

Please take your seats and get your passports ready.

MR. ABAD

Excuse me!

(Taps LYDIA on the shoulder. He is also simultaneously checking his smartphone, waving it around looking for reception.)

You are ignoring my question. Why do we even need to be here? What is all this about? My family—

(Points vaguely towards the other PASSENGERS.)

—and I have somewhere else to be.

LYDIA

Please, sir. Just take your seat.

LOLO CRUZ

Oongahija, anongginagawanamindito?

(Opens his passport and points at something)

Is it because of this?

LYDIA

Please, sir. Just take your seat.

(Motions for LOLO CRUZ to sit down.)

JAMES

(Snickers to CHRISTIAN)

Damn robot lah that girl.

CHRISTIAN

(Giggles but looks embarrassed at the same time.)

Aiyohkuya, not so loud lah.

(JAMES rolls his eyes)

(The rest of the PASSENGERS behave as such: RACHEL is looking at the pictures on the wall and is trying to strike up a conversation with CARLOS who is seated near a poster she is looking at; MANANG ELING is still digging through her carry-on luggage on the floor for something while chattering away about her plans for her vacation to LOLA CRUZ; MRS. ABAD is adjusting the clothes of CHRISTIAN; JAMES and CHRISTIAN are arguing the way brothers usually do.)

(LYDIA turns away from MR. ABAD and LOLO CRUZ to address the PASSENGERS again.)

LYDIA

Everyone!

(Tries to talk over the chatter of the PASSENGERS.)

Everyone! Please listen!

(PASSENGERS ignore her and continue talking amongst themselves.)

Everyone! Please!

(The frosted door opens. PASSENGERS and LYDIA turn to look at the man who has just entered the room. He is tall and dressed in a stylish and clearly expensive Barong.)

DEBRIEFER

Good afternoon, everyone!

(Closes frosted door.)

LYDIA

(Looks embarrassed.)

Ay, sir! Hi! Welcome! I was just about to brief them.

(Lowers her voice as she nears the DEBRIEFER.)

But they're a hard crowd to control kasi eh.

DEBRIEFER

It's okay, Lydia. You may go now. I'll handle the introductions.

(LYDIA exits. JAMES rolls his eyes at her. MR. ABAD tries to get LYDIA'S attention again. LYDIA waves him off.)

DEBRIEFER

Everyone, please have a seat. C'mon,

(Walks over to MANANG ELING.)

Ma'am, please leave your bag alone for now.

(Leads MANANG ELING to a seat at the front before addressing the group again.)

Good morning. So, you may all be wondering what you are doing here today.

(PASSENGERS nod/murmur in approval.)

DEBRIEFER

If you could all just take a look at your passports,

(Looks at MANANG ELING and addresses her confused look.)

Yes, your passports. If you turn to the latest page, the one that was stamped at the customs of your country of destination—

MANANG ELING

(Raises hand)

'Yung Hong Kong?

DEBRIEFER

Yes, ma'am, if that's where you came from.

(Waits for MANANG ELING to nod in understanding.)

As I was saying, if you look at that page—for example, in her case

(Points at MANANG ELING.)

Her latest page is stamped with Hong Kong's departure seal. If you look at that page now, you'll see a red stamp where the Philippines' arrival seal should be. Granted, you shouldn't expect to even have the Philippines' arrival seal since you've all yet to go through customs. In its place is this red stamp that should read "Debrief before Release." Does everyone see that in their passport? Lydia should have stamped that for you earlier.

(A flurry of activity from the PASSENGERS as they look through their passports.)

Is anyone here not seeing that?

(Waits for a response.)

Anyone? No one? Great! So—

CHRISTIAN

(Looks at MRS. ABAD and tries to look at the passports she is holding.)

What is that man talking about, mommy? What stamp?

RACHEL

(Raises hand.)

So what does this mean for us?

(Looks incredulously at her passport.)

“Release?” Am I...I mean...are we in trouble or something?

MANANG ELING

Oongapo, anobayungibingsabihin nun? Pasensyanapo, angtagalkona ringhindibumisitasa Pilipinas.

JAMES

(Whispers to MRS. ABAD)

See, they don't want us here. Can we go back home or not?

(MRS. ABAD shushes JAMES)

MR. ABAD

(Turns to his FAMILY.)

Hold on, I'll settle this.

(Stands up and raises his hand.)

Excuse me!

DEBRIEFER

(Looks at Mr. Abad.)

Sir, if you could just please sit down and I'll explain—

MR. ABAD

I've been waiting for an explanation for quite a while now. We all have—I...I mean my family and I, have somewhere to be!

DEBRIEFER

I understand that, sir. But there's a new protocol. If you'd just let me explain.

MRS. ABAD

(Pulls on MR. ABAD'S sleeve.)

Honey, sit down and let him explain.

(Lowers her voice so only MR. ABAD can hear.)

You're embarrassing us.

(MR. ABAD sits down reluctantly.)

DEBRIEFER

Right. Moving on. So why are you all here? What is this all about? You may have heard the announcement upon landing requiring all of you to report to the Information Desk prior to Customs. Correct?

(PASSENGERS nod/murmur in approval.)

Well, this is all part of a new program that we're rolling out. As stated in the ordinance dated a couple of days ago, anyone bearing a Filipino passport upon arrival and has been away from the country for three years or more has to participate in an orientation program as required by law. Since the program is still in its early stages, we've so far only been trying out the program in small batches on passengers chosen at random; but, so far, I think we're making great progress.

JAMES

Na beh, so mah fan!

MRS. ABAD

James!

(Smacks JAMES on the arm before turning to address the DEBRIEFER.)

I'm sorry, he's kind of in a mood.

DEBRIEFER

(Ignores JAMES.)

Just a quick survey, can everyone tell me how many years since you've all last visited or been to the Philippines. Why don't we start from here? Would you two like to start?

(Points to LOLO AND LOLA CRUZ.)

LOLO CRUZ

Ano?

DEBRIEFER

Just tell the group how many years you've been away from the Philippines. When were you last here?

LOLO CRUZ

Ah. Angtagalna, hijo.

(Looks at LOLA CRUZ.)

Anoba? Around fifty years?

LOLA CRUZ

(Nods.)

Parangganun.Tagalna, noh? We were in our thirties when we left the Philippines, kakapangananaklangkayTotoy.

LOLO CRUZ

(Sighs in nostalgia.)

Oonga. Si Totoy. Angkulit-kulitngbatangyun.

DEBRIEFER

Great. Fifty years. From where?

LOLO CRUZ

San Francisco.

DEBRIEFER

Great, San Fran.Awesome place. Thank you. How about you?

(Points to MANANG ELING.)

MANANG ELING

Five years napo. Ayawkasipong employer ko mag pa-leave pa sa akin kasikakapangananaklangponya. So ayun, kailangannyadawakosabahay. Perongayonnagbakasyonsila, sopinayaganpoakoumuwingisang lingo.

DEBRIEFER

And you came from Hong Kong, correct?

MANANG ELING

Opo.

DEBRIEFER

And what were you doing there?

MANANG ELING

DH, po.

DEBRIEFER

DH?

MANANG ELING

Opo.

DEBRIEFER

What's that?

MANANG ELING

Domestic Helper, po.

DEBRIEFER

Ahhh. Okay. Good job. Good on you! Next—

(Points to RACHEL.)

How about you, young lady?

RACHEL

(Looks around.)

Me?

DEBRIEFER

Yes, you.

RACHEL

I've never been to the Philippines before. This is my first time and it seems lovely! Look at all the pictures!

(Points to a poster of Boracay.)

Beautiful! I can't wait to go there!

DEBRIEFER

So you're here for a vacation?

RACHEL

I just really wanted to get to know my roots, you know?

DEBRIEFER

And how old are you?

RACHEL

Twenty-three.

DEBRIEFER

And I'm guessing you don't speak Filipino at all?

RACHEL

Just English. My parents are second-generation immigrants so we don't speak Filipino back home. I understand a bit though. Not much. But I get by.

DEBRIEFER

And where is this home that you speak of?

RACHEL

Seattle.

DEBRIEFER

It seems that you have a lot of work cut out for you, then!

RACHEL

I know! It's all so exciting!

(Claps her hands in happiness.)

DEBRIEFER

Yes. It's great. Okay, moving on.

(Points to CARLOS.)

Your turn, young man.

CARLOS

Hi. From Malaysia. Been away for three years. Working.

DEBRIEFER

That's all?

CARLOS

Yup.

DEBRIEFER

Okay. And how about your family?

(Points to MR. ABAD.)

MR. ABAD

We're the Abad family. We've been away for almost—

(Turns to CHRISTIAN.)

How old are you now? Six?

CHRISTIAN

Eight!

JAMES

Aiyoh, Da. Can't even get your own son's age correct.

MR. ABAD

(Ignores JAMES. Pauses for a bit to count.)

So that makes it...seven years. We've been away for seven years. In Singapore. Recently offered a promotion to head the office here in Manila. We thought it's a great opportunity...so we came back.

JAMES

No. *You* thought it's a great opportunity.

MRS. ABAD

James!

(Turns to DEBRIEFER.)

Sorry again, he wasn't a fan of coming back here.

JAMES

Still am not a fan!

DEBRIEFER

(Addresses MRS. ABAD.)

Don't worry, ma'am, I've seen plenty young'uns like him.

(Turns to address JAMES.)

You'll soon love it here, son.

JAMES

(Mutters under his breath.)

Don't fucking call me, son.

MR. ABAD

(Motions for JAMES to shush.)

Now that you've taken your little survey, can we all go now? I think we've all been here long enough.

(Looks at his watch.)

DEBRIEFER

Not quite. As you all may have noticed, your group has something in common.

(PASSENGERS look at each other.)

You've all been away from the Philippines for quite a significant number of years. So naturally, it is expected that many of you have forgotten a lot of your—how can I say this?—“Filipino-ness” due to the expected assimilation process you've all gone through, whether it be in Hong Kong or in Malaysia.

RACHEL

(Turns to talk to CARLOS.)

Sounds dodgy.

(CARLOS acknowledges with a forced smile.)

DEBRIEFER

So what does this all mean, you may all be wondering?

JAMES

(Mutters under his breath and crosses his arms.)

Not really.

(CHRISTIAN giggles.)

DEBRIEFER

It just means that you've all been invited to participate in this mandatory program that will gauge your level of assimilation—basically how far, or rather, how much you have lost in the assimilation process.

(Murmur of unhappiness spreads through the room.)

Don't worry. This doesn't mean you're in trouble nor does it mean that your country isn't happy with all of you. In fact, the country is happy for your return. Really excited! The country loves this trend of returning Filipinos!

MR. ABAD

So let us all go, then.

DEBRIEFER

Ah...not quite. You see, while it's great that everyone seems to be returning or visiting or whatever may be your reason, studies have shown that many returnees seem out of it upon their arrival, almost as if they've lost their sense of self, that the Philippines is now foreign to them. That is the reason why the ordinance was created in the first place; and we—meaning my team and I—are now tasked to help remedy that problem.

MANANG ELING

(Raises her hand.)

Hindi namanpoganoon, maramipoakongkilalanaPinoynaPinoy pa rin.

MR. ABAD

(Raises his hand too, but his eyes are focused on his smartphone.)

Yes. What she said.

LOLO CRUZ

(Raises hand.)

Kahitangtagalna naming nawalasaPinas,

(Looks at LOLA CRUZ for approval, she nods at him to continue.)

I'm speaking for the both of us to let you know that we are still as Filipino as ever.

CARLO

(Looks bored.)

Yup.Same here.

RACHEL

(Whispers to CARLO.)

What's going on?

CHRISTIAN

(Turns to RACHEL.)

Shhhh!!!!

(MRS. ABAD motions for CHRISTIAN to behave. JAMES gives CHRISTIAN a high-five.)

DEBRIEFER

Yes. Yes. We are well aware that some of you may have managed to retain you Filipino-ness...and that's great; but we still need to gauge and make sure that what you're telling us is true.

MANANG ELING

(Looks nervous.)

Paanonyopogagawiniyon?

MR. ABAD

Is there a form we need to fill up? C'mon. Let us know so we can speed this up so we can all leave.

(Murmur of agreement from the PASSENGERS.)

DEBRIEFER

Yes. I was about to get to that.

(Walks over to open the frosted door, sticks his head out, and shouts.)

Lydia! Come here, please! Quickly!

(DEBRIEFER walks back to the front of the room.)

(Movement is heard from behind the frosted door.)

LYDIA

(Peeks her head into the room.)

Yes, sir?

DEBRIEFER

Where are the keys?

LYDIA

Ay. Etopo.

(DEBRIEFER gives LYDIA a disapproving look.)

I mean—here they are.

(Pulls a set of keys from her pocket and walks over to hand it to the DEBRIEFER.)

(DEBRIEFER whispers something inaudible to LYDIA while looking at his watch. LYDIA looks at her own watch and nods in reply. She exits the room with her head bowed, avoiding eye-contact with the PASSENGERS.)

DEBRIEFER

Right. Sorry for that. As I was saying—

(Dangles the set of keys in his hand.)

You are all going to be gauged through a series of tests. The whole concept is simple enough. Each test is either a pass or a fail. There will be five rounds of tests in total. Your objective: pass as many of these tests as you can. Simple as that.

RACHEL

(Turns to CARLOS.)

Awesome! I'm great with tests. I feel so prepared. I've been studying this book in my bag...it's pretty great; it has all these facts and everything! Like I read—

CARLOS

(Interrupts RACHEL mid-sentence.)

Yes. Great. Okay.

(RACHEL looks unperturbed.)

LOLA CRUZ

What type of tests, hijo?

DEBRIEFER

I'll be coordinating simple tests that will gauge how well you know the Philippines. These tests will test your knowledge on things that everyone else in the country—I'm referring to those who haven't left—are very familiar with. You'll be tested on things that are deemed part of the Filipino consciousness, a collective experience that every Filipino share with each other. Since you've all been away for quite some time, or as in the case of that young lady over there—

(Points to RACHEL)

(RACHEL smiles shyly)

—have never been here before, it's only natural that your country would want to gauge to make sure you're still a Filipino, a Filipino who has not lost touch with the Filipino consciousness. As such, we do expect a certain level of effort from all of you.

JAMES

(Looks warily at the DEBRIEFER.)

What sort of effort?

DEBRIEFER

An effort to show your *want*—your *need*—to assimilate yourself back in your homeland, of course! That's the whole point of these tests...or, you know what, the term 'test' makes this all seem rather formal...let's just call them activities. Think: fun activities!

(Notices the wary expression spreading through the room.)

Don't stress too much about it. As long as you're full-on Filipino, you're bound to pass these tests easily.

CARLOS

And what happens if we don't?

DEBRIEFER

Great question, young man!

MANANG ELING

Oonga, po. Anong mangyayarisakaling hindi kami pumasa?

DEBRIEFER

If you fail, you'll have to undergo a compulsory immersion program for thirty-days. That's all.

RACHEL

What's that?

MR. ABAD

(Looks up from his smartphone at the phrase "Thirty-Days".)

What? Like community service? My family and I do not have time to undergo such a thing!

(Murmur of dissent spread through the room.)

MANANG ELING

Pero isang linggol ang po akoditosa Pinas.

RACHEL

(Taps MRS. ABAD on the shoulder.)

Excuse me. What's happening? What community service?

MRS. ABAD

Just listen, dear.

LOLO CRUZ

But we already made plans for the next few months. We don't have time to do an immersion program.

(RACHEL still looks confused and is pestering CARLOS)

MR. ABAD

Yes. No one has the time for this!

JAMES

(Addresses MRS. ABAD.)

I told you returning here was a bad idea.

(CHRISTIAN giggles.)

DEBRIEFER

(Holds up his hands in an attempt to quiet the PASSENGERS.)

Listen. Listen, everyone! There is no need to panic. That's why I said earlier that all you have to do is pass the tests, didn't I? As long as you pass these test—these activities—you'll be fine! No need to worry.

CARLOS

(Reluctantly raises his hand.)

I think it would be nice if you could explain what that immersion program is all about.

RACHEL

(Addresses CARLOS.)

Thank you!

(Turns to address the DEBRIEFER.)

Yes. What do you mean by "immersion"?

DEBRIEFER

Right. So in addition to this current program that you are all in right now, we have also developed a secondary program to help those in dire need of guidance in assimilating back into

the country, to re-learn and re-discover their Filipino-ness. Basically, it's a personalized immersion program that will help the participant reach the level that is deemed satisfactory to enter back into the country. It takes thirty-days to complete and will see the participant go through various modules. The specifics of the immersion really depend on the situation—meaning, the level of loss—of the participant.

RACHEL

Level of loss? Sounds scary.

DEBRIEFER

Don't be frightened. It's pretty fun, we—I mean, I—make sure it's be fun for all our participants.

RACHEL

And how many people have gone through the immersion?

DEBRIEFER

Umm...none yet actually.

MR. ABAD

(Raises hand.)

And how many have gone through this current program we're all stuck in right now?

DEBRIEFER

You're part of the second group to undergo this initial process. So you're one of the pioneers! So feel proud! Be happy! C'mon! Be happy!

(PASSENGERS, except RACHEL, express fake happiness.)

(RACHEL beams with joy and excitement, clapping her hands.)

RACHEL

(Turns to CARLOS.)

Yay! How exciting!

(CARLOS strains a smile.)

DEBRIEFER

Great! So now that everything is in the clear, shall we get started?

MR. ABAD

Yes. Let's.

DEBRIEFER

Unless, of course, anyone else has any questions?

MR. ABAD

No. No questions. Let's move this along.

(PASSENGERS all nod in approval.)

DEBRIEFER

Okay. Great! Let's start then.

(DEBRIEFER walks over to the locked door at Center Stage Right, opens it with the set of keys, and steps inside. He leaves the door partially opened.)

(PASSENGERS behave as such: MR. ABAD is still trying to get reception on his smartphone and shows signs of impatience; MRS. ABAD is opening a packet of potato chips for CHRISTIAN; JAMES is brooding in his chair; RACHEL is striking up a conversation with MANANG ELING; CARLOS remains still and quiet, looking rather bored; the LOLO CRUZ and LOLA CRUZ are talking amongst themselves about their plans for the next few days.)

(DEBRIEFER emerges from the door at Center Stage Right rolling a table covered with a blue cloth so that its contents are hidden from view. The table is placed Down Center.)

Alright.

(PASSENGERS all turn to look at him.)

Let's begin.

(DEBRIEFER pulls the blue cloth off the table revealing various plastic opaque bowls covered by a secure lid. There is a number placed atop each bowl. Inside the bowls are unidentified Filipino dishes.

First up: Food!

(PASSENGERS lean forward to take a look.)

RACHEL

Ooohhh...smells divine!

JAMES

Divine your face, lah. Damn smelly, can! Filipino food is so gross.

CHRISTIAN

But you like mommy's sinigang, what!

JAMES

Shut up, lah you. Mind your own business!

(LOLA CRUZ turns to look at JAMES and CHRISTIAN. She gives them a disapproving look.)

MRS. ABAD

(Addresses LOLA CRUZ with a whisper.)

Sorry. They're not usually like this.

MANANG ELING

(Addresses MRS. ABAD.)

Ganyantalagasaumpisa. Mahirap.Masasanayrinsila.

MRS. ABAD

Sana nga, po.

DEBRIEFER

(Takes a stack of index cards off the table and reads from it.)

Our country's cuisine is the one thing a Filipino should never lose touch of. After all, Filipino food is a delight in flavor—

MR. ABAD

(Interrupts the DEBRIEFER.)

—so what do we do? Are those for us?

(Points at the covered bowls.)

Are we going to eat all of it?

(Stands up.)

Come on.

(Motions for his FAMILY to stand up and move to the table.)

Let's get eating.

JAMES

I don't want to eat.

DEBRIEFER

(Motions for MR. ABAD to sit down.)

Wait—Sir, please sit down.

(MR. ABAD reluctantly sits down.)

Before we begin, let me read off the rules. Since this is the first time we've had groups of families taking part in this test, I guess—umm...how should we do this?—I guess I'll group all of you according to your family-ties. So that means—

(Points to MR. ABAD and FAMILY.)

Your family will make up one group.

(Points to the LOLO CRUZ and LOLA CRUZ.)

Both of you will be another group. The rest of you without any partners or families will be taking the test as individual participants. Those in groups have to pass collectively—meaning each member has to take the test and the scores will be averaged out. The rest of you will be scored individually. Understood? Everything clear?

MANANG ELING

Opo.

(Murmurs of agreement from the rest of the PASSENGERS.)

DEBRIEFER

Great! Now, please stand and push the chairs to the walls. We need to clear the space here in the middle. I want all of you to be comfortably spaced apart, with those in groups standing clustered together.

(PASSENGERS noisily push the chairs against the wall.)

(RACHEL pulls a book about the Philippines from her bag before she takes her place with the rest of the PASSENGERS center stage. She tucks the book in the back pocket of her jeans.)

RACHEL

This is exciting!

JAMES

Whatever.

DEBRIEFER

Everyone ready? Everyone in their places?

(Walks around the room to ensure PASSENGERS are standing comfortably apart.)

Perfect! Now, here we go!

(Reads off the index card.)

First test: Defining the Filipino Palate. A Filipino should have a palate that can easily identify popular Filipino dishes. This will put your palate to the test. In front of you are bowls containing Filipino dishes that you should be familiar with and thus can easily identify. The task here is simple.

(Takes a velvet drawstring bag off the table.)

Each of you will draw a number from this bag—

(Points towards the whiteboard.)

—the number will also serve as your participant number for the duration of this program. Once you have your number, stand in front of the bowl of your corresponding number. Each of you will also be blindfolded.

(Points at the stack of blindfolds on the table.)

At my word, you'll all consume whatever is in the bowl in front of you. If you find it difficult to feed yourself while blindfolded—as the previous group had complained—raise your hand and I will come over and feed you. Is that clear?

(PASSENGERS look confused and react at the mention of the phrase “come over and feed you”.)

MANANG ELING

(Raises hand.)

Kailanganpoba naming ubusin—

DEBRIEFER

(Interrupts MANANG ELING mid-sentence.)

The answer is no, you do not have to finish everything in the bowl. You may, of course, eat as much as you like. As long as you've tasted enough to give the correct answer, then you may stop eating. Is that clear?

(PASSENGERS all nod.)

MR. ABAD

(Puts his smartphone in his pocket and looks impatient.)

Can we start now?

DEBRIEFER

Everyone, please take a number.

(Goes around the room to let the PASSENGERS pick a number from the drawstring bag and also hands each PASSENGER a blindfold.)

(PASSENGERS pick the following numbers in this particular order— RACHEL: # 2; CARLOS: # 7; MR. ABAD: # 8; MRS. ABAD: # 1; JAMES: # 5; CHRISTIAN: # 9; MANANG ELING: # 3; LOLA CRUZ: # 4 LOLO CRUZ: # 6—and proceed to stand at their designated places.)

Great, everyone's in place. Now please blindfold yourselves.

(PASSENGERS are initially hesitant with the blindfold. They eventually awkwardly blindfold themselves.)

(DEBRIEFER goes around the room to make sure the PASSENGERS are putting on the blindfold correctly and that none of them can see a thing.)

DEBRIEFER

At the count of three, you may gently lift the cover off your bowl, take the spoon placed on the right, and begin eating. Ready?

(PASSENGERS all feel for the spoons next to them.)

PASSENGERS

Ready!

DEBRIEFER

Okay. One, two, three! Go!

(A flurry of activity as the PASSENGERS attempt to get the cover of their bowl and eat the dish inside. Their progress in the task differs from each other, some are slower than others.)

JAMES

(Struggles to remove the cover on his bowl.)

This is stupid.

LOLA CRUZ

(The cover of her dish falls to the ground. The cover is made of plastic so it does not break.)

Susmaryosep, anghirapnaman.

DEBRIEFER

(Walks around the room observing the PASSENGERS.)

Don't forget to raise your hand if you need help.

MRS. ABAD

Christian. Do you need help, honey?

CHRISTIAN

(Stirs the contents of his bowl with the spoon.)

No, mommy. It's okay. I got it.

MR. ABAD

Good boy.

(Attempts to pat CHRISTIAN on the head; but pats the head of CARLOS instead who has his head down, his mouth placed on the rim of the bowl as he scoops the food into his mouth.)

(CARLOS is surprised, straightens up, and looks confused.)

JAMES

(Taps the rim of the bowl with his spoon.)

This is really, really stupid.

RACHEL

(Raises hand.)

Excuse me! Excuse me!

MANANG ELING

(Puts spoon down and raises hand.)

Taposnapoako.

RACHEL

(Still has her hand raised.)

Excuse me! I don't know how to eat this.

(Holds up an egg.)

LOLO CRUZ

(Speaks towards LOLA CRUZ's direction.)

Okay kalang? Need help? We can take turns.

(Listens to LOLA CRUZ still fumbling with her lid.)

LOLA CRUZ

(Addresses LOLO CRUZ.)

I can't seem to get the lid off properly.

LOLO CRUZ

Okay. Wait langmuna, ha? Let me finish mine and I'll go over and help you with yours.

RACHEL

(Still has her hand raised.)

Excuse me!

DEBRIEFER

(Taps RACHEL on the shoulder.)

Yes. Do you need help?

RACHEL

(Holds up the egg again.)

What is this? How do I eat this?

MANANG ELING

(Still has her hands raised.)

Sasabihinkonapobayungsagot?

DEBRIEFER

(Addresses MANANG ELING.)

Hold on. Let's wait for the others to finish.

(MANANG ELING lowers her hand and proceeds to patiently wait.)

(DEBRIEFER Turns back to RACHEL.)

DEBRIEFER

Okay. What do you have there? What does it feel like?

RACHEL

(Turns the egg over and over in her hand.)

It's obviously an egg. But I'm not sure if I should I crack the egg onto the bowl.

DEBRIEFER

You can if you want to.

RACHEL

(Cracks the egg on the rim of the bowl and empties the contents in the bowl, much like how one would crack open a raw chicken egg with one hand, throwing the eggshells aside.)

Goodness! This feels disgusting! Why does it feel all strange and lumpy? Is it rotten...and eww! What is this hard thing? Are you sure it's edible? And what—

DEBRIEFER

(Ignores RACHEL'S outburst and looks into her bowl.)

There. Now it should be easier to eat. Do you need to be fed?

RACHEL

(Looks repulsed at the thought of being fed.)

No. It's okay. I think I've got it. Thanks.

(RACHEL brings the bowl to her lips and slowly sips the contents. She makes a face, clearly disgusted with that she just consumed.)

(At this point, LOLO CRUZ is done tasting his dish and is slowly making his way over to where LOLA CRUZ is standing. He helps her with her task, lifting the lid off the bowl and slowly feeding the contents to LOLA CRUZ.)

(The DEBRIEFER is still making his way around the table, once in a while checking in on each participant to make sure they're completing the task or if they need to be fed. CARLOS and MR. ABAD brushes him off.)

JAMES

(Catches a whiff of the egg in RACHEL'S bowl.)

Wahseh! Gross siah! What the fuck is that smell?!

MRS. ABAD

James! Watch your language!

(JAMES ignores MRS. ABAD's reprimand.)

JAMES

(Mutters to himself.)

I'm just being honest, what!

MRS. ABAD

(Ignores JAMES and raises hand.)

I'm ready to give my answer.

CHRISTIAN

(Still stirring the contents of his bowl)

Wah, mommy, so fast ah!

MR. ABAD

C'mon boys, hurry up. I want us to be done with this A.S.A.P!

MRS. ABAD

(Addresses MR. ABAD.)

Honey, give them time.

MR. ABAD

(Addresses MRS. ABAD.)

They've had enough time.

(Raises hand, trying to get the attention of the DEBRIEFER.)

Excuse me! Can we move this along? I think most of us are done.

DEBRIEFER

(Checks his watch before addressing the PASSENGERS.)

Are all of you finished?

CARLOS

(Arms crossed over his chest.)

Yup. I'm done.

(Mutter of agreement from the rest of the PASSENGERS.)

CHRISTIAN

But I'm not done yet—

JAMES

(Whispers to CHRISTIAN.)

Psst. Lick the spoon! Hurry! Hurry! Before that man comes around.

(JAMES and CHRISTIAN hurriedly dip their spoons in their bowls and lick the spoon to taste.)

CHRISTIAN

(Giggles.)

Okay. Now I'm done!

JAMES

(Throws his spoon on the table.)

Me too!

DEBRIEFER

Great. Now, please remain where you are for a little bit.

(Walks around the table, covering the bowls with lids.)

Okay. You may remove your blindfolds now.

(PASSENGERS remove their blindfolds. They spend a few seconds adjusting to the light, with some fixing their hair and/or brushing lint off their face.)

Wasn't that fun?

(Non-committal murmurs from the PASSENGERS.)

Now I'd like for all of you to take turns giving me your answer. First state the number you picked and then your answer. Who would like to go first?

(PASSENGERS look nervously at each other.)

(DEBRIEFER points to CARLOS)

Would you like to go first?

CARLOS

(Looks bored.)

Number 7. Pinakbet.

DEBRIEFER

Okay. Your answer is “Pinakbet.” Are you sure?

CARLOS

Yup.

DEBRIEFER

Really sure?

CARLOS

Yup.

DEBRIEFER

(Looks at the index cards he’s holding.)

...And you are correct!

CARLOS

I know.

DEBRIEFER

(Pats CARLOS on the back.)

Great work! Full score for you!

(CARLOS moves away from the DEBRIEFER.)

(DEBRIEFER moves over the whiteboard in the room and fills in the score for CARLOS in the column listed for number 7. He addresses the PASSENGERS while writing on the whiteboard.)

Don’t mind this simple whiteboard score system. My team’s developing a more sophisticated one for future use.

(None of the PASSENGERS respond.)

Anyway, moving on...how about the both of you?

(Points to the GRANDPARENTS.)

What did each of you get?

LOLO CRUZ

Umm—

DEBRIEFER

(Interrupts LOLO CRUZ.)

Remember, both of your scores will be averaged. So if one of you gets it wrong—

MR. ABAD

(Interrupts the DEBRIEFER.)

Yes. Yes. He gets it. We all get it. Can we move this along?

(Whispers to MRS. ABAD.)

They need a better system. What a mess.

(MRS. ABAD shushes him.)

DEBRIEFER

(Gets a bit flustered.)

Right.

(Addresses LOLO CRUZ.)

Continue your answer, sir.

LOLO CRUZ

Definitely adobo.

DEBRIEFER

(Looks at the index card.)

Are you sure it isn't something else?

LOLO CRUZ

(Looks at the DEBRIEFER incredulously.)

Of course I'm sure! Adobo is my favorite!

(Reaches over to hold LOLA CRUZ's hand.)

DEBRIEFER

(Looks at the index card again.)

...and yes, you are correct!

LOLA CRUZ

(Smiles at LOLO CRUZ.)

Galing!

DEBRIEFER

(Addresses LOLO CRUZ.)

Wait. What's your number again? I don't think you said it.

LOLO CRUZ

Number Six.

DEBRIEFER

(Looks at the index card again.)

Ah. Yes. Number 6. Yes. You are correct!

JAMES

(Addresses the DEBRIEFER. He speaks loudly wanting everyone to hear him.)

Aiyoh. Like you're not sure like that. Do you even know?

(CHRISTIAN giggles)

(DEBRIEFER ignores JAMES by turning away from him.)

DEBRIEFER

(Addresses LOLA CRUZ.)

Now how about you? What did you get?

LOLA CRUZ

I got number 4.

(Shows her card to the DEBRIEFER.)

Dinuguan. I'm sure of it.

LOLO CRUZ
(Smiles at LOLA CRUZ.)

PaboritoniTotoyyundiba?

LOLA CRUZ
(Nods sweetly at LOLO CRUZ before turning to address the DEBRIEFER.)

Tama poba?

DEBRIEFER
(Looks at the index card.)

Yes. You are most definitely correct!

(DEBRIEFER moves over the whiteboard to update the scores. He addresses the PASSENGERS while writing on the whiteboard.)

Good job so far, everyone! Moving on—

(Points towards the ABAD family.)

Now let's move on to this family, over here.

Well—

MR. ABAD

CHRISTIAN
(Interrupts MR. ABAD and raises his hand.)

I want to go first! I want to go first!

MR. ABAD
(Sighs.)

Go ahead. Make it quick.

(Returns his attention back to checking his smartphone.)

CHRISTIAN
(Looks at the DEBRIEFER.)

Hi! I'm Christian!

(Goes up to shake the DEBRIEFER'S hand.)

DEBRIEFER

(Warily shakes CHRISTIAN'S hand.)

Okay. You do know that you don't need to introduce yourself, right?

JAMES

He's weird like that.

CHRISTIAN

(Digs around his pocket for his number, find it and shows the DEBRIEFER his number.)

I got number nine. I like number nine.

DEBRIEFER

Okay...and what dish did you get?

CHRISTIAN

Sinigang!

DEBRIEFER

Are you sure?

CHRISTIAN

Yes! Very sure! Sinigang!

DEBRIEFER

(Looks at the index card.)

And you are...correct!

CHRISTIAN

Yay!

(MR.ABAD pats CHRISTIAN atop his head.)

(JAMES rolls his eyes at CHRISTIAN.)

DEBRIEFER

(Addresses the ABAD FAMILY.)

Okay. So who'd like to go next?

MRS. ABAD

(Raises her hand.)

I'll go next. I got number 1. It's pretty easy. Definitely adobo.

DEBRIEFER

(Looks at the index card.)

...and you are also correct! Very good!

(Turns to address JAMES.)

Would you like to go next?

JAMES

(Shrugs.)

Whatever.

DEBRIEFER

So what's your answer?

JAMES

I don't know.

DEBRIEFER

You don't?

JAMES

I don't.

DEBRIEFER

Why not?

JAMES

I don't know.

DEBRIEFER

You do realize that you're affecting your family's score, right?

JAMES

(Shrugs again.)

Uh-huh.

DEBRIEFER

So I'll mark you as incorrect then?

MR. ABAD

(Addresses JAMES.)

James! Can you just give an answer!

MRS. ABAD
(Addresses MR. ABAD.)

You don't need to raise your voice at him.

MR. ABAD
(Ignores MRS. ABAD and continues to address JAMES.)

Just give an answer so we can get out of here.

JAMES
Okay lah. Okay lah. No need to be all dramatic, can?

MR. ABAD
Just give an answer.

CHRISTIAN
(Cheers JAMES on.)

Go, kuya!

JAMES
I anyhow guess one, okay?

DEBRIEFER
The important thing is that you try.

JAMES
Fine.Tocino.

DEBRIEFER
Are you sure?

JAMES
Of course not lah! I anyhow guess one, what.

DEBRIEFER
(Looks at the index card.)

And why did you guess that specific dish?

JAMES
Don't know lah. I just anyhow say one.

MR. ABAD

(Addresses the DEBRIEFER.)

So, is he correct?

DEBRIEFER

For a random guess, he's...incorrect!

CHRISTIAN

(Hugs JAMES.)

Aww. It's okay, kuya. At least you tried.

JAMES

(Pulls away from CHRISTIAN'S hug.)

Aiyoh. Why must hug?

DEBRIEFER

The answer is longaniza.

JAMES

(Shrugs again.)

Close enough.

DEBRIEFER

Not really. Anyway, that's one point down for your family—

(Addresses MR. ABAD.)

So that leaves you, sir, to pull up your family score. May I have your answer?

CHRISTIAN

Yay! Go, Daddy!

MR. ABAD

Number 8.Paksiw. I know this is correct.

DEBRIEFER

(Looks at the index card.)

Yes, you are indeed correct!

MR. ABAD

(Turns to whisper to MRS. ABAD.)

It was disgusting though.

DEBRIEFER

(Walks up to the whiteboard to update the scores.)

So that leaves us with just the two of you.

(Points to RACHEL and MANANG ELING.)

Who'd like to go first?

RACHEL

(Turns to MANANG ELING with a smile.)

Oh, you may go ahead. Please.

MANANG ELING

(Smiles at RACHEL.)

Ay. Salamat, hija.

(Turns to address the DEBRIEFER.)

Number three poako. Sisig.

DEBRIEFER

(Looks at the index card.)

Well that sure seemed easy for you. Are you sure it isn't Bulalo? Or Calamares?

MANANG ELING

Sure poako. Sisigyungsa akin.

DEBRIEFER

(Looks at the index card again.)

...and you are correct! Good job!

(Updates the scores on the whiteboard before turning to address RACHEL.)

And last but not least, it's finally your turn, young lady.

RACHEL

(With uncertainty in her voice.)

I got number 2. I think I got ba-lot? Bal-ot? I'm not sure. I've never actually had one, but I've heard about it before, seen pictures and stuff, and it—

(A knock on the frosted door. LYDIA opens the door and peeks into the room.)

LYDIA

(Addresses the DEBRIEFER.)

Hi sir. Is it time yet?

DEBRIEFER

(Turns to LYDIA, annoyed at the interruption.)

Almost. But I guess you may get it ready now. We might not have enough time otherwise.

LYDIA

Yes, sir.

(LYDIA walks into the room, trying to not look at any of the PASSENGERS. She walks over to the locked door at Center Stage Right and steps inside.)

DEBRIEFER

(Addresses the PASSENGERS.)

Sorry about that. Where were we?

(Turns to RACHEL.)

What's your answer, again?

RACHEL

Bal-lot?

DEBRIEFER

Balot? Are you sure?

RACHEL

Yes. Balot. I think so. I mean...I hope so. I hope I'm correct.

DEBRIEFER

(Looks at the index card.)

...and you are correct!

RACHEL

(Claps her hands in delight.)

Oh, wonderful!

DEBRIEFER

(Walks up to the whiteboard to tally the scores.)

Well, it looks like all of you passed the first test. Great job! Great results! Be proud of yourselves!

(Murmur of forced happiness from the PASSENGERS.)

(RACHEL claps excitedly.)

MR. ABAD

(Still tinkering with his smartphone.)

Does that mean we can go now? The reception in this room is terrible!

DEBRIEFER

Not quite. We still have a few more tests to complete.

(Murmur of complaints from the PASSENGERS.)

Are you all ready for the next round?

MR. ABAD

Yes. Yes. Can we make this quick?

DEBRIEFER

Don't worry, sir.

(Looks at his watch.)

We still have plenty of time. Now...let's move onto the next part of this program.

(Walks over to the closed door on Center Stage Right and knocks once.)

Lydia! Please take this table away.

LYDIA

(Her voice muffled through the closed door.)

Yes, sir!

(LYDIA gently opens the door, taking care not to open it too wide as she steps back into the room. There is a small stream of white smoke that escapes through the opening. She quickly closes the door shut and walks over to the DEBRIEFER. It is obvious that she is trying to stifle a cough. She is holding a

brown A4-size envelope which she hands over to the DEBRIEFER. She then leans in to whisper something to him.)

DEBRIEFER

(Whispers to LYDIA.)

Just get it done. Okay?

(LYDIA nods, walks over to the table and proceeds to push it towards the closed door at Center Stage Right. She opens the door just a crack, peers inside, decides it's clear, opens the door wide, pushes the table of food through the doorway, and shuts the door behind her. Muffled coughing is heard through the closed door.)

DEBRIEFER

(Addresses the PASSENGERS.)

Okay. Let's move onto the next test—I mean, activity! Are you all ready?

(PASSENGERS murmur “ready” in varying levels of interest, with RACHEL being the most excited of all of them.)

(RACHEL takes the book about the Philippines from her back pocket and begins to flip through it.)

Okay. Here we go!

(DEBRIEFER opens the brown envelope, removes an index card, and reads off it.)

This next test, or activity, gauges how up-to-date you are with the buzz-worthy happenings in the country—

JAMES

(Leans in to whispers to CHRISTIAN.)

We don't watch the news. Confirm fail liao.

(JAMES and CHRISTIAN engage in a whispered conversation.)

MRS. ABAD

(Addresses JAMES and CHRISTIAN.)

Boys, keep it down.

DEBRIEFER

—Showbiz, as based on our research, is one of the more highly prized form of entertainment in the country, with majority of Filipinos heavily invested not just in the on-screen romances of popular teleseryes but also in the off-screen lives of local celebrities. So this test, I mean, activity—

CARLOS

(Interrupts the DEBRIEFER. He speaks with his hand raised.)

But I don't care about such things.

DEBRIEFER

(Looks up from his index card.)

Excuse me?

CARLOS

I don't care about such things.

DEBRIEFER

(Addresses CARLOS.)

But I'm sure you watch television. So you should know enough.

(Addresses the PASSENGERS.)

Like I said earlier, most of the activities I'm—I mean, we're—putting your through are things that a regular Filipino, living right here in the Philippines knows. These are not things that require any special studying—

(RACHEL quickly stops flipping through her book and tucks it again into her back pocket.)

—as long as all of you feel you're Filipino enough, that your Filipino-ness is still intact, you should all be able to get through these just fine. Is that clear?

(PASSENGERS murmur “Yes”.)

(DEBRIEFER addresses CARLOS.)

Any other concerns?

CARLOS

Nope.

DEBRIEFER

Okay then. Here we go.

(Reads off the index card.)

Rules! Participants will each be given a buzzer.

(Looks into the brown envelope and pulls out a set of buzzers placed in a Ziploc bag. These buzzers are small enough to fit in a person's palm. He gives each of the PASSENGERS one buzzer each. Once everyone has a buzzer, he proceeds to continue reading off the index card)

There will be six questions during this quick-fire round. The first person to press the buzzer and answer the question correctly will get the point. Should the person fail to answer the question correctly, the question will be open for the rest of the group to answer.

(Looks up at the PASSENGERS.)

For those in groups, your points will be averaged out. Everyone else will be scored individually. Is that clear for all of you? Are there any questions?

RACHEL

(Raises her hand.)

How will we be scored?

DEBRIEFER

Right. Good question! The group or individual with the most points at the end of the quick-fire round will get 25 points added to their final score—

(Points to the whiteboard.)

The group or individual who places second, third, and fourth will each get 10 points. The group or individual who comes in last will not get any points. Is that clear?

CARLOS

Sure.

MANANG ELING

Opo.

LOLA CRUZ

(Whispers to LOLO CRUZ.)

Sana hinditayo 'yungnasa last place. Galinganmo ah.

LOLO CRUZ

Don't worry. Kaya natin 'to.

CHRISTIAN

(Fiddles with the buzzer in his hand.)

Can we start now?

DEBRIEFER

Is everyone ready?

(PASSENGERS test out their buzzers. The room explodes in flashes of red lights and buzzing noises.)

Please stop that.

(DEBRIEFER waits for the noise to die down.)

Now let's begin.

(Pulls out a thin cardboard file from the brown envelope. He flips it open. Inside the file are pictures and a sheet of paper containing the six questions.)

Question 1. Get your buzzers ready.

(PASSENGERS look at each other nervously.)

This is an easy one. Who won the first teen edition of Pinoy Big Brother?

(RACHEL and MANANG ELING both quickly press their buzzers. RACHEL presses the buzzer first.)

(DEBRIEFER points at RACHEL.)

Yes. Go ahead.

(The PASSENGERS turn to look at RACHEL. CARLOS looks amused. MANANG ELING looks frustrated at her buzzer and fiddles with it.)

RACHEL

Kim Chiu!

(A buzzer goes off and some of the PASSENGERS are startled.)

CHRISTIAN

Ooops. Sorry.

MR. ABAD

(Takes the buzzer from CHRISTIAN and puts it in his pocket.)

Don't play with that!

DEBRIEFER

(Ignores the din caused by CHRISTIAN'S buzzer. He looks at the paper in the file and addresses RACHEL.)

And your answer is correct! A point for you!

(Walks over to the whiteboard and updates the score.)

Good job! Okay. Next question. Get your buzzers ready. Name the leading couple in the 2003 movie "Kung Ako Na Lang Sana."

JAMES

2003? Movie so old, ah?

(RACHEL, MANANG ELING, and MRS. ABAD quickly press their buzzers. MRS. ABAD presses the buzzer first.)

MRS. ABAD

Aga Mulach and Sharon Cuneta!

JAMES

(Looks at MRS. ABAD.)

Wah, mommy. So kancheong!

CHRISTIAN

(Giggles.)

Kancheong spider.

(MRS. ABAD shushes at JAMES and CHRISTIAN.)

DEBRIEFER

And you are correct!

(Walks over to the whiteboard to update the score.)

Okay. Next question. This is a two-part question. First, then sing the chorus of the title track of the movie “Kung Ako Na Lang Sana” and then tell me—

(Looks inside the brown envelope and pulls out a small Ziploc bag containing a lock of black hair. The lock of hair is long and straight and tied together by a blue ribbon.)

Whose hair is this?

(PASSENGERS look at each other, unsure if they heard the question correctly.)

This is simple enough. First sing the chorus of the song—you have to get the lyrics correct—then tell me whose hair this is. Here,

(Pulls out the hair from the Ziploc bag.)

—pass this around so you can get a feel of it.

(PASSENGERS gingerly pass the lock of hair to each other.)

JAMES

(Looks disgusted as he passes the lock of hair over to CHRISTIAN.)

This is damn weird, lah.

CHRISTIAN

I don't want to touch that!

DEBRIEFER

Anyone know the answer?

(PASSENGERS all look confused and unsure what to do..)

(CARLOS awkwardly presses his buzzer. The PASSENGERS all turn to look at him. JAMES smirks at him.)

JAMES

Gross! You know the answer?

CARLOS

Umm...I really have to sing?

DEBRIEFER

Yes.

(JAMES and CHRISTIAN stifle their laughter.)

LOLA CRUZ

(Turns to CARLOS. She is still looking over at the lock of hair.)

Kaya moyan, hijo.

CARLOS

(Clears his throat and begins to sing. His voice is soft and wobbly but he holds a tune.)

Kung akonalangsanaangiyongminahal. Di kanamuling mag-iisa. Kung akonalangsanaangiyongminahal. Di kanamulingluluha pa. Di kanamangangailangan pang humanapngiba. Naritoangpusoko. Naghihintaylamangsayo.

(PASSENGERS clap enthusiastically. CARLOS looks embarrassed.)

DEBRIEFER

Good job! Now, can you tell me whose hair that is?

(LOLO CRUZ passes the lock of hair to CARLOS.)

CARLOS

I don't know.

DEBRIEFER

Give it a guess. If you get it wrong, you'll get half-a-point and the question will be tossed back to the rest of them.

(Points to the rest of the PASSENGERS.)

CARLOS

Bea Alonzo? No, wait. KC Concepcion. She has long straight hair and is connected to that question because her mom sang it? I don't know.

DEBRIEFER

Interesting reasoning—

(Looks at the file he's holding.)

...and it seems, you are correct!

(CARLOS looks surprised.)

RACHEL
(Talks to CARLOS.)

Amazing! How did you know that song? And that hair question? I thought you aren't into these sort of things!

CARLOS
I know someone who's into such things.

MANANG ELING
(Pinches CARLOS lightly on the arm.)

Ay. Someone you know? Or ikaw?

RACHEL
Who?

CARLOS
No.

LOLA CRUZ
(Pats CARLOS on the arm.)

Hayaanmonasya, hijo.

CARLOS
(Looks confused.)

Anopo?

LOLA CRUZ
'Yung kanta.

MANANG ELING
Oo! Ramdamnaramdamko 'yung emotionmo!

CARLOS
(Looks even more confused.)

Anopo?

LOLA CRUZ
(Pats CARLOS again on the arm.)

Kaya ngasabiko, hayaanmonasya. You'll find someone eventually.

(Looks towards RACHEL and smiles.)

RACHEL

What?

LOLO CRUZ

(Addresses LOLA CRUZ.)

Ay, ikawnaman. Pabayaanmona ‘yungbata.

MANANG ELING

(Shushes everyone.)

Huy, mamayanayan. Quiet namuna. Wala pa akong score!

(MANANG ELING shifts her attention back to the DEBRIEFER.)

DEBRIEFER

Fourth question! It’s another two-parter. It has nothing to do with showbiz but we thought it would be fun to throw this in as a little breather from all these showbiz questions.

(Clears his throat.)

How many people are there in the painting ‘The Last Supper’ and where would you place the painting in your home?

(MRS. ABAD, RACHEL, MANANG ELING, LOLA CRUZ, and LOLO CRUZ all press their buzzers. RACHEL presses the buzzer first.)

RACHEL

13! Jesus, Bartholomew, James Minor, Andrew, Judas, Peter, John, Thomas, James Major, Philip, Matthew, Thaddeus, and Simon!

DEBRIEFER

(Looks overwhelmed by RACHEL’S answer.)

Well you didn’t have to name them all...but okay—where would you put the painting?

RACHEL

The dining room!

DEBRIEFER

Correct! That’s two correct answers from you so far!

RACHEL

‘Cause we have that at home!

(Claps happily to herself before turning to address the other PASSENGERS.)

I've been looking at that painting since I was born! I've been studying it for years! How lucky!

JAMES

(Whispers to CHRISTIAN.)

She damn toot, lah. Of all things to study!

(CHRISTIAN giggles.)

DEBRIEFER

Moving onto the next question.

LOLA CRUZ

(Addresses LOLO CRUZ.)

Naku! Two more questions left!

DEBRIEFER

(Flips through the file he's holding. Removes a picture and flashes it to the PASSENGERS. The picture is of the back of a tall, tanned man, walking in a shopping center.)

Who is the man in the picture?

(PASSENGERS lean forward to get a closer look.)

JAMES

Aiyoh. What type of picture is that?

(LOLO CRUZ takes a pair of glasses from his pockets, puts it on, and leans closer to the picture being held up by the DEBRIEFER.)

DEBRIEFER

The question is simple enough. Who is this?

MANANG ELING

Walapo bang clue? Anghirapnamanpokungwala.

LOLA CRUZ

Oonga.

RACHEL

He looks familiar.

(RACHEL removes the book from her back pocket and begins to flip through it.)

CHRISTIAN

(Notices what RACHEL is doing.)

Hey! No cheating!

(Turns to MRS. ABAD.)

Look oh, she's cheating!

MR. ABAD

(Shushes CHRISTIAN before turning to address the DEBRIEFER.)

How is that picture relevant?

DEBRIEFER

Just answer the question. It's simple enough.

(Addresses the PASSENGERS.)

Come on. Who do you all think he looks like? He's a popular actor.

MANANG ELING

(Presses the buzzer.)

Try langpo, ah. Si John Lloyd Cruz?

JAMES

(Whispers to CHRISTIAN.)

She's wrong. John Lloyd is not that dark, or even that tall.

CHRISTIAN

(Giggles.)

Kuya! How you know that?

JAMES

Shut up!

CHRISTIAN

(Still giggling.)

You know the answer is it?

DEBRIEFER

(Turns to MANANG ELING.)

I'm sorry but your answer is incorrect.

(Addresses the rest of the PASSENGERS.)

The question is now open for any of you to answer. Who is this man?

CHRISTIAN

(Grabs JAMES' buzzer and presses it.)

Kuya knows! Kuya knows!

JAMES

No! Give it back!

MR. ABAD

Boys, behave.

(Turns to JAMES.)

Give your answer so we can all get out of here.

JAMES

But I don't the answer! He any how take the buzzer from me!

CHRISTIAN

No! Kuya said he knows the answer!

(During this commotion, CARLOS leans in to whisper something to LOLA CRUZ. He urges her to press her buzzer. The DEBRIEFER doesn't see any of this.)

LOLA CRUZ

(Presses her buzzer. The PASSENGERS and the DEBRIEFER turn to look at her.)

Derek Ramsay?

(LOLA CRUZ turns to smile at CARLOS who smiles back.)

DEBRIEFER

That is...correct!

(Walks over to the whiteboard to update the score.)

You and your husband are finally on the scoreboard for this round!

LOLA CRUZ
(Whispers to CARLOS.)

Thank you, hijo.

LOLO CRUZ
(Addresses CARLOS.)

How did you know?

Magandakasisi Angelica.

LOLO CRUZ
(Pats CARLOS on the back and laughs.)

Ay. Oonganaman!

DEBRIEFER
Okay. Last question.

MANANG ELING
Naku! Wala pa akong score!

DEBRIEFER
Who is known for being the “Star For All Seasons?”

JAMES
Si mi “all seasons?” The Philippines only has one season, what!

MANANG ELING
Ay! Alamko ‘to!

(RACHEL, MANANG ELING, MRS. ABAD, and LOLA CRUZ all press their buzzers. It’s not clear who pressed the buzzer first.)

DEBRIEFER
Umm. Who buzzed in first?

RACHEL
(Looks at the scoreboard, sees that everyone has a score but MANANG ELING.)

I think she did.

(Points to MANANG ELING.)

DEBRIEFER

Are you sure.

MRS. ABAD

Yes. Yes. She buzzed in first.

LOLA CRUZ

I think so too.

DEBRIEFER

Are you sure?

LOLO CRUZ

(Points to MANANG ELING.)

Yes. Let her answer.

DEBRIEFER

I can't just go by "I think so." It'll ruin the integrity of this whole program!

CARLOS

(Mutters to himself.)

What integrity?

MR. ABAD

Or you could just make it simple and just let everyone buzz again.

DEBRIEFER

Ummm...I think you should all press the buzzer again just to be sure.

MR. ABAD

What I said.

DEBRIEFER

On the count of three. One—

(A buzzer goes off. The DEBRIEFER looks annoyed.)

JAMES

(Laughs and the points at his buzzer.)

The lights damn funny, lah.

DEBRIEFER

(Sighs.)

Let's do this again.

(Looks at the PASSENGERS.)

One.Two. Three!

(PASSENGERS all refrain from pressing their buzzers so that only MANANG ELING'S buzzer sounds.)

MANANG ELING

Vilma Santos!

DEBRIEFER

...and you are correct!

RACHEL

Yay!

DEBRIEFER

(Walks over to the whiteboard to tally the score.)

Hmmm...it seems all of you got at least one point, with Number 2—

(Points to RACHEL.)

—earning 2 points! So I guess that means everyone gets extra points added to their current tally.

(PASSENGERS smile at each other.)

(At this point, the door at Center Stage Right opens and LYDIA rushes out. She is mumbling something to her walkie-talkie. She runs out towards the frosted door in a hurry.)

(The DEBRIEFER looks at his watch.)

MR. ABAD

What was that about?

DEBRIEFER

Umm—

LYDIA

(Voice heard through the speaker)

To all arriving passengers, please take note that those holding Philippine Citizenship or Philippine Dual-Citizenship have to proceed to the Information Desk prior to Immigration. Once again, all passengers holding Philippine Citizenship or Philippine Dual-Citizenship have to proceed to the Information Desk prior to Immigration. Thank you.

DEBRIEFER

(Looks at his watch again.)

Umm...it looks like we're running behind schedule.

RACHEL

What do you mean?

(The silhouettes of a group of people can be seen on the frosted door. There is a knock and LYDIA peers into the room. Muffles of conversation can be heard behind her.)

LYDIA

Sir, I'm sorry. But the next batch is ready for you.

(PASSENGERS all turn to look at the DEBRIEFER.)

DEBRIEFER

Okay. Give me five minutes.

LYDIA

Yes, sir.

(LYDIA closes the frosted door. The silhouettes move away.)

DEBRIEFER

(Takes a small notebook out from his pocket and flips through it. He finds the page he needs and reads it for a second. He looks at his watch again before turning to address the PASSENGERS)

Okay. I think we can squeeze in one more test—I mean, activity. Please wait a moment.

(The DEBRIEFER walks over to the door at Center Stage Right, opens it wide, and steps inside.)

(While this is going on, MR. ABAD finally finds reception and makes a call on his smartphone. The rest of the PASSENGERS mingle with each other.)

MR. ABAD

(Talks to the person on the other end of the line.)

Hello? Hello? Yes, this is Mr. Abad.

MRS. ABAD

(Whispers to MR. ABAD.)

Honey, not so loud.

(MR. ABAD waves her off.)

MR. ABAD

Yes. Hi. We're still here at the airport. A little hiccup here in immigration but it seems we'll be out of here soon. Could you please—

(The DEBRIEFER comes back into the room with another table covered in blue cloth. There seems to be a medium-sized square box underneath the blue cloth.)

(MR. ABAD walks Upstage Left to quietly finish up his phone conversation.)

JAMES

Wahseh! Not another food test!

DEBRIEFER

No, no. It's not another food test.

MR. ABAD

(Still talking to the person on the other end of the line.)

Yes. Yes. Please wait for us. Thank you.

(Puts down the phone and walks back to join his family.)

CHRISTIAN

(Walks closer to the table and tries to peer under the cloth.)

Then what is it?

DEBRIEFER

This is meant to be the last test, but since we're running out of time, I figured that this is the perfect test to balance everything out.

(Pulls the cloth off the table to reveal a little machine.)

RACHEL

What's that?

(A silhouette appears again at the frosted door. There is a knock and LYDIA peers in again.)

LYDIA

Sir, sorry, but we really have to hurry.

(Reacts when she sees the machine on the table.)

Ay, sir! Hindi pa ready iyan! I mean, it's not ready yet!

DEBRIEFER

(Addresses LYDIA.)

I'm sure it's fine. We've checked it before.

LYDIA

Yes...but...kaninapo, I mean, just now...I tried it and—

DEBRIEFER

Stop stammering and come here and help me turn this on.

LYDIA

(Walks tentatively towards the machine on the table.)

Ay. But sir!

DEBRIEFER

You said we should hurry, so let's hurry. Come on. Turn this thing on.

MR. ABAD

(Turns to LYDIA.)

Yes. Do as he says. We have somewhere to be.

(PASSENGERS murmur in agreement.)

RACHEL
(Turns to CARLOS.)

That thing looks scary though, doesn't it?

CARLOS
Hindi naman.

CHRISTIAN
It looks like a candy floss machine!

JAMES
Candy floss your face lah! It looks an intergalactic warship!

(JAMES and CHRISTIAN peer closer at the machine on the table, watching as LYDIA prepares to switch it on.)

MRS. ABAD
(Pulls JAMES and CHRISTIAN back towards him.)

Can you two behave?

LYDIA
(Addresses the DEBRIEFER.)

There. It's ready now. Pero slowly langpo, ah.

DEBRIEFER
(Addresses the PASSENGERS.)

Okay. This is your last activity.

(Pulls an index card from underneath the machine and reads off it.)

We've now come to the smog test. This gauges your ability to handle the smog of Manila. The objective—

MR. ABAD
(Addresses the DEBRIEFER.)

Do you have to read all of that? Can you just get to the point?

DEBRIEFER
(Looks at his watch.)

Right.Fine.

(Puts the index card back onto the table.)

This is basically a smog machine that replicates Manila’s level of pollution. Survive the smog and ten points will be added to your current—and final—score. Simple as that.

LOLO CRUZ

Is it safe?

DEBRIEFER

Of course it’s safe! Nothing to worry about. It’s all been carefully designed to provide optimal replication.

(LOLA CRUZ still looks warily at the machine.)

Any other concerns before we start?

(PASSENGERS all murmur “no.”)

Great. Let’s begin.

(Turns to LYDIA.)

Turn it on.

(LYDIA hesitantly turns the machine on, steps away from the table, and moves towards the frosted door. The machine makes a loud whirring sound. The PASSENGERS look alarmed.)

Don’t worry. Nothing to be worried about. Just wait.

(The machine starts to cough out smog.)

There. See? It’s working.

(The room quickly fills up with smog. The PASSENGERS begin coughing.)

MR. ABAD

What is this? Turn that thing off!

DEBRIEFER

Just a little replica of Manila’s smog. Pretty good, huh? I designed it—well not really, I just thought of the idea.

JAMES

Wahseh! Damn smelly lah!

RACHEL

(Notices that LOLO and LOLA CRUZ are coughing terribly. She waves her hands around, trying to get the DEBRIEFER'S attention.)

Excuse me! Could you please turn that off? Excuse me!

(RACHEL hands LOLO CRUZ and LOLA CRUZ a pack of tissue paper to cover their faces.)

DEBRIEFER

(Looks at his watch.)

Just a few more seconds. Breath it in, everyone!

(DEBRIEFER gestures for the PASSENGERS to breath-in-and-out. He inhales deeply and almost chokes.)

(The PASSENGERS try their best to cover their mouth and noses with their clothes. Out of everyone, CARLOS seems the most unbothered by the smog.)

CHRISTIAN

(Turns to MRS. ABAD, on the verge of crying.)

Mommy, I don't like anymore!

(MRS. ABAD soothes CHRISTIAN while MR. ABAD pulls out his handkerchief from his pocket and hands it over to CHRISTIAN. MRS. ABAD helps to place it over CHRISTIAN's nose and mouth.)

DEBRIEFER

(Looks around at the PASSENGERS with their noses and mouths covered either by a handkerchief, tissue paper, or their hands.)

Wow. You're all actually doing the right thing...umm...good job!

(Looks at this watch, counting seconds as they pass. After counting to five, he motions over to LYDIA.)

Lydia! What are you doing there? Come here and turn this off. They've shown us enough.

(LYDIA walks over, coughing. She tries to turn the machine off. It doesn't turn off but churns out more smog instead.)

MR. ABAD

What are you doing? He said to turn it off! Turn it off!

MANANG ELING

(Coughs heavily.)

Ay, Diyoskopo!

DEBRIEFER

(Tries to restrain himself from coughing.)

Lydia! I said turn it off! What are you doing?

LYDIA

It isn't working!

DEBRIEFER

Move aside!

(Tinkers with the buttons of the machine. More smog comes out.)

What's wrong with this? What did you do?

LYDIA

I didn't do anything!

(Everyone in the room starts coughing heavily. The PASSENGERS begin to panic. Eventually, CARLOS walks over the frosted door and opens it, letting the smog out of the room. The PASSENGERS, seeing the opened door, quickly grab their luggage and walk towards the door.)

DEBRIEFER

Wait! No! You can't go yet! I need to give you all a score first!

(LYDIA runs to halt the PASSENGERS from leaving.)

MR. ABAD

You can't make us stay in this room any longer! I'll sue you all!

MRS. ABAD

Honey, huwag namanganyan!

JAMES

Let us out, lah you!

CARLOS

(Addresses the DEBRIEFER.)

Could you just hurry up and tally the score so we can all get out of here?

RACHEL

(Speaks in mid-cough.)

...yes, please do that! Look at them—

(Points towards LOLO CRUZ and LOLA CRUZ who are both coughing a lot.)

This can't be good for them.

(All the PASSENGERS simultaneously argue with the DEBRIEFER and LYDIA to let them out.)

LYDIA

Sir, I think we should let them out.

DEBRIEFER

But they haven't been scored!

LYDIA

But, sir!

(PASSENGERS continue to raise their voices.)

DEBRIEFER

Alright! Alright! Alright! Quiet down! You may leave! You may leave!

(He coughs as he points to LYDIA who is standing by the opened door.)

Just give your passports to her as you exit the room and collect them at the immigration counter.

(Addresses LYDIA.)

Lydia, just stamp their passports and send them on their way.

(PASSENGERS all clamor to hand their passports over to LYDIA. They are all still coughing as they exit the room.)

(A few seconds after the group leaves, the smog machine sputters and dies.)

LYDIA

Sir, are you okay?

DEBRIEFER

(Clears his throat.)

Yes. Of course I'm fine. I just need to finish tallying their scores.

LYDIA

(Tries to clear the room of smog by fanning the smog out the door.)

How are you going to score them?

(DEBRIEFER walks over to the whiteboard and stands there for a few seconds, evaluating the scores. He eventually, and somewhat reluctantly, adds ten points to each participant.)

DEBRIEFER

There.

LYDIA

So they all passed?

DEBRIEFER

(Sighs.)

Yes.

LYDIA

I'll take note of it in the report, sir.

DEBRIEFER

Yes. Please do that...but leave this little hiccup out of the report.

LYDIA

Yes, sir.

DEBRIEFER

(Looks at the scores on the whiteboard.)

You know, what? I don't get it.

LYDIA

Get what, sir?

DEBRIEFER

Based off all the research we conducted and studies we read, I expected a different outcome.

LYDIA

(Looks at the whiteboard.)

Well, sir. There are still other groups.

DEBRIEFER

I know.

LYDIA

Shall I send them in?

DEBRIEFER

(Looks around the room.)

Yes. Send them in.

(LYDIA heads towards the frosted door.)

—and Lydia,

(LYDIA pauses by the door.)

...arrange another meeting with the team. We need to make the tests harder.

LYDIA

Yes, sir. I'll do that, sir.

DEBRIEFER

Okay. Go ahead and send the next group in.

(LYDIA walks out of the room, closing the door behind her.)

(The DEBRIEFER pushes the smog machine back through the door at Center Stage Right and locks the door. He then wipes the scores off the whiteboard, places the chairs in their proper rows, and surveys the room one more time to make sure everything is in order.)

(At this point, a silhouette of a group of people is seen on the frosted door. The DEBRIEFER clears his throat, adjusts his Barong, looks at his watch, and waits for the knock on the door.)

----- END -----