

# **REPATRIATION**

**(One-Act Play – English)**

## SYNOPSIS

*Repatriation* follows Marissa Cruz, a Filipino housewife whose husband, Ernesto, an overseas petroleum engineer, dies unexpectedly of a heart attack on an oil platform in the Middle East. What should have been a solemn and orderly return of his remains becomes a month-long descent into bureaucratic absurdity and institutional neglect.

Told over 15 episodic beats, *Repatriation* unfolds across multiple settings: her cramped home, a government benefits office, a remittance center, an airport cargo terminal, and a surreal dreamscape. Marissa navigates a maze of requirements: coordinating with the oil company's HR department, following up with the Philippine consulate, submitting notarized documents, paying clearance fees, and arguing with airline staff over mislabeled cargo. Her grief is constantly deferred—first by delays in the embalming process, then by a mistaken identity at the funeral home, and finally by a coffin rerouted to the wrong country. In one scene, she opens what she is told is her husband's coffin, only to find a stranger's body inside. In another, she is informed that her husband may be in Sri Lanka, Taiwan, or Thailand—but no one is sure.

Despite mounting indignities, Marissa is not portrayed as a victim. She is exhausted, sarcastic, furious, and at times grimly humorous. The play culminates in a surreal public ceremony where politicians and media figures use Ernesto's return as a photo opportunity. Only then is his body finally returned.

*Repatriation* is a meditation on the dehumanizing effect of bureaucracy in the face of private loss. Blending realism with dark humor and moments of poetic surrealism, the play offers a stark portrait of what it means to grieve within a machinery that has no space for mourning.

## REPATRIATION

### CHARACTERS:

MARISSA CRUZ – Female, early 40s. Widow of an OFW.

ROLANDO CRUZ – Male, mid-30s. Marissa's younger brother.

ERNESTO CRUZ – Male, 40s. Deceased husband. Appears in photo, memory, and dream.

DANIEL PEREZ – Male, 50s. Oil company HR.

COUSIN – Female, 30s.

BUREAUCRATIC ENSEMBLE – Various minor roles representing government and corporate offices. Includes:

1. Consular Officer
2. Government Officer
3. Teller
4. Mortuary Officer
5. Airline Agent / Representative / Executive
6. Clerk
7. Customs Officer / Junior Customs Officer
8. Driver
9. Receptionist
10. Embalmer
11. Funeral Director
12. TV Anchor
13. Politician
14. Bureaucrat

## 15. Cameraman

### **SETTING:**

The play unfolds across multiple locations over 15 beats. The stage should be modular and fluid to allow quick transitions between domestic spaces, government offices, and corporate institutions. Every space is indifferent to grief.

### **1. THE PHONE CALL**

*Lights up. The stage is silent except for the faint hum of an air conditioner and the low murmur of a news program on a small TV. MARISSA stands at the sink, rinsing dishes. She wears a house shirt and shorts. She moves slowly, lost in thought. The TV news anchors mumble. A phone buzzes on the counter. MARISSA glances at the phone. She wipes her hands on her shirt and picks it up.*

**MARISSA**

Hello?

*A pause. The TV volume dips. The air hums with a faint static crackle. The voice of DANIEL PEREZ comes in, distant and impersonal.*

**DANIEL (voice)**

Mrs. Cruz? This is Daniel Perez, HR Department, Gulf PetroTech. I'm calling regarding your husband, Ernesto.

*MARISSA straightens. Her eyes fix on the wall clock.*

**MARISSA**

Yes?

**DANIEL (voice)**

There's been an incident on the platform.

**MARISSA** *(frozen)*

What kind of incident?

**DANIEL (voice)**

We received confirmation from operations. Your husband suffered a cardiac arrest. Early this morning. During pipeline inspection. The medical team was unable to revive him.

*MARISSA stands still. The faucet drips. The clock ticks.*

**DANIEL (voice, after pause)**

Mrs. Cruz?

**MARISSA** *(almost whispering)*

You're sure it's him?

**DANIEL (voice)**

Yes, Ma'am. Identification was verified. Badge number confirmed. Superintendent on Platform D-12 witnessed it.

*MARISSA slowly sits at the table, still holding the phone. A low, vibrating silence fills the space.*

**MARISSA** *(to herself)*

Platform D-12...

He mentioned it. Last time we talked.

*The TV continues murmuring, now a faint advertisement on a consumer good.*

**MARISSA**

This can't be real.

**DANIEL (voice)**

I'm sorry, Ma'am. I know this is difficult. We'll work with the embassy in Dubai to start the repatriation.

*MARISSA closes her eyes briefly. She rubs her face with one hand.*

**MARISSA**

What do I do now?

**DANIEL (voice)**

You'll need to coordinate with us, then contact the consular office in Dubai. They will guide you through repatriation protocols. Also check with OWWA. If your husband is a registered member, there are benefits—

**MARISSA (cutting in)**

What?

**DANIEL (voice)**

Benefits. From OWWA. But we'll verify that.

*She stares at the floor. She is not hearing him anymore. The voice keeps talking, calm and transactional.*

**DANIEL (voice)**

The process will take some time. Maybe three weeks. Or more.

**MARISSA (suddenly alert)**

What do you mean, more?

**DANIEL (voice)**

Standard procedure, Ma'am. Formalities. They take time.

*MARISSA places the phone down on the table. The voice is cut. She looks toward the window. Then she stands, walks over to the fridge, pulls out a glass of water, and drinks it in one gulp. She leans against the fridge. The TV now shifts to a different story, something trivial. MARISSA begins to laugh, quietly at first, then harder. It turns to a sob. She wipes her face, steels herself, walks over to the table, and picks up the phone again.*

**MARISSA (to herself)**

Three weeks.

*The TV flickers. The TV program merges into static. A soft, rhythmic ticking fades in, like a system heartbeat.*

## **2. PENDING CLEARANCE**

*Lights crossfade. A new day. MARISSA stands by the table, staring at the laptop screen. The sound of email notifications echoes in the background. On the screen: a flowchart titled "REMAINS REPATRIATION PROCESS." Her eyes scan but do not process. She clicks, refreshes. Click. Refresh.*

*A chair screeches. MARISSA types. The TV is off. Air feels heavy.*

*The phone buzzes on the table. She answers. DANIEL's voice again.*

**DANIEL (voice)**

Mrs. Cruz, it's Daniel Perez again from Gulf PetroTech. I just wanted to walk you through the next steps regarding your husband's repatriation.

*MARISSA doesn't speak. She closes her eyes.*

**DANIEL (voice)**

So we're currently waiting for clearance to move the body from the offshore platform to the mainland. Once that's done, it will be embalmed and then processed for air transport. We'll need your signed acknowledgment, passport copy, and a death certificate once it's issued. Also, OWWA coordination—

**MARISSA**

How long?

**DANIEL (voice)**

Difficult to say. A few more weeks maybe. There's... paperwork.

*She nods faintly, then hangs up. Her phone has low battery. She sets it down. A figure steps into the doorway—her COUSIN.*

**COUSIN**

Who was that?

**MARISSA** *(flat)*

Oil company. Same things. Still offshore.

**COUSIN** *(hesitant)*

Did they say anything about the body?

*MARISSA glances at her cousin. Her voice is clipped, mechanical.*

**MARISSA**

Still there. Waiting for clearance. Then embalming. Then paperwork.

**COUSIN** *(clicks tongue)*

Ay. You should call OWWA. Maybe they can help.

*MARISSA looks at her phone. Low battery warning. She doesn't move.*

**MARISSA**

Later.

*Her cousin exits. MARISSA sits. Faint sounds of voicemails and text messages echo, and blended voices are heard.*

**CHORUS OF VOICES**

We heard about Ernesto. So sorry, Maris...

Condolences, Mare. Let us know if you need anything.

Our prayers are with you.

Did the body arrive yet?

Baka pwede ka nang magpa-benefits sa OWWA...

*The voices rise, layer over each other, until they become a drone. MARISSA presses her palms to her ears.*

*She opens her email again. Click. Refresh. Her breath trembles. Then: she opens a new message. Starts typing.*

**MARISSA** *(reading aloud as she types)*

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to follow up on my husband's case. His name is Ernesto Cruz. He passed away on Platform D-12. I have received initial instructions but no updates.

*She stops typing. Her hands shake. A long pause. She whispers.*

**MARISSA**

Just bring him home.

*She presses send. The email whoosh echoes loud. It lingers like an alarm.*

*A stamp slams down. Lights snap to stark white.*

### **3. OWWA OFFICE**

*The stamp sound repeats rhythmically, like a conveyor belt. Fluorescent lights buzz. A pedestal fan chops the air with tired regularity. Rows of plastic chairs. MARISSA sits among them, folder*

*clutched like armor. Her face is dull with exhaustion. Behind glass, a GOVERNMENT OFFICER flips pages with robotic detachment.*

**OFFICER**

Registered OWWA member? Ma'am?

*(Glances at the form.)*

Ah, okay, good. We can assist you with death and burial benefits. But you'll need to get the death certificate authenticated first.

**MARISSA**

Authenticated?

**OFFICER** *(rehearsed)*

By the DFA in the UAE.

Oh, and a translation, if it's in Arabic.

**MARISSA**

But it happened on an oil rig.

**OFFICER** *(cutting in, slides a leaflet forward)*

No problem. Here are the steps.

Step one: confirm embalming and transportation from the UAE.

Step two: coordinate with the airline for cargo transport.

Step three: OWWA will reimburse after all receipts are submitted.

*MARISSA stares at the paper, overwhelmed. The OFFICER leans back in their chair, indifferent.*

**MARISSA**

What about the embassy?

**OFFICER**

Embassy is for the legal part, Ma'am. And for helping with permits.

We only handle benefits.

*MARISSA continues to stare at the leaflet, eyes glazed. A low, steady sound of rustling papers and murmuring voices grows as the government machinery grinds forward.*

*The OFFICER stamps a paper offstage. Another stamp follows. Then another. The rustling grows louder. Printer. Copier. Footsteps. The sound of a metal drawer slamming shut.*

*The rhythm becomes overwhelming. A ringtone slices through the din.*

#### **4. VERIFICATION**

*The ringtone cuts off mid-ring as she answers. MARISSA is now on a couch, phone in hand. Her cousin sits beside her, scrolling through her own phone. A small pile of notarized documents, bank details, and printouts sit on the table in front of them. MARISSA is mid-call. A VOICE from the consular office in Dubai speaks with a polite but robotic tone.*

**CONSULAR OFFICER (voice)**

You will need an authorization letter for us to process anything on your behalf.

It should include your full name, Ernesto's full name, and his passport details.

**MARISSA** *(exhausted)*

But you already have his details.

**CONSULAR OFFICER (voice)**

Yes, Ma'am. But it's protocol.

*MARISSA presses the phone against her ear, jaw clenched.*

**MARISSA**

And who authorizes me? He's dead.

**CONSULAR OFFICER (voice)**

You may have a sworn affidavit before the notary public, and have it apostilled.

**MARISSA** *(incredulous)*

Are you serious?

**CONSULAR OFFICER (voice)**

Yes, Ma'am.

*Her cousin leans in and whispers, just loud enough for the audience to hear.*

**COUSIN**

Just say yes. Don't fight.

*MARISSA wants to scream, but doesn't. She closes her eyes.*

**MARISSA** *(quietly)*

Fine.

*Immediately, a mechanical beep cuts the air, followed by the flat whine of a scanner warming up.*

*MARISSA is now seated at the table, robe loose, eyes unfocused. Documents are scattered.*

*The scanner hums in waves. Paper feeds through with a scrape. Her fingers shake. A notification chime breaks through.*

*She opens an email. The text is read aloud by a flat male VOICE (oil company HR).*

**OIL COMPANY VOICE** *(reading email)*

Dear Mrs. Cruz,

Please send the following additional requirements: affidavit of kinship, barangay clearance, and bank account details for reimbursement of cargo expenses.

We thank you for your continued cooperation.

*MARISSA stares blankly. Then lowers the laptop screen.*

*Interlude visual: A spotlight briefly isolates a table with a single chair. A placard or simple projection shows: "Offshore Platform D-12 – Status: Awaiting Clearance." No one speaks. The chair is empty.*

*Evening. A laptop glows on the table. MARISSA sits before it, unread emails stacked in her inbox. She clicks one open. Her expression hardens. A VOICE (neutral, detached) reads the contents aloud, line by line, as if from an email.*

**OIL COMPANY VOICE** (*reading email*)

Mrs. Cruz,

We confirm that Mr. Ernesto Cruz's remains have been safely transferred to the mainland.

A local mortuary is currently preparing the remains for onward transport.

We assure you that the matter is being handled.

*MARISSA rereads it. She forwards it. Waits. After a moment, another VOICE reads the consular reply, the tone clinical and procedural.*

**CONSULAR OFFICE VOICE** (*reading email*)

Please see required next steps. Coordinate with the mortuary for embalming certification.

Submit certification to the local health authority for clearance. Secure approval from

UAE Civil Aviation for human remains transport. Confirm cargo booking with the

airline. Please be advised that processing delays may occur. Thank you for your patience.

*MARISSA stares at the screen. She exhales, closes the laptop with two fingers.*

**MARISSA**

Patience?

*She stands, walks slowly to the door. Lights shift to follow her. She exits briefly. A moment later, she returns with a single stick of cigarette in her hand. She opens the window, lights it.*

**5. MORTUARY FEE**

*MARISSA is seated at the table, stirring a second cup of instant coffee. The fan whirs. A soft ringtone breaks the silence. MARISSA answers. The voice on the other end is fast, efficient, and impersonal.*

**MORTUARY OFFICER (voice)**

Mrs. Cruz, the embalming is complete, but we're still waiting on the municipality's clearance for transport.

You'll need to expedite the payment for their processing fee.

**MARISSA**

How much?

**MORTUARY OFFICER (voice)**

Three hundred dirhams.

Cash or bank transfer.

*MARISSA rubs her temple with one hand, her other hand gripping the coffee mug.*

**MARISSA**

Can't the company pay first?

**MORTUARY OFFICER (voice)**

I'm afraid not, Ma'am.

Company policy requires reimbursement post-approval.

*The call ends. MARISSA sets the phone down slowly, face blank.*

**MARISSA**

Of course it does.

*She lifts her mug. She sets it down. A receipt flutters from a folder and lands on the floor.*

*MARISSA is now standing in line at a cramped remittance center. A small television near the ceiling plays a Filipino soap opera at low volume. Three women in line bicker about exchange rates. MARISSA stands behind them, shifting from foot to foot.*

*When it's her turn, the TELLER motions her forward. MARISSA hands over a form. The TELLER inspects it slowly, pen tapping on the counter.*

**TELLER**

You didn't write the receiver's middle name.

**MARISSA**

They didn't give it to me.

**TELLER**

We need it for accuracy, Ma'am.

Otherwise, they might not release the money.

*MARISSA closes her eyes briefly, breathes in. Pulls out her phone and dials. A male voice answers.*

*She turns away slightly for privacy.*

**MARISSA** *(into phone)*

Hi, this is Marissa Cruz... yes, I'm at the remittance center... I need the full name of

your staff.

...Yes, for the payment... no, the teller says they need the middle name...

*(pause)*

No, I can't guess.

*MARISSA exits the counter slowly, receipt in hand. She stares at it for a moment. Her hand trembles slightly. The receipt is damp with sweat.*

*She folds it carefully, as if it were fragile, and slips it into her bag. A long pause. The television continues to play the soap opera behind her; two characters are crying. MARISSA does not.*

## **6. HEALTH CERTIFICATES**

*MARISSA sits in front of her laptop, reading a new email. A soft glow illuminates her face. A VOICE reads the email contents aloud, formally and cheerfully.*

**CONSULAR OFFICE VOICE** *(reading email)*

Dear Mrs. Cruz,

We are pleased to inform you that the required health certificates have been issued.

Attached is the official certificate of embalming and cause of death.

You may now proceed with coordination with your chosen airline for cargo transport.

Best regards,

Consular Services – Philippine Embassy, UAE.

*MARISSA forwards the email. Lights shift as she dials the airline's hotline. She navigates automated prompts, each one echoed faintly offstage.*

**AUTOMATED VOICE (offstage)**

Press 2 for cargo services.

Press 5 for human remains.

Please stay on the line...

*Click. A HUMAN AGENT finally speaks. Their voice is polite but robotic.*

**AIRLINE AGENT (voice)**

Good evening, Ma'am. For cargo transport of human remains, please prepare the following: embalming certificate, death certificate, customs clearance from UAE, and proof of payment for coffin packaging.

**MARISSA**

I've sent the certificates already. What about customs clearance?

**AIRLINE AGENT (voice)**

That's with UAE authorities, Ma'am.

You'll need to follow up directly.

Once cleared, we can book the coffin on the next available flight.

However, please be advised: cargo space is limited this week.

**MARISSA (voice rising)**

What if there's no space?

**AIRLINE AGENT (voice)**

Then we book it on the next flight after that.

**MARISSA**

When is that?

**AIRLINE AGENT (voice)**

Next Thursday.

*MARISSA stands, hand gripping the phone tight.*

**MARISSA**

He's been dead for ten days.

What happens to his body if there's no space?

**AIRLINE AGENT (voice)**

Ma'am,

The mortuary has refrigeration facilities.

*MARISSA stares out a window. She does not cry. Her body remains still, but her jaw clenches. The fan continues to spin. The light from the laptop screen flickers gently as the scene fades.*

## **7. BOOKING DELAY**

*A cramped, slightly messy sala. MARISSA paces back and forth, phone pressed to her ear. Her cousin watches from the corner, unsure whether to comfort or keep distance. MARISSA is mid-call, her voice sharp with disbelief and fury.*

**CONSULAR OFFICER (voice)**

Ma'am, the coffin was booked on a cargo flight to Manila.

But there was an error in the shipping manifest. It was labeled "Philippine Sea."

It was rerouted to a port in Sri Lanka.

**MARISSA (shouting)**

What the hell does that even mean?

*She stops pacing, staring into the middle distance as if trying to make sense of the words.*

**CONSULAR OFFICER (voice)**

There was a misunderstanding with the logistics company.

We're investigating.

**MARISSA**

So where is he now?

Is he in Sri Lanka?

**CONSULAR OFFICER (voice)**

We believe the cargo is still in transit.

We'll confirm shortly.

*MARISSA lowers the phone. Then she hangs up without saying goodbye. The fan continues to spin in the background. She turns to her cousin.*

**MARISSA (flat, bitter)**

They lost him.

*She lets out a laugh, not joy, but exhaustion curdled into madness.*

**MARISSA**

Of course they did.

Of course.

*She slumps into a chair. Her cousin moves as if to speak, but doesn't.*

## **8. DREAM**

*A greenish-blue wash spills across the stage. No clear source. Just a sickly hue, like backlit water or an old monitor.*

*A desk floats mid-stage, half-submerged. On it: stacks of paper, a blinking fax machine, a half-melted passport. The waves make no sound. There is no water, only the suggestion of it.*

*ERNESTO stands ankle-deep in this illusion. His posture is upright but wrong, with arms too stiff, head tilting slightly with each beat of silence. He wears his work uniform, but the company logo on his chest morphs between shipping barcodes and embassy seals.*

*MARISSA appears opposite him, barefoot, holding a clipboard and pen. She speaks first.*

**MARISSA**

I sent the affidavit.

I sent everything.

**ERNESTO (flat, echoing)**

The manifest.

They printed me (*garbled*)

The manifest.

**MARISSA**

Backlog... backlog... (*garbled*)

**ERNESTO**

Perishable.

They stamped... (*garbled*)

*A soft alarm buzzes in the distance, the sound of a scanner jamming, on loop.*

*A customs officer in a wetsuit steps forward from the shadows. He doesn't speak. He only flips through a stack of mismatched documents.*

**MARISSA** (*to officer*)

Is this enough?

*The officer drops all the papers. Documents fly across the stage as if blown by a whirlwind.*

*ERNESTO now stands behind a transparent wall. He taps once. Twice. Each tap echoes like a gavel.*

**ERNESTO** (*muffled*)

Barcode. Barcode.

**MARISSA**

Which part of you is still mine?

*He mouths something, but no sound comes out. A cargo tracking number scrolls across the backdrop like an LED display:*

“STATUS: UNKNOWN. FINAL DESTINATION: N/A.”

*Lights flicker. The dream glitches. MARISSA tries to step forward, but the floor slides backward.*

*She never moves.*

*Everything dissolves in harsh white.*

## **9. PACKAGE MISROUTED**

*MARISSA is sitting alone at the kitchen table. Her face is impassive, her body slack. Her phone rings. She answers without enthusiasm.*

**AIRLINE REPRESENTATIVE (voice)**

Good afternoon, Ma'am. I'm calling from GulfStar Airlines regarding the remains of Mr. Ernesto Cruz. We've located the cargo. It was mislabeled as "Medical Supplies" and sent to a depot in Sharjah. We deeply apologize. This was due to human error compounded by a clerical oversight.

**MARISSA (expressionless)**

So when is he coming home?

**AIRLINE REPRESENTATIVE (voice)**

Once we reprocess the cargo clearance and re-book the flight, Ma'am.

However, there is an additional storage fee for the time it spent in the depot.

*MARISSA doesn't move.*

**MARISSA**

Storage fee?

For a coffin you lost?

**AIRLINE REPRESENTATIVE (voice)**

Yes, Ma'am. It's standard policy.

*MARISSA places the phone on speaker and sets it down on the table. She stares at it, unmoving.*

**AIRLINE REPRESENTATIVE (voice, fading slightly)**

...we can send the updated invoice within the day. Please also note that flight availability remains limited this week...

*The voice drones on. MARISSA doesn't move.*

**10. ARRIVAL**

*A hot, chaotic cargo terminal. Forklift beeps, shouting workers, dragging crates. MARISSA and her brother ROLANDO stand near a "CARGO RECEIVING" sign, which is handwritten, taped askew on a wall. Both look exhausted. MARISSA clutches a wrinkled email printout. ROLANDO fans himself with a folder.*

**ROLANDO**

Where do we even go?

**MARISSA** *(focused)*

Cargo Receiving Office. It's this way.

*They approach a low counter. Behind it, a CLERK flips through a clipboard. He doesn't look up.*

**CLERK**

Coffin?

**MARISSA**

Yes. Ernesto Cruz. From the UAE.

**CLERK** *(starts shuffling papers)*

Name...

*He rifles through forms, frowning. The background noise continues, metal scraping, loud voices, heat pressing in.*

**CLERK** *(muttering)*

Wait a moment.

*MARISSA and ROLANDO exchange a glance. MARISSA's grip on the email tightens. A bead of sweat runs down her temple. The clerk keeps flipping pages. The moment stretches.*

*MARISSA and ROLANDO remain near the receiving desk. The CLERK returns, looking hesitant, papers in hand.*

**CLERK** (*meekly*)

Ma'am... there seems to be a delay.

The cargo hasn't been offloaded yet.

**MARISSA**

What do you mean, 'hasn't been offloaded'?

**CLERK**

It's still on the plane.

**MARISSA**

Why?

**CLERK** (*scratches head*)

Customs issue. There's confusion over the clearance papers.

*MARISSA's face hardens.*

**MARISSA**

You've had weeks to clear him. Weeks.

What kind of confusion?

**CLERK** (*avoids eye contact*)

There's a mismatch in the documents.

The death certificate says "heart attack."

The cargo manifest says "natural causes."

Customs needs clarification before they can release it.

*MARISSA explodes, quiet at first, then with ferocity.*

**MARISSA**

Clarification?

He's dead.

Does it matter if it's a heart attack or natural causes?

*ROLANDO steps in.*

**ROLANDO**

Calm down, Ate. Let's figure this out.

*MARISSA shakes him off violently, steps forward.*

**MARISSA** *(to clerk, voice like steel)*

How long will this take?

**CLERK** *(shifting, cornered)*

It depends.

Maybe a few hours.

Maybe tomorrow.

*MARISSA stares at him, then looks past him. Her breathing is sharp and shallow.*

**ROLANDO** *(quietly)*

Ate...

*She doesn't respond. Her fists clench around the crumpled email.*

*The drone of airport machinery builds faintly in the background.*

*Time passes. MARISSA and ROLANDO are now slumped in cheap plastic chairs under harsh fluorescent light. A wall clock ticks past midnight. A vending machine hums. Sweat stains their backs. Paper cups litter the floor. Airport noise has dulled to a low, ambient fatigue.*

*A CUSTOMS OFFICER enters with a clipboard and a neutral expression. MARISSA looks up, eyes bloodshot.*

**CUSTOMS OFFICER**

Ma'am, there's an issue with the embalming certificate.

*(Flips papers, not looking at her.)*

The seal is partially smudged.

We need confirmation from the UAE mortuary.

**MARISSA** *(hoarse)*

It's been two weeks.

How is this still an issue?

**CUSTOMS OFFICER** *(shrugs)*

Standard protocol.

We just need verification.

*He walks away before she can respond. MARISSA slumps deeper in her chair. ROLANDO rises silently and crosses to the vending machine. A loud mechanical groan, then a small paper cup drops. Liquid sputters in.*

*Slow ticking clock. Occasional thud of cargo being moved in the distance.*

*Time passes. Lights dim slightly to mark the early hours. Then a younger officer, fresh-faced, approaches them around 3:00 a.m.*

**JUNIOR CUSTOMS OFFICER**

Ma'am?

*MARISSA looks up slowly.*

Clearance has been approved.

The coffin can be released.

*MARISSA blinks. No sigh, no cry. Just stillness.*

**MARISSA** *(flat)*

Finally.

*ROLANDO returns and hears it. He nods. He puts the coffee down, untouched. MARISSA exhales, not with relief or joy, just release.*

**11. FUNERAL VAN**

*The front seat of a funeral van. Outside, a projection of the city rolls by slowly in gray, early morning tones. Everything is muted, washed-out. MARISSA sits in the passenger seat, expression unreadable, staring out the window. ROLANDO is not visible but implied to be in the back, accompanying the coffin.*

*The road hums. The driver, a weary man in his 50s with bloodshot eyes and a rough voice, speaks without turning his head.*

**DRIVER**

You're lucky, Ma'am.

Some bodies stay in customs for weeks.

Even months.

*MARISSA doesn't respond. The word "lucky" hangs in the air like a slur.*

*She watches as Manila's streets drift past. A tricycle crosses an intersection. A dog sleeps by the gutter. The van moves forward, steady, slow.*

**MARISSA** *(softly, without irony)*

Lucky.

*She turns her face back to the window. A shaft of morning light cuts across her. The hum of the engine continues as the van disappears into the light.*

**12. FUNERAL HOME RECEPTION**

*A cold, clinical reception area. A fluorescent light flickers above. MARISSA stands at a counter, pen in hand, filling out another form. Her shoulders are slumped. A RECEPTIONIST, polite but detached, explains something without much inflection.*

**RECEPTIONIST**

Due to the delays and possible decomposition during transit, Ma'am,  
we'll need to conduct a re-embalming.

Please sign here.

*The fan hums. The pen scratches. The fluorescent light buzzes faintly, echoing the same dull hum from her kitchen.*

*MARISSA signs without protest. The form is slid away. She turns and walks toward the viewing room, her steps slow, deliberate, mirroring the same gait from the airport scene.*

*Scene shifts to a funeral viewing room. A quiet, dimly lit space. A closed coffin sits center stage, flanked by artificial flowers. MARISSA sits alone in a plastic chair. A framed photo of ERNESTO rests nearby. Her bag is beside her, overstuffed with documents. Her hands rest in her lap, trembling slightly.*

*She looks at the coffin. Not crying. Just bone-tired.*

*SFX: The same fan hum. A muffled jeepney horn outside. The distant mechanical wheeze of airport cargo ramps.*

*These sounds fade in and out like memory.*

**MARISSA (softly)**

He's home.

But the process isn't over.

Not yet.

*She leans back in the chair, eyes fixed on the coffin. The light above her flickers once more.*

*The coffin now sits prominently under a flickering fluorescent light. Family members murmur softly offstage. A ceiling fan squeaks in slow, useless rotation. MARISSA, ROLANDO, and an EMBALMER are in the room. The EMBALMER stands quietly in a corner, clipboard in hand. The air is heavy.*

**ROLANDO (arms crossed, voice low)**

You sure you want to see him like this, Ate?

After everything?

**MARISSA (nods, jaw tight)**

I need to. Just to make sure it's him.

*The EMBALMER steps forward. Wordless, efficient, he unlatches the coffin. The lid creaks open. He lifts it carefully. Inside: a pale, waxy man in a wrinkled suit. Wrong. Totally wrong. Older. White-haired. A mole on his cheek. Folded hands. Peaceful expression. Everyone freezes.*

**MARISSA (gasping)**

What the... who is that?

*Silence.*

**ROLANDO** (*cautiously*)

Uh... Ate?

That's not Kuya Ernesto.

**MARISSA** (*explodes*)

No shit, Rolando!

*She stumbles back. Her hands tremble. The room is still. The EMBALMER flips through his clipboard, unhurried.*

**EMBALMER** (*mildly*)

Ma'am, are you sure this isn't your relative?

**MARISSA** (*voice rising*)

Are you serious?

He looks like my grandfather!

My husband didn't have white hair.

And he definitely didn't have a mole on his face!

*The EMBALMER frowns. Flips to another page.*

**EMBALMER**

Ah... let me check...

It seems there was a... uh... mix-up.

**MARISSA** (*shouting*)

Mix-up?!

**MARISSA** *(louder)*

What do you mean *mix-up*?!

Where's Ernesto?

**EMBALMER** *(hands up, uselessly)*

Ma'am, please calm down.

We'll look into this immediately.

It's possible the remains were switched during transit.

**MARISSA** *(voice cracking)*

Switched? Switched?!

This isn't a pair of shoes from Lazada!

This is my husband! Where is he?!

*ROLANDO stares at the body again. He's trying not to laugh, nervous, shocked, overwhelmed.*

**ROLANDO** *(under breath)*

Ate... are we sure we didn't just get some random Tito?

**MARISSA** *(spinning on him)*

Shut up, Rolando!

*She's flushed, breath ragged. The room is dead silent except for the buzzing light, the creaking fan, and the distant honk of a jeepney outside.*

*Lights freeze on MARISSA, fuming and humiliated. The coffin remains open behind her like an accusation. The absurdity sits like lead.*

### 13. WRONG BODY

*MARISSA paces in the corner, phone pressed to her ear. The misidentified corpse still lies in the open coffin. ROLANDO sits nearby, scrolling on his phone. The FUNERAL DIRECTOR enters in a rush, sweating and over-apologetic.*

**FUNERAL DIRECTOR** (*breathless*)

Ma'am, I—deepest apologies. We're going to get to the bottom of this, I assure you.

There must've been a handling error in the documentation. We'll coordinate immediately.

Please, please don't panic. We are with you.

*He dabs his forehead with a handkerchief, clearly overwhelmed. MARISSA ignores him. She's on a call with the CONSULAR OFFICER. Voice is flat, coldly bureaucratic.*

**CONSULAR OFFICER (voice)**

It seems there may have been an error in the cargo manifest.

We're investigating now, but it's possible that your husband's body was sent elsewhere.

**MARISSA** (*gritting teeth*)

Elsewhere?

Where is elsewhere?

**CONSULAR OFFICER (voice)**

We don't know yet.

We've reached out to the airline.

There's a chance it may have been sent to...

*Pause.*

...Taiwan.

**MARISSA**

Taiwan?!

**CONSULAR OFFICER (voice)**

Or maybe Thailand.

*MARISSA's mouth hangs open. She closes her eyes and leans against the wall, nearly sliding down it.*

**MARISSA** *(quiet fury)*

So you're telling me my husband could be anywhere in Asia?

**CONSULAR OFFICER (voice)**

Ma'am, please understand. These logistics are complicated.

Human error happens.

**MARISSA** *(screaming into the phone)*

Human error?!

You already lost him once! Now you've lost him again!

What kind of circus are you running over there?!

*ROLANDO, still scrolling, suddenly speaks up.*

**ROLANDO** *(muttering)*

Ate... look.

*He turns his screen toward her. MARISSA grabs the phone. Reads aloud.*

**MARISSA** *(deadpan)*

“Cargo mix-up at NAIA. Airline mistakenly delivers human remains to Sri Lanka again.”

*She drops her arm. Her voice cracks into disbelief.*

This can't be happening.

This this can't be real.

*Everyone is still. The coffin sits open, anonymous. Rolando closes his phone. The funeral director backs out slowly.*

*MARISSA remains standing, eyes vacant. A woman screaming into silence.*

#### **14. ESCALATION LOGGED**

*MARISSA sits alone at the table, a nearly empty bottle of gin beside her. A single glass. Beside it: ERNESTO's wedding photo in a frame. A soft radio plays an old kundiman tune in the background.*

*MARISSA stares at the photo, blank, silent, still.*

*She lifts the glass. Drinks. Sets it down. Her fingers trace the photo frame.*

**MARISSA (to herself)**

Somewhere out there—Taiwan... Sri Lanka... who knows—

My husband's in a freezer.

And I've got someone else's Tito in my funeral parlor.

*(A pause. Then, with a snort—)*

Whoever this man is...

I hope his family isn't as unlucky as me.

*MARISSA laughs. At first it's a chuckle. Then a louder laugh. It builds—raw, loud, sudden, gasping. A laugh that's too sharp, too long. It echoes off the quiet room.*

*ROLANDO steps into the doorway, holding a plate of crackers.*

**ROLANDO (worried)**

Ate? You okay?

*MARISSA wipes her eyes, still laughing through her words.*

**MARISSA**

No, Rolando.

I'm not okay.

*She holds up the glass, mock toast.*

But what else can I do?

Write "return to sender" on the coffin?

*She laughs again, shorter this time. Then it stops. A long pause follows. She stares at the glass. Her hands fall to her lap. The radio continues to hum softly in the background.*

## **15. PUBLIC STATEMENT**

*MARISSA and ROLANDO stand side by side. It's daytime, but chaotic. Sound design: camera shutters clicking, faint feedback from an unwatched microphone, vans idling. Downstage, a disordered group of MEDIA PERSONNEL, POLITICIANS, and GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES buzz around a black hearse parked just off-center. A BUREAUCRAT from Customs checks a clipboard. An AIRLINE EXECUTIVE fidgets nervously, holding a bouquet of lilies. A LOCAL MAYOR in an oversized barong poses near the casket, angling for cameras. The atmosphere is surreal.*

**ROLANDO** *(dryly)*

What is this circus?

*MARISSA squints at the crowd. She doesn't step forward. Just watches.*

**MARISSA**

Looks like they're running for office...

on Ernesto's corpse.

*Offstage, someone tests a microphone. A reporter shouts for better light. The AIRLINE EXECUTIVE steps forward, as if to offer the flowers. No one in the crowd acknowledges Marissa or Rolando. They're treated props, not mourners.*

*The coffin is gently removed from the hearse—this time correct, verified, too late. Flashes go off. Voices blend into a blur of bureaucratic self-congratulation. MARISSA does not move. She does not cry. She just watches.*

**ROLANDO** *(quietly, to her)*

You want to say something?

**MARISSA** *(shakes head slowly)*

They've said enough for both of us.

*The camera shutters continue for a few seconds, then fade out. The chaos recedes into static. MARISSA and ROLANDO remain still, the only people in real grief amid a performance of sympathy.*

*Chairs are pushed aside. Extension cords snake across the floor. A COFFIN is being wheeled centerstage. Spotlights and microphones crowd the room. A TV ANCHOR with perfect makeup approaches MARISSA, flanked by a CAMERAMAN. ROLANDO stands nearby, watching tensely.*

**TV ANCHOR** *(brightly, into mic)*

Ma'am, how do you feel now that your husband has finally been brought home after such an ordeal?

*MARISSA turns to face her, calm but sharp. She speaks directly to the camera.*

**MARISSA**

How do I feel?

I feel like I've spent the last month chasing my husband's corpse around the globe  
because no one in this system knows how to do their damn job.

*The anchor freezes. Smile cracks. The CAMERAMAN keeps rolling. A POLITICIAN in an oversized barong steps in, smiling for the cameras.*

**POLITICIAN**

We understand the pain this family has gone through.

This tragic series of events highlights the need for reforms in how we handle the repatriation of our beloved overseas Filipino workers.

**MARISSA** *(turning on him)*

Beloved?!

He was a petroleum engineer, not a saint.

And the only thing he'd want reformed

is how long it takes to get your hands out of our pockets!

*The POLITICIAN falters. He mumbles something inaudible. Before he recovers, the AIRLINE EXECUTIVE steps forward, holding the lilies like a peace offering.*

**AIRLINE EXECUTIVE**

Ma'am, on behalf of GlobalTrans Cargo,

please accept our deepest apologies.

*He holds out the flowers. MARISSA slaps them away. The bouquet hits the floor.*

**MARISSA**

I don't need your damn flowers.

*No one moves.*

*The EMBALMER steps forward cautiously toward the coffin.*

**EMBALMER** *(softly, to the room)*

Perhaps we should proceed?

*Everyone steps back. The EMBALMER gently undoes the latches. The lid creaks open. The room collectively leans in. Silence stretches.*

*Inside lies ERNESTO. Pale. Waxed. Still. But undeniably him. MARISSA steps forward. Her hands grip the edge of the coffin. Her breath catches. Then, slowly, she exhales. Not joy. Not relief. Just... stillness. Her shoulders drop slightly. Her brother watches silently behind her.*

**MARISSA** *(barely audible)*

Finally.

*The silence lingers. Then, breaking the stillness—*

**CUSTOMS OFFICER** *(offstage or stepping forward)*

Ma'am, before we proceed,

we'll just need you to sign this form

to confirm that the contents match the manifest.

**[Blackout.]**