

STELLA and MARIA are seated beside each other on the couch, rehearsing their lines together. JENNY is sitting on a small stool opposite them, helping with narration.

MARIA

(in anguish)

Your father is not the great man you think he is! Wealth has corrupted him. He's just a filthy philanderer! We can't stay with him any longer.

JENNY

Mr De Souza abuses them. Mrs De Souza tries to kill herself but Abigail stops her.

STELLA

(pretending to cry)

You're right. Father is a changed man now. What happened? I wish... we could return to those happy days.

Stella and Maria lean against each other, crying.

JENNY

Cut!

Stella stops acting at once but Maria keeps sobbing. Stella and Jenny look upon Maria with admiration.

JENNY (CONT'D)

Grandma's acting is really a whole other level man.

STELLA

Yeah, mum! How do you put in so much emotion? (brightly) Teach me!

Maria remains unresponsive with her head hung down. Stella turns to Maria and gently touches her shoulder.

STELLA (CONT'D)

You're so absorbed... Hey.

Maria finally lifts her head to reveal reddish eyes. Stella and Jenny exchange concerned looks.

JENNY

(breaking the silence)

But this script is too tragic! The women should retaliate, not hurt themselves more. Tsk, they should let me rewrite it.

(CONTINUED)

STELLA

I know! I'm so glad our family's nothing like that! Mum and Dad have always been such a model couple.

Stella hangs her arm over Maria's shoulder. Maria appears stiff as she tries to smile.

STELLA (CONT'D)

Ah! It's your wedding anniversary tomorrow right? (excited) Let me cook for you guys!

MARIA

I-I'm not sure if your dad can make it...

STELLA

(disappointed)

Oh, he's been busy with the new business, huh? What exactly is it though?

MARIA

(dismissively)

It's not important. Let's continue rehearsing.

STELLA

Nah, let's call it a day. (looks at her watch) Hm, it's already past midnight and Dad's not back yet. Is he really that busy?

MARIA

It's late. I should send you guys off now.

STELLA

Let's wait till Dad gets back. I wanna see him.

MARIA

(sighing)

Forget it, you won't.
(hesitantly, shaking her head)
He's on a business trip for his modelling agency again. (getting bitter) Having a good time meeting young ladies I guess, that bastard -

STELLA

(cutting in, in disbelief)

Mum! (pauses) You mean Dad...
(softly) No way.