

Migrant Voices presents

Let Me Off!

Adapted from the original piece written by The Necessary Stage. In association with Dramabox. Co-facilitated by Rei, Sha and Heng Leun.

In a society where the priority is economic development and wealth, to have time off is becoming a valuable commodity as people are now working later and longer. There once was a time when work stopped at the doors of the office, but now many of us have no choice but to bring work home. It is definitely becoming tougher to balance both work, home and family and many of us have no choice but to seek help from domestic workers.

Unlike most relationships, the one we have with our domestic workers is much like being match-made and married overnight. Before we can build enough trust and respect, we already have her in our home.

Mrs. Liew is one such working mother who had her trust and respect betrayed by her domestic worker, Ira, on her day off and had to bear the consequences of it. With this experience, she refused to let her new domestic worker, Rosalinda, have a day off.

Featuring a cast of both Singaporeans and migrant workers, "Let Me Off!" is an interactive theatre piece that explores the concepts of integrity and responsibility when managing our relationships with migrant workers - especially the ones in our homes.

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The characters

Mrs. Liew is 32 years old and married with one kid. She has now entered the workforce to become a working mother now that her eight-year old daughter has safely settled into primary school. She was offered a job as a Human Resource Executive at an MNC and her starting salary is higher than when she first entered the job market. With this in mind, Mrs. Liew decided to hire a helper to assist in her daughter's day to day needs. At the same time, she would like for someone to do basic cleaning for her two-storey household located at Telok Kurau Road.

Catherine is eight years old and loves to draw. Her favourite drawings are of flowers and she always draws them in twos – one for her mother and one for Ira.

Ira is 23 years old and she hails from Medan, Indonesia. This is her first time working out of Indonesia since graduating from school. She speaks English well and was chosen to be a fitted candidate for employment at Robson Employment Agency. Ira's parents feel that she can learn a lot from experiencing the outside world and also be able to help them save for their retirement. Her other sibling who is still in school, would benefit from her help when she remits money over each month.

Hassan is 30 years old and has been in Singapore for the past six years. He works on a construction site but was later promoted to a supervisor. He manages other workers on site and provides translations into Bengali for his employer. Hassan misses his homeland of Bangladesh but know that he is needed to work in order to allow his parents to retire. His two other brothers are also working overseas, one in Saudi Arabia and the other in Korea. He currently works at a site in Telok Kurau to supervise the construction of a childcare centre.

Karen has just entered the workforce and currently looking for a job. She was not able to find one that fits her bill but because she had applied for all vacant positions that she sees fit, Robson Employment Agency called her in for an interview and a month later, she was offered to position of Human Resources Executive. Karen knows little about foreign domestic workers and this is her first time working in such a place.

Norma De Souza has been working with foreign domestic workers from all over Asia for a year now. She meets all sorts of employers and domestic workers are her agency. Norma sometimes would get calls from helpers seeking a transfer or help at their employers' place. She would assist the best way she can but often finds, some things are beyond her job description.

Rosalinda is not new to working overseas. She had experience working in Canada before with an employer who is liberal. She attended courses on Sundays and have chances to hang out with friends even on weekdays. After finishing her contract, Rosalinda went back to Philippines for a year to see her children to school before signing on to work overseas once again. This is her first time in Singapore.

Scene 1

Mrs. Liew enters Robson Employment Agency and spoke to agent Karen. She explains her requirements.

Mrs. Liew: I'm looking for someone to take care of my daughter. I work on weekdays and will need someone to look after her school needs. I live in a two-storey house and it would be good to have someone around to take care of the chores too. This is my first time going back to work since my daughter was born. Do you have anyone in mind?

Karen: There are many selections I can show you but first, can I confirm with you some things Mrs. Liew?

Mrs. Liew: Yes sure go ahead.

Karen: Are you ok to give her a day off on Sundays?

Mrs. Liew: I'm fine by it. She will need her own time and space as well. I don't mind spending time with my daughter on Sundays when she goes for her day off. It will help me catch up with her and my husband too.

But I expect you to make sure she knows that there are rules and regulations here in Singapore she must abide by. I have to pay \$5,000 as a security bond and it will be a waste of money if all is gone. So I will need you to make sure she does not get herself in a tough situation.

Karen: Ok, I have just the person for you.

The scene switches to Ira taking a hand oath with Karen reciting to her what she would not do during her employment.

Karen: Repeat after me. I promise not to get pregnant.

Ira: I promise not to get pregnant.

Karen: I promise not to use the telephone.

Ira: I promise not to use the telephone.

Karen: I promise not to run away.

Ira: I promise not to run away.

Karen: Ok, you are lucky because your employer is ok with you going off on Sundays for your own time. But remember not to abuse it ok? Otherwise, if she complains to us about you, we will encourage her to send you back home.

Ira: Yes, ma'am.

Scene 2

A conversation is held between Ira and Hassan outside of Mrs. Liew's house. They speak about going to a Shah Rukh Khan concert happening next week. Listening in on the conversation is Catherine.

Hassan: Salaamualaikuuuuuuuum!

Ira: Yes brother, waalaikumsalaam to you too.

Hassan: Hello Catherine. No school today?

Catherine: No, I am having my break currently.

Hassan: So where are you two going?

Ira: We're going to buy groceries for the house.

Hassan: Oh I see, sorry to disturb you! By the way, have you heard that Shah Rukh Khan is coming to Singapore next month?

Ira: Serious! I didn't know that. Are you going?

Hassan: That's why I don't know if I want to go or not. I have no friends to go with. You like Shah Rukh Khan also right? Why don't you come with me? It is on a Sunday so you can go on your day off.

Ira: What time will it start?

Hassan: Starts at 6pm and finish at 11pm.

Ira: So late! I don't know if my employer will allow me to go out so late. My day off is usually from 9am until 6pm only.

Hassan: You try and ask first. Maybe she will give you an extension.

The scene cuts to Ira seeking permission from Mrs. Liew. She was granted an extension but will have to repay it by taking a later day off the next week.

In this scene we will have Ira on stage share her conversation with Mrs. Liew on this.

Ira: I was so scared when I asked Mrs. Liew for an extension. I even told her it was my favourite star and I'm going to be late but will make sure to catch the last train back. She said ok after asking me questions about whom I am going with. I did share with her that I'm going with Hassan.

DANCE SEQUENCE

Hassan and Ira dancing to *Break Free*, from Bollywood film *Krazzy 4* which Shah Rukh Khan contributed a dance piece to. They gazed into each others' eyes and proceed to lock lips. The stage will black out before the kiss happens.

Scene 3

Ira is sitting at a corner crying. Mrs. Liew is speaking to Karen.

Mrs. Liew: She is pregnant. What happened here?

Karen: Mrs. Liew I can assure you we will take care of this matter.

Mrs. Liew did not allow Karen to speak further and cuts her off.

Mrs. Liew: Look, you promised me that she will not get pregnant. I have signed on a security deposit of \$5,000 and it states that if she gets pregnant, I will lose it. What are you going to do about this now!

Karen: Don't worry Mrs. Liew, actually you will lose it if she gives birth in Singapore. Basically she cannot be in Singapore anymore and we must repatriate her back.

Mrs. Liew: You did not train her well enough. My money is wasted!

Ira gets up to leave but was stopped by Catherine. Ira leaves with a heavy heart.

Scene 4

Mrs. Liew enters National Employment Agency. She speaks to Norma De Souza, the agent on her requirements.

Mrs. Liew: I want a helper immediately. I cannot give her any day off. My last helper gave me so much trouble when she got pregnant. I was lenient and gave her Sundays off. She took advantage of me!

Norma: Calm down ma'am. But did you know that a day off per month should be given otherwise you are entitled to pay her about \$20 for not giving the day off?

Mrs. Liew: \$20 is still better than losing \$5,000. I'm just not up to going through the trouble of dealing with her issues when I have my own to look after.

Norma: We might have someone in mind for you, she has experience working in Canada before.

Scene cuts to Rosalinda at Mrs. Liew's home.

Mrs. Liew: Linda, I want you to take care of Catherine and clean the house. You cannot go out on Sundays and if you need to go the shop and buy groceries, you must not stop to talk to anyone. I will ask my neighbour to keep an eye on you. I will allow you to watch TV but make sure the house are clean and Catherine has her dinner before I come home. Understand?

Rosalinda: Yes, mum. Mum, can I ask a question?

Mrs. Liew: Sure.

Rosalinda: Can I use my handphone and write letters to my parents? And I also need to ask you how I can remit money to my family is I don't get Sunday off.

Mrs. Liew: You can use your handphone after 9pm when I am back. As for your salary, I will remit to you family. Just provide me with the details. You can go ahead and write letters.

Rosalinda: Mum, can I ask why my agency is cutting my salary for 6 months. They charge me for accommodation and food when I was at the agency also. I thought this is something they should pay and not me. I did not remember

3 months later.

Rosalinda is seen here cleaning and conversing with Catherine on certain occasions. Catherine showed her drawings to Rosalinda but did not receive a favourable response from a tired Rosalinda.

Rosalinda: I feel so trapped. I don't feel very happy working here at all. I thought life would be easier here but I was wrong. I want to run away.

Rosalinda runs off the stage. Catherine screams, "Auntie!" at the background.

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