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Abstract

Study Abroad -
An Original Television Pilot

by

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FADE IN:

INT. STUDY ABROAD OFFICE - DAY

WE OPEN ON ROMY, A FIRST-GENERATION LOW-INCOME LATINA STUDENT. SHE SITS IMPATIENTLY AND LOOKS AROUND THE ROOM. STUDY ABROAD COUNSELOR, JANICE, EMERGES THROUGH THE DOOR AND SITS.

JANICE

Hi. How can I help you today?

ROMY

Hi. I want to look into programs for study abroad. I'm hoping you could help me.

JANICE STANDS AND WALKS TOWARDS CABINETS.

JANICE

Do you know what kind of program you are interested in? What year are you in as well?

ROMY

Uh, I'm not sure. I've never been anywhere outside the country besides Mexico. I'm a second year here.

JANICE SEARCHES THROUGH CABINETS. SHE PULLS OUT PAMPHLETS AND SITS.

ROMY

I just want to know what programs I qualify for and actually have a chance with. I mean, is it even possible for me?

JANICE

Of course you have a chance! Everyone does or well, we at least try to encourage everyone. As a second year

this is a great time for you to start planning. Any specific places you're looking or wanting to look into?

ROMY

I don't know, I think Europe?

ROMY FIDGETS AROUND IN THE SEAT, TWIDDLES HER FINGERS.

But I think it might be too expensive. I honestly can't afford anything that can't get covered with aid. Wait, will this be covered with financial aid? This is the only way I'm able to pay for school.

JANICE SLIDES A HANDFUL OF PAMPHLETS OVER TO ROMY.

JANICE

I know the financials can be stressful but let's look over what you might be interested in first. No need to worry about the money aspect right now. Take some time to look over these programs, then come back and let me know how we can move forward from here.

ROMY NERVOUSLY GRABS THE PAMPHLETS. SHE SMILES AND EXITS.

INT. ROMY'S BEDROOM - DAY (2 WEEKS LATER)

ROMY SITS ON HER BED. SHE IS ON FACETIME WITH HER MOM. LAPTOP IS OPEN AND SHE IS ON A SCHOOL'S WEB PAGE FOR STUDY ABROAD.

ROMY

I managed to get an appointment for my passport in two weeks. I need to get it done asap to turn into the office, mom. The only thing is I don't know how I'm gonna pay for a whole passport, it's

expensive as hell. We can't afford that right now. And on top of that, i need to apply for a visa too.

ROMY'S MOM

Don't worry about the money. I'll get it for you. Just make sure you get the appointment. Where do you have to go for the visa? How does that work?

ROMY

Honestly I really don't know. I think it's the Italian embassy thingy? Since I'm staying for four months a visa is required. Oh! Also I got my acceptance letter for my school in Italy today!

ROMY STANDS UP AND WALKS OVER TO HER DESK. SHE GRABS THE LETTER AND SITS BACK DOWN.

ROMY'S MOM

Como que no sabes? You need to figure these things out now, Romy. Pero ay mija, congrats mamas. I'm proud of you!

ROMY SHOWS HER MOM THE LETTER ON SCREEN. SHE DANCES AROUND AS SHE SITS.

ROMY

Have any of us ever done this? No, so sorry if I don't know all of it right now but I will figure it out, ma. Thank you though. I showed my dad earlier, and I told him about the deposit. How in the hell are we gonna have enough money to pay for my deposit and my passport stuff? That's like three grand total we need.

ROMY SETS THE LETTER ASIDE. A TEAR RUNS DOWN HER FACE.

I know we can't afford this stuff right now and I'm being selfish. If I need to take out loans for this I will. I don't

want you guys worrying over this, when it's something I'm choosing to do. I can't let you guys pay for all of this.

ROMY'S MOM

No, don't start with me. If this is something you want to do then me and your dad are going to help you. That's how this works. We want you to have these opportunities, mamas. You leave the rest to us.

ROMY CRIES AND WIPES HER NOSE ON HER SLEEVE.

ROMY

I just feel bad and I feel selfish.

(gasps)

I don't think I deserve to go or why is it that you guys are helping me pay for something I'm choosing to do that isn't necessary. It's not fair I'm gonna have this experience and you guys are not. I should be here and working to help you pay what you struggle wi-

ROMY'S MOM INTERRUPTS.

ROMY'S MOM

Okay, now stop. I'm the mom here. Me. The only person that needs to think about the financials is me and your dad. I know you always feel like you need to help us, but we're gonna do this for you. However we can. You have worked so hard, and we want you to be able to go out and see the world. you're the first in our family to go to college and we are so proud of you for that. We always want you to reach for

more. Stop with the money stuff. I'll take care of it. I gotta go okay, I love you.

ROMY

Okay. I love you too, mom.

ROMY HANGS UP THE FACETIME CALL. SHE LIES DOWN. HER FRIEND, JANETH WALKS IN.

JANETH

I was able to get my appointment too! I got lucky right now and managed to get a spot the same day as yours. We can go together.

JANETH LOOKS AT ROMY.

What happened? Why are you crying? Are you okay?

JANETH SITS ON THE BED NEXT TO ROMY.

ROMY

Yeah. I just got off the phone with my mom and it stressed me out. I'm not sure if I should be doing this. Like, really. What are we doing? I'm a Latina, first-Gen student from South Central. Who do we know from back home that gets these kinds of experiences? What makes us so special that we get to do this?

JANETH GOES IN AND HUGS ROMY. SHE WIPES ROMY'S TEARS AWAY.

JANETH

First of all, let me just say I'm happy you told me about this program and encouraged me to go for it with you. Because you're right, who do we know

back home that gets to do this? And girl,
that's why we have to do it.

ROMY PULLS AWAY.

ROMY

What do you mean?

JANETH

People like us, with our background and
all, deserve these opportunities too you
know. Us being little South Central
babies don't mean we don't deserve to
reach for the damn stars. We do this for
us and to show that us kids can do it too.

ROMY SMILES AND FIXES HER HAIR OUT OF HER FACE.

ROMY

You're right. It just upsets me that as
a low-income student, I feel like I
don't deserve this or should be
discouraged from it. You know I read
only thirty percent of students in the
U.S who study abroad are people of color?
That tiny ass percentage is divided
between Latinx, Black, Native American,
Pacific Islander and more.
The other seventy percent are all white
folks. Imagine how many people from there
are low-income students, or first-gen
students? Shit ain't fair.

JANETH

And that's exactly why we have to do
this. We'll find the resources and make
it happen, Romy. Tomorrow let's go turn
in our paperwork that we do have and all
that we need to let the school know we
will be abroad in the Fall.

JANETH STANDS UP AND HEADS FOR THE DOOR.

ROMY

Let's do this then. I'll see you tomorrow.

JANETH

See ya.

JANETH WALKS OUT THE DOOR. ROMY STARES AT HER ACCEPTANCE LETTER.

EXT. SKYE HALL BUILDING - DAY (NEXT DAY)

ROMY STANDS AND LEANS AGAINST BUILDING WALL. JANETH APPEARS FROM THE CORNER AND WALKS UP TO HER.

JANETH

Sorry it took me so long! I couldn't find that stupid paper for my courses that we need to turn in. You ready?

ROMY

Yeah, let's go. I don't want to end up missing Janice.

BOTH GIRLS ENTER THE BUILDING. ROMY PUSHES THE BUTTON TO THE ELEVATOR. THEY WAIT AND BRIEFLY CHAT (NOT AUDIBLE TO AUDIENCE). A STUDENT APPROACHES THE ELEVATOR - SHE'S A WHITE, THIRD-YEAR STUDENT. SHE LOOKS AT THE PAPERWORK IN ROMY'S HAND. THE ELEVATOR DOORS OPEN. ALL THREE GIRLS STEP INSIDE. THE STUDENT TURNS TO ROMY.

STUDENT

OMG! Are you studying abroad next year?

ROMY TURNS TO THE STUDENT AND SMILES.

ROMY

Yes, we both are actually.

STUDENT

That's so cool! I'm planning to study

abroad too. How long do you plan to go?

ROMY

We're doing a semester abroad in Italy.
How about you?

STUDENT

That's nice. You don't think you'll
want to stay out there longer? Italy
is beautiful. I've been a few times
and let me tell you, you're not gonna
Want to leave.

ROMY AND JANETH LOOK AT ONE ANOTHER. THE ELEVATOR DOORS OPEN TO
THE FOURTH FLOOR OF THE BUILDING. THE GIRLS STEP OUT. THEY HEAD
INTO THE SECOND DOOR ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE BUILDING - STUDY
ABROAD OFFICE. THE GIRLS CHECK IN. THEY SIT IN THE WAITING ROOM.

STUDENT

So why aren't you guys just doing the
year? It's because of the coursework,
huh? I know thats tricky trying to make
it transfer. When i went abroad my first
year here I had a hard time doing it.

ROMY LOOKS TO JANETH. SHE TWIDDLES HER THUMBS ANXIOUSLY.

JANETH

Oh so this will be your second time
going abroad?

STUDENT

Well, studying abroad. I go to Europe
every summer with my parents. I figured
why not do my last year there, you
know? I found a great program, and it
costs about fifty grand which isn't bad
considering a private school. I'd highly
recommend it!

ROMY TURNS TO THE STUDENT, EYES WIDENED.

ROMY

Fifty thousand! Wow, that's a lot of money for a program. And you've already been to Europe before? You're lucky.

STUDENT

Yeah, haven't you guys been before? It's a little pricey but honestly it's not all that bad and totally worth it. My parents think its beneficial for my education. They did it when they were in college so they weren't surprised I chose to do it too.

JANICE WALKS OUT OF OFFICE. SHE CALLS JANETH INTO THE ROOM. JANETH STANDS UP AND HEADS TOWARDS THE OFFICE. ROMY TURNS BACK TO THE STUDENT.

ROMY

No, I haven't been. I don't know many people who have been either where I'm from.

STUDENT TILTS HER HEAD AND FURROWS BROWS.

STUDENT

Oh, where are you from?

ROMY

LA. South Central to be exact.

STUDENTS EXPRESSION CHANGES.

STUDENT.

Oh. That makes sense.

ROMY STANDS FROM HER CHAIR IN CONFUSION.

ROMY

What's that supposed to mean?

STUDENT

Look, all I'm saying is I get it you know?

ROMY FOLDS HER ARMS ACROSS HER CHEST.

ROMY

No, I don't know. Please explain what you mean by that.

STUDENT STANDS UP.

STUDENT

Look, I didn't mean to come off in any offensive way. It's just I've heard of that neighborhood and the kind of people that live in it. And I get that it's a poor area. I understand why you say you don't really know anyone who's been abroad.

JANETH WALKS OUT THE ROOM AS ROMY OPENS HER MOUTH TO ANSWER THE STUDENT.

JANETH

Okay, Romy. Janice is waiting for you inside. I'm coming with.

ROMY LOOKS TO THE STUDENT AND TURNS AWAY. THEY BOTH WALK INTO THE OFFICE AND SIT. ROMY HANDS PAPERWORK TO JANICE.

ROMY

Here's everything we need to finish with the academic side of the paperwork.

JANICE PICKS UP THE PAPERWORK. SHE LOOKS THROUGH THE PAGES AND PAPER CLIPS THEM TOGETHER.

JANICE

Everything looks good, thank you. I also have some news for the both of you from your study abroad program.

JANICE SMILES AND BRINGS OUT TWO PACKETS. SHE HANDS ONE TO EACH OF THE GIRLS.

JANICE

The school you're attending is a small, private university in a small town. It's a wonderful school but because it's not a big city, they don't gain much traction during the fall semester. With a small applicant of students this year entering their program, and taking into consideration your financial statements and amazing resumes, they've offered the both of you a scholarship. This will cover half the costs of your room and board. Financial aid will have to cover the rest.

ROMY AND JANETH LOOK DOWN AT THE PAMPHLETS. ROMY OPENS PACKET AND LOOKS AT THE SCHOLARSHIP LETTER.

ROMY

Oh my God! Are you serious right now? Wow! This is amazing, thank you so much! You have no idea how much this means to me.

JANETH

Seriously, this is amazing! Thank you!

JANICE REACHES OUT WITH HER HAND. SHE SHAKES BOTH OF THE GIRLS' HANDS.

JANICE

Of course. I'm glad to help. Now remember that the rest is to be

covered by financial aid and you. I'll go ahead and start the paperwork to get the financial aid rolling. I can't guarantee that it'll cover the rest of the costs.

ROMY STANDS AND SIGNALS FOR JANETH TO DO THE SAME.

ROMY

Yeah, of course. Thank you again. We'll be back soon with our passports and finalized paperwork in a few weeks.

THE GIRLS EXIT.

INT. ROMY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT.

ROMY AND JANETH LAY ON HER BED. THE LAPTOP IS IN THE BACKGROUND PLAYING A MOVIE. ROMY SITS UP ON HER KNEES.

ROMY

Dude, I can't believe everything that happened today. It was weird and a blessing all at the same time.

JANETH SITS UP AND SETS THE PILLOWS ON HER LEGS. SHE SITS CRISS CROSSED.

JANETH

It was definitely a blessing, but what do you mean? We won a whole ass scholarship, nothing weird about that!

ROMY LAUGHS.

ROMY

I didn't mean with the scholarship. I was talking about our interaction with that one girl at the office. She came at me really weird.

JANETH

Okay, now really what do you mean?
What did she say or what?

ROMY SHAKES HER HEAD.

ROMY

It was nothing really, just dumb.
She asked me where I was from and
then said it made sense to her now why
I hadn't studied abroad.

JANETH MAKES A CONFUSED FACE.

JANETH

What the hell does that even mean?

ROMY

Exactly. She tried saying it wasn't
offensive, but it was. And this is
what i mean about people making us
feel like we don't deserve the same
opportunities rich kids do - or white
kids do. But like you had said, we do
deserve it. We deserve those same
chances and opportunities, whether
that's in education or just the
community itself. More people like us
should be able to go abroad. There
should be resources for us, and more
people encouraging us. It's not
completely accessible right now, and
to be honest I'm surprised I was even
presented with the opportunity. I
would've never pictured myself getting
this kind of chance in college.

ROMY SETS A PILLOW OVER HER FACE AND YELLS INTO IT, MUFFLED.

It's just so frustrating!

JANETH NODS.

JANETH

See and that's exactly what I was telling you. That's why even though it's gonna be harder for us than it would be for other people, we gotta push through.

ROMY

I like to say I'm the first but not last when it comes to my family. I'm the first to go to college, and go to a great university right outta high school. It's a big deal. But I don't want it to stop there, or why should it stop there, you get me? My family and others in my community should get to do this too - and I haven't even done it myself yet!

JANETH

Yo, forreal. We're doing this. For sure.

ROMY SITS UP.

ROMY

I hate that I feel this way. And on top of all this, i'm still stressed about the financials. I'm also worried about the way it's gonna be once we're there. I've been thinking a lot about it and I'm scared.

JANETH

Scared of what?

ROMY BRINGS HER KNEES TO HER CHEST. SHE BURIES HER FACE IN HER ARMS.

ROMY

It's scary to think about how things are going to be out there. We have to budget everything correctly. It's gonna be the first time either of us are out of the country - alone. I'm terrified of what could happen or even just thinking about the way people will treat us. And the language barrier? I have heard that Italian is similar to Spanish but still. And it's not like we're just going out for a few days or even weeks. It's four whole months, think about the culture shock. And-

JANETH INTERRUPTS.

JANETH

Girl, breathe! I get it. I know what you mean. But we're gonna get through this together. We'll budget and save as best as we can. We're gonna be together, so we're not facing a whole new country alone. And most importantly, we're two bad ass Latinas from South Central. Yes there will be culture shock, but we're used to having to adapt to changes. We got this, okay?

JANETH LIGHTLY PUSHES ROMY'S SHOULDER.

ROMY

We got this. We're gonna see the world and then help change it, aren't we?

JANETH HIGH FIVE'S ROMY. SHE GRIPS ONTO THEIR INTERTWINED HANDS WITH HER OTHER HAND AND SMILES.

JANETH

Hell yeah we are!

BOTH GIRLS BURST OUT IN LAUGHTER.

ROMY

Aye, here's to making a damn difference.
To being the first but not the last.
We're gonna make it through.

JANETH JUMPS UP OFF THE BED.

JANETH

Yes ma'am! But first, I'm hungry. Wanna
order some dinner And do delivery? What
ya feel like eating tonight?

ROMY LOOKS AT JANETH AND SMILES.

ROMY

I'm feeling like Italian.

BOTH LAUGH AND JANETH PICKS UP THE PHONE AND DIALS.

FADE OUT.