

AQUINO, or PEEK-A-BOO GRINGO! by Asher Wyndham

Synopsis: Manuel Aquino takes a passenger for a bumpy ride through Tucson while attempting to persuade his passenger that he's not an illegal immigrant.

Characters:

Manuel Aquino, a Mexican-American taxi-driver, late-thirties to early forties

Passenger, a young business woman, disinterested in what the driver has to say*

*Only speaks one line. May be played a male passenger. TBD.

NOTE: Spanglish is used throughout—being that which is used primarily in the Southwest. Misspellings are necessary. Pronunciation is footnoted.

SETTING: In the Yellow Limo taxi cab.

The PASSENGER, perhaps very disinterested person, is the back seat. Perhaps a woman who listens to her iPod or puts on make-up with a compact mirror, smokes or chews and blows bubblegum.

AQUINO

So, how you today? I said, how you today? One of the three Bs? Bad day? Bankruptcy? Break-up? You don' have to be scared. I'm not crazy. I won' take you for Devil's ride on the I-10. —See crucifix and Lady of Guadalupe dangling from dashboard mirror? 'S for blessin¹. Good Catholic, I am. Mm-hm. Reasonable fare. Fair fare. Red chili pepper, tha's jus' decoration.

Hey...I have Jane or Joe tell me wha's up, wha's bothering 'em, blah-blah-blah and wha' in the world is sooo wrong. So, if somethin's up—I mean, down, not up—somethin' down—does that make sense? Well, if there's somethin' and y'want to get it out, you can talk to me...like I am a Father at Confession. My guests—I like to call the riders of this Yellow Limo “guests”—because they are sooo special. My guests, they're usually quiet. Some jus' chew gom² or listen to music³ on fancy iPod. Mos' don' say much. Usual “D'ya, like, mind if I roll down the window and smoke?” or “Tucson is Hell.” You don' have to be quiet. Say somethin'. Anythin'. Um, if, uh, if you, if you're not goin' to say anythin', lemme say somethin', OK? ...

I love my job, and therefore I love you. Yes, you. I don' know you. But I love you. I. Heart. You. Whoever you are. I love you not because y'pay the fare and,

¹ Blessin (BLE-zeen): blessing.

² Gom (GOM): gum, as in “bubblegum.”

³ Pronounced “MOO-sik.”

hopefully gimme awesome tip. But because you make my life, how should I say it? “Meaningful”—? Yes. Aquino, he takes ya...to where ya need to go. If it wasn’t for me, you would have to walk. And that would take a long time, right? Life—’s easier with a taxi driver like me, Aquino.

—’Nother pothole! But no worry for me! I drive on!

(A beat. Whistles cheerfully for a moment.)

...I am what ya call “Mexican-American.” I am that, of course, duh! But I, I prefer to be called “American.” Jus’ “American.”

Some Arab terrorists can fool people into thinking they’re Mexicans. I. Am. Not. Saudi. Arabian. I am not a bendito⁴ for Osama Bin Laden, trained in a cave in Afghanistan, and now here for bombing. —I. Am. An. American. I was born here. North of Rio Grande. America, America’s my homlan⁵. Honestly. Really. Born in this city. I am not from México. Well, my descendants are, but not me. —I didn’ hop a fence. I didn’ come up some toilet in El Paso and say, “Peek-a-boo Gringo!” I got nothin’ to do with a drug ganga⁶, no. Got a family! Four bambinos, yeah four! Maricella, my hony⁷, she’s pregnant, big like Jabba the Hutt with the fifth! We eat Hamburger⁸ Helper and watch *Deal or No Deal*—or Lou Dobbs. We live in nice mobilhom⁹ with a white picket fence ’round it.

—Honestly, I’m not an illegal immigrant. An alien, un mojado?—no! I can show you my Social¹⁰ Security card, if y’want? Better: I can show you my Costco card.

(Shurg his shoulders: “Well, OK.” A beat. Whistles just for a bit because he’s not cheerful anymore.)

...Yesterday, I got stopped. Again. By Road Patrol—or, I bet, really la migra—the immigration police—right up ’gainst my bomper¹¹. How many times has Aquino been stopped? Hmm. —A baker’s dozen, I bet. Oh-h, yesterday, one cop car behind me, one in front of me. It was like I was on that show *Cops*—!

(Sings some lines from the theme song by Bad Boys for Cops.)

⁴ Bendito (ben-DEE-toh): bandito.

⁵ Homlan (HOM-lan): homeland.

⁶ Ganga (gan-ga): gang.

⁷ Not “honey.” Hony (kho-NEE): honey, meaning sweetheart.

⁸ Pronounced “HAM-bur-ger.”

⁹ Mobilhom (mo-beel-HOWM): mobile home.

¹⁰ Social: pronounced “so-TIAL.”

¹¹ Bomper (bom-PER): bumper, as in “car bumper.”

“Bad boys, bad boys, whatcha gonna do, whatcha gonna do when they come for you?” ...I had no one with me. I was jus’ munchin’ on my lonche¹², a Whataburger¹³, mmm, while drivin’ really slow, waiting for a call from Dispatch, when red lights started flashing. I stopped, as all good Americans should do. Two cops come up to me, tall like school yard bullies. One tapped on the window¹⁴. “Wha’ I do wrong—again, eh?” They wanted to see my Driver’s License and my Social Security card. I stayed in my taxi for—? Like a half an hour. Helluva time! I got two calls from Dispatch. Told Dispatch I was being questioned by cops. “For what?” “I, I don’ know.” Cops came back, handed me back my cards and said, “Have a nice day, amigo.” “A nice day”—? I waited for the cops to drive away. I jus’ sat in my taxi, with the seat back, eating my beef, wondering why. ... Why?

¹² Lonche: lunch.

¹³ Pronounced “What-a-bur-ger.”

¹⁴ Pronounced “WEEN-doh.”