

Talk-Story

by
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A Filipina daughter, with a penchant for emulating the heroines of '40s movie flicks, continues her father's legacy of telling stories to herself and to those around her. Moving between her world in present-day San Francisco and that of her father in his '30s world of rural California, she tells her version of dealing with bigotry much the same way her father told his own heroic tales to her.

TIME: Pasts and presents of both father and daughter

PLACE: Various: Father's past (told from hotel room): church, stores, Watsonville corner, diner, jungle road.

Present: hotel room, hospital room

Daughter's present: office, cafe, moviehouse, Headlands, Lon's couch, hospital

CHARACTERS (TWO FEMALES, FOUR MALES)

FRANK Asian (prefer Filipino), Dee's tall-tale father, somewhat itinerant, 70s, a braggart, endearing, exasperating, lives in San Francisco hotel (noticeable accent)

- DEE Asian (prefer Filipina-American), 30s, a 1940s aficionado, fantasizer, storyteller, a columnist
- CLARA African-American, 30s, Dee's best friend, account rep, follows Dee's tales, blunt

IN THEIR STORIES

- LON Caucasian, 30s, Dee's editor, the modern-day liberal
- PEDRO Asian (prefer Filipino), Frank's brother and hero-self, sexy confident (will age)
Island relative (both roles: noticeable accent)
- CHARLIE Frank and Pedro's World War II buddy
also CHIEF, BULLY, BOSS, DRUGGIST

 ACT I

[In darkness, SLIDE: "TALK-STORY." Voice-over of a man teaching song to his young daughter, who half-tries to sing along. It is the English translation of Joey Ayala's "Walang ganggang Pa'alam" ("Never Ending Good-Bye") repeated in second act:]

Many times I think of you, many dreams to remember
 You haunt all my thoughts, my life
 Dreaming brings you close to me, dreaming makes me wonder
 When will you return this time?
 Although you are so far away I always will remember
 Though we are apart the memories still linger
 Always smiles with the sighs, always tears with the laughter
 Till the day we'll be together . . . come that day
 (Tell me you will be returning, tell me no more yearning)

[Lights up. DEE is heard as young girl urging FRANK, narrating. Whether 70 years old or younger, he in his costume will never change. Always in baggy pants, button shirt, hat, a man who's been the itinerant, the lettuce picker, the cannery worker. Above all, he is a storyteller.]

DEE: Okay, daddy, now a story!

FRANK: I thought you wanted to learn this song . . .

DEE: [oblivious] The GHOST one! The spooky one! Go on, daddy!

FRANK: [laughs] Okay, okay!

SLIDE: LEYTE, THE PHILIPPINES

[Seen is a makeshift cot, army-issue, behind scrim/filmstrip and sleeping body (PEDRO). One cricket heard. The feeling should be a very warm night at guard duty in a hollowed-out church baptismal chamber: World War II, Leyte. Light should suggest haunted feeling, spooky. FRANK relishes his story as he tells (audience) his tale:]

FRANK: *[dramatically]* I was all alone after my brother, your uncle, took off for the base. Me, Frank Abano, far from camp, guarding the movie projector for the company at our makeshift theatre in a baptismal chamber—only one cricket chirping. Can you see it, Dee? Stars overhead at night. And, Clara, you could smell the damp air on that hot, wet island of Leyte. You see, the roof had been bombed off! Yes, the roof! Remember, this is wartime. . . .

[Moans heard from "body" (PEDRO).]

[continues] I was drunk. I had just stumbled into my cot when I heard . . .

[Measured footsteps heard.]

[continues] footsteps. *[from where he sits, slurred]* Ano, who'z zair??

[FRANK does steps with his foot.]

[repeats, leans up] I called again.

SOLDIER: *[PEDRO]* Who'zout zair?? HALT!!

[Footsteps stop, then start again. Behind scrim filmstrip. SOLDIER with rifle rises groggily from cot and points offstage.]

[weaving] I'm warning you, if you don't identify yourself, I'll shoot!

[Footsteps hesitate, but continue. SOLDIER raises rifle.]

FRANK: *[to audience]* So, to show I meant business, I shot my rifle—HIGH.

[SOLDIER shoots wobbily.]

FRANK: *[continues]* But the steps kept on. So I called, HALT!

[Footsteps continue.]

[continues] I leveled my rifle. . . .

[SOLDIER shoots levelly. Silence. SOLDIER makes moves toward offstage when footsteps heard again.]

FRANK: [*amazed*] I should've hit him! He was right in front of me! But there was no one there. No one walking where I heard walking, and from where I could STILL hear walking. Well, I could've grabbed my gear, to hell with the projector, and I could've run out of there! But instead I laughed! Ghosts? HA! I stayed right there, yelling at all the ghosts. . . .

SOLDIER: [*boisterous, drunk*] Come'n get me! I'm not afraid of you! I dare you! I DARE YOU! HA-HA-HA! [*drifts off*] Come on! Come'n try. . . .

FRANK: So drunk, I . . . I fell asleep. [SOLDIER *passes out*] Yep, I stayed put. All alone.

[*Lights down on chamber. SOLDIER exits.*]

[*continues*] Later I found out right in front of the chamber was a secret crypt. Former pastors of the church, bones of the elders buried right where I'd been sleeping, disturbed by a soldier, drunk and laughing, on their final resting place. The same place where they whispered vespers and walked in solitude. Dead or alive, you're always alone, braving the elements, animals . . . ghosts. In here [*points to heart*] is the stuff of heroes. Always rely on that. Face the music. Running's not always the answer.

[*Blackout*]

SLIDE: OFFICE—TODAY

[*DEE types furiously. CLARA carries chinese food. Surrounded by '40s movie posters, DEE emulates its stars.*]

CLARA: Sorry I'm late. Long line at Moon Garden today . . .

DEE: Pass me that white-out.

CLARA: [*peers into bag*] How do you wrap muushu pork again? [*as she nibbles*] Next time when I win, it's Filipino food.

DEE: [*still whitening-out*] Lay 'em out, spread some plum sauce, spoon in the stuff, fold and twist the ends.

CLARA: No fair. You were born Oriental.

DEE: Asian. They offer Political Correctness on campus now.

CLARA: [*peers over shoulder*] What are you doing?

DEE: Writing.

CLARA: Thank you, Sherlock!

DEE: An article. Due in two days.

CLARA: I'm still writing those notes from last weekend: The Conference from HELL. Everybody ELSE's group gets first-class treatment. . . . Me, the only

Black female account rep. What do I get? LEFTOVERS! And as top account rep, I stand there, open-mouthed with EGG on my face, and it's not my fault!

DEE: Better hand those notes in.

CLARA: I told you about Murphy.

DEE: It's his format. Nail 'im.

CLARA: He's a CEO! I can't alienate him now.

DEE: Face the music, Clara. Expose the deficiencies of the program. Murphy answers—not you. Don't kowtow, Clara. [*quotes:*] "A career is a curious think . . ."

CLARA: Okay, okay! You know, not everything has to be done in the Sherman-talk way YOU do all the time! [*pouts*] Can't I just hide my head in the sand for awhile?

DEE: Running's not always the answer, Clara. My dad taught me that . . .

CLARA: [*sighs*] I remember . . . the snake story, right?

DEE: No, the ghost one. Damn! White-out again, please?

CLARA: [*hands over*] Stop typing and talk to me!

DEE: Sorry. [*She stopped typing.*] I gotta get this thing done. A prime opportunity. I can't screw it up. [*her Roz Russell delivery:*] "You need timing, an eye for seeing the turning point or recognizing the big chance when it comes along. . . ."

CLARA: Uh-oh. [*like Poltergeist*] "She's ba-ack!"

DEE: "Don't settle for the little dream. Go on to the big one."

CLARA: Just tell your story, Dee. You will, anyway. . . .

SLIDE: AN OFFICE

[CHIEF enters a busy, fast-paced world of newspapers. A '40s look: The CHIEF (like His Girl Friday), DEE like tough ace reporter Rosalind Russell. She holds a smart hat. CLARA listens.]

DEE: [*like Roz, to CLARA*] "The chief called me into his office upstairs . . ."

CHIEF: [*ignores her, into phone:*] Get 'em off our backs! We're running a paper here!

DEE: "He'd been watching me and my work and he seemed impressed . . ."

CHIEF: [*pushes button*] Hello, Stan? STAN?? [*pushes another*]

CLARA: [*bit skeptical*] You just walk in and he drops what he's doing, huh?

CHIEF: Hello, anyone there? HELLO??

[*Lights change.*]

DEE: [*her former self, to CLARA*] I'm setting a mood here.

CLARA: Why can't you just tell a story straight?

DEE: [*rolls eyes*] BOR-ING!

CLARA: Amazing how things are all the time happening to you, appearing at a drop of a hat! . . .

DEE: Clara! Let me WALLOW a bit, okay??

CLARA: I know how you are, Dee . . .

DEE: [*quotes FRANK's saying:*] "Indulge me! . . . Please?"

CLARA: [*sighs, adjusts hat on DEE's head*] And then you said? . . .

DEE: [*eagerly to CHIEF*] I'm Dee Abano . . .

CHIEF: [*inattentive*] Steno pool's down the hall around the corner on your right . . .

DEE: From downstairs? . . .

CHIEF: First door by the cooler. Can't miss it.

DEE: Features! Copy assistant! You sent for me? . . .

CHIEF: [*phone buzzes*] Stan? Stan, where'd you go, okay, where were we? . . .
[*turns away*]

[*DEE braces herself, then boldly depresses boss's telephone:*]

DEE: [*again as Roz, kickstarts into fantasy*] "Chief, I came up when I could. Hope you weren't waiting long."

CHIEF: [*hangs up, a complete change*] Well, well, well! Just the person I want to see!

DEE: [*nods to CLARA smugly*] Just the reception I want to get.

CLARA: [*dry*] You don't smoke.

[*DEE snuffs cigarette.*]

CHIEF: I'll come to the point. Dee, we got forty-five inches of copy to fill in our series on Oriental groups. . . .

DEE: Which one?

CHIEF: What are YOU?

DEE: You mean, it doesn't make a difference?

CHIEF: [*shifts*] Sure it does! . . . See, there's a quota involved . . .

DEE: Ah.

CHIEF: I mean, you oughta be grateful!

DEE: [*laughs*] Right! [*to CLARA*] And then Lon comes in—Newsroom.

[*LON enters.*]