

# Times Change

Carlos A. Rabell

When the lights come up a typical hospital room (without walls) is on the center of the stage. An old man (GRANDPA) is lying on bed. A young man (FRANK) (long hair, torn jeans, earring, and red, yellow and green shirt) enters stage left and sits down.

FRANK

Hi Grandpa.

GRANDPA

Francisco José, que sorpresa.

*Francisco José, what a surprise.*

How are you feeling?

GRANDPA

¿Yo? Pues mi hijo aquí en la lucha contra este cancer. ¿Y tú, cómo estás?

*Me? Well my son, fighting against this cancer. And you?*

I'm Ok, you know, the usual.

(FRANK sits down. Pause)

Would you call me Frank instead of Francisco?

GRANDPA

¿No te gusta tu propio nombre?

*Don't you like your own name?*

Yes, but Francisco is so...

FRANK

¿"Portorro"?

*(Slag word meaning Puerto Rican)*

No, it's so common. I want to be different.

GRANDPA

Veo.

*I see.*

¿Y mi beso, dónde está?

(Small pause)

*Where is my kiss?*

Sorry, I forgot.

FRANK

(FRANK stands up, kisses the old man, and sits down)

GRANDPA

Ya veo que eso no es todo lo que se te ha olvidado...

*It looks like that's not the only thing you've forgotten...*

FRANK

What do you mean?

GRANDPA

Tu pelo, la pantalla, esos trapos que llevas por pantalones...

*Your hair, the earring, those rags you are wearing for pants...*

FRANK

This is just fashion, nothing else. Besides, I like it.

(FRANK touches his earring and puts his hand in one of the holes of his jeans while saying this. GRANDPA coughs)

GRANDPA

Veo, traeme un poquito de agua de la neverita. ¿Quieres?

*I see, bring me some water from the mini fridge, would you?*

(FRANK stands up, gets an empty cup from a nearby table, fills it up with water from a mini-fridge, and gives it to Grandpa. GRANDPA chugs most of it and sets it on the table. FRANK sits down)

Yo sólo espero que todavía te gusten las mujeres...

*I hope you still like women...*

FRANK

Grandpa?

(As if asking: "Why do you say that?")

GRANDPA

No me "granpees" a mi. ¿Es que ya se te olvidó el español?

*Don't give me that "grandpa" stuff, did you forget your Spanish or what?*

FRANK

No, it's just that English is more important.

(Pause, GRANDPA gives FRANK a bad look)

What I mean is that I wouldn't get a job if I don't know English. And if I know English and Spanish I can communicate with anyone from *Tierra de Fuego* all the way up to Alaska.

GRANDPA

Sólo falta que me digas que quieres hacer de Puerto Rico un estado "gringo".

*The only thing I need to hear from you is that you want Puerto Rico to be a "gringo" state.*

FRANK

Well...

GRANDPA

No, dime que lo estoy soñando.

*No, tell me that I'm dreaming it.*

(Begging)

FRANK

I've thought about it, and I think that's the best for

FRANK cont'd

Puerto Rico.

GRANDPA

Tu lo que quieres es que yo me muera más rápido,  
¿verdad?

*You just want me to die sooner, right?*

FRANK

Grandpa, remember that *Albizu* and *Muñoz* are  
dead. We don't have the leadership for the drastic change  
to independence.

GRANDPA

No me vengas con eso, lo que hace falta son "cojones" para  
salvar a nuestra patria de los "yankis".

*Don't give me any of that, all we need is guts to  
save our country from the "yankis".*

FRANK

It's not that easy. Besides, statehood is the only solution  
to our economic problems.

GRANDPA

Sí, puede ser, pero y ¿qué me dices de las  
tradiciones, el idioma y las olimpiadas?

*Maybe, but what about the traditions, the language,  
and the olympics?*

FRANK

Traditions will stay as they are, I have no doubt about it.  
About the language I'll say that being bilingual is  
definitely better. And about the olympics, I think that's *on*  
something we'll have to sacrifice in order to get economic  
and political stability.

GRANDPA

¿Tu crees que eso valga la pena?

*Do you think it's worth it?*

FRANK

Yes, I think it's worth it.

GRANDPA

Bueno, yo a la verdad que ya no puedo hacer nada pues yo estoy  
más de allá que de acá.

*Well, I really can't do anything because I'm more  
dead than alive.*

FRANK

Don't say that, you'll be all right very soon.

GRANDPA

Tal vez, pero no por mucho tiempo.

*Maybe, but not for long.*

FRANK

Come on!

GRANDPA

Entonces, ¿a todos los jóvenes les han comido el

## GRANDPA cont'd

cerebro?

*So, have all the young people been brain washed?*

FRANK

No, it's just progress.

GRANDPA

Bueno, yo me rindo, parece que esta batalla no hay quien la gane.

*Well, I give up, it looks like no one can win this battle.*

FRANK

Don't say that. Puerto Rico will be free one day.

GRANDPA

Bien, ahora me quieres dar esperanzas para que me muera feliz.

*Nice, now you are giving me hope, so I can die happy.*

FRANK

No, nothing like that, I hate making people think there is hope if there is none. I think that Puerto Rico should be free, just like you. But it's not the time, it's not convenient. Maybe in 50 years, who knows, maybe in 10.

GRANDPA

Parece que tu papá no es tan mal maestro.

*It looks your father is not that bad of teacher.*

(Pause)

Bueno, ¿y qué?  
¿Tienes novia?

*So what? Do you have a girlfriend?*

FRANK

A girlfriend? Are you kidding? I have some friends, but nothing formal.

GRANDPA

¿Es que no te quieres casar?

*Don't you want to get married?*

FRANK

What for? Marriage is not for me.

GRANDPA

¿Te vas a meter a cura entonces?

*Then you are going to be a priest?*

FRANK

A priest? Grandpa, I think you need to watch some T.V.

GRANDPA

¿Y entonces qué?

*Then what?*

FRANK

I want to stay a bachelor, work, party, have affairs once in a while... You know, free for all.

GRANDPA

¿Que tu qué? Dios mio, a lo que estamos llegando.

*What? Oh my God, look what we are getting to.*

FRANK

Times change, Grandpa.

*(As if saying: "take it easy...")*

GRANDPA

Sí, empeoran cada vez.

*Yes, they get worse everytime.*

FRANK

What do you mean?

GRANDPA

A lo que me refiero es que durante todo el curso de la historia cada hombre ha querido buscar una mujer para formar una familia y ser felices. ¿Qué tiene eso de malo?

*What I'm taking about is that through out history man has been searching for a woman to form a family, and be happy. What's wrong with that?*

*(GRANDPA coughs)*

FRANK

The problem is that marriage doesn't work. Why do you think there are people that change their wives more often than their underwear?

GRANDPA

No te hagas el gracioso.

*Don't try to be funny.*

*(Grandpa coughs, chugs the rest of the water, and puts the cup back)*

Traeme un poquito más de agua. ¿Quieres?

*Would you bring me some more water please?*

*(FRANK gives Grandpa more water. GRANDPA chugs some and sets the cup back on the table. FRANK sits down)*

¿Y qué me dices del matrimonio de tu papá y tu mamá? ¿Funciona el matrimonio o no?

*What about the marriage of your parents? Does marriage work or not?*

FRANK

Well, I guess that marriage works for some people, but not for me.

GRANDPA

¿Y cómo sabes que no es para tí?

*And how do you know it's not for you?*

FRANK

I don't know, I just can't picture myself with a wife, kids, and all the responsibility that is needed.

GRANDPA

O sea que no eres responsable suficiente como para casarte.

*So you are no responsible enough to get married.*

FRANK

No, that's not it.

GRANDPA

¿Y entonces?

*And then?*

FRANK

The thing is that all the chicks nowadays don't believe in having a family. They all want to be doctors, engineers... you know, they want to be your boss. And if they want to work all day long and maybe during the night, who takes care of the family? The man of the house?

GRANDPA

Tienes un punto.

*You have a point.*

(Pause)

Y tú, ¿qué quieres hacer con tu vida?

*So what do you want to do with your life?*

FRANK

I want to be an actor.

GRANDPA

Lo que faltaba. ¿Por qué no estudias algo de verdad: ingeniería, medicina, banca... tu sabes, cosas prestigiosas, de chavos... no de "pelaos".

*That's all I needed. Why don't you study something real: engineering, medicine, banking... you know prestigious things, with money... not for bums.*

FRANK

Are you trying to say that acting is no good?

GRANDPA

Exactamente.

*Exactly.*

(GRANDPA chugs some water)

Mira Francisco José...

*Look Francisco José...*

FRANK

Call me Frank.

(Angry)

GRANDPA

Mira Frank, yo quiero lo mejor para ti. Y créeme que debes pensarlo mejor. ¿Quién tu crees que hace más chavos: un ingeniero como tu papá o un actor como Juan Manuel Lebrón?

*Look Frank, I want the best for you, and believe me, you need to think more about it. Who do you think makes more money: and engineer like your dad or an actor like Juan Manuel Lebrón?*

FRANK

Probably Dad makes more money than Juan Manuel Lebrón, but I don't care. I'd rather do something I like and earn a respectable amount of money than do something I don't like and be a miserable rich person who doesn't enjoy his work.

GRANDPA

Y qué me dices de la vida diaria. ¿Podrías ir

GRANDPA cont'd

a la farmacia de la esquina tranquilo?

*What about your daily life? Would you be able to go to the grocery store that's around the corner in peace?*

FRANK

I don't care. If I'm a good actor and someone recognizes me in the street I'll just be myself. I'll give her my autograph and keep walking.

(Pause)

GRANDPA

Ya te entiendo. Tú no te quieres casar porque las mujeres quieren mandar. O sea que te vas a meter a actor para vivir en un mundo de fantasía, en el cual tu eres el hombre de la casa y eres el que manda.

*I understand. You don't want to get married because women want to rule. So you want to be an actor to live in a fantasy world in which you are the ruler.*

FRANK

No, I just... I just want to be my own boss and go all over the world without any attachments.

GRANDPA

Dime una cosa. ¿Te has enamorado alguna vez?

*Tell me something. Have you ever been in love?*

FRANK

I think so.

GRANDPA

¿Cómo era ella?

*What was she like?*

FRANK

She was awesome.

GRANDPA

¿Y qué pasó?

*So what happened?*

FRANK

She broke up with me.

(Pause)

The thing is that she wanted to be a doctor, and I didn't quite liked that. So, she decided that the best thing for us was to break up. I wasn't very pleased at the moment, but now I see that she was right.

GRANDPA

¿Podría ser que todo eso de que no te quieres casar sea una consecuencia de ese fracaso?

*Could it be that you don't want to get married as a consequence of that failure?*

FRANK

Maybe, but all the chicks I know have the same stuff between their ears.

## GRANDPA

Sigue buscando y veras que todavía hay muchachas buenas. Lo que pasa es que no has encontrado a la que es para ti.

*Keep looking and you'll see that there are a lot of nice young women out that. What happens is that you haven't found the one for you yet!*

(GRANDPA coughs)

Ya no puedo hablar mucho porque se me seca la garganta. Así es que, ponme un poco de esa cremita en el dedo.

*I can't talk much because my throat is getting dry so why don't you put some of that ointment on my finger.*

(The conversation keeps going. FRANK gets up, gets an ointment tube from the table and squeezes some onto Grandpa's finger. GRANDPA spreads it all over his mouth and cleans his finger with a handkerchief that is on the table. FRANK puts the tube back and sits down. GRANDPA chugs most of the water and puts the cup back)

FRANK

I don't think so. There's not such thing as a person destined to be my wife. Everyone does what they want to.

GRANDPA

Y si no te casas, ¿qué vas a hacer?

*So what are you going to do if you don't get married?*

FRANK

I told you. Study, work, get a nice apartment, and maybe, if I'm lucky, go to Hollywood.

GRANDPA

¿Hollywood? Eso como que está muy lejos.

*Hollywood? That sounds very far away.*

FRANK

Raul Julia did it.

GRANDPA

Pero Raúl Juliá es un tremendo actor.

*But, Raúl Juliá is a great actor.*

FRANK

And, what makes you think I'm no good?

GRANDPA

Yo no quise decir eso, sólo que no es fácil, que hay que fajarse.

*I didn't mean to say that, only that it's not easy, that you would have to work hard.*

(Small pause. Now Grandpa is referring to the squeezing of the ointment tube.)

¡No! Aprieta el tubo por abajo, no por el medio, así dura más...

*No! Squeeze the tube from the bottom, no from the middle, it lasts longer.*

FRANK

What difference does it make? If I squeeze the damn tube in the middle and the ointment comes out... You get your medicine, right?

GRANDPA

Sí, pero las cosas no se hacen así.

*Yes, but that's not how things are done.*

FRANK

Anyways, let's go back to acting.

(Small pause)

Let me tell you, I'm doing my best,

(FRANK looks at his watch)

I even have an... Shit!

Is today Thursday?

GRANDPA

Sí, y ten cuidadito con lo que dices.

*Yes, and be careful with what you say.*

FRANK

Sorry, but I forgot about my audition, I thought today was Wednesday. I should get going, the traffic is hell at this time in the afternoon.

GRANDPA

¿Y esta audición de qué es?

*And this audition, what's it for?*

FRANK

It's the audition required to get into the best acting school in the island.

GRANDPA

Yo insisto, olvidate de la actuación, estudia algo práctico, constructivo, algo que pueda ayudar a los demás.

*I insist, forget about acting, study something practical, constructive, something in which you could help others.*

FRANK

Have you ever been to a good play in your life?

GRANDPA

Sí, algunas obras buenisimas.

*Yes, some very good plays.*

(GRANDPA coughs)

Más agua, por favor.

*More water please.*

(FRANK keeps talking while getting some more water for Grandpa. GRANDPA chugs some and sets the cup back on the table)

FRANK

Have you ever learned anything from a play?

GRANDPA

Sí, varias veces.

*Yes, a few times.*

FRANK

Don't you think that the actors are doing something productive, helping others understand something, and sometimes even themselves.

(Pause)

GRANDPA

Pues fíjate que sí. ¿Estás seguro que te gusta actuar?

*It looks like you are right. Are you sure you like acting?*

FRANK

I'm as sure about acting as you are sure about the importance of marriage.

GRANDPA

Yo sólo te digo que hagas lo que te dicta tu corazón y sea cual sea tu decisión hazlo con orgullo y dedicación.

*Just remember to do what your heart tells you to do and whatever that might be do it with pride and dedication.*

FRANK

I'll do my best.

GRANDPA

En cuanto a lo del matrimonio, dejame hacerte un cuento. Pero primero mójame el pañuelo en alcoholado y pómelo en la frente. ¿Quieres?

*About marriage, let me tell you a story, but first would you soak that handkerchief in alcohol and put it in my forehead?*

(FRANK soaks the handkerchief with rubbing alcohol in the nearby sink and puts it in Grandpa's forehead, then sits down)

Excelente.

*Excelent.*

FRANK

So, what's the story about?

GRANDPA

Cuando yo era como de tu edad tenía una amiga. Al principio nos llevábamos lo más bien, pero al pasar los años nos dimos cuenta que pensábamos de manera bien diferente y por poco terminamos la amistad. Hasta que nos dimos cuenta que polos opuestos se atraen, nos casamos y fuimos felices por 54 años.

*When I was about your age I had a girlfriend. At the beginning everything was great, but after some time we noticed that we thought very differently about a lot of things and we almost finished our friendship. Then we noticed that opposite poles attract, we got married, and were happy for 54 years.*

FRANK

What are you trying to say? That because you and Grandma, may she rest in peace, were the odd couple that made you get together and form a family? That's funny, then the perfect woman for me is the one that has a way of thinking totally opposed to mine?

GRANDPA

Más o menos. A mi me funcionó.

## GRANDPA cont'd (translation)

*More or less, it worked for me.*

FRANK

In other words, the perfect woman for me is my old girlfriend. We couldn't agree on anything, well almost anything. You know what? I think you might have a point.

GRANPA

Mira a ver, nada pierdes con tratar.

*Check it out, you have nothing to lose.*

FRANK

Talking about trying, I have to go. The audition starts in 15 minutes. Actually, she lives very near to the audition place, so, maybe I'll go visit her.

GRANDPA

Ataca muchacho, pero acuerdate de quitarte la pantallita.

*Attack young man, but remember to get rid of the earring.*

FRANK

Don't worry, the earring won't scare her away.

(Small pause)

I really have to get going. Thanks Grandpa.

(FRANK kisses Grandpa and starts to exit stage left.)

GRANDPA

*Good Bye Romeo.*

FRANK

*Adiós Abuelo*

(GRANDPA chugs the rest of the water, puts the handkerchief away, adjusts himself to a comfortable position to sleep, and puts the blanket over his head)

(Curtain)