

# **FORBIDDEN DREAMS**

by Dmae Roberts

## **CAST:**

FRANKIE  
ANNOUNCER/STAGE MANAGER  
DOTTIE LEE  
MRS. LEE

**TIME:** FEBRUARY 20, 1942

**PLACE:** Forbidden City Nightclub, San Francisco

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NOTE:

*The Forbidden City Nightclub was the Asian Cotton Club during the late 1930's and ending by the 1960's. Looked down upon by the traditional Asian community, this club was the only place that Asian singers and dancers could perform.*

*While movies of the time period depicted Asian as servants, launderers or exotic villains, Forbidden City allowed singers and dancers to practice their craft before a mostly white audience. Food and drink was cheap, and the club often hosted a wide range of people from celebrities such as Bing Crosby, Bob Hope, Ronald Reagan to sailors on shore leave.*

*The club billed the performers as the Asian Frank Sinatra or Sally Rand, but it was the only place where young artists could dream of becoming stars. Most of these performers never did find acceptance let alone stardom in mainsream theatre or film.*

*The time period is the day after Japanese-Americans were ordered to pack up two suitcases and report to internment camps for the duration of World War Two.*

*[LIGHTS UP on FRANKIE , handsome young man as he finishes a light but sensual Fred Astaire-type song. He has a spotlight on him and a piano backup.*

*There is SOUND of a crowd talking in the background.*

*This is the Forbidden City nightclub in San Francisco, February 20, 1942.*

*FRANKIE finishes his song. There is applause. He bows as the spotlight fades on him.]*

ANNOUNCER: And we bid a fond farewell to Frankie...of the dance-duo Frankie and Dottie! Good-bye, Frankie, and good luck! We'll have Dottie out here in just a moment, so stick around!

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the all-star Chinese revue here at Forbidden City--where you can get a full course Chinese meal for just a buck, and see girls  
--lots and lots of pretty girls! Now turn your attention please to Minnie Ho and her dancing bubbles!

*[LOUD MUSIC blares for a moment.*

*Then a LIGHT CHANGE to another part of the stage.*

*A dressing room in the nightclub.*

*DOTTIE LEE , a young performer applying make-up at her dressing table. SOUND of knocking at the door. STAGE MANAGER peaks his head inside the room.]*

STAGE MANAGER: Ten minutes, Dottie!

DOTTIE: Thank you!

*[DOTTIE powders her face. SOUND of more knocking at the door.]*

DOTTIE: I said, I'll be there!

WOMAN'S VOICE: Dorothy?!

DOTTIE: Oh, dear God...

*[DOTTIE immediately stands up. She looks around to see where she can hide.*

*MRS. LEE enters. She is well-dressed and conservative in a dark winter coat. She wears a hat neatly pinned to her neatly coifed hair-do.]*

MRS. LEE: Oh, dear God...

DOTTIE: Mom, what are you--how did you--

MRS. LEE: I've seen enough. Pack up your things.

DOTTIE: What are you doing here?

MRS. LEE: Aiya... Do you know the horrible, horrible shame of having to follow one's daughter through the streets each night on the way to this shameful, shameful club?

DOTTIE: Follow?

MRS. LEE: Forbidden City...should be forbidden to you, huh?! Do you know the torture I have put myself through waiting for you to come home late these after your "night" classes?

DOTTIE: What?!

MRS. LEE: Do you know the unbearable silence I endured wondering when you were going to tell me the truth of your awful, awful deception? Do you know anything at all?

DOTTIE: Have a seat, Mom. You look flushed.

MRS. LEE: And now, you are coming home with me.

DOTTIE: I don't think so, Mom.

MRS. LEE: If your father were alive, this would kill him.

DOTTIE: I'm going on solo in a few minutes.

MRS. LEE: Solo doing what?

DOTTIE: Singing.

MRS. LEE: Singing?!

DOTTIE: I've been dancing with Frankie. We were Frankie and Dottie. Now it's my first time as me, Dottie Lee.

MRS. LEE: What happened to your partner?

DOTTIE: He's...leaving...

MRS. LEE: Good for his parents.

MRS. LEE: Dorothy, this is no place for a good Chinese girl. Look at you. Parading around in your underwear does not help us at all, Dorothy Lee. How do you expect to marry? Your father didn't raise you to be a--a--fan-fan dancer!

DOTTIE: I'm not a fan-fan dancer. I'm the Chinese Ginger Rodgers--at least I was till Frankie was sent away.

MRS. LEE: Sent away?

DOTTIE: Mom, we can have a long talk after I finish my song, but right now--

MRS. LEE: You are not going out this door to make a spectacle of yourself in front of all those drunken white soldiers!

*[A KNOCK at the door. STAGE MANAGER enters.]*

STAGE MANAGER: Dottie, everything all right in there?

DOTTIE: Yes, I'm fine!

STAGE MANAGER: You're on in five minutes!

DOTTIE: I'll be there!

MRS. LEE: No, she won't!

STAGE MANAGER: Who's that?

MRS. LEE: Never you mind, nosy man!

STAGE MANAGER: Sheesh... *[exits]*

DOTTIE: Mom... I'm sorry I lied to you. But how do I tell you what this means to me...

*[DOTTIE thinks for a second, then puts a feather boa around her MRS. LEE's shoulders. MRS. LEE thinks DOTTIE is out of her mind.]*

DOTTIE: Mom, this is how I feel...

*[DOTTIE stands before MRS. LEE and applauds to her. DOTTIE is smiling and joyous.]*

DOTTIE: Will you look at her!... Isn't that Dottie Lee something? She doesn't have bow-legs! That girl's a real looker! That girl has talent! That Dottie Lee could really go somewhere!

*[DOTTIE does a whistle or a big cheer, then stops applauding. She looks at her mother...waiting...]*

MRS. LEE: Mr. Wong, the grocer has been looking for a wife.

DOTTIE: Mr. Wong, the grocer is 60 years old.

MRS. LEE: So what's wrong with being a rich widow?

DOTTIE: And what's wrong with following my dreams. That's what you told me to do when I was little.

MRS. LEE: I also told you to save your money and not to trust strangers. What happened to that?

DOTTIE: I knew you wouldn't understand.

MRS. LEE: I came to San Francisco with your father. We built a respectable dry cleaning business in a respectable neighborhood. This we gave to you.

DOTTIE: And this is my dream.

MRS. LEE: A filthy nightclub with drunks and loud-mouths.

DOTTIE: Ronald Reagan came here once.

MRS. LEE: Who's that?

DOTTIE: The movie actor?

MRS. LEE: So what.

DOTTIE: Mom. Here, I'm more than that Oriental girl. Here I'm Dottie Lee, the singer and dancer. I am someone with talent. Someone special. Someone to be remembered.

MRS. LEE: Your father and I could only afford to have you--you alone. He worked until his heart gave out so he could see his daughter graduate. And this... *[she really looks at DOTTIE]* So shameful...

DOTTIE: Mom, I have to do this.

MRS. LEE: Then I have no daughter.

*[silence]*

MRS. LEE: When Mr. Wong the grocer asks me, "how is Dorothy?" I will say, "I do not know who you are talking about." When my friends ask me, "where is your daughter?" I will say, "I have never had a daughter."

DOTTIE: If that's the way you want it.

*[There is a slight standoff. MRS. LEE starts to exit. SOUND of a knock at the door. FRANKIE enters. He is dressed in an overcoat and carries a suitcase with him.]*

FRANKIE: Dottie... I have to say "good-bye"...

DOTTIE: But what about our farewell dance?

FRANKIE: The bus is leaving.

MRS. LEE: Is this the boy who led you to your shame?

DOTTIE: *[to FRANKIE]* My mother...

FRANKIE: Mrs. Lee! I'm Frankie Yoshida.

*[FRANKIE takes MRS. LEE's hand.]*

FRANKIE: I'm sorry we couldn't have met earlier, Mrs. Lee. You really should be proud of her. Knock 'em dead, darling...

*[He kisses DOTTIE. MRS. LEE is shocked.]*

FRANKIE: *[to MRS. LEE]* It was a pleasure to meet you. Have you ever heard her sing?

MRS. LEE: No.

FRANKIE: You don't want to miss this...

DOTTIE: Where will you be?

FRANKIE: Tule Lake *[pronounced Too-lee]*. Close to the Oregon border.

DOTTIE: It's just desert there...

FRANKIE: Lots of land for gardening, I guess... *[to MRS. LEE]* You take care of her, huh, Mrs. Lee?

*[FRANKIE kisses DOTTIE again.]*

DOTTIE: I'll visit...

*[FRANKIE shakes his head "no." Then he starts exits. DOTTIE rushes to him and tries to embrace him. FRANKIE kisses her hand. Perhaps this gesture is the most important of all. Then he exits.]*

MRS. LEE: So who is this Japanese boy?

DOTTIE: He and his family have been ordered to Tule Lake, an internment camp, Mom.

*[DOTTIE is visibly shaken and starts to cry. She sits down.]*

MRS. LEE: Now what's the matter?

*[SOUND of a knock at the door.]*

STAGE MANAGER: Dottie, you're on in a couple of minutes! Dottie, did you hear me? Dottie?

*[DOTTIE doesn't answer. FRANKIE's departure has defeated her. MRS. LEE is worried about her daughter despite herself. The STAGE MANAGER peaks his head in.]*

STAGE MANAGER: Hey, what's going on in there?

MRS. LEE: She heard you!

STAGE MANAGER: Who the heck are you?!

MRS. LEE: Her mother! Leave us alone!

STAGE MANAGER: Her mother?!

MRS. LEE: Hit the road, Jack!

STAGE MANAGER: Jeez Louise, I'm just doing my job, lady...

*[He exits.]*

MRS. LEE: What an annoying man.

*[MRS. LEE stares long and hard at DOTTIE, who is still crying.]*

MRS. LEE: Dear God, you love this Frankie Yoshida...

DOTTIE: With all my heart...

MRS. LEE: All your heart... Oh Samuel, what am I to do with this girl? First she sneaks away from home every night to come to this place. Then she lies to me about making a spectacle of herself --

DOTTIE: I didn't make a spectacle--

MRS. LEE: Quiet! I'm talking to your father! Then she dances with a Japanese boy and falls in love with him--not a Chinese boy, no, not our daughter--that would be too easy! Then the boy gets sent away for who knows how long... And now she looks up at me like... Samuel, what am I to do with this girl?!

DOTTIE: Maybe you're right... I'm just a no-talent girl pretending to be something I can never be.

MRS. LEE: I never said that.

DOTTIE: I'm not Ginger Rodgers. I'm nobody. I will always be nobody.

MRS. LEE: I never said that.

DOTTIE: Just marry me off to some old man... Who did I think I was anyway?

*[More KNOCKING at the door. DOTTIE tries to get up but she gives up. STAGE MANGER enters.]*

STAGE MANAGER: Dottie! Get out there, or you're fired!

MRS. LEE: No Lee has ever been fired!

*[STAGE MANAGER exits. MRS. LEE takes her daughter by the shoulders.]*

MRS. LEE: Dorothy Lee, I will now tell you something... I am a crazy woman. Not in a thousand years would I choose this job for you. But you chose this job, and Lees do not fail at anything! You want to go sing a song, then go sing a song!

DOTTIE: Mom--

MRS. LEE: You're going to argue now?!

*[DOTTIE is stunned. She starts to exit.]*

MRS. LEE: Wait, wait, wait...

*[MRS. LEE puts the feather boa around her.]*

MRS. LEE: There. More clothes, the better. Now... go do your job!

*[DOTTIE nods and exits. MRS. LEE takes a little framed photo of her husband from inside her purse. She looks at it for a moment.]*

MRS. LEE: I know, I know... I'm always too soft on the girl. But Samuel, if you had seen the look in her eyes... her eyes, Samuel...

*[MRS. LEE kisses the photo and places it back into her purse. She exits.]*

ANNOUNCER: Ladies and gentleman, I bring you the extraordinary Dottie Lee!

*[LIGHT CHANGE to stage area. DOTTIE is in a spotlight. She sings her song beautifully. At the end, a SPOTLIGHT on MRS. LEE. She doesn't applaud, but gives a slight nod of her head as if saying "good, that's done."]*

LIGHTS FADE

END OF PLAY