

SUNSET ON THE POTOMAC (IN A-MINOR)

a play by

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**CAST**

FRANKLIN.....A young man

POP.....FRANKLIN's father

MOM.....FRANKLIN's mother

PATRICIA.....A young dancer

MARIANNE.....A young woman

HARRY SPOK.....Husband of MARIANNE

(An apartment house with a lobby and three apartments visible. Each apartment has a telephone. There is also a pay phone "outside" the house. FRANKLIN and MOM and POP's apartment is on the lowest level with the lobby. It is furnished with a grand piano, a bookcase and an easy chair. In the lobby is a sofa and a lamp. Upstage in the lobby are elevator double doors, closed. Above the elevator, on the highest level is PATRICIA's apartment. It is provided with mirrors and an exercise barre. On an intermediate level is the apartment of HARRY SPOK and MARIANNE. They possess a shag rug and a hassock. As the play opens, FRANKLIN is playing the piano, MOM is knitting and MARIANNE sits on the hassock, brushing her long, beautiful hair. She wears a negligee and slippers. PATRICIA dances to the music, waving long scarves. MARIANNE dials her phone. The phone rings in FRANKLIN's apartment. He stops playing. MOM answers the phone.)

MOM

Hello?

(long pause. MARIANNE smiles and hangs up silently. MOM hangs up.)

...Wrong number. Play.

(FRANKLIN resumes playing. MOM resumes knitting. MARIANNE resumes brushing. PATRICIA dials her phone. The phone rings in FRANKLIN's apartment. FRANKLIN stops playing. MOM answers the phone.)

MOM

Hello?

PATRICIA

Your son plays so beautifully. When he plays, I dance with my long scarves. My name is Patricia. Could we meet? He could play, I could dance...

(MOM hangs up.)

MOM

Wrong number. Play.

(FRANKLIN resumes playing. MOM resumes knitting. PATRICIA resumes dancing. HARRY appears at the pay phone. He dials. The phone rings in FRANKLIN's apartment. FRANKLIN stops playing. MOM answers the phone.)

MOM

Hello?

HARRY

Is your son at home? I want to help him to get ahead.

(MOM hangs up. HARRY exits.)

MOM

Wrong number. Play.

(FRANKLIN resumes playing. MOM resumes knitting. In time she signals him to stop playing.)

MOM

...Music, music, music is so beautiful... "Sunset on the Potomac in A minor". It was my favorite song when I was young. When you play, Dear, don't look at me. Don't look at your Mother. I was only knitting. I keep time. When you are staccato, I knit faster. When you are legato, I knit slower. I knit little, intricate patterns with my stainless steel knitting needles.

(Phone rings. We see POP on the pay phone. He is wearing a blue pin-striped suit with a little white flower in his lapel.)

MOM

Hello?

POP

Is your son still there?

MOM

Yes.

POP

You haven't let him out?

MOM

No.

POP  
What are you doing?

MOM  
Knitting and pianoing.

POP  
That's all?

MOM  
Yes.

(POP hangs up.)

MOM  
It's your father. Play that song again for him when he comes in. It was our song of meeting, our song of courting. When I was young, my mother wanted me to be a concert singer, to sing at concerts. I took lessons from a Frenchman. He wore a blue pin-striped suit with a little white flower in his lapel. We practiced the scales together. Up and down, up and down. I was good at it. One day he assaulted me. Right in his atelier. We were practicing the scales together. Up and down, up and down. I was getting better. Then suddenly he put his hand on my arm and whispered something in my ear. He was sweating. A singer had to be careful in those days.—Play!

(FRANKLIN resumes playing. POP enters.)

POP  
What is that filthy noise?

MOM  
Our song of meeting. Our song of courting...

POP  
Stop!

(FRANKLIN stops. POP X to piano, stands behind FRANKLIN.)

Again!

(FRANKLIN resumes. POP slaps FRANKLIN on the sides of his head, in tempo.)

No...No...No...Wrong, wrong, always wrong, my boy is always, always wrong...Stop!

(POP X to easy chair, sits and removes one shoe.)

You. Stand.

(FRANKLIN stands facing POP. POP hurls his shoe at FRANKLIN, barely missing him.)

POP

Bring it here!

(FRANKLIN retrieves the shoe and returns it to POP.)

Bend over.

(FRANKLIN bends over facing POP. POP hits him over the head with the shoe.)

Now. Get out. Go into the lobby and read. Read Plato and a little Rabelais...

(FRANKLIN selects two books from the bookcase and exits into the lobby.)

...Look at him. He moves like a Jew. Does he know what it is to have a book? When I was young, I would march. I would march like a mantis to see someone reading a book. Would he do it? Would he?...

(FRANKLIN settles himself on the lobby sofa, opens a book, reads.)

MOM

You're hungry. I have something good for you. Good for the hard palate and good for the soft palate. Full of vitamin C.

POP

Jellyfish! Idiot!

MOM

It's yummy. It'll prevent diseases. Dropsy. Beri-beri. Scurvy. Flu...

POP

Pig.

MOM

Vegetables. Meat. Lamb. A bit old for lamb, but still, lamb. An old lamb. Maybe beef. You like beef? Veal? You like veal? Not real veal. Like veal. Kind of veal...

POP

Meat?

MOM

Bread?

POP

French?

MOM

Italian.

POP  
Butter?

MOM  
No. Oleo. Oleo. Oleo.

(MOM fawns over POP as he speaks.)

POP  
When I met you, you were a young pig. Now you're an old pig. I took you in. I taught you words and music. Music was my life. When I was young, I was incredible. People were stunned. They would step back. I would walk along the shore and I would see my reflection in the water. I had it. No one else had it, but I had it. I would lie on my back, naked in the wet grass and stare at the sun through the red gaps in my partially opened fingers. I had visions – cities rising in a red mist, the blue smoke of people moving on the horizon...I was beautiful...but you! You!...

MOM  
Oleo...

POP  
...Parasite...

MOM  
Oleo...Wanna' smoke?...

POP  
You, ugly, ugly...aging, nymphette...

MOM  
Cigar? Cigarette?

(POP throws her off and exits SL. MOM follows him off. FRANKLIN reads aloud, following the text with his finger.)

FRANKLIN  
"...Alla, eumaschre...euelpidas...anai..."  
(The elevator doors suddenly open, red elevator lights flash and elevator chimes ring. PATRICIA stands in the elevator. She speaks urgently to FRANKLIN. He freezes at the sound of her voice. He does not turn around.)