

SUNSET ON THE POTOMAC

a play by

James Bentley Campbell

Copyright © July 2023 James Campbell and Off the Wall Plays

<https://offthewallplays.com>

This script is provided for reading purposes only. Professionals and amateurs are hereby advised that it is subject to royalty. It is fully protected under the laws of the United States of America, the British Empire, including the Dominion of Canada, and all other countries of the Copyright Union. All rights, including but not limited to professional, amateur, film, radio, and all other media (including use on the worldwide web) and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved; and any unauthorized use of the material may subject the user to any and all applicable civil and criminal penalties. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher or author, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other non-commercial uses permitted by copyright law. Although every precaution has been taken to verify the accuracy of the information contained herein, the author and publisher assume no responsibility for any errors or omissions. No liability is assumed for damages that may result from the use of information contained within. For any information about royalties or to apply for a performance license please click the following link:

<https://offthewallplays.com/royalties-and-licensing-of-plays-sold-by-off-the-wall-plays/>

CAST

FRANKLIN A silent young man

MOM FRANKLIN's Mom

POP FRANKLIN's Pop

PATRICIA A dancer

HARRY SPOK A car salesman

MARIANNE SPOK's Wife

(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. US in the lobby are elevator double doors, closed. Above the elevator, on the highest level is PATRICIA’s apartment. It is furnished 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 scene opens, FRANKLIN is playing the piano, MOM is knitting and MARIANNE sits on the hassock, brushing her long, glistening 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. FRANKLIN stops playing. MOM answers the phone.)

MOM

Hello?

(Pause. MARIANNE smiles and hangs up, silently. MOM hangs up.)

...Wrong number. Play.

(FRANKLIN plays. MOM knits. MARIANNE brushes. PATRICIA dials. The phone rings. FRANKLIN stops. MOM answers the phone.)

Hello?

PATRICIA

Your son plays 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 *plays*. MOM *knits*. *In time she signals him to stop.*)...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 at 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*.) 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 *plays*. POP *enters the apartment*.)

POP

What is that filthy noise?

MOM

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

POP

Stop! (FRANKLIN *stops*. POP *X's to piano, stands behind FRANKLIN*.) Again! (FRANKLIN *resumes*. POP *slaps FRANKLIN on the sides of his head, in tempo*.) No...no...Wrong, wrong, always wrong. My boy is always, always, wrong! Stop! (POP *X's to easy chair, sits and removes one shoe*.) You. Stand. (FRANKLIN *stands facing POP*. POP *hurls his shoe*

at FRANKLIN barely missing him. Bring it here! (FRANKLIN retrieves the shoe and returns it.) 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 sofa in the lobby. Opens a book. Reads.)

MOM (*To POP.*)

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 (*Fawning over POP.*)
No. Oleo. Oleo. Oleo.

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...