

Sara Plays Her Game

Frank Canino



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SARA PLAYS HER GAME

by

Frank Canino

MADAME SARA JOEL: Early 60's, beautifully dressed and coiffed in the manner of a lady of Paris from the previous generation. Her Parisian accent is still pronounced, but her English is perfectly articulated. She has style, charm, and is not above flirting with her students. She enjoys being a delightful--if somewhat unorthodox--teacher as she conducts a one-on-one session with a student.

Place

A Berlitz Language School, somewhere in the USA.

Time

1995 or thereabouts.

Setting: A room in a Berlitz Language School. The setting can be as realistic and detailed as your budget will allow. But all that is required are two chairs: one for SARA and the other for the student.

At Rise: SARA enters through the audience, murmuring "Bon Jour" as she greets people in passing. The following moment should be an improvisation: SARA asks for her student to come forward and take his/her chair for the next French lesson. She will tease, wheedle or charm an audience member to play the student, which only require him/her to sit in the chair and pronounce the word for the start of the lesson. SARA settles the student at ease in the chair and starts the class.

SARA: We begin, yes? (Enunciating clearly) Jeu...Jeu! (The student does not pronounce it correctly. Sara gently corrects him/her.) No, not "Jew." A Jew is a member of the Hebrew people. Like me. Je suis Juive. (Translation: I am a Jew). But "jeu"--lips like this, mon cher--means a game. All kinds. Your hockey...tennis...and love. For me it has a special meaning, which I had to learn when I was a child in the war. Believe me, my life was wonderful then: living

behind my father's shop on the rue St. Severin. "Richard Joel, Antiquites." He was an artist who made picture frames and sold antiques. So I grew up with such beauty, new and old...my father's paintings...statues and portraits. And my mother, Lea, singing operetta, while she flirted with the customers--which drove Papa mad. They quarreled when they were not making love or painting or singing.

But above all--when I was only eight years old--there was my special game. You leave the shop by the back door and turn left on rue St. Severin, then right onto rue de L'Harpe, then left to Place St. Michel for the metro. There he is--St. Michel --the beautiful angel who flies above the fountain, his sword in his raised arm. Pay your fare, then down the long staircase. So many tunnels, so many turns where you can go wrong, get lost. And then the crowd and the noise! But I can read the signs. Behind me--at a distance--my papa says, "Be quiet--be patient with yourself, Sara. You will only win the game if you know the rules and if you keep your head. And it must not be too easy. Or there is no adventure." Always, he is behind me--how do you say?--coaching. Always encouraging, "Listen, Sara, a game must be a little dangerous or it is no fun! No suspense!" Though I had no idea how dangerous this game was.

I always had to be ready to play the game. My coat hung up by the door and the school jumper with the rosary in the pocket, the back sack with the books, the little gold crucifix to hang around my neck--and, of course, my papers with my picture and my new name. Every other day we practice the game, Papa and me. "You must be able to do it alone one day, my Sara," he says. "Without Papa behind you to remind you of everything. Pull down the lever firmly when the train stops. Step carefully onto the platform. Look for the sign that says 'Porte de

Clignancourt'." Ah, so many things to remember. And if you forget, you lose the game. Papa is very encouraging, and when I make no mistakes on the long journey, he rewards me with my favorite patisserie...a huge creamy Napoleon, just for me. Oh, I was a very greedy little girl!

Then one day I am helping Papa cut vegetables for dinner. Maman is waiting on a customer in the shop when the we hear new voices--men with German accents. Papa goes to the door of the shop, then turns sharply and says, "Sara, it is time to play the game." He hands me my coat and smock then hangs the little gold crucifix around my neck. "Quick," he says, "you must start the game now, if you want to win." He opens the back door and gently pushes me out. When I turn to wave at him, he has closed the door already.

So I must play all alone now: St. Michel is looking at me, his sword still upraised as I go down into the metro. I give my coin to the lady behind the wicket and take the train to the Louvre. Then pull the door lever, down and to the right, step carefully onto the platform, then up the steps, and through another tunnel to get my next train. I am winning! All goes well in my game! I have done everything perfectly.

END OF FREEVIEW

You'll want to read and perform this show!