

**The Piano Teacher (*Amour et Piano*)
by Georges Feydeau**

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A smart salon in Paris at the end of the nineteenth century. Lucile (age 20) is playing scales on the piano. Her servant Baptiste is tidying up.

- Baptiste** Bravo, Mademoiselle! Forgive my impertinence, Mademoiselle, but your thunderstorm is just.... well....
- Lucile** My "thunderstorm"? I'm playing my scales.
- Baptiste** For me, it's a thunderstorm, Mademoiselle. Don't you find that so much more evocative than a "scale"? It is the force of a north wind from the hills whistling through a country cottage (*he whistles to illustrate*). Yes that's exactly it.
- Lucile** Well perhaps. But here in Paris we call it a scale.
- Baptiste** I'm not surprised. Everything here seems dull – like in England.
- Lucile** Don't start on that again! Tell me, has mother gone out yet?
- Baptiste** Yes a few minutes ago.
- Lucile** Oh well never mind. It's going to be difficult for her. Do you know where she's gone?
- Baptiste** No.
- Lucile** You'll never guess... She's been summonsed.
- Baptiste** Summonsed?
- Lucile** To appear in court. Don't worry, it's only as a witness.
- Baptiste** I think I'd rather like to be "summonsed".
- Lucile** Don't be absurd. And leave me alone to practise. You're wasting my time with your musings. Do you like the piano,?
- Baptiste** Certainly - when it is Mademoiselle that is playing. When it's me, then no.
- Lucile** I didn't realise you knew the piano?
- Baptiste** Yes, Mademoiselle. My mother had an old one.
- Lucile** And did you use it?
- Baptiste** Yes, Mademoiselle, as a cupboard. In our village, we didn't have the luxury of being able to waste a good piano by playing music on it.
- Lucile** Talking of music, a gentleman will be here shortly – my new piano teacher. I can't remember his name, but he's terribly well known – a real maestro! And a bit eccentric, apparently. Now what's his name?
- Baptiste** Moliere?
- Lucile** Don't be silly.
- Baptiste** You're right, Moliere is the grocer.
- Lucile** Anyway it doesn't matter. He'll ask for my mother....
- Baptiste** ... and I'll say she's out.
- Lucile** No – you show him in.
- Baptiste** When Madame isn't here?
- Lucile** Yes, yes. I've arranged it all with her. It's the only option. And you can't ask a maestro to pop back in a couple of hours like an errand boy. When you have an appointment with a maestro, you must be punctilious. Maestros on the other hand are expected to be less so.
- Baptiste** (*aside*) Unlike servants.
- Lucile** So when he arrives, just show him in. Meanwhile, let me practise my scales. (*she returns to her scales*)
Doh re mi fah so la ti doh; doh ti la so fah mi re doh! God this is dry! But it has to be done. These days you can't get a husband if you can't play the

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piano. Though I've often suspected that that's not all that a wife has to do. And certainly not scales! Boring! They say it loosens the fingers – but I don't see why a wife needs loose fingers. Wouldn't it be nice for a young woman to be able to say what she thinks. What I'd say to a prospective husband is: "Here I am. 20 years old. I can't play the piano. But then I don't need you to play the flute either. Marriage isn't a performance, it's... er... well I don't know what it is... but one doesn't get married in order to play music. If you're happy to marry me without the piano, I'm yours; if not, then on your bike!" So there! Why do women always have to conform?

Enter Baptiste

Baptiste Mademoiselle, he's here. Your "mice throw".

Lucile Ah! The maestro!

Baptiste Here's his card.

Lucile Edouard Lorillot. That's a funny name. Oh well. Show him in. I'll be right back.

Exit Lucile

Baptiste shows Edouard into the room

Baptiste This way, sir. Mademoiselle will only be a moment.

Edouard She'll only be a moment? Did you give her my card? And when she read my name, how did she react?

Baptiste She said "That's a funny name".

Edouard Is that all?

Baptiste That's all I heard.

Edouard Thank you.

Exit Baptiste

Well, here we go. I arrived in Paris a fortnight ago. I'm actually from Toulouse, but it doesn't show. No accent. Maybe because I was brought up in Calais. I'm young, smart and a millionaire. 15,000 a year! That counts as a millionaire up north. Being rich means that I have friends who swear that I'm a true Parisian. Even I believe them. I have the finest tailor, the most popular hairdresser; I'm on first name terms with princes; and there's a duke I go riding with. I have it all. Just one thing missing: a society mistress. So I said to myself: I'll present myself to Madame Dubarry. I'm told she's one of the most fashionable women in Paris. I've never met her, but she must be just right: she's an actress who makes men fall in love with her. So I found her address, and here I am. Elegant, isn't it? This must be the salon, and behind that door I'll bet it's... but we'll see about that later.

Enter Lucile

Lucile I do apologise for keeping you waiting, sir. I was looking for my music.

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Edouard Not at all, Mademoiselle.
Lucile I couldn't manage without it! Please, do sit down.
Edouard It's true that music is beautiful, Mademoiselle.
Lucile The most beautiful of the arts, sir. (*aside*) I want him to think well of me.
Edouard I absolutely love music! (*aside*) I need to agree with her.
Lucile It can be quite difficult to start with.
Edouard I don't think I ever started!
Lucile (*aside*) He's a bit sure of himself! Perhaps all artists are. Do you like Wagner, sir?
Edouard You mean the butcher?
Lucile I'm sorry?
Edouard Thierry Wagner - the butcher in Toulouse?
Lucile No; the composer.
Edouard The composer? Ah yes, that does ring a bell. Apparently he is a musician.
Lucile (*aside*) "Apparently"?
Edouard Yes I'm sure I've heard of him. (*aside*) Maybe I should just come straight out with it? (*aloud*) Excuse me, Mademoiselle, but....
Lucile Then who is your favourite composer?
Edouard Oh, er... Cordillard.
Lucile Cordillard? Who is that?
Edouard One of my friends.
Lucile Oh.
Edouard A very talented musician. He wrote "The clown from Chicago".
Lucile I've not heard of that.
Edouard Oh it's really good.
(*he sings*) [lyrics and melody to be agreed!]
Good, isn't it? But here we are chatting away, Mademoiselle, and I haven't explained....
Lucile Explained what?
Edouard Why I'm here.
Lucile But I already know!
Edouard You know...?
Lucile Of course.
Edouard (*aside*) Parisian women are very intuitive!
Lucile I was expecting you.
Edouard Expecting me? Then you know who I am?
Lucile Not at all. But we're getting to know each other now.
Edouard Indeed we are.... (*aside*) This is going well!
Lucile I'm told that you are in fashion.
Edouard I have an excellent tailor.
Lucile No, I mean you're very successful.
Edouard Oh yes.
Lucile You were obviously at the Academy.
Edouard The Academy? Oh you mean the one on the corner – yes I came that way.
(*aside*) What is she on about?
Lucile Did I not hear that you were awarded first prize?
Edouard Sorry? Oh yes – but it was a long time ago. I was only nine. A prize for

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spelling – nothing to write home about! (*aside*) This is an odd conversation!

Lucile (*aside*) He's a bit unusual.

Edouard (*determined to get to the point*) Mademoiselle, my name is Edouard Lorillot, and I am 25 years old...

Lucile Nothing wrong with being 25.

Edouard Nothing at all!

Lucile However, age doesn't really matter for this.

Edouard Really?

Lucile Not at all..

Edouard You will at least agree that youth is an advantage?

Lucile Hmm, well age brings experience.

Edouard Of course, but that's not enough!

Lucile As the saying goes: "if age only could; if youth only knew how".

Edouard Ah but I do know how!

Lucile I wasn't speaking of you, sir. Everyone knows that you have proved yourself.

Edouard Is that so? Well, let's not go into that!

Lucile In fact, I was hoping you'd show me.

Edouard Really?

Lucile Of course.

Edouard With the greatest pleasure! Whenever you want. That's exactly why I came. I'd be delighted to show you! Oh yes!

Lucile Are you quite all right?

Edouard All right, Mademoiselle? I just can't believe my luck!

Lucile But this is all in the cause of art.

Edouard And of the artist, Mademoiselle!

Lucile You are most polite.

Edouard To be clear, let me say that I shall be quite relaxed on the ... er... financial side of things.

Lucile I had assumed that you had been made aware of the terms.

Edouard The terms?

Lucile Yes.

Edouard Er no, no one said anything. (*aside*) She's going to try to sting me.

Lucile Well it's 400 a month for four sessions a week.

Edouard Oh..... 400 a month. All included?

Lucile Is that not sufficient?

Edouard (*aside*) I knew Paris was expensive!

Lucile Is there a problem?

Edouard No, it's just that I'm surprised....

Lucile But you said that you'd be relaxed about money. And maybe, if everything is satisfactory, we could consider a little something extra at the end of the month.

Edouard Ah right... fine... Yes I was thinking... (*aside*) I'm a bit nervous about that "little something extra".

Lucile Anyway, I don't get involved with these details. If you're not happy, then please talk to my mother.

Edouard Your mother? There's a mother as well?

Lucile I'm sorry? You must have met her or you wouldn't be here.

Edouard Oh yes of course! (*aside*) What's she on about?

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Lucile You'll need to sort it out with her.
Edouard Will I indeed?
Lucile But I doubt she'll agree to anything different.
Edouard Is that so?
Lucile I'm fairly sure.
Edouard Well in that case, I accept. 400 a month.
Lucile And four sessions a week.
Edouard Yes four sessions a week.
Lucile Good. So, now that's all settled, perhaps we can begin?
Edouard What, just like that? Right now?
Lucile If that's all right? (*looking for something*) That's odd. What can I have done with it? I must have left it in my room. Excuse me a moment. (*exit*)
Edouard Well that didn't take long! No messing about here! Not like in the provinces! Anyway, here we go with a little adventure that's going to help me to go up in the world.

As he is about to follow her, enter Baptiste with music

Baptiste Here you are, sir.
Edouard What's that?
Baptiste It's a booklet that Mademoiselle calls "P&O starters". She asked me to give it to you.
Edouard "P&O starters". Is it a cruise brochure?
Baptiste No doubt.
Edouard (*reading*) "Piano sonatas"
Baptiste Really? That doesn't mean anything to me.
Edouard What does she want me to do with it?
Baptiste Er... read it?
Edouard Well, thank you. (*he heads for the door where Lucile went*)
Baptiste Excuse me, sir, but do you know where that leads to?
Edouard I certainly do!
Baptiste Because that room...
Edouard Yes? Oh I see. (*he gives him money*) Well?
Baptiste Wow! That's the... er ... bedroom....
Edouard Oh yes! The bedroom, the temple of Venus, the secret sanctuary...
Baptiste where her mother takes her rest.
Edouard (*taking the money back*) Her mother?
Baptiste Yes sir. My tip, sir?
Edouard Oh yes. (*giving him a coin*)
Baptiste But that's only...
Edouard Never mind, keep it anyway.

Exit Baptiste

So it's the mother! And I thought ...

Enter Lucile with a baton

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Lucile This is the only one I can find.
Edouard What's that?
Lucile The baton.
Edouard What's it for?
Lucile I can't play properly without it.
Edouard Well that's an unusual suggestion.
Lucile Now take a chair and start the beat.
Edouard (*aside*) she wants me to beat the furniture?
Lucile Off we go then. (*she sits at the piano*) I should warn you that I'm not very good.
Edouard This must be some kind of initiation ceremony.
Lucile Come on! Start the beat.
Edouard No problem. But it might raise a bit of dust.
Lucile Dust? Here we go. (*she plays*)
Edouard (*beating the furniture with the baton*) This is a bit humiliating.
Lucile But you're not beating in time.
Edouard I'm doing my best.
Lucile (*turning to look at him*) What a lot of dust! What are you doing?
Edouard Beating!
Lucile (*she sneezes*) Whatever for?
Edouard Because you told me to!
Lucile What?
Edouard You told me to start beating.
Lucile To beat time!
Edouard Time? It's the time you want me to beat?
Lucile Yes. (*aside*) what a strange man! (*aloud*) Let's try again.
Edouard (*beating time - aside*) This is quite an adventure! It's not all fun having an affair with an actress! Having to beat time when I know nothing about music. (*Lucile stops playing and watches him beating time and talking to himself*) My friends would find this very funny! I didn't ask for music, and here I am listening to this boring piece – which incidentally she isn't playing at all well. This isn't what I came for. Ah well....
Lucile What *are* you doing?
Edouard Beating time.
Lucile But I've stopped playing.
Edouard Oh sorry.
Lucile (*aside*) He seems distracted.
Edouard Mademoiselle, perhaps you are tired?
Lucile No, not in the least.
Edouard Music is a wonderful thing, but you can have too much of it.
Lucile But I've only just begun.
Edouard (*aside*) Only just begun! (*aloud*) That's quite enough for me.
Lucile But remember we only have four sessions a week, and each one is only an hour.
Edouard Exactly! If you take up the whole hour playing the piano, there'll be no time left for...

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Lucile For what?
Edouard Well... er... for everything else.
Lucile (*aside*) I wonder if he's a bit mad.
Edouard No, come on, leave the piano. You can play it when I've gone.
Lucile (*aside*) This is an unusual teaching method!
Edouard Let's just have a little chat. Now, my dear, do you like oysters?
Lucile I'm sorry?
Edouard I asked if you like oysters.
Lucile Very much.
Edouard (*making notes*) Right – oysters. And figs?
Lucile I've never tried them.
Edouard They go very well together. Now what would *you* like?
Lucile I don't want anything.
Edouard Leave it to me. I'll organise it all.
Lucile (*aside*) he seems harmless, at least.
Edouard Would you have an envelope, Mademoiselle?
Lucile Over there on the table.
Edouard (*sitting at the table to write*) I take it you're free at midnight?
Lucile I'm sorry?
Edouard This evening, after the theatre.
Lucile But I'm not going to the theatre this evening.
Edouard Oh it's your night off? Even better.
Lucile (*aside*) It's amazing they let him out on his own!
Edouard (*sealing the letter*) There we are. They'll keep the private room for us at midnight. May I call your servant to deliver it?
Lucile (*she rings*) He'll be here in a moment.
Edouard Thank you.

Enter Baptiste

Baptiste You rang?
Edouard Have this letter delivered, please.
Baptiste Very good sir.

Exit

Edouard Right. So what shall we talk about? Let's talk about you – and your success. Do you know, I haven't even seen the play!
Lucile What play?
Edouard Why, "The Girl from the Moulin Rouge", of course.
Lucile That's hardly a play for a young lady!
Edouard But I'm not a young lady.
Lucile I realise that! But I wasn't talking about you.
Edouard Right! I'll go this evening.
Lucile Good idea. (*aside*) Why tell me?
Edouard But only because of you.
Lucile Because of me?

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Edouard Only for that reason.

Lucile How kind. (*aside*) It's sad in one so young!

Edouard You know everyone's talking about you.

Lucile About me?

Edouard The whole of Paris is in awe. Your name on everyone's lips. Every paper singing your praises.

Lucile Me?

Edouard You have so many admirers!

Lucile Really?

Edouard So many men in love with you!

Lucile Sir....!

Edouard And you remain unruffled despite all this adulation! Unaffected, untarnished by your glorious reputation! The pride that so often comes with fame makes no impression on you, and your manner is so welcoming that one feels immediately at ease in your presence. I came here nervous and trembling. But you welcomed me kindly. You even played music for me – perhaps a little too much music – and instead of the miserable failure I was expecting, it has been a complete success. I was afraid that you would throw me out, but not only have I been allowed to stay, but you've even done me the honour of agreeing to an intimate little supper. Let me say, Mademoiselle, you are an angel!

Lucile Stop there, sir!

Edouard No I can't stop there! I am wealthy, and I want you to have everything you desire. I want to satisfy your every whim! 400 a month? Make it double that! Or triple it! More than you could possibly want! Oysters at every meal, since you like them so much! And me too, you'll come to like me too, won't you? (*he takes her hand*) Won't you?

Lucile Let me go!

Edouard You don't understand! Don't you know Romeo and Juliet? Daphnis and Chloe? Abelard and Heloise? Well that's what I am: a Romeo without a Juliet; a Daphnis deprived of Chloe; an Abelard looking for his Eloise... It is you I have chosen... It is you I love, and that love is driving me insane!

Lucile Insane! I knew it. What should I do?

Edouard Come here next to me!

Lucile Leave me alone!

Edouard Do I frighten you?

Lucile Please leave!

Edouard I'm not going to do you any harm. Don't tremble like that. There's nothing frightening in what I say. All I'm doing is stating the obvious.

Lucile Yes very obvious! (*aside*) Never disagree with them.

Edouard Look I'm completely calm. There's nothing to be afraid of. Admit you were just being silly.

Lucile It was quite wrong of you to speak like that to me.

Edouard Oh come on. It can hardly be the first time!

Lucile What!

Edouard But in the theatre...

Lucile In the theatre?

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Edouard When one is an actress...

Lucile Who are you talking about?

Edouard Why you!

Lucile Me? I'm not an actress.

Edouard Oh yes you are.

Lucile Certainly not!

Edouard What? Then you're not Mademoiselle Dubarry?

Lucile No I am not!

Edouard Oh come on, you're teasing me! Admit that you're joking.

Lucile I am quite serious, sir.

Edouard Then I don't understand. I must be losing my mind. Why am I here?

Lucile Good question! I don't understand. I wonder.....

Edouard You wonder? Well so do I. We're both wondering. (*aside*) I must look ridiculous!

Lucile Just a minute! I'm beginning to understand.... Yes! There is an actress who lives next door. Maybe that's Mademoiselle Dubarry. And you just got the wrong house. She lives at number 2A and this is number 2.

Edouard Ah so this is number....

Lucile Two. Exactly.

Edouard Number two. Right. Well what a stupid mistake. I've got the wrong house: it's next door that I should be... er.... I'll just be off then.... Oh Mademoiselle, I am so ashamed...

Lucile Anyone can make a mistake, sir. I took you for a piano teacher after all!

Edouard Me? A piano teacher! I can't even play.

Lucile That's why I troubled you with my playing, and why I got you to beat time – which incidentally you made a pretty poor job of.

Edouard Well I've never done any conducting!

Lucile Never mind. All's well that ends well.

Edouard My deepest apologies.

Lucile Accepted. And now you are free to go.

Edouard Yes.

Lucile Mademoiselle Dubarry lives next door.

Edouard No, I'm not going there now. (*pause*) Mademoiselle, I hope that one day I may have the pleasure of making your acquaintance.....

Lucile We're bound to come across one another.

Edouard ... and of picking up the threads of the conversation that began so strangely today.

Lucile I wish you good fortune.

Edouard I shall do my best not to need it. (*bowing*) Mademoiselle!

Lucile (*with a curtsey*) Sir!

Edouard Mademoiselle! (*aside*) Well I came here to take a step up in the world. This wasn't quite what I had in mind!

Curtain