

© 2005 Anne Phelan. Sample *La leçon de musique*. A Ten-Minute Play. For scripts or performance rights, contact anne@annphelan.co

Characters:

FAY	20s/30s
NURSE	30s/40s

Setting:

Fay's bedroom

Playwright's Note: This play is loosely based on Henri Matisse's painting "*La leçon de musique*" and the Phedre/Hippolytus myth. Fay (Phedre) is married to Ted (Theseus), the leader of a military junta in a South American country. He has life-or-death control over all of its citizens, including his wife. She has fallen desperately in love with his son John (Hippolytus), but dare not tell anyone except her old nurse. At the end of the play, willing to do anything to protect Fay, the nurse goes off to tell John, afraid that Fay will commit suicide if she doesn't.

La leçon de musique was given a non-Equity production as part of "The Matisse Plays," directed by Lauren Reinhart in February 2005. It was produced by the Milk Can Theatre Company, Julie Fei-Fan Balzer, Artistic Director.

(FAY opens a box of keepsakes- a sash, a photo, a necklace. Each item evokes happier times. SHE pulls out the sash and tries it on. NURSE enters and stands, watching HER. FAY doesn't see the NURSE. FAY remembers something painful connected with the sash and rips it off)

NURSE:

What? What's wrong, sweetie?

(FAY puts the sash away)

You used to tell me everything. From the time you learned to talk. I'd take you onto my lap and you'd whisper into my ear.

FAY:

I thought you were a goddess. That you could do anything. But, I'm not a child anymore.

NURSE:

You are to me.

FAY:

I have two boys of my own, a husband-

NURSE:

I know him for what he is, the bastard.

FAY:

Don't let the servants hear you.

NURSE:

Why not? They all know. Great, brave General Ted. Him and his ladies. Him and his soldiers and the women prisoners in Kosovo-

FAY:

Where did you pick that up?

NURSE:

Everyone knows, my dear. I only wonder why you stay with him.

(FAY is silent)

Is it for the children?

FAY:

I'm hardly so selfless.

NURSE:

He does see more of them than he ever saw of John at that age.

FAY:

I can't talk about this.

NURSE:

Why not?

FAY:

Because if I tell you, I'll starting crying and won't be able to stop. I've got so ... so much grief in me, I don't dare let it out.

NURSE:

You can to me.

FAY:

No one should be capable of feeling this much. I can't think of anything else. If I tell you, I know I won't be able to keep it in anymore.

NURSE:

But Fay, why?

FAY:

Because you love me. More than anyone ever did. All I have is you, and the children and ... this grief.

NURSE:

Now, now. It can't be as bad as all that.

FAY:

I can't bring to mind what I used to see in Ted. How he looked in his uniform? That's enough when you're 17 and far from home. He cheated on me while we were still engaged. I didn't know, I couldn't tell. I was too stupid.

NURSE:

No, not stupid. Young. And in love. That's always been my dearest wish. To see you happy again.

FAY:

But this time-

NURSE:

So that's the great, dark secret. I think it's normal.

FAY:
(With a laugh)

No, not this!

(Puts the box of souvenirs away)

NURSE:
Well, with a husband like Ted, it's hardly surprising. It's- understandable.

FAY:
I'm not sure there's that much understanding on the entire planet.

NURSE:
Does this man know you love him?

FAY:
I can't be certain.

NURSE:
Have you told him?

FAY:
No.

NURSE:
Tell your old nursie. C'mon....

FAY:
It's John.

NURSE:
John who?
(Realizes)
But he's so- prickly.

FAY:
He was always like that. From when I first came here. Always a little off to the side. A little bit apart.

NURSE:
And he's-

FAY:
I've tried everything to stop. Imagined what Ted would do. The scandal there would be. But I can't help myself. Anything, is- I'd give anything just to be near him.

NURSE:

But why now?

FAY:

I can barely remember a time when I didn't.

NURSE:

My poor little one.

FAY:

The first time we met, John came home from college- Sat out on the terrace the whole time. It was May. Ted and I were in the living room. The three of us were never in the same room except for meals. John looked like a fawn- big liquid brown eyes. His legs were so long, you'd have thought he'd have to be clumsy. But he was so graceful.

NURSE:

Fay, honey-

FAY:

Most days I feel like John is the only real thing in my world. It's all the rest that's shadows.

NURSE:

Will you tell him?

FAY:

I never could. I'm terrified.

NURSE:

Of John?

FAY:

Of what I'll do if he says no.

NURSE:

What about what he'll do? He could go to Ted, to-

FAY:

I don't care about anything but him.

NURSE:

I could.

FAY:

What?