



Hoppersville #2 - A Room in Hoppersville

PJ Lyon

Published: 2009

Tag(s): "creative commons" "short story"

License

Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0
Unported

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>

A Room in Hoppersville

As the sour-faced man entered the darkened apartment, the sound of a piano met him. A sound he'd never wanted to hear again. A sound he'd thought was gone from his life for good. He met that sound with a sound of his own. Not music, no, but a horrible sound that came from the back of his throat where it had hidden since entering the front hall. Another sound he'd never wanted to hear again, especially from his own lips. "Arial? Are you home, Arial?" *Plink-plonk-plink-plonk*. A mouse skittered across the keys in the unseen room. Delicate, rodent-small fingers lost but never lost in the darkness. The first bars of a song. But how could that be? How, when he'd cut the secret vocal chords inside the terrible machine? He'd made it mute. Tossed the bits and pieces of the voice into the gray waters of the Hoppersville river. *Plink-plonk-plink-plonk*. The mouse skittered and the song continued and the murdered machine rose from the dead to sing a song of marriage, of a love long ago lost and what he'd hoped could never be found

again. "Arial?" *Plink-plonk-plink-plonk*. He tiptoed down the hall, every tip a *plink* every toe a *plonk*, the music matching his fearful approach to the music room. "Is that you in there, Arial?" he asked, not wanting to hear an answer but hoping that all this was a mistake. An hallucination in his ears, carried over from one too many late nights, and one too many coffees. She was *supposed* to be gone by now. Once she'd discovered the mangled machine then her threat would be a reality. Bags packed, the apartment emptied to a beautiful and long-lasting silence. Gone. Gone. Not gone? Simon placed a hand upon the open door of the music room and felt the electric silence burn through to the tips of his fingers. *Plink!* A note as sharp as any dagger rang out in the room. He jumped back and checked himself for an open wound that he knew would not be there. What was this game she played with him? A new game invented since he'd left the apartment earlier that evening? A cat and mouse game with the cat's *meow-ing* on the unseen side of the mouse hole? And if cat saw mouse, then what? He knew what. The

carousel would begin again, the same ride taken, the same spinning silence that had come so many nights before. It wasn't the music that had driven him to his impromptu murder, but that silence between the end of one song and the beginning of another. Arial sat in front of the piano. Arial's finger hovering over a key, ready to strike up another song that would take the place of words. Twenty years of marriage and ten of them spent swapping chords for sweet nothings. When was the last time he'd heard her once-warm voice at his ear? When was the last time she'd led him into the hot darkness of their bedroom, there to create more heat? Too long. Now there was only the sound of the piano and the silence that stretched out forever between the end of one song and the beginning of another. *Plink-plonk-plink-plonk*. Simon's fists clenched and crushed ten years of songs and silence into the flesh of the palms. This was supposed to be his night, he was supposed to be free now, free now... free.. *Plink-plonk-plink-plonk*. The sound of the keys was a lazy taunt, a drunken stumble of fingers across white then black, then white

again. No words, but there were words enough in that broken song for Simon to hear. *You thought you could beat me, didn't you?* Simon ground his teeth. *Plink-plonk-plink-plonk.* He took a step forward only to take a step back. *You and me, we're in this 'til death, honey. We're in this 'til death.* Simon's hands grabbed at an imagined throat as he imagined squeezing the sound out of the delicate pipes and bringing a real silence to the apartment, to his life. He heard, but only in those secret echo chambers of his mind, the snapping of a neck and it was a beautiful sound, a new music that he wanted to listen to forever. *Plink-plonk-plink-plonk.* Simon shook the sonic daydream away. *Thought I'd just up and leave, didn't you? Thought without this goddamn piano, I'd want to get up and leave? You're dead wrong, honey, dead wrong.* Dead wrong. The imagined voice gave him a real idea. Simon turned from the door and to the kitchen. The neon Hoppersville night bathed the room in a heartbeat of electric blood red light. Under that pulsing bloody light the method of his madness was trapped, given a saintly glowing halo. The knife.

The *knives*. But he would need only one to gain a lasting silence. With only one he could graduate to homicide from... what exactly was the murder of a piano called? Simon smiled at the thought, that smile grew wider as he approached the kitchen. His hands tingled now with new anticipation. His fingers took on a clairvoyant grip over what was to come. The knives called to him, a different music, a shark song that cut into the throbbing neon beating heart of light around him as a fin might break the surface of water. The beating of his heart warned him away from those dangerous and bloody waters, a dull, thudding siren. His hands shook as he reached out, then pulled back. Silence, that's all he'd wanted, a true silence that was not forced by Arial's hand. Sound, sound would be good also, real sounds, the whispers of a loving wife, a tender sentence, a happy hello now and again. But not the goddamn piano. Not the goddamn out-of-tune keys being hit over and over again by the same hands that would not touch him. Simon yanked at one of the knives. It came free as if it had made its

home in nothing more than butter. Simon held the knife into the throbbing red neon light and turned it over. Such promise in the sharp edges. It was the teller of fortunes, good fortunes, no need for Tarot or crystal balls, he held the future, his silent future in one, electrically charged hand. The other half of that future waited in the darkened music room. *She* waited, her fingers still hitting the keys. Her victory in every bum note that drifted out into the apartment. But not for long. Simon turned to the hall and the music room. He gripped the handle of the knife tighter. Licked the sweat from his top lip. And stalked forward to commit the second murder in two days. *** They were married on the Golden Coast, under a blue, blue sky, in a blue, blue summer month where time had no meaning and they lost their days to flesh and the wants of that flesh. It was there, on that Golden Coast, that Arial had first played the piano. A wedding song. A song without a title or words, none that he could remember in any case. Back then he'd been in love with that music, he'd heard in the chords and progression what he felt when he

looked at Arial. Love was a song and that song was their love. But now... .. now a different song played as he headed toward the darkened music room. It was a savage song, unsynchronized, a thundering drum accompanying the broken, taunting music Arial played. *Plink-plonk-plink-plonk. Thud-thud-thud-thud.* 'Til death that was what he'd thought she'd meant by the playing of her tune. 'Til death. And now that death would come, and with it his own brand of silence, his own peace and quiet. He would cut the throat of this night and from that open wound all the days of silence that followed, would flow. At the door he stopped, the promise of those long forgotten honeymoon days remembered in the pause between the hitting of keys. They *had* been in love, right? They *were* once lovers, that was correct? Was there a chance, a possibility to restore the magic, to write a new song on this night? A new song that would kill all the silences and the terrible music that had come before? *Plink-plonk-plink-plonk.* The song, *that* song was the world to him somewhere in that lost and forgotten past. He would

have stopped time if he'd had the skill, if only to listen to that song forever. So when had that song become his torture? When had the silence become so suffocating? He could not place a date, there was no mark on the calendar, no month or particular year that came forward in his mind and shouted for attention. Somewhere between then and now love had turned from a sweet, sweet music into a horrible noise, and the absence of that noise had become even worse. As bad as listening to the building of a gallows, the hammer falls that tick-tocked the hours away until the noose dropped. *Plink-plonk-plink-plonk*. Simon was the hit key, the tensed wire. The bad note hit once to often. He jumped forward into the darkness, the knife slashing at silent spaces where he thought she would be. And met only silence. Thick as the darkness, that silence, but with no resistance, no new noise to fill it up and make it make sense. Only the pounding unsynchronized drumbeat of a maddened heart beating away inside his head. Only the *plink-plonk-plink-plonk* of the keys being hit, over and over and over... A chill swept him from the

feet to the end of his shaking hand. Simon stood very still and listened for a breath in the darkness, but he could hear nothing, not even his own panting. There was nothing but the broken rhythm of keys and the drumbeat of blood inside his head. How could she have survived the swinging of the knife? How could she have been left untouched by the blade? How could he have - "Arial?" he called into the darkness. The keys responded to his question, repeating the same pattern they had all night. *Plink-plonk-plink-plonk*. "Arial!" he screamed into the dark. *Plink-plonk-plink-plonk*. Cold and shivering, Simon staggered to the far wall. He reached out and touched the light switch, but did not turn to see what he knew would wait for him. What was *not* waiting. She was not there, he knew that now. She hadn't been in the room for days now. And she would never return. How had he forgotten all these things? How had he convinced himself of noise in the absence of noise? What madness had washed over him? Love was a kind of madness, the oldest kind, and he knew why, why wasn't so hard. He done it all because

he missed her, because he wanted her to return to the silent apartment and fill it with noise again. But there was only silence. Different to the one that had driven him to the murder of the piano. Different than all those times before when he'd prayed that she would pull her fingers away from the keys. Silence. He had his silence now, but that silence wasn't enough. It had made him a ghost, and like a ghost, Simon turned. And there, as memory made real, was Ariel. She sat in another season, another time, her red dress falling like a soft touch across her legs. And he, that other Simon, that other man who'd never wanted the song to end, sat in the chair in that other country, that other season of their lives. A better season, a Summer before he'd grown old and tired of her noise. A season where he hadn't plotted his murder of the song, where he hadn't cut the strings inside the piano and lied about repairs to stop her playing. A season of love, not the madness of love gone stale. A season that had passed too quickly into Fall and then... Simon staggered over to the piano and ran his fingers over the muted keys.

There was no sound. But he heard the song again. It carried him to the chair, where he fell into the deep folds of a memory and stared into the past. *Their past*. Arial at the piano, her smile as warm as any song, her delicate mouse-like fingers skittering across the keys. *Plink-plonk-plink* - He closed his eyes, and for a moment everything was right with the world, and he hadn't cut the throat of the machine and he hadn't invented her return and he was not mad with love and loss. Arial hadn't left and somewhere, in the heat of his imagination, they shared a bed together as they once had. The song played. *Plink-plonk-plink-plonk*. Soon the only sound was that of a sobbing man in a lonely room in Hoppersville. *** Arial watched the window from the street below. And there the shadow-puppet madness of her failed marriage as it played out. If only they hadn't grown old. If only love was like good food, something that could be enjoyed almost all the time. If only... "You ridin', miss, or you want me to wait a little while longer?" the lady Hack said, leaning out the side of the cab. "Ridin'," she said, her

eyes still on the shadow of her sobbing husband.
"To where would that be exactly?" She was suddenly empty, more empty than she'd ever been in her life. Empty and needing to be filled.
"Know anywhere I can get good food?" she said.
The lady hack smiled. "You like Chop Suey?" she said.

From the same author on Feedbooks:

- "*Small Victories*" (2009)
- "*Sights a Bird*" (2009)
- "*Midnight in Paris*" (2009)
- "*Sleeping Dogs*" (2009)
- "*Suggested Oddities*" (2009)
- "*I Burn Today*" (2009)
- "*Wild Honey*" (2009)
- "*Walker in the Rain*" (2009)
- "*The Drowned*" (2009)
- "*Not So Much a Season*" (2009)
- "*Hoppersville #1 - Nighthawks*" (2009)



www.feedbooks.com

Food for the mind