

The Accordion

by Cat Rambo

If I play my accordion too loudly while you're painting, you complain. You stamp about in your room under mine. You fetch the broom from the closet and use it to thump vehemently on the ceiling. I feel the vibrations through my feet.

"I'm trying to work down here!" you shout furiously out of your window.

I put the accordion down on the sofa. The air slowly squeezes out, making it wheeze like a beast perishing for love. I go to the window, but you have already pulled in your head, and are engaging your canvas once again. There is only the lit trapezoid of your window.

I lower myself in the window washer's abandoned apparatus, ropes squeaking, bump bump bumping against the bricks. I come to your window and peer in. There are pockmarks in the plaster of your ceiling. Your coveralls are streaked with drips of black and white and red.

You're painting still, a picture of hearts and flowers and maidens with mournful eyes. Are you thinking of me too? My breath makes a foggy patch on the glass. But when you turn around and see me, I am suddenly shy. I pull the window washer's cap down over my eyes and pretend to be squee-geeing.

You go back to your painting. Sadly, I hoist myself back up.

I hire jugglers to ambush you in the hallway, street mimes to gesture out my devotion to you, mariachi bands to stroll beneath your window in the little garden ten stories below.

But you ignore the jugglers, pay the treacherous mimes to go away, absent-mindedly empty the turpentine you've used to clean your brushes out the window. Several members of the band who were smoking cigarettes are badly burned.

I play my accordion again, and this time I hear no thumps. Can you be listening?

I look out my window and see yours dark and empty. You have gone away for the weekend.

The witch doctor down the hall offers to cast a love spell on you, if I give him twenty dollars and three live chickens.

I buy the chickens and bring them home, but in the car they look so reproachfully at me that I cannot bear to give them to him. Instead I install them in my room and feed them popcorn. They sit on the radiator, clucking peacefully. I play lullabies to them on my accordion.

I hear a door slam and then the thumping begins again. You are back!

Spring wears into summer, and now you don't even thump any more, because the drone of your air conditioner drowns out my accordion. I leave my window open. The chickens seem to enjoy the heat.

One day I despair. How will I ever reach you? I pace my room, at each turn banging my head against the unpainted walls, raising puffs of white dust which coat my eyebrows. The neighbors on each side complain, and rightly so. I stop banging but still pace, thinking feverishly. The accordion lies abandoned on the sofa. The chickens watch me with sad eyes.

I buy a bassoon, a cowhorn, a dulcimer, an euphonium, a flugelhorn, a glockenspiel, a harmonica, a jaw harp, a kettledrum, a lute, a marimba, a nail fiddle, an oboe d'amore, a pan pipe, a recorder, a samisen, a tambura, a ukelele, a violin, a wood block, a xylophone, a yang kin, and a zither. No use! I can't produce a single recognizable note. I can't step anywhere in my room without tripping over one of the instruments.

I go out for a walk. I leave the door unlocked behind me, hoping that someone will come in and steal the bassoon, the cowhorn, the dulcimer, the euphonium, the flugelhorn, the glockenspiel, the harmonica, the jaw harp, the kettledrum, the lute, the marimba, the nail fiddle, the oboe d'amore, the pan pipe, the recorder, the samisen, the tambura, the ukelele, the violin, the wood block, the xylophone, the yang kin, the zither, or perhaps even the chickens. Anything but my accordion.

When I return, there you are! Sitting on the sofa, next to the accordion. I can only gape in astonishment. You blush.

"I came to thank you for the eggs."

"Eggs?" I say. Perhaps artist's jargon for songs. I don't think so.

"Yes, the fresh eggs you've been sending down via the window washer's lift. I find them outside my window every morning. Aren't they from you?"

The chickens have a smug look. "Oh yes," I say. "From me."

"And the notes?" What could they have written?

But I nod. "Of course."

That night I play my accordion again. You and the chickens listen, sitting together framed by the perfect rectangle of the window, eating popcorn. When I finish, you applaud. Then you take the zither, and we play together.

