

SILENT BATTLE

By Patrick Gabridge

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CAST: ELISA and ZELDA

SCENE: Two chairs, facing the audience. If desired, there could be the platform of a front porch between the two chairs.

AT RISE: ELISA and ZELDA are seated in their chairs, facing the audience. Both are at least in their 30s, but can be older.

ELISA: The music starts pounding around noon. I'm sure that's when she hauls her lazy butt out of bed. Sets her feet on the floor and clicks that button. Boom boom boom. Like I'm not going to hear it. All I'm asking for is a little human consideration. My windows are all closed, it's not like the sound is coming through, not really. It's the vibrations. Through the soles of my feet. In the cavity of my chest. Transfer of drums into some weird offsetting heartbeat. Don't get me wrong, I love music. I listen to it all the time, but not so loud that other people have to participate, whether they like it or not. It's the fashion nowadays, to be generous with our music and our conversations. Post-pubescent boys rig up their souped up Hondas so that they shake my windows when they drive past. They roll down their windows while they wait for their girlfriends and puke out their street music, if it should even be called music. I'm not old enough to feel so conservative, I don't want to be mentally wrinkled and fragile. But I do want some peace. It's my house. I don't have any control over anywhere else in the world. Not over the church next door with their hymns shattering Sunday morning, not the sirens that serve as a constant background hum. But over this, I do. I've been nice about it. Asked a few times, in person. But I'm not going to keep running downstairs and making it a habit—Zelda plays her music too loud, Elisa asks her to turn it down. It becomes a ritual. Look at the volume dial and figure it out, use your common sense, there are other people living in this house. One of those persons values the ability to think quietly without a rhythm pounding its way inside her head. **(SHE takes an envelope out of her pocket and hands it to ZELDA, who opens it and reads it.)**

ZELDA: What's this?

ELISA: About the music. It's been loud and bothersome to me and the other tenants. This is official notice that you've been warned.

ZELDA: All you had to do was knock on my door.

ELISA: I've done that.

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ZELDA: You could have done it again. A letter. The other landlord just came down and knocked on my door.

ELISA: I'm sure he did. I think this way it's a little clearer.

ZELDA: Oh, it's clear.

ELISA: Good.

ZELDA: Maybe you can ask your kids to stop jumping on the floor over my head.

ELISA: I will.

ZELDA: But I'll keep my music down.

ELISA: Thank you. ***(They retreat back to their chairs.)***

ZELDA: Wants me out. That's what it is. I never did anything. Just enjoyed my music a little. Not a lot of joy in my life. Not a lot of joy. All I want is the freedom to listen to my sounds, let them filter in, lose myself a little. Thinks she's so quiet. Her and her big feet and her children. Like she gives them a hammer every morning. I work until late, don't get to sleep until almost midnight. Come six a.m. there's her little darlings pounding so's my pictures fall off the wall and cracks come in my ceiling. Then has the nerve to write me a letter telling me I'm disturbing everyone. Don't ask for much, just want a decent place to live, just want to listen to my music. But that's too much to ask. Don't matter. I can be quiet. Because I'm not going anywhere. This is my home. And she can't just force me out, not like that. Oh, no. I can turn this way low. I'll cozy my ear up right against it. Find me a pair of headphones, though I never like it that way. I like the freedom. Don't like my ears so hot. That's all right, I'll find my way. But she won't hear me. Like a mouse I'll be.

ELISA: Complaining about my children. They're babies. They can't control themselves. Doesn't she think they drive me crazy, too? No quiet from them, no quiet anywhere in this house. They go off to preschool, and I want a little quiet. But no, she's got to play loud when they're gone. When they're asleep. It's like there's a massive noise conspiracy, making sure that there's always some intrusive sound at any given instant in my life. But, I'll make sure they walk on tiptoe.

ZELDA: I'm just waiting for the next letter. Sends me a letter. What way is that to deal with a person? I want respect. I don't care if she's the landlord, she still has to treat me like a decent human being. I'm a decent human being. ***(They meet each other at the door.)***

ELISA: Hi, Zelda.

ZELDA: Hi, Elisa. Music been quiet enough for you?

ELISA: Yes, thanks.

ZELDA: I've been hearing a lot of banging lately.

ELISA: Yes. We're doing some construction. It should be done soon.

(Back to their chairs, to the audience.)

ZELDA: I'm keeping my part of the bargain. I don't even slam my door shut anymore. I ease it shut, so it doesn't shake their place. When I have friends over, I tell them to whisper, and I get them inside from the yard. I don't want sound carrying up over there. No, I want her to feel like I've suddenly become a ghost. I don't even turn the faucet on full blast anymore. I wait to flush the toilet until I think that she's asleep or I know she's left the house. Everything I touch, first I think about how much noise it's gonna make. Oh, my ears are always awake.

ELISA: Why do cars all seem to need new mufflers. And the firehouse must be at least a mile away, but somehow they sound like they're just two houses down. My other neighbor cranks his jazz up to the limit at four in the morning. The neighbor girls and their little toddlers scream in the sunshine, arguing, shouting, why are they all shouting? Their voices could carry through a concrete bunker. I keep all the windows shut, I don't care how warm it gets in here. That's what air conditioning is for, though once that thing's on, I have a hum that I just can't shake. I caulk every crack around the windows, and I've put up a sheet of plastic insulation, to see if that will help. There must be something that will help. There's a creak in the floor over there. I will have them rip up the floor boards and tighten them up.

ZELDA: Bang bang bang. I don't know what the hell she's building up there, but I swear it's never going to be finished. Hauling all kinds of junk up the stairs, creak, creak, creak. First she asks me to shut up, then she turns this into a construction zone. But she can't make me leave. I'm not going nowhere. No, no, no. And I've given up on complaining. That's just one more noise. If I start complaining, she'll just say, why don't you move somewhere else. She's not saying that to me. I live here. She can't complain about me. I sit right next to the TV now, probably burning my eyes out, just so I don't have to turn it up too loud. I put on the closed captioning, so I can read along when I can't hear it so good. Got rid of my electric can opener. I've opened up my microwave and my washing machine and found the wires that make 'em beep when they're done.

ELISA: The saws and the hammers drive me almost insane, like they're cutting and pounding right inside my skull. How can the men move so slowly? Don't they see that this is important? They say they've never built anything like this before. Don't be stupid, I say, it's just a room, that's all. Hemmingway had one. ***(They approach each other at the door.)***

ZELDA: Hi, Elisa.

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