

Lost on Both Sides

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I SUPPOSE WE ALL SHARE THE SAME SPACE at one time or another. One can search out these spaces, as I have. Outside Paris I spent an afternoon mulling about in Malmaison, Napoleon and Josephine's love nest. In French *mal* means bad or ill. The house—*maison*—took its name from the fact that before Josephine lived there, it had been an institution for the sick or crazy—I don't know which. She obviously was not bothered by the fact, though I might have been. The jilted Empress did commit suicide there later, but her problems were personal and in no way connected to the house's previously unhappy history. I remember the master bedroom which she had decorated to resemble an opulent, Franco-Arab tent—the trappings of a marital life assembled together with Persian rugs and Greco-Egyptian furniture. But it is simply a museum now. There were no tragic images trapped in the space, no conversations of passion and state still vibrating in the nooks and crannies like tidal pools. And there's really no predicting here—ghosts, phantoms, are scarcely ever where you could expect to find them, and like cops, they're never really there when you need them.

I had spent close to a week driving through near-well impassable roads to reach her—her, in this case, being a leggy brunette with the good looks and demeanor of a spoiled pom-pom girl. Perhaps you have met her type, a psychology graduate who thinks she can read your psychotic little imps like a Rolodex—and sometimes she can. In my case, you see, it was indubitably my mother. Approaching thirty-five and unmarried—never been married. Daphne believes that I must hate my mother, though I don't, clearly I don't; no one's perfect, of course, but I love my mother. "Then why do I feel the continual need to prove it to her," Daphne probes. If being kind and careful so as not to offend, calling at the same time every week, spending available holidays in her presence, if this is proving something . . . well, then I don't know. Daphne hates her's. She was practically an abandoned child—but I told her that between abandoned and practically abandoned is a measurable gulf. No, her mother is absolutely the worst and her latter-day attempts to make it up to her only rub salt in the wound.

The cute decorations in Daphne's apartment, the painted Dutch ducks, the wreaths of dried flowers, the pastel drapes, it's all her mother's handiwork. The walls and windows would be barren otherwise. There's no arguing with her in this mood, and I confess to her—somewhat dishonestly—that I hate my mother too.

Nevertheless, I will travel to the Bay Area to see my folks at Christmas, but before that, I will spend a few days with Daphne. We'll shop. Eat out a lot. We'll open her presents. She hasn't one for me, but that's okay. She's on public assistance and I'm not. I have a good job—for the moment anyway. Perhaps I make her sound worse than she is. If she were really a bitch, would I be working so hard to fall in love with her?

In the back of my car I have a pillow and a down-filled comforter. I don't like sleeping on alien sheets with somebody else's blankets over me. I certainly don't want to place my head on an unfamiliar pillow. I don't think I'm neurotic. You wouldn't either if you considered all of the heads that might have laid their oily surfaces down on hotel pillows, or if you but consider the uses to which that pillow may have been put. Decency forbids that I should say more.

For several nights I had been driving the highway between Provo and South Salt Lake. I have an old college chum who puts me up in an extra bedroom which is only occupied by his two daughters on Thursday and Friday nights. It's Thursday and rather than getting a hotel, Daphne says, "I have a key to Nicolette's apartment; John stayed there when he was here visiting Tyler. Why don't you go over and use her place?"

I'm tired. We've been arguing about whether I have the capacity to really love anyone—whether I can make a commitment, and all because of my mother, she thinks, though I believe it's because there was an election and my contract wasn't renewed—that's city managing for you—and I don't want to take on the responsibility of a woman who wants to be a mother of nations and her son who wants to grow up just like his daddy—at least, not until I secure another position. I mean, wouldn't it be silly for her to marry me and lose her public assistance just at the time that I lose my job and need someone to support me? That last part is a joke, I tell her. I don't want someone to support me. Her last husband John did, she tells me. She's almost always had to work. Now she wants to be supported, and she wants to have another baby while she still can. I could say more about that but it's personal.

So, I'm tired, and although it seems simple enough for me to just fall asleep—with or without her permission—on the couch, I get up and go out for my blanket and pillow. Daphne is searching for the key and will meet me at the car. When one is fagged, there's something really disagreeable about getting on the winter coat and mittens and going out into the raw air to retrieve a frozen pillow and down comforter. Still, it must be done as

Daphne will not have me sleeping on her couch. How will it look to her neighbors, she complains. She is too concerned about appearances, I think. Obviously, I'm not. In my opinion, people who are, are either hypocrites, or not really having much fun. Daphne falls into the latter category I suppose. But there's no point in arguing now. I argued this out with her long distance over the phone already. I told her that her neighbors are, for the most part, disreputable—and this according to her. The lad downstairs swipes bikes, disassembles them, rearranges the parts, and no one recognizes them when he sells them back to kids in the neighborhood. The people to her left are drug-smoking heathens. Clearly, Daphne can't be worried about violating the moral codes of the neighborhood; what she's worried about, I think, is losing her unimpeachable righteousness. She's a pearl in a pig sty—and I think she likes to rub it in a bit.

Also, there's the matter of her ex and Tyler. She won't let her ex sleep on the couch anymore when he comes to visit. Ty gets ideas that maybe things are back to where they used to be. And that is an odious prospect. I've never met John, but he's supposed to be a useless lump of flesh and a lout. And if daddy can't stay on the couch, where does this guy from back east get off sleeping on the couch? Of course, all this makes sense. She has a point. But I don't do it for the neighbors or her reputation. Believe it or not, I do it for Tyler, though clearly the kid hates me.

I follow her over to Nicolette's through the clouds of whirling powder that melts on my face and drips down my collar. It's not a huge apartment complex, but large enough for similarities to be confusing. The two-bedroom apartment is in the last stages of holiday desertion. A bargain basement tree leans as though exhausted against a corner. There is a week of newspapers and shoppers guides on the living room floor. The apartment is dank and chill, but I've stayed in worse. I drop my bag, blanket, and pillow in the middle of the entry and walk her back to her apartment which is perhaps 100 yards away.

On the way back I try Nicolette's key in a couple of the wrong doors. An entry light goes on. I stand there like a fool—but more foolish I think to run like a failed intruder. I know someone is watching me from the other side of the fisheye in the door. For a moment, I feel odd and vulnerable at the thought of being watched, scrutinized by presences that can only be imagined. I think, if they aren't going to open the door at midnight, maybe I should try to explain that I've lost my way, but who wants to shout in the windy hallway at one a.m. I pause before the door for a few moments to let whoever get a good look at me. I try not to act like a criminal, but I am reminded of a police lineup. Then I turn slowly and go to another identical entry way, wondering if the police are on their way. This time, the door opens before I can get the key out. It's still another heavy-set woman, the apartment manager; a big furry animal pushes through her legs and heads

for the snow. I try to explain, but she actually knows the story already and points to the door directly across the landing.

It's an easy mistake to make. Provo is full of these apartment complexes. Their exteriors are uniform if not universal. I had lived in innumerable apartment complexes across town myself fifteen years earlier; they all had the same appearance. Doors are doors. Two-bedroom apartments are two-bedroom apartments.

Funny, I think, as I get undressed in the back bedroom, that I should be back here after so many years. I had spent seven years at the church university including my M.S. One would have thought that would be enough. I hadn't been popular with the administration. As a teaching assistant, my own civic government students had turned me in for "criticizing the Brethren" when all I had said was that perhaps those "fine old gentlemen in Salt Lake" should see a movie before they condemned it—as in the case then of *Saturday Night Fever*. My bishop had tried to expel me for not attending church on a regular basis. Actually, my attendance had not even been on an irregular basis.

Now, years later, I had returned to Zion to find what had been so backward and provincial, quaint as a horse buggy or hooped-skirts. I didn't like all the rules, but they hadn't done me any harm, I suppose. And they did keep young people—though not me—out of trouble. Last summer I had returned for a visit—to dredge up some old memories—and had stumbled upon what I thought was this most remarkable girl-woman hanging around the free phone in the Wilkinson Center. From a distance, I pegged her for a freshman. She was impatient, and I wanted to lend her a quarter just to meet her. But what would I be doing with a teenager? What she was, I opined from the phone conversation that followed, was an anorexic woman disguised in the sort of garb one would buy at the Teen Depot at Wal-Mart. She had been to a single adults thing and needed to check in on the baby sitter. We went out a few times, I spoke to her about love; then, my vacation over, I had to hightail it back to Michigan where among the barren crags, I "mete and dole unequal laws unto a savage race."

Now, five months later, and after a ten-day visit which she spent with me in Michigan, it's time to reckon our differences. To this purpose, the holidays have been of little use. The fact of losing my political appointment had made me vacillate—though I have to admit that there's always been a convenient excuse. I had managed to avoid the important dialogues. Tomorrow, early, I must drive to California to visit my parents.

I pull the bedding off the bed. The sheets look none too fresh. I think of Nicolette, whom I have met, and then John, whom I haven't, easing their heavy carcasses onto the mattress. I decided to lay myself down from side to side, rather than the traditional head to toe. The bed, like the apartment, has that feeling of long-time cold. The chill penetrates to the very skeleton

of the bed. But I wrap the comforter about me and in a few moments, I am cozy and asleep.

I wake later that evening. There's a knocking on the door. Then I realize it's the bedroom door. I must confess to a bit of mental confusion, but my perceptions are sharp. My skin feels porous and acutely the chill in the air, the darkness, and a sensation of heavy anxiety. I turn about look over a shoulder—towards the door. It's only a matter of feet away. There. Standing in the hall is a tall form—a man, I think. How long has he been there—I don't know, but it is staring down rather intently on me, glaring in fact. My heart is going wild and expands like an emergency life vest—it fills my entire chest cavity; it is beating desperately, as though it were a man tossed on a violent sea, frantically bailing water from a swamping dingy. Though the windows are blinded, only slivers of moonlight coming in, my eyes clearly delineate the outlines of a light brown topcoat, which is open and showing off a sort of waistcoat of a similar color, sandy-colored hair, short or pulled back, the basic shape of an oval face, the downward turn of the head towards me. It doesn't react. Finally, I say, for I can think of no other explanation of why someone would be in the apartment or rapping at yon chamber door, "Oh, you must be John—John?" I think maybe he's come back to town for another visit. Maybe, though it is not the sort of judgment I would admire, Daphne has given him the key—as she did me—and sent him over to share the apartment.

"You must be John," I say, and when he says nothing, I think, if it's not John, the abusive John who is going to kick my ass, it's a burglar. Whichever it is, I am not going to be caught flat on my back—I won't be the only one who'll be surprised, and I, with not the slightest twinge of lethargy or diminished ability, spring to my feet and lunge at the figure. A galloping beat or two later, I am standing before the door, my hand has somehow found the light switch. I am apparently alone—the air is still charged with ambiguity. The fear is still there, coming from myself. But there is something else—not my own.

The difference between the two moments is so complete that I think I must have dreamt it. Still, I am wondering why I am standing by the door, and not still in bed. And how did I find the light switch—as though I had used it a million times. For several minutes I pace about, trying things out, taking account of things. The rooms are all empty—though the furniture looks now to be awkwardly arranged as though by a maniac—one chair faces directly upon a blank wall, a side-table is now too far from the armchair to be of service; more even than this, the furniture seems to block natural pathways and create inventive hiding places. It all appears to be just *almost* the way I left it before retiring to bed, and frankly, I feel just a bit giddy at the thought that I might be going insane.

Then it occurred to me that it was not my insanity which really shook

me but another's. And it wasn't, I realized then, a sort of physical threat with which I was confronted, but an insane mood bred of terrible longing and isolation. Certainly, these emotions were not mine, but even so, they did threaten, if I may use that word again, threaten to infect me unless I could, by some rational process of deduction, explain the apparition as some sort of cognitive mistake on my part—a momentary optical error.

So I go back and turn the bedroom light off and on. The blackness is really something. I lie back on the bed and try to imagine what I could possibly have seen that would take on the likeness of a man in a topcoat. The door frames a blank hall wall. And there is scarcely enough light to make out a door frame, let alone a fully dressed figure.

Now, I had never seen a ghost before. When I was a young man I had imagined, once again when I was sleeping in a strange house, faces looking in from the windows. But they were, after all, second-story windows. Since then I had fought against my fears with a heavy dose of skepticism. In fact, my entire adult career had been built on scientific rationalism. Do you know what it is like to have the bridgework of an entire philosophy of life, crumble to its foundations because of one little visitation? I didn't know what troubled me more, the uninvited guest or that I may have been living in a sort of enlightened blindness. To admit the reality of spirits is to admit the possibility of angels, and devils and God and Judgment. When I think about it, I realize that this is what Utah is all about. It's all about the hidden world—the secret life behind things.

I haven't led a life of crime, but there have been omissions—lots of omissions. Things I should have said, like the truth, but didn't because no one asked for volunteers. And there were times when I was solicited to say things which I should not. I had not been to church since I had spoken in sacrament meeting about "The Role of Personal Revelation in My Daily Life." Besides, I had found the Mormon church's whole post enlightenment, materialistic-metaphysical system, with and without its hypocrisies and internal contradictions, too heavy an emotional burden. I just want life to make sense and to feel relatively good about myself—just that, instead of the ecstasy and self-loathing I used to bounce between like a pinball.

After a few minutes I picked up the phone. She told me it was 2:30 in the morning. I said, "I'm sorry. Really. I don't know how to say this exactly"—I had never said such a silly thing in my entire life, but there it was—"I think I've seen a ghost." There was a long pause. "Listen, could I come over and sleep on your couch?"

"You're serious?"

"This would be a stupid joke if I weren't. I know it sounds crazy, but . . . "

"Why don't you just go back to sleep?"

"Because I've seen a ghost," I say. "Don't you understand? I can't sleep here."

"Look," Daphne says, "ghosts can't hurt you. They don't hurt people. They just show up."

I couldn't believe I was talking to a human being—let alone someone who was supposed to care about me. I said, "No, you look, I've seen a ghost, and I don't want to sleep here. You think that's abnormal? I don't know anybody who'd want to sleep in a house with a ghost."

"But it's just an apartment . . ."

"Okay. Forget I bothered you—just forget it!"

"What are you going to do?" she asked as I hung up. I started packing my things. By the time I had them out to my car, I was prepared to get in and just keep driving. I started the car engine and her porch light went on. In a moment she was motioning me to come in. Once again I took the blanket and pillow from the back and trudged to her door. When I got there she gave me a look of surprise at seeing the blanket. "Were you going to leave with the key?" she asks.

I toss it at her and turn away in fury, but she calls me back again. "Listen, I was kidding about the key." She looks quizzically about me. Then she asks if I think the ghost could follow me over to her place. I say that I don't know anything about ghosts—I don't know. Maybe, but I always thought they just hung around the same place. "Okay," she says tentatively, "I guess you can stay here," and turns towards her room.

In the morning I overhear her telling Tyler that I slept on the couch because "He thinks he saw a ghost." I have to get on the road if I am going to get to my folks' place at a decent hour. My mother thinks all fatal accidents happen after 10 p.m. But I tell Daphne before I go that she is thoughtless, and I throw in insensitive to hammer the point home. I think there's something wrong with her. She tells me that she has lost a lot of respect for me because of the ghost thing. I should have just gone back to sleep instead of being such a "big chicken"—to use her words, though they would seem more apt coming from Tyler.

Several days later in California, I get a phone call from Daphne. She wants to know if I will be coming back. She says she thinks she was insensitive. Her psychologist says it's because her mother was insensitive and that she can't forgive weakness in people she is supposed to be able to rely on for protection. The apology is gratifying, but, I think, what's she going to think when we're married and I refuse to get in fisticuffs with someone who steals a parking spot or flips us the bird on the highway? I'm going to be a big disappointment, I think.

By the time I return the next week, my ghost is a sort of celebrity in the building. Tyler asks me to describe my ghost over and over again, as though I might be forgetting some detail that would solve some puzzle.

Actually, I have done, in the hiatus, a good deal of thinking about the ghost myself. It is curious that the figure I describe bears no likeness to anyone I know in particular. Also, I think maybe I had buried deep in my subconscious, a fear of confrontation with John. He's a big guy I know, from Daphne's description—about 270 pounds. But the ghost who I thought, by the dim light of reason, might be John wasn't big and chunky, but rather slight. Hey, spirits lose a lot of weight someone jokes.

Maybe it's Nicolette's secret lover, I told Daphne. Nicolette, too, is fulsome. Daphne laughs at the characterization because, although Nicolette, Daphne's one true ally in the building against the incursion of deviance doesn't take lovers either, there is something very sexual about her, something about her weight that makes her not less sexy, but more, if you get my drift. Daphne is amused with my speculation about how disappointed the ghost must have been to find me there in the place of Nicolette. I tell her that actually the conversation with the ghost went something like this: "You must be looking for Nicolette?" "Yea, verily," he moans and rattles a chain. "She didn't tell you? She's visiting relatives. By the way, how can you possibly be interested in such an obese lover?" "It's not the corporal body that a ghost is interested in," he explains, "but her spirit within, and believe me, her spiritual body is skinny and very sexy."

But the manager is the most curious about the report. She comes over to Daphne's with her furry animal and asks me as many questions as Ty. But there's no one she can think of that would fit that bill, she replies. She has been the manager in that building for seventeen years. In all that time, she never heard tell of any man dying or being murdered in that apartment—"though there was this young girl," she concludes, "and it's not like you saw woman."

She says she was a pretty thing, and so I ask the next question, being always morbidly curious about the untimely death of maidens. "Her name was Kristy Brown," she says, and my heart dropped into my socks.

I hadn't thought about Kristy Brown in years, and this is odd because for several years, I thought about her a dozen times a day. That's adolescence for you. I ask a few questions and verify that I had, indeed, known the girl who had occupied the apartment sixteen years ago.

For years after her death, in fact, to this day, I am unable to hear the old Herman's Hermits song without thinking of Kristy.

Mrs. Brown you've gotta lovely daughter—something, something, something—are something rare. Things have changed, she doesn't love me now, she's made it clear enough, it ain't no use to cry.

Or something like that. One rarely ever knows all the words in Rock

'n' Roll lyrics. Kristy Brown had been my *belle idéale* in high school. She was a year ahead of me, and she had exuded a life force that always left me breathless. I remember how in the middle of exchanging pleasantries after church, she would suddenly lift her arms above her head, arch her back supinely, and smile as though the stretch had been the best tonic. Then she would pause in what she was saying as though to query, "Was that as good for you as it was for me?" Even so, I had kept my distance for fear of tipping my hand and failing outright. When I stepped up to the plate, I wanted to be ready to hit a home run. I was underclass and not in her league. But I had this idea that she really cared for me and hers was a constant teasing to get me to leap that chasm between us, the chasm of age, high school clique, and social class. Let's face it, her father was the "Eggman" of the Bay area—he owned some of the largest chicken farms in the state and, to boot, a church patriarch. Mine was inactive and an encyclopedia salesman. Our worlds never met, except at church. But I fully intended, once I was at BYU to renew the acquaintance. It would be a new ball game then.

The manager repeated what she remembered, and I filled in the holes. Kristy had gotten in a car with a bunch of kids for the drive home at Christmas. A short distance outside of Provo, the car had skidded on a patch of ice, and rolled over twice before righting itself. No one seemed hurt. All were happy to be safe and had decided to start their journey anew the following morning with another car. Minutes after returning to her apartment with some friends, Kristy fainted. Then she stopped breathing. Later they found a bruise on her forearm. They also found a small splinter of bone in her brain.

Daphne seemed fascinated by my narrative. My details were exact and telling. In her mind, I think, Daphne put us together, and she couldn't help admiring—and perhaps envying—the picture I painted of a girl who had it all, including a funeral whose numbers pushed the doors open to fill both the chapel and the cultural hall. I told how at the funeral, an apostle had spoken and how several had hinted that Kristy had been taken to God to prevent her from getting into any real trouble. God, I suppose, became then a sort of a romantic competitor. Now there was an unbreachable class distinction. It had made me furious at the time that people had to make this out as though it were actually a blessing for her, but I understood too that everyone who knew her loved her—in spite of the fact that everyone knew she had smoked dope and was probably no longer a virgin.

"Yeah, well, that wasn't all," the manager said. "She had a guy living in her apartment. I would have thrown him out myself had I not felt so sorry for him."

"You mean after the funeral?" I asked.

"No, no, before that. She had a runaway Mormon missionary living with her," she said, smiled and shook her head. Daphne was flabbergasted.

"The guy had run away from the mission home. He had nowhere to go, no money, just one suit to wear all the time, and Kristy let him stay until he figured something out. I don't think she had sex with him—they didn't act that way together—but then again, I suppose she might have. She was a busy girl that way."

Somehow Daphne got it into her mind that the ghost was the unhappy spirit of the runaway missionary, and like a dog with a bone, wouldn't leave the notion alone.

"Yes, I wondered that myself," I added, wondering what had become of him, too, though I had no reason at all to assume that he too had taken or lost his life.

"Oh him, he just went somewhere," the manager shrugged. "That's another story entirely."

It was amazing to me to be talking about her after all these years. Amazing for me to realize that she had slept in that apartment while I had finished high school. And to think, I would never have known. It made me wonder briefly about the other places I have been. But my mind kept coming back to Kristy and that apartment.

"As a matter of fact, you're not the first to complain of queer things happening in that apartment. Once a tenant complained that the kitchen table reared up on two legs and flopped over on to its back like a dying cockroach. Another tenant complained that a poster of a temple would keep falling down. Even when she would switch it with other pictures. They'd always stay up, but not the one of the temple. But those are only a few complaints over what—sixteen years?"

I had not confessed to anything but a casual acquaintance. Finally, Daphne asked, "So you were friends, or did you, like, go out with her?" There was something strained in her tone.

"Neither," I said, and that was the truth, "but what if I had?"

"Doesn't seem like a very good person—that's all," Daphne said.

"What are you talking about—you didn't know her."

"It's pretty obvious—isn't it? Okay, that she smoked drugs and slept around might be forgiven, but to ruin a missionary—that's really wrong. And if she slept with him—what with the promises that he made in the temple—I'm sorry, I think that's really evil."

I had to suppress my anger. I didn't know why I was getting so angry. I should have been flattered, I thought even at the time. Daphne was showing a little jealousy, but it really annoyed me to think that years later, a young girl who had given such delight to her friends and acquaintances, should be vilified in a shoddy little public assistance rental by a priggish divorcee who had never even met her. Finally, I said, let's change the subject, but we didn't change the subject, we just stopped talking and

watched something or other about Stalinist purges on the Discovery Channel.

Later Tyler came out and did something that somewhat surprised me. He crawled on to my lap, and while I stroked a cowlick, he felt the bicep in my right arm. It was a nice feeling. Daphne was a bit surprised too. He talked to me about some Canadian money that his mother had brought home from a trip we had made to Canada, and he asked me if I could send him some Canadian postage stamps.

Daphne put him back to bed, but his coming out really seemed to cast a glow on things. Daphne sat beside me again and told me she was sorry about lots of things. She couldn't really explain it. She freely admitted that she had never treated anyone as badly. The insights flowed so easily that it was almost as if she were talking about someone else's behavior—no doubt something she had learned from her psychologist. The indifference and criticism, she thought was a sort of defense reflex. She honestly couldn't help it, she said, and I got the impression that she had no intention of trying, for she shifted the focus from herself to me, and the commitment she had been waiting for. "You must really care to put up with so much?"

"I must," I replied, feeling more doubtful than ever. "You know," Daphne said later, "you don't need to go back up to Bob's tonight."

"You mean, Nicolette's?"

"You wouldn't want to sleep there again—not after the ghost business?" She studied my face looking for a clue, a recognition in my eyes that she had already made.

"Oh that, I don't really believe in ghosts," I said nonchalantly.

"But you say you saw it . . ."

"A hallucination."

"The business about not staying here, I don't suppose it matters anymore. You could stay here—on the couch, of course. Why not? You've done it already, and Tyler didn't have a fit or anything."

"It's nice of you to offer, but all the same, for appearance's sake," I said, assuming a posture blatantly hypocritical. "If it's still okay with Nicolette, I'll just stay at her place again."

Daphne sat up on the couch now, less cuddlesome. "Why, you wouldn't rather stay here with me? After all, you complained when I wouldn't let you before. Now, you think it's all right, but I'm telling you, you don't have to!"

"I don't know what you are getting so excited about. I'm just trying to respect your previous wishes. Wouldn't you rather I did for Tyler's sake, and frankly, a bed is a bit more comfortable than a couch."

"So you're complaining about the couch or—what, you want to sleep in my bed or nothing?"

No, I told her, I was implying nothing more than simply a bed at Nicolette's was more comfortable than the floor at Daphne's.

"I thought you were afraid?"

"I thought you hated that in men?"

Her eyes drifted about the room and settled on several inanimate objects as though they had suddenly come to life and required her attention; then just out of the blue she said, "All right, all right—Go to hell then."

Was it the very idea that after a major concession on her part I refused to accept her hospitality? Was that what set her off or something else? That was pretty much the end of that conversation, and the relationship. That evening before I left for Bob's I went over to the manager's for a brief moment. I told her that I had left an electric razor inside and asked to borrow the key. As I opened the front door I heard the door in the bedroom kiss the doorjamb. My heart changed tempo. I paced my way back in the dark, scared in a way, but almost sick with nostalgia. I pictured her in every room, and I wondered if it were merely my imagination, or was it a fusing with hers, her fashioning for me a vision or two of how she wanted to be remembered. I pushed open the bedroom door which had not been closed shut. The room was pretty much as I had left it. I sat on the bed for several moments. I wanted to say something, but I felt silly talking in the dark. All I could finally force to my lips was "God, Kristy . . . what a mess I've made of things. And now here we are lost on both sides."

As I closed the front door on my way out, I heard once again the bedroom door kiss the frame as the night air pushed against the vacuum.