

The Little Apartment

by Sheila Luecht

They climbed into his car and drove back down the alley like road to his place. It was a way from the school, lined with big evergreens and tightly spaced little homes. There was a thick snow everywhere and it was still falling. The air had a bite to it but the tension in the car was very real. It was so strange, like an interruption in a movie. Just like when you are waiting to get to the good part and the projector breaks. You have to just hold on until someone fixes it and try to re-capture the build up to the scene. The thing is sometimes, the build up is better than the scene or there is something actually just missing in the whole thing. There is, after all, a lot to be said for foreplay.

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The little apartment had a small kitchen, bathroom and living area. That was all. There were no screens on the windows and crisp snow coming down did not deter having the glass open for a bit each day. Fresh air was important. On one wall was a huge book case, simply made, stocked with works and a stereo system. Under a window was a trunk with a Turkish rug on it from a trip he had once made with his first wife. On the wall facing the bookcase was another window and his desk under it and chair near by. There was a twin bed lining the other wall. Upstairs lived his land lady and no doubt she would see his guest about for the next several days. He would let her know.

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Foreplay it was, the years in between their romantic parting. There was a kiss and also a pack of cigarettes for her to try and smoke her way out of her mourning. which he handed to her that last day in Salzburg. It was for the train ride to the airport in Germany. It had no effect as she was not really a smoker, she had one once in a

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while, especially when she was around him. He was the smoker. She saw it then as part of his continental style, his fitting in with his natural surroundings. Just like how he drank and how he thought and how romantic all those coffee house settings for their little exchanges had always been. The smells, the smoke, the hefty sense of intimacy, of human life, once reflected in a very old painting. These walls around here all seemed dark and full of residue of war and triumph of many a human and love. Certainly love. Why love? Love of being alone, love of being with someone, love of small dark places with Julius Meinl.

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The little kitchen in the apartment was very white, bright and the window there stood by the small table. There was a bit of a coffee smell there too, but tea was the real drink at home. Fruit dumplings were easy to make and that was something he liked to make for her because she said she would like that. He found some in a freezer at the market and there it was, easy.

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She had been hopelessly in love, but really he had been affected too. He was confused, teary eyed even, when she had left. He had not had quite an experience like this before. In a way it was very strange. Later in this return trip they would find themselves with a group of his friends in a bar with live music and dancing. When the band took a break there was some kind of Viennese waltz recording playing. She asked him to dance. He seemed very surprised, that she could waltz, and would ask him to waltz. She asked him if he could and he said "Of course" and took her onto the floor. As they spun around she was light on her feet. Ballroom dancing class had taught her that. It was a whirl of all the things that had been interrupted and left unsaid to the point. He stopped her when the music ended and praised her for her ability to dance so well and she said, very

clearly, "If I had known you could dance this well, I would have never left you."

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There was a dinner party by one of his friends and lots of food and an ex girlfriend of his there with her new lover, Bodel. They were expecting a child. She had apparently been shortly after her. As they were sitting around drinking, she had said that she could not live up to her shadow. That they parted over the expectations that were not met among other things. Interesting. So interesting in fact it had shocked her to hear it and know that it was not that way at all now, or so it seemed. They shared some pictures with her of the time after she left and filled in some of the back story that had occurred as dinner was being prepared, with just the women in the afternoon. When the men arrived there was no more talk of that other time, of the pain he had experienced that had been so visible to his friends, the steps in his life he had found necessary to take. He had lived through his letters to her, and some of it she knew. They wanted her to know it all. He had choices to make, things to undo and commitments to be broken or honored. She had let him make all those on his own, knowing deeply that it pained him but knowing it could not have continued as it all had.

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Well we know that was not true, she had to leave, and he had to have her leave, but at the time it seemed a very romantic thing to say, fresh from a spinning Viennese waltz. What she would have had with him was still really not clear at that time, just the story was there, the imaginary idea of what might have been or could be. The truth is on this trip back she realized that he was probably not the same person that she once thought he was, that he was a bit more selfish, a bit more reserved, a bit more entangled with what he thought his life would be or could be. He had finished his doctorate

and was lauded for his work by his government and he was very big, to himself at least. She was herself still undone, still searching and still toying with romance and love.

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She had once received a Kirk silver bracelet from someone who loved her too and had broken up with her and moved on. It was a large cuff and she had kind of liked it but had never been especially fond of it especially after that particular man had told her he never really loved her. He had been someone she met while working a summer job and he thought he loved her but changed his mind. She could not apparently live up to his expectations. An old Arab custom of giving something to someone if they admire it, struck her. At the dinner party the pregnant women who could not live up to expectations for her lover now lost to her, expressed how beautiful it was. She took it off her wrist and gave it to her. It was a simple thing and over in a minute. She never regretted it. Everyone had been fairly drunk at the time, but the gesture did not go unnoticed.

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In the end they talked a lot, shared what they could, both seemingly trying to rekindle something that was no longer hot, and yet they could not let go of each other. Year after year would prove that. Right then, just then, it seemed that the physical part of the whole thing did not have the same hold and while they slept together, and laughed and kissed as they once had so passionately, it was just like a break from their normal.

It was not them. It was like a shadow of something. Each could feel it and yet, they still helped each other and cared about each other and spent that time together building something else, or refurbishing something else.

This time around she met all the friends in town, she laughed with them and toyed with life in Salzburg. The city had also changed. It was not a romantic hide away anymore, a place of history and past, no, now it was a city where a friend lived. She liked the picturesqueness of it, the size of it, walkable and compact, but the treasured memories were sometimes out of Salzburg, they were in Mondsee and Vienna, in Prague and stretched across miles inbetween because this is where they had been together. Where they had loved each other.

So it was all a kind of farce this trip, and this was the last time they slept together, and kissed passionately. Not the last time they met, no. The next time he came to her in the states and tried to figure out what he had let go of. This time she was filled with someone else and a marriage was looming just weeks from the visit. It was not to be believed, but it happened, the situation in almost the reverse. How can two people wait again, another three, almost four years and have the shoe on the other foot. Was it letters and heart strings tied so tightly that they could not be undone?

Still at that second time in Salzburg, he had his first book published and had something which she had wanted to frame for him from it, some original art work. She had been a bit upset that the book was dedicated to someone other than herself, but she told her self it would be unrealistic for him to have done that. Even though that book had been researched in part in London and he had written her from that library several times as he waited for a book he had requested to be fetched for him for his research. There was no internet at the time and this was how it was done. In person, with some books being held and only available if requested and then only used there. It was all right though, he knew other women in all these years. Just as she had known other men. So how did she figure it would be dedicated to her? Even she had to ask, just then, who was she to him? Then, or now, or ever?

She had been the one who helped him see himself and what made him happy. She was just somehow in tune to him the moment she had met him and understood so much about him and where he was at in his life that she had real directional impact. She knows that after all these years. She smiles about that. She had played a similar role many times since for others.

At the time the artwork for the book could not be framed quickly enough so she decided not to have it done. He was upset and he said, " Well you could have just left it, I would have picked it up." She had not even thought of that. She had only thought of leaving him with something, as she did when she left the first time, she had bought him a leather watch band and he had nursed it along for many years. She had told him she would always be near him, holding his wrist. In fact she had meant that. He told her he wore it until it fell off his wrist years later.

So the idea of framing the original artwork for the book did not come to fruition and in comparison, neither did the visit. What she had hoped for had not happened but she had not fully expected it to. And he had not either. So off she went and she lived again, but he still kept the string and held it tightly. The string being attached to her heart, was still there, obviously buried but real, none the less.

