

Creepy & Clean

My Two Gh0sts

Story by Denise Thompson-Slaughter

One beautiful autumn Saturday in the mid-1980s, when we were living in New Jersey, my husband and I decided to go to Lambertville, on the Delaware River, for the weekend. My husband had grown up in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, just across the river; and he knew that the Lambertville Inn was reputed to be haunted. The hotel had seen better days and was rather shabby, but we decided to stay the night anyway. Our room was small and was both cold and stuffy at the same time, with only one window. It had a number of tacky modern repairs and “improvements” that weren’t in keeping with its nineteenth-century shell. The atmosphere, in short, was disappointing. I certainly didn’t think it likely that we’d see a ghost there.

Indeed, I didn’t exactly “see” one. But, I woke up in the middle of the night to the sound of someone sobbing in an unattractive way. At first, I thought that either I was dreaming or that my husband was snoring, but after a moment, it became clear to me that neither was the case. With my eyes opened on total darkness, I sensed rather than really saw an elderly woman sitting in a rocking chair only three feet from the bed.



Artwork by Fariel Shafee

I don't understand how I sensed all the other things I knew then, either. I just sort of comprehended in a total way, not as bits and pieces coming to me as I would expect if I were imagining it, but as a gestalt. I knew that she was a ghost, but she didn't know it; she was waiting for her son to come back from a war—and even though she should have known he was never coming back, she couldn't let go and kept looking toward the window. She'd been indulging in her sorrow for a long, long time and was quite unbalanced. I felt embarrassed that I had only a little sympathy for her and that it was outweighed by fear. I felt she was desperately and perhaps dangerously unhappy, and I didn't even try to communicate with her—I just wished she weren't there, and I snuggled down into the covers hoping she would go away.

I listened to her barren sobs for the better part of an hour, realizing in an instant that ghosts are not “cool” beings to befriend, but are, in most instances when they hang around in a “haunting” manner, mentally ill. Unlike the ghost of her father that came to comfort my grandmother when her daughter died, “habitual” ghosts may not even realize they have

passed over and are completely confused about where (and when) they are. Their attachment to some strong emotion or possession on earth keeps them tied here in a timeless manner, waiting for their own spirits to “wake up” to the potential to move on. Finally, I drifted off into an uneasy sleep. In the morning, I couldn't sense her any longer but was eager to leave nonetheless.



The confusion of ghosts reminds me of the time that I apparently lived with an obsessive one. In my early twenties, I was living in a 1940s-era brick apartment building. I shared a two-bedroom apartment with a roommate who was even less inclined to do housework than I was. On a few occasions when there was no one home but me, I walked into a room and found cleaning supplies set up in the middle of the room—buckets of water and ammonia, the ammonia bottle opened on the floor, and rags next to the bucket. On the first occasion, I just thought it was weird and that my roommate must have done it, but later she said she thought I had left the bucket and so forth in the middle of the floor. (The cleaning supplies sat out all day

as we each waited for the other person to put them away.)

On the second occasion, my roommate was at work and was as astonished as I was to hear about the cleaning supplies being set up in the bathroom. On the third occasion, she was off camping with her boyfriend for the entire weekend. The day after she left, I walked into the kitchen and was stunned to find the cleaning supplies set up in the middle of the floor. I had been in the kitchen only an hour earlier to raid the refrigerator, and they were not there then. There was no one in the apartment but me; I had been reading in the living room and had never even noticed any sounds coming from the kitchen, which was on the other side of the dining room and around the corner—not more than twenty paces away! Without passing me, no one could have gone to the kitchen from the front (and only) door; yet I never saw or heard anything. It's true that we were slob, and I guess it was a hint; but I've always wondered: if the ghost could set up the supplies, why couldn't she just go ahead and use them?