



## Letter on the Kitchen Table, by John Ptacek

Dear Ego,

I'm breaking up with you. No more circular discussions, no more eleventh hour recriminations. We're through.

This is not an emotional decision. Actually, it doesn't feel like a decision at all. We've been drifting apart for some time now, and more than anything I'm just acknowledging the distance between us. Whatever kept us together just isn't there anymore.

It won't do you any good to turn on the charm. Don't bother trying to fill my head with thoughts about how great we are together or how lost I'll be without you. You no longer have that kind of power over me. I see right through you now. I look, and there's nothing there.

It took me a long time to figure you out. Like so many unhappy couples I know, we drifted into our own little world and for the longest time I mistook it for reality. If you asked me to pinpoint the day this shift occurred, I couldn't, because it happened so long ago. But I vaguely remember what life was like before I met you. Actually, it's more a feeling than a memory, a feeling of freedom. Not an "I-have-a-whole-weekend-in-front-of-me-with-no-plans" kind of freedom, but something different altogether. It's more a sense of spaciousness, the kind children must feel before their heads become filled with worldly nonsense, before their sense of wonder contracts, before they begin to imitate the behavior of the troubled souls around them.

I can feel that sense of spaciousness right now when I close my eyes and forget that I have a body. It's like I'm not even a person anymore, I'm just this space that goes on forever.

I don't expect any of this makes sense to you. It never has before. You always have to define things, slot them into categories. But this isn't something that is easily explained. It's beyond words- I know, I know, you hate it when I talk like this, when I challenge your rigid view of things. You slip into this really pouty silence.

In the old days I misinterpreted that silence. I felt wrong, even a little crazy, for expressing myself. Now that silence tells me something totally different. It tells me that I threaten you. And it tells me something else, something really important. It tells me that I'm capable of living on my own. When your voice dies away, my voice appears. It's just there. It's probably been there the whole the time, but you were always drowning it

out. It's a clear voice. And strong. I'm going to be just fine without you.

My friends think I'm crazy. They wonder what I'm going to do without you. They've seen what happens when we're together, the crazy highs and lows, the bizarre behavior, but they still question my decision. This really throws me until I remind myself what it was like to live in an unhealthy relationship. The worst part is you don't think it's unhealthy. You're convinced that it's perfectly okay to be miserable all the time. Month after month, year after year, you think - it'll get better. We'll work this out. But it doesn't get better. It can't. Sick relationships like ours don't get better, they just get sicker.

It's a small world and no doubt we'll be running into each other a bunch. I guess it's more like "see you around" than it is "goodbye". As long as we maintain a proper distance, we'll be fine. I need to be far enough away from you to hear my own voice. I actually wouldn't mind your company once in a while, like when I'm fixing the sink or packing for a trip. We've always gotten along pretty well in those situations. But this time around, you'll need an invitation. You can't just come barging in. You don't live here anymore.

Please pack up your stuff and leave your key on the table. When I come home later, all I want to hear is the sound of you being gone. I'm going to lose myself in the spacious silence, forget where I begin and end. You said something to me once. You said I'd be nothing without you. Remember? Well, I want to end this on a positive note by telling you that you were right. Without you, I am nothing. Nothing at all. If it weren't for all the hell I went through because of you, I'd have never arrived at that momentous conclusion. So thank you, even if you have no clue about what I just said.

Love always,

John Ptacek