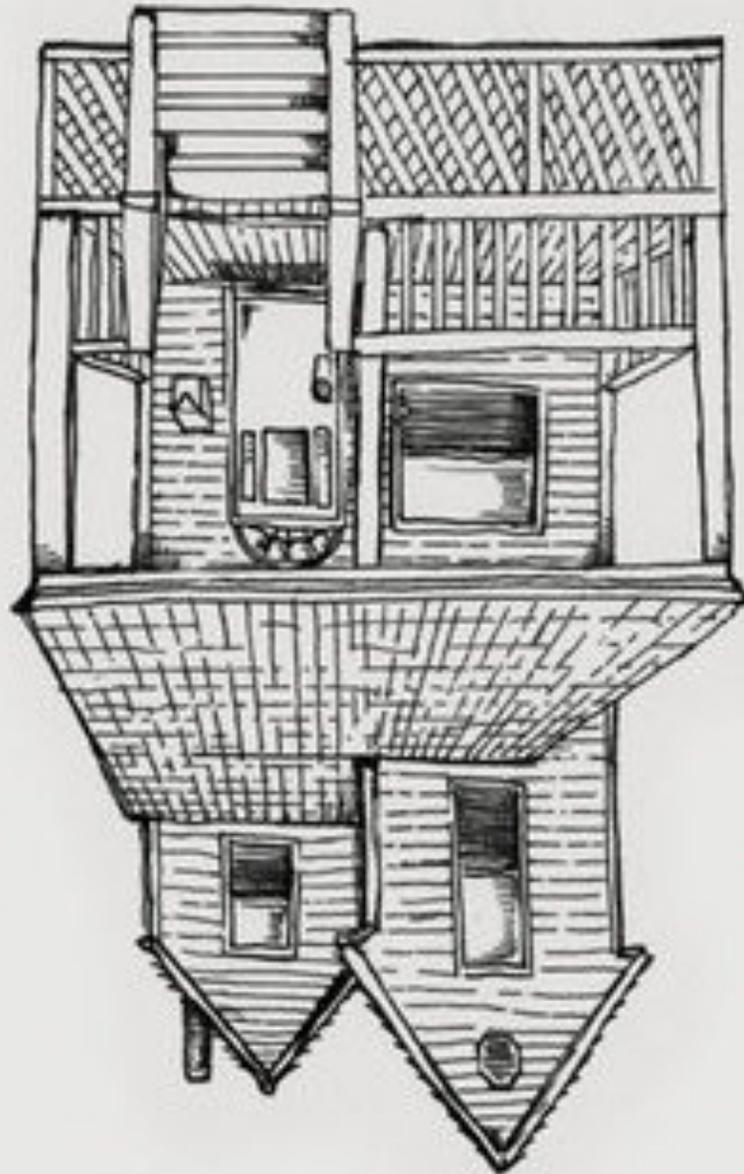


The Miraculous House of Houswife (Preview)



A story of destruction and rebirth

by Kela Parker

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May, 2016. I stood outside my house, one side blackened by a fire, a few windows busted in. Firefighters packed up their gear, the heavy stench of soot lingering in the air. A neighbor said the fire was so hot they could feel it all the way across the street. The night before, my next-door neighbor had dropped a cigarette on her living room floor, where it landed next to her oxygen tank, which exploded and burned a hole in the ceiling before engulfing the entire house. The fire killed her, totaled her house, and sent her son to the hospital with third degree burns. By comparison, the impact on my house was, eh, not so bad. But it was still a disaster. My entire life at that house I had skirted catastrophe. Now it had come for its due.

Providence

Nearly ten years earlier, a girl in her mid-twenties came strolling down Southeast Salmon Street in a vintage full-length wool coat, on her way to Stumptown to grab a coffee. Poking out of a weedy sidewalk, a *For Sale* sign caught her eye. It was a tiny little gingerbread Victorian, the kind decorating all the neighborhoods of Southeast Portland, Oregon. Porches framed with intricate woodwork, eclectic carnival paint colors suggesting alternative lifestyles.

Sure, the little house was a bit worse for the wear after having suffered an anemic beige paint job, apparently at least a decade before. Her shingles looked like the cheek of an old man with acne scars. But still, a certain charm shone through.

Upon first sight I knew I would live there. I didn't know exactly how, because I hadn't been planning to buy a house. Most people who buy houses get married, have plans to start a family, and peruse many options in their price range. At the very least, they have stable jobs. Me, I was single, cobbling together my spotty income from teaching piano, school loans, and coffeehouse tips, and I only looked at the one. I didn't have a "price range," because in truth buying a house was in another financial stratosphere altogether.

But now I wanted one. *This* one.

Finally, all of my hours spent skulking the metaphysical aisles at Powell's Books on Hawthorne would come to fruition. I was going to manifest the *shit* out of that house. It would be mine. In my head, where I had always mostly lived, it was no trouble to draw up an alternate fantasy world on command, to get deep into descriptive detail and *feel* my way, as metaphysical gurus advise, into the life I wanted to experience.

"Yeah, you make a good hourly rate as a teacher, but there's no way you can do that full time and make enough to support a mortgage," said my wise and ever-practical friend, Jillian.

"I'm sure it's a beautiful house," offered temperate and reasonable Valentine, "but it seems like you're not really financially ready for that right now."

I listened patiently, pretending to appreciate their input, while internally dismissing them as negative curmudgeons. I went on designing the furniture layout and planning the garden in my mind. Actually, I had notebooks full of extensive sketches containing plans for both the interior floor plan and furnishings, and the exterior landscaping.