

ORACLE HOUSE



Fourteen years after the Summer of Love, in 1981, I graduated from college with a marketless degree in philosophy. The buck stopped once I had that diploma in hand, my father, after the graduation ceremony, grunting "Philosophy," under his breath, like I'd just earned a degree in bottle capping.

It was all the challenge I needed to prove my self-sufficiency. After graduation, I went home to Oakland, but I spent all my waking hours in San Francisco looking for work and a place to live. In a coffee shop I saw an ad tacked on the wall about a room for rent on Waller Street so I went right over and found the place. It was a three-story Victorian house painted turquoise with lavender and pink trim. It stood out, even on that flower power street with one house after another painted a surreal mix of colors. On the front triangular peak of the house was a Delphic eye inside a pyramid. There was no eye lid, just a huge purple eye with the blackest pupil, a tunnel. I looked up at that eye and thought it was looking ahead, that it knew my future.

I knocked on the front door and a woman about my age, early twenties, opened it. I almost blurted, "I'll take it," before I even looked at the place, she was such a knockout. She had green eyes with blue flecks in them that flashed like a pinwheel. Her hair, red and down to her shoulders, looked like it hadn't been combed in a couple of days, like she had just gotten out of bed. She wore a dance leotard the color of red wine and a short faded jean skirt. She was barefoot, with tiny silver rings on both of her baby toes. I told her my name was Alan and I was there about the room.

"Oh," she said, looking over her shoulder. Then she called out, "Max, someone here about the room for rent." She stepped back to let me through the door and I walked in and sat in a sagging gray armchair in the front room. "He'll be right out," she said, and walked out of the room. It gave me a moment to look around. The place was wonderfully Spartan with dark wood