



PROJECT MUSE®

Ethan Allen in Love, House Beautiful

James Cihlar

Prairie Schooner, Volume 77, Number 1, Spring 2003, pp. 166-169 (Article)

Published by University of Nebraska Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/psg.2003.0006>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/41647>

James Cihlar

Ethan Allen in Love

Lofty ideas. The living room space hides
a multitude of details.

You have cleverly done everything.
The crown molding was patched by hand.

Under the console table,
near the splatback chair,

My cat tries to tell me something.
We had lived in Hyde Park

and wanted to increase the area
of our primary living spaces.

The urine seeps between the tongue
and groove of the tiger maple.

Something's not working. Mikhail
and his partner Vince Baroni

like the raw look of steel.
A week of deaths,

job tragedies revisited,
and a cold bed

have deposited me on the crosstown.
The pie safe comes in cherry

or walnut. This display room's walls
are the same color as our bedroom.

Now let's turn around
and look at the en suite.

Sean Pratt, the host, defines the words
Portico, Soldier Line, Parapet Walls.

There is no room for me here. My cat
vomits on the wool rugs.

Old homes restored.
A Maryland couple

has spent twenty years
refurbishing their Victorian farmhouse.

A table saw sits
in the center of the dining room.

House Beautiful

The lady across the hall
smoked, and her cigarettes trailed
through the plumbing into my apartment.
As Bill and my sister and brother-in-law

moved my stuff out of the Soviet-bloc-
style apartments in Columbia Heights, Minnesota,
she opened the door
and yelled drunken gibberish at my sister.

Rita lived in a Wisconsin cabin outside the cities
for three seasons of the year, with Binks,
a pet turtle, and Chippie, a feral
chipmunk. The sign outside Richmond reads,

The City Beautiful. Neither of these places
was home. When Rita turned sixteen,
our mother set fire to her sheets
as Rita slept in bed. Through the flames,

she sang to her, Happy Birthday
to You, Happy Birthday to You.
Six blocks down from the Capitol
in Nebraska, I once soaked in the tub

with my headphones on, Paul
in bed, the phallic deco building
glowing in the flood lights
as cars circled its base,

men cruising
in what was known as the fruit loop.
That was my apartment. Long story short:
I later moved in with him, then I moved out.

Okay, back up: I came home from the party
just noticing the rips in my shirt from the fight,
and he had pushed the furniture in front of the doors
so I couldn't get in.

Later, by myself in my own apartment
on thirteenth and "B" Street,
I sat in front of the speckled mirror tiles,
free Gevalia coffee-maker brewing its first pot of coffee,

watching myself eat a delivered pizza,
 with *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* playing
 on a UHF channel. Believe it or not,
 that was the closest to home I'd gotten by then.

So when I walk up to my house, now,
 I will not hear the stereo from the street,
 and when I walk inside
 I will not listen for the note in her voice

that betrays her drinking. Inside these doors,
 no one will have words they don't say
 that build up over months and years,
 and no one will ever leave me.

Lynne Kuderko

According to a Proverb

Two antelope walk together so that
 one can blow dust from the other's eyes.
 A man walks out onto the street. Perhaps

he hurries, perhaps he is going to meet a woman,
 who may or may not be beautiful. A cloud in the sky.
 Perhaps it will rain, perhaps

there will be days of unrelenting sun.