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Relics

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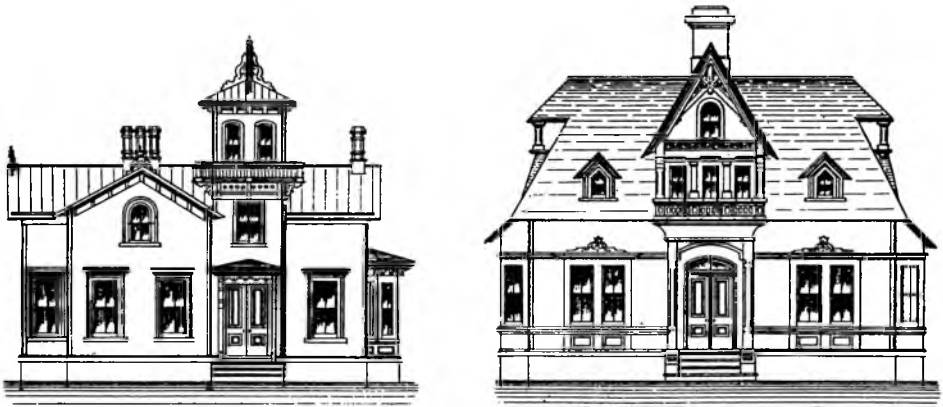
Relics

Old houses haunt me more passionately
than ghosts: perpetual fascinations of magnolia-
Greek Revival, Stick Victorian, Queen Anne: even
castellated visions of monolithic Rhode Island Stone Ends.

Victorian gingerbread, more serpentine than any
cottage curlicue out of Hansel and Gretel
appears appetite-teasing as an edible treat:

grit-crumbly like Easter Egg sugar
and sand-rough to the touch (those
19th-century imaginations, seaming their fanciful, quasi-
astral sublimate embroideries
are nakedly cabinetted here: we may sicken
on sugar, provided we hide the evidence...)
Then, insinuated

inside by ingenuity, I fondle surreptitiously
the friendly finger-patina of old banisters:
burrow like a brown recluse into closets,
inspecting the premises for webs: pad
about, ready to pounce, on wide pine boards
suspecting dim corners of overlooked mice. Ancient water-
stained paper, peeling in decadent strips
from stalactite-moist walls
exudes a musty declarative invitation: and
through the leaded glass of doorpanes at Christmas
millions of caged electric vespers glitter quietly on hall-erected
trees, wavering by the ambulant enthusiast in ripples,
caught like so many water-drowned stars. I languish



and devour the real-estate ads in the paper
like a termite, searching for the pithy square of print
which will be as a Message for me: but the prices
are too high and the insufficient, minted alloy-coins
in my fraying pocket
slither through the decaying threads like flat round eels
inadvertently set free. Therefore

my dreams feature huge white columns and obtrusive pediments.
Lecturers chatter endlessly in my slumber,
gabbing of friezes and plaster medallions.

I am forced to hunt my quarry in museums,
avid to flush out endless duplications
of the Corinthian capitals which once supported
Grandma's front porch. I go on every house tour
in every accessible city

and on the Neanderthal street every glazed eye of
every old house I pass leers, winks or whispers
lewdly "Come in...

Come in."

by Susan Luther

