



## Saying Goodbye to Your House

How do you say goodbye to a house you fell in love with on a winter day, seven years ago—a house that has nurtured you and your craziest dreams ever since?

How do you say goodbye to the perfect Craftsman dining room, with its box-beam ceiling, window-seat, and the clear-heart fir of the wainscoting? Or to the built-in sideboard with its leaded glass windows and their secret image of a sailboat—a hint, you're quite sure, that the owner-builder was a sailor as well as a carpenter?

How do you say goodbye to the huge attic room, the one not counted in the square footage, which nonetheless proved a paradise for your son, who went from ten years old to 6'2" in the seven years he dreamed his boyhood dreams there? How do you say goodbye to the gracious front porch—the only one on the whole street—where you sat in the morning sunshine and drank your coffee, read, and listened to the birds?

How do you say goodbye to the living room where you sat by the fire and wrote two novels, from start to finish? Or to the late-afternoon light in the bedroom, where you kept the windows open during the weeks when the plum trees were in blossom, letting them fill the house with their perfume and making the back yard, carpeted in white blossoms, look like the perfect site for a wedding?

How do you say goodbye to the *Daphne odora* you planted by the front steps, so that everyone who walks in, or walks by, smells that knock-me-over sweet scent when spring is still months around the corner?

As a long-time resident of the East Bay, you planted the same three things at every house you rented: a Meyer lemon tree, a fig tree, and a Double Delight rose. How do you say goodbye to the lemon tree, the fig, and the glorious roses you planted in the first garden you ever owned?

Or to the freestanding white wisteria whose blossoms you swore you would learn to distill someday, so that you could wear the scent all year round? How do you say goodbye to the two weeping cherry trees and their fountain of blossoms—or the three handsome Ikebana cherry trees you sweet-talked the City into planting for you along the north side of the house?

How do you say goodbye to the shed in the side yard, hidden by morning glories and a riotously blossoming potato vine, where you stashed your bicycle, so that any time you felt restless or at a loss for words, you could grab your notebook, hop on your bike, and ride down to Fourth Street for a writing session fueled by white noise and Peet's coffee?

How do you say goodbye to the picking garden you planted over seven years—to the sweet peas, roses, lilies, columbine, lisianthus, and poppies that allowed you to fill the house with bouquets and always bring flowers to your friends?

How do you say goodbye to a house that held you close and made you feel safe—where you waited and rested and grew strong enough to fall in love again? Where you wrote and thrived and watched your child launch himself into the world? How do you say goodbye to a house that held you both until life told you, each for your separate reasons, that it's time to leave now?

Goodbyes are always hard. And yet our lives are defined by the transitions we make—some by choice and others by necessity. We cope, celebrate, or grieve the bust-ups, the graduations, the deaths. We pack our belongings and turn to face the future, filled with a certain amount of fear and regret but also hopeful and excited and, finally, ready.

We say goodbye to a garden by getting on our hands and knees and weeding and planting one final spring before another gardener comes to pick the flowers there and adorn the house with them. We say goodbye to a house by saying thank-you for the privilege of being steward to this nearly 100-year-old architectural treasure of the Berkeley flatlands. We whisper a prayer to the next owner that he or she or they will love this house as we have loved it—and will thrive there and blossom as beautifully as the garden.

—*Barbara Quick*

*Novelist Barbara Quick is the author of VIVALDI'S VIRGINS and the A GOLDEN WEB (forthcoming from HarperCollins on April 6, 2010).*