

Short story: Princess Wants Hardwood Floors (award winner)

Welcome! This used to be a duplex. You can tell because so many rooms are a mirror image of one another. This room used to be two. You can see the seam where the wall was knocked down. This closet used to be a bathroom. The second bedroom was a kitchen—you can tell because the windows are up high. It's about a thousand square feet. Built in 1920. Yes, all appliances remain. The furnace is only two years old. So is the roof—a full tear-off. We put in the dishwasher a little over a year ago. The dryer is new, too...

We're motivated, you know. Why am I selling it? Well, I bought the place when I was single, and then I met my husband a few months later. No, it was big enough for two people, but he has a home-based business and he needed the room to meet with clients. He's an artist. Oh, the people next door have three kids. Five people in this same size house. They're building a room addition, and it's going to look great once they get the back yard cleaned up.

The neighbors are great. The lady next door is blind, but she's very self-sufficient. Everyone on the block has dogs. That's another reason we wanted to move—we wanted to get a few Dalmatians and they need lots of room to run around. There are lots of kids too. No one ever drives down the street. It reminds me of my old neighborhood, growing up on the West Side, only nicer. It's cool. You'll like it here.

You know, I had hardwood floors growing up. Yes, there's hardwood flooring underneath the vinyl in the dining room. You can see it in the old bathroom—I mean, the closet. It would be easy to take it up...

Okay, well, here's a flyer. Please think about it. We can close as soon as you need to. We have two mortgages right now, so the sooner the better.

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Come on in! As it says in the flyer, this used to be a duplex. There are two of everything. Two porch lights. Two laundry rooms in the basement. Two entrances in the back. No, I didn't do that. It was before my time.

The dishwasher is new. It works better than the one at my new house! Well, yes, I do miss it already. I miss the short commute to work, but my husband works at home and we just needed more space. He was written up in last month's *Chicago* magazine. He's an artist. Had a big show downtown. One-man. No, I work at UIC, Circle. I got the house before I met him.

So you live in Roscoe Village? I used to live there, when I first had my own apartment. Really trendy, I know. But then in 2001 the interest rates were so low I knew I would regret it if I didn't buy. You know, my mortgage was less than my rent. If you sit down and figure out how much you've paid in rent, once you hit thirty grand or so you'll see how buying is such a no-brainer. You can't lose.

Oh, you have cats? That's great. No, no pets. We'd love to, but we're allergic. But everyone on the block has cats. The man across the street has this cat that everyone knows and looks after. And no one ever speeds down the street. It's very safe.

There's hardwood underneath the dining room. There's also wood under the living room carpet, but I don't know what kind. I don't want to peel away the carpeting. It probably is, though; the house is about eighty years old.

Since you don't have a realtor we're very open to offers, since no one has to pay a percentage. We hired a lawyer when we bought our new house. Saved us thousands. My number's on the flyer. Talk to you soon!

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Here's the house. New appliances, so everything's really energy efficient. This used to be a duplex, so it's twice as big as some of the houses around here. The furnace is only two years old. Yes, the dishwasher stays. Everything stays. Except the weed whacker. I need to keep that here to keep up the curb appeal, if you know what I mean.

You know the house on the corner sold for almost thirty thousand dollars more two months ago? And it was on the market for only a week? This is a very popular neighborhood. It's close to everything. Lots of young people starting out, young families. It's a good investment.

Oh yes, there's hardwood floors. They're under the dining room tile. Easy job. I'll even throw in a four hundred dollar allowance at closing so you can fix it up however you like.

Did I say something wrong?

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Sorry I'm late—I got a little lost. Yeah, we live an hour away now. I miss how it's so close to everything. Anyway, thanks for waiting. As you can tell, the air conditioning works. Great on a day like today, for sure! And it's so quiet. The furnace is a year old. So is everything else. You can move right in.

I remember when those weren't trendy. I had them growing up, and people thought we were poor. But it seems lots of people your age want them. You know, I wanted them too when I was your age—strictly nostalgia—but then I got my priorities in order.

Listen, this isn't Lincoln Park, I'm sorry. This isn't "gentrified." Real people live here.

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Hi. Oh, you found our Web page? Cool. Let me know if you have any questions. All new appliances, new walk and steps, everything stays. Ceiling fans are nice, huh? Yeah, I like them too.

Funny you should ask. There's some nice wood in the dining room, under the parquet. And also in the living room, under the carpeting. It's Pergo. It's an exotic South American hardwood, only not from the rainforest, looks fabulous. Yes, they're socially responsible. No animal habitats are destroyed in the harvesting of it. Pergo. You haven't heard of it?

Listen, bitch, you can live in Lincoln Park and pay a million for a house with your damned hardwood floors, or you can buy out here, pay less than half that and get whatever you want.

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Glad you could make it! We've needed the rain, I know. Let's go to the basement. I've never had any flooding or seepage, even when it's poured like this. When they laid the new walk

last month they pitched it so the water runs into the yard instead of into the shed, which I think is really cool.

No, I've never had a problem with mice. Oh, those things plugged into the walls? You see, I have this horrible fear of spiders, and those things make this sound that we can't hear but scares spiders away. Oh, they work for mice too? Well, that explains why I've never seen any!

Yes, the carpeting is in good shape. Of course there's hardwood floors underneath. Every house around here from the Twenties has them. Goes without saying.

Have you ever read "The Tell-Tale Heart"? Edgar Allen Poe? Never heard of him? That's a shame. This guy's lying in bed, and he hears the sound of his heart beating, driving him insane. Only it's not his heart, it's the heart of a guy he killed, still beating under the floorboards. Think about *that* the next time you see hardwood floors, you spoiled brat.

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Welcome! Yes, the living room *is* huge. It used to be two rooms. This whole house used to hold two families. See this window? It used to be a door. Pretty neat, huh? Let me show you the master bedroom. I'm pretty proud of the wallpaper. It was very expensive. I'd love to take it with me, but I think someone else should enjoy it. Sometimes you have to give up what's closest to you.

Yes, I hate to have to sacrifice this house. It was my first. But my husband needed a lot of room for his art studio and space for his Dobermans, so we moved out to the suburbs. No, I didn't know him when I bought this place.

No, I'm afraid we didn't go to high school together, I'm not from where you're from, sorry. Yes, I'm sure. I grew up here. West Side. No, not the suburbs. But in a house kind of like this. Same era. You know, now that you mention it, it did have hardwood floors. But then we had to have them sanded and refinished. Yeah, they aren't always clean and perfect like you, little girl.

Especially when you have blood stains on them. It's such a nuisance to get out, especially when it's soaked in so far. But I like blood. Royal blood is the way to go. It's so beautiful.

Don't look all scared.

Come on, Princess. Come here. Come closer.

Don't you want hardwood floors?