

Ready to Surface in All Respects

by John Olson

Our realtor is worried about selling our apartment. He believes it is a submarine. We cannot convince him otherwise. I agree that our apartment is a little small and more than a little cluttered. We have a lot of books. The sensation of standing or sitting in our apartment is not unlike being in a submarine. It is also partially underground, so that the view from our living room window is that of a few small plants and a snail or two. But it is not a submarine. "How many fathoms deep are we today?" he asks. I tell him that we are at sea level, on top of a hill. "I can feel the pressure," he says, "the inconsolable darkness of the abyss." He sits down on the couch, a look of awe and stupefaction in his face, and points to what he says is a flashlight fish. "This is wonderful," he tells me, "but I cannot sell this property until it surfaces." "Ha ha. Good one!" I say. "What do you mean?" he asks. "I mean, we're not in a submarine. Our place is small, and we have a humidity problem, but calling our apartment a submarine is a little exaggerated, wouldn't you say?" "Then how," he affirms, "do you explain that?" "What?" I ask. "That hotwater geyser spewing a black billowing mass of minerals and liquid carbon dioxide and what appears to be a Pacific Blackdragon with a long chin whisker dangling above a giant isopod. I won't lie. This property will be a hard sell. People are fussy about mold, but when they see a hydrothermal vent enveloped in giant tube worms they may balk. I see you've got a new dishwasher and smoke alarm, and that will help, but there is so much more to do before we can get this place properly staged. And for that to happen, we will need to surface." "But we are," I insist, "we're on the surface. That's the door to the hallway. And look, over there, that's the kitchen window. You can see the porch. The mailman was just here. Didn't you see his legs? The man has the hairiest legs I've ever seen. How could you

miss them?" "I did not see the legs of a mailman," he said, "I saw the tentacles of a giant squid undulating in lyrical inquiry as it went gliding past the window." He bent his arm around to his back and groaned. "It's my back," he says, "these underwater pressures affect my spine. I must leave soon. I just want you to look through the notebook here at some of the properties you might be interested in as soon as we return to land and can spend some time visiting a few addresses and neighborhoods." We look through the glossy pages of the notebook at beautiful kitchens and beautifully appointed bedrooms with views of the city or a nearby park. It occurs to us to hire a realtor who can better represent our apartment as an apartment and not a submarine but we have made a promise to this man. We will have to stage it as he insists. We will need some radar masts, communication antennas and periscopes. We will need to have someone clean out the ballast and trim tanks. He recommends a little oil for the rudder and a maid brigade for the mess deck. I don't know what to say. He hands me a list of numbers for contractors, electricians and welders. He gets up slowly from the couch and we shake hands and walk to the door and stand there. I gaze into his eyes as he waits for me to give the signal to surface. There are pressures in his eyes, fathoms I cannot plummet. I shout "stand by to surface," and he smiles.

