

What constitutes a tenement? At what point? A highrise ensconced among other highrises, crosses its own threshold of dilapidation. To become. Tenement. When? When fewer than half the apartments are occupied? A third? A fifth? Those of us who have stuck it out. When the “For Rent” sign has been

rain-soaked or blown to bits? When that always already absent landlord stops collecting the rent.α The building manager? Gone to ground. Because of the boy. You know the story. Why am I telling it again? A couple. Ukrainians. They were God’s Witnesses. Sent the boy around to collect the rents (perhaps you’d like a pamphlet

while I’m here?).δ Shall we say someone (a tenant) asked him to come in for a moment. Again. Until he started having doubts and nightmares in equal proportion. Stopped collecting. Just as well, for his sake. Downstairs, in the foyer, the city notices. Building violations.ε What sprinkler system? What hot water? Why does he go on like this? One becomes accustomed to a cold shower. Except in the winter. Which, in this country, lasts six months. Not to mention the memory. Which lasts four more. Or fourteen. And yet. Not yet. One becomes inured to cold showers. Oh, that they (the ones who do) would cut off the electricity once and for all, rather than torture us with brownouts. One can plan for a total eclipse. Only the uncertainty haunts. And if they cut it off?

Would that be enough?φ How should we act? Look for another room and a half? From street to street. Strange buildings, strange smells (though certainly no worse). Sign a lease, a cheque. But no, not a cheque. That was a book the bank had closed, for lack of content. Small bills then, not to mention coins, tucked into an envelope. Rent a truck. Perhaps a hand cart would suffice. Fold boxes. Abandon old dust. Who would carry the other end of the bookcase?

How should we act? Wondering if I could. Writing here and writing there. Continue in this way. But if so, what then? Just the knowledge that, in one’s solitude, the length of which and were it not for, one might write one’s solitude. Would he withhold exactly that? And to have come all this way, only to discover. But what did or could he expect. Otherwise. Yes, and how should we act? Shall we assemble a clause? And sign it. But it is not in our hand.

Story? Who would tell it? There are some who say. A story is a fiction, a mistake. We add and subtract and expound. We say it thus and we say it thus. When we take the first part, we take the end as well. This is in and this is in. But this only resembles this. We cast one man or woman against another. The heart in conflict with itself. When? A story teaches an exaggeration. It is possible to refute. If there is a difficulty, this is the difficulty. Better to be silent.

And if you say: but what then? A house is not a home, some (too many) say. Still one resides there, in a room and a half of turpitude. One does not go out, if at all possible. One remains perfectly still, if at all possible. One remains perfectly silent. This is always possible. But perhaps you are thinking: how does he eat, pay the rent, move through time toward death? This itself is not difficult. He ate rarely. Paid no rent. Let time move him. He lay on the cot of desolation in a room and a half. Do I teach an exaggeration? Certainly it is possible to refute. Did he regret abandoning a struggle? Or those sins committed in the name of the struggle? What remained in the wake of failure? The body, the thing itself. This is ours and this is theirs. What is this? We incubate lust and something else. Sexual relations, money, pigs, leprosy. Here, suddenly, a word about my mother: no mute imperative driving me across the countryside to find her. He sought something else, something more. How can you find it? I am still looking. Now that we have come to this. The question, the difficulty, returned to its place. And are we still at it? And he who asked it – why did he ask it? Some will say: Go this way! Others say: Just the opposite! Perhaps it is a case of go read it in the teacher’s house.

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α These are things from which all benefit is forbidden.

δ Awake!

ε When the landlord stops collecting, beware the insurance fire...

φ Those of us who have stuck it out, those of us who have lost the will to move on.

Mark the first page of a book with a red ribbon, for the wound is inscribed at its beginning. E. Jabès *Le livre des questions*

γ Sanhedrin 91a

η I prefer not to.

What keeps me here? Inertia. The view. Here a suspension. Across the boulevard. A canyon of traffic. A mountain. Trees rising out of the city. Across. I meant a cross. A floor and a half higher than the bedroom window. How many floors? Twenty-two? Twenty-three? If we count the thirteenth.κ Once, in another season, green trees sucked in all a city could throw up at them. There was a point of saturation. They shed everything, became dry grey sticks, cracked under the weight of the wind.λ And yet, altitude, unlike neatness, counts. On the first three floors, no one. An accumulation of garbage in the incinerator chute. And yet. Not yet. Is this the way of things? Those Ukrainians are not gone. You may be surprised to learn. They moved to a higher floor. A couple.μ She speaks a few words of English, he knows where the boiler is. Though he would never tell. And who would ask? The deal only got sweeter. No longer compelled to respond to the sustained and urgent pleas of tenants. The way of things. Free to pursue life in the West as they had not imagined it. But for the trouble with the boy. On the twenty-second, or twenty-third, the pool, abandoned. Cracked. Flaking.ν A matter of time. Those of us who have stuck it out. Those of us who’ve lost the will to move on. Those of us who’ve forgotten how. Organization, you are thinking. Because you remember the sixties. The years, I mean.τ Or someone’s memory of them. Tenants’ cooperatives. Self-administration. Kronstadt. The idea of Kronstadt, I mean, not the actual events. Having taken place sixty years before the sixties of which we are speaking. Those of us who resist. Block occupations. Committees. All night meetings. And yet. Not yet. If you think I would. Once more. Engage. Rise up, body and soul as one, and go into the world. You are sorely... mistaken : :

An imbrication and a suspension. What makes a good sleuth? Which powers are preferred? Observation? Deduction? Patience? Imagination? Anticipation? To say: The nature of this case is not like the nature of this case and the nature of this case is not like the nature of that case. The event that happened happened that way. And which sins are, by a sleuth, to be avoided? Antonius said to Rabbi: Seemingly, a person’s body and soul are each able to excuse themselves from judgment after death. The body says: It is the soul that has sinned, for from the day that it has departed from me, I have been lying, unable to sin, like a silent rock in the

grave. And the soul says: It is the body that has sinned, for from the day that I have departed from it, I have been flying in the air like a bird, unable to sin. Rabbi said to him: A king owned a beautiful orchard which contained beautiful early figs. And he stationed two guards – one lame, the other blind. The lame one said to the blind: “I see beautiful early figs in the orchard. Come, mount me on your shoulders and together we will bring the figs here to eat them. The lame mounted the back of the blind, and they brought the figs and they ate them. The owner of the orchard came and said to the guards: “The beautiful early figs – where are they?” The lame one said to him, “Do I have feet with which to travel to the figs? I certainly could not have taken them.” And the blind one said: “Do I have eyes with which to see where the figs are? I certainly could not have taken them.” What did the king do? He mounted the lame one on the back of the blind, and he judged them as a unit.ζ But we were asking: which sin must a sleuth, if he is to sleuth, avoid? Digression.

Certainly he was no sleuth. A sleuth could find better lodgings. A sleuth could detect the source of an odour that rose into the room and a half of his nose. Pardon the hypotyposis. He would not sleuth.η He would remain silent. He would not ask: How should we act? He would not reflect on the past of his future. He would lie on the cot of lethargy in a room and a half. To act, to sleuth, to rise up and go into the world, that is a Halakhah for the Time of the Messiah : :

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κ Though it was present only in spirit.

λ That wind. In July, runs its fingers through the branches, whistles like a boy; in September raps at your window; in December comes to cut your throat.

μ Refugees from the fall of communism.

ν A dark, still fermentation of dead and dying things.

τ Those days imbricated in another tense, not quite past nor future. No matter. Today, the incinerator chute below, the pool above. How should we act?