

Shall we say he was not in the habit of reading obituaries?<sup>α</sup> Not then. Not now. Not ever. And yet. Not yet. This is possible to refute. In fact, at one time,<sup>β</sup> death was all he read. A very heavy stone. Tossed the rest of the paper back into the trash without so much as a glance. Even today, I miss the papers. Don't know why.

<sup>α</sup> An obituary is the tent over a dead body.

<sup>β</sup> There is no earlier and later in the Torah.

<sup>ε</sup> Here a generalization that needs a detail and a detail that needs a generalization.

<sup>φ</sup> The gnaw of longing is itself an addiction.

<sup>γ</sup> Two?! Why do I need two?

<sup>η</sup> Or some (unfortunate) body's idea of a joke.

<sup>κ</sup> The word is free on both sides.

<sup>λ</sup> This morning, slipping that pink toe into its shoe, in the optimism of the new day, it seemed no one could possibly guess, but now...

What use the news of the world for one such as I? Nostalgia, the sweet, fetid stink of hindsight, detritus with a rosy hue.<sup>ε</sup> And yet, I admit to a lack, a desire. A cerebral pang.<sup>φ</sup> Shall we say it's the obituaries I miss? Though I have only myself to blame. All a question of access. Those twenty-two flights down to the street. And the elevator. Elevators, I should say. Two.<sup>γ</sup> Though they might as well be one. A flaw in the wiring.<sup>η</sup> They travel together always. Has someone called from the ground floor? Let us say so. Two elevators descend in tandem. Doors slide in unison. Accordion duet. That moment of hesitation before a meaningless choice. Identical chambers. Why hesitate?<sup>κ</sup> Unless. Your neighbour. That stranger. Also waiting. Fiddling a set of keys. Unwrapping a scarf. Resting a bag against the ashtray. Trace of the Other's breath. If such were the case, you too would try for a split.

But not obviously. Because would he be insulted? Would he think it was his odour, the white cane, the flaming forehead pimple? Hole in a sock?<sup>λ</sup> Perhaps none of the above, or all. But really just the close quarters. Awkward silence. The risk of insipid conversation, the enormous effort required. This is the difficulty. To fumble through my memory for a personality appropriate to circumstance. Perhaps two chambers arrive empty, you are alone, but some residual odour causes you to recoil from your initial choice and leap for the other. At such moments, time bends. The doors, barely open, are already slamming shut. Whereas. When you're inside, waiting to go up, hoping no one will spoil your solitude... But enough about elevators. The point is. At last, the point! Or perhaps not *the* point, but a point, however minute. And yet. Not yet. Why go on and on? Do we so much as recall the topic, I mean the point, under discussion? The point is this: that, from the point of view of one who has decided, at some point, to point himself downstairs for a newspaper, there may as well be a single elevator, because instead of racing up to

get you, the empty one, carrying as little content as this anecdote and moving about as quickly, has descended with its partner,<sup>μ</sup> paused toothless while said partner ingested a passenger on the ground floor, then accompanied its twin up to, say, the twelfth, where, opening wide, it waits agape for the other to disgorge, and then and

<sup>μ</sup> A second elevator would be like a second column, but this only resembles this. This is always only this.

only then, both mount the shaft together, to collect. You. Is that the point? Elevators? Two!? Why do I need two? We were speaking of newspapers. We were the subject of newspapers. I mean, newspapers were our subject. If point there is to be, ought not said point to vaguely point towards newspapers? Or news?" The point then. Why go out for newspapers? Why be bothered? All the trouble waiting for the elevators. And the neighbour. His purple zit. What sort of addiction, you are thinking,<sup>π</sup> if a bit of a wait and someone's facial blemish will suffice to dissuade? The long twist of waiting is not what finally operates to dissuade.<sup>ρ</sup> What if that pimple were on my forehead? If it happens to be my toe rubbing against the inside of my shoe? A case of desire conflicting with dread.<sup>σ</sup> Philia and phobia. From neither of which I suffered at the time I am

<sup>ν</sup> At the very least, paper.

<sup>π</sup> But perhaps you are not. Thinking, I mean.

<sup>ρ</sup> Though waiting provides that unwelcome opportunity for thinking.

<sup>σ</sup> The lure of death. News from the other side. The fear of leaving the languorous solitude of my shelf.

recalling. At that time, it was pure accident I happened to glance at the paper I was using to cover my legs, or fill my shoe, pure chance it was the obituaries section (at last we approach the point), and purest chance the name was one I recognized or dimly recalled. So, in the end, if story is what we are unfolding, surely all this talk about habituation and elevators is pointless : :

When to die quietly is the decent thing. As any mother will, or ought to do. In due time. Until then, a transistor radio hardly compensates. Not for peace and quiet. Later, one's mater having gone, there is less need of a radio. It was necessary for this to be said. In the street or on the bus he was silent.<sup>α</sup> Con-

<sup>α</sup> Morning is the time to hide. They wake up, hale and hearty, their tongues hanging out for order, beauty and justice, baying for their due. S. Beckett *Molloy*

<sup>β</sup> I mean the music, or the baseball game.

<sup>ε</sup> The body, the thing itself. This is ours and this is theirs. This only resembles this.

<sup>φ</sup> So quickly the difficulty (myself) returned to its place.

<sup>γ</sup> Every tanna is the amora of someone else's tanna.

<sup>η</sup> Let us say I soaked those plugs overnight.

<sup>κ</sup> I mean the radio, not the ability to suffer without complaining.

fronted the surface of the world from between a set of earphones. His ears filled with bubblegum.<sup>β</sup> We are already into extra innings. Arm-pits. A matter went out from among them. Up from the depths past the gape of mouths and rows of teeth.<sup>ε</sup> I have no preference: baseball or bubblegum. Classical or call-in. It is necessary, to thicken the walls of the cocoon. To cloister the ugly worm of the self. Anticipation. The armpit of a passerby. Suddenly an eye-to-eye. Someone else is a beast. My forehead drenched, my already fragile digestion.<sup>φ</sup> Perhaps this cannot enter your mind. I heard the talk show of the Amoraim.<sup>γ</sup> Shall we say that these disagree according to the difference of opinion between A and B? A good host should be a reactionary. Something to gnaw on. Instead of my tongue. The fleshy wall. The trilobite's cephalic shield. Of course, to say a radio is not to say a new radio. She'd had it for years. Hence the disinfectant.<sup>η</sup> She was not happy to see me plugged in her presence. And yet she did not complain. How could she? It was her gift.<sup>κ</sup> An attachment. Nor did I look her in the mouth. Or any place else. If I could help it. Up to here there is no difficulty. Boys are forever wrestling with their mothers

and it was said thus. It escaped me. Une demi-baguette. How can you find it? Bananas. Intolerant. So brief and yet so disconcerting. Something else. A newspaper: Perverse addiction or last tenuous link to the world? Should we rely on answers such as these? Perhaps you cannot possibly think so. They subtract and add and expound. Superfluity in measured amounts. He raised the volume on the radio. Smiled with difficulty. Returned to a room and a half : :

<sup>ω</sup> We are already weary running with the foot-soldiers, and yet they bring on the horses! Jeremiah 12:5

and their mothers' deaths. They say in the West. Such is not my case. Having always been indifferent to mine. In life as in death. I mean hers. Mine too for that matter. Perfectly happy to leave her to hers and get on with mine. Such as it is.<sup>λ</sup> But I digress. The radio. A lucky thing she gave it to me. Because when she died, she

left me nothing. Must I go on like a peddler? I'll stop.<sup>μ</sup> The shopkeepers. Who would venture from a room and a half but for provisions?<sup>ν</sup> Let us say, a fixed routine is best. First, the elevator. But that's another story. Who mentioned this item, which is being cited now as if it had already been mentioned? Let us wildly assume disaster has not already struck before the used bookstore. Two blocks north one block east.<sup>π</sup> We are already in extra innings. To sell, not to buy. My dwindling collection. Deduce from it, and again from it. Shall we divide books into groups?<sup>ρ</sup> This is in and this is in. Those that cannot be sold. Those I do not desire to sell but would bring a good price. Those they buy by the pound. Blue books. Schwitters. Poe. Poetry in Tagalog. Here is not an alphabet. Books that will not sell today but may someday sell again. Books I would have liked to have written.<sup>σ</sup> Books too tall for the shelf.

Generalization. Detail. Generalization. Generalization. Generalization.

detail detail, detail.

Won't you climb up on my shoulders so that together we might steal a beautiful early fig. For I am blind and you are lame. And those figs. Beautiful. Early. Luscious exhalation. Superfluity in measured amounts. Is there nothing else? What remains beyond the end of story? Dust (a hint of transgression). There is no agent for transgression. A person is close to himself. A blind body beneath a lame head. Shall we judge them together? A man is always considered forewarned. Those figs. From which benefit is forbidden. Act, deed, event, precedent. Something learned from its end. Ouch, yet another soteriology. A perilous repetition perched blindly upon my shoulders. Dust settles. What remains? A detail. The taste of figs. Beautiful. Early. Dust of seeds upon your tongue : :

Books by adults for children. Or by children claiming to be adults. Books only a child could understand (Stein). Here, at least, a pretext. To continue in this way. But we were speaking of grocers. They incline. They wipe their pink hands. What do you have to say? Is there anything else? Sexual relations, money, pigs, leprosy. The violence of an empty phrase. The underexpected. It was said thus

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<sup>λ</sup> Perhaps one finds meaning only in one's own death. Always already too late.

<sup>μ</sup> To be perfectly Beckett, she did not actually give it to me. I took it. Which was not difficult. Because of her blindness. Well, it was of no use to her. Because of her deafness. Ça suffit! I'll stop.

<sup>ν</sup> A fistful of bananas, une demi-baguette, a can of tuna, ce thon blanc entier, mon semblable, qui baigne dans son huile.

<sup>π</sup> Knight to bishop three.

<sup>ρ</sup> In the category of external books: purely secular books, such as Homer's, may be read, so long as they do not disrupt the reader's study of the Torah. Sanhedrin 100b

<sup>σ</sup> The classic book is a frigate, a fleet. It is orderly. A sacred book is absolute, perfect. J.-L. Borges