

From “Fall in the House that Heartbreak Built,” [sic], summer ’07:

The day I moved in, in September, it was raining. It looked like someone had come in during the week and moved the walls closer together. They had scratched the hardwood floors and covered the entire kitchen, its cupboards, stove, and countertops in a sticky, red film. And the bathtub was completely crusted over with blood. Papo, Patrice’s toothless stepfather, was somehow determined that I owed him money for a cleaning fee, some sort of move-in tip, and as I stood on the sidewalk, loaded down with my box of books, telling him a payoff was completely out of the question, he blocked me from coming into the building. “*You know why you’re not paying me? Because you’re Jewish. You’re Jewish!*” I’m Jewish. “*You’re a cheap Jew!*” he yelled, because I wouldn’t give him money, because it was *common sense* to give the super something, especially after Patrice had spent so much time cleaning it, which was to whom, he indicated, all the money would rightly go. “She’s all right,” I said. “She’s an enterprising girl.” He was screaming in my face. Spitting at me. It was such an appalling scene. People stuck their heads out their windows to see what was going on. *Who was the cheap Jew?* It was me. I was the cheap Jew. They watched me stand there and take it from this paradigm of class because I needed the apartment, the cheapest one in all of New York City.

Once I cleaned it and furnished it and hung things on the walls, the place was perfectly inhabitable. I had plants, books, records. Cheap decorative shelving made of balsa wood that snapped together, built for nothing heavy. My parents donated a painting they’d hung in the house of my childhood, a six-foot long impressionist picture of the New York City skyline. My mother made denim curtains with matching pillows that I thought really gave the place a necessary touch of class. I had a small fish tank.

A friend once told me it looked like I used to be rich, but now was broke, and still had all my old stuff with me. I told him, that was fair to say.

I could walk from one far wall to the other in four strides. I don't have a dresser. I
climb a ladder to get to bed. How old am I? I am 30.

Craig Levinsky