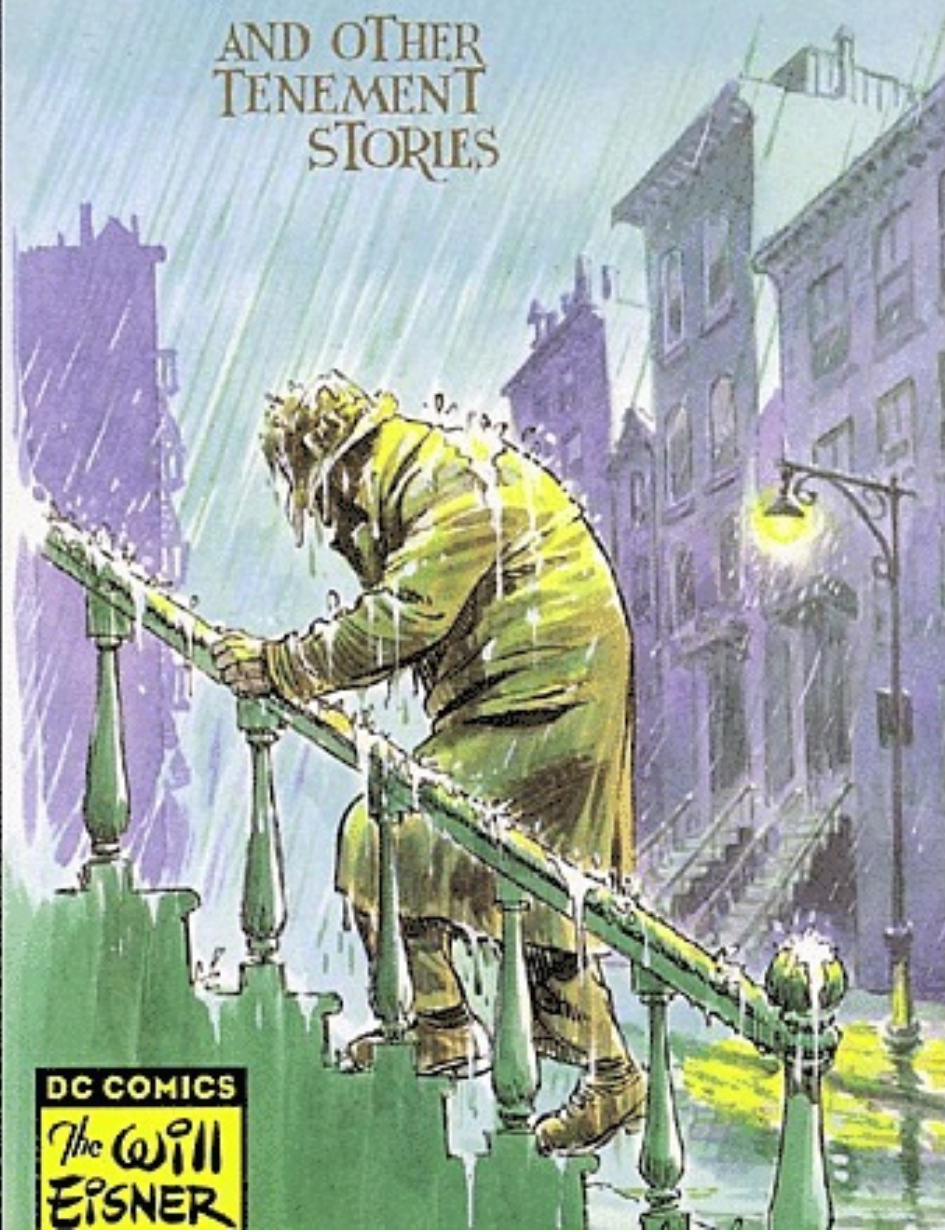


A CONTRACT WITH GOD

AND OTHER
TENEMENT
STORIES



A
Graphic
Novel
BY
WILL
EISNER

DC COMICS
The Will
EISNER



A
CONTRACT
WITH **גוֹד**

And other
tenement
stories

By
Will Eisner

A CONTRACT WITH GOD

WILL EISNER
writer and artist

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PREFACE

Early in 1940, after an intimate involvement with the birth and burgeoning of the so-called comic book art form, I undertook a weekly series entitled *The Spirit*. This was to be a complete story to appear as a newspaper insert comic book every Sunday. It revolved around a freelance masked crime fighter in the heroic tradition and would, the distributing syndicate hoped, latch on to the growing national interest in comic books.

With all the self-assurance of youth, I plunged into the task without much real planning. It was not until I came up for air after the first fifteen weeks that I realized the full magnitude of this undertaking. In fact, I was delivering a short story a week to an audience far more sophisticated and demanding than the newsstand comic book reader. The reality of the task and the enormous perimeters of the opportunity were thrilling, and I responded with the euphoria and enthusiasm of a frontiersman. In the twelve years that followed, I thrashed about this virgin territory in an orgy of experiment, using *The Spirit* as the launching platform for all the ideas that swam in my head.

With hindsight, I realize I was really only working around one core concept—that the medium, the arrangement of words and pictures in a sequence—was an art form in itself. Unique, with a structure and gestalt all its own, this medium could deal with meaningful themes. Certainly there was more for the cartoonist working in this technique to deal with than superheroes who were preventing the destruction of Earth by supervillains.

I was not alone in this belief. In the middle 1930s, Lynd Ward explored this path in his remarkable attempts at graphic storytelling. He produced several complete novels in woodcuts. One of these books, *Frankenstein*, fell into my hands in 1938 and it had an influence on my thinking thereafter. I consider my efforts in this area attempts at expansion or extension of Ward's original premise.

At the time, to openly discuss comics as an art form—or indeed to claim any autonomy or legitimacy for them—was considered a gross presumption worthy only of ridicule. In the intervening years, however, recognition and acceptance has fertilized the soil, and sequential art stands at the threshold of joining the cultural establishment. Now, in this climate warmed by serious adult attention, creators can attempt new growth in a field that formerly yielded only what Jules Feiffer referred to as junk art. The proliferation of

stunning art and imaginative exploration is but an early harvest of this germination. For me, the years after I stopped producing *The Spirit* were devoted to the application of the comic book art form to education, instruction and other pragmatic directions. Satisfying and rewarding as these were, they were also demanding, and so there was little time available to pursue the experiments I set aside in 1951. Twenty-five years later, given the time and opportunity, I embarked on the effort which you hold in your hands; a harvest at last from seedlings I had carried around with me all those years.

In this book, I have attempted to create a narrative that deals with intimate themes. In the four stories, housed in a tenement, I undertook to draw on memory culled from my own experiences and that of my contemporaries. I have tried to tell how it was in a corner of America that is still to be revisited.

The people and events in these narratives, while compounded from recall, are things which I would have you accept as real. Obviously in the creation, names and faces were rearranged. It is important to understand the times and the place in which these stories are set. Fundamentally, they were not unlike the way the world of today is for those who live in crowded proximity and in depersonalized housing. The importance of dealing with the ebb and flow of city existence and the overriding effort to escape it never seems to change for the inhabitants.

In the telling of these stories, I tried to adhere to a rule of realism which requires that caricature or exaggeration accept the limitations of actuality. To accomplish a sense of dimension, I set aside two basic working constrictions that so often inhibit the medium—space and format. Accordingly, each story was written without regard to space, and each was allowed to develop its format from itself; that is, to evolve from the narration. The normal frames (or panels) associated with sequential (comic book) art are allowed to take on their integrity. For example, in many cases an entire page is set out as a panel. The text and the balloons are interlocked with the art. I see all these as threads of a single fabric and exploit them as a language. If I have been successful at this, there will be no interruption in the flow of narrative because the picture and the text are so totally dependent on each other as to be inseparable for even a moment.

Finally, I must confess to a certain sense of uneasiness at trying to explain what I'm about to present. I have always cringed with embarrassment when listening to an artist, writer, or musician preamble an offering with an explanation of what he or she is trying to do. It is almost as though one is begging the

audience to excuse the imperfections or—at the very best—seeking to influence the judgment that will surely come. Perhaps I, too, am a victim of this insecurity, because for me, this is a new path in the forest.

To colleagues who encouraged the effort, to my family who urged me to try, to Rose Kaplan, who edited this work, and the others who read the early drafts and offered advice—my thanks.

White Plains, New York
August 1978

Addendum to the third printing: In the years since *A Contract With God* was first published, the book has been translated into six languages, including, appropriately, Yiddish—a language in which I can think but cannot read or write. I have since written several other books in this medium. They are more polished technically but with this maiden work, a big piece of my heart remains.

Tamarac, Florida
January 1989

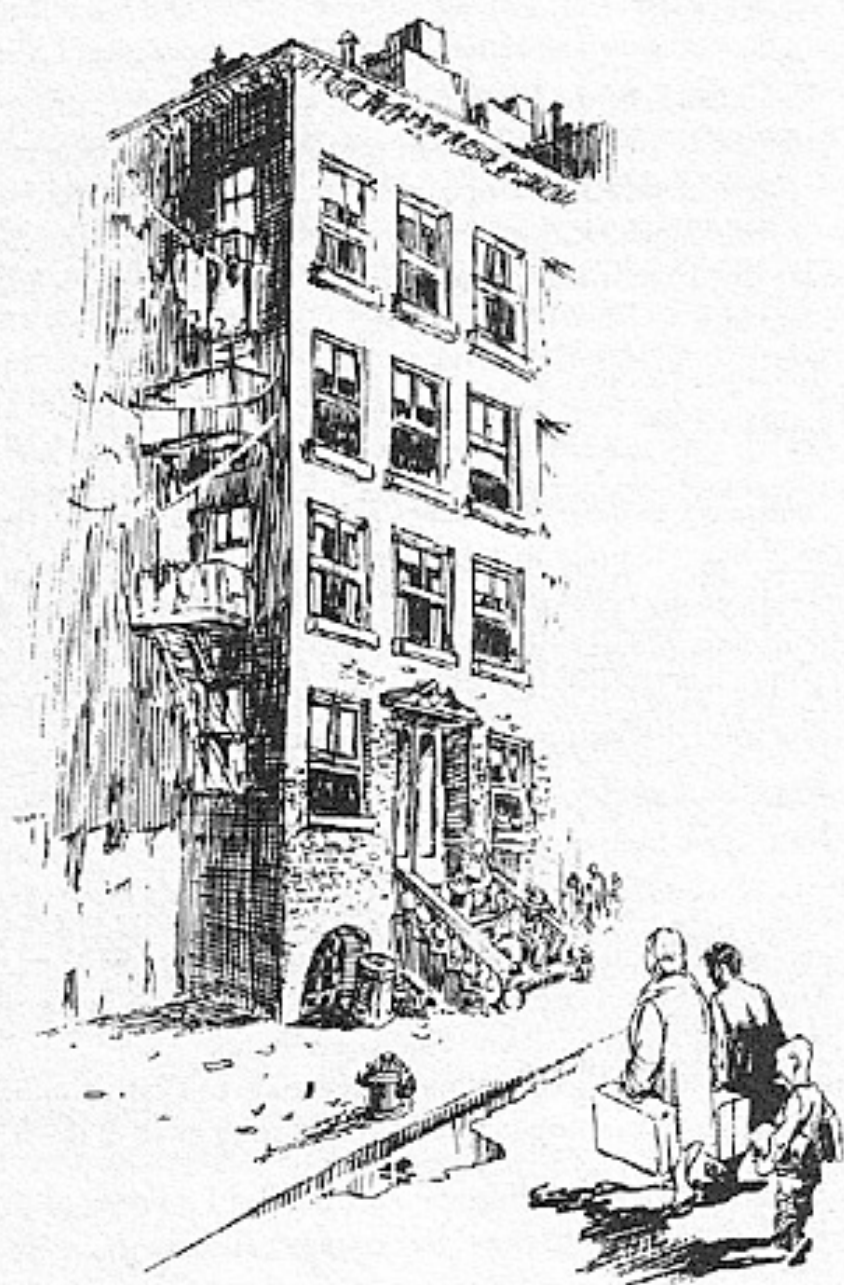
Addendum to the fifth printing: In the seventeen years that *A Contract With God* has remained in print, the enlarging field of fine graphic novels has reinforced my belief that there would be a continually growing audience for the literary pretensions of this medium. After many subsequent works, I can still look back at this maiden effort without embarrassment and I retain for it the special affection one has for a first child.

Tamarac, Florida
June 1995

Addendum to the DC Edition first printing: Now, at long last this book, my first graphic novel, will enter its seventh printing under the DC Comics flag. After 22 years of being “in print” it is assuring to know that its future will be in their strong and knowledgeable hands.

I want also to acknowledge my deep gratitude to Denis Kitchen who was responsible for its continued publication during most of those years.

Will Eisner
Tamarac, Florida
March 2000



INTRODUCTION

DENNY O'NEIL

When I agreed to do this article, I planned to cheat. Instead of actually assessing *A Contract With God*, I thought I'd pay tribute to the astonishing anomaly that is its author, Will Eisner: the creator of a self-described "middle-class hero" who has himself been a professional nonconformist; the rebel who has prospered working within that epitome of the Establishment, the Department of Defense; the hard-working, unpretentious deadline meeter who, nonetheless, produces his genre's best art. There is a major critical work to be written about Will Eisner and I had hoped to use this space to begin sketching at it, and, accidentally, to confess my own admiration for the man. (I have tried on at least twenty different occasions to write a "Will Eisner story" and I haven't yet come close.)

But I wanted to avoid dealing with *A Contract With God* because I didn't think I'd like it and I didn't care to publicly dump on a continuing source of enjoyment and inspiration; better to avoid the issue. I'd glimpsed the book at a lecture Eisner had given a week prior to publication and I wasn't impressed. It seemed that not even Eisner had accomplished what comics professionals are forever talking about: transcending the limitations of commercial comic books and using the medium for something other than simplistic morality tales, baby science fiction and, in the case of the undergrounds, scatological satire—which are the things comics have been at their best, and not to be scoffed at. Still, isn't there *anything* else?

The answer is yes, as of the publication of *A Contract With God*. After reading the book five times, I am convinced it needs no apologia. Goethe's critical dictum remains the best: the critic can only decide what the artist was trying to accomplish, and whether he succeeded. By that standard, *A Contract With God* is a near masterpiece.

However, for me to appreciate Eisner's achievement I had to resolve two problems—which may bother you, too. The first was a preconceived notion of what a comic is. I've written over 700 comic book stories and read tens of thousands and so, despite the pretensions to perception and objectivity that accompany a reasonably fancy degree in English Lit, I pick up a comic with reflexive anticipations. Action, movement, extravagant locales, a certain kind of pacing and—may the ghost of Henry James forgive me—a broad drama of crime and punishment: those are my expectations from anything with pictures and word balloons, and they are catered to very little in *Contract*.

The second difficulty is that, being from the Irish-Catholic Midwest, I am largely unfamiliar with the Jewish milieu that forms Will Eisner's memories.

What he has given us here are those memories, as tales, and realized in a fusion of image and copy. They are simple and they are harsh; there are no easy morals to be gotten from them. The Good Guys don't win and the Bad Guys don't lose because there are no good guys and bad guys. Instead, there are lonely, frightened, and ambitious people, immigrants seeking relief from poverty, despair, and the dread that, unhappy as the present is, the future may be worse. A man remembering in that way is not likely to depict heroes and villains; rather, he will be compassionate toward everyone, winner and loser alike, and compassion is the pervading, unstated theme of Eisner's work. His sympathetic recognition of human frailty and folly is most evident in his representation of sex: not the smirking prurience that usually passes for the erotic in comics (and in many other arenas of popular culture) but the pleasures of the body as a palliative for misery and as manifestations of a raging libido—enjoyed, incidentally, by individuals not particularly beautiful.

Of course, such autobiographical reminiscence is common in modern writing; it is the raw material of the stories of Bernard Malamud, Philip Roth, and Isaac Bashevis Singer, to name three of dozens of Jewish writers. But Eisner's presentation is unique: with the fusion of image and copy I mentioned earlier he mimics the operations of memory itself, perhaps as well as they can be imitated on paper.

The prologue which relates the background of the Bronx tenement that is the setting of the stories and a brief digression explaining the plight of Jews in Czarist Russia correspond to the gestalt of the consciousness—information a bright child would acquire from his environment without anyone specifically teaching it. The scenes he could not actually be remembering, the scenes he was not present at, are the adult's attempts to make whole his childhood recollections, to fill in the gaps, a process akin to psychoanalysis. Eisner writes in the past tense, a departure from normal comics technique; these are, after all, past events. Yet his dialogue, presented in the familiar balloons, is present tense; one remembers words in the mode in which they were spoken. There is no contradiction here: Eisner is using the resources of the language exactly as a novelist uses them, to combine past and present into a single experience, and with the added resource of his artwork.

The pictures are Eisner's special contribution and what lifts the book into its own category. I've heard casual readers complain that Eisner's people are "cartoony" compared to his realistic cityscapes, and in his comic strips the contrast does take getting used to (though it is worth the effort); this may explain why his *Spirit* comics have not been as commercially successful as lesser, more conventional strips. However, in *A Contract With God*, the exaggerated features of the characters work for the whole. The child in us does not remember the adults we met as they actually were; he remembers them as archetypes—as caricatures, almost. He remembers them as Eisner draws them. Similarly, we do not recall every detail of the houses and streets we inhabited as children, as anyone who has ever visited a childhood neighborhood after a long absence will testify: we recall *impressions*, the sort of mnemonic sketches Eisner draws. The Bronx of *A Contract With God* is much less precisely rendered than the Central City of *The Spirit*, and that is surely a conscious decision of a thinking artist intent on introducing us to his private, interior experience instead of reproducing the world as most of us see it. Eisner even puts the ink the book is printed in to his artistic uses: it is sepia brown, a close approximation of the monochrome psychologists say is the color of dreams—and memories.

I realize I'm making *A Contract With God* seem very complicated. It isn't. What Eisner has accomplished needs to be seen: once it is, everything is plain, and no explanation or elaboration is necessary.

The book fulfills Goethe's criterion: it succeeds splendidly and uniquely in being what Eisner wants it to be.

A TENEMENT IN THE BRONX

At 55 Dropsie Avenue, the Bronx,
New York- not far from the elevated
station- stood the tenement.



Like the others, it was built around
1920 when the decaying apartment
houses in lower Manhattan could
no longer accommodate the flood
of immigrants that poured into

These buildings -
called "Tenements"
after the 16th century
legal term for a
multiple dwelling
that housed tenants
- soon occupied large
tracts of Bronx land.



By 1930 they were already part of the
roots of a whole new group of first-
generation Americans and their
foreign-born parents.

Inside - in the "railroad-flat" layouts
lived low-paid city employees, laborers,
clerks and their families. They teemed
with a noisy neighborliness not
unlike the life-style the newcomers
had left on the "other side." It was
a kind of ship board fellowship of

passengers in transit - for, they were on a voyage of upward mobility.

They were intent on their own survival, busy with breeding their young and dreaming of a better life they knew existed "Uptown."

What community spirit there was, stemmed from their hostility toward a common enemy - the landlord!



55 Dropsie Avenue was typical of most tenements. Its tenants were varied. Some came and went. Many remained there for a life time... imprisoned by poverty or other factors. It was a sort of micro-village - and the world was **Dropsie Avenue**.

Within its walls
great dramas were
played out.

There was no real
privacy-no anonymity.

One was either a
participant or a
member of the
front-row audience.

"Everybody
knew about
everybody."

The following
stories are based
on life in these
tenements during
the 1930's...the
dirty thirties!
They are true
stories.

Only the telling
and the
portrayals have
converted
them to fiction.

Will Eisner



1



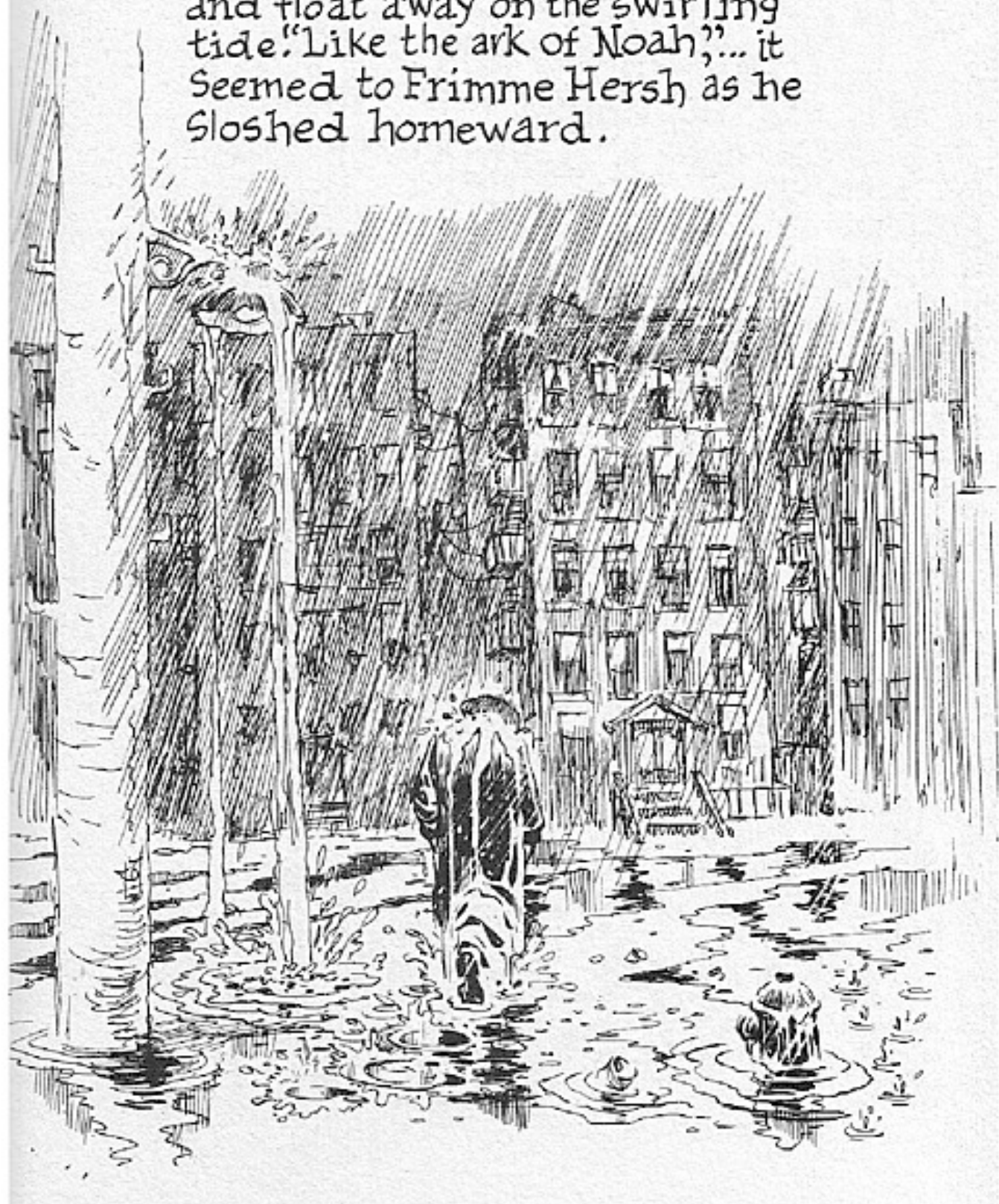


All day
the rain
poured
down on
the Bronx
without
mercy

The sewers overflowed
and the waters rose
over the curbs of the street.



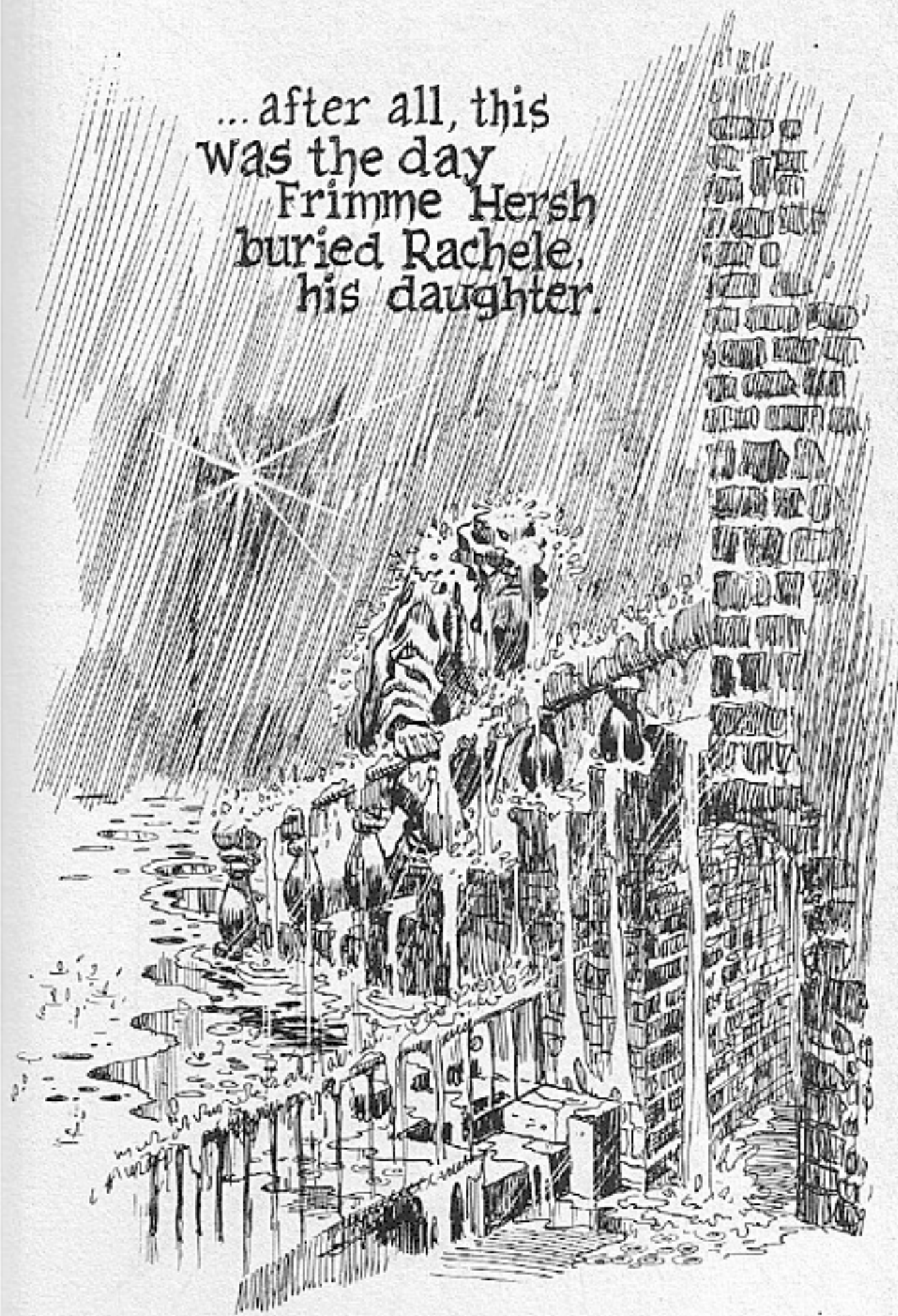
The tenement at no. 55 Dropsie Avenue seemed ready to rise and float away on the swirling tide. "Like the ark of Noah,"... it seemed to Frimme Hersh as he sloshed homeward.

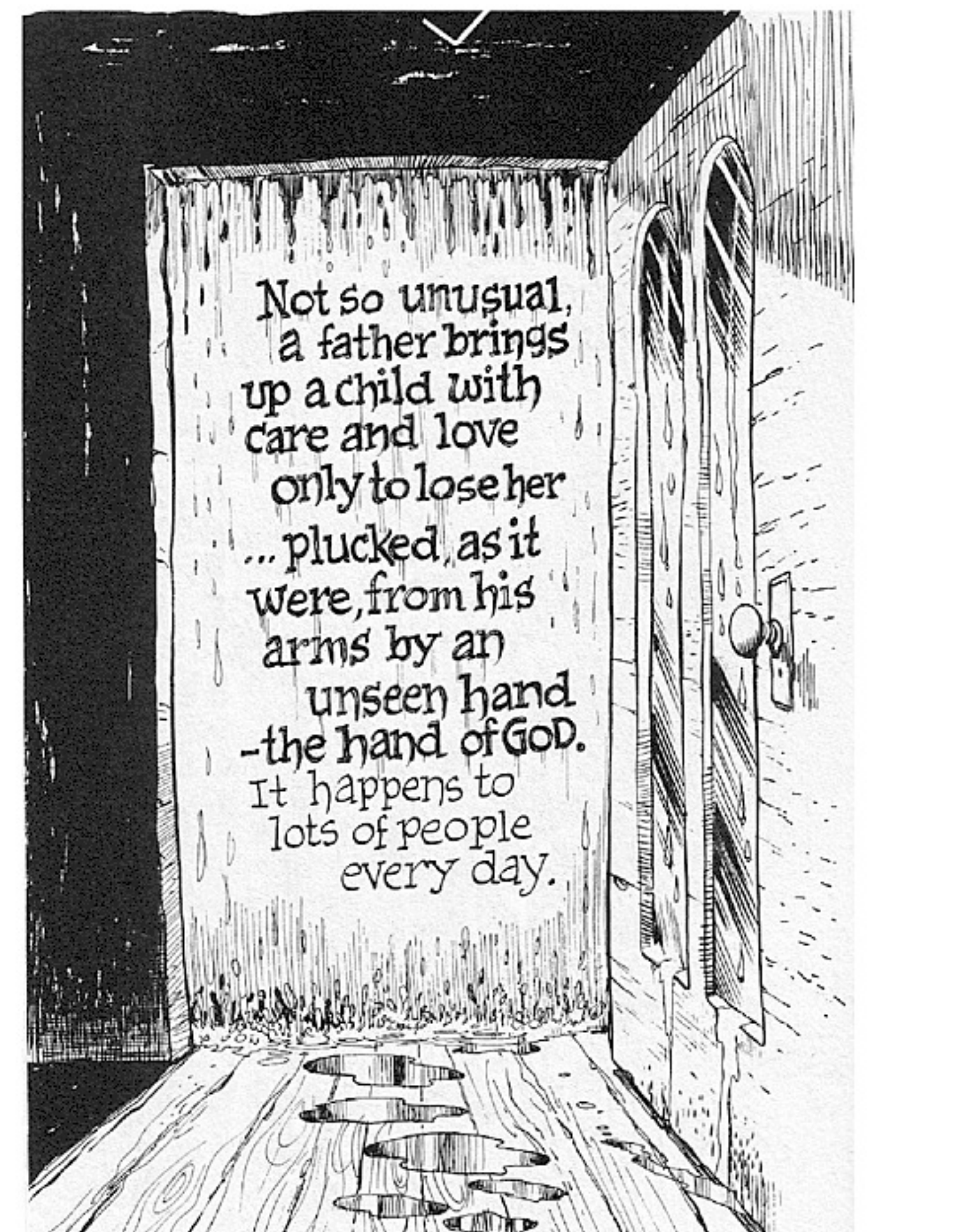


Only the tears of
ten thousand
Weeping angels
could cause
Such a deluge!
And, come to think
of it, maybe
that is exactly
what it was...



...after all, this
was the day
Frimme Hersh
buried Rachele,
his daughter.





Not so unusual,
a father brings
up a child with
care and love
only to lose her
... plucked, as it
were, from his
arms by an
unseen hand
-the hand of God.
It happens to
lots of people
every day.

...to others, maybe.





... but not to Frimme Hersh.

And why not to Frimme
Hersh ??



That's a fair question!



It should not have happened
to Frimme Hersh

**BECAUSE FRIMME HERSH
HAD A CONTRACT
WITH GOD!**



And
a contract
is a
contract !
It was, after
all, a solemn
agreement of
many years.





In 1882 Tsar Alexander II of Russia was assassinated and a wave of terrible anti-semitic pogroms swept the country.

In that year also, Frimme Hersh was born in a little village near Tiflis, named Piske.

Somehow his family survived the massacre and Frimehleh, as he was lovingly called, grew up.

By the time he was ten, it became clear that this boy was special. He was brilliant and seemed to acquire knowledge from-the-air. In a poor stetle like Piske, where survival was the main concern, how else?

Above all, Frimehleh was helpful and kind. After his parents died, he became the child of the childless in Piske.



In those years, this was said to him often for he performed many, many good deeds.



One day, after a terrible attack, the surviving elders summoned him.



THE NEXT ATTACK MAY WIPE US OUT, SO WE HAVE SELECTED YOU TO SAVE, FOR WE BELIEVE YOU ARE FAVORED BY GOD!





...And so Hersh obeyed. Two nights later
on the trail deep in the forest...





And
that night
in the cold
forest, he
wrote
the contract
on a small
stone.





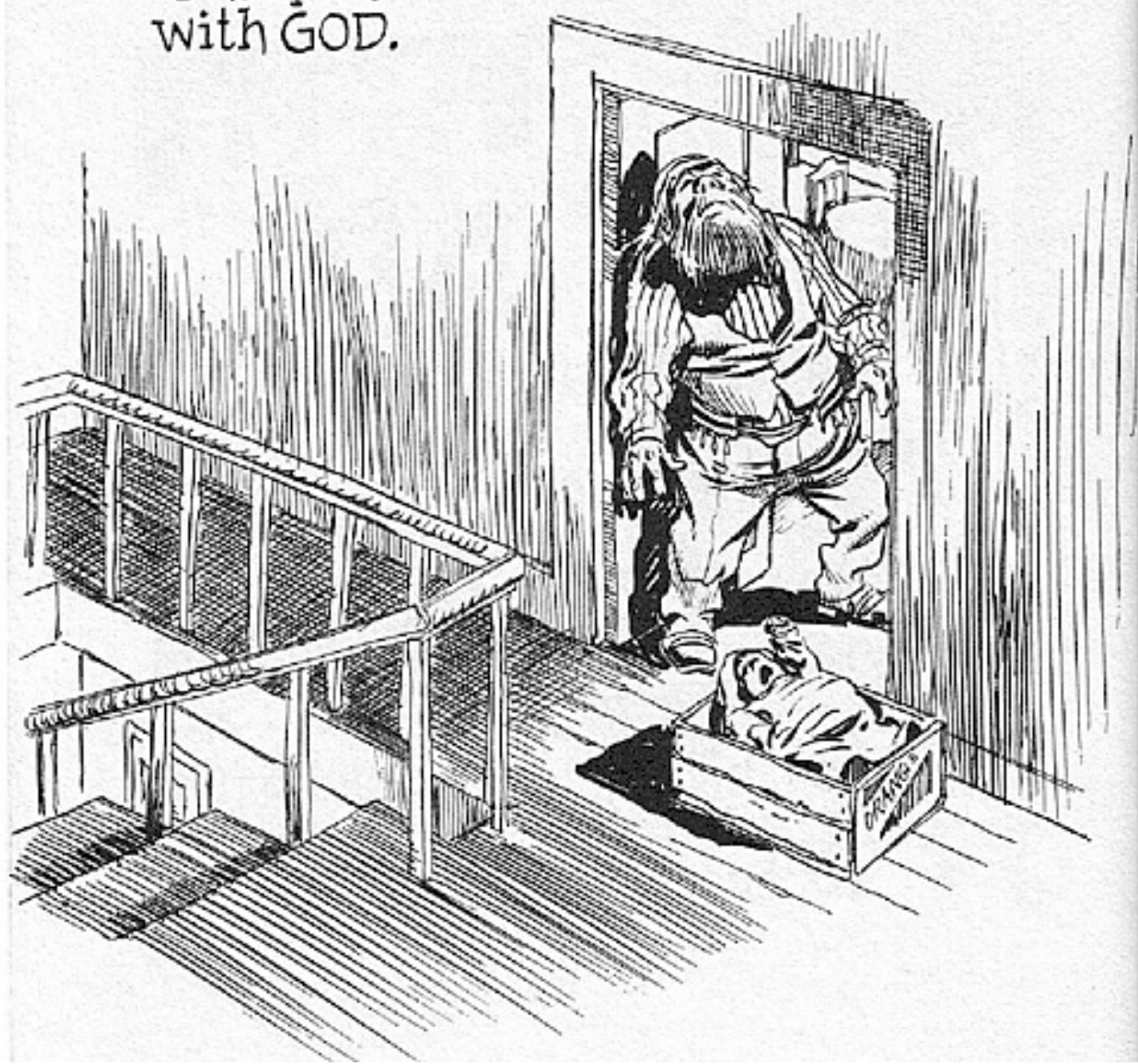
And with the little stone tablet in his pocket, Frimme Hersh settled in New York City where he found shelter in the Hassidic community. There he took religious instruction and devoted himself to good works,



Faithfully and piously, he adhered to the terms of his contract with GOD.

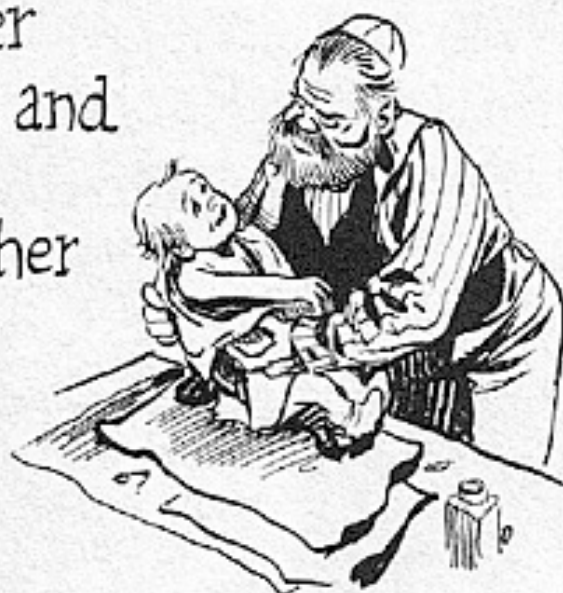
In time he became a respected member of the Synagogue, trusted with money and social matters.

So it was not surprising that it was on Hersh's doorstep that an anonymous mother abandoned her infant girl. What could be clearer? To Frimme, this was part of his pact with GOD.



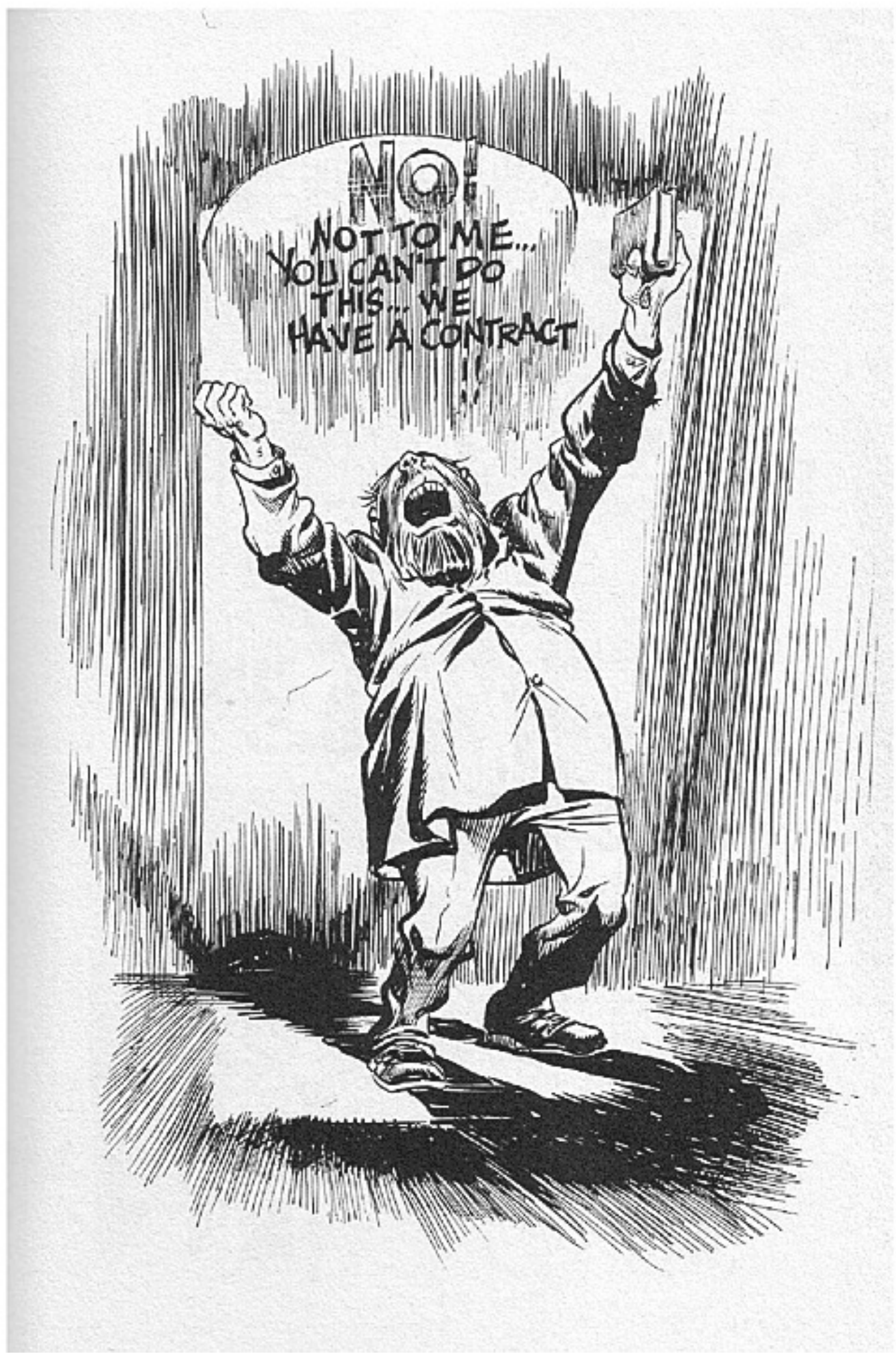
Since no one wanted a child
born of GOD-knows-what Kind
of parents, Frimme Hersh
adopted the baby himself.

He named her
Rachele, after
his mother, and
devoted
himself to her
With all his
love.



So, she grew up blossoming in the warmth and nourishment of Frimme's gentle heart and pious ways. She was indeed his child and the joy of his years. Then one day - in the springtime of her life - Rachele fell ill. Suddenly and fatally.





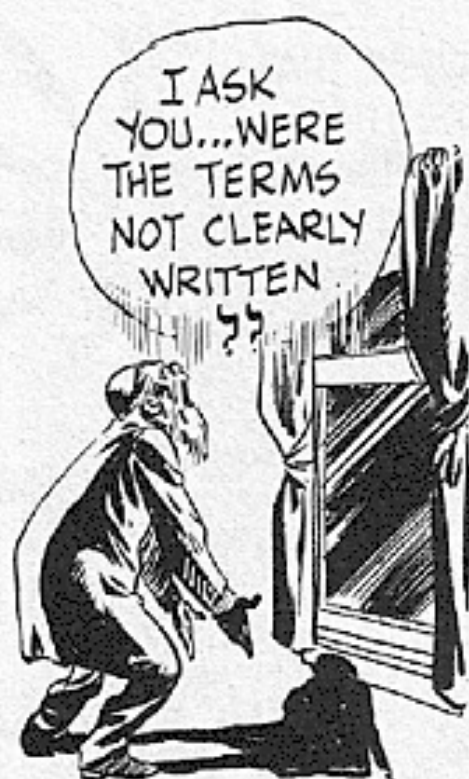
That night Frimme Hersh
confronted GOD...



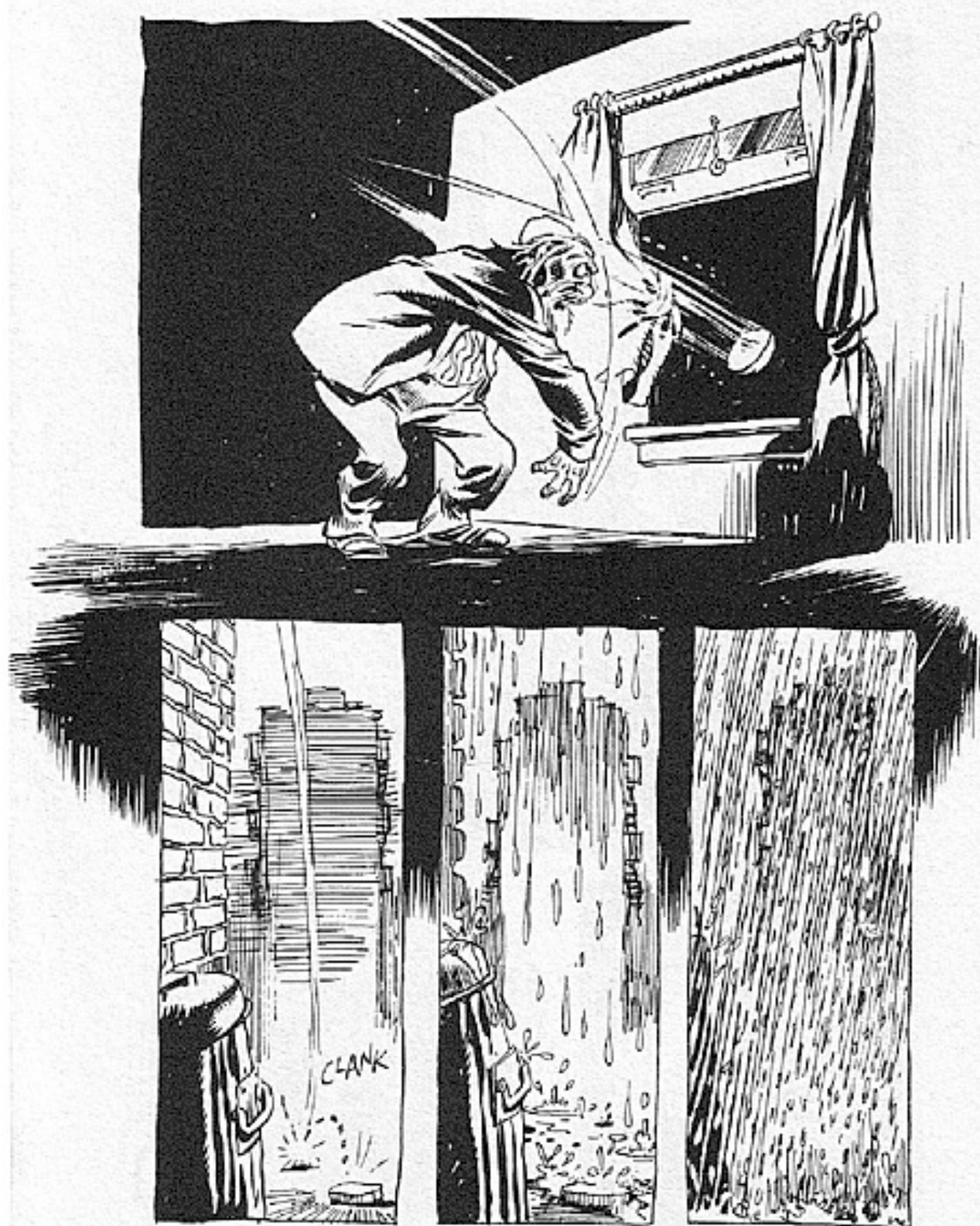
...and the old
tenement trembled
under the
fury of the
dialogue











All during the days of mourning that followed the funeral, the rain fell without pause.

Friends came—each offering Hersh the usual words of comfort which he accepted in stony silence.

THE RAIN IS FALLING



At the end of the days
of Shiva in the dawn of the
eighth day, the sun rose in a
clear sky and Frimme Hersh
said the morning prayer...for
the last time.



Then...With deliberation...he
shaved off his beard...



...and
walked to
the 196th Street
bank.



SO, MR. HERSH
YOU WANT TO **BUY**
THE PARCEL ON
DROPSIE AVE...

YES...YOU
KNOW IT- THE
TENEMENT
AT NO. 55



WELL, NOW...
IT'S AN EXPENSIVE
PIECE OF
PROPERTY.

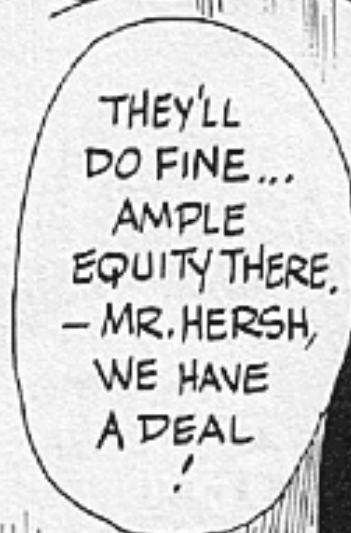
WHAT E-X-P-E-N-S-I-V-E?
PLEASE, MR. JOHNSON,
I KNOW YOU FORECLOSED
ON IT TWICE!



SO, FOR THE
MORTGAGE I'LL
BUY IT!...BELIEVE
ME IT AINT WORTH
IT...but IT'S A
START!

HMPFF...
WELL, NOW I
THINK WE CAN
MAKE A DEAL!
...WHAT IS YOUR
FINANCIAL
WORTH?





For the first time, Frimme HersH lied.

For the first time, he committed an act which formerly was unthinkable.

The bonds were not his- they had only been entrusted to him for safekeeping by the synagogue.



...AND BESIDES, WHO AM I HURTING?! IN A YEAR I'LL BUY BACK THE BONDS... SO, A BIG TSIMMIS !!



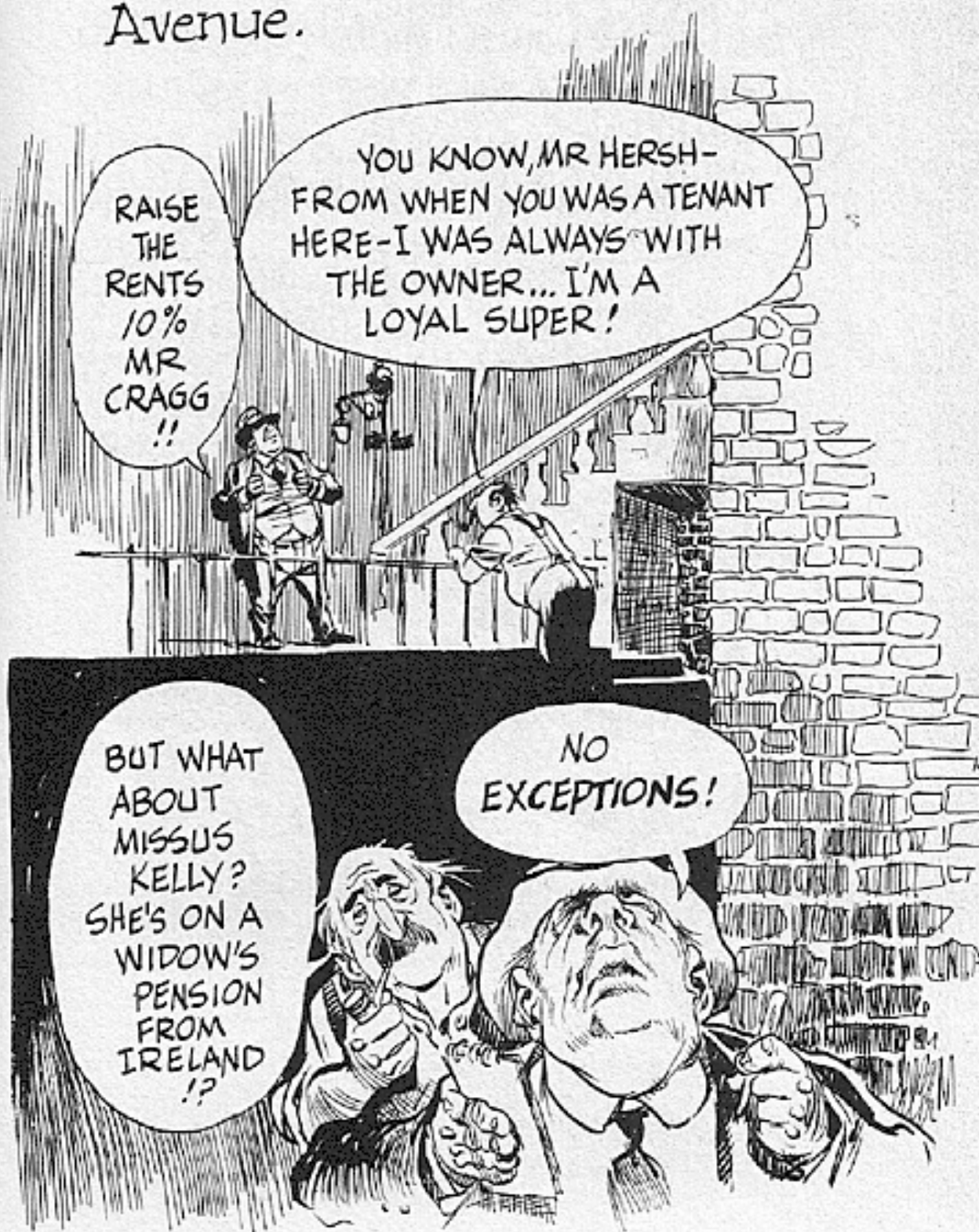
So, Frimme Hersh became the new owner of 55 Dropsie Avenue.

RAISE
THE
RENTS
10%
MR
CRAGG
!!

YOU KNOW, MR HERSH -
FROM WHEN YOU WAS A TENANT
HERE - I WAS ALWAYS WITH
THE OWNER... I'M A
LOYAL SUPER!

BUT WHAT
ABOUT
MISSUS
KELLY?
SHE'S ON A
WIDOW'S
PENSION
FROM
IRELAND
!?

NO
EXCEPTIONS!



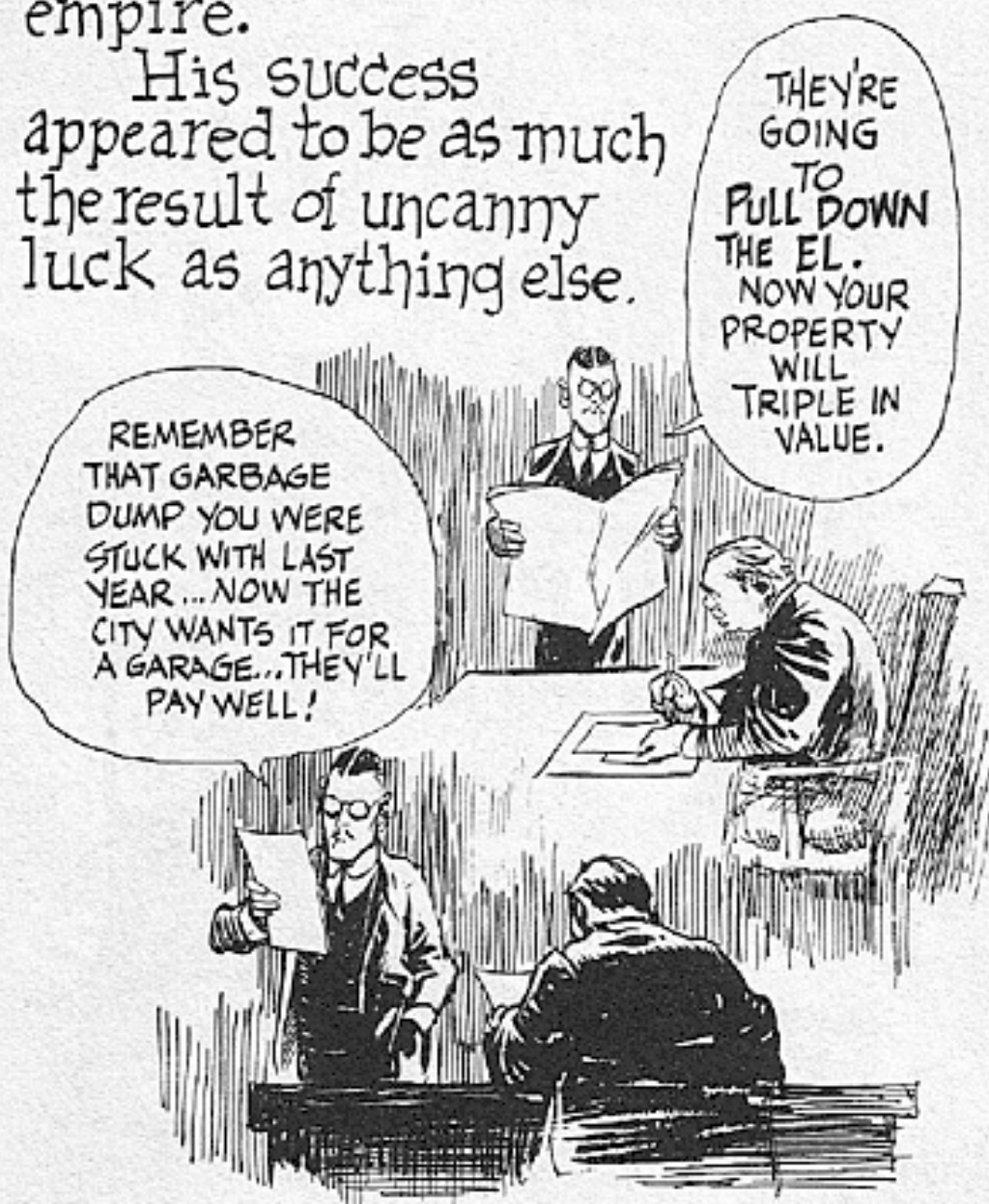
YOU WILL ALSO CUT
DOWN ON STEAM HEAT
10% FROM NOW ON THE
TENANTS WILL MAKE THEIR
OWN REPAIRS...I DON'T
WANT TO KNOW FROM
NO COMPLAINTS!

ACH...
THESE JEWS
...YESTERDAY
A POOR TENANT,
TODAY THE OWNER!
...HOW DO THEY
DO IT ?!



Within a year, Frimme Hersh gleaned enough out of the property to acquire the one next door. Within the next three years, he accumulated the beginning of a real estate empire.


His success appeared to be as much the result of uncanny luck as anything else.



Before long he took a mistress,
a 'shikseh' from Scranton, Pa.,
and took up a lifestyle he
felt more appropriate to his
new station.

He traded buildings like toys.
But one building he never
sold-the tenement on Dropsie Ave.
At least once every week he would
come there...just to look at it.





WHY DON'T
YOU SELL
THOSE CRUMMY
BUILDINGS
FRIM?!

WHY DON'T
YOU MIND
YOUR OWN
BUSINESS!!

Y'KNOW, FRIM,
YOU GOT, LIKE, A
BLACK HOLE INSIDE
O' YOU!

YOU DON'T DRINK...
YEAH, THAT'S IT-HAVE A DRINK!
MY FATHER USED TO SAY IT
FILLED THE BLACK HOLE
INSIDE HIM... COME ON,
BABY, TRY IT!



TRY...
COME
ON.

AAAHH.. Y'R
HOPELESS!

...WE NEVER GO NOWHERE, FRIM!
WHAT KIND OF LIFE IS THIS?—YOU'RE
SO RICH YOU CAN BUY ANYTHING
YOU WANT... SO, BUY IT!!

WE
DON'T
EVEN
GO TO NO
CHURCH...

HEY!
Y'WANT
I SHOULD
BECOME
JEWISH
?



FRIM?
FRIM?
NOW,
WHAT
DID I
SAY
WRONG
?



One evening Frimme Hersh
walked from his penthouse
uptown all the way to
the old synagogue.



There he
called on
the wisest of
the elders.

DO YOU
REMEMBER
ME?... I'M
FRIMME
HERSH.

WE
REMEMBER
YOU.

I AM VERY RICH NOW
EVERYTHING I TOUCH
TURNS TO GOLD -
AS THEY SAY.



A FEW YEARS AGO I
USED THE CONGREGATION'S
BONDS AS COLLATERAL.
NOW I CAN REPAY YOU



SO, I'M RETURNING
THEM, WITH INTEREST!



WE ARE
ALL
GRATEFUL.

NOW, I NEED
SOMETHING FROM
YOU!




FROM US?
...WHAT CAN
WE GIVE A
WEALTHY
MAN?



Carefully, Hersh recounted the history of his former contract.





THAT CONTRACT
WAS WRITTEN WHEN
I WAS A CHILD—SO,
WHO KNOWS, MAYBE
IT WAS POORLY
WRITTEN !



BUT
MR. HERSH,
THIS IS A
**PRIVATE
MATTER**
BETWEEN
YOU AND GOD
!!

YOU ARE LEARNED
IN THE WORD OF GOD
—AND IF YOU KNOW
HIS WORD YOU KNOW
HIS WILL !

IF YOU WILL HELP ME IN THIS, I
WILL ALSO DONATE TO THE SYNAGOGUE
THE TENEMENT AT 55 DROPSIE AVENUE
--THIS WILL PROVIDE A GOOD
INCOME, BELIEVE ME!



And so the three old men pondered
the request.

WHAT RIGHT
HAVE WE TO
BE A PARTY
TO THIS...

... ON THE OTHER HAND, IF NOT
US -WHO THEN? ARE WE NOT
AFTER ALL LEARNED IN
THE LAWS OF GOD ??



BUT, REBBE,
WOULD IT NOT BE
A BLASPHEMY
IF WE SHOULD
DEVIATE
FROM THE LAW ?

WE
WILL
NOT
DEVIATE !
... WE
WILL
ABBREVIATE
!



IS NOT ALL RELIGION A
CONTRACT BETWEEN MAN
- AND GOD?

SO, WHAT IS HERSH ASKING FOR,
AFTER ALL ??...HE IS ASKING US
TO PROVIDE HIM WITH A GUIDING
DOCUMENT-SO THAT HE MIGHT LIVE IN
HARMONY WITH GOD... CAN WE TRULY
DENY HIM THIS ??



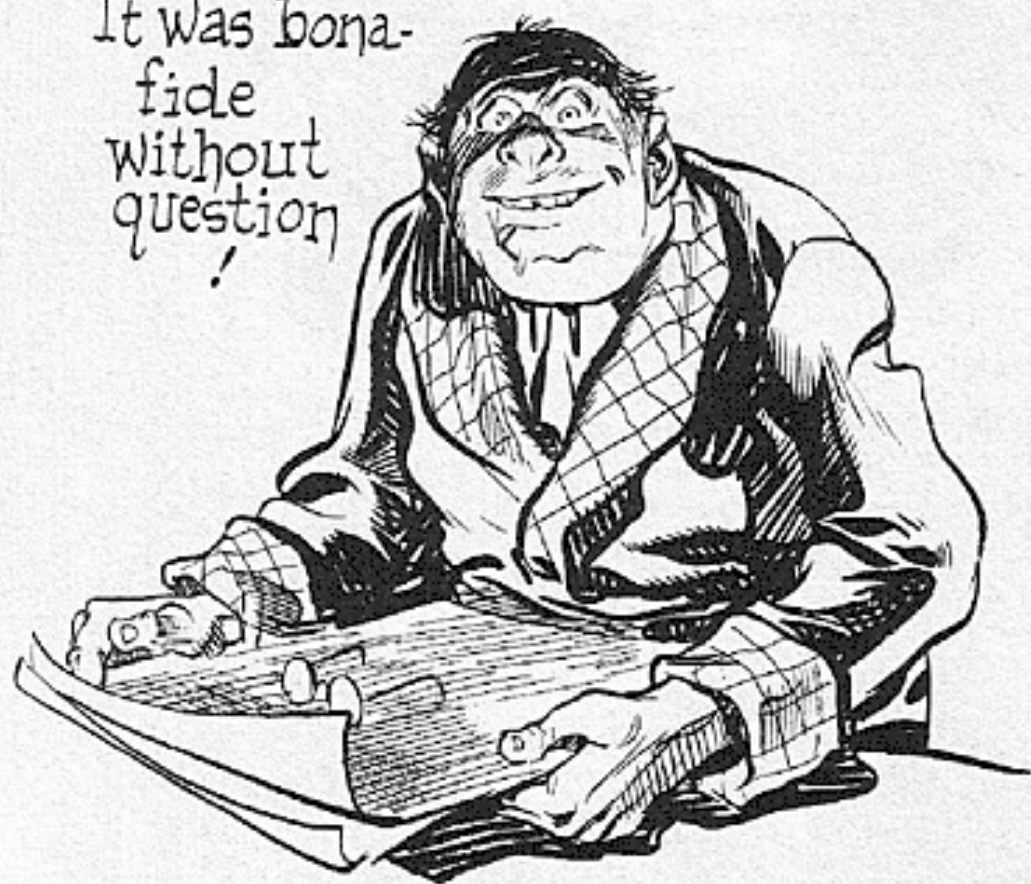
So in the days that followed,
the elders toiled, interrupted
only by the Sabbath and certain
days of prayer. At last they presented
the document to Hersh.

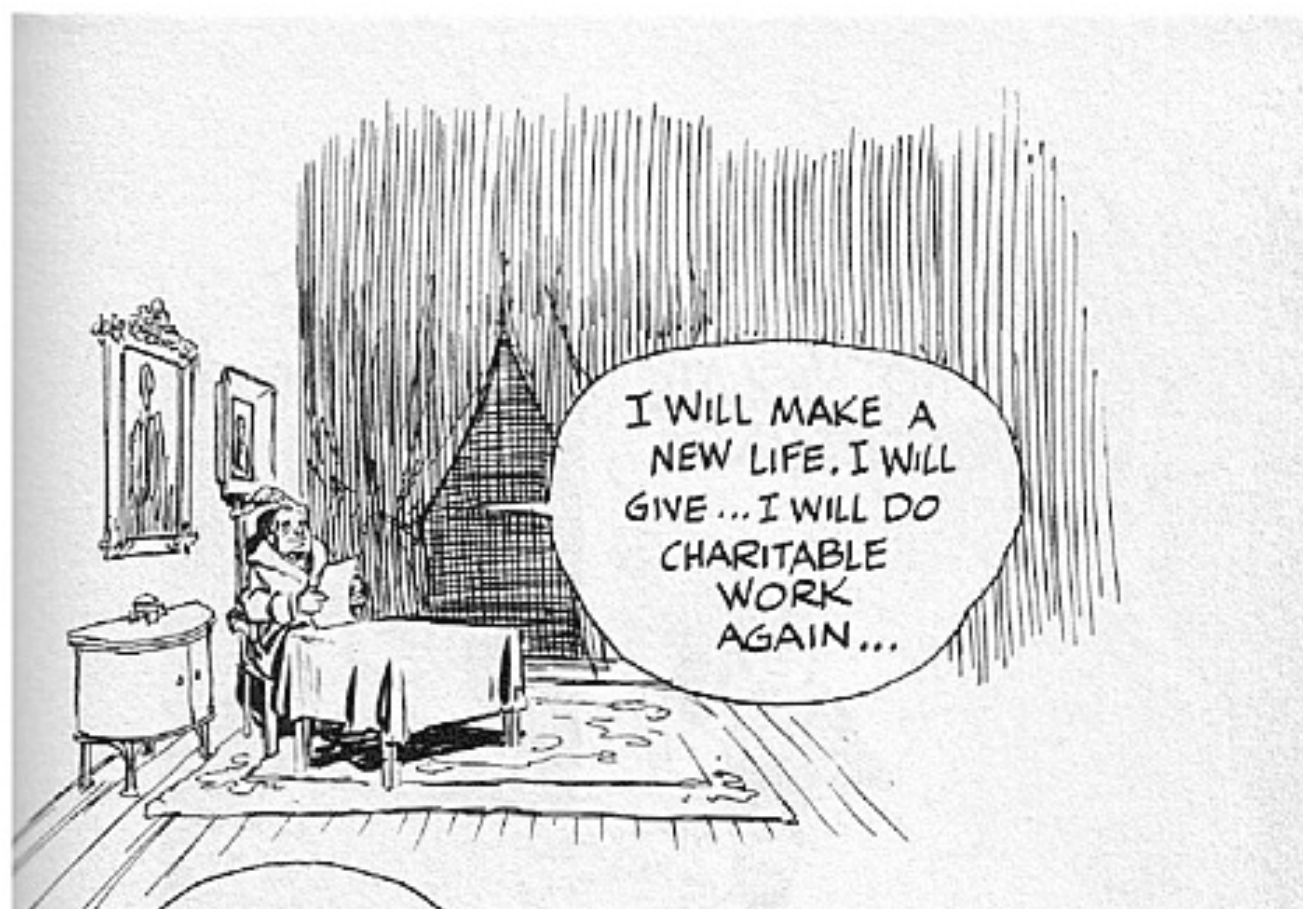


All that
night Hersh
sat reading
the contract.
Again and
again...he
studied every
word with
great care.

It was bona-
fide
without
question
!

AT LAST-I
HAVE A
GENUINE
CONTRACT
WITH
GOD!





I WILL MAKE A
NEW LIFE. I WILL
GIVE ... I WILL DO
CHARITABLE
WORK
AGAIN ...

... AND, AND
AFTER ALL - I
AM NOT TOO
OLD TO **MARRY**.
I SHALL HAVE
A DAUGHTER ...
AND I SHALL
NAME HER
RACHELE,
YES YES !!



THIS TIME, YOU
WILL NOT VIOLATE
OUR CONTRACT

THIS TIME,
I HAVE THREE
WITNESSES!

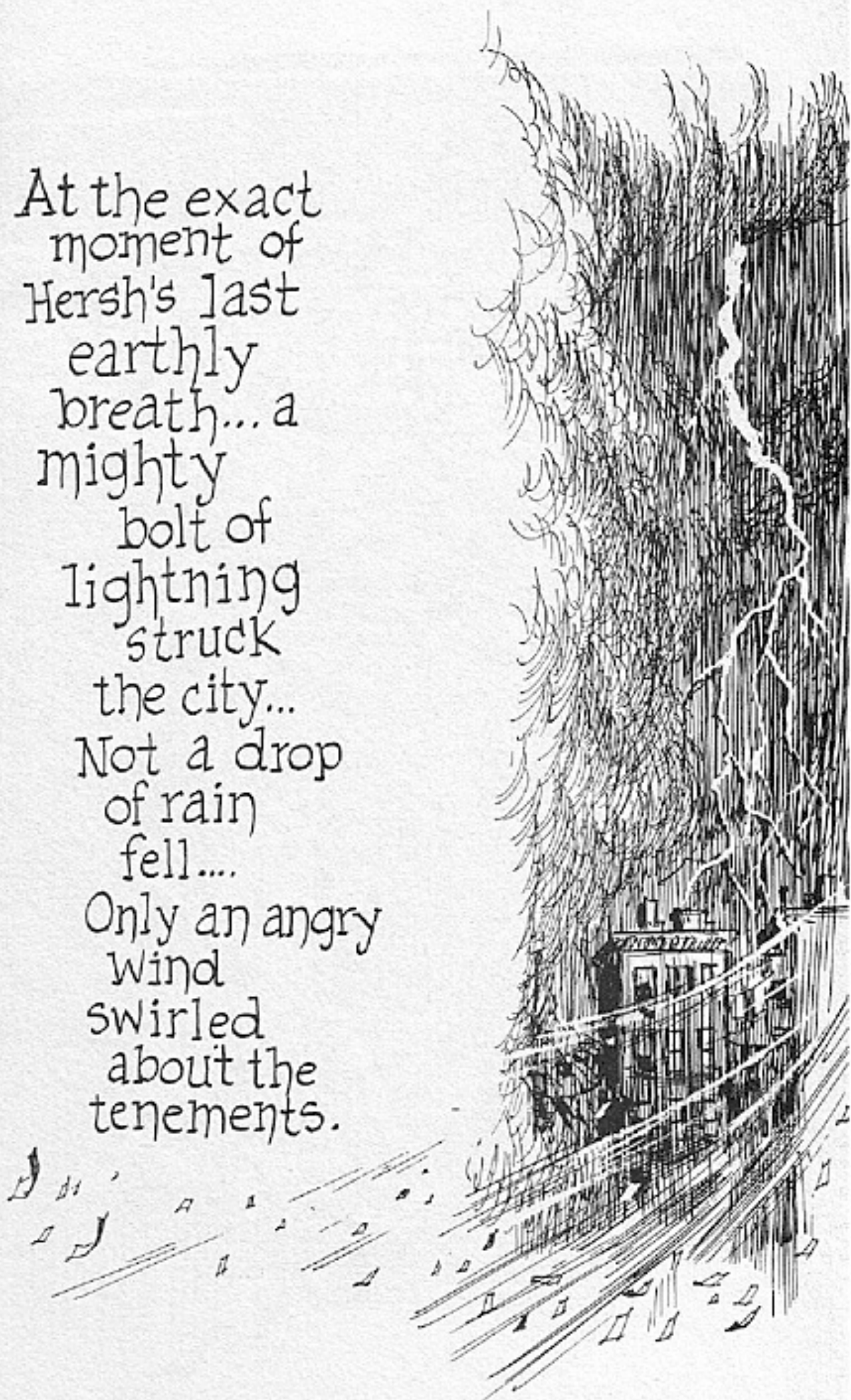
THIS TIME
I

ULP MY CHEST
A PAIN IN

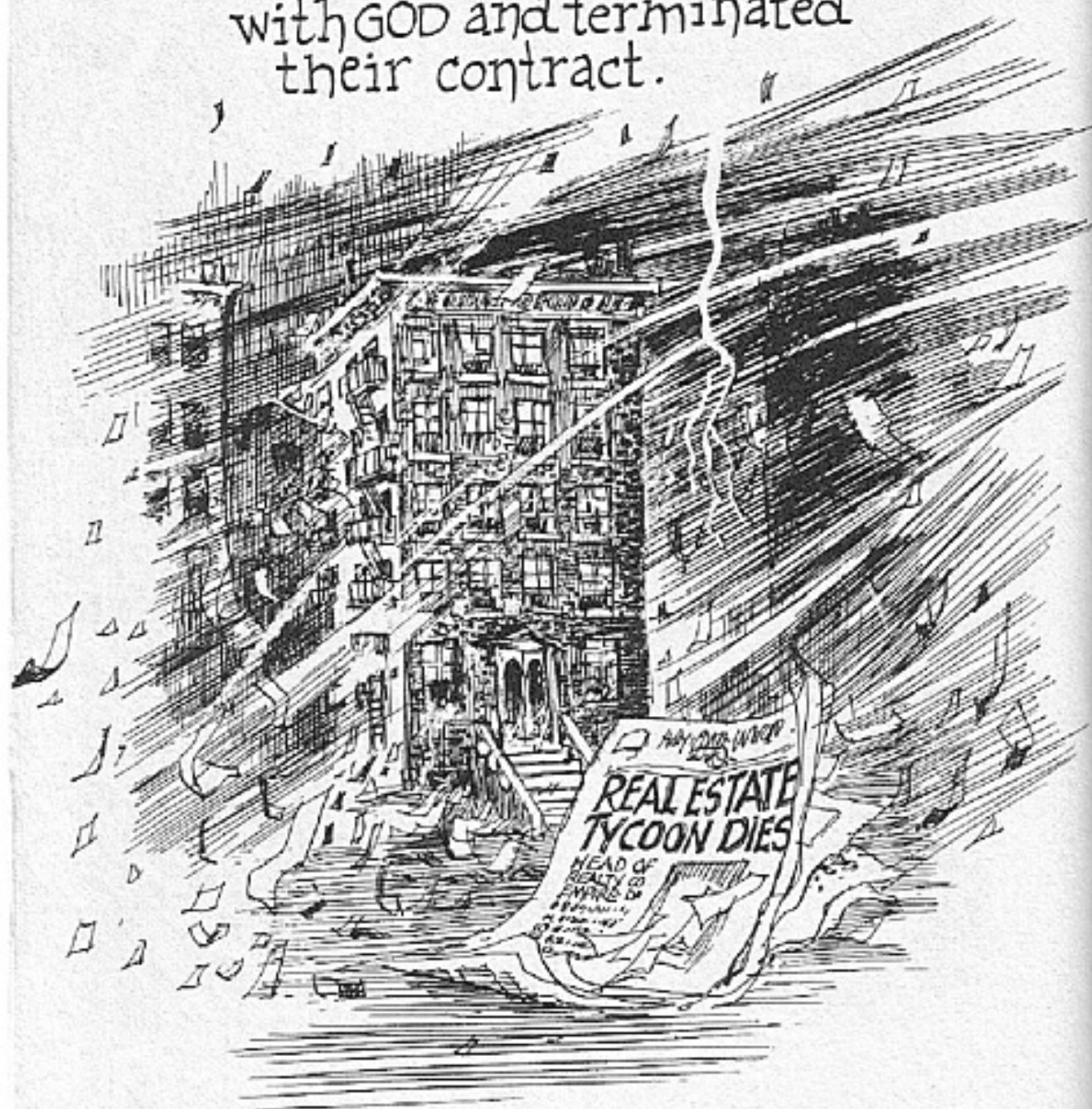
GLAK!



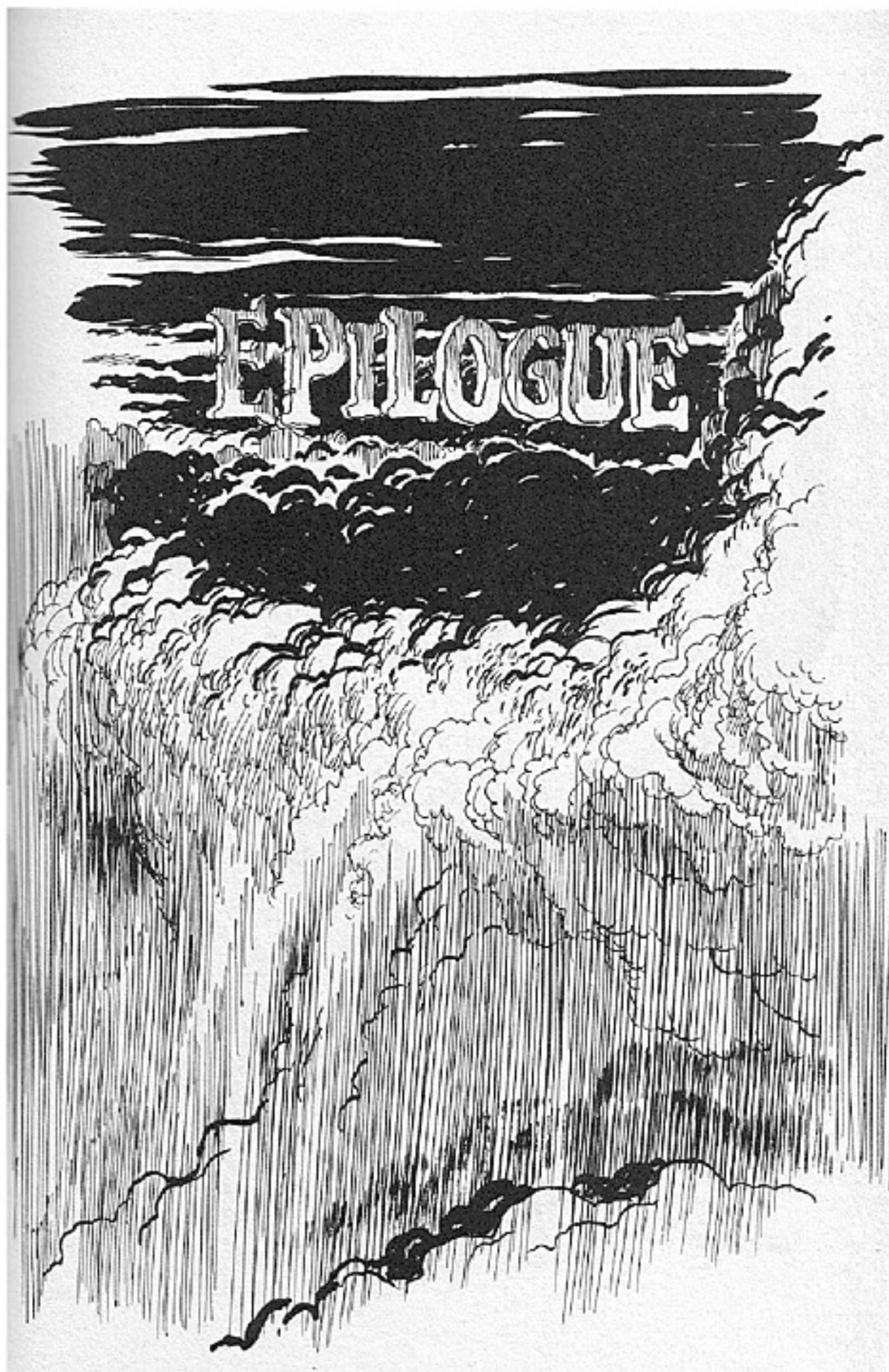
At the exact
moment of
Hersh's last
earthly
breath... a
mighty
bolt of
lightning
struck
the city...
Not a drop
of rain
fell....
Only an angry
wind
swirled
about the
tenements.



On Dropsie avenue the old
tenements seemed to tremble
in the storm. It reminded the
tenants of that day, years ago,
when Frimme Hersh argued
with GOD and terminated
their contract.

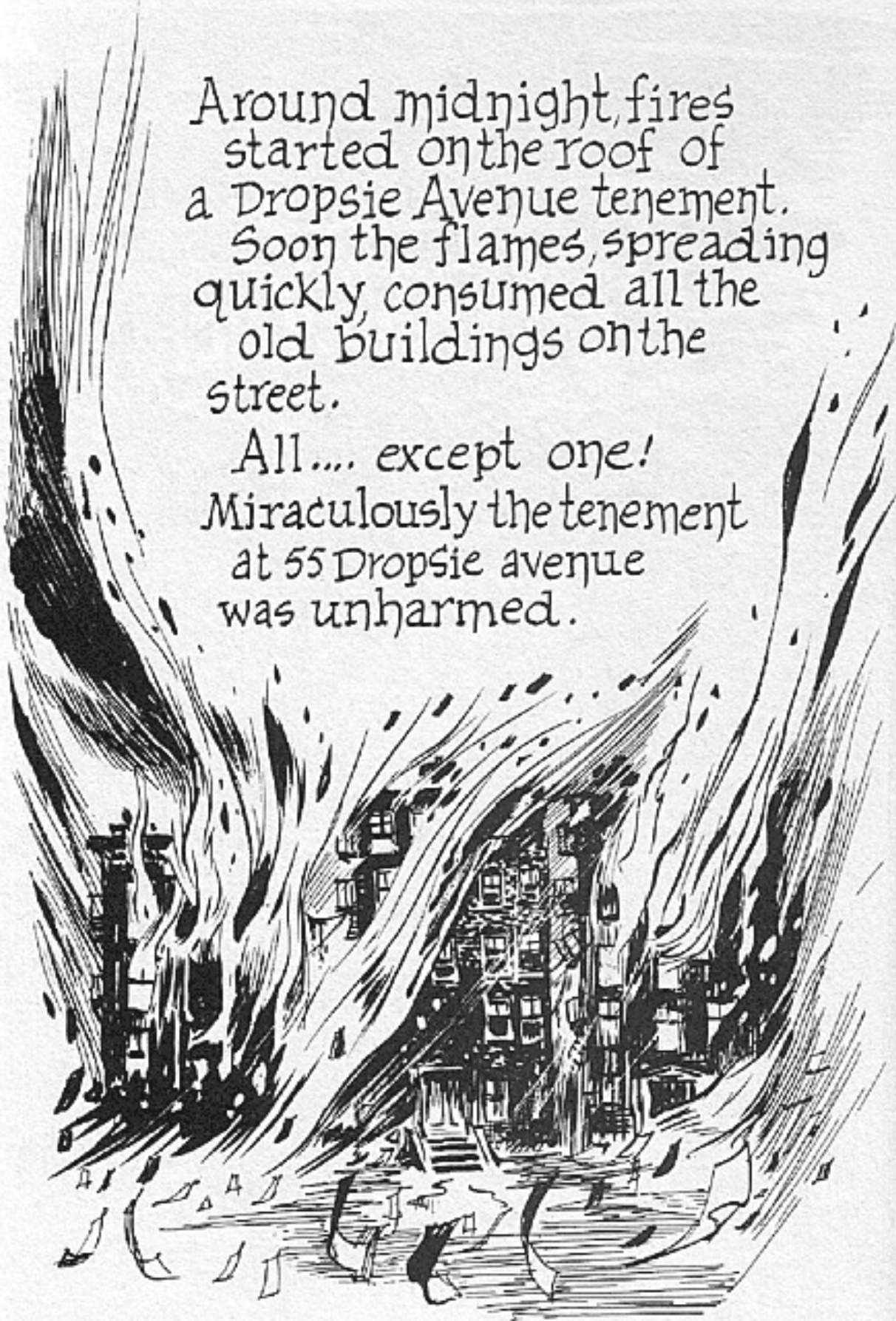


EPHLOGUE



Around midnight, fires
started on the roof of
a Dropsie Avenue tenement.
Soon the flames, spreading
quickly, consumed all the
old buildings on the
street.

All.... except one!
Miraculously the tenement
at 55 Dropsie avenue
was unharmed.

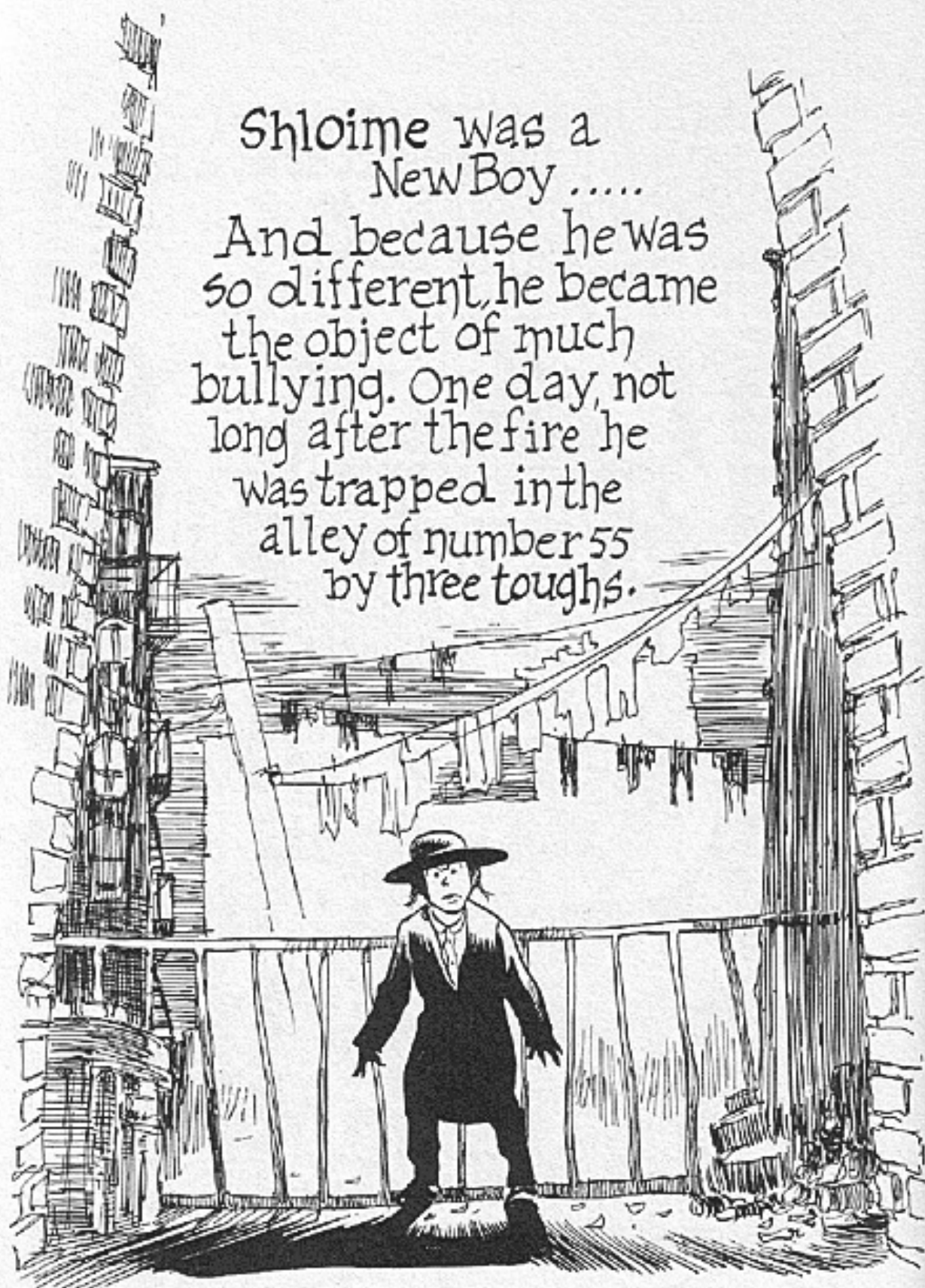


And it happened that a boy,
Shloime Khreks was
the hero of the day



Shloime was a
New Boy

And because he was
so different, he became
the object of much
bullying. One day, not
long after the fire he
was trapped in the
alley of number 55
by three toughs.







...And that evening on the stoop
of the tenement, Shloime Khreks
signed his name below that of
Frimme Hersh... thereby entering
into a Contract with GOD.



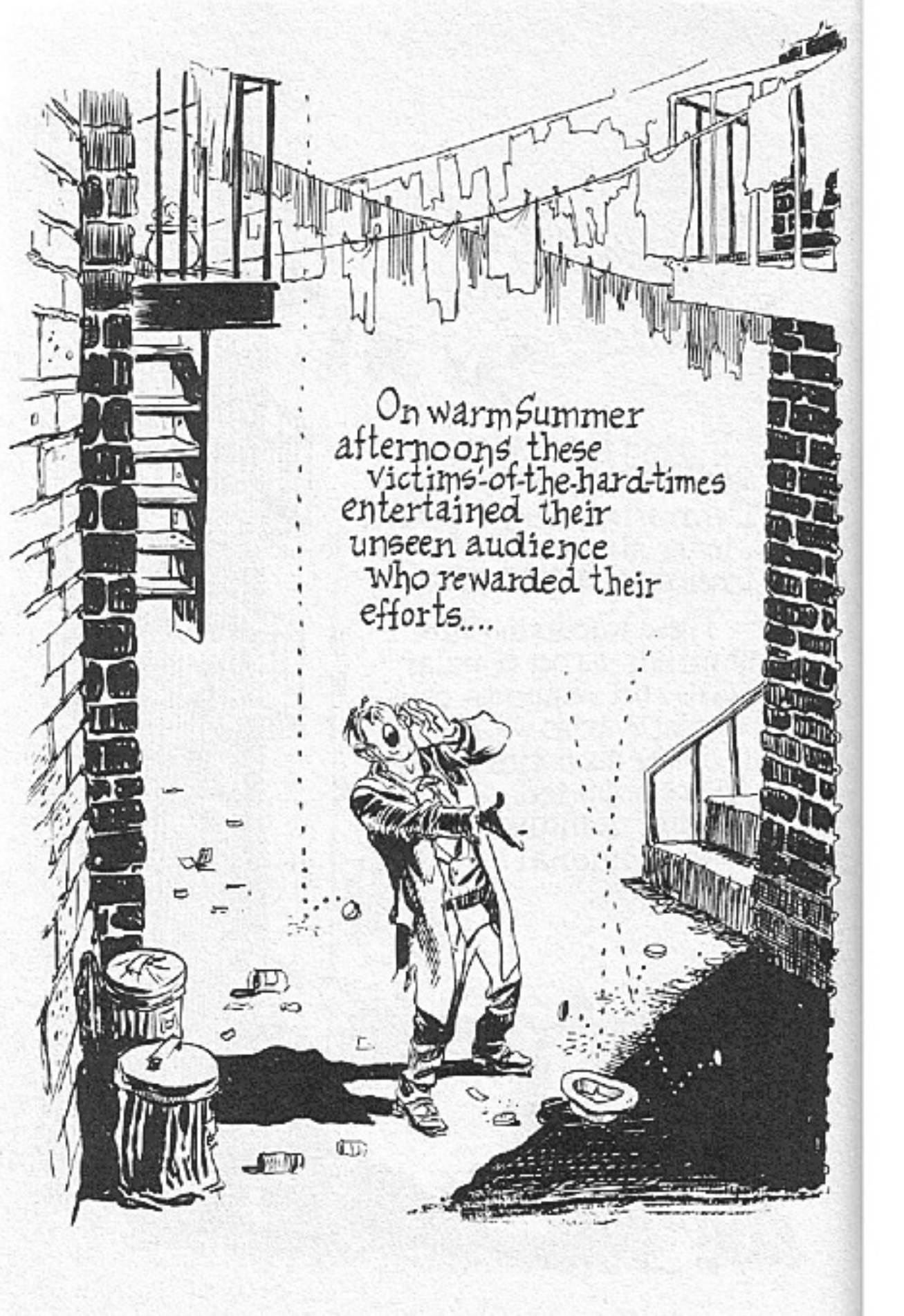


THE STREET SINGER

During the early 1930s,
at the depth of the Great
Depression, there appeared
in the alleys of the
tenements, STREET SINGERS.

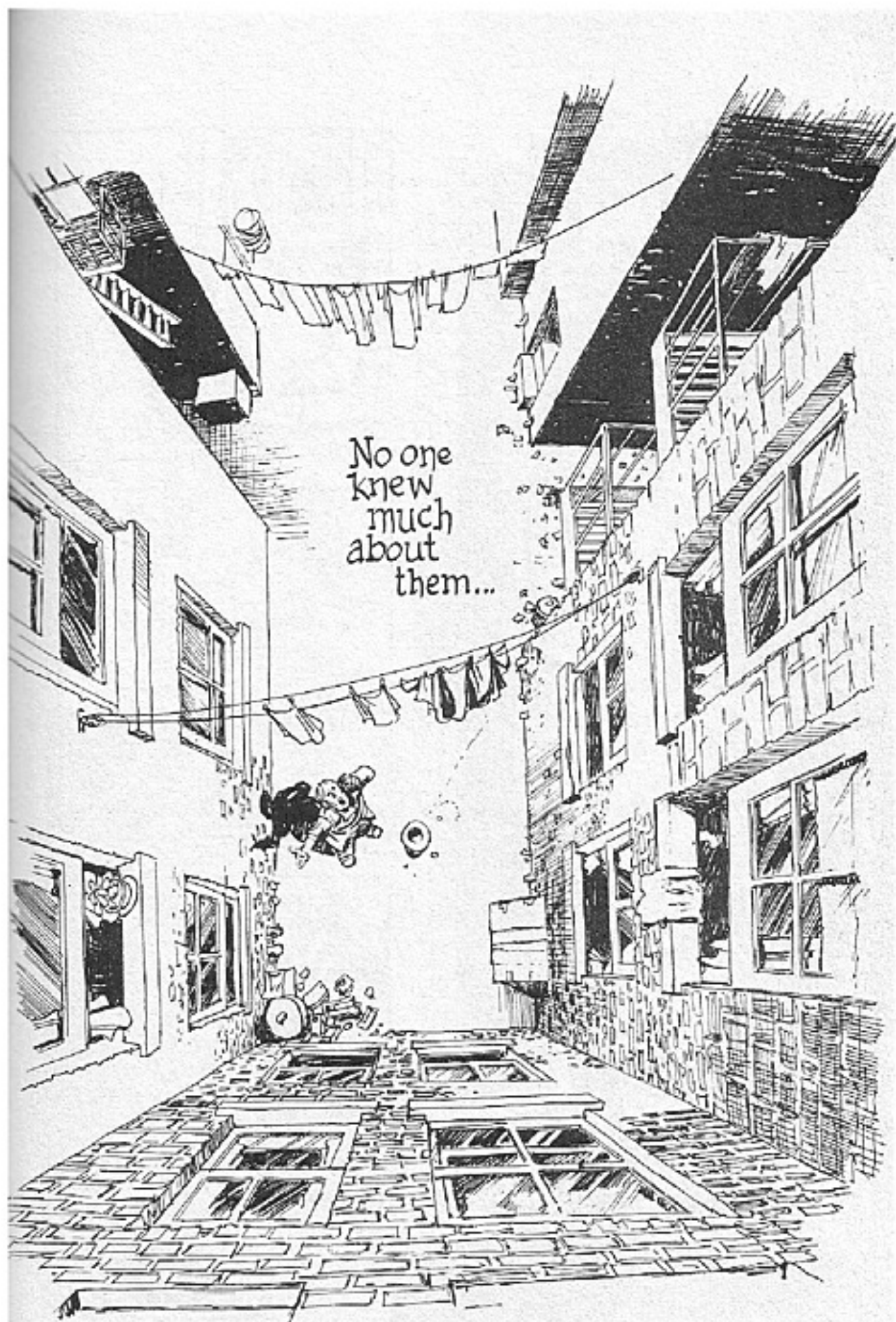
These wandering street
minstrels sang popular
songs and segments of
operatic arias which
in the acoustics of the
place, sounded
surprisingly
professional.

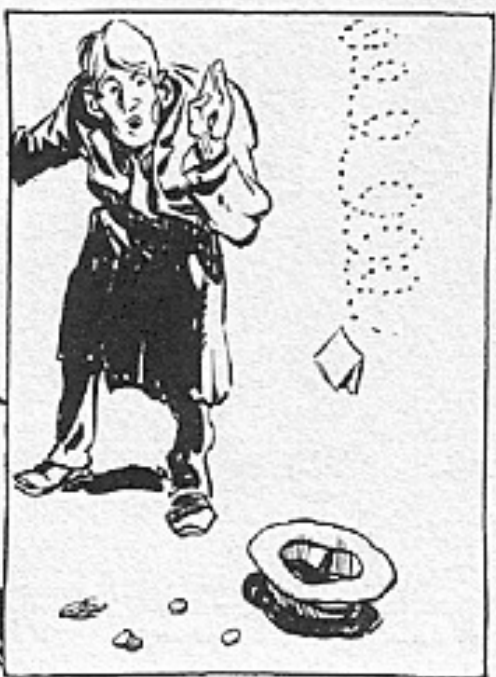
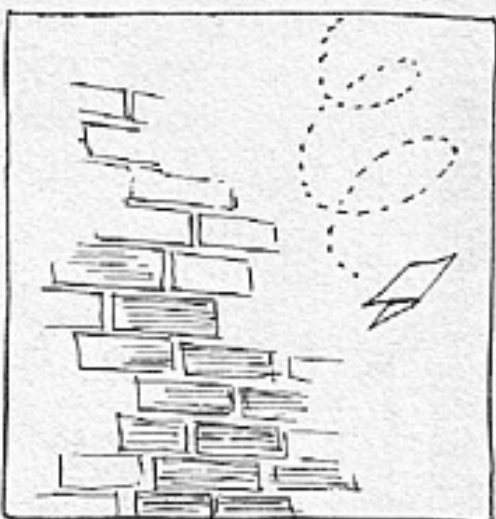
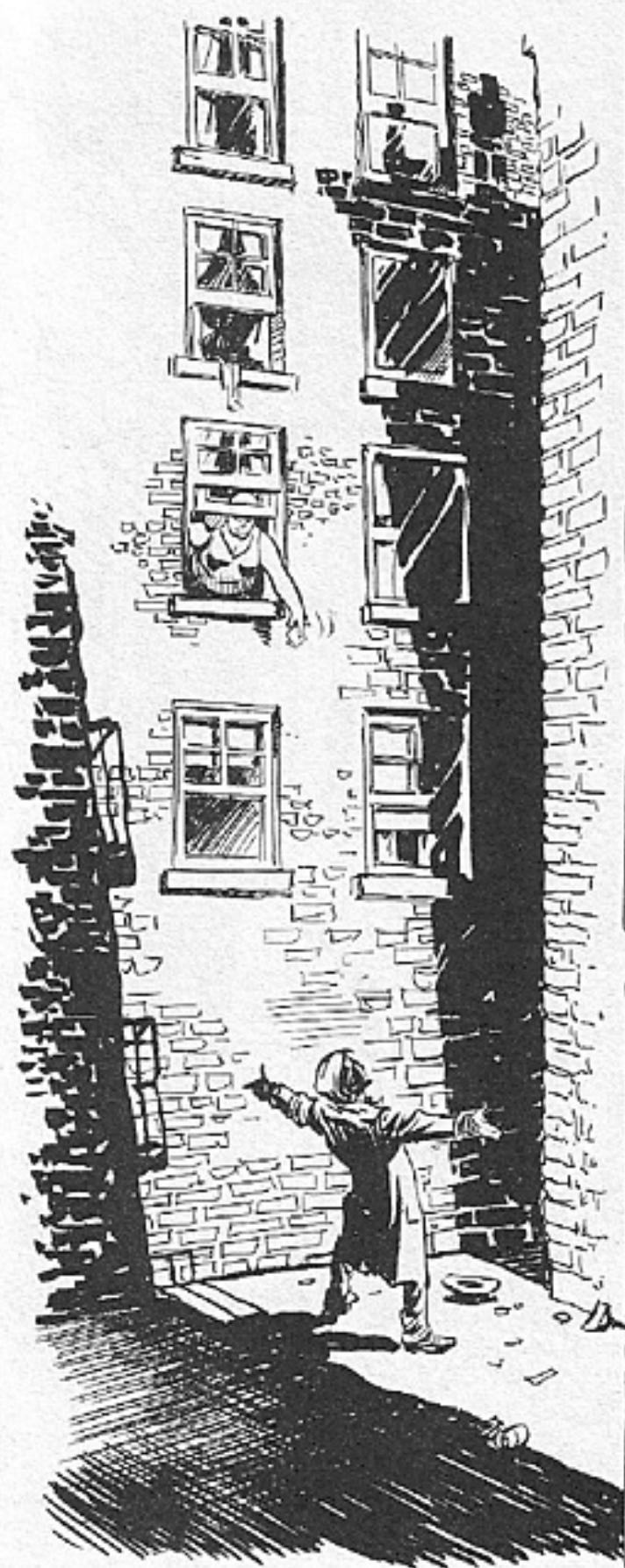


A black and white illustration of a man in a courtyard. The man is standing in the center, looking up with his hands near his face in a gesture of surprise or distress. He is wearing a jacket and trousers. The courtyard is enclosed by brick walls. On the left, there is a balcony with a railing. On the right, there is a staircase leading up. The ground is littered with trash, including a broken plate and several small containers. Dotted lines radiate from the man, suggesting a wide field of vision or a search for something. The overall style is that of a mid-20th-century comic book or magazine illustration.

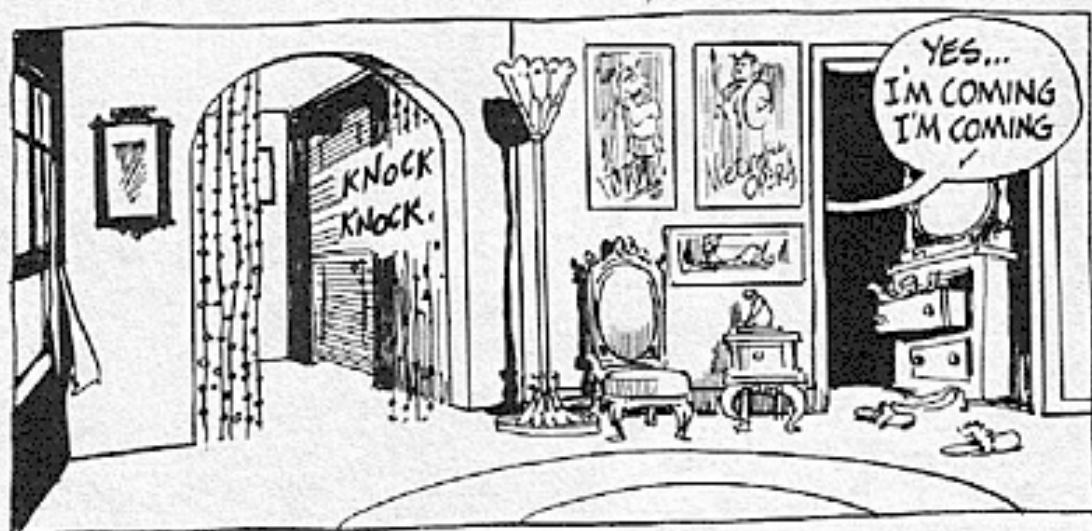
On warm summer
afternoons these
victims of the hard times
entertained their
unseen audience
who rewarded their
efforts....

No one
knew
much
about
them...

















FIRST... WHAT IS
YOUR NAME ??... OH,
NEVER MIND, I'LL GIVE
YOU A NEW NAME.
HMMM, LET ME SEE...



RONALD BARRY!!!
YES, THAT'S IT, YOU'LL BE
RONALD BARRY
THE GOLDEN BARITONE!

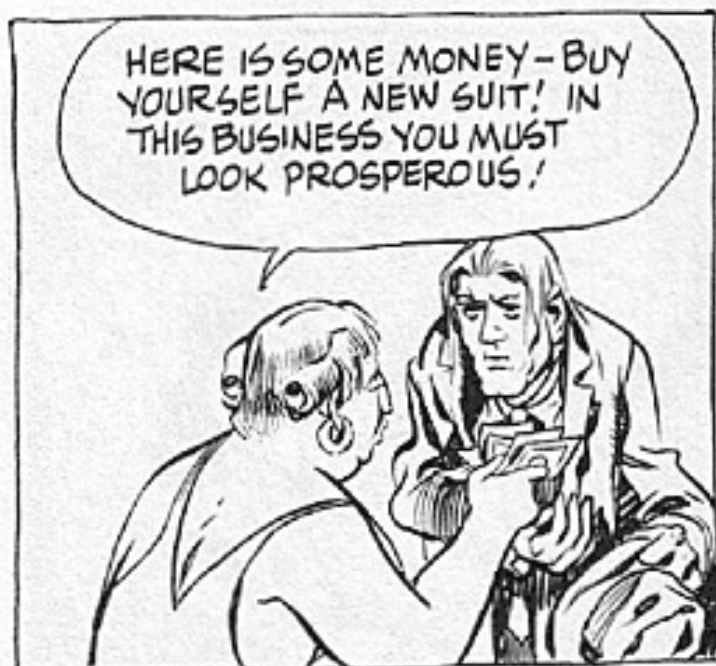


YOU LOOK LIKE QUALITY!
Y'KNOW YOU RESEMBLE JOHN BARRYMORE.
HMMM, NO... MORE LIKE RONALD COLEMAN!
YOU ARE VERY ATTRACTIVE... WITH YOUR VOICE
AND LOOKS - AND MY EXPERIENCE... WE'LL
MAKE IT TO THE **TOP** - TOGETHER!!





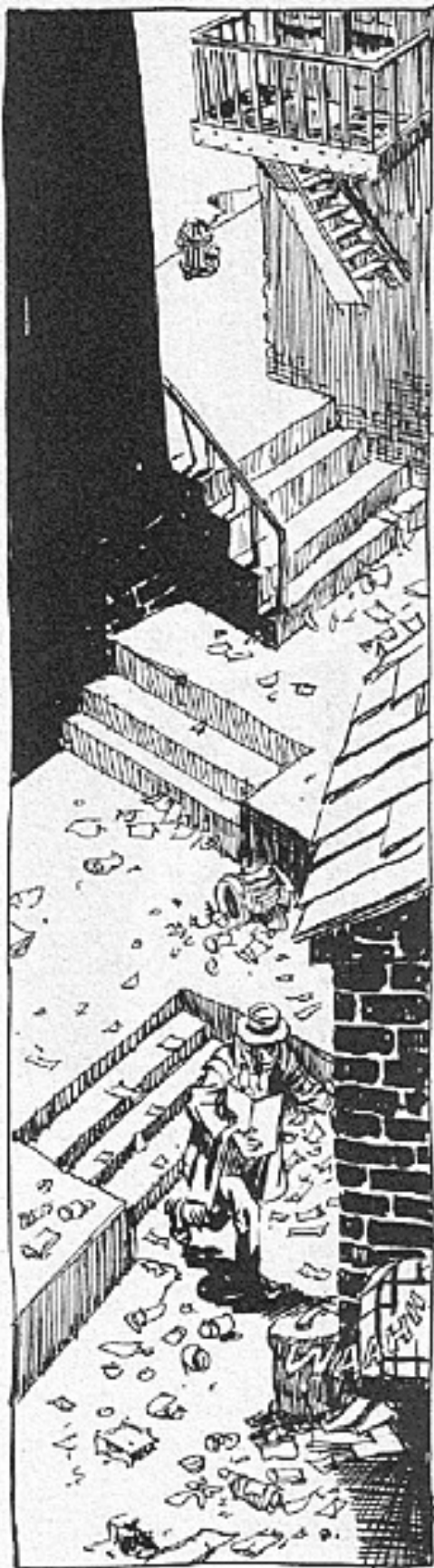


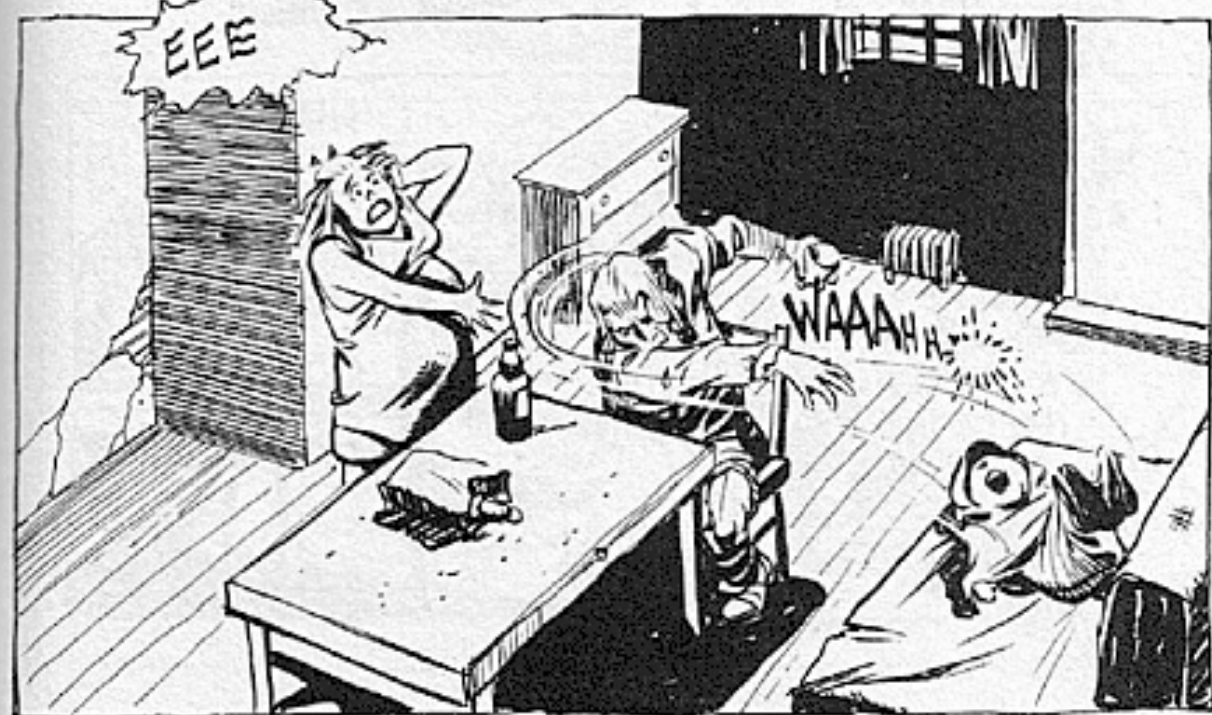


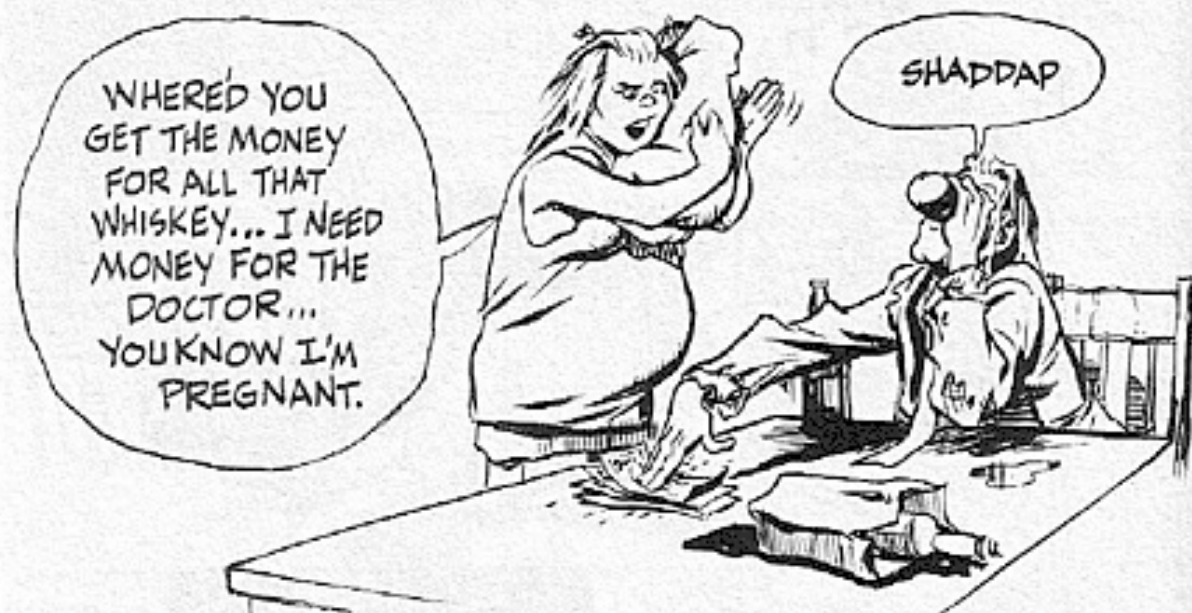






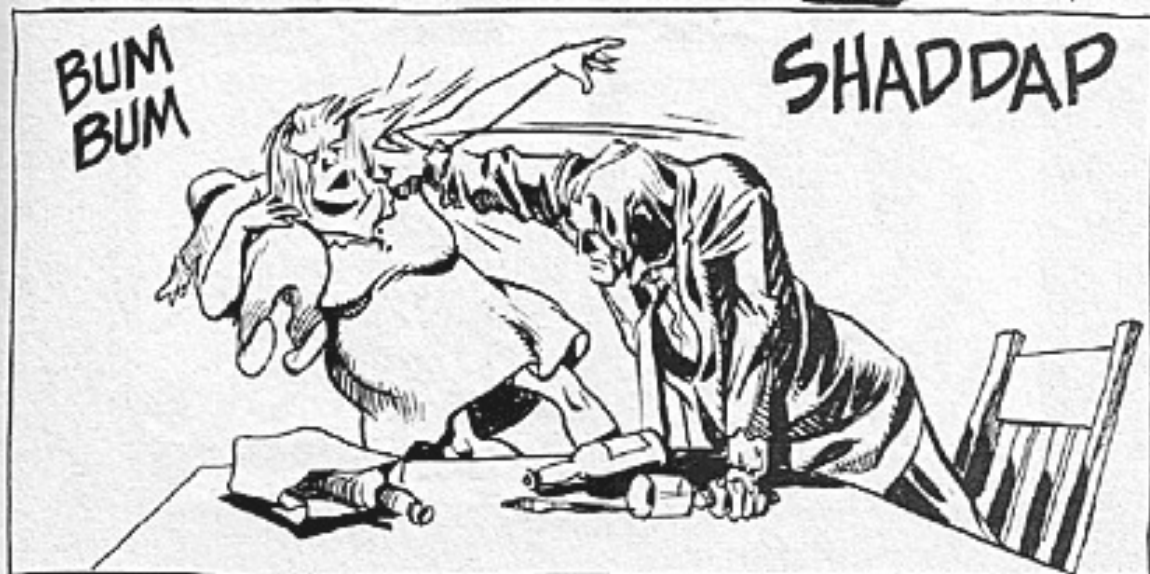








YOU DON'T
EVEN KNOW
HOW TO SING
YOU DIDN'T
EVEN WHISTLE
BEFORE
YOU MET
ME!







EDDIE...IT'S NOON
ALREADY-PLEASE,
GO OUT AND LOOK
FOR A JOB,...
PLEASE!



I'M
SORRY
ABOUT
LAST NIGHT,
SOPHIE.

THAT'S
OKAY, EDDIE!
GO, HONEY...
DON'T SING
TODAY-
GET A JOB!





SHE RECOGNIZES MY
SINGING TALENT.....
BESIDES SHE'S SWEET
ON ME.



Y'SEE... MY PLAN IS
LET HER PROMOTE ME
...THEN WHEN I'M
ONTOP-I'LL GO
BACK TO MY WIFE
AND KID... A
SINGING STAR...
NOT A CRUMMY
ACCOUNTANT



SEE... YOU, YOU UNDERSTAND
JOE?... C'MON JOE....



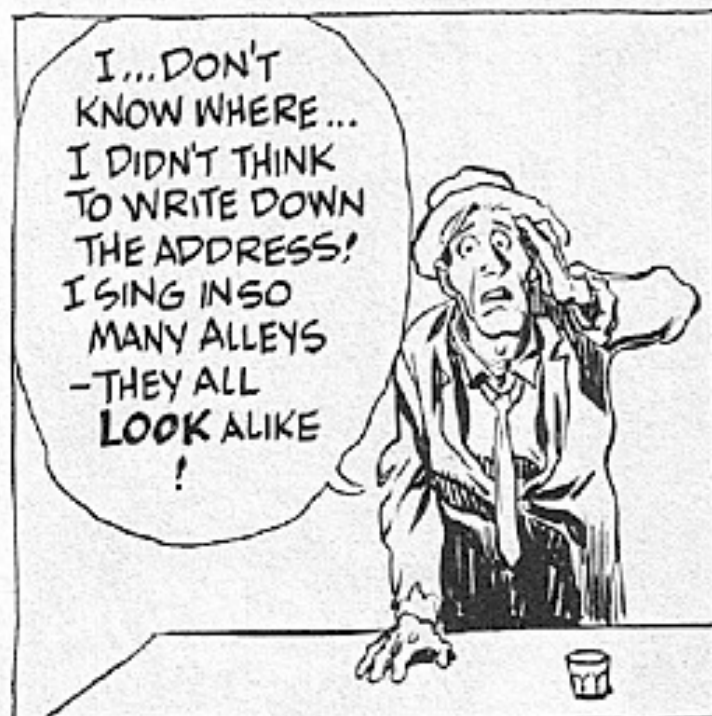
OKAY, HERE... BOY,
EDDIE, YOU'RE ALL
HEART!

SAY, WHERE
DOES THIS...
DIVA LIVE
?



OH,
MY
GOD





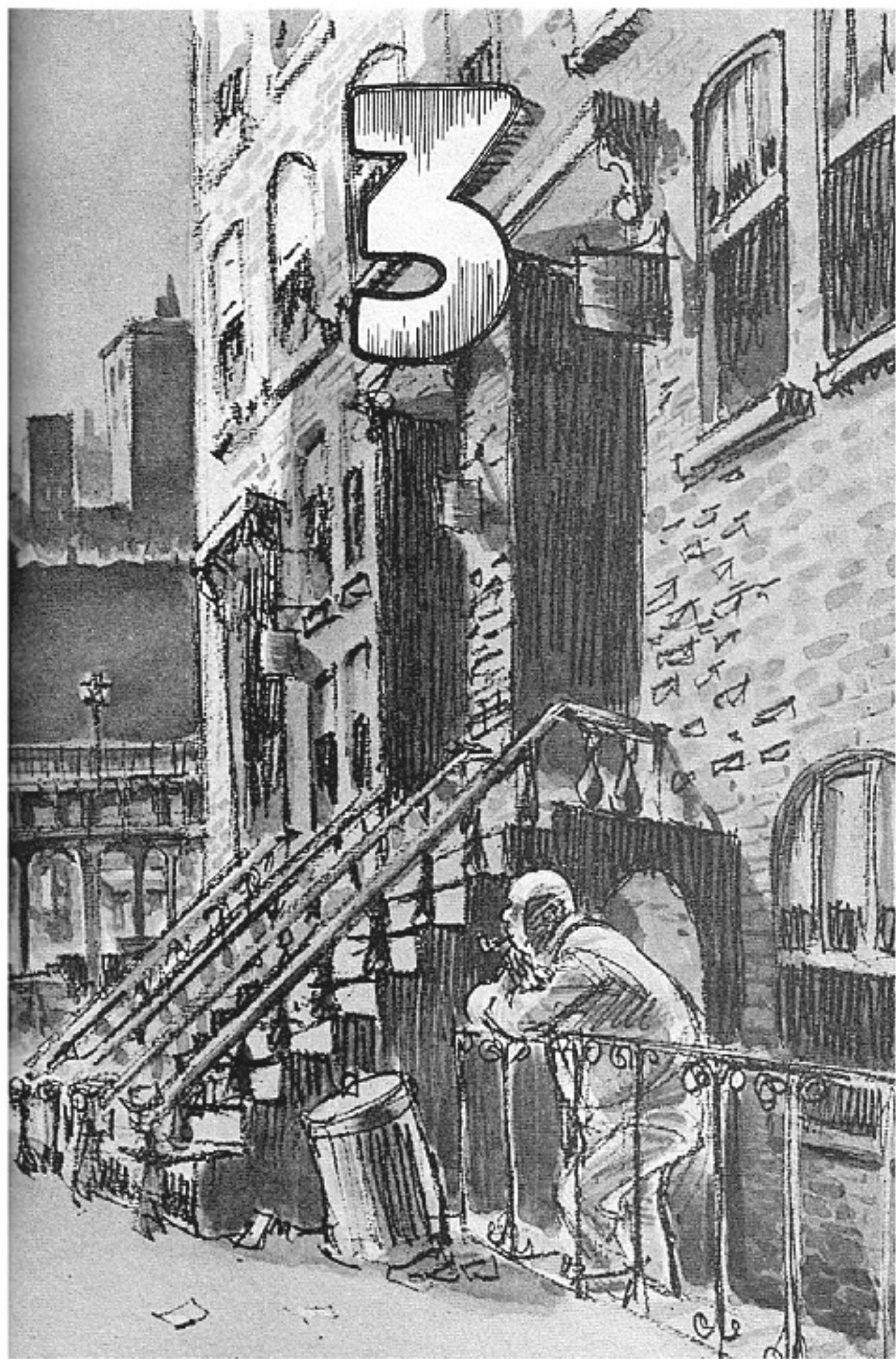




Street
Singers
played a
tenement
only
once.

There
were,
after all,
plenty
of
alleys...







SUPER


The tenement was like
a passenger ship
anchored in a sea
of concrete. In its
bowels lived the Captain.
He was called the **SUPER**

The super at 55 Dropsie
was Mr. Scuggs.

MISTER
SCUGGS,
WHEN YOU
GONNA FIX
THE HALL STEPS?
WHAT KINDA
BUILDING
YOU RUNNIN'
HA??



Nobody
really liked
Mr. Scuggs.

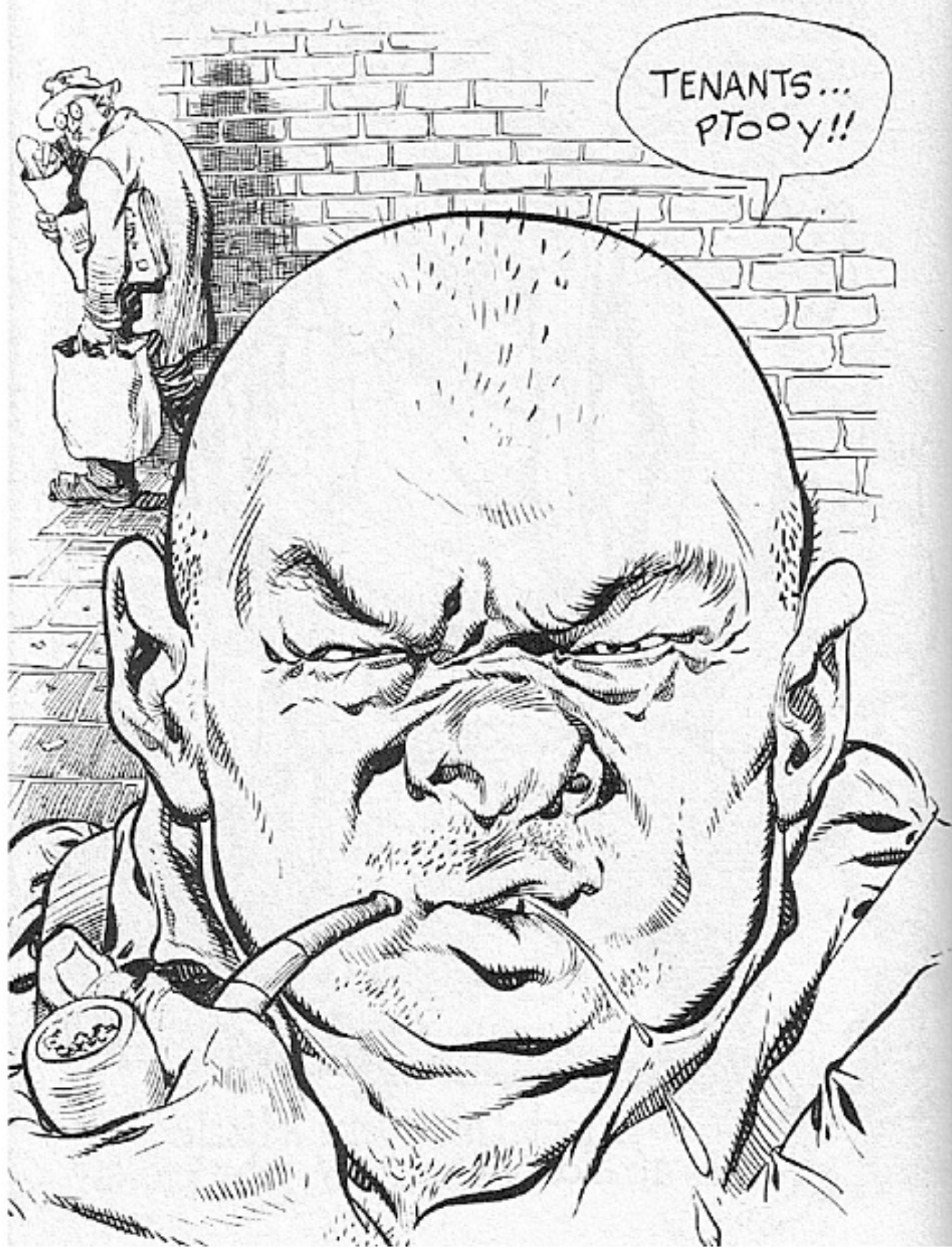


I'M RUNNING
THIS BUILDING
MR. LEVINSKY!
AND I'LL DECIDE
WHEN THINGS NEED
TO BE FIXED!

In fact they were a little
afraid of him...why, who knows?

Perhaps it was what they
didn't know that fed the fear.

TENANTS...
PTOOY!!





YAH!... BACK IN
CHERMANY THINGS
IS DIFFERENT! THERE,
THEY HAF **RESPECT!**
YAH, **THERE** NOBODY
TALKS LIKE THAT
TO THE SUPER!

SOON,
SOMEDAY
WE WILL HAVE
DISCIPLINE
HERE TOO!
YAH, ITS COMING
...ORDNUNG!

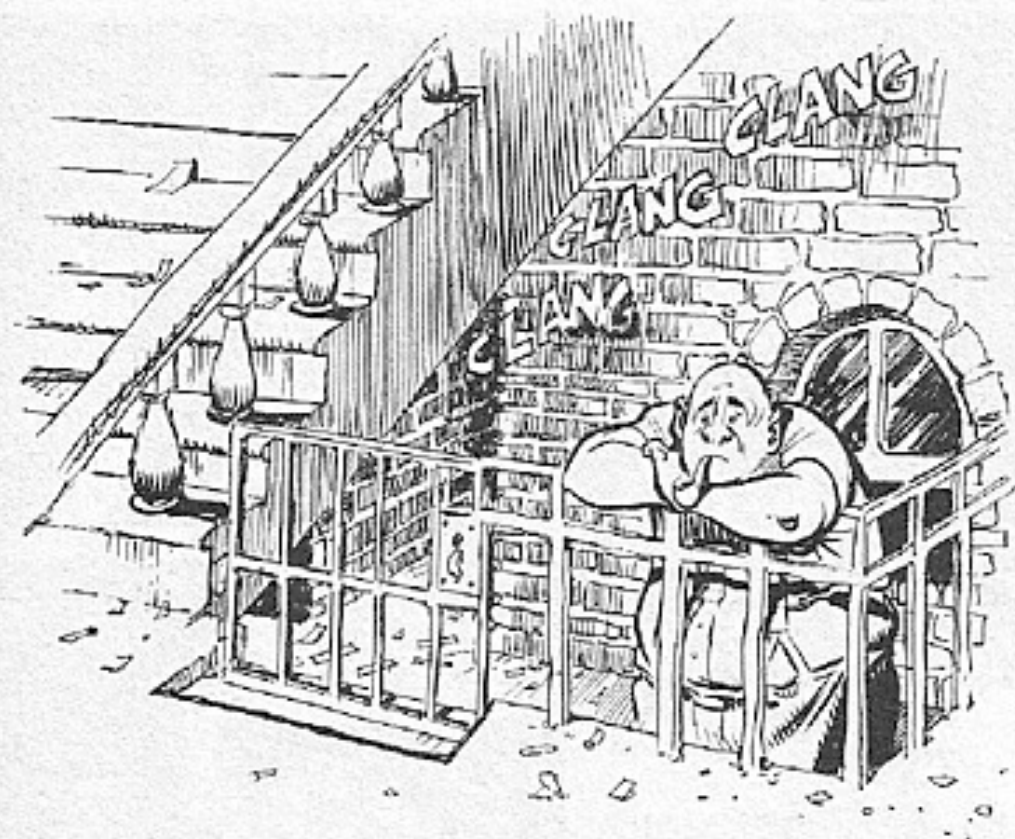




After all, he was the landlord's man—the enemy.

So, between replying to bitter complaints, the nagging and the muttering behind his back, he was left with little else but remoteness to defend his dignity and promote his authority.





His job was
not an easy one.





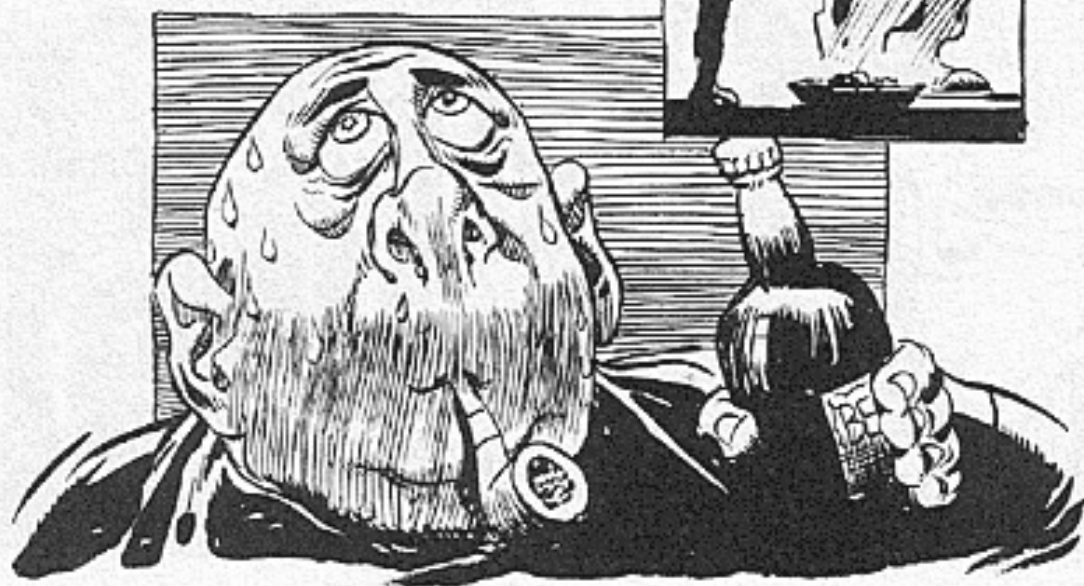
STOP KNOCKIN'
ON THA PIPES, MISSUS
FARFELL. I KNOW
YOU AINT GOT HOT
WATER - I JUST STARTED
UP THE BOILERS!











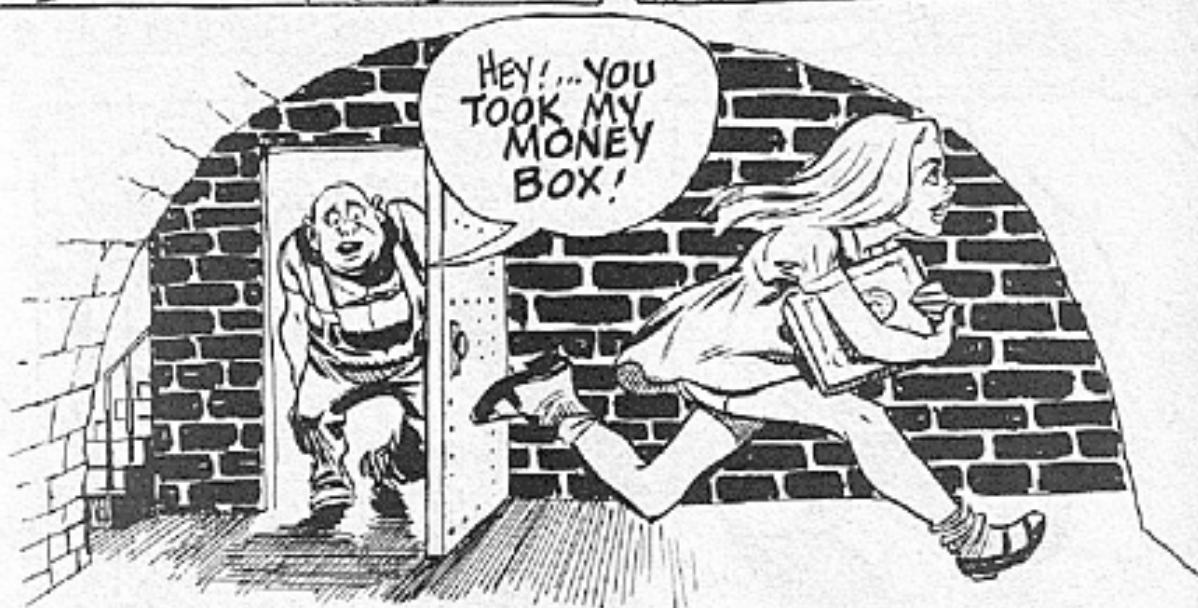
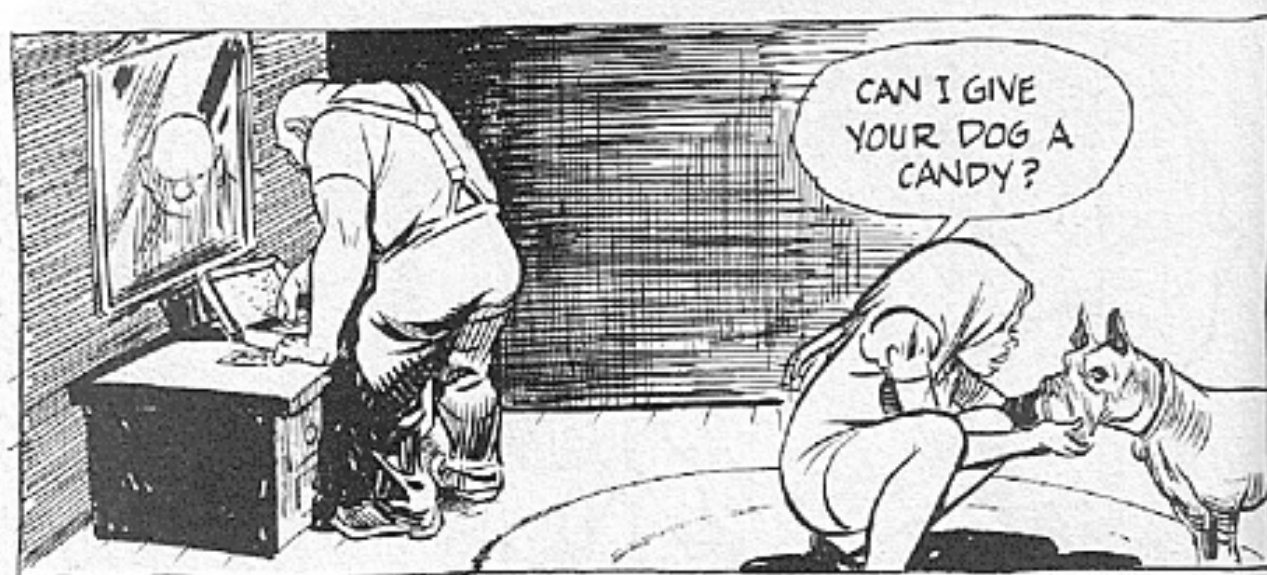












GET HER
HUGO!



HUGO

SHE
POISONED
MEAM?



AGGRRRAH



SLAM









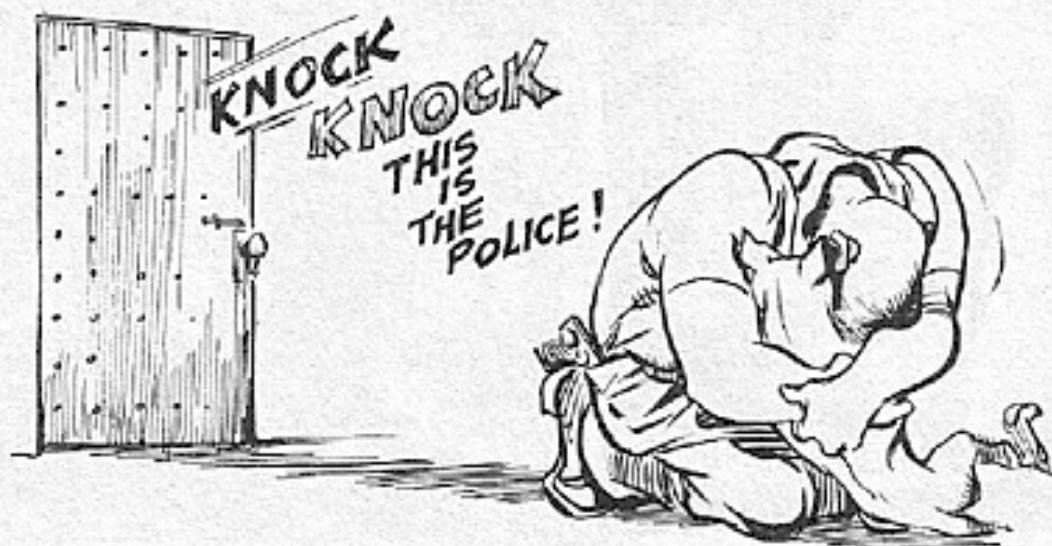
MURDERER!

ANIMAL!

I NEVER
TRUSTED THAT
SUPER... HE'S A
SEX MANIAC!

DID
HE HOIT
YOU
DOLLINK
?







WHAT
HAPPENED
??

MR. SCUGGS
KILLED
HIMSELF !!

HE
WAS
CRAZY
?

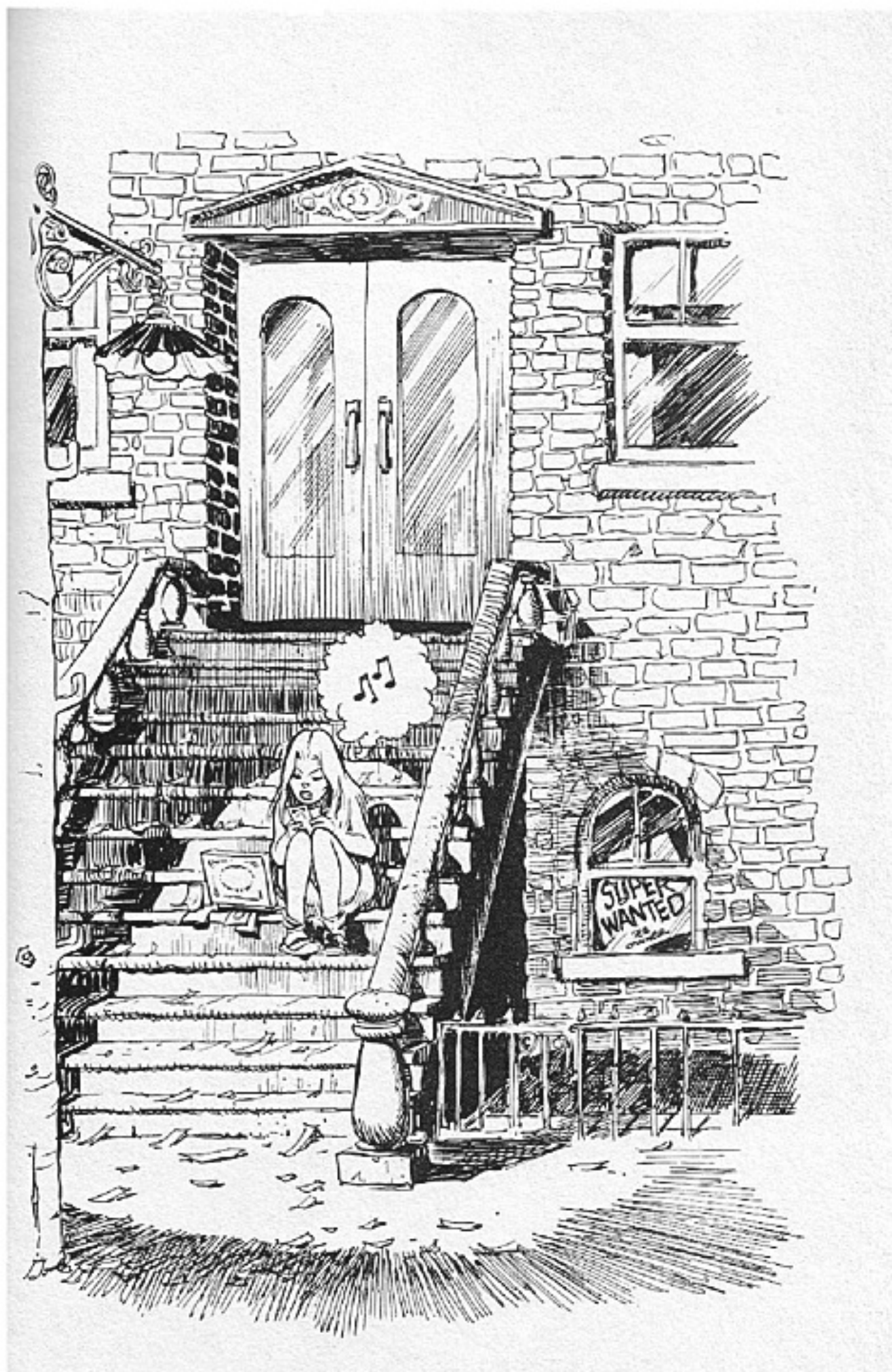
WHO
KNOWS
WHY?

GOIVES
HIM RIGHT-
HE NEVER GAVE
GOOD STEAM
IN WINTER !

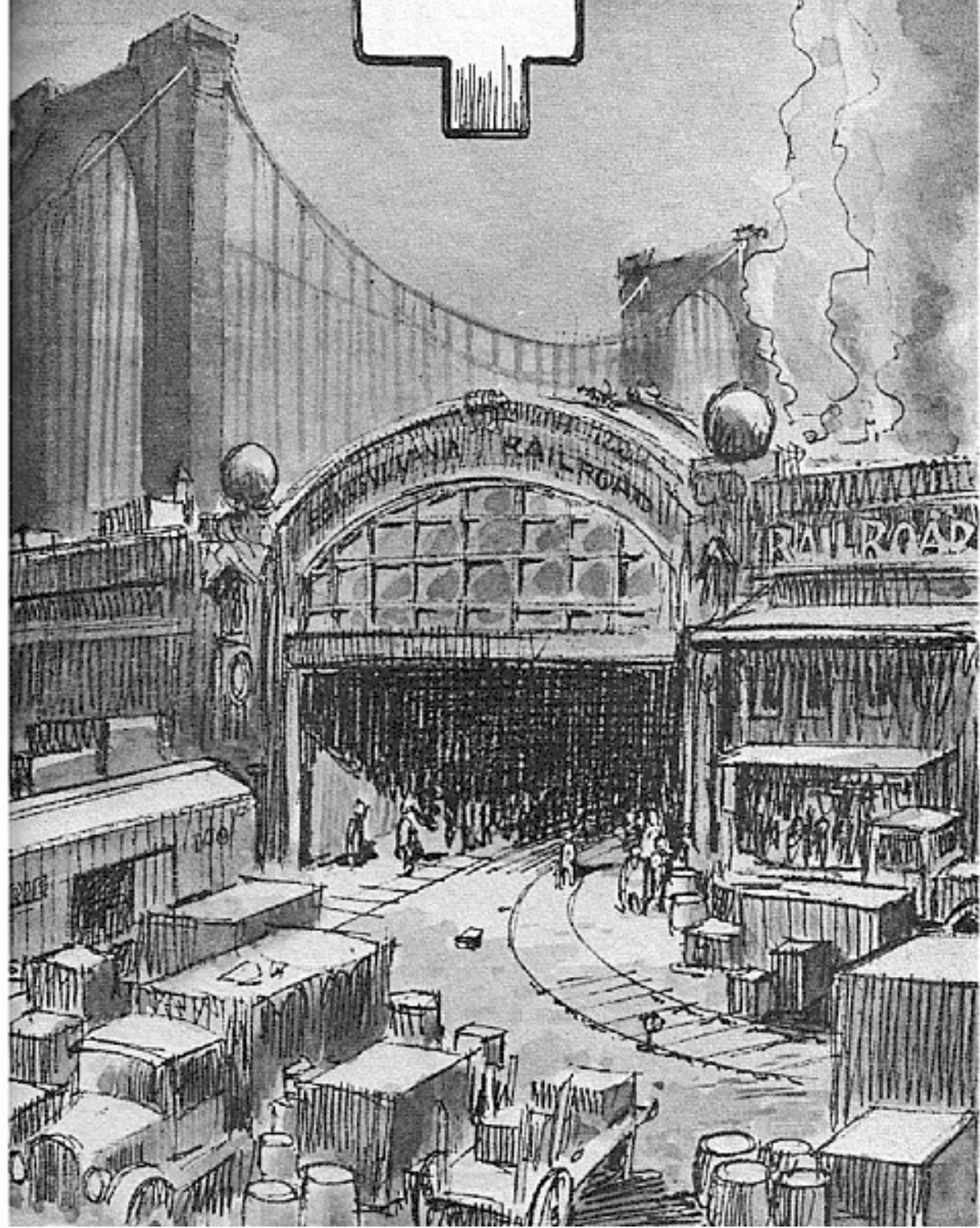
DID HE EVER
MOLEST YOUR
NIECE ... ER... YOU
KNOW I MEAN...
??

P-L-E-A-S-E
OFFICER-NOT IN
FRONT OF HER!!!
SHE'S ONLY 10-YEARS
OLD... **OF COURSE**
NOT!! GOD KNOWS
WHAT HE HAD
IN MIND?!!

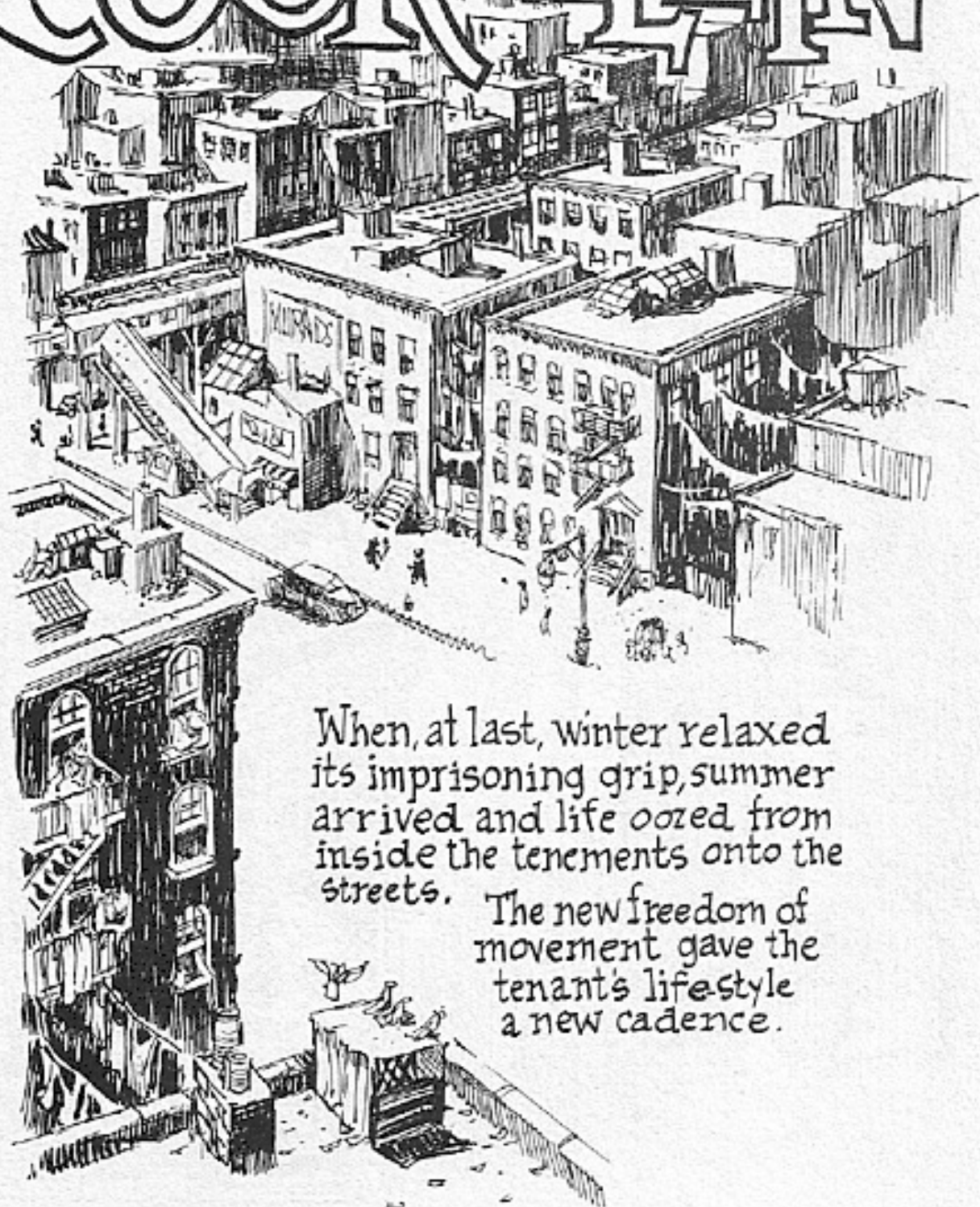




4



COOKALLEN



When, at last, winter relaxed its imprisoning grip, summer arrived and life oozed from inside the tenements onto the streets. The new freedom of movement gave the tenant's lifestyle a new cadence.

Now communications
became easier between the
tenants. A new status
developed...the vacationers.



For some tenants it was
time to harvest the yield
from a year of doing-without.

FANNIE... YOU'RE
A WONDER!
HOW'D YOU PUT
TOGETHER \$75 ON
WHAT I BRING IN?

HOW ELSE?
2-DAY OLD BREAD,
YESTERDAY'S MILK
AND HAND-ME-DOWN
CLOTHES FROM MY
SISTER'S KIDS...IF
I LEFT IT TO YOU
WE'D HAVE
NOTHING!

WHAT ARE
WE GONNA DO
THIS SUMMER, MA?



WELL YOU'RE NOT GOIN' TO
HANG AROUND THE STREETS
THIS SUMMER WITH THOSE
ROTTEN KIDS!

SO, WHERE
WE GOIN, MA?



WE'RE
GOIN' TO
THE COUNTRY!
...NOW GO TO BED!



HEY, PA!! WOT'S A
COOKALEIN??

IT'S A HOTEL!
... WHERE Y'
MOTHER DOES
THE COOKING
HERSELF!

WE ONLY GET
A ROOM TO SLEEP
IN... THAT WAY IT'S
CHEAPER THAN IN
A REG'LAR HOTEL!
... NOW GO TO
SLEEP PETEY!



BE
PATIENT,
FANNIE!
NEXT YEAR
IF WE HAVE
A GOOD
SEASON,
I'LL START
MY OWN
LINE!



HAHH!!
YOU'LL FAIL
LIKE YOU DID
BEFORE!! OY,
YOU COULDEARN
A GOOD LIVING
ASA HOUSEPAINTER
...BUT NO-YOU
GOTTA BE A
FURRIER!

SO, WHY DID
I MARRY YOU??
DID I HAVE A CHOICE?
...A NEEDLE WORKER
IN A HAT FACTORY
WITH NO EDUCATION...



...LIVING LIKE A
SLAVE IN MY SISTER'S
HOUSE ...CLEANING
AND WASHING ... SO,
YOU TOOK ME OUTTA
ONE MISERY-INTO
ANOTHER !!



ENOUGH, ALREADY!
I'VE HEARD IT ALL BEFORE!
LET ME SLEEP TOMORROW.
I GOT A BIG DAY
IN THE SHOWROOM!



HMPF... BIG SHOWROOM
MOCHER... WHILE
YOUR FAMILY HARDLY
HAS WHAT TO EAT,

SO, SAM -
I HEAR Y'R
SENDING FANNIE
AND THE KIDS TO
THE COUNTRY
THIS YEAR!

YEAH,
SHE'S
GOIN' TO
FEGELS.
IT'S A
COOKALEIN

LA LA LA
MY
WIFE'S
GONE TO
THE
COUNTRY
HOORAY
HOORAY

SO, NOW
WE CAN HAVE
TH' PINOCHILE
GAME AT YOUR
HOUSE, SAM.

SO,
GOLDIE...
WHEN DO
YOU START
ON YOUR
VACATION
?

TOMORROW
MORNING!
...BOY, I CAN
HARDLY WAIT

BLINKIN'
FURS

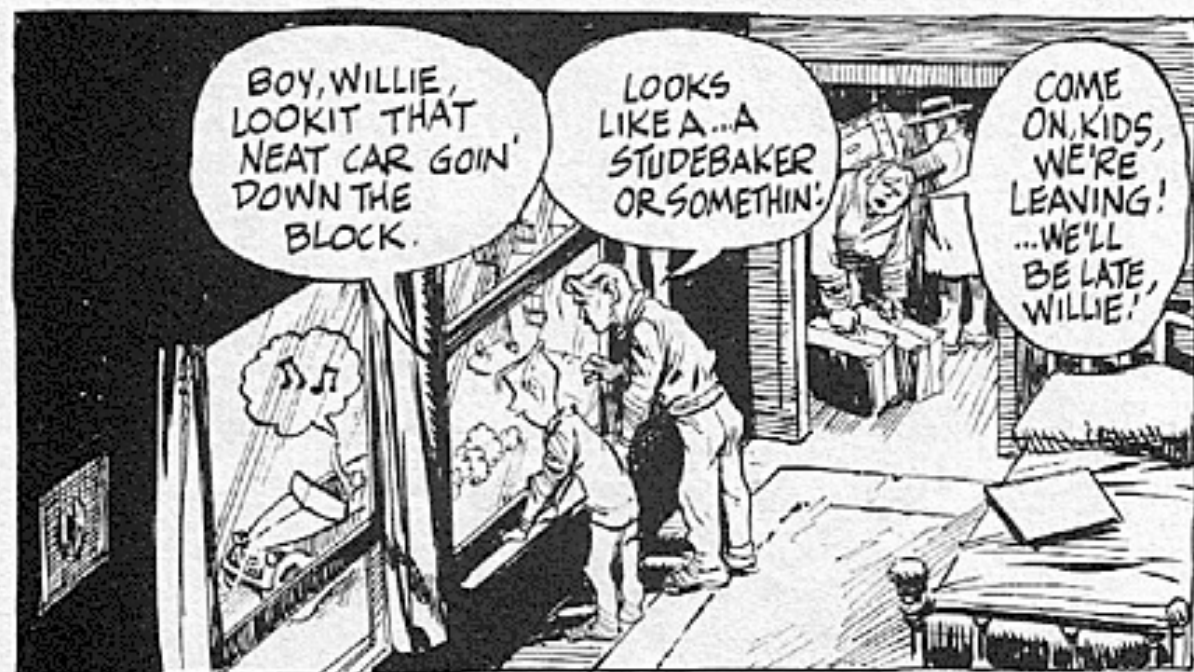







It was a time to come to a reckoning with dreams-time to climb over the invisible walls and escape.







FANNIE... THIS YEAR
TRY TO HAVE
A GOOD REST

IF THE KIDS DON'T
GETSICK AND MY
ACID CONDITION DON'T
START UP... I'LL TRY,
SAM... I'LL TRY!!
WHO AM I DOING
THIS FOR?? THE KIDS!

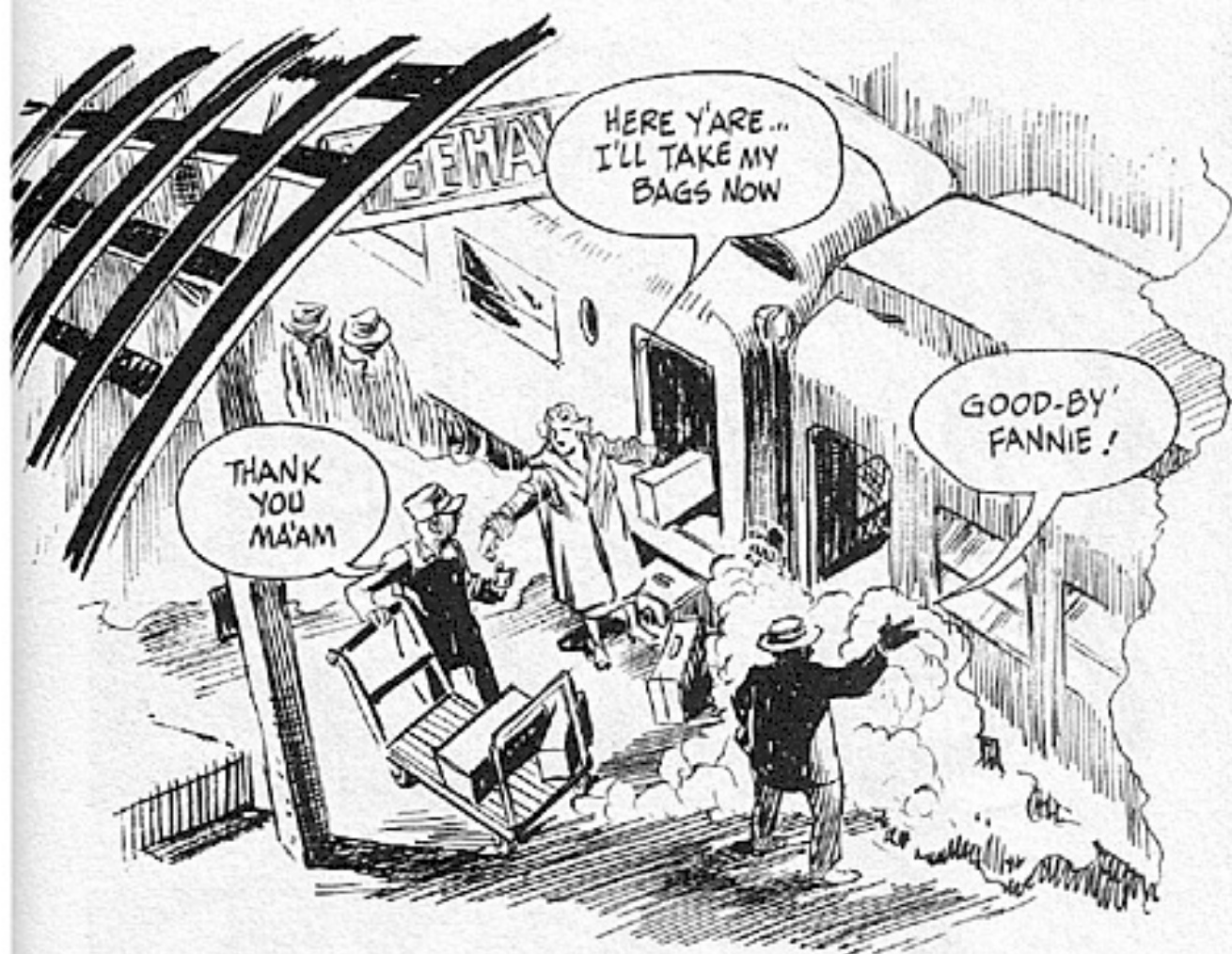
NOO??
SO WHERE
IS THE
CATSKILL
TRAIN?

NOT
SO LOUD,
FANNIE!

TRACK
G
LADY!









Y'GOT THE ROYAL BRUSH OFF!
HA, HA, WANNA JOIN US??

SORRY... I'VE GOT
SOME READING
TO DO!

WHAT ARE YOU... A
DOCTOR OR SOMETHIN'?

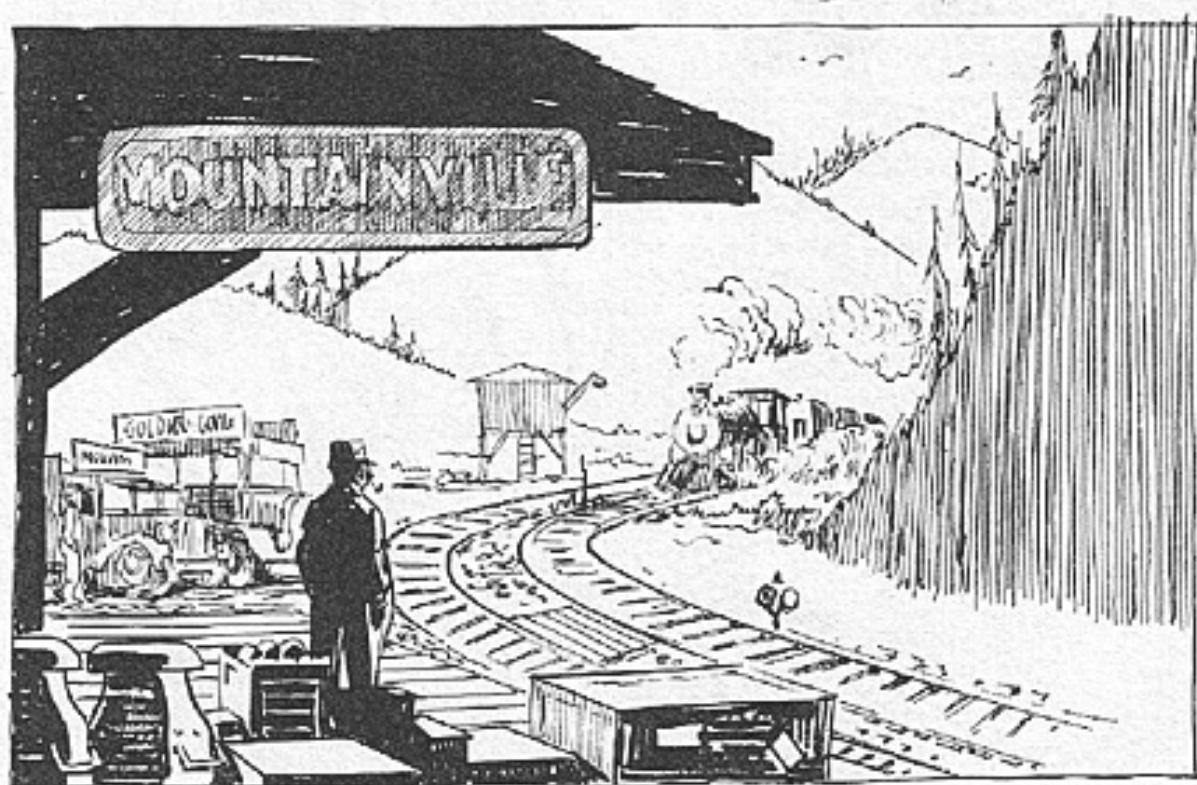
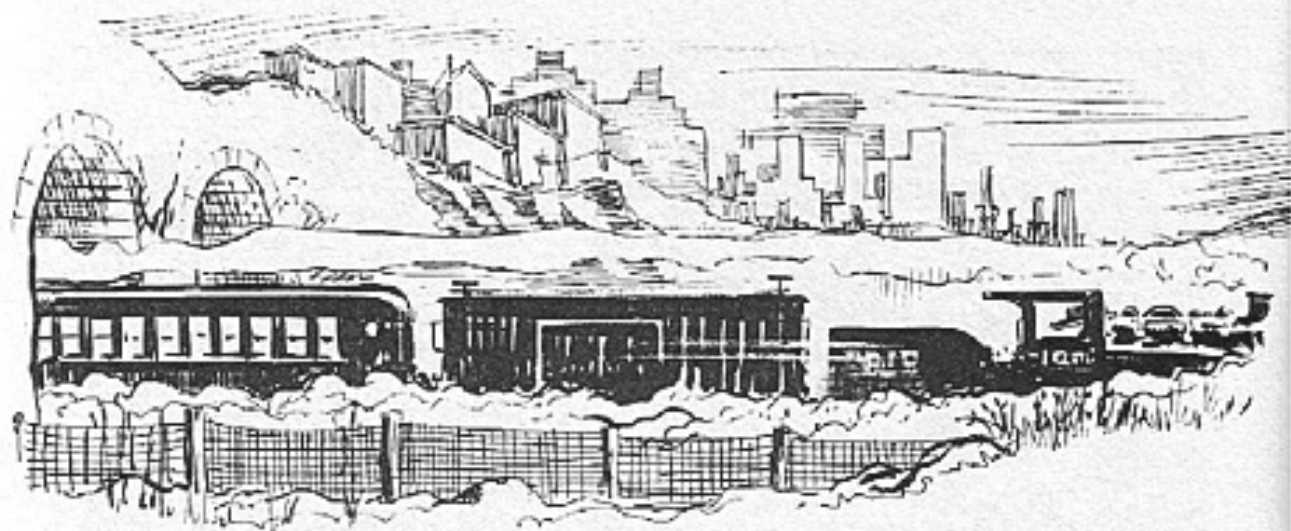
ALMOST... I'M AN
INTERN.

WHERE
Y' STAYING?

I'M GOING TO GROSSMAN'S!
I'M BLOWIN' A SAX IN THE
BAND... IT'S A FREE
VACATION AND LOTSA
TIME TO STUDY!

I'M WAITING ON
TABLES - LOTSA
TIPS!

AHH THE
TRAINS PULLIN'
OUT - WE'RE
ON TIME.





KUGEL'S
MOUNTAIN
LODGE!

GROSSMAN'S
HOTEL!

O'BRIEN'S
HOLLOW,
HERE!!

HILLTOP
FARMS, HERE!

WILLIE,
THERE'S FÉGELS!
...STAY WITH THE
TRUNK, I'LL GET
HIM TO HELP
LOAD US!

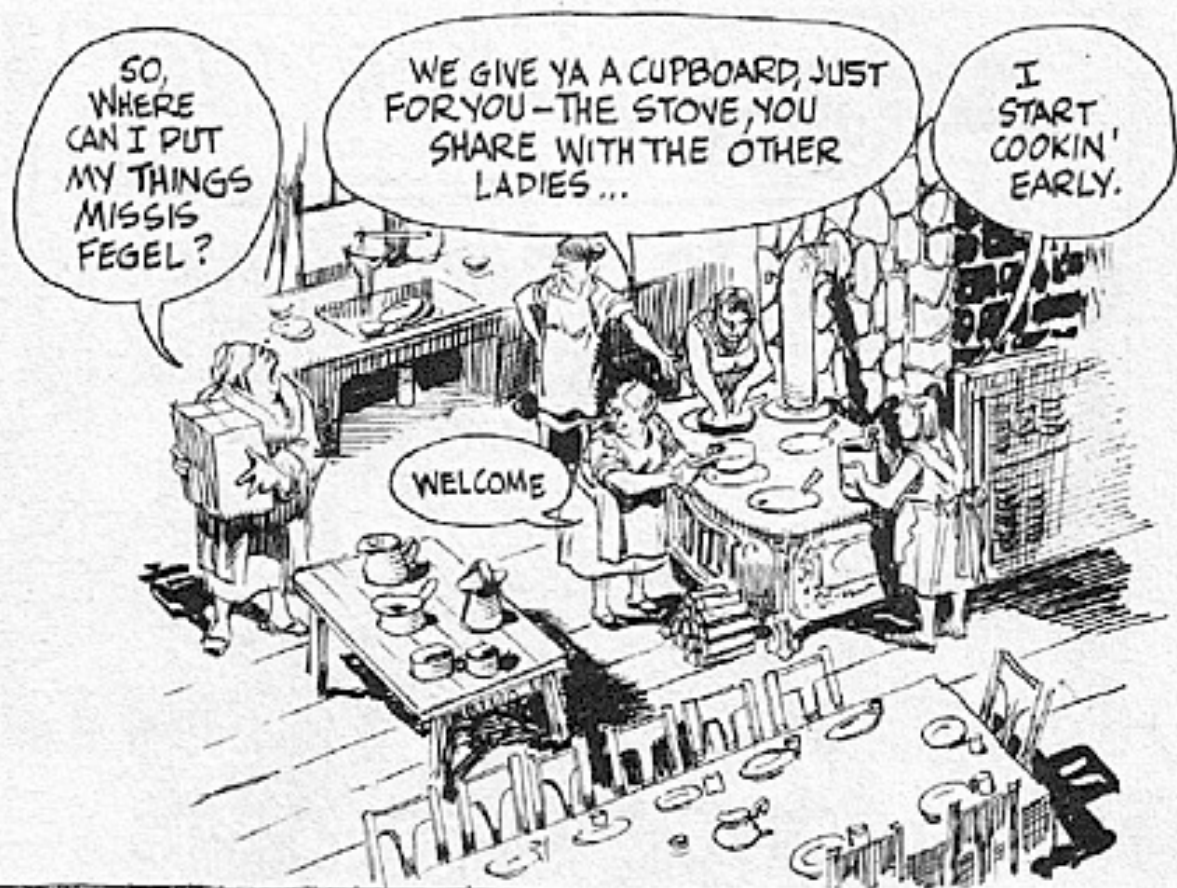
SO, MISTER
FEGEL...YOU
CROWDED THIS
SIZZIN?...IS MISSIS
FEGEL EXPECTING
ME?

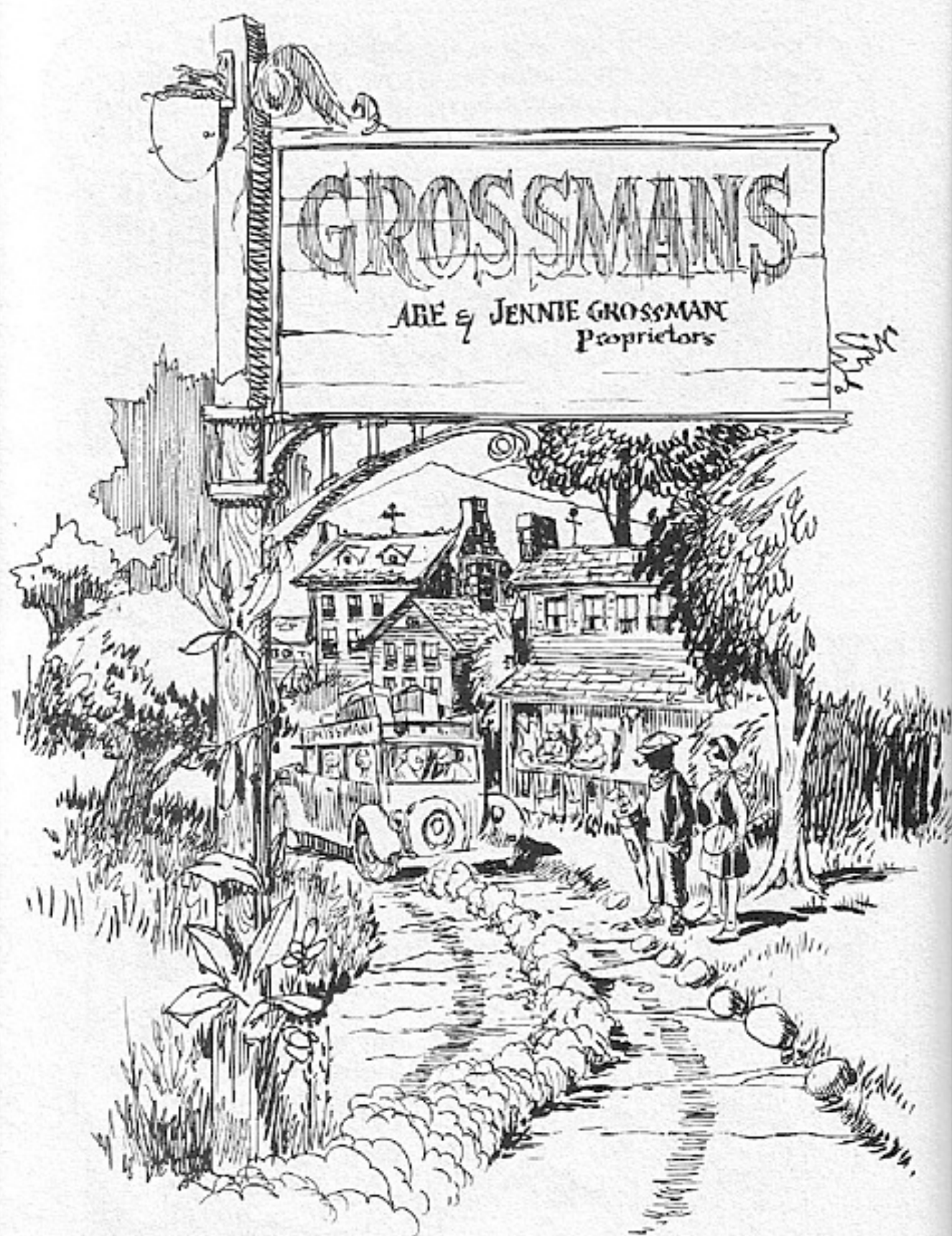
YEP!! ALL THE COTTAGES IS
TAKEN...YOU GOTTA
STAY IN THE MAIN HOUSE.

WELCOME FANNIE -
WE SAVED YOU A BIG
ROOM - MY, HOW YOUR
KIDS ARE GROWING!
WILLIE IS NOW OVER 15!
ALREADY A MAN, EH?

YES, YES, SO SHOW
US THE ROOM, MISSUS
FEGEL!









DANNY,
YOU HERE
AGAIN THIS
YEAR?

DANNY,
THE TOOMLER,
IS NOW THE
SOCIAL
DIRECTOR

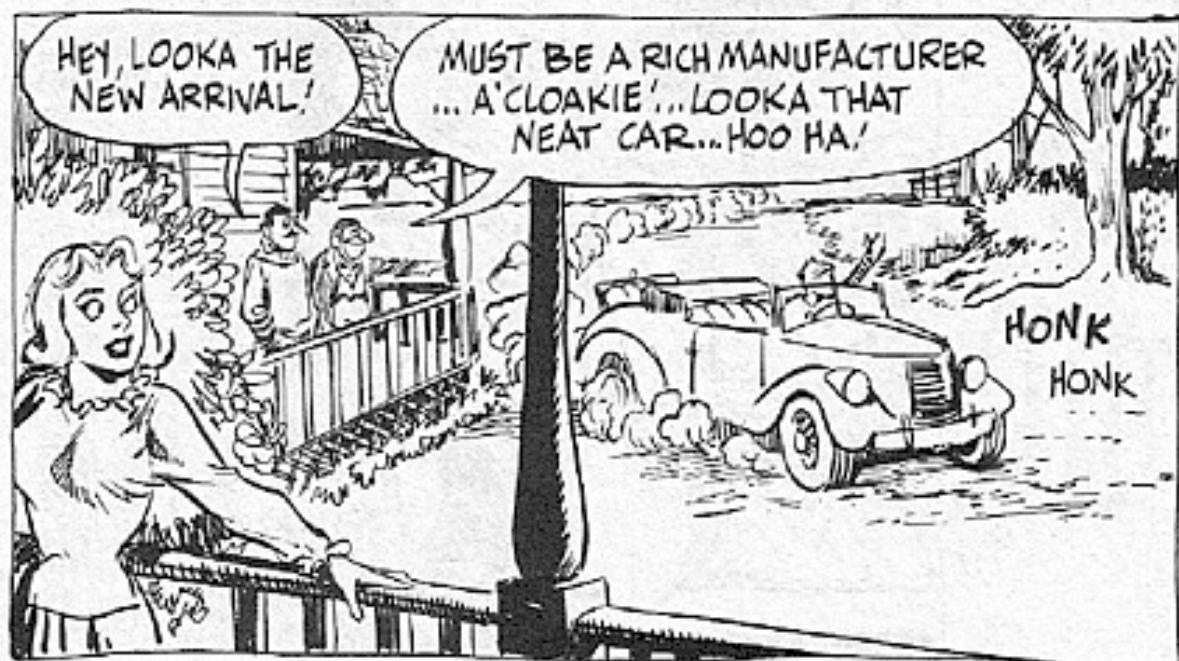
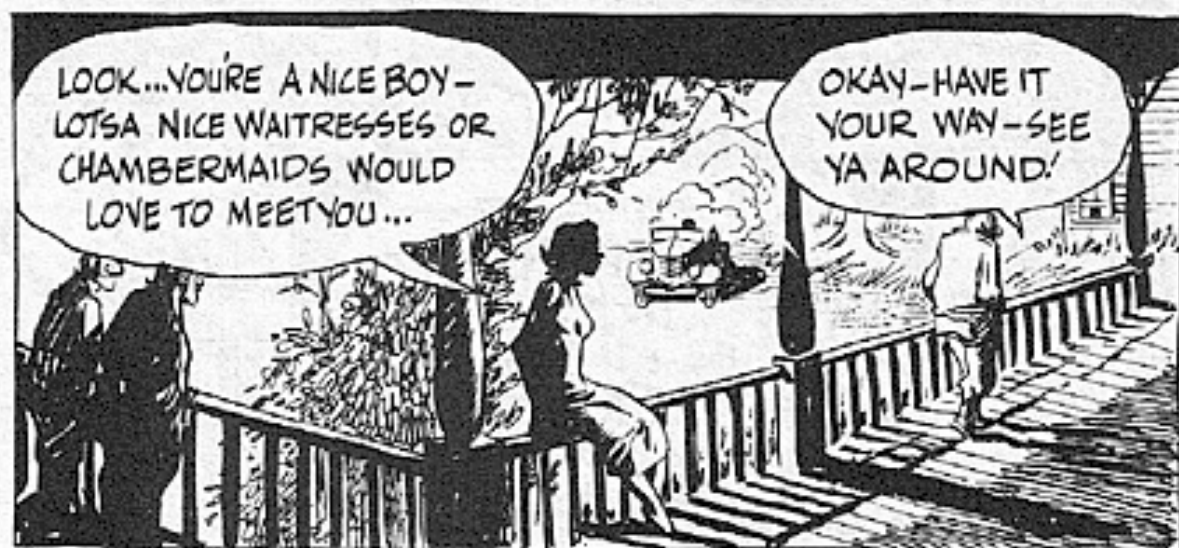
ACTIVITY ♪
♪ ACTIVITY ♪
LOTS A ACTION...
...TANGO LESSONS
AT THREE -
MISSUS GOLDFARB!

OY...
WHAT A
DEVIL!









BOY...TAKE MY BAGS
AND PARK MY CAR...HA..
BOY,I MADE IT FROM
THE BRONX IN 5 HOURS!

HERE!

WOW\$\$

WHICH WAY IS
THE DESK??

THAT
WAY!

THANKS...SEE
YOU LATER BABY!


SURE

LEMME RING
THE COWBELL
TOO, JOEY!

DINNER TIME
ENVYBODY!

CLANG





STOP SINGING
ABE, AND DILL THE
CODDS...OY, BOYCHIK,
I'M TELLINK YOU, IT'S A
MEHIAH... AWHOLE
MONTH WE CAN PLAY
PINOCHILE WIT NO
WIMMEN TO BODDER
US!

♪ MY WIFE ♪
WENT TO ♪
THE COUNTRY ♪
HOORAY ♪
HOORAY

SAM,
DO ME A FAVOR
AND CLOSE THE
WINDER...C'MON
...PAY ATTENTION
TO THE GAME!



SAM!...VERE
YOU GOIN?... IT'S
YORE PARTY-SO, SIT
ALREADY!

PLAY, PLAY... BE MY GUEST...
ER -I GOTTA VISIT MY TANTE
MINNIE... SHE GOT AN ATTACK
TODAY... SUDDENLY...



KATHLEEN



SAM
HONEY!



CHRIST, SAM, YOU
AINT BEEN AROUND
SINCE EASTER!



DON'T WORRY.
WE GOT A MONTH
TOGETHER!



MY WIFE'S
GONE TO THE
COUNTRY!



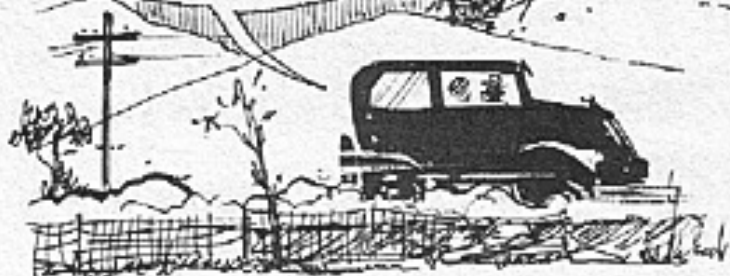




..LISSEN, SAM,
DROP ME OFF AT
GROSSMAN'S...ER I'LL
COME UP TO FEGEL'S
COOKALEIN LATER!
...ER **DON'T** TELL
ANYONE I'M
COMING, O.K?

SURE,
IRVING!
Y'GONNA
SURPRISE
MISSIS
MINKS
?

YEAH!



NOW, WILLIE...POPPA'S
COMING UP TONIGHT-SO YOU
SLEEP IN THE BARN...PETEY,
YOU'RE GOING DOWN TO
GROSSMANS TO STAY WITH
AUNT ROSE...YIZZLE
SLEEP WITH YOUR COUSIN!

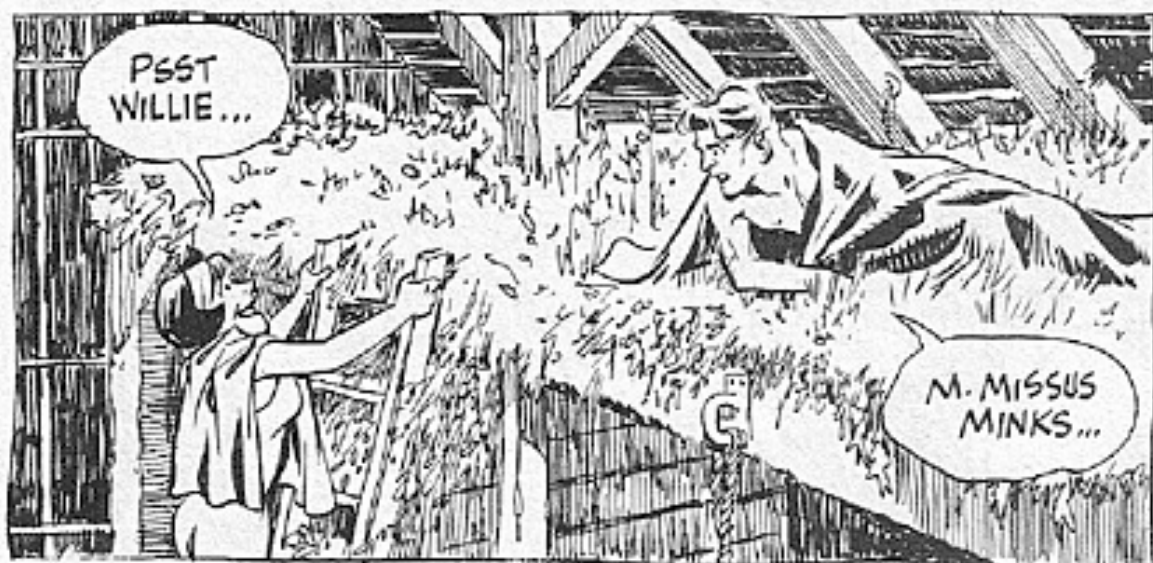
OKAY!

AWW
'WISHT
I COULD
SLEEP
IN THE
BARN
TOO
!!











AAAAH HOW OLD
ARE YOU **REALLY**,
WILLIE?

GEE, MARALYN... GUESS I CAME
TOO FAST... SORRY... I, I'M
ONLY 15 !!



NAH, SWEETIE... THAT WAS
PRETTY **MANLY** FOR
SOMEONE YOUR AGE... I'M
GOING TO TEACH YOU... BY
THE END OF THE SUMMER
YOU'LL BE...



**EEK OH MY
GOD!!**



SO... I
MIGHTA
KNOWN... MY
MARALYN
IN THE HAY WITH
A KID!! HA!

IRVING!
HOW... WHEN
DID YOU
GET HERE?!



I HEARD YOU WERE
UP TO YOUR OLD TRICKS
...SO, I CAME UP TO
FIND OUT... HA! SOME-
ONE IN THE HOUSE
SAW YOU GO INTO THE
BARN- AT THIS TIME
OF NIGHT??... HA! I
FIGGERED OUT
THE REST!

IRVING!
I WAS JUST
COMING TO
GET SOME
FRESH MILK
AND THIS KID
PROPOSITIONS
ME... HAHAHA
IMAGINE, HE'S
ONLY 15!

LIAR

IRVING
NO!
NO!









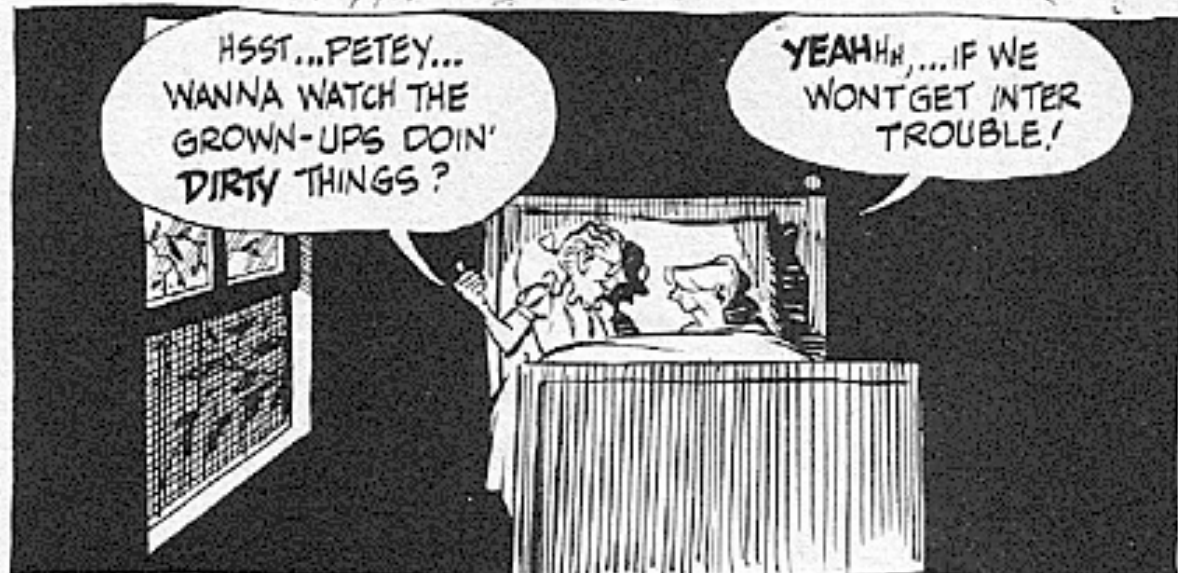
GEE HILDIE...IT IS
PRETTY CLASSY
HERE AT
GROSSMANS!

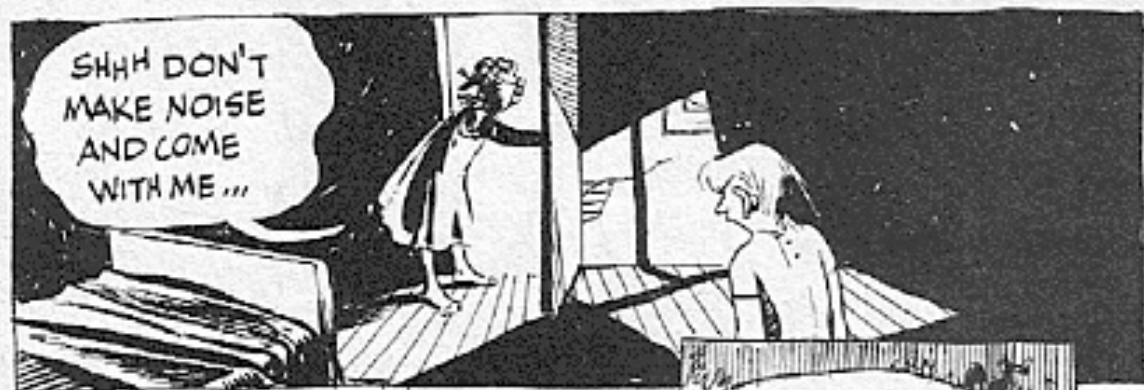
HOW COME
YOUR FOLKS SENT
YOU DOWN HERE
TO SLEEP WITH US,
PETEY??

'CAUSE POPPA
CAME UP-AND
THERE WAS NO
ROOM FOR
ME.

YOUR MA
AND PA WANNA
SLEEP TOGETHER
-YOU KNOW WHY?

TO TALK
PRIVATE...OR
MAYBE TO
FIGHT-
I DUNNO!








OKAY...OKAY!!
SO, WE'LL WAIT
UNTIL WE'RE
MARRIED...BUT
HONEY, LET'S DO
IT RIGHT AWAY!
THIS PLACE
IS COSTING
ME A PRETTY
PENNY!

?



BUT BENNY, I
THOUGHT YOU WERE
...I MEAN, YOU'RE A
RICH... THAT IS, YOU ARE
A MANUFACTURER
AREN'T YOU??

WELL, TO TELL
THE TRUTH GOLDIE,
I'M NOT... I'M JUST
A CUTTER! OH, WELL,
SO YOUR FOLKS'LL
TAKE ME INTO THE
BUSINESS!
AFTER WE'RE MARRIED
WHAT'S THE
DIFFERENCE?!









...YOU REST NOW, GOLDIE!
NO ONE NEED EVER KNOW,
-NOT EVEN YOUR PARENTS!
IN A MONTH OR TWO, I'LL
BE GOING INTO PRIVATE
PRACTICE. WE'LL GET
MARRIED - AND THAT'S
THAT!!



GET SOME
SLEEP... I
GOTTA PLAY
WITH THE BAND
- IT'S MY JOB!



HERBIE!



YES?



I LIKE YOU...
VERY MUCH!



SO, YOU'RE
RUTHIE FEIN,
THE HEIRESS



OH, BENNIE,
I HOPE YOU
WON'T LET
MY FATHER'S
WEALTH
COME
BETWEEN
US!

BENNY!





HOW DO YOU KNOW...?!
I MEAN, HOW DID YOU KNOW
THAT ABOUT ME??

I'M A
DOCTOR,
BENNY,
BELIEVE
ME,
I
KNOW!

WHY DON'T WE BOTH
KEEP QUIET ABOUT
THIS!... DON'T EVER
MENTION GOLDIE'S
NAME... EVER!

O.K.
O.K.

WHAT WAS
THAT ABOUT,
BENNY?

OH, ER..
SOME
GUY
WANTS
ADVICE
ABOUT
HIS
GIRL!

OH, BENNY,
YOU MUST BE
A ~~KEE~~ DEVIL
WITH GIRLS...
YOU'RE SO
SOPHISTICATED!

YEH...
SO, WHEN
AM I
GONNA
MEET
YOUR FOLKS
??

And so
the
summer
ends...
and like
migratory
birds
the
vacationers
return
to the
sanctuary
of the
tenement
where
normal
life
resumes.





SO,
GOLDIE,
YOU HAD A
GOOD
VACATION
??

YEAH...I
MET A DOCTOR
...WE'RE GETTING
MARRIED IN
TWO MONTHS!

MOZZLE
TOV!

WELL, BENNY,
BACK FROM THE
MOUNTAINS?! SO,
HOW WAS IT??

GREAT! I QUITTING
THIS JOB!! I'M
MARRYING A GIRL I
MET-HER FATHER IS
TAKING ME INTO THE
DIAMOND
BUSINESS!

NOO...WILLIE? VACATIONS OVER ALREADY!
SO, START GETTING READY FOR SCHOOL!!
THIS YEAR **YOU'RE** GONNA HAVE LOTSA
RESPONSIBILITY AROUND HERE...YOUR
FATHER IS.... ..GONNA BE ^{AN} TRAVELLING
ALOT...SO, YIZZEL BE THE **MAN** OF
THE HOUSE NOW!...Y'HEAR ME
WILLIE...WILLIE?



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