

Story for performance #939
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Source: Jonathan Finer, 'Israelis doing their block over push to halt settlements', *Washington Post* in *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 15/01/08.

Tags: [home](#), [security](#), [poetry](#)
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In adding a second storey, I saved my life.

One of those things we do so well is to judge: to categorise and reduce the options.

This we: part of an impossible generalising, bunching up all humanity into one package.

Or, should I say, two. The packages of Us and Them.

Enemies and citizens.

Quivering, as I lie here, upstairs, listening to them below, entering and breaking.

Who are they? Enemies or citizens? Likely both.

Is that the key to empathy—to have also, or once, acted and then been judged.

The menace of adding a second storey to protect your kith and kin.

All that senseless action on the ground. The tumult of property rights, of privacy; of the ill-gotten as well as the bona fide possessions.

I know—I've lost, too. *The art of losing isn't hard to master.*

This is a firecracker night, children everywhere; fierce intentions and pride and certificates of ownership displayed whether asked for or not.

Birthright. Land title. Paternity. Maternity. Contests and rivals.

An unequal society. *So many things seem filled with the intent to be lost that their loss is no disaster.*

The cycle of being in, and then out, of important work and blessed with opportunities. How public figures feel when they step out of government.

Roosters to feather dusters. Any pronouncement, once second nature, now sounds like air, garners no volume.

I'll show you my title deed to land. It matters not to me that the laws have changed. This is my entitlement, literally.

And this is our life. Striving to the fresh air at the top, the second storey, closer to God and glory. Detached.

By adding a second story to my repertoire, I saved my life.

Trust me, I know what you have lost. I know it is not replaceable.

Those enemies and citizens have taken from me something much less than you lost. More tangible, more replaceable. *Some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.*

My signet ring with onyx. From a Hungarian hock shop. It flooded me with gravitas when it snugly rested on my hand.

These interlopers left me no easy identifying signals. No ID, no access to money; no medicine, no lipstick or colouring. Nothing about them, either.

I stumbled around in this daze for days, wondering where the well-established markers of my life had slipped away to. (After the second story, would there be a third one? How do we absorb the loss of the people we love, the things we need to live well?)

And waited for them to return. They always do, with their land title deeds, their blood and other burdens, their fierce belief and mastery. Their greed, or need. Their taste, or hunger. Forgetting what is best forgotten.

All was revealed to me after they left—I felt the outline of my body, recently woken, and was happy to still have my life. I added a second storey and its loftiness protected me from harm.

The spectacle of occupied territories, however, is as different as any alien world. The US President visits and retribution is offered as a promise and a threat. For this road map one needs superior GPS.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Terri-ann White.

Lines in italics are from 'One Art', in Elizabeth Bishop, *The Complete Poems 1927-1979*, [Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1984]