

“**W**hat We Saw” began during a heat wave in an ancient tenement in the East Village. There was no air conditioning, and the apartment felt to be on fire, with heat rising up from the floor. That sense of apocalypse intruding on the mundane recalled another time in that apartment, described by my former roommate. He rose one morning in 2001 to discover the towers on fire, then ran to the roof and saw them collapse. The apartment filled with smoke, then the building, then the whole street and neighborhood. During the heat wave, I climbed to that same roof and gazed downtown and realized I could see the old tenement where my ancestors had settled after fleeing the Russian pogroms. I felt, once more, a sense of history bearing down. After many rewrites of “What We Saw,” these initial images felt too large for the story, but the sensory and emotional resonances behind them remained. Much of my fiction starts with unconnected sensory memories and moments of heightened experience. The writing is about following an intuitive process to discover why these moments and images seem to me to be aligned, and then, finally, letting the characters take over.

—*Elizabeth Kadetsky*

