

The Smokin' Tenement

1. the small aunt/grandmother/daughter who lives on the second highest floor has lit incense in her bathroom, as she does every morning, after brushing her teeth. if this comes up in conversation, she calls it "eating".
2. Pigeons have started stealing freshly lit cigarettes from the mouths of pedestrians, and finishing them off elsewhere.
3. There is an exit sign in the stair well that hasn't shined in the dark since the most recent fire.
4. The hallways are the best place for contemplation, because any bad idea or strange thought can be made comfortingly impermanent, like it can be hoovered up like the dust hovering in the air so thickly my neighbours door lingers as only a memory
5. on the second floor a man who most recently called himself jamie has started a band, but none of the bandmates ever say anything. They stand outside smoking weed after their nightly noise-making, worrying, I imagine, about the rent.
6. A rat scrambles under the wire fence to rifle through the top quality shit residents have thrown away. This rat carries no diseases, just an unstoppable determination to make tonights dinner better than yesterday's. I found it's tiny grill, made from tin foil, wet tooth picks and a lighter, under my car.
7. Sunrise wakes up the walls, and they steam even if it didn't rain last night.
8. A toddler downstairs needed to be told that lava lamps do not contain molten rock, and that her excavation of the green behind the building can stop now
9. I receive a letter from my landlord. I burn it in my sink and warm my coffee over it.
10. The cleaner that never needs to open any doors spends hours on a single corner of the atrium because it's "got a bad aura". Little did they realise the hoover was not connected to the tank.
11. all the post boxes are empty. Even the first floor's meal box never showed up. Apparently the postie doesn't like it when all the tenants hang out their windows with fags or joints or cocktail cans or animals or low battery phones or crisps or unfolded laundry in hand, hoping that will make the package arrive faster.
12. My landlord gave everyone on my floor a rudely unannounced visitation earlier today. I slammed the door in his face and told him to come back with a warrant. Only after falling to my sofa in deep satisfaction did I remember that eviction is a thing that can happen.
13. A cat that belongs to the building has recently given birth. Her water bowl is evaporating away faster than she can drink it. There must be a leaky tap somewhere.
14. the new-comer is having a domestic with his extractor fan again. No one has the bravery to tell him how easy it is to unclog, or that it's clogged at all.
15. A woman on the sixth floor spends the first of every month throwing her paper anxieties to the wind from her bedroom window, in the form of acrid smoke that blows back into the upstairs flats with unfortunately open windows.
16. I am getting evicted. Because I didn't open the letter about the increase in rent. I wonder how jamie feels about this.
17. A dog is building a shelter at the far end of the internal courtyard. It's use of twigs and wood scraps is inspired. He could be the next makintosh.
18. We organise a house-cooling dinner party. We knew it would be good after pissing off the smoke detector by burning the bacon. We move to the flat green outside and try to admire the tenement. Try to imagine it on a day with nice weather and content residents. Try to imagine a future where I manage to get the smell of it out of my jacket. Try to imagine the people, the animals, the cleaner, living anywhere else. We fail on all counts. We toast to possibility.