

Moving Day
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Fiction

My roommate Lou and I left our old place with a rental truck loaded with furniture and belongings. We had good thoughts of our new apartment with its large bedroom and neat kitchen, our plan to set up nicely in the place. The apartment we had seen was in a five-story sandstone building that boasted an orange tile roof and window shutters, its address about ten blocks from where we had been living. We arrived at the site with our loaded truck in ready order just after ten. However, we found the sandstone building no longer there, a gray edifice with plain windows and an asphalt roof having taken the spot. The place did not even have apartments, it turned out; the clerk I asked in the lobby said it was a center for medical professionals. The change of building seemed an incredible mystery. However amazing it was to consider, Lou and I had a more urgent issue: we were without the room where we had planned to go. We could not return to our old apartment, either, since it had been rented. We were dispirited; however, we drove on, hoping to find somewhere else that had apartments available.

At the corner stores, we picked up newspapers that listed ads for rooms and called to set up viewings for that very afternoon. I filled with anticipation. "We won't be shortchanged," I told my friend, "switched building or not." We drove to the places advertised in the papers: the Red House on 8th Avenue, the Castle Arms on Bond Street. From our truck, the most casual glance told us the buildings and their environs were less than enticing. In fact, they were totally run down: covered in graffiti, filthy. It boggled the mind to think anyone would choose

to live there. We did not stop to check out the rooms that were advertised; we just drove away, discouraged.

As the leads from the newspaper failed and our budget did not allow us to rent the moving van an extra day, it seemed we had only one recourse left: to scope the streets from our truck until we located a place. "A true *road* mission," my friend Lou said. Driving one avenue to the next, we came to an intersection where we saw a handsome row house up ahead. The house was peach colored stone and had red lintels over the windows and front door. A sign by the front steps said ROOMS TO LET.

"This looks the ticket," Lou said, pointing. "Let's investigate."

So we parked in front of the house. A elderly, gray, and liver-spotted man emerged quickly from the building and met us as we walked to the front steps.

"I'm Al, the building manager," the man said, smiling. "You came to look at a room, I take it?"

I appreciated this swift service after all our trouble that day. I told Al we were and he said, "We have a few available. Why don't I show you inside to them?"

Lou and I followed Al indoors, eager as he seemed. He showed us first to an economy room, "good for two guys aiming to save," as he said. He showed us next to a regular one-bedroom that he insisted "offered plenty of space." The fellow told us about the room amenities, building perks (a quality laundry, ample storage area), and, of course, the monthly rents. While Al did a fine sales pitch, Lou and I exchanged critical glances behind his back. Everything he showed and described came short for us. One room proved too small. Another cramped and musty. We hit one that had a good amount of space, but the rent was out of reach.

Al led us into the hall after we had done with the last room on his list. "Those were the rooms we advertised,"

he said cheerfully, as if sure we were sold. "What do you think?"

"I don't know," Lou said. "They felt kind of off, every one." Then he added, "How about the rooms you *didn't* advertise?"

I thought this a strange request. Why not advertise a room to let, right? But I considered we had not much luck going the expected routes that day: we might as well try to hook around the corner, so to speak.

Al blanched with disappointment. We were not falling in line with his idea of docile customers it seemed. However, he said, "We have only the one. I think it's not in the most ready shape, else I'd have shown you it. But you might say otherwise. It's this one." He turned and pointed to the door of the room right by us. I went and opened it without hesitating and we ventured inside.

The room, we discovered, had many features that we liked. Spacious size. The neat if aged condition of the floors. The brand name oven and fridge. Even the reasonable rent. To tell the truth, the room suited us better than we could have hoped, so we agreed to rent it. We went to Al's office behind the building and signed the paperwork without delay.

Lou and I had gone many unusual detours that day to be sure, but we did have fun settling into our new apartment. There were some challenges with getting in our stuff. The beds, for one, were too big to lie side by side as at our former place; we had to set them wide apart at the bedroom corners before they fit right. Then, the dining table clashed with the side room off the kitchen, the apparent dinette, but worked beside the kitchen island, a more convenient spot for serving food. But once we had set up, we felt part of the place. And soon we were calling the new apartment home.