

### The Cruellest Lies Are Often Told In Silence

The contract, written in dense legalese that reminded the mover of the separation agreement he'd signed with his ex-wife, said he could rent the storage locker for \$39.99 a month for a year and renew at the same rate without paying a further deposit or providing a credit check. Nothing in the contract said anything about a capacity limit, or fire regulations.

"You've got too much stuff in the locker," the manager of the facility told the mover. "You've got to get some of it out. By the end of the week." The manager warned the mover that the contents would be sold or donated if he didn't comply in a timely fashion.

"We expect full cooperation in a timely fashion," he said.

“You know I’ve got nothing in there would start a fire,” the mover told the manager. “There’s at least another two feet at the front of that locker for more things.”

“You’ve used ten feet of its length, all five feet of width, and the entire six feet of height. No one has that much to store. It’s not a packing crate,” the manager said.

“But I rented all the feet,” the mover said.

“The end of the week. Start getting things out or else.”

“It’s not like I’m storing bodies.”

“Who says something like that? Clear it out!”

The mover calculated the time and physical energy need to accede to the manager’s demand and decided to bring his truck to the locker on the following Saturday morning. His plan was to take one half to another storage facility less than a block away and leave the rest behind as a punitive gesture. He was partial to a set of cappuccino cups (linen white with cherry-red lipstick marks on their rims that revealed both passion and carelessness) that he took from his ex-wife.

Last week he’d moved three different couples out of east-end apartments, tossed out by landlords who were renovating, which really meant that the landlords applied a coat of white paint, changed the shower curtain, and put the unit back on the market for twenty percent more. These renovictions accounted for twenty of his jobs in the last year. Another couple couple he moved out that week made up the greatest share of his work: love torn asunder.

“I need you to move us out separately,” the woman told him. “Me first, so I can make sure I take what’s mine, and him last, which is what he deserves.”

He listened to her tone more than her words to judge how tempestuous the assignment might become. If he detected bitterness, or anger, he’d turn down the job, or inflate the quote; he wanted compensation for his anxiety.

“Will you both be at the apartment, at the same time?” he asked.

“The asshole will make sure he’s around to see what I take,” she said.

The mover added ten percent to the quote.

“You need to bring strong men to lift my boxes of books,” she said. “And please make sure that any boxes labelled ‘personal’ aren’t dropped or opened.”

He often received elaborate or nonsense instructions, but he’d either politely appease his customers or ignore them. If they told him to place their small dog in a cardboard box he’d suggest that the animal might prefer an open pet carrier and direct the client to purchase one before he’d finished loading the truck. One woman paid him extra to pack her entire kitchen and left written notes with diagrams showing him how to arrange the cutlery in purpose-built containers. Another client left notes for him written in Klingon.

“We never drop anything,” he told the women. “I’ve got two guys working with me who have very sticky hands. And large muscles.”

“Good. Maybe they’ll intimidate my ex and make sure he doesn’t do anything stupid.”

“Do you think he might?”

“He’s like a lot of men. Territorial and insecure.”

The mover considered her judgement and wondered if he had a smidgeon of these disdainful qualities. He decided not.

His mother warned him not to do manual labor. “There’s no money and you’ll always take orders.” She was aghast that he’d borrowed money to start a business whose sole purpose was to provide manual labor. “An ape can do that work,” she said.

“An ape can’t drive a truck, talk to clients, or organize,” he told her.

“I’m not so sure. And eventually A.I. will do the parts the monkey can’t do.”

Her dismissal did not prevent her from asking him to occasionally use his truck. She had recently purchased an expensive chaise lounge for her foyer and felt that he should pick it up as practise for when he moved “a better class of people”.

“Now that I’ve got money and experience, at my age, I don’t mind helping others, and you,” she told him.

He thought about his mother’s comment and wondered what parameters she was working within. Did she mean help with money? Relationship issues? Did she honestly think that she, whose husband had left her no reason whatsoever—no younger woman or secret second wife or sudden flight from legal troubles—could offer help? When his own wife had left him, his mother said “well, you should never have married, it’s not your strength”.

The mover once thought that history was a fact, entirely objective, and that what he read in textbooks and popular nonfiction was true. He now knew that history could be rewritten at a whim, erased, entirely made up. His ex-wife concocted a story of their marriage, told to their mutual friends who soon cleaved to her, that was completely untethered from his memories. To justify ownership over their previously shared chattels, she recast events tied to objects: who discovered the artwork in a small-town gallery, who'd seen the value in the rustic nightstand bought at a garage sale, how hard she had fought to have a sisal area rug in the kitchen.

“You didn't choose the coffee mugs, if you really think about it,” she said. “I spotted them in the thrift store while you looked for a shirt.”

“I walked past them first and told you they were interesting.”

“And I translated ‘interesting’ into ‘interest’ and bought them.”

They divided the household contents. She claimed two-thirds of everything, by his count, and more than eighty percent if his emotional attachment to these items was considered. He forfeited his vintage typewriter (“you aren't a writer just because you majored in English, and I found the store that sold it” she argued), laptop (“you always used a tablet”) and a vintage acid washed jean jacket (“I wore it as part of my Halloween costume last year” she reminded him).

“I'll rent a truck and pick up whatever's mine tomorrow,” he told his ex. “I'm bringing friends to help.”

“If you have any left,” she said.

Instead of renting a truck he bought one and his first professional moving job took place on the day he carted twelve boxes holding his possessions out of his former matrimonial home.

On Friday he finished his moving jobs without drama and decided to swing past his storage locker and start culling its contents. He took the longer route, past the apartment of the woman he'd moved that week. He thought about her judgement of men and thought she should know that he was an anomaly.

He rang her buzzer, planning to return materials she purchased even though he wasn't obligated to do so when customers bought a comprehensive moving package.

“Hello?” he called into the microphone. “It's me, your friendly mover. I have your extra boxes and tape from last week.”

Her voice crackled through the speaker, echoing his friendly tone.

“That's great! I'll be right out. I love free stuff, or returns.”

He gave her five small cardboard boxes, “best for dishes or books”, he said, a sheet of bubble wrap, and a spool of packing tape.

“You have a pretty large library,” he said. “My guys got a workout from carrying them.”

“Collected them in school and then afterwards. You might have noticed that my ex didn't ask for any of them.”

The ex was present for only the first ten minutes of the moving day, insisting that he be moved out first and then relenting when the moving crew told him to step aside.

“Yeah. He didn’t strike me as the type to covet literature.”

“Nope. Sports gear and baseball caps. And taxidermy.”

The mover said he didn’t recall any taxidermy.

“Yes. He said he never got one of them. A dog. He thinks you lost it or I threw it out. He picked up road kill and had them stuffed,” she said. “He said the animals deserved posterity.”

Maybe the boyfriend was an anthropologist, or vet?

“You should have kept at least one of his caps,” the mover said. “It’s a good way to confirm the past.”

“History is constantly being rewritten,” he explained. “The Soviets did it, then the Russians. The Chinese do it. So do Republicans and Canadians. But if you keep an artifact that is truthful, then you can preserve the past, future-proof it from tampering.”

“Right, so if I keep his hat I can always remember what he was about,” she said.

“Exactly.”

They spent the next week meeting daily in the coffee shop near her new apartment. He arranged his schedule for that week so he only did small jobs and

could carve out an hour each day to meet her. She worked remotely and could meet anytime.

“I name colours,” she told him when he asked what she did for a living.

“Really? Colours for what?”

“Paint, cars, drapes. Anything really. Companies need someone to name the colour.”

“What about people?”

“Sure. Your hair is ‘chunky chocolate’. And your eyes are ‘dried moss’.”

“Wow. That’s edifying. I never thought to go past ‘brown’ and ‘brown’”, he said.

“Yeah. Take the mundane and make it sacred. People want to live in houses that are painted in colours that seem otherworldly, or buy blue cars painted ‘Area 51’,” she said. “They think they possess something unusual, unique, mysterious.”

He told her about his moving job and some of the odd things he’d witnessed, like the newly engaged couple. The future husband had just arrived that morning from a three-month tour of service. The woman asked the moving crew to put the new mattress and bed frame together before anything else came off the truck, and she and her fiancé went to the bedroom, closed the door, and had sex while the movers finished their work. Another time he’d almost finished packing the truck for a couple breaking up when the couple came out of their building, hand-in-hand, and canceled the move, asking the mover to leave the boxes on the front lawn.

“Did you charge them the full amount?” she asked.



“I discount when love is regained, but not for lust,” he said, “so yeah, I gave them a break.”

“So, you’re a professional voyeur,” she said.

“No, my clients are exhibitionists,” he answered.

“I shall call your perspective ‘aperture grey’”, she said. “I think the truth is never starkly black or white, and the aperture is your brief glimpse into their lives.”

His wife had arranged the service of a moving company three times, then canceled each time when he convinced her to stay. He explained to his wife that his unruly behaviour (refusing to pick up strewn clothes, empty the sink of dishes, pay bills on time, not yell during arguments) was a consequence of a nasty malady. He’d done a few online quizzes and scored high for ADHD. Supposedly he should have five or more traits for inattentiveness and three or more for hyperactivity; he had three and one, respectively, or slightly more than fifty percent of the baseline, so that was a passing grade, for sure. He had ADHD no doubt.

“I have ADHD,” he told his wife. “And maybe a bit of something else, but I’m not sure.”

“ADHD? Really? You seem just fine running a business and reading history books,” she suggested.

The manager of the storage locker called him three times in the next two days, demanding that he remove everything immediately or the contents would be sold and/or discarded.

“It’s in the contract. If you violate terms I can do this,” the manager said.

“Violate what terms? I’m storing boxes.”

“We opened the locker, which we are allowed to do by the way, and found unusual items. Dead animals are not allowed.”

“It’s not dead. It’s stuffed.”

“It’s not walking or breathing, so by my estimation it’s dead. You’ve got forty-eight hours.”

“I have boxes in there. Personal things.”

“The labels don’t even match your name. ‘Lisa’s clothes. Max’s desk’. Not yours.”

“Fine. I’ll get it out but I expect a refund.”

“I don’t discount violators,” the manager said and hung up.

The mover decided not to join his crew the following week. One of his men had lost his license for too many DUIs and another had three accidents in thirteen months, but his longest employee, a guy who drove a school bus as a side hustle, could take the wheel. You had to trust the right people, he told his ex-wife, provide them with space to flourish. By allowing his men to drive he found the space to meet every morning at the coffee shop and play “I Spy”. He’d say “I spy

with my little eye something that is blue” and she’d guess both what he spied and then provide a new label for it. “It’s the shirt the barista is wearing,” she correctly guessed. “It’s ‘thin-skin vein blue’. That’s the colour.”

“You have amazing focus”, he told her. “I can’t seem to settle on anything. I’m so easily distracted.”

“I don’t think so. You sit here with me every day for an hour.”

His mother once told him he wasn’t like other children, he was special, and this explained his lack of childhood friends and love. But she also said “you have a lousy personality”, although this was so generalized that no useful conclusion could be drawn. What, after all, did “lousy” mean? The colour consultant liked him.

“That’s true. Maybe I am special,” he said.

“Special? I don’t think I said that,” she said.

“Colourful then, “ he replied.

“More than one colour. Yes.”

The colour consultant couldn’t meet him the next day, saying she was face down in a time-sensitive project. The mover decided not to return to work and instead use the time to cull the locker.

He drove his pickup truck to the storage facility at six in the morning and entered the code to open the chain-link fence gate. On his third failed try he

considered pushing the truck through the gate, slowly with little noise, just a gentle nudge.

“I locked you out. You should have been gone yesterday!”

The manager stood on the other side of the fence. His arms were thicker than the metal posts that anchored the fence to the ground.

“I want my stuff. I’m here like I said I would. And I own it. You can’t change that fact.”

The manager pointed at him.

“You stole stuff, didn’t you? People you moved, right?”

“I’m an historian. Those are artifacts. A natural museum.”

It was true. He was preserving a moment for each person he’d moved. These things his clients had once owned were like insects trapped forever in the resin.

“Did you know that palaeontologists discovered insects in amber that were 99 million years old and their true colours were still visible?” he asked the manager.

“Why would I give a fuck?” the manager said.

“Because their history couldn’t be denied or forgotten. That’s amazing.”

“Your stuff is at the corner of the lot, along the road. Garbage pickup is today so you’re lucky you get to still be our local historian.”

The mover parked his truck along the curb and did a quick inventory of his boxes lined along the sidewalk. Lisa’s clothes were still firmly taped in a cardboard box, and Max’s desk contents remained in a plastic bin. The stuffed

border collie stood guard beside the other boxes. The mover patted the dog's head and gently picked him up to place in the truck bed. In the broad light cast by the streetlamp the dog's fur reminded him of his morning coffee, right before he stirred the cream into it.

“Nespresso night,” he said to the dog. “That’s your colour.”

A shame, thought the mover, that the boyfriend, or the colour consultant, or any of his other clients, would never know that their past was being held for them in a box, or that their history could be tossed into a landfill. One day he might return it to them, free of charge, no quote required, leave it on their doorstep with a note, when they were ready to accept the truth, rather than deny it in silence.