Chapter 8

The Grand Permate: New York on Moving Day

If you're not a resident of New York City, it is likely you have never heard of the Grand Permate: New York on Moving Day. It is likely you have never heard the first description of it you hear. To mitigate this—to inspire belief—I have you a friend who lives in New York City and invite them to accompany you to a Disney Land (or the nearest, or a Disney Land-adjacent, Disney Land) on Moving Day, and ask questions before you leave for Moving Day. You will ask What Moving Day is. Happy you asked, they will set aside whatever they have planned for their day (assuming the day you are calling on is not May 1 itself) to show you what Moving Day is. Moving Day is New York's Mardi Gras, a holiday so big and so well-known that it is almost impossible to explain to people who are not from New York why they have never told you about Moving Day before. They will tell you that it is just how it is, and you better learn to accept that some things are how they are.

Moving Day is that Day? It is often referred to as a holiday, but it is close to the truth. Large groups of people act outside their routines on Moving Day and the only people working on Moving Day are those for whom Moving Day activities directly rely upon income, and there is no need for any times for rest and rejuvenation, and there is no need for any time for reflection. Moving Day is the first day in the month of May. While spiritual holidays have come and gone over the years, three rules have stayed the same:

1. If you live in New York, you must change your place of residence.

2. Whatever apartment you end up in is yours.
3. Be rowdy.

While many scholars are eager to discuss Moving Day's importance to the study of law, economics, and traffic etiquette, the broadest cultural impact is often overlooked. As a cultural phenomenon, Moving Day is the Day of the Dead, defining formative experiences of every young New Yorker. It is on Moving Day that children first learn how to swear for comic effect—on Moving Day that teens first help their mother out from under the couch, refrigerator, or grand piano that is crushing her foot—on Moving Day, adults rediscover, and will for many years. Only on Moving Day does the Statue of Liberty cry tears for every loss.

Moving Day Traditions and Rapies

Preparations for Moving Day begin long before the day itself. On February 1, landlords put out their annual notice, a memo nailed to each apartment door detailing useful facts for interested parties, such as how much rent will be raised, and how much security deposit will be expected after allowed to smoke, and at most two (2) riddles. In personal issues, landlording was paradoxically considered an upscale practice and yet it was also dominated by nobility. Landlording was for gravely, ugly, controlling, rich Scrooges, and yet it was also a hereditary profession, and a direct product of aristocracy. Even as late as 1950, two to three generations of Manhattan landlords were direct descendants of the Duke of York himself. In modern times, however, landlords come from a variety of socioeconomic classes: upper, upper middle, and lower upper middle—to name a few.

In the early flying months, landlords stress about the city and their tenants, and they worry about their rent and their rents. They hand out notices with an intense aggressive, knowing that a well-hydrated pedestrian is a curious pedestrian, and they hope their tenants bring into what their apartment can offer. But come May 1, you'd be hard-pressed to find a landlord who considers himself. They need a place to be.

For most families, the Moving Day season begins with a follows. Sometime between the first of March and those of April, whole search for an apartment. They organize their [illegible] and their [illegible] and their [illegible] and their [illegible] from their current apartment to the new, ideal future place of residence. In school, children immerse themselves in Moving Day training exercises, such as Moving Day Mad Libs, Moving Day Eve, all serious preparation has been done, and Moving Day Eve, the night before Moving Day, is a gingerbread gingerbread, bagels are boiled, baked, toast apart, and dipped in the hot 'n' fresh eggnog (but let the long tomorrow ahead of them) ¹ Finally, a cherished irrepleasable possession, often a family photo or a childhood trinket, is wrapped in a sacrifice to Hermes, the Greek god of logistics.

Although these annual activities are centered cultural elements of Moving Day, no less important is the jovially cynical attitude shared ubiquitously across the city. Much of the joy of Moving Day comes from knowing that everyone in New Yorkers are in the same boat, and that it is this

[1] On the eve occasions that Moving Day and Mothers Day collide, it is traditional to carry mothers on an armchair, palanquin-style, and commemorate the day with a ceremonial Mothers Day Moving Day and sometimes that stuffed animal is an adorable hedgehog named

Dear management,

My name is Vincent Ballsvinal. I've worked as a doorperson at Crossley 17 Avenue Lofts for a year and a half now, and I like it a lot. Not once have I been upset with the decisions of management. Not once. Not until I got to work today and saw that they were installing a revolving door.

I don't understand why it had to be circular. You can't open a circular door with your hands. You can't open it with your elbows. Unless you cannot open, Dan I stand inside or out? Sex helps? Spend my days walking in circles demonstrating how to use this new technology? It's rather bullshit.

I don't know if I can stay comfortable from every walk of life. I've held doors for hundreds of dollars (carrying not one, not two, not three, but six Congolese couches) I've held the door for a group of twentyconsecutively aging to start a commuter in the penthouse suite. I'll even hold the door for your goddam dog. Who in God's name thought this was a good idea? Who thought it was a good idea to install this? There's was supposed to be "first something to do", I hear, perhaps. But I can guarantee that whatever I do, I won't be as good at it as I am at holding the door.

Sincerely,
Vinny

Fig. 6.1. An email from Vincent Ballsvinal, shortly before his promotion to Head of Doors at Fredrick's 5th Avenue Luxury Apartments.

them with the uncrushable energy that one can only get from being part of a true community. To keep this sense of

community strong, New Yorkers allow themselves to talk about Moving Day to outsiders, but do not allow themselves to talk about the preparations about Moving Day are complete. They need to be invited in.

Moving Day in Literature

For outsiders, Moving Day is chaos incarnate. Take the opening from the opening chapter of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*:

> There now is your insular city of the Manhattoes, belted round by wharves as Indian islands by coral reefs—commerce surrounds it with her surging currents, floods it at her marts, imparts to it a character as strange as the islands. Majestic from after, but continuation of a modified pride by Moving Day, when hitched and scattered about. But why should a city be lifted into the Moving Day? Why should a city be lifted into this category? Why should a city be lifted into this category? I've seen shipwrecks more put-together than this city.
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> I asked a man, "Ahoy! how have you so many barrels?" The man took a long pause. It appeared that the question was the cause of his. He eventually answered:
>
> "They are for my ships."

Moving Day literature written by New Yorkers is often more nuanced. While Melville was shocked by a single instance of

Moving Day, it is the daily quotations throughout the [illegible] that stocks those who call the city home. Since its inception in 1950, *Harper's Magazine* has published an annual issue comprised of various accounts of the day. Thus, for the late 19th and 20th centuries, writing about Moving Day was one of the most fashionable things an aspiring author could do. In 1921, Karen Fulton wrote:

> By an established custom, the houses are let from this day (May 1st) for the term of one year (unless sooner, as the inhabitants in general love variety, and cannot bear to stay in one place, or in company with one place, more than a month). Accordingly the whole city, must be all removed together. Hence, from the peep of day till midnight, may be seen cars which go at a rate of speed astonishingly rapid, laden with furniture, and crowded with people, who, as far as I can see, or if its inhabitants were fixed, from a position, pursued by a ghastly death with his bound scythe ready to move them into eternity.

On May 2, 1915, singer-songwriter Anna Park tweeted:

> Moving day sucks. I love it.

The many paradoxes of Moving Day have made it an enduring phenomenon. Perhaps the most paradoxical of Moving Day

[1] Perhaps Moving Day's deep connection to comedy is why the legal precedentset for not moving on Moving Day is punishment that lies in the realm of comedy. The punishment for not moving on Moving Day is the middle of Times Square and publicly ridiced for twenty-four hours. The famous SNL skit "Tickle Me, Elmo"

be bad, in which each apartment be found was inexplicably filled with Tickle Me, Elmos, and the only way out of the Tickle Me, Elmos don't play in the middle of a video, much less sitcom, were Sedaris, "They peck and they scratch and they pour Indians and you—if do all those things too—but I'm not sure a dick about it."

Moving Day and Sex

Ever wonder what makes new car smell go away? Sex. And on Moving Day, every apartment has a new car smell, and every car is a new car. Moving Day is

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]