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## Moving Day

~AmyCushing

I struggle with the packing tape as I clumsily pull the taping gun across the top of the large cardboard box, sealing what is, hopefully, the last of many. I survey the room, scanning the sea of boxes that fill the space. A sense of relief consumes me as I take a moment to admire a job well done. I grab the Sharpie marker nearby and write, “Odds and Ends” on the box.

“Hmmm...odds and ends,” I think to myself.

The phrase kind of sums up the past few years of our time here in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. There have been so many changes since moving here three years ago—marriage, law school, career change, new city—I find myself feeling nostalgic, but also looking forward to our new beginnings.

I’ve heard the first year of marriage is the hardest. I’ve also heard the first year of law school is a major test of endurance. My husband and I happened to encounter both at the same time. Some people thought we were nuts for pulling up our roots and taking a leap into a career change for my husband when we were just starting up the corporate ladder. Add our newly minted marriage to the mix and, well, they thought we had lost our marbles.

What they didn't know, is we both saw the rung at the top of top of both our career ladders, and it didn't look worthy of the climb. We wanted more, and my husband wanted to see how far he could go. I was happy to join him on this new path, and although the ride has been bumpy, I never once questioned his goals. Now, the day has finally arrived for us to start at the bottom of that corporate ladder once again. But first, we have to make the long journey back to where we started.

We're setting out for Phoenix, Arizona in a few hours, my hometown and the place where my husband and I met. The undertaking has me excited, stressed, tired, and overwhelmed all at the same time. I try to keep focused, but a million thoughts occupy my mind, and each is demanding my attention.

I stop and decide a sip of water is in order. I wander through the crevices we've created in order to navigate through the wall of boxes and make my way to the refrigerator. I open the door and feel the rush of brisk air stream from inside. It cools me. Even though it's a cloudy, seventy-degree day outside, I'm hot from my work. I grab one of the last water bottles from the otherwise barren fridge, close the door, twist open the cap, and quickly consume its contents.

I pause for moment to lean against the refrigerator, letting its sturdiness support me. I can see most of the apartment from my vantage point. I scan the room, noticing the stark white walls, the generic eggshell-colored, vertical blinds covering the French doors that lead to the small balcony, the lackluster taupe carpet, and the stacks of boxes. Despite the mess of cartons strewn about the space, it seems so plain now, so empty, but the memories of our time here abound.

Like the first day we arrived at this apartment, and how my husband nervously unlocked the door to show me our new home for the next three years. He only had time for a two-day home search in the weeks leading up to his first day of law school and had rented the place in a moment's notice. It was a basic two-bedroom, one bath apartment with a rickety ceiling that creaked each time the upstairs neighbors took a step, but it was our first home as husband and wife. To me it was perfect. I smiled when we stepped through the front door and into the small living room.

"I like it," I said. I saw the relief on his face.

Then came the day we thought it was time to add a puppy to our small family. We spent weeks preparing for the new arrival, driving all the way to Pittsburgh to pick him up. We brought the sweet, little creature home and placed him on the carpet where he immediately peed. After three sleepless nights, numerous clean ups, and complaints from the neighbors, we called the breeders to ask if they could find the puppy a new home. They said yes. I cried the entire car ride to Pittsburgh and all the way home and continued to feel the guilt months later over failing to be a good dog owner. In actuality, we weren't ready.

There was also our first Thanksgiving as husband and wife. We decided to spend it with just the two of us. I roasted the turkey in a roasting bag. Being a novice cook, it didn't occur to me to check the cooking time in the bag versus the standard cooking time listed in my cookbook. It's a cookbook, how could it be wrong? I was unaware a turkey roasts much faster in a bag. By the time I took it out of the oven, it was so overdone the legs had fallen off. We both laughed. My husband snapped a picture. At the time I didn't see the significance of memorializing the event in photo, but now every time I see it, I smile.

There were the restless nights, the fights, the lazy Sundays, the small parties, the visits from family and friends, and those beautiful, precious intimate moments etched on my heart. The tumultuous first year of marriage, when we were both still finding our place in our new family, grew here. This is where we started anew, not just as husband and wife, but also in our careers. I look at it now, marveling at how it seems so different from the first moment I stepped through the front door. It's no longer the blank canvas I saw in the beginning.

Now, it's filled with color and drama and life. I notice the red streak on the far wall marked from a hardcover book that scraped it as the book fell from my arms and slammed onto the floor. I catch sight of the small, clumped spot of carpet near the center of the room where I knocked over a lit candle, spilling the hot wax on the floor. I had read about a trick using a hot iron and towel to remove the wax from the carpet, but no matter how hard I tried, this small mark remained. In a distant corner I can see the large ring left by planter we no longer own. We thought plants would help liven up the place. They just ended up attracting millipedes.

There it lay before me, my work of art from the first three years of my marriage. Never on that first day, would I have thought this place would move beyond a temporary stopping point and become a sentimental space. It had become our home.

The doorbell rings and jolts me from my thoughts. I rush to answer the door. It's Don, one of my husband's law school buddies.

"Hey, Don. Thanks for helping us out today," I say.

"No problem, Amy, I'm happy to do it," he replies. "Looks like rain, we should probably get the truck loaded up," he adds.

I agree with him. "Yeah, we should. Terry's in the bedroom packing up the last of his clothes," I reply.

Don heads to the bedroom while I do last minute check of the house. I take my time strolling through each room, slowly peering into the cabinets and closets. I stood for a moment in the bathroom, remembering the time I lost my wedding ring while getting dressed for an evening out.

I had panicked, completely convinced it was stuck in the drain. I was ready to tear apart the whole sink until my husband calmly asked me to retrace my steps. He patiently followed me as I frantically flew about the house, overturning everything in my path. Sure enough, as I grabbed the laundry basket from the closet, I noticed my shiny band resting on top of the pile of clothes. I instantly plucked it from its perch and placed it on my finger, and then began to sob.

Terry came over to console me, confused from the sudden sadness. I tearfully explained that I was terrified at the thought of losing the only piece of jewelry I cared about. He had placed it on my finger the day he said his vows to me. That simple band was a small memory I carried with me every day. The thought of losing it had crushed me. I laugh at the thought of me tearing apart the sink. I would have done it, sledgehammer and all, if my level-headed husband hadn't stepped in. I glance down at my left hand, happy to see my ring is in its proper place.

Terry's voice disrupts my train of thought. "Don and I are going to start loading up the truck," he says. "Hopefully we can get the furniture in before the rain starts."

I look out the window and notice the sky has grown darker. I follow him to the front room to help load the truck. I grab one of the cartons marked "pots and pans" and make my way out the door. The temperature has dropped a few degrees, and a misty drizzle fills the air. It's just enough moisture to dampen the cardboard box in my arms. Piece by piece, box by box, we expeditiously load our entire home into one small Penske truck.

We shut the door just as the drizzle turns into a light rain. We thank Don and offer to buy him lunch. He politely declines saying he has some packing of his own to do. We thank him again. He and Terry shake hands and wish each other well. He strolls down the steps, hops into his car, and drives away. I wonder if we'll see him again.

"Whew, looks like we're all set," Terry says. "We'd better hit the road, it's getting late. I'm just going to do a quick check of the apartment before we go."

I wait by the door, giving Terry time to do some reminiscing of his own. I look outside. The rain is coming down now. I can hear its patter hit the balcony rail. I look at the view from the door. Just past our steps, beyond the parking lot, is a beautiful, lush, wooded area, fully bloomed in green from the May showers. It reminds me of the summer nights Terry and I would sit on the balcony, gazing at the fireflies as they zipped through the tall, dense trees and lush bushes, and we talked about our dreams for the future. Sometimes a firefly would make his way to where we sat, zooming around our space with his tail blinking on and off, as if showing off his talents. We would just sit, and talk, and dream as the crickets played their symphony. I'm going to miss that.

"You ready?"

Terry's voice snaps me back to the present moment. "Yeah, yeah, let's get going."

“You alright?” he asks.

“Yes, just thinking. It’s been a busy morning.” I reply.

He grabs my hand, and we make our way out the door. We notice the rain is falling steady and strongly now. We unclasp hands and rush to the truck, hopping in before it’s able to soak us too deeply. Terry turns the key, releases the parking brake, and moves the gearshift to drive.

I take one last look at our apartment. From the outside it’s boring, with its cream siding, brown trim blending in with all the other apartments that surround it. The number 112 above the door is the only thing that delineates it from the rest, but to me, it means much more. It’s where I spent my first days as a wife.

Now we’re leaving to continue that life together, to capture those dreams we pondered on those peaceful summer nights. I turn to look at Terry and brush his shoulder with my hand. He presses gently on the gas pedal as he maneuvers the truck through the parking lot and around the corner toward the street. We’re on our way.

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