



Day

Hey, let's get goin'

by

Susan Surman

WHY I LIKE IT: *Acting Drama Editor EZRA NEIGHBORS writes... Rarely can a script pique the waning interests of an attention-deficit actor. It must drive forward in action, leap from line to line, and make clear intention but destroy forthcoming expectation.*

BUCKLE UP. In the short ride of Moving Day by Susan Surman, we are dropped right into the boiling pot of action right from the get-go. I always love a great off-stage zinger. Who said it? Where's it coming from? The zingier the zing, the heartier the belly laughs. I digress. A quick read that builds a deeply colored divorce — pardon — separation that is imbued with a beat that keeps us craving the release of finality. Surman ensures we are along for the ride whether we get our release or not.

Five stars

MOVING DAY

By Susan Surman

Cast of Characters:

Grace Gordon 50-60

Dan Gordon 50-60

Setting:

A bedroom in Manhattan (or any major city)

Time:

The present

Synopsis:

After many years married, Grace and Dan are splitting up. Dan is moving out.

DAN (off)

You're not getting any younger or thinner!

GRACE (off)

You'll be bald in three years!

DAN (off)

Watch it, sister!

GRACE (off)

Shut up!

DAN (off)

You shut up!

(DAN GORDON ENTERS holding his I-Phone and carrying a large cardboard box of cd's. Looks around for a place to sit. Puts the box down. HE wears shorts and a t-shirt. GRACE follows behind carrying her laptop. SHE wears an old flannel nightgown and furry slippers although it is summer. Both are in a fury as they go through the inventory of their music)

DAN

I gotta get out of here. It's four hundred degrees.

GRACE

I'm freezing.

DAN

It's August! Okay, let's finish this up. Where were we?

GRACE

Household Effects. (Finds it on her laptop) Got it.

DAN

Not household effects. Music. Music. Make sure you got the music category. Have you got it?

GRACE

I'm not a complete idiot. I got it. CD player.

DAN

You can keep it. I bought a new one. Okay. Next.

GRACE

(Reading from the list) Ahmad Jahmal. Me.

DAN

Me.

GRACE

Absolutely not. Before me, you never heard of the jazz pianist. It was part of my dowry.

DAN

You never had a dowry.

GRACE

I did. You just didn't know about it.

DAN

Then I get Duke Ellington.

GRACE

According to my list, two Dukes for me and two Erroll Garners for you.

DAN

If you recall, Errol Garner was mine originally.

GRACE

Originally, you had records like everybody else. You can have Sarah Vaughn.

DAN

I hate Sarah Vaughn. I want Lena Horne.

GRACE

I didn't know that. All these years, I thought you liked her.

DAN

I never said anything so you assumed I like her. The dish pan assumption.

GRACE

The what?

DAN

I told you that. First week at Harvard Business School, we were told never to assume anything.

GRACE

So what's that got to do with a dish pan?

DAN

The professor used it as an example to illustrate the point. A man knocks at the back door of a cottage in the woods. A woman gets out of the bathtub and answers but before opening the door, she grabs a dish pan in the kitchen to cover herself. She answers the door. The man says: Lady, you are assuming there is a bottom to that dish pan.

GRACE

That professor was a crackpot. Lena Horne is mine. You can have Dinah Washington.

DAN

Keep her. What about the drum solos? (Looks through the box) I can't find Gene Krupa, Buddy Rich...They're not in the box.

GRACE

On the list. I have them on my list. Can't you find them on your list?

DAN

You know what I mean. Where are they?

GRACE

Ah. Oh, those drums. They disappeared.

DAN

What do you mean exactly by they disappeared?

GRACE

The time I had the flu. I was delirious. I accidentally threw them out.

DAN

Charming. I remember.

GRACE

Charming? I had a hundred and three temperature and you left me alone for fifteen hours.

DAN

I was working, Grace.

GRACE

On the golf course. In the dark, Dan.

DAN

You don't throw away music. Damn you, Grace. You threw out drum solos. My favorites. Gene, Buddy, Sid Catlett...

GRACE

All dead. Ever hear of You Tube?

DAN

It's not the same as the actual disc. I'm taking Ella.

GRACE

As long as you leave me Frankie.

DAN

According to my list, I get three Frank Sinatras. You get one.

GRACE

I want Madison Square Garden!

DAN

Jesus, Grace, you're getting the apartment!

GRACE

One apartment. Check!

DAN

Okay, keep going. Benny Goodman.

GRACE

Me.

DAN

Me.

GRACE

Okay, you keep Benny; I get Artie Shaw.

DAN

Artie Shaw was mine originally.

GRACE

I love Artie Shaw.

DAN

I didn't know you were that into him.

GRACE

It reminds when I was a little girl and one time my parents saw his show at Ciro's in Los Angeles. They got his autograph. I still have it.

DAN

Look, this is just taking up too much time. Why don't I just take the whole box and then give you what you want later.

GRACE

Or why not leave the box here and I can give you what you want later.

DAN

You don't even listen to music.

GRACE

I do so.

DAN

No you don't.

GRACE

That's where we met.

DAN

I remember. Cat Stevens.

GRACE

Sting when he was with the Police.

DAN

It was hot and your eye makeup was running down your face.

GRACE

I wear waterproof now.

DAN

That's when I knew I was going to marry you.

GRACE

Really? That quick. When did you know you wanted to divorce me?

DAN

Ouch. You sure know how to hurt a guy. No one said anything about getting a divorce.

GRACE

I don't know why we're making such a big fuss. We never listen to the damned things anyway.

DAN

Music isn't damned things. I don't think I'll have room at the new place.

GRACE

Leave it all. I don't care, Dan. It makes no difference.

(DAN looks around)

GRACE

What now?

DAN

What about my dirty laundry?

GRACE

There isn't any.

DAN

You sent it out?

GRACE

Did it myself. It's all clean. My parting gift.

DAN

You didn't have to.

GRACE

Well, I did.

DAN

What about my handkerchiefs? Did you iron my handkerchiefs?

GRACE

Did you know you have a total of sixty-two handkerchiefs?

DAN

Don't start with that. I use two, sometimes four a day. Doris keeps buying me handkerchiefs.

GRACE

She keeps buying me chocolate covered prunes. Tell your mother you don't want any more handkerchiefs. And tell her I'm allergic to chocolate.

DAN

You tell her. I can't even tell her we're getting a divorce. Separation. Separation.

GRACE

You know for some years now, there is something called disposable hankies.

DAN

We've been over that. Not everyone has my problem.

GRACE

Habit.

DAN

I can just see it. I'm with a business client just about to close the deal and I pull out a goddamn pink tissue from my pocket.

GRACE

You could coordinate the color of the Kleenex with your tie.

DAN

You knew my problem when you married me.

GRACE

It's your diet.

DAN

Lay off!

GRACE

Your whole life is in ten cardboard boxes.

DAN

Not my whole life. Only the ten years with you. What about the stuff in the storage room in the basement? Why isn't that on the inventory, Grace?

GRACE

(Sarcastic) I guess we forgot, Dan.

DAN

I haven't got room at the other place.

GRACE

If only marriage could be as stimulating as divorce. Separation.

DAN

You'll be able to write now. Any time. All the time.

GRACE

The baby carriage in the hallway is the enemy of art.

DAN

What do you mean? We have no children.

GRACE

You. You're the child. Writing is hard. You have to stay focused. How can you be focused when you're sorting your husband's socks, planning his meals, picking up his cleaning, meeting his business associates? My mother called it the wifely duties. Marriage. God, I sound like her. And now pretense. Pretending it isn't moving day, pretending I haven't failed as a wife, pretending there will be a life after this life. Life. Wife. Rhymes.

DAN

Save it for the written page. (Looks at his watch) Aw, shit!

GRACE

Please don't. We've been through this a million times.

DAN

Not that. Thomas Lynch. I have to pick him up at the airport in an hour. I almost forgot. The three of us will have to go out to dinner tonight.

GRACE

What are you talking about?

DAN

We always take him out.

GRACE

No.

DAN

Whaddya mean no?

GRACE

No is no. I don't have to do that anymore. That's a wifely duty. I'm not your wife. Well I'm not really your wife. Or soon won't be.

DAN

As a favor, Grace. Come on. He's Catholic with a wife and seven kids. What will I tell him?

GRACE

Tell him I died.

DAN

Please. This is important.

GRACE

I'm not going to sit through a dinner with a business associate of yours and pretend everything is status quo. No. Quo. No. Another rhyme.

DAN

Cole Porter, move over. Come on, Grace. One last favor.

GRACE

What part of 'no' do you not get?

DAN

All right. All right. I get it. I'll think of something. I better get going.

GRACE

We didn't finish the music. And we have to finish the books.

DAN

Keep it. You keep it all. Just keep it.

GRACE

You mean it?

DAN

Sure. What's the difference? I don't care. Keep it.

GRACE

That's sure a turnaround in attitude.

(Shrugs) Well, I'm really a nice guy.

DAN

Sometimes.

GRACE

Know what I'll miss most?

DAN

My flannel nightgowns.

GRACE

Your banana omelets.

DAN

I am good with eggs. And least? What will you miss least of all?

GRACE

Your cauliflower fritters.

DAN

They're a specialty. It takes years to perfect.

GRACE

Well, I guess, kiddo, this is it.

DAN

I guess so, kiddo.

GRACE

(HE starts to go)

Wait, Dan. What about the keys?

DAN

What about the keys?

GRACE

The keys to the apartment. Front door. What about those things?

DAN

I don't know. I never did this before. I guess I should hang on to them. For a while, anyway

GRACE

I think the one who leaves is supposed to leave the keys. Maybe I'm supposed to change the locks. Am I supposed to change the locks?

DAN

You don't have to do that. I'll keep them in case.

GRACE

In case what?

DAN

You might need me. An emergency. I'm six blocks away. I could be here in a flash.

GRACE

I'm not getting separated to see more of you.

DAN

You're really funny today. I hope you're writing all this down. Well, I'll go. You'll be able to finish your novel now.

GRACE

I'm not a novelist.

DAN

You write.

GRACE

I write plays. I'm a playwright.

DAN

That's what I meant. You'll be able to finish your play without me around.

GRACE

Yuh.

DAN

Okay.

GRACE

O - kay.

(DAN starts to go. GRACE begins to hyperventilate).

GRACE

Dan...I - can't breathe. I can't- catch - my breath.

DAN

Stop it! You're doing this on purpose. For Chrissake, Grace, just breathe. Breathe.

GRACE

I can't...

DAN

One of us had to move out. We agreed it made more sense for me and for you to stay here.

GRACE

How will I know how without you? I can't breathe...

DAN

(Looking around) Where's a bag when you need one?

GRACE grabs a smallish brown paper bag from a table to hand, dumps out the contents of cotton balls, Q-tips, rolled up Kleenex and holding the bag to her mouth, breathes deeply into it.

DAN (cont'd)

That's it. Just breathe.

GRACE

I can't.

DAN

It's just a delay tactic. Stop it.

GRACE

(Gasping) I'm dying.

DAN

You're not dying. You'll figure it out. We'll both figure it out. I have to pick up Lynch at the airport. I'll get him to his hotel and then I'll come back. Breathe.

GRACE

Everyone leaves me.

DAN

Don't start that again. You're not the victim. We are leaving each other. It was the most difficult decision I've ever had to make. I never thought it would come to this. Who knows? Maybe we just need a break.

GRACE

(Somewhat calmer now. Has she been faking the hyperventilation?) Okay. Okay. Go if you're going. Go. Take the keys. Take it all. Call me later. Maybe I'll go with you tonight.

LIGHTS OUT

End Play

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS: *Moving Day has been kicking around for a long time as a scene in a full length play (In Between) that is now in its sixtieth draft with as many titles. So I pulled it out as a standalone 10 minute number and in 2022 it was chosen by HB Studio as part of the program celebrating Uta Hagen. The director, also part of the HB community, asked me why they had to be in their 30's. He asked if I'd go along with making them 50 or 60. Let's try it, I said. And voila, a tragedy became a comedy. By the way, I never before have used the expression 'voila' – not even in my writing. Not even in Paris.*

I just joined the Playwrights Center and learned about FOTD. I liked their approach of HOTS. It sounded like a good fit for me. My work, whether it is novels, short stories, or plays is about the male/female relationship and self-revelation. Here's a true story: One of my plays was performed at a local theatre. After the 3rd or 4th performance, I said to one of the actors: "Gee, this is a serious play." He said, "Didn't you know that?" I said, "No, I thought I wrote a comedy." My point is you don't know what you have until you see it in print - or see it performed.

Who influences me? I come from the Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Neil Simon generation.

When I first began writing plays, I think I wanted to be Neil Simon. But that didn't last. I think I'm uniquely me.

AUTHOR BIO: Susan Surman is an award-winning novelist, short story writer, playwright, and actress. She lived abroad in London and Sydney for 22 years as an actress and writer using the pseudonyms Susan Kramer and Gracie Luck. She has acted with such notables as Robert Vaughn and Jacki Weaver. Weaving in her extensive background in acting and travel, her stories transport the reader to the time and place effortlessly. Surman has facilitated many writing classes in Winston-Salem as well as running acting classes for non-actors. Surman lives in North Carolina where she continues to write and teach.