The couch

Eight feet of rust corduroy, four flights of stairs, and two guys I met on the sidewalk.

I bought a couch this week. Which sounds like a small thing to write a whole post about. It wasn't a small thing. It was eight feet long.

For two years I've been sitting on this little grey loveseat I got when I first moved in. It was fine. It was also basically a chair that thought it was a couch. If I lay down on it my legs hung off from the knee. When friends came over, someone always ended up on the floor. Usually me.

So I've been looking on Marketplace for months. Scrolling at 2am. Saving things, never messaging anyone. And then on Sunday night I saw it.

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It was a big old sectional-ish thing from the seventies, but just one long piece, no corners. Rust-orange corduroy. Low wooden legs. The cushions looked like they'd been sat on by about three generations, in a good way. The guy selling it was in Clinton Hill and he was moving to Denver on Wednesday and wanted it gone. Ninety dollars.

I messaged him at 2:14am. He wrote back at 2:16am. I guess I'm not the only one awake.

His name was Ryan. He said "you can have it for sixty if you get it out of here by Tuesday." I said deal before I thought about how I would actually get an eight-foot couch from Clinton Hill to a fourth-floor walk-up in Williamsburg. That was Monday-me's problem.

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Monday-me found a guy with a van. One of those apps where you book a man and a van by the hour. His name was Hector and he was very clear on the phone that it was "curbside only." Like, he'd help load it at the other end, but at my place he'd put it on the sidewalk and that was it. He said it twice. I said that's fine, I'll figure it out. He said "you have friends?" I said yes. That was kind of a lie. I texted Tyler, who said he was in Philly for the week. I texted two other people who didn't answer.

Picking it up was easy. Ryan and Hector and me carried it out of a first-floor apartment in about four minutes. Ryan looked kind of sad watching it go. He said he'd had it since college. He patted it on the arm, like a horse. Then he went back inside to keep packing.

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So then it's Tuesday, around six, and I'm standing on the sidewalk outside my building next to a giant orange couch, and Hector is driving away, and I have no plan.

People walking by were looking at me. One lady said "nice couch." A guy said "you moving in or out?" I said in. He said "good luck, man" and kept walking. I think everyone could tell what was about to happen.

I tried lifting one end by myself, just to see. I got it about a foot off the ground and then put it back down and stood there for a while. Like I was waiting for the couch to have an idea.

Then this guy stopped. Big guy, gym bag on his shoulder, headphones around his neck. He looked at the couch, looked at my building, looked up at the fourth floor windows. He said "which floor?" I said

fourth. He said "oh, no." And then he put his bag down and said "okay, let's go."

His name was Marcus. He was on his way home from the gym on Grand. I don't think I've ever been so happy to meet someone.

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We got it up one flight and realized it wasn't going to turn on the landing. The stairs in my building are old and narrow and they go up in this tight square. We were stuck with the couch half on the stairs, half in the air, Marcus holding the bottom, me pinned against the wall holding the top.

That's when the second guy showed up. Skinny guy, maybe twenty, paint all over his jeans, coming down from the third floor. I'd never seen him before. I think he's subletting on the third floor, or he's someone's boyfriend, I'm not sure. He looked at us and said "you have to stand it up." Like, vertical. Then he squeezed under the couch, which I still don't know how he did, and grabbed the middle.

His name was Evan. He said he's an art student at Pratt and that he's moved "like eleven couches" because everyone he knows lives in a walk-up. He was the brains of the operation. Marcus was the muscle. I was mostly the guy saying "sorry" every time it hit the wall.

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It took us forty-five minutes. Four flights. We had to stand it straight up on every landing and kind of spin it, with Evan saying "tilt, tilt, tilt, okay stop, other way." At the third floor Linda opened her door to see what the noise was and just said "oh, honey" and closed it again.

At the top we had to take my door off the hinges. Marcus did that with a butter knife. I don't know how.

When it finally went through, we just put it down in the middle of the loft and all three of us fell onto it at the same time. Nobody said anything for a minute. We just sat there, breathing. Sweaty, wrecked, three strangers on a rust-colored couch.

Then Evan said "this is a really good couch, actually." And it is.

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I ordered pizza from the place on Metropolitan, two large pies, and grabbed some beers from the bodega. We sat on the couch and ate with the windows open and the sun going down through them, and it turned into this whole night. Marcus is a physical therapist. Evan paints portraits of people's grandparents for money and his own stuff for nobody. I told them I do design and some modeling and they both said "modeling?" at the same time, which was humbling.

They left around ten. We all followed each other on Instagram. Marcus said if I ever buy a fridge, don't call him. I promised.

I slept on the couch that night. Didn't mean to. I lay down just to try it out and my whole body fit, legs and everything, for the first time in two years. I woke up at four with the windows still open and the cushions smelling like someone else's apartment. I'll fix that eventually. Or I won't.

— Shay

Thanks for reading. There are more of these on my site, one every couple of weeks.