

Squatter with a Lexus

By Tom Lichtenberg

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Katie Parsons

When Katie Parsons received a letter notifying her that she had thirty days to present the key to the strongbox or its contents would revert to the state, she realized that either this was a mistake or else her ship had finally come in.

It was a mistake.

When she inspected the envelope she discovered that the letter was addressed to a Mr. Pearson Holmes. She had never heard of any Holmes outside of Sherlock.

"Oh well," she sighed. "Easy come, easy go," and tossed the letter into the kitchen garbage pail. It sat there all day Wednesday, all day Thursday, and most of Friday, until her husband, Keith, finally took out the trash. Then the letter sat in the yard beside the garage for the rest of Friday, and well into Saturday morning.

It was retrieved by Freddy the Freegan on Saturday, June 23rd, at 11:47 A.M. That is when our story begins.

Lieutenant Mike

Going through people's junk mail wasn't his usual thing, but Freddy sometimes made exceptions. A man has got to pay some bills, after all, no matter how far off the grid he'd like to get. There's some wiggle room in the freegan ethics, and sharing information doesn't pose any major contradictions. He looks, he finds, and if he can make a little something on the side for sharing, it's all good.

"Those Parsons keep it clean," he tells Lieutenant Mike.

"They've got their reasons," Mike replies. He's got some sort of feeling about Keith Parsons. The information sharing goes one way, as far as he's concerned.

"I mean no scraps, no junk, no reusable anything," Freddy relates. "They've got some mighty consciousness going on in there,"

Mike speaks Freddy's language by now. There's been a history of sharing. Not usually a patient man, he lets Freddy ramble on. His coffee's getting cold as they sit there in the Main Street Diner. Freddy would like another slice of pie but Mike is holding out.

"So they got a disposal," Mike says. "Come on. Tell me what you saw,"

"Nothing," Freddy says. "They do recycling too. Someone drinks a lot of Gatorade and Red Bull. Or maybe one of them drinks the Gatorade and the other one the Red Bull. I could dust for prints and find out," Freddy chuckles. He thinks he's being funny. Mike doesn't even smile. He's staring at the cream congealing in his cup.

"What else,"

"They get some junk mail," Freddy says, "I'm surprised they don't recycle it. Catalogs especially. What a waste. She likes furniture and gardening, I'd say. I'd guess they own the house because of all the mortgage re-fi junk they get. Someone's getting old - they get a lot of cruise brochures and retirement shopping specials. And some other banking stuff,"

"Banking?" Mike looks up.

"Yeah, a couple of things,"

"What bank?" Mike asks.

"Fourth Fidelity was one. Hedgerow Funds the other. First was bogus, though. It wasn't addressed to them," said Freddy, handing over the mail.

"Oh?"

"Yeah, somebody Pearson. No, no. Pearson Holmes. Mailman probably mixed it up. Parsons, Pearson, easy. "

"What about the Funds?"

"Brochure. Pamphlet. Nothing personal,"

"Damn," Mike is disappointed. "Nothing else?"

"Nope," says Freddy, wishing he had more to say.

"The rest was basic trash. Paper towels, wrappers, peach pits - love that summer fruit, you know."

"All right," Mike gets up, peels out a twenty and throws it on the table. He's a very large man, barely squeezes out of the booth. Freddy swipes the bill and sticks it in his pocket, nodding.

"Any time," Freddy says.

"I'll let you know," the cop replies, and walks away. Freddy waits until he's gone, then slides the cooling coffee over. "Waste not, want not," he tells himself, as he calmly drains the remains. Thirty days, he thinks, only now it's more like twenty-five. Who the fuck is Pearson Holmes and where'd he put that key?

Benjamin Holmes

A procession of text lines falling across the screen had no indication of a Pearson Holmes. There were plenty of combinations of the name, notably a captain of industry in Britain and a semi-famous poet who once knew a somewhat more famous poet. This led him on to a search of moguls in general, and a sidetrack about romanticism, but he knew he had to hurry. In this house the younger male roommate tended to come home unexpectedly on Saturdays.

Freddy lowered the laptop lid and slid out the second floor bedroom window of the pleasant beige suburban mini-manse, and just in time. The silver Range Rover made its appearance at the end of the block, and no sooner had he slipped through the hedge than it presented itself on the yellow brick driveway. Young Rob was cheating on boyfriend Peter again. Two mid-twenties men in tennis outfits chuckled and murmured their way into the front door.

Freddy was annoyed, but on this side of town he had no other easy online access. Guess I'll try the phone book, he decided, and meandered down to the local post office. There were seven Holmes's in the book. Stepping outside with the silently sliced page, Freddy punched some numbers into the last

remaining pay phone. Somewhat surprised that the numbers still worked, he started down the list.

He presented himself as a bank representative, inquiring on the whereabouts of the mystery Holmes. One after another, the answering Holmes had nothing to give him, nothing until the last.

"Pearson Holmes?"

"Yes, thank you. We'd be glad of any information," Freddy said.

"Why?"

"Official bank business," Freddy intoned.

"Confidential, you understand."

"And you're calling me out of the blue asking if I've ever heard of him? Some procedure you got there."

"We'd be much obliged," Freddy continued.

"Sorry," the man at the other end replied, and hung up the phone.

Aha, Freddy thought. That was a definite nibble. Benjamin Holmes. 422 Maple. Next stop, strongbox.

Marcus Holmes

As soon as he hung up the phone, Ben picked it up again and called his brother Marcus. After waiting through the obligatory thirteen rings he was greeted, as expected, with a mumbled "Yo."

"Marcus," he said, "Somebody just called about dad."

"What are you talking about? Who called?"

"Said he was from a bank, but didn't sound like a bank. Sounded like snooping."

After a long silence, Ben heard Marcus sigh, and then say,

"I don't know what the fuck you are talking about," and he hung up the phone.

Ben called back right away but this time had to wait through twenty six rings before hearing the familiar "Yo."

"Maybe it's got something to do with money!" Ben exclaimed.

"You think? Bank calls and you think it might have something to do with money?"

"Maybe he left us some money," Ben continued, ignoring his brother's sarcasm.

"Dad never had any money," Marcus replied.

"Maybe he did," Ben said. "Maybe it was a secret,"

"No," said Marcus.

"But," Ben began.

"Did you call the bank back?" Marcus asked.

"No," Ben admitted.

"Well, little brother, maybe you should," and with that, Marcus hung up again, and Ben knew it would be useless to try and call again. Marcus would never answer the phone more than twice in one day. He had his rules, and stuck to them no matter what.

"Fuck," said Ben. He paced around his tiny apartment for a minute. Gloria would be home soon. She'd know what to do.

Gloria Holmes

All day Sunday Gloria brooded. She had tried to get through to someone at the bank, but the answering service referred her to the fact of office hours. It seemed ridiculous to Gloria. These days they are glad to take your money any hour of the day or night and any old day of the week, but help you? No. Nothing.

She had already made up her mind to camp out first thing Monday morning and be there at the main branch of the Fourth Fidelity downtown on Piney Street before the doors even opened, and it fell to poor old Mr. Moot to have to deal with all her pent up curiosity.

"I'm his daughter-in-law," she explained, "My husband is his youngest son. You sent us a letter."

"Yes, so you said. Do you happen to have a copy of this letter?" Moot inquired.

"Do I look like I have a copy?" Gloria replied, "of course I do not. I assumed that since you sent us a letter you would know what it was about."

"It would help to see," Moot tried to imply, but Gloria was all over his desk again, jumping up from her chair and pacing around, wagging the occasional finger at the row of tellers lined up beside her.

"Does anyone know? Who do I have to ask? Who's in charge of sending letters to people around here anyway?"

"I checked the computer," Moot spoke up.

"Well, check again," she demanded, and she came up behind him and for a moment considered shoving him out of his wobbly chair and taking over the machine. At this point the Bank Director, Harley Swink, made his appearance on the scene.

"Please take a seat," he imperiously directed. Swink was clearly accustomed to obedience. At his gesture even Gloria complied.

"Now then," he proceeded, once she'd calmed a bit. "What is all this about, Mr. Moot?"

"The lady," Moot nearly whispered, "is inquiring after a letter she claims to have received from our office, regarding a Mr. Pearson Holmes."

"Pearson Holmes?" Swink said, "Are you quite sure? Pearson Holmes?"

"He's my father-in-law," Gloria said.

"Quite," replied Swink. He appeared to be deep in thought, standing there with his arms crossed and his thick white hair just so.

"Quite a feat," he continued after a bit, "to be the daughter-in-law of someone who was dead before she was even born,"

"Then you know him," Gloria replied, ignoring the

condescension. "Of course my husband was only a child when his father died. He barely remembers him at all. Nevertheless."

"Quite," Mr. Swink insisted, "And so you have the key?"

"The key?"

"You did receive our letter, did you not?"

"Of course," Gloria lied.

"The key, then, to the strong box. You have precisely twenty-three days to produce the key, or else the box, and all of its contents, will be forfeit. According to the contract, naturally."

"What's so important about the key?" Gloria wanted to know. "You could just open it, couldn't you?"

"The contract," Mr Swink sighed, apparently weary of repeating himself. "It's all in order. Quite. Wait here," and so saying, Swink vanished behind the tellers into some secret chamber well concealed. Gloria felt conflicted. Happy to have found out more about it, but puzzled about the contract. She knew so little about her husband's dad. Only her brother-in-law Marcus seemed to know anything about the man, and getting anything out of Marcus was, well, a fucking pain in the ass! "Marcus," she thought. "Goddamn freak."

Swink returned with a copy of the contract. It was several pages long and made no sense to her at

all. There was no indication of the contents of the box. No mention of Ben, no mention of Marcus. No mention of their mother either, no details of anything, really, mostly legal clauses. The party of the first and the party of the second. The interests of the state. The key must be produced. That much was clear. The expiration date as well. July 19, this year.

"You may keep it," Swink declared, and with that he sort of waved and turned away.

"Bring us the key if you can," he casually mentioned as he disappeared for good.

Outside on the pavement, clutching the paper, Gloria stood for a while and just one thought pervaded her mind.

The key.

Gary Grasz

By the time that Gloria Holmes had parked herself in front of the Fourth Fidelity on Monday morning, waiting for the bank to open, Lieutenant Mike had long since seen what she was about to see and learned more than she was about to learn. He had roused Swink out of his golf game Sunday, police business, you understand. Swink understood business, police and otherwise, and ever since the Holmes case had come to his attention, he had become more than slightly interested.

"The salient feature of the contract," he dictated to his secretary, Lila, "is that it doesn't matter who brings in the key, as long as someone does."

He had said the same thing to Mike, as they stood there in the secondary vault, gazing at the box. It was, as the name suggested, a big hulking object on the floor in the corner of the room, around two feet on every side, and as black as death.

Monday morning Mike was reading through the contract yet again, after he squeezed himself into the very front booth at May's Cafe. It was all a bunch of nonsense to him. He had understood nothing each time, which was why he'd invited his lawyer buddy, Gary Grasz, to breakfast.

Grasz was running late, as usual. All of his clients were either out on bail or trying to get out on bail, which meant he was tied up in the courts or at the bondsman's almost all day every day. When Grasz puffed in all scattered, Mike waved him over, and before he even got settled, Mike had pushed the pile of papers across the table at him.

"Greek to me," Mike muttered as Grasz started piecing together the pile to make sure all the pages were in order. The waitress knew what he wanted and had a glass of orange juice in front of him before he even noticed her.

"Criminal case?" Grasz queried, already knowing the Lieutenant wouldn't tell him. He didn't bother listening to the silence that followed his question.

"A lot of stipulations," he said, rifling through the contract. "Party of the first, party of the second."

He pushed the papers around with one hand on the table while his other hand groped and finally reached the OJ. After taking a big gulp, still focused on the pages.

"Nothing about the contents of the box," he said.

"Angie? Can I get a bagel? Onion. Toasted? Yeah, lots. Thanks."

"Sure I want to know what's in it," Mike was saying, "but more than that I want to know why. Think it's authentic?"

"No doubt," said Grasz. "No one but a lawyer could

put together shit like this. As for why, I cannot tell you."

"Got a guess?"

"Maybe," Grasz paused to take another swig.

"Might be this Holmes guy wanted to leave something special for someone, but he maybe didn't trust them. No, maybe he didn't even know who. He wanted to leave it for someone, but didn't know who."

"I don't get you," Mike was eating nothing. The case was making him hungry for something other than food.

"Whoever he gave the key to," Grasz said. "Or whoever would know where he put it, that would be the person who deserved it. Just a guess. Lot of factors. How old he was at the time, was he married, things like that."

"Huh," Mike grunted. He was not going to tell Grasz anything. Now that Grasz knew about the key and the guy's name too, he already knew too much.

"How many people know about this?" Mike wondered, as Grasz flew off to his next emergent crisis. Keith and Katie Parsons. Freddy. The bank manager. Himself and now Grasz. The one thing none of them seemed to know was, who the hell was Pearson Holmes?

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