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Box 1347

I turn the key to my condominium's mailbox. The hallway reeks of the recent paint touch up. Inside my mailbox are three utility bills, the most recent issue of Sports Illustrated magazine and a yellowed letter. As a member of the information age, I seldom send or receive physical mail. I even force myself annually to write "Thank You" notes to my relatives for my birthday and Christmas - each time forgetting the current cost of postage. Why then did I receive mail that appears to have been penned ages ago? I glance over to the front of the envelope. The letter has no return address. I walk back to my apartment.

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"Hey, I helped myself to a beer while you were gone," says my roommate Ginny. Ginny is wearing a Bob Dylan shirt she bought online. The shirt reads, "Lay Lady Lay" and features the outline of Bob Dylan's signature silhouette. Her dirty blonde hair and vibrant blue/green eyes contrast with her pale complexion. Ginny's hair is done up in a ponytail held together by one of her many scrunchies. Her sense of fashion has always been jumbled. She is standing in front of the kitchen/bar countertop in our apartment. We haven't dated in some months and remain close friends with her paying for her share of rent.

"You really should think about getting a few healthier snacks other than potato chips. Some granola bars, maybe?"

"Uh... huh," I say not raising my eyes to meet hers.

"What's up, Dan, you seem preoccupied."

"Oh, it's this letter I got in the mail. It looks like it was mailed years ago, and it has no return address." I hold up the letter to the overhead light to confirm the age in a more familiar setting.

"That's odd," says Ginny, "Open it."

"Hold up," I say, "I have no clue what this could be or how it got in my mailbox. Also, it feels like there is a key or something made of metal inside."

"So go ahead and open it, silly." Ginny takes a sip from her bottle. She bites into a tortilla chip covered in queso cheese dip.

I place my thumb under the seal and tear open the letter. The seal tears apart with ease. The envelope contains a letter and a key. I unfold the included letter and begin to read the contents to myself. Ginny interrupts by throwing her arms in the air and yelling, "Wait!" She calmly says, "Please read it aloud, Dan."

"There isn't that much to read, Ginny," I say.

"Well, what is the gist of the letter then?"

"It says the key is for a safe deposit box. The box is number 'thirteen-hundred-forty-seven' at Duncan Family Bank."

"Yeah, that's across from Kerouac's Toyota dealership on Briarcliff."

"Sure, I know." I turn the letter over but the back page is blank.

"Tomorrow is Saturday. If you get there by noon you can see if you're a millionaire or the proud possessor of some family

member's staggering debt." The joke makes Ginny laugh. She takes another sip from her bottle, barely able to properly swallow as she attempts to contain her laughter.

"Yeah, we'll see."

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"Good Saturday morning to you, Sir. Welcome to Duncan Family Bank," says a woman sitting at a desk near the bank entrance. She is wearing a name tag that reads, 'Tonya Redding.'"

"Yeah, I would like to access the bank vault, please."

"Sure, can you wait just a moment? I have to go get the vault keys."

"Let me see your key, Sir." Tony examines the key from all sides. It doesn't appear that she is familiar with the key's make. She lets out a visible sigh. "The key does read 'Duncan Family Bank,' Sir, but it isn't like any key we have ever issued at this location."

"How many locations of this bank are there?"

"Just this one. It is a small family-run loan bank after all."

"I thought you said 'location,'" I say. Tonya hands the back the key.

"Duncan once existed on Cedar Road before relocating to this location about five years ago. I bet this is a key from the old branch."

"Well... thanks, I guess."

"No problem, Sir. Can I help you with anything else today?"

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"So you went to Duncan Bank and you couldn't find the box?" Ginny's voice sounds tired through the cell phone connection.

"The key is different from what they currently issue to safe deposit box owners."

"Well that sucks." Ginny sounds genuinely disappointed. She is audibly chewing on something.

"The bank worker did say that there was a former branch location on Cedar Road."

"Do you want to go out and explore the building to see if it still exists?"

"I'd love to. I can't go today since I have that dinner with my colleagues."

"Sure," says Ginny, "Does tomorrow afternoon work for you at two?"

"Works for me."

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Ginny's long blonde bangs tumble in the breeze. She is wearing a violet/black flannel shirt and a White Sox baseball cap. She is currently staring out the window of my car. We are both looking for any sign of the derelict Duncan Family Bank on Cedar Road. I approach a stop light.

"It is a nice day, isn't it," says Ginny.

"Yeah, but I think it is starting to get a bit muggy."

"You would complain," says Ginny as if her response were predetermined.

The light turns green. I press my foot on the accelerator. The car rolls forward.

"So what if this bank is gone when we get there," I say.

"I guess we will turn around and continue our poor existence," says Ginny mockingly, "Chin up, Dan." Ginny opens her purse and thumbs through its contents until she finds her lighter and pack of Winston Lights. She offers me one and I accept while rolling down the pair of front windows.

Ginny's eyes squint in the sunlight as she flicks the lighter. She is not wearing sunglasses. She never does. She blows the smoke out of the car in a robotic-like response to my opening of the window.

"Could that be it?" says Ginny holding the cigarette between her index and middle finger of her right hand as she attempts to point towards the building.

"Possibly."

"There's a parking spot over there."

"I'm not sure I like the looks of this building," I say, "What if someone has made this their home. I don't have a weapon on me." Ginny shoots me a disapproving eye.

"Let's go around back," Ginny says.

"Sure," I say. I know not to speak anything more about our present situation.

It takes a few minutes to find the route to the rear of the building. The adjacent stores have blocked off entrance to Duncan Bank rear entrance since its move. Ginny walks ahead of me. After a moment of observing the rear entrance she speaks up.

"We could probably force this window open."

"You think?" I say.

"Give me that rock."

"What?"

"The rock next to your right foot. It should do the job." Ginny appears frustrated.

"Ginny, I'm not comfortable breaking into a building."

"Come on, Dan. We're not going to actually break the window. Do you want to see what is inside your deposit box or not?"

"Alright. What do you need me to do?"

"Keep that window open. I can barely breathe in here. The air is stale," I say, "Shouldn't one of us stand guard?"

"Who is going to pass by this building on a Sunday afternoon?" Ginny holds the flashlight in her hand. She pans the beam of light over each wall.

"Hey, I think I found the bank vault."

"Please, keep your voice down," I say.

"Sure." Ginny's hair shines in the beam of light as she directs it on the vault door. Walking into the vault a sudden sense of panic overwhelms me. I jump slightly as Ginny shines the flashlight on every surface. I attempt to locate any motion sensing security devices while she does this.

"Dan, cut it out. I think the safe deposit box should be over here," says Ginny. We move towards the boxes numbered in the one thousands.

"What was the number again?"

Ginny shines the light down onto the key. "The number is 1347."

"Ah, it is over here," says Ginny, "It looks like we just might find out what is in your box."

"Yeah, these boxes should have been emptied when the bank moved. I guess they are still transitioning or something."

"Maybe your relative told them to leave it here," Ginny says.

"Maybe."

The key has some trouble fitting into the grooves but I somehow manage to open the door without breaking it. Ginny remains silent while I pull out the metal tray found inside the deposit box. I place this tray on a nearby table and notice several leather-bound books sealed in Ziploc bags. They appear in good condition.

"Books? Great," says Ginny flatly.

"Hold up. I think these are first edition books." I open the Ziploc bag and stare at the novel at the top of the stack.

"So?"

"These could easily be worth several thousand dollars," I say, "Yeah, this is a Hemingway novel." I open the book. It is signed by the author to my uncle.

"I wonder why your uncle couldn't have just moved these books to the new bank?" says Ginny.

"Probably because he died before he could send off the letter to me," I say, "Most likely my aunt came across the letter and saw it was for me and mailed it without realizing that she didn't put a return address on the letter."

"Are you going to sell these books?"

"No, I'm going to talk with my aunt about this find," I say, "Let's get out of her."

Ginny slips through the window pulling the rock out and placing it on the ground where she found it. We navigate the rear of the building making our way towards my car. An officer in a police car pulls over across the street. A feeling of dread runs through me much like the one I felt inside the bank vault. I look over and Ginny is rummaging through her purse. She pulls out two cigarettes and lights both at the same time. She hands me one and stares at me as if to say, "Here dummy, smoke one and shut up."

The officer approaches us and asks if we have seen any suspicious activity in the Duncan Bank building. Apparently a shop owner was out sweeping across from the Duncan Bank and saw a flashlight beam inside through the front door. I shake my

head. Ginny looks at the officer and tells him to have a great day.

As the officer is leaving he sees the books under my arm and asks where I bought such beautiful books. Before I can reply Ginny answers, "We went to an old book shop around here. We believe they are first editions - worth a lot of money, hopefully."

The officer wishes us a good day and returns to his car.

Ginny and I enter my car and stare directly ahead without saying anything for what feels like an hour. With the books still in my lap I lean over and kiss Ginny. She doesn't pull back. After twenty minutes of passionate kissing we both decide to head back to the apartment. Ginny's flowing blonde hair is blowing in the breeze created by the car's open windows. Halfway home I suddenly remember - in our excitement we forgot to pull the key out of the deposit box. I don't say anything to Ginny - she looks so happy again.