

Over the Back Fence  
For Friday May 30, 2008  
Approx 630 words

Undelivered parcels  
By Alva Wood

Things go smoothly enough around the village as long as no one goes away. Moose Green knows that a warning works as well as a citation for making Ollie Armitage obey stop signs. Tessa Vanderkam knows that Nellie Rinehart is no longer married to Jim Smith, and shouldn't be getting his Playboy magazines at her address, even if the publisher hasn't figured that out yet.

But all hell breaks loose when those regulars take a holiday.

When Tessa took a three-week Caribbean cruise, the post office sent a junior clerk from River City to replace her.

Tanya Smith went into the post office to pick up the mail for herself and her husband Jim, Nellie's ex. She used their key to open the post box. It contained a card saying that Jim had a parcel to pick up.

Tanya pushed through the door into the staffed part of the post office.

"I'd like to pick up this parcel," says Tanya.

The clerk squints at the card she had filled out herself.

"I'll need to see some identification," she says.

Tanya produces her driver's licence.

"Sorry," says the clerk. "It says you're Tanya Rinehart. This parcel is addressed to Jim Smith."

Tanya explains that she got her licence long before she married Jim, and there's no law that says she has to change her name.

"That doesn't prove you're his wife," says the clerk.

Tanya digs their chequebook out of her purse. "Here," she says, pointing to the address on the cheques: "Jim and Tanya Smith."

"And you might notice," she adds, "that we live at the same address. In fact, we sleep in the same bed."

"That's nice," says the clerk. "But if your husband wants you to pick up his parcels, he has to give us a letter of authorization that we keep on file."

Tanya looks at the key in her hand. "But I'm already picking up his mail," she says. "That's how I got your card, about a parcel."

"I can't release it without his authorization," says the clerk.

"Since when?" demands Tanya.

"Since January 1, when the new regulation came in," says the clerk.

"That's ridiculous," Tanya splutters. "We have a joint key for the mail box. We have a joint account at the bank. We own our condo jointly. You're telling me that I can spend him broke, I can wipe out his investments, and if I left him I could force him to take out a mortgage for half the value of our condo to pay me off, but I can't pick up a parcel that's probably a promotional gift from Reader's Digest anyway?"

"Yes," says the clerk.

Tanya is about to stomp out, when she remembers that Jim is attending meetings in Ottawa and Toronto for a month.

"How long do you hold parcels?" she asks.

"Two weeks," says the clerk. "Then we return them to the sender."

"Can you at least tell me who sent the parcel, so I know if it's worth getting a letter of authorization?"

Tanya asks.

"That's privileged information," replies the clerk.

Tanya figures she'd better make the effort, just in case the parcel is important. She calls Jim. She gets him out of a meeting. He's not pleased. But he faxes a letter to her. Tanya takes the fax to the post office.

"Here," Tanya says, pushing the letter across the counter. "Now can I have his parcel?"

“Nope,” says the clerk, examining the letter. “We have no way of knowing you didn’t make up this letter yourself. He’ll have to come in himself and show us satisfactory identification to prove that this really is his letter.”

Jim’s back now. But his parcel went back to its sender before he returned. He’s still wondering if it was important.