



## Locksmith overcharged her, woman alleges

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Allston — An Allston woman's luck went from bad to worse last Saturday night, after a shady locksmith charged her hundreds of dollars to let her get back into her apartment.

Around midnight on Dec. 23, the 21-year-old woman, who is a student at Northeastern, had her purse snatched while out with friends in Brookline. She lost everything — cell phone, wallet and keys.

Upon returning to her apartment, she called her landlord's emergency number on a borrowed cell phone to see if someone could let her in, but no one answered. In desperation, she called 411 and was given the name of a locksmith company, who said that they would send someone over to her Commonwealth Avenue apartment right away.

A man with a toolbox who identified himself as a locksmith arrived a short time later. The woman, who asked not to be identified, said he started acting suspiciously almost immediately.

"He never asked me for any ID, to confirm that I actually lived there, and he kept looking around and asking if there were any police patrols," she said. He also asked her a lot of personal questions, such as where she was from and where she went to school.

The man quoted her a price of \$55, which she agreed to, then went to work replacing her locks. However, as the work progressed, the price kept rising, until finally he presented her with a bill for \$660.

After vociferously objecting to what she felt was a particularly mean late-night bait-and-switch tactic, the woman pleaded with the locksmith to reduce the price, but he merely offered to walk her to an ATM machine and help her withdraw the required amount.

"I thought he might try to jump me and steal all my money," said the woman, who did not agree to go to the ATM. Instead she gave him a credit card, knowing that she would likely be able to dispute the charges later.

The man, who never gave his name, left her with a receipt that simply said USALocksmith.com, but contained no street address or local phone number.

The next day, the woman contacted her landlord's locksmith, 7 A's Locksmith and Fixit Shop in Allston, who said that it should only have cost her a maximum of \$120 to get back into her apartment. They also said they had heard reports that USA Locksmith was known in the industry for overcharging customers, especially young females in distress.

The woman filed a police report, and contacted her credit card company to dispute the charges.

When the TAB called USA Locksmith for comment, a supervisor said that according to his records, no complaint had been filed by the customer. He added that he did not know the details of the case nor the breakdown of the charges, therefore he was unable to speculate on whether or not there had been any overcharging. But he said that if the customer felt she was treated unfairly, the company would do a full investigation.

A search of the Better Business Bureau Web site revealed that several East Coast branches of USA Locksmith have had complaints lodged against them.

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