

Excerpt from Powerball 310, Chapter 23:

[Keith is following what he thinks are clues. He arrives mid-day at the Alpha Zeta Taverna to see if it has any relevance to the murder.]

“Greek wine – have a taste on the house.” The bartender smiled and spontaneously poured a generous glass from a wine bottle prominently labeled in Greek letters. At the first taste, Keith made a face, but kept on sipping it again, just to make sure. The two women stopped their conversation, looked in his direction, and broke into hushed giggles.

Keith picked up his wine glass and started to take a stroll through the bar. The center of the room was filled with small tables, with a few booths along the partition. He thought he recognized a man sitting by himself in the farthest booth in the corner. He held a martini glass; a forlorn olive skewered by a toothpick sat inside a second, empty martini glass. As the last time Keith had seen him, this drunk was deep in his own thoughts.

The man’s face was turned away, but the profile struck Keith. He took another gulp of his retsina and made a wry face. How could they call this stuff wine – it tasted more like turpentine, or cleaning fluid, or something. He figured he’d drunk worse in college though, so he’d be okay.

The man in the corner booth returned Keith’s gaze, his narrow gray eyes below bushy eyebrows had a vague glimmer of recognition. Keith slipped into the booth across

the table from him. The man flicked his fingers in annoyance and looked away from Keith, hoping that by ignoring him he could deny his existence.

“You’re the guy from the Curly Cue Club, aren’t you?” Keith tried to make eye contact. “You’re the one the police interviewed before me, because you were in the room when that guy was killed.”

The man looked at him full on, with a blank stare. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“What?” Keith’s voice rose in surprise. “I know you – you’re Gallagher,” Keith reached for his wrist, but the man pulled it away, “Wayne Gallagher.”

The man looked at him icily. “I’ve never seen you before. I didn’t invite you to sit with me. Please go away. If you don’t mind, I was enjoying myself having a private drink.” He gestured a slightly blotchy hand toward his martini glasses. He then made a motion to shoo Keith away, as if he were banishing a pesky insect that had crawled onto the table. Keith remained in his seat, dumbfounded.

“Wait a minute,” Keith reached out again in the man’s direction – his message was urgent. “Don’t play dumb with me, of course you know who I am. You told the cops you saw me talking to Rodger McCormack. You told them we got into an argument.”

Finally the man mumbled, “Sorry, kid. You’ve confused me with someone else.”

“The hell I have.” Keith stood up within the booth and leaned over to shake his fist at the man. “Don’t play the innocent with me.” The man blinked, looking at him out of partially fogged eyes. “You can’t play the drunk,” Keith goaded him. “This is too important. Why did you tell the cops I was the person who was with Rodger when he was stabbed? You knew damn well it wasn’t me. All you saw was the back of his head, if even that. Why would you lie to them?”