

Excerpt from Powerball 310

Chapter 4: Trevor Harding is the banker for the conspiracy. He tries to recruit a runner to turn in the rigged lottery ticket.



Friday, Trevor left the bank early for a long lunch. Valet parking brought out his Mercedes. He tipped twenty bucks. Trevor was planning to meet Sidney at a nice restaurant out on the pike. Whether Penn's Mill Inn was built out of an actual old mill or just made to look like one, Trevor didn't care. It had that country club, prime rib, cocktails-instead-of-wine feel that Trevor liked when making a deal. He did deals, usually large commercial finance; this was the same kind of thing, right?

He pulled into the lot at noon sharp and spotted Sidney sitting on the covered patio drinking mineral water. Sidney was a private eye, a real one. Never done a murder investigation that he would talk about, but working for wealthy families, Sidney had snooped on countless divorces, located a dozen runaway teenagers, and settled the score on many wrongs too sensitive for rich people to take to court. He was Trevor's age. He claimed to have been a professional lightweight boxer in his early twenties – his trim physique and slightly asymmetric facial features suggested he was telling the truth.

On his way in, Trevor told the maitre d' to bring him a gin and tonic and slipped him a tip to make sure no one was seated near them.

"Sidney!" Trevor exclaimed. "Thanks for meeting me. How's life? Weather never seems to bother you, but I'd love it if it would cool off a little."

Sidney let Trevor rattle on a while, trying to guess what kind of deal would emerge. He joined in the banter. Trevor had been a lucrative client: he'd been hired to check the background of applicants on commercial and construction financing and lately to do some snooping for Trevor's divorce. After the waiter took the lunch order, Trevor drained his drink and set down his glass.

"My friend, we have worked together on many odd projects, but this is the oddest one yet. I need you to maintain this discussion in utmost secrecy."

Sidney lifted his thumb in the air to signal his agreement. Trevor leaned forward just a little. "You know very well the trouble I am having with my divorce."

"I've seen it many times," Sidney nodded sagely.

"Bonnie is killing me. I am happy to give her half, but she seems to want the assets half and leave me with the liabilities half. I personally feel like I'm getting a raw deal. Unfair, but my attorney says it always looks that way."

Trevor paused when the club sandwiches arrived and waited for privacy. "Now, she has thrown me out of the house, but we haven't settled the date of separation yet. I'm great at making money, but everything I make, even today, I'll have to split with her. She likes it that way, and that sucks." Sidney knew all of this. Trevor once suspected Bonnie had a boyfriend, which would indicate separation and turn the tables a little. Sidney did some spying, but it turned out her personal trainer was gay and the nights Bonnie was gone were really spent at an ailing friend's house.

"Here is my dilemma. I won the Powerball jackpot..."

Sidney jerked his head back, and held up his hand. He almost choked on a mouthful of sandwich. "Is this for real?"

"It's real. I've got a winning ticket, but if I hand it in, Bonnie gets half. The IRS is bad enough, but the ex-wife is the worst of all. Fuckin' blood sucker." He made a wry face.

Sidney took a sip of his ice water. "So, where do I come in?"

"Well, I need someone to, like, turn in the ticket for me." "Yes. We'll pay the taxes and everything legal, and then we – I – can do a little creative bank work. I figure one hundred thousand for you, just as a courier fee."

Sidney shook his head slowly. "I walk in to a lottery office with your ticket and say it's mine? Then I give you the money. That's legal?"

"Of course. What law is broken?"

Sidney didn't know, but had a hunch there was at least one.

Trevor ignored his skeptical look. "What I do is set up a trust account for you. In effect, you assign the winning ticket to the trust and the money goes there. The trust pays the taxes, files a return. Then invests its assets elsewhere."

"Meaning your bank account in the Bahamas."

"Yeah, the Bahamas. Nice place: pink sand, private banks. Ever been there?"

"Not yet. So, how much is the ticket worth?"

Trevor swallowed. "Don't really know until we turn it in. I am going take it in cash, but the face value is three hundred ten million."

Sidney put down his glass and stared at Trevor. "No shit. That *is* a lot of money." Sidney thought about it. Trevor watched him eat his sandwich. "You know, the fee for the bag man is usually a percentage."

Trevor had seen that one coming. "Hundred thou is good pay. A day or two of work, with no risk and no night work."

"Risk? You know, Trevor, risk is a measure of what is at stake, not just how likely it is to screw up." Trevor looked blank. "I mean, I work hard for my clients, but I work really hard at staying out of prison. I spent a little time there when I was young and stupid. I am forty now and I've got things

to do that do not involve being in the pen.” Trevor started to protest. Sidney stopped him. “When was this ticket a winner? Three-ten was last Wednesday’s jackpot. You called me about this on Tuesday. What is up with that?”

Trevor didn’t answer right away. “I called you about doing more work on the divorce. I think Bonnie is hiding assets somewhere.”

“No, Trevor.” Sidney’s face hardened. “After not hearing from you for two months, you call with this vague bullshit lunch date. That was before the lottery jackpot. Today, you tell me you just won the lottery. How the hell can that happen?”

Trevor was silent. He leaned forward, “Take it easy, Sid. You’re attracting attention. I told you. Last week I was calling you about Bonnie. Now it turns out I need you for something else, more important.”

Sidney’s suspicion lingered. “Did you pull some scam? Is this a fake, a counterfeit ticket? Are you crazy, Trevor?”

“No, not a fake, all legit. But you are right, it’s a lot of money and maybe there is more work involved. I’ll double the fee, how about two hundred thousand?”

Sidney looked at him coolly and his expression left no doubt in Trevor’s mind that the game was up. “I think just having this conversation is going to cost you one hundred thousand – for my discretion. As for the delivery, I’ll get back to you. My rule of thumb is not to get involved in anything that someone doesn’t need to graduate high school to figure out you broke the law.” Sidney stood up. “I never want to leave a courtroom except through the front door. I’m surprised you don’t share my philosophy.” He put down a twenty for his sandwich and left Trevor sitting, twisting his gold signet ring around his right ring finger and wondering what he was going to do.

