

She sat down and flicked the television on. Channel surfing briefly before finding the lottery draw. A handsome man in a flashy suit was on the screen talking some nonsense that wasn't paid attention to. The only thing that mattered were the numbers. It's not every day that you find a lottery ticket on the same day as the draw after all.

Some time went by and the man on the screen continued to drone on. Growing restless, she fidgeted about. Twiddling her thumbs, shifting her sitting position and sighing loudly.

"Why do they make the lottery draws so long?" she thought to herself. Unimpressed by the theatrics.

"... and here is Vanessa with tonight's draw!" came the voice from the television, causing her to sit up and alert.

"Thank you Mike," said Vanessa as the camera panned over to her in front of the lottery ball machine. The machine itself springing to life, the lottery balls inside popping around like popcorn being cooked.

After a short delay, the first ball was pulled from the machine. "32," said Vanessa. Looking down at the lottery ticket, she smiled briefly as she spied 32 on the ticket she held. "19," came the announcement of the next ball. And there it was again, on the ticket.

"Maybe today is my lucky day..." she said, her voice full of hope as she clutched the ticket in her hand tight. It'd been a long road getting to this moment. It was clear that she desperately needed the win, as she sat there with her body tensed.

"11 is the next number," came the familiar voice. This time she began to squeal, 11 was on the ticket too. She couldn't believe her luck. That was 3 out of 3 so far. That meant she had already won something, not a lot but something. It could only build from here. It could only get better from here.

"And the next number is... 47!" said Vanessa, her voice from the television set the only thing breaking the deafening silence of the apartment. 47 was on the ticket too. 2 more numbers and something unbelievably life-changing was going to happen. 2 more numbers and she would be free.

Her palms were sweating as she watched Vanessa on the

screen. The numbers popping around in the machine were mesmerizing. Those numbers were her fate. Dancing around in an enclosed area. Ready to make or break her. It was now or never. Many decisions had been leading up to this moment, and they were not particularly sound.

Her thoughts interrupted by the television as the next number was announced. "25," it said. 25 was on the ticket. She had won at least a few thousand pounds. That would be enough. She began to squeal again, jumping up from her chair as she done a small dance on the spot. She had won. She had finally gotten the break she thought she deserved.

But then she went back to the thoughts of her day. The decisions she made. She had stolen a woman's bag today. She had emptied it of anything worth taking and then discarded it in some trash. She knew it was wrong, but she was desperate. She couldn't pay her rent. She couldn't eat. She had no job. She owed money. She had to steal.

The lottery ticket. That had come from the bag too. She hadn't intended on stealing thousands of pounds from the woman. The woman looked wealthy, that's why she had targeted her, but not many people can afford to lose thousands of pounds. Even less people deserve to lose out on thousands of pounds they would've won by chance.

Could she keep the lottery ticket? Or did she have to find the woman? Her thoughts again interrupted by the lottery draw, as the last number was announced. "3 is the final number of the evening. Best of luck to all of you out there, and congratulations to all the winners!" Vanessa signed off with.

3 was on the ticket too. The stolen bag, that had contained a grand total of £422 worth of stuff and cash combined – enough to cover rent and food for a short while – had also contained the ticket to £2.1 million. This was more than she had ever intended to take. This was more than she could've ever imagined.

The idea of giving the ticket back had vanished, as she began to dance around the room. Day-dreaming of what the first thing she would buy would be. She was a millionaire now. She had made it. No more worrying about money. No more worrying about what she owed. No more scraping by to make rent. She was a new person. A free person. She was ready to embrace it.

Grabbing the phone, she recklessly dialed the lottery

hotline. After some short verifications, a date for her to come down and present the ticket – as well as be awarded the money – was set. In less than 24 hours, she would be picking up £2.1 million. It didn't seem real. But she was ready to collect, nonetheless.

Over the period of the next 24 hours, very little thought had gone back to the fact that the ticket was stolen. She had mostly forgotten about everything that had happened prior to the draw. Likely because of the copious amount of celebratory alcohol she had consumed, but also likely that she had chosen not to remember it.

She met the lottery staff. She presented the ticket. Everything was verified. A ceremony took place, pictures were taken, press releases were written and the money was awarded. As well as two tickets for a Caribbean Cruise. If it were not for the money and the cruise, the whole day would've been events that had annoyed her. But the rewards had been worth it.

She now had 2 days before the departure of the cruise and millions of pounds to spend. So rightfully, she went out and purchased a modest house outside of the city. Nothing too fancy. It cost her £400k, and she could see herself living there for a long time to come. Her life was in the process of being made.

Then came furniture shopping. As if spending £400k impulsively on a house you viewed and moved into on the same day wasn't enough, she blew a further £30k on 'essential' furniture. Having never had money before, the excessive spending came as no real shock. But she was determined to be careful with it now that the essentials were out of the way.

Having slept in her own bed, in her own house, for the first night ever, she woke up feeling invincible. She got cleaned up, got dressed. Her plan was to pack up her old place and bring whatever she decided to keep over to the new place today. Before jetting off on a relaxing cruise tomorrow. Despite having no one for the second ticket.

Not so strangely, she checked her phone to see she had a missed call from an unrecognized number. She had been getting calls non-stop for the past 48 hours from a variety of different news sources. She thought nothing of it, deleted the notification and assured herself that if it was important they'd call back.

She called a cab and got dropped off at the nearest car lot. Again, she impulsively spent part of her winnings. This time £10k on a car. She had sold hers back when money got really tight, and always missed the freedom of being able to drive wherever she wanted whenever she wanted. After some time expended on paperwork, including temporary insurance, she got the keys and left.

Climbing into her newly owned, but previously used, BMW – she was filled with a sense of freedom and purpose that had been missing from her life. She drove over to her old apartment and cleared it out of anything worth keeping. Clothes, pictures and other odd trinkets had all found their way into the keep pile for now. Everything else was packed into black bags and thrown out with the trash.

She loaded her belongings up into the car, then headed over to the landlord's office. She owed him for late-fees and damages to the property, which she paid in full. It seemed like pocket change to her these days. Which was amusing to her, considering it was the source of much her life stress not even 72 hours prior.

With the chains of her old life slowly being cast off, she had one last stop to make. Hopping back in the car, she drove to a relatively intimidating area of the city. Climbing up a dozen flights of stairs, she reached a damaged and vandalized door. She knocked nervously. Knowing the owner of the place was not a nice, or patient, character.

She owed him £700. She had done for 3 months. She had been avoiding him for the past 2. And he wasn't known for his forgiving nature. Her palms were sweating. Her legs were almost shaking. Her head was swimming. The wait for the door to be answered seemed like it was lasting a lifetime.

Then he answered. With a warm grin and an inviting motion, he let her in. "Hey there lottery winner. So I guess you've got my money now, huh?" he said the moment she stepped through the door. A slight sting to the end of his sentence catching her off-guard. He was mad. She could tell.

"Hey... Yeah... I've got your money. Actually I've got double it. No, triple it. For the 3 months late. You can have it right now," she replied nervously and hastily. Her words merging towards the end of her speaking, as she focused on trying to remember to breathe. She didn't want to get hurt, and she knew this was the guy that would if she said the wrong thing.

"Three times? Well, that's very generous of you. Very generous. Almost as generous as me waiting the whole three months. So where's the money?" he replied venomously. His demeanor rapidly changing as the situation continued to unfold.

She produced the money from her bag. She had intentionally only brought enough to pay him off. She wouldn't dare take any unnecessary risk around a guy like this. Especially not with his history, and the amount of time she had left him waiting. She handed over the money, her hand shaking slightly.

He quickly snatched it from her hand and counted it. His expression softening. She had done something right, she could tell. "So, we're even then?" she dared to ask. She had to know. She couldn't wait any longer, her heart was about to explode out of her chest.

"We're even," he said, as he got up to his feet and opened the door for her. "Now get out. Be thankful I'm letting this end here."

She nodded. "Thank-you for everything. Really. Thank-you," she replied tentatively as she made her way for the door. Passing through the door way and practically sprinting from that point onward. She dived down the flights of stairs. She didn't stop until she reached her car. Climbing in, she breathed a sigh of relief.

She had made it. She had unshackled the last chain. She was now truly free. She didn't get hurt, she didn't get in trouble, she had done it. She had solved everything that had once bothered her. She could now enjoy the rest of her life without the worries that had previously bound her.

As she took a moment to gather herself in the car, the weight lifting with every passing moment, she thought of all that she could achieve now. With the money. With her life. Completely zoning out to a day-dream of becoming a big shot business woman, the rest of the world had faded out.

Until her phone started ringing. Obnoxiously. Snapping her back to reality. She rummaged around in her bag before finding her phone and hastily hitting the answer button.

"Hello," she said into the phone.

"Hello," came a stern voice from the other end.

"Sorry, who is this?" she replied, rather unphased by the tone of their voice.

"The woman whose bag you stole."