

The Winning Ticket
By William P. Holton

Sunday morning. Nothing's nicer than waking up late to a fresh-brewed pot of coffee, a bagel with cream cheese and a couple of leisurely hours with the paper.

Likewise, there's nothing more irritating than waking up Sunday morning, putting on that pot of coffee for you and the Mrs., preparing the bagels and then watching everything grow cold while you scavenge through the house rounding up scattered bits and pieces of the paper: the sports section in the bathroom, the funnies in the living room, the front page in a crumpled heap in the foyer, and the rest strewn here and there.

"I do wish your brother would show some consideration about the newspaper," I said to Tricia, my wife, as I positioned the bed tray for our Sunday morning repast.

"Now, now, Robert, you're not the only one who likes to read the paper," Tricia mildly reprimanded me.

"Yes, but I *am* the only one who pays for it," I returned, a bit more sharply than I would have liked. But I couldn't help it. Kenny was a sore subject with me, and had been ever since he moved back in with us some three months back.

I rejoined Tricia in bed. I sipped my coffee and did my best to flatten the crumpled front section of the paper.

"He didn't win again, I see," Tricia remarked. Every week Kenny played the lottery. He always played the same numbers – a combination of his Social Security number and his age – and he always checked the numbers Sunday morning.

"Waste of good money, if you ask me," I groused.

"Oh, Robert," Tricia said. "Kenny only spends a dollar a week on it! I think he's just hoping to win enough to pay us back someday for all we've done for since Mom and Dad died."

Tricia's parents died the month before Kenny was due to go away to college. They'd left no insurance. We'd taken Kenny in for the month, then come September we'd seen him off to college. Holidays and summers he'd spent with us too. *Lucky us.*

After graduating in the bottom third of his college class – a school, I might add, whose tuition bills had always come addressed to me – Kenny had made a few halfhearted attempts to obtain employment.

I'd offered Kenny a job right out of school at my print shop. He'd lasted exactly two days.

"I'm more the brains and ideas type," he'd said. "Maybe Robert here is happy doing drudge work, but it's not for me."

Now Kenny is home looking for work. That is, if you can call pressing the buttons on the TV remote control looking for work.

There were some repairs around the house that needed doing. I spent Sunday afternoon doing some odd jobs such as fixing a leaky faucet and hanging a set of blinds. Kenny spent the afternoon watching football.

"You could help, you know," I said to him when Tricia was out of earshot.

Kenny gave me a sort of scowl. "I suppose," he said haughtily, "that you expect *all* of your guests to perform manual labor?"

I was so angry with Kenny, and so frustrated with Tricia's blind spot when it came to him. The only way I could stop myself from blowing up was to work late every night the following week at the print shop.

Tricia would put a plate in the oven for me before she went bed, and if Kenny didn't get to it first I would eat it in the kitchen when I arrived home sometime between 11:30 and midnight.

Saturday morning I saw Tricia slip Kenny fifty bucks for pocket money. I left the house furious, my breakfast still on the table. I didn't come home until nearly three a.m.

The Sunday papers were on the neighborhood lawns by the time I arrived home. I carried ours inside and left it on the table in the foyer. Then I went to bed.

I was awakened a few hours later by the sound of Kenny screaming. Tricia and I hurried downstairs.

"I won!" Kenny shouted.

"You won what?" Tricia asked, descending the last few stairs.

"The lottery!" Kenny whooped, waving the newspaper. "I won!"

"Oh, Kenny!" Tricia exclaimed, giving her brother a congratulatory hug. He showed her the ticket, then folded the paper so she could see the winning combination.

Tricia turned to me. "It says here that the lottery computer shows only one winner, from right here in Branonville."

"Congratulations, Kenny," I offered. "You want me to take that ticket down to the shop and put it in the safe until tomorrow morning when the lottery office opens?"

If looks could kill, I would have been struck dead right then and there.

"You'd like that, wouldn't you?" he sneered. "Then you could go in tomorrow morning and steal the ticket and try to claim the prize as your own."

"Kenny!" said Tricia. "Robert wouldn't do something like that!"

"Of course not," I agreed. "I'll be perfectly happy with my share."

"Your share of what?" Kenny asked.

"I believe it was *my* dollar you used to buy that ticket," I reminded him.

"Big deal," Kenny shot back. "I didn't ask for it. Tricia gave it to me. I don't owe you guys a cent!"

"Kenny!" Tricia said sharply. "There's more than simply a dollar at stake here. Or have you forgotten that we paid for your schooling? Not to mention the fact that we've been letting you stay with us rent-free while you look for a job."

"Can I help it if you guys are soft touches?" Kenny asked her. "Just because you two are suckers, it doesn't mean I have to be one too." He gave his ticket a loud smack. "Yes sirree, this baby is my ticket out of Nowheresville!"

With that he bolted upstairs, returning a brief minute later with an overnight bag. "Think I'm gonna spend the night in a hotel," he announced. "Wouldn't want to take a chance on one of you guys stealing my ticket while I'm asleep, now would I?"

There were angry tears in Tricia's eyes as she watched her brother hop into the car *we 'd* bought him and drive off. Then she turned to me. "Go ahead, say it."

"Say what?" I inquired.

"I told you so."

I gave my wife a hug. "Try not to let it get you too upset," I said.

Tricia and I didn't spend our usual calm Sunday morning with a pot of coffee and the newspaper. Tricia spent most of the day upstairs, stomping through the rooms and angrily slamming doors and windows.

I pattered around the house, washed the car, swept the front porch and sidewalk. I carried the trash out to the backyard incinerator and touched it off with a match.

I even collected the newspaper and threw it in: the funnies, sports section... and the *two* front pages – the one that had actually come with the paper and the *other* one I'd spent all night at the print shop putting together with Kenny's lottery numbers in the little box about halfway down the page.

And as the flames rose to swallow the newsprint, I couldn't help but wonder which was going to be Kenny's bigger surprise: showing up at the lottery office with a ticket that didn't hold a single winning digit ... or coming back here to discover that Tricia had tossed all his belongings out the upstairs window into a heap in the middle of the lawn.

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1. What does Robert enjoy doing on Sunday mornings? (3 marks)

2. Who has recently moved back in with Robert and his wife Tricia? (1 mark)

3. What has happened to Tricia’s parents? (2 marks)

4. How does Robert feel about Kenny? Does he enjoy having him around? (3 marks)

5. What awoke Robert in the early morning? (2 marks)

6. How did Kenny react to winning the lottery? How did he treat Robert and Tricia? (4 marks)

7. What was the major surprise at the end of the story? (3 marks)

8. What can moral or lesson can be learned from this story? (2 marks)
