

# My Life as a Multi-Millionaire

I reclined in the back seat of my shiny, chauffeured car, staring languidly out the window at the less fortunate passersby. The car came to a stop at a red light, and I recognized the faces of several co-workers dimly visible through the dirty windows of the bus in the next lane. “God, Jack Butler is looking old,” I mused aloud. “What was that, ma’am?” my chauffeur said, attentively, politely, from the front seat. “Nothing, James, nothing,” I replied, smiling at my private joke. The light turned green and we sped wealthily away, leaving the bus lumbering in our affluent wake.

That is how I imagined my commute to work would play out, once I won the Powerball jackpot. Every morning I spent the thirty-seven-block bus ride working out the details: what kind of car would I have? What color would the upholstery be? Would James (sometimes I called him “Charles”) have a hat? Of course, not all the details were imaginary. Jack Butler really was looking old and haggard, ever since he got that promotion. But I kept that observation to myself—which I wouldn’t have to do, as a multi-millionaire. Hell, when I won the Powerball jackpot I could tell everyone that Jack was the spit and image of Carol Burnett and nobody would contradict me. “That Carla,” they would all say, “she’s so observant. I wonder why we never noticed before.”



Most of my post-jackpot plans focused on the office, and it was months before it occurred to me that, after I was a multi-millionaire, I probably wouldn't need to go to work anymore. That made me stop and think for a bit, but eventually I decided I'd keep showing up for a few weeks, just until I could arrange all the details of my millionaire lifestyle. "I don't plan to let this money change my life completely," I would tell the reporters. "I'm still a nine-to-five kind of gal." Eight-fifteen to six, really, if you counted the commute—but once I had James (or Charles) to drive me, I wouldn't mind. "Drive through the park, James," I would say, nibbling at a croissant in the back seat, and perusing the paper through the reading glasses perched expensively on my nose. I used to read the paper on the bus, but I was always carsick by 66<sup>th</sup> Street. Then I tried holding it open on my lap and only reading it when we were stopped in traffic, but I kept losing my place, and I still usually got sick before I reached my stop. When I won the jackpot and had my own car, I could hire a carsickness specialist to calibrate my tires or something, and then I would read the entire paper every morning, even the boring articles in the "Science and Technology" section and the box scores I don't understand. I would do so much reading that I would have to buy expensive glasses to protect my eyes from strain. "You don't really need them," my fawning optometrist would say, "but they would make life a bit easier." "Oh, Dr. Charles, money is no object," I would smile back, with the hint of a wink that implied, "...and we both know it."

Work would be a lot easier, of course, once I won the jackpot. It would hardly be work at all. People would treat me like the boss, because they would know that I could buy the company if I really wanted to. The boss would realize this, too, and he would offer me a big office with a view, and I would say, "No, no, nothing ostentatious. I'm happy where I am—and I wouldn't want the pressure to get to me, or I might start looking prematurely old, what?" I was practicing ending sentences that way, with a likeable "what?" that said, "Don't you agree?" and implied, "of course you do." I had tried adding an "eh"—"eh, what?"—but I couldn't fit it in without affecting a British accent, and somehow that sounded too jarring. James would have a British accent, I decided, and I might pick it up from him after a while.

You have to be careful making friends, when you're rich. My mailbox would probably be stuffed with marriage proposals from strangers, and I would

chuckle over them with James, and maybe draft a polite form letter to send to my many admirers. "I'm very flattered," it would say, "but I'm afraid there just isn't enough of me to go around. I hope you're not too disappointed, what?" Of course, I wouldn't want to spend all my time just joking with my chauffeur, so I decided to dedicate my weekends to visiting upscale clubs and such, under an alias, so the men there wouldn't know just how wealthy I was. Of course, my picture would be all over the news when I won the jackpot, but I'm sure wealthy people never pay attention to such things, and the kind of men who would pursue me at the clubs would never recognize me from my fifteen minutes of vulgar fame. Especially if I had a different name. I was still working on that, but the one I liked best was "Charlotte"—close enough to "Carla" that I wouldn't forget to answer to it, but sophisticated and European and feminine, not like "Carla" which sounds like "car" and "Carl," what?

I bought forty-five Powerball tickets. I bought them all myself using money from the office petty cash fund, since I knew nobody would mind once I'd won the jackpot. People at the office were sharing tickets—buying them together and agreeing to split the prize, if they won. I laughed, trying to imagine Jack Butler sharing the prize with Lisa James and Charlie What's-his-name. The most I'd ever seen him share was a bottle of vodka at the Christmas party! I made a mental note to repeat that to James, who would get a kick out of it, but I didn't say anything to Jack and his "partners." No sense in crushing their dreams, I decided; that would seem tasteless and petty, once I was a multi-millionaire.

I didn't go to work the day the numbers were announced. I thought about calling in sick, but I decided it would be better to let them wonder where I was (plus, I was afraid they'd ask me about the petty cash). I'd let them all see me on the evening news, and then I'd shock them by showing up to work again on Monday with little gift bags for everyone: hair dye, perhaps, for Jack, and a novelty keychain for Lisa that said, "I just work here!"

I spread out all my tickets on the floor in front of the TV, since I didn't know which one would be the winner. I taped the announcement, and I played the tape over and over so I could check the tickets one by one. I must have missed one the first time through, so I went back and did it again, this time with the "brightness" slightly increased

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on the television for easier visibility. Forty-five times, for forty-five tickets. I counted this time. What was wrong with me today? Why couldn't I keep track of my numbers? I was just about to rewind the tape and start again—this time with the “contrast” turned up—when I heard a voice behind me ask, “Do you need any help, ma'am?”

I turned and was relieved to see the familiar face of my chauffeur, who stood deferentially in the doorway. “Oh, James, it's only you! You scared me out of my wits.”

“Sorry, ma'am,” he said, politely, humbly. “I just came to deliver the latest proposal letters—six, today—and to inquire whether you will be going out to the club this evening.” Evidently I had been daydreaming, but James had brought me back to reality. He continued, “Your guests all enjoyed the party last night, I am told. Lady Charleston was most complimentary, and Lord Jamesworth said he could not recall when he had passed such an enjoyable evening.”

The party! Ah, yes. I surveyed the room. Champagne glasses strewn everywhere, and the floor scattered with sequins! Earrings and other semi-precious jewels lay where they had fallen, beneath chairs and tables, cast-off and forgotten. Stains marred the carpet where Dame Carlotta's bichon frise had vomited up its caviar dinner. The wealthy are so careless—I laughed to think of it—and of course, my parties are always so gay. No time now for reflection, though—James stood awaiting my instructions. “We will have to clean this up before we head to the club, what?” I trilled cheerfully. “Oh, and James—you don't have to be so formal with me. You can call me Charlotte.”

James blushed and looked down at the hat he held in his hands. “Well, then,” he smiled, “I suppose you should call me Charles.”

“Delightfully intimate!” I exclaimed, as Charles knelt down to gather the pearls from the carpet. “And so I shall. Thank you, Charles...” He looked up, prepared for the witticism he knew would be forthcoming. I grinned down at him, gaily, mischievously. “Thanks a million!” I quipped. Oh, how luxuriously we laughed!

—WILSON  
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