

Better Me than You



By **Samuel S. Partridge**

Some con artist in a far-off place does not like me anymore. For a couple of weeks we were best pals. I was just the right lawyer and he was a very responsive client who followed all of my advice. He was so pleased that I was representing him with his collection matters that even in these dark economic times, he eventually offered to double my fee. What a guy. Clients like him do not just grow on trees but con artists are a dime a dozen. I was a big fish on his line and he was deftly trying to land me and mount me on his living room wall. He believed that once caught, my wallet would overflow with a nice little payday to the tune of around \$200,000. Fortunately for me, I found some rocks near the bottom and broke the line. I get the feeling that as I tell this story, he is still wondering how it all went so horribly wrong.

It all starts with a nice little e-mail from parties located in whereabouts unknown. These individuals own a large foreign entity. They got your name from a lawyer in another state. You are the man for this job as your stellar legal reputation precedes you. All you have to do is collect a little money for them and

they will make it worth your while. They have some clients here in the U.S. whose accounts are delinquent and they need you to initiate collection efforts. Name your retainer. I guarantee you they will pay it, or at least promise they will.

In early June 2009, my new best client called himself Mr. Robert Weng and his trusted business associate referred to herself as Ms. Aletha Patrick. Their business, Matilla Manufacturing, is located somewhere in China. They really needed my help. I e-mailed them back and told them I was a helpful kind of guy. They were so pleased. I told them that in order to begin my efforts on their behalf, I would require a \$10,000 retainer. They needed to think about it for a minute or two and accepted almost immediately. Just a few days later I received a voicemail from a foreign gentleman named Sam Moore. He needed to verify my address so that he could send me a cashier's check. I knew at this point that my little reverse scam operation was likely finished. My voicemail identifies my title as assistant general counsel and our receptionist had answered the switchboard with her familiar greeting



"Not worth the paper it's written on" – above is the \$361,000 check Sam Partridge received from a "friend."

"Alabama State Bar." I returned his call but he was none the wiser. The check was on the way.

I then got the best news of the year. My clients had taken it upon themselves to contact one of their customers to inform them that I was onboard. The customer became fearful that I was about to unleash a brutal legal assault. Of course, they paid up. Wow, I thought. Just the mere mention of my name and the money was flowing. I must be a pretty scary guy. The customer was sending me the check directly and I could take my retainer out of the proceeds I collected. I could even take an extra \$10,000 for future legal work. Great! Now I could buy that new boat I had been eyeing. All I had to do was wire the balance to their corporate account in China.

Within a few days the check arrived. It was drawn on a Citibank account made payable to "yours truly" for \$361,000. The return address was Ontario, Canada. I was instructed to deposit it in my trust account and wire out \$200,000. They informed me to hold the balance in my trust account and await future instructions. I informed my client that I would be depositing the check that afternoon. Immediately thereafter, I received my wiring instructions. Then the unthinkable happened. I disappeared and was never heard from again.

They sent desperate emails and even Mr. Weng himself left me a voicemail. They needed their money now or they were going to be in breach of contract with one of their associates. It was a bleak situation. Their vast manufacturing empire was crumbling around them and it was all my fault. Where had their trusted lawyer gone? I think I may have even violated the

Alabama Rules of Professional Conduct when I stopped communicating with them and failed to inform them of my withdrawal. I guess I will need to self report.

It is easy to make light of this situation and I must admit that I did smile as I was scamming these scammers. The scary side of this charade is that, on occasion, it works. There are law firms that have wired out large sums of money to foreign banks. The check that they received allowed the funds to become available for a short period of time. Later, the bank informs them that the check is actually a forgery and that they are the responsible party. When I called Citibank I was informed that the account number is valid and belongs to Citibank of Canada.

If you receive a suspicious e-mail or telephone call, stay on alert. My Matilla Manufacturing friends were easy to recognize from the onset as a fraud but I have heard of some scammers who can be particularly savvy. If you think that a potential client is a con artist, I can guarantee you that they probably are. I would suggest not responding but, in my case, I could not resist. It was just too much fun to waste some of their time and effort and, along the way, I knew that they could not use some of that time to scam somebody else. ▲▼▲



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The FBI and the Internet Crime Complaint Center ask:

Are you a safe Internet user? You may be at risk if you answer "yes" to any of the following questions:

- Do you visit Web sites by clicking on links within an e-mail?
- Do you reply to e-mails from companies or persons you are not familiar with?
- Have you received packages to hold or ship to someone you met on the Internet?
- Have you been asked to cash checks and wire funds to an employer you met online?
- Would you cash checks or money orders received through an online transaction without first confirming their legitimacy?
- Would you provide your personal banking information as a result of an e-mail notification?

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