

The Best of Luck *By* Arthur Somers Roche

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

GERALD MAGEE is penniless and does not know where to look for his next meal. Unable to obtain work in Rockport he is lurking about the railway station in search of some freight car bumper that will give him a free ride out of this inhospitable town. A shifty-eyed stranger suddenly appears out of the evening shadows and thrusts into Magee's hands a mysterious envelope. Just then Elias J. Blake, the wealthy Mayor of Rockport, and his beautiful daughter, Eleanor, pass in their motor car. The stranger adds still further to Magee's amazement by referring to Eleanor Blake as the girl Magee is going to marry. After the stranger has gone Magee opens the envelope and finds twenty \$1,000 banknotes. He disposes of one of the \$1,000 banknotes at a pawnbroker's and then proceeds to exchange his tramp's garb for one of prosperity and refinement. After engaging a luxurious suite at the fashionable Hotel Belnord he visits a local newspaper "morgue" under pretense of being a reporter and there learns that Eleanor Blake is engaged to marry Henry J. Madison, the District Attorney who enjoys the reputation of having closed Holberg's well-known gambling house by a raid. The establishment, however, is still open, and Magee visits the place that night. He arrives just in time to prevent Holberg from murdering Tarson for having, as he thinks, "double crossed" him. Tarson had been given a \$20,000 bribe for Madison, and it was this money which he handed to Magee, having mistaken the latter for the dishonest District Attorney in disguise. Enraged at his failure to receive the promised bribe Madison later in the night makes a spectacular raid on the gambling house.

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Edmund
Frederick
1919

Holberg stops the panic-stricken rush of his "guests" for the door by knocking down the first man who tries to pass him. Threatening the crowd with his revolver he orders the steel doors closed to keep the gamblers in and the raiders out until his employees can hide the gambling paraphernalia and thus prevent its being seized as evidence. Just then Tarson recognizes Magee and points him out to Holberg as the man who got the \$20,000. Despite Magee's cleverness in tearing out the electric light switch and throwing the place into darkness he is seized by one of Holberg's henchmen and locked in the strong room. There to his amazement he finds Eleanor Blake. She is awaiting the coming of her brother Bob, the assistant district attorney, who planned this raid and promised her a glimpse of it. When Bob fails to appear Eleanor consents to allow Magee to escort her home but they find they cannot get out of the strong room. A few minutes later Holberg and Madison enter. Madison has come to try to recover the bribe money which Holberg has convinced him was given to the wrong man by mistake. He is astounded to find his fiancée there. Holberg, however, fails to recognize the Mayor's daughter, and in the angry conversation which follows he reveals to her Madison's crookedness. She in turn reveals to Holberg the fact that Madison was intending to carry out the raid even if he had received the bribe money. The infuriated gambler attacks Madison and Magee, first with blackjack then with revolver. Magee's life is saved by Eleanor's heroism in seizing Holberg by the arm with which he is about to shoot him. Magee trips and falls unconscious, bleeding from a scalp wound, as he is trying to save Eleanor a blow from Holberg's fist. But the blow never falls, for a bullet from the revolver of the dying district attorney opportunely finds its mark in the desperate gambler. When Magee recovers consciousness on the blood-stained floor beside the two dead men Eleanor is gone but her handkerchief remains bound about his head. Magee returns to his hotel, wondering how he can save Eleanor from the scandal that will follow the double killing.

CHAPTER VI.—(Cont'd) After the Tragedy.

HE had just fought the heavyweight champion of the world eighteen savage rounds for the hand of Eleanor Blake. He had just knocked the champion down and the referee was counting the fatal ten when Eleanor herself climbed up into the ring and stretched her hands out to him. Just then the bell, denoting the end of the round, began to clang. It clanged and clanged and clanged.

Mr. Magee sat up in bed, cursing softly. His head ached, his eyes were sore from lack of sleep. If there had been something handy he would have thrown it at the jangling telephone on the wall. As there was no missile within reach he groaned, got up out of bed and walked to the instrument. "Well, who is it? The King of Spain?" It was the voice of the night clerk who answered.

"No, sir, not him, but it's Police Captain Kenton and he's on his way up, and I'm tipping you off because you're ace-high with me. Thought you might want to stow something away, or—"
"Much obliged," said Mr. Magee. He hung up the receiver and stared stupidly about his room. He couldn't have slept more than three hours, for the night clerk most probably was relieved from duty at eight. He was tired, worn out and in no shape to talk with a police captain. But—on the door of his parlor came a peremptory knock.
Mr. Magee scrambled into shoes, coat and trousers and walked through the parlor, opening the door a trifle. It was immediately pushed open the whole way, and a large man, red of face, beady of eye and imposing of chest and paunch, attired in a plain blue suit, entered the room. He slammed the door shut behind him.
"You're the guy that calls himself Jerry Magee, eh?" said the visitor.
"My name is Gerald Magee," said that gentleman, calmly.
The police captain grunted; he walked heavily through the parlor and sat down upon the edge of the bed in the next room.
"Might as well make myself comfortable," he said. "Any guy with nerve enough to jump from boin' it to the Belnord probably'll have to be shown."
He drew a cigar from his waistcoat pocket, lit the end from it,

lighted a match and, between the first puffs, remarked, "I'm Captain Kenton, of the police, Mr. Magee."
"Too bad I'm not the commissioner," said Mr. Magee, "so that I could have you broken. However—what do you want, captain?"
"Twenty thousand round from men; twenty thousand paper wafers; twenty thousand little plasters that'll drive dull care away. The cash, Mr. Magee, the cash. I'm a man of few words, sir. Money is half my vocabulary. Kick in."
Mr. Magee found a cigarette in his coat pocket. He lighted it.
"Self-defense, captain," he remarked, apologetically. "That cigar of yours is a six-cylinder one, you know."
"Yep. It's strong; so am I! I'm captain of the police, Mr. Magee. Is the twenty thousand too heavy for you to pass to me? Shall I come and take it off you?"
"Not unless you're in fine shape," said Mr. Magee. "I prefer to hear you talk. You talk so soothingly. I love to hear a man talk about money in the morning."
"I love the name of it morning, noon and night," said the captain. "But you're all tired out, Mr. Magee. You ain't had your beauty sleep. If you'll kindly indicate the spot where the coin is cached I'll just be on my way."
"Oh, don't hurry, captain," said Mr. Magee, politely. "I'm a student of dreams, myself. Where do you get 'em? From that pill you're smoking?"
Captain Kenton crossed his knees. He drew complacently on his cigar. "I hate to play with amateurs," he said. "Before you boed it around I'll bet you was a highstepper, Mr. Magee. I'm glad of it; I hate it when it comes too easy. However, sir, you've called, and you got a right to see my cards. Here they are!"
He tapped one stubby, blunt forefinger against the other.

"I'll just check off my cards to you, Mr. Magee. First, twenty thousand dollars that should have gone from Holberg to District Attorney Madison went to a vag near the Union Station. Coarse work, very, but Madison was a cautious guy. He wanted to get the coin himself, didn't trust any go-between of his own, and still he had to be all to the leary about how he got it. Had the acting bug bad, he did. Still, that's no crime. What is a crime is that that vag still has the money when I'm needin' just twenty thousand to buy me a steam yacht. Well, that's card one. Here's card two."
"Just a moment, captain," interrupted Mr. Magee. "Where did you get all this stuff about twenty thousand dollars, anyway?"
"I was mighty curious why Madison went back with Holberg to the house after the raid," said the captain. "But, of course, bein' as Madison could have me broke I asks no questions. But when I learns that Madison and Holberg are dead, why, I question the guy closest to Holberg, askin' him if there's any reason why they should fight. The guy's name is Tarson; he slips me the whole story; all about his mistake. Clear?"
"Perfectly lucid," assented Mr. Magee. "And your second card?"
"Blair, one of the croupiers, had hold of the card that you presented at Holberg's that night. It was signed by the night clerk of this hotel. Didn't take much headwork to find you, did it?"
"Oh, I think it was quite clever of you," said Mr. Magee. "But, still, you know—"
"Card three," announced Kenton. He rose from the bed and opened the bedroom door. He leaned out and beckoned. A moment later the pimply-faced youth of Rosenbaum's pawnshop stood in the doorway. The captain jerked a finger at Mr. Magee.
"This the guy?" he asked.

"The very one, so help me, Jae!"
"Beat it, and remember that if you open your trap I'll settle you," said the captain. He slammed the door upon the pimply-faced youth and turned to Mr. Magee. "How's that?" he asked.
"Three in a row," admitted Mr. Magee, admiringly. "How'd you do it?"
"Oh, I'm not above gettin' mine when the gettin's good," said the captain, proudly. "All the fences belong to me. I round 'em up every night at nine. Rosenbaum was goin' to hold out on me about changin' a thousand-dollar bill for a tramp, but His Pimples there is sore on his boss, so he slipped me an careful last night. I made old Resie hand me a century of that good graft and threatened to send him to the rockpile if I ever heard of his holdin' out on me again. Neat, eh?"
"Rather lucky, I think," said Mr. Magee. "What else?"
"Ain't them enough?" queried the captain, harshly. "I got you dead to rights. I know you got twenty thousand of Holberg's money. Holberg didn't leave any heirs, and if he did I'm not above tellin' you they'd wait a long time for this bit. It's mine; do you hand it over now?"
Mr. Magee yawned. "What'll you do if I don't—never, of course, admitting for a moment that you're within seven miles of the truth?"
"It's all true enough," chuckled the captain. "But what'll I do if you don't come across now? Why, I'll just show you my fourth card. You're under arrest for the double murder of Aaron Holberg and Henry J. Madison! Nix! Don't laugh. I got the motive—you wanted to hang on to that bankroll. The opportunity—they had you in a room and you done 'em up. Don't laugh."
"I can't help it," grinned Mr. Magee. "Not that I want the money, but I'm going to give it to Holberg's heirs, if he has any, and if not, to charity. You don't come under the head of charity."
"Why, you strangely obtuse gentleman, think a moment! If you

once make a murder charge against me you can't withdraw it the minute I hand over the bankroll to you, and I'm not fool enough to think you can. You'll have to do your best to make the charge stick. And, realizing that, you won't make the charge. Not while I'm alive and you think the twenty thousand is unspent. For once you make the charge you lose your last chance of making me come across. You're bluffing, captain; you've only played four cards and four flushes never beat me yet."
The captain's lips tightened, his mouth became hard.
"That's right; I've only shown four cards. Here's the fifth!"
He drew it from his pocket. It was the handkerchief which Mr. Magee had found bound around his head when he recovered consciousness in the "strong-room" of Holberg's gambling house, and which, evidently, he had left there. Captain Kenton smiled complacently at Mr. Magee's start of surprise.
"I didn't really expect to have to play this card when I came up here, Mr. Magee," said the captain. "I kind of expected to find some bum or a tout. But you're different from any yegg I ever met before. I guess you been a gent in your day, all right. And gentlemen—well, your kind is easy to read, Mr. Magee. There was a girl in that room with you; probably she was mixed up in the shootin'. That's neither here nor there. I don't care about that.
"But you, bein' a gent, ain't goin' to let me trace the laundry marks on this handkerchief; you ain't goin' to let some girl into this scrape—some girl who was there when the killin' took place, because there's blood on this handkerchief, and I found some hairpins on the floor of the room—you ain't goin' to have her dragged into this, charged with bein' accessory to murder, when you can save her by comin' across with twenty thousand that don't belong to you, anyway. Not if I know your kind, you're not. How about it?"
"It makes a fine hand, captain,"

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