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Opening Extract from...

Get Rich or Get Lucky

Written by Max Nowas

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MAX NOWAZ

Get Rich or Get R Lucky



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GET RICH OR GET
LUCKY



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CHAPTER 1

The builder was early. He knocked so hard on the old door that Adam thought the door would fall off its hinges.

“Coming,” shouted Adam, as he struggled to put on some trousers and rush down the stairs, almost tripping down them in the process. He was not sure if the man had heard him.

Just as Adam was about to open the door, he knocked again. A burly, sour-faced man greeted him.

“Sorry, I wasn’t sure if you heard me, mate,” he said. “I’m in a bit of a hurry as I’m starting on another job this morning, so I’m a bit early. Where’s the job you want the estimate for?”

“Come in,” said Adam. “This way.”

The man followed him into the kitchen. “I see you got your work cut out here.” He smiled.

“I’ve got to finish the work in four weeks. My future depends on it.” Adam knew instantly that it was the wrong thing to say to a builder.

“What would you like me to do?”

“I want these new units put up and the old ones taken down. As I already said, I’m in a bit of a hurry.” Adam regretted repeating himself, but the monkey had already slipped the cage.

“What’s your hurry?” asked the man.

“I’ve got a survey to get through in four weeks,” said Adam, regretting giving this information again. What was wrong with him? He was leading himself to the slaughter, but he felt tired; tired of all the incessant building work he had gone through lately.

“The earliest I can do it is in two weeks. It will cost you £700,” the man said without blinking. “A very fair price, if you ask me.”

“Can’t you do it this week?” Adam asked hopefully. He knew it was daylight robbery, but he was desperate.

“It’ll cost you an extra £500.” The man smiled again. “Time is money.”

It was on the tip of Adam’s tongue to tell him to fuck off, but he controlled himself. He knew he was being badly ripped off.

“Why? Don’t you think it’s a bit steep?” he heard himself pleading.

The man told him that he had a lot of work on at the moment. He shrugged his shoulders, throwing his hands up in the air, but he would like to help Adam out, and as a concession he would do it for an even £1,000.

Adam protested that it was still too much, and £700 was not exactly cheap. He said he didn’t think he wanted to pay any more than that, at which the man grimaced and said that he’d be lucky to get anybody else at such short notice. He was trying to do Adam a favour and he was sorry, but that was his price, so Adam could take it or leave it. His beady eyes gleamed as if he knew he had Adam in a corner.

“I think I’ll leave it,” said Adam, much to his own surprise, but his hackles were up. Adam had never liked being pushed into a corner. “I’ll do it myself.”

The man’s expression almost turned into a scowl; he was himself surprised. “You’re wasting my bloody time.” He looked almost threatening.

“Not at all, it’s my time that you’ve wasted,” said Adam with much satisfaction, even though he wasn’t looking forward to the job. Later that afternoon as Adam tried to take down one of the old kitchen units, part of the wall behind it collapsed, revealing a bricked-up doorway to a hidden cellar.

There had been no mention of the cellar in the fact sheet

of the house he had received from the estate agent. Even the surveyors had missed it during the survey. Those surveys were not worth the paper they were written on, he thought.

The next thought that crossed Adam's mind was one of misgiving. What extra problems did he face now with this semi-derelict house he had burdened himself with – the prospect of a damp, or even a flooded cellar?

The cellar was in fact quite large, and it was dry and there was a small metal box on a shelf cut into the wall. The box was securely fastened by a rusting iron clasp and an old lock. The thought of hidden treasure sent his pulse racing, and Adam wanted to get his hands on whatever was in the box.

Adam forcefully prised it open, eager to find out what was inside, but instead of treasure, he was disappointed to find a book. It was bound in tatty brown leather, untitled and gave off a horrific smell. *What a waste of an evening*, thought Adam.

It was his night to go and play badminton, but that was in London. He was a long way from there at present, in Littledon. The house was his latest acquisition, and a first outside London. He had bought it in a moment of madness at an auction. Badminton would have to wait for another day, and also his weekly drink with Charlie, after club night. However, his thoughts drifted to Charlie.

"You could probably be a good badminton player," said Charlie. "You have a lot of natural ability."

Adam was having a drink with him after club night. It was over two years ago that he had joined the badminton club in a desperate bid to improve his social life.

"I need to play more often to manage that, and unfortunately I've no time for it at present."

"I suppose you've got family commitments," Charlie acquiesced.

"No, I'm not married, but I'm doing up a house," said Adam. "This is much worse. The house was in a very bad state when I got it and I have to do a lot of the work myself."

Charlie remarked that it must be good to be a handyman, and Adam told him that he was self-taught. If Charlie had seen his first house after he had finished with it, he would have laughed at his handiwork. Still, he had made a good profit on it.

Charlie was intrigued, and asked Adam what he had done to it. Adam told him he had converted it from a two to a three-bedroomed house.

"You must've had a lot of capital to begin with, to embark on such projects." Charlie sighed. "I can't even get enough money together for a deposit to buy a flat."

"Not really," said Adam. "I went to the bank and borrowed a load of money to buy a car and used it as a deposit for the house." Adam blurted out the information without thinking, and realised that maybe he was bragging about the wrong thing.

Charlie asked Adam what made him take such a risk. It seemed to surprise him that anybody would undertake such a risky endeavour.

Adam told him that he had been desperate. Three years ago his then-girlfriend ditched him because he was a complete non-achiever. He was thirty and didn't even own a good car, so he had no choice but to improve his fortunes.

Adam didn't tell Charlie, however, that he had been obsessed with the idea of making it rich for some time, though for a time after college he had wanted to be a writer. But after a stack of rejections, his sense of insecurity had kicked in and all his literary aspirations had gone out of the window.

He had analysed it himself, after assiduously reading a good many books on psychology, including Freud and Jung amongst others. He had concluded that his insecurity stemmed from the

fact that his father had left him and his mother when he was twelve and just about to reach his teens. They had then tail-spun into poverty from a fairly comfortable standard of living.

His mother had failed to keep up with the mortgage payments for the house and they had moved into mouse-infested rented accommodation. His insecurity had multiplied steadily over the years as his mother complained incessantly about a shortage of the filthy lucre, without which life had slowly ground them down.

He had been lucky though, and had managed to claw his way into a second-rate university and get a degree in business studies. He still owed quite a bit on his student loans, even though he had worked steadily all the way through college in various low-paid part-time jobs.

But the thought of poverty haunted him, and had also been instrumental in the downfall of the few relationships he had had with women. His parsimonious ways had been the main problem, and though he did attract some women, he still suffered from a lack of confidence because of his feeling of insecurity about his finances.

Adam had adapted to a very frugal lifestyle as he struggled to save the money he needed to fulfil his ambition of owning his own house. This, however, proved costly nonetheless, as all his relationships with women nosedived because of a lack of funds to support a reasonable lifestyle.

Finally, out of frustration he had resorted to the desperate but simple scheme to buy his first house. Adam hated the crass, bourgeois nature of his scheme and his failed literary spirit rebelled against it, but he had to accept he was stuck with it if he was to prosper in the worship of Mammon.

“You still don’t have a good car,” laughed Charlie.

Adam told him that he had been pretty stretched with all the money he was having to spend on the new house, and would get a better car when he sold it.

“So you are a property developer.”

“Hardly, but a wise man told me a long time ago that unless you have a really fantastic job, it’s impossible to become rich doing nine to five.”

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The next week, when they went for a drink again, Charlie surprised him.

“I’d like to invite you to a barbecue this weekend. I’ve already asked my friend Dick and he said to bring you along.” Charlie told Adam that his friend Dick had a big house in Highgate Village. Adam knew it was a posh area.

“Dick’s house is worth a million pounds. You should see the girls that turn up to his barbecues.” Charlie seemed very proud of having such a friend.

“Oh, really?” Adam was interested.

“He’s a big shot in advertising and the girls are real babes.”

“Have you had any luck with them?” But Adam already knew the answer to that question.

Charlie explained that unfortunately these girls were more interested in their own types. One needed a good car and an expensive pad to impress them, and again, unfortunately for Charlie, he possessed neither at present.

A slightly downbeat Charlie went on to elaborate that he lived in a rented studio flat in Tottenham, a not-very-desirable area. Adam asked Charlie why Dick bothered to invite him.

“We went to school together.” Charlie cheered up. “Isn’t it marvellous what he’s achieved?”

“I suppose so.”

“He’s such a successful man, don’t you think so?”

“It seems like he’s doing well.” Adam took a good look at Charlie, a shabbily dressed, thin, wiry individual. “Why would he be interested in me?”

“I told him you’re a budding property developer.”

Adam found out soon, much to his utter disappointment, that Dick indeed worked in advertising and the girls were usually from a similar background and normally disinterested in the likes of Charlie or himself. His efforts were further undermined when Dick invariably mentioned that Adam drove an old Skoda. Charlie had never learnt to drive.

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After giving the outside of the book a thorough clean by spraying it with leather furniture polish, which had the effect of diminishing the unpleasant smell somewhat, Adam flicked through the book. It was in German, and just out of sheer curiosity he read some words aloud.

The whole house then began to shake, and the lights started popping one by one. He closed the book promptly, and then it stopped.

The next morning when he awoke he found the bulbs to be intact. He had a feeling then that there was something strange about the book.

He wanted to investigate further but there were far more pressing problems to worry about at the time. He had bought the current house with the help of a sizeable bridging loan at an extortionate rate of interest, before he could sell the last house. He suddenly found that he was barely able to cover his expenses, and there was now a sudden housing downturn and the old house was not selling.

He needed to remortgage his current house quickly to repay the bridging loan as he was running out of money fast. However, before he could do that, there were many jobs that still needed to be finished. The survey for the remortgage was due in four weeks. In his mad dash to get rich quick Adam had over-extended himself.

It had rained quite a lot the night before and the roof of the house had seen better days. After spending several hours the next day trying to move slates and taping up the gaps to the best of his ability, he decided to break for lunch. As he sat down with a cup of tea and bit into the sandwich he had made, his thoughts turned to the book.

It was certainly very strange what had happened, but he was not even sure it *had* actually happened. No, he must have imagined the whole thing.

It seemed impossible that reading aloud from a book would cause the whole house to shake, unless the book had hidden powers. But that was nonsense, of course. No, there had to be another explanation for what had happened.

That evening Adam checked the internet to see if there had been any seismic activity in the area, but there had been none; neither had there been any mention of an earthquake in the news on the television. It was all very strange.

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As the book was written in a Germanic script it took him many days to make any sense of it. But he brushed up his schoolboy German, and with the help of a large dictionary he acquired, he deciphered a few verses.

He then checked the verse which had caused his house to shake. The paragraph before it gave a warning not to invoke the spell in an enclosed space, lest one should literally bring down the house upon oneself. As far as he could make out, the verse read:

I summon thee, the invisible force that blows the air around the world, to give me the power to raise winds from the air that surround me, to gather rain clouds and make rain at my command.

It was an ancient rain-making spell, and that could point to only one thing: it was probably a book of magic. *What nonsense*, he thought; he was the last person on earth to believe in hocus-pocus. It was just so much hogwash. However, he decided that he would try out the spell again, now that he had patched up the roof somewhat, to see if he had imagined the whole thing or not, just for his own peace of mind.

Next day he had a quick look outside the window and saw that it was quite a sunny day. There were no signs of any clouds anywhere. *Perfect*, he thought, *let's see if I can ruin a few people's day*. He took the book out from its case and made his way into the back garden.

After making sure that he was not being watched, he opened the book and looked for the spell. Last time he had only muttered a couple of lines of the spell and had then closed the book in a hurry. This time he decided to recite the whole spell, making sure he pronounced all the words carefully.

For a while nothing happened, then suddenly he heard the sound of thunder at a distance. Then some very dark clouds started appearing not too far away, as if suddenly materialising out of thin air. Adam decided he would rather watch the show from inside the house. He closed the book and hurried back inside.

All of a sudden the sun disappeared completely, and it got quite dark. The sky was covered in black clouds. When the rain came, it was very heavy. The water fell in sheets, reducing visibility to a few feet from the house.

Adam burst into spontaneous laughter; he could not help himself. The spell was working, and he could not contain his joy. It was like winning the lottery. What other secrets did the book hold? Was it going to make him rich or famous, or both? Could he have a career on television, as a magician? He wouldn't need any conjuring tricks; his magic would be completely authentic.

Adam managed to stop himself from getting totally carried away. For a start he would have to keep the book a secret, for one

could only imagine what would happen if news of the book got out. He would have to be very cautious and only try out some little spells at first, to get the hang of things, before trying any really big stuff. What would happen if the spells did not work out or worked badly – could he set things back to normal? Only one thing was sure: the roof was leaking again.

Adam knew he had to be very careful but he had to tell somebody, otherwise he would go mad. He definitely could not tell his mother, or his ex-girlfriend Linda; they would immediately assume that he was crazy and laugh at him. If he actually demonstrated that it worked, his ex would probably try to report him to the authorities for practising the black arts and his mother would probably support her.



Adam had met Linda when he was in the process of selling his second house. He still remembered that night at a barbecue at Dick's, when he walked in with a large crate of beer.

"Ah! The delivery is here," laughed Dick, and his very even teeth gleamed.

"Help yourself," said Adam, putting down the crate.

"Nobody drinks beer these days, except you and Charlie," Dick roared again. He had that polished, practised laughter, which was sort of infectious.

"Leave him alone," said Rachael, Dick's new, blonde girlfriend. "I'll have a beer."

"They'll have to go into the fridge first," said Adam. He liked Rachael, the blonde bombshell, Dick's latest acquisition. She had a sense of humour.

"There's a few cans in the fridge already, if you'd really like a beer," said Dick, perplexed. "I thought you never touch anything but shots and red wine."

“One can always have a change,” retorted Rachael.

“Join the plebs, eh?” Dick smiled. “You’ve always got a soft spot for Adam, our budding property developer.” It seemed to Adam that he was always a source of merriment to Dick.

“Come with me,” said Rachael. “I want to introduce you to Linda, a friend of mine who’s looking desperately for a husband.”

“And you think I might suit?” asked Adam, amused.

“Sure, an upwardly mobile property magnate like you might just be the right person. She’s not in advertising.”

Linda had turned out to be a petite brunette, busy in conversation with some other men. Rachael ignored them and grabbed Linda and pulled her over.

“This is Adam, Linda, I told you about him. He’s a bit shy with women, can I leave him in your good hands?”

“Hello, Adam.” Linda smiled. “Don’t worry, I’ll take good care of him.”

“Hi, Linda, I hope I’m not imposing on you.” Adam smiled.

“Not at all,” said Linda. “Rachael told me a lot about you.”

“All good, I hope?”

By this time his house was in a fairly good condition, and Linda had no idea that Adam was selling it to buy another rundown house to renovate.

Linda was a legal secretary in her early thirties, and was of similar age to Adam, but looked older. Adam soon got to know that she was actually desperately looking for somebody to have some children with and Adam almost fitted the bill, so he decided to roll with it. Maybe it was time for him to settle down.

“You should get yourself a better car,” Linda had advised Adam on their second date, and then she had given him strict instructions not to park his Skoda directly in front of her rented flat when he went round to pick her up on a date.

Trouble started when Adam sold the second house and moved on to the next one, which was the last house before the present one.

Sure, it was in a better area, but it needed some major overhauling. By this stage Linda had been ready to move in with Adam, but she balked when she saw the new house. Adam assured her that it would soon be ready, but she was not buying it.

“I can’t live here,” Linda had complained. However, she had moved in, reluctantly as she had already given up her flat, but she was not happy at all.

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No, he could not breathe a word to Linda, not after all that had taken place between them, so whom could he invite to come down to look at the book?

Adam thought of the people he had worked with until he had been let go the previous month. Could he tell Vera, the boss’s wife, for whom he got the sack, and tempt her back to him? No, it was too dangerous even to think about it – she would tell her husband immediately and that would be that.

There was no point taking a chance with things; better to go slow. It was best to invite Charlie and Dick and give them a little surprise. They were probably also the wrong people as things went, and of course they would never believe him. He would have to provide a little demonstration for them. It would be fun.

Yes, it would be greatly amusing to see their faces when he performed a little trick for them. They, who had always instinctively doubted his ability to achieve anything much, would soon at last see what he was capable of. *Yes! Yes!* thought Adam; he was going to be both rich and lucky.

Adam decided that he would invite them down on the following weekend as this would give him enough time to practise a suitable spell to impress them with. Something not too difficult but suitably impressive, so that they finally got the message that he was somebody worthy of their attention. It was time to change the pecking order.