

## HOME AND FARM MAGAZINE SECTION SERIAL.

By  
Geo. Barr  
McCutcheon

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## A Fool and His Money

## SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS INSTALLMENTS.

In the opening instalments of "A Fool and His Money," Geo. Barr McCutcheon's charming novel, serial rights for which have been specially obtained for the Home and Farm Magazine Section, we learn of John Bellamy Smart, the young man who is telling this story. He has just written his first novel, and at the same time has fallen heir to an immense fortune left him by his uncle. After a visit to London, Smart takes a trip on the River Danube. After finding an old-world town, he discovers an ancient castle, which he purchases from its owner, the Count. With his secretary, Poopendyke, he takes possession of the immense structure, which is supposed to be tenanted only by the caretaker and his family, the Schmaifka. Later Smart finds a woman who is in possession of a wing of the castle that is barred to him. She grants a brief interview, but refuses to leave. The servants appear to be in league with her, and Smart is in a quandary. Later he is captivated by the wit and beauty of the mysterious lady and no longer urges her departure. He finds that she is divorced from a worthless and scheming Austrian Count, who was awarded the custody of the lady's child. The Count demands a million dollars from his rich American father-in-law, when he would give it up. The mother abducts the child and selects the castle as a hiding place. Smart fears trouble with the authorities, but consents to assist the fair divorcee.

Laid awake half the night morbidly berating the American father who is so afraid of his wife that he lets her bully him into sacrificing their joint flesh and blood upon the altar of social ambition. She had said that her father was opposed to the match from the beginning. Then why, in the name of heaven, wasn't he man enough to put a stop to it? Why—But what use is there in applying wiles to a man who doesn't know what God meant when He fashioned two sexes? I put him down as neutral and tried my best to forget him.

But I couldn't forget the daughter of this brow-beaten American father. There was something singularly familiar about her exquisite face, a conviction on my part that it easily accounted for. Her portrait, of course, had been published far and wide at the time of the wedding; she must have been pictured from every conceivable angle, with illimitable gowns, hats, veils and parasols, and I certainly could not have missed seeing her, even with half an eye. But for the life of me I couldn't connect her with any of the much-talked-of international marriages that came to mind as I lay there going over the meagre assortment I was able to recall. I went to sleep wondering whether Poopendyke's memory was any better than mine. He is tremendously interested in the financial doings of our country, being the possessor of a flourishing savings' account, and as he also possesses a lively sense of the ridiculous it was not unreasonable to suspect that he might remember all the details of this particular transaction in stocks and bonds.

The next morning I set my laborers to work putting guest-rooms into shape for the coming of the Hazzards and the four friends who were to be with them for the week as my guests. They were to arrive on the next day but one, which gave me ample time to consult a furniture dealer. I would have to buy at least six new beds and everything else with which to comfortably equip as many bed chambers, it being a foregone conclusion that not even the husbands and wives would condescend to "double up" to oblige me. The expensiveness of this ill-timed visit had not occurred to me at the outset. Still there was some prospect of getting the wholesale price. On one point I was determined; the workmen should not be laid off for a single hour, not even if my guests went off in a huff.

At twelve I climbed the tortuous stairs leading to the Countess' apartments. She opened the door herself in response to my rapping.

"I neglected to mention yesterday that I am expecting a houseful of guests in a day or two," I said, after she had given me a very cordial greeting.

"Guests?" she cried in dismay. "Oh, dear! Can't you put them off?"

"I have hopes that they won't be able to stand the workmen banging around all day," I confessed, somewhat guiltily.

"Women in the party?"

"Two, I believe. Both married and qualified to express opinions."

"They will be sure to nose me out," she said ruefully. "Women are dreadful nosers."

"Don't worry," I said. "We'll get a lot of new padlocks for the doors downstairs and you'll be as safe as can be, if you'll only keep quiet."

"But I don't see why I should be made to mope here all day and all night like a sick cat, holding my hand over Rosemary's mouth when she wants to cry, and muzzling poor Jinko so that he—"

"My dear Countess," I interrupted sternly, "you should not forget that these other guests of mine are invited here."

"But I was here first," she argued.

"It is most annoying."

"I believe you said yesterday that you are in the habit of having your own money."

She nodded her head.

"Well, I'm afraid you'll have to come down from your high horse—at least temporarily."

"Oh, I see. You—you mean to be very firm and domineering with me."

"You must try to see things from my point of—"

"Please don't say that!" she flared.

"I'm so tired of hearing those words. For the last three years I've been com-

manded to see things from some else's point of view, and I'm sick of the expression."

"For heaven's sake, don't put me in the same boat with your husband!"

She regarded me somewhat frigidly for a moment longer, and then a slow, witching smile crept into her eyes.

"I shan't," she promised, and laughed outright. "Do forgive me, Mr. Smart. I am such a piggy thing. I'll try to be nice and sensible, and I will be as still as a mouse all the time they're here. But you must promise to come up every day and give me the gossip. You can steal up, can't you? Sur-

reptitiously?"

"Clandestinely," I said, gravely.

"I really ought to warn you once more about getting yourself involved," she said pointedly.

"Oh, I'm quite a safe old party," I assured her. "They couldn't make capital of me."

"The grouse was delicious," she said, deliberately changing the subject. Nice divorcees are always doing that.

We fell into a discussion of present and future needs; of ways and means for keeping my friends utterly in the dark concerning her presence in the abandoned east wing; and of what we were pleased to allude to as "separate maintenance," employing a phrase that might have been considered distasteful and even banal under ordinary conditions.

"I've been trying to recall all of the notable marriages we had in New York three years ago," said I, after she had most engagingly reduced me to a state of subjection in the matter of three or four moot questions that came up for settlement. "You don't seem to fit in with any of the international affairs I can bring to mind."

"You promised you wouldn't bother about that, Mr. Smart," she said severely.

"Of course you were married in New York?"

"In a very nice church just off Fifth Avenue, if that will help you any," she said. "The usual crowd inside the church, and the usual mob outside, all fighting for a glimpse of me in my wedding shroud, and for a chance to see a real Hungarian nobleman. It really was a very magnificent wedding, Mr. Smart." She seemed to be unduly proud of the spectacular sacrifice.

A knitted brow revealed the obfuscated condition of my brain. I was thinking very intently, not to say remotely.

"The whole world talked about it," she went on dreamily. "We had a real prince for the best man, and two of the ushers couldn't speak a word of English. Don't you remember that the police closed the streets in the neigh-

borhood of the church and wouldn't let people spoil everything by going about their business as they were in the habit of doing? Some of the shops sold window space to sight-seers, just as they do at a coronation."

"I dare say all this should let in light, but it doesn't."

"Don't you read the newspapers?" she cried impatiently. She actually resented my ignorance.

"Religiously," I said, stung to revolt. "But I make it a point never to read the criminal news."

"Criminal news?" she gasped, a spot of red leaping to her cheek. "What do you mean?"

"It is merely my way of saying that I put marriages of that character in the category of crime."

"Oh!" she cried, staring at me with unbelieving eyes.

"Every time a sweet, lovely American girl is delivered into the hands of a foreign bounder who happens to possess a title that needs fixing, I call the transaction a crime that puts white slavery in a class with the most trifling misdemeanors. You did not love this pusillanimous Count, nor did he care a hang for you. You were too young in the ways of the world to have any feeling for him, and he was too old to have any for you. The whole hateful business therefore resolved itself into a case of give and take—and he took everything. He took you and your father's millions and now you are both back where you began. Some one deliberately committed a crime, and as it wasn't you or the Count,—who levied his legitimate toll,—it must have been the person who planned the conspiracy. I take it, of course, that the whole affair was arranged behind your back, so to speak. To make it a perfectly fashionable and up-to-date delivery it would have been entirely out of place to consult the unsophisticated girl who was thrown in to make the title good. You were not sold to this bounder. It was the other way round. By the gods, madam, he was actually paid to take you!"

Her face was quite pale. Her eyes did not leave mine during the long and crazy diatribe,—of which I was already beginning to feel heartily ashamed,—and there was a dark, ominous fire in them that should have warned me.

She arose from her chair. It seemed to me she was taller than before.

"If nothing else came to me out of this transaction," she said levelly, "at least a certain amount of dignity was acquired. Pray remember that I am no longer the unsophisticated girl you so graciously describe. I am a woman."

"True," said I, senselessly dogged; "a woman with the power to think for yourself. That is my point. If the same situation arose at your present age I fancy you'd be able to select a husband without assistance, and I venture to say you wouldn't pick up the first dissolute nobleman that came your way. No, my dear countess, you were not to blame. You thought, as your parents did, that marriage with a count would make a real countess of you. What rot! You are a simple, lovable American girl and that's all there ever can be to it. To the end of your days you will be an American. It is not within the powers of a scape-grace count to put you or any other American girl on a plane with the women who are born countesses, or duchesses, or anything of the sort. I don't say that you suffer by comparison with those noble ladies. As a matter of fact you are surpassingly finer in every way than ninety-nine per cent. of them—poor things! Marrying an English duke doesn't make a genuine duchess out of an American girl, not by a long shot. She merely becomes a figure of speech. Your own experience should tell you that. Well, it's the same with all of them. They acquire a title, but not the homage that should go with it."

We were both standing now. She was still measuring me with somewhat incredulous eyes, rather more tolerant than resentful.

"Do you expect me to agree with you, Mr. Smart?" she asked.

"I do," said I, promptly. "You, of all people, should be able to testify that

my views are absolutely right."

"They are right," she said, simply.

"Still you are pretty much of a brute to insult me with them."

"I most sincerely crave your pardon, if it isn't too late," I cried, abject once more. (I don't know what gets into me once in a while.)

"The safest way, I should say, is for neither of us to express an opinion so long as we are thrown into contact with each other. If you choose to tell the world what you think of me, all well and good. But please don't tell me."

"I can't convince the world what I think of you for the simple reason that I'd be speaking at random. I don't know who you are."

"Oh, you will know some day," she said, and her shoulders drooped a little.

"I've—I've done a most cowardly, despicable thing in hunting you—"

"Please! Please don't say anything more about it. I dare say you've done me a lot of good. Perhaps I shall see things a little more clearly. To be perfectly honest with you, I went into this marriage with my eyes wide open, but I was only one fool among many. Dozens of other girls in my set were crazy to marry him. I—I haven't told you that he is extremely good-looking. And he was—was adorable in those days."

A far-away, dreamy look came into her eyes. She was staring at me, but I felt myself quite outside the range of her vision.

I ventured a shrewd conjecture, considering the obvious character of her abstraction.

"Stranger things have happened than that you should patch up your difficulties and go back to live with your husband."

She uttered a little cry of revulsion. The dreamy light died in her eyes and he transfixed me with a look of indignation.

"How dare you suggest such a thing! How dare you speak to me in that way! You—I ought to order you out of this room and never—never—"

My luminous smile checked the outbreak.

"Splendid!" I cried. "You convince me that it can never happen."

She smiled doubtfully, quite uncertain how to take my humor.

"Oh, dear me," she sighed, "I don't believe we shall ever get on at all well together, Mr. Smart. You are such a whimsical person."

"I'll try to do better," I cried, frankly pleased with the situation. "Give me a chance."

"You spoke of him as my husband," she said, going back to my remark. "He is not my husband. Please be good enough to remember that."

"It will be easy, I assure you. May I therefore venture the hope that if you ever decide to marry again you'll give some deserving American a chance to make you his queen? You'll find it better than being a countess, believe me."

"I shall never marry, Mr. Smart," she said with decision. "Never, never again will I get into a mess that is so hard to get out of. I can say this to you because I've heard you are a bachelor. You can't take offence."

"I foolishly hope to die a bachelor," said I with humility.

"God bless you!" she cried, bursting into a merry laugh, and I knew that a truce had been declared for the time being at least. "And now let us talk sense. Have you carefully considered the consequences if you are found out, Mr. Smart?"

"Found out?"

"If you are found shielding a fugitive from justice. I couldn't go to sleep for 'ours last night thinking of what might happen to you if—"

"Nonsense!" I cried, but for the life of me I couldn't help feeling elated. She had a soul above self, after all!

"You see, I am a thief and a robber and a very terrible malefactor, according to the reports Max brings over from the city. The fight for poor little Rosemary is destined to fill columns and columns in the newspapers of the two continents for months to come. You, Mr. Smart, may find yourself in the thick of it. If I were in your place, I should keep out of it."

(To Be Continued.)