

By
Geo. Barr
McCutcheon

HOME AND FARM MAGAZINE SECTION SERIAL.

A Fool and His Money

Copyright, 1913,
By Geo. Barr
McCutcheon.

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 an Austrian count. With his secretary, Poppendyke, he takes possession of the immense structure, which is supposed to be tenanted only by the caretaker and his family, the Schmicks. 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 meets her and is captivated by her wit and beauty. 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 decides to assist the fair divorcee, although she warns him of the danger. A number of visitors makes it difficult to keep secret the presence of the Countess in the castle, especially as she has been seen by some of the party, who are suspicious but have failed to identify her.

At last we came to the broad hall at the top of the main staircase. Almost directly in front of us loomed the great padlocked doors leading to the other wing. Passing them like the wind she led the way to the farthest end of the hall. Light from the big, paneless windows overlooking the river, came streaming into the vast corridor, and I could see doors ahead to the right and the left of us.

"Your bedroom?" I managed to gasp, uttering a belated question that should have been asked five or six flights higher up at a time when I was better qualified to voice it. "What the dickens is it doing down here?" She did not reply, but, turning to the left, threw open a door and disappeared into the room beyond. I followed ruthlessly, but stopped just over the threshold to catch my breath in astonishment.

I was in "my lady's bed-chamber."

The immense Gothic bed stood on its dais, imposing in its isolation. Three or four very modern innovation trunks loomed like minarets against the opposite walls, half open; one's imagination might have been excused if it conjured up sentries who stood ready to pop out of the trunks to scare one half to death. Some of my most precious rugs adorned the floor, but the windows were absolutely undraped. There were a few old chairs scattered about, but no other article of furniture except an improvised wash-stand, and a clumsy, portable tin bathtub which leaned nonchalantly against the foot of the bed. There were great mirrors, in the wall at one end of the room, cracked and scaly it is true, but capable of reflecting one's presence.

"Don't stand there gaping," she cried in a shrill whisper, staring across the room only to turn aside with a sharp exclamation. "That stupid Helene!" she cried, flushing warmly. Catching up a heap of tumbled garments, mostly white, from a chair, she recklessly hurled them behind the bed. "This is the mirror—the middle one. It opens by means of a spring. There is a small hole in the wall behind it and then there is still another secret door beyond that, a thick iron one with the sixth Baron Rothhoefer's portrait on the outer side of it. The canvas wings open. We must—"

I was beginning to get my bearings. "The sixth baron? Old Ludwig the Red?"

"The very one."

"Then, by Jove, he is in my study! You don't mean to say—"

"Please don't stop to talk," she cried impatiently, looking about in a distracted manner, "but for goodness

sake get something to put against this mirror."

My mind worked rapidly. The only object in the room heavy enough to serve as a barricade was the bed, and it was too heavy for me to move, I feared. I suggested it, of course, involuntarily lowering my voice to a conspiratorial whisper.

"Pull it over, quick!" she commanded promptly.

"Perhaps I'd better run out and get Max and Ru—"

"If my husband—Mr. Pless should open that secret door from the other side, Mr. Smart, it will be very embarrassing for you and me, let—"

I put my shoulder to the huge creaky bed and shoved. There were no castors. It did not budge. The Countess assisted me by putting the tips of her small fingers against one end of it and pushing. It was not what one would call a frantic effort on her part, but it served to make me exert myself to the utmost. I, a big strong man, couldn't afford to have a slim countess pushing a bedstead about while I was there to do it for her.

"Don't do that," I protested. "I can manage it alone, thank you."

I secured a strong grip on the bottom of the thing and heaved manfully.

"You might let me help," she cried, firmly grasping a side piece with both hands.

The bed moved. The veins stood out on my neck and temples. My face must have been quite purple, and it is a hue that I detest. When I was a very small laddie my mother put me forward to be admired in purple velvet. The horror of it still lingers.

By means of great straining I got the heavy bed over against the mirror, upsetting the tin bathtub with a crash that under ordinary circumstances would have made my heart stand still, but now only tripled its pumping activities. One of the legs was hopelessly splintered in the drop from the raised platform.

"There," she said, standing off to survey our joint achievement, "we've stopped it up very nicely." She brushed the tips of her fingers daintily. "This afternoon you may fetch up a hammer and some nails and fasten the mirror permanently. Then you can move the bed back to its proper place. Goodness! What a narrow squeak!"

"Madam," said I, my hand on my heart but not through gallantry, "that bed stays where it is. Not all the king's horses nor all the king's men can put it back again."

"Was it so heavy, Mr. Smart?"

I swallowed very hard. A prophetic erick already had planted itself in my back. "Will you forgive me if I submit that you sleep quite a distance from home?" I remarked with justifiable irony. "Why the deuce don't you stay on the upper floors?"

"Because I am mortally afraid," she said, with a little shudder. "You've no idea how lonely, how spooky it is up there at the dead hour of night. I couldn't sleep. After the third night I had my things moved down here, where I could at least feel that there were strong men within—you might say arm's length of me. I'm—I'm shockingly timid."

She smiled; a wavering, pleading little smile that conquered.

"Of course, I don't mind, Countess," I hastened to say. "Only I thought it would be easier up there with Rosemary and the two maids for company."

She leaned a little closer to me. "We all sleep down here," she said confidentially. "We bring Rosemary's little mattress down every night and put it in the bathtub. It is a very good fit and makes quite a nice cradle for her. Helene and Blake sleep just across the hall and we leave the doors wide open. So, you see, we're not one bit afraid."

I sat down on the edge of the bed and laughed.

"This is delicious," I cried, not without compunction for I was looking directly into her eager, wistful eyes. A shadow crossed them. "I beg your pardon. I—I can't help laughing."

"Pray do not stop laughing on my account," she said icily. "I am used

to being laughed at since I left America. They laugh at all of us over here."

"I dare say they laugh at me, confound them," said I, lugubriously.

"They do," said she flatly. Before I could quite recover from this sentient dig, she was ordering me to put the bathtub where it belonged. This task completed, I looked up. She was standing near the head of the bed, with a revolver in her hand. I stared. "I keep it under my pillow, Mr. Smart," she said nervously. I said nothing, and she replaced it under the pillow, handling the deadly weapon as gingerly as if it were the frailest glass. "Of course I couldn't hit anything with it, and I know I should scream when it went off, but still—accidents will happen, you know."

"Um!" said I, judicially. "And so my study is just beyond this mirror, eh? May I enquire how you happen to know that I have my study there?"

"Oh, I peeked in the other day," she said, serene once more.

"The deuce you did!"

"I was quite sure that you were out," she explained. "I opened Ludwig the Red an inch or two, that's all. You are quite cozy in there, aren't you? I envy you the grand old chaise longue."

I wavered, but succeeded in subduing the impulse. "It is the only comfortable piece of furniture I have left in my apartments," said I, with convincing candor.

"You poor man," she said, with her rarest smile. "How fortunate you are that I did not remember the chaise longue. You would have been deprived of it. I am quite sure. Of course I couldn't think of robbing you of it now."

"As a matter of fact, I never lie in it," I said, submitting to a once conquered impulse. "If you really like to have it, I'll see that it is taken up to your rooms at once."

"Thank you," she said, shaking her head. "It's kind of you, but I am not so selfish as all that, believe me."

"It is—quite in the way, Countess."

"Some one would be sure to miss it if you sent it up now," she said reflectively.

"We'll wait till they're all gone," said I.

She smiled and the bargain was settled without a word from her. You've heard of men being wrapped about little fingers, haven't you? Well, there you are.

We returned to the corridor. She closed the door softly, a mockery in view of the clatter I had made in shifting the bed and its impediments.

"We can't be too careful," she said in a whisper. She might have spoken through a megaphone and still been quite safe. We were tramping up the stairs. "Don't you think your guests will consider you rather inhospitable if you stay away from them all morning?"

I stopped short. "By Jove, now that you remind me of it, I promised to take them all out for a spin in the motor boat before luncheon. Hazzard has had his boat sent down."

She looked positively unhappy. "Oh, how I should love to get out for a spin on the river! I wonder if I'll ever be free to enjoy the things I like most of—"

"Listen!" I whispered suddenly, grasping her arm. "Did you hear footsteps in the—Sh!"

Some one was walking over the stone floor in the lower hall, brisk strides that rang out quite clearly as they drew nearer.

"It is—it is Mr. Pless," she whispered in a panic. "I recognize his tread. As if I could ever forget it! Oh, how I hate him! He—"

"Don't stop here to tell me about it," I cut in sharply. "Make haste! get up to your rooms and lock yourself in. I'll—I'll stop him. How the deuce did he get into this side of the—"

"Through the dungeons. There is a passage," she whispered, and then she was gone, flying noiselessly up the narrow stairway.

Assuming a nonchalance I certainly did not feel, I descended the stairs. We met in the broad hallway below. Mr. Pless approached slowly, evidently hav-

ing checked his speed on hearing my footsteps on the stairs.

"Hello," I said agreeably. "How did you get in?"

He surveyed me coolly. "I know the castle from top to bottom, Mr. Smart. To be perfectly frank with you, I tried the secret panel in your study but found the opposite door blocked. You have no objection, I trust, to my looking over the castle? It is like home to me."

My plan was to detain him in conversation until she had time to secrete herself on the upper floor. Somehow I anticipated the banging of a door, and it came a moment later—not loud but very convicting, just the same. He glanced at me curiously.

"Then how did you get in?" I repeated, cringing perceptibly in response to the slam of the distant door.

"By the same means, I daresay, that you employ," said he.

For a moment I was confounded. Then my wits came to the rescue.

"I see. Through the dungeon. You do know the castle well, Mr. Pless."

"It is a cobwebby, unlovely passage," said he, brushing the dirt and cobwebs from his trousers. My own appearance was conspicuously immaculate, but I brushed in unison, just the same.

"Growsome," said I.

He was regarding me with a curious smile in his eyes, a pleasantly bantering smile that had but one meaning. Casting an eye upwards, he allowed his smile to spread.

"Perhaps you'd rather I didn't disturb Mrs.—Mrs.—"

"Britton," said I. "My valet's wife. I don't believe you will disturb her. She's on the top floor, I think."

He still smiled. "A little remote from Britton, isn't she?"

I think I glared. What right had he to meddle in Britton's affairs?

"I am afraid your fancy draws a rather long bow, Mr. Pless," said I, coldly.

He was at once apologetic. "If I offend, Mr. Smart, pray forgive me. You are quite justified in rebuking me. Shall we return to our own ladies?"

Nothing could have been more adroit than the way he accused me in that concluding sentence. It was the quintessence of irony.

(To be continued.)

EARN CHIROPRACTIC

A science that meets the needs of every one who is sick. MEN and WOMEN are successful practitioners. Enter a profession that makes you independent, and brings you money. We have the best course. Class now forming. WRITE FOR CATALOG. PACIFIC CHIROPRACTIC COLLEGE, COMMONWEALTH BUILDING, PORTLAND, OREGON.



One of Our Houses.

"Follow Our Plans." They Solve the Home-Building Problem.

Fit the pieces—drive the nails yourself.

Your house comes ready to put up. Every piece numbered to fit accurately and securely—our plans contain the numbers.

We furnish everything—lumber, trim, finish, doors, windows, paint, stain, nails, hardware, plaster or interior wall board. "Follow our plans"—you can't go wrong. The result—a permanent, substantial and attractive home—not a portable house. Satisfaction guaranteed. Your own ideas carried out, if preferred. Plans for any sized house. Send for illustrated catalog. It shows how you can build your own home easily, quickly and economically. Write today.

READY BUILT HOUSE COMPANY

990 Broadway, Portland, Ore.