

HOME AND FARM MAGAZINE SECTION SERIAL.

By
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A Fool and His Money

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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, Poopendyke, 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. One guest, familiar with castle, almost comes upon Smart and the Countess separately. The woman escapes—but slams a door behind her. The visitor suspects Smart of an intrigue with the wife of his valet. Finally the party leaves and Smart is relieved.

LOOKED in at the door. Over in his corner by the window Poopendyke was at work, his lanky figure hunched over the key-board, his head enveloped in clouds from a busy pipe, for all the world like a tugboat smothering in its own low-lying smoke. Sheets of paper were strewn about the floor. Even as I stood there hesitating, he came to the end of a sheet and jerked it out of the machine with such a resounding snap that the noise startled me. He was having the time of his life!

I stole away, unwilling to break in upon this joyful orgy.

Conrad, grinning from ear to ear, was waiting for me outside by bedroom door late in the day. He saluted me with unusual cordiality.

"A note, mein herr," said he, and handed me a dainty little pearl-gray envelope. He waited while I read the missive.

"I sha'n't be home for dinner, Conrad," said I, my eyes aglow. "Tell Hawkes, will you?"

He bowed and scraped himself away; somehow he seemed to have grown younger by decades. It was in the air to be young and care-free. I read the note again and felt almost boyish. Then I went up to my room, got out my gayest raiment without shame or compunction, dressed with especial regard for lively effects, and hied me forth to carry sunshine into the uttermost recesses of my castle.

The Countess welcomed me with a radiant smile. We shook hands.

"Well, he has gone," said I, drawing a deep breath.

"Thank the Lord," said she, and then I knew that the symphony was complete. We all had sung it.

It must not be supposed for an instant that I had been guilty of neglecting my lovely charge during that season of travail and despair. No, indeed! I had visited her every day as a matter of precaution. She required a certain amount of watching.

I do not hesitate to say at this time that she seemed to be growing lovelier every day. In a hundred little ways she was changing, not only in appearance but in manner.

Now, to be perfectly frank about it, I can't explain just what these little changes were—that is, not in so many words—but they were quite as pronounced as they were subtle. I may risk mentioning an improvement in her method of handling me. She was not

taking quite so much for granted as she did at first. She was much more humble and considerate, I remarked; instead of bullying me into things she now cajoled me; instead of making demands upon my patience and generosity, she rather hesitated about putting me to the least trouble. She wasn't so arrogant, nor so hard to manage. In a nutshell, I may say with some satisfaction, she was beginning to show a surprising amount of respect for me and my opinions. Where once she had done as she pleased, she now did so only after asking my advice and permission, both of which I gave freely as a gentleman should. Fundamentally she was all right. It was only in a superficial sort of way that she fell short of being ideal. I thought I could see the making of a very fine woman in her.

I do not say that she was perfect or ever could be, but she might come very close to it if she went on improving as she did every day. As a matter of fact, I found an immense amount of analytical pleasure in studying the changes that attended the metamorphosis. It seemed to my eager imagination that she was being translated before my eyes; developing into a serious, sensible, unselfish person with a soul preparing to mount higher than self. Her voice seemed to be softer, sweeter; the satirical note had disappeared almost entirely, and with it went the forced raillery that had been so pronounced at the beginning of our acquaintance.

Her devotion to Rosemary was wonderful to see. By the way, while I think of it, the child was quite adorable. She was learning to pronounce my name, and getting nearer and nearer to it every day. At the time of which I now write she was calling me (with great enthusiasm), by the name of "Gogo," which, reduced to aboriginal American, means "Man-with-the-Strong-Arm-Who-Carries-Baby."

"It is very nice of you to ask me to dine with you," said I.

"Isn't it about time I was doing something for you in return for all that you have done for me?" she inquired gaily. "We are having a particularly nice dinner this evening, and I thought you'd enjoy a change."

"A change?" said I, with a laugh. "As if we haven't been eating out of the same kettle for days!"

"I was not referring to the food," she said, and I was very properly squelched.

"Nevertheless, speaking of food," said I, "it may interest you to know that I expected to have rather a sumptuous repast of my own to celebrate the deliverance. A fine plump pheasant, prepared a la Oscar, corn fritters like mother used to make, potatoes pieced—"

"And a wonderful alligator pear salad," she interrupted, her eyes dancing.

"I stared. "How in the world did you guess?"

She laughed in pure delight, and I began to understand. By the Lord Harry, the amazing creature was inviting me to eat my own dinner in her salle manger! "Well, may I be hanged! You do beat the Dutch!"

She was wearing a wonderful dinner gown of Irish lace, and she fairly sparkled with diamonds. There was no ornament in her brown hair, however, nor were her little pink ears made hideous by earrings. Her face was a jewel sufficient unto itself. I had never seen her in an evening gown before. The effect was really quite ravishing. As I looked at her standing there by the big oak table, I couldn't help thinking that the Count was not only a scoundrel, but all kinds of a fool.

"It is necessary for me to bribe all of your servants, Mr. Smart," she said.

"You did not offer the rascals money, I hope," I said in a horrified tone.

"No, indeed!" She did not explain but I knew that money isn't everything to a servant after all. "I hope you don't mind my borrowing your butler and footman for the evening," she went on. "Not that we really need two to serve two, but it seems so much more like a

function, as the newspapers would call it."

It was my turn to say, "No, indeed."

"And now you must come in and kiss Rosemary good night," she said, glancing at my great Amsterdam clock in the corner.

We went into the nursery. It was past Rosemary's bedtime by nearly an hour and the youngster was having great difficulty in keeping awake. She managed to put her arms around my neck when I took her up from the bed, all tucked away in her warm little nightie, and sleepily presented her own little throat for me to kiss, that particular spot being where the honey came from in her dispensation of sweets.

I was full of exuberance. An irresistible impulse to do a jig seized upon me. To my own intense amazement, and to Blake's horror, I began to dance about the room like a clumsy kangaroo. Rosemary shrieked delightedly into my ear and I danced the harder for that. The Countess, recovering from her surprise, cried out in laughter and began to clap time with her hands. Blake forgot herself and sat down rather heavily on the edge of the bed. I think the poor woman's knees gave way under her.

"Hurrah!" I shouted to Rosemary, but looking directly at the Countess. "We're celebrating!"

Only Blake's reserved and somewhat dampening admonition brought me to my senses.

"Please don't drop the child, Mr. Smart," she said. I had the great satisfaction of hearing Rosemary cry when I delivered her up to Blake and started to slink out of the room in the wake of my warm-cheeked hostess.

"You would be a wonderful father, sir," said Blake, relenting a little.

I had the grace to say, "Oh, pshaw!" and then got out while the illusion was still alive. (As I've said before, I do not like a crying baby.)

It was the most wonderful dinner in the world, notwithstanding it was served on a kitchen table moved into the living room for the occasion. Imposing candelabra adorned the four corners of the table and the very best plate in the castle was put to use. There were roses in the center of the board, a huge bowl of short-tempered Marshal Niel beauties. The Countess' chair was pulled out by my stately butler, Hawkes; mine by the almost equally imposing footman, and we faced each other across the bowl of roses and lifted an American cocktail to the health of those who were about to sit down to the feast. I think it was one of the best cocktails I've ever tasted. The Countess admitted having made it herself, but wasn't quite sure whether she used the right ingredients or the correct proportions. She asked me what I thought of it.

"It is the best Manhattan I've ever tasted," said I, warmly.

Her eyes wavered. Also, I think, her faith in me. "It was meant to be a Martini," she said sorrowfully.

Then we both sat down. Was it possible that the corners of Hawkes' mouth twitched? I don't suppose I shall ever know.

My sherry was much better than I thought, too. It was deliciously oily. The champagne? But that came later, so why anticipate a joy with realization staring one in the face?

We began with a marvellous hors-d'oeuvres. Then a clear soup, a fish aspic, a— Why rhapsodise! Let it be sufficient if I say that in discussing the Aladdin-like feast I secretly and faithfully promised my chef a material increase in wages. I had never suspected him of being such a genius, nor myself of being such a Pantagruelian disciple. I must mention the alligator pear salad. For three weeks I had been trying to buy alligator pears in the town hard by. These came from Paris. The chef had spoken to me about them that morning, asking me when I had ordered them. Inasmuch as I had not ordered them at all, I couldn't satisfy his curiosity. My first thought was that Elsie Hazzard, remembering my fondness for the vegetable—it is a vegetable, isn't it—had

sent off for them in order to surprise me. It seems, however, that Elsie had nothing whatever to do with it. The Countess had ordered them for me through her mother, who was in Paris at the time. Also she had ordered a quantity of Parisian strawberries of the hot-house, one-franc-apiece variety, and a basket of peaches. At the risk of being called penurious, I confess that I was immensely relieved when I learned that these precious jewels in the shape of fruit had been paid for in advance by the opulent mother of the Countess.

"Have I told you, Mr. Smart, that I am expecting my mother here to visit me week after next?"

She tactfully put the question to me at a time when I was so full of contentment that nothing could have depressed me. I must confess, however, that I was guilty of gulping my champagne a little noisily. The question came with the salad course.

"You don't say so!" I exclaimed, quite cheerfully.

"That is to say, she is coming if you think you can manage it quite safely."

"I manage it? My dear Countess, why speak of managing a thing that is so obviously to be desired?"

"You don't understand. Can you smuggle her into the castle without any one knowing a thing about it? You see, she is being watched every minute of the time by detectives, spies, secret agents, lawyers, and Heaven knows who else. The instant she leaves Paris, bang! It will be like the starter's shot in a race. They will be after her like a streak. And if you are not very, very clever they will play hob with everything."

"Then why run the risk?" I ventured.

"My two brothers are coming with her," she said reassuringly. "They are such big, strong fellows that—"

"My dear Countess, it isn't strength we'll need," I deplored.

"No, no, I quite understand. It is cunning, strategy, caution, and all that sort of thing. But I will let you know in ample time, so that you may be prepared."

"Do!" I said gallantly, trying to be enthusiastic.

"You are so wonderfully ingenious at working out plots and conspiracies in your books, Mr. Smart, that I am confident you can manage everything beautifully."

Blatford was removing my salad plate. A spasm of alarm came over me. I had quite forgotten the two men. The look of warning I gave her brought forth a merry, amused smile.

"Don't hesitate to speak before Blatford and Hawkes," she said, to my astonishment. "They are to be trusted implicitly. Isn't it true, Hawkes?"

"It is, Madam," said he.

(To be continued.)



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