

HOME AND FARM MAGAZINE SECTION SERIAL

By
Geo. Barr
McCutcheon

Copyright, 1913,
By Geo. Barr
McCutcheon.

A Fool and His Money

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS INSTALLMENTS.

In the opening installments of "A Fool and His Money," Geo. Barr McCutcheon's charming novel, 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. Smart takes a trip on the River Danube. He discovers an ancient castle, which he purchases from an Austrian count. With his secretary, Poopendyke, he takes possession. It 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. One guest, familiar with the castle, almost comes upon Smart and the Countess unawares. 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.

"I AM OUT making afternoon calls," said she. Her face was flushed with excitement and self-consciousness. "Will you please put a chair here so that I may hop down?"

For answer, I reached up a pair of valiant arms. She laughed, leaned forward and placed her hands on my shoulders. My hands found her waist and I lifted her gently, gracefully to the floor.

"How strong you are!" she said admiringly. "How do you do, Mr. Poopendyke? Dear me! I am not a ghost, sir!"

His fingers dropped to the keyboard. "How do you do," he jerked out. Then he felt his heart. "My God! I don't believe it's going."

Together we inspected the secret doors, going so far as to enter the room beyond, the Countess peering through after us from my study. To my amazement the room was absolutely bare. Bed, trunk, garments, chairs—everything in fact had vanished as if whisked away by an all-powerful genie.

"What does this mean?" I cried, turning to her.

"I don't mind sleeping upstairs, now that I have a telephone," she said serenely. "Max and Rudolph moved everything up this afternoon."

Poopendyke and I returned to the study. I, for one, was bitterly disappointed.

"I'm sorry that I had the 'phone put in," I said.

"Please don't call it a 'phone!' she objected. "I hate the word 'phone.'"

"So do I," said Poopendyke recklessly.

I glared at him. What right had he to criticize my manner of speech? He started to leave the room, after a perfunctory scramble to put his papers in order, but she broke off in the middle of a sentence to urge him to remain. She announced that she was calling on both of us.

"Please don't stop your work on my account," she said, and promptly sat down at his typewriter and began pecking at the keys. "You must teach me how to run a typewriter, Mr. Poopendyke. I shall be as poor as a church mouse before long, and I know father won't help me. I may have to become a stenographer."

He blushed abominably. I don't believe I've ever seen a more unattractive fellow than Poopendyke.

"Oh, every cloud has its silver lining," said he awkwardly.

"But I am used to gold," said she. The bell on the machine tinkled. "What do I do now?" He made the shift and the space for her.

"Go right ahead," said he. She chattered the whole alphabet across his neat sheet but he didn't seem to mind.

"Isn't it jolly, Mr. Smart? If Mr. Poopendyke should ever leave you, I may be able to take his place as your secretary."

I bowed very low. "You may be quite sure, Countess, that I shall dismiss Mr. Poopendyke the instant you apply for his job."

"And I shall most cheerfully abdicate," said he. Silly ass!

I couldn't help thinking how infinitely more attractive and perilous she would be as a typist than the excellent young woman who had married the jeweller's clerk, and what an improvement on Poopendyke!

"I came down to inquire when you would like to go exploring for buried treasure, Mr. Smart," she said, after the cylinder had slipped back with a bang that almost startled her out of her pretty boots and caused her to give up typewriting then and there, forevermore.

"Never put off till tomorrow what you can do today," quoted I glibly.

She looked herself over. "If you knew how many times this gown had to be put off till tomorrow, you wouldn't ask me to ruin it the second time I've had it on my back."

"It is an uncommonly attractive gown," said I. "Shall we set tomorrow for the treasure quest?"

"Tomorrow is Sunday."

"Can you think of a better way to kill it?"

"Yes, you might have me down here for an old-fashioned midday dinner."

"Capital! Why not stay for supper, too?"

"It would be too much like spending a day with relatives," she said. "We'll go treasure hunting on Monday. I haven't the faintest notion where to look, but that shouldn't make any difference. No one else ever had. By the way, Mr. Smart, I have a bone to pick with you. Have you seen yesterday's papers? Well, in one of them, there is a long account of my—of Mr. Pless' visit to your castle, and a lengthy interview in which you are quoted as saying that he is one of your dearest friends and a much maligned man who deserves the sympathy of every law-abiding citizen in the land."

"An abominable lie!" I cried indignantly. "Confound the newspapers!"

"Another paper says that your fortune has been placed at his disposal in the fight he is making against the criminally rich Americans. In this particular article you are quoted as saying that I am a dreadful person and not fit to have the custody of a child."

"Good Lord!" I gasped helplessly.

"You also expect to do everything in your

power to interest the administration at Washington in his behalf."

"Well, of all the— Oh, I say, Countess, you don't believe a word of all this, do you?"

She regarded me pensively. "You have said some very mean, unkind things to me."

"If I thought you believed—" I began desperately, but her sudden smile relieved me of the necessity of jumping into the river.

"By Jove, I shall write to these miserable sheets, denying every word they've printed. And what's more, I'll bring an action for damages against all of 'em. Why, it is positively atrocious! The whole world will think I despise you and—" I stopped very abruptly in great confusion.

"And—you don't" she queried, with real seriousness in her voice. "You don't despise me."

"Certainly not!" I cried vehemently. Turning to Poopendyke, I said: "Mr. Poopendyke, will you at once prepare a complete and emphatic denial of every da— of every word they have printed about me, and I'll send it to all the American correspondents in Europe. We'll cable it ourselves to the United States. I sha'n't rest until I am set straight in the eyes of my fellow-countrymen. The whole world shall know, Countess, that I am for you first, last and all the time. It shall know—"

"But you don't know who I am, Mr. Smart," she broke in, her cheeks very warm and rosy. "How can you publicly espouse the cause of one whose name you refuse to have mentioned in your presence?"

I dismissed her question with a wave of the hand: "Poopendyke can supply the name after I have signed the statement. I give him carte blanche. The name has nothing to do with the case, so far as I am concerned. Write it, Fred, and make it strong."

She came up to me and held out her hand.

"I knew you would do it," she said softly.

"Thanks."

I bent low over the gloved little hand.

"Don Quixote was a happy gentleman, Countess, with all his idiosyncrasies, and so am I."

She not only came for dinner with us on Sunday, but made the dressing for my alligator pear salad. We were besieged by the usual crowd of Sunday sight-seers, who came clamoring at our staunch, reinforced gates, and anathematized me soundly for refusing admission. One bourgeois party of fifteen refused to leave the plaza until their return fares on the ferry barge were paid, stoutly maintaining that they had come over in good faith and wouldn't leave until I had reimbursed them to the extent of fifty hellers apiece, ferry fare. I sent Briton out with the money. He returned with the rather disquieting news that he had recognized two of Mr. Pless' secret agents in the mob.

"I wonder if he suspects that I am here," said the Countess paling perceptibly when I mentioned the presence of the two men.

"It doesn't matter," said I. "He can't get into the castle while the gates are locked, and, by Jove, I intend to keep them locked."

"What a delightful orgie you are, Mr. Smart," said she.

Nevertheless, I did not sleep well that night. The presence of the two detectives outside my gates was not to be taken too lightly. Unquestionably they had got wind of something that aroused suspicion in their minds. I confidently expected them to reappear in the morning, perhaps disguised as workmen. Nor were my fears wholly unjustified.

Shortly after nine o'clock a sly-faced man in overalls accosted me in the hall.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Smart," he said in fairly good English, "may I have a word with you? I have a message from Mr. Pless."

I don't believe he observed the look of concern that flitted across my face.

"From Mr. Pless!" I inquired, simulating surprise. Then I looked him over so curiously that he laughed in a quiet, simple way.

"I am an agent of the secret service," he explained coolly. "Yesterday I failed to gain admission as a visitor, today I come as a laborer. We work in a mysterious way, sir."

"Is it necessary for Mr. Pless to resort to a subterfuge of this character in order to get a message to me?" I demanded indignantly.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"It was not necessary yesterday, but it is today," said he. He leaned closer and lowered his voice. "Our every movement is being watched by the Countess's detectives. We are obliged to resort to trickery to throw them off the scent. Mr. Pless has read what you had to say in the newspapers and he is too grateful, sir, to subject you to unnecessary annoyance at the hands of her agents. Your friendship is sacred to him. He realizes that it means a great deal to have the support of one so powerful with the United States government. If we are to work together, Mr. Smart, in bringing this woman to justice, it must be managed with extreme skill or her family may—"

"What is this you are saying?" I broke in, scarcely able to baffle my ears.

"I speak English so badly," he apologized. "Perhaps I should do no more than to give you his message. He would have you to meet him secretly tonight at the Rempf

Hotel across the river. It is most important that you should do so, and that you should exercise great caution. I am to take your reply back to him."

For an instant I was fairly stupefied. Then I experienced a feeling of relief so vast that he must have seen the gleam of triumph in my eyes. The trick was mine, after all.

"Come into my study," I said. He followed me upstairs and into the room.

Poopendyke was there. "This is my secretary, you may speak freely before him."

Turning to Poopendyke, I said: "You have not sent that statement to the newspapers, have you? Well, let it rest for a day or two. Mr. Pless has sent a representative to see me." I scowled at my secretary, and he had the sense to hide his astonishment.

The fellow repeated what he had said before, and added a few instructions which I was to follow with care if I would do Mr. Pless the honour to wait upon him that evening at the Rempf Hotel.

"You may tell Mr. Pless that I shall be there at nine," said I. The agent departed.

When he was safely out of the room, I explained the situation to Poopendyke, and then made my way through the secret panels to the Countess's rooms.

She was ready for the subterranean journey in quest of treasure, attired in a neat walking skirt, with her bouny hair encased in a swimming cap as a guard against cobwebs.

"Then you don't intend to send out the statements?" she cried in disappointment.

"You are going to let every one think you are his friend and not mine!"

I was greatly elated. Her very unreasonableness was a prize that I could not fail to cherish.

"Only for the time being," I said eagerly.

"Don't you see the advantage we gain by fooling him. Why, it is splendid—positively splendid!"

She pouted. "I don't feel at all sure of you now, Mr. Smart," she said, sitting down rather dejectedly in a chair near the fireplace. "I believe you are ready to turn against me. You want to be rid of me. I am a nuisance, a source of trouble to you. You will tell him that I am here—"

I stood over her, trying my best to scowl.

"You know better than that. You know I am as loyal as—as can be. Hang it all!"

I burst out impulsively. "do you suppose for a minute that I want to hand you over to that infernal rascal, now that I've come to—that is to say, now that we're such ripping good friends?"

She looked up at me very pathetically at first. Then her expression changed swiftly to one of wonder and the most penetrating inquiry. Slowly a flush crept into her cheeks and her eyes wavered.

"I—I think I can trust you to—to do the right thing by me," she said, descending to a banality in her confusion.

I held out my hand. She laid hers in it rather timidly, almost as if she was afraid of me. "I shall not fail you," said I without the faintest intention to be heroic but immediately conscious of having used an expression so trite that my cheek flamed with humiliation.

For some unaccountable reason she arose hastily from the chair and walked to the window. A similar reason, no doubt, held me rooted rather safely to the spot on which I stood. I have a vague recollection of feeling dazed and rather short of breath. My heart was acting queerly.

"Why do you suppose he wants to see you?" she asked, after a moment, turning toward me again. She was as calm as a summer breeze. All trace of nervousness had left her.

"I can't even supply a guess."

"You must be very, very tactful," she said unceasingly. "I know him so well. He is very cunning."

"I am accustomed to dealing with villains," said I. "They always come to a bad end in my books, and virtue triumphs."

"But this isn't a book," she protested. "Besides virtue never triumphs in an international marriage. You must come—to see me tonight after you return from town. I won't sleep until I've heard everything."

"I may be very late," I said, contriving to hide my eagerness pretty well, I thought.

"I shall wait for you, Mr. Smart," she said, very distinctly. I took it as a command and bowed in submission. "There is no one here to gossip, so we may be as careless as we please about appearances. You will be hungry, too, when you come in. I shall have a nice supper ready for you."

She frowned faintly. "You must not, under any circumstances, spoil everything by having supper with him."

"Again I repeat, you may trust me implicitly to do the right thing," said I beamingly. "And now, what do you say to our trip to the bottom of the castle?"

She shook her head. "Not with the house full of spies, my dear friend. We'll save that for another day. A rainy day perhaps. I feel like having all the sunshine I can get today. Tonight I shall be gloomy and very lonely. I shall take Rosemary and Jinko out

upon the top of the tower and play all day in the sun."

I had an idea. "I am sure I should enjoy a little sunshine myself. May I come too?"

She looked me straight in the eye. There was a touch of dignity in her voice when she spoke.

"Not today, Mr. Smart."

A most unfathomable person!

CHAPTER XI.

I am Invited to Spend Money.

ANY one who has traveled in the Valley of the Donau knows the Rempf Hotel. It is an ancient hostelry, frequented quite as much in these days as it was in olden times by people who are by way of knowing the excellence of its cuisine and the character of its wines. Unless one possesses this intelligence, either through hearsay or experience, he will pass by the Rempf without so much as a glance at its rather forbidding exterior and make for the modern hotel on the plaza, thereby missing one of the most interesting spots in this grim old town.

Is it to the fashionable Bellevue that the nobility and the elect wend their way when they come to town? Not by any means. They affect the Rempf, and there you may see them in fat, inglorious plenty smugly excreting the plebeian rich of many lands who dismiss Rempf's with a sniff, and enjoying the aforesaid rich would not consider at any price.

You may be quite sure that the rates are low at the historic Rempf, and that they would be much lower if the nobility had anything to say about it. One can get a very comfortable room, without bath, at the Rempf for a dollar a day, provided he gets in ahead of the native aristocracy. If he insists on having a room with bath, he is guilty of lese majeste and is sent on his way.

But, bath or no bath, the feed is the best in the entire valley and the cellar without a rival.

I found Mr. Pless at the Rempf at nine o'clock. He was in his room when I entered the quaint old place and approached the round manager with considerable uncertainty in my manner. For whom was I to inquire? Would he be known there as Pless?

The manager gave me a broad (I was about to say servicable) smile and put my mind at rest by blandly inquiring if I was the gentleman who wished to see Mr. Pless.

He directed me to the top floor of the hotel and I mounted two flights of stairs at the heels of a porter who exercised native thrift by carrying up a large trunk, thus saving time and steps after a fashion, although it may be hard to see wherein he really benefited when I say that after escorting me to a room on the third floor and knocking at the door while balancing the trunk on his back, he descended to the second and delivered his burden in triumph to the lady who had been calling for it since six o'clock in the evening. But even at that he displayed considerable cunning in not forgetting what room the luggage belonged in, thereby saving himself a trip all the way down to the office and back with the trunk.

Mr. Pless stiffened. His face grew per- of warmth. He called me "dear old fellow" and shook hands with me with more heartiness than I thought him capable of expressing. His dark, handsome face was aglow with pleasure. He was quite boyish. A smallish old gentleman was with him. My introduction to the stranger was a sort of afterthought, it seemed to me. I was informed that he was one of the greatest lawyers and advocates in Vienna and Mr. Pless's personal adviser in the "unfortunate controversy."

I accepted a cigar.

"So you knew who I was all the time I was at Schloss Rothboefen," said Mr. Pless, smiling amiably. "I was trying to maintain my incognito so that you might not be distressed, Mr. Smart, by having in your home such a notorious character as I am supposed to be. I confess it was rather shabby in me, but I hold your excellent friends responsible for the trick."

"It is rather difficult to keep a secret with women about," said I evasively.

"But never difficult to construct one," said Mr. Schymansky, winking rather too broadly. I think Schymansky was the name.

(To be continued.)

Sweater vs. Overcoat.

Many boys will wear sweaters when they would scorn overcoats. If these knitted garments are long enough to protect them thoroughly they are much better than overcoats, except in the coldest weather, for they are lighter and allow freer action in the child's play. All clothing should be simple, warm, and of the fewest number of pieces. Union suits are more comfortable than separate shirts and drawers; garters must be pliable and girls should wear bloomers and tights of soft wool with their winter dresses.