

By
Geo. Barr
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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 unaware. 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. The Count turns up again and asks for a loan of money, but is refused.

"Or ten years! Besides, the whole SNT she worth waiting a year for—squabble will come to an end the minute old man Titus puts up the back million. And the minute the Countess goes to him and says she's willing for him to pay it, you take my word for it, he'll settle like a flash. It rests with her."

"I don't quite get your meaning."
"She isn't going to let a stinky little million stand between her and happiness."
"Confound you, do you mean to say she'd ask her father to pay over that million in order to be free to marry?" I did not condescend to finish the sentence.

"Why not?" he demanded after a moment. "He owes it, doesn't he?"
I gasped. "But you wouldn't have him pay over a million to that damned brute of a Count!"

He grinned. "You've changed your song, my friend. A few weeks ago you were saying he ought to pay it, that it would serve him right, and—"

"Did I say that?"
"You did. You even said it to the Countess."

"But not with the view to making it possible for her to hurry off and marry again. Please understand that, Fred."

"He ought to pay what he owes. He gave a million to get one husband for her. He ought to give a million to be rid of him, so that she could marry the next one without putting him to any expense whatsoever. It's only fair to her, I say. And now I'll tell you something else: The Countess, who has stood out stubbornly against the payment of this money, is now halfway inclined to advise the old gentleman to settle with Tarnowsky."

"She is!" I cried in astonishment. "How do you know?"

"I told her I thought it was the cheapest and quickest way out of it, and she said: 'I wonder!'"

"Have you been discussing her most sacred affairs with her, you blithering—"

"No, sir," said he, with dignity. "She has been discussing them with me."
I have no recollection of what I said as I stalked out of the room. He called out after me, somewhat pleadingly, I thought: "Ask Britton what he has to say about it."

Things had come to a pretty pass! Could not a gentleman be polite and agreeable to a young and charming lady whom circumstances had thrown in his way without having his motives misconstrued by a lot of snooping, idiotic menials whose only zest in life sprung from a temperamental tendency to belittle the big things and decalogue upon the small ones? What rot! What utter rot! Ask Britton! The more I thought of Poopendyke's injunction the more furious I grew. What insufferable insolence! Ask Britton! The idea! Ask my valet! Ask him what! Ask him politely if he could oblige me by telling me whether I was in love. I suppose that is what Poopendyke meant.

It was the silliest idea in the world. In the first place I was not in love, and in the second place whose business was it but mine if I were? Certainly not Poopendyke's and certainly not Britton's, certainly not the Schmicks! Absolute lack of any sense of proportion, that's what ailed the whole badly of them. What looked like love to them—benighted delusion!—was no more than a rather resolute effort on my part to be kind to and patient with a person who had invaded my home and set everybody—including myself—by the ears.

But, even so, what right had my secretary to constitute himself adviser and mentor to the charming invader? What right had he to suggest what she should do, or what her father should do, or what anybody should do? He was getting to be disgustingly officious. What he needed was a smart jacking up, a little plain talk from me. Give a privileged and admittedly faithful secretary an inch and he'll have you up to your ears in trouble before you know what has happened. By the same token, what right had she to engage herself in confidential chats with— But just then I caught sight of Britton coming upstairs with my neatly polished tan shoes in one hand and a pair of number 8½ A tan pumps in the other. Not expecting to meet me in the hall, he had neglected to remove his cap when he came in from the court yard. In some confusion, he tried to take it off, first with one hand, then with the other, sustaining what one might designate as absent treatment kicks on either jaw from two distinct sexes in the shape of shoes. He managed to get all four of the minto one hand, however, and then grabbed off his cap.

"Anything more, sir?" he asked, purely from habit.

I was regarding the shoes with interest. Never have I known anything so ludicrous as the contrast between my stupendous number tens and the dainty pumps that seemed almost babyish beside them.

Then I did the very thing I had excoriated Poopendyke for even suggesting. I asked Britton!

"Britton, what's all this gossip I hear going the rounds of the castle behind my back?"

Confound him, he looked pleased! "It's quite true, sir, quite true."

"Quite true!" I roared. "What's quite true, sir?"

"Isn't it, sir?" he asked, dismayed.

"Isn't what?"

"I mean to say, sir, isn't it true?"

"My God!" I cried, throwing up my hands in hopeless despair. "You—you—wait! I'm going to get to the bottom of this. I want the truth, Britton. Who put it into that confounded head of yours that I am—in love with the Countess? Speak! Who did it?"

He lowered his voice, presumably because I had dropped mine to a very loud whisper. I also had glanced over both shoulders.

"Begging your pardon, sir, but I must be honest, sir. It was you as first put it into my head, sir."

"I!" My face went the color of a cardinal's cap.

"You, sir. It's as plain as the nose on your—"

"That will do, Britton," I commanded. He remained discreetly silent. "That will do, I say," I repeated, somewhat testily.

"Do you hear, sir?"

"Yes, sir," he responded. "That will do, you says."

"Ahem! I—ahem!" Somewhat clumsily I put on my nose-glasses and made a pretext of examining his burden rather closely.

"What's this you have here?"

"Shoes, sir."

"I see, I see. Let me have them."

He handed me my own. "The others, if you please," I said, disdainful the number tens. "May I inquire, sir, where you are taking these?" I had the Countess' pumps in my hands. He explained that he was going to drop mine in my room and then take hers upstairs. "You may drop mine as you intended. I shall take care of these."

"Very good, sir," said he, with such positive relief in his voice that I glared at him. He left me standing there, a small pump in each hand.

Five minutes later I was at her door, a pump in each hand and my heart in my mouth. A sudden, inexplicable form of jantic took possession of me. I stood there ready to tap resoundingly on the panel of the door with the heel of a slipper; I never raised my hand for the purpose.

Instead of carrying out my original design, I developed an overpowering desire to do nothing of the sort. Why go on making a fool of myself? Why add fuel to the already pernicious flame? Of course I was not in love with her, the idea was preposterous. But, just the same, the confounded servants were beginning to gossip, and back stair scandal is the very worst type. It was wrong for me to encourage it. Like a ninny, I had just given Britton something to support his contention, and he wouldn't be long in getting down to the servants' hall with the latest exhibit in the charge against me.

Moreover, if every one was talking about it, what was to prevent the silly gossip from reaching the sensitive ears of the Countess? A sickening thought struck me: Could it be possible that the Countess herself suspected me of being in love with her? A woman's vanity goes a long way sometimes. The thought did not lessen the panic that afflicted me. I tip-toed away from the door to a less exposed spot at the bend in the stairway.

There, after some deliberation, I came to a decision. The proper thing for me to do was to show all of them that their ridiculous suspicions were wrong. I owed it to the Countess, to say the least. She was my guest, as it were, and it was my duty to protect her while she was in my house. The only thing for me to do, therefore, was to stay away from her.

The thought of it distressed me, but it seemed to be the only way, and the fair one. No doubt she would expect some sort of an explanation for the sudden indifference on my part, but I could attribute everything to an overpowering desire to work on my story. (I have a habit of using my work as an excuse for not doing a great many things that I ought to do.)

All this time I was regarding the small tan pumps with something akin to pain in my eyes. I could not help thinking about the tiny feet they sometimes covered. By some sort of intuitive computation I arrived at the conclusion that they were adorably small, and pink, and warm. Suddenly it occurred to me that my present conduct was reprehensible, that no man of honor would be holding a lady's pumps in his hands and allowing his imagination to go too far. Resolutely I put them behind my back and marched downstairs.

"Britton," said I, a few minutes later, "you may take these up to the Countess after all."

He blinked his eyes. "Wasn't she at home, sir?"

"Don't be insolent, Britton. Do as I tell you."

"Very good, sir." He held the pumps up to admire them. "They're very cute, ain't they, sir?"

"They are just like all pumps," said I indifferently, and walked away. If I could have been quite sure that it was a chuckle I heard, I should have given Britton something to think about for the rest of his days. The impertinent rascal!

For some two long and extremely monotonous days I toiled. A chapter shaped itself—after a fashion. Even as I wrote, I knew that it wasn't satisfactory and that I should tear it up the instant it was finished. What irritated me more than anything else was the certain conviction that Poopendyke, who typed it as I progressed, also knew that it would go into the waste paper basket.

Both nights I went to bed early and to sleep late. I could not deny to myself that I was missing those pleasant hours with the Countess. I did miss them. I missed Rosemary and Jinko and Helen Marie Louise Antoinette and Blake.

An atmosphere of gloom settled around Poopendyke and Britton. They eyed me with a sort of pathetic wonder in their faces. As time went on they began to look positively forlorn and unhappy. Once or twice I caught them whispering in the hallway. On seeing me they assumed an air of nonchalance that brought a grim smile to my lips. I was beginning to hate them. Toward the end of the second day, the four Schmicks became so aggravatingly doleful that I ordered them, one and all, to keep out of my sight. Even the emotionless Hawkes and the perfect Blatchford were infected. I don't believe I've ever seen a human face as solemnly respectful as Hawkes' was that night at dinner. He seemed to be pitying me from the bottom of his heart. It was getting on my nerves.

I took a stroll in the court yard after dinner, and I may be forgiven I hope for the few surreptitious glances I sent upwards in the direction of the rear windows in the eastern wing. I wondered what she was doing, and what she was thinking of my extraordinary behavior, and why the deuce she hadn't sent down to ask me to come up and tell her how busy I was. She had not made a single sign. The omission was not particularly gratifying, to say the least.

Approaching the servants' hall, I loitered. I heard voices, a mixture of tongues, Britton appeared to be doing the most of the talking. Gradually I became aware of the fact that he was explaining to the four Schmicks the meaning of an expression in which must have been incorporated the words "turned him down."

Hawkes' the impeccable Hawkes, joined in. "If I know anything about it, I'd say she has thrown the 'looks into 'em'."

Then they had to explain that to Conrad and Gretel, who repeated "Ach Gott!" and other simple expletives in such a state of misery that I could almost detect tears in their voices.

"It ain't that, Mr. 'Awkes," protested Britton loyally. "He's lost his nerve, that's what it is. They allus do when they realize 'ow bad they're hit. Turn 'im down! Not much, Mr. 'Awkes. Take it from me, Mr. 'Awkes, he's not going to give 'er the chance to turn 'im down."

"Ach, Gott!" said Gretel. I will stake my head that she wrung her hands.

"Women is funny," said Hawkes. (I had no idea the wretch was so ungrammatical.) "You can't put your finger on 'em ever. While I 'aven't seen much of the Countess during my present engagement, I will say this: She has a lot more sense than people give 'er credit for. Now why should she throw the 'looks into a fine, upstanding chap like 'im, even if he is an American? She made a rotten bad job the first time, mind you. If she has threw the 'looks into 'im, as I am afeared, I can't see what the deuce ails 'er."

My perfect footman, Blatchford, ventured an opinion, and I blessed him for it. "We may be off our nuts on the 'ole blooming business," said he. "Maybe he 'as thrown the 'looks into 'er. Who knows! It looks that w'y to me." (I remember distinctly that he used the word "thrown," and I was half a mind to rush in and put him over Hawkes, there and then.)

"In any case," said Britton, gloom in his voice, "it's a most unhappy state of affairs. He's getting to be a perfect crank. Complains about everything I do. He won't 'ave 'is trousers pressed and he 'asn't been shaved since Monday."

I stole away, rage in my soul. Or was it mortification? In any event, I had come to an irrevocable decision: I would ship the whole lot of them, without notice, before another day was gone.

The more I thought of the way I was being treated by my own servants, and the longer I dwelt upon the ignominious figure I must have presented as the hero of their back-door romance, the angrier I got. I was an object of concern to them, an object of pity! Confound them, they were feeding

sorry for me because I had received my conge, and they were actually finding fault with me for not taking it with a grin on my face!

Before going to bed I went into the loggia (for the first time in three days) and, keeping myself pretty well hidden behind a projection in the wall, tried to get a glimpse of the Countess' windows. Failing there, I turned my steps in another direction and soon stood upon my little balcony. There was no sign of her in the windows, although a faint light glowed against the curtains of a well-remembered room near the top of the tower.

Ah, what a cosy, jolly room! What a delicious dinner I had had there! And what a supper! Somehow, I found myself thinking of those little tan pumps. As a matter of fact, they had been a source of annoyance to me for more than forty-eight hours. I had found myself thinking of them at most inopportune times, greatly to the detriment of my work as a realist.

It was cool on the balcony, and I was abnormally warm, as might be expected. It occurred to me that I might do worse than to sit out there in the cool of the evening and enjoy a cigar or two—three or four, if necessary.

But, thought I sat there until nearly midnight and chattered my teeth almost out of my head with the cold, she did not appear at her window. The aggravating part of it was that while I was shivering out there in the beastly raw, minuscule air, she doubtless was lying on a luxurious couch before a warm fire in a dressing gown and slippers—ah, slippers!—reading a novel and thinking of nothing in the world but her own comfort! And those rascally beggars presumed to think that I was in love with a selfish, self-centered, spoiled creature like that! Rubbish!

I am afraid that Poopendyke found me in a particularly irascible frame of mind the next morning. I knew that Britton did. I thought better of my determination to discharge Britton. He was an exceptionally good servant and a loyal fellow, so why should I deprive myself of a treasure simply because the eastern wing of my abode was inhabited by an unfeeling creature who hadn't a thought beyond fine feathers and bonbons? I was so charitably inclined toward Hawkes and Blatchford, who were in my service through an influence over which I did not appear to have any control. They would have to go.

"Mr. Poopendyke," said I, after Blatchford had left the breakfast room, "I want you to give notice to Hawkes and Blatchford today."

"Notice?" he exclaimed incredulously.

"Notice," said I, very distinctly.

He looked distressed. "I thought they were most satisfactory to you."

"I've changed my opinion."

"By Jove, Mr. Smart, I—I don't know how the Countess will take such high-handed—ahem! You see, sir, she—she was good enough to recommend them to me. It will be quite a shock to—"

"By the Lord Harry, Fred, am I to—"

"Don't misunderstand me," I made haste to say. "This is your house. You have a perfect right to hire and discharge, but— but— Don't you think you'd better consider very carefully—" He seemed to be finding his collar rather tight.

I held up my hand. "Of course, I do not care to offend the Countess Tarnowsky. It was very kind of her to recommend them. We—we will let the matter rest for a few days."

"She has informed me that you were especially pleased with the manner in which they served the dinner the other night. I think she said you regarded them as incomparable diadems, or something of the sort. It may have been the champagne."

My thoughts leaped backward to that wonderful dinner. "It wasn't the champagne," said I, very stiffly.

"Do you also contemplate giving notice to the chef and his wife, our only chambermaid?"

"No, I don't," I snapped. "I think they were in bed."

He looked at me as if he thought I had gone crazy. I wriggled uncomfortably in my chair for a second or two, and then abruptly announced that we'd better get to work. I have never ceased to wonder what construction he could have put on that stupid slip of the tongue. (To Be Continued.)

To clean an oil painting, peel and grate a raw potato and mix it with enough cold water to make a thin paste. Rub the picture with this, using a small sponge, then sponge with clear cold water and dry with a fine cloth. Only a small portion should be done at a time.

To clean children's white kid topped shoes, rub them with a cloth dipped in milk and then lather with a good white soap. Rub in well and set in the air to dry. This softens as well as cleanses the kid.