

HOME AND FARM MAGAZINE SECTION SERIAL.

A Fool and His Money--By George Barr McCutcheon

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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 \$1,000,000 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. The Count turns up again and asks for a loan of money, but is refused. He leaves after Smart uses rather plain language. The Countess tells Smart she married blindly, and he believes her. Unknown to himself he has fallen in love with her. She tells him she intends to marry again, but does not say whom. The Count and a confederate plan to swindle Smart, but the latter knocks the Count down and orders the men out of the castle. Mrs. Thus, mother of the Countess, arrives with two sons, posing as Smart's mother. Old friends drop in unexpectedly. It is learned that a Baron has challenged the Count to a duel.

WHEN the Hazzards and Smiths departed the next morning they were in full possession of all of our plans, hopes and secrets, but they were bound by promises that would have haunted them throughout all eternity if they allowed them to be violated. I do not recall having seen two more intensely excited, radiant women in my life than Elsie and Betty Billy. They were in an ecstatic state of mind. Their husbands, but little less excited, offered to help us in every way possible, and, to prove their earnest, turned the prow of the motor-boat down-stream, abandoning the trip up the river in order to be in Vienna in case I should need them for any purpose whatsoever.

"You may rest easy so far as I am concerned, Mrs. Titus," said the young diplomat. "As a representative of the United States Government I can't become publicly involved in this international muddle. I've just got to keep my lips sealed. If it were discovered that I knew of all this, my head would be under the sickle-scythe in no time at all. Swiss! Officially suicided!"

At 10 o'clock the next morning I was called to the telephone. Smith had startling news to impart. Count Tarnowsky and Baron Umovitch had engaged in a duel with pistols at sunrise and the latter had gone down with a bullet through his lungs! He died an hour later. Tarnowsky, according to the rumors flying about official Vienna, was already on his way to Berlin, where he would probably remain in seclusion until the affair blew over or imperial forgiveness was extended to him.

There was cause for satisfaction among us, even though the Baron had fallen instead of the Count. The sensational affair would serve to keep Tarnowsky under cover for some weeks at least and minimize the dangers attending the Countess' flight from the castle. Still I could not help feeling disappointed over the outcome of the meeting. Why couldn't Count Tarnowsky have been the one to fall?

The Countess, very pale and distraught, gave utterance to her feelings in a most remarkable speech. She said: "This is one of the few fine things that Maria has ever done. I am glad that he killed that man. He should have done so long ago—the beast! He was—ugh!—the most despicable creature I've ever known."

She said no more than this, but one could readily grasp all that she left unuttered.

Collingraft rather sentimentally remarked to little Rosemary, who could not have comprehended the words of course: "Well, little Rosebud, your papa may be a spendthrift, but he never wastes bullets."

Which was entirely uncalled for, I contend. I was struck by the swift look of dread that leaped into Aline's eyes and her pallor.

On top of all this came the astonishing news, by cipher dispatch from old Jasper Titus' principal adviser in London, that his offer of \$1,000,000 had been declined by Tarnowsky two days before, the Count having replied through his lawyers that nothing short of \$2,000,000 would induce him to relinquish all claims to his child.

I had been ignorant of this move in the case, and expressed my surprise.

"I asked father to do it, Mr. Smart," said the Countess dejectedly. "It seemed the easiest way out of our difficulties—and the cheapest. He will never give in to this new demand, though. We must make the best of it."

"Why did you suggest such a thing to him?" I demanded with heat.

She looked hurt. "Because you seemed to think it was the right and honorable thing to do," she said patiently. "I do not forget what you said to me, days and days ago, even though it may have slipped your mind. You said that a bargain is a bargain—and—well, I had Mr. Bangs' wife father just what you thought about it."

There was a suspicion of tears in her voice as she turned away and left me without another word. She was quite out of sight around the bend in the staircase, and her little boots were clattering swiftly upwards, before I fully grasped the significance of her explanation—or, I might better say, her reproach. It slowly dawned upon me that I had said a great many things to her that it would pay me to remember before questioning her motives in any particular.

As the day for her departure drew nearer—it was not but 48 hours away—her manner seemed to undergo a complete change. She became moody, nervous, depressed. Of course, all this was attributable to the dread of discovery and capture when she was once outside the great walls of Schloss Rothoeten. I could understand her feelings, and rather lamely attempted to bolster up her courage by making light of the supposed perils.

She looked at me with a certain pathetic sombreness in her eyes that caused my heart to ache. All of her joyous gallantry was gone, all of her gentle arrogance. Her sole interest in life in these last days seemed to be of a sacrificial nature. She was sweet and gentle with everyone—with me in particular. I may say—and there was something positively humble in her attitude of self-abnegation. Where she had once been willful and ironic, she was gentle and considerate. Nor was I the only one to note these subtle changes in her. I doubt, however, if the others were less puzzled than I. In fact, Mrs. Titus was palpably perplexed, and there were times when I caught her eyeing me with distinct dis-

approval, as if she were seeking in me the cause of her daughter's weaknesses, as much as to say: "What other nonsense have you been putting into the poor child's head, you wretch?"

I went up to have a parting romp with Rosemary on the last night of her stay with me, to have my last sip of honey from her delectable neck. The Countess paid but little attention to us. She sat over in the window and stared out into the dusky shadows of the falling night. My heart was sore. I was miserable. The last romp!

Blake finally snatched Rosemary off to bed. It was then that the Countess aroused herself and came over to me with a sad little smile on her lips.

"Good night," she said, rather wistfully, holding out her hand to me.

I deliberately glanced at my watch. "It's only 10 minutes past 8," I said reproachfully.

"I know," she said, quietly. "Good night."

CHAPTER XVIII

I Speed the Parting Guest.

FOUR O'CLOCK in the morning is a graceless hour. Graveyards may yawn at 12, but even they are content to slumber at 4. I don't believe there is anything so desolate in this world as the mental perspective one obtains at 4 o'clock. Tombstones are bright beacons of cheer as compared to the monumental regret one experiences on getting up to greet the alleged and vastly over-rated glories of a budding day. The sunrise is a pall! It is a deadly, dour thing. It may be pink and red and golden and full of all the splendors of the east, but it is a resurrection and you can't make anything else out of it. Staying up till 4 and then going to bed gives one an idea of the sunrise that is not supported by the facts; there is but one way to appreciate the real nature of the hateful thing called dawn, and that is to get up with it instead of taking it to bed with you.

Still, I suppose the sun has to come up and perhaps it is just as well that it does so at an hour when people are least likely to suspect it of anything so shabby.

Four o'clock is more than a graceless, sodden hour when it ushers in a day that you know is to be the unhappiest in your life; when you know that you are to say farewell forever to the hopes begot and nurtured in other days; when the one you love smiles and goes away to smile again but not for you. And that is just what 4 o'clock on the morning of the 14th of September meant to me.

Britton and I set forth in the automobile just at the break of dawn, crossing the river a few miles below the castle, and running back to a point on the right hand bank, where we were to await the arrival of the boat conveying the Countess and her escort. Her luggage, carefully disguised as crated merchandise, had gone to Trieste by fast express a couple of days before, sent in my name and consigned to a gentleman whose name I do not now recall, but who in reality served as a sort of middleman in transferring the shipment to the custody of a certain yacht's commander.

It was required of me—and of my machine, which is more to the point—that the distance of 120 miles through the foothills of the Austrian Alps should be covered and the passengers delivered at a certain railway station 50 miles or more south of Vienna before 10 o'clock that night. There they were to catch a train for the little seaport on the upper Adriatic, the name of which I was sworn never to reveal, and, as I have not considered it worth while to be released from that oath, I am of necessity compelled to omit the mention of it here.

Mr. Bangs went on to Vienna the night before our departure, taking with him Helene Marie Louise Antoinette, a rather shocking arrangement you would say unless you had come to know the British lawyer as well as we knew him. They were to proceed by the early morning train to this obscure seaport. Collingraft Titus elected to accompany his sister the entire length of the journey, with the faithful Blake and Rosemary.

Billy Smith was to meet us a few miles outside the town for which we were bound, with a word of warning if there was anything sinister in the wind.

I heard afterwards from Poopendyke that the departure of the Countess and Rosemary from the castle in the gray, forlorn dawn of that historic 14th was attended by a demonstration of grief on the part of the four Schmicks that was far beyond his powers of description, and he possesses a wonderful ability to describe lachrymose situations, rather running to that style of incident, I may say. The elder Schmicks wailed and boo-hoed and proclaimed to the topmost turrets that the sun would never shine again for either of them, and to prove that she was quite in earnest about the matter, Gretel fell off the dock into the river and was nearly drowned before Jasper, Jr., could dive in and get her. Their sons, both of whom cherished amorous feelings for Blake, sighed so prodigiously all the way down the river that the boat rocked. Incidentally, during the excitement, Jinko, who was to remain behind and journey westward later on with Mrs. Titus and Jasper, Jr., succeeded after weeks of vain endeavor in smartly nipping the calf of Hawkes' left leg, a feat of which he no doubt was proud but which sentenced my impressive butler to an everlasting

dread of hydrophobia and a temporary limp.

It was nearly 5 o'clock when the boat slipped into view around the tree-covered point of land and headed straight for our hiding place on the bank.

I shall not stop here to describe the first stage of our journey through the narrow, rocky by-roads that ended eventually in the broad, alpine highway south and west of Vienna. Let it be sufficient to say that we jostled along for 12 or 15 miles without special incident, although we were nervously anxious and apprehensive. Our guide book pointed, or rather twiddled, a route from the river flats into the hills, where we came up with the main road about 8 o'clock.

We were wrapped and goggled to the verge of ludicrousness. It would have been quite impossible to penetrate our motor-masks and armour, even for one possessed of a keen and practiced eye. The Countess was heavily veiled; great goggles bulged beneath the green, gauzy thing that protected her lovely face from sun, wind and man. A motor coat, two or three sizes too large, enveloped her slender, graceful figure, and gauntlets covered her hands. Even Rosemary's tiny face was wrapped in a silken veil of white. As for the rest of us, we could not have been mistaken for anything on earth but American automobilists, ruthlessly inspired to see Europe with the sole view to comparing her roads with our own at home. You would have said, on seeing us, that we knew a great deal about roads and very little about home.

Collingraft and Britton—the latter at the wheel—sat in the front seat, while I shared the broad cushions of the tonneau with the Countess, part of the time holding Rosemary, who was clamoring for food, and the rest of the time holding my breath in the fear that we might slip over a precipice. I am always nervous when not driving the car myself.

We stopped for breakfast at a small mountain inn, 15 miles from our starting place. The Countess, a faint red spot in each cheek and a curiously bright, feverish glow in her dark eyes, revealed a tendency to monopolize the conversation, a condition properly attributed to nervous excitement. I could see that she was vastly thrilled by the experiences of the hour; her quick, alert, brain was keeping pace with the rush of blood that stimulated every fiber in her body to new activities. She talked almost incessantly, and chiefly about matters entirely forgotten to the enterprise in hand. The more I see of women, the less I know about them. Why she should have spent the whole half hour devoted to breakfast to a surprisingly innocuous dissertation on Schopenhauer and Nietzsche is—beyond me.

How was I to know that tears lay close to the surface of those shimmering, vivacious eyes? How was I to know that soba took refuge behind a simulated interest in philosophy?

We had luncheon picnic fashion halfway on our journey's end, diverging from the main road to find a secluded spot where we could spread our cloth and open our hampers without fear of interruption or, to use a more sinister word, detection. It was rather a jolly affair, that first and last al fresco banquet of ours under the spreading branches of mighty trees and beside the trickling waters of a gay little mountain brook that hurried like mad down to the broad channel of the Danube, now many miles away. The strain of the first few hours had slackened. Success seemed assured. We had encountered no difficulties, no dangers in town or country. No one appeared to be interested in us except through idle curiosity; villagers and peasants stared at us and grinned; policemen and soldiers stood aside to let us pass, or gave directions politely when requested to do so. There were no signs of pursuit, no indications of trouble ahead. And so we could afford to be gay and confident at our midday meal in the hills bordering the broad highway.

We even went so far as to arrange for a jolly reunion in New York City at no distant day! I remember distinctly that we were to dine at Sherry's. To me, the day seemed a long way off. I suppose, being a writer of fiction, I should be able to supply at this point in the narrative, a series of thrilling, perhaps hair-raising encounters with the enemy, in the form of spies, cut-throats, imperial mercenaries or whatever came handiest to the imagination. It would be a very simple matter to transform this veracious history into the most lurid of melodramas by the introduction of the false and bizarre, but it is not my purpose to do so. I mean to adhere strictly to the truth and stand by the consequences. Were I inclined to sensationalism it would be no trouble at all for me to have Tarnowsky's agents shooting at our tires or gasoline tank from every rag and cranny; or to have Rosemary kidnapped by aeroplaneists supplied with drag-hooks, or to have the Countess lodged in a village prison from which I should be obliged to liberate her with battle-axe and sixshooter, my compensation being a joyous rest in a hospital with the fair Aline nursing me back to health and strength and cooing fond words in my rapacious ear while I reflected on the noble endowments of a nature that heretofore had been commonplace and meek. But, no! None of these things happened and I decline to perjure myself for the privilege of getting into the list of "six best sellers."

So far as I am able to judge, there

was absolutely no heroism displayed during our flight through the hills and valleys, unless you are willing to accept as such a single dash of 60 miles an hour which Britton made in order to avoid a rain shower that threatened to flank us if we observed the speed laws.

But wait! There was an example of bravado on my part that shall not go unrecorded. I hesitated at first to put it down in writing, but my sense of honor urges me to confess everything. It happened just after that memorable picnic luncheon in the shady dell. The Countess, I maintain, was somewhat to blame for the incident. She suggested that we—that is to say, the two of us—explore the upper recesses of this picturesque spot while the others were making ready for the resumption of our journey.

Shame, contrition, humiliation or whatever you may elect to call it, forbids a lengthy or even apologetic explanation of what followed her unfortunate suggestion. I shall get over with it in as few words as possible.

In the most obscure spot in all those ancient hills, I succumbed to an execrable impulse to take her forcibly in my arms and kiss her! I don't know why I did it, or how, but that is just what happened. My shame, my horror over the transcendental folly was made almost unbearable by the way in which she took it. At first I thought she had swooned, she lay so limp and unresisting in my arms. My only excuse, whispered penitently in her ear, was that I couldn't help doing what I had done, and that I deserved to be drawn and quartered for taking advantage of my superior strength and her gentle forbearance. Strange to say, she merely looked at me in a sort of dumb wonder and quietly released herself, still staring at me as if I were the most inexplicable puzzle in the world. Her cheeks, her throat, her brow grew warm and pink with a just indignation; her lips parted but she uttered no word. Then I followed her dejectedly, cravenly back to the roadside and executed an inward curse that would hang over my miserable head so long as it was on my shoulders.

Her vivacity was gone. She shrank down into the corner of the seat, and, with her back half turned toward me, gazed steadfastly at the panoramic valley which we were skirting. From time to time I glanced at her out of the corners of my eyes, and eventually was somewhat relieved to see that she had closed her own and was dozing. My soul was in despair. She loathed, despised me. I could not blame her. I despised myself.

And yet my heart quickened every time I allowed myself to think of the crime I had committed.

The day was a glorious one and the road more than passably good. We bowled along at a steady rate of speed and sundown found us about 25 miles from our destination. Not caring to run the risk of a prolonged stay in the town, we drew up at a roadside inn and had our dinner in the quaint little garden, afterwards proceeding leisurely by moonlight down the sloping highway.

Billy Smith met us six or eight miles out and we stopped to parley. He examined the Countess' skillfully prepared passports, pronounced them genuine (!), and then gave us the cheerful news that "everything was lovely and the goose hung high." The train for the coast was due to leave the Staatsbahn-hof at 10:05, and we had an hour to spare. He proposed that we spend it quite comfortably at the roadside while Britton went through the pretence of repairing our tires. This seemed an agreeable arrangement for everyone but Britton, who looked so glum that I, glad of the excuse, offered to help him. No sooner was I out of the car and Billy Smith in my place beside the Countess than she became quite gay and vivacious once more. She laughed and chatted with him in a manner that promptly convinced me that propinquity so far as I was concerned had had a most depressing effect upon her, and that she revelled in the change of companions.

I was so disturbed by the discovery that Britton had to caution me several times to handle the inner tubes less roughly or I would damage them and we might suffer a blowout after all.

Everyone appeared to be gay and frivolous, even Blake, who chattered sotto voce with Britton, that excellent rascal spending most of his time leaning against the spare tires in order to catch what she was saying for his benefit. All efforts to draw me into the general conversation were unavailing. I was as morose and unresponsive as an Egyptian mummy, and for a very excellent reason, I submit. The Countess deliberately refused to address a single remark to me. Indeed, when I seemed perilously near to being drawn into the conversation she released into a silence that was most forbidding. My cup of misery was overflowing.

I wondered if she would feel called upon at some distant confessional to tell the fortunate Lord Amberdale that I had brutally kissed her. And Lord Amberdale would grin in his beastly supercilious way and say: "What else could you have expected from a bally American bouncer?" She would no doubt smile indulgently.

Heigh-ho!

All things come to an end, however. We found ourselves at last uttering our good-bys in the railway station, surrounded by hurrying travelers and attended by eager porters.

(To Be Continued.)