

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. Titus, 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. The Baron is killed and the Count flees until the affair has blown over. In disguise the Countess leaves the castle to fly to safety on her father's yacht. Smart kisses her and thinks she hates him for it.

THE Countess did not lift her veil. I deliberately drew her aside. My hot hand clasped hers, and found it as cold as ice and trembling. "For God's sake," I whispered hoarsely in my humbleness, "say that you forgive me!"

She did not speak for many seconds. Then her voice was very low and tremulous. I felt that her sombre eyes were accusing me even as they tried to meet my own with a steadiness that was meant to be reassuring.

"Of course I forgive you," she said. "You have been so good to me."

"Good!" I cried bitterly. "I've been harsh, unreasonable, supercritical from the day I met you."

"Hush!" she said, laying her free hand upon my arm. "I shall never forget all that you have done for me. I—I can say no more."

I gulped. "I pray to heaven that you may be happy, Alaine—happier than any one else in the world."

She lowered her head suddenly, and I was more miserable than before by hearing a quick, half-suppressed sob. Then she withdrew her cold little hand and turned away to follow Colingraft, who had called out to her.

I saw them board the train. In my heart there was the memory of a dozen kisses I had bestowed in repentant horror upon the half-asleep Rosemary, who, God bless her little soul, cried bitterly on being torn away from my embrace.

"Well," said Billy Smith, taking me by the arm a few minutes later, "let's have a bite to eat and a cold bottle before we go to bed, old chap. I hope to heaven she gets through all right. Damn, I am strong for her, aren't you?"

"I am," said I, with conviction, coming out of a daze.

He led me off to a cafe where he seemed to be more or less at home, and where it was bright and gay for him but gloomier than the grave to me.

I drove the car home the next day. When we got down at the garage, Britton shivered and drew a prodigious breath. It was as if he had not breathed for hours. We had gone the distance in little more than half the time taken on the trip down.

"My word, sir," was all he said, but there was a significant tremor in his voice. It smacked of pride.

Mrs. Titus placidly inquired how we had got along, and appeared quite relieved when I told her we had caught the train at K—. Jasper, Jr., revealed a genuine interest in the enterprise, but spoiled it all by saying that Alaine, now prematurely safe, was most likely to leap out of the frying-pan into the fire by marrying some blithering foreigner and having the whole beastly business to do over again.

"How soon do they go?" asked Poopendyke late that afternoon, after listening to Mrs. Titus' amiable prophecies concerning Alaine's future activities, and getting my harassed ear in a moment of least resistance.

"I don't know," said I, hopelessly. I had heard about all I could endure concerning his lordship's magnificent estates in England, and the sort of a lord he was besides. "There's nothing to do but wait, Fred."

"She is a remarkably fine woman but—" He completed the estimate by shaking his head, trusting to my intelligence, I suppose.

We waited two days for word from the fugitives. Late in the afternoon of the second day, Britton returned from town with a telegram for me. It said: "Cargo safely aboard Pendennis, Captain Pardee commanding. Clear at 2 today. Everything satisfactory."

(Signed) "C. G. RAFT."

No sooner was this reassuring news received than Mrs. Titus complacently set about having her trunks packed. The entire household was in a stew of activity, for she had suddenly decided to catch the eight o'clock train for Paris. I telephoned to reserve accommodation on the Orient Express from Vienna, and also to have it stopped at the town across the river, a concession secured at a no inconsiderable cost.

She was to travel once more as my mother.

"You will not fail to look us up when you come to New York, will you, Mr. Smart?" Mr. Titus will not be happy until he has expressed to you in person his endless gratitude. You have been splendid. We shall never forget your kindness, your thoughtfulness, your—your forbearance. I—I—"

Upon my word, there were real tears in the dear lady's eyes! I forgot and forgave much in recognition of this instant of genuine feeling on her part. It was not necessary for her to complete the sentence so humbly begun.

Their departure was with some degree of caution. Mrs. Titus rather considerably reminding herself that my interests were at stake. I saw them aboard the train; she played her part admirably. I will say that for her. She lifted her veil so that I could bestow a farewell filial kiss upon her cheek. Jasper, Jr.'s eyes popped very wide open at this, and as he shook my hand warmly at parting, he said:

"You are a wonder, John—a sure enough wonder. Why, hang it all, she doesn't even let dad do that."

But Jasper, Jr., was very young and he couldn't understand.

At last we were to ourselves, my extensive household and I. Late that night I sat in my study considering the best means of reducing my staff of servants and in computing, with dismay, the cost of being a princely host

to people who had not the least notion what it meant to do sums in economic subtraction. It was soon apparent to me that retrenchment, stern and relentless, would have to follow upon my wild though brief season of profligacy. I decided to dismiss the scullery maid.

I was indescribably lonely. Poopendyke was worried about my pailor, my lassitude. At the end of a week he took it upon himself to drop a line to the Hazards, urging them to run out for a visit in the hope that company might take me out of myself. All attempts to renew my work on the ill-fated novel met with utter failure. The power of mental concentration was gone. I spent most of my time in the garden.

The Hazards came and with them the joyously beautiful Betty Billy. Poopendyke must have prepared them for the task in hand, for they proceeded at once to transform the bleak, dreary old castle into a sort of hilarious merry-go-round, with me in the very vortex of it all. They succeeded in taking me "out of myself." I will say that for them. My spirits took an upward bound and, wonderful to relate, retained their altitude in spite of all I could do to lower them. I did not want to be happy; I figured that I owed it to my recently aroused temper to be permanently unhappy. But the wind blew another way and I drifted amiably with it, as a derelict drifts with the currents of the ocean, but preferably with the warm gulf stream.

We had word from Mrs. Titus, in London, that negotiations had been reopened with the Count, and that a compromise might be expected. The obdurate nobleman had agreed, it seemed, to meet Jasper Titus' lawyers in Paris at no distant date. My chief concern, however, was for the Countess herself. That she had successfully reached the high seas was apparent; if not, the newspapers, which I read with eagerness, would have been filled with accounts of her seizure. We eagerly awaited the promised cablegram from New York announcing her safe arrival there.

Smith joined us at the end of the week. I nerved myself to question him about the Englishman.

"Splendid fellow," said he, with discouraging fervor. "One of the finest chaps I know, eh, George?"

"For an Englishman," admitted Hazard.

"He's a gentleman, and that's more than you can say for the rag-tag of nobility that paid court to Alaine Tarnowsky. He was in love with her, but he was a gentleman about it. A thoroughbred, I say."

"Good looking?" I inquired.

"Well, rather! The sort of chap women rave about. Ask Betty. She was mad about him. But he couldn't see anything in her. I think she hates him now. He had eyes for no one but the fair Countess. An awful grind on Betty. She's used to something different."

Hazard studied the clouds that drifted over our heads. "I wonder if Alaine cared anything for him."

"I've always believed that she liked him better than she cared to admit, even to herself."

"I fancy he'll not let any grass grow under his feet, now that she's free," said Dr. Hazard.

"Think she'll have him?"

"Why not? He has a much better position in England than Tarnowsky has here, and he's not after her money. I hate to say it, but Alaine is a seeker after titles. She wouldn't be averse to adding 'your ladyship' to her collection."

"Oh, come!" I protested. "That is a nasty thing to say, George."

"She may have regenerated," he said obligingly. "You know her better than I do, old chap. What say?"

"I didn't say anything," I muttered. "I thought you did."

I hesitated a moment and then purged myself of the truth. "As a matter of fact, I have reason to believe she's in love with Amberdale and has been for a long time. I'm not saying it in disparagement, believe me. God knows she's entitled to something decent and fine in the shape of love. I hope he's good enough for her."

They looked at me with interest, and Smith broke the momentary silence.

"Oh, he's good enough for her," he said, with a queer smile.

"I'm glad of that," I said gruffly.

"The old la— I mean Mrs. Titus will be tickled to death if the match is pulled off," said Hazard.

"She was tickled the first time," said I sentimentally, and changed the subject. There was no sense in prolonging the agony.

Toward the close of their visit, a message arrived from the Countess herself, signed with the fictitious name we had agreed upon. The news she gave caused us to celebrate that night. We had a bonfire in the courtyard and drank to the god of good luck.

"Cargo safely landed in New York and forwarded to the Adirondacks for storage and to await the appearance of a claimant. Former owner has agreed to accept million and a half and release all claims. When are you coming over?" (Signed) "ALROSE."

moves me in this matter and I earnestly hope that you may be induced to part with your white elephant. If you will be so kind as to wire your decision you will find me deeply grateful, and at the Ritz for the ensuing fortnight.

"Faithfully yours,"

"MARIS TARNOWSKY."

My "white elephant!" I was so eager to get rid of it that I would have wired at once, naming a figure proportionately low had it not been for the united protests of my four friends and the canny advice of Mr. Poopendyke.

"Seak him," said he, and I arose to the occasion.

I waited for three days and then telegraphed him that I would not take a Heller less than two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, more than doubling the price I had paid for the property. I was prepared, however, to come down a paltry hundred thousand or so if he revealed signs of reluctance.

We built another bonfire that night and danced around it like so many savages.

"Terms acceptable. Will come to Schloss Rothhoefen at once to complete the transfer."

CHAPTER XIX.

I Burn a Few Bridges.

Accompanied by Hazard and Smith, I went over the castle from top to bottom, in quest of the reason for Tarnowsky's prompt acceptance of my demand. We made no doubt that he had a good and sufficient reason for wanting the place, and but one thing suggested itself to our imagination: his absolute certainty that treasure was hidden somewhere about the venerable pile, treasure of considerable magnitude, you may be sure, or he would not have revealed such alacrity in accepting my terms. Sentiment had nothing to do with this surprising move on his part. That was all bosh. He had an ulterior motive, and it was for me to get the better of him at his own game if I could. While I was eager to get rid of the castle at any price, I did not relish the thought of being laughed at for a fool by Maris Tarnowsky after he had laid his greedy hands upon treasure that had been mine without my knowledge.

He was no fool. The castle meant nothing to him as a home or as an investment. No doubt he would blow it to pieces in order to unearth the thing he knew its walls secreted.

We spent two unprofitable days in going over the place, and in the end sank down tired, defeated and without the slightest evidence in our possession that so much as a half crown lay hidden there as treasure-trove. I gave in and announced that if Tarnowsky could find anything worth having he was entitled to it so far as I was concerned, and I wouldn't begrudge him a farthing's worth.

He telegraphed that he would arrive on the morning of the third day, accompanied by his lawyer, a notary and an architect. My four guests departed in haste by the late night train, after extracting a promise from me to join them in Vienna when I was no longer the master of Schloss Rothhoefen. I rather relished the thought of a brief vacation.

Then, like the spider, I crept back into my web and waited for the foolish fly, knowing all the time that he would have the better of me in the long run.

I confess to a feeling of sadness in parting with the place, after all, elephantine thought it was in every sense of the word. Within its gray and ancient walls that beautiful thing called love had come to me, to live with me forever. It had come unbidden, against my will, against my better judgment, and in spite of my prejudices, but still it was a thing to cherish and to hold in its virgin youth all through the long years to come. It would always be young and sweet and rose-colored, this unrequited love of mine. Walking through the empty, dismantled rooms that had once been hers, I grew sick with longing, and, in something like fear, fled downward, absurd tears blinding my eyes. Verily, I was a fool—a monstrous, silly fool!

Tarnowsky was as bland and smiling as a May morning as he came jauntily down the great hall to where I awaited him.

"I am here incognito, my dear Smart," he said, extending his gloved hand, which I took perforce. "Sub-rosa, you might say, he went on with a wry smile. "A stupid, unchivalric empire has designs upon me, perfunctorily perhaps, but it's just as well not to stir up the monkeys, as you Americans would put it."

"Our late friend, the Baron, was not totally without friends, I take it," said I drily.

He made a grimace. "Nor enemies," he declared. "Brave men usually have more enemies than friends, and he was a brave man, a truly brave man. Because he was a brave man I have no feeling of regret over the outcome of our—er—meeting. It is no honor to kill a coward, Mr. Smart."

He introduced his three companions. I was surprised to see that the lawyer was not the fawning Schymansky, and later on inquired for him. Tarnowsky laughed. "Poor old Schymansky! He is in prison."

"Aha! I am not surprised," said I. "He was my second, poor chap. It did not occur to him to run away after the—er—duel. They had to make an example of someone. His trial comes up next week. I am afraid he may be dealt with rather harshly. I miss him dreadfully. But let us come to the matter in hand, Mr. Smart. I daresay your time is valuable. You have no

objection to my going over the place with Mr. Saks, I am sure. He is the architect who is to rebuild the castle for me. My attorney and Mr. Pooley—the notary—will, with your assistance, draw up the proper contracts preliminary to the formal transfer, and I will sign them with you upon my return."

"Would it not be better to discuss the question of payments before we go any further, Count Tarnowsky?"

"You will be paid in cash, Mr. Smart, the instant the deed is transferred," he said coldly.

I followed him to the top of the stairs which descended to the basement of the castle. It was rather significant that he elected to explore the lower regions first of all.

"I shall accompany you," said I deliberately.

A faint scowl came into his face. He eyed me fixedly for a moment, then shrugged his shoulders and said that his only desire was to avoid putting me to any unnecessary trouble. If I cared to come, he would be more than grateful.

"It isn't necessary to visit the cellars, Saks," he said to the architect. "Ample time for that sort of rummaging. I particularly want your opinion on the condition of the intersecting walls on this floor and above. My scheme of improvements, Mr. Smart, contemplates the enlargement of these halls by throwing them into one."

"A very simple process," said I. "If the whole structure doesn't topple down upon your heads while you're about it."

"I shall contrive to save my scalp, Mr. Smart, no matter what happens. It is very precious to me."

We went over the castle rather hurriedly, I thought, but he explained that Saks merely wanted a general idea of the structure; he would return another day to make a careful inspection.

"I daresay you are surprised that I should be willing to pay double your price for Schloss Rothhoefen," he ventured, pausing in the corridor to light a cigarette. We were on our way to the top of the east wing.

"Oh, no," I said calmly. "I am aware that treasure is buried here. As a matter of fact, I've tried to unearth it myself, but without success. I wish you better luck."

"Thanks," said he laconically, after the first swift glance of inquiry. "It is doubtless a fairy tale, handed down by tradition. I take no stock in it. My principal object in acquiring Rothhoefen is to satisfy a certain vanity which besets me. I have it on excellent authority that my ex-father-in-law—the man Titus, you know—talks of buying the property and performing the stupendous, characteristic American feat of removing it, stone and timber, just as it is, to his estate north of New York City. No one but a vulgar, purse-proud American would think of doing such a thing."

The news staggered me. Could there be anything in what he said? If it was true that Jasper Titus contemplated such a quixotic move, there could be but one compelling force behind the whim: sentiment. But not sentiment on the part of Jasper Titus.

"I cannot believe that he considers doing such a thing," I said rather blankly. "You see, if anyone should know I am that one. He has not approached me, of that you may be sure. He did not appear to be interested."

"My information is not authoritative, Mr. Smart," said he. "It came to me through my representatives who conferred with his lawyers a fortnight ago in regard to certain difficulties that had existed between us. From what they were able to gather, the idea has taken root in the old man's head. Now, I want to buy this place for no other reason than to tell him that he hasn't enough money in his possession to purchase it from me. Do you see? Vanity, you may call it, as I do, but it pleases me to coddle it."

Very thoughtfully I strode along beside him. Would I be serving the Countess ill or well by selling the place to Tarnowsky? It was her whim, of course, and it was a foolish one.

"Suppose that he offered you twice what you are to pay me for the place," said I, struck by a sudden thought.

He laughed easily. "You will not, it seems, acquit me of cupidity, Mr. Smart. I should not sell to him under any consideration. That is final. Take it or leave it."

By this time we were in the rooms once occupied by the Countess. He glanced about the apartment carelessly. "Deserted, I observe," he remarked with a queer smile.

My heart almost stood still. "Eh? What do you mean?"

"If I am not mistaken, these are the rooms once occupied by your valet's wife. Am I right?"

I steepled myself. "She has gone away," I said. "Couldn't stand the climate."

"I see," said he, but he was still smiling. "How does your valet stand it?"

"Nicely," said I, with a conscious blush.

"I mean the separation, of course."

"Certainly. He is used to it."

"Isn't it rather odd that he should still think she is here in the castle?"

"Does he?" I murmured.

"I inquired for her when I encountered him downstairs. He said she was quite well this morning, except for a headache."

"She is subject to headaches, I believe," said I, with the utmost nonchalance. He lifted his right eyebrow slightly, but said no more on the subject.

(To Be Continued.)