

HOME AND FARM MAGAZINE SECTION SERIAL.

By George Barr McCutcheon

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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, 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. He is 35 years of age.

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 its owner, the 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. To Smart's amazement, the first night, he hears the cry of a baby.

Looking out at a balcony one night Smart sees the white figure of a woman silhouetted. He immediately begins a hunt for Schmick, the caretaker, to solve the mystery of who the woman may be. With the Schmicks he endeavors to break down a heavily barred door into that section of the castle, but fails. Smart learns that souvenir hunters from New York are demanding to buy the castle heirlooms. Smart's visitors demand to buy the curiosities of the castle although he assures them time and time again they are not on sale. They think he is holding out for a higher price. The would-be buyers are insulting, and are roughly ejected from the castle. Smart discovers a woman's face at an upper window. He is too much interested to attend to his correspondence, as is desired by his secretary. The story continues.

"WE OUGHT to clean them all up before we begin on the romance, sir. That's my suggestion. We shan't feel like stopping for a lot of silly letters—By the way, sir, when do you expect to start on the romance?" He usually spoke of them as romances. They were not novels to Poopendyke.

I came to my feet, the light of adventure in my eye.

"This very instant, Poopendyke," I exclaimed.

His face brightened. He loves work.

"Splendid! I will have your writing tablets ready in—"

"First of all, we must have a ladder. Have you seen to that?"

"A ladder?" he faltered, putting one foot back through the window in a most suggestive way.

"Oh," said I, remembering, "I haven't told you, have I? Look! Up there in that window. Do you see that?"

"What is it, sir? A rug?"

"Rug! Great Scott, man, don't you know a woman's hair when you see it?"

"I've never—or never seen it—you might say—just like that, is it hair?"

"It is. You do see it, don't you?"

"How did it get there?"

"Good! Now I know I'm not dreaming. Come! There's no time to be lost. We may be able to get up there before she hears us!"

I was through the window and half way across the room before his well-meant protest checked me.

"For heaven's sake, Mr. Smart don't be too hasty. We can't rush in upon a woman unexpectedly like this. Who knows? She may be entirely—"

He caught himself up sharply, blinked, and then rounded out his sentence in safety with the word "dehabille."

I was not to be turned aside by drivel of that sort; so, with a scornful laugh, I hurried on and was soon in the courtyard, surrounded by at least a score of persons who madly inquired where the fire was, and wanted to help me to put it out. At last we managed to get them back at their work, and I instructed old Conrad to have the tallest ladder brought to me at once.

"There is no such thing about the castle," he announced blarney, puffing away at his enormous pipe. His wife shook her head in perfect serenity. Somewhat dashed, I looked about me in quest of proof that they were lying to me. There was no sign of anything that even resembled a ladder.

"Where are your sons?" I demanded.

The old couple held up their hands in great distress.

"Herr Britton has them working their souls out, turning a windlass outside the gates—ach, that terrible invention of his!" groaned old Conrad.

"My poor sons are faint with fatigue, mein herr. You should see them perspire—and hear them pant for breath."

"It is like the blowing of the forge bellows," cried his wife. "My poor little boys!"

"Fetch them at once, Conrad," said I, endgelling my brain for a means to surmount a present difficulty, and but very slightly interested in Britton's noble contraption.

The brothers soon appeared and, as if to give the lie to their fond parents, puffed complacently at their pipes and yawned as if but recently aroused from a nap. Their sleeves were rolled up and I marvelled at the size of their arms.

"Is Britton dead?" I cried, suddenly cold with the fear that they had mutinied against this brusque English overlord.

They smiled. "He is waiting to be pulled up again, sir," said Max. "We left him at the bottom when you sent for us. It is for us to obey."

Of course, everything had to wait while my obedient vassals went forth and reeled the discomforted Britton to the top of the steep. He sputtered considerably until he saw me laughing at him. Instantly he was a valet once more, no longer a crabbed genius.

I had thought of a plan, only to discard it on measuring with my eye the distance from the ground to the lowest window in the east wing, second floor back. Even by standing on the shoulders of Rudolph, who was six feet five, I would still find myself at least ten feet short of the window ledge. Happily a new idea struck me almost at once.

In a jiffy, half a dozen carpenters were at work constructing a substantial ladder out of scantlings, while I stood over them in serene command of the situation.

The Schmicks segregated themselves and looked on, regarding the window with sly, furtive glances in which there was a distinct note of uneasiness.

At last the ladder was complete. Resolutely I mounted to the top and peered through the sashless window. It was quite black and repelling beyond. Instructing Britton and the two brothers to follow me in turn, I climbed over the wide stone sill and lowered myself gingerly to the floor.

I will not take up the time or the space to relate my experiences on this first fruitless visit to the east wing of my abiding place. Suffice to say, we got as far as the top of the stairs in the vast middle corridor after stumbling through a series of dim, damp rooms, and then found our way effectually blocked by a stout door which was not only locked and bolted, but bore a most startling admiration to would-be trespassers.

Pinned to one of the panels there was a dainty bit of white note-paper, with these satiric words written across its surface in a bold, feminine hand:

"Please keep out. This is private property."

Most property owners no doubt would have been incensed by this calm defiance on the part of a squatter, either male or female, but not I. The very impudence of the usurper appealed to me. What could be more delicious than her serene courage in dispossessing me, with the stroke of a pen, of at least two-thirds of my domicile, and what more exciting than the thought of waging war against her in the effort to regain possession of it? Really it was quite glorious! Here was a happy, enchanting bit of feudalism that stirred my romantic soul to its very depths. I was being defied by a woman—an amazon! Even my grasping imagination could not have asked for more substantial returns than this. To put her to rout! To storm the castle! To make her captive and chuck her into my dungeon! Splendid!

We returned to the courtyard and held a counsel of war. I put all of the Schmicks on the grill, but they stubbornly disclaimed all interest in or knowledge of the extraordinary occupant of the east wing.

"We can smoke her out, sir," said Britton.

I could scarcely believe my ears.

"Britton," said I severely, "you are a brute. I am surprised. You forget there is an innocent babe—maybe a collection of them—over there. And a dog. We shan't do anything heathenish, Britton. Please bear that in mind. There is but one way: we must storm the place. I will not be defied to my very nose." I felt it to see if it was not a little out of joint. "It is a good nose."

"It is, sir," said Britton, and Poopendyke, in a perfect ecstasy of loyalty, shouted: "Long live your nose, sir!"

My German vassals waved their hats, perceiving that a demonstration was required without in the last knowing what it was about.

"Tonight we'll plan our campaign," said I, and then returned in some haste to my balcony. The mists of the waning day were rising from the valley below. The smell of rain was in the air. I looked in vain for the lady's tresses. They were gone. The sun was also gone. His work for the day was done. I wondered whether she was putting up her hair with her own fair hands or was there a lady's maid in her menage.

Poopendyke and I dined in solemn grandeur in the great banquet hall, attended by the clumsy Max.

"Mr. Poopendyke," said I, after Max passed me the fish for the second time on my right side—and both times across my shoulder—"we must engage a butler and a footman tomorrow. Likewise a chef. This is too much."

"Might I suggest that we also engage a chambermaid? The beds are very poorly—"

I held up my hand, smiling confidently.

"We may capture a very competent chamberman before the beds are made up again," I said, with meaning.

"She doesn't write like a chambermaid," he reminded me.

Whereupon we fell to studying the very aristocratic chirography employed by my neighbor in barring me from my own possessions.

After the very worst meal that Frau Schmick had ever cooked, and the last

one that Max under any circumstances would be permitted to serve, I took myself off once more to the enchanted balcony. I was full of the fever of romance. A perfect avalanche of situations had been tumbling through my brain for hours, and, being a provident sort of chap in my own way, I decided to jot them down on a pad of paper before they quite escaped me or were submerged by others.

The night was very black and tragic, swift storm clouds having raced up to cover the moon and stars. With a radiant lantern in the window behind me, I sat down with my pad and my pipe and my pencil. The storm was not far away. I saw that it would soon be booming about my stronghold, and realized that my fancy would have to work faster than it had ever worked before if half that I had in mind was to be accomplished. Why I should have courted a broken evening on the exposed balcony, instead of beginning my labors in my study, remains an unrevealed mystery, unless we charge it to the account of a much-abused eccentricity attributed to genius and which usually turns out to be arrant stupidity.

(To Be Continued.)

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