

HOME AND FARM MAGAZINE SECTION SERIAL.

By
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McCutcheon

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A Fool and His Money

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS INSTALLMENTS.

In the opening instalments 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. Later he 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. Smart determines to solve the mystery of the east wing of the castle and enters a window by means of a ladder. He is blocked by a stout door on which is pinned a note reading: "Please keep out. This is private property." Later he meets the woman, who greatly puzzles him.

CHAPTER IV.

I Become an Ancestor.

TRUE to the promise she had extracted from me, I laid off my workmen the next morning. They trooped in bright and early, considerably augmented by fresh recruits who came to share the benefits of my innocuous prodigality, and if I live to be a thousand I shall never again experience such a noisome half hour as the one spent in listening to their indignant protests against my tyrannical oppression of the poor and needy. In the end, I agreed to pay them, one and all, for a full day's work, and they went away mollified, calling me a true gentleman to my face and heaven knows what to my back.

I spoke gently to them of the sick baby. With one voice they all shouted:

"But our babies are sick!"

One octogenarian—a carpenter's apprentice—heatedly informed me, through Schmick, that he had a child two weeks old that would die before morning if deprived of proper food and nourishment. Somewhat impressed by this pitiful lament, I enquired how his wife was getting along. The ancient, being in a placid state of senility, courteously thanked me for my interest, and answered that she had been dead for forty-nine years, come September. I overlooked the slight discrepancy.

During the remainder of the day, I insisted on the utmost quiet in our wing of the castle. Poopendyke was obliged to take his typewriter out to the stables, where I dictated scores of letters to him. I caught Britton whistling in the kitchen about noon-time, and severely reprimanded him. We went quite to the extreme, however, when we tiptoed about our lofty halls. All of the afternoon we kept a sharp lookout for the doctor, but if he came we were none the wiser. Britton went into the town at three with the letters and a telegram to my friends in Vienna, imploring them to look up a corps of efficient servants for me and to send them on post-haste. I would have included a request for a competent nurse-maid if it hadn't been for a report from Poopendyke, who announced that he had caught a glimpse of a very nifty-looking person at one of the upper windows earlier in the day.

I couldn't, however, for the life of me understand why my neighbor enjoined such rigid silence in our part of the castle and yet permitted that confounded dog of hers to yowl and bark all day. How was I to know that the beast had treed a lizard in the lower hall and couldn't dislodge it?

Britton returned with news. The ferrymen, with great joy in the telling, informed him that the reason for tourists parties was just beginning and that we might expect, with them, to do a thriving and prosperous business during the next month or two. Indeed, word already had been received by the tourists company's agent in the town that a party of one hundred and sixty-nine would arrive the next day but one from Munchen, bent on visiting my

ruin. In great trepidation, I had all of the gates and doors locked and reinforced by sundry beams and slabs, for I knew the overpowering nature of the collective tourist.

I may be pardoned if I digress at this time to state that the party of one hundred and sixty-nine, both stern and oppsite, besieged my castle on the next day but one, with the punctuality of locusts, and despite all of my precautions, all of my devices, all of my objections, effected an entrance and overran the place like a swarm of ants. The feat that could not have been accomplished by an armed force was successfully managed by a group of pedagogues from Ohio, to whom "Keep off the Grass" and "No Trespass" are signs of utter impotence on the part of him who puts them up, and ever shall be, world without end. They came, they saw, they conquered, and they tried to buy picture postcards of me.

I mention this in passing, lest you should be disappointed. More anon.

Punctually at nine o'clock, I was in the balcony, thanking my lucky stars that it was a bright, moonlit night. There was every reason to rejoice in the prospect of seeing her face clearly when she appeared at her secret little window. Naturally, I am too much of a gentleman to have projected unfair means of illuminating her face, such as the use of a pocket electric lamp or anything of that sort. I am nothing if not gallant—when it comes to a pinch. Besides, I was reasonably certain that she would wear a thick black veil. In this I was wrong. She wore a white, filmy one, but it served the purpose. I naturally concluded that she was homely.

"Good evening," she said, on opening the window.

"Good evening," said I, contriving to conceal my disappointment. "How is the baby?"

"Very much better, thank you. It was so good of you to stop the workmen."

"Won't you take off your veil and stay awhile?" I asked, politely facetious. "It isn't quite fair to me, you know."

Her next remark brought a blush of confusion to my cheek. A silly notion had induced me to don my full evening regalia, spike-tail coat and all. Nothing could have been more ludicrously incongruous than my appearance, I am sure, and I never felt more uncomfortable in my life.

"How very nice you look in your new suit," she said, and I was aware of a muffled quality in her ordinarily clear, musical voice. She was laughing at me. "Are you giving a dinner party?"

"I usually dress for dinner," I lied with some haughtiness. "And so does Poopendyke," I added as an afterthought. My blush deepened as I recalled the attenuated blazer in which my secretary breakfasted, lunched and dined without discrimination.

"For Gretel's benefit, I presume."

"Ah! you do know Gretel, then?"

"Oh, I've known her for years. Isn't she a quaint old dear?"

"I shall discharge her in the morning," said I severely. "She is a liar and her husband is a poltroon. They positively deny your existence in any shape or form."

"They won't pay any attention to you," said she, with a laugh. "They are fixtures, quite as much so as the walls themselves. You'll not be able to discharge them. My grandfather tried it fifty years ago and failed. After that he made it a point to dismiss Conrad every day in the year and Gretel every other day. As well try to remove the mountain, Mr. Smart. They know you can't get on without them."

"I have discharged her as a cook," I said, triumphantly. "A new one will be here by the end of the week."

"Oh," she sighed plaintively, "how glad I am. She is an atrocious cook. I don't like to complain, Mr. Smart, but really it is getting so that I can't eat anything she sends up. It is jolly of you to get in a new one. Now we shall be very happy."

"By Jove!" said I, completely staggered by these revelations. Unable to find suitable words to express my sustained astonishment, I repeated: "By Jove!" but in a subdued tone.

"I have thought it over, Mr. Smart,"

she went on in a business-like manner, "and I believe we will get along much better together if we stay apart."

Ambiguous remarks ordinarily reach my intelligence, but I was so stunned by preceding admissions that I could only gasp:

"Do you mean to say you've been subsisting all this time on my food?"

"Oh, dear me, no! How can you think that of me? Gretel merely cooks the food I buy. She keeps a distinct and separate account of everything, poor thing. I am sure you will not find anything wrong with your bills, Mr. Smart. But did you hear what I said a moment ago?"

"I'm not quite sure that I did."

"I prefer to let matters stand just as they are. Why should we discommode each other? We are perfectly satisfied as we—"

"I will not have my new cook giving notice, madam. You surely can't expect her—or him—to prepare meals for two separate—"

"I hadn't thought of that," she interrupted ruefully. "Perhaps if I were to pay her—or him—extra wages it would be all right," she added, quickly. "We do not require much, you know."

I laughed rather shortly—meanly, I fear.

"This is most extraordinary, madam!"

"I—I quite agree with you. I'm awfully sorry it had to turn out as it has. Who would have dreamed of your buying the place and coming here to upset everything?"

I resolved to be firm with her. She seemed to be taking too much for granted. "Much as I regret it, madam, I am compelled to ask you to evacuate—to get out, in fact. This sort of thing can't go on."

She was silent for so long that I experienced a slow growth of compunction. Just as I was on the point of slightly receding from my position, she gave me another shock.

"Don't you think it would be awfully convenient if you had a telephone put in, Mr. Smart?" she said. "It is such a nuisance to send Max or Rudolph over to town every whip-stitch on errands when a telephone—in your name, of course—would be so much more satisfactory."

"A telephone?" I gasped.

"Circumstances make it quite unwise for me to have a telephone in my own name, but you could have one in yours without creating the least suspicion. You are—"

"Madam," I cried, and got no farther.

"—perfectly free to have a telephone if you want one," she continued. "The doctor came this evening and it really wasn't necessary. Don't you see you could have telephoned for me and saved him the trip?"

(It was due to the most stupendous exertion of self-restraint on my part that I said: "Well, I'll be—jiggered," instead of something a little less unique. Her audacity staggered me. (I was not prepared at that time to speak of it as superciliousness.)

"Madam," I exploded, "will you be good enough to listen to me? I am not to be trifled with. Tomorrow sometime I shall enter the east wing of this building if I have to knock down all the doors on the place. Do you understand, madam?"

"I do hope, Mr. Smart, you can arrange to break in about five o'clock. It will afford me a great deal of pleasure to give you some tea. May I expect you at five—or thereabouts?"

Her calmness exasperated me. I struck the stone balustrade an emphatic blow with my fist, sorely peeling the knuckles, and ground out:

"For two cents I'd do it to-night!"

"Oh, dear—oh, dear!" she cried mockingly.

"You must be a dreadful woman," I cried out. "First, you make yourself at home in my house; then you succeed in stopping my workmen, steal my cook and men-servants, keep us all away with a barking dog, defying me to my very face—"

"How awfully stern you are!"

"I don't believe a word you say about a sick baby—or a doctor! It's all poppy-cock. Tomorrow you will find yourself, bag and baggage, sitting at

the bottom of this hill, waiting for—"

"Wait!" she cried. "Are you really, truly in earnest?"

"Most emphatically!"

"Then I—I shall surrender," she said, very slowly—and seriously, I was glad to observe.

"That's more like it," I cried, enthusiastically.

"On one condition," she said. "You must agree in advance to let me stay on here for a month or two. It—it is most imperative, Mr. Smart."

"I shall be the sole judge of that, madam," I retorted, with some dignity. "By the way," I went on, knitting my brows, "how am I to get into your side of the castle? Schmick says he's lost the keys."

A good deal depended on her answer. "They shall be delivered to you tomorrow morning, Mr. Smart," she said, soberly. "Good night."

The little window closed with a snap and I was left alone in the smiling moonlight. I was vastly excited, even thrilled by the prospect of a sleepless night. Something told me I wouldn't sleep a wink, and yet I, who bitterly resent having my sleep curtailed in the slightest degree, held no brief against circumstances. In fact, I rather revelled in the promise of nocturnal distraction. Fearing, however, that I might drop off to sleep at three or four o'clock and thereby run the risk of over sleeping, I dashed off to the head of the stairs and shouted for Britton.

"Britton," I said. "I want to be called at seven o'clock sharp in the morning." Noting his polite struggle to conceal his astonishment, I told him of my second encounter with the lady across the way.

"She won't be expecting you at seven, sir," he remarked. "And, as for that, she may be expecting to call on you, instead of the other way round."

"Right!" said I, considerably dashed.

"Besides, sir, would it not be safer to wait till the tourist party has come and gone?"

(To Be Continued.)

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