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A FOOL AND HIS MONEY

By
GEORGE BARR M'CUTCHEON,
Author of "Graustark,"
"Truxton King," Etc.

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SYNOPSIS.

John Bellamy Smart, unmarried and heir to a fortune, while abroad with his secretary, Poopendyke, and his valet, Britton, buys a dilapidated castle on the Danube, in care of the Schmicks, and discovers a mysterious woman inhabiting one of the towers.

Smart fails to batter down a huge door leading to the east wing in search of the fair lady. He interrupts a visit of American relic hunters.

Their amusing attempts to buy some of the castle's ancient furniture result in their discomfiture and hurried departure. Smart catches a glimpse of his fair neighbor's waving hair.

Another visit to the mysterious east wing fails, but later the beautiful stranger strikes up an acquaintance with the new owner through a secret loophole.

She agrees to entertain him at tea. Meanwhile he learns the history of the old castle from the Schmicks and receives a visit from a crowd of tourists.

Refusing to be put off by the fair chateau's plea of a headache, Smart batters down the doors to the maiden's apartments. Here a surprise awaits him.

He learns she is a rich American girl, divorced from her nobleman husband, and is in hiding, having kidnaped her own baby.

The Hazards, friends of Smart, visit the castle, bringing with them the countess's husband, masquerading as Mr. Pless. Smart learns the villain's identity.

Smart aids the countess to foil her ex-husband's attempt to find his way through a secret door and tries to throw the count off the track.

Smart dines with the countess in celebration of the departure of the count and other guests and she speaks of buried treasure.

The newspapers publish statements in which Smart is made to say he upholds Count Tarnowsky in everything. Smart sends a denial.

The count invites the "fool" to lend him \$100,000 for which he offers doubtful security. He shows resentment when the money is refused.

Smart is informed he is in love, an impression his secretary aids in creating by sending flowers to the countess. Bangs, a lawyer, reports to the countess.

Count Tarnowsky and a Mr. Schwartzmuller visit the castle, offering to restore ancient frescoes for \$50,000. Blows are struck, and the count draws a pistol.

The countess unfolds a plan whereby her mother, Mrs. Titus, hopes to get her safely out of the country.

Smart motors to the railroad station to meet Mrs. Titus, but she arrives with her sons, Colingraft and Jasper, by a different route.

(Continued from last week.)

CHAPTER XIX.

I Meet Mrs. Titus.

WHILE we were crossing the muddy stream my secretary, his teeth chattering with cold and excitement combined, related the story of the night.

"We were just starting off for the boathouse up the river, according to plans. Max and Rudolph and I with the two boats, when the countess came down in a mackintosh and a pair of gum boots and insisted upon going along with us. She said it wasn't fair to make you do all the work and all that sort of thing. While we were arguing with her—and it was getting so late that I feared we wouldn't be in time to meet you—we heard some one shouting on the opposite side of the river. The voice sounded something like Britton's, and the countess insisted that there had been an accident and that you were hurt, Mr. Smart, and nothing would do but we must send Max and Rudolph over to see what the trouble was. It was raining cats and dogs, and I realized that it would be impossible for you to get a boatman on that side at that hour of the night—it was nearly 1—so I sent the two Schmicks across. I've never seen a night as dark as it was. The two little lanterns bobbing in the boat could hardly be seen through the torrents of rain, and it was next to impossible to see the lights on the opposite landing stage—just a dull, misty glow.

"To make the story short, Mrs. Titus and her sons were over there, with absolutely no means of crossing the river. It took two trips over to fetch the whole party across. Raining pitch forks all the time, you understand Mrs. Titus was foaming at the mouth because you don't own a yacht or at least a launch with a canopy top or a limousine body or something of the sort.

"I didn't have much of a chance to converse with her. The countess tried to get her upstairs in the east wing, but she wouldn't climb another step. I forgot to mention that the windlass was out of order and she had to climb the hill in mud six inches deep. The Schmicks carried her the last half of the distance. She insisted on sleeping in the hall or the study—anywhere but upstairs. I assumed the responsibility of putting her in your bed, sir. It was either that or—

"I broke in sarcastically, "You couldn't have put her into your bed, I suppose."

"Not very handily, Mr. Smart," he said in an injured voice. "One of her sons occupied my bed. Of course it was all right, because I didn't intend to go to bed, as it happened. The old-

er son went upstairs with the countess. She gave up her bed to him, and then she and I sat up all night in the study waiting for a telephone message from you. The younger son explained a good many things to us that his mother absolutely refused to discuss. She was so mad when she got here. It seems she took it into her head at the last minute to charter a special train, but forgot to notify us of the switch in the plans. She traveled by the regular train from Paris to some place along the line, where she got out and waited for the special which was following along behind, straight from Paris too. A woeful waste of money. It seemed to me. Her idea was to throw a couple of plain clothes men off the track, and, by George, sir, she succeeded. They thought she was changing from a train to some place in Switzerland and went off to watch the other station. Then she sneaked aboard the special, which was chartered clear through to Vienna. See how clever she is? If they followed on the next train or telegraphed it would naturally be to Vienna. She got off at this place, and—well, we have her with us, sir, as snug as a bug in a rug."

"What is she like Fred?" I inquired.

"I confess that I hung on his reply.

"I have never seen a wet hen, but I should say on a guess that she's a good bit like one. Perhaps when she's thoroughly dried out she may not be so bad, but—he drew a long, deep breath—"but upon my word of honor she was the limit last night. Of course one couldn't expect her to be exactly gracious, with her hair plastered over her face and her hat spoiled and her clothes soaked, but there was really no excuse for some of the things she said to me. I shall overlook them for your sake and for the countess." He was painfully red in the face.

"The conditions, Fred," I said, "were scarcely conducive to polite persiflage."

"But, hang it all, I was as wet as she was," he exploded so violently that I knew his soul must have been tried to the utmost.

"We must try to make the best of it," I said. "It will not be for long." The thought of it somehow sent my heart back to its lowest level.

He was grim and silent for a few minutes. Then he said, as if the thought had been on his mind for some hours: "She isn't a day over forty-five. It doesn't seem possible, with a six foot son twenty-six years old."

Grimly I explained, "They marry quite young when it's for money, Fred."

"I suppose that's it," he sighed. "I fancy she's handsome, too, when she hasn't been rained upon."

We were halfway up the slope when he announced nervously that all of my dry clothing was in the closet off my bedroom and could not be got at under any circumstance.

"But," he said, "I have laid out my best frock coat and trousers for you and a complete change of linen. You are quite welcome to anything I possess, Mr. Smart. I think if you take a couple of rolls at the bottom of the trousers they'll be presentable. The coat may be a little long for you, but—"

My loud laughter cut him short.

"It's the best I could do," he said in an aggrieved voice.

I had a secret hope that the countess would be in the courtyard to welcome me, but I was disappointed. Old Girel met me and wept over me, as if I was not already sufficiently moist. The chef came running out to say that breakfast would be ready for me when I desired it; Blatchford felt of my coat sleeve and told me that I was quite wet; Hawkes had two large, steaming toddlers waiting for us in the vestibule, apparently fearing that we could get no farther without the aid of a stimulant. But there was no sign of a single Titus.

Later I ventured forth in Poopendyke's best suit of clothes, the one he uses when he passes the plate on Sundays in faraway Yonkers. It smelled of moth balls, but it was gloriously dry, so why carp? We sneaked down the corridor past my own bedroom door and stole into the study.

Just inside the door I stopped in amazement. The countess was sound asleep in my big armchair, a forlorn and lovely thing in a pink peignoir. Her rumpled brown hair nestled in the angle of the chair; her hands drooped listlessly at her sides; dark lashes lay upon the soft white cheeks; her lips were parted ever so slightly, and her bosom rose and fell in the long swell of perfect repose.

Poopendyke clutched me by the arm and drew me toward the door or I might have stood there transfixed for heaven knows how long.

"She's asleep," he whispered.

It was the second time in twelve hours that some one had intimated that I was blind.

The door creaked villainously. The gaunt, ecclesiastical tails of my borrowed frock coat were on the verge of being safely outside with me when she cried out, whereupon I swiftly transposed myself and stuck my head through the half open door.

"Oh, it's you!" she cried, in a quavery voice. She was leaning forward in the chair, her eyes wide open and eager.

I advanced into the room. A look of doubt sprang into her face. She stared for a moment and then rather pitiously rubbed her eyes.

"Yes, it is I," said I, spreading my arms in such a way that my hands emerged from the confines of Poopendyke's sleeves. "Upon my word, I had no idea that he was so much longer than I!" "It is still I, countess, despite the shrinkage?"

"The shrinkage?" she murmured slowly sliding out of the chair. As she unbent her cramped leg she made a little grimace of pain, but smiled as she

limped toward me, her hand extended.

"Yes, I always shrink when I get wet," I explained, resorting to face flattery.

Then I bent over her hand and kissed it. As I neglected to release it at once, the cuff of Poopendyke's best coat slid down over our two hands, completely enveloping them. It was too much for me to stand. I squeezed her hand with painful fervor and then released it in trepidation.

"Poopendyke goes to church in it," I said vaguely, leaving her to guess what it was that Poopendyke went to church in, or, perhaps, knowing what I meant, how I happened to be in it for the time being. "You've been crying!"

Her eyes were red and suspiciously moist.

As she met my concerned gaze, a wavering, whimsical smile crept into her face.

"It has been a disgustingly wet night," she said. "Oh, you don't know how happy I am to see you standing here once more, safe and sound, and—and amiable. I expected you to glower and growl and—"

"On a bright, glorious, sunshiny morning like this?" I cried. "Never! I prefer to be graciously refulgent. Our troubles are behind us."

"How good you are!" After a moment's careful scrutiny of my face she added, "I can see the traces of very black thoughts, Mr. Smart, and recent ones."

"They were black until I came into this room," I confessed. "Now they are rose tinted."

She bent her slender body a little toward me, and the red seemed to leap back into her lips as if propelled by magic. Resolutely I put my awkward, ungainly arms behind my back and straightened my figure. I was curiously impressed by the discovery that I was very, very tall and she very much smaller than my memory recorded. Of course I had no means of knowing that she was in bedroom slippers and not in the customary high heeled boots that gave her an inch and a half of false stature.

"Your mother is here," I remarked hurriedly.

She glanced toward my bedroom door.

"Oh, what a night!" she sighed. "I did all that I could to keep her out of your bed. It was useless. I did cry, Mr. Smart. I know you must hate all of us."

I laughed. "Love thy neighbor as thyself," I quoted. "You are my neighbor, countess. Don't forget that. And so happens that your mother is also my neighbor at present, and your brothers too. Have you any cousins and aunts?"

"I can't understand how any one can be so good natured as you," she sighed. "The crown of her head was on a level with my shoulder. Her eyes were lowered. A faint line of distress grew between them. For a minute I stared down at the brown crest of her head, an almost ungovernable impulse pounding away at my sense of discretion. I do take credit unto myself for being strong enough to resist that opportunity to make an everlasting idiot of myself. I knew even then that if a similar attack ever came upon me again I should not be able to withstand it."

All this time she was staring rather pensively at the second button from the top of Poopendyke's coat, and so prolonged and earnest was her gaze that I looked down in some concern, at the same time permitting myself to make a nervous, jerky and quite involuntary digital examination of the aforesaid button. She looked up with a nervous little laugh.

"I shall have to sew one on right there for poor Mr. Poopendyke," she said, poking her finger into the empty buttonhole. "You dear bachelors!"

Then she turned swiftly away from me and glided over to the big armchair, from the depths of which she fished a small velvet bag. Looking over her shoulder, she smiled at me.

"Please look the other way," she said. Without waiting for me to do so she took out a little gold box, a powder puff and a stick of lip rouge. Crossing to the small Florentine mirror that hung near my desk, she proceeded before my startled eyes to repair the slight—and to me unnoticeable—damage that had been done to her complexion before the sun came up.

"Woman works in a mysterious way, my friend, her wonders to perform," she paraphrased calmly.

"No matter how transcendently beautiful woman may be, she always does that sort of thing to herself, I take it," said I.

"She does," said the countess with conviction. She surveyed herself critically. "There! And now I am ready to accept an invitation to breakfast. I am disgustingly hungry."

"And so am I!" I cried with enthusiasm. "Hurray! You shall eat Poopendyke's breakfast just to penalize him for failing in his duties as host during my unavoidable!"

"Quite impossible," she said. "He has already eaten it."

"He has?"

"At half past 6, I believe. He announced at that ungodly hour that if he couldn't have his coffee the first thing in the morning he would be in for a headache all day. He suggested that I take a little nap and have breakfast with you—if you succeed in surviving the night."

"Oh, I see," said I slowly. "He knew all the time that you were napping in that chair, eh?"

"You shall not scold him!"

"I shall do even worse than that. I shall pension him for life."

She appeared thoughtful. A little frown of annoyance clouded her brow. "He promised faithfully to arouse me the instant you were sighted on

(Continued on page 4.)

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