

OH, MONEY! MONEY!

by Eleanor H. Porter



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CHAPTER I

Exit Mr. Stanley G. Fulton.

There was a thoughtful frown on the face of the man who was the possessor of \$20,000,000. He was a tall, spare man, with a fringe of reddish-brown hair encircling a bald spot. His blue eyes, fixed just now in a steady gaze upon a row of ponderous law books across the room, were friendly and benevolent in direct contradiction to the bulldog, never-let-go fighting qualities of the square jaw below the firm rather thin lips.

The lawyer, a youthfully alert man of 60 years, trimly gray as to garb, hair and mustache sat idly watching him, yet with eyes that looked so intently that they seemed to listen.

For fully five minutes the two men had been pulling at their cigars in silence when the millionaire spoke.

"Ned, what am I going to do with my money?"

Into the lawyer's listening eyes flashed, for a moment, the keenly scrutinizing glance usually reserved for the witness on the other side. Then quietly came the answer.

"Spent it yourself, I hope—for some years to come, Stanley."

Mr. Stanley G. Fulton was guilty of a shrug and an uplifted eyebrow.

"Thanks, very pretty, and I appreciate it of course. But I can't wear but one suit of clothes at a time, nor eat but one dinner—which, by the way, just now consists of somebody's health biscuit and hot water. Twenty millions don't really what you might call melt away at that rate."

The lawyer frowned.

"Shucks, Fulton," he expostulated, with an irritable twist of his hand. "I thought better of you than that. This poor rich man's one-suit, one-dinner, one-bed-at-a-time hard-luck story doesn't suit your style. Better cut it out!"

"All right. Cut it is." The man smiled good-humoredly. "But you see I was nettled. You didn't get me at all. I asked you what was to become of my money after I'd done spending it myself—the little that is left, of course."

"Once more from the lawyer's eyes flashed that keenly scrutinizing glance.

"What was it, Fulton? A midnight rabbit, or a wedge of mince pie not like mother used to make? Why, man alive, you're barely over 50, yet. Cheer up! It's only a little matter of indigestion. There are a lot of good days and good dinners coming to you yet."

The millionaire made a wry face.

"Very likely—if I survive the biscuits. But, seriously Ned, I'm in earnest. No, I don't think I'm going to die—yet, at least. But I ran across young Bixby last night—got him home, in fact. Delivered him to his white-faced little wife. Talk about your maudlin idiots!"

"Yes, I know. Too bad, too bad!"

"Hm-m; well, that's what one million did—inherited. It set me to thinking—of mine, when I get through with them."

"I see." The lawyer's lips came together a little grimly. "You've not made your will, I believe."

"No. Dressed it, somehow. Funny how a man'll fight shy of a little thing like that, isn't it? And when we're so mighty particular where it goes while we're living!"

"Yes, I know; you're not the only one. You have relatives—somewhere, I surmise."

"Nothing nearer than cousins, third or fourth, back east. They'd get it, I suppose—without a will."

The millionaire repeated the wry face of a moment before.

"I'm not a marrying man. I never did care much for women; and—I'm not fool enough to think that a woman would be apt to fall in love with my bald head. Nor am I obliged enough to care to hand the millions over to the woman that falls in love with them, taking me along as the necessary sack that holds the gold. If it comes to that, I'd rather risk the cousins. They, at least, are of my own blood, and they didn't angle to get the money."

"You know them?"

"Never saw 'em."

"NOW WHAT AM I GOING TO DO WITH MY MONEY?"

"Why not pick out a bunch of colleges and endow them?"

The millionaire shook his head.

"Doesn't appeal to me, somehow. Oh, of course, it ought to—but—it just doesn't. That's all. Maybe if I was a college man myself; but—well, I had to dig for what education I got."

"Very well—charities, then. There are numberless organizations that—"

He stopped abruptly at the other's uplifted hand.

"Organizations! Good heavens, I should think there were! I tried 'em once. I got that philanthropic bean in my bonnet, and I gave thousands, tens of thousands to 'em. Then I got to wondering where the money went."

Unexpectedly the lawyer chuckled.

"You never did like to invest without investigating, Fulton," he observed.

With only a shrug for an answer the other plunged on.

"Now, understand. I'm not saying that organized charity isn't all right, and doesn't do good, of course. Neither am I prepared to propose anything to take its place. And maybe the two or three I dealt with were particularly addicted to the sort of thing I objected to. But, honestly, Ned, if you'd lost heart and friends and money, and were just ready to chuck the whole shooting match, how would you like to become a case, say, No. 23,741, ticketed and docketed and duly apporportioned off to a six-by-nine rule of do this' and 'do that', while a dozen spectacled eyes watched you being cleaned up and regulated and wound up with a key made of just so much and no more parts and precepts carefully weighed and labeled? How would you like it?"

The lawyer laughed.

"I know; but, my dear fellow, what would you have? Surely, unorganized charity and promiscuous giving is worse—"

"Oh, yes, I've tried that way, too," shrugged the other. "There was a time when every Tom, Dick and Harry, with a run-down shoe and a ragged coat, could count on me for a 10-spot by just holding out his hand, no questions asked. Then a serious-eyed little woman sternly told me one day that the indiscriminate charity of a millionaire was not only a curse to any community, but a corruption to the whole state. I believe she kindly included the nation, as well, bless her! And I thought I was doing good!"

"What a blow—to you." There was a whimsical smile in the lawyer's eyes.

"It was." The millionaire was not smiling. "But she was right. It set me to thinking, and I began to follow up those 10-spots—the ones that I could trace. Jovel! what a mess I'd made of it! Oh, some of them were all right, of course, and I made those fifty on the spot. But the others—I tell you, Ned, money that isn't earned is the most risky thing in the world. If I'd left half those wretches alone they'd have braced up and helped themselves and made men of themselves, maybe. As it was—well, you never can tell as to the results of a so-called 'good' action. From my experience I should say they are every whit as dangerous as the bad ones."

The lawyer laughed outright.

"But, my dear fellow, that's just where the organized charity comes in. Don't you see?"

"Oh, yes, I know—Case No. 23,141! And that's all right, of course. Relief of some sort is absolutely necessary. But I'd like to see a little warm sympathy injected into it, some way. Give the machine a heart, say, as well as hands and a head."

"Then why don't you try it yourself?"

"Not I!" His gesture of dissent was emphatic. "I have tried it, in a way, and failed. That's why I'd like some one else to tackle the job. And that brings me right back to my original question, I'm wondering what my money will do, when I'm done with it. I'd like to have one of my own kin

have it—if I was sure of him. Money is a queer proposition, Ned, and it's capable of—most anything."

"It is. You're right."

"What I can do with it, and what some one else can do with it, are two quite different matters. I don't consider my efforts to circulate it wisely, or even harmlessly, exactly what you'd call a howling success. Whatever I've done, I've always been criticized for not doing something else. If I gave a costly entertainment, was accused of showy ostentation. If I didn't give it, I was accused of putting money into honest circulation."

"Oh, I'm going to be there, in Hillerton."

"There? Hillerton?"

"Yes, where the cousins live, you know. Of course I want to see how it works."

"Humph! I suppose you think you'll find out—with your watching every move!" The lawyer had settled back in his chair, an ironical smile on his lips.

"Oh, they won't know me, of course, except as John Smith."

"John Smith?" the lawyer was sitting erect again.

"Yes, I know what you mean, but I'm not crazy. And really I'm interested in genealogy, too, and I've been thinking for some time I'd go digging about the roots of my ancestral tree. I have dug a little, in years gone by. My mother was a Blaisdell, you know."

"Her grandfather was brother to some ancestor of these Hillerton Blaisdells; and I really am interested in collecting Blaisdell data. So that's all straight, I shall be telling no fibs. And think of the opportunity it gives me! Besides I shall try to board with one of them. I've decided that."

"Upon my word, a pretty little scheme!"

"Yes, I knew you'd appreciate it, the more you thought about it." Mr. Stanley G. Fulton's blue eyes twinkled a little.

With a disdainful gesture the lawyer brushed this aside.

"Do you mind telling me how you happened to think of it, yourself?"

"Not a bit. 'Twas a little booklet got out by a trust company."

"It sounds like it!"

"Oh, they didn't suggest exactly this, I'll admit; but they did suggest that, if you were fearful as to the way your heirs would handle their inheritance, you could create a trust fund for their benefit while you were living, and then watch the way the beneficiaries spent the income, as well as the way the trust fund itself was managed. In this way you could observe the effects of your gifts, and at the same time be able to change them if you didn't like results. That gave me an idea, I've just developed it. That's all. I'm going to make my cousins a little rich, and see which, if any of them, can stand being very rich."

"But the money, man! How are you going to drop a hundred thousand dollars into three men's laps, and expect to get away without an investigation as to the why and

wherefore of such a singular proceeding?"

"That's where your part comes in," smiled the millionaire blandly. "Besides, to be accurate, one of the laps is—er—a petticoat one."

"Oh, indeed! So much the worse, maybe. But—and so this is where I come in, is it? Well, and suppose I refuse to come in?"

"Regrettably I shall have to employ another attorney."

"Humph! Well?"

"But you won't refuse." The blue eyes opposite were still twinkling. "In the first place, you're my good friend—my best friend. You wouldn't be seen letting me start off on a wild-goose chase like this without your guiding hand at the helm to see that I didn't come a-cropper."

"Aren't you getting your metaphors a trifle mixed?" This time the lawyer's eyes were twinkling.

"Eh? What? Well, maybe. But I reckon you get my meaning. Besides, what I want to do is a mere routine of regular business, with you."

"It sounds like it. Routine, indeed!"

"But it is—your part. Listen, I'm off for South America, say, on an exploring tour. In your charge I leave certain papers with instructions that on the first day of the sixth month of my absence (I being unheard from), you are to open a certain envelope and act according to instructions within. Simplest thing in the world, man. Now, isn't it?"

"Oh, very simple—as you put it."

"Well, meanwhile I'll start for South America—alone, of course; and, so far as you're concerned, that ends it."

"If on the way, somewhere, I determine suddenly on a change of destination, that is none of your affair. If, say in a month or two, a quiet, inoffensive gentleman by the name of Smith arrives in Hillerton on the legitimate and perfectly respectable business of looking up a family pedigree, that also is none of your concern."

With a sudden laugh the lawyer fell back in his chair.

"By Jove, Fulton, if I don't believe you'll pull this absurd thing off!"

"There! Now you're talking like a

sensible man, and we can get somewhere. Of course I'll pull it off! Now here's my plan. In order best to judge how my esteemed relatives conduct themselves under the sudden accession of wealth, I must see them first without it, of course. Hence, I plan to be in Hillerton some months before your letter and the money arrive. I intend, indeed, to be on the friendliest terms with every Blaisdell in Hillerton before that time comes." (Continued Monday.)

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"Nonsense, Fulton! Have you lost your senses?"

"No." The millionaire still smiled imperturbably. "Really, my dear Ned, I'm disappointed in you. You don't seem to realize the possibilities of this thing."

"Oh, yes, I do—perhaps better than you, old man," retorted the other with an expressive glance.

"Oh, come, Ned, listen! I've got three cousins in Hillerton. I never saw them, and they never saw me. I'm going to give them a tidy little sum of money apiece, and then have the fun watching them spend it. Any harm in that, especially as it's no one's business what I do with my money?"

"No-no, I suppose not—if you can carry such a wild scheme through."

"I can, I think. I'm going to be John Smith."

"Nice distinctive name!"

"I chose a colorless one on purpose. I'm going to be a colorless person, you see."

"Oh! And—er—do you think Mr. Stanley G. Fulton, multimillionaire, with his pictured face in half the papers and magazines from the Atlantic to the Pacific, can hide that face behind a colorless John Smith?"

"Maybe not. But he can hide it behind a nice little close-cropped beard." The millionaire stroked his smooth chin reflectively.

"Humph! How large is Hillerton?"

"Eight or ten thousand. Nice little New England town, I'm told."

"Hm-m. And your—er—business in Hillerton, that will enable you to be the observing fly on your cousins' walls?"

"Yes, I've thought that all out, too; and that's another brilliant stroke. I'm going to be a genealogist. I'm going to be at work tracing the Blaisdell family—their name is Blaisdell. I'm writing a book which necessitates the collection of an endless amount of data. Now how about that fly's chances of observation, eh?"

"Mighty poor, if he's swatted—and that's what he will be! New England housewives are death on flies, I understand."

"Well I'll risk this one."

"You poor fellow! There were exasperation and amusement in the lawyer's eyes."

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