

Oliver October

By George Barr McCutcheon

WNU Service

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BORN TO BE HANGED

Here's a clever story about a man born to be hanged before he was thirty for a crime he didn't commit—that's the way a gypsy queen told his fortune the night he was born. And what's more, the gypsy queen was right; she was a palm reader who knew her business and wasn't afraid to admit it. So Oliver's father disappeared and the neighbors cried, "Murder!"

And before long they also yelled, "Oliver." And finally, just six days before Oliver's thirtieth birthday came along a lynching he strung him up. But, just the same, all this did not prevent Oliver's getting elected to the state senate and winning a pretty wife and living happily ever after. By George Barr McCutcheon. Enough said!

CHAPTER I

Oliver, Born in October

Oliver October Baxter, Jr., was born in the town of Rumley on a vile October day in 1890. Rumley people were divided in their excitement over this event and the arrival of a band of gypsies, camped on the edge of the swamp below the Baxter house.

Oliver's parents were prominent in the commercial, social and spiritual life of the town. His father was the proprietor of the hardware store, a prominent member of the Presbyterian church, and a leader in the local lodge of Odd Fellows. His mother, Mary Baxter, a comely, capable young woman, was beloved by all. No finer "youngun" than Oliver October had ever been born, according to Mrs. Serepta Grimes, and Serepta was an authority on babies. It was she who took command of Oliver, his mother and his father, the house itself, and all that therein was.

As the story of Oliver October really begins at 7 o'clock in the evening of his birthday, we will open the narrative with Mr. Joseph Sikes, Mr. Baxter's old and trusted friend, hovering in solitary gloom over the baseburner in the sitting room of Baxter's house. He was interrupted in his gloomy meditations by the slamming of the kitchen door. His brow grew dark. This was no time to be slamming doors.

Rushing to open the door, he was confronted by a pair of total strangers—a tall man with short black whiskers and a frail little woman with red, wind-smitten cheeks.

"I am Oliver Baxter's sister," announced the woman, "and this is my husband, Mr. Gooch. We drove all the way over here from Hopkinsville to take charge of things for my brother."

"Well, I guess if you are his sister you'd better come into the sitting room and take your things off," said Mr. Sikes, leading the way.

Mrs. Gooch, having divested herself of coat, scarf, bonnet and overshoes, straightened her hair before the looking glass, while her husband surveyed the room and its contents with the disdainful air of one used to much better things.

Gooch typified prosperity of the meaner kind. Over in Hopkinsville he was considered the richest and the stingiest man in town. He was what is commonly called a "tax shark," deriving a lucrative and obnoxious income through his practice of buying up real estate at tax sales and holding it until it was redeemed by the hard-pressed owner, or, as it happened in many instances, acquiring the property under a provision of the state law then in operation, whereby after a prescribed lapse of time he was enabled to secure a tax deed in his own name. No one, not even his fellow church members, had ever been known to get the better of him.

"I shall take charge here," Mrs. Gooch announced to Mr. Sikes. "Is this the way upstairs?"

Mr. Sikes nodded. "But if I was you," he said, "I'd ask Serepta Grimes before I took charge here."

"I will soon get rid of Mrs. Grimes," said she, tossing her head.

As she started to leave the room, a loud knocking at the front door rose above the howl of the wind. Sikes, resuming his office as master of ceremonies, pushed his way past Mrs. Gooch and opened the door to admit a woman and two men. The first to enter the sitting room was a tall man wearing a thin black overcoat and a high silk hat. This was Rev. Herbert Sage, pastor of the Presbyterian church of Rumley. The lady was his wife.

The other member of the trio, a fat, red-faced, jolly looking man of indeterminate age, was Silas Link, the undertaker, upholsterer and liverman of Rumley.

"Reverend" Sage was a good-looking young man of thirty, threadbare and a trifle worn, with kindly brown eyes set deep under a broad, intelligent brow. His wife was, surprisingly enough, a handsome, dashing young woman. She was tall, willowy and startling. She wore a sea-lark coat—at least it looked like sea-lark with sleeves that ballooned grandly at the shoulders; rather stunning coral earrings made up of graduated globes and a silky satin skirt of blue.

"Good evening, Mr. Sikes," she

drawled, as she scuffled past him into the sitting room. "Nice balmy weather to be born in, isn't it?"

Mr. Sikes, taken unawares, forgot himself so far as to wink at the parson, and then, in some confusion, stammered: "St-step right in, Mrs. Sage, and have a chair. Let me make you acquainted with Oliver's sister, from Hopkinsville. Reverend Sage, Mrs. Gooch. Mr. Link, Mrs. Gooch. And this is Oliver's brother-in-law, her husband, also of Hopkinsville."

Everybody bowed.

"How is your dear brother, Mrs. Gooch?" inquired Mr. Sage.

"I didn't know there was anything the matter with Oliver."

"There isn't anything the matter with him," said Mrs. Sage, "that a good, stiff drink of whisky won't cure."

"Ahem!" coughed her husband. He had the worried manner of one who never knew what is coming next.

His wife looked up into his face and smiled—a lovely, good-humored smile that was slowly transformed into a mischievous grimace.

"I'm always making breaks, am I not, Herby dear? It's a terrible strain, Mr. Gooch, being a parson's wife."

"Umph!" grunted Mr. Gooch.

At this juncture the sitting room door was opened and the proud father, followed by Serepta Grimes, entered the room. Beaming, he surveyed the assembled gathering.

"He's got the finest head you ever saw," he announced. "Got a head like a stevedamn."

Reverend Sage had moved over to one of the windows, while the other occupants of the room surrounded Baxter, and was gazing out between the curtains across the gale-swept porch into the blackness beyond. He shivered a little, poor chap, at the thought



The Light Fell Full Upon a Face Close to a Window Pane.

of going out again into the bitter, unbelievable night—at the thought of his cold little home at the farther end of the village.

He was thinking, too, of his wife and the mile walk she would have to take with him into the very teeth of the buffeting gale when this visit was over. She had come to this wretched little town from a great city, where houses and flats were warm and snug. He thought of the warm little room on the third floor of the boarding house where he had lived and studied for two full years. It was in this house that he had met Josephine Judge. She was the daughter of the kindly widow who conducted the boarding house—a tall, slim girl who used slang and was gay and blithe and had ambitions! Ambitions! She wanted to become an actress. She was stage-struck.

He was not a theater-going youth. He had been brought up with an abhorrence for the stage and all its iniquities. So he devoted himself, heart and soul, to the saving of the misguided maiden, with astonishing results. They fell in love with each other and were married.

He pressed his face against the cold pane, striving to rid his mind of the doubts and worries that beset it.

Suddenly he drew back with an exclamation. The light fell full upon a face close to the window pane, a face so startling and so vivid that it did not appear to be real. A pair of dark, gleaming eyes met his for a few seconds; then swiftly the face was withdrawn. He leaned forward and peered intently. Two indistinct figures took shape in the unrelieved darkness at the corner of the porch—two women, he made out.

"Joseph," he called, "there are two strange women on the porch. Perhaps you—"

"Go see who it is, Joe," commanded Mrs. Grimes crisply.

"Good evening, Mr. Sikes," she

Sikes hastened to obey, and returned presently in great excitement.

"Say, Ollie," he burst out, "there's a couple of women out here from that gypsy camp. They claim to be fortune-tellers. One of 'em wants to tell the baby's fortune. She says she knows a couple of weeks ago that he was going to be born today, that's what she says."

"Well, I'm not going to allow any gypsy woman to go nigh that infant," cried Mrs. Grimes.

"She says it ain't necessary to even see the baby. She says the only reliable and genuine way to tell a baby's fortune is by reading its father's hand."

Mr. Baxter arose. "Bring her in, Joe. Now, don't kick, Serepta. My mind's made up. I'm going to know my son's future."

Mr. Sikes rushed from the room. A moment later he returned, followed by two shivering women who stopped just inside the door.

The host, with a nervous sort of geniality, beckoned to the strangers. "Better come down to the fire, Queen."

The elder woman fixed a curious look upon Mr. Baxter.

"I am the queen of the gypsies, mister, but how came you to know it?" she asked in a hoarse, not unmusical voice.

"Always best to be on the safe side," said Baxter. "But look here. Do you mean to say, Queen, that you can look at my hand and tell what's ahead of my boy upstairs?"

"First, you must cross my palm with silver."

The company drew their chairs closer as Baxter dropped some coins into the gypsy's palm. Silence pervaded the room. Every eye was on the dark, impassive face of the fortune-teller as she seized Ollie's hand and began:

"I see a wonderful child. He is strong and sturdy. I can see his son of yours, mister, as a leader of men. Great honor is in store for him, and great wealth. I see men in uniform following your son—many men, mister, and all of them armed. I see him as a successful man, as the head of great undertakings. He has been out of college but a few years."

"That will please his mother," said Baxter, sniffing.

"Sh!" put in Mr. Sikes testily.

"I see him," continued the fortune-teller, "as he is nearing thirty. Rich, respected and admired. He will have many affairs of the heart. I see two dark women and—one, two—yes, three fair women."

"That would seem to show that he's going to be a purty good-looking sort of a feller, wouldn't it?" said Baxter, proudly.

"He will grow up to be the image of his father, mister."

The gypsy leaned back in her chair, spreading her hands in a gesture of finality.

"I see no more," she said.

"Is that all?" Mr. Baxter sniffed.

"Well, Queen, I guess you took us all in purty neatly."

Outraged royalty turned on him.

"You scoff at me. For that you shall have the truth. All that I have told you will come true. But I did not tell you of the end that I saw for him. Hark ye! This son of yours will go to the gallows. He will swing from the end of a rope for a crime of which he is not guilty." She was now speaking in a high shrill voice; her hearers sat open-mouthed, as if under a spell that could not be shaken off. "It is all as plain as the noonday sun. He will never reach the age of thirty. That is all. That is the end. I have spoken the truth. You forced me to do so. I go."

"Well, Oliver's got quite a career ahead of him. Can he live up to it?"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Bahama Islands

The Bahamas are a group of 3,000 islands, mostly reefs, of which only 20 are inhabited. The principal islands are: New Providence, population 13,354; Obaco, population 4,463; Great Bahama, 1,824; Andros, 7,546; and Harbor Island. The total area is 4,408½ square miles, and the highest point is over 410 feet above sea level. The principal city is Nassau, which is situated on New Providence, and is a fashionable health resort. The mean temperature in the hot months is 88 degrees Fahrenheit, and in the cold months 66 degrees Fahrenheit. There are heavy rains from May to October, and the rainfall in one year was 63.32.

Stick to Home-Made Bread

Although bakers' products have increased enormously in the last ten years, due to the letting-up of home cooking and baking and the increasing custom of entire families eating out, there are still many home makers who bake their own bread apparently, at least year the United States Department of Agriculture sent out more than 2,000,000 copies of the bulletin "Baking in the Home."

COSTUME SLIPS NOW IN FAVOR; FABRICS FOR TOTS' FROCKS

Now that the costume slip has supplanted the petticoat in point of favor it behooves the well-dressed woman to see to it that her wardrobe contains a goodly supply. To buy is one way of doing this; to make is another. Some of us prefer the latter for great glory in being able to say: "I made it myself." To such the following hints are respectfully subscribed.

For practical everyday wear slips buy pongee silk. It tubs perfectly, and

possession, for all sorts of sheer or lace frocks can be worn over it effectively. Style decrees that little folks' clothes must be featured with an abundance of cunning handwork—so here is mother's opportunity to keep busy with needle and gay-colored yarns during the long, tedious inter-season period when winter refuses to take its ice and snow and depart from hence.

There is any amount of fun to be had collecting lovely remnants in the



Showing Color Combinations.

is genteel in appearance. Several of these slips should be made up by the home seamstress now in readiness for spring.

A washable white satin or radium slip is also easily home-made, and at least one is necessary to the well-regulated wardrobe.

When it comes to the popular Italian silk costume slips the subject takes on an element of color importance. This is especially true for the coming season for the trend to exquisite pastel color combinations is as apparent in fashionable underthings as in the outer costume.

If one cannot afford to purchase pure silk knit yardage, then ask for rayon-knit. It is eminently satisfactory and costs so much less than genuine Italian silk.

The new color combinations can be carried out as exquisitely in one instance as the other. Here are some suggestions for lovely and up-to-the-

clearance sales which take place at this time of the year. Fashions are so cunning for youngsters it adds to the joy to choose this pattern and that and then "get busy" following directions.

Think of the pleasure in store for the home seamstress who has in contemplation the making of a little girl's white net frock, for net is one of the materials favored for little girls' dainty dresses, which will serve now for wear at winter parties and later for summertime dress-up affairs. The fairytale sleeveless straight-from-the-shoulder frock in the picture is made of net, although colored voile could be used just as pleasingly. This dainty model is really quite unusual, first on account of its being made in net and then because of the unique embellishment of quaint green geese which are figuratively sailing on green water, as interpreted by the embroidered design. The geese are done in



Of Fine White Net.

moment color effects: Gray with violet or periwinkle alternate borderings as shown in the picture; maize with mint green piping outlining two tiers of scallops around the skirt portion; seashell with wide border of rose in solid tint finishing the hemline.

Some of the more expensive white satin or silk, also flesh-colored, gain a flare through insets of lace, adding a band of lace about the top with lace bands over the shoulder.

Last, but not least, make a costume slip of gold or silver cloth, for it can be fashioned at home so economically. This sort of a slip becomes a treasured

cross-stitch with fuzzy angora wool. There are other colors introduced in the scene and about the neck, where Antwerp blue and tangerine cross enter into the scheme.

Another item to keep mother busy is smocking. For no one's little girl is expected to go through the spring and summer season without owning several smocked gingham, voiles and dotted swisses.

Myriads of little ruffles are finding their way also on lovely pastel-colored dresses.

JULIA BOTTOMLEY.

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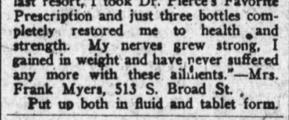
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