

"Oliver October"

(Continued from First Page)

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 whiskey 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 grin.

"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 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 statesman."

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 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-some, 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 of 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 unreliable 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.

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 women to get 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 to read the 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 stepped just inside the door.

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

The elder woman fixed an anxious look upon Mr. Baxter.

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

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

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

The company drew their chairs close as Baxter dropped some coins into the gypsy's palm. Silence pervaded the room. Every eye was on the dark, impressive 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 this son of yours, mister, as a great 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, smiling.

"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 pretty good-looking sort of a feller, wouldn't it?" said Baxter proudly.

"He will grow up 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 pretty 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 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 noon-day 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 it. I go."

CHAPTER II**Ten Years Later.**

TEN years passed, years of change and growth. Rumley had not stood still during the decade. It was the proud boast of its most enterprising citizen, Silas Link, that it had done a great deal better than Chicago; it had tripled its population.

Oliver Baxter, Sr., owned one of the new business "blocks" on Clay street. It was known as the Baxter block, erected in 1896.

Mary Baxter died of typhoid fever when young Oliver was nearing seven. Her untimely demise revived the half-forgotten prophecy of the gypsy fortune-teller. People looked severely at each other, and in hushed tones discussed the incoherent ways of fate. It was the first "sign" that young Oliver's fortune was coming true.

Of an entirely different nature was the agitation created by the unrighteous behavior of Josephine Sage, who had finally succumbed to the lure of the stage, leaving her husband and child, in order to gratify her life's ambition. Half the women in town, on learning that she was going to Chicago for a brief visit with her folks, went around to the parsonage to kiss her good-by. Excitation and a stream of "I told you so's" were bestowed upon the pretty young wife and mother when it became known that she was not coming back.

Herbert Sage was stunned, bewildered. . . . She wrote him from Chicago at the end of the first week of what was to have been a fortnight's visit with her mother. She was leaving at once for New York, where she had been promised a trial by one of the greatest American producers. A month later came a telegram from her saying she was rehearsing a part in a new piece that was sure to be the "hit of the season."

"You will be proud of me, Herby," she wrote, "because I will take mighty good care that you never have any reason to be ashamed of me or for me to be ashamed of myself. You know what I mean. I don't suppose I will say my prayers as often as I did when you were around to remind me of them, but I will be a good girl just the same."

That was four years ago. Her confidence in herself had been justified, and, for all we know, the same may be said of Herbert Sage's confidence in her. She had the talent, the voice, the beauty, and above all, the magnetism, and so there was no holding her back.

For two successive seasons she appeared in a Chicago theater, following New York runs of the pieces in which she was playing.

Finally, in one of her letters announcing a prospective engagement in London, she put the question to him: "Do you want a divorce from me, Herby?" His reply was terse and brought from her the following undignified but manifestly sincere telegram: "Neither do I, so we'll stick till the cows come home. Sailing Friday. Will cable. Much love."

She made a "hit" in London in the big musical success of that season. They liked her so well over there that they wouldn't let her come back to the States.

She was greatly missed by little Oliver October. For some reason—perhaps she did not explain it herself—at any rate, she did not go to the trouble of speculating—she had taken a tremendous fancy to the child. This small boy of five or six was the only being in town with whom she could play to her heart's content, and she made the most of him. Her own tiny baby, Jane, interested but did not amuse her.

Oliver was always to have a warm corner in his heart for the gay Aunt Josephine, but new diverting games reduced his passionate longing for her to a mild but pleasant memory. Perhaps, too, her own daughter had something to do with Josephine's fading from Oliver's mind.

For Janie Sage, at the age of six, was by far the prettiest and the most-sought-after young lady in Rumley. Oliver was her chosen swain, and many were the battles he fought in her defense.

The time came when Oliver October Baxter, age ten, had to be told what was in store for him if he did not mend his ways. For, be it here recorded, Oliver not only possessed a quick temper, but a surprisingly sanguinary way of making it felt.

He was a rugged, freckle-faced youngster with curly brown hair, a pair of stout legs, and a couple of hard fists, with which he made his temper felt.

It was after witnessing a particularly ferocious battle between Oliver and Sammy Parr, that Joseph Sikes and Silas Link decided that the boy must be warned of the fate that awaited him if his awful temper was not curbed.

And so it came to pass that young Oliver October learned what was in store for him if his "fortune" came true. In the presence of his father, his good friend, Mr. Sage, who had opposed telling the boy, and the Messrs. Link and Sikes, he was made to realize the vastness of the dark and terrifying shadow that hung over him.

When they had finished, he cleared his throat. "I wish my ma was here," he said, his lip trembling.

"Amen to that," said Mr. Sage, fervently.

"Amen!" repeated Mr. Link in his most professional voice.

Mr. Sage laid a hand on the boy's shoulder. "Do you say your prayers every night, Oliver?"

"Yes, sir—I do."

"Well—er if Brother Baxter doesn't mind, and if you gentlemen will excuse me, I think I will go upstairs with Oliver and—listen to his prayer."

A little later on, the tall, spare pastor sat on the side of young Oliver's trundle bed and talked in a confidential whisper.

"I am going to tell you something, Oliver, and I want you to believe it. Nobody on this earth can tell the future. All that talk about your being hung some day is poppycock—pure poppycock. Don't you believe a word of it. I came upstairs with you just for the purpose of telling you this—not really to hear your prayers. Now don't you feel better?"

"Yes, sir," said Oliver. "I do."

"What I want you to do, Oliver, is to go on—leading a—er—regular boy's life. Do the things that are right and square, be honest and fearless—and no harm will ever come to you. Now, turn over and go to sleep, there's a good boy."

And the kind-hearted minister went downstairs feeling that he had given the poor lad something besides the gallows to think about.

It is not the purpose of the narrator of this story to deal at length with the deeds, exploits, mishaps and sensations of Oliver as a child. He was seventeen when he left Rumley high school and became a freshman at the state university. The last of the three decades allotted to him by the gypsy was shorn of its first twelve months when he received his degree. As Mr. Sikes announced to Reverend Sage at the conclusion of the commencement exercises, he had less than nine more years to live at the very outside—a gloomy statement that drew from the proud and happy minister an unusually harsh rejoinder.

"You ought to be kicked all the way home for saying such a thing as that, Joe Sikes." Turning to the slim, pretty girl who walked beside him across the June-warmed campus, he said comfortingly: "Don't mind this old croaker, Jane, dear."

A word in passing about Jane Sage. Slender, graceful, slightly above medium height, just turning into young womanhood, she was an extremely pretty girl.

She adored Oliver October. There had been a time when she was his sweetheart, but that was ages ago—when both of them were young! Now he was supposed to be engaged to a girl in the graduating class—and Jane was going to be an old maid—so the childish romance was over.

Late in the fall of 1911 young Oliver, having passed the age of twenty-one, packed his bag and trunk, shook the dust of Rumley from his feet, and accepted a position in the construction department of a Chicago engineering and investment concern.

Early in 1913 he was sent to China by his company on a mission that kept him in the Orient for nearly a year and a half. A week before Christmas, 1914, the Rumley Dispatch came out with the announcement—under a double head—that Oliver October Baxter was returning from the Far East, where he had been engaged in the most stupendous enterprise ever undertaken by American capital.

When he arrived he was met at the depot by a delegation.

"I can't believe my eyes—no, sir, I can't," cried old Oliver, quaveringly, as she wrung his son's hand. "You're back again, alive and sound."

"You bet I'm alive," answered Oliver October, laying his arm over the old man's shoulder and patting his back. "It's mighty good to see you, and it's wonderful to be back in the old town again. Hello, Uncle Joel. Well, you see they haven't hung me yet."

"And they ain't going to if I can help it," roared Mr. Sikes, pumping Oliver's arm vigorously. "Not on your life! It's all fixed, Oliver. We've got you the appointment of city civil engineer of Rumley."

"You needn't worry about that, father. I'll not accept the position."

Mr. Baxter brightened. "You won't? Good for you! That'll show Joe Sikes and Silas Link that they can't run everything."

Presently they drew up in front of the Baxter residence, and as they did so an uncommonly pretty girl opened the front door.

"Hello, Oliver!" she cried.

"Hello, Jane!" he shouted back, as he ran up the steps. "Gee! It's great to see you. And, my goodness, what a big girl you are."

He was holding her warm, strong hands in his own; they were looking straight into each other's eyes.

"You haven't grown much," she said slowly. "Except that you are a man and not a boy."

"That's it," he cried. "The difference in you is that you're a woman and not a girl."

"Come in," she said, with a queer dignity that she herself did not understand.

When he came downstairs after having unpacked his bags and scattered the contents all over the room, he found the "company" already assembled. As might have been expected, the guests including Rev. Mr. Sage, Mr. Sikes and Mr. Link, and one outsider, the mayor of Rumley, Mr. Samuel Belding.

"What's this I hear?" demanded the latter sternly, as he shook hands with the young man. "Your father's just been telling us you won't accept the distinguished honor of the city of Rumley has conferred upon you. What's the matter with it?"

"The truth of the matter is," Oliver answered seriously, "I have other plans. I'm going Over There in February with the Canadians. It's all settled. I'm to have my aid job back when the war is over."

"But it's not our war!" cried Mr. Sikes.

"It's everybody's war," spoke young Oliver out of the very depths of his soul. "We will be in it some day. Oh, I'll come back, never fear. You see, Uncle Joel, I've just got to pull through alive and well, so that I can be hung when my time comes."

(Continued next week)



Change Now—to a non-congealing oil

It's time to change to free-flowing Zerolene, if you do not already use this wonderful motor oil the whole year 'round. When other oils congeal in cold weather, Zerolene flows freely. It is an aid to easy starting and a sure protection from cold-weather frictional dangers, rapid depreciation and repairs. Don't take a chance—change to Zerolene NOW.

To determine the correct body of Zerolene for the winter lubrication of your car, consult the Zerolene Correct Lubrication Chart—
—at Standard Oil Service Stations and at dealers.

STANDARD OIL COMPANY (California)



"That Lucky Guy"

That's what his competitors said when Mr. Merchant came upon a wallet filled with dough. But they did not see through it all. Mr. Marchant had foresight—he saw it in the distance.

Whenever he had a line of stock to dispose of, he advertised it—with

the kind of advertising that brings results.

But his competitors thought him lucky—money came to him just like finding it.

Ask us about the kind of advertising Mr. Merchant did.

Phone Main 882. We will call.

Heppner Gazette Times