

GREEN FANCY

by **GEORGE BARR MC CUTCHEON**

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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I—Thomas K. Barnes, wealthy New Yorker, on a walking trip through New England, is caught in a storm miles from his destination. At a crossroads point he meets a girl in the same plight. While they discuss the situation an automobile sent to meet the girl, arrives and Barnes is given a lift to Hart's tavern, while the girl is taken on to her destination, which she tells Barnes is a place called Green Fancy.

CHAPTER II—At the tavern Barnes falls in with a stranded troupe of "barnstorming" actors, headed by Lyndon Rushcroft, and becomes interested in them.

CHAPTER III—As the storm grows, Barnes finds himself worrying over the safety of the girl, traveling over the mountain roads at what he considers dangerous speed. He learns that Green Fancy is something of a house of mystery. Two mounted men leave the tavern in a manner which arouses Barnes' curiosity.

CHAPTER IV—He meets "Miss Thackeray," leading lady of the stranded theatrical troupe, who is acting as chambermaid. That night he is aroused by the bringing of a dying man to the tavern, one of the two who had ridden away a short time before. They tell of finding the dead body of the other man. Both had been shot.

CHAPTER V—The wounded man, registered at the tavern as Andrew Paul, dies and Barnes is informed he must not leave until after the inquest. O'Dowd and De Soto, guests at Green Fancy, visit the tavern, apparently much mystified over the affair.

"She? A woman, was it?" demanded O'Dowd. "Bedad, if she said she was coming to Green Fancy she was spoofing you. Are you sure it was old Peter who gave you that jolly ride?"

"No, I am not sure," said Barnes uneasily. "She was afoot, having walked from the station below. I met her at the corners and she asked me if I knew how far it was to Green Fancy, or something like that. Said she was going there. Then along came the automobile, rattling down this very road—an ancient Panhard driven by an old codger. She seemed to think it was all right to hop in and trust herself to him, although she'd never seen him before."

"The antique Panhard fits in all right," said O'Dowd, "but I'm hanged if the woman fits at all. No such person arrived at Green Fancy last night."

"Did you get a square look at the driver's face?" demanded De Soto.

"It was almost too dark to see, but he was old, hatchet-faced, and spoke with an accent."

"Then it couldn't have been Peter," said De Soto positively. "He's old, right enough, but he is as big as the side of a house, with a face like a full moon, and he is Yankee to his toes. By gad, Barnes, the plot thickens! A woman has been added to the mystery. Now, who the devil is she and what has become of her?"

CHAPTER VI.

Charity Begins Far From Home, and a Stroll in the Wildwood Follows.

Mr. Rushcroft was furious when he arose at eleven o'clock on the morning after the double murder, having slept like a top through all of the commotion. He boomed all over the place, vocal castigations falling right and left on the guilty and the innocent without distinction.

"I don't see how you managed to sleep through it," Barnes broke in. "You must have an unusually clear conscience, Mr. Rushcroft."

"I haven't any conscience at all, sir," roared the star. "I had an unusually full stomach, that's what was the matter with me. I take oath now, sir, never to eat again as long as I live. A man who cannot govern his beastly appetite ought to defy it, if nothing else."

"I gather from that remark that you omitted breakfast this morning."

"Breakfast, sir? In God's name, I implore you not to refer to anything so disgusting as stewed prunes and bacon at a time like this. My mind is—"

"How about luncheon? Will you join me at twelve-thirty?"

"That's quite another matter," said Mr. Rushcroft readily. "Luncheon is an esthetic tribute to the physical intelligence of man, if you know what I mean. I shall be delighted to join you."

"Twelve-thirty, did you say?"

"It would give me great pleasure if your daughter would also grace the festal board. I think it is too bad that she has to go about in the gown she wears. Mr. Rushcroft," said Barnes. "She's much too splendid for that. I have a proposition I'd like to make to you later on. I cannot make it, however, without consulting Miss Thackeray's feelings."

"My dear fellow!" beamed Rushcroft, seizing the other's hand. "One frequently reads in books about it coming like this, at first sight, but, damme, I never dreamed that it ever really happened. Count on me! She ought to leave the stage, the dear child. No more fitted to it than an Easter lily. Her place is in the home, the—"

"Good Lord, I am not thinking of—"

And Barnes, agast, stopped before—

blurring out the words that escaped to his lips. "I mean to say this is a proposition that may also affect your excellent companions, Bacon and Dillingford, as well as yourself."

At twelve-thirty sharp Barnes came down from his room freshly shaved and brushed, to find not only Mr. Rushcroft and Miss Thackeray awaiting him in the office, but the Messrs. Dillingford and Bacon as well.

"I took the liberty, old fellow," said Rushcroft, addressing Barnes, "of asking my excellent co-workers to join us in our repast."

"Delighted to have you with us, gentlemen," said Barnes affably.

The sole topic of conversation for the first half hour was the mysterious slaying of their fellow lodgers. Mr. Rushcroft complained bitterly of the outrageous, high-handed action of the coroner and sheriff in imposing upon him and his company the same restrictions that had been applied to Barnes. They were not to leave the county until the authorities gave the word. One would have thought, to hear the star's indignant lamentations, that he and his party were in a position to depart when they pleased. It would have been difficult to imagine that he was not actually rolling in money instead of being absolutely penniless.

Barnes had been immersed in his own thoughts for some time. A slight frown, as of reflection, darkened his eyes. Suddenly—perhaps impolitely—he interrupted Mr. Rushcroft's flow of eloquence.

"Have you any objection, Mr. Rushcroft, to a more or less personal question concerning your own private—er—misfortunes?" he asked, leaning forward.

For a moment one could have heard a pin drop. Mr. Rushcroft evidently held his breath. There could be no mistake about that.

"It's rather delicate, but would you mind telling me just how much you were stuck up for by the—er—was it a writ of attachment?"

"It was," said the star. "A writ of inquisition, you might as well substitute. The act of a polluted, impecunious, parsimonious—what shall I say? Well, I will be as simple as possible—hotel keeper. Ninety-seven dollars and forty cents. For that pitiful amount he subjected me to—"

"Well, that isn't so bad," said Barnes, vastly relieved. He was covertly watching Miss Thackeray's half-averted face as he ventured upon the proposition he had decided to put before them. "I am prepared and willing to advance this amount, Mr. Rushcroft, and to take your personal note as security."

Rushcroft leaned back in his chair and stuck his thumbs in the armpoles of his vest. He displayed no undue elation. Instead he affected profound calculations. His daughter shot a swift, searching look at the would-be Samaritan. There was a heightened color in her cheeks.

"Moreover, I shall be happy to increase the amount of the loan sufficiently to cover your return at once to New York, if you so desire—by train," Barnes smiled as he added the last two words.

"Extremely kind of you, my dear Barnes," said the actor, running his fingers through his hair. "Your faith in me is most gratifying. I—I really don't know what to say to you, sir."

"May I inquire just how you expect to profit by this transaction, Mr. Barnes?" Miss Thackeray asked steadily.

He started, catching her meaning. "My dear Miss Thackeray," he exclaimed, "this transaction is solely between your father and me. I shall have no other claim to press."

"I wish I could believe that," she said.

"You may believe it," he assured her.

"It isn't the usual course," she said quietly, and her face brightened. "You are not like most men, Mr. Barnes."

"My dear child," said Rushcroft, "you must leave this matter to our friend and me. I fancy I know an honest man when I see him. My dear fellow, fortune is but temporarily frowning upon me. In a few weeks I shall be on my feet again, zipping along on the crest of the wave. I dare say I can return the money to you in a month or six weeks. If—"

"Oh, father!" cried Miss Thackeray. "We'll make it six months, and I'll pay any rate of interest you desire. Six per cent, eight per cent, ten per—"

"Six per cent, sir, and we will make it a year from date."

"Agreed. Get up and dance for us. Dilly! We shall be in New York tomorrow!"

"You forget the dictatorial sheriff. Mr. Rushcroft," said Barnes.

"The varlet!" barked Mr. Rushcroft. It was arranged that Dillingford and

Bacon were to go to Hornville in a hired motor that afternoon, secure the judgment, pay the costs, and attend to the removal of the personal belongings of the stranded quartette from the hotel to Hart's Tavern. The younger actors stoutly refused to accept Barnes' offer to pay their board while at the Tavern. That, they declared, would be charity, and they preferred his friendship and his respect to anything of that sort. Miss Thackeray, however, was to be immediately relieved of her position as chambermaid. She was to become a paying guest.

Rushcroft took the whole affair with the most noteworthy complacency. He seemed to regard it as his due, or



Rushcroft Took the Whole Affair With the Most Noteworthy Complacency.

more properly speaking as if he were doing Barnes a great favor in allowing him to lend money to a person of his importance.

"A thought has just come to me, my dear fellow," he remarked as they arose from table. "With the proper kind of backing I could put over one of the most stupendous things the theater has known in fifty years. I don't mind saying to you—although it's rather sub rosa—that I have written a play—a four-act drama that will pack the biggest house on Broadway to the roof for as many months as we'd care to stay. Perhaps you will allow me to talk it over with you a little later on. You will be interested, I'm sure. Egad, sir, I'll read the play to you. I'll—What ho, landlord. Have your best automobile sent around to the door as quickly as possible. A couple of my men are going to Hornville to fetch hither my—"

"Just a minute," interrupted Putnam Jones, wholly unimpressed. "A man just called you up on the phone, Mr. Barnes. I told him you was entertaining royalty at lunch and couldn't be disturbed. So he asked me to have you call him up as soon as you revived. His words, not mine. Call up Mr. O'Dowd at Green Fancy. Here's the number."

The mellow voice of the Irishman soon responded to Barnes' call.

"I called you up to relieve your mind regarding the young woman who came last night," he said. "You observe that I say 'came.' She's quite all right, safe and sound, and no cause for uneasiness. I thought you meant that she was coming here as a guest, and so I made the very natural mistake of saying she hadn't come at all, at all. The young woman in question is Mrs. Van Dyke's maid. But, bless my soul, how was I to know she was even in existence, much less expected by train or motor or Shanks' mare? Well, she's here, so there's the end of our mystery."

Barnes was slow in replying. He was doubting his own ears. It was not conceivable that an ordinary—or even an extraordinary—lady's maid could have possessed the exquisite voice and manner of his chance acquaintance of the day before, or the temerity to order that sour-faced chauffeur about as if—The chauffeur!

"But I thought you said that Mr. Curtis' chauffeur was moon-faced and—"

"He is, bedad," broke in Mr. O'Dowd, chuckling. "That's what deceived me entirely, and no wonder. It wasn't Peter at all, but the rascalion washer who went after her. He was instructed to tell Peter to meet the four o'clock train, and the blockhead forgot to give the order. Bedad, what does he do but sneak out after her himself, scared out of his boots for fear of what he was to get from Peter. I had the whole story from Mrs. Van Dyke."

"Well, I'm tremendously relieved," said Barnes slowly.

"And so am I," said O'Dowd with conviction. "I have seen the heroine of our busted romance. She's a good-looking girl. I'm not surprised that she kept her veil down. If you were to leave it to me, though, I'd say that it's a sin to carry discretion so far as all that. You see 'at I mean, don't you?" His rich laugh came over the wire.

"Perfectly. Thank you for letting me know. My mind is at rest. Good-by." As he hung up the receiver he said to himself, "You are a most affable, convincing chap, Mr. O'Dowd, but I don't believe a word you say. That woman is no lady's maid, and

you've known all the time that she was there."

At four o'clock he set out alone for a tramp up the mountain road in which the two men had been shot down. His mind was quite clear. Roon and Paul were not ordinary robbers. They were, no doubt, honest men. He would have said that they were thieves bent on burglarizing Green Fancy were it not for the disclosures of Miss Thackeray and the very convincing proof that they were not shot by the same man.

It was not beyond reason—indeed, it was quite probable—that they were trying to cross the border; in that event their real operations would be confined to the Canadian side of the line. He could not free himself of the suspicion that Green Fancy possessed the key to the situation. Roon and his companion could not have had the slightest interest in his movements up to the instant he encountered the young woman at the crossroads. His busy brain suddenly suffered the shock of a distinct conclusion. Was she a fellow conspirator? Was she the inside worker at Green Fancy in a well-laid plan to rick the place?

Could it be possible that she was the confederate of these painstaking agents who lurked with sinister patience outside the very gates of the place called Green Fancy?

His ramble carried him far beyond the spot where Roon's body was found and where young Conley had come upon the tethered horses. His eager, curious gaze swept the forest to the left of the road in search of Green Fancy. Overcome by a rash, daring impulse, he climbed over the stake and rider fence and sauntered among the big trees which so far had obscured the house from view. The trees grew very thickly on the slope, and they were unusually large. He progressed deeper into the wood. At the end of what must have been a mile he halted. There was no sign of habitation, no indication that man had ever penetrated so far into the forest. As he was on the point of retracing his steps toward the road his gaze fell upon a huge moss-covered rock less than a hundred yards away. He stared, and gradually it began to take on angles and planes and recesses of the most astounding symmetry. Under his widening gaze it was transformed into a substantial object of cubes and gables and—yes, windows.

He was looking upon the strange home of the even stranger Mr. Curtis—Green Fancy.

Now he understood why it was called Green Fancy. Its surroundings were no greener than itself; it seemed to melt into the foliage, to become a part of the natural landscape. Mountain ivy literally enveloped it. Exposed sections of the house were painted green; the doors were green; the leafy porches and their columns, the chimney pots, the window hangings—all were the color of the unchanging forest. And it was a place of huge dimensions, low and long and rambling.

"Gad," he said to himself, "what manner of crank is he who would bury himself like this? Of all the crazy ideas I ever—"

His reflections ended there. A woman crossed his vision; a woman strolling slowly toward him through the intricate avenues of the wildwood.

CHAPTER VII.

Spun-Gold Hair, Blue Eyes and Various Encounters.

She was quite unaware of his presence, and yet he was directly in her path, though some distance away. Her head was bent; her mien was thoughtful, her stride slow and aimless.

She was slender, graceful and evidently quite tall, although she seemed a pigmy among the towering giants



Suddenly She Stopped and Looked Up.

that attended her stroll. Her hands were thrust deep into the pocket of a white duck skirt. A glance revealed white shoes and trim ankles in blue. She wore no hat. Her hair was like spun gold, thick, wavy and shimmering in the subdued light.

Suddenly she stopped and looked up. He had a full view of her face as she gazed about as if startled by some unexpected, even alarming sound. For a second or two he held his breath, stunned by the amazing loveliness that was revealed to him. Then she discovered him standing there.

(To be continued next week)

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