

OLIVER OCTOBER

By George Barr McCutcheon

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SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I—Oliver October Baxter, Jr., was born on a vile October day. His parents were prominent in the commercial, social and spiritual life of the town of Rumley. His father was proprietor of the hardware store. The night that Oliver October was born a gypsy queen reads his father's fortune and tells him what a wonderful future his son has before him, but after the reading, the gypsy becomes angry and leaves the house in a rage after telling Mr. Baxter that his son will never reach the age of thirty, that he will be hanged for a crime of which he is not guilty.

CHAPTER II—Ten years elapse and Oliver's father is the owner of a business block in the town. Mrs. Baxter died when Oliver was nursing seven. Josephine Sage, wife of the minister, causes a sensation when she leaves Rumley to go on the stage. She becomes a "star" and later goes to London, where she scores a hit. Her daughter Jane and young Oliver become greatly attached to one another. After finishing college, young Oliver accepts a position in Chicago with an engineering company. He goes to China on an important mission for his firm. Upon his return he enlists in the Canadian army.

CHAPTER III—The war is over, Oliver returns to Chicago and is told by his employers that his services are no longer required. He returns home. He hears Jane is in love with Doctor Lansing. Jane and Oliver meet again. Oliver is reproached by his father for not getting another position. Oliver threatens to leave home.

CHAPTER IV—Despite Mr. Baxter's pleading to Oliver to remain in Rumley, Oliver decides to accept a position in Chicago. Mr. Baxter accompanies Oliver thru a swamp on the way to the Sage home. On the way they quarrel over Oliver's refusal to stay in Rumley. Mr. Sage tells Oliver his father fears the thing the gypsy predicted and wants his son to stay home, where he can watch over him. Oliver decides not to leave him. Mr. Baxter fails to return home and is believed by some to have perished in the swamp. Oliver tells the authorities of the quarrel with his father, but they do not accuse him of having anything to do with his father's disappearance. Oliver takes charge of his father's business. Three months remain of the last year allotted to Oliver by the gypsy queen.

The winter wore away, spring came and quickly melted into summer; that first anniversary of the unexplained disappearance of Oliver Baxter passed. Three months remained of the last year allotted to Oliver October by the gypsy "queen" on that wild, shrieking night in '90. But by this time practically everybody in Rumley was counting the days and jokingly reminding Oliver that his chances got better every day!

"I see by the paper this evening that your Uncle Horace has announced himself as a candidate for state senator," said Mr. Sage one evening as he sat enjoying his customary half hour on Sage's porch with Jane and Oliver.

"Well, I know one vote he will not get," said Oliver, "even if he is my uncle."

"I know of another," said the minister dryly.

"Why, daddy, I am really beginning to take quite a fancy to you," cried Jane delightedly. "Only last week you said he ought to be tarred and feathered for turning those two old Bannister women out of their house over at Pleasant Ridge."

"But he didn't turn them out," said Oliver quickly. "Somebody came along at the last minute and lent them the money to redeem their little house and farm."

"You don't really mean it, Oliver?" cried Mr. Sage. "That is good news—splendid news."

"I hate that old Gooch man," cried Jane.

"Jane, my dear, you really are becoming quite a vixen," remonstrated her father.

An auto came to a sudden stop in front of the house, and an agile young man leaped out, leaving his engine running. He came up the walk with long strides.

"Say, Oliver, you old skate, I've been looking all over town for you," shouted Sammy Parr. "This isn't your night to call on Jane—don't you know that? Good evening, Jane. Evening, Mr. Sage. Say, the Bannisters told me all about you, you blamed old skate—I mean, Ollie, not you, Mr. Sage. Gee whiz, Ollie, you certainly did throw the hooks into Uncle Horace this time, didn't you? You certainly—"

"Shut up!" growled Oliver, scowling fiercely at the excited Sammy.

"What on earth are you talking about, Sammy?" cried Jane.

"Out with it, Sammy, out with it," counseled Mr. Sage, coming down the steps.

"Well, what do you think, Mr. Sage—what do you think? Why, this chump here is the guy that lent Mrs. Bannister the money to redeem her house."

"Oh, Oliver!" cried Jane. "Did you really do it? I could squeeze you to death for it. And you never told me—you never breathed a word!"

"It was only about a thousand dollars," mumbled Oliver.

"Sure it was," agreed Sam cheerfully. "But right there and then the destiny of the great American nation was shaped along new lines. The words were no sooner out of the mouth of old Mrs. Bannister when the boom was born! Yes, sir, at that very moment—"

"Oh, for the Lord's sake, Sammy, slow down! What the dickens are you driving at, anyhow? Boom? what boom?"

"Your boom, you idiot! The boom's been stated for you as candidate for state senator against old man Gooch."

"Why, you darned chump!" roared Oliver. "I'm not going to run for state senator or anything else. You must be crazy. I'll head it off tomorrow. I'll telephone—"

"Won't do you a darned bit of good," cried Sammy, exultingly. They'll nominate you, anyhow. Why, you're the only man in this county that would stand a ghost of a show,

Ollie. And the best of all—popular nephew running against Shylock uncle! Gee whiz! I'm going down to see Al Wilson at the Dispatch office. Put him wise and warn him not to let a word of it leak out in the paper till he gets the word. Night, Mr. Sage—so long, Jane."

"Wait a minute!" called out Oliver, springing to his feet as Sammy darted down the walk.

"Nix!" shouted Sammy over his shoulder.

The three of them watched him in silence as he leaped into his car and began his swift, reckless turn in the narrow street.

"What are you going to do about it?" inquired the minister, the first to speak.

Jane did not give Oliver a chance to reply.

"Do about it?" she cried. "Why, he's going to run against old Gooch and beat the life out of him!"

Oliver looked up at her. She stood on the top of the steps, the light from the open door falling athwart her radiant face, half in shadow, half in the warm, soft glow. Suddenly his heart began to pound, heavy, smothering blows against his ribs, that had the effect of making him dizzy, as with vertigo. He continued to stare, possessed of a strange wonder, as she turned to her tall, gray-haired parent and laid both hands on his shoulders.

"I wish I could say 'gee whiz' as Sammy says it," she cried. "I feel all over just like one great big 'gee whiz.' Don't you, daddy?"

The man of God took his daughter's firm, round chin between his thumb and forefinger and shook it lovingly.

"One 'gee whiz' in the family is enough," said he. "I am glad you feel like one, however. You take me back 25 years, my dear. Your mother used to say 'gee whiz' when she felt like it. It is, after all, a rather harmless way of exploding."

Presently he left them and Jane spoke gently.

"Did you notice, Oliver, that he spoke of mother a little while ago? It was the first time in years. I wonder if I remind him of her in lots of ways."

Oliver's thoughts leaped backward a score of years and more. "I used to think she was the most wonderful person in all the world," he said. "I was very desperately in love with your mother when I was six or seven, Jane."

He hesitated and then went on clumsily, almost fatuously. "I am beginning to think that you are like her in a lot of ways."

She gave him a quick, startled look. His face was turned away, and so he did not see the tender, wistful little smile that flickered on her lips, nor was he aware of the long, deep breath she took. From that moment a queer, uneasy restraint fell upon them. There were long silences, dreamy on her part, moody on his. He left shortly after 10; his "good-night" was strangely gruff and unnatural.

He was jealous. He knew it for a fact, he confessed it to himself for the first time openly and unreservedly. There was no use trying to deny it. He did not go so far as to think of himself as being in love with Jane—that would be ridiculous, after all the years they had known each other—but he bitterly resented the thought that she might be in love with some one else. Especially with the superior, supercilious, cocksure Lansing!

CHAPTER V

An Amazing Cablegram.

"WHY, if Jane were in love with Lansing," reflected Oliver, "good Lord, what a fool he had been to think it would make no difference to him! It would make a difference—an appalling difference. All nonsense to think she wouldn't get out of his life if she married Lansing or anyone else. Of course she should be so consumed with jealousy when he wasn't the least bit in love with Jane himself. He had been in love a dozen times. He ought to know what love was—and certainly his feelings toward Jane were nothing like those he experienced in bygone affairs of the heart. Gee whiz! What had suddenly got into him?"

The next morning he was down at the swamp bright and early, inspecting the work of the ditchers and tile layers. The task of reclaiming the land had been under way for several months and was slowly nearing completion.

"I wish you'd change your mind about not going out any farther, Oliver," said old John Phillips, who was superintending the work. "We could go out a quarter of a mile farther without a bit of risk, and you'd add about 20 acres of good land to—"

"We'll have enough, John," interrupted the young man. "We'll stick to the original survey. Don't go a rod beyond the stakes I set up out yonder. It may be safe but it isn't

worth while."

"Well, you're the boss," grumbled old John, and added somewhat peevishly: "But I can't help saying I think you're making a mistake. There's some mighty good land there, 'spite of them mudholes a little farther out."

"I'm not denying that," said Oliver patiently. "But we'll stop where the stakes are, just the same."

A few minutes later old John confided to one of the ditchers that young Baxter was considerable of a darned fool. Either that, or else he had some thundering good reason of his own for not wanting to go out beyond the stakes.

"This here job has cost up'ards of \$3,000 already, and for a couple of hundred more he could clean up clear to the edge of the mire. I used to look upon that boy as a smart young feller."

"Maybe he's a whole lot smarter than you think," said the ditcher significantly.

"Oh, I don't for a minute think it's that," said old John hastily. "Not for a minute."

"I can't help thinkin' we'll turn up that old man's body some day. It sort of gives me the creeps."

The two big ditches, fed by lateral lines of tile, held a straight course across the upper end of the swamp and drained into Blacksnake creek, a sluggish little stream half a mile west of Rumley. Roughly estimated, three hundred acres were being transformed into what in time was bound to become valuable land.

Oliver was walking slowly back to the house, his head bent, his hands in his pockets, when he observed an automobile approaching over the newly rutted, seldom traveled road. He recognized the car at once. Lansing's yellow roadster.

"Hello, there!" called Mr. Lansing. "Hop in, Oliver. I've been sent to fetch you over to Mr. Sage's. He had a cablegram this morning and sort of went to pieces."

"A cablegram? His wife—is she dead?"

"I should say not. She's sailing for the United States tomorrow and is coming here to live."

It was true that Josephine Sage was coming home. The beatific minister thrust the cablegram into Oliver's hand as the young man came bounding up the veranda steps ten minutes later.

"She's coming on the Baltic. I have decided to go to New York to meet her. Jane will accompany me. I wish you would find out for me, Oliver, when the Baltic is due to arrive at New York. Please help me out, lad. Perhaps I should have telegraphed myself—or had Jane do it—but we—I mean I—er—"

"Say," interrupted Oliver, with sparkling eyes, "I'll bet you're 20 years younger than you were yesterday, Uncle Herbert!"

"I—I believe I am," said Mr. Sage, squaring his thin shoulders and drawing a deep breath.

Mr. Horace Gooch of Hopkinsville, heretofore a miserly aspirant for legislative honors, but persistently detesting the distinction for which he was loath to pay, had "come across" so handsomely, and so desperately, that the bosses had foolishly permitted him to be nominated for the state senate. The people did not want him; but that made little or no difference to the party leaders; the people had to take him whether they liked him or not. Mr. Gooch's astonishing contribution to the campaign fund was not to be "passed up" merely because the people didn't approve of him.

The report that young Oliver Baxter of Rumley was being urged to make the race against his uncle caused no uneasiness among the bosses. It was not until after the young man was nominated and actually in the field that misgivings began to set in. Young Baxter was popular in the southern section of the county, he was a war hero and he was an upstanding figure in a community where the voters were as likely as not to "jump the traces." The bosses sent for Mr. Gooch and suggested that it wouldn't be a bad idea for him to withdraw from the race—on account of his age, or his health, or his nephew.

"Do you mean to tell me," began Horace, genuinely amazed, "that you think this young whippersnapper of a nephew of mine is liable to defeat me?"

"Nobody knows what the people want," replied the chairman sententiously. "Now, this young Baxter. He's a fine feller. He has a clear record. There isn't a thing we can say against him. On the other hand, he can say a lot of nasty things about you, Mr. Gooch. I'm not saying you'll be licked next November, but you stand a blamed good chance of it, let me tell you, if this young Baxter goes after you without gloves."

"I've just been thinking," said Mr. Gooch, leaning forward in his chair, "suppose I go down to Rumley and

have a talk with Oliver."

"What about?" demanded the other sharply.

"I may be able to reason with him."

"No chance," said the other, shaking his head. "He's got it in for you, I hear."

Mr. Gooch got up and began pacing the floor.

"See here, Smith," he began, halting in front of the "boss." "I may as well come out flat-footed and tell you I've never been satisfied with all these stories and speculations concerning the disappearance of my brother-in-law a year ago. It's mighty queer that a man like Oliver Baxter could disappear off of the face of the earth and never be heard of again. Most people believe he's alive—hiding somewhere—but I don't believe it for a minute. He's dead. He died that night a year ago when he had his last row with his son. And, what's more to the point, I am here to say I don't believe his son has told all he knows about the—er—matter."

"Say, what are you trying to get at, Mr. Gooch. That comes pretty near to being a charge, doesn't it?"

"You can call it what you please. All I've got to say is that I'm not satisfied, and I'm going to the bottom of this business if it's possible to do so."

Two days later, Horace Gooch stopped his ancient automobile in front of the Baxter block in Rumley and inquired of a man in the doorway:

"Is young Oliver Baxter here?"

The loiterer turned his head lastly and squinted searchingly into the store, and then replied that he was.

"Tell him his uncle is out here."

The citizen disappeared. He was back in a jiffy, grinning broadly.

"Well?" demanded Mr. Gooch, as the messenger remained silent. "What did he say?"

The citizen chuckled. "It ain't fit to print," said he.

Mr. Gooch shut off his engine and settled back in the seat, the perspiration of grim and dogged patience.

Fifteen minutes passed. Passersby, sensing something unusual, found an excuse for loitering in front of nearby show windows. Mr. Link came out of his office, and after taking one look at the harassed old man in the automobile, hurried to the rear of his establishment. A few seconds later he returned, accompanied by Joseph Sikes. They took up a position in the doorway.

At last Oliver October appeared.

"Hello, Uncle Horace," was his greeting. "Sorry to have kept you waiting. And I'm in a bit of a hurry, too. Some friends coming down on No. 17, Mr. and Mrs. Sage—you remember them, no doubt. Anything in particular you wanted to see me about?"

"Yes, there is," said Mr. Gooch harshly. "I came over here to demand an apology from you, young man—a public apology printed over your signature in the newspapers. I wrote you a very plain and dignified letter in which I told you what I thought of the underhanded way you acted in regard to those dear old ladies, Mrs. Bannister and her sister. You know as well as I do that it was my intention to restore their property to them absolutely tax free and without a single claim against it. You simply sneaked in and got ahead of me. And what did you say in reply to my simple, straightforward letter? You said you wouldn't trust me as far as you could throw a locomotive with one hand, or something like that. If I don't have a written and published acknowledgement from you that you deliberately misrepresented me, that you played me an underhand trick simply for political purposes, I'll—"

"I'll make it so blamed hot for you you'll wish you'd never been born," grated Mr. Gooch. "It rests with you, young man, whether a certain investigation takes place or not."

"What do you mean by investigation?" demanded Oliver, his eyes narrowing. "Just what are you driving at?"

His uncle leaned forward and spoke slowly, distinctly. "Is there any evidence that you father ever left this place at all?"

Oliver looked his uncle straight in the eye for many seconds, a curious pallor stealing over his face.

"There is no evidence to the contrary."

"There's no evidence at all," said Gooch, "either one way or the other. There has never been anything like a thorough search for him—in the neighborhood of his own home. I don't believe Oliver Baxter ever ran away from home. I believe he's out there in that swamp of yours. Now you know what I mean by an investigation, young man—and if it is ever undertaken I want to say to you it won't be under your direction, and it won't be a half-hearted job. And the swamp won't be the only place to be searched. There are other places he

(Continued on Page Eight.)

Table with columns for various departments (COUNTY CLERK, COUNTY SHERIFF, COUNTY ROAD MASTER, etc.) and their respective salaries and expenses.

The following amounts are not included within the 6 per cent limitation law and are authorized by the Oregon Laws:

Table listing amounts for Interest on bonds, Bond Sinking Fund, State Tax, High School Tuition, and a TOTAL of \$153,300.00.

Table listing estimated receipts for the year 1926, other than taxation: Interest on bank deposits, Fees from Clerk's office, 25 per cent Forest Rentals, 5 per cent Land Sales, Uncollected taxes, and a TOTAL of \$44,600.00.

RECAPITULATION
Total estimated expenditures for the year subject to 6 per cent limitation \$145,001.00
Total estimated receipts not including proposed tax 44,600.00
Balance, amount to be raised by taxation subject to 6 per cent limitation \$100,401.00

Dated at Heppner, Oregon, this 4th day of November, A. D., 1925.
MORROW COUNTY BUDGET COMMITTEE,
LUCY M. JARMON, Secretary.
R. L. BENGE, Chairman.

NOTICE

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that there will be a meeting of the Levying Board of Morrow County, Oregon, at the Court House in Heppner, Oregon, on the 3rd day of December, 1925, when and where the estimates arrived at by the Budget Committee of Morrow County, Oregon, hereafter set forth, may be discussed with the Levying Board, and when and where any person who shall be subject to such tax levy, shall be heard in favor of or against said tax levy or any part thereof.

Dated at Heppner, Oregon, this 9th day of November, 1925.
R. L. BENGE, County Judge.
G. A. BLEAKMAN, Commissioner.
L. P. DAVIDSON, Commissioner.

Estimate and Accounting Sheet

THIS estimate and accounting sheet is made in compliance with Chapter 118, General Laws of Oregon, for 1921, and shows in parallel columns the unit cost of the several services, materials and supplies for the three years next preceding the current year, the detailed expenditures for the last one of the said preceding years, and the budget allowance and expenditures for the six months of the current year, also the budget estimate for the year 1926.

Table with columns for Department or Officer, Estimated '26 Expenditures, Expended 6 Month 1925, Budget 1925, Expended 1924, Expended 1923, and Expended 1922. Includes entries for COUNTY JUDGE Salary and Expense.