

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 in life he 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 nearing 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 reprimanded 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 through a swamp on the way to the city. 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. Oliver accepts a position in Chicago, 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. Uncle Horace Gooch announces himself as a candidate for state senator. Friends start a boom for young Oliver as candidate for state senator against old man Gooch. Jane forces Oliver to enter the race against his Shylock uncle.

CHAPTER V—Oliver employs ditch diggers to drain part of the swamp where his father is supposed to have disappeared. Mr. Gooch's campaign managers urge him to withdraw from the race for senator, as they realize that Oliver is the most popular candidate. Mr. Gooch refuses to quit. Reverend Sage is happy when his actress-wives cables him that she is sailing for home. Mr. Sage and his daughter go to New York to meet her. Mr. Gooch, convinced he will lose the election, convinces Oliver to try and intimidate him by demanding a thorough investigation into the disappearance of Oliver's father.

CHAPTER VI—Hundreds of persons are at the depot in Rumley to greet Mrs. Josephine Sage after an absence of 23 years. Jane notices Oliver is not in the throng at the station and is told by Sammy Parr that something of a political nature must have kept him away. Oliver goes to the Sage home.

CHAPTER VII—The sheriff unwillingly serves papers on Oliver after the prosecutor refused to lay the matter of Mr. Baxter's disappearance before the grand jury as requested by old man Gooch, but accedes to his demand for an official investigation. A few hotbeds in the town talk of tar and feathers for Mr. Gooch. The detectives start digging in the swamp for Mr. Baxter's body.

CHAPTER VIII—Oliver threatens to strike Malone if he ever insinuates again that he had anything to do with the disappearance of his father. At a reception given at Oliver's home Oliver tells Jane that he loves her. She promises to marry him. While out on the porch they hear mysterious footsteps. Oliver tells Jane Peter Hines boarded up his cabin in the swamp and had skipped town. They see a light in the cabin. Jane's engagement to Oliver is announced at the reception.

CHAPTER IX—Oliver spends a busy three weeks "electioneering" and speech-making while the opposition press prints sensational reports of the search for old man Baxter. Oliver wants to withdraw from the senatorial race.

CHAPTER X—Only six more days remain until Oliver is thirty years old, the time limit set by the gypsy "queen" for Oliver's execution. The diggers unearth a carcass in the swamp, but it is unrecognizable. The top of the skull was split wide open. Things looked bad for young Oliver. Oliver is unable to identify the body as that of his father. Oliver offers to release Jane from her promise.

CHAPTER XI

Oliver in Danger.

THE front door opened suddenly and in walked Sammy Parr. "Excuse haste," he said, tossing his hat and gloves on a chair. "I'm back. Say, gee whiz, everybody in town is out on Clay street. Lots of them down this way, strolling past—" "What are the people saying, Sammy?" Judge Shtridge broke in, grasping his arm.

"Well, I hate to tell you, but as far as I can make out, judge, there seems to be a general feeling that— that Oliver did it," said Sammy, wiping his moist forehead with the back of a hand that shook slightly. "Snap judgment," said the lawyer, after silence had reigned for a few seconds. "That is always the way with the ignorant and uninformed. Nothing to worry about, Oliver. They will be on your side tomorrow when they understand a little better. It's always the way with a crowd."

Josephine Sage spread her hands in a gesture of contempt. "What fools these mortals be," she declaimed theatrically.

It was after eleven o'clock when Oliver's friends departed. He stood on the porch and watched them drive off in two automobiles. A few persons had stopped at the hot-ou, of the drive to see who were in the cars. The glaring headlights fell upon white, indistinct faces and then almost instantly left them in pitch darkness.

"I wish you had let Mr. Sage marry you and Jane tonight, Oliver," said Mrs. Grimes, at his side on the top step. "You have the license and everything, and it could have been over in a few minutes, and Jane begged you so hard."

"I couldn't do it, Aunt Serrecta," he said dejectedly. "I don't know what is ahead of me. I may be in jail before I'm a day older. He gave her a

the nose was drawn close about his neck by cold, nervous fingers. A prayer was struggling on his writhing lips. Strong hands hauled at the rope. He swung into the air. . . .

A great white flare of light burst upon the gruesome spectacle—the din of a charging monster—the din of shrieking klaxons—and then the piercing scream of a woman.

The dense mob in the road broke, fighting frantically to get out of the path of Lansing's car. Some were struck and hurled screaming aside—and on came the car, forging its way slowly but relentlessly through the struggling mass.

Up to the awaying, wriggling form shot the car, a force irresistible, guided by a man who thought not of the human beings he might crush to death in his desire to reach the one he sought to save.

"Let go that rope!" yelled this man. Behind him came another car. Panic seized the mob. The compact mass broke and scattered.

A writhing, tortured figure lay in the middle of the road, a loose rope swinging free from the limb. The bewildered, startled men who held their hands fell back—uncertain, bewildered.

Lansing, unafraid, sprang from the car and rushed to the prostrate form. In a second he was tugging at the noose, cursing frightfully.

Now a woman hung herself down beside the man with the rope around his neck, sobbing, moaning, her arms straining to lift his shoulders from the ground.

A baffled roar went up from the mob. Men surged forward and hands were laid upon the rope—too late. The noose was off—and Sammy Parr, standing over the doctor and the distracted girl, had a revolver in his hand.

"Come on!" he yelled. "Come on, you dirty cowards! You swine! You d—d Huns! Come on and get a man-sized pull!"

From all sides boomed the shouts and curses of a quickly revived purpose. "Rush 'em!" "Kill 'em!" "Kill the—"

"Beat their heads off!" "Get him! Get him!" "Suddenly a strange voice rose above the clamor. Rich, vibrant, it fell upon puzzled ears, and once again there was a pause.

All eyes were turned upon the owner of this wondrous voice. A startling figure she was, standing erect upon the front seat of Lansing's car. "Men of Rumley! Hold! Hold, I command you! Is there one among you who has not heard of the gypsy's prophecy of thirty years ago? Let him speak who will, and let him speak for all."

A score of voices answered. "Aye!" she went on. "You all have heard of it. I ask one of you—any one of you—to stand forth and tell the rest of this craven mob what the gypsy fortune teller said on that wild and stormy night."

"She said the baby son of Oliver Baxter would be hung for murder before he was thirty years old," bawled someone. "And what else did she say?" rang out the voice of Josephine Judge.

"Oh, a lot of things that don't matter now," yelled a man back in the crowd. "Get busy, boys. We can't—" "Stop! Listen to me, varlets! You believe she spoke the truth when she uttered that prophecy? Answer!"

"Yes!" came from a hundred throats. "Then you must know that this boy was adjudged innocent of this crime on the day he was born," fell slowly, distinctly, from the lips of Josephine. "I will repeat the words of the gypsy woman. She said: 'He will not commit a murder. He will be hanged for a crime he did not commit.' Speak! Are not those the words of the gypsy?"

Absolute silence ensued. It was as if the crowd had turned to stone. "And so," she cried, leveling her finger at the men in the front rank, "you have done your part toward making the prophecy come true. You have hung Oliver October Baxter in spite of the fact that you were told thirty years ago that he would be innocent."

The mob stood rooted to the ground. A sudden shout went up from those in the front rank—a shout of relief. Oliver October was struggling to

"Sammy," he cried out thickly but with the ring of enthusiasm in his voice, "do me a favor, will you?"

"Sure," said Sammy, springing to his feet. "Stand up with me. I'm going to be married."

"Great!" cried Sammy. "I'll not only stand up with you, old boy, but I'll let you lean on me."

"Now?" gasped Serrecta Grimes, in great agitation. "Yes—now!" cried Jane softly, and for the first time that night the color came back into her cheeks.

CHAPTER XIII

Mr. Gooch Sees Things at Night.

HORACE GOOCH was going to bed. He had had a hard day, and it was nine o'clock. He had a book, a well-worn copy of "David Harum," but he did not begin reading at once. He was thinking of the many dark and lonely nights old Oliver had spent in Death Swamp. It gave him a creepy feeling. He tucked the covers a little more tightly under his chin—but still the creepy feeling persisted.

"Hey, Horace!" Someone was knocking at the front door—and the voice! There was only one voice in the world like that. Mr. Gooch went to the window. He hesitated a moment, then boldly drew the curtain apart.

"Hello, Horace," came wafting up to Mr. Gooch. "That you? Say, open up and let me in." Mr. Gooch grasped the window frame for support. "Good G—d!" he gulped, but in a

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Gonty Shoe Store

There was no delay. . . . The stout rope was thrown over the limb,