

OLIVER OCTOBER

by GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEON

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The ability of Mr. McCutcheon to invent clever, baffling, highly interesting plots seems to be without limit. In each of his novels there is an unusual situation or unique idea. In "Graustark" it was the tantalizing position of a patriotic American who loved and was loved in return by a family of controlled and politically bound European princes. In "Breast of Millions" the engaging young hero was confronted with the necessity of spending a million dollars in a year without giving any of it away, making useless purchases or indulging in wild extravagance. In "Viola Gwyn" two young people, ardently in love with each other, but whose birth records were confused, were confronted with the possibility that they might be brother and sister. In the present story, "Oliver October," you will find an even more original and remarkable situation.

George Barr McCutcheon, born on a farm in Tippecanoe county, Indiana, began his writing career as a reporter in Lafayette, Ind., shortly after graduation from Purdue university. His first novel, "Graustark," was published in 1901. Its popularity was instantaneous. It seems to have struck exactly the right chord with romance lovers, and continues to be a favorite. Its annual sales still yielding its author substantial royalties. It resulted in a series of several novels, in which many of the same characters appeared, and which were received no less graciously than the first one. For a number of years Mr. McCutcheon has been almost the king of romance in America. He has written upward of 40 novels, mostly romantic in character, besides a large number of short stories, the latter chiefly of a humorous nature. It has been said that no one excels McCutcheon in ability to portray beautiful heroines and make them real and human. He is also an excellent master of humor and character drawing, and is an expert in the art of fitting tense dramatic situations into his stories. "Oliver October" is a thoroughly interesting story and probably different from anything you ever read.

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-smiten 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 tyfied 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 liveryman of Rumley.

"Reverend" Sage was a good-looking young man of thirty, threadbare and a trifle wan, 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 sealskin coat—at least it looked like seal—with sleeves that ballooned grandly at the shoulders; rather stunning coral earrings made up of graduated globes and a slinky satin skirt of black.

"Good evening, Mr. Sikes," she drawled, as she scuffed 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 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 blithesome, 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.

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?"



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

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 this 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, sniffling.

"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."

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 inexorable 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-bye. Excoriation 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 to 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 long 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 to get 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 go 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 her heart for the gay Aunt Josephine, but her 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 little fists, with which he made his temper felt.

It was after witnessing a particularly ferocious battle between Oliver and Sammy Farr, 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 foretell 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 October as a child. He was



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

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 contentedly: "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 he 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 Joe! 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 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 included Rev. Mr. Sage, Mr. Sikes and Mr. Link, and one outsider, the mayor of Rumley, Mr. Samuel Beiding.

"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 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 old 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 Joe, I've just got to pull through alive and well, so that I can be hung when my time comes."

To be Continued.

Filipinos Continue to Believe in Talismans

A young Filipino descended from a "gatmayan" or ancient feudal prince known as Maiki is seeking the enchanted kerchief which gave his illustrious ancestor supernatural powers, such as that of charming birds so that they would alight upon his extended finger, or philtering with other men's wives without arousing jealousy on the part of the offended husbands. The kerchief is known in the family traditions as "the kerchief from the angel in moon." With other talismans and amulets, it is supposed to have been secretly buried by the chieftain before he died. Each succeeding eldest son has searched for the spot in vain. American schools endeavor to disabuse the native mind of its belief in talismans, but the belief is still widespread; a mysticism almost abysmal in depth affects the psychology of the people.

It was only recently necessary for the police in a town adjoining Manila to take into custody an adolescent boy to whom thousands of the afflicted were going because it was said his possession of an enchantment bestowed upon him healing powers.

Not far from this town a gang of counterfeiters were recently raided by a constabulary squad. To conceal evidence the men threw their dies into a stream bank their shanty. Washerwomen later found one of the dies, and when they cleaned it they discovered the image of Maria Cristina, queen regent of Spain prior to King Alfonso's coming of age. The old woman conceived this image to be that of the Virgin, and soon a story was abroad that the die (of the true nature of which no one had the least conception, not even the local officials) had been miraculously hidden in the stream bed and that a great blessing would ensue from its discovery. From surrounding towns people by thousands began making pilgrimages to the fortunate village, to adore the image and receive its blessing.

Vets Plant Memorial Trees

One hundred and sixteen new members of the American Tree association at Washington have been registered, following a tree planting on a memorial walk, by the United States Veterans' hospital, No. 100, Battle Creek, Mich. Among others, trees were planted for President Coolidge, General Pershing, Woodrow Wilson, Warren G. Harding, Robert E. Lee, General Miles, Clara Barton, Mabel Boardman, Abraham Lincoln, Joyce Kilmer. Plans for the tree planting were directed by Emma L. Kotz and Dr. William M. Dobson. The tree association sends tree-planting instructions and tree-day programs for a stamp to pay postage. The memorial walk is of silver maples.

Does Active Work at 88

R. R. Woodring of Nampa, Idaho, cannot play golf like the senior Rockefeller, but upon the occasion of the oil magnate's recent birthday when he played a round of golf and got much publicity, Mr. Woodring pointed out to the newspaper reporters that he himself of similar age, was quite active. He mowed the lawn while the reporters stood by recording the proof. Mr. Woodring mows grass for eight to ten hours daily as a regular vocation.—Chicago Post.

Homecoming Proved Fatal

Thomas O'Rourke of Liverpool, England, at the age of sixty-nine, decided to revisit his boyhood home in Belfast, Ireland. As he reached the beautiful Mourne mountains near Killybeg he stopped at the foot of the hill leading upward to his old home and after a few seconds dropped dead. Physicians say his death was caused by the emotional excitement and joy which were too much for his physical condition at his age.

Italy's Streets Narrow

Few streets in Italy are broad enough to permit street cars.