

GREEN FANCY

By GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEON

Author of "GRAUSTARK," "THE HOLLOW OF HER HAND," "THE PRINCE OF GREENBAY," ETC.

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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I—Thomas K. Barnes, a New Yorker, on a walking trip through New England, is caught in a storm near his destination. He is rescued by a stranger, who is later identified as a man named Sprouse. Barnes is taken to a tavern where he meets a girl named Green Fancie. He is attracted to her and tries to get her to go with him. She refuses, but he is determined to win her.

CHAPTER II—At the tavern Barnes falls in with a strange troupe of "bar-storming" actors, headed by Leonard Bushcraft, and becomes interested in them.

CHAPTER III—As the storm grows, Barnes finds himself worrying for the safety of the girl, traveling over the mountain roads. He learns that Green Fancie is something of a hoodlum, but he is determined to rescue her. He is aided by a man named Sprouse, who is later revealed to be a man of considerable means.

CHAPTER IV—He meets "Miss Thackeray," a 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. He is told that the man is a man named Sprouse, who is later revealed to be a man of considerable means.

CHAPTER V—The wounded man, who is later revealed to be a man named Sprouse, is taken to the tavern. Barnes is told that the man is a man of considerable means, and he is determined to rescue him.

CHAPTER VI—Barnes advances Bushcraft money sufficient to release the company from its embarrassing position. He is later revealed to be a man of considerable means, and he is determined to rescue the man named Sprouse.

CHAPTER VII—She seems not to be desirous of recognizing him, and turns away. O'Dowd appears and in apparently friendly fashion escorts Barnes to the grounds. He is later revealed to be a man of considerable means, and he is determined to rescue the man named Sprouse.

CHAPTER VIII—Miss Thackeray warns Barnes that a man attempting to rescue her, ostensibly a book agent, had searched his baggage for what he considers dangerous. He is later revealed to be a man of considerable means, and he is determined to rescue the man named Sprouse.

CHAPTER IX—The acquaintance of the storm is introduced as Miss Cameron. The makeup of the house party, particularly a man introduced to him as "Loeb," and the character of the man named Sprouse, is later revealed to be a man of considerable means, and he is determined to rescue the man named Sprouse.

CHAPTER X—Miss Cameron informs him she is a prisoner in the house, appealing to him for aid and binding him to secrecy. He is later revealed to be a man of considerable means, and he is determined to rescue the man named Sprouse.

CHAPTER XI—At breakfast the supposed book agent introduces himself as Sprouse, a government secret agent. He is later revealed to be a man of considerable means, and he is determined to rescue the man named Sprouse.

CHAPTER XII—Barnes agrees to accompany Sprouse on a nocturnal visit to Green Fancie's room, with the object of securing the jewels, and Barnes with the hope of rescuing "Miss Cameron."

CHAPTER XIII.

The Second Watcher Receives Two Visitors at Midnight.

The coroner's inquest over the bodies of Ron and Paul was held that afternoon at St. Elizabeth. Witnesses from Hart's Tavern were among those to testify. The verdict was "Murder at the hands of parties unknown."

Sprouse did not appear at the Tavern until long after midnight. The secret agent listened somewhat indifferently to the latter's account of his telephonic experiences. At nine o'clock he yawned prodigiously and announced that he was going to bed, greatly to the surprise of Mr. Barnes, who followed him from the taproom and demanded an explanation.

"People usually go to bed at night, don't they?" said Sprouse patiently. "It is expected, I believe."

"But, my dear man, we are to undertake—"

"I have some cause for believing that one of those chaps in there is from Green Fancie. Go to bed at ten o'clock, my friend, and put out your light. I don't insist on your taking off your clothes, however. I will rap on your door at eleven o'clock. By the way, don't forget to stick your revolver in your pocket."

A few minutes before eleven there came a gentle tapping on Barnes' door. He sprang to his feet and opened it, presenting himself before Sprouse fully dressed and, as the secret agent said later on, "fit to kill."

The night was as black as pitch. Barnes, trusting to the little man's eyes and hanging close upon his coat-tails, followed blindly but gallantly in the tracks of the leader. It seemed to him that they stumbled along parallel to the road for miles before Sprouse came to a halt. "This is the short cut to Green Fancie," he whispered, laying his hand on Barnes' arm. "We save four or five miles, coming this way. Do you know where we are?"

"I haven't the remotest idea."

"About a quarter of a mile below Curtis' house. Are you all right?"

"Fine as a fiddle, except for a hacked knee and a skinned elbow, a couple of more or less busted ribs. I've hunged into more trees than—"

"Sh!" After a moment of silence, intensified by the mournful squawk of night birds and the chorus of katydids, Sprouse whispered, "Did you hear that?"

Barnes thrilled. This was real melodrama. "Hear what?" he whispered shilly.

"Listen!" After a second or two there was a woodpecker hammering on the limb of a—

the grounds near the house. You see what we're up against, Barnes. Do you still want to go on with it?"

"I'll stay by you," replied Barnes sturdily.

Several minutes went by. There was not a sound save the restless patter of rain in the tree tops. At last the faraway thud of footsteps came to the ears of the tense listener. They drew nearer, louder, and once more seemed to be approaching the very spot where he crouched.

Then came the sound of a dull, heavy blow, a hoarse gasp, a momentary commotion in the shrubbery, and—again silence. Barnes' blood ran cold. He waited for the next footfall of the passing man. It never came.

A sharp whisper reached his ears. "Come here—quick!"

He floundered through the brush and almost fell prostrate over the kneeling figure of a man.

"Take care! Lend a hand," whispered Sprouse.

Dropping to his knees, Barnes felt for and touched wet, coarse garments, and gasped:

"My God! Have you killed him?"

"Temporarily," said Sprouse, between his teeth. "Here, unwind the rope I've got around my waist. Take care!"

He floundered through the brush and almost fell prostrate over the kneeling figure of a man.

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ered with a lattice work and hunched. I can shin up like a squirrel and go through her room to the—

"Are you crazy, Sprouse? You'd take your life in your hands and—"

"See here," said Sprouse shortly. "I am not risking my life for the fun of the thing. I am risking it for her."

"There were no lights visible. The house was even darker than the night itself; it was vaguely outlined by a deeper shade of black."

At last they were within a few yards of the entrance and at the edge of a small space that had been cleared of shrubbery. Here Sprouse stopped and began to adjust the sections of his fishing rod.

"Write," he whispered. "There is a faint glow of light up there to the right. The third window, did you say? Well, that's about where I should locate it."

The tiny metallic tip of the rod held in the upstretched hand of Barnes, much the taller of the two men, barely reached the window ledge.

He tapped gently, persistently on the hard surface. Just as they were beginning to think that she was asleep and that their efforts were in vain their straining eyes made out a shadowy object projecting slightly beyond the sill.

After a moment or two of suspense Barnes experienced a peculiar, almost electric shock. Someone had seized the tip of the rod; it stiffened suddenly, the vibrations due to its flexibility ceasing. Someone was untying the bit of paper he had fastened to the rod, and with fingers that shook and were clumsy with eagerness.

He had written: "I am outside with a trusted friend, ready to do you no bidding. Two of the guards are safely bound and out of the way. Now is your chance. We will never have an other. If you are prepared to come with me now write me a word or two and drop it to the ground. I will pass a rope to you and you may lower anything you wish to carry away with you. But be exceedingly careful. Take time. Don't hurry a single one of your movements." He signed it "with a large 'B'."

It seemed an hour before their eyes distinguished the shadowy head above. As a matter of fact but a few minutes had passed. During the wait Sprouse had noisily removed his coat, a proceeding that puzzled Barnes. Something light fell to the ground. It was Sprouse who stooped and searched for it in the grass. When he resumed an upright posture he put his lips close to Barnes' ear and whispered:

"I will put my coat over your head. Here is a little electric torch. Don't flash it until I am sure the coast is arranged so that you can do so without a gleam of light getting out from under."

He pressed the torch and a bit of closely folded paper in the other hand and carefully draped the coat over his head.

Barnes read: "Thank God! I was afraid you would wait until tomorrow night. Then it would have been too late. I must get away tonight but I cannot leave—I dare not let without something that is concealed in another part of the house. I do not know how to secure it. My door is locked from the outside. What am I to do? I would rather die than to go away without it."

He wrote: "If you do not come at once, we will force our way into the house and fight it out with them all. My friend is coming up the vines. Let him enter the window. Tell him where to go and he will do the rest. He is a miracle man. Nothing is impossible to him. If he does not return in ten minutes, I shall follow."

There was no response to this. The head reappeared in the window, but no word came down.

Sprouse whispered: "I am going up. Stay here. If you hear a commotion in the house, run for it. Don't wait for me. I'll probably be done for."

"I'll do just as I please about running," said Barnes, and there was a deep thrill in his whisper. "Good luck! God help you if they catch you."

"Not even he could help me then. Good-by. I'll do what I can to induce her to drop out of the window if anything goes wrong with me downstairs."

A moment later he was silently scaling the wall of the house, feeling his way carefully, testing every precarious foothold, dragging himself painfully upwards by means of the most uncanny, animal-like strength and stealth.

Barnes could not recall drawing a single breath from the instant the man left his side until the faintly luminous square above his head was obliterated by the black of his body as it wriggled over the ledge.

He will follow Sprouse. When he crawled through the window and stood street inside the room, he found himself confronted by a tall, shadowy figure, standing half-way between him and the door.

He advanced a step or two and uttered a soft hiss of warning.

"Not a sound," he whispered, drawing still nearer. "I have come four

from Paris by persons you know to aid you in delivering the crown jewels into the custody of your country's minister at Paris. We must act swiftly. Tell me where they are. I will get them."

"Who are you?" she whispered tensely.

"My name is Theodore Sprouse. I have been loaned to your embassy by my own government. I beg of you do not ask questions now. Tell me where the prince sleeps, how I may get to his room—"

"You know that he is the prince?"

"And that you are his cousin?"

"She was silent for a moment. "Not only is it impossible for you to enter his room but it is equally impossible for you to get out of this one except by the way you entered. If I thought there was the slightest chance for you to—"

"Let me be the judge of that, cousin. Where is his room?"

"The last to the right as you leave this door—at the extreme end of the corridor. Across the hall from his room you will see an open door. A map sits in there all night long, keeping watch. You could not approach Prince Ugo's door without being seen by that watcher."

"You said in your note to Barnes that the—something was in Curtis' study."

"The prince sleeps in Mr. Curtis' room. The study adjoins it, and can only be entered from the bedroom. There is no other door. What are you doing?"

"I am going to take a peep over the transom, first of all. If the coast is clear, I shall take a little stroll down the hall. Do not be alarmed. I will come back with the things we both want. Pardon me." He sat down on the edge of the bed and removed his shoes. She watched him as if fascinated while he opened the bosom of his soft shirt and stuffed the wet shoes inside.

Then he said: "You are not dressed for flight. May I suggest that while I am outside you slip on a dark skirt and coat? You cannot go far in that dressing gown. It would be in shreds before you had gone a hundred feet through the brush. If I do not return to this room inside of fifteen minutes, or if you hear sounds of a struggle, crawl through the window and go down the vines. Barnes will look out for you."

"You must not fall, Theodore Sprouse," she whispered. "I must regain the jewels and the state papers. I cannot go without—"

"I shall do my best," he said simply. Silently he drew a chair to the door, mounted it and, drawing himself up by his hands, peered his head through the open transom. As instant later he was on the floor again. She heard him inserting a key in the lock. Almost before she could realize that it had actually happened, the door opened slowly, cautiously, and his thin wiry figure slid through what seemed to her no more than a crack. As softly the door closed.

For a long time she stood, dazed and unbelieving, in the center of the room, staring at the door. She held her breath, listening for the shout that was so sure to come—and the shot, perhaps! A prayer formed on her lips and went voicelessly up to God.

Suddenly she roused herself from the stupefaction that held her. With feverish haste she snatched up garments from the chair on which she had carelessly placed them in anticipation of the emergency that now presented itself. A blouse (which she neglected to button), a short skirt of some dark material, a jacket, and a pair of stout walking shoes (which she failed to lace), completed the swift transformation. As she glided to the window, she latched the latch into a small black vat of felt. Then she peered over the edge.

She started back, stifling a cry with her hand. A man's head had almost come in contact with her own as she crouched out. A man's hand reached over and grasped the inner ledge of the casement, and then a man's face was dimly revealed to her startled gaze.

Continued next week.

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