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GREEN FANCY

By GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEON

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

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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.

CHAPTER VI—Barnes advances Rushcroft money sufficient to release the company from its embarrassing position thereby becoming its official backer. He visits Green Fancy, and in the grounds meets his acquaintance of the night before, finding her a girl of surprising beauty.

CHAPTER VII—She seems not to be desirous of recognizing him, and turns away. O'Dowd appears and in apparently friendly fashion escorts Barnes (who feels he is unwelcome) from the grounds.

CHAPTER VIII—Miss Thackeray warns Barnes that a man stopping at the tavern, ostensibly a book agent, had searched his baggage in his absence. O'Dowd comes to the tavern and with Barnes and others goes over the scene of the previous night's shooting. Barnes is invited to dinner at Green Fancy.

CHAPTER IX—His 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 number of menservants about the place, somewhat astonishes Barnes.

CHAPTER X—Miss Cameron informs him she is a prisoner in the house, appealing to him for aid and binding him to secrecy. In conversation with the chauffeur who drives him back to the tavern, Barnes becomes convinced there is a conspiracy of moment hatching at Green Fancy.

CHAPTER XI—At breakfast the supposed book agent introduces himself as Sprouse, a government secret agent. Sprouse tells Barnes he is there to watch the party at Green Fancy, describing them as refugees from a country overrun by the Germans. He asserts that "Miss Cameron" is a relative of the former ruler of the devastated country and that she or "Loeb" have with them the crown jewels, of enormous value, which Sprouse would recover.

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

CHAPTER XIII—They enter the grounds in safety, Sprouse overcoming two men evidently on guard. Reaching the house, Barnes sends up, by means of a fishing rod carried by Sprouse, a note to "Miss Cameron," informing her of their intention to enter the house. She tries to dissuade them, but Sprouse climbs to her room and goes through it on a quest for the crown jewels and state papers.

CHAPTER XIV—Barnes becomes uneasy at Sprouse's long absence and follows him, climbing by means of the ivy attached to the wall. While talking to "Miss Cameron" a commotion in the house warns them that Sprouse has been detected. Barnes, with "Miss Cameron" clinging to him, makes his escape to the ground. He loses his sense of location and they become lost, finally taking refuge in a small shed. "Miss Cameron" explains how she was decoyed to the house, and was to be married against her will to the man "Loeb," whom she reveals as a prince of the house to which she belongs. They are surprised in the darkness by O'Dowd.

CHAPTER XV—O'Dowd demands the jewels, which he thinks the fugitives have in their possession, not knowing of Sprouse's enterprise. Convinced neither "Miss Cameron" nor Barnes have them, O'Dowd puts them on the right road to the tavern, where Barnes gives his companion into the care of Miss Thackeray. Next day O'Dowd tells Barnes Sprouse, whom he describes as an expert burglar, got away with the treasure, after killing a guard in the house. O'Dowd and "Loeb" leave Green Fancy.

CHAPTER XVI—Barnes tells "Miss Cameron" of Sprouse's treachery, and she tells him the whole story of Green Fancy. The man known as Loeb is her cousin, and he inveigled her to the house with the object of possessing himself of the jewels, which were in her custody.

CHAPTER XVII—O'Dowd returns and informs Barnes of the identity of "Miss Cameron." She is of royal blood, he asserts, Countess Therese Mara-Dafanda.

CHAPTER XVIII—Barnes visits Green Fancy to secure the wardrobe of the countess. He meets Sprouse, who tells him Loeb got away with the jewels after killing the guard and accusing Sprouse of the murder and robbery.

CHAPTER XIX—Barnes and the countess leave Hart's tavern with the actors, and at Crowndale, where they are to appear. Barnes again meets Sprouse.

CHAPTER XX—Sprouse tells Barnes Loeb is in hiding in Crowndale with his mistress, and promises to rob him of the jewels. He does so, delivering the treasure to Barnes, as agreed, at the same time informing him that he would take it from him if he could, at the expiration of one week.

CHAPTER XXI.

The End in Sight.

Barnes, soaring beyond all previous heights of exaltation, ranged dizzily between "front" and "back" at the Grand opera house that evening. He was in the "wings" with her, whispering in her delighted ear; in the dressing-room, listening to her soft words of encouragement to the excited leading lady; on the narrow stairs leading up to the stage, assisting her to mount them; and all the time he was dreading the moment when he would awake and find it all a dream.

There was an annoying fly in his ointment, however. "I love you," she had said simply. "I want more than anything else in all the world to be your wife. But I cannot promise now. I must have time to think, time to—"

"Why should you require more time than I?" he persisted. "What is time to us? Why make wanton waste of it?"

"I know that I cannot find happiness except with you," she replied. "No matter what happens to me, I shall always love you, I shall never forget the joy of this. But—I cannot promise now," she finished gently and kissed him.

Between the second and third acts Tommy Gray rushed back with the box-office statement. The gross was $359. The instant that fact became known to Mr. Rushcroft he informed Barnes that they had a "knockout," a gold mine, and that never in all his career had he known a season to start off so auspiciously as this one.

Three days later Barnes and "Miss Jones" said farewell to the strollers and boarded a day train for New York city. They left the company in a condition of prosperity. The show was averaging two hundred dollars nightly and Mr. Rushcroft was already booking return engagements for the early fall. He was looking forward to a tour of Europe at the close of the war.

Barnes' sister, Mrs. Courtney, met them at the Grand Central terminal.

"It's now a quarter to five," said Barnes after the greeting and presentation. "Drop me at the Fifth Avenue bank, Edith. I want to leave something in my safety box downstairs. Sha'n't be more than five minutes."

He got down from the automobile at Forty-fourth street and shot across the sidewalk into the bank, casting quick, apprehensive glances through the five o'clock crowd on the avenue as he sprinted. In his hand he lugged the heavy, weatherbeaten pack. His sister and the countess stared after him in amazement.

Presently he emerged from the bank, still carrying the bag. He was beaming. A certain worried, haggard expression had vanished from his face, and for the first time in eight hours he treated his traveling wardrobe with scorn and indifference.

"Thank God, they're off my mind at last," he cried. "That is the first good, long breath I've had in a week. No, not now. It's a long story and I can't tell it in Fifth avenue. It would be extremely annoying to have both of you die of heart failure with all these people looking on."

He felt her hand on his arm, and knew that she was looking at him with wide, incredulous eyes, but he faced straight ahead. He was terribly afraid that the girl beside him was preparing to shed tears of joy and relief. He could feel her searching in her jacket pocket for a handkerchief.

Mrs. Courtney was not only curious but apprehensive. She hadn't the faintest idea who Miss Cameron was, nor where her brother had picked her up. But she saw at a glance that she was lovely, and her soul was filled with strange misgivings. She was like all sisters who have pet bachelor brothers. She hoped that poor Tom hadn't gone and made a fool of himself.

The few minutes' conversation she had with the stranger only served to increase her alarm. Miss Cameron's voice and smile—and her eyes!—were positively alluring.

She had had a night letter from Tom that morning in which he said that he was bringing a young lady friend down from the north—and would she meet them at the station and put her up for a couple of days? That was all she knew of the dazzling stranger up to the moment she saw her. Immediately after that she knew by intuition a great deal more about her than Tom could have told in volumes of correspondence. She knew, also, that Tom was lost forever!

"Now tell me," said the countess the instant they entered the Courtney apartment. She gripped both of his arms with her firm little hands and looked straight into his eyes, eagerly, hopefully. She had forgotten Mrs. Courtney's presence, she had not taken the time to remove her hat or jacket.

"Let's all sit down," said he. "My knees are unaccountably weak. Come along, Ede. Listen to the romance of my life."

And when the story was finished the countess took his hand in hers and held it to her cool cheek. The tears were still drowning her eyes.

"Oh, you poor dear! Was that why you grew so haggard and pale and hollow-eyed?"

"Partly," said he with great significance.

"And you had them in your pack all the time? You—"

"I had Sprouse's most solemn word not to touch them for a week. He is the only man I feared. He is the only one who could have—"

"May I use your telephone, Mrs. Courtney?" cried she suddenly. She sprang to her feet, quivering with excitement. "Pray forgive me for being so ill-mannered, but I—I must call up one or two people at once. They are my friends. You will understand, I am sure."

Barnes was pacing the floor nervously when his sister returned after conducting her new guest to the room prepared for her. The countess was at the telephone before the door closed behind her hostess.

"I wish you had been a little more explicit in your telegram, Tom," she said peevishly. "If I had known who she is I wouldn't have put her in that room. Now I shall have to move Aunt Kate back into it tomorrow and give Miss Cameron the big one at the end of the hall." Which goes to prove that Tom's sister was a bit of a snob in her way. "Stop walking like that and come here." She faced him accusingly. "Have you told all there is to tell, sir?"

"Can't you see for yourself, Ede, that I'm in love with her? Desperately, horribly, madly in love with her. Don't giggle like that! I couldn't have told you while she was present, could I?"

"That isn't what I want to know. Is she in love with you? That's what I'm after."

"Yes," said he, but frowned anxiously.

"She is perfectly adorable," said she, and was at once aware of a guilty, nagging impression that she would not have said it to him half an hour earlier for anything in the world.

She was strangely white and subdued when she rejoined them later on. She had removed her hat. The other woman saw nothing but the wealth of sun-kissed hair that rippled. Barnes went forward to meet her, filled with a sudden apprehension.

"What is it? You are pale and—what have you heard?"

She stopped and looked searchingly into his eyes. A warm flush rose to her cheeks; her own eyes grew soft and tender and wistful.

"They all believe that the war will last two or three years longer," she said huskily. "I cannot go back to my own country till it is all over. They implore me to remain here with them until—until my fortunes are mended." She turned to Mrs. Courtney and went on without the slightest trace of indecision or embarrassment in her manner. "You see, Mrs. Courtney, I am very, very poor. They have taken everything. I—I fear I shall have to accept this kind, generous proffer of a—" her voice shook slightly—"of a home with my friends until the Huns are driven out."

Barnes' silence was more eloquent than any words. Not until Mrs. Courtney expressed the hope that Miss Cameron would condescend to accept the hospitality of her home until plans for the future were definitely fixed was there a sign that the object of her concern had given a thought to what she was saying.

"You are so very kind," stammered the countess. "But I cannot think of imposing upon—"

"Leave it to me, Ede," said Barnes gently, and, laying his hand upon his sister's arm, he led her from the room. Then he came swiftly back to the outstretched arms of the exile.

"A very brief New York engagement," he whispered in her ear, he knew not how long afterward. Her head was pressed against his shoulder, her eyes were closed, her lips parted in the ecstasy of passion.

"Yes," she breathed, so faintly that he barely heard the strongest word ever put into the language of man.

Half an hour later he was speeding down the avenue in a taxi. His blood was singing, his heart was bursting with joy—his head was light, for the feel of her was still in his arms, the voice of her in his enraptured ears.

He was hurrying homeward to the "diggings" he was soon to desert forever. He was to spend the night at his sister's apartment. When he issued forth from his "diggings" at half-past seven he was attired in evening clothes, and there was not a woman in all New York, young or old, who would have denied him a second glance.

Later on in the evening three of the countess' friends arrived at the Courtney home to pay their respects to their fair compatriot and to discuss the crown jewels. They came and brought with them the consoling information that arrangements were practically completed for the delivery of the jewels into the custody of the French embassy at Washington, through whose intervention they were to be allowed to leave the United States without the formalities usually observed in cases of suspected smuggling. Upon the arrival in America of trusted messengers from Paris, headed by no less a personage than the ambassador himself, the imperial treasure was to pass into hands that would carry it safely to France. Prince Sebastian, still in Halifax, had been apprised by telegraph of the recovery of the jewels, and was expected to sail for England by the earliest steamer.

And while the visitors at the Courtney house were lifting their glasses to toast the prince they loved, and, in turn, the beautiful cousin who had braved so much and fared so luckily, and the tall wayfarer who had come into her life, a small man was stooping over a rifled knapsack in a room far downtown, glumly regarding the result of an unusually hazardous undertaking, even for one who could perform such miracles as he. Scratching his chin, he grinned—for he was the kind who bears disappointment with a grin—and sat himself down at the big library table in the center of the room. Carefully selecting a pen-point he wrote:

"It will be quite obvious to you that I called unexpectedly tonight. The week was up, you see. I take the liberty of leaving under the paperweight at my elbow a two-dollar bill. It ought to be ample payment for the damage done to your faithful traveling companion. Have the necessary stitches taken in the gash and you will find the kit as good as new. I was more or less certain not to find what I was after, but as I have done no irreparable injury I am sure you will forgive my love of adventure and excitement. It was really quite difficult to get from the fire escape to your window, but it was a delightful experience. Try crawling along that ten-inch ledge yourself some day and see if it isn't productive of a pleasant thrill. I shall not forget your promise to return good for evil some day. God knows I hope I may never be in a position to test your sincerity. We may meet again, and I hope under agreeable circumstances. Kindly pay my deepest respects to the Countess Ted, and believe me to be,

"Yours very respectfully,
"SPROUSE.

"P. S.—I saw O'Dowd today. He left a message for you and the countess. Tell them, said he, that I ask God's blessing for them forever. He is off tomorrow for Brazil. He was very much relieved when he heard that I did not get the jewels the first time I went after them, and immensely entertained by my jolly description of how I went after them the second. By the way, you will be interested to learn that he has cut loose from the crowd he was trailing with. Mostly nuts, he says. Dynamiting munition plants in Canada was a grand project, says he, and it would have come to something if the d——d women had only left the d——d men alone. The expletives are O'Dowd's."

* * * * * * *

Ten hours before Barnes found this illuminating message on his library table he stood at the window of a lofty Park avenue apartment building, his arm about the slender, yielding figure of the only other occupant of the room. Pointing out over the black housetops, he directed her attention to the myriad lights in the upper floors of a great hostelry to the south and west and said:

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[THE END.]

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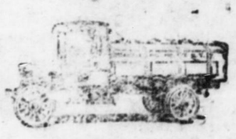

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