

Outrageous Fortune

by Patricia Wentworth

SYNOPSIS: Two women go to the Elston hospital in response to an inquiry broadcast by the authorities after a man is picked up on the shore, dazed from his experience in a shipwreck. He has talked in his sleep about "Jimmy Riddell" and about green heads, and afterwards, Nests Riddell tells the hospital staff the man is her husband, and removes him to her brother Tom's car. Caroline Leigh arrives too late. She believes the man may be her cousin, Jim Randall, an engineer. The nurse explains, and tells her that unless she is sure Jim Randall was on the unlucky boat, she must continue to "hope for the best."

Chapter Five

MORE MYSTERY
 "Oh—" said Caroline. "And he hadn't any papers or anything of that sort?"
 "Not a thing—nothing at all, except the torn-off end of a letter."
 "Oh, that's something!" Caroline's voice thrilled. "A bit of a letter? Oh please, what was on it?"
 "Nothing but the signature," said the day nurse.
 "What? Your affectionate Uncle Alfred, or Aunt Maria, or Cousin Jimmie?"
 The day nurse felt a little disturbed; she did not know why. "No—it was only the name."
 "What name?"
 "Just Caroline."
 Caroline put both hands to her

"His age, height, weight, color, hair, eyes?" Caroline flung the words at her like a handful of pebbles.
 The day nurse caught at the easiest question.
 "Well, his hair was what you'd call betwixt and between—nothing very special, you know."
 "And his eyes?"
 The nurse shook her head.
 "I never noticed them—he'd mostly got them shut."
 Caroline picked up the rest of the pebbles and threw them one by one. She wanted to shake the nurse, but she restrained herself.
 "Age?"
 "Oh, he wasn't old."
 "About thirty?"
 "He might have been."
 "Height?"
 "Oh, just ordinary."
 "Coloring?"
 "Well, he was sunburnt—we all noticed that."
 "Where has she taken him?"
 "Marley," said the nurse. "It's only about eight miles from here, and if it will set your mind at rest—
 "Yes—I must see him. I'll go there. Thank you very much—I'll go." She turned, and turned back again. "You haven't got that bit of my letter, I suppose?"



"I am Caroline Leigh."

head as if she were afraid that her hat would blow off in some violent, intangible wind. She felt giddy with the rush of it. It slapped her face and sang in her ears. She held on to her bright brown curls and opened her eyes as far as they would go.
 "Caroline!" she said in her very deepest voice.
 "That's all."
 "It's quite enough. My dear thing, it's more than enough—because I am Caroline."
 "Oh!" said the nurse. Then she said, "Caroline—" in an experimental sort of way. Then she stopped dead.
 "Caroline Leigh," said Caroline with a warm rush of words. "I told the girl who let me in, but I expect she forgot—or perhaps she just didn't like the name—lots of people don't. But I am Caroline Leigh, and I wrote to him and stened it just like that—just Caroline. And what do you think of that?"
 The nurse did not seem able to think at all. She took refuge behind Nests Riddell.
 "Mrs. Riddell said he was her husband."
 "Is her name Caroline?"
 "I don't know. I did ask her if she knew anyone by that name."
 "And what did she say?"
 "She said she might."

THIS was going too far for the nurse.
 "I don't see how it could be your letter," she protested. "No—we left it in his pocket just where it was."
 Caroline turned again. The signature would have told her everything at once. Now she'd got to wait and wait and wait. Eight miles, or eight hundred, were all the same when you wanted to know something at once—at once.
 "Miss Leigh—"
 Of course she hadn't said goodbye. How frightfully, unforgivably rude. She flung round with an impulsive hand out.
 "Oh, please forgive me—you've been so kind!"
 But the nurse was taking something out of her apron pocket.
 "That's nothing. But if you're seeing Mrs. Riddell, perhaps you'll give her this." She held out a flimsy folded paper. "The nurse who let her in thinks she must have dropped it when she opened her bag. She's just given it to me, and though I don't suppose it's important, still if you are seeing her—"
 "Yes, of course. What's the address?"
 "She didn't say—but Marley's quite a small place."
 "Good-bye, and thank you," said Caroline.
 The nurse had said she was busy, yet she stood quietly in the door as Caroline got into her little car, turned and disappeared down the drive as quickly as the conformation there would permit.
 The nurse was thinking, and it was difficult for her. There were, evidently two Carolines, since Nests Riddell had practically admitted to knowing one. It was asking a good deal of coincidence to believe there were two missing men as well, yet Caroline was on the trail of a Jim Randall, and Nests Riddell had a Jimmy Riddell in her care at the moment.
 Or could it be—a voice shrilled behind her, and the nurse, suddenly called back to earth, disappeared with a sigh.

CAROLINE stopped holding her curls. The wind had blown past her and away. Her right hand took her left hand and pinched it hard.
 "She said it was her husband?"
 "Yes."
 "She ought to know. What was he like? I ought to have asked that straight away—oughtn't I? What was he like?"
 The day nurse looked vague. Her mind didn't work as quickly as that; it did not in fact work quickly at all, except on the accustomed lines of routine.
 Caroline's eyes sparkled and implored. They were bright, as deep spring water is bright—bright, and brown, and eager.
 "Oh, what was he like? Aren't you going to tell me?"
 "Well—" said the nurse slowly. "It's not so very easy to say, you know."

she ran onto the highway after her dog, Phyllis Court, three years old, was killed near here today. Andrew Turbium, driver of the car, was exonerated by police.
 The child was standing with her father beside the highway. The dog ran into the road and the little girl followed, running suddenly in the path of the Turbium machine.

NURSE SAVES FINE BY WAR TIME ACT

MONSENSEN, Pa., Sept. 27.—(AP)—Wounded soon after he went to the

front in France 15 years ago. William Fields, an American doughboy, of Brownsville, pleaded with a nurse: "Please don't let them cut off my arm."
 She patted his shoulder reassuringly—and Fields came back home with his arm intact. He never saw her again in France.
 That nurse—Eleanor Schoolhart of Monessen—was handed a parking

ticket in Brownsville and told to see the burgess.
 She placed the tag on the burgess' desk, that official, the same William Fields she befriended overseas, looked up and recognized her.
 She paid no fine.
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FISHERMAN SAVED BY LIFE GUARDS

ASTORIA, Ore., Sept. 27.—(AP)—Its sole occupant in an exhausted

condition from his long vigil the trolling boat, "Grant H." of Seattle, battered about by the stormy Pacific winds for the past seven days, was towed into the Columbia river last night by life boats from the Point Adams and Cape Disappointment coast guards stations.
 Francis Huntsucker of Astoria, who was operating the boat, was

stressed for exposure. He said he left Umpqua river a week ago.
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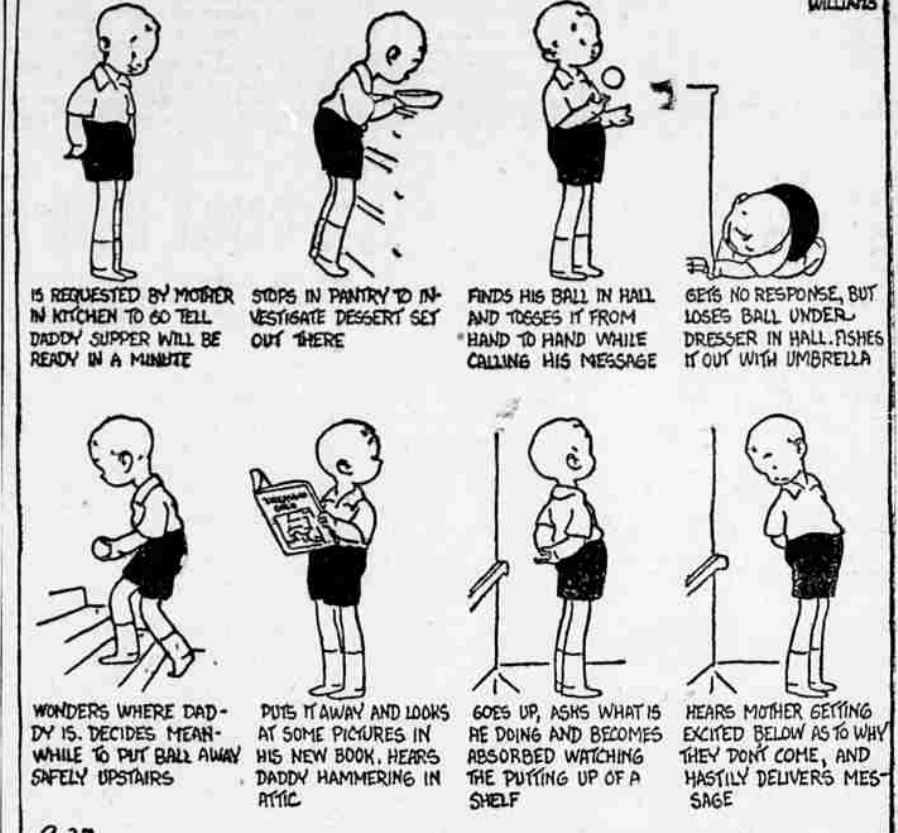
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LITTLE GIRL KILLED TRYING TO SAVE PET

VANCOUVER, Wash., Sept. 27.—(AP)—Struck by an automobile as

she ran onto the highway after her dog, Phyllis Court, three years old, was killed near here today. Andrew Turbium, driver of the car, was exonerated by police.
 The child was standing with her father beside the highway. The dog ran into the road and the little girl followed, running suddenly in the path of the Turbium machine.

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