

# Outrageous Fortune

by Patricia Wentworth

**SYNOPSIS:** Jim Fendal determines to remain in hiding at his hideout home Hale Place, in an effort to regain his memory of the last six weeks, and to settle the situation in which he finds himself. He meets for all he can prove, he both the thief who took the Van Berg emeralds and the husband of a woman he detests, Nesta Siddell. Moreover, from what Caroline Leigh tells him, clues found by the police at the Van Berg house seem to help out Nesta's story.

## Chapter 25 THE LETTER

CAROLINE interrupted Jim with a frightened, "Stay here!" "Why not? You said Mrs. Lodger only came once a week. If she was here yesterday, that gives me five clear days. If I can't remember things by then, I shall send for Robert and put myself in his hands." He stopped in the middle of the floor. "And now you must go."

Caroline got up. "Have you got enough blankets? Are they aired?" He laughed—a real laugh this time.

"Who do think's been airing my bedclothes for the last seven years?"

"I don't know," said Caroline. "And you needn't laugh—it's nice of me to want you to have dry blankets. Don't you think so?"

She came up close and stood on tiptoe, putting up her face. "Good-night—darling ungrateful Jim!"

He said, "I'm not ungrateful."

In the middle of the short sentence his voice changed. He would have stepped back, but she held him with a hand on either arm.

"Perhaps you'll be grateful when you see what a nice supper I've brought you. I bought the things in town. Good-night!"

She kissed him as if it were seven years ago, and she a child and he her all but brother. But all of a sudden her heart beat quick and hard. When she had kissed Jim last her heart had not beaten like this. She stepped back, too confused and troubled by her own feelings to be aware of his. She wanted to be out of the room and out of the house.

She went to the door and opened it. The dark passage lay before her. She stepped out into it with her thoughts still in great confusion. Why should it make her feel like this to touch Jim's cheek with her lips? What was always kissed him. What was there to make this kiss any different from all the other kisses?

His rigid silence escaped her. She was scarcely aware that he had taken up the candle and was following. They walked along the corridor and down the stairs without a spoken word. Words unspoken clattered in them both.

He walked with her down the dark drive and through the sleeping village. At the cottage gate he broke the long silence.

"You mustn't come again."

"I must," said Caroline.

"No, you mustn't."

"I shall come tomorrow," said Caroline, and was gone before he could answer.

THE first mail in the morning brought a proposal in due form from Robert Arbutnot. Patsy Ann glowed and blushed over it as if it had been the most ardent of love-letters. She read it aloud in snatches, with agitated and enthusiastic comments. It concluded:

"I have, for some time, been considering the question of matrimony. I hope you know me well enough as subject the most serious consideration before taking what I regard as an irrevocable step. From the hour of your conversation yesterday I gather that you would not consider a distant degree of relationship, such as exists between yourself and me, as an insuperable bar to marriage. May I therefore ask whether you could entertain the idea of accepting me as your husband?"

Patsy broke off and dabbed her eyes.

"He makes it sound so solemn—doesn't he? I think it's a wonderful letter. Don't you?"

Patsy dabbed her eyes again. "I don't know how to answer it. I can't write a beautiful letter like that."

"I shouldn't try," said Caroline. "That's Robert's sort of letter. You write your own sort, and perhaps he'll sit down at the other end and wonder how you did it."

"Do you think so? Do you think I could just say that he's made me very happy—would that do?"

"Beautifully," said Caroline.

As she said it, the telephone bell began to ring. A scarlet Patsy caught up the receiver.

"Caroline—if it's him—"

"Then as Caroline, laughing and shaking her head, was about to run out of the room, there was a change in voice and manner. A puzzled look came over Patsy's face; her color receded, and her voice took on a tone of disappointment.

"Oh... Yes, she's here. Who shall I say?... Oh... Very well, I'll call her."

She turned from the instrument, which was fastened to the wall at the foot of the stairs.

"Caroline—someone wants you. She won't give any name."

Caroline took the receiver with some impatience. It was so stupid of people not to give their names. If you were out off, you never knew who had been calling you. She simply hated that.

There came to her along the wire an almost inaudible voice.

"Is that Caroline Leigh?"

"Who is speaking?"

"Is that Caroline Leigh?"

"Yes. Who is speaking?"

"Will you come and see me? I want to see you very badly."

"But who are you? I didn't hear—"

"I didn't say. I want to see you—about—Jim." There was a faint desperate catch in the voice before the name came out.

IT took Caroline a moment to get her own voice steady.

"Are you—no, you're not—Nesta." "Who is Nesta? No, never mind I'm Susie. You know now, don't you? Will you come and see me?"

Caroline's heart leapt. Susie Van Berg wanted to see her. Why? O all things in the world, she wanted most to see Susie Van Berg. She wanted it so much that she was afraid to say yes. Could she go—might she go? Was there any possible hurt to Jim in her going? She couldn't see any.

Susie Van Berg spoke again, a little louder, a little more insistently.

"Are you there? Will you come?"

"Yes," said Caroline, and had the feeling, like Robert, that she was taking an irrevocable step.

"How will you come?" said Susie Van Berg. "I would send the car—but then the servants would talk—"

"They'll do that anyhow," said Caroline with the ghost of a laugh. "But you needn't bother—I've got my own little car. When shall I come?"

The voice said, "At once."

Caroline's thoughts moved rapidly. She said, "Not if you don't want to make talk. It isn't as if I knew you very well. It would be better if I came in the afternoon—anyone can come in the afternoon."

"What time?" The voice fluttered. "Between five and six," said Caroline. "Will that do?"

The voice said, "Yes." The click of the receiver put a full stop to the word.

Susie Van Berg turned from the telephone, clutching with both hands at the pale blue satin wrap she was wearing. She had locked both doors before she rang up Caroline Leigh—the bedroom door, and the door of the big dressing-room which she had turned into a sitting-room for herself.

The communicating door stood open between the two rooms. The telephone was in the sitting-room. She had hung up the receiver because she had heard someone try the handle of the bedroom door.

She stood for a moment, listening in a strained position, the light of the grey rainy morning falling cold upon her pallor. She had the type of looks which needs the sun. Her hair was so pale as to be almost silver, her eyes a forget-me-not blue, her skin as white as privet, with no more than a faint rose to tinge the cheeks, and deeper to the color of pink hawthorn in the lips.

She stood there listening, and heard the handle tried again. In an instant she had stepped out of her slippers and, picking them up, crossed the floor and gone through the communicating door, moving without a sound. The bedroom blinds were down, and the curtains drawn. The only light came from the sitting-room.

Susie Van Berg slipped into the turned-down bed and, leaning over the edge, set her slippers down beneath it. Then, pulling the clothes about her, she reached out her hand and rang the bell.

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Tomorrow, Caroline makes a strangely upsetting call.

# CCC BOYS SHOW GAIN IN WEIGHT

DES MOINES—(AP)—One of the army officers commanding civilians conservation corps camp in Iowa checked up a complaint from a mother that her boy was not getting sufficient cake and pie.

The officer put the boy on the camp scales. The dial showed a net gain of twelve pounds in weight since the boy had enlisted.

Figures prepared by the camp physicians show that the young men have averaged eight pounds gain in weight since last spring. Some have gained as much as 20 to 25 pounds, little of which is fat.

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College Registration Down. CORVALLIS, Ore.—(UP)—Registration figures for Oregon State College have reached 2,000. This indicates an approximate eight per cent drop from last year at this time. Mountains Lured German. DENVER, Colo.—(UP)—Paul Max Weber, 23, of Berlin, Germany, traveled 6,000 miles to attend Denver University this year. It was the mountains that lured him. "They'll be grand for gliding and I'm more interested in gliding than anything else."

Seventeen Children Freed Him. DENVER, Colo.—(UP)—Michael Widhalm of Hugo, Col., was freed of a liquor offense after he told Federal Judge J. Foster Symes he had seventeen children and had to sell booze in order to feed his flock. Symes lectured him, advised him to apply for federal farm relief, and discharged him.

185 State Parks in Oregon. SALEM, Ore.—(UP)—Oregon has 185 state parks, comprising 13,836 acres. The state park system was created in 1925.

# S'MATTER POP—

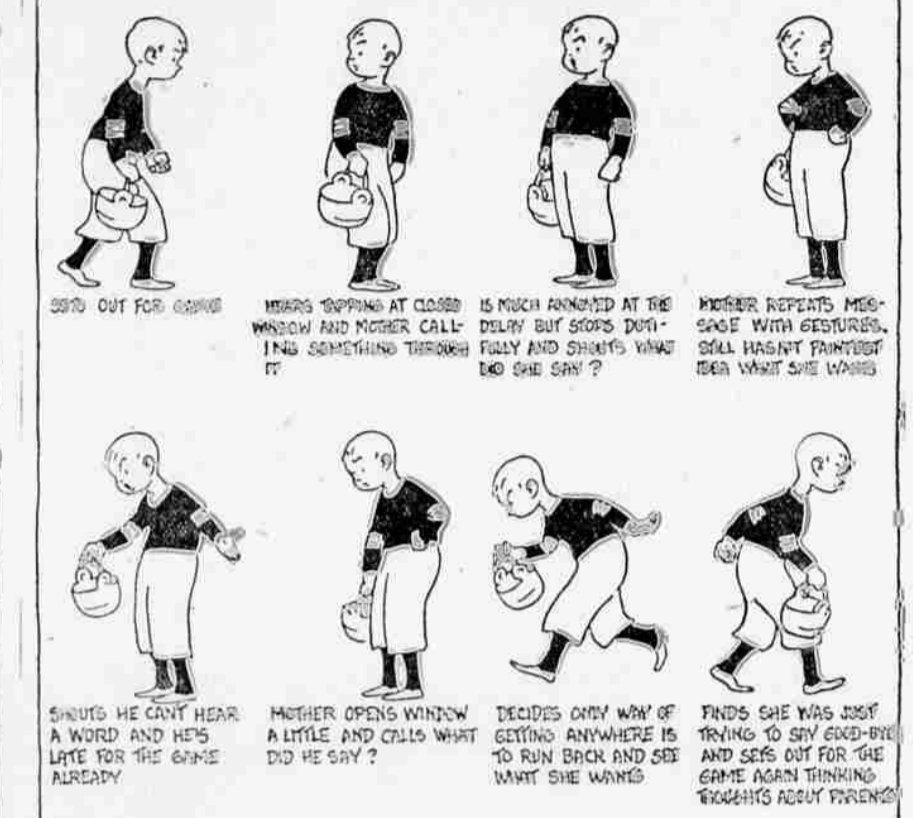
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# SNAPSHOTS OF A BOY STARTING FOR THE GAME

By GUYAS WILLIAMS



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# TAILSPIN TOMMY—Nothing To Report

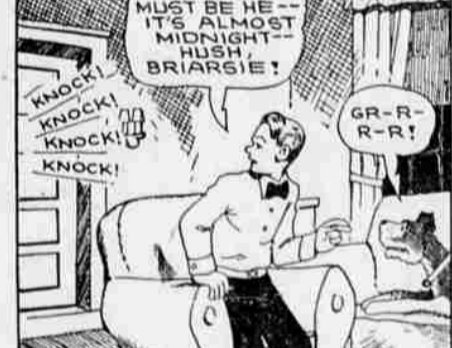
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