

Outrageous Fortune

by Patricia Wentworth

Chapter 47 DANGEROUS STORY

CAROLINE shut her eyes. She felt odd and light, like a soap-bubble that is just going to fly away.

When she opened them again, the inspector was sitting at the writing-table. He had a sheet of paper before him and a pen in his hand. Jim was sitting opposite to him, and Major Anderson was standing with his back to the mantelpiece. He was frowning as Caroline opened her eyes. He said:

"Before you make a statement I had better tell you that Mr. Van Berg is expected to recover consciousness any time during the next few hours."

The inspector was full of disapproval. The law had been complied with; Mr. Randal had been warned. If he ran his head into a noose, so much the worse for him, and so much the better for the law.

Major Anderson's frown deepened. He had known Jim Randal since he was eight years old. He had dined at Hale Place four times a year for fifteen years. He wasn't going to have Jim Randal bucketed into making a statement without knowing what he was up against.

"One moment, inspector," he said. "Now, Randal—you say you want to make a statement. Before you do so I think you ought to know that I saw Mrs. Van Berg this morning."

"Yes?"

"She says that on the night of the sixth of August she came down between eleven and twelve o'clock to get a book. She heard voices in the study, and she now says that she recognized one of them as yours."

"Yes," said Jim—"I was there. I think you had better let me make a statement. There really isn't any time to lose. Meanwhile let me tell you that the man who shot Elmer Van Berg and lifted the emeralds is Jim or Jimmy Riddell, and I left him twenty minutes ago having an interview with his wife up at St. Leonard's Tower. Here's his description. Five-foot-eight or so—slim—wiry—two teeth missing in front—long nose—long chin—pallid—between thirty and thirty-five."

"Jimmy the Bell!" said the inspector.

"Well, you'd better look quickly or he'll get away. His wife's maiden name was Nesta Williams. She's a cousin of the housekeeper at Packham Hall, and she's living with a brother, Tom Williams, at Happicot, Sandringham Drive, Ledington End."

The atmosphere in the room had changed.

"Jimmy the Bell!" said the inspector under his breath. Then, "We'd better get hold of him. Excuse me, sir." He lifted the telephone and spoke into it.

Jim struck in.

"His original idea was to get to Glasgow, his low there for a bit, and then get abroad. But I think he's more likely to hang around here now—you'll see presently."

The inspector nodded and went on with his instructions. Presently he hung up the receiver.

"Now, Randal," said Major Anderson.

"Well," said Jim, "I landed at Liverpool on the first of July—but if you've been taking an interest in me, I expect you know that. I was in the wreck of the Alice Arden on August eighth, and until about half an hour ago I hadn't the remotest idea of what had happened between those two dates—" He paused, and added, "with one exception."

A WAVE of excitement swept over Caroline. The color rushed to her cheeks.

"Look here," said Jim, "can I tell this my own way? I'll sign a formal statement afterwards if you want me to, but I'd like to tell it to you first just as it happened. Can I do that?"

"Yes," said Major Anderson.

"Carry on."

"Well then, I understand that I was taken to the Elston cottage hospital, where I kept on repeating the name of Jim, or Jimmy Riddell. They weren't sure at first whether I was saying Riddell or Randal, so they sent out a message with both names. Next day Mrs. Riddell rolled up, identified me as her husband, and carried me off.

"Now I come to what I do remember. I woke up next day in a perfectly strange room. A perfectly strange young woman came in and assured me that my name was Jimmy Riddell, and that she was my

wife. I couldn't contradict her, because as far as having any memory was concerned I might have been a new-born baby.

"The only thing I remembered—and I didn't know whether I was remembering it or not—was someone holding up a string of square green stones under a bright light.

"And there was a fog, and a voice talking in the fog—talking about the emeralds and Jimmy Riddell. It worried me to death, because I couldn't make out whether it was my own voice or not." He paused.

Major Anderson said, "This is a most extraordinary story, Randal." Jim went on again.

"I'll cut it as short as I can, but you've got to understand the sort of state I was in. Nesta Riddell said we'd been married on the 25th of July at the Grove Registry office in London, and she told me that I had shot Elmer Van Berg and stolen eight very valuable emeralds on the night of the 6th of August. She wanted to know what I had done with the emeralds. She said I was on my way to Glasgow. She said I'd hidden the emeralds before I went, and she wanted to know where they were."

MAJOR ANDERSON took a step forward.

"Really, Randal, I don't know whether you hadn't better see a doctor. This is the most extraordinary story!"

Jim Randal laughed.

"I know it sounds extraordinary, but I'm perfectly sane. I'd like to go on if I may."

He went on.

"Bits of my memory were coming back. It was like seeing pictures—I could see myself drinking with Elmer Van Berg. I know that I called him Elmer, and that his wife's name was Susie. And when I remembered all that, I got the wind up, because it seemed as if I must have done it—and there were my finger-prints on the glass I'd used."

"My one idea was to get out of Ledington. Well, I started out across country without any idea of where I was going. The most damning thing was that Nesta Riddell really did think I'd got the emeralds—there was no mistake about that."

"To cut a long story short, I went to Hale Place, and when I got there I remembered my name and who I was. In fact I remembered everything except the time between the first of July and the 13th of August—which was when I waked up at Happicot."

The inspector made a note of the dates.

"I got into the house and I stayed there. You can understand that I wanted time. I made up my mind to wait for a week and see what happened. I knew I was exposing myself to suspicion, but I decided to wait."

Jim went on speaking.

"During the time I was at Hale Place the house was twice entered. There's a room there called the Blue Room. The burglar came straight to this room on both occasions. The first time he charged me and got away. The second time he got what he had come for—the emeralds."

"What?" said Major Anderson.

"They were hidden in the Blue Room. He got away with them, and I caught the last train into Ledington, and I just missed it. I came on in the morning and watched for Mrs. Riddell."

"I watched the road all day. In the evening Miss Leigh met me. She had her car, and thanks to her I was able to follow Mrs. Riddell when she came out. She had taken her brother's motorcycle. We followed her to St. Leonard's Tower. Miss Leigh remained in the field, and I went on to the ruins."

"I overheard an interview between Mrs. Riddell and the man. They quarrelled. She had parked the money she had brought him somewhere, and absolutely refused to hand it over unless he showed her the emeralds. In the end he gave way. They were on one side of the Tower, and I was on the other, with one of those narrow alleys between us. He struck a match, and there were the emeralds dangling about a yard away from me." He paused.

"Well," said Major Anderson.

"I grabbed them."

He dived into a pocket and flung a glittering heap of green and pearl upon the inspector's foolcap.

"There they are!" he said.

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In the next chapter the police remain unconvinced by Jim's tale.

WOES CROWD ON LARGEST FAMILY

SEDALIA, Mo., Nov. 15.—(UP)—The troubled affairs of Missouri's

largest family reached a climax today when it was announced that Mrs. James Murry was expecting the birth of her 20th child.

The 43-year-old mother collapsed here today at an inquest held over the death of her eldest son, Alfred, 27, who committed suicide last week. Three other sons had been held for questioning in connection with the death, but they were released after

their 6-year-old brother, Ray, told officers he had seen Alfred shoot himself.

James Murry, father of the record-holding family and the only member who has had work, is in a Kansas City hospital with a fractured skull, suffered in an accident on the railroad by which he was employed.

W. C. T. U. TO DRIVE ON DRINK HABIT

EVANSTON, Ill., Nov. 15.—(AP) The W. C. T. U. announced today part of

its plan for a drive on what is described as "the drink habit and the drink traffic."

It includes, a statement from the organization said, "the mobilization of its entire national force in 33 regional conferences, to be called in strategic cities from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from the Canadian boundary to the Rio Grande river," at dates not yet determined.

Among the objectives of the drive, the statement said, "is to expose the so-called 'Rockefeller report,' as contained in the book, 'Toward Liquor Control,' as an unscientific effort to glid the liquor traffic and an excuse for increased drinking, under the dangerous formula of 'true temperance'."

S'MATTER POP—

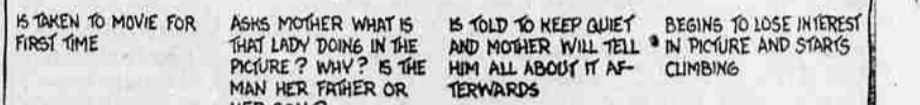
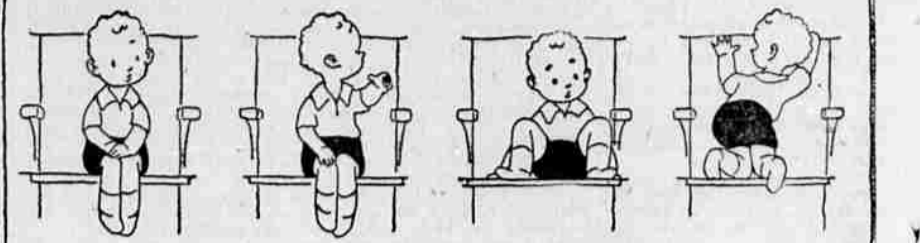
By C. M. PAYNE



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SNAPSHOTS OF A VERY SMALL BOY AT THE MOVIES

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



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TAILSPIN TOMMY—Wrecked Mail Plane Buried—Brownie In A "Fog!"

By GLENN CHAFFIN and HAL FORREST

