

Outrageous Fortune

by Patricia Wentworth

A dazed man, picked up by the wreck of the Alice... has been taken from the hospital by Nests Riddell, who says he is her husband, Jimmy Riddell. He is at her brother Tom's house in La-Union, and has been babbling in his sleep—of emeralds and such. A few moments after Nests and the man had left, Caroline Letch arrives at the hospital, searching for her cousin, Jim Riddell. As she is leaving, disappointed, the nurse remembers a scrap of a letter found in the man's pocket, with the signature "Caroline." So Caroline determines to carry on her apparently hopeless search. Meanwhile the man wakes, and declares he does not know her. Next morning he confronts Nests, but rather weakly, for he cannot remember events earlier than the day before.

Chapter Ten THE EMERALDS

"YES, I should like to know why I'm here," Jim said.

"I wonder whether you'll like it as much when you do know?"

"I shall know more about that when you've told me."

She nodded.

All at once the tension was less. She said in an easy, ordinary voice: "Sure you can't remember anything, Jimmy?"

"I've told you I can't."

"Then why do you talk about the emeralds in your sleep?"



"Sure you can't remember, Jimmy?"

It was exactly as if Nests had come towards him with a smile and then thrown a knife. He had seen knives thrown like that—he didn't know where or when, but he'd seen it. All right—he'd teach her to throw knives at him.

He looked at her with an effect of wooden surprise.

"Do you mind saying that again?" She said it again, louder this time.

"Why did you talk about the emeralds in your sleep?"

"What emeralds?"—but in his mind there was a lighted space where eight square green stones swung from a man's hand—eight square green stones, linked two and two with pearls.

"Like a kid's green beads—?" said Nests with her eyes upon his face.

A pulse hammered in his temples. Where did she get that? Someone had said that before... a voice... his voice?

"You talked in your sleep," she said. Then she dropped her voice. "Jimmy—where are they?"

He wrenched away from the picture of the square green stones.

"Will you tell me what you are talking about?"

"Will you tell me you don't know?"

"Yes, I will. I haven't an idea what you are talking about."

Nests was smiling. When she smiled, she showed sharp uneven teeth, too small, too close, too pointed.

"You wouldn't know an emerald if you saw one, I suppose?" Then, with a change of voice, "Jimmy, we've been partners all through—you simply can't go back on me like this. Where have you put them?"

HE stuck his chin in the air.

"What's the good of talking like that? I don't remember anything. You say, where have I put them—and I keep on telling you I don't know what you're talking about. How much farther do you think that's going to get us?"

"You don't know what I'm talking about?"

"No, I don't."

Something hung in the balance. He saw her checked, hesitating, uncertain. Then with an impatient movement she came round the chair.

HE experienced a horrible sliding sensation. It was as if the room had tilted. The chair in which he was sitting tilted. His thoughts slid, but only for a moment. Then he was looking fixedly at a point a little to the left of Nests' head and saying quite quietly,

"Hadin' you better begin at the beginning?"

She drew at her cigarette and blew out the smoke.

"The beginning? That's before my time. I can't go any farther back than March."

"Then perhaps you'll begin there."

She hesitated again, bent a suspicious glance upon him, and said angrily,

"If you're making game of me—"

He leaned back and closed his eyes. This was the sort of woman who might very easily get herself brained. She exasperated him as much as she repelled him. And he had married her! In heaven's name—why?

"All right, I'll begin. And don't blame me if I'm telling you what you know already. Ever heard of a place called Packham?"

He shook his head, and then was aware of the name playing hide-and-seek with his thoughts.

"Well, that's funny—because that's where we ran into each other. You don't remember that?"

He shook his head again.

"Well, we did. Mr. Entwistle was abroad, and the Hall was let to Mr. Van Berg—Mr. and Mrs. Elmer Van Berg. That doesn't mean anything to you?"

"No." The hide-and-seek went on.

"Mr. Van Berg had just given her the emeralds. His uncle, old Peter Van Berg, left them to him. He was the second richest man in America, and he'd spent half his life collecting emeralds. His nephews got the lot, and he took Packham Hall and gave them to his wife, and she was going to be presented in them and splash about London with the most valuable set of emeralds in the world. She was crazy about them." She stopped, tilted up her chin, blew out a cloud of smoke, and added, "So were you."

Jim learns more about his mysterious "career," tomorrow.

MORE POISONED FROM MUSSELS

MARSHFIELD, Ore., Oct. 3.—(AP)—New instances of mussel poisoning

were reported from Port Orford and Gold Beach today, although only one fatality, that of Delos Gardner of Bandon, has resulted.

Mussels were the only shell-fish tainted by the mysterious poison, and southern Oregon residents continued to enjoy all other types of seafood.

The theory given the most credence, as physicians tried to account

for the poisoning, is that seasonal low tides, which leave the higher mussels exposed to the sun, are responsible.

The body of a cat which died apparently after eating mussels, was sent to the University of California medical school last night by Dr. John Simpson, city health officer. A report of the case is expected within a few days.

KINGFISH'S STORY HINTED LIBELOUS

NEW YORK, Oct. 3.—(AP)—A new York printing firm has refused to

print 50,000 copies of Senator Huey Long's version of the "eye-watching" episode at Sands Point - L. I., the World-Telegram says today.

The Kingfish at first ordered 100,000 copies printed but when he learned of the cost, reduced the order to 50,000, the story said. However, on advice of its attorneys, the printing firm refused the order, even though Senator Long offered cash.

The printing firm refused to discuss the matter, an official saying "Our dealings with Senator Long are confidential and we cannot speak one way or another. It is true, however, that we are not printing anything for him now. It is being printed elsewhere in New York."

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