

# Outrageous Fortune

by Patricia Wentworth

**SYNOPSIS:** Susie Van Berg just has told Caroline Leigh that her husband, Elmer Van Berg, and Jim Russell quarreled the night Elmer was shot, and the famous Van Berg emeralds were stolen. Susie believes the quarrel was over her, because she had made her husband jealous of Jim—just as a joke. Caroline, who loves Jim, does not believe Jim shot Van Berg, although Jim himself cannot be sure, since his memory has left him. Caroline, in the darkness of a terrible storm, stumbles into a room and hears the voice of Nesta Riddell. It is Nesta who declares Jim is her husband.

## Chapter 28

### THE SEANCE

ANOTHER voice answered Nesta's.

"Yes, the storm's going over. It'll draw down river now."

Caroline had never heard this voice before, or any quite like it. It reminded her of a fly in a tractor, or a voice heard in a thick muffling fog. It had a peculiar soft tonelessness that blurred the words, and the which never varied.

"Then we'd better get on with it," said Nesta. "That last crash put me right off—but I shall have a train to catch presently, and I've got to know about Jim before I go."

Caroline had taken another step, but these words halted her. She had not meant to listen, but when Nesta said, "I've got to know about Jim," she knew that she was going to listen. If there was anything to know about Jim, she was going to know it. She heard the soft sound of someone moving, and the gurgle of water or some other liquid. The smooth toneless voice said:

"Look into the pool."

"What shall I see? Suppose I don't see anything?" This was Nesta.

"I don't say you'll see, nor what you'll see—there's no saying, if you don't see nothing, there's no harm done. Look in the pool."

Silence fell on the room—a curious silence, enclosed by the sound of restless, hurrying wind and distant thunder. It was like the still place at the center of the storm. Caroline edged forward and looked round the screen.

The room was full of a half light except for one bright patch—a light directed downwards upon a bowl of dark blue glass which appeared to be full of ink. It was about the size of a hyacinth bowl, and it stood on a stool with a worked cross-stitch top.

On one side of this stool Nesta Riddell was kneeling, and on the other, in a low armless chair sat a plump elderly woman. This must be the other Caroline—Caroline Bussell, Nesta Riddell's cousin, the housekeeper at Packham Hall.

She had a pale flat face, pale and plump, and a tight curled fringe of faded hair controlled by a net. Her hands lay in her lap. She leaned forward over them, watching Nesta.

There was no sound in the room at all, and the sound of the wind and the thunder was drowned in a steady downpour of rain. Time did not seem to pass; it stood still. Caroline stood still, with her hand on the edge of the screen. She looked at Nesta, and Nesta looked into the bowl of ink.

At once the silence broke. Nesta said in her hard voice:

"I can't see anything but fog."

"Sometimes the fog comes first," said Caroline Bussell. "Maybe it'll clear away."

"There's nothing but fog!" Nesta's voice was fretful. She jerked back suddenly on to her heels. "There's nothing but fog going up and down like waves—it makes me giddy. I'm not going to look any more. I didn't come all the way here to do the thing myself either."

Caroline Bussell spoke in her smooth voice.

"You've not got the patience—it needs patience. And you mustn't have your thoughts all churned up neither—you might as well go strapping up the mud in a pond and then expect to see clear to the bottom."

"Do it yourself!" said Nesta sulkily. "That's what I came here for. If I could do it, I'd have done it at home, and no need to come all this way."

Caroline Bussell leaned down and took up the bowl of ink. She set it in the hollow of her lap, and drew the lamp so that the light shone upon it. All her movements were slow, smooth, and noiseless. The light from the lamp shone down on the bowl of ink and on two pale, plump hands and a fold of smooth brown

skirt. Nesta Riddell was just a shadow now.

Caroline began to feel afraid. The time seemed endless before Caroline Bussell spoke, swaying forward a little.

"Ask—the fog is lifting."

Nesta knelt up. The movement brought her almost to the edge of the light again.

"Where's Jim? That's what I want to know. Where is he?"

Caroline Bussell began to speak slowly and monotonously.

"I see the fog lifting—waves breaking—a ledge on a cliff—he is on the ledge—"

"What's the good of that? That's the part I know! Come down to present day! Where is he now?"

Caroline Bussell put up her hand. Then she leaned over the bowl of ink. Her brooch caught the light. She spoke again:

"Windows—blue—windows—up to the ceiling and down to the floor—no, that's curtain—blue—narrow—like slits—windows like slits—narrow—one, two, three, four—I'm in the middle of the room—I must turn round—one, two, three, four, five—five narrow windows like slits—"

Caroline felt cold water run down her spine. Caroline Bussell wasn't looking into the ink pool now. The bowl was in her lap, but her hands had fallen; they hung straight down at her side like pale, heavy weights. She had lifted her head, and sat stiffly upright with her eyes fixed on some point above Nesta's head. The light that struck upwards showed her eyes pale and set. Her lips hardly moved as she spoke.

"Five windows—like slits—"

That was the Blue Room at Hale Place. She had said blue. How did she know? Cold drops kept running down Caroline's back.

"Is he there? Can you see him?" Nesta's voice was low but insistent. "No—not there."

"What room is it? Why do you see it if he's not there?"

"He has been there—I can feel him there—I am in the room—I am turning in the room—I am counting the windows—one, two, three, four, five—five windows—like slits—and blue curtains—now the fireplace—deep hearth—china candlesticks—one of them is broken—I think he broke it—now the door—I am still turning—he came through the door—fear jumped out at him and he ran away—I am turning again—there is a bed set back in the wall—head-piece, footpieces, and four posts—the bed draws him—if he reaches it—no, not yet—not now—because of the other—"

Nesta leaned closer.

"What room is it? Where is it? Why do you keep on describing it? Where is it?"

Caroline Bussell sat silent.

"Can't you see where it is? You haven't told me anything at all."

"Eight—green—stones—"

Caroline Bussell.

Nesta made an abrupt movement.

"Are they in that room?"

"Eight—green—"

She swayed a little, stiffly like a figure carved in wood. "Eight—green—stones—five windows—like slits—I am counting the windows—"

"You've counted them!" said Nesta angrily. "You don't need to start all that again! Get back to the stones! Where are the eight green stones?"

Caroline Bussell swayed from side to side. The white of her eyes showed all round the iris. Her voice dragged.

"Five windows—blue—count—one, two, three, four, five—head—door—bed—"

"Where are the emeralds?" said Nesta in a furious whisper.

Caroline Bussell gave a violent start. She said in a loud, heavy voice, "He's alive," and the bowl of ink tilted over. The ink ran down over her brown skirt, soaking into it. The bowl slipped off her lap and broke.

Nesta jumped up with an angry exclamation, but after that one violent start Caroline Bussell sat quite still, blinking her eyes. She did not seem to notice the ink that was soaking into her dress. After a moment she said in a bewildered voice:

"Did you know that he was alive?"

Caroline took three steps backwards and opened the door. The dark winding stair was before her. She went down half a dozen steps on tiptoe, holding her breath, and then ran as if there were wolves behind her.

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Caroline, Monday, investigates a secret "picnic" place.

# PHONE REVENUES TAKE SHARP DROP

SAN FRANCISCO, Nov. 2.—(AP)—The Pacific Telephone company reports total consolidated operating revenues for the company and its associated corporations amounted to \$85,061,585 in the first nine months of this year—a substantial drop from the \$72,020,934 in revenues of the corresponding period of 1932.

Net income in the first nine months was \$10,352,125 this year compared with \$12,230,063 last year. The net earnings thus far this year fell short of dividend requirements by \$-460,374, or somewhat farther from the mark than in the 1932 period, when the deficit after dividends was \$936,187.

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# DURANTE'S NOSE IS COPYRIGHTED

WASHINGTON, Nov. 2.—(AP)—Jimmy Durante's "schnozzle" has brought him such popularity that he is trying to copyright his name even against use on foods and watches.

A string of long numbers at the copyright office tell the efforts of Durante.

Already registration number 307,356 of October 31, 1933, protects him on 116 new puzzles and other games.

Pending are his applications: \$30,778 on jewelry; \$39,775 on foods; \$39,774 on clothing, and \$39,777 on watches and watchfobs.

Copyright officials said those pending might reach their final stages before the end of the year.

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Dance at Lake Creek Grange hall Saturday night. Butte Falls orchestra.

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By C. M. PAYNE



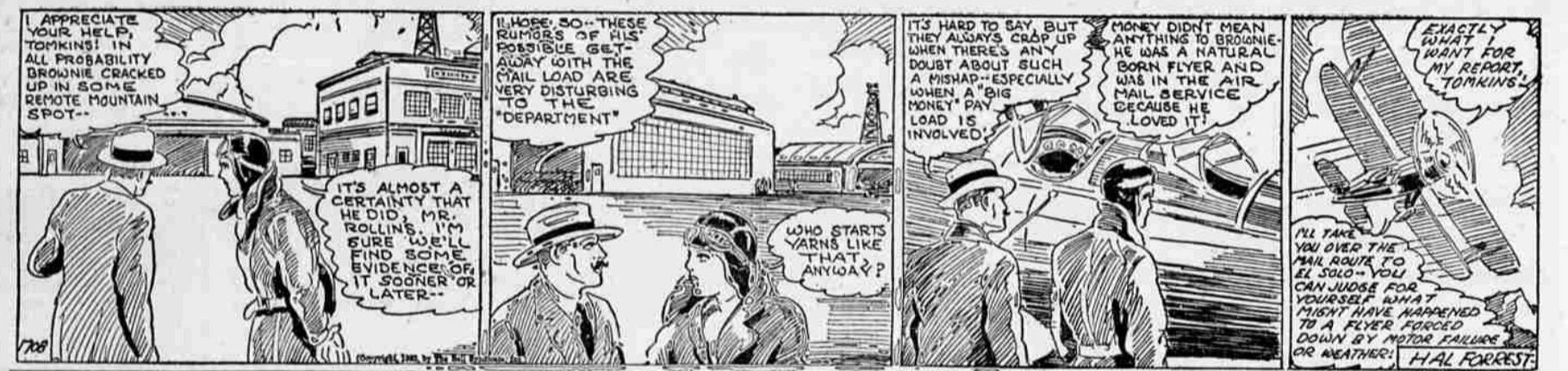
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# VILLA'S SON ORDERED COMMITTED ASYLUM

LOS ANGELES, Nov. 2.—(AP)—Pancho Augustin Villa, 21-year-old son of the late Mexican guerrilla general, was adjudged insane today and committed to an asylum.

perior Judge Thomas Gould ordered him committed to the state hospital at Norwalk. Physicians reported he was suffering from dementia praecox. He was taken into custody Monday in complaint of his guardian, Henry Seidner, who told the authorities that Villa, since he recently signed a contract to play in a motion picture depicting his father's career, had acted strangely.

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