

The GOODDALE EMERALDS

BY RITA WEIMAN.

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I'd been watching them for weeks—no, months—and that morning Mrs. Gooddale swept through the hotel foyer, the amiable Archie mincing in her wake, I had to cough to kill a chuckle.

Fortunately I'm small, of nondescript coloring, dainty and inconspicuous, so no one noticed me. But my name is Wynona. Note the flexibility of it—"Wyn"—"Whistle"—"Nona"—"Ona"—as changeable as a woman, you see. And I'd been brought up to believe I had a right to other people's money, not as the socialist sees it, nor yet after the manner of the smug, powerful politician, but with an element of danger to make success more elusive, sweeter when captured. Not the taking of a man's livelihood or life—but often the risking of my own.

So before it perceptibly winked an eye I recognized my opportunity. That Mrs. Gooddale stopped to leave her key at the hotel desk was of satisfying interest. That she did not leave a red leather box, long and flat, was momentous!

Out of my chair behind the curtains of the writing room I drew myself with an inward gasp of non-belief. Only a few moments earlier Mrs. Gooddale's French maid had hurried through the corridor to the street, jaunty turban set far down on her head, and from it, floating over her face, a black lace veil. I'd studied that make-up from New York to Paris, from Paris to Naples, from Naples across the sea again. Every detail of it I knew by heart. Likewise I knew the ways of hotel clerks.

In less than fifteen minutes by the bronze clock in the foyer a trim little figure, with black lace veil covering her face, walked up to the office desk.

"Mees Gooddale key, please," she demanded with an upward trill.

The clerk indifferently dragged his hand across the rows of pigeon holes, inserted it and clapped down a key. It was just as indifferently picked up. Then the bearer whisked into an elevator and was whirled out of sight.

The tenth floor reached, she stepped out, hurried down the main corridor and into a semi-private hallway jutting from it. At the extreme end was a door, before which she stopped, eyes shining. The little French maid was little me (with apologies for incorrect English). And that door was the gate to Fortune.

Quick as a flash I had it open and shut again, locked tight, with key and me on the inside. I was in a gold salon. Beyond were bed and dressing rooms. This door formed the sole entrance to the apartment.

The place had not yet been put in order. It was evident, too, that Mrs. Gooddale's maid had been sent out to haste on a mission for her mistress. For over chairs hung silk and lace garments, hung there carelessly, and among pastes and powders on the dressing table chaos reigned. I took in the rooms, their arrangement and furnishing, at a glance. Not even the pictures in their frames incriminated with brilliants escaped me. Finney, the theatrical manager through whom poor Archie's attentions to Totty Gilmore had been "press agented" into a proposal of marriage, stood on the hearth surrounded by diamonds. Muzie La Salle, Mrs. Gooddale's chum of showgirl days, reposed on a reading table. In spite of eight months of travel, away from the past into a very different future, the aroma of the theatre still clung to everything.

I pulled down all the window shades and made for the bureau, intent on one object, the feel of an oblong smooth leather case under my hand, the sense that it was red, and within, the flash of the famous Gooddale emeralds. But the bureau from drawer to drawer yielded nothing. Neither did the chiffonier, or dressing table in the adjoining room.

Back to the bedroom I made my way, groping, for things were still in semi-darkness. I could not risk raising the window shades.

And stepping across the threshold I tripped over a chair, dragged with me the chiffon dressing gown that lay across it. When I stumbled to my feet there lay the long, red leather box. It had been reposing all the time on the chair under that gown! I blinked hard, almost laughed outright at my stupidity, and, clutching the case, sprang it open. Oh, the gleam of green fire, like the disembodied eyes of a Circe! I could—honestly, I could have made love to them.

Surprising the Thief.

I had just snatched to the case and made a dive for the copious handbag I'd left in the salon when a timid knock sounded on the door.

"Frightened? Not a whit! I simply ignored the knock and continued to dive. It was repeated, but no response. At last the doorknob was turned. But, of course, it failed to yield. I had it securely locked on the inside.

"She's here, I know," came from without. "I seen her come in myself. I made the man say. "If she's in she surely ought to answer."

The somewhat humble tone was Archie Gooddale's. And at once I knew I must answer either to him or to the hotel management.

Half a minute later the door of the apartment was opened the space of two inches by a little French maid, in white frill and apron. Oh, yes, I'd come prepared for emergencies. Turban, black lace veil and jacket lay tossed into a far corner of the room, the handbag and the red leather case tucked under them.

"Madame es not?" I began in fluty accents. Then, apparently just recognizing the maid and with not a glance in Archie's direction, "you cannot come in now. Madame as only these moment gone out." And the door banged abruptly.

"She didn't notice me," I heard Archie explain. "You needn't wait. I'll get in."

And in that second came a decided click. I heard the door of the salon open. In my haste I'd forgotten to lock it.

"Marcelle" called Archie, entering. "Pull the curtains. I can't see where I'm going."

"Oh, set it you, M'sieu Gooddale." I answered faintly, and permitted a thread of light from the bedroom to find its way across the floor.

"Where are you?" Archie gropingly followed the narrow trail.

By that time I was in the dressing room. "I see you, M'sieu," I murmured, bending over the chiffon gown, whose fall had revealed the emeralds.

"Mrs. Gooddale sent me back. She thought you'd still be out. And we forgot to take her jewel case downstairs this morning. She's very much worried about it."

Worried! I almost laughed outright at poor Archie's mild picture of what no doubt had been rage, brigandage and red as his wife's pompadour.

"Eet ees all right," trilled I sweetly. "I've remembered and at once 'ave return to take the case to the office. Already ees set down below."

"You're a good girl, Marcelle," Archie approved heartily. "I told Mrs. Gooddale the jewelry would be safe."

To which I did not reply. My accent was beginning to hurt.

moment was how to dispose of the real Marcelle without disclosing the presence of the spurious one.

At last he opened wide the door. With swift agility, I slipped in back of it, flattened against the wall.

Marcelle walked in, sniffing like a fox terrier, and made straight for the curtained windows.

"Never mind that!" cried Archie, nervously. "I'll attend to it."

French shoulders went up, and, I dare say, eyebrows, too. Through the crack where the door hinged I watched her stop before Archie, give him one long, comprehensive stare, shrug again, and with evident reluctance retire into the bedroom.

"Now will you please explain to me?" As I came forward he led the way to the extreme end of the room, close—oh, disastrously close—to my hat, coat and boot. "I suppose you had an object?"

"Before I could stop him he had raised the window shade and the light glancing in touched a corner of the red leather box. He pulled it from under my coat. A thoroughly frightened look came into his eyes as he quickly jerked open the cover. There they lay—necklace, bracelets, brooch, earrings and rings; their green gleam shot eerily into the shadow. The man actually shivered with relief, they came over to where I sat huddled in an armchair.

that they lay trapped on the floor, he took a second pair from his waistcoat pocket, adjusted, took them off and surreptitiously wiped each glass.

"If I should give you up?" he half-questioned, taking up the jewel case again.

"It will mean prison, of course," I answered in terrified whisper. And I know I looked every inch the helpless little girl. "Everything's against me, even the confession I've just given you. Why I haven't a shred of defence—none whatever. You see I've not been at the game long enough to be well versed in all its tricks. I'm hopeless—a bungler."

Archie sprang open the case once more, made sure the emeralds still nestled in their velvet bed, then looked at me. "What would you do if I were to let you go?"

"Oh," I breathed, with a little unbelieving gasp, "I'd leave it—all this—and try to find something decent to do. If only I had the chance!"

"Perhaps," mused Archie slowly, "I could help you."

"You don't mean?" I cried, hands clasped before me.

"Yes," he interrupted softly. "I believe that at the core you are good. Your very confession proves it. You've got to keep out of the clutches of this—this

"Don't say dear' me. I want to know the meaning of it, that's all. A strange woman—and when Marcelle comes in, you keeping her out, and the shades drawn and whispers so that Marcelle couldn't catch a word. And then she vanishes and—"

"My dear," Archie managed to interject, "do I ever question where you lunch or dine? Didn't you go off with Finney yesterday? I assure you this was a matter of business, nothing more."

"Business—in a dark corner for hours! Your eyes may be half blind; mine are not! What do you think of me?"

"Nothing—I mean, dear," Archie soothed, a hopeless note in his voice, "you're exaggerating. It was half an hour at most."

"I don't care if it was five minutes. I want to know, and I'm going to!"

And there, with brother Bill calmly ordering the dinner while I wanted to shriek to Archie to keep silence at all costs, Mrs. Gooddale gradually drew forth the story as a dentist extracts a tooth—with protesting, fidgeting and reluctance on the part of the patient. When she had finished I was clinging with both hands to my chair like a shipwrecked sailor to the mast.

"Archie Gooddale," she gasped finally, "I thought you were a fool when you married me. Now I know you must have been the original one. Lord, you make me want to—scratch!"

"Why," there was hurt astonishment in Archie's tones, "no harm's done!"

"And you didn't even have her searched?" she choked.

"Searched? Why, no. The emeralds are all right. You saw for yourself this morning. What would have been the use? The poor thing!"

"Give me the key to that box!" Mrs. Gooddale interrupted swiftly. "Hereafter I'll look after the jewel case."

And the next day she left her husband.

The papers were full of it. Under the direction of John Finney, her former manager, she was going back on the stage, and would appear in vaudeville wearing the famous emeralds. Whether she had presented to her on their marriage. Such was the announcement.

During the three months that followed those emeralds were manipulated by press agent until she might have been entwined, chained, in them, just as the billboards pictured her. For it was generally understood that a dazzled public would rush to see jewels rather than to hear aie songbird. Even in show girl days Mrs. Gooddale's voice had never rivalled her shoulders.

Poor Archie fled town to escape persistent reporters. But from the absolute indifference to his wife's desertion I judged freedom had not been unwelcome, even at the sacrifice of family jewels.

Immediately after our dinner at the Waldorf brother Bill, too, had left the city "on urgent business." So I kept out of sight and amused myself following the progress of Mrs. Gooddale's progress. But three days before the lady's debut, blazoned brilliantly on the first page of an evening paper were the headlines "Famous Emeralds Stolen!"

Bets on the Emeralds.

Of course no one believed it, though rewards were offered broadcast for their return. It was just possible, the management explained, that they'd been lost. A day passed and no results. Added to the reward came a promise of "no questions asked." Still another day went by. Then the opening was postponed a week. At last the public began to take notice. Could it be possible that the story was true? Curiosity was aroused, conjecture stimulated, the usual assortment of cranks came forward with theories. The case was discussed in hotel corridors, on street corners. It became an absorbing topic of interest. Archie's friends in club windows along Fifth avenue laid bets on the outcome. Jaded old New York took to wondering whether this press agent might had been actually served with the relish of truth. And speculators began to ask ten dollars a seat for the night of Mrs. Gooddale's first appearance.

Then came the flash of the expected after all. The Gooddale emeralds had been found!—by a poor old seamstress whose family was on the verge of starvation. A beautiful story—and oh, pathetic to the point of tears. But just here a doubting newspaper launched forth. It advised its readers none too delicately that during last week's uproar Mrs. Gooddale's jewels had probably been reposing in a safe deposit vault. It published letters by the score. And at length came one, terse, to the point.

"How is a poor bewildered public to know," the cynical writer inquired, "that the Gooddale lady's gams are the real thing after all? Why has her husband made no effort to recover them since her unceremonious leave taking? The answer is, because they're probably made of paste."

At once the newspapers seized on the question and flaunted it. Certainly it offered a sensational solution of the whole affair. The emeralds a fake! The bare possibility of it made reportorial lips smack. An army of press representatives visited Mrs. Archie at her hotel.

She rose up shrieking defiance. "How dared they!" she stormed. She let them send an expert. She'd prove to them, to every one, she'd sue for libel. For, naturally, doubt as to the reality of her star drawing card mean fiasco.

A meeting was arranged and a connoisseur selected to test the precious stones. Reporters of other papers were invited to be present.

I put on a thick veil and a briak, businesslike air and to that meeting I went.

It was held in Mr. John Finney's private office, at the top of his big vaudeville theatre. Unlike other rooms of the type—bare, tobacco stained and lined in posters—this was a stunning place. A multitude of signed photographs covered the gold-tinted walls. On a dull green rug in the centre of the room stood a huge, flat mahogany desk. At this—judicially—sat the manager. Beside him, in high back chair, Mrs. Gooddale reclined like a queen holding court, her manner that of delicate disdain, but in her eyes a sparkle that told she realized the advantages of the situation. On the desk lay a long—oh, so familiar—red leather box. Obviously the scene had been arranged with care calculated to prove the climax of advertisement.

We were ushered in with the ceremony of a Fifth avenue reception. I half expected to have my name required. Wonder which I'd have given. But no questions were asked. In I walked, one of the last to arrive. A group of reporters lolled near a window through which the sun streamed. Some strolled about examining pictures. All were but mildly thrilled at the proceeding. That smile in Mrs. Gooddale's eyes was enough to dispel any doubt. But she vouchsafed no word, and when the expert hurried in she continued to sit silent, while Finney handed him the red leather case.

He snapped it open.

The emerald eyes gleamed, winked, coquetted. But the sunfire played with theirs. He pulled down one of the several shades. The stones glittered more brilliantly. He fingered them, carried them to a window facing a side street cut off from strong light. Silence, while he took a glass from his pocket, examined them closely through it. Again he ran sensitive fingers over necklace, bracelets, brooch, ear rings and rings, taking up each in turn. A ripple of excitement stirred the air. Mrs. Archie glanced at the expert—curiosity tinged with impatience. He was handling the jewels again, still more carefully. Presently he looked across them at her, something like a question in his eyes. She half rose, uneasiness replacing the early sovereign poise.

The reporters were rousing themselves, grown alert as the silent seconds sped by. Mrs. Gooddale exchanged a rapid charged glance with her manager. Up again she started. He laid a detaining hand on her arm. But she flung it aside and reached her full height.

Her eyes, narrowed in scorn, met those of the expert.

"Well!" she demanded indignantly, as he came with a slow step across the room.

He planted himself before her—the case, with a bang, on the desk. "Madam," he said shortly, "these emeralds—are made of—glass!"

Few days later Archie Gooddale received anonymously a single dazzling square emerald.

It was the last I could do. You see he didn't know it, but that time he let me get away, I'd gone off with the real stones in my handbag and left glass ones in their place in the case.



"Do You Mean to Say," He Breathed Incredulously, "That You Meant to Steal These?"

As he turned and started for the salon I was hanging away the gown carefully, with great regard for detail. With every step he made I took a breath of relief, and when he banged into a sharp corner of the bed I gave a shriek, so tight was my tension-keyed.

Then, impatient to be rid of him, and with belated compunction for the trick I was playing his short sight, I hurried into the salon and opened the door to the hall.

"Oh, by the way," he remarked, pausing on his way out, "if Mrs. Gooddale phones, tell her everything's all right." He crossed the threshold. Then he stopped with a sharp exclamation.

I peered from behind the door. A miracle had come to pass! For there in the hall outside stood another Marcelle, vague as to outlines, but unmistakable the instant she opened her lips.

"Monsieur Gooddale, I've 'urry 'ome. We 'ave forgot to take madam's—"

Archie turned in bewilderment. There I was on his side of the door, real enough in my French frills—yet, never so real as the other's accent. Facing discovery, I was strangely, deceptively calm. It's not in moments of peril that your polished financier loses head or courage. So with other professions whose business is to separate men from money.

"What?" began Archie, desperately.

"May I speak to you alone?" I whispered in English close to his ear, and without great effort, I can tell you, allowed my voice to tremble a little.

He hesitated, dilly. His eyes flew to the girl standing perplexed in the hall, came back to the one kneeling behind the door, jumped to the hall again, chased madly for something tangible, something definite. In his confusion he dropped his glasses and stepped on them. The French maid coughed, a suspicious warning. Poor Archie's discomfort was certainly that of guilt. Yet it was plain that all he could think of at the

"Do you mean to say," he breathed incredulously, "that you meant to steal these?"

"I nodded, gulped hard.

"I—I've been the tool of—a—Fagin," I murmured.

"For months I've followed you, waiting for just such an opportunity as presented itself this morning. Oh, you don't know what it is to be forced to this kind of thing against your will! I've been watching you, your wife, your maid, day and night ever since you left London. I've scarcely slept, scarcely eaten. And to-day my moment of release came. You'd all gone out—you had forgotten to lock up the emeralds. I got into your apartment—no matter how. I suppose I didn't lock the door securely when I closed it on the chambermaid. I heard it open—and my heart stood still. All sorts of plans rushed through my head. I wanted to throw myself from the window."

I turned away. A convincing sob caught in my throat. "I'm so tired of it all," I moaned.

Poor Archie covered his eyes with his hand as the tears commenced to roll down my cheeks, great peary drops, beautiful enough to string.

Archie cleared his throat—I could almost feel the lump in it. "It's a pretty serious state of affairs," he said, with desperate attempt at severity. "You'll admit my duty seems clear."

"Yes," I shuddered, sinking still further into the chair, a crumpled heap. "I suppose there's nothing else you can do. I've known—I'd come to this some day. And there at the door when I saw that little French girl outside, I knew she was Fate—that my hour had struck. But somehow I felt—hoped—that if I should tell you my story, you might understand—and pity. Why should you, though?" I broke off, with subtle appeal to his generosity. "I came here to steal, and the fact that I didn't succeed doesn't change matters, does it?"

Archie reached for his glasses. Then recalling

Fagin you speak of, that's all. Let me see—suppose you meet me at my lawyers, Kirke, Brown & Halsey, to-morrow at twelve, and I'll see if I can't find something for you."

I glanced up at him in quick suspicion. Of course I wouldn't go to his lawyers, but was he cleverer than I thought? Was this a scheme?—

"No—no," he added hastily, interrupting my look. "This—er—experience will be quite safe with me. I give you my word no one shall ever know of it." He extended his hand and I bent my head over it in mute though thankful gratitude.

The Broken Appointment.

"To-morrow," he reminded me, as I whisked off the apron, spread on my hat and flicked up my handbag in rapid succession. And on his face I could read the smile of complacent self-satisfaction that invariably creams the milk of human kindness.

Of course that to-morrow never came—save in one sense.

My brother Bill took me to dinner the following night at the Waldorf. It's a way we have of either celebrating a big coup or forgetting a big disappointment. Dangerous if you like. But, then, risk rapidly becomes meat and drink to one who depends on it for both. Besides, you'd never have recognized me as I posed nonchalantly in the doorway of the rose colored room. Dressing up to look to the manner born is a disguise I've cultivated like many women not in my profession. To-night I wore moonshine with green lights in it, and a black picture hat swooping down over my eyes. Also under the last was the red of my lips had come not exactly through biting them. Yes, I flatter myself I did look the lady as I stood waiting for Bill and the matre d'hotel to decide on a table. Suddenly I turned, and laid lightly on my brother's arm.

"The table next to the corner one," I drew in suggestion. "I should like it, I think."

Bill glanced in the direction indicated and I felt his muscles tighten. At a table shoved close to the one I'd pointed out sat Mr. and Mrs. Archie Gooddale. She was talking excitedly. Every hair in her red pompadour seemed to spring from the confining band of brilliant and point accusingly at her husband. Archie was fumbling nervously with his glasses.

Brother Bill hesitated, eyes on me in rapid question. My answer was to move languidly toward the table I'd selected.

"Can't you see," my lips formed the words hurriedly, as I seated myself back to Mrs. Gooddale, chair pushed up against hers. "I've got to know what the argument's about."

"Run your head into the lion's mouth," brother Bill warned.

But I was more interested in the lady's. Her voice was pitched high, like a fury's, and

Archie