

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook ***

This ebook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the ebook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the ebook. If either of these conditions applies, please check with an FP administrator before proceeding.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. **If the book is under copyright in your country, do not download or redistribute this file.**

Title: Ivan Greet's Masterpiece: The Great Ruby Robbery

Date of first publication: 1893

Author: Grant Allen

Date first posted: June 25, 2013

Date last updated: June 25, 2013

Faded Page ebook #20130650

This ebook was produced by: David Edwards, Fred Salzer & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <http://www.pgdpcanada.net>

(This file was produced from images generously made available by The Internet Archive/Canadian Libraries)

THE GREAT RUBY ROBBERY.

A DETECTIVE STORY.

I.

PERSIS REMANET was an American heiress. As she justly remarked, this was a commonplace profession for a young woman nowadays; for almost everybody of late years has been an American and an heiress. A poor Californian, indeed, would be a charming novelty in London society. But London society, so far, has had to go without one.

Persis Remanet was on her way back from the Wilcoxes' ball. She was stopping, of course, with Sir Everard and Lady Maclure at their house at Hampstead. I say "of course" advisedly; because if you or I go to see New York, we have to put up at our own expense (five dollars a day, without wine or extras) at the Windsor or the Fifth Avenue; but when the pretty American comes to London (and every American girl is *ex officio* pretty, in Europe at least; I suppose they keep their ugly ones at home for domestic consumption) she is invariably the guest either of a dowager duchess or of a Royal Academician, like Sir Everard, of the first distinction. Yankees visit Europe, in fact, to see, among other things, our art and our old nobility; and by dint of native persistence they get into places that you and I could never succeed in penetrating, unless we devoted all the energies of a long and blameless life to securing an invitation.

Persis hadn't been to the Wilcoxes with Lady Maclure, however. The Maclures were too really great to know such people as the Wilcoxes, who were something tremendous in the City, but didn't buy pictures; and Academicians, you know, don't care to cultivate City people—unless they're customers. ("Patrons," the Academicians more usually call them; but I prefer the simple business word myself, as being a deal less patronizing.) So Persis had accepted an invitation from Mrs. Duncan Harrison, the wife of the well-known member for the Hackness Division of Elmetsire, to take a seat in her carriage to and from the Wilcoxes. Mrs. Harrison knew the habits and manners of American heiresses too well to offer to chaperon Persis; and indeed, Persis, as a free-born American citizen, was quite as well able to take care of herself, the wide world over, as any three ordinary married Englishwomen.

Now, Mrs. Harrison had a brother, an Irish baronet, Sir Justin O'Byrne, late of the Eighth Hussars, who had been with them to the Wilcoxes, and who accompanied them home to Hampstead on the back seat of the carriage. Sir Justin was one of those charming, ineffective, elusive Irishmen whom everybody likes and everybody disapproves of. He had been everywhere, and done everything—except to earn an honest livelihood. The total absence of rents during the sixties and seventies had never prevented his father, old Sir Terence O'Byrne, who sat so long for Connemara in the unreformed Parliament, from sending his son Justin in state to Eton, and afterwards to a fashionable college at Oxford. "He gave me the education of a gentleman," Sir Justin was wont regretfully to observe; "but he omitted to give me also the income to keep it up with."

Nevertheless, society felt O'Byrne was the sort of man who must be kept afloat somehow; and it kept him afloat accordingly in those mysterious ways that only society understands, and that you and I, who are not society, could never get to the bottom of if we tried for a century. Sir Justin himself had essayed Parliament, too, where he sat for a while behind the great Parnell without for a moment forfeiting society's regard even in those earlier days when it was held as a prime article of faith by the world that no gentleman could possibly call himself a Home-Ruler. 'Twas only one of O'Byrne's wild Irish tricks, society said, complacently, with that singular indulgence it always extends to special favourites, and which is, in fact, the correlative of that unsparing cruelty it shows in turn to those who happen to offend against its unwritten precepts. If Sir Justin had blown up a Czar or two in a fit of political exuberance, society would only have regarded the escapade as "one of O'Byrne's eccentricities." He had also held a commission for a while in a cavalry regiment, which he left, it was understood, owing to a difference of opinion about a lady with the colonel; and he was now a gentleman-at-large on London society, supposed by those who know more about every one than one knows about one's self, to be on the look-out for a nice girl with a little money.

Sir Justin had paid Persis a great deal of attention that particular evening; in point of fact, he had paid her a great deal of attention from the very first, whenever he met her; and on the way home from the dance he had kept his eyes fixed on Persis's face to an extent that was almost embarrassing. The pretty Californian leaned back in her place in the carriage and surveyed him languidly. She was looking her level best that night, in her pale-pink dress, with the famous Remanet rubies in a cascade of red light setting off that snowy neck of hers. 'Twas a neck for a painter. Sir Justin let his eyes fall regretfully more than once on the glittering rubies. He liked and admired Persis, oh! quite immensely. Your society man who has been through seven or eight London seasons could hardly be expected to go quite so far as falling in love with any woman; his habit is rather to look about him critically among all the nice girls trotted out by their mammas for his lordly inspection, and to reflect with a faint smile that this, that, or the other one might perhaps really suit him—if it were

not for—and there comes in the inevitable *But* of all human commendation. Still, Sir Justin admitted with a sigh to himself that he liked Persis ever so much; she was so fresh and original! and she talked so cleverly! As for Persis, she would have given her eyes (like every other American girl) to be made “my lady”; and she had seen no man yet, with that auxiliary title in his gift, whom she liked half so well as this delightful wild Irishman.

At the Maclures’ door the carriage stopped. Sir Justin jumped out and gave his hand to Persis. You know the house well, of course; Sir Everard Maclure’s; it’s one of those large new artistic mansions, in red brick and old oak, on the top of the hill; and it stands a little way back from the road, discreetly retired, with a big wooden porch, very convenient for leave-taking. Sir Justin ran up the steps with Persis to ring the bell for her; he had too much of the irrepressible Irish blood in his veins to leave that pleasant task to his sister’s footman. But he didn’t ring it at once; at the risk of keeping Mrs. Harrison waiting outside for nothing, he stopped and talked a minute or so with the pretty American. “You looked charming to-night, Miss Remanet,” he said, as she threw back her light opera wrap for a moment in the porch and displayed a single flash of that snowy neck with the famous rubies; “those stones become you so.”

Persis looked at him and smiled. “You think so?” she said, a little tremulous, for even your American heiress, after all, is a woman. “Well, I’m glad you do. But it’s good-bye to-night, Sir Austin, for I go next week to Paris.”

Even in the gloom of the porch, just lighted by an artistic red and blue lantern in wrought iron, she could see a shade of disappointment pass quickly over his handsome face as he answered, with a little gulp, “No! you don’t mean that? Oh, Miss Remanet, I’m so sorry!” Then he paused and drew back: “And yet ... after all,” he continued, “perhaps——,” and there he checked himself.

Persis looked up at him hastily. “Yet, after all, what?” she asked, with evident interest.

The young man drew an almost inaudible sigh. “Yet, after all—nothing,” he answered, evasively.

“That might do for an Englishwoman,” Persis put in, with American frankness, “but it won’t do for me. You must tell me what you mean by it.” For she reflected sagely that the happiness of two lives might depend upon those two minutes; and how foolish to throw away the chance of a man you really like (with a my-ladyship to boot), all for the sake of a pure convention!

Sir Justin leaned against the woodwork of that retiring porch. She was a beautiful girl. He had hot Irish blood.... Well, yes; just for once—he would say the plain truth to her.

“Miss Remanet,” he began, leaning forward, and bringing his face close to hers, “Miss Remanet—Persis—shall I tell you the reason why? Because I like you so much. I almost think I love you!”

Persis felt the blood quiver in her tingling cheeks. How handsome he was—and a baronet!

“And yet you’re not altogether sorry,” she said, reproachfully, “that I’m going to Paris!”

“No, not altogether sorry,” he answered, sticking to it; “and I’ll tell you why, too, Miss Remanet. I like you very much, and I think you like me. For a week or two, I’ve been saying to myself, ‘I really believe I *must* ask her to marry me.’ The temptation’s been so strong I could hardly resist it.”

“And why do you want to resist it?” Persis asked, all tremulous.

Sir Justin hesitated a second; then with a perfectly natural and instinctive movement (though only a gentleman would have ventured to make it) he lifted his hand and just touched with the tips of his fingers the ruby pendants on her necklet. “*This* is why,” he answered simply, and with manly frankness. “Persis, you’re so rich! I never dare ask you.”

“Perhaps you don’t know what my answer would be,” Persis murmured very low, just to preserve her own dignity.

“Oh yes, I think I do,” the young man replied, gazing deeply into her dark eyes. “It isn’t that; if it were only that, I wouldn’t so much mind it. But I think you’d take me.” There was moisture in her eye. He went on more boldly: “I know you’d take me, Persis, and that’s why I don’t ask you. “You’re a great deal too rich, and *these* make it impossible.”

“Sir Justin,” Persis answered, removing his hand gently, but with the moisture growing thicker, for she really liked him, “it’s most unkind of you to say so; either you oughtn’t to have told me at all, or else—if you did——” She stopped short. Womanly shame overcame her.

The man leaned forward and spoke earnestly. “Oh, don’t say that!” he cried, from his heart. “I couldn’t bear to offend you. But I couldn’t bear, either, to let you go away—well—without having ever told you. In that case you might have thought I didn’t care at all for you, and was only flirting with you. But, Persis, I’ve cared a great deal for you—a great, great deal—and had hard work many times to prevent myself from asking you. And I’ll tell you the plain reason why I haven’t asked you. I’m a man about town, not much good, I’m afraid, for anybody or anything; and everybody says I’m on the look-out for an heiress—which happens not to be true; and if I married you, everybody’d say, ‘Ah, there! I told you so!’ Now, I wouldn’t mind that for myself; I’m a man, and I could snap my fingers at them; but I’d mind it for *you*, Persis, for I’m enough in love with you to be very, very jealous, indeed, for your honour. I couldn’t bear to think people should say, ‘There’s that pretty American girl, Persis Remanet that was, you know; she’s thrown herself away upon that good-for-nothing Irishman, Justin O’Byrne, a regular fortune-hunter, who’s married her for her money.’ So for your sake, Persis, I’d rather not ask you; I’d rather leave you for some better man to marry.”

“But *I* wouldn’t,” Persis cried aloud. “Oh, Sir Justin, you must believe me. You must remember——”

At that precise point, Mrs. Harrison put her head out of the carriage window and called out rather loudly—

“Why, Justin, what’s keeping you? The horses’ll catch their deaths of cold; and they were clipped this morning. Come back at once, my dear boy. Besides, you know, *les convenances!*”

“All right, Nora,” her brother answered; “I won’t be a minute. We can’t get them to answer this precious bell. I believe it don’t ring! But I’ll try again, anyhow.” And half forgetting that his own words weren’t strictly true, for he hadn’t yet tried, he pressed the knob with a vengeance.

“Is that your room with the light burning, Miss Remanet?” he went on, in a fairly loud official voice, as the servant came to answer. “The one with the balcony, I mean? Quite Venetian, isn’t it? Reminds one of Romeo and Juliet. But most convenient for a burglary, too! Such nice low rails! Mind you take good care of the Remanet rubies!”

“I don’t want to take care of them,” Persis answered, wiping her dim eyes hastily with her lace pocket-handkerchief, “if they make you feel as you say, Sir Justin. I don’t mind if they go. Let the burglar take them!”

And even as she spoke, the Maclure footman, immutable, sphinx-like, opened the door for her.

II.

Persis sat long in her own room that night before she began undressing. Her head was full of Sir Justin and those mysterious hints of his. At last, however, she took her rubies off, and her pretty silk bodice. "I don't care for them at all," she thought, with a gulp, "if they keep from me the love of the man I'd like to marry."

It was late before she fell asleep; and when she did, her rest was troubled. She dreamt a great deal; in her dreams, Sir Justin, and dance music, and the rubies, and burglars were incongruously mingled. To make up for it, she slept late next morning; and Lady Maclure let her sleep on, thinking she was probably wearied out with much dancing the previous evening—as though any amount of excitement could ever weary a pretty American! About ten o'clock she woke with a start. A vague feeling oppressed her that somebody had come in during the night and stolen her rubies. She rose hastily and went to her dressing-table to look for them. The case was there all right; she opened it and looked at it. Oh, prophetic soul! the rubies were gone, and the box was empty!

Now, Persis had honestly said the night before the burglar might take her rubies if he chose, and she wouldn't mind the loss of them. But that was last night, and the rubies hadn't then as yet been taken. This morning, somehow, things seemed quite different. It would be rough on us all (especially on politicians) if we must always be bound by what we said yesterday. Persis was an American, and no American is insensible to the charms of precious stones; 'tis a savage taste which the European immigrants seem to have inherited obliquely from their Red Indian predecessors. She rushed over to the bell and rang it with feminine violence. Lady Maclure's maid answered the summons, as usual. She was a clever, demure-looking girl, this maid of Lady Maclure's; and when Persis cried to her wildly, "Send for the police at once, and tell Sir Everard my jewels are stolen!" she answered, "Yes, miss," with such sober acquiescence that Persis, who was American, and therefore a bundle of nerves, turned round and stared at her as an incomprehensible mystery. No Mahatma could have been more unmoved. She seemed quite to expect those rubies would be stolen, and to take no more notice of the incident than if Persis had told her she wanted hot water.

Lady Maclure, indeed, greatly prided herself on this cultivated imperturbability of Bertha's; she regarded it as the fine flower of English domestic service. But Persis was American, and saw things otherwise; to her, the calm repose with which Bertha answered, "Yes, miss; certainly, miss; I'll go and tell Sir Everard," seemed nothing short of exasperating.

Bertha went off with the news, closing the door quite softly; and a few minutes later Lady Maclure herself appeared in the Californian's room, to console her visitor under this severe domestic affliction. She found Persis sitting up in bed, in her pretty French dressing-jacket (pale blue with *revers* of fawn colour), reading a book of verses. "Why, my dear!" Lady Maclure exclaimed, "then you've found them again, I suppose? Bertha told us you'd lost your lovely rubies!"

"So I have, dear Lady Maclure," Persis answered, wiping her eyes; "they're gone. They've been stolen. I forgot to lock my door when I came home last night, and the window was open; somebody must have come in, this way or that, and taken them. But whenever I'm in trouble, I try a dose of Browning. He's splendid for the nerves. He's so consoling, you know; he brings one to anchor."

She breakfasted in bed; she wouldn't leave the room, she declared, till the police arrived. After breakfast she rose and put on her dainty Parisian morning wrap—Americans have always such pretty bedroom things for these informal receptions—and sat up in state to await the police officer. Sir Everard himself, much disturbed that such a mishap should have happened in his house, went round in person to fetch the official. While he was gone, Lady Maclure made a thorough search of the room, but couldn't find a trace of the missing rubies.

"Are you sure you put them in the case, dear?" she asked, for the honour of the household.

And Persis answered: "Quite confident, Lady Maclure; I always put them there the moment I take them off; and when I came to look for them this morning, the case was empty."

"They were *very* valuable, I believe?" Lady Maclure said, inquiringly.

"Six thousand pounds was the figure in your money, I guess," Persis answered, ruefully. "I don't know if you call that a lot of money in England, but we do in America."

There was a moment's pause, and then Persis spoke again—

“Lady Maclure,” she said abruptly, “do you consider that maid of yours a Christian woman?”

Lady Maclure was startled. That was hardly the light in which she was accustomed to regard the lower classes.

“Well, I don't know about that,” she said slowly; “that's a great deal, you know, dear, to assert about *anybody*, especially one's maid. But I should think she was honest, quite decidedly honest.”

“Well, that's the same thing, about, isn't it?” Persis answered, much relieved. “I'm glad you think that's so; for I was almost half afraid of her. She's too quiet for my taste, somehow; so silent, you know, and inscrutable.”

“Oh, my dear,” her hostess cried, “don't blame her for silence; that's just what I like about her. It's exactly what I chose her for. Such a nice, noiseless girl; moves about the room like a cat on tiptoe; knows her proper place, and never dreams of speaking unless she's spoken to.”

“Well, you may like them that way in Europe,” Persis responded frankly; “but in America, we prefer them a little bit human.”

Twenty minutes later the police officer arrived. He wasn't in uniform. The inspector, feeling at once the gravity of the case, and recognizing that this was a Big Thing, in which there was glory to be won, and perhaps promotion, sent a detective at once, and advised that if possible nothing should be said to the household on the subject for the present, till the detective had taken a good look round the premises. That was useless, Sir Everard feared, for the lady's-maid knew; and the lady's-maid would be sure to go down, all agog with the news, to the servants' hall immediately. However, they might try; no harm in trying; and the sooner the detective got round to the house, of course, the better.

The detective accompanied him back—a keen-faced, close-shaven, irreproachable-looking man, like a vulgarized copy of Mr. John Morley. He was curt and business-like. His first question was, “Have the servants been told of this?”

Lady Maclure looked inquiringly across at Bertha. She herself had been sitting all the time with the bereaved Persis, to console her (with Browning) under this heavy affliction.

“No, my lady,” Bertha answered, ever calm (invaluable servant, Bertha!), “I didn't mention it to anybody downstairs on purpose, thinking perhaps it might be decided to search the servants' boxes.”

The detective pricked up his ears. He was engaged already in glancing casually round the room. He moved about it now, like a conjurer, with quiet steps and slow. “He doesn't get on one's nerves,” Persis remarked approvingly, in an undertone to her friend; then she added, aloud: “What's your name, please, Mr. Officer?”

The detective was lifting a lace handkerchief on the dressing-table at the side. He turned round softly. “Gregory, madam,” he answered, hardly glancing at the girl, and going on with his occupation.

“The same as the powders!” Persis interposed, with a shudder. “I used to take them when I was a child. I never could bear them.”

“We're useful, as remedies,” the detective replied, with a quiet smile; “but nobody likes us.” And he relapsed contentedly into his work once more, searching round the apartment.

“The first thing we have to do,” he said, with a calm air of superiority, standing now by the window, with one hand in his pocket, “is to satisfy ourselves whether or not there has really, at all, been a robbery. We must look through the room well, and see you haven't left the rubies lying about loose somewhere. Such things often happen. We're constantly called in to investigate a case, when it's only a matter of a lady's carelessness.”

At that Persis flared up. A daughter of the great republic isn't accustomed to be doubted like a mere European woman. “I'm quite sure I took them off,” she said, “and put them back in the jewel case. Of that I'm just confident. There isn't a doubt possible.”

Mr. Gregory redoubled his search in all likely and unlikely places. “I should say that settles the matter,” he answered blandly. “Our experience is that whenever a lady’s perfectly certain, beyond the possibility of doubt, she put a thing away safely, it’s absolutely sure to turn up where she says she didn’t put it.”

Persis answered him never a word. Her manners had not that repose that stamps the caste of Vere de Vere; so, to prevent an outbreak, she took refuge in Browning.

Mr. Gregory, nothing abashed, searched the room thoroughly, up and down, without the faintest regard to Persis’s feelings; he was a detective, he said, and his business was first of all to unmask crime, irrespective of circumstances. Lady Maclure stood by, meanwhile, with the imperturbable Bertha. Mr. Gregory investigated every hole and cranny, like a man who wishes to let the world see for itself he performs a disagreeable duty with unflinching thoroughness. When he had finished, he turned to Lady Maclure. “And now, if you please,” he said blandly, “we’ll proceed to investigate the servants’ boxes.”

Lady Maclure looked at her maid. “Bertha,” she said, “go downstairs, and see that none of the other servants come up, meanwhile, to their bedrooms.” Lady Maclure was not quite to the manner born, and had never acquired the hateful aristocratic habit of calling women-servants by their surnames only.

But the detective interposed. “No, no,” he said sharply. “This young woman had better stop here with Miss Remanet—strictly under her eye—till I’ve searched the boxes. For if I find nothing there, it may perhaps be my disagreeable duty, by-and-by, to call in a female detective to search her.”

It was Lady Maclure’s turn to flare up now. “Why, this is my own maid,” she said, in a chilly tone, “and I’ve every confidence in her.”

“Very sorry for that, my lady,” Mr. Gregory responded, in a most official voice; “but our experience teaches us that if there’s a person in the case whom nobody ever dreams of suspecting, that person’s the one who has committed the robbery.”

“Why, you’ll be suspecting myself next!” Lady Maclure cried, with some disgust.

“Your ladyship’s just the last person in the world I should think of suspecting,” the detective answered, with a deferential bow—which, after his previous speech, was to say the least of it equivocal.

Persis began to get annoyed. She didn’t half like the look of that girl Bertha, herself, but still, she was there as Lady Maclure’s guest, and she couldn’t expose her hostess to discomfort on her account.

“The girl shall *not* be searched,” she put in, growing hot. “I don’t care a cent whether I lose the wretched stones or not. Compared to human dignity, what are they worth? Not five minutes’ consideration.”

“They’re worth just seven years,” Mr. Gregory answered, with professional definiteness. “And as to searching, why, that’s out of your hands now. This is a criminal case. I’m here to discharge a public duty.”

“I don’t in the least mind being searched,” Bertha put in obligingly, with an air of indifference. “You can search me if you like—when you’ve got a warrant for it.”

The detective looked up sharply; so also did Persis. This ready acquaintance with the liberty of the subject in criminal cases impressed her unfavourably. “Ah! we’ll see about that,” Mr. Gregory answered, with a cool smile. “Meanwhile, Lady Maclure, I’ll have a look at the boxes.”

III.

The search (strictly illegal) brought out nothing. Mr. Gregory returned to Persis's bedroom, disconsolate. "You can leave the room," he said to Bertha; and Bertha glided out. "I've set another man outside to keep a constant eye on her," he added in explanation.

By this time Persis had almost made her mind up as to who was the culprit; but she said nothing overt, for Lady Maclure's sake, to the detective. As for that immovable official, he began asking questions—some of them, Persis thought, almost bordering on the personal. Where had she been last night? Was she sure she had really worn the rubies? How did she come home? Was she certain she took them off? Did the maid help her undress? Who came back with her in the carriage?

To all these questions, rapidly fired off with cross-examining acuteness, Persis answered in the direct American fashion. She was sure she had the rubies on when she came home to Hampstead, because Sir Justin O'Byrne, who came back with her in his sister's carriage, had noticed them the last thing, and had told her to take care of them.

At mention of that name the detective smiled meaningly. (A meaning smile is stock-in-trade to a detective.) "Oh, Sir Justin O'Byrne!" he repeated, with quiet self-constraint. "*He* came back with you in the carriage, then? And did he sit the same side with you?"

Lady Maclure grew indignant (that was Mr. Gregory's cue). "Really, sir," she said angrily, "if you're going to suspect gentlemen in Sir Justin's position, we shall none of us be safe from you."

"The law," Mr. Gregory replied, with an air of profound deference, "is no respecter of persons."

"But it ought to be of characters," Lady Maclure cried warmly. "What's the good of having a blameless character, I should like to know, if—if——"

"If it doesn't allow you to commit a robbery with impunity?" the detective interposed, finishing her sentence his own way. "Well, well, that's true. That's perfectly true—but Sir Justin's character, you see, can hardly be called blameless."

"He's a gentleman," Persis cried, with flashing eyes, turning round upon the officer; "and he's quite incapable of such a mean and despicable crime as you dare to suspect him of."

"Oh, I see," the officer answered, like one to whom a welcome ray of light breaks suddenly through a great darkness. "Sir Justin's a friend of yours! Did he come into the porch with you?"

"He did," Persis answered, flushing crimson; "and if you have the insolence to bring a charge against him——"

"Calm yourself, madam," the detective replied coolly. "I do nothing of the sort—at this stage of the proceedings. It's possible there may have been no robbery in the case at all. We must keep our minds open for the present to every possible alternative. It's—it's a delicate matter to hint at; but before we go any further—do you think, perhaps, Sir Justin may have carried the rubies away by mistake, entangled in his clothes?—say, for example, his coat-sleeve?"

It was a loophole of escape; but Persis didn't jump at it.

"He had never the opportunity," she answered, with a flash. "And I know quite well they were there on my neck when he left me, for the last thing he said to me was, looking up at this very window: 'That balcony's awfully convenient for a burglary. Mind you take good care of the Remanet rubies.' And I remembered what he'd said when I took them off last night; and that's what makes me so sure I really had them."

"*And* you slept with the window open!" the detective went on, still smiling to himself. "Well, here we have all the materials, to be sure, for a first-class mystery!"

IV.

For some days more, nothing further turned up of importance about the Great Ruby Robbery. It got into the papers, of course, as everything does nowadays, and all London was talking of it. Persis found herself quite famous as the American lady who had lost her jewels. People pointed her out in the park; people stared at her hard through their opera-glasses at the theatre. Indeed, the possession of the celebrated Remanet rubies had never made her half so conspicuous in the world as the loss of them made her. It was almost worth while losing them, Persis thought, to be so much made of as she was in society in consequence. All the world knows a young lady must be somebody when she can offer a reward of five hundred pounds for the recovery of gewgaws valued at six thousand.

Sir Justin met her in the Row one day. "Then you don't go to Paris for awhile yet—until you get them back?" he inquired very low.

And Persis answered, blushing, "No, Sir Justin; not yet; and—I'm almost glad of it."

"No, you don't mean that!" the young man cried, with perfect boyish ardour. "Well, I confess, Miss Remanet, the first thing I thought myself when I read it in *The Times* was just the very same: 'Then, after all, she won't go yet to Paris!'"

Persis looked up at him from her pony with American frankness. "And I," she said, quivering, "I found anchor in Browning. For what do you think I read?"

'And learn to rate a true man's heart
Far above rubies.'

The book opened at the very place; and *there* I found anchor!"

But when Sir Justin went round to his rooms that same evening his servant said to him, "A gentleman was inquiring for you here this afternoon, sir. A close-shaven gentleman. Not very prepossessin'. And it seemed to me somehow, sir, as if he was trying to pump me."

Sir Justin's face was grave. He went to his bedroom at once. He knew what that man wanted; and he turned straight to his wardrobe, looking hard at the dress coat he had worn on the eventful evening. Things may cling to a sleeve, don't you know—or be entangled in a cuff—or get casually into a pocket! Or some one may put them there.

For the next ten days or so Mr. Gregory was busy, constantly busy. Without doubt, he was the most active and energetic of detectives. He carried out so fully his own official principle of suspecting everybody, from China to Peru, that at last poor Persis got fairly mazed with his web of possibilities. Nobody was safe from his cultivated and highly-trained suspicion—not Sir Everard in his studio, nor Lady Maclure in her boudoir, nor the butler in his pantry, nor Sir Justin O’Byrne in his rooms in St. James’s. Mr. Gregory kept an open mind against everybody and everything. He even doubted the parrot, and had views as to the intervention of rats and terriers. Persis got rather tired at last of his perverse ingenuity; especially as she had a very shrewd idea herself who had stolen the rubies. When he suggested various doubts, however, which seemed remotely to implicate Sir Justin’s honesty, the sensitive American girl “felt it go on her nerves,” and refused to listen to him, though Mr. Gregory never ceased to enforce upon her, by precept and example, his own pet doctrine that the last person on earth one would be likely to suspect is always the one who turns out to have done it.

A morning or two later, Persis looked out of her window as she was dressing her hair. She dressed it herself now, though she was an American heiress, and, therefore, of course, the laziest of her kind; for she had taken an unaccountable dislike, somehow, to that quiet girl Bertha. On this particular morning, however, when Persis looked out, she saw Bertha engaged in close, and apparently very intimate, conversation with the Hampstead postman. This sight disturbed the unstable equilibrium of her equanimity not a little. Why should Bertha go to the door to the postman at all? Surely it was no part of the duty of Lady Maclure’s maid to take in the letters! And why should she want to go prying into the question of who wrote to Miss Remanet? For Persis, intensely conscious herself that a note from Sir Justin lay on top of the postman’s bundle—she recognized it at once, even at that distance below, by the peculiar shape of the broad rough envelope—jumped to the natural feminine conclusion that Bertha must needs be influenced by some abstruse motive of which she herself, Persis, was, to say the very least, a component element. ’Tis a human fallacy. We’re all of us prone to see everything from a personal standpoint; indeed, the one quality which makes a man or woman into a possible novelist, good, bad, or indifferent, is just that special power of throwing himself or herself into a great many people’s personalities alternately. And this is a power possessed on an average by not one in a thousand men or not one in ten thousand women.

Persis rang the bell violently. Bertha came up, all smiles: “Did you want anything, miss?” Persis could have choked her. “Yes,” she answered plainly, taking the bull by the horns; “I want to know what you were doing down there, prying into other people’s letters with the postman?”

Bertha looked up at her, ever bland; she answered at once, without a second’s hesitation: “The postman’s my young man, miss; and we hope before very long now to get married.”

“Odious thing!” Persis thought. “A glib lie always ready on the tip of her tongue for every emergency.”

But Bertha’s full heart was beating violently. Beating with love and hope and deferred anxiety.

A little later in the day Persis mentioned the incident casually to Lady Maclure—mainly in order to satisfy herself that the girl had been lying. Lady Maclure, however, gave a qualified assent:—

“I *believe* she’s engaged to the postman,” she said. “I *think* I’ve heard so; though I make it a rule, you see, my dear, to know as little as I can of these people’s love affairs. They’re so very uninteresting. But Bertha certainly told me she wouldn’t leave me to get married for an indefinite period. That was only ten days ago. She said her young man wasn’t just yet in a position to make a home for her.”

“Perhaps,” Persis suggested grimly, “something has occurred meanwhile to better her position. Such strange things crop up. She may have come into a fortune!”

“Perhaps so,” Lady Maclure replied languidly. The subject bored her. “Though, if so, it must really have been very sudden; for I think it was the morning before you lost your jewels she told me so.”

Persis thought that odd, but she made no comment.

Before dinner that evening she burst suddenly into Lady Maclure's room for a minute. Bertha was dressing her lady's hair. Friends were coming to dine—among them Sir Justin. "How do these pearls go with my complexion, Lady Maclure?" Persis asked rather anxiously; for she specially wished to look her best that evening, for one of the party.

"Oh, charming!" her hostess answered, with her society smile. "Never saw anything suit you better, Persis."

"Except my poor rubies!" Persis cried rather ruefully, for coloured gewgaws are dear to the savage and the woman. "I wish I could get them back! I wonder that man Gregory hasn't succeeded in finding them."

"Oh! my dear," Lady Maclure drawled out, "you may be sure by this time they're safe at Amsterdam. That's the only place in Europe now to look for them."

"Why to Amsterdam, my lady?" Bertha interposed suddenly, with a quick side-glance at Persis.

Lady Maclure threw her head back in surprise at so unwonted an intrusion. "What do you want to know that for, child?" she asked, somewhat curtly. "Why, to be cut, of course. All the diamond-cutters in the world are concentrated in Amsterdam; and the first thing a thief does when he steals big jewels is to send them across, and have them cut in new shapes so that they can't be identified."

"I shouldn't have thought," Bertha put in, calmly, "they'd have known who to send them to."

Lady Maclure turned to her sharply. "Why, these things," she said, with a calm air of knowledge, "are always done by experienced thieves, who know the ropes well, and are in league with receivers the whole world over. But Gregory has his eye on Amsterdam, I'm sure, and we'll soon hear something."

"Yes, my lady," Bertha answered, in her acquiescent tone, and relapsed into silence.

VI.

Four days later, about nine at night, that hard-worked man, the posty on the beat, stood loitering outside Sir Everard Maclure's house, openly defying the rules of the department, in close conference with Bertha.

"Well, any news?" Bertha asked, trembling over with excitement, for she was a very different person outside with her lover from the demure and imperturbable model maid who waited on my lady.

"Why, yes," the posty answered, with a low laugh of triumph. "A letter from Amsterdam! And I think we've fixed it!"

Bertha almost flung herself upon him. "Oh, Harry!" she cried, all eagerness, "this is too good to be true! Then in just one other month we can really get married!"

There was a minute's pause, inarticulately filled up by sounds unrepresentable through the art of the typefounder. Then Harry spoke again. "It's an awful lot of money!" he said, musing. "A regular fortune! And what's more, Bertha, if it hadn't been for your cleverness we never should have got it!"

Bertha pressed his hand affectionately. Even ladies'-maids are human.

"Well, if I hadn't been so much in love with you," she answered frankly, "I don't think I could ever have had the wit to manage it. But, oh! Harry, love makes one do or try anything!"

If Persis had heard those singular words, she would have felt no doubt was any longer possible.

VII.

Next morning, at ten o'clock, a policeman came round, post haste, to Sir Everard's. He asked to see Miss Remanet. When Persis came down, in her morning wrap, he had but a brief message from head-quarters to give her: "Your jewels are found, miss. Will you step round and identify them?"

Persis drove back with him, all trembling. Lady Maclure accompanied her. At the police-station they left their cab, and entered the ante-room.

A little group had assembled there. The first person Persis distinctly made out in it was Sir Justin. A great terror seized her. Gregory had so poisoned her mind by this time with suspicion of everybody and everything she came across, that she was afraid of her own shadow. But next moment she saw clearly he wasn't there as prisoner, or even as witness; merely as spectator. She acknowledged him with a hasty bow, and cast her eye round again. The next person she definitely distinguished was Bertha, as calm and cool as ever, but in the very centre of the group, occupying as it were the place of honour which naturally belongs to the prisoner on all similar occasions. Persis was not surprised at that; she had known it all along; she glanced meaningly at Gregory, who stood a little behind, looking by no means triumphant. Persis found his dejection odd; but he was a proud detective, and perhaps some one else had effected the capture!

"These are your jewels, I believe," the inspector said, holding them up; and Persis admitted it.

"This is a painful case," the inspector went on. "A very painful case. We grieve to have discovered such a clue against one of our own men; but as he owns to it himself, and intends to throw himself on the mercy of the Court, it's no use talking about it. He won't attempt to defend it; indeed, with such evidence, I think he's doing what's best and wisest."

Persis stood there, all dazed. "I—I don't understand," she cried, with a swimming brain. "Who on earth are you talking about?"

The inspector pointed mutely with one hand at Gregory; and then for the first time Persis saw he was guarded. She clapped her hand to her head. In a moment it all broke in upon her. When she had called in the police, the rubies had never been stolen at all. It was Gregory who stole them!

She understood it now, at once. The real facts came back to her. She had taken her necklet off at night, laid it carelessly down on the dressing-table (too full of Sir Justin), covered it accidentally with her lace pocket-handkerchief, and straightway forgotten all about it. Next day she missed it, and jumped at conclusions. When Gregory came, he spied the rubies askance under the corner of the handkerchief—of course, being a woman, she had naturally looked everywhere except in the place where she had laid them—and knowing it was a safe case he had quietly pocketed them before her very eyes, all unsuspected. He felt sure nobody could accuse him of a robbery which was committed before he came, and which he had himself been called in to investigate.

"The worst of it is," the inspector went on, "he had woven a very ingenious case against Sir Justin O'Byrne, whom we were on the very point of arresting to-day, if this young woman hadn't come in at the eleventh hour, in the very nick of time, and earned the reward by giving us the clue that led to the discovery and recovery of the jewels. They were brought over this morning by an Amsterdam detective."

Persis looked hard at Bertha. Bertha answered her look. "My young man was the postman, miss," she explained, quite simply; "and after what my lady said, I put him up to watch Mr. Gregory's delivery for a letter from Amsterdam. I'd suspected him from the very first; and when the letter came, we had him arrested at once, and found out from it who were the people at Amsterdam who had the rubies."

Persis gasped with astonishment. Her brain was reeling. But Gregory in the background put in one last word—

"Well, I was right, after all," he said, with professional pride. "I told you the very last person you'd dream of suspecting was sure to be the one that actually did it."

Lady O'Byrne's rubies were very much admired at Monte Carlo last season. Mr. Gregory has found permanent employment for the next seven years at Her Majesty's quarries on the Isle of Portland. Bertha and her postman have

retired to Canada with five hundred pounds to buy a farm. And everybody says Sir Justin O'Byrne has beaten the record, after all, even for Irish baronets, by making a marriage at once of money and affection.



Transcriber's Note

This text has been preserved as in the original, including archaic and inconsistent spelling, punctuation and grammar, except that obvious printer's errors have been silently corrected.

[The end of *The Great Ruby Robbery* by Grant Allen]