

THE STOLEN KASABA

A STORY OF A PEARL ROBBERY IN INDIA.

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"The Lone Furrow," etc.

THE solemn firm of Cook Company, jewellers, in Calcutta, was in a most unusual hurry. Dimitri the Greek and Duttoo the Hindoo goldsmith were working all day and half the night on a wondrous pearl head-dress, a moti kasaba, for Maharajah Darwaza.

The "Bushira," the most beautiful pearl in the world, that had just come up from its finding in the Persian Gulf, was to be enthroned in this wonderful golden crown surrounded by myriads of lesser pearls.

Hansen, the head clerk, had in charge this trinket that would cost four lakhs of rupees—\$125,000. All day he must keep his eyes on the priceless pearls, and at midnight take them to the vault in the showroom, of which he and the manager alone knew the combination.

Maharajah Darwaza must have the kasaba for the durbar at Government House on the 20th, for the express purpose of humiliating his rival in Oriental display, the Thakore of Bharana. It was an old-time rivalry; and for weeks Calcutta had talked of a wonderful silver bedstead, with a musical box beneath, that the jewellers had made for Bharana.

Mr. Dodd, the manager of Cook Company, occupied the flat above the showroom; and on the morning of the 19th when he came down to his office, Burns, a clerk, asked if he would open the vault, as Duttoo was waiting to finish the moti kasaba.

"Hasn't Hansen been here yet?" Dodd queried.

"No, sir."

"That's strange; hope he is not ill; must be, though—must be. Send a peon to his bungalow to ask."

Dodd adjusted the combination, swung the heavy iron door and stepped into the vault. Then he gave a cry of alarm. The silver casket which should have contained the kasaba yawned empty.

"Who has taken the head-dress?" Dodd gasped, wringing his hands and turning frightened eyes upon Burns.

"Nobody, sir; they couldn't—the vault was locked—you opened it yourself, sir."

"Where is Duttoo? Where is Dimitri?"

"Here is Duttoo, sir; he is waiting."

"Where is the kasaba, Duttoo?" Dodd gasped; "where have you put it?"

The frightened Hindoo stared in bewildered astonishment.

"Speak! Do you hear?" And the manager grasped him roughly by the shoulder.

Burns interposed, saying: "Duttoo is frightened, sir." Then turning to the goldsmith he added gently: "Tell the Burra Sahib when you last saw the kasaba, Duttoo."

"Last night when the big clock struck twelve times, Hansen Sahib took the kasaba and his little lamp. He unlocked the strong door that is between here and our little workshop, and he passed through. Then the sahib locked it again, and I went out the back door, as Kushna, the durwan, will say. And now here am I waiting for the work; that is all Duttoo knows, huzoor."

"Call Gopal Singh," Dodd commanded; and when the durwan of the front door came, the manager asked if Hansen had passed out the night before.

"Yes, huzoor, surely Hansen Sahib went out at midnight and locked the front door behind him," Gopal Singh answered. "No one went in because I and Peroo Singh rested on our charpoys against the outside of the door."

"Did Hansen Sahib carry anything?" Dodd asked.

"Nothing, huzoor."

"Ah, I have it," the manager declared. "He has forgotten the combination—he could not open the vault, and has hidden the pearls somewhere. Quick, Burns, jump in a gharry, drive to Hansen's bungalow, and tell him we are waiting. Durwan, allow no one in or out while we search the premises. Of course, it will be all right as soon as Hansen comes—quite all right, but in the meantime—" Dodd broke off and rubbed his hands together nervously.

The search brought forth nothing; and it was with a cry of relief Dodd heard a gharry clatter up to the front door and stop. "Ah!" he said eagerly, "here is Mr.

Hansen at last; now we'll—" His voice broke and he leaned against the door jamb.

Burns descended alone from the gharry and in his white face was a look that frightened the manager.

"Come into my office—don't speak," he whispered, grasping Burns by the arm. Inside he said: "Now, what is it?"

"Hansen hasn't been to his bungalow since yesterday. He lives in a chummery out on the Tollyjunge Road, and his comrades are anxious—they can't understand it. He was always so steady, sir."

"My God! Here, Burns, take a gharry—quick—go to police headquarters and tell Mr. Creighton, the Chief of Detectives, that I want to see him. Give him my compliments, and ask him to please come at once. But not a word to anybody, mind—silence."

In fifteen minutes the detective chief appeared, and the jeweller explained his trouble.

"I'll put Teck on this," the Chief said. "You've heard of him, Mr. Dodd? He brought the Nawab of Kojac to book over poisoning the Resident. And he found the Nizam's jewels that were stolen when the Nizam was here last year. Yes, Teck is the man; I'll send for him at once. I'll have a look about, myself, in the meantime."

"Thank you, Mr. Creighton. I do hope you are successful. I have a feeling that there has been foul play. I'll give a reward—yes, ten thousand rupees for the recovery of the kasaba."

Again Burns was dispatched in a gharry to police headquarters, and presently returned with a short, chubby round-faced little man who looked quietly at Dodd out of mild blue eyes.

"We had better go into your office, Mr. Dodd," the Chief said, "and you can explain the case fully to Mr. Teck."

When the circumstances had been repeated to the detective, Creighton said: "It seems quite clear that this Hansen has disappeared with the pearls; there is not the slightest evidence of any one having broken into the place. If we can locate him, we shall find the pearls. He has yielded to the temptation, I fear."

"It wasn't Hansen," declared the manager firmly. "I would trust my life with him. There's been foul play, I'm sure."

"Whom do you suspect?" Teck clicked in a soft, gentle voice.

"Perhaps the durwans. I've had Gopal Singh for some time, but I've just discovered that Peroo Singh, who has come lately, is a subject of the Thakore of Bharana."

"What connection has the Thakore with the case?" Teck asked.

"Well, there is fierce rivalry between the two princes. They happened to meet here yesterday, and nothing would do Darwaza but he must have the pearl kasaba and try it on, just to anger Bharana. I tell you the Thakore's eyes were unholy in their vicious jealousy. He knew that the Maharajah was going to wear this at the durbar."

"And you think he may have put the durwans up to stealing it, out of revenge?" Teck asked.

"He is capable of doing it, I know that. He came to the guddi (throne) through the murder of his uncle."

"Well," said Teck, "I want an hour to look about. Shut the front door, let no one in or out, and we'll hold another little conference here in one hour. It is now"—Teck raised his eyes to a clock on the wall—"what! Half-past eleven? Ah! I see, it is stopped."

"It is just eleven o'clock, Mr. Teck," Dodd advised, pulling a watch from his pocket. "That clock must have stopped last night—it was going yesterday. My man has forgotten to wind it."

Dodd arose, went to the clock, which consisted of the works, a dial plate, and the weights and pendulum hanging down the wall without an enclosing box. He swung the pendulum and the clock started off.

"It is not run down—odd it should have stopped," he added. "Well, we'll meet here at twelve again."

"I will go to my office, send out Detective Thoms on