



MR. DRAKE'S TREASURE

How a Ghost Guarded the Jewels

By MR. JOHN K. LEYS

Author of "By an Unseen Hand," "Held in the Toils," etc.



WE had only been three months married when the blow fell. The senior partner in the firm that employed me died; the business was amalgamated with that of a rival concern; there was a general readjustment of men and posts; and the result was that I lost my billet.

I knew by bitter experience what it was to haunt the London offices in search of work, hungry and despairing; and if it had not been for Mary I should have given way to despair. She was far braver than I, partly, perhaps, because I had "been there," and she had not.

Of course, I set myself to find a new berth of some kind, but I had an inward presentiment that I would not succeed. I did not succeed. Day by day our little stock of money melted away; each day I grew a little thinner, a little shabbier.

One poor little asset I had, rather uncommon among London clerks—a working knowledge of Hindustani. This I had picked up from my ayah—I was born in Delhi—and thinking that it might come in useful some day I had improved my knowledge of it as I grew older.

But Hindustani was a drug in the market, and subsequently I discovered that scarcely any clerks are engaged to go to India nowadays.

At last one morning, while searching the columns of the *Daily Trumpet*, my eyes lit on the words I had despaired of ever beholding—"One with knowledge of Hindustani preferred." I shouted for joy, made a spring at Mary, kissed her rapturously, and with scarcely a word of explanation, and no breakfast, rushed out of the house.

Mr. Timothy Drake I found to be a short, stout, elderly man about sixty years of age, with a shock of iron-gray hair that rose straight up from his forehead like a ruff, an all-round set of whiskers, a brick-like complexion and a fiery eye.

He greeted me in Hindustani, and I replied in the same language. A few questions and answers in the same tongue, and when they were ended Mr. Drake frowned and fell into a brown study.

Presently he aroused himself.

"Good, so far," said he. "And now, what can you do? Anything beyond making entries in ledgers and writing formal business letters?"

"I once managed a tin mine in Cornwall for a few months," I answered, diffidently.

He snorted contemptuously.

"I want a man to be sub-manager on a tea plantation, under supervision, of course. Tin and tea are not quite the same thing."

I sorrowfully admitted that this was true, and hinted that I was not too old to learn.

He did not seem to hear me.

"Any objection to going up country?"

"Not the least," I answered.

"There is one thing I should warn you of," said Mr. Drake, slowly, looking me full in the face. "The natives with whom you will be brought into contact are extremely superstitious. They have their own magic, and they are rather fond of practising their arts on white men they may wish to get rid of. I don't say there is anything in it, mind you, and I don't say there isn't. But I have seen some queer things myself—here Mr. Drake's voice dropped to a whisper—"very queer things indeed. Now—"

"Oh, I'm all right as far as that goes, sir," I interrupted confidently. "I haven't an ounce of superstition in my composition."

"Do you mean that?" asked Mr. Drake, suddenly leaning forward in his chair.

"Certainly I do."

"Then perhaps you wouldn't mind helping me in a little bit of private business which requires some nerve."

"I should esteem it a pleasure," I answered promptly.

He smiled grimly.

"I doubt whether you will think so if you undertake it," said he. "The case is this:

"My grandfather, who died a good many years ago, held an important post in the East India Company's service; he seems to have been a bold, resolute and unscrupulous kind of man. He lived nearly all his life in India, and came home to enjoy the money he had made, forgetting that his time for enjoyment had fled, never to return.

"He was reputed to be a very wealthy man, but his wealth consisted principally of precious stones, how obtained we had better not enquire.

"He died at an advanced age, and the curious thing was that his jewels seemed to have predeceased him. They could not be found anywhere. Some thought that the old gentleman (who was not of an amiable disposition) had thrown them into the Thames sooner than let his heirs have them; some



MR. TIMOTHY DRAKE

said his favorite Hindoo servant had stolen them and taken them back to India; many declared that they had never existed.

"But they were all wrong. Only a few days ago I discovered, among a lot of old family papers, a memorandum in my grandfather's handwriting stating that he had instructed his Hindoo servant to put them in his coffin and bury them with him. And he added that his spirit would watch over the treasure, and that a frightful punishment would befall any one who should attempt to remove them.

"Now, of course, such a threat is a thing that neither you nor I, nor any sensible man would dream of paying any attention to. Still I confess, meddling with the bones of the dead, even for an innocent purpose, is not a thing I like, especially in the case of an ancestor of my own. But if you have no such scruples, I should be greatly obliged for your help."

"You are most welcome to any help I can give you," I responded promptly. "I don't think people have any business to have jewels buried with them if they wish their remains to be undisturbed. I suppose the coffin will have to be opened?"

Mr. Drake moved uneasily in his seat.

"Unless it has fallen asunder with age."

This opened up a rather gruesome prospect, but having pledged my word to give what help I could, I faced it "in imagination" without moving a muscle.

"The coffin lies, I believe, in a vault under Shipford Church—at least I know we have a family vault there, and my grandfather's body will be there too, I have no doubt."

"When do you wish me to go down and see it?" I asked, rising from my chair.

"This is Monday," answered Mr. Drake. "Suppose we go together on Thursday afternoon? I will bring a lantern and all the necessary tools, and pay you five pounds as soon as the job is done."

He dismissed me with a nod, and I went home in a state of great, though repressed, excitement. I had already decided that I would not tell Mary the

real object of my journey on Thursday, for I did not wish to alarm her superstitious fears.

I left with her all the little money we had and reached Waterloo on Thursday afternoon without a penny in my pocket. But that did not matter. Mr. Drake was waiting for me, a large black bag in his hand, and of course he paid all expenses.

It was already dusk when we reached the lonely, retired, remote village of Shipford. The church lay nearly a mile off within the confines of a park; and on our way from the station Mr. Drake enquired the way to the sexton's cottage.

"The old man was unwilling to let me keep the keys all night," said Mr. Drake, as he emerged from the cottage, "but I told him that I wanted to inspect the church early in the morning and could not be troubled to send back for the keys, so he let me have them. And what is more, I have learned the exact position of my grandfather's coffin. It lies at the end of the second shelf on your left as you enter the vault."

A walk of something under a mile brought us to the village inn, where Mr. Drake engaged a room for each of us. Having ordered dinner he proposed that we should take a look at the church in the fading light, and so be to some degree familiar with the ground when we visited it at night.

As we set out the rain began to fall steadily and drearily. Not a soul did we meet by the way. The church lay in a hollow, almost concealed by the surrounding trees. We opened the vestry door and peeped in, but came away at once, leaving the door on the latch.

I had no umbrella, and by the time we got back to the inn I was pretty well soaked through. I shivered with cold, and felt faint for want of food. A plentiful dinner cured the latter evil, but did not dry my clothes, and the fire, though cheerful enough, was not strong enough to take the damp feeling out of my garments.

About ten o'clock we went upstairs, but my employer told me I had better not go to bed, and I sat shivering in my fireless room for more than two hours.

A little after twelve Mr. Drake put his head inside my door and beckoned to me.

"I think they are all asleep now," he said in a whisper; "we had better be going."

Leaving the inn by a back door which led into the stable yard, we were soon in the street. I carried the black bag, and Mr. Drake carried the umbrella. It was still raining.

When we got to the wicket gate that led into the park, Mr. Drake stopped and lit the lantern.

Our midnight walk through the plantation was inexpressibly dreary. Mr. Drake went first, his umbrella in his right hand and the lantern in his left, while I toiled after him, carrying the bag with tools.

Twenty minutes' walk brought us to the lych gate. We entered the church, and Mr. Drake went at once to a flagstone in the north-west corner, in which was embedded a large iron ring.

It took all our strength to raise the stone, but at last we got it up on edge, and, peering down, saw a flight of steps leading into the darkness below.

"Give me the lantern," said Mr. Drake. "I will go first."

At the foot of the steps was a massive oaken door

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MARY



CHARLIE