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MYSTERY OF THE GREAT RUBY.

BY LUCIE ST. DEANE.

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PRELUDE.

The sepoy mutiny of 1857-8 was one of the most tragic uprisings in history. Two hundred million fanatics revolted against British rule, and the flaming plains of India were swept by fire and crimsoned with the blood of the innocents until faraway England rose in the might of her wrath, and her heroes ground the rebels to the earth. The Mogul empire was proclaimed at Delhi, in May, 1857, and Cawnpur mutinied on the last day of that month. It was invested by Nana Sahib on the 6th of June and surrendered 20 days later. General Havelock fought his way, step by step, to the walls of the city, and Nana stole away like a thief in the night. Before he left (July 16) occurred the massacre of the European women and children in Cawnpur—a crime that thrilled the civilized world.

The British government offered a reward of \$50,000 for the capture of Nana Sahib, and every effort was made to trace him, but he vanished as utterly as if he had never been.

Investigation, however, has made it quite certain that Nana Dhoonda Pant, known in history as Nana Sahib, fled with a few followers to the jungles of Oude and penetrated deep into those dismal solitudes. All died miserably, and the eagles of the Himalayas alone look down from their lofty heights upon the crags of the royal vanguard who perished there long years ago.

Small loss to the world was the death of Nana Sahib, but when he entered those desolate wilds he carried with him the most wonderful ruby of history. It was the size of a robin's egg, of the purest "pigeon blood" and without a flaw. Its brilliancy and perfection gave it fabulous value and a rank beside that of the Kohinoor and the great gems of the world. If that ruby is ever found, it will make the finder famous and rich beyond compare.

CHAPTER I.

THE NARRATIVE OF JOHN R. BROWN.

I am a quiet, middle aged gentleman who has been a jeweler in Maiden lane, New York, for rising 30 years. I may be permitted to say that I have a family of whom I am fond, and that my circumstances are satisfactory. Understand at the beginning of this story that I am not the hero, and have only set out to relate the occurrences that came to my knowledge, and in which, from the trend of circumstances, I was compelled to act a leading part.

A certain October day, a few years ago, was one of the most dismal I ever experienced. The downfall of rain was constant for two days, and when night closed in the steady drizzle continued. We had not seen a customer since the forenoon, and I allowed my two clerks to go home early. There was nothing for them to do after placing the stock within the massive safe, and I was in that state of unrest when I was glad to be freed from seeing their faces.

I would have left the store at the same time but for a call from my old friend, Carl Wittner, the detective, who, with the remark that he knew I would be lonely, walked behind the counter and back into my private office, where I joined him and we lit our cigars.

I was glad to see him. Wittner was an officer of exceptional skill, bright, intelligent, well educated, and I am sure thoroughly honest. We had been friends for years, and he knew that he need never wait for an invitation to visit me. He was always welcome.

The genuine detective is not a man to tell his secrets or boast of his exploits, as members of the profession do in fiction. Nevertheless I am satisfied that Wittner let me know more of his doings than any other person. He sometimes appealed to me for counsel in certain matters, but inasmuch as, so far as I could learn, he generally took an opposite course from what I recommended (and I must confess with good results, as a rule) I suspect that he had little purpose except to compliment me.

We had talked 15 minutes or so upon nothing in particular when the door of the store opened and a man entered.

"Is it possible that I have a customer?" I remarked, rising and walking forward to greet the caller.

I was struck by his appearance. He was tall, elegantly formed and dressed and evidently a foreigner. He set down his dripping umbrella in the stand, and then, as he turned, I gained a good view of him.

His hair, eyes, mustache and imperial were as black as the raven's wing. His teeth were glistening white and his complexion as swarthy as a Spaniard's, though I was sure he was not a native of Europe. His gloves, silk hat and attire were of fashionable make, and a diamond of the first water glistened on his scarf.

Years before I had spent several weeks in Calcutta, and prompted by a curious whim I said:

"Rajah sahib salaam. Ap ka mizay kaisa hai?"

These words are Hindoostanee and mean: "Peace to you, honorable sir. How is your temper today?"

The black eyes flashed, the white teeth showed behind the jetty mustache, and he instantly broke forth with a lot of words which I could no more understand, except that they were in the same language employed by me, than I could speak Choctaw.

"I picked up only a few sentences

when in India," I replied, with a laugh. "If you are familiar with English, let us confine ourselves to that."

"With pleasure," he replied, his accent faultless. "I suppose nearly every language is spoken in New York, and I was delighted to hear my own, but I think I can make my meaning clear in your tongue."

"I am sure no one could speak it more correctly. I shall be pleased to serve you, if in my power."

"I thank you, sir. You are a dealer in precious stones, I observe?"

He glanced about the store as he spoke, and I inclined my head.

"I have something I would like to show you."

"I shall be glad to see it."

He reached his hand inside his vest and drew forth one of those small green pasteboard boxes such as are used to hold certain kinds of jewelry, and lifting the lid took from the soft pinkish cotton the most wonderful gem I have ever looked upon.

A man who has been in business for 30 years in Maiden lane sees about all there is worth seeing in that line, and during my travels I had beheld some of the great jewels of the world. I may say that had he produced the Kohinoor itself my amazement would not have been greater.

That which I took between my thumb and forefinger at his invitation was a pigeon blood ruby the size of a small walnut with the husk removed. A pigeon blood ruby, it may not be known, is more valuable than the same number of carats in the form of a pure diamond.

"What do you think of that, sir?" asked the man, enjoying my astonishment.

"If that is genuine," I replied, holding it under the glare of the electric light, "and it seems to be, it is worth a kingdom."

"You are an expert. I leave it with you to decide whether it is a ruby or imitation."

"Wait, please, till I get my glass."

I made this excuse to walk to the back office, where Wittner was smoking. I stooped over the table, so as to bring our heads close together, and whispered:

"Follow that man and learn what you can about him."

I was gone but a moment. When I returned, the caller was leaning one elbow on the glass case, his attitude an easy and graceful one, patiently awaiting my verdict.

The scrutiny under the magnifying glass seemed to confirm my first impression, and my wonder grew.

"I would like to examine it by daylight—that is, if the sun will ever shine again," I remarked as a gust of wind blew the rain spitefully against the windows.

"With your permission I will leave it with you a few days."

At this moment Wittner came from the inner office and passed through the door.

"Good night, Mr. Brown," he said carelessly as he buttoned his mackintosh about him. "I must go home. Will see you next week."

I nodded to him and noticed the quick, searching glance he gave the man, who did not seem to be aware of his presence.

"May I inquire where this gem came from?" I asked as the door closed behind my friend.

"Certainly—from the Himalayas, in northern India."

"It is yours?"

"Pardon me. It would hardly be in my possession if it were not."

"Why do you bring it to me?"

"Perhaps you may find me a customer."

"Then you wish me to sell it for you, for it is too valuable for me to buy."

"That is the view I took of it."

"But, begging pardon, it strikes me as strange that you should have brought this ruby to America when in London, Amsterdam, Vienna, Paris or any one of a dozen cities in Europe you would have been more likely to find a purchaser."

"There are plenty of buyers, but kings and queens just now are poor and cannot afford my price. I presume you are somewhat familiar with the history of the mutiny in India in 1857?"

"In a general way I am."

"You have heard of Nana Sahib?"

"I saw him at Cawnpur a few weeks before the breaking out of the mutiny."

"Ah, you were fortunate."

"In what way?"

"That it was a few weeks before the uprising. Had you been in Cawnpur, say, in July, 1857?"

He completed the sentence with a shrug and shudder.

"I understand. Well?"

"You are aware that the British government offered a reward of a lac of rupees for his capture, but never captured him?"

"I have heard that."

"Do you know what became of him?"

"No one knows of a certainty. It was reported that he and a few of his followers took refuge in the Himalayas and there perished."

"That report is true. Two of his spies returned. I saw and conversed with one of them. When Nana fled, he took with him the most valuable ruby in all India."

"I have heard that also, but what bearing has that upon our business?"

"The ruby which you hold in your hand is the one which Nana Sahib took with him in his last flight."

CHAPTER II.

My caller rightly interpreted the expression on my face.

"It is a strange story, but I tell you the truth. Nana did not flee until the year after the Cawnpur massacre, and it was 23 years later that I met one of the spies who was with him. He was an old man, living in the sacred city of Benares, on the Ganges. He was at the point of death when I helped—being a physician—to bring him back to life. He told me the story and volunteered to show me the path to the spot where his master died. But though he led the way to the neighborhood he either could not or would not take me to the place. We returned from our bootless errand, and he died a few years later. His secret was buried with him."

The speaker paused and changed his lolling attitude. Noting my interest, he resumed:

"I knew that when Nana Sahib entered those jungles the great ruby was in his turban, and if the spot could be found where he died there would be found the gem which I have brought to you. Five years ago I went back with a single companion, a native like myself of the country."

He paused long enough for me to remark:

"Then 30 years must have passed since the death of Nana."

"Fully that, and not a vestige of his rags or bones was left. How could I hope to discover the gem? There was no reason to believe I would, but all such great finds, as you know, are the result of chance. I knew where to look for it, and I kept up the hunt for weeks until stricken with fever and so emaciated that I could barely stand. My companion did not fall ill, and my spirit enabled me to search even when my brain was burning with delirium."

"One night when the moon was shining bright and I was groping over the spot where I had at last tumbled down, unable to walk, I reached out my hand and clutched the ruby of Nana Sahib."

The speaker was now greatly excited and would have said no more had I not asked him to finish his story.

"I do not remember clearly what took place until I reached Bareilly. I was ill most of the time. My companion tried to take the ruby from me, but did not succeed. When I returned to my friends, I came alone."

No need of more particulars on that point. I could picture the fearful struggle between those two men for the possession of a jewel worth a prince's ransom. The presence of this man before me showed who was conqueror.

Who knows that it was not his companion that made the find? Who can say what the nature of that struggle was? Was there a conflict at all? Was not this man now in my presence a murderer?"

But why speculate? He was the only living witness, and no one could unseal his lips.

"Pardon my agitation," he said, rapidly regaining his self poise, "but you can comprehend the reason. I have given you the true story of Nana Sahib's ruby. I bring it to you, hoping that among your many millionaires in this city you may find a purchaser for me. True, the ruby is valuable, but of itself it is neither meat nor drink, and what good can it bring me? I cannot afford to keep it. There are those who can. Find me one of them, and your fee shall be a liberal one."

"You have not set a price, provided I find a customer, which is exceedingly doubtful."

"What do you esteem it worth?"

"I must decline to say. When you pass a certain point with the diamond or ruby, there is no rule by which its value can be determined. It is purely fancy."

"If you wish me to name my price, I will say \$50,000."

I was astonished again, and an uneasy suspicion took possession of me, a suspicion which I could not define. But I felt there was something uncanny and unnatural about the whole business.

The price he had set was barely one-tenth of the ruby's real value. I believed more than one crowned person in Europe would pay at least \$250,000 to become its owner. The thought that such a bargain was probable half decided me to make the purchase myself.

"I read your surprise," he said, with that winning courtesy which had impressed me at the opening of our interview. "I know that it is worth a great deal more than that, but the sum I name is one which few people will pay for a luxury of that sort. It is enough for me. When shall I call?"

"Suppose you say toward the end of the week. I will give you a receipt."

"It is not necessary. Your reputation

is a guarantee that my property is safe in your hands."

"But I prefer that you should hold my receipt."

"I am satisfied. Why should you not be?"

And despite my half angry protest he took up his umbrella, and with the smile revealing his white teeth behind his black mustache he passed out of the door into the darkness and rain.

Left alone with my disturbing thought and the wonderful stone, I now subjected it to the most minute examination possible.

And as one claiming to be an expert I must say something about the ruby, one of the aristocrats of the mineral kingdom.

The finest rubies in the world come from the mines of Burma, although they are found in many other parts of the world, and even in our own country, where their quality cannot be compared with those of Burma and the specimens of India proper. The genuine ruby is pure, limpid, fiery red corundum, which is crystallized oxide of aluminum, and forms the basis of nearly every gem, excepting the diamond, which we value for hardness, brilliancy and color. A crystal of pure red corundum is a ruby, of the blue variety a sapphire, of the green an emerald, and so on.

The structure of the ruby is as extraordinary as that which determines its color. It is found in crystals of an endless variety of shapes, but all hav-

ing a peculiar tendency to the growth known to crystallographers as "twinning." By testing crystals of corundum with polarized light the structure is found to be remarkably complex, and under the microscope its exterior face is covered with a strange network of sculpture indicative of molecular changes.

The most striking fact about the corundum crystal is that it is nearly always found to have inclosed and surrounded some foreign body or other, which lies imprisoned in it. More striking still is the fact that these inclosed foreign bodies lie generally disposed of in planes, meeting each other at an angle of 60 degrees, the result being to produce the phenomenon of asterism, which is the term given to the white star of light observable in certain jewels cut with rounded surface. Quite frequently the imprisoned body is a minute bubble of gas or drop of liquid, containing sometimes little crystals of its own. This fluid delicate scientific tests have proved to be liquid carbonic acid gas reduced to that condition by immense pressure.

Rubies change their color in a remarkable way under the action of heat. Bluish ones turn perfectly green, and on cooling regain their original tint. The blue sapphire turns white, and the yellow corundum crystal becomes green. I might mention other singular properties of this gem, but obviously it would be out of place here. Let me say that on the following day, during which the sun shone most of the time, I subjected the ruby left with me to every possible test, and that it passed triumphantly through all. No problem in geometry was ever demonstrated more clearly than that this enormous gem was the equal of any similar one, as respects purity and brilliancy, found anywhere in the world. That being the case, its value could be measured only by hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Meanwhile my friend Wittner had called with his report. He had lingered in the rain and darkness on the other side of Maiden lane on the night of the man's first visit with the gem and kept him under his eye until he reached the Astor House, where he was staying for the time.

"He may be an East Indian," remarked Wittner, "but if his right name is on the register of the hotel it is no more Hindoostanee than yours or mine, for it is plain Darius C. Howard, and he hails from London. Look out for him."

CHAPTER III.

Having established the genuineness of the great ruby, another duty was before me—the finding of a purchaser. The conviction that there was something wrong behind the whole business—that, in other words, Darius C. Howard was one of those brilliant criminals who are continually pitting their brains against the law and generally winning—was fixed in my mind. It was incredible that he should have brought such a priceless gem thousands of miles across land and ocean, passing by more inviting markets on the road, and then placed it in my hands at an absurdly low price. He must have had some all powerful reason for this extraordinary step. There was no ground for fearing that I could become implicated in the dark work. What I had done was wholly regular, and my standing could not be

imperiled by anything that he or any one else could do.

I gave up the idea of negotiating the sale through some of our correspondents in Europe, not that I feared I would not secure a princely price, but because of the annoying complications that were sure to follow.

"You may speculate for days and weeks," remarked my friend Carl Wittner after he had made his report of what he had learned about my caller, "and the chances are that you will be further from the truth than at first. There is one point where you can stand upon safe ground."

"Where's that?"

"At the beginning. Thus we know that a gem worth several fortunes has been placed in your custody by a man who is registered at the Astor House as Darius C. Howard from London. He has told you an interesting story of how he found it on the spot where the late lamented Nana Sahib crossed the great divide, and—well, that is all we know about it."

"But we know that what he says is untrue."

"We know nothing of the kind. We simply know nothing."

"What is your theory?"

Wittner shook his head, with a significant grin.

"No, you don't. I have given up the business of dealing in theories. I haven't been very successful. My last theory required the murder of that merchant in the Tenderloin district. The whole thing was perfect, but in the end a flaw appeared. The merchant was unfeeling enough to come back from Europe and prove he hadn't been murdered at all. No, Brown, there isn't any satisfaction in the theorizing business. Take my advice and keep out of it. Gaborian's detectives who could spin facts and theories down to the millioth of a hair never lived. The only man who could strike a true theory in this business was Sherlock Holmes, and now he has been killed—an unpardonable crime on the part of the gifted Doyle. So, as I said, let's keep out of the whole thing."

"But a man can't help thinking."

"True, but let him strike out and try to get hold of the truth. The mystery is before him. Solve that if he can, and let theories alone."

"You go to the other extreme. What is the harm of speculating when you do not allow yourself to be misled by your speculations?"

"You cannot help it. For instance, you have formed the belief that Mr. Howard has lied to you about the ruby; that it was not the gem which Nana Sahib carried in his turban with him to the Himalayas."

"No; I don't believe it, nor do you!"

"Never mind about me, but Mr. Howard may have told you the truth. I suspect that that ruby is what he declares it to be. It seems to me that if it was not a great deal more would be known about it, but his story explains the fact that you, and so far as you know, less than half a dozen persons are aware of its presence among civilized people. My advice is to sell the thing, if you can find a buyer, explaining the circumstances, of course, and then wash your hands of the business. Have you any purchaser in view?"

"Yes; Geoffrey Sandhusen. He has more money than he knows what to do with and is a connoisseur in precious stones. You remember that it was he who bought the Darak diamond of me last year and that famous black diamond from Kimberley a couple of years ago."

Wittner nodded his head.

"An old friend of mine. I've done some work for him. Did he ever tell you how he lost the black diamond and I succeeded in recovering it?"

"Never heard the story."

"I may tell you some time; can't now. Is he at home?"

"No; his family have not returned from Europe. He's staying at the Windsor. I'll take the ruby up there this afternoon."

Wittner left a few minutes later, and I was sitting in my office reading a daily paper when a lady entered the store and asked to look at some diamonds. I remained in my seat, leaving the clerks to wait upon her, when I heard her ask:

"Let me see the finest rubies you have."

The words, as well as the slightly foreign accent, caught my attention, and laying down my paper I strolled into the store.

As I did so my gaze fell upon the most beautiful woman I have ever beheld. She was elegantly dressed, was perhaps 30 years old (though I am aware that I may be far out of the way in that guess) and instantly recalled the visitor with the great ruby. Like him, her eyes and hair were of the deepest black and her complexion olive. But the nose, slightly aquiline, just enough to give character to her countenance, the matchless teeth, displayed as she talked, the perfect contour of the face, eyebrows, forehead and the tout ensemble were her own and in their way were exquisitely perfect.

My age and experience are my safeguard against the fascinations of the other sex, but I am sure no man could look upon such matchless loveliness without being impressed. I admired her as I admire a masterpiece of Rubens, Vandyke or Angelo. It was a feast for the eyes too rare to be neglected.

Hamilton, the clerk, was a sensible fellow, and when he saw me coming forward he resigned his place behind the case, with the remark:

"This lady wishes to purchase a ruby, I believe."

"Begging pardon," she said, with a resistless smile and turning those dark eyes, tremulous with light, upon me, "I asked to look at some rubies."

"I shall be pleased to show you what we have," I replied, blushing to the crown of my head, where the hair is scant, and feeling as confused as a schoolboy.

Those tiny hands of fairylike contour were covered with kids which could not have been larger than No. 5 or 5½ at the most, and she handled the crimson specimens with the delicate grace that of itself was enough to set a man's brain awirl. After some dallying she selected a ruby, the price of which was \$800, and paid me with eight crisp new bills which looked as if they had come from the government press within the preceding 24 hours.

The transaction completed, I laid before her Nana Sahib's ruby. When her eyes rested upon the marvel, she gave a gasp of astonishment and delight, and looking at it a moment daintily picked it up and turned it over and over in her hand, finally holding it up to the light, her expression and manner all the while like that of a child who has been given the most gorgeous toy ever fashioned.

Closing one eye—and it seemed a pity that the light of such a ruby should be obscured for a moment—she murmured:

"Yes, it is real, a genuine pigeon's blood! Where in the world shall its equal be found? It does not exist."

"I am confident it has no superior," I ventured. It was placed in my hands to sell. Would you like to purchase?"

"Ah, me, if I could! That is worth \$1,000,000."

"It may be to the queen of England, the czar of Russia or the emperor of Germany, provided any one of them wishes to buy. But it is the property of whoever will pay \$50,000 for it."

Another faint gasp, a slight recoil, and looking in my face she assumed an indescribable expression of despair.

"How sad it is to be poor! I would be happy all my life if I could own that, but I am too poor, too poor!"

It was on my lips to remonstrate gently, but I held my peace and tried to keep my countenance from becoming too crimson. She fondled and admired and praised the gem for several minutes, and then with a faint bewitching sigh shook her head and handed it back to me, with the envious remark:

"He who gets that for the sum you name is the most fortunate individual in the world. Ah, if I were rich!"

She bade me good day, thanking me for my attention, and passed out. She had not come to the store in a carriage, and as she turned in the direction of Broadway I presume she either took the cable car or possibly called at some place where her conveyance was waiting.

Resolutely putting behind me the disturbing thoughts about this remarkable woman, I placed Nana Sahib's ruby, inclosed in its little box, within my inner pocket, buttoned coat and vest, and some 20 minutes later left the car and made my way to the Windsor hotel, with the purpose of offering the gem to my old friend, Geoffrey Sandhusen.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT FRIDAY.

SIBLEY ON SILVER.—Ex-Congressman Sibley, of Pennsylvania, is at Denver, Col., last Tuesday, and from the steps of the capitol addressed the largest assemblage of voters that has ever been seen in the State. The Associated Press dispatches give but a brief synopsis of his speech:

"Any place but Colorado to talk silver," he said. "I did not come to talk silver. I can do that in the East, where it is needed, but I can ask you to advance and exalt the spirit of patriotism, even at the sacrifice of partisanship. The president has said the ignorant people of Colorado have got to be educated on the money question, and I wish he were here to see whom he proposes to educate. The silver sentiment is steadily growing, and even in Boston and Michigan it is crystallizing. It is spreading in spite of the efforts of J. Sterling Morton and other members of the cabinet."

"The people of the East will think the white ballots for silver in 1896 will amount to a snowstorm, and will lie down and die like the blind mule in the popcorn. If silver had got its rights when Cleveland took the president's chair, Denver would now be the center of the population of the United States. But I did not come here to attempt to educate you on the subject of bimetalism, but to meet the people of Colorado and talk with them as brothers, and fill myself up with the life and vigor and electrical force which one gets from breathing the pure ozone of Colorado and shaking hands with her people."

Mr. Sibley was frequently interrupted with applause from the vast assemblage of men and women, and expressed himself as more than gratified with the earnestness of the people in the cause of silver.

BAKED PORK AND BEANS.—Soak overnight in cold water a quart of small white soup beans. In the morning wash them well through a colander. Put on to boil in a pot of cold water, which should much more than cover. Let boil for an hour, then add a pound of salt pork in square piece. After another hour, when the water is partially boiled away, remove the pork, which score into square. Season the beans in their liquor with pepper and salt if needed. Add also, if you wish the beans to be especially delicious, two tablespoonsful of molasses. Put both pork and beans into a pot and let them bake in a slow oven all day long, being careful not to let them become too dry. Pork and beans prepared in this way may be served either cold or hot.