



"That's right," cried old Frick, clinking his champagne glass against that of the Englishman. "The whole house and all that I possess is at the disposal of my old friend's son. After dinner you shall hear what I owe him. I don't suppose I need offer to assist you with any money, for in his last letter to me your father wrote that he would leave you everything he possessed, for your mother died when you were a little boy, and you were the only child. Your father was not so very rich, but I think he wrote something about £1,200 a year."

"Yes, thereabouts," replied the young man, good-naturedly, and smiling at the kind old man's loquacity; "and that is more than enough for me." "Then perhaps I had better strike out your name from my will; it has, until now, been standing beside those of Sigrid and Einar."

We all laughed heartily and rose from the table. When we were drinking our coffee, and had lighted our cigars, old Frick began the story of his friendship with Howell the elder, and the adventures which bound these two so closely together.

To tell the truth, I tried my best to slip away, hoping for a chat alone with Sigrid; but that couldn't be managed, and after having heard old Frick's story, I must confess that only a man in love could dream of anything more interesting than his account of it.

I should like to give it in all its detail, and in old Frick's words, but I cannot, and I must restrict myself to giving you the main points in his story. Bartholomew Frick had left Norway and run away to sea in 1830; his desire for adventure and his dislike for the schoolroom had driven him to this.

For many years he roamed about in the great East, in India, South Africa, and Australia, sometimes as a sailor, and sometimes as a hunter and adventurer on shore.

Then at the end of the forties he found himself in Australia when the gold fever was just beginning to rage. Soon after, a party of three people started for Melbourne to proceed to the gold districts. One was Frick, who was the eldest of them, and two Englishmen, Howell and Davis.

The acquaintanceship of these three men—they were adventurers, but all of good family—was not of long standing; but it developed, in the course of the following year, into strong friendship and most faithful comradeship.

They led the usual life of gold diggers for many years, and sometimes, when they were lucky, they would go off to Melbourne and spend their money in a few days' time.

Having gone through many ups and downs in the course of seven years, they at last came across a rich find of gold, and realized a fortune in a couple of months.

The partnership was then dissolved. Howell, who was the quietest and most level-headed of them, bought a large piece of land and took to sheep farming. In this way he was able to preserve his fortune and even to add to it, although he had not been one of the most fortunate.

On the other hand, Frick and Davis did not think they had enough. The money they had made enabled them to carry out a plan which Frick had thought of, and which for a long time they had been anxious to carry out.

In the middle of the thirties Frick, when quite a young man, had been in South Africa. He then followed the settlers who trekked to the north across the Orange River, and had joined in raids across the river Vaal, and still farther to the north.

When on these expeditions Frick himself had found diamonds, and had heard wonderful stories from the natives of the great quantities of these stones which were to be found in caverns of a peculiar formation, reminding one more of deserted mines than anything else.

Frick had obtained the report through a source which did not admit of doubt that there was at least some truth in it; and the location given with regard to the place seemed to be efficient. But he could not then get any companions to form an expedition, as the supposed place lay far away in the desert, blocked by wild and hostile negro tribes. Nor had he at that time the means to fit out an expedition by himself, and he was therefore obliged to give up all thoughts of it. These were the diamonds in search of which Frick and Davis decided to go.

"Davis seemed to me to be just the right sort of a man," remarked old Frick, when he had gone thus far in his narrative; "he was at least double as greedy about finding the diamonds as I."

large expedition. The money which they did not spend on the outfit they sent to the bank in London.

It was Davis who managed all that; he was the more businesslike of the two.

This expedition got as far as the Vaal, but did not return, and this is how it happened.

When they had got so far that, according to Frick's and Davis's calculations, they should be only a day's journey from the diamond caves, they let the natives, with the ox wagons, camp, while they themselves continued their journey alone.

They were lucky enough to find what Frick maintained must have been Solomon's deserted mines, and they filled a whole sack with diamonds. But when they reached the camp they found it had been plundered, and all the members of the expedition killed by a hostile negro tribe.

Frick and Davis were also captured after a hard struggle.

In the night Davis, who was uninjured, succeeded in escaping, but Frick, who had received an arrow in his thigh, could not follow him.

Davis, with Frick's consent, took with him the bag of diamonds, and promised immediately on reaching civilization to prepare a new expedition for the release of Frick.

In the meantime, the blacks dragged him with them farther and farther inland, where it was impossible for him to think of flight, and he lived with them for three years.

At last a gang of European pioneers turned up far in the interior of the dark continent where the tribe lived, and before the blacks had thought of keeping guard on Frick, he had joined the whites and followed them to their own settlements.

In all probability the blacks had, after such a long time, come to look upon Frick as one of themselves.

When Frick reached civilization the first thing he did was to ask after his friend Davis.

Yes, he had returned safely to the Cape Colony, but had not mentioned a word about any relief expedition for Frick. On the contrary, he had given out that Frick was dead, and had gone straight to England. He had mentioned that he had some diamonds with him, but he had not shown them to any one.

Frick was not very well pleased with this information, as you can imagine. He still had a few small diamonds with him, which he had found during his stay among the blacks. These he sold for a couple of hundred pounds, and set out for England to find Davis.

Here he discovered that the latter had drawn all the money out of the bank, had sold all the diamonds, and having bought a large country estate, was now living, a landed proprietor, in Yorkshire. Frick set off to visit Davis at his country house, but was not even allowed to enter. Davis refused to deliver up any part whatsoever of the money that had been deposited in the bank, or any of that which he had received from the sale of the diamonds.

When Frick became furious and tried to force his way in to the scoundrel, he was turned away by the servants.

Frick then applied to the police, but they advised him to take legal proceedings. He would have to engage a lawyer in order to proceed against his old comrade.

It was not a difficult matter to find a lawyer, or even lawyers, but none of them would take up the case unless Frick would guarantee them their fees and expenses first. Davis was rich and powerful, and would naturally use all the weapons with which the English law so lavishly favors those who have few scruples and plenty of money.

Frick raged awhile like a lion in a cage, but happily he pulled himself together and shipped to Australia before he had become quite "mad from anger," as he expressed it himself.

In Australia he was well received by the third member of the late partnership, and when Howell got to learn of the story, he became just as furious over Davis's rascality as Frick himself. It was, however, an unfortunate period with Howell. His farm had just been visited by a huge flood, and the larger part of his flock of sheep had been drowned.

But Howell did not give in. He would not hear of Frick's remonstrances, but raised, with much difficulty, a loan of £5,000 on his property. This money he forced upon Frick, and when the latter saw that his friend would not listen to reason, he no longer hesitated, but went back to England with the money.

There was now no difficulty in getting the affair taken up. A clever lawyer was engaged, and the case against Davis was carried on with all possible despatch.

Frick himself thought he should never succeed in bringing him to bay. Davis had understood how to make use of the time to guard himself well, and had employed all means to delay the case.

Frick's £5,000 was fast disappearing, when his lawyer was fortunate enough to discover some dark doings in Davis's life before the time when Frick had learnt to know him.

These doings were of such a character that Davis, who in the meantime had been elected M.P. for his county, had to, at any price, prevent them being made public. He was therefore obliged to agree to a compromise, and to pay Frick half of what he was worth, which after all was only what was Frick's due.

have now heard it, also keep it quiet. If it can help the scoundrel to repent of his sins in peace and comfort for the rest of his days, it is no doubt the best.

"It was not possible to get your father, Mr. Reginald, to accept anything more than the £5,000 he had lent me, although I was now much richer than he. No, he was as proud as Lucifer, just as proud as he was faithful."

With the exception of Mr. Howell, we had all listened with greatest interest to old Frick's long story. In spite of Mr. Howell's good manners, his impatience had several times been noticeable, even to the story-teller himself.

The latter remarked: "Yes, you have, of course, heard the story several times before from your father, Reginald; so for your sake, it was hardly necessary to tell it. But I am anxious that those who stand nearest to me in the world should know what a friend your father was to me."

Mr. Howell smiled, somewhat embarrassed; "Yes, of course, I have heard the story from my father two or three times. But you can understand he did not lay so much stress upon the help he gave you. It was no more, he said, than a man's duty to a friend; and that's what I think also."

"He is his father's son!" exclaimed old Frick, and was not satisfied until he had seized the Englishman's hand and shaken it vigorously, although the latter modestly tried to avoid it.

"Did you ever hear anything later about Davis?" he asked after a pause. "No, not much," answered old Frick. "He was already married when I took proceedings against him, but I don't think it was a very happy marriage; his wife took care to see that a good deal of the punishment he so well deserved was carried out. Later on, I also heard that he had much trouble in managing his large property, after he had been obliged to take out so much capital. Ah, well, that's his own lookout; we have, thank God, something else to talk about than that scoundrel. One thing, however, I forgot to mention, is that when Davis was forced to pay me back half the money, I took the black diamond in its present setting, the one we call 'the tortoise.' I took that over for £2,000, which would be about its value in its uncut condition. We found it, just as it is, up in Solomon's mines. It was the only one of the diamonds that Davis had not sold."

"I looked at my watch; it was exactly twenty-five minutes to eight. "How can you be sure it happened after five o'clock? Didn't the black tortoise lie in the case with the iron shutters, in the museum?"

"Yes, of course; but now you shall hear. Old Jurgens, the lawyer, you know him, of course? He who has that collection of curios, the old idiot! Well, he dined with us, and afterward we drank our coffee out in the museum, as we often do. At five o'clock Jurgens left, and we all went over to the house. For some reason, as I shall presently explain, I forgot to lock the door of the museum and cupboard. In about half an hour's time I suddenly remembered this. I then had a look into the cupboards before I locked them, and so discovered that the tortoise was gone."

"Are you sure it was there at five o'clock?" "Yes; we had been looking at it just before we all left the museum; I was the last who went out, and I had put it in its place before I left."

"Have you told any one that the tortoise is gone?" "No; the first thing I did when I was sure of what had happened was to telephone to you, since then I have watched and seen that no one has gone in or out of the gate."

A long life rich in changes and events had taught this old man expediency and presence of mind. He had done just the right thing, and his information and answers were clearer than nine-tenths of those which detectives are accustomed to get under similar conditions.

"Is Miss Sigrid or your nephew at home?" "No; Einar went to Hamburg on business for me the day before yesterday; he will be there about a week, and Sigrid went for a walk about half an hour ago. It was while accompanying her to the gate that I came to remember the door of the museum wasn't locked."

"Haven't you missed anything else in the museum but the tortoise?" "Not so far as I can see; in any case, there are still a number of small and costly articles which would be much easier to turn into ready money than the tortoise. It could not have been any ordinary thief, or if so, it must have been an unusually stupid one!"

"Has the black tortoise any special value to you or to any one else apart from the worth of the gold and the stone?" "No, that I can gladly swear! You mean, I suppose, is there anything about this diamond, as one reads in of the English detective stories, where black and yellow people sneak about with daggers in their belts and vengeance in their eyes! No! there is nothing of that kind in this case. We found it in the cavern, as I told you, together with all the other diamonds. Man has not set foot there for thousands of years; and the negroes who live thereabout do not care a fig for diamonds. For that reason they let Davis keep the bag, which he took with him when he escaped in the night. It is only when negroes have learnt to

know the blessing of civilization that they get a taste for diamonds."

"One thing I cannot pass over in my story: One fine day, when I summoned up courage and put the all-important question to Miss Frick, I received as satisfactory an answer as any man could wish."

She desired that we should, for a time, keep our engagement secret, for she shrank from telling her uncle, who would scarcely take the prospect of losing her with composure. Old Frick was remarkably fond of his brother's children. The old man had lived his life for many years without having felt the sunshine of tenderness other than that of comradeship; now he seemed to be making up for it in the fond relations between him and the two young people who were tied to him by the ties of blood as well as by those of gratitude.

I have, all the same, a suspicion that the old fox had an idea of what had passed between Sigrid and me; and at the same time, I also think that I had been fortunate enough to win his respect, so that if he were to lose his niece, he would rather have given her to me than to any one else.

It was the tenth of May, and a beautiful day; the spring had come unusually early that year, and the trees were already covered with leaves.

My work was finished. It had been a long and troublesome day, and I was just standing in my room, wondering if, as a reward, I should give myself an evening off and spend it at Villa Ballarat. I had not had time to visit Sigrid for several days.

just then I heard the telephone bell. "Hello! is that you, Monk?"

It was old Frick's voice; I knew it well; it was the same voice that, eight months ago, had asked me for the first time to come to Villa Ballarat.

"Yes, it is I." "Can you come out here at once? Something has happened!"

"I shall be with you in ten minutes." At St. Olaf's Place I took a carriage; I didn't want to lose a minute. An uncomfortable feeling possessed me that some misfortune was pending, or had already occurred. I do not know if one can really have a presentiment without some material cause; in this case the feeling had sufficient ground by old Frick's abrupt message.

At the outer gate stood Frick himself, holding it open for me. He looked the gate carefully after us, stuck the key in his pocket, and then said, as he stopped in front of me with his hands in his pockets: "The black tortoise is gone again!"

"Gone?" "Yes, gone! Stolen, I say!" and he raised his voice.

I asked him not to speak so loudly and to explain the matter. It was a relief for me to hear that it was nothing worse. Little did I suspect that anything worse could have happened.

"There is no one about who can hear us," said Frick. "It is as I say; the black tortoise has been stolen again, and within the last few hours. Since five o'clock."

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CHANGES ARE MADE IN MOTHERS' PENSION FUND

The trustees of Mothers' Pensions throughout the state, recently received a notice from the officials at Harrisburg that three important changes have been made in the acts governing their bureau.

The first amendment will make little change. It states that women shall be awarded pensions if they have children under 16, and their husbands are dead, or if they are permanently confined to an institution for the insane when such women are of good repute but poor and dependent on their own efforts for support, as aid in supporting their children.

The officials of the boards all over the state are well pleased with the next amendment. It has been quite a difficulty for children under 16 to find employment to aid their widowed mothers, who were not provided with a large enough pension to support children over 14 years of age. The law now raises the age from 14 to 16, to which children can be supported with their mother's pension, in conformity with school and employment laws.

The third change relates to the administration. In the past a maximum amount was allowed such county for expenses. The counties were divided into classes. In the future, the administration expenses will be limited to ten per cent of the appropriations received from the state.

These changes, with several others less important, were approved by the governor, June 18, 1915.

Pennsylvania licensed automobiles will display orange and black tags in 1916, according to an announcement by Highway Commissioner Cunningham.

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