

Old Frick was patrolling to and fro at the gate when I returned. "Nobody has got over the fence today," said I.

"No," he answered thoughtfully; "that has been my belief the whole time. I fear that we must have thieves in the house—but here comes Sigrid!"

He was quite right, for there was the dear girl walking at a rapid pace toward the gate.

A warm blush overspread her face when she saw me, but it disappeared quickly, and I noticed she looked very pale and fatigued.

We opened the gate for her, and I gave a sign to Frick that I wished first to speak with her.

I went up to her, took her hand, and whispered some words which had nothing to do with the theft. Then, as we came nearer her uncle, I remarked aloud and as carelessly as possible:

"Your uncle cannot find the black tortoise; he thinks he must have mislaid it in some place or another."

I said this purposely to arouse her attention, in case the diamond really had been mislaid. I was afraid that if I mentioned at once that it might have been stolen, she would have become too excited to think quietly over the matter.

"But, dear me, isn't it in the cupboard? I myself saw you put it in its place before we followed Mr. Jurgens through the garden."

I could not help noticing that Sigrid spoke in a very absent-minded manner; she looked fagged out, like a person who had gone through some physical or mental exertion.

We told her not to mention anything for the present to the servants about the disappearance of the diamond, and then she left us and went into the house. It struck me as remarkable that the affair should interest her so little.

The next thing I did was to telephone to the police station, and order two of my men to come out immediately to Villa Ballarat. I then asked old Frick to take a walk with me in the garden until they arrived; in this way we could see that nobody went in or out of the house without our knowledge.

"Where is Mr. Howell?" I asked. I suddenly began to wonder why I had not seen or heard anything of this gentleman.

"Oh, he went by rail to Osterdalen this afternoon. He was invited by a man called Varingson, I think, who owns large forests up there. They are going to shoot capercaillie; it is only four days, I think he said, before close time begins."

"What time in the afternoon did he—"

"He had sent his luggage down to the station before mid-day; but the train was not going before six or seven. We can hear from Iverson when he left. Besides, you know, everybody goes and comes as they like in this house."

Iverson was Frick's trusted man; he was formerly a sergeant in the army, an unusually trustworthy and clever fellow, whom Frick had taken into his service at my recommendation. He was generally known as the gardener, but he took his turn as gatekeeper, and with the coachman he kept the yard in order; was joiner, smith, and many other things, and received from old Frick a very liberal salary.

Both he and the coachman were unmarried; they lived in quite a small lodge near the gate, but had their meals up at the house.

In the meantime my two men arrived at the gate, and I gave them my instructions. One of them was to keep watch outside the villa and arrange that he should be relieved, so that the house and garden should not be unwatched. If the diamond was still within the iron railings, the thief would at once try to get it out of the house.

The other constable got orders to instruct pawnbrokers and all others to whom the diamond might be offered that, should this occur, they must inform the police without loss of time, and that the person bringing it must be followed and watched.

At supper I received a long detailed account from old Frick and Sigrid of all that occurred in the house that day. Their statement as to time, etc., corroborated exactly. Sigrid had, however, a bad headache, and looked very poorly. Both Frick and I advised her to go to bed, which she did soon after.

Then I had a conference with Iverson. The coachman was away for the day. Lastly, I had a talk with the housemaid and cook. Sigrid's maid, Evelina, had been away that afternoon to visit her mother. She had, however, been at Villa Ballarat about six o'clock, but had gone out again immediately, and had not yet returned.

What results or conjectures I arrived at after all these investigations I shall later on return to; for the present, I can only add they were not very satisfying; I began to be afraid that this affair would cause me more trouble and worry

than any other business of the kind had hitherto done.

Before I parted from old Frick I got him to write an official notification of the robbery to the police; without this I could not take up the case in earnest.

CHAPTER V.
AT THE POLICE STATION.

The next morning at eleven o'clock I stood in the police superintendent's office; he had told me to be there at that hour.

I had, for some weeks, figured as chief of the detective department, during my superior's holiday. The latter was applying for a position in another department, and I had had the chief superintendent's assurance that I would be appointed in his place. "I have already spoken to the Minister of the Interior about it, and you can consider the matter as good as settled," were the words with which my superior officer, some days before, had concluded a conversation which had given me great satisfaction. It was soon after I had been fortunate enough in clearing up the celebrated Bjornerd case, and in getting the murderer arrested.

My chief had always been very friendly to me, and treated me, especially of late, almost as a comrade; that is to say, as far as his old-fashioned, dignified and solemn manners would allow of it. He shook me by the hand as soon as I came in, and said:

"Good morning, take a seat." He beckoned to a constable standing stiffly in one corner, who then pushed a large armchair toward me. "You can go into the anteroom for the present, Struktstad; I have something to talk over with Mr. Monk."

"You are a lucky fellow, Monk, to have got another interesting affair in hand. I mean the diamond robbery at old Frick's in Drammen Road. If I know you rightly, you have already made up your mind about the case. From what I have heard you are a friend of the family. Indeed, if I am not very much mistaken, it is not only the diamond which attracts you to the house."

I must confess I was much surprised that my chief should know a secret which I, like all other people in love, believed to be well guarded.

Naturally, I did not enter upon that part of the story, neither did my superior seem to expect it; but I began as shortly and briefly as possible, to explain to him a little about the state of affairs in the house, and among the occupants.

I afterward gave him an account of the previous day's events.

"As you may know, sir, there was a guest at the house yesterday to dinner. It was old Jurgens, the lawyer; you know him, his collection and his mania for collecting! I have heard that his relations are trying to prove that he is incapable of looking after his own affairs. He is getting imbecile from old age, and squandering his large fortune by buying up all the world's curiosities."

"But he is still sharp enough not to let any one pawn off any trash upon him; but if there is an object of real value, one way or another, then he will pay the largest sums without blinking."

"He dined with old Frick. He came, of course, only to see his collection, and he nearly worried the life out of Frick with his importunate requests to be allowed to buy this and that."

The party at dinner consisted of Jurgens, Frick, Miss Frick, and Mr. Howell. Young Frick had gone away two days before. There were in the house, besides the cook, the housemaid, and the gardener. The coachman was on a visit to his family at Moss. I have already telephoned to the police there and ascertained that he reached there in the morning and left by the evening train at eight o'clock.

"Miss Frick's maid, Evelina, was also away during the afternoon; she had got permission to go home to her mother, who was ill."

"After dinner they all went into the museum, as the people of the house call the building which I told you about some time ago—the one which Mr. Frick, upon my advice, had erected out in the garden between the main building and the Drammen Road."

"When they have guests at Villa Ballarat, it is often the custom to serve the coffee in the museum, especially when the guests wish to see the curiosities."

"Jurgens, the lawyer, had then for the twentieth time asked to see the black tortoise, and was persistently pressing Frick to sell it to him."

"I will pay £500 cash for it!" shouted the old man.

"In the first place it is worth four times as much, my dear Jurgens," old Frick had replied, "and besides, I wouldn't sell it at any price."

"Jurgens then had to relinquish all hopes of obtaining the diamond; but he continued asking to be allowed to buy some of the other curiosities. He was especially struck with a little elephant carved in ivory with a clock in its forehead. The clock-works lie in the animal's body, and the trunk acts as the pendulum. The swinging backward and forward of the trunk has a most comical effect."

"He had no better success with the elephant than he had had with the tortoise; and it was rather a relief to the family when the tiresome old man was taken away by his servant. You know he has some difficulty in walking, and has to be carried about in a wheeled chair, pushed by his servant."

"Frick said good-by to Mr. Jurgens, and was just going to lock the cases, after having put everything in its place, when a cry was heard outside."

"The clumsy servant, who had apparently been drinking, had nearly upset the old man onto one of the flower beds."

"All rushed out from the museum into the garden."

"After having got Mr. Jurgens righted again, and safely outside the gate, they all went into the house. Thus it came about that old Frick forgot to lock both the cupboard with the iron shutters and the door to the museum."

"It was then exactly five o'clock in the afternoon."

"Old Frick went up to his room and took his after-dinner nap. Miss Sigrid went out for a walk; she had been suffering from headache the whole day."

"At six o'clock they met again; she had been back a quarter of an hour, and awaited her uncle with afternoon tea in the sitting-room."

"The two sat together till seven o'clock, drank tea, and went through Sigrid's household accounts."

"At seven the young girl went again for a little walk, as her headache was no better."

"When Frick had seen her to the gate, he suddenly remembered that the door of the museum was not locked, and then he made the discovery that the diamond was gone."

"The gate-keeper, Iverson, had spent the time between five and half-past seven in the little lodge; he had been busy with some carpentering, and stood at the windows, which looked out on the gate and the road."

"I asked him if any one had passed in or out during that time. The key to the gate hung in the room where he was working, and he had himself let every one in and out."

"Yes, first there was Miss Sigrid, who went out at five and came home in about half an hour or three quarters."

"About six Evelina came home, but went out again at about half-past six."

"About seven o'clock Mr. Howell went out; he had a gun and game-bag, and took a four-wheeler which was passing at the time."

"Soon after, Miss Sigrid again went out, accompanied to the door by Mr. Frick."

"The cook and the housemaid had been in the kitchen or their bedroom the whole time."

"I must say yours is a model of a preliminary report, Mr. Monk; you seem to have got it all by heart, and not even to have made any notes."

"I believe I have a special talent in that respect, sir. I only get confused if I take down anything except what is absolutely necessary. I can see it much clearer when I've got it in my head."

"Yes, oh yes, each one has his own method! It is at any rate a very useful talent for a detective. But tell me one thing; how can you be so sure that the different times you mention are correct? It is not always that the people in a house are so exact in regard to time."

"As it happens, my statements have been confirmed on that point. Old Frick has a remarkably good pocket chronometer, and he takes a pride in always keeping it correct to the minute."

"Just before Jurgens left, a remark was made how correctly the little watch in the elephant's head kept time. It stands on a shelf just over the cupboard where the diamond had its place. Although it had not been regulated for a long while, it showed the right time to a minute; which was verified by comparing it with the chronometer."

"And thus we have a safe starting-point; the time was five minutes past five."

"Then Mr. Frick takes his afternoon tea precisely at six each day. The servants have got into the habit of being most exact in that respect, as the old man is very particular."

"Finally, Iverson looked at the clock when Mr. Howell left, to see if he would be in time for the train. Mr. Howell had made the remark as he was passing out that the time was ten minutes to seven, which agreed exactly with Iverson's watch."

"As you see, the different times which I have mentioned cannot be far wrong—not more than a minute or two."

"Yes, I see that. I suppose your inquiries at the pawnbrokers' and jewelers' have been so far without result?"

"Yes; up till now they have led to no result, and I think they never will."

The superintendent nodded. Neither of us said as much, but we were both agreed that the thief who could steal an article like the tortoise, which would be so difficult to dispose of, whilst he had plenty of other salable articles to select from, must have had his special reasons, and would not have rushed to his own destruction by trying to dispose of the stolen jewel to a pawnbroker.

"Of course I know," said the superintendent, cheerily, "that you haven't by a long way finished with your investigations. But it would really be interesting to make a few guesses as to who could have taken the diamond." Who can have taken it, do you think?"

I saw that my august superior wanted to discuss the case, and I could not refuse, although I had no mind for it at this stage of the inquiry.

"As far as I can see," I answered, "there are only five persons who could have taken the diamond: the gardener, Iverson, Mr. Howell, the maid, Evelina, the cook, or the housemaid. All these people had the entry to the garden between five and half-past seven, and also into the museum."

"You forget two people, Mr. Monk." I stared at him.

"You forget old Frick and Miss Frick."

The superintendent smiled, and I tried also, but it was a sorry attempt, and a most unpleasant feeling crept over me. The superintendent evidently took notice of this.

"Yes, I speak, of course, from quite a theoretical standpoint. It is part of a policeman's A B C that he must suspect every one as long as the guilty party is not discovered."

"Not every one, sir!" I felt I spoke with an earnestness which was not in harmony with the situation, or with the genial tone of my superior; but I could not get rid of the unpleasant feeling which the mentioning of Sigrid's name had caused me.

"Perhaps you are right, Mr. Monk; in any case, this will not prove the opposite. But tell me, what is really your opinion of Mr. Howell?"

It was obvious that the superintendent

wanted to get away as quickly as possible from the subject which I had been foolish enough to discuss in rather a disagreeable manner, and I felt not a little ashamed of my want of tact.

"It is only right, sir, that you should direct my attention to him. From five o'clock till ten minutes to seven he had the opportunity of taking possession of the diamond and getting away with it from the house. There would be no risk for him to enter the museum; if any of the servants had seen him do it, it would have attracted no attention; he is just like a member of the Frick family."

"That is one side of the case; the other side is that Mr. Howell in every respect gives the impression of being a gentleman, that he is tied by the bond of friendship to the Frick family, and finally that he need not steal either diamonds or anything else."

"Are you sure of this?"

"Yes; I go by what he and old Frick have said; besides, at half-past nine this morning I called on Wendel, the banker. I myself recommended this highly respected firm to Mr. Howell, and I asked the chief, quite confidentially, how Mr. Howell's account stood."

"He informed me that the latter at the present moment had from three to four hundred pounds standing in his account. It was the remainder of a sum of money he had brought with him in cash and deposited with the banker; besides which, instructions had been received from Messrs. Hamboe & Son, the London bankers, to open an account for Mr. Howell to the amount of two thousand pounds."

"Well, I should be glad if I had such an account at the bank! It does not seem probable that the Englishman should have taken the diamond. By the bye, Mr. Monk, I must not detain you any longer; go on with the matter as you yourself think best; you have, of course, not had much time for inquiries, and I ought, perhaps, not to have been so inquisitive at such an early stage of the investigations; but you must rather look upon our conversation as a kind of refreshment, which I take between the dustbins and the demonstration in the theatre. Well, good luck to you, and let me hear from you as soon as you have anything of interest to report."

The superintendent shook me by the hand.

"Struktstad, let the manager of the theatre come in," he said resignedly, as I went out at the back door."

Later in the day a letter was handed me from the superintendent, marked "Private," which read as follows:

DEAR MR. MONK,—I have not been able to dismiss old Frick's diamond from my mind. Couldn't it have been lost in quite an ordinary way; fallen on the floor, put on a wrong shelf, or in some such way got astray?

One might also imagine that some one for fun has hidden it, to play old Frick a trick.

I confess it is not likely, but it is still more unlikely that any one should have stolen it—the most unsalable article of all the valuables which you say lay in that cupboard.

I ask you to take this into consideration, and apply the greatest caution in your investigations.

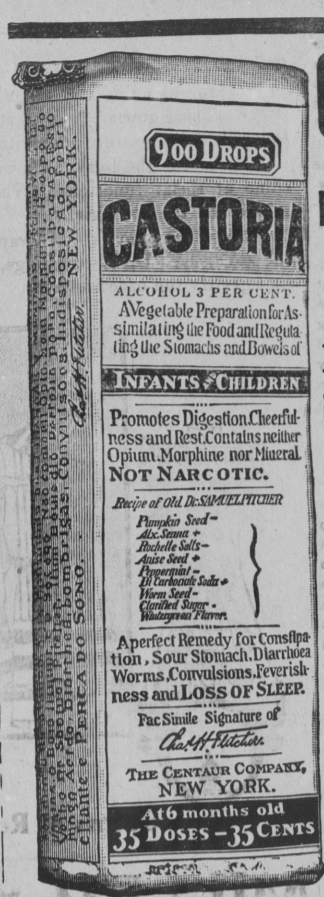
The disappearance of the diamond will soon be the general talk of the town.

It is of the greatest importance that the police should not make fools of themselves. That is to say, they must not let themselves be deceived by people's extraordinary stupidity.

I know your good sense, and in all probability these lines are superfluous.

Yours, etc.

(To be Continued.)



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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.

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