

She met his look of blank surprise, her comely face dimpling with delight.

"OH! you foolish boy! to fancy your mother is blind. Do you think that I could not see how miserable you were yesterday when you returned from the horrible dissecting-room. Oh! my darling, how I pitied you. I was at your door last night while you were awake, and in your room when you were asleep. Do you really think, Hugh, it would please me to see you miserable? Of course, I made up my mind at once it was not to be. This afternoon I went to Sir Dominick and told him. 'I believe you are quite right, madame,' he said. 'To men of vivid imagination our profession is impossible. Their minds cannot stand the strain. It drives them mad. It is only prosaic chaps like myself that can eat, sleep, and keep on doctoring. What do you think of doing with the lad now? Can I help at all?'"

"He loves pictures," I said. He answered 'Humph!' It wasn't exactly encouraging. But when I showed him the picture you picked up the other day, and which I brought with me in the cab, he was interested at once."

"It looks a wonderful find," he said, 'but between ourselves, though I have to keep up a pretence like the rest of the world, I know very little about art, except what I am told by my friends who do know. One of those same friends is the director of the National Gallery. Leave the picture here, if you can trust me with it, and I'll have him over.' So I left the picture, and five minutes before you came in I had this wire:—

"Picture all right. Bring Hugh along to-morrow morning. Think can arrange. D.C."

"And now my dear, we can go to dinner with light hearts."

When they called at Sir Dominick's house at Merrion Square there was a man with him in his study—a tall, thin, dark man, with wonderfully bright eyes, studying Hugh's picture. "Allow me, Sir Philip," said the doctor, "to introduce Mrs. Limner, the widow of a dear old friend, and her son who bought this masterpiece for your gallery."

"Aren't you going a little too fast, Sir Dominick?" asked Sir Philip smiling.

"Not a bit. I am sure you two will have a deal. Hugh, my boy, Sir Philip is the director of the National Gallery, and the best judge of pictures in the world."

Sir Philip broke in again, addressing himself to Hugh.

"Where did you get the Jan Weenix, my boy?"

Hugh noted with delight that he took the painter for granted.

"In a shop in Liffey Street, sir," he said. "It is a Jan Weenix, isn't it?"

"Unmistakable, and about the finest example of his work I have ever seen, though perhaps I ought not to say that until our bargain is made."

"Don't play the Jew with the boy, Phil," Sir Dominick interposed.

"It was daubed over with a portrait when I saw it," Hugh went on. "There was just a little bit of landscape showing in the background, and I knew at once the man who painted the daub could not paint the landscape."

"It was pretty quick of you," said Sir Philip, "you like pictures?"

"I love them," Hugh answered.

"Then you have been to our Gallery, I suppose?"

"Every day almost since I came to town."

Sir Dominick so far forgot his dignity as to actually wink at Mrs. Limner as Sir Philip and Hugh began to talk pictures, the man plainly impressed and delighted by the boy's knowledge and enthusiasm.

Sir Philip was descending on the wonderful colour of Turner's sunsets when Sir Dominick chipped in:

"That's all right, Phil, we'll take it for granted. I'll admit your Turner could paint a finer sky than ever God made if that will please you. But this is business, and my patients will be getting well if I don't see after them. The question now is what are you going to give the boy for his Jan Weenix? if that's the name of it."

Sir Philip relapsed into business at once. "What does the boy want for it?"

"That's not the question, you sweater. The boy, I'll take it, doesn't know what to want. He has no notion of the commercial value of the picture, and you have. Of course, you won't give him full price, you want a bargain for your Gallery."

"We are a bit short of funds in the Gallery at the present time," said Sir Philip.

"I expected that," grumbled the doctor.

"But all the same I can offer a fair price. Very likely he'd get more at Christie's. But he might get a great deal less. An auction is a lottery."

"How much?" cut in Sir Dominick.

"Two hundred and fifty pounds." Both Hugh and his mother gave a little cry of delight and surprise, but Sir Dominick tried to look disappointed.

The other went on hastily. "Candidly, I don't think it's the value of the picture. You know it's my business to buy pictures under value, and I often do, though I don't often say so before the bargain is made. But I mean to make it up to our young friend another way if I can. It is plain he has the gift for art. He's a deal too good for your unpleasant profession, Dominick. I'm a believer in putting a boy to the work he has a taste for."

"So am I," asserted Sir Dominick. "The labour we delight in physics pain,' as a wiser man than either of us remarked."

"Well, I know a dealer in Bond Street who might be useful to him, and to whom he might be useful later on if he has the gift I think he has. He would spend his morning amongst pictures old and new, learning to clean them, and picking up all the tricks of the trade. You'll hardly know that Jan Wennix when I have it properly cleaned, my lad. After a while he might pick up something else worth having on his own account. How would that suit?"

"SPLENDID," cried Hugh, and his mother turned her face from the light that he might not see the tears that started to her eyes at the sudden thought of parting.

"Shall we consider it settled, then?" said Sir Philip, "and I will give you the cheque now and write to my man to-day. I have had dealings with him before, and I think he would be willing to oblige."

"Make it three hundred," urged Sir Dominick, "and we'll say done."

"All right," assented Sir Philip easily. "Three hundred was what I meant to give, but I knew you would try to squeeze an extra fifty out of me, you old bloodsucker. Well, that's settled. I'll take the picture with me. I don't care to trust it out of my sight. Lunch with me to-morrow, Mr. Limner, at the University Club, and we will have a stroll round the Gallery together afterwards. It is not often I come across anyone who loves pictures as they ought to be loved."

The reaction gave keener zest to the treat which Hugh enjoyed next day at the Gallery. Sir Philip had a rare knowledge and love of pictures, and—a rarer quality still—he could tell what he knew and felt.

"I trust you will always count me your friend, Hugh," said Sir Philip, as he handed him the cheque in his own room when their rounds of the Gallery were done. "I am more than ever convinced that Ambrose Pallacio will find a treasure in his apprentice."

"Pallacio," cried Hugh in great amazement.

"Yes, Pallacio, the dealer I told you of. Why do you look like that? Have you by any chance heard of the man before?"

"I have seen the man himself," answered Hugh, and straightway he told the whole story of the stolen Velasquez.

"A genuine Velasquez, you are sure?"

"Quite sure," said Hugh, and Sir Philip did not question his judgment. "Then," he said decisively, "I believe our friend, Pallacio, stole it. Are you still willing to go to him as a kind of apprentice?"

(To be continued.)

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