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Don't you see, my dear Mr. Limner, that even if you could take legal proceedings with any hope of success, the picture would have vanished before they could come to a hearing."

"It seems a bit hard, sir. A picture has been stolen. We know where it is; yet there is no way to get hold of it."

"How did Lord Sternholt get hold of it?" asked Mr. Yorke mildly.

"Stole it!" retorted Hugh.

"Ah, just so, I had forgotten it for the moment. Risky plan, very, but, as you say, effective. Lord Sternholt is a man of action; saw it was the only way, and took it. Well, goodbye, Mr. Limner," for Hugh had risen abruptly when the last few words were spoken. "Sorry I could not help you further, but it is my province to advise only on the law, and I'm sorry I could suggest to you no legal remedy." There was a faint emphasis on the word "legal."

"I thank you most heartily," cried Hugh with compromising gratitude, as he caught the lawyer's meaning at last.

"For nothing, for nothing, my dear sir," Mr. Yorke replied quickly. "I would be glad to assist you if I could, the case is peculiar. The likeness of the portrait to Lord Sternholt's brother and to Miss Darley's father is a very interesting coincidence. 'Things that are equal to the same thing,' how does it go? I have forgotten my Euclid. Can you guess at what else the man Pallacio wanted to tell you? If the picture should ever by any means come into your hands, Mr. Limner," again there was the faintest possible emphasis on the words "any means," "I should advise you to make very full inquiries about it. I will be always glad to advise you on the law if you have anything further to tell me about this interesting case."

HUGH had no doubt that Mr. Yorke meant him to steal the picture.

The advice was as clear to him as if it had been put in plain words. He realized it was the only logical and rational plan. As Mr. Yorke said, he could not legally recover it from Lord Sternholt. Lord Sternholt would find it harder still to recover it from him if he once reduced it into possession. The old fox was right. The law could not help him. Robbery must be met with robbery. As Hugh walked homewards his mind was made up as to what he should do—the only puzzle remained how he should do it.

The details of the plan were vaguely forming in his mind by the time he reached Christie's sale-rooms, and from mere force of habit went in. It was an off-day, but almost at the door he met the courteous head of the firm.

"I have something to show you, Mr. Limner," he said, "arrived the day before yesterday—a very fine Reynolds. Man and woman—husband and wife apparently, but no one knows what husband or what wife.

"The picture was discovered in an old room in the Temple, and sent in here for sale. I don't think there is any doubt it is genuine."

He led Hugh in front of the picture, which hung in a good light near the door. But if he hoped to have his judgment confirmed or reversed he was disappointed, for Hugh was silent.

"An unquestioned Reynolds," he added tentatively.

"So much the better for the finder," Hugh answered smiling.

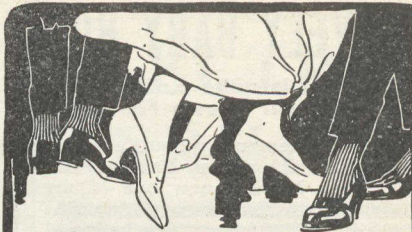
"The owner of the chambers has put a reserve price of two thousand on the picture. I may tell you Lord Sternholt is very keen on buying it."

Hugh's attention was instantly arrested by the casual mention of that name, but he said nothing, and the other went on.

"His lordship was here yesterday to know when the picture would be sold. You know his lordship's way—always bids in person when he can—will trust no one. I told him the sale was the day after to-morrow. That did not satisfy him. He should know the exact hour that this particular picture was to be sold."

"And you told him?"

"About twelve or half-past I said as



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