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younger and more progressive element among the members picked the institution up bodily and moved it that far—as later on they did.

Not that he favored any such innovation: "Move up-town! Why, my dear sir!" he protested, when the subject was first mentioned, "is there nothing in the polish of these old tables and chairs rubbed bright by the elbows of countless good fellows, that appeals to you? Do you think any modern varnish can replace it? Here I have sat for thirty years or more, and—please God!—here I want to continue to sit."

He was at his own small table in the front room overlooking the street when he spoke—his by right of long use, as it was also of Morris, MacFarlane, Wright, old Partridge the painter, and Knight the sculptor. For years this group of Centurions, after circling the rooms on meeting nights, criticising the pictures and helping themselves to the punch, had dropped into these same seats by the side of Peter.

And these were not the only chairs tacitly recognized as carrying special privileges by reason of long usage. Over in the corner between the two rooms could be found Bayard Taylor's chair—his for years, from which he dispensed wisdom, adventure and railery to a listening coterie—King, MacDonough and Collins among them, while near the stairs, his great shaggy head glistening in the overhead light, Parke Godwin held court, with Sterling, Martin and Porter, to say nothing of still older habitués who in the years of their membership were as much a part of the fittings of the club as the smoke-be-grimed portraits which lined its walls.

On this Saturday night he had stepped into the club-house with more than his usual briskness. Sweeping a comprehensive glance around as he entered, as if looking for some one in the hall, he slipped off his overcoat and hat and handed both to the negro servant in charge of the cloak-room.

"George."

"Yes, Mr. Grayson."

"If anybody inquires for me you will find me either on this floor or in the library above. Don't forget, and don't make any mistake."

"No, suh—ain't goin' to be no mistake."

This done, the old gentleman moved to the mirror, and gave a sidelong glance at his perfectly appointed person—he had been dining at the Portmans', had left the table early, and was in full evening dress.

The inspection proved that the points of his collar wanted straightening the thousandth part of an inch, and that his sparse gray locks needed combing a wee bit further toward his cheek bones. These, with a certain rebellious fold in his necktie, having been brought into place, the guardian of the Exeter entered the crowded room, picked a magazine from the shelves and dropped into his accustomed seat.

Holker Morris and Lagarge now strolled in, and drawing up to a small table adjoining Peter's touched a tiny bell. This answered, and the order given, the two renewed a conversation which had evidently been begun outside, and which was of so absorbing a character that for a moment Peter's face, half hidden by his book, was unnoticed.

"Oh!—that's you, Methusalem, is it!" cried Morris at last. "Move over—have something?"

Peter looked up smiling: "Not now, Holker. I will later."

Morris kept on talking. Lagarge, his companion—a thin, cadaverous-looking man with a big head and the general air of having been carved out of an old root—a great expert in ceramics—listening intently, bobbing his head in toy-mandarin fashion whenever one of Holker's iconoclasm cleared the air.

"Suppose they did pay thirty thousand dollars for it," Holker insisted, slapping his knee with his outspread palm. "That makes the picture no better and no worse. If it was mine, and I could afford it, I would sell it to anybody who loved it for thirty cents rather than sell it to a man who didn't, for thirty millions. When Troyon painted it he put his soul into it, and you can no more tack a price to that than you can stick an auction card on a summer cloud, or appraise the perfume from a rose garden. It has no

money value, Lagarge, and never will have. You might as well list sunsets on the Stock Exchange.

"But Troyon had to live, Holker," chimed in Harrington, who, with the freedom accorded every member of the club—one of its greatest charms—had just joined the group and sat listening.

"Yes," rejoined Morris, a quizzical expression crossing his face—"that was the curse of it. He was born a man and had a stomach instead of being born a god without one. As to living—he didn't really live—no great painter really lives until he is dead. And that's the way it should be—they would never have become immortal with a box full of bonds among their assets. They would have stopped work. Now they can rest in their graves with the consciousness that they have done their level best."

"There is one thing would lift him out of it, or ought to," remarked Harrington, with a glance around the circle. "I am, of course, speaking of Troyon."

"What?" asked Morris.

"The news that Roberts paid thirty thousand dollars for a picture for which the painter was glad to get three thousand francs," a reply which brought a roar from the group, Morris joining in heartily.

The circle had now widened to the filling of a dozen chairs. Morris's way of putting things being one of the features of the club nights, he, as usual, dominating the talk, calling out "Period"—his way of notifying some speaker to come to a full stop, whenever he broke away from the facts and began soaring into hyperbolics—Morgan, Harrington and the others laughing in unison at his sallies.

The clouds of tobacco smoke grew thicker. The hum of conversation louder; especially at an adjoining table where one lean, old Academician in a velvet skull cap was discussing the new impressionistic craze which had just begun to show itself in the work of the younger men. This had gone on for some minutes when the old man turned upon them savagely and began ridiculing the new departure as a cloak to hide poor drawing, an outspoken young painter asserting in their defence, that any technique was helpful if it would kill off the snuff-box school in which the man under the skull cap held first place.

Morris had lent an ear to the discussion and again took up the cudgels.

"You young fellows are right," he cried, twisting his body toward their table. "The realists have had their day; they work a picture to death; all of them. If you did but know it, it really takes two men to paint a great picture—one to do the work and the other to kill him when he has done enough."

"Pity some of your murderers, Holker, didn't start before they stretched their canvases," laughed Harrington.

And so the hours sped on.

All this time Peter had been listening with one ear wide open—the one nearest the door—for any sound in that direction. French masterpieces, Impressionism and the rest of it, did not interest him to-night. Something else was stirring him—something he had been hugging to his heart all day.

Only the big and little coals in his own fireplace in Fifteenth Street, and perhaps the great back-log, beside himself, knew the cause. He had not taken Miss Felicia into his confidence—that would never have done—might, indeed, have spoilt everything. Even when he had risen from Morris's coterie to greet Henry MacFarlane—Ruth's father—his intimate friend for years, and who answered his hand-shake with—"Well, you old rascal—what makes you look so happy?—anybody left you a million?"—even then he gave no inkling of the amount of bottled sunshine he was at the precise moment carrying inside his well-groomed body, except to remark with all his twinkles and wrinkles scampering loose:

"Seeing you, Henry—" an answer which, while it only excited derision and a sly thrust of his thumb into Peter's ribs, was nevertheless literally true if the distinguished engineer did but know it.

It was only when the fairs dragged on and his oft-consulted watch marked ten o'clock that the merry wrinkles be-