

mystic, laughingly, to the astonishment of his hearers. "Excuse my referring to the fact that I'm a professional Magus—still, you should not be surprised if I tell you that I hold to the theory of vampires and wehr-wolves and sirens and the rest of the dear creatures!"

"Be serious, master!" urged Flynn, using a title which he knew would put the mystic on his honor.

"My dear lad, I believe this murder was done by some one whom none of them knew to have been there."

"But how could he have got away?"

"Vanished whence he came."

"A haunted house? Damn it, something in your tone makes my blood run cold."

"Well," slowly answered the mystic, "possibly, in a sense, a haunted house."

Major called the waiter to bring another bottle of Burgundy.

"Have you really formed a theory about the case?" asked Flynn. "To me it's absolutely beyond reason."

"Beneath it, beneath it! Ah well, no matter! As a fact, I have not made up my mind. How can I, till I've seen this chap's pictures?"

"You think there was some motive of jealousy?" snapped out Major.

"I don't think at all till I've seen them. Look here! do you know his work?"

"No; he hasn't shown anything. He's an absolute kid, you know. But Tite saw a thing of his in some studio or other, and Tite said it was damned bad. So I dare say it's pretty decent stuff."

"Where's his studio?"

"Don't know," answered the sculptor. "I'll find out to-night, if you're really set on this. May I call for you in the morning? We'll go up together; perhaps you'll let me make it déjeuner—you'll come, of course, Jack—as I've been shouting for Burgundy at your dinner, you shall shout for Claret at my lunch!"

"I'm at Bourcier's, 50 rue Vavin, as always," said Simon Iff. "The best house, and the best people, in all Paris. Come round at nine."

"Right. Meet me there, Flynn. It's a great hunt, the truth!"

"With a hunter like Simple Simon, you'll find it so," said Flynn, enthusiastically.

II.

The next morning saw the three friends tramping it up the Boulevard Raspail, past the great calm glory of the unconquered Lion de Belfort, along the busy Boulevard de Montrouge, and so to the very hem of Paris, the "fortifs" dear to the Apache. Here they turned west, and came presently to an old wine shop, through which lay the entrance to the studio of de Bry.

He was already at work in his little garden; an old man, leaning on a spade, was posing for him.

Major advanced and offered his card. "Monsieur de Bry! I feel sure you will pardon me. I am a Sociétaire of the Beaux Arts; I have heard that your work is excellent, and I am here with two friends of the most distinguished to ask the honor of looking at it."

"Mr. Major!" cried the boy, as he put his brushes down in his eagerness—at first he had not recognized the great man—"indeed, the honor is altogether mine. But I've nothing worth seeing, I assure you."

Major introduced his friends. De Bry, telling the model to rest, led the party into the studio. With infinite diffidence the boy began to show his work.

In a few minutes Major, with his hands thrust deep into his trousers' pockets, and his head thrown back, was reduced to utter silence. Simon Iff, who was watching him as well as the pictures, smiled his grimmest smile. The editor, inured to small talk by his profession, made the conversation. "It's all beginnings," said the boy, "but this is more what I've tried for. I did it in the summer." The mystic noticed with a darkening face that he seemed to speak of that summer as if it had held nothing but a holiday.

The canvas showed the rock of Dubhbheagg amidst the breakers. It had been painted from a boat on a clear day. The sky was blue; a flight of wildfowl gave life to the picture. But the rock itself was more vital than the birds. It seemed the image of some great lost God of solitude, eternally contemplative, eternally alone. It was more melancholy than Dürer's master-work, or Thomson's interpretation of it. And de Bry had not used the materials of melancholy, or images of death; he had merely painted a rock just as it was when he saw it. Yet he had made it a creature of cosmic life, as significant and vital as the universe itself—and as lonely and inexorable.

Simon Iff spoke for the first time. "Is that picture for sale?" he asked. "Yes," said the painter, rather eagerly. They noticed that he looked ill.

"Probably hasn't had a meal since that damned affair," thought Major. "How much?" very stiffly from Simple Simon.

The painter hesitated. "Would you give me fifty francs for it?" he asked timidly.

The mystic rose to his feet, and shook his stick in the boy's face. "No, you damned young scoundrel, I will not!" he roared. "How dare you ask such a price?"

The boy shrank back; he expected that the old man would strike him.

"Do you know who I am?" thundered Simon. "I'm the chairman of the Art Committee of the Hemlock Club! That's the trouble with you artists; you're blacklegs, every one of you. Offering a thing like that for fifty francs and pulling down the price of everything but the old Masters! Answer me straight now: how much is it worth?"

The boy was too taken aback to reply.

"Have you ever seen a worse thing offered for ten thousand francs?" asked Simon, cynically.

"Oh yes!" he stammered at last.

"I'll give you fifteen thousand. Here's a thousand on account; I'll send a cheque for the balance this afternoon. Send the picture to Simon Iff, 50, rue Vavin. And, if you've nothing to do, come and see me as soon as the light fails this afternoon. Yes, bring the picture round in a fiacre. About 5, then!"

He thrust a big thousand franc note in the boy's hand, and withdrew stormily from the studio.

The others followed him; but Major stopped a moment. "Did you like my bust of Rodin?" asked the sculptor. The boy was still too bewildered to do more than nod. "I'll send you a bronze, if you'd care to have it. And come and see me, any time you care to, and particularly any time you need a friend." De Bry grasped the offered hand in silence.

The others had reached the street when Major caught them. "I hope you don't mean mischief by that boy," he said to Iff. "I seem to smell a trap. For