

had called about half past seven, and upon being informed that the valet was confined to his room and could not be seen, had disappeared. No one had taken any particular notice of his coming or going.

When the party had once more assembled in the reception-room, Duvall turned to M. de Grissac.

"There is nothing more to be accomplished here, monsieur," he remarked quietly. "We will get after this fellow Seltz at once, and I trust that, before long the missing snuff-box will be returned to you."

The ambassador shook hands with his guests in a state of extreme agitation. "Lose no time," he urged. "You must recover the box before the thief has an opportunity to turn it over to those who are back of him, else it will be too late. I shall pray for your success."

He stood at the door as his guests departed, shaking as though with a palsy. "It is a matter of greater moment than life itself. I trust you will not fail."

Chapter IV.

AT THE BARBER SHOP.

Richard Duvall, accompanied by the silent little curio dealer, left the home of the French ambassador and walked rapidly to the barber shop of Alphonse Perrier, in Piccadilly Circus.

They found the place without difficulty, a large and evidently prosperous establishment, located on the ground floor of a building, the upper rooms of which were devoted to business offices. A large plate-glass window in front bore the sign, "Alphonse Perrier, Tonsorial Parlors."

The detective and his companion walked slowly past the brightly-lighted window, their eyes taking in the details of the interior of the place. It was now close to ten o'clock, but the street was filled with pedestrians, and there were still one or two customers in the shop.

At the first chair toward the door stood a large, pasty-faced man, with a mop of bushy black hair, who was engaged in trimming a young man's mustache. The second chair was occupied by a man who was being shaved. The fellow who was shaving him answered in a general way to the descriptions of Seltz given by the ambassador's servants.

The third chair was unoccupied, and the man in charge of it, as well as those at the remaining two chairs, were engaged in putting away their razors and brushes, preparatory to leaving. It was evident that the closing hour was near at hand.

Duvall turned to his companion. "M. Dufrenne," he said, "will you enter at once and take the third chair? Keep your eyes and ears open and see what you can learn. I will wait here in the shadow of the next doorway. Our man is evidently inside. He will soon be leaving the shop. If he does so before you do I shall follow him. In that event, return to M. de Grissac's house and wait there for word from me."

Dufrenne felt his stubbly beard. "It is fortunate, monsieur, that I have not been shaved since Monday," he said, as he entered the shop.

The man in charge of the third chair looked at him with a sulky expression as he took his seat. His companions grinned. Evidently he had not expected another customer before the closing-hour. He began to shave the little, old Frenchman with careless haste. The latter lay in his chair, with half-closed eyes, pretending to doze. In reality, he was watching every movement of the man next to him.

The customer who occupied the second chair was a small, thin man, with sandy hair and a bony face. His eyes, rather prominent, under sparse, red eyebrows, were closed as though in sleep. He was not paying the slightest attention to his surroundings, taking no notice whatever of Seltz, who was going over his face in a stolid and methodical way.

There seemed nothing about either of them to attract attention, and Dufrenne began to wonder whether they might not after all be upon a false scent. The man Seltz, showed neither haste nor nervousness in his movements. If he was in very much of a hurry to finish his work for the evening and leave the place, he certainly did not show it.

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