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and regular contour, more like a huge seal.

And seal it was.

Duvall, dropping on one knee beside the body, felt for the man's heart, at the same time looking closely at the mark upon his lips. He was quite dead, and had apparently been so for an hour or two. The blot upon his face was a great lump of red sealing-wax, tightly binding together his lips, and upon it was the coarse imprint of a man's forefinger.

The ambassador shrank back with a cry, as his eyes fell upon the ghastly sight.

Dufrenne gazed at the dead man impassively.

Duvall, springing to his feet, went at once to the window at the rear of the room, which stood partly open, and raising it to its full extent, looked out. The others heard him give utterance to a low whistle as he drew back into the room.

"No one could have entered the room," cried the ambassador in a frightened voice. "It is thirty-five feet or more to the ground."

Duvall motioned to the window.

"Look out, monsieur," he remarked quietly.

De Grissac did so, then uttered a sudden cry.

From the window to the garden below stretched a long, slender, wooden ladder.

"It belongs to the men who have been repairing the rain-spouting," he exclaimed. "They leave it in the garden at night. I knew there was no way in which Noel could get out."

"But clearly a way; monsieur, by which others could get in," said Duvall quietly, as he began a minute examination of the room.

"But the snuff-box; do you think it has been taken away?"

"Undoubtedly, monsieur. I suspected as much when you showed me the man's letter. Your servant, I have no doubt, took the box while shaving you this morning. You doubtless dozed off, thus giving him the opportunity. He did not know that you had taken snuff from the box this morning shortly after arising, and imagined, no doubt, that you would suppose you had lost it some time the night before. This would relieve him of any suspicion. He hurried off to his room to secrete the box, meaning to deliver it to this friend of his, Oscar Seltz, during the afternoon. His arraignment by you and his subsequent imprisonment no doubt frightened him and filled him with remorse—hence his rather unfriendly letter to Seltz. He had repented of his bargain, and was doubtless engaged in preparing a confession, telling you of his crime, and the reasons therefor, when the murderer entered the room."

"The latter, who probably was this man Seltz, must have become alarmed by the tone of Noel's letter. He was, it seems clear, planning some trip away from London, upon which he was about to leave. He meant to take the snuff-box with him. Upon receiving Noel's letter he determined to see him and demand the box, if he found the latter had secured it. No doubt he made inquiries from some of the servants, on calling to see Noel, and was informed that he was confined to his room.

"He then pretended to leave, but in reality ascended to the room by means of the ladder he found in the garden, while the servants were at dinner. It was a desperate chance, but he took it. Upon arriving in the room he found Noel engaged in preparing his confession, insisted upon reading it, then realizing that his confederate was about to play him false, killed him, after gaining possession of the box, and departed."

"The ambassador uttered a groan."

"My God," he moaned, "I am lost."

Dufrenne, who meanwhile had been making a careful examination of the dead valet's body, rose with a mystified expression upon his face.

"There are no wounds upon the body at all, M. Duvall," he said. "How can you account for this man's death?"

Duvall stooped and repeated the examination which his companion had just made.

"You are right," he said. "The case is a most mysterious one."

"At least we can identify the murderer by the finger-print upon the seal," De Grissac remarked eagerly.

"I'm afraid not. This man Seltz cannot be quite a fool. Look!"

He held up the forefinger of the dead man's right hand, upon which was a dull-red burn, with bits of red sealing-wax about the nail. "He wasn't taking any chances."

He let the already stiffening arm fall, and continued his examination of the body.

"The method by which the man was killed," he remarked slowly, "is not yet clear to me. Certain finger prints on the throat indicate that he might have been strangled, but they are hardly deep or extensive enough for that. I fancy they would have resulted in temporary unconsciousness only. No—there is another reason—although what it is—" he paused as his eyes lit upon a vain, shining object on the floor beside the table.

"Oh—this may tell us something."

He picked up the thing which the others saw at once to be a large scarf-pin, and examined it carefully.

"Did this belong to your servant, M. de Grissac," he asked, holding the pin up to the light.

"Yes." The ambassador glanced at the pin carelessly.

"It was one of my own that I had given some months ago."

Duvall laid the scarf-pin carefully upon the table, then went to the body on the floor, turned it over and made a careful examination of the back of the neck. He held the candle close, pushing aside the man's thin, sandy hair. Presently he rose and placed the candle on the table beside the pin.

"This was what your servant was killed with, M. de Grissac," he said, as he indicated the scarf-pin with his finger. "It was thrust violently into the spine at the base of the brain. Only a tiny blood-spot remains to tell the tale. This fellow, Seltz, is a shrewd customer."

"We do not even know that it was he who committed the crime. There is no real evidence against any one. The snuff-box may still be here. I insist that you make a thorough search."

"It would be useless, monsieur," Duvall remarked with a faint smile. "The box must have been on the table when the murderer entered the room."

"Why?"

"Because otherwise he would have searched for it, and you would have found everything in disorder. Believe me, monsieur, your servant had repented of his theft and was about to return the box to you—it was that which caused his death. The seal upon his lips is a gruesome joke—silence—his lips are sealed—he can tell nothing."

"Seltz must be arrested at once," the ambassador cried in a rage.

"So far, monsieur, there is not the slightest evidence against him. Further, it is my opinion that he will leave London at once. Tell me the name of the shop in Piccadilly Circus where he was employed, and we will lose no further time in getting on his trail."

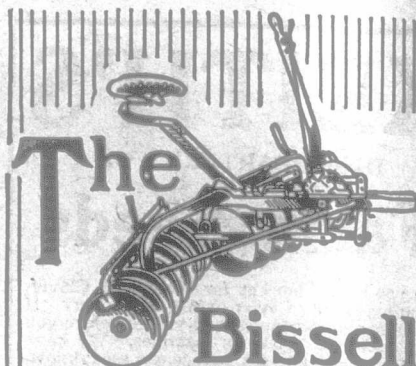
The ambassador was not entirely certain of the location of the shop. He had never visited it. The name, he remembered, was given in the note as Perrier. The note had been delivered by one of the servants. He could tell where, and to whom he had delivered it.

Duvall recommended to the ambassador that he report the murder to the police at once, but requested that no mention be made of the presence of himself and M. Dufrenne.

"We should be held as witnesses," he cautioned M. de Grissac, "and that would seriously interfere with our plans. Let us interview the servant who took the letter at once."

The letter, a groom, was soon disposed of. He gave the number and location of the barber shop in Piccadilly Circus, a short distance away, and reported that he had handed the message to a dark, smooth-shaven man at the second chair. He did not know Seltz, but the proprietor had pointed him out in response to his inquiries.

His description of the man was vague and unsatisfactory; he was unable to give any further information on the subject. Investigation as to any one having made inquiries at the servants' entrance during the evening regarding Noel, elicited the information that a heavily built, dark man, smooth-shaven,



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