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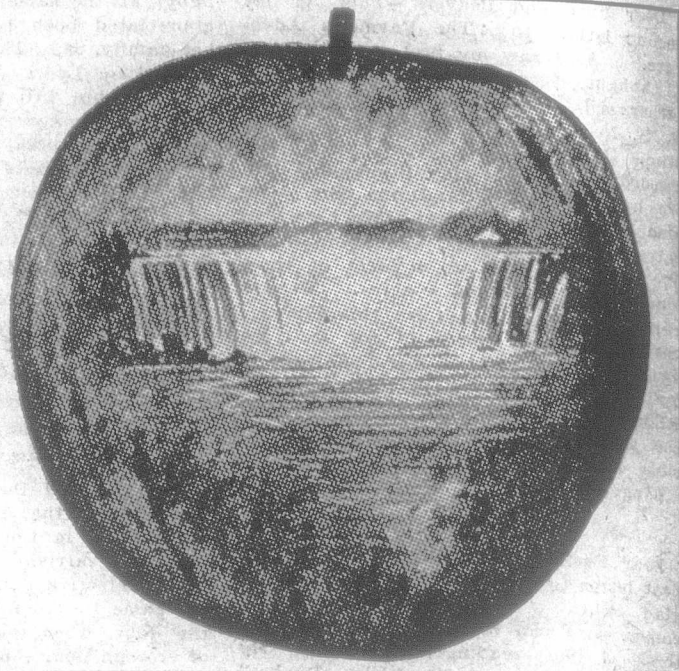
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to injure me. They know that I prized this thing highly. Their motive may have been not money, but revenge. In that case its recovery will be vastly more difficult."

Duvall saw that M. de Grissac was not being frank with him, and for a moment he was conscious of a deep sense of annoyance.

M. Lefevre had heretofore invariably taken him into his confidence. He controlled his feelings, however, and appeared to be satisfied with the ambassador's explanations.

"What did the box contain, M. de Grissac," he asked pleasantly.

"A quantity of snuff, monsieur."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing."

"Oh. And you, monsieur, are in the habit of using snuff?"

"Yes. It is the only form in which I use tobacco. Old fashioned, perhaps, but I belong to the older generation."

He straightened himself up suddenly.

"Let us proceed, gentlemen. I fear we are wasting valuable time."

Duvall nodded.

"Permit me to ask you a few more questions."

"I am at your service, monsieur."

"When did you last see the box?"

"This morning at nine o'clock. I always carry it in the right-hand pocket of my waistcoat. To insure its safety I had it attached to a long gold chain, which was securely fastened to the inside of the pocket. I rose this morning somewhat late, having attended a banquet the night before. After having my coffee and rolls in my bed-room I went to my dressing-room to be shaved. As I did so I paused for a moment, drew the snuff-box from the pocket of my white evening waistcoat, which my valet had hung in a closet the night before, and took a pinch of snuff from it. I then replaced it in the pocket and entered the dressing-room adjoining, where Noel, my man, was waiting for me. He proceeded to shave me as usual, and I began to dress. Upon going to the closet in my bed-room to remove the box, and fasten it by means of the chain to the clasp in the pocket of the waistcoat I had just put on, I was amazed to find it gone. I at once summoned Noel."

"Summoned him?" interrupted the detective. "Was he not with you in the room?"

"No. A few minutes before—as soon, in fact, as I had completed dressing—he left the apartment to give some instructions to my chauffeur."

"What did you do then?"

"I at once rushed out into the hall, calling for Noel."

"You believed then that he had taken the box?"

"I could believe nothing else. No one but he had been in my rooms."

"Oh! I see. And you questioned him?"

"Yes. On reaching the hall I met one of the maids ascending the stairway. I called to her, asking if she had seen Noel. She had not. She had been in the servants' hall—talking with the chauffeur—Noel had not been there."

"What did you do then?"

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"I rushed to his room, which is on the floor above, thinking that, if he had taken the box, and proposed to deny the fact, he would have gone there to secret it."

"Would he not have been more likely to leave the house immediately, since he knew you would discover your loss at once?"

"No. He would realize that to flee would be to admit his guilt. He could not have gone more than a few hundred feet. Capture would have been inevitable."

"Did you find the man in the room?"

"He was just leaving it as I came up."

"What did you do then?"

"I ordered him back into the room and questioned him sharply. He denied all knowledge of the matter, and appeared to be deeply hurt at my suspicions."

"Did you believe him?"

"I do not know. The matter is incomprehensible. Noel has been in my service for eight years. I supposed him absolutely incorruptible; absolutely honest. He also insists that after I left the bed-room and came into the dressing-room to be shaved, he did not leave me, nor again enter the bed-room, in which case, he could not have committed the theft."

"Is this true?"

"So far as I can remember, it is."

He spoke in a slightly hesitating way, and Duvall at once noticed it.

"You are then not absolutely sure?"

he asked.

"I feel confident that Noel did not leave me, nor enter the bed-room. If I hesitated for a moment it arose from the fact that on one or two occasions I have fallen asleep while being shaved, but this morning I am quite sure that I did not do so."

"Yet you were up late last night, and awoke feeling sleepy and tired."

"Yes," the ambassador nodded; "that is true."

"Is there any other door to the bed-room?"

"None, except that which opens into my bath. The bath-room has no windows. It is an inside room."

"And the bed-room?"

"It has two windows, facing upon the adjoining property. There is quite thirty feet of space between the two buildings, and the windows are at least twenty-five feet from the ground."

"What room is above?"

"A guest's chamber, unused and locked."

Duvall rose and began to stride up and down the room, chewing viciously upon his unlighted cigar.

"After you finished questioning the man what did you do then?"

"I searched his room thoroughly, and made him turn out the contents of his pockets, his trunk, and bureau drawers."

"And you found—"

"Nothing. That was before noon today. Since then I have kept the man locked in his room awaiting your coming. One of the other servants has remained on guard outside his door ever since."