

Chapter 4

**Zwinger—
How to Track a Murder**

**FULFILLMENT OF A PROMISE—REMARKABLE PSYCHOMETRIC
OR CLAIRVOYANT FEATS—TRACING A CRIMINAL BY THE
NECKTIE HE WORE WHILE COMMITTING THE CRIME.**

To fulfill the promise which my teacher had made me of visiting Zwinger, we mounted several flights of stairs in an old house in Sophien Stradt, and at last reached a landing upon which many persons were congregated about and around an open door, through which I was led by Professor von Marx into a large apartment, shabbily furnished, and half filled with loungers, amongst whom I recognized more than one official of the constabulary force of the city.

Pushing his way through the assembled company to a sort of recess at the far end of the room, the professor addressed himself to a little, black-eyed, Oriental-looking individual, who was seated on a table, dangling his legs, and fidgeting restlessly about, whilst a grave official, in the habit of a notary, was taking down depositions or making notes from what the other was saying. The moment the little man set eyes on the professor, he sprang from the table, and seizing his hand with a sort of fawning, propitiatory air, which seemed more like the action of deferential fear than real cordiality, he cried: "Ah, my prince of the powers of the air! welcome! ever welcome to Zwinger, but more especially at this time, when a most wonderful phase of your art. that is to say, of mine, or the Devil's or some of his imps', for what I know, has just been perpetrated through my innocent instrumentality." The little man whilst speaking manifested all the feverish excitement of an actor anxious to overdo his part, at the same time obviously desirous to interest his listener, as one of whom he stood in some awe. Without paying any attention to this speech, Professor von Marx, turning to me, said calmly: "Louis, this is Zwinger."

"Adept!" (to Zwinger) "a pupil of mine, for whose benefit I wish you to recite some little fragments of your experience;" then, seating himself upon the table from which the Bohemian had dismounted, and motioning me to a stool by his side, he proceeded, addressing the notary, to whom he had slightly nodded, "Well, Herr Reinhardt, what new discoveries has our lively little sleuth-hound been making?"

"Oh, nothing out of the common line, professor," replied the other, in a grave official drawl. "We've caught the murderer of Frau Ebenstein; that's all."

"That's all?" cried the Bohemian, with a tone and gesture of almost frantic excitement.

"That's all, is it? Slave of the dull earth and the duller prison watch and ward! All is it, to traverse nearly two hundred miles of ground, cross three rivers, plunge through marshes, scale mountain heights, pierce the forest, sink through the cavern's depths, and toss on the roaring rapids of the terrific Schwartz cataract; and still never to lose—no, not for a single moment—the scent of an invisible and unknown mortal, whom these eyes had never beheld, whom these hands had never touched, and of whom no sign, no symbol, no token in the realms of earthly existence could be found, except by me, Zwingler!"

As he spoke, he beat his breast, and elevated his glittering black eye to the heavens in an attitude of half-ecstatic frenzy.

The notary, without the slightest change of feature, continued to write, wholly unmindful of his rhapsody; but Professor von Marx, fixing his deep, piercing dark eyes upon the Bohemian, said in a calm, soothing tone, as if he were attempting to subdue a fractious child: "You are a marvelous being, indeed, Zwingler, and that all the world knows. Come now! there's a good fellow, tell us all about it. Sit down—no, not there—there at my feet; so, that will do. Now relate the whole story; we will listen most patiently and admire most fervently," he added, speaking aside to me in Spanish. "Remember, I have not seen you for two months, and only yesterday heard that you had returned in triumph from your long pilgrimage. When I was last here, the tidings had just reached us that Frau Ebenstein, the rich widow of Baden Baden, had been foully murdered, her house sacked and plundered, and her destroyer—"

"An unknown," broke in the notary, as if impatient to recite details which were specially in the line of his duty, "an unknown, whether male or female also unknown, but supposed to be the former on account of blood-stained footprints, marks of a large thumb and finger on neck of the deceased, and a torn neckerchief, evidently a man's, part of which was clutched in the fingers of said deceased, and part of which was found beneath the couch, saturated with gore, and rent, as if in a violent struggle."

As the speaker proceeded, strong shudderings seized the frame of the Bohemian, though the hand of Professor von Marx, laid lightly on his shoulder, for a time subdued the spasms and quelled them into slight shiverings; but when the neckerchief was mentioned, the little creature's excitement was frightful to behold. He writhed like an eel beneath the touch of the professor, who at last, raising his hand, said quietly: "Now, Zwingler, proceed. Tell the rest in your own way."

"Yes, yes, I will tell," he cried. "I always do. When did I ever fail? Answer me that, prince of the air; answer me! Never, my king of adepts; go on."

"They brought me that neckerchief, then, mein Herren," he continued, as if addressing a vast assembly, but without looking at any of the loungers in the outer apartment, who now closed up about him; "and lo! as I clutched it, I saw—yes, instantly, I saw a dark-browed, broad-shouldered Dutch serving-man—the man of blood, the man who did the deed. I swear it! I saw him do it. I saw him and the whole act; and oh, how horrible it was! how cruel! how cowardly! and the poor, poor old Frau! I saw her too—saw her struggle, plead, choke, die! All this I saw—out of that neckerchief, mein Herren! Instantly, as I touched it, it came like a flash, a flash of darkness, but full of the scene I describe, and full, too, of all its horror. Gott in Himmel, Then it went as all scenes do after the flash I get of them as I touch the thing; after that I said: 'Give me my shoes; I must walk far. Put me a cup to scoop up water with in my wallet, give me my staff, and let me go.' I had been hungry and was about to dine, but I hungered no more; no, not for seven long days did I touch other food than the nuts and

berries close to the path streaked with the murderer's life, and the water of the rivers, streams and cataract he had crossed; but I will tell you all. Listen! As I made to go, I chose my path as I always do, because a long black line seemed to stream out from the neckerchief I held in my hand, and point ever on the way I should go. It led me through the city; it pointed me into a low inn where he had stopped to rest. I told them such a man had been there.

They shuddered, and said to one another: 'Zwinger!' and then to me: 'He has been and gone.' I knew it; but the way he had taken was still pointed by the black line. I know what you were going to say, professor; I see your thought. You want to know if I see the line I speak of with my eyes, my very eyes, or my soul's eyes. I reply: 'With both.' My soul feels the line, and it draws me on, and seems like a cord dragging at the object I hold, and pulling me in the direction I must take to arrive at the owner of that object. Sometimes I seem to see the line, and then I do not feel it pull, but it never leaves one sense or the other—sight or feeling—until I abandon the object or find the person to whom it has belonged. Well, sirs, thus it led me on, day and night, never suffering me to get out of his track. It guided me through several villages and some towns, and wherever it was the thickest and most palpable, there he had stopped to take rest or refreshment, and there I said: 'Such and such a man has been here;' and they answered with a shudder: 'Zwinger! he has come and gone.'

"I rested sometimes, but ever on the ground—the ground he had trodden; and then the black, vapory cord seemed to coil up all around me like a misty garment. I tried to rest once on a bed he had occupied, but oh, heaven! all the scene of the murder was there. I heard her shriek, I saw her struggle, and what was still more horrible, it seemed to me that I was the murderer, and was actually doing the deed over again. I fled from the place, and should have lost the track had I not returned to it again, and started afresh from that house.

"To one like me, professor, that house will always be haunted; that is, until the murderer's shade melts away from it; and it will do so in time. I answer your thought again, you see, professor. It was near midnight, some time—I cannot tell how long—after I had started, that the black cord began to thicken and spread, and at length to assume the shape of a man.

"It trembled and quivered, and at first was only the indistinct outline of a man, but presently it grew more and more dense, and now behold! It was the ghost of the Dutch serving-man in full, walking just so far before me, above the ground one foot, and ever looking over its shoulder at something coming after it. That man went to a great many places in the town I was now hunting through, for the ghost was at every street-corner and in every alley, and lurking in all the dark lanes and by-streets; and though I knew he must be close at hand, by the density of the ghost, still he had wandered and wandered, and lurked about in so many places that I should have become confused had not both senses been suddenly appealed to at once. I saw him, and at last I felt him. I felt him, as it were, tugging at the neckerchief in my hand, and striving—O holy martyrs, how he strove!—to get it away from me.

"Sirs, he was just then thinking about that neckerchief, remembering he had lost it in the murdered lady's room, and wishing he had got it, and cursing his folly, and mentally longing, longing to get it back. Lucky for me he did think thus, for his thought, being set on the neckerchief, pulled at it so frantically that it led me straight to his hiding-place, and there and then, when I saw him, and screamed that that was the murderer of Frau Ebenstein, and the landlord and guests of the inn cried: 'Zwinger, Zwinger!' he uttered a great cry, and fell as if he had been struck; and then it was they captured him and brought him thither."

"Ay! and the strangest fact of all this is, gentlemen," broke in the grave notary, unable to keep silence any longer, "that this wretch had changed his dress ever so many times, and

when this wonderful Bohemian here tracked him to his lair, he was disguised as a sailor, and so disguised that none but the Devil, or perhaps his particular ally, Zwingler, could have found him out."

"Pshaw!" replied the Bohemian, scornfully, "what know you burghers of my art? I do not track the clothes of the man, but the man. His soul was in his hand; on his neck, and in the neckerchief around it when he did the deed. The sleuth-hound senses his human game through the organ of smell. I sense it through smell, touch, taste, sight, and hearing. I sense soul through perception. Every thing, every place, where soul has been, is full of it; and once give me a link, a single thread of association, such as an object the soul I would track out has come into contact with, and the depths of the sea cannot hide it, the mountains cannot cover it, the disguise of a monarch or the rags of a beggar cannot conceal the identity of the man whose soul Zwingler would track out. But remember, mein Herren, Zwingler tracks souls, not masking habits."

The little Bohemian's slight form seemed to expand, as he spoke with impassioned gesture and rapid utterance, into the proportions of a giant; and as he turned away to reply to some question addressed to him by one of his admiring auditors, the professor murmured in my ear: "He has detected more criminals in this way than all the constabulary in Germany. Give him but a garment, a lock of hair, or even a rag that has come in contact with a living organism, and he will track out its owner with a fidelity unmatched by the best bloodhound that ever ran." Then addressing the Bohemian, he said aloud: "Glorious Zwingler as wise as you are gifted, tell my foolish young son here what you mean by a soul. He is eager to learn of you what soul really is."

"Soul is the life, my prince; you know that," reeled Zwingler, half daunted, as he always seemed to be when addressing Professor von Marx.

"You think; then, soul is just the life principle and nothing more; that which keeps the man alive; is that so?"

"What else can it be?"

"But what is the 'black cord' you speak of, what the essence which clings to substances and enables you to describe or sense the person from whom it has flowed out?"

"The soul, of course, great master."

"Is the soul, then, a substance?"

"Is the air a substance, the wind a substance? You cannot see or feel either until they come into contact with some other substance, and when they do, although invisible, you know they are something. The soul is finer than air, thinner and more ethereal than wind, and only some souls as fine and pure as mine can sense it. But when a Marx can sense the air, and feels the wind, a Zwingler can sense the soul and feel the substance"

"Admirable, my little philosopher! and now, one question more: What do you suppose becomes of the soul after a man dies?"

"Pshaw, learned master! why ask me so foolish a question? What becomes of the body after a man dies? Why not ask me that?"

"Why not indeed?" muttered the professor, glancing triumphantly at me. "But, Zwingler,

if the form of a soul can appear whilst a man lives, can it not and does it not appear sometimes after death?"

"Does not the body appear too, if you look for it? Surely it does not all fade away at once, but decays and corrupts and at last disappears. No doubt soul and body both wear away, fade out, and melt into their original elements when they become separated, as at death. No doubt, too, some can see only the body, and some, like Zwinger, can see the soul as well but both live only when they are together, and die when they are apart;" then contracting his singularly mobile features into a frown of impatience, he cried, irritably: "But why torment me, and make me talk, about things which only you great professors understand? I hate to think of death! I loathe it! I—I—fear it! I wish I could live forever!" He was about to dart away, when Professor von Marx laid a hand gently on his arm; the Bohemian stood as if transfixed, and muttered submissively: "What more would you have of me, great professor?"

"Only to accept this slight token of my young friend's gratitude for your instructive narrative, adept," replied the professor; and as he spoke, Herr von Marx suddenly snatched from me the locket and ribbon of poor Constance, which I held as he had desired during the interview in my right hand, and which he now as suddenly placed in Zwinger's.

Before I could pronounce a word of protest against this unexpected and unwelcome transfer, the Bohemian clutched at the ornament with an action so fearfully spasmodic and full of terror that the words I would have uttered died on my lips. "Death again!" he murmured, with a strangely piteous accent. "Ever surrounded with the faded blossoms of dead souls! But ah met this was a cruel death—so young, so fair, so innocent; and destroyed, too, by the hand of him who should have been her protector! Herr Professor, I shall not have far to go to trace the soul of him who did this deed of blood."

"Hush, little dreamer!" responded the professor in a low whisper; "your art is not wanted here. Stay! I will change the token. Keep this, and be silent or worse will come of it." So saying, he took back the locket, returning it to me, and placing several gold pieces in the Bohemian's hand, led me through the crowd, who opened reverentially to permit the learned and celebrated Professor von Marx to pass through. At home again, and in our quiet lodgings, the ominous silence of the last hour between Professor von Marx and myself was thus broken:

"What think you of Zwinger, my Louis?"

"What think you of the death, or rather the murder, of Constance Muller, my master?"

"Ever harping on a worn-out theme and irrevocable past, silly boy! Science must, will, and shall have its martyrs, Louis, and woe to the progress of the race when idle emotion erects itself to match the interests of science. Enough, once and forever, of this. What think you of Zwinger?"

"He fails to convince me that an apparition of a soul after death is only an apparition."

"Then, what is it before death?"

"Ay! that is the question."

"Zwinger's mode of philosophizing is crude enough," replied Herr von Marx, "but the philosophy itself is unanswerable. Like the lower elementary, and the higher planetary spir-

its, the soul of man, the finest and most sublimated condition in which matter exists, inheres to all coarser forms, and thus it can be sensed, as Zwingler calls it, as a sphere, sometimes in a premonition of its approach, sometimes in the feeling of indescribable repulsion or attraction which we conceive for strangers even as we approach them. Sometimes it can be seen in bodily shape, apart from the body, as in the case of the 'double' or 'atmospheric spirit,' and sometimes it can be seen when it has separated entirely from the body, ere it is quite resolved back again into its original elements. And that is all."

"And that is all," I mechanically repeated, feeling, however, at the same time that the professor was merely reciting a lesson in a form of words familiar to him, whilst his spirit was strangely abstracted, and his manner vague and wandering as my own when I repeated his last words.

As the professor and myself relapsed into deep silence, a chiming as of very distant bells was heard in the air; a singular radiance stole through the dim twilight obscurity of our chamber, and settled about the table strewn with books, at which in the past morning I had been studying. That radiance at first appeared like a shimmering fire-mist; then it expanded, bent, curled, and at last seemed to weave itself into the proportions of a human form. Clearer, brighter, stronger grew the vision; at length the mists rose and parted on either side, disclosing the shining apparition and seraphic features of the dead Constance. Turning her head of sunny glory towards me, she smiled, then bent over the table, seemed to select with swift action a large Lutheran Bible from a heap of books, opened it, took up the locket and black ribbon I had laid down near it, placed the ribbon like a mark across a certain passage, pointed to it emphatically three times, then with such a smile as a mortal could scarcely look upon and live, she vanished from my sight, and all was darkness.

What followed, or how long I may have remained unconscious of life and being, after this vision, I know not; but my first recognition of passing events was the sound of Herr von Marx's voice speaking through the thick darkness of night which had fallen upon us, saying: "Louis, are you awake? Surely, I must have had a long sleep, for the night has stolen upon me unawares."

The janitor at this moment entered with lights, and placed them on a sideboard. The professor, rising from his seat, took one of the lamps, and advancing to the table held it over the open Bible, at the same time exclaiming in a voice of singular agitation: "Who has marked these passages?"

I advanced, looked over his shoulder, and saw him remove the ribbon and locket, only to disclose several deep black lines, drawn, as if with Indian ink, beneath the following words, in different parts of the fifteenth chapter of the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians:

"There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body."

"Behold I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed."

"Death is swallowed up in victory."

"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"