

to be deeply immersed in thought until, with one of those characteristic changes of manner, he seemed to fling care wholly aside and began speaking.

"Pardon me for my inattention," he said, "but there is really nothing that I can tell you just now that would be worth the telling. There is nothing likely to happen until tomorrow night, and we called at the Graystone only for the purpose of learning whether Swartzberger had suddenly given up his rooms or whether he contemplated such action soon. He retains his rooms and has given the management no indication that he is thinking of leaving. I did not ask you to get out at the hotel because I thought that Swartzberger might be in the lobby and would recognize you with O'Lunt."

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I composed my patience as best I could and did not say to McCalman that I thought that there was much that he might tell me if he was of a mind to do so.

My friend's next words revealed that he wished to talk of other things than the problem which confronted us.

"I suppose," he went on irrelevantly, "that you have never studied the law of reactions—that is, outside the laboratory—and yet as a writer for the daily press and as a young man who is ambitious of turning his experience to a lasting literary account you could study that law with much profit.

"I have heard it claimed for men of undisputed genius in all lines that they achieved their most startling and interesting results while they were under the influence of some particular form of dissipation. Each time I hear the claim advanced I experience a great desire that he who makes the claim may be shot at sunrise on the following day if not at sunset on the day before. Those who advance the claim are like many others who when they find a half truth believe that they have solved the whole riddle of life. They are a dangerous brood.

"The truth of the matter is that those great exceptions, called for the want of a better name geniuses, because of high nervous tension fall victim to some one form of dissipation. Now during these lapses, if we except a few of the great surgeons, these men are almost all of them incapacitated from performing the function by which they contribute most largely to the world's progress. The surgeon Levenald of St. Louis was one of these rare exceptions, but he stood almost alone in the field of surgery. In no other field do I know of a single instance in support of the dangerous theory.

"Now when it comes to the reactions from dissipation—that is quite another matter. A great deal of the very best work of our master creators has been done during these periods of reaction. The pity of it all is that it is so unnecessary."

As was invariably the case with me when my friend began discoursing in this matter, I became genuinely interested, forgetting everything but the subject which he discussed.

There was a short silence, during which only the purring of the motor sounded in our ears. I did not wish McCalman to break off the particular subject which he had taken up. I felt perhaps that he might be leading up to an application having to do with the business at hand, and I was in no mind to miss whatever he had to say on the subject.

"Well?" I finally questioned.

"What I mean is this," went on the detective. "These reactions are dangerous—terribly dangerous—in that they afford so much of temptation to repetition, and that man, be he ever so gifted, who systematically yields finds his powers bankrupt and exhausted long before his time.

"Do you remember those two little canvases which hang side by side just above the bust of Schubert in my rooms?" asked McCalman.

"Yes," I answered. I remembered them very well indeed as having afforded me many half hours of wonder that

the same hand could have wrought both of them. One of them was a fresh and vigorous presentation of Spanish character, saturated with temperament, yet sane and clean in spirit and execution; the other was no less wonderful in so far as it was thoroughly impregnated with temperament, but its subject and manner were ghastly, unclean, as if some ancient grave had been compelled to vomit up its lecherous secrets.

"Well," went on McCalman, "those two oils are striking proof of the fatality of the reactive method. The man who did them was Goya, a Spaniard, and he let his reactions run away with him. To

mentioned the existence of this menacing criminal figure, the great Bos, of whom he must have had some knowledge, else he could not now speak of him so knowingly. But as for that, I remembered that Dugald McCalman had always been a close-mouthed man, and I remembered also that he had good humoredly taunted me with my ignorance of those other two—Axelsen and the woman. He had known about them and had said nothing about them, and I reasoned that it was just as probable that he had also known of Swartzberger. I resented somewhat the reticence which had kept him from taking me into his confidence completely,



Miss Willoughby was waiting for me in the big drawing-room.

the last he was a painter of genius and a master craftsman. But what a degeneration in the innate essence of the man those two pictures reveal! That is why I have them hung together. They are a constant object lesson to me and to all of my friends who know the story."

My friend's next words revealed to me that I had been right in my belief that he was about to make timely application of his theory.

"Hermann Swartzberger is a genius who has never let his reactions run away with him, and his genius is one of the rarest. I doubt not that he could have achieved pre-eminence in any one of a number of fields had not chance shaped him to criminality. He has his powers trained in utter subjection to an iron will. The man's greatest gift, I believe, was for organization, and his power over lesser men than himself is one of the wonders of the time did the world at large know of it.

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CHAPTER XXIII.  
The Wine of Life.

ONE thing had struck me as being strange in all my friend's talk, and that was that never before during our acquaintance had he even so much as

I fancy that I put something of this resentment into my voice when I asked of him: "How is it that until very recently you have never spoken to me of this man Swartzberger? You must have known of him for a long time."

"Well yes, I have known of him after a fashion," answered McCalman, and continued; "I have known of him just as a few others have known of him, but if you will remember I told you that the knowledge possessed of the two others, Axelsen and the De Alvarez woman, was very hazy. Well, the knowledge that we have of Swartzberger is even more hazy. Like the De Alvarez woman, only on an infinitely larger scale, he is suspected of having been implicated, or rather of having been the directing genius of most of the great crimes during the last ten years, geography barred. But I go too fast. What I mean to say is that the suspicion has been growing that most of these big crimes have been perpetrated under the guidance of some one man or set of men. The identity or identities of these men have not been known. There have been a number of suspects. Never before have I been so close, it seems to me, to solving the big riddle. That is why I am proceeding so carefully.

"What I learned while I was held in alleged imprisonment assures me almost that Swartzberger's is the master mind in control."

My friend fell silent again, and again I heard only the purring of the motor as we sped homeward.

I wondered if it was while McCalman was an alleged prisoner that he had learned that the great Bos, M. Steinfeldt and Hermann Swartzberger was one and the same person, and also if it was then that he had learned that the master criminal had once been a cook's scullion in Germany.

I flattered myself that I understood my friend's motive in calling upon M. Steinfeldt in his rooms at the Graystone earlier in the evening. He had been actuated by a desire to further ingratiate himself into the good graces and councils of the great Bos and had evidently taken the name of some widely known underworld worker whom he knew had previously operated alone and who was personally unknown to Swartzberger. But it seemed strange to me that the great Bos could have been so easily duped at a time when he should be decidedly on his guard.

These thoughts were in my mind when the car a short time later drew up in front of the building in which my friend's rooms were situated. As we stepped out onto the pavement an undersized A. D. T. messenger came out of the entrance and inquired for me. He handed me a note and said that he had been waiting for me for more than thirty minutes.

As the chief's car got under way and departed I tore open the note, wondering who could have written me a letter at this hour of the night. It was well along toward 12 o'clock. I was surprised to see that it was from Miss Willoughby, and that she wished me to come to her immediately. I tipped the boy, after telling him that the note required no answer, and a few minutes later was walking briskly through the streets toward the Willoughby home.

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It was bitter cold, but I wore my great coat, and the fur cap pulled well down over my ears kept at bay the biting wind that blew straight into my face from the east.

Moreover, there was a warm glow of satisfaction in my breast over the fact that Clarice Willoughby had bidden me to come to her. That she had not sent for McCalman, as would have been more natural in the circumstances, in view of the fact that he was in charge of the case, did not take any of the warmth out of the satisfaction I felt. But what was it that had induced her to send for me? Despite the cold and the fact that I was fatigued, that walk to the Willoughby home was a pleasant one indeed, for Clarice Willoughby was waiting at the end of the trip.

The two police guards had been changed at the front door, so it was necessary for one of them to summon Matthews before I was allowed to enter the house. On his appearance the lieutenant told me that nothing had happened since our departure, save that the house had been twice searched again from top to bottom.

"And yet I can't for the life of me understand how it was possible for the fellow to get out of the house without being seen and without leaving tracks somewhere in the snow in the yard. There is absolutely no possibility that he left the house by any of the doors or that he left the premises by any of the walks, as those points were too closely watched. And he didn't get out by way of the windows, for there are no tracks under any of them except those made by us when we searched."

Matthews then told me that the chauffeur, whose name was Robert Iversen, had returned a short time before, and that he had been taken into custody and sent to headquarters. The police officer expressed the belief that the man was wholly innocent of any complicity in the crime, and I agreed with him. Iversen