brightly when, soon after nine o'clock, I left Kemper's. My Spanish shawl, wrapped up in tissue paper, was under my arm. At the entrance of the hotel I paused, as an additional precaution, to survey the street, a discreet thoroughfare of prim banks and stolid public buildings. But my friend of the train was nowhere visible and, as far as I could determine, no one followed me when presently I went the length of the street to where, as the hall porter informed me, an archway gave upon Unter den Linden.

In the crowded avenue I felt safe. My cleverness in outwitting Grundt's emissary rather tickled my fancy, and I was smiling to myself as I took a taxi from the rank opposite the Bristol Hotel, and bade the driver drive me to Hohenzollern-Allee, 305.

CHAPTER XI

Hohenzollern-Allee, 305

The Hohenzollern-Allee was a brand-new street in a brand-new quarter of Berlin. A double row of brand-new trees lined it, and behind them brand-new blocks of flats in an extraordinary jumble of architectural styles, but each as bright and staring as the picture on a child's box of bricks, succeeded one another until the Allee suddenly decided to stop being the city, and frankly became the open country.

The effect of this metamorphosis was to cut off the three-hundreds in their prime. No. 305, as far as I could judge, was one of the last of the houses. Still careful to cover up my tracks, I dismissed the cab a few blocks before my destination and, keeping a keen watch about me; did not proceed on my way until the taxi was out of sight.

But the appearance of the street reassured me. In the bright sunshine it ran its length to where the brown fields swallowed it up as quiet and deserted as you may find any
suburban thoroughfare on a week-day morning. A chauffeur washing his car, and a soldier servant in canvas slops beating a uniform in a front garden, were the only human beings in sight. With rising confidence I came to my goal.

A warm red roof and timbered front, on which two elongated seraphim were depicted, elegantly upholding a scroll inscribed with some appropriate German trope, gave a not unpleasing suggestion of old Nuremberg to the architecture of No. 305. But this artistic grouping was promptly arrested by the pompous entrance hall panelled with glittering mirrors, which reflected a positive orgy of marble, crushed-strawberry carpet, and gilt.

The automatic lift bore me to the third floor where, the concierge told me, Frau von Pellegrini occupied the left-hand apartment. A plump blonde, as natty in her dainty cap and apron and short black skirt as any soubrette of French farce, opened to my ring. This, I told myself, must be Hedwig. . . .

"Nacht zu Haus!" she announced pertly in answer to my inquiry. "What was it, please?"

The augury was excellent, I decided. Nothing suited me better than to find the lady from home. If only I could gain admission to the drawing-room. . . .

"I have a shawl to sell," I exclaimed, "a Spanish shawl. . . ." And, shaking it from its paper, I held it up for the girl to see.

She cooed her admiration. "Gott, ist das reizend . . .!"

Then, taking the shawl from my hands, she draped it about her, turning this way and that to catch her reflection in a long mirror which hung on the wall behind. At last, with a sigh she handed the shawl back to me. Now that she had placed me as a humble supplicant, her manner became at once familiar.

"She's out riding, my little one. And she may not be back for an hour or more. D'you want to leave it?"
"Oh," said I, "I couldn't do that!"

"Just as you like. Only I handle all Madame's money affairs, you may as well know. Also . . ." She made as if to shut the door.

I knew what she meant. My talks with Franziska, who had been in service in one of the rich patrician families of Hamburg, had taught me something of Continental servants and their ways. My gold piece was in Hedwig's hand before she could carry out her intention. "If I get my price from Madame, there'll be another twenty marks for you," I said. "But I can't leave the shawl, for I need the money at once. Couldn't I come in and wait?"

With a gratified smile the maid stowed my tip in her purse. "One has to live, nicht wahr?" she remarked, with an air half apologetic. "And it's little enough I get out of Madame, even when she remembers to pay me my wages. If it weren't for her gentlemen friends, here and there . . . And it's not an easy place, you know. She's a proper handful, you can take it from me. Temperament, that's her trouble. You know what these artistes are." She sighed. "Gott, if I were only as beautiful as she is! Or rich! It comes to the same thing. You can only afford to be temperamental if you're one of the two, and that's a fact!" With a gesture of the head she beckoned me in. "Quietly!" she enjoined, a finger to her lips.

She closed the front door gently, and led the way through the hall, across a soft green carpet which deadened all sound, to a pair of white sliding doors, with the upper panels of glass curtained in green silk. Her hushed air intrigued me. But, then I reflected that probably her mistress was still in bed and asleep. No doubt the statement that she had gone out riding was an excuse to put off inconvenient callers . . .

The girl slid back one side of the white doors, and a
long, dim room appeared. Closed shutters darkened the bright sunshine of the street, and curtains of grass-green silk filtered the light softly upon gilt furniture of the formal French sort, a long, black piano, and sundry laurel wreaths, tied up with ribbons, that hung round the walls. The air was very faintly scented. I thrilled to the realisation that I was in Floria von Pellegrini's drawing-room, and yes! there in a corner, between a rack of opera scores and a Buhl console, stood allegro contraption of dark mahogany, a bogus Sheraton affair, the gramophone, no less!

I had reached my objective at last!

Hedwig was at the windows, opening the curtains, throwing back the shutters. Her movements were swift and quiet. The room was flooded with light. I looked about me. Clearly, green was the favourite colour of the lady of temperament. The walls were washed in a neutral tone of it, somewhere between verdigris and apple, but the paint-work of doors and windows was grass-green like the curtains, and of the same hue was the thick pile carpet which covered the entire floor with, here and there, an Oriental rug spread out. There was a broad, green divan piled high with enormous, gaudy cushions, emerald, orange and gold; and pale green shades, of Chinese shape and design, screened the lights. After nightfall, with the green curtains drawn, and the Chinese lamps spilling a soft green radiance, I could imagine the room intimate and charming. But, bathed as it was in the dazzling sunshine, its air of exotic luxury, like its subtle, clinging perfume, struck stately, as it were, upon the senses, and in the glory of the summer morning the effect was tawdry, even as the cluster of strangely-striped purple orchids, that stood in a crystal vase upon the piano, seemed tawdry by contrast with the tall basket of white roses that neighboured them.

"So!" said Hedwig, as she turned to go, "wait there a
little till Madame comes! And, hören Sie, whatever you do, don't stir from this room or make any noise! You've got to keep still as a mouse, d' you understand?"

Her manner was strangely impressive, awed almost. Once more she put a finger to her lips, the door slid to silently, and I was alone...

The moment for action had arrived. My heart was thumping with excitement, but I was resolved to do nothing to jeopardise the miraculous good fortune which had so far accompanied me. The maid might come back. I glanced at my watch. I would give myself two minutes to obviate this possibility. In the meantime, I reconnoitred the position.

In the wall opposite to where the gramophone stood guarding its secret a door was set. That door worried me. Obviously, it communicated with the interior of the apartment: with Frau von Pellegrini's bedroom, as like as not. I crossed to this door and listened. Not a sound. Longingly I regarded the dulled silver handle. The apartment was sunk in silence. Dare I try the door? The risk, I decided, was too great. I consulted my watch. My two minutes were up. Taking my courage in both hands, I approached the gramophone.

It was of the familiar cabinet type, with the revolving disc and the sound-box above, and below a cupboard with three shelves, one above the other, to hold the records. I dropped to my knees before the cabinet and, lifting out the records stacked in an untidy pile on the topmost shelf, swiftly explored the sides and back of the niche with my fingers. Nothing! I repeated the process with the second shelf. Again the same negative result!

Remained one shelf, the third and last, cluttered up, like the others, with an untidy pile of dusty discs. As I gathered them together, I was conscious of a wild hope that the envelope might not be there, for that would mean
that my friend the Major had forestalled me and was alive and at liberty. For myself, too, I was secretly praying that my mission might thus prematurely end. Obsessed, as I was, by a dull premonition of evil, I had the sensation that hitherto my undertaking had run all too smoothly, and I dreaded what the future might bring forth.

I had the records in my hand, and was in the act of depositing them upon the carpet at my feet when, to my intense alarm, I heard a movement in the adjoining room. There was a muffled thud and then a stealthy, padded footfall as of some one in slippers moving about on a soft carpet. I could guess what those quiet sounds signified. The temperamental Florida had left her bed and was getting up. Any second now I might expect to be interrupted.

But, having advanced thus far, I made up my mind, at whatever risk, to go through with the job. I put down the records and plunged my hand into the cabinet. The narrow shelf cramped my fingers and, as I groped, I distinctly heard, above the thudding of my heart in my ears, that stealthy footfall in the adjoining room. But now the footsteps were crossing the floor towards the door at my back.

And then my fingers slipped on some glazed surface, on something that rustled and crinkled at the touch, and I drew out a long blue envelope.

Without noticing more than that it was sealed and unaddressed, I thrust the envelope down the front of my frock, crammed the records back on their shelf, and even as, very slowly and quietly, the door in the wall swung back, sprang for the green divan where I had put down my belongings. Too late I observed, with a sense of dire dismay, that in my haste I had omitted to close the doors of the cabinet.

The divan occupied a corner beside one of the two windows of the salon, and was so placed that the door in opening hid the intruder from my view. As the door was
pushed deliberately inward, I took the shawl from its paper and stood up, intending to place myself between the door and the gramophone, in the hope of screening the evidence of my carelessness until I should have the opportunity of rectifying it. But I remained rooted to the spot, for there, in the doorway, instead of the woman I had expected to see, a fat young man in a dressing-gown was standing.

CHAPTER XII

ENTER THE PELLEGRINI

For a full minute he remained there in the doorway, blinking at me out of little, puffed-up eyes that were like currants sunk in a suet pudding. It was apparent that he had only just awakened from sleep, for his hair was all tousled, and the lower part of a purple crepe-de-chine sleeping suit projected below his dressing-gown, a flaming affair of green and orange flowered silk with wide sleeves. His bare feet were thrust into a pair of scarlet Turkish slippers.

Presently he groaned aloud and pressed his fingers to his temples. With some disgust I observed that he wore a gold chain bangle about his right wrist. "Lord," he said in German, "my head!") Then he came into the room and, going to a side table, poured himself out a glass of mineral water from a bottle that stood on a tray, and drank it off. He took a cigarette, from a silver box on the piano, lit it, blew out a cloud of smoke, and turned to me.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded, and promptly closed his eyes, as though he had forgotten his question.

All my life I have abominated two things in a man: fat and a monocle. In both respects the creature in the gorgeous dressing-gown fell under my inhibition. He was that object of ignominy, a fat, young man, not more than