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
twenty-five at the outside, sleek as a firkin of butter, and as full of curves as a Cubist drawing. But for all the grotesqueness of his avoidupois, there was nothing loutish about him: on the contrary, he bore himself with a certain air of distinction marked by an utter absence of self-consciousness most unusual in the German male. I had a feeling that he represented a type; but in what walk of life I could not determine.

I remained silent, and on that he opened his eyes, made a grimace, and his monocle dangled, swinging, from its string. Without his eyeglass he looked less vapid; but he had, below a small blond moustache, a loose and sensual mouth, and a tip-tilted nose lent his face a horribly gross, snorting expression. This, I told myself, must be one of the "gentleman friends" I had heard of from Hedwig.

"Where's the Pellegrini?" the young man demanded.

"Out riding, the maid said."

"So!" He dropped down upon the couch. His eye fell upon those tell-tale doors of the gramophone cabinet. "Hullo, who's been playing the gramophone?"

I went over and closed the doors. "I was just looking over the records," I explained.

Rougishly he wagged his head. "Don't you ever play the gramophone in this house! I gave the Pellegrini that machine, and she's never opened it. She hates tinned music, our Florida, and what she hates, she won't have. She hates me, sometimes. . . ." He grinned expansively, as though to ask, "What do you think of that?" When he smiled, his face, pink and round and shining, creased itself into innumerable little mountains of fat, from which the sun struck high lights, like peaks in a landscape of lard.

"You're not German!" he observed suddenly.

He caught me unawares, and, not knowing whether to contradict him or not, I murmured rather feebly: "What makes you say that?"
"Because our German women are big and strong, and na..."—his plump hands outlined a rotund gesture—"you're too thin, like an Englishwoman. You're English, that's what you are." He did not give me the chance to deny it, but went on immediately: "London Kolossal!" He broke into passable English. "Many times I have been there. I know your Ritz, your Saffoy. I have been to the Der-r-by, to Ascot. Chic, hein, Donnerwetter? Fine horses and lovely ladies: funny, how they go always together! Your English girls are nice, too! I had oh, a colossal success with the English misses. They found me very attractive. Do you, also, find me attractive?"

He turned the most engaging leer upon me. If I had been less nervous, I should have felt inclined to laugh. But, having secured the blue envelope, I was on fire to get away. I wanted to tell him that he looked like a performing pig in that monstrous dressing-gown of his; but I mastered my feelings sufficiently to give him the answer he undoubtedly expected.

With perfect gravity he nodded. "Yes, all women tell me this. They find me unwiderstehlich—how do you say that in English...?"

"Irresistible?" I suggested, but without enthusiasm.

"Irresistible—that's the word. It is a great bother to me that I am so irresistible. I am not to blame. But it makes our Flora very angry sometimes, and then she hates me. Pfui Deibel!" He passed his hand tenderly over the back of his head.

While he was speaking, I was conscious that he was mustering me out of his small, dull eyes. His scrutiny made me uncomfortable. I seized upon the lull in his flow of talk to make a determined effort to break away.

"I'm afraid I must be going," I said. "Will you tell Frau von Pellegrini that I'll call another time?"

"Don't be in such a hurry like this," he replied in his
quaint English. "What do you want with her? Is she going to hear you sing?"

"No," I told him, "I've brought a shawl to show her. I thought she might buy it. . . ."

I had approached the divan to get my gloves and things. The young man caught my arm. "A shawl? Is that it in your hand?" He forced me down beside him. "Put it on and I shall tell you how I like it!

To save argument I did as I was bid. "Entzückend!" exclaimed the fat youth. "With your black hair you are like Carmen!"

I whipped off the shawl and wrapped it up again. "And now I really must be going," I said.

"And leave me all alone? You wouldn't be so cruel. Such pains in the head I had this morning! I was so drunk like a monkey last night. You must keep me company a little longer already. The Pellegrini will be back in a minute. . . ."

"I really must go," I repeated, and tried to stand up.

But his grip on my arm tightened. His wide nostrils twitched and his eyes glittered horribly. "Don't you want to be nice to me?" he said rather thickly. "Come on, give me a little kiss!"

I tore my arm away and sprang to my feet. I tried to be calm, but I was angry, and frightened too. He jumped up and, darting to the door into the hall, locked it and put the key in his pocket.

"What a fire!" he exclaimed. "What a spirit! Na, I like it so. What a pretty thing you are, my dear!"

So saying, he camprancing across the floor at me, his loose, wet lips pursed up in a fatuous and evil smile.

"Please unlock the door and let me go!" I told him. But he only laughed and made a grab at me. I eluded him and shrank back. But all the time he was driving me into the corner where the divan stood.
And then without warning he sprang at me. I was afraid to cry out; but I dashed my two clenched fists into that flabby and leering face. He imprisoned my hands and slobbered over them. Shuddering at the contact, I tried in vain to tear them free. His snorting face was pressing into mine! while, sick with disgust and horror, I strained away from him, where, without warning, the handle of the locked door was rattled sharply, there was the rapid patter of feet outside, and the next moment Hedwig burst in upon us from the bedroom.

"Highness, Highness," she cried, "the gnädige Frau!"

From the promptness of her intervention it was clear to me that Fräulein Hedwig had been listening at the keyhole. I looked in amazement from her to the fat youth whose face betrayed symptoms of the liveliest alarm. She had called him "Hoheit"—and "Hoheit" in German signifies a Prince of one of the ruling families.

But before his Highness could move, there came, a furious rattling of the door-knob, and immediately thereon, from the bedroom, a tall, slim figure in a riding-habit swept down wrathfully upon us.

The moment I set eyes on Floria von Pellegrini I understood why she had chosen green as the colour scheme of her apartment. This woman was the perfect red-blonde. Her hair, or as much of it as appeared front under the brim of her hard black riding-hat, flamed like the heart of a fire, a deep, rich, natural auburn, and she had the creamy, lustrous skin and emerald-green eyes of the type. She was tall and lissom, with a figure of exquisite moulding, a gorgeous, warm creature whose vivid beauty glowed like the brilliant plumage of some brilliant sub-tropical bird.

My relief at her timely intrusion was so immense that I suddenly perceived the humour of the situation. It was, in truth, preposterous. The pair of us were breathing hard like a couple of wrestlers, I with my hat over one eye
and my hair coming down; my fat companion, a grotesque object in his gaudy wrapper, pouting like a naughty child, with a scarlet face which, I was delighted to see, bore the mark of my knuckles. The shawl lay on the carpet between us, where it had fallen in the struggle.

The Pellegrini was white with anger.

"So," she cried furiously, "you'd bring your women here, would you? You wouldn't come riding with me, oh no! You were tired: you'd sleep a little longer! And the instant my back is turned . . . What are you doing here?"

Shrilly she rounded on Hedwig, who was standing there with her mouth open.

"I was going to explain to the gnädige Frau," faltered the maid. She pointed to me. "This person brought a shawl for the gnädige Frau to see . . ." She gathered up the shawl from the ground. "I put her in here to wait. His Highness knows nothing about her . . ."

The Pellegrini flung me a glittering look. "Is this true?"

But now the Prince stepped forward. "Send Hedwig away, and I'll explain just what happened," he said ingratiatingly.

"Get out of here!" The Pellegrini snapped out the order over her shoulder, her eyes travelling from the fat man to me. Hedwig thrust the shawl into my hands and fled away through the bedroom.

With a meaning glance at me, the Prince laid his hand gingerly on the Pellegrini's sleeve. "Will Flo-Flo be patient and let her Karlchen tell her about the naughty trick he played on her?" he said in a flutey voice.

Angrily she shook his hand away. "More lies, I suppose," she exclaimed, and stamped her foot. At once the fat youth was on his dignity. "I beg you to remember, Florida, that we are not alone!"

She plucked off her hat and flung it with her riding-
switch upon the divan. Her hair was glorious and very simply dressed. "I am listening to your Highness," she observed coldly.

He patted her shoulder. "Come now, don't be cross with Karlchen." He flung me an imploring glance. "It was just a joke to make you jealous. I heard you in the hall and locked the door, and ... and ..." he fumbled for his words—"na, as I say, it was all a trick. We ... we,"—he made me an encouraging sign—"we planned it between us. She ... she disarranged her hair on purpose, nicht wahr?" His little eyes, small and furtive, like an elephant's, appealed to me.

Floria threw me the briefest of glances. "Well ...?"

But, Prince or no Prince, I was determined he should get no support from me.

"All I know," said I stoutly, "is that this gentleman locked the door and tried to kiss me. And now, if you'll allow me, I'm going." On that I picked up my belongings, and began to set my hat to rights in the mirror over the divan. In the glass I saw the venomous look that came into the Prince's eyes.

"A-ah!" The exclamation that broke from the Pellegrini's lips was like a hiss. "I might have known that no woman was safe from you." She was pacing up and down the floor. "But in my own house, under the eyes of my own maid. ..." She burst into tears and began to sob with rage. "You ... you ... in your position, you never think of me. You humiliate ... me. Oh, it's infamous!"

The Prince snapped his fingers at me. "Go away!" His fat face was vindictive. He unlocked the door into the hall and flung it wide. As I passed out, Hedwig came running through the vestibule, one hand on her heart, her face as white as paper.

"Grundt!" she gasped.