

CHAPTER XX

LAURENZ TERBROICH had stepped aside involuntarily. With open-mouthed wonder he looked at the apparition. Then he pressed his thin lips together and inflated his nostrils to master his surprise. "Herr Doktor Otten?" he finally asked and smiled obsequiously. "You have returned to Cologne?"

"Just on your account."

Laurenz Terbroich closed the corridor door and admitted the visitor into his parlor. "Pardon the lack of order, Herr Doktor. My servant took this afternoon off, on account of the end of the carnival. I, too, intended going to an affair. During these days a fellow scarcely gets out of his domino. But then, you, too, have been young, and were not slow in these things. But, really, things do look disgraceful here."

He sputtered out the sentences as if he did not wish to give his visitor a chance to speak, as if he tried from the beginning to lead the conversation into light channels.

Joseph Otten looked about observantly. The salon was fitted out in good taste and quite harmoniously. Old, well-framed oil-paintings hung on the walls. Upon the table there stood a bronze cast of the Venus of Milo, about a foot high. Beside the figure stood a slim, long-stemmed champagne glass of Venetian workmanship, half filled with the sparkling beverage, and in a metal cooler the empty bottle. With an ironical smile, Otten