

## The Brotherhood of the Seven Kings.

BY L. T. MEADE AND ROBERT EUSTACE.

### IX.—THE BLOODHOUND.



THE aspect of matters had now completely changed. Mme. Koluchy had at last put herself under the power of the law, and her arrest at the worst was only a question of days. She had, it is true, a good start of her enemy, but an early wire to Scotland Yard would limit her movements by every conceivable device. Each railway terminus in England would be watched, as well as every port all over the country; for in all probability she would try to make straight back to Italy, where, even if she were arrested for crimes committed in England, according to international law the Italian authorities would not be bound to deliver her up to an English tribunal.

Yes, we felt that circumstances were at last pointing to a crisis, and the arrest of the greatest criminal of her day was all but accomplished. Nevertheless, one knew that with such resources as Madame possessed she might surround herself with unexpected defences, for she had many friends in the country, and some of these moved in the highest and most influential circles.

By an early train the two detectives, Dufrayer, and myself returned to town. Madame had, of course, avoided the railways, and had doubtless gone off by road on a pre-arranged plan with some of her confederates.

On the way up, Tyler, who had been silent for some little time, leant across to the official inspector and said: "Ford, I shall put Miss Beringer on to this case now. I have more faith in her intuition and skill where a woman is to be hunted down than in any of my own men, or yours either."

The inspector smiled.

"Just as you like," he said. "I am well aware of Miss Beringer's skill. There is not a cleverer lady detective in the whole of London; but, whether she is employed in the case or not, Madame cannot keep out of our clutches much longer. She has probably got back to London by now, and when once there I'll swear she won't get out. What we have to do when we arrive is to go straight to Bow Street and get the warrant drawn up."

"You look terribly knocked up, Head," said Dufrayer, glancing at me.

"I have not quite got over the shock I received yesterday," was my reply; "but my hand and arm are not nearly so painful as they were, and I am far too excited to think of rest at present. When I reach town I shall go straight off to Monkhouse, in Wimpole Street, and take his advice. My impression is that the arm will be all right in a week or so; and now, happen what may, I intend to be in at the death."

Dufrayer gave me one of his steady, long glances, but he did not shake his head or attempt to oppose me, for he knew that on this point my resolution was firm.

On reaching London I left my companions, who promised to call at my house about one o'clock, and went straight off to see Monkhouse. He dressed my arm and hand carefully, said that I had had a miraculous escape, but he did not believe the injury was permanent.

I then went home and waited anxiously for the arrival of Dufrayer and the police officers. They came soon after the hour arranged, having obtained the warrant for the arrest of Mme. Koluchy. To my surprise I saw that they were accompanied by a stranger, a tall, well-made girl of about five-and-twenty years of age. Tyler introduced her to me as Miss Anna Beringer, and added, in a whisper, that we were all right now, as we had secured her services.

I glanced at her with some curiosity. She was a good-looking girl, with a keen, clever face. Her grey eyes were very bright, and all her features small and well formed, but there was a certain hardness about her lips which struck me even at the first glance. Those lips alone gave indication of her character, for there was nothing else in her appearance at all out of the common, and to an ordinary person she would appear simply as a bright, well-set-up young girl, with high spirits and a somewhat off-hand manner. Her usual expression was both frank and open, and her voice was very pleasant to listen to.

"Mr. Tyler has already given me the outline of the case," she said, turning to me.



"I know exactly what occurred yesterday. By the way, Mr. Head, I hope you are feeling better. Mme. Koluchy acted in a most dastardly way towards you, and you escaped as by a miracle. I need not say that Madame is very well known to me. It has been the most earnest wish of my life for several years now to be connected with her capture. I look upon such a capture as the blue ribbon of my profession. She shall not escape me now."

As Miss Beringer spoke the hard lines round her mouth grew still harder, and the womanly element in her face faded out, giving place to a strong, masculine look of determination and resolution.

"Well," said Ford, "we have got the warrant at last, so it is all comparatively plain sailing. The first thing is to go at once to Madame's house. She will scarcely have arrived there yet, but we can at least search the place and put a man on guard. Do you feel up to coming with us, Mr. Head?" he added, turning to me.

"Certainly," I replied.

"Well, then, we had better lose no time. I have a carriage at the door, and also a hansom."

Miss Beringer, Dufrayer, and myself a moment later entered the landau which was in waiting for us, and the two detectives followed in the hansom. We all drove straight to Welbeck Street. As we approached Madame's house we saw that it bore the usual marks of being shut up and comparatively deserted. The window-boxes were destitute of flowers, the blinds were down, the steps had not been cleaned, and an air of desolation hung over the

place. Dufrayer and I ascended the steps and rang the bell. Ford, Tyler, and Miss Beringer remained in the street.

"Suppose we cannot get in?" I said, after a moment's pause, for no one had yet come to answer our summons.

"With this warrant in my possession we can, if necessary, break down the door," replied Ford, laughing. "But here comes someone at last."

We heard shuffling footsteps approaching, they reached the door, the chain inside was undone, and some bolts drawn back. The door was then opened, and a tall old woman stood on the threshold.

"What do you want?" she said, speaking in a mumbling voice.

"We want Mme. Koluchy," said Ford; "is she within?"

The woman started back quite perceptibly. When Ford came up and spoke to her I saw that she trembled all over.

"Madame is not at home," she began.

Ford interrupted hastily.

"Look here, missus. I have a warrant here for the arrest of Mme. Koluchy, and I demand an entrance, as I wish to search the house immediately."

The woman drew back, apparently paralyzed with fear, and we immediately entered the hall in a body.

"I tell you Madame is not here," she whimpered. "Madame has not been here since Saturday last."

Ford pushed her aside unceremoniously, and we began our search. We began with the magnificent reception-rooms on the ground-floor.

This was the first time I had been inside



"MISS BERINGER."



Madame's house in Welbeck Street, but the splendour of the great rooms and the extraordinary luxury of their decorations scarcely astonished me, for I knew the tastes of their owner only too well. Had I not seen Mme. Koluchy's palace in Naples? Had not her reception-rooms there been all too familiar to me in those early days, when she exercised so fatal a charm over my life, and by so doing ruined all my future?

The English house bore many marks of its foreign ownership. Treasures of priceless value from all parts of the globe were scattered here and there. The most valuable curios of every sort abounded; while carvings of strange heathen deities and frescoes, executed with all the skill of which modern art is capable, decorated the ceilings. Magnificent pictures by English as well as foreign painters, both old masters and more recent productions, were to be found on the walls.

We entered the consulting-room, the door of which was hung with a splendid specimen of Gobelins tapestry. The same magnificence and wealth of detail were to be found here. Madame's own special desk was an Italian one in walnut wood. It was inlaid with scroll work and figures of the cardinal virtues and the pagan deities. Close by its side was the chair in which she must have sat to receive her many patients. This was of antique oak lined with old tapestry, the back and arms profusely set with enamelled medallions. There was also, not far from the desk and chair, a handsome Louis XV, *escritoire*, inlaid with various woods and heavy mountings of chased *ornulu*. The rest of the furniture of

the room was in keeping with that portion which immediately surrounded Madame's chair.

The walls from floor to ceiling were formed of inlaid woods, and the ceiling itself was in the shape of a dome, which gave a sort of colossal effect to the great room. But, splendid as everything was, the place wore a strange air of desolation. It was only to stand within these walls to know that the animating and dominant spirit was no longer present to give life and significance to the whole.

Having finished searching the ground-floor

we went upstairs. The upper part of the house was furnished in a less heavy and more cheerful style, but it was also quite deserted. We were just coming down again when a ladder, leading to the roof, attracted Ford's attention. He ran up and opened a trap-door. We followed him and found, secured in a sheltered part of the roof between two gables, a pigeon-cote, which was now open and empty.

"There is nothing to be found here," I said, somewhat impatiently.

"Had we not

better go at once and search the vaults and the laboratories?"

As I said the words I little knew that our apparently unimportant discovery on the roof of the house was destined to be brought home to us in a remarkable manner. We went down to the basement and continued our exhaustive search. The old woman now came forward and said, in a whining, agitated voice, that she was the only person in the house, all the other servants having been dismissed.



"THERE IS NOTHING TO BE FOUND," I SAID.



"Can you show us the way to the laboratories?" I asked of her.

She looked uneasy, but did not hesitate to comply. She pointed with her finger, and we went down a dim passage. The door of the outer laboratory was open, and we entered. There was another beyond this also with its door ajar. Both rooms were fitted up with every modern device, and excited my curiosity as well as envy. But search as we would we could get no clue to Madame's whereabouts.

"She is not in the house, that is certain," said Ford; "and now there is nothing whatever for us to do but to keep a sharp watch in case she should venture to return."

As he spoke my attention was attracted by the attitude of the old woman. Hitherto she had followed us about something like a snarling and ill-conditioned cur, who protested, but had not courage to attack. Now she came boldly into the room, and stood facing us, leaning up against the wall. Her eyes were dark and piercing, and shone out on us from beneath heavy, overhanging brows. Her mouth was almost toothless, and she had a nutcracker chin.

"You won't find her," she muttered. "Ah, you may look as long as you like, but you'll never find her. The likes of her ain't for the likes of you. She ain't like other women. She's more spirit than woman, and the Evil One himself is a friend to her. You won't find her, never, never!"

She laughed in a hollow and exultant manner as she spoke.

"Would it not be well to arrest this old crone?" I said, turning to Ford.

He shook his head. "I don't believe she has anything to do with the conspiracy," he said, dropping his voice to a whisper, "beyond the fact that she is Madame's paid servant; but even if we wished to arrest her, we could not do so on vague suspicion. We can but watch her closely."

"Then there is nothing more to be done at present?" I queried, in a tone of disappointment.

"As far as you are concerned, Mr. Head, there is nothing more," answered Tyler. "I should recommend you to go home and have a good rest. We will let you know the instant anything happens."

We parted outside the house, where an officer in plain dress was already standing on duty. Dufrayer said he would look me up in the evening, and the detectives and Miss Beringer went on their way.

I hailed a hansom and returned to my own house. As I have already said, I was

far too excited to rest. The old woman's words had affected me more strongly than I cared to allow, and as I paced up and down in my study, I could not help feeling anything but certain of the final result. I knew that Dufrayer, Miss Beringer, Tyler, and Ford were each and all absolutely sure that Madame would soon be captured, but I was possessed by uneasy fears. In this moment of extremity, would not the great criminal bring all the strength of her magnificent genius to bear on the situation?

As I thought over these things I was suddenly possessed by a sense of comfort. This was caused by my recollection of Miss Beringer's face. Ordinary as that face looked to the casual observer, it was by no means so to those who watched it more narrowly. To such a watcher its strange look of power could not but appeal. So contemplated, the face was the reverse of pleasant—the hardness round the lips became its dominant feature. There was also an insistence in the grey eyes which might on emergency amount to absolute cruelty. But it was the strange look of strength which I now remembered, with a feeling of satisfaction. If Madame ever met her match, it would be in the person of that slight girl, for she possessed, I knew well, a grip of her subject which neither Ford nor Tyler, with all their intelligence and long practice, could own to. Miss Beringer could do work which they could not even attempt, for to her belonged the delicate intuition which is so essentially a woman's province. I longed to see her again, and also alone, that I might talk over matters more freely with her. Tyler had furnished me with her private address, and I now resolved to telegraph to her. I did so, asking permission to call upon her that evening. The reply came within an hour.

"Don't come to-night, but expect me to call on you early to-morrow."

Dufrayer came in as I was reading the telegram.

"What have you got there?" he asked.

"A wire from Miss Beringer," I replied. I put it into his hand.

"You are impressed, then, by our new detective?" he said, slowly.

"Very much so," I answered. I gave a few of my reasons, and he favoured me with a grave smile.

"I never felt so hopeful," he continued; "we are in a position we were never in yet. It is, as Tyler says, merely a question of days. Where so many are on the watch, Madame cannot long escape us."



"Remember that the person we want to get is Mme. Koluchy," I answered, "and do not be too sure. For my part, I shall never be certain of her until she is absolutely our prisoner."

He did not remain with me much longer, and I spent the night as best I could.

Between ten and eleven o'clock on the following morning Miss Beringer arrived. She entered my room quickly, came close to my side, and fixed her eyes on my face.



"SHE CAME CLOSE TO MY SIDE."

I was startled by the change in her appearance. The grey eyes had a curious bright glitter in them, and her face was pale and drawn.

"Yes, Mr. Head," she said, as she took the chair offered her; "these cases take it out of me. When once on the track, I never rest day or night. I have never failed yet. If I did, I think it would kill me."

She shivered as she spoke, and her thin lips were drawn back to show her teeth. She had somewhat the expression of a tigress about to spring.

"You have news, Miss Beringer?" I said; "I hope good news?"

"I have news," she replied, gravely, "and I trust it is good. It was because of what I am about to tell you that I was unable to call to see you last evening. Are you strong enough and well enough to go down at once with Ford to Hastings?"

"Certainly," I replied.

"I will give you my reasons for asking you to do so. There is a yacht cruising off the coast. It is said to belong to a Captain Marchant. I have had my suspicions from the first that it is subsidized by Madame. It was on account of these suspicions that I went to Hastings last night."

"To Hastings?" I said.

"Yes; I spent several hours of the night and evening in one of the low quarters of the town by the fish-market. There is no doubt that several members of the gang are hiding in the neighbourhood of Hastings, and their object is, of course, to get to the yacht. It is all-important to take immediate steps to prevent this."

"But how could you find out about the yacht in the first instance?" I asked.

"I obtained a slight clue," she replied, "no matter how obtained,

and just when your telegram reached me was on my way to Hastings, disguised as a fisher-woman. I possess many disguises in my rooms, and am seldom taken aback when I want to act a good part. I went third-class to Hastings, and immediately visited the vicinity of the fish-market. I have a friend there, a fish-wife, who does not know my real character, and who is always glad to see me. I can act the part admirably, and when I asked her to accompany me to a large gin-palace, she was all too willing. I was in reality



following two men, but she knew nothing of that. While these men were drinking at the bar, I drew near and was fortunate enough to hear a few words of their conversation. They spoke for the most part in Italian, which I happen to know. The name of Captain Marchant's yacht, the *Snowflake*, dropped from the lips of one. There was also a woman mentioned, but not by name. The *Snowflake* was waiting for the woman. Meanwhile, the men were hiding in an old disused Martello tower on the Pevensy Marshes. This I learned scrap by scrap, but it was enough for my purpose. I returned to town by the first train this morning. Ford and Tyler have received all the information I have just told you, and are certain that the yacht belongs to Madame. Ford and Tyler go to Hastings by the twelve o'clock train. And now the question is, can you go with them, and will Mr. Dufroyer be induced to accompany you? Knowing as much as you must do about the Society, your help will be invaluable."

"I will go," I said, "and I will send a wire to Dufroyer."

"Very well," she replied; "it is scarcely eleven o'clock yet—you will find the detectives at Charing Cross at noon."

"But won't you come with us?" I said.

She turned a little pale.

"No," she answered, "my work obliges me to remain in town."

"Do you mind telling me what your next step is?" I asked.

"I would rather not," she answered, "for even here walls may have ears."

As she spoke she glanced round her with a nervous flash in her eyes, which left them almost as soon as it appeared.

"I never confide my plan of operations to anyone in advance," she continued. "I have much to do and not a moment to lose. I believe now, between us, Madame has little chance of escape; but one false step, the smallest indiscretion, would be fatal. Good-bye, Mr. Head. I am glad that you have confidence in me."

"The utmost," I replied, as I wrung her hand.

A moment later she left the house. I packed a few things, sent a wire to Dufroyer, and at the right moment drove off to Charing Cross, where I met my friend, and also the two detectives. We took our seats in the train and it moved out of the station. We happened to have the carriage to ourselves, and Ford was in such a state of excitement that he could scarcely sit still.

"Did I not say that Miss Beringer was the one person in all London to help us?" he cried. "She is like a bloodhound when she scents the prey, and never lets go of the scent. From what she tells me, there is little or no doubt that most of the gang are hiding down in the Pevensy Marshes, and have taken possession of one of the old, disused Martello towers. There are a good many of them along the south coast."

Dufroyer asked one or two questions, and Ford continued: "That's a cute idea about using the old tower, and I believe the one which we are to watch is No. 59. It stands on the beach by the marshes of Pevensy Bay. The gang are only waiting till the steam yacht now being closely watched can take them off. Of course, we could quite easily go straight to the tower and catch those members of the gang who are there, but we want Mme. Koluchy, and my impression is, that she is quite certain to come down to-night or to-morrow. Our present work, however, will be to watch the tower day and night, so that when she does arrive we can catch her. Miss Beringer is under the strong impression that at present Madame is hiding in London. We may have a rough and tumble with the gang when it comes to the point, but I have taken steps to secure lots of assistance."

On arriving at Hastings station we were met by a couple of Tyler's agents.

"Has anything fresh occurred?" asked Ford, as we alighted.

"Nothing," answered one of the men, "but there is no doubt that several members of the gang are in No. 59 tower, and the steam yacht has drawn off down Channel."

"Just as I expected," said Ford; "well, the sooner we mount guard the better. We will start as soon as it is dark."

The next few hours we spent in making preparations. It was arranged that we should go as if we intended shooting wild duck. This would give us the excuse of carrying guns, which we knew we might possibly want for bigger game if the gang offered any serious resistance.

At six o'clock our little band, consisting of Dufroyer, Ford, Tyler, myself, and a couple of policemen in plain clothes, drove westwards out of the town to a lonely part of the shore. Here a boat awaited us, and, entering it, we pulled out into the bay. The moon had risen, and we could see the row of Martello towers dotted along the beach, and the dark waste of the marshes behind them.

Ford steered, and, after an hour's hard



pulling, turned the boat's head towards the beach, where one of the dykes ran into the marshes from the sea. This we silently entered, and in a few moments the tall bulrushes that grew on either side completely concealed us. Ford raised his hand, and we quietly shipped our sculls.

"That's where they are," he whispered, pointing to one of the towers about two hundred yards off. "There is not a light visible, but they are there and no mistake. Now, what we have to do is this. We will leave the boat here, and crawl up under cover of the shingle ridge. We shall be quite close to the tower there, and we can lie in wait, unseen by the gang. How Madame will come, if to-night at all, by boat or otherwise, it is impossible to say; but at any rate, whenever she arrives she cannot escape us. There is the steam yacht now," he added, pointing out to sea.

I looked up and saw two red and green lights moving slowly along a mile or so from the shore.

Taking our guns and the provisions and flasks we had brought with us, we crept through the rushes and out on to the shingle, till we were within twenty yards of the tower. So close were we that I could see every detail. The ladder leading up to the door of the tower half-way up the wall was plainly visible; as was, also, the old, rusty twenty-

four-pounder, pointing uselessly out to sea. The tower itself was almost in ruins, and here and there the brickwork of the walls showed through the stucco which had worn off by time.

It was a calm night, and only the wash of the sea broke the stillness. I stretched myself on the rough, loose boulders and shingle,

and laid my gun by my side. Hour after hour crept by. The vigil we were all keeping was sufficiently strange and exciting to keep us wakeful and attentive. Presently a night breeze arose and sighed among the bulrushes in the marshes behind us. But all within the tower was absolutely silent—not a light showed through the chinks of windows, not a footfall came to our ears. From where I lay, I could watch the lights of the yacht move to and fro in the black darkness. The slow hours dragged on, and still nothing happened. At last the dawn began to break—it grew brighter each



"THAT'S WHERE THEY ARE," HE WHISPERED.

moment. I was just turning towards Ford for our signal to go back to the boat, when suddenly I saw him leap up, raise his gun, and a loud report rang out on the still morning air. I leapt to my feet also, as did the others. The little window of the tower opened, and two revolver shots rang through it as Tyler, Dufroyer, and three of the men rushed up the ladder. I followed them immediately, at a loss to know what this



sudden change of plan meant. In a few moments we had smashed down the flimsy wooden door and had come in contact with four men, who, armed with revolvers, greeted us from within. Our onslaught, however, was so sudden and unexpected, that after a short but desperate resistance we had taken them all prisoners. They were immediately handcuffed, and Ford and Tyler with the other police-officers led them out of the tower on to the beach.

Ford's eyes were blazing with excitement, and to my surprise I saw a dead pigeon at his feet.



"I SAW A DEAD PIGEON AT HIS FEET."

"A messenger to Welbeck Street, Mr. Head," he exclaimed, handing me what looked like a piece of cigarette paper.

"A carrier pigeon!" I cried, the meaning of his first shot now bursting upon me.

"Yes, and I had a lucky shot at it in this half light," he continued; "but to tell you the truth, I half expected something of the kind, and, so to speak, lay in wait for that pigeon. Last night things came back to me, and I remembered that empty pigeon-cote on the roof of the house in Welbeck Street. From

the fact that a message was about to be sent to her, there is no doubt whatever that Madame has returned to her town residence. We will catch her for certain now, though how she has contrived to get into her house with our man watching it is more than I can say. Can you read this?"

As he spoke he put the cigarette paper into my hand. I scrutinized it closely. Written in very tiny letters I read the following words: "*Stay in London. Don't come here. Danger.*"

"Yes," went on Ford, "they spied us directly it began to get light, and seeing their game was up, dispatched this to Madame. But for that shot of mine she would probably have escaped us again. Now we have her safe."

"But how?" I answered. "The pigeon is dead, so she won't get the message, and in all probability will come down to Hastings to-day or to-night."

"We will keep her in London," said Ford, looking extremely knowing and much excited. "Oh, yes, she will have her message all right, and in two hours from the present time. Bring them along, Tom."

One of the men was now seen descending the ladder with a wooden cage in his hands, in

which were fluttering two more pigeons.

"By Jove!" I cried, seeing what he meant, "this is splendid."

"Yes, it is about the smartest bit of work I have ever done," he replied, "and we owe it all to Miss Beringer; she has given us the clue."

As he spoke he handed me another piece of cigarette paper, exactly like the one on which the first message had been written.

"You might make things a bit stronger, Mr. Head," he said.



I thought a moment, and then wrote: "*Stay in Welbeck Street until one of us comes to you. Important. Danger if you stir.*"

Ford's eyes glittered as he read my words. He attached the little note deftly to the neck of one of the birds.

"There, off you go," he exclaimed; "it's lucky birds can't talk."

He tossed the pigeon into the air, the bird rose rapidly in gradually increasing circles, and then shot off in a straight line for the north, and so was lost to view bearing my message to Mme. Koluchy.

As the pigeon darted up into the air, I heard one of the prisoners utter an exclamation, and turn to his fellow. This action of ours had evidently taken him completely by surprise. The man at whom he looked made no reply, even by a glance, but folding his arms across his breast stood motionless as if at attention. A glance showed me all too plainly that, desperate as the men were, they were at least true to Madame. Even death by torture, did such await them, would not induce any one of the Brotherhood to betray their chief. They were all well dressed, and had the appearance of gentlemen. They took their apparently hopeless fate with stoicism, and did not attempt any escape.

By this time the sun had well risen, and a glorious morning had chased away the gloom of the night. Placing our prisoners in the boat, we pulled round to a lower part of the shore. Here a trap met us by appointment, and in less than an hour we were all on our way to London. Success had at last rewarded our efforts. We had secured Madame's gang, and now it would be an easy feat to make Madame herself our prisoner.

Ford had wired to Miss Beringer to meet us at the station, and he whispered to me from time to time as we ran up to town his keen sense of satisfaction.

"Trust Miss Beringer not to have been idle while we were busy down here!" he exclaimed. "She may probably be able to account for the way in which Mme. Koluchy has got back to her house. Ah, we have done for Mme. Koluchy at last. She has got the message of the carrier pigeon by now, but she little guesses who are coming to pay her a visit."

He laughed as he spoke. The train began to approach its destination, and slowed down preparatory to coming into the station.

"The first thing to be done," said Ford, "is to take our prisoners to Bow Street and have them formally charged, then we will all go and visit Madame in a party. Ah! here

we are: I'll just jump out first, and have a look round for Miss Beringer."

He was the first to spring on to the platform, but look as he would he could not find the lady detective. He came back presently to the rest of us with a crestfallen expression of face.

"It's odd," he said, "but it only shows that she's precious busy with our business. In all probability we will find her in the vicinity of the house. Now, then, to look after the prisoners."

We took our men in a couple of cabs to Bow Street, and having seen them safe in the cells, drove straight to Madame's house. We had our last great capture to make in order to complete our work.

As we neared the house a strange and almost ungovernable excitement took possession of me. Dufroyer and the two detectives were also silent. This was no time for speech. My heart beat hard and fast—the stirring events of the last twenty-four hours had kept my brain going at fever heat, and, weak after the shock I had recently undergone, the strain began to tell. Once or twice I had to shake myself as a man in a dream. Truly, it was almost impossible to believe that in a few moments now Mme. Koluchy, the invincible, the daring, the all-powerful, would be our prisoner.

We drew up at last at the well-known entrance, and spoke a few words to the man on duty.

"Oh, yes," he replied, "it's all right, and there's little or no news. The old woman has gone out once or twice to a shop to get some food, but no one has entered the house."

"What about Miss Beringer? Has she been here?" I asked.

"She was here yesterday evening," he answered, "but I've not seen her since."

Telling him to be in readiness without informing him of our convictions, we knocked loudly and rang imperiously at the door. After a very short delay the same old woman appeared. She wore a sort of night-cap with a deep frill and her piercing eyes confronted us from under the shaggy brows. She would only now vouchsafe to open the door a few inches.

The place showed dimly in the half light, for every blind was down and every shutter up. We could not even see the bent form of the old woman distinctly.

"Now, look here," said Ford, "your mistress is in this house somewhere. We happen to know it for an absolute fact. Will you take us to her or not, for find her we will?"



The woman gave a low laugh, suppressed as soon as uttered.

"You may look all you can," she exclaimed, "but Madame is not here. You are welcome to search the house to your hearts' content."

After saying the last words she mumbled something more to herself, and then shuffled off down the passage.

We all entered the house.

"Now, then," said Ford, "we'll search from cellar to garret, and we'll start this time downstairs."

We descended to the basement, and made a careful search through the various domestic offices, until once more we found ourselves in the first of Mme. Koluchy's magnificent laboratories. Ford switched on the electrics, and we looked around us. The place was in perfect order, but a curious ethereal distillate familiar to my nostrils hung in the air. I could not account for this at the time, although it filled me with a vague fear. We went on into the second laboratory, which was also in order, but was pervaded even more strongly by the same smell. At the further end of this room was a very low doorway studded with nails and iron bands. It looked as if it led into some cellar, and I suddenly remembered that we had not explored beyond its portals on the occasion of our first visit. The old woman had followed us into the laboratories, keeping well in the background. Ford, who seemed to observe the door at the same moment that I had, turned upon her eagerly.

"Where is the key of this door?" he said.

"I don't know," she answered.

"Go and find it immediately."

"My mistress keeps the key of that room, and until she returns you can't get in," was the low reply.

Vol. xvi.—40.

"We'll soon see about that," cried Ford.

He turned to one of his men.

"Just go out," he said, "and tell the man on duty outside to get me an axe and crowbar, and bring them here as soon as possible. Hurry as fast as you can, Johnson; there's not a moment to lose."

The man left us immediately.

"I think we shall find a clue at the other side of this locked door," continued Ford, glancing at me. "I hope Johnson will look sharp."

In less than a quarter of an hour the man returned with the necessary implements.

"Martin and I went together to fetch them," he said; "I'm sorry I could not be back sooner."

Ford seized the axe, and after a few smashing blows over the lock inserted the bar and the door burst open. He stepped inside immediately, but as he did so he started back and a look of horror spread over his face. We all rushed in.

"Good God, we are too late!" he cried. "She has escaped us."

"Escaped? How?" I said, pushing forward.

"By death!" he answered.

He went forward and knelt on the floor of the room. In the dim light I could plainly



"IT WAS THE BODY OF MADAME KOLUCHY."



see the body of a woman. Ford struck a match and held it close to the face. It was the body of Mme. Koluchy. Yes, there she lay. The well-known face, in all its magnificent beauty, wore now the awful repose of death. Beside her was a small hypodermic syringe, and also an open bottle containing some clear solution. From that open bottle had issued the smell which pervaded the outer and the inner laboratory.

For fully a moment we all gazed down at the dead woman in absolute silence. The sudden discovery had struck us dumb. How she had managed to obtain access to the house when it had been so closely watched was indeed a mystery. But after all it mattered nothing now. The end had come. A fit end to such a life as hers had been. We withdrew from the semi-darkness of the room into the outer laboratory. Dufroyer glanced round him.

"I wonder where the old woman can be!" he exclaimed.

"She was with us a moment ago," I answered. "Is she not here now?"

"No, she has gone back into her own haunts, most likely. Had we not better call her? It is impossible that Madame could have got into the house without her assistance."

"I will go and have a look for her," said Tyler. He left the laboratory, and we heard him moving about the house, his footsteps echoing as he went. He presently came back.

"She is not in any of the kitchens," he said. "Perhaps she has gone upstairs—it does not matter much now, does it?"

"No," I answered, and then once more we were all silent, too stunned to utter many words. I never saw anyone look so utterly crestfallen as Ford.

"To think that Mme. Koluchy should have done us at the very end!" he exclaimed more than once; "but it was like her; yes, it was like her."

"The message which the carrier pigeon brought meant evidently more to her than lay on the surface," I remarked. "She saw that she was hemmed in on every side, and was not the woman to be taken alive."

"Well, our search has come to an unlooked-for end," said Ford, again; "but I do wonder," he added, "where Miss Beringer can be. It is very odd that we have not heard or seen anything of her."

Just then Dufroyer spoke.

"Hark!" he cried, "what is that?"

We all stood still and listened. Far away,

as if from some great distance, we heard a muffled cry. Again and again it was repeated. So faint was the sound that it seemed to be away out in the street.

"What on earth can it be?" said Ford, looking round him anxiously.

We moved softly round the laboratory, fearing to disturb the silent figure that lay in the awful repose of death. Again and once again we heard the cry. We stopped now and then to listen more closely. At last we reached a point where it seemed louder than anywhere else. I lay down and applied my ear to the stone flags.

"It is here!" I cried, in intense excitement, "just beneath us. Listen!"

Yes, it was now unmistakable—the sound came from beneath our feet.

"There is a cellar beneath this," I said; "someone is immured here."

We searched rapidly for any sign of an entrance, but searched in vain.

Once again the cry was repeated, but now it was as faint as that which might come from the throat of an infant.

"There is someone under here," said Dufroyer, in a tone of the greatest excitement. "We must smash the flagstone immediately."

Ford and Tyler both seized the crowbar. In a few moments they had loosened the stone, levered it up, and turned it over. As they did so, I perceived that there was a secret spring underneath, and had we looked long enough we could have removed the stone without the help of the crowbar. The moment it was turned up a breath of intensely cold air greeted us, and we saw immediately beneath our feet a dark, circular hole. A low moan came up from the darkness. I gently lowered down the crowbar; it rested on something soft.

Our excitement now was intense. Taking off my coat I lowered myself through the hole, and holding on by my hands to the edge of the hole, my feet at last touched the solid ground. The cold that surrounded me was so intense that I almost gasped for breath. In what infernal region was I finding myself? I let go and, striking a match, looked round. Good God! a woman lay in this fearful dungeon! In another moment I had raised her, and as her face caught the light I saw at a glance that it was Miss Beringer. The others quickly lifted her out, and I sprang up beside them. A pair of steel handcuffs were on her wrists. She was icy cold from the awful chill of that subterranean chamber, that at first she looked like one dead. Her mouth was torn and her hands swollen.



When she was brought up into the warmer air she lay to all appearance unconscious for several moments. Dufrayer quickly took a flask from his pocket, poured out some brandy, and put it to her lips. At first she could not swallow, then, to our great relief, a few drops went down her throat. She sighed audibly and opened her eyes. When she did so she stared with a dazed expression all round. In less than a moment, however, full consciousness returned, a fierce light of

"Mme. Koluchy is dead!" I answered, thinking that she had not yet recovered her senses.

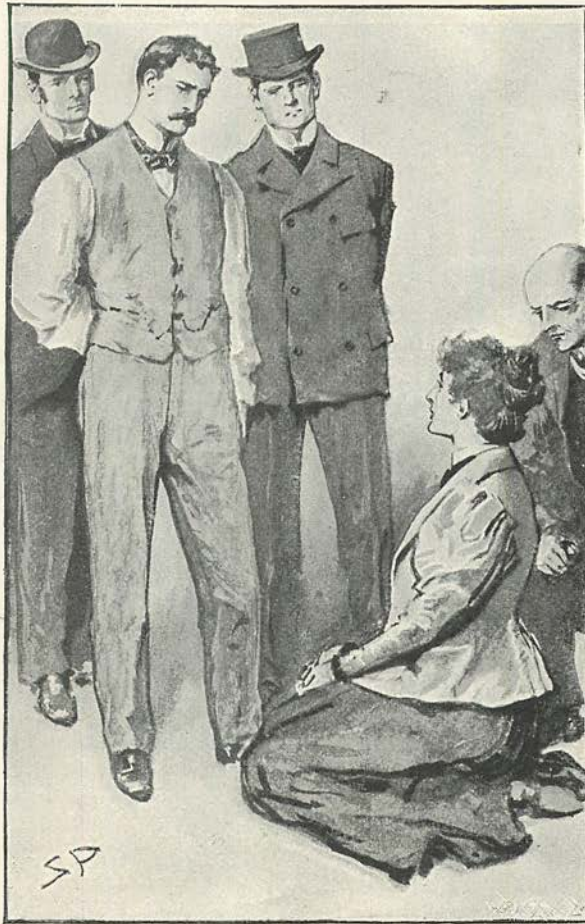
"But she is not!" she answered, in a passionate voice. "Take the old woman."

Ford turned to one of his men.

"Fetch her in," he said.

"I have had a good search for her already," said Tyler, "and could not find her in any of the lower regions."

He spoke in a whisper, and I do not think



"HAVE YOU GOT HER?" SHE ASKED.

understanding shone in the depths of her eyes, and she sat up.

"Have you got her?" she asked, gazing wildly round.

"We have, Miss Beringer, but not alive," I answered. "Now tell us how it is you are here. Tell us what has happened, if you possibly can."

"But the old woman—Mme. Koluchy—have you got her?"

Miss Beringer heard him. She was lying back again with closed eyes. Ford's man rushed out of the room, to return in a few moments.

"I have been all over the house," he said, "and cannot find the woman high or low. She is not here—she must have gone out when Martin and I were away fetching the axe and crowbar. I remember now, we left the door open—we had no thought of anything else in our excitement."



Miss Beringer heard the words, and once again she roused herself. Now she sprang to her feet.

"I might have known it," she said. "Fools! all of you! How was it she escaped? Did not you recognise her?"

"But Mme. Koluchy is dead," I said. "Come and look for yourself, if you do not believe me. Here she lies in this very room. You scarcely know what you are saying just now, after your own awful experience; but at least Madame has not escaped. She can never harm anyone again—she has gone to her long account."

Miss Beringer uttered a hollow laugh.

"I am all right," she said. "It does not take me long to come back to my senses. Oh, what fools all you men are! Madame knew what she was about when she immured me in that living grave. Do you call *that* Mme. Koluchy? Come and look at her again."

In the dim light of the laboratory we went and bent over the dead woman. I looked earnestly into the face, and then raised my eyes. Beyond doubt, poor Miss Beringer's senses had given way. The woman on whom I gazed was Mme. Koluchy. Feature for feature was the same.

"I see you doubt me," said Miss Beringer. "Well, listen to my story."

She stood before us and began to speak eagerly. We all clustered round her. Never before had we listened to a tale of more daring and unparalleled atrocity.

"I told you, Mr. Head," she began, "that I had work which would keep me in town. So I had. From the time you went to Hastings yesterday I began to watch this house. I had all faith in the police officers you, Mr. Ford, had placed on duty, but I also felt certain that Madame, in her unbounded resources, would find a means to return. I knew that, if such were the case, it would need all a woman's keenest wit and intuition to foil her. She knew me as

well as I knew her. It is true that she feared no man in London, but I do believe she had a wholesome dread of Anna Beringer.

"Well, my watch began, and for the first hour or so nothing occurred, but as soon as it was dark I saw the old caretaker, who showed you over the house on the first occasion, come out by the area door. I immediately followed her. She went straight to a shop in the Marylebone High Street—a small grocer's. She remained there for nearly half an hour. When she came out she was carrying a bag, quite a small one, which apparently contained some provisions. I followed her again, watching her closely, as I did so. Something about her walk first attracted my attention. The man on duty passed us as we went down Welbeck Street. I quickened my steps, and was in reality only two or three feet behind the woman whom I now strongly suspected to be Mme. Koluchy herself.

"Just when we reached the open gate of



"SHE TURNED QUICK AS LIGHTNING UPON ME."



the area, and as I was about to lay my hand on her shoulder, she turned quick as lightning upon me, and dashed into my face a liquid which must have been a solution of the strongest ammonia. The effect was instantaneous. I fell back gasping for breath, and unable to utter a sound. She well knew what the effect of the ammonia would be, causing a sudden paralysis of the glottis, which would prevent my uttering a word for a couple of moments. Before I could recover myself, she had flung her arm around me, had dragged me down the area steps and into the house. The moment we got within she slipped a pair of handcuffs on my wrists and also gagged me. I was so paralyzed by the effect of the ammonia that I did not attempt to make the smallest struggle until too late. When she had gagged and bound me, she dragged me down a passage and into this laboratory where we are now standing. She then laid me on the floor and tied me down securely. When she had done this, she looked down at me and smiled a smile of devilish cruelty.

"'Yes, Miss Beringer,' she said, 'you are a smart woman, the smartest with one exception in all London. You are interested in me—I am about to gratify that interest.'

"She left me for a few moments, and presently returned dragging something heavy after her. Horror of horrors, it was a woman's dead body! I could scarcely believe the evidence of my own senses. She laid the body on the floor, and began to dress it in some of her clothes. Having done this, and having arranged it in the attitude of one who might have suddenly fallen and died, she came up to me again.

"'Two years ago,' she said, speaking slowly, and bending her face to within about a foot of mine, 'there lived a woman in Naples who was in every respect my double. She was like me in each feature, in height, proportion, even to the expression of the face. She was a peasant woman, but so strong was her resemblance to me, that twice the Neapolitan police arrested her, believing her to be me. They, of course, discovered their mistake, and she quickly recovered her liberty. The woman died, and though to all appearance she was buried, it was but a mock funeral. For I had been watching her, and I felt that *in extremis* she would be of the utmost use to me. I offered the woman's husband a large sum for her body. It was conveyed to my house

in Naples, no matter how. The husband received his money, but in order that no tales might arise he was quickly afterwards put out of the way by one of my confederates. I kept the body at a very low temperature, and when I came to England in my own yacht, brought it with me. Since then it has remained in a frozen chamber beneath the floor of the inner laboratory, thus retaining its likeness, as under such circumstances it would perpetually.

"'The time has come when I must use my double in order to effect my own escape. The most vindictive tribunal in the world will pause at the edge of the grave. My enemies will suppose that I am dead, and I shall escape from their power, for the likeness to me is so perfect, that detection cannot be made until the autopsy. By then I shall be well out of the country, for the men who are on watch for me will have withdrawn the moment the news of my suicide is known. I mean to put a hypodermic syringe and a bottle of strong poison near the body of the woman. Thus all will be complete. This is my last trump card.

"'And now, Miss Beringer,' she added, with a strange laugh, which I hear even now echoing in my ears, 'for your part in this ghastly game. In order to insure your silence I mean to consign you to the frozen chamber from which I have just taken this woman. Gagged and bound in that place your tortures will not last long, for death will soon release you from them. But know that you can never again mingle with your fellow-men. Know also that you made a mistake when you pitted your strength against mine, for mine is the stronger. Come!'

"She raised me as if I were an infant, and lifted me into the inner room. I noticed that one of the flagstones was up—the gag prevented my speaking, the thongs which bound me prevented my struggling. Madame thrust me into the frozen chamber and sealed the stone above me. There I have remained for the last fifteen hours. What I have endured is beyond description. At last I fancied I heard footsteps overhead. I made one frantic struggle, and managed to remove the gag from my lips. The moment I did so I shouted wildly. Thank God, you heard me in time."

Miss Beringer's words fell on our ears like the strokes of a hammer. We were far too stunned to reply. Madame had been in our very grasp, under our hands, and once more she had eluded us.