

woman with his elbow), "to made us engug in our old age."

"We may as well then," responded the house keeper, drawing a long breath, "just sweep off what's here now."

Then there followed a ransacking of different drawers in Captain Sinclair's secretary, a rattling of silver and sovereigns, and the rustle of notes, with occasional remarks and exclamations. During all the preceding conference, Ruth remained perfectly motionless, overwhelmed at this marvellous revelation of villainy, and so absorbed in the thought of the danger hanging over Captain Sinclair's head, that she had not yet even realised what her own position might be, if she were suddenly discovered by the two conspirators. It was only as they were closing the secretary, and evidently preparing to decamp, that this startling thought rushed upon her. She had, now and again, cast a glance upon them as they stood with their backs to her both at the fireplace and secretary; but except as she did so, she instinctively kept eyes close shut, as if in sleep; while her very breathing seemed stifled from the attention that she was constrained to give to every syllable they spoke. Now one silent, earnest prayer for safety rose from her throbbing heart, as she felt what she might expect if they found her, with their horrible secret disclosed. Already the butler and housekeeper had reached the door; Mrs. Montserrat had her hand upon the lock, and was still saying something to Marks, but either in so much lower a key, or Ruth's extreme agitation as the moment of peril was passing, deadened her hearing. Whatever it was she did not catch it until the words:—"Recevez, recevez; give me the key," when the housekeeper returned quickly across the room. She had not advanced many steps, when, by her stopping suddenly, dropped the key from her hand, and ejaculating in a trembling whisper: "Mon Dieu!" Ruth felt, for she dared not open her eyes, that the dread discovery was made. A dead silence, in which seconds seemed expanded into hours, ensued. At last, Marks, while his teeth chattered in the extreme of alarm, asked:—"What is it! For God's sake, what ails you!"

There was no reply; but the tall figure moved swiftly to the sofa, and Ruth felt the panting breath of her enemy, and knew that the terrible eyes were glaring upon her like those of a beast at bay. Marks stole trembling to her side. "Mon Dieu, la gouvernante!" was the quivering ejaculation.

"Is she asleep!" inquired the other, and his ash lips could scarcely form the words, so great was his fear.

"Asleep or awake, it matters not; whatever brought her here, she sleeps her last to-night," and the voice that sealed her doom sounded in the ears of the unfortunate listener more like the hiss of a serpent than a human utterance. "Give me that," and she stretched out her hand for the pistol that Marks still held.

"Are you mad, woman! A shot in the house at this hour of the night!"

"True—true; you're right. Stay, I know what will do," and with the same swift, noiseless motion, so habitual to her, she passed to the sideboard, at the other end of the long apartment followed by

Marks. Ruth cast one despairing glance towards the door, but saw that escape was hopeless in that quarter, as the murderers were directly between her and it. Mrs. Montserrat softly opened a drawer in the sideboard, and, after a brief search, took out a long sharp-pointed steel kept there, and used for sharpening knives. "Listen to me now," she said in a fierce, commanding whisper, turning to Marks:—"When I give you the signal, do you instantly gag her with this—and she handed him a handkerchief—and seize her hand at the same time; I'll manage the rest."

"Oh, but stop a moment," remonstrated Marks; "let us not have more bloodshed than we need. God bless me, 'tis horrible; may she be asleep!"

"How can we tell? Remember, she may know enough by this time to hang us both. See, too, man," she continued; "better to have her out of the way entirely. If we sink her body to-night in the lake, we'll be far off before it comes u, again, and they'll think she made off. Besides, I have more reasons than one for wishing her off my road."

"I tell you, Marguerite, we had best let her live, if she's asleep; it's an awful thing to bring so much blood upon one's self."

"Do you want, you fool, to have the rope round your neck?" answered the woman, with irritation. "Besides, I'm not asking you to do the job; I'll do it myself."

"Well, just try first if she's asleep, can't you," returned the man; and he drew her over towards the sofa again. Every sentence spoken, though hardly above the breath, was distinctly audible to the terrified listener. She lay hopeless, passive, an almost unbreathing form; an icy horror seemed to pervade her whole frame; with one despairing effort at self-preservation, she remained under the semblance of the deepest sleep, and that was all that she could do; she felt it to be her one sole chance.—They both bent over the all but inanimate figure, watching for the quivering of an eyelid, or a flush upon the pale cheek, that might indicate the consciousness of their presence. "Feel her pulse," whispered Marks. Most fortunately, she heard him, otherwise, no doubt, a violent start would have betrayed her, when the long, cold snake-like fingers crept up her hand, and pressed upon the wrist; over its beating poor Ruth could have exercised no control; and she imputed it only under Providence, to the still clam of despair, that a wild fluttering there did not at once disclose that her sleep was feigned.

"She certainly is asleep," muttered Mrs. Montserrat.

"Then come here a moment," earnestly re-joined Marks; and the two slowly retired, putting out the candle, as it seemed to Ruth; and for a considerable time she heard the indistinct murmur at the door, when the sound of its gently closing reached her relieved ear, and she concluded that she was alone and in darkness. Yet still she lay quiet, while now a cold clammy perspiration broke out at every pore; and the lifting of the pressure of the last hour brought back so tumultuous a throbbing to her heart, that it became well nigh insupportable. She was just

about to rise from her recumbent position, when again the door opened, and though there was no light, there was the rustle of a tread on the carpet, and the sound of a hand feeling for something on the floor. It was Mrs. Montserrat, seeking for the dropped key. In a few minutes, her search seemed successful; she stood immovable for a brief period, as if to satisfy herself that the sleeper had not awakened; and then went out as silently as she had entered. A considerable time elapsed before the poor creature, who had been subjected to so fearful an ordeal, dared to move either hand or foot. Her excited imaginations conjured up a thousand terrific phantoms in the silence and the darkness of that room. Again and again she fancied that she could detect Mrs. Montserrat's stealthy step returning, or feel her hot breath; or she was convinced she caught the low whisper renewed beside the door; at last, raising herself into a sitting posture, and peering into the dense gloom, she slipped off the sofa, and groped her way to the fireplace. There was not now a single spark in the grate, so she searched in the usual place for the matches, and lit the candle; it was ten minutes to three by the timepiece before her. Glancing once more with a shudder round the room, she went out into the hall, crouching down like a hunted thing, that would flee anywhere for shelter. "I must," she thought, "make my way back to my own room; but I wish I was safe up those stairs." As rapidly as she could, she hurried on, and with difficulty suppressed the scream that rushed to her lips, as her own elongated shadow fell upon the wall before her at a turn of the stairs. After a careful survey of both her own apartments, she locked the outer door, and leaving the candle alight, for she could stay no more in the dark, she threw herself again upon her bed, to try and think over the awful past two hours, and consider what course she could take to provide for Captain Sinclair's safety. A thousand different thoughts and plans whirled through her brain, but one determination was ultimately fixed upon; to see Mrs. Sinclair, at all hazards, before leaving the house, and to tell her exactly what she had heard; and if this failed in making the necessary impression—if she were incredulous to so astounding a tale, as with her prejudices and impressions, she very possibly might be—then, to make her way direct to the captain himself, and put him on his guard. Somewhat calmed when she had thus settled upon a definite course, and retaining no single concern for herself or her distracted affairs, she lay on her side, with her eyes fixed upon the window, looking out into the darkness, and waiting until it was time for her to get up, to see Mrs. Sinclair, and then to leave that dreadful house for ever.

CHAPTER VIII.

Ruth lay in a dreamy trance of thought but not asleep, when a knock aroused her. It was a servant, who called out that it was time to get up, for that the man with the ear would be round at the door immediately. She found it no easy task to complete her toilet that morning; pins dropped from her cold and trembling fingers, and in her confusion, she could find nothing she wanted. The unsnuffed candle had nearly burned to the socket, and gave