

saw her deck swarming with villainous forms, and among them he recognised that of the tramp, whom he had so recently repulsed from his house. He was sufficiently awake to know that the expected storm was passing in its fury, and sufficiently asleep to fit its tumultuous sounds into the fanciful scheme of his dream.

The lightning would not have awakened him, but he somehow became conscious of the presence of a steady light. He opened his eyes and saw three men at his side. One held a pistol to his head and told him that if he raised a hand he would blow his brains out.

The men were masked and understood their brutal business; and Nicholas readily comprehended the fact that he was in their power. It was useless to call, for no one could help him. It was vain to struggle, for he was not a match for them.

"Men, you will have your way, I suppose," said Nicholas, "and all I ask of you is that you will not disturb the lady. She cannot harm you, for she is feeble and old. I suppose you have all had a mother, and you must owe something to her memory."

The return for the speech was a harsh slap upon the mouth, and an order to turn in his bed, that his hands might be tied behind him. They then lashed his hands and his feet together, gagged him, and leaving a man to watch him, searched his pockets and went off down-stairs.

"I told you I'd have it out of you," said the man huskily, who stood at his side. "You are a smart boy, you are, but we are too many for you this time."

Nicholas would have been at no loss to recognise his keeper, even if he had not betrayed himself in his language. He could have sworn to the brutal, husky voice, whatever words it might have uttered.

Between the explosions of profane abuse with which the villain poured forth his revengeful spleen, Nicholas lay helplessly, and heard the confederates going from room to room, opening doors and drawers, and talking in low tones, and knew that the house and all its treasures were in their hands. They could murder him and burn the dwelling that covered him. They could and would carry away all that their greedy hands could bear, and do it in perfect safety at their leisure.

His confinement became agony at last, and then he heard a low whistle at the foot of the staircase.

"The game's played," said the husky voice at his side. "You've been a nice boy. Pleasant dreams to you, and a breakfast without silver. Bye-bye."

Nicholas heard the man descend the stairs, then the clink of metal as the robbers shouldered their burdens, and, at last, their heavy tramp upon the ground as they moved off.

There were other ears that heard it all, and in a moment, Mrs. Flem-