

"Oh, you won't be driven to that," he laughed. "When you came here I said I would protect you from insult. I caught hold of your shoulder just now. That was an insult, and I ask your pardon for it. It is the last you shall receive from me. I love you—well, you can see that, can't you?"

"You have a strange way of showing it," she replied.

"Not like the Englishman, eh? No, thank Heaven, I can't love in that cold-blooded way, though I'm half-English myself. He's been humming and hawing for three weeks whether he'll die or live happily with you for his wife. I shouldn't have hesitated for three minutes—not for three seconds. I should have thought the whole world well lost for love."

"That is very likely," she answered, sarcastically. She no longer had any fear of him. He had said that he would offer her no further insults, and she believed him. That had been all she had feared. She felt that she was more than a match for him with words.

"I love you," he continued, passionately. "I shall offer you no insult; but, for all that, you shall be my wife. You shall never marry that man. He isn't worthy of you. You ought to be a queen—the queen of the world. You were meant for something better than to be the wife of a white-faced scholar."

"I am quite content," she replied; "and now, Senor Smith, don't you think that you had better see Mr. Lowick?"

"The man who has come to buy his life from me? Yes, of course I will see him," and as he spoke he looked at her in a way that made her shudder. She had read what was in his mind.

"You have given your word," she said, nervously. "If Mr. Lowick gives up his secret, you will give us both safe passage home again?"

"Yes," he replied, looking her steadily in the face. "If Mr. Lowick gives up his secret."

"He has come here to do so."
"He has come here to give me the names of certain metals. It will be some time before we can prove whether he has tried to make a fool of me or not."

Joan Endermine felt his fierce eyes upon her, and she knew that this was a moment in which her lover's fate was trembling in the balance. If this man suspected that Lowick was going to deceive him, if her face betrayed the plan of deceit, the whole game was lost. Senor Smith would probably shoot his prisoner—now his rival—without the slightest compunction.

"If Mr. Lowick gives up his secret," the Spaniard repeated, "I will keep my word."

"Have I not told you he has come here to do so?"

"Most certainly—but how am I to know?"

"You will test the truth of his statement."

"Yes; but that will take a long time. Much may happen before I know the truth. I should like to know now. The test will take so long, and life is so very short."

"Do you mean that you will not accept his word?"

"Oh, yes, of course. Still—" The Spaniard shrugged his shoulders. Then he added: "I would rather take yours."

Joan Endermine was silent. She was being forced into a position from which it would be hard to extricate herself.

"If you were to guarantee that the particulars are correct," he continued, "I should feel quite satisfied."

"I can hardly do that, for I do not know them."

"But you know Mr. Lowick. You would be willing to go bail for his truthfulness?"

"Of course—if that were of any use."

"It would be of the greatest use to me. Are you willing to go bail for Mr. Lowick?"

"Yes, I have said so."

"Very well, then, you shall. You shall give yourself as a hostage."

"As a hostage? What do you mean?"

"If Mr. Lowick speaks the truth,



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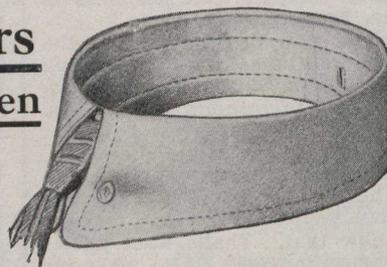
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