

your machine might yield up its secret to analysis. We have a scientist among us of European reputation—a man who has devoted five years of his life to the same object as your eminent father. He failed, and your father succeeded; but, as you may imagine, a man who was half-way on the road to success might possibly discover the secret of one who has reached the goal."

"I see," said Lowick, thoughtfully. "And Miss Endermine pointed this out to you?"

"Oh, no," laughed the Spaniard. "She has used a better argument than that. She has purchased your life."

"Purchased my life?" Lowick repeated, slowly. Then he rose to his feet, and, placing his manacled hands on the table, leant forward, his dark eyes glittering and his lips moving convulsively.

"Yes," continued the Spaniard. "Miss Endermine has promised to marry me."

CHAPTER XXI.

LOWICK stood motionless for a few moments. Then he sprang forward, sent the table crashing to the floor, stumbled over it, and fell to the ground.

Senor Smith, laughed. "Don't be foolish, Mr. Lowick," he said, as he watched the prisoner's efforts to rise. "You ought to be grateful to Miss Endermine. It is not every woman who would have done so much for the man she loves."

"You vile scoundrel!" cried Lowick. "I'd rather die than let her do such a thing!" He struggled fiercely to rise, but the chain on his feet had got entangled with the leg of the table, and he fell sprawling on the ground again.

"You'll have no choice," said the Spaniard. "Miss Endermine has decided what she wishes to do."

"O Heaven, if my hands were free!" shrieked Lowick, who was foaming at the mouth with rage and the exertion of his struggles.

"They would be no use if they were free, Mr. Lowick. I could fight you with one hand tied behind my back. Now, look here, you've got to look at this thing sensibly. I love Miss Endermine, and she won't come to any harm while she's under my protection. She's given up a good deal to save you, and, personally, I don't think you're worth it. I, on the other hand, have given up a good deal because I love her, and want her to be my wife. I could have wrung the secret out of you in time, and made myself master of the world. I've given all that up."

"Oh, if my hands were free!" moaned Lowick. "If you would give me five minutes."

"You shall have them," said the Spaniard, grimly. Then he went to the door and gave a shrill whistle. The firing-party came running up, emerging like white ghosts from the darkness.

"Take off the man's chains," he said. "He wants to fight me with fists, in the English fashion. You will stand by and see fair play. If he attempts to run, you will shoot him."

The men grinned with pleasurable anticipation, and set about their work. In five minutes they had removed the chains, and two of them held Lowick by the arms.

"He is hardly in fit condition for fighting," said Senor Smith, looking at his opponent contemptuously, "and I wouldn't like it to be said that I had thrashed a child or a woman. Fetch a piece of rope, Jules."

One of the men departed. Senor Smith rolled and lit a cigarette. "You had better clear the room, Virk," he said to another, "unless Mr. Lowick would like a larger ring in the open air."

"No, I'll fight in here," said Lowick, fiercely. "There's room enough for me to kill you."

"Very well. Virk, it is in here that Mr. Lowick will kill me. Move everything out, and draw the lamp up a few inches so that it will clear my head."

Virk, a short, broad-shouldered fellow, strong and thick-necked as a bull, began to move the few articles

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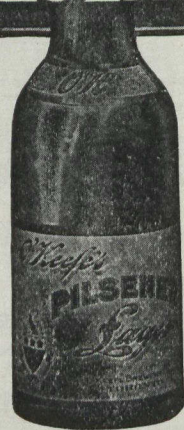
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