

obey the summons which it was madness to obey? Why have you forced me to keep my vow?"

"Because I wished to think myself a gentleman," I said, as coldly as I could. "Because I owed you a debt."

"What! for nothing more than that?" she went on, quickly, and with what seemed like growing rage. "Only to keep a wretched promise to a woman? You did not come, then, because *I* called you? If I had been some hideous old hag, you would have come just the same?"

"I hope so," I answered; and I hope, at least, that my answer was strictly true.

"Then—then it is fate that condemns you," she cried out, with a very passion of scorn. "Not even I can help a — fool. You say that Life is the only thing you—love. Bid it farewell. Seat yourself. My vow has been fate. . . . Mannoeh : my sword."

She was right: Life was very dear. I was clearly the victim of some incomprehensible blunder; but, no less clearly, to resist would be as vain as to argue or to plead. No—never had life seemed so well worth living. But there was still one thing left to be lived for, and that was to bethink me of my English birth, and to die with dignity. Even the gypsy bandit, to whose ghost I was being sacrificed, had done so much. I would have escaped if I could; but, as I had less chance of that than if I had been under the claws of a tigress, I composed myself, and made Flamenka my best bow. I wanted to leave her a last word, but none would come.