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He tore himself from her embraces,
and walked towards the door. As he
reached it he turned and looked at
the woman he loved. "Be brave, Joan
dear," he said, quietly. "Heaven will
watch over you and keep you from
harm. It is only a question of wait-
ing, after all. I will wait for you, and
you must wait for me."

He left the room, and Joan Ender-
mine stared wildly at the closed door.
Then she staggered forward a pace
with outstretched arms, seemed to
stumble, and fell in a heap on the
floor.

CHAPTER XX.

"I'm getting a little tired of this,"
said Ralph Lowick. "Don't you
think you could untie my hands?"

"We have our orders," growled Ha-
gen, a big Englishman, with a red,
bloated face. "There's trouble here
if orders aren't obeyed."

"My hands and arms are numbed,"
Lowick continued. "It's not neces-
sary to torture a man like this be-
fore he dies."

"It won't be much longer, I reckon,"
said Hagen.

Lowick sighed and leant wearily
against the wall. At his feet, out of
reach, two lanterns were placed on
the ground. Their light fell on the
white wall, and the figure that leant
against it with uplifted arms. It fell,
too, on Hagen's red face, and his huge
body threw a long shadow on the
grass. In the distance it showed a
patch of white, that resolved itself
into a small group of men. They
were laughing and chattering to-
gether, and every now and then, as
they moved, there was a glint of steel.
It was the firing-party waiting for
the orders of Senor Smith.

Nearly half an hour had elapsed
since Ralph Lowick had been led out
to die. He felt certain that Smith
would not carry out his threat, and
that all this grim business of bound
hands, and lanterns, and men with
rifles was only an attempt to terror-
ize him into giving up his secret.
What use would a dead man be to
Senor Smith? The secret would then
be gone for ever. Of course, the whole
thing was only a particularly ugly
form of pantomime.

Yet, for all that, he was suffering
intensely from physical pain. His
manacled hands had been lashed to
the hook above his head, and stretch-
ed so high that the weight of his body
rested on them, unless he slightly
raised himself from the ground on
his toes. Perhaps this was the be-
ginning of long weeks of torture.
They were going to force him to
speak, and this was the first turn of
the screw.

But as the minutes passed he began
to wonder if there were not some oth-
er reason for this delay in the carry-
ing out of his sentence. It was pos-
sible that within that white house
Joan Endermine was pleading for his
life. He did not like to think of that.
Senor Smith was not the sort of man
to be moved by a woman's entreaties,
or by a woman's tears. The Spaniard
had made up his mind either to get
the secret or to kill the man who re-
fused to give it up. It was probable
that the present scene meant nothing
worse than physical pain. But the
Spaniard's purpose was unalterable.
Ralph Lowick knew that when death
came, it would not come so easily as
it comes from the muzzles of four
rifles at thirty paces.

"We are wasting our time," said
Hagen, returning from the place
where the other men were standing,
and taking long steps as if measur-
ing the distance. "His Excellency
does not as a rule take so long over
a business of this sort."

"I suppose not," said Lowick, faint-
ly. "Don't you think you might un-
fasten my hands?"

"Aye, and be put there in your
place till morning. I'm no taking any
of that, thank you."

He leant against the wall close to
Lowick, and rolling up a cigarette
placed it between his lips and lit it.
The flame of the match showed his
face plainly—a heavy dishonest face.

"I suppose you like your master?"
queried Lowick, in a low voice.

"Aye, we all do that. He's a man."

"I suppose none of you have ever
tried to take his place?" said Lowick,
after a long pause.

"Two have tried," he man answer-
ed, carelessly. "I wouldn't like to tell
you how they died."

Lowick laughed. Then he leant his
head towards the man. "I could put
you in his place," he whispered.

"He'd be more likely to put me in
yours," Hagen replied, with a grin.

"I could put anyone in his place,"
Lowick continued, "if I were free, and
could get to the machine he has
stolen from me."

The man spat on the ground. "That
would be yourself most likely," he
said, after a pause. "Don't you go
talking to me like that, or I'll make it
unpleasant for you."

"It could hardly be more unpleas-
ant than it is, my friend. You see, a
man who has been condemned to
death doesn't mind what he says."

"Well, I needn't listen to you," Ha-
gen answered, and he walked slowly
away from the wall and rejoined the
other men.

Lowick groaned. The pain in his
arms was becoming almost unbear-
able. "The fellow's a coward," he
thought. "He hates his master like
poison. I saw that much in his face.
But he is a coward, and they are
harder to bribe than brave men."

Two minutes later Hagen returned,
and leant once more against the wall.
"I don't think it's fair on you or us,"
he grumbled. Then he kicked a flat
piece of wood towards Lowick.
"You'd be more comfortable if you
stood on that," he said.

"Thank you," Lowick replied. "I'm
glad to see you're still able to do a
man a good turn."

"I know what it feels like," Hagen
answered, fiercely. "I had thirty
hours of it once."

"The sort of thing one doesn't for-
get, eh?"

"The sort of thing one has to for-
get unless one wants to go through
it again."

For a minute there was silence.
Then Hagen moved away from the
wall, and stood facing Lowick. His
huge bulk rose between the prisoner
and the firing party like a wall.

"You were talking about the ma-
chine," the man whispered. "I'd like
to be able to use it."

"Very likely, my friend. It is a most
cunning toy."

"The master is the only one that
knows how to use it," Hagen con-
tinued. "At least, that's what they
tell us."

"That's a pity," said Lowick, "for
if anything happened to him you fel-
lows would lose a good deal."

"That's so."

"I could tell you," Lowick continued,
after a pause, "and I'd do it if—"

"Now then, Hagen!" came a sharp
voice. "What's all this?"

Lowick turned and saw the Span-
iard coming towards them. He look-
ed gigantic in the dim light of the
lamps. Hagen stood on one side and
saluted.

"Talking to the prisoner, eh?"
queried Smith. "Well, you know my
orders. I've half a mind to put you
there in his place."

"I was only guarding him, your
Excellency."

"Exchanging experiences, eh?"
sneered the Spaniard. "Well, that
must be interesting. I think, Hagen,
I'll give you a chance of refreshing
your memory."

He beckoned to the firing party,
and told them to release Lowick and
tie up Hagen in the prisoner's place.

"You look pretty there," he said,
when the men had done their work.
"You show up better than Mr. Lowick.
Your red face against the white wall
is quite picturesque."

Then Smith turned to the men.
"Take the prisoner back to his hut,"
he said, quietly, "and remain there
till I come."

Lowick was led away and thrust
back into his prison. He seated him-
self on a chair, and placing his arms
on the table rested his head between
them. He was aching in every limb,
and the blood, slowly returning to his
numbed hands, was causing him in-
tense agony.



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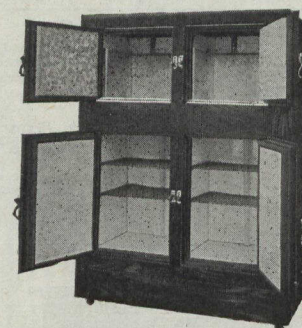
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