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Livenza opening the door and closing it again the instant we had passed.

"A single sound will cost you your life," whispered Corpola, fiercely into my ear, giving an additional pressure of the pistol-barrel by way of emphasis.

But he did not succeed in scaring me to the extent he hoped. The circumstances were now as much in my favour as I could expect to have them. It was not a pleasant experience to stand between two desperate fanatics in a dark room with their pistols pressed close to my head ; but it was obvious that I had only to jerk my head out of the touch of the pistols to make it exceedingly difficult for my guards to regain their advantage.

Despite my awkward plight I was hopeful now, for both were positively trembling with excitement.

"What is the meaning of all this?" I whispered ; designing merely to get them off their guard. "That was a woman's voice."

"Silence !" said Corpola, in a fierce whisper.

"Very well," I answered, with a big shrug of my shoulders.

This action was designedly intended to embarrass the two men, and for half a second the pressure of the pistol-barrels was relaxed ; but that half-second was sufficient for me. I slipped my head back from between the pistols, and at the same moment caught the two men from behind and thrust them against each other ; then turning on Valera, the weaker of the two, I gripped his revolver in my left hand, caught his throat with the other, and dragged him across the room, scattering chairs and tables and bric-a-brac in my course, and having wrested his weapon from him, flung him away