

"Now, my friend," I said pleasantly, as I turned his wild thrusts aside, "I am going to amuse myself. You have had your jest and enjoyed it, now I shall have mine. I shall not kill you—what good would that do me?—but if I do not make you cut a poor figure this day, then let me never besiege a fort or sack a town again! You are a very poor swordsman, and I think that even were my eyes blindfolded I could parry your thrusts without danger. Do your best, for with this sword of mine—with my needle, if you please!—I intend to instruct you how dangerous a matter was your pretty jibe. Now, gentlemen, I pray your attention, for the play begins!"

With that I sent him backward, stumbling and panting, wildly defending himself from my attacks; and I followed him, driving him onward relentlessly, and executing a series of thrusts at his fat legs which made him squeal like a frightened pig. Straight across the court I drove him, and through the gateway into the palace loggia; and close on our heels came the soldiers and pages and lackeys, who, beside themselves with excitement now, gave vent to wild outbursts of laughter and cheering, and fairly danced for glee as the battle went on.

The great loggia was a fair sunny place, the brightest spot in all the palace. Flowers lay thickly scattered over the pavement, which was built of Verona marble, with alternating blocks of close-grained cream-color and rich mottled red, forming a