

of my own free companions, each wearing across his left shoulder the white scarf, embroidered in silver, which was the badge of the White Company. They were dare-devil rogues, fellows from England and France and Spain and all the duchies of Italy, men who would not have feared to jest at the expense of a king, or, what would have been held worse by most, at the Pope himself; but I wasted no time in scanning their faces for signs of guilt, being well aware that, indifferent as they were to the great of the earth, they one and all entertained a dread of me that kept their tongues civil in my presence, if not always in my absence. They had heard the taunt even as I had, and were elbowing a way to the front of the throng that they might have a clear view of the turmcil which, they plainly believed, was sure to follow.

Not far from the threshold where I had halted stood a group of different metal from the other occupants of the court—a half-dozen of the Prince of Verona's own friends and followers, young fops with splendid raiment and empty heads, any of them likely enough to have attempted a jest at the expense of me, whom they did not love. In the centre of the circle I saw Ranucio della Torre, Prince Antonio's favorite. Though he was my very bitter enemy and tireless in his efforts to work me harm, I had never felt any wonder that he was so beloved by his royal master, for he was a shrewd man and a brave one, and gifted with a dark beauty of face