

"Bid your horse-boys be silent when I speak," he cried. "Ah, Sir John Hawkwood, you may think to rule tavern loiterers and thieves and bullies, such as this famous Company of yours, with black looks and wild words, but you need not hope to awe the nobles of Verona. Yes, we know you, braggart, drunkard and cutthroat that you are—but never dream you can frighten me, Sir Ruffian!"

He stopped, partly from exhaustion and partly in startled horror; for on his last word I had seized my sword-hilt and pulled the weapon out, flashing it under his eyes. For a moment he stared at me in blank amazement, while the surrounding circle of his friends gave back a trifle, and O'Meara uttered an exclamation of blissful content. "Del Mayno," I said with brutal directness, "you are an old fool, and badly in want of a lesson. You have called me John of the Needle. Do you not know that a needle is a very sharp thing, not one with which to jest? Then you shall learn it now. This blue blade in my hand is my needle, and I am going to give you some experience of its powers. Why do you stand there staring at me like any imbecile? Get your sword out, unless you desire that I should spit you while you wait!" And I made a pass within an inch of his nose.

I had fancied he would quibble at so far lowering his dignity as to meet me sword in hand—but I had forgotten the power of bare steel. After all, it is no very pleasant experience to have a blade flashed