

laughter to see the desperate efforts and wild protruding eyes of my pupil. Flesh and blood could not resist the absurd scene; the loggia was now one great roar of mirth, and even those in the gallery held their sides and wiped their eyes.

"Sir John!" the Prince screamed, in a rage. "Do you hear me? Put up your sword on the instant! Cease your horse-play and let him go!"

This time I was ready to obey him, for I saw that my victim could bear no more. "Once again, one final effort," I cried, and swung my sword in a hissing circle straight at the feet of Del Mayno, who, with a wild cry and a convulsive spring, leapt high into the air and just cleared the blow. "Well done, my friend. Now rest and get your breath, and take warning by this lesson that needles are too sharp to be spoken of in jest—they have the power to prick, you see." Still roaring with laughter, I thrust my sword into its scabbard. "Let Della Torre and his friends pass in now, O'Meara. The play is ended," I called to the Irishman. And then I stood waiting, unable to guess what might be the result of my mad whim, but tolerably certain that the next half-hour would prove a stirring one for me.