

by instinct and at once, the moment that O'Meara's words had left his mouth.

Striding across the space that separated me from Del Mayno, I halted before him. The crowd gasped in delighted anticipation, and surged forward to see. O'Meara followed me so closely that his shoulder almost touched mine—the rogue! I knew well enough that he was hoping some turn of the business would give him a chance at a quarrel. The group of courtiers, their mocking laughter still on their lips, stared at me haughtily, and Della Torre scowled as if incensed at my daring in approaching him. As for Del Mayno, he set his head back and roared noisily with mirth. Plainly he thought himself quite safe by virtue of his rank, and was inclined to enjoy his jest to the full.

For some reason all this merriment suffered a slight check as I paused and looked steadily about the circle. During the moment which I spent in a deliberate survey, the laughing faces sobered not a little, and unless I am mistaken some of those present called to mind various tales that had reached their ears of my summary methods of dealing with those who offended me. When the pause had grown strained I spoke. "My lord," I said to Del Mayno, "you said *Giovanni della Guglia*, if I am not wrong. The jest is somewhat thread-bare by now, it appears to me; none but dull wits continue to harp on a jibe that has grown old by use. Moreover, at its newest this sobriquet was never particularly to my