

"Your mother is wrong."

"Indeed!"

"So are you."

She forced a frown, "You are becoming perfectly horrid."

"No, I have a great surprise for you."

"It's taking a long time to spring it;" she was apparently annoyed, but a teasing smile dawned about the corner of her lips and her eyes trembled merrily.

"You may address me as Sir Michael O'Connor," he said gravely, "I was knighted last evening."

"But, Mike!" she gasped, "that is impossible."

"No, dear, not impossible. Improbable, I'll admit, but true. I was knighted by King James last night....." He smiled, about to go into details when a dainty figure, in the red uniform of the English horse burst or rather danced in a high state of petty anger, into the room.

"Rebel," he cried, pointing a shaking bejewelled finger accusingly at the young Irishman. "I come to surprise happily my aunt and cousin and find you, a rebel, in their midst "I—I—" He grew inarticulate with fury, or jealousy, maybe.

He drew his sword and with a shout, "Have at thee, knave!" rushed across the room.

Nora sprang to one side and her mother, choosing this, of all times, to re-enter, fainted away. As for Sir Mike, he smiled at the ludicrous figure rushing at him, kicked a table out of the way and leisurely unsheathed his rapier.

But the moment the two foils crossed, Sir Leslie Cruikshank became a different man. Although really a coward at heart he was an expert fencer and was confident of an easy victory.* Very few young Irishmen could have stood a minute before him, but old Sir John O'Connor had been the finest swordsman in all Ireland in his day and his son had been well trained by him. After a minute or so of gentle fencing the swords began to flash in earnest. Sir Leslie feinted only to be parried by a swift upstroke in carte and saved himself by a nimble backward skip. He was more cautious after that and the fight became quite settled. If a duel of this type is not finished in the first minute or two, once the fencers settle down it may last for a very long time—till one tires. Sir Michael, now, was not the disdainful youth who had so carelessly taken his stand. He realized that he was fighting for his life with the best swordsman he had ever met. Beads of sweat collected on Cruikshank's brow. Already his wine-ruined body was tiring and he realized that if he won the fight he must win it within five minutes. He doubled and re-doubled the pace. Nora could not distinguish the flashing rapiers.

Parry! Thurst! Thrust! Parry! Sir Leslie's sword flashed high, leaving an apparently wide opening. O'Connor's rapier darted in, in an amateur's thrust. A rapid side-step, a quick cut and thrust, a reel to one side and the blood spurted from O'Connor's left arm. He had swerved just in time to