

# THE FENCING-MASTER

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## CHAPTER I.

"Halt!"

The clang of a dragging sabre suddenly ceased.

"Attention!"

The lone cavalry officer, constituting the entire army, stood suddenly, rigid, suppressed merriment beaming in his eyes.

"Right about face!"

The scraping of the ponderous sabre was again heard as the order was dutifully obeyed.

"And now, sir, m-a-r-c-h!"

The final command, in the sweet girlish voice, was given with amusing gusto and command.

Instead of the order this time, however, being obeyed, the gorgeously clad young officer stood as immovable as Ajax.

For a few moments the beautiful young commandant gazed in silent mock amazement at the army's disobedience to military orders, and then drawing up her petite, graceful figure to its utmost cubit (fully five feet two) she exclaimed, with sternness intended to be tremendously withering: "Captain Gordon Belmont, of His Majesty's Lancers, obey the command of your superior officer—m-a-r-c-h!"

But the revolting army, with audacious temerity, still refused to budge; in fact it had the effrontery to smile audibly.

Rebellion such as this could naturally be endured no longer, and so, stepping up to the revolting officer, the general of the disobedient forces, with extreme gravity, and self-importance, unsheathed (but with tremendous difficulty) the heavy cavalry sabre at his side. Then, in a tone

intended to cut as sabre never before did, she exclaimed: "Mutiny! Rank mutiny in His Majesty's army! Leniency, sir, would now be criminal. I deprive you of your sword. Once more, Captain Belmont—M-A-R-C-H!"

With a desperate effort the graceful commander struggled to raise the ponderous sabre (so as to give proper and terrifying emphasis to her command) as she endeavored to point, in threatening way, down the broad corridor along which the revolting army was being bidden to march. The sabre, however, proved to be shamefully heavy; so that, after waving for a space, like a reed in the wind, its point suddenly came to the floor with a loud and humiliating ring.

And now the white teeth of the towering young officer were gleaming quite plainly through his smiling lips. To make the situation still more humiliating to the lovable commandant, the officer was looking down, with mock sorrow, at the heavy sabre, which the small hands still valiantly grasped; and he presently had the hypocrisy to innocently ask if the weapon was heavy.

Upon this the commandant did a most unwarrior-like thing: she abruptly turned, tossed back her head, with its masses of gleaming hair, as though really too indignant for further words.

The bewitching picture she made was really too much for the rebellious army, and occasioned it to do a thing utterly without precedent in the annals of mutiny. With a laugh of boyish merriment which echoed down the stately corridor, the officer looked in the most tender way at the offended commander and said: "There, Miss Dorothy, the mutinied army