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**The Lady of
the Mount**
by **FREDERIC S. ISNAM**
AUTHOR OF "THE STROLLER," "UNDER THE ROSE," ETC.
ILLUSTRATIONS BY **RAY WALTERS**
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CHAPTER I—Countess Elise, daughter of the Governor of the Mount, has chance encounter with a peasant boy.

CHAPTER II—The "Mount," a small rock-bound island, stood in a vast bay on the northwestern coast of France, and during the time of Louis XVI was a government stronghold. Develops that the peasant boy was the son of Seigneur Desaurac, nobleman.

CHAPTER III—Young Desaurac determines to secure an education and become a gentleman; sees the governor's daughter depart for Paris.

CHAPTER IV—Lady Elise returns after seven years' schooling, and entertains many nobles.

CHAPTER V—Her Ladyship dances with a strange fisherman, and a call to arms is made in an effort to capture a mysterious *Le Seigneur Noir*.

CHAPTER VI—The Black Seigneur escapes.

CHAPTER VII—Lady Elise is caught in the "Grand" tide.

CHAPTER VIII—Black Seigneur rescues, and takes Lady Elise to his retreat.

CHAPTER IX—Elise discovers that her savior was the boy with the fish.

CHAPTER X—Sanchez, the Seigneur's servant, is arrested and brought before the governor.

CHAPTER XI—Lady Elise has Sanchez set free.

CHAPTER XII—Elise is rescued from the sea, but, according to habit, preserved a shrewd silence; in the afternoon a small number of the crew landed to take on stores and ammunition—of which there was ever a plentiful supply at this base; that night, however, all, including their master, betook themselves to the Cockles.

CHAPTER XIII—The Black Seigneur, standing at the door, just beyond reach of the fierce driving rain, welcomed the Black Seigneur warmly; but the young man, one of whose arms seemed bound and useless, cut short his greeting; tossed brusquely aside his heavy cloak, and called for a room where he might sit in private with a companion. This person the landlord eyed askance; nevertheless, with a show of bluff heartiness, he led the way to a small chamber, somewhat apart, but overlooking the long low apartment, the general eating and drinking place of the establishment, now filled by the crew and a number of the islanders.

"Your captain has been hurt? How?" A strapping, handsome girl, clad in red and of assured mind, passing across the room, paused to address a man of prodigious girth, who drank with much gusto from a huge vessel at his elbow.

"Did not your father, Pierre Laroche, tell you?"

"He? No; all he thinks of is the money."

"Then must the captain speak for himself, Mistress Nanette."

"You are not very polite, Monsieur Gabaric," she returned, tossing her head; "but I suppose there is a reason; you have been beaten. In an encounter with the Governor's ships? Did you sink any of them? It would be good news for us islanders."

"You islanders!" derisively.

"Yes, islanders!" she answered defiantly. "But tell me, a number of you wear patches, which make you look very ugly. They were acquired—how?"

"In a little clerical argument!" growled the poet.

She glanced toward the secluded apartment; its occupants—the subject of their conversation, and a priest, a feeble-looking man of about seventy, whose delicate, sad face shone white and out-of-keeping in that adventurous company. "At any rate, the Black Seigneur hasn't lost his good looks!"

"Take care you don't lose your heart!"

"Bah!" Her strong bold eyes swept back. "Much good it would do me!"

"And for that reason—"

"Messieurs! the landlord's voice broke in upon them; "behold!" it seemed to say, as pushing through the company, he preceded a lanky lad who bore by his legs many plucked fowls and birds—woodcock, wild duck, chit pigeons—and made his way to the great open fireplace at one end of the room. There, bending over the glowing embers, the landlord deliberately stirred and spread them; then, reaching for a bar of steel, he selected a poulet from the hand of the lanky attendant and prepared to adjust it; but before doing so, prodded it with his finger, surveyed it critically, and held it up for admiring attention.

"Who says old Pierre Laroche doesn't know how to care for his friends? What think you of it, my masters?"

"Plump as the King's confessor," muttered the poet.

"Or your King himself!" said one of the islanders.

"On with the King! Skewer the King!" exclaimed a fierce voice.

"And then we'll eat him!" laughed the girl, showing her white teeth.

"Thoughtless children!" From his place at the table in the small room adjoining, the priest, attracted by the grim merriment of the islanders, looked down to regard them; the red fire, the red gown.

"Here, at least, will you find a safe asylum, Father," said his companion, the Black Seigneur, in an absent tone; "a little rough, perhaps, to suit your calling."

"The rougher, the more suitable—as I've often had occasion to learn since leaving Verranch."

"Since being driven from it, you mean?" shortly.

"Ah, those revolutionary documents—placed in my garden!"

"To make you appear—you, Father!—a sanguinary character!" But the other's laugh rang false.

"Alas, such wickedness! But I was too content; the rose-covered cottage"

Sanchez bent forward, his words disjointed; his eyes gleaming.

"But," the Governor added, "the criminal must be taught not to forget; then turned to his soldiers. "Beat me this fellow from the Mount!" he commanded.

"What!" The blood sprang to the dark face of the listener; he half started from his chair.

"And they did! A merry chase, down the streets, across the sands! I, an old soldier!" His voice choked. "Beaten like a dog!"

For some moments the young man stared at him; then again sank back; looked straight ahead. Without, the laughter and harsh voices of the islanders had become louder; within the little chamber, the only sound now was the hard, persistent ticking of the clock on the shelf.

"But how," at length Desaurac made a movement, "did he—"

"Learn!" violently. "The way I told you he would!"

"You mean—"

"That I was betrayed and you were—by the Lady Elise—"

"Impossible!" the Black Seigneur exclaimed with sudden violence.

"Because she has a pretty face!" sneered the other.

"Silence! Or—"

"That is it!" The servant's voice rose stridently. "Beaten at one end, threatened at the other!"

The arm the young man had reached out fell to his side. "Hush! You're mad; you don't know what you're saying!"

"And you did not know what you were doing! Oh, I dare say—I tell you now I little liked the task of taking her back; expecting some sort of treachery, and, when it came, was not surprised! Any more than, when they had brought me before the Governor, I saw her at the cloister—watching, hiding—"

"Hiding!"

"Behind the coping to listen when he, her father, was questioning me! And, when I looked up and caught her, she walked out—to show me I might as well confess!"

"She did that?"

"Then tried to cozen me into believing it was not through her," went on the man bitterly, as if speaking to himself. "But I know the lying blood—none better—and when she saw it was no use," he paused and looked up, the marks of the stripes on his face seeming suddenly to burn and grow livid, "she acknowledged it to my face! I won't deny. Those were her words! And when she left the place, she turned around to look back at me—and laugh—"

"You are not mistaken?"

"Perhaps," said the man, a venomous light in his obstinate eyes, "it was all a fancy; or—I am lying!"

Outside, the wind, blowing sharper, whistled about the eaves, beat at the window and shook the blinds angrily; far below, a steady monotone to those other sounds, could be heard the rush and breaking of the surf.



"No More, I Say!"

"Why did I cross myself that day on the island, when I saw her—behind you?" Sanchez's taciturnity, the reticence of years—suddenly burst into bonds. "Because she made me think of the former lady of the Mount—the Governor's wife—who betrayed the Seigneur, your father! I promised him to keep the secret—he would have it for the sake of the lady; but now—to you! Your father was stabbed at the foot of the Mount by the Governor!"

"Stabbed! By him!"

"It was given out," sourly, "by rogues—again to shield her!"

"But—"

"That same day he had a letter— from her. As evening fell he walked near the Mount—was followed by the Governor, who sprang, struck in the back and left him for dead! I found him and took him home. But before he recovered, it was reported my lady had died—"

"How?"

"I know not; a punishment, perhaps! She was always delicate—of liked to be considered such—a white-faced, pretty, smiling thing, whose beauty and treachery this other one, the daughter, inherits. It was the ghost of herself looking over your shoulder that day on the island, with the same bright, perfidious eyes—"

"Enough!" Angriest the Black Seigneur brought down his hand. "I will hear no more!"

"Because she has caught your fancy! Because you—"

"No more, I say! Think you I would not avenge your wrongs at once, were it possible? That I would not strike for you, on the instant? But now? My hands are tied. Another matter—of life, or death—presses first!"

Sanchez looked at him quickly; said no more; between them, the silence grew. The servant was the first to move; turning to the table, he began to eat; at first mechanically; afterwards faster, with the ravenous zest of one who has not tasted food for many hours. The other, for his part, showed no immediate desire to disturb that occupation; for some time waited; and it was not until the servant stopped, reached out his arm for a glass, to drink, that the young man again spoke.

"The palace? The plan of the Mount? Did you notice? Tell me something of it—how it is laid out—"

Sanchez swallowed; set down the glass hard. "Yes, yes! I saw much—a great deal!" he answered with eager zest. "Oh, I kept my eyes open, although I seemed not to, and was mindful of learning all I could!"

"Here!" From his pocket the young man took a note-book; pencil. "Set it down; everything! I know something, already, from the old monks—the rough diagrams in their books. You entered where? Take the pencil and—"

The minutes passed and still Sanchez traced; seemed almost to forget his injuries in his interest in the labor. Plan after plan was made; torn up; one finally remained in the hand of the Black Seigneur.

"You think—"

"Anxiously the servant watched his master's face; but the latter, straight, erect, with keen eyes fixed, did not answer.

"You think," again began the man when the ancient, this time, beating harshly the floor, interrupted.

"Eleven o'clock! High tide!" The Black Seigneur pushed back his chair and rose.

"Good!" Sanchez's alacrity indicated a quick comprehension of what the movement portended.

"You—had better remain here!" shortly.

"No!" said the servant with a harsh laugh. "Me?"

"Have you not had enough of my family—my services?" the young Seigneur demanded bitterly.

"Bah!" muttered the other. "The dog that's beaten springs at the chance to bite! You go to rescue your comrades. I—will go with you!"

"In which case, death—not vengeance—will most likely be your reward!"

"I care not!" stubbornly.

A moment the Black Seigneur regarded him; then made a gesture.

"Well, have your way!" He listened. "The wind is in the west."

"A little south of west," answered the man.

"A rough night for your boat to have crossed!"

"Oh, I was bound to come! And if you hadn't been here, I'd have gone on, on—till I found you—"

The hand of the young man touched the other's shoulder. "Come!" he said, and threw open the door.

"You are going in the storm?"

The Black Seigneur nodded shortly.

"It must be an important mission to take you to sea on such a night. Why don't you stay where it's warm and comfortable? Or," with a laugh, "at least until Monsieur Gabaric," indicating the corpulent figure entrenched behind a barricade of dishes and bottles on a small table near the fire, "has finished the little puppet play he is writing."

"It is finished!" As he spoke, the poet rose. "I had but written 'curtain' when you spoke. Your wine, fair Nanette, hath a rarely inspiring quality!"

"Oh, I care not for your compliments!" she returned. "Your captain, again studying the Black Seigneur with dark sedulous eyes, "has not found it so much to his liking! He has neither asked for more, nor drunk what he ordered; and now would venture out—"

Unmindful of her words the young man called to old Pierre.

"Well," she went on, throwing back her head, "if you lose your ship, come to me, and—I'll see you have another!"

Above in his chamber at the inn, not long thereafter, the priest, looking out of the window, saw a line of men file down the narrow stairs; embark in the small boats from the sheltered creek where they lay, and later, in the light of the moon, breaking from between scudding clouds and angry vapors, a ship that got under way—glided like a phantom craft from the heaven and set seaward through the foam.



The Governor Himself Appeared.

"Oh, my Lady!" Her companion, and former nurse, a woman about fifty years of age, ventured this mild expostulation.

"There, Marie! You can go!"

"Yes, your Ladyship—"

"One moment!" The slender figure turned. "This fastening—"

In an instant the woman was by her side.

"Have you heard anything more about the prisoners, Marie?" abruptly.

"Nothing—only Beppo said they are to be hanged day after tomorrow—when the pilgrimage is over."

"Day after tomorrow!" The brown eyes looked hard and bright; the small white teeth pressed her lip.

"And the man my father—the Governor had—whipped from the Mount—you have heard nothing more of him—where he has gone?"

"No, my Lady; he seems to have disappeared completely; fled this country, perhaps, for those islands where so many like him," half bitterly, "have gone before!"

The girl looked up in a preoccupied manner. "Poor Marie! Your only sister died there, didn't she?"

"Yes, my Lady; I never saw her after she left France with her husband and baby girl. He was an unpatriotic fellow—Pierre Laroche!"

"No doubt," said the Governor's daughter absently, as the other prepared to leave the room.

Alone, the girl remained for several moments motionless before the great Venetian mirror; then, mechanically, hardly looking at the reflection, the glass threw back at her, she finished her toilet. This task accomplished, still she stood with brows closely drawn; afar the flute-like voices of the choir-boys arose from different parts of the Mount, but she did not seem to hear them; made a sudden quick gesture and walked toward the door in the manner of one who has arrived at some resolution.

Passing down a corridor, she reached an arched opening whose massive door swung easily to her touch, and let herself out by a private way, which had once been the ancient abbot's way, to an isolated corner of a small secluded platform. From this point a stairway led up to a passage spanning a great gulf. Below and aside, where the red-tiled houses clung to the steep slope of the rock, fluttered many flags; yet the girl did not pause either to contemplate or admire. Only when her glance passed seaward and rested on the far-away ocean's rim of light, did she stop for an instant—mid-way on the bridge—then, compressing her lips, moved on the faster; down the incline on the other side, up winding stairs between giant columns, reaching, at length, that bright and grateful opening, the cloister. With an unvarying air of resolution she stepped forward; looked in; the place was empty—silent save for the tinkling of the tiny fountains in the center.

"Are you looking for some one, my Lady?"

The voice was that of Beppo, who was regarding her from an angle in the cloister walk.

"I am looking for his Excellency. I suppose he is—"

To be Continued

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