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The LADY OF the MOUNT by FREDERIC S. ISNAM AUTHOR OF "THE STROLLERS," "UNDER THE ROSE," ETC. ILLUSTRATIONS BY RAY WALTERS

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 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 Nols.

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—Seigneur and a priest at the "Cockles."

CHAPTER XIII—Sanchez tells Desaurac that Lady Elise betrayed him, but is not believed. The Seigneur plans to release the prisoners at the Mount.

CHAPTER XIV—Lady Elise pleads with her father to spare the lives of condemned prisoners.

CHAPTER XV—Disguised as a peasant, Lady Elise mingles with the people and hears some startling facts.

CHAPTER XVI—A mysterious Mountebank starts a riot and is arrested.

CHAPTER XVII—The Mountebank is locked up after making close observations of the citadel, and is afterwards summoned before the governor's daughter, commanded your presence.

CHAPTER XVIII. The Mountebank and My Lady. "The Governor's daughter!" Had the light been stronger they must have seen the start the mountebank gave. "Impossible!"

"Eh? What?" Surprised in turn, the officer gazed at him. "You dare—out with him!" To the soldiers. But in a moment had the mountebank recovered his old demeanor, and, without waiting for the troopers to obey the commandant's order, walked voluntarily toward the door and into the passage.

"Our supper! Our supper!" A number of the prisoners, crowding forward, began once more to call lustily, when again was the disk-studded woodwork swung unceremoniously to, cutting short the sound of their lamentations.

"Dogs! Malevolently the dwarf gazed back. "To want to gorge themselves on a holy day!"

"Pious Jacques!" murmured the commandant. "But I always said you made a model landlord!"

"When not interfered with!" grumbled the other. "At any rate he doesn't seem to appreciate his good fortune," with a glance at the mountebank.

"No," jeering. "A gallant cavalier to step blithely at a great lady's command! 'Your Ladyship overwhelms me!' bowing grotesquely. "'Your Ladyship's condescension!'"

"Why, then, need you take me?" interposed the mountebank quickly. "Can you not tell her ladyship I am not fit to appear in her presence—an uncouth clown?"

"Bah! I've already done that," answered the commandant. "But how came her ladyship to know of me—here?"

"How indeed?" "And what does she want of me?" "That," roughly, "you will find out!" and stepped down the hall, followed by the soldiers, mountebank and dwarf, the last of whom took leave of them at the door.

Clear was the night; the stars, like liquid drops about to fall, caressed with silvery rays the granite piles. In contrast to the noisome atmosphere of the prison, faint perfumes, borne from some flowery slope of the distant shore, swept languorously in and out the open aisles and passages of the Mount. In such an hour that upper region seemed to belong entirely to the sky; to partake of its wondrous stillness; to share its mysteries and its secrets. Like intruders, penetrating an enchanted spot, now they trod soft shadows; then, clangorous, beat beneath foot delicate faceworks of light.

"Here we are!" The officer stopped. At the same time upon a nearby balcony a nightingale began to sing, tentatively, as if trying the scope and quality of its voice. "You are to go in!" he announced abruptly. "Such a fine palace! I—I would rather not!" muttered the fellow, as they crossed an outer threshold and proceeded to mount some polished stairs. "Stubborn dolt. Now in you march," pausing before a door. "But, hark you! I and my men remain without. So, mind your behavior, or—" A look from the commandant completed the sentence.



"But My Livelihood!"

mitted himself to survey, or study, these details of refinement and luxury; the swift eager interest that had shone from the dark eyes gave way to an expression, lack-luster and stupid; his countenance once more resumed its blank, stolid aspect. As if unconscious of the anomalous figure he presented, mechanically had he seated himself; was gazing down, when through a doorway, opposite the one by which the commandant had left, a slender form appeared. Under the heavy, whitened lids a slight movement of the clown's eyes alone betrayed he was aware of that new presence. A moment the girl stood there, her glance resting on the grotesque, bent figure before her; then with a quizzical lift of the delicate brows she entered.

"You believe, no doubt, in making yourself at home?"

Crossing to the table, once more she stopped; her figure, sheathed in a gown of brocade of rose, gloved bright and distinct in contrast to the faint, vari-colored tints of ancient embroideries on the wall. Above, the light threw a shimmer on the deep-burnished gold of her hair; the sweeping lashes veiled the half-disdainful, half-amused look in her brown eyes.

"Or, perhaps, you are one of those who think the peasants will some day sit, while the lords and ladies stand?"

"I don't know," he managed to answer, but got up, only to appear more awkward.

"You do not seem to know very much, indeed!" she returned, her tone changing to one of cold severity. "Not enough, perhaps, to perceive the mischief you may cause! That play of yours, which I witnessed today—"

"You! Today? Your Ladyship was—"

"Yes," imperiously, "I was there! And heard and saw the effect it had on the people; how it stirred all their baser passions! But you, of course, could not know—or care, thinking only of the sou!—that, instead of teaching a lesson, the piece would only move them to anger, or resentment."

"I—your Ladyship—great lords have commended the play—"

"Great lords!" she began, but stopped; regarded her listener and shrugged her shoulders.

A few moments silence lasted, the few apparently not knowing what to say, or if he was expected to say anything, while, for her part, the girl no longer looked at him, but at the flowers, taking one, which she turned in her fingers.

"Your Ladyship would command me—"

"To give the play no more!" "But—" Expostulation shone from his look.

"In which event you shall be suffered to go free tomorrow."

"But my livelihood! What shall I do, if I am forbidden to earn—"

She gave him a colder look. "I have spoken to the commandant; told him what I had seen, and that I did not think you intended to make trouble. Your case will, therefore, not be reported to his Excellency. Only, with a warning flash, "if you are again caught giving the play, you must expect to receive your deserts."

"Of course! If your Ladyship commands!" dejectedly.

"I do! But, as an offset to the coppers you might otherwise receive, I will give you a sum of money sufficient to compensate you."

"Your Ladyship is so generous!" He made an uncouth gesture of gratitude and covetousness. "May I ask your Ladyship how much—"

"How much?" scornfully. "But I suppose—"

The words died away; her glance fell, lingered on the hand he had extended. Muscular, shapely, it seemed not adapted to the servile gesture; was most unlike the hand of clod or clown. Moreover, it was marked with a number of wounds, half-healed, which caught and held her look.

"Of course, I am so poor, your Ladyship—" he began, in yet more abject tone, but stopped, attracted in turn by the direction of her gaze; then, meeting it, quickly withdrew the hand and thrust it into his pocket. Not in time, however, to prevent a startled light, a swift gleam of recollection from springing into her eyes! The very movement itself—ironically enough!—was not without precedent.

"You!" She recollected from him, "The Black—"

eyes," he remarked quietly, but as he spoke glanced and moved a little toward the window.

My lady stood as if dazed. He, the Black Seigneur, there, in the palace! Mechanically she raised her hand to her breast; she was very pale. On the balcony the nightingale, grown confident, burst into a flood of variations; a thousand trills and full-throated notes filled the room.

"I understand now," at length she found voice, "why that fancy came to me below, when I was listening to the play on the platform. But why have you come—to the very Mount itself?" Her voice trembled a little. "You! On the beach the people tried to stop you—"

"You saw that, too?" "And you knew the play would make trouble! You wanted it to," quickly. "For what purpose? To get into the upper part of the Mount? To have them arrest—bring you here?" She looked at him with sudden terror. "My father! Was it to—"

A low, distinct rapping at the door she had entered, interrupted them. She started and looked fearfully around. At the same time the mountebank stepped back to the side of a great bronze in front of the balcony, where, standing in the shadow, he was screened.

"Elise!" a voice called out. The flower the girl had been holding fell to the floor.

"My—" she began, when the door opened and the Governor stood on the threshold.

CHAPTER XIX.

The Mountebank and the Governor. In his hand the Governor held a paper; his usually austere face wore a slightly propitiatory expression, while the eyes he turned upon her, as slowly he entered the room, suggested a respite of differences. Pausing, he toyed with the missive, turning it around and around in his fingers, as if something in his thoughts were revolving with it. Had he been more watchful of her, less bent on some matter uppermost in his mind, he could not have failed to mark the pallor of his face, or the agitation written there. As it was, his glance swept without studying.

"I hoped to find you here," he began complacently; "hoped that you had not yet retired."

She made some faint response, but her voice, despite herself, wavered. Whereupon his look sharpened; then almost immediately relaxed; con-

straint on her part could easily be accounted for; not many hours had elapsed since their last interview.

"Yes," he continued, "I have here to consider," indicating a paper he held, "a rather important matter." He waited a moment before adding: "A matter that concerns you!"

"That concerns me?" Her hands tightened. "Yes."

"Since it is important," she said hastily, "would it not—shall we not leave it until tomorrow? I—I am rather tired tonight, and—"

"What?" he returned in the same untrifling tone. "Would you postpone considering the command of the King?"

"Command!" she repeatedly nervous-ly. "Of the King?"

"Or request," which is the same." "But—" she began, and stopped; held by a sound, as of some one moving, near the window.

"Shall I read it, or—"

She had started to look behind her; but abruptly caught herself, and seemed about to frame some irrelevant response, when his voice went on: "The King desires to change the date set for your marriage with his kinsman, the Marquis de Beauvilliers."

"Change?" she echoed. "Yes; to hasten it." If the Governor had expected from her hostility, or perverseness, he was agreeably disappointed; the girl evinced neither pleasure nor disapproval; only stood



"He Had Intended No Mischief."

in the same attitude of expectancy, with head half turned.

"His Majesty's reasons for this step—"

"Can't we—can't we, at least, postpone considering them?"

Again he regarded her more closely. "What better time than the present?"

"But I don't want—"

"Elise!" A slight frown appeared on his brow. "His Majesty," once more looking at the paper, "hints at an important political appointment he desires to confer on the Marquis de Beauvilliers which would take him abroad; but whether as ambassador, or as governor in the colonies, his Majesty does not disclose. Obviously, however, the bestowing of the honor—a high one, no doubt!—depends on an early marriage, and a wife to grace the position. The letter," weighing it, "is a tentative one; the courteous precursor of a fuller communication when he has learned our—your—pleasure."

She did not at once express it; indeed, at the moment, seemed scarcely to have comprehended; her glance, which had swept furtively behind when he was studying the document, returned more uneasily to his, but not before he had caught the backward look.

"Well?" he said with a touch of asperity. "Well?" he repeated, when his gaze, following the direction hers had taken, paused.

Although well lighted in the center by a great Venetian candelabrum, the far ends of the spacious hall lay somewhat in obscurity; notably the space adorned with tropical plants and a life-size bronze before the entrance to the balcony. It was on this dim recess the Governor permitted his eye to rest; at first casually; then with a sudden appearance of interest.

"Eh?" he muttered, and before my lady could prevent him, if she had been mindful so to do, walked quickly forward; but as he advanced, a white figure stepped boldly out from behind that partial screen. With a sharp exclamation, which found a startled echo from the girl, the Governor stopped; stepped back as far as the table.

"What mummy is this?" His lips shaped the words uncertainly; his hand, reaching out with that first startled instinct of danger, touched the bell.

"Your Ladyship rang?" On the opposite side of the room was the door thrown suddenly open. The look of expectancy on the face of the commandant, who had so promptly ap-

peared, gave way to one of surprise; consternation. "His Excellency!" he muttered, and mechanically saluted.

Over the Governor's visage a faint trace of relief flitted; dryly he looked from the mountebank, now erect and motionless, to the girl; but the face was averted and his Excellency could not see the sudden whiteness of her cheek; again he regarded the officer.

"You answer our summons with alacrity," he observed to this last subject of his scrutiny.

The commandant reddened. "I—your Excellency—the truth is, I was waiting without, at the door."

"What you have just stated," returned the Governor, "is patent; what I should like to know, however, with subtle change of tone, "is why you were stationed there."

"To take this mountebank player away, when it pleased her Ladyship to—"

"Yes; to take him away!" interrupted the lady in hurried tones, the agi-

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