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The Lady of the Mount
by FREDERIC S. ISNAM
AUTHOR OF "THE STROLLERS," "UNDER THE ROSE," ETC.
ILLUSTRATIONS BY RAY WATERS

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SYNOPSIS.

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 northwest 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. Note.

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.

You rewarded him well, I trust? "He wouldn't take anything." "And you neglected to inquire his name?"

"I did not think." "You were so glad to get back?" remarked the Governor, regarding her closely. "What sort of man was he?"

"Old." "And—" "That—is all I remember." "Hum! Not very lucid. No doubt you were too overwrought, my dear, to be in an observant mood." His voice sank absently; his fingers sought among the papers, and, as his glance fell, the girl walked away. Again she leaned on the parapet, and once more regarded the barren waste below—the figures of the cockle-seekers, mere specks, the shadow of the Mount, stamped on the sand, with the salt, a shapeless form, holding up a tapering black line—a sword—at the apex.

"She is keeping back something. What?" Above an official-looking document the Governor watched her, his lips compressed, his eyes keen; then shrugged his shoulders and resumed his occupation. The death-like hush of an aerial region surrounded them; the halcyon peace of a seemingly chimerical cloister; until suddenly broken by an indubitable clangor—harsh, hard!—of a door, opening; shutting. The Governor lifted his head in annoyance; the dove on the roof of the cloister-walk flew away, and a short, fat man, breathing hard, appeared.

"Pardon, your Excellency! But the drafts! They seem sometimes to sweep up from the very dungeons themselves, and—" "Well?"

Beppo cut short excuse, or explanation. "A prisoner is waiting without. The man, Sanchez, from the shore! Monsieur le Commandant, who brought him, told me to inform you."

The Governor considered a moment with down-bent brows. "You may show him in, but first," he glanced up with a frown, "I have a question to put to you."

"Your Excellency?" "This morning you thought fit to apprise me," Beppo looked uncomfortable, "in view of the events of last night—that you saw yesterday this fellow, Sanchez, setting out in a sail-boat, accompanied by a priest—a fact that might have been of great service to me, had I been aware of it in season!" The Governor paused to allow the full weight of his disapproval to be felt. "At what hour did you see them start out?"

"About dusk, the time of the 'grand' tide," was the crestfallen answer. "I was following the shore, feeling anxious on account of the Lady Elise, who, I knew, had gone in the direction of the forest, when I saw them, some distance out, but not too far to recognize this fellow's boat and in it two men, one of them in the black robes of a priest. I attached no importance to the incident until—"

The Governor interrupted. "You may send the prisoner in," he said shortly. "No—wait!" Toward the spot where the girl had been standing the Governor glanced quickly, but that post of observation was now vacant, and his Excellency more deliberately looked around; caught no sight of her. "You may send him in here," he said, "alone. I will speak with the prisoner in private."

CHAPTER XI. The Governor is Surprised. But the Lady Elise had not gone. Passing through the cloister through the great arched doorway leading to the high-roofed refectory, she had stopped at the sight of a number of people gathered near the entrance. At first she had merely glanced at them; then started, as, in the somewhat dim light prevailing there, her eyes became fixed upon one of their number.

Obviously a prisoner, he stood in the center of the group, with head down-bent, a hard, indifferent expression on his countenance. Amazed, the girl was about to step forward to address him—or the commandant—when Beppo appeared from the cloister, walked toward the officer, and, in a low ill-humored tone, said something she could not hear. Whatever it was, the commandant caused him to repeat it; made a gesture to the soldiers, who drew back, and spoke himself to the prisoner. The latter did not reply nor raise his eyes, and the commandant laid a heavy hand on his shoulder, whereupon the prisoner moved forward mechanically, through the doorway.

"You are sure his Excellency said

"alone?" asked the commandant. "As sure as I have ears," answered Beppo.

"But her ladyship—see! She is walking after him." Beppo shrugged his shoulders. "She always does what she pleases; no orders apply to her."

In the shadow of the cloister roof, at a corner where the double row of pillars met, the girl paused; looked out through the columns, her hand at her breast. The Governor was unconcernedly writing; not even when the prisoner stepped forward did he turn from his occupation; at his leisure dotted an "i" and crossed a "t"; sprinkled sand lightly over the paper; waited a moment; then tapped the fine particles from the letter. For his part, the prisoner displayed equal patience, standing in an attitude of stolid endurance.

"Your name is Sanchez?" At length the Governor seemed to notice the other's presence. "Yes."

"And you formerly served the Seigneur Desaurac? Followed him to America?" "As your Excellency knows." The servant's tone was veiled defiance.



"Have I Not Told You—"

"It is useless to say that I did not play this double role of which you accuse me, and that I did keep, in every particular, the promise I made."

"Oh, yes; you could say it, my Lady!" with sneering emphasis. "But you reserve to yourself the right not to believe me? That is what you mean?"

The man's stubborn, vindictive look answered. "Then I will deny nothing to you; nothing! You may think what you will."

His face half-covered by his hand, the Governor gazed at them; the girl, straight, slender, inflexibly poised; the prisoner eying her with dark, unvarying glance.

"What is this?" he muttered. "What is this?" Her concern gave way to a new feeling. Her concern for something—somebody—held him. A promise!

"You can step back a few moments, my man!" to Sanchez. "A little farther—to the parapet! I'll let you know when you're wanted. And the prisoner obeyed, moving slowly away to the wall, where he stood out of earshot, his back to them. "You spoke of a promise?" the Governor turned to his daughter. "To whom?"

A suggestion of color swept her face, though she answered at once without hesitation: "To the Black Seigneur."

The slight form of the Governor stirred as to the shock of a battery. "There is no harm in telling now," hurriedly she went on. "He saved me from the 'grand' tide—for I was on Saladin's back when he boiled and ran. I had not dismounted, though I allowed you to infer so, and he had carried me almost to the island of Casque when we heard and saw the water coming in. The nearest place was the island—not the point of the mainland, as I felt obliged to lead you to think, and we started for it; we might have reached the cove, had not the sea been so high and so rough."

CHAPTER XII. At the Cockles. A rugged mass of granite, rent by fissures, and surrounded by rocks and whirlpools, the Norman English isle, so-called "Key to the Channel," long

last I remembered the water came rushing around, and when I awoke, I was in a watch-tower, with him—the Black Seigneur!"

The Governor looked at her; did not speak. "I at first did not know who he was—not until this man came—and the priest! And when he, the Black Seigneur, saw I had learned the truth, he asked me to promise—not for himself—but because of this man!—to say nothing of having met him there, or the others! And I did promise, and—he sent me back—and that is all—"

"All!" Did the Governor speak the word? He sat as if he had hardly comprehended; a deeper flush dyed her cheek.

"You—can not blame me—after what he did. He saved me—saved my life. You are glad of that, mon pere, are you not? And it must have been hard doing it, for his clothes were torn, and his hands were bleeding—he can't be all bad, mon pere! He knew who I was, yet trusted me—trusted!"

The Governor looked at her; touched a bell; the full-toned note vibrated far and near.

"What are you going to do?" Something in his face held her.

"Remember it is I who am responsible for—" "Your Excellency?" Across the court appeared Beppo, moving quickly toward them. "Your Excellency?"

"One moment!" The servant stepped back; the Governor looked first at the girl; then toward the entrance of the cloister.

"You want me to go?" Her voice was low; strained; in it, too, was a hard, rebellious accent. "But I can't—can't—until—" "What?"

"You promise to set him free! This man who brought me back! Don't you see you must, mon pere? Must!" she repeated.

His thin lips drew back disagreeably; he seemed about to speak; then reached among the papers and turned them over absently. "Very well!" he said at length without glancing up.

"You promise," her voice expressed relief and a little surprise, "to set him free?" "Have I not said so?" His eyelids veiled a peculiar look. "Yes, he shall be liberated—very shortly."

"Thank you, mon pere." A moment she bent over him; the proud, sweet lips brushed his forehead. "I will go, then, at once." And she started toward the door. Near the threshold she paused; looked back to smile gratefully at the Governor, then quickly went out.

CHAPTER XII. At the Cockles. A rugged mass of granite, rent by fissures, and surrounded by rocks and whirlpools, the Norman English isle, so-called "Key to the Channel," long

hundred miles or more northwest of the Mount, had from time immemorial offered haven to ships out of the pale of French ports. Not only a haven, but a home, or that next-best accommodation, an excellent inn. Perched in the hollow of the mighty cliff and reached by a flight of somewhat perilous stairs, the Cockles, for so the ancient tavern was called, set squarely toward the sea, and opened wide its shell, as it were, to all waifs or stormy petrels blown in from the foamy deep.

Good men, bad men; Republicans, royalists; French-English, English-French, the landlord—old Pierre Laroche, retired sea-captain and owner of a number of craft employed in a dangerous, but profitable, occupation—received them willingly, and in his solicitude for their creature comforts and the subsequent reckoning, cared not a jot for their politics, morals, or social views. It was enough if the visitor had no lenten capacity; looked the fleshpots in the face and drank of his bottle freely.

The past few days the character of old Pierre's guests had left some room for complaint on that score. But a small number of the crew of the swift-looking vessel, well-known to the islanders, and now tossing in the sea-nook below, had, shortly after their arrival toward dusk of a stormy day, repaired to the inn, and then they had not called for their brandy or wine in the smart manner of seamen prepared for unstinted sacrifice to Bacchus. On the contrary, they drank quietly, talked soberly, and soon prepared to leave.

"Something has surely gone wrong," thought their host. "Why did not your captain come ashore?" he asked. "Not see his old friend, Pierre Laroche, at once! It is most unlike him."

And on the morrow, the islanders, or English-French, more or less privateersmen themselves, were equally curious. Where had the ship come from? Where was it going? And



The Landlord Deliberately Stirred and Spread Them.

how many tons of wine, bales of silk and packages of tobacco, or "ptum," as the weed was called, had it captured? Old Pierre would soon find out, for early that day, despite the inclemency of the weather, he came down to the beach, and, followed by a servant, got into a small boat moored close to the shore.

"He is going aboard!" "Who has a better right? His own vessel!"

"No; Andre Desaurac—the Black Seigneur!" They say he long ago paid for it from prizes wrested from the Governor of the Mount.

"At any rate, old Pierre entered into a bargain to build the boat for him—" "And added to his wealth by the transaction."

Later that morning the old man

To be Continued

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