

The Lady of the Mount

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 ILLUSTRATIONS BY RAY WATERS

SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I—Countess Elise, daughter of the Governor of the Mount, has a 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 Selgneur Desmarre, nobleman.

CHAPTER III—Young Desmarre 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 Nola.

CHAPTER VI—Black Selgneur returns, and takes Lady Elise to his residence.

CHAPTER VII—Selgneur is arrested and brought before the governor.

CHAPTER VIII—Lady Elise has Selgneur set free.

CHAPTER IX—Selgneur and a priest at the "Cockles."

CHAPTER X—Selgneur tells Desmarre that Lady Elise betrayed him, but is not believed. The Selgneur plans to release the prisoners at the Mount.

CHAPTER XI—Selgneur and a priest at the "Cockles."

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CHAPTER XIII—Selgneur tells Desmarre that Lady Elise betrayed him, but is not believed. The Selgneur 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—Desmarre 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.

CHAPTER XVIII—The governor enters the room during the interview with the Mountebank.

CHAPTER XIX—As a miserable buffoon, the Mountebank is released by order of the governor.

CHAPTER XX—Desmarre overpowers guard and dons soldier's uniform.

CHAPTER XXI—The Selgneur successfully escapes guards and finds the "Cockles."

CHAPTER XXII—Jacques, the jailer, forced to tread the wheel and bring up enemies of the governor.

CHAPTER XXIII—The Black Selgneur releases the prisoners, but is himself captured.

CHAPTER XXIV—The Marquis de Beauvilliers again visits the Mount.

CHAPTER XXV.

The Under World.

A coterie of brilliant folk soon followed in the wake of my lord, the Marquis' retinue, holy-day banners were succeeded by holiday ribbons; the misere of the multitude by peens of merriment. Hymen, lo Hymen! In assuming the leading role to which circumstances now assigned her, the Governor's daughter brought to the task less energy than she had displayed on that other occasion when visitors had sojourned at the rock. Her manner was changed—first, lukewarm; then, almost indifferent; until, at length, one day she fairly waived the responsibility of planning amusements; laid before them the question: What, now, would they like to do?

"Devise a play," said one.

"With shepherds and shepherdesses!"

The Marquis, however, qualified the suggestion. "A masque that is very good; but, for this morning—I have been talking with the commandant—and have another proposal—"

"Which is?"

"To visit the dungeons."

"The dungeons?" My lady's face changed.

"And incidentally inspect their latest guests! Some of you heard of him when we were here before—Le Selgneur Noir—the Black Selgneur!"

"Le Selgneur Noir!" They clapped their hands. "Yes, let us see him! Nothing could be better. What do you say, Elise?"

She started to speak, but for the instant her lips could frame no answer; with a faint, strained smile, confronted him, when some one anticipated her reply.

"Did she not leave it to us? It is we who decide."

And a merry party they swept along, bearing her with them; up the broad stairway, cold, gray in the morn; beneath the abbot's bridge—black, spying spen—to the church, and thence to the isolated space before the guard-house to the dungeons. Here, at the sound of their voices, a man, carrying a bunch of keys—but outwardly the antithesis to the hunchback—peered from the entrance.

"Unless I am mistaken, the new jailer!" With a wave of his hand, the Marquis indicated this person.

"The commandant was telling me his Excellency had engaged one—from Diestre, or Fort l'Eveque, I believe!"

"Hoarse, my lord!" said the man gravely. "And before that, the Bastille."

"Ah!" laughed the nobleman. "That pretty piece some of the foolish people are grumbling about! As if we could do without prisons any more than without salacious! But we have come, my good fellow, to inspect this lower world of yours!"

The man's glance passed over the paper the Marquis handed him; then slowly he moved aside, and unlocked the iron door.

"Are you not coming?" At the threshold the Marquis looked back. When that they had approached the guard-house, involuntarily had the Governor's daughter drawn aside to the ramparts; now, with face half-averted, stood gazing off.

"Coming?" Surprised, the Marquis noted her expression; the fixed brightness of her eyes and her parted lips. "Oh, yes!" and turning away.

"You thought me, then, but a com-

Would they have to be locked in?—the half-comprehensive query of one of the ladies caused the jailer at first to hesitate, and then to answer in the negative. "He would leave the doors from the inner room open, and vade in self await there the visitors' return. With which reassuring promise, he distributed lights; called a guardman, familiar with the intricate underground passages, and consigned them to his care.

One of the gay procession, the Lady Elise stepped slowly forward; the guide proved a talkative fellow, and seemed anxious to answer their many inquiries appertaining to the place. The sal de la question? Yes, it existed; but the ancient torture devices for the "interrogatory ordinary" and the "interrogatory extraordinary" were no longer pressed into service; the King had ordered them relegated to the shelves of the museum. The cabans, or black holes? Louis XI. built them; the carcasses duri and vade in pace, however, dated from Saint Mauritius, fourth abbot of the Mount.

"And the Black Selgneur? How have you accommodated him?"

"In the best cell; just to the left! We are going there now."

"I am going back!" A hand touched the arm of the Marquis, last of the file of visitors, and lifting his candle, he held it so that the yellow glimmer shined on the face of the Governor's daughter. Her eyes looked deeper; full of dread, as if the very spirit of the subterranean abode had seized her! He started.

"Surely you, Elise, are not afraid?"

"I prefer the sunlight," she said hurriedly in a low tone. "It—it is not cheerful down here! No; do not call the guide—let the others know. I'll return alone, and—wait for you at the guard-house."

He, nevertheless, insisted upon accompanying her; but, indicating the not distant door through which they had come, she professed to make light of objections, and when he still clung to the point, repelled with a flash of spirit, sudden and passionate. It compelled his acquiescence; left him surprised for a second time that day; a little hurt, too, perhaps, for heretofore had their intimacy been maintained on a strictly ethical and charming plane. But he had no time for analysis; the others were drawing away to the left, into a side passage; and, with a last backward glance toward the retreating figure, the Marquis reluctantly followed the majority.

Despite, however, her avowed repugnance for that under-world, my lady showed how no haste to quit it; for scarcely had the others vanished than she stopped; began slowly to retrace her way in the direction they had taken. When the narrow route to the petit cell connected with the main aisle, a sudden draft of air extinguished her light; yet still she went on, led by the voice, and a glimmer afar, until reaching a room, low, massive, as if hewn from the solid rock, again she paused. Drawing behind a heavy square pillar, she gazed at the lords and ladies assembled in the forbidding place; listened to a voice that ran on, as if discoursing about some anomalous thing. Again was she cognizant of their questions; a jest from my lord, the Marquis; she saw that several stole forward; peered, and started back half afraid.

But, at length, they asked about the oubliettes; and, chatting gaily, left their garments about touched the Governor's daughter; lights played about the gigantic pillars, and like will-o'-the-wisps whirled away. Now, staring straight ahead toward the chamber they had vacated, my lady's attention became fixed by a single dot of yellow—like a candle placed in a niche by the jailer's assistant. It seemed to fascinate; to draw her forward; across the perrais—into the room itself!

How long she stood there in the faint suggestion of light, she did not realize; nor when she approached the iron-barred aperture, and what she first said. "Something eager, solicitous, with odd silences between the words, until the impression of a motionless form, and two steady, cynical eyes fastened on her, brought her to an abrupt pause. It was some time before she continued, more coherently, an explanation about her apprehension on account of her father, which

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But, at length, they asked about the oubliettes; and, chatting gaily, left their garments about touched the Governor's daughter; lights played about the gigantic pillars, and like will-o'-the-wisps whirled away. Now, staring straight ahead toward the chamber they had vacated, my lady's attention became fixed by a single dot of yellow—like a candle placed in a niche by the jailer's assistant. It seemed to fascinate; to draw her forward; across the perrais—into the room itself!

How long she stood there in the faint suggestion of light, she did not realize; nor when she approached the iron-barred aperture, and what she first said. "Something eager, solicitous, with odd silences between the words, until the impression of a motionless form, and two steady, cynical eyes fastened on her, brought her to an abrupt pause. It was some time before she continued, more coherently, an explanation about her apprehension on account of her father, which

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