

The Lady

OF THE

Mount

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(Continued)

"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— or 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!" Angriily 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; afterward 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!"

"Hence!" From his pocket the young man took a notebook, 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—" Sanchez began the man when the abundant time-piece, beating harshly the hour, 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.

"Me?" said the servant with a harsh laugh. "Me?"

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

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

"In which case, death—no 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 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 nook 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.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Pilgrimage.

From far and near the peasants and the people of the towns and villages, joined in the customary annual descent upon—or ascent to—the Mount. None was too poor, few too miserable, to undertake the journey. A pilgrimage, was the occasion called; but although certain religious ceremonies were duly observed and entered into by some with fanatical warmth, many there were, who, occupied by pay tithes, nourished the onerous recollection of the enforced "ecclesiastical tenth" to the exclusion of any great desire to avail themselves of the compensating privilege of beholding and bowing before the sacred relics. To these recalcitrant spirits, license and a rough sort of merrymaking became the order of the hour.

Early in the morning the multitude began to arrive—in every manner of dilapidated vehicle, astride starved, looking donkeys and bony horses, or on foot. Many who had camped out the night before, by wayside or in forest, brought with them certain scanty provisions and a kitchen pot in which to boil thin soup, or some poor makeshift mess; others came empty-handed, "pilgrims" out at the elbow and shoelaces, trusting to fortune for their sustenance, and looking capable even of having poached in one of the wide forests they had traversed, despite a penalty, severe and disproportionate to the offense, for laying hand on any lord's wild birds or rabbits.

Savage men; sodden men—good, bad and indifferent! Like ants thronging about the hill, they straightway streamed to the Mount; took possession of it, or as much as lay open to them; for around the top, chosen abode of the Governor, extended a wall; grim, dark and ominous; bristling with holes which seemed to look blackly down; to watch, to listen and



The Governor Himself Appeared.

to frown. Without that pretentious line of encircling masonry, the usual din, accompaniment to the day and the presence of so many people, prevailed; within, reigned silence, a solemn hush, unbroken by even a sentiment's tread.

"I shall be glad when it's all over!" Standing at the window of her chamber the Lady Elise had passed in dressing to look out upon the throng moving massed in the narrow byways, and motionless ones near the temporary altars.

"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. "Those who were tried, I mean?"

"Nothing—only Beppo says he is to be hanged day after tomorrow—when the afternoon 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 un-patriotic 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 joyster. With an unvarying air of resolution she stepped forward; looked in; the place was empty—silent save for the tinkling of the tiny fountain 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—"

"In the apartments of state, my Lady. But—" The girl frowned.

"But, but!" she said. "But what?"

"His Excellency has left word—he was expecting a minister from Paris—that no one else was to be admitted; the matter was so important that he wished no interruptions."

She had already turned, however; moved on past him without answer.

At the inner entrance to the "little castle" or chateau, which presently she reached, the girl stopped. Here, without, in the shadow of two huge cylindrical towers, that crowned the feudal gate-house, a number of soldiers, seated on the steps, clinked their swords and talked; within, beneath the high-vaulted dome of the guard-room looked the commandant and several officers on a bench before a large window. Immediately on her appearance they rose, but, merely bowing; stiffly, she started toward a portal on the left. Whereupon the commandant started forward, deferentially would have spoken—stopped her, when at the same moment, the door she was approaching opened, and the governor himself appeared. At the sight of her he started; a shade of annoyance crossed his thin features, then almost immediately vanished; his cold eyes met hers expectantly.

"I have been told you were very busy, yet I must see you; it is very important—"

A fraction of a moment he seemed to hesitate; then with an absent air: "Certainly, I was very busy; nevertheless—" he stepped aside; permitted her to pass, and softly closed the door. With the same preoccupied air he walked to his table before one of the large fireplaces whose pyramidal canopies merged into the ribs of the vaulting of a noble chapel, and, seating himself in a cushioned chair, looked down at a few embers.

"I came," standing, with her fingers straight and stiff on the cold marble edge of the table, the girl began to speak hurriedly, constrainedly, "I wanted to see you—about the prisoners—"

He did not answer. Gently stroking his wrist, as if the dampness from some subterranean place had got into it, he evinced no sign he had heard, and this apathy and his apparent disregard of her awoke more strongly the feeling she had experienced so often since that day in the cloister, when he had promised to see her. The servant of the Black Seigneur; had kept his word, indeed, but—

"Can't you see," she forced herself to continue, "after what the man, Sanchez thought—suspected about me, what he said that day at the Mount, when what he, the Black Seigneur, did for me?"—the Governor started—"that you, if you care for me at all," he looked at her strangely, "at least, should—"

"As I told you the other day," his accents were cold, "why concern yourself about outlaws and peasants clamoring for 'rights?'"

"But it is my concern," she said passionately. "Unless—"

"Neither yours nor mine," he answered in the same tone. "Only the law!"

"The law's!" she returned. "You are the law—"

"Its servant!" he corrected.

"But—you could spare their lives! You could deal with them more mercifully!"

"The law is explicit. In the King alone rests the power to—"

"The King! But before word could reach him—"

"Exactly!" As he spoke, the Governor rose. "And now—"

"You will not hear me?"

"If there is anything else—"

Her figure straightened. "Why do you hate him so?" she asked passionately. "You have hastened his trial, and would carry out the sentence before there is time for justice and the

man whom that day you ordered whipped from the Mount—after letting me think him safe! After all that his master did for me! Why was he lashed? Because of him he served or of the old Seigneur before that? I heard you ask about him—of his having gone to America? Why did you care about that?"

"You seem to have listened to a great deal!"

"And why did he go to America?" she went on, unheeding. "Did you hate him, too? What for?"

"If you have nothing else to talk about—" He glanced at the door. "And the lands!" she said. "They were his; now they are yours—"

"Unjustly, perhaps you think—"

"No, no!" she cried. "I didn't mean I didn't imply that. Of course not! Only, putting out her hands, 'I try to understand, and—you have never taken me into your confidence, mon pere! You have been indulgent; denied me nothing, but—I don't want to feel the way I have felt the last week, as if—'" quickly she stopped. "No doubt there are reasons—although I have puzzled; and if I knew! Can't you, abruptly, 'treat me as one worthy of your confidence?'"

"You!" he said with quiet irony. "Who—listen!"

The girl flushed. "I had to, because—"

"And who misrepresented facts, as in the case of—Saladin!"

"How long," standing over her, "were you on the island?"

"I—don't know!"

"You don't?" His voice implied disbelief.

"Part of the time I was unconscious—"

"In the watch-tower with him!"

"She made a gesture. "Would you rather—"

"What did he say?"

The girl's eyes that had been so steadfast, on a sudden wavered. "Nothing—"

"And you? Nothing, too? Then how was the deception devised—the pact entered into—"

Her figure stiffened. "There was no pact."

"Treason, then? The law holds it treason to—"

"You are cruel; unjust!" she cried. "To me, as you were to him. That old man, you had whipped! I wonder, impudently, 'if you are so to all of them, the people, the peasants. And if that is the reason they have only black looks for me—and hatred? As if they would like to curse us!'"

He turned away. "I am very busy,"

"Non pare!"

He walked to the door.

"Then you won't—won't spare them?"

He opened wide the door. Still she did not move, until the sight of the commandant without, the curious glance he cast in their direction, decided her. Drawing herself up, she walked toward the threshold; and, bowing perfunctorily, with head held high, crossed it.

CHAPTER XV.

The Voice from the Group.

"No one from the household is allowed through without an order!"

"You will, however, let me pass."

"Because you have a pretty face?"

The sentinel at the great gate separating the upper part of the Mount from the town, answered roughly. "Not you, my girl, or—"

But she who impudently raised the sides of the ample, linen head-dress and revealed fully her countenance.

"My Lady!" His lips compressed, half incredulous, the soldier looked; stared, at features, familiar, yet seeming different, with the rebellious golden hair smoothed down severely above; the figure garbed in a Norman peasant dress, made for a costume dance when the nobles and court ladies had visited the Mount.

"You do not doubt who I am?" Imperiously regarding him.

"No, my Lady; only—"

"Then open the gate!" she commanded.

The man pushed back the ponderous bolts; pressed outward the mass of oak and iron, and, puzzled, surprised, watched the girl slip through. Of course it was none of his affair, my lady's caprice, and if she chose to go masquerading among the people on such a day, when all the idle vagabonds made pretext to visit the Mount, her right to do so remained unquestioned; but, as he closed the heavy door, he shook his head. Think of the risk! Who knew what might happen in the event of her identity being revealed to certain of those in that heterogeneous concourse without? Even at the moment through an aperture for observation in the framework

to which he repaired—upon adjusting the fastenings, he could see approaching a procession of noisy fanatics.

The apprehension of the soldier was, however, not shared by the girl, who, glad she had found a means to get away from the chilling atmosphere of her own world, experienced now only a sense of freedom and relief. In her tense mood, the din—the shouting and unvoiced sounds—were not calculated to alarm; on the contrary, after the oppressive stillness in the great halls and chambers of the summit, they seemed welcome. Her pulses throbbed and her face still burned with the remembrance of the interview with her father; as she eyed unseeingly the approaching band, led by censor-and banner-bearers.

"Vierge-mot esperance—" Caught up as they swept along, she found herself without warning suddenly a part of that human stream. A natural desire to get clear from the multitude led her at first to struggle, but as well contend with the inevitable Faces fierce, half-crazed, encompassed her; eyes that looked starved, spiritually and physically, gleamed on every side. Held, as in a vise, she soon ceased to resist; suddenly deposited on a ledge, like a shell tossed up from the sea, she next became aware she was looking up toward a temporary altar, garish with bright colors.

"Etdens-sur-nous—" Louder rose the voices; more-uncontrollable became the demeanor of the people, and quickly, before the unweaving of the sacred relics had completely maddened them, she managed to extricate herself from the kneeling or prostrate throng; breathless, she fled the vicinity.

Down, down! Into the heart of the village; through tortuous footpaths, where the pandering, hot pietistic, element held sway; where, instead of shrines and altars, had been erected booths and stands before which vendors of trumpery vended their loquacity on the pilgrims'—

"All hot! All hot!"

"A la barque! A l'ecaille!"

"La vie! Two drinks for a lard!"

"Voila le plaisir des dames!"

The Mount, in olden times a glorious and sacred place for royal pilgrimages, where kings came to pray and seek absolution, seemed now more mar than holy spot. But those whom the petty traders sought to entice—sullen-looking peasants, or poorly clad fishermen and their families—for the most part listless, indifferently, or with stupid derision.

"Bah!" scoffed one of the women dressed in worn-out costume of inherited holiday finery. "Where think you we can get soup for gewgaws?"

"Or full stomachs with empty pockets!" said another. "The foul fiend take your Ppetugals!"

The nomadic merchants replied and a rough altercation seemed impending, when, pushing through the crowd, the girl hurried on.

Down, down, she continued; to the base of the rock where the sand's shining surface had attracted and yet held many of the people. Thither they still continued to come—in bands; processions; little streams that, trickling in, mingled with and augmented the rabble. An encampment, for the hour—until the "petite" tide should break it up, and drive it piecemeal to the shore or up the sides of the Mount—it spread out and almost around the foundations of the great rock. Only the shadows; it avoided—the chilling outlines of piazzas and towers; the cold impress of the saint, holding close to the sun's rays and seeking in its warmth.

Some, following the example of their sea-faring fellows, dug half-beastedly in the sands in the hope of eking out the meager evening meal; with at course, salt-flavored; others, abandoning themselves to lighter employment, made merry in heavy or riotous fashion, but the effect of these holiday efforts was only depressing, and inconspicuous.

"Want you join?" Some one's arm abruptly seized my lady.

"No, no!"

Unconsciously he still would have drawn her into the ring, but with a sudden swift movement, she escaped from his grasp.

"My child!" The voice was that of a wolfish false friar, who, seeing her pass, quickly near, by, broke off in direct solicitation and appeal for souls, to intercept her. "Aren't you in a hurry, my child?"

"It may be," she answered steadily, with no effort to conceal her aversion at sight of the gleaming eyes and teeth. "Too much so, to speak with you, who are no friar!"

"What mean you?" His expression, ingratiating before, had darkened, and from his upgan eyes shot a malignant look; she met it with fearless disdain.

"That you make pretext of this holy day to rob the people—as if they were not poor enough!"

(To Be Continued.)

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