

The Lady

OF THE

Mount

By **FREDERIC S. ISHAM**
Author of
"The Strollers"
"Under the Rose"
— Etc. —
Illustrations by
RAY WALTERS

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(Continued)

"Ban you with bell, book and candle! Your tongue is too sharp, my lord, finding the flashing glance, the contemptuous mien, or the truth of her words, little to his liking. That he profited not by the last, however, was soon evident, as with amulets and talismans for a bargain, again he moved among the crowd, conjuring by a full calendar of saints, real and imaginary, and professing to excommunicate, in an execrable confusion of monkish gibberish, where the people could not, or would not comply with his demands.

"So they are—poor enough!" Leaning on a stick, an aged fishwife who had drawn near and overheard part of the dialogue between the thrifty rogue and the girl, now shook her withered head. "Yet still to be cozened! Never too poor to be cozened!" she repeated in shrill falsetto tones.

"And why," sharply my lady turned to the crows, "why are they so poor? The lands are rich—the soil fertile."

"Why?" more shrilly. "You must come from some far-off place not to know. Why? Don't you, also, have to pay manna here to some great lord? And banalite here, and banalite there, until—"

"But surely, if you applied to your great lord, your Governor; if you told him—"

"If we told him!" Brokenly the woman laughed. "Yes; yes; of course; if—"

"I don't understand," said the Governor's daughter coldly.

Muttering and chucking the woman did not seem to hear; had started to hobble on, when abruptly the girl stopped her.

"Where do you live?"

"There!" A claw-like finger pointed. "On the old Seigneur's lands—a little distance from the woods—"

"The old Seigneur? You knew him?"

"Knew him! Who better?" The whitened head wagged. "And the Black Seigneur? Wasn't he left as a child, with me, when the old Seigneur went to America? And," pursing her thin lips, "didn't I care for him, and bring him up as one of my own?"

"But I thought—I heard that he, the Black Seigneur, when a boy, lived in the woods."

"That," answered the old creature, "was after. After the years he lived with us and shared our all! Not that we begrudged—no, no! Nor he! For once when I sent word, pleading our need, that we were starving, he forgave—I mean, remembered me—all I had done and, in a wheedling voice, 'sent money—money—'

"He did?" Swiftly the girl reached for her own purse, only to discover she had forgotten to bring one. "But of course," in a tone of disappointment at her oversight, "he couldn't very well forget or desert one who had so generously befriended him."

"There are those now among his friends he must needs desert," the crows cackled, wagging her head.

A shadow crossed the girl's brow. "Must needs?" she repeated.

"Aye, forsooth! His comrades—taken prisoners near the island of Casque? His Excellency will hang them till they're dead—dead, like some I've seen dangling from the branches in the wood. He, the Black Seigneur, may wish to save them; but what can he do?"

"What, indeed?" The girl regarded the Mount almost bitterly. "It is impregnable."

"Way there!" At that moment, a deep, strong voice from a little group of people, moving toward them, interrupted.

CHAPTER XVI.

The Mountbank and the People. In the center walked a man, dressed as a mountbank, who bent forward, laden with various properties—a bag that contained a miscellany of spurious medicines and drugs, to be sold from a stand, and various dolls for a small puppet theater he carried on his back. It was not for the Governor's daughter, or the old woman, however, he called had been intended. "Way there!" he repeated to those in front of him.

But they, yet seeking to detain, called out: "Give the piece here!" Like a person not lightly turned from his purpose, he, strolling-player as well as charlatan, pointed to the Mount, and, unceremoniously thrusting one person to this side and another to that, stubbornly pushed on. As long as they were in sight the girl watched, but when with shouts and laughter they had vanished, swallowed by the shifting host, once more she turned to the crows. That person, however, had walked on toward the shore, and indecisively the Governor's daughter gazed after. The

woman's name she had not inquired, but could find out later; that would not be difficult, she felt sure.

Soon, with no definite thought of where she was going, she began to retrace her steps, no longer experiencing that earlier over-sensitive perception for details, but seeing the picture as a whole—a vague impression of faces; in the background, the Mount—its golden saint ever threatening to strike—until she drew closer; when abruptly the uplifted blade, a dominant note, above color and movement, vanished, and she looked about to find herself in the shadow of one of the rock's bulwarks. Near by, a scattering approach of pilgrims from the sands narrowed into a compact stream directed toward a lower gate, and, remembering her experience above, she would have avoided the general current; but no choice remained. At the portals she was jostled sharply; no respecters of persons, these men made her once more feel what it was to be one of the great commonalty; an atom in the rank and file! At length reaching the tower's little square, many of them stopped, and she was suffering to escape—to the stone steps swinging sharply upward. She had not gone far, however, when looking down, she was held by a spectacle not without novelty to her.

In the shadow of the Tower of the King stood the mountbank she had seen but a short time before on the sands. Now facing the people before his little show-house, which he had set up in a convenient corner, he was calling attention to the entertainment he proposed giving, by a loud beating on a drum.

Rub-a-dub-dub! "Don't crowd too close!" Rub-a-dub-dub! "Keep order and you will see—"

"Some trumpety miracle mystery!" called out a jeering voice.

"Or the martyrdom of some saint!" cried another.

"I don't know anything about any saint," answered the man, "unless, rub-a-dub-dub!—you mean my lord's lady!"

And truly the piece, as they were to discover, was quite barren of that antique religious flavor to which they objected and which still pervaded many of the puppet plays of the day.

The Petit Masque of the Wicked Peasant and the Good Noble, it was called; and odd designation that at once interested the Lady Elise, bending over the stone balustrade the better to see. It interested, also, those official guardians of the peace, a number of soldiers and a few officers from the garrison standing near, who unmindful of the girl, divided their attention between the pasteboard center of interest and the people gathered around it.

Circumspectly the little play opened; a scene in which my lord, in a waistcoat somewhat frayed for one of his station, commands the lazy peasant to beat the marsh with a stick that the croaking of the frogs may not disturb at night the rest of his noble spouse, seemed designed principally to show that obedience, submission and unquestioning fealty were the great lord's due. On the one hand, was the patrician born to rule; on the other, the peasant, to serve; and no task, however onerous, but should be gladly welcomed in behalf of the master, or his equally illustrious lady. The dialogue, showing the disinclination of the bad peasant for this simple employment and the good lord's noble solicitude for the nerves of his high-born spouse, was both nimble and witty; especially those bits punctuated by a cane, and the sentiment: "Thus all bad peasants deserve to fare!" and culminating in an excellent climax to the lesson—a tattoo on the peasant's head that sent him simultaneously, and felicitously, down with the curtains.

"What think you of it?" At my lady's elbow one of the officers turned to a companion.

"Amusing, but—" And his glance turned dubiously toward the people. Certainly they did not now show proper appreciation either for the literary merits of the little piece or the precepts it promulgated in fairly sounding verse.

"The mountbank!" From the crowd a number of discontented voices rose. "Come out, Monsieur Mountbank!"

"Yes, Monsieur Mountbank, come out; come out!"

With fast-beating heart the Lady Elise gazed; as in a dream had she listened—not to the lines of the puppet play; but to a voice—strangely familiar, yet different—ironical; scoffing; laughing! She drew her breath quickly; once more studied the head, in its white, close-fitting clown's covering; the heavy, painted face, with red, gaping mouth. Then, the next moment, as he bowed himself back—



"Down With the Devil!"

some one threw and which struck his little theater—the half-closed, dull eyes met hers; passed, without sign or expression—and she gave a nervous little laugh. What a fancy!

"Act second!" the tinkling of a bell prefaced the announcement, and once more was the curtain drawn, this time revealing a marsh and the bad peasant at work, reluctantly beating the water to the Song of the Stick.

"Beat! beat! At his lordship's command; For if there's a croak, For you'll be the stroke, From no gentle hand."

A merry little tune, it threaded the act; it was soon interrupted, however, during a scene where a comical-looking devil on a broomstick, useful both for transportation and persuasion, came for something which he called the peasant's soul. Again the bad peasant protested; would cheat even the devil of his due, but his satanic Majesty would not be set aside.

"You may job your master," he said, in effect; "defraud him of banalite, bardage and those other few taxes necessary to his dignity and position; but you can't defraud Me!" Whereupon he proceeded to wrest what he wanted from the bad peasant by force—and the aid of the broomstick!—accompanying the rat-a-tat with a well-rhymed homily on what would certainly happen to every peasant who sought to deprive his lord of feudal rights. At this point a growing restiveness on the part of the audience found resentful expression.

"That for your devil's stick!"

"To the devil with the devil!"

"Down with the devil!"

The cry, once started, was not easy to stop; men in liquor and ripe for mischief repeated it; in vain the mountbank pleaded: "My poor dolls! My poor theater!" Unceremoniously they tumbled it and him over; a few, who had seen nothing out of the ordinary in the little play took his part; words were exchanged for blows, with many fighting for the sake of fighting, when into the center of this, the real stage, appeared soldiers.

"What does it mean?" Impressive in gold adornment and conscious authority, the commandant himself came down the steps. "Who dares make riot on a day consecrated to the holy relics? But you shall pay!" as the soldiers separated the belligerents.

"Take those men into custody and—who is this fellow?" turning to the mountbank, a mournful figure above the wreckage of his theater and poor puppets scattered, haphazard, like victims of some untoward disaster.

"It was his play that started the trouble," said one of the officers.

"Diable!" the commandant frowned.

"What have you to say for yourself?"

"I," began the mountbank, "I—"

"I," began the mountbank, "I—"

repeated, when courage and words alike seemed to fail him.

The commandant made a gesture.

"Up with him! To the top of the Mount!"

"No, no!" At once the fellow's voice came back to him. "Don't take me there, into the terrible Mount! Don't lock me up!"

"Don't lock him up!" repeated some one in the crowd, moved apparently by the sight of his distress. "It wasn't his fault!"

"No; it wasn't his fault!" said others.

"Eh?" Wheeling sharply, the commandant gazed; at the lowering faces that dared question his authority; then at his own soldiers. On the beach he might not have felt so secure, but here, where twenty, well-armed, could defend a pass and a mob batter their heads in vain against walls, he could well afford a confident front. "Up with you!" he cried sternly and gave the mountbank a contemptuous thrust.

For the first time the man's apathy seemed to desert him; his arm shot back like lightning, but almost at once fell to his side, while an expression, apologetically abject, as if to atone for that momentary ferce impulse, overcame his dull visage. "Oh, I'll go," he said in accents servile. And proceeded hurriedly to gather up the remains of his theater and dolls. "I'm willing to go."

CHAPTER XVII.

The Mountbank and the Hunchback. Up the Mount with shambling step, head down-bent and the same stupid expression on his face, the mountbank went docilely, though not silently. To one of the soldiers at his side he spoke often, voicing that dull apprehension he had manifested when first ordered into custody.

"To you think they'll put me in a dungeon?"

"Dungeon, indeed!" the man answered not flatteringly. "For such as you! No, no! They'll keep the obliettes, calottes, and all the dark holes for people of consequence—traitors, or your fine gentry consigned by lettres de cachet."

"Then what do you think they will do with me?"

"Wait, and find out!" returned the soldier roughly, and the mountbank spoke no more for some time; held his head lower, until, regarding him, his guardian must needs laugh.

"Here's a craven-hearted fellow!" "Well, if you really want to know, they'll probably lock you up for the night with the rest of rag-tag," indicating the other prisoners, a short distance ahead, "in the cellar, or almonry, or suberge des voleurs; and in the morning, if you're lucky and the Governor has time to attend to such as you, it may be you'll escape with a few stripes and a warning."

"The suberge des voleurs!—the thieves' inn!" said the man. "What is that?"

"Bah! You want to know too much! If now your legs only moved as fast as your tongue—"

And the speaker completed the sentence with a significant jog on the other's shoulders.

Whereupon the mountbank quickened his footsteps, once more ceased his questioning. It was the soldier who had not yet spoken, but who had been pondering a good deal on the way up, who next broke the silence.

"How did it end, Monsieur Mountbank?—the scene with the devil, I mean."

The man who had begun to breathe hard, as one not accustomed to climbing, or wearied by a long pilgrimage to the Mount, at the question ventured to stop and rest, with a hand on the granite balustrade of the little platform they had just reached. "In the death of the peasant, and a comic chorus of frogs," he answered.

"A comic chorus!" said the soldier. "That must be very amusing."

"It is," the mountbank said, at the same time studying, from where he stood, different parts of the Mount with cautious, sidelong looks; "but my poor frogs—all torn! trampled!"

"Well, well!" said the other not unkindly. "You can mend them when you get out."

"When!" If I only knew when that would be! What if I should have to stay here like some of the others?—pour etre oublié—to be forgotten?"

"If you don't get on faster," said the soldier who had first spoken, "you won't be buried alive for some time to come, at least!"

"Pardon!" muttered the mountbank. "The hill—it is very steep."

"You look strong enough to climb a dozen hills, and if you're holding back for a chance to escape—"

"No, no!" protested the man. "I had no thought—do I not know that if I tried, your sword—"

"Quite right, I'd—"

"There, there!" said the other soldier, a big, good-natured appearing fellow. "He's harmless enough, and, as once more they moved on, "that tune of yours, Monsieur Mountbank," abruptly; "it runs in my head. Let me see—how does it go? The second verse, I mean—"

"Beat! beat! Mid marsh-muck and mire, For if any note Escapes a frog's throat, Beware my lord's ire!"

"Yes; that's the one. Not bad!" humming—

"For if any note Escapes a frog's throat, Beware my lord's ire!"

"Are the verses your own?"

"Oh, no! I'm only a poor player," said the mountbank humbly. "But an honest one," he added after a pause, "and this thieves' inn, Monsieur?" returning to the subject of his possible fate, "this suberge des voleurs—that sounds like a bad place for an honest lodging."

"It was once under the old monks, who were very merry fellows; but since the Governor had it restored, it has become a sober and quiet place. It is true there are iron bars instead of blinds, and you can't come and go, as they used to, but—"

"Is that it—up there?" And the mountbank pointed toward a ledge of rock, with strong flanking buttresses, outjutting beneath a mysterious-looking wall and poised over a sparsely-wooded bit of the lower Mount. "The gray stone building you can just see above the ramparts, and that opening in the cliff to the right, with something running down—that looks like plank—"

"The wheel?"

"The great wheel of the Mount! It was built in the time of the monks, and was used for—"

"Hold your tongue!" said the other soldier, and the trio entered the great gate, which had opened at their approach, and now closed quickly behind them.

For the first time in that isolated domain of the dreaded Governor, the mountbank appeared momentarily to forget his fears and gazed with interest around him. On every side new and varying details unfolded to the eye; structures that from below were etched against the sky in filmy lines, here resolved themselves into vast, solid, but harmonious masses.

Those ribbons of color that had seemed to fall from the woolly sky, to adorn these heights, proved, indeed, fallacious; more somber effects, the black touches of age, confronted the eye everywhere, save on one favored prospect of a newer period, an architectural addition whose intricate carvings and beautiful roses of stone invited and caught the warmer rays; whose little balcony held red buds and flowers, bright spots of pink dangling from, or nestling at, the window's edge.

"Yonder looks like some grand lady's bower," as he followed his captors past this more attractive edifice, the mountbank ventured to observe.

"Now, perhaps, lives there—"

"Hark you, my friend," one of the soldiers brusquely interrupted; "a piece of advice, His Excellency likes not babblers, neither does he countenance gossip; and if you'd fare well, keep your tongue to yourself!"

"I'll—I'll try to remember," said the mountbank docilely, but as he spoke, looked back toward the balcony; at the gleaming reflection full on its windows; then a turn in the way cut off the pleasing prospect, and only the grim foundations of the lofty, heavier structure on one hand and the massive masonry ramparts on the other greeted the eye.

For some distance they continued along the narrow way, the mountbank bending lower under his load and observing the injunction put upon him, until the path, broadening, led them abruptly on to a platform where a stone house of ancient construction barred their further progress. But two stories in height, this building, an alien edifice amid loftier piles, stood sturdily perched on a precipitous cliff. The rough stonework of its

front, darkened by time, made it seem almost a part of the granite itself, although the roof, partly demolished and restored, imparted to it an anomalous distinctness, the bright new tile prominent as patches on some dilapidated garment. In its doorway, beneath a monkish inscription, well-nigh obliterated, stood a dwarf, or hunchback, who, jingling a bunch of great keys, ill-humoredly regarded the approaching trio.

"What now?" The little man's welcome, as mountbank and soldiers came within earshot, was not reassuring. "Isn't it enough to make prisoners of all the scamps in Christendom without taking vagabond players into custody?"

"Orders, good Jacques!" said one of the soldiers in a conciliatory tone. "The commandant's!"

"The commandant!" grumbled the grotesque fellow. "It is all very well, mimicking: 'Turn them over to Jacques. He'll find room. If this keeps on, we'll soon have to make cages of confessionals, or turn the wine-butts in the old cellar into oubliettes."

"If any of our ancient flavor lingers in the casks, your guests would have little reason to complain!" returned the other soldier. "But this fellow, he'll make no trouble."

"Oh, I suppose we'll have to take care of him!" muttered the dwarf. "In the thieves' inn there's always room for one more!" Obeying the gesture, at once menacing and imperious, that accompanied these words, the mount-



"Oh, I suppose we'll have to take Care of Him!"

bank, who had been eyeing his prospective host not without visible signs of misgiving, reluctantly entered. But as he did so, he looked back; toward the soldier who had displayed half-friendly interest in the play.

"If you care to know more about the piece—" he began, when the maledictions and abuse of the misshapen keeper put a stop to further conversation and sent the mountbank post-haste into the darkness of the cavernous hall intersecting the ground floor.

(To Be Continued.)

Port Jervis Won Ball Game.

The Port Jervis baseball team journeyed to Milford on Thursday afternoon and played a game with the Milford nine. Port Jervis won by the score of 13 to 8.

The Port Jervis team was composed of Carrigan, c.; Burkert and March, p.; Custer, 1 b.; McIvers, 2 b.; March and Burkert, s. s.; P. Regan, 3 b.; D. Regan, 1 f.; Gillen, r. f.; Mulvaney, 1 f.

The umpires were Angle and Riche.

Cold July Day.

The mercury touched 44.5 as the lowest Friday night in this city. Incidentally Friday was the coldest July day in some years. There have been only three that equalled it in 20 years, according to the local record.

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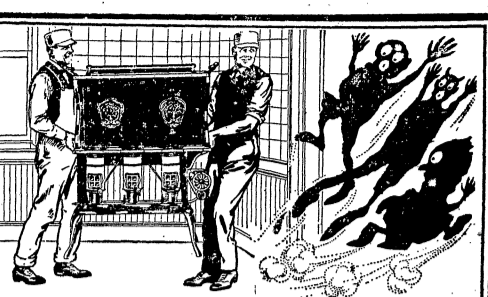
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