

LUCILLE LOVE

The Girl of Mystery

By the
MASTER PEN*

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SYNOPSIS

Valuable governmental papers are stolen by Thompson, follower of Loubeque, who is a Northern spy, friend of Love. When Loubeque goes to Manila, Love's daughter Lucille goes in a steamer to recover the papers in order to clear the name of Lieutenant Gibson, whom she loves.

Loubeque, tampering with the wireless on the steamer, is hurt. Lucille nurses him in an attempt to recover the papers.

Lucille gets the papers, but the ship is wrecked. She can't ashore. The native child is lost to his master, the native chief to his hut to serve his sick child.

The native child is restored to health, and the grateful natives follow Lucille, also cast ashore, tries various plans to recover the papers, but in vain.

Loubeque, aiming, forges a message from a neighboring chief to lure Lucille away. She falls into a pitfall losing the documents.

Loubeque's native old steals the papers from his master, and Lucille takes them from the native after he is killed by a servant. She finds and follows an underground passage in the jungle.

Lucille falls into the hands of a tribe of ape men, who lead her to a place of sacrifice, where she takes the life and Loubeque are rescued from the island by a yacht commanded by Captain Wetherell.

The girl and Loubeque are set adrift in an open boat by Wetherell after she refuses to give up the papers. She takes the papers to her employer.

Saved by fishermen, Lucille and Loubeque are in China. As she passes a house Loubeque's diary thrown to her by a native. She tries to board a vessel bound for America. Loubeque recovers the papers from Wetherell.

Lucille stows away, is caught and dresses as a cabin boy with the aid of the captain of the steamer in order to search Loubeque's stateroom for the papers.

Loubeque takes the papers from Lucille. Landing at San Francisco, she is kidnapped by the spy and held a prisoner in Loubeque's house by Thompson.

(CHAPTER XV Continued)

Lucille hangs about her wildly. She beats her head against the window, then stopped at the utter futility of it. She looked down, and her eyes stared wide into those of a pedestrian upon the sidewalk. It was the captain of the ship who had been her friend. She waved her hand, knowing from his expression that he recognized her, that he had been hunting her. He made a motion as if writing, and she nodded swiftly, then darted toward the little dressing table.

And there she sat, dumb with misery. In the delight of seeing a friend's face at the psychological moment, when her despair, her misery, her desperation, was at its height, she had not thought a simple thing like a pencil, a pen, ink, paper, might be necessary. In despair Lucille looked about her. Paper she had. She tore the blank strip off the top of the newspaper page, tore it so that the headline regarding Lieutenant Gibson appeared beneath it. She started helplessly in the mirror, her teeth fastened viciously in her lower lip, so viciously that when she withdrew them a tiny drop of red blood appeared upon the delicate skin. If only she had a pencil or pen, something to write with!

A blood drop fell upon the paper, hitting it. Lucille gasped sharply. Her hand seized a pin from the writing table and dabbed at the blot. It dried up. Nervously she said lightly jabbed the pin into the ball of her thumb, feverishly writing upon the blank paper. How painful it was! How swiftly the blood dried! But she must—must—

"Prisoner of Loubeque—Here—Help—Head bent!"

She swayed slightly. She could endure the torture no longer. It was awful. He could piece together what he read, what she had told him aboard the ship. But how to reach him with the fragmentary story of paper? Tearing the necklace from about her throat she detached a jewel swiftly and wrapped the strip of paper about it. In one leap she had reached the window. The captain was still there.

For a moment Lucille hesitated. She must break the window pane. Swiftly she took a slipper from her foot, drew back and brought the tiny heel crashing against the glass. At the sound of smashing glass she heard a rustling without her door. The captain looked up at her, and simultaneously she slipped the round missile toward him, watched him angrily as he stooped to pick it up and then thrust it hurriedly in his pocket, passing on. She saw Thompson, the butler, slip hurriedly out of the door and take after him. Then a slight creaking, as of rusty hinges, and she stared about in mute horror. She was moving down and walls were advancing forward. She was moving down and the room was moving with her.

Came a little groan, a tremor running through the walls of the room. Looking up she could see solid steel walls passing into place where the room she was in had been. Merely a cage—an elevator had been the boudoir where she was a captive. The machinery stopped working abruptly. She peered over the edge of the room, for she was merely standing on a flat surface so far as one side was concerned. To her ears came the insistent ringing of the bell. A huddled, black mass showed almost beneath her. Crouching upon the floor she leaned over and gingerly groped at it with her fingers, drawing them sharply back as they encountered human flesh.

For just a second she faltered before investigating her discovery. Loubeque would have come from her room in this fashion. It might be that in some way Loubeque had failed and injured the machinery. To stop down, take the papers from his pocket and hide them between the cracks of the floor of the room and the bottom of the elevator was the work of an instant.

The room gilded gently into place without so much as a tremor she stepped down and lifted the groaning man's head to her lap. She had come barely in time, for the spy was struggling feebly to get to his feet. He smiled ruefully as he lighted a match and scanned the features of his companion.

"Honors have been too even till now. I fancy the ranch will settle the rub satisfactorily—at any rate, satisfactorily to me."

His mind shot toward the place where he had placed the stolen papers.

"Come," he said quietly, his tones milky, yet dry and cold and hard, "come, young lady. Of course you understand the papers will be found, and this is merely delaying the inevitable."

He did not wait for her to speak, merely touched her arm and assisted her to the platform. He stirred slightly. Came the whirr of machinery, almost immediately shut out. Once more the room was in motion, going upward this time. She closed her eyes instinctively before the mystery of it. When she opened them once more she was in the place she had left. Everything was as it had been save for a broken window pane and the presence of Loubeque.

He regarded her narrowly, still smoking silently. He opened his lips as though to speak, then closed them sharply and stepped to the door, listening a moment, then ringing a bell, which was almost immediately answered by the butler and the woman who had first captured the girl.

Hurriedly Thompson explained what had happened—the pebble wrapped strip of white paper which the man outside had picked up, the manner in which he had mysteriously disappeared, eluding the butler's pursuit, the admission of policemen to the house and the throwing of the spring that lowered the girl's room to the basement.

"And he got out of the way, eh?" Loubeque frowned thoughtfully, then laughed a dry, barking laugh as he turned to the girl. "And with all this work, working for you, Miss Lucille, you see now how impossible it is to escape. Now I shall leave you alone to reflect upon the advisability of restoring the packet to me. Until then you will not be disturbed even by a servant. You may recall, my child, that thirst is a very unpleasant torture."

He closed the door behind him very softly. Not a sound came from without. Hunger, thirst, pain—all three in this prison, this prison so much unlike a prison that it was rendered the more hideous thereby. And even though outsiders knew she was being detained here they could not find her, could not even secure adequate evidence that she was here did they make an examination. She flung herself upon the bed, burying her face in her hands and giving way to sobs.

She straightened, startled by a faint knock against the window pane. Swiftly she approached the window. Upon the street no one was in sight. She looked up and espied the face of the captain peering cautiously from over the brick wall above her.

Feverishly she ripped at the netting which had been within the glass before she broke it. Carefully she drew the glass inside and laid it upon the floor. The netting gave slightly. She tore her hands opening the space until she could get her shoulders through. Slowly, round and round, she worked stealthily into the room. Lucille flexed herself—a steel spring wound to its last notch.

Thompson approached swiftly, silently. He was beside her, leaning over her, his hand groping at her throat; a little exclamation of triumph as his finger pads touched the necklace. It was in his hands, and then the steel sprang uncoiled with tremendous suddenness.

In a moment he reappeared, slowly dangling a heavy rope from which he had made a looped chair. Lucille edged her way slowly through the opening. She stood upon the heavy all outside, hanging to the netting with one hand while she reached for the rope with the other. The second time her fingers closed about it. Swiftly she tucked it about her skirts, then drew taut. Her feet swung clear of the ledge. Then she felt herself being slowly lifted, tilted in little spasmodic jerks.

Her finger tips brushed the roof. Another pull and she had a firm hold and was drawing herself over. Powerful hands closed about her wrists, then from below came a shout that she had been discovered.

With an oath the captain yanked her to the roof, jerked her there so violently she toppled and fell against him, straightened and caught his arm to support herself.

From beneath them came sounds of pursuit, hurrying footsteps upon stairs, loud voices. Lucille seemed to have all the initiative now. She grasped the man's arm and buried him toward the closest chimney just as a sky-light door hung open where they had stood.

He drew a revolver and held it steadily pointing toward the place. A chip of plaster cracked at their feet. Lucille looked down at a flattened lead bullet. Yet there had been no shot fired. She stared incredulously at the man.

"A silencer—Maxim silencer," he whispered.

She nodded understanding. Together they crept in the shadow of the chimney toward the thin brick dividing wall, the sanded roof scratching their heads terribly. Again that butler of chips. The captain turned and fairly buried a shot from his revolver at the figures so cautiously approaching. A cry of pain followed the report and in the confusion, the pair made a short rush.

The report grew bold now. Rosa the voice of Loubeque, cold, steady, terrible.

The captain's grip tightened reassuringly on her wrist.

"If they get me," he said quietly, "take the gun and make them work."

In the excitement he became separated from Lucille. She looked about, then uttered a cry of warning. He took a step backward, then instinctively lifted his elbow as though to avert a bullet. The movement overbalanced him and he disappeared over the edge, a groping, tumbling thing.

From the darkness came the purr. Lucille suddenly noticed there was no attempt made to close in upon her, but that she was being driven in a certain direction. A bullet dashed a spray of sand into her face, and she darted aside—dashed into a yawning blackness.

When she opened her eyes she was surprised to find that there had been no fall worth mentioning, that she had merely been driven toward a trap door and caught as she stepped down. Loubeque was watching her, a curiously twisted smile playing about the corners of his mouth.

"You have too many friends, Lucille," he said.

"Yes," he murmured, after a moment's silence, "you are altogether too slippery, too nerve racking a prisoner. I think while the search for the packet is going on it would save wear and tear on our constitutions to move you to my ranch—my ranch in Mexico. A beautiful spot," he smiled. "I trust you will enjoy it as much as I have."

Loubeque looked at him steadily. In the eyes of both glowed an indomitable purpose, a hard resolve, a mutual admiration. Loubeque smiled once more, this time grimly.

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She straightened, startled by a faint knock against the window pane. Swiftly she approached the window. Upon the street no one was in sight. She looked up and espied the face of the captain peering cautiously from over the brick wall above her.

Feverishly she ripped at the netting which had been within the glass before she broke it. Carefully she drew the glass inside and laid it upon the floor. The netting gave slightly. She tore her hands opening the space until she could get her shoulders through. Slowly, round and round, she worked stealthily into the room. Lucille flexed herself—a steel spring wound to its last notch.

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