

# 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, international spy, from General Love, who Loubeque hates, in Manila. Loubeque tells Lucille to go to 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 is cast ashore on Pacific Island and is taken by a native chief to his hut to nurse his sick child.

The native child is restored to health, and the grateful natives later rescue Lucille. She also catches a message from Loubeque, but in vain.

Loubeque, armed, forces a message from a neighboring chief to lure Lucille away from her friends. She falls into a pitfall, losing the documents.

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

Lucille falls into the hands of a tribe of ape men, whose leader drops a necklace of priceless rubies, which she takes. She and Loubeque are rescued from the island by a yacht commanded by Captain Wetherell.

That man caught me while I slept and stole the necklace from about my throat. Then he dropped out of the window of his compartment. That is why he was detained."

Loubeque fastened his cold eyes upon the butler. The man had nerves as steady as a rock. Lucille studied the judge and caught up eagerly. She could see that Thompson was beating down the spy's belief in her story. Swift as a flash, without a second's thought, she darted toward the thief. She had no time to think. She had no time to think. She had no time to think.

It was the eighth day he ran into a forging party sent out by Villa in advance of his main army. Much as she knew of the mysterious spy, Lucille was still surprised to mark the respect and deference paid him by the dark-skinned rebels. Consequently several days later, days of tireless travel, she was not surprised on reaching Manila to find the man upon whom he had been being treated with the greatest respect, while Loubeque was in constant consultation with the rebel leader.

Day after day she felt the growing helplessness of her position. Loubeque seemed omnipotent in the opinion of the main body of the army to whom he appeared to have stumbled.

Still she would not permit hope to die. The justice of her cause, the growing humanity of the international spy, her very youth and the power of her love forbade this.

Through the very eagerness and desperation of this feeling she slowly became aware of the attitude toward her master of Thompson. She was aware of the subtle atmosphere of hatred which the slick scoundrel's mask of servitude concealed so well. In lieu of anything to do on her own account she took to watching him, following his every move, his every change of expression.

Enmity toward the master he had served so well and who had mistreated him mingled with hatred for the girl he had so bitterly wronged and who had brought his punishment about. Consequently Lucille was surprised to come across a briefly scribbled note on a bit of rice paper, such as she had often noticed the butler using in rolling cigarettes. It was pressed tightly against one of the partially cut slices of bread when Thompson served his master and Lucille with his dinner.

The detached fragment of bread, dropping it to the floor and securing the fragment of paper as she picked up, concealing it in the palm of her hand.

For what seemed countless hours she bravely attempted to eat the food before her, tried to endure the heart-breaking period during which Loubeque smoked silently at his cigar. It was with a sigh of relief so obvious the spy was obliged to smile that she made half-hearted protest at his retirement. No sooner had his figure ceased to darken the doorway than she started eagerly to examine the message.

"At the third hole of the cigarette." Merely that, but the delicate words seemed pregnant with wondrous meaning.

Hours trod upon one another's heels so fast they moved under the tension of her waiting. Vague forebodings were in her mind, and she analyzed the words despite the fire of hope that had been kindled within her drooping spirit. There had been something doubly about Thompson's manner, under the scrutiny of the man she knew he hated so venomously, which made her shudder and form a half resolution to acquit Loubeque with his servant's treachery. She had half risen to her feet, still fighting against the dullerous impulse when the shrill hoot of an owl reached from out the mighty distances of the far-reaching desert.

And now the very seconds lagged. Every nerve, every muscle, flexed, for she knew not what. Lucille waited, her ear against the wall, her eyes pools of mirrored terror.

After what seemed an interminable age came again the sound. Double the time to ensure the long interval when she was charged to undergo, she softly opened the door, peering over the sleeping city that the rebel chieftain had hung up at a mere command. Immediately before her own abode she made out the less pretentious shack of the international spy.

A dim light from the partially opened door cast a segment from the darkness. Far more significant of slumber than complete darkness was that light.

A tiny droning sound reached her ears. By main force piercing the thick veil of night Lucille made out the dimly illuminated against a pile of lava dust. Something shapeless and dark and furtive of movement crept across the space that intervened between the door and the light cleavage of Loubeque's quarters. Lucille could not resist the impulse that forced her from the door into the open.

Something tugged at her feet, fairly drawing her away from the scene. Then a strange wave of pity for the unsuspecting one against whom this furtive attack was being made urged her forward. As the dark figure thrust through the door Lucille struck her head cautiously within. Upon the cot by the long figure of the international spy, his face turned toward the silent, motionless figure that stood in the center of the room staring at him. The eyes were tightly closed, but the girl knew that the man merely feigned slumber.

Thompson turned toward her, there came a swift vision before her, one that made her stop and stare. Eyes met her own eyes, eyes that seemed to force their way through the dark interior and cause her to forget everything that had intervened, eyes that mirrored a message of love and faith and hope to her as she looked down from the shadows of the mysterious room in San Francisco into the eyes of her lover, the man whose happiness could not be insured without those papers so short a space before her.

With the thought she sprang into the room. She bounded high, clearing the bodies of the men and tables, groping, groping, her hands encountered the cold rubies. She thrust them swiftly into her bodice, her left hand continuing the search. Papers rustled under her fingers. An iron hand was upon her shoulder, but she wrenched herself loose and leaped back.

Along the wall she moved until her body encountered the awaiting door. Even as Loubeque sprang at her she slapped the door shut. There came a cry of pain and rage, the stumble of feet backward.

Lucille fled through the night, fled toward where she had seen the motor-car from which Thompson had come to this place. It was a chance, no odds what orders the man had been given.

What commands had he been given? She stopped a second. She had no time to wait for three boots of the owl, and but two had been given. Impulsive directing her, she lifted her hands to her mouth. First no sound came. A second time she made the attempt. Feeble it was at best, but it started silence took it up and hurried back this offender against restfulness.

To her right came the purr of the motor. From behind sounded a shot. She lunged toward the first sound and entered the tonneau. A dark figure leaped from the seat and drew her beside him. Lucille clung to the man, sobbing from nervous reaction even as the car shot through the night.

The sibilant of a bullet sounded overhead, another and yet another. She dared not look back. The papers warmed through the flesh against her body and to her very heart itself. But Hugo Loubeque knew the method of her departure, knew what she carried with her. And already she knew Hugo Loubeque was working to overtake her.

Low in the seat beside the driver crouched Lucille with the precious papers and rubies in the waiting automobile the butler had arranged for himself.

Suddenly she leaped forward, beating her little fists together, urging the Mexican chauffeur to accelerate his speed. The man smiled down at her, shaking his head to signify he did not understand the words, even as he stepped on the clutch and shot the car forward like a huge arrow now released from the bow, and belted someone upon the same road there was another machine with a determined man in it, a man who had never yet allowed machine or man or even the elements to thwart him.

To her right the dull ratcheting sound from before her. The car swerved viciously, swung in such an abrupt circle she clung to the side of her seat to avoid being hurled out. The driver righted his machine swiftly, dexterously, and she started to leave a huge sigh of relief.

But only started to, for the front wheels suddenly slipped, seemed smoothly to be gliding upon a surface of nothingness, clawing for a foothold. The chauffeur roared heavily, fought with his wheel, but vainly.

Then the heavy car lost balance, tilted heavily and rolled down, down, down.

Lucille felt no fear. It was all too deadly for that. She was only conscious, even as her tiny hands clutched the edge of her seat, of a droning sound from behind that was growing faint as the car sped from the scene.

Came a long period of delicious languor of stinking, much as though she floated upon ether; a harsh, crunching jolt and blackness—merciful unconsciousness that closed black shutters across the mental vision of her and brought a sweet smile to the lips that had been tightened so long. Sleep—

Lucille pieced together happenings vaguely after that; then dimmed to nothing. She was comfortable and partially content. She recoiled for a fractional space of time being lifted and carried away by strong, friendly, pitying arms. The memory passed immediately with the coming of an impression of swift travel in a motorcar, which, in turn, gave way to the more sharply etched impression of being wheeled aboard a train in an invalid's chair. Then came a vision of the lean, powerful face of Loubeque close to her own, the gentle whisper of his voice close to her ear, calling her name over and over again, while matching the sufferings in his tones, were the deeply carved lines of agony upon his face. Over and over again the man called to her, and yet she knew it was not to her he called, but to the mother whom she resembled.

She fell all her sympathy going out to this man who had groined such a bitter enemy, who had brought such catastrophe upon her and her's, and would again prove so relentless. To the attempt to take advantage of her physical weakness to appeal to her sympathy.

she was going she did not know nor care. With the precious papers she could do anything. Simultaneously with the thought came one of terror. Vague at first, it spread over her spirit like a veil that obliterated all light, all hope.

As though forcing herself against her will, she closed her eyes and drew forth the bundle and necklace. Yes, there could be no doubting the genuineness of the rubies. Their scintillating luster was fairly blinding. But she paid them little heed. Her fingers groped at the papers even as her eyes snapped open. Then a little cry of rage and chagrin came from her lips.

The packet upon the table had evidently been nothing but a blind. Hugo Loubeque had taken no chance with the stolen papers even while awake. She longed to grasp the worthless waste paper. The international spy still held the whip hand.

She clinched her pretty teeth tightly together even as she kept repeating to herself over and over again the question why—why had he bothered to pursue her when he knew how she had been misled; why had he not allowed her to go her way and leave him safe to transact the last act in his plan of revenge? Why—why—why had he taken to himself so dangerous an enemy?

She knew he was fond of her, fond of her in the same way her own father was, but what of that? Alone, with the ruby necklace, she had sufficient means to do as she pleased and be perfectly safe from any danger.

But was she safe from any danger? Had she not been in danger before? Yes, on the train. And the reason was because Thompson knew she held the ruby necklace. Thompson was one to be feared and respected.

Softly she slipped down the vestibule aisle. She had reasoned out the answer. Thompson had escaped Loubeque, followed in his attempt to gain the necklace, was still in the pursuit.

Swiftly she stepped down the aisle, through car after car, until she halted abruptly and moved back again, for, lozing against a pillow in the tourist car, long gash over his eye rendered him a bit villainous looking, was the butler-thief.

Lucille sought her compartment, her brain awhirl. It was a three cornered fight now—Loubeque to retain the papers and to protect her in her wealth; Thompson to gain the ruby necklace and revenge himself upon his master, but she—Lucille only sought the papers. Nothing else counted as against that. And Loubeque held the papers.

(To be continued next week.)

hands as he pressed toward them. Not a sound disturbed the silence, but something caused her to dart a swift glance at the sleeper. His eyes were narrowed, but opertly lights of amethyst mallets in them she had never suspected could show in mortal eyes, lights so malignant she shuddered even as she would have opened her lips to cry a warning. The butler-thief drew closer to the prize he had worked so hard to gain. His thief's fingers were outstretched to grasp the necklace, when, with a crash, the lamp darted toward him, smashing upon the floor and leaving utter blackness in its wake.

Upon the heels of his startled alarm came a chuckling laugh from Loubeque, a laugh that matched the evil that had glowed from his eyes so scant before. Came a gurgled oath, the heavy breathing of strong men in combat.

Lucille turned as though to run. There came a swift vision before her, one that made her stop and stare. Eyes met her own eyes, eyes that seemed to force their way through the dark interior and cause her to forget everything that had intervened, eyes that mirrored a message of love and faith and hope to her as she looked down from the shadows of the mysterious room in San Francisco into the eyes of her lover, the man whose happiness could not be insured without those papers so short a space before her.

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