

LUCILLE LOUQUE, The Girl of Mystery

A Soul Thrilling Story of Love, Devotion, Danger and Intrigue

By the "MASTER PEN"

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SYNOPSIS OF THE FOREGOING CHAPTERS.

While students together at West Point, and in love with the same girl, Sumpter Love is dishonorably discharged. Love wins the girl. The animosity thus begun finds outlet in later years at Manila, when a butler-thief in the employ of Loubeque, now an international spy, steals valuable papers from the Government safe of General Love. Loubeque sails with them on the steamship Empress and General Love accuses Lieut. Gibson, his aide and the sweetheart of his daughter Lucille, of the crime. Loubeque sends a wireless message cleverly insinuating that General Love had sold the papers to a foreign power. To save the honor of the man she loved and to erase the stigma from her father's name, Lucille takes her out to sea in her aeroplane. To foil Lucille, Loubeque destroys the wireless apparatus on the Empress and is hurt in the resulting explosion. In her search for the papers, Lucille becomes his nurse, and when the ship takes fire, secures them. The vessel is burned to the water's edge and Lucille drifts to a strange island on the car of a crushed lifeboat.

CHAPTER IX.

A Castaway.

CONSCIOUSNESS lapsed slightly and was followed by a state of dull apathy. Some instinct held Lucille's arms upon the car that had floated away when the life boat smashed itself against the side of the burning Empress. First, the immensity, the ridiculousness of expecting to reach safety from the mighty ocean impressed her. Only the natural fight inherent in human flesh induced her to continue the effort to float.

Mountains of waves sifted along her path, bearing her gently to their crests and passing her through the trough of sea to the next wave in line. From watching the myriad stars blazing in the heavens she became interested in trifles, never thinking of the precious papers she had rescued at so great effort from the international spy, forgetting even the ones at Manila on whose behalf she had taken such risks to get them back. Came a long interval of restfulness where everything grew dim and indistinct and the water in which she was being tossed about seemed like a fostering mother upon which, in perfect confidence, she could rest her weary head and sleep. The lap-lap of the waves wove itself into a lullaby and slowly her eyes closed and, dreaming, she slept.

Little needles continually pricking at her flesh brought her from slumber so abruptly she straightened bolt upright, staring about her incredulously. Before her stretched the giant ocean, peaceful now save for playful white caps that rushed ferociously at her from far down a long sand bar then wore themselves out by the time they touched the soles of her feet. Every nerve and sinew of her body ached terribly, cramping her so she could barely look about the long expanse of beach that seemed to stretch interminably in every direction. Behind her she finally managed to clear her eyes enough to make out a luxuriant vegetation, obviously tropical. The sun, a copper cauldron glared upon her, almost burning her flesh with the ferocity with which he applied his heat in an effort to loosen the joints stiffened by so long cold and exposure.

Safety meant little to her. Her brain was in such a state that the providential escape seemed natural. That she was alone upon an island in the Pacific seemed simple enough. Nothing mattered. Again she closed her eyes and gave herself over to slumber which lasted until nightfall.

Securely hidden by the thick vegetation, she settled down, taking a firm grip on herself and trying to reassemble the things that had happened to her in such fashion that she might know what was best to be done. And always primarily did her thoughts revert to the papers concealed in the bosom of her dress, the papers and the man who sought them.

Even here she shuddered at recollecting the features of the man, so expressive of his character. The premonition came to her that nothing could thwart him, that his cold resolve was so great as even to force the elements to battle with him. And yet—what was it all about? Why should this man so desire to ruin the ones she held dear?

The papers—Undoubtedly there was something in them which would afford the clue. She stared at the oiled belt thoughtfully, fighting down the instinct which repelled her touching the secrets of another. There was something in the very care with which the oiled belt had been wrapped about its contents that told her how imperative it was she should have no scruples in fighting one so versed in warfare as Hugo Loubeque.

The bulky envelope from Washington to her father which the butler had stolen from the safe was still unbroken. She placed the packet to one side, knowing that if the spy did not care to investigate the contents there could be nothing in them which would assist her. The diary she investigated next, reading there until the shafts of moonlight which penetrated the thick foliage wandered away, leaving but a pale, silver shadow.

But Lucille paid no attention to the lack of light, was not even thinking of her predicament. Thoughtfully she sat there, the diary in her lap, the picture of her mother in her hands. She knew the life of Hugo Loubeque now, knew the dominating hatred of his life, the love of his life, the gigantic efforts of the man, involving nations and humanity, the thousand tentacles of the man, stretching to every quarter of the globe.

But as she looked at the faded picture the spy had cherished through all the years, tears of pity filled her eyes, pity for the man who could allow love to associate itself inseparably with hatred.

The unselfish love for a wrongly accused man was the motive that impelled her every move, had led her to take such great risks, would lead her to take any that might be even greater. Fate, misshapen offspring of a wrongly founded love, dominated the international spy. She realized now that Destiny itself was fighting in her behalf; that, giant intellect though he was, Hugo Loubeque had more than herself to contend with because of the unnatural baseness of his motives.

But it was a fight, would be a fight to the bitter end. She must find out where she was, what nature of place this might be, what chance for rescue there was. She must get back to Manila, for the papers were no better than rags here. She must start immediately.

A long shadow suddenly reached out before her, a very different shadow from the grotesque ones thrown by the stately palms, the gnarled and twisted Jumbo trees. First she could not make out what it was, though a premonition of disaster chilled her. Motionless she stood and stared at it. From another direction came the crackling report of a broken twig. In every direction, as though the sound had been a signal, the sounds of a forest were louder now.

more frequent. Then, with a rush, Lucille saw the shadows resolve themselves into figures of men.

She had but time to make out their brown color, fear blinding her. She closed her eyes fearfully, knowing she was surrounded. A hand touched her forehead timidly. Something in the touch was reassuring. She looked about upon a solid ring of scantily clad natives who stared at her in bewildered amazement. Again the hand touched her arm.

The native stood beside her, evidently much older than his fellows. Lucille could scarcely repress a smile as she caught the incredulity on the man's face as he looked at his hand, evidently expecting the white of her flesh to rub off.

Already her brain was working at lightning speed. The reason for the fear and astonishment that possessed her captors was obvious. They had never before seen a white woman. And the girl was thinking how she might use this thing which must appear a miracle to them.

CHAPTER X.

A Chief's Daughter.

SHE was white. Lucille found time even in her strange predicament to wonder at the way the most natural thing could turn itself to her advantage. She could feel the hesitation of the natives who had come upon her so unexpectedly, knew that they were prepared to regard this phenomenon from any angle, that they might fear her, reverence her, hate her, love her. So she stayed close to the chief; the one who had touched her arm.

An old man he was from the heavy wrinkles that criss-crossed his face, but his naked torso was magnificently muscular, his carriage that of a man to whom obedience always comes. There was something very splendid about his steady, black eyes—narrowed a bit as though to hint of Mongolian origin—about the thin nostrilled nose, the full lips.

All through the night the march continued. Lucille shuddered as, from the black fastnesses of the semi-jungle that hedged them in the glow of yellow eyes gleamed. Fire balls they might have been, so steady and silent were the animals who watched the procession, but the pat of stealthy feet, the crunch of broken twigs, an occasional growl or cry told her what they were.

Her feeling that this forced march might have some other object than merely getting back to a village was made doubly strong by noticing the masterful manner in which the leader commanded any desire for rest on the part of the natives. He himself led the way, finding hidden paths as though by intuition, forcing his way through creepers that grew so thickly at times they seemed to form a solid wall.

It was well into the day when their party was met by a native coming from the opposite direction. Lucille was attracted by the rapid conversation he held with the Chief, noticing the perturbation which showed so strongly on the old man's face when he turned away and redoubled his pace. It was well nigh impossible for her to keep up now. Worn out by exposure and this tramp through the jungle, there seemed times when she could not drag herself along, when the tired muscles kicked and refused to work.

Then quite unexpectedly, through a wall of vegetation, the party emerged into a great clearing upon which the sun beat fiercely. A few old men squatted before the openings to the hundred or more huts that filled the open space, set down here in the midst of the jungle. Many children played about, dressed only in the garments of their birth. Here and there dogs prowled, silently nosing into the huts, slinking furtively about the edge of the clearing. The leader of the party lifted his hand in signal for a halt, his splendid body flexed.

From a hut, many times the size of any other and set at the extreme head of the clearing facing down the double row as would an officer scan his files of men, came a droning sound, the low pitched wailing of many women's voices, never varying in its dreary monotone. A terrible sound it was, sorrowful, dirgelike. Instinctively Lucille lifted her eyes to those of the Chief, her finger tips brushing against his bare forehead sympathetically.

A swift gleam crossed his stern face. At a few sharp words the party disbanded, disappearing in the huts. At his nod she followed his swift stride toward the great hut from which the sound came.

Even as she followed the man, she marvelled at the implicit confidence that seemed to have become a part of her since trusting herself to his escort. In one of her own race she would have known it for instinctive liking. The interior of the hut was crowded with women, the atmosphere so close as to fairly drive her back toward the tiny door through which she had entered. Above them, squatting, waiting women towered the splendid figure of the old chief. There was a slight droop to his shoulders now, a falling away about the muscles of his face. And to the ears of the girl, dominating the dirge-like wail, came a simple note that told her the story in its entirety, even as it struck to her woman's heart, arousing every atom of tenderness—the crying of a child.

Impulsively she brushed through the women, stooping over the pallet of rushes where the patient lay. Even with the emaciation which her illness had caused, despite the blaze of delirium in the widened eyes, the black blotches of fever like cheeks, Lucille would have known the girl for the daughter of the old man. As she turned to look at the Chief the pity of ignorance rushed upon her, and she rose and grasped both his hands in her own, unconscious of the horrified looks bestowed upon her by the women.

By signs she made it clear to the old man that the hut must be cleared before anything could be done to assist his daughter. It was difficult, communicating with him, but her obvious sympathy and understanding seemed to make the task easier. Gradually it dawned upon her that this was a custom of his people which required vast faith to go against. She watched him eagerly, her very heart crying out for the sick child whose name, for recovery was being stolen by this crowd of women, using up all the oxygen in the room when it was the most necessary thing for her recovery.

The Chief made his decision quickly. With a little cry of delight, quickly suppressed, she realized that the mystery of her coloring had made such an impression upon him that he was willing to follow her instructions to the letter. With the same dignity he had used in forcing his men to double their pace through the jungle he observed the women's protests and drove them from the hut, leaving the opening wide.

Lucille opened her mouth, laying her throat with the intoxicating air that drove on the odors the congestion had left behind. Then she turned her attention to the child.

There is a certain quality in the natural woman which gives her intuition when it comes to the nursing of an invalid or the caring for a baby, a quality which makes a cry coherent, a moan intelligible. Lucille, restricted though her experience had been, had sensed the proper

thing to do for the girl, giving her lungs a chance to feed the body properly.

That it was a fever was all she knew, the type was beyond her. She knew that some custom of the people had been violated by sending forth the women. She could feel it in the attitude of the natives when she emerged at short intervals to take a bit of exercise. But she was playing a lone game and the stakes were huge.

Day and night she ministered to the girl, encouraged at a diminution of the fever, now downright discouraging symptoms. All she had to work with were the natural weapons which Nature leaves to the hands of the sensible nurse. Where the patient had been fed meat, Lucille made a broth; where witch doctors had stimulated a weakened heart and system, she soothed. And so much depended upon the little brown girl.

If she recovered then Lucille knew she would have made no mean friend in the grim chief who called daily to watch his daughter for a few moments then, without a word, would disappear. And friends meant so much to her now. It was



LUCILLE RESTORES THE CHIEF'S DAUGHTER TO HEALTH.

her turn toward the chief rather expectantly. Gravely as any king bestowing an order upon a loyal subject, the old man lifted the amulet by its two golden threads and dropped it about her neck, an amulet of a curious, milky stone carved into the semblance of an elephant and glittering with tiny precious stones, so set as to spell out certain native words.

Immediately the ceremony had been performed, every native lifted his shield and brought his spear against it with all his strength. The sound grew to such a volume she thought it would deafen her. Bewildered, she looked about, smiling at what she knew to be a sign of these people's belief in her. And then the smile died upon her lips, faded from her eyes and was succeeded by one of fear.

For, behind the throng, arms folded, his saturnine face impassive, cold, determined stood Hugo Loubeque, his eyes fastened undeviatingly upon her.

CHAPTER XI.

The Power of an Amulet.

WHAT followed the ceremonial attendant upon the presentation of the White Elephant to Lucille was all a blur to her. She remembered being taken to some temple, the triumphant return in the chair upon the back of the sacred beast but always before her eyes had loomed the figure of Hugo Loubeque. This afternoon, when she had come back to the hut which the Chief assigned to her, she felt a certain relief at knowing the man was about.

Vaguely she had dreaded his coming before but always had she thought it inevitable that he would come upon her. She knew him too well to imagine he could have survived the ship's fire

and still lose track of the papers for which he had fought so hard. And the diary with his life's story, his mapped out scheme of revenge; the picture of the woman he loved which he had kept so many years—No, she had always felt that the man was far from defeated even though the belt had been thrown away long since and the contents transferred to a bag she carried next her bones.

Times there were when she would have fled from the place in a sudden fit of hysteria induced by thinking of the urgency for the information in her possession being in Manila. Cooler thought always made her grapple with the impulse for haste and place herself in the hands of this superior power which had looked over her through such startling happenings.

If the international spy was at work—and at work she knew he assuredly was, now he had located her—why did he not strike? That was the hardest part of her stay in the village—the constant strain of waiting for the inevitable. The thought grew to be an obsession. She longed for something to do, something to occupy her mind that she might get the nervous terror out of her waking moments. She tried to think of the place in which she lived, what it was, who these people were, whether there might not be some chance of getting back to civilization, but Hugo Loubeque was too dominant a figure in the working out of her ambition to allow of anything else coming in.

It was the fourth day that her attention was irresistibly drawn to a native whose facial traits differed so materially from that of any of the men she had seen about the village that she studied him more closely. Everything and every body drew her scrutiny now. In every nook and corner she looked, suspecting something, she had no idea what, to happen that would be engineered by Loubeque. She had read the man's diary so constantly in her effort to study out the possible limitations of the man that it had become an obsession with her.

The man was seated, cross legged, upon a fallen log just a little ways beyond the village. His eyes were narrow slits that emitted sharp slants of evil light when they fell upon her, a light that frightened her and made her turn hurriedly back toward her hut.

She had not made over twenty steps before an unseen menace cast its shadow upon her heart. Though she could hear nothing, she knew unconsciously that the man was following her at such a pace he was obviously doing so for a purpose. She knew to run would make the man more confident. By an effort she conquered the impulse, trying to bring her pace to a slow walk. Then she realized the futility of such a method.

Slowly, relentlessly, the pat pat of the native's feet came to her. She halted and whirled upon him. The slits of eyes met her own and she read there the light of an unconquerable purpose. Her lips opened but no words would come. She had not especially feared the Chief of the village and his followers, but this man was different, different in every way.

Cautiously, stealthily he advanced upon her. There was a deathlike coldness about him that reminded her of the one she knew to be his master, the man under whose orders he was doing this thing. Her breath was coming fast but she knew she could do nothing unless the Providence that had looked over her up to now should intervene once more. She could feel the glitter of his eyes, could read the meaning in the terrible

hands which were outstretched toward her. She felt a curious constriction at her throat from the terror inspired within her by the appalling figure of the man. Her fingers clutched there for relief, pressing, pressing at the skin to loosen it sufficiently for the breath to come. And always the terrible figure of the native moved toward her, hands outstretched, the narrow slits of eyes growing more narrow until they were but a glitter from out the pasty brown of the lids.

There seemed nothing to do, no way out of his clutches. She tried to shriek but felt the sounds strangling in her throat. Her fingers encountered the slender golden threads that wound the amulet about her neck. She ripped at them as though they had caused her fright. And then everything became more distinct, more astonishing.

For, with a little gasp of fright, the menacing figure dropped flat upon the ground, dropped before her. For a second she thought the man was dead, then her eyes widened with astonishment as slowly, with face turned always down, the man crawled in a wriggling motion suggestive of a snake, back, back, back, until his body was lost in the tangle of shrubbery where she had come across him first, only a swaying of the leaves there, an occasional crackling of twigs betraying the fact that such a one had ever existed.

Lucille stared straight ahead of her. The terror that had fallen upon her was too great for immediate relief. Again her fingers sought the tortured throat, falling upon the amulet which the grateful chief had presented to her and immediately she realized what had saved her from the man.

She took the amulet from her neck and looked at it more thoughtfully than she had

done before. Then she went swiftly back to her hut in the village. But her mind was revolving the incongruity of the ways in which Fate assisted her in her purpose, a contrast extending from the aeroplane of Harley to the mystic efficacy of the sacred white elephant.

Incongruous truly, yet both were equally effective in blocking the fertile brain of a man who, with far less effort, had brought nations to war, had changed the map of continents.

CHAPTER XII.

Loubeque Narrows Down His Search.

PERHAPS it was the shock from her encounter with the strange native that made her slumber light, for the sound was very faint that awakened Lucille from the doze into which she finally had fallen. Like the rippling of a breeze through the leaves it was and yet something ominous about it brought her bolt upright in bed, her every faculty alert.

Like no other sound she had ever heard it grew more and more distinct as wakefulness claimed her fully. Gradually she made out that it came from immediately over her head. Her ears and eyes worked together and she followed the motion of sound until it ceased and was followed by another and more ominous one, such a sound as a rat makes gnawing at a hole. And yet it was not at all like such a sound.

The noise ceased abruptly. Startled at the suddenness of it she looked at the spot from which the last noise had come, then, with a shriek of horror, her eyes followed the stealthy, graceful reptile that seemed to grow from out the very roof of the thatched hut, its spineless body warring longer and longer before her horror-stricken eyes, its flat head moving in all directions, two little threads continually flickering from out its hideous mouth.

With a wild scream of terror she darted through the hut opening, heaving a sigh of relief at feeling the warm, clean air of the open window upon her cheek after the fetid atmosphere which the snake-intruder had seemed to bring with him. After a long effort she conquered the chill of icy terror which the serpent had thrown upon her. Her heart was very heavy for it was the first time anything had happened to her which seemed apart from human agency.

There at the outskirts of the village she fought against her terror, fought down the horror of the apparition which had awakened her from slumber and driven her forth into the night. And then she steeled herself against the fear, the cowardice. About her neck was the little bag with the papers and diary of Hugo Loubeque, the papers that meant so much to the man to whom she was engaged.

Fighting against herself, against everything feminine in her nature, she forced herself back to the hut. And then a great feeling of relief engulfed her. For the snake was gone. Listen closely as she would, no sound came to her ears save the myriad noises of the surrounding country, the jungle. But the hut was in wild disorder. Everything inside it had been torn apart. Not an inch of its surface but had been covered carefully in the disruption. No snake had brought about this confusion.

Lucille smiled to herself. Hugo Loubeque was the man who had frightened her so artfully. But she still had the papers.

(Continued)

such a task she had laid out for herself, the way was so stormy and beset with thorns. But she could not lose. She must get back to Manila and clear her sweetheart of the charge against him.

At times the task seemed impossible and there was no language for her misery save a moan. Then she would take a fresh brace as the picture of Lieutenant Gibson rose before her, stern, masterful, every inch a man even while her father was accusing him of betraying his country for money.

It was on the eighth day she was awakened from one of the naps she had accustomed herself to taking by the girl's turning on her pallet and regarding her out of eyes that held the light of sanity in lieu of the delirium it had seemed so impossible to combat. Lucille rose quickly, her hand feeling the steady pulse, smoothing the forehead that had been so feverish before.

Slowly, very slowly, under the abrupt relaxation of the strain under which she had been, her knees sank from under her and beside the bed of rushes she knelt, shaking with incoherent sobs, filled with a joy so great the tears refused to flow.

How long she knelt she did not know, was never to know. But merciful slumber came to her and she was awakened by the tender touch of a calloused hand upon her shoulder. Startled she sprang to her feet, then laughed at her alarm as she looked at the Chief and saw from the expression upon his face that he knew his child was out of danger.

She turned to the patient, still sleeping. Yes, no one could fail to see that the crisis was reached and passed. The girl's emaciated bosom was rising and falling evenly, the breath coming with none of the effort that had racked the fragile frame before. And the black fever spots upon the brown cheeks had disappeared.

From outside came a sudden clash of sound, a rippling, drumming sound that diminished to almost an echo only to rise slowly, gradually into a perfect thunderous wave. There was something musically triumphant about it which seemed to her to give with the majestic tones of a huge organ. Fascinated Lucille listened to the barbaric music, suddenly becoming aware that the old Chief was standing motionless beside the hut opening, his face emotionless save for the gleam of gratitude that suffused his eyes.

Slowly his right hand reached out, his head slowly bending in obedience. Lucille wonderingly placed her fingers upon the forehead of the man and emerged into the open, her eyes rounded in wonderment at the sight that greeted her.

Gorgeously caparisoned in scarlet and gold, a wonderful throne of the same colors upon his back, a bronzed native astride his head, knelt a milk white elephant almost at her feet. Before the huts stood the natives, their wide shields held across the forearms of their right hands while they drummed out the chorus she had observed before by slapping their spears against the tightly drawn surfaces. The old Chief stood motionless beside the elephant and she realized slowly that he meant for her to take the seat.

She shook her head in negation. She was too utterly tired and worn out to do anything. Before she had time to regret her decision, the old man stepped toward her, unwinding a curiously shaped amulet from about his neck. Came a crowding forward of the natives from every direction, the men in the forefront, the women and children in the rear. Something in the silence that succeeded the drumming noise, in the sober faces of the orderly throng surrounding her made