

LUCILLE LOVE. The Girl of Mystery. A Novel Thrilling Story of Love, Devotion, Danger and Intrigue

By the "MASTER PEN"

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(Synopsis of preceding chapters.)

While students together at West Point, and in love with the same girl, Sumpter Love proves Hugo Loubeque a thief and Loubeque is discharged. Love wins the girl. The enemy thus begins his work. In later years at Manila, when a butler thief in the employ of Loubeque, now an international spy, steals the 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 prevails upon Harley, a government aviator, to take her out to the ship, in his 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 oar of a crushed lifeboat. Lucille is rescued by friendly savages. She is given an amulet for curing the disease that has attacked her, and is set against the machinations of Hugo Loubeque, who, likewise cast on the island, plans to get the papers. He enters Lucille's hut, but she escapes with the precious papers. He sends a decoy message asking her to go to the home of a neighboring chief, whose wife is ill and in need of nursing. On the way there she falls into a covered pit, dug by Loubeque across her path. Her guide, an old crone, takes the papers from Lucille, and gives them to Loubeque, who goes with them to the jungle. His guide and servant steal them, but is killed by a lion, and Lucille, who had trailed them three days, recovers them from the body. Lucille meets strange cave-dwelling people, attacked by monkeys, escapes in a canoe and is carried into an underground whirlpool. She is rescued by Captain Wetherell and taken aboard his yacht, where she meets Loubeque, who is also picked up by the yacht, which is carrying contraband arms to Chinese rebels. When warships pursue, the papers are put into Lucille's hands and she is taken to sea in an open boat, because they know too much of his plans. Their water gives out and Lucille nearly drowns, but is rescued by a Chinese fisherman. Hugo, after nursing Lucille back to life, goes after Wetherell to get the papers back, and is captured by him. Lucille allows her captor, who is a shadowy figure, to take her to the city of San Francisco, in the hold, and on being released, searches Loubeque's room for the papers. He catches her, ties her up, convinces the captain that she is insane, and on the vessel's arrival at port has her whirled away in a taxi.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A House of Mysterious Entrances.

SOMETHING told Lucille as she stood at the ship's rail that trouble awaited her once her feet were set upon the wharf. She had the captain's reassurance that everything would be all right, knew that he had sent a wireless to the authorities in San Francisco, but, as she glanced to her right, saw the sinisterly meaningful gesture of Hugo Loubeque, every word of the man came back to her, every word he had uttered in his horribly playful mood, regarding keeping her under his finger, seeing to it that she could do no more harm to the working out of his evil plans.

And her hand closed about the diary hidden in the bosom of her dress, the diary she had read so many times she knew it well-nigh by heart, the diary with its tale of gigantic power and unscrupulousness in the accomplishment of one purpose, the destruction of her father. What chance did the honest, simple minded captain have, what chance did the officers of a mere municipality have when they opposed themselves to one who overthrew nations and their rulers by the lifting of his hand?

The lifting of his hand, just such lifting as the one he had just made to some unseen power upon the wharf, a giant power probably, yet bent readily to do his will. She turned her eyes toward him, eyes that were filled with a mute appeal, then turned them away again, sick at heart as she caught the triumphant smile behind the cruel steel of his own. Still, strain though she would toward that crowd upon the landing, she could make out nothing suspicious. She could even see the squad of policemen marching toward the crowd, officers of the law she knew were sent to protect her from any possible violence.

Reassuring though the sight was, her steps were laggard as she marched down the plank. Almost immediately she felt a pressing forward in the fore ranks of the crowd, a pressing forward that tended in her direction. She looked about her and found a man's face staring into hers from every direction. There was no enmity on those faces. They were not brutal, not even on those faces. There was a fixed purposefulness about them, a grim regard that told her instinctively they were the minions of Hugo Loubeque. She had marked that same expression on his own face as many times, that set, iron determination to work out his purpose at any and all costs. Yet not a hand was laid upon her, not a voice lifted. She tried to force her way forward, but a steady resistance met her. She attempted to go to the side. Again that impalpable power held her in the center of the crowd. In an agony of despair she raised her eyes in mute appeal to the rail where she had last seen the captain. He would understand her distress, would help her. But to her dismay, she found that the man was so close, the heads of the men so towering, that even sight of the vessel was cut off from her. Then, just as a heavily veiled woman pressed toward her, with eyes that glittered a menace matching poorly the affectionate pose of her form, Lucille lifted her voice, only to have her appeal smothered by the fierce embrace of the woman, who continually referred to Lucille as "her poor sister."

She did not know how it was worked, but the crowd of men opened readily for the escort and herself, not only opened but assisted them along their way. The door of a great limousine stood open before her. She drew away, tried to fight against the strength of the mysterious woman, only to find the arm that held hers with such an appearance of affection to be made of bands of steel. Swiftly she was hustled into the car and before her companion had closed the door, the car shot forward, gaining speed with every rod. The thunder of planks ceased as the machine struck the asphalt.

The futility of further resistance made her sink back against the cushions, sick with apprehension of what was to come, a dull apathy gradually closing about her and soothing her tired eyes. After all, she had known that Hugo Loubeque would be able to do as he said, that there could be no adequate assistance against him, so long as she knew nothing of his plans. She recalled all that happened before in her warfare to regain possession of the stolen papers, seeing the hand of a guiding Providence in her every successful effort and the many escapes she had made from what appeared certain death. The car leaped like a living thing through the streets of the city and then doubled upon its tracks so that she might have no chance to place certain sites and gain some idea thereby where her ultimate destination was. Lucille studied her captor from under cover of her heavy lashes. She could see but little of the face for the heavy mourning veil swathing it. She only made out that she appeared apathetic, disinterested, now her portion of the work assigned to her had been carried through. It seemed a characteristic attitude of all who worked for the man. They were but cogs in a vast machine, responsive to the master's touch, obedient, but

never working through any motive save his own impetus. A kind face, the woman had, yet the possible outcome of the weak, unhappy girl she had captured so boldly seemed to make not the slightest impression upon her. Only at the end of their drive, when the chauffeur opened the door did she speak. "Any attempt to escape would be quite useless," she said in a dull, mechanical tone of voice. "If you are wise you will not make the situation any more difficult for yourself by being foolish."

As the motor car ceased purring at the curb, the woman pressed the door bell. Came a scuffling along the hall, a shadow fluttered there a second, then the door swung open. Lucille stepped across the threshold with her captor, surprised to see no one in sight. Apparently the door had opened of its own volition. Before her was a straight stairway, appearing to end at the second flight. To her left was a living room into which she was ushered. Again the woman pressed a bell. "You will want some tea and cakes," she said quietly.

Lucille nodded, studying her surroundings keenly. What a change from the place she would have expected and yet how natural that the international spy should choose just such an unpretentious place from which to pull his wires, play upon the strings of the world! How typical of Hugo Loubeque was every detail! She turned at a suggestive clink of china. She had heard no one enter the room, yet, in the shadows, she saw an attentive butler holding the tea tray while the mysterious veiled woman poured. The man moved toward her, manded silently, swiftly, surely. There was something about his manner, his perfection, strikingly reminiscent of some one she had seen before. He stood before her and, even as she bent his head murmuring a query as to her preference regarding sugar or lemon, she recognized him.

"Thompson!" she gasped. "Thompson! You here! What are you doing here?" "Yes, Miss Love! Thank you, Miss! I am employed by Mr. Loubeque, Miss Love! Thank you!" She stared at him incredulously, at the mask of a face, upon which not the flicker of expression was stamped. And then gradually she understood, knew who had stolen the papers from her father's safe, realized how completely they had all been fooled by this cunning servant. She shrank away from him as though from the plague, but still he showed no sign of anger or chagrin.

"Go away!" she muttered brokenly. "Go away! I can't bear to look at you." "Yes, Miss. Thank you!" When she looked up he had disappeared. Swiftly she gathered herself together. Such childish tricks must not be permitted to shatter her courage for even an instant. She must strike while her captor was new to them, all before a system of surveillance had been thoroughly established. She slipped stealthily to the door through which she had entered the house. In the hall she looked cautiously about, then put her foot upon the stairs and proceeded to move to the first flight. Midway, she was paralyzed into inactivity by finding the stairs to be in motion.

Horror seized her. Then once more she braced herself. Only another trick of Loubeque's it was. The stairs seemed to fold up within her courage for even a moment. They were grey steady once more and the girl looked about an unfurnished room of stone wall. But she did not see this wall, did not mark the lack of decorations or furniture in the room, for a company of men formed a crescent facing her, one tall figure standing apart from the rest, immovable, silent.

The solitary figure lifted his hand. Then, frozen with terror though she was, Lucille saw that each figure was swathed in a black robe and that a plain, silk mask of black covered every face. Masks through which threatening eyes glared out upon her, masks so light they flattered against the wearer's features with hideous significance. Slowly the company passed her, pausing before her to peer narrowly into her face, as though impressing her every feature indelibly upon their minds. When she regained her powers of observation the line had passed, had paused and disappeared. She looked about her. She was alone.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Correspondence Under Difficulties.

TWO days and never a sign of Loubeque. Lucille had feared and dreaded that first meeting. She was positive the solitary figure apart from the masked company had been the spy. But the formality had been so silent, so ominous she had thrust it from her because of the terror its recollection never failed to induce within her heart. The band of evil-doers certainly could make no mistake regarding her identity after that close scrutiny.

The room assigned her was a chamber, but, trying the large windows, she found they could be let down from the top and were there covered by a thin netting of a metal that resisted every attempt at prying apart. Looking more carefully she saw this same filament of wire was interwoven with the glass so they could not be completely smashed. The only means of escape lay by the door and, to get out that way, involved a flight of steps which passed many rooms.

But she must escape. The thought of what Loubeque might be doing unimpeded drove her brain tyrannically against a worn-out body. She had the man's diary, wherein was evidence against him of such crimes as would have appalled the most hardened courts, would have set nations at one another's throats, entailed countless deaths. The thing was so deadly that, zealous though she was in her object of saving her sweetheart, Lucille knew she could never bring herself to the point of making public such a document. She had the rubies from the throat of the hideous idol in the subterranean cave. Times without number she regarded the glowing stones, shuddered at the blood-red rays that of each to have borrowed some of its luster from the rivers of blood that had been shed through the lure of its mocking light. A king's ransom, each one; the ransom of many nations, was the strand. Lucille allowed the jewels to run through her slender fingers idly, unthinkingly, even contemptuously. For of what avail was all this when she was a prisoner in the house of one who hated so soundly that he would willingly sacrifice his very soul for revenge! A man to whom life, death, honor, fame, family, fatherland, all, everything meant naught but revenge! Idle, worthless stones, no better than pebbles upon a sandy shore they were to the girl whose heart and soul and body were inextricably interwoven with love. The amulet which the savage chief had given her for saving his daughter's

life—that was her only other possession, and of what use was such a thing in this city of super-civilization?

Apparently she was free to come and go about the place as she pleased, but the very mockery of such a freedom made her real situation all the more. Absorbed in the hopeless task of finding some means of escape she took to having her meals served in her room, eating scarcely anything so engrossed was she with her thoughts.

On the fourth day, as she sat beside the window, dejectedly looking out upon the well-nigh deserted street, she was suddenly aware of a shadow falling upon the glass. She sprang to her feet, turned to face Loubeque. The spy was not smiling now. Instead there was a tender expression on his face, a look of sympathy such as she dimly recalled having seen while she was racked with delirium of fever in the open boat, out there upon the seemingly sparsely ocean. In his hands he held a newspaper and instantly she divined it held something that would hurt her. She nodded slowly, catching her breath with an effort, fighting back her nameless terror.

She turned at a suggestive clink of china. She had heard no one enter the room, yet, in the shadows, she saw an attentive butler holding the tea tray while the mysterious veiled woman poured. The man moved toward her, manded silently, swiftly, surely. There was something about his manner, his perfection, strikingly reminiscent of some one she had seen before. He stood before her and, even as she bent his head murmuring a query as to her preference regarding sugar or lemon, she recognized him.

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CHAPTER XXX. On the Roof Tops. 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 felt a sudden terror of what could happen next in this mysterious house of instantaneous entrances and exits. 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 a 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 must have come from her room in this fashion. It might be that, in some way, Loubeque had fallen and injured the machinery. She peered more narrowly at the man, and, her eyes growing accustomed to the thick blackness, she made out the grim features of the spy. To stoop down, take the papers from his pocket, and hide them between the crack of the floor of the room and the bottom of the elevator, was the work of an instant. As the room glided gently into place without so much as a tremor, she leaped 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. For a second he appeared dazed, then swift consternation crossed his face as his hand shot toward the place where he had placed the stolen papers. Almost simultaneously his left hand closed about her wrist, gripping it so tightly she kept from screaming only by the sturdiest effort.

"Where did you put them—the packet?" he demanded. Her mocking laugh answered him. The grip tightened. "Answer!" His voice was hoarse with suppressed passion. "Tell me the truth or—" "You will break my wrist, I presume. That seems quite in your line, sir." The gibing note in her voice made him relax his grip with a little cry of mingled apology and chagrin. "Come," he said quietly, his tones silky 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 whir 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 all. 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. There was a glint of admiration in his eyes, mingled with the steady determination to secure what he desired. His face was smeared with blood but, despite that, he retained the same commanding, grim dignity and assurance. 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 luck 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—solitude—All three in this prison, this prison so much unlike a prison that it was rendered only 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. True, Loubeque did not have the papers and could do nothing until they were found, but neither could she do anything with them, did not even know how to go about finding them again. She flung herself upon the bed, burying her face in her hands and giving way to sobs. Everything was so hopeless, the way had been so long, and still stretched so indefinitely before her, the road that had no turning, the road that seemed but to lead her further and further from the ones she held so dear— She straightened, startled by a faint tinkle 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 the opening. It was finally wide enough. She looked up. The captain nodded briefly, then disappeared. In a moment he reappeared, slowly dangling a heavy rope which he had made a looped chair from. Lucille edged her way slowly through the opening. She stood upon the heavy sill 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. Back and forth she gently swayed a second, fending herself from the house with her right hand. Then she felt herself being slowly lifted, lifted in little spasmodic jerks.

Strong tugs at the rope drew her closer and closer to the brick cemented fringe that separated the house from its neighbors. Her finger tips brushed the top of these. Another pull and she had a firm hold and was drawing herself over. Powerful hands closed about her wrists, when from below came a shout that told 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, low voices. Lucille seemed to have all the initiative now. She grasped the man's arm and hurried him toward the closest chimney just as a sky-light door flung 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 sandal roof scrawled thin their hands terribly. Again that flutter of chips. The captain turned and fairly hurled 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 pursuit grew bold now. Rose the voice of Loubeque, cold, steady, terrible. "Don't waste shots. Get the man with lead. Catch the girl." The captain's grip tightened reassuringly on her wrist. "If they get me," he said quietly, "take the gun and make them work." She nodded, pressing his hand. Like frightened children they scurried from chimney to chimney, that silent pursuit always drawing closer, the captain now and then turning to throw a shot back at the common enemy. 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 every direction came the pursuit. Lucille suddenly noticed there was no attempt made to close in upon her but that she was being driven in a certain direction. She stopped fearfully, vaguely afraid of that which she could not fathom. A bullet dashed a spray of sand into her face and she darted aside—darted 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 toppled down. Loubeque was watching her, a curiously twisted smile playing about the corners of his mouth. "You have too many friends, Lucille," he murmured, a hint of the same admiration in his voice that she had caught earlier in his eyes. "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."

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

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Frozen With Terror, Lucille Found Herself Surrounded by Threatening Masked Figures.

(Continued Next Week.)