

# LUCILLE LOVE, The Girl of Mystery

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

By the "MASTER PEN"

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CHAPTER XXXIV.

Accident.

OW in the seat beside the driver crouched Lucille, still a bit numbed by the rapid succession of events which preceded her finding herself free once more from the spy's surveillance. Scarcely more than an hour had it been that she sat opposite him at dinner and found the note from the butler hinting to her of a safety she had almost forgotten how to hope for. The two hoots of the pseudo owl, the instinct of terror which had led her to Loubeque's quarters barely in time to rescue the precious papers and rubies from the pair, the waiting automobile the butler had arranged for himself and which she occupied alone—all these seemed no things that had happened in the long ago.

Suddenly she leaned 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 newly released from the bow.

Like a living thing, all a-tremble with his precious cargo, throbbing with the sacredness of his race, the car leaped through the night, eating up the zigzag stretch of road like some giant monster, then spewing it forth again and continuing his way. And behind somewhere, upon the same road, here 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.

Then came the dull crunching 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 heave a huge sigh of relief.

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

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

CHAPTER XXXV.

A Tenacious Thief.

THERE are but two stages to unconsciousness—the blank state and the drowsy stage where scenes transpiring are vaguely sensed by the sufferer only to be obliterated completely as the murmur of a brook is wiped from memory of the ear.

Lucille pieced together happenings vaguely after that, then dismissed them as of no account. Nothing appeared to matter. She was comfortable and partially content. She recollected 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 motor car, 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 suffering in his tones was 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, the woman he had loved and lost and whose memory had stirred up such a hatred in his heart that he had been obliged to spend his life torturing the daughter of the loved one.

As though something had snapped inside her brain the voice and face of the man brought her to a consciousness so keenly acute it was positive suffering. As had happened so many times before she felt all her sympathy going out to this man who had proved such a bitter enemy, who had brought such catastrophe upon her and her's, and who would again prove so relentless should she attempt to take advantage of his temporary weakness to appeal to the better side of him.

She fought back the words of sympathy that came to her with an effort, even as she closed her eyes and feigned slumber. Her brain was working at a rate that pained her, as though it was forced to make up its tardiness. Loubeque had caught and rescued her. Undoubtedly he was again in possession of the papers. Suddenly she felt that he had conquered his emotions and moved away. She slowly opened her eyes and looked about. She was in her own private compartment on the train. She was alone.

Tremulously, fearful yet almost positive her hands would not encounter that which she sought, she touched her bosom. The feel of the necklace and papers reassured her, drove away the last mists of unreality. Where 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. She tiptoed to the door, looking it, then stood a moment in the center of the tiny place, her fingers seeking for the papers which her courage would not allow her to touch.

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 scintillant 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 chances with the stolen papers even while awake. She had stolen a sheaf of worthless waste paper. The international spy still held the whip hand.

She clenched her pretty teeth tightly together even as she kept repeating to herself over and over again the question of 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. He had well nigh proven himself able to cope with the mighty Loubeque himself.

She unlocked the door very softly and slipped down the vestibule aisle. She had reasoned out the answer. Thompson had escaped Loubeque and, foiled in his attempt to gain the necklace, was still one of the pursuit.

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

Lucille sought her compartment, her brain a-whirl. 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.

Let the three cornered fight go on. All the parties to it saved herself had double motives. She wanted the papers that would lead to the fulfillment of her heart's desire. Nothing could divert her from that. And she was so close to them—so close—so close that she must win.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Lucille Indulges a Feminine Instinct.

LUCILLE thrilled with inexpressible delight when she found herself once more in San Francisco. Somehow, it seemed a harbinger of good that she should come back to the place where last she had seen her sweetheart. She imagined him roving the city, using every means in his power to find her. She knew he had read aright the message she shot him from the window of Loubeque's mysterious house, that he had led the assault upon that house, and that not even the secret exit made by the occupants could divert him from his purpose of finding her. All woman at that thought, she fought against the natural instinct to hunt him up and rely upon him. She had a far better chance than he with Loubeque. She only caught herself hoping that the international spy would return to his home.

She knew the hope was foolish as it immediately turned out to be. Not for the cunning brain of such a one as the spy to go back to a place from which he had been driven and which he had every reason to believe would be under surveillance. Instead of doing this he promptly took a motor to the St. Francis, relying upon the very audacity of his move to protect him.

Lucille followed him quietly, almost meekly. They had but little to say to each other. Both knew the other's thoughts too well to waste time in words; both knew the other's relentlessness of purpose. And, more than anything and everything else, both knew that the fight between them must be settled very shortly, that any move must be made quickly.

Lucille slipped out of the hotel her second day, undecided as to what to do and caring little to plan or plot. Before this opportunities had presented themselves. Providential opportunities which no one could have foreseen. Only at such times had she been enabled to make a satisfactory move. And she felt convinced that the very justice of her cause would permit her to win when the last hands were dealt in this strange game. And always there was Thompson to be reckoned with.

Thompson was the man who had been capable enough to be the right hand of Hugo Loubeque; Thompson was the one who, when he turned against his former master, was the one who excited such alarm in the spy that he took the most elaborate precautions against him; Thompson was the man upon whom she must depend. Thompson would lay open a way. And the hate of Thompson would turn itself against the hate of Loubeque and then her own great Love would have its innings.

Somehow this utterly illogical, unreasonable viewpoint upon the situation buoyed her hopes to such an extent that she went out the great doors of the hotel, fairly beaming with satisfaction. And in this mood, for the first time since leaving Manila so abruptly in the aeroplane of Harley, her thought turned from the sweetheart she felt was in the city to the thought of meeting him. And simultaneously with this thought came a dismayed alarm.

She stopped short, the song upon her lips frozen there as she looked down at herself. For the first time in months an idea recurred to her, an idea that seemed to have formed a major portion of her ideas in life before that time—clothes.

Clothes! She fairly blushed as she looked upon the beautiful dressed woman upon the street. Clothes! Why, she looked a perfect ragamuffin. She became frightfully self-conscious, ascribing the glances of admiration bestowed upon her from pedestrians to her shabbiness. Unconsciously her hands sought the precious necklace. She shuddered and drew into an arcaic way. She should meet Lieutenant Gibson here. Would he not be a bit ashamed of her?

She speeded swiftly and furtively down the street. Self-reliance had become a part of her from her experiences but the thought of obtaining money was something that appalled her. She had never known anything of money in her life. Things had always seemed to just come to her without the necessity for worrying.

Resolutely she bit her lips and forced her way through the doors of a jewelry establishment, fighting her resolution to the point of approaching the bespectacled, important looking man behind the counter. Somehow, she could not repress a faint smile at sight of the glittering baubles so temptingly outlined beneath the glass. She found her amusement intensified by the obvious lack of impression she made upon the salesman as he looked her over.

As he bent forward politely, questioning her as to her pleasure, her hand sought the necklace and brought it forth, laying it quietly upon the counter.

"I wished to sell," she murmured bashfully. The salesman stared from her to the necklace, his eyes growing wider and wider with wilderment as he looked upon such stones as he had never seen before in his life.

The proprietor—he muttered. Lucille followed the direction of his pointed finger, on the verge of bursting into laughter at the change in his demeanor. With added confidence she pushed open the ground glass door upon which was marked a caution for all outsiders to keep out.

A keen eyed little man turned upon her abruptly, his lips half open for a protest against the intrusion when his eyes fell upon the neck-

lace she carried loosely in her hands. "I wished some ready money," Lucille quickly explained, blushing at her own temerity as she placed the precious necklace upon the desk. "I don't know what the stones are worth but I would like to realize as much as I can upon them."

The man drew a jeweler's glass from his drawer and stooped to examine each stone, his lips pursing to vent a little whistle of awe and admiration every few moments. After what seemed an interminable length of time he turned abruptly upon her, his mouth very stern.

"Where did you get this necklace, Miss? I presume you realize something of its value?"

"No, sir," she was frightened at his stern manner. "I—I found it—"

The man sneered incredulously. "Found it! Where, may I ask?"

"I—I really don't know exactly where," she



swiftly—who was constantly proving himself but a mere man, after all; a man susceptible to woman's charms just as the greatest and strongest men of history had proven themselves susceptible.

With the thought, Lucille seemed to change; to shrink away from herself as though she were defiled slightly by the mere thought. But her head was high, her cheeks sparkling as she entered the first fashionable shop she came to; her manner such that the crowding, jostling women made way for her as for a queen in regal attire instead of a young girl with habiliments torn and disheveled by such privations and adventures as those about her never dreamed of.

And always, alongside the doors of all the establishments she entered waiting—patiently waiting—furtively waiting, a rather servile appearing man stood, respectful, quiet, contained.

Swift, certain, sure as the evening he had



His Voice Was Hoarse, Terrifying in Its Bitterness, Its Scorn.

was on the verge of tears now as she reached for her possession. "It was on a savage island where I was cast away—an island just eight days from Manila."

"A savage island—from Manila—" A bit of the incredulity had left his manner already. Once more he stooped to examine the necklace. "Yes," he muttered, "the cutting of the stones is different from any I have ever encountered—Old Asiatic, undoubtedly." Again he turned to her. "How long ago was this, Miss? What is this story of being cast away? I do not recollect any wrecks—"

"The Empress," Lucille quickly explained, her eyes clouding with terror as she recollected the horrors of the subterranean cavern into which she had fallen, recalled the clammy touch of the sightless inhabitants, the grinning, hideous monster-like squatting in the arms of the still more hideous idol.

"There—there,"—the little man was bending over her, a glass of water in his hands which he pressed upon her. "I believe you, my dear young woman, I merely wished to know—"

"It isn't that," she smiled faintly. "It's recollecting the terrible place underground—the horrible creatures—everything—"

"Well, well, well," he rubbed his hands together in frank amazement. "To think that anyone escaped from the wreck of the Empress! Once more his lips pursued. "But why have you not reached friends?"

"I am Lucille Love," she said quietly. "I cannot go back—"

"Lucille Love—daughter of General Love?" He studied her keenly, nodding his head from side to side. "Yes, yes, your father and I were quite well acquainted when he was stationed at the Presidio here. And you will not go back because of the disgrace that caused you to leave when the orders from Washington were stolen?"

Lucille rose haughtily from her chair, taking the necklace from the table and moving toward the door.

"There was no disgrace," she explained clearly, her tones fairly chilling. "The papers were stolen by an outsider, sir. That was why I boarded the Empress. That is why I am here. That is why I seek money; why I am still searching."

"There—there—" The jeweler's manner was frankly proprietary. "I meant no offense. I merely wished to know—"

"I came to know if you cared to purchase the necklace," she coldly retorted, preparing to replace it about her neck.

"But my dear Miss Love," he smiled, "you must realize that there is not money enough in the establishment to purchase such a wonderful necklace as the one you own. A few stones—possibly, or," he added on an afterthought, "I might purchase an option on the necklace for, say as much of a reasonable sum as you desire at present, and will then look about for a purchaser."

Lucille's face showed her relief. "I will give you ten thousand dollars for an option to sell the necklace within six months," the man continued quickly. "Meanwhile, I will keep it here and give you a receipt for it, in order that I may show it to possible customers."

"Ten thousand dollars!" Lucille's eyes were wide in wonderment. She had never thought in terms of dollars and cents before and the sum seemed incredible to her.

It was not ten minutes later, with a mutual promise to say nothing of the transaction that she left the shop with a certified check for the sum mentioned in her tightly clenched fist, accompanied by a clerk.

A strange shadow seemed to have fallen upon her, one which took a large part of the amusement she anticipated getting from her shopping away. She could only ascribe it to meeting with one who had known her father, who unwittingly showed her what the judgment of the world had been in regard to the missing orders, the necessity for immediately fleeing Hugo Loubeque.

the room at the appearance of Lucille. His own manner was bending, yielding and it was clear to her that he was looking at her from a new angle, one which frankly surprised him, that Lucille had become a gorgeously wonderful woman to him and not merely the pretty daughter of the woman he had loved in the Long Ago.

She was playing a part she had never dreamed of playing until she caught sight of her beautiful reflection mirrored back at her from the long glass in her apartment; was playing a part which she would not characterize even to herself, was playing it as though born to just such a role. And a great shame was upon her, even as her growing self-disgust divided itself between shame at seeing the great Loubeque falling into the net she was deftly weaving for him. The creaming champagne had no effect upon her. She was astonished to see how it worked upon the spy, while her's was grounding upon one all-obscuring idea. She watched him narrowly, marking the constantly growing boldness of his frank admiration.

A rather pretty girl whirled into the center of the big dining-room and without waiting for the faint murmur of applause that greeted her appearance to subside, began to dance. Lucille noticed that Loubeque had so far given himself over to the spirit of revelry that his dishes went untouched as he watched the indifferent dancing. Inspiration came to Lucille, a daring thought that fired her eyes, that made her cheeks flush so hotly she lifted her glass to conceal it from her escort. Before this she had acted on a vague impulse without seeing any definite result that could come from her endeavors. She saw the weak spot in Hugo Loubeque's well-nigh perfect armor, thought she saw a method of reaching it. Quietly, she excused herself and left the room, graceful, apparently unconscious of the undisguised admiration bestowed upon her.

Once at the end of the room her manner changed. Swiftly she turned, taking the direction she had seen the dancer leave and coming into a small room where the entertainers sat. For just a second she paused, not knowing exactly how to do what she had started now that she actually confronted the situation. Taking herself firmly in hand she approached the girl, drawing her to one side.

"If I pay you well," she whispered eagerly, "would you let me dance in your place the next time—pay you one hundred—five hundred dollars," she added as the girl regarded her suspiciously.

"Five hundred dollars!" Wonderment glinted in the eyes upon her. "What do you want—to get a chance at cabaret work?"

"No—no. I can dance, but I merely wish to do it once. There is a reason I cannot explain to you. But it means everything to me. Please—please—"

Tears glistened in eyes filled to overflowing with such honest pleading that the girl quickly nodded.

"Let's see you work," she demanded. "What line, Miss?"

Lucille slowly recalled an old Spanish dance she had learned years before, one she had danced in private theatricals. The cabaret dancer whispered to a young man in the corner who took his guitar from its case and thrummed lightly until Lucille nodded. Five minutes later, a bit flushed but perfectly confident she had acquitted herself well, she halted at a sharp word from the woman she sought to supplant.

"You'll do," the girl said quickly, then, with a tinge of envy in her voice and eyes, "dead sure you ain't after me job?"

Lucille pressed the money upon her, warmly assuring her over and over again that such was not her intention.

"All right then. You're due in half an hour. I'll fix with the manager and put the orchestra leader wise to the game. That dress ain't quite the stuff for—"

Lucille nodded gayly. Half an hour could be ample time for her to make a change. Hurriedly she scribbled a note to Loubeque, reassuring him as to her delay and begging him to wait a short time until she came. Then she darted to her suite, fairly tearing her gown from her in her haste. She did not know what odd whims had induced her to purchase the little costly fish taffeta dancing gown that fitted the part she intended playing so perfectly.

A bit breathless she returned to the cabaret room barely in time to make her entrance. She turned a bit cold as she waited, frightened of her own temerity. The girl gave her a shove forward and she found herself standing in the big room, heard, as from a long way off, the stringed orchestra brilliantly playing La Paloma, playing so irresistibly that, even with all her fear, her toes tapped in time to the music.

"Gwan! Beat it!" It was the voice of the cabaret dancer.

Lucille knew then that she must go through with what she had started. Taking a long breath, her body awayed to the strains. Slowly, gracefully she glided into the room, her face partially concealed by the mantilla. A gasp of surprise followed her appearance, men and women leaned forward, forgetful of their dinner, lured by her infectious grace and charm. But she had eyes for but one man, the international spy, who, surprised, puzzled expression on his face, leaned far forward in his chair, watching this woman who danced so wonderfully, with such innocent abandon and charm, who had eyes for no one, thought of nothing save her work.

Then suddenly the music changed. Lucille flashed a glance at Loubeque and from that moment danced to him and him alone. It was perfectly obvious to everyone in the room. The spy sank back in his chair, a bit embarrassed but quite happy with delight. The music was growing slower, slower, and with a trickling laugh of impish merriment, Lucille flung wide her mantilla and bowed mockingly, yet with the pleading expression of a child seeking applause, to the arch-spy.

For just a second his splendid mouth gaped, then, with eyes that shot strange fires at her, his palms cracked vigorously together as he led off the whirlwind of applause that set the glasses for but one dancing. The orchestra leader, who's baton toward Lucille for an encore and, from her chair opposite Loubeque into which she had sunk, she half rose to respond with a bow.

"My God!" "My God!"

The voice was hoarse, terrifying in its bitterness, its scorn. Lucille turned, startled, then, involuntarily, her hands reached out toward the man who was standing, tense, a horrified expression of disgust and unbelief upon his countenance.

"Dick!" she quavered.

Lieutenant Gibson moved away as her slender figure swayed toward him. Her hands were upon his wrists. He looked at them a second then slowly detached them and turned away, leaving the great room, leaving behind the woman who dared everything for him.

And Lucille, the radiant face of a moment, before gone into a mask, a frigid, icy mask, watched him as, without turning, he left her alone to fight alone the battle for him. Loubeque touched her shoulder sympathetically.

"Poor child, Lucille!" he murmured. "It was Gibson. After all you might have believed of him, to have him turn that way instantly—"

"Dick is a man," she smiled sadly. "Man is full of suspicion. But when a woman loves she does not ask for references."

(Continued Next Week.)