

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 XXXVIII

Defeat in the Hour of Victory.

Lucille Love, the cutter, Lucille for the first time heaved a huge sigh of relief as she glanced back toward the shore and saw Hugo Loubeque jump from the car in which he had been pursuing her and glance hurriedly up and down the harbor front.

She glanced approvingly now at the broad shoulders of the sailors, revelled in the long swing of the oars that took her out of the spy's reach. Always her hands pressed against the papers at her heart. They were in her possession now, they were hers, and the honor of the ones she held most dear was in her keeping, never to be lost again.

She clambered over the sides of the waiting government vessel, being met at the deck by the Captain himself. His eye-brows rose in surprise as he regarded the slender slip of a girl facing him, her eyes wet with tears.

"Ensign Howell informed me that Mr. Loubeque—" he began when she interrupted.

"The papers are here, Captain. I have them. They are safe now."

For a moment she studied her meditatively. She felt an icy chill running up and down her spine. Would he see the frantic man upon the shore? Would he hesitate? Would he not believe her when she told him the truth regarding the documents? Would he turn back and force her to return the papers? At the very suggestion her face flexed in every muscle while her eyes met his coldly and steadily, a purpose in their depths which even the officer turned away from, convinced that all was well.

And now that she was safe, the nervous reaction came upon her. In her own tiny cabin, safe finally from the man she had last seen upon the shore, it seemed the very air was fraught with terrors, horrible fears reaching toward her, gibbering at her with threats of perils greater even than those she had come through already. A light tapping on the door brought her, to her feet, heartily ashamed of the false terrors she had allowed to unnerve her. She opened the door and Ensign Howell entered.

Lucille regarded him coldly, in far different manner from the coquettish young woman who had put him off at the house of Loubeque. His eyes were frowning, at first, then under the exquisite beauty of her, they melted and he took an involuntary step forward.

"Miss—Miss—" he stammered, "why did you send me away from the appointment? The Captain wishes to speak with you and when you tell him the truth, it will appear as though I—"

"You need have no fear," she answered quietly, ignoring the expression of the man which told her that even his dread of a reprimand from his superior was of far less consequence than her opinion of him. "Will you kindly conduct me to the Captain. I will explain everything."

The Captain of the Terror regarded her steadily as she was brought before him. Seated at his desk, in the very throne of his authority, a power that ruled the depths of the ocean, with the young Ensign at his side, heels together, toes and chest out in rigid, stern attention, Lucille felt him a very much more formidable being than when she met him on the deck. This man was her enemy, would be her enemy until the question of possession of the papers had been thoroughly threshed out.

"Your name, please?" queried the commander shortly.

Lucille felt a thrill of pride running through her, taking possession of every particle of space within her slender body. Her name—that was the beginning and end of it all, the weeks of peril, privation, hardship, danger. Her name—the name of Love, the name that this man and the great government which ruled the flag under which this boat of the seas sailed, had and was endeavoring to traduce.

"My name, sir," she said quite simply, yet with a tremor, "is Lucille Love, daughter of General Sumpter Love, United States Army."

"Impossible!"

As though the two voices had been one, the Captain and his junior burst forth in the exclamation. Lucille merely smiled as she saw the wondering incredulity upon their faces change to one of understanding then of resolve for warfare.

The commander held out his hand.

"I am in receipt of orders from Washington," he said, "to meet Hugo Loubeque, who would turn over to me certain papers and orders which he received from Washington while in command at Manila, and which he sold—"

"It's a lie!" Lucille's voice had no tremor now. Instead it rang against the sides of the cabin with a vibrant force that made the two men start violently.

"Yes, a lie," she repeated, quieting the fury which was racking her. "My father did receive the papers. There was a military ball in progress at the time. He gave them to his aide, Lieutenant Gibson, my fiancée, to put in the safe. That night they were stolen by a servant in the employ of Hugo Loubeque; stolen, I tell you, not sold."

The Commander nodded coldly.

"Your contention is a matter for the Court of Inquiry to thresh out. I am under orders to receive the packet of papers and take them to that court, together with the affidavit of Hugo Loubeque that they were sold to him. If they are in your possession, I will take them; if not, I shall be forced to turn back and find Mr. Loubeque."

"The papers are in my possession, sir. They belong to me until I can turn them over to my father, to whom they were sent. What he will do with them is a matter for the Court of Inquiry to decide."

"That is quite impossible," the man snapped sharply. "In the first place, your story is quite incredible—Lucille Love was drowned when the Empress took fire."

"Lucille Love is here, sir. Lucille Love was aboard the Empress, flew there with Mr. Harley, the government aviator, because she knew from a message she cut in on upon the telephone that Hugo Loubeque was aboard the Empress and that he had the papers. Ever since, through jungle, desert, land and water, I have followed him. I have seen the spy's diary. It is here with the papers—always. That will show his hatred for my father. That will explain. That will prove my story."

Even as the Captain nodded, rising to his feet to eagerly take the girl's frantic search through the packet, all a-quiver himself to have her prove her case so unmistakably, a little, dry sob broke from her lips. As the lily droops upon its stem, so did the slender figure of the girl slowly sink—sink—sink.

was not among the papers she had recovered. The Captain nodded toward his Ensign, who, with a glance of sympathy toward the stricken girl, scooped up the papers and laid them before his commanding officer.

Lucille turned and slowly left the room. Her eyes were fastened directly ahead but she walked as one who journeys in slumber, unseeing, benumbed. And her lips repeated over and over again:

"Too cruel! Too cruel! Too cruel!"

CHAPTER XXXIX

Exit Hugo Loubeque.

SERGEANT DALY, plain clothes man of the San Francisco police department, showed scarcely a sign of interest as he was assigned to the mysterious case at the St. Francis. The meagre details trickled through his ears and were lost forever. That was a part of the method which had made him the greatest sleuth of the department—he always found out for himself and never trusted to advance information.

Swiftly he took in the salient details of the house detective, the discovery of a man's dead body in the suite of a young woman who had registered there under the name of Lucille Love. Then he went immediately to the room and examined the corpse.

Thompson had not been touched. He lay as he had been when Hugo Loubeque looked back at him, from the doorway, his body twisted a bit from the struggle with the spy, his right hand tightly clenching the revolver in his mouth. Daly bent over him, uttering a little ejaculation of surprise which whetted the curiosity of the manager instantly. After a long interval he rose to his feet, holding a soiled linen label in his hand.

"Frank Thompson," he smiled quietly. "Here is the name of the tailor who made the suit he wears. I wonder how he ever came to go to Manila."

"Manila?" Frankly curious was the manager. "Yes—Manila. No wonder that crook hasn't been active in the States for the last couple of years. Wonder whatever pulled Chicago Tom that far away from State Street?"

"Then he was a crook?"

"It's my turn to ask questions," the Sergeant interrupted sharply. "You say this suite was assigned to Lucille Love?"

"A young woman who was arrested yesterday, Sergeant, when she was caught on the fire escape outside Mr. Loubeque's suite. She came here with Mr. Loubeque and he registered her. Her first night here she created a sensation by paying one of the cabaret to allow her to dance in her place. Yesterday a call came to the office from Loubeque's suite that a hotel sneak thief was in his apartment. When the detectives arrived the place was vacant but the young woman was caught on the fire escape and arrested, paroled in the custody of Mr. Roller, the big jeweler. It is a case of suicide, Sergeant?"

Daly shook his head.

"Suicide! I should rather guess not. Look at the man's gums. The gun was forced into his mouth and the gums badly bruised in the doing of it. Where can I find this Lucille Love or Loubeque?"

Before the manager could answer the telephone bell tinkled. He turned to the detective excitedly, his hand pressed over the phone mouthpiece.

"A Lieutenant Gibson calling on Miss Love," he explained.

"Tell him to wait."

Richard Gibson was little inclined for cross examination when first the two men approached him. Shamed of his unreasoning jealousy of the girl he loved, aghast at his conduct in turning away from the woman who had left him so unceremoniously in order to prove his innocence of stealing the papers from General Love's safe, he had fought the battle out with himself, coming to the conclusion that there must be a reasonable explanation for her conduct. Sergeant Daly regarded him steadily a moment, then told him the reason for his wishing to know everything. Gibson whirled upon the manager, his face livid with rage, fists clenched.

"And you had her arrested—you had her—"

Daly held the arm that was about to strike, soothing him with quieting words.

"Evidently he can tell us nothing," Daly muttered to the manager. "He didn't even know about the arrest and bailment until I told him."

Gibson flung upon his heel and left the hotel, black hatred, suspicion, fear, a thousand and one emotions in his heart. At the jeweler's his tale caused the proprietor to almost have a stroke of apoplexy.

"A murdered man in her suite while she was in the station house," he gasped. "Then she won't—"

He fairly wept in the depths of his emotions. "Then the necklace must have been stolen," he finally cried, his eyes flashing vindictively. "But she shan't have the money for it. I'll keep that until the rightful owner comes along. Perhaps I may get back the ten thousand dollars I paid her for an option on it."

"Sold—this necklace sold—who bought it?"

The jeweler agitatedly sought the memorandum of the purchase.

"A Mister Hugo Loubeque—never heard of a millionaire by such a name but he had the two hundred thousand to buy it and I let it go."

"Hugo Loubeque!" Gibson grasped the amazed man by the shoulders and fairly shook answers from him, at the re-mention of this name that kept continually cropping up before him.

Dick Gibson rushed from the establishment finally, an idea in his head which he cursed himself for not having thought of before. The house where he had last seen Lucille! The house from the second story window of which she had looked down at him with the light of a great fear and love and pleading and a call for assistance in her eyes! The house he had caused to be raided and in which there was nothing to be found, not even a sign of life! Might not, was not this mysterious Loubeque the one whose hand he had seen dragging her from the window?

Breathlessly he darted up to the door and, finding the lock still unprepared, dashed inside and up the stairs. He did not expect to find Lucille there, did not know exactly what he would find, but there was surcease from torture in action, and his brain had been fanned into flame by the mysterious tales he had heard regarding his sweetheart and the strange crimes which seemed to link her name so inextricably with them.

Suddenly he stopped, halted abruptly. He could hear no sound yet was positive someone was close to him, that he was being watched. For a full five minutes he waited, there upon the stairs. The silence of the place was oppressive, deadly.

"You wished to see me, sir?"

Smiling and suave, his great, brooding eyes holding a light of melancholy and sorrow such as the young officer had never witnessed before, appearing as if by magic, and now facing him was Hugo Loubeque. He knew it was the man he sought yet the compelling personality of the spy abashed him, drove the blind rage from his heart almost instantly and made him feel like a fool-

ish child who has asked a primer question of a very wise man.

"Loubeque—" he stammered.

The international spy bowed gravely, his eyes still fastened upon the young man before him, inscrutable eyes that seemed to search to the very depths of the soul.

And, as his eyes sought the carpet, away from the magnetic power of the man, all the rage returned to the young officer. This man was the one who had taken his sweetheart from him, who had tangled her up in such base affairs as those he had just heard of. His eyes roved the room, lighting upon a pair of broadsword, crossed upon the wall. He caught the smile on

man who had so lately lusted for his blood.

"You will kindly give this to—Lucille—with my compliments and felicitations," he murmured, bowing again in the grave, Continental fashion which had so impressed the other.

Gibson stared at him, wondering at the lack of emotion on his face in this moment of peril. Slowly, steadily Loubeque stepped backward. Then suddenly a yawning panel stood beside him. He stood in the cavity a second, smiling as the door burst open and Sergeant Daly, followed by a squad of uniformed officers lurched into the room.

"That's him!" Daly's shout turned into a wild yelp of terror, as the room shot from under the

time." He sighed heavily, for the trial was a weight upon his own shoulders even as it was upon the shoulders of the entire army.

"But you can investigate—my story is strange, unbelievable," she pleaded impulsively, reaching out her hands in a wide gesture of appeal toward him. "I know that. But if you would only investigate. You would find that I told the truth when I said I caught the Princess on an aeroplane. I left word that I had received information that led me to believe the papers were in the possession of someone aboard that boat. You know I did that. I found the papers and recovered them. I was shipwrecked with them upon a savage island. Hugo Loubeque was also saved and got the papers away once more. And then he got them again in China—look into the records. Ask the Chinese Ambassador to investigate a death—"

"All details of your story have been proven, Miss Love," gravely, sadly answered the cabinet minister, "but there is no evidence in your father's favor. What would be the motive for Hugo Loubeque—"

"Revenge," she answered quickly. "Can't you see—"

"If it could be proven—"

He was interrupted by the entrance of a clerk with a card. The Secretary frowned, then listened to the whispered explanation of the man's slight smile upon his face. He nodded that admittance was to be granted, then turned again to Lucille.

"Mr. Gibson—formerly Lieutenant Gibson—"

Lucille sprang to her feet, all confusion. She strained toward the door but a great fear was holding her back. The last time she had seen her sweetheart, he had repulsed her, had turned away from her, and now—

Gibson entered quickly, halted abruptly at sight of the woman he loved standing there, with the gentle love light in her eyes and the reproach of a maid offended in her form. Slowly, very slowly, as one who would be forgiven yet cannot hope for that forgiveness, he placed the little, ivory box in her hands, the box which Hugo Loubeque had given to him. She looked at him inquiringly and his lips parted:

"From Hugo Loubeque with hopes for forgiveness and felicitation."

With trembling fingers she pried open the delicate lid, then gave a sharp cry of disappointment that was echoed by one of mute admiration and amazement from the others as, turning the box upside down, the wonderful ruby necklace fell upon the floor, every blood red facet darting a thousand threats at them. But Lucille's eyes paid the necklace no heed. Instead they fastened upon a little slip of paper in the bottom of the box, dirty and torn, but which she dragged forth with a cry of unutterable joy, pressing it to her heart in an ecstasy of delight, fairly babbling over it:

Page from Diary of Hugo Loubeque.

In account with General Sumpter Love for dismissal from West Point and robbing me of Lucille—

Theft committed—

She read no farther but, sobbing with the abandonment of a child, placed the page from the diary in the hands of the Secretary of War. He turned it over and over in his hands, a light of understanding growing in his eyes, a light which softened as he looked upon the girl who watched him.

"I see," he murmured quietly. "You say, Mr. Gibson, Hugo Loubeque gave this to you to hand to Miss Love?"

"Yes sir."

"If you do not object, Miss Love," he said to the girl, with a little knowing smile in the direction of her sweetheart, "I shall take this immediately before the Board of Inquiry. I think, with your story and the verifications I have gathered of its details, it will not only clear your father but also return to the Army a young Lieutenant who had been named Captain at the time this unfortunate incident occurred."

"Mr. Secretary—"

He still smiled, as, embarrassed, she halted midway toward him, her arms outstretched as though to throw them about his neck.

"Then I shall return it to you," he said quietly. "It reads: 'Account finally cancelled by Loubeque because no hate is strong enough but would wither and die in him who knows Lucille'."

"You will excuse me," he added, after a long pause.

Evidently, important cabinet officer though he was, the Secretary expected no answer for he did not even glance back at the couple, who were so forgetful of etiquette as to ignore his question. But Lucille had her arms close, close about the neck of Richard Gibson, and that young man was only mindful of his burden at the moment.

CHAPTER XXXXIV

Concerning Ghosts.

At his desk, General Sumpter Love smiled as the murmur of two voices came to him. His eyes closed wearily and his head sank forward upon his chest, a victim of dreams—dreams of the long ago. It had been hard, giving up to another this daughter whom he had only just regained. And yet—and yet—there was another Lucille—

"Lucille!"

His arms were outstretched toward the vision of his dead wife and the cry of her name from his lips, from his overburdened heart, wakened him with a start.

"You called, Father?"

Lucille's arms were about his neck just as they had been about his neck that other time in Manila when she coaxed his consent to her marriage to Gibson. And Gibson, with the straps of a Captain, was standing once more in the doorway.

His hand rose to pat the rose petal cheek of her. Then his fingers encountered the necklace about her throat, the necklace of rubies which the Washington papers had decanted upon so voluminously in their accounts of the romantic postponed wedding. As though he had struck a snake, his hand recoiled.

"Loubeque's necklace!" he muttered.

The arms about his neck tightened. The cheek was pressed against his own.

"Poor, poor Hugo," she murmured. "Poor, poor man who did not know there was no room for hate in a world that might be filled with love. Poor, poor man."

"I think, sometimes," she murmured dreamily, "I hear his voice as I heard it when he suffered gladly for me—when he nursed me out there in the open boat—when he—food—anything—and always—it is kind and gentle—"

General Sumpter Love turned away. His eyes had suddenly become moist. Captain Gibson put his hand gently upon the shaking shoulder of his wife.

The three were silent. There was no room for words. Ghosts were all about—whispering, soothing ghosts that would not be allayed—ghosts that danced merrily through the leaping flames of the grate fire, that winked from the ashes on the hearth, ghosts that murmured over and over again—

"Lucille—Lucille—"

Lucille's arms were about his neck just as they had been about his neck that other time in Manila when she coaxed his consent to her marriage to Gibson. And Gibson, with the straps of a Captain, was standing once more in the doorway.

"I hear his voice as I heard it when he suffered gladly for me—when he nursed me out there in the open boat—when he—food—anything—and always—it is kind and gentle—"

General Sumpter Love turned away. His eyes had suddenly become moist. Captain Gibson put his hand gently upon the shaking shoulder of his wife.



The Three Were Silent. There Was No Room for Words in This Great Happiness.

the spy's face when he looked again at him and knew his thoughts had been read.

"What have you done with Lucille Love?" he cried.

"Miss Love," murmured Loubeque, his voice taking on a sighing note that fairly tortured the listener's ears. "Miss Love is on a war ship bound for Washington, I believe."

"You know a man was murdered in her suite—that she was arrested as a hotel sneak thief?" Not so much a question as an accusation was it.

"Miss Love has been through many more trying situations than that," answered Loubeque slowly, "since she pitted herself against me."

"Pitted herself against you?" The light of a great understanding glowed in Gibson's eyes, mingled with the murderous hatred there. "Then it was you who stole the papers—"

"Quite so," Hugo Loubeque turned upon his heel, but the iron grip of the officer was upon his shoulder, whirling him about so that their faces met. Gibson's words came in a sibilant hiss.

"You—you coward! So I owe you my disgrace—my enforced resignation from the army. So General Love owes his trial and disgrace to you. So you have kept Lucille from us, knowing nothing of her, thinking her dead—"

Words came so fast they choked him. Only his rolling eyes testified to the full extent of his fury. Again he lighted upon the broad sword. Like a panther he leaped across the floor, seizing them and slapping them away from the fastening. Loubeque gravely, quietly, without change of expression accepted the one that was hurled at his feet, placing himself on guard, easily turning the insane slashes of the officer, who hurled himself upon him.

Easily, by wrist alone, Loubeque played with the man. His eye held no expression save that of one looking very far away, sad, mournful, distant. That look of indifference only served to madden Gibson doubly. He pressed the attack but could force no recognition from his adversary. He was panting, breathing, and the spy, despite his years, showed never a sign of fatigue.

Furiously he lunged when suddenly, the blade of his adversary whirled, sending out scores of scintillating lights as it danced in the air above his head. He could hear it whistling about his ears, singing sinister songs of Death. Yet he was unable to pierce that guard and make an impression. Summoning every last ounce of strength against his tormentor, he swept the great blade high behind his back. Then he brought it forward in one swoop that would have severed the spy.

He fell back as from a blow, his wrist numbed and deadened by the wrench that had carried the handle of the heavy sword from his grasp. Hugo Loubeque had dropped his own blade to the floor and was studying him quietly, no glimmer in his eyes. Gibson glared over his head. The sword was still away from side to side from the fury with which it had been driven into the low hanging wooden beam overhead. Instinctively his hand reached to recover his weapon when Loubeque laid a hand of iron upon his shoulder.

"That will do," he cried sternly. "Be a man, sir." Again that mellowed light drove the light of anger from his eyes. His lips opened and the voice of him was little more than a sigh; "such a man as Miss Lucille Love deserves."

Gibson looked at him, startled, aghast. Once more Loubeque would have spoken when, from below stairs, came the shrill scream of a policeman's whistle, followed almost instantly by a rush of feet upon the stairs.

The spy seemed in no wise perturbed, even though the sounds were growing louder and louder each fraction of a second. His right hand moved along the desk, picking up a small ivory box, exquisitely carved, which he handed to the

feet of the occupants and they found themselves precipitated into the very bowels of the house.

It was half an hour before they managed to find their way out; half an hour which swallowed up the international spy completely as though it had been the grave.

CHAPTER XXXXV

An Appeal and an Interruption.

DESPERATELY, Lucille finished her dressing and turned to look out the hotel window over Pennsylvania Avenue. Far in the distance she could see the stately head of the Capitol building. Upon the street she could make out from the very manner of the pedestrians just who was of importance in managing the machinery of the great nation, citizenship in which had always been her proudest boast. She recalled the short year that had elapsed since last she was in Washington, just before sailing for Manila to join her father, happy and care-free and ignorant of life's struggle as ever a girl could be. But now she was alone in this magnificent city of distances, a girl seeking to save the father to whom all men had done deference on that former visit from disgrace at the hands of the country he had been so proud to serve.

When the Captain of the Terror had spoken of the Court of Inquiry before which General Sumpter Love was being tried for selling the papers he had received from Washington, she had conjured up visions of him behind bars, dreamed horrible dreams of a disgrace that was being heaped upon him physically as well as mentally. But when she realized on reaching the city that she herself was allowed to live; her joy had submerged almost every other feeling. It had been four days now, however, and still she had not called up sufficient courage to see him.

All night she had been awake trying to scheme up some method of aiding him. The papers she had recovered and it seemed that instead of helping she had placed in the hands of the government exactly what they wanted to convict. She dared not meet the old man and tell him that she had done this thing. And now, it seemed to her she could stand the strain no longer. Surely, there must be a justice in Washington, a somebody big enough to help her father.

All the day before she had sat in Lafayette Park before the White House, seeing the President of the United States come out for his walk, return and leave once more. She had thought his face kindly, had even started impulsively toward him to make a plea for just a few moments of his time to tell him why she was there. And then—just at the supreme moment her courage had failed. Kindly, his face was but she saw also could reason there and knew that everything looked to be against General Sumpter Love. Then, too, she realized that clemency would scarcely be forthcoming in the era of war which was upon the nation, with this patient, calm President fighting against the inevitable from his country's Southern neighbor.

But there was the Secretary of War! Surely, there might be some chance in an appeal to him. She had managed to gain her way with other men when sorely pressed. Why was it not worth the trial. And so, this morning, after a long timorous glance up and down the long avenue, she had started for the Army and Navy Building with steps that were fighting against her own will all the way.

"Miss Lucille Love—Lucille Love—" The Secretary turned the card over and over in his hands while regarding her narrowly the while. "I have heard of you, Miss Love, and of the papers. You may rest assured your story will receive every attention in the conduct of the trial of your father. Certainly, you know the nation can ill afford to lose such a man just at this