

LUCILLE LOUVE. 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 poses Hugo Loubeque a thief, and Loubeque is dishonorably discharged. Love wins the girl. The enemy 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 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 edge of a crushed lifeboat. Lucille is rescued by friendly savages. She is given an amulet for curing the Chief's daughter, and it proved potent against the machination of Hugo Loubeque, who likewise cast on the island, plans to get the papers. He burns Lucille's hut, but she escapes with the precious papers. He sends a decoy message asking her to come 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 crook, takes the papers from Lucille, and goes to Loubeque, who goes with them to the jungle. His guide and servant steals them, but is killed by a lion, and Lucille, who had trailed them three days, recovers them from the body. Lucille meets a strange cave dwelling people, is attacked by monkeys, escapes in a canoe, and is carried into an underground whirlpool.

CHAPTER XX.

The Mysterious Other Passenger.

ASTER, faster, in ever shortening circles the creamy foam of savage waters drew the frail catamaran toward the ugly, black rock that rose from out its center, leering upon the helplessness of the delicate morsel being brought him. And Lucille, the useless, broken paddle in her hands, fought desperately against her fate, though knowing the bit of wood could do nothing in calm water much less against this swirling whirlpool.

Instead of dulling her brain, the very uselessness of her efforts quickened every faculty, tuned up her natural instinct for life. Quite abruptly a sudden calm visited her, a calm that rested upon her spirit like a soothing balm, quieting and easing without being soporific. She resisted from her efforts, drawing the paddle handle from the water with an effort. Her eyes were alert, burning in their intensity as she looked before her, staring at the rock that seemed so inevitably for her gravestone without the slightest perturbation.

Round and round in the circles of waters the frail craft sped. The nose of the catamaran spurred the grasping whirlpool aside, seeming to leap joyously at this opportunity for a magnificent annihilation against the rock instead of being slowly rent to bits by the water it had always conquered. For a brief fraction of a second the circular progress was halted, the canoe being held steady, quivering as another force seized it and tried to fight against the whirlpool. Lucille held her breath, measuring the length of time a new hope arrived in hours instead of the seconds it really was. Then the craft shot out of the current and continued upon its wild chase toward the rock.

It was now a matter of but two revolutions at best before the end. Lucille saw this with eyes that flinched not, yet that refused to hold any dread. Half way round the circle some instinct from within caused her to lift the paddle end, thrusting it out even as she closed her eyes against the contact with the rock that seemed inevitable. The stout wood splintered in her hands as it crushed against the monster rock, tearing it from her grasp with such force that an involuntary cry issued simultaneously from her lips.

She crouched back a-shudder, her eyes closed against seeing the end, her lips opening and closing without the blessed relief of words. Once more the current that had withheld the craft reached out and fought against the whirlpool. Lucille knew it was useless but eyed the craft with a desperate loathing. Something slashed against her cheek and her hands instinctively reached up, clutching, grasping, clinging to the thick tangle of creepers let down from the encircling jungle.

The canoe whirled out from under her while she clung there, the savage water leaping, snapping at her feet. Came a crunching to her ears, a sound that made her hold tighter upon the vines. She looked up, reaching at a higher point in the vine-tangle, a place where the suction of the water might be avoided.

Desperation loaned her strength. Times it seemed she could not draw herself another inch, but one look at the white whirlpool beneath gave fresh energy to her arms. Reason came to her aid as she saw her progress was taking her toward land as well as in the air. For just a second she rested, then bravely reached out and clambered along the thick vine until she saw the earth beneath, then dropped and lay panting upon the ground, shaking with a nervous chill as the reaction seized her.

Loud voices wakened her from the state of self pity which followed the chill. She looked up swiftly, now that the dense fastnesses encircling her were really pregame, fearing a new enemy. A moment before she in her loneliness and misery would have sacrificed almost anything for the sight of a human being. Now that she knew men, and men who spoke her own tongue, were within hearing distance she shrank back, afraid.

Fate had been so kind to her and man so unkind that she realized her chief danger simultaneously with the recollection of what she had to guard. She clutched the little sack, thrilling at the rustle of the papers she had fought so hard to gain, at thought of what they meant to her sweetheart in Manila. The diary told her that Hugo Loubeque had thousands of men working to do his will. She must be very wary of whom she trusted. Better the jungle than Loubeque again.

The shrill protesting creak of oar locks drove away her fear, supplanting it with one of wild alarm. The men were going away, were leaving her alone here. She had chosen this jungle where she knew Hugo Loubeque to be in preference to a fairly certain chance of escape. Of the millions of inhabitants of the globe why should she think every man a worker of the spy;

that madness had induced her to hang back before this opportunity which was slipping with every faint creaking sound that reached her ears. She flung herself wildly through the tangle of thick vegetation that barred her way from the sound, crying aloud at the top of her voice for assistance even though she knew no sound could carry to the men. She found herself standing upon a pebbly little beach that snatched a serene crescent of water from the ocean. Straining her eyes she could dimly see a large row-boat at the tip of the crescent, its objective point being obviously a beautifully slender yacht anchored well out to sea.

Lucille waved her arms in the air wildly, running up and down the beach in desperation and also saving her opportunity for escape from the terrible jungle receding. Her throat was racked from the dry sobs which escaped her, sobs of rage and chagrin at her own cowardice and folly. The papers were in her possession, the papers for which she fought so hard and which were so useless here. And, at the first opportunity to get away, get where they might do some good, her courage had failed her.

Suddenly she stopped dead in her tracks, her fists tightly clenched as she pressed them against her breast, frightened for fear what she had seen might turn out nothing more than an optical illusion. Then with a gasp of delight she made out that the boat had stopped, that the man standing in the bow was no chimeric of her brain, and that it was being turned and was coming toward her. Was coming toward her.

Over and over again she repeated it. She had been seen at the last moment and was going to be taken away. She lifted her eyes in an unspoken prayer, a prayer that included a promise never again to allow hardship to so weaken and blind her as it had done this time. And the prayer was not even finished before the boat grounded lightly at her feet and she found herself speaking to a heavy-featured, youngish man who was evidently in command of the yacht.

There was something sinister about the man, something she could not define and which she set down to be a freakish feminine mood, that made her distrust him even while she told her story. She noticed that he was paying but slight attention to her words but that his eyes were fastened upon her face in such bold admiration that she instinctively drew away from him.

Suddenly he turned to his men, roughly ordering them to prepare for the row out, then assisted Lucille to a seat alongside himself. Try though she would she could not feel the joy that seemed natural as the boat slipped through the water, propelled by the sturdy oarsmen. She studied them keenly. Rough, powerful men they were, but she was woman enough to know them to be the sort easily handled by a beautiful woman, the weaker the easier. Something told her before she was done with the captain of the yacht there was done with the necessity for appealing to them. And she saw that this man was heartily disliked, that his arrogant manner, his gruff commands were not pleasant to his crew. She noticed also that two of the oarsmen had faces that showed signs of recent battering. The intuition that had served her so well before told her Captain Wetherell, for such was the name he used in introducing himself, had been a party to this.

It was the sixth day out that, for the first time, she saw the man upon the deck in daylight. Captain Wetherell was scanning the sky, his brow clouded and his heavy jaw thrust forward like an angry bull-dog. Lucille was standing beside the old boatswain, questioning him and whiling away the long sultry day by listening to the stories he loved to tell her. She was suddenly aware of the keen, lowering scrutiny of her host and, as was her custom, immediately started toward her cabin. She heard a swift step across the deck and hurried the faster, only pausing to look back when she reached her door.

A little cry of pity and rage came from her lips when, with an ugly oath, Wetherell lifted his great fist and floored the old seaman, grinning maliciously down at the man, then, with a shrug of the shoulders starting to turn away. Every womanly impulse rose up within her at the outrageous, uncalculated-for attack. Forgetful of her own precarious position, forgetful of everything save the pain of the old man upon the deck, she started to his assistance, when the door of the Chinaman's state-room slapped open and the ocean-patrol strode across the deck toward Wetherell.

And then Lucille halted stone-still, her eyes widening with amazement and terror. She could not analyze her sensation, did not attempt to do so, but there was something about the movements of the man, a commanding mastery, a control of self-evident rage as he spoke with Wetherell in low tones of suppressed passion that struck a chill to her heart.

The captain eyed the man angrily for a moment, then turned and slipped away, his very back dropping like that of a whipped cur. Lucille turned to enter her cabin but something caused the door to stick and she stood for a moment, feeling an inclination to scream for aid but a moment of recognition of the man who stepped into the cabin behind her, softly closing the door, held her dumb. For, under the yellow coloring, the made-up slanting eyes, the Mongolian mask he had so cunningly assumed, fear loaning clarity to her vision, she recognized Hugo Loubeque and instinctively both hands clasped at the little bag about her neck which held the precious papers. The spy smiled at the impulsive gesture.

"You have guessed the reason for this intrusion, Miss Love," he murmured gravely, his rich voice holding a note of deference and apology which she recalled as so much a part of him, which was continually checking her hatred for the man. "I am sorry but you surely must see by now that there is no escape from me; you must understand that this pursuit is most unpleasant but that you have no chance to thwart me. The papers, if you please."

The terror-widened eyes of the girl narrowed slowly as her gaze traveled from the indomitable face of the outstretched hand. No chance, he said! But there was a chance, always had been a chance; always would be, so long as she retained the courage to fight him! The game was in her hands, had been equal up to now. Her lips parted in a smile as she moved toward the door and held it open for him to leave. He frowned impatiently, shaking his head as though at the stubbornness of a child.

"Miss Lucille," he continued, his tones sharper, "you must appreciate my forbearance toward you so far. It cannot continue forever. Undoubtedly you know my power. Does it not startle you to find me in a position of authority upon this yacht. It is always so. Everywhere I find my assistants. Forty years of my life has been spent in ordering events so that such obstacles as you have encountered would be at my command. Till now, I have refrained from securing the documents you hold by violence. You know the reason for my forbearance. But, understand now, that it can continue no longer. The papers, if you please."

She quailed before the lightning that darted from his sombre eyes. Common sense, the instinct for self-preservation, everything urged her to obey. Yet when her hands sought her bosom the feel of the precious little bag renewed her courage, gave her strength to meet his eyes with a courage greater even than his own assurance. Her eyes held to his with an effect of frightened fascination. It was the change in his tone, the difference in his wording of the demand that told Hugo Loubeque's patience had been finally frayed to the breaking point, that craft and diplomacy would be things of the past did she not relinquish the papers to him now. Yet Duty,

she realized she had made a mistake, that her tones showed fright. She tried to correct the error by drawing herself haughtily erect but knew the man had recognized her mind. The captain laughed aloud, eyeing her keenly the while.

"Don't be alarmed," he said softly. "I have settled with Mr. Loubeque. You need have no further fear of him, my dear."

Fear! Lucille felt a great yearning for the spy, a need of his protection even as a moment before she had thought it impossible to be in such mortal terror of anyone as she had been

open mouthed, unable to believe the evidence of their own eyes. Gradually it dawned upon them that the type of the brutalizer, the man they all hated and feared had been subjugated, cowed by this slip of a girl. Whispers grew louder, louder and she caught the approval in the eyes that constantly drew closer to her own until she was surrounded by a cordon of sailors.

A thrill of conscious triumph set her all a-tremble but she fought down the inclination to be overmastering in her victory. Only through winning the crew to her side could she maintain her position. Backing away but still holding the revolver level upon the captain she cast an appealing glance about upon the men. Her voice trembled with excitement, with the wear and tear upon her nerves, with the struggle from which she had just emerged.

"Friends," she whispered, then, surprised at finding how low her voice was, swallowed the lump in her throat and continued bravely. "Friends, I am just a weak girl and I need your help. I have two enemies upon this ship. One of them I was able to frighten off but the other anybody in the world would not steal half hour ago. He will do anything to steal from me some papers I have rescued from him after he stole them from my father. My sweetheart, the man to whom I am engaged, was accused of the theft and arrested. And I have fought so hard to keep them!" Her voice broke a trifle but she straightened bravely, tears still glistening on her lashes. "I'm so tired—so tired of fighting."

The murmur of sympathy from the men died down before a still more menacing silence, a silence that bent itself upon the sullen captain and fastened him threateningly. Lucille felt the change and immediately started to take full advantage of it when, from one to the outskirts rose a shout. All eyes were turned in the direction of his pointing finger and from out two great smoke spirals that seemed to come from the other side of the ocean, rose slowly, majestically, the thin outlines of a huge boat. Lucille raised her voice and those nearest immediately turned toward her once more, their attention seeming to be unconsciously drawn that of the men on the outskirts from the big vessel. But the girl, scenting disaster from that sight, read it on the sneering face of her victim.

"But I am more afraid of your captain, men," she cried, her voice thrillingly vibrant. "He came to me in my cabin and demanded the papers. He threatened me, seized me in his arms and tried to make love to me. He did this to a weak girl, men. He would treat me as he has treated you. I have seen the way he treats you, have seen him knock you down and kick you and curse you for doing exactly what he ordered. I have seen him do these things and I know that you will be justified in mutinying. I ask you all to protect me and yourselves from this man's brutality. You see what a coward he is. You see how he does not dare—"

Her voice was drowned in the chorus of shouts that rose at the welcome announcement. Wetherell's shoulders sloped still more while his eyes darted from face to face, triumphant, cunning, ferocious. His body tensed as though for a spring. On every side of him were lowering faces, the faces of men he had battered and bruised to suit his hellish humor. The shout died away into that ominous mob-murmur which precedes violence, when a faint booming sound reached out to them across the waters, distracting their attention. Something dark and round described a parabola from the speck of a ship and leaped through the air toward them. Came a splash of water not one hundred yards away, a splash followed by a cry of alarm.

"They're firing on us!" the pointing revolver in the hands of the girl, sprang forward, facing the puzzled, frightened men.

"Mutiny!" his great voice rose in derision. "Mutiny, now when you hear a girl lying to you! Mutiny now against the only man who knows where we are, what we are doing! Mutiny now when we have a cargo of arms and ammunition in the hold for the Chinese rebels and a government warship is pursuing us! Mutiny now and put the man and woman in command who hired me to carry this cargo!"

"It's a lie!" Lucille's voice was shrill now. "Again Wetherell's laugh arose and the puzzled faces of the men were turned toward one another indecisively.

"Lie, is it? Very well. Where did I pick you and Loubeque up? On the same bit of land, as the men know. If he is your enemy, how did you two happen to be at the place where I picked up the cargo? Tell the men that. Tell the man what is in the hold. Tell them that the punishment for mutiny is death. Tell them what the Chinese government does to a sailor on a boat carrying arms and ammunition which cannot be accounted for." Once more he laughed aloud, as he turned upon his heel flinging back over his shoulder. "Very well, mutiny! My brave men, do your damndest and mutiny! Let this girl get you out of the noose you are running your heads into but don't bother me any more—"

Again the fatal booming sound from the warships whose outlines were growing more and more distinct each moment. Again, that splash, followed quickly by a rising hiss of air as a great cannon ball sped across their bows. The proximity of their danger threw the men into a panic. All thoughts of injustice, of chivalry disappeared instantly before the omnipresence of the menace that threatened their lives. They rushed upon Wetherell in a body, pleading, fairly on their knees, for him to take command and avert the disaster that was upon them.

Of them all, he alone knew the position of the yacht, the fine points of navigation, the crooks and turns of the ocean in this vicinity. And they recognized only too well now that they were between the Devil and the deep, blue sea. Mutiny—capture by the pursuing warship. Both meant death.

Wetherell appeared to be considering, to hesitate about resuming command. Suddenly he straightened as another cannon ball hurled across the path of the yacht. His voice rose, stentorian, as he whirled, pointing a finger toward the girl. "Take that passenger's revolver from her. Bring the Chinese passenger on deck. They must not be found aboard if we are captured. Lower a life boat from the davits and set them adrift with provisions for three days and a cask of water."

He clasped his hands smartly together to emphasize the urgency for haste. Lucille felt arms about her, the pistol whirling from her grasp and ricocheting toward Captain Wetherell who, with a malicious smile, picked it up and thrust it in his pocket.

She did not protest—there seemed no use for protest, for anything. In a haze she found herself in the tiny boat that was being lowered. As through a thicker haze she glimpsed the face of Hugo Loubeque, facing her. The creaking of the davits ceased and the tiny craft bobbed about on the bosom of the waters. She did not move. It seemed a dream, a nightmare. A great hole appeared suddenly in the wave not ten feet from them and the spray splashed against her cheeks. Hugo Loubeque silently, grimly, seized an oar, motioning her toward the second.

"We must get out of the firing zone," he said quietly, reassessing almost gently. Singularly enough as she fingered the great oar, she almost felt kindly toward the spy.



After Finding Her Way Through the Thick Tangle, Lucille Is Startled by the Sound of Her Boat's Engines.

Love—twin shadows, wraith-like, yet of iron strength—held her back from obedience. The spy recognized the spirit in the girl and stepped toward the port-hole, motioning with his hand toward the dancing waves without, his voice low-pitched yet surcharged with ominousness.

"Think, Miss Love, think of our positions. Match my strength, brute strength, against your own; measure the strength of any one of the thousands who implicitly obey me. Those waters tell no tales, give up no ghastly secrets. See how the waves reach up toward us; think how the body of each wave is but a mouth, large enough and speedy enough to gulp any object thrown toward it. Think of that, Miss Love, I beg of you, then give me the little bag you wear about your neck."

His voice was full of pleading yet his eyes held a death message which made her shudder as she realized the sincerity of his threat. "You seek to save the ones dear to you, child, from the one I hate. You think me wicked, cruel, relentless, and I am all of these things. You fight me on the impulse of love and I fight back with the poison of a hate that is my very life, my heart and soul and my body. Forty years ago I might have done as you do now, but all the impulses of that time are dead, killed by your father; all the love I ever had, the only love, has been dead for forty years, killed by your father; all the ambition of that time of youth, the happiness of hope, the pride of fatherland, is dead, has been dead for forty years, killed by your father, General Sumpter Love. And you—you think that I would stoop to violence to prevent your thwarting me; you think I would trade those forty years of hate for the faint splash of a girl's body on the waters of this great waste. True, the sound would din in my ears of nights—but the forty years have been filled with just such sounds; true, there would be regret for one who recalls memories I thought quite dead—but the forty years have supplanted those memories with active dreams of hate—hate—hate."

The while his tones grew lower, they carried a vibrant thrill that struck at her very heart. His face was flinty, as with passionate pleading she lifted her eyes to his. Instinctively she recoiled as a shadow fell between them. Loubeque frowned as Captain Wetherell joined them, his eyes flashing a questioning glance at the pallid face of the girl. Lucille watched the two men slumber and to pleasant dreams. And after all, was she not foolish in attempting to combat this giant of a man? Was she not absolutely in his power? How had he come aboard the boat, dared speak to Captain Wetherell as he had, were he not speaking the truth regarding his position here?

Her question was partially answered by the whispers of the men growing louder and louder until she could distinguish the angry voice of Wetherell, lifted now in surly rebellion. Lucille shrank back against the wall visualizing from the man's tones the waves came leaping to greater horror than the waves came leaping to her mind. Hugo Loubeque was her protection from this brute. She knew it was true. And the man's voice showed now that he was out from control, that he was in rebellion against the iron hand of the spy.

There flashed across her mental vision every lineament of the man as he struck down the old bosun, and, as though the picture unconsciously developed, there called up the actual individual. Captain Wetherell stepped inside her cabin, without the formality of knocking, closing the door cautiously behind him, his every movement furtive, his face wearing a sheepishly leering expression as he stood there, regarding the girl who faced him, her eyes dilated with a horror she tried vainly to conceal and cover under the guise of indignation at the intrusion.

"What—what do you want?" Immediately the question passed her lips

of Hugo Loubeque and his crafty manner. "No fear; I don't understand!" Her voice quavered.

"I mean he understands who is master of this boat now. He attempts to give me orders, to bribe me to force you to give up some papers, to threaten me—"

Wetherell broke off with a laugh, coming a bit closer to her even as she retreated before him. "As though anyone could force me to harm you," he leered.

"What do you want?" Even as she spoke a thrill of conscious triumph surcharged her as she realized the tremble had left her voice and with its departure had come again that strange feeling of self-assurance.

Wetherell halted uncertainly, held back by her change. Then the helplessness of the small tense figure crouching in the shadows, her eyes dark pools of defiance set in a face of pallid determination gave him courage and again he moved closer. His voice was hoarse now, his great hands clasping and unclasping.

"Want?" he repeated, then with a short, barking laugh, "I want the papers and I want you."

"I don't understand—" though her voice was steady, her expression showed his meaning to be clearer to her than anything else in the world. He leaped forward, clasping her about the waist, with his great arms, the right hand moving toward her mouth, closing over the delicate lips and smothering her cry of wild alarm.

"Want you," he cried, "I want you and I want the papers. Loubeque knows it, but he's out of the way now. Give me the papers and I will keep them away from him. Give me the papers—"

He sprang back with a low-toned oath of surprised incredulity even as her brittle laugh echoed through the cabin. Slowly, a step at a time, inch by inch, Lucille forced the man toward the door. In smothering her screams he had freed her right arm and her tiny fist, fighting against his, beating at his body had encountered his revolver which she deftly abstracted and had pressed against his chest.

"The papers are quite safe where they are," she murmured sweetly, the glint in her eyes belying the tones. "Come, captain, don't try to take this gun away from me. That would be foolish. Remember I am accustomed to firearms and that you have placed me in a position where I should not hesitate to use a bullet. Come, captain, let's see how the men you have bullied like the sight of you now."

Wetherell opened his lips to curse but there was an expression of icy determination on the girl's face, in the tense lines of her figure, in the remorseless feel of the gun against him that made him do her bidding. He told himself that it was all a joke, a preposterous thing, but the feel of the weapon continually brought him back to the stern reality of the predicament his carelessness had brought him into. Only when he felt the cabin threshold beneath his feet and knew another step would bring him in sight of the crew did he halt, the maxillary muscles swelling defiantly. Lucille laughed again, the same mirthless, brittle laugh, emphasizing it with a sharp nudge of the gun sight.

It was a scant fifteen seconds the man and girl stood there, their eyes challenging. But the eyes of Lucille were steady, determined; those of the captain were truculent, defiant. Then Wetherell flinched and dropped his murderous expression. Quickly he looked up once more and for an instant Lucille feared she had gone too far. Then, with a surly shrug, Captain Wetherell marched across the threshold and upon the deck, before his men, while Lucille felt the joy of such a triumph as she had never known before. Her plans were formulated for the next move, had been prepared from the instant she drew the man's own gun upon him. Risky it was and with slight chance for success, but—there was a chance. It was sufficient.

Wetherell sullenly moved before her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Triumph Precedes Catastrophe.

WHEN one looks upon the unbelievable it takes some time for the brain to become accustomed to a picture presented to the vision. As the sailors looked up and saw Captain Wetherell sullenly marching under impetus of the revolver in Lucille's hand they straightened and stared,

(Continued Next Week.)