

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.

A Crumb of Bread Makes a Loaf of Hope.
 LUCILLE awoke to a numbed sense of failure, defeat, of loss irreparable. For a few moments she allowed her head to rest against the pillows, perfectly passive, retracing the course of her efforts in the fight with Loubeque for recovery of the papers up to this disastrous conclusion.

Theft, dishonor, treachery had pointed lean fingers at her sweet heart with accuracy such as only a loving woman could deny. And, despite it all, she had jeered at the possibility of such a thing being true, had staked life, honor, everything and anything unhesitatingly whenever it appeared a point might be scored against Hugo Loubeque by so doing. And for what? She dressed leisurely and for some time was seated at her window scattering crumbs on the ledge for stray birds. As she crossed the room a moment later a metallic sound struck against her ears again and again before she was even conscious of it. She looked about the room then made out the sound coming from the window ledge. Curiously she regarded the pigeon, strutting about there, eagerly devouring the crumbs. Upon his leg she saw a tiny, brass cylinder, tap-tap-tapping with its every step.

Her heart gave her a warning, thumping violently even as she recognized the pretty creature for a carrier bird. Stepping quietly to the window of her bedroom she stared about her, a smile crossing her face as, by careful count, she made out the crumbs upon the eighth window ledge from hers. That would be Hugo Loubeque's apartment.

Swiftly, excitedly, tremulously, for fear the bird might have fled, Lucille reached the ledge, her voice low and caressing as she reached, an infinitesimal fraction of an inch at a time toward the carrier. Once he lifted his wings, poised a second. Lucille halted in her approach, then, as the bird's doubts were allayed, reached out and clasped him firmly, surprised that he made no effort to escape. In a second she had detached the cylinder, taking the tiny tissue paper note from it.

"Arrangements complete. Deliver papers to Ensign Howell, U. S. Ship Terror, with affidavit as to sale by General Sumpter Love, now under trial, Washington, D. C. At your residence; 5:30." Lucille gasped as she took in the meaning of the message. For just a moment she sat staring dully ahead of her, dismay and terror frozen in her eyes. At 5:30 the international spy's work would be completed and her father ruined. But a few hours and the stolen papers with the lie of Loubeque accepted, and immunity doubtless promised, would be in the hands of the prosecution.

She clenched her fists tightly together, pacing up and down the floor of her suite, her pretty teeth fastened upon her under lip, her very being vibrant with protest at the horrible injustice of it all. It must not be. It could not be. She stopped suddenly. *It should not be.* Calmly she crossed to the writing desk and added a line through the hour appointed, carefully making an eight of the five. She scanned the result of her labors with knitted brows.

She loosed the pigeon, pointing him toward a window which was open. She knew Loubeque was growing impatient and would not do. So few hours remain wherein to regain the precious packet of papers that she must be at work. The papers were but a few short suites away, on the very same floor.

His residence she knew must mean the house of mystery, the weird place of horrors, of sliding staircases and folding rooms. That Loubeque should choose such a rendezvous showed how plainly he considered the last trick in the game of his life played, how absolutely assured he now was of absolute success. At five thirty, Ensign Howell would be at that house. She had three hours wherein to work. But the hours between—what of them? She could not endure inaction at this moment.

With the thought she rose and moved toward the door, closing it softly behind her. For a moment she hesitated in the hall, then stepped boldly to the suite of the spy, rapping upon the door.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

The Butler-Thief Makes His Last Bid.
 HUGO LOUBEQUE, master of men and nations, whose power was so great the course of Empires halted at his spoken word of command, moodily stared out his window after the carrier pigeon he had just released. For forty years he had bent every energy of his life for this day; every hour of those forty years had contained a dream of his revenge so dear to his heart it had caused him to redouble his energies. And now that it had come, somehow the sweet had turned bitter upon his palate.

He stared at it wearily in his chair. He had almost been lulled to sleep by the spell of the past that had woven itself for him. His mission was not yet complete.

Strangely enough, a tender smile played about the corners of his hard mouth as he thought of the girl upon the same floor with him, the girl who was the image of the Lucille of forty years ago, the Lucille who, at the climax of his scheming, at his supreme moment when he had possession of the papers stolen from General Love's safe, had flown out to the speeding Pacific liner and thenceforth through jungle, shipwreck, fire, war, starvation had continually thwarted him, hounded him when he held the upper hand and defeated him time and again. No, not till the actual transfer of the stolen papers and his affidavit into the hands of the Ensign would he actually know that Lucille had finally been beaten.

Lucille—He murmured the name over tenderly, even as his fingers plucked the precious picture of the girl's mother from his breast pocket. He had treasured that picture above all other possessions these forty years, yet now he found himself regarding it merely as the likeness of the daughter. Lucille the daughter of that other Lucille of the long ago—

He rose impatiently, ashamed of the mellow mood that was upon him and moved across the floor. The slightest awaying of the curtains that connected with the bed-room hastened his eye. He did not pause, did not even hesitate but a hard look crept into his eyes. He resumed his seat after a moment, took his gloves from the table and busied himself strangely with them. A tapping on the door made him frown impatiently, then answer it, smiling to find Lucille, dressed for the street, confronting him.

"Since the mountain won't come to Mohamet, Mohamet must go to the mountain," she quoted

with a light laugh, a laugh that belied the worn expression about her lips.

"The mountain certainly knew of no desire"—laughed the spy, frank pleasure on his countenance. "Is it a walk you planned—tea—?"

"An invitation to luncheon," she returned, "and I wonder if it would be too much to ask of you to see that they give me a good machine for the afternoon."

"I'll phone," he responded, hardening instantly at the shadow of displeasure that crossed her face. Evidently she wished to be rid of him. He smiled to think of how close the game was to being finished. Somehow, he could not get any acute pleasure out of it now he looked at this smiling girl and recalled that precious few words upon the smile upon that face after he had finished. But, psaw! Why would his mind persist in thinking of such things. He bowed and repeated the hour of their engagement as she tripped down the hall, then resumed his seat at the table.

From a drawer there he took a small, thin mirror which he slipped swiftly into the flap of his glove, then placed the glove upon his hand. A grim expression was on his face as he leaned back in his chair once more, his eyes fastened upon the entrance to the bedroom as revealed to him in the mirror even though his back was turned from that entrance.

Hour dragged upon the heel of hour, chased each other out the room as though frightened of the silent, motionless figure at the table. Hugo Loubeque took no account of time save to make the most of it when action was necessary and to throttle it when delay seemed best suited to his purpose. Slowly the grey head of the man swayed from side to side. He caught himself abruptly. Again his head sank toward his chest, this time to remain there. Apparently Loubeque kept as he did everything else, soundly, yet with the least possible amount of effort.

The portieres swayed more and more heavily. Grew the outlines of a human face against the smooth velvet. Through the opening crept a pair of furtive eyes. Slowly, slowly, the face of Thompson showed. He did not bother to look at the slumberer. Before revealed himself he had made sure that his old master slept soundly. Swiftly, certain, sure, he moved beyond the curtains.

The thief who had been selected by the arch-spy to attend to his most important plan made no sound. So soft his footfall it seemed he might have walked across the strings of a musical instrument without a sigh rippling from them.

Closer, closer, a step at a time he advanced. The hate had left his eyes, for there was no time for hate when bent on business. Almost close enough to reach out and rest a hand upon Loubeque's shoulder he was, when he halted, his mouth dropping ludicrously open, his feet apparently gummed to the carpet, his fingers twitching uncertainly, his eyes fastened in amaze at his own face as it stared back at him from the tiny mirror in the gloved hand of Hugo Loubeque.

As he recovered, his hand darting swiftly toward his pocket, the sinister laughter of his master broke the silence.

"Keep the hand in the pocket, Thompson. Keep it there or I shall be obliged to shoot and maul the place."

The butler-thief's upper lip curled back from his teeth, giving him the expression of an angry mongrel dog. All the servile politeness had disappeared from his manner and his soul lay bare upon his face—the soul of a hyena with the heart of a fox.

"And you thought to play with me," Loubeque murmured wonderingly, more to himself than to his captive. "The man who knows me better than anyone else thought to catch Loubeque sleeping. You dared come near me after the second affair."

Thompson seemed to gain a bit of courage from the man's tone. Indeed, underlying the words, was a self-proach, a query, a bedazzlement that he knew Hugo Loubeque had never felt before. His hand started to creep from the pocket of his coat but an emphatic, little gesture of the spy's with the tiny automatic in his palm paralyzed those clever fingers.

"No, no, my dear Thompson. Don't think I am getting old. If I but had the time I should strangle you with these hands. They itch for the feel of your throat once more. Remember the job was not completed properly through no fault of my own. I have a little favor to ask you—"

The thief growled something inarticulate but Loubeque smiled in mockery of an honest mirth once more, taking the delight of a cat in playing with the mouse it has captured and frightened into partial inanition.

"You must pity me since you think I have grown feeble and old enough to continue to play such pranks with me, don't you now, Thompson?"

ing sob of relief he dragged Thompson after him and slapped the door shut maintaining his hold meantime. The flurry of rushing feet was in the corridor. Breathless he waited, listening with every nerve in his body.

Once a puzzled expression crossed his face as a little feminine cry of fear and dismay reached his ears. He heard a scurrying, rushing sound, the slapping of a door, the jar of the elevator cage, its rattling descent, then silence. He turned to the traitorous servant.



Lucille Opened the Window and Slipped Inside, Her Bosom Heaving Tumultuously at This Opportunity to Search the Suite of Hugo Loubeque.

"And that is what you would say—would tell?" His voice was not harsh, not even indignant, merely curious.

"That's what," Thompson straightened, a touch of braggadocio about his very figure.

Slowly, inexorably the fingers of Hugo Loubeque reached out and grasped the man's wrists. Slowly, inexorably, he pressed the cold metal of the automatic into the useless palm. Slowly, inexorably that weapon-bearing hand was lifted, lifted until it pressed against the blue lips of the thief, then stopped. Loubeque's voice was soft, purring, soothing.

"Open the teeth, my old friend—open them or I'll knock them out. Put the gun inside your mouth. It's simple—only a second—then a longer trip than you've ever taken before. Don't fight—it's useless—you should know that. Surely you won't resist and make it hard for your master. Just think—if you don't—I might be called—a murderer—while—if you follow instructions—it's—just—suicide—"

With every syllable he rendered the wrists of the struggling man more feeble, forced the steel muzzle of the gun more and more harshly against the tender gums. As he pronounced his final judgment, the judgment he hoped would prove that of a coroner, the muffled shot beat against the walls of the room. Thompson writhed, then straightened. Loubeque held tightly to the wrists until rigor mortis gripped them about the weapon.

He rose slowly, rubbing his hands softly together as though brushing away something offensively filthy. At the door he looked back and smiled at the silent thing that had but a moment before been man.

"Not so old, Loubeque," he murmured; "not so old, after all."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Lucille Finds Eavesdropping Has More Disadvantages Than One.
 AS Lucille stood in the doorway of Loubeque's room, her eyes always keenly suspicious to the slightest trifle when about the man, observing that as he talked with her, his eyes were fastened upon the gloved hand. Instantly it had struck her as strange he should wear a glove in his room. Then she caught the reflection of his eyes and saw the mirror flashing in that palm, the eyes of the man watching the curtains leading to his bed chamber. They swayed slightly. Then she made her adieu for she knew Loubeque was not alone.

In her own room she paced the floor nervously. What did it mean? Someone had entered Loubeque's room, was spying upon him, and the surreptitious presence had been discovered. The visitor was under surveillance. But who could that visitor be? what was his motive?

Thompson—Gibson—Gibson—Thompson. Her sweetheart and the butler thief both might have motives for such an entry. That it related to the stolen papers she had no doubt. Suppose they were taken by some other just at this last moment. But the man behind the curtains had little if any chance against Loubeque, now he had discovered them.

stand the hurried retreat of both from the room. She opened the window and slipped inside, her bosom heaving tumultuously at this opportunity to search the man's suite.

The door slapped open just as she was exploring the drawer of the table. She felt herself seized by the wrists, uttered a cry of protest and dismay and pleading, only to look into strange, brutal faces, the faces of house detectives and not the sardonically friendly one of Loubeque.

"Nipped in the act!" grated one of them, as he dragged her toward the door. "The cabaret dame, too!"

Protesting, weeping, hysterical, Lucille was dragged to the elevator and bundled into a cab. Unable to think, to reason, she only realized the full extent of her calamity when the green globe before the grim police station loomed before her eyes, as she was roughly assisted from the cab and taken before the uniformed sergeant behind the desk.

She might have been unconscious, so little was she actually aware of what was transpiring. Acute, yet merely subconsciously so, she knew she defended herself stoutly against the charge of being a hotel sneak-thief, showing over five thousand dollars to prove she did not need to stoop to such work. She feverishly cited the obvious ridiculousness of Hugo Loubeque's making such a charge against her. In explanation of her presence on the fire escape, she had nothing to say. The sergeant was frankly puzzled.

Obviously this girl was not a thief. The brilliant idea struck him of summoning the jeweler from whom she claimed to have received the money. Also the failure to produce Loubeque argued heavily against the house detective's case. And all the while Lucille paced up and down the floor, white-faced, miserable, her lips moving as she muttered over and over again her principal worry, forgetful of the horrible mess she had gotten herself in.

Five thirty this afternoon—Ensign Howell calls for the papers. Five thirty—five thirty—I must be there—must be—must—"

And the station house clock grinned wide derision at her, its hands pointing ironically toward the hour of four.

CHAPTER XXXXI.

An Ensign Feels His Dignity Offended.
 IT lacked but fifteen minutes to five before she found herself upon the street with the jeweler who had rushed to her assistance and, after a short conference with the officers and detectives had arranged her release, personally agreeing to produce her when desired. On the sidewalk he told her that only his knowledge of her parentage, her possession of the necklace and her speaking to him before of the stolen papers enabled him to believe her story.

"If you know Loubeque has the papers," he demanded as a triumphant clincher to his exordium, "why don't you call on a policeman to protect you and to rescue them?"

Lucille smiled faintly at his commonplace advice, realizing the absolute impossibility of impressing anyone with the power of her enemy. And she must hurry to the mysterious house where Ensign Howell was to call at five thirty. Even as she thanked her friend, bidding him good-bye at the door of the motor car, coughing impatiently for the passenger who had summoned it, she noticed a policeman importantly swinging his club, sole symbol of authority, and thought of the slim chance he would have against a spy who might swing rulers to work out his ends. No, the little jeweler could never be made to understand.

Hurriedly she searched the streets for the mysterious residence of Hugo Loubeque. Nothing mattered to her now. She did not care what happened to her. She was a cat—a tiger cat more savage than any she had encountered in the jungle, for they had failed and she would not fail in this, her last attempt against the international spy.

She had ten minutes leeway before the Ensign was due to call, ample opportunity if she had not forgotten any details of the message. The house was vacant, just as she had thought it would be, for Loubeque would never trust himself for long time to the place that had once been raided. It would suffice for this short bit of business—that was all.

She let herself easily by the door, the smashed lock of the raiding party never having been replaced. Swiftly she rushed through the familiar rooms, the sliding doors that held so many horrible menacing thoughts for her. With lightning fingers she examined sliding panels, moving picture frames. In the desk drawer of the spy she found a medium sized automatic, the slender still she had seen on the night she moved to the basement, for the gallant captain of the liner who had lost his life through one of these weapons while endeavoring to assist her.

In the basement, as she expected, she came upon the system of levers that controlled the intricate machinery of the household. Plainly marked they all were, also the speed and velocity with which the work might be done was indicated by a simple system of buttons. Lucille tested several, finding they answered readily to her touch, when she was interrupted by the clanging of the bell.

The last act in the play was about to be begun. Ensign Howell was at the door, unless the spy had detected her trick in tampering with the message of the carrier pigeon. All the weeks, the months of peril and privation were things forgotten, things that became as nothing against the work before her now. Steadily she ascended the stairs.

Her right hand, which had been clasped the reverse concealed beneath her coat, unclasped, and a sigh of obvious relief came from her lips as she opened the door to greet a young Ensign in uniform. She did not quite know what she would have done had it been Loubeque.

was ready for anything now. Time and again the man had placed her life in danger, had stopped at nothing to gain possession of the packet. And now the means were in her hands to play a man's part, and an unscrupulous man's, in this warfare. She took the revolver from its hiding place and examined it carefully. Yes, she would shoot to kill if necessary. Loubeque must not win. As though to test her courage she stepped into the big living room. A portrait in oils of the owner of the house looked down from the wall at her. Steadily, relentlessly, without a quail, she lifted the automatic and fired. The canvas ripped silently across the face and Lucille turned squarely and continued her examination of the house.

Laggard time for once flew while she waited the long interval that was to elapse before the arrival of the spy. Lucille found once more the tunnel through which she had been led, found mysterious passages and explored them, studied the position she would be in when she completed her work with the enemy who was to come.

A step sounded overhead, slow, measured, methodical. She pressed close against the switchboard to the house of mystery, the emanation of the mysteries. Her fingers trembled slightly. The feet moved up the stairs. She waited, fingers outstretched toward a little ivory button. The cool surface kissed the finger pad, the pad upon which depended the honor of father and sweetheart which she had lost, life, love to her.

Somewhere a clock was ticking. No, it was her heart. Pounding, pounding until she thought the sound would deafen her. Still, she waited. From above—silence.

CHAPTER XXXXII.

The Hour Appointed.
 HUGO LOUBEQUE moved slowly to his private office on the second floor. He shivered slightly as he went up the stairs. Ghosts were in the house, ghost-memories that he was about to slay finally and forever. And all the ghosts were those of Hate, had always been those of Hate, until this slip of a girl had come here.

He seated himself at his desk to wait, wandering off in a day dream of pleasanter memories. Lucille—how her very presence here had made the place bearable! What had the witch done to him that she could entice away all the grim visions of blood and carnage and evil through which he had gone in his life pursuit of revenge? He too, the precious packet of stolen papers from his pocket.

The sweet he had longed for was his now and yet it was not sweet. No, all the sweetness of his life had been since first he looked toward the heavens and the giant man-made bird brought into his life Lucille. And this greater sweetness he was about to turn to gall and wormwood that he might cling to an aged memory.

He slapped his fist heavily upon the table, cursing himself for a fool that such thoughts should oppress him. Forcibly he recalled the days at West Point, the days of his sweetheart, by Sumpter Love, his own disgrace and expulsion and the hard, barren life that followed. Hate was king, had always been king and would be crowned this night—this very minute—"

What ailed the Ensign that he did not come. It was past the time appointed. That was most unusual. He strode nervously up and down the floor. Nerves tightened within him. Could it be—was it possible that, after all—Pshaw! Away with such child's thoughts. He was a man, had always played more than a man's work in the game of life.

Alone! Always had he been alone. Servants. Yes, there were still servants but they must be held in abject fear, must sometimes be killed even as Thompson had been killed. Thompson—

The beginning of the papers had been with Thompson, and now how very close the end had been the butler's finish. The icy terror on that face at which he had glanced back, etched itself upon his brain and he shrank away from it. He flung out his hands in a wide gesture of expansion and simultaneously the floor gave way violently beneath him, flashed down with lightning speed, bringing up upon the basement floor with such violence that everything in the room was overturned, while he himself lay half stunned against the table.

He staggered away, finding himself so weak and dazed he was obliged to clutch the table edge to keep from toppling over. Something cool and soft brushed against his hand, then the softness grew as iron and his fingers were loosened from their clutch. He staggered back, back against the basement wall. He heard Lucille's voice, uttering a little cry of delight. His hands encountered the light switch, instinctively pressing. The room was a flood of yellow light in the center of which, slowly retreating toward the tunnel exit from the house, revolver pointed steadily at him with eyes sighting behind the revolver that were harder even than the glare of metal stood Lucille Love, the precious packet of papers in her hand, the fingers of which clutched them in a death-defying grip.

Slowly, without a word, she disappeared from view, departed as abruptly, as unexpectedly as she had appeared, making use of the spy's ingenuity to turn it against him in this, his greatest hour. For a moment he could not think or do anything, then he darted toward the tunnel, staggering back as a white hot iron seared his brow even as an orange spurt of flame leaped out the darkness at him—

He could not charge that way. He dashed to the stairs, rushing into the open, hatless, wide, disheveled. An automobile stood before the door. He directed it wildly toward the tunnel entrance, arriving there barely in time to see Lucille step inside another motor car and dart forward like a living thing.

Feeble, hopeless, yet fighting on with bull dog tenacity, Loubeque continued the chase. Times he would lose her only to pick the car up again in the most unexpected place. Then, for a full five minutes, along the water front, she disappeared.

A husky, irate chauffeur stepped before his driver and slammed open the door. "Hey, you chasin'," he bawled angrily, "whatta yuh mean chasin' a lady like dat?"

"That must be her answer. Instead he put a question, snapping it in a tone of authority that made even the man cringe.

"Where did she go?"

The driver passed him a grimy card. The international spy turned it over in his hand, reading the address upon it and marking that it was not a block away. On the obverse side he read Ensign Howell's name. The chauffeur was pointing out upon the harbor, Loubeque looked, marked the slim figure of Lucille standing upright in the briskly-manned cutter approaching the big ship. A speck of white fluttered in her hands. It dropped. The hands themselves flung out farewell to him and, as the big ship slowly disappeared, leaving in its wake but a whirl of rushing water, he turned away.

His shoulders seemed to have slumped in the half hour, his face to have undergone a chiseling process by the sculptor Suffering. He turned away slowly. A smile crossed his face.

"That must be her handkerchief coming in," cried the chauffeur, rushing down and resending the filmy bit of lace.

Loubeque took it, passing the man a banal note. When he entered the machine, he buried his face in it—still smiling.

(Continued Next Week.)