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LUCILLE & LOVE
THE GIRL OF MYSTERY

BY THE
"MASTER PEN"

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CHAPTER IV.
"To the boats!"

IT was on the eighth day out that the spy suddenly sprang to his feet, darting swiftly to the door of the stateroom. She stared at him in astonishment, amazed at the change which had come over him.

His life must have made him more than unusually sensitive to impressions, for a full quarter hour elapsed after he had resumed his seat before a barely perceptible thudding sound came from beneath the deck.

Perhaps it may have been the premonition of the silent man, perhaps foreboding of disaster on her own part that took her to the deck. The captain had quit the bridge and stood at the door of the engine room, his face betraying the anxiety he tried to conceal from his passengers. Louder, louder grew the thudding sound, followed now by a retching like the ripping of a rotten cloth.

"A boiler in the engine room," Loubeque said quietly, when she returned to his suit.

She stared at the spy incredulously. Came another thought with that of helplessness, a thought of which she felt ashamed for the second. If worst came to the worst this man would attempt to save, to take with him his most priceless possession. If only she could find out where the stolen papers were concealed she would get them. It was not wrong to take advantage of the weakness of a physician! Invald who possessed such giant mental strength.

Mingling with the horrid retching sound came a long hiss. The spy sprang to his feet again and opened the door. Passengers were rushing wildly about the decks, their faces betraying the abject terror they felt. At the rail stood the captain and second mate supervising the lowering of the lifeboats. A white faced steward banged against the door, thrusting his head inside.

"Fire," he whispered, then, as though ashamed for the fear which had robbed him of his voice. "It's fire—to the boats!"

Lucille turned away, a sickening feeling clutching at her heart. Fire! Fire out here on the broad ocean and never a sight of land since Manila! What could she do? She suddenly was conscious of Hugo Loubeque's swift motions. The spy darted across the room and drew from the top drawer of his desk a package of papers which he hurriedly replaced as she turned. There was something on his countenance which told her the truth, told her that he had revealed the secret of the stolen papers. He slapped the drawer shut, reassuming his aspect of indifference as he brushed her away from the door.

Quick as the spring of a cat she secured the papers while he stepped to the deck, apparently to study the situation. When he returned she was moving carelessly about the room, wearing so innocent an expression that he studied her suspiciously a second. Their eyes met, and he sprang to the desk, slapping open the drawer so violently its contents fell upon the floor. As he whirled upon her she saw in his face that the truce was at an end, that he knew of his loss and would stop at nothing to regain his secret.

Swiftly she sprang through the open door, losing herself in the mass of passengers huddled against the rail. Below them sounded that horrible hissing sound, the sound of unbridled fire.

Lucille felt an overmastering impulse within her to remain with this terror, anything save the great, threatening ocean that looked so monstrous now, waiting the tiny craft that creaked down from the davits. Then powerful arms were about her. She felt herself being lifted and hurried forward, huddling down in the crowded boat that was being lowered to the waves.

A hand reached out and rested upon her shoulder. For a second she was unconscious of it, then something steady, indomitable about the clutch of finger tips made her turn. Hugo Loubeque smiled into her eyes, smiled with the pitying expression of an invincible one who grieves for the weakling that dashes against him.

Her eyes upraised toward the boat, a mass of whitish smoke now through which leaped playful reddish flames. Now and then a figure would dart toward the rail and lunge overboard, the bodies striking the water in great circles that lost themselves in one another. And for a second she thought came to her that even that inferno of a ship was preferable to this man beside her.

"Well played, Miss Love," the spy murmured slyly. "But I fear you must return the"—

A piercing shriek made him turn

swiftly, a shriek that lost itself in the heavy crunching of wooden oars against wood. Came a horrid bumping that seemed more like the crunching of a wild beast upon bones than anything she had ever heard. Heat, intense, steaming, beat upon her cheeks. She looked up and only the dark bulk of the Empress loomed above her, only a lurid flame illumined the heavens.

She was conscious of her heavy clothing, sodden now with water; was conscious of the lack of support. Something long and wooden tilted against her, and instinctively her fingers clutched the oar which had floated out to her from their boat, which had been tossed and crushed against the burning liner's side. Again she looked up. And within her soul flickered the spark of combat which youth will not allow to die.

Consciousness lapsed slightly and was followed by a state of dull apathy. Some instinct held Lucille's arms upon the oar that had floated to her when the lifeboat smashed itself against the side of the burning Empress.

Mountains of waves sifted along her path, bearing her gently to their crests and passing her through the trough of sea to the next wave in line. From watching the myriad stars blazing in the heavens she became interested in trifles, never thinking of the precious papers she had rescued at so great effort from the international spy, forgetting even the ones at Manila on whose behalf she had taken such risks to get them back. Came a long interval of restfulness where everything grew dim and indistinct, and the water in which she was being tossed about seemed like a fostering mother upon which, in perfect confidence, she could rest her weary head and sleep.

Little needles continually pricking at her flesh brought her from slumber so abruptly she straightened bolt upright, staring about her incredulously. Every nerve and sinew of her body ached terribly, cramping her so she could barely look about the long expanse of beach that seemed to stretch interminably in every direction. Behind her she finally managed to clear her eyes enough to make out a luxuriant vegetation, obviously tropical. Safety meant little to her. Her brain was in such a state that the providential escape seemed natural. That she was alone upon an island in the Pacific seemed simple enough. Nothing mattered. Again she closed her eyes and gave herself over to slumber, which lasted until nightfall.

Securely hidden by the thick vegetation, she settled down, taking a firm grip on herself and trying to reassemble the things that had happened to her in such fashion that she might know what was best to be done. And always primarily did her thoughts revert to the papers concealed in the bosom of her dress, the papers and the man who sought them.

The papers! Undoubtedly there was something in them which would afford the clew. She stared at the oiled belt thoughtfully, fighting down the instinct which repelled her touching the secrets of another.

The bulky envelope from Washington to her father which the butler had stolen from the safe was still unbroken. She placed the packet to one side, knowing that if the spy did not care to investigate the contents there could be nothing in them which would assist her. The diary she investigated next.

Thoughtfully Lucille sat there, the diary in her lap, the picture of her mother in her hands. She knew the life of Hugo Loubeque now, knew the dominating hatred of his life, the love of his life, the gigantic efforts of the man, involving nations and humanity, the thousand tentacles of the man, stretching to every quarter of the globe.

But as she looked at the faded picture the spy had cherished through all the years tears of pity filled her eyes, pity for the man who could allow love to associate itself inseparably with hatred. She realized now that destiny itself was fighting in her behalf; that, giant intellect though he was, Hugo Loubeque had more than herself to contend with because of the unnatural baseness of his motives.

But it was a fight, would be a fight to the bitter end. She must find out where she was, what nature of place this might be, what chance for rescue there was. She must get back to Manila, for the papers were no better than rags here. She must start immediately.

A long shadow suddenly reached out before her. Motionless she stood and stared at it. From another direction came the crackling report of a broken twig. In every direction, as though the sound had been a signal, shadows flitted. The sounds were louder now.

more frequent. Then, with a ruck, Lucille saw the shadows resolve themselves into figures of men.

She had but time to make out their brown color, fear blinding her. She closed her eyes fearfully, knowing she was surrounded. A hand touched her forearm timidly. Something in the touch was reassuring. She looked about upon a solid ring of scantly clad natives, who stared at her in bewildered amazement. Again the hand touched her arm.

The native stood beside her, evidently much bolder than his fellows. Lucille could scarcely repress a smile as she caught the incredulity on the man's face as he looked at his hand, evidently expecting the white of her flesh to rub off. They had never before seen a white woman. And the girl was thinking how she might use this thing which must appear a miracle to them.

Lucille stayed close to the chief; the one who had touched her arm.

An old man he was from the heavy wrinkles that crisscrossed his face, but his torso was magnificently muscular, his carriage that of a man to whom obedience always comes. There was something very splendid about his steady black eyes—narrowed a bit as though to hint of Mongolian origin—about the thin nostrilled nose, the full lips.

CHAPTER V.
A Chief's Daughter.

ALL through the night the march continued. Lucille shuddered as, from the black fastnesses of the semijungle that hedged them in, the glow of yellow eyes gleamed.

Fire balls they might have been, so steady and silent were the animals who watched the procession, but the pat of stealthy feet, the crunch of broken twigs, an occasional growl or cry told her what they were.

It was well into the day when their party was met by a native coming from the opposite direction. Lucille was attracted by the rapid conversation he held with the chief, noticing the perturbation which showed so strongly on the old man's face when he turned away and redoubled his pace. It was well nigh impossible for her to keep up now. Worn out by exposure and this tramp through the jungle there seemed times when she could not drag herself along, when the tired muscles kinked and refused to work.

Then quite unexpectedly through a wall of vegetation the party emerged into a great clearing upon which the sun beat fiercely. A few old men squatted before the openings to the hundred or more huts that filled the open space set down here in the midst of the jungle. Many children played about dressed only in the garments of their birth.

From a hut many times the size of any other and set at the extreme head of the clearing facing down the double row as would an officer scan his files of men came a droning sound, the low pitched wailing of many women's voices, never varying in its dreary monotone. A terrible sound it was—sorrowful, dirgelike. Instinctively Lucille lifted her eyes to those of the chief, her finger tips brushing against his bare forearm sympathetically.

A swift gleam crossed his stern face. At a few sharp words the party disbanded, disappearing in the huts. "Come with me," said the chief. And, although she did not understand the words, she followed his swift stride toward the great hut from which the sound came.

The interior of the hut was crowded with women, the atmosphere so close as to fairly drive her back toward the tiny door through which she had entered. And to the ears of the girl, dominating the dirgelike wail, came a simple note—the crying of a child.

Impulsively she brushed through the women, stooping over the pallet of rushes where the patient lay. Even with the emaciation which her illness had caused, despite the blaze of delirium in the widened eyes, the black spots of fever in the cheeks, Lucille would have known the girl for the daughter of the old man.

By signs she made it clear to the old man that the hut must be cleared before anything could be done to assist his daughter. Gradually it dawned upon her that the crowding of the hut was a custom of his people, which required vast faith to go against. She watched him eagerly, her very heart crying out for the sick child, whose last chance for recovery was being stolen by this crowd of women using up all the oxygen in the room when it was the most necessary thing for her recovery.

The chief made his decision quickly. He overruled the women's protests and drove them from the hut, leaving the opening wide.

Lucille opened her mouth, laying her throat with the intoxicating air that drove out the odors the congestion had left behind. Then she turned her attention to the child.

Day and night Lucille administered to the girl, now encouraged at a diminution of the fever, now downcast at discouraging symptoms. All she had to work with were the natural weapons which nature leaves to the hands of the sensible nurse. Where the patient had been fed meat, Lucille made a broth; where witch doctors had stimulated a weakened heart and system, she soothed. And so much depended upon the little brown girl. If she recovered then Lucille knew she would have made no mean friend in the grim chief who called daily to watch his daughter for a few moments, then, without a word, would disappear. And friends meant so much to her now. It was such a task she had laid out for herself, the way was so stormy and beset with thorns. But she could not lose. She must get back to Manila and

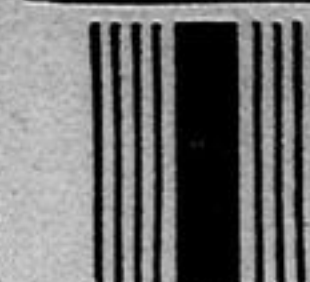
PHONES 4 and 26

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Oatmeal Millers.

Continued on page 7.

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