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**LUCILLE LOVE THE GIRL OF MYSTERY BY THE "MASTER PEN"**

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She nodded understanding. Together they crept in the shadow of the chimney toward the thin brick dividing wall, the sanded roof scratching their hands terribly. Again that flutter of chips. The captain turned and fairly buried a shot from his revolver at the figures so cautiously approaching. A cry of pain followed the report and in the confusion, the pair made a short rush.

The pursuit grew bold now. Rose the voice of Loubeque, cold, steady, terrible.

"Don't waste shots. Get the man with lead. Catch the girl."

The captain's grip tightened reassuringly on her wrist.

"If they get me," he said quietly, "take the gun and make them work."

In the excitement he became separated from Lucille. She looked about, then uttered a cry of warning. He took a step backward, then instinctively lifted his elbow as though to avert a bullet. The movement overbalanced him and he disappeared over the edge, a groping, tumbling thing.

From every direction came the pursuit. Lucille suddenly noticed there was no attempt made to close in upon her, but that she was being driven in a certain direction. A bullet dashed a spray of sand into her face, and she darted aside—darted into a yawning blackness.

When she opened her eyes she was surprised to find that there had been no fall worth mentioning, that she had merely been driven toward a trap door and caught as she toppled down. Loubeque was watching her, a curiously twisted smile playing about the corners of his mouth.

"You have too many friends, Lucille," he said.

"Yes," he murmured, after a moment's silence, "you are altogether too slippery, too nerve racking a prisoner. I think, while the search for the packet is going on it would save wear and tear on our constitutions to move you to my ranch—my ranch in Mexico. A beautiful spot," he smiled. "I trust you will enjoy it as much as I have."

Lucille looked at him steadily. In the eyes of both glowed an indomitable purpose, a hard resolve, a mutual admiration. Loubeque smiled once more, this time grimly.

"Honors have been too even till now. I fancy the ranch will settle the matter satisfactorily—at any rate, satisfactorily to me."

As Thompson, the butler-thief, swiftly descended to the ground floor and out into the court and knelt over the body of the man who had fallen from the roof top, his hands fluttered over the man like tiny, white birds. Through the pockets he went, rifling them completely and replacing those things which would be of no value to him. He stopped as he unwrapped the note Lucille had written on the scrap of paper and bound about the ruby.

Incredulity, avarice and puzzled delight fought for mastery upon his face, in his eyes. Secretly the ruby in his pocket, he carefully lifted his burden and carried it to the basement of the house. Then he took one last, loving look at his find and started in search of his master. Already a plan had entered his cunning brain to gain the rest of the necklace, a plan whereby Loubeque was to be no gainer.

**CHAPTER XVI.**

**A Thief is Rudely Foiled.**

QUIETLY Lucille allowed herself to be conducted back to the room from which she had just made her escape. Her heart was so heavy over the death of the captain she did not care what happened.

She had tried her best, but still failure dogged her footsteps. Her sweetheart had resigned from the army under such a cloud as must have broken his spirit completely. His heart she knew was already broken by her seeming disbelief in him. Her father was entangled in the same net with his aid, and she held the key to the situation—a key with no lock to fit. She alone knew where the papers that would clear up the entire mystery were located, and she was a prisoner.

"Mr. Loubeque's compliments, Miss Lucille," murmured the butler as he noiselessly approached with a tiny glass of liquor, "and he thought a tiny sip might prove beneficial to the nerves."

"Thank you, Thompson," she murmured sweetly. "Tell your present employer I shall gladly do so. But," she added, her eyes flashing maliciously, "I forgot Mr. Loubeque has been your employer right along."

"Quite so, Miss Lucille. Thank you," he said. "Before his perfect anolmb Lucille

stood undecided. Her nerves were shattered, and the drink, she knew, would do her good. But there had been that look in the man's eyes. She could not be mistaken in it. She touched her tongue to the delicious, fiery stuff and waited. A sensation of comfort slowly approached her weary spirit—a feeling of lassitude. She fought the sensation away.

Pouring out the doctored liquor carefully, she lay against the pillows in a posture of dreamless sleep. It was half an hour before her patience was rewarded. Then Thompson slipped stealthily into the room. Lucille flexed herself—a steel spring wound to its last notch.

Thompson approached swiftly, silently. He was beside her, leaning over her, his hand groping at her throat; a little exclamation of triumph as his finger pads touched the necklace. It was in his hands, and then the steel spring uncoiled with tremendous suddenness.

Taken by surprise before the vicious fury of the girl's attack the butler staggered back. Before he could recover she was upon him, driving him toward the door. He lifted his hands to fend his face, then stopped abruptly as he staggered into his master, just entering the room.

Hugo Loubeque waited, watching the furious girl and the ruffled butler curiously. A smile curved his lips as he turned toward her.

"You object to the draft, I presume. I assure you it has no ill effects and will make the journey one of pleasure instead of weariness." Then he whirled upon the butler, his face hard as granite, his teeth clipping off each word like steel particles.

"What are you doing here?"

"I came to see if the draft had taken effect," sulkily murmured the butler.

"By what authority?"

"Asking your pardon, sir, but I suggested it and was afraid it might have a bad effect. I grew to take an interest in Miss Lucille in Manila, sir, and did not wish—"

Loubeque frowned heavily, but cut him short with an impatient wave of his hand. Lucille felt a sudden impulse to tell him the truth, but conquered it swiftly. She could fight Thompson much easier than this man. She must keep her own counsel. The spy turned to her again.

"You did not take the draft?"

"No."

"I assure you on my word as a gentleman that it will cause you no inconvenience. Further, I hoped not to be obliged to tell you that if you do not take it willingly you will be compelled to get it down."

She bent her head docilely. Resistance was out of the question, and, after all, she must save her strength to fight the big things. After a moment's hesitation, a shudder at the enticing colors shed from the stuff, she drained the glass.

Languor, comfort, peace. She gave herself up to the drug with a prayer, a prayer she felt so certain would be heeded, that in her slumber a smile parted her lips, played about her countenance. And when she awoke she was at Loubeque's Mexican ranch.

Low, rambling houses of Spanish architecture dotted the great area which the curiously fantastic, wholly artistic fence enclosed. The grounds were laid out in orderly fashion, blooming like the garden of Eden with a riotous profusion of flowers and plants.

This was a new Loubeque she met there. Always had she associated him with the manner of her knowing him. Times he had been tender, other times he had been cruel, always was he crafty, cunning, courageous, a one ideal man. But now he seemed all poet, painter. She could hear the softened tones of his voice as, with some of his companions, he wandered about the grounds, tenderly explaining to them the history, the beauty of the flowers, the rare species he had imported for the place.

It was after one of these rambles that she noticed signs of some impending change about the menage. One morning he suddenly walked toward her, entering the house to shortly enter her room.

"I am leaving today," he began abruptly, all the nature lover gone from his cold, stern manner. "Again I ask you to tell me where you put the papers."

"Then they haven't been found"—She stopped abruptly, realizing that her delight had revealed quite as much as his demand.

"I am sorry, Lucille, that you cannot see the folly of this. It is your last chance to tell me. It is your last chance to count me a friend. I am waiting."

She did not answer. Their eyes met

and held, both filled with an unaltered purpose. Then Loubeque, without a word, left the room.

Nor did she see him again. That he had gone she knew from the taxiness about the household among his servants. It gave her food for hope. She must escape—she must. She must escape before the iron grip of dreamy languor about the place became unbreakable.

But always when she wandered about she would encounter one of Loubeque's aids, always masked, always casually surprised at coming upon her, always urbane and polite, yet insistent upon turning her in an opposite direction. It got upon her nerves to such an extent that she finally took to the house and remained there. Every room was grated, and though she knew they were not here for the purpose, they served it admirably.

Thompson seemed upon his master's departure to have lost poise as thoughts of the ruby necklace his fingers had touched seared itself upon his brain.

She recalled how he had served in her father's house so long with never a suspicion from any one that he was other than the perfect butler with a thought outside of his work. And then she recalled the incident of the necklace, always would she shudder at the recollection, then deliberately drive it from her mind.

It was the fourth day since the departure of the master of the place that, standing beside her iron barred window, she saw the figure of a man topping a rise in the distance and drawing swiftly nearer. There was something strangely familiar about him, something she seemed to recall. In slashed bolero, tight trousers and gold braided sombrero of straw, his long black hair waving gracefully to his shoulders, the man made an impressive figure as he fastened steady, undeviating eyes upon her window until she was positive he was looking at her for a purpose. Low voices hummed in conversation, then the man appeared before her, offering his arm.

"Senor Loubeque sent me that I might escort you about the grounds, might place myself at your disposal," he murmured.

Lucille drew away from him at mention of his master, but something to the meaning eyes behind the mask reassured her and she moved out into the patio. Here they passed Thompson, whose eyes darted a message of suspicion at them.

"He thinks all is not right," said the man quietly when they were out of sight. "Well," he added, with a low sigh, "he is right in his suspicion. I could not hope to fool that man. Only a little less wise is he than Hugo himself."

"Not right! Then you have come to help me?"

"I have come," he answered quietly, "because I could not help coming. I have come because since first I looked upon you—you will forgive me—there in the city home of Hugo, when I looked upon your face I have seen no other. I have come because I could not stay away. I have come against the will of the man to whom I owe everything, the man I love, because you called me, because—"

She touched his arm lightly with her fingers in mute appeal. Her woman's instinct told her that such a love as this might be turned to account.

Slowly they wandered through the beautiful gardens, speaking of what they saw, yet never touching upon the



Slowly They Wandered Through the Gardens.

subject nearest both their hearts. Suddenly the man seemed unable to stand the strain longer, and she touched his arm sympathetically, but he drew away with a little cry of near pain.

"Come with me to the crystal ball," he cried, "and see the vision that has haunted my eyes so long a time. Come with me to the crystal and see the face that has made me forget my vows; forget the one I love and fear; forget everything save the desire for life that I may lay down to bring a smile to it. Come with me, lady of my heart."

Before the tempestuousness of his voice Lucille followed his lead. Gone from her was every thought of immediate escape. She saw that the man could not be handled easily; that she could not escape from him any more than she could from the other minions of the spy without the use of craft, and yet she felt a curious sympathy for him, pain that she must harm him.

Before the great crystal ball that was set upon the flagging beside the patio fountain, beside which stood the

Continued on page 7.

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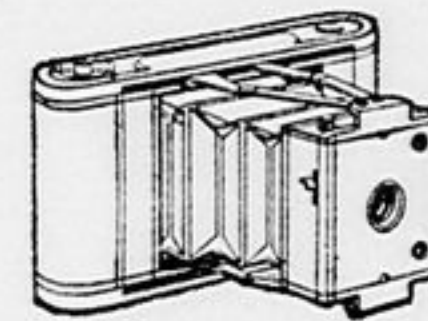
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