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LUCILLE & LOVE THE GIRL of MYSTERY

BY THE "MASTER PEN"

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Like one inspired she was, as the halting tones of her plea changed to those of passionate conviction, a certainty that expressed itself in words tumbling from the tongue with utter abandon, words that seemed to come from other lips than her own. And as Loubeque looked back at the beautiful figure of the girl he was surprised to see that suddenly she seemed to have changed, that the slip of a child who had come on board the Empress from the hydroaeroplane had suddenly become a woman of such capacity for love and hate as even he himself did not have.

Came back to him the girl he had loved and whom he still loved as fondly as in the old days of Flirtation walk at the Point, from which he had been expelled. Swiftly she came to his side, placing her hand upon his shoulder, her voice low and tender again like the sighing of an April breeze through the greening baby leaves.

"You think you are working for hate, and all the time you are working for the same reason that I am—you are working because of love. Can you not see what a perversion of love is this thing you constantly seek to do? Can you not?"

Lucille could feel the man's shoulders trembling, could mark the tremendous effort he made at self control. She was almost ready to plead with him for a return of the papers, to give up his entire life work and count it failure, confident that he was well along the road to doing so, when a rap sounded on the door.

For some reason which she could not define a shudder ran through her at the sound. She seemed to recognize a sinister presence close by. She glanced at Loubeque, and her heart sank as she saw the wave of emotion she had bred within him had passed, that he was again the icy, indefatigable international spy.

"Come in," he called briskly. Slowly, cautiously, yet with not the slightest uncertainty, the door pushed open. Before the visitor appeared on the threshold Lucille knew who it would be.

For a moment she was taken aback by Thompson's perfect aplomb. She knew he had been the one who robbed her of her necklace, that he had sprayed her with ether and taken it from about her throat while she slept. And yet not so much as by the quiver of an eyelash did he show any sign of surprise or fear.

"I was delayed, sir," the butler began apologetically, when Loubeque lifted his hand imperatively.

"You were delayed," coldly repeated the spy, separating every syllable and meting it out as though it were a death judgment. "It is perhaps better that you were delayed, Thompson. I have just received a letter from a man with whom you are acquainted. In this letter, Thompson, he informs me he intends turning traitor to my interests, that he intends assisting Miss Love to make her escape."

"Quite so, sir," murmured the butler-thief. "I am informed by him that he spied upon you while you cut through the bars of Miss Love's window."

Thompson did not stir, but Lucille saw the scar go a sickly white.

"The man lied, sir."
"Men do not lie at such moments."
For just a moment Thompson was silent. The hush upon the room was so profound as to make the ticking of Loubeque's watch strike upon the ears like mallet strokes. Slowly the butler's index finger moved to the scar upon his cheek.

"The man you speak of evidently did the work in the hope of releasing Miss Love. I gained this scar while trying to prevent the flight, sir."

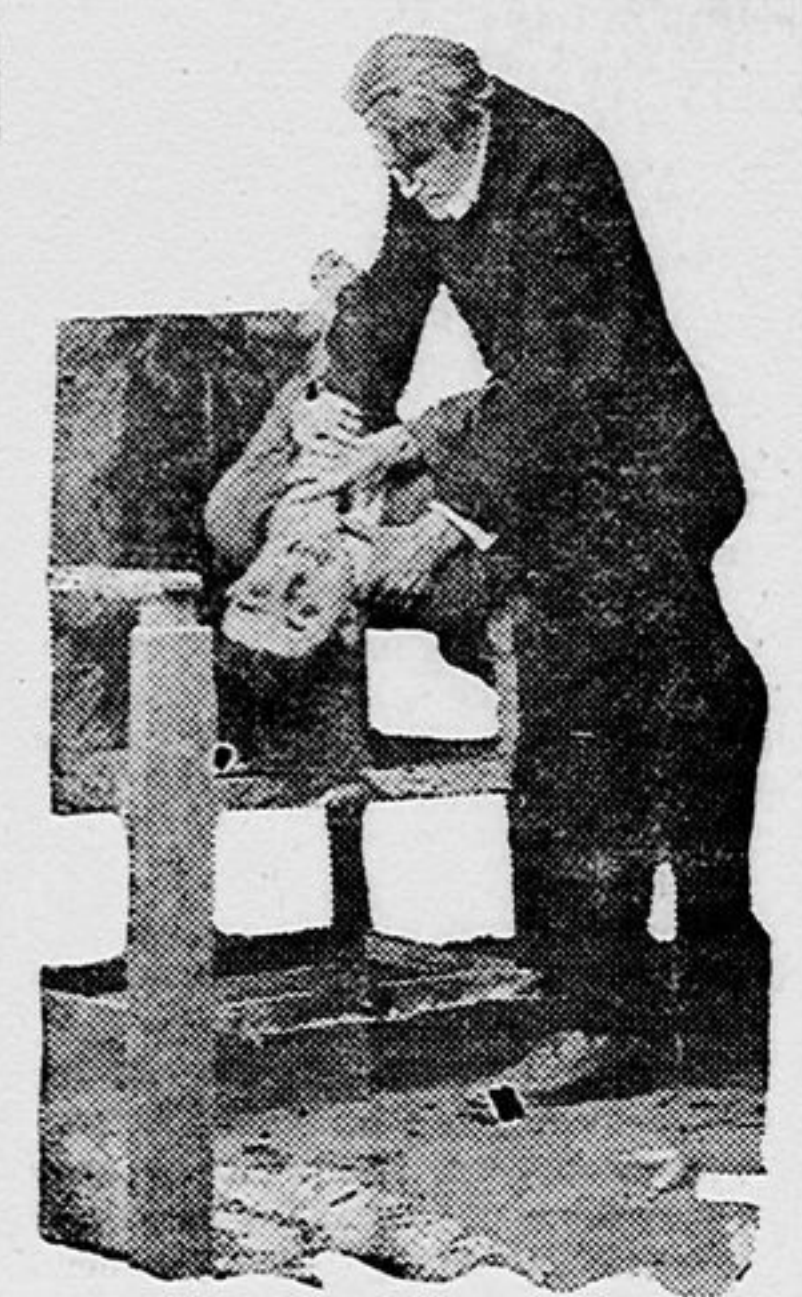
"It's a lie!" Lucille burst forth passionately. "That man tried to rob me here in this very house. That was why I insisted upon a maid to serve me when I took the drug you put in the drink."

"Why did you not mention it at that time?" The spy's tones were dubious. "Because I did not wish you to know I had anything of such value about me."

"Value? You had no money when you left Manila."
"No, but I obtained possession of a wonderful ruby necklace in the cavern of the jungle just before I was rescued by the filibuster. Three nights ago when I boarded the train for here that man drugged me while I slept and stole the necklace from about my throat. Then he dropped out of the window of his compartment. That is why he was detained."

Loubeque fastened his cold eyes upon the butler. The man had nerves as steady as a rock. Lucille studied the judge and culprit earnestly. She could see that Thompson was beating down the spy's belief in her story. Swift as

a flash, without a second's thought, she darted toward the thief. She had noticed his fingers involuntarily seek the right hand breast pocket of his coat



His Fingers Gripped Thompson's Throat.

when she made her charge. In one swift movement she had ripped open the coat. With the other hand she plunged toward the place she knew the necklace to be.

At first Thompson was taken off his guard. Then he sprang back with a hoarse cry of rage and alarm, forgetful of everything. The girl clung to her hold like a tigress. He grasped her wrist roughly and thrust her, reeling, across the room, his eyes glaring as, with clinched fists, he stared at her, while, dazed though she was by the violence of him, she held triumphantly in her hand the gorgeously dazzling ruby necklace.

Hugo Loubeque did not utter a sound; did not change expressions for one instant. Slowly, with all the leisurely grace of some giant animal, he rose and stepped toward his minion.

The cold expression in his eyes had turned to one of grim ferocity, such an expression as made Lucille shudder, as she saw his fingers reach out and grip Thompson about the throat, pressing, pressing—

Not hurriedly, but with cold, definite, murderous purpose, the spy slowly forced the struggling figure into limpness, then cast him from him without apparently making the slightest effort, rubbing his palms slowly together as though the touch had defiled them.

Lucille was chilled with horror as she watched the spy reseal himself, his face calm and emotionless. Apparently he had quite forgotten the huddled, silent figure upon the floor, whose blackened face was slowly regaining its color. Thompson was groaning when Loubeque impatiently pressed a button and waited for an answer.

CHAPTER XX.

When the Owl Hoots.

It came even before he expected. A loud clanging of bells through the house punctuated the silence, a clanging that pierced through the treble sound of the doorbell. Hugo Loubeque sprang to his feet swiftly. The mask of his face dropped and showing that face keen, eager, a bit perturbed.

The clanging sound was augmented by the rushing of feet. She had never dreamed there could be so many in the house. More like a warren it was than anything else. Whispers sounded from the halls. But she gave them all no heed. She was swaying gently to and fro, her body fighting against the faintness that was causing her knees to refuse support, her eyes wide with delighted recognition and love and disbelief, and then she opened her lips, trying to cry out aloud the name of the man she loved, the man she had worked so hard for, the man who stood in the street below, staring up at the very window at which she stood. But all that came from her lips was the faintest sound, tremulous, pitiful; the whisper of his name.

Before she could regain control of herself, even realize that she really was seeing her sweetheart here in flesh and blood, the hand of Loubeque was about her waist, drawing her gently, but firmly, away from the window. But even as the casement shut out her view of him she caught the lightning flash of recognition as her appeal drew Gibson's own eyes to that window, and she knew he had seen her.

Loubeque restrained her firmly. The clanging of the bells throughout the house ceased instantly just as a loud hammering on the door below rose. Came a flying rush of men within the

room, filling it completely. Loubeque swiftly glanced about at the anxious faces, then nodded.

"The tunnel!" he cried sharply. Suddenly Lucille became aware that the room was shooting downward like a giant elevator. She glanced about her, sick with apprehension, upon the faces so close to her own in the narrow confines. A breath of rank cool air fanned her cheek from out the darkness. Loubeque's hand was upon her wrist, his voice softly advising her to follow him. Far in the distance a little speck of light reached out toward them.

For what seemed an endless distance she was led by the spy, with always that rush of feet behind. The light was growing broader, brighter. Loubeque released his hold upon her. She could see him reach and press harshly against something, a door evidently, for the light slowly lengthened and broadened. Daylight and a foreign street!

A bitter sob broke from her lips as she looked at Loubeque and realized how infinitely far away she was from the man she loved.

Days upon the desert—blistering days with merciless sunlight pouring from the molten kettle overhead, burning savagely at the impervious sand and cacti that alone had resisted the fire so many ages.

Nights of cold, unwinking stars—stars pitiless in their steady undeviating scrutiny as the glower of sun; nights where the desert breeze searched out the marrow of the bones; nights surrounded by the minions of Loubeque, by Loubeque himself; nights of sleeplessness for herself, but nights filled with the sounds of the slumbers of her captors.

Save Hugo Loubeque. Loubeque never slept. Lucille saw he had steeled himself against her vow, that never again would she be able to penetrate his pitilessness in the pursuit of his previous revenge.

Close at hand was the hour for him to strike, ready at hand were the means. What was his object in seeking Mexico and the Constitutionalist leader she had no means of knowing? That there was a great object, one which she must defeat at any and all costs, she knew.

It was the eighth day he ran into a foraging party sent out by Villa in advance of his main army. Much as she knew of the mysterious spy, Lucille was still surprised to mark the respect and deference paid him by the dark skinned rebels. Consequently several days later, days of tireless travel, she was not surprised on reaching the main body of the army to find herself being treated with the greatest respect, while Loubeque was in constant consultation with the rebel leader.

Day after day she felt the growing helplessness of her position. Loubeque seemed omnipotent in the opinion of these men upon whom he appeared to have stumbled.

Still she would not permit hope to die. The justice of her cause, the growing humanity of the international spy, her very youth and the power of her love forbade this.

Through the very eagerness and desperation of this feeling she slowly became aware of the attitude toward his master of Thompson. She was aware of the subtle atmosphere of hatred which the slick scoundrel's mask of servitude concealed so well. In lieu of anything to do on her own account she took to watching the man, following his every move, his every change of expression.

Enmity toward the master he had served so well and who had mistreated him mingled with hatred for the girl he had so bitterly wronged and who had brought his punishment about. Consequently Lucille was surprised to come across a briefly scribbled note on a bit of rice paper such as she had often noticed the butler using in rolling cigarettes. It was pressed tightly against one of the partially cut slices of bread when Thompson served his master and Lucille with their dinner. She detached the fragment of bread, dropping it to the floor and securing the fragment of paper as she picked it up, concealing it in the palm of her hand.

For what seemed countless hours she bravely attempted to eat the food before her, tried to endure the heart-breaking period during which Loubeque smoked silently at his cigar. It was with a sigh of relief so obvious the spy was obliged to smile that she made half hearted protest at his retirement. No sooner had his figure ceased to darken the doorway than she started eagerly to examine the message.

"At the third hoot of the owl leave," Merely that, but the dephic words seemed pregnant with wondrous meaning.

Hours trod upon one another's heels so fast they moved under the tension of her waiting. Vague forebodings which she could not analyze oppressed her despite the fires of hope that had been kindled within her drooping spirit. There had been something deadly about Thompson's manner, under the scrutiny of the man she knew he hated so venomously, which made her shudder and form a half resolution to acquaint Loubeque with his servant's treachery. She had half risen to her feet, still fighting against the ludicrous impulse when the shrill hoot of an owl reached from out the mighty distances of the farreaching desert waves.

And now the very seconds lagged. Every nerve, every muscle, flexed, for she knew not what. Lucille waited, her ear against the wall, her eyes pools of mirrored terror.

After what seemed an interminable age came again the sound. Unable this time to endure the long intermission she was charged to undergo, she

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softly opened the door, peering out over the sleeping city that the reticent chieftain had hung up at a mere command. Immediately before her own abode she made out the less pretentious shack of the international spy. A dim light from the partially opened door cut a segment from the darkness. Far more significant of slumber than complete darkness was that light.
A tiny droning sound reached her ears. By main force piercing the thick veil of night Lucille made out the shadowy outlines of a lean motorcar dimly silhouetted against a pile of lava dust. Something shapeless and dark and furtive of movement crept across the space that intervened between it and the light cleavage of Loubeque's quarters. Lucille could not resist the impulse that forced her from the door into the open.
Something tugged at her feet, fairly drawing her away from the scene. Then a strange wave of pity for the unsuspecting one against whom this furtive attack was being made urged her forward. As the dark figure slipped through the door Lucille thrust her head cautiously within. Upon the cot lay the long figure of the international spy, his face turned toward the silent, motionless figure that stood in the center of the room staring at him. The eyes were tightly closed, but the girl knew that the man merely feigned slumber.
Thompson turned toward the table upon which the lamp dimly burned. Lucille allowed her eyes to wander for a second in that direction, her heart thudding so violently at sight of the diary and papers there that she was fearful she would be heard. Alongside the papers, its facets sending out a million flashes of reddish blood, lay the strand of rubies. She marked the involuntary flexing of the thief's hands as he tiptoed toward them.
Not a sound disturbed the silence, but something caused her to dart a swift glance at the sleeper. His eyes
Continued on page 7.
The town of Perth has an assessment rate of 25 mills and an overdraft of \$19,000.