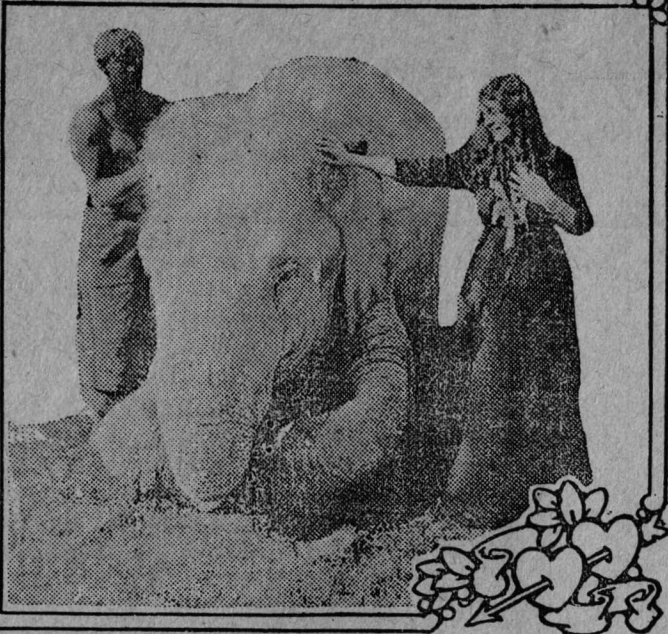


LUCILLE LOVE

THE GIRL OF MYSTERY

BY THE
"MASTER PEN"

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PROLOGUE.

In print, as on the moving picture screen, "Lucille Love" is a thrilling, rapid fire story. It takes its heroine, a young woman of charm and beauty, into the strangest of situations. There she braves the perils of sea and land for the sake of her love. As the situations unfold, with the swiftness and ease of the moving picture, the reader finds himself following, as he would the living movements of the reel, the fortunes of Lucille, her foe, Loubeque, the international spy, amid scenes of shipwreck and the wildness of nature, on sea, among the islands of the cannibals and elsewhere. But Lucille and her arch foe are not the only two in the picture and story whose movements are followed with the tribute of intense interest. The old general, Lucille's father; her lover, Lieutenant Gibson; the chief of the savages and others all stand out distinctly in the panorama of picture and story.

CHAPTER I.

The Work of a Spy.

HE was swift; he was certain; he was sure. Faintly sweet the tantalizing perfume lingered in the room, and the rustle of Lucille Love's skirts seemed still to sound against the walls of the tiny room which General Sumpter Love used as his private office; the echo of Lieutenant Gibson's pleading tones had not departed when the door leading to the servant's quarters moved. A cautious fraction of an inch at a time, a sound so faint that nothing lived between it and silence succeeded the departure of the general's aid and the girl he loves, the girl he means to marry. As the butler's face framed itself on the threshold the door was opened that led to the ballroom, a burst of music vibrated there, then all was silence. The butler closed the door swiftly behind him and glided across the floor, stopping before the safe, his dexterous fingers manipulating the knobs with a careless certainty



Lucille Love.

that spoke of the master crackman, his face against the cold steel, his ears fairly peaked with the tensile of his listening for the click of falling tumblers. His expression betrayed no anxiety. He knew his worth, knew the pregnability of the safe in which his master placed so great confidence and to which he had consigned the papers and orders he had just received from Washington until the ball was over and he had time to study the instructions at his leisure.

The crackman heaved a sigh of relief as his sensitive finger tips told him the last tumbler had fallen. The great iron door swung open to his tug.

He was swift; he was certain; he was sure. Not a paper was disarranged. His fingers fluttered like little white birds, drifting among the general's papers with a certitude that bespoke great familiarity. With a sigh

of relief he stared at the sealed packet he had just seen the army officer receive and place there. The butler thrust it into his pocket, drawing out a package of bank notes and putting it in the tiny vault where the papers had been. The door closed softly, the knobs whirring under the man's touch. Again he waited, listening, listening. The vibration of the dancer's feet continued for a second, the strains of music died. With the noiseless glide of a panther the butler slipped across the door and closed the door behind him. Not one motion had been wasted. For months he had served in his menial capacity for this one opportunity.



"It's about Dick's promotion, dad."

For months to come he would continue to serve in order that no suspicion might rest upon him. Ten minutes later Thompson, alias Tommy the Dude, alias "Chi" Tom and wanted for just such jobs in many police departments of the world, glided out the rear of the house, scurrying across the moon splashed parade ground and losing himself in devious windings among the officers' homes upon the military reservation. Slipping down a narrow street, lined with disreputable houses that leaned at drunken angles toward one another, the filthy windows winking learily to their neighbors, he paused before the largest of these places. His hand reached toward the bell pull. From some distant part of the house came back an echo. Slowly, very slowly, the door swung open, swallowing up the figure of the thief-butler. And there the butler and his employer made their plans.

General Sumpter Love, U. S. A., smiled tolerantly to himself as he overheard the low voices of his aid and Lucille coming from the little cozy corner in which the young lieutenant had hidden his sweetheart away from the avid dancers who would have taken her away from him. Then he sighed heavily as he realized he stood on the threshold of another change; that the courtship of his aid had finally been successful and another household would soon be occupied in Officers' row, leaving him alone in this great house.

He wondered if all fathers felt this way, wondered if he could gladly give his daughter to another man and be happy watching that other remold her world. And the time was so short. That very boat in the harbor now might bear the senate's confirmation of young Gibson's promotion to the rank and pay of captain. The two men had agreed that the marriage should wait on that, and the general had to admit that the aid had lived up to his word. But, then, Gibson always did that.

Again the general shook his shoulders, striding briskly to his private office. Only in work could he get relief from these fits of depression. And there was always work to be done, for the little brown people loved their fighting, were never satisfied with peace and quiet. He pressed the annunciator on his desk, curtly commanding the soldier who responded to send Lieutenant Love to him.

General Love permitted a smile to play about the corners of his stern mouth as the rustle of a woman's skirt reached his ears simultaneously with the click of his aid's boots. Came a brief whispered conversation outside the door, then the aid stood upon the threshold at attention, Lucille hiding behind him in an attitude of mock timidity. The old man bit his mustache viciously, then smiled broadly.

"Well," he demanded, fumbling among the papers that littered his desk, "what have you got to say for yourself, young woman?" Lucille slipped across the floor, twining a pair of white arms about her father's neck, the soft velvet of her cheek smoothing his brown, leathery one. It was the way she had coaxed him when a child, the way she had never outgrown or known to fail.

"It's about Dick's promotion, dad,"

she whispered. "It hasn't come on the Empress, and that means wait at least another month. If there was any chance of the senate's failing to confirm it we wouldn't bother you, but a month is such a long time, and—and Dick has some money now!"

"Yes, yes, yes," the general retorted gruffly, a twinkle in his eye that belied the tone. "But from what I've seen tonight and the last week since Harley started his aeroplane maneuvers I thought there might be some change in your plans."

Lucille flushed prettily, her eyes flashing a mocking smile at the stalwart young officer, who stood now with her, holding her hand.

"Mr. Harley's a very nice man," she defended, "even if Dick does get jealous. Besides, a girl has to be amused somehow when busy old generals keep their officers working all day and night."

"I'll think it over, dear," the general said kindly, "immediately I get through with the orders that came tonight. Lieutenant," he said briskly, "you put the orders and papers from Washington in the safe, as I told you? Will you get them for me?"

The aid flushed a bit, his fingers playing at the gold strap at his side.

"Why—why, general," he stammered, "I left the combination memorandum in my room. Lucille was waiting and—"

"Get it!" snapped the old man. The slightest infraction of military system touched his heart on the raw.

He studied his aid curiously when he returned and began fumbling with the knobs of the safe. The door opened, and the lieutenant's hand automatically reached inside toward the place where he had put the packet. An expression of incredulous dismay was upon his face as he drew out a bundle of banknotes.

"Why, I don't remember these!" he cried. Then with an expression of relief, "You have already been here, sir?"

"No," General Love's tone was peremptory, crackling. He did not relish delay of any sort. "Come, come—the papers I gave you, lieutenant."

"General, they are—not there."

"Not there!" Like the crackling of fire in dry twigs was the old man's voice. "Not there, sir! Then perhaps they, too, may be in your room."

"No, sir. I distinctly recall placing them in the order box. There was no money there at the time."

But two men had access to that safe; but two men knew of the arrival of



"Oh, father!"

the orders and papers. General Love suddenly rose, the chair scraping raspily upon the tense silence.

"Lieutenant Gibson," he began, his voice rivaling the sound of the scraping chair. "Lucille mentioned a moment ago that you had suddenly acquired sufficient money to justify an immediate marriage."

"Yes, sir. A legacy!"

General Love snorted his disbelief.

"Leaving the combination of this safe, with secrets which are invaluable to the United States, with secrets that would be of untold value to the enemies of the United States, with secrets that might mean the sacrifice of not territory, but countless lives—does that not strike you as strange, not to say suspicious, that such a precious thing

should be left in your room, lieutenant?" The tones of the general's voice had risen, a sneer vibrating through every syllable. "The papers, lieutenant Gibson—immediately! This is your last chance."

"I placed them in the safe, and they are not there now, sir." The tones were quiet, cold, determined.

"You will go to your quarters, sir, and consider yourself under arrest. The humiliation of an escort will be spared you. However, there will be a guard about the place."

A faint little cry of protest, "Oh, father!" sounded clear and distinct against the dead silence. The young man's hand fell from salute as he stepped swiftly toward his sweetheart. General Love's arm reached out and drew the sobbing girl to him, his left hand outstretched as though the mere touch of his aid would be defiling. Gibson halted in his tracks. Again his arm rose stiffly in salute; then without a word he turned, his steps falling fainter and fainter upon the ears of the pair who listened with leaden hearts.

CHAPTER II.

A Man With but One Thought.

HUGO LOUBEQUE turned the packet of papers and orders over and over in his hand, a brooding expression in his eyes that told his thoughts were very far away from the butler crackman who had just brought them to him. A massive figure of a man, he seemed to fill the room with his presence, the chair in which he sat seemed to have been built about him, the room itself with its magnificent furnishings was dwarfed by its occupant. Greatest of international spies, the rise and fall of many nations might have been placed at his door, rivers of blood had burst their barriers at the touch of those powerful fingers, yet all his thoughts were directed toward revenge against one man, toward the destruction of General Love.

Over and over he turned the stolen papers. Only another link it was in the chain he was drawing about the old army officer. The butler coughed nervously, and his master looked up, waving him away without a word of praise. The man had but done his duty. Hugo Loubeque expected that.

The telephone rang and the spy stiffened in his chair, no more the dreamer. Loubeque was at work finishing this detail in his scheme of revenge.

With the ruins of every hope smashing about her, without a thought save the need for a confidante and friend in time of distress, Lucille took up the telephone to speak with her chum, the wife of a young officer who had only just reached the post a month before.

For a second, sensitized by suffering though her mind was, she did not catch the significance of the orders being given by the man whose wire had crossed her own. Then a feeling of faintness caused her to reel at the power and strength she caught in the tones. She listened, conquering her fear in one triumphant throb of love for the imprisoned officer.

"General Love's orders and papers are in my possession now. For Shanghai on the Empress tonight. Have the launch ready."

And then the buzzing of the instrument told her that she could hear no more. She rushed to the window, her heart sinking at sight of the smoke curls spewing from the big liner's funnels. The Empress was ready—ready—and her sweetheart was arrested. Resolution so vague as to be indefinable urged her across the floor and out the door. She did not stop to analyze the impulse which urged her feet across the parade ground, down the streets of Manila toward the dock. A mad despair possessed her as she caught the signs of readiness from the Empress and saw there was no boat to take her out to the ship which carried the precious orders.

She beat her tiny fists fiercely together. There must be a way. There must be. Faintly to her ears came a humming sound from the boat. It reminded her of another sound she had heard recently, a sound she identified with the solution of her problem—Harley and his aeroplane.

It was a five miles, but her horse could do the distance in short time. Faster even than she had reached the dock did she get to the stables. No time for saddling, for anything save the wild ride before her. Through the moonlight she dashed, the little mare accepting this new freak of his mistress with delight.

The aviator had only just returned from the dance when she flung herself from the mare and grasped him fiercely by the shoulders, shaking him in the vehemence of her command. He stared at her unbelievably as he made out what she desired, but there was something in the entreating eyes, the drawn face, that told her deadly earnestness.

"It means the honor of the man I love."

Harley turned away, turned toward the giant plane. Breathlessly she watched him, waiting his decision. There was a curiously twisted smile upon his lips when he faced her again. "Get in," he motioned.

Hugo Loubeque leaned against the liner's rail, pencil poised over the open page of the diary which was headed "Loubeque's Account With Love." Items upon that page had been canceled, more remained clear. The hand started to draw through one of these last when faintly to his ears reached down a drumming sound from the heavens.

As his eyes wandered up the great bird in mid heaven grew more and

more distinct, the figures of a man and woman emerging. A grim smile crossed the spy's face as he put the diary and pencil back in his pocket, for Hugo Loubeque was thorough, and the item might not be canceled yet.

Grimly Hugo Loubeque watched the aeroplane approaching the Empress. Ruthless, above all authority, next to omnipotent with the power he had given his life to build up that he might be revenged upon the man who had brought about his ruin early in life, the international spy watched this attempt at interference with his plans—for such he instinctively knew it to be—keenly.

Cheers rose from the deck at the masterly manipulation of the plane. Then the aviator's purpose of landing on the liner's deck became clear. The explosions of the motor died out abruptly. Then the plane swooped down to



"It means the honor of the man I love."

ward the deck nose-on, righted itself and glided to a perfect landing.

Lucille separated herself quickly from the passengers. She was beginning to think again, to realize what a task lay before her. The orders and papers of her father were upon the boat, but who carried them she did not know. Of all these hundreds any one might be the thief. Harley interrupted her mood of black depression, taking her hand and wishing her luck.

"Everything is arranged with the captain," he reported. "And, Miss Love," he added earnestly, "I don't know what there is to be done, but you cannot help succeeding when you start with such spirit."

The encouragement flamed her eyes, blinding out the sight of the aviator as he started his engine once more and, with one short glide, rose toward the element he loved. Her slender figure straightened as she turned from the rail, her head uplifted itself courageously, almost defiantly.

The sound of her own name, repeated twice in a hoarse whisper of incredulity, brought her out of her abstraction. She looked wonderingly at the man who had called her by name, amazed at the emotions twitching his powerful face.

Hugo Loubeque mastered himself with an effort. He had never seen the general's daughter before, this girl with the face and form of her mother, and this apparent resurrection of what had been a living memory so long had stunned him out of his usual composure.

"I beg your pardon," he murmured as she passed him. "I thought I recognized"—He stopped abruptly, amazed at the expression of delight and craft and joy and guile which mingled on her face as she stopped and stared into his face, and in the clash of eyes the man knew that this slip of a girl recognized him for her enemy.

Lucille stared after his retreating figure, her lips parted, her eyes twin stars for the hope that had been kindled there.

"The voice on the telephone," she whispered over and over to herself.

The international spy paced up and down the floor of his suit, for the first time in years a prey to emotions that threatened to overwhelm him.

The message in his eyes had been clear. This girl knew that the papers his underling had stolen from the general's safe were in his possession. She was his enemy, determined to go appalling lengths to thwart him, just as he must forget the instinctive love he had felt for her, this girl who came from the sky and stirred up visions of days when he had known such a thing as happiness. He settled himself in a chair, closing his eyes while he rearranged all he knew of the general's household. Undoubtedly the general's aid, with whom she was in love, had been charged with the theft.

His somber eyes glowed at the completeness of the havoc he had wrought. Not alone had General Love been struck, but his entire household.

It was an hour before Loubeque rose and moved toward the door, an expres-

sion in his eyes which told the problem had worked itself out.

In the wireless room he wrote out his message, waiting idly while he watched the operator adjust his helmet and send the message hurtling back to Manila. He wondered at the indifference of the wireless man to the import of the message.

"Not the aid. General Love sold me papers."

The operator turned indifferently. "Signature?" he queried.

The international spy shook his head, smiling at the expression of interest kindled in the young man's eyes. He must for once do work of the most difficult sort and do it himself instead of trusting it to a subordinate. To do this he must ingratiate himself with this man.

That accusatory message must not be answered. Undoubtedly upon its receipt at Manila an investigation would be started which would open with finding the source of the original charge. To obviate this the wireless must be put out of order, must be wrecked so thoroughly it would be impossible to repair it until the Empress was out of the zone of communication.

It was a matter of hours before he got his opportunity, the operator leaving his board and going to the saloon. Hugo Loubeque wasted not a second. The sound of the man's boots had not ceased to sound before the box lay open before the spy. His hands moved like lightning, carrying out the plan he had conceived as the safest and most effective from the instructions of the operator. In and out his fingers moved, loosening a screw here, a wire there.

CHAPTER III.

A Second Accusation.

GENERAL LOVE sat at his desk trying vainly to figure out what motive there could have been for his trusted aid's taking the desperate chance of which he had accused him.

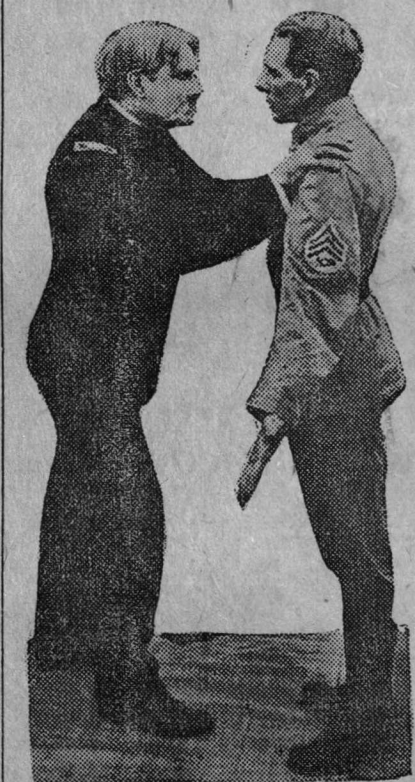
But no matter in which direction he turned, the general was unable to see how the young officer could be honest. Where had he received the money so unexpectedly that led him to believe he might be married before his promotion was confirmed? And yet—always there was that "yet" to contend with. He knew the boy, knew him so well he had been willing to entrust his daughter's life to him, and he could not believe that Gibson was guilty of the charge.

He was roused from the reverie into which he had fallen by the entrance of his orderly, who told him of Lucille's flight to the Empress. Alarmed, the general sent for Harley.

Briefly Harley told of his trip to the Empress with Lucille, the earnestness of her pleadings, the final words that had won his consent.

"For the honor of the man I love."

Over and over again he repeated the words, trying to make something of them. Of course she meant Gibson, but what could she find out on the Empress relating to the robbery of the safe in this office? Puzzled he ordered his aid brought before him. There was a certain suspicion, an air of contempt in the very figure of Gibson that told



The Orderly Told Him of Lucille's Flight.

the superior he was himself under another's suspicion. It was more than puzzling, more than baffling—that accusatory pair of frank gray eyes.

"Lieutenant," he began slowly, "I have tried to think of some solution to this affair that will not involve you. You must realize how greatly I desire this. But I have thought for hours and there seems no other explanation of the disappearance of the papers I turned over to you. Can you suggest some other person that might possibly have an interest in their disappearance?"

"I can, sir," steadily answered the aid, his eyes holding those of the older man. "I am not, however, insubordinate nor insolent to my superior officer."

The smoldering flame in General Love's eyes leaped high as he grasped the semiaccusation. By an effort he mastered himself, forcing his voice to steadiness.

"Harley, the aviator, has just reported that Lucille came to him this evening and persuaded him to take her to the Empress. She evidently felt she possessed information that would clear you of this charge and that the Empress was carrying the guilty party.