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Every Friday

The Million Dollar Mystery
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ing at all unless she takes the advice of some of us old timers and fires that young squirt of an engineer, John Dorr."

Wilkerson leaned over and his face suddenly grew white in its intensity of expression.

"I'm the superintendent of this mine. Now go!"

Tubbs looked astonished at the tone, but obeyed.

Wilkerson smiled to himself. One man, and he one of the most important in the camp, was his absolute tool and slave. He took his pen and rapidly wrote out an order:

"After this day all wages in this mine will be reduced 25 per cent."

He called one of the bookkeepers and curtly ordered him to post it on the wall of the office outside. A surprise awaited him, however, in the attitude of the miners. They paid no attention to the notice he had posted on the office wall, nor did they seem to recognize the presence of the new superintendent. He questioned Ed Mayer, the leading boss.

"Miss Ruth is running 'The Master Key,'" Mayer replied.

After the passing of Thomas Gallon things at the mine went very quietly for a few weeks. John Dorr had accepted the subordinate position under Wilkerson and was faithfully de-



He Jerked Wilkerson to His Feet.

voting himself in the intervals of his duties to soothing Ruth's grief. The girl had really been enormously dependent upon her father. She was only a child, but now in her solitariness she turned to John and old Tom Kane with impulsive trust and affection. She tried hard to be brave, but the days were long and the nights longer. The cook house bloomed with fresh roses every day, an excuse for her going down to talk with old Tom, and in the evening, when the shadows fell across the gulch, John and she would water the flowers together, and he would tell her of his life in college and in New York.

"I'd love to see New York," she said a dozen times, and on each occasion John would smile at her and say, "You shall."

Neither of them realized that circumstances would shortly take them both, though separately, to New York, for there was piling up in a secret drawer in Wilkerson's desk letters written in a woman's script. Some of them in scented envelopes on embossed paper. Each one of them was signed "Jean Darnell." When the seventh letter came the superintendent reread it many times.

Astor House, New York, May 18, 19--.
Dear Harry—From what you say and from what I learn from George, I think that I would be willing to put up the money to buy control of your "Master Key" mine, but you must be sure about this. I know that old Gallon made money out of it, but I'm also sure that he was concealing something, as you think. Make the mine worth while and well, I remember my days in that camp—I'd like my revenge. George Everett will handle the stock end of it very quietly when you say the word. Don't let your ugly temper get away from you and look out for Dorr.
JEAN DARNELL

"Now," thought Wilkerson exultantly, "I can put the screws on Dorr. I'll fire him."

At this moment the man he was thinking so bitterly of appeared, and Wilkerson, while his courage was still fresh, said insolently, "I see you are spending a good deal of time out of your office. The mine can't afford such extravagance. I guess we'll have to have a new mining engineer. I've sent for one, so you better pack."

For the moment John did not speak. They confronted each other for a moment; then Dorr turned on his heel and walked off. As he did so he brushed into old Tom Kane.

"The miners won't stand any more of Wilkerson, and they are going to strike tonight, when the day shift comes off," Tom croaked. "Lots of them are packing their duds now to get out. D—n him; he has ruined little Ruthie's property!"

John looked out of the window and realized that the various groups of miners, tired, sullen, as if waiting for something, made an ugly picture.

"I'm afraid it's up to them, Tom," he said, a little huskily. "I have been discharged, and I am leaving myself tonight."

He was perfectly amazed at the effect of his words. Dropping the coffee-pot with a crash on the top of the range, Tom Kane dashed out of the door and into the nearest group of miners, gesticulating and laughing hysterically. He said two words and then rushed back, his bright eyes gleaming fiercely.

"That saves the mine for Ruthie, John," he gasped. "The miners were just going to quit quietly. Now they will make Wilkerson take you back."

and you can make him straighten matters out with them."

He peered anxiously up into the young man's face. "You won't desert her, will you, John?"

With an inarticulate growl John swung out into the sunshine and bowed his way through the straggling throng of miners just coming off shift. Ahead of him he saw Wilkerson talking to an old miner, who seemed to be arguing earnestly. He saw the superintendent and the miner re-enter the office, and a moment later Ruth appeared.

As John came to the office door he heard the sound of a scuffle within. He kicked open the frail barrier and stood inside just in time to see Wilkerson draw a gun on the old miner.

"Drop that gun, you dog!" he bellowed, and with one leap was at Wilkerson's throat.

Wilkerson was no plummy in strength and as agile as a panther. He managed to land two stinging blows on John's eye before Dorr drove him up against the wall, laid his powerful hands on him and thrust him to the floor in absolute helplessness. His fist was lifted to give the final finishing blow when he caught sight of Ruth's white face. He jerked Wilkerson to his feet, flung him into the corner and strode silently out.

"John, John! What is the matter?" demanded Ruth.

"That bound in there discharged me! I am going to leave tonight."

Her eyes slowly filled with tears. "You are not going to leave 'The Master Key' mine, are you, John? And—"

Before he could answer her appeal in words there was a wild roar down the street and the tramp of booted feet.

"Get the dynamite and blow the fellow up!" bawled a couple of hoarse voices.

"Get a rope and hang him to the hoist!" yelled another. Then a full chorus of angry cries rose into the evening air and filled the valley with raucous sound.

Quickly John drew Ruth aside in the shelter of one of the cottages and said hurriedly: "This must be stopped. Ruth, I'll get out there and stop them."

Ruth's property was in peril. John's stentorian voice rang out across the throng: "Stop, men! Stop!" But he soon saw that the crowd was getting out of hand. He perceived three or four of the tunnel men racing down the hill to join in the fracas. One of them, he was sure, had been to the powder house. He gritted his teeth and made his last appeal.

"Ruth—Ruth Gallon!" he called. Doubtless none of the miners had noticed her presence, and when her slender figure emerged from a doorway, boldly yet modestly out toward the man who was trying to hold them in check, there was a dead silence. That silence was portentous. In it was decided the fate of "The Master Key."

It was broken by wild and tumultuous cheers as John lifted Ruth on the box, and she held out her slender arms in girlish entreaty to the men she knew so well.

Cowed, yet as ever alert to snatch at any opening, Wilkerson now came boldly on the scene. Just as he had bluffed his way many a time before, he now made a play on which he knew his own safety depended. He mounted on the box beside Ruth. "Miss Gallon has asked me to restore the former rate of wages," he shouted. "It has been done."

What meant that ominous silence? What more must he say to those faces upturned to his? "And I have reappointed John Dorr to run this mine," he muttered.

Possibly he hoped that those low, hoarse tones would not carry far, but attentive ears caught them up and knew their meaning.

Old Tom Kane came through the crowd, thrust Wilkerson off the box without ceremony and raised his crack-



"Stop, men, stop!"

ed voice in a yell that brought a perfect thunder of cheers from the miners. Without waiting to listen for more Wilkerson went away with as much bravado as he could muster to the office.

On his way he picked up his gun, which John had flung through the window, and thrust it in the bosom of his shirt, with a meaning glance backward at John Dorr, who was now helping Ruth through the crowds toward the bungalow, followed by a yelling, tramping, laughing, bellowing column of men.

Once inside the office Wilkerson went to his desk and unlocked the drawer which held that seventh letter. "Some time"—he muttered meanly—

Continued next week

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