

THE MASTER KEY CHAPTER IX

Master of the "Master Key" Mine.

WHEN Ruth Gallon did not call upon him and he found himself unable to locate her...

Unhappily for the girl, Everett was called out of town. And so when he found himself forced to make a hurried trip to San Francisco...

The false Everett, George Drake, took it upon himself to call at the Ritz for her mail, and, returning with word that there was none for her...

Mrs. Darnell found her gazing out of the drawing room window, huddled in a pathetic little heap...

"Don't," purred the hostess, "you look as if you had lost your best friend on earth. Do cheer up. What is the trouble?"

Ruth turned her head, but remained in the same queer little attitude, replying in a plaintive voice:

"I do not understand why Mr. Dorr has not written or wired me. Really, Mrs. Darnell, I am beginning to fear that something has happened to him."

Mrs. Darnell looked at her searchingly, but recovered quickly under the questioning return gaze.

"Do not worry, Ruth. Everything will come out all right. Supposing we take a drive. The air and sunshine will do you a world of good."

Every minute was one of delight to the unsophisticated girl, and each new sight and vista opened a new world to her inexperienced mind.

The truck had turned completely over and lay broken and smoldering across the waterworn bowlders. Wilkerson could not see two forms; all he discerned through the eddying smoke was the body of John Dorr.

He raised himself exultantly in his stirrups. He was now master of the "Master Key" mine.

CHAPTER X. In the Heart of Chinatown. WITH quick decision Wilkerson turned his horse toward Valle Vista.

He discovered that through an oversight he had put into his pocket before leaving the office the last San Francisco mint check for something like \$3,000.

The evening sun was pouring a pale blue light through a high Pacific fog when John Dorr came to his senses.

Twenty feet away the machine was smoldering and the smell of oil and varnish lay like a miasma in the gulch.

It did not escape him that Tom Kane and the young engineer were in consultation several times. What were they planning?

John had been expecting this perfectly natural question and was ready with his answer:

"Everything seems to be all right." "Good!" said the superintendent in dryly.

John looked up and caught himself. He was in no position to quarrel with this man.

"I'm going for a trip, and I thought I'd look over my notes in the man's while," he said.

Wilkerson said no more. He went on the alert. From Hill Tubs he learned that Dorr was going to run into either Valle Vista or Silent Valley with the motor truck.

The superintendent of the "Master Key" belonged to the type that is cut like in its quickness of action based on intuition rather than on reason.

While Ruth Gallon was carefully concealed, it was more than possible that Dorr would so stir things up with the aid of Everett that all plans to seize control of the mine's stock would be futile.

But how to prevent him? Wilkerson pondered this problem till his dark face was suffused with angry blood.

There was no way but the way of violence. Among his sensuous appetites was none for blood, but he nerved himself to his task and shortly after midday called for his horse and rode out, stating that he was going across the divide to see about a fresh supply of wood.

After mulling over the problem he felt that he must confide in some one. Of all the men in the mine he trusted only Tom Kane.

"Look here, Tom," John said abruptly, holding out the telegram. "I haven't said anything before, but Ruth is lost in San Francisco. I've wired Everett before. He can't find her."

Without a word the cook reached for the yellow slip and read it slowly. He glanced up and said with the utmost simplicity, "I reckon you'd better catch this evening's express."

"But my work here—somebody has got to look after the mine and Wilkerson."

Tom Kane glanced at him and then at the bit of paper. "I know how you feel," he muttered, "but I've cooked years enough to know that if you leave

bridge of considerable height. It was midafternoon when Harry Wilkerson threw the bridle rein over his pony's head and climbed down the hill slope till he was directly under the bridge.

From his place of vantage halfway up the hill he waited. The hour that elapsed before he heard the coughing of the motor seemed an endless succession of deadly seconds, each marked by a stabbing breath.

The heavy truck bumped upon the bridge, and in the desert silence the man on the hill saw it quietly sway to one side and then plunge downward to the rocks below.

"My God!" whispered Wilkerson to himself. "The gasoline tank exploded and the car is on fire!"

"Just as soon as you get able, John," he said huskily, "you take this money and get to Frisco. Find Ruth. That's all that matters—find that little girl."

"Hurry!" he whispered "Wilkerson is gone. He's been gone since mid-afternoon."

"But I am badly hurt," said John Dorr stupidly. Then Kane understood that he must take desperate measures.

Fifteen minutes later Dorr was pounding down the road toward Silent Valley. His head was roughly bandaged, his chest had been tightly strapped with the ripped woolen blanket.

Excitant in his triumph, Wilkerson stifled the small voice of his conscience and strode on. One thought now mastered his every action—he must reach San Francisco and Jean Darnell.

Arrived at the station he sent her a wire telling of his coming. Two minutes later he was aboard the train. As he gazed backward a bend of the rails drew a curtain to his musings, and he turned and entered the car.

Upon their arrival in San Francisco Mrs. Darnell acted upon her decision made during the journey—that they would stop at a less pretentious hotel than the St. Francis, where the chances of her plans being spied by chance meetings with the real Everett or perhaps John Dorr were too great.

Quickly she turned to Ruth and, following the lead of the bellboy, escorted her toward the elevators.

No sooner had they removed their wraps in the luxurious apartments than a rap at the door interrupted their talk.

"See who it is," commanded Mrs. Darnell to her maid.

The latter returned with a telegram from Harry Wilkerson saying that he was on his way and would join them soon.

Wearied by the long trip across the continent, Ruth was glad to retire early, and shortly after the dinner hour she was tucked in her bed and sleeping soundly.

Drake hastened to the depot and met Wilkerson, driving him to the Manx with all haste.

"I'm awfully glad to see you, Harry," he said, "the offensive greeting he received from Jean."

His heart pounded with the joy of it! After all his scheming and plotting

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Something Had Gone Wrong.

things on the fire they'll burn. This business won't wait." He smiled significantly. "And you just leave to me. I've been here since the mine started, and I guess I can attend to it from cook shanty to Wilkerson. The main thing is to find Ruth. I know she's safe, for nobody would hurt that little girl. But you've got to go to Frisco and help her. Likely she's found herself pretty much a stranger. I got lost in New Orleans once, and I reckon Frisco is bigger."

"I'll go," said Dorr promptly. "I'll leave my papers and my new plans in your charge, Tom."

The old man laid his warm hand on John's arm. "New plans?" he whispered. "Have you found the mother lode? Don't say anything to Wilkerson."

"But he is the superintendent?" "Not of this shanty. I never trust an egg until I've broken it."

In Harry Wilkerson's dark heart there was what he might in his twisted vocabulary have termed happiness. His plans were working out to perfection.

John Darnell had wired again that all was well and that she would have news for him in a few days. This meant that she and George Drake had done their part. But he wondered why it was that John Dorr, who must certainly be anxiously awaiting word from Ruth, neither said anything nor displayed a sign of impatience.

It did not escape him that Tom Kane and the young engineer were in consultation several times. What were they planning? He determined to probe boldly.

When Dorr came into the office in the afternoon and began to clear up his desk Wilkerson asked quietly, "What's the news from San Francisco? Has Ruth wired?"

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What is not necessary is dear at a penny.—Cato. Continued on Page 7



Ruth Spied a Florist's Window.

the schemer counterbalanced all doubts, and the girl was therefore persuaded to hasten to San Francisco to carry out her plans.

Accordingly she wired Dorr, but again "the wires crossed," for, although she learned that she was going to the western city, he again learned that Everett had failed to connect with her.

Ruth had been gone many days when John Dorr received another telegram from Everett that made his heart stop its regular beat.

San Francisco, April 2 John Dorr, Silent Valley, Cal.: Have been unable to find Miss Gallon. EVERETT.

For awhile his mind refused to work logically. All that he could think of was little Ruth Gallon, she of the slender hands and pure eyes, lost in the great city and pitiously seeking a familiar face. But he pulled himself vigorously together and called up the agent at the station.

"Bill," he said over the telephone. "This is Dorr. I want to get a wire through to San Francisco."

"All right, John; what is it?" John thought a moment and then dictated this message:

Charles Everett, Call Building, San Francisco: Miss Gallon was to have gone to the Frisco, as I wired you before. DORR.

Highland Park Press advertisements on the right margin, including 'Highland Park Press', 'The Boulevard Cafe', 'Why Not', 'Shoe Repairing', 'J. P. Steffen', 'Miss Alma Sahuri', 'John C. Borchardt', 'Patents', and 'Chas. E. County'.