THE MASTER KEY CHAPTER XIII.

The Second Story Man. EAN DARNELL paced back and forth in the miserable room where Harry Wilkerson had lodged her and her maid pending the outcome of his wild plotting to get possession of Ruth Gallon's precious papers. Her handsome and cruel face was clouded with sic wrath, and she clinched her hands now and again till the knuckles were

white. For one thing, Mrs. Darnell loved the plush of life. Physical luxury was her highest wish, the goal of her loftiest ambition, the one price she had set on her soul. The dull surroundings she had been forced to accept nauseating her uncomfortable.

like a wildcut,

"I won't stay here another hour, Ruth or no Ruth!"

Wilkerson flinched. "I'm sorry," he rasped, "but Drake made a mess of the whole affair, the police are after Sing Wah and that girl got away."

Mrs. Darnell stopped in her almost hysterical walk about the room and stared at Wilkerson with burning eyes." He returned her look defiantly. "I'd never had to do all this if you had done your part long ago and got the papers when she was in your charge," he said. "But there is no use in crying over what can't be helped."

At this moment Drake entered, presenting himself sullenly. He had already received Wilkerson's acrid compliments on his astuteness in failure. and he expected nothing less from Mrs. Darnell. He was ready to quit the conspiracy.

Jean's quick instinct did not fail ber, and she instantly smiled on Drake and murmured: "You poor boy! Now tell me all about it!"

When he had finished his relation of the morning's experiences, with much emphasis on the shooting and his narrow escape from Sing Wah's den, she looked at him thoughtfully.

"It was a madman's scheme," she said. She turned to Wilkerson. "Harry, you used to do things better. Use your wits! This isn't the desert. Force won't avail and time is getting short. We must have those papers immediately and raise the money on them and get enough capital ahead to find the old plan to the mother lode of the 'Master Key' mine. Use your wits!"

For a long moment the three of them stood in silence. Then Wilkerson smiled sardonically.

"All right, Jean: I think I understand you. I'll see what I can do today. First I must find out a few things. Drake and I will go together."

"Thanks," said the young man drily, "I have a notion that I'm about fed up with your plans and plots."

Before Wilkerson could respond with the bitter repreaches ready on his lips Mrs. Darnell interposed, curbing her own unruly temper.

"George," she said, looking at him with suddenly soft eyes, "I know just how you feel. But it means everything to me-to all of us. I have trusted you so, and if you fall me now"- She threw out her arms in a gesture of pleading. Then she came closer to him



"I've got my scheme and my man,"

and whispered. "And are you going to give up the stake you are playing for? You are in love with her!"

"That's but little reason why I should help Harry here out with all kinds of preposterous plans. That one of last night nearly did for us all, if she badn't escuped as she did the police would be at the door now."

"John Dorr is a stup!d fool," Wilkerson broke in "It's been mere luck that's helped him so far. Nobody ever crossed Harry Wilkerson yet and got away with it. Old Tom Gallon found that out."

Jean Darnell glanced at his feverish eyes and understood him. She knew that the reaction from the thought that he had caused Dorr's death-the sudden surprise of finding him alive and in San Francisco-had shaken his nerve. He would hereafter seek the devious and obscure ways he knew so well, Her eyellds almost closed till she was looking at him through narrow slits. She seemed satisfied and turned to Drake. "Please do it for me," she urged again. "I know Harry has some good, safe plan in view."

Wilkerson nodded. "We'll be back before very long, Jean. Better stay

right here so that I can get you on the phone if necessary."

"Oh, I'll stay here!" she mocked. "That seems to be my role staying where you put me.'

He stepped very close to her and looked into her stormy eyes. "And if in the world?"

She saw the passion flaming, as if the man's soul were on fire, and drew back fearfully. Wilkerson understood that movement and laughed grimly She feared him, and be feasted on the terrors he inspired, even where be also

Once out on the street, Drake sullen ly followed his companion's lead into still Jower quarter of the town. Busy with his own thoughts and still shaken from his experiences of the morning. ed her. She hated Wilkerson for mak- he did not notice that Wilkerson was evidently on the lookout for some one. So when be came in, walking very | Once or twice he stopped to think. slowly and quietly, she turned on him | Once he greeted an old acquaintance and carried on a low voiced conversa-"Take me out of here!" she panted. | tion, of which Drake heard nothing except the name "Pell" and "he usually hangs out around Adam's poolroom." When Wilkerson rejoined him Drake

> said peevishly, "Where to now?" "I've got my scheme and my man." was the reply. "It'll be plain sailing from now on."

A moment later Drake was surprised to see Wilkerson step to one side di rectly into the path of a pale faced. quietly dressed young man of about thirty years of age. The individual stopped, stared at the man who had so rudely interrupted his walk and then recoiled.

"Harry!" he stammered. Wilkerson smiled cruelly, but said

nothing. The other repeated the name and went on, "Are you here? Why are you here?" His dread was so evident that Drake

looked at him curiously. strange what a number of queer acquaintances Wilkerson had and how deeply most of them seemed to fear him. He listened intently to his companion's drawling tones. "Yes, I'm Harry Wilkerson. I was

looking for you, Pell," The man he addressed licked his dry lips and essayed a smile. "Long time I no see you?" he said in an attempt

at a jesting tone. "How long is it, now?" Wilkerson said as if to himself. "You got five years"-

"For God's sake, man, be quiet!" whispered Pell. "I—no one knows me here, and I'm on the square now too."

"You mean the police don't know you," grinned Wilkerson. "But, then, I know you, old sport. You wouldn't would you?"

Pell grudgingly accepted the hand head out and shook it feebly.

"We'll just go to some nice place and sit down and talk over old times," Wilkerson remarked pleasantly

"But I've got a date! I'm working downtown!" protested Pell miserably. "Working?" demanded Wilkerson mockingly. "Since when has old Sam Pell been working? Answer! Since he was broke." He laughed loudly.

"I came out here to live on the level," pleaded the other, his foxlike face white with fear.

"Things too hot for you in the torrid east? Well, I never went back on a pai, did i, Sam? And I'm not going back on you now. I'm going to put you in the way of some coin.

At this point they turned into a small Greek cafe, and Wilkerson ordered coffee all around. When they had been served and were alone he introduced get busy with Everett and finish three bounds was in her room. She Drake and Pell and remarked to the former: "Sam Pell is known as the slickest man in his line. Ain't you. Sam?"

"I ain't working that lay any more," was the sulky answer.

Wilkerson leaned across the table and his lean face held a very evil expression on it. "Not working? But you'd do a turn for an old friend, wouldn't you, 'specially when there's lots of good, safe money in it?" As if hypnotized, Pell stared into the

dark eyes fixed on his and swiftewed chokingly.

"I knew you would," said Wilkerson willfully misinterpreting his marticu late groan. "Now to business, Sam!" "Henry" gasped the other "My name's Henry now. Don't 'tall me Sam."

"Well, Henry." said Wilkerson south ingly "I declare, I do forget unimes so easily Now. I want to explain my little proposition It's just in your line, Sa-Henry.

Pell bit his finger nails and squirmed on his sent. But when the man op posite him easually pulled out a heavy purse and as he heard the clink of gold be subsided

Very rapidly and curtly Wilkerson told him of the existence of a bundle of papers that he wished to "recover. He laid only enough emphasis on their character to enable Pell to identify them on sight and concluded by say ing: "It's worth money in your pocket to locate them and get them back Find a girl named Ruth Gallon in one of the hotels here. She has the pu

Wilkerson."

explain a little more clearly."

The outcome was that half an hour later Pell took \$50 advance from Wilpapers for him. Before they parted ["I'll deliver them there when I the latter made several little jokes them. which Drake could not see the point of, but which seemed to make Pell sick with terror.

"Who is that fellow?" Drake de make dates ahead," he said quietly manded as they were returning to "But it won't be long." their lodgings.

Harry Wilkerson laughed bitterly out?" The best hotel worker and second Pell winked and moved off.

story man in America," he replied. "But he's lost his nerve."

"I don't like the way we're getting mixed up with all sorts of crooks in this business," said Drake crossly, went into this to oblige Jean and"-

"Help yourself," Wilkerson finished I put you where you most want to be for him. "I notice that Mrs. Darnel and I are putting up the coin and doing the work so far. Where's your

The evil spell that Wilkerson had cast over so many weaklings closed about George Drake, and he was silent.

Just how it was that she found herself again in the same room in the tel Ruth could not have told after her terrible experiences of the night and



The Ex-Thief Spent the Day Searching Hotel Registers.

morning. But John had hurried her into a cab, ordered it driven to the Manx and quickly made arrangements for Ruth to occupy his room with a maid to look after her. "All my clothes are with that horrid

woman," she whispered.

"I'll rig you out, and then we'll go shopping," was the rejoinder. With the help of the maid and the

housekeeper Ruth was presently made presentable for the street, and John, in dry clothes and none the worse for his ducking, met her in the lobby.

"I have engaged a taxi by the hour." he told her. "I think it will rest you more to get the fresh air and dig say now that I wasn't an old friend, around in the shops among the pretties than it will to brood in your own

Ruth hesitated shyly. "But I have no money, John."

"Oh!" he said blankly, and then thought came to him. "Why, here am carrying around a lot of the ranch money which I was going to turn over

Once in the taxi Ruth told him of her experiences from the time she had Ruth." left the mine. John listened soberly. though once in awhile a heavy flush on his cheeks betrayed his deep seated anger at the plotters who had not only sight within. A tall man in a light tried to deprive her of her mine, but mask was delving into the desk and had finally risked her life and liberty.

when she had finished. "He caused ly thrust a bundle of papers into his your father to make him superintend pocket and slipped toward the open ent of the mine and then bounded him | window. Then Ruth understood and into his grave. He is your bad angel. screamed for help. Ruth, But I am here now, and I'll . John Dorr heard that call and in things up, and we'll soon be back at the mine and have things going again."

He answered her questions about the situation at the "Master Key" as tactfully as he could; he realized that her nerves were badly shaken. He would trust to old Tom Kane to hold the fort in the mountains while he transacted the necessary business in San Fran

He directed the chauffeur to drive them through the shopping district and while Ruth spent several hours in replenishing her wardrobe John sat in the taxt and studied things out. But he was continually seeing Wilkerson's dark face before him, and before they returned to the hotel he had determined to find out where he was and what he was doing.

While Ruth went to her room to dress for dinner John sat in the lobby and completed his plans. He did not observe a siender, quietly dressed young man with a very pale face, who sauntered in and out with an occasional trip to the cigar stand to light fresh cigarette. It was Henry Pell.

The ex-thief had spent the day going from hotel to hotel, searching the reg isters It was only at last that be went to the Manx. There he found the name "Ruth Gallon" on the register and below it "John Dorr." This he reported to Wilkerson, who swore luridly, but emphasized the necessity of getting hold of the papers immedi-

"And I trust you to do it," he said

Pell, flushed with drugs, nodded briskly. "I'll get 'em, all right. Har-Pell rose nervously. "Not for me, ry," he said, but did not add his inmost thought, which was that, with the Wilkerson rose, too, quite undisturb papers once in his own possession, he ed. "We'll just walk down the street | could easily get much more from Wilapiece with you, Sa-Henry, and I can kerson than the \$200 he had promised, "When will you have them?" Wilkerson went on impatiently.

Pell smiled faintly, but significantly. kerson and promised to recover the "I know your address," he remarked "John. John!" she called softly.

> "But when?" growled the other. Pell flicked his cigarette stub into the gutter and whistled. "I never "Have you your plan all schemed

CHAPTER XIV.

The Fight on the Roof. LKERSON did not follow Pell. ous customer and a man who worked secretly and in his own way. It was like Wilkerson to ods and mannerisms. He never interfered with an expert when that expert of his quarry.

was working for him. But he could not refrain from a furtive glance in the lobby of the hotel He saw John Dorr there, still bearing the bruises and burns gained in the wreck of the auto truck. He stared at him, for there was something uncanny in seeing in the flesh the man he had thought to have killed. Then he went swiftly away, as Ruth came out of the elevator and joined Dorr.

At supper both Ruth and John were silent, not only from weariness, but because they had not settled things yet. Everett hadn't been seen nor any preparations made for the mising of the money needful to improve the "Mes ter Key" mine. So by mutual consum they made a short meal of it. In the lobby they sat and talked a little while. but presently Ruth had to confess that she was worn out.

"Of course you are." said John y pentantly. "I'll take you right up an turn you over to your maid. A gold night's rest will set you on your feet again."

"I shall dream of that horrible China man!" she murmured, shuddering. "Don't let that worry you," he said

comfortingly. "I have a room right near yours, and if you want help I'll be there.'

She thanked him, and together they entered the elevator and were lifted to their floor. In the hallway Ruth gravely shook hands and said "Good night." John tried to hold her little hand longer than was needful, but she shook her head and slipped away to her own room, just down a short hall. He watched her open the door and turned to go to his own room when a thought struck him, and he called gently

She came back quietly. "I'm so glad you called me," she said, with eviden nervouspess. "After all, it's ridiculous ly early to go to bed. Let's go for ride some more."

They went out through Golden Gate

park and after a brief stop on the bright beach came back into town by way of the Presidio. Ruth was now quieted, and as they

got out at the hotel she sighed hap-"That was beautiful, John," she said.

At the desk the clerk handed John a note addressed in a crabbed hand. 1 He tore it open, glanced at the contents and turned to Ruth.

"Old Tom Kane got here tonight!" he exclaimed. "He came while we were out and left this note for me." Ruth's face lit up wonderfully "Where is he? Where is he?" she de

manded. "I want to see him." At her door he left her with a hasty "I'll be right in as soon as Tom comes.

"All right!" she called back, and opened her door as he opened his own. She paused on the threshold at the rummaging among her papers and be-"It's all that man Wilkerson," he said longings. At the sight of her he quick-

pointed to the open window, gasping "That way! The thief! He stole the

Without a word Dorr leaped to the window. It opened on a fire escape. He peered down. No one. He tooked A slight figure was mounting quickly and silently toward the roof.

Within another instant John had swung himself out on the ladder and was climbing rapidly after the un known housebreaker. He paid no at tention to Ruth's agonized cry after him: "John! John! Don't go ufter him! He'll hurt you!"

Helplessly she peered out of the win down and saw the two figures going swiftly up toward the crest of the building. The seconds seemed hours as she watched. Then she saw John stumble and catch himself. That decided her. She picked up her skirts and stepped out on the platform her self. Then she gingerly swung ber self out on the iron ladder and com menced to climb upward. She saw the thief reach the cornice and crawl over. then John. She struggled on up sob bingly, bruising her tender hands on the rusty rods. Once or twice she stopped and called: "John! John!"

There was no answer. Then she realized that there was an ther on the ladder below her. She nearly lost her grip and fell. Surely it must be some accompline of the thief! She hastened her way up the ladder, not daring to look down again

At last she gained the cornice, where the ladder bent suddenly outward and she must perforce almost hang suspended by her hands. But she managed to surmount this difficulty and stumbled forward on the roof of the

At first glance she saw no one. The roof was huge, broken here and there by skylights and chimneys and air shafts. The shadows cast by the moon lay dark and strange across the tarry

get Then again, in terror, she cried shrilly: "John! Oh, John!"

At that moment the figure of the masked man slipped from behind one of the chimneys and made for the fire escape. She realized that he was escaping. Where was John? She wavered. Could he be killed? She cried John made one last desperate grapple again. "John!"

She stood directly in the way of the lly, but not upon the roof.

man making for the ladder, and be paused at the sight of that eerie figure The besitation was futul to his pur pose. Dorr darted across the roof an grasped for him. With a swift turn the thief leaped over a skylight and commenced to ran hither and thither. respect a fellow crook's special meth- trying to evade John, who was not to be put off now that he had full sight

> Ruth watched the chase with hards tensely clasped over her bosom. She could not stir from her position in the full moonlight, near the edge of the roof, nor did she move when Dorr fin ally eaught his man and tripped him.

They fell together on the roof and rolled over and over, each trying to bulk the other of a good hold. The fighting was furious, for Pell, still under the spell of drugs, was possessed of tremendous strength which even Dorr's hard muscles could not over-

Suddenly Ruth heard a familiar voice behind her saving, "I'll be dadblamed if it ain't a fight!" She did not turn. Her eyes were fixed on the two

Suddenly Pell started to roll over to ward the edge of the roof, dragging John after him. This new danger uppalled the girl. She watched with fas cinated eyes.

John Dorr was well out of breath by this time and knew his man. It was a desperate struggle, for the thief was fighting for his freedom and possibly his life. So Dorr settled down to hold him until his wild strength ebbed and he could handle him.

Henry Pell, on the other hand, knew precisely his plight and saw with exactness what would happen to him un less he escaped the huge arms that tied him down. Like all men of his class, he was averse to carrying weapons. Tonight be cursed himself for being unarmed. One shot, the fire escape and away! That being impossible, he planned another mode of getting away In pursuance of it, he gradually worked himself nearer and nearer to the scape ladder. If he could once get his hands on those iron rails and swing himself over, his assailant must in evitably either let go or drop over Pell knew the steel strength of his own arms, practiced for years in just such tricks.

But the presence of a second man right in front of the ladder, as be perceived through his blurged eyes rendered that hope out of the ques tion. In desperate fury he kicked Dorr violently, tore one arm loose and drove his bony fist like a bullet into John's throat.

This forced Dorr for the moment to let him go. Pell rushed swiftly toward the ladder. He was halted by the sight of a perfectly level gun held in the hand of a man who evidently knew how to use it. He darted back, and John caught him again, this time with a well directed blow that felled him A second later the thief was helpless lying almost at the very edge of the roof. He was trapped and he knew it. There was but one thing to do, get rid of the evidence that he had been thieving. With a firt of his elbow, he managed to send the bundle of papers which had fallen out of his pocket over the coping and into the air. Then he choked up to Dorr.

"Are you mad?" "Mad?" panted Dorr, letting his hold relax. At this moment Ruth came out of her stupor and ran up to them, fol-



Ruth and the Deeds to the Mine.

come up the fire escape. Ruth cried out, "John!" then "Are you burt,

"Ruth!" he gasped. Then his eyes lit on the form behind her and he shouted, "Tom Kane!" By this time the tumult had attract

ed attention in the botel and a half dozen employees and the house detective emerged from the stairway to demand an explanation.

John started to explain, loosening his hold on the prostrate thief, when the letter with a quick twist of his lithe body freed himself and darted away Dorr sped after him instantly.

The chase was a short one. John caught him near the edge of the roof, tackled him low, and they crashed down together. The thief put up a furious fight, managing to get on his feet again in spite of his captor's efforts to hold him till help came. See ing that he was about to escape him caught him fairly and threw him heav-

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