

THE MASTER KEY CHAPTER XV.

THE morning brought John Dorr, Ruth Galton and Tom Kane together to discuss the problems before them.

The papers so necessary for the examination of the desk that Everett had prepared were again lost.

It's really only a formality, said the manager of the hotel. The man was a robber and Mr. Dorr tried to capture him as he fled every night to do, and the man was quiet.

This failed to comfort Ruth. To her mind the presence of the busy officers the fact that John Dorr was under arrest in a strange city made her feel that her burdens were too great to bear.

Everett arrived and the moment she saw him she heaved a sigh of relief. He was so capable looking, so cool, so genuinely cordial to John that even Tom Kane softened his grim visage a little.

"I'm under arrest," John told him. "The officers were good enough to let me stay here till you came. Now I must be off. Let me introduce you all around."

This done, John Dorr went on. "They can tell you all about things and when you've learned the worst come down and get me out, if you can."

Everett agreed, and Dorr rose, and with a smile said good-bye to his companions. As he left the hotel with an officer on either side of him Ruth broke down and cried.

But when Drake arrived with the morning papers and said nothing articulate and only pointed to the headlines on the first page both Wilkerson and Mrs. Darnell knew that something had happened again to spoil their plans.

It was Wilkerson who snatched up the paper and read the news: HOTEL THIEF HURLED TO DEATH. Guests of the Manx Hotel Have Victim Struck With Hotel Robber.

Shortly before midnight last night Miss Ruth Galton, a guest at the Hotel Manx, entered her room to find a masked man crouching near her desk.

She was either struck or fell to the street below. He was instantly killed. Shortly afterward the body was identified by the police as that of Samuel Price, alias Henry Pell, an ex-convict and drug fiend.

Wilkerson read no further. He turned his ghastly face on Mrs. Darnell and said huskily, "He's dead."

"Well, he won't tell any tales," was the cold response. "The question is did he get the papers?"

To this question there was no satisfactory answer until Wilkerson read down further and learned that nothing of value had been found on Pell's body.

"So he didn't get the deeds, and Ruth still has them," Mrs. Darnell said bitterly. "That is the way all your plans succeed."

Wilkerson flushed. "There is one comfort, he said in an ugly tone. 'Dorr is to be held for killing him.'"

unfortunate all around, but I know that John will fix things. Tom Kane fixed his honest old eyes on the girl and shook his head.

"I don't want to discourage you, Ruthie," he said quietly. "but with that man Wilkerson is out of the mine for good you can't do more than patch matters up temporarily."

Meanwhile Wilkerson and John Dorr were anxiously awaiting news from Henry Pell. It was getting about in the forenoon and the woman insisted that if he had succeeded in getting the papers he should have been on the ground long before that morning.



"I don't want to discourage you, Ruthie."

John was worried, but said the delay to Pell's habits and the necessity possibly of avoiding the police.

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"For how long?" sneered Jean. "On all his friends get him out. And mean while you do nothing!"

"She continued in this strain for some time, Drake and Wilkerson moodily listening. They knew that it she once threw the affair up they would be helpless and all their time and work and money would have gone for naught.

Wilkerson was thinking quickly. Suddenly he interrupted Jean to ask for pen and ink. She got them, and he sat down at the table to write. Drake and Mrs. Darnell kept up a desultory conversation until he had finished.

"Humph!" said Kane. "That sounds funny to me." Ruth nodded, looking at the note. Then she said, more cheerfully: "I'll dress anyway. Maybe he needs me. Now, you old dear, leave me awhile."

Kane departed and Ruth quickly changed into street dress. While she was doing this the lobby returned to see that a machine was waiting for her.

"The one that brought the note," he said. "He says he was told to wait." "Oh," she exclaimed. "Tell him I'll be right down."

When the boy had gone she called Tom Kane on the telephone and told him that she was going. "John sent a car for the," she added.

"All right," came back the answer. "I'll just travel along. Maybe I might help John myself."

So it was agreed, and they met in the lobby, where Ruth showed the note to the clerk in her impulsive way. Something in that official's expression made the old cook unobtrusively take out his revolver and see that it was in good condition.

He followed Ruth to the street and into the waiting machine. This move disconcerted Drake. He had not intended to have two passengers, but he saw no help for it and merely nodded when Ruth ordered him to take her to the city prison.

He started his engine and they sped off up the hill. They rode for some time and as neither of them was acquainted with the city it did not occur to them that they were being rapidly conveyed into a part of town only partly built up and now veiled in dense clouds of swirling fog.

"It's a long way," Ruth remarked several times, but Kane merely granted. He was busily pondering over some method of extricating John Dorr.

Suddenly the car swerved around a corner, dived down a steep hill and came to a stop before a big gray building the boarded up residence of an absentee. Reaching back, Drake opened the door, and Ruth sprang out.

A figure darted across the sidewalk, and she felt herself clutched by the arm. She looked into the gleaming, cruel eyes of Wilkerson.

"I've got you now!" he said triumphantly. "Oh!" moaned Ruth, shrinking back in terror.

"Yes, indeed," Wilkerson taunted her. But at that moment he heard another voice, stern, commanding and familiar. He looked around into the muzzle of Tom Kane's revolver.

For the moment they faced each other while Ruth shrank back still farther. The old man's eyes gleamed, and his trigger finger seemed to rest on the trigger with a precise and deliberate touch.

"You here," said Wilkerson with an oath. Suddenly the old man's temper flared up. The other saw death in his eyes, turned on his heel and ran as fast as he could up the street.

Without a second's hesitation Kane swung his weapon round till it covered Drake, cowering at his wheel. "Now you drive us back to the hotel," he thundered. "And if you make a false move I'll drill ye as sure as God gave me good shooting eyes."

Drake saw that he was helpless and sulkily waited till they were in and then turned his car back toward the center of the city. Tom Kane sat grimly just behind him with his gun ready. And his mind was piecing things together. Suddenly he saw a policeman on his beat and realized that he was playing his cards for him.

He ordered Drake to halt and hailed the officer. To that somewhat astonished individual the cook explained briefly that he had just foiled an abduction plot and that the chauffeur was in it. Though Drake strenuously denied the charge the policeman decided that it was a case for the captain.

"I'll just ride in front here, and we'll go to headquarters," he remarked. "You can put up that gun, old fellow, for I'll see that young fellow doesn't cut up any monkey shins."

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"Please hurry," Ruth pleaded.

The result was that things went to the bad and the boys they sent to the aid went to know how long they were to stay.

"I suppose we mean how long before a pay day," I says to em. So far as I know nobody has laid out no.

"They agreed with me, but said they couldn't feed their folks without money, and if they got no money but if why work?"

"They haven't been paid then?" "No. And Wilkerson put off all credit. It at the store I guess I got in bad with folks when I pitched up a lot of flour and said that was in the cook's hands among the worst of ones.

CHAPTER XVI. Too Late! "MOTHER JOHN and Everett went outside, and from the quarter they learned that a car had driven up, that the chauffeur had delivered a note and that Ruth Galton had come down and been driven off.

Board of Local Improvements of the Village of Deerfield. Dated, Deerfield, Lake County, Illinois, January 15, 1915.

Advertise in The Highland Park Press. Continued on Page 6.