

he felt that a superior authority should handle so delicate a situation. The governor had agreed and ordered a troop of cavalry to the "Master Key" to preserve order. It was just when Wilkerson had seen his chance for a grand coup that the troopers arrived.

Ruth, with some of the women, had taken refuge in John's house on the hill, with old Tom Kane as their bodyguard. Wilkerson knew that if he could capture Ruth he could make his own terms. He directed several of his men to make a detour around the hill and effect this. Meanwhile he set fire to a cabin below in order to distract the attention of Dorr and his men.

The ruse had nearly succeeded but for Kane's quickness. Though he had not used his gun for many years, he had lost none of his old time skill, and when the marauders made their final dash on the porch of the house the cook, with a single glance over his shoulder, shot from the hip. His man tumbled dead at Ruth's feet, and his companions sneaked back.

At that instant the cavalry rushed in, and before five minutes were passed their commander had separated the combatants, and proceeded to disarm them.

He then called Dorr and Wilkerson to him and curtly stated that his orders were to see that there was no trouble. "What your quarrel is I don't know," he said.

Wilkerson tried to argue, but neither the officer nor the sheriff, who now arrived, would listen to him. They also turned a deaf ear to John Dorr's statement of Wilkerson's crimes, including the kidnaping of Ruth in San Francisco.

"If you have anything against Wilkerson," the sheriff asserted, "swear out a warrant for him. I'll serve it quick enough."

With this John must perforce be satisfied, but after a conference with Kane it was agreed that the latter should go to the county seat and make formal complaint and procure a warrant for Wilkerson's arrest on the ground of forgery.

"You and I know those deeds he flourishes aren't genuine," John said earnestly. "Let's make it an issue and try it in court. At any rate, we'll be rid of him for awhile."

"I know you're right," the old cook assented heartily. "I'll be off today. With these troopers around the greasers won't dare do anything openly. But keep your eyes open, John! They will sneak something across if they can."

"Trust me for that," was the reassuring response.

But when Kane had gone Dorr realized that he was in a nasty predicament. Wilkerson was desperately play-

ful of insolent words. The exact location of the ledge in question on a slip of paper, which I placed in the hand of an Indian idol in an old sea chest, which went down with the ship on which I was wrecked."

On the master key, the key to that chest, and which you wear on your neck, is carved the location where the vessel went down. Find that slip of paper and the wealth is yours. Your devoted father, THOMAS GALLON.

CHAPTER XX.

The Rival Wrecking Crews.

FOR some moments Dorr stared at this message from the dead. True, it was addressed to Ruth, but its message was to him, John Dorr. Now, he knew something of the tremendous stake for which Wilkerson was playing. So deep in thought was he that he did not notice that he was being spied upon. He must see Ruth and tell her. He slipped the letter into his pocket, not observing that the torn portion dropped to the table.

As he hurried out, fat with his news, a Mexican stole into the room and, after a keen glance around, picked up the bit of paper. He had seen the triumphant expression on Dorr's face. That writing must be valuable. He tried to decipher it, but failed. So he thrust it into his shirt and stole away.

Half an hour later the last few lines of that letter were in Harry Wilkerson's hands.

It was not until he had explained to Ruth the circumstances under which he had opened the letter and handed her the inclosure that John discovered that the last portion was missing, the part that told of the figures on the key. Together they sought it in vain. "Well," said Ruth cheerfully, "at least I have the key and now we know what those figures stand for."

"Yes," he assented, "the latitude and longitude where the wreck sank. But I don't like the disappearance of that last part. It was rank carelessness of me. What if it should fall into Wilkerson's hands?"

Ruth laughed, dangling the key by its ribbon. "We have the master key."

"Yes," John replied more cheerfully. "He won't know where the place is anyway. But we must arrange to find that wreck and get the chest."

"But if the ship sank?" she said. "Lots of people will remember the wreck," was the response. "And with this accurate position of where it went down a diver will be able to recover what we want."

They discussed this for some time and decided that as soon as Kane returned with the warrant for Wilkerson they would start out for San Pedro and proceed to locate the sunken vessel and find if possible the chest and its precious contents.

"With Wilkerson safely in the sheriff's hands and Kane on the job here all will be safe," John said finally.

But Wilkerson, with the torn scrap of paper in his hand, was planning swiftly and certainly. With Vigas he laid a scheme for that night. When the details were settled the bandit smiled crookedly. "I'll get the key myself," he remarked. "It will be a pleasure."

"No roughness," warned Wilkerson. "With a lady?" demanded Vigas silkily. "Never!"

"All right," was the response. "But remember these troopers aren't overly fond of you."

The Mexican made his preparations to get the key that held the secret of the treasure with peculiar care. One would have thought he was going to a ball, so fanciful his dress, so careful his whole get-up. When he had completed his arrangements he presented a striking and gaudy figure, with silver banded sombrero, heavy studded belt, embroidered shirt and flowing scarf.

Wilkerson contemplated him moodily. "You'd better wear a jumper and overalls," he snarled. "Any one can spot you a mile in that dandified dress."

Vigas kissed a dirty hand to the stars. "In honor of the lady," he said, with bravado. "Never shall it be said that Jose Vigas was ignorant of the niceties of demeanor, senor."

Finding his protests useless, Wilkerson subsided. Vigas departed, apparently for a stroll through the silent camp. He even stopped for a chat with a watchful trooper, who readily believed his casual statement that he was going on a lover's expedition.

It was just midnight when Vigas stood over the bed on which Ruth lay asleep. For a long moment he stood there in his gaudy finery watching her. He seemed almost on the point of waking her in order to satisfy his overweening vanity. But the clank of a bridle chain outside warned him that he stood in great peril. With swift fingers he touched the ribbon, bent over and gently drew out the key. He cut the ribbon with one slip of his knife and looked at his booty. But the girl's immovable and lovely face drew his eyes again to her. With a sweep of his arm he lifted his heavy hat to her and passed out, silent as a cat of his native mountains.

With the key in his possession Wilkerson became suddenly his own nervous self. He must get away instantly, he knew. Kane would be back in the morning with a warrant. Already he was being watched by the suspicious troopers. He must escape this very night.

After a short conversation with Vigas and the appointment of a future rendezvous, Harry Wilkerson armed himself and started lazily down into the camp to see what was moving. Nothing stirred. He returned to the hill camp and thence swiftly and quietly made his way upward, taking advantage of every bush and rock that might afford him screen.

He was almost to the top when a

sentry challenged him and stepped forward.

"I'm merely going out a little ways for a walk," Wilkerson explained.

"Not allowed after nightfall," was the response.

Without further parley, Wilkerson leaped forward, grasped the man's rifle and tripped him. A moment later he was footing it up to the crest at top speed, with the sentry's cries for help urging him on.

Before he could reach the divide a bullet whizzed by his head, then another. He turned nimbly and fired rapidly down into the shadows at his pursuers. He cursed himself for his folly when a second sentry appeared above him, drawn by the flash of his shots to his hiding place. There was but one refuge, the mine shaft. He plunged obliquely downward for it.

Naturally enough, the troopers thought their quarry was cornered, but Wilkerson drove straight on downward to an old working, mounted again, crossed by a disused gallery and finally emerged far up the cliff. On his way he had picked up a coil of rope, and when he found himself on the edge of the precipice and his pursuers gaining on him he made one end of the rope fast and speedily started to descend. But the distance was too great. Before he was halfway to the bottom he had been discovered, and he felt the rope being hauled up. In despair, with a madman's strength, he swung far out and then in, dropping on a little ledge concealed by the overhang of the cliff.

As the rope came free in their hands the pursuers realized that their prey had escaped them. They peered over. Surely he had fooled the law only to meet death on the rocks far below.

On his giddy perch Wilkerson heard their awed speculations and laughed silently. Then he crawled away. In the distance he heard the screech of a locomotive whistle, marking the passage of an express. The freight would be due in two hours. He must make it.

Tom Kane arrived early in the morning to find the camp in an uproar. The Mexicans had quietly vanished. Ruth was mourning the loss of the master key, and the sheriff, staring at the now useless warrant, was beyond words to express his chagrin.

John Dorr alone was serene, though he realized that Wilkerson had again outwitted him. But the immediate need of the hour was haste. He instructed Kane to take charge of the mine and directed Ruth to prepare for a trip to the coast that afternoon.

"Luckily I copied those figures," he said grimly.

Two days later John Dorr and Ruth were steaming up the channel from San Pedro in a launch fitted with diving outfit. The skipper of the launch remembered perfectly the burning of the steamer and, now that he knew the position where it sank, gave out great hopes of finding the hull.

"The sea is shallow there, and the tides aren't strong enough to move her," he stated. "The only thing is, somebody may have been ahead of us."

"Wilkerson couldn't be ahead of us," John assured Ruth. "I inquired carefully at San Pedro."

Yet at noon his unspoken fears were realized. There was another powerful launch ahead of them which their captain identified as a diving and salvage boat from San Diego.

"Then they'll get ahead of us," Ruth mourned. "After all our trouble!"

The launch captain and the diver both comforted her by stating that the given position was not far away, that it was sometimes a matter of days to find a wreck even if the approximate location was known and that at any rate they would soon be near enough to see whether the other craft was successful.

Two hours later Wilkerson's launch was swinging easily over the low

The captain and the diver glanced at each other doubtfully; then the former shook his head.

"No," he said gruffly. "They found it, and it's theirs by sea law. Anyway I ain't going to send my man down when there's danger, as there always is with two men working under water at cross purposes."

"But they'll get the chest!" cried Ruth.

"Wait and see," said the imperturbable diver.

Half an hour later John turned to Ruth and said miserably: "Well, they have got it. That ends this excursion."

"Is that your chest, missy?" demanded the captain.

"Yes, yes; my father's!"

"Well," he said slowly, "there's nothing to hinder us going over and seeing what it looks like, is there?" He signaled his engineer and put his helm over.

As they ranged alongside the other launch Wilkerson raised his face to Dorr's wrathful gaze and smiled. Instinctively John put his hand on his gun. A rough touch on his shoulder recalled him.

"This ain't any piratical cruise," the skipper remarked meaningly. "That minn was hired the same as me, and we ain't got no fight with each other."

"Of course," Dorr agreed willingly. Then he made a leap for the deck of the other boat, intent on regaining the chest single handed.

For the moment Wilkerson was paralyzed by the boldness of this move, but a moment later strong hands had swung John back on his own deck, and his skipper, thinking that matters had gone far enough, soon put a safe distance between the two craft.

A little later Wilkerson's launch started off down the channel.

"Now or never," said Dorr to the captain of his own boat. "Don't lose sight of them. I must know where they land and what they do with the chest."

"They're hurrying some," was the response, "but I guess we can keep 'em in view, at least till night comes on."

While the moon was lighting up the smooth waters of the channel that night Ruth tried to comfort John Dorr. And as he listened to her gentle words and watched the loveliness of her face under the silver beams he forgot the bitterness in his heart and knew something of a happiness that Wilkerson, pawing over water soaked rags in raging despair, was never to know.

The Farce.

Farce is a modern term founded on the Latin verb *facere*, to stuff. This was originally an allusion to the practice of the ancient buffoons padding out their stage dress to abnormal dimensions. Later the padding was dispensed with, but the wide garments were retained.

Germany on North Sea.

The border of Germany on the North sea, from the easternmost corner of Oldenburg to the northernmost point in Schleswig, measures some 200 miles. The Kaiser Wilhelm (Kiel) canal is sixty-one miles long and cost \$40,000,000.



The Cook Shot From the Hip.

ing so bold a game that it would take every resource at his disposal to meet him successfully. Ruth must be protected in her rights. The "Master Key" mine must remain in her possession undisturbed. That would be impossible until Wilkerson was eliminated. And that man was after great stakes; otherwise he would never have ventured so far.

As he debated this inwardly John went over in memory all the events of the brief period since old Thomas Gallon had died, leaving his daughter in his charge. Before his mind's eye ran the pictures of the last scenes and then—

Like a flash it came to him! What was in that letter the old man had so carefully cherished and handed him at the last? Had Gallon foreseen something like this and prepared for it? In his last days had his failing powers concentrated on his single aim and evolved a final safeguard for the "Master Key"?

With the sealed letter in his hand John Dorr stared at the superscription: Not to be opened until my daughter's eighteenth birthday or before then if her welfare is threatened.

Quickly he tore the envelope open. The inclosure fell out in two portions. He put them together, with a muttered ejaculation at his own carelessness and read the crabbéd script:

Silent Valley, Cal., June 20. Little Girl—Read carefully what I write. On this depends your future welfare. The "Master Key" mine discovered by me five years ago contained a mother



Her Eyes Filled With a Mingling of Triumph and Hatred.

swells not a mile from the bluff shore, and they could see his diver preparing to go down.

"I hope he doesn't find it!" breathed Dorr as he urged his own men to greater speed.

"They've struck the spot if those figures of yours are correct," was the reply. "But time will tell."

When the two boats were close together John saw that Mrs. Darvell was with Wilkerson. He could see the bronze glint of her eyes, her eyes filled with a mingling of triumph and hatred. And that look grew brighter and more malicious when the diver, coming up from his first descent, showed a large bit of wood, evidently from a wreck. Though they could not hear the words, those on Dorr's boat could understand the directions that were being given.

"Get over and send your man down, quick!" commanded Dorr.

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