

At the Star Theatre every Thursday CHAPTER VII.

Wilkerson the Fletcher. WILKERSON had thoroughly learned his lesson in Wilkerson's cool eye, in spite of the fact he had received from Jean Darnell in New York, telling him of her willingness to finance her scheme, determined he must be friends with John Dorr, at least outwardly. So he smoothed out the visible wrinkles in his face, trying to veil the malicious gleam in his eyes, and spent two days quietly trying to show his amiability, not only to the miners, but to Dorr himself.



"Look here, Wilkerson, maybe both of us have made a mistake."

Wilkerson was absolutely certain that his old partner, Thomas Gallon, had really made a rich find and that he had lost the location and accepted "The Master Key" as a substitute in the hope that by working it thoroughly he might find the mother lode. In other words, careful manipulation of the truth, even lessening the immediateness of the catastrophe, but her distaste of the man was too great to allow her to discuss the matter with him in the intimate way which she felt was necessary. She must see John Dorr.

She quickly dismissed Wilkerson and then went to Dorr's office, meeting him at the door. She bore as a gift a small basket of fruit. Without preliminaries she said, "John, are we broke?" He laughed; then his face grew grave. "The mine is not paying," he said briefly. "But can't we make it pay? What is the matter?" "Money," said John. "But why money?" "It will cost \$10,000 to drive that new tunnel," John added as they entered the office. "But Mr. Wilkerson just said he was going to pay over \$30,000 to the men," Ruth said soberly. "If we have that much money, why can't we?"

Wilkerson flushed. "Miss Gallon, I hope that you don't think that I'm not doing my best. I am, John Dorr and I have gone over this matter together. He agrees with me that we have absolutely lost the vein and that 'The Master Key' is to pay anything more we must find it again."

Ruth's expression softened at the mention of John Dorr's name. "What does she think?" she demanded. "What is the chance of finding it again?" "If we run west, Dorr thinks," said Wilkerson slowly, "we'll recover the vein, but that will cost money, which we haven't got. Do you realize, Miss Gallon, that the pay roll here is over \$1,000 a day? Within a week I have to pay out over \$30,000 for the month, and I tell you frankly that when I have paid that there will be no more money to the account of 'The Master Key' in the bank in Silent Valley."

Ruth realized that he was speaking the truth, even lessening the immediateness of the catastrophe, but her distaste of the man was too great to allow her to discuss the matter with him in the intimate way which she felt was necessary. She must see John Dorr. She quickly dismissed Wilkerson and then went to Dorr's office, meeting him at the door. She bore as a gift a small basket of fruit. Without preliminaries she said, "John, are we broke?"



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Wilkerson nodded and said: "I'll put the men to work tomorrow, Dorr. Better have your plans ready?" He stamped out. "You had better go this afternoon," John told Ruth. "There is no time to lose."

to be filled with sunshine and a familiar zest of sucking over dry California on half broken horsehoes. "All right, we'll ride," he said. "While you are getting ready I'll write a letter to George Everett."

Ruth watched her trip down the hill toward her own little bungalow, and it seemed to him as if he held one end of a golden thread that she was spinning through sunshine. It was anchored in his heart. That thread would be 3,000 miles long before she saw good old Everett. He picked up his pen and wrote rapidly: "Master Key" Mine, June - George Everett, 111 Broadway, New York City.

Dear George—When a young, slender, brown eyed, golden haired girl walks into your office and says, "I'm Ruth Gallon," and hands you the papers that she will have in her little hand bag, please see that she gets \$10,000. Ever yours, JOHN DORR. He would have added more. His finer instinct told him that Ruth should be the first to put the whole scheme before the cool headed, rather cold hearted George Everett. He addressed the envelope and sealed it. Then he went to the telephone and called up the station at Silent Valley.

Bill, he said quietly after listening a moment to see if any one was on the line. "I want to send a telegram. Take it over the wire, please. I'll be down in a little while and pay you." "Sure," booted back a cheerful voice. "I wish my credit was as good as yours, ten miles away, but it seems as if I have to be always present when I ask for it. Go ahead, John!" "This is it, Bill," said John; George Everett, 111 Broadway, New York City.

CHAPTER VIII. Jean Darnell's Rise. THIS must be Miss Gallon," said a pleasant voice. Ruth looked up to see a woman of blond beauty and dressed in somewhat extravagant style looking down at her out of great, tawny, velvet eyes. Western bred, Ruth responded amiably to this salutation, though she had not the faintest idea who the woman was.

"Yes, I am Miss Gallon," said the woman. "I am Mrs. Darnell," said the woman. "May I sit down? I am an old friend of your friend, John Dorr's. He wired me that I would find you on this train." The lie was so plausible that Ruth merely blushed, thinking that it was one more token of John Dorr's carefulness of her comfort and safety. To her inexperienced eyes this woman represented the tremendous city to which she was going. Her dress, her manner, her jewels, the evasive perfume that she affected were all strange and impressive to her. She moved over a little to allow Mrs. Darnell to sit down.

"John never spoke of you," said Ruth simply. "I did not have the faintest notion that I was to meet any of his friends. Do you live in New York?" "Yes, I live in New York. I happened to be in Chicago, and through Mr. Everett I heard from John." "Oh, you know Mr. Everett?" cried Ruth. "He is the man I am going to see in New York," and she went on to tell, as best she could, the gist of her mission.

It was typical of the woman to whom she was talking that she did not interrupt this naive narrative. She sat in silken silence, occasionally allowing her great eyes to rest on Ruth's fair face with an assumption of affection. As a matter of fact, she was profoundly interested. Life had taught Jean Darnell a great many things, and among them had been the great lesson of self preservation—the saving for herself of money, her health and good looks. Now it was a question of money, prime among them all, and her rather keen wits saw precisely the chances which Wilkerson was making. She recalled his oft repeated statements that there was money in "The Master Key" and his latest letters imploring her to help him get control of the stock.

lusty broker and, being thoroughly and temperamentally an actor, felt the chill of this lack of interest and would certainly have fallen down on his part had he not been prompted by Mrs. Darnell. He was glad to hasten away to find the elusive taxi.

The real George Everett got out of his limousine on the corner of Vanderbilt avenue and hurried through the revolving doors; brisk, debonaire, alert, decided; with that happy style which denies foppery and avoids surveillance. It seemed strange that he should have a photograph in his hand at which he looked intently until he got in the course. There he stopped and, with the picture still in his hand, commenced watching the faces of the people thronging through the gates under the vast dome. As he waited he frowned slightly. "Why had John Dorr sent him during business hours on a wild goose chase?" He thought of this articulately and then smiled to himself. "A wild goose?" he muttered. It brought up darkling sunset vistas, lakes smooth as quicksilver under the evening sky, and slim, gray, beautiful birds homing downward. The frown left his forehead.

"After all it will be good to see somebody from out of doors," he said to himself. Half an hour later he discovered that he had irretrievably missed the arrival of the Chicago express and with it Ruth Gallon. He went back into his car and drove to his office. Once there he called his head clerk, an ancient and fragile man, as crisp and bloodless as the money that passes on Wall street, and told him to see at what hotel Miss Ruth Gallon was stopping. Then he wired John Dorr: 111 Broadway, New York. John Dorr, "Master Key" Mine, Silent Valley, Cal.

Could not find Miss Gallon at train. Am seeking for her as it is important that the business be settled immediately. Wire any possible address. GEORGE EVERETT. Far out on Broadway, above the eighties, an operator was ticking off the numbers as they passed. He was addressed to Harry Wilkerson, 111 Broadway, New York. Harry Wilkerson, "Master Key" Mine, via Valle Vista, Cal.

Darnell flung herself into her evil passion with all the abandon of the tragedienne, only her voice was almost inaudible: "Tom Gallon, Tom Gallon, dead though you are, I'll have revenge!" When her fury had spent itself—and, like all physically indolent women, she could not yield long to emotion—she prepared her campaign.

First she called up George Drake and made certain that he would be at her home for dinner that evening. Then she called up two old acquaintances who were always glad to fill empty chairs at her well set table. This settled, she again sought Ruth and persuaded her from going down immediately to Everett's office. "You must be very tired, my dear," Mrs. Darnell purred. "And, anyway, you know, in New York young ladies do not go about unescorted to men's business offices, and I cannot go with you until tomorrow or next day."



"What was John Dorr doing?"

When her hostess was gone she stood by the window trying to think more calmly of all that had happened since she had left "The Master Key" mine, but one thought was prominent: "What was John Dorr doing?" She recalled that there was three hours' difference in time. It was now 2 o'clock in New York, and it was only 11 in Silent Valley. Tom Kane would be just making his final preparations for dinner, and she could almost smell the odor of his coffee. These homely details occupied her mind tenderly for an hour; then she caught up and dressed herself for the street again. She had barely finished when the maid came in with tea, followed by Mrs. Darnell. "My child, what in the world are you doing to do?" asked Jean. "Look, we'll have tea together."