At the Star Theatre every Thursday CHAPTER VII.

Wilkerson the Plotter. LEN he hald thoroughly learned his less it Wilacts in cool ly, in spite of the bater he

had received from Jean Daynell in New York, teiling thin of her willingness to finance her scheme, determined be must be friends with Joses Dorr, at least outwardly. So he smoothed out the Visible Wrinkles in his face, mying to vell the malicious gleam in his eyes, and shout two days quietly trying to show his amiability. not only to the miners, but to Dorr

himself. Wilkerson was absolutely certain that his old partner, Thomas Gallon. "The Master Key" as a substitute in the hope that by working it thoroughly he might find the mother tode. In



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

the present mine, painstaking toil in figuring out the trend of the various veins would lead to that particular pot of gold which had been at the end of Gallon's youthful rainbow of hones Wilkerson was determined to be masengineering knowledge.

John Dorr knew that there was a tremendous secret in Gallon's life represented by the golden key which he had torn from his neck and handed to Ruth when he was dying. That key had figures on it. He understood that represented something tremendously important, and that the old man had committed Ruth to his charge and had don't like Mr. Wilkerson, do you?" spoken of Wilkerson as his former partner and said, "Wilkerson knows."

What was it that Wilkerson knew! It was better, thought John, to accept his amiable advances and thereby possibly gain his confidence and find out for Ruth's sake that secret which Thomas Gallon had taken to his grave.

So on the second day after the restoration of the old scale of wages and his own reappointment as engineer in charge John went down to the office and said bluntly: "Look here, Wilker- \$10,000." son, maybe both of us have made a mistake. I'm sure my only aim is to help out in the promotion of 'The Master Key."

Wilkerson received him amiably. "I'm sure my only interest in this business is to fetch into good ore. All that we are digging out now is dirt without any pay in it.

"I think I know where we can strike first class stuff," Dorr returned. "There is sure pay rock if we travel south from that main tunnel. We may have to go a couple of hundred feet.

Wilkerson looked at him shrewdly. "That will cost money," he remarked "But I'll take this up with Ruth."

John looked at him with a faint trace of the old enmity in his eyes. He did not like to hear the first name of the mistress of "The Master Key" on those

"If the mine is not paying it's up to us to make it pay," he remarked.

When Wilkerson entered the bungalow Ruth perceived a great change in his attitude. He was no longer sullen. and he was evidently worried. It was a clean worry, and she smiled at him. Had not her father come in with that expression on his face many times? She put her chin in the cup of her hands and asked cheerfully, "What is it, Mr. Wilkerson?"

"May I sit down?" he said awkwardly.

She motioned to a chair, and he pulled out of his pocket a paper covered with figures.

"I think you ought to know how things are going along. Miss Gallon," he said, with unusual formality John told Ruth. "There is no time to "When your father made me superin- lose. tendent of this mine I did not realize that the responsibility was so heavy as in an hour." it is. We are not making any money. We are losing money. You can see by the reports which I have here that our cleanup lately has been far less than our expenses, and our last one showed vein again. To do so we must have money. There is no money in 'The

Master Key mine." "That's what father used to say sometimes," said Ruth quietly. "Lut he always got it."

hope that you don't think that I'm not doing my best. I am. John Dorr and I have gone over this matter in lether. He agrees with me that we have absointely lost the vein and that it 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 he 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. had really made a rich find and that and I tell you frankly that when I he had lost the location and accepted 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 other words, careful manipulation of the truth, even lessening the immediateness of the catastrophe, but her allow her to discuss the matter with that she gets \$10,000. Ever yours, him in the intimate way which she felt was necessary. She must see John

> She quickly dismissed Wilkerson and then went to Dorr's office herself, meet before the cool headed, rather cold ing him at the door. She bore as a hearted George Everett. He addressed gift a small basket of fruit. Without the envelope and sealed it. Then he preliminaries she said, "John, are we went to the telephone and called up

He laughed; then his face grew grave. "The mine is not paying," he said brieffy.

"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 en-

tered 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"-

comprehensed her her series and her her stood why old Thomas Gallon had been so insistent that he, John Dorr, should look after her. She was a mere child He tried to explain the exact situation. with the result that Ruth finally push ed him off his high stool, got up on it herself and wrote in a large, childish hand right across the face of one of his new drawings, "I must raise \$10,

She swung around to John and asked, "How can I get \$10,000?"

Dorr hesitated. His plan was risky in view of Wilkerson's attitude, but. after all, the money must be raised He said quietly: "Pledge the stock you own in 'The Master Key,' 1 know a man in New York who will loan you \$10,000 on it." He bent over her earnestly, "But listen, Ruth, If we spend ter of "The Master Key." He needed | the \$10,000 and we don't find the moththe skilled aid of John Dorr with his er lode, you lose the mine. It's just like a mortgage on a farm."

"But you wouldn't suggest this if it weren't the only way out," she said briefly. "Now, how am I to do this?"

"You must go to New York and see George Everett. I will give you a let ter to him, and he will see to it that those scratches on that golden surface | you get the extra money we need Meanwhile I'll keep the mine going." Ruth gave him her full eyes, "You

> "I don't trust hon," he renlied. At this moment the superintendent entered the office and, seeing their two heads close together over the desk, he

scowled. "I came to see what we are going to do about that new funnel." he said roughly. "I don't like to start in anything I can't finish."

Ruth swung around to say quietly: "I am going to New York city to see Mr. George Everett, a friend of Mr Dorr's, and I will come back with the

"Everett, Everett"-repeated Wilker son, "who is George Everett?"

Despite John's frowns, Ruth volubly explained. When she had finished



"John, are we broke?"

Wilkerson nodded and said: "I'll put the men to work tomorrow. Dorr. Better have your plans ready!" He stamp-

"You had better go this afternoon."

"All right." she said, "I'll be ready John smiled. "All right; I'll take you over in the motor truck or shall

we ride to Silent Valley?" "I've never been to New York." she said timidly, and with that inconsepractically nothing. We must find the guential logic which maidens have, she added. "Let's ride. I'll take Patsy and you can ride Black Joe."

Dorr did not understand at all that in leaving her home for the great strange city she wished her last hours

Wilkerson flushed. "Miss Gallen, I to be filled with sunshine and a familfar zest of sourrying over dry California on haif broken horseflesh.

"All right, we'll ride," he said While you are getting ready I'll write a letter to George Everett'

Buth laid one sleader hand on John's shoulder. You're always doing things for me.

John," slav said simply. "Some day I'll do something for you." She slipped tway without a backward glance. Dorr 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 oid Everett. He picked up his pen and wrote rapidly:

"Master Key" Mine, June George Everett, III Broadway, New York

Dear George-When a young, slender, brown eyed, golden hatred girl walks into your office and says. "I'm Ruth Gallon, distaste of the man was too great to have in her little hand bag, please see JOHN DORR

> He would have added more. His finer lastinct told him that Ruth should be the first to put the whole scheme 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," floated 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, III Brondway, New York Miss Ruth Gallon leaves tonight to see you about "Master Key" stock. Meet her

and wire me on her arrival. Take good

JOHN DORR The operator repeated the message and involuntarily adopted a little of John's savage intonation on the last four words. It woke him up to the fact that he was allowing his feelings to become public. He begun to see why it was that men looked at him strangely at times, when it was a question of Ruth's interests. He must restrain himself.

The operator did not bang up imme diately, but said hesitatingly: "Say, John, there's a wire here; just came in from 'The Master Key' mine. It does not seem to jibe with yours. Wilkerson sent it."

"I'll play fair," said John to himself. and he called back over the wire, "Billy, that's yours and Wilkerson's business, not mine." If he had listened to have learned what Wilkerson was plotting.

For years Wilkerson had built up for himself a golden image in Jean Darnell. No one realized better than himself that she was a creature of appetite, a lover of silk and velvet. A woman whose eyes widened at sight of a Persian cat. Feminine in every degree, womanly in none. But he himself, dominated absolutely, utterly and completely by his desires, had fallen under her spell, and he was going to win her, no matter how. It is a era must be like church-one wants to strange thing that when a dishonest; go all by oneself." man finally yields to an honest passion nothing will satisfy him but the ut for the first time in many years revealmost observance of the ritual of society. Harry Wilkerson's vision was of my only pleasant memories, my dear, walking up the aisle of a great church to meet his bride at the altar.

Yet he had always thought of her in terms of gold; that was a contrastthe pallid, sating, blue eyed woman. voluptuous, soft-and his image of her built of yellow gold, dragged out of the bowels of "The Master Key" mine

This image was now before his eyes: Instead of the warm, sun blessed California hills, with their faint scent of sage and cactus, he saw a richly furattar of roses. Let us not follow him in his dreams. But looking over his shoulder an hour later we read;

"Master Key" Mine, June -Jean Darnell, Astor House, New York

Find George Everett at III Broadway and meet Ruth Gallon in Chicago on Sante Fe express leaving here this evening. Introduce Drake as Everett after you have seen Everett and keep the girl to yourself until I can arrange matters. HARRY.

near here," he thought, "so I guess I'll ride down to Valle Vista and hand it to the conductor. He can send it from play his hand for him?" Los Angeles."

er met her ears before-the sounds of I told you." the world's business which, oddly enough, seemed to be mostly hauled the door of his cook shanty, of the more than the fool I take you for." great ore bucket swinging across the

Master Key." It had been so impressed upon her emotions flowed into the same channel bosom, out of its hiding place and looked at it.

CHAPTER VIII.

Jean Darnell's Ruse. IIIS must be Miss Gallon." said a pleasant voice. Ruth looked up to see

dressed in somewhat extravagant style to find the clusive taxi. looking down at her out of great, tawny, veivet eyes. Western bred, Ruth responded anniably to this salutation, though she had not the faintest idea who the woman was,

"Yes, I am Miss Gallon."

"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 perand hands you the papers that she will fume that she affected were all strange and impressive to her. She moved over a little to allow Mrs. Darnell to evening sky, and slim, gray, beautiful

"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 fuir face with an assumption of affection. As a matter of fact, she was profoundly interested. Life had taught Jean Dar- any possible address nell a great many things, and among them had been the great lesson of self preservation-the saving for herself of money, or health and fearth 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 atting-She recalled his off repeated statements Key" and his latest letters implement her to help him get control of the stock

When Ruth ended up with a gen. which she dully pondered at night.

train." sife said briefly, "and then you oak pertals within which she lived. To can tell him all this. Meanwhile, sup Ruth Gallen, of course, the house

said Ruth. "Oh, you will," said Mrs. Darnell. "You can combine the pleasure of see, within herself and had nothing to say ing New York with your little busi- until she had been conducted to her ness. Mr. Everett will quickly settle lowa room on the third floor and a disthat part of it, and I shall take great creet maid was basy unpacking her pleasure in showing you about Manhat- things. Buth felt that society had aitan. I presume you are fond of op-

"I have never been to the opera." Ruth responded. "I should love to go, but when I do go I must go all alone." she went on impulsively. "I think op-

Mrs. Darnell turned very slowly and ed a secret thought: "Do you know that are of myself?"

The bitterness of that confession. with all its implication, wholly escaped Ruth's sensitive but inexperienced mind. Yet there was something in the tone that warmed her heart to this effulgent creature. At least, she was not going into the great city all alone. nor confront Mr. Everett by herself. Mrs. Darnell made her feel that she

was competently protected. When they arrived the next morning nished room and breathed the odor of at the Grand Central station in New York city Mrs. Darnell quietly introduced her to a slim, rather handsome young man, who seemed ill at ease until he had drawn Ruth's companion changed her street gown for a negligee. tages or the society of trained, alert. aside for a moment for a chat while

the porter collected their luggage. "I don't just like this game," he said "In the first place, Everett is a big man in the city, and this Miss Gallon doesn't look to me like a girl you could fool long. Anyway, I can't under-"I can't send this through any office stand what you are trying to do, Jean. dear." She threw out her jeweled You must know what sort of a fellow hands with a sparkling gesture of half Harry Wilkerson is by this time. Why comic resignation. Ruth laughed.

"I don't notice you holding any Three days later Ruth Gallon settled 'trumps in your hand," she returned herself in the seat of a Pullman that gently, but with a faint gleam in her was soon to leave Chicago for New eyes which made him draw back. York. She was excited. In crossing "This is my game, and I expect you to town from one depot to another play your part. You come on now and through the streets roaring with traf- be George Everett. The girl is as igfic she had heard sounds that had nev- norant as a pigeon. Remember what

"About that stock?" he said sullenly. "Yes, the stock. You understand over cobblestones. The faint echo of that she came to New York simply to of course, I mean-tonight, and you that noise still rong in her ears. It appraise money for this mine. You are palled her to think that she must dwell supposed to handle the business for phere; also she felt very lonely. She be learned about 'The Master Key' thought of the mine, of Tom Kane in mine in the next two days you are

She drew him back to where Ruth guich toward the mill, of John, bend- stood amid the suit cases and hand ing over his blue prints and papers; of bags and said, "Miss Gallon, Mr. Evthe grave on the hill where her father erett has been telling me that he, too. iy. "It's my mine. My father left it lay, still within the precincts of "The has heard from John Dorr about your

coming." Ruth scanned him politely. But the that her mission was of vital impor- interest died in her eyes when she tance to the mine, that these tender saw what sort of a man he was. He might be a friend of John's; he might with her really keen business instinct be the man to rescue "The Master She pulled the key, warm from her Key" from bankruptcy, but he did not

interest her. Drake, trying to play the part of the

lusy broker and, being thoroughly and temperamentally an actor, felt the chill of this lack of interest and would cetthinly have fallen down on his part

had be not been prompted by Mrs. woman of florid beauty and Darnell. He was glad to hasten away

The real George Everett got out of his limousine on the corner of Vander- prepared her campaign. bilt avenue and hurried through the revolving doors; brisk, debonair, 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 concourse. There he stopped and with the picture still in his hand, commenced watching the faces of the people 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 erticulately and then smiled to himself. "A wild goose!" he muttered.

brought up darkling sunset vistas. takes smooth as quicksilver under the birds boming downward. The frown left his forehead

"After all it will be good to see somebody from out of doors," he said to Ruth

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 an cient 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:

III 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

GEORGE EVERETT. Far out on Broadway, above the eighties, an operator was ticking off Wilkerson. It read: 25 A West Eighty-fourth St., New York

Harry Wilkerson, "Master Key" Mine, via Valle Vista, Cal.: Everything all right. George met Reth She is now with me and waiting further that there was money in "The Master particulars. Have seen Everett under guise of prospective purchaser of stock The girl is charming JEAN DARNELL

Some houses, like some people, should "And so I told John Td come and see never be illumined with sunshine, and what I could do," the elder woman Mrs Darnell's residence, overlooking smiled gently. Times were not so good the Hudson, was of this type. Its dull, with her as they had been, and if Har- red stone front, marked by windows ry Wilkerson could put this deal that seemed blind to all that went by, through and make money for them all was not distinctive in that neighborit would simplify many a problem food. A thousand doors within a mile would have suggested to the passerby "Mr. Everett will meet us at the nothing more nor less than the great the tenor of the message directed to Jean Darnell, in New York, he would "But I can't think of anything else," seemed that calculate formal and state. so also und, strange and alten to all she had ever known that she should

ready laid its restrictions on her. She recognized the maid as the "gown and hat" policeman.

This silent, but exceedingly obsrusive personage having retired at last, Ruth studied her surroundings. When she had comple ed her survey she thought to hers if that there were two things wanting. One was a sift baired Persian cut and the other a thining colored searf across the bed that completed the altogether of an apartment severely luxurious. Then she tried to analyze the odor, delicate yet insistent. which she was ever afterward to associate with Jean Darnell and her expe-

rience in New York. flowers in the great green and dark red that made Ruth flush. It seemed to vase, whose unwholesome beauty was convict her of discourtesy to her hosthat of plants whose roots have never tess. "You had best have tea!" and been in good, sound soil. They looked the girl obediently removed her hat to her much like lilles, whose pads had and jacket and sat down. floated on some dark and opalescent

ly. Jean Darnell turned her tawny succeeded. eyes on her and smiled faintly.

"I am not usually up until noon," she responded, "and-I am getting old, my flushed darkly and turned to the girl

"John Dorr says everybody gets old in New York. Don't you like him?"

Mrs. Darnell looked into the clear eyes of the girl and almost failed to you, even if it is funny that I didn't follow her baser instinct. But at that loose throat she saw the heavy gold of "The Master Key." As if it had supernatural powers, the sight of that key locked the door of her heart. "Of course I like John," she said easily. "We must get everything fixed up now. George will be here-George Everett. and he can talk the business over."

"You know, we simply must have with men who lived in such an atmos- her. If you don't learn all that is to the money." Ruth returned earnestly. "The mine isn't paying now, but John knows where we can find the mother lode again; then we'll all be rich."

> selling stock. I presume?" "I own it all," Ruth returned proud-

to me when he died." She did not see the sullen hatred that slowly flamed until Jean Darnell's eyes fairly blazed. | sides, I've promised Miss Gallon to go breathless. Then she tore off her fleecy grams." He turned to Ruth, and she negligee in an intensity of silent rage

eyes of the god whom she had defied. It is wickedness, not virtue, which is theatrical, and at this moment Jean

and despair, seen only by the unexcited

Darnell flung herself into her evil pass sion with all the abandon of the tragedian, only her voice was almost inaudilde; "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

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."

"That will be too late." cried Ruth. Mrs. Darnell opened her eyes wide. as if in surprise. "Mr. Everett is coming to dinner tonight," she said soothingly. "You can talk business to your heart's content right bere."

"That will be much better," said

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 tinished when the maid came in with tea, followed by Mrs. Darnell.

"My child, what in the world are you tree and the ?" asked dean, Thore .. Il have ten fogether. "I was going out for a walk," Ruth

responded. "You know I have never



"What was John Dorr doing?"

been in New York, and it seems a shame to waste this line afternoon. Anyway, I want some fresh air.

Mrs. Darnell looked at her thought-At last she traced it to some pallid fully and smiled presently in a way

It seemed to her that the rest of the pool, viscid with odors of the night. afternoon passed in flashes of such en-She was still staring at these and tertainment as she had never known. sniffing their scent through widened. It must be remembered that Ruth, livnostrils when Mrs. Darnell knocked on ing in the mine nearly all her life since the door and entered slowly. She had leaving school, had not had the advanwhich instantly caught the girl's ap- smart, clever women. Mrs. Darnell was very clever and she used her ev-"You look beautiful," she said quick- ery art to keep Ruth's attention. She

That night at dinner George Drake. posing as George Everett, suddenly at his left. "Miss Gallon." he said in a whisper, flashing his dark eyes toward his hostess to see if she were watching, "I really hope that the trust you put in me you won't find misplaced. I'll do everything I can to help know that John Dorr has red hair."

Ruth looked at him very soberly. "I don't just understand a great many things," she said. "It all seems so strange, Mr. Everett, and, you know. I am worried. I ought to go to the Ritz Carlton and see if there are telegrams for me. for that's where John would wire me. I'm afraid Mrs. Darnell thinks I'm awfully impolite because I want to go and make sure for

myself that John has not wired." "I'll go myself," said the false Everett, looking at his plate. "I'll go to-"Ah!" said Jean Darnell. "You're night. In fact, I'll go right now." He caught Mrs. Darnell's eye and said apologetically: "I'm afraid, my dear hostess, I'll have to leave you. I have just remembered my solemn promisto be at the club at 9 o'clock, and, be-In her own room she stood a moment to the Ritz and get her mail and telenoticed a very grave look in his eyes. which she was to understand later. He bent gallantly over her hand and

lightly kissed her fingers. "You may trust me." he said. (TO BE CONTINUED.)