

MASTER KEY. (Continued from Yesterday.)

CHAPTER XVIII. The Battle in the Mine.

OR an hour or so Drake equipped and tried to postpone action. But it was made plain to him that he could not avoid action.

At last he saw that he must do something immediately. He called some of the leaders into the office and with apparent frankness told them he had known nothing of the situation and that he felt sure Wilkerson was unaware of it.

"What are you going to do?" came the demand. "This," replied Drake, writing rapidly. He showed them the message: Harry Wilkerson, Los Angeles, Cal.: Come to mine at once. Trouble is brewing. DRAKE.

"Will that bring him?" demanded one of them coldly. "It will. Now who will take it and send it?"

Two men volunteered to take old Tom Kane's burros and make the trip. "And while you're in Silver Valley," Drake said, yielding to a sudden inspiration, "take this \$20 and get some grub for the camp."

"There's still some locked up in the rook house," said another. "It's old Tom Kane's lookout, so we didn't exactly feel like taking it."

Drake turned to Tubbs quickly. "Distribute the food as far as it will go," he said. Tubbs looked suddenly serious. "I guess you better leave that to me," he said in a low voice. "I know where it will do the most good." He winked slyly.

Meanwhile John Dorr, Everett and Tom Kane were spending long hours in discussing what was to be done to save the "Master Key" to Ruth. Tom once more went over the exact situation at the mine and asserted that unless prompt measures were taken not only would there be actual distress, but likely rioting.

"You know some of the worst ones hang with Wilkerson," he said grimly. "And they might at any time take it into their heads to do a little dynamiting. Dynamiting is mighty dangerous stuff around several thousand dollars' worth of machinery, and if they blew up the workings there wouldn't be any mine left, you see."

"I see," said Everett at last. "Not having the papers, I can't put this deal through the way I want to eventually. But something must be done on the spot."

"In the way of money?" added Kane harshly. "Precisely," Everett assented with all cheerfulness. "Now I'm going to loan John Dorr here \$5,000 today for the 'Master Key' mine. Then—"

John shook his head. "That isn't business-like," he protested. Everett fixed his keen eyes on him. "Any reason why I shouldn't loan money to Miss Ruth Gallon's manager and guardian? Any reason why you, looking after her interests, should refuse help in fixing up her affairs?"

Dorr flushed. "I didn't mean it that way. It seems as if I kind of messed things up myself, and I thought I might get 'em set right by myself."

"You called on me, and I'm the doctor," said Everett authoritatively. He pulled out his wallet and commenced counting out bills. "I came prepared for this, for I thought there might be an emergency."

"But who will take charge of it? Who will go to the mine?" The broker laughed at him. "Not you. You'd be in a fight in three minutes, specially if Wilkerson turned up Tom Kane is our man." He turned on the old man abruptly. "Will you take this money and go?"

The old cook stared at the crisp bills and then at Dorr. "I ain't handled paper worth that much lately," he remarked. "But if you want me to go in there and feed them people and get 'em back to work and keep things going till John can fix things here I'll go."

On his way to the mine Harry Wilkerson's courage, newly fired by a last conversation with Jean Darnell, commenced to ebb.

Drake and Tubbs received him with unaffected relief. A few words sufficed to make the status of affairs plain. Tubbs looked at his superior with strained anxiety in his bleared eyes. Dull and sodden with liquor as he was, he understood perfectly that everything depended on the next few days. The engineer had lived in mining camps and on the desert all his life, and he knew the passions engendered by the arid mountains and the

remorseless desert. What would Wilkerson do? Was he strong enough to handle these men who were ready for anything, even to bloodshed if aroused? Wilkerson had lost his sense of fear oddly enough. As he had come into the camp a dozen miners had recognized him and scowled. He had felt their hatred, and it fed the man's sinister passion to do harm, to hurt, to destroy. Now he faced Drake and Tubbs arrogantly.

"It won't be long till these chips find out who's the boss," he said. With a significant look at Drake he pulled out the forged deeds and handed them to Tubbs.

"Those mean that I'm legally the owner of the 'Master Key' mine," he announced. The engineer peered at them dully. He haltingly mumbled over some of the legal phrases at the beginning, saw the names Thomas Gallon and Harry Wilkerson prominently displayed. He was impressed. He did not understand the purport of the papers. He did understand that Wilkerson was smailing with the insolence of triumph achieved. He grinned slowly and passed the papers back.

"I guess that'll fix 'em," he said huskily. "I guess it will," was the rejoinder. Tubbs seemed thoughtful, glancing out of the window now and again. Drake voiced his feeling.

"The sooner you let the miners know and get things settled the better."

Wilkerson licked his dry lips. The battle was on. He broke the silence by saying gruffly. "Call 'em up here, Bill!"

Nothing loath, Tubbs went out on the porch, and his hoarse tones resounded through the little valley. Instantly men appeared from doorways, came from a dozen places in response to that call. And women, clutching their children, peered out to see what was in the air.

When the men were gathered before him Wilkerson stepped forward and commenced to speak. He could not break their sullen silence, and, after a few words of generalities, he mustered his courage and shouted: "I am the owner of this mine! I have the deeds right here!"

The effect of this was far other than he had expected. Not a murmur came from the still, motionless throng. It was as if they had not heard him. In a lower tone he repeated it. "I am the owner of the 'Master Key' mine and all that goes with it!"

He held up the papers, and Bill Tubbs looked at them and gravely nodded his head, as much as to say that he had inspected them and could vouch for their authenticity. Still no sound from the miners.

There is a quality in the silence of the crowd of earnest men that is more questioning than any word could be. The men who had worked and toiled for old Tom Gallon, who had been deceived and baffled, who had had their loyalty tested to the utmost, now demanded through their imperious silence that Wilkerson open up his mind to them. If he was indeed the owner of the "Master Key," what did he intend to do?

"You'd better say some more quickly," warned Drake in a low tone. And Wilkerson, completely bewildered, set the match to the powder. He stepped forward with an ugly look as he could assume and cried, "Now tell me what you want?"

Instantly the air was filled with roars of rage and disappointment. Fifteen minutes later Harry Wilkerson was sweating within the cabin. With a shaking hand he poured himself out a tumbler of Tubbs' whisky. He had promised the miners' back pay, steady work, full wages and food. He must make good, and he did not know how.

"Tubbs," he said sharply, "you must find out what men we can trust. Say nothing, but get all the information you can. I'll make it worth the while of the men who'll stick by me."

Again the engineer chuckled fatuously. "They'll all stick by ye," he said sagely, "as long as ye pay 'em like you said ye would."

It was late in the afternoon when Tom Kane appeared on the mall wagon. The driver had already informed him of how affairs were going, and the cook wasted no time. He climbed down from the high seat, jerked his battered case out of the wagon and made straight for his shanty. Within five minutes he had divested himself of his black clothes and donned his official overalls and apron. Then he appeared on the porch as calm and unconcerned as though he had not been away.

In no time at all a couple of dozen miners had gathered to shake hands and swap news. Naturally their biggest item was Wilkerson's proclamation of ownership.

At this Tom Kane laughed scornfully. He derided the papers, ridiculed the miners for being fools easily taken in and stated in set terms that he, Tom Kane, actually held the place of authority.

This soon came to Wilkerson's ears, and he hurried down the hill to stop what he knew to be a dangerous accession. Instantly the old cook locked horns with him, pooh-poohed him to his face, called him names of peculiar virulence and offered to fight him on any terms.

(To be Continued Tomorrow.)

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Table with columns for Receipts and Disbursements for January 1st, 1914. Total receipts: \$187,428.03. Total disbursements: \$152,779.48.

Table with columns for Receipts and Disbursements for January 1st, 1915. Total receipts: \$70,979.88. Total disbursements: \$58,401.60.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT, January 1st, 1915.

Table with columns for Receipts and Disbursements for January 1st, 1915. Total receipts: \$75,628.48. Total disbursements: \$58,401.60.

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Table with columns for Assets and Liabilities. Total assets: \$818,898.91. Total liabilities: \$737,328.83.

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The receipts during 1914 were \$11,250.00 greater and the expenditures were \$15,500.00 less than estimated in the budget. The sinking fund investments were \$4,500.00 greater than the receipts.

The general fund paid off \$61,606.32 of 1912 warrants. The city has just paid for the auto fire truck, the upper story of the city building, equipment and furnishing for same, some of the paving around the city property, the Schilling tract on Second street and the fire alarm system.

The general fund warrants issued each year represent the general current expenses for that year. The taxes levied and paid and the general warrants issued in each year for the past seven years were as follows:

Table showing tax rates for years 1909-1915. Columns for year and amount. Total Warrants Issued: \$21,791.68.

The tax rate is 1.1 mills less than last year. However it includes 1.5 mills road tax that formerly was a county tax. So the real reduction in city taxes for this year is 2.6 mills. The reduction of outstanding warrants was approximately \$40,000.00.

C. M. HUMPHREYS, City Treasurer.

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