

"THE MASTER KEY"

By John Fleming Wilson

CHAPTER V. The Night Rider.

THE light in the bungalow on the hill across the valley winked as some one passed beneath it and the window.

"I can see clearly enough," said Wilkerson, "that there is a girl mixed up in this affair. Tom Gallon never walked like that."

He rode slowly down the steep hill till he reached the pumping engine. Bill Tubbs, the bulky, sodden faced engineer, came to the doorway.

"Is this 'The Master Key'?" demanded Wilkerson.

"Certainly is," was the response.

"And—old Tom Gallon runs it?"

Wilkerson pulled out a flask, divining Bill Tubbs' ruling vice, and the engineer, after a long drink, wiped his mouth with the back of his oily hands.

"So you are looking for Thomas Gallon, are you? Well, he owns this mine, but it's mostly run by a young girl there in that bungalow on the hill. You see, Tom ain't up to what he used to be. The ore is getting worse every day and the old man's sick up there in his house."

"I'm going up to see him now," said Wilkerson. He rode on a few yards and surveyed the snug houses, stamp mill and all the apparatus of the growing mine and snarled: "So this is what he wanted for himself."

The man he was seeking lay propped up in bed. To Ruth he gave everything—silk and down and all the soft things of this life. Himself he still slept on a hard cot with a straw pillow under his head—that is, he had slept. It seemed to him that sleep had forever fled, and he was now looking up into Ruth's face almost pleadingly, trying to keep his grim old lips from asking sympathy. There was reason in his mind that he should accept of tender ministrations from the lovely girl who stood beside him. His sacrifice must be complete; and when his daughter bent over him and asked him if he felt all right he mustered a smile.

"There's nothing the matter with me, Ruth," he was saying, and his glance sought that of John Dorr, who stood at the foot of the bed. The eyes of the two men met, and Dorr imperceptibly nodded his head in token that he would not tell. Not that he yet knew the secret of "The Master Key," but he recognized the fact that sooner or later he was to know.

Ruth stooped over and said:

"Papa, I don't believe you do feel well. I'm going to make you something hot to drink. I'll bring you a toddy." And she went into the kitchen and shut the door.

When she was gone John nodded a pleasant "Good night," and also left.

Then old Thomas Gallon rose and went to his worn desk and got his well thumbed diary.

"I am haunted," he wrote slowly, "always haunted. Am I to die without knowing whether Wilkerson is alive and that Ruth is safe?"

At that moment he glanced up and thought he saw the sinister face of his former partner at the window. By the strongest effort of will he managed to control himself and went on writing:

"Wilkerson still alive by night! When will he come out into the day? He shall never have the key that would unlock the secret to my little girl's happiness. I will trust John."

Fancy to yourself scenes that must have fled like swift films before the old man's eyes as he put the diary away. The desert and its mortal thirst; Wilkerson, ever drinking greedily of precious water; gold; murder; his escape with the plans, their loss in the chest when the vessel went down in a cauldron of flame; the image of his dying wife; the picture of the babe he had lifted from her chill breast—Ruth, for whom he had suffered. He bowed his head on his folded arms.

Such is the bitterness that the night brings upon those who are alone.

When Ruth came in with the steaming glass of toddy she quietly set the glass down and went out on the porch to look at the light across the gulch which marked John Dorr's window. Youth was calling to youth.

It was no apparition that Gallon had seen at the window this time. It was really Wilkerson, who, after one satisfied glance, rode swiftly away.

It was midnight when he rapped at the door of the Valle Vista railroad station and called the sleepy agent.

"I want to get a telegram through right away," he said brusquely. "There is an extra dollar in your pocket if you can rush it."

The slender boy who represented the Rocky Mountain Southern railroad silently led the way in, turned up the wick of the lamp and shoved blanks and pencil across the counter.

"You look half asleep to me," Wilkerson growled as he picked up the pencil.

The boy scanned the stranger quietly and opened the drawer of his telegraph desk and faced his visitor again. Wilkerson caught the glint of the steel barrel of a revolver in that drawer.

"You must have some money in the safe," he snarled.

The boy looked at him with steady blue eyes and stated in a perfectly matter of fact tone, "I merely wanted to show you that I am awake." Their glances met. It was Wilkerson's eyes that fell.

He grasped the pencil and wrote on the yellow blank:

"The charge to New York is \$1," he said mildly.

Wilkerson scowled. "Well, rush that anyway!" He strode out of the little office and mounted his horse. The wreny animal tried to turn in toward its accustomed corral, but its rider reined it sharply back into the road toward "The Master Key" mine.

"I think Gallon will recognize me," he muttered to himself.

Tom Kane, who since the beginning of the camp had been the open handed but close mouthed cook, sounded his triangle.

Immediately poured out from the quarters of the unmarried men a stream of miners. As he had done for many years, Thomas Gallon went to the window to watch this morning ceremony. He saw that the men greeted John Dorr respectfully, yet generally.

"It was a lucky day when John Dorr came," he muttered to himself. Then his eye caught the figure of a horse man riding leisurely down the street, apparently careless of the scowls from the men against whom he brushed roughly.

The old man rubbed his eyes feebly and looked again. Yes, it was true. He could never mistake that figure or that surmounting visage. God! Why had his bullet not gone through that face? He reached for his gun with somewhat of the vigor of youth; he was safe now. One shot out of that window and that figure that had haunted him for years would tumble and fall and forever disappear from his life. He could do it.

He put the gun down quietly and dropped his chin on his breast. He realized that his years of struggle had broken down the indomitable spirit of his youth and his pride. He was an old man; he could not keep Wilkerson from coming back.

Harry Wilkerson saw that face at the window, and his smile hardened. He thought he would take Gallon by surprise possibly, but before he rapped

you remember that woman in Valle Vista five years ago—that woman you thought your little daughter too good to speak to? It was you who drove her out of camp, and now—she smiled faintly—"she's rich and in New York, and she hates you!"

Gallon bowed his head.

"What is it you want, Harry?" he whispered huskily.

The other man pulled a paper out of his pocket and threw it on the table. "There's a contract for you to sign."

At this moment the door opened, and Ruth entered. She stared a moment at the visitor and then looked anxiously at her father, who said:

"This is an old partner of mine, Ruth—Harry Wilkerson."

Ruth shyly looked at the tall stranger and then shook hands with him. He held her gentle fingers a second too long. Her face flushed, and she retired without a backward glance.

Without paying any more attention to the old man, who had now subsided into a chair by the table, Wilkerson walked to the window and watched the slim, girlish figure of the young girl tripping down the hill. Then he swung on the old man harshly: "Well, I need a job. You need a new superintendent, don't you? I guess I'll take the place."

He stepped quickly to the window once more. This time he saw Ruth, with Tom Kane, the old cook, and another, in front of the cook house.

"Come here, Tom. Who is that talking to that girl of yours?" he said.

Gallon got up heavily from his chair and walked over to the window, and he could not repress an expression of relief. "Oh, that's the mining engineer, 'The Master Key,' John Dorr."

With a quick swing Wilkerson was back, leaning over the table. He picked up the paper. "Sign here," he said insolently.

Gallon made a last faint protest: "I can't do it!"

Wilkerson picked up a pen, dipped it and put it in the old man's hand. "Sign!"

As the last letter of that signature, which had so long stood for respectability, was blotted at the foot of the paper Ruth entered.

"Your father has just made me superintendent of this mine. I'm his old partner, you know."

Ruth looked at her father with consternation. "Why—why—I thought John—"

Thomas Gallon looked up and wiped his lips. "Yes," he said, "I have made my old—my old—partner superintendent of 'The Master Key.'"

"I expect we'll see a good deal of each other from now on," Wilkerson said slyly, and with those slim, white fingers of his he reached out and pinched Ruth's cheek.

Ruth did not draw back. She clinched her firm little hand and Wilkerson received a blow in the mouth that made him stagger back.

At the moment that he received that stinging blow he heard a movement to one side of him, and with the old instinctive fear of Thomas Gallon, he drew away back with his hand on the gun at his hip. He met the glaring eyes of the old man, who had risen from his seat, and understood that until life left that decrepit frame its mastering passion—the passion which he could not hope to master—would be love for the girl whom he had just insulted.

He made a daring apology, the apology of the coward and the liar. "I beg your pardon, Ruth, but you used to sit on my knee when you were a little one."

She merely glanced at him and went out of the bungalow. She did not see her father rise to his full height and

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HARRY.

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The new superintendent gritted his teeth, folded up the telegram and called roughly to a boy lounging outside on the porch:

"Here, take this to the telegraph station, and be quick about it!" Then he addressed himself to an examination of the reports and time sheets and various papers that explained the working of the mine. His soft, white fingers caressed receipts that spoke of gold extracted from the earth.

ing at all unless she takes the advice of some of us old timers and fires that young squirt of an engineer, John Dorr."

Wilkerson leaned over and his face suddenly grew white in its intensity of expression.

"I'm the superintendent of this mine. Now go!"

Tubbs looked astonished at the tone, but obeyed.

Wilkerson smiled to himself. One man, and he one of the most important in the camp, was his absolute tool and slave. He took his pen and rapidly wrote out an order:

"After this day all wages in this mine will be reduced 25 per cent."

He called one of the bookkeepers and curtly ordered him to post it on the wall of the office outside. A surprise awaited him, however, in the attitude of the miners. They paid no attention to the notice he had posted on the office wall, nor did they seem to recognize the presence of the new superintendent. He questioned Ed Mayer, the leading boss.

"Miss Ruth is running 'The Master Key'?" Mayer replied.

After the passing of Thomas Gallon things at the mine went very quietly for a few weeks. John Dorr had accepted the subordinate position under Wilkerson and was faithfully do-

and you can make him straighten matters out with them."

He peered anxiously up into the young man's face. "You won't desert her, will you, John?"

With an inarticulate growl John swung out into the sunshine and allowed his way through the streaming flood of miners just coming off shift. Ahead of him he saw Wilkerson talking to an old miner, who seemed to be arguing earnestly. He saw the superintendent and the miner re-enter the office, and a moment later Ruth appeared.

As John came to the office door he heard the sound of a scuffle within. He kicked open the frail barrier and stood inside just in time to see Wilkerson draw a gun on the old miner.

"Drop that gun, you dog!" he bellowed, and with one leap was at Wilkerson's throat.

Wilkerson was no pigmy in strength and as agile as a panther. He managed to land two stinging blows on John's eye before Dorr drove him up against the wall, laid his powerful hands on him and thrust him to the floor in absolute helplessness. His fist was lifted to give the final finishing blow when he caught sight of Ruth's white face. He jerked Wilkerson to his feet, flung him into the corner and strode silently out.

"John, John! What is the matter?" demanded Ruth.

"That bound in there discharged me! I am going to leave tonight."

Her eyes slowly filled with tears. "You are not going to leave 'The Master Key' mine, are you, John? And—"

Before he could answer her appeal in words there was a wild roar down the street and the tramp of boot- ed feet.

"Get the dynamite and blow the fellow up!" bawled a couple of horse voices.

"Get a rope and hang him to the hoist!" yelled another. Then a full chorus of angry cries rose into the evening air and filled the valley with rancorous sound.

Quickly John drew Ruth aside in the shelter of one of the cottages and said hurriedly: "This must be stopped, Ruth. I'll get out there and stop them!"

Ruth's property was in peril. John's stentorian voice rang out across the throng: "Stop, men! Stop!" But he soon saw that the crowd was getting out of hand. He perceived three or four of the tunnel men racing down the hill to join in the fracas. One of them, he was sure, had been to the powder house. He gritted his teeth and made his last appeal.

"Ruth—Ruth Gallon!" he called.

Doubtless none of the miners had noticed her presence, and when her slender figure emerged from a doorway, boldly yet modestly out toward the man who was trying to hold them in check, there was a dead silence. That silence was portentous. It was decided the fate of "The Master Key."

It was broken by wild and tumultuous cheers as John lifted Ruth on the box, and she held out her slender arms in girlish entreaty to the men she knew so well.

Cowed, yet as ever alert to snatch at any opening, Wilkerson now came boldly on the scene. Just as he had bluffed his way many a time before, he now made a play on which he knew his own safety depended. He mounted on the box beside Ruth. "Miss Gallon has asked me to restore the former rate of wages!" he shouted. "It has been done."

What meant that ominous silence? What more must he say to those faces upturned to his? "And I have repented John Dorr to run this mine," he muttered.

Possibly he hoped that those low, hoarse tones would not carry far, but attentive ears caught them up and knew their meaning.

Old Tom Kane came through the crowd, thrust Wilkerson off the box without ceremony and raised his crack-

Take One Pain Pill, then—Take it Easy.

For Neuralgia, nothing is better than

Dr. Miles' Anti-Pain Pills

Used by thousands for a generation

Those who have suffered from neuralgia pains need not be told how necessary it is to secure relief. The easiest way to get relief is to use Dr. Miles' Anti-Pain Pills. They have relieved sufferers for so many years that they have become a household necessity.

Those who have taken Dr. Miles' Anti-Pain Pills for five years and they are the only thing that does me any good. They have relieved neuralgia in my head in fifteen minutes. I have been taken then for rheumatism, back ache, pain in the breast, toothache, earache and pain in the bowels and limbs. I have found nothing to equal them and they are all that is claimed for them.

J. W. BEEDIE, Blue Springs, Mo.

At all drug stores—25 doses 25 cents. Never sold in bulk.

MILES MEDICAL CO., Elkhart, Ind.

MEMORY OF DEAD HONORED BY ELKS

TEMPLE IS FILLED AT ANNUAL MEMORIAL SERVICES SUN. DAY AFTERNOON

R. R. BUTLER DELIVERS ADDRESS

Quartette Consisting of T. A. Burke, H. A. Swafford, H. Hollowell and V. C. Gault Furnishes Music

The hall of Oregon City lodge, No. 1183, of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks was well filled Sunday afternoon with members of the lodge and others to attend the annual Memorial services. The following program was rendered:

Opening ceremonies, by the lodge members, William R. Logus, exalted ruler; opening ode, by the lodge members; invocation, Rev. P. K. Hammond; "What is Life" (Aller), Dr. Swale quartette, T. A. Burke, M. A. Swafford, H. Hollowell, V. C. Gault; memorial address, R. R. Butler, Hopper lodge, No. 358; vocal solo, "In Heavenly Love Abiding" (Roberts), Mrs. John F. Risley, Miss Sue Kenay, accompanist; eulogy, Joseph E. Hege; vocal solo, Hoffnung, "When the Roses Bloom" (Reichardt), Mrs. John F. Risley; closing ceremonies, the lodge members; "We are Going Down the Valley" (Hilmore), male quartette; benediction, Rev. P. K. Hammond.

The Oregon City lodge has lost the following members since it was instituted: Ralph C. Dimick, October 2, 1911; W. E. Carlin, P. E. R., November 29, 1911; O. Tonkin, Jr., April 21, 1913; E. T. Fields, February 18, 1913; W. A. Shewman, April 21, 1913; M. J. Lavelle, October 10, 1913; G. W. Bingham, October 30, 1913; E. S. Follansbee, November 29, 1913; Fred H. Rice, October 3, 1914.

The memorial day committee was Roy O. Young, J. J. Tobin and W. E. Swafford. The ushers were C. T. Bollinger, E. K. Stanton, W. L. Malvi, F. P. Parrish and H. L. Martin.

SELLING'S ELECTION AS SPEAKER IS SURE

ENOUGH VOTES ARE ALREADY PLEDGED TO INSURE CHOICE OF PORTLANDER

PORTLAND, Ore., Dec. 3.—Ben Selling of Portland doubtless will be speaker of the house at the next session of the legislature.

It is probable that Mr. Selling will have more than 40 votes on the first ballot when the legislature organizes. The only opponent of Mr. Selling remaining in the field is Alton H. Eaton, of Eugene, who, according to unauthenticated reports, has a maximum of 17 pledged votes.

The Portland man will have the support not only of the solid Multnomah delegations of 12 members, but of nearly all the representatives from eastern Oregon, most of whom were waiting for action by the Multnomah caucus. He also will have five or six votes from western Oregon representatives, some of whom heretofore considered the advisability of supporting Mr. Eaton.

"I am confident that I'll be elected speaker," said Mr. Selling tonight. "I have more than enough votes to elect me pledged already. Several representatives in the outlying districts of the state, who I am sure will support me, have yet to be heard from. They will increase my majority. I'll be elected. There's no question about that."

Portland gave a local firm of contractors the big Shattuck school contract over a lower bidder in Montana.

Merz & Lather are going to give Everett Grove a creamery and ice cream factory.

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He grasped the pencil and wrote on the yellow blank:



"Still partners in 'The Master Key.'"

When he was gone Wilkerson waxes rapidly:

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Jean Darnell, Astor House, New York City, N. Y.

I have just been appointed superintendent of this mine; tell George; Harry follows.

HARRY.

He stared down at his own signature with a strange feeling that it was new—letters instead of figures! He winced as he seemed to hear her say: "I'll never marry you until you are rich. Get the money and you shall have Jean Darnell."

The new superintendent gritted his teeth, folded up the telegram and called roughly to a boy lounging outside on the porch:

"Here, take this to the telegraph station, and be quick about it!" Then he addressed himself to an examination of the reports and time sheets and various papers that explained the working of the mine. His soft, white fingers caressed receipts that spoke of gold extracted from the earth.

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