

# THE MASTER KEY

By John Fleming Wilson

By special arrangement for this paper a photo-drama corresponding to the installments of "The Master Key" may now be seen at the leading moving picture theaters. By arrangement made with the Universal Film Manufacturing company it is not only possible to read "The Master Key" in this paper, but also afterward to see moving pictures of our story.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### Sir Donald Faversham Volunteers.

His search for the Hindu, who had bought the idol containing the plans of the motor-erode of the "Master Key" mine, John Dorr had recourse again to the pawnbroker.

That individual's curiosity was aroused by now, and he asked a great many questions, which John answered evasively.

When it came to getting a description of the Hindu the broker could give but few details.

He laid emphasis on the fact that he sold rugs and that he looked like any one of a dozen East Indians frequenting a Pacific port. He knew of no address.

With this Dorr had to be content, and he returned to Ruth to discuss with her what they should do next.

"If Wilkerson gets it there is an easy way to get him," he said in the course of their conversation.

"How?" demanded Ruth.

"Have him arrested as a fugitive from justice and held for the county sheriff and the warrant that Tom Kane swore out," he replied.

Ruth considered this thoughtfully and shook her head.

"It would mean our going back to the mine and all kinds of trouble," she said wisely. "Besides, we wouldn't be any nearer the papers father wanted me to have."

"That is very true," John agreed. "We'll keep that in reserve in case we discover that he has the idol. Our only plan, then, is to trace this Hindu, who will be a hard job."

"Why not put detectives on the trail?"

"I don't think any detective could do better than myself," she replied.

"But you can't do it all," she argued. "You can't be looking for this peddler and keeping an eye on Wilkerson and seeing to it at the same time."

"The seeing to it is the pleasantest part of the job," he said laughingly. "I refuse to delegate that to any one. Of course you're quite right, though, about it's being too big an affair for me to handle alone. I think I'll ask Everett to join us. Maybe he can suggest something. I'll wire him, and then we'll take a trip down to the water front and interview our launchman again. He seemed to me a pretty level-headed chap, and he'll maybe be able to put us on the track of the Hindu if he took a steamer for the north, as I strongly suspect he did."

Ruth could not understand why the peddler should do this, and Dorr explained that the Hindu evidently had set great store on the idol, as he had not only paid cash, but had given a rug as well in exchange.

"He would know that the thing was worthless as an article of merchandise," he went on. "In the next place, he wasted no time in getting possession of it once he saw it. I have no doubt that it is sacred in his eyes—a god. It was stolen at some time from

"But that's all guesswork," Ruth insisted practically.

"I know it," he admitted. "But a good guess is better than nothing to work on. Let's go and see our skipper person."

The launch captain received them genially and listened to John's story. At its finish he agreed with John that it was very likely that the Hindu had recognized a native god and would restore it to its own temple.

"I've visited those eastern ports a good deal," he told them. "I know boys on a lark from the ship will do just that trick—run off with an idol for a curio—and I know the fuss the heathens make about it too. They'll give you any length to get back a first-class god."

Before they left he promised to keep an eye open for the Hindu and inform them if he got the smallest clew. With this they had to be satisfied, as inquiries elsewhere developed nothing helpful.

Everett arrived on the evening train and after dinner listened to the story of their adventures with great interest. When he had asked a few questions he and John looked at each other. Finally Everett spoke.

"It might take years to locate that lode without the exact plans," he said thoughtfully. "I don't doubt that your father, Miss Ruth, spent many a long hour and day prospecting for it. So we must have the plans if it's in the bounds of possibility to recover them. I think you will have to find your Hindu."

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a woman traveling with you. It is all right to do as you like in the mines, where no one would dream of speaking evil or thinking it, but Mrs. Grundy insists on the maid."

John agreed with Everett and departed to get the tickets, in spite of Everett's warning that he had better send and get them.

The result was that George Drake, just landed from the mine and in search of Wilkerson, found him shadowing Dorr.

Drake explained his coming by saying that he had heard nothing from either Wilkerson or Mrs. Darnell, and he could be of no use at the "Master Key."

"It's just as well," Wilkerson said sulkily. "I have a dozen things to attend to, and you can help. The first is not to let that man Dorr get out of our sight or turn a hand unless we know it."

In a few sentences filled with bitterness he told the story of the analysis of the chest and the futile search for the plans and the abstraction of the idol containing them.

When Wilkerson found that Dorr and Ruth looked passage on the Halcyon for San Francisco and had inquired about the next sailings for the Orient he took Drake aside and they determined that this could only mean one thing—

Dorr was on the track of the idol. "We'll follow them," he said savagely. "We've spent too much to quit now."

Jean Darnell received Drake coolly and listened to Wilkerson's explanation of his new scheme without a word.

Her stormy eyes boded no good to some one, and Wilkerson feared she would abandon him.

But there was the tenacity of a tiger in her passions, and now she could not give up her sweet revenge nor forego the thought of possessing the wealth which had once been Tom Gallon's and which he had tried to conceal.

She agreed to go, and they decided to leave by train that evening, thus being in San Francisco in time to meet the steamer and watch for Dorr's next movement.

Two days later Everett again met John and Ruth in the hotel in San Francisco.

John's news was that the Hindu they sought had undoubtedly been on the Halcyon and that John had bought a steamer passage for Bombay.

"You ought to get the plans before you get to India," Everett said earnestly. "You'll find yourself in a strange land, where it will be like looking for a needle in a haystack to get hold of your man."

Dorr acknowledged this and outlined his tentative plan of getting hold of the idol during the passage.

"After all, we don't want the idol. I shall try to persuade the man of this and get him to let me have the papers concealed in it."

At this moment Sir Donald Faversham was announced.

The entrance of the Englishman who had made himself so attentive to Ruth at the southern hotel awakened little enthusiasm in either Dorr or Everett, but for Ruth's sake they played the civil part.

She, on the other hand, received Sir Donald with every evidence of lively pleasure.

"We are this minute talking of going over to India, where you lived so long," she told him after the first greetings. "And you are just the man to tell us all about it."

"Going to India?" ejaculated the baronet. "My word!"

"Yes," she proceeded. "We are after a Hindu and his idol."

At this point John laughingly came to the rescue and briefly explained the object of their quest.

Sir Donald listened quietly, occasionally glancing at Ruth, whose beauty was enhanced by pretty excitement.

fact, I should think it a jolly trip. But if you think I took advantage of the little lady's courtesy say so."

Entirely disarmed, John Dorr had to confess that Sir Donald's offer relieved him of a responsibility too heavy for him.

The two parted the best of friends, though John could not refrain from an expression of jealousy to himself.

But he knew that Ruth's interests were now doubly safeguarded and tried to restrain his morbid heart.

As the steamer sailed the next day they had little time for their preparations, but John made sure that the Hindu was on board before the last line was cast off and the big liner backed into the stream and headed slowly round for the channel to the open sea.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### "He Is a Prisoner!"

DURING the long voyage to Hongkong the three were thrown much together, and Sir Donald learned in full the history of the "Master Key" mine and the present search for the plans of the site of the mother lode.

At first he could hardly believe that such things could happen, but slowly he came to understand that the tremendous passions that were fighting to be satisfied would stop at nothing.

"I fear you will find it different in India," he told John many times. "The country is immense, it is inhabited by races of different speech and habits and religions, and yet over it all there is the vague spell of the east which is so foreign to your western America that I fear you will not easily recover what you seek."

"But I must get the papers back," said John quietly. "There is no question about it."

"Many a man has refused to acknowledge that a thing is impossible," Faversham warned him, "and the east has driven him mad. However, I am much interested myself, not only for the sake of Miss Ruth, but from a sporting standpoint, and I promise you I'll do my best to help you."

They considered the suggested plan of taking the idol away from the Hindu during the voyage, but Faversham vetoed this after a somewhat extensive investigation.

"You see," he told Ruth, "I know the fellow's language, and he comes from a tribe far in the north of India. Most of those chaps are looked upon as rather sacred, and this man in special, I see, is much respected by the other natives in the steamer. To desecrate his image would simply mean an uproar that we could never explain to the satisfaction of the captain and his officers. In fact, we should all get into the most serious trouble."

"Then your advice is to wait?" she murmured.

"Most decidedly," said the baronet. "And the waiting isn't so bad, is it?"

The steamer was slipping easily along across a moonlit sea that night, and Ruth and Sir Donald were far in the bow watching the waves foam softly away from the cutter.

The girl had awakened during the past few weeks to the dim happiness of being always the center of men's thoughts.

She was not in love, but she was ready to be. The experienced man beside her surmised this. His own heart was beating a new tune. He had heard much, and women had not been absent from his life.

But this fair, proud, inexperienced, yet self-contained girl awakened in him a deeper feeling than he cared to confess.

To be sure, he had John Dorr to contend with. Faversham did not underestimate him as a possible rival when he allowed himself to go so far as contemplating marriage with Ruth.

He liked the young American, and none knew better than he the effect that constant association with Dorr must have upon a young and very impressionable girl. John's own sentiments were unmistakable—he was deeply in love.

From Hongkong they transhipped to a P. and O. steamer for Bombay, and under Sir Donald's expert guidance they shortly found themselves in India and installed in a very good hotel.

"We must wait here till I discover through natives just where that fellow is bound for,"

"Why not simply trace him?" demanded Dorr, impatient to be about his errand.

"That would be out of the question," Faversham explained. "In the first place, you don't understand any native tongue, and in the second place the British government doesn't look with favor on strange and unwatched Europeans strolling about among the natives."

"If you leave it to me I think I not only can ascertain the exact place where this fellow comes from, but the temple where the idol belongs."

Several days passed, during which Sir Donald was busy among old acquaintances, leaving John and Ruth to their own devices.

They occupied their time in sight-seeing. At last Faversham came into dinner one evening with a smile on his face.

"I've found your man and learned something of the history of the image," he said.

"And we can get it back?" Ruth inquired promptly.

Sir Donald shook his head gently. "Not so fast, young lady!"

"But that is what we came for," she went on.

"The fact of the matter is this," said the baronet—"that image was stolen several years ago—a great many, in truth. It is the tutelary deity of a small city on the river Biala, and it is about as sacred an article as you could pick up. The people of that city think that since they have lost their image the god is angry with them, and for some years they have quietly conducted a search for it."

"And this man will take it to Biala?" demanded Ruth.

"He has already started. I understand from some of the natives I know."

"Then what are we to do?" demanded John.

"Biala is some hundreds of miles up country," Sir Donald continued. "Part of the way we can go by rail, but part of the road we must travel either on foot or by litter—if we go."

"Of course we are going," said Ruth. "I most earnestly beg of you to stop here," said the baronet. "You don't know your India as I do, and even if we accomplished our purpose we should run double risk in getting back."

They argued the matter for some time, but Ruth refused to consider retreat at this stage, and John, impressed though he was by the other's evident sincerity, could not help feeling that as an outsider he did not understand the necessity of the recovery of the plans.

When he and Sir Donald talked it over alone the baronet was even more insistent.

He characterized the whole expedition as rash and plainly stated that should the British government get wind of such a search immediate steps would be taken to see that the Americans went no further.

Dorr was unconvinced and finally intimated that Faversham had not meant what he said when he had volunteered to help them.

Sir Donald shrugged his shoulders and admitted himself helpless in the face of such arguments.

"At least I can go along and do what I can to save the young woman from actual peril," he remarked. "I by no means promise to give you active assistance."

"I'll be satisfied if you'll just tip me off once in awhile," John responded.

They made the journey to Biala safely, Ruth and John viewing the novel sights that met their eyes on every hand, Sir Donald acting as general guide and instructor.

On their arrival at the towning city they were soon installed in an inn outside the center and some distance up the river.

Faversham wasted no time in looking up certain people he knew among the natives and was in a position to inform them that he had not only discovered the temple, but that he had learned that the idol had been recovered and would be restored to its proper shrine with due ceremony and great festivity.

"That will be just our chance," said John. "In the crowds we ought to be safe."

Faversham tried to convince him that this was not so, but Dorr insisted so strongly that the Englishman yielded to his better judgment.

"I'll try to get you within sight of the idol anyway," he consented. "But I must insist that you obey my instructions implicitly. Otherwise we shall all get into trouble and you will eventually kill any chance you may have of attaining your purpose."

The result of this was that Ruth late that night was awakened by Sir Donald's rapping on her door.

When she had flung on some clothes and opened she saw from his manner and his disheveled dress that all had not gone well.

"It's true," Faversham told her. "Dorr couldn't resist what he thought was a chance to get hold of the idol. He was captured, but I managed to get away by my knowledge of the language and the help of some natives who are friendly to me."

He knew might mean his own death, but he was helpless in the grip of this sweet passion.

Yet he would not go without at least a word of hope and promise.

"I'll get him," he told her. "It will be a hard job, but I'll save him for your sake, Ruth, and when I come back with him—"

She leaned forward, gloriously content that John was to be brought back to her.

She did not read aright the expression in the man's eyes. She threw out her little hands to him joyously.

"I'll always love you if you will," she whispered.

He stared dazedly, and she withdrew before he could put out his hands or say a word. Five minutes later he was hastily making his way back toward the temple.

To his dying day Sir Donald was never able to explain just how he found John Dorr nor how he extricated him from the howling mob who yelled for the life of the impious man who had laid foul hands on their god.

His own recollection was of desperately using his tongue, his muscles and his knowledge of the usual intricacies of a native city.

John himself could give no clear description, but confessed that he had given up hope of rescue when Sir Donald appeared as by magic.

It was dawn when they reached the hotel, and Ruth was on the balcony watching. When Faversham looked up and called out, "I managed it," she leaned far over, her eyes shining, and threw him a kiss.

The baronet's heart beat high. He had won her for his wife.

The fact that Dorr and Ruth had sailed for India did not escape Wilkerson and Mrs. Darnell's sharp senses, and they sailed, with Drake as their companion, on the next steamer.

"We can easily pick up Dorr's trail when we land," Wilkerson told them. He found this true. Within two days he had also ascertained that they had left for the interior under the escort of Sir Donald Faversham.

Without delay they followed and in due time landed in Biala, not long after Sir Donald had rescued Dorr from the mob who had seized him when he had tried to recapture the idol. Wilkerson grinned when he told Mrs. Darnell of this success.

"But will you fare any better?" she demanded.

"Sure," he said confidently. "I'll let Dorr and this British baronet burn their fingers getting the thing; then I'll get it away from them. It's a long way back to America, and if we stick tight to Dorr we'll sooner or later be able to handle the plans ourselves."

"Then the 'Master Key' will be ours for good and all!"

(Continued Next week.)

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R. P. PLIMPTON, Homeopathic Physician. Office in Residence, Broadway.

W. T. WRIGHT, Physician and Surgeon. Phone: Residence, 21; Office, 325. Offices and Treatment Rooms, Same Stairway as Telephone Co.

CARR & BRANNON, Physicians and Surgeons. Office in McCarthy Building. Telephone—Crawford County 85.

J. J. MEEHAN, Physician and Surgeon. Office in Opera House Block. Phone: Office, 249; Res., 246.

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B. F. PHILEROOD, D. D. S., Offices in the Lath Block. Denison, Iowa.

R. C. MCCONNAUGHEY, D. D. S., Office in New McCarthy Bldg. Phone—359.

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J. P. CONNER, P. E. C. Lally, CONNER & LALLY, Attorneys at Law. Offices Over C. C. State Bank.

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"But Mrs. Grundy insists on the maid."

was allowed to go pretty much to ruin. Tom Kane would do his best, of course, but actually we are looking for the bird in the bush when we have one in the hand."

"I see your point," the promoter said promptly. "My offer of days ago still holds good. I'll finance this matter to the end, and I'll look after the mine too. So you can be care free so far as that goes, John."

"You know I wouldn't take it for myself," John began awkwardly and was silenced by a smile.

The next morning they had barely finished breakfast when the launch captain was announced.

The three of them found him bursting with news.

"I think I located your Hindu," he told them. "He came down at daylight this morning looking for a steamer sailing for the north. The Halcyon leaves at noon, and the steward gave him a job in the galley."

"But it might be another Hindu," Ruth suggested.

The captain turned toward her and shook his head. "I don't think it's possible," he said. "He answered the description clear down to the rug. Besides that, he seemed kind of nervous, and when one of the sailors jollied him the man nearly had a fit. I'm sure he's your man."

"There's only one thing for you to do," Everett said promptly—"take passage on that steamer yourselves to San Francisco. By that time you can be pretty sure whether the man is or not."

This was agreed upon, and Ruth started on her preparations immediately, Everett insisting that she take her maid with her.

"But I don't need her!" Ruth protested. "She's so expensive too!"

"You are merely a youngster," Everett said quietly, "and you must have



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