

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 attend to see moving pictures of our story.

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CHAPTER VII.

WHEN he had thoroughly learned his lesson Wilkerson coolly, in spite of the letter 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.

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

things are going along, Miss Gallon," he said, with unusual formality. "When your father made me superintendent of this mine I did not realize that the responsibility was so heavy as 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 practically nothing. We must find the 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. "But he always got it."

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 if '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 \$10,000 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, herself, 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?"

A tenderness flooded Dorr's eyes. He comprehended her helplessness, understood 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 pushed 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 \$10,000."

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.' I 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 the \$10,000 and we don't find the mother 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 letter to him, and he will see to it that you get the extra money we need. Meanwhile I'll keep the mine going."

Ruth gave him her full eyes. "You don't like Mr. Wilkerson, do you?"

"I don't trust him," he replied. "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 tunnel," 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 \$10,000."

"Everett, Everett!" repeated Wilkerson, "who is George Everett?"



"John, are we broke?"

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

Ruth laid one slender hand on John's shoulder. "You're always doing things for me, John," she said simply. "Some day I'll do something for you." She slipped away 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 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 fiercer 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," boated 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.

Miss Ruth Gallon leaves tonight to see you about "Master Key" stock. Meet her and wire me on her arrival. Take good care of her or I'll take care of you.

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 began 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 hang up immediately, 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 pay fair," said John to himself, and he called back over the wire. "Bill, that's yours and Wilkerson's business, not mine." If he had listened to the tenor of the message directed to John Darnell, in New York, he would 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 strange thing that when a dishonest man finally yields to an honest passion nothing will satisfy him but the utmost extravagance of the ritual of society.

Harry Wilkerson's vision was of 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 contrast—the pallid, satiny, 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 furnished room and breathed the odor of attar 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 City.

Find George Everett at 111 Broadway and meet Ruth Gallon in Chicago on Santa Fe express leaving here this evening. Introduce me to him as George Everett, and have him see Everett and keep the girl to yourself until I can arrange matters.

HARRY.

"I can't send this through any office 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 Los Angeles."

Three days later Ruth Gallon settled herself in the seat of a Pullman that was soon to leave Chicago for New York. She was excited. In crossing town from one depot to another

through the streets roaring with traffic she had heard sounds that had never met her ears before—the sounds of the world's business which, oddly enough, seemed to be mostly hauled over cobblestones. The faint echo of that noise still rang in her ears. It appealed her to think that she must dwell with men who lived in such an atmosphere; also she felt very lonely. She thought of the cook abanys, of the great ore bucket swinging across the rails toward the mill, of John, bending over his blue prints and papers; of the grave on the hill where her father lay, still within the precincts of "The Master Key."

It had been so impressed upon her that her mission was of vital importance to the mine, that these tender emotions flowed into the same channel with her really keen business instinct. She pulled the key, warm from her bosom, out of its hiding place and looked at it.

CHAPTER VIII.

JEAN DARNELL'S ROOM.

"THIS must be Miss Gallon," said a pleasant voice.

Ruth looked up to see a woman of fair 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."

"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 fee was so plausible that I was one more token of John Dorr's carelessness 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 stilted 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, of comfort, of health and of good looks. Now it was a question of money, prime among them all, and her rather keen wit saw precisely the chances which Wilkerson was taking. 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.

When Ruth ended up with a gentle "And so I told John I'd come and see what I could do," the elder woman smiled gently. "Times were not so good with her as they had been, and if Harry Wilkerson could put this deal through and make money for them all it would simplify many a problem which she dully pondered at night."

"Mr. Everett will meet us at the train," she said briefly, "and then you can tell him all this. Meanwhile, suppose we talk about something else."

"But I can't think of anything else," said Ruth.

"Oh, you will," said Mrs. Darnell. "You can combine the pleasure of seeing New York with your little business. Mr. Everett will quickly settle that part of it, and I shall take great pleasure in showing you about Manhattan. I presume you are fond of opera?"

"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 opera must be like church—one wants to go all by oneself."

Mrs. Darnell turned very slowly and for the first time in many years revealed a secret thought: "Do you know that my only pleasant memories, my dear, 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 confined Mr. Everett by herself. Mrs. Darnell made her feel that she was conspicuously protected.

When they arrived the next morning 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 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 understand what you are trying to do, Jean. You must know what sort of a fellow Harry Wilkerson is by this time. Why play his hand for him?"

"I don't notice you holding any trump in your hand," she returned gently, but with a faint gleam in her eyes which made him draw back. "This is my game, and I expect you to play your part. You come on now and be George Everett. The girl is as ignorant as a pigeon. Remember what I told you."

"About that stock?" he said sullenly. "Yes, the stock. You understand that she came to New York simply to

raise money for this mine. You are supposed to handle the business for her. If you don't learn all that is to be learned about "The Master Key" mine in the next two days you are more than the fool I take you for."

She drew him back to where Ruth stood amid the suit cases and hand bags and said, "Miss Gallon, Mr. Everett has been telling me that he, too, has heard from John Dorr about your coming."

Ruth scanned him politely. But the interest died in her eyes when she saw what sort of a man he was. He might be a friend of John's; he might be the man to rescue "The Master Key" from bankruptcy, but he did not interest her.

Drake, trying to play the part of the busy broker and, being thoroughly and temperamental 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 wade away to find the elusive trail.

The real George Everett got out of his limousine on the corner of Vanderbilt avenue and hurried through the revolving doors; brisk, debonair, alert, decided; with that happy stia which denies foppish 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 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 ardently and then smiled to himself. "A wild goose!" he muttered. It brought up darkling sunset vistas, like smooth or pebbles under the evening sky, and slim, gray, beautiful birds bombing 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 irrevocably 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 another message addressed to Harry Wilkerson. It read:

21 West Eighty-fourth St., New York. Harry Wilkerson, "Master Key" Mine, Valle Vista, Cal.

Everything all right. George met Ruth. She is now with me and waiting for particular. Have seen Everett under guise of prospective purchaser of stock. The girl is charming.

JEAN DARNELL.

Some houses, like some people, should never be illumined with sunshine, and Mrs. Darnell's residence, overlooking the Hudson, was of this type. Its dull, red stone front, marked by windows that seemed blind to all that went by, was not distinctive in that neighborhood. A thousand doors within a mile would have suggested to the passerby nothing more or less than the great old portals within which she lived. To Ruth Gallon, of course, the house seemed tremendously formal and stately. Within she found an atmosphere so absolutely strange and alien to all she had ever known that she shrank within herself and had nothing to say until she had been conducted to her own room on the third floor and a discreet maid was busy unpacking her things. Ruth felt that society had already laid its restrictions on her. She recognized the maid as the "gown and hat" policeman.

This silent, but exceedingly obtrusive personage having retired at last, Ruth studied her surroundings. When she had completed her survey she thought to herself that there were two things wanting. One was a silk haired Persian cat and the other a flaming colored scarf 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 experience in New York.

At last she traced it to some pallid flowers in the great green and dark red vase whose translucent beauty was that of plays whose roots have never been in good, sound soil. They looked for her much like lilies, whose petals had floated on some dark and opalescent pool, veiled with odors of the night. She was still staring at these and sniffing their scent through widened nostrils when Mrs. Darnell knocked on the door and entered slowly. She had changed her street gown for a negligee, which instantly caught the girl's appreciative eye.

"You look beautiful," she said quickly. Jean Darnell turned her tawny eyes on her and smiled faintly.

"I am not usually up until noon," she responded, "and—I am getting old, my dear." She threw out her jeweled hands with a sparkling gesture of half comic resignation. Ruth laughed.

"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 follow her baser instinct. But at that moment she saw the heavy gold of "The Master Key." As if it had supernatural powers, the sight of that key looked the door of her heart. "Of course I like John," she said slyly. "We must get everything fixed up now. George will be here—George Everett, of course. I mean—tonight, and you and he can talk the business over."

"You know, we simply must have 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."

"Ah!" said Jean Darnell. "You're selling stock, I presume?"

"I own it all," Ruth returned proudly. "It's my mine. My father left it to me when he died." She did not see the sudden hatred that slowly flamed until Jean Darnell's eyes fairly blazed.

In her own room she stood a moment breathless. Then she tore off her decey negligee in an intensity of silent rage and despair, seen only by the unexcited eyes of the god whom she had defied.

It is wickedness, not virtue, which is theatrical, and at this moment Jean Darnell flung herself into her evil passion with all the abandon of the tragedian, 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 unsecured 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 here."

"That will be much better," said Ruth.

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 mail came in with tea, followed by Mrs. Darnell.

"My child, what in the world are you going to do?" asked Jean. "Look, we'll have tea together."

"I was going out for a walk," Ruth responded. "You know I have never



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

Mrs. Darnell looked at her thoughtfully and smiled presently in a way that made Ruth flush. It seemed to convict her of discourtesy to her hostess. "You had best have tea" and the girl obediently removed her hat and jacket and sat down.

It seemed to her that the rest of the afternoon passed in flashes of such entertainment as she had never known. It must be remembered that Ruth, living in the same nearly all her life since leaving school, had not had the advantages of the society of trained, alert, smart, clever women. Mrs. Darnell was very clever and she used her every art to keep Ruth's attention. She succeeded.

That night at dinner George Drake, posing as George Everett, suddenly flushed darkly and turned to the girl 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 you, even if it is funny that I didn't 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 Rita 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 tonight. 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 promise to be at the club at 9 o'clock, and, be-

side, I've promised Miss Gallon to go to the Rita and get her mail and telegrams." He turned to Ruth, and she noticed 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.

(Continued Next Wednesday.)

TOURIST TRAFFIC WILL INCREASE 50 PER CENT

President Ripley of the Santa Fe Declares Westbound Business This Year Will Exceed the Record.

San Bernardino, Cal., Dec. 29.—E. P. Ripley, president of the Santa Fe system, has announced that he expects the westbound business on the California coast, in conjunction with the European wars, to result in an unprecedented increase in tourist travel throughout 1915. He estimated the increase would be as great as 50 per cent. President Ripley bases his estimate on the reports gathered by the Santa Fe lines.

"This large army of tourists will be comprised mostly of very wealthy people who, heretofore have been accustomed to spending their winters and vacations in European countries," he said. "The war has scared them out of their European touring plans and they have selected California as their playground for 1915."

"Aside from the railroads of the western states business activities are showing great improvement. Regarding the routing of the interstate commerce commission advancing the freight rates of 20 eastern railroads 2 per cent, California shippers will not be affected as this ruling excludes the Santa Fe road."

President Ripley will remain at the Maryland with Mrs. Ripley for a week.

FEDERAL DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE ASKS FOR CHICKEN TICKS

Roswell, N. M., Dec. 28.—The federal department of agriculture is advertising for chicken ticks. The department is investigating the habits and effects of the chicken tick in the southwest and is anxious to obtain a liberal supply of live ticks, together with information in regard to the experience of the poultry raisers in this section. "If there are any farmers who have been troubled with this pest I would like to hear from them immediately," said J. B. St. John. "The pest is spreading with great rapidity northward and eastward, and the prompt action on the part of the farmers who have had experience with this insect will materially assist in solving the government to make an exhaustive study of the pest before it has had time to do more damage."

"It is especially anxious to obtain a number of live specimens as soon as possible, and trust that someone who can supply them will come forward promptly and assist me in forwarding the department of agriculture with the means to get quickly to their efforts to eradicate the ticks."

Information.

Friend—Did you see the place where the Magna Charta was made? Mrs. Richardson (Jan) returned from abroad—Yes, and if you should ever see him it is really your duty to get another title at it.—Town Topics.

Local Harity.

Willow—Well, Mr. Bradford, have you read the will? Fred—Yes, but I can't make anything out of it. Heirs—I'm sure I have patented immediately. A will that a lawyer can't make anything out of is a dissipation.—London Telegraph.

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

the present mine, painstaking toll 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 hopes. Wilkerson was determined to be master of "The Master Key." He needed the skilled aid of John Dorr with his engineering 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 those scratches on that golden surface represented something tremendously important, and that the old man had committed Ruth to his charge and had 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, Wilkerson, 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."</