

Rex Beach writes: POWDER

First Serial Fiction in a new form. . . . Three Prize Short Stories (of four instalments each) by a master story-teller. . . . They're Rex Beach at his best. © by REX BEACH

FIRST INSTALMENT

Ben Furlong came to the Southern oil fields looking for work. He was very dusty and quite hungry when at last he stopped in at the Durham House.

This was a rather better-looking place than the average Texas homestead, and when he knocked at the kitchen door a girl appeared who was very much better-looking than the average Texas homesteader. She was, in fact, a very pretty girl.

She readily fetched Ben a drink of water, and while he rested she talked to him. That was, no doubt, because of his smile. He informed her that he had been raised in the Pennsylvania fields and was a good, practical oil man.

There being no chores to do, Ben sat in the kitchen and chatted with the girl while she cooked something for him, and in the course of their conversation he learned that her name was Betty Durham, that her parents were dead, and that the farm belonged to her aunt, with whom she had lived ever since she was a little girl. The aunt had gone to Opportunity in the family flivver.

"Funny, you cooking for a tramp driller like me and your aunt owning acreage like this," Ben remarked. "Isn't this land on the structure?"

"Sure! It's worth a lot of money. That well over yonder—look in hand—Miss Durham indicated a derrick not far away—belongs to us."

From where he sat Furlong could see that the timbers of the tower were still bright and unstained, thus advertising the melancholy fact that the well itself was not a producer, so he inquired:

"What's wrong with it? Dry?"

"Dry nothing! They're not down yet. They've got a fishing job—been at it for a couple of weeks."

"Gee! The visitor shook his head. "That's running somebody in debt." "When the first oil talk commenced we'd been glad to get the farm drilled on most any kind of royalty, but nobody would lease it. When they finally got ready, Aunt Mary wanted a bonus—two bits an acre—and she wouldn't listen to Uncle Joe's arguments. By and by they offered two bits, but by that time she wanted a dollar. Then the companies got together, or the boom kind of petered out, or something, and it began to look as if Uncle Joe would be lucky to make any kind of a deal. He finally laid his ears back and leased a small block. Then he up and got killed."

"That's too bad." "It was an accident. A powder wagon let go." The speaker's face grew wistful, she stared out across the arid countryside for a moment or two. "Uncle Joe loved me but—Aunt Mary's his second wife; we're not really kinsfolks. It might just as well have been Maddox who got killed; he was as close to the wagon as Uncle Joe and yet he wasn't touched. Funny, too, because he's always been afraid of the stuff and has a hunch he'll be blown up. All you have to say to him is 'powder' and—"

"How'd your aunt come to put down this new well?"

"Maddox drilled the well on the lot we leased, and after Uncle Joe was killed he quit the company and sort of took charge of things for Aunt Mary. It wasn't a big well, but the royalty is enough to pay for this one. I won't cook any more ham and eggs so you'd better make the most of these. Yes, and you'd better come and get them; they're done." Miss Durham set a plate on the table and Furlong drew up his chair.

With the curiosity natural to his calling, the visitor inquired more specifically about the nature of the mishap that had halted Maddox's progress, but he learned little. He inferred however, that the royalties from the first well were dwindling at an alarming rate and that any considerable delay in completing the new well might therefore result in ruin to the owner. It was a prospect that naturally gave Betty and her aunt grave concern.

When Ben had finished eating he said: "Maybe I can give this driller of yours some help. I've worked on a good many fishing jobs. D'you think he'd let me try?"

"He will if I tell him to," the girl declared. "He's tried everything anybody has told him to try. Who knows? Maybe you can do it." The speaker put on her sunbonnet and together she and Furlong went across the valley to the well.

Tiller Maddox was a swarthy man of about thirty-five; his eyes were bold and black and set close together. He greeted the Durham girl with an easy familiarity, a suggestion of proprietorship that gave the visitor cause for thought, but towards Furlong he was none too cordial and when Betty explained the reason for the letter's presence Maddox frowned.

"Another wise guy, eh? Every rope-choker in ten miles has been tryin' to show us how smart he is. What d'you know about fishin', stranger?"

"Not much," Ben confessed, "but

I've had some luck."

"Oh, I've had plenty of luck, myself!" Maddox asserted. "But I never had any good luck lettin' strangers monkey with my work. If you jim up the well, I take the blame."

"I won't jim anything."

"What'll you charge for this here miracle of yours?"

Impatiently Miss Durham exclaimed, "What's the difference how much he charges if he can do—?"

"I've been paid for any help I can give you," Furlong declared. "Probably I can't do anything, but so far I don't even know what's wrong. Do you mind telling me?"

"We've got a bolt in the hole."

"A bolt?"

"Sure! A six-inch steel bolt. It worked loose and dropped out of a tool."

"That's a new one," Ben admitted. "Why don't you drill it out, pound it to pieces?"

Maddox grinned. "That's what we been tryin' to do, but it's tempered harder than the bit. It duils every tool we use and all we been doin' for two weeks is sharpen steel."

"Can't you drill past it?"

"How you goin' to sidetrack a six-inch bolt loose in the bottom of a hole?"

"You can drive it into the wall."

"Oh, you can, can you? We're into a stratter of iron pyrites an' the rock's dam' near as hard as the bolt. It's much as ever a tool will cut it at all. That bolt just shifts around in the bottom of the hole like it was in a steel cup, an' it's too small to grapple. I s'pose we could get holt of it with some fancy kind of a magnet if we could get holt of some fancy kind of a magnet that would get holt of it."

Again Maddox grinned.

Betty Durham was staring at Furlong with an apprehensive pucker between her brows. "Ain't that our luck for a little bitty old bolt to ruin everything? Can you think of any way—?"

"I can think of one way that won't cost much to try."

"I don't want any strangers experimentin' around—" Maddox began; but the girl exclaimed, sharply:

"You've been experimenting for two weeks at a hundred dollars a day; haven't you? It's our well. Let Mr. Furlong have a go, is it?"

The driller executed an exaggerated gesture of acquiescence. "Right you are, Betty! But if this feller puts it on the bum, don't blame me." Then to Ben he announced: "Help yourself, partner. You heard the boss."

When Furlong had fully satisfied himself as to conditions he took off his coat and went to work. He knew of no fishing tool so designed as to pick up an object so small and as easily movable as a six-inch bolt, therefore he made one. He took a short length of steel casing of a diameter small enough to slip into the well, and in one end of this he cut teeth several inches long. It was a labor that consumed time; he was still at it when Betty reappeared at the well about dark and advised him that his supper was waiting.

Mrs. Durham had returned from town. She was a woman of indeterminate age. Her eyes were pale; her nose was hooked like the beak of a hawk; her lips were thin and set in avaricious lines. Immediately upon meeting Furlong she wanted to know whether he believed his experiment would succeed, how he proposed to go about it, how long it would take, and the like. Ben was noncommittal, and he refused to raise her hopes. Before he had finished his meal he had convinced himself that the woman stood in some sort of dread of Tiller Maddox and that her fear of antagonizing him almost equaled her anxiety for Furlong's success. Ben wondered why. Another fact he discovered—Betty and her aunt were not on the best of terms.

After supper, by the light of a gasoline torch, Furlong resumed his work the while Maddox vainly tried, with the new device which his employer had brought out from town, to grapple that obstinate piece of steel a fifth of a mile beneath his feet. But it was blind work, monotonous work, dispiriting work; time after time the clumsy fishing tool was raised and lowered, but its jaws refused to seize the troublesome bolt. It was a job as hopeless and as baffling as trying to pick up a pin with a pair of fire tongs attached to a string.

The engineer of the rig watched Furlong's work with the interest of a fellow machinist, and of him the latter inquired finally:

"Say! How come Mr. Durham to get killed?"

"He was blown up. It was when the Planet Company was getting ready to put down that well on the northeast corner. Maddox was workin' for the company then—movin' the rig onto the ground. A powder wagon came by an' the driver stopped to ask his way. You've seen them trucks—six hundred odd quarts of nitroglycerine in square cans all set in felt-lined racks to keep 'em from jarring. I allus been scared of 'em, but them drivers pound their wagons

over these rough roads like it's so much molasses they got. Old man Durham went across to the road and give him directions—he stood there watchin' the wagon as it drove on. The driver was trottin' his hosses, an' when he crossed the railroad track it let go. Jar set it off. I s'pose. Tiller says he saw it all, but he don't remember hearin' a sound or feelin' a shock of any sort. All he seen was a big black cloud, an' when he looked for Old man Durham he wasn't there. The fence was gone, too."

"What happened to the driver?"

"What d'you reckon happened? All the trace they ever found of him or the outfit was part of a hoss's leg hangin' on a telegraph cross-arm about a hundred yards up the grade. There was a hole, thirty feet wide where the wagon had been and the railroad iron was corkscrewed for a quarter of a mile. They found quite a bit of Mr. Durham—enough to hold a funeral over."

"And Maddox wasn't scratched! That stuff certainly acts queer at times."

"They figured some air current was responsible. Kind of a Godsend for Tiller, wasn't it?"

"Not to be killed? Sure—"

"Now! To get in with the wider an' Betty. Lucky for them, too, that he took to lookin' out for 'em. If he makes this well they'll be movin' into one of them Dallas mansions with marble balustrades."

"Humph! He'll never make a well if he keeps droppin' hardware in it. In my country a driller that careless would lose his job."

"Tiller won't lose his job," the engineer asserted, positively. "He don't lose anything he goes after."

In the course of time Furlong finished cutting the end of his steel casing into a series of teeth, and these teeth he then bent slightly inward. This done, he attached the device to a tool and lowered it into the hole. Even Betty Durham and her aunt Mary, who looked on with growing suspense, understood now how he proposed to pick up that bolt. He had shaped those tapering teeth so that they resembled the curing fingers of a hand, and his delicate task was to drive the casing home against the steel-hard bottom of the well until those fingers closed, until he clirched them over the obstacle. It was a task less difficult than it sounds.

(Continued Next Week.)

TIMELY FARM QUESTIONS

Question: How can I increase egg production in my poultry flock?

Answer: Many poultrymen are getting higher production by feeding only a small amount of grain in the morning and the remainder at night. The morning grain is fed in a clean litter from four to six inches deep and consists of about one pound of grain for each 100 hens. The afternoon feeding is put in troughs. The practice of feeding grain at different intervals of the day, especially during the winter months, increases the activity of the birds, overcomes idleness, and indirectly increases feed consumption. The combination of these tends to give an increase in egg production.

Question: Where can I secure plans for building a modern dairy barn?

Answer: Plans for building dairy barns that have been approved by the dairy specialists at State College are mailed free upon request to the Agricultural Editor at State College. However, we suggest that you get in touch with your county farm agent who will be glad to recommend the proper plan and give other information in regard to the building. In requesting plans always specify the number of animals to be housed and whether a feed loft is desired. Plans for other farm buildings may also be had from the same address.

Boys and girls who are members of the Iredell 4-H clubs have been given health examinations by two registered nurses and will be examined again at the close of their club work next year.

Work Animals Need A Balanced Ration

For economy and efficiency on North Carolina farms, the horse and mule are hard to beat.

Good work animals supply a highly satisfactory form of pulling power for farm implements and machinery, and they utilize feed crops that can be grown at home.

But to get the best service out of work stock, care must be exercised to feed it properly, said Prof. R. H. Ruffner, head of the animal husbandry department at State College.

Corn, oats, and barley are about equal in feeding value, but corn is a little cheaper, usually, for feeding mature animals. Barley should be crushed or ground before feeding.

A great variety of hays are suitable for horse or mule feed. For each grower, the best type to feed is that grown on his own farm, Professor Ruffner said.

Among the hays and roughages fed with good results are: lespedeza, timothy, clover, corn stover, soybean, cowpea, alfalfa, and peanut.

When timothy and ear corn are fed, it is well to include a quart of wheat bran each day to balance the diet.

Animals at work need 2 to 2½ pounds of feed, dry roughage and concentrates combined, for each 100 pounds of live weight. A 1,000 pound mule should receive 10 pounds of hay and 10 pounds of grain.

However, if the hay or roughage contains a lot of weeds or coarse stems, the quantity fed should be increased. A good practice is to give the animals all the roughage they will eat without waste.

When animals have plenty of good hay or pasturage, and are not working, the grain feed may be cut in half.

Less soil erosion and more fertile acres are resulting from crop rotation systems adopted in Rutherford county.

Drinking Water Pumped To Jerusalem in Pipes 7 Volumes In Book Shelf 3 Inches Long

Jerusalem. — British authorities have solved Jerusalem's 2,000-year-old water problem by building a pipe line from the Ajaja river. Water will be pumped instead of flowing from mountain springs through aqueducts built by the Romans at the start of the Christian era.

The new scheme started November 1 and will bring water from the Ajaja river north of Jaffa at the rate of 3,000,000 gallons daily instead of the present 700,000 gallons furnished by other sources.

Water will cost 5 cents a cubic yard, just half the present rate. Of this amount 3 cents goes to the government to cover \$1,350,000 advanced for construction of the line.

Montreal. — J. S. Snasdell, Mon-book collector, believes he has the tiniest book shelf in the world. It is only three inches long, but it contains seven volumes.

Perfect in every way, the books contain several hundred pages each and type is so clear that they can be read with naked eye.

The "miniature library" contains an English dictionary, believed to be the smallest in the world, a book of English, Irish, and Scotch songs, complete with music and finely engraved illustrations, a volume of Burns poems, two volumes of extracts from world-famous philosophers and humorists, an English-French dictionary, and a copy of the Koran, printed in Arabic.

The volumes are less than an inch high and just three-quarters of an inch across.

Democrat Ads Pay

Camels don't get your Wind

I'M INTERESTED IN KEEPING FIT, SO I ALSO PREFER CAMELS. THE MILDEST CIGARETTE I EVER SMOKED

I'VE GOT TO STAY IN TOP CONDITION, SO I SMOKE CAMELS. CAMELS ARE SO MILD THEY DON'T GET YOUR WIND

SO MILD! YOU CAN SMOKE ALL YOU WANT

DICK SHELTON Champion Cowboy

BETTY GRIFFIN 'PHONE OPERATOR

CAMELS COSTLIER TOBACCOS

PASTIME THEATRE

BOONE, N. C.
"PLACE OF GOOD SHOWS"

Program for Week Dec. 9-14

Monday and Tuesday, Dec. 9-10
"So Red the Rose" with Margaret Sullivan and Randolph Scott

Wednesday, Dec. 11
"Coronado" with Jack Haley and Johnny Downs

Thursday, Dec. 12
"Here's to Romance" with Genevieve Tobin

Friday, Dec. 13
"Hands Across the Table" with Carole Lombard and Fred MacMurray

Saturday, Dec. 14
"The Big Caliber" with Bob Steele

Special Bargain Matinee, 10c, 15c

Night Shows, 10c and 25c.
MATINEES AT 2:30 & 4:00
NIGHT SHOWS, 7:15 & 8:45

How Calotabs Help Nature To Throw-Off a Bad Cold

Millions have found in Calotabs a most valuable aid in the treatment of colds. They take one or two tablets the first night and repeat the third or fifth night if needed.

How do Calotabs help Nature throw off a cold? First, Calotabs is one of the most thorough and dependable of all intestinal eliminants, thus cleansing the intestinal tract of the germ-laden mucus and toxins.

Second, Calotabs are diuretic to the kidneys, promoting the elimination of cold poisons from the system. Thus Calotabs serve the double purpose of a purgative and diuretic, both of which are needed in the treatment of colds.

Calotabs are quite economical; only twenty-five cents for the family package, ten cents for the trial package. (Adv.)

METAL TUBES and the STEWART-WARNER Ferrodyne Radio

CONQUER DISTANCE • NOISE • INTERFERENCE

MODEL 1365

WARNING! FOR EQUAL PERFORMANCE METAL TUBES ARE NOT INTERCHANGEABLE WITH GLASS TUBES—DO NOT ACCEPT A COMPROMISE!

SPECIAL EASY TERMS

You have never seen anything like the sensational new Ferrodyne Radio. You have never heard anything like it. Twin development with metal tubes, this set establishes the standard of modern radio performance. It spans oceans and continents with equal ease, giving a quality of reception you had never dreamed possible. Come in and ask for demonstration today.

Farmers Hardware and Supply Company

IN WINTER'S CHILL JUST AS IN SUMMER'S HEAT ESSO MOTOR OIL TOPS 'EM ALL IN LOW CONSUMPTION AND ENGINE PROTECTION!

BUY AT THE ESSO SIGN

THE SIGN OF **Happy Motoring!**