

each) by a master story-teller. . . . They're Rex Beach at his best.

Ben Furlong, a good footing. oung but practical oil man driller from the Pennsylvania field, drifted into the Texas oil country, broke and looking for work. Finalhe fetched up at the Durham home where live an elderly aunt, shortly widowed by the explosion of a powder wagon, and her neice, pretty Betty Durham Perhaps because of his smile, Betty cooks some food for Ben and while he eats he learns the aunt, in town n business, has an oil man, Tiller Maddox, sinking an oil well for her . . . A short 6 inch bolt worked loose from the rigging and is in the bottom of the well. Work has been suspended for days as the crew "fish" for the bolt and operating funds dwindle away . . Fur-long offers to give a hand, but Maddox objects . Betty insists and overrules Maddox so Furiong fashions a tool which he has just lowered into the well, hoping to fish out the bolt . . On the order of Betty's aunt, Furlong is given a job. . . . Maddox shows his dislike for the new hand, especially because Ben and Betty are so friendly. While the two are in town shopping one evening, Maddox calls upon the aunt, demanding she help his case with Betty or there will be no well ... NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY.

THIRD INSTALMENT

"Did you drop that bolt in the well?" Mrs. Duham bleated, in dis-

"I ain't savin' I did or I didn't But remember, if this well ain't a producer, you're blowed up, and it ain't a-goin' to produce till there's a Mrs. a-goin' to produce till there's a Mrs.

Tiller Maddox to see it and to get her share! We bargained that out iong ago. Yes, an' I ain't afraid of you goin' back on our deal, either.

You don't dast."

Ben passed his arm around the slim girlish figure, and drew it to him. "That'll be about all for you!"
He kissed the cheek next to his and Betty hungrily pressed her face closer. "Good thing you around any hour see." you goin' back on our deal, either. You don't dast."

"I--I'll try again." "You better do more n try. I'll give dollars!"
you just one more chance. If she "You don't come across, I want you to go visit your folks Saturday evenin', an' him.
leave her here. Understand?"

at the speaker, then she said:

Tiller Maddox, you're a dirty Say! I've got all the back talk I

Not until Ben and Betty had fin-

the trouble he had had with Maddox her.

course he'll fire me the first chance he gets," Furlong predicted. "Did he?" "He talke

"Oh, Ben! Why did you do it?"

"Oh, Ben! Why did you do it?"

"The thinker a "The

She doesn't trust him any more than

Say! What has he got on her?" The girl did not look up from her driving. She fetched a deep breath as she said: "I'd dearly love to know. There's semething queer about it . Uncle Joe was a sweet, easy-going man and she rode him with a Spanish bit. She never would have let him take me in, when my folks died, only I did all the work. But he sure loved me. When the oil excitement came they rowed and fought for months. When ever he got an offer she claimed he was trying to give the farm away and threatened to go to law. I fold you about that. He stood it as long as he could; then he up and announced that I'd been more of a daughter to him than she u been a wife and he aimed to give most of his money to me anyhow, and cared a lot for you and—and I want then he made that lease with the comes in this farm" be worth— I comes in this farm" be worth— I comes in this farm. Planet people. That's how Maddox came. I think she'd have poisoned me, if she dared, after what uncle said. When he was killed I supposed, of course, she'd throw me out, but she didn't. No use to do it, I suppose, inasmuch as he hadn't left any writing. As a matter of fact, she was better to me than she'd ever been

times-Wonder what?"

"If he didn't tell Tiller something. Something that makes her scared of him. Sometimes she acts like it's only because of him that she's nice to me.
. . I don't know what I'd do if she sent me away. I haven't got a red

That's what makes me wonder some-

There isn't a living soul I could-"

ser. 'Good thing you aren't an heir-ess—and me with less than a hundred

"You behave yourself, or you'll wreck this car," the girl warned

ave her here. Understand?"

Waddox carried out his intention.

He discharged Furlong on Friday night, explaining that the well was down, and the next morning Ben broke the news to his sweetheart. Betty was indignant. She was for can stand for one day. You heard appealing to her aunt, but he refused me. You do like I tell you, an' you to permit her. He promised to let her needn't to get back from your visit hear from him in a day or so.

hear from him in a day or so.

Betty's face was flushed, her eyes
were shining, when she entered the
house after he was gone. She was
house after he was gone was my own kin.

"Rats! said the girl.

The town lay hot and gasping unished their shopping and were on house after he was gone. She was their way home did he tell her about surprise to find her aunt awaiting

that morning.
"He let on he was fooling, but of when you was in town," Mrs. Dur-"Tiller came over the other night

"He talked a lot about you. Til-

ler's a fine man, dearie-"
Belty broke out irritably: "Don't

"Aunt Mary won't let him fire you e doesn't trust him any more than lo."

suppose? But what's he got? Nothing. Not even a job. Now Tiller wants to marry you and you better do

"You know very well I'll do nothing of the sort."

"Maybe you won't and maybe you his way around the house, will." Mrs. Durham's lips set themselves in lines of inflexibility. "If you got a smitch of sense you will or d'you want to be rich?"

clared the girl. "The big, black, grea- fied voice.

"Now don't fly off the handle till

"I've earned my keep ever since I came. You'd have paid more for a hired girl than I cost."

hired girl than I cost."

"Oh, hush up and let me finish. We allus fight like this. Your Uncle Joe cared a lot for you and—and I want to respect his wishes. When that well to respect his wishes. When that well the louse just ahead of him. don't know what. Anyhow, my heart's set on seeing you get a good home and have everything. How'd you like to live in a fine house in Dallas?"
"What alls you? Are you losing your mind, Aunt Mary?"

"And you can have 'em if you marry Tiller. Marry Furlong and you'll spend your life over a cook

"How can Tiller give me things like that?"

"I'll give 'em to you."

After a moment Betty inquired, uriously, "How much will you give?" It was Mrs. Duham's time to hesi-tate, her words came with an ef-fort. "I don't know mebbe a quarter interest.'

"Humph!" The exciamation was one of scorn.

"There's gratitude for you! Mebbe if it's a real big well I'd do better. You-you've got to do it, Betty!" the widow cried in distraction, "If you don't he'll ruin everything. He said so. If that well don't come in the

farm ain't worth "
"So! That's why you're so generous. Now you listen to me. I wouldu't marry Tiller Maddox, not for all
the oil in Texas, not if it was to save

"Wait! Don't make up your mind in a hurry. I—I'm going over to Cous-in Anna's—"

When? What for?"

"Right after dinner. You think it over while I'm gone, dearle. I feet like you was my own kin. I want to

of doors, for nothing grew in the streets, not even grass; its cinder yards, its board walls and iron roofs radiated waves of heat like those from a stove.

Late in the afternoon Ben Furlong entered the skating rink, paid his admission at the turnstile, and went through. Here, at least, was a place

to sit down out of the sun.
Out of the whirling throng upon
the floor sat a figure; it was Ben's friend, the engineer of the Maddox rig. He rolled up to the bench where Furlong sat and collapsed upon it.
"Whew! It's hard work havin' a

good time in this town," he panted. Landed a job yet?"

"I've got some prospects lined up. What's the matter? You fired, too?" | "Naw! Maddox laid us off for the day. Miz' Durham brought us in." 'Did Betty come with her?" Ben

eagerly inquired. The engineer shook his head; a grin spread over his face. "Say! You know how scared Tiller is of nitroglycer-ine? When we left he was hidin' out in the brush like a quail. The pow-der wagon came an he took it on the

"Powder wagon? What's a powder wagon doing there?" Ben inquired.
"Why, he aims to shoot the well. "Why, he aims to shoot the well. He got a permit an' the stuff's on the ground, ready for the men."
"He's crazy if he shoots that well," Furlong declared. "What's he thinking acout?"

Furlong declared. "What's he think-ing acout?"

"So I told him. Leave her alone an' she'll blow herself in, I says to him. She's coughin' now, an' I bet him. She's coughin now, an as many wells has been ruined by that as many wells has been ruined by that

'I'm going to see Mrs. Durham." Ben rose, but the other explained: "She's gone away over Sunday to visit her kinfolks."

"Who's looking out for Betty?

"I dunno, Tiller, I reckon."
Furlong frowned. For a while he

Conditons all over the oil fields, as he well knew, were unsettled, and he did not relish the thought of Betty out there alone in that farmhouse fact the but even more disturbing was the fact that Maddox proposed to shoot the Durham well. What ailed the man?

After some indecison Ben decided o warn Betty. It was none of his to warn Betty. It was none of his business, to be sure, but a word from her might induce the aunt to go her might induce the authorise slowly and perhaps save the cost of the well. It would be criminal to leave her in ignorance of the risks she ran. He tried to hire a car to run him back out to the farm, but what

were for hire were out, and it was some time before he could disin that direction.

was considerably after aark when Furlong left Opportunity; but he had to walk the last three miles, so it was late bedtime when he finalarrived at the Durham home-

Evidently Betty was asleep; at any rate, the farmhouse windows were dark and Ben wondered how he could best awaken her without causing alarm. Visitors in the country at his time of night were not common He decided to call softly from outside her window, so he closed the gate quietly behind him and made

turned the corner of the building, for you got a smitch of sense you will the kitchen door was open. A mo-D'you want to be poor all your life mentary panic swept over him: then he drew a breath of relief, for at "I tell you I won't! I won't!" de- that moment he heard the girl's muf-

"Who's there?" she cried.

He opened his lips to speak reas-I'm through I've been pretty good to suringly, but the sound died in his you—" heard a man's voice, then a stir, a movement. This was followed by a

Incredible as it seemed, he had arrived barely in time.

"Betty!" he yelled, "Betty!"
That throaty clamor from the girl's room, meanwhile, continued.
There were hasty movements, the sounds of a struggle.

Furlong had never been inside the front part of the house, but its plan was simple and he was guided by those stricks of targets. those shricks of terror. The door to Betty's room was closed, but it opencd when he found the knob. He glimpsed the dim square of a window opposite and silhouetted against it he saw the girl herself, then blackness engulfed him.

The next he knew Betty Durham was holding his head in her lap and splashing water into his face. struck him as queer that the lamp be burning when only the should fraction of an instant before all had

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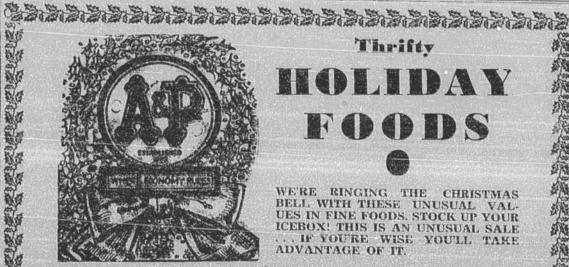
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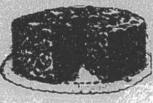
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