



Second Instalment

Gloria regained control of herself with an effort and her flower-like face broke into a smile. "I'll be patient. Only don't let anything happen."

As he left the house, Donald told himself with a pang that he had a sick girl on his hands. Gloria was sicker than she had permitted him to realize and it had taken this brief flicker of animation at the prospect of going home to show him just how weak she really was. She was fragile—bloodless—the life and the laughter had gone out of her. As a matter of fact, he had watched it go day by day for months and he had tried vainly to check it, but never before had he appreciated to what extent she had failed. If anything should happen to her—Don closed his eyes and refused to face such a thought. Only ten days more, then they would go north to those green fields and cool waters of which she was forever wistfully speaking. Ten days wasn't long.

This certainly was not a woman's country. Least of all was it a country for a lovey, high-bred creature like Gloria. But, Don reflected, it had been this or nothing. Gloria had been willing, nay eager, to marry him, even against her family's advice, and even though it had meant exile. Nor had she once complained, at least not until today when it was all over and she could voice her hatred of this life without hurting him. That was like her, to fade away, if need be, by inches at his side, without complaint.

One thing was sure—without Gloria's love to strengthen him he would never have had the courage and the pertinacity to win his fight against the desert. The mere fact that his own money and that of his friends was sunk in the El Centro field would not have been sufficient to keep him here. Not by any means. But with a wife like Gloria, a man couldn't quit; he couldn't tolerate failure of any sort.

If he and Gloria had been able to get away once in a while it would not have been so bad, but money from the wells which he had somehow managed to drill had gone into new equipment, into storage tanks, tank cars, drilling rigs, leases, and the like; for in order to live at all in this business it had been necessary to expand, and as a result production had not quite kept pace with expenditures. It had been the old, heart-breaking story of most so-called successful oil enterprises—just enough encouragement to render it impossible to let go. But the company had real holdings now, and with the Homestake making five thousand barrels a day, yes, or even one-half that, it would be out of the red in no time, and its stock would be worth a lot. It would be worth so much that Gloria could well afford to give her family the laugh. Something like a million dollars, that's what it would mean to them. And Homestake couldn't raise. El Centro wasn't that kind of a pool. Once inside the limits, a man was as safe as if his money were in the Bank of England.

Ten days more, then New York with its shops and its lights and its theaters. He'd show Gloria that he wasn't merely a machine eternally thinking, talking, dreaming, living oil. He'd prove that he was the wisest, the most extravagant, the most devoted lover the world had ever seen. The things he would buy for her—the love, the tenderness he'd shower upon her! He'd repay her for the faith and for the courage she had shown. Ten days more!

Gloria ate but little supper that night. She attributed her lack of appetite to excitement, to the anticipation of leaving, but as a matter of truth, Francesca, the one servant they could afford, had been more than usually shiftless that afternoon and the young wife herself had been forced to prepare the meal. Any exertion of late left her upon the ragged edge of utter collapse.

Donald's sympathetic remonstrance was interrupted by old Pedro, the water man. Pedro hailed his groaning truck outside the house and called something in Spanish that took Fisk away from the table and out into the road. Gloria had mastered only a few words of the language—this climate robbed women of energy both physical and mental—hence she could not understand what was being said. When Don returned, he forestalled her anxious query by announcing: "McKay's in some sort of trouble and I've got to run out there again. Don't worry—it's nothing much."

"What kind of trouble?" Gloria's tired face was suddenly drawn with apprehension.

"Some kind of a fishing job—Pedro didn't know just what." Fisk came around the table and kissed his wife. "Don't fret, and don't wait up for me. You know how long everything takes around a well. I may not get it fixed before morning." He smiled reassuringly and playfully pinched her ear. "Can't afford to risk any delay for the sake of a little sleep, eh?"

With sinking heart Gloria watched him go, for there had been something in his voice that belied his

cheerful words. This hateful oil business! Its hazards were never ending; there was a malignant genius in the wells that took delight in wrecking human plans and killing high hopes, however well founded.

Don returned for breakfast, hot and tired and dirty; he began guffing: "I was afraid of McKay! He dropped a tool in the hole."

"What does that mean?" "He didn't set up his joint properly, I presume. Anyhow, it means we've got to fish it out."

"Is that a—long job?" "Not necessarily; depends on how the stem is cocked and things like that. We're going to take a picture of it—you know, lower a soap mold and take an impression. While they're doing that I'm going to get a few hours' sleep—I haven't been off my feet all night. Lord, it's hot!"

Fisk lay on his bed all that morning, and he perspired in his sleep. Meanwhile his wife went on with her packing and her unpacking. There was indeed very little to get ready and it was a foolish waste of effort, but she had to do something with her hands and this occupation gave her the same pleasure she had derived from folding and unfolding her doll's clothes for imaginary journeys. She had loved to play that game when she was a tiny girl and she was becoming very childish of late.

Don left again during the most cruel heat of the afternoon; he returned about midnight and Gloria gathered from what he told her that these fishing jobs were tedious at best and that the crew was getting along as well as could be expected. For two days his nightly report was the same. Had the accident occurred earlier, he would have proceeded upon failure to grapple the troublesome bit stem, to sidetrack the obstruction, so he explained. In other words he would have drilled past it, by allowing the second bit to be deflected by the first. The lost tool was in reality a forty-foot steel shaft standing in the bottom of the hole, and it weighed many hundreds of pounds. Inasmuch as it was tipped so that its upper end rested against the side of the well, it was not easy to get hold of it. This new drilling would have resulted in a crooked hole fifty or sixty feet deep and would have left the obstructing tool standing upon a shelf of rock. By exploding a small shot a few feet below this shelf the lost bit could have been dropped into the pocket—sidetracked—after which the old shaft could have been carried on.

But Fisk declared he was afraid to attempt this maneuver so close to the structure. Other oil men had warned him against doing so. Twice something of the sort had been tried in the El Centro field and in each instance a ruined well had resulted. The shaft had scored the rock—due perhaps to some peculiar characteristics of the formation. Again he told his wife not to worry; new fishing tools were on the way up from the coast; McKay might have the obstruction out before they arrived—in fact, he might get hold of that bit stem at any moment. That was the way with fishing jobs.

Don maintained this hopeful attitude; in his wife's presence he continued to be cheery, but out at the Homestake, where he spent twenty out of every twenty-four hours, he was anything but optimistic. Nor was he a pleasant person to get along with. Under ordinary circumstances he would have refused to be unduly perturbed by the oil game and grappling blindly for a bit stem in the bottom of a steel-lined shaft a quarter of a mile deep is slow work at best. Sometimes it takes weeks.

But circumstances were not ordinary. Gloria's heart was set on catching that boat, the days were slipping past, and Don could no longer blind himself to the truth that she was seriously ill and ought to go. And yet there was nobody here he could send with her, nor could he leave until the well was in. The directors wouldn't stand for that, even if he could bring himself to do such a thing. It so happened—as it usually does happen—that no time in the entire history of the company's operations could have been more unpropitious than the present for a mishap such as this. The treasury was low, there were bank loans soon to be met; nothing less than big new "production" could avert a serious crisis. If he lost the Homestake, the company was wrecked.

Fisk drove his men without mercy, but it was maddening futile work, this blind grappling, this interminable experimenting with one device after another. He became irritable and jumpy; his hands shook when he wiped the stinging sweat out of his eyes; he cursed the desert aloud when its heat rendered the work doubly hard. Working on that derelict floor was like working upon a bed of coals. Every piece of metal that flesh fell upon was hot enough to blister; the state water that he and his men swilled down their throats was tepid, and even in their sleep they were thirsty.

Fisk told his wife grimly one day that they could not make the boat. She took the announcement much as

she would have taken a blow in the face. It left her pallid and stricken with something infinitely worse than pain. She crept away, and a few minutes later he found her weeping. She made no sound, there was no expression of grief upon her face, but tears of utter exhaustion were coursing down her cheeks.

"Honey! Honey girl!" her husband cried in agony. "Don't take it like that!"

She tried to smile. "I'm so tired, Don! I've been planning so. Oh, Don, I haven't strength left to stand another disappointment!"

"We'll catch the next boat, sure." "I've been thinking so much about the green grass and the cool waters! I'm so hot—so tired!"

Fisk nodded; his face was working. "I know. But I can't leave. I can't—without throwing away everything we've fought for. The company will go to smash—you understand! I'd chuck it all if it were mine, but the crowd relies on me. They'd never forgive me. I'd be a quitter!"

"I suppose so." Gloria tried unsuccessfully to check the tears. "My people, too! We wouldn't have our triumph, would we? You mustn't mind me. I'm such a baby! I'll be all right as soon as I get home."

Day after day the work at the well went on. Many times Fisk was tempted to blast, but the men talked him out of the idea.

Concluded Next Week

OBITUARY

This in remembrance of our beloved brother, A. W. Harmon, was born Nov. 19, 1866 and departed this life Oct. 22, 1935.

Was married to Nancy Brewer and to this union was born six children, two of which departed this life before their father. Survived by the widow and four children, Stanford, Monroe, Virgil, and daughter, Minnie. Bro. Harmon professed faith in Christ and joined Brushy Fork Baptist Church and later moved his membership to Mt. Lebanon Church. Bro. Harmon loved his church and always filled his seat as much as possible. A vacant seat which we can see at church and a vacant chair at home. We remember at church on one occasion the instructions and the food he stowed for the hungry souls. His death is our loss but heaven's gain. Bro. Harmon's plea was that his children turn from their ways and live a life where we can be united in a home where partings will be no more. At death, we believe, that he said farewell, children; weep not for me. So blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth, yea, saith the Spirit; that they may rest from their labours and their works do follow them.

Bro. Harmon is at rest as we will all do, trust his body goes back to mother dust. Dust thou art and from dust we came. He rests in heaven where angels do sing.

J. N. MINTON, REV. J. R. SHORES, RONDA EARP, Committee.

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Boone High Life

Contributed By Boone High School Journalism Club

What the Grads Are Doing John H. Furthing was accepted for service in the U. S. Marine Corps on January 25.

Fred Michael is in Hawaii training in the military squad.

Hoy Gragg is in Hawaii in the U. S. Navy.

Misses Jean and June Bush are in school at the University of North Carolina.

Wanda Cook is now being called Mrs. Hartley. Boy, boy, did that high school English do her good! (She learned how to say "I do" correctly.)

Austin Moody, H. B. Perry Jr., Edward Lovell, Thomas B. Moore, Olen Cooke, Bruce Farthing, Ward Carroll, Geneva Osborne, Milton Mast, Daisy Austin, Thelma Bond, Virginia South, Grant Ashley, and others are students at good old Appalachian State.

The Rambler

Hello everybody! No, it isn't the songbird of the South—it's just your old B. H. S. rambler, bringing to you the latest gossip from Boone High. Flash—Robert Davis is reported to be very fond of little red-headed girls. Ask him about the one from M. C. Flash—Ray Hampton says "If you want your shoes repaired just right, bring them to 'me' at the Daniel Boone Shoe Shop." He maintains that his firm "dyes for the ladies." Flash—If you want to get up into big figures just try to count the coats Eileen Bryant wears every day during the cold weather. Flash—During this terrible weather I've seen more gaudy, flashy scarfs than ever before, and I usually see them tied around folks' heads. It makes me think the good of Puritan styles are coming back into fashion. Flash—In my opinion our school paper is getting better and better. What do you think? Flash—Mrs. Pyrite is putting her knowledge of popular songs into practice, everyday conversation. When asked why she

she answered "Well, you see, I'm no longer 'footloose and fancy-free.'" Flash—I think one of our Freshmen girls, Daisy Shores, bears a striking likeness to that child actress, Edith Fellows. Did you see her with Claudette Colbert in "She Married Her Boss?" Flash—While I'm talking about the resemblance stuff, have you ever noticed how Basil Houck's voice sounds just like Abner Peabody's of good ol' Pineridge? Flash—Er—er, oh, nothing. I can't think of anything else just now in the way of dirt. And so I'll just say "thanks for listening." And goodbye, folks.

THE RAMBLER

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