

Rex Beach writes: POWDER

Final Instalment

FINAL INSTALMENT
Mechanically Ben made an effort to rise, but could not manage it.

"Must have hit on my head," he mumbled thickly, and raised groping fingers. Then he sat up. He knew now that he had not fallen into a pit.

"Where are they? What's happened?"

Betty was sobbing wildly; her hair hung in a cascade about her shoulders; she was clad only in her nightdress, and it was soaked with the water she had poured over Ben to revive him.

Besides the open door to the hall lay the wreck of a chair; two of its legs were splintered, broken off; Ben realized more clearly now what it was that had crashed down upon his head. With an effort he scrambled dizzily to his feet. Water was trickling into his eyes and blinding him; he brushed it away, then discovered, to his great surprise, that it was not water at all, but blood, his own blood. His head felt twice its normal size; his brain did not function clearly and his limbs refused to obey him.

Betty's voice came to him as if from a long distance; she was telling him something, trying to make him understand that they were alone in the house and that their assailant had fled. When this became plain to Furlong, he sat down.

It was some time before the girl succeeded in stanching that flow of blood wound, for she was scarcely in condition to render help to anybody. By the time her task was completed Ben had managed to get a pretty clear idea of what had happened. She had been awakened by a sound and had realized that somebody was in her room; she had uttered a frightened challenge, only to feel groping hands upon her, to find herself in the grasp of some unseen person. She retained no very clear recollection of anything after that; the rest was a hideous nightmare. Not until the miscreant had bolted out of the house and she had finally managed somehow to strike a light was she made aware of the reason for his flight. Then she had stumbled over Ben and had realized that it was his voice she had heard calling to her, that it was the sound of his coming that had interrupted the attack. His plight had done a good deal to bring her back to herself but now she threatened to again abandon her self-control.

Furlong checked this by saying: "Betty Durham! You've got nothing on but your nightie!"

It was some time later when the girl emerged from her room, dressed after a fashion, to find her delivered waiting in the kitchen with a scowl upon his face.

"You got a gun?" he inquired, harshly.

"No, Ben. Why?"

"I'm going to kill Maddox."

For a moment Betty stared at the speaker; with shaking fingers she plucked at her dress. It was in a thin, reedy voice that she said: "It wasn't Maddox."

"How do you know?"

"Oh, I know! It wasn't Maddox."

"Are you sure?" The girl nodded, and Ben bowed his throbbing head in his hands. "I'm glad," he groaned. "Providence certainly brought me back. It wouldn't happen that way once in a thousand times. Whoever it was, I'll find him."

Both the man and the girl were in wretched condition. The rest of the night they sat together, watching the clock and listening for a possible return of the marauder, waiting for the day to break.

It was shortly after they had finished breakfast that Furlong was surprised to discover signs of activity, movements going on at the well which caused him to stare fixedly, then to announce, incredulously:

"Say! I believe Maddox is fixing to shoot the well!"

Betty took her place at his side. "Why—he can't! He doesn't! The powder men won't be here till tomorrow."

"All the same, he's doing something queer. See those cans—those shiny things?"

"You couldn't hire Tiller to touch nitrolycerine. He's scared of it."

Ben uttered an oath. "I tell you he's filling those cartridges. He's crazy! You've got to stop him!"

Betty turned white; she shook her head. "I won't go near the place. It's—it's Aunt Mary's well."

"Then I'll stop him. Why, it's ten to one he'll sear the rock, ruin the whole job and—Darned if I don't believe he's trying to do that very thing!"

Furlong started for the door, but Betty clung to him. When he pushed on past her she followed him. Together they hurried across the field and took the path through

frantic tones of appeal: "Let him go, Ben. He knows what he's doing. You've got no right stopping him. You'll just make trouble—"

"It's none of my business," the latter agreed, impatiently, "but agreed, impatiently, 'but there's something crooked—' He ceased speaking then he seized Betty and whirled her around with the sharp command, 'Run! Get back!'"

They were still perhaps a hundred yards from the well, but Furlong's practiced eye had seen something that suddenly raised the hair upon his head. That rope from which was suspended the heavy charge of liquid death no longer hung vertically, it no longer ran over the block and into the casing; instead it was falling in loops about Maddox. It was coming up out of the well!

Maddox himself was alive to what had happened. That which he most greatly feared had come upon him, and he also turned to flee. But the platform was slippery or else he tripped over the rope and fell. The others heard his cry of terror. He quickly regained his feet, but to Furlong it seemed as if his movements thereafter were maddeningly slow and deliberate.

The engineer's apprehensions had been well grounded. Once again gas had been released far down in the earth, and now, like breath forced from the lungs of some tortured giant, it rose, propelling the smoothly fitting cart-



He seized Betty, whirled her around and yelled, "Run! Get back!"

the mesquite. As they went the girl continued to implore him not to interfere.

Halfway to the drilling camp they met the engineer hastening towards the farmhouse, and the latter announced, breathlessly: "Tiller's gone plumb off his nut! He's going to shoot the well himself. You better stay clear."

Furlong dashed past the speaker and emerged from the shelter of the bushes in time to see Maddox gingerly swing a long, cylindrical tin over the well mouth and guide it into the opening. A new manilla rope had been run through a block on the derrick, and with this he lowered the charge.

Ben pelted at him; he waved his arms. Maddox glanced over his shoulder, then let the line slide smoothly through his hands.

"Take my tip an' don't go too close," the engineer shouted. "He ain't no powder man an' that well's makin' gas. She blows off every few minutes."

Betty seconded this warning in

goin' in to town."

"Right: 'I'll stay here until Mrs. Durham gets back.'"

"Here's all of Tiller's stuff that we could find. I reckon you better look after it."

"Anything besides clothes?" "Not much. A few letters an' things we found in his bunk. Miz' Durham can keep 'em in case he's got relatives. There's one suit of clothes that would fit me. No use to throw 'em away. Say! It's funny how scared he was of powder. It musta been a hunch."

Shortly after the enigmist had left, Ben came to Betty with a queer light in his eyes. In his hand he held a soiled sheet of foolscap paper.

"Feel strong enough to stand another explosion?" he inquired with an effort to suppress his agitation. "Well, the queerest thing—"

This farm doesn't belong to your aunt Mary, after all; it belongs to some breathless query, but Ben you!" The girl gasped; she voiced ran on: "Your uncle Joe left it to you, just as he promised. He left everything to you, except a thousand dollars to her. This is his will and Maddox had it. I guess it's a good will, even though your uncle wrote it himself. Anyhow it's witnessed by two people—Maddox and another. From the date I figure it must have been signed just a day or so before he was killed."

"Where did it come from? How did Maddox—?" "I've figured that out, too. Mr. Durham must have had it in his pocket when Maddox found him. That would explain everything—how he made your aunt do just what he wanted and why she didn't dare to fire him."

"That's why she said I'd have to marry him! That's why—Oh, Ben! Betty rose suddenly and clutched Furlong. I knew she was a mean, selfish old thing, but I never thought she was so wicked. This oil is a curse to poor people. I hate it!"

"Why, Betty!" Furlong exclaimed. "You're the wicked one to quarrel—"

"She's the only kin I've got left and I tried my best to love her. But she was so greedy for quick money that nothing mattered. Maddox, too! It made beasts of them. I almost wish we'd never heard of oil." After a moment the speaker continued, more quietly: "I lied to you last night. It was Tiller who came here."

Furlong's body stiffened, he breathed an oath, then he muttered: "I thought so. Why didn't you tell me?"

"What's more, she knew he was coming! They arranged it. She as good as sent him! That's how he got the kitchen key."

This announcement the man greeted with the growl of an animal. He began to pace about the room; his face had grown black and threatening; his fingers were

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working as he stormed:

"Wait! Wait till she gets back here!"

"You can't lay your hands on a woman—"

"Can't I?" he breathed. Betty shook her head; a moment, then a new expression slowly crept into her eyes; her chin set itself firmly. "No!" she declared. "But you can lay 'em on her trunk and drag it out here where I can pack it."

"I sure can," Ben agreed. "And what's more, when you get it packed I can lug it out to the gate where it will be nice and handy for her." As he finished speaking his frown disappeared; it was replaced by a grin and he said: "Say, Betty! What'd you think? I'm going to marry an heiress, after all."

THE END

The Woman's Angle

(By Nancy Hart)

New in the market are baby clothes in slip-on styles that are claimed to save 48 per cent time in dressing the infant.

And rubber panties—laytex, really—for the baby. They'll stretch to nine times their normal size without damage.

And a new style diaper that is form fitting, avoids the use of pins, and ties gently about the baby's waist. They're at Chicago's merchandise mart.

When you're preparing hamburger steak, frequently so delicious, and yet inexpensive, add half a cup of milk to a pound of meat and assure yourself your cakes will be juicy. Cook one side and season. Turn and season while cooking instead of mixing the seasoning beforehand. It makes a difference.

Ella Gardner of the Agriculture Department's extension service after travelling far and wide throughout the country, maintains that farm women are not only as well dressed, as cultured and as poised as city women, but better informed on the political situation and current events. Her extension work lies principally in the field of recreational pursuits.

In the days when you and I were very, very young, there was usually a "Sunday best" outfit in the closet on week days, and we wore older shoes and darned stockings to school... That's changed considerably, these days, and I rather wonder what lessons our children are getting that will take the place of that "ace in the hole" feeling of conservatism? That something set aside for a rainy day?

Rings to match bracelets and clips in the new catkin jewelry is a feature of the winter costume jewelry line.

If, when your soup is about ready to serve it seems too salty, add from half a cup to a whole cup of raw sliced potatoes to the soup, and let it stand ten to fifteen minutes. Remove the potatoes which absorb the saltiness and serve.

QUEER THINGS THAT HAPPEN TO SLEEPWALKERS

An interesting article which discloses the strange freaks of somnambulists. One of the illustrated articles in the American Weekly, the big magazine which comes every Sunday with the BALTIMORE AMERICAN. Your newsboy or newsdealer has your copy.

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TIMELY FARM QUESTIONS ANSWERED AT STATE COLLEGE

Q. What minerals do brood sows need during the gestation period?

A. A satisfactory mineral mixture can be made by thoroughly mixing 10 pounds of acid phosphate, 10 pounds of hardwood ashes or ground limestone, and two pounds of common salt. The animals should have access to this mixture at all times. Proper care and feed for the animals during this period is also necessary for best results and this information is given in Extension Circular 151, copies of which may be had free upon application to the Agricultural Editor of State College.

Q. How long does it take to cure sweet potatoes and what should be the average temperature of the house?

A. It usually takes about two weeks for proper curing with the temperature maintained at 80 to 85 degrees. Plenty of ventilation, however, must be given during the curing in order to drive off all moisture. Watch the potatoes carefully and when the buds show a tendency to sprout and the skin feels "velvety" the curing is completed. After curing, allow the temperature to drop to about 50 degrees F. and keep it as close to that mark as possible while the potatoes are kept in storage.

Q. What size lights must I put in my poultry house for artificial lighting?

A. This depends upon the size of the house, but two 40-watt bulbs for each 400 square feet of floor space gives the most satisfactory results. The bulbs should be placed in the center of the house ten feet apart and six feet above the floor. To prevent lighting the entire house, a reflector 16 inches

in diameter and four inches deep should be used with each light bulb.

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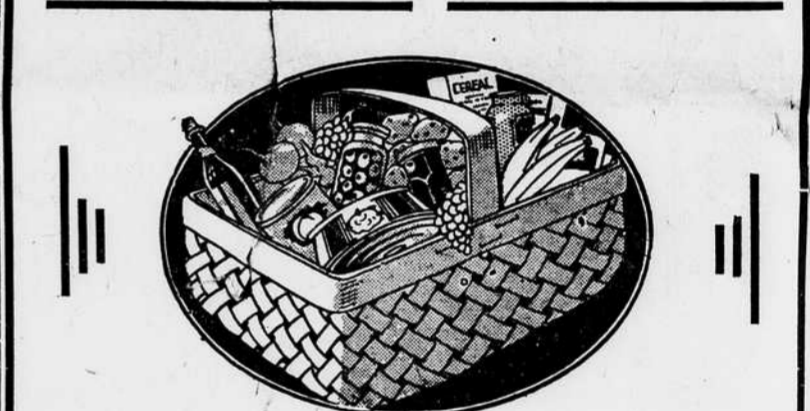
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