

Rex Beach writes: POWDER

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FINAL INSTALLMENT

Mechanically Bea 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.

Beside 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 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 deliverer 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, goings-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 dassent! 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 nitroglycerine. 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—Dammed 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

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 cartridge of nitroglycerine ahead of it as a pea is propelled out of a pea-shooter. It was a phenomenon by no means unusual in a well as unstable in its balance of forces as this one. In fact, under like conditions none but a madman would have dared to risk Maddox's maneuver.

The latter had not put fifty feet behind him when up out of the well mouth shot the gleaming tin cylinder. Directly above and in its path hung the massive forty-foot steel bit suspended from its wire



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

through 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 goin' 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 manila rope had been run through a block on the derrick, and with this he lowered the charge.

Ben yelled 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 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 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.

cable.

What happened next the observers were never able to agree upon, but the world dissolved into an inferno of smoke and flame and the suddenness of it rocked the sky, upheaved the earth. The two came together with a cataclysmic roar. Furlong and Betty Durham were tossed headlong, flung down like straws. When they scrambled to their feet, dazed, shaken, terrified, it was to find themselves enveloped in a mighty dust cloud. The eighty-foot tower of heavy timbers was gone; in an instant it had utterly vanished. Where it had stood was a shallow, smoking crater. Splinters of planking, debris of every sort, were scattered far and wide; particles of earth and gravel were raining from the heavens with the sound of a heavily hailstorm; nothing in the neighborhood of the well remained except the boiler and engine, and the former lay upon its side. Even the bushes had been whipped out, uprooted, shaved off as by a sweeping scythe.

That afternoon Furlong's friend, the engineer, came over to the farmhouse with a considerable bundle in his arms.

"How's Betty?" he inquired.

"She's all right, but pretty well bruised, of course."

"Well, I guess there's nothing more us boys can do, so we're 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 engineer 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 you!" The girl gasped; she voiced some breathless query, but Ben 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 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)

MORE PROFIT SEEN IN HOGS

Swine Specialist Advises Farmers To Grow More Pork

With the current trend of pork prices, North Carolina farmers are again finding a profitable source of income in the production of hogs.

Growers raising hogs for market should breed their sows about November 1 and May 1 each year, said W. W. Shay, swine specialist at State College.

By following this schedule, two litters can be produced each year so that they will be ready for marketing in September and April respectively, when prices are usually highest.

The ideal marketing weight for a hog is around 200 pounds, Shay added.

Growers raising hogs for home consumption may vary the breeding date, but if they plan to sell some of their hogs, Shay said it will pay them to follow the recommended schedule.

Where pigs were farrowed in September, they should be weaned in October and early November. The weaning process should start by giving the pigs access to corn and fish meal or tankage. After about four weeks they should be taken completely away from the sow.

Castrate the male pigs before they are completely weaned, Shay recommends.

A self-feeder, in which feed may be kept before the pigs at all times, will hasten their growth. Directions for building self feeders may be obtained free from the agricultural editor at State College, Raleigh, N. C.

Give the pigs an abundant supply of pasturage on a lot that is not contaminated with worms. If worms once get into the pigs, they are usually there to stay, Shay warned.

The Seine and the Rhine

Paris isn't on the Seine, and the Rhine never reaches the sea. Geographers point out that Seine is only one of the minor tributaries rather than the main branch of the river that flows through Paris. The Rhine breaks up into a number of rivers as it enters Holland. None is called the Rhine.

Shark Is Productive

No other living creature on earth gives birth to as many living young at a time as the shark. Fishermen along Great Barrier Reef off the coast of Australia have captured females that contained as many as 70 unborn babies all of which were from two to three feet long.

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