

BLACK GOLD

Fortune and Girl Won In Oil Field Fight

By FREDERICK R. BECHDOLT

Two days later Hart entered Long's office in Kernfield. Frank Long shook his finger and threw back his head—the victory will not be with you.

CHAPTER XXII

Hart's Ultimatum.

HART nodded. He made no reply. Savage glanced sharply at this visitor, whose humbleness was beginning to be disconcerting.

"You follow that I'm a fool!" he exploded. "You don't know the situation. I called you here to tell you that I'm willing to take on a hundred thousand barrels of your storage—at nineteen cents, I'll do it to stave off hard times among the producers. I can afford that much. But I won't be able to make any contracts. You understand now."

"Just a moment," Hart interrupted quietly. "I'll not talk about your own figures—that twenty-five million barrels. He allowed a trace of sarcasm to creep into his voice.

"You're counting the oil from my gauger," Hart retorted swiftly. "That's not for sale for him, anyhow. The rest don't go on the market during the fight. Not one drop more than fifty thousand barrels."

"I'll give you our figures," Savage jerked the words out. "I'll tell you how you stand. Two million barrels on hand now, and—"

CHAPTER XXIII

Three Twenty-Dollar Pieces.

HE General Pacific had built a new depot two years before in Kernfield, a structure upon whose framework wire screening had been stretched, and over that wire screening a rough mortar had been sprayed.

Hart sent two telegrams that evening, and the next morning Olds and Porter rode to the Southern Hotel. "Here's what I want," said Hart.

"The tanks in Kernfield—the tanks that the association and the United claim are now storing ten million barrels—want that information. And we've got it. You're keeping us here, Barker, and we've decided to take Hart smiled his hard, tight smile.

CHAPTER XXIV

The Bribe.

BEING a complex mechanism of marvelous efficiency, the United was often likened to a monster, with senses, and motives, and appetite. But the United was only a machine, whose purpose was to get crude oil into one end of every pipe line at the lowest possible price, and to discharge it from the other end at the highest possible price.

George Long sent a telegram to Frank Hart. The message found Frank in another field.

Such is Life

By Maurice Ketten



that we had a little more than a million and a half barrels. I took off the market my oil—all but one-tenth of it. I did that to cut down supply. I know you would ratify my action. I want one to make a motion to that effect now."

There was a faint sound of metal touching metal. A flash light threw a circle of radiance upon the ground. "Keep that lantern in your pocket!" growled a voice.

Two groups of men stole forth through the darkness. They separated. Each group fitted through the night toward one of the tank villages.

Olds lay prone upon the roof of an oil tank. In the thick night which enveloped him he listened intently. About him came faint noises, of bodies scraping over metal; slight, sharp blows. Close beside him a box-like inclosure rustled.

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Olds nodded. His breath was still ebbing heavily, as if he had been running. His eyes were averted. "Tell it to the rest of them," Hart commanded.

"We gauged the tanks," Olds began, with a queer catch in his breath. "I gauged all of them." His voice rose with his excitement. "Listen, gentlemen! They haven't one hundred thousand barrels of oil there where they claim ten million. Those tanks are full of water! A foot of oil floating on top of it!"

Suddenly the others comprehended. They leaped from their chairs. Their voices rose in wild, exultant babble. "Tanks filled with water!" "Not a hundred thousand barrels!" "Think of that!" "Oh, what a bluff!" "Men, we've got them now!" "He's saved the situation!" "Hart, you did it!"

CHAPTER XXVIII. To Compromise or Not. HE raid upon the tanks was one of those news stories which force their way to front pages. And everywhere men spoke of the oil shortage.

On the saffron plain, under a sky as clear and warm as though it were still summertime, he spent days with Jean. They marked out the site for their house. They saw the lumber come, in the van of a long procession of heavy teams and traction engines.

One afternoon, when the house was built and all the furniture installed, when all the little things which make a home unlike any other four walls in the whole world, were in their places. Hart turned his eyes to the oil field again.

It was time for him to fight once more. He went out with Lawson that afternoon.

The auto was jacked the town of Midway. Lawson jerked his head toward a cluster of frame buildings off to one side of this main street. These one-story structures bore gaudy signs. Their doors were wide open from them came many noises; thumping pianos, scuffs of feet, voices upraised in mirth and dispute, women's shrill, unmusical shriekings.

Hart was looking at the neighborhood of ill repute. He was frowning. Before the doors of those buildings were many men.

"Who are those fellows, Ed?" he asked abruptly. Lawson smiled. "Speckles and Ryan were downtown last night. They told me about them. They're gunmen."

"Gunmen?" Hart exclaimed. "Remember in the old Baker River days?" Lawson asked. "When the railroad and the Petroleum Association were fighting over claims? They had two or three battles trying to tear down assessment derricks. Well, these are the same bunch that the railroad hired. Lord knows who brought them here. Some of the big companies, I suppose."

"Humph!" Hart muttered. "Drive out to our derrick on No. 25, Ed." When they arrived at the naked tower, which stood here with neither shed nor derrick house, Hart climbed about the machine. He walked about

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Then a voice shouted out. "You were pounding on the carb. The great auto truck started its tires rolling. "Holy smoke! They're running!"

CHAPTER XXX. The Fight Resumed.

WHEN Hart came into the living room he found his wife giving directions to the Chinese servant. "Lawson's coming over to dinner," he said.

CHAPTER XXXI. The Biggest Gusher in History.

THE doctor came from Sumner within the hour. He announced that the bullet had broken Lawson's collar bone, and had lodged in one of the muscles of the back. Unless there was poisoning he would recover.

During the days and nights which succeeded, Virginia Henry remained at the bungalow. So, one day, when Lawson was again able to supervise the work, although he was still somewhat weak and rather wobbly, Hart got the news from his wife. Lawson was going to build a bungalow near to theirs. The lumber was coming out within the week. The wedding would take place when it was done.

All of these things came about as they had been decided. And one evening, when Lawson and Virginia had come back from Kernfield into their home, Hart and Jean returned from the housewarming. There had been more than a dozen guests.

Ten days later the American brought in a gusher. It was the largest fountain of oil in the history of the Russian fields. It was the marvel of the producing world.

Hart rode over with Lawson to see the black fountain. The next morning Jacoby telephoned from Kernfield. "I'm about to quit this afternoon about that pipe-line proposition," was all that Jacoby said. Hart hurried to the telephone to commander Jacoby.

That afternoon he found Jacoby in his office with Lewis, the president of the American. The old man with the chin beard of a past generation was still about, but Jacoby introduced them. But back of his cordiality was a sort of caution.

Jacoby looked from one of them to the other. "Koy," he said, "his emotionless business manner. "Frank I called you here to talk pipe line with Mr. Lewis."

Hart had made up his mind now. "I'll have a meeting of the Agency," he said. "They sat there for an hour or more, going over details. And then Lewis looked at Jacoby. "You can depend on me. I'll take care of it."

By the time they had reached the assessment derrick on Twenty-five he had the battle arranged. The derrick was but an open framework of timbers, to hold the claim according to the law.

There followed an hour of silence. At last there came a heavy, throbbing mutter, which grew into a pounding roar. "Auto truck," Lawson whispered into Hart's ear.

The roar grew louder; nearer. But the claim jumpers were coming without lights. They could hear the various noises of the engine and the snarl of wheels on dry earth was the only sound. Shortly after the work was done Hart caught a faint humming from afar. Two streaks of pale light crept toward them on the plain.

"Lawson!" Hart exclaimed. Lawson stopped the auto at the very edge of the earthworks. "Hold hard!" he said, "and cartridges to burn. I'll be another party out inside of two hours." He checked. "When I came through Midway, I ran slow. And I think I have a few more. Speckles—a dozen of them, all drunk, and howling like wolves."

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