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Grace Notes

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INDUSTRY

signs of progress and regression

Giant Field

By Margie Snowden North

Unorthodox ideas
and playing hunches
are part of the oilman’s game.

Shell Oil, New York, 1947...

Orders to forsake that block of leases
back there in Western Oklahoma—
Beckham County, east—
(Where is that, anyway?)
those leaves that have been
shocked and vibrated and measured and recorded,
prodded and probed and burrowed to 13,000 feet,
Dry hole
Judged a failure by appropriate committees,
approved for abandonment.

But Shell’s new president* was an oilman,
a trailblazer (as oilmen are likely to be)
and the explorer in him overruled
logic and raw facts.
His ultimatum: Try ‘er again, boys
Re-examine the prospect.

Unorthodox, yes.
Sensible to forget a failure
But they gave her one more try.

Jackpot
Ace up a sleeve
A giant field**, and more
120 million barrels
of gleaming black gold
because an oilman—
the most prolific gambler of them all—
played a hunch and won.

*M. Burns was quoted later as saying, “I don’t know why,
but I couldn’t begin my job as president by condemning an area
as having no oil.” It was on his first day as Shell’s president
that he refused to abandon the sites near Elk City.

**Giant field: term for an oil field containing more than a
million barrels.

Fading Star —
cont’d from page 25.

as she reached for the doorknob, however,
James’ hand shot out and he
pulled her into the room by her hair.
Mira touched her head now in remembrance.
Yes, it was still quite sore. This
time, she was sure that he meant to kill her,
she had fought him back.
Her punches had been few; but because of
his inebriated condition, she managed to
throw him on the ground. She then
ran out of the house and came to the
only secure place she had known for a
long time.

Now as she sat there, alone and
afraid, she asked herself, “Why?” Why
did her life have to be the way it was?
Other girls led normal lives, but her life
revolved around her stepfather and the
kind of mood he was in. If he was in his
usual drunk mood, she went around
the house cowering and trying to hide,
but it was useless. He usually found
fault with everything she did, and he
beat her for it. Her mother had stopped
trying to protect her since the time
James had broken her arm for doing so.
She remembered the wild, crazy look
he got when he beat her like a punching
bag. His eyes, full of hate and repulsion,
seemed to probe into her very being
while his clenched fists hit her again
and again. Why did he hate her so
much? Mira tried to please him, but he
didn’t care. Mira thought about the
future. What did it have in store for
her? Would she grow up to be like her
mother? No! She wanted to be a nurse.
But what chances did she have of even
surviving?

The train whistle interrupted her
thoughts. With a swift trot, she headed
for the door and listened. Yes, it was
very near. She would need to hurry if
she wanted to be on time. She buttoned
her worn jacket and stepped outside.
At first, the cold numbed her, but then
she broke into a slow, shaky jog. While
running, she thought about what she
was going to do. It was the only way
out. Her life in this world was mean-
ingless. The hurt and pain would be
gone forever. Yes, she would do it!
As if to reassure herself, she ran faster.
From far away, she resembled a tiny
struggling figure. When she arrived at
the railroad tracks, she sat down,
gasping for breath. Her eyes searched
for the train and didn’t find it, but the
whistle came closer and closer. Slowly,
she got up and smoothed her hair as
best she could. The tears were threat-
ening to overspill, and she tilted her
head back, looking at the dark, stormy
sky. “God,” she asked the Almighty,
“Why did you put me in this world to
suffer like this? What is the purpose of
living if my life is controlled by such a
beast?” As Mira uttered these words, a
tiny patch of blue appeared in the sky.
As if awakening from a dream, the
truth dawned on her. Her brothers and
sisters had not foolishly thrown them-

selfs in front of a train. No. They had
patiently waited and then simply
walked away. Why should she kill
herself? Maybe she could become a
nurse after all. Of course, it would take
plenty of work, but she could do it. As
she was thinking, she walked away.
The train sped by, urging her to come
back, but Mira walked on. Up in the
sky, sunlight streamed through the
patch of blue. Life wouldn’t be easy for
her, but after the storm, the most
beautiful calm would envelop her.

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