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From a Painting by Charles Livingston Bull

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Three Wild-Horse
Hunters Made Camp

WILDFIRE

By Zane Grey

Author of "Riders of the Purple Sage," "The Lone Star Ranger," etc., etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK TENNEY JOHNSON

wouldn't hurt none to let him come. An' hold your gun hand fer the time he swears he'll be honest. Queer deal, ain't it, men? A hoss thief turnin' honest jest to see a race! Beats me! . . . Bostil, it's a cheap way to get at least a little honesty from Cordts. An' refusin' might rile him bad. When all's said Cordts ain't as bad as he could be."

"I'll let him come," replied Bostil, breathing deep. "But it'll be hard to see him, rememberin' how he's robbed me, what he's threatened. An' I ain't lettin' him come to bribe a few weeks' decency from him. I'm doin' it for only one reason. . . . Because I know how he loves the King—how he wants to see the King run away from the field thet day! Thet's why!"

There was a moment's silence during which all turned to Creech. He was a stalwart man, no longer young, with a lined face, deep-set troubled eyes and white thin beard.

"Bostil, if Cordts loves the King thet well he's in fer heartbreak," said Creech with a ring in his voice.

Down crashed Bostil's heavy boots and fire flamed in his gaze. The other men laughed, and Brackton interposed:

"Hold on, you boy riders!" he yelled. "We ain't a-goin' to have any arguments like thet. . . . Now, Bostil, it's settled then? You'll let Cordts come."

"Glad to have him," replied Bostil.

"Good. An' now mebbe we'd better get down to the bizness of this here meetin'."

They seated themselves round the table, upon which Bostil laid an old and much-soiled ledger and a stub of a lead pencil.

"First we'll set the time," he said with animation, "an' then pitch into details. . . . What's the date?"

No one answered and presently they all looked blankly from one to the other.

"It's April, ain't it?" queried Holley.

That assurance was as close as they could get to the time of year.

"Lucy!" called Bostil in a loud voice.

She came running in, anxious, almost alarmed.

"Goodness, you made us jump! What on earth is the matter?"

"Lucy, we want to know the date," replied Bostil.

"Date! Did you have to scare auntie and me out of our wits just for that?"

"Who scared you? This is important, Lucy. What's the date?"

"It's a week today since last Tuesday," answered Lucy sweetly.

"Huh! Then it's Tuesday again," said Bostil, laboriously writing it down. "Now what's the date?"

"Don't you remember?"

"Remember? I never knew."

"Dad! . . . Last Tuesday was my birthday—the day you *did not* give me a horse!"

"Aw, so it was," rejoined Bostil, confused at her reproach. "An' thet date was—let's see—April sixth. . . . Then this is April thirteenth. Much obliged, Lucy. Run back to your aunt now. This hoss talk won't interest you."

Lucy tossed her head. "I bet I'll have to straighten out the whole thing." Then with a laugh she disappeared.

"Three days beginnin', say, June first. June first, second an' third. How about thet for the races?"

Everybody agreed, and Bostil laboriously wrote that down. Then they planned the details. Purses and prizes, largely donated by Bostil and Muncie, the rich members of the community, were recorded. The old rules were adhered to. Any rider or any Indian could enter any horse in any race, or as many horses as he liked in as many races. But by winning one race he excluded himself from the others. Bostil argued for a certain weight in riders, but the others voted him down. Special races were arranged for the Indians, with saddles, bridles, blankets and guns as prizes.

All this appeared of absorbing interest to Bostil. He perspired freely. There was a gleam in his eye, betraying excitement. When it came to arranging the details of the big race between the high-class racers then he grew intense and harder to deal with. Many points had to go by vote.

Muncie and Williams both had fleet horses to enter in this race; Holley had one; Creech had two; there were sure to be several Indians enter fast mustangs; and Bostil had the King and four others to choose from. Bostil held out stubbornly for a long race. It was well known that Sage King was unbeatable in a long race. If there were any chance to beat him it must be at short distance. The vote went against Bostil, much to his chagrin, and the great race was set down for two miles.

III

DAYS did not pass swiftly at Bostil's Ford. But, except in winter and during the spring sandstorms, the lagging time passed pleasantly. Lucy rode every day, sometimes with Van, sometimes alone. She was not overkeen about riding with Van—because he was in love with her, and because, in spite of that, she could not beat him when he rode the King. They were training Bostil's horses for the much-anticipated races.

At last word arrived from the Utes and Navajos that they accepted Bostil's invitation and would come in force, which meant, according to Holley and other old riders, that the Indians would attend about eight hundred strong.

"Thet old Chief Hawk is comin'," Holley informed Bostil. "He hasn't been here fer several years. Recollect thet bunch of colts he had? They're hosses, not mustangs. . . . So you look out, Bostil!"

No rider or rancher or sheepman, in fact no one, ever lost a chance to warn Bostil. Some of it was in fun, but most of it was in earnest. The nature of events was that sooner or later a horse would beat the King. Bostil knew that as well as anybody, though he would not admit it. Holley's hint made Bostil look worried. Most of Bostil's gray hairs might have been traced to his years of worry about horses.

The day he received word from the Indians he sent for Brackton, Williams, Muncie and Creech to come to his home that night. These men, with Bostil, had for years formed a sort of club the Ford was noted for. Creech was no longer a friend of Bostil's, but Bostil had always been fair-minded, and now he did not allow his animosities to influence him. Holley, the veteran rider, made the sixth member of the club.

Bostil had a cedar log blazing cheerily in the wide fireplace, for these early spring nights in the desert were cold.

Brackton was the last guest to arrive. He shuffled in without answering the laconic greetings accorded him, and his usually mild eyes seemed keen and hard.

"John, I reckon you won't love me fer this here I've got to tell you tonight, specially," he said seriously.

"You old robber, I couldn't love you anyhow," retorted Bostil. But his humor did not harmonize with the sudden gravity of his look. "What's up?"

"Who do you suppose I jest sold whisky to?"

"I've no idea," replied Bostil. Yet he looked as if he was perfectly sure.

"Cordts! . . . Cordts, an' four of his outfit. Two of them I didn't know. Bad men, judgin' from appearances, let alone company. The others was Hutchinson an'—Dick Sears."

"Dick Sears!" exclaimed Bostil.

Muncie and Williams echoed Bostil. Holley appeared suddenly interested. Creech alone showed no surprise.

"But Sears is dead," added Bostil.

"He was dead, we thought," replied Brackton with a grim laugh. "But he's alive again. He told me he'd been in Idaho fer two years, in the gold fields. Said the work was too hard, so he'd come back here. Laughed when he said it, the little devil! I'll bet he was thinkin' of thet wagon train of mine he stole."

Bostil gazed at his chief rider.

"Wal, I reckon we didn't kill Sears after all," replied Holley. "I wasn't never sure."

night. They hate work. Besides Farlane is there, an' the boys." This reassured Bostil and he resumed his chair. But his hand shook a little.

"Did Cordts have anythin' to say?" he asked.

"Sure. He was friendly an' talkative," replied Brackton. "He came in jest after dark. Left a man I didn't see out with the hosses. He bought two big packs of supplies, an' some leather stuff, an', of course, ammunition. Then some whisky. Had plenty of gold an' wouldn't take no change. Then while his men, except Sears, was carryin' out the stuff, he talked."

"Go on. Tell me," said Bostil.

"Wal, he'd been out north of Durango an' fetched news. There's wild talk back there of a railroad goin' to be built some day, j'inin' East an' West. It's interestin', but no sense to it. How could they build a railroad through thet country?"

"North it ain't so cut up an' lumpy as here," put in Holley.

"Grandest idea ever thought of for the West," avowed Bostil. "If thet railroad ever starts we'll all get rich. . . . Go on, Brack."

"Then Cordts said water an' grass was peterin' out back on the trail, same as Red Wilson said last week. Finally he asked: 'How's my friend Bostil?'"

"I told him you was well."

"He looked kind of thoughtful, then, an' I knew what was comin': 'How's the King?'"

"'Grand,' I told him—'grand.'"

"'When is them races comin' off?'"

"I said we hadn't planned the time yet, but it would be soon—inside of a month or two."

"'Brackton,' he said sharplike, 'is Bostil goin' to pull a gun on me at sight?'"

"'Reckon he is,' I told him."

"'Wal, I'm not powerful glad to know thet. . . . I hear Creech's blue hoss will race the King this time. How about it?'"

"'Sure an' certain this year. I've Creech's an' Bostil's word for thet.'"

"Cordts put his hand on my shoulder. You ought to've seen his eyes! 'I want to see thet race. . . . I'm goin' to.'"

"'Wal,' I said, 'you'll have to stop bein'—you'll need to change your bizness.'"

"Then Bostil, what do you think? Cordts was sort of eager an' wild. He said thet was a race he jest couldn't miss. He swore he wouldn't turn a trick or let a man of his gang stir a hand till after thet race if you'd let him come."

A light flitted across Bostil's face.

"I know how Cordts feels," he said.

"Wal, it's a queer deal," went on Brackton. "Fer a long time you've meant to draw on Cordts when you meet. We all know thet."

"Yes, I'll kill him!" The light left Bostil's face. His voice sounded differently. His mouth opened, drooped strangely at the corners, then shut in a grim, tense line. Bostil had killed more than one man. The memory, no doubt, was haunting and ghastly.

"Cordts seemed to think his word was guarantee of his good faith. He said he'd send an Indian in here to find out if he can come to the races. I reckon, Bostil, thet it

"But two miles! . . . Two miles!" he kept repeating. "Thet's Blue Roan's distance. Thet's his distance. An' it ain't fair to the King!"

His guests, excepting Creech, argued with him, explained, reasoned, showed him that it was fair to all concerned. Bostil finally acquiesced, but he was not happy. The plain fact was that he was frightened.

When the men were departing Bostil called Creech back into the sitting room. Creech appeared surprised, yet it was evident that he would have been glad to make friends with Bostil.

"What'll you take for the roan?" Bostil asked tersely as if he had never asked that before.

"Bostil, didn't we thresh thet out before—an' fall out over it?" queried Creech with a deprecating spread of his hands.

"Wal, we can fall in again if you'll sell or trade the hoss."

"I'm sorry, but I can't."

"You need money an' hosses, don't you?" demanded Bostil brutally. He had no conscience in a matter of horse dealing.

"Lord knows I do," replied Creech.

"Wal, then, here's your chance. I'll give you five hundred in gold an' Sarchedon to boot."

Creech looked as if he had not heard aright. Bostil repeated the offer.

"No," replied Creech.

"I'll make it a thousand an' throw Plume in with Sarch," flashed Bostil.

"No!" Creech turned pale and swallowed hard.

"Two thousand an' Dusty Ben along with the others!"

This was an unheard-of price to pay for any horse. Creech evidently saw that Bostil was desperate. It was an almost overpowering temptation. Evidently Creech resisted it only by applying all his mind to thought of his clean-limbed, soft-eyed, noble horse.

Bostil did not give Creech time to speak.

"Twenty-five hundred an' Two Face along with the rest!"

"Bostil, stop it! I can't part with Blue Roan. You're rich an' you've no heart. Thet I always knew. At least to me you never had, since I owned them two racers. Didn't I beg you, a little time back, to lend me a few hundred to meet thet debt? An' you wouldn't, unless I'd sell the hosses. An' I had to lose my sheep. Now I'm a poor man—gettin' poorer all the time. But I won't sell or trade Blue Roan, not for all you've got!"

Creech seemed to gain strength with his speech and passion with the strength. His eyes glinted at the hard, paling face of his rival. He raised a clenching fist.

"An' I'm goin' to win thet race!"

During that week Lucy had heard many things about Joel Creech, and some of them were disquieting.

Some rider had not only found Joel's clothes on the trail but he had recognized the track of the horse Lucy rode, and at once connected her with the singular discovery. Coupling that with Joel's appearance in the village incased in a heaving armor of adobe, the riders guessed pretty close to the truth. For them the joke was tremendous.

It came to Lucy's ears that Joel began to act and talk strangely. She found out that the rider Van had knocked Joel down in Brackton's store and had kicked a gun out of his hand. Van laughed off the rumor and Brackton gave her no satisfaction. Moreover she heard other rumors. Finally, when Muncie discharged Joel, who worked now and then, Lucy realized that something was wrong with Joel and that she was to blame for it.

She grew worried and anxious and sorry, but she held her peace and determined to find out for herself what was wrong. Every day when she rode out into the sage she expected to meet him or at least see him somewhere; nevertheless, days went by and there was no sign of him.

One afternoon she saw some Indians driving sheep down the river road toward the ford and acting upon impulse she turned her horse after them.

Lucy seldom went down the river road. Riding down and up was merely

work, and a horse had as little liking for it as she had. Usually it was a hot, dusty trip and the great, dark, overhanging walls had a depressing effect upon her. She always felt awe at the gloomy cañon and fear at the strange, murmuring red river. But she started down this afternoon in the hope of meeting Joel. She had a hazy idea of telling him she was sorry for what she had done and of asking him to forget it and pay no more heed to the riders.

The sheep raised a dust cloud in the sandy wash where the road wound down, and Lucy hung back to let them get farther ahead. Gradually the tiny roar of pattering hoofs and the blended bleating and baaing died away. The dust cloud, however, hung over the head of the ravine, and Lucy had to force Sarchedon through it.

Sarchedon did not mind sand and dust, but he surely hated the smell of sheep. Lucy seldom put a spur to Sarchedon; still she gave him a lash with her quirt, and then he went on obediently, if disgustedly. He carried his head like a horse that wondered why his mistress preferred to drive him down into an unpleasant hole when she might have been cutting the sweet, cool, sage wind up on the slope.

The wash, with its sand and clay walls, dropped into a gulch, and there was an end of green growths. The road led down over solid rock. Presently she came out upon a lower bench of the cañon, into a great, red-walled space, with the river still a thousand feet below and the cliffs towering as high above her. The river appeared to sweep round a bold, bulging corner a mile above. It was a wide, swift, muddy, turbulent stream. A great bar of sand stretched out from the shore. Beyond it, through the mouth of an intersecting cañon, could be seen a clump of cottonwoods and willows that marked the home of the Creeches.

Lucy could not see the shore nearest her as it was almost directly under her. Besides, in this narrow road, on a spirited horse, she was not inclined to watch the scenery.

She hurried Sarchedon down and down, under the overhanging brows of rock, to where the rim sloped out and failed. Here was half an acre of sand, with a few scant willows, set down seemingly in a dent at the base of the giant, beetling cliffs.

Lucy rode across the bar to the shore where the Indians were loading the sheep into an immense, rude flatboat. As the sheep were frightened the loading was no easy task. Their bleating could be heard above the roar of the river. Bostil's boatmen, Shugrue and Somers, stood knee-deep in the quicksand of the bar, and their efforts to keep free-footed were as strenuous as their handling of the sheep.

Presently the flock was all crowded on board, the Indians followed, and then the boatmen slid the unwieldy craft off the sand-bar. Then, each manning a clumsy oar, they pulled upstream. Along shore were whirling slow eddies and there rowing was possible. Out in that swift current it would have been folly to try to contend with it, let alone make progress. The method of crossing was to row up along the shore as far as a great cape of rock jutting out, and there make into the current, and while drifting down pull hard to reach the landing opposite. Heavily laden as the boat was, the chances were not wholly in favor of a successful crossing.

Lucy watched the slow, laborious struggle of the boatmen with the heavy oars until she suddenly remembered the object of her visit down to the ford. She appeared to be alone on her side of the river. At the landing opposite, however, were two men, and presently Lucy recognized Joel Creech and his father. A second glance showed Indians with burros, evidently waiting for the boat.

Joel Creech jumped into a skiff and shoved off. The elder man, judging by his motions, seemed to be trying to prevent his son from leaving the shore. But Joel began to row upstream, keeping close to the shore. Lucy watched him. No doubt he had seen her and was coming across.

Either the prospect of meeting him, or the idea of meeting him there in the place where she was never herself, made her want to turn at once and ride back home. But her stubborn sense of fairness overruled that. She would hold her ground solely in the hope of persuading Joel to be reasonable.

She saw the big flatboat sweep into line of sight at the same time Joel turned into the current. But while the larger craft drifted slowly the other way the smaller one came swiftly down and across. Joel swept out of the current into the eddy, rowed across that, and slid the skiff up on the sandbar. Then he stepped out. He was bare-headed and barefooted, but it was not for that fact he seemed like a stranger to Lucy.

"Are you lookin' fer me?" he shouted.

Lucy waved for him to come up.

Then he approached. He was a tall, lean young man, stoop-shouldered and bow-legged from much riding, with sallow, freckled face, a thin fuzz of beard, weak mouth and chin, and eyes remarkable for their small size and piercing quality and different colors—for one was gray and the other was hazel. There was no scar on his face, but the irregularity of his features reminded one who knew that he once had been kicked in the face by a horse.

Creech came up hurriedly, in an eager wild way that made Lucy suddenly pity him. He did not seem to remember that the stallion had an antipathy for him. But Lucy, if she had forgotten, would have been reminded by Sarchedon's action.

"Look out, Joel!" she called, and she gave the black's head a jerk. Sarchedon went up with a snort and came down pounding the sand. Quick as an Indian Lucy was out of the saddle.

"Lemme your quirt," said Joel, showing his teeth like a wolf.

"No. I wouldn't let you hit Sarch. You beat him once and he's never forgotten," replied Lucy.

The horse and the man eyed each other squarely and there was similarity in their attitudes. Then Lucy dropped the bridle, and drew Joel over to a huge driftlog, half buried in the sand. Here she sat down, but Joel remained standing. His gaze was now all the stranger for its wistfulness. Lucy was quick to catch a difference in him, but she could not tell wherein it lay.



"I Swore I'd Lay fer You—an' Steal Your Clothes—So You'd Have to Run Home Naked"

"What'd you want?" asked Joel.

"I've heard a lot of things, Joel," replied Lucy, trying to think of just what she wanted to say.

"Reckon you have," said Joel dejectedly, and then he sat down on the log and dug holes in the sand with his bare feet. Lucy had never before seen him look tired, and it seemed that some of the healthy brown of his cheeks had thinned out.

Then Lucy told him guardedly a few of the rumors she had heard.

"All thet you say is nothin' to what happened," he replied bitterly. "Them riders mocked the life an' soul out of me."

"But, Joel, you shouldn't be so—so touchy," said Lucy earnestly. "After all the joke was on you. Why didn't you take it like a man?"

"But they knew you stole my clothes," he protested.

"Suppose they did. That wasn't much to care about. If you hadn't taken it so hard they'd have let up on you."

"Mebbe I might have stood that. But they taunted me with bein'—loony about you."

Joel spoke huskily. There was no doubt that he had been deeply hurt. Lucy saw tears in his eyes and her first impulse was to put a hand on his and tell him how sorry she was. But she desisted. She did not feel at her ease with Joel.

"What'd you and Van fight about?" she asked presently.

Joel hung his head.

"I reckon I ain't a-goin' to tell you."

"You're ashamed of it?"

Joel's silence answered that.

"You said something about me?" Lucy could not resist her curiosity, back of which was a little heat. "It must have been—bad—else Van wouldn't have struck you."

"He hit me; he knocked me flat," passionately said Joel.

"And you drew a gun on him?"

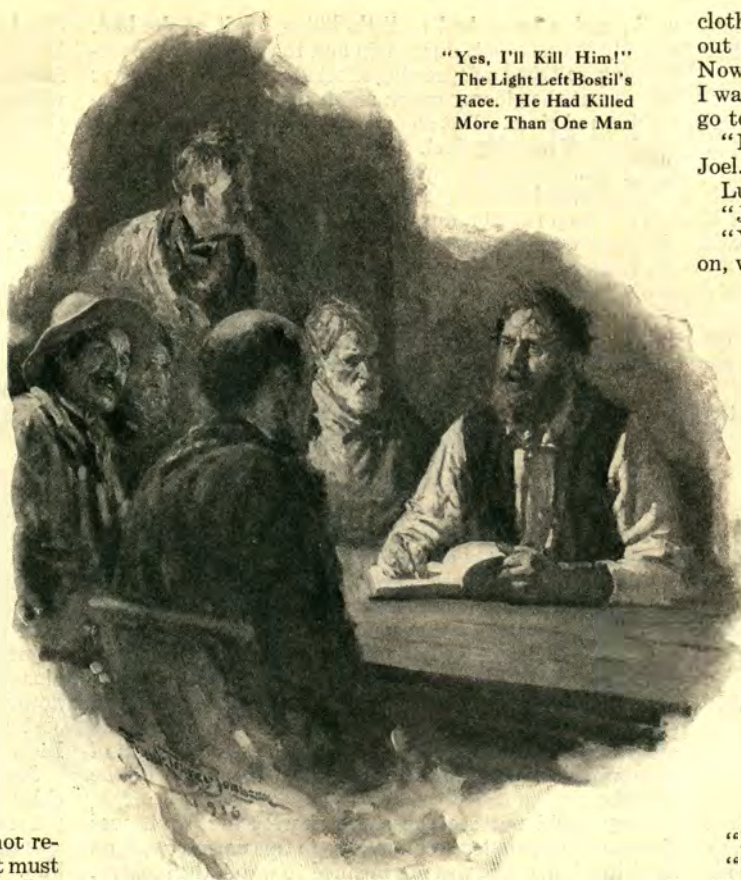
"I did, an' like a fool I didn't wait till I got up. Then he kicked me! . . . Bostil's Ford will never be big enough fer me an' Van now."

"Don't talk foolish. You won't fight with Van. . . . Joel, maybe you deserved what you got. You say some—some rude things."

"I only said I'd pay you back," burst out Joel.

"How?"

"I swore I'd lay fer you—an' steal your clothes—so you'd have to run home naked."



"Yes, I'll Kill Him!"
The Light Left Bostil's
Face. He Had Killed
More Than One Man

There was indeed something lacking in Joel, but it was not sincerity. His hurt had rankled deep and his voice trembled with indignation.

"But, Joel, I don't go swimming in spring holes," protested Lucy, divided between amusement and annoyance.

"I meant it, anyhow," said Joel doggedly.

"Is that all you said to provoke Van?"

"It's all, Lucy, I swear!"

She believed him, and saw the unfortunate circumstance more than ever her fault.

"I'm sorry, Joel. I'm much to blame. I shouldn't have lost my temper and played that trick with your

clothes. . . . If you'd only had sense enough to stay out till after dark! But no use crying over spilt milk. Now if you'll do your share I'll do mine. I'll tell the boys I was to blame. I'll persuade them to let you alone. I'll go to Muncie —"

"No, you won't go cryin' small fer me!" blurted out Joel.

Lucy was surprised to see pride in him.

"Joel, I'll not make it appear —"

"You'll not say one word about me to anyone," he went on, with the blood beginning to darken his face. And now he faced her. How strange the blaze in his differently colored eyes!

"Lucy Bostil, there's been thet done an' said to me which I'll never forgive. I'm no good in Bostil's Ford. Mebbe I never was much. But I could get a job when I wanted it an' credit when I needed it. Now I can't get nothin'. I'm no good! . . . I'm no good! An' it's your fault!"

"Oh, Joel, what can I do?" cried Lucy.

"I reckon there's only one way you can square me," he replied, suddenly growing pale. But his eyes were like flint. He certainly looked to be in possession of all his wits.

"How?" queried Lucy sharply.

"You can marry me. Thet'll show thet gang! An' it'll square me. Then I'll go back to work an' I'll stick. Thet's all, Lucy Bostil."

Manifestly he was laboring under strong, suppressed agitation. That moment was the last of real strength ever shown by Joel Creech.

"But, Joel, I can't marry you—even if I am to blame for your ruin," said Lucy simply.

"Why?"

"Because I don't love you."

"I reckon thet won't make any difference if you don't love someone else."

Lucy gazed at him in blank astonishment. He began to shake and the look in his eyes grew wild. She got up off the log.

"Do you love anybody else?" he asked passionately.

"None of your business!" retorted Lucy. Then, at a strange darkening of his face, an aspect unfamiliar to her, she grew suddenly frightened.

"It's Van!" he said thickly.

"Joel, you're a fool!"

That only infuriated him.

"So they all say. An' they got my old man believin' it too. Mebbe I am. . . . But I'm a-goin' to kill Van!"

(Continued on Page 872)

THE TRACTOR—By Barton W. Currie

Size Problem: Will the Tractor Fit the Farm or the Farm Fit the Tractor?

GOING it blindfolded! That is the situation with the majority of farmers who are picking tractors today. It is not the fault of the tractor makers any more than it is the fault of the farmers. You may standardize the quality of your tractor to a superfine degree, but how about the standardization of the purchaser's ingenuity, skill, versatility, good or bad fortune in production?

You hear many sound arguments against the economic success of the small tractor, but you hear none to convert the fact that the small tractor has come as an incalculable boon to the industry. The popular-priced tractor has in the short span of two years provided resources for the tractor industry that could not have been obtained in a score of years had it not been developed. The pony tractor has created cash-sale possibilities that could not have been contrived by any other means, and without cash-sale possibilities the tractor industry would have labored alone under the same dead weight that has hampered the modernization of the implement industry.

From the manufacturer's standpoint, volume of production was the great stumbling-block. A concern that could not hope to make more than a few hundred tractors a year had little hope of cutting down manufacturers' costs. A manufacturer compelled to make all his own parts and castings could develop only a special narrow market for a quality product at a quality price.

If a group of manufacturers had got together and standardized certain parts and agreed to take the output of some parts-manufacturer, a definite economy could have been accomplished.

But the spirit of competition was most decidedly not headed that way. Each separate maker seemed to desire as many selling arguments in favor of his tractor as there were parts. He wanted to be able to say that he had a better make of motor than the other fellow, a better carburetor, better ignition, better transmission, better cooling and lubricating systems, a better contrivance of bull

wheels or caterpillar sleeves for pulling and balancing the load, better belt-drive connections.

I heard it said that one manufacturer had boasted: "There are 22,000 pieces in my tractor and practically all of them are different from the pieces in any other tractor—and better." Heaven help the owner who needed a few nuts and bolts of this tractor in a hurry!

When you get down to fundamentals, this sort of thing has occurred in the history of every mechanical development. The design is crudely direct and simple at the start—crudely inefficient too. Then the refining process begins and is attended by a mania for complexities. The next step is to eliminate the complexities and gradually approach a refined simplicity. Throughout every step the ratio of efficiency is being increased and the road to standardization is being smoothed down.

Thanks to the small tractor the industry has already approached such standardization that it is possible for thirty-two makers to use one type of motor—that is, a type of motor made by one manufacturer. Sizes and adjustments are adapted to fit the special needs of different tractors. The same tendency will be followed in the cases of carburetors, magnetos, radiators, gears, transmissions, differentials, and so on. The development of the automobile has not only made this possible but has really forced it upon the tractor industry as the only economic method of cutting the cost of production.

Automobile engineers have really done a great deal for tractor manufacturers by refining the essential parts of tractor mechanism. Both industries are striving now toward the perfection of a system of coal-oil carburation. While some oil-burning tractors are advertised as equal in efficiency to any rival gasoline burners, they have yet a long way to go to prove that the combustion efficiency of kerosene equals the combustion efficiency of gasoline. Nor, as a matter of fact, will they ever succeed in raising the B. T. U. ratio of kerosene to the B. T. U. ratio of gasoline. What

they may do and what they are striving toward is to develop a combustion mechanism that will give kerosene the same fuel dependability as gasoline. If they accomplish this they will achieve great economy.

As a general thing, farmers in this country have been learning a good deal more about the four-cylinder high-speed type of motor in the past few years than they have about one and two cylinder oil-burning tractor motors. Manufacturers who jumped into the tractor game overnight felt that they could supply the popular demand by simply grabbing a four-cylinder automobile motor, common types of automobile carburetors and magnetos and slapping them into any old sort of tractor frame. They suffered from the obsession that if a tractor ran and developed a definite amount of power, that was all that was necessary. They didn't even bother to hitch on a plow and see if the thing would buck or not.

In the days of the 50,000-pound leviathan tractors no one bothered about bucking propensities. The chief thing was to get it started and keep it going. When they got down to the 4000 and 5000 pound tractors it was not so much a case of spinning the flywheel and keeping the motor warmed up to its job as of keeping the "feather-weight" from imitating an aeroplane after the plows had bitten into the sod. Nice adjustments and balances of weight were required. The plow hitch became essentially important, to avoid side-draft and to get the highest efficiency of pull.

A great many of these little fellows were underpowered, even for their weight, at the start. Some of them still are. The great need for surplus power was not fully understood. How could it have been otherwise when the rush products that were flung on the market had had practically no testing out?

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W I L D F I R E

(Continued from Page 830)

"No! No! Joel, what are you saying? I don't love Van. I don't care any more for him than for any other rider—or—or you."

"Thet's a lie, Lucy Bostil!"

"How dare you say I lie?" demanded Lucy. "I've a mind to turn my back on you. I'm trying to make up for my blunder and you—you insult me!"

"Your sweet talk isn't enough. You made me no good. Will you marry me?"

"I will not!"

Lucy, with her blood up, could not keep contempt out of voice and look, and she did not care. That was the first time she had ever shown anything approaching ridicule for Joel. The effect was remarkable. Like a lash upon a raw wound it made him writhe, but that was not what struck Lucy so significantly as a sudden breaking in his face and a wildness of rolling eyes. Then she did turn her back, not from contempt, but to hurry away from him.

He leaped after her and grasped her with rude hands.

"Let me go!" cried Lucy, standing perfectly motionless. The hard clutch of his fingers roused a fierce, hot anger in her.

Joel did not heed her command. He was forcing her back. He talked incoherently. One glimpse of his face added terror to Lucy's fury.

"Joel, you're out of your head!" she cried, and she began to wrench and writhe out of his grasp. Then ensued a short, sharp struggle. Joel could not hold Lucy. But he tore her blouse into shreds. It seemed to Lucy that he did that savagely. She broke free from him and he lunged at her again. With all her strength she lashed his face with the heavy leather quirt. That staggered him. He almost fell.

Lucy bounded to Sarchedon. In a flash she was up in the saddle. Joel was running toward her. Blood on his face! Blood on his hands! He was not the Joel Creech she knew.

"Stop!" cried Lucy fiercely. "I'll run you down!"

The big black plunged at a touch of spur, and he came down quivering, ready to bolt.

Creech swerved to one side. His face was livid white except where the bloody welts crossed it. His jaw seemed to flop, making speech difficult.

"Jest fer—thet—!" he panted hoarsely, "I'll lay fer you—an' I'll strip you—an' I'll tie you on a hoss—an' I'll drive you naked through Bostil's Ford!"

Lucy saw the utter futility of all her good intentions. Something had snapped in Joel Creech's mind. And in hers kindness had given precedence to a fury she did not know was in her. For the second time she touched a spur to Sarchedon. He leaped out, flashed past Creech and thundered up the road. It was all Lucy could do to break his gait at the first steep rise.

IV

THREE wild-horse hunters made camp one night beside a little stream in the Sevier Valley, five hundred miles, as a crow flies, from Bostil's Ford.

These hunters had a poor outfit, of course, excepting their horses. They were young men, rangy in build, lean and hard from life in the saddle, bronzed like Indians, still-faced and keen-eyed. Two of them appeared to be tired out, and lagged at the camp-fire duties.

The shades of night fell swiftly, and it was dark by the time the hunters finished their meal. Then the camp fire had burned low. One of the three dragged branches of dead cedars, and replenished the fire.

"I reckon a pipe would help me make up my mind," said one of the two tired hunters. "Wal, Bill," replied the other dryly, "your mind's made up, else you'd not say smoke."

"Why?"

"Because there ain't but three pipefuls of thet precious tobacco left."

"Thet's one apiece, then. . . . Lin, come an' smoke the last pipe with us."

The tallest of the three, he who had brought the firewood, stood in the bright light of the blaze. He looked the born rider—light, lithe, powerful.

"Sure, I'll smoke," he replied.

Then presently he accepted the pipe tendered him and, sitting down beside the

fire, composed himself to the enjoyment which his companions evidently considered worthy of a decision they had reached.

"So this smokin' means you both want to turn back?" queried Lin, his sharp gaze glancing darkly bright in the glow of the fire.

"Yep, we'll turn back. An', Lordy, the relief I feel!" replied one.

"We've been long comin' to it, Lin, an' thet was for your sake," replied the other. Lin slowly pulled at his pipe, and blew out the smoke as if reluctant to part with it.

"Let's go on," he said quietly.

"No. I've had all I want of chasin' thet damn wild stallion," returned Bill shortly.

The other spread wide his hands and bent an expostulating look upon the one called Lin.

"We're two hundred miles out," he said. "There's only a little flour left in the bag. No coffee! Only a little salt! All the hosses, except your big Nagger, are played out. We're already in strange country. An' you know what we've heard of this an' all to the south. It's all cañons, an' somewheres down there is thet awful cañon none of our people ever seen. But we've heard of it. An awful cut-up country."

He finished with a conviction that no one could say a word against the common sense of his argument. Lin was silent, as if impressed.

Bill raised a strong, lean brown hand in a forcible gesture.

"We can't ketch Wildfire!"

That seemed to him evidently a more convincing argument than his comrade's.

"Bill is sure right if I'm wrong, which I ain't," went on the other. "Lin, we've trailed thet wild stallion for six weeks. Thet's the longest chase he ever had. He's left his old range. He's cut out his hand an' left them, one by one. We've tried every trick we know on him. An' he's too smart for us. There's a hoss! Why, Lin, we're all but gone to the dogs chasin' Wildfire. An' now I'm done, an' I'm glad of it."

There was another short silence, which presently Bill broke.

"Lin, it makes me sick to quit. I ain't denyin' thet for a long time I've had my hopes of ketchin' Wildfire. He's the grandest hoss I ever laid eyes on. I reckon no man, unless he was an Arab, ever seen as good a one. But, now, thet's neither here nor there. . . . We've got to hit the back trail."

"Boys, I reckon I'll stick to Wildfire's tracks," said Lin in the same quiet tone.

Bill swore at him, and the other hunter grew excited and concerned.

"Lin Slone, are you gone plumb crazy over thet red hoss?"

"I—reckon," replied Slone.

The working of his throat, as he swallowed, could be plainly seen by his companions. Bill looked at his ally as if to confirm some sudden understanding between them.

For them the situation subtly changed. For weeks they had been three wild-horse wranglers on a hard chase after a valuable stallion. They had failed to get even close to him. They had gone to the limit of their endurance and of the outfit, and it was time to turn back. But Slone had conceived that strange and rare longing for a horse—a passion understood, if not shared, by all riders. And they knew that he would catch Wildfire or die in the attempt.

"I tell you, Lin," said Bill, "your hoss Nagger's as good as when we started."

"Aw, he's better," vouchsafed the other rider. "Nagger needed to lose some weight. Lin, have you got an extra set of shoes for him?"

"No full set. Only three left," replied Lin soberly.

"Wal, thet's enough. You can keep Nagger shod. An' mebbe thet red stallion will get sore feet an' go lame. Then you'd stand a chance."

"But Wildfire keeps travelin' the valleys—the soft ground," said Slone.

"No matter. He's leavin' the country, an' he's bound to strike sandstone sooner or later. Then, by gosh, mebbe he'll wear off them hoofs."

"Say, can't he ring bells offen the rocks?" exclaimed Bill. "Oh, what a hoss!"

"Boys, do you think he's leavin' the country?" inquired Slone anxiously.

"Sure he is," replied Bill. "He ain't the first stallion I've chased off the Sevier Range. An' I know. It's a stallion thet makes for new country when you push him hard."

"Yep, Lin, he's sure leavin'," added the other comrade. "Why, he's traveled a beeline for days! I'll bet he's seen us many a time. Wildfire's about as smart as any man. He was born wild an' his dam was born wild. An' there you have it. The wildest of all wild creatures—a wild stallion with the intelligence of a man! A grand hoss, Lin, but one thet'll be hell if you ever ketch him. He has killed stallions all over the Sevier Range. A wild stallion thet's a killer! I never liked him for thet. Could he be broke?"

"I'll break him," said Lin Slone grimly. "It's gettin' him thet's the job. I've got patience to break a hoss. But patience can't catch a streak of lightnin'."

"Nope, you're right," replied Bill. "If you have some luck you'll get him—mebbe. If he wears out his feet, or if you crowd him into a narrow cañon, or run him into a bad place where he can't get by you. Thet might happen. An' then, with Nagger, you stand a chance. Did you ever tire thet hoss?"

"Not yet. He could run hard fifty miles—mebbe more."

"Lin, if Wildfire gives you the slip he'll have to fly. You've got the best eyes for tracks of any wrangler in Utah."

Slone accepted the compliment with a fleeting, doubtful smile on his dark face. He did not reply, and no more was said by his comrades. They rolled with backs to the fire. Slone put on more wood, for the keen wind was cold and cutting; and then he lay down with a goatskin under him and a saddle blanket over him.

All three were soon asleep. The wind whipped the sand and ashes and smoke over the sleepers. Coyotes barked from near in the darkness, and from the valley ridge came a faint mourn of a hunting wolf. The desert night grew darker and colder.

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