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Wildfire
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From a Photograph by J. T. Jennings

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continued showing up of the slowness and uncertainty of the seedlings, caused the Northern Nut Growers' Association to pass unanimously the following resolution, which condemns the practice so widespread among nurserymen of selling English walnut and pecan seedlings without letting it be clear that they are seedlings:

Nut trees may and do sometimes come fairly true to type, but they do not come true to variety. Consequently our association does not approve of the sale of seedling trees under variety names; and this association further recommends to all journals that they take no advertisements for nut trees if such trees are not sold under conditions that clearly comply with the provisions of this resolution.

Of course the man who is getting a dollar for a seedling tree that costs two cents to grow is under great temptation, and the newness of the art of grafting walnuts in the Eastern United States gives him a great opportunity. It is true, too, in the East as on the Pacific Coast, that nearly all the big trees are seedlings and most of the production is from seedling trees.

Grafting is new and has not had time to make much commercial demonstration. There has, however, been enough of it done to show that it is quite successful from the technical and botanical standpoints. Persian walnuts, grafted on black, have been thriving in a few cases in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania for twenty years or more, and I have had one old tree reported to me from Maryland that was grafted more than eighty years ago and has a record of twenty-five bushels at a single crop.

It is really almost a joke on American horticulture that we have been so recently in such darkness, while the French have been making a regular practice of grafting these trees since long before Lafayette set sail to help us in our Revolution. It is difficult to explain how people who would scoff at the idea of planting a seedling apple tree or a seedling peach will plant seedling nut trees with little question. It is all right to plant Persian walnuts as seedlings, but the planters should regard themselves as experimenters—which, unfortunately, most of them do not do.

These are some of the reasons that caused the Northern Nut Growers' Association to do its best to warn the country against the unknowing purchase of seedling trees. The seedling, despite the character of the mother tree, is uncertain as to both hardiness and ancestry, and slow in bearing.

I chanced upon one planting of seedlings near Philadelphia, where the trees have shown themselves hardy but slow and of mixed ancestry. The owner says of these:

"I purchased ten years ago fifty seedling trees. A few of these show unmistakable evidence of having been crossed

with the black walnut. Some have done very well, making trees some twelve feet in height. I am now getting eight or ten nuts from each of the larger trees. This fruit seems to be of fair quality, medium size, and thin of shell.

"Every tree has lived and all are hardy, except that some of the upper shoots occasionally die back from frost. This feature is not serious."

This mixing, referred to by the owner, is one of the pronounced characteristics of the walnuts. A black-walnut tree a quarter of a mile or more away will often pollinate your Persians; so will the butternut, as a farmer near Camden, New Jersey, found out by experience. He has three seedling English walnut trees that bear well and regularly. He was so much pleased with them that he bought a hundred more from a nursery. They grew nicely; but when they began to bear, the nuts were so much like the long, rough, hard-shell, native butternut or white walnut that he dug up all but one—and that sole survivor has proved to be of no value, although a fine, extra vigorous tree. Extra vigor is a common characteristic of the hybrids.

This whole question of seedlings has been met in California and in the light of experience the growers have nearly all turned grafters. J. B. Neff, one of the well-known growers, says: "For myself I have top-grafted 225

out of 550 seedling trees on twenty acres and find that I should have worked over some more."

The English walnut industry is well established on the Pacific Coast, and it seems reasonable to believe that in the Eastern United States we have the makings of another English walnut industry. I have been through the three leading export walnut districts of Europe. I know that in the Naples district of Italy and in the Grenoble and Bordeaux districts of France there are no thriftier or better looking trees than in the United States, both East and West.

California and Oregon have them by the tens of thousands, and I have seen nothing in Europe to exceed in size a tree that stands in a yard in Washington, District of Columbia. It has a reach of seventy feet, a girth of nine feet, and its owner was selling nuts to his grocer by the barrel when I was a little boy. I have actually seen in locations as far apart as Washington and Niagara Falls a number of trees that are quite as thrifty as are the well-cared-for trees in the orchards of the famous Grenoble district of France.

We have already reached the point where every farmer and shade-tree planter in the peach-growing parts of the United States might well put out a few grafted trees as an experiment. Doubtless the Pennsylvania nut survey and the breeding experiments that California State and many private citizens are carrying on will result in some superior new varieties.

But meantime the energy of private citizens has found some good Eastern varieties and propagated them, and the trees are already growing in many Eastern States. To the surprise of all, cions from the California strains of the famous French Mayette and Franquette varieties, grafted on native black, have proved hardy in Pennsylvania and Connecticut for the past three winters.

Much more conclusive is the discovery of a thrifty, top-grafted black walnut that was converted to Franquette eighteen years ago, in Southern Pennsylvania near Gettysburg, by an experimenting farmer named Garretson. This tree has survived all winters nicely and is a good bearer.

While experimental plantings are certainly safe in all localities where the peach thrives, it would be foolish to expect annual crops. Peach trees do not do so well as that, and occasionally a late frost, as that of May 23, 1915, in Central Pennsylvania, nips even the native black-walnut tree.

Pending the collection of evidence, the grafted English walnut tree should be thought of as a fine shade tree that looks well and may occasionally hand you a five-dollar bill. Such trees are worthy of respectful consideration.

Wildfire

By Zane Grey

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

ILLUSTRATED BY
FRANK TENNEY JOHNSON



His Haste to Learn What Lucy Said Bewildered Him

XX

SLONE went down to Brackton's and put the horses in a large, high-fenced pasture adjoining Brackton's house. He felt reasonably sure his horses would be safe there, but he meant to keep a mighty close watch on them. And old Brackton, as if he read Slone's mind, said this: "Keep your eye on that daffy boy, Joel Creech. He hangs round my place, sleeps out somewheres, an' he's crazy about hosses."

Slone did not need any warning like that, nor any information to make him curious regarding young Creech. Lucy had seen to that. In fact, Slone was curious to meet this half-witted fellow who had so grievously offended and threatened Lucy. All morning, however, Creech did not put in an appearance. The village had about returned to normal now—and the sleepy tenor of its way. None of the Indians remained and they had been last to go. The days were hot while the sun stayed high, and only the riders braved its heat.

The morning, however, did not pass without interesting incident. Brackton approached Slone with an offer that he take charge of the freighting between the Ford and Durango.

"What would I do with Wildfire?" was Slone's questioning reply. And Brackton held up his hands.

A later incident earned more of Slone's interest. He had observed a man in Brackton's store, and it chanced that this man heard Slone's reply to Brackton's offer. And he had said: "You'll sure need to corral that red stallion. Grandest hoss I ever seen!"

That praise won Slone, and he engaged in conversation with the man, who said his name was Vorhees. It developed soon that Vorhees owned a little house, a corral and a patch of ground on a likely site up under the bluff, and he was dearly anxious to sell cheap because he had a fine opportunity at Durango where his people lived.

What interested Slone most was the man's remark that he had a corral that could not be broken into. The price he asked was ridiculously low if the property was good at all. An idea flashed across Slone's mind.

He went up to Vorhees' place and was much pleased with everything, especially the corral, which had, indeed, been built by a man who feared horse thieves as much as Bostil. The view from the door of the little cabin was

magnificent beyond compare. Slone remembered Lucy's last words. They rang like bells in his ears:

"Don't go—don't!" They were enough to chain him to Bostil's Ford till the crack of doom. He dared not dream of what they meant. He only listened to their music as they pealed over and over in his ears.

"Vorhees, are you serious?" he asked. "The money you ask is little enough."

"It's enough an' to spare," replied the man. "An' I'd take it as a favor of you."

"Well, I'll go you," said Slone, and he laughed a little irrationally. "Only you needn't tell right away that I bought you out."

The deal was consummated, leaving Slone still with half the money that had been his prize in the race. He felt elated. He was rich. He owned two horses—one the grandest in all the uplands, the other the faithfulest—and he owned a neat little cabin where it was joy to sit and look; a corral that would let him sleep at night; and he had money to put in supplies and furnishings, and a garden.

After he drank out of the spring that bubbled from under the bluff he told himself it alone was worth the money.

"Looks right down on Bostil's place," Slone soliloquized with glee. "Won't he just be mad! An' Lucy. . . . Whatever's she goin' to think?"

The more Slone looked round and thought the more he became convinced that good fortune had knocked at his door at last. And when he returned to Brackton's he was in an exultant mood. The old storekeeper gave him a nudge and pointed underhand to a young man of ragged aspect sitting gloomily on a box. Slone recognized Joel Creech. The fellow surely made a pathetic sight, and Slone pitied him. He looked needy and hungry.

"Say," said Slone impulsively, "want to help me carry some grub an' stuff?"

"Howdy," replied Creech, raising his head. "Sure do."

Slone sustained the queerest shock of his life when he met the gaze of those contrasting eyes. Yet he did not believe his strange feeling came from sight of different colored eyes. There was an instinct or portent in that meeting.

He purchased a bill of goods from Brackton and with Creech helping carried it up to the cabin under the bluff. Three trips were needed to pack up all the supplies and articles, during which Creech had but few words to say and these of no moment. Slone offered him money, which he refused.

"I'll help you fix up an' eat a bite," he said. "Nice up hyar."

He seemed rational enough and certainly responded to kindness. Slone found that Vorhees had left the cabin so clean there was little cleaning to do. An open fireplace of stone required some repair and there was wood to cut.

"Joel, you start a fire while I go down after my horses," said Slone.

Young Creech nodded and Slone left him there. It was not easy to catch Wildfire nor any easier to get him into the new corral, but at last Slone got him safely there. And the bars and locks on the gate might have defied any effort to open or break them quickly. Creech was standing in the doorway watching the horses, and somehow Slone saw, or imagined he saw, that Creech wore a different aspect.



"I Come Up Hyar to
Tell You it'd be Wise
Fer You to Vamoose"

"Grand wild hoss! He did what Blue was a-goin' to do—beat thet there Bostil's King!"

Creech wagged his head. He was gloomy and strange. His eyes were unpleasant to look into. His face changed. And he mumbled. Slone pitied him the more, but wished to see the last of him. Creech stayed on, however, and grew stranger and more talkative during the meal. He repeated things often—talked disconnectedly, and gave other indications that he was not wholly right in his mind. Yet Slone suspected that Creech's unbalance consisted only in what concerned horses and the Bostils. And Slone, wanting to learn all he could, encouraged Creech to talk about his father and the racers and the river and the boat, and finally Bostil.

Slone became convinced that whether young Creech was half crazy or not he knew his father's horses were doomed, and that the boat at the ferry had been cut adrift. Slone could not understand why he was convinced, but he was. Finally Creech told how he had gone down to the river only the day before; how he had found the flood still raging but much lower; how he had worked round the cliffs and had pulled up the rope cables, to find they had been cut.

"You see, Bostil cut them when he didn't need to," continued Creech shrewdly. "But he didn't know the flood was comin' down so quick. He was afeared we'd come across an' git the boat thet night. An' he meant to take away them cut cables. But he hadn't no time."

"Bostil?" queried Slone as he gazed hard at Creech. The fellow had told that rationally enough. Slone wondered if Bostil could have been so base. No! and yet—When it came to horses Bostil was scarcely human.

Slone's query served to send Creech off on another tangent which wound up in dark, mysterious threats. Then Slone caught the name of Lucy. It abruptly killed his sympathy for Creech.

"What's the girl got to do with it?" he demanded angrily. "If you want to talk to me don't use her name."

"I'll use her name when I want," shouted Creech.

"Not to me!"

"Yes, to you, mister. I ain't carin' fer you!"

"You crazy loon!" exclaimed Slone with impatience and disgust added to anger. "What's the use to be decent to you?"

Creech crouched low, his hands digging like claws into the table, as if he were making ready to spring. At that instant he was hideous.

"Crazy, am I?" he yelled. "Mebbe not so crazy! I kin tell you're gone on Lucy Bostil! I seen you with her out there in the rocks the mornin' of the race. I seen what you did to her. An' I'm a-goin' to tell it! . . . An' I'm

a-goin' to ketch Lucy Bostil—an' strip her naked—an' tie her on a hoss an' fire the grass!"

Livid and wild he breathed hard as he got up, facing Slone malignantly.

"Crazy or not—here goes!" muttered Slone grimly, and leaping up, with one blow he knocked Creech half out of the door, and then kicked him the rest of the way.

"Go on and have a fit!" cried Slone. "I'm liable to kill you if you don't have one!"

Creech got up and ran down the path, turning twice on the way. Then he disappeared among the trees.

Slone sat down.

"Lost my temper again!" he said. "This has been a day. Guess I'd better cool off right now an' stay here. That poor devil! Maybe he's not so crazy. But he's wilder than an Indian. I must warn Lucy. . . . I wonder if Bostil could have held back repairin' that boat—an' then cut it loose. I wonder. Yesterday I'd have sworn never. Today—"

Slone drove the conclusion of that thought out of his consciousness before he wholly admitted it. Then he set to work cutting the long grass from the wet and shady nooks under the bluff where the spring made the ground rich. He carried an armful down to the corral. Nagger was roaming round outside picking grass for himself. Wildfire snorted as always when he saw Slone, and Slone, as always when time permitted, tried to coax the stallion to him. He had never succeeded, nor did he this time. When he left the bundle of grass on the ground and went outside Wildfire readily came for it.

"You're that tame, anyhow, you hungry red devil," said Slone jealously. Wildfire would take a bunch of grass from Lucy Bostil's hand. Slone's feelings had undergone some reaction, though he still loved the horse. But it was love mixed with bitterness. More than ever he made up his mind that Lucy should have Wildfire. Then he walked round his place, planning the work he meant to start at once.

Several days slipped by, with Slone scarcely realizing how they flew. Unaccustomed labor tired him so that he went to bed early and slept like a log. If it had not been for the ever-

present worry and suspense and longing in regard to Lucy he would have been happier than ever he could remember.

Almost at once he had become attached to his little home, and the more he labored to make it productive and comfortable the stronger grew his attachment. Practical toil was not conducive to day dreaming, so Slone felt a loss of something vague and sweet. Many times he caught himself watching with eager eyes for a glimpse of Lucy Bostil. Still, he never saw her, and, in fact, he saw so few villagers that the place began to have that loneliness which endeared it the more to Slone.

Then the view down the gray valley to the purple monuments was always thrillingly memorable to Slone. It was out there Lucy had saved his horse and his life. His keen desert gaze could make out even at that distance the great, dark monument, gold-crowned, in the shadow of which he had heard Lucy speak words that had transformed life for him. He would ride out there some day. The spell of those looming, grand shafts of colored rock was still strong upon him.

One morning Slone had a visitor—old Brackton. Slone's cordiality died on his lips before it was half uttered. Brackton's former friendliness was not in evidence; indeed, he looked at Slone with curiosity and disfavor.

"Howdy, Slone. I jest wanted to see what you was doin' up hyar," he said.

Slone spread his hands and explained in few words. "So you took over the place, hey? We all figgered thet. But Vorhees was mum. Fact is, he was sure mysterious." Brackton sat down and eyed Slone with interest.

"Folks are talkin' a lot about you," he said bluntly. "Is that so?"

"You 'pear to be a pretty mysterious kind of a feller, Slone. I kind of took a shine to you, at first. An' thet's why I come up hyar to tell you it'd be wise fer you to vamoose."

"What!" exclaimed Slone.

Brackton repeated substantially what he had said, then pausing an instant continued: "I've no call to give you a hunch. But I'll do it jest because I did like you, fust off."

The old man seemed fussy and nervous and patronizing and disparaging all at once.

"What'd you beat up thet poor Joel Creech fer?" demanded Brackton.

"He got what he deserved," replied Slone, and the memory, coming on the head of this strange attitude of Brackton's, roused Slone's temper.

"Wal, Joel tells some queer things about you—fer instance, how you took advantage of little Lucy Bostil—grabb'in' her an' maulin' her the way Joel seen you."

"The loon!" muttered Slone, rising to pace the path.

"Wal, Joel's a bit off, but he's not loony all the time. He's seen you—an' he's tellin' it. When Bostil hears it you'd better be across the cañon!"

Slone felt the hot, sick rush of blood to his face, and humiliation and rage overtook him.

"Joel's down at my house. He had fits after you beat him, an' he ain't got over them yet. But he could blab to the riders. Van Sickle's lookin' fer you. An' today when I was alone with Joel he told me some more queer things about you. I shut him up quick. But I ain't guaranteein' I can keep him shut up."

"I'll bet you I shut him up," declared Slone. "What more did the fool say?"

"Slone, hev you been round these hyar parts—down among the monuments—fer any considerable time?" queried Brackton.

"Yes, I have—several weeks out there, an' about ten days or so round the Ford."

"Where was you the night of the flood?"

The shrewd scrutiny of the old man, the suspicion, angered Slone.

"If it's any of your mix I was out on the slope among the rocks. I heard that flood comin' down long before it got here," replied Slone deliberately.

Brackton averted his gaze and abruptly rose, as if the occasion was ended.

"Wal, take my hunch an' leave!" he said, turning away.

"Brackton, if you mean well I'm much obliged," returned Slone slowly, ponderingly. "But I'll not take the hunch."

"Suit yourself," added Brackton coldly, and he went away.

Slone watched him go down the path and disappear in the lane of cottonwoods.

"I'll be darned!" muttered Slone. "Funny old man. Maybe Creech's not the only loony one hereabouts."

Slone tried to laugh off the effect of the interview, but it persisted and worried him all day. After supper he decided to walk down into the village, and would have done so but for the fact that he saw a man climbing his path. When he recognized the rider Holley he sensed trouble, and straightway he became gloomy.

Bostil's right-hand man could not call on him for any friendly reason. Holley came up slowly, awkwardly, after the manner of a rider unused to walking. Slone had built a little porch on the front of his cabin and a bench, which he had covered with goatskins. It struck him a little strangely that he should bend over to rearrange these skins just as Holley approached the porch.

"Howdy, son," was the rider's drawled remark. "Sure makes—me—puff to climb—up this mountain."

Slone turned instantly, surprised at the friendly tone, doubting his own ears, and wanting to verify them. He was the more surprised to see Holley unmistakably amiable.

"Hello, Holley, how are you?" he replied. "Have a seat."

"Wal, I'm right spry fer an old bird. But I can't climb. . . . Say, this here beats Bostil's view."

"Yes, it's fine," replied Slone rather awkwardly as he sat down on the porch step. What could Holley want with him? This old rider was above curiosity or gossip.

"Slone, you ain't holdin' it agin me, are you—thet I tried to shut you up the other day?" he drawled with dry frankness.

"Why, no, Holley, I'm not. I saw your point. You were right. But Bostil made me mad."

"Sure, he'd make anybody mad. I've seen riders bite themselves, they was so mad at Bostil. You called him. An' you sure tickled all the boys. But you hurt yourself, fer Bostil owns an' runs this here Ford."

"So I've discovered," replied Slone.

"You got yourself in bad right off. Fer Bostil has turned the riders agin you—an' this here punchin' of Creech has turned the village folks agin you. What'd you pitch into him fer?"

Slone caught the kindly interest and intent of the rider and it warmed him as Brackton's disapproval had alienated him.

"Wal, I reckon I'd better tell you," drawled Holley as Slone hesitated, "thet Lucy wants to know if you beat up Joel an' why you did."

"Holley! Did she ask you to find out?"

"She sure did. The girl's worried these days, Slone. . . . You see, you haven't been round, an' you don't know what's comin' off."

"Brackton was here today an' he told me a good deal. I'm worried too," said Slone dejectedly.

"Thet hoss of yours, Wildfire—he's enough to make you hated in Bostil's camp, even if you hadn't made a fool of yourself, which you sure have."

Slone dropped his head as admission.

"What Creech swears he seen you do to Miss Lucy out there among the rocks, where you was hid with Wildfire—is there any truth in thet?" asked Holley earnestly. "Tell me, Slone. Folks believe it. An' it's hurt you at the Ford."

Bostil hasn't heard it yet an' Lucy, she doesn't know. But I'm figgerin' thet you punched Joel because he throwed it in your face."

"Hedid—an' I lambasted him," replied Slone with force. "You did right. But is it true what Joel seen?"

"Yes, Holley, it's true! But what I did isn't so bad—so bad as he'd make it look."

"Wal, I knowed thet. I knowed fer a long time how Lucy cares fer you," returned the old rider kindly.

Slone raised his head swiftly, incredulously.

"Holley! You can't be serious."

"Wal, I am. I've been sort of a big brother to Lucy Bostil fer eighteen years. I carried her in these here hands when she weighed no more'n my spurs. I taught her how to ride—what she knows about hosses. An' she knows more'n her dad. I taught her to shoot. I know her better'n anybody. An' lately she's been different. She's worried an' unhappy."

"But, Holley, all that—it doesn't seem —"

"I reckon not," went on Holley as Slone halted. "I think she cares fer you. An' I'm your friend, Slone. You're goin' to buck up agin some trouble round here sooner or later. An' you'll need a friend."

"Thanks, Holley," replied Slone unsteadily. He thrilled under the iron grasp of the rider's hard hand.

"You've got another friend you can gamble on," said Holley significantly.

"Another! Who?"

"Lucy Bostil. An' don't you fergit thet. I'll bet she'll make more of a row than Bostil when she hears what Joel Creech is tellin'. Fer she's bound to hear it. Van Sickle swears he's a-goin' to tell her an' then beat you up."

"He is, is he?" snapped Slone darkly.

"I've a hunch Lucy's guessed why you punched Joel. But she wants to know fer sure. Now, Slone, I'll tell her why."

"Oh, don't!" said Slone involuntarily.

"Wal, it'll be better comin' from me. It'll prepare Lucy. An' she's as good a scrapper as Bostil any day."

"It all scares me," replied Slone. He did feel panicky, and that was from thoughts of what shame might befall Lucy. The cold sweat oozed out of every pore. What might not Bostil do?

"Holley, I love the girl. So I—I didn't insult her. Bostil will never understand. An' what's he goin' to do when he finds out?"

"Wal, let's hope you won't git any wuss'n you give Joel."

"Let Bostil beat me!" ejaculated Slone. "I think I'm willin'—now—the way I feel. But I've a temper. And Bostil rubs me the wrong way."

"Wal, leave your gun home, an' fight Bostil. You're pretty husky. Sure he'll lick you, but mebbe you could give the old cuss a black eye."

Holley laughed as if the idea gave him infinite pleasure.

"Fight Bostil? . . . Lucy would hate me!" cried Slone.

"Nix! You don't know thet kid. If the old man goes after you Lucy'll care more fer you. She's jest like him in some ways." Holley pulled out a stubby black pipe, and filling and lighting it he appeared to grow more thoughtful.

"It wasn't only Lucy thet sent me up here to see you. Bostil had been pesterin' me fer days. But I kept fightin' shy of it till Lucy got hold of me."

"Bostil sent you? Why?"

"Reckon you can guess. He can't sleep thinkin' about your red hoss. None of us ever seen Bostil have sich a bad case. He raised Sage King. But he's always been crazy fer a great wild stallion. An' here you come along—an' your hoss jumps the King."

"Holley, do you think Wildfire can beat Sage King?" asked Slone eagerly.

"Reckon I do. Lucy says so an' I'll back her any day. But, son, I ain't paradin' what I think. I'd git in bad myself. Farlane an' the other boys, they're with Bostil. Van, he's to blame fer thet. He's takin' a dislike to you, right off. An' what he tells Bostil an' the boys about thet race don't agree with what Lucy tells me. Lucy says Wildfire was fiery an' cranky at the start. He wanted to run round an' kill the King instead of racin'. So he was three lengths behind when Macomber dropped the flag. Lucy says the King got into his stride. She knows. An' there Wildfire comes from behind an' climbs all over the King! . . . Van tells a different story."

"It came off just as Lucy told you," declared Slone. "I saw every move."

"Wal, thet's neither here nor there. What you're up agin is this: Bostil is sore since you called him. But he holds himself in because he hasn't given up hope of gittin' Wildfire. An' Slone, you're sure wise, ain't you, thet if Bostil doesn't buy him you can't stay on here?"

"I'm wise. But I won't sell Wildfire," replied Slone doggedly.

"Wal, I'd never wasted my breath tellin' you all this if I hadn't figgered about Lucy. You've got her to think of." Slone turned on Holley passionately.

"You keep hintin' there's hope for me—when I know there's none!"

"You're only a boy," replied Holley. "Son, where there's life there's hope. I ain't a-goin' to tell you agin thet I know Lucy Bostil."

Slone could not stand nor walk nor keep still. He was all inwardly shaken.

"Wildfire's not mine to sell. He's Lucy's!" confessed Slone.

"What!" ejaculated Holley, and he nearly dropped his pipe.

"I gave Wildfire to her. She accepted him. It was done. Then—then I lost my head, an' made her mad. . . . An'—she said she'd ride him in the race, but wouldn't keep him. But he is hers."

"Oho! I see. Slone, I was goin' to advise you to sell Wildfire—all on account of Lucy. You're young an' you'd have a big start in life if you would. But Lucy's your girl an' you give her the hoss. . . . Thet settles thet!"

"If I go away from here an' leave Wildfire for Lucy—do you think she could keep him? Wouldn't Bostil take him from her?"

"Wal, son, if he tried thet on Lucy she'd jump Wildfire an' hit your trail an' hang on to it till she found you."

"What'll you tell Bostil?" asked Slone, half beside himself.

"I'm consarned if I know," replied Holley. "Mebbe I'll think of some idee. I'll go back now. An' say, son, I

reckon you'd better hang close to home. If you meet Bostil down in the village you two'd clash. I'll come up soon, but it'll be after dark."

"Holley, all this is—is good of you," said Slone. "I—I'll —"

"Shut up, son," interrupted the rider dryly. "Thet's your only weakness, so far as I can see. You say too much."

Holley started down then, his long, clinking spurs digging into the steep path. He left Slone a prey to impondering thoughts, at once anxious and dreamy.

Next day Slone worked hard all day, looking forward to nightfall, expecting Holley would come up. He tried to resist the sweet and tantalizing anticipation of a message from Lucy, but in vain. The rider had immeasurably uplifted Slone's hope, that Lucy at least cared for him. Not for a moment all day could Slone drive away the hope. At twilight he was too eager to eat—too obsessed to see the magnificent sunset.

But Holley did not come and Slone went to bed late, half sick with disappointment.

The next day was worse. Slone found work irksome, yet he stuck to it. On the third day he rested and dreamed, and grew doubtful again, and then moody. On the fourth day Slone found he needed supplies that he must obtain from the store. He did not forget Holley's warning, but he disregarded it, thinking there would scarcely be a chance of meeting Bostil at mid-day.

There were horses standing bridles down before Brackton's place, and riders lounging at the rail and step. Some of these men had been pleasant to Slone on earlier occasions. This day they seemed not to see him. Slone was tingling all over when he went into the store. Some devilry was afoot! He had a hot thought that these riders could not have minds of their own.

Just inside the door Slone encountered Wetherby, the young rancher from Durango. Slone spoke, but Wetherby only replied with an insolent stare. Slone did not glance at the man to whom Wetherby was talking. Only a few people were inside the store, and Brackton was waiting upon them. Slone stood back a little in the shadow. Brackton had observed his entrance but did not greet him. Then Slone absolutely knew that for him the good will of Bostil's Ford was a thing of the past.

Presently Brackton was at leisure, but he showed no disposition to attend to Slone's wants. Then Slone walked up to the counter and asked for supplies.

"Have you got the money?" asked Brackton as if addressing one he would not trust.

"Yes," replied Slone, growing red under an insult that he knew Wetherby had heard.

Brackton handed out the supplies and received the money without a word. He held his head down. It was a singular action for a man used to dealing fairly with everyone. Slone felt outraged. He hurried out of the place, with shame burning him, with his own eyes down-cast, and in his hurry he bumped square into a burly form. Slone recoiled—looked up. Bostil! The old rider was eying him with cool speculation.

"Wal, are you drunk?" he queried without any particular expression.

Yet the query was to Slone like a blow. It brought his head up with a jerk—his glance steady and keen on Bostil's.

"Bostil, you know I don't drink," he said.

"A-huh! I know a lot about you, Slone. . . . I heard you bought Vorhees' place, up on the bench."

"Yes."

"Did he tell you it was mortgaged to me for more'n it's worth?"

"No. He didn't."

"Did he make over any papers to you?"

"No."

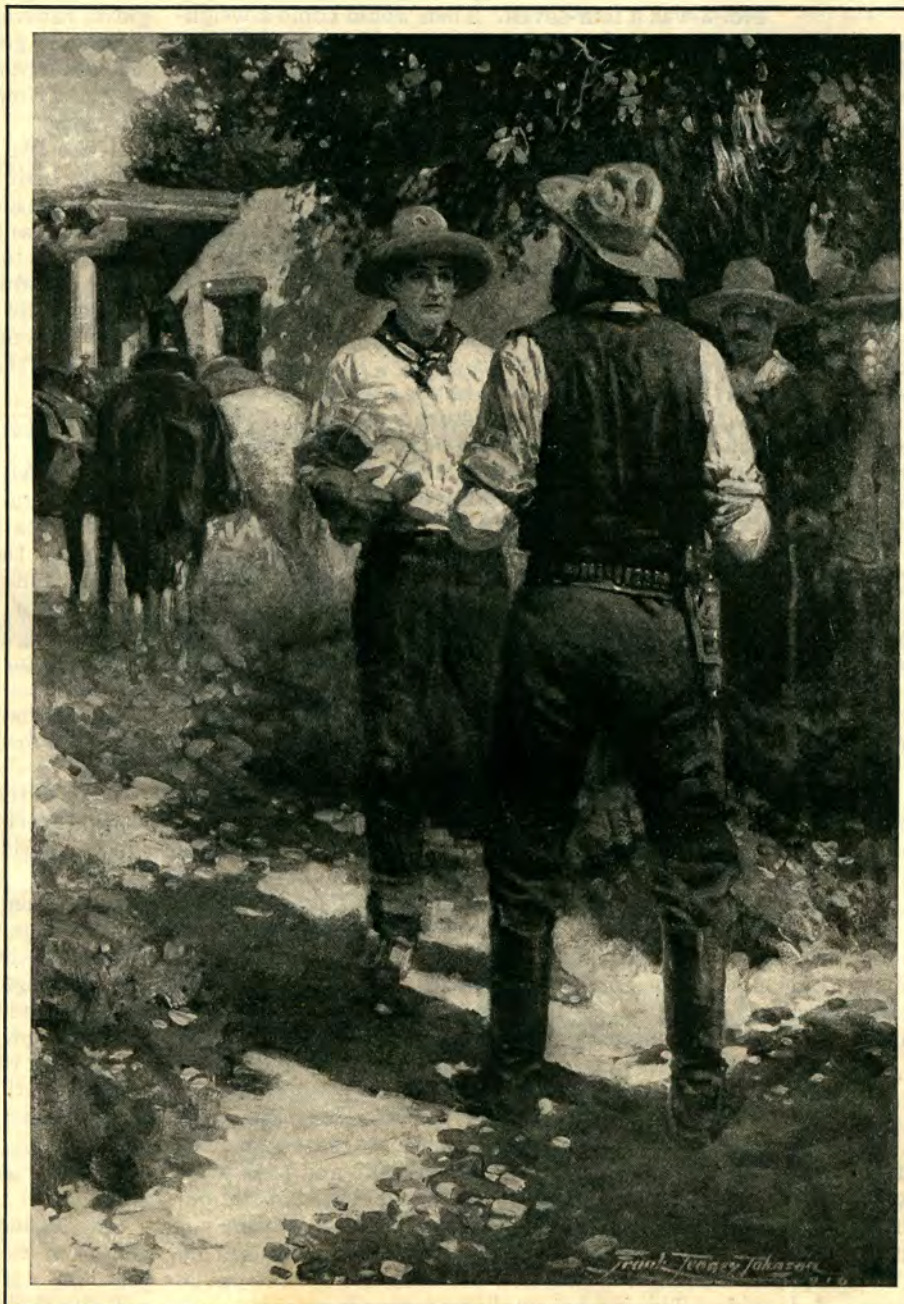
"Wal, if it interests you I'll show you papers thet proves the property's mine."

Slone suffered a pang. The little home had grown dearer and dearer to him.

"All right, Bostil. If it's yours—it's yours," he said calmly enough.

"I reckon I'd drove you out before this if I hadn't felt we could make a deal."

"We can't agree on any deal, Bostil," replied Slone steadily. It was not what Bostil said, but the way he said it—the subtle meaning and power behind it—that



"An' What'll You Bet?" "My Life an' My Horse!" "Agin What?" He Demanded Hoarsely. "Your Daughter Lucy!"

breakage and eggs will go across the continent in good order.

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in the center. This is to separate the layers of eggs. The top should not be nailed to this partition, but layers of excelsior should be placed on top of the eggs and the top of the case nailed securely to each end. Excelsior should also be placed in the bottom of the case. Then if the wagon suddenly drops into a hole the excelsior absorbs the shock.

WILDFIRE

(Continued from Page 1223)

gave Slone a sense of menace and peril. These he had been used to for years; he could meet them. But he was handicapped here because it seemed that, though he could meet Bostil face to face, he could not fight him. For he was Lucy's father. Slone's position, the impotence of it, rendered him less able to control his temper.

"Why can't we?" demanded Bostil. "If you wasn't so touchy we could. An' let me say, young feller, that there's more reason now that you do make a deal with me."

"Deal? What about?"

"About your red hoss."

"Wildfire! . . . No deals, Bostil," returned Slone, and made as if to pass him. The big hand that forced Slone back was far from gentle, and again he felt the quick rush of blood.

"Mebbe I can tell you somethin' thet'll make you sell Wildfire," said Bostil.

"Not if you talked yourself dumb!" flashed Slone. There was no use to try to keep cool with this Bostil if he talked horses. "I'll race Wildfire against the King. But no more."

"Race! Wal, we don't run races round here without stakes," replied Bostil with deep scorn. "An' what can you bet? The little dab of prize money is gone, an' it wouldn't be enough to meet me. You're a strange one in these parts. I've pride an' reputation to uphold. You brag of racin' with me—an' you a beggarly rider! . . . You wouldn't have them clothes an' boots if my girl hadn't fetched them to you!"

The riders behind Bostil laughed. Wetherby's face was there in the door—not amused, but hard with scorn and something else. Slone felt a sickening, terrible gust of passion. It waved over him. He trembled. And as the wave subsided the quick cooling of skin and body pained him like a burn made with ice.

"Yes, Bostil—I'm what you say," responded Slone, and his voice seemed to fill his ears. "But you're dead wrong when you say I've nothin' to bet on a race."

"An' what'll you bet?"

"My life an' my horse!"

The riders suddenly grew silent and intense. Bostil vibrated to that. He turned white. He, more than any rider on the uplands, must have felt the nature of that offer.

"Agin what?" he demanded hoarsely.

"Your daughter Lucy!"

One instant the surprise held Bostil mute and motionless. Then he seemed to expand. His huge bulk jerked into motion and he bellowed like a mad bull.

Slone saw the blow coming—made no move to avoid it. The big fist took him square on the mouth and chin, and laid him flat on the ground. Sight failed Slone for a little, and likewise ability to move. But he did not lose consciousness. His head seemed to have been burst into rays

and dots and flecks and red mist that blurred his eyes. Then these cleared away, leaving intense pain.

He started to get up, all in an instant his brain in a whirl. Where was his gun? He had left it home. But for that he would have killed Bostil. He had already killed one man. The thing was a dark, burning flash—then all over! He could do it again. But Bostil was Lucy's father!

Slone gathered up the packages of supplies and without looking at the men hurried away. He seemed possessed of a fury to turn and run back. Some force, like an invisible hand, withheld him. When he reached the cabin he shut himself in, and lay on his bunk, forgetting that the place did not belong to him, alive only to the mystery of his trouble, smarting with the shame of the assault upon him.

It was dark before he composed himself and went out, and then he had no desire to eat. He made no move to open the supplies of food—did not even make a light. But he went out to take grass and water to the horses. When he returned to the cabin a man was standing at the porch. Slone recognized Holley's shape and then his low voice.

"Son, you played hell today."

"Holley, don't you go back on me!" cried Slone. "I was driven!"

"Don't talk so loud," whispered the rider in return. "I've only a minnit . . . Here—a letter from Lucy. . . . An' son, don't git the idee thet I'll go back on you."

Slone took the letter with trembling fingers. All the fury and gloom instantly fled. Lucy had written him! He could not speak.

"Son, I'm double crossin' the boss right this minnit!" whispered Holley hoarsely. "An' the same time I'm playin' Lucy's game. If Bostil finds out he'll kill me. I mustn't be ketchin' up here. But I won't lose track of you—wherever you go."

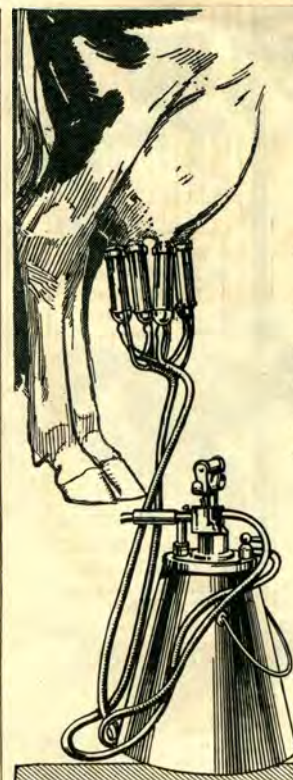
Holley slipped away stealthily in the dusk, leaving Slone with a throbbing heart.

"Wherever you go!" he echoed. "Ah! I forgot! I can't stay here."

Lucy's letter made his fingers tingle—made them so hasty and awkward that he had difficulty in kindling blaze enough to see to read. The letter was short, written in lead pencil, on the torn leaf of a ledger. Slone could not read rapidly—those years on the desert had seen to that—and his haste to learn what Lucy said bewildered him. At first all the words blurred:

"Come at once to the bench in the cottonwoods. I'll meet you there. My heart is breaking. It's a lie—a lie—what they say. I'll swear you were with me the night the boat was cut adrift. I know you didn't do that. I know who—Oh! come! I will stick to you. I will run off with you. I love you!"

(TO BE CONTINUED)



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Dog Breeding on the Farm

(Concluded from Page 1218)

the morning, a dry bone or piece of stale bread at noon, and a hearty meal at night, consisting of meat, bread and rice or cereal, moistened but not soaked with soup. It is well to add a pinch of salt to the mixture. The following is Mrs. Baker's regimen for feeding puppies:

"One puppy biscuit at seven or eight o'clock; milk, slightly warmed, at ten or eleven o'clock; cereal or wheat shreds with milk at twelve or one o'clock; milk at three or four o'clock; raw meat, ground, with boiled rice at six or seven o'clock.

"Gradually drop the milk feedings after four months, and at six months and after give a dog biscuit, or one and a half, for breakfast, a piece of dry bread or a dry bone at noon, and a hearty meal at night of cooked or raw meat, with rice or cereal slightly moistened with soup.

"Salted, well-cooked vegetables, such as carrots, cabbage, beans or spinach, may be added to the mixture. Boiled fish may be substituted for meat occasionally. Always give plenty of water in clean dishes. Never feed poultry or pork."

The quantities here given should be reduced for small toy dogs.

Table scraps usually make a well-balanced ration for the dog, but it is often necessary to purchase food and, as Mrs. Baker's business is conducted, this forms one of the most important items of expense. For six grown dogs fifty cents' worth of meat should suffice for one week. Shin beef is a good kind to buy. Broken rice may be bought for four to five dollars a hundred pounds. Wheat shreds, a by-product, cost two dollars a hundred pounds, and the same amount of dog biscuit may be purchased for five dollars. One hundred pounds of the biscuit, rice and wheat shreds last about two months for six dogs, so the expense for one month for this number is about as follows: Meat, \$2.50; biscuit, \$2.50; wheat shreds, \$1; rice, \$2.50; total \$8.50.

Fifty dollars is a fair average price for a good male pup of one of the more popular breeds. Mrs. Baker's puppies are usually sold young—about two months of age. Females are worth about thirty-five dollars at her kennels, and her grown dogs bring a hundred dollars or more.

Though a female will breed twice a year, only once is advisable. With great good luck, three females should raise, on the average, fifteen salable puppies a year, which, at an average price of forty dollars, would bring \$600. Reckoning the ordinary expenses at about \$250 for the six grown dogs, there would be an apparent profit of \$350. This, however, does not include interest on investment, feeding and care of unsold puppies, or the misfortunes that are sure to befall occasionally.

The beginner will probably do well to break even the first year. Mrs. Baker says she could begin anew with a capital of \$600 and make the business pay. The farmer's boy, however, might reasonably expect to be able to make a start on much less.

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