

Cattle Kingdom

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By ALAN LE MAY

WNU Service

CHAPTER I

"Of course you knew," the girl said, "a man has been killed, here on the 94 range?"

Billy Wheeler turned to look at the girl who perched beside him on the corral fence, and for a moment he forgot to answer. Marian Dunn hadn't been in the desert country long enough to gather a very heavy tan. Under the shadow of her Stetson her face reflected the glow of the fresh morning sunlight upon the red hills; to Billy Wheeler it seemed a fragile face, finely drawn, suggesting transparency. And her eyes were blue distance boiled down. She wore belted overalls and half boots; but she could never have been mistaken for a Westerner.

Billy Wheeler, though, could never be mistaken for anything else. The dry intermountain country, by its necessity of wide ranges and the perpetual mobility of the saddle, has set its mark upon its sons. Wheeler was young, but his weather-trimmed features showed the blast of sun and sweep of wind, and his gray eyes were visibly tuned to distance.

The girl turned her eyes to him, reminding him he was supposed to say something.

"I didn't hear much," he said. "A gas station man told me there was a killing, as I came through Inspiration; but he didn't know much about it."

"I guess nobody does."

"Yes, but—who was killed? And when?"

"That's just it," the girl told him. "They don't know who was killed. It's the strangest thing I ever heard of. They can't even find him."

"Can't find who? The man who was killed?"

"That's it."

Billy Wheeler grinned slowly, boyishly. "Well, I'll be darned!"

"I don't think it's funny. I think it's—horrible."

"Well, yes; I guess it is."

He looked away, estimating again the nearness of the approaching riders. John "Red Horse" Dunn, Old Man of the 94, at whose summons Wheeler had come 300 miles, had not been on hand to receive him, having set out before daylight on an unknown mission with three of his cow hands. But they were coming in now: across the dry morning Wheeler could identify the individual riders at the half mile as they jog-trotted in, their ponies abreast.

"When did all this happen?" he asked.

"Uncle John found the sign, as he calls it, yesterday morning."

"Then he must have wired me right after that."

"I guess so."

She hadn't known, then, that her uncle had sent for him. She hadn't known that he was coming—and he hadn't known she was here. That made a difference.

"Uncle John hasn't wanted to talk about this thing—to me," the girl now said. "Perhaps he'll give you a different, clearer story, Billy."

They fell silent. Billy Wheeler let his eyes run over casual, familiar things—the roadster he had come in, the tall barns, the low sprawled house, bunkhouse, and grub shack. But as Billy Wheeler's eyes drifted out over the vast rolling "flats" of the plain, resting here and there on a broken, flat-topped mesa or far-up-thrust mountain of gaunt red rock, all that he saw, excepting only the far peaks, was under the dictatorship of Horse Dunn's brand—the 94.

Billy Wheeler looked at these familiar things, but he was not thinking about them. He was thinking about the girl at his side, whom he hardly looked at at all.

Billy Wheeler had not seen Marian Dunn for two years. Had he known that she was here, he would not have come here now.

Marian Dunn was Horse Dunn's niece. Once, for a couple of months two years ago, Wheeler had seen her every day. He had used every persuasion he knew of, all he had, to make this girl love him—and had failed. Sometimes he could still hear her low, cool voice: "I'm sorry—truly sorry." The sincere regret in that was pretty hard to take.

In everything else he had succeeded. He had come up from nothing in cows, and tripled in land, and switched back to cows to double again. He had liquidated everything at the peak of cattle prices, and at twenty-seven had nothing to worry about. But in this one thing he cared most about he had met only complete blank defeat. He would not have come here, to raise again the bitterness of that defeat, if he had known that she was here.

And down there was a certain awkwardness between them, since she inevitably knew all that, too.

"I think he's going to ask a favor of you," Marian said.

"I don't know if you know this," Billy Wheeler said slowly; "but his wire made out as if he was offering me a job."

"Yes—I knew that."

"I owe a lot to old Horse Dunn," Billy Wheeler said. "He picked me up when I was fourteen years old, half-way starved and all the way

maverick. He carried me along four years. If it wasn't for him, I'd be in the wild bunch—or in the pen. And he showed me my start in cattle."

"I suppose, then," Marian said, "you won't turn him down in this thing now."

"I've got things to see to, Marian," he stalled. "I couldn't take on another job now."

He supposed she might know that this was not so. For the present he was out from under; he could afford to do anything he wanted to, to fill his time or to help a friend. But to take a job in which he would see this girl every day, while yet tight-chinned by the knowledge that she was not for him, and never would be—that was something else.

"I don't know how much he needs you," Marian said; "nor who else he could get, instead. But I know this—he has more enemies than friends, by three to one."

Billy Wheeler stirred restlessly, and began to build a cigarette. He knew it was true that the 94 had many enemies, few friends. Here in



"I'll—Get Out of Here If You Want Me To."

this dusty, mesa-broken land Horse Dunn had set out to build a cow kingdom—a kingdom on the grand scale of the old days.

But you can't build a cow kingdom, buying up the range rights of little brand after little brand, without annoying and disturbing the brands that are left; and the bought-out brands are forever trying to edge back.

Here and there in the world were perhaps half a dozen graves commemorating the drawn-out, inevitable conflict. There had never been a general open war. But more than one lone-riding cowboy of the 94 had come to his end by the gunfire of persons unknown, and one or two others had left on the range an enemy who would force the issue no more. And at Ace Springs had died two men of four—hired gunfighters all—who had jumped Horse Dunn from ambush. The 94 could have started its own Boot Hill.

More effective than those brief, unofficial bursts of action was the enmity of certain cooler, more wisely watchful men, like Link Bender, Pinto Halliday, Sam Caldwell—the defeated contestants for the Red Hills ranges. Nowadays the expanding 94 found itself encircled by a veritable wolf ring of enemies—a wolf ring biding its time with a malevolent optimism.

"I don't even know what the situation is," the girl went on. "But it's worrying him deeply; he can't hide that, not from me. And his first move was to turn to you."

"Oh, shucks now, Marian. . ."

"I shouldn't like to think," the girl said oddly, as if with difficulty, "that you turned him down because I'm here."

For an instant he sat perfectly still, silent. He hadn't expected her to come out with it, direct and straight like that.

She put both hands on the rail between them and leaned toward him. "I'd never forgive myself if I thought you let Horse Dunn down on account of me. I'll—get out of here, if you want me to."

He looked straight at her—and lied. "Nothing farther from my mind," he assured her. "No call to even think of such a thing."

He paused, listening to the stampede of hoofs beyond a big barn which obscured the riders as they swung into the layout.

And now rescue came, as Horse Dunn thundered around the corner of the barn and slid his pony to a stop before them in a great up-jump of dust.

To old-timers John Dunn was known as "Red Horse Jack"—or more commonly, just "Horse" Dunn—partly because he was big as a horse, and partly because of the coarse sorrel mane he had had in his youth. Nobody knew how old Horse Dunn was; they thought he must be sixty-eight at least, and his mustache and curly beard were at last roaned with gray. But he seemed to have an Indian medicine on him which cheated time, for he was powerful and barrel-chested yet, and straight as a lodgepole pine.

Half an hour after his return Dunn was to be seen leaning against a post of the open gallery which ran along the front of the cook-shack; he was chewing a blade of burro grass. Said he, "We all grant a man is dead. Any of you still doubting that?" He watched the cowboys, who lounged along the open edge of the gallery floor, but none of them answered.

Breakfast had been set out by a little withered old woman known as Tia Cara. She had fed them promptly—and they ate the same way.

"Look here," Dunn went on. "Look here! I'm going to ask you once more—and this is the last time. If any of you is a good enough man to have blasted a cow thief, say so now! I'll back any boy of mine that shot in defense of the brand. You know that!"

He paused, and waited. Val Douglas, Dunn's thirty-year-old range boss, let mild eyes dream on a distant peak, and Tulare Callahan spat over his shoulder through his teeth.

"All right," the Old Man said. "I ain't doubting you, any of you. Now I'm telling you what I want you to do. You've seen the killer's trail at Short Crick—the trail of a cup-hoofed pony, long in the toe; been shod, and the shoes pulled off. We've missed out on locating that trail where it left Short Crick. Now range. Somewhere, somehow, we got to cut that trail. And especially we've got to find the man that's dead."

"Anybody checking back on the dead man's horse?"

"Don't you worry about the dead man's horse? There'll be plenty checking done on that horse! Tulare, you take the flat country to the south."

"Okay."

"Gil, you sweep northwest between Short Crick and the Spotted Range," Dunn went on. "Val, you take a wider swing than Gil, and to the east. Scout the edge of the bare rock below Red Sleep Ridge."

The cowboys waited. "Is there any guess yet," Tulare asked after a moment, "as to who it is we're looking for?"

Unexpectedly the Old Man flared up. "How the hell do I know!" he roared. "And what do you care? You'll know him when you find him because he's dead! Ain't that enough for you? What you waiting for now? Get on with it!"

They moved off.

Horse Dunn turned to Billy Wheeler. "Get your war bag. You got to get into horse pants and boots. You and I got some riding of our own to do, no later than now."

Billy Wheeler jerked suitcase and saddle from his roadster and followed Horse Dunn to a room in the rambling weathered house—the only room the Old Man used when he was alone.

Here, while Wheeler changed to cow-country work clothes, Horse Dunn stood looking out across the range. He turned to Billy Wheeler, his big crinkly-bearded face unreadable.

"Look out the window. Look over at Lost Whiskey Buttes. You see a signal there?"

Wheeler obeyed. Four miles off, on a high place, he made out a thin vertical line against the brassy sky.

"That's Steve Hurley's smoke," Horse Dunn told him. "Last night Steve was in Inspiration, checking up. This morning—he's been on that butte since before daybreak."

"What's the smoke mean, Horse?"

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Beavers Are Nature's Flood Engineers; Dams Are Far Safer Than Man-Made Levees

Beavers are the original flood-control engineers, and they are among the shrewdest and thriftiest and most valuable as well. Beaver dams near river sources, and forests, are stronger and surer and safer than the best of man-made levees. Unhappily, both beavers and forests are diminishing, and we are trying desperately and not to successfully, to substitute steel and concrete for their services, asserts a writer in the St. Louis Globe-Democrat.

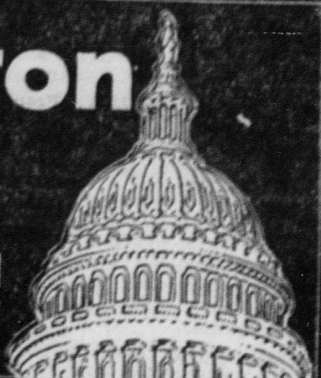
Nine times out of ten, the site chosen for a beaver dam is the most feasible spot along any particular stretch of river. The tenth time the dam may fall, in which case the beavers abandon it and diligently hasten to make good their mistake by building another. For beavers, as the old adage will remind you, are workers, especially the old beavers for whom the cutting of a tree 4 or 5 inches in diameter is a simple matter, generally to be accomplished at a single sitting without stopping.

The actual work of cutting the logs is generally done by one beaver to a tree. Just before the tree falls,

Washington Digest

National Topics Interpreted By WILLIAM BRUCKART

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Washington. — Some years ago, when New England's sharp-tongued George H. Moses sat in the presidential officer's chair as president pro tempore of the senate, I used to marvel at the speed with which he got rid of legislation. The Republicans were in control of the senate. The late Senator Charles Curtis of Kansas was the Republican leader. Between the astute Curtis and the nimble-witted Moses, the senate many times really ran in high gear.

To me, it was reminiscent of the old days, therefore, when I watched Vice President "Jack" Garner operate in the senate the other day to get the judiciary reform bill through that body without permitting a deluge of debate. I think Mr. Garner performed on that occasion with even greater finesse than did Senator Moses because Mr. Garner did not wait for cues from the floor of the senate; he simply took charge and, knowing what the job was, saw to it that things were accomplished in record time.

But the significance of this incident should not be overlooked. It was noteworthy, of course, that the senate should pass the court bill and send it to the house in a total of six hours. It was noteworthy that the Vice President established a precedent by granting permission to senators to include in the Congressional Record speeches they would have made if the debate had been prolonged. And yet it was the implication of the senate action that seems to me to be the most important phase of that situation.

The way I see the picture is this: The ease with which that bill was put through demonstrates that those who opposed the original bill to add six new justices to the Supreme court were objecting only to the court packing and not to the reforms in procedure.

The bill as it becomes law provides for a number of changes in court procedure to the end that adjudication of controversy can be accomplished much more quickly than has been the case in the past. It does not include any addition to the membership of the Supreme court and it does not include any provision for sending hand-picked judges into the various circuits and districts as the White House and the Department of Justice may decide. In other words, the new law leaves the judiciary system independent and again establishes it as a co-ordinate branch of the government, equal in all respects to the legislative, which is congress, and the executive, which is the President and the executive departments. There can be no doubt that this piece of legislation is worthwhile although to the layman the benefits may not immediately appear. It must be regarded, however, simply as a piece of legislation that cuts much legal red tape and those who must avail themselves of the courts or those who are forced under jurisdiction of courts will come more nearly obtaining justice than heretofore.

I have said in these columns before that when the senate refused to accept the President's orders and pass legislation that would permit him to appoint six new justices to the Supreme court at one time, the President suffered one of the worst political defeats he has ever encountered. He probably will never meet with another such disastrous setback.

It was obvious to the vast majority of senators and representatives and to observers here within six weeks after Mr. Roosevelt submitted the court packing bill that he could not force it through. He refused nevertheless to admit defeat. In consequence, it took nearly six months of bitter and futile wrangling in the senate to convince the President that he was on the wrong side of the question as far as public sentiment was concerned.

So congress has wasted nearly all of the 1937 session on a proposition for which it was not responsible.

It may be said that congress should remain in session under those circumstances and give all of the time that is necessary to deliberation of measures before it. Yet, facts must be faced. One of these facts is that through all of the months prior to adjournment scores of members were wearing themselves down fighting against a proposition with which they could not agree. In the meantime, Washington's summer is a completely hot and humid summer. Most of the members of the senate and house are no longer boys of college age. They cannot withstand the physical rigors of heavy work under weather conditions that prevail in a Washington summer. Thus it is not strange at all that as July passed and August wore on, most of the members wanted to go to places more comfortable than the Capital city and that constituted a terrific urge to get rid of whatever legislation was before them with the very

minimum of effort. In consequence, there has been some very bad legislation and congress is now wholly to blame for it.

A friend of mine, a well-known doctor, who is not a politician, knows nothing about politics—a man, in short, who minds his own business and tries to do the best job of which he is capable, asked me a question the other day that precipitated this discussion. He asked me why the newspapers throughout the country were giving so much space, front page space at that, to the political fight over the Democratic nomination for mayor in New York.

My doctor friend observed that which is true, namely, that the mayor of New York is only mayor of that city and has no jurisdiction or power anywhere else; he observed as well that New York City is simply a subdivision of the state of New York and that New York state is only one state out of forty-eight in our nation. Further, he suggested that he, and he believed millions of others, could not possibly have any interest in whether Tammany or the New Deal faction of Democrats in New York City should win the nomination and their mayoralty candidate.

Superficially, the doctor was right. His thoughts, however, do not touch the root of that situation. Fundamentally, the battle between Tammany and the Democrats in New York is a battle between the old line, conservative Democrats throughout the nation and the New Deal faction of the party which is headed by President Roosevelt. It is vitally important also to the Republicans for the reason that the Presidential election of 1940 is almost certain to be a campaign in which we will find conservatives from whatever party aligned on one hand and radicals from whatever party aligned on the other side. To that extent, the New York primary and mayoralty election is the beginning of the 1940 presidential campaign.

The bitterness that is going to prevail from here on has been given something of a preview by the charge by Senator Copeland, the Tammany candidate, that President Roosevelt was interfering in a purely local fight. Senator Copeland's activities in the senate have been almost wholly antagonistic to the President and the New Deal generally. Where the President has been sound, as the conservatives recognize sound policies, Senator Copeland has fought alongside of the New Dealers. Otherwise, he has not concealed his opposition to radical New Deal proposals.

Thus, when Senator Copeland broke openly and accused the President of stooping to local politics, he opened the way for conservatives everywhere to strike back at the political machine managed by Postmaster General Jim Farley in Mr. Roosevelt's behalf. As one house member suggested: "Senator Copeland has put fire into the fight."

The selection of Senator Copeland by the famous Tammany organization in New York City was the signal for the New Deal faction of the great city to take off their coats. They promptly announced selection of New York Supreme Court Justice Mahoney as their candidate against Copeland. There are four borough organizations behind Mahoney. There is only the Tammany group behind Copeland. On the face of it, it would seem that the senator cannot win. The fact seems to be, however, that there will be a rather close race for the reason that some of the four organizations behind Mahoney may not be able to control the Democratic votes in their bailiwicks as entirely as Tammany Hall will control Democrats so long as affiliated with that organization. Certainly, according to the best advice I can get, the Copeland charge against Mr. Roosevelt is likely to swing a good many Democrats to the Copeland ticket. This will be so because New York City always has resented outside influences in its political battles. Senator Copeland can be counted upon as well to broaden the charge so that Mr. Farley's tentacles in New York City politics where he has long been active will be made to appear like the strangling, crushing arms of an octopus. In other words, the conservatives who are supporting Copeland will not let the charge of interference by the President become of less consequence any time it is retold.

True, Secretary Marvin McIntyre of the White House staff denied that the President had talked politics with the Mahoney leaders. But the denial was not accepted by Copeland as being sincere, for he added: "I am not afraid of Mr. Roosevelt's reprisals. The President enjoys a great personal popularity, but his political popularity is swiftly disappearing."

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