

Cattle Kingdom

By
**ALAN
LE MAY**

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WNU Service

SYNOPSIS

Billy Wheeler, wealthy young cattleman, arrives at the 94 ranch, summoned by his friend Horse Dunn, its elderly and quick-tempered owner, because of a mysterious murder. Billy is in love with Dunn's niece Marian, whom he has not seen for two years. She had rejected his suit and is still aloof. Dunn's ranch is surrounded by enemies, including Link Bender, Pinto Halliday and Sam Caldwell, whom he had defeated in his efforts to build a cattle kingdom. Dunn directs his cow hands, Val Douglas, Tulare Callahan and others to search for the killer's horse.

CHAPTER I—Continued

"It means the sheriff is on the ride—he's left Link Bender's, headed for Short Crick. Maybe you think he's getting a slow start. He is. That's the nature of the man. You ready?"

"Lead out," said Wheeler, buckling his chap belt.

"Wait."

Horse Dunn reached down a broad cartridge belt whose holster carried a heavy six-gun, and swung this about his waist. "Pick yourself a gun," he told Wheeler.

"What's this for?" Wheeler demanded.

"In case of emergency, boy."

Wheeler stared at him. Then he shrugged, picked a weighted gun-belt from the wall, and strapped it on.

"Bring your saddle."

At the corrals Horse Dunn pointed out a stocky buckskin pony, and when Billy Wheeler had roped and rigged this animal, Dunn led the way out of the layout. Promptly Horse Dunn pushed his own tall sorrel into a hard laming trot.

"I want to join up with the sheriff somewhere about Chuck Box Wash," Dunn explained. "I'm right anxious to be with him when he makes his look-see at Short Crick."

"Horse," said Billy Wheeler, "what's happened here?"

"You'll see for yourself, better than I can tell you, knowing the lay of country like you do. But I'll tell you what I know."

In abrupt sentences he told Wheeler what had happened.

Morning of the day before, Horse Dunn had been riding Short Creek in the course of making a cattle count. The range of the 94 was far-flung and broken; the first step toward a count was to read the water holes, to find out what part of the range the big bunches were frequenting. Reading sign on Short Creek, Dunn had come upon the double trail of a shod horse and an unshod horse, ridden side by side. The trail was going his way. He rode along it without attention—until he came upon blood-stained ground.

"I studied the ground very careful, tracing the trails," Dunn said. "In five minutes I knew for sure I'd come on the place where a man met his death."

"But there was no body?"

Dunn shook his head. "The dead man keeled out of the saddle as he was shot," he reported the sign.

"But I guess he got stirrup hung, for he was dragged. His pony pulled him through the crick. I followed across, and found where he came loose. But the dead man was no more there."

"I don't know as I get this," Wheeler said.

Dunn gave it as his opinion that the man on the other horse had followed and picked up his victim. "When I saw that," said Dunn, "I knew I was looking at the beginning of something. Maybe—at the beginning of the end."

For a moment Wheeler stared at Dunn; then the spell broke. To assume flatly that a man was killed, when even the identity of the victim was unknown, seemed to Wheeler an outlandish stretch, even for an old tracker.

"This is the darnedest thing I ever heard of," Wheeler complained. "What—no corpse? What kind of murder is this? Who's missing?"

"Nobody's missing, that's known yet."

"Well, what I don't see," Wheeler said, "is why you were in such a hurry to report to the sheriff, with so little known."

"I had no choice. I was still looking over the ground when I sighted a rider, about a mile off. In a minute I made out it was Link Bender. Maybe you can remember when Link's Seven S was bigger than the 94. Maybe you remember how he tried to pinch out the 94—almost put Marian's father to the wall. I broke him of all that! But he's never swattered that he was licked. I've got plenty enemies, Billy; but Link Bender is the smartest of 'em. Naturally I couldn't leave it so's he could report he seen me sneaking away. So I had to signal him over and show him what I found."

"And he read the sign the same as you?"

"Billy, I keep telling you! There ain't any other way to read that sign."

"Yes, but look here—the supposed dead man's horse—"

"Link Bender took off on the trail of the dead man's horse. Hoping to find the body, like a fool. I let him go, and haven't seen him since.

So I don't know what he found. But he went and reported to the sheriff, like I knew he would."

"I should think you'd have been some interested in the dead man's caballo yourself."

"More interested in the other side of it. The killer's trail took to the crick. Short Crick runs two hands deep on stone for two miles, then disappears in the sand. I took to the crick and hunted for where the killer left it. Plenty horse bands water at Short Crick, wading in and out. I lost the trail.

"So pretty soon," Horse Dunn finished, "I rode back to the ranch. By that time it had come to me what I might be up against here. So I had a wire sent to you."

They trotted two miles in silence. "I've been trying to figure out," Billy Wheeler said at last, "where I fit in this."

Dunn was silent for a little way. "I've got enemies, Billy," he said finally.

"A few head of 'em," Wheeler agreed.

"And you know, too," Dunn reminded him, "the cow country is in terrible bad shape. Everybody has had to borrow, for three years straight. Nobody has borrowed deeper than the 94. Now our debts come due again. I have to go to Las Vegas, maybe to San Francisco."



"It's a close call, by God, to keep the 94 out of bankruptcy! Now suppose this coyote ring, with Link Bender at the head of it, can force some trouble onto the 94. Suppose that trouble is made to look bad enough so that I can't extend those loans—let alone increase 'em? The work of 15 years drops from under like a shot pony!"

Wheeler frowned. "There used to be a pretty square bunch running the county offices at Inspiration," he said.

"There was while Tom Amos was alive. He's dead; his boy is sheriff—and he isn't man enough for it. Link Bender's ring runs the whole show. They're fixed to make a case stick, all right—for a little while—even if it's a poor one. It's going to be alright necessary that we know more about this than the other fellers, Billy. I sent for a good man to help us with that end of it. I sent for Old Man Coffee of Mc-Tarnahan."

"I've heard of him. I guess he's pretty good on a trail. But still I don't see where I fit, Horse."

"Suppose Link Bender's crowd can work it out to hold me on some trumped-up charge—60, 90 days? Long enough for the 94 to go to pieces in the face of its called loans? There's going to be more to pulling the 94 through the landslide than a wagon boss like Val Douglas can handle. There's got to be a different man on the ground—and that man is you."

For a moment Wheeler was deeply troubled. If, by any chance, Horse Dunn's prophesies should prove correct, Wheeler did not see how he could refuse the old man the assistance he asked. But evidently this would mean that Wheeler would have to sign on to help with the management of the 94.

Thinking of this awkward possibility, he thought again of the blue eyes of Marian Dunn, of the strangely lovely glow of her face in the reflected light of the red-gold hills. For him there was a magic in that girl. It was a magic which could humble a man, and break him, heart and soul; taking the light out of every victory he might win, when only she turned away her face. And he heard her voice, full of that same magic still: "I'm sorry—truly sorry . . ."

Far ahead dark specks of horsemen showed, emerging from Chuck Box Wash as if from the surface of the plain. Dunn booted his pony into a lope.

CHAPTER II

Walt Amos, sheriff of the Red Hills country, was a youngish man, with a direct but mild gray-green eye. He led a low-headed pony by a rope to his saddle horn.

"I'm right glad you rode over, Horse," he said when the 94 men had drawn up. "You'll be able to help Link, here, recall how the sign looked when you first seen it."

Behind him, lounging in their saddles, sat three others. These, Wheeler knew, were Link Bender, tall, hawk-faced, close-lipped; Link's son, a lanky, weasel-faced youth whom Wheeler knew only as "the Kid"; and Cayuse Cayetano, a saffron-faced Indian breed who wore a circular shield marked "Indian Police" upon a green and black checked shirt.

These three had nodded in greeting, but said nothing; and now there was a moment's awkward pause. In the silence could be heard an irregular moaning sound somewhere far to the north—the bellowing of cattle working themselves into a state of mind over some unknown thing.

"I was figuring to ride over to your place later, anyway, Dunn," the sheriff said. "I was especially kind of hoping you'd recognize this horse."

"Link Bender—" Dunn said slowly—"he found him, did he?"

"He found the horse—this horse; not the man."

Dunn studied the led horse at the sheriff's flank. "So this," Dunn said, "is the horse a feller got killed on."

The horse the sheriff led was a runty bay of the wild pony type which infests the intermountain ranges from border to border. It bore no brand; but broad on the withers and extending downward on the off side almost to the knee were the dust-crust stains of yesterday's blood.

Dunn leaned low to study the feet of the led horse. "It's the horse from Short Crick, all right," he said at last. "No, I never seen him before."

The sheriff looked hopefully at Wheeler, but Billy Wheeler shook his head.

"Nobody knows the damn animal!" the sheriff burst out fretfully. "I'd have thought you fellers would know every horse in the country by this time."

"You get around as much as anybody," Dunn grunted. "Where's the saddle?"

"Link didn't find any saddle."

Dunn glanced at the dark, lean-visaged Link Bender. "Dead man must have taken his saddle with him across the big divide," he commented sarcastically.

Sheriff Amos looked irritated. "Well, come on; we'll look over the ground."

They turned and rode northward at a jog. A curious tension had come over them for no plain reason.

They were nearing Short Crick; and the bellowing of cattle had become near and strong—a fantastic deep booming broken by whistling soprano squalls. "What the devil them steers raising hell about?" Amos demanded querulously.

Nobody answered him. They rode in a peculiarly oppressive silence, a silence somehow unnatural and ominous, even among these naturally quiet men. Now as they rounded the shoulder of Two Bull Butte they sighted the disturbed cattle at the quarter mile, a dark milling knot, restless with tossing horns.

Link Bender raised his clenched hands to the sky and swore abruptly, savagely. "There goes your sign! There goes your evidence, and your trails!"

Billy Wheeler's scalp crawled; men might misread the sign, but the cattle knew. One of the strang-

est things of the range, and the source of many a weird legend, was the way the big white-faced range steers would come for miles to mark the place of a killing, bawling and pawing, and throwing the dirt over their backs.

The sheriff said in a strange voice, "Is that the place?"

"Sure it's the place! The fool critters have swarmed in on the smell of blood!"

Wheeler heard Horse Dunn curse between his teeth. The Old Man jumped his pony forward, whipping up side and side, and charged down upon the milling cattle. The others joined him, whooping and whipping up their ponies.

The steer bunch broke reluctantly, half inclined to face out the charging riders.

Wheeler had been less interested in the running off of the cattle than in the reactions of the riders. All sign would have been obliterated; he was anxious now to see who would be exasperated and who indifferent. Watching, he noted the conspicuous fury of Link Bender, the red-eyed anger of Horse Dunn—and the watchful detachment of Cayuse, the Indian.

The riders were gathering again, disgruntled as they focused upon the stretch of creek the cattle had trampled.

Horse Dunn circled a little and brought them to Short Crick again 200 yards up-stream.

"Here you see my trail as I come up to the crick," he said; "it's the trail of the same horse I'm riding today . . . Here you see the trail of the two horses of the killer and the feller that was killed, riding side by side along the rim of the cut. Right here my trail comes on to theirs. You, Amos—notice that my trail is 20 hours younger'n the other two."

"I'm not so sure," Link Bender said.

The sheriff hesitated, studying the tracks glumly from the saddle. He turned to the Indian. "What do you say, Cayuse?"

Cayuse Cayetano spoke briefly and promptly in Spanish. "This horse of Dunn's came yesterday," he said. "The other two horses, maybe one day before. Not the same time."

"That Indian's a deer hunter," Sheriff Amos said. "When Cayuse says he knows, he knows. We'll let it stand at that."

"You'll have to take my word for it from here on," Dunn told them. "The cattle sure smeared it up. But anyway—here the two-horse trail dropped down into the crick bed. So did I."

He led them down into the cut and along the margin of the water.

Dunn moved a hundred yards down stream, checked his landmarks, and stopped. "Here's where the feller was shot," he said; "he keeled out of the saddle. His horse stamped across the crick, running some sideways. The feller was being dragged, like from the stirrup."

Dunn turned and led across the shallow water. "As I rode up this bank," he told the sheriff, "I seen that the trail of the killer was following the trail of the stampeded horse—the same as I." He led on another 50 yards across a maze of cleft trappings. "Here," he said finally, "is where the feller broke loose from the saddle."

"How'd you know he fell loose here?" Amos asked.

"Because he wasn't dragged no further," Dunn said shortly.

For a moment now they sat staring morosely at a shallow bowl-like pit which the dusty pawing of the cattle had dug.

"This what you saw, Link?" Sheriff Amos asked.

Bender nodded. "So far."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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By CHERIE NICHOLAS



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Light Beam Devised to Protect Sleep Walkers; Is Suggested for Hospitals

A safeguard for sleep walkers, tying them to bed with intangible and almost invisible light beams instead of ropes or strips of bedcloths, has been devised by a British manufacturer of photo-electric cells and similar devices, states a London correspondent of the Chicago Tribune.

One or more light beams of dim blue or red light are directed across the bed from special lamps and reflectors like miniature searchlights. These beams enter one or more light-sensitive cells, which give an electric current so long as the light beam enters them. If anything interrupts the light beam, even for a small fraction of a second, the electric signal ceases. This stoppage may be made to sound an alarm or to work any other kind of electric apparatus.

When the sleeper retires this light beam system is switched on. If then the sleeper gets out of bed or even sits up in bed, his body must cut one or more of the light beams passing across the bed. This casts a shadow on the light-sensitive cells, stops for an instant the electric current from

this device and sounds whatever kind of alarm that has been provided.

In hospitals the device is suggested to watch over restless or delirious patients not attended continually by a nurse. Any move of the patient to get out of bed instantly flashes a signal to the nurse in charge of the ward.

For sleep walkers who want to break their habit or to guard against hurting themselves, the alarm may be arranged to ring a bell if the sleeper arises and thus to wake him up, to turn on the bedroom lights, to lock the door automatically, to call some other member of the family or to do anything else that may be desired to protect the sleeper.

Attractive Church in Mexico
The Great Church of Santa Prisca, at Taxco, Mexico, built in 1757 is reminiscent of some of the wonderfully picturesque places in Spain, with its huge dome decorated in glazed tiles in vivid ultramarine, orange, green and white sparkling in the intense sunlight.

MANY COLORS SEEN IN COATS FOR FALL

Coats of many colors have been featured so extensively in Paris that they are expected to be early fall fashion successes in this country. All of these coats are very brief and are made of elegant fabrics or of ribbons, thus indicating their place with evening dresses.

One French designer has introduced a little jacket made of two-inch velvet ribbon sewn together in vertical strips, the ribbon combining shades of apple green, old blue, chamouis, pink which has a blue cast and an orchid-purple.

This is worn over a gown of black Chantilly lace. Another jacket is made of red and blue grosgrain ribbon interlaced to suggest a woven pattern.

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One-Piece Dress of Blue Linen for Morning Wear

For morning wear Schiaparelli makes a one-piece dress of pale blue linen in a coarse, rough weave. It is worn with a jacket of flame-colored linen made with short cap sleeves. The matching hat of blue linen is made halo fashion, to be worn on the back of the head, and is trimmed with a small band of flowers.

Pale green linen in a rough weave is used for a two-piece summer suit, made on strictly tailored lines. The blouse is in rose pink crepe made with a high neck and short sleeves.

Matching Hats and Heels Popular for Sportswear

Matching headdresses and heels are providing a gala touch to simple summer outfits worn by attractive young spectators at smart Mid-western country clubs. Dusty pink frocks combined with beige turbans and ostrich skin pumps with beige-colored built-up heels are a popular combination. On many of the smartest white ensembles, effective accents are furnished by paisley print headbands and heels.

SMART SHEER WOOL

By CHERIE NICHOLAS



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