

to: Mike Dunham  
Abilene, KS

from: Dick Dunham  
Burgin, KY

March 5, 2015

Mike-

Got your letter about two weeks ago now. I passed it on to dad, but he's so far gone now that what he said doesn't make a whole lot of sense. I have a fair inkling what he would have said about your little game plan had you sent it to us a few years ago. Mama took a look at it, too.

Do you remember when you were 12 and I was 15 years old. That summer we were both working on Finn Murray's farm, topping tobacco and generally lending a hand. He never paid too well, remember? I think it was \$25 a day split between the two of us and we ~~had~~ had to bring our own food and water. It was so god damn hot that year. But do you remember one day, it had just been a scorcher,

and we weren't getting on so great, Murray was loaded by noon and gave us each a sip of that clear pouring dynamite. Well, I took another slug or two off it after he stumbled back into the cab of the truck. Then once that badness had taken effect on me, I think I'd tossed a clod of dirt ~~at~~ at you and caught you full in your pudgy little face with it. And you — I think you might have taken an extra sip, too — tried to tackle me and then I nicked myself with dad's ~~old~~ old knife trying to get you off of me. God damn Mr. Murray was furious, threatened to send us home with no pay and to tell our folks that we couldn't come back. And we punched each other in the shoulder on the truck ride back. And then we hosed off out back and ~~went~~ went inside for dinner, and I was hungry and happy but you looked like you'd tasted an unripened persimmon.

We were having sweet potatoes, pan fried chicken and cukes and onions. We three - dad, mom, and I, dug right into it after grace, but you didn't pick up a fork, ~~and~~ much less spoon anything on to your plate. We all carried on for a few minutes until mama asked if you were going to join us. (Actually, dad kept eating. I remember - he took more cukes.) And when you said no, she asked whether she could get you anything.

Then it happened. You didn't even raise your voice, but simply had some requests ready. New clothes, not hand me downs. A little allowance so you wouldn't have to work in old Murray's stinking hot fields. And then, a new family in California.

Well. Honestly, that's pretty mild stuff compared to what me and Kat used to get from Lloyd and Jennie. But back then?!

Do you remember seeing mama's reaction when you said that? Her eyes kind of got glazed over and far away looking. She didn't cry about it, just stood up, wiped her hands

on her napkin and went outside and sat on the porch swing the rest of the evening. I remember that was also the very first time dad ~~never~~ swatted you for getting so far out of line, and that was almost the farthest you'd ever been. He just stopped eating, told us to clean up the table, then took his pipe outside and sat with mama as we washed and dried ~~the~~ and put away the dishes in silence. But do you remember her face at that moment? That was the face she had after she'd read your letter, read what you're planning.

The bottom line is this: you really out to reconsider your plan. In fact, cancel it outright, is what it comes right down to.

I know you're not about to be swayed by emotion here. So ready yourself for for some argumentation now. I took the time to read your letter and detailed plan, and I hope that you'll take the time to read this rebuttal to it. I went around to a few other nearby ranches, as well, and everyone of them had the same response. **BAD IDEA.**

First and foremost, you're not a god damn horse

rustler, much less a bandit, cow-poke, -boy, -head or anything else. After you took all those "prep" classes and graduated from Burgh, snagged yourself a Berkeley degree, gigged at internship after internship and then scored yourself an MBA. We couldn't believe it. Our Scholarship boy. Didn't hear from you for almost five years, except for the regular semester transcript and dean's list announcements and periodic postcard from your latest post that "needed a person to survey the situation, develop a plan to remedy the wrongs and put that plan in action... and who wanted a good lactey to serve that person coffee their way." (Your words.) But the end result, hey, that was terrific and we all respected it and knew you'd do great things with your smarts. Then Denver. You gave us a heads up, but we never knew what happened to you, with you while you were in Denver. Were you skiing, watching the Broncos, the Avalanche, the Rockies? You couldn't have been watching the Nuggets, could you? Not a word. You never called, never e-mailed, never wrote for over a year and a half. Never even

sent us an address. We only ~~learned~~ learned that you'd moved to Denver after you'd moved to Abilene ~~and~~ and only then after you had already been in Abilene for three months. Had your corporate compadres kicked you out? Had you chased skirt out there and then to Abilene, or fled from some crazy person? No clue. Anyway, by that time I'd taken up with Kat (then Morgan) at her folks' abode, working with the foals, but I could still see our folks' place from the MoBAR ranch. They left the front porch light on as they always had. Before you wrote from Abilene, I know I saw mama out there once or twice a month, at least, sitting on the swing. Anyway, we finally got word from you that you were in Abilene. Weren't sure what was there for you, as all you'd sent was a manila envelope with a box of chocolates and a "Kansas at night" postcard with "the prettiest town I ever seen" written on the back and tucked inside it. We all laughed at the joke you were making, but later on ~~we~~ we weren't sure that we or you truly knew the joke you were making there. Mama mentioned

that she ate one of those chocolates out of the box every week, even the cherry marsh kind. (Yeah, I know.) And ~~a~~ at least you'd included your return address this time, and so we wrote back. Mama said that she felt like you were coming back home ~~some~~ <sup>one</sup> time zone at a time. Then, of course, the clocks stopped working. I don't want to talk about that. We saw hardship in the first couple years afterwards. I'm sure you saw hardship. Chocolate probably ~~isn't~~ ~~isn't~~ isn't all that high on your list of necessities once the power and water goes out and your car turns into a brick. But the fact remains that once you made your mind up on what you wanted to do - which I think we all agree was when you were 11 or 12 - you pushed forward with your professional plans and never spent time getting to know much else. And that spirit of yours is what inspired you to come up with this idea, but ideas are cheap and work ain't anymore. You're a businessman, Mike, a manager - not a ranch hand.

The risk in what you propose so far outweighs the possible benefits that, for me, it's not worth discussing.

But Duke Morgan said I'm not doing this for my own benefit—though I wonder about that—so here goes. None of us here know the Men you're falling in with to do this. Are you certain you can trust them? Not to stab you in the back or anything silly like that? But are they going to stand by you if you get in a jam? Are they going to risk getting trampled if you fall off your mount in the middle of a stampede. Risk drawing to save you if there's a flash flood in a gulch? It sounds to me like this is a pretty mercenary operation, and that can often draw the wrong kinds of people. I know you mentioned you had good prospects for "selling" your herd once you acquired it, but are these solid offers <sup>or</sup> just rumors. How in the hell are you going to keep that many horses alive and corralled long enough to sell them? You didn't mention any of this in your plan, and I know you know ~~it~~ better than to just let them roam in some fenced-in farmer's pasture. That's always been a good way to get into mighty hot water, even moreso nowadays.

You might have maps, and the roads are probably still passable in your neck of the woods, but have you ~~scout~~ scouted things out? Do you know exactly where the

herd is, what it's range is? The temperament of the group as a whole. Also, since I more or less backed into this topic, a few words on your quarry. Mustangs are the most worthless god damn animals on the face of this earth. You're right that they're fast, but they're so blinkering stupid and bad tempered, I can't imagine a good use for them except as in a stew of some kind or glue. I'm dead serious. They sure as hell aren't going to be any use to courriers— they're probably a bit quicker than a bike, if you can even get them broken in. But they'll just go native once they're out on the range again. None of those courriers know how to handle an animal, anyway. Good kids, just not horsemen, and I doubt your meager and dubious "contribution" would do much, if anything, to change that.

All in all, your idea is terrible and I'm sure as hell not sending saddles and tack and what few good hands I have here to risk their necks for some shot in the dark. I don't want this to be completely me busting you out, so let me make a counteroffer here. I've got more business on my hands now that I can reasonably handle. Burros, mules, and pack and draft horses— people need breeds capable of doing real work, and we've got them but not in sufficient

numbers and their manners still aren't all they should be. If you trust them as much as you seem to, bring your boys back here to work at the MOBAR. We'll put them up, feed them ~~at least~~ decent food and provide a cozy spot for them to hang their hats. I'll tell you what to have them do, and you make sure they do it. You've always been much better at working with people than me. Then, once we've got a good handle on the current business, we can look into getting some Arabians and working them into good courier mounts. They're so much better than those wild ass mustangs.

You want to completely break mama's heart? Then just go right on ahead with your plan there. You want to make mama ~~to~~ cry? Come back to Burgin.

Your brother,  
Dick