

THE SMOKY YEARS

By ALAN LE MAY

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INSTALLMENT 13 THE STORY SO FAR:

Dusty King and Lew Gordon had built up a vast string of ranches. King was killed by his powerful and unscrupulous competitor, Ben Thorpe. Bill Roper, King's adopted son, was determined to avenge his death in spite of the opposi-

tion of his sweetheart, Jody Gordon, and her father. After wiping Thorpe out of Texas, Roper conducted a great raid upon Thorpe's vast herds in Montana. Roper left for Lew Gordon's home when told that Jody had disappeared. Unable

to reconcile her father with Roper, Jody had set out with Shoshone Wilce to find him. They were attacked by some of Thorpe's men hiding in Roper's shack. Wilce escaped but Jody was captured. The men decided to hold her as bait.

beyond his age, in a face so dark and lean-carved it was hard to recognize behind it the face of Dusty King's kid. He made no attempt to answer a question which was necessarily meaningless to him. He finished pulling off his gloves, unbuttoned his coat, and hooked his thumbs in his belt before he spoke.

"I heard yesterday that Jody has turned up missing," he said. "I came to Miles hell-for-leather to see if it's so. From what I could find out down in the town, no word has come in on where she is. If that's true, I don't aim to give my time to anything else until she's found."

"It was your own man talked her into it," Gordon said with menace. "My own man? What man?" "A little sniveler called Shoshone Wilce. Everybody knows he was a scout coyote for you, before Texas ever run you out."

"Jim," the younger rider said soberly, "if Roper's got his wild bunch with him—Jim, it's such a fight as none of us have ever gone into yet! When you stop to think that any time—any minute—a bunch of 'em may land in here—"

"You mean to deny you know where she is?" Gordon shouted.

"Nobody run me out of any place," Roper said; but his mind whipped to something else. It was true that he talked to certain men in the town before he had come here. Now suddenly he knew that he had learned what he had come to find out. He buttoned his coat, pulled on his gloves.

A silence fell, a long silence. Heavy upon Jody Gordon was the panic of an open-space creature held helpless within close walls. Her voice was low and bitter. "You're set on holding me here?"

Roper's voice did not change. "You talk like a fool," he said.

"Gordon confronted him stubbornly. "I mean you shan't leave here without telling me what you know."

"No call to put it that way," Jim Leathers said mildly, almost gently. But his eyes denied that mildness, so that behind him Jody sensed again the vast animosity built by the Texas Rustlers' War.

Lew Gordon's eyes were savagely intent upon Roper's face; he was trying to discover if this man could be believed.

"Quite a tidy little nest egg," Roper agreed. "I'd like to have it myself."

"You may be lying," he added at last, "and you may not, but I'll tell you this—you sure won't leave here until you hold me here?"

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A trick of the wind sent a great whirl of papers across the room as he went out."

Once more Jim Leathers' canine teeth showed in his peculiarly unpleasant grin. "Hell, no," he said.



Lew Gordon's eyes were savagely intent on Roper's face.

CHAPTER XVIII

Perhaps Lew Gordon should have known that if Bill Roper learned of Jody's disappearance at all, Roper would come directly to him.

till I find out where my girl is. You're wanted anyway, my laddie buck; there's a legal reward on your head, right now—and part of it was put up by me."

He had not come here without providing that the horse which waited under his saddle was fresh and good. He struck westward now out of Miles City, unhurrying. At the half mile he found a broad cross trail where some random band of cattle had trampled the snow into a trackless pavement. He turned north in this, followed it for a mile, then swung northwest over markless snow. Now that this horse was warmed a little he settled deep in his saddle and pushed the animal into a steady trot; at that gait, even in the snow, he could expect the tough range-bred pony to last most of the night.

Upon this night Lew Gordon was pacing the main room of his little Miles City house; forty-eight hours had passed since his daughter's disappearance and the old cattleman had lashed himself into a state of repressed fury comparable to that of a trap-buffed mountain lion, or a goaded bear. Everything that could be done to locate his daughter was being done.

"I heard that," Bill Roper said. "When I get ready to leave, I'll leave, all right. My advice to you is to begin using your head. I may be in a kind of funny position. But it puts me where I know things about the Montana range that neither you nor your outfits have got any clue to. If you want your daughter back you better figure to use what I know about the Deep Grass."

CHAPTER XIX

He knew that Jody's disappearance was voluntary, and he knew its purpose. The brief but highly informative note that Jody had left him told him that much. It simply said:

Lew Gordon compelled himself to temporize. What he couldn't get around was his own belief that Roper knew something definite, specific, about where Jody had gone—or had started out to go. He must have known also, in spite of the bluff to which anger had prompted him, that he could not hold Roper here when Roper decided to leave, nor force any information from him in any way whatever.

A tired horse is not much inclined to shy, toward the end of a long day's travel; and when Bill Roper's horse snorted and jumped sideways out of its tracks the rider looked twice, curiously, at the carcass which had sprung his pony. A dead pony on the winter range being a fairly common thing, he was about to ride on, when he noticed something about this particular dead pony which caused him to pull up and dismount for a closer examination.

"One of you must be made to see reason. I am going to talk to Billy Roper myself."

"What is it you want to know?" he asked at last, helpless, and angry in his helplessness.

After leaving Lew Gordon he had ridden deep into the night. Half an hour would bring him within sight of the Fork Creek rendezvous, and he was eager to push on, so that his deduction as to Jody's whereabouts might have a quick answer, one way or the other; but when he had examined the dead pony he was glad that he had checked.

What this did not tell him was where Roper was, or how Jody expected to find him. Impatient of mystery and delay, he could not understand why his many far-scattered cowboys could dig up no word. For all he knew, his daughter was by this time lost somewhere in the frozen wastes of snow, in immediate desperate need of help.

"In the first place, I want to know what made you think Jody was with me?"

This was no winter-killed pony. The bright trace of frozen blood that had first caught Roper's eye was the result of two gunshot wounds in neck and quarters.

Lew Gordon sat alone for a little while. For the moment his helpless anger was burned down into a heavy weariness. His mind was full of his daughter, whom he persistently pictured as a little girl, much more of a child than she actually was any more.

"You swear," Lew Gordon demanded, "you don't know the answer to that?"

A dark foreboding possessed Roper as he studied the dead pony. Roper himself was short-cutting through the hills, following no trail. The coincidence that he had stumbled upon the carcass in all those snowy wastes could be accounted for only in one way: both Roper and the pony had followed a line of least resistance through the hills—a line that had the Fork Creek rendezvous at its far end. His discovery told him that there had been fighting at Fork Creek within the last forty-eight hours. If he was right in believing that Jody had come to Fork Creek—

Suddenly it struck him how curious it was that in this bare room in which he sat there was no sign of any kind that Jody had ever been here at all. This was partly because she had never lived here nor even been expected here; but it brought home to him sharply how much of his life had been given to cattle, how little to his daughter. It made him realize how little he knew his daughter, and how little he had ever given her of himself.

"I don't swear anything," Roper said. "I asked you a question, Lew."

He remounted and swung northward, mercilessly whipping up his weary pony, but approaching the Fork Creek camp roundabout, behind masking hills and through hidden ravines. An hour passed before he threw down his reins and crept on hands and knees to the crest of a ridge commanding the valley of the Fork.

This was Lew Gordon's state of mind as the door thrust open, letting in a brief lash of wintry wind; and he wheeled in his chair to face the last man on earth he had expected to see.

Lew Gordon hesitated. It was a good many years since anyone had talked to him in the tone Bill Roper took; but for once the purpose in hand outpowered the violence of his natural reaction. He turned from his litter of papers, and handed Bill Roper the little scrap of Jody's handwriting which was all she had left to indicate where she was gone.

He moved a half mile closer and resumed his watch; but for some time he could make out nothing.

Bill Roper shook a powdering of dry snow off the roll of his coat collar, then stood looking at Lew Gordon in a cool hard silence as he pulled off his gloves. Once this man had been almost a son to Lew Gordon—the adopted son, in actuality, of Lew Gordon's dead partner. But a definite enmity now replaced what a little while ago had been a friendship as deep and close as the variance in their ages could permit. All the meaning of their association, almost as long as Bill Roper's life, was gone, wiped out by those two smoky years since the death of Dusty King.

"One of you must be made to see reason. I am going to talk to Billy Roper myself."

Then just as the sun set, three men moved out of the cabin. For a moment or two they stood in the snow close together. One went back into the cabin. The two others disappeared for a moment, to reappear moments. They separated, and Roper watched them ride in opposite directions up the nearest slopes of the hills. These passed beyond his sight, but in another minute or two their ways were retraced by two other riders.

For a moment or two Lew Gordon stared at him in utter disbelief. Then he whipped to his feet.

"Where is she?" he demanded intensely, furiously. "What have you done with her?"

"Outposts," Roper decided. "Somebody's keeping a hell of a careful watch."

Bill Roper no longer looked like the youngster Dusty King had raised on the trail. His gray eyes looked hard and extremely competent, old

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AUTOMOBILING AND THE BLOOD TEST

"Pull over to the curb!"

"What for?"

"For a blood test."

"But I ain't bleedin', officer!"

"You WILL be!"

This may be a typical Sunday afternoon dialogue in heavy auto traffic this summer. Already one state, New York, has passed a law making the alcoholic content of the blood stream admissible court evidence in the case of alleged drunken driving.

If your blood shows 15-100ths of 1 per cent alcohol, you're pickled. And if it holds more than 5-100ths but less than 15-100ths, you're not any too sober.

It has always been the custom to judge whether an automobile driver was soused or sober by his behavior, breath and monologue after the moment of impact. But it is going to be a matter for a laboratory from now on.

Once you just called a cop if some driver returning from a wedding tried to go between your front headlights, mistaking your flivver for two bicycles. Now you call a chemist.

Little week-end travels.

Little drops of gore.

Tell which driver's half stewed

And which driver's more.

The cry after each sound of ripping fenders will be, "Quick, officer, the needle!" And arrangements may have to be made to have a chemical laboratory at every pumping station.



You may be able to tell how many times a man has been arrested for drunken driving by the needle marks on his arm.

Can't you picture the scene: You are tooling along the highway when some fellow tourist tears off your left fender. You leap out, fire in your eye and demand, "Whattamattah? Doncha know how to drive?" He falls out of his car, zig-zags unsteadily to your side and remarks, "Lissen, whoosha think thinky talking to whaffor and whattaz big idea comin' oush side street sixty miles sour and nosh give no warning, huh?"

Now up to 1941 you could just draw back and say, "Why, you're drunk, mister!" But not any more. You've got to get a needle and make sure!

But where? Have you a needle on you? Probably not.

So you yell for a cop. Here is where the catch comes in. The blood test to be legal must be taken within two hours of the collision. What chance have you of locating a cop these days inside of two hours?

Of course, if the drunk is a good fellow and wants to be fair, he will give you a little of his blood voluntarily. If he is the right type autoist, he will carry a needle on him, jab his arm and let you have a few drops with a polite "Here's my blood. Just call me up and if I'm drunk, let me know. We can adjust things."

If you, too, are a good sport you will let him have a few drops of your blood, too. Fair is fair.

INDEX TO IMPORTANCE

Around the city's big hotels, A man is always gaged, Not by what he does or sells, But by the times he's paged.

—Merrill Chilcote.

HUMAN TOUCH

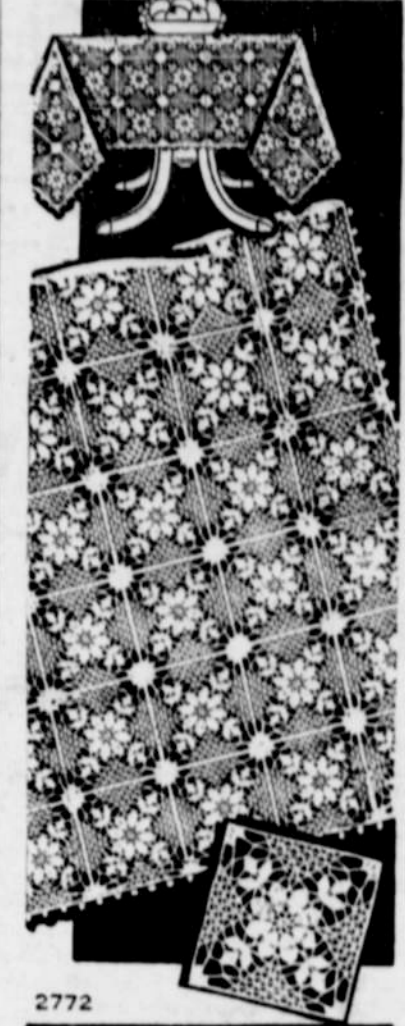
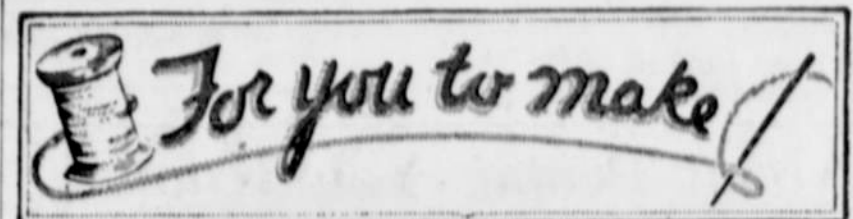
Wherever I see a sign "Fresh Paint," I gotta feel if it is or ain't.

—Lee A. Cavalier.

The house of representatives recently killed a bill to have a black-out test in Washington. It figured too many people down there are in the dark as it is.

NO ERRORS

To market, to market For U. S. Bonds new; It makes me feel loyal And pretty smart, too!



WANT to win a prize? This crochet design wins it repeatedly wherever shown. The six-inch square, so easily cro-

Ask Me Another

A General Quiz

The Questions

1. A pundit is a man who is—illiterate, comical or learned?
2. What American city outside the United States has the largest population?
3. How long is a tennis court?
4. Where is the world's largest church building?
5. Which of the following had faithless daughters—Othello, Macbeth or King Lear?
6. The name of Elijah Lovejoy is associated with what?
7. Over what country does the House of Savoy reign?
8. What organization is the largest user of office space in the world?
9. What was the area of Germany before the present war as compared to that of the state of Iowa?

The Answers

1. Learned.
2. Mexico City.
3. Seventy-eight feet.
4. Rome (St. Peter's cathedral).
5. King Lear.
6. Freedom of the press. He was an Abolitionist editor who was killed by a mob at Alton, Ill., in 1837.
7. Italy.
8. Our federal government. It owns or rents a total of 118,225,000 square feet in 19,117 buildings scattered throughout this country. The 26,000,000 square feet in Washington alone is double that of only nine years ago.
9. The area of Germany before September, 1940, was 225,258 square miles, including Austria and the Sudetenland. The area of Iowa is 56,147 square miles.

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Time for Greatness

Nothing great is produced suddenly, since not even the grape or fig is. If you say to me now that you want a fig, I will answer to you that it requires time; let it flower first, then put forth fruit, and then ripen.—Epictetus.

INDIGESTION may affect the heart

Gas trapped in the stomach or gullet may act like a half-trigger on the heart. At the first signs of distress smart men and women depend on Bell's Colic Tablets to get gas free. No laxative but made of the future-saving medicine known for relief of indigestion. If the FIRST Dose fails, give Bell's Colic Tablets, return bottle to us and receive DOUBLE Money Back, 50c.

Economizing Time

Laziness grows on people; it begins in cobwebs and ends in iron chains. The more business a man has to do, the more he is able to accomplish; for he learns to economize his time.—Hale.

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With Life, Woe

To labour is the lot of man below; and when Jove gave us life, he gave us woe.—Homer.

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