

# THE SMOKY YEARS

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## INSTALLMENT 18 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. Roper conducted a great raid upon Thorpe's vast herds in Montana. He was captured by Leathers and Kane, two of Thorpe's men. Leathers' girl, pretty Marquita, loved Roper and

made a desperate but vain attempt to save him. Thorpe's men were attacked by some of Roper's cowboys, led by Jody. Her joy at finding him was short lived, because Marquita told her that Marquita, not Jody, was Roper's girl.

### CHAPTER XXIII—Continued

Jody stood up. She felt suddenly tired and numb. "I still think a world can be made where decency can live," she said. "Some day, decent things will live on this prairie, whatever happens to us. But meantime—I guess he belongs to you."

She held Marquita's stare for a moment, then turned and walked to the door. Opening it, she saw that the first forlorn cold gray of the winter dawn was coming into the sky east of Montana.

The black hulk of the horse whose neck she had broken lay at her feet. She pulled from under it the coat with which she had blinded it when she charged the door, and pulled it on; the bitter cold of the dawn was enough to penetrate to the bones.

Slowly she uncinched and worked the saddle free, then the bridle. She staggered a little as she shouldered the saddle, and walked out toward the corral where other, living ponies stood, dark humped-up shapes against the snow.

### CHAPTER XXIV

Bill Roper and Bob Stokes—the King-Gordon cowboy whom Roper had not known—had finished their makeshift dressing of Old Joe's wound, and were working on Jim Leathers. Jim Leathers lay perfectly still; only his eyes seemed alive.

"How's she feeling?" Bill Roper asked. "The Gordon girl? She's all right. She went out to look over the horses or something."

"Bob, you better go see nothing's happened to Jody."

"I'll go in a minute, soon as we're through here."

But Jody came in of her own accord, before that. She went straight to Old Joe.

"Are you terribly uncomfortable, Joe?"

"I feel great," Joe said with spirit. "I been hunting for a vacation for fifteen years, and this is my first excuse!"

"I'm sorry, Joe. You'll never know how sorry I am. I tangled things up pretty badly, I guess."

"You done wonderful," Joe told her. "You saved Bill's neck, all right. They had him hog-tied like a mooshorn, and the girl, too, when we busted in."

Jody shot Marquita a glance in which the only light was a faint contempt, but she did not comment.

"I'm riding back to Miles," she told Joe. "On the way I'll send help back, and everything you'll need. And I'll see that you're moved in a spring wagon, soon as you feel like moving. I appreciate what you've done, Joe."

"Hey, look," Bob Stokes began. "You can't be riding off like this in the middle of the night!"

"It's coming daylight, fast. I'll be all right."

Outside, in the gray light that seemed colder than the air, Jody Gordon had mounted as Bill Roper came to her stirrup.

him in the market fit to break them both, and finally he kills Lew's partner, and still he keeps on. "Joe," Bill Roper said, "Joe—Walk Lasham himself is with Ben Thorpe!"

"Well—I ain't surprised." "But God Almighty, Joe, if he walks into a fight with those two, all hell can't save him! He's as good as dead, the minute he walks in there!"

"That," said Old Joe, "is what I figured you ought to know."

### CHAPTER XXV

It was very early; the sun was only just breaking over the winter-starved prairie, that Sunday morning as Bill Roper splashed through the creek that runs by Sundance, and rode into the little town.

Overhead the sky was such a clear crystalline blue as Bill Roper had not seen since he left Texas, and underfoot his tired pony was sinking fetlock deep in thawed mud. The mud itself was predicting a spring which Roper believed now he would never see.

Without sign from the rider, Roper's pony drew up before the Palace Hotel and Livery.

With some difficulty Bill Roper roused a sleepy and resentful individual.

"Feed this pony, and feed him well."

Casually Roper strolled along the corral where stood the loose horses



Bill Roper splashed through the creek that runs by Sundance.

which were being boarded here. He was chewing a straw as he came back to the sleepy man who was now shaking down hay.

"I see you have a 9B horse there—a good one."

"Yeah?" "I figure Lew Gordon rode that horse in?"

"And supposin' he did?" "Where is he stopping?"

"How should I know? This dump is good enough for his horse, but it ain't good enough for him. He went to sleep with some friend or something, out at the edge of town."

"I'll take a room facing on this street," he said.

A little while later Roper sat at last with his heels caught in the window sill, resting as he regarded the empty street.

That Ben Thorpe was here was known to every cattleman in the north country. Ben Thorpe had been here many weeks; it was to Thorpe that Bill Roper was to have been delivered, here, if a kid horse wrangler following Jody Gordon had not shot Jim Leathers down. But, by the fine, hard-riden 9B horse which Lew Gordon had ridden in, Bill Roper knew that Gordon had not been here long. He judged that he had got here in time.

Bill Roper sat there a long time. Seven o'clock passed, and eight, and nine, while he smoked and waited. Ten o'clock passed, and ten-thirty.

Then upon the quiet main street of Sundance appeared a figure—the one he had been waiting for.

It seemed to Bill Roper that Lew Gordon walked like a younger man than Roper had remembered. Bill Roper knew Lew Gordon by the flash of silver in his short beard, by the old hat, curiously like Dusty King's, which Lew Gordon had never changed. But he had to look twice to be sure that this man with the springy stride and erect bearing was the Lew Gordon he had known.

When he was sure, Bill Roper stood up and stretched; he filled his lungs with air, and at last let it go again, with a whoof like that of a

pony which knows that it has come to the end of the long trail.

He drew a last drag from his cigarette, and strapped on the gunbelt which he had laid aside. Unhurriedly, he three or four times drew the iron from its leather, to be sure that it was running free. Then, with a purely unconscious motion, he cocked his hat over one eye and went down into the street.

He knew that Lew Gordon had gone into the Red Dog Saloon, and he walked toward it now.

For a moment Bill Roper, raider, night-rider, gunfighter—dreaded name of the Long Trail—experienced a twist of the heart, terrible, unbelievably acute. Then he shrugged, and walked into the Red Dog Bar.

Lew Gordon stood at the bar of the Red Dog Saloon. The hard line of his jaw was blurred by a silver shag of whisker now, and his mustache was silver, and his hair; but the clear blue eyes were unbelievably young, younger than Bill Roper had ever seen them before. His hands were folded quietly, one elbow on the bar; and so greatly did this silver-haired man dominate the space in which he stood that it was minutes before Roper realized that there was a bartender there at all.

"So you came," Lew Gordon said. "Of course, Lew. Didn't you know I would come?"

"In one way," Lew Gordon said, "I'm glad you came. I want to say a couple of things to you, Billy, my boy. I done something wrong, Billy. I was right and I was wrong. You fought him; I tried to smooth things out. I'm glad I've lived to tell you this: you was right and I was wrong!"

"Lew—" Bill began. "I should have killed him, Billy," Lew Gordon said.

"Lew! What are you telling me?" "I know I was wrong," Lew Gordon said. Yet, somehow he did not seem unhappy. "Always I stood for law, for order—the decent thing, the thing that would build this country into something my kid could live in. But—I guess it wasn't meant to be. I should have swung with you when you tied into him in Texas, and again when you tied into him in the north! But I aim to square it all up today!"

"You mean—?" said Bill Roper. "He's coming to meet me here."

"With how many men?" Roper asked again. "What does it matter?" Lew poured himself a drink.

Outside, on the board walk of Sundance, were sounding the heels of approaching men.

"I can kill him," Bill Roper said. "I can kill him even if I die."

"Lew Gordon's face changed swiftly. Suddenly he was the indomitable old man whom Bill Roper had always known.

"Ben Thorpe is for me," Lew Gordon said. "To make up for the quiet years . . ."

And Bill Roper, looking deep into the young eyes of that ageing man, finally said, "Okay."

And then the door darkened, and the approaching heels on the board walk were silent because they had arrived. The man Lew Gordon had sent for had come.

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### Brown Was Starting Early To Get Along With the Cook

The bus was starting in the midst of a torrent of rain, when the conductor put his head inside and inquired: "Will any gentleman get out and oblige a lady?" "She can come inside and sit on my knee, if she likes," said a passenger, jocularly, and, to his great surprise, in bounced a buxom woman, who forthwith appropriated the offered knee.

After a time the man, Brown, by name, got into conversation with his burden, and asked her where she was going. On hearing her destination, he exclaimed, "Why, that's my house!" "Well, then," replied the woman, blushing, "I'm your new cook."

### New Jobs Being Offered By U. S. Civil Service

WHAT a parade Uncle Sam could lead of his workers—workers of every kind. You may have often wondered if there is a place for you in that parade. What chance would you have in the United States Civil Service?

New tests are being given all the time and there are literally

### Ask Me Another A General Quiz

- The Questions**
  1. How many tablets of stone held the Ten Commandments as given to Moses?
  2. The average amount of blood in the human body is about what proportion of the body weight?
  3. "Double, double, toil and trouble; fire burn and cauldron bubble" is a quotation from what?
  4. What is a binnacle?
  5. In Greek legend, who sowed the dragon's teeth?
  6. What country named its capital after an American President?
  7. What is meant by 0:15 a. m.?
  8. Who were Egbert, Ethelwulf, Ethelbald, Ethelbert, and Ethelred?

**The Answers**

1. Two.
2. One twentieth.
3. "Macbeth."
4. A box containing a ship's compass.
5. Jason.
6. Liberia (Monrovia, named for President Monroe).
7. Fifteen minutes after midnight. The zero is used to denote that the first hour of the day has not elapsed.
8. The first five rulers of England, reigning 12, 19, 2, 8, and 5 years respectively, from 827 to 873. Their conquest formed part of the rich early Saxon-Danish history of the island.

### Common Friendship

Friendship is like rivers, and the strand of seas, and the air, common to all the world; but tyrants, and evil customs, wars, and want of love, have made them proper and peculiar. — Jeremy Taylor.



**Film Fashions**  
An American film producer asked an English friend to watch the "shooting" of one of his "society" films to see that it was all right.

After a time the Englishman asked: "Why does that man keep his hat on when he's talking to the lady in the drawing room?" "Sure," said the producer, "he can't take it off—another lady's coming in presently, and he's got to raise his hat to her."

**Quick woollings seem to be the fashion. Sort of blisskriegs.**

**Much to Learn**  
"How does Charlie make love?" "Well, I should describe it as unskilled labor."

**He'd Been Told**  
Sergeant—Now take that rifle and find out how to use it.  
Draftee—Tell me one thing. Is it true that the harder I pull the trigger the further the bullet will go?

**No Accompanist**  
"What is your occupation?" "An organist." "Organist, eh? And why did you give it up?" "The monkey died."



**No Halfway**  
I hate to see a thing done by halves; if it be right, do it wholly; if it be wrong, leave it undone.—Gilpin.

### Nervous Restless-Girls!

Cranky? Restless? Can't sleep? Tire easily? Because of distress of monthly functional disturbances? Then try Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound.

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**Pride No Reward**  
Unless what occupies your mind be useful, the pride you derive from thence is foolish.—Phaed.

### Miserable with backache?

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