

THE SMOKY YEARS

By ALAN LE MAY W.N.U. Release

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 opposition.

CHAPTER XVII—Continued

A shiver ran the length of Jody Gordon's body. Casually, as if they were talking about getting breakfast, these quiet-faced men were speaking of a proposed death—the death of a boy who had once been very close to her, and very dear. Suddenly she was able to glimpse the power and the depth of the animosity behind the mission of these men. No effort and no cost would seem to Ben Thorpe too great if in the end Bill Roper was struck out of existence.

"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—a minute—a bunch of 'em may land in here—"

"Charley's on lookout," Jim Leathers shrugged. "We'll know in plenty time."

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?"

"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.

"I want a flat answer," Jody said bravely. "Are you going to give me a horse, or not?"

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

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.

And, knowing this, he should have prepared himself. But Lew Gordon had not met Roper face to face in nearly two years; and nothing was farther from his mind than the possibility that Roper would walk in upon him now.

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-baited mountain lion, or a goaded bear. Everything that could be done to locate his daughter was being done.

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:

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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?"

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

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

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."

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

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

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

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



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

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."

"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."

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.

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

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

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

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

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 outperformed 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.

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

When Bill Roper had read that, the eyes of the two men met in hostile question.

"This looks mighty like a false lead, to me," Bill Roper said at last. "Like as if she aimed to cover up where she really went. Don't hardly seem likely she'd start out to come to me."

"I know she went looking for you because she said she did. My girl don't lie."

Roper shrugged. "Why should she do that?"



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.

"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."

"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.

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

A glint of hard amusement was plain in Bill Roper's eyes. "I know what you've told me. But I'll add this onto it. I think you'll soon have back your girl. I'm walking out of here now, Lew, because it's time for me to look into a couple of things. But I'll be seeing you—if Thorpe don't get you first."

The veins stood out sharply on Lew Gordon's forehead, high-lighted by a faint dampness. "In all fairness I'll tell you this," he said. "It's true I can't lift a gun on you, or on any man who stands with empty hands. But as soon as you're out of that door, all Miles City will be on the jump to see you don't get loose. Twenty thousand hands over your head, my boy!"

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

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

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.

CHAPTER XIX

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 spooked 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.

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.

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.

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—

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.

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

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 mounted. 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.

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

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Star Dust

STAGE SCREEN RADIO
By VIRGINIA VALE
(Released by Western Newspaper Union.)

SAMUEL GOLDWYN has a sure-things combination in Bette Davis and Director William Wyler, who've just done "The Little Foxes" for him. They were responsible for "Jezebel," which won the second Academy Award for Bette, though a lot of people thought she'd given better performances in other pictures. They also did "The Letter," a hit film.

Bette is working now in "The Man Who Came to Dinner," and likes it because it's legitimate comedy; the comedy she did with James Cagney, "The Bride Came C. O. D.," wasn't so much to her liking, because it was slapstick stuff.



Bette Davis

And RKO, which releases "The Little Foxes," may have a sure thing on its hands in Terry Frost. He is the last of the three men who played "Killer Mears" in the stage version of "The Last Mile." Producer Bert Gilroy picked him for a part in Tim Holt's "Cyclone on Horseback," in which Frost will make his film debut after a wait of 11 years.

And—the other two men who played "Killer Mears" were Spencer Tracy and Clark Gable—and it was Gilroy who picked Gable for his first film, "Painted Desert." So, if good things come in threes, Terry Frost is headed straight for stardom.

A matrimonial expert, who's been asking American wives "What has Charles Boyer that your husband doesn't have?" maintains that 70 per cent of the country's married women are in love with male stars. One thing he's got is a beautiful and charming wife.

It's on again, off again with John Garfield and Warner Brothers. As previously reported here, he refused to do "New Orleans Blues," was suspended, and Richard Whorf, the very talented actor who appeared so often on the stage with Lum and Fontanne, replaced him. Garfield was assigned to "Bridges Are Built at Night," and all seemed well.

But it wasn't, and now he's been suspended again, and again Whorf has replaced him. Seems to be becoming a habit. Maybe Garfield has forgotten the rumpuses Bette Davis and James Cagney had with the same studio—and that both of them went back to work at the same old stand when the fuss was finally settled.

Guy Lombardo has been having a lot of fun with those lyricized commercials, superimposed over a musical background, and radio audiences like them so much that he's decided to make them a regular feature of his Saturday evening programs.

Tom Hanlon, announcer on Gene Autry's CBS Sunday program, "Melody Ranch," figures that he's on his way up, in motion pictures. He recently played a scene with Greta Garbo and Melvyn Douglas at the Metro studio. He did a commercial announcement which they were supposed to hear over the radio during an important sequence. But—he worked just out of camera range on the set with the Swedish star.

Red Skelton has already arrived at the top, if reports of what preview audiences thought of "Whistling in the Dark" are a prophecy. Seems he's going to give Bob Hope a run for Hope's laurels, and make all of us laugh our heads off while so doing.

It looks as if September 15 would be Orson Welles day in Hollywood. On that date he inaugurates his new variety broadcasts as star, producer, director and author with the Mercury players, and also starts the cameras grinding on his next RKO picture, "The Magnificent Ambersons." Between times he'll probably do card tricks; he's just mastered seven new ones.

ODDS AND ENDS — That man Rochester, Jack Benny's "valet," is the high spot of the new Mary Martin picture, "Kiss the Boys Goodbye." Practically all newspaper critics have thrown bouquets at "The Stars Look Down" . . . Walt Disney and some of his staff will journey to South America to get ideas for cartoons suitable for that market . . . Charles Laughton will star in "Out of Gas," a Tahiti tale by the "Mutiny on the Bounty" authors . . . Maureen O'Hara will have the lead opposite Tyrone Power in 20th Century-Fox's "Benjamin Blake" . . . There's a National Society of Hardy Families, not related to Metro's.

Grand Coulee World's Number One Dam

Grand Coulee, biggest dam in the world, is now in action. The Columbia river, which has been dammed, is one of the swiftest and fiercest in the world, and to curb it a barrier has been erected which is three-quarters of a mile long and 500 feet high.

The result will be a lake 151 miles long, the irrigation of 1,200,000 acres of land, and sufficient electric power to supply an area five times the size of England.

Boulder dam, which harnesses the Colorado river, with all its collateral works, was completed in 1935. It is thrown across a terrific gorge called Black Canyon, which is 2,000 feet wide, and the lake behind it is 115 miles long and took three years to fill.

So tremendous is the weight of water in this lake that geologists have suggested that it may cause a bending in the crust of the planet.

Habits of Salmon

A group of Pacific salmon, or king salmon, that inhabits the Northern Pacific waters, dies after the breeding season (July to December) is over, says Pathfinder. These salmon never return to the sea.

Other types of salmon, however, return to the sea after spawning, and remain there until the next breeding season. All salmon live partly in the sea and partly in fresh water, breeding in the latter. They ascend rivers and tributary streams to spawn.

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