



The Man Called Noon: A Novel

By Louis L'Amour

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In one swift moment, a fall wiped away his memory. All he knew for certain was that someone wanted him dead—and that he had better learn why. But everywhere he turned there seemed to be more questions—or people too willing to hide the truth behind a smoke screen of lies. He had only the name he had been told was his own, his mysterious skill with a gun, and a link to a half million dollars' worth of buried gold as evidence of his past life. Was the treasure his? Was he a thief? A killer? He didn't have the answers, but he needed them soon. Because what he still didn't know about himself, others did—and if he didn't unlock the secret of his past, he wasn't going to have much of a future.

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Editorial Review

From the Inside Flap

In one swift moment, a fall wiped away his past. Now he was up and running for his life--into a tangle of lies and deceit. His memory lost, the man had only a name and a few clues. Where did his skill with a gun come from? What was the link between his past life and half a million dollars' worth of buried gold? He didn't have the answers, but he needed them soon. Because what he still didn't know about himself, others did--including the men who wanted him dead.

About the Author

Louis L'Amour is undoubtedly the bestselling frontier novelist of all time. He is the only American-born author in history to receive both the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and the Congressional Gold Medal in honor of his life's work. He has published ninety novels; twenty-seven short-story collections; two works of nonfiction; a memoir, ***Education of a Wandering Man***; and a volume of poetry, ***Smoke from This Altar***. There are more than 300 million copies of his books in print worldwide.

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Chapter One

SOMEBODY WANTED TO kill him.

The idea was in his mind when he opened his eyes to the darkness of a narrow space between two buildings. His eyes came to a focus on a rectangle of light on the wall of the building opposite, the light from a second-story window.

He had fallen from that window.

Lying perfectly still, he stared at the rectangle of light as if his life depended on it, yet an awareness was creeping into his consciousness that the window no longer mattered.

Only one thing mattered now-escape. He must get away, clear away, and as quickly as possible.

There was throbbing in his skull, the dull, heavy beat that was driving everything else from his brain. Impelled by what urge he could not guess, he lifted a hand toward his face. There was a twinge of pain from the arm, then he touched his face.

He did not know to whom the features belonged. Gingerly, he touched his skull . . . there was half-caked blood, and a deep wound in his scalp. His hand dropped to his shirt, which was stiffening with blood.

Somebody had tried to kill him, and he felt sure that they would try again, and would not cease trying until he was dead. Nothing else remained in his memory.

Stiffly, he turned his head, looking first one way and then the other. In the one direction there was blackness, in the other was light . . . a street.

He was conscious of a faint stirring from the darkness behind the buildings. Something or someone was

creeping along in the blackness, some enemy intent upon his destruction.

Heaving himself from the ground, he half fell against the building behind him. He remained there for a moment, struggling to gather himself for an effort. For he must escape. He had to get away.

A hand went to his hip. There was a holster there, but it was empty. Dropping to his knees, he felt quickly around him, but discovered nothing. His gun, then, must be up there, in that room. It had fallen or had been taken from him before he fell from the window.

He started blindly toward the street. He could hear music from the building beside him, a murmur of voices, then muffled laughter.

Staggering into the light, he paused and stared stupidly to left and right. The street was empty. Drunken with pain and shock, he started across the street and into the shadows of a space between the buildings diagonally across from the one he had left behind.

He had no idea where he was going, only that he must get away; he must be free of the town. Beyond the buildings between which he walked there were scattered outhouses and corrals, and a few lightless shacks, and then he was walking in grass, tall grass.

Pausing, he glanced back. There was no pursuit, so why was he so sure there would be pursuit?

He went on, his brain numb with the pounding ache, until he saw before him a single red eye. Staring at it, he went ahead toward the red light. Suddenly he was beside it and his toe stumbled against the end of a railroad tie.

To his left the rails glimmered away into a vast darkness, on the right they led to a small railroad station. He had taken a stumbling step toward it when he brought up short, realizing his enemies would surely look for him there.

He stopped, swaying on his feet, trying to order his thoughts.

He did not know who he was. Or what he was.

His fingers felt of his clothing. The coat was tight across the shoulders and the sleeves were a bit short, but it seemed to be of good material.

He glanced back at the town, but beyond the fact that it was a very small town it told him nothing. There had been hitching rails along the street, a few cow ponies standing there. Hence it was a western town.

He had heard the whistle a second time before it dawned upon him that a train was coming, and he would, if he remained where he was, be caught in the full glare of the headlight. He dropped into the grass not an instant too soon as the train came rushing out of the night.

A train offered escape, and escape would give him a chance to consider, to sort out what must have happened, to discover who he was and why he was pursued.

When the train had passed and drawn up at the station, he studied it with care. There were at least three empty boxcars, their doors invitingly open. Yet as he considered his chances of getting into the nearest one

he heard a rush of horses' hoofs and twisted about from where he lay in the grass to see a party of horsemen dash up to the train and split into two groups to ride along both sides, checking every car, every rod and bumper.

He eased back farther into the grass, but he could hear them talking as they drew near.

". . . a waste of time. He was in bad shape, with blood all over, and staggering. He could never have made it to the tracks, believe me. If he's not hid somewhere in town he's lyin' out yonder in the grass, bleedin' to death."

"He was a tough man for a tenderfoot."

"I ain't so sure he was-a tenderfoot, I mean. Ben Janish swore he'd got him, and did you ever know Ben to miss? That gent must have an iron skull!"

"Aw, he's dead, all right! Dead or dyin'."

They turned at the caboose and walked their horses back along the train. They were a dozen yards away when the whistle blew. Rising, he ran for the nearest empty car. A rider started to turn in his saddle, so he changed direction and leaped for the rear ladder and swung between the cars and out of sight.

He had a moment only until the cars would be moving, taking him right by the lights from the station, and he went up the ladder and lay down flat alongside the catwalk, throwing an arm across it to hang on.

The train bumped, started, bumped again, and gathered speed. Still he lay quiet, his heart pounding. Was somebody riding the caboose? Had he been seen from its windows?

The train whistled, the cars rattled over the rail ends and gathered speed. He pulled himself along, still lying flat, until he was right over the door of the empty car.

Did he dare try to hang over the edge, then swing into the door? If he fell he would fall free of the tracks, but could easily break a leg if not his neck. The train was now moving fast, the lights of the station had disappeared, and soon the brakeman would be coming along the catwalk, checking the train.

Easing along the roof of the car, he looked over. The door was there, open and inviting. He worked his body around, his fingers clinging to the cracks between the boards of the roof. He let one leg over, then the other, holding only by his fingertips. He lowered his body down, moved his hands one by one to a grip on the edge of the car roof, then swung his body in and let go.

He fell sprawling on the floor of the car, and for a moment he lay still, gasping for breath. After a long time he got up and staggered to the door. Leaning his shoulder against the car wall beside the door, he looked out into the night. There were stars, and the night was cool, the wind coming soft off the sagebrush.

He tried to think. Who was he? A fugitive from the law?

Or were those men who had tried to find him lawless men, wanting to kill him because of something he knew? Or because of something he possessed?

Sodden with weariness, he sat down and leaned against the wall, his body drained of strength, empty and

sick. But he forced himself to think.

Ben Janish . . . he had one name, at least. Ben Janish had been sent to kill him, and Janish did not often miss. This implied that Janish was expert at the business, and might have killed before. They had spoken of him as a man with a reputation. Therefore it should not be too difficult to find Ben Janish, and find out who he himself was.

But if Ben Janish had been sent to kill him, he had been sent by whom?

They had said he was a tenderfoot, which implied he was new to the West. If this was the case, why had he come west? And where had he come from? Did he have a family? Was he married or single?

Well, he had the one clue. He must find out who Ben Janish was, and where he was.

He had no mirror, and therefore no knowledge of what he looked like. That he was tall was obvious, and by feeling his biceps he assured himself that he was an uncommonly strong man. Tenderfoot he might be, but he was no weakling.

He thrust his hands into his trousers pockets. One hand emerged with a small sack that proved to contain ten gold eagles and some odd coins. There was also a small but solid packet of greenbacks, but he did not take the time to count them.

The other pocket contained a strong clasp knife, a white handkerchief, a waterproof matchbox, a tight ball of rawhide string, and three keys on a key chain.

The side pockets of the coat contained nothing at all, but the inside pocket paid off with some kind of legal document and two letters.

The letters were addressed to Dean Cullane, El Paso, Texas. Was that who he was?

He spoke the name aloud, but it evoked no response in his memory.

It was too dark to do more than make out the addresses on the letters, and he returned them to his pocket to wait for a better light.

"Well, Dean Cullane, if that is who you are, for a man with so much money you certainly have a lousy tailor."

El Paso . . . he said the name but it meant nothing to him. However, it was his second lead. He would go to El Paso, go to the home of Dean Cullane and see if he was recognized there.

Yet . . . did he dare?

Somewhere along the tortured line of his thinking, he dozed off, but was awakened when a rough hand grasped his shoulder.

"Mister"-the voice was low but anxious-"don't you swing on me. I'm a friend, and by the looks of that crowd waiting up the street, you need a friend."

He was on his feet, shocked into clear-headedness. The train was still moving, lights flashed past the doors, and they were entering a town. "What is it?" he asked. "What's happening?"

"There's a big crowd up the street, mister, and they've got a rope. They're fixing to hang you."

"Hang me? Why?"

"Don't stand there asking questions! When we pass that water tank, you jump and run." The man pointed toward a dark, looming building. "There's a gap between that building and the corral. You can take it running. At the end of the corral there's bushes, and right past the corner of the corral there's a path goes through into the wash."

"You take off up that wash for the hills, and if you can run, you'd better. Don't leave the wash until you see a big boulder, kind of greenish color, if it's light enough to see. When you get to that boulder you do a hard right and go up the bank. There's a path . . . follow it."

The train was slowing now, and suddenly the man beside him dropped into the night, and was running. In an instant he had done the same. Even as he did so he wondered at the practiced ease with which he accomplished it. His memory might be gone, but the habit patterns in his muscles had not forgotten.

The water tank dripped into the dirt below, and there was a pleasant smell of dampness as he went past. He was aware briefly of the feel of cinders under his feet, the smell of coal smoke from the engine, and steam drifting back from the exhaust.

He saw the huge old barn, the corrals nearby, and he ran into the opening between, stretching his long legs and moving fast. The night was cool. He caught the fresh smell of hay and the smell of manure from the barns, and then he was past the corral.

Behind him men were shouting: "Search the train! Don't let him get away!"

He ducked into the black opening in the brush, was through it and into the sand of the wash. His running slowed because of the heavy going, but he plunged on until his heart was pounding so that it frightened him. He really slowed down then, walking and trotting. For a man who had been slugged on the head and who had been dead-tired a short time before, he seemed to have remarkable endurance.

He plodded on. The boulder loomed before him, and he turned and went up the bank. Almost at once he was on a path that ran parallel to the wash but a dozen feet above it, angling up the slope but under cover from the brush.

The trail dipped down to a small creek. He knelt and drank a little, and then as there seemed no other route he walked upstream in the water. He had gone no more than a quarter of a mile when a low call arrested him.

"Up here!"

He turned and went up into the rocks, where his unknown friend stood waiting.

Without a word the man turned and forced his way through a narrow crack in the rocks, followed a path for perhaps forty yards, and then ducked under some leaning boulders and into a small hollow among brush and huge rocks. He went through another crack and into a great cave formed by huge sandstone boulders that had

fallen against each other.

A stack of firewood against one wall showed the place had been prepared, and there was a circle of stones and the blackened ashes and charcoal of old fires.

The stranger gathered sticks and commenced building a fire.

"Won't they smell the smoke?"

"Not much chance. Except the way we came, there's no way to get within half a mile of this place on horseback, and you know no cowhand is goin' to walk unless he's forced to. This hideout's been used forty years or more, and nobody the wiser."

From some unknown well of wisdom he said, "You just better hope no outlaw has turned lawman. It happens."

The man had his fire going. He stood up, brushing his hands on his jeans. "Could happen," he agreed. He looked curiously at his companion. "My name is Rimes, J. B. Rimes," he said.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Wesley McFarland:

Why don't make it to be your habit? Right now, try to ready your time to do the important action, like looking for your favorite publication and reading a reserve. Beside you can solve your short lived problem; you can add your knowledge by the reserve entitled The Man Called Noon: A Novel. Try to face the book The Man Called Noon: A Novel as your friend. It means that it can to get your friend when you truly feel alone and beside those of course make you smarter than ever. Yeah, it is very fortuned to suit your needs. The book makes you far more confidence because you can know every little thing by the book. So , we need to make new experience and also knowledge with this book.

Cathrine Hart:

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George Bash:

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