

THE SMOKY YEARS

By ALAN LE MAY

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INSTALLMENT 14 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. Unable to reconcile her father with Roper, Jody 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. Roper was approaching one of his own shacks when he noticed outposts keeping a careful watch-

CHAPTER XIX—Continued

To Roper's right, surprisingly close, a rifle spoke, once only. Roper could neither see the man who had fired nor guess his target. He waited five minutes, gun ready, then stood up and moved his pony down-slope into a shallow draw in which it was hidden by the brush. Moving cautiously, he proceeded north along the cut, seeking the position of the man who had fired.

Through the hillside brush a figure moved, crouching so low that his dark shape resembled a bear. After a moment Bill Roper was able to make out that the approaching man carried a light carbine.

The man with the carbine moved swiftly down the hillside, sliding on the hard crust of the snow, but surprisingly silent in the brush.

The watched man dropped into the ravine, angling toward the bend where Roper stood. Bill Roper pulled himself out of the gully. He was crouched in dense brush, gun in hand, as the scout appeared below him.

Roper stood up. "Steady," he said.

The man in the draw jumped as if he had been struck; but as he raised his hands he straightened so that Roper saw his face.

His captive was Shoshone Wilce. "By God," said Shoshone, "I was never so glad to see anybody in my life!"

Roper's voice bit like frosty ice. "You know where she is?"

"Yeah," said Shoshone. "Yeah, I know where she is."

Roper dropped into the gully to snarl close into Shoshone's face. "Is she alive? Is she all right?"

"Oh, yeah, sure," Wilce assured him. "She's alive, all right. Don't seem like she's hurt any. I—"

"Don't seem like?" Roper repeated. "Damn your hide, where is she?"

"Bill, seems like them buzzards have her down there at that cabin, and won't leave her loose."

"Who won't?"

"Bill, I don't know who."

"Well, how the devil did she get there?"

"Me," Shoshone said. He met Roper's eye bleakly. Obviously, he knew that he was in trouble here. "I brought her."

"Why in all—"

"She would have come anyway, Bill. She was dead set on locating you. She didn't have nobody else to ride with her. I figured you'd sooner I'd try to bring her direct to you, so somebody would be with her, than have her wandering loose around the country by herself. A bartender in Miles told me you were here, and we rode here. And then—and then—"

"Well, then—what?"

"As I come into the valley," Shoshone said, "seemed to me like something was wrong. But I couldn't make out what. We came up to the cabin careful and slow, in the dark. But they seen us coming and they laid for us, I guess. Before we knew what had busted, they gunned her pony down, and they drilled mine twice so bad that I had to turn him loose. Most likely he's dead by now. I—" Shoshone hesitated.

"And you run out and left her," Bill filled in for him.

"Bill, I swear, I wouldn't have done nothing like that, not for no amount. Thing was, they was all around me; I couldn't see where to shoot or who they was. I figured first it was your own boys, making a mistake, and after I seen it wasn't, I just figured to keep in a fighting position, you might say, and close in first chance. Only—"

"Only you never saw any chance," Roper said with contempt.

"Well, no; there's seven of 'em down there, Bill, and they keep an awful steady watch. And I been scouting 'em steady ever since. Sometimes I get in a long shot at one or another of 'em. This carbine don't carry so very good, but I plugged two of 'em; don't know how bad."

"How do you know she wasn't shot or hurt when her horse went down?" Roper demanded. "By God, Shoshone, if you let anything happen to that girl—"

"They let her walk outside sometimes during the day," Shoshone said. "That's how I seen she's all right."

"Can you make out who the bunch down there is?"

"I figure they're some Thorpe gun squad, out after your scalp. I figure they was laying to gun you. And now that they got the girl, I figure that they aim to hold her for bait, kind of."

Shoshone fell silent, and Roper, deep in thought, let him rest.

"You're most likely right," Roper said morosely at last. "There's four or five of these Thorpe war parties out after me; and this could easy be one. But of all the infernal luck I ever saw—What did Jody want with me? Did she tell you?"

"Thorpe has made up his mind to kill her old man," Shoshone said. "I went and told her, because I thought you'd want her to know, so she could maybe look out for him some. But the old man wouldn't

listen to her and they had a row. So then the only thing she could think of was to come to you. She's got some notion of trying to get you and her old man together again."

"A fine chance!"

"That's what I told her. But she—"

"Why in God's name," Roper flared at him again, "didn't you go after help?"

"I figured I'd get strung up for sure," Shoshone said flatly, "if I went and told Gordon what I'd done. I wanted to come for you, but naturally I didn't know where you'd went. The only thing I could figure out, I better try to ghost around these hills and maybe whittle 'em down to my size."

"You say there are seven men in the cabin," Roper asked at last; "two wounded?"

Shoshone nodded. "They ain't all in the cabin all the time. Seems like they must have had the girl tell 'em that she come here to meet you. Naturally they'd think you knew she was coming. Most likely they figure that if I ain't dead I'm carrying you word that will bring you here a-king. So they're holding her there now until they see if they can't get you. I ain't watched

those fellers for fifteen years without knowing how they work."

"They're taking an awful chance," Roper said, iron death in his eye. "If I rode in here, warned, with my wild bunch—"

"It ain't such a bad chance they're taking," Shoshone contradicted. "Night and day their outposts are out. Two men can check the whole country daytimes, so they can see you coming twenty miles. You only got here because you come up through the timber to the south, on the trail from Miles—the last way they'd figure you'd come. Nights there are more men on lookout than that, near as I can make out, and their lookout is strongest just before dawn—I suppose Iron Dog taught 'em that trick in the old days, always striking just before daylight, and now they can't get it out of their heads. Night and day they got ponies saddled. If ever they spotted your wild bunch riding in, they'd be almighty hard to catch."

"If only," Roper said, "the wild bunch was going to ride in! But it isn't."

"Maybe there's some way we could fake it, so they'd give up and clear out. I figure they'd leave the girl behind if ever they set out to run."

"I'm going down and smoke 'em out," Roper said through his teeth. "I'm going to smoke 'em out before the sun ever comes up again, and you're going to help me."

Shoshone nodded. "If we tackled 'em just before daylight, when the outpost is strong and the cabin is weak—"

They talked it over for a long time. In the hidden gulch where Shoshone had been holing up they made coffee and cooked meat, and completed their plans.

"We can get in," was Shoshone's verdict at last. "We can get in, and we can take the cabin. But God knows how we're ever going to get out."

"I've got a plan for that," Roper said.

He wouldn't tell Shoshone what it was.

CHAPTER XX

There were no stars when Roper roused himself in his blankets, and he had no mechanical means of tell-

ing the time. Yet he knew very definitely that dawn was just two hours away.

He shook Shoshone Wilce. The little man groaned once, then came full awake with the sudden response of an animal.

Without the snow the rock-like impenetrability of the overcast sky would have made the night utterly black, but the ghostly pallor of the snow had the effect of faintly modifying the darkness. The eye might possibly have made out a moving dark shape at ten yards; beyond that there was nothing but a muffling blackness.

"You lead out," Roper said. His voice was instinctively hushed, even at this distance from the enemy.

"You've had more chance to study the lay than me."

Shoshone Wilce delayed. "Bill," he said, "I lay thinking about this time for a long time, after you was asleep." A dogged stubbornness came into his tone. "I figure we can probably take the cabin. And if we take the cabin without fighting we've got a chance to get away. But if so much as one shot is fired—Bill, the outposts will close like a b'ar trap. I don't see no way we can ever get clear."

By the sudden frozen silence, Shoshone Wilce was able to sense Bill Roper's anger.

"I wish to God," Bill Roper said at last, "I had Hat Crick Tommy here, or Tex Long; or even the very greenest kid cowboy that's riding the range with them, somewhere tonight. I need one other man for this job. It wouldn't take an especially brave man, or smart man, nor a real good gunfighter. I just need one fairly good man. But I haven't even got that!"

"Bill, I only claim—look, Bill: I ain't afraid of 'em. I only—"

"You ain't afraid," Bill Roper repeated; "no—not much. But when the guns spoke, you left a girl down under her horse in the snow—maybe hurt, maybe dead—and you ran for your life."

When Bill Roper had said that, both were utterly still, while a man might have counted a hundred.

Shoshone's voice was flat and dead. "Is that the way it looks to you?"

"Look at it yourself."

"Then," Shoshone said, "I guess there ain't anything more to say." He stood up.

"There's this to say," Bill Roper said. "You're going to work with me tonight because I haven't got anybody else. You're going to do exactly what I say, and when I say, without any back talk or question. You make one slip tonight and the West won't hold you, nor the world won't hold you, and you'll answer to me in the end. You hear me?"

"Okay," Shoshone said in the same flat, dead voice.

"One thing more," Roper said. "If we make a quiet job, we'll try to go out slow and quiet, the three of us together. Otherwise, you take Jody's lead rope and ride like hell. Six miles below here, near the creek, there's a kind of a brush corral. You and the girl will wait for me there. Wait for me until daylight begins to come; then go on."

They moved down into the valley of the Fork, walking fast. When they had dropped into the bed of Fork Creek itself they moved northward, following its windings, for what seemed a long way; but no sign of approaching dawn yet showed, and Roper felt that they had plenty of time. As they at last passed the point where the cabin stood, invisible in the dark, Shoshone indicated its location with raised arm; but they moved on fifty yards farther, so that they might approach the cabin from the north.

Cautiously now, Shoshone climbed the bank, silent as the Indians with whom he had spent his youth. Turning, he gripped Bill Roper's arm. His words were whispered close to Roper's ear.

"One of the night guards is out that-a-way, about five hundred yards," he whispered; "about in line with where you see that big dead pine."

Roper could see no dead pine. It annoyed him that Shoshone's eyes were better than his own—as good as the eyes of an Indian, or a lynx.

"I'll leave my carbine standing just outside the door," Shoshone said. "I only want it for later, after we've took to the horses."

"That's all right," Roper said. "But you remember this: If there's any trouble in the cabin, you stand and fight! Because if you don't, I'll turn and plug you myself, if it takes my last shot to do it."

"Okay."

Roper went ahead now, walking boldly across the snow. Better, he thought, to simulate the casual approach of friends than to depend upon a hope of complete surprise.

As he raised his hand to the door a strange thrill of dread momentarily stirred him at the thought that Jody Gordon was inside—with whom?



THE NEW BUNKER HILLS

"We must be realistic about that word 'attack.' It can begin anywhere in the western hemisphere. If you wait to shoot until you see the whites of their eyes as at Bunker Hill you will never know what hit you."—President Roosevelt.

Bunker Hill may be in Iceland—Boston may be far at sea, Concord Bridge may be a structure Beyond visibility;

Distance in this war is shrinking And it quite disturbs our sleep To regard the North Church belfry As upon the briny deep.

II

Paul Revere once watched for lanterns From a famous Charlestown shore—

But he now needs long-range glasses That will take in Labrador;

He must watch a lot of steeples On some Arctic stretch of land And must look for signals flashing From some Indian coral strand.

III

Now "the muffled oars" must cover Lots of distance, wild and rough, And the epic Charlestown rowboat Must do ocean-going stuff;

Paul was once a local rider— And we owe a lot to him, But he now must get around more— And must teach his horse to swim!

IV

Now he stands beside his saddle And he wonders what to do As he keeps an eye on Dakar Trinidad and Suez, too;

As he watches for new doings With that classic "eagle search," He may catch a warning glimmer From a Madagascar church.

V

Mystic once was in New England, But who thinks it there today? Medford cocks now crow in Iceland Or perhaps in Baffin Bay;

It was one o'clock, they tell us, When Paul got to Lexington . . . But the journey was a land trip— And was not an ocean run.

VI

It was two o'clock at Concord— Then a Massachusetts place— Not a village in the Azores Or a borough near Cape Race;

Then the flocks that Paul heard bleating Were all flocks quite close at hand Never flocks in far-off Narvik Or some spot off Newfoundland.

VII

Middlesex was then non-shifting, Not transferable each week; It was not in midatlantic And 'twas not in Martinique!

Distance isn't what it once was— Now our shores, so we hear, Can be somewhere close to China, Crete, Suez or Finistere.

L'ENVOI

So to wait to "see the whites of" Hostile eyes brands you a dope— Unless you are tensely squinting Through a big Lick telescope;

So we give Revere the curtain As a far out-dated lad And we shoot his horse quite blithely— But it leaves us pretty sad!

• • •

The trouble is that too many Americans think of an unlimited emergency as meaning tire trouble during a week-end auto trip, a slight traffic congestion on the way to the bathing beach or a shortage of auto parking space for the hired hands.

• • •

A blackout may be tried in New York soon. It is going to be a terrible order for the average New Yorker to have to find the delicatessen and drug store in the dark.

• • •

The Nazis have perfected the art of jumping out of planes, but the time will come when they will have to solve the problem of jumping back.

CANDIDATES FOR THE FIRING SQUAD

I'm very sick of lots of things, But of nothing more today Than golf stars striding four abreast To the camera man's "Okay!"

• • •

What America needs more than anything else is a good five-cent dime.

• • •

Elmer Twitchell can't help wondering how long it is going to take radio advertisers to realize that nothing loses them more customers than having the war commentators abruptly turn from the latest crisis into a spiel on hair tonics, shoe polishes and spinach dressings.

'DELAYED IN TRANSIT'

Whenever I zoom up an elevator, I get there first—my stomach later! —Lee A. Cavalier.

• • •

The North Carolina, just launched, is the first battleship built by this country in 18 years. And yet Uncle Sam would resent it if called a dope.

• • •

"In-Laws and Canned Dinners Cause High Divorce Rate, Says Judge."—Headline. Bunk. Judges are the cause of the high divorce rate.

Easy Home Shorthand Course



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DREAMING of a good secretarial job—and doing something about it!

As shorthand may so easily be learned at home, no girl need re-

main unskilled—at a disadvantage in job-seeking. And if you long to enter some fascinating field—fashion, buying, advertising—remember, shorthand usually opens the door. It is fun to practice it.

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Unsought Thoughts

The thoughts that come often unsought, and, as it were, drop into the mind, are commonly the most valuable of any we have, and therefore should be secured, because they seldom return again.—Locke.

Age of Plants, Animals

Plants exceed animals in the length of their lives and, surprisingly enough, in the shortness of their lives also. Parrots belong to the century group; elephants may attain an age of two centuries. A good record for the animals, but on the plant side we have the California Sequoia trees living for 50 centuries.

At the other extreme are some bacteria which have a life cycle of only 20 minutes, shorter than any animal's life.

Driven by Thought

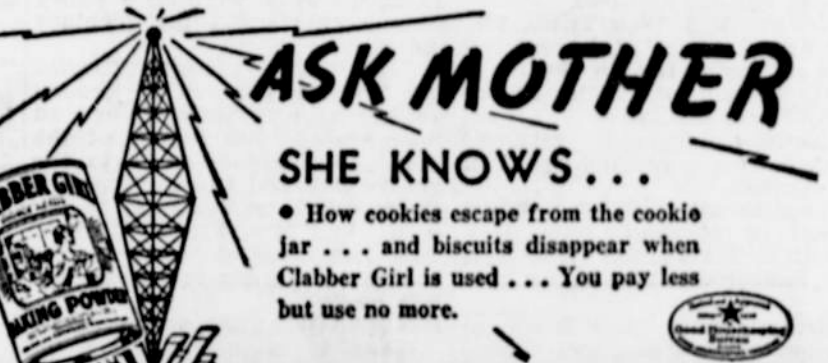
A spur in the head is worth two in the heels.

5¢ Kool-Aid

Makes 10 BIG Drinks

Driven by Thought

A spur in the head is worth two in the heels.



ASK MOTHER SHE KNOWS...

• How cookies escape from the cookie jar . . . and biscuits disappear when Clabber Girl is used . . . You pay less but use no more.

CLABBER GIRL Baking Powder

Poetry a Demi-God The basis of poetry is language, which is material only on one side. It is a demi-god.—Emerson.

No Need of Whip Flattery is the bridle and saddle with which you may drive the vain man.

Don't say Pork and Beans



SAY Van Camp's PORK and BEANS

Feast-for-the-Least

Short World Think not thy time is short in this world, since the world itself is not long. The created world is but a small parenthesis in eternity.—Sir Thomas Browne.

THE SMOKE'S THE THING!



YOU BET I SMOKE CAMELS, THEY'RE EASY ON MY THROAT. EXTRA MILD. AND THE FLAVOR IS SWELL.

GOLF CHAMPION BEN HOGAN

THE SMOKE OF SLOWER-BURNING CAMELS CONTAINS 28% LESS NICOTINE

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(TO BE CONTINUED)