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THE SKY LINE OF SPRUCE
by Edison Marshall
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(Continued From Our Last Issue.)
"Tell me about it," he said at last, casually. "I was thinking of making a boat and going down on a prospecting trip."

"I'll tell you about it, and then I think you'll change your mind. The first cataract is the one just above where we first saw the river—coming in; then there's this mile of quiet water. From that point on the Yuga flows into a gorge. The walls are just about straight up on each side, and of course are absolutely impassable. For nearly two hundred miles the river is considered impassable for boats. Two hundred and fifty miles or so below there is an Indian village—but they never try to go down the river from here."

"And after you've once got into the rapids, there's no getting out—or landing?"

"Of course not. I suppose there are places where you might get on the bank," but the gorge above is impassable."

"You couldn't follow the river down—with horses?"

"Yes, in time. Of course it would be slow going, as there are no trails, the brush is heavy, and the country is absolutely unexplored. If any criminal—or any one like that—could take down this river a canoe in high water—and get through into that great, virgin, trackless country a hundred miles below, it would be almost impossible to get him out."

"And with good ambushes?"

"To strike at them indirectly—through some one they love—such had been his greatest wish."

"Goodby," the girl was saying. "I'll see you soon."

He turned toward her, a smile at his lips. His voice held steady when he spoke.

"I'll have to be soon, if at all," he replied. "I've got to really get to work in a few days. How about a little picnic to-morrow—on the other side of the river?"

The girl's eyes shone, and the color rose again in her tanned cheeks. "I'd think that would be very nice," she told him.

"Then I'll meet you here at eight."

CHAPTER IX

The Wolf Man's Strategy
Alone by the fire Ben had opportunity to balance one thing with another and think out the full consequences of his plan.

In the still hour of midnight he carried the equipment down to the



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After Every Meal

U.S. No. 12-27.

canoe that Beatrice had left the evening before. Then he drew from his pocket a sheet of paper and wrote carefully, a long time, with a pencil.

Folding his letter carefully, he sealed it with tallow. Then, wrapping one of his blankets about him, he prepared to wait for the dawn.

Just before eight he saw her come. Her voice rang clear and sweet through the hushed depths as she called a greeting.

"Go back and get your heavy coat," he commanded. "I've been out on the water, and it'll freeze your stiff."

She smiled into his eyes, but she came of a breed of woman that had learned obedience to men, and she immediately turned. But Ben had builded better than he thought. His eyes were no longer on her radiant face. They had dropped to the pistol, in its holster, that she carried in her hands, preparatory to strapping it about her waist. This pistol and a small package, the contents of which he did not know, were the only equipment she had.

She laid down the things, and in a moment the thicket had hidden her. Swiftly Ben reached for the gun, and for a few speeding seconds his fingers worked at its mechanism.

"For goodness sake, Mr. Darby," the girl cried. "What have you got in this boat?" She pointed to the pile of supplies, covered by the blankets, in the centre of the craft.

"It looks like we had enough to stay a month, doesn't it?" he laughed. "There's blankets there, of course—to make us comfortable—and the lunch, and a pillow or two."

The girl's eyes fell with some apprehension on the shaggy wolf. "I haven't established very friendly relations with Fenris—"

"I'd leave him at home, but he won't stand for it. Lie down, old boy," Ben motioned, and Fenris sprawled at his feet. "Now come here and pet him, Miss Neilson."

"He understands," Ben explained. "He realizes that I've accepted you, and you're all right. You've not forgotten anything?" he asked casually.

"Nothing I can think of."

"Got plenty of extra shells?"

"Part of a box. It's a small calibre automatic, you see, and a box holds fifty."

"Ben's tone indicated deep interest. "May I see 'em a minute? I think I had a gun like it once. Not the gun—just the box of shells."

Presently he started to push off. "You're not taking the other paddle," the girl asked curiously.

"No. I don't believe in letting young ladies work when I take 'em on an outing. You are just to sit in the bow and enjoy yourself."

Just one moment more he hesitated. From his pocket he drew a piece of paper. This he inserted into a little crack in the blade of the second paddle.

"Just a little note for your father," he explained, "to tell him where we are, in case he worries about you."

"That's very considerate of you," the girl answered in a thoughtful voice.

After the manner of backwoods fathers, Jeffery Neilson had offered no objections to his daughter's all-day excursion with Ben.

When he heard his daughter's voice on the canoe landing, one hundred yards below, he was inordinately startled. She had not told him that their picnic would take them on to the water.

He turned toward the door, instinctively alarmed; then hesitated. After all, he could not tell her to come back. Beatrice would be mortified; and besides, there was nothing definite to fear.

Yet what, in reality, did he know of Ben Darby? All at once a baffling apprehension crept like a chill through his frame.

He could not laugh it away. It laid hold of him, refusing to be dispelled. Once more the man started for the door.

When he reached the landing the canoe was already near the opposite shore, heading swiftly downstream.

"Come back!" Neilson called again, "I order you—"

Then his eye fell to the landing on which he discerned the white paper.

He bent for it with eager hand. His eye lagged over the white envelope.

"To Miss Melville's maid," Ben had written. And with that reading Jeffery Neilson knew a terror beyond any experienced in his life.

His hand ripped apart the sealed fold, and he held the sheet before his eyes.

To Neilson and His Gang:
When you get this, Beatrice will be on her way to Back There—either there or on her way to hell.

Ezra Melville was my pard. A letter leaving his claim to me is in my pocket, and I alone know where Hiram's will is, leaving it to Ezra. Your title will never stand as long as those papers aren't destroyed. If you don't care enough about saving your daughter from me, at least you'll want those letters.

Come and get them. I'll be waiting for you. Ben Darby.

As the truth flashed home, Neilson's first thought was of his rifle. One well-aimed bullet over the water, might yet hurl the avenger to his death in the moment of his triumph. And he cursed himself when his empty hands showed him that he had left his rifle in his cabin.

His pistol, however, was at his belt, and his hand reached for it. His steady finger pressed back against the trigger.

The first shot fell far short. He lifted the gun higher and shot again. Again he shot low. But the third bullet fell just a few feet on the near side of the canoe.

Once more he fired, but the boat was farther distant now, and the bullet went wild. The pistol was empty. He turned back to his cabin for his rifle.

CHAPTER X

The Stream of Death
"We'd better keep on going to our landing place," Ben advised. "There's no place to land above it—I want all over the shore this morning. That will give him time to cool down. I only want to get around this curve before he comes with his rifle."

"Turn into the shore," she told him, half-whispering. "You still have time to steer into shore. I'll jump overboard if you don't."

He shook his head. "Don't jump overboard, Beatrice," he answered. "It isn't my purpose to kill you—"

It's my last warning. Turn quick, or I'll fire," she said.

and to jump over into this stream only means to die."

The girl knew he spoke the truth. "What do you mean to do?" she asked.

"It's just a little debt I owe your father—and his gang," Ben explained. "I'll tell you some time, in the days to come. It was a debt of blood—"

The girl's dark eyes charged with red fire. "And you, a coward, take your payment on a woman. Turn the canoe into the bank."

"You're safe with me—the daughter of Jeff Neilson can't ever be anything but safe with me—as far as the thing you fear is concerned. I'm simply paying an honest debt, and you're the unfortunate agent."

"You've still got time to turn back," the girl answered him, seemingly without feeling. "Glide into shore, and we'll try to catch an overhanging limb. It's my last warning."

Ben shook his head. The girl's white hand flashed to her side, then

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(Continued in Our Next Issue.)

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(Contest Closes April 16, 1927.)

RULES OF CONTEST
All scholars not over seventeen (17) years of age whose parents or guardians subscribe to this paper may enter the contest.
Essays may deal with the subject from any point of view, but must not exceed 1,000 words in length.
Paper of foiscap size must be used, and writing appear on one side only. Neatness will be considered in making awards.
All manuscripts submitted become the property of the publishers. Send essays to Canada Essay Editor, in care of this paper.
The following information must accompany each entry:—Name of contestant, Age, Address, Name of School, Name of Teacher, and each essay must bear the following certificate signed by parent, guardian, or school teacher:
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