



THE SKY LINE OF SPRUCE by Edison Marshall

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BEGIN HERE TODAY

BEN DARBY, a prisoner, is declared to be a victim of amnesia by a noted almanac, and is paroled to an old friend.

ERICA MELVILLE. Teacher, Ezra starts on trip to the Yuga River, where Ezra goes to take possession of a rich claim left by his brother, Hiram Melville, who has died.

Ben is to have a partnership and a new lease of life. At Seattle lives

JEFFERY NEILSON and his two

partners, Ray Brent and

CHAS. HEMINWAY. Leader of

the notorious gang has a beautiful

daughter, Beatrice, with whom Brent is in love. She doesn't care for him.

Ben complains to Neilson and her father.

He put two or three questions—in a

rather curious, hushed voice—and got

his answer.

"What have you and your poor vic-

ting been talking about, all this time?" Ben asked.

"Oh, just a gabfest—a tat-tat as

you'd call it. But you know, Ben, I've got a idea all sudden." Ben straightened, lighted his pipe, and prepared to listen.

"This old boy tells me that we'd save just twelve miles

by striking off from here, instead of goin' into town. Snowy Gulch is six

miles, and we have to come back to this very place. What's the use of goin' into town at all?"

"Good heavens, Ez! Have you for-

gotten we've got to get supplies? And your brother's gun—and his dog?"

"Yes, I know—one of us has. But, Ben, it seems to me that one of us

ought to strike off now and figure out the way and sort of get located."

"Oh, it would be all right," Ben be-

gan rather doubtfully. "I don't see

that much is to be gained by it. But I'll strike off on foot, if you want me to."

Erica's mind was flashing with

thoughts like lightning, and his an-

swer was ready. "Ben, if you don't

mind, I'll do that," he said.

"But you'd get a ride, if you wanted—"

"I hate horse, anyway—"

"You've surely changed a lot since the war."

"I was thrown off not long ago—and have been leery of the dum

things ever since."

Erica was wholly deliberate. He

knew what awaited him on arrival

at his brother's claim. Jeffery Neilson and his gang had assembled there,

had already jumped the claim just as

his brother had warned him that they

would do; and coolly and quietly he

had resolved to face them alone.

He made his pack—a few simple

provisions wrapped in his blanket—and a knife and camp ax swung on his belt. He took his trusted pipe—

because he knew well that he could never acquit himself credibly in a fight without a few lungfuls of tobacco smoke first—and he also took his rifle. "You keep this copy of the letter." He handed Ben the copy he had made of Hiram's will. "I'm the

worst hand for losin' things you ever

seen."

They said their simple good-byes, shaking hands over a pile of stores.

"I've only got one decent place to

keep things safe," Ezra confided,

"and that ain't so all-fired decent, either. When I get any papers that

are extra precious, I always stick 'em

between the sock and the leather. But it's too much work to take the boot

off now, so you keep the letter."

"I suppose you've got a million-dollar bank account hidden down there now," Ben remarked.

"No, not a cent. Just the same, if

ever I get shuffled off all of a sudden I want you to look there mighty

careful. There may be a document

or two of importance."

"I won't forget," Ben promised.

"Oh, nothin' at all. Why?"

"If you fellow is prospectin', Jeffery Neilson is a first-class man to

stay away from—Ray Brent and

Chas. Heminway. But they're out of

town right now. They skinned out all

in a bunch a few weeks ago—and I

can't tell you what kind of a scent

they got."

Ezra felt cold to the marrow of

his bones. He glanced covertly at

Ben; fortunately his partner was busy

among supplies, and was not

listening to this conversation.

"You don't know where they went,

do you?" he asked.

"Not exactly. They took up this

creek here-a ways, through Spruce

Pass, and over to Yuga River—the

country that kind of a crazy old chappie

named Hiram Melville, who died here

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