

# THE SKY LINE OF SPRUCE

by Edison Marshall  
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(Continued From Our Last Issue)

HE sat dry-eyed, incoherent prayers at her trembling lips. Mostly she did not touch the man, only sat at his bedside in the crude chair Ben had fashioned for her.

The hours dragged by, the night sloped down to the forest; and the dawn followed the night. Ben's life still flickered, like a flame in the wind, in the twilight land between life and death.

Yet little could she do for him these first few days, except, in her simple faith, to pray.

But in the morning of the fourth day he opened his eyes vividly, muttered, and fell immediately to sleep.

In the days that followed he was conscious to the degree that he could drink broth, yet never realizing Beatrice nor seeming to know where he was.

It would be long weeks before Ben could hope for sufficient strength, to start the journey down to the settlements, even if the way were open. As it was, their only chance lay in the fall rains that would flood the Yuga and enable them to journey down to the native village in their canoe.

Yet she still waged the fight, struggling with high courage and tireless resolution against the frightful odds that opposed her.

But now the real hour of crisis was at hand—not from his illness, but from the depletion of their food supplies.

She walked to the mouth of the cave, and famine itself stood close, waiting in the shadows. She gazed out into the gathering gloom.



BEATRICE'S LAST DEFENSE HAD FALLEN SERIOUSLY WOUNDED.

The forest was silent tonight. Not a twig cracked or a branch rustled. It was hushed, breathless, darkly sinister. All at once her eyes peered and strained into the dusk.

Far across the valley, beyond the beaver marsh and on the farther shore of the lake she saw a little glimmer of light through the rift in the trees. A gleam of hope in the darkness of despair.

She hastened into the cave, drew the blankets higher about Ben's shoulders, then crept out into the dusk. Half running, she hastened toward the distant camp fire.

## CHAPTER XVI

### The Shot That Warned

Impelled by the excitement under which she advanced, her agility of motion had for the moment returned to her; and she crept softly as a fawn between the young trees. One misstep, one rustling branch or crackling twig might give her away; but she took each step with consummate care, gently thrusting the tree branches from her path.

One of the three men looked up.



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and she saw his face plainly through the low spruce boughs. It was with a distinct foreboding of disaster that she saw that the man was Ray Brent.

At one side, quite to the edge of the flashlight, she saw a kayak—one of those square boxes that are hung on a pack saddle—which seemed to be heaped with jerked caribou or moose flesh. For the time of a breath she could not take her eyes from it.

Chan and Neilson were seemingly asleep and now Ray was knocking the ashes from his pipe.

He got up and removing his outer coat, rolled in his blankets. The night hours began their mystic march across the face of the wilderness.

The fire was a heap of gray ashes except for its red-hot center; the kayak was in gloom. Very softly Beatrice crept through the thickets, meanwhile encircling the dying fire, and came up behind it.

Now it was almost in reach; now her hands were at its loops. She started to lift it in her arms.

But disaster still dogged her trail. Ray Brent had been too wary of attack, tonight, to sink easily into deep slumber. He heard the soft movements and with a startled oath sprang to his feet.

Still trying to hold the kayak of food that meant life to Ben, she turned and darted into the shadows.

Like a wolf Ray sprang after her. The moonlight showing her fleeing figure in the trees, and shouting aloud he sprang through the coverts to intercept her flight. Embarrassed by the heavy box she could not watch her step. She was hurled with stunning force to the ground.

Desperate and intent, but in realization of impending triumph, Ray's strong arms went about her.

Neilson and Chan were on their feet now, and they regarded her in the utter silence of amazement. Breathing fast, Ray came behind her.

"Build up the fire, Chan," he said in a strange, grim voice. "We want to see what we've caught."

Obediently Chan kicked the coals from under the ashes, and began to heap on broken pieces of wood.

Slowly the fire's glow crept out to her, revealing her wide, frightened eyes and the dark, speculative faces of the men. Then Ray spoke sharply.

"Well, why don't you question her?" he demanded of Neilson. "I suppose you know what she was doing. She was trying to steal food. It looks to me like she's gone over to the opposite camp."

Her father sighed. "Is that so, daughter?" he asked simply.

"I was trying to take some of your food—to Ben," Beatrice replied softly. "He's in need of it."

"You see they're on intimate terms," Ray suggested viciously. "Ben was in need of food—so she came here to steal it."

But Neilson acted as if he had not heard. "Why didn't you speak to us—and tell us you were safe?" he asked. "We've come all the way here to find you."

"Perhaps you did. If you had been here alone, I would have told you. But Ray and Chan came all the way here to find Ben. They intend to kill him when they find him. I—I didn't want him killed."

Slowly her father shook his head. "But I can't save him now. He brought this on himself."

"Remember, he was in the right," the girl pleaded brokenly. "You won't—you couldn't be a partner to murder."

Neilson straightened, his eyes steel and bright under his grizzled brows. Only too well he knew that this was the test. Affairs were at their crisis at last.

"If one of you dares to lay a hand on Beatrice, I'll kill him where he stands."

Even as he spoke his thought went to his rifle, leaning against a dead log ten feet away. The jealousy and rivalry and hatred between himself and Ray had reached the crisis.

Ray leered, his muscles bunching. "And I say to you, you're a dirty traitor," he answered.

Neilson leaped forward with all his power and if his blow had gone home, Ray would have been shattered beneath it like a tree in the lightning blast. But Ray's arms were incredibly swift, and his rifle leaped in his hands.

The barrel gleamed. The roar-rehearsed in the silence. Neilson's head bowed strangely; and for a moment he stood swaying, then pitched forward in the dew-wet grass.

Beatrice's last defense had fallen, seriously wounded; and Ray's arm seized her as, screaming, she tried to flee.

The shot that wounded Jeffery Neilson carried far through the forest aisles. It came clear as a voice to the cavern where Ben lay.

The man started violently in his cot. His entire nervous system seemed to react.

The truth was that the sound acted much as a powerful stimulant to his retarded nervous forces. His mind gave a great leap and remembered its familiar world.

The only possible explanation for the shot was that a rifle had been fired by some invader in their valley—in all probability Neilson or one of his men.

He looked out of the door of the cavern, trying to get some idea of the lateness of the hour. The very quality of the darkness indicated that the night was far advanced.

Instantly his keen eyes saw the far-off gleam of the camp fire on the distant margin of the lake. His straining ear caught the faintest, almost imperceptible vibration in the air—but Ben recognized it in a flash.

In the sudden light of that distant camp fire, Beatrice had screamed for aid.

Swiftly he started down the glade toward her.

Yet in a moment he knew that unless he conserved his strength he could not hope to make a fourth of the distance. At the first steps he swayed, half staggering.

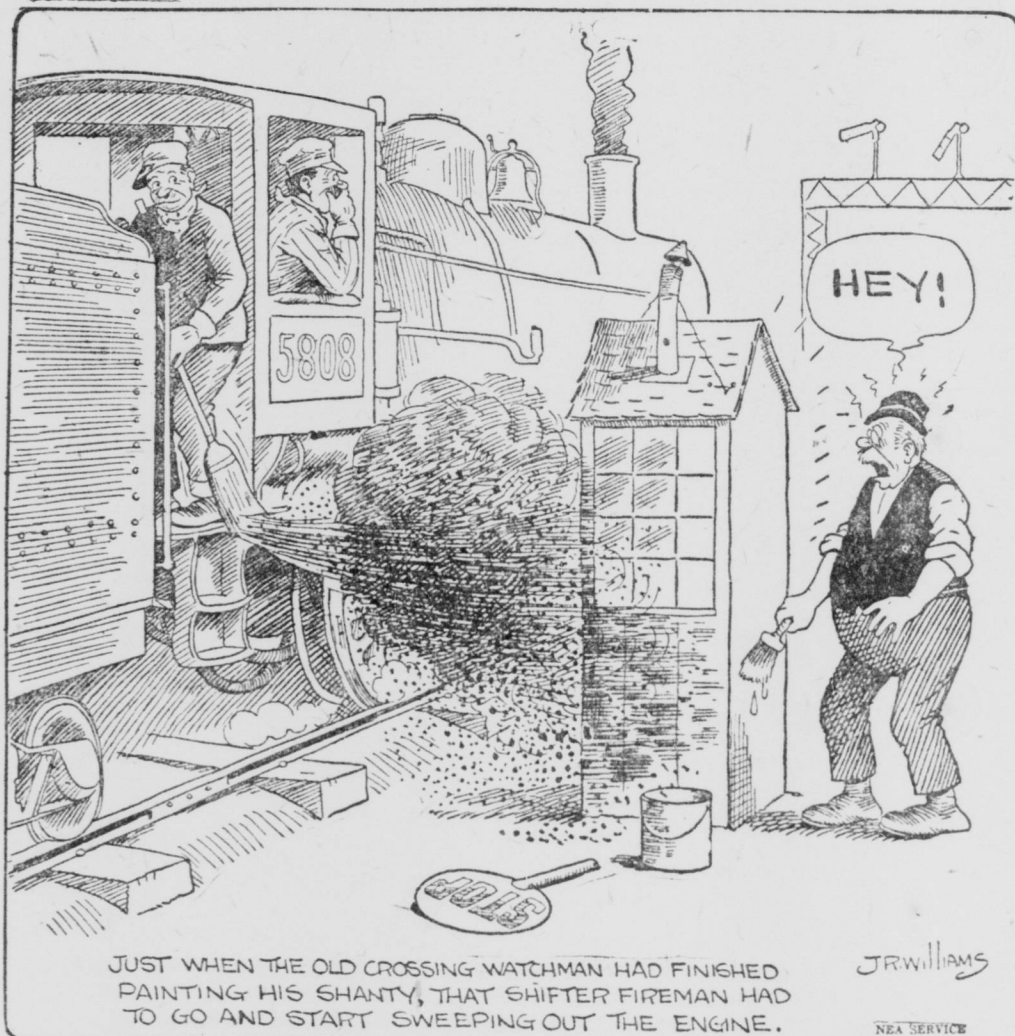
Likely he would come too late to change the girl's fate. Yet even now he knew he must not turn back. The penalty was death, there must be no hesitancy in him; he must not with hold one step.

He fell again and again as he tried

## DOINGS OF THE DUFFS—



## OUT OUR WAY—By WILLIAMS



JUST WHEN THE OLD CROSSING WATCHMAN HAD FINISHED PAINTING HIS SHANTY, THAT SHIFTER FIREMAN HAD TO GO AND START SWEEPING OUT THE ENGINE.

## THE BOY NEXT DOOR

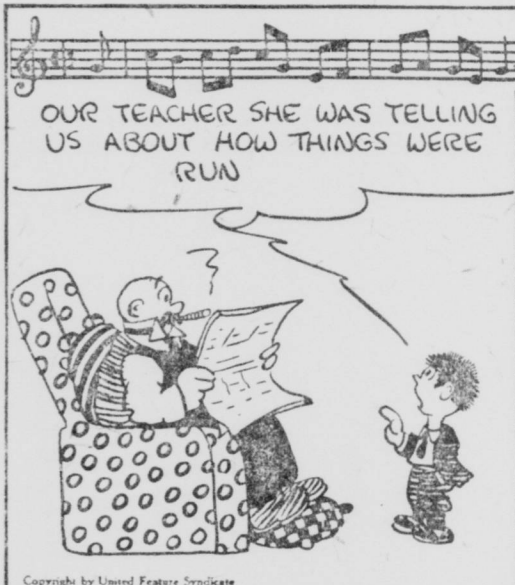
## FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS—By BLOSSER



## THESE DAYS IS GONE FOREVER—

## Test This On Your Trumpet

## —By AL POSEN



## THE OLD HOME TOWN—By STANLEY



LIVERYMAN DAVE WHITAKER TRADED AN OLD SORREL HORSE FOR A FINE GOLD WATCH DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY—THE GOLD WATCH TURNED GREEN TODAY

## OUR BOARDING HOUSE—By AHERN



THE AROMA OF ARNICA BECKONS TO KID PORTLAND

to make headway in the marsh. Only too plain he saw that the time was even now upon him when he could no longer keep his feet at all.

But at that instant he remembered the canoe. He plunged down into the tall tufts. Yes, the boat was still in place.

It took all the strength of his weakened body to push it out from the weeds. The canoe was strongly but lightly

made, so that it could be portaged with greatest possible ease; and his strokes, though feeble, propelled it slowly through the water.

## CHAPTER XVII

### The Wolf Pack

For a strange, still moment Ray's face seemed devoid of all expression. It was flat and lifeless as dark clay. Then Beatrice felt the insult of his quickening gaze.

"Put a rope around her wrists, Chan," he said. "We don't want to take chances on her getting away."

She wore Ben's knife at her belt, and her hand sped toward it. But the motion, fast as it was, came too late. Chan saw it; and leaping swiftly, his arms went about her and pinned her own arms to her sides.

Ray was aiding his confederate now and in an instant more she was helpless.

"You haven't lost all your looks," he told her breathlessly. "That mouth is still pretty enough to kiss. And I guess you won't slap—this time."

Her voice rose shrilly to a scream. "Ben—help me!"

(Continued in Our Next Issue)

New republic of Czechoslovakia embraces three-fourths of the entire industrial area of the former Austro-Hungarian empire.

Reports have been received here of successful operation of the motorized milk and water laboratory now in Warsaw, where representatives of the State board of health are teaching sanitary conditions at summer resorts.

After completing work at Warsaw the equipment will be moved to Lake Wawasee and other vacation areas. B. H. Jepp, local sanitary engineer, is in charge.

Caruso published "Dreams of Long Ago" principally to give his friends autographed copies.

A 2,200-acre fox farm has been started near Wrangell, Alaska.