

best down with a load of de-
berries.
wasn't in the least surprised. He
at this season of the year, the
were rich with them; one only
slip quickly through the back
the mother's eye was else
to find enough of them not
and discolor most of the face.
seemed to him that he reached
wasn't as he expected. Either
wasn't there, or—since his first
of them—his own stature
revised.
he had eaten the last berry
possibly hold, he went to
to drink. He lay down be-
a still pool, and the water was
to his lips. Then he rose at the
of an approaching motor car
him.
the driver—evidently a cattleman—
and looked at Bruce
some curiosity. He marked the
fitting suit of dark flannel,
rim, expensive shoes that were
dust-stained, the silken shirt
which a juicy berry had been
western fashion.
"How do you do," Bruce replied.
"How far to Martin's store?"
The man filled his pipe with great
before he answered. "Jump in
car," he replied at last, "and I'll
you. I'm going up that way my-

CHAPTER VI

Martin's was a typical little moun-
store, containing a small sample
almost everything under the sun,
built at the forks in the road.
entered slowly, and the little
of loungers gazed at him with
curiosity.
Only one of them was of a type
distinctly distinguished so that
his own curiosity was aroused.
He was a huge, dark man who stood
almost at the rear of the build-
—a veritable giant with savage,
bound lips and deep-sunken eyes.
There was a quality in his posture
that attracted Bruce's attention at
once. No one could look at him and
think that he was a power in these
mountain realms.
He was dressed much as the other
mountain men who had assembled in
the store. He wore a flannel shirt over
his gorilla chest, and corduroy trousers
stuffed into high, many-seamed
gaiter boots.
The dark eyes were full upon
Bruce's face. He felt them—just as
if they had the power of actual physi-
cal impact—the instant that he was
inside the door. Nor was it the
ordinary look of careless speculation
or friendly interest. It was such that
to man, to whom self-respect is dear,
could possibly disregard. It spoke
clearly as words.
Bruce flushed, and his blood made
a curious little leap. He slowly
turned. His gaze moved until it rested
full upon the man's eyes. It took all
of Bruce's strength to hold that gaze.
The moment was charged with a mys-
terious suspense.
The stranger's face changed too. He
did not flush, however. His lips curled
ever so slightly, revealing an instant's
glimpse of strong, rather well-kept
teeth. His eyes were narrowing too;
and they seemed to come to life with
singular sparkles and glowings be-
tween the lids.
"Well!" he suddenly demanded.
Every man in the room—except one—
started. The one exception was
Bruce himself. He was holding hard
on his nerve control, and he only con-
tinued to stare coldly.
"Are you the merchant?" Bruce
asked.
"No, I ain't," the other replied. "You
usually look for the merchant behind
the counter."
There was no smile on the faces of
the waiting mountain men, usually to

"It soon becomes a trail, but keep
right on going up it. At the fork in
the trail you'll find her cabin."
"How far is it, please?"
"Two hours' walk; you can make
it easy by four o'clock."
"Thank you." His eyes glanced over
the stock of goods and he selected a
few edibles to give him strength for
the walk. "I'll leave my suitcase here
if I may," he said, "and will call for
it later." He turned to go.
"Wait just a minute," a voice spoke
behind him. It was a commanding
tone—implying the expectations of
obedience. Bruce half turned. "Simon
wants to talk to you," the merchant
explained.
"I'll walk with you a way and show
you the road," Simon continued. The
room seemed deathly quiet as the two
men went out together.
They walked side by side until a
turn of the road took them out of eye-
range of the store. "This is the road,"
Simon said. "All you have to do is
follow it. Cabins are not so many
that you could mistake it. But the
main thing is—whether or not you
want to go."
Bruce had no misunderstanding
about the man's meaning. It was sim-
ply a threat, nothing more nor less.
"I've come a long way to go to that
cabin," he replied. "I'm not likely to
turn off now."
"There's nothing worth seeing when
you get there. Just an old hag—a
wrinkled old dame that looks like a
witch."
Bruce felt a deep and little under-
stood resentment at the words. Yet
since he had as yet established no
relations with the woman, he had no
grounds for silencing the man. "I'll
have to decide that," he replied. "I'm
going to see some one else, too."
"Some one named—Linda?"
"Yes. You seem quite interested."
They were standing face to face in
the trail. For once Bruce was glad of
his unusual height. He did not have
to raise his eyes greatly to look
squarely into Simon's. Both faces
were flushed, both set; and the eyes
of the older man brightened slowly.
"I am interested," Simon replied.
"You're a tenderfoot. You're fresh
from cities. You're going up there
to learn things that won't be any
pleasure to you. You're going into
the real mountains—a man's land such
as never was a place for tenderfeet. A
good many things can happen up
there. A good many things have hap-
pened up there. I warn you—go
back!"
Bruce smiled, just the faint flicker
of a smile, but Simon's eyes narrowed
when he saw it. The dark face lost a
little of its insolence. He knew men,
this huge son of the wilderness, and
he knew that no coward could smile in
such a moment as this. He was ac-
customed to implicit obedience and
was not used to seeing men smile
when he uttered a threat. "I've come
too far to go back," Bruce told him.
"Nothing can turn me."
"Men have been turned before, on
trails like this," Simon told him.
"Don't misunderstand me, I advised
you to go back before, and I usually
don't take time or trouble to advise
any one. Now I tell you to go back.
This is a man's land, and we don't
want any tenderfeet here."
"The trail is open," Bruce returned.
It was not his usual manner to speak
in quite this way. He seemed at once
to have fallen into the vernacular of
the wilderness of which symbolic re-
ference has such a part. Strange as
the scene was to him, it was in some
way familiar too. It was as if this
meeting had been ordained long ago;
that it was part of an inexorable des-
tiny that the two should be talking to-
gether, face to face, on this winding
mountain road. Memories—all vague,
all unrecognized—thronged through
him.
Many times, during the past years,
he had wakened from curious dreams
that in the light of day he had tried
in vain to interpret. He was never
able to connect them with any remem-
bered experience. Now it was as if
one of these dreams were coming true.
There was the same silence about him,
the dark forests beyond, the ridges
stretching ever. There was some
great foe that might any instant over-
whelm him.
"I guess you heard me," Simon
said; "I told you to go back."
"And I hope you heard me too. I'm
going on. I haven't any more time to
give you."
"And I'm not going to take any
more, either. But let me make one
thing plain. No man, told to go back
by me, ever has a chance to be told
again. This ain't your cities—up here.
There ain't any policemen on every
corner. The woods are big, and all
kinds of things can happen in them—
and be swallowed up—as I swallow
these leaves in my hand."
His great arm reached out with
incredible power and seized a hand-
ful of leaves of a near-by shrub. It
seemed to Bruce that they crushed
like fruit and stained the dark skin.
"I've already decided. I'm going
on."
Once more they stood, eyes meeting
eyes on the trail, and Simon's face was
darkening with passion. Bruce knew
that his hands were clenching, and
his own muscles bunched and made
ready to resist any kind of attack.
But Simon didn't strike. He laughed
instead—a simple deep note of utter
and depthless scorn. Then he drew
back and let Bruce pass on up the
road.

CHAPTER VII

Bruce couldn't mistake the cabin. At
the end of the trail he found it—a
little shack of unpainted boards with
a single door and a single window.
He stood a moment in the sunlight

He could not guess what was his des-
tiny behind that rude door. It was
a moment long waited; for one of the
few times in his life he was trembling
with excitement. He felt as if a key,
long lost, was turning in the doorway
of understanding.
He walked nearer and tapped with
his knuckles on the door.
If the forests have one all-pervad-
ing quality it is silence. What sound
there is carries far and seems rather
out of place. Bruce could picture the
whole of the little drama that followed
his knock by just the faint sounds—
inaudible in a less silent land—that
reached him from behind the door. At
first it was just a start; then a short
exclamation in the hollow, half-whis-
pering voice of old, old age. A mo-
ment more of silence—as if a slow-
moving, aged brain were trying to
conjecture who stood outside—then
the creaking of a chair as some one
rose. The last sounds were of a
strange hobbling toward him—a rustle
of shoes half dragged on the floor and
the intermittent tapping of a cane.
The face that showed so dimly in
the shadowed room looked just as
Bruce had expected—wrinkled past
belief, lean and hawk-nosed from age.
The hand that rested on the cane was
like a bird's claw, the skin blue and
hard and dry. She stood bowed over
her cane.
Yet in that first instant Bruce had
an inexplicable impression of being in
the presence of a power. He did not
have the wave of pity with which one
usually greets the decrepit. And at
first he didn't know why. But soon
he grew accustomed to the shadows
and he could see the woman's eyes.
Then he understood.
They were set deep behind grizzled
brows, but they glowed like coals.
There was no other word. They were
not the eyes of one whom time is
about to conquer. Her bodily strength
was gone; any personal beauty that
she might have had was ashes long
and long ago, but some great fire
burned in her yet.
She blinked in the light. "Who is
it?" she croaked.
Bruce did not answer. He had not
prepared a reply for this question. But
it was not needed. The woman leaned
forward, and a vivid light began to
dawn in her dark, furrowed face.
Even to Bruce, already succumbed to
this atmosphere of mystery into
which his adventure had led him, that
dawning light was the single most
startling phenomenon he had ever be-
held. The witchlike face seemed to
gleam with a white flame. And
Bruce knew that his coming was the
answer to the prayer of a whole life-
time. It was a thought to sober him.
No small passion, no weak desire, no
prayer that time or despair could sil-
ence could effect such a light as this.
"Bruce," he said simply. It did not
even occur to him to use the surname
of Duncan. It was a name of a time
and sphere already forgotten. "I
don't know what my real last name
is."
"Bruce—Bruce," the woman whis-
pered. She stretched a palsied hand
to him as if it would feel his flesh to
reassure her of its reality. He saw
the exultation in his wrinkled, lifted
face. "Oh, praises to Her Everlasting
Name!" she cried. "Oh, Glory—Glory
to us High!"
And this was not blasphemy. The
words came from the heart. No mat-
ter how terrible the passion from
which they sprang, whether it was
such evil as would cast her to hell,
such a cry as this could not go un-
heard. The strength seemed to go out
of her as water flows. She rocked on
her cane, and Bruce, thinking she was
about to fall, seized her shoulders.
"At last—at last," she cried. "You've
come at last."
She gripped herself, as if trying to
find renewed strength. "Go at once,"
she said, "to the end of the Pine-
Needle Trail. It leads from behind the
cabin."
He tried to emerge from the dream-
like mists that had enveloped him.
"How far is it?" he asked her steadily.
"To the end of Pine-Needle Trail,"
she rocked again, clutched for one of
his brown hands, and pressed it be-
tween hers.
Then she raised it to her dry lips.
Bruce could not keep her from it. And
after an instant more he did not at-
tempt to draw it from her embrace. In
the darkness of that mountain cabin,
in the shadow of the eternal pines, he
knew that some great drama of human
life and love and hatred was behind
the action; and he knew with a knowl-
edge unimpeachable that it would be
no insolence for him to try further
to resist it. Its meaning went too
deep for him to see; but it filled him
with a great and wondering awe.
Then he turned away, up the Pine-
needle Trail. Clear until the deeper
forest closed around him her voice still
followed him—a strange croaking in
the afternoon silence. "At last," he
heard her crying, "at last, at last."

CHAPTER VIII

In almost a moment, Duncan was
out of the thicket and into the big
timber. As far as he could see there
was nothing but the great pines climb-
ing up the long slope of the ridge. They
stood straight and aloof, and they were
very old.
He fell into their spirit at once. The
half-understood emotions that had
flooded him in the cabin below died
within him. The great calm that is,
after all, the all-pervading quality of
the big pines came over him. Bruce
was rather tremulous and excited as
he crept softly up the trail.
It was the last lap of his journey.
At the end of the trail he would find—
Linda! And it seemed quite fitting

that she would be waiting there,
where the trail began, in the wildest
heart of the pine woods. He was
quite himself once more—carefree,
delighting in all the little manifesta-
tions of the wild life that began to
stir about him.
His delight grew upon him. It was
a dream coming true. Always, it
seemed to him, he had carried in his
mind a picture of this very land, a
sort of dream place that was a reality
at last. He had known just how
it would be. He had always known
how the pine shadows would fall
across the carpet of needles. The
trees themselves were the same grave
companions that he had expected, but
his delight was all the more because
of his expectations.
As the trail climbed higher, the
sense of wilderness became more



At the End of the Trail He Would Find—Linda!

pronounced. Even the trees seemed
larger and more majestic, and the
glimpses of the wild people were
more frequent. The birds stopped
their rattle-brained conversation and
stared at him with frank curiosity.
The grouse let him get closer before
they took to cover.
The hours passed. The trail grew
dimmer. Now it was just a brown
serpent in the pine needles, colling
this way and that—but he loved every
foot of it. It dipped down to a little
stream, of which the blasting sun of
summer had made only a succession
of shallow pools. Yet the water was
cold to his lips. And he knew that
little brook trout—waiting until the
fall rains should make a torrent of
their tiny stream and thus deliver
them—were gazing at him while he
drank.
By a queer pounding of his blood
Bruce knew that he was in the high
altitudes. He had already come six
miles from the cabin. The hour was
about six-thirty; in two hours more
it would be too dark to make his way
at all.
He examined the mud about the
spring, and there was plenty of evi-
dence that the forest creatures had
passed that way. Here was a little
triangle where a buck had stepped,
and further away he found two pairs
of deer tracks—evidently those of a
doe with fawn. A wolf had stopped
to cool his heated tongue in the wa-
ters, possibly in the middle of some
terrible hunt in the twilight hours.
Then he found a huge abrasion in
the mud that puzzled him still more.
At the first he couldn't believe that
it was a track. The reason was sim-
ply that the size of the thing was in-
credible—as if some one had laid a
flour sack in the mud and taken it up
again. He did not think of any of
the modern-day forest creatures as
being of such proportions. It was
very stale and hid been almost obli-
terated by many days of sun. Perhaps
he had been mistaken in thinking it
an imprint of a living creature. He
went to his knees to examine it.
But in one instant he knew that he
had not been mistaken. It was a
track not greatly different from that
of an enormous human foot; and the
separate toes were entirely distinct.
It was a bear track, of course, but
one of such size that the general run
of little black bears that inhabited
the hills could almost use it for a den
of hibernation!
He got up and went on—farther
toward Trail's End. He walked more
swiftly now, for he hoped to reach
the end of Pine-Needle Trail before
nightfall, but he had no intention of
halting in case night came upon him
before he reached it. He had waited
too long already to find Linda.
Another hour ended the day's sun-
light. The shadows fell quickly, but
it was a long time yet until darkness.
He yet might make the trail-end. He
gave no thought to fatigue. In the
first place, he had stood up remark-
ably well under the day's tramp for
no other reason than that he had al-
ways made a point of keeping in the
best of physical condition. Besides,
there was something more potent than
mere physical strength to sustain
him now. It was the realization of
the nearing end of the trail—a knowl-
edge of tremendous revelations that
would come to him in a few hours
more.
Already great truths were taking
shape in his brain; he only needed a
single sentence of explanation to con-
nect them all together. He began
to feel a growing excitement and im-
patience.
It was quite dark now, and he
could barely see the trail. For the

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"I Would Like to Have You Tell Me,"
He Said Quite Clearly, "The Way to
Mrs. Ross' Cabin."

He expected when one of their num-
ber achieves repitance on a tenderfoot.
Nevertheless, the tension was broken.
Bruce turned to the merchant.
"I would like to have you tell me,"
he said quite clearly, "the way to
Mrs. Ross' cabin."
The merchant seemed to wait a long
time before replying. His eyes stole
to the giant's face, found the hips
curled in a smile; then he flushed.
"Take the left-hand road," he said
with a trace of defiance in his tone.