Strength of the Pines

By Edison Marshall

"The Voice of the Pack" Settod

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SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I .- At the death of his foster wrath he turned back to his ambush. r. Bruce Duncan, in an eastern city, es a mysterious message, sent by a Ross, summoning him peremptorily thern Oregon—to meet "Linda."

CHAPTER II.—Bruce has vivid but baf-ing recollections of his childhood in an rphanage, before his adoption by New-on Duncan, with the girl Linda.

CHAPTER III.—At his destination, Trail's End, news that a message has been sent to Bruce is received with marked displeasure by a man introduced to the reader as "Simon."

CHAPTER IV.—Leaving the train, Bruce is astonished at his apparent fa-nillarity with the surroundings, though o his knowledge he has never been there. CHAPTER V.—Obedient to the message, gruce makes his way to Martin's cross-oads store, for direction as to reaching drs. Ross' cabin.

CHAPTER VI.—On the way, "Simon" dered about the roo terrily warns him to give up his quest that's the best way?" and return East. Bruce refuses.

"I wouldn't be telling the refuse of the roo that it is the best way?"

CHAPTER IX.—The girl tells him of wrongs committed by an enemy clan on her family, the Rosses. Lands occupied by the clan were stolen from the Rosses, and the family, with the exception of aunt Elmira (Mrs. Ross) and herself, reiped out by assassination. Bruce's father, Matthew Folger, was one of the fettims. His mother had fled with Bruce and Linda. The girl, while small, had leen kidnaped from the orphanage and rought to the mountains. Linda's father and deeded his lands to Matthew Folger, but the agreement, which would confute he epenny's claims to the property, has been lost.

Word I sent out. "Go easy!" That's the wisest course to follow at present. The valley people pay more attention to such things than they used to; the fewer the killings, the wiser we will be. If he'll keep quiet for the hundred let him have it in peace."

Dave hadn't forgotten. But his features were sharper and more ratlike than ever when he came in sight of Hudson's camp, just after the fall of darkness of the second day out. The

CHAPTER XI.—A giant tree, the Sen-inel Pine, in front of Linda's cabin, eems to Bruce's excited imagination to endeavoring to convey a message.

CHAPTER XII.—Bruce sets out in search of a trapper named Hudson, a witness to the agreement between Linda's father and Matthew Folger.

CHAPTER XIII.—A gigantic grizzly, known as the Killer, is the terror of the vicinity, because of his size and ferocity.

CHAPTER XIV.—Dave Turner, sent by Simon, bribes Hudson to swear falsely concerning the agreement, if brought to light, he knowing its whereabouts.

was cross; and he didn't care who hunger is an emotion for the beasts curred to Dave now-as he watched of prey to keep carefully to them-

The Killer moved quite softly. One in his own pocket-had been prohibitwould have marveled how silently his ed until further notice. great feet fell upon the dry earth and

the creatures that had bowers in the of pressure on the hair trigger. Half heart of the thicket would be coming along that trail onto the feeding grounds on the ridge. He had only

The night wind, rising somewhere in the region of the snow banks on the highest mountains, blew down into the Killer's face and brought messages that no human being may ever receive. Then his sharp ears heard the sound of brush cracked softly as some one of the larger forest creatures came up the trail toward him.

The steps drew nearer and the Killer recognized them. They were plainly the soft footfall of some member of the deer tribe, yet they were too pronounced to be the step of any of the lesser deer. The bull elk had left his bed. The red eyes of the grizzly seemed to glow as he waited. Great though the stag was, only one little blow of the massive forenrm would be needed. The huge fangs would have to close down but or

The bear did not move a single telltale muscle. He scarcely breathed The bull war almost within striking range now. The wicked red eyes could already discern the dimmest shadow of his outline through the thickets. But all at once he stopped, head lifting. The Killer knew that the elk had neither detected his odor nor heard him, and he had made no movements that the sharp eyes could detect. Yet the bull was evidently alarmed. He stood immobile, one foot lifted, nostrils open, head raised. Then, the wind blowing true, the griz-

zly understood. A pungent smell reached him from below-evidently the smell of a living wrench. He realized that Simon had creature that followed the trall along the stream that flowed through the glen. He recognized it in an instant. He had detected it many times, particularly when he went into the cleared lands to kill cattle. It was man, an odor almost unknown in this toward Hudson's camp.

self. He knew the ways of men only | If ke'll keep still for a bundred, let | ture that he met. too well. Too many times he had him have it in peace."

elk would progress no farther down being since his last visit to the settlethe bite to the throat that followed it. Was enough to take his dreadful attenthe effect on Dave was ludicrous. The effect on Dave was ludicrous. The telling you it's of real importance.

The bull seemed to leap straight up. His muscles had been set at his first alarm from Turner's smell on the grub?" wind, and they drove forth the powerful limbs as if by a powder exploforepaws battered down where he had would have slain; and in the light of

The grizzly knew better than to try to overtake him. Almost rabid with

Simon Turner had given Dave very definite instructions concerning his embassy to Hudson. "The first thing this Bruce will do," Simon had said, "is to hunt up Hudson—the one living man that witnessed that agreement between Ross and old Folger. One reason is that he'll want to verify Linda's story. The next is to persuade the old man to go down to the courts with him as his witness. And what you have to do is line him up for our side first."

"You think-" Dave's eyes wandered about the room, "you think

"I wouldn't be tellin' you to do it CHAPTER VII.—Mrs. Ross, aged and affrm, welcomes him with emotion. She astens him on his way—the end of "Pine-eedle Trail."

I wouldn't be teini you to do it if I didn't think so." Simon laughed—a sudden, grim syllable. "Dave, you're a bloodthirsty devil. I see what you're CHAPTER VIII.—Through a country uzzlingly familiar, Bruce journeys, and his childhood playmate, Linda. thinking of—of a safer way to keep him from telling. But you know the word I sent out. 'Go easy!' That's thinking of-of a safer way to keep word I sent out. 'Go easy!' That's

darkness of the second day out. The trapper was cooking his simple meala blue grouse frying in his skillet, coffee boiling, and flapjack batter ready for the moment the grouse was Dave's thoughts returned to done. the hundred dollars in his pocket-a good sum in the hills. A brass rifle cartridge, such as he could fire in the thirty-thirty that he carried in the hollow of his arm, cost only about six cents. The net gain would be-the figures flew quickly through his mindninety-nine dollars and ninety-four cents; quite a good piece of business for Dave. But the trouble was that Simon might find out. The word had gone out, for the present at least, to knew it. He was hungry too; but "go easy." Such little games as oc-

The thing looked so simple that with what slight sound his heavy Dave squirmed all over with annoyform moved through the thickets. He ance. It hurt him to think that the moved slowly, cautiously-all the time hundred dollars that he carried was call signing the deed itself." ounting farther up the little hill that to be passed over, without a wink of se from the banks of the stream, an eye, to this bearded trapper; and He came to an opening in the thicket, the only return for it was to be a little brown pathway that vanished promise that Hudson would not testify in Bruce's behalf. And a hundred ness. Then they turned to the blandollars was real money! Just a little kets. The Killer slipped softly into the matter of a single glance down his heavy brush just at its mouth. It was rifle barrel at the figure in the silhouhis ambush. Soon, he knew, some of ette of the fire glow-and a half-ounce



Dave Helped Himself to the Food of the Man That, a Moment Before, He Would Have Slain.

jesting with himself, he dropped on one knee and raised the weapon. The trapper did not guess his presence. The blood leaped in Dave's veins.

But he caught himself with a spoken true when he said that the old howl of rage. He leaped into the trail days were gone, that the arm of the mouth, then ran as fast as he could law reached farther than formerly, in pursuit of the running wolf. He and it might even stretch to this far was too enraged to stop to think that place. He remembered Simon's in a grizzly bear has never yet been able structions. "The quieter we can do to overtake a wolf, once the trim legs these things, the better," the clan got well into action. At first he lonely glen. Dave Turner, brother of Tender bad said. "If we can get couldn't think about anything; he had Simon was walking the brother of Tender bad said. "If we can get couldn't think about anything; he had Simon, was walking down the stream toward Hudson's come of tremendous killings, the safer it is for us. Go first impulse was one of tremendous

To the elk this smell was Fear it. ener, Dave, Sound this Hudson out.

perfectly what that sound meant. It men quick to show astonishment. was a simple way of saying that the Hudson had not seen another human surprise at this visitation, "Howdy," he grunted.

"Howdy," Dave replied. "How about

"Help yourself. Supper just ready." Dave helped himself to the food of sion. He was full in the air when the the man that, a moment before, he been. Then he darted away into the the high fire that followed the meal, he got down to the real business of the visit.

> "I suppose you've forgotten that little deed you witnessed between old Mat Folger and Ross-twenty years ago," Dave began easily, his pipe between his teeth.

Hudson turned with a cunning glitter in his eyes. Dave saw it and grew bolder. "Who wants me to for-

get it?" Hudson demanded. "I ain't said that anybody wants you to," Dave responded. "I asked you if you had."

Hudson was still a moment, strokto know," he said, "I ain't forgotten. But there wasn't just a deed. There son's traps. was an agreement, too."

"I know all about that agreement," Dave confessed.

to forget."

good is it going to do you to remem- how," ber?" he demanded.

me any good. At present I ain't got ing his breakfast in preparation for nothing against the Turners. They've the last lap of his journey. He had always been all right to me. What's passed the night by a spring on a long between them and the Rosses is past ridge almost in eye range of Hudson's and done-although I know just in camp. Now he was preparing to dip what way Folger held that land and down into the Killer's glen. no transfer from him to you was legal. But that's all part of the fast. little creek. As long as the Turners continue to be my friends I don't see why anything

should be said about it." Dave speculated. It was wholly plain that the old man had not yet heard of Bruce's return. There was no need to mention him. "We're glad you are our friend," Dave went on. "But we don't expect no one to stay friends with us unless they benefit to some small extent by it. How many furs do you hope to take this year?"

"Not enough to pay to pack out. Maybe two hundred dollars in bountles before New Year-coyotes and wolves."

"Then maybe fifty or seventy-five dollars, without bothering to set the trans, wouldn't come in so bad." "It wouldn't come in bad, but it

dred would be better." "A hundred it is," Dave told him with finality. The eyes above the dark beard

the trapper in the firelight with one changed hands. They sat a long time, great, gray form of the Killer, not hundred dollars of the clan's money deep in their own thoughts. "All we ask," Dave said, "is that

you don't take sides against us." "I'll remember. Of course you want

me, in case I'm ever subpoenaed, to re-"Yes, we'd want you to testify to

"Of course." They chuckled together in the dark-

"I'll show you another trail out tomorrow," Hudson told him. "It comes into the gien that you passed tonight-the canyon that the Killer has turn. There was no defense; his gun

CHAPTER XV

The Killer had had an unsuccessful night. He had waited the long hours through at the mouth of the trail, but only the Little People-such as the rabbits and similar folk that hardly constituted a single bite in his great jaws-had come his way. Now it was morning and it looked as if he would have to go hungry. He started to stretch his great muscles, intending to leave his ambush. But all at once he froze again into a lifeless gray patch in the thickets. There were light steps on the trail. Again they were the steps of deer-but not of the great, wary elk this time. Instead it was fust a fawn, or a yearling doe at least, such a creature as had not yet learned to suspect every turn in the trail. The forest gods had been good

easy. But even as the Killer watched, the prize was simply taken out of his mouth. A gray wolf-a savage ensuccessful hunt-had been stealing through the thickets in search of a late, and he came out on the trail not fifty feet distant, halfway between the hear and the fawn. The one was almost as surprised as the other. The fawn turned with a frightened bleat and darted away; the wolf swung into

The bear lunged forward with a

But in a single second he realized they carried in their hands. He uttered a far-ringing snort.

It was a distinctive sound, beginning rather high on the scale as a
loud whistle and descending into a
loud whistle and loud on the trigger.

The distance was far; Bruce was
loud whistle shot, and it bor
fawn and the lids dickered down over them.

A traveler had gone.

You're slways bringing news,
who is a fine had
moved.

The distance was far; Bruce wa true that the Killer would miss the not reach a vital place. It stung like Turner was climbing slowly down the take my time." pleasure of slaying his own game a wasp at the Killer's flank, however, tree. Bruce made six strides and the ecstatic blow to the shoulder and cutting a shallow flesh wound. But it seized his rifle. In this case, the wolf would do that tion from the mortally wounded trap- He clung fast to the tree limbs, as if part of the work for him. It was just | per in the pine needles. ture away from his dead.

fawn, it was nothing but a sharp clang of metal behind him and an answering *shriek of pain-sounds that in its terror it heard but dimly. But it was an unlooked-for and tragic reality to the wolf. His leap was suddenly arrested in mid-air, and he was hurled to the ground with stunning force. Cruel metal teeth had selzed his leg. and a strong chain held him when he tried to escape. He fought it with desperate savagery. The fawn leaped on to safety.

But there was no need of the grizzly continuing its pursuit. Everything had turned out quite well for him, after all. A wolf is ever so much more filling than any kind of seasonal fawn; ing absently his beard. "If you want and the old gray pack leader was imprisoned and helpless in one of Hud-

. In the first gray of morning, Dave Turner started back toward his home. "You do, eh? So do L I ain't likely "T'll go with you to the forks in the trail," Hedson told him. "I want to Dave studied him closely. "What take a look at some of my traps, any-

At the same hour-as soon as it was "I ain't saying that it's going to do light enough to see-Bruce was finish-

Turner and Hudson followed up the

The first of Hudson's sets proved empty. The second was about a turn in the creek, and a wall of brush made it impossible for him to tell at a distance whether or not he had made a catch. But when still a quarter of a mile distant, Hudson heard a sound that he thought he recognized. It was a high, sharp, agonized bark that dimmed into a low whine, "I believe I've got a coyote or a wolf up there," he said. They hastened their steps.

The whole picture loomed suddenly before their eyes. There was no wolf in the trap. The steel had sprung. certainly, but only a hideous fragment of a foot remained between the laws. The bone had been broken sharply off, as a man might break a match in his fingers. There was no living wolf. doesn't buy much these days. A hun- Life had gone out of the gray body many minutes before. The two men saw all these things as a background only-dim details about the central figure. But the thing that froze them shone in the firelight. The money in their tracks with terror was the twenty feet distant, beside the man-

gled body of the wolf. The events that followed thereafter came in such quick succession as to seem simultaneous. For one fraction of an instant all three figures stood motionless, the two men staring, the grizzly half-leaning over his prey, his head turned, his little red eyes full of hatred. He uttered one hoarse, say age note, a sound in which all his batred and his fury and his savage power were made manifest, whirled with incredible speed, and charged.

Hudson did not even have time to been using lately for a hunting was strapped on his back, and even if it had been in his hands, its bullet would not have mattered the sting of a bee in honey-robbing. The only pessible chance of breaking that deadly charge lay in the thirty-thirty deer rifle in Dave's arms; but the craven who held it did not even fire. He was spoke with assurance. The words limb of a tree, and the weapon fell his eyes as if he were too sleepy to from his hands as he swung up into stay awake longer. Then Bruce saw the limb. The fact that Hudson stood a strange thing. He saw, unmistak-

ing, did not deter him in the least. No human flesh could stand against | face. that charge. The vast paw fell with was struck down as if felled by a meteor, and the power of the impact forced it deep into the carpet of pine needles. The savage creature turned, the white fangs caught the light in the open mouth. The head lunged toward the man's shoulder.

No man may say what agony Hudson would have endured in the last few seconds of his life if the Killer | Trail's End long ago." had been given time and opportunity. His usual way was to linger long, it," he said. "I saw it-in your face. I until all living likeness was destroyed, hear me?" male that also had just finished an The blood lust was upon him; there would have been no mercy to the dynot to know those rending fangs a second time.

this land had dropped to his knee in wrong. It will go a little way. the shrubbery, his rifle lifted to the had come in time to see the charge What did you promise Turner?" through a rift in the trees.

The bear was on Hudson, and the yards away. His instinct was to throw the gun to his shoulder and fire without aiming; yet he conquered it with an iron will. But he did move quickly. man. Bruce shook him by the shoul-

meant death to the first living crea- and that the gun leaped to his shoul- to hear the rest, "Yes-where?" der. He seemed to know that from a "It's hidden-just-out-" lower position the target would be words were no longer audible to Dave,

a simple matter of driving the crea- He whirled about, growling furious claws—could not reach him there. "But suit yourself." ly and biting at the wound. Then he Bruce laid the gun behind him, then But at that instant fate took a hand stood still, turning his gaze first to the stood walting with his own weapon turned. "Don't be a fool, Simon," he in the merry little chase. To the pale face of Dave Turner thirty feet resting in his arms. above him in the pine. The eyes glowed in fury and hatred. He had found "The bear is gone." men out at last; they died even more Dave crept down the trunk and easily than the fawn. He started to halted at its base. He studied the turn back to the fallen, and the rifle | cold face before him. "Better not try spoke again.

It was a complete miss, this time; yet the bear leaped in fear when the think Pm afraid of a coward?" bullet thwacked into the dust beside and perhaps his anger somewhat sati- fist. ated by the blow he had dealt Hudson, he crashed into the security of the thicket.

Bruce waited a single instant, hoping for another glimpse of the creature; then ran down to aid Hudson. per's helpless body he had already given all the aid that he could. Un- have stopped the bear's charge." derstanding came quickly. He had ture—just a gilmpse of a light as it faded. The blow had been more than gun. I'm going to go." any human being could survive; even strange calm which often, so mercifully, immediately precedes death.

He opened his eyes and looked with



He Opened His Eyes and Looked With

light in them was dimming, fading like a twilight, yet there was indication of

neither confusion nor delirium. There was, however, some indication of perplexity at the peculiar turn affairs had taken. "You're not Dave

Turner," he said wonderingly. Dim though the voice was, there was considerable emphasis in the tone. Hudson seemed quite sure of this point, whether or not he knew anything concerning the dark gates he was about to enter. 'He wouldn't have spoken greatly different if he had been sitting in perfect health before his own camp fire and the shadow was now already so deep his eyes could

scarcely penetrate it. "No," Bruce answered. "Dave Turner is up a tree. He didn't even wait

to shoot." "Of course he wouldn't." Hudson standing just below the outstretched dimmed at the end, and he half-closed weaponless, ten feet away in the clear- able as the sun in the sky, the signs of a curious struggle in the man's

The trapper—a moment before sinkresistless force; and no need arose for | ing into-the calm of death-was lighta second blow. The trapper's body ing desperately for a few moments of respite. There could be no other explanation. And he won it at last,an interlude of half a dozen breaths "Who are you?" he whispered.

Bruce bowed his head until his ear was close to the lips. "Bruce Folger, he answered,-for the first time in his knowledge speaking his full name. "Son of Matthew Folger who lived at

The man still struggled. "I knew sharp fangs closing again and again see-everything now. Listen-can you "Yes."

"I just did a wrong-there's a ing creature in the pine needles. Yet hundred dollars in my pocket that I it transpired that Hudson's fiesh was just got for doing it. I made a promise-to lie to you. Take the moneyit ought to be yours, anyway-and On the billiside above, a stranger to bers; and use it toward fighting the

"Yes." Bruce looked him full in the level of his eyes. It was Bruce, who eyes. "No matter about the money.

"That I'd lie to you. Grip my arms with your hands-till it hurts. I've man had gone down, before Bruce only got one breath more. Your faeven interpreted him. Then it was ther held those lands only in trust-the just a gray patch, a full three hundred Turners' deed is forged. And the secret agreement that I witnessed is

hidden-The breath seemed to go out of the

and overpowering wrath-s fury that He dropped to his knee the very sec- ders. Dave, still in the tree, strained | neek, gave it one more jerk that al-

he thought a bullet-like a grizziy's

"Come down, Dave," he commanded.

nothing," he advised hoarsely.

"Why not?" Bruce asked. "Do you man started at the words; his head him. He did not wait for a third. His | bobbed backward as if Bruce had caution suddenly returning to him, struck him beneath the jaw with his

"People don't call the Turners cowards and walk off with it," the man

told him. "Oh, the lowest coward!" Bruce sald between set teeth. "The yellowest, mongrel coward! Your own con-But in driving the bear from the trap- federate-and you had to drop your gun and run up 4 tree. You might

Dave's face twisted in a scowl. arrived only in time for the Depar- "You're brave enough now. Wait to see what happens later. Give me my

"You can go, but you don't get your now Hudson was entering upon that gun. I'll fill you full of lead if you

try to touch it." Dave looked up with some care. He wanted to know for certain if this some wonder into Bruce's face. The tenderfoot meant what he said. The man was blind in some things, his vision was twisted and dark, but he made no mistake about the look on the cold, set face before him. Bruce's finger was curied about the trigger, and it looked to Dave as if it itched to exert further pressure.

"I don't see why I spare you, anyway," Bruce went on. His tone was self-reproachful. "God knows I hadn't ought to-remembering who and what you are. If you'd only give me one little bit of provocation-'

Dave saw lurid lights growing in the man's eyes; and all at once a conciusion came to him. He decided he a make no further effort to regain the gun. His life was rather precious to him, strangely, and it was wholly plain that a dread and terrible passion was slowly creeping over his enemy. He could see it in the darkening face, the tight grip of the hands on the rifle stock. His own sharp features grew more cunning. "You ought to be glad I didn't stop the bear with my rifle," something that you did find out if he hadn't lain here dying. You wouldn't have learned-"

But the sentence died in the middle. Bruce made answer to it, a straightstrength behind it, in the very center of his enemy's face.

CHAPTER XVL

Dave Turner traveled hard and late, and he reached Simon's door just be fore sundown of the second day. Bruce was still a full two hours distant. But Dave did not stay to knock. It was chore-time, and he thought be would find Simon in his barn, supervising the feeding and care of the live stock. He had guessed right, and the two men had a moment's talk in the dusky passage behind the stalls. "I've brought news," Dave said.

Simon made no answer at first. The saddle pony in the stall immediately in front of them, frightened at Dave's unfamiliar figure, had crowded, trem- "I-I threw the d-n thing away. bling, against his manger. Simon's red eyes watched him; then he uttered a short oath. He took two strides into the stall and seized the haiter rope in his huge, muscular hand. Three times he jerked it with a peculiar, quartering pull, a curbing that might have been ineffective by a man of ordinary strength, but with the incomprehensible might of the great forearm behind it was really terrible punishment. Dave thought for a moment his brother would break the animal's neck; the whites began to show about the soft, dark pupils of its eyes. The strap over the head broke with the fourth pull; then the horse recoiled, plunging and terrified, into the opposite corner of the stall.

Simon leaped with shattering power at the creature's shoulders, his huge arms encircled its neck, his shoulders heaved, and he half-threw it to the floor. Then, as it staggered to rise, his heavy fist fielled against its neck. Again and again he struck, and in the half-darkness of the stable it was a dreadful thing to behold. The man's fury, always quickly aroused, was upon him; his brawny form moved with the agillty of a panther. Even Dave, whose shallow eyes were usually wont to feast on cruelty, viewed the scene with some plarm. It wasn't that he was moved by the agony of the horse. But he did remember that horses cost money, and Simon seemed determined to kill the animal before his passion was spent.

The horse cowered, and in a me ment more it was hard to remember he was a member of a noble, highspirited breed-a swift runner, brainy as a dog, a servant faithful and worthy. He stood quiet at last, his head hanging low, knees bent, eyes curiously gorrowful and dark. Simon fastened the broken strap about his

seen members of his herd fall stricken at a word from the glittering sticks at a word from the glittering sticks.

But in a single second he realized that this wild chase was fairly good to hear in vain. The lips ceased movement of his breath. The chances for a perceptible quickening of his breath.

"All right," the other replied autthis time-and some time you'll find out." He scowled into the dark face.

Dave walked clear to the door, then urged. "Listen to what I have to tell you. Bruce Folger knows where that secret agreement is."

For once in his life Dave got a response of sufficient emphasis to satisfy him. His brother whirled, his whole expression undergoing an immediate and startling change. If there was one emotion that Dave had never seen on Simon's face it was fear-and he didn't know for certain that he saw it now. But there was alarm-unmistakable-and surprise.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "Out with it!" His tone was really



"What Do You Mean? Out With It!"

urgent now, not insolent as usual, "Good Lord, man, don't you know that if Bruce gets that down to the settlements before the thirtieth of next month we're lost-and nothing in this world can save us? We can't drive him off, like we drove the Rosses. There's too much law down he said hurriedly. "I had Hudson in the valleys. If he's got that paper, bribed-you wouldn't have found out there's only one thing to do. Help me saddle a horse."

"Wait a minute. I didn't say he had if. I only said he knew where it was. He's still an hour or two walk from here, toward Little river, and if we out blow with his fist, with all his have to wait for him on the trail, we've got plenty of time. And of course I ain't quite sure he does know

where it is." Simon smiled mirthlessly. "The news is beginning to sound like the

"Old Hudson is dead," Dave went on. "And don't look at me-I didn't do it. I wish I had, though, first off. For once my judgment was better than yours. The Killer got him."

"Yes. Go on." "I was with him when it happened. My gun got jammed so I couldn't

"Where is it now?" Dave scrambled in vain for a story to explain the loss of his weapon to Bruce, and the one that came out at last didn't do him particular credit. Wish I hadn't now, but it made me so mad by jamming-it was a fool trick. Maybe I can go back after it and find

Simon smiled again. "Very good so

far." he commented. Dave flushed. "Bruce was there, too-fact is creased the bear-and the last minute before he died Hudson told him where the agreement was hidden. I couldn't hear all he said-I was too far away-but I heard enough to think that he told Bruce the hiding place."

"And why didn't you get that infornation away from Bruce with your

ammed? If it hadn't of been for that, I'd done something more than find out where it is. I'd stopped this nonsense once and for all, and let a hole through that tenderfoot big enough to see through. Then there'd never be any more trouble. It's the thing to do

Simon looked at his brother's face with some wonder. More crafty and cunning. Dave was like the coyote in that he didn't yield so quickly to fury as, that gray wolf, his brother. But when it did come, it scared him. It had come now. Simon couldn't mistake the fact; he saw it plain in the glowing eyes, the clenched hands, the drawn lips. Dave was remembering the pain of the blow Bruce had given him and the smart of the words that

ith

had preceded it. "You and he must have had a little session down there by the creek," Simon suggested slowly, "when your gun was jammed. Of course, he took the gun. What's the use of trying to lie to me?"

"He did. What could I do?"
"And now you want him be