## The Strength of the Pines

By Edison Marshall "The Voice of the Pack"

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Illustrations by Irwin Myers **300000000000000000** 

#### SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I.—At the death of his foster father, Bruce Duncan, in an eastern city, receives a mysterious message, sent by a Mrs. Ross, summoning him peremptorily to southern Oregon—to meet "Linda."

CHAPTER II.—Bruce has vivid but baf-ging recollections of his childhood in an orphanage, before his adoption by New-ton Duncan, with the giri Linda.

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

CHAPTER VI.—On the way, "Simon" sternly warns him to give up his quest and return East. Bruce refuses.

CHAPTER VII.—Mrs. Ross, aged and infirm, welcomes him with emotion. She hastens him on his way—the end of "Pine-Needle Trail."

CHAPTER VIII.—Through a country puzzlingly familiar, Bruce journeys, and finds his childhood playmate, Linda.

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, wiped out by assassination. Bruce's father, Matthew Folger, was one of the victims. His mother had fled with Bruce and Linda. The girl, while small, had been kidnaped from the orphanage and brought to the mountains. Linda's father had deeded his lands to Matthew Folger, but the agreement, which would confute the enemy's claims to the property, has been lost.

CHAPTER XI.—A giant tree, the Sentinel Pine, in front of Linda's cabin, seems to Bruce's excited imagination to be endeavoring to convey a message.

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

CHAPTER XIII.—A signatic sright, 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.

CHAPTER XV.—Hudson and Dave visit the former's traps. A wolf, caught in one, is discovered by the Killer. Disturbed at his feast, the brute strikes down Hudson. Bruce, on his way to Hudson, shoots and wounds the Killer, driving him from his victim. Hudson, learning Bruce's identity, tries to tell him the hiding place of the agreement, but death summons him.

CHAPTER XVI.—Simon, believing Bruce knows where the document is concealed, lays plans to trap him.

CHAPTER XVII.—Dave decoys Linda and Aunt Elmira from their home. The man insults Linda and is struck down by the aged woman. Elmira's son has been murdered by Dave, and at her com-mand, after securely binding the des-perado, Linda leaves them alone.

CHAPTER XVIII.—Returning, Bruce finds a note, presumably from Linda, telling him she has been kidnaped by the Turners,

CHAPTER XIX.-Bruce falls into Si-mon's trap, and is made prisoner.

CHAPTER XX.—Charging Bruce with attempting to reopen the blood feud, the clan, after a mock trial, decides to leave him, bound, in a pasture on the spot where the Killer had siain and half eaten a calf the night before. They look for the return of the grizzly and the probable slaying of Bruce by the animal.

CHAPTER XXI.—Bruce, helpless, awaits arrival of the Killer and death.

CHAPTER XXII.—Simon makes Linda an offer of marriage. The girl refuses, telling him she loves Bruce. Enraged, the man brutally strikes her, and leaves. The girl is confident he will go to Bruce, and she follows him.

Thoroughly alarmed, she went back into the front room and tried to de have brought your whole murdering cipher the mystery of the strange band with you. The Turners believe weapon. She couldn't conceive of any in overwhelming numbers." possibility whereby Bruce would exchange his father's trusted gun for grimly into her face. this. Possibly it was an extra weapon that he had procured on his journey. And since no possible gain would come of her going out into the forests to seek him, she sat down to wait for his He straightened the chair that had

The moments drugged by and her while, and sat down in it. apprehension grew. She took the rifle in her hands and, slipping the lever me," she said. "I'm in a hurry to go him?" part way back, looked to see if there to bed-and this really isn't the hour were a cartridge in the barrel. She for calls. saw a glitter of brass, and it gave her He looked a long time into her face. a measure of assurance. She had a She found it hard to hold her own pistol in her own room-a weapon that | gaze. Many things could be doubted Elmira had procured, years before, about this man, but his power and his from a passing sportsman-and for a courage were not among them. The moment she considered getting it also, smile died from his lips, the lines She understood its action better and deepened on his face. She realized as and struck her tender flesh. would probably be more efficient with never before the tempestuous passions It if the need arose, but for certain and unfathemable latensity of his natity of the man stood forth at last. No he is in his right mind he would have never-to-be-forgotten reasons she ture. wished to keep this weapon until the moment of utmost need.

consisted of six-completely filling the swered. "We've stood for different magazine of the pistol. Closely things. unable to procure more. Many a were just-to win you over to our side. drendful night these six little cylinders | It didn't work-all it did was to waken of brass had been a tremendous consolider desires in me-desires that persolution to her. They bad been her baps have come to mean more than sole defense, and she knew that in the the possession of the lands. You knew final emergency she could use them to what they are. You've slways known

Linda was a girl who had always | could come and rule my house,"

**~~~~** was not one to flinch from the truth and with false optimism disbelieve it. She knew these mountain realms; better still she understood the dark passions of Simon and his followers, and this little half-pound of steel and wood with its brass shells might mean, In the dreadful last moment of despair, deliverance from them. It might mean escape for herself when all other ways were cut off. In this wild land, far from the reaches of law and without allies except for a decrepit old woman, the pistol and its deadly loads had been her greatest soluce.

The hours passed, and the clouds were starting up from the horizon when she thought she saw Bruce returning. A tall form came swinging toward her, over the little trall that led between the tree trunks. She peered intently. And in one instant more she knew that the approaching figure was not Bruce, but the man she most feared of anyone on earth, Simon

Her thoughts came elear and true. It was obvious that his was no mission of stealth. He was coming boldly, freely, not furtively; and he must have known that he presented a perfect rifle target from the windows. Nevertheless, it is well to be prepared for emergencies. If life in the mountains teaches anything, it teaches that. She took the rifle and laid it behind a little desk, out of sight. Then she went to the door.

"I want to come in, Linda," Simon told her.

"I told you long ago you couldn't come to this house," Linda answered



Told You Long Ago You Couldn't Come to This House," Linda Answered Through the Panels.

through the panels. "I want you to go | lined face.

Simon laughed softly. "You'd bet-

Bruce?" she asked. "I let Dave in those lands is secure. Bruce is in Bruce's body. But she knew that in a For an instant he had an exultexpect me to be caught twice by the

er had suddenly become considerable of a mystery to Simon. He had thought about him and Linda out in the darkness together, and his heart had seemed to smolder and burn with jealousy in his breast. It had been a great relief to him to find her in

"I wonder-where he is by now." Linda answered in a strange voice. "No one in this world can answer that question, Simon. Tell me what you

She opened the door. She couldn't bear to show fear of this man. And

she knew that an appearance of courage, at least, was the wisest course.

"No matter about him now. I want to talk to you on business. If I meant rough measures, I wouldn't have come alone.

"No," Linda scorned. "You would The words stung him, but he smiled

"I've come in peace, Linda," he said gently. "I've come to give you a last chance to make friends." He walked past her into the room.

been upset, smiling strangely the "Then tell me what you have to tell

"We've never been good friends,"

Simon went on slowly, Her whole stock of pistol cartridges "We never could be," the girl an-

watched by the Turners, she had been "At first, my efforts to make friends the door, -that any time you wished-you fraction of an instant, and a voice But none of these was true of the permitted him to identify the troubling

somber love of this mighty man. She

had known it for months. take about that. Linda, I'm a stern, hard man. Pve never known how to she crept to the open doorway. I don't know that I want to know how, the way it is done by weaker men. It has never been my way to ask for what I wanted. But sometimes it seems to me that if I'd been a little more gentle-not so masterful and so relentless-that I'd won you long ago."

Linda looked up bravely into his face. "No, Simon. You could have never-never won me! Oh, can't you see-even in this awful place a woman wants something more than just brute strength and determination. Every woman prays to find strength in the man she loves-but it isn't the kind that you have, the kind that makes your men grovel before you, and makes me tremble when I'm talking to you. It's a big, calm strength—and I can't tell you what it is. It's some thing the pines have, maybe-strength not to yield to the passions, but to restrain, not to be afraid of, but to cling to-to stand upright and honorable and manly, and make a woman strong

just to see it in the man she loves." He listened gravely. Her cheeks blazed. It was a strange scene-the silent room, the implacable foes, the breathless suspense, the prophecy and inspiration in her tones.

"Perhaps I should have been more gentle," he admitted. "I might have forgotten-for a little while-this surging, irresistible impulse in my muscles and tried just to woo you, gently and humbly. But It's too late now. I'm not a fool. I can't expect you to begin at the beginning. I can only go on in my own way-my hard, remorse-

"It isn't every man who is brave enough to see what he wants and knock away all obstacles to get it." he went on. "Put that bravery to my credit. To pay no attention to metheds, only to look forward to the result. That has been my creed. It is my creed now. Many less brave men would fear your hatred-but I don't fear it as long as I possess what I go after and a hope that I can get you over it. Many of my own brothers hate me, but yet I don't care as long as they do my will. No matter how much you segrn it, this bravery has always got me what I wanted, and it will get me what I want now."

The high color died in her face. She wondered if the final emergency had

"I've come to make a bargain. You can take it or you can refuse. On one side is the end of all this conflict, to be my wife, to have what you wantbought by the rich return from my thousands of acres. And I love you, Linda. You know that."

The man spoke the truth. His terrible, dark love was all over him-in his glowing eyes, in his drawn, deeply

"In time, when you come around to my way of thinking, you'll love me. ter let me in. I've brought word of If you refuse—this last time—I've got the child you took to raise. You know to take other ways. On that side is defeat for you—as sure as day. The time is almost up when the title to

She got up, whitefaced. "Bruce-7" "Yes! Did you think he could stand "Dave?" Where is Dave?" The fact against us? Fil show him to you in the morning. Tonight he's paying the sides, she knew how to wield it, and the great beast paused, sniffing.

But some smell in the air segment to price for ever daring to oppose my

She turned imploring eyes. He saw them, and perhaps-far distant-he saw the light of triumph, too. A grim

smfle came to his Hps. "Simon," she cried. "Have mercy." The word surprised him. It was the first time she had ever asked this man for mercy. "Then you surrender-?"

"Simon, listen to me," she begged. fight you any more. I'll let you keep those lands and never try any more to make you give them up. You and your brothers can keep them forever, and we won't try to get revenge on

you, either. He and I will go away." He gazed at her in deepening wonderment. For the moment, his mind refused to accept the truth. He had known perfectly the call of the blood in her. He had understood her hatred of the Turners; he could hate in the same way himself. He realized her love for her father's home and how she had dreamed of expelling its usurpers. Yet she was willing to repounce it all. The power that had come to her was one that he, a man whose code of life was no less cruel and remorseless than that of the Killer himself. could not understand.

"But why?" he demanded. "Why are you willing to do all this for

luster was in her dark eyes. "I suppose it is because-I love him." He looked at her with slowly dark- Killer. ening face. Passion welled within him. An oath dropped from his lips, blas-

ness voice. Then he raised his arm He struck her breast. The brutalpicture that all the dreadful drams each one of his gray hairs plucked out, of the wild could portray was more terrible than this. The girl cried out, reeled and fell fainting from the pain, and with smoldering eyes he gazed at

mountain home had not yet rung down. keep out of the sight of man. And the Half-unconscious, she listened to his Tawny One himself, white-fanged and derstood. He remembered now. Possteps. He was out in the moonlight, long-clawed and powerful as he is, vanishing among the trees. Strange never gets farther than certain dreadfancies swept her, all in the smallest | ful, speculative dreams,

She nodded. She knew that she had of her will she dispelled the mists of won, against her will, the strange, dawning unconsciousness that the pain that he feared no living creature that had wrought and crept swiftly to the "As my wife-don't make any mis- hand fumbled in the shadow behind it and brought out a glittering rifle. Then

Lying on the floor, she raised the gone as yesterday's daylight. weapon to her shoulder. Her thumb pressed back, strong and unfaltering,



of the Man Stood Forth at Last.

click as it sprung into place. Then she looked along the barrel until she saw the swinging form of Simon through the sights.

There was no remorse in that cold gaze of hers. The wings of death away. lovered over the man, ready to swoop Her fingers curled tighter about the trigger. One ounce more pressure, and Simon's track of wickedness and bloodshed would have come to an end at last. But at that instant they crept down their dusky trails at her eyes widened with the dawn of an night; it was the fear of darkness

hatred that was upon him. And she ited upon him by those terrible rendrealized, as if by an inspiration from ing fangs and claws. It was the fear on High, that before he went to his that can be heard in the pack song in house to sleep he would go once more the dreadful winter season, and that into the presence of Bruce, confined somewhere among these ridges and suffering the punishment of having utters in the half-darkness. He had opposed his will. Simon would want one look to see how his plan was getting on; perhaps he would want to utter one taunting word. And Linda saw her chance.

into her own room. There she procured a weapon that she trusted more, her little pistol, loaded with six cart-

If she had understood the real na- of this ancient fear of beasts, ture of the danger that Bruce faced fective defense against such an enemy erisis, against such of the Turners as ant hope that the bear would continue she thought she might have to face, it would serve her much better than the all her life she had kept it for just

such an emergency. The pain of the blow was quite gone now, except for a strange sickness that had encompassed her. But she was never colder of nerve and surer of Cunningly she lay down again before she crept through the door, so that if Simon chanced to look about he would fall to see that she followed him. She crept to the thick-"Let him go-and I won't even try to ets, then stood up. Three hundred yards down the slope she could see Simon's dimming figure in the moonlight, and swiftly she sped after him.

CHAPTER XXIII

The shadow that Bruce saw at the edge of the forest could not be mistaken as to identity. The hopes that he had held before—that this stalking figure might be that of a deer or an elk-could no longer be entertained. Men, as a rule, do not love the wild and wailing sobs of a coyote, as he Tooks down upon a camp fire from the ridge above. Sleep does not come easily when a gaunt wolf walks in a slow, inquisitive circle about the pallet, scarcely a leaf rustling beneath his feet. And a few times, in the history of the frontier, men have had queer tinglings and creepings in the scalp when they have happened to glance over their shoulders and see the eyes of a great, tawny puma glowing an "Why?" she echoed. Once more the odd blue in the firelight. Yet, Bruce would have had any one of these, or and perhaps it was the mercy of Fate all three together, in preference to the

No words have ever been capable of phenious, more savage than any wilder- expressing the depths of cowardice of which a coyote is capable. He will whine and weep about a camp, like a soul lost between two worlds, but if one by one, rather than attack a man, The cunning breed to which he belongs has found out that it doesn't pay. The welf is sometimes disquietingly brave her unmoved. Then he turned out of when he is fortified by his pack brethren in the winter, but in such a season But the curtain of this drama in the | as this he is particularly careful to

spoke clearly. With all the strength Killer. He had already shown his

scorn of men. His very stride showed shared the forest with him. In fact, little desk placed against the wall. Her he considered himself the forest master. The bear is never a particularly timid animal, and whatever timidity the Killer possessed was as utterly

> Bruce wetched him with unwinking eyes. It might be that the Killer would fall to discern his outline. Bruce had no conscious knowledge, as yet, that it is movement rather than form to which the eyes of the wild creatures are most receptive. But he acted upon that fact now as if by instinct. He was not lying in quite the exact spot where the Killer had left his dead the preceding night, and possibly his outline was not enough like it to attract the grizzly's attention. Besides, in the intermittent light, it was wholly possible that the grizzly would try to find the remains of his feast by smell alone; and if this were lacking, and Bruce made no movements to attract his attention, he might wander away in search of other game.

For the first time in his life, Bruce knew Fear as it really was. It is a knowledge that few dwellers in cities can possibly have; and so few times has it really been experienced in these days of civilization that men have mostly forgotten what it is like. If they experience it at all, it is usually only in dream that arises from the germplasm-a nightmare to paralyze the muscles and chill the heart and freeze a man in his bed. The moon was strange and white as it slipped in and out of the clouds, and the forest, mysterious as Death itself, lightened and He Struck Her Breast. The Brutality darkened alternately with a strange effect of unreality; but for all that, Bruce could not make himself believe that this was just a dream. The dreadful reality remained that the Killer, whose name and works he knew, was even now investigating him from the shadows one hundred feet

The fear that came to him was that of the young world-fear without recompense, direct and primitive fear that grew on him like a sickness. It was the fear that the deer knew as and silence and pain and heaven She knew this man. She knew the knows what cruelty that would be viscan be felt in strange overtones, in the sobbing wall of despair that the coyote been afraid for his life every moment he was in the hands of the Turners He knew that if he survived this night, he would have to face death again. He had no hopes of deliverance alto-She dropped the rifle and darted gether. But the Turners were men, and they worked with knife blade and bullet, not rending fang and claw. He could face men bravely; but it was hard to keep a strong heart in the face

The Killer seemed disturbed and she would have retained the rifle. It moved slowly along the edge of the shot with many times the smashing moonlight. Bruce could trace his power of the little gun, and at long movements by the irregularity in the range was many times as accurate, but line of shadows. He seemed to be even it would have seemed an inef- moving more cautiously than ever, now. Bruce could not hear the slight

But some smell in the air seemed to reach him, and he came stealing back.

In reality, the Killer was puzzled. He had come to this place straight through the forest with the expectation that food-flesh to tear with his fangs-would be waiting for bim. And now, as he waited at the border of the darkness, he knew that a strange change had taken place. And the Killer did not like strangeness.

The smell that he had expected had dimmed to such an extent that it promoted no muscular impulse. Perhaps it was only obliterated by a stranger smell-one that was vaguely familiar and wakened a slow, brooding anger in his great beast's heart.

He was not timid; yet he retained some of his natural caution and remained in the gloom while he made his investigations. Probably it was a hunting instinct alone. He crept slowly up and down the border of moonlight, and his anger seemed to grow and deepen within him. He felt dimly that he had been cheated out of his meal. And once before he had been similarly cheated; but there had been singular triumph at the end of that experience.

All at once a movement, far across the pasture, caught his attention. It seemed that some one had come, taken one glance at the drama at the edge of the forest, and had departed. Bruce himself had not seen the figure:

-not usually merciful-that he did not. He might have been caused to hope again, only to know a deeper despatr when the man left him without giving ald. For the tall form had been that of Simon coming, as Linda had anticipated, for a moment's inspection of his handiwork. And seeing that it was good, he had departed again.

The grizzly watched him go, then turned back to his questioning regard of the strange, dark figure that lay so prone in the grass in front. The darkness dropped over him as the moon went behind a heavy patch of

And in that moment the Killer unsibly the upright form of Slmon bad suggested it to him; possibly the wind had only blown straighter and thus

(Continued Next Week)

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