

When Tomasso had played the dirgelike thing for the third time, Red said, "That's the kind of music that drives a feller to drink."

"Bein' as you're so pressin', Red, don't mind if I do," Peloo said suggestively.

"It orter be on the house for harbourin' the cause of complaint," Red proclaimed; "but Mr. Tomat—the musicianer has been mos' obligin' an' entertainin', an' my proposition goes."

THEY adjourned to the bar, and there was a round of drinks.

Then Peloo said, "The house now rises to the occasion to remark that it's ready to discharge its

Meekins was diligently trying to recover his equilibrium.

"Danged if the bridge ain't gone!" Slack declared. "Black Water's chewed it up, that's what it's done!"

Meekins looked with angry reproach at the surging flood which had swept away the primitive wooden bridge. "Well, I'm dashed!" he growled. "How're we goin' to get to the Big Pine now?"

"We can't," Slack answered flatly. "There ain't a hoss livin' that'd tackle that cranky crick, an' if he did he couldn't get up that straight bank acrost."

"Well, I'm danged!" Red objurgated. "There's nothin' for it but to go back to Peloo's,"

she'll hit the open. I been through here wunst."

The uplift of the horses' backs told that they climbed a heavy grade. A wind blew in their faces now; it chilled as though beyond lay snow.

"We're gettin' there," Red called back to Slack, "I'm gettin' ol' Keewatin's breath."

"I wisht he was gettin' a punch in the face!" Slack muttered to himself. "I'd like to give him one."

Soft wailing strains came from the pine boughs overhead as the wind cut through their wirelike screen. Afraid, Slack rode with nerves as vibrant as though he dangled over a precipice. He almost screamed in agony when something, perhaps a startled wolf, fled in noisy haste across their path. The horses snorted. They too seemed on the edge of fear.

"I was a fool to come inter these danged hills!" Slack muttered.

Red spoke to his horse some needless word, as though he sought a change to the silent strain.

Gradually, imperceptibly, the wind grew stronger as they rode the hill. The music of the pines was now one lengthened hum, as though bees hung on every limb.

"We're on top, Slack," Red advised, as their horses flattened to level going. "This gully is on the divide; then we dip down into the valley."

"This wind's blamed strong!" Slack growled. "She blows through here like a funnel."

"This cut ain't more'n ten feet wide, that's why," Red explained, "an' the sides is about three hun'ed feet up. Guess this is where the gold is—or p'raps the ghosts."

Slack shivered, and exclaimed, for the horses had checked after the stiff climb, "Push on, ol' man. I'm about sick of this dungeon!"

Their way lay over stones which caused their mounts to flounder as they rode. They left behind the heavier gloom of the lower hills, and some reflected moonlight crept through the gorge.

A hundred yards beyond the narrow cleft was ended by an amphitheater; it was like a colosseum. On its edge Red checked his horse to say:

"There's two or three openin's leads from this. I guess ours is the fu'st on the left."

His words echoed back from the encircling walls. The sound caused Slack to say:

"The wind's died out all of a sudden."

HIS voice was cut by a demoniac scream which died away in a low wailing note of anguish. Slack felt his scalp twitch. A cold chill crept up his back, and on his forehead beads of perspiration clung cold and clammy. The horses stood in trembling fright.

"What's that, Red? My God! What—"

The wailing note which had sunk to nothing came again, faint, growing in strength, until at the pitch of a scream it was smothered by a roaring medley, as through huge fiends fought in the arena of the encircling walls.

Slack's horse, terrorstricken, or perhaps the man, drunk with fear, drove with unconscious hand, galloped off to the left and through the first opening in the rocky barrier.

Red's horse plunged and fought against the pull of his rider's hands. Fighting they struggled across the amphitheater with its wailing cries. Through another cleft in the rocks the horse sought for escape. Struggling, trying to check the frightened beast, Red was smashed against a jutting rock which caught a leg and swept him from the saddle where he lay stunned by the fall.

HE lay for a long time crumpled up among the boulders. The grey light of dawn crept in through the creviced rock, and when he opened his eyes wearily it was day.

Half stupid, the wailing voices of the rocks threw him back all the hours since he had left the house of Peloo. "Say, Peloo," he muttered drowsily, "I'm sick of that tune! Tell Tomato to stop playin' the melojun."

Returning consciousness told him all the hard, bitter facts, brushed away the cobwebs from his unnerved brain. He looked out on the cold grey rocks, and then the memory of his horse, the ride up the hill, the fight for lost control, the crashing fall, came back in jostling sequence. And all the time the heavy roar, the wailing, vibrant note, alternated with sudden times of quiet.

Red tried to rise. With a cry of pain he fell back. One leg useless, wrenched somewhere. As he lay helpless his mind took up the vivid things of the night, pondering all the many whys and hows. It was time to think, a good chance for a slow working mind to solve problems.

After a long time he chuckled; then he swore softly. "I jus' got to lay here till Slack hikes back to find out why I ain't comin'," he said to an un-



obligations. What'll you all have, gentlemen?"

The Constable, as cause of the trouble, felt called upon to keep up his end; so that at the expiration of half an hour Tomasso having gone back to the organ, the four friends were left somewhat in a mellow, confidential mood.

"I don't mind sayin', fellers," Peloo remarked, "that I've heerd that kinder dead march piece before." He looked with wise gravity at Speers and winked.

"That's what I was sorter drivin' at," the Constable observed. "Was it the Frenchman an' the breed?"

"It was," Peloo declared dramatically. "That danged breed would stand there a howlin' by the organ, an' Lamonte he's a thumpin' the ivories an' scrawlin' somethin' on paper. See?"

"Makin' it up," Speers suggested, nodding his head.

"That don't prove nothin'," Slack objected. "They was both nutty. You fellers put me in mind of ol' women that, when they hear a dog howl, they say it's a sign somebody's goin' to die."

"Slack," Meekins put his hand on the last speaker's shoulder, "you go and get the hosses an' we'll pull out for the Big Pine. I know it's stopped rainin', I feel so danged dry. I ain't goin' to get full to-night, 'cause I'm on the water waggon."

Meekins laughed foolishly as his foot missed the stirrup. "This black mud's so danged slip'ry!" he remarked as an extenuating explanation to Peloo and Speers, who stood in the doorway. At the next try he made it, and, lifting to the saddle, sang out, as the impatient horse lurched forward, "Good-night, boys. Hope Slack don't want to go up into the Keewatin Hills to-night."

As the horsemen swung to the trail from Silver City, the cupping hoofs beneath them driving up a spray of soppy mud, Slack uttered in staccato gasps, "Guess—it's stopped rainin'—'cause—the supply—had run out."

"Must've come down to beat Noah's big storm," Red added.

A huge moon leered at the riders complacently from over the tree softened outline of Keewatin Hills as their horses ate into the westward trail at a pounding gallop. The two men had lapsed into the silence that comes with sleeping Nature's hush. Where the trail swept the base of Keewatin Hills with the curve of Eugene's simitar, suddenly loomed, like a cavern door, dark and forbidding, the Devils Pass.

"That's where Lamonte got hisn," Red said.

Fifty yards beyond, Slack muttered, "Comes of hookin' up with a breed. He orter knowed better'n to travel with one of that kidney."

ANOTHER half-mile, silent but for the rubber-like pound of the hoofs, and with a snort of affright, Red's horse stiffened his fore legs, swerved, and then stood still, throwing his head irritably up and down, the bit clanking against his set teeth.

Slack said resignedly, looking again at the rushing water.

"An' get the laugh throwed inter us good an' plenty," Meekins contributed. "Peloo'd be in bed, an' everythin' shut up."

"We got to go," Slack persisted.

"I ain't goin' back six miles like a danged fool!" Red declared. "Goin' back there means boozin'. I been off the liquor for three months 'cept to-night, an' I ain't goin' to take a chanst. We'd have to wait two or three days, p'raps, an' I got to be on my claim to-morrer."

"How're you goin' to get there?" Slack asked.

"By ridin' the trail through Keewatin Pass, that's how! 'Tain't more'n four miles farder."

Meekins swung his horse as he said this. Slack turned his mount and in silence rode at the other's side. At the mouth of Devils Pass Slack checked his steed, saying:

"'Tain't much use us goin' in there. A feller's jus' as like to hit the wrong trail an' fetch up at Loon Lake."

"Thought you wasn't feared of 'em squaw stories," Red sneered.

"I ain't feared of nothin' no more'n you are," Slack retorted angrily; "but I don't want to go moonin' round like a stray goat jus' for the fun of the thing."

"Well, I'm goin' to the Big Pine to-night by this trail!" Red declared. "All I got to do is keep bearin' to the lef' an' come out inter Kettle Valley; then it's as good as a sidewalk to the Big Pine. If you want to go back to Peloo's, Slack, jus' tell 'em that the air up in these hills kinder made your lungs ache an' you didn't care to tackle it. Don't say nothin' about the ghosts, or they'll laugh at you."

"Of all the danged fellers to be sot in their way that I ever see, you've got 'em skinned both ways of the jack, Mr. Meekins! You're wuss'n a kid, an' I'm goin' to play the fool humourin' you. Shove along, an' we'll see who's afeered, an' who's a danged—"

But Meekins had slipped into the gloom of the pass; for the moon had now dipped behind the barrier of Keewatin Hills and the penciled line of the trail had blurred to nothing.

WITH heads low hung in the freedom of slacked rein the horses sought the trail with cautious stride. Sometimes a stone clinked a metallic note from the iron shoes; sometimes a quickened rush told of a muskeeg stretch; sometimes a rocky wall brushed leg or arm as the path they rode looped some sharp point; but always they drove into a deeper gloom which lay in heaviness upon their hearts. Strange broken fragments of the organ's wail came hauntingly to Meekins in the sombre stillness of the gorge. Once Slack's horse misplaced a hoof and floundered on the giving edge of a cut bank, and, startled, he cried out in sudden fear; then he coughed and swore to reassert his nerve.

"Kinder dark," Red threw back; "but in a mile