

José Vaca

Across the northern end of the cañon the winnowing heat waves died to the level of the ground. Brown shadows shot from the western wall and spread across the widening outlet. The horses stepped briskly, knowing that they were near water.

Waring became more alert as they approached the adobe buildings of the rancho. Vaca had drifted into a dull silence. Gray with suffering and grim with hate for the gringo, he rode stolidly, praying incoherently that the gunman might be stricken dead as he rode.

The raw edge of the disappearing sun leveled a long flame of crimson across the mesa. The crimson melted to gold. The gold paled to a brief twilight. A faint star twinkled in the north.

Dogs crowded forward in the dusk, challenging the strange riders. A figure filled the lighted doorway of the Armigo ranch-house. The dogs drew back.

Ramon dismounted and helped his uncle down. Waring sat his horse until Juan Armigo stepped from the doorway and asked who came. Waring answered with his name.

"Si! Si!" exclaimed Armigo. "The señor is welcome."

Waring dismounted. "Juan, I have two of your friends here; José Vaca and Ramon Ortego."

Armigo seemed surprised. "José Vaca is wounded?" he queried hesitatingly.