

Tang of Life

merciful for the moment, only to turn his captives over to the merciless men of the mines; men who held a Mexican's life worth no more than a dog's. The wounded man, stiff in the saddle, turned his head. Round a bend in the dry river-bed, his neck held sideways that the reins might drag free, came Waring's big buckskin horse, Dexter. The horse stopped as he saw the group. Waring spoke to him. The big buckskin stepped forward and nosed Waring, who swung to the saddle and gestured toward the back trail.

They rode in silence, the Mexicans with bowed heads, dull-eyed, listless, resigned to their certain fate. For some strange reason the gringo had not killed them in the arroyo. He had had excuse enough.

Would he take them to Sonora — to the prison? Or would he wait until they were in some hidden fastness of the Agua Fria, and there kill them and leave them to the coyotes? The youth Ramon knew that the two little canvas sacks of gold were cleverly tied in the huge tapaderas of his uncle's saddle. Who would think to look for them there?

The gringo had said that they would ride to the ranchito of Juan Armigo. How easily the gringo had tricked them at the very moment when they thought they were safe! Yet he had not asked about the stolen money. The ways of this gringo were past comprehension.

Waring paid scant attention to the Mexicans, but he glanced continuously from side to side of the