

"Come back when you get ready. Leave manana."

The next day toward sundown, Ramon found him at the corral.

"Your hands?" asked Ramon.

"Better. Let's pull out tonight."

"Bueno—at what hour?"

"Right away."

Bill mounted and they rode out of the yard together, leading the pack animals. Ramon stopped before an adobe house on a side street, and went in. Bill saw the flutter of a white dress. He waited outside, sick at heart. Ramon joined him and they went forward. When they dipped down from the mesa into the cool night shadows of the desert, Ramon took off his hat and lifted his hand wearily to his forehead. "Dios," he murmured, "I would that I need never return."

They pitched camp at midnight, and Ramon shouldered the heavy work, sparing Bill's hands. In the months that followed they became friends as only men who love the desert can.

One night Bill brought in a mountain sheep.

"Grub's holdin' out fine." Bill lighted his pipe and sat watching the dancing shadows in the fire.

"Si. How long have we traveled?"

"Round about four months, I calculate, by the washin' we done." They fell silent.

Ramon finally sat down by Bill and rolled a cigaret. "Are you happy?" he asked suddenly.

Bill moved nearer the camp fire and propped his head on one hand. "Nobody's happy. The best we can do is to forget, for a little bit, the things we oughter remember."

"But a man cannot stay out here forever. Maybe you have nothing on your soul—"

"We all do some things it ain't pleasant to remember. But I didn't have nothin' to do with that 'hair-brandin'."

"I knew it," Ramon said. "But I was powerless."

Bill guiltily remembered his plotting. "It's harder to be sinned against than to sin," Bill said slowly, thereby unveiling what had been sacred for five years.

"That is hard—but it is the sinner who has to pay for his crime. And he must keep on paying."

"We got to pay, somehow, for everything we get. I've thought a good deal about what I'll have to pay for the thing I've got to do." He quietly placed a new log on the coals and waited for it to blaze. "I've got to kill him—when I find him. It ain't a pretty story," he said wearily. "I like to forget it—that's why I ain't looked for him. I'll run across him some day—that's the way things happen. An' I'm waitin'—just like I have been waiting since that night I come home and found her gone. It's all happened lots o' times, I reckon. I married her—an' I had to go away once. When I came back all the windows was shut down, an' everythin' was dusty. There was a letter—but she didn't tell me the man's name. It's him I'm waitin' for." He fumbled in his wallet and brought out the photograph of a woman. "The Lord makes some women too good lookin'," he said, brooding over the pictured face.

"When was it, Bill?" Ramon asked. His voice was shaking, and it was the first time he had used the Christian name.

"At Palomas—five years ago." He gave him the picture.

"Madre Dios," Ramon whispered, and put his head down on his arms.

The picture dropped into the fire, and Ramon reached for it.

"Don't touch it!" Bill said. He kicked it deeper into the coals. "She don't want to see this. He stood up, waiting. His face was white, and the pupils of his eyes were distended and blackened.

Ramon got up. "I am ready," he said wearily. "It has been hell—straight through."

Bill looked at him, feeling a tor-