THE GRINGOS

B. M. BOWER
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“Gringos are savages and worse than savages.”

FRONTISPIECE. See Page 268.
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"Gringos Are Savages and Worse Than Savages."

He Twisted in the Saddle and Sent Leaden Answer to The Spiteful Barking of the Guns.

Mrs. Jerry Took the Señorita's Hand and Smiled up At Her.

"An Accident It Must Appear to Those Who Watch"
CHAPTER I

THE BEGINNING OF IT

If you would glimpse the savage which normally lies asleep, thank God, in most of us, you have only to do this thing of which I shall tell you, and from some safe sanctuary where leaden couriers may not bear prematurely the tidings of man's debasement, watch the world below. You may see civilization swing back with a snap to savagery and worse—because savagery enlightened by the civilization of centuries is a deadly thing to let loose among men. Our savage forebears were but superior animals groping laboriously after economic security and a social condition that would yield most prolifically the fruit of all the world's desire, happiness; to-day, when we swing back to something akin to savagery, we do it for lust of gain, like our forebears, but we do it wittingly. So, if you would look upon the unlovely spectacle of civilized men turned savage, and see them toil painfully back to lawful living, you have but to do this:

Seek a spot remote from the great centers of our vaunted civilization, where Nature, in a wanton gold-revel of her own, has sprinkled her river beds with the shining dust, hidden it away under ledges, buried it in deep canyons in playful miserliness and salved with its potent glow the time-scars upon the cheeks of her gaunt mountains. You have but to find a tiny bit of Nature's gold, fling it in the face of civilization and raise the hunting cry. Then, from that safe sanctuary which you have chosen, you may look your fill upon the awakening of the primitive in man; see him throw off civilization as a sleeper flings aside the cloak that has
covered him; watch the savages fight, whom your gold has conjured.

They will come, those savages; straight as the arrow flies they will come, though mountains and deserts and hurrying rivers bar their way. And the plodding, law-abiding citizens who kiss their wives and hold close their babies and fling hasty, comforting words over their shoulders to tottering old mothers when they go to answer the hunting call—they will be your savages when the gold lust grips them. And the towns they build of their greed will be but the nucleus of all the crime let loose upon the land. There will be men among your savages; men in whom the finer stuff outweighs the grossness and the greed. But to save their lives and that thing they prize more than life or gold, and call by the name of honor or friendship or justice—that thing which is the essence of all the fineness in their natures—to save that and their lives they also must fight, like savages who would destroy them.

There was a little, straggling hamlet born of the Mission which the padres founded among the sand hills beside a great, uneasy stretch of water which a dreamer might liken to a naughty child that had run away from its mother, the ocean, through a little gateway which the land left open by chance and was hiding there among the hills, listening to the calling of the surf voice by night, out there beyond the gate, and lying sullen and still when mother ocean sent the fog and the tides a-seeking; a truant child that played by itself and danced little wave dances which it had learned of its mother ages agone, and laughed up at the hills that smiled down upon it.

The padres thought mostly of the savages who lived upon the land, and strove earnestly to teach them the lessons which, sandal-shod, with crucifix to point the way, they had marched up from the south to set before these children of
the wild. Also came ships, searching for that truant ocean-child, the bay, of which men had heard; and so the hamlet was born of civilization.

Came afterwards noblemen from Spain, with parchments upon which the king himself had set his seal. Mile upon mile, they chose the land that pleased them best; and by virtue of the king's word called it their own. They drove cattle up from the south to feed upon the hills and in the valleys. They brought beautiful wives and set them a-queening it over spacious homes which they built of clay and native wood and furnished with the luxuries they brought with them in the ships. They reared lovely daughters and strong, hot-blooded sons; and they grew rich in cattle and in contentment, in this paradise which Nature had set apart for her own playground and which the zeal of the padres had found and claimed in the name of God and their king.

The hamlet beside the bay was small, but it received the ships and the goods they brought and bartered for tallow and hides; and although the place numbered less than a thousand souls, it was large enough to please the dons who dwelt like the patriarchs of old in the valleys.

Then Chance, that sardonic jester who loves best to thwart the dearest desires of men and warp the destiny of nations, became piqued at the peace and the plenty in the land which lay around the bay. Chance, knowing well how best and quickest to let savagery loose upon the land, plucked a handful of gold from the breast of Nature, held it aloft that all the world might be made mad by the gleam of it, and raised the hunting call.

Chance also it was that took the trails of two adventurous young fellows whose ears had caught her cry of "Good hunting" and set their faces westward from the plains of
Texas; but here her jest was kindly. The young fellows took the trail together and were content. Together they heard the hunting call and went seeking the gold that was luring thousands across the deserts; together they dug for it, found it, shared it when all was done. Together they heeded the warning of falling leaf and chilling night winds, and with buckskin bags comfortably heavy went down the mountain trail to San Francisco, that ugly, moiling center of the savagery, to idle through the winter.

Here, because of certain traits which led each man to seek the thing that pleased him best, the trail forked for a time. One was caught in the turgid whirlpool which was the sporting element of the town, and would not leave it. Him the games and the women and the fighting drew irresistibly. The other sickened of the place, and one day when all the grassy hillsides shone with the golden glow of poppies to prove that spring was near, almost emptied a bag of gold because he had seen and fancied a white horse which a drunken Spaniard from the San Joaquin was riding up and down the narrow strip of sand which was a street, showing off alike his horsemanship and his drunkenness. The horse he bought, and the outfit, from the silver-trimmed saddle and bridle to the rawhide riata hanging coiled upon one side of the narrow fork and the ivory-handled Colt's revolver tucked snugly in its holster upon the other side. Pleased as a child over a Christmas stocking, he straightway mounted the beautiful beast and galloped away to the south, still led by Chance, the jester.

He returned in a week, enamored alike of his horse and of the ranch he had discovered. He was going back, he said. There were cattle by the thousands—and he was a cattleman, from the top of his white sombrero to the tips of his calfskin boots, for all he had bent his back laboriously all summer over a hole in the ground, and had idled in town
since Thanksgiving. He was a cowboy (vaquero was the name they used in those pleasant valleys) and so was his friend. And he had found a cowboy's paradise, and a welcome which a king could not cavil at. Would Jack stake himself to a horse and outfit, and come to Palo Alto till the snow was well out of the mountains and they could go back to their mine?

Jack blew three small smoke-rings with nice precision, watched them float and fade while he thought of a certain girl who had lately smiled upon him—and in return had got smile for smile—and said he guessed he'd stick to town life for a while.

"Old Don Andres Picardo's a prince," argued Dade, "and he's got a rancho that's a paradise on earth. Likes us gringos—which is more than most of 'em do—and said his house and all he's got is half mine, and nothing but the honor's all his. You know the Spaniards; seems like Texas, down there. I told him I had a partner, and he said he'd be doubly honored if it pleased my partner to sleep under his poor roof—red tiles, by the way, and not so poor!—and sit at his table. One of the 'fine old families,' they are, Jack. I came back after you and my traps."

"That fellow you bought the white caballo from got shot that same night," Jack observed irrelevantly. "He was weeping all over me part of the evening, because he'd sold the horse and you had pulled out so he couldn't buy him back. Then he came into Billy Wilson's place and sat into a game at the table next to mine; and some kind of a quarrel started. He'd overlooked that gun on the saddle, it seems, and so he only had a knife. He whipped it out, first pass, but a bullet got him in the heart. The fellow that did it—" Jack blew two more rings and watched them absently—"the Committee rounded him up and took him out to the oak, next morning. Trial took about fifteen minutes, all told. They
had him hung, in their own minds, before the greaser quit kicking. I know the man shot in self-defense; I saw the Spaniard pull his knife and start for him with blood in his eye. But some of the Committee had it in for Sandy, and so—it was adios for him, poor devil. They murdered him in cold blood. I told them so, too. I told them—"

"Yes, I haven't the slightest doubt of that!" Dade flung away a half-smoked cigarette and agitatedly began to roll another one. "That's one reason why I want you to come down to Palo Alto, Jack. You know how things are going here, lately; and Perkins hates you since you took the part of that peon he was beating up,—and, by the way, I saw that same Injun at Don Andres' rancho. Now that Perkins is Captain, you'll get into trouble if you hang around this burg without some one to hold you down. This ain't any place for a man that's got your temper and tongue. Say, I heard of a horse —"

"No, you don't! You can't lead me out like that, old boy. I'm all right; Bill Wilson and I are pretty good friends; and Bill's almost as high a card as the Committee, if it ever came to a show-down. But it won't. I'm not a fool; I didn't quarrel with them, honest. They had me up for a witness and I told the truth—which didn't happen to jibe with the verdict they meant to give. The Captain as good as said so, and I just pleasantly and kindly told him that in my opinion Sandy was a better man than any one of 'em. That's all there was to it. The Captain excused me from the witness chair, and I walked out of the tent. And we're friendly enough when we meet; so you needn't worry about me."

"Better come, anyway," urged Dade, though he was not hopeful of winning his way.

Jack shook his head. "No, I don't want anything of country life just yet. I had all the splendid solitude my system needs,
this last summer. You like it; you're a kind of a lone rider anyway. You never did mix well. You go back and honor Don Andres with your presence—and he is honored. If the old devil only knew it! Maybe, later on—So you like your new horse, huh? What you going to call him?"

Dade grinned a little. "Remember that picture in Shakespeare of 'White Surry'? Or it was in Shakespeare till you tore it out to start a fire, that wet night; remember? The arch in his neck, and all? I hadn't gone a mile on him till I was calling him Surry; and say, Jack, he's a wonder! Come out and take a look at him. Can't be more than four years old, and gentle as a kitten. That poor devil knew how to train a horse, even if he didn't have any sense about whisky. I'll bet money couldn't have touched him if the man had been sober."

He stopped in the doorway and looked up and down the street with open disgust. "Come on down to Picardo's, Jack; what the deuce is there here to hold you? How a man that knows horses and the range, can stand for this—" he waved a gloved hand at the squalid street—"is something I can't understand. To me, it's like hell with the lid off. What's holding you anyway? Another señorita?"

"I'm making more money here lately than I did in the mine." Jack evaded smoothly. "I won a lot last night. Wheee! Say, you played in some luck yourself, old man, when you bought that outfit. That saddle and bridle's worth all you paid for the whole thing. White Surry, eh? He has got a neck—and, Lord, look at those legs!"

"Climb on and try him out once!" invited Dade guilefully. If he could stir the horseman's blood in Jack's veins, he thought he might get him away from town.
"Haven't time right now, Dade. I promised to meet a friend—"

Dade shrugged his shoulders and painstakingly smoothed the hair tassel which dangled from the browband. The Spaniard had owned a fine eye for effect when he chose jet black trappings for Surry, who was white to his shining hoofs.

"All right; I'll put him in somewhere till after dinner. Then I'm going to pull out again. I can't stand this hell-pot of a town—not after the Picardo hacienda."

"I wonder," grinned Jack slyly, "if there isn't a señorita at Palo Alto?"

He got no answer of any sort. Dade was combing with his fingers the crinkled mane which fell to the very chest of his new horse, and if he heard he made no betraying sign.
CHAPTER II

THE VIGILANTES

Bill Wilson came to the door of his saloon and stood with his hands on his hips, looking out upon the heterogeneous assembly of virile manhood that formed the bulk of San Francisco's population a year or two after the first gold cry had been raised. Above his head flapped the great cloth sign tacked quite across the rough building, heralding to all who could read the words that this was BILL WILSON'S PLACE. A flaunting bit of information it was, and quite superfluous; since practically every man in San Francisco drifted towards it, soon or late, as the place where the most whisky was drunk and the most gold lost and won, with the most beautiful women to smile or frown upon the lucky, in all the town.

The trade wind knew that Bill Wilson's place needed no sign save its presence there, and was loosening a corner in the hope of carrying it quite away as a trophy. Bill glanced up, promised the resisting cloth an extra nail or two, and let his thoughts and his eyes wander again to the sweeping tide of humanity that flowed up and down the straggling street of sand and threatened to engulf the store which men spoke of simply as "Smith's."

A shipload of supplies had lately been carted there, and miners were feverishly buying bacon, beans, "self-rising" flour, matches, tea—everything within the limits of their gold dust and their carrying capacity—which they needed for hurried trips to the hills where was hidden the gold they dreamed of night and day.
To Bill that tide meant so much business; and he was not the man to grudge his friend Smith a share of it. When the fog crept in through the Golden Gate—a gate which might never be closed against it—the tide of business would set towards his place, just as surely as the ocean tide would clamor at the rocky wall out there to the west. In the meantime, he was not loath to spend a quiet hour or two with an empty gaming hall at his back.

His eyes went incuriously over the familiar crowd to the little forest of flag-foliaged masts that told where lay the ships in the bay below the town. Bill could not name the nationality of them all; for the hunting call had reached to the far corners of the earth, and strange flags came fluttering across strange seas, with pirate-faced adventurers on the decks below, chattering in strange tongues of California gold. Bill could not name all the flags, but he could name two of the bonds that bind all nations into one common humanity. He could produce one of them, and he was each night gaining more of the other; for, be they white men or brown, spoke they his language or one he had never heard until they passed through the Golden Gate, they would give good gold for very bad whisky.

Even the Digger Indians, squatting in the sun beside his door and gazing stolidly at the town and the bay beyond, would sell their souls—for which the gray-gowned padres prayed ineffectively in the chapel at Dolores—their wives or their other, dearer possessions for a very little bottle of the stuff that was fast undoing the civilizing work of the Mission. The padres had come long before the hunting cry was raised, and they had labored earnestly; but their prayers and their preaching were like reeds beneath the tread of elephants, when gold came down from the mountains, and whisky came in through the Golden Gate.
Jack Allen, coming lazily down through the long, deserted room, edged past Bill in the doorway.

"Hello," Bill greeted with a carefully casual manner, as if he had been waiting for the meeting, but did not want Jack to suspect the fact. "Up for all day? Where you headed for?"

"Breakfast—or dinner, whichever you want to call it. Then I'm going to take a walk and get the kinks out of my legs. Say, old man, I'm going to knock a board off the foot of that bunk, to-night, or else sleep on the floor. Was wood scarce, Bill, when you built that bed?"

"Carpenter was a little feller," chuckled Bill, "and I guess he measured it by himself. Charged a full length price, though, I remember! I meant to tell you when you hired that room, Jack, that you better take the axe to bed with you. Sure, knock a board off; two boards, if you like. Take all the boards off!" urged Bill, in a burst of generosity. "You might better be making that bunk over, m'son, than trying to take the whole blamed town apart and put it together again, like you was doing last night." In this way Bill tactfully swung to the subject that lay heavy on his mind.

Jack borrowed a match, cupped his fingers around his lips that wanted to part in a smile, and lighted his before-breakfast cigarette—though the sun hung almost straight overhead.

"So that's it," he observed, when the smoke took on the sweet aroma of a very mild tobacco. "I saw by the back of your neck that you had something on your mind. What's the matter, Bill? Don't you think the old town needs taking apart?"

"Oh, it needs it, all right. But it's too big a job for one man to tackle. You leave that to Daddy Time; he's the only reformer—"
"Say, Bill, I never attempted to reform anybody or anything in my life; I'd hate to begin with a job the size of this." He waved his cigarette toward the shifting crowd. "But I do think—"

"And right there's where you make a big mistake. You don't want to think! Or if you do, don't think out loud; not where such men as Swift and Rawhide and the Captain can hear you. That's what I mean, Jack."

Jack eyed him with a smile in his eyes. "Some men might think you were afraid of that bunch," he observed with characteristic bluntness. "I know you aren't, and so I don't see why you want me to be. You know, and I know, that the Vigilance Committee has turned rotten to the core; every decent man in San Francisco knows it. You know that Sandy killed that Spaniard in self-defense—or if you didn't see the fracas, I tell you now that he did; I saw the whole thing. You know, at any rate, that the Vigilantes took him out and hung him because they wanted to get rid of him, and that came the nearest to an excuse they could find. You know—"

"Oh, I know!" Bill's voice was sardonic. "I know they'll be going around with a spy-glass looking for an excuse to hang you, too, if you don't quit talking about 'em."

Jack smiled and so let a thin ribbon of smoke float up and away from his lips.

Bill saw the smile and flushed a little; but he was not to be laughed down, once he was fairly started. He laid two well-kept fingers upon the other's arm and spoke soberly, refusing to treat the thing as lightly as the other was minded to do.

"Oh, you'll laugh, but it's a fact, and you know it. Why, ain't Sandy's case proof enough that I'm right? I heard you telling a crowd in there last night—" Bill tilted his head
backward towards the room behind them—"that this law-and-order talk is all a farce. What if it is? It don't do any good for you to bawl it out in public and get the worst men in the Committee down on you, does it?

"What you'd better do, Jack, is go on down to Palo Alto where your pardner is. He's got some sense. I wouldn't stay in the darned town overnight, the way they're running things now, if it wasn't for my business. Ever since they made Tom Perkins captain there's been hell to pay all round. I can hold my own; I'm up where they don't dare tackle me; but you take a fool's advice and pull out before the Captain gets his eagle eye on you. Talk like you was slinging around last night is about as good a trouble-raiser as if you emptied both them guns of yours into that crowd out there."

"You're asking me to run before there's anything to run away from." Jack's lips began to show the line of stubbornness. "I haven't quarreled with the Captain, except that little fuss a month ago, when he was hammering that peon because he couldn't talk English; I'm not going to. And if they did try any funny work with me, old-timer, why—as you say, these guns—"

"Oh, all right, m'son! Have it your own way," Bill retorted grimly. "I know you've got a brace of guns; and I know you can plant a bullet where you want it to land, about as quick as the next one. I haven't a doubt but what you're equal to the Vigilantes, with both hands tied! Of course," he went on with heavy irony, "I have known of some mighty able men swinging from the oak, lately. There'll likely be more, before the town wakes up and weeds out some of the cutthroat element that's running things now to suit themselves."

Jack looked at him quickly, struck by something in Bill's voice that betrayed his real concern. "Don't take it to heart, Bill," he said, dropping his bantering and his stubbornness
together. "I won't air my views quite so publicly, after this. I know I was a fool to talk quite as straight as I did last night; but some one else brought up the subject of Sandy; and Swift called him a name Sandy'd have smashed him in the face for, if he'd been alive and heard it. I always liked the fellow, and it made me hot to see them hustle him out of town and hang him like they'd shoot a dog that had bitten some one, when I knew he didn't deserve it. You or I would have shot, just as quick as he did, if a drunken Spaniard made for us with a knife. So would the Captain, or Swift, or any of the others.

"I know—I've got a nasty tongue when something riles me, and I lash out without stopping to think. Dade has given me the devil for that, more times than I can count. He went after me about this very thing, too, the other day. I'll try and forget about Sandy; it doesn't make pleasant remembering, anyway. And I'll promise to count a hundred before I mention the Committee above a whisper, after this—nine hundred and ninety-nine before I take the name of Swift or the Captain in vain!" He smiled full at Bill—a smile to make men love him for the big-hearted boy he was.

But Bill did not grin back. "Well, it won't hurt you any; they're bad men to fuss with, both of 'em," he warned somberly.

"Come on out and climb a hill or two with me," Jack urged. "You've got worse kinks in your system, to-day, than I've got in my legs. You won't? Well, better go back and take another sleep, then; it may put you in a more optimistic mood." He went off up the street towards the hills to the south, turning in at the door of a tented eating-place for his belated breakfast.

"Optimistic hell!" grunted Bill. "You can't tell a man anything he don't think he knows better than you do, till
he's past thirty. I was a fool to try, I reckon."

He glowered at the vanishing figure, noting anew how tall and straight Jack was in his close-fitting buckskin jacket, with the crimson sash knotted about his middle in the Spanish style, his trousers tucked into his boots like the miners, and to crown all, a white sombrero such as the vaqueros wore. Handsome and headstrong he was; and Bill shook his head over the combination which made for trouble in that land where the primal instincts lay all on the surface; where men looked askance at the one who drew oftenest the glances of the women and who walked erect and unafraid in the midst of the lawlessness. Jack Allen was fast making enemies, and no one knew it better than Bill.

When the young fellow disappeared, Bill looked again at the shifting crowd upon which his eyes were wont to rest with the speculative gaze of a farmer who leans upon the fence that bounds his land, and regards his wheat-fields ripening for the sickle. He liked Jack, and the soul of him was bitter with the bitterness that is the portion of maturity, when it must stand by and see youth learn by the pangs of experience that fire will burn most agonizingly if you hold your hand in the blaze.

One of his night bartenders came up; and Bill, dismissing Jack from his mind, with a grunt of disgust, went in to talk over certain changes which he meant to make in the bar as soon as he could get material and carpenter together upon the spot.

He was still fussing with certain of the petty details that make or mar the smooth running of an establishment like his, when his ear, trained to detect the first note of discord in the babble which filled his big room by night, caught an ominous note in the hum of the street crowd outside. He lifted his head from examining a rickety table-leg.
"Go see what's happened, Jim," he suggested to the man, who had just come up with a hammer and some nails; and went back to dreaming of the time when his place should be a palace, and he would not have to nail the legs on his tables every few days because of the ebullitions of excitement in his customers. He had strengthened the legs, and was testing them by rocking the table slightly with a broad palm upon it, when Jim came back.

"Some shooting scrape, back on the flat," Jim announced indifferently. "Some say it was a hold-up. Two or three of the Committee have gone out to investigate."

"Yeah—I'll bet the Committee went out!" snorted Bill. "They'll be lynching the Diggers' dogs for fighting, when the supply of humans runs out. They've just about played that buckskin out, packing men out to the oak to hang 'em lately," he went on glumly, sliding the rejuvenated table into its place in the long row that filled that side of the room. "I never saw such an enthusiastic bunch as they're getting to be!"

"That's right," Jim agreed perfunctorily, as a man is wont to agree with his employer. "Somebody'll hang, all right."

"There's plenty that need it—if the Committee only had sense enough to pick 'em out and leave the rest alone," growled Bill, going from table to table, tipping and testing for other legs that wobbled.

Jim sensed the rebuff in his tone and went back to the door, around which a knot of men engaged in desultory conjectures while they waited expectantly. A large tent that Perkins had found convenient as a temporary jail for those unfortunates upon whom his heavy hand fell swiftly, stood next to Bill's place; and it spoke eloquently of the manner in which the Committee then worked, that men gathered there
instinctively at the first sign of trouble. For when the Committee went out after culprits, it did not return empty-handed, as the populace knew well. Zealous custodians of the law were they, as Bill had said; and though they might have exchanged much of their zeal for a little of Bill's sense of justice (to the betterment of the town), few of the waiting crowd had the temerity to say so.

Up the street, necks (whose owners had not thought it worth while to wade through the sand to the scene of the shooting) were being craned towards the flat behind the town, where the Captain and a few of his men had hurried at the first shot.

"They're comin'," Jim announced, thrusting his head into the gambling hall and raising his voice above the sound of the boss's nail-driving.

"Well—what of it?" snapped Bill. "Why don't you yell at me that the sun is going to set in the west to-night?" Bill drove the head of a four-cornered, iron nail clean out of sight in a table top. And Jim prudently withdrew his head and turned his face and his attention towards the little procession that was just coming into sight at the end of the rambling street, with the crowd closing in behind it as the water comes surging together behind an ocean liner.

Jim worshiped his boss, but he knew better than to argue with him when Bill happened to be in that particular mood, which, to tell the truth, was not often. But in five minutes or less he had forgotten the snub. His head popped in again.

"Bill!"

There may be much meaning in a tone, though it utters but one unmeaning word. Bill dropped a handful of nails upon a table and came striding down the long room to the door; pushed Jim unceremoniously aside and stood upon the
step. He was just in time to look into the rageful, blue eyes of Jack Allen, walking with a very straight back and a contemptuous smile on his lips, between the Captain and one of his trusted lieutenants.

Bill's fingers clenched suggestively upon the handle of the hammer. His jaw slackened and then pushed itself forward to a fighting angle while he stared, and he named in his amazement that place which the padres had taught the Indians to fear.

The Captain heard him and grinned sourly as he passed on. Jack heard him, and his smile grew twisted at the tone in which the word was uttered; but he still smiled, which was more than many a man would have done in his place.

Bill stood while the rest of that grim procession passed his place. There was another, a young fellow who looked ready to cry, walking unsteadily behind Jack, both his arms gripped by others of the Vigilance Committee. There were two crude stretchers, borne by stolid-faced miners in red flannel shirts and clay-stained boots. On the first a dead man lay grinning up at the sun, his teeth just showing under his bushy mustache, a trickle of red running down from his temple. On the next a man groaned and mumbled blasphemy between his groanings.

Bill took it all in, a single glance for each,—a glance trained by gambling to see a great deal between the flicker of his lashes. He did not seem to look once at the Captain, yet he knew that Jack's ivory-handled pistols hung at the Captain's rocking hips as he went striding past; and he knew that malice lurked under the grizzled hair which hid the Captain's cruel lips; and that satisfaction glowed in the hard, sidelong glance he gave his prisoner.
He stood until he saw Jack duck his head under the tent flaps of the jail and the white-faced youth follow shrinking after. He stood while the armed guards took up their stations on the four sides of the tent and began pacing up and down the paths worn deep in tragic significance. He saw the wounded man carried into Pete's place across the way, and the dead man taken farther down the street. He saw the crowd split into uneasy groups which spoke a common tongue, that they might exchange unasked opinions upon this, the biggest sensation since Sandy left town with his ankles tied under the vicious-eyed buckskin whose riders rode always toward the west and whose saddle was always empty when he came back to his stall at the end of the town. Bill saw it all, to the last detail; but after his one explosive oath, he was apparently the most indifferent of them all.

When the Captain ended his curt instructions to the guard and came towards him, Bill showed a disposition to speak.

"Who's the kid?" he drawled companionably, while his fingers itched upon the hammer, and the soul of him lusted for sight of the hole it could make in the skull of the Captain. "I don't recollect seeing him around town—and there ain't many faces I forget, either."

The Captain shot him a surprised look that was an unconscious tribute to Bill's diplomatic art. But Bill's level glance would have disarmed a keener man than Tom Perkins.

Perkins stopped. "Stranger, from what he said—though I've got my doubts. Some crony of Allen's, I expect. It was him done the shooting; the kid didn't have any gun on him. Allen didn't deny it, either."
"No—he's just bull-headed enough to tough it out," commented Bill. "What was the row about—do yuh know?"

Perkins stiffened. "That," he said with some dignity, "will come out at the trial. He killed Rawhide outright, and Texas Bill will die, I reckon. The trial will show what kinda excuse he thought he had." Having delivered himself, thus impartially and with malice towards none, Perkins started on.

"Oh, say! You don't mind if I talk to 'em?" Bill gritted his teeth at having to put the sentence in that favor-seeking tone, but he did it, nevertheless.

The Captain scowled under his black, slouch hat. "I've give strict orders not to let anybody inside the tent till after the trial," he said shortly.

"Oh, that's all right. I'll talk to 'em through the door," Bill agreed equably. "Jack owes me some money."

The Captain muttered unintelligibly and passed on, and Bill chose to interpret the mutter as consent. He strolled over to the tent, joked condescendingly with the guard who stood before it, and announced that the Captain had said he might talk to the prisoners.

"I did not," said the Captain unexpectedly at his shoulder. "I said you couldn't. After the trial, you can collect what's coming to you, Mr. Wilson. That is," he added hastily, "in case Allen should be convicted. If he ain't, you can do as you please." He looked full at the guard. "Shoot any man that attempts to enter that tent or talk to the prisoners without my permission, Shorty," he directed, and turned his back on Bill.

Bill did not permit one muscle of his face to twitch. "All right," he drawled, "I guess I won't go broke if I don't get it."

You mind what your Captain tells you, Shorty! He's running this show, and what he says goes. You've got a good man over yuh, Shorty. A fine man. He'll weed out the town till it'll look like grandpa's onion bed—if the supply of rope don't give out!" Whereupon he strolled carelessly back to his place, and went in as if the incident were squeezed dry of interest for him. He walked to the far end of the big room, sat deliberately down upon a little table, and rewarded himself for his forbearance by cursing methodically the Captain, the Committee of which he was the leader, the men who had witlessly given him the power he used so ruthlessly as pleased him best, and Jack Allen, whose ill-timed criticisms and hot-headed freedom of speech had brought upon himself the weight of the Committee's dread hand.

"Damn him, I tried to tell him!" groaned Bill, his face hidden behind his palms. "They'll hang him—and darn my oldest sister's cat's eyes, somebody'll sweat blood for it, too!" (Bill, you will observe, had reached the end of real blasphemy and was forced to improvise milder expletives as he went along.) "There ought to be enough decent men in this town to—"

"Did you git to see Jack?" ventured Jim, coming anxiously up to his boss.

The tone of him, which was that hushed tone which we employ in the presence of the dead, so incensed Bill that for answer he threw the hammer viciously in his direction. Jim took the hint and retreated hastily.

"No, damn 'em, they won't let me near him," said Bill, ashamed of his violence. "I knew they'd get him; but I didn't think they'd get him so quick. I sent a letter down by an Injun this morning to his pardner to come up and get him
outa town before he—But it's too late now. That talk he made last night—"

"Say, he shot Swift in the arm, too," said Jim. "Pity he didn't kill him. They're getting a jury together already. Say! Ain't it hell?"