Cimarron

By
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THE STORY

CHAPTER I.—It was 1889 Yancey Cravat, just returned from the newly opened Indian territory where he had participated in the Run over the border, is describing this adventure to a large family gathering of the Venables. The Venables, ruined by the Civil war had left Mississippi and settled in Wichita, Kan. Five years before Yancey Cravat had appeared in Wichita and won as his bride sixteen-year-old Sabra Venable. Gossip said of Yancey Cravat that there was Indian blood in him. He is a clever criminal lawyer and editor of the Wichita Wigwam. A born orator, he combines something of the charlatan, much of the actor and a dash of the fanatic When the Run started, Yancey had raced his pony against the thoroughbred mount of a girl. When her horse fell and broke both forelegs, he stopped to shoot the crippled animal The girl leaped on his mustang, galloped to the quarter section and got the land by right of claim. Yancey announces he is going back to the Oklahoma country to start a newspaper in one of the new towns. Sabra, defying her mother, says she will go too.

CHAPTER II—They make the journey in two covered wagons. Isaiah, a little negro servant of the Venables, is found when they make camp the first night, hidden in a roll of carpet. The travelers find the darky youngster almost invaluable in his care and protection of Cimarron, the four-year-old son of the Cravats.

CHAPTER III—At Osage Yancey immediately begins trying to learn who had murdered a man named Pegler, who had been shot after the first edition of his paper, called the New Day, appeared in Osage. He had been too truthful in calling attention to conditions in the territory. Preparations for the publication of Yancey's paper, the Oklahoma Wigwam, are about completed Isaiah becomes a member of the Cravat household.

CHAPTER IV—Yancey is asked to conduct church services on Sunday and Arkansas Grat Gotch "loans" his gambling tent, which is packed, the novelty of a church service and a sermon by Yancey Cravat being impossible to resist.

CHAPTER V—Before he starts his sermon, Yancey announces he has learned who killed Jack Pegler. He stoops just in time to escape a bullet fired by Lon Yountis Still stooping, Yancey shoots and kills Yountis, then announces that Yountis had shot Pegler in the back Among the late arrivals at the tent services is a handsome young woman known as Dixie Lee, whom Yancey recognizes as the girl who tricked him out of his quarter section. With her are six highly rouged girls, whom she has brought with her to Osage.

CHAPTER VI—Sabra's second child, named Donna, is about three years old when she returns to Wichita for her first visit She finds she has grown away from family and relatives and is glad to get back to Osage.

CHAPTER VII—Yancey frustrates a bank robbery in Osage, killing the "Kid" and another desperado, and becoming a hero in the territory Sabra's energy and [illegible] win women readers for the paper Yancey, always eager for adventure, urges Sabra to join him in the [illegible] at the opening of the Cherokee strip She refuses He leaves her, and is gone five years

CHAPTER VIII Dixie Lee becomes a town [illegible] The wives and mothers of Osage are indignant Yancey is [illegible] through rumors, Sabra [illegible] paper successfully An Osage Indian girl Arita, becomes the mother of a son Isaiah is the father [illegible] the Osage Indians [illegible] with a negro, is a [illegible] Isaiah and Arita, with the [illegible] are kidnaped and tortured to death.

CHAPTER IX—The war with Spain begins Yancey [illegible] to Osage in a Rough Rider [illegible] Sabra, despite his [illegible] him He has been in Alaska he says The good women of Osage led by Sabra, combine to [illegible] of Dixie Lee Her trial as a [illegible] comes up on the [illegible] He defends her and she is acquitted. Yancey leaves to join his regiment.

CHAPTER X—Yancey returns from the war broken in health, but still a popular [illegible] the [illegible] prospers as the town "settles down" An Osage Indian girl Ruby [illegible] Elk, is Sabra's house servant [illegible] the Cravat's first [illegible] appears to Sabra's horror [illegible] interested in her.

CHAPTER XI—The girl, Donna at fifteen is sent to a New York "finishing" school. Sabra becomes the town's society leader Cimarron accompanies Ruby Big Elk to an Indian ceremony despite his mother's remonstrances Yancey, the wanderlust upon him, again leaves Osage That night Sabra, alarmed at Cimarron's absence seeks and finds him at the Indian ceremonial, having actually taken part in it. She brings him home

CHAPTER XII—The "oil boom" convulses Oklahoma Donna ultra sophisticated, comes home determined, she tells her astonished mother, to marry "the richest man in the state" Yancey returns, aroused by the news that oil has been struck on the Indian reservation, and determined to defend their rights. In the newspaper, though he antagonizes public sentiment Cimarron's open friendliness with the Indians stirs Donna to indignation

CHAPTER XIII—Big Elk, Osage Indian chief, and his wife, formally notify the Cravats of the marriage that morning of their daughter, Ruby, to Cimarron. The monstrous announcement staggers Sabra, though Yancey is unmoved. With her husband, Sabra attends the wedding festivities, though she feels that, for her, life is over. Tracy Wyatt, former truck driver, is easily the richest man in Oklahoma. Divorcing his wife, he marries Donna. Her ambition is fulfilled. For years, again, Sabra hears nothing from Yancey, who had disappeared soon after Cimarron's marriage Sabra is elected congresswoman, and Donna and her husband, and Cimarron's Indian wife, electrify Washington with their display of wealth.

CHAPTER XIV—With a congressional party, and some leading oil operators, Sabra is making a tour of investigation into conditions in the Oklahoma oil districts. At the town of Bowlegs she finds Yancey, outcast and bum, dying, a hero, with the last magnificent gesture of an empire builder, in the mud of the oil fields, but she is in time to be recognized by him and to close his eyes in forgiveness and love.

(Continued From Last Week)

Slowly, slowly, the life of the community, in the beginning so wild, so unrelated in its parts, began to weave in and out, warp and woof, to make a pattern. It was at first faint, almost undiscernible. But presently the eye could trace here a motif, there a figure, here a motif, there a figure. The shuttle swept back, forward, back, forward.

"It's almost time for the Jew." Sabra would say, looking up from her sewing. "I need some number forty sewing-machine needles."

And then perhaps next day, or the day after, Cim, playing in the yard, would see a familiar figure, bent almost double, gnomelike and grotesque, against the western sky. It was Sol Levy, the peddler, the Alsatian Jew.

Sabra would fold up her work, brush the threads from her apron; or if her hands were in the dough she would hastily mold and crimp her pie crust so as to be ready for his visit.

Sol Levy had come over an immigrant in the noisome bowels of some dreadful ship. His hair was blue-black and very thick, and his face was white in spite of the burning southwest sun. A black stubble of beard intensified this pallor. He had delicate blue-veined hands and narrow arched feet. He belonged in crowded places, in populous places, in the color and glow and swift drama of the bazaars. God knows how he had found his way to this vast wilderness. Perhaps in Chicago, or in Kansas City, or Omaha he had heard of this new country and the rush of thousands for its land. And he had bummed his way on foot. He had started to peddle with an oilcloth-covered pack on his back. Through the little hot western towns in summer. Through the bitter cold western towns in winter. They turned dogs on him. The children cried, "Jew! Jew!" He was only a boy, disguised with that stubble of beard. He would enter the yard of a farmhouse or a dwelling, in a town such as Osage. A wary eye on the dog. Nice Fido. Nice doggie. Down, down! Pins, sewing machine needles, rolls of gingham and calico, and last, craftily, his Hamburg lace. He brought news, too.

"The bridge is out below Gray Horse. . . . The Osages are having a powpow at Hominy. All night they kept me awake with their drums, those savages. . . . The Kid and his gang held up the Santa Fe near Wetoka and got thirty-five thousand dollars; but one of them will never hold up a train again. Shot in the head. Verdigris Bob by name. Would be a feather in that sheriff's cap, to catch the Kid! . . . A country! My forefathers should have lived to see me here!"

His beautiful, civilized face, mobile as an actor's, was at once expressive of despair and bitter amusement. His long slender hands were spread in a gesture of wondering resignation.

He sometimes talked to Dixie Lee. There existed between these two a strange relation of understanding and something resembling respect. Outcasts, both of them, he because of his race, she because of her calling. "A smart girl like you, what do you want in such a business?"

"A Smart Girl Like You, What Do You Want in Such a Business?"

"I've got to live, Solly. God knows why!"

"You come from a good family. You are young yet, you are smart. There are other ways."

"Y-e-e-s? I tried a couple of things. Nix, nix!"

In a year or two he opened a little store in Osage. It was, at first, only a wooden shack containing two or three rough pine tables on which his wares were spread. He was the town Jew. He was a person apart. Sometimes the cowboys deviled him; or the saloon loungers and professional bad men. They looked upon him as fair game. He thought of them as savages.

* * * * * * *

In the three and a half years of her residence in Osage Sabra had yielded hardly an inch. It was amazing. It was heroic. She had set herself certain standards, and those she had maintained in spite of almost overwhelming opposition. She had been bred on tradition. If she had yielded at all it was in minor matters and because to do so was expedient.

Once only in those three years had she gone back to Wichita. At the prospect of the journey she had been in a fever of anticipation for days. She had taken with her Cim and Donna. She was so proud of them, so intent on outfitting them with a wardrobe sufficiently splendid to set off their charms, that she neglected the matter of her own costuming and found herself arriving in Wichita with a trunk containing the very clothes with which she had departed from it almost four years earlier. Prominent among these was a green nun's veiling with pink ruchings. She had had little enough use for it in these past years.

The visit was not a success. The very things she had expected to enjoy fell, somehow, flat. She missed the pace, the exhilarating uncertainty of the Oklahoma life. The teacup conversation of her girlhood friends seemed to lack tang and meaning. Their existence was orderly, calm, accepted. For herself and the other women of Osage there was everything still to do. There lay a city, a country, a whole vast territory to be swept and garnished by an army of sunbonnets. Paradoxically enough, she was trying to implant in the red clay of Osage the very forms and institutions that now bored her in Wichita. Yet it was, perhaps, a very human trait. It was illustrated literally by the fact that she was, on her return, more thrilled to find that the scrawny elm, no larger than a baby's arm, which she had planted outside the doorway in Osage, actually had found some moisture for its thirsty roots, and was now feebly vernal, than she had been at sight of the cool glossy canopy of cedar, arbor vitae, sweet locust, and crepe myrtle that shaded the Kansas garden.

Then the children. The visiting Venables insisted on calling Cim by his full name—Cimarron. Sabra had heard it so rarely since the day of his birth that she now realized, for the first time, how foolish she had been to yield to Yancey's whim in the naming of the boy. Cimarron. Spanish; wild, or unruly. The boy had made such an obstreperous entrance into the world, and Yancey had shouted, in delight, "Look at him! See him kick with his feet and strike out with his fists! He's a wild one. Heh, Cimarron! Peceno Gitano."

Cimarron was almost eight now. If it is possible for a boy of eight to be romantic in aspect, Cimarron Cravat was that. His head was not large, like Yancey's, but long and fine, like Sabra's—a Venable head. His eyes were Sabra's, too, dark and large, but they had the ardent look of Yancey's gray ones, and he had Yancey's absurdly long and curling lashes, like a beautiful girl's.

His speech was strangely adult. This, perhaps, because of his close association with his elders in those first formative years in Osage. His skin was bronzed the color of his father's. He looked like a little patrician Spaniard or perhaps (the Venables thought privately) part Indian. Then, too, there had been few children of his age in the town's beginning. Sabra had been, at first, too suspicious of such as there were. He would, probably, have seemed a rather unpleasant and priggish little boy if his voice and manner had not been endowed miraculously with all the charm and magnetism that his father possessed in such disarming degree.

Even little Donna was not much of a success. The baby was an eerie little elf, as plain as the boy was handsome. She resembled her grandmother, Felice Venable, without a trace of that redoubtable matron's former beauty. All in all, Sabra found herself joyously returning to the barren burning country to which, four years earlier, she had gone in such dread and terror. She resented her mother's do-this, do-that. She saw Felice Venable now, no longer as a power, an authority in all matters of importance, but as a sallow old lady who tottered on heels that were too high and who, as she sat talking, pleated and unpleated with tremulous fingers the many ruffles of her white dimity wrapper. The matriarch had lost her crown. Sabra was matriarch now of her own little kingdom; and already she was planning to extend that realm beyond and beyond its present confines into who knows what vastness of demesne.

She had meant, at the last, to find occasion to inform her mother and the minor Venables that it was she who ironed Yancey's fine white linen shirts. But she was not a spiteful woman. And she reflected that this might be construed as a criticism of her husband.

So, gladly, eagerly, Sabra went back to the wilds she once had despised.

CHAPTER VII

Before the Katy pulled in at the Osage station (the railroad actually had been extended, true to Dixie Lee's prediction, from Waboo to Osage and beyond) Sabra's eyes were searching the glaring wooden platform Yancey was not there. The stark red-painted wooden station sat blistering in the sun. Yancey simply was not there. Not only that, the station platform usually graced by a score of vacuous faces and limp figures gathered to witness the exciting event of the Katy's daily arrival and departure, was bare.

Sabra felt sick and weak. Something was wrong. She left her boxes and bags and parcels on the platform. Half an hour before their arrival in Osage she had entrusted the children to the care of a fellow passenger while she had gone to the washroom to put on one of the new dresses made in Wichita and bearing the style cachet of Kansas City. She had anticipated the look in Yancey's gray eyes at sight of it. She had made the children spotless and threatened them with dire things if they sullied their splendor before their father should see them.

And now he was not there.

With Donna in her arms and Cim at her heels she peered in at the station window. Pat Leary was bent over his telegraph key. A smart tight little Irishman who had come to the territory with the railroad section crew when the Katy was being built. Station agent now, and studying law at night.

"Mr. Leary! Mr. Leary! Have you seen Yancey?" He looked up at her absently, his hand still on the key, then wiped his wet forehead with his forearm protected by the black sateen sleevelet. "Ain't you heard?"

"No," whispered Sabra, with stiff lips that seemed no part of her. Then, in a voice rising to a scream. "No! No! No! What? Is he dead?"

The Irishman came over to her then, as she crouched at the window. "Oh, no, ma'am Yancey's all right He ain't hurt to speak of. Just a nick in the arm—and left arm at that."

"Oh, my God!"

"Don't take on. You goin' to faint or—?"

"No, Tell me."

"I been so busy. . . . Yancey got the Kid, you know. Killed him. The whole town's gone crazy. Pitched battle right there on Pawhuska avenue in front of the bank, and bodies layin' around like a battlefield. I'm sending it out. I ain't got much time, but I'll give you an idea. Seems Yancey was out hunting up in the hills last Thursday—"

"Thursday! But that's the day the paper comes out."

"Well, the Wigwam ain't been so regular since you been away." She allowed that to pass without comment. "Up in the hills he stumbles on Doctor Valliant, drunk, but not so drunk he don't recognize Yancey. Well, he tells Yancey, drunk as he is, that he's right in the camp where the Kid and his gang is hiding out. One of them was hurt bad in that last Santa Fe hold-up at Cimarron. Like to died, only they sent for doc, and he came and saved him. They got close to thirty thousand that trick, and it kind of went to their heads. Valliant overheard them planning to ride in here to Osage, like today, and hold up the Citizens' National in broad daylight like the Kid always does. They was already started. Well, Yancey off on his horse to warn the town, and knows he's got to detour or he'll come on the gang and they'll smell a rat. Well, say, he actually did meet 'em. Came on 'em, accidental. The Kid sees him and grins that wolf grin of his and sings out, 'Yancey, you still runnin' that paper of yourn down at Osage?' Yancey says, 'Yes.' 'Well, say,' he says, 'how much is it?' Yancey says a dollar a year. The Kid reaches down and throws Yancey a shot sack with ten silver dollars in it. 'Send me the paper for ten years,' he says. 'Where to?' Yancey asks him. Well, say, the Kid laughs that wolf laugh of his again and he says, 'I never thought of that. I'll have to leave you know later.' Well, Yancey, looking as meek and mealy-mouthed as a baby, he rides his way, he's got a little book of poems in his hand and he's reading as he rides, or pretending to, but first chance he sees he cuts across the hills, puts his horse through the gullies and into the draws and across the scrub oaks like he was a circus horse or a centipede or something. He gets into Osage, dead tired and his horse in a lather, ten minutes before the Kid and his gang sweeps down Pawhuska avenue, their six-shooters barking like a regiment was coming, and makes a rush for the bank. But the town is expecting them. Say! Blood!"

"But the Town Is Expecting Them."

Sabra waited for no more. She turned. And as she turned she saw coming down the road in a cloud of dust a grotesque scarecrow, all shanks and teeth and rolling eyes. Black Isaiah.

"No'm, Miss Sabra, he ain't hurt—not what yo' rightly call hurt. No, ma'am. Jes'a nip in de arm, and he got it slung in a black silk hand'chief and looks right sma't handsome. They wouldn't let him alone noways. Ev'ybody in town they shakin' his hand caze he shoot the shot dat kill de Kid. An' you know what he do then, Miss Sabra? He kneel down an' he cry like a baby. . . . Le' me tote dis yere valise. Ah kin tote Miss Donna, too. My, she sho' growed!".

The newspaper office, the print shop, her parlor, her kitchen, her bedroom, were packed with men in boots, spurs, sombreros; men in overalls; women with children. Mrs. Wyatt was there—the Philomatheans as one woman were there; Dixie Lee, actually; everyone but—sinisterly—Louie Hefner.

(Continued Next Week)

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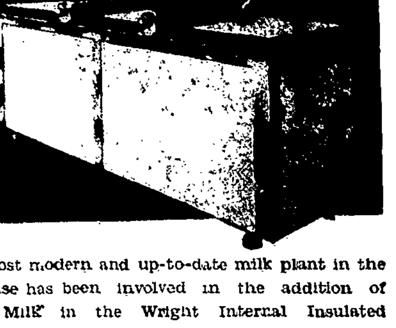

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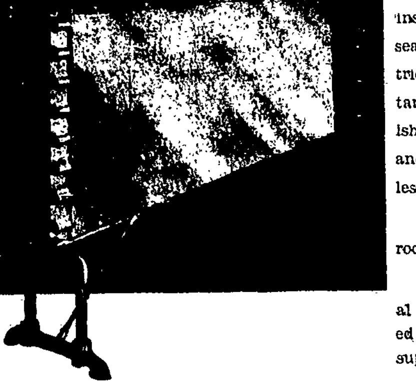

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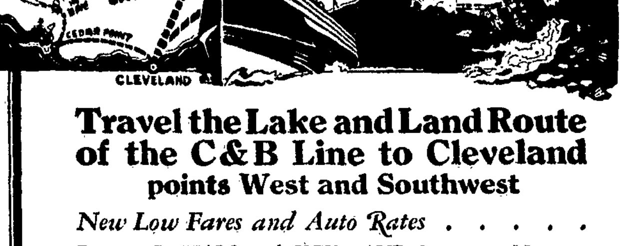

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