



Copyright by Edna Ferber

Illustrations by Irwin Myers

SYNOPSIS

In 1889, Yancey Cravat and his young wife, Sabra Venable, with their four-year-old son, Cimarron, start out as pioneers to the newly opened Oklahoma country, from Wichita, Kansas, where Cravat practiced law and edited the Wichita Wigwam. A typically picturesque figure of the West at that time, Yancey Cravat was a dashing cowboy, born orator, brilliant lawyer, whose past was shrouded in mystery, and who, gossiped said, had Indian blood in his veins. He revolts against the decadent aristocracy of his wife's family who bitterly oppose his taking the young and beautiful Sabra to the dangers and hardships of frontier life. Journeying in two covered wagons, they discover the first night out that the little negro servant, Isaiah, devoted to his mistress and the boy, determined not to be left behind is hidden in a roll of carpet. He helps his mistress search for the child who wanders out of sight while they camp on the way, and is found in the company of four strange men who are entertaining him. One of the men, a slim young cowboy, receives the distressed mother with easy grace, carrying her and the boy back to their camp on his horse, mounted before and behind him. When Yancey heard of the adventure, he suddenly decided to move on at once. Traveling in the cool night of the prairie, three horsemen, wearing the badges of U. S. marshals, heavily armed, stood in their path. The leader said "Howdy."

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY.

The three looked a little perturbed at this. They glanced at each other, then at Yancey, then away uncomfortably. "Oh, newspaper, huh?" There was little enthusiasm in the marshal's voice. "Well, we did have a newspaper there for a little while in Osage, 'bout a week."

"A daily?"

"A weekly."

There was something sinister in this. "What became of it?"

"Well, seems the editor—name of Pegler—died."

"Who killed him?"

A little shadow of pained surprise passed over the features of the marshal. "He was just found dead one morning on the banks of the Canadian. Bullet wounds. But bullets are all pretty much alike, out here. He might 'a' killed himself, plumb discouraged."

The silence fell again. Yancey broke it. "The first edition of the Oklahoma Wigwam will be off the press two weeks from tomorrow."

He gathered up the reins as though to end this chance meeting, however agreeable. "Well, gentlemen, good-evening. Glad to have met you."

The three did not budge. "What we stopped to ask you," said the spokesman, in his gentle drawl, "was, did you happen to glimpse four men anywhere on the road? They're nesting somewhere in here, the Kid and his gang. Stole four horses, robbed the bank at Red Fork, shot the cashier, and lit out for the prairie. Light complexioned, all of 'em. The Kid is a slim young fella, light hair, red handkerchief, soft spoken, and rides with gloves on. But then you know what he's like, Cravat, well's I do."

Yancey nodded in agreement. "Everybody's heard of the Kid. No, sir, I haven't seen him. Haven't seen anybody the last three days but a Kaw on a pony and a bunch of dirty Cheyennes in a wagon. Funny thing, I never yet knew a bad man who wasn't light complexioned—or, anyway, blue or gray eyes."

"Oh, say now!" protested the marshal, stroking his sandy mustache.

"Fact. You take the Kid, and the James boys, and Tom O'Phalldard, and the whole Mullins gang."

"How about yourself? You're pretty good with the gun, from all accounts. And black as a crow."

Yancey lifted his great head and the heavy lids that usually drooped over the gray eyes and looked at the marshal. "That's so," said the

sound of a piano hammered horribly. Horses clattered by. Voices came up in jocose greeting; there were conversations and arguments excruciatingly prolonged beneath her window.

Yet somehow she had fallen asleep in utter exhaustion, only to be awakened by pistol shots, a series of bloodcurdling yells, the crash and tinkle of broken glass. Then came screams of women, the sound of horses galloping. She lay there, cowering. Cim stirred in his bed, sighed deeply, slept again. She was too terrified to go to the window. Her shivering seemed to shake the bed. She wanted to waken the child for comfort, for company. She summoned courage to go to the window; peered fearfully out into the dim street below. Nothing. No one in the street. Yancey's bleeding body was not lying in the road; no masked men. Nothing again but the clink of glasses and plates; the tinny piano, the slap of cards.

She longed with unutterable longing, not for the sweet security of her bed back in Wichita—than seemed unreal now—but for those nights in the wagon on the prairie with no sound but the rustle of the scrub oaks, the occasional stamp of horses' hoofs on dry clay, the rippling fo a nearby stream.

It was midnight when Yancey came in. She sat up in bed in her high-necked, long-sleeved nightgown. Her eyes, in her white face, were two black holes burned in a piece of paper.

"What was it? What was it?"

"What was what? Why aren't you asleep, sugar?"

"Those shots. And the screaming. And the men hollering."

"Shots?" He was unstrapping his broad leather belt with its twin six-shooters whose menacing heads peered just above their holsters. He wore it always now. It came, in time, to represent for her a sinister symbol of all the terrors, all the perils that lay waiting for them in this new existence.

"Why, sugar, I don't recollect hearing any—Oh—that!" He threw back his great head and laughed. "That was just a cowboy, feeling high, shooting out the lights over in Strap Turkey's saloon. On his way home and having a little fun with the boys. Scare you, did it?"

He came over to her, put a hand on her shoulder. She shrugged away from him, furious. She pressed her hand frantically to her forehead. It was cold and wet. She was panting a little. "I won't bring my boy up in a town like this. I won't. I'm going back. I'm going back home, I tell you."

"Wait till morning, anyhow, won't you, honey?" he said, and took her in his arms.

Next morning was, somehow, magically, next morning, with the terrors of the night vanished quite. The sun was shining. For a moment Sabra had the illusion that she was again at home in her own bed at Wichita. Then she realized that this was because she had been awakened by a familiar sound. It was the sound of Isaiah's voice somewhere below in the dusty yard. He was polishing Yancey's boots, spitting on them industriously and singing as he rubbed. Sabra knew he was utterly happy.

There was the absurdly wide street—surely fifty feet wide—in this little one-street town. Here and there a straggling house or so branched, off it. But the life of Osage seemed to be concentrated just here. There were tents to be seen serving as dwellings. Houses and stores were built of unpainted wood. They looked as if they had been run up overnight, as indeed they had. Tied to the crude hitching posts driven well into the ground were all sorts of vehicles: buckboards, crazy carts, dilapidated wagons, mule drawn; here and there a top buggy covered with the dust of the prairie; and everywhere, lording it, those four-footed kings without which life in this remote place could not have been sustained—horses of every size and type and color and degree. Direct descendants, these, of the equine patricians who, almost four hundred years before, had been brought across the ocean by Coronado or Moscoso to the land of the Seven Cities of Gold.

Crude and ugly though the scene was that now spread itself before Sabra and Yancey, it still was not squalid. It had vitality. You sensed that behind those bare boards people were planning and stirring mightily. There was life in the feel of it. The very names tacked up over the store fronts had bite and sting. Sam Pack, Mott Bixler, Strap Buckner, Ike Hawes, Clint Hopper, Jim Click.

Though they had come to town but the night before, it seemed to her that a surprising number of people knew Yancey and greeted him as they passed down the street.

"Hare you, Yancey! Howdy, ma'am." Loungers in doorways stared at them curiously.

It struck Sabra suddenly with a little shock of discovery that the men really were doing nothing. She was to learn that many of them were not builders but scavengers. The indomitable old '9ers were no kin of these. They were, frequently, soft, cruel, furtive, and avaricious. They had gathered here to pick up what they could and move on. Some were cowmen, full of resentment against a government that had taken the free range away from them and given it over to the homesteaders. Deprived of their only occupation, many of these became outlaws. Equipped with six-shooters, a deadly aim, and horsemanship that amounted to the miraculous, they took to the Gyp hills or the Osage, swooping down from their hidden haunts to terrorize a town shoot up a bank, hold up a train, and dash out again, leaving blood behind them. They risked their lives for a few hundred dollars. Here was a vast domain without written laws, without precedent, without the customs of civilization; part of

Milton has no words for such beauty."

"Do hurry, dear. We've so much to do."

With his curling locks, his broad-brimmed white sombrero, his high-heeled boots, his fine white shirt, the ample skirts of his Prince Albert spreading and swooping with the vigor of his movements, Yancey was an equally striking figure, though perhaps not so unusual as she, in this day and place.

The first thing Sabra noticed, as she stepped into the dust of the street in her modish dress and hat, caused her heart to sing. The few women to be seen scuttling about wore sunbonnets and calico—the kind of garments in which Sabra had seen the women back home in Wichita hanging up the Monday wash to dry on the line in the back yard. Here they came out of butcher's shop or grocery store with the day's provisions in their arms; a packet of meat, tins of tomatoes or peaches, unwrapped. After sharp furtive glances at Sabra, they vanished into the little pine shack or that, immediately afterward there was great agitation among the prim coarse window curtains in those dwellings boasting such elegance.

"Hi Yancey! Howdy, ma'am." Past the Red Dog saloon. A group in chairs tilted up against the wall or standing about in high-heeled boots and sombreros greeted Yancey now with a familiarity that astonished Sabra. "Howdy, Cim! Hello, Yancey!"

"He called you Cim!"

He ignored her surprised remark. Narrowly he was watching them as he passed. "Boys are up to something. If they try to get funny while you're here with me—"

Sabra, glancing at the group from beneath her shielding hat brim, did see that they were behaving much like a lot of snickering schoolboys who are preparing to let fly a bombardment of snowballs, an air of secret mischief about.

"Why are they—what do you think makes them—" Sabra began, a trifle nervously.

"I can't say for sure. But I suspect they're the boys that did Pegler dirt."

"Pegler? Who is—oh, isn't that the man—the editor—the one who was found dead—shot dead on the banks of the—Yancey! Do you mean they did it?"

"I don't say they did it—exactly. They know more than is comfortable, even for these parts. I was inquiring around last night, and everybody shut up like a clam. I'm going to find out who killed Pegler and print it in the first number of the Oklahoma Wigwam."

Rachel was, she knew, out of the Bible; she was a little hazy about the Gracchi, but basked serenely in the knowledge that a compliment was intended.

There was the absurdly wide street—surely fifty feet wide—in this little one-street town. Here and there a straggling house or so branched, off it. But the life of Osage seemed to be concentrated just here. There were tents to be seen serving as dwellings. Houses and stores were built of unpainted wood. They looked as if they had been run up overnight, as indeed they had. Tied to the crude hitching posts driven well into the ground were all sorts of vehicles: buckboards, crazy carts, dilapidated wagons, mule drawn; here and there a top buggy covered with the dust of the prairie; and everywhere, lording it, those four-footed kings without which life in this remote place could not have been sustained—horses of every size and type and color and degree. Direct descendants, these, of the equine patricians who, almost four hundred years before, had been brought across the ocean by Coronado or Moscoso to the land of the Seven Cities of Gold.

Crude and ugly though the scene was that now spread itself before Sabra and Yancey, it still was not squalid. It had vitality. You sensed that behind those bare boards people were planning and stirring mightily. There was life in the feel of it. The very names tacked up over the store fronts had bite and sting. Sam Pack, Mott Bixler, Strap Buckner, Ike Hawes, Clint Hopper, Jim Click.

Though they had come to town but the night before, it seemed to her that a surprising number of people knew Yancey and greeted him as they passed down the street.

"Hare you, Yancey! Howdy, ma'am." Loungers in doorways stared at them curiously.

It struck Sabra suddenly with a little shock of discovery that the men really were doing nothing. She was to learn that many of them were not builders but scavengers. The indomitable old '9ers were no kin of these. They were, frequently, soft, cruel, furtive, and avaricious. They had gathered here to pick up what they could and move on. Some were cowmen, full of resentment against a government that had taken the free range away from them and given it over to the homesteaders. Deprived of their only occupation, many of these became outlaws. Equipped with six-shooters, a deadly aim, and horsemanship that amounted to the miraculous, they took to the Gyp hills or the Osage, swooping down from their hidden haunts to terrorize a town shoot up a bank, hold up a train, and dash out again, leaving blood behind them. They risked their lives for a few hundred dollars. Here was a vast domain without written laws, without precedent, without the customs of civilization; part of

a great country, yet no part of its government. Here a horse was more valuable than a human life. A horse-thief, caught, was summarily hanged to the nearest tree; the killer of a man often went free.

Down the street these two stepped in their finery, the man swaggering a little as a man should in a white sombrero and with a pretty woman on his arm; the woman looking about her interestingly, terrified at what she saw and determined not to show it. If two can be said to make a procession, then Yancey and Sabra Cravat formed quite a parade as they walked down Pawhuska avenue in the blaze of the morning sun. Certainly they seemed to be causing a stir. Lean rangers in buckboards turned to stare. Loungers in doorways nudged each other, yawning. Cowboys clattering by whooped a greeting. It was unreal, absurd, grotesque.

"Hi Yancey! Howdy, ma'am."

Past the Red Dog saloon. A group in chairs tilted up against the wall or standing about in high-heeled boots and sombreros greeted Yancey now with a familiarity that astonished Sabra. "Howdy, Cim! Hello, Yancey!"

"He called you Cim!"

He ignored her surprised remark. Narrowly he was watching them as he passed. "Boys are up to something. If they try to get funny while you're here with me—"

Sabra, glancing at the group from beneath her shielding hat brim, did see that they were behaving much like a lot of snickering schoolboys who are preparing to let fly a bombardment of snowballs, an air of secret mischief about.

"Why are they—what do you think makes them—" Sabra began, a trifle nervously.

"I can't say for sure. But I suspect they're the boys that did Pegler dirt."

"Pegler? Who is—oh, isn't that the man—the editor—the one who was found dead—shot dead on the banks of the—Yancey! Do you mean they did it?"

"I don't say they did it—exactly. They know more than is comfortable, even for these parts. I was inquiring around last night, and everybody shut up like a clam. I'm going to find out who killed Pegler and print it in the first number of the Oklahoma Wigwam."

Rachel was, she knew, out of the Bible; she was a little hazy about the Gracchi, but basked serenely in the knowledge that a compliment was intended.

There was the absurdly wide street—surely fifty feet wide—in this little one-street town. Here and there a straggling house or so branched, off it. But the life of Osage seemed to be concentrated just here. There were tents to be seen serving as dwellings. Houses and stores were built of unpainted wood. They looked as if they had been run up overnight, as indeed they had. Tied to the crude hitching posts driven well into the ground were all sorts of vehicles: buckboards, crazy carts, dilapidated wagons, mule drawn; here and there a top buggy covered with the dust of the prairie; and everywhere, lording it, those four-footed kings without which life in this remote place could not have been sustained—horses of every size and type and color and degree. Direct descendants, these, of the equine patricians who, almost four hundred years before, had been brought across the ocean by Coronado or Moscoso to the land of the Seven Cities of Gold.

Crude and ugly though the scene was that now spread itself before Sabra and Yancey, it still was not squalid. It had vitality. You sensed that behind those bare boards people were planning and stirring mightily. There was life in the feel of it. The very names tacked up over the store fronts had bite and sting. Sam Pack, Mott Bixler, Strap Buckner, Ike Hawes, Clint Hopper, Jim Click.

Though they had come to town but the night before, it seemed to her that a surprising number of people knew Yancey and greeted him as they passed down the street.

"Hare you, Yancey! Howdy, ma'am." Loungers in doorways stared at them curiously.

It struck Sabra suddenly with a little shock of discovery that the men really were doing nothing. She was to learn that many of them were not builders but scavengers. The indomitable old '9ers were no kin of these. They were, frequently, soft, cruel, furtive, and avaricious. They had gathered here to pick up what they could and move on. Some were cowmen, full of resentment against a government that had taken the free range away from them and given it over to the homesteaders. Deprived of their only occupation, many of these became outlaws. Equipped with six-shooters, a deadly aim, and horsemanship that amounted to the miraculous, they took to the Gyp hills or the Osage, swooping down from their hidden haunts to terrorize a town shoot up a bank, hold up a train, and dash out again, leaving blood behind them. They risked their lives for a few hundred dollars. Here was a vast domain without written laws, without precedent, without the customs of civilization; part of

a great country, yet no part of its government. Here a horse was more valuable than a human life. A horse-thief, caught, was summarily hanged to the nearest tree; the killer of a man often went free.

Down the street these two stepped in their finery, the man swaggering a little as a man should in a white sombrero and with a pretty woman on his arm; the woman looking about her interestingly, terrified at what she saw and determined not to show it. If two can be said to make a procession, then Yancey and Sabra Cravat formed quite a parade as they walked down Pawhuska avenue in the blaze of the morning sun. Certainly they seemed to be causing a stir. Lean rangers in buckboards turned to stare. Loungers in doorways nudged each other, yawning. Cowboys clattering by whooped a greeting. It was unreal, absurd, grotesque.

"Hi Yancey! Howdy, ma'am."

Past the Red Dog saloon. A group in chairs tilted up against the wall or standing about in high-heeled boots and sombreros greeted Yancey now with a familiarity that astonished Sabra. "Howdy, Cim! Hello, Yancey!"

"He called you Cim!"

He ignored her surprised remark. Narrowly he was watching them as he passed. "Boys are up to something. If they try to get funny while you're here with me—"

Sabra, glancing at the group from beneath her shielding hat brim, did see that they were behaving much like a lot of snickering schoolboys who are preparing to let fly a bombardment of snowballs, an air of secret mischief about.

"Why are they—what do you think makes them—" Sabra began, a trifle nervously.

"I can't say for sure. But I suspect they're the boys that did Pegler dirt."

"Pegler? Who is—oh, isn't that the man—the editor—the one who was found dead