



SYNOPSIS

In 1899, Yancey Cravat and his young wife, Sabra Noble, with their four-year-old son, Cimarron, and a negro servant, Isiah, start out as pioneers to the newly opened Oklahoma country, from Wichita, Kansas, where Cravat practiced law and edited the Wichita Wagon. A typically picturesque figure of the West at that time, Yancey Cravat was a fishing cowboy, born orphan, brilliant lawyer whose past was shrouded in mystery, and who, gossip said, had Indian blood in his veins. He reveals a just the blindest aristocracy of his pet's family who bitterly oppose his taking the young and beautiful Sabra to the dangers and hardships of frontier life. In two covered wagons they make the journey across the prairies through days of heat, with several adventurous encounters, to the month-old town of Osage. Sabra is shocked by the wild and lawless character of the town, and frightened by a pistol shot aimed at her husband the day after their arrival. Yancey begins trying to discover who murdered the last editor, named Pezler.

A combination newspaper plant, law office and dwelling is secured. Sabra bravely sets up housekeeping and assists Yancey in the publication of the Oklahoma Wagon. Sabra frantically pleads with Yancey to cease his determined efforts to find the murderer of Pezler for fear of a like fate for him.

Now go on with the story.

For one dreadful sickening second something closed with iron fingers around Sabra Cravat's heart and squeezed it, and it ceased to beat. White faced, her dark eyes searched her husband's face. Wichita whispers, Kansas slander. But that face was all exaltation, like the face of an evangelist, and as pure. His eyes were glowing. The iron fingers relaxed.

"But Pezler. The men who killed Pezler. Why are they so much worse?"

"Skunks. Dirty jackals hired by white-livered politicians."

"But why? Why?"

"Because Pezler had the same idea I have—that here's a chance to start clean, right from scratch. Live and let live. Clean politics instead of the skullduggery all around; a new way of living and of thinking, because we've had a chance to see how rotten and narrow and biased the other way has been. Here, everything's fresh. It's all to do, and we can do it. This's never been a chance like it in the world. We can make a model empire out of this Oklahoma country, with all the mistakes of the other pioneers to profit by. New England, and California, and the settlers of the Middle West—it got away from them, and they fell into the rut. Ugly politics, ugly towns, ugly buildings, ugly minds." He was off again, Sabra, all impatience, stopped him.

"But Pezler. What's that got to do with Pezler?" She hated the name. She hated the dead man who was stalking their new life and threatening to destroy it.

"I saw that one copy of his paper. He called it the New Day—poor devil. And in it he named names, and he outlined a policy and a belief something like—well—along the lines I've tried to explain to you. He accused the government of robbing the Indians. He accused the settlers of cheating them."

he rolled cigarettes in the cowboy fashion, with exquisite deftness.

Pete Pitelkin, famous Indian scout of a bygone day, had grown portly and flabby, now that the Indians were rotting on their reservations and there was no more work for him to do. He was a vast fellow, his height of six feet three now balanced by his bulk. Late in his hazardous career as a scout on the plains Pitelkin had been shot in the left heel by a poisoned Indian arrow. It was thought he would surely die. This failing, it was then thought he would lose that leg. But a combination of unlimited whiskey, a constitution made up of chilled steel, and a determination that those varmints should never kill him, somehow caused him not only to live but to keep the poison-ravaged leg clinging to his carcass. Stubbornly he had refused to have it amputated and by a miracle it had failed to send its poison through the rest of that iron frame. But the leg had withered and shrunk until now it was fully twelve inches shorter than the sound limb. He refused to use crutches or the clumsy mechanical devices of the day, and got about with astonishing speed and agility. When he stood on the sound leg he was, with his magnificent breadth of shoulders, a giant of six feet three. But occasionally the sound leg tired, and he would rest it by slumping for a moment on the other. He then became a runt of five feet high.

These two specimens of the Southwest it was that Yancey now approached, his step a saunter, his manner carefree, even bland. Almost imperceptibly the two seemed to stiffen, as though bracing themselves for action. In the old scout it evidenced itself in his sudden emergence from lounging cripple to statuesque giant. In the Spaniard you sensed, rather than saw, only a curiously rippling motion of the muscles beneath the smooth tawny skin, like a snake that glides before it really moves to go.

They stood, the three, wary, silent. Yancey balanced nimbly from shifting boot toe to high heel and back again.

Yancey put the eternal question—

"All right. Go back there. Go back to your trees and your churches and your sidewalks and your Sunday roast beef and your snug, dead-alive family. But not me! No, I'm staying here. And when I find the man who killed Pezler I'll face him with it, and I'll publish his name, and if he's alive by then I'll bring him to justice and I'll see him strung up on a tree. If I don't it'll be because I'm not alive myself."

"Oh, G-d!" whimpered Sabra, and sank a limp bundle of misery into his arms. But those arms were, suddenly, no haven, no shelter. He put her from him, gently, but with iron firmness, and walked out of the house, through the newspaper office, down the broad and sinister red road.

CHAPTER IV

Yancey put his question wherever he came upon a little group of three or four lounging on saloon or store porch or street corner. "How did Pezler come to die?" The effect of the question always was the same. One minute they were standing sociably, tossing, rolling, cigarette-smoking citizens at ease in their shirt sleeves. Yancey would stroll up with his light, graceful step, his white sash over his shoulder, his two bullet holes in his crown, his Prince Albert, his fine high-heeled boots. He would ask his question. As though by magic the group dispersed, faded, vanished.

Yancey strolled out into the glaring sunshine of Pawlonska avenue. Indians, Mexicans, cowboys, solid citizens lounged in whatever of shade could be found in the hot, dry, dusty street. On the corner stood Pete Pitelkin talking to the Spaniard, Estevan Miro. They were the gossips of the town, these two. This Yancey knew. News not only of the town, but of the Territory—not alone of the Territory but of the whole brilliant burning Southwest, from Texas through New Mexico into Arizona, sieved through this pair. Miro not only knew; he sold his knowledge. The Spaniard was very quiet, and his movements appeared slow because of their teline grace. Eternally

query less airy. Their faces relaxed in an expression resembling disappointment. It was as when gunfire fails to explode. The Spaniard shrugged his shoulders. A profane gesture intended on this occasion to convey to the beholder the utter innocence and uneventfulness of the daily existence led by Estevan Miro. Pete Pitelkin's eyes, in that ravaged face, were coals in an ash heap. It was not for him to be seen talking on the street corner with the man who was asking a fatal question—fatal not only to the asker but to the

one who should be foolhardy enough to answer it. He knew Yancey, admired him, wished him well. Yet there was little he dared say now before the reptilian Miro. Yancey continued conversationally: "I understand there's an element 'rarin' around town bragging that they're going to make Osage the terror of the Southwest, like Abilene and Dodge City in the old days; and the Cimarron. I'm interviewing citizens of note," continued Yancey, blandly, "on whether they think this town ought to be run on that principle or on a Socratic

one that the more modern element has in mind." He lifted his great head and turned his rare gaze full on the little Spaniard. His gray eyes, quizzical, mocking, met the black eyes, and the darker ones shifted. "Are you at all familiar with the works of Socrates—Socrates . . . who well inspir'd the oracle . . . pronounced wisest of men?"

some bewilderment, and a grain—the merest fleck—of something as nearly approaching contempt as was possible in him for a man whom he feared.

(Continued next week)

Robert Barwick, of Fort Barwell in Craven county, says his hogs paid him a profit of from 60 to 70 cents a bushel for all corn fed them.

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