

Cimarron

by Edna Ferber



Illustrations by Irwin Myers

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(Continued from last week)

Big Elk turned his great head, slowly, as though it moved on a mechanical pivot. He stared at his fat, round-faced wife. He uttered a brief command in his own tongue. The squaw smiled a little, strange, embarrassed smile, like a schoolgirl—it was less a smile than a contraction of the face, so rare in her race as to be more frightening than a scowl.

"Big Elk and me come take you back to Wazhazhe."

"What for?" cried Sabra, sharply.

"For o'clock big dinner, big dinner, your son want me come tell you. Want me know he marry, Ruby this morning."

She was silent again, smiling her foolish fixed smile.

"God Almighty!" said Yancey Cravat. He looked at Sabra, came over to her quickly, but she waved him away.

"Don't! I'm not going to—it's all right!" It was as though she shrunk from his touch. She stood there, staring at the two barbarian figures staring so stonily back at her with their dead black Indian eyes. It was at times like that that the Marcy in her stood her in good stead. She came of iron stock, fit to stand the fire. Only beneath her fine dark eyes you now suddenly saw a smudge of turpish brown, as though a dirty thumb had rubbed there; and a sagging of all the muscles of her face, so that she looked wretched, lined, old.

"Don't look like that, honey. Come. Sit down."

Again the groping wave of her hand. "I'm all right, I tell you. Come. We must go there."

Yancey came forward. He shook hands formally with Big Elk, with the Indian woman. Sabra, seeing him, suddenly realized that he was not displeased. She knew that no formal politeness would have prevented him from voicing his anger if this monstrous announcement had shattered him as it had her, so that her very vitals seemed to be withering within her.

"Sugar, shake hands with them, won't you?"

"No. No." She wet her dry lips a little with her tongue, like one in a fever. She turned, woodenly, and walked to the door, ignoring the Indians. Across the hall, slowly, like an old woman, down the porch steps, toward the shabby little car next to the big rich one. As she went she heard Yancey's voice as there an exultant note in it? at the telephone.

"Jesse! Take this. Get it in ready! Ex-Chief Big Elk, of the Osage nation, and Mrs. Big Elk, living at Wazhazhe, announce the marriage of their daughter, Ruby Big Elk, to Cimarron Cravat, son of—don't interrupt me—I'm in a hurry—son of Mr. and Mrs. Yancey Cravat of this city. The wedding was solemnized at the home of the bride's parents and was followed by an elaborate dinner made up of many Indian and American dishes, partaken of by the parents of the bride and the groom, many relatives and numerous friends of the young."

Sabra climbed heavily into the car and sat staring at the broad back of the car ahead of her. Chief Big Elk and his wife came out presently, unreal, bizarre in the brilliant noonday Oklahoma sun-shine, ushered by Yancey. He was being charming. They heaved their ponderous bulk into the big car. Yancey got in beside Sabra. She spoke to him once only.

"I think you are glad."

"This is Oklahoma. In a way it's what I wanted it to be when I came here twenty years ago. Cim's like your father, Lewis Venable. Weak stuff, but good stock. Ruby's pure Indian blood and a magnificent animal. It's hard on you now, my darling. But their children and their grandchildren are going to be such stuff as Americans are made of. You'll see."

"I hope I shall die before that day."

The shabby little middle-class car followed the one whirling ahead of them over the red clay Oklahoma roads. Eating the dust of the big car just

"Good," said Mrs. Big Elk, beside her, and pointed at the mass with one dusky maculate finger.

Sabra lifted her fork to her lips and swallowed a bit of it. It was delicious—spicy, rich, appetizing.

"Yes," she said, and thought, I am being wonderful. This is killing me. "Yes, it is very good. This meat—this stuffing—is it chop or ground through a grinder?"

The huge Indian woman beside her turned her expressionless gaze on Sabra. Ponderously she shook her head from side to side in negotiation.

"Now," she answered, politely.

The clatter of a fork dropped to the plate a clash among the cups and saucers. Sabra Cravat had fainted.

Osage, Oklahoma, was a city. Where, scarcely two decades ago, prairie and sky met the eye with here a buffalo wallow, there an Indian encampment, you now saw a twenty-story hotel; the Savoy-Bisby. The Italian head waiter bent from the waist and murmured in your ear his secret about the veal cutlets with mushrooms or the spaghetti Caruso do' jour. Sabra Cravat, congresswoman from Oklahoma, lunching in the Louis XVI room with the members of the Woman's State Republican committee, would say, looking up at him with those intelligent dark eyes, "I'll leave it to you, Nick. Only quickly. We haven't much time." Nicolo Mazarini would say yes, he understood. No one had much time in Osage, Oklahoma.

Twenty-five years earlier anybody who was anybody in Oklahoma had dilated to his or her eastern connections. Iowa, if necessary, was East.

They had been ashamed of the Run. Bragged about the splendors of the homes from which they had come.

Now it was considered the height of chic to be able to say that your parents had come through in a covered wagon. Grandparents were still rather rare in Oklahoma. As for the Run of '89—it was Osage's Mayflower. At the huge dinner given in Sabra Cravat's honor when she was elected congresswoman, and from which they tried to exclude Sol Levy over Sabra's vigorous (and triumphant) protest, the chairman of the committee on arrangements explained it all to Sol, patronizingly.

"You see, we're inviting only people who came to Oklahoma in the Run."

"Well, sure," said the former peddler, genially. "That's all right. I walked."

The Levy Mercantile company's building now occupied an entire square block and was fifteen stories high. In the huge plate-glass windows on Pawhuska avenue postured ladies waxen and coquettish, as on Fifth avenue.

The daughter of Mrs. Pat Leary (nee Crooke Nose) always caused quite a flutter when she came in, for accustomed though Osage was to money and the spending of it, the Leary's lavishness was something spectacular. Hand-made silk underwear, the slickest of cobweb French stockings, model hats dresses—well, in the matter of gowns it was no good trying to influence Maude Leary or her mother. They frankly wanted beads, spangles, and paillettes on a foundation of ermine color. The salaried men were polite and acquiescent, but they rocked an eyebrow at one mother. Squaw stuff. Now that little Cravat girl—Felice Cravat, Cimarron Cravat's daughter, was different. She insisted on plain, smart tailored things. Young though she was, she was Oklahoma state woman tennis champion. She always said she looked a freak in fluffly things—like a boy dressed up in girl's clothes. She had long, lean muscular arms and a surprising breadth of shoulder, was slim flanked and practically stomachless. She had a curious trick of holding her head down and looking up at you under her lashes and when she did that you forgot her boyishness, for lashes were like fern fronds, and her eyes, in her dark face, an astounding ocean gray. She was a good sport, too. She didn't seem to mind the fact that her mother, when she accompanied her, wore the blanket and was hatless, just like any poor Kay, instead of being one of the richest of the Osages. She was rather handsome for a squaw, in a big, insolent, slow-moving way. Felice Cravat, everyone agreed, was a chip of the old block, and by that they did not mean her father. They were thinking of Yancey Cravat—old Cimarron, her grandfather, who was now something of a legend in Osage and throughout Oklahoma. Young Cim and his Osage wife had had a second child—a boy—and they had called him Yancey; after the old boy. Young Yancey was a bewilderingly handsome mixture of a dozen types and forebears—Indian, Spanish, French, Southern Southwest. With that long narrow face, the dolichocephalic head, people said he looked like the king of Spain—without that dreadful

JUST HUMANS

By GENE CARR



"Why Are You Smoking That Paper?" "I'm Tryin' 'T'be a Lady!"

Haysburg jaw. Others said he was the image of his grandmother, Sabra Cravat. Still others contend that he was his Indian mother over again—insolent and all. A third would come along and say "You're crazy. He's old Yancey, born again. I guess you don't remember him. There, look that way I mean! The way he closes his eyes as if he were sleepy, and then when he does look at you straight you feel as if you'd been struck by lightning. They say he's so smart that the Osages believe he's one of their old gods come back to earth."

Mrs. Tracy Wyatt (she who had been Donna Cravat) had tried to adopt one of her brother's children, being herself childless, but Cim and his wife Ruby Big Elk had never consented to this. She was a case, that Donna Cravat Oklahoma was agreed about that. She could not away with things that any other woman would be shot for. When old Tracy Wyatt had divorced her wife to marry this girl local feeling had been very much against her. Every one had turned to the abandoned middle-aged wife with attentions and sympathy, but she had met their warmth and friendliness with such a stony indifference that they fell back in terror and finally came to believe stories of how she had deviled and nagged old Tracy all through their marriage. They actually came to feel that he had been justified in deserting her and taking to wife this young and fascinating girl. Certainly he seemed to take a new lease on life, but five inches around the waist line, played job, roamed something of his old drag-driving days, and made a great hit in London during the season when Donna was presented at court. Besides, there was no withstanding the Wyatt money. Even in a country blue of millionaires Tracy Wyatt's fortune was something to marvel about. The name of Wyatt seemed to be everywhere. As you rode in trains you saw of oil cars, thousands of them, and painted on them in letters of white, "Wyatt Oils." Moving through Oklahoma and the whole of the South you passed miles of Wyatt oil tanks, whole silent cities of landfills, like something grimly Egyptian, squatting, crouching like on the prairies.

As for the Wyatt house—it was not a house at all, but a combination of the palace of Versailles and the Grand Central station in New York. It occupied grounds about the size of the duchy of Luxembourg, and on the grounds, once barren plain, had been set great trees brought from England. A mile of avenue, planted in elms, led up to the mansion, and each elm, bought, transported, and stuck in the ground, had cost fifteen hundred dollars. There were rare plants, farms, forests, lakes, tennis courts, golf links, polo fields, race tracks, air-dromes, swimming pools. Whole paneled rooms had been brought from France. In the bathrooms were electric cabinets, and sunken tubs of rare marble. And shower baths glass enclosed. These bathrooms were the size of bedrooms, and the bedrooms the size of ballrooms, and the ball-rooms as big as an auditorium. There was an ice plant and cooling system that could chill the air of every room in the house, even on the hottest Oklahoma windy day. The kitchen range looked like a house in itself, and the kitchen looked like that of the Biltmore, only larger. When you entered the dining room you felt that here should be the solemn diplomats in gold braided singing world treaties and having their portraits painted doing it. Sixty gardeners manned the grounds. The house

"Looks like Ruby, don't you think?" Donna had said, when first she had shown it to her mother.

"No!" Sabra had replied, with enormous vigor. "Not at all! Your father."

"Well—maybe—a little."

"A little! You're crazy! Look at his eyes. His hands. Of course they're not as beautiful as your father's hands were—are..."

It had been five years since Sabra had heard news of her husband, Yancey Cravat. And now, for the first time, she felt that he was dead, though she had never admitted this. In spite of his years she had heard that Yancey had gone to France during the war. The American and the English armies had rejected him, so he had dyed his graying hair, lied about his age, thrown back his still magnificent shoulders, and somehow, by his eyes, his voice, his hands, or a combination of all these, had hypnotized them into taking him. An unofficial report had listed him among the missing after the carnage had ceased in the shambles that had been a wooded plateau called the Argonne.

"He isn't dead," Sabra had said almost calmly. "When Yancey Cravat dies he'll be on the front page, and the world will know it."

But a year had gone by.

The Oklahoma Wigwam now issued a morning as well as an afternoon edition and was known as the most powerful newspaper in the Southwest. When Sabra was in town she made a practice of driving down to the office at eleven every night, remaining there for an hour looking over the layout, reading the wet galley proof of the night's news lead, scanning the A. P. wires. Her entrance was in the nature of the passage of royalty, and when she came into the city room the staff all but saluted. True, she wasn't there very much, except in the summer, when congress was not in session.

The sight of a woman on the floor of the congressional house was still something of a novelty. Sentimental America had shrunk from the thought of women in active politics. Woman's place was in the home, and American womanhood was too exquisite a flower to be subjected to the harsh atmosphere of the assembly floor and the committee room.

Sabra stumped the state and developed a surprising gift of oratory.

Perhaps it was not altogether what she said that counted in her favor. Her appearance must have had something to do with it. A slim, straight, dignified woman, yet touchingly feminine. Her voice not loud, but clear. Her white hair was shingled and beautifully waved and beneath this her soft dark eyes took on an added depth and brilliance. Her eyebrows had remained black and thick, still further enhancing her finest feature. Her dress was always dark, becoming, smart, and her silhouette was the slim slippers with their cut steel buckles were those of a young girl. The aristocratic Murray feet and ankles.

In Washington she was quite a belle among the old boys in congress and even the senate. The

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