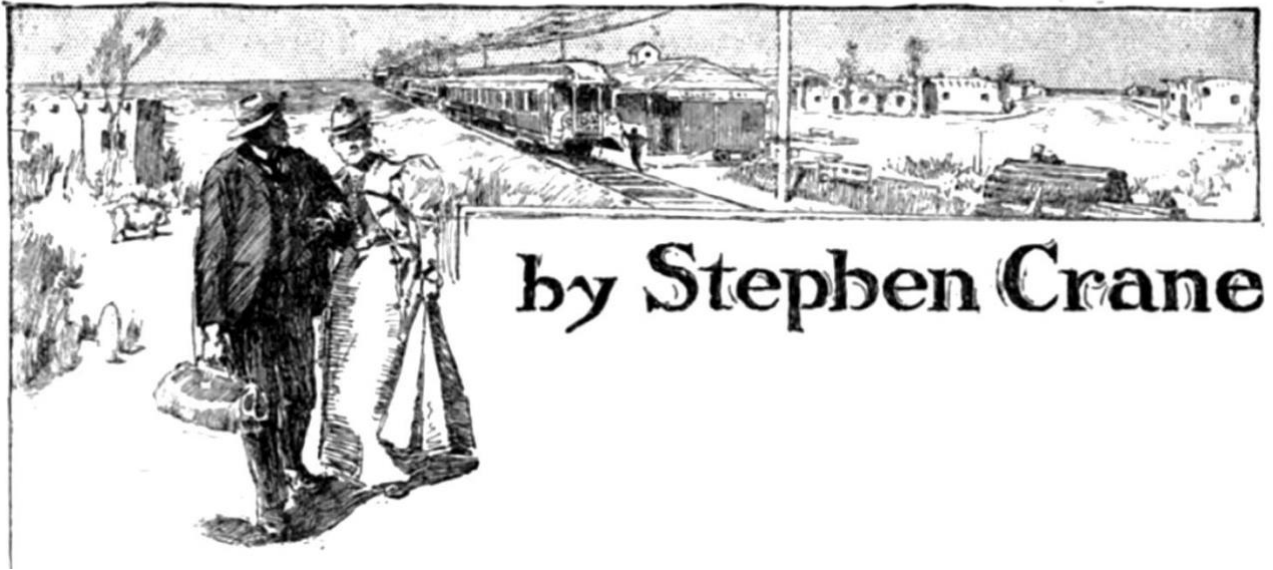


THE BRIDE COMES TO YELLOW SKY.



by Stephen Crane

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The great Pullman train drifted slowly across the vast Texas plain. It passed across flat land where only green grass and cactus grew. Small groups of wooden framed houses were the only sign of human habitation

At San Antonio a newly married couple boarded. The man's face was dressed in new black clothes but his face was red from many days in the wind and sun. He sat with a hand on each knee, like a man waiting in a barber's shop.

The bride was not pretty, nor was she very young. She wore a blue cashmere dress with silver buttons and puff sleeves. These were very stiff, straight, and high. They embarrassed her.

The other passengers in the Pullman carriage silently assessed place in the world. This was a woman who cooked and expected to cook for her new husband. She came from a different social world.

But the couple were evidently very happy. "Have you ever been in a parlour-car before?" he asked, smiling with delight.

"No," she answered. "I never was. It's lovely, isn't it?"

"Yes. And later we'll go to the dining-car and have the finest meal in the world. They charge a dollar"

"Really!" cried the bride. "Isn't that too much for us, Jack?"

"Not on this trip," he answered bravely. "It doesn't matter what it costs."



Later, he explained to her about the train. "It's one thousand miles from one end of Texas to the other. The train runs right across it but only stops four times."

He had the pride of an owner as he pointed out the luxurious fittings of their carriage. Her eyes opened wider as she contemplated the sea-green velvet, the shining brass, silver and glass. For the couple, this luxury reflected the glory of their marriage that morning in San Antonio.

"We are due in Yellow Sky at 3.42," he said, looking tenderly into her eyes.

"Oh, are we?" she said, taking from her pocket a little silver watch. This was present her husband had bought her. "It's seventeen minutes past twelve."

She looked up at him lovingly. A passenger observed this and winked at himself in in one of the many carriage mirrors.

The Rio Grande came into view. It was away to the left, miles down a long purple slope. The train was approaching it at an angle.

As they got closer to Yellow Sky, the husband became restless. His brick-red hands tapped his legs. He looked anxiously out of the window.

Jack Potter was the town marshal of Yellow Sky. He was a man known, liked, and feared in the town. But he had not informed anyone in Yellow Sky about his news. His community knew nothing about his new bride.

Of course, people in Yellow Sky married whoever they wished to. But Potter knew his marriage was important to the people of the town. He feared his friends might not forgive him.

The bride looked anxiously at him. "What's worrying you, Jack?"

He laughed again. "I'm not worrying, girl. I'm only thinking of Yellow Sky. We're nearly there," he said.

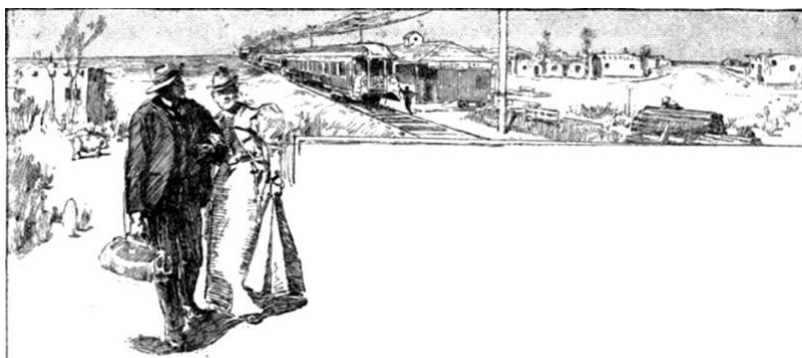
As the train pulled in, Potter was glad and astonished to see that the station was almost deserted.

"Come on, girl," said Potter, with a false laugh. He helped her down and took their bag from the porter.

Further up platform the station-agent was unloading two trunks.

Porter gripped his wife's arm firmly to his side, and they fled.

Behind them the porter stood chuckling.



The California Express on the Southern Railway was due at Yellow Sky in twenty-one minutes. There were six men at the bar of *The Weary Gentleman* saloon.

One was a drummer in a brass band. New to Yellow Sky, this drummer talked a lot.

Three were Texans. They did not care to talk at that time. Two were Mexican shepherds. They never spoke in *The Weary Gentleman* saloon.

The barkeeper's dog lay in front of the door, with his head on his paws. He glanced drowsily here and there. Across the sandy street were patches of bright green grass.

At the cooler end of the railway station, a man without a coat sat in a rocking chair and smoked his pipe. The Rio Grande circled near the town,

Away from *The Weary Gentleman*, Yellow Sky was dozing. In the saloon, the drummer stood at the bar telling stories.

Suddenly a young man appeared at the open door. He cried: "Scratchy Wilson's drunk. And he's carrying his guns."

The two Mexicans at once set down their glasses. They disappeared out of the rear entrance of the saloon. The drummer laughed and said: "Don't worry about that. Come in and have a drink!"

Then he looked around to see solemn and anxious faces. "Say," said he, mystified, "What is this?"

The young man at the door came into the saloon. "It means, my friend," he answered, "that for the next two hours this town won't be a health resort."

The barkeeper went to the door and locked and barred it. Reaching out of the window, he pulled in heavy wooden shutters and barred them.

"You don't mean there's going to be a gun-fight?" said the drummer

"Don't know whether there'll be a fight or not," answered one man grimly. "But there'll be some shooting."

The young man waved his hand. "Oh, there'll be a fight, if anyone wants it. Anybody can get a fight out there in the street. There's a fight just waiting."

The drummer was fascinated but fearful.

"What did you say his name was?" he asked.

"Scratchy Wilson," they answered in chorus.

"And will he kill anybody?"

There was a gloomy silence

"What are you going to do? Can he break in that door?"

"No, he can't break down that door," replied the barkeeper. "He's tried it three times. But when he comes you'd better lay down on the floor, stranger. He will shoot at it, and a bullet may come through."

From then on the drummer carefully watched the door. He also kept close to the door. "Will he kill anybody?" he said again.

The men laughed at the question.

"So what can we do?" asked the drummer.

A man responded: "It's Jack Potter Scratchy is looking for -- "

"But," in chorus, the other men interrupted, "Jack Potter's in San Antonio."

"Well, who is he? What's he got to do with it?"

"Oh, he's the town marshal. He goes out and fights Scratchy when he gets like this."

"Wow," said the drummer, wiping sweat from his brow. "Nice job he's got."

The men were whispering now. When the drummer tried to ask further questions they motioned him to remain silent.

In the deep shadows of the room the eyes of the men shone. They were listening for sounds from the street. One man made a gesture at the bar owner. The bar owner, moving like a ghost, handed him a glass and a bottle.

The man poured a full glass of whisky, and set down the bottle noiselessly. He gulped the whisky in a swallow. Then he turned again toward the door.

The drummer saw the barkeeper take a Winchester rifle from beneath the bar. The barkeeper then beckoned him to join him. The drummer tiptoed across the room.

"Come with me to back of the bar."

"No, thanks," said the drummer. Sweat rolled down his face. "I'd want to be where I can make a break for the back door."

The barkeeper shook his head. "It's safer to stay with me," he said. "Scratchy Wilson is a terror when he's drunk. When he's sober he's the nicest fellow in town. But when he's drunk--!"

There was another still silence. Then the barkeeper said "I wish Jack Potter was back from San Antonio. He shot Wilson up once -- in the leg -- "

A shot rang out in the distance. This was followed by three wild yowls.

The men in the darkened saloon looked at each other. There was a shuffling of feet. "Here he comes," they said.

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A man in a maroon shirt and red boots walked into the middle of the main street of Yellow Sky. In his hands were heavy black revolvers.

Scratchy Wilson's shouts and shrill cries echoed around the deserted town. His face was flushed with rage that came from whisky. His eyes scanned the doorways and windows, waiting for an ambush.

He walked with the creeping movement of the midnight cat. The only sounds were his terrible invitations. "Come out now! The time has come!"

Scratchy was calling to the sky. He bellowed and fumed and swayed. His revolvers swung in every direction.

The dog of the barkeeper of *The Weary Gentleman* saloon still lay dozing in front of his master's door. Laughing, the man paused and raised his revolver.

The dog sprang up and walked diagonally away, growling. The man yelled after him. The dog began to run.

A bullet hit the ground directly before the dog. Another shot rang out and the dog disappeared around the corner. The man stood laughing, his weapons at his hips.

Scratchy Wilson approached the closed door of *The Weary Gentleman* saloon. Hammering with a revolver, he shouted. "Open up! I want a drink

The door remained closed. Wilson picked up a bit of paper from the floor and nailed it to the framework with a knife. Turning his back on the bar he began walking to the opposite side of the street.

Suddenly he span on his heel quickly. He fired at the bit of paper and missed it by a few centimetres. Swearing to himself Scratchy Wilson fired more shots. The man was playing with this town. It was a toy for him.

Jack Potter! Scratchy staggered off to hunt down his old enemy. But when he reached his address another a locked door faced him.

Scratchy Wilson reloaded his revolvers. He began firing again.

4

POTTER and his bride walked quickly, their heads bent against a strong wind. They talked in low voices, laughing at a private joke together.

"Next corner, dear," he said finally. "We're nearly at our new home."

As they circled the corner, they came face to face with a man in the maroon shirt. Scratchy Wilson was pushing cartridges into a large revolver. Instantly dropping this gun to the ground, he pulled another from its holster.

The second weapon was aimed at the bridegroom's chest.

There was silence. Potter dropped the bag to the sand. The bride's face turned a strange snake-like yellow

The two men faced each, three paces apart. Scratchy smiled with a new and quiet ferocity. "Tried to sneak up on me," he said.



Potter made a slight movement. Wilson lifted his revolver. "Don't try anything, Jack Potter. Don't move an eyelash! You do what I tell you."

Potter looked at his enemy. "I'm not carrying a gun, Scratchy," he said. His thoughts were of the Pullman carriage: all that sea-green velvet, the shining brass, silver, and glass. His glorious marriage.

"I can't fight you this time, Scratchy Wilson. I ain't got a gun on me."

His enemy's face went red with fury. Wilson stepped forward, waving his weapon at Potter's chest. "Don't you lie to me. No man in Texas has ever seen you without a gun." His eyes blazed with light, and his throat worked like a pump.

"It's the truth, Scratchy," answered Potter. His heels had not moved an inch backward. "I don't have a gun. Shoot me if you're going to. You'll never get a chance like this again."

"Why ain't you got a gun?" Wilson sneered. "Been to Sunday-school?"

"I've just come from San Anton' with my wife," said Potter. "I'm married,"

"Married!" said Scratchy, not at all comprehending.

"Yes, married. I'm married," said Potter.

"Married?" said Scratchy.

Seemingly for the first time Wilson saw the woman at the other man's side. "No!" he said. He moved a pace backward, and his arm with the revolver dropped to his side. "Is this the lady?" he asked.

"Yes, this is the lady," answered Potter.

There was another period of silence.

"Well," said Wilson at last, slowly, "I suppose it's all off now."

"It's your decision, Scratchy. I ain't looking for trouble."

Potter lifted his suitcase. Wilson was looking at the ground. "'Married!' he said Scratchy Wilson picked up his revolver from the floor. Placing both weapons in their holsters, he went away. His feet made tracks in the heavy sand.