LAHOMA

BY

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE ELLIS

Copyright, 1913, by the Bobbs-Merrill Company.

CHAPTER VI.

A Young Man's Fancy.

"I WANT you to enjoy yourself," went on Brick, in reply to La Loma's query. "And when I'm old and ugly, I want you'd need somebody to take care of you, and you'd go full equipped and ready to stand up to any civilized person that tried to run a bluff on you."

"But, oh, I want to go—I want to go out there—where there ain't no plates and wheels and buffalo grass—where they's pavements and policemen and people in beautiful clothes. I don't mean now. I mean when I've got civilized." She drew herself up proudly. "I wouldn't go till I was civilized—till I was like them." She turned impulsively to Brick. "But you've got to go with me when I go! I'm going to stay with you till I'm fit to go, and then you're going to stay with me the rest of my life."

"Am I fit to go with her?" Brick appealed to Bill Atkins.

"You ain't," Bill replied.

"I ain't fit," Brick declared firmly. The tears were in Lahoma's eyes. She looked from one to the other, her little face deeply troubled. Suddenly she grabbed up her books and started toward the stove. "Then this here civilizing is going to stop!" she declared.

"Lahoma!" Brick cried in dismay.

"Yes, it is—unless you promise to stay with me when I go to live in the big world."

"Honey, I'll promise you this. When you are ready to live out there I'll sure go with you and stay with you—if you want me, when the time comes."

Lahoma seized his hand and jumped up and down in delight.

"It's a safe promise," remarked Bill Atkins dryly.

* * * * * * *

One evening in May a tall lithe figure crept along the southern base of the mountain range, following its curves with cautious feet as if fearful of discovery. He was a young man of twenty-one or two, bronzed, free of movement, agile of step. His face was firm, handsome and open. A few yards from Brick Willock's dugout low stood a neat log cabin, and not far from the door of this cabin were a girl of about fifteen seated on the grass.

She had been reading, her book had slipped to her feet. With hands clasped about her knee and head tilted back she was watching the lazy white clouds that stretched like wisps of scattered cotton across the blue field of the sky. The young man stretched himself where a block of granite and, below it, a cedar tree effectually protected him from discovery. Thus hidden he stared at the girl unblinkingly.

For two years he had led the life of a cowboy, exiled from his kind, going with the boys from lower Texas to Kansas along the Chisholm trail, overseeing great herds of cattle, caring for them day and night, scarcely ever under a roof, even that of a dugout. Through rain and storm the ground had been his bed. During these two years of hard life, reckless companions and exacting duties he had easily slipped into the grooves of speech and thought common to his fellows. Only his face, his unconscious movements and accents distinguished him from the other boys of "Old Man Walker," the boss of the G-Bar outfit. On no other condition but that of apparent assimilation could he have retained his place with Walker's ranchmen.

For two years he had seen no one like the girl of the cove.

That was wonderful hair, its brown tresses gleaming, though untouched by the sun, as if in it were entwined innumerable particles of light. The fact was more wonderful. There was the seal of innocence on the lips, the proof of fearlessness in the eyes, the touch of thought on the brow, the sign of purpose about the resolute little chin. The slender brown hands spoke of life in the open air, and the glow of the cheeks told of burning suns. Her form, her attitude, spoke not only of instinctive grace, but of a certain wildness in admirable harmony with the surrounding scene.

It seemed to him that in this young girl, who had the look and poise of a woman, he had found what hitherto he had vainly sought in the wilderness—the beauty and the charm of it, refined and separated from its sordidness and uncouthness—in a word, from all that was base and ugly.

At last he tore himself away, retraced his steps as cautiously as he had come and flung himself upon the horse left waiting at a sheltered nook far from the cove. As he sped over the plains toward the distant herd it came to him suddenly in a way not before experienced that it was May, that the air was balmy and fragrant and that the land, softly lighted in the clear twilight, was singularly beautiful. He seemed breathing the roses back home, which recalled another face, but not for long. The last time he had seen that eastern face the dew had lain on the early morning roses. How could a face so different make him think of them?

The G-Bar headquarters was on the western bank of what was then known as Red river, but was really the North fork of Red river. "Old Man Walker," who was scarcely past middle age, had built his corral on the margin of the plain which extended to that point in an unbroken level from a great distance and which, having reached that point, stopped without warning, a sheer precipice, to an extensive plain.

The young man reached the corral after a ride of twelve or fifteen miles, most of the distance through a country of difficult wood. He galloped up to the side entrance, surrounded by a cloud of dust through which his keen gray eyes discovered Mizzou on the eve of leaving camp. Mizzou was one of the men whose duty it was to ride the line all night—the line that the young man had guarded all day—to keep Walker's cattle from drifting.

"Come on, Mizz," called the young man as the other swung upon his broncho; "I'm going home with you."

The lean, leather covered, snuffy mustached, earthenman uttered words not meet for print, but expressive of hearty pleasure. "Ain't you had enough of it, Bill?" he added. "I'd think you'd want to lay up for tomorrow a mora—"

"Oh, I didn't sleep!" the young man declared as they rode away side by side. "I couldn't close an eye tonight, and I want to talk."

Mizzou was so called from his habit of attributing his most emphatic aphorisms to "his maul." Miss Sue of Missouri," a lady held to be his own paragon to be a purely fictitious character, a convenient "Mrs. Harris" to give weight to Mizzou's words emanating from centuries of use.

"I'll talk my head off!" Mizzou declared. "It won't keep you off the more with me."

"What I want you to talk about is that little girl you had on the hill down in Texas seven years ago."

Mizzou burst out in a hearty laugh. "I reckon it sure you better to take her as a little girl," he cried, his lean form shaking convulsively. "I'll never forget how you looked, Bill, when we tried to run a bluff on her daddy last month. Yes, 'Old Man Walker' never knowed what a proposition he was handling so when he rumored to drive the old mountain lion out of his lair. Pity you and me was at the tail end of the attacking party. First thing we knowed there other four Indians was falling backwards a getting out of range, trap of a cave, and the bullets was whizzing about our ears!—

He broke off to shout with laughter. "And it was all done by one old woman and his gal, shoot mounting out open and free with their breech loaders, and us falling out for camp like whipped curs!"

The young man was impatient, but he compelled himself to speak calmly. "As I never got around the spur of the mountain before you finished were in full retreat, I object to being classed with the whipped curs, and you'll best that in mind, Mizzou. You saw the girl all right, didn't you?"

"You bet I did, and as soon as I seen her I knowed it was the same big game across on the trail seven rainy nigs. Her daddy give it to us plain that if he ever catched one of us inside the cove he'd kill us like so many coyotes, and I reckon he would. Well, he's got as much right to his claim as anybody else. This land don't belong to anybody, and there has been mighty little considerable longer than we've had on this ranch. He was in the right of it, but what I admire was his being able to hold his rights. Lots of folks has rights but they ain't man enough to hold 'em. And if you could have seen that gal, her eyes like two big burning suns, and her mouth closed like a steel trap, and her hand as steady on that trigger as the mountain rock behind her! Lord, Bill, what a trembly, knock-kneed, mewling sort of a husband she's a-going to fasten to her hand, one of these days! Not pretty! None more so. And a-going all to waste out here in the desert!"

"And now about that child seven years ago," the young man said.

"Why, yes, me and the boys was bringing about 2000 head up to Abilene when we come on to this same pardner and another man walking the trail, with a little gal coming behind 'em on her pony. And it was this same gal. I reckon she was seven or eight year old then. Well, sir, I just thought as I looked at her that I never seen a prettier sight in this world, and I reckon I ain't, for which I looked at the same gal the other day the gun she was holding up to her eye sort of dazzled me so I couldn't take stock of all her good points. We went into camp that evening, and all of us got pretty soft and mellow, what from the unusualness of the meeting, and we asked the old codger if we could all come over to his camp and shake hands with the gal. He'd drawed back from us about a mile, he was that skeered to be sociable. So after considerable bagging and jawing he said we could, and here we come, just about sundown, all of us looking sheepish enough to be carved for mutton, but everlasting determined to take that gal by the paw."

"Well," said the young man who had often heard this story, but had never been treated to the sequel, "what happened then, Mizzou? You always stop at the same place. Didn't you shake hands with her?"

The other ruminated in deep silence for some time, then rejoined: "I don't know how it is. A fellow can talk about the worst devilment in creation with a free rein and no words hot enough to blister his tongue, but let him run up against something simple like that and the bottom of his lungs seems to fall out. I guess they ain't no more to be told. That was all there was to it, though I might add that the next day we come along by old Whisky Simeon's joint that sets out on the sand hills, you know, and we put spurs to our broncs and went whooping by, with old Whisky Sim a staring and a-hollering after us like he thought we was crazy. I don't know as I had missed a drunk before for five year when the materials was ready found for its making. And I ain't never forget the little kid with the brown hair and the eyes that seen to your bottom layer."

Darkness came on and the hour grew late, but few words were exchanged as they rode the weary miles that marked the limit of the range. The midnight luncheon beside a small fire over which the coffee steamed, roused something like cheerful conversation.

Few Words Were Exchanged as They Rode the Weary Miles.

which however, flickered and died unnoticing like the bonfire.

"Guess I'll leave you now," remarked the young man when the fire had died away.

"You better turn in, for you're most an common tired, you know," Mizzou replied tranquilly. "'Twould be just about as much company for me if you'd hike out and leave me your pleasure to carry along."

Instead of taking the direction toward the river the young man set out at a gallop for the distant mountain range, which in the gloom seemed not far away. After an hour's hard riding he reached it.

CHAPTER VII.

The Flag of Truce.

EARLIEST dawn found the young man seated composedly upon one of the flattened summits of the hill of stone that lay like an island between the outer plain and the sheltered cove. Both the dugout and the cabin of cedar logs within the cove were as silent and devoid of movement as the rocks behind them. The young man watched the cove, then the other, as tireless and vigilant as if he had not been awake for twenty-four hours.

It was the dugout that first started from its night's repose. The door was thrown away from the chinks and a great unmouth man, strung as a giant and wild of aspect as a savage, strode forth, gun in hand, his eyes sweeping the landscape in quick flashing glances. Almost instantly he discovered the figure perched on the granite block crossing his retreat. He raised his gun to his shoulder.

The young man fell sidewise behind the rocks, and a bullet chipped the edge of his barricade. Remaining supine, he fastened his handkerchief to the end of his whip and waved it above the rampart. Having thus manifested his peaceful intent, he rose, still holding the flag of truce above his head, and remained motionless. Brick Willock stared at him for a moment in hostile indecision, then strode forward. At the same time an old man, thin, tall and white haired, issued from the dugout, evidently attracted by the gunshot, and soon after the cabin door opened, and the girl of the cove looked out inquiringly.

In the meantime the young man slowly descended the hill to the oval valley, while Willock turned forward to meet him.

"Don't you come no fu'ther!" Willock commanded, threatening with his gun. "Keep your hands above your head until I can ship your cargo."

Obediently he stood while the great whiskered fellow took the weapons from his belt and dived into his hip pockets.

"That'll do. Now, what do you want?"

"It's hard to put it into a few words," the other complained. "I'd like to have a little talk with you."

"You are one of them fellows that come here to run us out of the country, ain't you? Are your pards outside there, waiting for a message?"

"Nobody knows I'm here or thought of coming. Let me put that affair in its true light. The boys are all under our boss, and when he lays down the law it isn't for us to argue with him. We carry out orders"—

"Unless there's a Brick Willock involved in them orders," returned the man, with a grim smile.

"But it's our duty to try to carry out the orders, whether we like 'em or not. So you won't hold that against me—that little scrimmage of last month, especially as you came out best man."

"I used to have a boss myself," Willock spoke uncompromisingly, "but when he give me certain orders one particular night last I rebelled I knocked him on the head and put out for other parts. I guess your boss knowed this wasn't his land, didn't he? What's going to become of this country when a man isn't satisfied with what is his n't? Well, now you've had a little talk with me you can just mosey along. I'll send your response after you by a messenger."

The young man cast a despairing glance toward the girl, who stood in her doorway gravely listening. The man with the husky white hair had drawn near, but evidently with no thought of interfering.

"Willock"—the voice came so suddenly, so impetuous, that the words were somewhat incoherent—"I've got to talk to your daughter. Hold on! don't shoot, listen! That's what I've come for, to see her and—and meet her and hear her voice. I can't help it, can I? It's been two long years since I left home back there and in all these two years I've never seen anything like your little girl. And—and what harm can it do? I say, have pity on a fellow, and do also the largest favor he could enjoy on this earth when it won't cost you a penny or a turn of your hand! I'm just as lonesome, as homesick, as dead killed by all these cruel hills and alkali beds and nothing to talk to from one year's end to the next but men and cattle."

Willock glared at him in silence, fingering the trigger thoughtfully.

"There I've sat on that hill," he continued, "since 2 o'clock last night waiting for daylight so I could ask you to help a miserable wretch that's just starving to death for the sound of a girl's voice and the sight of a girl's smile."

"It is studer lonesome," remarked the other gruffly. He lowered his gun and leaned on it irresolutely. "You've sure touched me in the right spot, son, for I knows all you mean and more that you ain't even ever dreamt of; but, you see, we don't know nothing about your name, your character, if you're got one, nor what you really intends."

"My name is Wilfred Compton. I—I have a letter or two in my pocket that I got a long time ago. They'll tell something about me, but I'd rather not show 'em, as they're private"—

"From your gal, I reckon?" asked Willock more mildly.

"Yes," he answered gloomily.

"Carried 'em as long as a year?"

"Nearly two years."

"Mean to still lug 'em around?"

"Of course I'm going to keep 'em."

"Well, I don't deny that's pretty favorable. Now look here, son. I've been half crazy from lonesomeness, and I don't believe I've got the heart to send you away. That gal of ours—she's just a kid, you understand. Now you wouldn't be taking up no idea that she was what you'd classify as a young lady or anything like that, eh?"

"Of course not. She's fifteen or sixteen, I should think. Upon my honor, Willock, any thought of sentiment or romance is a thousand miles from my mind."

"Yes; just so. But such thoughts travels powerful fast. Don't take 'em long to lap over a thousand mile."

"But it's because she is a young girl, fresh and unartificial as the mountain breeze, that I want to be with her for a little while—yes, got to know her, if I may."

Willock turned to the taciturn old man standing a little behind him. "Bill Atkins, what do you say?"

"I say fire him, and do it quick!" was the instant rejoinder, accompanied by threatening twitchings of the huge white mustache.

Willock was not convinced. "Son, if you sets here till we have had our breakfast and has held a caucus over you I'll bring you the verdict in about an hour. If you don't like that they's nothing to do but put out for your ranch."

"I so on duty at 7," replied the young man composedly, "but I have a friend riding the line that'll stay with it till I come. So I'll wait for your caucus."

"That friend—one of them devils I shot at the other day?"

Wilfred Compton smiled with sudden sunniness. "Yes."

Somewhere beneath the immense whiskers an answering smile slipped like a breeze, stirring the iron gray hair. "I kinder believe in you, son. Nobody can't gainsay that you've played the man in this matter. Now, just one thing more. You must swear here before me, with Bill Atkins for an unwilling witness, that should we let you make the acquaintance of our little gal and should you get to be friends, you two, that the very first minute it comes to you that she ain't no little gal, but is in the way of being food for love—Bill Atkins, sir I making myself plain?"

"You ain't," returned the old man sourly. "You're too complicated for ordinary use."

"Then you tell him what I mean."

The old man glared at Wilfred fiercely. "If we decide to grant your request, young man, swear on your honor that the second you find yourself thinking of our little girl as a woman, to be wooed and won, you'll put out and never stop till you're so far away you'll be clear out of her world. And not one word to her, not so much as one hint, mind you, as to the reason of your going. It'll just be goodby and farewell!"

"You see," Willock interpolated, "she is nothing but a little gal, and we don't want no foolish ideas to the contrary. You takes her for what she is, nothing took from nor added to. In course she'll be growed up some day, I reckon, though may the good Lord take a good long time finishing up the work he's began so noble. When she's growed up, when she's a woman, it isn't for us to say just you come and how you go, take from or add to. But while she's a kid it is different, according."

"You have my word of honor to all these conditions," Wilfred cried fervently. "As a child of the mountains I ask for her acquaintance. If I should ever feel differently about her I'll go away and stay away until she's a woman."

The two men went into the cabin. An hour later they emerged, almost parted by the door. Wilfred was still seated obediently on the rock.

"Come over here to the shade," Willock called as he strode toward a grassy bank that formed an open line of three cedar trees of interlocked branches. "Come over here and know her. This is our gal."

Lahoma looked at the young man with grave interest as he advanced, taking note of his garments and movements as she might have examined the skin and actions of some unknown animal. Bill Atkins also watched him but with suspicious eye.

"Set down," said Willock, sinking on the grass. "The last man up is the biggest fool in Texas."

Lahoma and Wilfred instantly dropped as if shot, as the same time breaking into laughter that caused Willock's beard to quiver sympathetically. Bill Atkins, sour and unresponsive, stood as stiffly erect as possible, aided to do so in this obstinate attitude by the natural inelasticity of age.

The young man exclaimed aloud, still smiling at the girl. "We're friends already because we've laughed together."

"Yes," cried Lahoma, "just fetch in in it too. That's best of all."

"I ain't in it!" cried Bill Atkins so fiercely that the young man was somewhat discomposed.

"Now, Bill," exclaimed the girl reprovingly, "sit right down and make the move."

"This is Miss Lahoma Willock," growled Bill, "and this"—waving at the young man disparagingly—"says he is Wilfred Compton. Know each other?"

"I am glad to know you," Lahoma declared frankly. "It's mighty lucky you came this way, for you see I just live here in the cove and never touch the big world. I believe you know a thousand things about the world that we ain't never dreamed of."

"That we have never dreamed of!" corrected Bill Atkins.

"That we have never dreamed of," resumed Lahoma meekly, "and that's what I would like to hear about. I'm just a little girl now, but when I am of age I'm going out into the big world, so that's why I'm so glad to know you, to use you like a kind of dictionary. Are you coming back here again?"

"I hope so!" he exclaimed fervently.

"And so do I. In my cabin I have a long list of things written down in my tablet that I'd like to know about—questions that come to me as I sit looking over the hill into the sky. Brick doesn't know and not even Bill Atkins. So that's why I'm glad to know you." Lahoma said gravely. "But why did you want to know me?" She fastened on him her innocent brown eyes, with red lips parted, awaiting the clearing up of this mystery.

Wilfred preserved a solemn countenance. "I've been awfully lonesome, Lahoma, for four two years, because up to that time I'd lived in a city with friends all about them and at end of any times, and these last two years I've been in the terrible desert. You are the first girl I've seen that reminded me of home. When I saw you and knew you were my kind the way you held yourself and the smile in your eyes"—

"Oh, is that it? But I want to ask you all about yourself," remarked Lahoma thoughtfully, "because I can see from your face and the way you talk that you're a real sample of the big world. If I tell you all about myself will you do the same?"

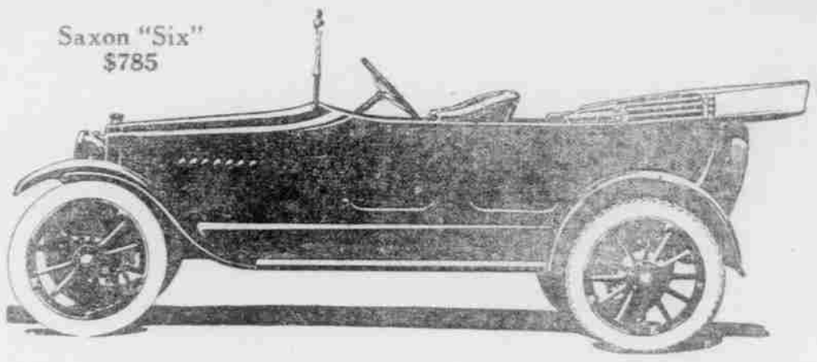
Wilfred promptly and Lahoma entered on the history of her childhood. Wilfred looked and listened joyously, conscious of the unusual action alive to the subtle charm of her fearless eyes, her unreserved confidences, the melting harmony of her musical tones.

To be sure, she was only a child, but he saw already the promise of the woman. The petals as yet were closed, but the faint sweet fragrance was already astir.

(Continued Next Saturday)

New Series Saxon Cars

Saxon "Six"
$785



New Features of Saxson "Six"

Two unit electric starting and lighting
Timken axles—Timken bearings throughout the chassis
Silent helical bevel gears
Linoleum covered running boards and floor boards
Roomier rear seat
Improved body finish
Garnish strip around top of body
—and 17 other detail improvements

These are the added features that place the New Series Saxon "Six" even farther ahead as the biggest touring car value ever produced. The New Series Saxon "Six" embodies the four big new ideas of motor car design: **high speed motor**, of wonderful power and flexibility; **light weight**, due to modern design and finest materials; **yacht line body**, the latest automobile fashion, increased **comfort for all five passengers**.

The two unit electric starting and lighting system is reliable, efficient and wonderfully quiet. The Timken axles with full Timken bearing equipment, front and rear, are of the same specifications as those used in higher priced cars. No automobile at any price has better axles than the New Series Saxons. Helical bevel gears are noiseless and frictionless.

The body improvements all help to make the "Six" even more satisfying to the critical buyer. The garnish strip around the top of body and the linoleum covered running boards are dressy and trim. The improved finish assures long lasting lustre. The widened rear seat makes the "Six" roomier and more comfortable than any car in its price class.

Other features of the New Series Saxon "Six" include six-cylinder high speed motor, 30-35 h. p., sliding gear transmission, demountable rims, canadian steel cantilever springs; 112 inch wheelbase; 32x4½ inch tires; non-skid in rear; one-man top. Why not take your demonstration today?

SAXON
Strength Economy Service

New Features of Roadster

Three speed transmission
Timken axles
New body—handsome, roomier
Improved high speed motor
Signal lamps at side
Ventilating windshield
Improved cantilever springs of vanadium steel
Adjustable pedals
—and 15 further refinements

These and a number of other detail refinements feature the New Series Saxon Roadster. They make it unquestionably the most inviting two-passenger car on the market.

Three speed transmission provides increased flexibility. Saxon is the only car in the world, selling for under $400, which has three speed transmission. The extra set of side lamps, the ventilating windshield and the adjustable pedals you will readily appreciate.

The Saxon high speed motor has from the first been one of the marvels of automobile design. Improved and refined it gives the Roadster amazing power and speed.

The New Series Saxon Roadster is the economy champion of motordom. It makes 30 miles on a gallon of gasoline—100 to 150 miles on a pint of oil—3000 to 4000 miles on a $7.00 tire. It costs only half a cent a mile to run. Come in today and see it.

Saxon Roadster $395

"Four" Roadster	$395	"Six" Touring Car	$785
With detachable Coupe top	455	With detachable Limousine top	935
Delivery Car	395	"Six" Roadster	785

JOHN DEE AUTO SALES CO

1612-14 Third Ave. Phone, R. I. 2336.

DIXON & MOELLER
Funeral Directors
Can be reached at all hours. Office 2030 Fourth avenue, in the Eagles' Home. Office phone, R. I. 380. Residence phones, 3250 and 818.

OLD MISSION BEER
EQUAL TO THE BEST IMPORTED
ROCK ISLAND BREWING CO.

AUTO EXPRESS
Baggage and light hauling. Prompt, fast service.
Phone R. I. 3743 or Residence R. I. 1871
226 Seventeenth St.
Rock Island