



LAHOMA

BY JOHN BRECKENRIDGE ELLIS

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PROLOGUE.

A story with the refreshing breath of the great outdoors is this. The romance and glamour of the wide, wide west of days past are reflected in every chapter. Lahoma, saved from a violent death by what is really a modern miracle, becomes a vital factor in the wild, rough lives of pioneers of the plains. Indian strategy and Indian loyalty to true friends play no small part in this interesting narrative. The story demonstrates above all else the facts that honest simplicity in character and thorough sincerity in dealing with one's fellow men are virtues certain to bring a merited reward. The rapid action of the novel and the vivid word painting of the characters in it will make it one of unusual attractiveness to discerning readers.

CHAPTER I.

The Touch of a Child. I HAVE given my word of honor, my sacred oath, not to betray what I have discovered here. At these words from the prisoner a shout arose in which oaths and mocking laughter mingled like the growling and snapping of hunner and dened wolves.

"Then if I must die," Gledware cried, his voice in its shrill excitement dominating the ferocious insults of the ruffians, "don't kill the child. You see she is asleep, and she's so young—only five. Even if she were awake she wouldn't know how to tell about this cabin. For God's sake don't kill the little girl!"

Since the seizure of Gledware the child had been lying on the rude table in the midst of a greasy pack of cards—cards that had been thrown down at the sound of his gasping horse. The table supported also much of the booty captured from the wagon train, while on the dirt floor beside it were prizes of the freighting expedition too large to find resting place on the boards. Nor was this all. Mingled with stolen garments, furs and boxes of provisions, purses and bags of gold were the Indian diseases in which the high-wagoner from No Man's Land had descended on the prairie schooners on their tedious journey from Abilene, Kan., toward the southwest.

"Shut up!" roared a tremendous voice. The speaker stepped forward. "You know I am something of an orator, or I guess you wouldn't of made me your leader. Now, as long as I'm your leader, I'm going to lead. But I ain't never unreasonable, and when talk is needed I'm cap'nous enough. I ain't called Red Kimball, and my brother, you see, he is known as 'Kansas Kimball.' What else is known of us is this—that we wasn't never wont to turn loose a spy when once kerched. Here is a man who says he is Henry Gledware, a though you know if that's so. He comes galloping up to the door just as we are in the midst of a game. I stakes all my share of the spoils on the game, and Brick Willock is in a fair way to win it. That I admit, but in comes this whirly spy."

The prisoner in a frenzied voice disclaimed any purpose of spying. That morning he had driven the last wagon of the train, containing his invalid wife and his stepdaughter, for the child lying on the table was his wife's daughter. At the alarm that the first wagon had been attacked by Indians he had turned about his horses and driven furiously over the prairie, he knew not whither. All that day he had fled, seeing no one, hearing no pursuing horseback. At night his wife, unable in her weak condition to sustain the terrible jolting, had expired. Taking nothing from the wagon but his saddle, he had mounted one of the horses with the child before him and had captained his flight, the terrific wind at his back.

"Well, pard," said the leader of the band, waiting until he had finished, "you can't never claim that you ain't been given your say, for I do admire free speech. I want to address you reasonable and make this plain and simple, as only a man that has been alleged to be something of an orator can accomplish. My men and me has had our conference, and it's decided that both of you has got to be shot and immediate. The reasons is none but what a sensible man must admit, and such I take you to be. I am sorry this has happened, and so is my men, and we wish you well. It's a hard saying, pard, but whatever your intentions as a spy you had proved. For what do you find on busting open our door? Here we sit playing with our booty for stakes and our Indian toes lying all about. You couldn't help knowing that we was the 'Indians' that gutted them

wagons and put up the fight that left every man and woman dead on the field except that there last wagon you are telling us about.

"You see, pard," Red Kimball went on, "you are losing sight of the point. Us fellows has been operating for some years, but whatever we do is blamed on the Indians. That there is a secret that would ruin our business if it got out. Tomorrow a king of white men will be degrading in the Washita country to get revenge for today's massacre."

Again Gledware protested that he would never betray the band.

"Oh, cut this short," interposed Kansas Kimball, with an oath. "Daylight will catch us and nothing done if we listen to that white livered spy. We don't believe in that wagon he talks about, and, as for this kid, he brought her along just to save his bacon."

"No, as God lives!" cried Gledware. "Can't you see she is dead for sleep? She was terrified out of her wits all day, and I've ridden with her all night. Don't kill her, men." He turned impassioned eyes on the leader.

"Ride, you are!" exclaimed the man with the ferocious whiskers—who he had been spoken of as Brick Willock—"You'll have to go, pard, but I'm against killing infants."

The leader darted an angry glance at the man who but for the untoward arrival of Gledware would have won from him his share of the booty. But his voice was smooth and pleasant as he resumed, "Yes, pard, the kid must die."

Brick Willock, with terrible oaths again expressed himself as strongly opposed to this decision.

"We've had enough of this!" Red declared, his voice suddenly grown hard and cold. "Kansas, take the prisoner Brick Willock, as you're so fond of the kid, you can carry her." He opened the door, and a rush of wind extinguished the candle.

Red went outside and waited till his brother had drawn forth the quivering man and Brick Willock had carried out the girl. Then he looked back into the room. "You fellows can stay in here," he said authoritatively. "What ye got to do ain't any easier with a lot of men standing about looking on."

Red closed the door on the scene and turned to face the night. Gledware had already been stationed with his face toward the moon, and Kansas Kimball was calmly examining his pistol. Between them and the horses Brick Willock had come to a halt, the little girl still sleeping in his powerful arms. Red scowled heavily. He had not forgiven Willock for beating him at cards, still less for his persistent opposition to his wishes, and he now resolved that it should be Willock's hand to deal the fatal blow. He had been troubled before tonight by inaudible on the part of this man of ardent wishes, this knave whose voice was ever for mercy, if mercy were possible.

As Kansas Kimball raised his weapon to fire the man before him uttered a cry of terror and began to retreat for his life. "Hold on, Kansas!" interposed Red. "There's not one of the bunch believes that story about the last wagon getting away, and the dying wife. We know this Gledware is a spy, whatever he says, and that he brought the kid along for protection. He knew if we got back to No Man's Land we couldn't be touched, not being under no jurisdiction, and he wanted to find us with our paint and feathers off. He's a sneaking dog, and a bullet's too good for him. But—with an oath—"blessed if he don't hate to die worse than any man ever I saw! I don't mind to spare him a few minutes if he's agreeable. I put it to him—would he rather die the kid be put out of the way first and him afterward, or does he want the first call?"

"For God's sake, put it off as long as you will!" quavered the prisoner. "I swear I'm no spy. I swear!"

The captain of the highwaymen interposed. "Just you say another word, and I'll put daylight into you with my own hand. Stand there and keep mum, and I'll give you a little breathing space. Now, Brick Willock," the leader spoke grimly, "take your turn first. That kid's got to die, and you are to do the trick and do it without any foolishness."

"I can't," Willock declared doggedly. "Oh, yes; yes, you can, Brick. You see, we can't tend to no infant class, and I ain't hard hearted enough to leave a five-year-old girl to die of hunger on the prairie, nor do I mean to take her to no town or stage station as a card for to be tracked by."

"Red," exclaimed Willock desperately, "I tell you fair, and I tell you foul, that this little one lives as long as I do."

Red swiftly raised his arm and fired point blank at Willock's head as it was defined above the sleeping form. Though fumed as an orator, Red understood very well that at times action is everything and there is death in long speaking. He was noted as a man who never missed his mark.

Now, however, his bullet had gone astray. The few words to which he had treated himself as an introduction to the intended deed had proved his undoing. They had been enough to warn Willock of what was coming, and before Red fired Willock had sent a bullet through the threatening wrist. The two detonations were almost simultaneous, and the roar of pain as he dropped his weapon rang out as an accompaniment to the crash of fire arms.

The next instant Willock with a second shot from his sixshooter stretched Kansas on the ground; then, rushing forward with reversed weapon, he brought the butt down on Red's head with such force as to deprive him of consciousness. So swift and deadly were his movements, so wild his appearance, as with long locks streaming in the wind and huge black whiskers hiding all but glittering eyes, aquiline nose and a brief space of tough red skin, so much more like a demon than a man, it was no wonder that the child, awakened by the firing, screamed with terror at finding her head pressed to his bosom.

"Come!" Willock called breathlessly to the prisoner who still stood with his back to the moon, as if horror at what he had just witnessed rendered him as helpless as he had been from sheer terror.

Henry Gledware, awakened as from a trance, bounded to his side. Willock helped him to mount, then placed the child on the saddle in front of him.

"Ride," he urged hoarsely, "ride for your life! They ain't no other chance for you and the kid, and they ain't no other chance for me!"

He leaped upon the second pony quick as a flash.

"Which way?" faltered Gledware, settling in the saddle and grasping the bridle, but without the other's practiced ease.

"Follow the moon. I'll ride against the wind. More chance for one of us if we ain't together. Start when I do."



Red Swiftly Raised His Gun.

for when they hear the horses they'll be out of that door like so many devils turned loose on us. Ride, pardner, ride, and save the kid for God's sake! Now off we go!"

He gave Gledware's pony a vicious cut with his lariat and drove the spurs into his own broncho. The thunder of hoofs as they plunged in different directions caused a sudden commotion within the isolated cabin. The door was flung open, and in the light that streamed forth Willock, looking back, saw forms rush out, gather about the prostrate form of the two brothers, move here and there in indecision, then by common impulse burst into a swinging run for the horses.

As for Gledware, he never once turned his face. Urging on his horse at utmost speed and clasping the child to his breast, he raced toward the light. The shadow of horse, man and child, at first long and black, lessened to a mere speck, then vanished with the rider beyond the circle of the level world.

Brick Willock, galloping toward the southwest, frequently looked back. He saw the desperadoes leap upon their horses, wheel about in short circles that brought the animals upright, then spring forward in pursuit. He heard the shouting, which, though far away, sounded the unmistakable accent of ungovernable fury.

The little girl and her stepfather had vanished from the smooth, open page of the Texas Panhandle, and Brick Willock rejoiced with a joy new to him that these escaped prisoners had not been pursued. It was himself that the band meant to subject to their savage vengeance and himself alone, as he well knew.

As their bullets pursued him Willock lay along the body of the broncho, feeling his steed very small and himself very large, and yet, despite the rain of lead, his pleasure over the escape of the child warmed his heart.

He had selected for himself and for Gledware poles that had often been cut against each other and which no others of all Red Kimball's crowd could surpass in speed. Gledware and the child were on the pony that Kimball had once staked against the swiftest animal the Indians could produce, and Willock rode the pride of the Indian

band, which had almost won the prize. The race was long, but always unequal. The ruffians, who had dashed from the scene of the cabin almost in an even line, scattered and straggled unevenly. Now only two were able to send bullets whistling about Willock's head; now only one found it possible to cover the distance. At last he fell out of range.

The child who had lain so trustfully upon Willock's wild bosom, who had clung to him as to a father—she was safe! An unwonted smile crept under the bristling beard of the fugitive, as he urged the pony forward in unremitting speed. Should he seek refuge among civilized communities his crimes would hang over his head. To venture into his old haunts in No Man's Land would be to expose his back to the assassin's knife, or his breast to ambush ed murderers.

These were desperate reflections, and the future seemed framed in solitude yet Brick Willock rode on with that odd smile about the grim lips. The smile was unlike him, but the whole affair was such an experience as had never entered his most daring fancy. Never before in his life had he held a child in his arms, still less had he felt the sweet embrace of peaceful slumber.

The sun had risen when the pony, after a few tottering steps, suddenly sank to earth. Willock unfastened the halter from its neck, tied it with the lariat about his waist, and without pause set out afoot.

Though stiff from long riding, the change of motion soon brought renewed vigor. Willock had grown thirsty and as the sun rose higher and beat down on him from an unclouded sky, his eyes searched the plains eagerly for some shelter that promised water. He did not look in vain. Against the horizon rose the low blue shapes of the Wichita mountains, looking at first like flat sheets of cardboard, cut out by a careless hand and set upright in the sand. He advanced, growing weaker, breathing with more difficulty, but still muttering, "Not yet—not just yet!"

The mountains had begun to spread apart. There were long ranges and short. Here and there a form that had seemed an integral part of some range, defined itself as distinct from all others, lying like an island of rock in a sea of unbroken desert. Willock was approaching the Wichita mountains from their southwestern extremity. As far as he could see in one direction the grotesque forms stretched in isolated chains or single groups; but in the other the end was reached, and beyond lay the unbroken waste of the Panhandle.

Swaying on his great legs as with the weakness of an infant, he was now very near the end of the system. A wall of granite sparsely dotted with green rose above him to a height of about 250 feet.

He sank to the ground, his eyes red and dimmed. For some time he remained there inert, staring, his brain refusing to work. It roared stood a white object between him and the mountain, a curious white something with wheels, might it not be a covered wagon? No; it was a mirage. But was it possible for a mirage to develop him into the fancy that a wagon stood only a few hundred feet away? Perhaps it was really a wagon. He started strongly, not moving. There were no dream horses to this ghost wagon. There was no sign of life. If captured by the Indians it would not have been left intact. But how came a wagon into this barren world?

He stared up at the sun as if to assure himself that he was awake, then laughed hoarsely, foolishly. He began to crawl forward, but the wagon did not move. As it grew plainer in all its details a new strength came to him. He strove to rise and, after several attempts, succeeded. He staggered forward till his hands grasped one of the wheels. It was no dream.

A searching look distinguished two objects that excluded from attention all others. Upon a mattress at the rear of the wagon lay a woman, her face covered by a cloth, and near the front seat stood a keg of water. The rigid form of the woman and the position of the arms and hands showed that she was dead.

The man recognized this truth, but it made only a dim impression. That keg of water meant life—and life was a thousandfold more to him than death. He drew himself upon the seat, snatched at the tin cup beside the keg and bowled out the cloth covered corner of the wagon. Having slaked his thirst there was mingled with his sense of ineffable content an overwhelming desire for sleep. He dropped on the second mattress, on which bedclothes were carelessly strewn. His head found the empty pillow that lay indented as it had been left by some vanished sleeper. As his eyelids closed he fell sound asleep. But for the ringing and falling of his powerful breast he was motionless as the body of the woman.

On the domelike summit of Mount Welsh, a mile away, a mountain lion showed his sinuous form against the sky 700 feet in air, and from the mountain side near at hand stared from among the thick groenery of a cedar the face of an Indian whose black hair was adorned by a single red feather.

When Willock started up from the mattress in the covered wagon the sun had set. Every object, however, was clearly defined in the first glow of the long August twilight, and it needed but a glance to recall the events that had brought him to seek shelter and slumber beside the dead woman. He felt an overpowering desire to look on her face. For years there had been no women in his world but the abandoned creatures who sought shelter in the resorts of Beer City, in No Man's Land.

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TAX COMMISSION'S WORK.

The sum total of the work of the tax commission in its recent long and laborious session, is now before the people for their information and discussion.

With limited powers under an inefficient law, with a woefully inadequate appropriation of money to do the vast work required to equalize assessments, to justify fair assessments where assessments are not, and to put tax property on the rolls; under such conditions, the state tax commission has performed the greatest work ever done by any official board in New Mexico. And there is no distinction as to merit among the members of the commission. It was a great piece of team work, and it richly deserves the commendation of the people of the state.

A study of the figures shows some things worthy of note. For example: among the amounts of property found not on the tax rolls of the various counties, Rio Arriba stands highest with a total of \$685,168.50, Valencia county next with a total of \$632,143.00, and Colfax a close third with a total of \$546,880.80. None of the other counties came anywhere near this amount of tax dodging property. Socorro being next with a total of \$352,381.30, and San Miguel with \$334,614.50.

Great assessors they have in those three counties, that could miss over half a million dollars of property in each one! Thank the gods, they are not democrats, or we never would hear the last of it. And then too, the assessors of Socorro and San Miguel are not democrats nor are the assessors of Guadalupe, Mora, Otero, Taos, and other counties, that are comparatively high on the list. And further; none of the democratic counties reached \$100,000 of tax-dodging property, except Eddy with a total of \$139,930, and the average of all these counties is less than \$60,000, while the average of the republican counties is approximately \$275,000. A study of the tabulation, which we publish elsewhere, shows it to be decidedly favorable to the democratic counties in this and other respects.

But the sum total of tax-dodging property put on the rolls, \$4,324,199.68, is a mere drop in the bucket compared with what ought to be there. With its limited means, it is rather surprising the commission found so much.

The showing is also quite creditable to Commissioner Garcia, of Rio Arriba county. It is natural that a commissioner should know more of the property in his home county, and Mr. Garcia seems to have used his knowledge to good effect. But there will still be a handsome deficiency in revenue.—Santa Fe Eagle.

NEWS BRIEFS.

Denver, Oct. 4.—A governor's session is planned to tonight at the farm congress at which Governor George A. Carlson, of Colorado, is to preside. Governors Capper, of Kansas; Morehead, of Nebraska; Kendrick, of Wyoming; McDonald, of New Mexico; Byron, of South Dakota, and Alexander of Idaho, are expected to make addresses.

Pueblo, Colo., Oct. 4.—State Bank Commissioner Drach today appointed George H. Sweeney, of this city, as permanent receiver for the defunct International Bank of Commerce.

Washington, Oct. 4.—Ambassador Morgenthau, at Constantinople, was instructed by cable today to inform the Turkish minister of foreign affairs that public sentiment in the United States was so stirred by the reports of the Armenian massacres that unless the massacres ceased friendly relations between the American people and the people of Turkey would be threatened.

Lansford, Pa., Oct. 4.—The six men and three boys who were rescued yesterday after having been imprisoned for more than six days in the Coal-dale mine of the Lehigh Coal & Navigation Co., were in good condition today and all are expected to be able to go to their homes in a few days.

London, Oct. 4.—Two powerful squadrons are reported to have appeared off the Bulgarian coast, near Varna, on the Black sea.

Boston, Oct. 4.—Nicholas Flintley, of the Boston Herald, was selected as the official scorer for Boston in the coming world's series by the Baseball Writers' association, of this city today.

If you MUST swear, call at the Current office and do it legally. Notary always in.