

The Ranch at the Wolverine

A Story of Love and Adventure on Idaho's Plains

By B. M. BOWER

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CHARLIE FOX ARRIVES AT THE COVE AND HELPS MARTHY RUN THE PLACE—HE SOON DISCOVERS EVIDENCE OF CATTLE THEFT.

Synopsis.—Marthy and Jase Melike, pioneers, have for twenty years made a bare living out of their ranch at the Cove on Wolverine creek in the mountain range country of Idaho. Their neighbors, the MacDonalds, living several miles away, have a daughter, Billy Louise, now about nineteen years old, whom Marthy has secretly helped to educate. At the time the story opens Billy Louise is spending the afternoon with Marthy. A snowstorm comes up, and on her way home the girl meets an interesting stranger, who is invited to stay overnight at the MacDonald ranch. Ward Warren and Billy Louise become firm friends. Jase dies and Marthy buries his body without aid.

CHAPTER III—Continued.

"You saw mommie, of course. You came from home?"

"No, I did not. I got as far as the creek and saw Blue's tracks coming down, so I just sort of trailed along, seeing if I was mommie's daughter I felt most like talking to."

"Mommie's daughter" laughed a little and insignificantly made a change in the subject.

"I've got to go in and wash the dishes," she said, stepping back from him. "Of course nothing was done in the cabin, and I've been doing a little housecleaning. I guess the dishwasher is hot by this time—if it hasn't all boiled away."

Ward, as a matter of course, tied his horse to the fence and went into the cabin with her. He also asked her to take him to a dish towel, which she did after a good deal of rummaging. He stood with his hat on the back of his head, a cigarette between his lips, and wiped the dishes with much apparent enjoyment. He objected strongly to Billy Louise's assertion that she meant to scrub the floor, but when he found her quite obdurate he changed his method without in the least degree yielding his point, though for diplomatic reasons he appeared to yield.

He carried water from the creek and filled the teakettle, the big iron pot and both pails. Then, when Billy Louise had turned her back, upon him while she looked in a dark corner for the mop, he suddenly seized her under the arms and lifted her upon the table, and before she had finished her astonished gaspings he caught up a pail of water and sloshed it upon the floor under her. Then he grinned in his triumph.

Billy Louise gave a squeal of consternation and then sat absolutely still, staring round eyed through the doorway. Ward stepped back—even his composure was slightly jarred—and twisted his lips amusedly.

"Hello," he said after a few blank seconds. "You missed some of it, didn't you?" His tone was mildly commiserating. "Will you come in?"

"N-o-o, thank you, I don't believe I will." The speaker looked in, however, saw Billy Louise perched upon the table and took off his hat. He was well plastered with dirty water that ran down and left streaks of mud behind. "I must have got off the road," he said. "I'm looking for Jason Melike's ranch."

Billy Louise tucked her feet farther under her skirts and continued to stare dumbly. Ward, glancing at her from the corner of his eyes, stepped consid-



Caught Up a Pail of Water and Sloshed It on the Floor.

ately between her and the stranger that his broad shoulders quite hid her from the man's curious stare.

"You've struck the right place," he said calmly. "This is it." He picked up another pail of water and sloshed it on the wet floor to rinse off the mud. "Is—ah—Mrs. Melike in?" One could not accuse the young man of cringing, but he certainly did try to get another glimpse of the person on the table and fled because of Ward.

"She's down in the meadow," Billy Louise murmured.

"She's down in the meadow," Ward pointed to the bespattered young man, who just got down past the stable and

been up the gorge nor had any one come to the ranch while I was gone. So you see, Miss Louise, here's a very pretty mystery."

"You think they were driven off, don't you?" Billy Louise asked a question with the words and made a statement of it with her tone, which was a trick of hers.

Charlie Fox shook his head, but his eyes did not complete the denial. "Miss Louise, I'd work every other theory to death before I'd admit that possibility. I very well know all of my neighbors so very well, but I should hesitate a long, long time—"

"It needn't have been a neighbor. There are lots of strange men passing through the country. Did you look for tracks?"

"I did not. I didn't want to admit that possibility. I decline to admit it now." The chin of Charlie Fox squared perceptibly, so that Billy Louise caught a faint resemblance to Marthy in his face. "I saw a man accused of a theft once," he said. "The evidence was—or seemed—absolutely unassailable. And afterward he was exonerated completely. It was just a horrible mistake. But he left school under a cloud. His life was ruined by the blunder. I'd have to know absolutely before I'd accuse any one of stealing those calves, Miss Louise. I'd have to see them in a man's corral, with his brand on them—I believe that's the way it's done out here—and even then—"

"Where have you looked?" There were reasons why this particular subject was painful to Billy Louise. "And are you sure they didn't get out of that pasture and wander on down the Cove, among all those willows? It's a perfect jungle away down. Are you sure they aren't with the rest of the cattle? I don't see how they could leave the Cove unless they were driven out."

"Yes, I thought of that—strange as it may seem," Charlie's voice was unoffended. On the contrary, he seemed glad that she took so keen an interest in his affairs. "It has been a week, you know, since they flew the coop. I did hunt every foot of that Cove twice over. I drove every hoof of stock up and corralled them and made sure these four were not in the herd. Then I hunted through every inch of that willow jungle and all along the bluff and the river. Miss Louise, I put in three days at it, from sunrise till it was too dark to see. Then I began riding out there. There isn't a trace of them anywhere. I had just bought them from Seabeck, you know. I drove them home, and because they were tired, and so was I, I just left them in that upper meadow as I came down the gorge. I hadn't branded them yet. I— I know I've made an awful botch of the thing, Miss Louise," he confessed, turning toward her with an honest distress and a self-deprecating humility in his eyes that wiped from Billy Louise's mind any incipient tendency toward contempt. "But you see I'm green at this ranch game. And I never dreamed those calves weren't perfectly safe in there. The fence was new and strong, and the bars are absolutely bars to any stock larger than a rabbit."

"I hate to bother you with this, and I don't want you to think I have come whining for sympathy," he said after a minute of moody silence. "But, seeing they were not branded yet—with our brand—I thought perhaps you had run across them and paid no attention, thinking they belonged to Seabeck."

Billy Louise smiled a little to herself. If he had not been quite so "green at the ranch game" he would have mentioned brands at first as the most important point instead of tacking on the information casually after ten minutes of other less vital details.

"Were they vented?" she asked, suppressing the smile so that it was merely a twitch of the lips which might mean anything.

"—Yes, I think they were. That's what you call it when the former owner puts his brand in a different place to show that his ownership has ceased, isn't it? Seabeck puts his brand upside down."

"I know Seabeck's vent," Billy Louise cut in. There was no need of letting such a fine fellow display more ignorance on the subject. "And I should have noticed it if I had seen four calves vented fresh and not rebranded. Why in the world didn't you stick your brand on at the same time?" Billy Louise was losing patience with his greenness.

"I didn't have my branding iron with me," Charlie answered humbly. "I have done that before, when I bought those other cows and calves. I—"

"You'd better pack your iron next time," she retorted. "If you can't get a little bunch of calves ten miles without losing them—"

"But you must understand I did. I took them home and turned them into the Cove. I know—I'm an awful chump at this."

"The calves may not be absolutely lost, you know. Why, I lost a big steer last spring and never found him till I was going to sell a few head. Then he turned up, the biggest and fattest one in the bunch. You can't tell. They get themselves in queer places sometimes. I'll come over tomorrow if I can and take a look at that pasture

CHAPTER IV.

The Mystery of the Missing.

WHEN Charlie Fox rode down to the Wolverine a month or so later, tied his horse under the shed and came up to the cabin as though he knew of no better place in all the world; when he greeted "mommie" as though she were something precious in his sight and talked with her about the things she was most interested in and actually made her feel as if he were immensely interested also, Billy Louise simply could not help admiring him and liking him for his frank good nature and his kindness. She had never before met a man just like Charlie Fox, though she had known many who were what Ward once called "parlor broke."

It was not until Charlie was going that he gave Billy Louise a hint that his errand was not yet accomplished. She walked down with him to where his horse was tied and so gave him a bloom against the dull brown of the chance to speak what was in his mind.

"You know, I hate to mention little worries before your mother," he said. "Those pathetic eyes of hers make me ashamed to bother her with a thing. But I am worried, Miss Louise. I came over to ask you if you've seen anything of four calves of ours. I know you ride a good deal through the hills. They disappeared a week ago, and I can't find any trace of them. I've been looking all through the hills, but I can't locate them."

Billy Louise had not seen them, either, and she begged for particulars. "I don't see how they could get away from your cove," she said, "unless your bars were down."

"The bars were all right. It was last Friday, I think. I'm not sure. They were in the little meadow above the house, you see. I was away that night, and Aunt Martha is a little hard of hearing. She wouldn't hear anything unless there were considerable noise. I came home the next forenoon—I was over to Seabeck's—and the bars were in place then. Aunt Martha had not

and all around. And I'll keep a good lookout for the calves."

Many men would have objected to the unconscious patronage of her tone. That Charlie Fox did not, but accepted the spirit of helpfulness in her words, lifted him out of the small natured class.

"It's awfully good of you," he said. "You know a lot more about the bovine nature than I do, for all I put in every spare minute studying the subject. I'm taking four different stock journals now, Miss Louise. I'll bet I know a lot more about the different strains of various breeds than you do, Miss Cattle Queen. But I'm beginning to see that we only know what we learn by experience. I've a new book on the subject of heredity of the cattle. I'm going home and see if Seabeck hasn't stumbled upon a strain that can be traced back to your native mountain sheep."

Billy Louise laughed and said good-by and stood leaning over the gate watching him as he zigzagged up the hill, stopping his horse often to breathe. She began to wonder, then, about those calves. Vented and not rebranded, they would be easy game for any man who first got his own brand on them. She meant to get a description of them when she saw Charlie again—it was like his innocence to forget the most essential details—and she meant to keep her eyes open. If Charlie were right about the calves not being any-

where in the cove, then they had been driven out of it, stolen. Billy Louise turned dejectedly away from the fence and went down to a shady nook by the creek, where she had always liked to do her worrying and hard thinking.

The next day she rode early to the Cove and learned some things from Marthy which she had not gleaned from Charlie. She learned that two of the calves were a deep red except for a wide, white strip on the nose of one and white hind feet on the other; that another was spotted on the hindquarters and that the fourth was white, with large, red blotches. She had known cattle all her life. She would know these if she saw them anywhere.

She also discovered for herself that they could not have broken out of that pasture and that the river bank was impassable because of high, thick bushes and miry mud in the open spaces. She had a fight with Blue over these latter places and demonstrated beyond doubt that they were miry by getting him in to the knees in spite of his violent objections. They left deep tracks behind them when they got out. The calves had not gone investigating the bank, for there was not a trace anywhere, and the bluff was absolutely unscalable. Billy Louise herself would have felt doubtful of climbing out that way. The gray rim rock stood straight and high at the top, with never a crevice, so far as she could see, and the gorge was barred so that it was impossible to go that way without lifting heavy poles out of deep sockets and sliding them to one side.

"I've got an idea about a gate here," Charlie confided suddenly. "There won't be any more mysteries like this. I'm going to fix a swinging gate in place of these bars, Miss Louise. I shall have it swing uphill like this, and I'll have a weight arranged so that it will always close itself if one is careless enough to ride on and leave it open. I have it all worked out in my alleged brain. I shall do it right away, too. Aunt Marthy is rather nervous about this gorge now. Every evening she walks up here herself to make sure the bars are closed."

"You may as well make up your mind to it," said Billy Louise irrelevantly in a tone of absolute certainty. "Those calves were driven out of the gorge. That means stolen. You needn't accuse any one in particular. I don't suppose you could. But they were stolen."

Charlie frowned and glanced up speculatively at the bluff's rim.

"Oh, your mountain sheep theory is no good," Billy Louise giggled. "I doubt if a lizard even would try to leave the Cove over the bluff," which certainly was a sweeping statement when you consider a lizard's habits. "A mountain sheep couldn't anyway."

"They're hummers to climb—"

"But calves are not, Mr. Fox. Not like that. You know yourself they were stolen. Why not admit it?"

"Would that do any good—bring them back?" he countered, looking up at her.

"N-o, but I do hate to see a person deliberately shut his eyes in front of a fact. We may as well admit to ourselves that there is a rustler in the

country. Then we can look out for him."

Charlie's eyes had the troubled look. "I hate to think that. Aunt Martha insists that is what we are up against, but—"

"Well, she knows more about it than you do, believe me. If you'll let down the bars, Mr. Fox, I'll hit the trail, and if I find out anything I'll let you know at once."

When she rode over the bleak upland she caught herself wishing that she might talk the thing over with Ward. He would know just what ought to be done. But winter was coming, and she would drive her stock down into the fields she had ready. They would be safe there surely. Still, she wished Ward would come. She wanted to talk it over with a man who understood and who knew more about such things than she did.

The fate of the four heifer calves became permanently wrapped in the blank fog of mystery. Billy Louise watched for them when she rode out in the hills and spent a good deal of time heretofore given over to dreaming in trying to solve the riddle of their disappearance. Charlie Fox insisted upon keeping to the theory that they had merely strayed. Marthy grumbled sometimes over the loss, and Ward—well, Ward did not put in an appearance again that fall or winter and so did not hear of the incident.

CHAPTER V.

The Little Devils of Doubt.

THE spring had come, and Wolverine canyon, with the sun shining down aslant into its depths, was a picturesque flash in the hills, wild enough in all conscience, but to the normal person not in the least degree gloomy. The jutting crags were sunlit and warm. The cherry thickets whispered in a light breeze and sheltered birds that sang in perfect content. Not a gloomy place surely when the peace of a sunny morning laid its spell upon the land.

Billy Louise, however, did not respond to the canyon's enticements. She brooded over her own discouragements and the tantalizing little puzzles which somehow would not lend themselves to any convincing solution. She was in that condition of nervous depression where she saw her finest cows dead by blot in the alfalfa meadows—and how would she pay that machinery note then? She saw John Pringle calling unexpectedly and insistently for his "time," and where would she find another man whom she could trust out of her sight? John Pringle was slow, and he was stupid and growled at poor Phoebe till Billy Louise wanted to shake him, but he was "steady," and that one virtue covers many a man's faults and keeps him drawing wages regularly.

Her mother had been more and more inclined to worry as the hot weather came on. Lately her anxiety over small things had rather got upon the nerves of Billy Louise. She felt ill used and downhearted and as if nothing mattered much anyway. She passed her cave with a mere glance and scowled for the memories of golden days in her lonely childhood that clung around it.

She was in this particularly dissatisfied mood when she rode out of the canyon at its upper end, where the hills folded softly down into grassy valleys where her cattle loved best to graze. Since the grass had started in the spring she had kept her little herd up here among the lower hills, and by riding along the higher ridges every day or so and turning back a wandering animal now and then she had held them in a comparatively small area, where they would be easily gathered in the fall. A few head of Seabeck's stock had wandered in among hers and some of Marthy's. And there was a big roan steer that bore the brand of Johnson, over on Snake river. Billy Louise knew them all, as a housewife knows her flock of chickens, and if she missed seeing certain leaders in the scattered groups she rode until she found them. Two old cows and one big red steer that seemed always to have a following wore bells that tinkled pleasant little sounds in the alder thickets along the creek as she passed by.

She rode up the long ridge which gave her a wide view of the surrounding hills and stopped Blue, while she stared moodily at the familiar, shadow spotted expanse of high piled ridges, with deep, green valleys and deeper hued canyons between. She loved them, every one. But today they failed to steep her senses in that deep content with life which only the great outdoors can give to one who has learned how satisfying is the draft and how soothing.

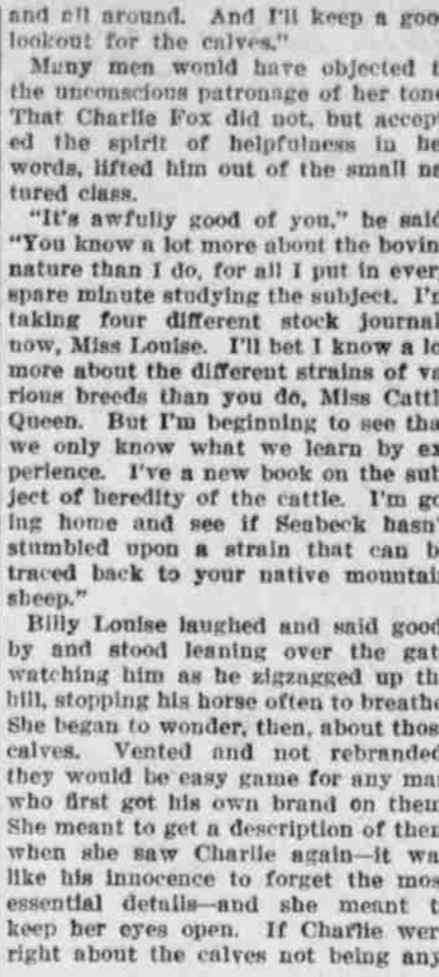
Billy Louise becomes very much discouraged over the state of family finances. She hears and sees things that make her doubt Ward.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Crepes and Pongees.

Crepe de chine, in spite of its name, does not come from China but from Japan, Italy and France. There are no factories for making silk piece goods in China, all the weaving being done by hand. With the exception of pongees, the products of the Chinese looms are not popular abroad, except in Oriental countries, being too heavy, although the patterns are wonderfully beautiful and the colors exceedingly rich.

The pongees are woven in the homes of the peasants, and as they come from many looms no two pieces are ever exactly alike in weight, fineness, color and texture. The Shantung comes from the Lutung district, and the Nanshai from the Nigai district.



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Home Town Helps

SHOULD RELY ON ARCHITECT

Common Sense Owner Will Make No Suggestions Within Province of Expert, It is Asserted.

Architects face several hard problems in the construction of a house for a new owner. The latter believes that since the money which pays for the house is his he must be given the liberty to declare what builder is to get the job after all bids are in. The owner forgets that the architect knows more about building than he; that he is an expert in that line and for that reason the owner has hired him. The common sense owner makes no suggestions within the province of the architect, but relies on his judgment. Should the owner be allowed his own way, he would oftentimes get into hot water, says an exchange.

Naturally the owner in awarding the contract would select the lowest bidder because he is the lowest bidder. The lowest bidder may not be of sufficient financial means to meet obligations in case he is given the contract, and mechanics' liens tie up the construction of the house, making the owner the loser and not the builder. The architect, who probably knows the builder is not the proper man to build the house, advises against him. In this way the architect protects his client because he, by reason of his work, is able to discriminate between the unscrupulous and the scrupulous builders, and the financially-fitted and the builder with weak finances.

AMERICA IS MAKING TILES

Decorations in Spanish, Moorish and Other Designs of Past Centuries Add to Beauty of Homes.

In this country the making of tiles has been taken up with enthusiasm by potters. The styles vary greatly in color and texture, showing Spanish, Moorish, German, old English and other designs. The interesting way in which they may be used to decorate a modern facade is shown in a house on Nineteenth street, New York city. The tiles are set off with especial refinement and brilliancy by the rough cement background.

The large panel over the door is of a pleasing, medium blue color, and the decoration is of a peacock, the whole panel being in four parts. These were taken from the Basilica of St. Apollinaris at Ravenna. Around it is a border of tiling and cement and the sun tiles which ornament the ground show two swastika forms.

One of these is copied from a tile at Tyro, the other copied from one excavated at Persepolis. This doorway is further enhanced by large garden pots, one on either side. These are made of the same materials, a gray, negative concrete, with tiles of historic design in dull greens and blues and browns imbedded in the material of the vase. The tulip design on one of these vases is eighteenth century German.

Mistakes in Drainage.

It has been learned by experience as well as by experimental investigation that the influence of a tile drain in removing water from soil of uniform character is increased by lowering the drain. A drain laid at a considerable depth along one side of a road is better than two drains at less depth, one on each side of the road, provided the soil is of a uniform character. Unfortunately, this qualifying provision in the general statement is often forgotten, and a single line of tile is laid along one side of a road where the conditions are such that it cannot possibly perform the desired work. In a subsoil which changes from sand to a compact, fairly impervious clay at six feet, it would be unwise to install drains deeper than six feet, for otherwise they would be in material yielding very little water, and might even prove less effective than drains laid at the level of the clay surface.

Errors in Finish.

Prospective builders should plan to make their dwelling not a mere house, but a home. Indifferent looking trim should be avoided. Color in woodwork, whether stained, enameled or painted, is the keynote of taste in homelike rooms. Daintiness, warmth of tone and artistic effect are totally dependent upon the kind of wood on which the desired color scheme is carried out.

Greenwich Village.

For the benefit of out-of-town tourists, I may explain that Greenwich village is situated at the crossroads of Fourth and Tenth streets. It is inhabited by Bohemians who are trying to live as though they were in a Russian novel. Their diet consists of truffles and their chief industry is running playhouses too small to hold any audience.—E. E. Stossion in the New York Independent.

Order in the Garden.

All strong or striking features in garden should be at some distance from the residence and from each other, so that each shall be a center of interest for that particular part of the garden. Never have a clutter of such things, either about the house or elsewhere.