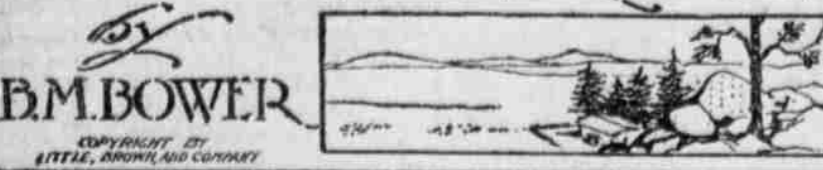


The RANCH at the WOLVERINE



BILLY LOUISE BECOMES MUCH DISCOURAGED OVER THE STATE OF FAMILY FINANCES—SHE HEARS AND SEES THINGS THAT MAKE HER DOUBT WARD

Synopsis.—Marthy and Jase Melke, 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. Charlie Fox, Marthy's nephew, comes to the Cove. He discovers evidence of cattle stealing.

CHAPTER V—Continued.

Far over to the eastward a black dot moved up a green slope and slid out of sight beyond. That might be Ward taking a short cut across the hill to his claim beyond the pine dotted ridge that looked purple in the distance. Billy Louise sighed with a vague disquiet and turned to look away to the north, where the jumble of high hills grew more rugged, with the valleys narrower and deeper.

Here came two other dots, larger and more clearly defined as horsemen. From mere objects that stood higher than any animal and moved with a purposeful directness they presently became men who rode with the easy swing of habit which has become a second nature. They must have seen her sitting still upon her horse in the midst of that high, sunny plateau, for they turned and rode up the slope toward her.

Billy Louise waited, too depressed to wonder greatly who they were. Seaback riders probably. And so they proved. At least one of them was a Seaback man—Floyd Carson, who had talked with her at her own gate and had told her of the suspected cattle stealing. The other man was a stranger, whom Floyd introduced as Mr. Birken.

"They had been prowling around," according to Floyd, trying to see what they could see. Floyd was one of those round-faced, round-eyed young fellows who do not believe much in secrecy and therefore talk freely whenever and wherever they dare. He said that Seaback had turned them loose to keep cases and see if they couldn't pick up the trail of these rustlers who were trying to get rich off a running iron and a long rope. (If you are of the West you know what that means, and if you are not you ought to guess that it means stealing cattle and let it go at that.) It was not until he had talked for ten minutes or so that Billy Louise became more than mildly interested in the conversation.

"Say, Miss MacDonald," Floyd asked by way of beginning a new paragraph, "how about that fellow over on Mill



Far Over to the Eastward a Black Dot Moved Up.

creek? He worked for you folks a year or so ago, didn't he? What does he do?"

"He has a ranch," said Billy Louise, with careful calm. "He's been working on it this summer. I believe."

"Uh-huh. We were over there this morning. Then you cattle up above his place are his, I reckon?"

"Yes," said Billy Louise. "He's been putting his wages into cattle for a year or so. He worked for Junkins last winter. Why?"

"Oh, nothing, I guess, only he's the only stranger in the country, and his prosperity ain't accounted for—"

"Oh, but it is!" laughed Billy Louise. "I only wish I had half as clear a ticket. When he isn't working out he's wolfing, and every dollar he gets hold of he puts into that ranch. We've known him a long time. He doesn't blow his money, you see, like most fellows do."

Floyd found occasion to have a slight argument with his horse just then. He happened to be one of the "most" fellows, and the occasion of his last "blowout" was fresh in his mind.

"Well, of course if you know he's all straight that settles it. But it sure seems queer—"

"That fellow is as straight as a string. Don't you suppose it's some gang over on the river, Floyd? I'd look around over there, I believe, and try to get a line on the unaccountables. There's a lot of new settlers come in just in the last year or two, and there might be some tough ones scattered through the bunch. Better see if there has been any cattle shipped or driven through that way, don't you think?"

"We can try," Floyd assented without eagerness. "But as near as we can figure it's too much of a drib drab proposition for that. A cow and calf here and there, and so on. We got wind of it first when we went out to bring in a gentle cow that the deacon wanted on the ranch. We knew where she was, only she wasn't there when we went after her. We hunted the hills for a week and couldn't find a sign of her or her calf. And she had struck down in the creek bottom all the spring, so it looked kind a funny. He twisted in the saddle and looked back at the pine dotted ridge."

"There's a Y6 calf up there that's a dead ringer for the one we've been hunting," he observed, "but it's running with a cow that carries Junkins' old brand, so"—He looked apologetically into the calm eyes of Billy Louise. "Of course I don't mean to say there's anything wrong up there," he hastily assured her. "But that's the reason I thought I'd ask you about that fellow."

"Oh, it's perfectly right to make sure of everybody," smiled Billy Louise. "I'd do the same thing myself. But you'll find everything's all straight up there. We know all about him and how and where he got his few head of stock and everything. But of course you could ask Junkins if you have any doubt—"

"Oh, we'll take your word for it. I just wanted to know. He's a stranger to our outfit. I've seen him a few times. What's his name? Us boys call him Noley. It's like pulling a wisdom tooth to get any kind a talk out of him."

"He is awful quiet," assented Billy Louise carelessly. "But he's real steady to work."

"Them quiet fellows generally are," put in Mr. Birken. "You run stock in here, too, do you, Miss MacDonald?"

"The big De," answered Billy Louise and smiled faintly. "I've been range herding them back here in these foothills this summer. Do you want to look through the bunch?"

Mr. Birken blushed. "Oh, no, not at all! I was wondering if you had lost any."

"Nobody would rustle cattle from a lady, I hope. At any rate, I haven't missed any yet. The folks down in the Cove have, though."

"Yes, I heard they had. That breed rove over to see if he could get a line on them. It's hard luck. That Charlie Fox seems a fine, hard working boy, don't you think?"

"Yes-s," said Billy Louise shyly, "he seems real nice." She looked away and bit her lip self-consciously as she spoke.

The two men swallowed the bait like a hungry fish. They glanced at each other and winked knowingly. Billy Louise saw them from the tail of her downcast eye and permitted herself a little sigh of relief. They would be the more ready now to accept at its face value her statement concerning Ward, unless they credited her with the feat of being in love with the two men at the same time.

"Well, I'm sorry Charlie Fox has been tapped off too. He's a mighty fine chap," declared Floyd, with transparent heartiness, his round eyes dwelling curiously upon the face of Billy Louise.

"Yes, I must be going," said that young woman self-consciously. "I've quite a circle to ride yet. I hope you locate the rustlers, and if there's anything I can do—if I see or hear anything that seems to be a clew—I'll let you know right away. I've been keeping my eyes open for some trace of them, and so has Char—Mr. Fox." Then she blushed and told them good-bye very hastily and loped off up the ridge.

"Bark up that tree for awhile, you two!" she said, with a twist of her lips, when she was well away from them. "You—you darned idiots, to go prowling around Ward's place, just as if—Ward'll take a shot at them if he catches them nosing through his stock!" She scowled at a big D cow that thrust her head out of an alder thicket and sent Blue in after her. Frowning, she watched the animal glomping down the hill toward the Wolverine. "Just because he's a stranger and doesn't mix with people and minds his own business and is trying to get a start they're suspicious, as if a man has no right to—Well, I think I managed to head them off anyway."

Her satisfaction lasted while she rode to the next ridge. Then the little devils of doubt came a-swarming and a-whispering. She had said she knew all about Ward. Well, she did to a greater extent than others knew. But she wondered if she did not know too much or if she knew enough. There were some things—

She headed Blue down the slope and as straight for the Big Hill as she could go. There was no trail that way, and the ridges were steep and the canyons circuitous. But Blue was a good horse, with plenty of stamina and much experience. He carried his lady safely, and he carried her willingly. Even her impatience could find no fault with the manner in which he climbed steep pitches, slid down slopes as steep, jumped narrow washouts and picked his way through thickets of quaking aspens or over wide stretches of shale rock and lava beds. He was yet to his ears when finally he shuffled into Ward's trail up the creek bottom, but he breathed evenly, and he carried his head high and perked his ears knowingly forward when the corral and haystack came into view around a sharp bend. He splashed both front feet into the creek just before the cabin and stopped to drink, while Billy Louise stared at the silent place.

By the tracks along the creek trail she knew that Ward had come home, and she urged Blue across the ford and up the bank to the cabin. She slid off and went in boldly to hide her inward embarrassment—and she found nothing but emptiness there.

Billy Louise did not take long to investigate. The coffee pot was still warm on the stove when she laid her palm against it, and she immediately poured herself a cup of coffee. A plate and a cup on the table indicated that Ward had eaten a hurried meal and had not taken time to clear away the litter. Billy Louise ate what was left, and mechanically she washed the dishes and made everything neat before she went down to look for Rattler. She had thought that Ward was out somewhere about the place and would return very soon probably. Blue she had left standing in plain sight before the cabin so that Ward could see him and know she was there, a fact which she regretted.

While she was washing dishes and sweeping she had been trying to think of some excuse for her presence there. It was going to be awkward, her coming there on his heels, one might say.

Billy Louise began to wish she had not come. She began to feel quite certain that Ward would be surprised and disgusted when he found her there and would look at her with that faint curl of the lip and that fainter lift of the nostril above it, which made her go hot all over with the scorn in them. She had seen him look that way once or twice, and in spite of herself she began to picture his face with that expression.

Billy Louise was on the point of riding away a good deal more hastily than she had come in the hope that Ward would not discover her there. Then her own stubbornness came uppermost, and she told herself that she had a perfect right to ride wherever she pleased and that if Ward didn't like it he could do the other thing.

She went to the door and stood looking out for a minute, wondering where he was.

There was a little window behind the bunk and beside that a shelf filled with books and smoking material and matches. She knew by the very arrangement of that shelf and window that Ward liked to lie there on the bunk and read while the light lasted.

At the head of the bed hung a flour sack half full of some hard, lumpy stuff which Billy Louise had not noticed before. She felt the bag tentatively, could not guess its contents and finally took it down and untied it. Within were irregular scraps and strips of stuff hard as bone, a puzzle still to one unfamiliar with the frontier. Billy Louise pulled out a little piece, nibbled a corner and pronounced: "M-m-m! Jerky! I'm going to swipe some of that," which she proceeded to do to the extent of filling her pocket, for to those who have learned to like it jerked venison is quite as desirable as milk chocolate or any other nibbly tidbit.

The opposite wall had sacks of flour stacked against it and boxes of staple canned goods, such as corn and tomatoes and milk and peaches. A box of canned peaches stood at the head of the bed and upon that a case of tom-

atoes. Ward used them for a table and set the lantern there when he wanted to read in bed. "He's got a pretty good supply of grub," was the verdict of Billy Louise, sipping up the assortment while she nibbled at the piece of jerky. "I wonder where he is anyway?" And a moment later: "He oughtn't to hang his best clothes up like that. They'll be all wrinkled when he wants to put them on."

She went over and disposed of the best clothes to her liking and shook out the dust. She had to own to herself that for a bachelor Ward was very orderly, though he did let his trousers hang down over the flour sacks in a way to whiten their hems. She hung them in a different place.

But where was Ward? Billy Louise bethought her that Blue deserved something to eat after that hard ride and led him down to the stable. There was no sign of Rattler, and Billy Louise wondered anew at Ward's absence. It did not seem consistent with his haste to leave the Wolverine and his frequent assertion that he must get to work. From the stable door she could look over practically the whole creek bottom within his fence, and she could see the broad sweep of the hills on either side. On her way back to the cabin she tried to track Rattler, but there were several stock trails leading in different directions, and the soil was too dry to leave any distinguishing marks.

She waited for an hour or two, sitting in the doorway, nibbling jerky and trying to read a magazine. Then she found a stub of pencil, tore out an advertising page which had a wide margin and wrote: "I don't think you're a bit nice. Why don't you stay home when a fellow comes to see you?" This she folded neatly and put in the cigar box of tobacco over Ward's pillow.

She resaddled Blue and rode away more depressed than ever, because her depression was now mixed with a disappointment keener than she would have cared to acknowledge, even to herself.

CHAPTER VI.

The Corral in the Canyon.

QUITE suddenly, just at sundown, Billy Louise's journeying was interrupted in a most unexpected manner. She was dreaming along a flat bottomed canyon, looking for an easy way across, when Blue threw up his head, listened with his ears thrust forward and sniffed with widened nostrils. From his manner almost anything might lie ahead of them. And because certain of the possibilities would call for quick action if any of them became a certainty Billy Louise twisted her gun belt around so that her six shooter swung within easy reach of her hand. With her fingers she made sure that the gun was loose in its holster and kicked Blue mildly as a hint to go on and see what it was all about.

Blue went forward, stepping easily on the soft side hill. In rough country whatever you want to see is nearly always around a sharp bend; you read it so in the stories and books of travels and when you ride out in the hills you find it so in reality. Billy Louise rode for three or four minutes before she received any inkling of what lay ahead, though Blue's behavior during that interval had served to reassure her somewhat. He was interested still in what lay just out of sight beyond a shoulder of the hill, but he did not appear to be in the least alarmed. Therefore Billy Louise knew it couldn't be a bear, at any rate.

They came to the point of the hill's shoulder and Billy Louise tightened the reins instinctively while she stared at what lay revealed beneath. The head of the gulch was blocked with a corral—small, high, hidden from view on all sides save where she stood, by the jagged walls of rock and heavy aspen thickets beyond.

The corral was but the setting for what Billy Louise stared at so unbelievably. A horseman had ridden out of the corral just as she came into sight, had turned a sharp corner and had disappeared by riding up the same slope she occupied, but farther along and in a shallow depression which hid him completely after that one brief glimpse.

Of course the gulch was dusky with deep shadows, and she had had only a glimpse. But the horse was a dark bay and the rider was slim and tall and wore a gray hat. The heart of Billy Louise paused a moment from its steady beating and then sank heavily under a great weight. She was range born and range bred. She had sat wide eyed on her daddy's knees and heard him tell of losses in cattle and horses and of corals found hidden away in strange places and of unknown riders who disappeared mysteriously into the hills. She had heard of these things; they were a part of the stage setting for wild dramas of the West.

With a white line showing around her close pressed lips and a horror in her wide eyed glance she rode quietly along the side of the bluff toward where she had seen the horseman disappear. He was riding a dark bay and he wore a gray hat and dark coat, and he was slim and tall. Billy Louise made a sound that was close to a groan and set her teeth hard together afterward.

She reached the hillside just above the corral. There were cattle down there, moving uneasily about in the shadows. Of the horseman there was, of course, no sign—just the corral and a few restless cattle shut inside—and on the hilltops a soft, rose violet glow and in the sky beyond a blend of purple and deep crimson to show where the sun had been. Close beside her as she stood looking down a little, gray bird twittered wistfully.

Billy Louise took a deep breath and rode on, angling slightly up the bluff so that she could cross at the head of the gulch. It was very quiet, very peaceful and widely beautiful, this jum-

ple of hills and deep gashed canyons. But Billy Louise felt as though something precious had died. She should have gone down and investigated and turned those cattle loose—that is, if she dared. Well, she dared; it was not fear that held her to the upper slopes. She did not want to know what brand they bore or whether an iron had seared fresh marks.

"Oh, God!" she said once aloud, and there was a prayer and a protest, a curse and a question all in those two words.

So trouble—trouble that sickened her very soul and choked her into dumbness and squeezed her heart so that the ache of it was agony—came and rode with her through the brooding dusk of the canyons and over the brighter hilltops.

Billy Louise did not remember anything much about that ride except that she was glad the way was long. Blue carried her steadily on and on and needed no guiding, and though Wolverine canyon was black dark in most places she liked it so.

John Pringle was standing by the gate waiting for her, which was unusual, if Billy Louise had been normal enough to notice it. He came forward



This She Folded Neatly and Put into the Cigar Box.

and took Blue by the bridle when she dismounted, which was still more unusual, for Billy Louise always cared for her own horse both from habit and preference.

"Yor mommie, she's sick," he announced stolidly. "She's worry you maybe hurt yourself. Yo better go, maybe."

Billy Louise did not answer, but ran up the path to the cabin. "Oh, has everything got to happen all at once?" she cried aloud, protesting against the implacableness of misfortune.

"Yor mommie's sick," Phoebe announced in a whisper. "She's crazy 'cause you been so long. She's awful bad, I guess."

Billy Louise said nothing, but went in where her mother lay moaning, her face white and turned to the ceiling. Billy Louise herself had pulled up her reserves of strength and cheerfulness, and the fingers she laid on her mother's forehead were cool and steady.

"Poor old mommie! Is it that nasty lumbago again?" she asked caressingly and did not permit the tiniest shade of anxiety to spoil the reassurance of her presence. "I went farther than usual and Blue's pretty tender, so I eased him along, and I'm fearfully late. I suppose you've been having all kinds of disasters happening to me." She was passing her fingers soothingly over her mother's forehead while she explained and she saw that her mother did not moan so much as when she came into the room.

"Of course I worried. I wish you wouldn't take them long rides. Oh, I guess it's lumbago—mostly—but seems like it ain't, either. The pain seems to be mostly in my side." She stirred restlessly and moaned again.

"What's Phoebe been doing for it? You don't seem to have any fever, mommie—and that's a good thing. I'll go fix you one of those dandy spice poultices. Had any supper, mommie?"

"Oh, I couldn't eat. Phoebe made a hop poultice, but it's awful soppy."

"Well, never mind. Your dear daughter is on the job now. She'll have you all comfy in just about two minutes. Headache, num? All right, I'll just shake up your pilly and bring you such a dandy spice poultice I expect you'll want to eat it!" Billy Louise's voice was soft and had a broody sweetness when she wished it so, that soothed more than medicine. Her mother's eyes closed wearily while the girl talked; the muscles of her face relaxed a little from their look of pain.

Billy Louise bent and laid her lips lightly on her mother's cheek. "Poor old mommie! I'd have come home a-running if I'd known she was sick and had to have nasty, soppy stuff."

In the kitchen a very different Billy Louise measured spices and asked a question now and then in a whisper and breathed with a repressed unevenness which betrayed the strain she was under.

Billy Louise discovers that her love for Ward is darkened by suspicion that he is connected with a gang of bad men and she treats him with coolness, much to his puzzlement.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Italian railroads are experimenting with lignite, peat and peat mixed with other substances as locomotive fuel.

HOME TOWN HELPS

NEED OF DEFINITE PROGRAM

To Strike at the Essential Rather Than the Incidental is Object of Best Commercial Bodies.

To strike at the essential rather than the incidental, to get an organic program and follow it unwaveringly—that is the object of the directors and executives of well-organized commercial associations today.

There was a time when citizens of many communities had a mixture of right and wrong impressions about the function of such organizations. They were right in their recognition of the need for a central directing force, but wrong in their assumption that such a force could be made 100 per cent efficient without intelligent, broad-minded management and a definite, concrete program, declares the Indianapolis Star.

So commercial organizations have gone through an evolution. The tendency today is to make them indispensable business institutions—just as necessary to well-rounded city life as a public utility or any food or clothing distributor. The tendency is to make such organizations reflexes of all other business activity—a guardian of commercial, social and civic interests. Citizens in their collective capacity speak and act effectively through such an organization.

Large chambers of commerce in many American cities have achieved notable results for their localities by adopting a definite program and sticking to it.

"Every community has its own problems, but there are certain lines of work that have been found productive very generally in all American cities," said Ernest N. Smith, general secretary of the Indianapolis chamber of commerce.

"The purpose of the well-conducted modern chamber of commerce is to establish departments of activity and undertake programs of civic change that will operate definitely at every point to make the city larger or better."

PERGOLA NOW WIDELY USED

Adds to Beauty of Garden if It is Properly Constructed and Effectively Placed.

Comparatively few gardens are now complete without a pergola of some kind, though twenty years ago they were almost unknown in America. They are, however, so useful in giving variety to the garden, and have so much decorative value, that they are widely used.

Pergolas need careful construction, and an effort should be made, before building one, to choose a suitable position for it, since, if a pergola is set down with no apparent reason d'être, it becomes a burden rather than a help in the garden scheme. It should lead to some defined object—to a summer house, or a gate, or perhaps to terrace steps; if it begins and ends for no apparent reason, it is certainly misplaced. In the gardens of La Mortola near Bordighera, the pergola leads out to a wide terrace with a stone balustrade, while beyond lies the wonderful blue of the Mediterranean and the gray rocks of the Italian coast; and this view gains a double value from being framed as it were, in a tunnel of greenery.

"Panic Proof" Vies With Fire Proof.

According to a decision recently made by Supreme Court Justice Gavan of New York the state industrial commission may direct owners of buildings to make them "panic proof," even if they were previously fireproof. The court said: "The reasonableness of the commission's orders depends directly on the question, 'Is the building safe from the danger of panic?' Panic may result from causes not confined to a factory building itself nor affected by its fireproof character. It may be caused by smoke alone, or by fire in a building adjoining or in the immediate neighborhood, or by a conflagration, or by a hostile attack in time of war from land, sea or air, or by earthquake, or even by a false alarm."

Mad Artists.

Quite a number of eminent artists have been victims of brain disorder. Sir Edwin Landseer, towards the close of his life, showed signs of insanity, while the eccentricities of Turner were quite of the insane order. Amongst other eminent artists it might be mentioned that Sir Thomas Lawrence suffered from a symptom of brain disorder; David Wilkie lost power of attention, and ultimately had a nervous seizure which made his speech incoherent; while Romney suffered so much from the hallucination that his talent would desert him that at the height of his fame he thought of relinquishing his art altogether.

Screening Rear Garden With Trellis.

If your rear garden is too much in evidence and chickens and laundry are not very decorative, a pretty white gate, or even a plain high white trellis reaching from the side of the house to the side fence, will shut off everything objectionable. No matter how small your back garden you will need more of the white trellis to make it perfect.