

# THE RANCH AT THE WOLVERINE

A tale of the wild outdoor life of pioneer days that called forth all the courage and resourcefulness of men and women inured to danger and hardship

By B. M. BOWER

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## BILLY LOUISE DISCOVERS THAT HER LOVE FOR WARD IS DARKENED BY SUSPICION THAT HE IS CONNECTED WITH SOME BAD MEN

**Synopsis.**—Marthy and Jase Melk, 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, and Billy Louise verifies suspicions.

### CHAPTER VI—Continued.

"Tell John to saddle up and go for the doctor, Phoebe, and don't let moment know whatever you do. This isn't her lumbago at all. I don't know what it is. I wonder if a hot turpentine cloth wouldn't be better than this? I've a good mind to try it; her eyes are glassy with fever and her skin is cold as a fish. You tell John to hurry up. He can ride Boxer. Tell him I want him to get a doctor here by tomorrow noon if he has to kill his horse doing it."

That night took its toll of Billy Louise and left a seared place in her memory. It was a night of snapping fire in the cook stove that hot water might be always ready; of tireless struggle with the pain that came and tortured, retired sullenly from Billy Louise's stubborn fighting with poultices and turpentine cloths and every remedy she had ever heard of, and came again just when she thought she had won the fight.

There was no time to give thought to the trouble that had ridden home with her, though its presence was like a black shadow behind her while she worked and went to and fro between bedroom and kitchen and fought that tearing pain.

She met the dawn hollow eyed and so tired she could not worry very much about anything. Her mother slept uneasily to prove that the battle had not gone altogether against the girl who had fought the night through. She had her reward in full measure when the doctor came, in the heat of noon, and after terrible minutes of suspense for Billy Louise while he counted pulse and took temperature and studied symptoms, told her that she had done well and that she and her homely politeness had held back tragedy from that house.

Billy Louise lay down upon the couch out on the back porch and slept heavily for three hours, while Phoebe and the doctor watched over her mother.

She woke with a start. She had been dreaming, and the dream had taken from her cheeks what little color her night vigil had left. She had dreamed that Ward was in danger, that men were hunting him for what he had done at that corral. The corral seemed the center of a fight between Ward and the men. She dreamed that he came to her and that she must hide him away and save him. But though she took him to a cave, which was secret enough for her purpose, yet she could not feel that he was safe even there. There was something—some menace.

Billy Louise went softly into the house, tiptoed to the door of her mother's room and saw that she lay quiet, with her eyes closed. Beside the window the doctor sat with his spectacles far down toward the end of his nose, reading a pale green pamphlet that he must have brought in his pocket. Phoebe was down by the creek washing clothes in the shade of a willow clump.

She went into her own room, still walking on her toes. In her trunk was a blue push box of the kind that is given to one at Christmas. It was faded and the clasp was showing brassy at the edges. Slitting upon her bed with the box in her lap Billy Louise pawed hastily in the jumble of keepsakes it held; an eagle's claw which she meant some time to have mounted for a brooch; three or four arrowheads of the shiny, black stuff which the Indians were said to have brought from Yellowstone park; a knot of green ribbon which she had worn to a St. Patrick's day dance in Boise; rattlesnake rattles of all sizes; several folded clippings—yesses that had caught her fancy and had been put away and forgotten; an amber bead she had found once. She turned the box upside down in her lap and shook it. It must be there—the thing she sought, the thing that had troubled her most in her dream; the thing that was a menace while it existed. It was at the very bottom of the box, caught in a corner. She took it out with fingers that trembled, crumpled it into a little ball so that she could not read what it said, straightened it immediately and read it reluctantly from the beginning to the end where the last word was clipped short with hasty scissors. A paragraph cut from a newspaper it was; yellow and frayed from contact with other objects, telling of things—

Billy Louise bit her lips until they hurt, but she could not keep back the tears that came hot and stinging while she read. She slid the little heap of odds and ends to the middle of the bed, crushed the clipping into her palm and went out stealthily into the immaculate kitchen. As if she were being spied upon she went cautiously to the stove, lifted a lid and dropped the clipping in where the wood blazed the brightest. She watched it flare and become nothing—not even a pinch of ash; the clipping was not very large. When it was gone she put the lid back and went uptoeing to the door. Then she ran.

Phoebe was down by the creek, so Billy Louise went to the stable, through that and on beyond, still running. Farther down was a grassy nook—on beyond the road. She went there and hid behind the willows, where she could cry and no one be the wiser. But she could not cry the ache out of her heart nor the rebellion against the hurt that life had given her. If she could only have burned memory when she burned that clipping! She could still believe and be happy if only she could forget the things it said.

Phoebe called her after a long while had passed. Billy Louise bathed her face in the cold water of the Wolverine, used her handkerchief for a towel and went back to take up the duties life had laid upon her. The doctor's team was hitched to the light buggy he drove, and the doctor was standing in the doorway with his square medicine case in his hand waiting to give her a few final directions before he left.

He was like so many doctors—he seemed to be afraid to tell the whole truth about his patient. He stuck to evasive optimism and then neutralized the reassurances he uttered by emphasizing the necessity of being notified if Mrs. MacDonald showed any symptoms of another attack.

Billy Louise ran into her own room, grabbed a can of talcum and did not wait to see whether she applied it evenly to her telltale eyelids, but dabbed at them on the way to her mother's room.

"Doctor says you're all right, mommie; only you mustn't go digging post holes or shoveling hay for awhile."

"No, I guess not!" Her mother responded unconsciously to the stimulation of Billy Louise's tone. "I couldn't dig holes with a teaspoon, I'm that weak and useless. Did he say what it was, Billy Louise?" The sick are always so curious about their illnesses.

"Oh, your lumbago got to scragging with your liver. I forgot the name he gave it, but it's nothing to worry about." Billy Louise had imagination, remember.

"I guess he'd think it was something to worry about if he had it," her mother retorted fretfully, but reassured nevertheless by the casual manner of Billy Louise. "I believe I could eat a little mite of toast and drink some tea," she added tentatively.

"And an egg poached soft if you want it, mom. Phoebe just brought in the eggs." Billy Louise went out humming unconcernedly under her breath as if she had not a care beyond the proper toasting of the bread and brewing of the tea.

One need not go to war or voyage to the far corners of the earth to find the stuff heroes are made of.

### CHAPTER VII.

#### Each In His Own Trail.

SINCE nothing in this world is absolutely immutable—the human emotions least of all perhaps—Billy Louise did not hold changeless her broken faith in Ward. She saw it broken into fragments before the evidence of her own eyes and the fragments ground to dust beneath the weight of what she knew of his past—things he had told her himself. So she thought there was no more faith in him, and her heart went empty and aching through the next few days.

But, since Billy Louise was human and a woman—not altogether because she was twenty—she stopped after awhile, gathered carefully the dust of her dead faith, and, like God, she began to create. First she fashioned doubts of her doubt. How did she know she had not made a mistake, there at that corral? Other men wore gray hats and rode dark bay horses; other men were slim and tall, and she had only had a glimpse, after all, and the light was deceptive down there in the shadows. When that first doubt was molded and she had breathed into

it the breath of life so that it stood sturdily before her she took heart and created reasons, a whole company of them, to tell her why she ought to give Ward the benefit of the doubt. She remembered what Charlie Fox had said about circumstantial evidence. She would not make the mistake he had made.

So she spent other days and long, wakeful nights. And since it seemed impossible to bring her faith to life again just as it had been, with the glamor of romance and the sweetness of pity and the strength of her own innocence to make it a beautiful faith indeed, she used all her innocence and all her pity and a little of romance and created something even sweeter than her untried faith had been. She had a new element to strengthen it. She knew that she loved Ward. She had learned that from the hurt it had given her to lose her faith in him.

That was the record of the inner Billy Louise which no one ever saw. The Billy Louise which her little world knew went her way unchanged except in small details that escaped the notice of those nearest her. A look in her eyes for one thing; a hurt, questioning look that was sometimes rebellious as well; a droop of her mouth also when she was off her guard; a sad, tired little droop that told of the weight of responsibility and worry she was carrying.

Ward observed both the minute he saw her on the trail. He had come across country on the chance that she might be riding out that way, and he had come upon her unawares while she and Blue were staring out over the desert from the height they had attained in the hills.

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"Lo, Bill!" he said when he was quite close and held himself ready to meet whatever mood she might present.

She turned her head quickly and looked at him, and the hurt look was still in her eyes; the droop still showed at her lips. And Ward knew they had been there before she saw him.

"What's molla, Bill?" he asked in the tone that was calculated to invite an unburdening of her troubles.

"Oh, nothing in particular! Mommie's been awfully sick, and I'm always worried when I'm away from the ranch for fear she'll have another spell while I'm gone. The doctor said she might have any time. Were you head-

Besides that, there was an undercurrent of gossip and rumors of cattle stealing whenever a man stopped at the ranch. It worried Billy Louise in spite of her rebuilt belief in Ward. Doubt would seize her sometimes in spite of herself, and she did not see Ward often enough to let his personality fight those doubts. She saw him just once in the next two months and then only for an hour or so.

A man rode up one night and stayed with them until morning, after the open handed custom of the range land. Billy Louise did not talk with him very much. He had shifty eyes and a coarse, loose lippled mouth and a thick neck, and, girl-like, she took a violent dislike to him. But John Pringle told her afterward that he was Buck Olney, the new stock inspector, and that he was prowling around to see if he could find out anything.

Billy Louise worried a good deal after that. Once she rode out early with the intention of going to Ward's claim to warn him. But three miles of snar thought changed her purpose. She dared not leave her mother all day, for one thing, and for another she could scarcely warn Ward without letting him see that she felt he needed warning, and even Billy Louise shrank from that might follow.

The stock inspector stopped again on his way back to the railroad. Billy Louise was so anxious that she smothered her dislike and treated him nicely, which thawed the man to an alarming amiability. She questioned him artfully—trusting Billy Louise for that—and she decided that the stock inspector was either a very poor detective or a very good actor. He did not, for instance, mention any corral hidden in a blind canyon away back in the hills, and Billy Louise did not mention it, either. He had not found any worked brands, he said. And he did not appear to know anything further about Ward than the mere fact of his existence.

"There's a fellow holding down a claim away over on Mill creek," he had remarked. "I'll look him up when I come back, though Seabeck says he's all right."

"Ward is all right," asserted Billy Louise rather unwisely.

"Haven't a doubt of it. I thought maybe he might have seen something that might give us a clew." Perhaps the stock inspector was wiser than she gave him credit for being. He did not at any rate pursue the subject any further until he found an opportunity to talk to Mrs. MacDonald herself. Then he artfully mentioned the fellow on Mill creek, and because she did not know any reason for caution he got all the information he wanted and more, for mommie was in one of her garrulous humors.

After that the days drifted quietly for a month and grew nippler at each end and lazier in the middle, which meant that the short summer was over and that fall was getting ready to paint the wooded slopes with her gayest colors and that one must prepare for the siege of winter.

He began to figure the cost of com-

muting his homestead right away, so that he would not have to "hold it down" for another three years. Maybe she would not want to bring her mother so far off the main road. In that case he would go down and put that Wolverine place in shape. He had no squeamishness about living on her ranch instead of his own if she wanted it that way. He meant to be better "hooked up" financially than she was and have more cattle when he put the gold ring on her finger. Then he would do whatever she wanted him to do, and he would not have to crucify his pride doing it.

You see, they could not have quarreled, since Ward carried castles as well as the blues. In fact, their parting had given Ward an uneven pulse for a mile, for Billy Louise had gone with him as usual as far as the corral when he started home. And when Ward had picked up his reins and turned to put his toe in the stirrup Billy Louise had come close—to his very shoulder. Ward had turned his face toward her, and Billy Louise—Billy Louise had impulsively taken his hand between her two hands, had looked deep into his eyes and then had kissed him wistfully on the lips. Then she had turned and fled up the path, waving him away up the trail. And though Ward never guessed that to her that kiss was a penitent vow of loyalty to their friendship and a slap in the face of the doubt devils that still pursued her weaker moments, it set him planning harder than ever for that stake he must win before he dared urge her further toward matrimony.

It's a wonder that the kiss did not wipe out completely the somber mood that held him. That it did not, but served merely to tangle his thoughts in a most hopeless manner, perhaps proves how greatly the inner life of Billy Louise had changed her in those two weeks.

She changed still more in the next two months, however. There was the strain of her mother's precarious health which kept Billy Louise always on the alert and always trying to hide her fears. She must be quick to detect the first symptoms of a return attack of the illness, and she must not let her mother suspect that there was danger of a return. That much the doctor had made plain to her.

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It was some time in the latter part of September that Billy Louise got up in the middle of a frosty night because she heard her mother moaning. That was the beginning. She sent John off before daylight for the doctor, and before the next night she stood with her lips pressed together and watched the doctor count mommie's pulse and take mommie's temperature and drew in her breath hardly when she saw how long he studied the thermometer afterward.

There was a month or so of going to and fro on her toes and of watching the clock with a mind to medicine giving. There were nights and nights and nights when the cabin window winked like a star fallen into the coolie from dusk to red dawn. Ward rode over once, stayed all night and went home in a silent rage because he could not do a thing.

There was a week of fluctuating hope and a time when the doctor said mommie must go to a hospital—Boise, since she had friends there. And there was a terrible, nerve racking journey to the railroad. And when Ward rode next to the Wolverine ranch there was no Billy Louise to taunt or tempt him. John Pringle and Phoebe told him in brief, stolid sentences of the later developments and gave him a meal and offered him a bed, which he declined.

When the suspense became maddening after that he would ride down to the Wolverine for news. And the news was monotonously scant. Phoebe could read and write after a fashion, and Billy Louise sent her a letter now and then, saying that mommie was about the same and that she wanted John to do certain things about the ranch. Sue could not leave mommie, she said. Ward gathered that she would not.

Once when he was at the ranch he wrote a letter to Billy Louise and told her that he would come to Boise if there was anything he could do and begged her to let him know if she needed any money. Beyond that he worked and worked and tried to crowd the lonesomeness out of his days and the hunger from his dreams with complete bone weariness. He did not expect an answer to his letter—at least he told himself that he did not—but one day Phoebe gave him a thin little letter.

Billy Louise did not write much. She explained that she could only scribble a line or two while mommie slept. Mommie was about the same. She did not think there was anything Ward could do, and she thanked him for offering to help. There was nothing, she said pathetically, that anybody could do. Even the doctors did not seem able to do much except tell her lies and charge her for them. No; she did not need any money. "Thank you just the same, Ward." That was about all. It did not sound in the least like Billy Louise.

Ward answered the note then and there and called her Wilhemina-mine, which was an awkward name to write and cost him five minutes of cogitation over the spelling. But he wanted it down on paper where she could see it and remember how it sounded when he said it, even if it did look queer. Farther along he started to call her Bill Lou, but rubbed it out and substituted Lady Girl (with capitals). Altogether he did better than he knew, for he made Billy Louise cry when she read it, and he made her say "Dear Ward" under her breath and remember how his hair waved over his left temple and how he looked when that smile hid just behind his lips and his eyes, and he made her forget that she had lost faith in him. She needed to cry, and she needed to remember and also to forget some things, for life was a hard, dull drab in Boise, with nothing to lighten it save a vicarious hope that did not comfort.

Billy Louise was not stupid. She saw through the vagueness of the doctors, and, besides, she was so hungry for her hills that she felt like beating the doctors with her fists because they did nothing to make her mommie well enough to go home. She grew to hate the nurse and her neutral cheerfulness.

That is how the fall passed for Billy Louise and the early part of the winter.

Poisoned Fish for Rats. The city dump at Somerville, Mass., is headquarters for a rat army which has invaded the city. The authorities are carrying on a franc-tireur warfare against the invaders, and the enemy has been exacting reprisals on family larders.

Householders fear that the cold weather will drive the rats away from the dump to some more private and exclusive domicile.

Poisoned fish are scattered about the dump and boys police the vicinity to keep children, dogs and cats from interfering with the rats' repast.

Maud Unit of Weight. The average Aden merchant prefers to calculate the weights of many of the commodities which he imports or exports, buys or sells, in terms of maunds. A maund is an Indian unit of weight having different values in various parts of that country, but having a value of 28 pounds in Bombay. It is the Bombay maund that is used extensively in Aden, and four maunds equal 112 pounds, the local hundred-weight.

Man Who Saves. The fellow who has \$200 in the bank is just that much richer than the chap who has to borrow \$5 from his neighbor, but expects some day to have a fortune.

To Remove Smoke Stains. This suggestion will be beneficial to housewives who have not the convenience of electricity or the modern gas fixtures. Frequently the ceiling above an old-fashioned gas jet becomes discolored from smoke and heat. The discoloration may be removed if a layer of starch and water is applied with a piece of flannel. After the mixture has dried it should be brushed lightly with a brush. No stain or mark will remain.

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## HOMETOWN HELPS

### WHY POORLY MANAGED CITIES

Inefficient Officials Placed in Charge of Affairs of Which They Know Nothing; Extravagance Follows.

A big city—whose affairs, says the Chicago Post, are more complex than those of any private corporation; whose revenues and expenditures are counted in many millions; whose administration affects the prosperity, health and morals of a million or more people—selects from among its citizens a politician, good fellow, joiner, and makes him its mayor. He appoints to office men of his own kind, chosen for personal or political reasons.

And then we wonder that extravagance, inefficiency and worse mark municipal government.

A big city puts on its council ward politicians and individuals who have never displayed a capacity for any useful occupation, and we wonder that the public interest is neglected.

A big city puts on its school board men who have no knowledge of educational problems, and we wonder that our schools are mismanaged.

It is the inefficiency of democracy, we say. Rather, it is the stupidity of people who have never tried to realize the possibilities of democracy; who have never given democracy a chance.

It is no essential principle of democracy to ignore the necessity of training for service. But that is what we have been doing. We persist in regarding public position as political jobs rather than as occasions for the employment of trained men in the doing of highly specialized work.

Mayor Mitchell of New York declares it to be his experience that trained men are practically unobtainable for municipal office. And that will remain true until we provide for their training and create a popular demand for their service.

The Wisconsin legislature is considering a bill to establish in the state university a training school for public service under a professor of public administration.

Every university has departments of political theory, but this school will deal with the practical problems of government and administration—municipal engineering, lighting, street making and cleaning, transportation, parks and playgrounds, health, drainage, education and the rest. It will endeavor to develop the practical expert in such matters.

### LESSON FROM THE INDIANS

Natives Made Bread From Nuts and Other Products of the Forests That Still Exist.

Germany has sent her children to the forests for oils that are badly needed in the fatherland. Mere nuts are employed to pick up beechnuts, which are rich in nutritious qualities vital to the health of the nation. If America is ever compelled by a great food shortage to return to nature, the present inhabitants of the United States will do well, according to the forest service of the department of agriculture, to take a lesson from the original owners of the soil, Thomas F. Logan writes in Leslie's. The forests of this country offer an amazing variety of edibles. America's beechnuts, butternuts, walnuts, pecans, chinquapins and hazelnuts are toothsome, highly nutritious, and may be used as a substitute for meat.

The Indians, according to forest service experts, mixed chestnuts with cornmeal and made a bread which was baked in corn husks, like tamales. Our redskin predecessors also manufactured a flour from the fruit of the oak. They pounded the acorns and leached out the tannin by treating the pulp with hot water. The result was a palatable and nourishing bread. Pine seeds, wild persimmons, wild crab apples, bulbs of the Judas tree and pods of the honey locust, cabbage, palmetto, mesquite and sassafras are excellent substitutes for cultivated fruits and vegetables. Nature is so prodigal of her riches in this country that America can never be starved to death by an "iron ring."

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He Was Like So Many Doctors—Afraid to Tell the Truth.