

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 it was mommie's daughter I felt most like talking to."

"Mommie's daughter" laughed a little and instinctively 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 rub the floor, but when he found her quite obstinate 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 gasps 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 erase it?"

"No-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 considerably so 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 upon the wet floor to rinse off the mud.

"Is—ah—Mrs. Melike in?" One could not accuse the young man of craning, but he certainly did try to get another glimpse of the person on the table and failed because of Ward.

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

"She's down in the meadow," Ward repeated to the bespattered young man. "You just go down past the stable and



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

follow on down"—he waved a hand vaguely before he took up the broom again. "You'll find her, all right," he added encouragingly.

"Oh, Ward! That must be Marthy's nephew. What will he think?"

"Does it matter such a dence of a lot what he thinks?" Ward went on with his interrupted scrubbing.

"I'm awfully glad he came, anyway," said Billy Louise. "I won't have to stay all night now. I was going to."

"In that case the young man is welcome as a gold mine. Here they come—be and Mrs. Marthy. You'll have to sit—

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 unfeigned. 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 those 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 outside. 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 know I've made an awful botch of the thing, Miss Louise," he confessed, turning toward her with an honest distress and a self-dying 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 talking 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 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 Charlie 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. Vent 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 anywhere 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; the 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."

"Yes, I thought of that—strange as it may seem." Charlie's voice was unfeigned. 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 hoof of stock up and corralled them and made sure those 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 outside. 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 know I've made an awful botch of the thing, Miss Louise," he confessed, turning toward her with an honest distress and a self-dying 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."

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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 care with a mere glance and scowl 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 faded 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 were bells that tinkled pleasant little sounds in the sadder 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 hood 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.

"No-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."

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"Oh, Ward! That must be Marthy's nephew. What will he think?"

"Does it matter such a dence of a lot what he thinks?" Ward went on with his interrupted scrubbing.

Daniel Boone's Long Swing Pursued by Indians, He Cut Grapevine Near Ground and Sailed Far Enough to Break Track.

Do you remember reading in one of the school histories about how the doughty Daniel Boone, when pursued by Indians on his way to the unknown wilderness of Kentucky, cut a grapevine near the ground so that it formed a swing upon which he traveled through the air far enough to break his track? If you read it, you probably thought it a bit fishy, writes Nilsah. Unless you live somewhere in the Allegheny mountains you would not believe that wild grapevines are long enough or strong enough or hold onto the trees tight enough to make much of a swing.

As a matter of fact, there is no reason to doubt that Daniel made the swing and got away from the Indians. For in the mountains of western Maryland and eastern West Virginia, across which Daniel took his hazardous way, the boys are still making such swings just for fun. And royal fun it is. The writer was driving through the mountains near the upper Potomac when he saw some enormous grapevines drooping 60 or 70 feet from the tops of the trees. They had been cut close to the ground, and the hillside above them was all plowed up by the feet of youngsters.

The temptation to try the Daniel Boone stunt was irresistible. It was quickly proved that by taking a running start down the hill one could swing a most amazing and breathtaking distance right over the creek. Swings made with ropes were tame by comparison. But there was no temptation to emulate Daniel by letting loose at the end of the swing. It took pioneering nerve to do that.

Cats Will Guard Chickens While Watching for Rats, They Fight Away Hawks—Are Broken From Killing Little Ones.

Did you know that cats are a valuable asset to the poultryman? You might believe that they were anything but invaluable because of their innate love for fresh meats. But sweeter than baby chicks to the palate of the cat are the smooth-coated, long-tailed creatures of the rat family. And rats prey upon chickens, asserts the Poultryman.

During the course of a year there is more loss in the poultry world from the ravages of rats than from cats or hawks, or even disease. A cat in the chicken yard, if trained to properly chase the life of the chickens, will terrorize and destroy the rats and will ward off the enemy hawks and so prove himself or herself of great worth.

Cats have proved their worth as chicken yard sentinels, and there have been many and various methods employed by their owners to break them from killing the chickens. One well-known method is that of tying a dead chicken about a cat's neck and making him tug around the heavy dead body for from one to two days. In the meantime the cat will supposedly grow to have a great dread and horror of a dead chicken.

Explaining the Universe. I suppose that we have all had moments of sudden illumination when it occurred to us that we had explained the universe, and it was so easy for us that we wondered why we had not done it before, says S. M. Crothers in the Atlantic. Some thought drifted into our mind and filled us with vague forebodings of omniscience. It was not an ordinary thought that explained only a fragment of existence. It explained everything. It proved one thing and it proved the opposite just as well. It explained why things are as they are, and if it should turn out that they are not that way at all, it would prove that fact also. In the light of our great thought chaos seemed rational. Such thoughts usually occur about four o'clock in the morning. Having explained the universe, we relax into satisfied slumber. When, a few hours later, we rise, we wonder what the explanation was.

Lacustral Settlements. The lacustral settlements were places of refuge for a pastoral and agricultural people, and the light and dryness that characterized the dwellings show a step in advance toward more permanent abodes. In this period science places the beginning of civilization. By these lacustrine men spinning and weaving were invented. Agriculture was born among them; animals were domesticated—the ox, the cow, the sheep, the goat, the dog. The uses of metal were discovered, and the age of iron was ushered in. Habitations similar to these still exist in the East Indies, and among the Amazonian tribes of Maracibo. They existed also in Lake Prasias, in Thrace, during the time of Herodotus, the Greek historian.

Spiders Ride on Flies. There is an aspect of spider and fly relations which fabulists and naturalists alike have overlooked. A correspondent who has brought the microscope to bear on many houseflies, finds that the parasite upon that hateful insect is often an immature spider, says the London Chronicle. Too weak yet to spin its web, it makes the fly its winged prey, and courses from place to place at the will of its captive; either until Pegasus perishes naturally, or, presumably, until the rider is able to make a meal of his charger. This, if confirmed, seems to carry us a step farther in the study of parasitism and commensalism.

Peter the Great. During his historic visit to London the great Russian empire builder, Peter the Great, was reproved for not attending church. "The church makes my soul uncomfortable. I will wait till I get back to Russia. There they are afraid of me. Here I am afraid of the ministers."

Not Far Wrong. Teacher—Now, children, what is the purpose of the calendar? Bright Boy—It's to tell you whether you'd order to get your life insured.

Head Over Heels. "He must be head over heels in love." "Why?" "He's engaged to a girl who talks highbrow stuff, but can't dance."

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Tommy's Unsatisfactory Supplies.

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Where Ignorance Was Bliss.

No Benefit.

Expediency.

Peter the Great.

Not Far Wrong.

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