

# The RANCH at the WOLVERINE

B.M. BOWER

## SYNOPSIS.

**CHAPTER I.**—Marthy, low-browed, uncombed, lurching, and speech and nature, with her shifthee husband Jase, Journey over desert trail, driving four oxen and are the pioneers whose lurching wagon first found the Wolverine stream. Jase is ready to stop at the first green spot, but Marthy insists on plodding along another full day's journey. That night, through natural instinct, two of the oxen stray into a narrow gorge and feast on the rich grasses of the Cove, where they are found by Marthy who recognizes the little, hidden Eden as the place of her dreams and the pioneers at once take possession. Later they are joined by another couple who are impressed with the Wolverine and also establish a home. To them is born a daughter, christened Billy Louise.

**CHAPTER II.**—After a visit to Marthy, Billy Louise on her horse Blue reaches home late, in a snow storm, having met a stranger riding over the same trail. He is invited to stop for the night and is welcomed by Billy Louise's mother. Introduces himself as Ward Warren who has a claim on Mill Creek.

## CHAPTER III.

### Marthy Buries Her Dead and Greets Her Nephew.

JASE did not move or give his customary, querulous grunt when Marthy nudged him at daylight, one morning in mid April. Marthy gave another poke with her elbow and lay still, numbed by a sudden dread. She moved cautiously out of the bed and half across the cramped room before she turned her head toward him. Then she stood still and looked and looked, her hard face growing each moment more pinched and stony and gray.

Jase had died while the coyotes were yapping their dawn song up on the rim of the cove. He lay rigid under the coarse, gray blanket, the flesh of his face drawn close to the bones, his skimp, gray beard tilted upward.

Marthy's jaw set into a harsher outline than ever. She dressed with slow, heavy movements and went out and fed the stock. In a stolid calm she did the milking and turned out the cows into the pasture. She gathered an apron full of chips and started a fire, just as she had done every morning for twenty-nine years, and she put the coffeepot on the greasy stove and boiled the brew of yesterday, which was also her habit.

She sat for some time with her head leaning upon her grimy hand and stared unseeingly up upon a peach tree in full bloom and at a pair of busy robins who had chosen a convenient crotch for their nest. Finally she rose stiffly, as if she had grown older within the last hour, and went outside to the place where she had been mending the irrigating ditch the day before. She knocked the wet sand off the shovel she had left sticking in the soft bank and went out of the yard and up the slope toward the rock wall.

On a tiny, level place above the main ditch and just under the wall Marthy began to dig, setting her broad, flat foot uncompromisingly upon the shoulder of the shovel and sending it deep into the yellow soil. She worked slowly and methodically and steadily, just as she did everything else. When she had dug down as deep as she could and still manage to climb out and had the hole wide enough and long enough, she got awkwardly to the grassy surface and sat for a long while upon a rock, staring dumbly at the gaunt, brown hills across the river.

She returned to the cabin at last, and, with the manner of one who dreads doing what must be done, she went in where Jase lay stiff and cold under the blankets.

Early that afternoon Marthy went staggering up the slope, wheeling Jase's body before her on the creeky, home-made wheelbarrow. In the same harsh, primitive manner in which they both loved Marthy buried her dead. And though in life she had given him few words save in command or upbraiding, with never a hint of love to sweeten the days for either, yet she went whimpering away from that grave. She broke off three branches of precious peach blossoms and carried them up the slope. She stuck them upright in the lumpy soil over Jase's head and stood there a long while with tear streaked face, staring down at the grave and at the nodding pink blossoms.

Billy Louise rode singing down the rocky trail through the deep, narrow gorge to where the hawthorn and choke cherries hid the opening to the cove.

From there to the pink drift of peach bloom against the dull brown of the bluff Blue galloped angrily, leaving deep, black prints in the soft green of the meadow. So they came headlong upon Marthy, just as she was knocking the yellow clay of the grave from her irrigating shovel against the pole fence of her pigpen.

"Why, Marthy!" Once before in her life Billy Louise had seen Marthy's chin quivering like that and big, slow tears sliding down the network of lines on Marthy's leathery cheeks. With a painful slump her spirits went heavy with her sympathy. "Marthy!" She knew without a word of explanation just what had happened. From Marthy's bent shoulders she knew and from her tear stained face and from

the yellow soil clinging still to the shovel in her hand. The wide eyes of Billy Louise sent seeking glances up the slope where the soil was yellow; went to the long, raw ridge under the wall, with the peach blossoms standing pitifully awry upon the western end. Her eyes filled with tears. "Oh, Marthy! When was it?"

"In the night, some time, I guess," Marthy's voice had a harsh huskiness. "He was—gone—when I woke up. Well—he's better off than I be. I dunno what woulda become of him if I'd went first." There, at last, was a note of tenderness, stifled though it was and fleeting. "Git down, Billy Louise, and come in. I been kinda lookin' for yuh to come ever sence the weather opened up. How's your maw?"

"What are you going to do now, Marthy?" Billy Louise was perfectly capable of opening a conversational door even when it had been closed decisively in her face. "You can't get on here alone, you know. Did you send for that nephew? If you haven't you must hire somebody till—"

"He's comin'. That letter you sent over last month was from him. I dunno when he'll git here; he's liable to come most any time. I ain't going to hire nobody. Charlie Fox, his name is. I hope he turns out a good worker. I've never had a chance to git ahead any, but if Charlie'll just take hold I'll mab-y git some comfort outa life yet."

"He ought to, I'm sure. And every one thinks you've done awfully well, Marthy. What can I do now? Wash the dishes and straighten things up, I guess."

"You needn't do nothin' you ain't a mind to do, Billy Louise. I don't want you to think you got to stop around washin' my dirty dishes. I'm goin' on down into the meadow and work on a ditch I'm puttin' in. You jest do what you've a mind to." She picked up the shovel and went off down the jungly path, herself the ugliest object in the cove, where she had created so much beauty.

Billy Louise sat down on the rock where Marthy had rested after digging the grave and, with her chin in her two cupped palms, stared out across the river at the heaped bluffs and down at the pink and white patch of fruit trees. She was trying, as the young will always try, to solve the riddle of life, and she was baffled and unhappy because she could not find any answer at all that pleased both her ideals and her reason. And then she heard a man's voice lifted up in riotous song and she turned her head toward the opening of the gorge and listened, her eyes brightening while she waited.

Ward came into sight through the little meadow, riding slowly, with both hands clasped over the horn of the saddle, his hat tilted back on his head and his whole attitude one of absolute content with life. He saw Billy Louise almost as soon as she glimpsed him, and she had been watching that bit of road quite closely. He flipped the reins to one side and turned from the trail to ride straight up the slope to where she was.

Billy Louise, with a self reproachful glance at the grave, ran down the slope to meet him—an unexpected welcome, which made Ward's heart leap in his chest.

"Oh, Ward, for heaven's sake, don't be singing that come-all-ye at the top of your voice, like that. Don't you?"

"Now I was given to understand that you liked that same come-all-ye. Have you been educating your musical taste in the last week, Miss William Louise?" Ward stopped his horse before her and with his hands still clasped over the saddle horn looked down at her with that hidden smile—and something else.

"No, I haven't. I don't have to educate myself to the point where I know the 'Chisholm Trail' isn't a proper kind of funeral hymn, Ward Warren." Billy Louise glanced over her shoulder and lowered her voice instinctively, as we all do when death has come close and stopped. "Jase died last night; that's his grave up there. Isn't it perfectly pitiful? Poor old Marthy was here all solitary alone with him. And—Ward, she dug that grave her ownself and took him up and buried him! And, Ward, she—she wheeled him up in the wheelbarrow! She had to, of course. She couldn't carry him. But isn't it awful?" Her hands were up, patting and smoothing the neck of his horse, and her face was bent to hide the tears that stood in her eyes and the quiver of her mouth.

Several minutes they stood there talking, while Billy Louise patted the horse absently, and Ward looked down at her and did not miss one little light or shadow in her face.

"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 stake 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 diplomat 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 jarr'd—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?"

"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 considerately between her and the stranger 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 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 deuce 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—he and Mrs. Marthy. You'll have to introduce me; I have never met the lady." Ward hastily returned the mop to its corner, rolled down his sleeves and picked up his gloves. Then he stepped outside and waited beside Billy Louise, looking not in the least like a man who has just wiped a lot of dishes and scrubbed a floor.

The nephew, striding along behind Marthy and showing head and shoulders above her, seemed not to resent any little mischance, such as muddy water flung upon him from a broom. He grinned reminiscently as he came up, shook hands with the two of them and did not let his glance dwell too long or too often upon Billy Louise nor too briefly upon Ward.

When Ward went to the stable after Blue half an hour later Charlie Fox went with him. His manner when they were alone was different, not so exuberantly cheerful—more frank and practical.

"Honest, it floored me completely to see what that poor old woman has been up against down here," he told Warren, stuffing tobacco into a silver rimmed briar pipe while Ward saddled Blue. "I don't know a deuce of a lot about this ranch game, but if that old lady can put it across I guess I can wabble along somehow. Too bad the old man cashed in just now, but Aunt Marthy as good as told me he wasn't much force, so maybe I can play a lone hand here as easy as I could have done with him."

Afterward, when Ward thought it over, he remembered gratefully that Charlie Fox had refrained from attempting any discussion of Billy Louise or from asking any questions even remotely personal. He knew enough about men to appreciate the tactful silences of the stranger, and when Billy Louise on the way home predicted that the nephew was going to be a success Ward did not feel like qualifying the verdict.

(Continued next week)

## COUNCIL PROCEEDINGS

Feb. 4.—Council met in regular session with all members present. Minutes of the previous meeting were read and approved.

The monthly and semi-annual statements of the treasurer were read and referred to the finance committee.

A resolution accepting proposition of J. H. Hawley in settlement of his assessment on south Pacific highway was read and adopted.

Resolution received for the extension for three years of the contract with the Cottage Grove Electric company, with some modifications, was read. On the motion for adoption Aldermen Kime, Garrette and Allison voted aye and Walker, Sterling and Ventch no. The vote being a tie Mayor Wheeler cast his vote in the negative.

Statement was received from John Dagen regarding the standing of water on his place on south Sixth street and referred to sewer committee.

The recorder was instructed to prepare a petition calling a special election to amend the charter in compliance with a measure enacted by the people requiring that city elections be held at the same times as state elections.

The following bills were audited and allowed:

C. G. Electric Co.	\$27.83
Ira Bandall, hauling gravel	4.05
Fire company, salaries	23.90
G. B. Pitcher, salary and expenses on pipe line	81.41
Frank Woodruff, work on sewer	7.75
J. H. Brown, salary and exp.	75.49
J. E. Young, salary	55.00
Sentinel, publishing proceedings	3.90
W. W. Oglesby, salary	10.00
C. G. Transfer Co., sweeping streets	21.50
Wynne & Kime, supplies for steam roller	5.10
W. B. Osmon, work on reservoir	3.50

On motion council adjourned to February 18, 1918.

J. E. YOUNG, City Recorder.

## OREGON MAY BE CALLED ON FOR \$50,000,000

Third Liberty Loan Drive in March or April with at Least Twice Previous Sum to Be Raised.

Some time between March 1 and April 15 the people of Cottage Grove, along with all the other people of the state and nation, will be called upon to subscribe to the third issue of Liberty bonds. The greatest of all drives will be conducted between those dates, the exact period not having yet been designated.

In all probability the national quota of the third loan will be from \$6,000,000,000 to \$8,000,000,000, and Oregon's share of the bonds may be placed at not less than \$50,000,000—a task titanic by comparison with those that have preceded it.

To meet the demands of the coming campaign, all citizens must be enlisted in the bombardment of dollars against the Hun. With a probable quota of double the amount raised during the second drive, the number of individual subscriptions must be greatly increased.

## BRIEF WAR NEWS

Sixty-six persons were killed and 183 injured in the two German raids over London last week.

Many German prisoners in Russia, taking advantage of internal disorders, are returning to the German lines.

Food riots have broken out in Vienna, according to reports received. Shops have been pillaged and clashes have occurred between rioters and the police.

It was officially announced that the total number of deaths resulting from the recent airplane raid of the Germans over Paris was 49 and the total wounded 206.

Great Britain has asked Brazil and Uruguay for the use of interned German merchant ships for the transportation of grain, according to information received from Rio Janeiro.

British expeditionary forces in Palestine again have assumed the offensive. Official war reports stated. General Allenby's line has been advanced to Anutieh, three miles north of Bireh on the Nabalus road.

Severe measures of repression have been taken by the German government against the workers whose strike movement in important industrial centers has tied up many plants engaged in munition and war supply work. Berlin and its environs remain the center of the disturbance. The city is under military control. Factories where strikes are in progress have been militarized, say dispatches, and the workers warned to report for work or undergo military discipline.

Many Soldiers Take Federal Insurance

San Francisco. — Soldiers in the western department of the army have taken government insurance to the total value of \$178,000,000 and before the period of automatic insurance, February 12, it is believed most of the 47,000 men in this jurisdiction will hold government policies, according to Captain E. H. Pearce, officer in charge.

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To Vacate Roadway at Goshen. A resolution to the effect that proper proceedings have been taken to vacate the old roadway at the S. P. crossing between West Springfield and Goshen, which has been abandoned for the under grade crossing a few yards further south, was adopted by the county court yesterday and steps will be taken at once to officially vacate the strip so that the railway company may fence the right-of-way at that point.

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