

The Ranch at the Wolverine

By B. M. BOWER

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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I.—Marthy, low-browed, uncombed, harsh of voice and speech and nature, with her shiftless husband, Jesse, journey over desert trail, driving four oxen and are the pioneers whose lurching wagon first fords the Wolverine stream. Jesse 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. Introduced to her home-made wheelbarrow and buried her dead. Charlie Fox, her nephew arrives.

CHAPTER III.—Marthy is horrified to find that Jesse has died during the night. Digging a grave in a level place above the main ditch, she wheels Jesse's body on the home-made wheelbarrow and buries her dead. Charlie Fox, her nephew arrives.

CHAPTER IV.

The Mystery of the Missing.

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

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

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

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

"The bars were all right. It was last Friday, I think. I'm not sure. They were in the little meadow above the house, you see. I was away that night, and Aunt Martha is a little hard of hearing. She wouldn't hear anything unless there were considerable noise. I came home the next forenoon—I was over to Seaback's and the bars were in place then. Aunt Martha had not been up the gorge nor had any one come to the ranch while I was gone. So you see, Miss Louise, here's a very pretty mystery."

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes, I thought of that—strange as it

may seem." Charlie's voice was unoffended. On the contrary, he seemed glad that she took so keen an interest in his affairs. "It has been a week, you know, since they flew the coop. I did hunt every foot of that Cove twice over. I drove every hoof of stock up and corralled them and made sure these four were not in the herd. Then I hunted through every inch of that willow jungle and all along the bluff and the river. Miss Louise, I put in three days at it, from sunrise till it was too dark to see. Then I began riding outside. There isn't a trace of them anywhere. I had just bought them from Seaback, 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-flaying 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 Seaback."

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

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

"I—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? Seaback puts his brand upside down!"

"I know Seaback'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 clump 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 Cattle Queen. But I'm beginning to see that we only know what we learn by experience. I've a new book on the subject of heredity of the cattle. I'm going home and see if Seaback hasn't stumbled upon a strain that can be traced back to your native mountain sheep."

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

She also discovered for herself that they could not have broken out of that pasture and that the river bank was impassable because of high, thick bushes and miry mud in the open spaces. She had a fight with Blue over these latter places and demonstrated beyond doubt that they were miry by getting him in to the knees in spite of his violent objections. They left deep tracks behind them when they got out. The calves had not gone investigating the

bank, for there was not a trace anywhere, and the bluff was absolutely unscalable. Billy Louise herself would have felt doubtful of climbing out that way. The gray rim rock stood straight and high at the top, with never a crevice, so far as she could see, and the gorge was barred so that it was impossible to go that way without lifting heavy poles out of deep sockets and sliding them to one side.

"I've got an idea about a gate here," Charlie confided suddenly. "There won't be any more mysteries like this. I'm going to fix a swinging gate in place of these bars, Miss Louise. I shall have it swing uphill like this, and I'll have a weight arranged so that it will always close itself if one is careless enough to ride on and leave it open. I have it all worked out in my



"If You'll Let Down the Bars, Mr. Fox, I'll Hit the Trail."

alleged brain. I shall do it right away too. Aunt Marthy is rather nervous about this gorge now. Every evening she walks up here herself to make sure the bars are closed."

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

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

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

"They're hummers to climb—"

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

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

"No, but I do hate to see a person deliberately shut his eyes in front of a fact. We may as well admit to ourselves that there is a rustler in the country. Then we can look out for him."

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

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

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

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

(Continued next week)

ENTENTE HAS MOST TROOPS

Secretary Baker Says Allies Numerically Superior on West Front.

Washington.—Warning the nation not to let reports of strikes and other internal disturbances in Germany slacken its war preparations, Secretary Baker in his weekly military review also makes the official announcement that American troops are at last holding a portion of the actual battle front.

For the first time, also, Secretary Baker declares that it is fully believed the allies have a preponderance of men and guns on the western front, despite the fact that the German line has been strengthened by troops from the Russian field. Secretary Baker declared the reports of numerical superiority have been spread by the enemy himself.

Classy job printing. The Sentinel. **

GENERAL MENCHER



General Chas. T. Mencher, who succeeded General Mann as commander of the Rainbow division of National Guard troops in France.

WAR COUNCIL SAYS PEACE IS REMOTE

London.—The supreme war council, which met at Versailles, finds no approximation in the German chancellor's and the Austro-Hungarian foreign minister's speeches to the terms of the entente allies and has decided to continue vigorous prosecution of the war until peace can be obtained "based on the principles of freedom, justice and respect for international law."

A summary of the official report of the Versailles war office says:

"The council was unable to find in Von Hertling's and Czernin's recent utterances any real approximation to the moderate conditions laid down by the allies' governments."

"Under the circumstances, the council decided that the only task before them to meet was the vigorous and effective prosecution of the war until the pressure of that effort produced a change of temper in the enemy governments, justifying the hope of the conclusion of a peace based on the principles of freedom, justice and respect for international law."

"The council arrived at a complete unanimity of policy on measures for the prosecution of the war."

The United States was represented in the council by General Tasker H. Bliss, chief of staff of the American army.

NOTICE FOR PUBLICATION.

Department of the Interior, U. S. Land Office at Roseburg, Ore., February 4, 1918.

Notice is hereby given that Harley O. Cain, of Blakelyville, Oregon, who, on March 8, 1915, made Adjoining Farm Homestead Entry, Serial No. 010029, for the Lot 7 of Section 7, Township 20 S., Range 2 E., Willamette Meridian, has filed notice of intention to make final three-year proof to establish claim to the land above described, before E. O. Immel, U. S. Commissioner, at his office at Eugene, Oregon, on the 18th day of March, 1918.

Claimant names as witnesses: Albert Haynie, of Blakelyville, Oregon; John M. Cain, of Blakelyville, Oregon; Thomas C. May, of Landax, Oregon; Joseph A. Blakely, of Blakelyville, Oregon.

W. H. CANON, Register.

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ADMINISTRATOR'S NOTICE.

Notice is hereby given that the undersigned has been appointed by the county court for Lane county, Oregon, administratrix of the estate of Martha A. Stroud, deceased.

All persons having claims against said estate are required to present them to me duly verified, at Cottage Grove, Oregon, within six months after the date of first publication of this notice. Date of first publication, the 1st day of February, 1918.

MRS. C. R. PERRY,

Administratrix of the estate of fml Mrs. Martha A. Stroud, deceased.

ADMINISTRATOR'S NOTICE OF FINAL SETTLEMENT.

Notice is hereby given that the undersigned administrator of the estate of Emery L. Goodridge, deceased, has filed in the county court of Lane county, Oregon, his final account as such administrator of said estate and that Saturday, the 16th day of March, 1917, at the hour of 11 o'clock a. m. of said day has been set by said court for hearing objections to said report and the settlement thereof.

NELSON DURHAM,

Administrator of the Estate of f15m15 Emery L. Goodridge, deceased.

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NOTICE OF FINAL SETTLEMENT.

Notice is hereby given that the undersigned executor with the will annexed of the estate of James A. Sears, deceased, has filed in the county court of Lane county, Oregon, his final account as such executor and that Tuesday, the 19th day of February, 1918,

at the hour of 11 o'clock a. m. of said day, has been fixed by said court as the time for hearing any objections to said report and the settlement thereof.

Order made and entered of record, January 15th, 1918.

ERNEST J. SEARS,

Executor.

ALTA KING, Attorney for Estate.

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