

The Ranch at the Wolverine

By B. M. BOWER

SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I—Marthy, low-browed, un-combed, harsh of voice and speech and hairy, with her milky husband Jase, journey over desert trail, driving four oxen and are the pioneers whose lumbering wagon first fords 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 lost 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 is horrified to find that Jase has died during the night. Digging a grave in a level place above the main ditch, she wheels Jase's body on the home-made wheelbarrow and buries her dead. Charlie Fox, her nephew arrives.

CHAPTER IV—Fox rides to Billy Louise's ranch to inquire if she has seen anything of four of their calves which disappeared, theft is discussed, and Billy Louise starts in search.

CHAPTER I

The Little Devils of Doubt. THE spring had come, and Wolverine canyon, with the sun shining down aslant into its depths, was a picturesque gash in the hills, wild enough in all conscience, but to the normal person not in the least degree gloomy. The jutting crags were sunlit and warm. The cherry thickets whispered in a light breeze and sheltered birds that sang in perfect content. Not a gloomy place surely when the peace of a sunny morning laid its spell upon the land.

Billy Louise, however, did not respond to the canyon's enticements. She brooded over her own discouragements and the tantalizing little puzzles which somehow would not lend themselves to any convincing solution. She was in that condition of nervous depression where she saw her finest cows dead by bloat in the alfalfa meadows—and how would she pay that machinery note then? She saw John Pringle calling 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 cave 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 folded 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 Seabek'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 wore bells that tinkled pleasant little sounds in the alder 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 lined 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.

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. Seabek riders probably. And so they proved. At least one of them was a Seabek 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 Seabek 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 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. Them Y6 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 property ain't accounted for—"

"Oh, but it is!" laughed Billy Louise. "I only wish I had half as clear a ticket. When he ain'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-drib 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 stuck 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 Noisy. 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 Ds," 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 rode 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 goodbye 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—your 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 go lumbering 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 wet 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 coral 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 Nattier. 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 four 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-mm! 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 tomatoes. 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, sizing 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.

(Continued next week)

NOTICE FOR PUBLICATION.

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

Notice is hereby given that James Albert Haynie, of Blakelyville, Oregon, who, on March 8, 1915, made Homestead Entry Serial No. 010928 for Lot 2 of Sec. 7, Tp. 29 S., R. 2 E., W. M., and on August 30, 1916, made Additional Homestead Entry Serial No. 016798 for the SW¹/₄ of SE¹/₄ of NW¹/₄ of Section 7, Township 29 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: Harley O. Cain, of Blakelyville, Oregon; John M. Cain, of Blakelyville, Oregon; Joe Blakely, of Blakelyville, Oregon; Thomas C. May, of Landax, Oregon.

W. H. CANON, Register.

f8mch14

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. 010929, for the Lot 7 of Section 7, Township 29 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.

f8m14

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. B. PERRY, Administratrix of the estate of f1m1 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.



In Keeping With the Big Thought of the Day

The daily press reflects a sentiment throughout the nation which clearly indicates a new condition.

Men are wanted everywhere. The work of this war is being carried on largely by those who never before have been in public office or in public work. Men who have been too busy, too engrossed with their own tasks, are leaving their work to others and giving their time and ability to the cause which is ours, yours, everybody's.

It is a time when politics in the ordinary sense must not be considered. It calls for all the ability that can be mustered.

Oregon, to be a successful part in this unit plan for the defense of Democracy, must likewise place the thought of the times before everything.

In another part of this paper appears the announcement of L. J. Simpson as a candidate for the nomination for governor on the republican ticket. Mr. Simpson was urged to become a candidate by his many friends in every part of the state, because of his business record, his understanding and knowledge of Oregon's resources, industries, needs; because of his public-spiritedness, which of recent years has led him to tasks which have been more important to him than his own affairs.

L. J. SIMPSON IS CLEARLY THE MAN WHO CAN GIVE OREGON THE ADMINISTRATION NECESSARY TO THIS PLAN OF NATIONAL EFFICIENCY.

His campaign will be directed straight to you as voters, as individuals who do your own thinking.

We are firmly convinced that you will not allow politics to influence your decision, and that you will vote for the man who is best fit to help the people of Oregon develop the state's vast resources, and to prepare for, and participate in, the great reconstruction that is to follow.

We believe you will weigh issues more closely than ever before, and that L. J. Simpson will be your choice.



What You Can Do

FIRST—Talk over his candidacy with your friends.

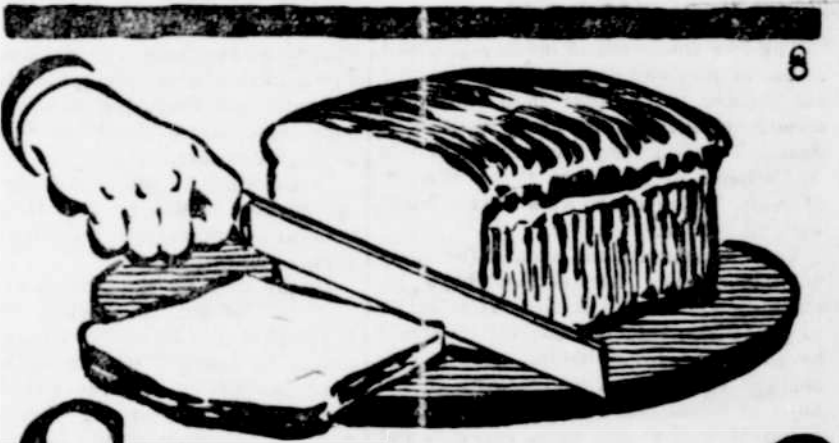
SECOND—If you believe that L. J. Simpson is worthy of your support write a letter to this committee.

Suggest how his cause may be advanced. We, in turn, will tell you how you can help.

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