

The Ranch at the Wolverine

By B. M. BOWER

SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I—Marthy, low-browed, un-
combed, hairy of voice and speech and
nature, with her shifless husband Jase,
journey over desert trail, driving four
oxen and two mules, the pioneers whose
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. 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 pos-
session. 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 wel-
comed by Billy Louise's mother. Intro-
duces 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 her calves which
disappeared. Theft is discussed, and Billy
Louise starts in search.

CHAPTER V—Spring has come, but
Billy Louise is not affected by the beau-
ties of Wolverine country, for she is brood-
ing over her disappointments and is on
the brink of nervous breakdown when
she finds one of her finest cows dead,
and she has a machinery to die. Two
men approach on horseback looking about
for missing stock. She rides to Ward's cabin,
but he is not there.

CHAPTER VI—Hiding along a flat-
bottomed canyon she sees a horseman resem-
bling Ward disappear in the hills and later
discovers a hidden corral such as she
remembers being told about by her father.
She is late in arriving home and finds
her mother ill, and a physician is called.

CHAPTER VII.

Each in His Own Trail.

SINCE nothing in this world is abso-
lutely 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 evi-
dence of her own eyes and the frag-
ments 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 be-
gan 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 molten 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 in-
nocence 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, ques-
tioning look that was sometimes re-
bellious as well; a drop 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.

"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, Billy?" he asked in the
tone that was calculated to invite an
unburdening of her troubles.

"Oh, nothing in particular! Mom-
mie's been awfully sick, and I'm al-

ways 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-
ed for our place? If you are, come on.
I was just starting back. I don't dare
be away any longer." If that were a
real unburdening Ward was an unrea-
sonable young man. Billy Louise look-
ed at him again, and this time her
eyes were clear and friendly.

Ward was not satisfied, for all the
surface seemed smooth enough. He
was too sensitive not to feel a differ-
ence, and he was too innocent of any
wrongdoing or thinking to guess what
was the matter. Guilt is a good barom-
eter of personal atmosphere, and Ward
had none of it. The worst of him she
had known for more than a year. He
had told her himself, and she had heal-
ed the hurt—almost—of the past by her
firm belief in him and by her friend-
ship. Could you expect Ward to guess
that she had seen her faith in him die
a violent death no longer than two
weeks ago? Such a possibility never
occurred to him.

For all that he felt there was a dif-
ference somewhere. He carried back
with him a fit of the blues which seem-
ed to have attacked him without cause
or pretext, since he had not quarreled
with Billy Louise and had been warm-
ly welcomed by "mommie." Poor mom-
mie was looking white and frail, and
her temples were too distinctly veined
with purple. Ward told himself that it
was no wonder his Wilhemina acted
strained and unnatural. He meant to
work harder than ever and get his
stake so that he could go and make
her give him the right to take care of
her.

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 moth-
er so far off the main road. In that
case he would go down and put that
Wolverine place in shape. He had no
squabbles about living on her
ranch instead of his own if she want-
ed it that way. He meant to be bet-
ter "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 quar-
reled, since Ward carried castles as
well as the blues. In fact, their part-
ing 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 head
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, wav-
ing 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 devil that still pursued
her weaker moments, it set him plan-
ning 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.

Besides that, there was an undercur-
rent 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 person-
ality 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 lipped 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 af-
ter that. Once she rode out early with
the intention of going to Ward's claim
to warn him. But three miles of safer
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 warn-
ing, and even Billy Louise shrank from
what 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 alarm-
ing amiability. She questioned him art-
fully—trust 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 in-
stance, 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 holdin' down a

claim away over on Mill Creek," he
had remarked. "I'll look him up when
I come back, though Seebek 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 clue." Perhaps
the stock inspector was wiser than she
gave him credit for being. He did not
at any rate pursue the subject any fur-
ther 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 gar-
gulous humors.

After that the days drifted quietly
for a month and grew nipper 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 gay-
est colors and that one must prepare
for the siege of winter.

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 be-
fore 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 after-
ward.

There was a month or so of going
to and fro on her toes and of watching
the clock with a mind to medicine giv-
ing. There were nights and nights and
nights when the cabin window winked
like a star fallen into the corral 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 croaking journey
to the railroad. And when Ward rode
next to the Wolverine ranch there was
no Billy Louise to taunt or tempt him,
boasting that he ever did, but he fre-
quently missed. He measured the dis-
tance with his mind while the man
stood there talking to some one un-
seen. To look at Ward's face you
would have sworn that the man was
doomed, but something held Ward's
finger from crooking on the trigger.

The man had his back turned squarely
toward the gun. Ward waited. The
man did not move. He waited another
minute, and then he opened his lips to
shout. And when his lips parted for
the call that would bring the fellow
facing him Ward's tricky brain snapped
before his eyes the face of Billy
Louise.

He lowered the gun. He could not
shoot when he knew that the bullet
would split a gulf between himself
and the girl—a gulf that would sepa-
rate him forever from that future
where stood his air castles.

He let down the hammer with his
thumb, slid the gun back into its hol-
ster and dismounted, with a glance to-
ward the place where the lookout was
stationed. He was sure he had not
been seen, and so he crouched behind
a splinter of rock and watched. He
had no plan, but his instinct impelled
him to closely watch Buck Olney.

Another man came into view down
there in the corral. He also stood
placidly revealed, and Ward gave a
little snort of contemptuous surprise
when he recognized him. After that
he studied the situation with scowling
his conclusions or complicated his
manner of dealing with Buck Olney.
Ward would not have hesitated one
second about putting the sheriff on
the trail of Buck, but if the second
man were implicated he could not bet-
ray one without betraying the other.
And if the business down there in the
corral were lawful, then he must think
of some other means. At any rate, the
thing to do now was to make sure.

The two in the corral came out and
closed the gate behind them, and the
first man kicked apart the embers of
a small fire and afterward busied him-
self with the ground, either looking for
tracks or covering them up. They
came a little way along the side of the
bluff, mounted and rode up toward
where the lookout waited. And one of
them rode a dark bay and was slim
and tall and wore a gray hat.

Ward glanced at Rattler standing
half asleep with reins dropped to the
ground. He reached out, took the
reins and led the horse farther down
under the shelter of the ledge. Rat-
tler pricked up his ears at the sound
of those other riders, but he did not
show enough interest to nicker a greet-
ing. He was always a self centered
beast and was content to go his way
alone, like his master.

Ward stood up, where he could see
the rim of the bluff over the ledge of
lava rock. He might get a closer view
and see who was the lookout, and he
might be seen. For that contingency
he kept his fingers close to his gun.
He heard their scrambling progress.
Now and then one of the horses sent
a little rock bounding down into the
canyon, whereat the cattle in the corral
moved restlessly around the small in-
closure.

They came closer after they had
gained the top. Ward, leaning against
the dull gray rock before him, heard
the murmur of their voices. Once he
caught the unmistakable tones of the
man he would like to kill. "I'll keep
cases and get him." Plotting against
some poor devil, as usual, Ward
thought and wondered if the man knew
he lived in this part of the country. If
he did, it might easily be—

"I'll keep cases some myself, you
reptile," he muttered under his breath.
"You won't get me again, if that's

what you've got in mind."

They went on, and presently Ward
was looking at their backs as they
rode over the ridge. He stood for
some time staring after them with
what Billy Louise called his gimlet
look. He was breathing shortly from
the pressure he had put upon his self
control, and he was thinking, thinking.

The silence came creeping in on the
heels of the faint, interrupted sound
of their voices. Ward took a long
breath, discovered that he was grip-
ping his gun as though his life depend-
ed on hanging to it and rubbed his
numbed fingers absently. After a min-
ute or so he mounted and rode down
to the corral.

Five dry cows and two steers snort-
ed at his approach and crowded against
the farther rails. Ward gave Rattler
a touch of the spurs, rode close to the
John Pringle and Phoebe told him in
brief, stolid sentences of the later de-
velopments and gave him a meal and
offered him a bed, which he declined.

When the suspense became madden-
ing 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.
She 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 loneliness out of his days and
the hunger from his dreams with com-
plete bone weariness. He did not ex-
pect 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 noth-
ing, 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. Far-
ther 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 doc-
tors, 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 win-
ter.

(Continued next week)

NOTICE FOR PUBLICATION.

Department of the Interior, U. S.
Land Office at Roseburg, Oregon, Feb-
ruary 4, 1918.

Notice is hereby given that James
Albert Haynie, of Blakelyville, Oregon,
who, on March 8, 1915, made Homestead
Entry Serial No. 010028 for Lot 2 of
Sec. 7, Tp. 20 S., R. 2 E., W. M., and
on August 30, 1916, made Additional
Homestead Entry Serial No. 010798 for
the SW¹ of SE¹ of NW¹ of Section
7, Township 20 S., Range 2 E., Willam-
ette Meridian, has filed notice of in-
tention to make final three-year proof to
establish claim to the land above de-
scribed, before E. O. Immel, U. S. Com-
missioner, at his office at Eugene, Ore-
gon, on the 18th day of March, 1918.

Claimant names as witnesses: Har-
ley 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.

NOTICE FOR PUBLICATION.

Department of the Interior, U. S.
Land Office at Roseburg, Ore., Feb-
ruary 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; Thom-
as C. May, of Landax, Oregon; Joseph
A. Blakely, of Blakelyville, Oregon.
W. H. CANON,
Register.

YOU COOK YOUR FOOD—WHY NOT YOUR TOBACCO?

YOU know what broiling
does to steak, baking to a
potato—and toasting to bread.
In each case flavor is brought
out by cooking—by "toasting."
So you can imagine how
toasting improves the flavor
of the Burley tobacco used in
the Lucky Strike Cigarette.

IT'S TOASTED



London Organizes Auxiliary.

Mr. and Mrs. J. E. Banton were in
the city from London Monday and
brought the news that a Red Cross aux-
iliary was organized at that place Fri-
day. The organization was effected at
the close of a patriotic program given
by the school children, with officers as
follows: Mrs. J. E. Banton, president;
Mrs. G. A. Small, secretary, and Mrs.
W. G. Massey, treasurer. Following the
organization Levi Geer spoke at some
length on thrift and war savings
tamps and called another meeting on
the subject for Friday night.

Everyman's Pledge.

American shall win this war! There-
fore, I will work, I will save, I will
sacrifice, I will endure, I will fight—
heartfully, and to my utmost—as if the
whole outcome of the struggle depended
upon me alone.

Don't forget that by paying a full
year's subscription in advance you get
it at the old rate of \$1.50. The new rate
applies on delinquent accounts only. If

NOTICE TO CREDITORS.

Notice is hereby given that Alf. Jury
has been appointed executor of the last
will and testament of Robert Griffin,
deceased, by the county court of Lane
county, Oregon, on the 19th day of Feb-
ruary, A. D. 1918; that all persons hav-
ing claims against said estate are here-
by notified to present the same, duly
verified, to said Alf. Jury at Bank of
Cottage Grove in Cottage Grove, Ore-
gon, within six months from date of
first publication of this notice.
Date of first publication the 22nd
day of February, 1918.

ALF. JURY,
Executor.
H. J. SHINN,
Attorney for estate. f22 m22

ADMINISTRATOR'S NOTICE OF FI- NAL SETTLEMENT.

Notice is hereby given that the un-
dersigned administrator of the estate
of Emery L. Goodridge, deceased, has
filed in the county court of Lane coun-
ty, 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 hear-
ing objections to said report and the
settlement thereof.

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



Does Your Horse
Kick On His
FEED?

A POORLY FED HORSE
reflects discredit on its owner, but the
owner gets the worst of the deal be-
cause economy in feeding the horse
affects its working capacity as well as
its appearance. If your horse kicks on
his feed you can correct it by buying
your feed here, as you get the best
quality for the least outlay. Farmers,
contractors and horse owners generally
know that our feed is always up to the
standard.

ALF. JURY,
Executor.
H. J. SHINN,
Attorney for estate. f22 m22

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