

MY FRIEND FLICKA

by MARY O'HARA



THE STORY SO FAR: Ten-year-old Ken McLaughlin can ride any horse on his family's Wyoming ranch, but he wants a colt of his own. His father, a retired army officer, refuses because Ken has not been promoted at school and has shown no sense of responsibility. But Ken's mother convinces Captain McLaughlin that the colt may be just what Ken needs. Ken picks the yearling filly of a "loc" (no good) mare named Rocket. A little later Rocket is sold, but is killed before she reaches her new owner. McLaughlin sells all of Rocket's offspring but Ken's colt. In spite of his father's displeasure Ken wants that colt and no other.

Now continue with the story.

CHAPTER IX

They dined in town, with the Bartletts; and by the time they got back to the ranch, a number of visitors were there; and from then on the pleasant sociabilities of Sunday afternoon kept the place alive with cars coming and going, trays of bottles and glasses being carried in and out, and much talk and laughter. Later in the afternoon, McLaughlin stuck a tin can on the tip of one of the branches of a pine tree on the Hill opposite and the officers took their revolvers and practiced target shooting, standing on the terrace.

Then Mrs. Grubb and Mrs. Gillfillan said they wanted to ride out and see the brood mares, so they all crowded into two automobiles, and McLaughlin led the way.

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"He always does."

The mares stopped grazing and stood, alert, curious, and ready to run. Banner was amongst them.

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Suddenly the big stallion moved towards them, ears pricked, inquiring eyes wide and fearless, and began to trot, his legs alternating in high, free, curving steps, his mane streaming, his tail up.

"Flying all his flags!" cried Nell. A roar and cheer burst from the officers as the stallion, without breaking his trot, increased his pace and came down the wind to them like a bugle call.

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Tomorrow . . .

When Ken opened his eyes next morning and looked out he saw that the house was wrapped in fog. There had been no rain at all since the day a week ago when the wind had torn the "sprinkling system" to pieces and blown all the tattered clouds away. That was the day he had found Flicka. And it had been terribly hot since then. They had hardly been able to stand the sun out on the terrace. They had gone swimming in the pool every day. On the hills, the grass was turning to soft tan.

Now there were clouds and they had closed down. After a severe hot spell there often came a heavy fog, or hail, or even snow.

Standing at the window, Ken could hardly see the pines on the Hill opposite. He wondered if his father would go after the yearlings in such a fog as this—they wouldn't be able to see them; but at breakfast McLaughlin said there would be no change of plans. It was just a big cloud that had settled down over the ranch—it would lift and fall—perhaps up on Saddle Back it would be clear.

They mounted and rode out. The fog lay in the folds of the hills. Here and there a bare sum-

mit was in sunshine, then a little farther on, came a smother of cottony white that soaked the four riders to the skin and hung rows of moonstones on the whiskers of the horses.

It was hard to keep track of each other. Suddenly Ken was lost—the others had vanished. He reined in Shorty and sat listening. The clouds and mist rolled around him. He felt as if he were alone in the world.

A bluebird, color of the deep blue wild delphinium that dots the plains, became interested in him, and perched on a bush near by; and as he started Shorty forward again, the bluebird followed along, hopping from bush to bush.

The boy rode slowly, not knowing in which direction to go. Then, hearing shouts, he touched heels to Shorty and cantered, and suddenly came out of the fog and saw his father and Tim and Ross.

"There they are!" said McLaughlin, pointing down over the curve of the hill. They rode forward and Ken could see the yearlings standing bunched at the bottom, looking up, wondering who was coming. Then a huge coil of fog swirled over them and they were lost to sight again.

McLaughlin told them to circle around, spread out fan-wise on the far side of the colts, and then gently bar down on them so they would

start towards the ranch. If the colts once got running in this fog, he said, there'd be no chance of catching them.

The plan worked well; the yearlings were not so frisky as usual, and allowed themselves to be driven in the right direction. It was only when they were on the County Road, and near the gate where Howard was watching, that Ken, whose eyes had been scanning the bunch, as they appeared and disappeared in the fog, realized that Flicka was missing.

McLaughlin noticed it at the same moment, and as Ken rode toward his father, McLaughlin turned to him and said, "She's not in the bunch."

They sat in silence a few moments while McLaughlin planned the next step. The yearlings, dispirited by the fog, nibbled languidly at the grass by the roadside. McLaughlin looked at the Saddle Back and Ken looked too, the passionate desire in his heart reaching out to pierce the fog and the hillside and see where Flicka had hidden herself away.

"Well, we'll drive the yearlings back up," said Rob finally. "No chance of finding her alone. If they happen to pass anywhere near her, she's likely to join them."

They drove the yearlings back. Once over the first hill, the colts got running and soon were out of sight. The fog closed down again so that Ken pulled up, unable to see where he was going, unable to see his father, or Ross or Tim.

He sat listening, astonished that the sound of their hoofs had been wiped out so completely. Again he seemed alone in the world.

The fog lifted in front of him and showed him that he stood at the brink of a sharp drop, almost a precipice, though not very deep. It led down into a semi-circular pocket on the hillside which was fed by a spring; there was a clump of young cottonwoods, and a great bank of clover dotted with small yellow blossoms.

In the midst of the clover stood Flicka, quietly feasting. She had seen him before he saw her and was watching him, her head up, clover sticking out of both sides of her mouth, her jaws going busily.

At sight of her, Ken was incapable of either thought or action. Suddenly from behind him in the

fog, he heard his father's low voice, "Don't move—"

"How'd she get in there?" said Tim.

"She scrambled down this bank. And she could scramble up again, if we weren't here. I think we've got her," said McLaughlin.

"Other side of that pocket the ground drops twenty feet sheer," said Tim. "She can't go down there."

Flicka had stopped chewing. There were still stalks of clover sticking out between her jaws, but her head was up and her ears pricked, listening, and there was a tautness and tension in her whole body.

Ken found himself trembling too. "How're you going to catch her, Dad?" he asked in a low voice.

"I kin snag her from here," said Ross, and in the same breath McLaughlin answered, "Ross can rope her. Might as well rope her here as in the corral. We'll spread out in a semi-circle above this bank. She can't get up past us, and she can't get down."

They took their positions and Ross lifted his rope off the horn of his saddle.

Ahead of them, far down below the pocket, the yearlings were running. A whinny or two drifted up, and the sound of their hoofs, muffled by the fog.

Flicka heard them too. Suddenly she was aware of danger. She leaped out of the clover to the edge of the precipice which fell away down the mountainside toward where the yearlings were running. But it was too steep and too high. She came straight up on her hind legs with a neigh of terror, and whirled back toward the bank down which she had slid to reach the pocket. But on the crest of it, looming uncannily in the fog, were four black figures—she screamed, and ran around the base of the bank.

Ken heard Ross' rope sing. It snaked out just as Flicka dove into the bank of clover. Stumbling, she went down and for a moment was lost to view.

"Goldarn—" said Ross, hauling in his rope, while Flicka floundered up and again circled her small prison, hurling herself at every point, only to realize that there was no way out.

She stood over the precipice, poised in despair and frantic longing. There drifted up the sound of the colts running below. Flicka trembled and strained over the brink—a perfect target for Ross, and he whirled his lariat again. It made a vicious whine.

Flicka went down like a diver. She hit the ground with her legs folded under her, then rolled and bounced the rest of the way. It was exactly like the bronco that had climbed over the side of the truck and rolled down the forty-foot bank; and in silence the four watchers sat in their saddles waiting to see what would happen when she hit bottom—Ken already thinking of the Winchester, and the way the crack of it had echoed back from the hills.

Flicka lit, it seemed, on four steel springs that tossed her up and sent her flying down the mountainside—perfection of speed and power and action. A hot sweat bathed Ken from head to foot, and he began to laugh, half choking—

The wind roared down and swept up the fog, and it went bounding away over the hills, leaving trailing streamers of white in the gullies, and coverlets of cotton around the bushes. Way below, they could see Flicka galloping toward the yearlings. In a moment she joined them, and then there was just a many colored blur of moving shapes, with a fierce sun blazing down, striking sparks of light off their glossy coats.

"Get going!" shouted McLaughlin. "Get around behind them. They're on the run now, and it's cleared—keep them running, and we may get them all in together, before they stop. Tim, you take the short way back to the gate and help Howard turn them and get them through."

Tim shot off toward the County Road and the other three riders galloped down and around the mountain until they were at the back of the band of yearlings. Shouting and yelling and spurring their mounts, they kept the colts running, circling them around toward the ranch until they had them on the County Road.

Way ahead, Ken could see Tim and Howard at the gate, blocking the road. The yearlings were bearing down on them. Now McLaughlin slowed up, and began to call, "Whoa, whoa—" and the pace decreased. Often enough the yearlings had swept down that road and through the gate and down to the corrals. It was the pathway to oats, and hay, and shelter from winter storms—would they take it now? Flicka was with them—right in the middle—if they went, would she go too?

It was all over almost before Ken could draw a breath. The yearlings turned at the gate, swept through, went down to the corrals on a dead run, and through the gates that Gus had opened.

Flicka was caught again.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

HOUSEHOLD MEMOS... by Lynn Chambers



Use a Water-Bath for Canning Tomatoes, Fruits (See Recipe Below)

Try Canning!

Many homemakers who have never done so before will be hard at work doing some old-fashioned "putting up" this summer. Not only will it be economical to put up your own Victory garden's surplus, but also it will be a vital step in stretching those precious points next winter.

Canning's simpler today and much of the spoilage that occurred formerly can be prevented if the home-maker checks the causes of spoilage. There's a reason for every type of spoilage, and what's more important, every one of them can be prevented if she's careful.

First, it's not smart to use leftover produce that you wouldn't eat at the table. Select only prime fruit and vegetables in perfect condition. Best quality goes into commercial canning, and so it should for home canning. Get out into the garden early in the morning to get vegetables and fruits and can immediately, or if you market, tie a bandana on your hair and go out early in the morning to get your produce while it's still fresh.

Cleanliness is another important factor. Remember that food spoils for other reasons than that the jar is not air-tight. More spoilage than you ever dreamed of can result from not washing the food properly and discarding bruised or imperfect vegetables and fruits. Be sure to peel the food, if it is to be peeled, so that no dirt and the bacteria that lurk in it get rubbed in the product as it is peeled.

Work as quickly as possible with the food once it's started on its way to the can. Flat sour, which occurs in vegetables, can often develop in vegetables, for example, if the jars in which the pre-cooked food is placed stand too long before processing. Too much delay in handling food from one step to the other may cause a great loss of vitamins and minerals.

Do as much preparation ahead of time as possible like checking equipment and getting together jars which are examined for imperfections and nicks. Wash all jars and caps in soapy suds (not in cool dish-water after the breakfast dishes!) and scald or sterilize them.

Follow the slogan, "two hours from garden to kettle." Use only fresh, firm, ripe rather than over-ripe produce. Wash all foods carefully before attempting any preparation.

Check jars, rubbers if used, and caps along with equipment before you start canning. Work at the range as much as possible to save time between steps. Have sterile jars on one side of range, fill them from kettle on stove (or from colander near stove, if using fruit which is not pre-cooked), and place immediately in water bath or pressure cooker or oven.

Jars should be washed in a pan of soapy suds and scalded, inverted on a clean towel until used.

Your Canning Shelf

- *Tomatoes
- *Beets
- Green Beans
- *Peas
- Spinach
- Corn
- *Recipe given

are necessary for canning non-acid vegetables, are available at the canning center. Then, if all produce must be canned in a single day, it will be necessary to recruit as much help as possible from others in your community and give them your time when needed.

Canning day should be canning day only, not laundry day, general cleaning and baking day, too. It's better, too, not to be overly ambitious and try to do three bushels of tomatoes, all in one sweep, for you will do better with a small quantity, and feel less tired, even though it may take several days in which to finish.

Processing Foods.

Fruits and vegetables need processing which means the application of heat to the product for a certain definite period of time. You just can't put fruit into jars, seal and store and expect them to stay in perfect condition.

Water-Bath Method.

In some cases, when pressure cookers are not obtainable, a water-bath may be used for vegetables and meats. However, the water-bath is more preferable for tomatoes (which are acid, and technically a fruit) and fruits.

To make a water bath, use a large wash boiler or deep vessel fitted with a rack made of laths, perforated material or galvanized wire. Have a tight fitting cover.

Place prepared jars on the rack which must hold them at least 1/2 inch above bottom of the canner. The water bath should be filled with boiling water which comes at least an inch or two above the tops of the jars. Jars on the rack should not touch each other. Start counting processing time as soon as water around jars begins to bubble, and keep it boiling during entire processing period. If necessary, add boiling water, if it boils away, for the water must always be boiling at least an inch above the tops of the jars.

Here are some recipes for common fruits and vegetables:

*Tomatoes.

Scald tomatoes in boiling water 1 minute. Soak in cold water 1 minute, peel, core, quarter and pack into clean, sterile jars. Add no water. Add a teaspoon of salt to each quart of tomatoes. Put on band and screw band firmly tight. Process in hot water bath for 35 minutes.

*Peas.

Shell, grade peas, using only prime quality. Pre-cook 3 to 7 minutes depending on size. Pack loosely, adding hot water to within 1 inch of top. Adjust cap and process in pressure cooker, 60 minutes at 10 pounds, or 180 minutes in hot water bath.

*Beets.

Use small, uniform beets. Wash carefully. Leave the roots and stems long. Boil 15 minutes. Plunge into cold water, remove the skins and pack into clean jars. Add 2 teaspoons of salt and sugar mixture to each quart jar if desired. Fill to within 1/2 inch of top, with boiling water. Put on cap, screwing band firmly tight. Process in hot-water bath 120 minutes or in pressure cooker 40 minutes at 10 pounds.

Are you having difficulties planning meals with points? Stretching your meats? Lynn Chambers can give you help if you write her, enclosing a stamped, self-addressed envelope for your reply, in care of her at Western Newspaper Union, 210 South Desplains Street, Chicago, Illinois. Released by Western Newspaper Union.

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SNAPPY FACTS ABOUT RUBBER

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