

The Neils had a big yellow cat and when he saw that blood he just yowled at me and whipped his tail. I thought that cat intended to eat me, and I got mad at him and fainted dead away! When I came out of it, I was wet from head to foot. They had thrown water all over me. And my hair was as straight as string. My hand was still streaming blood. But my straight hair didn't keep me from going to the dance that night, and I did all the cooking that day and the dishes—in spite of my knuckle.

But Mrs. Neil was so mean. Every once in a while she would come into the kitchen and say, "I'm going to make a cake that's decent to eat—inferring, of course that my cakes weren't." And she'd get flour on the ceiling. It would take a week to clean up after her, and she would always end up just putting the whole thing in the soil [same as the "garbage", I guess].

#### AN ANONYMOUS GIFT

Oh, but we had a fun time once. Mrs. Neil was gone to California for something or other. And when she left she would always have the chore man's wife, Mrs. Jarvis, come over and act as chaperone to protect me, I suppose, from the cowboys. Mr. Neil had gone down to Douglas. And while he was gone a package was delivered to the house. Groceries. We knew something was wrong. We had never had groceries like that delivered at our house.

But we kidded ourselves that it must have been meant for us. Why else would they have delivered it to our door? But there was all kind of goodies in it that we never had. Fine-cut bacon. Grated pineapple. Things that never would come out to a cow ranch. It was delivered when both I and Mrs. Jarvis was gone. And there it sat. It came in the morning and Mrs. Neil's brother opened it. I said: "You shouldn't have opened that—that's not ours. It isn't for us at all."

Neil had his cowboys living at different places all over the valley. The nesters were moving into Texas, and so he had cowboys homesteading the areas around his land, so Mr. Neil could get the land in his name and extend his holdings. They would send out orders to the cowboys, but nothing like this order. Especially the grated pineapple.

Neil's brother said: "How are you going to use this?" And I said, "I know a fine way to use this. I'll give it to you for supper."

So I made a big bunch of cake in big loaf tins, and I whipped some cream that I had and just loaded it with that pineapple. The cowboys came in, and they never did get enough of eating that cake and pineapple. It lasted two or three days. And we had fine-cut bacon and eggs and instead of grinding the coffee beans for coffee for the cowboys, I used that pre-ground coffee. By the time the Neils got back, we had finished that whole bag of groceries.

You know, Mrs. Neil had a fit over that! She just blew her top! But her husband just roared and laughed over it. "That's a fine way to feed cowboys, Charlotte," he said. We never did find out who that sack of groceries belonged to.

#### RIDING THE RANGE

Mother was a fast worker and when she finished with the duties that had been outlined for her, she thought she would have the rest of the time free for herself. Mrs. Neil just couldn't

stand not to have her busy every minute, and would think up extra things for her to do. To have some time to herself, Mother would have the cowboys saddle up a horse for her each evening, and she would regularly go for a ride out on the ranch. This really bothered Mrs. Neil, so one day she told the boys that Charlotte wouldn't be riding that evening.

When Mother came out to go riding, the cowboys told her that her horse was already out. The only other horse available was an ornery old horse which even the cowboys had a hard time riding. They told her Mrs. Neil had told them she would not be riding that evening, or they would have saved her regular horse for her. Mother said:

"Well, saddle him up. I am going riding." So they saddled him up and she headed out.

That cured Mrs. Neil. She was just sure that horse would throw me and I'd be off in the bushes someplace. She never told them that again. She knew my work was done—she was just being ornery.

The horse I rode regularly was a little horse named Billy. A mean little horse. He ran away with Mrs. Neil, and he ran away with her brother. He was "hard mouthed" and when he'd get the bit in his mouth, he would run and no one could stop him. She didn't want me to ride him and neither did any of the cowboys. But he was awfully nice to me. He never did anything like that to me.

One day I was going to MacNeil to pick up the mail, and I had a big bouquet of chrysanthemums to give to the postmistress. The cattlemen called the settlers who were coming in to farm the prairies "nesters" and there was constant trouble between the nesters and the cattlemen. The nesters would buy a piece of ground and put a fence around it, cutting off the usual trails and traffic patterns both for man and beast. The cattlemen would cut the fences as fast as the nesters put them up.

The nesters had put up a fence across the road and we had to make a detour, and Billy didn't want to accept that new fence. He got to snorting and going sideways right into that fence. I just flipped out of the one stirrup and let him take it sidewise, and when he went back away from the fence, I put my leg back over the saddle, talking to him all the time.

Another time he got frightened by a rattlesnake in the road and stopped "just on a dime." It's a wonder I didn't go over his head. And he snorted and went to stepping to one side and I patted him and said, "Billy, you're not afraid. Behave yourself," and he straightened out and went lopping off.

#### LOST ON THE RANGE

Mother never dated the cowboys who worked on the place, and that bothered Mrs. Neil, who thought she was not being "loyal". (She probably hoped Mother would marry one of the home cowboys and then she'd have a permanent cook.) But Mother once in a while dated a cowboy named Bill who worked on a neighboring ranch. They usually went to the weekend dances that would be held near by.

One night when I had gone riding, Bill came over about the time he thought that I would be getting back from my ride. He had been doing target shooting and Mrs. Neil was scolding him.