

The GIRL from The DOUBLE R

BY BETTY BLOCKLINGER

CHAPTER V
When Ralph Rowland went to war, his sister, "Rusty," was left in charge of the ranch. Soon black market operators got busy and slaughtered some of her cattle. She called Ladue Decker, a neighboring rancher, to come over, but he laughed at the idea of gangsters and proposed to her. Rusty turned him down. While ranch vigilantes were being organized at Rusty's place, a report came over the telephone that Decker's ranch had just been raided. The ranchers left for Decker's at once, and Rusty called Dr. Herb Westmore, a veterinarian whom she greatly admired, to tell him the news. Dr. Westmore, she thought, acted rather strangely.

A short meeting was held after supper. Each ranch appointed someone to represent it at another meeting to be held Sunday afternoon, with the sheriff pre-

siding, for much to Uncle Jed's with the law.
"Start out with our hands tied right at the beginning," he complained to Rusty later. "Can't do this and can't do that, cause it ain't in the statutes. How's a man to catch criminals when he don't get himself down to their level?"
"Their level might be dead level and the lot of you dead, if you tried to play their game," Rusty comforted him.
Sooner he laid out, decent, than livin' a sucker to city slickers," the old fellow grunted. "Goin' to turn in, Night, Rusty."
"Good night, Uncle."

Rusty made her way to the brooder pen with food for her new kitten. Fatso ate, then stood up on her hind legs, inviting Rusty to pick her up.
"Come on, I really need someone I can talk to."
In her room, she placed the kitten on the floor, but Fatso jumped to the bed to await her new mistress.

"I wish," Rusty told her, "that you could talk. You lived around the Westmores long enough to pick up a few facts, didn't you?"
Fungi posing. Just why had Miss Westmore given her that lecture on that peculiar phase of potamine-poisoning. To fool who-ever was listening in from the hospital? But why should she want to deceive anyone. And why had Herb Westmore ordered her not to answer the door? Had they expected someone other than Decker and his men?

"I'm right back where I started," she complained, "and too tired to figure it out."
In the morning, when Rusty went downstairs, she found her mother standing in the center of the living room, looking perplexed.

"Now what," inquired Rusty to her mother. "This house was built for so many, and so few are left."
"Muc, look here, why don't we shuff off everything downstairs except the living room and kitchen? We could eat in the kitchen; plenty of people do."
"Standards—" protested Mrs. Rowland faintly.
"Standards don't hold in war," Rusty spent most of the morning in the house, devising ways and means of cutting actual living chores to a minimum.

[Shortly before noon, a car drove up to the house, and two men came to the door. Rusty recognized them as dealers from the city's largest packing house. "Young Mr. Ralph said you'd have the final say," one said, "so we're putting it up to you, Miss Rowland. There in our city, we've thousands of war workers to feed and no meat to feed eight hundred head ready in two weeks and you're sending them to the feeder's. Why not switch them to us? We'll pay you ceiling price."
"So will the feeder," remarked Rusty.

"It's your patriotic duty, Miss Rowland," said the second dealer. "You've got to realize the men building planes and tanks need proteins to keep their production."
Rusty interposed. "What about next winter when they're going to need more than they do now? Suppose all of us sell our young stock for immediate slaughter? Where will you get your supply in the fall and winter? There won't be any."
"Miss Rusty,—the man took a new line—" you want to save this ranch. Now we know the rustlers have marked it as free game because there's a kid— beg pardon, a young girl running it. Who's your beef feeding when it's killed? And when the war's over, what will your brother find, a ranch sunk into debt or riding free? We can't offer you more than ceiling price, but there are such things as a bonus for immediate delivery, or say—"
"I'm sorry," Rusty interrupted. "I appreciate your offer, but I can't accept it. It won't help anyone to burn the bridges ahead. That's what selling your stock would be doing. As for losing the Double R— well, my grandfather and his father fought through the reconstruction period after the Civil War. They had 'slim pickings' but they pulled through. My own father fought through the re-First World War, the depression, and he pulled through. Surely, I can fight through the present war to give Ralph something to come home to when the war is over."

Rusty found Uncle Jed over-seeing a new line of fencing.
To think, he tumbled, as she rode up, "that I'd live to see the day we got to keep our cattle safe from highway ridin' rustlers. What brings you out?"
When Rusty was through with her story, Jed raged.
"You up and throw away a chance like that! Suppose the feeders go out o' business like they're threatening to do and we have to do the fattening."
Let's worry about that when it happens."
"When—" roared the old man. "Heck, girl, it has happened. The price feed is, feeders can't afford to hold cattle till the price gets up to where they kin break even. And the packers ain't goin' to relieve them by payin more than they kin get, or are allowed to get. You've got to make up your mind to use the methods forced on us."
"Unc," said Rusty, "it seems to me the problem's bigger than the Double R. Our part in it is to produce as much beef as we can. 'As much' means weight. If the feeders can't handle our young stock, we will."

"We will!" he roared. "How?"
"You know that branch of the Big Sandy which runs underground on a stony stretch. We've kept it clear of cattle because we were afraid they'd bog in a freshet. I've a hunch we can grow our winter feed on that."
"You're crazy as a —"
"Looon," supplied Rusty. "But it's worth trying. 'Bye, now.'"
Red Star was off, but now Rusty had caught his rhythm and sat secure, confident, her mind whirling with pictures.

There'd been a time when the Double R had been self-supporting, when nothing but coffee and spicer and calico had been brought in from the town.
If only her mother would agree. . . .
She told the outline of her plan to her mother, and Mrs. Rowland listened with interest.

"We had to do that in Virginia after the Civil War," she said.
Rusty rode into the late afternoon, went on across the fields until she found the barley deciperable trail which led up the Nopocos. Somehow she thought better when she was up above things.

Red Star snorted impatiently as Rusty led him in over the shale which marked the beginning of the incline. His mighty muscles scorned a slow pace on the upward trail.
The prairie was a sea of amber light. Rusty dropped rein, and Red Star grazed contentedly. At the edge of the ledge one could catch a fairly comprehensive panorama of the spread of the Double R.

Rusty pulled Ralph's last letter from her pocket and read it.

"When you realize what an infinitesimal part of the armed are here at this camp," he wrote, "and yet what an amazing amount of food it takes to keep the men in prime form, you realize how important every ranch, every farm, even every backyard garden can be."
"I've talked to some boys who've served overseas. Rusty, if you could know what food can mean to a man fighting, you would appreciate the weapon you are producing there at the Double R. Don't sell out, kid. Even if we lose the ranch, we've food for the boys who need it."

Red Star came up to give nudge. The swift twilight of the southern plains was falling.
"Even we lose the ranch, we've won—"
They needn't lose it.

As Red Star started down the trail, Rusty talked to him. "Look, you bull-headed rascal, all we have to do is stick to our main trail on short cuts—"
"Wasn't that what she had to do, stick to the main trail as she had been doing?"
As Rusty reached the foot of the trail, another horse and rider emerged from the blue shadows. Rusty held Red Star in.

Then she saw that the rider was Herb Westmore.
"Miss Rusty," he called, as he neared her, "your mother said I'd find you here. . . Why, what's wrong?"
Rusty was staring at him, realizing suddenly she had seen another man ride as he did.

"Your sister," she said automatically, "said you'd been deferred from active service. Once, when I was fourteen, a man rode in asking for work. My father watched him ride and then took him to the Ford. He was a deserter. Only cavalrymen ride the way you do."
"Go on— say it," Westmore's voice was bitter.

"My brother, who managed this ranch which could provide thousands of pounds of fighting food for fighting men, could not be deferred."
The horses unmindful of the way in which a man rode, as long as he proved himself master, touched noses, then swung together to start back to where there would be food.

Rusty glanced at the man riding beside her, who cocked a red eyebrow at her.
"Suspicioning, always suspicioning," he accused her. "I know; it was like that at home. Foreigners came in, men who spoke with a different accent, walked with a different gait."
They rode on. Rusty, far from satisfied, pondered.

"You brought Babe with you?"
"No. She's fine, but I thought we owed her a few more days in the straw. I had business out this way."
Rusty, despising subterfuge, decided to bring her questions into the open.

"Last night on the phone, your sister gave me a lecture on fungi poisoning. I didn't know why, I did overhear someone. I presume in your office, asking you to treat a bullet wound, not suffered by an animal."
"Whereupon," Westmore picked up her thoughts, "you decided I ded I was treating some black market rustler who was afraid to go to a legitimate surgeon."
He swung in his saddle, and the starlight revealed the intentness of his gaze.

"You do question me," he said. "I do," she returned.
Westmore sat stiffly in his saddle. "That's to bad. I've yet to see the person, male or female, to whom I felt I had to account. I still contend there is an underground river of understanding which unites those who think along the same channel. I've had the misfortune of banking on your being in that channel."
Rusty waited only to say, "I've never had any faith in things underground." Then she dug her

heels into Red Star and shot ahead of her guest.

Fatso sat on the back terrace awaiting her. She wound herself about Rusty's boots and purred. "You," stated Rusty, lifting her, "are an ingratiating wretch. You've the mark of the Westmore kennels on you in spite of yourself."
She went on into the kitchen. "Where is the young man?" inquired Mrs. Rowland. "Will he mind sitting at a kitchen table? He seemed such a gentleman."
"Rusty barked uncle Jed, 'about the underground channel of the Big Sandy—'
Rusty stood arrested. She had planned on using that underground stream to feed the roots of the crop she was going to plant; yet she'd told Westmore she'd never 'had any faith in things underground.'
"Yes," she questioned her uncle. (TO BE CONTINUED)

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But among the would-be farmers, the books which sell best are those which take the optimistic viewpoint—which say, "It can be done."

Probably, in the final analysis, it depends on the individual. There are certainly many cases where a city business man who happens to know how to use his hands, who understands machinery, who is willing to work hard and learn hard, and who takes the advice of his more experienced neighbors, has made a success of farming. But there are also countless examples of the man who "retired" to the country put in a couple of the hardest and most discouraging years of his life at unsuccessful farming was only too glad to return to the city when an opportunity presented itself.

There is no question that city life is becoming less and less attractive to the those who live and work in cities. The noise, the bustle, the severe competition, the sharp business methods are uninviting and taxing the constitution of more and more people.

But it is very much of a question whether the grass is really greener in rural America for these over-taxed people, or whether a flight to the farmlands will just be a matter of jumping from the frying pan into the fire. The sounder answer might be to make city life more attractive to decentralize industry—to get rid of giant metropolises and add a more rural touch to urban life.

A lot of his friends can't understand why he would be willing to give up an income of \$20,000 a year for an uncertain one of \$2,500, but he is glad to explain, to anyone who will listen, that it is infinitely more worthwhile to enjoy life than to devote all of your waking hours to earning a good living.

He hopes, when he has his farm, to have plenty of time for hunting and fishing and riding. He thinks it will be a fine thing for his children to have a healthful outdoor life. And he likes the idea of being entirely independent—of having his success or failure depend entirely upon his own efforts.

I am summarizing this man's outlook, because I think it is typical of the outlook of thousands of city business men who are right now flirting with the farm idea.

There is only one big difficulty that stands in their way, most of them don't know the first thing about farming.

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Maybe it is the general shifting around of employment and new kinds of work to be done—maybe it's an after-effect of war weariness—but whatever the reason, any real estate man will tell you that the demands of city people for a place in the country has reached an all-time high.

During the war the movement of people was definitely away from the farms and to the cities where lucrative war jobs were available. Some of the men and women who left the rural communities may not return for some time to come. The total rural population may be a long time in reaching its prewar figure. For many of the farm-raised

city work easier, more remunerative and more adventurous.

Those who have lived on farms and left for the city probably won't return until employment and high wages in the cities are difficult to obtain. It is the men and women who have always lived in the cities who are clamoring for country life—for the peace, the independence and the slower pace of living which they picture as existing in the quiet rural communities.

MONEY This desire for the rural life seems to exist more among the educated and well-to-do people than among the poorer classes. Or at least it is more evident among the better-off people who are able to get the money together to make the down-payment on a farm.

I know one man who makes about \$20,000 a year as manager of a large company who is right now dickering to "retire" at the age of 41, to a farm-life in an unpopulated but beautiful section of Pennsylvania. He has carefully worked out the details of his postwar farm life and figures that, if all goes well, he will be able to earn \$2,500 a year in addition to supplying his family with food.

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If You Had MY JOB

KEEPING HOUSE, helping take care of the family—you would realize that business girls are not the only ones who sometimes get Headaches and Tired Aching Muscles. We home girls often work just as hard and have just as many Headaches, just as many Stomach Upsets and get just as Tired.

About a year ago, I first used **ALKA-SELTZER**. I find that it eases my Aching Head, takes the kinks out of Tired, Aching Muscles and brings relief when I have Acid Indigestion.

The family says I am a lot easier to live with since I have known about Alka-Seltzer.

Have you tried **ALKA-SELTZER**? If not, why don't you get a package today? Large package 60¢, Small package 30¢, also by the glass at Soda Fountains.

Established 1907 Insurance that Insures

The Best Insurance

Fire Automobile Liability

Business Houses, Stocks Goods, Dwellings, Household Furniture, Farm Dwellings and All Buildings.

Automobile Protection Cheap in The Travelers which is the Oldest and Best.

DAVID P. DELLINGER
Cherryville, N. C.