

Lady Blanche Farm

A Romance of the Commonplace

By Frances Parkinson Keyes

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SYNOPSIS

Motoring through Vermont, near the village of Hamstead, Philip Starr, young Boston architect, meets in unconventional fashion, Blanche Manning, girl of seventeen, with whom he is immediately enamored. In conversation, he learns something of her family history. Starr is convalescing from a serious illness, and it being a long distance to Burlington, his destination, Blanche suggests, the small village not boasting a hotel, that he become, for the night, a guest of her cousin, Mary Manning.

CHAPTER II

Lady Blanche farm lay a mile or so south of Hamstead, stretching on one side of the road back to the foothills of the Green mountains, and on the other, in broad, sweeping meadows, straight down to the Connecticut river. Two big houses, one of brick, with a small, semi-detached brick building—the lawyer Moses' office—the other of wood, white-painted and white-pillared, with a large flower garden, stood on it. Across the road was a smaller house, brick with a wooden ell, less true to line, and decidedly less prosperous in appearance.

As they came in sight of all this Philip Starr brought his motor to an abrupt stop, and turned to Blanche, who had unhesitatingly accepted his invitation to "help him find the farm," by riding back with him.

"Is that where you live?" "Yes, the big brick house is ours. The big white one is Cousin Jane's. The one across the way is where Mary lives."

"Good Lord!"

"What's the matter?"

"Matter! It's the most beautiful place I ever saw in my life. I didn't tell you, did I—I'm an architect. I mean, that's my regular job. But on the side, I can't help dabbling in other things—sketching, modelling, carving—I was four years in Europe while I was growing up, and went back to Paris for a course at the Beaux Arts after I got through Harvard. And I've never—" his eyes turned from the landscape and swept over the face and figure of the girl beside him—"seen the Elysian fields and one of the nymphs before!"

"It's pretty, but I don't see why you should think it's so remarkable. And it's so deadly dull!—Perhaps we had better hurry a little, or Mary may be through supper."

They stopped beside the least pretentious of the three houses, and walked up the cobblestone path. Here, on the huge granite slab that formed the front doorstep, sat a small boy, who was engaged in eating an enormous piece of lemon pie with his fingers.

"Hello, Moses," said Blanche. "Where's Mary?"

"She's putting Algernon to bed," replied the small boy.

"Algernon!" exclaimed Philip, involuntarily.

"Yes," interposed Blanche, a trifle impatiently. "Cousin Laura—his mother, you know, that died—said she was so tired of the same old family names, that when he came along, she felt she'd simply got to have a change. She found that in a book called 'The Wicked Duke'; Algernon was the duke. It wasn't allowed in the Hamstead library, but it was a great story, just the same. Come in, Mr. Starr, and I'll call Mary, Mary—M-A-R-Y—"

"Yes," floated down a voice from the upper story. "Coming, honey. Did you have a good time?"

"Yes, lovely. Hurry up—we've got company."

A door opened and shut quickly, there was the sound of swift footsteps coming across a hall, and a girl, with another golden-haired child—presumably the namesake of the wicked duke—in her arms, appeared at the head of the stairs. In a flash, Philip remembered and understood the quick resentment Blanche had shown when he asked her if her cousin were plain. For if Blanche were lovely, Mary was certainly beautiful, with the tall, superbly formed, quiet beauty of a Greek statue. And yet, it was not of a Greek statue that he almost instantly thought. The blue cotton dress that she had on, dulled and faded from frequent washing, had turned to the soft color in which the painters of the Middle Ages loved to clothe their Madonnas; the little boy, apparently snatched from his bath to answer Blanche's summons, was cuddled, pink and plump and sturdy against her shoulder. Mary! The coincidence of the name, too, seemed almost startling. What sort of a man could the indifferent Paul be, he wondered. The younger girl's explanation of his presence broke in upon his silent admiration.

"This is Mr. Philip Starr of Boston, Mary. I met him by the brook. He's an architect. He's been sick with typhoid fever, and is on his way to Burlington in a motor to make a visit while he's getting strong, but he got lost. I told him I was sure you'd take him in for the night."

"I'm afraid I'm dreadfully intrusive," interrupted Philip, smiling up at Mary, but she in turn interrupted him.

"Of course not. Father and I'll both be awfully glad to have you. Will you put your motor in the shed while I get Algy tucked in? Blanche will take you. I'll be back in a minute, and show you where the guest-chamber and bathroom are."

She was already downstairs when they returned from the shed, bending over the gully but contented Moses.

"I'm afraid you won't have any dessert for supper," she said, laughing. "Moses seems to have cleaned out the pantry while I was busy with Algy. But I can open a jar of preserves, and there are cookies. You go upstairs and turn on the water, Moses. I'll be there in just a minute—Hello, Paul!"

Her voice, soft already, softened perceptibly at the last words. Philip, turning quickly, saw a boy who seemed to be simply a larger and masculine replica of Blanche—there was an almost astonishing family resemblance between all these Mannings—coming up the walk towards them.

"Hello," he said leisurely. "Hello, Blanche, you're going to catch it if running away. Hello—"

"This is Mr. Starr of Boston," put in Mary, quickly, repeating the somewhat scanty information which Blanche



"Then Say You Hope I'll Have It, Like a Good Girl."

had been able to give her about him. "My cousin Paul, Mr. Starr—Blanche's brother."

"How do you do?" said Paul, without much enthusiasm. "Glad to see you—Mother's gone to bed with a sick headache—all used up after cleaning the North parlor. So I thought I better come over here for supper."

"Of course," agreed Mary warmly. "Will you show Mr. Starr where to go while I get Moses settled? Come, Moses."

She disappeared up the stairs again. Philip picked up his bag, which Paul had made no effort to take from him, and followed. Little as he knew of the customs of New England farmers, he thought it unlikely that there were many who looked like this one, or who were at leisure to appear in white flannels at six o'clock on a May evening. He resented both the boy's beauty and his clothes. Paul stopped at the open door of a small room and motioned him to enter.

"I hope you'll find this fairly decent," he said, depreciatingly. "Mary's not much of a housekeeper—there's probably some dust about. That's the bathroom at the end of the hall—there's only one."

"Thanks—have I time for a shave before supper?"

"I guess so—Mary'll wait for you anyway."

The family was waiting for him when he went downstairs again. Blanche had gone home and changed her dress for another white one, softer and flimsier than the one she had worn in the afternoon. Mary, apparently, had had no time to freshen up, and had simply tied a crisp apron of generous proportions over the faded blue gingham; while a tired-looking, elderly man, without a necktie and with a shabby coat slipped on over his khaki shirt and trousers, came forward to welcome Philip.

"Pleased to meet you," he said with the same unquestioning cordiality that Mary had shown. "Blanche has been tellin' us how she happened to find you and that you've been sick. I'm real sorry, but I guess our good Vermont air'll fix you up. Come and set down to supper. It's all ready—such as 'tis. I understand Moses has set up a good share of it."

There was, however, no scarcity of supper. There was, on the contrary, a good deal of it—two big slices of ham, with a quantity of clear, golden-brown gravy, fried eggs, baked potatoes, dandelion greens. Philip thought he had never been so hungry, that nothing had ever tasted so good—

"Want to smoke?" asked Paul at his elbow as they rose from the table.

Philip hesitated. He had not visited in many families where "they did their own work" but he had a vague feeling that he ought to offer to be useful.

"Don't we help with the dishes first?" he asked.

"Mercy, don't you think of such a thing!" Seth exclaimed. "Mary'll have 'em done in no time, while I finish milkin'. You and Blanche and I'll go and set on the front porch and take it easy."

"I'm going to Wallacetown, to a show," said Paul briefly.

"Oh, don't tonight!" Paul turned on his cousin impatiently. "What are you so down on

Wallacetown for?" he asked crossly. "I've got all my plans made—I didn't know we were going to have company, did I? I'd have asked you to go with me, of course, only I knew you wouldn't care for it anyway, even if you weren't too busy—it'll be nine o'clock before you get the dishes done and the bread set." Then, seeing that Mary's face was still clouded, he added, more pleasantly and very persuasively, "Mary—you like me to have a good time, once in a while, don't you?"

"Of course I do. But—" "Then say you hope I'll have it, like a good girl."

He slipped his arm around her, rubbing his head against hers, and kissing her cheek. She smiled and returned his kiss.

"All right, run along," she said cheerfully. "Blanche, you can keep Mr. Starr amused, can't you?"

"Of course she can," said Philip hastily. But he stood still, looking at Mary with a slightly puzzled expression. Was it possible that Paul—engaged—he had the boy's sister's word for it—to this wonderful creature, was going to Wallacetown, wherever that might be, to a "show," his privilege to do so practically unquestioned, leaving her to wash dishes and make bread?

Customs of chaperonage in Hamstead are simple, not to say primitive. As a rule, however, they work out surprisingly well. Seth, coming in after dark from the barn, lighted the kitchen lamp, and read the Wallacetown Bugle and his farm paper. Then he took off his shoes, and tiptoed up the stairs to bed. Philip, going up to bed about eleven, found Mary in his room, turning down his bed.

"I say, Miss Manning—may I speak to you for a minute?" "Of course," answered Mary, turning to him with a smile. "What is it?"

"Your cousin Blanche—she isn't engaged, too, is she?"

Mary flushed. "What makes you say 'too'?" she asked quietly.

"Why—she told me about you and her brother. I hope you won't think I'm fresh if I tell you I consider him awfully lucky."

"It's I that am lucky," returned Mary slowly. "Paul's the dearest boy in all the world, after you get to know him. I feel much older than he is, though as a matter of fact, we're almost exactly the same age. But—we're not exactly engaged. We've a sort of an understanding—'keeping company' it's called, here in Hamstead. But—Paul isn't bound at all."

"Well, I should think he'd want to be," said Philip with visible admiration. "But now, about his sister? Has she got an 'understanding' or anything awkward like that with anybody?"

"No," said Mary, smiling. "She's very young yet, you know—barely seventeen. Why?"

"Because," Philip burst out, "I've fallen in love with her—head over heels. Of course I haven't told her so yet. But I think she's the loveliest—the most exquisite—oh, the—"

"Yes, I know," said Mary. "So you want—"

"I'm twenty-four years old, and I'm a fairly decent sort," went on Philip, plunging as usual straight to his point. "I haven't any ancestral home like this—in fact, one of my ancestors was an Irish immigrant, and all of my family were very plain people—there weren't any town histories written about them! But we've always been honest, as far as I know, and we've prospered and risen in the world. I've lots of friends. I've inherited some money, and I'm earning more. I've got a pretty good job, for my age. I'm in Davis and Hamlin's office—"

"Gale Hamlin, the architect?"

"Why, yes! Do you know him?"

"I've—I've met him. His niece, Hannah Adams, was one of my classmates at boarding school. I used to visit her, sometimes, in Boston. So you are in his office!"

"Yes," said Philip excitedly. "What tremendous luck! He can tell you about me—Blanche's mother and brother, you know—and you, for that matter! And you will help me all you can with Blanche, won't you?"

Mary picked up her lamp. "I don't believe you'll need an awful lot of help with Blanche," she said, whimsically. "But I'll say a few things to Cousin Violet that might make a difference. Good night."

"You are good! And you don't think I'm an awful chump going at things this way?"

"I think you're rather nice," said Mary, still whimsically—"if you must know!"

She was closing the door gently behind her, when Philip pulled it open again.

"Mary," he said, "I may call you Mary, mayn't I—tell me the superstition about Lady Blanche—about all the Blanche Mannings."

"Well," said Mary, hesitating a little, "all the Blanches so far have fallen in love at first sight, and married strangers—and gone away from their own homes to live. Their husbands have adored them, and they've been rich and beautiful and—"

"Is that all of the story?"

"Is there anything," asked Mary, suddenly, "that I could tell you that would make you want her any less? Anything that would make you—afraid to try and get her?"

"Anything in the way of an old superstition, you mean? Good Lord, no!"

"Then," said Mary, "I think that's enough for tonight. And good enough for any night, too, isn't it? Especially for a man who has just said he was in love with Blanche—it ought to make you feel as if the suit were half won already! Good night."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Brims and Eyes Play Hide and Seek

By CHERIE NICHOLAS



WHAT fun brims and eyes will be having this season playing hide-and-seek with each other! You see, it is this way,

fashion insists that brims take a most thrilling dip-over-one-eye slant, and what happens?—see for yourself in the picture where most of the brims pose at such a perilous angle they almost, if not quite, obliterate the right eye. Which is exactly the way the new hats are supposed to be worn. So get before your mirror and practice, for much of the success of the new hats depends on the "tricky" wearing thereof.

Not that the new hats are in any way lacking in comeliness within themselves. No, indeed! On the contrary the bewitching chapeaux which are flocking in by the thousands just now are about as fascinating a lot of millinery as ever joined in a midseason and spring style parade. It is not only the jauntness of their pose that enthralled but there is that appeal of the truly feminine in their ribbons, their flowers (yes, flower trims are "in"), their airy straws and their dainty fabrics which make them irresistible.

There's no mistake about it, intensely interesting things are now going on in the realm of millinery. One of them is the revival of taffeta as a medium for hats to wear now and hats to wear when springtime gladdens the earth. One of the dramatic plays which milliners are making with taffeta is to stitch it intricately and designfully. The "derby" of pale blue stitched penou d'ange taffeta shown at the top to the left in this group is a striking example of this. It is pulled down over one eye rakishly, as racy as even the youngest bed could desire. The next hat (centered at the top) is also of taffeta—navy blue moire taf-

feta, with melon crown and flaring brim which laps over at the front in a most flattering manner. The three-tone cluster of velvet flowers placed to the fore is its only decoration. One eye, you will observe, is entirely obscured.

The new crowns for the most part are flat and low. The model to the right at the top is a representative type. Small wreaths of velvet flowers encircle the crown. Velvet flowers either in multi-color or in solid tones adorn fabric and straw hats alike this season.

Again, in the instance of the hat worn by the print-frocked lady, the brim quite conceals the right eye. The interesting thing about the charming outfit is its trimming touches of velvet as expressed in the wreath of flowers which enhance the hat and as they appear in the belt and buckle. Designers are keen about adding a dash of velvet to the new costumes, so much so, they are beautifying the new spring prints and crepes and matelasse weaves with most intriguing accessories including velvet scarves, girdles, bows and all sorts of enhancing details.

Three outstanding trends are presented in the smaller sketches below. The high-built turban reflecting co-sack influence as shown to the left is a favorite in Paris. The plaid taffeta bow at the neck also conveys an important message. The felt fedora in the center is being worn by swagger tailored folks. With toques and small brims wear crisp veils, as illustrated to the right, are inevitable.

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CAPES AND CHECKS

By CHERIE NICHOLAS



Here's two important hints in regard to the new spring coats—capes and checks. Most every coat has its cape, for capes have gone on parade for spring. Capes that come off and capes that don't, capes that are furless and capes that are fur-trimmed, they each and all grace the season's smartest coats. Then as to the popularity of checks, it matters not whether the cloaking material be of fine sheer woolen of sturdiest weave or of gray and white silk, as is the material which fashions the model pictured, it is almost sure to be checked, for checked fabrics are the rage for spring. You'd love the material in this coat. It is a sort of soft heavy cling-silk mixture which you are sure to like better every time you wear it. The gray fox bordering satisfies the eye with a delectable color blend.

WOMEN NOW PREFER DOUBLE-DUTY DRESS

Two dresses have always been better than one, but now women prefer, above all, the single dress that is really two. Transformable clothes—originally an experiment to test out the possibility of thrifty fashions—have become big successes.

The fine feature of the transformable clothes is the fact that there is hardly an evidence of their double-duty background.

Time was when a transformation dress showed its taking-apart qualities at first glance; nowadays hardly a dress goes by in any fashion parade that doesn't look as if it might be taken apart and transformed—hence the dress which has this as its purpose is not set apart from others in any way.

Designers Making Much of All-Beige Costumes

Designers are making much of the all-beige costume as an advance spring fashion. Introduced in mid-winter, the first beiges planned for 1933 were of a darker tinge than usual. Many of them had a greenish cast, or were crosses between beiges and grays.

The current popularity in beiges leans toward lighter, paler shades. Many of the beige costumes shown in the better dressmakers are actually a deep, cream color, or lean toward pale yellow. One of the favorites is a very light beige that approximates the most delicate tones in baby lynx furs.

Black Chiffon Is Being Revived for Evening Wear

Black chiffon, an old favorite evening fashion, is being revived. Many smart women, tired of bright red crepe and black satins, are taking up a fashion that has always had big seasons of success, and are adapting it to 1933 silhouettes.

Many of the newest evening dresses appearing at fashionable theater openings are either entirely of black chiffon, or are of chiffon combined with lace or with satin.

WHEN SEASONS BEGIN

The dates of the equinoxes—that is, the dates of the sun's crossing of the equator—are approximately March 21 and September 22. The dates of the solstices—when the sun is farthest, north or south, from the equator—are approximately June 21 and December 21. These positions of the sun are considered to mark the boundaries between the seasons. The time varies a little from year to year, and the season may begin a day earlier or later than the dates given. This year spring begins March 20 at 8:43 a. m., eastern standard time. Summer will begin at 4:12 p. m., June 21; autumn at 7:01 p. m., September 23; and winter at 1:58 p. m. December 22.

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