

LADY BLANCHE FARM

A Romance of the Commonplace

by Frances Parkinson Keyes

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SYNOPSIS

Motoring through Vermont, 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. It being a long distance to Burlington, Starr's destination, Blanche suggests, the village of Hamstead not boasting a hotel, that he become, for the night, a guest of her cousin, Mary Manning. Mary receives Philip with true Vermont hospitality, and he makes the acquaintance of her cousin Paul, recognized as her fiancé. Starr finds Mary is acquainted with Gale Hamlin, noted Boston architect, in whose office Philip is employed. He informs her of his desire to win Blanche for his wife. She is sympathetic, and tells him of an old family superstition concerning the "Blanches" of the Manning family.

CHAPTER III

Violet Manning was an extremely pretty woman with an infinite capacity for doing nothing. She had been the only child, much spoiled and petted, of a shopkeeper in White Water, the next village to Hamstead, who had stunted himself to give her "advantages." She was sent away to a wretched boarding school, and acquired a veneer of culture, and a contempt for her parents, her neighbors, and her hometown, but not very much else. On her return to White Water, after she was "finished" at school, and had taken a three months' trip to Europe she might have been the belle of the countryside if she had only been as pleasant as she was pretty. But her would-be swains fell off, one by one, before the disdain of her manner; and it was with secret relief that, at the age of twenty-five, she accepted Martin Manning, and went to live on Lady Blanche farm. She was careful to convey the impression, to him and to everyone else, that she was doing him a great favor to marry him, and he at least, believed her. A sturdy couple from "out-back"—Horace, or as he was more frequently called, "Hod" Evans and his wife Myra—were installed in the big brick house as "help." And Violet lay in bed late in the morning, and sat in the north parlor—heretofore used only for weddings and funerals—embroidering centerpieces, and went to church on Sunday, dressed considerably better than anyone else in Hamstead. A woman with more brains would soon have been bored into activity by such an existence. But Violet was not bored. She was supremely satisfied at the easy and pleasant lines into which her life had fallen.

When she was a little over thirty, Martin, who still worshipped her blindly, died, leaving her with two small children, and enough money to live on comfortably, if simply. Every Sunday morning she went to church with Blanche and Paul at her side, her heavy black silk dress trailing down the aisle behind her. Every Sunday afternoon she went to the cemetery to place flowers on Martin's grave, taking the children. When the role of bereaved and sorrowing widow began to pall a little, and no one stepped forward to relieve her of it, Violet's laziness took refuge in that of the model housekeeper and devoted mother. Fortunately, with a contentment rare in New England, Myra and Hod stayed on; Myra ran the house to suit herself, Hod helped the hard-working and plodding Seth with the farm labor which Paul was supposed to be too delicate to perform, since an attack of scarlet fever, which had left him in a weakened condition, had given his mother the fixed idea that he had heart trouble. To be sure, Paul mowed the lawns and weeded the garden, but always under her careful supervision. He had been away to a near-by seminary to school, and drifted half way through a course at an agricultural college; but he was not a natural student, and the farm ran along "well enough" without his help. When for no very clear reason, he stated that he had decided not to finish his course, his mother did not try to force him to do so. More through lack of vital interest than through viciousness, he became dissipated. Violet excused him. There were some things, she said, that she couldn't, with modesty, discuss with him. Boys always sowed wild oats for a time, and then settled down and married some nice girl, just as Paul was going to settle down by and by and marry dear Mary. There was no use worrying or making a vulgar fuss over what was coming out all right in the end, anyway. And meanwhile Blanche was such a comfort! Blanche had also inherited her mother's good looks, and the discontent which the latter had felt in her youth, but there was "more Manning" to her, as Hamstead said.

At ten o'clock in the morning following Philip's unceremonious arrival at Lady Blanche farm, Violet was lying in bed with a new novel, still unopened, beside her, when there was a brisk, if gentle, knock at the door, and Myra walked in.

"Oh, good morning, dear," said Violet pleasantly, arousing herself. "I've been wondering why you didn't come over. Just take that breakfast tray downstairs, will you? Myra's getting ready to go to church, and seems to have forgotten it.—No, I thought it was raining too hard to attempt going myself. You know how easily I take cold."

"I'm sorry I couldn't get over earlier," said Mary, returning from her trip to the kitchen with the tray. "I hope you'll feel enough better by noon to come over to dinner and meet Mr. Starr."

"Oh, my dear, I couldn't. I don't even feel equal to the effort of walking over to the bureau to comb my hair—Why, yes, if you feel like doing it—don't pull it.—So he didn't leave this morning?"

"No," answered Mary, brushing out the long soft curls to their full length, "it was raining so dreadfully hard that it didn't seem best for him to attempt it. He's been sick, as I told you last night. He's telephoned his friends in Burlington not to expect him just yet. Well, he'll be disappointed not to see you, he's so crazy over everything that's beautiful. I think he really ought to have been an artist, not 'on the side' as he says, but for his real profession, instead of being an architect. But of course there isn't usually as much money in it. He's with Davis and Hamlin—"

"Gale Hamlin?"

"Yes. He told me after I went home last night. It makes me feel as if we knew him quite well already."

At this moment, the conversation, which was becoming extremely inter-



"Oh, Paul," She Said Reproachfully, "How Can You?"

esting to Violet, was interrupted by the appearance of Miss Jane Manning, who entered somewhat brusquely, and without knocking. None of the famous "Manning looks" had fallen to her lot. She was probably one of the plainest women the Lord had ever made, certainly the plainest that He had seen fit to place in Hamstead.

"Well, Violet—Well, Mary," she said abruptly, "aren't either of you going to church this mornin'?"

Violet murmured her excuses, Mary, who never either murmured or excused anything, stated her reasons plainly.

"I've got too much to do," she said, "with the children to look after, and dinner to get, and everything."

"What's this I hear," asked Cousin Jane, "about your taking in some strange young man that Blanche picked up by the roadside? You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Violet, for letting that girl traipse around so! Any tramp that'll come along and ask for a meal you'll welcome, Mary."

"Oh, Mr. Starr isn't a tramp," replied Mary pleasantly, "he's quite an important person." And she repeated her biographical sketch of Philip's career with enthusiasm. But Cousin Jane was not to be side-tracked.

"What do you know about his principles?" she asked without compromise. "Accordin' to your account, he's spent considerable time in France, and when that's been said, there ain't much more to add. We know what the French are like." This was entirely untrue, but Cousin Jane believed it to be so, and said it with a conviction that carried weight.

"Well, he looks delicate, just now, of course, because he's been sick, but there's something awfully clean and wholesome about him. And he looks you straight in the face, and comes right to the point about things. He knows his own mind, and he laughs as if he didn't have a thing on his conscience, and he likes books and flowers and children; and if those aren't all good signs of a Christian, I don't know what are!"

"You don't know anything about religion at all," retorted Miss Manning. "I'm shocked to hear you speak so. Yes, I'll be over to dinner and see him for myself. I don't want to judge, of course, but I'm prepared for the worst.—Where's Paul?"

"Paul isn't well, this morning," his mother said hastily. "He's in bed, too. He's really more delicate than any of you realize—if he gets the least bit over-tired, he has a dreadful headache, just as I do. He was out rather late last night. That reminds me, Mary, he called out to me just before you came in, that if you did come over, he wished you'd bring him up a pitcher of icewater and a bowl of cracked ice. He hated to ask Myra to get it for him, because he knew she'd give him a temperance lecture. Not that he's been really drinking, of course, but naturally, young fellows like a glass of ale or so when they go out in the evening. You better go and get the ice for him now. And I'm

awfully afraid you'll be late to church, Jane, if you don't hurry. I believe I'll get up after all. I'd hate to disappoint Mr. Starr if he really wants so much to meet me, and I'll make an effort to come over to dinner, Mary. I hope I shan't suffer for it afterwards."

CHAPTER IV

The dinner which Mary stayed home from church to cook, was not an entire success, either in her eyes or in the eyes of anyone else who attended it, with the possible exception of Blanche and Philip.

In the first place, it was prepared somewhat hurriedly, and with a sore and grieving spirit—a combination of misfortunes which has proved disastrous to more pretentious banquets. Going into her cousin's room with the bowl of ice and pitcher of icewater, Mary found Paul, clad in pale-blue pajamas, lying on his back in bed, his face lined and white, black rings about his closed eyes.

In spite of her wholesome freshness, Mary was by no means stupid. She knew perfectly well that "shows" in Wallacetown were apt to include other things "on the side," and she knew, too, that a drawn, mask-like pallor, might be as certain an indication of dissipation as a puffy flush.

"Oh, Paul," she said reproachfully, "how can you?"

Paul sat up in bed, reaching for the icewater. "How can I what?" he asked crossly.

"You know."

"I'm sure I don't. You're not very definite. Put some of that cracked ice in a handkerchief, will you, and wrap it around my head."

Mary complied in silence. Paul lay down again, and kept very still for some minutes, his tense expression gradually relaxing. Then he smiled, and put his arm around her.

"You're an awfully good girl, Mary," he said softly. "I don't know what I should do without you. Won't you give me a kiss? You haven't yet, this morning."

"Whom did you kiss last?" asked Mary in a hard voice.

"Why you, right after supper last night! Don't you remember? That is—Mary's gray eyes were looking straight into his, and there was something in them which Paul found it impossible to meet. "Look here," he broke off angrily, "you are getting to be the greatest prude, do you know it? And an awfully suspicious, jealous one at that. I went to Wallacetown with Jack Weston and some of the White Water crowd—no one else from Hamstead."

"By 'some of the White Water crowd' I don't suppose you mean our friends and relatives there, do you? You mean some of the girls and fellows that have just come to work in the new mill?"

"Well, what if I do? There's no harm in working in a mill, is there?"

"No—in fact, I think it's rather better to work in a mill than it is to loaf on a farm. Go on."

"I won't go on," said Paul, more angrily than he had spoken before. "You're enough to drive a fellow to drink—or worse—supposing I had done anything worse. But what does it amount to—kissing a pretty girl that you've had a lark with, when you say 'good-night'—anyway! It's only what she expects. It doesn't mean anything."

"It doesn't seem to—to you," replied Mary, very quietly.

"Oh, Lord! I mean, of course, it doesn't amount to anything wrong. Come back here—"

But Mary was gone, shutting the door behind her.

Outside the house, she hesitated, her lips quivering, her eyes full of tears. She couldn't—she couldn't—go home feeling the way she did, and start getting dinner. The village clock, striking eleven, decided her. Under-terred by the rain, which was still gently falling, she walked up the road towards a little mountain which was part of the farm, and called in memory of the first Blanche, who had loved to go there, "Countess Hill."

It was very quiet on the mountain. Mary, walking up one of the wide, needle-strewn paths that led to the top, the soft rain hardly penetrating the thick trees, began, almost immediately, to find peace and what she wanted still more—time and space to think resolutely about Paul. What should she do—what ought she to do? Break her engagement? How much she asked herself, with a quick little quiver of pain, would he care if she did? Why was she always fated to make herself so unattractive to him, to be so tactless, when she was trying only to be fair and honest? And would either of them be any better off if she made what would be, to her, a heart-breaking sacrifice? In vain she admitted that neither her reason nor her instinct should allow her to love a man whom she did not respect or trust, not nearly as much as she already respected and trusted Philip Starr, who, twenty-four hours earlier had been a complete stranger to her. The fact remained that she did love Paul, with every fiber of her being, far more deeply, far more passionately, than she had ever let him see. She always had—she always would.

He had not actually even proposed to her. Their kisses had changed a little in character, had become more frequent—some way, through embraces growing less coyly and more loquacious they had reached "an understanding." It was not clear in the minds of either of them how or when. But from that faintly determined time, Paul had become all in all to Mary, and Mary had gradually become less than she was before to Paul.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Here's What as to the New Blouses

By CHERIE NICHOLAS



A BLOUSE with this suit and a blouse with that suit, a blouse for this occasion and a blouse for that, plus an extra blouse or two for good measure—your spring and summer clothes budget will have to be planned just like that if you aspire to dress up to the minute. When one realizes the tremendous importance which fashion attaches to the skirt (either jacket or cape type) it is easy to discover the whyfor and the wherefor of the generous allowance which must be made this season for a whole wardrobe of blouses.

This challenge, which the impending vogue of the tailored suit flings to those who must create the perfect complement in the way of the blouse, is being played up to with such dramatic gesture it would seem that there is nothing left to wish for in color, fabric, style or novelty of the myriads of models which go to make up current collections.

There is everything in the realm of the blouse to intrigue the fancy, ranging from daintiest lingerie or ultra formal de luxe types of "sportiest" knitted sorts, not to forget to mention the flash-dashy scarf blouse which makes even the humblest tailored suit take on swank. Its riot of high color and bold design offers a most excellent antidote for that malady, "depression," some of us have been hearing about. And the new checked, bayadere-striped or plaided taffeta blouses—of course every fashion-wise woman will make a grand rush for one such at the very start of the season. What an air of smartness they add to the tailored spring suit! To multiply this degree

of chic, top the blouse with a straw sailor, set of course at a perky angle, with banding and facing of the identical taffeta check or plaid, for fashion's latest move is to match the hat up to the blouse.

Lace blouses, too, scores of them, and how lovely they are, especially those of the very new and chic tinted cotton laces.

The blouses pictured are a representative group. The one to the left at the top is made of one of those dashing scarf silks which are the talk o' town. For a spring outfit fancy can picture no more ideal a costume than this navy caped two-piece with its dashing gay blouse.

Below, the blouse on the seated figure proclaims the flair for shirring, in that the full sleeves are gathered into the armhole in this way. The shops are full of blouses on this order made either of crepe, satin or taffeta. No wardrobe is complete without at least one of this type.

The blouse on the standing figure is of a brilliant red print. It carries a very important message, in that it tells us of the latest style gesture which tops a light skirt with a darker blouse. The white kid T-strap pumps with their rows of perforations and broad center strap add glamor to any cruise wardrobe. The little swirls of red kid on the vamp and the side match the red of the blouse and the red of the band on the white sailor hat. A swanky striped taffeta blouse concludes the group.

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CHIC SAILORS

By CHERIE NICHOLAS



For your "first" hat choose one of the shallow crowned sailors which must be worn at just the proper angle to be appreciated. The model shown at the top is certainly a convincing argument in favor of this mode. It demonstrates that the plaid vogue is even invading the realm of millinery. This nifty little sailor is of dark green, yellow and white plaided straw, with two china buttons holding the ends of the twisted tri-color band. The arrangement of white pasted feather pads at the side of the crown and on the bandeau makes the other clever sailor a distinctive model for spring. That it is of the straw-cloth family is also a point of interest.

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NEW PRINT DESIGNS ARE MORE SUBDUED

The new prints are gay but not as bizarre as last year. The designs are more conservative and the color combinations more subdued. The patterns are generally smaller.

Checks, plaids and stripes are leaders. Polka-dots are still in the picture, but in many the dots are here and there instead of being in a set pattern. "Raindrop prints," one might call them.

Many of the new prints have designs executed in two shades of a color on a background of another shade of the same color—monotone prints. Sometimes there is white in the design. Many of the designs look as though they were sketched in "pencil-prints." In floral designs, which are good, the patterns are either small or conservatively done.

Sashes With Large Bows

Touch Up Daytime Frocks

Sashes with big bows and long streamers, tied in front, form a new touch on daytime dresses. Like the Lanvin model from which the idea comes, the sash is always in contrast, flaunting very gayly a colored sash on a black dress, especially blue.

Melon shades and the soft orange tones called by sundry names are played up in resort clothes.

Button-on tops in plique or linen, for silk evening frocks or wool travel dresses, can be removed and laundered easily, making a practical cruise fashion.

Lingerie Models Feature

Lace Matching the Silk

Lingerie models feature lace matching the silk. Panties and gowns feature this treatment particularly. The tendency during the past few seasons has been toward the dark laces, recently lightening gradually until now we are seeing quite a little white lace on white lingerie.

Qualities in Wife That Men Admire

Writer Cites Sincerity as Probably the First Requisite.

"A man doesn't want a helper, he wants an admirer. He doesn't want a partner, he wants a satellite. He doesn't want a comrade, he wants an audience to show off to, one that he can always be sure of as ready to be impressed and applaud."

That is what one writer has to say about where the intelligent, hard-working woman gets off when it comes to getting a husband or keeping him. She says men want women to be interested in their work, but never to know as much about it as they do themselves; always to step when they know enough to appreciate and admire them.

Well, granting that a woman is willing to subordinate everything to holding her man, including her self-respect, I should say it still won't work that way, declares a woman writer of high rank. I don't agree that men tire of admiration as quickly as of other temporary stimulants. In fact some of them never tire of it. I should not deny that it is one of the fundamental needs of the sex. But there are others which may conflict where interest in a woman is concerned. One is the need for something to go after, something unattained, if their interest is to be maintained. And the woman who is always ready unquestioningly to admire is too easy.

The moment you try to be clever about calculating in the matter of human relationships, you run into complications like that. That's why it seems to me there's nothing so safe as the old standby, sincerity, when it comes to making a lasting foundation for such a long pull proposition as marriage.

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A Lovely Skin

IF you want cheeks like velvet, sparkling eyes, a fair skin, take the advice of Miss Georgia Hickman of 2619 Jacob St., Wheeling. She says: "I have tried Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery. I was bothered with pimples and eruptions all over my face. I took only one bottle of the 'Discovery' when I was relieved. I can do my work with pleasure too, do not get so tired. I've told many friends about this tonic." Sold by all druggists.



Write to Dr. Pierce's Clinic, Buffalo, N. Y., for free medical advice.

One Worthy "Mob"

All mobs are not to be denounced—the one that emptied the tea in Boston harbor, for one.

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Unworthy Humans

Some do good, in order that they may do evil with impunity.



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