

# LADY BLANCHE FARM

A Romance of the Commonplace

by Frances Parkinson Keyes

WNU Service

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## CHAPTER XII—Continued

—14—

Mrs. Elliott had seen Mrs. Gray watching her slow approach through the deep snow from the kitchen windows, and had waved a greeting. Now, as she mounted the porch, she shook her umbrella and stamped the snow from her overshoes.

"No, I ain't a bit wet," she said, returning Mrs. Gray's hearty kiss. "I'm dressed real warm. If we're goin' to set in the kitchen, I guess I won't lay off my overshoes. If I keep 'em on my feet, it'll take 'em off my mind."

This point being satisfactorily settled, the two ladies sat down in rockers beside the stove and started work on their sleeveless sweaters. Mrs. Elliott, as usual, scarcely stopping for breath before she began her recital of the recent news of the neighborhood.

"Have you heard that old Miss Hunter, up to White Water is married again? Mr. Taylor tried to reason with her, seen' he's buried four of her husbands already, but she said, as long as the Lord took 'em, she would. Shockin', ain't it?—How's the baby? I shouldn't have thought that Austin could have borne to go off and leave that little helpless creature, but it seems to be thrivin', don't it? I don't s'pose you have the least notion he'd want to marry again, not for a while, anyway. Yes, I knew he was real fond of Sylvia, but men are human. Writes you real regular, does he? And Thomas, too? I'm always real pleased to hear about your boys, but I declare I steer clear of Violet Mannin's these days. You know how set she was against Paul goin' to war. But now she's got the biggest service flag in town and we are 100 per cent subscribed for her Liberty loan card. I bet all she bought was \$50 bonds, don't you? Be that as it may, mornin', noon and night she don't open her head except to talk about 'er hero. Goes around with a letter of Paul's in her hand, and—"

"Does he write her regular?"

"Seems to. I can't make out that he's ben in any great danger yet, and I've questioned her close. Enjoyin' himself considerable, I should say. Them Mannin' children always just fished and hankered to get out of Hamstead and I shouldn't be a mite surprised if that itchin' and hankerin' didn't have somethin' to do with Paul's patriotism and Blanche's romance. And that brings me to my main piece of news—Philip Starr's number's been called and he's goin' to Devens this week. Blanche's comin' home for the present and I hear she's mad clear through."

"Oh, the poor child!"

"Poor child nothin'. I don't deny Blanche is pretty and pleasant, but there ain't nothin' very deep about her. I bet she's lookin' forward to comin' here with lots of good-lookin' clothes and new ideas and puttin' on airs with her old neighbors. Mary's got her faults, but I'll say this for her, she ain't near so high and mighty as the rest of the family. Well, I must start along home. Clearin', ain't it? Well, this'll make nice sleighin' and that's one thing to be thankful for. It's lucky we got a few comforts left."

Philip had longed to volunteer in the first days of the war and Blanche had been so bitterly opposed to it that he had given in to her wishes, trying not to let her see the bitter spiritual struggle and loss of self-esteem which it had cost him to do this. But when the draft came, there could be no question of evasion or hesitation. His little income would keep her comfortable, and there was no child. This, Blanche knew, had been a source of disappointment and grief to Philip while she had secretly rejoiced at "not being tied down right away." Now the fact that a baby might have kept him at home made her resentful that she did not have one.

It was out of the question for her to stay on in the little Brookline apartment alone, and there was nothing for her to do but to return, rebelliously, to Hamstead. Philip, with never-failing understanding and gentleness, saw how hard it was for her to do this, and insisting that it should hereafter be called "Carte Blanche" to perpetuate his joke, urged her again to amuse herself by having the little law office renovated to suit the plans which he had made so long before. This time, the suggestion was a godsend. Blanche became genuinely interested and worked harder and more happily than she ever had done before in order to have the tiny home in perfect order for his first furlough. There was a merry little housewarming, when Philip appeared, wearing his sergeant's uniform, for all Hamstead wanted to see him.

But after the last guest had departed, he lighted a fire in the wide, shallow fireplace of the big, soft-co-

ored bedroom, and unfastened Blanche's party dress by candle-light as they stood before it. It had grown very cold outside, and the many-paned windows were frosting over with delicate shapes. The man, looking towards them from the fire, suddenly shivered a little. They were so icy and sparkling, reflecting the frozen moonlight out there, that there was something of almost unearthly loveliness about them, something ghostly—

"Blanche," he said abruptly, "when you fixed up Carte Blanche, what did you do with those old law books that were here?"

Blanche was standing before the mirror, combing her hair. She did not even turn.

"They were so musty and shabby and dry-looking, I burned them up. Why, did you want them?"

"No. Did you burn them all?"

"Yes."

"Read any of them first?"

"No. I could tell by the looks that they were dull. Not what you and I wanted in our lovely home."

She walked across the room to him, her golden hair falling over her shoulders, her soft white dressing-gown flowing from her bare neck and arms in an unbroken line to the floor. Deliberately, she blew out the flickering candles, one after the other, and, in the dim frelight, put her arms around his neck.

"It is lovely, isn't it?" she whispered.

Philip bent over her. There was something in her manner that had never been there before. Was she, too, feeling the mystery and power of the night? Had these last weeks of separation been teaching her, too—teaching her the lessons that, for a time, it seemed as if he, for all his love, had failed to make clear to her? Was the dread which had been slowly growing through the spring and summer that his white star was to prove only a will-o'-the-wisp, to be taken from him after all?

"Yes, sweetheart, beautiful," he answered. "But I want you to know a story that was in one of those books you burned, just the same, if you don't already. I ought to have spoken of it to you before—"

As quietly as he could, he told her first of his reading of the legend and then of his talk with Mary about it afterwards.

"I can't pretend to explain it. But it seems to me the first Blanche didn't want to hurt any person, especially—that it isn't a curse in that sense—but to teach her descendants, if she could, what a terrible thing it is to be selfish. Most of all, the selfishness that calls itself love. Occasionally mothers feel that kind of love for their sons, or children for their parents, or husbands for their wives—"

"You mean that is the kind that Colonel Moses felt for the countess," said Blanche slowly, "and—and it's been so, straight through the family. That's the way mother cares for Paul, that's the way—that's the way I cared for you—once. But, oh, I don't any more!"

"That isn't the way I've cared for you," said Philip. "I'm not very strong, and I'm not very good. I don't think that for a minute. But I do love you with all my heart and soul. That—that makes more difference than anything else, I believe. That curse is never going beyond this generation, and you must tell me tonight, that you're glad—I ought to have gone to war when I first knew it was the right thing for me to do. We can't help that now. But you've got to say you're glad I'm going now—"

His arms tightened around her, his lips, meeting hers, lay for a long time against them.

"If only we had a son—"

"Whenever I think of Lady Blanche farm," he went on, after a long silence, "I think of you and the brook—its freshness and fragrance and purity. It's shallow in places, it rushes into little falls, but where I found you, it widens to a deep pool, clear as crystal, a haven of refreshment and delight and—holiness. That's what you seem to me tonight—do you understand? Oh, my darling—"

## CHAPTER XIII

And so the first winter of the war came to Hamstead. The mail that brought letters from Jaqueline, nursing in a convalescents' home in Britany; from David, operating in a field hospital directly behind the firing-lines; from Austin, driving his ambulance over shell-shot roads; from Paul, "somewhere in France," from Jack and Thomas and Philip at Camp Devens—all as yet, unharmed and well.

There was a ball, and a banquet, and "comfort kits" for all the boys. There was the preparation of Christmas packages. There was the careful searching of the newspapers for accounts of the unsatisfactory conditions existing at Camp Devens.

Then, suddenly, the first blow fell. A telegram came for Blanche.

And Sol Daniels, instead of telephoning it up to the house, as he had telephoned so many times, wrote it down slowly with his stubby pencil, and locking up the station, walked down the road through the deep snow with it in his pocket, blowing his nose hard on his red bandana handkerchief as he went along.

To his intense relief, it was Mary, who was with her cousin a good deal in those days, who answered the knocker at Carte Blanche. Sol handed the grimy paper to her without a word as she opened the door, and cleared his throat.

"For Blanche?" asked Mary in a startled voice.

"Yes—it's a doggone shame. You

better open it first, and then tell her what's in it."

"No—I want it myself, please."

Mary and Sol turned quickly. Blanche was standing on the tiny winding staircase, holding out her hand. She, too, had heard the knocker.

"I've been—been expecting it ever since Philip was home—for his furlough. Take Sol in where it's warm, Mary, and give him some coffee. It was awfully kind of you, Sol, to bring it yourself."

"I'd a-rather ben licked than to a-brung it."

"I know—please."

She opened it slowly, almost carefully. It was from one of the doctors, and it was rather long. Philip had been stricken, very suddenly, with pneumonia. The entire illness had been a matter of only thirty-six hours. The doctor was obliged, with the deepest regret, to inform her . . . If she would telegraph her wishes, they would of course, be complied with in-so-far as possible—

The yellow sheet crackled in her hand. For a moment she shut her eyes, swaying, and Mary started towards her but she put out her hand as if to keep her back. Not even Mary could help her through this moment; she wanted to meet it alone. Then she came slowly down the stairs, and going to the window where the service flag hung, she took it down and stood for a long time with it in her arms, her lips quivering. At last she gathered it up, and crossing the room with it, she hung it, as if it had been an emblem of victory, over the portrait of the little French countess. Then she faced her cousin and her old friend.

"I'll have a new one, with a gold star, in the window," she said quietly, "but that one belongs there. Can you have the express stopped at Hamstead for me, Sol?—You'll go with me, Mary, of course? Please tell mother and Cousin Jane. I'd like to be alone a little while, I think— But I'll be ready to start in an hour."

There was no time to waste in "breaking the news gently." Mary found the two older women together and, without a single unnecessary word, told them what had happened. Violet, horribly stunned and shocked, broke into angry and rebellious grief which prostrated her completely. But when Jane had done all she could to relieve her and the frailer woman had recovered somewhat and they had taken the necessary steps to send Blanche and Mary to bring Philip home and to prepare Hamstead for its first military funeral, Jane went alone to her room and sat a long time, the tears rolling down her grim, plain face, the old candy box tied with red ribbons which Philip had given her long before and which she had kept ever since on her bed-side table near her Bible, clasped in her hands.

"That nice, pleasant, happy boy," she said repeatedly, and added involuntarily, "and he was a real Christian, too, same as Mary said from the first."

Violet, when she had discarded her mourning for her husband, had laid it away in her attic with her usual exquisite neatness, and Mary, unlocking the trunk, brought down the things that Blanche needed and helped her put them on, just as she had helped her dress for her wedding, a year and a half before.

"If I had let him go when he wanted to, this wouldn't have happened."

That was the only complaint she made, the only grief which, so far, she seemed able to voice. But she said it over and over again, after she and Mary were on the train, and the door of the Pullman drawing room had been closed, leaving them quiet and alone together.

"Hush, dear! He might have been killed in battle."

"There'd have been some meaning—some compensation—a glory of achievement in that! This was just waste! Hundreds of boys are dying like that—when it could perfectly well have been avoided. They've been almost freezing to death in the camps all over the country."

"I know. I see how you feel. But I don't believe that anything Philip ever did was wasted, just the same."

"If Paul dies, at least it won't be this way."

"No."

"Oh, Mary, how could you let him go the way you did? Supposing he never comes back, either—do you ever think of that?"

Did she ever think of it! Not long before, Mrs. Weston had handed her a letter that had just come from Rosalie King. She had hurried her floorwalker on a "hurry call" and they had had three days together before he "went across." And that, she had learned, was to be all the honeymoon she would ever have. Mary, taking the letter from Mrs. Weston's limp hand, read it over twice. And she had refused "a week at some quiet place by the sea"—had denied Paul the chance of looking forward to coming back to her "that way." . . . Did she ever think of it!

"Yes, I think of it," she said slowly. "But I had to do what I did, just the same. Even if I'd known he was going to be killed, Paul didn't—didn't love me the way Philip loved you."

"Mary—what do you think it all means? Why do the people who aren't needed, who aren't even wanted, live and live? While the ones like Philip—Do you think that it's really punishment for selfishness—not just mine, but—"

"This whole war is a punishment of selfishness—and an atonement for it. Philip is—one of thousands—"

"But my part. That story coming true. And the certainty we both had that it was going to."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

## Smart Frocks for Miss Six-Year-Old

By CHERIE NICHOLAS



MOTHER and big sister need not think they are the only ones who go stepping out in dramatically staged-style shows these days. There's a rival attraction on, which is about to snatch much of the glory from prideful grown-ups who go prouetting down fashion's runway. It's the juvenile style parades which leading establishments through the country are presenting this season.

These lilliputian style shows carry a very special message to onlookers that designers are making it a point to inject "style" in the full sense of the word into children's apparel. It is not enough that youngsters' clothes be simply utilitarian and dainty and lovely but we are given to understand that the modern child's wardrobe must bespeak a sophisticated styling which registers genuine swank.

This element of ultra-mode which is being so strongly advocated in the field of juvenile design flings quite a challenge to mothers who "do the family sewing." However, what with the helpful patterns with full sewing directions and the perfectly fascinating and inexpensive materials which are so easily available these days the task is made a joy rather than a burden. It adds greatly to fabric interest that so many handsome new weaves made of synthetic yarns have been launched during recent years, such as the new crepes and sheers and lace weaves as well as materials which look like tweeds and suitings of various description. The beauty of these made-of-bermberg and rayon fabrics is that they wash and iron as easily as a linen handkerchief. They are sun-fast, too, and resistant to perspiration. Another comforting thought is that white fabrics of bermberg always stay white.

The trio of modish little-tot cos-

times in the picture tell a story of last word chic when it comes to what the little miss of six or thereabouts will be wearing during the coming months. The first little girl has on a jacket-and-dress costume which will measure up in matter of "style" to mother's newest spring outfit. It is made of a two-tone red checked crepe of bermberg and rayon mixture. A perfectly stunning material this, which will endure any amount of hard wear. It's all "dolled up" with organdy fixings, too, as it should be to be stylish. The diminutive ocean pearl buttons on the collar and the pocket are just too cunning for words.

The demure little lady, seated in the center of the picture, has on a frock which most any mother will be wanting to copy. The material for this darling dress is dotted chiffon of bermberg. This model features the new dropped shoulder. Tiny puffed sleeves, a round yoke and an inset band in the skirt all of finely pleated net add to the exquisite daintiness of the frock. The ribbon around the waist is navy with red-red cherries to tell you that it's springtime.

In every little girl's wardrobe there should be at least one party frock. The model pictured is in pastel pink chiffon of bermberg. The skirt is as full as a dress to wear to dancing school should be. That's why this adorable youngster is carrying a muff of tulle to match her Pierrot ruff. She has no doubt been doing some fancy dancing. For ordinary party wear this dress is lovely without the muff and tulle ruff.

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## CHIC SEERSUCKER

By CHERIE NICHOLAS



We are going to wear lots of seersucker this summer. It is quite one of the smartest materials mentioned for sports-wear. When the young lady in the picture goes sporty and has an urge to play tennis she will don this sly frock of striped seersucker. It wraps around and ties in the front. It's the easiest thing in the world to slip into, having no troublesome buttons, and it allows the freedom which an active young woman demands. In repose it has a slim and youthful silhouette. Not only are the shops showing sly frocks, but they are featuring sly pajamas of stunning plaids and stripes which have the same practical fastenings.

## Odd-Length Coats

The newest ensembles feature coats in odd lengths just below the hip, knee length, three-quarter, five-eighths and seven-eighths lengths. Full-length coats are also shown. Regular short coats worn with dresses or with a blouse and skirt are also featured.

## STRING KNIT FOR SPORTS IS LATEST

The fashion moguls are looking to their knitting this spring. Knitted costumes for sports and street are among the newest things shown in our move up and coming shops. And the big favorite now, the smart, "string knit," two and three-piece sports outfits made out of knitted twine in natural color have a knowing air that has taken the town by storm.

And it's really twine—the kind you use to tie up packages. Its neutral color and its smart dull surface makes it one of the most popular fabrics for current sports costumes.

Usually there is a touch of color—a striped sweater with a solid color coat, or a checked blazer with a solid color dress.

The new knitted suits and dresses are tailored and styled like cloth suits, and a trick of the season is the use of an elastic knit which snaps back into shape.

## White Cotton Net Smart New Fabric for Evening

White cotton net is a new and smart material for summer evening gowns. Embroidered white organdie is back, sometimes having big polka dots in color.

The dark colors in tulle gowns are especially smart, and each of them has its jacket, in either a matching or contrasting shade. Little ruffled jackets of the same material are worn with the organdie, organza and starched chiffon gowns.

## Plaids Are Now Featured in New Evening Clothes

Mainbocher uses plaid for evening gowns. One is of candy pink and white plaid taffeta, designed with a V decolletage, a closely fitting hipline and a skirt flaring into fullness below the kneeline. It is worn with an elbow-length cape of the same taffeta. Red and green, and red and black taffeta frocks are designed along the same lines and worn with jackets or capes to match.

## Plaids for Style

Plaid silk dresses are smarter than printed ones this spring. Many of them have jackets of solid colors and it is very chic to have a jacket of the same colored plaid in larger squares.

## OUR CHILDREN



By ANGELO PATRI

## BEAUTIFYING SCHOOLS

SCHOOL ought to be a lovely place. Children thrive best in beautiful surroundings. That does not mean elegant surroundings. Things can be beautiful without being elegant, or expensive, or loud. Beauty is always best when dressed in simplicity.

A school building ought to be long and low, spread out on the grass like a brooding hen. Vines should dress the walls and old trees shade its grounds. Flowering shrubs should snuggle in the corners where children's feet do not reach them, and tucked in about their roots the spring bulbs should flourish.

The inside of the building is where children live. That means that it should be as beautiful as it can be made without becoming obviously decorated.

I think there ought to be one good picture in every room. I like that picture to be the one that appeals strongest to the children who use that room. Pictures ought to inspire the children, so they must be those that the children can read. They can only read a picture that calls upon their experience and their dreams.

I would not have a lot of children's work pinned about a room. It gathers dust.

Schoolrooms are not a good place for plants and animals, birds and fishes. If we can make them beautiful for the children we are doing well.

First, let us make them clean. The walls, the floor, the ceiling and the woodwork, all ought to be clean as brush and cleansing water can make them. The furniture should be smooth, its fair surface unmarred. The chairs and benches ought to be comfortable. It costs no more to supply a comfortable bench than to buy one that makes a child hunch and huddle and squirm to find a comfortable angle in it.

There must be plenty of light and air. A dark room with poor ventilation is never beautiful. The closets and wardrobes should be sufficient and they should be convenient. When hooks are higher than children's heads they cannot hang their things on them and they use the floor instead. Whatever makes for cleanliness, order, convenience, and comfort will make the classroom and the school a beautiful place to live. This is a good time to check up on paint and washing powders, furniture and equipment. Where the children live ought to be a place of beauty.

## WHY?

"I WISH I knew some way of making Clarisse practice her music."

"Doesn't she practice?"

"I should say not. If I didn't force her to go to the piano and stand there until she began playing she would not touch it. I've promised her everything but it's all no use."

"Why don't you try letting her alone for a change?"

"She wouldn't do a thing, I'm telling you. Know what she did last week? So deceitful. I was so upset I cried. I made her go to the piano and I stayed there until she got her fingers up and down. I had people coming to dinner so I had to go. I listened every once in a while and I heard her playing. At least I heard the piano goin'."

"Well, her father came home early on account of the company and he came to me in the pantry and said, 'Mary, is Clarisse supposed to be practicing or what?'"

"She's supposed to be practicing."

"But as a matter of fact she was reading a shocker and the kitten was doing the practicing."

"There she sat reading a perfectly awful book and every once in a while touching the keys, and letting her kitten go up and down the keyboard to fool me into thinking she was playing."

"I'd stop giving her music lessons."

"It's just a shame when Mrs. Clure's Marie plays like a streak. She gave a recital at the town hall last week and everybody was crazy about it. And I can't get Clarisse to do a thing."

You can't get Clarisse to do a thing but, cheer if you feel like that. Making a child learn to play a musical instrument, take a professional course, learn to dance for public appearances so that you can enjoy the applause won't do. Children do not learn that way. An art must have its source in the child's soul. If it is not there you can never put it there. It is unfair to use a child that way and no good comes of it.

Fathers sometimes make the mistake of trying to make star sportsmen of their sons. A place on the big team, a seat in the shell, a medal for a first in track or field sometimes becomes so important that it wrecks a boy and shakes a home to its foundations.

If you have a star, well and good. Let it shine. If you have a pleasant rushlight tend it well and let it shine happily within its own little circle. It is better that way.

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