

Lady Blanche Farm

A ROMANCE OF THE COMMONPLACE

By Frances Parkinson Keyes

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WNU Service

SYNOPSIS

Motoring through Vermont, Philip Starr, young Boston architect, meets Blanche Manning, seventeen, with whom he is immediately enamored. 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 tells him of an old family superstition concerning the "Blanches" of the Manning family. Paul Manning is inclined to be dissipated, not realizing Mary's true worth. Mary's reproaches for his undue "conviviality" are badly received by Paul, and the girl begins to have misgivings as to the wisdom of the alliance. Gale Hamlin, long a suitor for Mary's hand, visits Hamstead but makes no progress in his love-making. Philip, poring over records of the Manning family, learns the sorrowful story of the "Countess Blanche," French wife of a Revolutionary hero, Moses Manning, and of the peculiar "curse" she has transmitted to her descendants and the women of Hamstead. The evening of Philip's marriage to Blanche, Paul, under the influence of liquor, bitterly affronts Mary when she reproaches him for his condition, and tells her their engagement is ended.

CHAPTER VII

The lot in life of the girl who has been flitted is probably not very pleasant anywhere, but there is no place on earth where it is quite as hard as in a small country village. But Mary went about her usual occupations, after Blanche's wedding and the storm that followed it, with her head held high, and her back straighter than ever. She got, of course, no credit for this. It was set down against her that she had never really cared for Paul, after all, or she "would feel it more." Almost in the same breath she was accused by some one else—or even by the same person—of having worn her heart upon her sleeve, for all to see.

If village gossip was hard to bear, however, the family attitude was worse. Cousin Jane had a good deal to say about the inevitable fate of girls who ran after men who didn't want them, instead of attending their plain Christian duty. Seth said very little, but his silent, dejected attitude made his daughter feel more than any unkind words could have done, that he felt she had disgraced him almost beyond utterance. As for Violet, she became so violently "nervous" about the whole affair, that Mary dreaded to see her more than all the others put together. She never guessed that Paul was also suffering from his mother's "nerves."

"If you had the slightest consideration for me, you never would have let it happen," she lamented over and over again to her son. "My life is so full of grief and trouble that it takes a good deal of fortitude to bear it. Here is Blanche married—"

"You were tickled to death over that," muttered Paul.

"Paul! How can you be so vulgar! I tried to be cheerful, of course. But no one knows how I miss her. And Mary's money would have come in very handy, too."

"I didn't know Mary had any money."

"She will have, as soon as she's twenty-one, and that's very soon now. Laura had a little property of her own, and she left it all to Mary. I don't know as Mary knows it herself, but of course Seth will tell her soon, now."

But this was not the way Violet talked to Mary. She dwelt on the fact that the girl had not made herself "attractive enough" to Paul, that she was always neglecting to change her dress and tidy her hair, that she didn't join with him in those little pleasures that all young men like to "share with their fiancées."

"But Paul didn't expect to share them with me!" flared Mary, stung beyond endurance. "He didn't even want to! And I guess if you did all the cooking and cleaning and washing and ironing for four people, and took care of two children into the bargain, you wouldn't always look as nice as you do! Don't you suppose I've longed to be comfortable and rested—and pretty whenever Paul saw me? I guess I'm just as human as any other girl, and I guess I know 'the way to do things' just as well as you do."

"Well, I should manage to do them then, and to look well at the same time!" retorted Violet. "That's every woman's duty to herself."

"What about her duty to her family, if the two conflict?"

"Mercy, Mary, what a temper you have! No wonder Paul couldn't stand it! I'm sure I do my duty to my family, if any woman ever did, but I keep myself up, too. If you had more system about your housework you could get it done all right—it's all in the way you do it."

Violet felt that she had come out ahead in this tilt. Nevertheless, it "used her up" to have Mary so shockingly impertinent to her, as she said to Jane in telling her about it afterwards, and she did not attack her in this same way again. Instead, she brought Blanche's letters and read them to her. And listening to these accounts of Blanche's happiness was, to Mary, like having salt rubbed in a raw wound.

Blanche was blissful, Philip was perfect, they were divinely happy, no two persons had ever loved each other so much before. And so on. Places and pastimes that had always been mere names, conjuring up visions of delight, to be sure, but never within the reach of "anyone we know" were a matter of course to Blanche. Not that Mary begrudged her that—she had, from the beginning, rejoiced wholeheartedly in her cousin's happiness. But didn't she deserve a little happiness, too? Mary was thoroughly human and she was very intelligent. She would have known how to squeeze



"Sylvia! You're—You're Not a Bit Well, Are You?"

not only enjoyment, but education, out of every drop of pleasure that she could have had. But this was not the worst of it. The man whom Blanche loved, wanted to lavish all these good things on her, while the man whom she, Mary, loved, had neglected and ignored her, and finally insulted her and cast her from him. Mary listened to Blanche's letters in silence, or said merely, "I'm glad she's having such a good time," in a low voice, but when Violet left her alone again, she always sat for a time clenching and clenched her hands, dry little sobs of agony rising in her throat.

But hardest of all—harder than facing the village gossip, harder than facing Violet's complacency—was facing her own bruised pride, her own accusing conscience. Long ago—she knew it only too well—she should have told Paul that unless he mended his ways their engagement must end. She had evaded an issue which she should have met. She had been a coward. Because she feared losing Paul, she had compromised with right, and now she had lost him after all. She felt that she deserved her unhappiness, and this was more bitter than anything else except the way in which she had lost him. The thought of the

words Paul had spoken to her in the hall that night after Blanche's wedding, the memory of his heavy breath and violent kisses, branded her with shame. She was cheapened, degraded in her own eyes, that any man should have dared to behave so to her, and that was infinitely worse than being cheapened and degraded in the eyes of her family. Had she, after all, deserved that, too?

In all those dreadful weeks, Mary found only two sources of comfort, besides the walks she took up Countess Hill to gain solitude, and the prayers she managed, with shaken faith, to say. The first of these sources was Sylvia Gray. She was extremely fond of Mary, and usually saw a good deal of her, but she was not well enough to do that now. The neighborly visiting back and forth had been to a certain degree interrupted. But one afternoon, Sylvia phoned that she was "having a pretty good day," and that she wished Mary would bring her sewing and come over to supper.

It was, as usual, hard for Mary to break away from her family, but she spread out an appetizing cold supper on the table, covered it carefully, left the kettle boiling for Seth's evening cup of tea, and took the two little boys to the barn for their father to watch while he was milking. Seth did not altogether approve of this arrangement, but as usual, he said little, and she promised to be back early. She stopped a minute at the Old Gray homestead, where Mrs. Gray was sitting on her back porch, feeling instinctively that this kindly woman had spoken of her less harshly than most of her neighbors, and that she did not need to shun her; then went down the shady road that led to the little brick cottage where Sylvia and Austin lived. She found her lying in the hammock on her deep and sheltered piazza, looking, as always, supremely lovely, but also very frail. The expression on Sylvia's face shook Mary for the first time from the thought of her own troubles.

"Sylvia! You're—you're not a bit well, are you?"

"I'm perfectly all right. But I'm afraid I shall be tempted to pinch the twins, very gently, of course, sometimes, to make up for all the trouble they've caused me. Just think, they'll be the first twins in Hamstead since the Countess Blanche's—only mine are going to be both girls!"

Mary shivered a little. "Why do you keep talking about having twins?" she asked. "You'll have just one, another boy."

"You wait and see! But I didn't send for you to talk about twins. I've got a new scheme, and I want to see what you think of it. Now that David and Jacqueline have built that splendid cottage hospital, I think we've gone a long step forward in Hamstead. But after all, that only looks out for the people when they're sick or convalescent. I want to build something that will look out for them when they're well."

Mary dropped her sewing. "What do you mean?" she asked excitedly. "Hamstead's the loveliest place in the world to live in," went on Sylvia, without apparent connection, "—that is, I think so. But I can imagine that I wouldn't have, when I was younger—especially if I'd been a boy. There isn't much to do."

"I see," said Mary, beginning to think that she did.

"And so, as long as there isn't, most boys try to find something. And what they find isn't always very good for them."

How much this kind, wise woman saw and understood and forgave! No wonder Austin worshipped her!

"I can't understand, myself," Sylvia went on, "why more parents don't send

their boys away to good, really first-class schools and colleges. They don't seem to realize what a difference it would make, just at the age when it's perfectly natural and normal for a boy or girl to crave excitement and pleasure and activity and change. I'm a pretty good Episcopalian, but I believe just as many boys' souls have been saved by gymnasiums as by churches! And I want that nice new cousin of yours to start in on some plans for one as soon as he gets home from his wedding trip. I want it made suitable to use for dances, and want a billiard room, and a kitchen, and a swimming pool in it, too. I want . . ."

"Oh, Sylvia, no one in the world would have thought of this but you!"

"Did you ever hear," went on Sylvia again without apparent connection, "how wild Austin was when he was young?"

"—yes, I have—"

"That was before I knew him. But he was twenty-seven when I came here. If I'd grown up with him, loving him all the time—as of course I should have, for I loved him as much as I possibly could from the first moment I ever set eyes on him and never could help showing it—I suppose it would have hurt me dreadfully—to have him wild, I mean. I suppose I would have either mistaken immaturity for viciousness and condemned him when he had really done nothing to condemn, or excused viciousness for immaturity and forgiven him when he should, some way, have been punished. Either would have been equally bad, and equally likely to happen. We don't judge clearly when we're unhappy. Of course it hurts Austin and me, a little, now, to think that he ever—slipped up at all. He and I have talked this plan over a good deal. He thinks it ought to help the fellows in Hamstead, some, anyway. Do you remember that poem by Coventry Patmore that Ruskin quotes,

Ah, wasteful woman, she who may
On her own sweet self set the price,
Knowing man cannot choose but pay—
How she has cheapened Paradise!
How given for naught the priceless gift,
How spoiled the bread and spilt the wine,
Which, spent with due respective thrift,
Had made brutes men and men divine!

"Isn't that what we're all tempted to do when we love a man—to walk straight into his arms, without knowing whether his arms are ready for us?"

"Or worthy?"

"If they're really ready, they will be worthy. That's just the point."

"I see," said Mary, very low indeed.

"And then," continued Sylvia, "Austin had ideals, always, even if he didn't live up to them. There's a tremendous difference between that and not having any ideals, not being able to see them yourself, and not having anyone care for you enough to give them to you. Austin's got a wonderful mother."

"So have your boys," said Mary, sobs rising in her throat.

There was no more direct allusion to her trouble than that.

No one but Sylvia in all Hamstead would have been clever enough to see that nothing would comfort Mary so much as to be able to think a little more gently of Paul. Indeed, no one else considered that she deserved comfort or that this would be a legitimate means of giving it to her if she had. But this comfort, great though it was, did not last indefinitely. After that talk with Sylvia, Mary found that she got through the days very well. But the nights seemed to grow harder and harder. Formerly, she had gone straight to sleep when she went to bed, because she was so tired. Now she was so utterly weary, mentally and spiritually as well as physically, that she could not sleep. And when she could not sleep, she cried—cried so violently that each morning found her more and more spent. Her overwrought nerves, seeking some means of relief, found only this one, and they were, just then, stronger than her will-power. And at last something snapped, suddenly, and she broke down openly in the middle of the bedtime songs that she always sang to her little brothers.

She had had a long hard day, and it seemed as if evening and the chance to rest would never come. When, on top of everything else, the small boys showed no disposition to settle down promptly for the night, she began to feel as if her self-control were slipping from her like a cast-off garment.

"I want a drink of water," announced Algy, bouncing up and down on his mattress.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

FARM POULTRY

TO CHECK INROADS OF POULTRY LOUSE

Eradication Simple Matter, Specialist Says.

By R. E. GRAY, Extension Poultryman, Ohio State University—WNU Service.

Controlling the inroads of the poultry louse upon the production of the farm flock is a relatively simple task. The first symptoms of lice infestation are droopiness, lowered wings, and ruffled feathers. In young chicks, diarrhoea follows and chickens often die in a few days; or in older chicks they sometimes fall prey to various other diseases.

Mature birds sometimes are very heavily infested without showing much ill effects, but usually the egg yield is likely to decrease with a heavy lice infestation. In other cases, the mature bird may lose weight and die as a result of these little rapacious warriors.

Several different types of treatment have been designed for the control of lice; any one of which may be very effective. The big factor to be considered is the ease of treating the birds and the effect upon egg production.

Perhaps one of the best ways of controlling lice is by the use of nicotine sulphate. This material is applied to the top part of the perches just before the birds go to roost. The essential thing is to get as small a quantity as possible along the roosts and yet have some along the entire length of the roost. Although nicotine sulphate is very expensive, it has been found that a teaspoonful of the material is enough to treat the perches in a house with a capacity of 250 birds.

A second application should be made some eight or ten days after the first in order to destroy the newly-hatched lice.

Give Chicks Plenty of Room in Brooder House

"To successfully brood baby chicks a suitable brooder house and brooding equipment are necessary," says O. C. Ufford, extension poultryman for the Colorado Agricultural college.

"First of all, the brooder house should be large enough to comfortably accommodate without crowding the number of chicks to be brooded. A safe rule is to allow not over three chicks for each square foot of floor space."

"Experiments have shown a direct relationship between death loss of chicks and the amount of brooder floor space allowed per chick."

"The brooder house should be constructed to conserve heat, but it should be arranged so there can be frequent changes in the supply of air."

"Sunlight is important for the normal growth of baby chicks. Sunshine is one of the best disinfectants. The brooder house should be so constructed that it will provide plenty of sunshine. Last, but not least, the brooder house should be made so it can be cleaned easily—so that every crack and crevice may be reached by disinfectants."

How to Make Cold, Damp Poultry House Warm, Dry

Recently it has been found that at very little cost except for labor half-monitor poultry houses can be transformed from cold and damp houses into warm and very satisfactory ones. First the windows at the top are entirely removed, and the south side of the roof is raised at the middle to meet the north roof, so as to make a two-slope gable roof. The whole side can be raised as a unit by loosening the rafters at the middle of the building and then several men lifting it up and splicing the rafters.

When the roof is completed, the windows which were at the top are put into the south wall so as to make it nearly all glass, stringers are put across about six feet above the floor, strips and a 12 to 18-inch layer of oats straw put on, and then slatted openings made in each gable end or ventilators put on the roof.—Prairie Farmer.

Sex Shown by Feathers

At six weeks of age it is difficult, especially with the larger breeds, to tell sex. There are several "tests" offered among them this one: Pluck a few feathers from around the saddle or the base of the tail and hold them up to the light. If they are pointed they indicate a cockerel; if rounded, a pullet, it is claimed. Another way is to hold up the bird by the back of its neck with two fingers. If a male it will drop its legs; if a female it will draw them up close to the body.

Unpatented Method of Avoiding Paying Debts

Lewis Carroll, in the Golden Book Magazine, solves the problem of not paying your bills.

"How much is it this year, my man?" asked the professor.

"Well, it's been a-doubling so many years, you see," the tailor replied, "and I think I'd like the money now. It's two thousand pounds, it is."

"Oh, that's nothing," the professor carelessly remarked. "But wouldn't you like to wait just another year and make it four thousand? Just think how rich you'd be! Why you might be a king, if you liked!"

"I don't know as I'd care about being a king," the man said thoughtfully. "But it dew sound a powerful sight o' money! Well, I think I'll wait."

"Of course you will!" said the professor. "There's good sense in you, I see. Good day to you, my man!"

"Will you ever have to pay him the four thousand pounds?" Sylvie asked as the door closed on the departing creditor.

"Never, my child!" The professor replied emphatically. "He'll go on doubling it till he dies. You see, it's always worth while waiting another year to get twice as much money!"

Preparedness

It is better to have an iron railing at the edge of a precipice, than an ambulance wagon at its foot to receive the body of the wounded traveler.—Exchange.