LADY BLANCHE FARM

A Romance of the Commonplace

by Frances Parkinson Keyes

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When fall came, she was not working any longer, but the rest of Hamstead, thinking of her, worked harder than ever. For she was lying, very still and happy, in the big four-poster bed in the soft-colored chamber of Carte Blanche, with the golden, downy head of Philip Starr's son against her breast.

CHAPTER XIV

Moses and Algy Manning were coming home from school together. They had, in three years, grown noticeably taller and thinner. Their faces, as usual, would have been improved by the ministrations of a handkerchief and a wash-cloth. But Gale Hamlin, who had been riding for some hours over roads that not infrequently caused him to strike the top of the car or skid into a ditch, leaned out of the window and hailed them with delight as he caught sight of them.

"Stop a minute, Morrison— Hello, you kids! Climb in here. Going home from school?"

"Yes," replied the two small boys together, accepting his invitation with alacrity, and seating themselves beside him without further waste of words.

"Getting along pretty well?"

"Fine," answered Moses. "Algy's in kindergarten. I'm in the second grade."

"Good for you! Can you write your name yet?"

"Write my name!" exclaimed Moses, with injured pride. "I kin write poems!"

Gale Hamlin coughed. "No, really?" he asked politely. "If you can, fame and fortune await you. Unfortunately, there are so many young gentlemen who only think they can. They can't, really."

"I'll show you," said Moses, who did not understand the greater part of this speech but felt it, on the whole, unimportant whether he did or not. Removing the cover from his dinner-pail, and depositing on the seat beside him two apple cores, half a doughnut, a package of gum, a yard or so of twine, a jackknife and a Second Reader, he finally pulled out a piece of blue paper on the outside of which was written in large letters, "Two Poimes. By M. Manning," and handed them to the doubting Thomas in triumph.

"Ther was a bee and—" read Gale,
"He sat on a tree and
He herd a sound
And he made a bownd
At the sound.
So that's all so call."

"Go on," said Moses, without false modesty.

"There was a workman
Who carried a can
And his name was Smiller
And he went to the miller
And sat on a piller
And thats all ther was herd
Of Mr. Smiller."

"You should try the Atlantic Monthly," said Gale, folding and returning the paper. "But if that isn't appreciative, there are several other magazines. I will give you a list, if you like, or I will undertake to place these for you myself, for a small commission."

"I guess so," said Moses, feeling again that he was missing the point somewhere. "I showed 'em to Mary and she laughed and told me to take 'em to school and let my teacher see 'em."

"How is Mary?" Gale asked.

"Well, she looks kinder peaked. Was you thinkin' of comin' to say good-by to her?"

"Something of that sort. Why?"

"Because," replied Moses, "I wouldn't, if I was you. Thomas Gray tried it, and he wasn't suited at all. With the way she said good-by, I mean."

"Moses and I were under the sofa, playing lion, only Mary and Thomas didn't know it," said Algy, in an illuminating aside.

"She shook hands, nice and polite, like she's taught us to do it," continued Moses. "I don't know what more was wanted. But there was something. He said so."

"Twice," volunteered Algy.

"And then he said, 'Mary, isn't there any chance for me at all?' and she said, 'No, I'm sorry, but there isn't.'"

"And Thomas," continued the faithful chorus, "said, 'Wasn't there ever any chance for anyone except Paul?' and Mary stiffened up and said, 'Paul threw his chance away.'"

"What happened next?" asked Gale, feeling very much as if he had been eavesdropping himself.

"Thomas spoke right up as if he was kinder mad. 'Well,' he said, 'are you goin' on rememberin' that all the rest of your life, 'stead of that he tried good an... it again?'"

"Ah!" remarked Gale.

"And then Mary told him she couldn't discuss it with him. He was home just for a few hours, before he went to France. That was most a year ago. No one's tried it on her since."

"Suppose," said Gale, producing a crisp dollar bill, "that you boys go to Wallacetown with Morrison and have a spree? You might enjoy it and I—er—wouldn't run the risk of having any lions under the sofa while I was there!"

Mary was very glad to see Gale Hamlin, and she did not attempt to disguise the fact. He told her a good deal of Boston news that pleased and interested her, while he drank the tea and ate the cookies that she brought him, before he asked her any questions. "How is Mrs. Starr? I want to see her, too!"

"Oh, she's wonderful! So well, and so busy, and so happy with the baby! He's the loveliest little creature! Cousin Jane worships him, too. You must see him before you go. He isn't like a Manning at all—he's the image of his father."

"I am very glad she has him. Does she have good news of her brother, too?"

"She doesn't have any."

Gale did not answer immediately.

"I'm sorry if I've made a stupid mistake," he said at last. "You didn't mention any bad news, the last time you were in Boston."

"No—I don't often talk about Paul."

"So I have observed," remarked Gale dryly.

Mary flared instantly. "Men are not fair to women," she said bitterly.

Mary Flared Instantly. "Men Are Not Fair to Women."

"I'm sorry to say that's often true. But it's no reason why women shouldn't be fair to men. Two wrongs never made a right, you know."

"Are you trying to tell me what is right for me to do?"

"I'm trying to tell you what is wrong. It would be wicked if you never married."

"Wicked!"

"For you—not for every woman."

"Why for me especially?"

"You ought to guess. And I've seen you with men— I know how much charm you have, no matter how you try to hide it and how much power, no matter how little you choose to use it. And I've seen you with children—your patience and your wisdom and your loving kindness. Philip Starr has done wonderful things for the place—and the woman—he loved—by his death. But they're nothing to what you can do for the place and the man you may love—by your life—if you only will."

The girl rose suddenly and turned away from him. Gale crossed to her quickly, and put his hand on her shoulder.

"So you refused Thomas Gray?" he asked quietly.

"Yes. There was never any question of Thomas."

"Or of me?"

"Yes, there was some question of you. I thought you knew that."

"Will—could you answer it any differently now?"

"No."

"Or ever, do you think?"

"No. I—I'm sure I never could."

"Then how are you going to answer Paul when he comes home?"

"Paul isn't ever coming home," said Mary steadily—so steadily, in fact, that a man who knew her less well than Gale Hamlin did would have been completely deceived by her tone.

"What happened, Mary?" he asked gently. "Please tell me."

"He was wounded last May," she said in a hard voice. "Not seriously. Cousin Violet had a letter, written by Paul himself in the hospital, saying the wound was just a scratch—that he'd be out again for the next 'big scrap.'"

"Yes."

"He was. He was at Belleau Wood and Chateau-Thierry. Then he was listed as 'Prisoner or Missing.' We haven't heard since. That was nine months ago."

"Yes."

"There were very few marines taken prisoner. We thought, after the armistice was signed, we'd have some word."

"And you haven't?"

"No—not a syllable. We hope—I hope, anyway—that he was killed. It would be much less horrible—than the other." Then with a swift change of tone, she exclaimed, "Don't you ever read the Casualty lists yourself? Oh, I believe you knew all the time!"

"Yes—I did. But I wanted you to tell me yourself. I've been waiting, ever since last summer, to see if you wouldn't. I wanted to know just how you felt about it.

"Do you know now?"

"I think I do—Mary, don't you ever bend?"

"Bend?"

"Yes—because if you don't, I'm afraid some day you're going to break. You did, very nearly, you know, once before. You remember the old fable—

"I have been doing what I could," Gale went on, as Mary did not answer, "to locate your cousin ever since I found out the situation. But, so far, I haven't discovered anything. Now, however, I'm starting for Europe myself—almost immediately. Until now, it has seemed as if I could be most useful here. I am glad that at last there appear to be ways in which I can help over there—reconstruction, investigation—I don't need to tell you— There, my dear, there—"

He waited patiently for the storm to pass, stroking very gently the soft hair about the hidden face. He waited, it seemed to him, endlessly. For Mary was weeping with the abandonment, the utter hopelessness, that marks the ultimate despair of those strong souls whose fortitude enables them to restrain their grief until it reaches its culmination, and the shattering of whose spirit is all the more tragic because it is so sudden. Gale Hamlin's heart twisted in his breast at the sight of her unrestraint and the thought of her agony. He knew he was powerless to help her except by surrounding her with the sense of his infinite compassion. It was a long time before she raised her head, and as she did so, still far from composed, the door was flung unceremoniously open and Algy and Moses entered noisily.

"The dollar's all spent," announced Moses.

"Well," said Gale, with a slight sigh, "it lasted just about long enough. I rather wish, though, I had given you a dollar and a half! Will you take me over and introduce me to your new little cousin?"

* * * * * * *

Mrs. Elliott, who was "passing the afternoon" with Violet, saw him walk down the cobblestone path with a small boy on either side of him, from her point of vantage in the North Parlor window. Violet did not receive her callers in the kitchen, like Mrs. Gray. She did not consider it "select" to do so.

"Look here, Violet," called Mrs. Elliott excitedly, "if there ain't Mr. Hamlin comin' down Seth's front walk! He don't take 'no' for an answer very easy, does he?"

"No," said Violet, "and Mary doesn't say 'yes' very easily, either. I can't think what that girl's made of. She used to be always laughing and singing, but now-a-days she's so glum—except with the children—that you can hardly get a word out of her, and you can't ask her the most trivial question that she doesn't lose her temper. And she's never shown the slightest feeling about Paul!"

"Yes, she is real peculiar. Her mother was the same. She'd go a long time without hardly openin' her head, Laura Mannin' would, and then she'd up and take the bit in her teeth—like when she named Algy, and sent Mary off to school. I've always thought Mary some like her mother. But the menfolks do seem to like her—they never show much sense in their selections. Why, I never had an offer till I was most thirty!—Blanche don't seem to pindle none, does she?"

"No, she's actually gained since she's been nursing the baby, and she said the other day she'd never be happier in her life. I can't see what ails the girls in this generation. Rosalie King has come to visit Mrs. Weston again, and I can't see that she's changed at all. She doesn't even wear crepe—just plain black—and she says 'she should worry,' that she's 'hung on to her old job and got a raise at that' and that although she can't always buy the 'very latest' to wear, she's got a 'long way from September morn'—whatever she means by that! One of her usual vulgar expressions! And yet Mrs. Weston says she knows Rosalie thought the world of that man she married. She can't have, that's all—not in the way a woman of real refinement would have cared. Why, after Martin died, I refused all nourishment—except what was absolutely necessary, of course, to keep up my strength—and lay in a dark room for weeks and never dreamed of stirring out, even after that, except to go to church and to the cemetery. My heart was buried in the grave. I'm afraid Mary has been putting some of her queer ideas into Blanche's head, for when I asked her a little while ago if hers wasn't, she said no indeed, it was all with Philip!"

"Land! Where does she think Philip is?"

"She said in Heaven. And that Heaven was anywhere, if you could only see it."

Mrs. Elliott arose, and folded her work. "Them kind of notions give me the creeps," she said uneasily. "I must be goin'. I'm sure you'll get some let-up from all your troubles, Violet, but I'm forced to say I don't see no chance of it, with them two girls on your hands—one a widow woman before she's twenty and the other cut and dried for an old maid! I'm glad I didn't have nothin' but a son, and him a real smart, level-headed man. He applied for exemption right off—with that squint in his left eye, and a pindlin' family—the roads is awful ain't they? I kinder think, though, that we're goin' to get an early spring. The frost has come outer the ground a good deal today."

Mary was sitting on top of Countess hill, her chin resting on her hands, looking out over the meadows. She sat very still, watching the changing light. Without understanding why, and in spite of all her grief and weariness, she felt that one of the great hours of her life had come. The beauty and peace and promise of the country suddenly seemed to overcome her as no inanimate things had ever overcome her before. She felt, like an actual presence, the spirit of her puri-

(To be Continued.)

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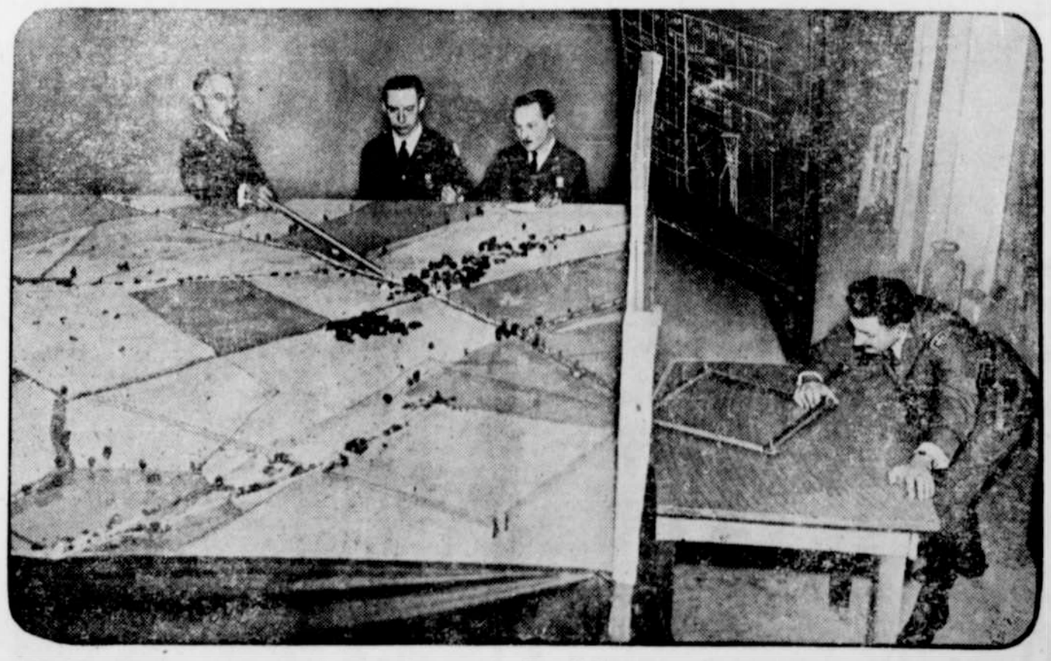

Rookie officers of the Seventy-Ninth division of the United States reserve corps are pictured using a terrain model to study modern field artillery tactics at regimental headquarters in tthe Gimbel building, Philadelphia. Maj. W. K. Bonnell at the right is adjusting the range for the guns. The board was constructed by members of the division.

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9:00	.....	*7:45	*7:55
10.00	8:10	8:15	8:20
11:00	*9:10	*9:15	*9:20
12:00	10:10	10:15	10.20
1:00	12:10	12:15	12:20
2:00	2.10	2:15	2:20
3:00	4:10	4:15	4:20
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12:00	.....	.....	.....

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Port. Lv.	Tualatin Lv.	Durham Lv.	Trece Lv.	Metzger Lv.
*7:00	.....	.....	.....	.....
8:00	*6:05	*6:10	*6.15	*6:20
10:00	*7:35	*7:40	*7:45	*7:50
12.00	*8:05	*8:10	*8:15	*8:20
2:00	9:05	9:10	9:15	9:20
4:00	11:05	11:10	11:15	11:20
*5.00	1:05	1:10	1:15	1:20
6:00	3:05	3:10	3:15	3:20
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