

LADY BLANCHE FARM

A Romance of the Commonplace

by Frances Park Keyes

Service by Frances Parkinson Keyes

tan forefathers who had turned this valley from a wilderness into a garden, who had lived their simple faith as truly as they had professed it, who had fought and died, when necessary, for an ideal. She turned her head, half expecting to glimpse some heavenly vision, trembling—But there was nothing to be heard, nothing to be seen, only something wonderful to be felt. She bowed her head and prayed. It was a long time before she lifted it again. When she did, Paul, bare-



Paul, bareheaded, dressed in khaki, was standing beside her.

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She sprang to her feet, shaking all over, entirely unable to speak. He was taller, thinner, paler, infinitely older and graver, all the bloom and softness of his boyish beauty had gone. For a moment she thought—it must be—She shut her eyes, swaying and crying aloud, as she felt herself falling. Then suddenly she was upheld by a strong arm, swung quickly around her shoulder, a firm hand taking both her trembling ones in a warm and steady grasp.

"There, there," Paul was saying, as if he had been speaking to a little child, and patting her arm as he spoke. "It's all right. I didn't mean to frighten you like this. Don't, Mary. Don't cry so. Why, there is nothing to cry about! I'm all right. I'm here!"

"Can't we sit down and talk?" he asked, and drew her down beside him on the big rock, still holding her hand. Then seeing how utterly impossible it was for her to speak, he went on, "I got in on the four o'clock and walked straight up to the farm. I didn't let mother know I was coming, for I thought, if I did, she'd have the minister, or a delegation from the D. A. R. or the Wallacetown band, or maybe all three, at the station to meet me. It never occurred to me that none of my letters from the other side telling her in a general way when to expect me, would have reached her."

"Tell me," said Mary, finding her voice at last.

"There isn't much to tell. You know what happened up to the time I was wounded. And the wound—the first one—didn't amount to anything. I was back at the front in no time. And then I was hurt—again, before I was taken prisoner."

"Go on."

"I was a prisoner several months, you see. I couldn't write then. Even after the armistice was signed, we weren't released right off. And then for a while, I wasn't well."

"You mean you were starving?"

"Well, I wasn't hungry, anyway!" said Paul, lightly. "But I'm all right now. And I'm home. You won't mind, will you, if I don't tell you more than this, just now? We—the men who've been there—don't like to talk about it much. Won't you say you're glad to see me? All the rest of the family has. Mother had hysterics, of course, but she was awfully glad, just the same. I couldn't help knowing that. And Blanche—well, of course Blanche and I both broke down a little. I didn't know, you see, about Philip—or little Philip. Well, then I went to the barn and found Cousin Seth. He said I might find you up here."

Now they were sitting on the old boulder, hand in hand, as they had done when they used to rest after picking blackberries—

"You're not strong," she said with a great effort, "and you've had this—this hard climb to reach me. I'm sorry."

For a moment Paul did not answer. Then he took the hand he held, and laid it against his lips.

"No, I'm not strong," he said huskily. "I know that. And I have had to climb—to climb a long way—to reach you. But I'm not sorry. I'm glad."

"Paul! You know I didn't mean it that way!"

"I know you didn't, dear, but I did. For it's true. But please tell me—aren't you glad I'm here, at last?"

"Yes," said Mary, very low indeed. "Then, may I tell you—anything I want to?"

"Yes," she said again, lower still. "Do you remember what you said to me—that day in Boston—about what loving really means?"

"Yes," said Mary a third time, though it was only a whisper now.

"Well—that's the way I love you. You were right—I didn't then. But I have learned to, since. At first it was just a dreadful physical longing and raging grief because I hadn't got what I wanted. I'd felt so hopeful—so sure—that day I went to you in Boston, that I'd get my week—but all the time the things you'd said about how you loved me, kept hammering themselves into my stupid brain, making me see more and more clearly that, even then, I didn't care for you like that, or it wouldn't be my own disappointment I'd be thinking most about. It would be the way I'd treated you, from the time we were youngsters—taking all your loveliness and goodness for granted—and then throwing it away."

"Don't, Paul," she said softly. "Don't speak of that, or even remember it any more. I've forgotten all about it."

"I haven't," he said between his teeth. "I never shall. I never can, unless—I can atone for it. I began to forget that I had lost you—and to wonder how—"

"How you could get me back?"

"Not even that—till afterwards. Only how I could make things up to you. Whether there was anything on earth I could do to make me worthy to come to you and say I was sorry, whether you were proud of me or not, that I'd got to change inside. I'd reached that point by the time I got to prison, and then it was weeks and weeks before I could think at all. But when I could—it was what kept me clean—and sane—whatever they did to me—"

"What did they do to you?" asked Mary, brokenly.

"I'll tell you that some other time," he said briefly. "The rest I have to tell you now. I've waited a long time to do it. It's the only thing I've got to tell you. The war didn't make me over. That is, I suppose it helped most of us a little, but it didn't create a new man of me as the novels say—I was you, all the time—before the war, and during it, and now, most of all—that made me want to be a better man. And now I've come home to settle down in Hamstead, just a plain, ordinary farmer—not even a first-class one. It isn't in me to be anything better than that. But I love you—"

"And there wasn't any 'pretty little French peasant,'" he said, after a long pause. And in that one simple sentence, Mary understood, though she could not answer, all that he was trying to tell her.

He misinterpreted her silence. He kissed her hand again, dropped it gently, and rose.

"It was wrong of me, maybe, to say all this to you—so soon," he said. "But I saw Mr. Hamlin just before I sailed for home. He told me—that—that you hadn't changed your mind about him, and that he knew you never would. He told me, too, that he knew you'd refused Thomas Gray. Sylvia sent me a message once, by David—I didn't get it until after she died—telling me never to stop fighting for you, if I had to die fighting. I thought for a while, that I was going to die fighting—then in that German prison. I was afraid for a while that I wasn't even going to die fighting—that it was to be starving, rotting. Now I know I'm not going to die at all—not for a good many years, I mean—but I'm going to live fighting. Do you remember, when I was a little chap, how I used to stand in the front yard, whenever I wanted to see you, and simply holler, 'Come over, Mary, come over? And you always came! I'm going right on calling for you now, until I've made you come again! I'll go down now, and see mother—I promised her that I wouldn't be long. But we'll see each other, some way, right along, won't we, Mary?"

He was half-way down the hill when he felt her touch on his arm. He turned quickly.

"What is it, dear?" he asked. "Is anything the matter?"

"No—yes—I haven't been honest."

"You haven't been honest!" echoed Paul in astonishment. "What do you mean?"

"I let you go away thinking that. I was afraid to let you think anything else, because I knew, though you 'wanted' me so much, you didn't really love me—then. I—I hoped you would, some day. It's nearly killed me ever since to think if you never came back, you wouldn't know—to remember that I didn't even kiss you good-by. For I wasn't honest. I mean—it was possible—I mean, I did—"

Paul stood for a stupefied moment, staring at her. Then he cried aloud with joy.

"You care now!" he exclaimed. "You have cared all the time!" Then, as he tried, very gently, to take down the trembling hands with which she had suddenly covered her face, he realized that his own were shaking, too.

"Mary," he said brokenly, "I won't, if you really don't want me to. But

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"You won't ever have to starve again," said Mary with a great sob, and took down her hands herself.

It was very late that evening, when Jane Manning, remembering that she had not "set back her chairs" against a possible storm—though there was not a cloud in the sky—went out on her piazza to "make sure everything was all right" for the night. She stopped in the middle of her pleasant task and stood stock-still. The moon shone very clear and bright and on the wide granite doorstep of her cousin's house opposite, she could see two persons—a man and a girl—standing very close together, their arms around each other. Then the man bent his head, and it was a long, long time before he lifted it again.

"Good night, sweetheart," she heard him say at last, and then saw him turn and come down the walk, his young face lighted with a radiance that did not seem to come wholly from the moon.

"Great Glory!" ejaculated Cousin Jane aloud, and without conscious profanity.

Paul heard her, stopped for a minute, and then walked rapidly toward her.

"Is that you, Cousin Jane," he called, "fixing up the piazza? Here, let me help you!" When complete order was restored, he blocked her entrance into the house for a minute, standing with his back against the door.

"Mary is going to marry me," he said, his voice ringing like a halloo. "Right off. We're going away for a few weeks—till I get stronger, and she gets rested—to some quiet place by the sea—And then we're coming back here to Lady Blanche farm—coming home together. Oh, God, how happy I am!"

"I dunno! I blame ye," said Cousin Jane.

His mother's house was dark, and Paul did not feel sorry. In the morning, of course, she must be told, and Mary's father—but tonight!—However, when he noticed a faint light shining from the upper windows of Carte Blanche, he went close to the little building and called—

"Blanche! May I come up?"

"Yes—I've been hoping you would."

She was sitting in a low rocker, nursing her baby. He crossed the room softly, and sat down on a footstool beside her.

"Mary's going to marry you," she whispered.

"How did you know?"

"How could I help knowing, looking at you? I've seen that look in a man's face before."

"Oh, you poor little thing!"

"Hush! Don't speak that way! I don't feel like that about it! And I'm so thankful—so happy—that I've seen it in yours, too."

They sat for a long time together, after the sleeping baby had been laid back in his cradle. And meanwhile, the woman who had never had a lover went slowly up to her room, and sit-

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ting down in the old chair, took up the Bible that lay near it, to read in it, as always, before she went to bed. It fell open at the last chapter of Proverbs:

"Who can find a virtuous woman," read Cousin Jane, "for her price is far above rubies. . . . Her children arise up also and call her blessed. Her husband also, and he praiseth her. Give her the fruit of her hands and let her own works praise her in the gates."

The Bible slipped from her lap, unnoticed, and Cousin Jane sat for a long time with happy tears rolling down her cheeks.

"I suppose that woman in the Bible may have had her faults," she said aloud at last, "same as Mary has. I shouldn't be a mite surprised if she had a tongue and a temper and a backbone and didn't forgive and forget very easy, though Solomon doesn't mention it. Seems to me there's some likeness between the two. Mary's been faithful to the trust her dear mother left her and denied herself to do for her father and her little brothers. She's been strong and wise enough to say 'no' to a rich man she didn't love and turn the poor, weak, shiftless boy she did love into a fine creature that needn't be afraid to look his Maker in the face. And she hasn't shirked or nagged or complained or boasted while she's been doing it. She's kept herself sweet and lovely through it all. There may be better jobs for women to do than things like them, but if there is, I never heard of 'em, any more than Solomon seems to have. We've been worryin' considerable lately about the little countess' curse, and I don't deny that it seems the Almighty gives strange powers to human beings sometimes, even after they're dead. But for all that, I guess His blessin' is more powerful than anything else, just the same. And I guess, too, that as long as Mary stays here, that blessin' will rest on Lady Blanche farm in the future, same as it has in the past."

[THE END.]

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LOOKING AT WASHINGTON

Continued from Page 1

General endorsement of the stand taken by the League of Nations in relation to the Far Eastern emergency was given by this country. Secretary Stimson, with the approval of Messrs. Roosevelt, Hoover and Hull, so notified the League after passage of a unanimous vote of censure of Japan's course by the assembly. The Japanese delegates, thus isolated from other nations, immediately withdrew from Geneva, although no formal notice of intention to quit the League has been given by Japan.

Several days later Great Britain prohibited the export of munitions to both China and Japan, although strong pressure was exerted to limit the ban to Japan. While this action reverses a recent government statement it put Great Britain in the position of neutrality even in the event the League secures an embargo against Japanese imports of munitions. Observers predicted that Japan would soon assert the right of a belligerent to seize ships carrying munitions to an enemy even if it is necessary to declare war upon China. The British action will avoid seizure of her merchant vessels with the attendant risks that follow.

In this country Senator Borah declared that an embargo against both nations would be equivalent to being against China, because Japan was

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