

THE LARK IN THE MORN

Also by Elfrida Vipont

Haverard Family Books

The Lark on the Wing

The Spring of the Year

Flowering Spring

The Pavillion

The Lark in the Morn

Elfrida Vipont

Illustrated by T.R. Freeman



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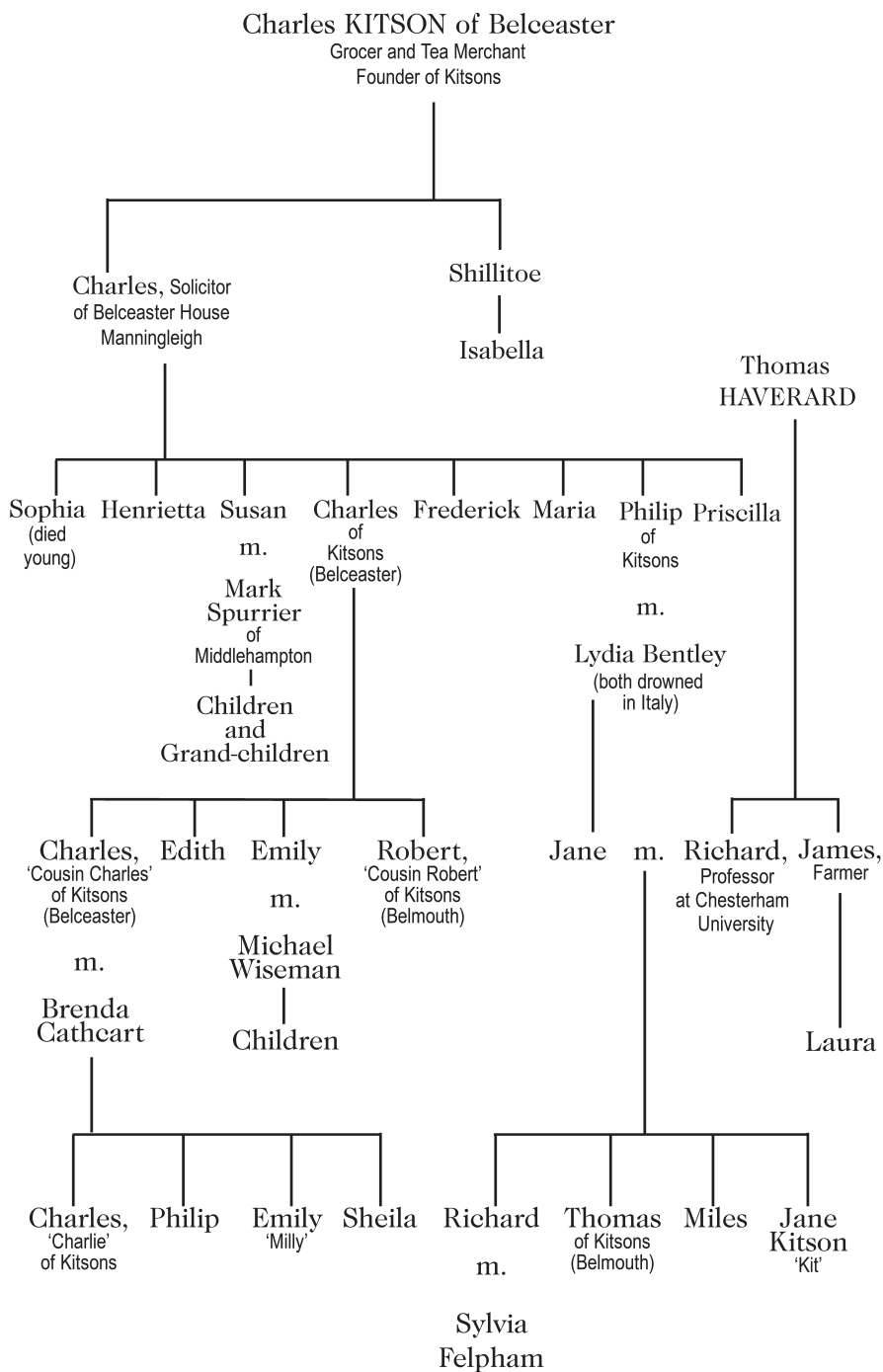
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About the Author

For
Robin, Carolyn, Dorothy
and
Ann



School Terms in This Book

There have been many changes in the English school system since 1948, when this book was written. Many government, or state schools were divided into junior and senior sections: junior from ages 5 to 12 and senior from 12 to 18. In other places there were separate primary and secondary schools. At the beginning of the story, Kit and her friends are at Chesterham High School, a girls' school in the state system. Pony and Helen, who are a little older than Kit, are in the Senior School by Chapter 3. Kit, still in the Junior School, takes the exam for the Junior Medal which will give her a scholarship to pay the fees for the Senior School, and may give her a "double remove," which would mean she would be in the A, or "alpha" stream with Helen, rather than the B or "beta" stream with Pony. Pony is a popular girl, and good at sports, but she is not as clever as Helen.

Later in the story, all three friends have moved to Heryot, a private girls' boarding school run by the Society of Friends, or Quakers. At Heryot Kit takes the School Certificate exam when she is 16, and leaves school after another year. Others stay on to take the Higher School Certificate which qualified one to go to university.

Heryot School is modeled on a Friends' school in York, familiar to the author. "The San," mentioned in some of the later chapters, refers to the Sanitarium, or infirmary.

*As I was a-walking,
One morning in the spring,
I met a pretty damsel,
So sweetly she did sing.
And as we were a-walking,
Unto me this did she say:
There is no life like the ploughboy's,
All in the month of May.*

*The lark in the morn
She will rise up from her nest,
And mount up in the air
With the dew all on her breast.
And like the pretty ploughboy
She will whistle and will sing,
And at night she will return
To her own nest, back again.*



1. *Over the Wall*

“KIT! KIT! WHERE are you, you impossible child?”

“Here.”

“Where?”

“Bedroom.”

“What are you doing?”

“Reading.”

“Have you done your homework and your practicing?”

“Need I do any moldy practicing? I had a lesson yesterday.”

“Of course you must practice, silly! If you’re too lazy to do any work, how do you expect your father to go on paying for your music lessons?”

“I don’t! I wish he wouldn’t!”

“Kit! You ungrateful child! Come downstairs at once and

bring your homework with you.”

“I’ve done everything except the arithmetic.”

“Then bring that. Be quick, or you’ll not be ready when Pony and Helen come.”

Laura Haverard stood in the hall at Thornley Mays, impatiently awaiting her small cousin. The child was always exasperatingly slow. Otherwise she might have been able to help with the spring-cleaning, but as it was, Laura was only too thankful to get her out of the way. Laura herself was very efficient. She prided herself on her orderly methods, but somehow or other she could never instill them into Kit. And if she pressed her too hard, there would only be a tantrum to cope with on top of everything else. Laura hated it when Kit indulged in tantrums. It was such a waste of time. However, if only she could hustle her into finishing her homework, the child would be able to run off and play for the rest of the morning, leaving her free to get on with her work. “For goodness’ sake hurry up!” she urged.

Kit came slowly down the stairs with a book under each arm. She looked very untidy, Laura thought. She herself could spring-clean all morning without getting so much as a hair out of place, and her blue overall was as neat as it was becoming. She pulled the child towards her and straightened the collar of her blouse, but what was the use of tidying her up when she never seemed to take any pride in her appearance? She sighed expressively and pushed Kit into the dining-room. “Come along and let’s see you start,” she said.

Kit sat down at the table and reluctantly opened her books. There were only three sums left. “Measure a room at home and give its area in square feet—”

“You’d better do that now, with my tape-measure,”

suggested Laura helpfully.

"Done it."

"Already? Which room did you measure?"

"Pantry—six feet by four."

"Lazy kid! You don't take a scrap of interest in your work, do you? Now, hurry up, or you'll not be able to go out with Pony and Helen."

Kit wrote "Answer" with a flourish and turned round in her chair. "But we're not going out. It's our Saturday to play here. Don't you remember?"

"No, dear, I don't. And even if it is, you know I can't possibly have you all here today."

"But Laura, we can't change everything now. I do think—it's so jolly unfair—"

"Why don't you go for a nice walk instead?" suggested Laura hurriedly, trying to avert a storm. "It's such a lovely day! You can leave a note for me at Mrs. Campion's, and those books for your father at Joseph Garth Fenwick's."

"Why can't you leave your own silly notes? I don't want—"

"Oh, but you do! And you can play your game, or whatever it is, in the park afterwards. That will be ever so much nicer than being here. Hurry up with that last sum—it's two pounds, fourteen and threepence, if you want to know. I'll let you off your practicing, for once. Run along and ask Martha for some cake."

"All right." Kit shrugged her shoulders as she scribbled down the answer. Arguing with Laura was a waste of time. So were sums. And at least she had got rid of her practicing. She slammed the door as she left the dining-room—"Go back again and shut the door quietly," called Laura from her spring-cleaning—slid along the freshly polished hall

and pushed through the green baize door into the kitchen. There was nobody there. The big ginger cat was dozing in front of the fire with his paws tucked cozily in, and tiny motes of dust were dancing sleepily in the broad sunbeams which streamed through the window. The kitchen was a comfy sort of place, thought Kit, much comfier than the drawing-room. It was the only room in the house that had never been changed since her mother's death, so Martha had told her. Even Laura was not allowed to touch it. It was a large, square room, with an old-fashioned range and ample shelves and cupboards: her mother's photograph hung in the place of honor over the dresser. Kit looked at it thoughtfully for a moment, and then sat down on the edge of the spotless deal table, swinging her legs and humming a little tune to herself. Perhaps, after all, it wouldn't be a bad idea to go for a walk. Suddenly the kettle boiled over and Martha came storming in.

Martha Ridyard was a handsome woman, tall, grey-haired and keen-eyed. She had come to Thornley Mays as general servant from the Kitson household at Manningleigh, when Janey Kitson married Professor Haverard. She had always been devoted to Janey. For many years she had ruled the house, not to mention the Professor and his wife, and the three little boys, Richard, Thomas and Miles, who had followed one another in swift succession. When some years later Kit was born, and the children were left motherless, Martha had stood by them staunchly: Janey's children could have had no more faithful guardian. The Professor's niece, Laura Haverard, had come to keep house for him and bring up the family, but one way and another that seemed to make very little difference to Martha.

She entered now in a whirlwind, first to sweep the

kettle off the fire and then to seize upon Kit. "Cake? And what do you want with cake, this time of a morning?" she thundered.

"It's to take out with us. It's our Saturday to play here and Laura won't let us. Isn't she a beast, Martha?"

"Now, don't let me hear you talk like that about Miss Laura. I'll not have it, and well you know it. But it's a shame not to let you play here. You wouldn't be a bit of trouble in the garden. See here, I'll give you each a bit of my bread pudding. I only baked it yesterday."

Martha's bread pudding contained more raisins to the square inch than any of the confections which passed for cake in the dining-room. Kit brightened as she pocketed her trophies. "You're a good sort, Martha," she said. "Sorry I was cross. Hullo, there's Laura calling me. Pony and Helen must have come. Good-bye, and thanks awfully."

Pony and Helen were standing in the hall, talking "company talk." "Oh no, Miss Haverard, we don't mind a bit. It's perfectly all right."

Kit grinned at them secretly as she pulled on her blazer. "Come on, you two. Good-bye, Laura. I'll not be late for dinner."

The front door closed with a bang, and the three ran down to the gate and swung upon it in a meditative row. Pony was the eldest, tall and brown and nearing her teens; Helen the next, bespectacled and clever. Kit, a thin slip of a child, would be twelve in June.

"It's a beastly shame!" she muttered, as they swung to and fro. "But what could I do? Laura's always like that when it's spring-cleaning."

"Let's get the errands done first," suggested Helen, "and then go and play in the fields by the Hall."