

An excerpt from  
**The Lark on the Wing**  
by Elfrida Vipont

CHAPTER I

'A RIDICULOUS IDEA '

I never heard of such a ridiculous idea in my life!' exclaimed Laura Haverard impatiently. 'Who on earth put it into your head?'

Kit hesitated. Everything had seemed so simple during that last week at school. She had sung at a school concert and suddenly she had found herself. She had never imagined that there would be any further difficulty. Even her cousin Laura would surely understand. 'Nobody put it into my head,' she said at last. 'It was just there. I think it must always have been there, only I didn't know.'

'Nonsense!' rapped out Laura tartly. 'It sounds to me as if somebody has been getting at you with a lot of half-baked psychology.'

'I don't know what you're talking about,' rejoined Kit indignantly. 'You just don't understand, that's all. But I don't know why you should carry on as if I'm batty. Why shouldn't I want to sing? Mother did, didn't she?'

Laura bit her lip. One of the most annoying things about Kit was that she was utterly unlike her mother and yet, at odd moments, there would be a sudden flash of likeness, like a caricature. Laura had been fond of her Uncle Richard's young wife. That was why she had welcomed the job of bringing up the children when Janey Haverard had died at Kit's birth. The boys, who were a good deal older, had given her no trouble at all.

'I'm not aware that Aunt Janey ever dreamed of singing professionally,' she replied. 'I've no doubt she could have done so, had she wished. *She* was musical, you see.'  
Kit had a stinging retort ready on her lips. Laura did not know the first thing about music, anyhow. But if Kit told her so, there would only be a row. 'Let's talk it over with Father this evening,' she suggested.

'I hope you won't mention it to Uncle at all,' rejoined Laura. 'He hasn't been very well lately, and it would only upset him. You know how he has been looking forward to having you as his secretary. You can't let him down at the last minute, Kit. Why, everybody knows about it—even Miss Priestley.'

Miss Priestley was the Headmistress of Heryot Friends School. The thought of her nerved Kit to make another attack. 'Miss Priestley never really thought I would be Father's secretary,' declared Kit. 'She knew I wanted to sing, long before I knew myself.'

'What utter nonsense!' exclaimed Laura. 'And what does she know about singing,

anyhow? You've been getting your head turned, Kit.'

'It wasn't only Miss Priestley,' persisted Kit. 'Papa Andreas was there, and the Chauntesingers.'

'Papa Andreas? The old foggy who taught Aunt Janey? Well, really, Kit, he must be long past it by this time.'

'He isn't—you know he isn't—Simon Trent and Terry Chauntesinger and any number of singers go back to him for lessons—and he said—'

'Well? What did he say?'

'He didn't say I had a swelled head, anyhow.'

Laura shrugged her shoulders and waited for Kit to lose her temper. Kit had always been an awkward child, and now that she had left school, she would soon develop into a problem if Laura did not keep the upper hand. It was only for the child's good, of course. She was far too imaginative and fanciful, but some day she would realize that Laura's plans were best. And then there was Kit's father, dear old Professor Haverard, to consider; Kit ought to be ready to take Janey's place now. When that happened, Laura would feel that her work was done.

Contrary to Laura's expectations, Kit still did not seem to want a row. She picked up the armful of books she had been carrying and turned to leave the room.

'What are you going to do now?' asked Laura.

'Finish unpacking,' replied Kit. 'It feels a bit strange, now that I've left school.'

Somehow or other, she felt that it should have been more exciting. After all, one only left school once in a lifetime. 'I think I'll go and see Pony afterwards,' she said.

'Do, by all means!' Laura encouraged her. 'I'm sure she doesn't agree with this nonsensical idea of yours about taking up singing.'

'As a matter of fact, she does!' said Kit, pausing as she reached the door. 'So does Helen.'

'I thought they had more sense,' observed Laura. 'Don't let's talk about it any more. But remember, I won't have Uncle upset.'

'All right,' said Kit briefly as she went out. Laura looked after her with a worried expression. She sensed trouble ahead.

Pony Cray was one of Kit's oldest friends. There had always been the three of them, Pony, Helen and Kit. Pony's father was a doctor and her mother was active on

innumerable committees. Helen was odd man out in her family; she was the daughter of Professor Edgington, a nervous, fussy little man with a fashionable wife and two elder daughters who took after her. All of them were Quakers, and Pony, Helen and Kit had been to the well-known Quaker school at Heryot. They had fallen in and out with each other amicably since babyhood, and enjoyed many friendships apart, but the old bond always held. After all, they could always count upon each other.

'You may as well stay for tea,' suggested Pony, as soon as she had opened the front door. She guessed something was wrong.

'It wouldn't be fair,' said Kit. 'What about the kids?'

Pony's sister and brothers were so much younger than she was, that they were generally lumped together as 'The kids'. In the old days they had been too little even to figure as 'The crowd' in pretending-games. Now the twins, Simon and Andrew, would soon be ready for Marston, and Lois was hoping to squeeze into Heryot at the same time.

'The kids are all right,' said Pony. 'They're at the Children's Meeting Garden Party. Mother's helping with the tea. I said I'd go if I had to, but she quite understood. Let's ring Helen up and get her to come too. We may as well celebrate leaving school.'

Things were beginning to look up. By the time Helen arrived on her bicycle, tea was nearly ready.

'Oughtn't we to wait for your father?' asked Kit.

'Not a bit of use,' rejoined Pony. 'He never knows when he'll be in. We'll brew some more for him when he comes. It's a dog's life, being a doctor. Don't know why I'm taking it up.'

'What are you doing about it?' asked Kit. 'Is there still no hope of your getting into University College?'

Pony shook her head. 'Not a scrap for this year,' she said, as she put another round of bread on the toasting-fork. 'I could have gone straight ahead if only I hadn't made such a fool of myself and failed my exams. I've never really caught up since. I think they'll have me next year, though, and meanwhile I'm going to Barley's to have a shot at First M.B.'

Barley's was a Tutorial College in Chesterham where students went for cramming. It seemed strange to think of Pony at Barley's.

'Won't that be rather moldy?' asked Kit.

'Oh, I don't know about that. I shall enjoy a bit of time at home, I expect. Only it's a pity you'll both be in London.'

Helen had won a Scholarship at the London School of Economics. And everybody knew that Kit had been lucky enough to attract the attention of Papa Andreas, the famous old maestro.

'Will you be going to the College of Music or the Academy, Kit?' asked Helen. 'Or will you study privately with Papa Andreas?'

'I don't suppose I'll study anywhere at all,' said Kit dully. 'Let's talk about something else.'

'I knew something was up,' said Pony. 'Here, shove the jam over to Helen and tell us all about it.'

'There's nothing to tell,' said Kit. 'I suppose I'll be going to some sort of secretarial college. That's all.'

'Laura?' suggested Helen, as she took a mouthful of buttered toast.

'Yes, Laura!' agreed Kit.

'Why don't you stand up to her?' asked Pony.

'It wouldn't be any use,' replied Kit.

'I don't know so much about that,' said Helen. 'What about Tom? Everybody used to think he was scared stiff of her, but he stuck up for himself and went into Kitsons in spite of her. She wanted him to go on the land, didn't she?'

'That was different,' maintained Kit. 'After all, Grandfather used to be in Kitsons. She couldn't really object to that.'

'Couldn't she just?' said Pony. 'I've heard Mother say many a time that Laura Haverard can't stand the Kitsons at any price.'

'That's because she's jealous of them,' said Helen. 'Don't you remember how she detested it when you insisted on going to stay with your mother's aunts after you were ill, Kit, before you went to Heryot, when we were all at the High School?'

'That was the beginning of such a lot of things,' said Kit slowly. 'If I hadn't gone there, I'd never have stayed with the cousins at Gramercie, and I might never have met Papa Andreas and Terry Chautesinger. It wasn't until I stayed at Gramercie that I found out what music was about. Ever since then I've been making up for lost time. But that's all over now.'

'Kit, you really *are* idiotic!' protested Pony. From the days when she used to boss their pretending-games, Pony had been the leader of the three. 'You know perfectly well you

don't mean it. You're going to carry on, in spite of all the Lauras in creation.'

'She says I mustn't talk to Father about it, because she says he isn't well. And he's always counted on having me for his secretary. Apparently he's writing another book on the later Minoan period. I can't let him down.'

'You mean Laura says you mustn't let him down,' interposed Helen.

'I bet it was Laura's idea from the beginning,' declared Pony. 'Professor Haverard would never notice, even if you went into a circus and did acrobatics for a living. Why can't Laura be his secretary?'

'I suppose she has enough to do already,' said Kit, 'What with running the house and going to committees and one thing and another.'

'Well then, why can't she get on with the job and leave you alone?' asked Pony.

'She couldn't!' said Kit expressively.

'Well then, we must get rid of her somehow,' said Pony.

'Couldn't one of her committees send her away on a mission somewhere?' suggested Helen hopefully. 'I think she'd make rather a good missionary.'

'Let's send her to Madagascar,' suggested Helen.

'Or Pemba,' laughed Pony.

'Or Itarsi,' volunteered Kit.

The name of each well-known Quaker mission field evoked fresh shouts of mirth, until Pony capped them all with the suggestion: 'Why doesn't she get married?'

'Why on earth doesn't she?' said Helen. 'That would solve the whole problem.'

'She might marry a missionary,' suggested Kit hopefully.

'Then you'd better push her off to the next Springfield Summer School,' said Pony. 'There are always lots of missionaries in Middlehampton. There, Kit, your problem's solved.'

'What's all the fuss about and what problem is solved?' asked Dr. Cray. He had entered the room unnoticed, and now stood looking down at them as they sprawled on the hearth.

'Kit's problem is solved and the fuss is about Laura,' explained Pony. 'We've married her off to a missionary, and now Kit can take up singing.'

'Is it as simple as that?' asked Dr. Cray, settling down in the biggest easy-chair.

'No, Doctor, it isn't!' replied Kit. She had always liked Dr. Cray. He had been one of the few grown-ups who had bothered to explain things to her when she was small.

'What's the trouble, Kit?' asked Dr. Cray. 'Thou may as well tell me while Pony and Helen are brewing a fresh pot of tea.'

'Go ahead, Kit!' Pony encouraged her. 'Only don't forget about the missionary. That solves the whole thing.'

'It all depends upon the missionary, doesn't it?' suggested Dr. Cray, with a twinkle in his eye. 'After all, he might convert Kit.'

'Then she could sing hymns to the heathen and the problem would still be solved,' laughed Helen. 'I'll get another teacup, shall I, Pony?'

'Breakfast cup!' said Pony. 'A pudding basin would be better. He likes his tea by the bucketful. Come on!'

'So Laura doesn't want thee to take up singing?' asked Dr. Cray, as Kit hesitated to begin.

'She doesn't, Doctor. And I want to—terribly.'

'How terribly?'

'With all I've got. It's the one thing I really want to do. There has always been something I wanted, and I never knew what it was—something which made Gramercie feel like home, and which made me understand about that very old aunt of Mother's, Henrietta Kitson, who was so unhappy. She ought to have been a singer, you know, but her parents were the old kind of strict Friends and they wouldn't let her.'

'But Laura doesn't disapprove of music,' protested the Doctor.

'Of course she doesn't. She always used to be getting at me because I wasn't supposed to be musical. But I'm not her kind of musical, I'm Mother's kind of musical, and she doesn't understand. Anyhow, she's always planned for me to be Father's secretary.'

'Hast thou talked it all over with thy father?'

'No. Laura says I mustn't upset him, because he hasn't been well.'

'Hm—there's some sense in that.'

'Hasn't he been well, Doctor?'

The Doctor shook his head. 'Nothing for thee to worry about, but—I've not been too easy about his heart lately. Thou must take care of him.'

'Laura will do that,' said Kit briefly.

'It's for thee to keep thine eyes open,' said the Doctor. 'Meanwhile, hold on to thy music.'

'What's the use?' asked Kit bitterly.

'How old art thou now?' asked the Doctor. 'What? Only just seventeen? Why, thou'rt much younger than Pony here, and even she has to wait a year before she can do what she really wants to do. Didn't I tell thee once that nothing worth while ever grows in a hurry? Well, it may be the same with thy music.'

Kit nodded thoughtfully. 'I can go on working by myself,' she said at last. 'I've done that for a year already.'

'But is it wise? What about straining thy voice?'

'I don't sing out, Doctor. I sing softly to myself. Old Fish used to show me how to do it; she taught me the piano at Heryot, and she knew a lot about singing, even if she was an old frump. Sometimes I just play accompaniments and think the songs. I've gone through any amount of Mother's old music in that way. And Terry lends me things sometimes.'

'Terry?'

'Terry Chautesinger. He's a singer. I met him at Gramercie and his people live in Heryot. He's a very great friend of Miles—don't you remember, Miles brought him to Richard's wedding?'

'Tall young fellow with a red head? I remember. Tell Miles to get him to lend thee some more. And I don't know if my wife has anything suitable, but I think she has most of the oratorios. They'll keep thee busy for a time. Then there's the Music Library in town; thou can get anything thou wants there.'

Kit rose from the hearth and began to rearrange the tea table. 'Thanks, Doctor,' she said. 'I feel better about it now.'

The Doctor nodded. 'Mind, I'm not telling thee to give in!' he said.

'I understand,' said Kit.

'Only—don't kick against the pricks,' he continued.

'I think I understand that too.'

‘And remember, nothing is ever wasted unless we will it so. Who knows what may happen in the next couple of years? When thee and thy father have worked together, you may understand one another a little better. So may thee and Laura.’

‘Are you still talking about Laura?’ asked Pony cheerfully, as she came in with a laden tea-tray. ‘I thought we’d married her off.’

‘That’s as may be, my dear,’ said the Doctor, reaching for the teapot. ‘Though I think thy mother would miss her help on committees. But we’ve been talking about Kit, who is rather more important just now, and we’re not going to marry *her* off, that I know of.’

‘What is she going to do?’ asked Pony.

‘I think she’s going to stick it,’ said Helen.

The Doctor nodded. ‘I think she will hold fast to that which is good,’ he said.

Laura was surprised and puzzled when Kit withdrew her opposition to the secretarial college. She even suggested that Kit might like to take lessons in singing from her friend, Daisy Trimble. ‘Good Lord, no!’ said Kit. ‘I beg your pardon, Laura, but I mean I’d rather work by myself.’

‘Have it your own way,’ said Laura, ‘Only I thought you were keen on singing lessons.’

When Laura received a letter of remonstrance from Miss Priestley, she was hurt and indignant. She even had to waylay one addressed to the Professor. She often opened the Professor’s letters for him, but she felt rather guilty about suppressing this one; Miss Priestley had been her Headmistress at Heryot, and she was still a little scared of her. Tom and Miles wrote to Kit, telling her to keep her pecker up. The eldest brother, Richard, who was a lecturer at Oxford, was in full agreement with Laura; he did not care for music himself, and thought secretarial work a much safer profession for his young sister. His musical little wife, Sylvia, added a postscript to his letter: ‘Don’t worry, chicken! It will all come right in the end. Tons of love, Flip.’ (‘You spoil that child,’ said Richard, when he had read it. ‘Of course I do!’ laughed Sylvia. ‘It’s what she needs.’)

Terry Chautesinger’s letter of protest took up several pages. It was all Kit could do to hide it from Laura, so that she could read it when she was by herself. Terry was furiously angry. Little by little, Kit began to be angry too. What business was it of Terry’s, anyway? She began to write a furious letter back, but then tore it up. After all, Terry knew what he was talking about. He had acted against his father’s wishes when he had forsaken architecture for singing. But that was long ago, thought Kit. Terry was a well-known singer now and perhaps that gave him the right to lay down the law to her.

In the end, she wrote a very short letter. Terry had to go through it two or three times before he could read between the lines. ‘Dear Terry, I’m sorry. But you needn’t bother. It’s



going to be all right in the end. Will you please go on lending me songs? Don't, if you'd rather not. Please give my love to your father and mother, and Cathy and Rose, and Heryot Cathedral. Kit.'

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