

Published by Blushing Books  
An Imprint of  
ABCD Graphics and Design, Inc.  
A Virginia Corporation  
977 Seminole Trail #233  
Charlottesville, VA 22901

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Annabelle Marin  
Letters to Holly

eBook ISBN: 978-1-63954-322-9  
Print ISBN: 978-1-63954-323-6

Cover Art by ABCD Graphics & Design

This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only. Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's advocating any non-consensual sexual activity.

# Letters to Holly

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Annabelle Marin



*The Grove Hills Chronicles*

*Issue:89 January 1880*

*Ask Posy*

Dear Posy,

My sweetheart has recently proposed. I, however, do not have money for a gown for me to wed. My poor papa has hardly made a penny from last year's harvest. It would be selfish to ask for more. I have some pin money, but not enough for the type of extravagant wedding gown I want. I don't want to look like I'm wearing a sack of potatoes, either. What should I do?

-Worried Bride

Dear Worried Bride,

You do not need large amounts of money to look beautiful for your wedding day. First, go purchase fabric if you cannot afford a modiste. From experience, telling the store owner of your situation with a few tears here and there will often guarantee a modest discount of your goods. Make sure the color you pick complements your features. When in doubt, choose pink. Next, copy a design from a dress you like from Godey's Lady's Book. If you follow my most trustworthy advice, your groom will be a very lucky gentleman indeed.

-Posy

The background of the page is a light, monochromatic floral pattern. It features large, detailed flowers, possibly peonies or similar multi-petaled blooms, scattered across the page. The flowers are rendered in a soft, almost ethereal style, with delicate lines and subtle shading, creating a gentle and elegant atmosphere. The overall tone is light and airy, with the floral elements serving as a decorative backdrop for the text.

## Chapter One

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HOLLY GILBERT SMILED as she looked at the latest issue of *The Grove Hills Chronicles* which featured, as always, the bi-monthly advice column she wrote for her small town of Grove Hills, Texas.

She took a sip of the bitter tea she enjoyed drinking alone in the mornings, especially on lovely May mornings such as this. A year ago, the owner of the newspaper, Mr. Thornton, had approached the bubbly Holly after church services and asked her if she wanted to write an anonymous advice column for their small-town newspaper. He told her it was all the rage back east and he wanted to try it in their small, Texas town.

Holly had immediately agreed, especially when Mr. Thornton had offered her a generous sum she could use for pin money, in addition to the tidy sum her parents had left to her before they died. Keeping the secret that she was "Posy" was hard for the talkative Holly, and once or twice, she'd almost spilled the beans to her best friend since childhood, Emily Griffin.

Twenty-one-year-old Holly, who had never been the

type of person to commit to something for very long, was surprised she still enjoyed writing the *Ask Posy* column after a year.

Her green eyes flickered as she looked at the worn-out clock in the tiny kitchen which had belonged to her grandmother who had passed away three years ago. She made a silent vow to get rid of the clock the first chance she got, once she'd earned enough money to purchase a prettier, modern one.

After her parents had died from a nasty bout of influenza which had nearly killed nine-year-old Holly as well, she had been raised by her dour and unfriendly maternal grandmother. When her grandmother had died three months after her eighteenth birthday, she had hardly shed a tear, but she did remember breathing a sigh of relief.

Now Holly was truly free, living independently in a small house just a few short feet away from the hustle and bustle of Grove Hills. Close enough in case of an emergency, but far away enough to have some privacy. She knew some of the elderly matrons grumbled about how a young woman of twenty-one was living alone with no chaperone, but Holly didn't care. After living under her grandmother's thumb, she relished her freedom.

For the past three years, Holly had been saving her meager earnings from working odd jobs to start planning the remodeling of her house. The list was extensive, a new roof, fresh paint on the inside and outside, and she had always wanted one of those fancy canopy beds.

Holly recognized the sound of horse's hooves as she quickly placed her blonde hair in its usual messy bun at the nape of her neck. It was Damon Montgomery, right on cue.

Damon Montgomery was thirty, handsome, and the owner of a small but successful cattle ranch ten miles east

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from Holly's home. He was also an orphan, having lost his widowed father when he was eighteen and knowing Holly since she was nine. Since his father had passed away, he had taken over the ranch his father had left behind as well as keeping an eye on the free-spirited Holly.

In all honesty, Holly felt as if Damon had grown even more protective since her grandmother died, and even though he was busy, he would still check on her every morning like clockwork by bringing her fresh milk from one of his dairy cows.

She opened the door and saw him get off the horse carrying a milk bottle. He threw her a crooked smile as he walked towards her. Holly gave him a small wave, once again wondering why a man as handsome as Damon was not married at thirty.

He had the dark, wavy hair women swooned over, the blue eyes that mirrored an ocean, and the large disposition that favored a caveman over a rancher.

"Morning, Holly." He gave her the milk bottle. It was still cold, and he had mentioned once he let it sit in the ice box for an hour or two before he brought it when she'd told him she hated warm milk. "You are all bright-eyed and bushy-tailed this morning."

She gave him a small eye roll. "I'm an early riser, you know that. Thank you for the milk. So, Damon, have you thought more about what I said yesterday?"

"The one who should be thinking about marriage is you, little lady." He quipped a dark eyebrow at her. "How old are you, twenty-one? You should be married with children at your skirts, not worrying about me."

Holly ignored his statement. She had honestly heard it before, but unlike most women her age, she couldn't care less about marriage, though every once in a while she had to

admit she longed for an adoring husband and a baby. Not that she would ever tell Damon that.

She fancied herself a bit of a matchmaker and had even had success once or twice setting up acquaintances from town. Lately, her best friend Emily had been groaning that no one would court her, and Holly immediately had thought of Damon.

Unfortunately for her, Damon was even more dead set against marriage than she was. "What's wrong with Emily? Why won't you court her?"

"Emily is a nice girl, but I am not interested in courting her right now." Damon placed his hands on his hips as he looked at the house. "Have you thought about what color you will paint the house? Green would suit it."

Holly continued to press on the matter at hand. "You haven't even given her a decent chance. Let me have you over for tea and you can—"

"Holly," Damon warned, his voice suddenly serious, "don't poke your nose where it doesn't belong. If I find out you're getting Emily's hopes up about me, I will tan your hide with my belt. Is that understood?"

Holly rolled her eyes at his empty threat. She knew Damon's feelings toward her. He cared for her like a friend, yes, but he also thought she was spoiled, unruly and, according to him, too big for her britches. Every once in a while, she would push too far, and he would threaten to spank her, but he never did. He was too much of a gentleman.

Her grandmother had also commented on more than one occasion that Holly needed a "good caning" to see sense, but thankfully Holly had never been spanked a day in her life. Damon Montgomery certainly wouldn't be the first man to spank her.

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"Fine, I'm just worried. You're thirty, Damon. Forgive me if I want to see you happily married before you become old and bitter."

"I wouldn't worry about me; worry about yourself," he teased her. "Unless you want to end up an old maid."

She gave an unladylike snort. "You sound like an old woman. You know I don't want to get married." She squealed when he playfully pinched her cheek. She placed a hand to her face. "Fine, I won't mention it anymore. You are wasting an amazing opportunity. Emily is a great girl."

"I'm sure she is. So, Hol, I'll see you Sunday?" He tipped his hat at her.

"After Sunday church, like always."

Ever since Holly's grandmother had died, she had been inviting Damon to dinner on Sunday. Mainly, because she hated cooking just for herself, but also because she knew Damon spent most of his days eating canned food and sandwiches. She thought the man needed at least one home cooked meal a week.

At first, the gossipy residents of Grove Hills had been suspicious, but when Holly would still declare she had no interest in marrying, and when Damon still called her a little pest like he would an adored sibling, they soon lost interest.

After Damon had left, she placed the bottle of milk inside the ice box and planned to drink it for dinner. A cup of milk always made her have a good night's rest. After getting ready for the day, she made sure everything was tidy and headed into town.

She had almost reached the café when she heard someone call out to her. Her best friend, Emily, was waving and nearly running toward her.

"Let me walk with you," Emily said in greeting as she



pressed her hand against her brown hair, trying to smooth down the braid which had started to become undone. "Did you have a chance to talk to Damon this morning? What did he say?"

Holly hesitated as she looked up at Emily's hopeful face. "I'm sorry, Em. I talked to him, I told him all your good qualities and that he was approaching old age, but he wasn't interested in courting anyone."

"Oh." Emily's shoulders slumped. "I guess it's for the best. He has always been in love with you after all."

Holly scoffed. "Damon Montgomery is not in love with me."

"You two have dinner every Sunday night and he brings you fresh milk every morning," Emily pointed out.

"He's just being neighborly." Holly waved her reasons away. "We've been keeping each other company ever since both of our relatives passed away, nothing more. Give me a few more days to convince him, Em. I promise you by this time next year, you will be carrying a little baby Montgomery."

"From your lips to God's ears." She lopped her arm over Holly's as they started crossing the street together. "And how about you? Are you interested in courting anyone? We could be mothers together next year if both of us plan correctly."

Holly shook her head. "You know as well as I do that I am not interested in marrying anyone. I am perfectly content living on my own. The only thing I am interested in is earning enough money to restore my house and truly make it my own. I wish women had more access to higher paying jobs."

"Perhaps I can ask my father if he needs an extra hand." Emily's father was a tailor.

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She grimaced. "Thanks, Emily, but you know I hate sewing." They stopped in front of the mercantile. "This is me. I'll see you later, Em."

The rest of the week passed by rather quickly and before Holly knew it, Sunday church services were over, and she was setting the table for Sunday dinner. She had briefly thought about asking Emily to dinner, but she was sure Damon would kill her if she did.

There was a knock on the door and Holly screamed at Damon to come in as she placed the hot chicken in the middle of the nicely decorated table.

Damon was holding a bouquet of violets like he always did every Sunday. "You don't have to yell; the door is six feet away."

"I like yelling," she replied sweetly as she took the flowers. "Wash up, dinner is ready."

Damon was a big eater and Holly always cooked large amounts of food, but it never seemed to be enough, the way Damon was stuffing himself like there was no tomorrow. Holly took a sip of her tea as she looked at him gobbling up the last biscuit. "I think you're right, and I will paint the house green. I'm going to get the paint this week. I just wish it wasn't so pricey."

Damon finally looked up from his meal. "I can help you paint next Sunday. I'll come by a little earlier."

"Don't be silly. I can manage."

His jaw clenched. "You are not painting the house by yourself. You're too small for the ladder. You could fall and break your foolish neck. Don't test me on this, Holly Gilbert. I'd better not see you on any ladder. Understood?"

Holly wanted to argue, but he looked quite serious. "Fine, I'll wait for you if you're so insistent, but I have painted before."

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"Never a house as tall as this one. The last thing you need is to break that beautiful, hard head." Damon looked obviously pleased he had won the argument, which annoyed Holly for some reason. Perhaps she liked having the upper hand.

"Are you ready for dessert? It's peach pie."

Damon whistled. "Oh, Holly darlin', I love your peach pie."

"I wish you loved the idea of courting even more." Holly started clearing the plates.

Damon grinned at her. "Tell you what, I'll get married when you finally do."

*The Grove Hills Chronicles*

*Issue: 90 January 1880*

*Ask Posy*

Dear Posy,

I've been married for three years. Since my wedding, my mother-in-law has shown her dislike of me. She is constantly criticizing everything I do, and I can never make her happy. My husband worships the ground she walks on, and I do not wish to cause distress with either party, but I am unsure of what to do.

-Unhappy Daughter-in-Law

Dear Unhappy Daughter-in-Law,

As you well know by now, when you marry the husband, you marry the family. A foul mother-in-law can be an awful beast to slay but, in your case, quite necessary. My

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advice is an old one: be kind. Especially in front of your husband. Shower her with compliments and show your gratitude for her advice in a most grotesque fashion. Not only will this confuse your dear mother-in-law, but it should allow your husband to take your side should it come to blows. If that doesn't work, then there is always moving. Whether it is you and your husband or your mother-in-law, the choice is up to you.

-Posy