



A Little of What You Fancy

H.E. Bates

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'Teetotal!' Ma said. 'It's a libel. He'll never live it down. He'll never be able to hold his head up again. Whatever will people think? What's he going to say when anybody asks him to have one?' 'No,' 'said Dr Conner. 'You'll have to strap him down,' Ma said. 'You'll have to put the handcuffs on.' And so after a mild heart-attack - caused by rather too much of what you fancy - Pop Larkin finds himself off the booze, off the good food and off the good life generally, much to his own and everyone's else's horror and upset. And while Ma tries to find ways around 'doctor's orders', young Primrose is finding her own way round a rather flustered - not to say flushed - Mr Candy...

This is the fifth of the five immensely popular comic novels consisting of 'The Darling Buds of May' (1958), 'A Breath of French Air' (1959), 'When the Green Woods Laugh' (1960), 'Oh! To Be in England' (1963), and 'A Little of What You Fancy' (1970). Bates, speaking of how he was inspired to create the Larkin family, recalled the real junkyard that he often passed near his home in Kent; and he remembered seeing a family -- a father, mother and many children, sucking at ice-creams and eating crisps in a "ramshackle lorry that had been recently painted a violent electric blue". He tried writing a brief tale based on the family, but soon decided that he couldn't waste such a rich gallery of characters to a short story." Pop is a wonderful character who hates pomp, pretension and humbug; loves his family, but doesn't hesitate to break a few rules... and his and the Larkins' secret is "that they live as many of us would like to live if only we had the guts and nerve to flout the conventions."

A Little of What You Fancy Details

Date : Published 1970 by Joseph

ISBN : 9780718107642

Author : H.E. Bates

Format : Paperback 216 pages

Genre : Fiction, Humor, Comedy, Novels, Literature, Classics

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Tracy says

Yet down

What can I say after reading these books one after the other with great joy I was shocked at how let down I felt by this last book . Not one word rang true to people in the book . I felt the people had change in this book from the others as well as the time (years had no idea what year it was meant to be)

Camilla Tilly says

This is the final novel of the Pop Larkin series and to me this book was a great disappointment. I realise that Herbert E Bates was almost 70 years old when he wrote this book. He had seen two World Wars and had fought in the second one of the two. He had seen an old England disappear where the privileged classes had to leave their country homes and sell them to nouveau rich from London. The upper classes walking around in rags and not being able to make ends meet. He had seen old traditions fly out the window, the countryside that he so much loved, change in more ways than one. It is an old man that writes this book. My first thought was a dirty old man with sexual fantasies beyond what most people "dream of". With his last book I am sure he wanted to show what excessive eating and drinking will lead to. And he also wanted to point out the liberal sexual views that was by then flourishing. But, does this make good, nice, cozy reading?

When I read the first book I was shocked at the eccentric ways of the Larkin family. But it was something one could laugh at and say was in a way funny. This final book is not funny. It is not cozy. It is not a book I would let my children pick up to read when teenagers and it is definitely not a book for a person with Victorian values or a prude.

The book starts out with Ma and Pop Larkin having sex twice drinking champagne mixed with brandy in between, one early morning in July. The couple now being in their 40s, one wonders at Pop's stamina and not even being on Viagra. A 70-year-old author's dream perhaps? When they are ready to go for it a third time, Pop gets a heart attack. And for the better part of the book we get to read the depressing thoughts of his as he recovers slowly in his bedroom at home. He is put on a diet and can not touch alcohol and to his great sorrow he can not even get "aroused" by all his beautiful female visitors and his nurse that is a beauty beyond words. When we are not reading about him we read about Primrose, his now about 20-year-old daughter, trying to seduce the vicar and finally succeeding. And intermixed with all this is the talk and discussion about the Pill. The book is a very sad finale to the series. Pop survives and without a doubt will go back to his drinking, excessive eating and his very active sex life with his wife and various other female creatures that find him irresistible. But when I turn the last page that declares that Primrose is pregnant out of wedlock with the vicar that is anti-Pill, then I say good riddence. Thank heavens there is no sequel. The book is nothing but soft porn and I would not have touched it, had I not felt the need for conclusion.

adllto says

The 5th part of HE Bates' stories of Pop Larking and his family. It retains all the charms of the earlier stories though the sub plot with Mr Candy was a little risque. Somehow along the road I realized I haven't read the fourth story/book Oh! To be in England.

Emma Dargue says

This is a little different to the other Larkin Novels as for the most part its not as jovial as the previous four books in the series. However if it is oldy worldy England you are looking for then this is your book.

Peter Thornton says

5th volume of Larkin chronicles and much more racy and explicit than earlier volumes. The book ends in a wonderfully intoxicating sexy bucolic romp that the man from the ministry simply doesn't get. Why would anyone want to save a junk yard?

Sarah Tummey says

Written 7 years after the previous book, it looks like the author had a bit of memory loss, because Ma and Pop's grandson doesn't get a mention. I liked the main story - Pop's heart attack, and their solution for getting him back to himself. With all that's going on with Brexit at the moment, it was funny reading this.

Overall, I didn't like it as much as the other books in the series. Didn't seem to have as much of a story, and as for Primrose and Mr Candy, I much preferred the TV version where his sister sent her packing!

Bettie? says

Bettie's Books

Alan says

my rating would be just over 3 stars i think - definitely not as good as the previous ones in the series but this final novel in the pop larkin series of stories is still a nice easy read is all of HE Bates novels.

however unlike the others where the stories revolve around a lead character (and family) who is full of the joys of living, this time around a heart attack has grounded pop larkin and he is generally depressed if not melancholic in mood for most of the story.

the ending which suddenly introduced the threat of new roads being built to link to the proposed channel tunnel and the subsequent destruction to the area of the larkin's farm and local village had the potential to be a novel in its own right - and considering that the novels are not very long anyway should have been - but it dealt with this new threat in a couple of chapters only.

so perhaps the author had grown tired of these characters or thought that the publisher and reading public had out grown the larkins and their circle of friends.

after all the actions and attitudes of the family which were shocking in the 1950's and early 1960's (although

being prescient in many ways of how the British family would change and evolve in the future) were quite ho-hum after the cultural/sexual revolutions of the late 1960's.

so by 1970 their casual (or earthy as described in the novels) attitudes to sex and relationships had moved from 'shocking' to simply 'shockingly familiar to readers of some Sunday papers'.

and whereas the possible pregnancy of Mariette in the first book was something accidental/normal and the family would deal with it, in this novel the pursuit of Rev Candy by Primrose and the resulting announcement of pregnancy despite the ready availability of 'the pill' does read as something slightly 'icky' (for want of a better term).

overall the novel and author seem to be saying that the life style enjoyed by the Larkins in the 1950's was acceptable and a good way to live but continuing unchecked with no changes by the 1970's had simply become a life of excesses which caused problems all around.

this novel does feel like a sad end to the series and although not a fan of series continued after the death of their creator, I do think it is a pity that there wasn't/isn't a final story showing Pop Larkin back on his feet and back to his normal cheerful self and also showing proper resolutions to the roads/tunnel and Primrose/Rev Candy story lines.

[edit] chatting about this with a friend I was reminded of the changes to a series of British films which ran from the late 1950's into the 1970's - the Carry On films. As with the Pop Larkin novels the early films were funny and had few innuendos in them and reflected society as it was. As the sixties progressed society changed and the humour in the films became less seaside postcard innuendo and more direct bawdy material and I think that the same effects are seen in the Larkin novels. Rather than write what could be seen as perhaps old fashioned and a bit stuffy novels HEBates tried to update his style in line with the newish trends. And like the carry on films does not really succeed so that despite still enjoying later works they feel a bit like someone trying too hard to fit in.

Hayley says

I love the Larkin series generally but was a little underwhelmed by this one. I first thought that I must have missed this one when I first read the series about 15 years ago as I had absolutely no recollection of it. However, as I got further into the book I did start to recall reading it before and I now think that it just didn't stay with me as I just didn't enjoy it as much as the others. In some ways it feels different in tone to the other books, with Pop's illness and maybe that is why it didn't appeal to me as much. The rest of the books are very much characterised by a very humorous, anything goes kind of attitude and Pop's illness and inability to indulge in his favourite pleasures just made him a very different character as to how he appears in the others. Overall I love this series but am not sure that I would bother reading this one again.

Mark says

Another good read (and the final one) in the Larkin chronicles.

This one feels less joyful than the previous ones though - mainly because this starts out with Pop suffering a heart attack (probably brought on by years of excessive food and drink consumption - you can tell these books weren't written in today's "health and safety" conscious days!) and then confined to bed whilst he recovers.

As the previous books have been full of Pop's lust for life, the contrast in this one where he feels despondent

and down, is quite marked and that atmosphere pervades throughout most of the book.

The story (and Pop) takes a turn for the better when he hears about a dastardly Government plan to build a road to the new Channel Tunnel which threatens to pass right through his land. This gives him something to rage against, and in plotting at how to overcome this he is joined by the usual cast of characters from the village. Needless to say, it all turns out good in the end.

Although this was the last book in the series of 5, it didn't feel like it was the end - although Pop was feeling down for most of it, you get the feeling there were more stories that could have been told with these characters.... or maybe the author felt there was little more to eke out of their lives?

These books had been written over a decade (first one in late 1950s, last one in 1970) and maybe the permissiveness of the 1960s (which is mentioned in some parts of the book) meant that the author felt less inclined to write about these characters as the world was moving on without them? Perhaps he felt that the public of the day were now less inclined to read about this family and the idyllic life in the 1950s - which is a shame. There's clearly a revived interest in nostalgic stories like this now, so perhaps they would do well nowadays.

Deb says

I actually read this series many years ago, after the TV adaptation was shown in the US. Worth reading just for the descriptions of the food, drink and flowers!

Arnab Chaudhuri says

Pop Larkins is back ... but not quite as one may have expected. It is not the usual Pop Larking that can be seen in the Pop Larkins series. The Pop Larkins chronicles has been always been about the rollicking country life. The rural setting and its casual lifestyle had always captivated me.

The Chronicle was very much characterized by a very humorous and with a carefree kind of attitude but in this last part Pop's illness and inability to indulge in his favorite pleasures have obviously dampen that attitude but one can always say that on the other hand the book showcased quite a different characteristics of Pop. One can see a great contrast between the rest of the books and this one. Somehow I think this one just lost the charms that the earlier Pop Larkins books had.

Mark Farley says

In the final and longest of the Darling Buds of May, Pop takes a turn for the worst and uncharacteristically spends most of this time laid up in bed with some sort of heart problem, whilst the rest of the cast take centre stage. Pop soon rouses though when the future of the modern world attempts to uproot the Larkins forever.

The Pop Larkin Chronicles are the quintessential feel good, detached country-bound romp. Well known by the popular tv series starring David Jason and introducing a young Catherine Zeta Jones to the world, this

series of novellas set in rural Kent depict a time of post-war relief and joy and with the Larkin family, a sense of openness, *laissez faire* and an eagerness to get on with life, enjoy nature and all it brings, not to mention the ability to eat, drink and be merry. As a whole, the series delights but can be rather disjointed and sporadic between volumes. They are a joy though and make you have a yearning for a spot at their table being force fed and watered.

Katie says

I've read the earlier books in the Pop Larkin series and went on a hunt for this one (found it in the lovely ramshackle secondhand bookshop, Badger Books in Worthing) for purely escapist reasons. It delivered in bucketloads - bucketloads of champagne, brandy, roast chicken, rare beef, and jellies as wobbly as Ma Larkin. Not a lot happens but what do you want to happen when you can bask in the Kent sunshine in the glorious tumble of the Larkins' immodestly blooming garden. Perfick.
