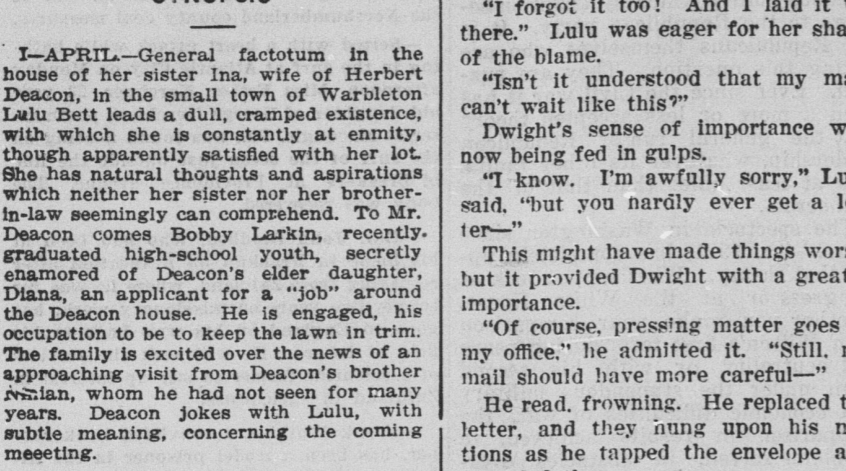


MISS LULU BETT

by
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(Continued from last week.)

SYNOPSIS

I—APRIL—General factotum in the house of her sister Ina, wife of Herbert Deacon, in the small town of Warbleton Lulu Bett leads a dull, cramped existence, with which she is constantly at enmity, though apparently satisfied with her lot. She has natural thoughts and aspirations which neither her sister nor her brother-in-law seem to comprehend. To Mr. Deacon comes Bobby Larkin, recently graduated high-school youth, secretly enamored of Deacon's elder daughter, Dian, an applicant for a "job" around the Deacon house. He is engaged, his occupation to be to keep the lawn in trim. The family is excited over the news of an approaching visit from Deacon's brother Ninian, whom he had not seen for many years. Deacon jokes with Lulu, with subtle meaning, concerning the coming meeting.

But one would say that nothing but the truth dwelt in Bobby.

"Oh, hullo," said he. "No. I came to see your father."

He marched by her. His hair stuck up at the back. His coat was hunched about his shoulders. His insufficient nose, abundant, loose-lipped mouth and brown eyes were completely expressionless. He marched by her without a glance.

She flushed with vexation. Mr. Deacon, as one would expect, laughed loudly, took the situation in his elephantine grasp and pawed at it.

"Mamma! Mamma! What do you suppose? Did thought she had a beau—"

"Oh, papa!" said Di. "Why, I just hate Bobby Larkin and the whole school knows it."

Mr. Deacon returned to the dining room, humming in his throat. He entered upon a pretty scene.

His Ina was darning. Four minutes of grace remaining to the child Monona, she was spinning on one toe with some Bacchanalian idea of making the most of the present. Di dominated, her ruffles, her blue hose, her bracelet, her ring.

"Oh, and mamma," she said, "the sweetest party and the dearest supper and the darlingest decorations and the gorgeousest—"

"Grammar, grammar," spoke Dwight Herbert Deacon. He was not sure what he meant, but the good fellow felt some violence done somewhere or other.

"Well," said Di positively, "they were. Papa, see my favor."

She showed him a sugar dove, and he clucked at it.

Ina glanced at them fondly, her face assuming its loveliest light. She was often ridiculous, but always she was the happy wife and mother, and her role reduced her individual absurdities at least to its own.

The door to the bedroom now opened and Mrs. Bett appeared.

"Well, mother!" cried Herbert, the "well" curving like an arm, the "mother" descending like a brisk slap. "Hungry now?"

Mrs. Bett was hungry now. She had emerged intending to pass through the room without speaking and find food in the pantry. By obscure processes her son-in-law's tone inhibited all this.

"No," she said. "I'm not hungry."

Now that she was there, she seemed uncertain what to do. She looked from one to another a bit hopelessly, somehow foiled in her dignity. She brushed at her skirt, the veins of her long, wrinkled hands catching an intense blue from the dark cloth. She put her hair behind her ears.

"We put a potato in the oven for you," said Ina. She had never learned quite how to treat these periodic refusals of her mother to eat, but she never had ceased to resent them.

"No, thank you," said Mrs. Bett. Evidently she rather enjoyed the situation, creating for herself a spotlight much in the manner of Monona.

"Mother," said Lulu, "let me make you some toast and tea."

Mrs. Bett turned her gentle, bloodless face toward her daughter, and her eyes warmed.

"After a little, maybe," she said. "I think I'll run over to see Grandma Gates now," she added, and went toward the door.

"Tell her," cried Dwight, "tell her she's my best girl."

Grandma Gates was a rheumatic cripple who lived next door, and whenever the Deacons or Mrs. Betts were angry or hurt or wished to escape the house for some reason, they stalked over to Grandma Gates—in lieu of, say, slamming a door. These visits radiated an almost daily friendliness which lifted and tempered the old invalid's lot and life.

Di flashed out at the door again, on some trivial permission.

"A good many of mamma's stitches in that dress to keep clean," Ina called after.

"Early, darling, early!" her father reminded her. A faint regurgitation of his was somehow invested with the paternal.

"What's this?" cried Dwight Herbert Deacon abruptly.

On the clock shelf lay a letter.

"Oh, Dwight!" Ina was all compunc-

ed, dusted, set it back, less as a process than as an experience. As she dusted the mirror and saw his trim semblance over against her own bodiless reflection, she hurried away. But the eyes of the picture followed her, and she liked it.

She dusted the south window sill and saw Bobby Larkin come round the house and go to the woodshed for the lawn mower. She heard the smooth blur of the cutter. Not six times had Bobby traversed the lawn when Lulu saw Di emerge from the house. Di had been caring for her canary and she carried her bird bath and went to the well, and Lulu divined that Di had deliberately disregarded the handy kitchen taps. Lulu dusted the south window and watched, and in her watching was no quality of spying or of criticism. Rather, she looked out on something in which she had never shared, could not by any chance imagine herself sharing.

The south windows were open. Alms of May bore the soft talking.

"Oh, Bobby, will you pump while I hold this?" And again: "Now wait till I rinse." And again: "You needn't be so glum—the village salutation signifying kindly attention.

Bobby now first spoke: "Who's glum?" he countered, gloomily.

The iron of those days when she had laughed at him was deep within him, and this she now divined, and said absently:

"I used to think you were pretty nice. But I don't like you any more."

"Yes, you used to!" Bobby repeated derisively. "Is that why you made foot of me all the time?"

At this Di colored and tapped her foot on the well-curb. He seemed to have her now, and enjoyed his triumph. But Di looked up at him shyly and looked down. "I had to," she admitted. "They were all teasing me about you."

"They were?" This was a new thought to him. Teasing her about him, were they? He straightened. "Huh!" he said, in magnificent evasion.

"I had to make them stop, so I teased you. I—I never wanted to." Again the upward look.

"Well!" Bobby stared at her. "I never thought it was anything like that."

"Of course you didn't." She tossed back her bright hair, met his eyes full. "And you never came where I could tell you. I wanted to tell you."

She ran into the house.

Lulu lowered her eyes. It was as if she had witnessed the exercise of some secret gift, had seen a cocoon open or an egg hatch. She was thinking:

"How easy she done it. Got him right over. But how did she do that?"

Dusting the Dwight-like piano, Lulu looked over-shoulder, with a manner of speculation, at the photograph of Ninian.

Bobby mowed and pondered. The magnificent conceit of the male in his understanding of the female character was sufficiently developed to cause him to welcome the improvisation which he had just heard. Perhaps that was the way it had been. Of course that was the way it had been. What a fool he had been not to understand. He cast his eyes repeatedly



He Straightened. "Huh!" He Said, in Magnificent Evasion.

toward the house. He managed to make the job last over so that he could return in the afternoon. He was not conscious of planning this, but it was in some manner contrived for him by forces of his own with which he seemed to be co-operating without his conscious will. Continually he glanced toward the house.

These glances Lulu saw. She was a woman of thirty-four and Di and Bobby were eighteen, but Lulu felt for them no adult indulgence. She felt that sweetness of attention which we bestow upon May robins. She felt more.

She cut a fresh cake, filled a plate, called to Di, saying: "Take some out to that Bobby Larkin, why don't you?"

It was Lulu's way of participating. It was her vicarious thrill.

After supper Dwight and Ina took their books and departed to the Chautauqua circle. To these meetings Lulu never went. The reason seemed to be that she never went anywhere.

When they were gone Lulu felt an instant liberation. She turned aimlessly to the garden and dug round things with her finger. And she

thought about the brightness of that Chautauqua scene to which Ina and Dwight had gone. Lulu thought about such gatherings in somewhat the way that a futurist receives the subjects of his art—form not vague, but heightened to intolerable definiteness, acute color, and always motion—motion as an integral part of the desirable. But a factor of all was that Lulu herself was the participant, not the onlooker. The perfection of her dream was not impaired by any longing. She had her dream as a saint her sense of heaven.

"Lulle!" her mother called. "You come out of that damp."

She obeyed, as she had obeyed that voice all her life. But she took one last look down the dim street. She had not known it, but superimposed on her Chautauqua thoughts had been her faint hope that it would be tonight, while she was in the garden alone, that Ninian Deacon would arrive. And she had on her wool chally, her coral beads, her cameo pin. . . .

She went into the lighted dining room. Monona was in bed. Di was not there. Mrs. Bett was in Dwight Herbert's leather chair and she lolled at her ease. It was strange to see this woman, usually so erect and tense, now actually loling, as if loling were the positive, the vital, and her ordinary rigidity a negation of her. In some corresponding orgy of leisure and liberation, Lulu sat down with no need.

"Inle ought to make over her delaine," Mrs. Bett comfortably began. They talked of this, devised a mode, recalled other delaines. "Dear, dear," said Mrs. Bett. "I had on a delaine when I met your father." She described it. Both women talked freely, with animation. They were individuals and alive. To the two pallid beings accessory to the Deacons' presence, Mrs. Bett and her daughter Lulu now bore no relationship. They emerged, had opinions, contradicted, their eyes were bright.

Toward nine o'clock Mrs. Bett announced that she thought she should have a lunch. This was debauchery. She brought in bread and butter, and a dish of cold canned peas. She was committing all the excesses that she knew—offering opinions, laughing, eating. It was to be seen that this woman had an immense store of vitality, perpetually submerged.

When she had eaten she grew sleepy—rather cross at the last and inclined to hold up her sister's excellencies to Lulu; and, at Lulu's defense lifted an ancient weapon.

"What's the use of finding fault with Inle? Where'd you been if she hadn't married?"

Lulu said nothing.

"What say?" Mrs. Bett demanded shrilly. She was enjoying it.

Lulu said no more. After a long time:

"You always was jealous of Inle," said Mrs. Bett, and went to her bed.

As soon as her mother's door had closed, Lulu took the lamp from its bracket, stretching up her long body and her long arms until her skirt lifted to show her really slim and pretty feet. Lulu's feet gave news of some other Lulu, but slightly incarnate. Perhaps, so far, incarnate only in her feet and her long hair.

She took the lamp to the parlor and stood before the photograph of Ninian Deacon, and looked her fill. She did not admire the photograph, but she wanted to look at it. The house was still, there was no possibility of interruption. The occasion became sensation, which she made no effort to quench. She held a rendezvous with she knew not what.

In the early hours of the next afternoon with the sun shining across the threshold, Lulu was paring something at the kitchen table. Mrs. Bett was asleep. ("I don't blame you a bit, mother," Lulu had said, as her mother named the intention.) Ina was asleep. (But Ina always took off the curse by calling it her "siesta," long I.) Monona was playing with a neighbor's child—she heard their shrill yet lovely laughter as they obeyed the adult law that motion is pleasure. Di was not there.

A man came round the house and stood tying a puppy to the porch post. A long shadow fell through the west doorway, the puppy whined.

"Oh," said this man. "I didn't mean to arrive at the back door, but since I'm here—"

He lifted a suitcase to the porch, entered and filled the kitchen.

"It's Ina, isn't it?" he said.

"I'm her sister," said Lulu, and understood that he was here at last.

"Well, I'm Bert's brother," said Ninian. "So I can come in, can't I?"

He did so, turned round like a dog before his chair and sat down heavily, forcing his fingers through heavy, upspringing brown hair.

"Oh, yes," said Lulu. "I'll call Ina. She's asleep."

"Don't call her, then," said Ninian. "Let's you and I get acquainted."

He said it absently, hardly looking at her.

"I'll get the pup a drink if you care spare me a basin," he added.

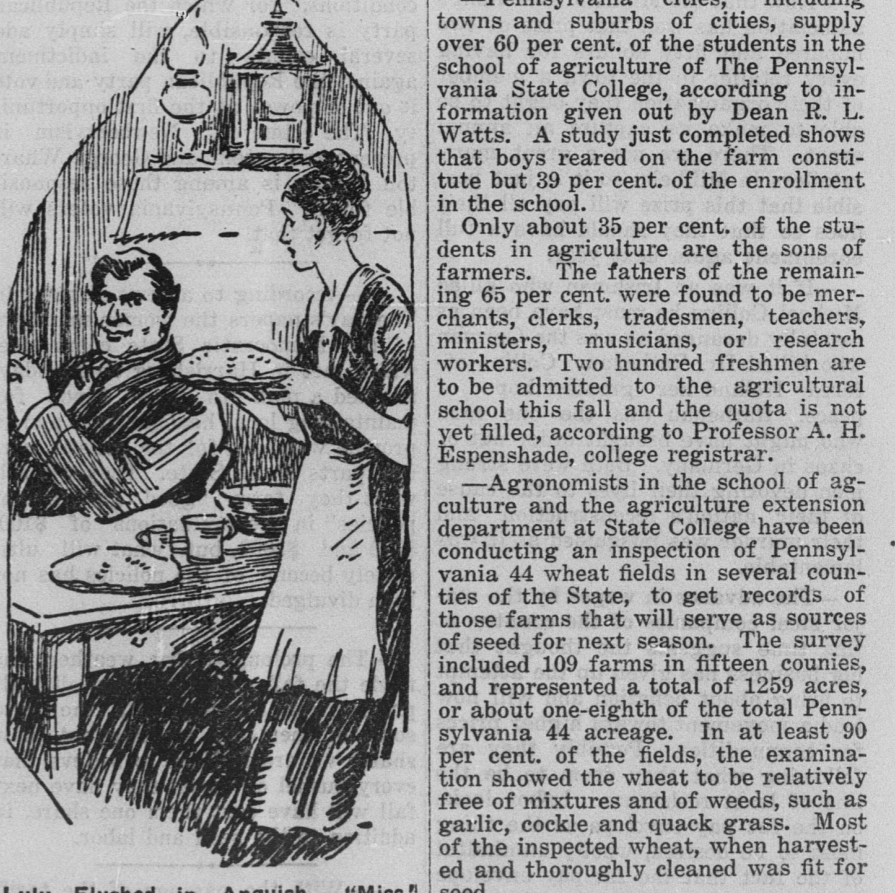
Lulu brought the basin and, while he went to the dog, she ran tiptoeing to the dining room china closet and brought a cut-glass tumbler, as heavy, as ungainly as a stone crock. This she filled with milk.

"I thought maybe . . ." said she, and offered it.

"Thank you!" said Ninian, and drained it. "Making pies, as I live," he observed, and brought his chair nearer to the table. "I didn't know Ina had a sister," he went on. "I remember now Bert said he had two of her relatives—"

Lulu flushed and glanced at him pitifully.

"He has," she said. "It's my mother and me. But we do quite a good deal of the work."



Lulu Flushed in Anguish. "Miss," She Said Low.

Then, from unplumbed depths, another Lulu abruptly spoke up. "From choice," she said.

He shouted with laughter.

"You bet! Oh, you bet!" he cried. "Never doubted it." He made his palms taut and drummed on the table. "Say!" he said.

Lulu glowed, quickened, smiled. Her face was another face.

"Which kind of a Mr. are you?" she heard herself ask, and his shoutings rebounded. Well! Who would have thought it of her?

"Never give myself away," he assured her. "Say, by George, I never thought of that before! There's no telling whether a man's married or not, by his name!"

"It don't matter," said Lulu.

"Why not?"

"Not so many people want to know."

(Continued next week.)

FARM NOTES.

—New York has 7620 acres of late onions this year, which is the largest acreage of any State in the Union.

—Mature sows which fail to raise litters of six good pigs should ordinarily be fattened and slaughtered.

—There is no branch of agriculture that takes as little fertility from the soil and at the same time returns as good profit as the dairy farm.

—A good farmer watches the plants and takes notice of the soil. He can tell what the soil needs from the color, the growth, the development and the fruitfulness.

—Colorado has the largest acreage of cantaloupes with 16,000 as compared with 8200 acres last year. Our neighbor, Maryland, has 6810 acres, compared with 5480 acres last year.

—Good products must be raised, harvested at the right stage of ripeness, and delivered in an attractive, sound and serviceable condition before good prices can be expected. Buyers want value for their money.

—Eggs that Demand the Price.—A good product will always demand a fair price. In order to supply eggs of top quality, dispose of the male birds and produce sterile eggs. Provide clean nests, one to every five hens.

—Save on your fertilizer bill by buying mixtures with high analysis. Low grade fertilizers containing varying quantities of filler are no less expensive per pound of plant food contained, than the high grade mixtures. Order early.

—Celery should be growing nicely now if sufficient moisture is always available. Mulching with manure is an excellent method of conserving moisture and adding fertility. Cultivate frequently and water artificially in case of dry weather.

—Present indications are that prices for feeder cattle will rule higher this fall than a year ago, due to the shortage of cattle in the grazing area. If second growth meadow is handy, it might be desirable to purchase light cattle during the month of August and allow them the use of such fields.

—Where pastures are getting shorter and dryer, the cow will repay her owner at the pail for an extra allowance of grain in her manger when she comes in from the field. A good mixture is, 150 lbs. oats, or corn and coal, 100 lbs. bran, 100 lbs. linseed meal, and 75 lbs. cottonseed meal.

—It is never too early to get your wheat seed. Obtain good clean seed of a desirable variety. In this year's tests, Pennsylvania 44 is outyielding most varieties. Don't forget that wheat responds profitably to fertilization. Use 300 to 500 pounds of acid phosphate or a 2-12-2 mixture, according to the condition of your soil.

—Dwarf Essex rape may be sown in late summer or early fall and the hogs given a fine start toward fattening. By turning pigs to rape a month or six weeks they may be easily and cheaply finished. An acre of rape should carry from 20 to 30 pigs for several weeks. Sow on rich land five pounds of seed broadcast to the acre. The soil should be prepared well and sowing done in late summer or very early fall.

—The fly menace is a very serious handicap to dairymen or farmers keeping dairy cows. These pests always reduce the milk flow at this season of the year, unless something is done to check their depredations. A very good spray is made as follows: Kerosene oil, 3 quarts; raw linseed oil, 16 ounces; pine tar, 8 ounces; crude carbolic acid, 8 ounces. This will make one gallon of spray that will not injure the cows. Spray night and morning with a small hand sprayer like those used in the poultry yard.

—Agronomists in the school of agriculture and the agriculture extension department at State College have been conducting an inspection of Pennsylvania 44 wheat fields in several counties of the State, to get records of those farms that will serve as sources of seed for next season. The survey included 109 farms in fifteen counties, and represented a total of 1259 acres, or about one-eighth of the total Pennsylvania 44 acreage. In at least 90 per cent. of the fields, the examination showed the wheat to be relatively free of mixtures and of weeds, such as garlic, cockle and quack grass. Most of the inspected wheat, when harvested and thoroughly cleaned was fit for seed.

In their examination of fields, the specialists rejected those that contained garlic or quack grass, and any that showed more than a trace of cheat or cockle. When evidence of scab, or loose smut, was found, a rigid examination was made to determine whether the infestation was sufficiently great to disqualify the wheat for seed purposes. The least amount of stinking smut in a field was enough to bar it from consideration as a seed field. In one instance, where black rust was found, the specialist located a barberry bush near by and suggested its removal.

All in all, the survey credits Pennsylvania 44 with a very good record. It has outyielded most every other variety by at least five bushels, and if its use were to spread to the entire wheat acreage of the State, the increase in yield would boost the value of the crop by several million dollars. Since 1918, when the college distributed the first seed of this variety, the acreage has grown from a limited number of selected fields to 10,000 acres during the past year.