

MISS LULU BETT

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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 seemingly can comprehend. To Mr. Deacon comes Bobby Larkin, recently graduated high-school youth, secretly enamored of Deacon's elder daughter, Diana, 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.

Again he laughed. This laughter was intoxicating to Lulu. No one ever laughed at what she said save Herbert, who laughed at her. "Go it, old girl!" Ninian was thinking, but this did not appear.

The child Monona now arrived, banging the front gate and hurrying herself round the house on the board walk, catching the toe of one foot in the heel of the other and blundering forward, head down, her short, straight hair flapping over her face. She landed flat-footed on the porch. She began to speak, using a ridiculous perversion of words, scarcely articulate, then in vogue in her group. And, "Whose dog?" she shrieked.

Ninian looked over his shoulder, held out his hand, finished something that he was saying to Lulu. Monona came to him readily enough, staring, loose-lipped.

"I'll bet I'm your uncle," said Ninian. Relationship being her highest known form of romance, Monona was thrilled by this intelligence.

"Give us a kiss," said Ninian, finding in the plural some vague mitigation for some vague offense.

Monona, looking silly, complied. And her uncle said, my stars, such a great big tall girl—they would have to put a board on her head.

"What's that?" inquired Monona. She had spied his great diamond ring. "This," said her uncle, "was brought to me by Santa Claus, who keeps a jewelry shop in heaven."

The precision and speed of his improvisation revealed him. He had twenty other diamonds like this one. He kept them for those Sundays when the sun comes up in the west. Of course—often! Some day he was going to melt a diamond and eat it. Then you sparkled all over in the dark, ever after. Another diamond he was going to plant. They say—He did it all gravely, absently. About it he was as conscienceless as a savage. This was no fancy spun to pleasure a child. This was like lying, for its own sake.

He went on talking with Lulu, and now again he was the tease, the braggart, the unbridled, unmodified male.

Monona stood in the circle of his arm. The little being was attentive, softened, subdued. Some pretty, faint light visited her. In her listening look, she showed herself a charming child. "It strikes me," said Ninian to Lulu, "that you're going to do something mighty interesting before you die."

It was the clear conversational impulse, born of the need to keep something going, but Lulu was all faith.

She closed the oven door on her ples and stood brushing flour from her fingers. He was looking away from her, and she looked at him. He was completely like his picture. She felt as if she were looking at his picture and she was abashed and turned away.

"Well, I hope so," she said, which had certainly never been true, for her old formless dreams were no intention—nothing but a mush of discontent.

"I hope I can do something that's nice before I quit," she said. Nor was this hope now independently true, but only surprising longing to appear interesting in his eyes. To dance before him. "What would the folks think of me, going on so?" she suddenly said. Her mild sense of disloyalty was delicious. So was his understanding glance.

"You're the stuff," he remarked absently. She laughed happily. The door opened. Ina appeared. "Well!" said Ina. It was her remotest tone. She took this man to be a peddler, beheld her child in his clasp, made a quick forward step, chin lifted. She had time for a very jangle of a look at Lulu.

"Hello!" said Ninian. He had the one formula. "I believe I'm your husband's brother. Ain't this Ina?" It had not crossed the mind of Lulu to present him.

Beautiful it was to see Ina relax, soften, warm, transform, humanize. It gave one hope for the whole species. "Ninian!" she cried. She lent a faint impression of the double to the initial vowel. She slurred the rest, until the y sound squinted in. Not Neenyun, but nearly Neenyun. He kissed her.

"Since Dwight isn't here!" she cried, and shook her finger at him. Ina's conception of hostess-ship was definite: A volley of questions—was his train on time? He had found the house all right? Of course! Anyone could direct him, she should hope. And he hadn't seen Dwight? She must telephone him. But then she arrested herself with a sharp, curved fling of her starched skirts. No! They would surprise him at tea—she stood taut, lips compressed. Oh, the Plows were coming to tea. How unfortunate, she thought. How fortunate, she said.

The child Monona made her knees and elbows stiff and daped up and down. She must, she must participate. "Aunt Lulu made three pies!" she screamed, and shook her straight hair. "Gracious sakes," said Ninian. "I brought her a pup, and if I didn't forget to give it to her."

They adjourned to the porch—Ninian, Ina, Monona. The puppy was presented, and yawned. The party kept on about "the place." Ina delightedly exhibited the tomatoes, the two apple trees, the new shed, the bird bath. Ninian said the unspelling "m-m," rising infection, and the "I see," prolonging the verb as was expected of him. Ina said that they meant to build a summer house, only, dear me, when you have a family—but there, he didn't know anything about that. Ina was using her eyes, she was arch, she was coquettish, she was flirtatious, and she believed herself to be merely matronly, sisterly, womanly.

She screamed. Dwight was at the gate. Now the meeting, exclamation, banality, gufaw . . . good will. And Lulu, peeping through the blind.

When "tea" had been experienced that evening, it was found that a light rain was falling and the Deacons and their guests, the Plows, were constrained to remain in the parlor. The Plows were gentle, faintly lustrous folk, sketched into life rather lightly, as if they were, say, looking in from some other level.

"The only thing," said Dwight Herbert, "that reconciles me to rain is that I'm let off croquet." He rolled his r's, a favorite device of his to induce humor. He called it "croquette."

He had never been more irrepressible. The advent of his brother was partly accountable, the need to show himself a fine family man and host in a prosperous little home—simple and pathetic desire.

"Tell you what we'll do!" said Dwight. "Nin and I'll reminisce a little."

"Do!" cried Mr. Plow. This gentle fellow was always excited by life, so faintly excited by him, and enjoyed its presentation in any real form.

Ninian had unerringly selected a dwarf rocker, and he was overlooking it and rocking.

"Take this chair, do!" Ina begged. "A big chair for a big man." She spoke as if he were about the age of Monona.

Ninian refused, insisted on his refusal. A few years more, and human relationships would have spread sanity even to Ina's estate and she would have told him why he should exchange chairs. As it was she forbore, and kept glancing anxiously at the overburdened little beast beneath him.

The child Monona entered the room. She had been driven down by Di and Jenny Plow, who had vanished upstairs and, through the ventilator, might be heard in a lift and fall of zigzagging. Monona had also been driven from the kitchen where Lulu was, for some reason, hurrying through the dishes. Monona now ran to Mrs. Bett, stood beside her and stared about restlessly. Mrs. Bett was in best black and rufes, and she seized upon Monona and patted her, as her own form of social expression; and Monona wriggled like a puppy, as hers.

"Quiet, pettie," said Ina, eyebrows up. She caught her lower lip in her teeth.

"Well, sir," said Dwight, "you wouldn't think it to look at us, but mother had her hands pretty full, bringing us up."

Into Dwight's face came another look. It was always so when he spoke of this foster-mother who had taken these two boys and seen them through the graded schools. This woman Dwight adored, and when he spoke of her he became his inner self.

"We must run up-stairs and see her while you're here, Nin," he said.

To this Ninian gave a casual assent, lacking his brother's really tender ardor.

"Little," Dwight pursued, "little did she think I'd settle down into a nice, quiet, married dentist and magistrate in my town. And Nin into—say, Nin, what are you, anyway?"

They laughed.

"That's the question," said Ninian. They laughed.

"Maybe," Ina ventured, "maybe Ninian will tell us something about his travels. He is quite a traveler, you know," she said to the Plows. "A regular Gulliver."

They laughed respectfully.

"How we should love it, Mr. Deacon," Mrs. Plow said. "You know we've never seen very much."

Goaded on, Ninian launched upon his foreign countries as he had seen them: Population, exports, imports, soil, irrigation, business. For the populations Ninian had no respect. Crops could not touch ours. Soil mighty poor pickings. And the business—say! Those fellows don't know—and, say, the hotels! Don't say foreign hotel to Ninian.

He regarded all the alien earth as barbarian, and he stoned it. He was equipped for absolutely no intensive observation. His contacts were negligible. Mrs. Plow was more excited by the Deacons' party than Ninian had been wrought upon by all his voyaging.

"Tell you," said Dwight. "When we ran away that time and went to the state fair, little did we think—" He told about running away to the state fair. "I thought," he wound up, irrelevantly, "Ina and I might get over to the other side this year, but I guess not. I guess not."

The words gave no conception of their effect, spoken thus. For there in Warbleton these words are not commonplace. In Warbleton, Europe is never so casually spoken of. "Take a trip abroad" is the phrase, or "Go to Europe" at the very least, and both with empressment. Dwight had somewhere noted and deliberately picked up that "other side" effect, and his Ina knew this, and was proud. Her covert glance about pensively covered her soft triumph.

Mrs. Bett, her arm still circling the child Monona, now made her first observation.

"Pity not to have went while the going was good," she said, and said no more.

Nobody knew quite what she meant, and everybody hoped for the best. But Ina frowned. Mamma did these things occasionally when there was company, and she dared. She never sauced Dwight in private. And it wasn't fair. It wasn't fair—

Abruptly Ninian rose and left the room.

The dishes were washed. Lulu had washed them at breakneck speed—she could not, or would not, have told why. But no sooner were they finished and set away than Lulu had been attacked by an unconquerable inhibition. And



And Instead of Going to the Parlor She Sat Down by the Kitchen Window.

Instead of going to the parlor, she sat down by the kitchen window. She was in her chilly gown, with her cameo pin and her string of coral.

Laughter from the parlor mingled with the laughter of Di and Jenny upstairs. Lulu was now rather shy of Di. A night or two before, coming home with "extra" cream, she had gone round to the side door and had come full upon Di and Bobby, seated on the steps. And Di was saying:

"Well, if I marry you, you've simply got to be a great man. I could never marry just anybody. I'd smother."

Lulu had heard, stricken. She passed them by, responding only faintly to their greeting. Di was far less taken back than Lulu.

Later Di had said to Lulu: "I s'pose you heard what we were saying."

Lulu, much shaken, had withdrawn from the whole matter by a flat "no." "Because," she said to herself, "I couldn't have heard right."

But since then she had looked at Di as if Di were some one else. Had not Lulu taught her to make buttonholes and to hem—oh, no! Lulu could not have heard properly.

"Everybody's got somebody to be nice to them," she thought now, sitting by the kitchen window, adult yet Cinderella.

She thought that some one would come for her—her mother or even Ina. Perhaps they would send Monona. She waited at first hopefully, then resentfully. The gray rain wrapped the air.

"Nobody cares what becomes of me after they're fed," she thought, and derived an obscure satisfaction from her phrasing, and thought it again. Ninian Deacon came into the kitchen.

Her first impression was that he had come to see whether the dog had been fed.

"I fed him," she said, and wished that she had been busy when Ninian entered.

"Who, me?" he asked. "You did that all right. Say, why in time don't you come in the other room?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"Well, neither do I. I've kept thinking, 'Why don't she come along?' Then I remembered the dishes." He glanced about. "I come to help wipe dishes."

"Oh!" she laughed so delicately, so delightfully, one wondered where she got it. "They're washed—" she caught herself at "long ago."

"Well then, what are you doing here?"

"Resting."

"Rest in there. He bowed, crooked his arm. "Senora," he said—his Spanish matched his other assimilations of travel—"Senora, allow me."

Lulu rose. On his arm she entered the parlor. Dwight was narrating and did not observe that entrance. To the Plows it was sufficiently normal. But Ina looked up and said:

"Well"—in two notes, descending, curving.

Lulu did not look at her. Lulu sat in a low rocker. Her starched white skirt, throwing her chally in ugly lines, revealed a peeping rim of white embroidery. Her lace front wrinkled when she sat, and perpetually she adjusted it. She curled her feet sideways beneath her chair, her long wrists and veined hands lay along her lap in no relation to her. She was tense. She rocked.

When Dwight had finished his narration, there was a pause, broken at last by Mrs. Bett:

"You tell that better than you used to when you started in telling it," she observed. "You got in some things I guess you used to clean forget about. Monona, get off my rocker."

Monona made a little whimpering sound, in pretense to tears. Ina said, "Darling—quiet!"—chin a little lifted, lower lip revealing lower teeth for the word's completion; and she held it.

The Plows were asking something about Mexico. Dwight was wondering if it would let up raining at all. Di and Jenny came whispering into the room. But all these distractions Ninian Deacon swept aside.

"Miss Lulu," he said, "I wanted you to hear about my trip up the Amazon, because I knew how inter-ested you are in travels."

He talked, according to his lights, about the Amazon. But the person who most enjoyed the recital could not afterward have told two words that he said. Lulu kept the position which she had taken at first, and she dare not change. She saw the blood in the veins of her hands and wanted to hide them. She wondered if she might fold her arms, or have one hand to support her chin, gave it all up and sat motionless, save for the rocking.

Then she forgot everything. For the first time in years some one was talking and looking not only at Ina and Dwight and their guests, but at her.

III.

June.

On a June morning Dwight Herbert Deacon looked at the sky, and said with his manner of originating it:

"How about a picnic this afternoon?"

Ina, with her blank, upward look, exclaimed: "Today?"

"First class day, it looks like to me."

Come to think of it, Ina didn't know that there was anything to prevent, but mercy, Herbert was so sudden. Lulu began to recite the resources of the house for a lunch. Meanwhile, since the first mention of picnic, the child Monona had been dancing stiffly about the room, knees stiff, elbows stiff, shoulders immovable, her straight hair flapping over her face. The sad dance of the child who cannot dance because she never has danced. Di gave a conservative assent—she was at that age—and then took advantage of the family softness incident to a guest and demanded that Bobby go too. Ina hesitated, partly because she always hesitated, partly because she was tribal in the extreme. "Just our little family and Uncle Ninian would have been so nice," she sighed, with her consent.

When, at six o'clock, Ina and Dwight and Ninian assembled on the porch and Lulu came out with the basket, it was seen that she was in a blue cotton house gown.

"Look here," said Ninian, "aren't you going?"

"Me?" said Lulu. "Oh, no."

"Why not?"

"Oh, I haven't been to a picnic since I can remember."

"But why not?"

"Oh, I never think of such a thing."

Ninian waited for the family to speak. They did speak. Dwight said:

"Lulu's a regular home body."

And Ina advanced kindly with:

"Come with us, Lulu, if you like."

"No," said Lulu, and flushed.

"Thank you," she added, formally.

Mrs. Bett's voice shrilled from within the house, startlingly close—just beyond the window blind, in fact!

"Go on, Lulle. It'll do you good. You mind me and go on."

"Well," said Ninian, "that's what I say. You hustle for your hat and you come along."

For the first time this course presented itself to Lulu as a possibility. She stared up at Ninian.

"You can slip on my linen duster, over," Ina said graciously.

"Your new one?" Dwight incredulously wished to know.

"Oh, no!" Ina laughed at the idea.

"The old one."

They were having to wait for Di in any case—they always had to wait for Di—and at last, hardly believing in her own motions, Lulu was running to



"Look Here," Said Ninian, "Aren't You Going?" "Me?" Said Lulu. "Oh, No."

make ready. Mrs. Bett hurried to help her, but she took down the wrong things and they were both irritated. Lulu reappeared in the linen duster and a wide hat. There had been no time to "tighten up" her hair; she was flushed at the adventure; she had never looked so well.

They started. Lulu, falling in with Monona, heard for the first time in her life, the step of the pursuing male, choosing to walk beside her and the little girl. Oh, would Ina like that? And what did Lulu care what Ina liked? Monona, making a silly, semi-articulate observation, was enchanted to have Lulu burst into laughter and squeeze her hand.

Di contributed her bright presence, and Bobby Larkin appeared from nowhere, running, with a gigantic bag of fruit.

"Bullylujah!" he shouted, and Lulu could have shouted with him.

She sought for some utterance. She wanted to talk with Ninian.

"I do hope we've brought sandwiches enough," was all that she could get to say.

They chose a spot, that is to say, Dwight Herbert chose a spot, across the river and up the shore where there was at that season a strip of warm beach. Dwight Herbert declared himself the builder of incomparable fires, and made a bad smudge. Ninian, who was a camper neither by birth nor by adoption, kept offering brightly to help, could think of nothing to do, and presently, bethinking himself of skipping stones, went and tried to skip them on the flowing river. Ina cut her hand opening the condensed milk and was obliged to sit under a tree and nurse the wound. Monona spilled all the salt and sought diligently to recover it. So Lulu did all the work. As for Di and Bobby, they had taken the pail and gone for water, discouraging her to the point of tears. But the two were gone for so long that, on their return, Dwight was hungry and cross and majestic.

"Those who disregard the comfort of other people," he enunciated, "cannot expect consideration for themselves in the future."

He did not say on what ethical tenet this dictum was based, but he delivered it with extreme authority. Ina caught her lower lip with her teeth, dipped her head and looked at Di. And Monona laughed like a little demon.

As soon as Lulu had all in readiness, and cold corned beef and salad had begun their orderly progression, Dwight became the immemorial dweller in green fastnesses. He began:

"This is ideal. I tell you, people don't half know life if they don't get out and eat in the open. It's better than any tonic at a dollar the bottle. Nature's tonic—eh? Free as the air. Look at that sky. See that water. Could anything be more pleasant?"

He smiled at his wife. This man's face was glowing with simple pleasure. He loved the out-of-doors with a love which could not explain itself. But he now lost a definite climax when his wife's comment was heard to be:

"Monona! Now it's all over both ruffles. And mamma does try so hard."

After supper some boys arrived with a boat which they beached, and Dwight, with enthusiasm, gave the boys ten cents for a half hour's use of that boat and invited to the waters his wife, his brother and his younger daughter. Ina was timid—not because she was afraid, but because she was congenitally timid—with her this was not a belief or an emotion, it was a disease.

(Continued next week.)

Not His Hard Luck.

The Colonel had heard of two recent disasters in the family of his colored orderly and was surprised to find him apparently as cheerful as ever when he returned to duty after a brief furlough home.

"Well, Sam," said the Colonel sympathetically, "I hear you have had some hard luck."

"What me, huh? Nossuh, Ah ain't had no hard luck."

"Why, wasn't that your brother who was killed in a railroad wreck recently, and wasn't that your wife that was hurt in an automobile accident?"

"Oh, yassuh, yassuh—but dat's deir hahd luck—not mine."

FARM NOTES.

—When tomatoes are very cheap and do not sell easily, try grading them. Dessert tomatoes are usually in demand when ordinary field run goes begging.

—Bees do not injure fruits of any kind. There is an erroneous idea that they puncture the skins of grapes and other fruits because they are found feeding upon such broken fruits.

—Raspberry and blackberry plantations that have not been trimmed out by this time, should be given careful attention at the first opportunity. The old canes are frequently diseased and should be removed. This practice also gives the young growth a chance to develop.

—The farmer would do well to inspect his field of corn at this time, noting all low, wet areas that have failed to produce on a par with the rest of the field. Plans should be made now for draining these wet spots after the crop has been harvested and before cold weather sets in.

—Get rid of the surplus cockerels as soon as possible. About ten days before marketing, separate them from the pullets, confine them and feed the following mash twice daily, all they will clean up in twenty minutes: two pound corn meal, one pound ground oats, one pound wheat shorts, eight pounds buttermilk.

—The safest kind of cattle to feed under average conditions are calves that are to be fattened and marketed as baby beef. They bring a higher price per pound because they are in greater demand than heavier cattle. The initial investment is less for baby beef, and they require less feed per hundred pounds gain.

—Salt is required by all animals. The United States Department of Agriculture says that the dairy cow requires an ounce or more a day, and, while she should be given all she needs, she should not be forced to take more than she wants. It is best, therefore, to place salt in the boxes in the yard, where the stock can lick it at will.

—Reports to the Bureau of Drug Control, State Department of Health, that certain race track men are procuring heroin and arsenic for the purpose of doping race horses and putting them in "condition" have resulted in a notice that veterinary surgeons may prescribe or dispense heroin and other narcotic drugs as the law provides, "in the course of professional practice only."

Dr. Thomas S. Blair, chief of the division of drug control, asks that persons who may secure evidence of the above practice communicate with the State Health Department, Harrisburg, and prosecutions will follow. He said, "This practice of doping horses, aside from the violation of the narcotic laws, constitutes cruelty to animals and procedure can also be taken on those grounds."

It was long the custom in Austria to give arsenic to horses to improve their wind and make them appear plump and spirited. It became an intolerable abuse in Europe and the practice was suppressed on the basis of fraud. These horses, unless kept on arsenic regularly, lose health and are apt to die; the arsenic habit, also, may shorten life and bring on disease.

Serious ravages causing almost complete destruction of the bee-keeping industry in parts of Europe by the "Isle of Wight" disease has started determined action by American beekeepers to save their business from similar losses. Thus far the disease has not gained a foothold in this country or in Canada, and it is believed that should the disease become established here beekeepers, queen breeders and manufacturers of bee supplies would quickly be ruined and horticultural interests would be seriously damaged.

As a first step toward preventing this, a meeting was held recently at the bureau of entomology of the United States Department of Agriculture, which was attended by specialists from several States and Canada who are interested in protective measures.

The meeting decided to use all feasible efforts to prevent the introduction of queen bees from all foreign countries except Canada, and to discourage the introduction of adult bees into the United States except for experimental and scientific purposes by the United States Department of Agriculture. Since there is no known Isle of Wight disease in Canada and since it is hoped and expected that the Dominion of Canada will establish the same safeguards to the bee-keeping industry, it is planned not to establish any quarantines or prohibitions against shipments of bees from and to Canada.

All importation of queen bees should be stopped, they believed. Pending full legislation in this matter, the conferees are hopeful that beekeepers in both countries will cooperate to the fullest extent by making no attempt to introduce adult bees. Any queen breeder who introduced this disease into the country would be doing a great wrong to the bee-keeping industry that would be a serious drawback to future business, it was said.

Beekeepers who see any outbreak of any disease of adult bees are urged to send at once samples for examination and diagnosis to the bureau of entomology, Washington. More detailed information concerning the disease may be obtained by writing to the United States Department of Agriculture, Washington, for a copy of Department Circular 218, entitled "The Occurrence of Diseases of Adult Bees," which is available for free distribution.

Isle of Wight disease is caused by a parasitic mite in adult bees, and is easily transported by bees shipped from Europe to America as was proved during the past summer when live bees carrying living mites arrived in Washington from Scotland. The disease is evidently a serious source of loss to beekeepers of the British Isles. It was first observed in 1904 in the Isle of Wight, whence came the name, and in succeeding years it has spread with considerable rapidity to all parts of Great Britain.