MISS LULU BETT

by

Zona Gale

Illustrations by Irwin Myers

Copyright by D. APPLETON AND COMPANY.

(Continued from last week).

The Plows were at breakfast next morning when Lulu came in casually at the side door. Yes, she said, she had had breakfast. She merely wanted to see them about something. Then she said nothing, but sat looking with a troubled frown at Jenny. Jenny's hair was about her neck, like the hair of a little girl, a south window poured light upon her, the fruit and honey upon the table seemed her only possible food.

"You look troubled, Lulu," Mrs. Plow said. "Is it about getting work?"

"No," said Lulu, "no. I've been places. I guess the bakery is going to let me make cake."

"I knew it would come to you," Mrs. Plow said, and Lulu thought that this was a strange way to speak, when she herself had gone after the cakes. But she kept on looking about the room. It was so bright and quiet. As she came in, Mr. Plow had been reading from a book. Dwight never read from a book at table.

"I wish—" said Lulu, as she looked at them. But she did not know what she wished. Certainly it was for no moral excellence, for she perceived none.

"What is it, Lulu?" Mr. Plow asked and he was bright and quiet too, Lulu thought.

"Well," said Lulu, "it's not much, but I wanted Jenny to tell me about last night."

"Last night?"

"Yes. Would you—" Hesitation was her only way of apology. "Where did you go?" She turned to Jenny.

Jenny looked up in her clear and ardent fashion: "We went across the river and carried supper and then we came home."

"What time did you get home?"

"Oh, it was still light. Long before eight, it was."

Lulu hesitated and flushed, asked how long Di and Bobby had stayed there at Jenny's; whereupon she heard that Di had to be home early on account of Mr. Cornish, so that she and Bobby had not stayed at all. To which Lulu said an "of course," but first she stared at Jenny and so impaired the strength of her assent. Almost at once she rose to go.

"Nothing else?" said Mrs. Plow, catching that look of hers.

Lulu wanted to say: "My husband was married before, just as he said he was." But she said nothing more, and went home. There she put it to Di and, with her terrible bluntness, reviewed to Di the testimony.

"You were not with Jenny after eight o'clock. Where were you?" Lulu spoke formally and her rehearsals were evident.

Di said: "When mamma comes home, I'll tell her."

With this Lulu had no idea how to deal, and merely looked at her helplessly. Mrs. Bett, who was lacing her shoes, now said casually:

"No need to wait till then. Her and Bobby were out in the side yard sitting in the hammock till all hours."

Di had no answer save her furious flush, and Mrs. Bett went on:

"Didn't I tell you? I knew it before the company left, but I didn't say a word. Thinks I, 'She wiggles and chitters.' So I left her stay where she was."

"But, mother!" Lulu cried. "You didn't even tell me after he'd gone."

"I forgot it," Mrs. Bett said, "finding Ninian's letter and all—" She talked of Ninian's letter.

Di was bright and alert and firm of flesh and erect before Lulu's softness and laxness.

"I don't know what your mother'll say," said Lulu, "and I don't know what people'll think."

"They won't think Bobby and I are tired of each other, anyway," said Di, and left the room.

Through the day Lulu tried to think what she must do. About Di she was anxious and felt without power. She thought of the indignation of Dwight and Ina that Di had not been more scrupulously guarded. She thought of Di's girlish folly, her irritating independence—"and there," Lulu thought, "just the other day I was teaching her to sew." Her mind dwelt, too, on Dwight's furious anger at the opening of Ninian's letter. But when all this had spent itself, what was she herself to do? She must leave his house before he ordered her to do so, when she told him that she had confided in Cornish, as tell she must. But what was she to do? The bakery cake-making would not give her a roof.

Stepping about the kitchen in her blue cotton gown, her hair tight and flat as seemed proper when one was not dressed, she thought about these things. And it was strange: Lulu bore no physical appearance of one in distress or of any anxiety. Her head was erect, her movements were strong and swift, her eyes were interested. She was no drooping Lulu with dragging step. She was more intent, she was somehow more operative than she had ever been.

Mrs. Bett was working contentedly beside her, and now and then humming an air of that music of the night before. The sun surged through the kitchen door and east window, a returned oriole swung and fluted on the elm above the gable. Wagons clattered by over the rattling wooden block pavement.

"Ain't it nice with nobody home?" Mrs. Bett remarked at intervals, like the burden of a comic song.

"Hush, mother," Lulu said, troubled, her ethical refinements conflicting with her honesty.

"Speak the truth and shame the devil," Mrs. Bett contended.

When dinner was ready at noon, Di did not appear. A little earlier Lulu had heard her moving about her room, and she served her in expectation that she would join them.

"Di must be having the 'tantrim' this time," she thought, and for a time said nothing. But at length she did say: "Why doesn't Di come? I'd better put her plate in the oven."

Rising to do so, she was arrested by her mother. Mrs. Bett was eating a baked potato, holding her fork close to the tines, and presenting a profile of passionate absorption.

"Why, Di went off," she said.

"Went off!"

"Down the walk. Down the sidewalk."

"She must have gone to Jenny's," said Lulu. "I wish she wouldn't do that without telling me."

Monona laughed out and shook her straight hair. "She'll catch it!" she cried in sisterly enjoyment.

It was when Lulu had come back from the kitchen and was seated at the table that Mrs. Bett observed:

"I didn't think Inie'd want her to take her nice new satchel."

"Her satchel?"

"Yes. Inie wouldn't take it north herself, but Di had it."

"Mother," said Lulu, "when Di went away just now, was she carrying a satchel?"

"Didn't I just tell you?" Mrs. Bett demanded, aggrieved. "I said I didn't think Inie—"

"Mother, which way did she go?"

Monona pointed with her spoon. "She went that way," she said. "I seen her."

Lulu looked at the clock. For Monona had pointed toward the railway station. The twelve-thirty train, which every one took to the city for shopping, would be just about leaving.

"Monona," said Lulu, "don't you go out of the yard while I'm gone. Mother, you keep her—"

Lulu ran from the house and up the street. She was in her blue cotton dress, her old shoes; she was hatless and without money. When she was still two or three blocks from the station, she heard the twelve-thirty "pulling out."

She ran badly, her ankles in their low, loose shoes continually turning, her arms held taut at her sides. So she came down the platform, and to the ticket window. The contained ticket man, wonted to lost trains and perturbed faces, yet actually ceased counting when he saw her:

"Lenny! Did Di Deacon take that train?"

"Sure she did," said Lenny.

"And Bobby Larkin?" Lulu cared nothing for appearances now.

"He went in on the Local," said Lenny, and his eyes widened.

"Where?"

"See." Lenny thought it through. "Millton," he said. "Yes, sure. Millton. Both of 'em."

"How long till another train?"

"Well, sir," said the ticket man, "you're in luck, if you was goin' too. Seventeen was late this morning—she'll be along, jerk of a lamb's tail."

"Then," said Lulu, "you got to give me a ticket to Millton, without me paying till after—and you got to lend me two dollars."

"Sure thing," said Lenny, with a manner of laying the entire railway system at her feet.

"Seventeen" would rather not have stopped at Warbleton, but Lenny's signal was law on the time card, and the magnificent yellow express slowed down for Lulu. Hatless, and in her blue cotton gown, she climbed aboard.

Then her old inefficiency seized upon her. What was she going to do? Millton! She had been there but once, years ago—how could she ever find anybody? Why had she not stayed in Warbleton and asked the sheriff or somebody—no, not the sheriff. Cornish, perhaps. Oh, and Dwight and Ina were going to be angry now! And Di—little Di. As Lulu thought of her she began to cry. She said to herself that she had taught Di to sew.

In sight of Millton, Lulu was seized with trembling and physical nausea. She had never been alone in any unfamiliar town. She put her hands to her hair and for the first time realized her rolled-up sleeves. She was pulling down these sleeves when the conductor came through the train.

"Could you tell me," she said timidly, "the name of the principal hotel in Millton?"

Ninian had asked this as they neared Savannah, Georgia.

The conductor looked curiously at her.

"Why, the Hess house," he said. "Wasn't you expecting anybody to meet you?" he asked, kindly.

"No," said Lulu, "but I'm going to find my folks—" Her voice trailed away.

"Beats all," thought the conductor, using his utility formula for the universe.

In Millton Lulu's inquiry for the Hess house produced no consternation. Nobody paid any attention to her. She was almost taken to be a new servant there.

"You stop feeling so!" she said to herself angrily at the lobby entrance.

"Tried the Parlor?" And Directed Her Kindly and With His Thumb.

"Ain't you been to that big hotel in Savannah, Georgia?"

The Hess house, Millton, had a tradition of its own to maintain, it seemed, and they sent her to the rear basement door. She obeyed meekly, but she lost a good deal of time before she found herself at the end of the office desk. It was still longer before anyone attended her.

"Please, sir!" she burst out. "See if Di Deacon has put her name on your book."

Her appeal was tremendous, compelling. The young clerk listened to her, showed her where to look in the register. When only strange names and strange writing presented themselves there, he said:

"Tried the parlor?"

And directed her kindly and with his thumb, and in the other hand a pen divorced from his ear for the express purpose.

In crossing the lobby in the hotel at Savannah, Georgia, Lulu's most pressing problem had been to know where to look. But now the idlers in the Hess house lobby did not exist. In time she found the door of the intensely rose-colored reception room. There, in a fat, rose-colored chair, beside a cataract of lace curtain, sat Di, alone.

Lulu entered. She had no idea what to say. When Di looked up, started up, frowned, Lulu felt as if she herself were the culprit. She said the first thing that occurred to her:

"I don't believe mamma'll like your taking her nice satchel."

"Well!" said Di, exactly as if she had been at home. And superadded: "My goodness!" And then cried rudely: "What are you here for?"

"For you," said Lulu. "You—you—you'd ought not to be here, Di."

"What's that to you?" Di cried.

"Why, Di, you're just a little girl—" Lulu saw that this was all wrong, and stopped miserably. How was she to go on? "Di," she said, "if you and Bobby want to get married, why not let us get you up a nice wedding at home?" And she saw that this sounded as if she were talking about a tea-party.

"Who said we wanted to be married?"

"Well, he's here."

"Who said he's here?"

"Isn't he?"

Di sprang up. "Aunt Lulu," she said, "you're a funny person to be telling me what to do."

Lulu said, flushing: "I love you just the same as if I was married happy, in a home."

"Well, you aren't!" cried Di cruelly, "and I'm going to do just as I think best."

Lulu thought this over, her look grave and sad. She tried to find something to say. "What do people say to people," she wondered, "when it's like this?"

"Getting married is for your whole life," was all that came to her.

"Yours wasn't," Di flashed at her.

Lulu's color deepened, but there seemed to be no resentment in her. She must deal with this right—that was what her manner seemed to say. And how should she deal?

"Di," she cried, "come back with me—and wait till mamma and papa get home."

"That's likely. They say I'm not to be married till I'm twenty-one."

"Well, but how young that is!"

"It is to you."

"Di! This is wrong—it is wrong."

"There's nothing wrong about getting married—if you stay married."

"Well, then it can't be wrong to let them know."

"It isn't. But they'd treat me wrong. They'd make me stay at home. And I won't stay at home—I won't stay there. They act as if I was ten years old."

Abruptly in Lulu's face there came a light of understanding.

"Why, Di," she said, "do you feel that way, too?"

Di missed this. She went on:

"I'm grown up. I feel just as grown up as they do. And I'm not allowed to do a thing I feel. I want to be away—I will be away!"

"I know about that part," Lulu said.

She now looked at Di with attention. Was it possible that Di was suffering in the air of that home as she herself suffered? She had not thought of that. There Di had seemed so young, so dependent, so—asquirm. Here, by herself, waiting for Bobby, in the Hess house at Millton, she was curiously adult. Would she be adult if she were let alone?

"You don't know what it's like," Di cried, "to be hushed up an laughed at and paid no attention to everything you say."

"Don't I?" said Lulu. 'Don't I?"

She was breathing quickly and looking at Di. If this was why Di was leaving home. . . .

"But, Di," she cried, "do you love Bobby Larkin?"

By this Di was embarrassed. "I've got to marry somebody," she said, "and it might as well be him."

"But is it him?"

"Yes, it is," said Di. "But," she added, "I know I could love almost anybody real nice that was nice to me." And this she said, not in her own right, but either she had picked it up somewhere and adopted it, or else the terrible modernity and honesty of her day somehow spoke through her, for its own. But to Lulu it was as if something familiar turned its face to be recognized.

"Di!" she cried.

"It's true. You ought to know that." She waited for a moment. "You did it," she added. "Mamma said so."

At this onslaught Lulu was stupefied. For she began to perceive its truth.

"I know what I want to do, I guess," Di muttered, as if to try to cover what she had said.

Up to that moment, Lulu had been feeling intensely that she understood Di, but that Di did not know this. Now Lulu felt that she and Di actually shared some unsuspected sisterhood. It was not only that they were both badgered by Dwight. It was more than that. They were two women. And she must make Di know that she understood her.

"Di," Lulu said, breathing hard, "what you just said is true, I guess. Don't you think I don't know. And now I'm going to tell you—"

She might have poured it all out, claimed her kinship with Di by virtue of that which had happened in Savannah, Georgia. But Di said:

"Here come some ladies. And goodness, look at the way you look!"

Lulu glanced down. "I know," she said, "but I guess you'll have to put up with me."

The two women entered, looked about with the complaisance of those who examine a hotel property, find criticism incumbent, and have no errand. These two women had outdressed their occasion. In their presence Di kept silence, turned away her head, gave them to know that she had nothing to do with this blue cotton person beside her. When they had gone on, "What do you mean by my having to put up with you?" Di asked sharply.

"I mean I'm going to stay with you."

Di laughed scornfully—she was again the rebellious child. "I guess Bobby'll have something to say about that," she said insolently.

"They left you in my charge."

"But I'm not a baby—the idea, Aunt Lulu!"

"I'm going to stay right with you," said Lulu. She wondered what she should do if Di suddenly marched away from her, through that bright lobby and into the street. She thought miserably that she must follow. And then her whole concern for the ethics of Di's course was lost in her agonized memory of her terrible, broken shoes.

Di did not march away. She turned her back squarely upon Lulu, and looked out of the window. For her life Lulu could think of nothing more to say. She was now feeling miserably on the defensive.

They were sitting in silence when Bobby Larkin came into the room.

Di flew to meet him. She assumed all the pretty agitations of her role, ignored Lulu.

"Bobby! Is it all right?"

Bobby looked over her head.

"Miss Lulu," he said fatuously. "If it ain't Miss Lulu."

He looked from her to Di, and did not take in Di's resigned shrug.

"Bobby," said Di, "she's come to stop us getting married, but she can't. I've told her so."

"She don't have to stop us," quoth Bobby gloomily, "we're stopped."

"What do you mean?" Di laid one hand flatly along her cheek, instinctive in her melodrama.

Bobby drew down his brows, set his hand on his leg, elbows out.

"We're minors," said he.

"Well, gracious, you didn't have to tell them that."

"No. They knew I was."

"But, Silly! Why didn't you tell them you're not?"

"But I am."

Di stared. "For pity sakes," she said, "don't you know how to do anything?"

"What would you have me do?" he

She Turned Her Back Squarely Upon Lulu and Looked Out of the Window.

inquired indignantly, with his head held very stiff, and with a boyish, admirable lift of chin.

"Why tell them we're both twenty-one. We look it. We know we're responsible—that's all they care for. Well, you are a funny . . ."

"You wanted me to lie?" he said.

"Oh, don't make out you never told a fib."

"Well, but this—" he stared at her.

"I never heard of such a thing," Di cried accusingly.

"Anyhow," he said, "there's nothing to do now. The cat's out. I've told our ages. We've got to have our folks in on it."

"Is that all you can think of?" she demanded.

"What else?"

"Why, come on to Bainbridge or Holt, and tell them we're of age, and be married there."

"Di," said Bobby, "why, that'd be a rotten go."

Di said, oh, very well, if he didn't want to marry her. He replied stonily that of course he wanted to marry her. Di stuck out her little hand. She was at a disadvantage. She could use no arts, with Lulu sitting there, looking on. "Well, then, come on to Bainbridge," Di cried, and rose.

Lulu was thinking: "What shall I say? I don't know what to say. I don't know what I can say." Now she also rose, and laughed awkwardly. "I've told Di," she said to Bobby, "that wherever you two go, I'm going too. Di's folks left her in my care, you know. So you'll have to take me along, I guess." She spoke in a manner of distinct apology.

At this Bobby had no idea what to reply. He looked down miserably at the carpet. His whole manner was a mute testimony to his participation in the eternal query: How did I get into it?

"Bobby," said Di, "are you going to let her lead you home?"

This of course nettled him, but not in the manner on which Di had counted. He said loudly:

"I'm not going to Bainbridge or Holt or any town and lie, to get you or any other girl."

"Come on, Aunt Lulu," said Di grandly.

Bobby led the way through the lobby, Di followed, and Lulu brought up the rear. She walked awkwardly, eyes down, her hands stiffly held. Heads turned to look at her. They passed into the street.

"You two go ahead," said Lulu. "so they won't think—"

They did so, and she followed, and did not know where to look, and thought of her broken shoes.

At the station, Bobby put them on the train and stepped back. He had, he said, something to see to there in Millton. Di did not look at him. And Lulu's good-by spoke her genuine regret for all.

"Aunt Lulu," said Di, "you needn't think I'm going to sit with you. You look as if you were crazy. I'll sit back here."

"All right, Di," said Lulu humbly.

It was nearly six o'clock when they arrived at the Deacons'. Mrs. Bett stood on the porch, her hands rolled in her apron.

"Surprise for you!" she called brightly.

(Continued next week).

MOTORISTS MULCTED $90,000,000.

"Short-measure" selling of gasoline was estimated recently by the National Motorists' Association to be costing purchasers $90,000,000 a year. This figure was based on an estimate that each of the 10,000,000 motorists of the United States buys two gallons of gasoline daily and that the average filching by "short-measure artists" actually amounts to 2 pints in each 5 gallons, resulting in a total loss to purchasers of 1,000,000 gallons, valued at approximately $250,000.

The association announced its intention to combat the short-measure selling.

Recent tests with fraud detecting devices, carefully made under official auspices by representatives of auto clubs, the statement said, "developed the astounding fact that out of a number of purchases of gas in 5-gallon lots, there was a shortage running from 1 to 8 pints each in over 50 per cent. of the tests made."

FOR AND ABOUT WOMEN.

DAILY THOUGHT.

HERITAGE.

Nothing is lost—nor grief, nor joy, nor pain;
No wreckage of today or yesterday—
The boundless granaries of life retain
All that the spendthrift ages cast away.

And each least grain we add unto their store,
Whether it spring of happiness or tears,
Shall dower every unborn soul the more
With good or ill to breast the coming years.—By Charlotte Becker, in Hampton's Magazine.

There is no getting away from the fact that skirts have taken unto themselves many, many extra inches around their lower edge. Not satisfied with growing longer, they have become tremendously wider as well.

And not in the least gradually have they brought about this result. We went to bed one night with skirts draped tightly and sinuously about the figure, and we got up the next morning with them circular, and pleated until they measured yards.

One cannot deny that they are charmingly graceful—when they are graceful; but beware of the circular model which is not fashioned by the clever hand! It sags hopelessly just where it is not supposed to sag, and hikes up forlornly directly in front. And although the uneven hem is smart enough when it is meant to be that way, there is no more dowdy thing in creation than a skirt which is not properly adjusted.

The godet pleats are appearing at every hand. New importations feature their lovely smartness, and it is a strong-minded woman indeed who can resist their appeal. Like every other mode which we have recently had, they show a decided affinity for Canton crepe, as well as the fascinating satin-back crepes. Godet pleats at the sides topped by a silver filigree ornament; no sleeves anywhere about, or long and loose and trailing when they are; the wide-low neck, which still continues a favorite—and milady is garbed quite according to fashion's latest whim.

For some time we have been hearing rumors of the return of broadcloth. Fashion displays for some time past have shown alluring models of this exquisite, patrician fabric. But there has been little of it seen except in the shops. Now, however, it promises to come more directly to the front, as though it might have been waiting for the old-time width which was the vogue when last it was in favor.

A most distinctive frock of black broadcloth, soft and fine as satin and lustrous as velvet, shows a circular skirt of the greatest chic. The blouse adopts a new note in dress by making use of old blue batiste, which forms the sleeves, except for a tiny cap at the shoulder, and the very deep chemisette. Have you noticed that a great number of the new frocks are showing these deep chemisettes? It has a way of softening the perfectly plain front, which many women did not find becoming.

A correspondent from Pennsgrove, N. J., wishes to start a rose garden, and wonders if autumn is the proper time. To which I reply: "None better!" In fact, the important thing is not the selection and planting of the roses themselves, but the proper preparation of their quarters. The border cannot be prepared one day and the tenants moved in the next. A thorough deep turning, enriching, mellowing and ripening of the soil for days is necessary, then a final settling of the bed into position. The sooner this work is done the better. After these preliminaries certain hardy varieties of roses may be installed while dormant in late October or November. It is more satisfactory to reserve delicate tea and hybrid tea types until late April.

There is one difficulty to overcome in that section, a poor and sandy soil. Poor soil is easily remedied; sandy soil for roses must be eliminated. Roses love a heavy clay liberally enriched with old manure. The top soil of an old pasture is fine. Removing soil means trouble and expense, but the bushes will flourish from the start.

Dig out the soil to the depth of at least two feet, and fill the trench with a mixture of top soil and old cattle manure. Both may be procured at reliable dealers, the top soil at $3 per barrel of 350 pounds; shredded cattle manure at $3.50 per bag of 100 pounds. Two barrels of soil with one bag of manure would be required. Then let the border settle.

Be sure the manure is distributed principally at the bottom of the trench, well mixed with the soil, so that the roots, striking downward, may obtain full benefit. I would choose Grus and Teplitz for the rear of the border. This, strangely enough is a hybrid tea, but in a class of its own, being included in the list of unkillables. The plants obtain a height of from five to seven feet, tremendously vigorous, with massive, erect canes, furnished with splendid foliage until frost. Clusters of vivid velvety red blooms may be cut with stems a yard long, like the American Beauty of the greenhouse, and the plant is rarely out of flower. No hothouse rose has finer foliage.

Ulrich Brunner, of a clear cerise red, ranks at the top of the hardy perpetual class (known as H. P.'s). It blooms enormously in June, with an occasional flower in autumn, while Mrs. John Laing is unsurpassed among the H. P. pink types. Each stalk bears a single perfect bloom with stem a foot or more long, making it ideal for cutting. Frau Kar Druschki (H. P.) is a worthy companion with immense pure white blossoms in a giant bush. Yellow roses are not for the beginner.

Silks should not be allowed to freeze, as they sunburn if put wet in the sun. Silks of fast dyes should be rolled while wet in heavy cloth or turkish towel until they are right for ironing, and not hung up to dry. The irons used should be medium hot, as the fabric scorches easily.