

Miss Lulu Bett

By Zona Gale

Illustrations by Irwin Myers

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(Continued from last week.)

Before they had reached the door, Ina bounded from the hall.

"Darling!" She seized upon Di, kissed her loudly, drew back from her, saw the traveling bag.

"My new bag!" she cried. "Di! What have you got that for?"

In any embarrassment Di's instinctive defense was hearty laughter. She now laughed heartily, kissed her mother again, and ran up the stairs.

Lulu slipped by her sister, and into the kitchen.

Dwight had come home. Lulu could hear Ina pouring out to him the mysterious circumstance of the bag, could hear the exaggerated air of the casual with which he always received the excitement of another, and especially of his Ina. Then she heard Ina's feet padding up the stairs, and after that Di's shrill, nervous laughter. Lulu felt a pang of pity for Di, as if she herself were about to face them.

There was not time both to prepare supper and to change the blue cotton dress. In that dress Lulu was pouring water when Dwight entered the dining room.

"Ah!" said he. "Our festive ball gown."

She gave him her hand, with her peculiar sweetness of expression—almost as if she were sorry for him or were bidding him good-by.

"That shows who you dress for!" he cried. "You dress for me. Ina, aren't you jealous? Lulu dresses for me!"

Ina had come in with Di, and both were excited, and Ina's head was moving stiffly, as in all her indignations. Mrs. Bett had thought better of it and had given her presence. Already Monona was singing.

But no one noticed Monona, and Ina did not defer even to Dwight. She, who measured delicate, troy occasions by avoidances, said brightly:

"No, Di. You must tell us all about it. Where had you and Aunt Lulu been with mamma's new bag?"

"Ina," said Lulu, "first can't we hear something about your visit? How is—"

Her eyes consulted Dwight. His features dropped, the lines of his face dropped, his muscles seemed to sag. A look of suffering was in his eyes.

"She'll never be any better," he said. "I know we've said good-by to her for the last time."

"Oh, Dwight!" said Lulu.

"She knew it, too," he said. "It—it put me out of business, I can tell you. She gave me my start—she took all the care of me—taught me to read—she's the only mother I ever knew—"

He stopped, and opened his eyes wide on account of their dimness. But eventually they were back again before that new black bag. And Di would say nothing. She laughed, squirmed, grew irritable, laughed again.

"Put an end to this, Lulu," he commanded. "Where were you two—since you make such a mystery?"

Di's look at Lulu was piteous, terrified. Di's fear of her father was now clear to Lulu. And Lulu feared him, too. Abruptly she heard herself temporizing, for the moment making common cause with Di.

"Oh," she said, "we have a little secret. Can't we have a secret if we want one?"

"Upon my word," Dwight commented, "she has a beautiful secret. I don't know about your secrets, Lulu." Every time that he did this, that fleet, lifted look of Lulu's seemed to bleed.

"I'm glad for my dinner," remarked Monona at last. "Please excuse me." On that they all rose. Lulu stayed in the kitchen and did her best to make her tasks indefinitely last. She had nearly finished when Di burst in.

"Aunt Lulu, Aunt Lulu!" she cried. "Come in there—come. I can't stand it. What am I going to do?"

"Di, dear," said Lulu. "Tell your mother—you must tell her."

"She'll cry," Di sobbed. "Then she'll tell papa—and he'll never stop talking about it. I know him—every day he'll keep it going. After he scolds me it'll be a joke for months. I'll die—I'll die, Aunt Lulu."

Ina's voice sounded in the kitchen. "What are you two whispering about? I declare, mamma's hurt, Di, at the way you're acting."

"Let's go out on the porch," said Lulu, and when Di would have escaped, Ina drew her with them.

It was a warm dusk, moonless, windless. The sounds of the village



"Di, Dear," said Lulu. "Tell Your Mother—you Must Tell Her."

street came in—laughter, a touch at a piano, a chiming clock. Lights starred and quickened in the blurred houses. Footsteps echoed on the board walks. The gate opened. The gloom yielded up Cornish.

Lulu was inordinately glad to see him. To have the strain of the time broken by him was like hearing, on a lonely winter wakening, the clock strike reassuring dawn.

Cornish, in his gentle way, asked about the journey, about the sick woman—and Dwight talked of her again, and this time his voice broke. Di was curiously silent. When Cornish addressed her, she replied simply and directly—the rarest of Di's manners—in fact, not Di's manner at all. Lulu spoke not at all—it was enough to have this respite.

After a little the gate opened again. It was Bobby. In the besetting fear that he was leaving Di to face something alone, Bobby had arrived.

And now Di's spirits rose. To her his presence meant repentance, recapitulation. Her laugh rang out, her replies came archly. But Bobby was plainly not playing up. Bobby was, in fact, hardly less than glum. It was Dwight, the irrepressible fellow, who kept the talk going.

"Mamma!" Monona shouted from her room. "Come and hear me say my prayers!"

Monona entered this request with precision on Ina's nastiest moments, but she always rose, unabashed, and went, motherly and dutiful, to hear devotions, as if that function and the process of living ran their two divided channels.

She had dispatched this errand and was returning when Mrs. Bett crossed the lawn from Grandma Gates', where the old lady had taken comfort in Mrs. Bett's ministrations for an hour.

"Don't you help me," Mrs. Bett warned them away sharply. "I guess I can help myself yet awhile."

She gained her chair. And still in her momentary rule of attention, she said clearly:

(Continued next week.)

Woman's Synodical Meeting.

The fortieth annual meeting of the Pennsylvania Woman's Synodical Missionary society of the Presbyterian church in the U. S. A., will be held in the First Presbyterian church of Altoona, October 24th to 26th. Opening session at 7:45 p. m., on October 24th. Executive board meeting at 3 p. m. of the same day, in the church parlors.

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A young people's banquet in con-

nection with the Synodical will be held at 5:30 Wednesday evening, October 25th, in the Second Presbyterian church, Eighth avenue and Thirteenth streets, at 75 cents per plate.

All who expect to attend the meeting should notify Mrs. J. W. Francis, 1300 Seventeenth avenue, Altoona, before October 15th.

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