

MISS LULU BETT

By ZONA GALE
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THE SLY ONE

SYNOPSIS.—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 odds, though apparently satisfied with her lot. Bobby Larkin, recently graduated high-school youth, is secretly enamored of Deacon's elder daughter, Diana. The family is excited over the news of an approaching visit from Deacon's brother Ninian, whom he had not seen for many years. Unexpectedly, Ninian arrives. Thus he becomes acquainted with Lulu first and understands her position in the house. To Lulu, Ninian is a much-traveled man of the world, and even the slight interest which he takes in her is appreciated, because it is something new in her life. At an outing which the family takes, Ninian and Lulu become confidential. He expresses his disapproval of her treatment as a sort of dependant in the Deacon home. Diana and Bobby, in the course of "soft nothings," discuss the possibility of eloping and "surprising the whole school." Lulu has awakened to pleasant possibilities concerning Ninian's intentions toward herself. Ninian takes the family for a "good time" in the adjacent city. At supper, after the theater, as part of a joke Lulu repeats the words of the civil marriage ceremony, with Ninian. Herbert remembers that a civil wedding is binding in the state, and inasmuch as he is a magistrate, Ninian and Lulu are legally married. They go honeymooning. Lulu returns. She says Ninian married eighteen years ago and wasn't sure that the woman was dead; so she came back.

V—Continued.

Lulu went on: "He was very good to me. This dress—and my shoes—and my hat. And another dress, too." She found the pins and took off her hat. "He liked the red wing," she said. "I wanted black—oh, Dwight! He did tell me the truth!" It was as if the red wing had abruptly borne mute witness.

Dwight's tone now mounted. His manner, it mounted too. "Even if it is true," said he, "I desire that you should keep silent and protect my family from this scandal. I merely mention my doubts to you for your own profit."

"My own profit!" She said no more, but rose and moved to the door.

"Lulu—you see! With Di and all!" Ina begged. "We just couldn't have this known—even if it was so." "You have it in your hands," said Dwight, "to repay me, Lulu, for anything that you feel I may have done for you in the past. You also have it in your hands to decide whether your home here continues. That is not a pleasant position for me to find myself in. It is distinctly unpleasant, I may say. But you see for yourself."

Lulu went on, into the passage. "Wasn't she married when she thought she was?" Mrs. Bett cried shrilly.

"Mamma," said Ina. "Do, please, remember Monona. Yes—Dwight thinks she's married all right now—and that it's all right, all the time." "Well, I hope so, for pity sakes," said Mrs. Bett, and left the room with her daughter.

Hearing the stir, Monona upstairs lifted her voice: "Mamma! Come on and hear my prayers, why don't you?"

When they came downstairs next morning, Lulu had breakfast ready. "Well!" cried Ina in her curving tones, "if this isn't like old times."

Lulu said yes, it was like old times, and brought the bacon to the table. "Lulu's the only one in this house can cook the bacon so's it'll chew," Mrs. Bett volunteered. She was wholly affable, and held contentedly to Ina's last word that Dwight thought now it was all right.

"Ho!" said Dwight. "The happy family, once more about the festive toaster." He gauged the moment to call for good cheer. Ina, too, became breezy, blithe. Monona caught their spirit and laughed, head thrown well back and gently shaken.

Di came in. She had been told that Auntie Lulu was at home, and that she, Di, wasn't to say anything to her about anything, nor anything to anybody else about Auntie Lulu being back. Under these prohibitions, which loosed a thousand speculations, Di was very nearly paralyzed. She stared at her Aunt Lulu incessantly.

Not one of them had even a talent for the casual, save Lulu herself. Lulu was amazingly herself. She took her old place, assumed her old offices. When Monona declared against bacon, it was Lulu who suggested milk toast and went to make it. "Mamma," Di whispered then, like escaping steam, "isn't Uncle Ninian coming too?"

"Hoah. No. How don't ask any more questions."

"Well, can't I tell Bobby and Jenny she's here?"

"No. Don't say anything at all about her."

"But, mamma. What has she done?"

"Di! Do as mamma tells you. Don't you think mamma knows best?" Di of course did not think so, had not thought so for a long time. But now Dwight said:

"Daughter! Are you a little girl or are you our grown-up young lady?"

"I don't know," said Di reasonably, "but I think you're treating me like a little girl now."

"Shame, Di," said Ina, unabashed by the accident of reason being on the side of Di.

"I'm eighteen," Di reminded them forlornly, "and through high school."

"Then act so," boomed her father. Baffled, thwarted, bewildered, Di went over to Jenny Plov's and there imparted understanding by the simple process of letting Jenny guess, to questions skillfully shaped.

When Dwight said, "Look at my beautiful handkerchief," displayed a hole, sent his Ina for a better, Lulu, with a manner of haste, addressed him:

"Dwight, it's a funny thing, but I haven't Ninian's Oregon address."

"Well!"

"Well, I wish you'd give it to me."

Dwight tightened and lifted his lips.

"It would seem," he said, "that you have no real use for that particular address, Lulu."

"Yes, I have. I want it. You have it, haven't you, Dwight?"

"Certainly I have it."

"Won't you please write it down for me?" She had ready a bit of paper and a pencil stump.

"My dear Lulu, now why revive anything? Why not be sensible and leave this alone? No good can come by—"

"But why shouldn't I have his address?"

"If everything is over between you, why should you?"

"But you say he's still my husband."

Dwight flushed. "If my brother has shown his inclination as plainly as I



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Judge that he has, it is certainly not my place to put you in touch with him again."

"You won't give it to me?"

"My dear Lulu, in all kindness—no."

His Ina came running back, bearing handkerchiefs with different colored borders for him to choose from. He chose the initial hat she had embroidered, and had not the good taste not to kiss her.

They were all on the porch that evening, when Lulu came downstairs. "Where are you going?" Ina demanded, sisterly. And on hearing that Lulu had an errand, added still more sisterly: "Well, but mercy, what you so dressed up for?"

Lulu was in a thin black and white gown which they had never seen, and wore the tilting hat with the red wing.

"Ninian bought me this," Lulu only said.

"But, Lulu, don't you think it might be better to keep, well—out of sight for a few days?" Ina's lifted look besought her.

"Why?" Lulu asked.

"Why set people wondering till we have to?"

"They don't have to wonder, far as I'm concerned," said Lulu, and went down the walk.

Ina looked at Dwight. "She never spoke to me like that in her life before," she said.

She watched her sister's black and white figure going directly down the street.

"That gives me the funniest feeling," said Ina, "as if Lulu had on clothes bought for her by some one that wasn't—that was—"

"By her husband who has left her," said Dwight sadly.

"Is that what it is, papa?" Di asked alertly. For a wonder, she was there; had been there the greater part of the day—most of the time staring, fascinated, at her Aunt Lulu.

"That's what it is, my little girl," said Dwight, and shook his head.

"Well, I think it's a shame," said Di stoutly. "And I think Uncle Ninian is a slunge."

"Di!"

"I do. And I'd be ashamed to think anything else. I'd like to tell everybody."

"There is," said Dwight, "no need for secrecy—now."

"Dwight!" said Ina—Ina's eyes always remained expressionless, but it must have been her lashes that looked so startled.

"No need whatever for secrecy," he repeated with firmness. "The truth is Lulu's husband has tired of her and sent her home. We must face it."

"But, Dwight—how awful for Lulu!"

"Lulu," said Dwight, "has us to stand by her."

Lulu, walking down the main street, thought:

"Now Mis' Chambers is seeing me. Now Mis' Curtis. There's somebody behind the vines at Mis' Martin's. Here comes Mis' Grove and I've got to speak to her . . ."

One and another and another met her, and every one cried out at her some version of:

"Lulu Bett!" Or, "W-well, it isn't you doing here? I thought . . ."

"I'm back to stay," she said.

"The idea! Well, where you hiding that handsome husband of yours? Say, but we were surprised! You're the sly one—"

"My—Mr. Deacon isn't here."

"Oh."

"No. He's West."

"Oh, I see."

Having no arts, she must needs let the conversation die like this, could invent nothing concealing or gracious on which to move away.

She went to the post office. It was early, there were few at the post office—with only one or two there had she to go through her examination. Then she went to the general delivery window, tense for a new ordeal.

To her relief, the face which was shown there was one strange to her, a slim youth, reading a letter of his own, and smiling.

"Excuse me," said Lulu faintly.

The youth looked up, with eyes warmed by the words on the pink paper which he held.

"Could you give me the address of Mr. Ninian Deacon?"

"Let's see—you mean Dwight Deacon, I guess?"

"No. It's his brother. He's been here. From Oregon. I thought he might have given you his address—"

she dwindled away.

"Wait a minute," said the youth. "Nope. No address here. Say, why don't you send it to his brother? He'd know. Dwight Deacon, the dentist."

"I'll do that," Lulu said absurdly, and turned away.

She went back up the street, walking fast now to get away from them all. Once or twice she pretended not to see a familiar face. But when she passed the mirror in an insurance office window, she saw her reflection and at its appearance she felt surprise and pleasure.

"Well!" she thought, almost in Ina's own manner.

Abruptly her confidence rose.

Something of this confidence was still upon her when she returned. They were in the dining room now, all save Di, who was on the porch with Bobby, and Monona, who was in bed and might be heard extravagantly singing.

Lulu sat down with her hat on. When Dwight inquired playfully, "Don't we look like company?" she did not reply. He looked at her speculatively. Where had she gone, with whom had she talked, what had she told? Ina looked at her rather fearfully. But Mrs. Bett rocked contentedly and ate cardamom seeds.

"Whom did you see?" Ina asked.

Lulu named them.

"See them to talk to?" from Dwight.

Oh, yes. They had all stopped.

"What did they say?" Ina burst out. They had inquired for Ninian, Lulu said; and said no more.

"You write that letter to Ninian!" she said.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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Sunday School Lesson

(By REV. P. B. FITZWATER, D. D., Teacher of English Bible in the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago.)
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LESSON FOR DECEMBER 31

REVIEW

GOLDEN TEXT.—The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor.—Luke 4:18.

DEVOTIONAL READING.—Psalm 98. **PRIMARY TOPIC.**—Favored Stories of the Quarter.

JUNIOR TOPIC.—Jesus Went About Doing Good.

INTERMEDIATE AND SENIOR TOPIC.—How Jesus Ministered to the People.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULT TOPIC.—Some Characteristics of Jesus' Ministry.

Since all the lessons of the quarter save one are from Luke, and the central and unifying theme is Jesus Christ, a profitable way to conduct the review, as suggested in Peloubet's Notes, would be to assign the following topics to the members of the class to make a brief report upon:

1. Christ's Mission to the World.
2. Christ's Helpers and How He Used Them.
3. Christ's Divine Power and How He Exercised It.
4. Christ's Methods of Teaching.
5. Christ's Love in Its Many Manifestations.
6. Christ's Courage and How He Showed It.
7. Christ's Foes and His Dealings With Them.
8. Christ's Pity for Sinners.
9. Christ's Passing Through Human Experience.
10. Christ as a Missionary and an Organizer.
11. Christ's Relation to the Father.
12. Christ's Preparation for the Climax of His Life.

Another way would be by summarizing each lesson, stating the outstanding topic and teaching of each lesson. The following suggestions are offered:

- Lesson 1.** The birth of John the Baptist, which from the human standpoint was impossible, was announced to his father, Zacharias. For his unbelief he was smitten with dumbness. God expects of his servant unquestioned belief in what He promises.
- Lesson 2.** Jesus was born in Bethlehem just as the prophet had foretold some 700 years before, and at the age of twelve years he consciously entered into the services of God's house. Though conscious of His divine being and mission, He lived a life of filial obedience.
- Lesson 3.** John the Baptist's ministry was a preparation for the coming of Christ. He fearlessly preached repentance and pronounced judgment upon the impenitent. Though a mighty preacher, he humbly declared that Christ was immeasurably greater than himself.
- Lesson 4.** Jesus Christ after His baptism was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. The purpose was to test the reality of the incarnation. The result was complete victory—a demonstration of His ability to save to the uttermost all who trust Him.
- Lesson 5.** Isaiah foretold the golden age upon the earth when Christ will reign.
- Lesson 6.** While Jesus was here He healed all kinds of diseases and cast out devils. He authenticated His mission and proved His power to forgive sins by miraculous deeds.
- Lesson 7.** Jesus taught the disciples the principles which should govern in His kingdom. Only those who have been born from above can love their enemies.
- Lesson 8.** While in Simon's house at dinner, a woman who had been a notorious sinner anointed Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair. The sinner's gratitude to Jesus for forgiveness is measured by the apprehension of sins forgiven.
- Lesson 9.** Jesus went forth throughout every city preaching the glad tidings of the Kingdom of God. The fact of salvation for sins through a crucified Redeemer is truly glad tidings.
- Lesson 10.** Jesus sent forth missionaries with the realization of the big task before them, and with power to perform supernatural deeds to authenticate their mission. Those who realize the bigness of their task will earnestly pray that the Lord will send forth laborers into His harvest.
- Lesson 11.** Jesus' reply to the question of a certain lawyer, "Who is my neighbor?" shows that the all-important consideration is not "Who is my neighbor?" but "How can I show that I am a neighbor?"
- Lesson 12.** A certain rich man is his perplexity over his prosperity decided to provide larger stores and settle down to a life of sensuous indulgence. The one who lays up treasures on earth and is not rich toward God is a fool.

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