

The Inglenook.

JUST LOUISE.

BY ELIZABETH ROBBINS,

"There—that chapter of my life is ended," said Louise, as she laid the long white roll tied with lavender ribbon on the table and sank into a chair. Her pretty, light hair was a little tumbled—which made it look all the prettier—her eyes were bright, her cheeks pink, and the white dress with the lavender was very becoming.

"And now the burning question is, what is my work in the world to be? What is the next chapter? It is so difficult to know."

"This is just what I've been expecting," said her brother Alan in a resigned tone. "I've heard the preliminary mutterings for some time, and I knew that as soon as you got your grip on that precious diploma the storm would burst."

"I would advise postponing the settlement of your future career till to-morrow," said their mother, as she began closing the windows for the night. "It will be eleven o'clock in two minutes more."

"Perhaps that would be more sensible," laughed Louise, rising from her chair. Then she added reminiscently, "If only father could have gone, my cup of happiness would have been full. Being a doctor is very inconvenient sometimes."

"They all went upstairs together, Louise stopped at grandma's door to tap softly and ask her if she were awake, and then to tell her that the graduation had gone off beautifully. Then she slipped into the room next her own, where, in their cribs, were Nina and Ralph, the little three and five-year-old sister and brother—they did look so pretty when they were asleep.

Just as Louise finished braiding her hair for the night, she heard her father come in and ran out into the upper hall to call down to him, softly:

"Papa, my education is completed."

"Nonsense! It's only just begun," Dr. Sherren answered back.

"Ever so many praised my class ode, Judge Evans among the rest."

"That is good."

"And, Papa, what am I to do now? What shall I do next?"

"Go straight back to bed, child, and get your beauty sleep," he answered promptly.

Louise meant to lie awake for a while and think seriously about her future work, but she was so tired that her eyes would close and her mind begin to wander in dreamland in spite of herself, and so when she awoke in the morning she had not made even a beginning on the settlement of the important question.

In the afternoon she was to start on her annual visit to her Aunt Eleanor. She went thus early in the vacation because in the middle of July she was to go with the Agnews and Bettersons on a six weeks' camping-out trip.

"And after that I must give up being a butterfly and begin my life work—whatever it is. I wish I knew what I really ought to do. You must all try to decide for me while I am gone," she said to the family at dinner.

"I think you had better go to the Conservatory," her father said. He was a great lover of music, and delighted in hearing Louise play and sing.

"Oh, it doesn't seem as if I had enough musical talent to make that pay," Louise deprecatingly.

"Your voice isn't strong, I know," her father answered, "but it is sweet and your ear is correct. If you feel that you must be independent I am sure you could fit yourself to sing at private houses, or even in a small church."

"I am of the opinion that you should study elocution," said grandma. "I think you read with a very great deal of feeling and expression."

"But my throat is so likely to give out if I read long," Louise objected.

"Practice would cure that," said grandma, confidently.

"I think you'd better go to the Normal school and learn teaching," said Alan. "You're fine for showing a fellow about his lessons. If you hadn't coached me so much I should have had to be conditioned, like lots of the others."

"I'd like the teaching part," said Louise, "but I'm very sure I shouldn't have good discipline."

"I think you could write children's stories," said her mother, "or, if you should go at it with determination I am sure you could succeed as an artist. You make very clear little sketches."

"Oh, mother!" Louise laughed. "I can do a little at both those things, but it would take a tremendous amount of determination for me to really succeed in either."

"Oh, well," said Alan, "If you're going to be so dreadfully modest, why not be companion to some rich somebody who'd go travelling all over the world and take you with her."

"That would be nice in some ways, but it doesn't seem like a real profession," Louise answered. Then she turned to the small brother and sister. "Everybody has given an opinion but you, Ralph and Nina," she said, laughingly. "Now tell me, what I shall be?"

"Not be anything. Just be Louise," Ralph answered, unsmiling, and Nina echoed, "Just be Louise."

This raised a general laugh, and the subject for the time being was dropped.

Louise meant to come to a decision while at her aunt's, but there was always so much going on there that she didn't seem to get any time to think. She had written down the vocation recommended by the members of her family. She had many times before considered them all, and it was plain that from this list she must make her choice. But which should she choose? In which should she be the most use? She had some talent for each one of them, and any one of them would be pleasant and agreeable. How puzzling it was to have a little ability in so many directions. How fortunate were they who had one big, decided talent, one particular thing they could do, and loved to do, far better than anything else. Their choice was made for them and they didn't have to puzzle their brains over the choosing. She broached the subject to her aunt, but got no help.

"What is the sense in your doing any of those things? Your father is able to support you," said Aunt Eleanor.

So Louise came home no further advanced toward a decision than when she went

away. Louise was at home two days, a time of hurried preparation, and then she departed with the Bettersons and Agnews.

While she was away the family received several letters from her, with enthusiastic descriptions of the lake beside which they were camping, the pines, the boating, fishing, the tramps in the woods, the long afternoons in the hammock. She was having the best time she had ever had in her life. In due course Louise returned home once more.

"Have you decided that momentous question yet?" her father asked.

"No, father, I haven't." A worried expression came to her face. "I've thought and thought, and I just cannot decide. It doesn't seem as if I had enough of any one talent to succeed with it, and the advantages and disadvantages of all the callings seem to be about equal. I've got to decide soon. Perhaps—" she stopped with a helpless laugh. "I think I'll have to write them on slips of paper and shake them up in a box, and take the first I draw out."

That afternoon Louise met with an accident. She had been up to her room for something and started to come down when her foot slipped, or her ankle twisted, and she fell, never stopping till she reached the floor at the foot of the stairs. Her father happened to be at home and ran to help her up. She thought at first she was not hurt, but the instant she rested her weight on her feet she felt such a terrible pain that she screamed out with the agony of it and then, for the first time in her life, fainted dead away.

When consciousness returned Louise found herself lying on her bed. Her shoe and stocking were off, and her father was looking down at her.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Nothing very serious," he answered, reassuringly. "Nothing but what you'll get over all right. You've broken your leg between the knee and ankle and I've telegraphed Dr. Bernat to come and set it."

In a few days, when a regular routine had been established, Louise was far from miserable. To be sure she must lie in bed for a good many days, but she suffered very little pain, her surroundings were very pleasant and everybody was so kind. Her room seemed to be the center of interest for the whole household. Grandma sat there with her knitting; her eyes troubled her and she could not do finer work. Louise's mother ran in whenever she had a few leisure moments; her father spent a good part of the time when he was at home there, chatting with her and telling her of the day's experiences. Alan said it did seem good to have Louise where one knew where she was, and to have a chance for the family to get acquainted with her; the children brought their playthings to her room on rainy days and friends dropped in often.

At last the time came when Louise was able to walk again, and one memorable morning she came to the breakfast table, with the others. It was an occasion of rejoicing, and the faces around the board were happy ones. "Only," grumbled Alan, "it won't last. Louise will be scooting off now to prepare for that much-talked-of career of hers. Have you made up your mind yet, sis, what it is to be?"

Louise laughed. "Yes, my mind is made up for good and all, and there's an end of my wavering uncertainty. I was going to wait till after breakfast and then tell you, but as Alan has brought up the matter, I'll tell you now."

They all looked at her, intent, anxious. There was a pretty color in Louise's cheeks.