

LOST TO THE PROFESSION.

BY DONOTHY HOLROYD.

It was Senior vacation at Vassar. "Well," exclaimed Louise Lennox, as she and her friend Laura Page wended their way down the length of the corridor, "if you expect me to look upon you as 'grave and reverend Seniors' you tax my imagination heavily."

Laura laughed. "You ought to have come before, my dear. I smile whenever I think how you hesitated to come during my 'overcrowded last days before Commencement!' We have absolutely nothing to do except our rehearsals with the elocution teacher. But you must not think we are quite so lawless as this all the time."

"Laura!" A tall, dark girl with dishevelled bangs rushed up to them. "I have sold your shades for a dollar."

"Good!" answered Laura with such hearty emphasis that her friend stared at her in open-eyed wonder.

"Oh, my dear! if your purse was as empty as mine, you would hail Senior Auction as all the rest of us do. This is the most delightful place to be poor in, for everybody else is in the same state by this time in the year, and I assure you it is quite a matter for congratulation to get rid of your useless furnishings and not have to pay some one to carry them away."

"Live and learn," remarked Miss Lennox. "My ideas on the subject of the higher education are becoming enlarged and amended."

"That's what Vassar is good for. But come." She led the way towards the end of the corridor when a crowd was gathering. "the auction is beginning, and Miss Barnard is auctioneer; I want you to see the whole of this hilarious spree."

"Young ladies!" A pretty girl, who was mounted on a table, held up a stump of a pencil.

"Who bids?" she asked, "who bids for the pencil with which the documents to the faculty were written? This pencil," turning it round and round, "is one that will be famous in the annals of the college forever. Ten cents, did you say? Twelve, fifteen, twenty, thirty, thirty-five, half a dollar. Going, going, gone to Miss Curtiss for fifty cents!"

"What nonsense!" laughed Miss Lennox, after they had watched a tin reflector, a drinking mug, and an outrageous chromo pass into the hands of three eager "preps." "One is tempted to inquire what madness hath seized them?"

"Well, the mug belonged to Miss Carter, a Senior for whom the little prep who bought it has a far-off admiration. She would have paid twice the amount rather than let any one else get. Are you tired of all the noise and confusion? Shall we seek a quieter place?"

"It's too bad to have to carry you so far to find a place to sleep, but the college regulations forbid us to entertain guests in our rooms, and we are only allowed to have a visitor for one meal a day. Isn't it ridiculous?"

"Rather," assented Miss Lennox. The two girls had left the college gate behind them, and were walking rapidly toward the farm-house where Laura Page had engaged board for her friend who had come from the South in fulfillment of an old promise to spend Commencement week at Vassar.

She had arrived only a few hours before, and after the fatigue of the long journey, the babel of tongues, the rapid introductions, and the general effervescence which seemed to pervade the Senior corridor were rather overpowering. It was a relief to find herself all alone with Laura in Mrs. Adams' prim little "bedroom;" there was so much of personal interest to hear and to relate, and she felt as if she had been on a parade until now.

"Is it well with the child?" She turned and placed both hands on Laura's shoulders, looking into the clear brown eyes with anxious tenderness. "You look tired out, dear." This was the apparent result of her close inspection.

"Not more than is to be expected, considering all things," answered Miss Page, lightly. "Look at those great circles under your eyes, beloved of my heart."

"Don't talk to me in such a tone as that," returned Miss Lennox, with significant emphasis. "I am physically tired, of course, but I haven't any such look as you have. Laura, my darling, you are not the same girl. Oh! how I hate that man!"

"Stop!" said Laura, quickly, "you don't understand."

"Yes, I do." Louise drew the girl down beside her on the bed, and clasped two loving arms around her. "I do understand that all this college life, all your honors, all your plans for future work, aren't helping you one bit, for you love him still."

There was silence for a moment. Louise, for all the tender and loving intimacy that existed between herself and Laura, felt half-frightened that she had dared to say so much.

"I don't—know," Laura's face was hidden and the words came slowly. "Louise, I hope I shall never see him again. I am sure it is better so. I don't believe I was born to make any man's home happy."

"And yet," retorted Louise, "in spite of everything, your brain is planning, you know—in your heart of hearts—that you want some one to take care of you, and love you, and compass you about 'with sweet observances.' You can't deny it."

"I mean to be a doctor," said Laura, steadily; "the fact that I have felt this want will bring me nearer to suffering bodies and souls. Don't worry about me, Louise, I am convinced that is the work I have to do in the world, and no one is unhappy who has a helpful and satisfying work to do."

"That is so, I grant you. A few hundred years ago, you would have gone into a convent; in the nineteenth century, a life dedicated to God is spent in trying to make many people better, rather than one alone. My dear little girl," Louise's voice was very low and tender, "I shall pray 'God bless your work,' but oh, I did want you to be happy!"

"And I shall be," answered Laura, looking up with a smile that was so unconsciously brave and patient that Louise felt like crying over her.

"Tell me!" she began, but stopped abruptly.

"Tell you what?"

"It is not a fair question; you needn't answer it, unless you choose; but Laura, if he were to come back to you, could you trust yourself—with all your real beliefs that things are best as they are—could you trust yourself to say him nay?"

Then another silence fell upon the two.

"No," answered Laura, at last, "and so I pray we may never meet. I shall devote myself to my profession, and I know it is better so, or it would not be. It was a very brief madness, and like all love, perfectly irrational. We are not at all suited to one another. I never should make him happy, for he is as conventional as I am erratic. And for myself," she hesitated a moment. "I shall be happier, too, by and by."

"I wonder if it really is better so," thought Louise, lying with wide-open eyes long after the drowsy god should have claimed her for his own. "So many women are unhappily married; and Laura might miss 'the simple obvious human bliss' more hopelessly as a wife than if she carried out her own plan, and forgetting herself, learn to live even more wholly for others. And yet, and yet—I am a woman myself, and I know how lonely a woman's life may be. Well, God knows best—it is in His hands, not mine," and with that comfort, she fell asleep.

"No; lie still!" Louise started up, hardly realizing that it could be morning.

"What a sleepy-head!" laughed Laura, "but you need not disarrange yourself, as our French friends would say. I must get back to the college in time for breakfast, but Mrs. Adams will serve yours whenever you are ready."

Louise yawned sleepily, and regarded with lazy admiration the energetic movement of her friend.

"Do you feel rested?" asked Laura bending to kiss her.

"I'll tell you by and by; I haven't found out yet."

"Farewell, then," said Laura, "lie still till you do. I'll come back for you just as soon as I can; but if you get tired of waiting, you are at liberty to walk up to the college and find me."

"Thanks; but I think I'll stay till you come."

Half an hour later, Mrs. Adams rapped at the door.

"If you please Miss Lennox," said she, putting her head in at the doorway, "will you be ready for an eight o'clock breakfast?"

"Yes, indeed," answered that young lady promptly.

"And," continued Mrs. Adams, "there

is a young gentleman staying here now, and will you take breakfast when he does, or would you like me to give you yours private?"

"Which ever is most convenient to you," responded Miss Lennox, politely. "I think if the young gentleman can stand it, I can."

"Well, you see," said Mrs. Adams, with a confidential accent, "I ain't used to taking any but the students' young lady friends; but he wanted to come here so particular, that I had to give in. It's my belief," her voice dropping almost to a whisper, "that he's in love with one of them, up there, he acts kind o' like it. Well, he's a real gentleman, anyhow, an' one can't say more than that."

The door closed, and Miss Lennox devoted herself to the task of her toilet—not an unpleasant one, either, it must be confessed. Besides, the little stimulus of "a real gentleman" gave an added zest to her labors.

The curling, chestnut "bang" which shaded her forehead with such studied carelessness, was even more bewitchingly arranged than usual; her quiet, and "correct" travelling dress was quite as becoming a garb as she could desire; and when she clasped the little golden arrow, with its diamond head, that confined her unobtrusive linen collar, she surveyed herself with serene satisfaction; and, feeling well armed for the fray, she entered the dining-room just as the clock struck eight.

"Let me introduce Mr. Kirkland, Miss Lennox," said Mrs. Adams, setting down a platter of beefsteak as she spoke, and going back to the kitchen for coffee and rolls.

Louise gave an involuntary start, and for a moment the pause threatened to become awkward; and then he came forward, holding out his hand with the frank belief that welcome was his due.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Miss Lennox."

Miss Lennox was not altogether sure of that fact, but she greeted him with lady-like composure, nevertheless.

Mrs. Adams had set breakfast upon the table, and had departed, and these two were left to an uninterrupted *tele-a-tel*.

It was embarrassing, to say the least, and "Oh!" thought Louise, "what if he and Laura had known that they had slept under the same roof last night?" Her usual self-possession seemed to desert her, and the ordinary breakfast table amenities were gone through with stiffly enough.

"Miss Lennox," Mr. Kirkland spoke abruptly, "you are surprised to find me here, and I should probably have avoided the meeting had I foreseen it. My very presence here tells its own tale, and you, who love Laura, will not be altogether disposed to do me injustice, I think."

"Surely not," Louise looked up with an impulse as frank as his own speech had been. "Laura's happiness is very dear to me," she said simply.

"And her happiness is mine," he returned quickly; "if you believe that, you will be my friend."

"I do believe it," she replied. She could not but trust those steady gray eyes that met her own so fearlessly.

"Thank you," said he, gratefully.

"But I don't understand"—Miss Lennox broke off in some confusion.

"Why I am here now?" said he, finishing her question. "It does seem like a foolish bit of secrecy—though, after all, my name and movements are open to the knowledge of the world."

"But why do you wait?" persisted Louise. "He either fears his fate too much—"

"Or his desert is small," interrupted Mr. Kirkland, "that is the reason—in part you know," speaking more gravely, "the cause of the trouble between us."

"No," she confessed.

"It was because Laura wished to study medicine, and I objected. It seemed to me that as my wife she would have ample scope for intellect and energies."

"That is like a man!" exclaimed Louise, involuntarily.

"If she loved me, it would have been," flushing slightly in his attempt to justify himself.

"Very true," said Louise, "and being a loving woman she would very soon have found it out if you had not irritated her by opposition."

"How could I tell that!" he retorted;

"she was restless and unsatisfied as long as our engagement lasted."

"Yet was the first state of this woman better than the last," said Louise, and then could have bitten her tongue out for the involuntary admission.

"She cared then," catching at the straw eagerly; "does she care still?"

"How can I tell?" she replied; "Laura's confidences are not given lightly."

"You would say I should ask only of her, and you are right. Would she soo me—would there be any chance for private conversation, if I were to go up to the college and send in my card?"

Louise pondered the question a moment, then temporized. "Why do you wish to see her?" she asked.

"Good heavens! can you ask such a question?" he exclaimed. "I wish to see her because I love her better and better every day I live; because I believe I can make her happy—if not in my way in her own. She shall study any profession she pleases, if she will only give me the right to love and care for her while she is doing it."

"You shall see her," said Miss Lennox, quietly. "Go into the parlor and wait." She arose from the table as she spoke, and waved him toward the door of that sacredly-guarded apartment. The little bay window in the dining-room overlooked the college grounds, and from the shadow of the great hedge that forms the boundary she caught a glimpse of Laura's dark blue draperies.

She went to the door herself, that no Mrs. Adams need appear in answer to the ring.

"Did I not get back in good time?" asked Laura, gayly. "I am almost breathless, I walked so fast."

"You did come quickly," replied Louise, trembling with an excitement she could not control. "So quickly that I have not yet finished my breakfast. Will you wait in the parlor? I suppose you would rather not come out to the dining-room."

The door closed upon the unconscious Laura, and Louise went back to the scarcely-tasted breakfast. Mrs. Adams bustled in with hot coffee, and looked her surprise at seeing the empty place.

"Mr. Kirkland was called out suddenly," explained Miss Lennox. "No more coffee, thank you; I have finished my breakfast."

Mrs. Adams regarded the table with a troubled look. "I'm afraid the eggs wasn't cooked right," she observed at last.

"O, yes, everything was very nice," Louise smiled faintly; "only that I am not hungry this morning. I think I haven't really rested since my journey."

She left the table and entered her own room. The parlor doors being closed, it was hardly likely that busy Mrs. Adams would prove a disturbing element; so Louise settled herself to wait with what patience she could muster.

Two ploughed fields, and a long stretch of dusty road, up which came the jangle of tuneless bells, and the red car made its way out to the college.

Had she done right? Was it best, after all? How had she dared to make a special providence of herself? These were the questions that tortured her brain with ceaseless iteration. The moment dragged so slowly. She heard the clock count out nine slow strokes, and then ten, before Laura appeared.

Laura! Was it indeed she? This bright-faced girl with the light of a new happiness shining through her eyes and fairly transfiguring her?

"Louise!" she cried, "Louise!" making a sudden descent upon that young lady, and hiding the happy face on her friend's shoulder. "Oh, Louise!"

It was intelligible, though not very intelligent, behaviour, in a young woman who was a firm believer in broad culture and the higher education. She was only a girl, after all, though she was about to graduate from Vassar. Her Commencement Day essay would demonstrate her powers over the English language to the dullest listener; but there was a happy lack of rhetoric in the short and confused sentences which met the ears of Miss Lennox.

"He is waiting to see you," she said. "Did you think we had quite forgotten you? Ah! you wouldn't if you had heard!"

As they entered the parlor together, Walter Kirkland met them with outstretched hands. "She has told you," he said, clasping both of Louise's hands in his, while he cast a loving glance upon Laura.

"I suppose so," replied Miss Lennox. "It was rather incoherent, but I believe I understand."