CHAPTER III. IN WHICH THE TRAIN IS LAID.

"After a holiday comes a rest day." The astuteness of this proverb continually proved itself in Vagabondia, and this was more particularly the case when the holiday had been Dolly's, inasmuch as Dolly was invariably called upon to "fight her battles o'er again," and recount her experiences the day following a visit, for the delectation of the household. Had there appeared in the camps a Philistine of notoriety, then that Philistine must play his or her part again through the medium of Dolly's own inimitable powers of description or representation; had any little scene occurred possessing a spice of flavoring, or illustrating any Philistine peculiarity, then Dolly was quite equal to the task of putting it upon the family stage, and re-enacting it with iniquitous seasonings and additions of her own. And yet the fun was never of an ill-natured sort. When Dolly gave them a correct embodiment of Lady Augusta in reception of her guests, with an accurate description of the "great Copper-Boiler costume," the bursts of applause meant nothing more than that Dolly's imitative gifts were in good condition, and that the "great Copper-Boiler costume" was a success. Then, the feminine mind being keenly alive to an interest in earthly vanities, an enlargement on Philistine adornments was considered necessary, and Dolly always rendered herself popular by a minute description of the reigning fashions, as displayed by the Bilberry element. She found herself quite repaid for the trouble of going into detail, by the unsophisticated pleasure in Mollie's eyes alone, for to Mollie outward furnishings seemed more than worthy of description and discussion.

Accordingly, the morning after Lady Augusta's conversazione, Dolly gave herself up to the task of enlivening the household. It was Saturday morning, fortunately, and on Saturday her visits to the Bilberry mansion were dispensed with, so she was quite at liberty to seat herself by the fire, with Tod in her arms, and recount the events of the evening. Somehow or other, she had almost regarded him as a special charge from the first. She had always been a favorite with him, as she was a favorite with most children. She was just as natural and thoroughly at home with Tod in her arms, or clambering over her feet, or clutching at the trimmings of her dress, as she was under any other circumstances; and when on this occasion Griffith came in at noon to hear the news, and found her kneeling upon the carpet with outstretched hands teaching the pretty little tottering fellow to walk, he felt her simply irresistible.

"Come to Aunt Dolly," she was saying. "Tod, come to Aunt Dolly." And then she looked up laughing. "Look at him, Griffith," she said. "He has walked all the way from that arm-chair." And then she made a rush at the child, and caught him in her arms with a little whirl, and jumped up with such a light-hearted enjoyment of the whole affair that it was positively exciting to look at her.

It was quite natural--indeed, it would have been quite unnatural if she had not found her usual abiding-place in her lover's encircling arm at once, even with Tod conveniently established on one of her own, and evidently regarding his own proximity upon such an occasion as

remarkable if nothing else. That arm of Griffith's usually did slip around her waist even at the most ordinary times, and long use had so accustomed Dolly to the habit that she would have experienced some slight feeling of astonishment if the familiarity had been omitted.

It was rather a surprise to the young man to find that Miss MacDowlas had appeared upon the scene, and that she had partaken of coffee and conversation in the flesh the evening before.

"But it's just like her," he said. "She is the sort of relative who always does turn up unexpectedly, Dolly. How does she look?"

"Juvenescent," said Dolly; "depressingly so to persons who rely upon her for the realizing of expectations. A very few minutes satisfied me that I should never become Mrs. Griffith Donne upon her money. It is a very fortunate thing for us that we are of Vagabondian antecedents, Griffith,--just see how we might trouble ourselves, and wear our patience out over Miss MacDowlas, if we troubled ourselves about anything. This being utterly free from the care of worldly possessions makes one touchingly disinterested. Since we have nothing to expect, we are perfectly willing to wait until we get it."

She had thought so little about Ralph Gowan,--once losing sight of him, as he stood watching her on the pavement, that in discussing other subjects she had forgotten to mention him, and it was only Mollie's entrance into the room that brought him upon the carpet.

Coming in, with her hair bunched up in a lovely, disorderly knot, and the dimple on her left cheek artistically accentuated by a small patch of black, the youngest Miss Crewe yet appeared to advantage, when, after appropriating Tod, she slipped down into a sitting posture with him on the carpet, in the midst of the amplitude of folds of Lady Augusta's once gorgeous wrapper.

"Have you told him about the great Copper-Boiler costume, Dolly?" she said, bending down so that one brown tress hung swaying before Tod's eyes. "Has she, Griffith?"

"Yes," answered Griffith, looking at her with a vague sense of admiration. He shared all Dolly's enthusiasm on the subject of Mollie's prettiness.

"Was n't it good? I wish I was as cool as Dolly is. And poor Phemie--and the gentleman who made love to you all the evening, Dolly. What was his name? Was n't it Gowan?"

Griffith's eyes turned toward Dolly that instant.

"Gowan!" he exclaimed. "You didn't say anything about him. You didn't even say he was there."

"Did n't she?" said Mollie, looking up with innocently wide-open eyes.

"Why, he made love to her all--"

"I wish you would n't talk such rubbish, Mollie," Dolly interrupted her--a trifle sharply because she understood the cloud on her lover's face so well. "Who said Mr. Gowan made love to me? Not I, you may be sure. I told you he talked to me, and that was all."

"You did not tell me that much," said Griffith, dryly.

It would scarcely have been human nature for Dolly not to have fired a little then, in spite of herself. She was constitutionally good-natured, but she was not seraphic, and her lover's rather excusable jealousy was specially hard to bear, when, as upon this occasion, it had no real foundation.

"I did not think it necessary," she said; "and, besides, I forgot; but if you wish to know the particulars," with a stiff little air of dignity, "I can give them you. Mr. Gowan was there, and found the evening stupid, as every one else did. There was no one else to talk to, so he talked to me, and when I came home he put me into the cab. And, the fact is, he is a good-natured Philistine enough. That is all, I believe, unless you would like me to try to record all he said."

"No, thank you," answered Griffith, and instantly began to torture himself with imagining what he really had said, making the very natural mistake of imagining what he would have said himself, and then giving

Ralph Gowan credit for having perpetrated like tender gallantries. He never could divest himself of the idea that every living man found Dolly as entrancing as he found her himself. It could only be one man's bitter-sweet portion to be as desperately and inconsolably in love with her as he was himself, and no other than himself, or a man who might be his exact prototype, could have cherished a love at once so strong and so weak. There had been other men who had loved Dolly Crewe,---adored her for a while, in fact, and imagined themselves wretches because they had been unsuccessful; but they had generally outlived their despair, and their adoration, cooling for want of sustenance, had usually settled down into a comfortable admiring liking for the cause of their misery, but it would never have been so with Griffith. This ordinary, hard-working, ill-paid young man had passionate impulse and hidden power of suffering enough in his restive nature to make a broken hope a broken life to him. His long-cherished love for the shabbily attired, often-snubbed, dauntless young person yclept Dorothea Crewe was the mainspring of his existence. He would have done daring deeds of valor for her sake, if circumstances had called upon him to comfort himself in such tragic manner; had he been a knight of olden time, he would just have been the chivalrous, hotheaded, but affectionate young man to have entered the lists in his love's behalf, and tilted against tremendous odds, and died unvanquished; but living in the nineteenth century, his impetuosity, being necessarily restrained, became concentrated upon one point, and chafed him terribly at times. Without Dolly, he would have been without an object in life; with Dolly, he was willing to face any amount of discouragement and misfortune; and at this stage of his

affection--after years of belief in that far-off blissful future--to lose her would have brought him wreck and ruin.

So when Dolly, in the full consciousness of present freedom from iniquity, withdrew herself from his encircling arm and turned her attention to Tod and Mollie, he was far more wretched than he had any right to be, and stood watching them, and gnawing his slender mustache, gloomy and distrustful.

But this could not last long, of course. They might quarrel, but they always made friends; and when in a short time Mollie, doubtless feeling herself a trifle in the way, left the room with the child, Dolly's impulsive warm-heartedness got the better of her upon this occasion as upon all others.

She came back to her lover's side and laid her hand on his arm.

"Don't let us quarrel about Ralph Gowan, Griffith," she said. "It was my fault; I ought to have told you."

He fairly crushed her in his remorseful embrace almost before she had finished her appeal. His distrust of her was as easily overcome as it was roused; one touch of her hand, one suspicion of a tremor in her voice, always conquered him and reduced him to penitent submission.

"You are an angel," he said, "and I am an unfeeling clod. No other woman

would bear with me as you do. God bless you, Dolly."

She nestled within his arms and took his caresses almost gratefully. Perhaps it would have been wiser to have shown him how deep a sting his want of faith gave her sometimes, but she was always so glad when their misunderstandings were at an end, that she would not have so revenged herself upon him for the world. The cool, audacious self she exhibited in the camps of the Philistines was never shown to Griffith; in her intercourse with him she was only a slightly intensified edition of the child he had fallen in love with years before,--a bright, quick-witted child, with a deep nature and an immense faculty for loving and clinging to people. Dolly at twenty-two was pretty much what she had been at fifteen, when they had quarrelled and made up again, loved each other and romanced over the future brilliancy of prospect which now seemed just as far off as ever.

In five minutes after the clearing away of the temporary cloud, they were in a seventh heaven of bliss, as usual. In some of his wanderings about town, Griffith had met with a modest house, which would have been the very thing for them if they had possessed about double the income of which they were at present in receipt. He often met with houses of this kind; they seemed, in fact, to present themselves to his longing vision every week of his life; and I think it rather to his credit to mention that he never failed to describe them to Dolly, and enlarge upon their merits with much eloquence. Furniture warehouses also were a source of some simple pleasure to them. If they possessed the income (not that

they had the remotest prospect of possessing it), and rented the house, naturally they would require furniture, and it was encouraging to know that the necessary articles might be bought if the money was forthcoming. Consequently a low-priced table or a cheap sofa was a consolation, if not a source of rejoicing, and their happiest hours were spent in counting the cost of parlor carpets never to be purchased, and window curtains of thin air. They even economized sternly in minor matters, and debated the expenditure of an extra shilling as closely as if it had been a matter entailing the deepest anxiety; and on the whole, perhaps, practical persons might have condemned their affectionate, hopeful weakness as childish and nonsensical, but they were happy in the indulgence of it, at all events, and surely they might have been engaged in a less tender and more worldly pastime. There were other people, perhaps, weak and imprudent themselves it may be, who would have seen a touch of simple pathos in this unconsciously shown faith in Fortune and her not too kindly moods.

"Old Flynn ought to raise my salary, you know, Dolly," said Griffith. "I work hard enough for him, confound him!" somewhat irrelevantly, but with laudable and not unamiable vigor. He meant no harm to "Old Flynn;" he would have done a good-natured thing for him at any moment, the mild expletive was simply the result of adopted custom. "There is n't a fellow in the place who does as much as I do. I worked from seven in the morning till midnight every day last week, and I wrote half his editorials for him, and nobody knows he does n't get them up himself. If he would only give me two hundred instead of one, just see how we could

live."

"We could live on a hundred and fifty," put in Dolly, with an air of practical speculation which did her credit, "if we were economical."

"Well, say a hundred and fifty, then," returned Griffith, quite as seriously, "for we should be economical. Say a hundred and fifty. It would be nothing to him,--confound him!--but it would be everything in the world to us. That house in the suburbs was only thirty pounds, taxes and all, and it was just the very thing we should want if we were married."

"How many rooms?" asked Dolly.

"Six, and kitchen and cupboards and all that sort of contrivances. I asked particularly--went to see the landlord to inquire and see what repairing he would do if we wanted the place. There is a garden of a few yards in the front, too, and one or two rose-bushes. I don't know whether they ever bloom, but if they do, you could wear them in your hair. I thought of that the minute I saw them. The first time I saw you, Dolly, you had a rose in your hair, and I remember thinking I had never seen a flower worn in the same way. Other girls do n't wear things as you wear them somehow or other."

Dolly acknowledged the compliment with a laugh and a coaxing, patronizing little squeeze of his arm. .

"You think they don't," she said, "you affectionate old fellow, that is it. Well, and what did the landlord say? Would he beautify?"

"Well, yes, I think he would if the matter was pressed," said Griffith, returning to the subject with a vigor of enjoyment inspiriting to behold. "And, by the way, Dolly, I saw a small sofa at a place in town which was just the right size to fit into a sort of alcove there is in the front parlor."

"Did you inquire the price?" said Dolly.

"Well--no," cheerfully; "but I can, if you would like to know it. You see, I had n't any money, and did n't know when I should have any, and I felt rather discouraged at the time, and I had an idea the price would make me feel worse, so I did not go in. But it was a comfortable, plump little affair, covered with green,--the sort of thing I should like to have in our house, when we have one. It would be so comfortable to throw one's self down on to after a hard day's work, particularly if one had a headache."

"Yes," said Dolly; and then, half unconsciously and quite in spite of herself, the ghost of a sigh escaped her. She could not help wishing things were a trifle more real sometimes, bright and whimsically unworldly as she was.

"What did that mean?" Griffith asked her.

She wakened up, as it were, and looked as happy as ever in an instant, creeping a trifle closer to him in her loving anxiety to blind him to the presence of the little pain in her heart.

"Nothing," she said, briskly. And then--"We don't want much, do we, Griffith?"

"No," said Griffith, a certain grim sense of humor getting the better of him. "And we have n't got it."

She laughed outright at the joke quite enjoyably. Even the grimmest of jocosities wins its measure of respect in Vagabondia, and besides, her laugh removed the impression her sigh might have created. She was herself again at once.

"Never mind," she said. (It was always "never mind.") "Never mind, it will all come right in the end. Humble merit must be rewarded, and if humble merit isn't, we can only console ourselves with the reasonable reflection that there must be something radically wrong with the state of society. Who knows whether you may not 'get into something,' as Phil says, which may be twenty times better than anything Old Flynn can give you!" with characteristic Vagabondian hopefulness.

Just at this juncture Phil himself entered, or, rather, half entered,

for he only put his head--a comely, curled head surmounted by a disreputable velvet cap--half into the room.

"Oh, you are here, are you?" he said. "You are the fellow I want. I am just touching up something I want to show you. Come into the studio for a minute or so, Grif."

"It is that picture Mollie sat for," he explained, as they followed him into the big, barren room, dignified by the name of studio. "I have just finished it."

Mollie was standing before the picture herself when they went in to look at it, but she did not turn round on hearing them. She had Tod in her arms yet, but she seemed to have forgotten his very existence in her preoccupation. And it was scarcely to be wondered at. The picture was only a head,--Mollie's own fresh, drowsy-eyed face standing out in contrast under some folds of dark drapery thrown over the brown hair like a monk's cowl, two or three autumn-tinted oak leaves clinging to a straying tress,--but it was effective and novel enough to be a trifle startling. And Mollie was looking at it with a growing shadow of pleasure in her expression. She was slowly awakening to a sense of its beauty, and she was by no means dissatisfied.

"It is lovely!" Dolly cried out, enthusiastically.

"So it is," said Griffith. "And as like her as art can make it. It's a

success, Phil."

Phil stepped back with a critical air to give it a new inspection.

"Yes, it is a success," he said. "Just give me a chance to get it hung well, and it will draw a crowd next season. You shall have a new dress if it does, Mollie, and you shall choose it yourself."

Mollie roused herself for a moment, and lighted up.

"Shall I?" she said; and then all at once she blushed in a way that made Dolly stare at her in some wonder. It seemed queer to think that Mollie--careless child Mollie--was woman enough to blush over anything.

And then Aimée and 'Toinette came in, and looked on and admired just as openly and heartily as the rest, only Aimée was rather the more reticent of the two, and cast furtive glances at Mollie now and then. But Mollie was in a new mood, and had very little to say; and half an hour after, when her elder sister went into the family sitting-room, she found her curled up in an easy-chair by the fire, looking reflective. Dolly went to the hearth and stood near her.

"What are you thinking about?" she asked.

Mollie stirred uneasily, and half blushed again.

"I don't know," she answered.

"Yes, you do," contradicted Dolly, good-naturedly. "Are you thinking that it is a pleasant sort of a thing to be handsome enough to be made a picture of, Mollie?"

The brown eyes met hers with an innocent sort of deprecating consciousness. "I--I never thought about myself in that way before," admitted Mollie, naively.

"Why," returned Dolly, quite sincerely, "you must have looked in the glass."

"Ye-es," with a slow shake of the head; "but it did n't look the same way in the glass,--it did n't look as nice."

Dolly regarded her with a surprise which was not unmingled with affectionate pity. She was not as unsophisticated as Mollie, and never had been. As the feminine head of the family, she had acquired a certain shrewdness early in life, and had taken a place in the household the rest were hardly equal to. There had been no such awakening as this for her. At fourteen, she had been fully and complacently conscious of the exact status of her charms and abilities, physical and mental. She had neither under-nor over-rated them. She had smiled back at her reflection in her mirror, showing two rows of little milk-white teeth, and being well enough satisfied with being a charming young person with a secure

complexion and enviable self-poise. She understood herself, and attained perfection in the art of understanding others. Her rather sharp experience had not allowed her to look in the glass in guileless ignorance of what she saw there, and perhaps this made her all the fonder of Mollie.

"What kind of a dress are you going to choose if Phil buys you one?" she asked.

"Maroon," answered Mollie. "Oh!" with a little shuddering breath of desperate delight, "how I wish I could have a maroon silk!"

Dolly shook her head doubtfully.

"It wouldn't be serviceable, because you could only have the one, and you could n't wear it on wet days," she said.

"I should n't care about its being serviceable," burst forth innocent Vagabondia, rebelling against the trammels of prudence. "I want something pretty. I do so detest serviceable things. I would stay in the house all the wet days if I might have a maroon silk to wear when it was fine."

"She is beginning to long for purple and fine linen," sighed Dolly, as she ran up to her bedroom afterward. "The saints forefend! It is a bad sign. She will fall in love the next thing. Poor, indiscreet little

damsel!"

But, despite her sage lamentations, there was even at that moment a plan maturing in her mind which was an inconsistent mixture of Vagabondia's goodnature and whim. Mollie's fancy for the maroon silk had struck her as being artistic, and there was not a Crewe among them who had not a weakness for the artistic in effect. Tod himself was imaginatively supposed to share it and exhibit preternatural intelligence upon the subject. In Dolly it amounted to a passion which she found it impossible to resist. By it she was prompted to divers small extravagances at times, and by it she was assisted in the arranging of all her personal adornments. It was impossible to slight the mental picture of Mollie with maroon drapery falling about her feet, with her cheeks tinted with excited color, and with that marvel of delight in her eyes. She could not help thinking about it.

"She would be simply incomparable," she found herself soliloquizing. "Just give her that dress, put a white flower in her hair and set her down in a ballroom, or in the dress circle of a theatre, and she would set the whole place astir. Oh, she must have it."

It was very foolish and extravagant of course; even the people who are weakly tolerant enough to rather lean toward Dorothea Crewe, will admit this. The money that would purchase the maroon garment would have purchased a dozen minor articles far more necessary to the dilapidated household; but while straining at such domestic gnats as these articles

were, she was quite willing and even a trifle anxious to swallow Mollie's gorgeous camel. Such impulsive inconsistency was characteristic, however, and she betook herself to her bedroom with the intention of working out the problem of accommodating supply to demand.

She took out her purse and emptied its contents on to her dressing-table. Two or three crushed bills, a scrap or so of poetry presented by Griffith upon various tender occasions, and a discouragingly small banknote, the sole remains of her last quarter's salary The supply was not equal to the demand, it was evident. But she was by no means overpowered. She was dashed, but not despairing. Of course, she had not expected to launch into such a reckless piece of expenditure all at once, she had only thought she might attain her modest ambition in the due course of time, and she thought so yet. She crammed bills and bank-note back into the purse with serene cheerfulness and shut it with a little snap of the clasp.

"I will begin to save up," she said, "and I will persuade Phil to help me. We can surely do it between us, and then we will take her somewhere and let her have her first experience of modern society. What a sensation she would create in the camps of the Philistines!"

She descended into the kitchen after this, appearing in those lower regions in the full glory of apron and rolled-up sleeves, greatly to the delight of the youthful maid-of-all-work, who, being feeble of intellect and fond of society, regarded the prospect of spending the afternoon

with her as a source of absolute rejoicing. The "Sepoy," as she was familiarly designated by the family, was strongly attached to Dolly, as, indeed, she was to every other member of the household. The truth was, that the usefulness of the Sepoy (whose baptismal name was Belinda) was rather an agreeable fiction than a well-established fact. She had been adopted as a matter of charity, and it was charity rather than any recognized brilliance of parts which caused her to be retained. Phil had picked her up on the streets one night in time gone by, and had brought her home principally because her rags were soaked and she had asserted that she had nowhere to go for shelter, and partly, it must be confessed, because she was a curiosity. Having taken her in, nobody was stern enough to turn her out to face her fate again, and so she stayed. Nobody taught her anything in particular about household economy, because nobody knew anything particular to teach her. It was understood that she was to do what she could, and that what she could not do should be shared among them. She could fetch and carry, execute small commissions, manage the drudgery and answer the door-bell, when she was presentable, which was not often; indeed, this last duty had ceased to devolve upon her, after she had once confronted Lady Augusta with personal adornments so remarkable as to strike that august lady dumb and rigid with indignation upon the threshold, and cause her, when she recovered herself, to stonily, but irately demand an explanation of the gratuitous insult she considered had been offered her. Belinda's place was in the kitchen, after this, and to these regions she usually confined herself, happily vigorous in the discharge of her daily duties. She was very fond of Dolly, and hailed the approach of her days of

freedom with secret demonstrations of joy. She hoarded the simple presents of finery given her by that young person with care, and regarded them in the light of sacred talismans. A subtle something in her dwarfed, feeble, starved-out nature was stirred, it may be, by the sight of the girl's life and brightness; and, apart from this, it would not have been like Dolly Crewe if she had not sympathized, half unconsciously, half because she was constitutionally sympathetic, with even this poor stray. If she had been of a more practical turn of mind, in all probability she would have taken Belinda in hand and attacked the work of training her with laudable persistence; but, as it was, private misgivings as to the strength of her own domestic accomplishments caused her to confine herself to more modest achievements. She could encourage her, at least, and encourage her she did with divers good-natured speeches and a leniency of demeanor which took the admiring Sepoy by storm.

Saturday became a white day in the eyes of Belinda, because, being a holiday, it left Dolly at liberty to descend into the kitchen and apply herself to the study of cookery as a science, with much agreeable bustle and a pleasant display of high spirit and enjoyment of the novelty of her position. She had her own innocent reasons for wishing to become a proficient in the art, and if her efforts were not always crowned with success, the appearance of her handiwork upon the table on the occasion of the Sunday's dinner never disturbed the family equilibrium, principally, perhaps, because the family digestion was unimpaired. They might be jocose, they had been ironical, but they were never severe,

and they always addressed themselves to the occasionally arduous task of disposing of the viands with an indifference to consequences which nothing could disturb.

"One cannot possibly be married without knowing something of cookery," Dolly had announced oracularly; "and one cannot gain a knowledge of it without practising, so I am going to practise. None of you are dyspeptic, thank goodness, so you can stand it. The only risk we run is that Tod might get hold of a piece of the pastry and be cut off in the bloom of his youth; but we must keep a strict watch upon him."

And she purchased a cookery book and commenced operations, and held to her resolve with Spartan firmness, encouraged by private but enthusiastic bursts of commendation from Griffith, who, finding her out, read the tender meaning of the fanciful seeming whim, and was so touched thereby that the mere sight of her in her nonsensical little affectation of working paraphernalia raised him to a seventh heaven of bliss.

When she made her entrance into the kitchen on this occasion, and began to bustle about in search for her apron, Belinda, who was on her knees polishing the grate, amidst a formidable display of rags and brushes, paused to take breath and look at her admiringly.

"Are yer goin' to make yer pies 'n things, Miss Dolly?" she asked. "Which, if ye are, yer apern 's in the left 'and dror."

"So it is," said Dolly. "Thank you. Now where is the cookery book?"

"Left 'and dror agin," announced Belinda, with a faint grin. "I allus puts it there."

Whereupon Dolly, making industrious search for it, found it, and applied herself to a deep study of it, resting her white elbows on the dresser, and looking as if she had been suddenly called upon to master its contents or be led to the stake. She could not help being intense and in earnest even over this every-day problem of pies and puddings.

"Fricassee?" she murmured. "Fricassee was a failure, so was mock-turtle soup; it looked discouraging, and the fat would swim about in a way that attracted attention. Croquettes were not so bad, though they were a little stringy; but beef à la mode was positively unpleasant. Jugged hare did very well, but oyster pâtés were dubious. Veal pie Griffith liked."

"There's somebody a-ringin' at the door-bell," said Belinda, breaking in upon her. "He's rung twict, which I can go, mum, if I ain't got no smuts."

Dolly looked up from her book.

"Some one is going now, I think," she said. "I hope it is n't a visitor," listening attentively.

But it was a visitor, unfortunately. In a few minutes Mollie came in, studiously perusing a card she held in her hand.

"Ralph," she proclaimed, coming forward slowly. "Ralph Gowan. It's Lady Augusta's gentleman, Dolly, and he wants to see you."

Dolly took the card and looked at it, giving her shoulders a tiny shrug of surprise.

"He has not waited long," she said; "and it is rather inconvenient, but it can't be helped. I suppose I shall have to run up-stairs and present him to Phil."

She untied her apron, drew down her sleeves, settled the bit of ribbon at her throat, and in three minutes opened the parlor door and greeted her visitor, looking quite as much in the right place as she had done the night before in the white merino.

"I am very glad to see you," she said, shaking hands with him, "and I am sure Phil will be, too. He is always glad to see people, and just now you will be doubly welcome, because he has a new picture to talk about. Will you come into the studio, or shall I bring him here? I think it had better be the studio at once, because you will be sure to drift there in the end,--visitors always do."

"The studio let it be, if you please," answered Gowan, wondering, just as he had done the night before, at the indescribable something in her manner which was so novel because it was so utterly free from any suggestion of affectation. It would have been a difficult matter to tell her that he had not come for any other reason than to see herself again, and yet this really was the case.

But his rather fanciful taste found Phil a novelty also when she led him into the studio, and presented him to that young man, who was lying upon a couch with a cigar in his mouth.

Phil had something of the same cool friendliness of deportment, and, being used to the unexpected advent of guests at all hours, was quite ready to welcome him. He had the same faculty for making noticeable speeches, too, and was amiable, though languid and débonnaire, and by no means prone to ceremony. In ten minutes after he had entered the room Ralph Gowan understood, as by magic, that, little as the world was to these people, they had, in their Bohemian fashion, learned through sheer tact to comprehend and tolerate its weaknesses. He examined the pictures on the walls and in the folios, and now and then found himself roused into something more than ordinary admiration. But he was disappointed in one thing. He failed in accomplishing the object of his visit.

After she had seen that Phil and the paintings occupied his attention to some extent, Dolly left them.

"I was beginning to think about pies and puddings when you came," she said, "and I must go back to them. Saturday is the only day Lady Augusta leaves me, in which to improve in branches of domestic usefulness," with an iniquitous imitation of her ladyship's manner.

After which she went down to the kitchen again and plunged into culinary detail with renewed vigor, thinking of the six-roomed house in the suburbs, and the green sofa which was to fit into the alcove in the front parlor, growing quite happy over the mental picture, in blissful unconsciousness of the fact that a train had been that day laid, and that a spark would be applied that very night through the medium of a simple observation made by Phil to her lover.

"Gowan was here this morning, Grif, and Dolly brought him into the studio. He's not a bad sort of fellow for a Philistine, and he seems to know something about pictures. I should n't be surprised if he came again."