

THE DIVINE FIRE

for he had been ill. He was entitled also to the ministrations of his cousin Lucia. Lucia spent her time in planning and doing kind things, and, from the sudden luminous sweetness of her face, he gathered that something of the sort was in preparation now.

It was. "Horace," she said, "would you like to ask him here?"

"No, Lucy, I wouldn't. I don't think it would do."

"But why not—if he's your friend?"

"If he's my friend."

"You *said* he was your friend. You did, you know." (Another awkward consequence of a cousin's adoration; she is apt to remember and attach importance to your most trivial utterances.)

"Pardon me, I said he was my friend."

"Where did you find him?"

"I found him in the City—in a shop."

She smiled at the rhythmic utterance. The tragedy of the revelation was such that it could be expressed only in blank verse.

"The shop doesn't matter."

"No, but he does. You couldn't stand him, Lucia. You see, for one thing, he sometimes drops his aitches."

"Well, if he does,—he'll be out all day, and there's the open country to drop them in. I really don't mind, if you'd like to ask him. Do you think he'd like to be asked?"

"There's no possible doubt about that."

"Then ask him. Ask him now. You can't do it when father's not at home."

Jewdwine repressed a smile. Even now, from the windows of the east wing, there burst, suddenly, the sound of fiddling, a masterly fiddling inspired by infernal passion, controlled by divine technique. It was his uncle, Sir Frederick, and he wished him at the devil. If all accounts were true, Sir Frederick, when not actually fiddling, was going there with a celerity that left nothing to be desired; he was, if you came to think of it, a rather amazing sort of chaperone.

And yet, but for that fleeting and tumultuous presence, Horace himself would not be staying at Cor- House. Really, he reflected, Lucia ought to get some lady to live