

The emotionless quiet of her tone suggested a noble resignation to the general obstructiveness of life; a resignation that, to the man's strenuous spirit, seemed alike pathetic and premature.

"Why, you're only on the threshold of things," he rebuked her gently. "What are the talents you've dabbled in? Do tell me."

"Oh, I've written a little and acted a little. I wanted to take that up in earnest. Heavens! Wasn't there a row! So I fell back on the writing. Verses, chiefly."

"Have they appeared, any of them?"

"A few. Here and there. I was vain enough once to have a booklet printed out of my allowance. Then there was a worse row than ever."

"But why?"

"Well—they weren't exactly of the pretty-pretty order. And my father's a clergyman: that kind of clergyman."

"I see."

He saw her, in fact, a creature of fine sensibilities, striving for self-expression, thwarted, discouraged, and misprized by those who should have been her natural helpers, and his heart went out to her the more.

"May I——" he hesitated. "Miss Alison, won't you let me see some of your verses?"

"No. Not for the world." She flushed suddenly and her voice had a tremor in it. It was the first time he had seen her really perturbed.

"I'm sorry," he began: but she was mistress of herself in a moment and turned the matter off with a laugh.

"We're both making mountains out of molehills! The verses were wretched poor stuff, most of them. Father was quite right to condemn them; but he went the wrong way about it. He usually does. They were just the outcome of—an influence: a