

Conversationally he knew how to make himself charming, and with a fresh rarity of charm, that the whole Ross household were not slow to discover and appreciate. Eloise should perhaps be excepted from the list of his more earnest admirers; for where it was a question of pleasing young bachelors she belonged to that class of feminine entertainers who would have no hesitation in scorning even the holy laws of hospitality themselves, provided she were not at all times rewarded with a good lion's share of notice.

'I don't dislike him—oh, not a bit!' she told Reginald, one evening, while he and she were standing together on the starlit piazza, having left a family-group within-doors. 'But I feel (don't you know?) as if I were the merest cypher when he is present, and of course that bothers my vanity, or something of the sort, can't you understand!'

'I think I can understand,' Reginald said, with a smile that the young lady did not see.

But she detected a satiric ring in his tones and fired up quite vigorously. 'Oh, you *can*, can you? Well, no doubt I'm not fit to breathe in the same room with that prodigious wise-acre. He exhausts all the air. What made you follow me out?' (with a sudden lowering of the voice and a quick lifting of the eyes to his face, succeeded as rapidly by a downward look.) 'I wish you hadn't.'

It is possible that Reginald already wished very much the same thing. Since the first coming of Eloise Forbes into his mother's household, there had been a new incident force directed upon his life, whose effects he had himself been watching with a sort of disappointed wonder, at certain separate intervals during the past five years. The man somehow revolted from what his temperament seemed imperatively to ordain. While he was in Eloise's company his mind seemed to close every door of intellec-

tual congeniality except that of a little antechamber, as it might be said, where trifling fancy and light pleasantry, and often random nonsense, gained free admission. That his feeling for Eloise should be dignified with the name of a passion, he sometimes made haughtiest mental denial; that it *was* a passion, dominating him with a tyranny as irresistible as distasteful, he now and then dejectedly confessed.

He had never come nearer to a complete victory over these self-despised impulses than just before Eloise's return. Had she remained away a few days longer, and had Beatrice given favourable answer to his suit, the change, he could not help believing, might have assumed a most permanent and resistant stability. Closer personal nearness to Constance, and those respectful caresses and pure fondlings that their engagement must sweetly have sanctioned, might have lighted with the real sacred flame an altar whose sculptured beauty alone needed this one illuminative grace. But now the altar seemed not only hopeless of the kindling touch; it had been overthrown as well. And who had been the iconoclast? A flippant-minded girl, a piece of pink-and-white wilfulness, too well-dowered with mischief to be called innocent, and too shallow to make the charge of wickedness ever a just one! In proportion to the strength of Reginald's late resolution, now followed the strength of its reaction. 'I can do nothing,' he told himself, as these new days lapsed along. 'If I were a lesser man or a greater man, it might be well with me. As I now exist, there is but one course left: To go away. I have gone many times before. A year ago it was Europe; it shall be Europe again, and this time for an indefinite space.'

But he did not go away. Willard's visit as yet showed no signs of termination, and he indeed seemed holding Reginald at his host's word as regarded making a most extended stay. Meanwhile each new day only aug-