

THE DIVINE FIRE

"Restrained? Do you think so?"

"Certainly," he said, his thought gaining precision in opposition to her vagueness, "his *Helen* is pure *Vere de Vere*. You might read me some of it."

She read, and in the golden afternoon her voice built up the cold, polished marble of the verse. She had not been able to tell him what she thought of Rickman; but her voice, in its profound vibrations, made apparent that which she, and she only, had discerned in him, the troubled pulse of youth, the passion of the imprisoned and tumultuous soul, the soul which Horace had assured her inhabited the body of an aitchless shopman. Lucia might not have the intuition of genius, but she had the genius of intuition; she had seen what the great Oxford critic had not been able to see.

The sound of the fiddling ceased as suddenly as it had begun; and over the grey house and the green garden was the peace of heaven and of the enfolding hills.

Jewdwine breathed a sigh of contentment at the close of the great chorus in the second Act. After all, Rickman was the best antidote to Rickman.

But Lucia was looking ardent again, as if she were about to speak.

"Don't, Lucy," he murmured.

"Don't what?"

"Don't talk any more about him now. It's too hot. Wait till the cool of the evening."

"I thought you wanted me to play to you then."

Jewdwine looked at her; he noted the purity of her face, the beautiful pose of her body, stretched in the deck-chair, her fine white hands and arms that hung there, slender, inert and frail. He admired these things so much that he failed to see that they expressed not only beauty but a certain delicacy of physique, and that her languor which appealed to him was the languor of fatigue.

"You might play to me, now," he said.

She looked at him again, a lingering, meditative look, a look in which, if adoration was quiescent, there was no criticism and no reproach, only a melancholy wonder. And he, too, wondered; wondered what she was thinking of.