

THE LIFTED VEIL

make any difference, for the reason that the communication made to me then was, so to speak, under the seal of the confessional."

"But when she herself gives you permission—"

"If the permission were better guaranteed than it is I still couldn't avail myself of it. Whatever there is to be made known must lie between you and her."

"I've asked her to marry me," the stranger said, abruptly.

"I inferred that it was something like that."

"I asked her once before—years ago—but she refused me."

The incoherent story Bainbridge had heard from her own lips began to come back to him.

"After she refused me I married some one else; but my wife died when her baby was born the next year. The child died, too." For the space of a minute the somewhat expressionless, handsome face grew grave, but the cloud passed and the eyes glinted when he began to speak again. "Now that she's free—and I'm free—I've come back to her—with the result that she's given me this letter to you."

"And no other answer?"

"No other answer as yet."

"Then when you see her again will you tell her that I'm sorry, but that I've nothing to say?"

"You *have* something to say, if you'll only say it."

There was a tension in the minute which made it possible for the glances of the two to meet in a searching regard, without self-consciousness on either side. What Bainbridge saw was a man accustomed to be obeyed; startled, if not angered, by opposition. He answered carefully, therefore.