

THE LIFTED VEIL

guests, moving hither and yon through the crowded tiny parlor, in which it was difficult to stir or to breathe, she seemed unaware that he was in the room. Miss Higgins herself, a tall, gaunt woman, suggesting an ostrich metamorphosed into human form, was so arch as to mention her in the act of shaking hands with him.

"Oh, Mr. Bainbridge! So flattered, I'm sure! So good of you to have come! And Mary will be so pleased. She's helped me so much that it's really her party more than mine. So sweet, she is. You can see her now, talking to old Mrs. Colfax—just there—with the olive-green hat. . . . Oh, how do you do, Mrs. Jarrott? So flattered, I'm sure. So good of you to have come! Mrs. Jarrott, do you know Mr. Bainbridge? . . . Oh, how do you do, Mrs. Palliser? So flattered, I'm sure. So good of you to have come. Mrs. Palliser, do you know Mr. Bainbridge? . . . Oh, how do you do, Mrs. Mortimer. . . ."

With the mechanical repetition of a doll wound up to say so many words and make so many smiling grimaces Miss Higgins went on with the task of welcoming her guests, while Bainbridge found himself slowly swirled away, like a plum in a boiling pudding, in company with the woman he knew best in New York.

"So you're here!" Mrs. Palliser gasped. "Well, for pity's sake! More of Mary's doings, I suppose. If she hadn't dragged me in by the hair of my head Miss Higgins wouldn't have seen so much as my shadow. The people look like job lots at an auction," she whispered. "Do come over into that corner with the little red sofa behind the palms, and let us sit down."

Beneath the high yapping of voices, which, if you listened to it consciously, became persistent, pitiless, and infernal, Mrs. Palliser could make herself heard by speak-