

THE LIFTED VEIL

"If I marry her—and she marries me—I think I can say it will not be for any such reason as that."

Bainbridge leaned back in his chair, his head against the cushion, gazing up at this splendid sample of physical manhood. That so lovable a giant should love any woman in vain seemed scarcely credible. Vaguely it came back to him that his veiled visitor had confessed that this man had impressed her, that if he had only insisted. . . . But aloud he said, quietly, "Then unless you change your mental basis I think it very likely that you won't marry her—and that if you do marry her you will both come to grief."

To the clergyman's amazement the stranger pressed the back of his gloved left hand against his eyes, as if to exclude some agonizing vision, while the lips were sharply contracted as in the effort not to cry out in pain. It was all over within the space of ten seconds, but the glimpse of a restrained man's suffering was one which a looker-on would not soon forget. As Bainbridge got himself to his feet he would have given a hand to be able to say that there was no need for this emotion; but before he could speak the banker had control of himself again. That is, he was able to turn fiercely on his host, as though accusing him of some wanton form of crime, and say:

"If it wasn't true you'd tell me."

Bainbridge answered as coldly and calmly as his own sympathy would allow. "I should tell you nothing whatever. From anything I've said you've no right to draw an inference. The confidence made to me is as sacred in the case of innocence as in that of guilt." His face, in which there was always a glow, became radiant as he added: "But I'll go as far as to say this, that a man's love can do anything for a woman, if it's of the right sort—if it's big