

THE THREAD OF FLAME

She turned round from the plaque without coming nearer to me.

"I just want to say that the things she told me, the things she pretended to betray, were things I knew more or less already. I'd been coming to the same conclusions for myself, only I hadn't quite reached them. . . . And then you came back, and everything was so strange . . . after I'd been in mourning for you . . . and given those prints as a memorial in your name! I wish—" I detected something like a sob—"I wish you could make some allowances for me, Billy."

The minute was a hard one for me, but I stood my ground:

"I make all allowances, Vio; I've no hard feelings whatever."

She advanced toward me by a pace.

"Then will you do this for me? If I can find a way to—to give you your liberty will you—will you marry Mildred Averill, and—and be happy?"

Though my heart was going wild I know my eyes must have been cold as I said:

"I can't promise you that, Vio, for a double reason. First, I'm not in love with her; and then she's not in love with me."

"Oh, but I thought she was. Everybody says so."

"Who's everybody?"

"Well—well, Alice Mountney."

"I can see how Alice Mountney might make that mistake; but it is a mistake, Vio, and please