

THE THREAD OF FLAME

"Oh, nothing of much importance, except for showing me that—that—she was the one."

"What one?"

"The one you spoke of . . . the . . . the last evening. That's . . . that's what made me come to New York, Billy, to see if I could do anything . . . to . . . to help out."

"To help out how?"

"Oh, Billy, don't make yourself dull. You know that nothing can be done unless I, or you, or one of us, should take the first step."

I asked, with a casual intonation:

"How's Stroud?"

Fire flashed right through the thickness of the veil, but she answered in the tone I had taken:

"I don't know. I haven't seen him since—since that girl—"

"She's married."

"Oh, is she? I hope it's to some one—"

"It's to some one as true-blue as she."

"She is true-blue, Billy. I see that now. She—she must be to have wanted to do what she did for . . . a woman like me, who—"

She took a step or two toward one of the cases, where she pretended to examine the luster of a great Moorish plaque.

"She's an erratic little thing," I said, finding it easier to talk of a third person rather than of ourselves, "all pluck, and high spirit, and good heart, harum-scarum, and yet a great deal wiser than you'd think."