

CHAPTER XXXVIII

WHEN Rush and Mrs. Balfame reached the jail sitting-room she mechanically removed her heavy hat and veil and sank into a chair.

"Is it true that Anna is dead?"

Her voice was as toneless as the district attorney's had been.

"Yes — and we can only be grateful."

"And she did that for me — for *me*. How strange! How very, very strange!"

"It has been done before in the history of the world." Rush too was very tired.

"But a woman —"

"I fancy you were the romance of poor Anna's life. She indulged in no dreams of the usual sort, with her plain face and squat figure. No doubt she had centred all her romantic yearnings and all her maternal cravings on you. She thought you perfect — unequalled —"

"I! I!"

She sprang to her feet and thrust her head forward, her eyes coming to life with resentment and wonder.

"What — *what* am I that two people — two people like you and Anna Steuer — should be ready to die for me? Why, I have never thought of a mortal being but myself! Anna must have been born with dotage in her brain. She knew me all my life. She saw me organise charities, give to the poor what I could afford,