

THE THREAD OF FLAME

an attempt to reproduce in abundance what the Oriental traders brought over only in small quantities. The specimens of delft being on shelves but little above the floor, I was crouched in a half-sitting position, with the lads hanging over my shoulders. Not till I had finished this part of my exposition did I rise, to find on turning that a lady was looking on.

Recognition on my part lagged behind amazement. Tall, slender, distinguished, dressed in black, and somewhat thickly veiled for a day in June, it was the sort of apparition to make a man doubt the accuracy of his senses. Before my lips could frame a word she held out something toward me, saying simply:

"Billy, I came to bring you this."

The boys fell back, knowing by instinct that the moment was one of dramatic significance to me and looking on overawed.

What I had in my hand I saw at once to be nothing but a copy of one of the New York papers that appear in the afternoon. That it contained some announcement affecting me went without saying, and a half-dozen terrors crowded into my mind at once. Without my knowing it she might have got a divorce; she might have got a divorce and remarried; she might have lost her money; I might have lost mine; some one near to us might be dead.

I held the paper stupidly, staring at her through the veil, and opening the journal without seeing it. When my eyes fell on the first page it was