

THE THREAD OF FLAME

Well, that's the way I feel now . . . about . . . about—"

"About me?"

"Of course. I never should have thought it at all, only that Wolf and Dick Stroud, and even the military authorities— But at heart I *didn't* believe them—"

"Do you mean that—?"

She nodded without waiting for me to finish the question.

"But I want it very plainly, Vio."

"I'll tell you as plainly as you like, Billy, but—but not now. I'm too worried."

"But what about? Is it—?"

"Oh, everything!" she burst out, desperately. "Money for one thing. Didn't you see how shabby the house was, and run down?" The sobs began to come freely now, and without restraint. "And—and Lulu Averill has a little boy, a perfect darling, and our little Bobby—"

"I'll go back with you to the hotel," I said, quietly, "only, don't—don't cry here, with people coming in and out."

She dried her eyes, drew down her veil, and took her sunshade from a corner. Picking up the paper she had brought, I folded it and slipped it into my pocket. I began to wonder if it might not prove a souvenir.

On the way to the main exit we passed through a corridor lined with cases of old silver.

"Do you think your boys would like a day with those things?" she asked, with the slight