

THE THREAD OF FLAME

"I thought not. That's what makes me wonder—"

She hesitated so long that I was compelled to say:

"Wonder, what?"

"Perhaps I had better not go on."

"Please do."

"I only will on condition that you authorize me."

"I authorize you to say anything you choose."

"Well, then, since you *don't* trust him, I wonder how you could expose any woman to—to his influence."

"Oh, but I don't. The—the events all took place while I was away, and I've no control over them."

"No control, perhaps; but there are other things in life besides control."

"I know that; but what things, for instance, do you mean?"

"Oh, lots of things." She looked about the room as if not attaching much importance to her words. "Love, for one."

"But in this case love has to be counted out."

"Can you ever count out love? I thought that was the one permanent factor in existence, though the skies were to fall."

"It may be a permanent factor, and yet have to remain in abeyance."

She laughed.

"Nonsense! Who ever heard of love remaining in abeyance? You might as well talk of fire