

THE STRAW

would have ducked her head under a pillow and screamed for help."

Through his banter vibrated an undertone of worship; dimly she felt it, knowing that in his soul this man was not laughing at her, but not faintly guessing what thoughts were his. The wind whistled through the chinks in the clay walls and made her shiver; the horses were stirring in thin-skinned restlessness, rubbing their heads as if in excuse against the man. Their eyes shone in the semi-darkness, luminous and kind.

Judy liked Leicestershire, liked the quick intimacy that sprang up among kindred spirits, the friendships that followed the accidents of a day without the suspicious paving of an acquaintance; all foolishness when you saw at a glance what a man was made of, when his risks were yours and you lent each other unquestioning a helping hand; when you could read him for yourself in a minute. She liked the men. They were so real, so regardless of the world's opinions and, like all sportsmen, the hardest veterans, always young.

If there seemed to her sometimes something wrong about the women, a rivalry, a hardness, the fancy passed over her head. After all, saints and sinners, they were good to her. . . .