

CHAPTER II

THE invariable east wind was king at the Belvoir meet at Scalford. The trees shivered and the grass had a wizened look.

Horses could not keep still with that sporting nip in the air. They sidled and backed restlessly all up the village street, making the groom's affectionate loitering at the public-houses almost impossible by their cantrips. Miles away the road rang ominously hard with a noise of trotting, varied by the wailing tune of motors. All were late and all were hurrying, ignorant that hounds had only just turned up, slipping in by the stack-yard. The huntsman, ruddy and impervious to the blast, was exchanging tales with the faithful who had not tarried and were warming themselves with gossip. In these bleak five minutes the good stories get a start that carries them over three counties without a check.

A minute ago the field had been almost empty, though a wall sheltered the numbed