

THE STRAW

"Laugh at me," he cried hotly. "I'd sooner——" and controlled himself. "Then you have guessed that the lot of us were taking a rise out of Burkinshaw? You heard them at the meet? You are not astonished——"

"That you look so respectable," she said gravely.

Conscious of his damaged condition he bowed as gravely, but his eyes twinkled.

"Heaven be thanked!" he said. "I was obliged to bolt, letting you think the worst. Tell me who you are. I have to restore your charitable benefaction."

"I am Judy Stewart," she said; "the Burkinshaws are my cousins."

"You're not——" he exclaimed, stopping himself in time.

When was it that Maria, raiding his house out of pure curiosity and finding it upside down, finding also three cattle-dealers drinking whisky in the dining-room, and mistaking them for bailiffs in possession, had generously offered to marry him to her husband's cousin? A good girl, she had said, but harmless, with a gun factory in the background. It was not so long ago that he could not recall his own lordly scorn.

"Yes," she said; "I am that wardering