

THE STRAW

distinct as it was. The hovel was low and dark and they could not ride into it without dismounting, but at least it was a refuge from the blinding storm. With his head bent Gay dashed out into the turmoil, pulling an armful of hay from the stack to stuff into the rude manger, for his fellow-fugitive to sit on, and then stood with the horses, outwardly quiet, staring into the whirl.

"There's blood on your cheek," she said.

Was her voice for him always to hold compassion? He turned his head, still wondering at himself and how it took hold of him.

"It's nothing," he said. "Like a good many others I took a toss. . . . I should like to ask you . . . do you know who I am?"

"I knew when you spoke" she said.

"And you are not nervous?" said Gay. "Taking shelter like this in a robber's cave?"

"Not now," she said. "I—I am beginning to understand."

"Are you thinking of bribing the criminal to emigrate and lead an honest life in a foreign land?" said Gay. The murder was out, and he felt extraordinarily lighthearted.

"Ah, don't laugh at me," she said. He thought her voice shook a little as if at a recollection.