

THE STRAW

"All I know is," said another, "he's the most extraordinary chap with horses. Understands them. Chucks away his cigarette at a stable door."

"He is a kind of confidential adviser to all the men he knows," said the first man who had spoken. "Sort of mild-mannered, quiet man to whom you can trust your secrets. And two years ago he was one of the most reckless customers under the sun. They tell stories of Tokenhouse——!"

He dropped the subject for want of words, and looking over Judy's head at the window, gave an astonished whistle, and ceased fanning the fire industriously under the impression that he was shielding her.

"Here is Bill Lauder himself," he said. "He looks as if he has had a hard day. This isn't his way home surely?"

Maria glanced suddenly at her husband.

"If any of you are going to give me your opinion about the bay, come along," said Burkinshaw, like a lamb. "I'm inclined to have him fired. It's near the end of the season."

Blindly grasping the signal that they were not wanted, he shepherded them out, sweeping the latest arrival with them, his mistake. The cheerful masculine voices became distant,