

THE STRAW

"Your horse, I think," he said, as simply as he could, face to face with her in the daylight.

"How kind of you," she said. "I am lost."

Gay looked from the darkening heavens to the wind-swept country that was a desert round them, blessing the hill that shut away the survivors of the run, making for Waltham Thorns.

"Burkinshaw had no business to put you on this clumsy brute," he said. "I'll talk to Maria. He isn't a lady's horse."

She started at his voice, looking at him earnestly, slightly catching her breath as she spoke to him again. He was stooping to put her up in the saddle.

"Oh, it wasn't the horse's fault," she said. "I rode him badly. I was frightened."

"Frightened?" said Gay. The word jumped out of him. "Frightened? *You?*"

His exclamation betrayed him to her; he was sure of it, wondering what would happen. For one moment both were silent, and then a blizzard was upon them and the air was thick with snow that obliterated trees and sky and the hill and the world itself.

"There's a haystack this way," said Gay, half smothered; "and a hovel."

They scampered frantically towards it, in-