

THE STRAW

cautiously put down in the draught, had been extinguished, but he had his matches. He felt for it, striking flashes.

How villainously the planks creaked ! But for that all was utter stillness. It was half a pity there had been no skirmish, no alarm. . . . His step was careless.

And then he heard a quick breath above him and saw one watcher. The light flaring in his fingers revealed her to him, pale and brave, clasping the balustrade.

The sight of her, startling as it was, fixed him, gazing. She looked so like a ghost and still so real, leaning out of the dark, making it living to him, clad in dim, blue silken stuff ; a young face with a shut but trembling mouth. Gay was bewitched.

Then he realised his own sinister appearance with Rafferty's ridiculous strip of black satin hiding half his face, and that one poor candle casting its weird shadows, painting him a ruffian. In his hurry to reassure this apparition, he forgot utterly to disguise his voice, gentlemanly, apologetic.

" I won't hurt you," he said hastily. " I'm frightfully sorry——"

He saw the desperate bravery in her eyes changing to bewilderment, heard her gasp