

## THE STRAW

window I heard him curse her. I told you the shutter was not secure; the bar had slipped and the sides had fallen apart. Lauder had careless servants. Standing close I could see into the room. He struck her, Sophia, kicked her falling body like the vilest brute on the earth—— The window-catch gave way at a push——”

He stopped himself. Into his voice that had vibrated to unaccustomed emotion came a sardonic calm.

“It doesn’t matter in the least what I say to you,” he observed. “I am in a position to shout it out on the housetops. There was more method in my madness, Sophia, than anybody supposed. Since I’ve been solemnly tried and acquitted according to law, no man can touch me. There’s nothing perilous in repeating what I know as openly as I choose—no occasion to let rumour poison the character of a friend. It gives one an odd sense of power, Sophia——”

“Why?” she said, holding her breath.

“Because,” said Tokenhouse, “I did it.”