

THE STRAW

Lord Robert, the instigator, had got rid of his chauffeur, sending him with a cargo of ladies'-maids to the servants' ball at Burrough, and had himself engineered his worst car with all imaginable precaution into the sleeping street. He was a bad driver but full of hope. They had had one or two lucky misses at the turnings, but his erratic steering had been triumphant, and they were at last running silently with hidden lamps along the pale strip of the Leicester Road.

"That villain Burkinshaw," said Lord Robert feelingly, letting her hum. "I'll teach him to snort at a poor devil who's had all his family tin-pots stolen. How could I keep out burglars from my ancestral cave in the horrible wilds of Wales?—boasting that only a fool is robbed——! I'd like to see his face to-morrow."

"Still," said Rafferty, "don't spill your confederates in the hedge."

Lord Robert slowed down a bit, peering into the darkness and dipping suddenly off the turnpike into the winding obscurity of a rutted lane. A mile or two passed miraculously without misfortune, and then he ran under the lee of a murmuring spinney and shut off the engine.