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PERSONS OF THE PLAY

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**MICHAEL STRANGWAY BEATRICE STRANGWAY
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BURLACOMBE BURLACOMBE TRUSTAFORD
JARLAND CLYST FREMAN GODLEIGH SOL
POTTER MORSE, AND OTHERS IVY
BURLACOMBE CONNIE TRUSTAFORD GLADYS
FREMAN MERCY JARLAND TIBBY JARLAND
BOBBIE JARLAND**

SCENE: A VILLAGE OF THE WEST

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The Action passes on Ascension Day.

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ACT III. Evening

**SCENE I. STRANGWAY'S rooms. SCENE
II. BURLACOMBE'S barn.**

A BIT O' LOVE

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ACT I

It is Ascension Day in a village of the West. In the low panelled hall-sittingroom of the BURLACOMBE'S farmhouse on the village green, MICHAEL STRANGWAY, a clerical collar round his throat and a dark Norfolk jacket on his back, is playing the flute before a very large framed photograph of a woman, which is the only picture on the walls. His age is about thirty-five his figure thin and very upright and his clean-shorn face thin, upright, narrow, with long and rather pointed ears; his dark hair is brushed in a coxcomb off his forehead. A faint smile hovers about

his lips that Nature has made rather full and he has made thin, as though keeping a hard secret; but his bright grey eyes, dark round the rim, look out and upwards almost as if he were being crucified. There is something about the whole of him that makes him seem not quite present. A gentle creature, burnt within.

A low broad window above a window-seat forms the background to his figure; and through its lattice panes are seen the outer gate and yew-trees of a churchyard and the porch of a church, bathed in May sunlight. The front door at right angles to the window-seat, leads to the village green, and a door on the left into the house.

It is the third movement of Veracini's violin sonata that STRANGWAY plays. His back is turned to the door into the house, and he does not hear when it is opened, and IVY BURLACOMBE, the farmer's daughter, a girl of fourteen, small and quiet as a mouse, comes in, a prayer-book in one hand, and in the other a glass of water, with wild orchis and a bit of deep pink hawthorn. She sits down on the window-seat, and having opened her book, sniffs at the flowers. Coming to the end of the movement STRANGWAY stops, and looking up at the face on the wall, heaves a long sigh.

IVY. [From the seat] I picked these for you, Mr. Strangway.

STRANGWAY. [Turning with a start] Ah! Ivy. Thank you. [He puts his flute down on a chair against the far wall] Where are the others?

As he speaks, GLADYS FREMAN, a dark gipsyish girl, and CONNIE TRUSTAFORD, a fair, stolid, blue-eyed Saxon, both about sixteen, come in through the front door, behind which they have evidently been listening. They too have prayer-books in their hands. They sidle past Ivy, and also sit down under the window.

GLADYS. Mercy's comin', Mr. Strangway.

STRANGWAY. Good morning, Gladys; good morning, Connie.

He turns to a book-case on a table against the far wall, and taking out a book, finds his place in it. While he stands thus with his back to the girls, MERCY JARLAND comes in from the green. She also is about sixteen, with fair hair and china-blue eyes. She glides in quickly, hiding something behind her, and sits down on the seat next the door. And at once there is a whispering.

STRANGWAY. [Turning to them] Good morning, Mercy.

MERCY. Good morning, Mr. Strangway.

STRANGWAY. Now, yesterday I was telling you what our Lord's coming meant to the world. I want you to understand that before He came there wasn't really love, as we know it. I don't mean to say that there weren't many good people; but there wasn't love for the sake of loving. D'you think you understand what I mean?

MERCY fidgets. GLADYS'S eyes are following a fly.

IVY. Yes, Mr. Strangway.

STRANGWAY. It isn't enough to love people because they're good to you, or because in some way or other you're

going to get something by it. We have to love because we love loving. That's the great thing —without that we're nothing but Pagans.

GLADYS. Please, what is Pagans?

STRANGWAY. That's what the first Christians called the people who lived in the villages and were not yet Christians, Gladys.

MERCY. We live in a village, but we're Christians.

STRANGWAY. [With a smile] Yes, Mercy; and what is a Christian?

MERCY kicks afoot, sideways against her neighbour, frowns over her china-blare eyes, is silent; then, as his question passes on, makes a quick little face, wriggles, and looks behind her.

STRANGWAY. Ivy?

IVY. 'Tis a man—whu—whu—

STRANGWAY. Yes?—Connie?

CONNIE. [Who speaks rather thickly, as if she had a permanent slight cold] Please, Mr. Strangway, 'tis a man what goes to church.

GLADYS. He 'as to be baptised—and confirmed; and—and—buried.

IVY. 'Tis a man whu—whu's gude and—

GLADYS. He don't drink, an' he don't beat his horses, an' he don't hit back.

MERCY. [Whispering] 'Tisn't your turn. [To STRANGWAY] 'Tis a man like us.

IVY. I know what Mrs. Strangway said it was, 'cause I asked her once, before she went away.

STRANGWAY. [Startled] Yes?

IVY. She said it was a man who forgave everything.

STRANGWAY. Ah!

The note of a cuckoo comes travelling. The girls are gazing at STRANGWAY, who seems to have gone off into a dream. They begin to fidget and whisper.

CONNIE. Please, Mr. Strangway, father says if you hit a man and he don't hit you back, he's no good at all.

MERCY. When Tommy Morse wouldn't fight, we pinched him—he did squeal! [She giggles] Made me laugh!

STRANGWAY. Did I ever tell you about St. Francis of Assisi?

IVY. [Clasping her hands] No.

STRANGWAY. Well, he was the best Christian, I think, that ever lived—simply full of love and joy.

IVY. I expect he's dead.

STRANGWAY. About seven hundred years, Ivy.

IVY. [Softly] Oh!

STRANGWAY. Everything to him was brother or sister—the sun and the moon, and all that was poor and weak and sad, and animals and birds, so that they even used to follow him about.

MERCY. I know! He had crumbs in his pocket.

STRANGWAY. No; he had love in his eyes.

IVY. 'Tis like about Orpheus, that you told us.

STRANGWAY. Ah! But St. Francis was a Christian, and Orpheus was a Pagan.

IVY. Oh!

STRANGWAY. Orpheus drew everything after him with music; St.

Francis by love.

IVY. Perhaps it was the same, really.

STRANGWAY. [looking at his flute] Perhaps it was, Ivy.

GLADYS. Did 'e 'ave a flute like yu?

IVY. The flowers smell sweeter when they 'ear music; they du.

[She holds up the glass of flowers.]

STRANGWAY. [Touching one of the orchis] What's the name of this one?

[The girls cluster; save MERCY, who is taking a stealthy interest in what she has behind her.]

CONNIE. We call it a cuckoo, Mr. Strangway.

GLADYS. 'Tis awful common down by the streams. We've got one medder where 'tis so thick almost as the goldie cups.

STRANGWAY. Odd! I've never noticed it.

IVY. Please, Mr. Strangway, yu don't notice when yu're walkin'; yu go along like this.

[She holds up her face as one looking at the sky.]

STRANGWAY. Bad as that, Ivy?

IVY. Mrs. Strangway often used to pick it last spring.

STRANGWAY. Did she? Did she?

[He has gone off again into a kind of dream.]

MERCY. I like being confirmed.

STRANGWAY. Ah! Yes. Now——What's that behind you, Mercy?

MERCY. [Engagingly producing a cage a little bigger than a mouse-trap, containing a skylark] My skylark.

STRANGWAY. What!

MERCY. It can fly; but we're goin' to clip its wings. Bobbie caught it.

STRANGWAY. How long ago?

MERCY. [Conscious of impending disaster] Yesterday.

STRANGWAY. [White hot] Give me the cage!

MERCY. [Puckering] I want my skylark. [As he steps up to her and takes the cage—thoroughly alarmed] I gave Bobbie thrippence for it!

STRANGWAY. [Producing a sixpence] There!

MERCY. [Throwing it down-passionately] I want my skylark!

STRANGWAY. God made this poor bird for the sky and the grass. And you put it in that! Never cage any wild thing! Never!

MERCY. [Faint and sullen] I want my skylark.

STRANGWAY. [Taking the cage to the door] No! [He holds up the cage and opens it] Off you go, poor thing!

[The bird flies out and away. The girls watch with round eyes the fling up of his arm, and the freed bird flying away.]

IVY. I'm glad!

[MERCY kicks her viciously and sobs. STRANGWAY comes from the door, looks at MERCY sobbing, and suddenly clasps his head. The girls watch him with a queer mixture of wonder, alarm, and disapproval.]

GLADYS. [Whispering] Don't cry, Mercy. Bobbie'll soon catch yu another.

[STRANGWAY has dropped his hands, and is looking again at MERCY.]

IVY sits with hands clasped, gazing at STRANGWAY. MERCY continues her artificial sobbing.]

STRANGWAY. [Quietly] The class is over for to-day.

[He goes up to MERCY, and holds out his hand. She does not take it, and runs out knuckling her eyes. STRANGWAY turns on his heel and goes into the house.]

CONNIE. 'Twasn't his bird.

IVY. Skylarks belong to the sky. Mr. Strangway said so.

GLADYS. Not when they'm caught, they don't.

IVY. They du.

CONNIE. 'Twas her bird.

IVY. He gave her sixpence for it.

GLADYS. She didn't take it.

CONNIE. There it is on the ground.

IVY. She might have.

GLADYS. He'll p'raps take my squirrel, tu.

IVY. The bird sang—I 'eard it! Right up in the sky. It wouldn't have sanged if it weren't glad.

GLADYS. Well, Mercy cried.

IVY. I don't care.

GLADYS. 'Tis a shame! And I know something. Mrs. Strangway's at Durford.

CONNIE. She's—never!

GLADYS. I saw her yesterday. An' if she's there she ought to be here. I told mother, an' she said: "Yu mind yer business." An' when she goes in to market to-morrow she'm goin' to see. An' if she's really there, mother says, 'tis a fine tu-du an' a praaper scandal. So I know a lot more'n yu du.

[Ivy stares at her.]

CONNIE. Mrs. Strangway told mother she was goin' to France for the winter because her mother was ill.

GLADYS. 'Tisn't, winter now—Ascension Day. I saw her cumin' out o' Dr. Desert's house. I know 'twas her because she had on a blue dress an' a proud luke. Mother says the doctor come over here tu often before Mrs. Strangway went away, just afore Christmas. They was old sweethearts before she married Mr. Strangway. [To Ivy] 'Twas yure mother told mother that.

[Ivy gazes at them more and more wide-eyed.]

CONNIE. Father says if Mrs. Bradmere an' the old Rector knew about the doctor, they wouldn't 'ave Mr. Strangway 'ere for curate any longer; because mother says it takes more'n a year for a gude wife to leave her 'usband, an' 'e so fond of her. But 'tisn't no business of ours, father says.

GLADYS. Mother says so tu. She's praaper set against gossip.

She'll know all about it to-morrow after market.

IVY. [Stamping her foot] I don't want to 'ear nothin' at all; I don't, an' I won't.

[A rather shame faced silence falls on the girls.]

GLADYS. [In a quick whisper] 'Ere's Mrs. Burlacombe.

[There enters fawn the house a stout motherly woman with a round grey eye and very red cheeks.]

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Ivy, take Mr. Strangway his ink, or we'll never 'eve no sermon to-night. He'm in his thinkin' box, but 'tis not a bit o' yuse 'im thinkin' without 'is ink. [She hands her daughter an inkpot and blotting-pad. Ivy Takes

them and goes out] What ever's this? [She picks up the little bird-cage.]

GLADYS. 'Tis Mercy Jarland's. Mr. Strangway let her skylark go.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Aw! Did 'e now? Serve 'er right, bringin' an 'eathen bird to confirmation class.

CONNIE. I'll take it to her.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. No. Yu leave it there, an' let Mr. Strangway du what 'e likes with it. Bringin' a bird like that! Well 'I never!

[The girls, perceiving that they have lighted on stony soil, look at each other and slide towards the door.]

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Yes, yu just be off, an' think on what yu've been told in class, an' be'ave like Christians, that's gude maids. An' don't yu come no more in the 'avenin's dancin' them 'eathen dances in my barn, naighther, till after yu'm confirmed—'t isn't right. I've told Ivy I won't 'ave it.

CONNIE. Mr. Strangway don't mind—he likes us to; 'twas Mrs.

Strangway began teachin' us. He's goin' to give a prize.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Yu just du what I tell yu an' never mind Mr.

Strangway—he'm tu kind to everyone. D'yu think I don't know how

gells oughter be'ave before confirmation? Yu be'ave like I did!

Now, goo ahn! Shoo!

[She hustles them out, rather as she might hustle her chickens, and begins tidying the room. There comes a wandering figure to the open window. It is

that of a man of about thirty-five, of feeble gait, leaning the weight of all one side of him on a stick. His dark face, with black hair, one lock of which has gone white, was evidently once that of an ardent man. Now it is slack, weakly smiling, and the brown eyes are lost, and seem always to be asking something to which there is no answer.]

MRS. BURLACOMBE. [With that forced cheerfulness always assumed in the face of too great misfortune] Well, Jim! better? [At the faint brightening of the smile] That's right! Yu'm gettin' on bravely. Want Parson?

JIM. [Nodding and smiling, and speaking slowly] I want to tell 'un about my cat.

[His face loses its smile.]

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Why! what's she been duin' then? Mr. Strangway's busy. Won't I du?

JIM. [Shaking his head] No. I want to tell him.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Whatever she been duin'? Havin' kittens?

JIM. No. She'm lost.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Dearie me! Aw! she'm not lost. Cats be like maids; they must get out a bit.

JIM. She'm lost. Maybe he'll know where she'll be.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Well, well. I'll go an' find 'im.

JIM. He's a gude man. He's very gude.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. That's certain zure.

STRANGWAY. [Entering from the house] Mrs. Burlacombe, I can't think where I've put my book on St. Francis—the large, squarish pale-blue one?

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Aw! there now! I knu there was somethin' on me mind. Miss Willis she came in yesterday afternune when yu was out, to borrow it. Oh! yes—I said—I'm zure Mr. Strangway'll lend it 'ee. Now think o' that!

STRANGWAY. Of course, Mrs. Burlacombe; very glad she's got it.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Aw! but that's not all. When I tuk it up there come out a whole flutter o' little bits o' paper wi' little rhymes on 'em, same as I see yu writin'. Aw! my gudeness! I says to meself, Mr. Strangway widn' want no one seein' them.

STRANGWAY. Dear me! No; certainly not!

MRS. BURLACOMBE. An' so I putt 'em in your secretary.

STRANGWAY. My-ah! Yes. Thank you; yes.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. But I'll goo over an' get the buke for yu.

'T won't take me 'alf a minit.

[She goes out on to the green. JIM BERE has come in.]

STRANGWAY. [Gently] Well, Jim?

JIM. My cat's lost.

STRANGWAY. Lost?

JIM. Day before yesterday. She'm not come back. They've shot 'er,

I think; or she'm caught in one o' they rabbit-traps.

STRANGWAY. Oh! no; my dear fellow, she'll come back. I'll speak to

Sir Herbert's keepers.

JIM. Yes, zurr. I feel lonesome without 'er.

STRANGWAY. [With a faint smile—more to himself than to Jim]

Lonesome! Yes! That's bad, Jim! That's bad!

JIM. I miss 'er when I sits than in the avenin'.

STRANGWAY. The evenings——They're the worst——and when the blackbirds sing in the morning.

JIM. She used to lie on my bed, ye know, zurr.

[STRANGWAY turns his face away, contracted with pain]
She'm like a Christian.

STRANGWAY. The beasts are.

JIM. There's plenty folk ain't 'alf as Christian as 'er be.

STRANGWAY. Well, dear Jim, I'll do my very best. And any time you're lonely, come up, and I'll play the flute to you.

JIM. [Wriggling slightly] No, zurr. Thank 'ee, zurr.

STRANGWAY. What—don't you like music?

JIM. Ye-es, zurr. [A figure passes the window. Seeing it he says with his slow smile] "'Ere's Mrs. Bradmere, comin' from the Rectory." [With queer malice] She don't like cats. But she'm a cat 'erself, I think.

STRANGWAY. [With his smile] Jim!

JIM. She'm always tellin' me I'm lukin' better. I'm not better, zurr.

STRANGWAY. That's her kindness.

JIM. I don't think it is. 'Tis laziness, an' 'avin' 'er own way. She'm very fond of 'er own way.

[A knock on the door cuts off his speech. Following closely on the knock, as though no doors were licensed to be closed against her, a grey-haired lady enters; a capable, broad-faced woman of seventy, whose every tone and movement exhales authority. With a nod and a "good morning" to STRANGWAY she turns at face to JIM BERE.]

MRS. BRADMERE Ah! Jim; you're looking better.

[JIM BERE shakes his head. MRS. BRADMERE. Oh! yes, you are.

Getting on splendidly. And now, I just want to speak to Mr. Strangway.]

[JIM BERE touches his forelock, and slowly, leaning on his stick, goes out.]

MRS. BRADMERE. [Waiting for the door to close] You know how that came on him? Caught the girl he was engaged to, one night, with another man, the rage broke something here. [She touches her forehead] Four years ago.

STRANGWAY. Poor fellow!

MRS. BRADMERE. [Looking at him sharply] Is your wife back?

STRANGWAY. [Starting] No.

MRS. BRADMERE. By the way, poor Mrs. Cremer—is she any better?

STRANGWAY. No; going fast: Wonderful—so patient.

MRS. BRADMERE. [With gruff sympathy] Um! Yes. They know how to die! [Wide another sharp look at him] D'you expect your wife soon?

STRANGWAY. I I—hope so.

MRS. BRADMERE: So do I. The sooner the better.

STRANGWAY. [Shrinking] I trust the Rector's not suffering so much this morning?

MRS. BRADMERE. Thank you! His foot's very bad.

[As she speaks Mrs. BURLACOMBE returns with a large pale-blue book in her bared.]

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Good day, M'm! [Taking the book across to

STRANGWAY] Miss Willie, she says she'm very sorry, zurr.

STRANGWAY. She was very welcome, Mrs. Burlacombe. [To MRS.

BURLACOMBE] Forgive me—my sermon.

[He goes into the house. The two women graze after him. Then, at once, as it were, draw into themselves, as if preparing for an encounter, and yet seem to expand as if losing the need for restraint.]

MRS. BRADMERE. [Abruptly] He misses his wife very much, I'm afraid.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Ah! Don't he? Poor dear man; he keeps a terrible tight 'and over 'imself, but 'tis suthin' cruel the way he walks about at night. He'm just like a cow when its calf's weaned. 'T'as gone to me 'eart truly to see 'im these months past. T'other day when I went up to du his rume, I yeard a noise like this [she sniffs]; an' ther' 'e was at the wardrobe, snuffin' at 'er things. I did never think a man cud care for a woman so much as that.

MRS. BRADMERE. H'm!

MRS. BURLACOMBE. 'Tis funny rest an' 'e comin' 'ere for quiet after that tearin' great London parish! 'E'm terrible absent-minded tu —don't take no interest in 'is fude. Yesterday, goin' on for one o'clock, 'e says to me, "I expect 'tis nearly breakfast-time, Mrs. Burlacombe!" 'E'd 'ad it twice already!

MRS. BRADMERE. Twice! Nonsense!

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Zurely! I give 'im a nummit afore 'e gets up; an' 'e 'as 'is brekjus reg'lar at nine. Must feed un

up. He'm on 'is feet all day, gain' to zee folk that widden want to zee an angel, they're that busy; an' when 'e comes in 'e'll play 'is flute there. Hem wastin' away for want of 'is wife. That's what 'tis. An' 'im so sweet-spoken, tu, 'tes a pleasure to year 'im—Never says a word!

MRS. BRADMERE. Yes, that's the kind of man who gets treated badly.

I'm afraid she's not worthy of him, Mrs. Burlacombe.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. [Plaiting her apron] 'Tesn't for me to zay that.

She'm a very pleasant lady.

MRS. BRADMERE Too pleasant. What's this story about her being seen in Durford?

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Aw! I du never year no gossip, m'm.

MRS. BRADMERE. [Drily] Of course not! But you see the Rector wishes to know.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. [Flustered] Well—folk will talk! But, as I says to Burlacombe—"Tes paltry," I says; and they only married eighteen months, and Mr. Strangway so devoted-like. 'Tes nothing but love, with 'im.

MRS. BRADMERE. Come!

MRS. BURLACOMBE. There's puzzivantin' folk as'll set an' gossip the feathers off an angel. But I du never listen.

MRS. BRADMERE Now then, Mrs. Burlacombe?

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Well, they du say as how Dr. Desart over to Durford and Mrs. Strangway was sweethearts afore she wer' married.

MRS. BRADMERE. I knew that. Who was it saw her coming out of Dr. Desart's house yesterday?

MRS. BURLACOMBE. In a manner of spakin' 'tes Mrs. Freman that says 'er Gladys seen her.

MRS. BRADMERE. That child's got an eye like a hawk.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. 'Tes wonderful how things du spread. 'Tesn't as if us gossiped. Du seem to grow-like in the naight.

MRS. BRADMERE [To herself] I never lied her. That Riviera excuse, Mrs. Burlacombe—Very convenient things, sick mothers. Mr. Strangway doesn't know?

MRS. BURLACOMBE. The Lord forbid! 'Twid send un crazy, I think. For all he'm so moony an' gentlelike, I think he'm a terrible passionate man inside. He've a-got a saint in 'im, for zure; but 'tes only 'alf-baked, in a manner of spakin'.

MRS. BRADMERE. I shall go and see Mrs. Freman. There's been too much of this gossip all the winter.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. 'Tes unfortunate-like 'tes the Fremans. Freman he'm a gipsy sort of a feller; and he've never forgiven Mr. Strangway for spakin' to 'im about the way he trates 'is 'orses.

MRS. BRADMERE. Ah! I'm afraid Mr. Strangway's not too discreet when his feelings are touched.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. 'E've a-got an 'eart so big as the full mune. But 'tes no yuse espectin' tu much o' this world. 'Tes a funny place, after that.

MRS. BRADMERE. Yes, Mrs. Burlacombe; and I shall give some of these good people a rare rap over the knuckles for their want of charity. For all they look as if butter wouldn't melt in their mouths, they're an un-Christian lot. [Looking very directly at Mrs. BURLACOMBE] It's lucky we've some

hold over the village. I'm not going to have scandal. I shall speak to Sir Herbert, and he and the Rector will take steps.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. [With covert malice] Aw! I du hope 'twon't upset the Rector, an' 'is fute so poptions!

MRS. BRADMERE. [Grimly] His foot'll be sound enough to come down sharp. By the way, will you send me a duck up to the Rectory?

MRS. BURLACOMBE. [Glad to get away] Zurely, m'm; at once. I've some luv'ly fat birds.

[She goes into the house.]

MRS. BRADMERE. Old puss-cat!

[She turns to go, and in the doorway encounters a very little, red-cheeked girl in a peacock-blue cap, and pink frock, who curtsies stolidly.]

MRS. BRADMERE. Well, Tibby Jarland, what do you want here? Always sucking something, aren't you?

[Getting no reply from Tibby JARLAND, she passes out. Tibby comes in, looks round, takes a large sweet out of her mouth, contemplates it, and puts it back again. Then, in a perfunctory and very stolid fashion, she looks about the floor, as if she had been told to find something. While she is finding nothing and sucking her sweet, her sister MERCY comes in furtively, still frowning and vindictive.]

MERCY. What! Haven't you found it, Tibby? Get along with 'ee, then!

[She accelerates the stolid Tissy's departure with a smack, searches under the seat, finds and picks up the deserted sixpence. Then very quickly she goes to the door: But it is opened before she reaches it, and,

finding herself caught, she slips behind the chintz window-curtain. A woman has entered, who is clearly the original of the large photograph. She is not strictly pretty, but there is charm in her pale, resolute face, with its mocking lips, flexible brows, and greenish eyes, whose lids, square above them, have short, dark lashes. She is dressed in blue, and her fair hair is coiled up under a cap and motor-veil. She comes in swiftly, and closes the door behind her; becomes irresolute; then, suddenly deciding, moves towards the door into the house. MERCY slips from behind her curtain to make off, but at that moment the door into the house is opened, and she has at once to slip back again into covert. It is Ivy who has appeared.]

IVY. [Amazed] Oh! Mrs. Strangway!

[Evidently disconcerted by this appearance, BEATRICE STRANGWAY pulls herself together and confronts the child with a smile.]

BEATRICE. Well, Ivy—you've grown! You didn't expect me, did you?

IVY. No, Mrs. Strangway; but I hoped yu'd be comin' soon.

BEATRICE. Ah! Yes. Is Mr. Strangway in?

IVY. [Hypnotized by those faintly smiling lips] Yes—oh, yes! He's writin' his sermon in the little room. He will be glad!

BEATRICE. [Going a little closer, and never taking her eyes off the child] Yes. Now, Ivy; will you do something for me?

IVY. [Fluttering] Oh, yes, Mrs. Strangway.

BEATRICE. Quite sure?

IVY. Oh, yes!

BEATRICE. Are you old enough to keep a secret?

IVY. [Nodding] I'm fourteen now.

BEATRICE. Well, then—, I don't want anybody but Mr. Strangway to know I've been here; nobody, not even your mother. D'you understand?

IVY. [Troubled] No. Only, I can keep a secret.

BEATRICE. Mind, if anybody hears, it will hurt Mr. Strangway.

IVY. Oh! I wouldn't—hurt—him. Must yu go away again? [Trembling towards her] I wish yu wer goin' to stay. And perhaps some one has seen yu—They——

BEATRICE. [Hastily] No, no one. I came motoring; like this. [She moves her veil to show how it can conceal her face] And I came straight down the little lane, and through the barn, across the yard.

IVY. [Timidly] People du see a lot.

BEATRICE. [Still with that hovering smile] I know, but—— Now go and tell him quickly and quietly.

IVY. [Stopping at the door] Mother's pluckin' a duck. Only, please, Mrs. Strangway, if she comes in even after yu've gone, she'll know, because—because yu always have that particular nice scent.

BEATRICE. Thank you, my child. I'll see to that.

[Ivy looks at her as if she would speak again, then turns suddenly, and goes out. BEATRICE'S face darkens; she shivers. Taking out a little cigarette case, she lights a cigarette, and watches the puff's of smoke wreathe shout her and die away. The

frightened MERCY peers out, spying for a chance, to escape. Then from the house STRANGWAY comes in. All his dreaminess is gone.]

STRANGWAY. Thank God! [He stops at the look on her face] I don't understand, though. I thought you were still out there.

BEATRICE. [Letting her cigarette fall, and putting her foot on it]
No.

STRANGWAY: You're staying? Oh! Beatrice; come! We'll get away from here at once—as far, as far—anywhere you like. Oh! my darling —only come! If you knew—

BEATRICE. It's no good, Michael; I've tried and tried.

STRANGWAY. Not! Then, why—? Beatrice! You said, when you were right away—I've waited—

BEATRICE. I know. It's cruel—it's horrible. But I told you not to hope, Michael. I've done my best. All these months at Mentone, I've been wondering why I ever let you marry me —when that feeling wasn't dead!

STRANGWAY. You can't have come back just to leave me again?

BEATRICE. When you let me go out there with mother I thought—I did think I would be able; and I had begun—and then—spring came!

STRANGWAY. Spring came here too! Never so—aching! Beatrice, can't you?

BEATRICE. I've something to say.

STRANGWAY. No! No! No!

BEATRICE. You see—I've—fallen.

STRANGWAY. Ah! [In a twice sharpened by pain] Why, in the name of mercy, come here to tell me that? Was he out there, then?

BEATRICE. I came straight back to him.

STRANGWAY. To Durford?

BEATRICE. To the Crossway Hotel, miles out—in my own name. They don't know me there. I told you not to hope, Michael. I've done my best; I swear it.

STRANGWAY. My God!

BEATRICE. It was your God that brought us to live near him!

STRANGWAY. Why have you come to me like this?

BEATRICE. To know what you're going to do. Are you going to divorce me? We're in your power. Don't divorce me—Doctor and patient—you must know—it ruins him. He'll lose everything. He'd be disqualified, and he hasn't a penny without his work.

STRANGWAY. Why should I spare him?

BEATRICE. Michael; I came to beg. It's hard.

STRANGWAY. No; don't beg! I can't stand it.

[She shakes her head.]

BEATRICE. [Recovering her pride] What are you going to do, then?

Keep us apart by the threat of a divorce? Starve us and prison us?

Cage me up here with you? I'm not brute enough to ruin him.

STRANGWAY. Heaven!

BEATRICE. I never really stopped loving him. I never—loved you,

Michael.

STRANGWAY. [Stunned] Is that true? [BEATRICE bends her head]

Never loved me? Not—that night—on the river—not—?

BEATRICE. [Under her breath] No.

STRANGWAY. Were you lying to me, then? Kissing me, and—hating me?

BEATRICE. One doesn't hate men like you; but it wasn't love.

STRANGWAY. Why did you tell me it was?

BEATRICE. Yes. That was the worst thing I've ever done.

STRANGWAY. Do you think I would have married you? I would have burned first! I never dreamed you didn't. I swear it!

BEATRICE. [Very low] Forget it!

STRANGWAY. Did he try to get you away from me? [BEATRICE gives him a swift look] Tell me the truth!

BEATRICE. No. It was—I—alone. But—he loves me.

STRANGWAY. One does not easily know love, it seems.

[But her smile, faint, mysterious, pitying, is enough, and he turns away from her.]

BEATRICE. It was cruel to come, I know. For me, too. But I couldn't write. I had to know.

STRANGWAY. Never loved me? Never loved me? That night at Tregaron? [At the look on her face] You might have told me before you went away! Why keep me all these—

BEATRICE. I meant to forget him again. I did mean to. I thought I could get back to what I was, when I married you;