

A Bit O' Love

By

John Galsworthy

A BIT O' LOVE

**JOHN
GALSWORTHY**



Persons of the Play

ACT I

ACT II

Scene I

Scene II

Scene III

ACT III

Scene I

Scene II

Persons of the Play

MICHAEL STRANGWAY

BEATRICE STRANGWAY

MRS BRADMERE

JIM BERE

JACK CREMER

MRS 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

The Action passes on Ascension Day.

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 yu, 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 whu forgave everything.

STRANGWAY

Ah!

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

CONNIE

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

MERCY

When Tommy Morse wouldn't fight, us 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 yu 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, naghther, 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 forehead, 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 gaze 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 vu'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 wreath about 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.

STBANGWAY

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.

STRANGGWAY

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; but, you see, what a girl can do, a woman that's been married--can't.

STRANGWAY

Then it was I--my kisses that----! [He laughs] How did you stand them? [His eyes dart at her face] Imagination helped you, perhaps!

BEATRICE

Michael, don't, don't! And--oh! don't make a public thing of it! You needn't be afraid I shall have too good a time!

[He stays quite still and silent, and that which is writhing in him makes his face so strange that BEATRICE stands aghast. At last she goes stumbling on in speech]

If ever you want to marry some one else--then, of course--that's only fair, ruin or not. But till then--till then----He's leaving Durford, going to Brighton. No one need know. And you--this isn't the only parish in the world.

STRANGWAY

[Quietly] You ask me to help you live in secret with another man?

BEATRICE

I ask for mercy.

STRANGWAY

[As to himself] What am I to do?

BEATRICE

What you feel in the bottom of your heart.

STRANGWAY

You ask me to help you live in sin?

BEATRICE

To let me go out of your life. You've only to do-- nothing. [He goes, slowly, close to her.]

STRANGWAY

I want you. Come back to me! Beatrice, come back!

BEATRICE

It would be torture, now.

STANGWAY

[Writhing] Oh!

BEATRICE

Whatever's in your heart--do!

STRANGWAY

You'd come back to me sooner than ruin him? Would you?

BEATRICE

I can't bring him harm.

STRANGWAY

[Turning away] God!--if there be one help me! [He stands leaning his forehead against the window. Suddenly his glance falls on the little bird cage, still lying on the window-seat] Never cage any wild thing! [He gives a laugh that is half a sob; then, turning to the door, says in a low voice] Go! Go please, quickly! Do what you will. I won't hurt you--can't----But--go! [He opens the door.]

BEATRICE

[Greatly moved] Thank you!

[She passes him with her head down, and goes out quickly. STRANGWAY stands unconsciously tearing at the little bird-cage. And while he tears at it he utters a moaning sound. The terrified MERCY, peering from behind the curtain, and watching her chance, slips to the still

open door; but in her haste and fright she knocks against it, and STRANGWAY sees her. Before he can stop her she has fled out on to the green and away.]

[While he stands there, paralysed, the door from the house is opened, and MRS BURLACOMBE approaches him in a queer, hushed way.]

MRS BURLACOMBE

[Her eyes mechanically fixed on the twisted bird-cage in his hands] 'Tis poor Sue Cremer, zurr, I didn't 'ardly think she'd last thru the mornin'. An' zure enough she'm passed away! [Seeing that he has not taken in her words] Mr. Strangway-- yu'm feelin' giddy?

STRANGWAY

No, no! What was it? You said----

MRS BURLACOMBE

'Tes Jack Cremer. His wife's gone. 'E'm in a terrible way. 'Tes only yu, 'e ses, can du 'im any gude. He'm in the kitchen.

STRANGWAY

Cremer? Yes! Of course. Let him----

MRS BURLACOMBE

[Still staring at the twisted cage] Yu ain't wantin' that--'tes all twizzled. [She takes it from him] Sure yu'm not feelin' yer 'ead?

STRANGWAY

[With a resolute effort] No!

MRS BURLACOMBE

[Doubtfully] I'll send 'im in, then. [She goes. When she is gone, Strangway passes his handkerchief across his forehead, and his lips move fast. He is standing motionless when CREMER, a big man in labourer's clothes, with a thick, broad face, and tragic, faithful eyes, comes in, and stands a little in from the elosed door, quite dumb.]

STRANGWAY

[After a moment's silence--going up to him and laying a hand on his shoulder] Jack! Don't give way. If we give way--we're done.

CREMER

Yes, zurr. [A quiver passes over his face.]

STRANGWAY

She didn't. Your wife was a brave woman. A dear woman.

CREMER

I never thought to luse 'er. She never told me 'ow bad she was, afore she tuk to 'er bed. 'Tis a dreadful thing to luse a wife, zurr.

STRANGWAY

[Tightening his lips, that tremble] Yes. But don't give way! Bear up, Jack!

CREMER

Seems funny 'er goin' blue-bell time, an' the sun shinin' so warm. I picked up an 'orse-shu yesterday. I can't never 'ave 'er back, zurr.

[His face quivers again.]

STRANGWAY

Some day you'll join her. Think! Some lose their wives for ever.

CREMER

I don't believe as there's a future life, zurr. I think we goo to sleep like the beasts.

STRANGWAY

We're told otherwise. But come here! [Drawing him to the window] Look! Listen! To sleep in that! Even if we do, it won't be so bad, Jack, will it?

CREMER

She wer' a gude wife to me--no man didn't 'ave no better wife.

STRANGWAY

[Putting his hand out] Take hold--hard--harder! I want yours as much as you want mine. Pray for me, Jack, and I'll pray for you. And we won't give way, will we?

CREMER

[To whom the strangeness of these words has given some relief] No, zurr; thank 'ee, zurr. 'Tis no gude, I expect. Only, I'll miss 'er. Thank 'ee, zurr; kindly.

[He lifts his hand to his head, turns, and uncertainly goes out to the kitchen. And STRANGWAY stays where he is, not knowing what to do. They blindly he takes up his flute, and hatless, hurries out into the air.]

ACT II

Scene I

About seven o'clock in the taproom of the village inn. The bar, with the appurtenances thereof, stretches across one end, and opposite is the porch door on to the green. The wall between is nearly all window, with leaded panes, one wide-open casement whereof lets in the last of the sunlight. A narrow bench runs under this broad window. And this is all the furniture, save three spittoons:

GODLEIGH, the innkeeper, a smallish man with thick ruffled hair, a loquacious nose, and apple-red cheeks above a reddish-brown moustache; is reading the paper. To him enters TIBBY JARLAND with a shilling in her mouth.

GODLEIGH

Well, TIBBY JARLAND, what've yu come for, then? Glass o' beer?

[TIBBY takes the shilling from her mouth and smiles stolidly.]

GODLEIGH

[Twinkling] I shid zay glass o' 'arf an' 'arf's about yure form. [TIBBY smiles more broadly] Yu'm a praaper masterpiece. Well! 'Ave sister Mercy borrowed yure tongue? [TIBBY shakes her head] Aw, she 'aven't. Well, maid?

TIBBY

Father wants six clay pipes, please.

GODLEIGH

'E du, du 'ee? Yu tell yure father 'e can't 'ave more'n one, not this avenin'. And 'ere 'tis. Hand up yure shillin'.

[TIBBY reaches up her hand, parts with the shilling, and receives a long clay pipe and eleven pennies. In order to secure the coins in her pinafore she places the clay pipe in her mouth. While she is still thus engaged, MRS BRADMERE enters the porch and comes in. TIBBY curtsies stolidly.]

MRS BRADMERE

Gracious, child! What are you doing here? And what have you got in your mouth? Who is it? Tibby Jarland? [TIBBY curtsies again] Take that thing out. And tell your father from me that if I ever see you at the inn again I shall tread on his toes hard. Godleigh, you know the law about children?

GODLEIGH

[Cocking his eye, and not at all abashed] Surely, m'm. But she will come. Go away, my dear.

[TIBBY, never taking her eyes off MRS BRADMERE, or the pipe from her mouth, has backed stolidly to the door, and vanished.]

MRS BRADMERE

[Eyeing GODLEIGH] Now, Godleigh, I've come to talk to you. Half the scandal that goes about the village begins here. [She holds up her finger to check expostulation] No, no--its no good. You know the value of scandal to your business far too well.

GODLEIGH

Wi' all respect, m'm, I knows the vally of it to yourn, tu.

MRS BRADMERE

What do you mean by that?

GODLEIGH

If there weren't no Rector's lady there widden' be no notice taken o' scandal; an' if there weren't no notice taken, twidden be scandal, to my thinkin'.

MRS BRADMERE

[Winking out a grim little smile] Very well! You've given me your views. Now for mine. There's a piece of scandal going about that's got to be stopped, Godleigh. You turn the tap of it off here, or we'll turn your tap off. You know me. See?

GODLEIGH

I shouldn' never presume, m'm, to know a lady.

MRS BRADMERE

The Rector's quite determined, so is Sir Herbert. Ordinary scandal's bad enough, but this touches the Church. While Mr. Strangway remains curate here, there must be no talk about him and his affairs.

GODLEIGH

[Cocking his eye] I was just thinkin' how to du it, m'm. 'Twid be a brave notion to putt the men in chokey, and slit the women's tongues-like, same as they du in outlandish places, as I'm told.

MRS BRADMERE

Don't talk nonsense, Godleigh; and mind what I say, because I mean it.

GODLEIGH

Make yure mind aisy, m'm there'll be no scandal-monkeyin' here wi' my permission.

[MRS BRADMERE gives him a keen stare, but seeing him perfectly grave, nods her head with approval.]

MRS BRADMERE

Good! You know what's being said, of course?

GODLEIGH

[With respectful gravity] Yu'll pardon me, m'm, but ef an' in case yu was goin' to tell me, there's a rule in this 'ouse: "No scandal 'ere!"

MRS BRADMERE

[Twinkling grimly] You're too smart by half, my man.

GODLEIGH

Aw fegs, no, m'm--child in yure 'ands.

MRS BRADMERE

I wouldn't trust you a yard. Once more, Godleigh! This is a Christian village, and we mean it to remain so. You look out for yourself.

[The door opens to admit the farmers TRUSTAFORD and BURLACOMBE. They doff their hats to MRS BRADMERE, who, after one more sharp look at GODLEIGH, moves towards the door.]

MRS BRADMERE

Evening, Mr. Trustaford. [To BURLACOMBE] Burlacombe, tell your wife that duck she sent up was in hard training.

[With one of her grim winks, and a nod, she goes.]

TRUSTAFORD

[Replacing a hat which is black, hard, and not very new, on his long head, above a long face, clean-shaved but for little whiskers] What's the old grey mare want, then? [With a horse-laugh] 'Er's lukin' awful wise!

GODLEIGH

[Enigmatically] Ah!

TRUSTAFORD

[Sitting on the bench dose to the bar] Drop o' whisky, an' potash.

BURLACOMBE

[A taciturn, alien, yellowish man, in a worn soft hat] What's wise, Godleigh? Drop o' cider.

GODLEIGH

Nuse? There's never no nuse in this 'ouse. Aw, no! Not wi' my permission. [In imitation] This is a Christian village.

TRUSTAFORD

Thought the old grey mare seemed mighty busy. [To BURLACOMBE] 'Tes rather quare about the curate's wife a-cumin' motorin' this mornin'. Passed me wi' her face all smothered up in a veil, goggles an' all. Haw, haw!

BURLACOMBE

Aye!

TRUSTAFORD

Off again she was in 'alf an hour. 'Er didn't give poor old curate much of a chance, after six months.

GODLEIGH

Havin' an engagement elsewhere--No scandal, please, gentlemen.

BURLACOMBE

[Acidly] Never asked to see my missis. Passed me in the yard like a stone.

TRUSTAFORD

'T'es a little bit rumoursome lately about 'er doctor.

GODLEIGH

Ah! he's the favourite. But 'tes a dead secret; Mr. Trustaford. Don't yu never repate it--there's not a cat don't know it already!

BURLACOMBE frowns, and TRUSTAFORD utters his laugh. The door is opened and FREMAN, a dark gipsyish man in the dress of a farmer, comes in.

GODLEIGH

Don't yu never tell Will Freman what 'e told me!

FREMAN

Avenin'!

TRUSTAFORD

Avenin', Will; what's yure glass o' trouble?

FREMAN

Drop o' eider, clove, an' dash o' gin. There's blood in the sky to-night.

BURLACOMBE

Ah! We'll 'ave fine weather now, with the full o' the mune.

FREMAN

Dust o' wind an' a drop or tu, virst, I reckon. 'Earl t' nuse about curate an' 'is wife?

GODLEIGH

No, indeed; an' don't yu tell us. We'm Christians 'ere in this village.

FREMAN

'Tain't no very Christian nuse, neither. He's sent 'er off to th' doctor. "Go an' live with un," 'e says; "my blessin' on ye." If 'er'd a-been mine, I'd 'a tuk the whip to 'er. Tam Jarland's maid, she yeard it all. Christian, indeed! That's brave Christianity! "Goo an' live with un!" 'e told 'er.

BURLACOMBE

No, no; that's, not sense--a man to say that. I'll not 'ear that against a man that bides in my 'ouse.

FREMAN

'Tes sure, I tell 'ee. The maid was hid-up, scared-like, behind the curtain. At it they went, and parson 'e says: "Go," 'e says, "I won't kape 'ee from 'im," 'e says, "an' I won't divorce 'ee, as yu don't wish it!" They was 'is words, same as Jarland's maid told my maid, an' my maid told my missis. If that's parson's talk, 'tes funny work goin' to church.

TRUSTAFORD

[Brooding] 'Tes wonderful quare, zurely.

FREMAN

Tam Jarland's fair mad wi' curate for makin' free wi' his maid's skylark. Parson or no parson, 'e've no call to meddle wi' other people's praperty. He cam' pokin' 'is nose into my affairs. I told un I knew a sight more 'bout 'orses than 'e ever would!

TRUSTAFORD

He'm a bit crazy 'bout bastes an' birds.

[They have been so absorbed that they bane not noticed the entrance of CLYST, a youth with tousled hair, and a bright, quick, Celtic eye, who stands listening, with a bit of paper in his hand.]

CLYST

Ah! he'm that zurely, Mr. Trustaford.

[He chuckles.]

GODLEIGH

Now, Tim Clyst, if an' in case yu've a-got some scandal on yer tongue, don't yu never unship it here. Yu go up to Rectory where 'twill be more relished-like.

CLYST

[Waving the paper] Will y' give me a drink for this, Mr. Godleigh? 'Tes rale funny. Aw! 'tes somethin' swats. Butiful readin'. Poetry. Rale spice. Yu've a luv'ly voice for readin', Mr. Godleigh.

GODLEIGH

[All ears and twinkle] Aw, what is it then?

CLYST

Ah! Yu want t'know tu much.

[Putting the paper in his pocket.]

[While he is speaking, JIM BERE has entered quietly, with his feeble step and smile, and sits down.]

CLYST

[Kindly] Hello, Jim! Cat come 'ome?

JIM BERE

No.

[All nod, and speak to him kindly. And JIM BERE smiles at them, and his eyes ask of them the question, to which there is no answer. And after that he sits motionless and silent, and they talk as if he were not there.]

GODLEIGH

What's all this, now--no scandal in my 'ouse!

CLYST

'T'es awful peculiar--like a drame. Mr. Burlacombe 'e don't like to hear tell about drames. A guess a won't tell 'ee, arter that.

FREMAN

Out wi' it, Tim.

CLYST

'T'es powerful thirsty to-day, Mr. Godleigh.

GODLEIGH

[Drawing him some cider] Yu're all wild cat's talk, Tim; yu've a-got no tale at all.

CLYST

[Moving for the cider] Aw, indade!

GODLEIGH

No tale, no cider!

CLYST

Did ye ever year tell of Orphus?

TRUSTAFORD

What? The old vet. up to Drayleigh?

CLYST

Fegs, no; Orphus that lived in th' old time, an' drawed the bastes after un wi' his music, same as curate was tellin' the maids.

FREMAN

I've 'eard as a gipsy over to Vellacott could du that wi' 'is viddle.

CLYST

'Twas no gipsy I see'd this arternune; 'twee Orphus, down to Mr. Burlacombe's long medder; settin' there all dark on a stone among the dimsy-white flowers an' the cowflops, wi' a bird upon 'is 'ead, playin' his whistle to the ponies.

FREMAN

[Excitedly] Yu did never zee a man wi' a bird on 'is 'ead.

CLYST

Didn' I?

FREMAN

What sort o' bird, then? Yu tell me that.

TRUSTAFORD

Praaper old barndoor cock. Haw, haw!

GODLEIGH

[Soothingly] 'Tes a vairy-tale; us mustn't be tu partic'lar.

BURLACOMBE, /b> In my long medder? Where were yu, then, Tim Clyst?

CLYST

Passin' down the lane on my bike. Wonderful sorrowful-fine music 'e played. The ponies they did come round 'e--yu cud zee the tears rennin' down their chakes; 'twas powerful sad. 'E 'adn't no 'at on.

FREMAN

[Jeering] No; 'e 'ad a bird on 'is 'ead.

CLYST

[With a silencing grin] He went on playin' an' playin'. The ponies they never muved. An' all the dimsy-white flowers they waved and waved, an' the wind it went over 'em. Gav' me a funny feelin'.

GODLEIGH

Clyst, yu take the cherry bun!

CLYST

Where's that cider, Mr. Godleigh?

GODLEIGH

[Bending over the cider] Yu've a -'ad tu much already, Tim.

[The door is opened, and TAM JARLAND appears. He walks rather unsteadily; a man with a hearty jowl, and sullen, strange; epileptic-looking eyes.]

CLYST

[Pointing to JARLAND] 'Tis Tam Jarland there 'as the cargo aboard.

JARLAND

Avenin', all! [To GODLEIGH] Pinto' beer. [To JIM BERE] Avenin', Jim.

[JIM BERE looks at him and smiles.]

GODLEIGH

[Serving him after a moment's hesitation] 'Ere y'are, Tam. [To CLYST, who has taken out his paper again] Where'd yu get thickey paper?

CLYST

[Putting down his cider-mug empty] Yure tongue du watter, don't it, Mr. Godleigh? [Holding out his mug] No zider, no poetry. 'Tis amazin' sorrowful; Shakespeare over again. "The boy stude on the burnin' deck."

FREMAN

Yu and yer yap!

CLYST

Ah! Yu wait a bit. When I come back down t'lane again, Orphus 'e was vanished away; there was naught in the field but the ponies, an' a praaper old magpie, a-top o' the hedge. I zee somethin' white in the beak o' the fowl, so I giv' a "Whisht," an' 'e drops it smart, an' off 'e go. I gets over bank an' picks un up, and here't be.

[He holds out his mug.]

BURLACOMBE

[Tartly] Here, give 'im 'is cider. Rade it yureself, ye young teasewings.

[CLYST, having secured his cider, drinks it o\$. Holding up the paper to the light, he makes as if to begin, then. slides his eye round, tantalizing.]

CLYST

'T'es a pity I bain't dressed in a white gown, an' flowers in me 'air.

FREMAN

Read it, or we'll 'aye yu out o' this.

CLYST

Aw, don't 'ee shake my nerve, now!

[He begins reading with mock heroism, in his soft, high, burring voice. Thus, in his rustic accent, go the lines]

God lighted the zun in 'eaven far.

Lighted the virefly an' the star.

My 'eart 'E lighted not!

God lighted the vields fur lambs to play,

Lighted the bright strames, 'an the may.

My 'eart 'E lighted not!

God lighted the mune, the Arab's way,

He lights to-morrer, an' to-day.

My 'eart 'E 'ath vorgot!

[When he has finished, there is silence. Then TRUSTAFORD, scratching his head, speaks:]

TAUSTAFORD

'Tes amazin' funny stuff.

FREMAN

[Looking over CLYST'S shoulder] Be danged! 'Tes the curate's 'andwritin'. 'Twas curate wi' the ponies, after that.

CLYST

Fancy, now! Aw, Will Freman, an't yu bright!

FREMAN

But 'e 'adn't no bird on 'is 'ead.

CLYST

Ya-as, 'e 'ad.

JARLAND

[In a dull, threatening voice] 'E 'ad my maid's bird, this arternune. 'Ead or no, and parson or no, I'll gie 'im one for that.

FREMAN

Ah! And 'e meddled wi' my 'orses.

TRUSTAFORD

I'm thinkin' 'twas an old cuckoo bird 'e 'ad on 'is 'ead. Haw, haw!

GODLEIGH

"His 'eart She 'ath Vorgot!"

FREMAN

'E's a fine one to be tachin' our maids convirmation.

GODLEIGH

Would ye 'ave it the old Rector then? Wi' 'is gouty shoe? Rackon the maids wid rather 'twas curate; eh, Mr. Burlacombe?

BURLACOMBE

[Abruptly] Curate's a gude man.

JARLAND

[With the comatose ferocity of drink] I'll be even wi' un.

FREMAN

[Excitedly] Tell 'ee one thing--'tes not a proper man o' God to 'ave about, wi' 'is luse goin's on. Out vrom 'ere he oughter go.

BURLACOMBE

You med go further an' fare worse.

FREMAN

What's 'e duin', then, lettin' 'is wife runoff?

TRUSTAFORD

[Scratching his head] If an' in case 'e can't kape 'er, 'tes a funny way o' duin' things not to divorce 'er, after that. If a parson's not to du the Christian thing, whu is, then?

BURLACOMBE

'Tes a bit immoral-like to pass over a thing like that. Tes funny if women's gain's on's to be encouraged.

FREMAN

Act of a coward, I zay.

BURLACOMBE

The curate ain't no coward.

FREMAN

He bides in yure house; 'tes natural for yu to stand up for un; I'll wager MRS Burlacombe don't, though. My missis was fair shocked. "Will," she says, "if yu ever make vur to let me go like that, I widden never stay wi' yu," she says.

TRUSTAFORD

'Tes settin' a bad example, for zure.

BURLACOMBE

'Tes all very airy talkin'; what shude 'e du, then?

FREMAN

[Excitedly] Go over to Durford and say to that doctor: "Yu come about my missis, an' zee what I'll du to 'ee." An' take 'er 'ome an' zee she don't misbe'ave again.

CLYST

'E can't take 'er ef 'er don' want t' come--I've 'eard lawyer, that lodged wi' us, say that.

FREMAN

All right then, 'e ought to 'ave the law of 'er and 'er doctor; an' zee 'er goin's on don't prosper; 'e'd get damages, tu. But this way 'tes a nice example he'm settin' folks. Parson indade! My missis an' the maids they won't goo near the church to-night, an' I wager no one else won't, neither.

JARLAND

[Lurching with his pewter up to GODLEIGH] The beggar! I'll be even wi' un.

GODLEIGH

[Looking at him in doubt] 'Tes the last, then, Tam.

[Having received his beer, JARLAND stands, leaning against the bar, drinking.]

BURLACOMBE

[Suddenly] I don' goo with what curate's duin--'tes tiff soft 'earted; he'm a muneey kind o' man altogether, wi' 'is flute an' 'is poetry; but he've a-lodged in my 'ouse this year an' mare, and always 'ad an 'elpin' 'and for every one. I've got a likin' for him an' there's an end of it.

JARLAND

The coward!

TRUSTAFORD

I don' trouble nothin' about that, Tam Jarland. [Turning to BURLACOMBE] What gits me is 'e don't seem to 'ave no zense o' what's his own praperty.

JARLAND

Take other folk's property fast enough!

[He saws the air with his empty. The others have all turned to him, drawn by the fascination that a man in liquor has for his fellow-men. The bell for church has begun to rang, the sun is down, and it is getting dusk.]

He wants one on his crop, an' one in 'is belly; 'e wants a man to take an' gie un a gude hidin zame as he oughter give 'is fly-be-night of a wife.

[STRANGWAY in his dark clothes has entered, and stands by the door, his lips compressed to a colourless line, his thin, darkish face grey-white]

Zame as a man wid ha' gi'en the doctor, for takin' what isn't his'n.

All but JARLAND have seen STRANGWAY. He steps forward, JARLAND sees him now; his jaw drops a little, and he is silent.

STRANGWAY

I came for a little brandy, Mr. Godleigh--feeling rather faint. Afraid I mightn't get through the service.

GODLEIGH

[With professional composure] Marteil's Three Star, zurr, or 'Ennessy's?

STRANGWAY

[Looking at JARLAND] Thank you; I believe I can do without, now. [He turns to go.]

[In the deadly silence, GODLEIGH touches the arm of JARLAND, who, leaning against the bar with the pewter in his hand, is staring with his strange lowering eyes straight at STRANGWAY.]

JARLAND

[Galvanized by the touch into drunken rage] Lave me be- I'll talk to un-parson or no. I'll tache un to meddle wi' my maid's bird. I'll tache un to kape 'is thievin' 'ands to 'imself.

[STRANGWAY turns again.]

CLYST

Be quiet, Tam.

JARLAND

[Never loosing STRANGWAY with his eyes--like a bull-dog who sees red] That's for one chake; zee un turn t'other, the white- livered buty! Whu lets another man 'ave 'is wife, an' never the sperit to go vor un!

BURLACOMBE

Shame, Jarland; quiet, man!

[They are all looking at STRANGWAY, who, under JARLAND'S drunken insults is standing rigid, with his eyes closed, and his hands hard clenched. The church bell has stopped slow ringing, and begun its five minutes' hurrying note.]

TRUSTAFORD

[Rising, and trying to hook his arm into JARLAND'S] Come away, Tam; yu've a-'ad to much, man.

JARLAND

[Shaking him off] Zee, 'e darsen't touch me; I might 'it un in the vase an' 'e darsen't; 'e's afraid-- like 'e was o' the doctor.

[He raises the pewter as though to fling it, but it is seized by GODLEIGH from behind, and falls clattering to the floor. STRANGWAY has not moved.]

JARLAND

[Shaking his fist almost in his face] Luke at un, Luke at un! A man wi' a slut for a wife----

[As he utters the word "wife" STRANGWAY seizes the outstretched fist, and with a jujitsu movement, draws him into his clutch, helpless. And as they sway and struggle in the open window, with the false strength of fury he forces JARLAND through. There is a crash of broken glass from outside. At the sound STRANGWAY comes to himself. A look of agony passes over his face. His eyes light on JIM BERE, who has suddenly risen, and stands feebly clapping his hands. STRANGWAY rushes out.]

[Excitedly gathering at the window, they all speak at once.]

CLYST

Tam's hatchin' of yure cucumbers, Mr. Godleigh.

TRUSTAFORD

'E did crash; haw, haw!

FREMAN

'Twas a brave throw, zurely. Whu wid a' thought it?

CLYST

Tam's crawlin' out. [Leaning through window] Hello, Tam-- 'ow's t' base, old man?

FREMAN

[Excitedly] They'm all comin' up from churchyard to zee.

TRUSTAFORD

Tam du luke wonderful aztonished; haw, haw! Poor old Tam!

CLYST

Can yu zee curate? Reckon 'e'm gone into church. Aw, yes; gettin' a bit dimsy-service time. [A moment's hush.]

TRUSTAFORD

Well, I'm jiggered. In 'alf an hour he'm got to prache.

GODLEIGH

'Tes a Christian village, boys.

[Feebly, quietly, JIM BERE laughs. There is silence; but the bell is heard still ranging.]

CURTAIN.

Scene II

The same-in daylight dying fast. A lamp is burning on the bar. A chair has been placed in the centre of the room, facing the bench under the window, on which are seated from right to left, GODLEIGH, SOL POTTER the village shopman, TRUSTAFORD, BURLACOMBE, FREMAN, JIM BERE, and MORSE the blacksmith. CLYST is squatting on a stool by the bar, and at the other end JARLAND, sobered and lowering, leans against the lintel of the porch leading to the door, round which are gathered five or six sturdy fellows, dumb as fishes. No one sits in the chair. In the unnatural silence that reigns, the distant sound of the wheezy church organ and voices singing can be heard.

TAUSTAFORD

[After a prolonged clearing of his throat] What I mean to zay is that 'tes no yuse, not a bit o' yuse in the world, not duin' of things properly. If an' in case we'm to carry a resolution disapprovin' o' curate, it must all be done so as no one can't, zay nothin'.

SOL POTTER

That's what I zay, Mr. Trustaford; ef so be as 'tis to be a village meetin', then it must be all done proper.

FREMAN

That's right, Sot Potter. I purpose Mr. Sot Potter into the chair. Whu seconds that?

[A silence. Voices from among the dumb-as-fishes: "I du."]

CLYST

[Excitedly] Yu can't putt that to the meetin'. Only a chairman can putt it to the meetin'. I purpose that Mr. Burlacombe-- bein as how he's chairman o' the Parish Council--take the chair.

FREMAN

Ef so be as I can't putt it, yu can't putt that neither.

TRUSTAFORD

'Tes not a bit o' yuse; us can't 'ave no meetin' without a chairman.

GODLEIGH

Us can't 'ave no chairman without a meetin' to elect un, that's zure. [A silence.]

MORSE

[Heavily] To my way o' thinkin', Mr. Godleigh speaks zense; us must 'ave a meetin' before us can 'ave a chairman.

CLYST

Then what we got to du's to elect a meetin'.

BURLACOMBE

[Sourly] Yu'll not find no procedure far that.

[Voices from among the dumb-as fishes: "Mr. Burlacombe 'e oughter know."]

SOL POTTER

[Scratching his head--with heavy solemnity] 'Tes my belief there's no other way to du, but to elect a chairman to call a meetin'; an' then for that meetin' to elect a chairman.

CLYST

I purpose Mr. Burlacombe as chairman to call a meetin'.

FREMAN

I purpose Sol Potter.

GODLEIGH

Can't 'ave tu propositions together before a meetin'; that's apple-pie zure vur zurtain.

[Voice from among the dumb-as fishes: "There ain't no meetin' yet, Sol Potter zays."]

TRUSTAFORD

Us must get the rights of it zettled some'ow. 'T'es like the darned old chicken an' the egg--meetin' or chairman--which come virst?

SOL POTTER

[Conciliating] To my thinkin' there shid be another way o' duin' it, to get round it like with a circumbendibus. 'T'all comes from takin' different vuse, in a manner o' spakin'.

FREMAN

Vu goo an' zet in that chair.

SOL POTTER

[With a glance at BURLACOMBE modestly] I shid'n never like fur to du that, with Mr. Burlacombe zettin' there.

BURLACOMBE

[Rising] 'T'es all darned fulishness.

[Amidst an uneasy shufflement of feet he moves to the door, and goes out into the darkness.]

CLYST

[Seeing his candidate thus depart] Rackon curate's pretty well thru by now, I'm goin' to zee. [As he passes JARLAND] 'Ow's to base, old man?

[He goes out. One of the dumb-as-fishes moves from the door and fills the apace left on the bench by BURLACOMBE'S departure.]

JARLAND

Darn all this puzzivantin'! [To SOL POTTER] Got an' zet in that chair.

SOL POTTER

[Rising and going to the chair; there he stands, changing from one to the other of his short broad feet and sweating from modesty and worth] 'Tese my duty now, gentlemen, to call a meetin' of the parishioners of this parish. I beg therefore to declare that this is a meetin' in accordance with my duty as chairman of this meetin' which elected me chairman to call this meetin'. And I purceed to vacate the chair so that this meetin' may now purceed to elect a chairman.

[He gets up from the chair, and wiping the sweat from his brow, goes back to his seat.]

FREMAN

Mr. Chairman, I rise on a point of order.

GODLEIGH

There ain't no chairman.

FREMAN

I don't give a darn for that. I rise on a point of order.

GODLEIGH

'Tese a chairman that decides points of order. 'Tese certain yu can't rise on no points whatever till there's a chairman.

TRUSTAFORD

'Tes no yuse yure risin', not the least bit in the world, till there's some one to set yu down again.
Haw, haw!

[Voice from the dumb-as-Etches: "Mr. Trustaford 'e's right."]

FREMAN

What I zay is the chairman ought never to 'ave vacated the chair till I'd risen on my point of order. I purpose that he goo and zet down again.

GODLEIGH

Yu can't purpose that to this meetin'; yu can only purpose that to the old meetin' that's not zettin' any longer.

FREMAN

[Excitedly] I didn' care what old meetin' 'tis that's zettin'. I purpose that Sol Potter goo an' zet in that chair again, while I rise on my point of order.

TRUSTAFORD

[Scratching his head] 'Tesn't regular but I guess yu've got to goo, Sol, or us shan't 'ave no peace.

[SOL POTTER, still wiping his brow, goes back to the chair.]

MORSE

[Stolidly-to FREMAN] Zet down, Will Freman. [He pulls at him with a blacksmith's arm.]

FREMAN

[Remaining erect with an effort] I'm not a-goin' to zet down till I've arisen.

JARLAND

Now then, there 'e is in the chair. What's yore point of order?

FREMAN

[Darting his eyes here and there, and flinging his hand up to his gipsy-like head] 'Twas--'twas--
Darned ef y' 'aven't putt it clean out o' my 'ead.

JARLAND

We can't wait for yore points of order. Come out o' that chair. Sol Potter.

[SOL POTTER rises and is about to vacate the chair.]

FREMAN

I know! There ought to 'a been minutes taken. Yu can't 'ave no meetin' without minutes. When us comes to electin' a chairman o' the next meetin', 'e won't 'ave no minutes to read.

SOL POTTER

'Twas only to putt down that I was elected chairman to elect a meetin' to elect a chairman to preside over a meetin' to pass a resolution dalin' wi' the curate. That's aisy set down, that is.

FREMAN

[Mollified] We'll 'ave that zet down, then, while we're electin' the chairman o' the next meetin'.

[A silence.]

TRUSTAFORD

Well then, seein' this is the praaper old meetin' for carryin' the resolution about the curate, I purpose Mr. Sol Potter take the chair.

FREMAN

I purpose Mr. Trustaford. I 'aven't a-got nothin' against Sol Potter, but seein' that he elected the meetin' that's to elect 'im, it might be said that 'e was electin' of himzelf in a manner of spakin'. Us don't want that said.

MORSE

[Amid meditative grunts from the dumb-as-fishes] There's some-at in that. One o' they tu purposals must be putt to the meetin'.

FREMAN

Second must be putt virst, fur zure.

TRUSTAFORD

I dunno as I wants to zet in that chair. To hiss the curate, 'tis a ticklish sort of a job after that. Vurst comes afore second, Will Freeman.

FREMAN

Second is amendment to virst. 'Tes the amendments is putt virst.

TRUSTAFORD

'Ow's that, Mr. Godleigh? I'm not particular eggzac'ly to a dilly zort of a point like that.

SOL POTTER

[Scratching his, head] 'Tes a very nice point, for zure.

GODLEIGH

'Tes undoubtedly for the chairman to decide.

[Voice from the dumb-as fishes: "But there ain't no chairman yet."]

JARLAND

Sol Potter's chairman.

FREMAN

No, 'e ain't.

MORSE

Yes, 'e is--'e's chairman till this second old meetin' gets on the go.

FREMAN

I deny that. What du yu say, Mr. Trustaford?

TRUSTAFORD

I can't 'ardly tell. It du zeem a darned long-sufferin' sort of a business altogether.

[A silence.]

MORSE

[Slowly] Tell 'ee what 'tis, us shan't du no gude like this.

GODLEIGH

'Tes for Mr. Freman or Mr. Trustaford, one or t'other to withdraw their motions.

TRUSTAFORD

[After a pause, with cautious generosity] I've no objections to withdrawin' mine, if Will Freman'll withdraw his'n.

FREMAN

I won't never be be'indhand. If Mr. Trustaford withdraws, I withdraws mine.

MORSE

[With relief] That's zensible. Putt the motion to the meetin'.

SOL POTTER

There ain't no motion left to putt.

[Silence of consternation.]

[In the confusion Jim BERE is seen to stand up.]

GODLEIGH

Jim Bere to spike. Silence for Jim!

VOICES

Aye! Silence for Jim!

SOL POTTER

Well, Jim?

JIM

[Smiling and slow] Nothin' duin'.

TRUSTAFORD

Bravo, Jim! Yu'm right. Best zense yet!

[Applause from the dumb-as-fishes.]

[With his smile brightening, JIM resumes his seat.]

SOL POTTER

[Wiping his brow] Du seem to me, gentlemen, seem' as we'm got into a bit of a tangle in a manner of spakin', 'twid be the most zimplest and vairest way to begin all over vrom the beginnin', so's t'ave it all vair an' square for every one.

[In the uproar Of "Aye" and "No," it is noticed that TIBBY JARLAND is standing in front of her father with her finger, for want of something better, in her mouth.]

TIBBY

[In her stolid voice] Please, sister Mercy says, curate 'ave got to "Lastly." [JARLAND picks her up, and there is silence.] An' please to come quick.

JARLAND

Come on, mates; quietly now!

[He goes out, and all begin to follow him.]

MORSE

[Slowest, save for SOL POTTER] 'T'es rare lucky us was all agreed to hiss the curate afore us began the botherin' old meetin', or us widn' 'ardly 'ave 'ad time to settle what to du.

SOL POTTER

[Scratching his head] Aye, 'tes rare lucky; but I dunno if 'tes altogether reg'lar.

CURTAIN.

Scene III

The village green before the churchyard and the yew-trees at the gate. Into the pitch dark under the yews, light comes out through the half-open church door. Figures are lurking, or moving stealthily--people waiting and listening to the sound of a voice speaking in the church words that are inaudible. Excited whispering and faint giggles come from the deepest yew- tree shade, made ghostly by the white faces and the frocks of young girls continually flitting up and back in the blackness. A girl's figure comes flying out from the porch, down the path of light, and joins the stealthy group.

WHISPERING VOICE OF MERCY

Where's 'e got to now, Gladys?

WHISPERING VOICE OF GLADYS

'E've just finished.

VOICE OF CONNIE

Whu pushed t'door open?

VOICE OF GLADYS

Tim Clyst I giv' it a little push, meself.

VOICE OF CONNIE

Oh!

VOICE OF GLADYS

Tim Clyst's gone in!

ANOTHER VOICE

O-o-o-h!

VOICE OF MERCY

Whu else is there, tu?

VOICE OF GLADYS

Ivy's there, an' Old MRS Potter, an' tu o' the maids from th'Hall; that's all as ever.

VOICE OF CONNIE

Not the old grey mare?

VOICE OF GLADYS

No. She ain't ther'. 'Twill just be th'ymn now, an' the Blessin'. Tibby gone for 'em?

VOICE OF MERCY

Yes.

VOICE OF CONNIE

Mr. Burlacombe's gone in home, I saw 'im pass by just now--'e don' like it. Father don't like it neither.

VOICE OF MERCY

Mr. Strangway shoudn' 'ave taken my skylark, an' thrown father out o' winder. 'Tis goin' to be awful fun! Oh!

[She jumps up and dawn in the darkness. And a voice from far in the shadow says: "Hsssh! Quiet, yu maids!" The voice has ceased speaking in the church. There is a moment's dead silence. The voice speaks again; then from the wheezy little organ come the first faint chords of a hymn.]

GLADYS

"Nearer, my God, to Thee!"

VOICE OF MERCY

'Twill be funny, with no one 'ardly singin'.

[The sound of the old hymn sung by just six voices comes out to them rather sweet and clear.]

GLADYS

[Softly] 'Tis pretty, tu. Why! They're only singin' one verse!

[A moment's silence, and the voice speaks, uplifted, pronouncing the Blessing: "The peace of God----" As the last words die away, dark figures from the inn approach over the grass, till quite a crowd seems standing there without a word spoken. Then from out of the church porch come the congregation. TIM CLYST first, hastily lost among the waiting figures in the dark; old MRS Potter, a half blind old lady groping her way and perceiving nothing out of the ordinary; the two maids from the Hall, self-conscious and scared, scuttling along. Last, IVY BURLACOMBE quickly, and starting back at the dim, half-hidden crowd.]

VOICE OF GLADYS

[Whispering] Ivy! Here, quick!

[Ivy sways, darts off towards the voice, and is lost in the shadow.]

VOICE OF FREMAN

[Low] Wait, boys, till I give signal.

[Two or three squirks and giggles; Tim CLYST'S voice: "Ya-as! Don't 'ee tread on my toe!" A soft, frightened "O-o-h!" from a girl. Some quick, excited whisperings: "Luke!" "Zee there!" "He's comin'!" And then a perfectly dead silence. The figure of STRANGWAY is seen in his dark clothes, passing from the vestry to the church porch. He stands plainly visible in the lighted porch, locking the door, then steps forward. Just as he reaches the edge of the porch, a low hiss breaks the silence. It swells very gradually into a long, hissing groan. STRANGWAY stands motionless, his hand over his eyes, staring into the darkness. A girl's figure can be seen to break out of the darkness and rush away. When at last the groaning has died into sheer expectancy, STRANGWAY drops his hand.]

STRANGWAY

[In a loco voice] Yes! I'm glad. Is Jarland there?

FREMAN

He's 'ere-no thanks to yu! Hsss!

[The hiss breaks out again, then dies away.]

JARLAND'S VOICE

[Threatening] Try if yu can du it again.

STRANGWAY

No, Jarland, no! I ask you to forgive me. Humbly!

[A hesitating silence, broken by muttering.]

CLYST'S VOICE

Bravo!

A VOICE

That's vair.

A VOICE

'E's afraid o' the sack--that's what 'tis.

A VOICE

[Groaning] 'E's a praaper coward.

A VOICE

Whu funked the doctor?

CLYST'S VOICE

Shame on 'ee, therr!

STRANGWAY

You're right--all of you! I'm not fit! An uneasy and excited mustering and whispering dies away into renewed silence.

STRANGWAY

What I did to Tam Jarland is not the real cause of what you're doing, is it? I understand. But don't be troubled. It's all over. I'm going--you'll get some one better. Forgive me, Jarland. I can't see your face--it's very dark.

FREMAN'S VOICE

[Mocking] Wait for the full mune.

GODLEIGH

[Very low] "My 'eart 'E lighted not!"

STRANGWAY

[starting at the sound of his own words thus mysteriously given him out of the darkness]
Whoever found that, please tear it up! [After a moment's silence] Many of you have been very kind to me. You won't see me again--Good-bye, all!

[He stands for a second motionless, then moves resolutely down into the darkness so peopled with shadows.]

UNCERTAIN VOICES AS HE PASSES

Good-bye, zurr! Good luck, zurr! [He has gone.]

CLYST'S VOICE

Three cheers for Mr. Strangway!

[And a queer, strangled cheer, with groans still threading it, arises.]

CURTAIN.

ACT III

Scene I

In the BURLACOMBES' hall-sitting-room the curtains are drawn, a lamp burns, and the door stands open. BURLACOMBE and his wife are hovering there, listening to the sound of mingled cheers and groaning.

MRS BURLACOMBE

Aw! my gudeness--what a thing t'appen! I'd saner 'a lost all me ducks. [She makes towards the inner door] I can't never face 'im.

BURLACOMBE

'E can't expect nothin' else, if 'e act like that.

MRS BURLACOMBE

'Tes only duin' as 'e'd be done by.

BURLACOMBE

Aw! Yu can't go on forgivin' 'ere, an' forgivin' there. 'Tesn't nat'ral.

MRS BURLACOMBE

'Tes the mischief 'e'm a parson. 'Tes 'im bein' a lamb o' God--or 'twidden be so quare for 'im to be forgivin'.

BURLACOMBE

Yu goo an' make un a gude 'ot drink.

MRS BURLACOMBE

Poor soul! What'll 'e du now, I wonder? [Under her breath] 'E's cumin'!

[She goes hurriedly. BURLACOMBE, with a startled look back, wavers and makes to follow her, but stops undecided in the inner doorway. STRANGWAY comes in from the darkness. He turns to the window and drops overcoat and hat and the church key on the windowseat, looking about him as men do when too hard driven, and never fixing his eyes long enough on anything to see it. BURLACOMBE, closing the door into the house, advances a step. At the sound STRANGWAY faces round.]

BURLACOMBE

I wanted for yu to know, zurr, that me an' mine 'adn't nothin' to du wi' that darned fulishness, just now.

STRANGWAY

[With a ghost of a smile] Thank you, Burlacombe. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter a bit.

BURLACOMBE

I 'ope yu won't take no notice of it. Like a lot o' silly bees they get. [After an uneasy pause] Yu'll excuse me spakin' of this mornin', an' what 'appened. 'Tes a brave pity it cam' on yu so sudden-like before yu 'ad time to think. 'Tes a sort o' thing a man shude zet an' chew upon. Certainly 'tes not a bit o' yuse goin' against human nature. Ef yu don't stand up for yureself there's no one else not goin' to. 'Tes yure not 'avin' done that 'as made 'em so rampageous. [Stealing another look at STRANGWAY] Yu'll excuse me, zurr, spakin' of it, but 'tes amazin' sad to zee a man let go his own, without a word o' darin'. 'Tea as ef 'e 'ad no passions- like.

STRANGWAY

Look at me, Burlacombe.

[BURLACOMBE looks up, trying hard to keep his eyes on STRANGWAY'S, that seem to burn in his thin face.]

STRANGWAY

Do I look like that? Please, please! [He touches his breast] I've too much here. Please!

BURLACOMBE

[With a sort of startled respect] Well, zurr, 'tes not for me to zay nothin', certainly.

[He turns and after a slow look back at STRANGWAY goes out.]

STRANGWAY

[To himself] Passions! No passions! Ha!

[The outer door is opened and IVY BURLACOMBE appears, and, seeing him, stops. Then, coming softly towards him, she speaks timidly.]

IVY

Oh! Mr. Strangway, MRS Bradmere's cumin' from the Rectory. I ran an' told 'em. Oh! 'twas awful.

[STRANGWAY starts, stares at her, and turning on his heel, goes into the house. Ivy's face is all puckered, as if she were on the point of tears. There is a gentle scratching at the door, which has not been quite closed.]

VOICE OF GLADYS

[Whispering] Ivy! Come on Ivy. I won't.

VOICE OF MERCY

Yu must. Us can't du without Yu.

Ivy. [Going to the door] I don't want to.

VOICE OF GLADYS

"Naughty maid, she won't come out," Ah! du 'ee!

VOICE OF CREMER

Tim Clyst an' Bobbie's cumin'; us'll only be six anyway. Us can't dance "figure of eight" without yu.

Ivy. [Stamping her foot] I don't want to dance at all! I don't.

MERCY

Aw! She's temper. Yu can bang on tambourine, then!

GLADYS

[Running in] Quick, Ivy! Here's the old grey mare cumin' down the green. Quick.

[With whispering and scuffling; gurgling and squeaking, the reluctant Ivy's hand is caught and she is jerked away. In their haste they have left the door open behind them.]

VOICE OF MRS BRADMERE

[Outside] Who's that?

[She knocks loudly, and rings a bell; then, without waiting, comes in through the open door.]

[Noting the overcoat and hat on the window-sill she moves across to ring the bell. But as she does so, MRS BURLACOMBE, followed by BURLACOMBE, comes in from the house.]

MRS BRADMERE

This disgraceful business! Where's Mr. Strangway? I see he's in.

MRS BURLACOMBE

Yes, m'm, he'm in--but--but Burlacombe du zay he'm terrible upset.

MRS BRADMERE

I should think so. I must see him--at once.

MRS BURLACOMBE

I doubt bed's the best place for 'un, an' gude 'ot drink. Burlacombe zays he'm like a man standin' on the edge of a cliff; and the lasts tipsy o' wind might throw un over.

MRS BRADMERE

[To BURLACOMBE] You've seen him, then?

BURLACOMBE

Yeas; an' I don't like the luke of un--not a little bit, I don't.

MRS BURLACOMBE

[Almost to herself] Poor soul; 'e've a-'ad to much to try un this yer long time past. I've a-seen 'tis sperrit cumin' thru 'is body, as yu might zay. He's torn to bits, that's what 'tis.

BURLACOMBE

'Twas a praaper cowardly thing to hiss a man when he's down. But 'twas natural tu, in a manner of spakin'. But 'tesn't that troublin' 'im. 'Tes in here [touching his forehead], along of his wife, to my thinkin'. They zay 'e've a-known about 'er a-fore she went away. Think of what 'e've 'ad to kape in all this time. 'Tes enough to drive a man silly after that. I've a-locked my gun up. I see a man like--like that once before--an' sure enough 'e was dead in the mornain'!

MRS BRADMERE

Nonsense, Burlacombe! [To MRS BURLACOMBE] Go and tell him I want to see him--must see him. [MRS BURLACOMBE goes into the house] And look here, Burlacombe; if we catch any one, man or woman, talking of this outside the village, it'll be the end of their tenancy, whoever they may be. Let them all know that. I'm glad he threw that drunken fellow out of the window, though it was a little----

BURLACOMBE

Aye! The nuspapers would be praaper glad of that, for a tiddy bit o' nuse.

MRS BRADMERE

My goodness! Yes! The men are all up at the inn. Go and tell them what I said--it's not to get about. Go at once, Burlacombe.

BURLACOMBE

Must be a turrable job for 'im, every one's knowin' about 'is wife like this. He'm a proud man tu, I think. 'Tes a funny business altogether!

MRS BRADMERE

Horrible! Poor fellow! Now, come! Do your best, Burlacombe!

[BURLACOMBE touches his forelock and goes. MRS BRADMERE stands quite still, thinking. Then going to the photograph, she stares up at it.]

MRS BRADMERE

You baggage!

[STRANGWAY has come in noiselessly, and is standing just behind her. She turns, and sees him. There is something so still, so startlingly still in his figure and white face, that she cannot for the moment find her voice.]

MRS BRADMERE

[At last] This is most distressing. I'm deeply sorry. [Then, as he does not answer, she goes a step closer] I'm an old woman; and old women must take liberties, you know, or they couldn't get on at all. Come now! Let's try and talk it over calmly and see if we can't put things right.

STRANGWAY

You were very good to come; but I would rather not.

MRS BRADMERE

I know you're in as grievous trouble as a man can be.

STRANGWAY

Yes.

MRS BRADMERE

[With a little sound of sympathy] What are you-- thirty-five? I'm sixty-eight if I'm a day--old enough to be your mother. I can feel what you must have been through all these months, I can indeed. But you know you've gone the wrong way to work. We aren't angels down here below! And a son of the Church can't act as if for himself alone. The eyes of every one are on him.

STRANGWAY

[Taking the church key from the window.] Take this, please.

MRS BRADMERE

No, no, no! Jarland deserved all he got. You had great provocation.

STRANGWAY

It's not Jarland. [Holding out the key] Please take it to the Rector. I beg his forgiveness.
[Touching his breast] There's too much I can't speak of--can't make plain. Take it to him, please.

MRS BRADMERE

Mr. Strangway--I don't accept this. I am sure my husband--the Church--will never accept----

STRANGWAY

Take it!

MRS BRADMERE

[Almost unconsciously taking it] Mind! We don't accept it. You must come and talk to the Rector to-morrow. You're overwrought. You'll see it all in another light, then.

STRANGWAY

[With a strange smile] Perhaps. [Lifting the blind] Beautiful night! Couldn't be more beautiful!

MRS BRADMERE

[Startled-softly] Don't turn away from these who want to help you! I'm a grumpy old woman, but I can feel for you. Don't try and keep it all back, like this! A woman would cry, and it would all seem clearer at once. Now won't you let me----?

STRANGWAY

No one can help, thank you.

MRS BRADMERE

Come! Things haven't gone beyond mending, really, if you'll face them. [Pointing to the photograph] You know what I mean. We dare not foster immorality.

STRANGWAY

[Quivering as at a jabbed nerve] Don't speak of that!

MRS BRADMERE

But think what you've done, Mr. Strangway! If you can't take your wife back, surely you must divorce her. You can never help her to go on like this in secret sin.

STRANGWAY

Torture her--one way or the other?

MRS BRADMERE

No, no; I want you to do as the Church--as all Christian society would wish. Come! You can't let this go on. My dear man, do your duty at all costs!

STRANGWAY

Break her heart?

MRS BRADMERE

Then you love that woman--more than God!

STRANGWAY

[His face quivering] Love!

MRS BRADMERE

They told me----Yes, and I can see you're is a bad way. Come, pull yourself together! You can't defend what you're doing.

STRANGWAY

I do not try.

MRS BRADMERE

I must get you to see! My father was a clergyman; I'm married to one; I've two sons in the Church. I know what I'm talking about. It's a priest's business to guide the people's lives.

STRANGWAY

[Very low] But not mine! No more!

MRS BRADMERE

[Looking at him shrewdly] There's something very queer about you to-night. You ought to see doctor.

STRANGWAY

[A smile awning and going on his lips] If I am not better soon----

MRS BRADMERE

I know it must be terrible to feel that everybody----

[A convulsive shiver passes over STRANGWAY, and he shrinks against the door]

But come! Live it down!

[With anger growing at his silence]

Live it down, man! You can't desert your post--and let these villagers do what they like with us? Do you realize that you're letting a woman, who has treated you abominably;--yes, abominably -- go scot-free, to live comfortably with another man? What an example!

STRANGWAY

Will you, please, not speak of that!

MRS BRADMERE

I must! This great Church of ours is based on the rightful condemnation of wrongdoing. There are times when forgiveness is a sin, Michael Strangway. You must keep the whip hand. You must fight!

STRANGWAY

Fight! [Touching his heart] My fight is here. Have you ever been in hell? For months and months--burned and longed; hoped against hope; killed a man in thought day by day? Never rested, for love and hate? I--condemn! I--judge! No! It's rest I have to find--somewhere--somehow--rest! And how--how can I find rest?

MRS BRADMERE

[Who has listened to his outburst in a soft of coma] You are a strange man! One of these days you'll go off your head if you don't take care.

STRANGWAY

[Smiling] One of these days the flowers will grow out of me; and I shall sleep.

[MRS BRADMERE stares at his smiling face a long moment in silence, then with a little sound, half sniff, half snort, she goes to the door. There she halts.]

MRS BRADMERE

And you mean to let all this go on----Your wife----

STRANGWAY

Go! Please go!

MRS BRADMERE

Men like you have been buried at cross-roads before now! Take care! God punishes!

STRANGWAY

Is there a God?

MRS BRADMERE

Ah! [With finality] You must see a doctor.

[Seeing that the look on his face does not change, she opens the door, and hurries away into the moonlight.]

[STRANGWAY crosses the room to where his wife's picture hangs, and stands before it, his hands grasping the frame. Then he takes it from the wall, and lays it face upwards on the window seat.]

STRANGWAY

[To himself] Gone! What is there, now?

[The sound of an owl's hooting is floating in, and of voices from the green outside the inn.]

STRANGWAY

[To himself] Gone! Taken faith--hope--life!

[JIM BERE comes wandering into the open doorway.]

JIM BERE

Gude avenin', zurr.

[At his slow gait, with his feeble smile, he comes in, and standing by the window-seat beside the long dark coat that still lies there, he looks down at STRANGWAY with his lost eyes.]

JIM

Yu threw un out of winder. I cud 'ave, once, I cud.

[STRANGWAY neither moves nor speaks; and JIM BERE goes on with his unimaginably slow speech]

They'm laughin' at yu, zurr. An' so I come to tell 'ee how to du. 'Twas full mune--when I caught 'em, him an' my girl. I caught 'em. [With a strange and awful flash of fire] I did; an' I tuk un [He taken up STRANGWAY'S coat and grips it with his trembling hands, as a man grips another's neck] like that--I tuk un. As the coat falls, like a body out of which the breath has been squeezed, STRANGWAY, rising, catches it.

STRANGWAY

[Gripping the coat] And he fell!

[He lets the coat fall on the floor, and puts his foot on it. Then, staggering back, he leans against the window.]

JIM

Yu see, I loved 'er--I did. [The lost look comes back to his eyes] Then somethin'--I dunno--and--and----[He lifts his hand and passes it up and down his side] Twas like this for ever.

[They gaze at each other in silence.]

JIM

[At last] I come to tell yu. They'm all laughin' at yu. But yu'm strong--yu go over to Durford to that doctor man, an' take un like I did. [He tries again to make the sign of squeezing a man's neck] They can't laugh at yu no more, then. Tha's what I come to tell yu. Tha's the way for a Christian man to du. Gude naight, zurr. I come to tell yee.

[STRANGWAY motions to him in silence. And, very slowly, JIM BERE passes out.]

[The voices of men coming down the green are heard.]

VOICES

Gude night, Tam. Glide naight, old Jim!

VOICES

Gude might, Mr. Trustaford. 'T'es a wonderful fine mune.

VOICE OF TRUSTAFORD

Ah! 'T'es a brave mune for th' poor old curate!

VOICE

"My 'eart 'E lighted not!"

[TRUSTAFORD'S laugh, and the rattling, fainter and fainter, of wheels. A spasm seizes on STRANGWAY'S face, as he stands there by the open door, his hand grips his throat; he looks from side to side, as if seeking a way of escape.]

CURTAIN.

Scene II

The BURLACOMBES' high and nearly empty barn. A lantern is hung by a rope that lifts the bales of straw, to a long ladder leaning against a rafter. This gives all the light there is, save for a slender track of moonlight, slanting in from the end, where the two great doors are not quite closed. On a rude bench in front of a few remaining, stacked, square-cut bundles of last year's hay, sits TIBBY JARLAND, a bit of apple in her mouth, sleepily beating on a tambourine. With stockinged feet GLADYS, IVY, CONNIE, and MERCY, TIM CLYST, and BOBBIE JARLAND, a boy of fifteen, are dancing a truncated "Figure of Eight"; and their shadow are dancing alongside on the walls. Shoes and some apples have been thrown down close to the side door through which they have come in. Now and then IVY, the smallest and best of the dancers, ejaculates words of direction, and one of the youths grunts or breathes loudly out of the confusion of his mind. Save for this and the dumb beat and jingle of the sleepy tambourine, there is no sound. The dance comes to its end, but the drowsy TIBBY goes on beating.

MERCY

That'll du, Tibby; we're finished. Ate yore apple. [The stolid TIBBY eats her apple.]

CLYST

[In his teasing, excitable voice] Yu maids don't dance 'elf's well as us du. Bobbie 'e's a great dancer. 'E dance vine. I'm a gude dancer, meself.

GLADYS

A'n't yu conceited just?

CLYST

Aw! Ah! Yu'll give me kiss for that. [He chases, but cannot catch that slippery white figure] Can't she glimmer!

MERCY

Gladys! Up ladder!

CLYST

Yu go up ladder; I'll catch 'ee then. Naw, yu maids, don't yu give her succour. That's not vair [Catching hold of MERCY, who gives a little squeal.]

CONNIE

Mercy, don't! MRS Burlacombe'll hear. Ivy, go an' peek.

[Ivy goes to flee side door and peers through.]

CLYST

[Abandoning the chase and picking up an apple--they all have the joyous irresponsibility that attends forbidden doings] Ya-as, this is a gude apple. Luke at Tibby!

[TIBBY, overcome by drowsiness, has fallen back into the hay, asleep. GLADYS, leaning against the hay breaks into humming:]

"There cam' three dukes a-ridin', a-ridin', a-ridin',
There cam' three dukes a ridin'
With a ransy-tansy tay!"

CLYST

Us 'as got on vine; us'll get prize for our dancin'.

CONNIE

There won't be no prize if Mr. Strangway goes away. 'T'es funny 'twas MRS Strangway start us.

IVY

[From the door] 'Twas wicked to hiss him.

[A moment's hush.]

CLYST

Twasn't I.

BOBBIE

I never did.

GLADYS

Oh! Bobbie, yu did! Yu blew in my ear.

CLYST

'Twas the praaper old wind in the trees. Did make a brave noise, zurely.

MERCY

'E shuld'n' 'a let my skylark go.

CLYST

[Out of sheer contradictoriness] Ya-as, 'e shude, then. What du yu want with th' birds of the air? They'm no gude to yu.

IVY

[Mournfully] And now he's goin' away.

CLYST

Ya-as; 'tes a pity. He's the best man I ever seen since I was comin' from my mother. He's a gude man. He'em got a zad face, sure enough, though.

IVY

Gude folk always 'ave zad faces.

CLYST

I knu a gude man--'e sold pigs--very gude man: 'e 'ad a budiful bright vase like the mane.
[Touching his stomach] I was sad, meself, once. 'Twas a funny scrabblin'--like feelin'.

GLADYS

If 'e go away, whu's goin' to finish us for confirmation?

CONNIE

The Rector and the old grey mare.

MERCY

I don' want no more finishin'; I'm confirmed enough.

CLYST

Ya-as; yu'm a buty.

GLADYS

Suppose we all went an' asked 'im not to go?

IVY

'Twouldn't be no gude.

CONNIE

Where's 'e goin'?

MERCY

He'll go to London, of course.

IVY

He's so gentle; I think 'e'll go to an island, where there's nothin' but birds and beasts and flowers.

CLYST

Aye! He'm awful fond o' the dumb things.

IVY

They're kind and peaceful; that's why.

CLYST

Aw! Yu see tu praaper old tom cats; they'm not to peaceful, after that, nor kind naighther.

BOBBIE

[Surprisingly] If 'e's sad, per'aps 'e'll go to 'Eaven.

IVY

Oh! not yet, Bobbie. He's tu young.

CLYST

[Following his own thoughts] Ya-as. 'Tes a funny place, tu, nowadays, judgin' from the papers.

GLADYS

Wonder if there's dancin' in 'Eaven?

IVY

There's beasts, and flowers, and waters, and 'e told us.

CLYST

Naw! There's no dumb things in 'Eaven. Jim Bere 'e says there is! 'E thinks 'is old cat's there.

IVY

Yes. [Dreamily] There's stars, an' owls, an' a man playin' on the flute. Where 'tes gude, there must be music.

CLYST

Old brass band, shuldn' wonder, like th' Salvation Army.

IVY

[Putting up her hands to an imaginary pipe] No; 'tis a boy that goes so; an' all the dumb things an' all the people goo after 'im--like this.

[She marches slowly, playing her imaginary pipe, and one by one they all fall in behind her, padding round the barn in their stockinged feet. Passing the big doors, IVY throws them open.]

An' 'tes all like that in 'Eaven.

[She stands there gazing out, still playing on her imaginary pipe. And they all stand a moment silent, staring into the moonlight.]

CLYST

'Tes a glory-be full mune to-night!

IVY

A goldie-cup--a big one. An' millions o' little goldie-cups on the floor of 'Eaven.

MERCY

Oh! Bother 'Eaven! Let's dance "Clapperclaws"! Wake up, Tibby!

GLADYS

Clapperelaws, clapperclaws! Come on, Bobbie--make circle!

CLYST

Clapperclaws! I dance that one fine.

IVY

[Taking the tambourine] See, Tibby; like this. She hums and beats gently, then restores the tambourine to the sleepy TIBBY, who, waking, has placed a piece of apple in her mouth.

CONNIE

'Tis awful difficult, this one.

IVY

[Illustrating] No; yu just jump, an' clap yore 'ands. Lovely, lovely!

CLYST

Like ringin' bells! Come ahn!

[TIBBY begins her drowsy beating, IVY hums the tune; they dance, and their shadows dance again upon the walls. When she has beaten but a few moments on the tambourine, TIBBY is overcome once more by sleep and falls back again into her nest of hay, with her little shoed feet just visible over the edge of the bench. Ivy catches up the tambourine, and to her beating and humming the dancers dance on.]

[Suddenly GLADYS stops like a wild animal surprised, and cranes her neck towards the aide door.]

CONNIE

[Whispering] What is it?

GLADYS

[Whispering] I hear--some one comin' across the yard.

[She leads a noiseless scamper towards the shoes. BOBBIE JARLAND shins up the ladder and seizes the lantern. Ivy drops the tambourine. They all fly to the big doors, and vanish into the moonlight, pulling the door nearly to again after them.]

[There is the sound of scrabbling at the hitch of the side door, and STRANGWAY comes into the nearly dark barn. Out in the night the owl is still hooting. He closes the door, and that sound is lost. Like a man walking in his sleep, he goes up to the ladder, takes the rope in his hand, and makes a noose. He can be heard breathing, and in the darkness the motions of his hands are dimly seen, freeing his throat and putting the noose round his neck. He stands swaying to and fro at the foot of the ladder; then, with a sigh, sets his foot on it to mount. One of the big doors creaks and opens in the wind, letting in a broad path of moonlight.]

[STRANGWAY stops; freeing his neck from the noose, he walks quickly up the track of moonlight, whitened from head to foot, to close the doors.]

[The sound of his boots on the bare floor has awakened TIBBY JARLAND. Struggling out of her hay nest she stands staring at his whitened figure, and bursts suddenly into a wail.]

TIBBY

O-oh! Mercy! Where are yu? I'm frightened! I'm frightened! O-oooo!

STRANGWAY

[Turning--startled] Who's that? Who is it?

TIBBY

O-oh! A ghosty! Oo-ooo!

STRANGWAY

[Going to her quickly] It's me, Tibby--Tib only me!

TIBBY

I seed a ghosty.

STRANGWAY

[Taking her up] No, no, my bird, you didn't! It was me.

TIBBY

[Burying her face against him] I'm frighted. It was a big one. [She gives tongue again] O-o-oh!

STRANGWAY

There, there! It's nothing but me. Look!

TIBBY

No. [She peeps out all the same.]

STRANGWAY

See! It's the moonlight made me all white. See! You're a brave girl now?

TIBBY

[Cautiously] I want my apple.

[She points towards her nest. STRANGWAY carries her there, picks up an apple, and gives it her. TIBBY takes a bite.]

TIBBY

I want any tambourine.

STRANGWAY

[Giving her the tambourine, and carrying her back into the' track of moonlight] Now we're both ghosties! Isn't it funny?

TABBY

[Doubtfully] Yes.

STRANGWAY

See! The moon's laughing at us! See? Laugh then!

[TABBY, tambourine in one hand and apple in the other, smiles stolidly. He sets her down on the ladder, and stands, holding her level With him.]

TABBY

[Solemnly] I'se still frightened.

STRANGWAY

No! Full moon, Tibby! Shall we wish for it?

TABBY

Full mune.

STRANGWAY

Moon! We're wishing for you. Moon, moon!

TIBBY

Mune, we're wishin' for yu!

STRANGWAY

What do, you wish it to be?

TIBBY

Bright new shillin'!

STRANGWAY

A face.

TIBBY

Shillin', a shillin'!

STRANGWAY

[Taking out a shilling and spinning it so that it falls into her pinafore] See! Your wish comes true.

TIBBY

Oh! [Putting the shilling in her mouth] Mune's still there!

STRANGWAY

Wish for me, Tibby!

TIBBY

Mune. I'm wishin' for yu!

STRANGWAY

Not yet!

TIBBY

Shall I shake my tambouline?

STRANGWAY

Yes, shake your tambouline.

TIBBY

[Shaking her tambourine] Mune, I'm shaken' at yu.

[STRANGWAY lays his hand suddenly on the rope, and swings it up on to the beam.]

TIBBY

What d'yu du that for?

STRANGWAY

To put it out of reach. It's better----

TIBBY

Why is it better? [She stares up at him.]

STRANGWAY

Come along, Tibby! [He carries her to the big doors, and sets her down] See! All asleep! The birds, and the fields, and the moon!

TIBBY

Mune, mune, we're wishing for yu!

STRANGWAY

Send her your love, and say good-night.

TIBBY

[Blowing a kiss] Good-night, mune!

[From the barn roof a little white dove's feather comes floating down in the wind. TIBBY follows it with her hand, catches it, and holds it up to him.]

TIBBY

[Chuckling] Luke. The mune's sent a bit o' love!

STRANGWAY

[Taking the feather] Thank you, Tibby! I want that bit o' love. [Very faint, comes the sound of music] Listen!

TIBBY

It's Miss Willis, playin' on the pianny!

STRANGWAY

No; it's Love; walking and talking in the world.

TIBBY

[Dubiously] Is it?

STRANGWAY

[Pointing] See! Everything coming out to listen! See them, Tibby! All the little things with pointed ears, children, and birds, and flowers, and bunnies; and the bright rocks, and--men! Hear their hearts beating! And the wind listening!

TIBBY

I can't hear--nor I can't see!

STRANGWAY

Beyond----[To himself] They are--they must be; I swear they are! [Then, catching sight of TIBBY'S amazed eyes] And now say good-bye to me.

TIBBY

Where yu goin'?

STRANGWAY

I don't know, Tibby.

VOICE OF MERCY

[Distant and cautious] Tibby! Tibby! Where are yu?

STRANGWAY

Mercy calling; run to her!

[TIBBY starts off, turns back and lifts her face. He bends to kiss her, and flinging her arms round his neck, she gives him a good hug. Then, knuckling the sleep out of her eyes, she runs.]

[STRANGWAY stands, uncertain. There is a sound of heavy footsteps; a man clears his throat, close by.]

STRANGWAY

Who's that?

CREMER

Jack Cremer. [The big man's figure appears out of the shadow of the barn] That yu, zurr?

STRANGWAY

Yes, Jack. How goes it?

CREMER

'Tes empty, zurr. But I'll get on some'ow.

STRANGWAY

You put me to shame.

CREMER

No, zurr. I'd be killin' meself, if I didn' feel I must stick it, like yu zaid.

[They stand gazing at each other in the moonlight.]

STRANGWAY

[Very low] I honour you.

CREMER

What's that? [Then, as STRANGWAY does not answer] I'll just be walkin'--I won' be gain' 'ome to-night. 'Tis the full mune-- lucky.

STRANGWAY

[Suddenly] Wait for me at the crossroads, Jack. I'll come with you. Will you have me, brother?

CREMER

Sure!

STRANGWAY

Wait, then.

CREMER

Aye, zurr.

[With his heavy tread CREMER passes on. And STRANGWAY leans against the lintel of the door, looking at the moon, that, quite full and golden, hangs not far above the straight horizon, where the trees stand small, in a row.]

STRANGWAY

[Lifting his hand in the gesture of prayer] God, of the moon and the sun; of joy and beauty, of loneliness and sorrow--give me strength to go on, till I love every living thing!

[He moves away, following JACK CREMER. The full moon shines; the owl hoots; and some one is shaking TIBBY'S tambourine.]