

*A Bit O' Love*

by

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## **A Bit O' Love**

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## 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. STRANGWAY'S rooms at BURLACOMBE'S. Morning.

ACT II. Evening

SCENE I. The Village Inn.

SCENE II. The same.

SCENE III. Outside the church.

ACT III. Evening

SCENE I. STRANGWAY'S rooms.

SCENE II. BURLACOMBE'S barn.

## 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 gloss 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 a foot, 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 tomorrow 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.

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