Evelyn Innes — Chapter 9

London: T. Fisher Unwin, 8 June 1898, pages 89-106, 6,713 words

IX

She sat in the music-room thinking, asking herself what use it would be to meet him in Berkeley Square unless to go away with him to Paris. She sat engrossed in her emotion; it was like looking into water where weeds are carried by a current out of the dim depths into the light of day. In a pensive atmosphere, a quiet daylight, his motives were revealed to her. She was in the humour to look at things sympathetically, and she understood that for him to run away with her entailed as much sacrifice on his part as on hers. It meant a giving up of his friends, pursuits and habits of life. There were sacrifices to be made by him as well as by her, and she smiled a little sadly as she thought of the differences of their several renunciations. She was asked to surrender her peace of mind, he his worldly pleasure. Often the sensation was almost physical; it rose up like a hand and seemed to sweep her heart clear, and at the same moment a voice said — It is not right. Owen had argued with her, but she could not quench the feeling that it was not right, and yet, when he asked her to explain, she could give no other reason except that it was forbidden by the Church.

Each thought that very little was asked from the other. To him her conscience seemed a slight forfeit, and worldly pleasure seemed very little to her. She thought that she would readily forfeit this world for him.... But eternity was her forfeit; even that she might sacrifice if she were sure her conscience would not trouble her in this world. She followed her conscience like a river; it fluttered along full of unexpected eddies and picturesque shallows, and there were pools so deep that she could not see to the bottom.

Suddenly the vision changed. She was no longer in Dulwich with her father. She saw railway trains and steamboats, and then the faint outline of the coast of France. Her foreboding was so clear and distinct that she could not doubt that Owen was the future that awaited her. The presentiment filled her with delight and fear, and both sensations were mingled at the same moment in her heart as she rose from her chair. She stood rigid as a visionary; then, hoping she would not be disturbed, she sank back into her chair and allowed her thoughts their will. She followed the course of the journey to France, and at every moment the sensation grew more exquisite. She heard him say what she wished him to say, and she saw the white villa in its garden planted with rhododendrons and chestnut trees in flower. The mild spring air, faint with perfume, dilated her nostrils, and her eyes drank in the soft colour of the light shadows passing over the delicate grass, and the light shadows moving among the trees. She lay back in her chair, her eyes fixed on a distant corner of the room, and her life went by, clear and surprising as pictures seen in a crystal. When she grew weary of the villa, she saw herself on the stage, and heard her own voice singing as she wished to sing. Nor did she foresee any break in the lulling enchantment of her life of music and love. She knew that Owen did not love her at present, but she never doubted that she could get him to love her, and once he loved her it seemed to her

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that he must always love her. What she had heard and read in books concerning the treachery of men, she remembered, but she was not influenced, for it did not seem to her that any such things were to happen to her. She closed her eyes so that she might drink more deeply of the vision, so that she might bring it more clearly before her. Like aspects seen on a misty river, it was as beautiful shadows of things rather than the things themselves. The meditation grew voluptuous, and as she saw him come into her room and take her in his arms, her conscience warned her that she should cease to indulge in these thoughts; but it was impossible to check them, and she dreamed on and on in kisses and tendernesses of speech.

That afternoon she was going to have tea with some friends, and as she paused to pin her hat before the glass, she remembered that if Owen were right, and that there was no future life, the only life that she was sure of would be wasted. Then she would endure the burden of life for naught; she would not have attained its recompense; the calamity would be irreparable; it would be just as if she had not lived at all. Thought succeeded thought in instantaneous succession, contradicting and refuting each other. No, her life would not be wasted, it would be an example to others, it was in renunciation that we rose above the animal and attained spiritual existence. At that moment it seemed to her that she could renounce everything but love. Could she renounce her art? But her art was not a merely personal sacrifice. In the renunciation of her art she was denying a great gift that had been given to her by Nature, that had come she knew not whence nor how, but clearly for exercise and for the admiration of the world. It therefore could not have been given to her to hide or to waste; she would be held responsible for it. Her voice was one of her responsibilities; not to cultivate her voice would be a sort of suicide. This seemed quite clear to her, and she reflected, and with some personal satisfaction, that she had incurred duties toward herself. Right and wrong, as Owen said, was a question of time and place. What was right here was wrong there, but oneself was the one certain thing, and to remain with her father meant the abandonment of herself.... She wanted herself! Ah, she wanted to live, and how well she knew that she was not living, and could never live, in Dulwich. The nuns! Strange were their renunciations! For they yielded the present moment, which Owen and a Persian poet called our one possession. She seemed to see them fading in a pathetic decadence, falling like etiolated flowers, and their holy simplicities seemed merely pathetic.

And in the exaltation of her resolution to live, her soul melted again into Owen's kisses, and she drew herself together, and the spasm was so intense and penetrating that to overcome it she walked across the room stretching her arms. It seemed to her more than impossible that she could endure Dulwich any longer. The life of love and art tore at her heart; always she saw Owen offering her love, fame, wealth; his hands were full of gifts; he seemed to drop them at her feet, and taking her in his arms, his lips closed upon hers, and her life seemed to run down like the last struggling sand in a glass.

Besides this personal desire there was in her brain a strange alienation. Paris rose up before her, and Italy, and they were so vague that she hardly knew whether they were remembrances or dreams, and she was compelled by a force so exterior to herself that she looked round frightened, as if she believed she would find someone at her elbow. She did not seem to be alone, there seemed to be others in the room, presences from which she could not escape; she

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could not see them, but she felt them about her, and as she sought them with fearing eyes, voices seemed speaking inside her, and it was with extreme terror that she heard the proposal that she was to be one of God's virgins. The hell which opened on the other side of Owen ceased to frighten her. The devils waiting there for her soul grew less substantial, and thoughts and things seemed to converge more and more, to draw together and become one. She was aware of the hallucination in her brain, but could not repress it, nor all sorts of rapid questions and arguments. Suddenly a voice reminded her that if she were going to abandon the life of the soul for the life of the flesh, that she should accept the flesh wholly, and not subvert its intentions. She should become the mother of children. Life was concerned more intimately with children than with her art. But somehow it did not seem the same renunciation, and she stood perplexed before the enigma of her conscience.

She looked round the room, dreading and half believing in some diabolic influence at her elbow, but perceiving nothing, an ungovernable impulse took her, and her steps strayed to the door, in the desire and almost in the intention of going to London. But if she went there, how would she explain her visit?... Owen would understand; but if he were not in, she could not wait until he came in. She paused to consider the look of pleasure that would come upon his face when he came in and found her there. There would be just one look, and they would throw themselves into each other's arms. She was about to rush away, having forgotten all else but him, when she remembered her father. If she were to go now she must leave a letter for him explaining — telling him the story. And who would play the viola da gamba at his concerts? and there would be no one to see that he had his meals.

Was she or was she not going away with Owen to Paris on Thursday night? The agonising question continued at every moment to present itself. Whatever she was doing or saying, she was always conscious of it, and as the time drew near, with every hour, it seemed to approach and menace her. She seemed to feel it beating like a neuralgic pain behind her eyes; and though she laughed and talked a great deal, her father noticed that her animation was strained and nervous, and he noticed, too, that in no part of their conversation was she ever entirely with him, and he wondered what were the sights and scenes he faintly discerned in her changing eyes.

On getting up on Wednesday morning, she remembered that the best train from Dulwich was at three o clock, and she asked herself why she had thought of this train, and that she should have thought of it seemed to her like an omen. Her father sat opposite, looking at her across the table. It was all so clear in her mind that she was ashamed to sit thinking these things, for thinking as clearly as she was thinking seemed equivalent to accomplishment; and the difference between what she thought and what she said was so repulsive to her that she was on the point of flinging herself at his feet several times.

There were times when the temptation seemed to have left her, when she smiled at her own weakness and folly; and having reproved herself sufficiently, she thought of other things. It seemed to her extraordinary why she should argue and trouble about a thing which she really had no intention of doing. But at that moment her heart told her that this was not so, that she

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would go to meet Owen in Berkeley Square, and she was again taken with an extraordinary inward trembling.

Our actions obey an unknown law, implicit in ourselves, but which does not conform to our logic. So we very often succeed in proving to ourselves that a certain course is the proper one for us to follow, in preference to another course, but, when it comes for us to act, we do not act as we intended, and we ascribe the discrepancy between what we think and what we do to a deficiency of will power. Man dares not admit that he acts according to his instincts, that his instincts are his destiny.

We make up our mind to change our conduct in certain matters, but we go on acting just the same; and in spite of every reason, Evelyn was still undecided whether she should go to meet Sir Owen. It was quite clear that it was wrong for her to go, and it seemed all settled in her mind; but at the bottom of her heart something over which she had no kind of control told her that in the end nothing could prevent her from going to meet him. She stopped, amazed and terrified, asking herself why she was going to do a thing which she seemed no longer even to desire.

In the afternoon some girl friends came to see her. She played and sang and talked to them, but they, too, noticed that she was never really with them, and her friends could see that she saw and heard things invisible and inaudible to them. In the middle of some trifling chatter — whether one colour or another was likely to be fashionable in the coming season — she had to put her hand in her pocket for her handkerchief, and happened to meet the key of the square, and it brought back to her in a moment the entire drama of her destiny. Was she going to take the three o'clock train to London, or to remain in Dulwich with her father? She thought that she would not mind whatever happened, if she only knew what would happen. Either lot seemed better to her than the uncertainty. She rattled on, talking with fictitious gaiety about the colour of bonnets and a party at which Julia had sung, not even hearing what she was saying. Wednesday evening passed with an inward vision so intense that all the outer world had receded from her, she was like one alone in a desert, and she ate without tasting, saw without seeing what she looked at, spoke without knowing what she was saying, heard without hearing what was said to her, and moved without knowing where she was going.

On Thursday morning the obsession of her destiny took all colour from her cheek, and her eyes were nervous.

'What is it, my girl?' her father said, taking her hand, and the music he was tying up dropped on the floor. 'Tell me, Evelyn; something, I can see, is the matter.'

It was like the breaking of a spring. Something seemed to give way within her, and slipping on her knees, she threw her arms about him.

'I am very unhappy. I wish I were dead.'

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He strove to raise her from her knees, but the attitude expressed her feelings, and she remained, leaning her face against him. Nor could he coax any information from her. At last she said, raising her tearful eyes, —

‘If I were to leave you, father, you would never forgive me? But I am your only daughter, and you would forgive me; whatever happened, we should always love one another?’

'But why should you leave me?’

'But if I loved someone? I don’t mean as I love you. I could never love anyone so tenderly; I mean quite differently. Don’t make me say more. I am so ashamed of myself.’

‘You are in love with him?’

‘Yes, and he has asked me to go away with him.' And as she answered, she wondered at the quickness with which her father had guessed that it was Owen. He was such a clever man; the moment his thoughts were diverted from his music, he understood things as well as the most worldly, and she felt that he would understand her, that she must open her heart to him.

'If I don’t go away with him I shall die, or kill myself, or go mad. It is terrible to have to tell you these things, father, I know, but I must. I was ill when he went away to Greece, you remember. It was nothing but love of him.’

'Did he not ask you to marry him?’

'No, he will never marry anyone.’

‘And that made no difference to you?’

‘Oh, father, don’t be angry, don’t think me horrid. You are looking at me as if you never saw me before. I know I ought to have been angry when he asked me to go away with him, but somehow I wasn’t. I don’t know that I even wanted him to marry me. I want to go away and be a great singer, and he is not more to blame than I am. I can’t tell lies. What is the use of telling lies? If I were to tell you anything else, it would be untrue.’

'But are you going away with him?’

'I don’t know. Not if I can help it;' and at that moment her eyes went to the portrait of her mother.

‘You lost your mother very early, and I have neglected you. She ought to be here to protect you.’

'No, no, father; she would not understand me as well as you do.’

'So you are glad that she is not here?’

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Evelyn nodded, and then she said, —

‘If he were to go away and I were left here again, I don’t know what would become of me. It isn’t my fault, father; I can’t help it.’

‘I did not know that you were like this. Your mother — ’

'Ah! mother and I are quite different. I am more like you, father. You can’t blame me; you have been in love with women — with mother, at least — and ought to understand.’

‘Evelyn... these are subjects that cannot be discussed between us.’

The eyes of the mother watched them, and there was something in her cold, distant glance which went to their hearts, but they could not interpret its meaning.

‘I either had to go away, father, telling you nothing, or I had to tell you everything.’

‘I will go to Sir Owen.’

'No, father, you mustn’t. Promise me you won’t. I have trusted you, and you mustn’t make me regret my trust. This is my secret.' He was frightened by the strange light that appeared in her eyes, and he felt that an appeal to Owen would be like throwing oil on a flame. 'You mustn’t go to Sir Owen; you have promised you won’t. I don’t know what would happen if you did.’

His daughter’s confession had frightened him, and he knew not what answer to make to her. When the depths find voice we stand aghast, knowing neither ourselves nor those whom we have lived with always. He was caught in the very den of his being, and seemed at every moment to be turning over a leaf of his past life.

'If you had only patience, Evelyn — ah! you have heard what I am going to say so often, but I don’t blame your incredulity. That was why I did not tell you before.’

'What has happened?' she asked eagerly; for she, too, wished for a lull in this stress of emotion.

‘Well,' he said, ‘Monsignor Mostyn, the great Roman prelate, who has just arrived from Rome, and is staying with the Jesuits, shares all my views regarding the necessity of a musical reformation. He believes that a revival of Palestrina and Vittoria would be of great use to the Catholic cause in England. He says that he can secure the special intervention of the Pope, and, what is much more important, he will subscribe largely, and has no doubt that sufficient money can be collected.’

Evelyn listened, smiling through her sorrow, like a bird when the rain has ceased for a moment, and she asked questions, anxious to delay the inevitable return to her own unhappy condition.

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She was interested in the luck that had come to her father, and was sorry that her conduct had clouded or spoilt it. At last a feeling of shame came upon them that at such a time they should be engaged in speaking of such singularly irrelevant topics. She could see that the same thought had come upon him, and she noticed his trim, square figure, and the old blue jacket which she had known so many years, as he walked up and down the room. He was getting very grey lately, and when she returned he might be quite white.

'Oh, father, father,' she exclaimed, covering her face with her hands, 'how unhappy I am.'

‘I shall send a telegram to Monsignor saying I can’t see him this morning.’

'Ah! you have to see him this morning;' and she did not know whether she was glad or sorry. Perhaps she was more frightened than either, for the appointment left her quite free to go to London by the three o’clock train.

‘I can’t leave you alone.’

'Darling, if I had wanted to deceive you, I should have told you nothing; and, however you were to watch me, I could always get away if I chose.’

She was right, he could not keep her by force, he could do nothing; shame prevented him from appealing to her affection for him, for it was in his interest she should stay. After all, Sir Owen will make a great singer of her. The thought had come and gone before he was aware, and to atone for this involuntary thought he spoke to her about her religion.

'I used to be religious,' she said, 'but I am religious no longer. I can hardly say my prayers now. I said them last night, but this morning I couldn’t.’

He passed his hand across his eyes, and said, —

'It seems all like a bad dream.’

He felt that he ought to stay with her, and at the same time he felt that she was right; that his intervention would be unavailing, for the struggle resided in herself. But if she should learn from Sir Owen to forget him; if he were to lose her altogether; if she should never return? The thought of such a calamity was the rudest blow of all, and the possibility of her going away for a time, shocking as it was, seemed almost light beside it. He struggled against these thoughts, for he hated and was ashamed of them. They came into his mind unasked, and he hoped that they represented nothing of his real feeling. Suddenly his face changed, he remembered his passion for her mother. He had suffered what Evelyn was suffering now. She had divined it by some instinct; true, they were very much like each other. Nothing would have kept him from Gertrude. But all that was so long ago. Good God! It was not the same thing, and at the very same moment he regretted that it was not a music lesson he was going to, for an appointment with

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Monsignor introduced a personal interest, and if he were not to stay by her, it would seem that he was indifferent to what became of her.

‘No, Evelyn, I sha’n’t go; I will stay here, I will stay by you.’

'But I don’t know that I am going away with Sir Owen.’

‘You said just now that you were.’

‘Did I say so? Father, you must keep your appointment with Monsignor, and you must say nothing to Owen if you should meet him; you promise me that? It rests with me, father, it is all in the heart.’

He stood looking at her, twisting his beard into a point, and while she wondered whether he would go or stay, she admired the delicacy of his hand.

'Think of the disgrace you will bring upon me, and just at the time, too, when Monsignor is beginning to see that a really great choir in London — ’

'Then, father, you do think that my going away will prejudice him against you?’

‘I don’t say that. I mean that this time seems less — . Of course you cannot go. It is very shocking that we should be discussing the subject together.’

A sudden fortitude came upon her, and a sudden desire to sacrifice herself to her father.

'Then, father, I shall stay. I will do nothing that will interfere with your work.’

'My dearest child, it is not for me — it is yourself — .’

She threw herself into his arms, begging him to forgive her. She wanted to stay with him. She loved him better than her voice, better than anything in the world. He did not answer, and when she raised her eyes she caught a slight look of doubt upon his face, and wondered what it could mean. At the very moment she had determined to stay with him, and forfeit her love and her art for his sake, a keen sense of his responsibility towards her was borne in upon him, and the feeling within him crushed like a stone that he could never do anything for her, nor anything else except, perchance, achieve that reformation of Church music upon which his heart was set. He understood in that instant that she was sacrificing all her life to his, and he feared the sacrifice she was making, and anticipated in some measure the remorse he would suffer. But he dared not think that she had better go and achieve her destiny in the only way that was open to her. He urged himself to believe that she was acting rightly, it was impossible for him to hold any other opinion. The thoughts that came upon him he strove to think were merely nervous accidents, and he forced himself to accept the irresponsibility of the sacrifice. He wished not to be selfish, but, however he acted, he always seemed to be acting in his own interest. Since she

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had promised him not to go away with Sir Owen, he was quite free to keep his appointment with Monsignor, and he gathered up his music, and then he let it fall again, fearing that she would interpret his action to mean that he was glad to get away.

She besought him to go; she said she was tired and wanted to lie down, and all the while he spoke she was tortured with an uncertainty as to whether she was speaking the truth or not; and he had not been gone many minutes when she remembered that she had not told him that Owen had asked her to meet him that very afternoon in Berkeley Square, and that the key of the square lay in her pocket. Like one with outstretched hands striving to feel her way in the dark, she sought to discover in her soul whether she had deliberately suppressed or accidentally omitted the fact of her appointment with Owen. It might be that the conversation had taken a sudden turn, at the moment she was about to tell him, for the thought had crossed her mind that she ought to tell him. Then she seemed to lose count of everything, and was unable to distinguish truth from falsehood.

To increase her difficulties, she remembered that she had betrayed Owen's confidence. She could not quite admit to herself that she had a right to tell her father that it was he. But he had guessed it... It seemed impossible to do right. Perhaps there was no right and no wrong, as Owen said; and a wish rose from the bottom of her heart that it might be so, and then she feared she had been guilty of blasphemy. Perhaps she should warn Owen of her indiscretion, and she thought of herself going to London for this purpose, and smiled as she detected the deception which she was trying to practise on herself.

There was nothing for her to do in the house, and when she had walked an hour in the ornamental park, she strayed into the picture gallery, and stood a long time looking at the Dutch lady who was playing the virginal, and whose life passed peacefully, apparently without any emotion, in a silent house amid rich furniture. But she was soon drawn to the Watteau, where a rich evening hushes about a beautiful carven colonnade, under which the court is seated; where gallants wear deep crimson and azure cloaks, and the ladies striped gowns of dainty refinement; where all the rows are full of amorous intrigue, and vows are being pleaded, and mandolines are playing; where a fountain sings in the garden and dancers perform their pavane or minuet, the lady holding out her striped skirt, and the gentleman bowing to her with a deference that seems a little mocking. An hour of pensive attitudes and whispered confidences, and over every fan a face wonders if there is truth in love.

'It is strange,' Evelyn thought, 'how one woman lives in obscurity, and another in admiration and success. That woman playing the virginal is not ugly; if she were dressed like these seated under the colonnade, she would be quite as pretty; but she is not as clever, Owen would say, or she wouldn't be playing the virginal in a village. It is strange how I remember everything he says.'

She thought of herself as the lady in the centre, the one that looked like the queen, and to whom a tall young man in a lovely cloak was being introduced, and then imagined herself one of the less important ladies who, for the sake of her beautiful voice, would be surrounded and admired

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by all men; she would create bitter jealousies and annoy a number of women, which, however, she would endeavour to overcome by giving back to them the several lovers whom she did not want for herself.

The life in this picture would be hers if she took the three o'clock train and went to Berkeley Square. The life in the other picture would be hers if she remained in Dulwich.

Only one more hour remained between her and the moment when she would be getting into the train, and on going out of the gallery her senses all seemed awake at the same moment; she saw and felt and heard with equal distinctness, and she seemed to be walking automatically, to be moving forward as if on wheels. She met a friend on her way home, but it was like talking to one across a river or gulf; she wondered what she had said, and hardly heard, on account of the tumult within her, what was being said to her. When she got home, she noticed that she did not take off her hat; and she ate her lunch without tasting it. Her thoughts were loud as the clock which ticked out the last minutes she was to remain at home, and trying not to hear them, she turned to the Monna Lisa, wondering what Owen meant when he had said that the hesitating smile in the picture was like her smile. Her thoughts ran on ticking in her brain like the clock in the corner of a room, and though she would have given anything to stop thinking, she could not.

Every moment the agony of anxiety and nervousness increased, and it was almost a relief when the clock pointed to the time when she would have to go to the station. She looked round the room, a great despair mounted into her eyes, and she walked quickly out of the house. As she went down the street she tried to think that she was going to Owen to tell him she had told her father that she was resolved to give him up. It seemed no longer difficult to do this, for, on looking into her mind, she could discover neither desire nor love, nor any wish to see him. She was only conscious of a nervous agitation which she could not control, and through this waking nightmare she walked steadily, thinking with extraordinary clearness.

In the railway carriage the passengers noticed her pallor, and they wondered what her trouble was, and at Victoria, the omnibus conductor just saved her from being run over. The omnibus jogged on, stopping now and then for people to get in and out, and Evelyn wondered at the extraordinary mechanism of life, and she took note of everyone's peculiarities, wondering what were their business and desires, and wondering also at the conductor's voice crying out the different parts of the town the omnibus would pass through.

'This is Berkeley Street, miss, if you are getting out here.'

She waited a few minutes at the corner, and then wandered down the street, asking herself if it was yet too late to turn back.

The sun glanced through the foliage, and glittered on the cockades of the coachmen and on the shining hides of the horses. It was the height of the season, and the young beauties of the year, and the fashionable beauties of the last decade, lay back, sunning themselves under the shade of their parasols. The carriages came round the square close to the curb, under the waving

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branches, and, waiting for an opportunity to cross, Evelyn's eyes followed an unusually beautiful carriage, drawn by a pair of chestnut horses. She did not see the lady's face, but she wore a yellow dress, and the irises in her bonnet nodded over the hood of the carriage. This lady, graceful and idle, seemed to mean something, but what? Evelyn thought of the picture of the colonnade in the gallery.

The men to whom the stately servants opened the doors wore long frock coats pinched at the waist, and they swung their canes and carried their thick, yellow gloves in their hands. They were all like Owen. They all lived as he lived, for pleasure; they were all here for the season, for balls and dinner parties, for love-making and the opera.

‘They are the people,' Evelyn thought, ‘who will pay thousands to hear me sing. They are the people who will invite me to their houses. If my voice is cultivated, if I ever go abroad.’

She ran across the street and walked under the branches until she came to a gate. But why not go straight to the house? She did not know…. She was at the gate, and the square looked green and cool. The gate swung to and closed with a snap; but she had the key and could leave when she liked, and worn out with various fears she walked aimlessly about the grass plots. There was no one in the square, so if he were watching for her he could not fail to see her. Once more a puerile hope crossed her mind fitfully, that perhaps it would be as well if he failed to see her. But no, since she had gone so far she was determined to go on to the end, and before this determination, her spirits revived, and she waited for him to come to her. But for shyness she did not dare to look round, and the minutes she walked under the shady trees were very delightful, for she was penetrated with an intimate conviction that she would not be disappointed. And one of the moments of her life that fixed itself most vividly on her mind was when she saw Owen coming towards her through the trees. He was so tall and thin, and walked so gracefully; there was something in his walk that delighted her; it seemed to her that it was like the long, soft stride of a cat.

'I am glad you have come,' he said.

But she could not answer. A moment afterwards he said, and she noticed that his voice trembled, ‘You are coming in to tea?’

Again she did not answer, and thinking it safer to take things for granted, he walked towards the gate. He was at the point of saying, ‘That is my house,' but he checked himself, thinking that silence was safer than speech. He could not get the gate open, and while he wrenched at the lock, he dreaded that delay might give her time to change her mind. But Evelyn was now quite determined. Her brain seemed to effervesce and her blood to bubble with joy, a triumphant happiness filled her, for no doubt remained that she was going to Paris to-night.

'Let us have tea as soon as possible, and tell Stanley to bring the brougham round at once.’

'Why did you order the brougham?’

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'Are you not —? I thought — ’

The brilliancy of her eyes answered him, and he took her hands.

'Then you are coming with me to Paris?’

'Yes, if you like, Owen, anywhere.... But let me kiss you.’

And she stood in a beautiful, amorous attitude, her arm thrown about his neck, her eyes aflame.

‘The brougham will be round in half an hour. There is a train at six to Dover. It gets there at nine. So we shall have time to dine at the Lord Warden, and get on board the boat before the mail arrives.’

'But I have no clothes.’

‘The night is fine; we shall have a lovely crossing; you will only want a shawl and a rug.... But what are you thinking of? You don’t regret?’

His eyes were tenderer than hers. She perceived in their grey lights a tenderness, an affection which seemed in contradiction to his nature as she had hitherto understood it. Even the thought flashed dimly in the background of her mind that his love was truer than hers; his cynicism, which had often frightened her, seemed to have vanished; indeed, there was something different in him from the man she had hitherto known — a difference which was rendered evident by the accent with which he said, —

‘Dearest Evelyn, this is the happiest moment of my life. I have spent two terrible days wondering if you would come.’

'Did you, dear? Did you think of me? Are you fond of me?’

He pressed her hand, and with one look answered her question, and she saw the streets flash past her — for they were in the brougham driving to Charing Cross. There was still the danger of meeting Mr Innes at the station; but the danger was slight. She knew of no business that would take him to Charing Cross, and they were thankful the train did not start from Victoria.

Owen called to his coachman to hasten. They had wasted, he said, too much time over the tea-table, and might miss the train. But they did not miss it, and through the heat of the long, summer afternoon the slow train jogged peacefully through the beautiful undulations of the southern counties. The sky was quiet gold and turquoise blue, and, far away were ruby tinted clouds. A peaceful light floated over the hillsides and dozed in the hollows, and the happiness of the world seemed eternal. Deep, cool shadows filled the copses, and the green corn was a foot high in the fields, and every gate and hedgerow wore a picturesque aspect. Evelyn and Owen

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sat opposite each other, talking in whispers, for they were not alone; they had not been in time to secure a private carriage. The delight that filled their hearts was tender as the light in the valleys and the hill sides. But Evelyn's feelings were the more boisterous, for she was entering into life, whereas Owen thought he was at last within reach of the ideal he had sought from the beginning of his life. This feeling, which was very present in his mind, appeared somehow through his eyes and in his manner, and even through the tumult of her emotions she was vaguely aware that he was even nicer than she had thought. She had never loved him so much as now; and again the thought passed that she had not known him before, and far down in her happiness she wondered which was the true man.

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