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E. M. Forster

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HOWARDS END

Edward Morgan Forster was born in London in 1879, attended Tonbridge School as a day boy, and went on to King's College, Cambridge, in 1897. He has had a life-long connexion with King's and was elected to an honorary fellowship in 1946. He has had honorary degrees conferred on him by many universities. He declares that his life as a whole has not been dramatic and he is unfailingly modest about his achievements. Interviewed by the B.B.C. on his eightieth birthday he said: 'I have not written as much as I'd like to. . . . I write for two reasons: partly to make money and partly to win the respect of people whom I respect. . . . I had better add that I am quite sure I am not a great novelist.' Eminent critics and the general public have judged otherwise; in Penguins alone *A Passage to India* has sold well over three quarters of a million copies.

In addition to his five famous novels and collections of short stories and essays available as Penguins, E. M. Forster has published about a dozen other works: they include two biographies; two books about Alexandria, the result of his sojourn there in the First World War when he was with the Red Cross; a film script; and, with Eric Crozier, the libretto for Britten's opera *Billy Budd*.

E. M. FORSTER

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'Only connect ...'



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CHAPTER I

ONE may as well begin with Helen's letters to her sister.

Howards End,
Tuesday.

Dearest Meg,

It isn't going to be what we expected. It is old and little, and altogether delightful – red brick. We can scarcely pack in as it is, and the dear knows what will happen when Paul (younger son) arrives tomorrow. From hall you go right or left into dining-room or drawing-room. Hall itself is practically a room. You open another door in it, and there are the stairs going up in a sort of tunnel to the first floor. Three bedrooms in a row there, and three attics in a row above. That isn't all the house really, but it's all that one notices – nine windows as you look up from the front garden.

Then there's a very big wych-elm – to the left as you look up – leaning a little over the house, and standing on the boundary between the garden and meadow. I quite love that tree already. Also ordinary elms, oaks – no nastier than ordinary oaks – pear-trees, apple-trees, and a vine. No silver birches, though. However, I must get on to my host and hostess. I only wanted to show that it isn't the least what we expected. Why did we settle that their house would be all gables and wiggles, and their garden all gamboge-coloured paths? I believe simply because we associate them with expensive hotels – Mrs Wilcox trailing in beautiful dresses down long corridors, Mr Wilcox bullying porters, etc. We females are that unjust.

I shall be back Saturday; I will let you know train later. They are as angry as I am that you did not come too; really Tibby is too tiresome, he starts a new mortal disease every month. How could he have got hay fever in London? and even if he could, it seems hard that you should give up a visit to hear a schoolboy sneeze. Tell him that Charles Wilcox (the son who is here) has hay fever too, but he's brave, and gets quite cross when we inquire after it. Men like the Wilcoxes would do Tibby a power of good. But you won't agree, and I'd better change the subject.

This long letter is because I'm writing before breakfast. Oh, the beautiful vine leaves! The house is covered with a vine. I looked out earlier, and Mrs Wilcox was already in the garden. She evidently loves it. No wonder she sometimes looks tired. She was watching the large red poppies come out. Then she walked off the lawn to the meadow, whose corner to the right I can just see. Trail, trail, went her long dress over the sopping grass, and she came back with her hands full of the hay that was cut yesterday – I suppose for rabbits or something, as she kept on smelling it. The air here is delicious. Later on I heard the noise of croquet balls, and looked out again, and it was Charles Wilcox practising; they are keen on all games. Presently he started sneezing and had to stop. Then I hear more clicketing, and it is Mr Wilcox practising, and then 'a-tissue, a-tissue': he has to stop too. Then Evie comes out, and does some calisthenic exercises on a machine that is tacked on to a greengage-tree – they put everything to use – and then she says 'a-tissue', and in she goes. And finally Mrs Wilcox reappears, trail, trail, still smelling hay and looking at the flowers. I inflict all this on you because once you said that life is sometimes life and sometimes only a drama, and one must learn to distinguish tother from which, and up to now I have always put that down as 'Meg's clever nonsense'. But this morning, it really does seem not life but a play, and it did amuse me enormously to watch the W's. Now Mrs Wilcox has come in.

I am going to wear [omission]. Last night Mrs Wilcox wore an [omission], and Evie [omission]. So it isn't exactly a go-as-you-please place, and if you shut your eyes it still seems the wiggly hotel that we expected. Not if you open them. The dog-roses are too sweet. There is a great hedge of them over the lawn – magnificently tall, so that they fall down in garlands, and nice and thin at the bottom, so that you can see ducks through it and a cow. These belong to the farm, which is the only house near us. There goes the breakfast gong. Much love. Modified love to Tibby. Love to Aunt Juley: how good of her to come and keep you company, but what a bore. Burn this. Will write again Thursday.

Helen.

Dearest Meg,

Friday.

I am having a glorious time. I like them all. Mrs Wilcox, if quieter than in Germany, is sweeter than ever, and I never saw anything like her steady unselfishness, and the best of it is that the others do not take advantage of her. They are the very happiest, jolliest family that you can imagine. I do really feel that we are making friends. The fun of it is that they think me a noodle, and say so – at least, Mr Wilcox does – and when that happens, and one doesn't mind, it's a pretty sure test, isn't it? He says the most horrid things about women's suffrage so nicely, and when I said I believed in equality he just folded his arms and gave me such a setting down as I've never had. Meg, shall we ever learn to talk less? I never felt so ashamed of myself in my life. I couldn't point to a time when men had been equal, nor even to a time when the wish to be equal had made them happier in other ways. I couldn't say a word. I had just picked up the notion that equality is good from some book – probably from poetry, or you. Anyhow, it's been knocked into pieces, and, like all people who are really strong, Mr Wilcox did it without hurting me. On the other hand, I laugh at them for catching hay fever. We live like fighting-cocks, and Charles takes us out every day in the motor – a tomb with trees in it, a hermit's house, a wonderful road that was made by the Kings of Mercia – tennis – a cricket match – bridge – and at night we squeeze up in this lovely house. The whole clan's here now – it's like a rabbit warren. Evie is a dear. They want me to stop over Sunday – I suppose it won't matter if I do. Marvellous weather and the views marvellous – views westward to the high ground. Thank you for your letter. Burn this.

Your affectionate

Helen.

Howards End,

Sunday.

Dearest, Dearest Meg,

I do not know what you will say: Paul and I are in love – the younger son who only came here Wednesday.

CHAPTER II

MARGARET glanced at her sister's note and pushed it over the breakfast-table to her aunt. There was a moment's hush, and then the flood-gates opened.

'I can tell you nothing, Aunt Juley. I know no more than you do. We met - we only met the father and mother abroad last spring. I know so little that I didn't even know their son's name. It's all so - ' She waved her hand and laughed a little.

'In that case it is far too sudden.'

'Who knows, Aunt Juley, who knows?'

'But, Margaret dear, I mean, we mustn't be unpractical now that we've come to facts. It is too sudden, surely.'

'Who knows!'

'But, Margaret dear - '

'I'll go for her other letters,' said Margaret. 'No, I won't, I'll finish my breakfast. In fact, I haven't them. We met the Wilcoxes on an awful expedition that we made from Heidelberg to Speyer. Helen and I had got it into our heads that there was a grand old cathedral at Speyer - the Archbishop of Speyer was one of the seven electors - you know - "Speyer, Mainz, and Köln". Those three sees once commanded the Rhine Valley and got it the name of Priest Street.'

'I still feel quite uneasy about this business, Margaret.'

'The train crossed by a bridge of boats, and at first sight it looked quite fine. But oh, in five minutes we had seen the whole thing. The cathedral had been ruined, absolutely ruined, by restoration; not an inch left of the original structure. We wasted a whole day, and came across the Wilcoxes as we were eating our sandwiches in the public gardens. They too, poor things, had been taken in - they were actually stopping at Speyer - and they rather liked Helen insisting that they must fly with us to Heidelberg. As a matter of fact, they did come on next day. We all took some drives together. They knew us well enough to ask

Helen to come and see them – at least, I was asked too, but Tibby's illness prevented me, so last Monday she went alone. That's all. You know as much as I do now. It's a young man out of the unknown. She was to have come back Saturday, but put it off till Monday, perhaps on account of – I don't know.'

She broke off, and listened to the sounds of a London morning. Their house was in Wickham Place, and fairly quiet, for a lofty promontory of buildings separated it from the main thoroughfare. One had the sense of a back-water, or rather of an estuary, whose waters flowed in from the invisible sea, and ebbed into a profound silence while the waves without were still beating. Though the promontory consisted of flats – expensive, with cavernous entrance halls, full of concierges and palms – it fulfilled its purpose, and gained for the older houses opposite a certain measure of peace. These, too, would be swept away in time and another promontory would arise upon their site, as humanity piled itself higher and higher on the precious soil of London.

Mrs Munt had her own method of interpreting her nieces. She decided that Margaret was a little hysterical, and was trying to gain time by a torrent of talk. Feeling diplomatic, she lamented the fate of Speyer, and declared that never, never should she be so misguided as to visit it, and added of her own accord that the principles of restoration were ill understood in Germany. 'The Germans,' she said, 'are too thorough, and this is all very well sometimes, but at other times it does not do.'

'Exactly,' said Margaret; 'Germans are too thorough.' And her eyes began to shine.

'Of course I regard you Schlegels as English,' said Mrs Munt hastily – 'English to the backbone.'

Margaret leaned forward and stroked her hand.

'And that reminds me – Helen's letter –'

'Oh yes, Aunt Juley, I am thinking all right about Helen's letter. I know – I must go down and see her. I am thinking about her all right. I am meaning to go down.'

'But go with some plan,' said Mrs Munt, admitting into

her kindly voice a note of exasperation. 'Margaret, if I may interfere, don't be taken by surprise. What do you think of the Wilcoxes? Are they our sort? Are they likely people? Could they appreciate Helen, who is to my mind a very special sort of person? Do they care about Literature and Art? That is most important when you come to think of it. Literature and Art. Most important. How old would the son be? She says "younger son". Would he be in a position to marry? Is he likely to make Helen happy? Did you gather - ?'

'I gathered nothing.'

They began to talk at once.

'Then in that case -'

'In that case I can make no plans, don't you see.'

'On the contrary -'

'I hate plans. I hate lines of action. Helen isn't a baby.'

'Then in that case, my dear, why go down?'

Margaret was silent. If her aunt could not see why she must go down, she was not going to tell her. She was not going to say 'I love my dear sister; I must be near her at this crisis of her life.' The affections are more reticent than the passions, and their expression more subtle. If she herself should ever fall in love with a man, she, like Helen, would proclaim it from the house-tops, but as she only loved a sister she used the voiceless language of sympathy.

'I consider you odd girls,' continued Mrs Munt, 'and very wonderful girls, and in many ways far older than your years. But - you won't be offended? - frankly, I feel you are not up to this business. It requires an older person. Dear, I have nothing to call me back to Swanage.' She spread out her plump arms. 'I am all at your disposal. Let me go down to this house whose name I forget, instead of you.'

'Aunt Juley' - she jumped up and kissed her - 'I must, must go to Howards End myself. You don't exactly understand, though I can never thank you properly for offering.'

'I do understand,' retorted Mrs Munt, with immense confidence. 'I go down in no spirit of interference, but to make inquiries. Inquiries are necessary. Now, I am going to be rude. You would say the wrong thing; to a certainty

you would. In your anxiety for Helen's happiness you would offend the whole of these Wilcoxes by asking one of your impetuous questions – not that one minds offending them.'

'I shall ask no questions. I have it in Helen's writing that she and a man are in love. There is no question to ask as long as she keeps to that. All the rest isn't worth a straw. A long engagement if you like, but inquiries, questions, plans, lines of action – no, Aunt Juley, no.'

Away she hurried, not beautiful, not supremely brilliant, but filled with something that took the place of both qualities – something best described as a profound vivacity, a continual and sincere response to all that she encountered in her path through life.

'If Helen had written the same to me about a shop-assistant or a penniless clerk –'

'Dear Margaret, do come into the library and shut the door. Your maids are dusting the banisters.'

'– or if she had wanted to marry the man who calls for Carter Paterson, I should have said the same.' Then, with one of those turns that convinced her aunt that she was not mad really, and convinced observers of another type that she was not a barren theorist, she added: 'Though in the case of Carter Paterson I should want it to be a very long engagement indeed, I must say.'

'I should think so,' said Mrs Munt; 'and, indeed, I can scarcely follow you. Now, just imagine if you said anything of that sort to the Wilcoxes. I understand it, but most good people would think you mad. Imagine how disconcerting for Helen! What is wanted is a person who will go slowly, slowly in this business, and see how things are and where they are likely to lead to.'

Margaret was down on this.

'But you implied just now that the engagement must be broken off.'

'I think probably it must; but slowly.'

'Can you break an engagement off slowly?' Her eyes lit up. 'What's an engagement made of, do you suppose? I think it's made of some hard stuff, that may snap, but

can't break. It is different to the other ties of life. They stretch or bend. They admit of degree. They're different.'

'Exactly so. But won't you let me just run down to Howards House, and save you all the discomfort? I will really not interfere, but I do so thoroughly understand the kind of thing you Schlegels want that one quiet look round will be enough for me.'

Margaret again thanked her, again kissed her, and then ran upstairs to see her brother.

He was not so well.

The hay fever had worried him a good deal all night. His head ached, his eyes were wet, his mucous membrane, he informed her, in a most unsatisfactory condition. The only thing that made life worth living was the thought of Walter Savage Landor, from whose *Imaginary Conversations* she had promised to read at frequent intervals during the day.

It was rather difficult. Something must be done about Helen. She must be assured that it is not a criminal offence to love at first sight. A telegram to this effect would be cold and cryptic, a personal visit seemed each moment more impossible. Now the doctor arrived, and said that Tibby was quite bad. Might it really be best to accept Aunt Juley's kind offer, and to send her down to Howards End with a note?

Certainly Margaret was impulsive. She did swing rapidly from one decision to another. Running downstairs into the library, she cried: 'Yes, I have changed my mind; I do wish that you would go.'

There was a train from King's Cross at eleven. At half past ten Tibby, with rare self-effacement, fell asleep, and Margaret was able to drive her aunt to the station.

'You will remember, Aunt Juley, not to be drawn into discussing the engagement. Give my letter to Helen, and say whatever you feel yourself, but do keep clear of the relatives. We have scarcely got their names straight yet, and, besides, that sort of thing is so uncivilized and wrong.'

'So uncivilized?' queried Mrs Munt, fearing that she was losing the point of some brilliant remark.

'Oh, I used an affected word. I only meant would you please only talk the thing over with Helen.'

'Only with Helen.'

'Because - ' But it was no moment to expound the personal nature of love. Even Margaret shrank from it, and contented herself with stroking her good aunt's hand, and with meditating, half sensibly and half poetically, on the journey that was about to begin from King's Cross.

Like many others who have lived long in a great capital, she had strong feelings about the various railway termini. They are our gates to the glorious and the unknown. Through them we pass out into adventure and sunshine, to them, alas! we return. In Paddington all Cornwall is latent and the remoter west; down the inclines of Liverpool Street lie fenlands and the illimitable Broads; Scotland is through the pylons of Euston; Wessex behind the poised chaos of Waterloo. Italians realize this, as is natural; those of them who are so unfortunate as to serve as waiters in Berlin call the Anhalt Bahnhof the Stazione d'Italia, because by it they must return to their homes. And he is a chilly Londoner who does not endow his stations with some personality, and extend to them, however shyly, the emotions of fear and love.

To Margaret - I hope that it will not set the reader against her - the station of King's Cross had always suggested Infinity. Its very situation - withdrawn a little behind the facile splendours of St Pancras - implied a comment on the materialism of life. Those two great arches, colourless, indifferent, shouldering between them an unlovely clock, were fit portals for some eternal adventure, whose issue might be prosperous, but would certainly not be expressed in the ordinary language of prosperity. If you think this ridiculous, remember that it is not Margaret who is telling you about it; and let me hasten to add that they were in plenty of time for the train; that Mrs Munt secured a comfortable seat, facing the engine, but not too near it; and that Margaret, on her return to Wickham Place, was confronted with the following telegram:

All over. Wish I had never written. Tell no one. – Helen.

But Aunt Juley was gone – gone irrevocably, and no power on earth could stop her.

CHAPTER III

MOST complacently did Mrs Munt rehearse her mission. Her nieces were independent young women, and it was not often that she was able to help them. Emily's daughters had never been quite like other girls. They had been left motherless when Tibby was born, when Helen was five and Margaret herself but thirteen. It was before the passing of the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill, so Mrs Munt could without impropriety offer to go and keep house at Wickham Place. But her brother-in-law, who was peculiar and a German, had referred the question to Margaret, who with the crudity of youth had answered, 'No, they could manage much better alone.' Five years later Mr Schlegel had died too, and Mrs Munt had repeated her offer. Margaret, crude no longer, had been grateful and extremely nice, but the substance of her answer had been the same. 'I must not interfere a third time,' thought Mrs Munt. However, of course she did. She learnt, to her horror, that Margaret, now of age, was taking her money out of the old safe investments and putting it into Foreign Things, which always smash. Silence would have been criminal. Her own fortune was invested in Home Rails, and most ardently did she beg her niece to imitate her. 'Then we should be together, dear.' Margaret, out of politeness, invested a few hundreds in the Nottingham and Derby Railway, and though the Foreign Things did admirably and the Nottingham and Derby declined with the steady dignity of which only Home Rails are capable, Mrs Munt never ceased to rejoice, and to say, 'I did manage that, at all events. When the smash comes poor Margaret will have a nest-egg to fall back upon.' This year Helen came of age, and exactly the same thing happened in Helen's case; she also would shift her money out of Consols, but

she, too, almost without being pressed, consecrated a fraction of it to the Nottingham and Derby Railways. So far so good, but in social matters their aunt had accomplished nothing. Sooner or later the girls would enter on the process known as throwing themselves away, and if they had delayed hitherto, it was only that they might throw themselves more vehemently in the future. They saw too many people at Wickham Place – unshaven musicians, an actress even, German cousins (one knows what foreigners are), acquaintances picked up at Continental hotels (one knows what they are too). It was interesting, and down at Swanage no one appreciated culture more than Mrs Munt; but it was dangerous, and disaster was bound to come. How right she was, and how lucky to be on the spot when the disaster came!

The train sped northward, under innumerable tunnels. It was only an hour's journey, but Mrs Munt had to raise and lower the window again and again. She passed through the South Welwyn Tunnel, saw light for a moment, and entered the North Welwyn Tunnel, of tragic fame. She traversed the immense viaduct, whose arches span untroubled meadows and the dreamy flow of Tewin Water. She skirted the parks of politicians. At times the Great North Road accompanied her, more suggestive of infinity than any railway, awakening, after a nap of a hundred years, to such life as is conferred by the stench of motor-cars, and to such culture as is implied by the advertisements of antibilious pills. To history, to tragedy, to the past, to the future, Mrs Munt remained equally indifferent; hers but to concentrate on the end of her journey, and to rescue poor Helen from this dreadful mess.

The station for Howards End was at Hilton, one of the large villages that are strung so frequently along the Great North Road, and that owe their size to the traffic of coaching and pre-coaching days. Being near London, it had not shared in the rural decay, and its long High Street had budded out right and left into residential estates. For about a mile a series of tiled and slated houses passed before Mrs Munt's inattentive eyes, a series broken at one point by six Danish