

THE MILL ON THE FLOSS

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MAGGIE is standing by the floss staring at the water. We can hear it lapping against the banks. STEPHEN approaches. MAGGIE sees his reflection and immediately darts away.

STEPHEN: You are angry with me for coming.

MAGGIE: I did not think you would wish to insult me further by forcing an interview on me in this way. Kindly let me return to the house.

STEPHEN: Of course, it is of no consequences what a man has to suffer. It is only your woman's dignity which you care about. As if it were not enough that I am caught up in this, that I'm mad with love for you, but you must treat me like a coarse brute who would willingly offend you. And when, if I had my own choice, I should ask you to take my hand, my fortune, my whole life and do what you want with them. I know I forgot myself. I hate myself for having done it but I repented immediately. The worst pain I could have is to have pained you. I would give the world to recall the error.

MAGGIE: You must not say these things. I must not hear them.

STEPHEN: Look at me: see what a hunted devil I am. I have been riding thirty miles every day to get away from the thought of you.

MAGGIE: I don't think any evil of you. I do forgive you. But please go away.

STEPHEN: I can't go away from you.

MAGGIE: It is wicked . . . base . . . think of Lucy . . .

STEPHEN: I do think of her. If I did not . . .

MAGGIE: And I have other ties.

STEPHEN: You are engaged to Philip Waken? Is it so?

MAGGIE: I consider myself engaged to him. I don't mean to marry anyone else.

Pause.

STEPHEN: Tell me then, that you don't care for me. Tell me that you love someone better. Tell me and I'll go. *(She can't answer.)* Come out in the boat with me, Maggie.

MAGGIE: I can't. It is out of the question.

STEPHEN: Do you remember, you said how you yearned to be on the river? We will not be long together. Let us have these last moments.

(He takes her hand. She does not resist. Music. He leads her, like someone blind, to the boat. He arranges the cushions and opens a parasol above her head. They are afloat. STEPHEN rows and

the air is filled with the rhythmic sound of the oars and birds in flight. Everything is very slow and languid. Occasionally, STEPHEN utters a quiet exclamation of love. Then he lays down the oars and sits back. The boat glides. The music changes. The sky grows dark. Suddenly MAGGIE sits up in alarm and looks about.)

MAGGIE: Are we past Luckreth? We should have stopped there.

STEPHEN: *(in a dreamy absent tone)*. Yes -along way.

MAGGIE: Oh, my God . . . we won't get home for hours. Oh God, help me . . . Lucy . . .

STEPHEN: Maggie, let us never go home again until we are married. Look . . . the tide has carried us away because we belong to each other. It will take us to Torby, we can get a carriage to York and then to Scotland and never stop until we are bound together.

MAGGIE: Let me go! How could you do this? You knew we had come too far. How could you bring me to this?

STEPHEN: I didn't notice that we had passed Luckreth until it was too late. You clearly don't love me enough. If you did, nothing else would matter. I will stop the boat and try to get you out. I'll tell Lucy I was mad and you shall be clear of me forever.

MAGGIE: No I'm sorry . . . I'm . . . I have been as weak as you. I would always care what happened to you.

STEPHEN: Oh Maggie, my darling, my dearest love . . . marry me, just say the word.

MAGGIE: No . . . no, I would rather die than fall into that temptation.

STEPHEN: It would be wrong to deny our love. Do you not see how strong it is? How can we go back to those others, knowing how we feel about each other?

MAGGIE: Oh Stephen, please, please don't urge me; help me . . . help me because I love you.

(He takes her in his arms and kisses her. Her resolution cracks. She sinks into the temptation and lets go.)

STEPHEN: You are mine, now, Lie back my darling, rest, I will row to Torby. Everything is all right now, Maggie, Everything is all right.

MAGGIE. Closes her eyes and sleeps. But she dreams. We hear snatches of her past - TOM saying he will build an ark and take her in, PHILLIP saying they will always belong to each other, LUCY saying how much she loves STEPHEN, MR TULLIVER saying he will always take her part. We see FIRST MAGGIE with her butterfly book. We see SECOND MAGGIE falling on her knees to pray and the great light of Thomas à Kempis. Then we see LUCY and TOM and PHILLIP in a boat, rowing towards the light. MAGGIE calls to them but they don't see or hear her and are gone. MAGGIE awakens and cries out -

MAGGIE: Wait!

In a room at an inn in Torby. MAGGIE is very still and silent. STEPHEN is trying to ignore the signs.

STEPHEN: Are you warmer now, my darling? I am sorry you have had to bear so much discomfort. The landlord will have a chaise for us within the hour and we will leave for Scotland. That will seem rest to you after this.

MAGGIE: I am not going.

STEPHEN: What?

MAGGIE: I am not going.

STEPHEN: Maggie . . . The whole thing is done.

MAGGIE: No. Too much is done - more than we can ever undo. But I will go no farther. I couldn't choose before. Now I can.

STEPHEN: Maggie, forgive me, I'm sorry for what I did but please don't blight our lives . . . (*She stands.*) No, wait. Sit down, think what you are doing.

MAGGIE: We must part at once.

STEPHEN: Why are you doing this? Do you wish to drive me mad?

MAGGIE: I will not begin any future, even for you with a deliberate consent to what ought not to have been. That is all. We must part now.

STEPHEN: We will not part. You will kill me. You will make me desperate, I won't know what I do.

Pause.

MAGGIE: Stephen . . . Stephen, think how you felt about his two weeks ago. You felt that you owed yourself to another. So did I.

STEPHEN: I am not engaged to Lucy. If her feelings had been withdrawn, I should have felt no right to assert a claim on her . . .

MAGGIE: That is not . . .

STEPHEN: You are not absolutely pledged to Phillip.

MAGGIE: That is not how you felt before. We have raised feeling and expectations in other minds. They are real ties.

STEPHEN: But our love is stronger. We have proved that. It is right, natural that we should marry.

MAGGIE: No. If life were quite easy and simple, as it might have been in paradise . . . I mean, if life did not make duties for us before love comes, then love would be a sign that two people belong together. But I know now that isn't true. There are things we must renounce in life; some of us must renounce love.

STEPHEN: Good God, Maggie . . . I would commit crimes for you and you can stand there balancing and choosing . . . I thought you loved me. How could I have been so stupid?

MAGGIE: Do you think this is easy for me? I am only clinging to the one thing I can see clearly - that I must not, cannot seek my own happiness by sacrificing others. I would be haunted by the suffering I had caused. Our love would be poisoned. Don't you see? *(She starts to cry.)*

STEPHEN: Maggie, please, listen to me. They would not thank us for our constancy without our love. It would be hateful, horrible to ever think of your being the wife of a man you didn't love. We have both been rescued from a mistake. *(He is holding her)* Listen to me, my darling, if you love me you are mine. There is nothing in the past that can change that. It is the first time either of us have loved with our whole heart and soul.

MAGGIE: *(Suddenly calm and brave)*. No. Not with my whole heart and soul. There are things inside me which you know nothing of. There are memories and affections and longings after perfect goodness. They would never leave me for long. They would come back and be pain to me; repentance.

FIRST and SECOND MAGGIE's have entered and are close to her.

I have caused sorrow already. I know - I feel it. I will not cause more. It has never been my will to marry you. If I could wake back again into the time before this, I would choose to be true to my . . . to myself.

Pause.

STEPHEN: Do you really think you can go back now without marrying me? Do you not know what will be said?

MAGGIE: Yes. I do. But they will believe me . . .

STEPHEN: You are raving. You see nothing as it really is.

MAGGIE: Lucy will believe me, she will forgive you and, and some good will come by clinging to the right. Dear, dear Stephen, let me go. My whole soul has never consented. It does not consent now.

Silence.

STEPHEN: Go then, *(She goes to touch him. He shrinks from her.)* Leave me.