

The Constant Lover

A comedy of youth in one act

By St. John Hankin

“As of old when the world's heart was lighter”

Characters

Evelyn Rivers (*18 or 20*)

Cecil Harburton (*25*)

Before the curtain rises the orchestra will play the Woodland Music (cuckoo) from Hansel and Gretel, and possibly some of the Greig Pastoral Music from “Peer Gynt” or some Gabriel Faure.

Scene: *A glade in a wood, with a great beech- tree, the branches of which overhang the stage, the brilliant sunlight filtering through them. The sky where it can be seen through the branches is a cloudless blue.*

When the curtain rises Cecil Harburton is discovered sitting on the ground under the tree, leaning his back against its trunk and reading a book. He wears a straw hat and the lightest of grey flannel suits. The chattering of innumerable small birds is heard while the curtain is still down, and this grows louder as it rises, and we find ourselves in the wood. Presently a wood -pigeon cooes in the distance. Then a thrush begins to sing in the tree above Cecil's head and is answered by another. After a moment Cecil looks up.

Cecil. *By Jove, that's jolly! (Listens for a moment, then returns to his book. Suddenly a cuckoo begins to call insistently. After a moment or two he looks up again.) Cuckoo too! Bravo! (Again he returns to his book.)*

A moment later Evelyn Rivers enters. She also wears the lightest of summer dresses, as it is a cloudless day in May. On her head is a shady straw hat. As she approaches the tree a twig snaps under her foot and Cecil looks up. He jumps to his feet, closes his book, and advances to her eagerly, holding out his right hand, keeping the book in his left.

Cecil (*reproachfully*). Here you are at last!

Evelyn. At last?

Cecil. Yes. You're awfully late. *(He looks at his watch.)*

Evelyn. Am I?

Cecil. You know you are. I expected you at three.

Evelyn. Why? I never said I'd come at three. Indeed, I never said I'd come at all.

Cecil. No. But it's always been three.

Evelyn. Has it?

Cecil. And now it's half-past. I consider I've been cheated out of a whole half-hour.

Evelyn. I couldn't help it. Mother kept me. She wanted the roses done in the drawing-room.

Cecil. How stupid of Mrs. Rivers!

Evelyn. Mr. Harburton!

Cecil. What's the matter?

Evelyn. I don't think you ought to call my mother stupid.

Cecil. Why not — if she is stupid? Most parents are stupid, by the way. I've noticed it before. Mrs. Rivers ought to have thought of the roses earlier. The morning is the proper time to gather roses. Didn't you tell her that?

Evelyn. I'm afraid I couldn't very well. You see it was really I who ought to have thought of the roses! I always do them. But this morning I forgot.

Cecil. I see. *(Turning towards the tree.)* Well, sit down now you are here. Isn't it a glorious day?

Evelyn *(hesitating)*. I don't believe I ought to sit down.

Cecil *(turns to her)*. Why not? There's no particular virtue about standing, is there? I hate standing. So let's sit down and be comfortable.

She sits, so does he. She sits on the bank under the tree, to the left of it. He sits below the bank to the right of it.

Evelyn. But ought I to be sitting here with you? That's what I mean. It's — not as if I really knew you, is it?

Cecil. Not know me?

The chatter of birds dies away.

Evelyn. Not properly — we've never even been introduced. We just met quite by chance here in the wood.

Cecil. Yes. (*Ecstatically*) What a glorious chance!

Evelyn. Still, I'm sure mother wouldn't approve.

Cecil. And you say Mrs. Rivers isn't stupid!

Evelyn (*laughing*). I expect most people would agree with her. Most people would say you oughtn't to have spoken to a girl you didn't know like that.

Cecil. Oh, come, I only asked my way back to the inn.

Evelyn. There was no harm in asking your way, of course. But then we began talking of other things. And then we sat down under this tree. And we've sat talking under this tree every afternoon since. And that was a week ago.

Cecil. Well, it's such an awfully jolly tree.

Evelyn. I don't know what mother would say if she heard of it.

Cecil. Would it be something unpleasant?

Evelyn (*ruefully*). I'm afraid it would.

Cecil. How fortunate you don't know it then.

Evelyn (*pondering*). Still, if I really oughtn't to be here. . . . Do you think I oughtn't to be here?

Cecil. I don't think I should go into that if I were you. Sensible people think of what they want to do, not of what they ought to do, otherwise they get confused. And then of course they do the wrong thing.

Evelyn. But if I do what I oughtn't, I generally find I'm sorry for it afterwards.

Cecil. Not half so sorry as you would have been if you hadn't done it. In this world the things one regrets are the things one hasn't done. For instance, if I hadn't spoken to you a week ago here in the wood, I should have regretted it all my life.

Evelyn. Would you? (*He nods.*) Really and truly?

Cecil (*nods*). Really and truly.

He lays his hand on hers for a moment, she lets it rest there. Cuckoo calls loudly once or twice — she draws' her hand away.

Evelyn. There's the cuckoo.

Cecil rises and sits on the bank by her side, leaning against tree.

Cecil. Yes. Isn't he jolly? Don't you love cuckoos?

Evelyn. They are rather nice.

Cecil. Aren't they! And such clever beggars. Most birds are fools — like most people. As soon as they're grown up they go and get married, and then the rest of their lives are spent in bringing up herds of children and wondering how on earth to pay their school-bills. Your cuckoo sees the folly of all that. No school-bills for her I No nursing the baby! She just flits from hedgerow to hedgerow flirting with other cuckoos. And when she lays an egg she lays it in some one else's nest, which saves all the trouble of housekeeping. Oh, a wise bird!

Evelyn (*pouting, looking away from him*). I don't know that I do like cuckoos so much after all. They sound to me rather selfish.

Cecil. Yes. But so sensible ! The duck's a wise bird too in her way. (*She turns to him.*) But her way's different from the cuckoo's. (*Matter-of-fact.*) She always treads on her eggs.

Evelyn. Clumsy creature !

Cecil. Not a bit. She does it on purpose. You see, it's much less trouble than sitting on them. As soon as she's laid an egg she raises one foot absent-mindedly and gives a warning quack. Whereupon the farmer rushes up, takes it away, and puts it under some wretched hen, who has to do the sitting for her. I call that genius!

Evelyn. Genius !

Cecil. Yes. Genius is the infinite capacity for making other people take pains.

Evelyn. How can you say that?

Cecil. I didn't. Carlyle did.

Evelyn. I don't believe he said anything of the kind. And I don't believe ducks are clever one bit. They don't look clever.

Cecil. That's part of their cleverness. In this world if one is wise one should look like a fool. It puts people off their guard. That's what the duck does.

Evelyn. Well, I think ducks are horrid, and cuckoos too. And I believe most birds like bringing up their chickens and feeding them and looking after them.

Cecil. They do. That's the extraordinary part of it. They spend their whole lives building nests and laying eggs and hatching them. And when the chickens come out the father has

to fuss round finding worms. And the nest is abominably over-crowded and the babies are perpetually squalling, and that drives the husband to the public-house, and it's all as uncomfortable as the Devil.

Evelyn. Mr. Harburton!

Cecil. Well, I shouldn't like it. In fact, I call it fatuous.

Evelyn is leaning forward pondering this philosophy with a slightly puckered brow — a slight pause.

Cecil. I say, you don't look a bit comfortable like that. Lean back against the tree. It's a first-rate tree. That's why I chose it.

Evelyn (*tries and fails*). I can't. My hat gets in the way.

Cecil. Take it off then.

Evelyn. I think I will. (*Does so.*) That's better. (*Leans back luxuriously against the trunk ; puts her hat down on bank beside her.*)

Cecil. Much better. (*Looks at her with frank admiration.*) By Jove, you do look jolly without your hat!

Evelyn. Do I?

Cecil. Yes. Your hair's such a jolly colour. I noticed it the first time I saw you. You had your hat off then, you know. You were walking through the wood fanning yourself with it. And directly I caught sight of you the sun came out and simply flooded your hair with light. And there was the loveliest pink flush on your cheeks, and your eyes were soft and shining

Evelyn (*troubled*). Mr. Harburton, you mustn't say things to me like that.

Cecil. Mustn't I? Why not? Don't you like being told you look jolly?

Evelyn (*naively*). I do like it, of course. But ought you . . . ?

Cecil (*groans*). Oh, it's that again.

Evelyn. I mean it's not right for men to say those things to girls.

Cecil. I don't see that — if they're true. You are pretty and your eyes are soft and your cheeks — why they're flushing at this moment! (*Triumphant*) Why shouldn't I say it?

Evelyn. Please! . . . (*She stops, and her eyes fill with tears.*)

Cecil (*much concerned*). Miss Rivers, what's the matter? Why, I believe you're crying!

Evelyn (*sniffing suspiciously*). I'm . . . not.

Cecil. You are, I can see the tears. Have I said anything to hurt you? What is it? Tell me.
(*Much concerned.*)

Evelyn (*recovering herself by an effort*). It's nothing. Nothing really. I'm all right now. Only you won't say things to me like that again, will you? Promise. (*taking out handkerchief.*)

Cecil. I promise ... if you really wish it. And now dry your eyes and let's be good children. That's what my nurse used to say when my sister and I quarrelled. Shall I dry them for you? (*takes her handkerchief and does so tenderly*)

Evelyn (*with a little gulp*). Thank you. (*Takes away handkerchief*) How absurd you are!
(*Puts it away*)

Cecil. Thank you!

Evelyn moves down, sitting at the bottom of the bank, a little below him.

Evelyn. Did you often quarrel with your sister?

Cecil. Perpetually. And my brothers. Didn't you?

Evelyn. I never had any.

Cecil. Poor little kid. You must have been rather lonely.

Evelyn (*matter-of-fact*). There was always Reggie.

Cecil. Reggie?

Evelyn. My cousin, Reggie Townsend. He lived with us when we were children. His parents were in India.

Cecil (*matter-of-fact*). So he used to quarrel with you instead.

Evelyn (*shocked*). Oh no! We never quarrelled. At least, Reggie never did. I did sometimes.

Cecil. How dull! There's no good in quarrelling if people won't quarrel back.

Evelyn. I don't think there's any good in quarrelling at all.

Cecil. Oh yes, there is. There's the making it up again.

Evelyn. Was that why you used to quarrel with your sister?

Cecil. I expect so, though I didn't know it, of course — then. I used to tease her awfully, I remember, and pull her hair. She had awfully jolly hair. Like yours — oh! I forgot, I mustn't say that. Used you to pull Reggie's hair?

Evelyn (*laughing*). I'm afraid I did sometimes.

Cecil. I was sure of it. How long was he with you?

Evelyn. Till he went to Winchester. And of course he used to be with us in the holidays after that. And he comes to us now whenever he can get away for a few days. He's in his uncle's office in the city. He'll be a partner some day.

Cecil. Poor chap!

Evelyn. Poor chap! Mother says he's very fortunate.

Cecil. She would. Parents always think it very fortunate when young men have to go to an office every day. I know mine do.

Evelyn. Do you go to an office every day?

Cecil. No.

Evelyn (*with dignity*). Then I don't think you can know much about it, can you?

Cecil (*carelessly*). I know too much. That's why I don't go.

Evelyn. What do you do?

Cecil. I don't do anything. I'm at the Bar.

Evelyn. If you're at the Bar, why are you down here instead of up in London working?

Cecil. Because if I were in London I might possibly get a brief. It's not likely, but it's possible. And if I got a brief I should have to be mugging in chambers, or wrangling in a stuffy court, instead of sitting under a tree in the shade with you.

Evelyn. But ought you to waste your time like that?

Cecil (*genuinely shocked*). Waste my time! To sit under a tree — a really nice tree like this — talking to you. You call that wasting time!

Evelyn. Isn't it?

Cecil. No! To sit in a frowsy office adding up figures when the sky's blue and the weather is heavenly, that's wasting time. The only real way in which one can waste time is not to enjoy it, to spend one's day blinking at a ledger and never notice how beautiful the world is, and how good it is to be alive. To be only making money when one might be making love, that is wasting time!

Evelyn. How earnestly you say that!

Cecil leans forward — close to her.

Cecil. Isn't it true?

Evelyn (*troubled*). Perhaps it is. (*Looks away from him.*)

Cecil. You know it is. Every one knows it. Only people won't admit it. (*Leaning towards her and looking into her eyes.*) You know it at this moment.

Evelyn (*returning his gaze slowly*). I think I do.

For a long moment they look into each other's eyes. He then he takes her two hands, draws her slowly towards him and kisses her gently on the lips.

Cecil. Ah!

Sigh of satisfaction. He releases her hands and leans back against the tree again.

Evelyn (*sadly*). Oh, Mr. Harburton, you oughtn't to have done that!

Cecil. Why not?

Evelyn. Because . . . (*Hesitates.*) Because you oughtn't. . . . Because men oughtn't to kiss girls.

Cecil (*scandalised*). Oughtn't to kiss girls ! What nonsense! What on earth were girls made for if not to be kissed?

Evelyn. I mean they oughtn't . . . unless . . . (*Looking away.*)

Cecil (*puzzled*). Unless?

Evelyn (*looking down*). Unless they love them.

Cecil (*relieved*). But I do love you. Of course I love you. That's why I kissed you.

A thrush is heard calling in the distance.

Evelyn. Really? (*Cecil nods. Evelyn sighs contentedly.*) That makes it all right then.

Cecil. I should think it did. And as it's all right I may kiss you again, mayn't I?

Evelyn (*shyly*). If you like.

Cecil. You darling! (*Takes her in his arms and kisses her long and, tenderly.*) Lean your head on my shoulder, you'll find it awfully comfortable. (*He leans back against the tree. She does so.*) There ! Is that all right?

Evelyn. Quite. (*Sigh of contentment.*)

Cecil. How pretty your hair is! I always thought your hair lovely. And it's as soft as silk. I always knew it would be like silk. (*Strokes it.*) Do you like me to stroke your hair?

Evelyn. Yes!

Cecil. Sensible girl! (*Pause; he laughs happily.*) I say, what am I to call you? Do you know, I don't even know your Christian name yet?

Evelyn. Don't you?

Cecil. No. You've never told me. What is it? Mine's Cecil.

Evelyn. Mine's Evelyn.

Cecil. Evelyn? Oh, I don't like Evelyn. It's rather a stodgy sort of name. I think I shall call you Eve. Does any one else call you Eve?

Evelyn. No.

Cecil. Then I shall certainly call you Eve. After the first woman man ever loved. May I?

Evelyn. If you like, — Cecil.

Cecil. That's settled then. *(He kisses her again. Pause of utter happiness, during which he settles her head more comfortably on his shoulder, and puts his arm round her.)* Isn't it heavenly to be in love?

Evelyn. Heavenly!

Cecil. There's nothing like it in the whole world. Love is the most beautiful thing in the whole world! Say so.

Evelyn. Love is the most beautiful thing in the whole world.

Cecil. Good girl! There's a reward for saying it right. *(Kisses her. Pause of complete happiness for both.)*

Evelyn *(meditatively)*. I'm afraid Reggie won't be pleased. *(The chatter of sparrows is heard.)*

Cecil *(indifferently)*. Won't he?

Evelyn *(shakes her head)*. No. You see, Reggie's in love with me too. He always has been in love with me, for years and years. *(Sighs.)* Poor Reggie!

Cecil. On the contrary. Happy Reggie!

Evelyn *(astonished)*. What do you mean?

Cecil. To have been in love with you years and years. I've only been in love with you a week. . . . I've only known you a week.

Evelyn. I'm afraid Reggie didn't look at it like that.

Cecil *(nods)*. No brains.

Evelyn. You see, I always refused him.

Cecil. Exactly. And he always went on loving you. What more could the silly fellow want?

Evelyn (*shyly, looking up at him*). He wanted me to accept him, I suppose. (*The bird chatter dies away.*)

Cecil. Ah ! . . . Reggie ought to read Keats's "Ode to a Grecian Urn." ... I say, what jolly eyes you've got! I noticed them the moment we met here in the wood. That was why I spoke to you.

Evelyn (*demurely*). I thought it was to ask your way back to the inn.

Cecil. That was an excuse. I knew the way as well as you did. I'd only just come from there. But when I saw you with the sunshine on your pretty soft hair and lighting up your pretty soft eyes, I said I must speak to her. And I did. Are you glad I spoke to you?

Evelyn. Yes.

Cecil. Glad and glad?

Evelyn. Yes.

Cecil. Good girl! (*Leans over and kisses her cheek.*)

Evelyn (*sigh of contentment, sits up*). And now we must go and tell mother.

Cecil (*with a comic groan*). Need we?

Evelyn (*brightly*). Of course.

Cecil (*sigh*). Well, if you think so.

Evelyn (*laughing*). You don't seem to look forward to it much.

Cecil. I don't. That's the part I always hate.

Evelyn. Always? (*Starts forward and looks at him, puzzled*)

Cecil (*quite unconscious*). Yes. The going to the parents and all that. Parents really are the most preposterous people. They've no feeling for romance whatever. You meet a girl in a wood. It's May. The sun's shining. There's not a cloud in the sky. She's adorably pretty. You fall in love. Everything heavenly ! Then — why, I can't imagine — she wants you to tell her mother. Well, you do tell her mother. And her mother at once begins to ask you what your profession is, and how much money you earn, and how much money you have that you don't earn — and that spoils it all.

Evelyn (*bewildered*). But I don't understand. You talk as if you had actually done all this before.

Cecil. So I have. Lots of times.

Evelyn. Oh! (*Jumps upfront the ground and faces him, her eyes flashing with rage.*)

Cecil. I say, don't get up. It's not time to go yet. It's only four. Sit down again.

Evelyn (*struggling for words*). Do you mean to say you've been in love with girls before? Other girls?

Cecil (*apparently genuinely astonished at the question*). Of course I have.

Evelyn. And been engaged to them?

Cecil. Not engaged. I've never been engaged so far. But I've been in love over and over again. (*Evelyn stamps her foot with rage — turning away from him.*) My dear girl, what is the matter? You look quite cross. (*Rises.*)

Evelyn (*furious*). And you're not even ashamed of it?

Cecil (*roused to sit up by this question*). Ashamed of it? Ashamed of being in love? How can you say such a thing! Of course I'm not ashamed. What's the good of being alive at all if one isn't to be in love? I'm perpetually in love. In fact, I'm hardly ever out of love — with somebody.

Evelyn (*still furious*). Then if you're in love, why don't you get engaged? A man has no business to make love to a girl and not be engaged to her. It's not right.

Cecil (*reasoning with her*). That's the parents' fault. I told you parents were preposterous people. They won't allow me to get engaged.

Evelyn. Why not?

Cecil. Oh, for different reasons. They say I'm not serious enough. Or that I don't work enough. Or that I haven't got enough money. Or else they simply say they " don't think I'm fitted to make their daughter happy." Anyhow, they won't sanction an engagement. They all agree about that. Your mother would be just the same. (*Impatient exclamation from Evelyn.*) I don't blame her. I don't say she's not right. I don't say they haven't all been right. In fact, I believe they have been right. I'm only explaining how it is.

Evelyn (*savagely*). I see how it is. You don't really want to be married.

Cecil. Of course I don't want to be married. Nobody does unless he's perfectly idiotic. One wants to be in love. Being in love's splendid. And I dare say being engaged isn't bad — though I've had no experience of that so far. But being married must be simply hateful.

Evelyn (*boiling with rage*). Nonsense! How can it be hateful to be married if it's splendid to be in love? (*The cuckoo is heard.*)

Cecil. Have you forgotten the cuckoo?

Evelyn. Oh! ! !

Cecil. No ties, no responsibilities, no ghastly little villa with children bellowing in the nursery. Just life in the open hedgerow. Life and love. Happy cuckoo !

Evelyn (*furious*). I think cuckoos detestable. They're mean, horrid, disgusting birds.

Cecil. No. No. I can't have you abusing cuckoos. They're particular friends of mine. In fact, I'm a sort of cuckoo myself.

Evelyn (*turning on him*). Oh, I hate you! I hate you! (*Stamps her foot.*)

Cecil (*with quiet conviction*). You don't.

Evelyn. I do!

Cecil (*shaking his head*). You don't. (*Quite gravely.*) One never really hates the people one has once loved.

He looks into her eyes. For a moment or two she returns his gaze fiercely. Then her eyes fall and they fill with tears.

Evelyn (*half crying*). How horrid you are to say that!

Cecil. Why?

Evelyn. Because it's true, I suppose. Oh, I'm so unhappy! (*Begins to cry.*)

Cecil (*genuinely distressed*). Eve! You're crying. You mustn't do that. I can't bear seeing people cry. (*Lays hand on her shoulder.*)

Evelyn (*shaking it off*). Don't. I can't bear you to touch me. After falling in love with one girl after another like that. When I thought you were only in love with me.

Cecil. So I am only in love with you — now.

Evelyn (*tearfully*). But I thought you'd never been in love with any one else. And I let you call me Eve because you said she was the first woman man ever loved.

Cecil. But I never said she was the only one, did I? (*Argumentatively.*) And one can't help being in love with people when one is in love, can one? I couldn't help falling in love with you, for instance, the moment I saw you. You looked simply splendid. It was such a splendid day too. Of course I fell in love with you.

Evelyn (*slightly appeased by this compliment, drying her eyes*). But you seem to fall in love with such a lot of people.

Cecil. I do. (*Mischievously.*) But ought you to throw stones at me? After all, being in love with more than one person is no worse than having more than one person in love with you. How about Reggie?

Evelyn. Reggie? (*The sparrows' chatter starts again.*)

Cecil (*nods*). Reggie's in love with you, isn't he? So am I. And both at once too! I'm only in love with one person at a time.

Evelyn (*rebelliously*). I can't help Reggie being in love with me.

Cecil. And I can't help my being in love with you. That's just my point. I knew you'd see it.

Evelyn. I don't see it at all. Reggie is quite different from you. Reggie's love is true and constant . . .

Cecil. Well, I'm a constant lover if you come to that.

Evelyn. You aren't. You know you aren't.

Cecil. Yes, I am. A constant lover is a lover who is constantly in love.

Evelyn. Only with the same person.

Cecil. It doesn't say so. It only says constant.

Evelyn (*half-laughing*). How ridiculous you are! (*Turns away.*)

Cecil (*sigh of relief*). That's right. Now you're good-tempered again.

Evelyn. I'm not.

Cecil. What a story!

Evelyn. I'm not. I'm very, very angry.

Cecil. That's impossible. You can't possibly be angry and laugh at the same time, can you? No one can. And you did laugh. You're doing it now. (*She does so unwillingly.*) So don't let's quarrel any more. It's absurd to quarrel on such a fine day, isn't it? Let's make it up, and be lovers again. (*The sparrows die away.*)

Evelyn (*shaking her head*). No.

Cecil. Please!

Evelyn (*shaking her head*). No.

Cecil. Well, you're very foolish. Love isn't a thing to throw away. It's too precious for that. Love is the most beautiful thing in the whole world. You said so yourself not ten minutes ago.

Evelyn. I didn't. You said it. (*Looking down.*)

Cecil. But you said it after me. (*Gently and gravely.*) Eve, dear, don't be silly. Let's be in love while we can. Youth is the time to be in love, isn't it? Soon you and I will be dull and stupid and middle-aged like all the other tedious people. And then it will be too late. Youth passes so quickly. Don't let's waste a second of it. They say the May-fly only lives for one day. He is born in the morning. All the afternoon he flutters over the river in the sunshine, dodging the trout and flirting with other May-flies. And at evening he dies. Think of the poor May-fly who happens to be born on a wet day! The tragedy of it!

Evelyn (*softly*). Poor May-fly.

Cecil. There! You're sorry for the May-fly, you see. You're only angry with me.

Evelyn. Because you're not a May-fly.

Cecil. Yes, I am. A sort of May-fly

Evelyn (*with suspicion of tears in her voice*). You aren't. How can you be? Besides, you said you were a cuckoo just now.

Cecil. I suppose I'm a cuckoo-May-fly. For I hate wet days. And if you're going to cry again, it might just as well be wet, mightn't it? So do dry your eyes like a good girl. Let me do it for you. (*Does it with her handkerchief. She laughs ruefully.*) There, that's better. And now we're going to be good children again, aren't we?

Evelyn (*giving in*). Yes.

Cecil (*holding out his hand*). And you'll kiss me and be friends?

Evelyn. I'll be friends, of course. (*Sadly.*) But you must never kiss me again.

Cecil. What a shame! Why not?

Evelyn. Because you mustn't.

Cecil (*cheerfully*). Well, you'll sit down again anyhow, won't you? Just to show we've made it up. (*Moves towards tree.*)

Evelyn (*shakes head*). No.

Cecil (*disappointed, turns*). Ah ! . . . Then you haven't really made it up.

Evelyn. Yes, I have. (*Picks up her hat.*) But must go now. Reggie's coming down by the five o'clock train, and I want to be at the station to meet him. (*Holds out her hand.*) Good-bye, Mr. Harburton.

Cecil (*taking her hand*). Eve! You're going to accept Reggie! (*Pause.*)

Evelyn (*half to herself*). I wonder.

Cecil. And he'll have to tell your mother?

Evelyn. Of course.

Cecil (*drops her hand*). Poor Reggie! So his romance ends too!

Evelyn. It won't. If I marry Reggie I shall make him very happy.

Cecil. Very likely. Marriage may be happiness, but I'm hanged if it's romance!

Evelyn. Oh! (*Exclamation of impatience. She turns away and exits. Cecil watches her departure with a smile, half-amused, half-pained, till she is long out of sight.*

Then with half a sigh he turns back to his tree.)

Cecil (*reseating himself*). Poor Reggie! (*Reopens his book and settles himself to read again. A cuckoo hoots loudly from a distant thicket and is answered by another. Cecil looks up from his book to listen as the curtain falls*)

Curtain