



## Cecil's proposal

*This text belongs to the second part of the novel and is set in England. Lucy has come back to Windy Corner, the Honeychurch home in Surrey. During her trip to Italy, she had spent some time in Rome with Cecil Vyse. The Vyses and the Honeychurches were already acquainted, but Cecil and Lucy only got to know each other better in Italy. There Cecil proposed to Lucy twice but she rejected him both times. In the text below Cecil is proposing again.*

Edward Morgan Forster  
***A Room with a View***  
**(1908)**

Part 2, Chapter 8

The curtains parted.

Cecil's first movement was one of irritation. He couldn't bear the Honeychurch habit of sitting in the dark to save the furniture. Instinctively he gave the curtains a twitch, and sent them swinging down their poles<sup>1</sup>. Light entered. There was revealed a terrace, such as is owned by many villas with trees each side of it, and on it a little rustic seat, and two flower-beds. But it was transfigured by the view beyond, for<sup>2</sup> Windy Corner was built on the range that overlooks<sup>3</sup> the Sussex Weald<sup>4</sup>. Lucy, who was in the little seat, seemed on the edge<sup>5</sup> of a green magic carpet which hovered<sup>6</sup> in the air above the tremulous world.

Cecil entered.

Appearing thus late in the story, Cecil must be at once described. He was medieval. Like a Gothic statue. Tall and refined, with shoulders that seemed braced square by an effort of the will<sup>7</sup>, and a head that was tilted<sup>8</sup> a little higher than the usual level of vision, he resembled those fastidious saints who guard the portals of a French cathedral. Well educated, well endowed<sup>9</sup>, and not deficient physically, he remained in the grip<sup>10</sup> of a certain devil whom the modern world knows as self-consciousness, and whom the medieval, with dimmer<sup>11</sup> vision, worshipped as asceticism. A Gothic statue implies celibacy, just as a Greek statue implies fruition, and perhaps this was what Mr Beebe meant. And Freddy, who ignored history and art, perhaps meant the same when he failed to imagine Cecil wearing another fellow's cap<sup>12</sup>.

Mrs Honeychurch left her letter on the writing-table and moved towards her young acquaintance<sup>13</sup>.

'Oh, Cecil!' she exclaimed – 'oh, Cecil, do tell me!'

'I promessi sposi,' said he.

They stared at him<sup>14</sup> anxiously.

'She has accepted me,' he said, and the sound of the thing in English made him flush<sup>15</sup> and smile with pleasure, and look more human.

'I am so glad,' said Mrs Honeychurch, while Freddy proffered a hand that was yellow with chemicals. They wished that they also knew Italian, for our phrases of approval and of amazement are so connected with little occasions that we fear to use them on great ones. We are obliged to become vaguely poetic, or to take refuge in Scriptural reminiscences<sup>16</sup>.

'Welcome as one of the family!' said Mrs Honeychurch, waving<sup>17</sup> her hand at the furniture. 'This is indeed a joyous day! I feel sure that you will make our dear Lucy happy.'

'I hope so,' replied the young man, shifting his eyes to the ceiling.

'We mothers –' simpered<sup>18</sup> Mrs Honeychurch, and then realized that she was affected, sentimental, bombastic – all the things she hated most. Why could she not be as Freddy, who stood stiff<sup>19</sup> in the middle of the room, looking very cross<sup>20</sup> and almost handsome?

'I say, Lucy!' called Cecil, for conversation seemed to flag<sup>21</sup>.

Lucy rose from the seat. She moved across the lawn and smiled in at them, just as if she was going to ask them to play tennis. Then she saw her brother's face. Her lips parted, and she took him in her arms. He said, 'Steady on'<sup>22</sup>!

'Not a kiss for me?' asked her mother.

- 1 he gave ... their poles. Diede uno strattone alle tende facendole scorrere lungo i bastoni.
- 2 for. Because.
- 3 the range that overlooks. La catena di colline che si affaccia su.
- 4 Weald. Regione agricola dell'Inghilterra meridionale che attraversa le contee di Sussex, Hampshire, Kent e Surrey.
- 5 edge. Bordo.
- 6 hovered. Si librava.
- 7 braced ... will. Puntellate da uno sforzo di volontà.
- 8 tilted. Inclinata.
- 9 well endowed. Benestante.
- 10 grip. Grinfie.
- 11 dimmer. Più incerta.
- 12 wearing ... cap. Indossare il copricapo di un altro. Qui: Mostrarsi in una veste diversa.
- 13 acquaintance. Conoscente.
- 14 They stared at him. Lo fissarono.
- 15 flush. Arrossire.
- 16 Scriptural reminiscences. Reminiscenze delle Sacre Scritture.
- 17 waving. Agitando.
- 18 simpered. Sorrise affettatamente.
- 19 stiff. Immobile, rigido.
- 20 cross. Contrariato.
- 21 to flag. Languire.
- 22 Steady on. Attenzione, calma.



Lucy kissed her also.

'Would you take them into the garden and tell Mrs Honeychurch all about it?' Cecil suggested. 'And I'd stop here and tell my mother.'

'We go with Lucy?' said Freddy, as if taking orders.

50 'Yes, you go with Lucy.'

They passed into the sunlight. Cecil watched them cross the terrace, and descend out of sight by the steps. They would descend – he knew their ways – past the shrubbery<sup>23</sup>, and past the tennis lawn and the dahlia-bed, until they reached the kitchen-garden, and there, in the presence of the potatoes and the peas, the great event  
55 would be discussed.

Smiling indulgently, he lit a cigarette, and rehearsed<sup>24</sup> the events that had led to such a happy conclusion.

He had known Lucy for several years, but only as a commonplace girl who happened to be musical. He could still remember his depression that afternoon at  
60 Rome, when she and her terrible cousin fell on him out of the blue<sup>25</sup>, and demanded to be taken to St Peter's. That day she had seemed a typical tourist – shrill, crude, and gaunt with travel<sup>26</sup>. But Italy worked some marvel<sup>27</sup> in her. It gave her light, and – which he held more precious – it gave her shadow. Soon he detected in her a wonderful reticence. She was like a woman of Leonardo da Vinci's, whom we love not so much  
65 for herself as for the things that she will not tell us. The things are assuredly not of this life; no woman of Leonardo's could have anything so vulgar as a 'story'. She did develop most wonderfully day by day.

So it happened that from patronizing civility<sup>28</sup> he had slowly passed if not to passion, at least to a profound uneasiness. Already at Rome he had hinted to her that  
70 they might be suitable for each other. It had touched him greatly that she had not broken away<sup>29</sup> at the suggestion. Her refusal had been clear and gentle; after it – as the horrid phrase went – she had been exactly the same to him as before. Three months later, on the margin of Italy, among the flower-clad<sup>30</sup> Alps, he had asked her again in bald<sup>31</sup>, traditional language. She reminded him of a Leonardo more than ever; her  
75 sunburnt features were shadowed by fantastic rocks; at his words she had turned and stood between him and the light with immeasurable plains<sup>32</sup> behind her. He walked home with her unashamed, feeling not at all like a rejected suitor<sup>33</sup>. The things that really mattered were unshaken.

So now he had asked her once more, and, clear and gentle as ever, she had accepted  
80 him, giving no coy<sup>34</sup> reasons for her delay, but simply saying that she loved him and would do her best to make him happy. His mother, too, would be pleased; she had counselled the step; he must write her a long account.

23 **past the shrubbery.** Oltre il boschetto.

24 **rehearsed.** Ripassò mentalmente.

25 **fell on him out of the blue.** Si erano avventate su di lui all'improvviso.

26 **shrill, crude, and gaunt with travel.** Petulante, rozza e deperita per il viaggio.

27 **marvel.** Meraviglia.

28 **patronizing civility.** Condiscendente cortesia.

29 **she had not broken away.** Non era fuggita.

30 **flower-clad.** Ricoperte di fiori.

31 **bald.** Esplicito.

32 **plains.** Pianure, distese.

33 **suitors.** Pretendenti.

34 **coy.** Civettuole.

## LITERARY COMPETENCE

### > VOCABULARY

**1 READ** the text and find the words deriving from the following.

- |                  |                     |
|------------------|---------------------|
| 1 irritate ..... | 6 reminiscent ..... |
| 2 instinct ..... | 7 assure .....      |
| 3 ascetic .....  | 8 wonder .....      |
| 4 acquaint ..... | 9 easy .....        |
| 5 approve .....  | 10 suit .....       |



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**> COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING A TEXT****2 READ** the text again and answer the following questions.

- |   |                                  |   |  |
|---|----------------------------------|---|--|
| 1 | Where does the scene take place? | 5 | What are Mrs Honeychurch's and Freddy's reactions? |
| 2 | Who are the characters involved? | 6 | What does Cecil remember once he is alone?         |
| 3 | What is the main event?          | 7 | Who does he want to inform?                        |
| 4 | How does Cecil announce it?      |   |  |

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**> COMPETENCE: ANALYSING AND INTERPRETING A TEXT****3 FOCUS** on the description of the setting at the beginning. What characterises it? What do the curtains symbolise?**4 IDENTIFY** the kind of narrator. Write down the lines where he expresses his own opinions.**5 ANALYSE** the character of Cecil.

- Say what method of characterisation is employed by Forster.
- List the details concerning his description, indicating
  - his physical appearance;
  - his attitude;
  - what he is compared to.
- What does the opposition between 'medieval' and 'Greek' point out about him?
- Find evidence of Cecil's condescension and feeling of superiority.
- What do you think the narrator's opinion of Cecil is?

**6 COMPLETE** the table with information about Cecil's three proposals in lines 67-82.

	First proposal	Second proposal	Third proposal
Place			
Time			
Cecil			
Lucy			

**7 EXPLAIN** Lucy's role in the passage. Trace her development through time according to Cecil. What had changed her most?**8 SAY** how the Honeychurches are presented. What kind of people are they?**9 WRITE** down the themes of the text.

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**> COMPETENCE: ESTABLISHING LINKS WITH THE LITERARY CONTEXT OF THE AGE****10 DISCUSS.** Compare this text with other texts dealing with the theme of love and marriage as regards the context, the suitor and the heroine's attitude.