



PART ONE

Becoming a “Grown Up Man”





“A Queer Moment”

It was just Lily and Morgan. This had not been the plan.

Alice Clara Whichelo, known as Lily, married a marvelous young architect after an eight-week engagement when she was twenty-one. Edward Morgan Forster was the son of a clergyman. Lily and Eddie settled near Dorset Square in London, a few blocks from the rose gardens of Regents Park—a fine place for a young couple to start a family, and far enough away from Eddie’s imposing relatives at Clapham to give them breathing space. It was January 1877. Eddie was twenty-nine, and a bit slow to get on his feet professionally. Coming down from Trinity College, Cambridge, he had taken a slightly crooked path, inching away from filial expectations that he become a vicar. He was just starting his career, and his family buoyed up the young people financially. His sister Laura, having inherited some money, commissioned him to draw up plans for a fine brick country house in Surrey.

Lily didn’t know it, but her husband’s commission of Laura Forster’s West Hackhurst house would be the zenith of her happiness and security for a long time. She was pregnant within weeks of her wedding but their baby was stillborn. So ended the first year of her marriage. The next spring, almost before she had time to breathe, Lily was pregnant again. In the brief time before it would be unseemly for Lily to be seen traipsing about in public, Eddie took her to France to widen her horizons. His formidable “Aunt Monie”—the family matriarch who financed the trip—found the chaperoning arrangements rather unorthodox: “no Lady companion” for Lily unless one counted Eddie’s university friend Ted Streatfeild, who accompanied the couple on their belated honeymoon. Streatfeild, Aunt Monie wrote acidly, was “very nearly” a lady companion, “I own, but not quite.” While Lily rested at the hotel, the

men walked and talked. For them Paris was familiar territory. Eddie was “very glib” at speaking French.

By the time they returned to London, Lily was heavily pregnant. On New Year’s Day 1879 she and Edward celebrated the birth of a son, also called Edward Morgan. Naming him thus came from a mistake at the baptismal font—the alchemy of absentmindedness and fear of social ostracism that would fuel Forster’s first comic novels. In deference to Aunt Monie, the couple had settled on the family name Henry Morgan, the Henry honoring both Monie’s father, Henry Thornton, and Eddie’s brother Henry, a “shining light” who had died when Eddie was eighteen. So they had registered the baby’s name in the official records, but when the verger read from the scrap of paper at the font, he found that Eddie—“distract”—had written his own full name instead. To differentiate him from his father, they called him by his middle name. Soon after the baby was born, it was clear that Eddie was very ill. He developed a horrifying cough and all through the year he could not shake a cold. Through eighteen “months of languor and sickness” Lily “could not take her husband’s illness seriously.” She was focused on the baby, and “she was accustomed to young people remaining alive.” Behind her back the Forsters and Eddie’s maternal family, the Thorntons, were full of advice and recrimination.

Lily came by her obtuse optimism honestly, and it later served her well. Like her husband, she was one of ten children. But the Whichelos were a hearty family—all her siblings were humming along, “fond of pleasure, generous and improvident,” full of “good looks . . . good taste and good spirits.” The Forsters were a more delicate bunch. Eddie, the eighth born, had already seen the death of five siblings from tuberculosis. One after the other they had been struck down; John, the firstborn, had lived all the way to the age of thirty-four, but the rest died in their teens and twenties. By the late summer of 1880 Lily realized that she must take the illness in hand. She rented a large house with a view of the sea in Bournemouth, and moved Eddie and the baby there to breathe the brisk salty air. But it was already too late. On October 30, 1880, Eddie died of tuberculosis, just ten days before his thirty-third birthday. Before her son was two, Lily was a twenty-five-year-old widow. Morgan wrote later, “[S]he felt that her life had ended before it had begun.” Her own words characterized her stupefying grief: “I wish tonight would never turn into day and that I could go on sleeping forever, it would be so nice.” Morgan was all she had left.

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There was no money on Lily’s side of the family. Her father had been a drawing master—a big, dreamy man who cobbled together a living. He had died suddenly when she was twelve, leaving her mother, Louisa, indefatigable and resourceful, to find ways of pressing her children out into the world. As the third of ten children and the eldest girl, Lily had learned to be stout-hearted, uncomplaining, and to take care of herself. In 1872, she had bought a diary which she wryly dedicated to herself, “a great heroine . . . age 17, manners 71 years of age, from her infancy always very old for her age.” Soon after, with an introduction from her family doctor, Lily became a companion to the neighboring Thorntons and a governess to the children of their friends. So she had met Eddie, and so she remained in the sway of his family after his death. Eddie had left a small inheritance. Seven thousand pounds would generate enough income for her to live a frugal middle-class life. By default Eddie had also left her to the redoubtable influence of his Aunt Monie, Marianne Thornton.

The Thorntons, Morgan Forster later came to understand, had a genetic gift: they “always had known best—it was part of their moral integrity.” And Aunt Monie “knew best better than ever” as she aged. She was eighty-two when Morgan was born, and she claimed not only the financial and moral power to determine her favored great-nephew’s future but a formidable family history to guide him. The Thorntons had all the gravitas and social influence the Whichelos lacked. They had been among the first families in Clapham for generations. Marianne’s father, Henry Thornton, was a founding member of the Clapham Sect, a group of Christian evangelists who proved to be effective, if ornery, politicians in the early nineteenth century.

Henry Thornton’s money came from banking. First he did well and then he did good. Family prayers were “a discipline and an institution,” Morgan wrote later. “The Clapham Sect listened, rose from its knees, ate, and then made money—made as much as ever it could, and then gave as much as it could away. The activity in either direction was immense.” Thorntons were great moralists, and despite all opposition they Stood Up for What Was Right. Year after year, Henry Thornton stood up in Parliament to support bills that would make this world a little more like the next: bills to establish asylums for the insane, bills for parliamentary reform against sinecures and corruption, bills for peace with the Americas, bills to stabilize the banking system,

which was hopelessly unregulated, always bubbling and bursting. Most famously, Thornton had been a great friend of William Wilberforce in the long campaign to end the British slave trade. Thornton was a moderate, humorless man who had not an ounce of whimsy in his bones. (His friend Hannah More had unironically named her two cats Non-resistance and Passive Obedience.) By the time of Eddie's death, in Marianne's hands the Thornton evangelical fervor had distilled to the essence of knowing what was right for Lily and the baby.

After a miserable and smothering year living in the gloom of Aunt Monie's large house in South London, Lily did something astonishing. She resisted her in-laws' desire to envelop her, and set off to establish a separate household for herself and Morgan. In the autumn of 1882 she found an eighteenth-century redbrick house to let on four acres of land *north* of the city. The house was an island, even an idyll, suspended in time and place. Neither country nor yet fully suburban, Rooksnest stood at the margin of the village of Stevenage.

Morgan and Lily would live at Rooksnest for the next decade. Once there had been a hamlet and farm called Rooksnest, but those had disappeared, and now the name attached like a ghost to a two-story gabled house with plain windows and broad chimneys in the center of the roof and at one end. There was nothing particularly grand or historical about the house. To Morgan, whose first proper piece of writing was a memoir of the house, composed when he was fifteen, its very ordinary Englishness made it seem mystical, tied as it was to a past that was rapidly being eroded by the growth of suburban London. The walk to the village was about a mile. In the meadow beside the house was an ancient wych-elm in which people of the distant past had pressed boars' fangs into the bark, little "votive offerings of people who had their toothache cured by chewing pieces of the bark." Next door was the Franklyn farm, where there were ponies and children to play with, and a barn full of sweet straw to hide in. The kitchen garden was big enough to be hard work. Lily adapted the lawn for tennis. She and Morgan lived with two domestic servants—one for indoors and one for out. There might have been a moat, so socially isolated was their little household. Years later Forster immortalized the house, and the feeling of the house, in a novel. He called it *Howards End*.

In *Howards End* the house is haunted not by a literal ghost but by a sort of genius loci. Eddie's ghost, if it walked at all, signified a lost world that might

have supplanted or at least balanced out the “haze of elderly ladies”—the aunts and great-aunts, Victorian matrons who formed the only circle of friends with whom Lily felt comfortable. The lost world, Morgan came to understand, was an unspoken world, not only male but homoerotic. When he was in his mid-seventies, preparing a biography of Marianne Thornton, Morgan thought back on the oddities that he had stubbornly gleaned from Eddie’s short life. There was the unusual interest in aesthetics, fashion, and the decorative arts, the kind of pursuit au courant with Oscar Wilde and his set at Oxford. In facing marriage, Eddie was described as “not wild like L[jily] but as befitted his seven more years all aglow with happiness and having looked ‘things’ steadily in the face . . .” *Things?* Why did the milk-livered Ted Streatfeild accompany the couple to Paris? Why had Aunt Monie worried that Eddie “won’t be too old maidish to walk you down the Boulevard Italienne at night”? Then there was the strange companionship, akin to an informal adoption, between his dashing young uncle Percy Whichelo and an older military gentleman. In retrospect, Morgan thought “the implication was obvious.” It was not merely wish fulfillment to see the root of his homosexuality in his family’s past.

At Rooksnest, Lily Forster established the domestic pattern that would last the rest of her life: she and her boy against the world. She never remarried. Mother and son lived alone on a delicate reef of interdependence. A formal photograph taken when Morgan was five suggests the balance of power. The picture looks mid-Victorian though it was taken thirty years later. Wearing a little velvet suit with lace cuffs and collar, Mary Janes and stockings, his long hair cascading down his back, Morgan appears as an androgynous little Lord Fauntleroy. Though he is stout, Lily is shielding him as if he’s delicate. She stands behind him, not yet thirty, still dressed in mourning, her long hair pulled back in an elegant coil of plaits. Steadying him with her right hand, his mother looks down at him adoringly. But Morgan—with wide blue eyes—faces the camera directly with the attitude of an odalisque.

Aunt Monie had given Morgan the “deplorable” nickname “The Important One,” and it had grown less and less ironic over the years. He was accustomed to being the center of attention, but oddly this didn’t translate into narcissism. Because he was intensely filial and intensely sensitive, Morgan felt the weight of his role as Lily’s reason for living. He was a solemn little boy, often very still. He watched with interest the delicate dance women must adopt to be heard by men. He became in effect Lily’s lady companion.

So close were he and Lily that their identities seemed to merge. He parroted her habit of cosseting and her intense interest in the exquisite proprieties of social standing and social etiquette. To his two dolls, Sailor Dollar and Sailor Duncan, he told long, complicated stories about what could and shouldn't be done. One afternoon when Morgan was five he and Lily settled down to play "our usual game at Béziq. M. had S. Duncan stuck under his arm, which a good deal interfered with his play. At last he said so gravely 'I am having such a miserable time with this doll. Do you think he would mind much not learning the game?'"

Learning the game seemed to be the key to living life. The whole of the world appeared as a set of rules, to be negotiated with care if you were not powerful. There seemed to be ways to earn a little safety. At the age of four, Morgan told his mother he "would much rather be a coward than brave because people hurt you when you are brave." At other times, it seemed that however much one tried, who you were was determined by whether you could adequately act a part. But both his anachronistic dress and his extremely sensitive manner made him seem "half a girl," Lily complained. "I wish he was more manly and did not cry so easily." Once, when he was mistaken for a girl by a servant, he was told to go back and correct the misapprehension. Dutifully, he returned and announced, "I'm a little boy." "Yes, miss," was the reply.

He was clever. By the age of four, he discovered that he could read. Thereafter he fiercely defended his interior life, commenting to Aunt Monie's maid that it was "[t]iresome to be interrupted in my reading when the light is so good." Learning to read opened a vista into a separate life—a life apart from Life, which he figured in a piece of juvenile fiction as a "secret place." Here it was possible to slow things down to consider them, to magnify feelings, to roll them around in the brain, to hone the strange interior truths of being and feeling. In later years, he crystallized these insights into a very funny, very sad essay he called "Notes on the English Character." "It is not," Morgan wrote there, "that the Englishman can't feel—it is that he is afraid to feel." The essence of English character is to "measure out emotions . . . as if they were potatoes." Even as a young boy, Morgan was both trapped in the English character and a connoisseur of its vagaries. When he was only four, he spent days earnestly studying an etiquette book for children. The book was titled *Don't!*

He became a keen pupil of different *kinds* of knowledge. There was the bilingualism of women, their private talk and their careful, vicious, oblique wielding of social power. And there was dream knowledge, a magical, incantatory way to discover what is already known to be true. In *Maurice*, he would write, “Maurice had two dreams at school; they will interpret him.” The wishes that acted upon, or acted for, the passive Morgan were centered on affection for men. The warm, diffuse, disembodied yearning for connection and intimacy that appeared as a voice calling out in the dark, and the panicky, miserable jolt of fear when the yearning became embodied in any way. Thinking about things was relatively safe. Touching was not.

So Morgan persisted in trying to figure himself out in a kind of vacuum. His earliest self-knowledge was sexual and tinged with homoerotic hunger. At Rooksnest, this island where there were no men, he sought the company of Ansell, a neighboring garden boy, confiding in him and relishing his unknowing touch. Decades later, in his fifties, Morgan recorded the memory in his undated “Sex Diary.” “We built a little house between a straw stack and hedge, and often lay in each other’s arms, tickling and screaming.” When he was eleven, the incantatory voice spoke to him at the scene of his father’s death:

[W]e all went to Bournemouth. There I remember a queer moment. I stood looking out of the sitting room at the deserted road and thought “It all depends on whether a man or a woman first passes.” From the right came a gentleman with a brown moustache. I was much relieved . . . This is the first *conscious* preference that I recall.

The relief may have been conscious, but the queerness felt fateful. That he was attracted to men, Morgan had already known without knowing for some time.

At Rooksnest he soon outstripped Lily’s capacity to tutor him and outlasted the patience of their housemaid, Emma, who turned in her notice after being imperiously instructed in botany, astronomy, cology—“about *shells*”—by a five-year-old. Lily turned to the village of Stevenage, where a pompous young Irishman named Mr. Hervey ran a mediocre day school he grandly called “The Grange.” She commissioned Mr. Hervey not only to teach the boy, but to assist him in masculine activities like climbing. Morgan instead used the trees to masturbate:

I used to hang on the branches, wind my legs about the curve and draw myself up and down. After a long time there would be a nice feeling between my legs, followed by tiredness, when I stopped and slid . . . Once I had the feeling when my tutor stood by—he was supposed to teach me climbing. He said laughing “How he kicks about!” I said to myself “You little know!”

Sometimes his secret life afforded a feeling of mastery over the adult world, but more often it engendered mysterious and startling surprises. Even the “fat dark” Mr. Hervey, with his hopeless little mustache, could summon powerful erotic thoughts in the boy. “Soon after Mr. Hervey came I had a dream which I perhaps added to in my waking hours: his prick, very long, filled the hall and the dining room like white macaroni and wound me up in it. I had never seen his prick, and indeed thought no one but myself had one, so the dream’s odd.”

The retreat into his imagination as a way to explore his desire safely became a lifelong pattern for Morgan. It would be decades before he found both the intimacy and the sexual contact he craved. He arrived at this blissful state, which he called *connection*, through his brain rather than his body, through listening to what he knew he felt before he actually felt it in the blood.

The world conspired with the Word to bewilder him. When he was four, Morgan faithfully told his mother he had discovered the “trick” of rubbing his prepuce “backwards and forwards.” Lily told him that was called “Dirty,” and “presently . . . ‘help me get rid of the dirty trick’ figured in my prayer.” Lily did not know this, but her invocation of Christianity was the first step in the separation of mother and son. Encountering this boundary alerted him to things that could not be said, not even to his beloved mother. All his life Morgan kept his homosexuality a secret from her. One of his friends described their delicate dance: “Morgan never came out of the closet. He wanted to protect his mother. And by the time he could have come out, there wasn’t any closet left.”

He looked in books for ratification of his scanty sexual experience. But the “dirties” of others were sadly absent from *Smith’s Classical Dictionary*,

and “concealed by drapery in the illustrations to Kingsley’s *Heroes*.” Fiction, and the feelings it produced, were much more satisfying.

Felt deeply about boys in books, especially about Ernest, the priggish second son in the *Swiss Family Robinson* . . . I could not bear that Ernest should grow up—he was 13 I think—so the end of the *Swiss Family Robinson*, which takes place 10 years later, was repellent to me, and I would pretend that Ernest and the others were magicked back into being boys.

When Lily misapprehended Morgan’s thoughts, he did not correct her. “My mother said ‘I believe Jack [third son—lively] is your favorite!’” He recognized that Lily, too, sought her consolations in literature. He would not be the man she wanted him to be, but she did not have to know.

Ironically, Sunday school stories became an excellent vehicle for homoerotic fantasies. The Christ omnipresent in Victorian stained glass—the genteel, compassionate figure in every Anglican parish church—is a grown-up Lord Fauntleroy. And this Christ was introduced into steamy narratives, “long serial stories. In one of them I was Christ and led my companions about.” Morgan perfectly mirrored Edwardian preoccupations, neatly conflating imperial and Christian themes in his subsequent erotic fantasies: “sleeping with naked black man in a cave” and “converting the inhabitants of New Guinea to Christ.”

There is no record of whether the era’s sexual scandals—the Cleveland Street scandal, which implicated the Prince of Wales’s son Albert in a homosexual brothel, or the discovery of a boy prostitution ring among British high officials in Dublin Castle—made their way to Morgan’s ears or eyes. But his fantasies comprised a queer refashioning of cultural anxieties about male friendship that were very much in the news when he was a child. Sexual issues began to ossify into law: Parliament, which had been largely silent on these private matters, now began to make them public ones, encoding the age of consent, limiting traffic in “white slavery,” and eventually criminalizing unspecified acts of “gross indecency” between men, in the Labouchère Amendment of 1885. This was the law that would send Oscar Wilde, the

most famous and successful writer in London, to prison when Morgan was sixteen. Christian reformers, who had promoted laws to maintain social purity, now began to bewail some consequences of the public scrutiny of relations between men. All sorts of innocent actions now might be misconstrued. The new public consciousness about sexual behavior narrowed the terrain where social actions between men could be assumed to be innocent, meaningless, private, or ambiguous. One lamented, “A few more cases like Oscar Wilde’s and we should find the freedom of companionship now possible to men seriously impaired to the permanent detriment of the race.”

At about the same time that Mr. Hervey appeared, Aunt Monie finally died at the age of ninety. Morgan had been dutifully taken to visit her in her last illness, but he did not recall it. The “arrival of the news” came by the kind of circumlocution that he and Lily were beginning to develop:

I knew that [Aunt Monie] was ill, and one gloomy afternoon I was walking with my mother towards our home . . . I asked her how Aunt Monie was, and she replied, in the strained tones then thought appropriate to the subject of death, “She is better.”—“Is she well?” I asked. “She *is*” came the solemn answer and I burst into tears. They were composite tears . . . I cried because crying was easy and because my mother might like it, and because the subject was death.

At her death, Monie left him a bequest larger than Eddie had left for his young family, to be devoted to Morgan’s education. And almost immediately, Lily sent him away to school. It was time he grew up and entered the world.

Going away to school meant both separation from Lily and harsh induction into a new world of uncompromising masculine conventions. He was supremely ill-suited to the public school ethos, with its hierarchies of power and its emphasis on manly sport, and he quickly came to hate it with a fervor he sustained into old age. The Kent House school in Eastbourne, to which he was sent in 1890, was small and relatively enlightened by the standards of the day. There were only thirty boys attending and the headmaster was a bit of an egghead, well-meaning but obtuse when faced with a very sensitive boy. Morgan was painfully homesick, and snubbed by most of the other boys, who called him “Mousie.” They were immune to his intellectual charm. School subjected him to all sorts of indignities—the public bathing was a special humiliation. One of the boys announced, “Have you seen Forster’s

cock? A beastly little brown thing,” and in one stroke he both learned the word and felt the sting of being thought repellent.

Most of all, going off to Kent schooled Morgan in the art of detachment. During his second term there, to his great relief, he was excused from playing games, and allowed to walk along the Downs for exercise. There he encountered a pedophile. It was a momentous event in the boy’s education but not for the reasons one might expect. Morgan began his Sex Diary to trace his origins as a man and a writer, certain that his homosexuality was the central fact of his being. More than forty years later, the details of the encounter with the pedophile were etched in his mind.

It was March 1891, and patches of snow still clung to the hills. Setting out over the Downs, Morgan encountered a man of forty or fifty—“large moustache, pepper and salt knickerbockers suit, deer stalker cap, mackintosh on arm”—near the summit, ostentatiously pissing into a gorse bush.

Having concluded he spoke to me, I forget how, then walked me aside and made me sit between some gorse bushes on the mackintosh. He sat on my left—then undid his flies, I forget how soon, and told me to take hold of his prick. “Dear little fellow . . . play with it . . . dear little fellow . . . pull it about.” I obeyed with neither pleasure or reluctance. Had no emotion at the time, but was startled at the red lolling tip (my own prepuce covering the gland even at erection) and was startled when some thick white drops trickled out. He rapidly lost interest in me, asked me where I lived (“Hertfordshire”) and offered me a shilling (“no thank you”). He didn’t try to handle me and I went off quietly.

The encounter with the pedophile did not fundamentally damage Morgan. Nor did it have much “effect on [his] development” since he “connected it with no sensations of my own.” But leaving the man raised the complex moral question of whether he should *tell* anyone about his experience, and here the tension began to mount in the young boy. “Going down hill I became upset and thought how if I had accepted the 1/- I would have hurled it into a patch of snow.” He decided to write to Lily about it.

As the event became public property, it magnified and hardened in predictable ways. Lily consulted her rector’s wife, and advised on the tone Morgan should take in reporting the circumstances to his headmaster, Mr.

Hutchinson. “By this time,” Morgan wrote in his Sex Diary, “I was in another mood, hard and important.” He decided to adopt a manly air, and to approximate a manly metaphor for what had occurred. “You know your bowels sir” [Morgan asked.] Mr. H said he did, and I described how this man’s bowels were diseased. This conversation took place near a fireplace in the dining room. It was followed by another equally disconcerting for Mr. H, as we walked down to the Police Station to report the matter.”

Mr. Hutchinson, too, sought refuge in allegory. He told Morgan haplessly,

“We know from the Bible about certain things, and there is the story of Adam and Eve . . . boys may do great harm to themselves.” He asked if I could identify the man again. All for vengeance, I said that I should, but he warned me against accusing strangers—if I saw anyone whom I suspected, I was to tell one of the masters quietly. “But we shall know him Sir, by this disease.” Mr. H did not reply, his long horse-shaped face was silent, he lost a great opportunity of enlightening me, for I was full of curiosity and quite cheerful . . .

The man was never identified and never found. Mr. Hutchinson even spared the boy the necessity of giving evidence to the police. But the encounter did bring home to Morgan important lessons about how shame and panic could be easily harnessed, even by a young boy, into full-blown hysteria. Forster’s novels would be perspicacious in their examination of how the public voice—what he called in *A Passage to India* “the herd instinct”—could do savage and irreparable harm. He would become the master of depicting a particular kind of male obtuseness, from hapless cowardice to outright malignity. And he would specialize in placing his readers in complex positions of sympathy, as indeed he had been in even at the time. The lesson of the pedophile was the lesson of telling the story to ignorant people in power, and watching them unravel and strike out in predictable ways. And it offered the inexorable instruction of estrangement. Afterward, he could no longer speak to Lily, or to anyone, about the things that touched him most deeply. The sign that he had learned this came in writing a single word in a now-lost diary. “I made an entry in my Diary <<<Nothing>>> to remind me it had been something.”

Only by inscribing such a concrete lie could Morgan articulate the complicated lessons of his strange encounter with panic and power. Writing the word showed that he understood how dangerous writing the truth could be, how

even describing things honestly might enmesh him, too. The “<<<Nothing>>>” incident became a kind of parable in itself, a parable of both finding himself as a writer and losing his faith in social systems. It was like an expulsion from Eden, for he could no longer talk to or trust Lily. “Later in the term mother came to see me, and said how painful it had been to her to write the letter that Mr. H saw, also asked me whether I had cured myself of my ‘dirty trick.’ I said I hadn’t and she was so distressed and worried that I decided not to mention it to her again. This ended my last chance of a confidant.” At the same time he jettisoned his belief in Christianity. He concluded that he could not be a Christian, because there was no evidence in the Bible that Christ had a sense of humor.

The episode with the pedophile effectively ended Morgan’s stint at the Eastbourne school. He came back home for an unsatisfactory resumption of his studies with Mr. Hervey at the Grange. But the lease on Rooksnest expired at the same time, and Lily decided to move to a place where she could live near a good school, and allow Morgan to go there as a day boy. So they moved to Tonbridge, where they joined many other families who took advantage of an obscure provision in the school’s charter that made such an arrangement cheaper than it might have been. Tonbridge School was a relative latecomer to the public-school tradition; it had been converted in the nineteenth century from a kind of guild academy for middle-class boys, and it had all the pretensions of a latecomer trying to prove itself worthy. There were houses and prefects and an elaborate system of sucking up to the older boys. And the place attracted a certain kind of pompous schoolmaster who felt he had to prove himself.

The best depiction of Tonbridge School as Morgan saw it is his scathing sketch of Sawston in *The Longest Journey*, and it is impossible to separate the sense of what the school was like from his virulent active loathing of his two years there. In middle age, Morgan shaped a delicious fantasy that he had actually been invited to supervise the *destruction* of a boarding school, and he lit into the project with glee. Affecting a precious accent he associated with the would-be upper-class men who attended Tonbridge, Forster addresses the audience:

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and bies: school was the unhappiest time of my life, and the worst trick it played on me was to pretend that it was the world in miniature. For it hindered me from discovering

how lovely and delightful the world can be, and how much of it is intelligible. From this platform of middle age, this throne of experience, this altar of wisdom, this scaffold of character, this beacon of hope, this threshold of decay, my last words to you are: “there’s a better time coming.”

At almost exactly the same time he wrote these cathartic words, Morgan settled down to compose his Sex Diary. The miseries were more comfortably in his past.

In the present moment, Morgan was subjected to the most crude bullying of his life. One Tonbridge alumnus, when asked about Morgan in the 1950s, recalled him with un-self-conscious spite: “Forster? The writer? Yes, I remember him. A little cissy. We took it out of him, I can tell you.” There is very little concrete evidence of Morgan’s own thoughts at the time. Edmund Gosse’s letter might have applied to the young Forster: “The position of a young man so tormented is really that of a man buried alive and conscious, but deprived of speech.”

Morgan survived Tonbridge, though he felt it prepared him neither for Cambridge nor for life. He took school prizes in Latin and geography, and though he did not distinguish himself enough to earn a scholarship, he was offered entrance to King’s College in October 1897, when he was eighteen.

The young man who went off to university was not nearly so physically ugly as he imagined himself. He had reached almost six feet in height, and had long, slender hands, musical hands. He played piano with intense passion and quite well. He already had learned to use his diffidence to advantage, devising creative ways to hide in plain sight. Shy and nondescript in his habits of dress, the young Morgan fashioned a caricature of an ordinary middle-class Englishman. He looked both completely unassuming and completely correct. He was gangly, a bit stooped even in his youth, and almost chinless. As a friend, Forster was funny, whimsical, emotionally urgent, and unpredictable. Like his great creation in *Howards End* Mrs. Wilcox, he seemed perfectly ordinary, and yet appeared to live on a deeper plane than other mortals.

He was still almost incomprehensibly naïve about sexual matters. After the debacle at the school in Eastbourne, Morgan had tried one last time to communicate with Lily about the strange conflation of biblical and sexual knowledge he had gleaned from Mr. Hutchinson.

Learnt that there was queer stuff in Bible, and thought that “lying together” meant that a man placed his stomach against a woman’s and that it was a crisis when he warmed her—perhaps that a child was born, but of this I cannot be sure. Told my mother in the holidays that now I knew what committing adultery was. She looked worried, and said “So you understand now how dreadful it would be to mention it, especially if a gentleman was there.” Never connected warming operation with my sexual premonitions. This chance guess, that came so near to the truth, never developed and not till I was 30 did I know exactly how male and female joined.

He began to apply the lessons of his bifurcated life to his conduct in the world, at first unconsciously. A real innocence was at the heart of this sensibility. It consisted of bringing himself, and eventually his friends and his readers, into an imagined world where the limitations of behavior and the possibilities of expression were wider, more honest, and more recondite than those of the material world. Morgan taught himself how to feel by force of a fierce, obtuse innocence.

He went up to King’s green as a reed.