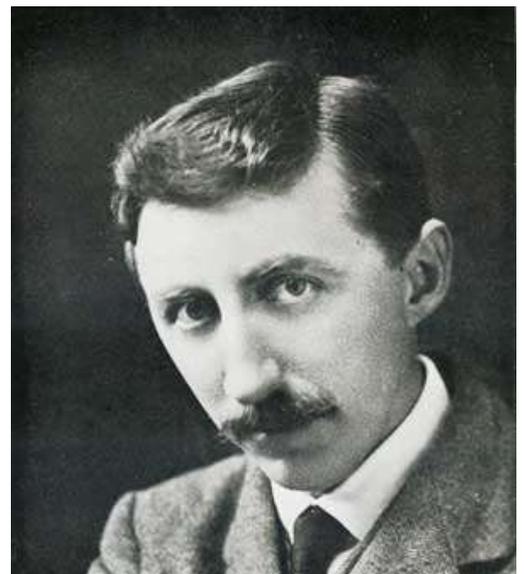
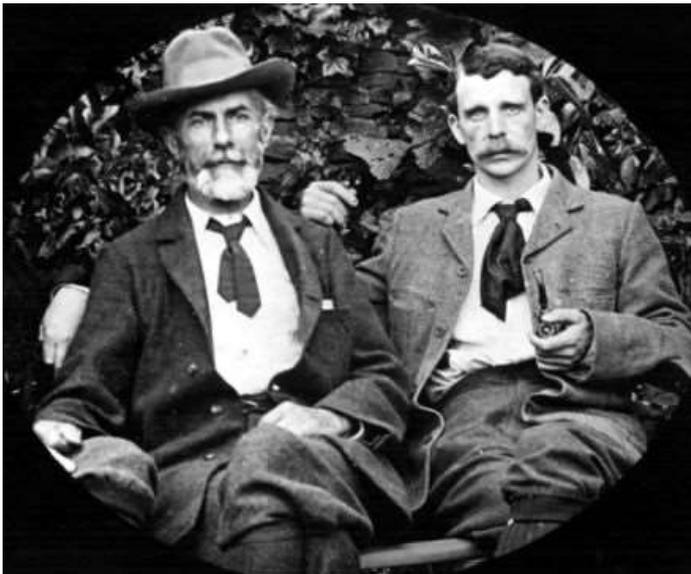


## **1912: A Helping Hand**

A pastoral chamber opera in one act

Music – Robert Ely

Libretto – Peter Scott-Presland



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## **Cast**

Edward Carpenter/Narrator (Bass)

Aged 69, very fit and wiry, grey hair and beard. Loose clothing, sandals, broad brimmed hat. Socialist and mystic. Apt to daydream

EM Forster (tenor)

Aged 34, a townie, in uncomfortable suit, buttoned up and repressed. His moustache gives no sense of masculinity, rather heightens his hesitancy. He has a slight stammer, from being bullied in childhood. As Maurice he is similar, but a younger version of himself, an academic

George Merrill (Baritone)

Aged 47. Stocky, northern, blunt. A moustache. Self-educated but never stupid. Carpenter's lover for 20 years, has lived with him for 15. He runs the household. As Maurice he is younger, sexier, idealised (nb. slight change in language) a gamekeeper.

## **Setting**

The garden of the Carpenter/Merrill farmhouse at Millthorpe, just outside Sheffield. The action moves into the novel Maurice in Forster's mind. The time is September 1913 – an Indian summer.

The action moves into the novel 'Maurice' as it takes shape in Forster's mind

## **Orchestration**

Flute and piano

## Synopsis

*The novelist EM Forster visits pioneer gay writer and activist Edward Carpenter and his lover – they live together openly; they motivate and inspire him sufficiently to clear his writer's block and enable him to write 'Maurice', a courageous gay novel, which was not published until after Forster's death, in 1971.*

Carpenter is in his garden shelling peas and daydreaming. Merrill comes to consult him about practical domestic issues and reminds him of Forster's visit.

Forster arrives shortly after, hot and bothered, having had a three mile walk from the nearest station. He voices his dislike of the countryside.

Carpenter questions Forster about hiding behind his initials, expounds his own interest in Hinduism (which Forster shares), criticises the timidity and aridity of Forster's writings. He gets him to open up about his sexual orientation.

Carpenter and Merrill try to convince Forster that he does not have to believe the repugnant Victorian labels but should elevate gay feelings to an expression of eternal love.

The novel 'Maurice' begins to form in Forster's mind, and they become characters in the novel, reflecting on never-ending love, and a happy ending,

*[An old deckchair. Carpenter sitting, hat shading his face, a bowl of peas on his lap.]*

CARPENTER: Light.  
In the evening glow of the sun  
All is light.  
Look at those leaves  
A halo surrounds each one  
Look through the leaves  
And see the veins  
The leaves become translucent  
And alive with light.

Great Krishna  
Lord of life and death  
Shiva the cobra  
His bite will dissolve us  
Vishnu will evolve us  
Brahma the unfathomable  
And infinite god

Take me, great Life,  
When my time comes  
Unloose these chains,  
Unbind these clogs and fetters.  
I will hear the call. I will come.

MERRILL: *[Offstage]* Ted! Ted!

*[enters]* I thought you'd be here

CARPENTER: My favourite place  
The murmur of the stream  
The water so soothing

MERRILL: Haven't **yer** done **them** peas yet?

CARPENTER: I was thinking

MERRILL: Daydreaming more like  
Get a move on  
I haven't got all day  
And a pea risotto  
Won't make **itsen**  
Do I have to do everything?

CARPENTER: Pea risotto? That's a bit fancy

MERRILL: With turnip tops  
I thought I'd do something fancy  
With Mr Forster coming

CARPENTER: Forster! I almost forgot

MERRILL: Forget **yer** own name next

CARPENTER: What time is he coming?

MERRILL: His train **were** due over an hour ago  
Get a move on with **them** peas  
And don't forget young Alec either

CARPENTER: Alec Brewster?

MERRILL: Aye.  
**Yer** promised that you'd meet him in **t'** pub  
For a game of skittles  
He's after you, **yer** know  
Wants to share **yer** bed

CARPENTER: Are you jealous?

MERRILL: Me? Jealous? Don't make me laugh

CARPENTER: *[Teasing]* He's a fine upstanding lad

MERRILL: But could he make yer tea?  
I **think** not

*[He kisses CARPENTER. They freeze. Lights fade on them, up on FORSTER opposite side of the stage. He is hot and sweaty in a three-piece suit, carrying a suitcase. Uncomfortable and irritated.]*

FORSTER: I hate the country  
It is so dirty – and noisy;  
All those animals and birds  
Sounding off for all **they're** worth  
Trust Carpenter to choose  
Somewhere miles from anywhere  
Apparently, he built his house himself  
A stage for the drama of his sainthood.  
*[change]* I must not be uncharitable  
I'm only tired  
I have waited so long for this meeting  
Only fear has held me back  
Fear of myself, and what I will find there

*[MERRILL and CARPENTER unfreeze. MERRILL goes to greet FORSTER.]*

MERRILL: Ah, Mr Forster you found us

FORSTER: There were no carriages for hire at Dronfield **Station**  
It was a three-mile walk and more  
And of course, the locals  
Don't know how to give directions  
*[imitates]* 'Turn right at **t'** hay barn'  
Which hay barn? There are several

CARPENTER: *[irritated]* Don't patronise the people, Forster

FORSTER: I'm sorry. Perhaps I'm tired

CARPENTER: They are your comrades and the future  
Enough of that  
Give me your hand  
I am glad to see you

MERRILL: Give me **yer** case  
I'll put it in **yer** room  
It's all prepared

FORSTER: Thank you – er –  
It's Merrill, isn't it?

MERRILL: Call me George. Everyone does [*Exits with the case, and the peas*]

CARPENTER: And what of you, Mr *Eee Emm* Forster?  
So many with initials  
EF Benson, GK Chesterton  
O Henry, JM Barrie  
MR James, RD Blackmoor  
HG Wells  
All hiding something of themselves  
Bottled up in initials

FORSTER: Come now; Herbert Wells  
Never bottles **up** anything  
That is part of his problem

CARPENTER: Ee Em?

FORSTER: All my family call me Morgan  
My mother and my aunts

CARPENTER: And shall I call you by your matriarchal name?

FORSTER: It is simplest.  
Mother's in Harrogate for the cure  
Of her rheumatism  
I'd rather she did not know of this visit.

CARPENTER: Am I that notorious?

FORSTER: You are well known through your writings  
They are what made me **long** to meet you  
But I held back  
Afraid of the experience  
And maybe the emotion  
I shrink from contact

CARPENTER: What is your feeling on nudity?  
Most days I swim naked in the stream  
I find it clears the mind and body

FORSTER: I have never been a great one  
For physical exercise

CARPENTER: I can see that. What size are your feet?

FORSTER: I am size seven. Why?

CARPENTER: I'd like to make you a pair of sandals.  
Here!

*[He beckons FORSTER to him, that FORSTER should put his foot in his lap. FORSTER hesitates, then does it reluctantly. CARPENTER removes his shoe; measures, then massages his foot.]*

CARPENTER: You see. So many of your chakras are blocked.  
There is no energy in your feet  
They cannot connect with the good earth  
And so, you have no roots.

*[FORSTER gives an enormous yawn.]*

FORSTER: I'm sorry

CARPENTER: No, it is healthy. You are opening yourself  
**As the flower opens** to the sun  
It is Vishnu working through you

FORSTER: Ah yes, Vishnu. I was in India last year.  
I learnt to meditate in Aligarh  
Troubles always drag on my coat tails  
Unless I **can** meditate on love,  
Love is the only thing can keep thought out  
I love Krishna  
I meditate on Krishna  
I don't know if he is a God  
But I love Love and Beauty and Wisdom  
I find them in his history

CARPENTER: I have written much on love  
On homogenic love  
The love of comrades  
Are you cut from the same cloth?  
Do you have a special friend?

FORSTER: I do not like to say  
My mother would not like it

CARPENTER: Beethoven would have written nothing  
If he wrote to please his mother  
Look at the arietta of his last sonata  
Like the unfolding of a child's face  
Like the carol of a lark  
Like the sunlight on the sea  
You can be sure Maria von Beethoven  
Would neither understand it  
Nor like it  
Perhaps I shall play it for you  
After dinner

MORGAN: *[shyly]* I play piano too  
Perhaps we can duet, what do you think?  
The Grosse Fugue, maybe...

CARPENTER: But would you give it passion  
Technique is nothing without feeling  
Oh Morgan, all this inhibition  
Will be the death of you  
The death of your soul  
It is already destroying you as an artist

FORSTER: How do you know that?

CARPENTER: You have written nothing for three years  
And before then you ploughed old furrows  
Because you will not feel

FORSTER: I cannot –

CARPENTER:       Cannot? Not even to yourself?

*[A long pause.]*

FORSTER:           I am an unspeakable of the Oscar Wilde sort

CARPENTER:       Again. *[louder]*

FORSTER:           I am an unspeakable of the Oscar Wilde sort

CARPENTER:       Wilde. What a dreadful influence!  
I could publish nothing then  
He set the cause of homogenic love  
Back a generation, maybe longer  
A shallow, stupid man  
There was no comradeship in him

FORSTER:           I was sixteen when he was put to trial  
A boy at Tunbridge School  
Much despised for hating games  
And being effeminate  
I became as quiet as I could  
Not to attract attention  
And I dreamt of my ideal friend

*[MERRILL re-enters.]*

MERRILL:           Right, the peas are set to cook  
The rice to boil

FORSTER:           You work so hard, George

MERRILL:           I have to. I'm a servant  
He pays the servant tax for me  
Fifteen bob a year  
So I must earn my keep

CARPENTER:       Come now, George, you know  
It's just for form's sake  
To stop the wagging tongues

MERRILL: Who's he think he's fooling?  
Everybody knows, love – and why not?

FORSTER: The words are so unpleasant  
Sodomite, catamite, pederast  
Even the pleasant words are not quite nice  
Mary Jane, Uranian<sup>1</sup>

MERRILL: I **just**<sup>2</sup> call it pleasant  
A labour of love

FORSTER: A love you **do**<sup>3</sup> not hide at all

MERRILL: Why should I? It suits me fine

FORSTER: I wish I had a friend like you  
Someone to stand by me  
To go through life together

MERRILL: **Yer** will have, Morgan  
Trust in me  
Trust in **yersen**  
Believe you are worthy to receive love

*[He puts his hand on FORSTER's back and pats it. His pat turns into a gentle stroke, and he works his hand down FORSTER's back, onto the top of his buttocks. This becomes slow-motion, unreal. FORSTER turns towards the audience, addresses them – spoken – while the music describes the internal process FORSTER is going through.]*

FORSTER *[spoken]* George Merrill made a profound impression on me, to touch a creative spring. He touched my backside. Gently and just above the buttocks. Nothing suggestive, but still subversive. I believe he touched most people's.

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<sup>1</sup> I'm not sure about the musical gap after 'not quite nice' – It's not clear that Mary Jane and Uranian follow as examples. Better a gap after.

<sup>2</sup> Need the 'just' to follow the argument/rejoinder

<sup>3</sup> It's a choice

CARPENTER: He was like a cat  
Always rubbing up against all and sundry

FORSTER: The sensation was unusual, and I still remember it, as  
I remember the position of a long-vanished tooth. It  
was as if he were taking ownership of me. No, not of  
me, exactly, but of my psyche, and my fear.

MERRILL: This is what it feels like  
To have a lover

FORSTER: I felt the heat of it.  
The playfulness

CARPENTER: It was Krishna playing  
As he played with the milkmaids  
And stole their clothes  
While they were bathing

MERRILL: Whoever heard of Jesus playing?  
Jesus never played, and  
That's why I can't take a Christian God

CARPENTER: Krishna must destroy  
To build you up and make you new

FORSTER: *[spoken]* It was as much psychological as physical. It  
seemed to go straight through the small of my back,  
into my ideas, without involving my thoughts. **If** it  
really did this, it was an example of Yogic mystic  
thought, the like of which Carpenter believed; it  
showed that this was that exact moment when I  
conceived. I was determined that in fiction anyway  
two men should fall in love and remain in it, for the  
eternity that fiction allows.

CARPENTER: The wall between subject, object  
Falls away with higher consciousness  
It touches, hears, sees, is  
All that it perceives  
Without motion, change or effort

But with the vast unprecedented joy  
To cosmic and universal parts of man

MERRILL/CARPENTER: Tell us a story, Forster  
Tell us a story, Morgan

MERRILL: A story full of hope

CARPENTER: A story full of light

BOTH: A story full of love and rapture

MERRILL: It has to have a happy ending

CARPENTER: Yes, it has to have a happy ending

FORSTER: A happy ending is imperative

*[FORSTER puts his arms around MERRILL: They have become MAURICE and ALEC in Maurice. CARPENTER is the narrator. A church clock chimes four.]*

NARRATOR: His heart leapt alive and shook him to pieces.  
It cried, 'You love and are loved'  
He stood for a moment entranced,  
And laying his hand very gently on the pillows  
Answered

They kissed, scarcely wishing it.

MAURICE: I think you're beautiful,  
The only thing of beauty I've ever seen  
I love your voice and everything about you,  
Down to your clothes  
And the room you are sitting in.  
I adore you.

*[They embrace]*

NARRATOR: They slept apart at first  
As if it worried them being near

Towards the morning they began  
To creep so gently to each other  
And woke so deeply in each other's arms

ALEC: Sir, the church has gone past four

MAURICE: Not sir, I am Maurice. Maurice

ALEC: But the church has –

MAURICE: Damn the church. Did you ever dream  
Of some fine strong, imperishable friend  
Someone who will last your whole life through  
And you through his **life too**<sup>4</sup>?  
I suppose it cannot happen outside sleep  
If truth be told

ALEC/NARR: A happy ending is imperative

ALEC: I do so long to talk with my arms around you  
And share with you everything  
It now seems sweeter to me  
Than words can say

CARPENTER: Alec snuggled closer  
More awake than he pretended  
Warm, sinewy, happy  
Happiness enfolded Maurice too

MAURICE: Time to get up, boy. Morning.

ALEC: You get up then

MAURICE: How can I move, the way you're holding me?

ALEC: Aren't yer the fidget?  
I'll teach yer to fidget

*[Kisses MAURICE]*

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<sup>4</sup> You have a repetition of 'his?' at Bar 44, which doesn't make sense. Does this help?

You alright, love? You comfy there?  
Rest your head against me there  
The way you like it – that's it, more.  
And don't you worry  
You're with me, don't worry

CARPENTER: A happy ending is imperative

MAURICE: I'll work. I'll get work with you

ALEC: What work?

MAURICE: We'll find out

ALEC: Find out and starve out  
Ruin of us both

CARPENTER: Happy ending

MAURICE: I don't care  
I'll see anyone, face anything  
It's a start of getting free

CARPENTER: Maurice knew what the call was  
And what his answer was  
They must live outside the law  
Outside class, or family or money  
They must **move to** France or Italy  
Where men unite, and do not go to prison  
For England never will accept  
The twists and turns of human nature

ALL: It has to have a happy ending

CARPENTER: Maurice had confirmed his spirit  
In its perversion, cut himself away  
From all the ruck of normal social man

MAURICE: We must work

ALEC: Yes, work

BOTH: And stick together hand in hand till death

CARPENTER: Krishna has spoken  
Broken and restored  
Destruction and creation

MAURICE: The timorous millions own their stuffy boxes  
But never their own souls

BOTH: But we will own the earth, the sky  
Each other

ALEC: And now we shan't be parted never

MAURICE: Ever, and that's the end of it

ALEC: The end of it

CARPENTER: There has to be a happy ending

ALL: Happy ending *[ad lib]*

**BLACKOUT**