

EVANGELINE

WRITTEN BY DARREN BREALEY

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EVANGELINE

English descendant full cousins Ashley and Evangeline Oliver marry on 23rd February 1904 at the Parish Church of Kilfinane, two months pregnant with Ashley's baby Richard Jnr. As the winds of trouble stir, Britain plans to grant Home Rule to Ireland. In the County of Limerick, is a small town named Kilfinane where the Oliver family Mill provides employment and an economical stronghold with its two corn, flax, carding and timber mills.

Ashley, son of William Silver Oliver, Medical Doctor-Surgeon - Irish Fusiliers and Evangeline, daughter of Richard Oliver Snr, the Miller, both live in the Mill complex in their home. With Richard Oliver Snr very unwell and no heir groomed to take over the reigns of the family Mill, the Mill's existence appears bleak.

In 1914 Britain calls to arms to go to war, taking many of Ireland's men with her, including Ashley Oliver. Evangeline and her mother, Alice begrudgingly bury their differences to keep the Mill afloat until Ashley returns home from the fighting overseas. Before Ashley can return home from war, Evangeline's father Richard Snr dies peacefully in his sleep.

Evangeline tells the story of a woman's torment and terrible injustices as her family empire dissolves, her husband fights in a war she doesn't understand in an overseas country, whilst her own country wages its own internal fight for freedom. Evangeline Oliver is a woman with a passion for playing the piano, drums, and clarinet, whose daily disruption is her pet dogs and the occasional visitor for tea. This is a woman from a privileged upbringing with servants, land, and never knowing what it is like to go hungry. Her constant distraction whilst her husband is away fighting and Richard Jnr in boarding school, is family friend Percy French; an English entertainer, painter and balladeer.

In 1918 when Ashley writes to Evangeline from the War Front to say he is coming home, she is confronted with the horrors of the war she has so passionately distanced herself with Ashley's injuries and exposure to Mustard Gas. Evangeline's brother, Dick and his friend Michael, both Doctors come to assist how and when they can, but Ashley's injuries are far worse than he is revealing to Evangeline.

During 1922 Ireland's fight for her own Parliament hits its peak for Evangeline when she is woken at 5:00AM and forced at gunpoint to make breakfast for a hungry and injured troop of soldiers from the notorious Black and Tans. After this point, Kilfinane is no longer the place Evangeline remembers as a child. With little preparations and no closure, Evangeline, Ashley, Richard Jnr and Alice pack their suitcases and travel to England, where they settle in Brighton, leaving everything behind in Kilfinane.

When Ashley dies from his First World War injuries two years later, Evangeline moves again, as far away as she possibly can from Ireland and the memories it holds.

Evangeline purchases two one-way tickets on the Glasgow Orient Liner, "SS Osterley" on a six week journey to Daylesford, Victoria Australia. Here she and Richard Jnr settle in a two bedroom miner's cottage on a peaceful hill overlooking Lake Daylesford.

Characters

Evangeline Oliver	...	First Cousin and wife to Ashley
Ashley Oliver	...	First Cousin and husband to Evangeline
Richard Oliver	...	Son of Evangeline and Ashley
Alice Galt	...	Ashley's Mother
Dr. Dick Oliver	...	Evangeline's brother
Dr. Michael	...	Dick's friend
Percy French	...	Friend to Evangeline and Ashley
Patrick	...	Friend to Richard
Mary	...	Sister to Patrick
Ghislaine	...	Friend to Evangeline
Mrs Harris	...	Friend to Evangeline
Mrs Reilly	...	Friend to Evangeline
Mrs Neville	...	Friend to Evangeline
Newspaper Boy	...	Newspaper Boy
Solider #1	...	Solider of the Black and Tans
Solider #2	...	Solider of the Black and Tans

In the Oliver home, the dinning room's exposed hand-turned timber floorboards gives off its own voice of grandeur. An eight-seater solid timber dinning table and wooden chairs with a criss-cross open back pattern and padded cloth cushions are centre-pieced. The table is adorned with a silver tea set, silver candelabra, and a silver fruit bowl – with fresh fruit. Against a wall sits a tall, solid timber Grandfather clock with gold trim and the makers' mark insignia clearly labelled on the clocks' face. An elegant sideboard with oval shaped mirror sits against an adjoining wall. It is ornamented with many silver serving instruments and its exquisite craftsman built engraved four wooden doors, gives it much grace. Along the same wall hangs a painting by Percy French, and next to that is a four-panelled window, decorated with heavy red drapes, hanging down to the floor, with a view of Oliver's Folly on a hilly peak. Its elegant brass curtain rod presents the window decoration. An upright piano sits patiently, adorned by a folded baby blanket on top of the lid. The piano reflects the flames from the magnificent inbuilt fireplace that warms the entire dinning room, decorated by a majestic mantle made from solid timber. Some personal trinkets sit upon it; a framed photo of her elderly father Richard Oliver Snr and a framed photo of her ten year old son, Richard Oliver Jnr. Above the mantle hang few family photos. During the colder months, often the dining room is warm with a slight draft that reminds them of Ireland's cold bitter seasons.

EVANGELINE

SCENE 1 The Oliver House

RICHARD enters.

RICHARD: Welcome. Settle in. My name is Richard Frederick Augustus Oliver. You can call me Richard. It's winter of 1914. The wind is picking up from the ice caps, straight across the North Atlantic Sea into our dining room. The place, Kilfinane, Southern Ireland. Somewhere between the Ballyhoura and Galty Mountains. The Titanic was built at the Harland and Wolff Shipyards in Belfast, north from here about two years ago. Some one-hundred and twenty-three passengers boarded her in Cobh, in the south and another seventy passengers in nearby Cork. Four days later the voyage ended and they never returned. Some maiden voyage, eh? Never sail on a ship that hasn't had her head wet, but I digress. I'm not here to tell you a story about the sinking of the Titanic, a sad tale at that. I'm here to tell you about my mother, Evangeline. Our family are of English decent and live in Kilfinane. Kilfinane has a strong Irish Catholic community, whom is asset and financially poor, and suffer under English rule.

EVANGELINE enters.

EVANGELINE: Yes, father. No. Don't get up; I'm getting it now for you.

EVANGELINE exits.

RICHARD: Evangeline is attending to her father, also named Richard Oliver. He's eighty-one years old, and not doing too badly. We own and run Millbrook, providing much of the local employment. It consists of two corn mills, a flax mill, carding mill and timber mill and our family home forms part of the complex. It belonged to my Great-Grandfather, William Oliver. When he died in 1863, Grandfather Richard inherited it.

EVANGELINE enters. She sits at the piano and holds a baby blanket.

RICHARD: In 1910 my younger brother was born. He was named after my Grandfather, William Silver Oliver on my father's side. He died as an infant.

Evangeline softly plays an Irish lullaby on the piano.

RICHARD: His death was hard on all the family. William was buried in the family crypt, in the vaults of the Church of Ireland in Kilfinane.

EVANGELINE: No Richard, I'm not interested in the silly Home Rule. Don't let Ashley catch you talking such nonsense. He'll think you're sympathising with the local Catholic farmers.

RICHARD: Two years ago in 1912, the Irish Home Rule Bill was introduced. The good people of the South, the Catholics, were pushing for a little of their own justice. They wanted to break away from British Rule and run the country themselves. Of course, we're happy with the status quo. This radicalised politics in Ireland. Not everyone agreed with Redmond's call to arms and they ridiculed his call for National Volunteers to enlist in the British Army, but we'll talk about that later. Grandfather Richard continues his protestations about the English and how they've done nothing for the good of the common Irish gentlefolk and their economy.

ASHLEY enters, holding a leaflet.

ASHLEY: Evangeline. I'm home. I have some disturbing news from Dublin.

EVANGELINE: Today is William's birthday.

ASHLEY: That it is.

EVANGELINE: Have we a candle to burn for him?

ASHLEY: Yes. In the sideboard.

EVANGELINE: Light it and put it on the window.

Ashley collects a candle, lights it from the fireplace and sits it in the window, near Evangeline.

RICHARD: Ashley and Evangeline were married here in Millbrook on the twenty-third of February, 1904. Evangeline was approximately two-months pregnant with me. They named me after Grandfather Richard.

EVANGELINE: What news has you?

Ashley reads the leaflet.

ASHLEY: By acclamation of the people, an Irish Army is formed.

EVANGELINE: An army. For what reason?

ASHLEY: To enforce this ridiculous Home Rule.

RICHARD: Home Rule was unclear to many people throughout Ireland; however, the surge of patriotism from Dublin spread over Ireland and a wide cross-section of people felt the same. This of course means the English-descendant landowners fear losing their land and their livelihoods.

EVANGELINE: They'll have to enforce their silly rules without me. I have my elderly father to take care of. He needs a cook, a maid and someone to entertain him.

ASHLEY: This is very serious. Should Britain leave Ireland, we could lose everything. You could lose everything. Listen to this, 'The Irish Army intends to secure and maintain the rights of all the people of Ireland; to train and arm a body of Irish volunteers; and to unite this purpose all Irishmen without distinction of creed, class or politics.'

Pause.

ASHLEY: I'll employ three more staff to look after Uncle Richard.

EVANGELINE: There's nothing to worry about? We are the people of Ireland, we are the people they intend to secure and maintain.

ASHLEY: The workingman will abandon his post and complete anarchy will ensue.

EVANGELINE: Ashley, you worry too much. Ghislaine, Mrs Neville and Mrs Reilly will support me. There will be no anarchy in Kilfinane.

ASHLEY: I will send word to your half-brother, William in Buttevant. I wonder how he is going to deal with this news. He has a profitable mill that employs many men. No doubt he will have a word to say about this.

EVANGELINE: That, of course if he isn't too busy to return a letter to you. He has carried a burden since his mother died.

ASHLEY: Evangeline, he is family and a businessman with the same concerns as me. He will answer me.

EVANGELINE: Castle Oliver could be lost?

ASHLEY: The businesses, possibly, but I can't see how they could overrun the Castle.

EVANGELINE: Ashley, I'm scared, I don't want to lose everything to some Dublin Army.

ASHLEY: We are Oliver's and no Irish Army is going to force us off our land. Our ancestry lives on in Kilfinane and Ardpatrik. This land breathes the life of our Great-Grandparents of many generations. Millbrook employs many Kilfinane men and I have no doubt they will protect us should the occasion arise.

RICHARD: Little did Ashley know, greater concerns than his own would come his way, in only a matter of months.

EVANGELINE: I need to know what will become of my father. He is not well and he needs much attention. Who will look after the Mill? And how will I look after my Terriers? My little precious dogs are such a delicate troop.

ASHLEY: Your dogs will have to learn to live without the refinement that they have come to know. We will need to be a little stricter with our money. Your dogs can no longer eat cooked butcher's meat.

EVANGELINE: They are akin to my children.

ASHLEY: Young Richard is our child.

EVANGELINE: And who will take care of young Richard, on the other side of the Galty Mountains.

ASHLEY: If it becomes too dangerous, we could always retrieve him from Fermoy Boarding School and bring him home. Mother could teach him everything he needs to know and continue my side of family tradition by joining a military unit

Pause. Evangeline plays an Irish lullaby on the piano.

EVANGELINE: This was William's favourite lullaby.

ASHLEY: Evangeline...

EVANGELINE: Ashley. It's his birthday today.

Pause.

EVANGELINE: Four, Ashley. He would've been...

ASHLEY: Why do you hide yourself in your music? William is dead, Evangeline. No candle and no lullaby will bring him back.

EVANGELINE: He was so still.

ASHLEY: I can't sit here and watch you do this.

EVANGELINE: He was just a baby.

ASHLEY: I do not have an answer for God's way.

EVANGELINE: It was not God that took away my son.

ASHLEY: Then who?

EVANGELINE: It was a trick of the devil.

ASHLEY: There was no trick of the devil, or wood nymph, nor elf. He died, Evangeline. I have no reason to why. Death happens, it is a part of life.

EVANGELINE: Just like that.

ASHLEY: What more could there be?

EVANGELINE: He was cold in his crib. Cold, Ashley. Babies shouldn't be cold and still.

ASHLEY: Aye. They should not.

EVANGELINE: We can not have anymore babies.

ASHLEY: We can have many more babies, a family as big as you like.

EVANGELINE: No Ashley.

ASHLEY: Evangeline. Is it wrong for a man and a woman to love each other?

EVANGELINE: It is not.

ASHLEY: Do you love me.

EVANGELINE: Of course.

ASHLEY: Then do not worry yourself any longer.

EVANGELINE: I miss him, Ashley.

ASHLEY: I too, my love. William will not need to wear the burden of the times ahead.

They embrace.

SCENE 2 The Street

RICHARD: Winter left Kilfinane with a touch of nostalgia. Ashley and Evangeline worried over money, Grandfather Richard's health, and the ongoing business of Millbrook. Spring was a particular fine time during 1914. There seemed to be more flowers budding than usual in Mrs Reilly's garden, and the breeze was a little more welcoming. Dublin was business as usual, with tensions building and men wanting change. A little event in another land called Austria almost didn't make an edition of the Weekly Irish Times. Somehow, at the time it didn't seem important, due to the current strain of the local political arena.

A NEWSPAPER BOY enters. ASHLEY enters.

NEWSPAPER BOY: Get your copy of the Irish Weekly Times.

ASHLEY: Boy.

Ashley takes a newspaper and gives the Newspaper Boy a coin.

NEWSPAPER BOY: Thank you, sir.

NEWSPAPER BOY exits.

ASHLEY: What news of the Volunteers this week?

ASHLEY opens the newspaper and enters the house.

RICHARD: Of course, the only royal family that anyone cares to read about are King George V and Queen Mary Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, of England. Aye, a royal story, is a royal story.

SCENE 3 The Oliver House

EVANGELINE sits at the piano. ASHLEY enters.

EVANGELINE: What news?

ASHLEY: June 28th, the Habsburg Archduke of Austria and heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Franz Ferdinand, was assassinated along with his wife, Countess Sophie Chotek and their two daughters. Gavrilo Princip, a Bosnian Serb nationalist shot dead Ferdinand and family in Sarajevo, Austrian-occupied Bosnia-Herzegovina. Habsburg is one of the ruling houses of Europe in Austria. Archduke Ferdinand and Countess Choteks' marriage was permitted only after the couple had agreed that Countess Chotek would not enjoy royal status and their children would

have no claims to the throne. Archduke Ferdinand alienated many sections of his Austro-Hungarian political adversaries due to the marriage. The world watches as Austria declares war against Serbia for the assassination of their Archduke.

EVANGELINE: Who?

ASHLEY: The Habsburg Archduke of Austria and heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne.

EVANGELINE: I don't know him. Is it important?

RICHARD: No one knew what was going to pursue from this European royal occasion. In a couple of months it would become apparent.

EVANGELINE: Is it far away?

ASHLEY: It's in the south-east of Europe.

EVANGELINE: Father is not getting any better. I had the Doctor over this morning, whilst you were in the corn mill fixing the grinders.

ASHLEY: It's something that needs to be updated.

EVANGELINE: More expense.

ASHLEY: The corn Mills are not making the money they used to.

EVANGELINE: Why?

ASHLEY: Bakers now use wheat husks to make their breads.

EVANGELINE: We'll process their wheat for them to make their breads.

ASHLEY: We don't have the machinery to do that. The Buttevant Mill is in a better position to produce wheat for the local bakeries and the expense to change over the machinery is extravagant.

EVANGELINE: What do you mean? The Trench family should give us some money. They are in business with us.

ASHLEY: Evangeline, a man knows his limits, and I am not a Miller. Your father, somehow manages to run the place from his bed, yet it has begun to slow down production. Management of the mill is slowly decaying and I don't know how to stop it.

EVANGELINE: Ashley, there is always someone to help. What has William said about taking over our mill?

ASHLEY: He does not respond to my letters. He has a large family and a large mill to run.

RICHARD: Millbrook was becoming a problem. Uncle William in Buttevant had no interest in taking over Millbrook. Ashley couldn't come to terms to tell Evangeline, she would've completely disappeared into herself.

SCENE 4 The Street

A NEWSPAPER BOY enters.

NEWSPAPER BOY: Germany declares war on Russia.

ASHLEY enters.

ASHLEY: Boy.

NEWSPAPER BOY: Thank you, sir.

Ashley takes a newspaper and gives the Newspaper Boy a coin. Ashley opens the newspaper. NEWSPAPER BOY exits.

RICHARD: July 25th...

ASHLEY: In a declaration of support, the Russian government declares it will act to protect Serbian sovereignty, and any act against Serbian sovereignty from Austria, will be treated as an act against Russia.

RICHARD: Being a weekly newspaper, if anything of great importance occurred during the same week, everything ended up in the one newspaper. July 28th...

ASHLEY: Austria-Hungarian military declares war on Russia in retaliation to their belligerent protection of the murderer of the Habsburg Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Serbia has been accused of provoking the assassination of the heir to Austria's throne.

ASHLEY exits.

RICHARD: Whilst there are men, there will be war. For the next six weeks Austria-Hungarian soldiers repeatedly invaded Serbia, but are repeatedly repulsed. Austria's friendly neighbours obviously found it difficult to let them fight it out by themselves and on August 1st decided that declaring war on Russia was their way of contributing to Austria's aide. They were grateful to have their neighbour, Germany on their side, yet Germany obviously

had their own agenda. August 2nd saw Germany invade Luxembourg and on August 3rd Germany declares war on France. August 4th Germany declares war on neutral Belgium and invades in a right flanking move, designed to defeat France quickly. Britain watched with great interest. After France, there wasn't much else to invade, hence...

A NEWSPAPER BOY enters.

NEWSPAPER BOY: Britain declares war on Germany.

ASHLEY enters.

ASHLEY: Boy.

Ashley takes a newspaper and gives the Newspaper Boy a coin.

NEWSPAPER BOY: Thank you, sir.

NEWSPAPER BOY exits. ASHLEY enters the house.

SCENE 5 The Oliver House

Ashley reads his Newspaper to Evangeline.

ASHLEY: In a move by Germany that right-flanked Luxembourg to overrun France, Britain has declared war...

EVANGELINE: I have an appointment at the Mitchelstown Barracks tomorrow night accompanying a local singer for the entertainment of the locals. Ghislaine has a new buggy, and one of her help will take us there and back. She has decided to be my travelling companion.

ASHLEY: German soldiers are coming and all you can worry about is getting to your concert in a new buggy.

EVANGELINE: They can sleep in the barn. Father won't cope with them in the house.

ASHLEY: They won't be here on a social visit, Evangeline.

EVANGELINE: I suspect you want to go off and fight them?

ASHLEY: Ireland is not involved.

EVANGELINE: Yet.

- ASHLEY:* This has come about so quickly. I have no doubt that we will be asked to protect our land.
- EVANGELINE:* They can have the cold nights.
- ASHLEY:* Don't let me hear you speak so flippantly. I doubt it will come to anything. Ireland is more concerned over its push for Home Rule, than it is with troubles overseas.
- EVANGELINE:* They'll have to invade some other country.
- ASHLEY:* Evangeline, you never take anything seriously.
- EVANGELINE:* Will you get involved?
- ASHLEY:* I guess so.
- EVANGELINE:* I must practise for tomorrow night. Is there some financial paperwork you need to attend to?
- ASHLEY:* Aye. There is.
- EVANGELINE:* If you were to leave Kilfinane, who would run Millbrook?
- ASHLEY:* I do not know.
- EVANGELINE:* Who will pay the bills?
- ASHLEY:* The Accountant could do that.
- EVANGELINE:* Who will maintain the house? There is still a leak in the kitchen ceiling from last winter, and the chimneys need cleaning.
- ASHLEY:* Evangeline, let me attend to my financials. Should Britain ask Ireland to volunteer for the fight, I'll have them ask you first.
- EVANGELINE:* I'll be in Mitchelstown. They can take the Irish Army that is enforcing their Home Rule. Have them push out the Germans and the British all at the same time.
- RICHARD:* Of course, she hadn't met the German army. In all her ways of looking at the world, in a strange view of the world, she convinced Ashley...
- EVANGELINE:* This nonsense won't involve us. It just doesn't make sense. Looking after the workmen and the home help is enough for me to deal with, than having to worry about something overseas that has nothing to do with me.

SCENE 6 The Street

A NEWSPAPER BOY enters.

NEWSPAPER BOY: Britain begins mobilising its Expeditionary Force.

ASHLEY enters.

ASHLEY: Boy.

NEWSPAPER BOY: Thank you, sir.

Ashley takes a newspaper and gives the Newspaper Boy a coin. Richard takes a newspaper from the Newspaper Boy's bag. NEWSPAPER BOY exits.

ASHLEY: News about Home Rule and Europe's war.

Ashley opens the newspaper.

ASHLEY: What have you for us now, Britain? Thousands of Irishmen are volunteering to join the British Military. Irishmen join British regiments and are earmarked to go to Europe, to fight the invading German army.

RICHARD exits.

SCENE 7 The Oliver Home

EVANGELINE sits at the piano. ASHLEY paces the room.

EVANGELINE: What do you mean, you want to join the British regiments?

ASHLEY: Let me think on it, Evangeline.

EVANGELINE: Ashley Francis Oliver my father is dying, without you there will be no family business, and without you, this family won't survive. We need you here in Kilfinane, not in some unknown place. Lord knows where you will be sent.

ASHLEY: Our family history is full of military involvement. What would Richard say when he finds out that his own father didn't join?

EVANGELINE: I know he would be grateful to still have a father. War kills men, Ashley. I've never understood the thirst for blood in angry men. I love you Ashley, but help me to understand this insanity. I can understand your father being a medical surgeon during his time in the Irish Fusiliers in India and my brother Dick in the Boer War. They helped men heal from their wounds, but you

want to go off to war to kill. I've never understand cousin Daisy marrying into that military Crakse family, she's never been able to settle down; they practically own her. I've never understood why anyone would want to live such an unstable lifestyle, being told how and where to live...

ASHLEY: Evangeline. Settle down. Let's worry about it another time.

SCENE 8 Blossom Gate Train Station

RICHARD enters.

RICHARD: Holiday break was always an interesting time in Kilfinane. I was never sure what was going to happen. Some school children had received letters from distraught mothers, telling them not to be concerned about their fathers and the war. Most often the anticipation of getting home was more exciting than actually being there. The train trip and the train Conductor often proved to be an imaginative time for all excitable children. Evangeline always picked me up from Blossom Gate train station. Once in a while we would take a day trip to Limerick City as a special treat. Today there was sunshine in the sky; however, I could see gloom in her eyes.

***** Truncated *****

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