

Molesworth Mrs.

Philippa



Mrs. Molesworth

Philippa

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Chapter One Good-Byes

Autumn – scarcely late autumn yet – and the day had been mild. But as the afternoon wore on towards evening, there came the chilliness and early gloom inevitable at the fall of the year – accompanied, to those who are sensitive to such things, by the indescribable touch of melancholy never present in the same way at other seasons.

Philippa Raynsworth shivered slightly, though half-unconscious that she did so, and turned towards the shelter of the friendly porch just at her side. As she moved, a hand was laid on her shoulder.

“Come in, you silly girl,” said its owner. “Do you want to catch cold?”

Philippa had been watching the gradual disappearance of a carriage down the long drive, till a turn in the road suddenly hid it altogether. Others had been watching it too, but she was standing somewhat aloof – she had no special interest in the departing guests; she had never seen them till today, and might very probably never see them again. But something nevertheless had impressed her – the kind of day, the approach of the gloaming, the evening scents from the garden, the little shy breeze that murmured and grew silent again – there was a plaintive harmony in it all, and even the prosaic, measured sound of the horses’ feet, growing fainter and fainter, and the carriage receding from sight while the “good-byes” still seemed hovering about, all fitted in. She did not seek to define what it reminded her of, or what feelings it awakened in her. It was just a scene – a passing impression, or possibly a lasting one. There is never any accounting for the permanence of certain spots in our experience – why some entirely trivial incident or sensation should remain indented on our memory for ever; while others which we would fain recall, some which it seems extraordinary that we should ever be able to forget, fade as if they had never been – who can say?

“I was just coming in,” Philippa replied, with a slight sense of feeling ashamed of herself. She hated any approach to what she called “affectation,” and she glanced quickly to where the little group had stood but a moment before. It had dispersed. There was no one to be seen but her cousin Maida and herself, and with a sense of relief Philippa stopped again.

“Wait a moment, Maida,” she said. “There is really no danger of catching cold, and it is nice out here. It will feel hot and *indoors* in the drawing-room, with the tea still about and the talking. Let us stay here just for a moment and watch the evening creeping in. *You* understand the feeling I mean, I’m sure?”

Miss Lermont did not at once reply. She was older than Philippa – a great deal older she would have said herself, and in some ways it would have been true, though not in all. She had suffered much in her life, which, after all, had not been a very long one, for she was barely thirty; she had suffered more, probably, than any one realised, and – even a harder trial – she knew that she would have to suffer a great deal more still, if she lived. All this, the remembrance of suffering past, and to some extent still present, and the anticipation, in itself an additional present suffering, of what was yet to come, had made her old before her time. Yet it had kept her young, too, by its intensification of her power of sympathy. It is not all sufferers who acquire this peculiar sympathy, nor is it the only good gift to be gained by passing through the fire. But Maida Lermont’s sympathy was remarkable. It was not solely or even principally for physical suffering, though to all but the few who knew her well, physical suffering only had been *her* fire.

“She has a happy nature,” most people would say of her, “though, of course, she has had a great deal to bear. I really don’t think any one so constitutionally cheerful is as much to be pitied as nervous patients or *very* sensitive people. There are, no doubt, some who feel pain much more than others. And then the Lermonts are rich. She has everything she wants.”

How little they knew! Maida was *not* “constitutionally cheerful” – the worst side, by far the worst, of her suffering had been to her, her vivid consciousness of the wreck it might make of her altogether – mind, heart, and soul.

But she had conquered, and more than conquered. She had emerged from her trial not only chastened, but marvellously lifted and widened. Intellect and spirit had risen to a higher place, and the rare and delightful power of her sympathy knew no limits. It unlocked doors to her as if she were the possessor of a magic key. Philippa was right when she turned to her cousin with the words “you understand.”

“Yes,” she said, after her momentary delay – a delay spent in gazing before her with her young cousin’s words in her ears. “Yes – it is fascinating to get inside nature, as it were, sometimes – to feel it all. I love to watch the evening coming, as you say, and I love to watch the dawn creeping up – even more, I think. That has fallen to my lot oftener than to yours, I hope, Philippa.” She smiled as she spoke, so her cousin was not afraid to laugh softly.

“I am generally fast asleep at that time, I must confess. But even if I were awake, I should not care for it as much as for evening. And to-day it all seemed of a piece. You know it is my last evening here – and I heard you all saying good-bye to those people who have just gone, and Lady Mary’s voice sounded so silvery when she called back ‘good-night’ for the last time. Don’t you think, Maida, that there is *always* something pathetic, if we stopped to think about it, in farewells, even if we expect to meet again quite soon? One never can be *sure* that a good-bye may not be a real good-bye.”

“Yes, I have often felt that. And the real good-byes, as you call them, are so seldom known to be such. Last times are not often thought to be last times – strangely seldom, indeed.”

“And yet there must be a last time to *everything*,” said Philippa, “even to the most commonplace little details of life.”

They were silent for a moment or two.

Then said Miss Lermont:

“I hope you will come back to us soon again, dear; I should like you to see more of the neighbourhood and the neighbours.”

“I like what I *have* seen of both,” said Philippa. “Lady Mary is a dear little thing.”

“All the Bertrands are pleasant, kindly people,” Maida replied. “They are happy people, and allow that they are so. It is refreshing nowadays when so many are either peculiarly unhappy, or determined to think themselves so. By-the-by, what a very silent man that friend of Captain Bertrand’s is. Mr Gresham, I mean.”

“I scarcely spoke to him,” said Philippa, adding, with a laugh, “but he certainly scarcely spoke to me, so I have no reason for disagreeing with you.”

“Very silent people are almost worse than very talkative ones,” said Maida. “I suppose you are a very lively party at home, now, with Evelyn and the children.”

“Fairly so. Evey fusses a little, but she is always sweet, and we love having them. We shall miss them terribly when Duke comes home and they go to him, though I suppose it would be selfish not to be glad when he does. *I* shall miss them almost the most of all.”

“They keep you pretty busy, I daresay.”

“Ye-es, but not too busy. I am so thankful not to be one of those poor girls who can’t find anything to do. There is no doubt about what *I* have to do. But things are much clearer than they were, now that papa is better. And when Charlie is at home for good, they will be easier still.”

“We shall have you crying for work to do then,” said Maida, smiling.

But Philippa shook her head.

“I don’t think so,” she said.

Miss Lermont turned to go in.

“Come, Philippa; we really shall catch, cold if we stay out here longer,” and Philippa followed her into the house.

“How few people understand each other!” thought the elder woman, as she went across the hall and down the wide passage to the drawing-room. “Nobody, to see her as she commonly is, would think that Philippa had those undertones in her character – that tenderness and sensitiveness that come out now and then. She seems just a very charming girl – bright and energetic, and full of humour.”

And two minutes later, when Maida was resting on her sofa again, and heard Philippa’s voice in spite of her reluctance to return to the “talking,” one of the liveliest in the family party, and noticed her quick tactful readiness to suit herself to whatever was going on, the contrast with the dreamy girl who had stood gazing at the darkening sky outside, responsive to every whisper of Nature’s evening prayer, struck her even more.

“She is very interesting,” thought Miss Lermont. “I care for her increasingly every day.”

It was Philippa’s first visit to Dorriford. The relationship was not a very near one – only that of second cousins on the parents’ side. And the Lermonts were very rich, and almost unavoidably self-engrossed, though not selfish. For they were a large family party, though Maida, the second daughter, was now the only unmarried one left at home. But a constant succession of incursions from married sons and daughters, unexpected swoopings down or turnings up of younger brothers from India, or grandchildren “for the holidays,” kept the house in a state of never-ending, active hospitality. It was accident – a chance meeting, that is to say, which had brought about renewed intercourse between the Lermonts and Philippa’s family, resulting in a week’s visit on the young girl’s part.

It was to a great extent a new experience to her. Her family “lines” were cast in very different places to luxurious Dorriford; her life, though happily far from an intellectually narrow one, had been passed amidst the restrictions of small means and many cares; her work, almost indeed before she had left childhood behind her, had been “cut out” for her distinctly enough.

The next morning brought her own farewells to Dorriford and its inmates.

“I have enjoyed myself so much,” she said, with her usual heartiness, to Mrs Lermont, when it came to saying good-bye. “It really has been a treat to me, and it will be a treat to them all at home to hear about it.”

“Well, then, dear, I hope you will soon come to see us again,” said her hostess, kindly. “We have enjoyed having you, I assure you.”

“Thank you for saying so,” Philippa replied. “But as for coming again *soon*,” and she shook her head. “Some time or other I shall hope to do so, but not soon, I fear.”

“They cannot well spare you, I daresay. But after all, they could surely always do without you for a week. So you must pay us more frequent visits, if they cannot be long ones.”

“If it were nearer,” said Philippa, “there is nothing I should enjoy more. But you see, dear Mrs Lermont,” she went on naïvely, “it isn’t only the ‘sparing’ me. I am not so tremendously important as all that. It is also that we can’t afford much travelling about.” Mrs Lermont looked uncomfortable.

“How I wish I had spoken of it before!” she thought. “She will perhaps be hurt at it now that she has said that herself. I wish I had taken Maida’s advice.”

She glanced round; there was no one within hearing. She half-nervously slipped her hand into her pocket.

“Philippa, my dear,” she began, “you must *promise* me not to mind what I am going to say. I – I know – of course it is only natural I should – relations as you are – that you have to consider such things, and I – I had prepared this.” She held out a small envelope addressed to “Miss Raynsworth.”

“You will accept it, dear to please me? And I want you to remember that whenever you can come to us, the cost of the journey must not enter into your consideration. That must be *my* affair.

If there were no other reason, the pleasure that having you here gives Maida, makes me beg you to let this be understood.”

The old lady spoke nervously, and a pink flush rose to her face. But the moment the tone of Philippa’s voice in reply reached her, she felt relieved.

“How *very* good of you, dear Mrs Lermont!” she exclaimed, heartily. “I never thought of such a thing; if I had – ” She stopped and coloured a little, but without a touch of hurt feeling. “I was going to say,” she went on, laughingly, “that if I *had* dreamt of such kindness, I would not have alluded to the expense. But you had thought of it before I said anything about it, hadn’t you? And of course you know we are not at all rich. ‘Mind,’” as Mrs Lermont murmured something; “no, of course, I don’t mind, except that I think you are very, very kind, and I am sure they will all think so at home too.”

She kissed her cousin again, and the old lady patted her affectionately on the shoulder as she did so.

“Then it is a bargain,” she said. “Whenever they can spare you – remember.”

Philippa nodded in reply, though she had not time to speak, for just then came one of her cousins’ voices from the hall, bidding her hurry up if she did not mean to miss the train.

“She is a thoroughly nice, sensible girl,” said Mrs Lermont to her daughter, when Maida entered the drawing-room that morning an hour or two later.

“Yes,” Maida replied. “She is all that and more. I like her extremely. But I do not know that life will be to her quite what one would feel inclined to predict, judging her as she seems now.”

“How do you mean?” said her mother. “I should say she will get on very well, and meet troubles pretty philosophically when they come. She is not spoilt, and there is nothing fantastic or in the least morbid about her.”

“N-no,” Miss Lermont agreed. “But she is more inexperienced than she thinks, and though not spoilt in the ordinary sense of the word, she has not really had much to try her. And her nature is deeper than you would think – deeper than she knows herself.”

“Possibly so,” Mrs Lermont replied. “But though you are certainly not morbid, Maida, I think you *are* a trifle fantastic – about other people, never about yourself. You study them so, and I think you put your own ideas into your pictures of them. Now *I* should say that Philippa Raynsworth is just the sort of girl to go through life in a comfortable – and by that I don’t mean selfish – satisfactory sort of way, without anything much out of the commonplace. She has plenty of energy, and, above all, any amount of common-sense.” Maida laughed. This sort of discussion was not very uncommon between the mother and daughter; they were much together, owing to Mrs Lermont’s increasing lameness and Maida’s chronic delicacy, and often alone. And they understood each other well, though in many ways they were very different.

“Perhaps you are right, mother,” the daughter said, “Perhaps I do work up people in my imagination till they grow quite unlike what they really are. People, some especially, interest me so,” she went on, thoughtfully. “I feel very grateful to my fellow-creatures; thinking them over helps to make my life much pleasanter than it might otherwise be.”

Mrs Lermont glanced at her half anxiously. It was so seldom that Maida alluded to the restrictions and deprivations of her lot.

“I am sure, dear, you always think of them in the kindest possible way; you may be critical, but you are certainly not cynical,” and she glanced at her daughter affectionately. Mrs Lermont was an affectionate mother to all her children, but her daughter Maida had the power of drawing out a strain of tenderness of which one would scarcely have suspected the existence in her. Miss Lermont smiled back.

“I am glad you think so, mother,” she said; “all the same, I often feel I should be on my guard lest the interest of dissecting others’ characters should lead me too far. As for Philippa, I shall be only too glad, poor child, if her life is a happy and uncomplicated one.” And the subject for the time was dropped, though Maida’s memory, above all where her affections were concerned, was curiously

retentive. From that time her young cousin had her own place in what Maida sometimes to herself called her invisible picture-gallery; there were many touches still wanting to the completion of the portrait, some which no one could have predicted.

Philippa herself, tranquilly seated in the corner of her second-class railway compartment, would have been not a little astonished could she have overheard what her cousins were saying about her—*herself* was not, as a rule, the subject of her cogitations.

It was a long journey to Marlby, the nearest station to Philippa's home; long, comparatively speaking, that is to say, for the length of journeys, like the measure of many other things, is but a relative matter, and the young girl had travelled so little in her short life that the eight hours across country seemed to her no trifling matter. She enjoyed it thoroughly; even the waitings at junctions and changing of trains, at which many would have murmured, added to the pleasurable excitement of the whole. There was something exhilarating in the mere fact of passing through places whose names were unfamiliar to her.

"What a pretty name!" she said to herself, at one station where some minutes had to be spent for no apparent reason, as nobody got out or got in, and neither express nor luggage train passing by solved the enigma—"Merle-in-the-Wold!" and what a pretty country it seems about here! I don't remember noticing it on my way coming. I wonder how long it will be before I pass by here again. They won't be so afraid about me at home after this, when they see how well I have managed—catching trains and everything quite rightly, and not losing my luggage, or anything stupid like that—though, I suppose, I'd better not shout till I'm out of the wood. I should feel rather small if my things don't turn up at Marlby."

But these misgivings did not trouble her long; she was absorbed by the picturesque beauty of the country around, which was shown to its greatest advantage by the lovely autumn weather.

"There is really some advantage in living in an uninteresting part of the world as we do," Philippa went on thinking; "it makes one doubly enjoy scenery like this. I wonder I never heard of it before. I wonder what those turrets can be over there among the trees; they must belong to some beautiful old house. Dear me, what delightful lives some fortunate people must have, though, I suppose, there are often drawbacks—for instance, in Maida Lermont's case! I wouldn't change with her for anything, except that she's so very, very good. It is so nice to be strong, and able to enjoy any lucky chance which comes in one's way, like this visit to Dorriford. I shall have to be content now with quiet home life for a good while."

But home, quiet and monotonous as it might be, was essentially home to Philippa. Her spirits rose still higher as she knew herself to be nearing it, and she had never looked brighter than when she sprang out of the lumbering old fly which had brought her and her belongings from Marlby station, and eagerly questioned the servant at the door as to which members of the family were in.

"Mamma is, you say, but not my father—and Mrs Headfort and the children? Everybody is quite well, I suppose?"

"All quite well, Miss Philippa," replied Dorcas, the elderly handmaid who had once been Philippa's nurse. "Your mamma and Miss Evelyn—Mrs Headfort, I should say—are in the drawing-room. I don't think they expected you quite so soon. My master has gone to meet the young gentlemen on their way back from school. I don't suppose they'll be in for some time."

"All the better," said Philippa, "so far as the boys are concerned, that is to say. I do want to have a good talk with mamma and Evey first."

"Yes, of course, Miss Philippa, you must have plenty to tell, and something to hear too, maybe;" this rather mysteriously.

"What can you mean?" said Philippa, stopping short on her way; but Dorcas only shook her head and smiled.

“Philippa already! How nice!” were the words that greeted her as she opened the drawing-room door. “Darling, how well you’re looking!” – and – “Evey, dear, ring for tea at once, the poor child must be famishing,” from her mother.

Certainly there could be no two opinions as to the warmth of the young girl’s welcome home.

“It is nice to be back again,” said Philippa, throwing herself on to a low chair beside her mother, “and with such lots to tell you. They have all been so kind, and I have so enjoyed it; but, by-the-by, before I begin, what does Dorcas mean by her mysterious hints about some news I had to hear?”

“Dorcas is an old goose,” said Mrs Headfort, “and,” (Page 21 missing) tively. “And as if I didn’t realise only too fully how terrible it is, Duke writes pages and pages of warnings and instructions and directions, and heaven knows what! down to the minutest detail. If he had known more about the fashions, he would have told me exactly how my dresses were to be made, and my hair done – ”

“He might have saved himself the trouble as to the last item,” said Philippa, consolingly. “You never have been and never will be able to do your hair decently, Evelyn.”

Mrs Headfort’s pretty face grew still more dejected in expression.

“I really don’t think you need be such a Job’s comforter, Philippa,” she said, reproachfully, “just when mamma and I have been longing so for you to come home. Duke *didn’t* write about my hair, so you needn’t talk about it. What he did write was bad enough, and the worst of all is – ”

“What?” said Philippa.

Chapter Two

“What?” said Philippa

“He says,” replied Mrs Headfort, glancing round her – “dear me, where is his letter? I would like to read it to you. I must have left it up-stairs.”

“Never mind,” said her sister, with a touch of impatience. Evelyn’s belongings were rather apt to be left up-stairs or down-stairs, or anywhere, where their owner happened not to be at the moment. “Never mind about it, you can read it to me afterwards; just tell me the gist of it just now.”

“If you mean by that the most perplexing part of it, I was just going to tell it you when you interrupted. Duke says I *must* take a maid. He says his cousins would never get over it – be too scandalised for words, if I arrived without one. Such a state of things could never occur to them, even though they knew how poor we are!”

“Naturally enough,” said Philippa, “even if Duke hadn’t spoken of it, I am sure we should have thought of it ourselves. And I don’t see any such tremendous difficulty about it.”

“I might have managed it in another way,” said Mrs Headfort, “if they had invited Bonny, for then I could have taken nurse, and – well, without saying what wasn’t true – let it be supposed that I didn’t want to bring two servants. And nurse would really have done all I need fairly well.”

“But they haven’t asked Bonny? And I suppose you can’t volunteer to take him?”

“Oh, dear, no,” Evelyn replied, gazing vaguely around her again, as if by some magic her husband’s letter could have found its way down to the table beside her. “That’s just what Duke says. Bonny, you see, Philippa, is the crux. Bonny must not be obtruded. Duke lays great stress upon that, and, of course, my own sense would have told me so if he hadn’t. Oh, no, of course I can’t take nurse and Bonny, even if you and mamma could have accepted the responsibility of Vanda without nurse.”

“Of course that would have been all right with Dorcas,” said Mrs Raynsworth. “I have suggested Evelyn’s taking Dorcas, Philippa, but – ”

“It would *never* do,” said Evelyn, hastily. “I’m sure you’ll say so, too, Philippa. That’s one reason I’m so glad you’ve come back. Do tell mamma it would never do.”

“Honestly, I don’t think it would,” said Philippa. “To begin with, one’s never sure of her rheumatism not getting bad – and then, though she’s the dearest old thing in the world, the wildest flight of imagination couldn’t transform her into a maid.”

“I was sure you would say so,” said Mrs Headfort. “You see, mamma dear, everything is so different from all those years ago when she was your maid.”

“Dorcas herself is different, certainly,” Mrs Raynsworth agreed, “and no wonder when you think of all she has done for us, and made herself into for our sakes,” and she sighed a little. “But otherwise, maids when I was young, I assure you, had to be quite as competent as nowadays.”

“Of course,” said Philippa, detecting the tiniest touch of annoyance in her mother’s tone, “Evelyn didn’t mean it quite that way. But still Dorcas certainly wouldn’t do. It would be very disagreeable for her at her age to be thrown into a household of that kind, and perhaps made fun of by smart servants.”

“And besides that,” said Mrs Headfort, “I don’t see how you could do without her here; and she is so clever about the children, it is a satisfaction to know you have her to consult if anything was wrong with either of them while I’m away. I mean,” she went on, with a half-unconscious apology for her maternal egotism, “for your sake, too, mamma, it lessens the responsibility.”

Mrs Raynsworth did not at once reply; she was thinking over things.

“There is Fanny,” she said; “she is a quick girl; she might be better than no one.”

“I scarcely think so,” said Philippa, “and she is inclined to be a chatterbox. She would entertain the servants’-hall at Wyverston with all the details of our life here, and, of course, it would be terribly

undignified to tell her to hold her tongue, as if we had anything to be ashamed of. It would seem to her that we wanted her to be untruthful – oh, no, it would never do!”

“There’s nothing to do that I can see,” said Evelyn, “except for me to go alone. There is just a chance of Dorcas hearing of some one – a girl in the village – who was coming home between two places, or something of that kind. Failing that, I see nothing for it.”

“I think a perfect stranger would be worse than anything,” said Philippa, “she would be so utterly unused to your ways, and yet – I thoroughly agree with what Duke says about it!”

“Oh, dear,” said Mrs Headfort, throwing herself back in her chair. “What a bother it all is! I almost wish the Wyverston people had continued to forget us. And yet I should be so proud and pleased if any good came of it for Duke, as it were, you know, through me, I mean, if I could make a good impression on them;” and her face flushed a little.

“How could she fail to do so?” thought her younger sister to herself, glancing at Evelyn with fond admiration.

Mrs Headfort looked very pretty, the slight additional colour brightening up her fair complexion advantageously. She *was* very pretty, and her beauty was of the kind that bears criticising – looking into minutely – for her features were all delicate and regular, her expression sweet though far from insipid, making a charming whole, though, as a rule, perhaps somewhat wanting in colour.

“Don’t let us talk about this tiresome maid question any more just now,” the elder sister continued. “I’ve lots to tell you and ask you about my clothes, Philippa. You must have seen all sorts of beautiful dresses at Dorriford, though I’m afraid there’s too little time for me to profit by any hints. And, by-the-by, I’ve not let you tell anything about Dorriford yet, rushing at you with my affairs.”

“It is so very interesting about your going to Wyverston,” said Philippa. “It has almost made me forget what I had to tell you. Nothing really exciting, perhaps! But it was all so new to me, and they were so kind. I did enjoy it thoroughly.”

Some details of her visit followed – about the people she had met, and descriptions of the place itself – the latter made more distinct by questions from her mother, who had stayed there once in her young days long ago.

“And they say – Mrs Lermont and Maida especially – that I must go back there before long. And oh! mamma,” she went on, “about the money! Wasn’t it kind of Mrs Lermont?” and she related what had passed between herself and her hostess just before she left Dorriford.

“It was very kind, very kind and thoughtful,” said Mrs Raynsworth, cordially.

“I’ve got ever so much money over,” Philippa continued. “The whole of Mrs Lermont’s present, of course, and some of what you gave me, mamma.”

“You may give me back the remains of mine,” said her mother, “but you must certainly keep what your cousin gave you for yourself, however you do another time. You father must certainly pay it this once.”

As she said the words, the door opened and Mr Raynsworth came in. He was tall and thin, fair like his elder daughter, and with the slight bend in his shoulders inevitable in one of his scholarly habits. He smiled brightly as he caught sight of Philippa, who started up to meet him.

“Well, my dear little secretary,” he said, affectionately. “Safe back again. You’re not sorry to be home, I hope.”

“No, indeed,” said the girl, “though I’ve been very happy. It was quite time for me to come home, as Evelyn is going to start off so soon. You would have been left with nobody at all!”

“I haven’t been much good to him,” said Mrs Headfort, deprecatingly.

“Oh, yes, my dear,” said her father, with amiable condescension, “you’ve been very good, very good indeed. You did your best, and who can do more?”

Mrs Headfort smiled. She knew she was much less clever than her sister, but the knowledge never roused in her the faintest sensation of jealousy.

“And *à propos* of my secretaries,” continued Mr Raynsworth, “it’s going to be an *embarras de richesses*. There’s a letter from Charlie by the second post” – he held out an envelope as he spoke – “to say that he may be coming next week instead of a fortnight later.” Philippa’s face fell a little. Fond as she was of her elder brother, it went somewhat against the grain with her to think of so soon giving up the post of amanuensis to her father, which she had filled for the last two years.

“So,” Mr Raynsworth went on, “so far as *I* was concerned, my dear, you might have paid a longer visit at Dorriford.”

“Or you might come with me to Wyverston! How I wish you were coming!” said Mrs Headfort, quick to perceive the slight disappointment in her sister’s face called forth by her father’s speech, though it had been made in all innocence.

“I wish I could go with you,” said Philippa. “I shall have nothing to do when you’re away.”

“Oh, yes, dear, you will,” said her mother; “Charlie will be wanting you all day long, to begin with.”

“And I want you dreadfully *now*,” said Evelyn. “I am longing to show you my clothes and what I’m arranging about them – several things I couldn’t fix about till you came back.”

“I’m quite ready,” said Philippa. “I’m not the least tired,” and she rose to accompany her sister up-stairs, but again the door opened, and this time two pairs of arms were thrown round her with exclamations of delight.

“Oh, Hugh – Leonard! one at a time, please,” she exclaimed, laughingly.

“We’re so glad you’re back,” said the boys together, “and we’ve such heaps of things to tell you – and to show you,” added Leonard. “Are you too tired to come out to-night? I’ve got the other guinea-pig I was hoping for – one of the feathery kind, you know; he is such a beauty. Do come –”

He got hold of his sister’s sleeve and began tugging at her, while Hugh on her other side was evidently bursting with some equally important communication he was longing to make to her.

Evelyn interposed, partly through selfish motives, partly, it is to be hoped, through pity for her sister.

“You mustn’t drag Philippa out to-night, boys,” she said. “It would be inhuman! Don’t you see she has had her hat on all day; you forget she’s been travelling since the morning. I’ve been selfish enough myself in keeping you here all this time talking – come up-stairs with me, Philippa,” and she passed her hand through her sister’s arm.

“I am really not tired,” said Philippa. “Perhaps I can come out later to see the guinea-pig, Leonard;” but she did not resist Mrs Headfort’s persuasive touch. The latter glanced at her once or twice as they slowly made their way up-stairs. Philippa’s face had an absent, grave expression, which made her sister feel somewhat self-reproachful.

“You *are* tired, Philippa, whatever you say, and it is greatly my fault. It is horrid to be rushed at the moment one arrives, with a lot of home worries.”

“They are not worries in the first place,” said Philippa, rousing herself; “I am feeling nothing but the greatest interest in your plans. I am only thinking it all over.”

“I hope you include my clothes in the ‘it,’ then! There are some patterns I must decide about before the post goes out. Will you come to my room as soon as you’ve taken off your things?”

“I must just peep in at the children for a moment,” said Philippa, “but I’ll come down again directly.”

The nursery was next door to her own room, a floor higher. For on Mrs Headfort’s return from India with her two babies more than a year ago, Philippa had given up to her sister the room which had been her own since Evelyn’s marriage.

Joyful sounds from above reached Mrs Headfort’s ears as she turned in to her own quarters – “Auntie Phil!” – “Aty, turn back!”

“How those children do adore her!” thought their mother. “I’m afraid they won’t let her go, and I really must settle about these tiresome clothes!”

But barely five minutes had passed before Philippa appeared again, divested of her travelling things, bright and interested.

“How did you manage to escape from the nursery?” said Mrs Headfort, admiringly.

Philippa laughed.

“I told them I *must* come down to you; children have a great respect for ‘must’ Oh, how pretty!” she went on, as she caught sight of an evening-dress lying on the bed; “you don’t mean to say that’s your old heliotrope! How capitally you’ve managed it!”

“I am so glad you like it,” said Evelyn, in a tone of great gratification. “I took it to Warder’s as soon as I heard about this terrible visit. It is really the only thing that’s quite ready. I must get one completely new evening-dress. Mamma and I thought white or cream would be best.”

“Yes,” Philippa agreed, “anything in colour gets so quickly, known, and white always suits you.”

“And, of course,” said Mrs Headfort, “I want something I can wear for a long time, and one can always alter a white dress. There are so many things to consider, you see, Philippa. Duke wouldn’t want them to think me extravagant, and yet, on the other side, I must on no account be dowdy.” She gave a deep sigh. “Men have no idea how difficult things are for women!”

“It is difficult,” Philippa agreed, “but your having no maid still seems to me the worst of it. Its hateful to depend on a housemaid’s good offices, and even morning-dresses are so difficult to manage by one’s self nowadays.”

“Yes indeed,” said Evelyn; “I shall never know if I look nice or not; it isn’t as if they were people I knew well – or knew at all. Oh, dear me, how I wish they had waited to ask me till Duke came home! But now you must help me to decide on one of these patterns, or I shall miss the post.”

The next half-hour passed quickly in discussions of the details of her sister’s trousseau, as Philippa laughingly called it; and if the younger girl in her secret heart found the minutiae rather wearisome, she kept her feelings to herself, and was more than rewarded by Evelyn’s increased good spirits and cheerfulness.

“You don’t know what a comfort it is to have Philippa back again,” she said to her mother that evening at dinner; “I am beginning to feel ever so much happier about Wyverston. I shall be able to write quite comfortably to poor old Duke by next mail.”

Mrs Raynsworth glanced affectionately at her younger daughter. Personally these two resembled each other very closely, nor did the resemblance stop with their outward appearance. There was decision and firmness in both faces, both even more strongly marked in Philippa’s case than in her mother’s, for young as the girl still was, she gave one an impression of extreme reliability, and of late years somewhat failing health and the mellowing influence of time had softened the character of Mrs Raynsworth’s whole personality. Her married life, though far from an unhappy one, had been by no means free from the undue share of practical cares which almost inevitably falls to the wife of a scholar. And that Mr Raynsworth was a scholar, in the fullest sense of the word, there could be no two opinions. It was from him Philippa inherited the intellectual side of her character, balanced by her mother’s practical good sense, and other more ordinary though not the less desirable feminine qualities.

In his secret heart there were times when Mr Raynsworth sighed over the girl’s eager interest in social amusements and the daily life of those about her.

“She almost has it in her to be a really learned woman,” he would say to himself, and in other surroundings it is possible that his ideal for her might have been realised. But as things were, Philippa would have choked in a study had the bulk of her time been spent poring over books. Her lessons with her father over, or, in later years, the work she did for him, and that with real appreciation, completed for the time being, she would fly off to arrange flowers in the drawing-room, or even to discuss the fashion of a new dress, with as keen enjoyment as if she had never touched a Greek or Latin book in her life.

Personally she was like her mother. Dark-haired, brown-eyed, and of a make and bearing suggestive of unusual vigour; while by one of those curious inconsistencies which abound in family likenesses, Evelyn Headfort resembled her father in appearance and temperament, and though by careful education her brain-powers had been made the most of, they were not above the average.

One gift she possessed – the source of infinite pleasure to those about her – that of a very beautiful voice, and if Philippa's generous nature had been capable of even a passing touch of jealousy of her sister, it would have shown in this direction.

"It is strange," she would say, sometimes, "that one can adore music as I feel I do, and yet have no power of expressing it one's self."

And even as a little child her sweetest dreams and fancies were shaped and coloured by the longing to find herself in possession of the marvellous gift of music, a gift which she sometimes felt inclined to reproach her sister for not sufficiently prizing. For musical as she undoubtedly was, Evelyn was neither poetical nor imaginative, however difficult it might be to credit this when one gazed at her delicate, almost ethereal features and lovely, dreamy blue eyes.

"One can't have everything," she would reply, prosaically enough, to her sister. "You're a hundred, thousand times cleverer than I, and quite as capable or more so, and, to *my* mind, quite as nice-looking. You really needn't grudge me my voice. I only care about it because all of you do."

But for the dissimilarity between them – possibly, indeed, to some extent in consequence of it – never were two sisters more heartily attached to each other. Never was a home less disturbed by the friction of opposing tastes or unrestrained moods than theirs. There was, no doubt, dormant intensity of feeling, depths of devotion and capacity for suffering in the younger girl's nature not yet gauged – potentialities which, it is to be questioned, if any of those about her could have understood even had she been sufficiently conscious of them herself to attempt to express them, or egotistical enough to wish to do so. But though possibly there was less power of sympathy with her deepest self than she had any idea of, there had been nothing in her life or surroundings to stunt or thwart her individuality. Nay, rather very much the reverse – calm and stillness are excellent guardians of character in certain stages of its development.

Chapter Three

“So Unlike Her.”

The next few days were fully occupied with Evelyn’s preparations for her visit. And here, perhaps, it may be well to explain why so apparently unimportant a matter as young Mrs Headfort’s spending a few days with her husband’s relations should have been looked upon by herself and her own family as an event of such moment.

It was now nearly four years since Evelyn Raynsworth’s marriage to Captain Headfort, and during that time two deaths had taken place in the immediate family of his cousin – the head of the house and master of Wyverston – which had greatly altered the young man’s position as a Headfort, with regard to the future. For the deaths had been those of Mr Headfort’s two sons, and though the large estates were not entailed, the family feeling of respect for the male line was proverbially strong. Marmaduke was an only son, and had been early left an orphan; the care of him in childhood and youth devolving upon relatives on his mother’s side, elderly people now dead. They had done their duty by the boy in a conscientious, unemotional fashion, and had left him a small addition to his own little patrimony: all, indeed, that they had it in their power to dispose of. So, though Captain Headfort’s childhood had been a somewhat loveless one, he remembered his uncle and aunt with gratitude – never so warm, perhaps, as when, at eight-and-twenty, he fell in love with Mr Raynsworth’s charming daughter – as but for this opportune legacy he would scarcely have thought it possible to marry. It had never occurred to him in his wildest dreams, that a day might come when he should be looked upon as the probable heir to the large estates belonging to the head of his family, of which he considered himself a very unimportant member; he was not even disappointed or hurt when no special notice was taken of his marriage, beyond a somewhat formal letter of good wishes and a wedding present of the orthodox type. There had scarcely, indeed, been time for an invitation to visit Wyverston, as the marriage took place immediately before he and his bride left for India; but the news of the death of his two cousins, little more than a year after his own marriage, and the birth of his own son had inevitably altered the aspect of things, even to a man uncalculating and single-minded as was Evelyn’s husband.

“There is actually no one of the name to succeed except myself and Bonny,” he said to his wife, when the first shock of natural concern for his cousins’ untimely fate had somewhat subsided, “for though Louis was married, he had only two daughters, and poor cousin Marmaduke is now quite an old man.”

“It is very sad,” said Evelyn, “very sad, indeed. Shall you write to them, Duke?”

He hesitated.

“I really can’t say,” he replied; “I know them so little. And, under these circumstances, don’t you see, I rather shrink from reminding them of my existence just now.”

“I don’t see that you can help writing,” said Evelyn. “The *not* doing so would be only too marked. And it isn’t as if the property were entailed; it is all *actually* nothing more to you than to any one else.”

So Captain Headfort wrote – a short, manly letter of honest sympathy – a letter which, however, in the months that followed, he often more than half regretted, though he was too generous to say so to Evelyn. For it brought forth no response, not even a formal acknowledgment.

“No doubt,” he thought to himself, “they looked upon it as a piece of officiousness. However, it was done for the best, and I’ll think no more about it.”

Two years later saw Evelyn obliged to return to England with her children, for her health had suffered to some extent from the climate, and little Marmaduke – Bonny, as he was called – was growing thin and pale. She had been with her own people for several months, when at last the coming of the little-looked-for invitation to visit Wyverston was announced to her by her husband, as has been related. Nothing could have been more unexpected, Captain Headfort having had no communication

till now with his cousins. He was even at a loss to explain their knowing of his wife's return home. And naturally he was anxious to respond cordially to this friendly overture; anxious, perhaps, above all, that no considerations of misplaced economy should prevent Evelyn's making her *début* among his relatives with befitting dignity.

Hence the sensation in the Raynsworths' family circle concerning an event, on the surface, so simple and commonplace. And no one, perhaps, of all the family party had taken the matter so deeply to heart as Philippa. It was never out of her head during the few days which succeeded her return home, and by night her dreams were haunted by absurd complications and variations of the theme.

As to Duke's wife herself, the younger sister had no misgivings whatever.

"Evelyn may be shy," she thought, "but she is never awkward. She can always be stately if occasion calls for it. And her clothes will be all right; indeed, she looks nice in anything, though I do wish she had some one to help her to put them on. Yes, it is the going without a maid that spoils it all. I don't know *what* can be done!"

For the previous day had destroyed the last hope of a temporary maid being procurable, and Evelyn, with the touch of *laissez-aller* inherent in her, and which her life in India had not tended to decrease, had made up her mind to face Wyverston unattended.

"If only you keep quite well, it won't matter so much," said Mrs Raynsworth.

"I shall take care not to let the Headforts know, if I don't," said Evelyn. "I should hate them to think that Duke had married a limp, delicate sort of a girl, and, unluckily, I always look much more so than I am."

"But you are not really strong yet," said her mother. "And if you do anything foolish out of a kind of bravado, you may really lay yourself up, and think how disagreeable that would be!"

Philippa, who was present, glanced at her sister. She was certainly looking more fragile than usual. The excitement, and, to a certain extent, fatigue of the last few days were telling upon her, and a feeling of additional anxiety came upon the younger girl.

"I shall really not be a bit surprised at anything that happens," she said, in a tone of annoyance. "You are quite right, mamma, and I wish you would frighten Evelyn well. She is sometimes as silly about herself as if she were no older than Vanda," and the laugh with which Mrs Headfort treated this remonstrance was by no means reassuring.

This conversation took place on Tuesday – Friday was the day fixed for Evelyn's journey. Late on Thursday evening Mrs Raynsworth and her eldest daughter were sitting alone in the drawing-room, or, to be more exact, Evelyn was lying on a couch while her mother sat beside her.

"Don't look so worried, mamma dear," said the younger woman. "I really am better; I don't think there is actually much the matter with me; I have just overtired myself a little. I shall be all right once I start to-morrow."

"It is your going alone," said Mrs Raynsworth, despondently.

Evelyn stroked her mother's hand.

"How funny you are!" she said; "you didn't mind it half so much at first as Philippa did, and now she says nothing more about it, and you have begun to worry yourself. But as for Philippa, where can she be? I've scarcely seen her to-day."

"She was out for some time this afternoon," said Mrs Raynsworth. "I was rather surprised at it, for she knows I am uneasy about you."

As she spoke, the door opened and her younger daughter entered.

"Where have you been?" said Mrs Headfort; "with papa?"

"No," Philippa replied, "I've been up in my own room."

"You might have stayed with me the last evening," her sister continued, with a touch of reproach. "And I must go to bed immediately – poor mamma's unhappy about my looking so ill."

Philippa glanced at her critically.

“I don’t wonder,” she said; “you certainly are not looking well. Yes, I think the best thing you can do is to go to bed. Let me see, what time do you leave to-morrow?”

“Not till eleven – that’s to say, eleven from this house. The train goes at twelve.”

Philippa’s face grew grave.

“Don’t think it horrid of me,” she began, “but I can’t possibly be here to say good-bye to you at eleven, or to go to the station with you. I *must* be at Marlby before then, to-morrow morning.”

“Well, if you’re to be there, why not come to the station to see me off?” said Evelyn. “I shall think it rather horrid of you if you don’t!”

“I am very sorry,” Philippa replied, “very sorry to seem horrid, but I can’t even see you off.”

“How strange you are, Philippa!” exclaimed Mrs Raynsworth. “You shouldn’t have made any pressing engagement for to-morrow morning. You seemed so anxious about Evelyn!”

“So I am, mamma,” Philippa replied, “but the mere fact of my seeing her off wouldn’t do her much good.”

But Mrs Raynsworth still looked annoyed. She was feeling really anxious and concerned about her elder daughter, and was in consequence less calm than usual.

“Evelyn,” said Philippa, “do come up to bed. I’ll stay with you while you undress.”

Mrs Headfort got up slowly.

“Philippa is queer this evening,” she thought to herself. “She’s not very nice to mamma.”

“I will come down again in a few minutes,” said Philippa, as they left the room. “I only want to make sure of Evelyn taking her medicine, and to prevent her going into the nursery again to-night. – What will you do without me to look after you,” she added, turning to her sister.

“There will be no nursery for me to wander into,” said Evelyn, with a sigh, “when I feel dull or lonely, as there is here.”

Philippa turned quickly.

“But you never do feel dull or lonely – at least not *lonely*, here with mamma and me, surely?” she said, with a touch of reproach.

“Oh, well, no, not in the same way, of course. But there must be times when I feel lonely without Duke, even though I love so being at home with all of you. It wouldn’t be natural if I didn’t miss him.”

“No, I suppose not,” said Philippa, half absently, for in her own mind she was thinking, “How strange it must be to care for anybody *more* than for one’s own people! I cannot picture it to myself at all.”

The few minutes she had spoken of to her mother turned out thirty at least, for more than half an hour had passed before her younger daughter rejoined Mrs Raynsworth in the drawing-room. And even then Philippa seemed so carried away and preoccupied that her mother felt again slightly irritated by her manner.

“Are you very tired this evening, Philippa?” she said at last; “or is there anything the matter? You don’t seem like yourself.”

Philippa gave a little start.

“I’m quite well – not the least tired, I mean,” she said, quickly. “I am thinking about Evelyn; there is nothing else the matter.”

“You mean about her going to-morrow alone?” said Mrs Raynsworth; “I am not at all happy about it myself. She looks so fragile, poor little thing. She is not nearly as strong as you, Philippa, in any way. But it is always a satisfaction to me to see how fond you are of each other; she clings to you so. And to tell you the truth, before she and the children came to us, I had some misgiving as to how it would be, for you were practically a child when she married, and those two or three years made all the difference. You had come to be so thoroughly the daughter at home – helping your father and me. I have perhaps never said to you before in so many words that I have been very pleased, very gratified by your whole tone towards and about Evey. You have been unselfish and self-forgetting all through.”

The young girl's eyes glistened with pleasure. It was not often that Mrs Raynsworth – as a rule a somewhat silent and undemonstrative woman – expressed herself so unreservedly.

“Dear mamma,” said Philippa, “there isn't *anything* I wouldn't do for Evelyn. And I am so glad, so particularly glad, that you understand it. Thank you so much for what you've said. Now, I think I will go to bed if you don't mind,” and she kissed her mother warmly.

“She must be tired, though she won't own to it,” thought Mrs Raynsworth as Philippa left the room. “It is generally so difficult to get her to go to bed early,” and again the feeling came over her of there being something slightly unusual about her younger daughter that evening.

She would have been still more perplexed and surprised could she have seen Philippa an hour or two later in her own room. For long after the whole household was asleep, the girl was busily sewing at various articles of her attire, altering them and modifying them with the help of some small purchases she had made that afternoon. And when at last all was completed to her satisfaction, she drew out a small light trunk, already partially packed, which she proceeded to fill.

“I think that will do,” she said to herself, as she stood up and surveyed it with satisfaction. “With this and a hand-bag, and the things I'll manage to get into Evelyn's roll of rugs, I am sure I shall have all I need. Now I've only to write my letter of explanation to mamma. Dorcas must give it to her when it is quite certainly too late to overtake me.”

And half an hour later she was in bed and fast asleep, her mother's words having removed any misgivings she had felt as to what she was about to do.

Mrs Headfort looked a little better the next morning, thanks to a good night's rest; thanks also, perhaps, to the not unnatural excitement she was feeling about her journey and its results. Between her anticipations and her regret at leaving her children, she was sufficiently distracted not to notice that Philippa had slipped away in some mysterious fashion quite an hour before the time fixed for her own departure. It was actually not till she was standing at the hall door, waiting till the luggage should be safely established on the top of the fly before getting in herself, that she suddenly exclaimed:

“Where can Philippa be, mamma? I haven't seen her since breakfast.”

Mrs Raynsworth glanced round with an air of annoyance.

“I have no idea,” she said. “She is certainly not with your father. What was it she was saying last night about not going to the station with you?”

“Oh, just that she couldn't go; she has some mysterious engagement. But she might at least have said good-bye first.”

“It is so unlike her,” replied the mother. “And somehow I didn't take it in, otherwise I would have got ready to see you off myself.”

“Oh, I don't mind that part of it in the least,” said Evelyn. “It's not as if it were a big crowded station. But tell Philippa, all the same, that I don't understand her going off like that. Now, good-bye, dear mamma, and don't worry about me. I shall be all right if I get good news of the children, and you or Phil will write every day, I'm sure – a mere word would be enough.”

“Yes, dear, of course we shall,” replied Mrs Raynsworth, reassuringly, though her face had a more anxious expression than usual. “I won't ask *you* to write every day,” she went on, “for I know how tiresome it is to feel bound to do so when one is staying with people. Only let us know of your arrival as soon as you can, and say how you are.”

She stood watching the fly as it made its way down the short drive, waving her hand in response to Evelyn's last smile and nod. Then she went slowly back into the house.

“I couldn't have said anything to disturb Evelyn just as she was starting,” she thought to herself, “but I really do think Philippa is behaving most extraordinarily. I hope these very independent ways of hers are not the result of her visit to Dorriford. I wonder, by-the-by, if Dorcas knows where she is gone.”

But, strange to say, Dorcas was not to be found in any of her usual haunts, though one of the under-servants said she had seen her not five minutes before, up-stairs in Miss Philippa's room. Tired

and somewhat depressed, though she scarcely knew why, Mrs Raynsworth sat down in the drawing-room with a vague intention of writing a letter or otherwise employing herself usefully, but contrary to her usual habits, more than an hour passed before she exerted herself to do anything but gaze dreamily out of the window, where the now fast-falling leaves were whirling about fantastically in the breeze.

“I feel as if I were waiting for something, though for what I don’t know,” she thought, and it was with a start of surprise that the clock, striking one, caught her ear. “Dear me, how idle I have been – one o’clock! Evelyn must be well on her way by this. I wonder when Philippa intends to come in?”

Just then the door opened and Dorcas appeared. She carried a salver in her hand, and on it lay a letter.

“If you please, ma’am,” the old servant began, “Miss Philippa wished me to give you this at one o’clock, but not before. I don’t know what it’s about, I don’t, indeed,” she added, anxiously, “but I do hope there’s nothing wrong.”

Her words were well intended, but they only served to sharpen the uneasiness which Mrs Raynsworth was already feeling. Her face grew pale, and her heart beat painfully fast as she took hold of the envelope.

“A letter, and from Philippa!” she exclaimed; “what can it mean? No, don’t go away, Dorcas,” though the old servant had shown no sign of doing so. “If – if there is anything wrong,” – though what could have been wrong she would have been at a loss to say – “I must keep calm. Don’t go till I see what it is.” And with trembling fingers she opened the letter.

For Philippa *had* been preoccupied and unlike herself the night before, and even this very morning, there was no denying.

Chapter Four

Fellow-Travellers

In the meantime all had progressed smoothly with Mrs Headfort.

The train was already in the station when she and her boxes found themselves on the platform, for Marlby was a terminus in its small way. It lay about an hour off the main line, and as express trains do not *always* wait the arrival of small local ones, departures from Marlby for the junction were characterised by most praiseworthy punctuality, any wafting that might occur being pretty sure to take place at Wrexhill junction itself.

But to-day the express proved worthy of its name, barely five minutes having been passed at the big station before Evelyn found herself re-established in her favourite corner of a first-class compartment, otherwise empty, of the train.

“Now I shall feel settled,” she said to herself, with satisfaction, “no more changes till I get almost to my journey’s end. I do hope nobody will get in. I wish I could go to sleep and then I should feel fresh on arriving, and I never like to shut my eyes with strangers in the carriage – for one thing, one looks so silly; I’ve often laughed at other people. I wish the train would start – oh, dear,” – as at that moment the door opened to admit a new-comer – “what a bother!” and as she made this mental ejaculation the train began to move.

“How rash of her!” thought Mrs Headfort, glancing at the intruder, whose back for the moment was turned towards her.

She was a tall, slender woman, neatly but simply dressed in black, young too, as far as Mrs Headfort’s present chances of observation could decide. “She looks like a maid – she must have got in first-class by mistake sorely,” but at this point in her reflections the black-robed figure turned, calmly seating herself opposite Evelyn, and lifting the thick veil she wore, disclosed to the gazer’s astonished eyes the face of her sister Philippa!

Mrs Headfort grew pale – more than pale indeed, perfectly white – and uttered a faint scream. For the moment, in the confusion of ideas always engendered by the utterly unexpected, she really felt as if she had seen a ghost. It was impossible for her at once to grasp the fact that before her was indeed her sister, a flesh-and-blood Philippa. She could scarcely have been more amazed had the figure in front of her proceeded to dissolve into thin air and disappear! And the effect on the girl herself of her sister’s agitation was for an instant paralysing. Any enjoyment she had anticipated in this *coup d’état*, any thought of “fun” completely faded. She felt so terrified and startled at the effect upon Evelyn of what she had imagined would cause at the most but a start of surprise, and probably some vehement remonstrance, that she was utterly unable to speak. Only, when at length – or what seemed at length, for in reality not twenty seconds had passed since the new-comer had revealed herself – Evelyn’s pale lips murmured with a gasp, “Philippa!” did her own power of utterance return to her.

“Evey, Evey,” she exclaimed, “don’t look like that I never thought you would be so frightened. I – I thought that on the whole you’d be pleased.”

The distress in Philippa’s face touched her sister. She tried to smile, and the effort brought some colour back again to her pale face.

“It was silly of me,” she said at last, “but I don’t understand! Did you mean to come with me to Wrexhill? Oh, no, I forgot, we have passed it; we shall not stop again till Crowminster, ever so far away. Philippa, what are you thinking of?” and again her face grew very troubled.

“Of course I know we don’t stop for ever so long,” said Philippa, trying to speak easily. “I looked it all out in the railway guide; that was why I wouldn’t let you know I was in the train till after we had passed the junction. It’s too late to send me back now, Evey; the trains don’t match in the least I should have hours to wait at Crowminster, and again at the junction. I shouldn’t get home till

who knows when, and what is still more to the purpose,” she added, but in a lower voice, “I wouldn’t go back if you told me to – nothing in the world would make me go back.”

The sense of her last words did not reach her sister’s brain. She sat staring at Philippa with more and more widely opening eyes.

“Why are you dressed like that?” she exclaimed, gradually taking in the fact of her sister’s unusual get-up. “Is it some trick you are playing, Philippa – some silly, practical joke? I *cannot* understand you, just now, especially, when I wanted to be calm and as easy-minded as possible for this visit!”

The reproach in her tone roused Philippa’s indignation.

“Trick – practical joke!” she repeated. “How can you say such a thing? What do you take me for?” and her voice faltered. “You are very stupid, Evelyn,” she went on, more lightly. “You surely must understand what I mean to do. I am no longer Philippa Raynsworth, I am Mrs Headfort’s maid – a very good, trustworthy girl, though rather young and not very experienced. So I hope, ma’am, I have made things clear.”

Evelyn gasped.

“Phil!” was all she could find breath to say for a moment. “Yes, indeed,” she went on, “I have been fearfully dense and stupid. I might have suspected something from your manner the last day or two, and when you so suddenly gave in about my going alone. But, oh, Phil, you are perfectly mad; such a thing cannot possibly be allowed. Just think if it were found out! What *would* Duke say?”

“Duke shall never hear of it!” Philippa replied, composedly. “It is my secret, Evelyn; I throw myself upon your honour never to tell *anybody*– do you hear – anybody without my leave. You must *promise*.”

“But papa and mamma?” said Evelyn, bewilderedly. “Papa and mamma,” repeated Philippa again, forgetting good manners in her excitement. “*They* know, of course. I mean,” – catching the increasing amazement on her sister’s face – “I mean they will know by this time. I left a letter for Dorcas to give mamma as soon as it was quite too late to stop me. In her heart I do believe mamma will be thankful to know I am with you, to take care of you, my poor little sweet, with your troubled white face. Oh, darling, do cheer up and see the bright side of it. *Its going to be*– nothing would make me give it up – do understand that, and let yourself be comfortable. Think how beautifully I can do your hair, and dress you, and everything, and what nice talks we can have when you are tired and come up to your room for a little rest. I can be ever so much more use to you even for talking and consulting, than if I were going with you as your sister. And think, if you feel ill or very depressed, how glad you will be to know I am at hand. And how glad mamma will be – why, I can write to her every day and keep her mind at rest.”

Evelyn’s face relaxed a little.

“But, Phil,” she began, and by the tone of her voice, in spite of the remonstrating, “but,” Philippa knew the battle was won, “but, Phil, the life for you – among the *servants*– you, my sister! Oh, no, it –”

“It will be such a chance for studying one part of the other side of things as falls to very few,” she interrupted. “Just what I shall enjoy. Why, if ever I come to write stories, as papa says I may do some day, think how valuable it will be to me to have actually made one at the ‘second table’ myself. It will be something like a night-in-a-casual-ward experience.”

Evelyn shuddered.

“Don’t say such things, Philippa, it makes it worse and worse. At least the servants will be *clean*.”

“It is to be hoped so,” said her sister, coolly.

“But the men-servants,” continued Mrs Headfort; “fancy you sitting down between the butler and the valet! Oh, Philippa, when papa hears of it I believe he will come off by the first train to fetch you himself.”

“He will do nothing of the kind,” returned Philippa. “He will shrug his shoulders and say it will be a good lesson for me, and in his heart he will enjoy the humour of it. You can certainly trust me to keep all the butlers and valets in the world in their place, even though I’m only a lady’s-maid,” and she drew up her head proudly. “But seriously, Evey,” she went on, “I’m sure there will be nothing of the kind required at Wyverston; you may be pretty certain the servants will be a most decorous, old-fashioned set. I shall not be expected to do more than ‘speak when I’m spoken to’ and ‘mend *your* clothes’ if you tear them.”

Philippa knew what she was about. She went on talking in the same strain till she succeeded in making Evelyn smile and even laugh, taking care to treat the whole affair as irrevocable – a *fait accompli*— knowing Mrs Headfort’s mind to be so constituted that taking her acceptance for granted was in nine cases out of ten to insure it.

An hour and more passed, Evelyn’s intended opposition to the extraordinary drama arranged by Philippa, growing, half unconsciously to herself, feebler and fainter. She was feeling very tired, too, as the result of the agitation she had gone through, and in such conditions it came naturally to her to cling with childlike appeal to those around her. And Philippa’s stronger personality made her a very rock of support to poor Evey.

Suddenly a thought struck her.

“Phil,” she said, “how is it you are travelling in here? Did you take a first-class ticket?”

Miss Raynsworth shook her head.

“Oh, no,” she replied; “I am going to get out at Crowminster. There is a second-class compartment next door. I don’t suppose there will be any difficulty about my having come this bit of the way with you, but if there should be, I can pay the difference. It is much better for me not to stay with you: we shall get into our rôle more quickly if we start at once. I will look in at every station to see if you want anything. We must be getting near Crowminster now.”

Evelyn did not speak for a moment or two.

“There is just one little thing to be settled,” Philippa went on, with a touch of hesitation. “What will you call me, Evey?”

Evey glanced at her.

“Oh, Phil,” she exclaimed, “it is altogether impossible. I shall never be able to keep it up.”

“Nonsense,” said her sister, with a touch of asperity. “*You* will have no keeping up, as you call it, to do, and as for my part of it, you can safely leave that to me.”

“I shall never be able to call you anything but Phil,” said Mrs Headfort, plaintively.

“I’ve thought of that,” replied the young girl. “We had better choose a name which would not clash – I mean, so that if you *did* call me ‘Phil’ by mistake, people would either not notice it or think you had interrupted yourself. What do you say to ‘Phillis’? It would do very well, I think?”

“I daresay it would,” said Mrs Headfort, with a curious kind of resignation in her voice.

“Of course it is a *perfect* name for a maid,” said Philippa, “if people didn’t always use surnames. But you can truthfully say, if any one remarks upon it, that you’ve known me all my life, though I’ve only lately entered your service.”

“I cannot go into any explanations of the kind, whatever people say, I warn you, Philippa. I haven’t the nerve for it. Even if my *words* were true, I should feel as if I were telling stories.”

“Oh, well, say nothing, then,” her sister replied, tranquilly. “On the whole it will be as well, or perhaps better. But now, Evey, we are getting near Crowminster, and I must go back to my own carriage. There’s only just one thing more I want to prepare you for. – Shut your eyes for a minute.”

Evey meekly obeyed; she was past the stage of any attempt at restiveness by this time.

“Now,” said Philippa, and Evelyn, looking up, gave a slight exclamation.

“Who would have thought it would change you so? Where in the world did you get them?”

The “it” and the “them” referred to a pair of bluish-tinted spectacles which Philippa had composedly donned.

“Aren’t they splendid?” she said. “Don’t you remember them? They’re a pair mamma had that summer ages ago, when she went to Switzerland with papa, to shade her eyes from the glare. Of course they’re only plain glass, and very dark blue ones wouldn’t have done; they look so like a disguise. At least, in all the sensational stories, they are always used for that. And real spectacles would have dazed me, for my sight’s as keen as – ”

“A hawk’s!” said Mrs Headfort, with a spark of reviving vivacity. “But, oh, Phil, the train is slackening. I wish you could have stayed with me.”

“It is much better not,” said Philippa, philosophically. “Very much better not. We should have gone on talking and forgetting the new state of things. My being in another compartment is the first act in the play – it will help us to realise it. And now, ma’am,” she continued, rising as she spoke, for by this time the train had stopped, “I had better leave you. I will come to see if you desire me for anything at the next station we stop at.”

Without the undue effort or constraint, which would have accompanied any complete change of tone for a prolonged period, she had managed slightly to modify her usual inflection of voice and manner of speaking. It was slower and more monotonous than its wont, with a slight suggestion of choosing her words, as might be done by an intelligent girl of a lower class with enough education to make her aspire to perfect correctness.

“All right, Phillis,” Mrs Headfort replied, with a somewhat pitiful and not very successful attempt at following her sister’s lead. “No,” she continued, with a sudden change of tone, “don’t speak to me. I can’t stand it! I will do my best to brace myself up to it, but it won’t be easy. Perhaps it is better for you to leave me alone.”

Philippa did not reply, except by a smile and a nod, feeling, to tell the truth, far less easy-minded than she looked. She was becoming conscious that till now she had not sufficiently taken into account Evelyn’s peculiar unfitness for acting a part of any kind; all she had directed her attention to having been the mere obtaining of her sister’s consent to her scheme.

“Yet, after all,” she thought to herself, as she stepped into the second-class compartment next door, “after all, all she will have to do will be very easy; there will be no acting involved. We shall hardly ever be seen together, and if her manner is constrained and peculiar, it will only be thought to be her way with servants. It isn’t as if we were going among people who had ever seen her before.”

With these reflections she did her best to quell her misgivings, and feeling that it would be better not to let her mind dwell too long on her own concerns, she looked about her for a little diversion.

There were two or three other occupants of the compartment, and her glance fell almost immediately on one of them who at once riveted her attention. This was a long-nosed, melancholy-eyed dachshund, whom Philippa’s judgment, experienced in matters pertaining to his family, straightway mentally labelled as a “perfect beauty.” In other words, as consistently and entirely ugly as the strictest connoisseur could demand.

Philippa loved dogs, and in general her amiable feelings towards them were reciprocated. She had a very tender association with dachshunds, the tragic death of one such pet having been literally the sorest grief of her childhood, and as she gazed on her four-footed fellow-traveller, whose soft eyes gazed back at her in return from the seat exactly opposite hers, where he was comfortably established in a corner, it was perhaps well for her that the blue-tinted spectacles hid the tears which involuntarily dimmed their surface.

Never since that terrible day – now, what the young girl would have called “so many, many years ago,” when the broken-hearted child had sobbed itself to sleep for the loss of her darling – never had she seen another dog so exactly like “Valentine.”

“Oh, you dear, dear dog,” she said, under her breath, “I feel as if you must know me.”

The words were quite inaudible, but some doggie instinct must have carried their meaning to the brain of poor Valentine’s double, for with something between a smile and a sigh – literally speaking, a yawn of regret at the interruption of his comfortable repose – the dachshund, at the cost

of considerable self-denial, slowly lifted himself, and with something between a spring and a stretch, landed his lengthy person on Philippa's knee. Thence he lifted his reddy-brown eyes, gleaming with mingled pathos and humour, to her face for approval.

"You dear little man, good doggie," exclaimed Miss Raynsworth, too delighted to remember her rôle, "how sweet of you to come to me! How did you find out I wanted you?"

Suddenly a voice interrupted her. Till this moment, absorbed by the dog, his owner had not attracted her attention. She was vaguely conscious of two elderly women at the other end of the carriage, and a man of some kind on the same side as the dachs, but that was all.

Now, glancing up quickly at the preliminary "I beg your pardon," she became aware of a pair of eyes, reddy-brown eyes, which might have been the dog's own transferred to a human face, looking at her with an expression in which, however, there was nothing pathetic, only kindly and good-humoured surprise.

"I beg your pardon," their owner repeated; "I never saw Solomon take such liberties before. – Down, Solomon; down, sir."

But Solomon demurred.

"She likes having me," he said, as plainly as dog language can speak, with a deprecatory wag of his tail, and Philippa passed her arm round him.

"I love him," she said, eagerly; "he is so like – one I had," her voice dropping a little. "Do let him stay with me. 'Solomon' – what a nice name!"

Solomon wagged his tail more energetically. For him the situation was quite agreeably clear; not so for his master. As Philippa glanced again at the young man the expression of surprise, almost of perplexity, on his face came home to her, bringing with it the remembrance of her assumed personality. The colour rushed into her face as she realised how imperfect was her preparation for carrying out her part.

"The very first time I have had to speak to any one," she thought to herself, "I have completely forgotten it all! Dear me, how shall I ever get on? It was all your fault, Solomon," giving him an affectionate little hug.

Solomon's master, meanwhile, was increasingly perplexed. The discrepancy between the young girl's easy manner and well-bred tone of voice, and the rigorous simplicity of her dress, which even his masculine eyes perceived to be not that of a lady, struck him more and more.

"What was there to make her get so red about?" he said to himself, and he was turning away, out of pity for her embarrassment, when she again addressed him.

"I am so fond of dogs, sir," she said, slowly. "I am quite accustomed to taking care of them."

"Certainly, if you like to be troubled with him," the young man replied, somewhat inconsequently. He spoke with perfect civility, yet there was an impalpable change in his tone at once perceptible to Philippa's quick ears – her last sentences had succeeded in their object. Yet the consciousness of this was accompanied to her by an altogether unreasonable touch of annoyance.

"He is quite satisfied already that I am a servant," she reflected. "Really, if beauty is but skin deep, social distinctions, or the outward signs of them, are far less so," and again the blood mounted to her cheeks, this time, however, without attracting the notice of her fellow-traveller, who had now opened a magazine and was absorbed in its contents.

Chapter Five

“Solomon.”

Philippa sat quietly in her corner, one arm thrown comfortably round Solomon’s plump little person, perfectly to that philosopher’s content. Among the various preparations for her journey, it had not occurred to the young girl to provide herself with any literature. Her eyes were consequently at leisure to occupy themselves with anything of interest that might come in their way. But the country through which the train was just then passing was flat and monotonous; she soon grew tired of staring out of the window, and she dared not amuse herself with Solomon for fear of attracting his master’s attention.

Furthermore, the dachs, by this time was contentedly asleep.

Philippa’s eyes strayed to the end of the carriage. One of the elderly ladies had already followed Solomon’s example; her sister, for sisters they unmistakably were, returned Philippa’s slight glance in her direction with a somewhat severe look of doubtful approval.

“What a forward girl!” she had been saying to herself, and Philippa almost felt the words.

She only smiled to herself, however.

“I am really going through excellent training already,” she thought, and again she turned to the window.

A moment or two later, however, some instinct, possibly merely a sensation of suppressed restlessness, led her to glance at Solomon’s master, and this time she was able to do so unobserved, for maiden-lady number two had also closed her eyes in peaceful repose.

“How ugly he is!” was Miss Raynsworth’s first idea, and the adjective was in some sense justified, for the charm of the young man’s face doubtless lay in his pleasant eyes, at present lowered so as he read. But there is ugliness and ugliness, and in the face under Miss Raynsworth’s scrutiny, in spite of its somewhat rugged features, there was nothing in the very slightest degree repellent or hard. The mouth was excellent, the rest of the features in no way remarkable, and yet not commonplace or in any sense weak, and a good mouth means a great deal. On the whole the face was interesting, and the longer Philippa observed him the more inclined she felt to modify her first somewhat wholesale opinion.

“I wonder how old he is,” she said to herself; “he might be almost any age between twenty-four and thirty-four.”

Then as he turned a leaf of his magazine, she hastily glanced away for fear of detection. There was another motive, besides that of an ever ready interest in her fellow-creatures, strongly developed in the girl; the face before her reminded her of some other that she had seen lately, though when or where she could not for some time recall. She glanced up furtively, and at last it flashed upon her, so much to her satisfaction, that she could scarcely suppress an exclamation of triumph.

“I know whom he is like, and yet they are as different as possible; it is that Mr Gresham whom I saw at Dorriford, that very silent man. And yet he was *so* handsome, and this man is just the opposite. What curious things likenesses are!”

At this point in her reflections she must have got a little drowsy, for which Solomon’s gentle, monotonous breathing close to her ear may possibly to some extent have been accountable. Whether this was the case or not, she knew nothing more till she was roused by the slackening of the train, quickly followed by preparations on the part of the two elderly ladies for leaving the carriage, which they did with their various rugs and bags as soon as it drew up at a large important station, one of the two or three at which the express stopped on its northward route.

Solomon yawned and looked about him, then fixed his gaze inquiringly on his master as if to ask: “Do *we* get out here too?” But to this inarticulate question the young man vouchsafed no reply, and Solomon settled himself down again.

“Are you not getting tired of having him?” he said to Philippa, when he had courteously helped the old ladies and their belongings on to the platform.

“Oh, no, no, thank you, sir,” she replied, “not at all; but,” getting up from her seat, “I must go to see if my lady wants anything. She is in the next carriage.”

“You had better be quick,” said her fellow-traveller, warningly; “we are going on again almost immediately, and I fancy we are a little behind time.”

Philippa managed, however, to peep in next door where Evelyn was still alone, apparently very comfortable and rather sleepy.

“I am all right, thank you, quite right,” she volunteered, before her sister had time to make any inquiry. “I think I must have been asleep a little, but I don’t mind when there is nobody in the carriage.”

“The best thing you could have done,” said Philippa, approvingly. “I don’t think we stop again now till Great Malden, where we change, you know, for the local line,” and nodding cheerfully she turned away, but not till some last words from Evelyn reached her.

“It is nice to know you’re next door, Phil.”

The girl sprang up into her own compartment just as the train began to move. Her former fellow-traveller, who was near the door, caught her arm to help her in.

“You really should be more careful,” he said; “there is nothing so risky as waiting till the last moment.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Philippa, feeling guilty; “it was careless of me.”

She ensconced herself in her corner again, but with a sensation of annoyance, which even Solomon’s unmistakable satisfaction at her reappearance did not allay.

“How stupid I am,” she thought to herself, “always doing something or other to attract notice when I should be quite unobserved!” and her face, as she sat staring out of the window, had lost its former cheerful expression.

So, at least, it seemed to Solomon’s master, as in spite of himself he glanced at her more than once.

“There’s something uncommon about the girl,” he thought to himself, “hyper-sensitive, I should say, for her position – possibly she was born in a better one. I don’t see that there was anything to hurt her feelings in what I said just now.”

But he was essentially kind-hearted, and the worried look on the girl’s countenance, and the absent way in which she returned the little dog’s friendly demonstrations, made him feel sorry for her.

“Perhaps her mistress is down upon her, poor girl,” he thought; “some women must be terribly tyrannical to their servants.”

They travelled on in silence, however, for a considerable time. By degrees the aspect of the country through which they were passing changed for the better – a little exclamation of pleasure escaped Philippa involuntarily as a charming view burst upon them. It was that of a small lake, its shores beautifully wooded, with rising ground on the farther side.

“Oh, how pretty!” she said, quickly, though instantly checking herself as she remembered that she was not alone. Rather to her surprise her fellow-traveller responded to her exclamation.

“Yes,” he said, “the part of the country we are coming to now is worth looking at, if you’ve never been here before. It’s rather like the prettiest part of Nethershire.”

“Oh,” said Philippa, impulsively, interested at once; “isn’t Merle-in-the-Wold in Nethershire? I passed that way last week – it was charming.”

Again the change in her tone and way of speaking struck her companion curiously. There was a coincidence, too, in the name she had just mentioned.

“Yes,” he replied; “it is that part I was thinking of; I know it well.”

But already Philippa had had time to repent her impulsiveness, and a slight feeling of alarm added to her discomfort – alarm at her own indiscretion.

“I shall be telling where my own home is next,” she thought to herself; “I really am too foolish for words.”

It was too late, however, to do away with the impression her inconsistency had produced. The young man went on speaking.

“Have you seen the ruins of the old abbey at Merle-in-the-Wold?” he said.

“Oh, no, sir, I have never stayed there,” Philippa replied, but she felt that she was not playing her part as she should. For something in his manner, quiet as it was, convinced her that her companion’s curiosity was aroused.

“Oh, I thought that you knew that part of Nethershire?” he said, more for the sake of saying something to cause her to reply than from any definite motive in the inquiry.

“N-no,” said Philippa, “I have only passed that way. I never heard of the ruins.” – “How I wish I had a book!” she thought to herself; “though he is perfectly nice, he is evidently trying to make me out I am afraid to speak, and I am afraid not to speak. I wish to goodness he hadn’t had a dog with him, though you *are* such a darling,” this last with reference to Solomon, who, seeming to read her thoughts, poked his long nose affectionately right up into her face.

Something in her manner made the young man conscious that his speaking to her caused her annoyance, and he turned his attention again to his magazine, greatly to Philippa’s relief.

“I suppose it is really a very good thing,” she thought again, “that I have had this experiment. I had no idea I should be so utterly silly and without presence of mind; I really must drill myself!”

For the present, however, there was no further opportunity of doing so, her fellow-traveller leaving her and his dog to their own devices for the rest of the time that had to pass till they reached Great Malden. At this station the sisters were to leave the main line for a branch one, by which an hour’s much slower travelling would bring them to their journey’s end.

As they entered the large station, Philippa collected her few belongings preparatory to getting out and rejoining Mrs Headfort.

“Good-bye, poor doggie,” she said, softly, as she patted Solomon’s sleek head; and, short as their acquaintance had been, a curious feeling of sadness stole over her as she caught sight of the unmistakable regret in the dachs’ wistful eyes. His master read on till after Philippa had left the compartment, apparently unconscious of the farewell and of the girl’s departure.

Evelyn, by this time more or less in a fluster as to catching the other train without leaving her luggage behind her, or similar catastrophes, welcomed her sister joyfully.

“Really,” she said, when she found herself once more comfortably established for the third and last time with nothing missing or left behind, “really, Phil, what a splendid courier you are! I have got quite out of things with India, and leading such a stay-at-home life since I came back, and you never seem to lose your head in the least,” she concluded, admiringly.

“I have always been stronger than you, you know, Evey,” said Philippa, glancing affectionately at her sister, whose pretty face had just now the added charm of a soft flush of excitement. “And really,” she added, “there has been nothing whatever just now to lose one’s head about. To all appearance this little train might have been peacefully waiting for us all day, and, now we are here, it shows no signs of intending to move.” Then, with a sudden change of tone – “Oh, I declare,” she exclaimed, as at that moment a dog, catching sight of her as she stood at the door of Mrs Headfort’s carriage, rushed up and sprang at her with the liveliest delight.

It was Solomon.

“Down, down, good doggie, be quiet,” said Philippa, hastily, afraid of startling Evelyn. But that small piece of mischief was already accomplished. Mrs Headfort jumped up in alarm.

“Phil, Phil,” she cried, “do send him away! A strange dog dashing at you like that; he must be mad!”

“Nonsense,” said Philippa: “look at him; he’s a perfect dear – just like Valentine; as gentle as he can be. Don’t be so silly, Evey.”

But as she said the last words, looking round, to her horror, she caught sight of Solomon’s owner standing, as might have been expected under the circumstances, but a few paces off.

Could he have heard her! Philippa trembled at the thought.

“And I, who had imagined he was safely whizzing off northwards in the express!” she reflected.

Nerving herself she turned round so as to face him. His expression of countenance was entirely imperturbable; it told her nothing. Coolly whistling the dog off, he walked along the platform to the farther end of the train – whether to get into it, or to pass the time while waiting for some other, Philippa could not discover – Solomon obediently, though reluctantly, following him.

“The dog’s gone,” said Miss Raynsworth, turning to her sister with a touch of sharpness in her voice. “He was all right, I assure you. He knew me again, because he travelled in the same compartment with me from Crowminster.”

“Well, you might have said so,” said her sister, half ashamed of her fright. “I wish you’d get into your carriage, Philippa; we are sure to start immediately.”

“I’m going,” the girl replied. “But *isn’t* he like Valentine, Evey?”

She moved away, however, without waiting for a reply.

The rest of the journey passed without incident. She spent the time in taking herself to task for having again lapsed into her ordinary tone to Evelyn, too confident of not being overheard, and in mentally drilling herself for the future.

“It was all Solomon’s fault,” she said to herself, “both just now and in the other train. I do hope he and his master are safely off in a different direction. But even if they are in the train, there is no reason why they should be going on to Wyverston station. I shall look out every time we stop on the chance of seeing: them.”

She had plenty of opportunities for so doing. Never had a train gone on its way more deliberately, or come to a standstill more frequently. But on none of the small platforms alongside of which they drew up did Philippa perceive the pair of travellers for whom she was on the outlook. Her hopes began to rise.

“I really think,” she said to herself, “that they can’t have come by this train. I daresay I am silly, but the very idea of that man’s being in the neighbourhood makes me nervous. I am so certain he was curious about me.”

This satisfaction at her fellow-travellers’ disappearance proved, however, premature. A station or two before that of the sisters’ destination, lo and behold! on a deserted-looking roadside platform, there stood, having evidently just emerged from the train, the dachshund and his master!

Quick as thought, Philippa, who had been glancing out half carelessly, drew back, retiring to the farther end of her solitary compartment. It might have been fancy, but she felt certain that Solomon was looking out for her. There was an indescribable air of alertness about him, even his long nose was elevated, and one of his pendent ears unmistakably cocked. Philippa felt almost guilty.

“Poor darling,” she thought, “I hate disappointing him, but I dare not risk it. I devoutly hope the pair are not in the habit of country strolls anywhere near Wyverston, for we can’t be far from there now.”

But in what direction they bent their steps, or whether any conveyance was waiting for them, she had no means of discovering. Before the train slowly moved on again they must have left the station; no trace of them remained, not even a little heap of luggage awaiting deliberate removal by a country porter.

Chapter Six

“Miss Ray.”

In the interest of their near approach to their journey’s end, Philippa put her recent fellow-travellers out of her mind. The afternoon was drawing in as she stepped out on to the platform at Wyverston; a fresh, invigorating breeze met her, bringing with it what she could almost have fancied a faint scent of the sea.

“We are not very far from the coast, I know,” she thought to herself, “but I had no idea it was such hilly country. It must be very bleak in winter,” and the thought made her hasten to her sister to ensure her wrapping up before leaving the shelter of her comfortable compartment.

Mrs Headfort was looking out for her.

“Evey,” began Philippa hastily, but in an instant corrected herself. “You must let me undo the rugs, ma’am,” she said in the quiet tone of voice she had adopted to suit her new personality. “It is ever so much colder here than at home.”

“Naturally,” said Evelyn; “we have been coming north all the way. Yes, I suppose we had better get out my fur cloak.”

There was no time to do so in the carriage, however. But when all their belongings were safely collected on the platform, Philippa hastened to extricate the garment in question. She had laid the bundle of rugs on the top of a portmanteau, imagining it to be one of their own boxes; but as she strapped up the roll again, the letters “M.V.G.” on the surface beneath caught her eyes, and glancing round she noticed a gun-case on which was painted in white letters the name “M.V. Gresham.”

“How odd!” she thought; “whose things can these be? No other passenger has got out. And what a strange coincidence that I had said to myself that Solomon’s master somehow reminded me of Mr Gresham at Dorriford!”

“This luggage is not ours,” she went on aloud, to the attendant porter; “has it been put out by mistake?”

“It’s all right, miss,” said a young footman, whom she now observed for the first time; “it’s to go up in the cart along of your lady’s. Mr Gresham – I should say Mr Michael – always gets out at Linley and walks up across the moor.”

Philippa’s heart for a moment seemed to stand still. She saw it all in a flash. The young man, her fellow-traveller, some relation no doubt of his namesake at Dorriford, was evidently an *habitué* of Wyverston – an expected guest there like her sister Evelyn!

She bit her lips with vexation and dismay. “To think what a fool I have made of myself! Was there ever anything so unlucky?” and her inward feelings gave a stiffness to her manner scarcely judicious under the circumstances, as she turned to the civil-spoken young servant, hardly more than a boy in years.

“Will you see to those things then,” she said, as she turned with the cloak to wrap it round her sister, already shivering with the fresh air, which to Philippa’s stronger frame seemed pleasantly bracing.

“The maid’s far high-and-mightier than the lady,” thought the young fellow to himself, as Evelyn thanked him with her usual pretty graciousness as he arranged a fur carriage-rug round her when she was seated in the brougham. And this first impression was not improbably communicated to his fellow-servants at the Hall.

“Phil,” said Evelyn, eagerly, as they drove off, “I’ve quite made up my mind already that I don’t at all want Duke to succeed to Wyverston. It’s far too bleak and cold. It would kill me; I don’t know how I shall stand even my week here.”

Philippa could not help laughing.

“You really are too absurd, Evey,” she said, “in the way you jump at conclusions. I shouldn’t wonder if the bracing air were to do you a great deal of good, and the house is pretty sure to be warm and comfortable. But there, now, you are tempting me again to forget whom I am. You really mustn’t do it, Evelyn; it makes it so much harder to get into it again each time.”

“We can’t sit looking at each other without speaking, and when we are alone together it would be a perfect absurdity to keep up the farce. Why, you said yourself what a comfort it would be to have a good talk now and then,” remonstrated Mrs Headfort.

“We shall have to be very guarded about it,” said Philippa, gravely, “very guarded indeed. To tell you the truth, I do not think I realised how very difficult *I* should find it to act my part consistently.”

“Why, you have scarcely begun it yet,” said her sister. “You have had no opportunity of testing yourself.”

Philippa did not reply at once, then she said more lightly:

“All the more reason for beginning it now in good earnest. Don’t let us talk about anything personal just at present; I wish we were in an open carriage, this sort of country is so new to me, such a contrast with home. I like the feeling of the air, a mixture of moor and sea.”

“I think it’s awfully chilly and bleak-looking,” said Evelyn, with a little shiver. “But I always have a sort of cold feeling on arriving at a strange place. It may go off after a little.”

“It is only nervousness,” said Philippa, encouragingly.

“No, no,” said Evelyn, “it is worse than that. If you weren’t here, I should be most terribly homesick already. You don’t know what I suffered, Phil, after I was married, when we went out to India, even though Duke was always so kind. And now, since I came back, I have learnt to lean on *you* so! I am afraid I am rather contemptibly weak.”

“Poor little Evey,” said her sister, tenderly. “You mustn’t say that of yourself; I understand you perfectly. Physical strength has a great deal to do with moral strength, after all. But, oh, dear! we are falling back worse than ever! Now, I am not going to say another word till we get to the house.”

Evelyn was not attracted by the rather wild scenery through which they were passing. She leant back in her corner and shut her eyes, which her sister did not regret, as anything was better than going on talking as they had been doing. To her the look of the country was full of interest, and from its very novelty invigorating.

“I hope I shall sometimes be able to go a good walk by myself,” she thought. “If only I could make friends with some nice dog who would come with me – dogs generally like me – but, oh, dear! that reminds me of Solomon, he is *sure* to be there; how shall I be able to keep out of his way? Dogs are so acute. What ill-fate made me get into that unlucky compartment!”

Her reflections and misgivings, however, were brought to an end more quickly than she had expected. They had got over the four miles between the railway station and Wyverston Hall with greater rapidity than she had realised, and she almost started as they suddenly, or so it seemed to her, turned in at lodge gates, exchanging the hard high-road for the pleasant smoothness of a well-kept drive. It had grown much darker, too, for the avenue at Wyverston was bordered by massive trees of too sturdy growth to suffer much from the exposed situation. What manner of trees they were, just now it was impossible to tell – only the faint fragrance of the falling leaves, and their rustle under the wheels passing over them, told that autumn winds were already at work.

Sensitive to every natural influence, however trivial, Philippa peered out into the dusk with a curious sense of enjoyment.

“There is something ever so much more romantic about it than about my arrival at Dorriford,” she thought. “I really feel as if I were on the brink of something tremendously interesting. I wonder what? I daresay it’s all excitement! I have often had these presentiments before, without their leading to anything. Certainly the thought of tea in the servants’-hall, or possibly in the housekeeper’s room – let me devoutly hope it will be the latter – is enough to damp any attractive anticipations,” and suddenly there came over her a strong yearning to be where she was, in her own character – an instinctive

revolt from the position she had placed herself in, however praiseworthy the motive. And as she sat there in silence, these mingled sensations culminated in a vague fear, almost amounting to terror, of what might be before her, of the unknown risks to which she might be exposing herself by the extraordinary step she had taken – risks outside herself, in no way connected with the completeness or incompleteness with which she might carry out her part.

But want of courage was by no means a characteristic of the girl, and with the practical good sense which contrasted curiously with the dash of recklessness in her temperament, she now told herself that, after all, there was no real ground for these mental tremors.

“I am actually mistress of the situation,” she thought. “It *does* depend upon myself, and I am not afraid of breaking down once I am really started, for I have plenty of imagination. Rather too much, in some ways – if we had been arriving on a bright summer afternoon, with the sun shining and no feeling of mystery and gloom, I should have been quite in high spirits. After all, considering everything, I daresay it is safer for me to be rather depressed.”

Very grave she was, very grave, indeed, as she stood behind Mrs Headfort in the hall a moment or two later. She was intensely eager to judge of the nature of Evelyn’s reception by her new relatives, but for the present she had small opportunity for observing anything. No member of the family was visible – only an irreproachable, grey-haired butler was informing her sister that the ladies were in the drawing-room, ere he turned to show her the way thither, and Evelyn, as she followed him, glanced back for an instant with a half-piteous, half-humorous expression which made Philippa feel as if she must either laugh or cry – which, she could not have decided.

To neither inclination, of course, did she yield; she did not even speak, as, in her turn, she followed a younger man-servant who civilly offered to show her the way to the housekeeper’s room, a new question presenting itself to her mind at the words. What sort of person would the housekeeper turn out to be? A great deal might hang upon this – everything almost, in fact; and as the vision of some housekeepers she had seen, stout and self-satisfied, innately vulgar in their very civility and obsequiousness to their superiors, rose before her mind’s eye, again it came home to Miss Raynsworth that she had been far from realising what she was undertaking.

A door in the somewhat dimly-lighted passage was thrown open, and as the footman stood aside to let her pass in, a pleasant, gentle voice met her ears.

“Good-evening,” it said, quietly; “you must have had rather a cold journey. You have just arrived with Mrs Marmaduke Headfort, have you not? Take a seat by the fire,” and as Philippa murmured her thanks and glanced round her at the neat, comfortable little room, Mrs Shepton, for such was her name, went on with increasing kindness of tone, as she saw that the girl seemed young, and suspected that she was timid. – “It is long past tea-time, of course, but I have ordered a little for you. I thought you would be glad of it.”

“I shall be very glad of it, indeed,” said Philippa, looking up gratefully, and speaking in the slow, careful way she had determined to adopt, and in the housekeeper’s face she read nothing to modify the first instinct of confidence and satisfaction drawn forth by the tone of her voice.

Mrs Shepton was an elderly woman, with a pleasant though somewhat careworn face. She had “known trouble” in her time, and many details of her sad, though by no means uncommon little history were confided to Philippa’s sympathising ears before her stay at Wyverston came to an end. And with some natures sorrow elevates as well as softens; though not in any conventional sense superior to her class, the good housekeeper was one whom no true woman, of whatever position, need have hesitated to call a friend. And Philippa’s instincts were quick and keen.

“She is nice, and good, and kind,” she decided at once. “It will make the greatest possible difference to me to have to do with such a woman. I feel as if she were a superior sort of Dorcas.”

The sweet expression on the girl’s face went straight to Mrs Shepton’s heart.

“There’s nothing like a cup of tea to refresh one after travelling,” she said in her homely way – there were occasions on which the housekeeper could be correctly dignified and “stand-off” even to

the most superior of ladies' maids – but just now her one thought was to set this shy young creature at her ease. “You have come from Mrs Marmaduke's home, I suppose?” she went on, as she handed the tea to Philippa. “I don't remember rightly where it is, but it's at several hours' distance from here, I know.”

“It is in – shire, close to Marlby,” Philippa replied. “We left the house about eleven o'clock this morning.”

“Have you been long with your lady?” pursued Mrs Shepton. “You look so young. You couldn't have been out in India with her, surely?”

“Oh, no, I was scarcely grown-up then. I have only just entered Mrs Headfort's service, but,” she added, after an instant's consideration, “she has known me a long time.”

Mrs Shepton nodded, approvingly.

“Been in the young lady's Sunday-school class, I daresay,” she thought to herself, and aloud she added, though without any suggestion of inquisitiveness, “That is very nice; your mother must be pleased for you not to be with strangers, that is to say if – ” for the seriousness of the girl's face, and her absolutely black attire, hinted at the possibility of her having recently lost some near relation.

Philippa understood the hesitation and answered at once, speaking more quickly and brightly than hitherto.

“Oh, yes, I have a mother, and father too!”

“I am glad to hear it,” rejoined Mrs Shepton, “but, by-the-by, my dear,” – the expression denoting that the new-comer had made a marvellously rapid stride in her good graces – “you've not yet told me your name!”

For the first time, strange to say, it struck Philippa that this – her surname, that is to say – was as yet an unknown quantity. She was fortunately not one of those people who change colour on small provocation.

“Mrs Headfort calls me Phillis,” she said, slowly.

The housekeeper looked rather surprised.

“Phillis,” she repeated; “that is a first name. I suppose it's with her having known you so long; but it was your surname I meant. It wouldn't do for the servants here to call you by your first name. Of course in a big house like this we have to be very particular.”

“Of course,” said Philippa, rather coldly. Then recollecting herself – “My last name,” she said, “is ‘Ray’ – ‘Phillis Ray,’” and she smiled slightly in spite of herself.

“Then ‘Miss Ray’ you must be to every one here but myself,” said Mrs Shepton. “There are not so many visitors among us just now as sometimes. There's only Mrs Worthing's maid – a very experienced person, much older than you; and Mr Gresham's valet, Mr Furze, a quiet young man, and of course he's so often here with his master that he's scarcely like a stranger. But when we are by ourselves as just now, my dear, I should like to call you Phillis; I had a sister once of that name – long ago.”

“Yes, please do,” said Philippa, heartily. – “Mr Gresham, did you say,” she continued. “Is that a gentleman with a dog? I saw the name on some luggage at the station, which must have belonged to him. They travelled part of the way in our train – in the carriage I was in – second-class, but I didn't see any valet.”

There was a touch of curiosity in her tone, which rather surprised and possibly disappointed the housekeeper.

“The Mr Gresham I alluded to,” she said, somewhat stiffly, “has been staying here some time. The young gentleman who came down to-day is Mr Michael, his cousin. You must excuse me, my dear, if I remind you not to speak of your lady as Mrs Headfort, but as Mrs Marmaduke,” she went on. “She is, of course, Mrs Headfort next to my lady, but still – ”

“Certainly,” interrupted Philippa, heartily, “I will be careful about it. Thank you for reminding me, Mrs Shepton. And indeed,” she continued, “I should be very much obliged to you if you will tell

me – me myself – of anything you think I require advice about. I am not very experienced, as you can see;” and in her own mind she thought, “this is an excellent precaution to take. It will prevent any gossip about me which might not otherwise come to my ears. For I am sure this good woman is thoroughly to be trusted. And if the Mr Gresham here really proves to be the one I met at Dorriford, I must be doubly on the alert. It is really too strange a coincidence.”

Philippa’s last words quite gained Mrs Shepton’s heart, and made her slight sensation of disapproval of the young girl’s apparent lapse into gossip concerning any of the visitors at Wyverston disappear. Her eyes had the kindest light in them as she replied:

“It will please me very much indeed, my dear, if you will look upon me while you’re here as if I were in a mother’s place to you; and now, I daresay, I had better take you to your room – the sooner you take your things off the better, as the dressing-gong will be sounding soon. Take care,” as Philippa wavered a little on first getting up; “are you so very short-sighted?”

“Oh, no,” said Philippa, “I wear spectacles as a precaution;” the truth being that her unaccustomedness to the glasses, and the reflection of the firelight upon them, had dazzled her a little.

“Oh,” said Mrs Shepton, tranquilly. “It is best to err on the safe side if your eyes are at all weakly. But I should have been sorry if you had really feeble sight, it stands so much in a maid’s way.”

So saying, she opened the door of the room and led the way along the passage to a staircase at the farther end.

Chapter Seven

A Successful Début

In all large country-houses of a certain importance, there is more or less resemblance in the internal aspect of things. And this Philippa felt conscious of as she followed Mrs Shepton up-stairs – across landings, down passages, and up-stairs again.

“I could fancy myself back at Dorriford,” she said to herself, with mingled sensations. “It is barely a week since I left it. What *would*

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