

Where Angels Fear to Tread

by E. M. Forster

Chapter 1

They were all at Charing Cross to see Lilia off--Philip, Harriet, Irma, Mrs. Herriton herself. Even Mrs. Theobald, squired by Mr. Kingcroft, had braved the journey from Yorkshire to bid her only daughter good-bye. Miss Abbott was likewise attended by numerous relatives, and the sight of so many people talking at once and saying such different things caused Lilia to break into ungovernable peals of laughter.

"Quite an ovation," she cried, sprawling out of her first-class carriage. "They'll take us for royalty. Oh, Mr. Kingcroft, get us foot-warmers."

The good-natured young man hurried away, and Philip, taking his place, flooded her with a final stream of advice

and injunctions--where to stop, how to learn Italian, when to use mosquito-nets, what pictures to look at. "Remember," he concluded, "that it is only by going off the track that you get to know the country. See the little towns--Gubbio, Pienza, Cortona, San Gemignano, Monteriano. And don't, let me beg you, go with that awful tourist idea that Italy's only a museum of antiquities and art. Love and understand the Italians, for the people are more marvellous than the land."

"How I wish you were coming, Philip," she said, flattered at the unwonted notice her brother-in-law was giving her.

"I wish I were." He could have managed it without great difficulty, for his career at the Bar was not so intense as to prevent occasional holidays. But his family disliked his continual visits to the Continent, and he himself often found pleasure in the idea that he was too busy to leave

town.

"Good-bye, dear every one. What a whirl!" She caught sight of her little daughter Irma, and felt that a touch of maternal solemnity was required. "Good-bye, darling. Mind you're always good, and do what Granny tells you."

She referred not to her own mother, but to her mother-in-law, Mrs. Herriton, who hated the title of Granny.

Irma lifted a serious face to be kissed, and said cautiously, "I'll do my best."

"She is sure to be good," said Mrs. Herriton, who was standing pensively a little out of the hubbub. But Lilia was already calling to Miss Abbott, a tall, grave, rather nice-looking young lady who was conducting her adieus in a more decorous manner on the platform.

"Caroline, my Caroline! Jump in, or your chaperon will go off without you."

And Philip, whom the idea of Italy always intoxicated, had started again, telling her of the supreme moments of her coming journey--the Campanile of Airolo, which would burst on her when she emerged from the St. Gothard tunnel, presaging the future; the view of the Ticino and Lago Maggiore as the train climbed the slopes of Monte Cenere; the view of Lugano, the view of Como--Italy gathering thick around her now--the arrival at her first resting-place, when, after long driving through dark and dirty streets, she should at last behold, amid the roar of trams and the glare of arc lamps, the buttresses of the cathedral of Milan.

"Handkerchiefs and collars," screamed Harriet, "in my inlaid box! I've lent you my inlaid box."

"Good old Harry!" She kissed every one again, and there was a moment's silence. They all smiled steadily, excepting Philip, who was choking in the fog, and old Mrs. Theobald, who had begun to cry. Miss Abbott got into the carriage. The guard himself shut the door, and told Lilia that she would be all right. Then the train moved, and they all moved with it a couple of steps, and waved their handkerchiefs, and uttered cheerful little cries. At that moment Mr. Kingcroft reappeared, carrying a footwarmer by both ends, as if it was a tea-tray. He was sorry that he was too late, and called out in a quivering voice, "Good-bye, Mrs. Charles. May you enjoy yourself, and may God bless you."

Lilia smiled and nodded, and then the absurd position of the foot-warmer overcame her, and she began to laugh again.

"Oh, I am so sorry," she cried back, "but you do look so

funny. Oh, you all look so funny waving! Oh, pray!" And laughing helplessly, she was carried out into the fog.

"High spirits to begin so long a journey," said Mrs. Theobald, dabbing her eyes.

Mr. Kingcroft solemnly moved his head in token of agreement. "I wish," said he, "that Mrs. Charles had gotten the footwarmer. These London porters won't take heed to a country chap."

"But you did your best," said Mrs. Herriton. "And I think it simply noble of you to have brought Mrs. Theobald all the way here on such a day as this." Then, rather hastily, she shook hands, and left him to take Mrs. Theobald all the way back.

Sawston, her own home, was within easy reach of London, and they were not late for tea. Tea was in the

dining-room, with an egg for Irma, to keep up the child's spirits. The house seemed strangely quiet after a fortnight's bustle, and their conversation was spasmodic and subdued. They wondered whether the travellers had got to Folkestone, whether it would be at all rough, and if so what would happen to poor Miss Abbott.

"And, Granny, when will the old ship get to Italy?" asked Irma.

"'Grandmother,' dear; not 'Granny,'" said Mrs. Herriton, giving her a kiss. "And we say 'a boat' or 'a steamer,' not 'a ship.' Ships have sails. And mother won't go all the way by sea. You look at the map of Europe, and you'll see why. Harriet, take her. Go with Aunt Harriet, and she'll show you the map."

"Righto!" said the little girl, and dragged the reluctant Harriet into the library. Mrs. Herriton and her son were

left alone. There was immediately confidence between them.

"Here beginneth the New Life," said Philip.

"Poor child, how vulgar!" murmured Mrs. Herriton. "It's surprising that she isn't worse. But she has got a look of poor Charles about her."

"And--alas, alas!--a look of old Mrs. Theobald. What appalling apparition was that! I did think the lady was bedridden as well as imbecile. Why ever did she come?"

"Mr. Kingcroft made her. I am certain of it. He wanted to see Lilia again, and this was the only way."

"I hope he is satisfied. I did not think my sister-in-law distinguished herself in her farewells."

Mrs. Herriton shuddered. "I mind nothing, so long as

she has gone--and gone with Miss Abbott. It is mortifying to think that a widow of thirty-three requires a girl ten years younger to look after her."

"I pity Miss Abbott. Fortunately one admirer is chained to England. Mr. Kingcroft cannot leave the crops or the climate or something. I don't think, either, he improved his chances today. He, as well as Lilia, has the knack of being absurd in public."

Mrs. Herriton replied, "When a man is neither well bred, nor well connected, nor handsome, nor clever, nor rich, even Lilia may discard him in time."

"No. I believe she would take any one. Right up to the last, when her boxes were packed, she was 'playing' the chinless curate. Both the curates are chinless, but hers had the dampest hands. I came on them in the Park. They were speaking of the Pentateuch."

"My dear boy! If possible, she has got worse and worse. It was your idea of Italian travel that saved us!"

Philip brightened at the little compliment. "The odd part is that she was quite eager--always asking me for information; and of course I was very glad to give it. I admit she is a Philistine, appallingly ignorant, and her taste in art is false. Still, to have any taste at all is something. And I do believe that Italy really purifies and ennobles all who visit her. She is the school as well as the playground of the world. It is really to Lilia's credit that she wants to go there."

"She would go anywhere," said his mother, who had heard enough of the praises of Italy. "I and Caroline Abbott had the greatest difficulty in dissuading her from the Riviera."

"No, Mother; no. She was really keen on Italy. This

travel is quite a crisis for her." He found the situation full of whimsical romance: there was something half attractive, half repellent in the thought of this vulgar woman journeying to places he loved and revered. Why should she not be transfigured? The same had happened to the Goths.

Mrs. Herriton did not believe in romance nor in transfiguration, nor in parallels from history, nor in anything else that may disturb domestic life. She adroitly changed the subject before Philip got excited. Soon Harriet returned, having given her lesson in geography. Irma went to bed early, and was tucked up by her grandmother. Then the two ladies worked and played cards. Philip read a book. And so they all settled down to their quiet, profitable existence, and continued it without interruption through the winter.

It was now nearly ten years since Charles had fallen in

love with Lilia Theobald because she was pretty, and during that time Mrs. Herriton had hardly known a moment's rest. For six months she schemed to prevent the match, and when it had taken place she turned to another task--the supervision of her daughter-in-law. Lilia must be pushed through life without bringing discredit on the family into which she had married. She was aided by Charles, by her daughter Harriet, and, as soon as he was old enough, by the clever one of the family, Philip. The birth of Irma made things still more difficult. But fortunately old Mrs. Theobald, who had attempted interference, began to break up. It was an effort to her to leave Whitby, and Mrs. Herriton discouraged the effort as far as possible. That curious duel which is fought over every baby was fought and decided early. Irma belonged to her father's family, not to her mother's.

Charles died, and the struggle recommenced. Lilia tried to assert herself, and said that she should go to take care of

Mrs. Theobald. It required all Mrs. Herriton's kindness to prevent her. A house was finally taken for her at Sawston, and there for three years she lived with Irma, continually subject to the refining influences of her late husband's family.

During one of her rare Yorkshire visits trouble began again. Lilia confided to a friend that she liked a Mr. Kingcroft extremely, but that she was not exactly engaged to him. The news came round to Mrs. Herriton, who at once wrote, begging for information, and pointing out that Lilia must either be engaged or not, since no intermediate state existed. It was a good letter, and flurried Lilia extremely. She left Mr. Kingcroft without even the pressure of a rescue-party. She cried a great deal on her return to Sawston, and said she was very sorry. Mrs. Herriton took the opportunity of speaking more seriously about the duties of widowhood and motherhood than she had ever done before. But somehow things never went

easily after. Lilia would not settle down in her place among Sawston matrons. She was a bad housekeeper, always in the throes of some domestic crisis, which Mrs. Herriton, who kept her servants for years, had to step across and adjust. She let Irma stop away from school for insufficient reasons, and she allowed her to wear rings. She learnt to bicycle, for the purpose of waking the place up, and coasted down the High Street one Sunday evening, falling off at the turn by the church. If she had not been a relative, it would have been entertaining. But even Philip, who in theory loved outraging English conventions, rose to the occasion, and gave her a talking which she remebered to her dying day. It was just then, too, that they discovered that she still allowed Mr. Kingcroft to write to her "as a gentleman friend," and to send presents to Irma.

Philip thought of Italy, and the situation was saved. Caroline, charming, sober, Caroline Abbott, who

lived two turnings away, was seeking a companion for a year's travel. Lilia gave up her house, sold half her furniture, left the other half and Irma with Mrs. Herriton, and had now departed, amid universal approval, for a change of scene.

She wrote to them frequently during the winter--more frequently than she wrote to her mother. Her letters were always prosperous. Florence she found perfectly sweet, Naples a dream, but very whiffy. In Rome one had simply to sit still and feel. Philip, however, declared that she was improving. He was particularly gratified when in the early spring she began to visit the smaller towns that he had recommended. "In a place like this," she wrote, "one really does feel in the heart of things, and off the beaten track. Looking out of a Gothic window every morning, it seems impossible that the middle ages have passed away." The letter was from Monteriano, and concluded with a not unsuccessful description of the wonderful little

town.

"It is something that she is contented," said Mrs. Herriton. "But no one could live three months with Caroline Abbott and not be the better for it."

Just then Irma came in from school, and she read her mother's letter to her, carefully correcting any grammatical errors, for she was a loyal supporter of parental authority--Irma listened politely, but soon changed the subject to hockey, in which her whole being was absorbed. They were to vote for colours that afternoon--yellow and white or yellow and green. What did her grandmother think?

Of course Mrs. Herriton had an opinion, which she sedately expounded, in spite of Harriet, who said that colours were unnecessary for children, and of Philip, who said that they were ugly. She was getting proud of Irma,