

Where Angels Fear to Tread



E. M. Forster

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Chapter 1

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 footwarmer 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 remembered 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, who had certainly greatly improved, and could no longer be called that most appalling of things—a vulgar child. She was anxious to form her before her mother returned. So she had no objection to the leisurely movements of the travellers, and even suggested that they should overstay their year if it suited them.

Lilia's next letter was also from Monteriano, and Philip grew quite enthusiastic.

"They've stopped there over a week!" he cried. "Why! I shouldn't have done as much myself. They must be really keen, for the hotel's none too

comfortable."

"I cannot understand people," said Harriet. "What can they be doing all day? And there is no church there, I suppose."

"There is Santa Deodata, one of the most beautiful churches in Italy."

"Of course I mean an English church," said Harriet stiffly. "Lilia promised me that she would always be in a large town on Sundays."

"If she goes to a service at Santa Deodata's, she will find more beauty and sincerity than there is in all the Back Kitchens of Europe."

The Back Kitchen was his nickname for St. James's, a small depressing edifice much patronized by his sister. She always resented any slight on it, and Mrs. Herriton had to intervene.

"Now, dears, don't. Listen to Lilia's letter. 'We love this place, and I do not know how I shall ever thank Philip for telling me it. It is not only so quaint, but one sees the Italians unspoiled in all their simplicity and charm here. The frescoes are wonderful. Caroline, who grows sweeter every day, is very busy sketching.' "

"Every one to his taste!" said Harriet, who always delivered a platitude as if it was an epigram. She was curiously virulent about Italy, which she had never visited, her only experience of the Continent being an occasional six weeks in the Protestant parts of Switzerland.

"Oh, Harriet is a bad lot!" said Philip as soon as she left the room. His mother laughed, and told him not to be naughty; and the appearance of Irma, just off to school, prevented further discussion. Not only in Tracts is a child a peacemaker.

"One moment, Irma," said her uncle. "I'm going to the station. I'll give you the pleasure of my company."

They started together. Irma was gratified; but conversation flagged, for Philip had not the art of talking to the young. Mrs. Herriton sat a little longer at the breakfast table, re-reading Lilia's letter. Then she helped the cook to clear, ordered dinner, and started the housemaid turning out the drawing-room, Tuesday being its day. The weather was lovely, and she thought she would do a little gardening, as it was quite early. She called Harriet, who had recovered from the insult to St. James's, and together they went to the kitchen garden and began to sow some early vegetables.

"We will save the peas to the last; they are the greatest fun," said Mrs. Herriton, who had the gift of making work a treat. She and her elderly daughter always got on very well, though they had not a great deal in common. Harriet's education had been almost too successful. As Philip once said, she had "bolted all the cardinal virtues and couldn't digest them." Though pious and patriotic, and a great moral asset for the house, she lacked that pliancy and tact which her mother so much valued, and had expected her to pick up for herself. Harriet, if she had been allowed, would have driven Lilia to an open rupture, and, what was

worse, she would have done the same to Philip two years before, when he returned full of passion for Italy, and ridiculing Sawston and its ways.

"It's a shame, Mother!" she had cried. "Philip laughs at everything—the Book Club, the Debating Society, the Progressive Whist, the bazaars. People won't like it. We have our reputation. A house divided against itself cannot stand."

Mrs. Herriton replied in the memorable words, "Let Philip say what he likes, and he will let us do what we like." And Harriet had acquiesced.

They sowed the duller vegetables first, and a pleasant feeling of righteous fatigue stole over them as they addressed themselves to the peas. Harriet stretched a string to guide the row straight, and Mrs. Herriton scratched a furrow with a pointed stick. At the end of it she looked at her watch.

"It's twelve! The second post's in. Run and see if there are any letters."

Harriet did not want to go. "Let's finish the peas. There won't be any letters."

"No, dear; please go. I'll sow the peas, but you shall cover them up—and mind the birds don't see 'em!"

Mrs. Herriton was very careful to let those peas trickle evenly from her hand, and at the end of the row she was conscious that she had never sown better. They were expensive too.

"Actually old Mrs. Theobald!" said Harriet, returning.

"Read me the letter. My hands are dirty. How intolerable the crested paper is."

Harriet opened the envelope.

"I don't understand," she said; "it doesn't make sense."

"Her letters never did."

"But it must be sillier than usual," said Harriet, and her voice began to quaver. "Look here, read it, Mother; I can't make head or tail."

Mrs. Herriton took the letter indulgently. "What is the difficulty?" she said after a long pause. "What is it that puzzles you in this letter?"

"The meaning—" faltered Harriet. The sparrows hopped nearer and began to eye the peas.

"The meaning is quite clear—Lilia is engaged to be married. Don't cry, dear; please me by not crying—don't talk at all. It's more than I could bear. She is going to marry some one she has met in a hotel. Take the letter and read for yourself." Suddenly she broke down over what might seem a small point. "How dare she not tell me direct! How dare she write first to Yorkshire! Pray, am I to hear through Mrs. Theobald—a patronizing, insolent letter like this? Have I no claim at all? Bear witness, dear"—she choked with passion—"bear witness that for this I'll never forgive her!"

"Oh, what is to be done?" moaned Harriet. "What is to be done?"

"This first!" She tore the letter into little pieces and scattered it over the mould. "Next, a telegram for Lilia! No! a telegram for Miss Caroline

Abbott. She, too, has something to explain."

"Oh, what is to be done?" repeated Harriet, as she followed her mother to the house. She was helpless before such effrontery. What awful thing—what awful person had come to Lilia? "Some one in the hotel." The letter only said that. What kind of person? A gentleman? An Englishman? The letter did not say.

"Wire reason of stay at Monteriano. Strange rumours," read Mrs. Herriton, and addressed the telegram to Abbott, Stella d'Italia, Monteriano, Italy. "If there is an office there," she added, "we might get an answer this evening. Since Philip is back at seven, and the eight-fifteen catches the midnight boat at Dover—Harriet, when you go with this, get 100 pounds in 5 pound notes at the bank."

Go, dear, at once; do not talk. I see Irma coming back; go quickly... . Well, Irma dear, and whose team are you in this afternoon—Miss Edith's or Miss May's?"

But as soon as she had behaved as usual to her grand-daughter, she went to the library and took out the large atlas, for she wanted to know about Monteriano. The name was in the smallest print, in the midst of a woolly-brown tangle of hills which were called the "Sub-Apennines." It was not so very far from Siena, which she had learnt at school. Past it there wandered a thin black line, notched at intervals like a saw, and she knew that this was a railway. But the map left a good deal to imagination, and she had not got any. She looked up the place in "Childe Harold," but Byron had not been there. Nor did Mark Twain visit it in the "Tramp Abroad." The resources of literature were exhausted: she must wait till Philip came home. And the thought of Philip made her try Philip's room, and there she found "Central Italy," by Baedeker, and opened it for the first time in her life and read in it as follows:—

MONTERIANO (pop. 4800). Hotels: Stella d'Italia, moderate only; Globo, dirty. * Caffè Garibaldi. Post and Telegraph office in Corso Vittorio Emanuele, next to theatre. Photographs at Seghena's (cheaper in Florence). Diligence (1 lira) meets principal trains.

Chief attractions (2-3 hours): Santa Deodata, Palazzo Pubblico, Sant' Agostino, Santa Caterina, Sant' Ambrogio, Palazzo Capocchi. Guide (2 lire) unnecessary. A walk round the Walls should on no account be omitted. The view from the Rocca (small gratuity) is finest at sunset.

History: Monteriano, the Mons Rianus of Antiquity, whose Ghibelline tendencies are noted by Dante (Purg. xx.), definitely emancipated itself from Poggibonsi in '261. Hence the distich, "POGGIBONIZZÌ, FAUÌ IN LA, CHE MONTERIANO SÌ FA CITTÀ!" till recently enscribed over the Siena gate. It remained independent till 1530, when it was sacked by the Papal troops and became part of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. It is now of small importance, and seat of the district prison. The inhabitants are still noted for their agreeable manners.

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