

# Excerpts from *Where Angels Fear to Tread*

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## Excerpt 1

*Lilia Herriton, a young widow from the very proper provincial town of Sawston, travels to Italy with her friend, the sensible **Caroline Abbott**, a District Visitor. They visit Monteriano, which is clearly Forster's name for San Gimignano, a hill-town between Florence and Rome. There she meets the handsome and charming **Gino Carella**, falls in love, and marries him. But she does not adapt well to Italian expectations of wife and mother. She tries to leave shortly before her baby is born, but stumbles on a steep slope, and dies in childbirth. Now Lilia's brother-in-law, **Philip Herriton**, a more seasoned traveler, has been sent out to Italy by his mother to negotiate the adoption of Lilia's baby. Caroline Abbott travels to Monteriano separately on her own mission, and encounters Philip there. In this excerpt, she is answering Philip's interrogation as to how, as chaperone, she could have allowed Lilia's marriage with Gino.*

"The first evening we got to Monteriano," she persisted, "Lilia went out for a walk alone, saw that Italian in a picturesque position on a wall, and fell in love. He was shabbily dressed, and she did not even know he was the son of a dentist. I must tell you I was used to this sort of thing. Once or twice before I had had to send people about their business."

"Yes; we counted on you," said Philip, with sudden sharpness. After all, if she would reveal her thoughts, she must take the consequences.

"I know you did," she retorted with equal sharpness. "Lilia saw him several times again, and I knew I ought to interfere. I called her to my bedroom one night. She was very frightened, for she knew what it was about and how severe I could be. 'Do you love this man?' I asked. 'Yes or no?' She said 'Yes.' And I said, 'Why don't you marry him if you think you'll be happy?'"

"Really—really," exploded Philip, as exasperated as if the thing had happened yesterday. "You knew Lilia all your life. Apart from everything else—as if she could choose what could make her happy!"

"Had you ever let her choose?" she flashed out. "I'm afraid that's rude," she added, trying to calm herself.

"Let us rather say unhappily expressed," said Philip, who always adopted a dry satirical manner when he was puzzled.

"I want to finish. Next morning I found Signor Carella and said the same to him. He—well, he was willing. That's all."

## Excerpt 2

*Later on, Caroline is once more alone with Philip, who has learned that she has already had a meeting with Gino. As he himself intends to see the Italian the next day, he asks her about it.*

“Might I ask for details of your interview with him? They might be helpful to me.”

He had spoken at random. To his delight she suddenly collapsed. Her hand fell from the window. Her face was red with more than the reflection of evening.

“My interview—how do you know of it?”

“From Perfetta, if it interests you.”

“Who ever is Perfetta?”

“The woman who must have let you in.”

“In where?”

“Into Signor Carella’s house.”

“Mr. Herriton!” she exclaimed. “How could you believe her? Do you suppose that I would have entered that man’s house, knowing about him all that I do? I think you have very odd ideas of what is possible for a lady. I hear you wanted Harriet to go. Very properly she refused. Eighteen months ago I might have done such a thing. But I trust I have learnt how to behave by now.”

Philip began to see that there were two Miss Abbotts—the Miss Abbott who could travel alone to Monteriano, and the Miss Abbott who could not enter Gino’s house when she got there. It was an amusing discovery. Which of them would respond to his next move?

“I suppose I misunderstood Perfetta. Where did you have your interview, then?”

“Not an interview—an accident—I am very sorry—I meant you to have the chance of seeing him first. Though it is your fault. You are a day late. You were due here yesterday. So I came yesterday, and, not finding you, went up to the Rocca—you know that kitchen-garden where they let you in, and there is a ladder up to a broken tower, where you can stand and see all the other towers below you and the plain and all the other hills?”

“Yes, yes. I know the Rocca; I told you of it.”

“So I went up in the evening for the sunset: I had nothing to do. He was in the garden: it belongs to a friend of his.”

“And you talked.”

“It was very awkward for me. But I had to talk: he seemed to make me. You see he thought I was here as a tourist; he thinks so still. He intended to be civil, and I judged it better to be civil also.”

“And of what did you talk?”

“The weather—there will be rain, he says, by tomorrow evening—the other towns, England, myself, about you a little, and he actually mentioned Lilia. He was perfectly disgusting; he pretended he loved her; he offered to show me her grave—the grave of the woman he has murdered!”

“My dear Miss Abbott, he is not a murderer. I have just been driving that into Harriet. And when you know the Italians as well as I do, you will realize that in all that he said to you he was perfectly sincere. The Italians are essentially dramatic; they look on death and love as spectacles. I don’t doubt that he persuaded himself, for the moment, that he had behaved admirably, both as husband and widower.”

“You may be right,” said Miss Abbott, impressed for the first time. “When I tried to pave the way, so to speak—to hint that he had not behaved as he ought—well, it was no good at all. He couldn’t or wouldn’t understand.”

There was something very humorous in the idea of Miss Abbott approaching Gino, on the Rocca, in the spirit of a district visitor. Philip, whose temper was returning, laughed.

## Excerpt 3

*Philip has been accompanied on this visit by his sister **Harriet Herriton**, who is not a seasoned traveler at all, and has all the suspicious xenophobia of provincial upper-middle-class English people of the time.*

And on the second day the heat struck them, like a hand laid over the mouth, just as they were walking to see the tomb of Juliet. From that moment everything went wrong. They fled from Verona. Harriet’s sketch-book was stolen, and the bottle of ammonia in her trunk burst over her prayer-book, so that purple patches appeared on all her clothes. Then, as she was going through Mantua at four in the morning, Philip made her look out of the window because it was Virgil’s birthplace, and a smut flew in her eye, and Harriet with a smut in her eye was notorious. At Bologna they stopped twenty-four hours to rest. It was a *fiesta*, and children blew bladder whistles night and day. “What a religion!” said Harriet. The hotel smelt, two puppies were asleep on her bed, and her bedroom window looked into a belfry, which saluted her slumbering form every quarter of an hour. Philip left his walking-stick, his socks, and the Baedeker at Bologna; she only left her sponge-bag. Next day they crossed the Apennines with a train-sick child and a hot lady, who told them that never, never before had she sweated so profusely. “Foreigners are a filthy nation,” said Harriet. “I don’t care if there are tunnels; open the windows.” He obeyed, and she got another smut in her eye. Nor did Florence improve matters. Eating, walking, even a cross word would bathe them both in boiling water. Philip, who was slighter of build, and less conscientious, suffered less. But Harriet had never been to Florence, and between the hours of eight and eleven she crawled like a wounded creature through the streets, and swooned before various masterpieces of art. It was an irritable couple who took tickets to Monteriano.