

Chapter 23

Chapter 23 marks a dramatic shift in the atmosphere at the Cornwall Hotel, following the cancellation of the much-anticipated wedding. The absence of both the bride and groom casts a shadow over the event, leaving guests feeling uneasy as they attempt to enjoy the hotel's spa amenities. The once vibrant setting is now quiet and subdued, with the lingering tension among the guests palpable. Pauline, who had once been full of energy, now moves through her duties with a heavy heart. She manages refund requests and addresses concerns about allergies, her tone reflecting her own sadness over the abrupt turn of events. Meanwhile, Phoebe stands in line with Nat and Suz, overhearing their hushed conversation about the wedding's sudden end. They speculate on Lila's true feelings toward her fiancé, offering hints that their suspicions about the couple's relationship had been present all along.

As Phoebe listens, she learns that Nat and Suz are set to leave that evening. Although she wishes to extend her stay at the hotel, she is told that there are no rooms available due to another wedding taking place. Pauline delivers the news with a firm finality, leaving Phoebe both frustrated and oddly proud of her decisiveness. Though initially taken aback, Phoebe ultimately accepts the situation, deciding to spend one last night at the hotel before checking out at eleven the following morning. The realization that the wedding had been replaced by another celebration leaves Phoebe reflecting on how quickly life can change. Despite the disappointment of the canceled wedding, Phoebe's thoughts remain fixed on her lingering attachment to the hotel, the sense of tranquility it provides, and her desire to remain in this world for just a little longer.

On the hotel's balcony, Phoebe finds herself thinking about Gary, wondering where he might have gone after the cancellation. She imagines he might seek solitude after everything that's transpired, contrasting his likely preference for quiet reflection with

her own need to escape into the comfort of her bed. As she watches hotel staff dismantling the remnants of the wedding celebrations, Phoebe envisions a white ribbon spiraling down into the darkness, symbolic of the fading dreams associated with the event. With a desire to check in on Gary, Phoebe knocks on his door but receives no response. Shortly after, Marla appears, unaware of Gary's whereabouts, and speculates that he may have left the hotel entirely. The uncertainty about Gary's whereabouts adds to the melancholy of the situation, further emphasizing the emotional toll the wedding's collapse has taken on everyone involved.

Later, in her own room, Phoebe reflects on the luxury of her surroundings, feeling a deep sense of nostalgia for the hotel that has become a temporary home. She wishes she could carry the essence of this space with her, capturing the comfort and calm it provides. With her departure looming, Phoebe contemplates how to mark this transition. She revisits her wedding speech, blending literary analysis with personal reflections on the nature of Victorian marriages. In the midst of this emotional contemplation, an email from Geoffrey offers Phoebe an exciting opportunity—a potential job that evokes the thrill of her childhood dreams. The offer presents a choice between continuing her connection with Gary or diving deeper into her passion for writing. Torn between the two paths, Phoebe ultimately decides to focus on her writing, choosing to explore *Jane Eyre* and analyze the pivotal moments leading to Jane's failed wedding. Energized by this decision, she writes through the night, finding solace in the creative process as she contemplates the impact of her narrative choices.

Phoebe's night of writing becomes a moment of personal liberation, where the weight of the world is momentarily lifted by the act of creation. She revels in the freedom of expressing herself on the page, feeling a sense of fulfillment that had eluded her in the past. This renewed sense of purpose offers Phoebe the clarity she needs to navigate the uncertainties ahead, allowing her to forge her own path forward. As she continues to immerse herself in the analysis of *Jane Eyre*, Phoebe feels a deeper connection to the themes of love, loss, and self-discovery that resonate within the novel. This moment of reflection, set against the backdrop of her current situation, marks a turning point in her journey—one that intertwines her personal growth with her

intellectual pursuits, ultimately leading her toward a future shaped by her own choices.