

Chapter 23

Chapter 23 opens with a subdued atmosphere at the Cornwall hotel following the abrupt cancellation of a wedding. The usual celebratory mood has vanished, replaced by an awkward silence and a sense of discomfort among the guests and staff alike. Pauline, the hotel employee, reflects this shift with a more solemn demeanor as she handles inquiries and logistical issues, such as the non-refund of spa fees and the reopening of amenities. Meanwhile, Phoebe observes her friends Nat and Suz quietly processing the news, revealing their insights into the bride's true feelings and their own reflections on love and marriage.

As the chapter progresses, Phoebe wrestles with her desire to remain at the hotel despite the changing circumstances. She requests an extension of her stay but is denied due to another wedding booking, which leaves her feeling unsettled and reluctant to leave the place that has become a temporary refuge. This moment highlights Phoebe's internal conflict and her yearning for stability amid the chaos. The narrative shifts to a quieter, introspective scene where Phoebe contemplates the absence of Gary, a significant figure whose whereabouts are unknown, deepening her sense of uncertainty and emotional isolation.

The story then moves to a more intimate setting where Phoebe interacts with other characters, such as Marla and Oliver, sharing light moments that contrast with the earlier tension. These interactions provide a brief respite and reveal Phoebe's attempts to connect and find normalcy. However, back in her room, Phoebe faces the reality of impending departure and the emotional weight of leaving a place she has grown to love. This reflection is intertwined with her academic interests, as she revisits her wedding speech and the literary analysis of Victorian marriage plots, drawing parallels between fiction and her own experiences.

The chapter concludes on a note of tentative hope and unresolved feelings. Phoebe receives a job offer that excites her but hesitates to share the news, underscoring her complex emotional state. She immerses herself in the story of *Jane Eyre*, focusing on the foreshadowing of a failed wedding, mirroring her own situation and the themes of love, expectation, and entrapment. This literary engagement serves both as an intellectual pursuit and a coping mechanism, leaving the reader with a nuanced portrayal of Phoebe's inner life as she navigates uncertainty and change.

