

The Distant Hills

Excerpt from Chapter 2 of The Distant Hills

(Book 5 of the series)

“You’re going to France after all?” Philip’s servant, Thomas, stared at him.

“Yes, Thomas, that is why I asked you to pack my trunk,” Philip said patiently.

“But you told the mistress that you would not be going.”

“That’s right, I did.”

“You promised her in fact.”

“I may have promised,” Philip allowed.

“You certainly did. How could you do this to her?” Thomas was far more than a servant to Philip and he was permitted more than a servant’s usual licence. When Thomas was twelve years old and an orphan of the street Philip had rescued him from the clutches of a sergeant who was trying to arrest him for cutting a purse. Now in his twenties, he had proved himself a brave and loyal servant to the master he adored and Philip thought the world of him. That was not to say that he intended to justify his actions to Thomas or anyone else.

“She is far happier imagining that I am still in London,” he said.

“But you can’t let her go on thinking that, my Lord.”

“Why not?”

“Well, because it isn’t true.”

“Truth is an adaptable thing, do you not think so, Thomas?”

Thomas shook his head. “Not really, no.”

“Then let me put it to you another way. Which do you think would distress her most, to know that I am going to France against her will or to discover it later, when all has come out well?”

“You could always turn matters around to suit yourself,” Thomas grumbled, beginning to pack Philip’s trunk all the same.

“I’ll wager you had this in mind all along, before she even left for High Heatherton. I don’t know how you could ever lie to her. I couldn’t, she has eyes which catch you out.”

“Don’t look into them then,” Philip said simply,



Judith Thomson

The Distant Hills

“that’s the best. Now stop nagging me, there’s a good fellow or I’ll leave you behind.”

“I’d like to see you try! What clothes will you be needing?”

“Something decorative. I must impress Monsieur.” Philip watched the servant folding one of his cravats. It was made of the finest Genoa lace, exquisite and expensive, and Philip knew that Thomas had begun to hanker for such things. As the personal servant of a duke he had become a person of some importance in his own right and it was natural that he wanted to dress the part. “You can have that one,” Philip told him.

“Truly?” Thomas rushed to the mirror and held the cravat up to his throat. He was a pleasant looking young man, despite the roughness on his cheeks left by the smallpox he had suffered the previous year. “Oh, thank you, my Lord. Wait until the Duchess of Dorset’s pretty maid sees me in this! “

Philip watched him fondly. It was worth the loss of one of his favourite cravats to see the pleasure on Thomas’ face. “Don’t wear yourself out wenching,” he warned him. “We’ll be travelling in a day or two if all goes well. Now I have to go and deal with Giles, and I fancy,” he added under his breath, “that a lace cravat will not buy my peace with him.”

Philip was right. His brother-in-law regarded him in horror when he heard of his plans.

“I thought Theresa had talked you out of this madness.”

“She thought she had as well. I am not here for a lecture upon my treatment of your sister, Giles. I have already endured that from Thomas. What I want from you is your assistance. King William turns to you for advice on everything and I desire you to advise him to let me go upon this visit.”

“Why should I? I am in complete agreement with Theresa.”

“The difference is that you can make it impossible for me to go. One cautionary word from you and William will refuse. I am at your mercy, Giles.”

He smiled at him winningly, but it was apparent that Giles was in no mood for playing games and Philip suspected that he might have spent another sleepless night at the King’s side. It did not occur to him that Giles might have problems of his own which, coupled with William’s incessant



Judith Thomson

The Distant Hills

demands, were placing an almost unbearable strain upon his nerves.

“I don’t know what you’re planning,” Giles said irritably, “nor do I desire to know, but surely you must see that any disgrace you bring upon yourself will reflect upon me and jeopardise the position I have worked so hard to attain at William’s side.”

Philip gave him a wry look. In his opinion no rewards could be worth the sacrificing of personal liberty that Giles was forced to endure in order to be King William’s aide. “I assure you that I have no intention of jeopardising the position of either of us, Giles. Credit me with a little more intelligence than that.”

“I credit you with an ingenious brain that must be constantly employed in perpetrating some preposterous scheme. How often have you nearly come to grief through your plotting and conniving?”

“I was my plotting and conniving, as you call it, which help to put the king you care so much about upon the throne,” Philip reminded him.

“And what of the many times you have come close to losing your life and endangering those who love you, including myself. When will you ever learn to be content?”

“Perhaps never,” Philip said frankly.

“My God, but you’re a bloody fool, Philip Devalle. You will sacrifice all you have worked for and for what? To get back into favour with the King of France? How can he benefit you now?”

“I’m not quite certain,” Philip admitted, “but I would indeed be bloody fool not to find out. Don’t be peevish with me, Giles,” he begged. “Who knows but that it may not be to your advantage too?”

“Don’t drag me into this,” Giles muttered crossly. “You may hurtle towards your own destruction if you please but I refuse, this time, to be involved in your misfortunes.”

“Or my glories?” Philip said meaningfully. But for him Giles would never be holding the position he now enjoyed at William’s side, as they both knew, for it was Philip who had persuaded Giles to support the Dutchman in the first place.

“King William offers you glories. You know he talks of sending you to Ireland.”



Judith Thomson

The Distant Hills

"An honour indeed," Philip said dryly. "Fighting King James and his French army to uphold the rights of a handful of greedy Protestants."

"You may soon get the opportunity to fight the French army on their own soil," Giles reminded him. "I am expecting William to announce any day now that we are at war with France."

"That is one war I hope to God will never come," Philip said with feeling.

"But you would go, wouldn't you," Giles said anxiously. "William may insist upon it."

"All the more reason why I should take this opportunity to speak with Louis."

"Why, for heaven's sake? He is England's enemy."

"But he is my friend," Philip stressed, "and I tell you frankly I have never held any man in such high regard, certainly not our ailing 'Dutch William'."

"Go then and be damned!" Giles turned his back on him. "You always were too pigheaded to take advice. Why should I or anyone else care what happens to you when it's plain you do not care a jot for any save yourself. You are an obstinate man, Philip. If you do this I am finished with you."

Philip was a little taken aback. He had expected Giles to argue but not to attack him quite so harshly.

"Giles, please don't let us part like this." He put his hand on his brother-in-law's shoulder but Giles shook him off. "I picked a bad time to approach you," Philip guessed. "I fear that if William drives you much harder he will wear you out."

"Why should that concern you?" Giles snapped back.

"I have always been concerned for you," Philip told him truthfully.

"Don't pretend to care about me, you contrary bastard! If you thought anything of me you would not even be considering this visit to France. Go, then, and be damned. With luck you'll not return and I shall consider myself well rid of you."

Giles had gone too far this time. Philip controlled his own temper with difficulty. "Perhaps," he said quietly as he left, "I have cared about you too much."



Judith Thomson