

BOOK 2 IN THE PHILIPPE DUVAL SERIES

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CHAPTER 1 - PRICE TO PAY

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Newly rich Dr Philippe Duval has embraced a life of wealth and privilege. But has this new life changed him in ways he hadn't expected? Will he pay a price for his behaviour? For the way he has betrayed the love of his life ...

J MARY MASTERS

# PROLOGUE

*April 1969*

AS PHILIPPE DUVAL, former eminent surgeon, settled into his first class seat on the flight taking him back to America, he began to reflect on how much his life had changed in less than a year.

He now had at his disposal a personal fortune he could not yet quite comprehend. But he doubted in his heart this grand gesture from the father he never knew until the last few weeks of his life would ever make up for the shame of his early life as an illegitimate child.

Nor could it make up for the way his mother had been treated throughout her life. But now there was no way to make amends to her.

In those moments of quiet clarity, he knew too he had behaved in ways he would always regret. He had agreed to separate from his wife, Julia. It seemed the only course of action. His mind went back to the day he had first met her. He had been a young US Army doctor, she the daughter of a wealthy Australian pastoral family. But for war, their paths would never have crossed.

And their daughter Pippa would never have been born. Illegitimate like me, he thought.

He marvelled at the series of unlikely events that had brought the three of them together years later. Was it really fair for Pippa to go on resenting the fact her mother had been forced to give her up for adoption? He couldn't decide. One thing was for sure, their daughter had suffered, as he had done, because of the circumstances of her birth.

And now she'll hate me, he thought. She'll hate me for breaking up my marriage to her mother.

Can I go back, he wondered? Can I go back to Julia and give up Karen? He shook his head slightly from side to side as if arguing the point with himself. Beautiful, capricious, demanding Karen. He had given her up once, before he married Julia. But now? It was a question he couldn't yet answer. Not honestly.

And yet the thought of Julia no longer being in his life left him feeling bereft. She had been his first love, just as he had been hers.

Why has my personal life become so filled with uncertainty, he asked himself? He shook his head slightly as if to dismiss the question from his mind.

But one thing was certain, the moment he touched down in New York and headed to his estate on Long Island, he would assume the mantle so unexpectedly thrust upon him by his late father. As the acknowledged head of the Cox family. As the decision-maker who would guide the family's wealth. As master of Eastbury Hall. As head of the Ella Duval Foundation. He was fashioning a new life. A life he had never imagined for himself. And in that new life, he understood the challenges, marking them off subconsciously.

An embittered sister-in-law Barbara Cox, who had long imagined herself mistress of Eastbury Hall, except her husband the late Walter William Cox III had been sidelined by his father. He had died a disappointed and angry man.

And then he thought of their son, Walter William Cox IV. He

had grown close to his grandfather in his final years. Philippe was grateful for his presence. And for his willingness to act as a bridge between the two households. He hoped Walter would at least calm his sister Virginia who continued to support her mother's belief the inheritance had been stolen from their family.

Philippe let out a long sigh. He hadn't asked for any of it. He hadn't expected any of it. But he knew he would be a hypocrite to deny he didn't enjoy the sudden wealth that had come his way.

For the first time, he understood how wealth could ease his way through life. Was he wrong to enjoy it? Was he wrong to enjoy the chauffeur-driven car that would collect him from the airport? Or the butler Clarence who saw to his every need without query? Was he wrong to indulge the women in his life?

He smiled to himself. If only his mother had been alive to see the great wrong righted. To know his father had regretted not marrying her until his dying day. But she had borne her lot in life with dignity and grace. And now he could do nothing to make amends, except in the one way available to him. His charitable foundation would honour her name. It seemed so inadequate but it was all he could do.

He settled back in the seat and closed his eyes. Take each day as it comes, he told himself. Take each day as it comes, as he drifted into an uneasy sleep, lulled by the throb of the aircraft engines.



# CHAPTER 1

*America—April 1969*

PHILIPPE DUVAL PULLED off his tie and coffee-stained shirt in one quick movement. Nearby, Arabella Courtenay sat on the edge of one of the two chairs in his bedroom, fully aware she was in his private space.

Philippe had insisted she accompany him while he changed his shirt so she could continue her briefing about the function they were due to attend that evening. He had tried and failed to suppress his irritation when a new employee had stumbled handing him a cup of coffee.

Arabella had been one of four candidates put forward by the executive search firm and the only woman on the list. English by birth. Mid-thirties. Cambridge educated. Elegant. Sophisticated but warm and friendly. And highly recommended by previous employers. Philippe had liked her immediately and appointed her as executive director of the Ella Duval Foundation. She had been in the job for just three weeks.

Arabella looked up from her notes as Philippe walked back into

the bedroom from his dressing room, a fresh shirt partly buttoned, his tie draped around his neck.

‘What pitfalls await me, Arabella?’ he asked as he concentrated on dressing.

She laughed. She could list a few but just for a moment she was distracted by her new employer. And then she looked back to her notes.

‘Let me put it this way,’ she said. ‘There’ll be a few unscrupulous people wanting funding for marginal projects with high overheads, meaning high salaries for them, and no reasonable hope of producing useful research. And they will go out of their way to meet you and flatter you.’

‘Thanks for the warning,’ he said and smiled at her. ‘Your job will be to rescue me if I look like I need it.’

She returned the smile. He was so different from other men she had worked with. He treated her as an equal. Listened to her opinion. Took her advice.

‘I don’t think you look like someone who will need rescuing,’ she said, ‘except from cups of coffee.’

He laughed. He was dressed again now except for his cufflinks.

‘Would you mind?’

He held out his right arm. She put her notes down and began the fiddly task of inserting the cufflink into the correct buttonholes.

‘Very patriotic,’ she said, noticing the fine etching of the American flag.

‘They’re my favourite. I have others including some ugly Cox cufflinks but I decided I needed a new updated design. The jewellers are working on it for me.’

‘I thought you might have something acknowledging your Australian life?’

He nodded his head slightly and smiled.

‘I do. From my wife with her family crest,’ he said. ‘I left them behind in Sydney. My wife and I have separated.’

She had not asked about his private life but she had been given a quiet briefing by the indispensable Clarence, who, she thought, seemed to know everything. She suspected he saw much more than he would ever speak about.

And then she remembered the warnings from her friends.

*He's a womanizer, Arabella. He finally married the woman he left in Australia, unmarried and pregnant. But rumour has it the marriage is on the rocks. He had a gorgeous redhead on his arm at the Vogue party in February. His mistress apparently. There's a long list of women happy to take her place. Brilliant surgeon but he's given up his medical career. Inherited a fortune unexpectedly. Oh, he's charming and good-looking too. Whatever you do, don't fall under his spell.*

'I understand your wife is coming over next month for the opening of the grounds here.'

She already knew his wife had been offered a board position on the Australian branch of the Foundation.

'She is indeed as is my daughter Pippa who will be involved with the Foundation in Australia.'

Up until that point, he had told only Clarence and Walter of his separation. Neither of them had been surprised but they were both disappointed. Walter, of course, had been the one to ask the other question. What about Karen?

But Philippe had been evasive in his reply. The question remained unanswered.

'Thank you for that,' he said, adjusting his sleeve and reaching for his suit coat. 'I'm sorry if I embarrassed you by bringing you into my bedroom. Perhaps that was unprofessional of me.'

Her office was on the ground floor of Eastbury Hall, the Long Island mansion he had inherited unexpectedly from his father. The Foundation staff, of whom there were now five people, were banned from the upper floors. She looked around her. It was a gloomy room lacking feminine touches.

'Perhaps it's time to call the decorators in.'



It had been a light-hearted observation to ease the tension of the moment.

‘It is indeed time to call in the decorators,’ he said. ‘In fact I need to get at least three of the bedrooms on this floor redone quickly.’

‘Three?’

He smiled as she quickly realised why he would want three bedrooms redone.

‘Do you know anyone suitable for the job? I’m sure I could rely on your recommendation.’

She nodded thinking of her close friend Claudia Rossi.

‘I do know someone as a matter of fact. Would you like me to call her tomorrow?’

‘Please. And I know it’s not part of your job description, but can I ask you to oversee it for me. I can see your taste is impeccable,’ he said, looking at her elegant, understated dress.

He liked her smile. It lit up her face, especially her deep blue eyes. And he liked how her dark blonde hair framed her face.

‘Are you sure Clarence won’t be put out if I do this?’

He shrugged.

‘Clarence will get over it. He’s got enough to do anyway without worrying about this.’

At that moment, she glimpsed the hint of arrogance others had spoken of. He wasn’t a man to apologise for wanting things to be done his own way.

‘And this room? Masculine and unfussy or some feminine touches?’ she asked as they headed to the door.

He smiled again and put his hand lightly on her back to guide her out of the room.

‘Not too masculine,’ he said. ‘I don’t expect to be occupying it alone indefinitely.’

He noticed then a slight blush colour her cheeks. He hadn’t needed to be told she would have heard all the gossip about his private life. Looked at objectively, it makes me sound like a philanderer, he

thought. He worried then what he had said had been inappropriate.

They walked down the main staircase together where Walter William Cox IV was waiting patiently. The first thing Walter noticed was the slight blush of colour on Arabella's cheeks and then he saw a quick almost surreptitious movement as Philippe pulled his arm away from her back.

What's she doing in the private quarters? Is he doing what I think he's doing? His wife isn't here with him because his marriage is in trouble. And there's been no mention of Karen. Has he found a new target for his attentions?

For Walter these were fleeting but troubling thoughts as he held the front door open for them and then, without explanation, guided Arabella towards his car.

'I'll drive you,' he whispered to her. 'You looked a bit uncomfortable with Philippe just now.'

He opened the car door for her and she got in without comment. Philippe smiled to himself as Frederick, his chauffeur, closed the car door behind him. He understood exactly what Walter was thinking. But to him it had all been just mild flirtatious chatter with an attractive woman. Nothing more.

As Walter warmed the Camaro's powerful engine, he smiled across at his passenger.

'Did I misinterpret what I saw, Arabella?' he asked. 'Was Philippe exercising his famous charm on you?'

She laughed quietly, amused by Walter's earnestness.

'He is charming, isn't he?'

'So I'm told,' he said, 'and his bed has a vacancy at the present time.'

He said it in the hope of shocking her to see how she would react. To find out if she had designs on Philippe. But she was equal to his challenge.

'I know he's separated from his wife,' she said, laughing out loud, 'but what happened to the redhead? I didn't realise he was taking applications to fill that vacancy.'

Walter shook his head and laughed too.

‘Not sure, he’s simply not talking about his private life. Not to me anyway.’

While they were talking about Philippe, she decided to risk another question, a question that had aroused her curiosity.

‘I take it you’ve met his wife,’ she asked, interested now to know more. ‘And his mistress too when she came to New York a few months back?’

She was intrigued. What type of women had Philippe chosen?

‘I have met them both,’ he said, taking his time to reply. ‘His wife Julia is delightful. Blonde, elegant, very friendly, not unlike yourself.’

‘And the mistress?’

‘She’s delightful too in a different sort of way. Beautiful long auburn hair that shines red in the light, eyes that sparkle with mischief, alabaster skin, very shapely. And besotted with him. He’s bought her diamonds and furs. Funded her fashion business. And he’s the envy of every man who’s ever set eyes on her because she’s available to him whenever he wants her.’

She thought about this new information for a few moments.

‘So why does he seem so lonely now?’

‘I’m guessing it’s because he’s separated from his wife. And he’s not sure where it will all end up.’

‘Meaning?’

‘Will they reconcile which means he’ll have to give up Karen. Or will they divorce which means Karen is going to expect the one thing he’s denied her so far – a wedding ring.’

He let the clutch out and simultaneously accelerated hard. She felt the sudden thrust of power as the big car leapt forward.

‘If you want my advice, Arabella, don’t get in the middle of it.’

He almost had to shout to make himself heard over the roar of the engine.

‘Did you think I was planning to?’

He risked a sideways glance at her.

‘Not planning exactly,’ he said, ‘but he’s got a lot to offer that might tempt a woman.’

‘You mean the expensive gifts or the cachet of being his mistress? Or perhaps his next wife?’

He wished she hadn’t said that. Was it just light-hearted banter? But it told him she had been thinking about Philippe. Thinking about him in quite the wrong context.

‘Perhaps I’ve said enough, Arabella,’ he said. ‘I just didn’t want you to be uncomfortable around him.’

‘I’m not uncomfortable around him, Walter,’ she said with a smile. ‘I find him polite and charming. He’s actually asked me to oversee the decorating of some of the upstairs bedrooms as a favour. That’s what we were talking about when you saw us. I’ve promised to call my friend Claudia to get the job done quickly.’

‘Well, the rooms certainly need updating, but isn’t that somewhat outside your job description.’

He didn’t say but he thought immediately it should be Clarence looking after it. Clarence had run the household for more than twenty years. Nothing happened at Eastbury Hall unless Clarence approved it.

‘Of course it is but I’ll do it for him as a favour,’ she said. ‘What I had asked him was whether he wanted his bedroom to be *masculine and unfussy* or with *some feminine touches*.’

‘And his reply?’

‘He said *not too masculine. I don’t expect to be occupying it alone indefinitely*.’

Walter laughed to himself then. He began to wonder if Philippe would be foolish enough to complicate his life by romancing another woman. Or was the redecoration of the rooms a good sign that he expected to reconcile with Julia. He hoped it was the latter. For all their sakes.

‘Well, I think I survived unscathed, Arabella,’ Philippe said as he stood back and let Frederick open the door of the car for her. ‘And I’ve convinced Walter you are safe with me and my chauffeur.’

‘I’m sorry he did rather hijack me,’ she said with a smile that contained just a hint of apology.

‘That’s fine,’ he said. ‘He meant well. He was just looking out for your interests.’

What am I meant to say to that, she wondered? She was keen to change the subject.

‘Are you getting your head around how the Foundation should work now?’ she asked, wondering if he found the detail rather tedious.

They had, over the weeks she had been in the job, discussed the criteria for grant applications and how the board should assess applications for research funding. She had raised another issue too, making sure the Foundation had a high profile to encourage philanthropic donors.

‘I am, Arabella,’ he said. ‘I’ve even begun schmoozing the widows as you suggested to get them to leave us a legacy.’

‘I knew you would be excellent at it,’ she said unsurprised. ‘You must have seen the ripple of gossip that went around the room when you walked in. You haven’t been about much since you took over here, have you?’

‘No, I’ve not had much opportunity really,’ he said. ‘And what were the gossips saying about me, if I may ask?’

But she shook her head. She couldn’t repeat what she had overheard but she was sure he would know.

‘Let me guess,’ he said. ‘It would either be *his wife’s not with him, they say he’s heading for the divorce court* or *what happened to the red-head?*’

She was grateful for the darkness in the car. Her face flushed hot and red. She had asked that very question of Walter earlier in the evening.

He glanced at her. He could sense a sudden tension between them. Years of medical practice had honed his perceptiveness. He was good at detecting changes in mood or changes in emotional states.

‘I shouldn’t have said that, should I?’ he said. ‘But I find it helps to talk to someone.’

‘To talk to someone about?’

She was unsure what he meant. Or at least she was pretending to be unsure what he meant.

‘About what’s going on in my life,’ he said. ‘I’m sure Clarence or Walter would have given you some insight into my complicated personal life.’

She nodded. What could she say?

‘I didn’t ask,’ she said finally. ‘Clarence volunteered a few sketchy details.’

‘And Walter?’

‘Filled in some of the gaps,’ she said.

He relaxed back into the luxuriously padded seat.

‘So they shredded my reputation very successfully, I take it?’

‘Well, let me just say, it wasn’t what I expected to hear.’

‘I know what you expected to hear,’ he said. ‘That I’d had a career as a top surgeon, inherited a massive fortune from the father I’d never known. That I’m happily married to Julia with whom I have a daughter I hadn’t met until she was in her early teens.’

She gestured as if to say *that about sums it up*.

‘If only life was that simple,’ he said. ‘As I said before, my wife and I have separated. I have no idea whether we’ll get back together again. My daughter doesn’t like me much anymore because I was unfaithful to her mother. And the redhead? The redhead is my weakness.’

He looked across at her. Had he been too frank with her? But he felt relaxed with her. He hadn’t realised how lonely he’d become. He was missing Julia. He was missing Karen.

‘But tell me, what’s going on in your life apart from your work?’

He knew very little about her except that she had one failed marriage behind her and had reverted to her maiden name. Her husband had been American and she had stayed on after their separation.

‘Nothing of interest,’ she said. ‘Absolutely nothing of interest really.’

‘You mean compared with my complicated personal life?’

‘Compared with almost anyone else’s life really.’

‘Is that deliberate?’

He wondered if she had been badly hurt by the failure of her marriage.

‘Possibly,’ she said, ‘but the fact remains women have to be twice as good at their jobs to compete. I decided to focus on my career.’

He understood that. Hadn’t he done that in his days as a surgeon? Medicine had been everything to him. He missed the daily demands of it. He missed his colleagues. He was about to say *but it makes for lonely nights* and then he stopped.

The car came to a standstill and Frederick jumped out to open the door to hand her out of the car. Philippe glanced at his watch. It wasn’t especially late.

‘Come in and have a nightcap before you go home,’ he said.

She looked at him and hesitated. Was this a good idea?

He knew why she was hesitating.

‘It’s nice to have someone to talk to,’ he persisted.

She relented and together they walked up to the front door to be greeted by Clarence who had been looking out for Philippe’s return.

‘Arabella is going to have a nightcap with me,’ he said leading the way to the first floor.

‘In your study?’

‘Yes, Clarence, in my study. Can you come up and make us some drinks?’

Arabella looked at him enquiringly.

‘Is your study a no go area?’

He laughed.

‘It is, according to Clarence, unless it’s lawyers,’ he said, ‘And it’s the room where I found out about the inheritance from my father.’

‘That must have been quite an occasion for you.’

‘It was.’

As they entered the room together, she walked across to the sideboard and picked up a framed photo.

‘Your wife and daughter?’

‘Yes, that’s Julia and Pippa.’

‘They could be sisters,’ she said. ‘They look very much alike.’

She put the photograph back on the polished surface and sat down on the sofa. He stood by the fire, stirring it back to life.

‘Clarence does a great martini. I hope you like martinis.’

With an almost unnatural silence, Clarence appeared suddenly.

‘Martinis, Dr Duval?’

‘Thanks, Clarence.’

Within minutes, he had handed them their drinks and backed out of the room but not before Philippe had time to register Clarence’s look of disapproval.

‘He’s not very happy with me,’ Philippe said with a half smile.

‘Because you’ve invited me in for a drink.’

He nodded.

‘Because I’ve invited you in for a drink.’

He continued to stand near the fire at some distance from her. He always found the old house chilly regardless of the season.

‘It’s just pleasant to have some company,’ he said.

‘I do understand that,’ she said. ‘It took me some time to get used to living alone again when my marriage broke up.’

He looked at her and wondered why a smart, attractive woman like her would be alone.

‘I’m surprised you didn’t go back to England. I assume you have family there?’

‘I do have family there. Well, a younger sister Elise whose main aim in life is to get her photograph in Tatler magazine. And a mother



who still believes I should be hankering for a good marriage instead of a career. She had several suitors lined up for my inspection when I returned to England briefly after my marriage failed.'

'And did you inspect any of them?' he asked, amused by her description of her mother's matchmaking.

She shook her head slowly.

'I told my mother one marriage was enough,' she said, with a hint of sadness. 'He was very controlling towards the end.'

He could see her dreams had been shattered by what marriage had turned out to be for her.

'And then you concentrated on your career.'

'I did,' she said, 'but I always knew it would be difficult to get beyond a certain level because of my sex, so I was delighted when you gave me the opportunity.'

He could see she was genuinely grateful.

'To be honest,' he said, 'given a choice, I had no desire to be surrounded by men in grey suits.'

'But you would have been mostly surrounded by men in your profession, surely?'

'That's true but more women are coming into the profession and I tried to help their careers. And I tried to shield them from the awful bullying of my male colleagues where I could.'

He was enjoying getting to know her, getting to understand her motivations, hoping it would be the start of a genuine friendship.

'By the way I have an invitation to the The Met gala on Monday. I don't suppose you'd like to come with me?'

'But don't worry if you already have plans,' he added quickly.

She sipped her drink trying to think of a good reason to decline the invitation but she could think of nothing. Instead, she found herself accepting.

'I'm got nothing planned,' she said. 'That sounds delightful.'

And then he came to sit alongside her. Not close. Not touching her. Keeping space between them.

‘I’m pleased you can come with me,’ he said. ‘I’m told it’s quite an event. I’ll get Frederick to pick you up.’

‘There’s no need for that,’ she said. ‘I can drive myself and meet you there.’

But he shook his head.

‘Certainly not. That’s what I keep a chauffeur for.’

He sipped his drink and looked at her closely. She possessed a natural friendliness that appealed to him. Am I putting her in a difficult position, he wondered? He hoped not.

For just a moment, their eyes met until she glanced away. She put her drink down on the coffee table.

‘I think it’s time I went.’

He didn’t try to dissuade her. He recognised the danger of the intimacy that was developing between them. They walked down the stairs to the front door together where Clarence was waiting to lock up behind her.

‘Can you organise Frederick to pick Arabella up Monday evening around six,’ Philippe said. ‘She’s coming to The Met gala with me.’

He saw Clarence’s look of surprise. He waited until Arabella was out of earshot.

‘Before you say something you shouldn’t, Clarence, just let me say there’s nothing more than friendship between us.’

Clarence nodded, acknowledging the reprimand but he smiled quietly to himself. He had seen where friendship could lead a man. And Philippe Duval was, at this point, particularly vulnerable, he thought. Very vulnerable indeed.