

***ANTHONY
HOPE***

***A YOUNG
MAN'S
YEAR***

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A Young Man's Year

EAN 8596547240020

DigiCat, 2022

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IN THE SPRING

CHAPTER I

OF THE MIDDLE TEMPLE, ESQUIRE

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It was a dark, dank, drizzly morning in March. A dull mist filled all the air, and the rain drifted in a thin sheet across the garden of the Middle Temple. Everything looked a dull drab. Certainly it was a beastly morning. Moreover—to add to its offences—it was Monday morning. Arthur Lisle had always hated Monday mornings; through childhood, school, and university they had been his inveterate enemies—with their narrow rigorous insistence on a return to work, with the end they put to freedom, to leisure, to excursions in the body or in the spirit. And they were worse now, since the work was worse, in that it was not real work at all; it was only waiting for work, or at best a tedious and weary preparation for work which did not come and (for all that he could see) never would come. There was no reason why it ever should. Even genius might starve unnoticed at the Bar, and he was no genius. Even interest might fail to help a man, and interest he had none. Standing with his hands in the pockets, listlessly staring out of the window of his cell of a room, unable to make up his mind how to employ himself, he actually cursed his means of subsistence—the hundred and fifty pounds a year which had led him into the fatal ambition of being called to the Bar. "But for that it would have been impossible for me to be such an ass," he reflected gloomily, as he pushed back his thick reddish-

brown hair from his forehead and puckered the thin sensitive lines of his mouth into a childish pout.

Henry the clerk (of whom Mr. Arthur Lisle owned an undivided fourth share) came into the room, carrying a bundle of papers tied with red tape. Turning round on the opening of the door, Arthur suddenly fell prey to an emotion of extraordinary strength and complexity; amazement, joy, excitement, fear, all in their highest expression, struggled for mastery over him. Had he got a Brief?

"Mr. Norton Ward says, will you be kind enough to protect him in Court III, in case he's on in the Court of Appeal? It's a very simple matter, he says; it's the Divisional Court, sir, third in the list." Henry put the papers on the table and went out, quite disregarding of the storm of emotion which he had aroused. Though keenly interested in the fortunes of his employers, he did not study their temperaments.

It had happened, the thing that Arthur knew he ought always to hope for, the thing that in fact he had always dreaded. He had not got a brief; he had to "hold" one—to hold one for somebody else, and that at short notice—"unhouseled, disappointed, unanealed!" That is to say, with no time to make ready for the fearful ordeal. It was nearly ten o'clock, at half-past he must be in court; at any moment after that the case might come on, its two predecessors having crumpled up, as cases constantly did in the Divisional Court. The fell terrors of nervousness beset him, so that he was almost sick. He dashed at the brief fiercely, but his fingers trembled so that he could hardly untie the tape. Still, he managed a hurried run through the papers and got the point into his head.

Lance and Pretyman, Jr., took their seats punctually at ten-thirty. Arthur Lisle, who felt much interest in judges as human beings and would often spend his time in court studying them rather than the law they administered, was glad to see Lance there, but feared Pretyman to the bottom of his heart. Lance was a gentle man, of courtly manners and a tired urbanity, but Pretyman was gruff, abrupt, terribly anxious about saving public time, and therefore always cutting into a man's argument with the Stand-and-deliver of a question to which, in Pretyman's opinion, there was no answer. It would be an awful thing if Pretyman set on him like that! Because then he might be incapable of speech, although he knew that he was in the right. And he believed that his case was good. "All the worse then, if you lose it!" said a mocking voice within him.

Henry had taken him over to the court and had done everything possible for him—had told the solicitor who had briefed Norton Ward how the matter stood and how very safe he would be in Mr. Lisle's hands if it came to that, had given his name to the usher so that the usher could, if necessary, give it to the Bench, and had even introduced him to Mr. O'Sullivan, who was on the other side, a tall and burly Irishman, famous for defending criminals, but not credited with knowing much law.

As the first two cases proceeded, Arthur read his brief again and again, and, when he was not doing that, he read the reported case which (in the opinion of the pupil who had got up Norton Ward's brief and had made a note of it for him) was decisive in his favour. All the while he was praying that the first two cases might last a long time. They did not.

Pretyman, J., smashed the pair of them in three-quarters of an hour. "Brown and Green" called the usher, and O'Sullivan was on his legs—and there was no sign of Norton Ward. Henry nodded to Arthur and left the court; he was going to see how matters stood in the Court of Appeal.

"This is an appeal from the West Hampstead County Court, my lords," began Mr. O'Sullivan, "which raises a question of some importance," and he went on in such a fashion that Arthur hoped he was going to take a long time; for Henry had come back, and, by a shake of his head, had indicated that there was no present hope of Norton Ward's arrival. Mr. O'Sullivan meant to take a decently long time; he wanted his client to feel that he was getting his money's worth of argument; therefore he avoided the main point and skirmished about a good deal. Above all he avoided that case which Norton Ward's pupil had considered decisive. Mr. O'Sullivan knew all about the case too, and had it with him, but he was in no hurry to get to it yet.

Lance, J., was leaning back, the picture of polite acquiescence in a lot assigned to him by Providence, a position wherein dignity was tempered by *ennui*. But Pretyman, J., was getting restive; he was fingering his beard—he committed the solecism of wearing a beard on the Bench; then he picked out a book from the shelf by him, and turned over the leaves quickly. Mr. O'Sullivan came, by a series of flourishes, a little nearer the point. And Norton Ward did not come; and Arthur Lisle felt no better.

"What about Watkins and Chichester?" demanded Pretyman, J., with a sudden violence that made Arthur jump.

"I have that case here, my lord, and——"

"You don't seem in a hurry to cite it, Mr. O'Sullivan. It seems to me dead in your teeth."

"Let us hear the headnote, Mr. O'Sullivan," said Lance, J., suavely.

Then they got to it, and Pretyman, J., and Mr. O'Sullivan had a fine wrangle over it, worrying it up and down, one saying that this was that case, the other that this case was not that case, because in that case that happened and in this case this happened, and so forth. Mr. O'Sullivan "distinguished" valiantly, and Pretyman knocked his distinctions into a cocked hat. Lance, J., sat on smiling in silence, till at last he asked blandly:

"If we think the cases indistinguishable, Watkins and Chichester binds us, I take it, Mr. O'Sullivan?"

That Mr. O'Sullivan had to admit, and on that admission down he sat.

The moment had come—and Norton Ward had not. With an actual physical effort Arthur rose to his feet; a strange voice, which did not seem to belong to him, and sounded quite unfamiliar, said, "My lords——" He saw Lance and Pretyman, J., in the shape of a grotesque, monstrous, two-headed giant; for the latter was leaning over to the former, who sat listening and twice nodded his head.

A slip of paper was handed up to Lance, J. He glanced at it and from it to Arthur. Again that strange voice said, "My lords——" But Lance, J., interposed suavely, "I don't think we need trouble you, Mr. Lisle," and he proceeded to say that not even Mr. O'Sullivan's ingenious arguments could enable his brother or himself to distinguish Brown and Green from

Watkins and Chichester, and therefore the appeal must be dismissed with costs.

"I concur," said Pretyman, J., with contemptuous curtness; in fact he did not say "I" at all; he merely grunted out "Concur."

Of course such a thing happened often, and was quite likely to happen; very probably Norton Ward, after glancing over his pupil's note and at *Watkins v. Chichester*, had seen that it might happen here and had the less scruple about entrusting his case to hands so inexperienced. None the less, Arthur Lisle felt that the gods had played a cruel game with him. All that agony of apprehension, all that tension of desperate coward's courage, endured for nothing and gone for nothing! All to be endured and achieved again—how soon? He got out of court he hardly knew how, and made his way hurriedly across the Strand. He would have that wig and gown off, or somebody else would be tapping him on the shoulder, arresting him with the stern command to hold another brief!

Now, back in chambers, with the strain over, he was furious with himself, savage and furious; that mood follows hard on the paroxysms of the malady. He began to attribute to it all the failures of his past life—quite unjustly, for in most cases, though it had tortured him, he had overcome the outward manifestation of it. He could not see his life as liveable if it were to meet him at every turn. What made him a prey to it? Self-consciousness, silly self-consciousness, his wise elders had always told him. But what made people self-conscious? Self-conceit, the same wise mentors had added. His soul rose in a plain and sincere protest, certain of its

truth: "But I'm not conceited." "Yes, but" (he imagined the mentors' argument now) "you really are; you think everybody's looking at you and thinking of you." "Well, but so they are when I'm on my legs speaking; and beforehand I know they're going to be." The mentors did not seem to have anything to say to that.

In the afternoon Norton Ward came into his room to thank him for holding the brief; he was a man of punctilious courtesy, as indeed he was master of most of the arts and gifts that make for success in life. At little more than thirty he had already a fine practice; he was on the edge of "taking silk"; he had married well—the daughter of a peer, with a substantial portion; he was a "prospective" candidate for Parliament. A favourite of nature and of fortune indeed! Moreover he was a kindly man, although a ruthlessly ambitious one. He and Arthur had become acquainted merely through the accident of Arthur's renting the spare room in his chambers, when he had been called to the Bar a twelve-month before; but the landlord had taken to his tenant and would gladly have done him a turn.

"I thought the case quite plain," he said; "but I'm sorry you were done out of your argument."

"I wasn't sorry," Arthur confessed, with a frankness habitual to him.

"You weren't? Oh, I see! Nervous!" He laughed gently.

"Beyond belief. Did you used to be?"

"Just at first. I soon got over it. But they say one oughtn't to get over it. Oh, you've heard the stories about big men, haven't you? Anyhow some men never do. Why, I've sat

behind Huntley and seen his hand tremble like our old friend the aspen leaf—and that when he was Attorney-General!"

"Lord!" was Arthur's despairing comment; because a malady which did not spare an Attorney-General must surely be unconquerable by lesser folk.

"But I expect it's not quite the same sort," Norton Ward went on, smiling. "It's rather like falling in love, I expect. A man's excited every time he falls in love, but I don't think it's the same sort of excitement as he suffers when he falls in love for the first time—I mean badly."

Now the last word of this observation so struck Arthur that he forgot all the earlier part of it—nay, he forgot his malady itself, together with the truth or falsity of the parallel Norton Ward suggested.

"Badly? What do you mean by falling in love badly?"

"I'm not speaking with regard to morals, Lisle. I mean severely, or utterly, or passionately, or, if you prefer, idiotically."

Arthur's lips puckered about his pipe-stem; it was a trick he had.

"I think I should call that falling in love well, not badly," he observed gravely.

It was the gravity of the speaker, not the import of the thing spoken, which made Norton Ward laugh again and heartily. His was one of those temperaments—sane, practical, concrete, equable—which regard the affairs of love as a very subsidiary matter in real life, in the real life of any individual, that is, for of course they possess a national and racial importance when reduced to statistics. He did not quarrel with the literary convention which exalted love to

the highest place—the convention made good reading and produced exciting plays—but it did not answer to real life as he knew it, to the stern yet delightful fight which filled his days, and really filled his wife's too, since she was a partner wherever she could be, and an eager encourager in all things. But what of the great amorists who were also great men and women? Well, how much of that too was play-acting—to the public and to themselves? That was the question his mind instinctively put about such cases.

As he looked at Arthur Lisle's slight figure and sensitive face, he felt a compassion for him, a pitying doubt whether so frail a vessel could live in the rough sea on which it had embarked. Characteristically this friendly impulse expressed itself in an invitation to dinner, which was received by Arthur with surprise, delight, and gratitude.

"Of course I will, and it really is most awfully kind of you," he said.

Norton Ward went off to a consultation with a smile of mingled pity and amusement still on his lips.

His invitation to dinner really pleased Arthur very much, not only as a sign of friendship, but for its own sake. He had found his early days in London lonely—in depressing contrast with the full social life of school and Oxford. The glowing anticipations with which imagination had invested his coming to the metropolis had not stood the test of experience. For some young men family connections, or notable achievements and high reputation, provide a ready-made place in London. Others possessed of ample means can make a pretty good one for themselves speedily. But Arthur's university career, though creditable and to him

delightful in the highest degree from its teeming fulness of interests, had not been conspicuous; he had no powerful friends, and he was very poor. After his chambers were paid for, and his share in Henry, and his lodgings in Bloomsbury Street, there was left not much margin beyond the necessities of life—food, raiment, and tobacco. The theatre, even the pit, could not be indulged in often. He had many solitary evenings. When it was fine, he often walked the streets; when it was wet he read—and often stopped reading to wish that something would happen. His vague and restless longings took no form more definite than that—wanting something to happen. He was in London, he was young, he was ready—and nothing happened! Consequently an invitation to dinner was a prize in the daily lottery of life.

When he got back to his 'diggings' in the evening, he found a letter from home. His mother and sister had continued to live on in the old house at Malvern Wells after the death of his father, who had enjoyed a fairly good practice as a doctor there, but dying comparatively early had left a slender provision for his family. Mrs. Lisle preferred to be poor, since poor she had to be, in a place where she was already known and respected. The school too was a great attraction; there Arthur had been educated as a day boy, and thence had proceeded to Oxford with an exhibition, to which he added a second from his college, thus much easing the family finances, and indeed rendering Oxford possible. There had been talk of his people's migrating to London and making a home for him there, but in fact none of the three had been zealous for the change. Mrs. Lisle was frail and clung to her accustomed hills and

breezes; Anna had her friends, her circle, her church work, her local importance; and Arthur was at that time too full of those glowing anticipations of London life to press the project of a family villa somewhere in the suburbs and a season-ticket to take him out of town at the precise hour of the evening when town began to be amusing.

For all that, he was an affectionate son and brother, and he smiled sympathetically over Anna's home gossip. Only the postscript made him frown rather peevishly. It ran: "Mother wants to know whether you have called on the Godfrey Lisles *yet!*"

Mother wanted to know that in pretty nearly every one of her own and Anna's letters; hence the italics which distinguished Anna's "yet." And the answer still had to be in the negative. Why should he call on the Godfrey Lisles? He knew his mother's answer; a thoroughly maternal answer it was. Godfrey Lisle, though only a distant cousin, was the head of the house, squire of Hilsey Manor, the old family place, and a man of considerable wealth—together, in fact, the Personage of the family. Most families have a Personage, to them very important, though varying infinitely in significance or insignificance to the world outside. On the whole the Lisle Personage was above the average from the outside point of view, and Mrs. Lisle's anxiety that her son should pay him proper attention, and reap therefrom such advantage as might accrue, was no more than natural.

But to Arthur all the reasons why he ought to call on his cousin were reasons why he could not do it. Just as, while Mr. O'Sullivan was arguing, his imagination was picturing what a young fool Pretyman, J., would soon be thinking him,

so here, whenever the question of this call arose, the same remorselessly active faculty rehearsed for him all the aspects in which he would appear to the Godfrey Lises—a poor relation, a tiresome duty, a country cousin, a raw youth—Oh, in fine and in the end, a Bore of purest quality and great magnitude! That, and nothing else, the Godfrey Lises would think him.

Still, if his mother persisted, the thing might have to happen. He had a vision of himself watching the Godfrey Lises out of their house, and then diving across the road to deposit furtive cards with the butler. A funny vision, but with him quite capable of turning into reality!

His brow cleared as he took up a second letter which awaited him. He knew the hand:

"DEAR MR. LISLE,

"Do drop in to-morrow evening after dinner. We shall be having cards and perhaps a little music. About 9.30. Do as you like about dressing.

"Yours sincerely,
"MARIE SARRADET."

The Sarradets lived in Regent's Park—rather far from any Underground station. "I'll dress if it's fine, and not if it's wet," thought Arthur. The balance of profit and loss as between paying a cab-fare on the one hand and taking the shine out of his patent leathers on the other presented a problem of constant difficulty in connection with his evening gaieties.

CHAPTER II

MISS SARRADET'S CIRCLE

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A hundred and fifty years ago or thereabouts a certain Jacques Sarradet had migrated from his native Lyons and opened a perfumer's shop in Cheapside. The shop was there still, and still a Sarradet kept it, and still it was much esteemed and frequented by City men, who bought presents or executed commissions for their wives and daughters there. To folk of fashion the Bond Street branch was better known, but which was the more profitable only the master knew. Together, at all events, they were very profitable, and the present Mr. Clement Sarradet was a warm man—warmer than he let the world know, or even his own family, so far as he could keep the knowledge from them. He had preserved his French frugality, and, although his house in Regent's Park was comfortably and hospitably conducted, the style in which he lived was a good deal less sumptuous than English notions would have considered his income to warrant. He had preserved too, in spite of mixed marriages in the family history, something of his French air, of the appearance of a prosperous *bon bourgeois*, with his short thick-set figure, his round paunch, his stiff upstanding white hair (he had married late in life and was now over sixty), his black brows and moustache, and his cheeks where blue and red seemed, after a tussle, to have blended harmoniously into a subdued purple.

Something French, though differently French, survived also in his cherished daughter Marie, writer of the note already set forth, and mistress of the house in Regent's Park since her mother's death five years ago. Here it was manner rather than looks (she was a brunette, but not markedly); she had a vivacity, a provocativeness, a coquetry, which in less favoured races often marks a frivolous or unstable character, but in the French finds no difficulty in blending with and adorning solid good sense, sturdy business-like qualities, and even sometimes a certain toughness of tissue more certainly valuable than attractive.

The evening party to which Arthur Lisle had been bidden was drawing to its close. They had played cards; they had had some music; they had ended up with a couple of "topping" comic songs from Joe Halliday, and they were still laughing over these as they munched sandwiches and sipped, according to sex, lemonade or whisky-and-soda. Mr. Sarradet watched them benevolently, thinking them a very pleasant set of young people, and admiring the way in which his daughter exercised a pretty dominion over this little band of chosen friends. The two girls, Mildred Quain and Amabel Osling, openly acknowledged her leadership; the men deferred to her, not only as the hostess (a position which she generally occupied), but as the centre of attraction and the deviser of pleasures, the organiser of visits to theatres and concerts, and of their lawn-tennis at the Acton ground in the spring and summer. But there was a touch of shrewd anxiety in his watching. Young men were wont to aspire to more than friendship where they found

metal attractive to their eyes. Mr. Sarradet was ambitious for his daughter.

"Next Monday, then, we'll all meet at His Majesty's," Marie announced—or commanded. She turned to Joe Halliday. "You get the tickets. And anybody who likes can come back here to supper afterwards."

"Splendid, dear!" said Amabel Osling, a dark girl with large eyes and a rather intense manner; she wore what might be described as an art-frock.

"An evening out, an evening out!" chanted Joe Halliday, a big young fellow with a shock of light brown hair and a manner of exuberant good-nature and heartiness.

"I'm afraid I can't come," said Arthur Lisle apologetically.

"Why not, Mr. Lisle?" Marie's voice sounded certainly disappointed, perhaps rather resentful.

"I'm dining out."

Sidney Barslow looked at him with a smile, in which Arthur detected an ironical flavour. Between these two members of the circle there was, in truth, no love lost. Barslow resented in Arthur a superiority of breeding which all his own vanity could not enable him to ignore. Arthur found this handsome fellow, with his carefully sleek hair, his bold challenging eyes, his lady-killerish airs, in the end a 'bounder' with only a veneer of elegance; all the same he wished he had half Barslow's easy assurance and self-confidence.

"Oh, Learned Counsel is dining out?" In the Sarradet circle, being of the Bar was felt to be enough of a distinction to warrant a little chaff. "May one ask who with? The Lord Chancellor perhaps?"

They all laughed. "Presently, presently!" said Joe, patting Arthur's head. "The lad will make his way in society."

"Don't be an ass, Joe." But Arthur liked Joe as much as he disliked Barslow, and his protest was quite free from annoyance.

"Don't you want to tell us who it is, Mr. Lisle?" asked Amabel.

"Well, I don't suppose you'll be any the wiser; it's the man whose chambers I share—Norton Ward."

Now, as it chanced, Mildred Quain's uncle lived in the suburban constituency which Norton Ward was 'nursing' and was of the same political colour as the prospective candidate. Mildred had heard the candidate speak at the opening of a bazaar—and had seen the Honourable Mrs. Norton Ward perform the ceremony.

"You are among the swells, Mr. Lisle!" said Mildred, and proceeded to describe the extreme political and social eminence of the Norton Wards. Arthur, who had gratefully accepted his invitation as a human kindness, was amused at finding it regarded as a promotion, as a cause for congratulation and envy; he grew afraid that his mention of it might be taken for a boast.

"I think it was pure charity on Norton Ward's part," he laughed. "I expect he thought I was lonely."

"I dare say. He couldn't be expected to know about the likes of us," said Barslow.

"Oh, shut up, Sidney!" cried Joe Halliday. "Can't Arthur go out to dinner without your permission?"

A sudden flush spread over Barslow's face; he glared angrily at Joe. Mr. Sarradet had taken up the evening paper,

and noticed nothing; but all the rest were conscious that a storm threatened the serenity of the gathering. On a trivial occasion latent jealousies had leapt to light.

Marie looked round her company with a smile which included all and betrayed no partisanship. "We'll choose another night for His Majesty's," she said. "That's quite simple. Then we can all go. And now shall we have one more song before we break up? One more from you, Joe!" As they moved towards the piano, she contrived to touch the irate Mr. Barslow lightly on the arm, to give him an arch glance, and to murmur—very low—the word "Silly!" Mr. Barslow's brow cleared wonderfully.

She wanted no quarrel and was confident of her ability to prevent one. If one came, she would have to be arbiter; she would have to take sides, and that must almost certainly mean the loss of one of her friends—either Sidney Barslow or Arthur Lisle. She did not want to lose either, for each had an attraction for her—an attraction not of mere solid friendship such as bound her to Joe Halliday, but an appeal of man to woman. Barslow's boldness, his challenge, his powerful virility drew one side of her nature with a strong magnet; to what was 'second-class' and tawdry in him she was not, by birth or breeding, very sensitive herself. On the other hand she knew that Arthur Lisle was, and admired him because he was. Nay, in a sense she was afraid of him because he was; if she did or said anything in his eyes amiss—if she shewed too much favour to Sidney Barslow, for instance—he might feel about her much as he did about the man himself. She knew all about Barslow, and all about what Barslow felt for and about herself; it was very familiar,

one might say inherited, ground. With regard to Arthur Lisle all this was different; he was still, in spite of their apparent intimacy, *terra incognita*. Though he constantly frequented the house, though from a chance acquaintance of her brother's he had grown into a familiar friend, though they were fast comrades, even though she knew that he admired her, there was so much about him which she vaguely divined to be there, but could not value or analyse—notions, instincts, spots of sensitiveness, to which she remained really a stranger. How strong were they, what was their verdict on her, what their influence on him? Would a tide of admiration or passion sweep them all away? Or would they make such a tide impossible, or, even if it came, dam its course with impalpable insurmountable obstacles? In fine, would he, in spite of any feeling for her that he might have, hold her "out of the question"?

He was the last to leave that night—as he often was, for the solitude of his lodgings had no attraction for him—and she went with him to the door. The stars shone now over Regent's Park, and they lingered a moment in astronomical conversation. Then she gave him her hand, saying:

"I'm so sorry about Monday. But you must tell me all about your party afterwards!"

"I don't suppose there'll be anything to tell. Well, Mildred Quain may be interested, because of her uncle!"

"I shall be interested too—though not because of my uncle," she said with a laugh and a fleet upward glance at him. "I consider I've introduced you to London society, and I take a maternal interest in you, Mr. Lisle."

"Why do you say 'Mr. Lisle' to me? You always say 'Joe' and 'Sidney' to the others."

"So I do. I don't know!"

"Well, then, don't do it," laughed Arthur. "It makes me jealous, you know."

She looked at him for a moment, not now in provocation, rather in thought, perhaps in puzzle. "It needn't do that, anyhow," at last she said.

"Is it then a mark of respect?" he asked banteringly, finding pleasure in the perplexed little frown which persisted on her pretty face.

"Well, I speak of you as I feel about you, and I can't say any more," she answered, half laughing, but protesting too that this sort of inquisition was unfair.

"You shall do as you like then! What you do is always right." He spoke affectionately and held out his hand to her again.

She did not give him hers. She drew back a little, blushing. "Ah, if you really thought that!" After a pause, she said rather sharply, "Why don't you like Sidney Barslow?"

"I don't exactly dislike him, but sometimes he——" He waved his arm, wanting a word.

"Grates?" she suggested briefly.

"Thank you," said Arthur with a laugh. "Just every now and then, perhaps!"

She stood there a moment longer with an expression on her face which was new to him there; she looked as if she wanted to say something or ask him something, but did not dare. Though her lips smiled, there was appeal, almost

timidity, in her eyes. But she turned away with no more than "Well, good-night."

Scores of times in the last year-and-a-half, since he had come to know her, he had called her "a good sort" for all the kindness and friendship she had shewn him; he had conceived for her, and her clever capable ways, an amused admiration. After these feelings there had grown up in him, by familiarity, a sort of mental friendship for her face and figure too. He never reckoned her beautiful or even very pretty, but she had a piquancy of face and a grace of figure which had gradually become very pleasant to him. That she was physically attractive had been an after-thought, but, when once it had come, it stayed. To-night he was particularly conscious of it, perhaps because of the air of timidity or self-distrust which softened her, and, softening her, flattered in him the latent masculine pride.

Though not entirely, he had been to a large extent free from boyish flirtations and philandering. The necessity of hard work, shyness and fastidiousness, bodily temperament, had all combined to keep him out of such things. One passion of a glorious Oxford summer term he had counted the real thing and remembered even now with a tender exultation; for the girl's heart had been touched, though not to the point of defying either prudence or propriety—even had he ventured to urge such courses. Save for this episode, now remote since such age quickly, he was in essence a stranger in the field of love. He did not recognise nor analyse the curious little stir which was in him as he walked home that night—the feeling of a new gaiety, a new joyfulness, a sense of something triumphant and as it were

liberated and given wings. He did not even get so far as to associate it explicitly and consciously with Marie Sarradet, though he did know that never had she seemed a dearer friend or a more winning girl than she had that night. He stood by the brink of the spring of love, but had not yet drunk of it nor recognised the hand that had led him there.

The girl had gone back to her father and mixed him his 'night-cap' of hot toddy, as her custom was. While he sipped it, she stood beside him, looking down into the fire, still and meditative. Presently she became aware of his bright beady eyes set on her with a glance half-apprehensive, half-amused; she interpreted it easily.

"A long time saying good-night, was I, Pops? And you think I've been flirting? Well, I haven't, and I couldn't have if I'd wanted to. Mr. Lisle never flirts. Joe pretends to sometimes, and Sidney—does. But Mr. Lisle—never!"

"That needn't mean that a man has no serious intentions," Mr. Sarradet opined.

She smiled. "With the English I think it does. We're not quite English, even after all this time, are we? At least you and I aren't; Raymond is, I think."

"Raymond's a goose, English or not," said the father impatiently. "He's in debt again, and I have to pay! I won't leave my business to a spendthrift."

"Oh, he'll get over it. He is silly but—only twenty-two. Pops!"

"And at twenty you've as shrewd a head as I know on your shoulders! Get over it he must or——!" An indignant gulp of his 'night-cap' ended the sentence.

"If you let him go in for something that he liked better than the business——" she began.

"What business has he not to like the business! It's kept us in comfort for a hundred and fifty years. Isn't it good enough for him? It's been good enough for me and my forefathers. We've known what we were; we've never pretended to be anything else. We're honest merchants—shop-keepers. That's what we are."

"Have patience, dear, I'll talk to him," she promised gently, and soothed the old fellow, whose bark was worse than his bite.

"Well, he'll come to me for a cheque once too often, that's all," he grumbled, as he kissed his daughter and took himself off to bed.

"Honest merchants—shop-keepers. That's what we are." The words echoed through Marie Sarradet's head. It was easy to smile at them, both at their pride and at their humility, easy to call ideas of that kind quite out of date. But what if they did represent a truth, irrelevant perhaps nowadays for public or political purposes, but having its relevance and importance in personal relations, in its influence on mind and feeling? This was the direction her thoughts took, though she found no words, and only dim ideas by which to grope. Presently the ideas grew concrete in the word which she had herself suggested to Arthur Lisle and he had accepted with alacrity. Sidney Barslow 'grated' on Arthur. It was not impossible to see why, though even this she acknowledged grudgingly and with a sense of treachery—she herself found so much to like in Sidney! Exactly! There she seemed to lay her finger on the spot. If

she liked Sidney, and Sidney grated on Arthur Lisle so badly—the question which she had not dared to ask at the door rose to her lips again—"Do I grate?" And was that why Arthur Lisle never flirted? Never with her, at least—for that was all she could really know on the subject.

CHAPTER III

IN TOUCH WITH THE LAW

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Arthur Lisle arrived on the pavement in front of Norton Ward's house in Manchester Square five minutes before the time for which he was invited, and fifteen before that at which he would be expected to arrive. Painfully conscious of this fact, he walked first down Duke Street, and then back up Manchester Street, trying to look as if he were going somewhere else. Nor did he venture to arrive at his real destination until he had seen three vehicles deposit their occupants at the door. Then he presented himself with the air of having hurried a little, lest he should be late. None of this conduct struck him as at all unusual or ridiculous; not only now but for long afterwards it was his habit—the habit of a nervous imaginative man.

The party was not a large one—only twelve—and it was entirely legal in character. Besides host and hostess there were three couples—two barrister couples and one solicitor couple. One of the couples brought a daughter, who fell to Arthur's lot. Arthur got on very well with his girl, who was fortunately an enthusiast about lawn-tennis; she interested without absorbing him; he was able to be polite without ceasing to watch the two people who really arrested his attention, his hostess and—most strangely, most wonderfully!—Mr. Justice Lance. For at half-past eight the old Judge, by his arrival, completed the party.

A catalogue of Mrs. Norton Ward's personal attractions would sound commonplace enough. She had small features, was fair, rather pretty, rather pale, and rather short; there seemed no more to say. But she possessed a gracious candour of manner, an extreme friendliness and simplicity, a ready merriment, and together with these a complete freedom from self-consciousness. Somehow she struck Arthur as a highly refined, feminised, etherealised counterpart of Joe Halliday—they were both such good human creatures, so superlatively free from 'nonsense' of all sorts. He took to her immensely from the first moment and hoped very much that she would talk to him a little after dinner. He felt sure that he could get on with her; she did not alarm or puzzle him; he knew that he had "got her right."

When Norton Ward moved, according to ritual, into his wife's vacant place beside Mr. Justice Lance, he beckoned to Arthur to come and sit on the Judge's other side and introduced him. "You just missed the pleasure of hearing his maiden argument the other morning, Judge," he added, laughing slyly at Arthur, who had not got over the surprise of encountering Lance, J., as a private—and harmless—individual.

"Ah, I remember—a case of yours! But O'Sullivan wouldn't give Mr. Lisle a chance!"

He spoke in the same soft, rather weary voice that he had used in court; with his sparse white hair he looked older than when he was in his wig; he was very carefully dressed, and his thin fine hands wore a couple of rather ornate rings. He had keen blue eyes and a large well-shaped nose.