

I -Frivolous Cupid

Upon Harry Sterling's return to Natterley, his transformation from a schoolboy to a university-bound young adult becomes the talk of the town. At the lawn-tennis club, Harry, with his newfound maturity symbolized by the cigarette perched between his lips, is received differently by his peers: warmly by the young men, reluctantly by the younger boys, and with a mix of intrigue and formality by the girls. Among the observers is Mrs. Mortimer, who notices the significant change in Harry, remembering him as a shy and untidy boy from her past encounters.

Harry's interaction with the Mortimer family, particularly with Mrs. Mortimer, takes a notable turn when he prefers her company over playing tennis with the Vicarage girls. Despite Mrs. Mortimer's attempt to maintain a motherly demeanor towards Harry, discussing his future prospects, Harry's actions suggest a shift in their dynamic, hinting at his viewing of Mrs. Mortimer not just as an elder but as a contemporary.

The narrative then delves into Harry's interactions with Maudie Sinclair, a childhood playmate, and Mrs. Mortimer's reflections on Harry's growing attachment to her. Despite Harry's discreet public behavior, ensuring neither embarrassment nor scandal, his attentions begin to stir in Mrs. Mortimer a mix of pleasure, vexation, self-contempt, and eagerness.

A dinner invite at the Sterlings' home further complicates matters. After dinner, Harry is volunteered to escort Mrs. Mortimer home, a task he undertakes with compliant silence. Choosing the longer path home under the pretext of enjoying the moonlit night, Harry's request for Mrs. Mortimer to take his arm under the guise of navigating the dark path highlights the shift in their relationship. This moment encapsulates the beginnings of a frivolous, yet charged, connection between Harry and Mrs. Mortimer against the backdrop of Natterley's social circles.