



His First Holiday

He watched her until she closed her father's door behind her. Then he went into the sweet little bedroom across the hall, sat down rather heavily upon the edge of a couch, pulled his collar away from his throat as if that act were necessary to let the blood back from his head, and murmured over and over again, in the hazy manner imaginable:

"Who would have thought it could come like this? Who would have dreamed it?"

Eleven o'clock that night. A fire in the library grate; logs crackling and the sap singing; the smell of live wood burning; the musketry of popping sparks; the swirl of smoke into the drafty chimney. New logs had just found their place of duty upon the half-starved fire behind the ancient "dogs." A sturdy poking had put life into the lazy embers. It was high time, indeed. For an hour the fire had gone neglected, unheeded. The chill of a bitter night had come creeping into the room, slowly conquering the warmth that had reigned supreme. Outside the wind had begun to whistle with a wilder glee; the creaking of wagon-wheels on the frozen roadway grew louder and more angrily insistent; a desolate cornet, far off in the Christmas air, sobbed its pathetic song to the fickle ear of the night.

Two sentinels had stood watch over the fire for hours. It died as they watched it, and yet they did not see.

Not unlike another fire, a week old and long since dead, was this one, and not unlike the soft glow of another fire-light was that which played on the serene faces of the two sentinels who sat side by side and watched their charge eke