



His First Holiday

closer to her: "I adored you when you were eight. You may call it boyish impulse or whatever you like. Be that as it may, I've never loved any one else. A hundred times I've tried to picture the face, the form, the character of the girl I'd really come to love. Always there came to my mind a face — not a child's face, but a child's face grown to a woman's. It was always the same. The face of the little girl who grew up in my brain without being observed — without a sign that she was there. When she was fifteen, she was fifteen to my dreams; when she was twenty, I imagined her as such. She grew up with me. Every year I saw the change in the girl I pictured as the one I could love. No other came up to that ideal. There could be no other, for there was a real girl there all the time. I loved you years ago, Mary Pembroke, and I must tell you that —"

"Oh, you must n't say it — you must n't!" she cried, tremulously, putting out her hand. "It — it does n't seem real — it would n't seem honest. Please, please don't treat it lightly. Don't spoil it all by —"

"I never was so serious," he said. "I — I did n't mean to shock you. It must sound foolish to you. Of course, I've never meant anything to you. It's all on my side. I've been too abrupt. I've been an awful ass to blurt it out to you so soon. Why, you can't help looking upon me as a total stranger. You have n't thought of me in years and years."

"Oh, I have n't forgotten the spindle-shanked boy," she said in a very low voice. "You may not have known it,