



The Alternative

laughter that greeted him from the shelter of the station building. She had come down to meet him. He had not expected it. But it was most unkind of her to laugh at him. The bundles contained Christmas presents for the children; he had lugged them about at great inconvenience, and — He was thinking these things, but not venturing to express them aloud.

"Forgive me," she cried, hurrying over to him. "You are so funny with all those packages."

He promptly set them down, regardless, and shook hands with her. His ears were a bit red. On second thoughts, he didn't blame her for laughing. He now recalled that other people had smiled as he crowded through the aisle of the car, but he had not noticed it at the time on account of a certain abstractedness that had to do with the future and not the present.

"I didn't expect you," he said. "It's awfully good of you to meet me. Merry Christmas!"

"To you the same," she cried, meeting his gaze with one in which happiness shone brightly. "I had a dark purpose in meeting you here, Mr. Van Pycke. It's very mysterious."

"Splendid!" he said. "I've always wanted to be a conspirator."

"Let me take some of the packages — yes, do! I insist! You are ridiculous, carrying all these things. I have a cab around the corner. We'll —"

"A cab!" he exclaimed, dropping a picture puzzle with considerable effect. "My dear Miss Pembroke, we can't afford cabs! They're luxuries."