



The Alternative

She appeared in the swinging door, her face flushed and her eyes glowing.

"Was n't it fun?" she cried.

He was picking cotton from his hair. He paused in this operation to stare at her, entranced.

"By Jove!" he murmured, his soul leaping to his eyes. As if fascinated, he advanced slowly, his hands extended to clasp hers. She drew back ever so slightly, confused by the look in his eyes. She gave him her hands, however, — warm, firm little hands that hesitated a long time before responding to the grip he gave them.

"Do you know," he said, irrelevant but serious to the point of perplexing her, "I believe I've never had you out of my mind during all these years? I have n't realized it before, but now I honestly believe it's true. You've been here — in my brain — all this time. That's why no one else ever really got in. Mary Pembroke, you are still the loveliest girl I've ever seen — just as you were fourteen years ago. You are just as wonderful to me now as you were then — even though you were eight and yellow-haired and lived in the cabin *de luxe*. It's — it's marvelous. You've been lying dormant in my memory — in my heart — all these years. Now you are suddenly revived. It's a terribly queer sensation. I — I don't believe I'll get over it."

She withdrew her hands; her lids wavered before his steady gaze. Something ineffably sweet crept into the dark eyes; a quick, almost imperceptible quiver flashed over her chin, and her lips parted in tremulous protest against the possibility of jest.