



## *The Alternative*

my friend, but I was very deeply in love with you in the days of the old *Campania*. I was —”

“You were! You really were?” he cried, with difficulty reducing it to a half whisper.

“I was a very impressionable child,” she said, regaining all of her lost ground as only a woman can when carried to the last extremity.

“And — and I *may* have a chance even now?” he cried, his eyes gleaming.

She pushed the swing-door open with her elbow and demurely held it ajar for him, a soft smile on her lips that he did not then understand and never was to understand, being a male.

“You are Santa Claus, not Romeo,” she said. He also missed the flutter in her voice and entirely overlooked the fact that she was breathing quickly.

He followed her into the dining-room, strangely subdued. They came by the light of a window. There, with an impulsive gesture and a quick laugh, she halted him. Her amused eyes were taking in his tumbled hair.

“Wait,” she said. “Do you mind if I pick some of the cotton out of your hair?”

“Not at all,” he said with alacrity.

“Lean over,” she said. He did so. Very daintily, very deftly she pulled the stray wisps of cotton from his hair, so deftly, in fact, that he scarcely felt the touch of her fingers, although his whole being thrilled with the delicious sensation of contact. For years he was to remember that infinite minute and a half. He knew how pleased Samson