

She looked at him with startled, uncomprehending eyes. "What love?" she answered. "I never have. Love who?"

He pointed upward, and after a moment she laughed, a sudden shy gratefulness in her eyes.

"O, an old blind man—and a kiddie that didn't have a home!" she retorted. "What's that amount to?" She went to arrange the silver with hands uncertain in confusion. "But it's just fine to think so." She crossed to him impulsively, her hands out to the lapels of his coat. "Seems like your thinking so has kept me at it all the time. And now—have you given that girl up? And when are you going to the hills?" She watched him dissembling with her old good-humor. "You know the place is sold to the Chinese—we'll have to quit each other and drift somewhere."

"No, I'm not going to have that. Nel, you'll go with me."

She sat back, and while the sparrows twittered in the breeze, she studied the tip of her finger. Then she turned seriously: "Go?—*Live* with you?"

"Marry me. Look here—we've no need of pretense—we know the big old fight. We can keep on trying, chum—somewhere."

"But if we cared," she murmured, "if we only did!"

"It's curious you think of that. Nel, you dreamer—you idealist!"

The girl was still. Presently she sat forward, watching his intent. "A woman must go on and live, I suppose—somehow. But this—no—" she smiled in a distant tenderness. "Hammy, you mustn't mind me. You go to the Sierras as you dreamed, and ride and shoot