

# **How the Man Came to Twinkling Island**

Melville Chater



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# How the Man Came to Twinkling Island

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OUT of the great world came a man to the wooing of Susanna Crane. From the vague southwest he came, now skirting the chimneyed towns and elm-bordered village streets, now exchanging the road for the bright rails and perhaps the interior of a droning freight-car, now switching anew through the edge of odorous pine woods, yet leaving behind him always a wary, broken trail.

The man was tall and strong, with hair that gleamed red in the sun, and eyes of a reddish brown. He walked with the free swing of a world wanderer, yet always his heart strained for a glimpse of the Canadian border; for some hundreds of miles behind him lay the Vermont marble quarries whose dust still faintly blanched his clothes, and there, in a drunken flight, he had killed a man. He did not know that in fleeing from justice he was rushing into the arms of love; he did not even know that he was in the Ragged Woods, with Twinkling Island just off the coast; he only studied the tree bark and snuffed the breeze, and knew that the sea was near. At length, well satisfied with the distance he had come since dawn, he cleared a space among the pine cones, then lay down, and, lulled by the ancient whisper of the wind in the treetops, closed his eyes.

He was of the Ulysses breed, this man, a wanderer of the earth, acquainted with many cities, one whose shipwrecks and misfortunes had but whetted his love of life; and even while he slept, there came upon him, as of old Nausicaa came upon Ulysses, a woman. She, too, was straight and strong; her dark face was framed by a blue-checked sunbonnet; she carried a large basket filled with blackberries, and her lips as well as her hands were stained. She saw the man lying in a shaft of the sunset, and started back, then, tiptoeing past, bent forward slightly to examine his face. In that lingering gaze a twig cracked beneath her foot. He sat up instantly, tense, expectant; then for a silent space their eyes caught and clung. Thus the first pair might have gazed when Adam wakened to find her who was bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh, standing over him.

"Did I scare you, Miss?" at length asked the Man. "I thought — well, I didn't know who you might be at first." His gaze deepened into unconcealed admiration. "I wouldn't scare you for anything!"

"I ain't so easy scairt," the girl returned defiantly. "Ef I was," she went on in her fresh, young voice, full of queer, upward inflections, "I wouldn't be a-berryin' in Ragged Woods after sundaown."

She marched onward, her head thrown well back. Twenty steps later the Man was again at her side.

"Pardname, little one!" he said. "But, seein' you ain't scared, an' thar bein' no blaze in these yere parts, maybe you'd put us on the trail. Guess I'd a-gone on siesterin' till midnight if you hadn't a-happened by — gracias á Dios!"

Her glance shot suspicion at him as though she scented banter in the strange, foreign phrases; then she said:

"Ef you mean you want'er git to Potuck, whar the railroad starts, you've got to walk three miles back to the Potuck Road; then it's three miles west to Potuck taown."

"An' what lies on ahead, whar you're goin'?" he asked.

"Why, nothin'," she returned with a child's surprised simplicity. "Nothin' but Twinklin' Island an' father an' me."

There was silence then, but the Man watched the strong, straight lines of her face. Her keen black eyes, her wealth of black hair tumbled into the back-fallen sunbonnet. At length he said quietly:

"Think I'll g'long over with you to your island, camarada. Maybe your father's got a bite o' something for a hungry man. I pay the freight, sabe? 'Twon't take me more'n a couple o' hours to make the railroad to-night."

To this she vouchsafed nothing, but swung onward, shifting her heavy basket from one hand to the other; then a strong grasp intervened, and she found herself burdenless. In the village streets of Potuck and Nogantic, shamefaced lads had offered such help a hundred times, and she had accepted it, flattered by their homage; but the

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quick, silent action of this big, red-haired man thrilled her with strange anger.

"I don't want no help," she said proudly, "I kin carry that."

"Not while I'm here, chiquita mia!" He smiled downward, and his body seemed to loom over her like a shield. "Say, when I woke up an' seen you, do you know what come into my head? A little Navajo squaw I knowed once. Her name was Moonlight Water, but the fellers called her Little Peachey. But she was twenty-five, and you — well, now, how old might you be?"

"Goin' on eighteen," she would have answered nonchalantly to any one else; for him there woke from the depths of her nature a fierce retort:

"Give us that basket! I ain't a-goin' to let you carry it a speck further."

"All right," he acquiesced with broad, kind humor, yet without relinquishing his burden. "All right, chiquita mia! Never you mind me, Little Peachey!"

They gained a bare tongue of land lapped by water. She stepped into a canoe, the Man following. Very quickly he took the paddle from her and put forth with strong, practiced strokes, cheering himself onward with snatches of a queer, guttural burden which he had picked up from a negro chantey-singer on some Southern cotton-wharf.

Straight ahead lay the island, breasting the Atlantic swell. Seen from the distant hills, the red sunset strikes its outpost cliffs for a moment's splendor, and so it is called Twinkling Island. The girl said not a word, nor indeed was it necessary. He found the beach without trouble, helped her ashore, and carried the canoe up the slope on his back. A hundred yards onward they encountered a low, rambling house and the vague shape, in the twilight, of an elderly man smoking his pipe on the steps.

The stranger set down the canoe and gave an account of himself. But even as the great Ulysses was wont to name a false lineage and give a feigned story to his hosts, so this man said his name was McFarlane — which it was not — and told a wily tale of having been directed to a logging camp where hands were needed, of alighting at the wrong station and losing his way in an attempted short cut through the woods. Meanwhile his listener, a man of weather-beaten face and a great shock of gray hair, observed him with shrewd attention. At length he replied:

"Thar's few strangers git to Twinkling Island; but so long as you're here, you're welcome to our plain victuals. The money's neither here nor thar. Git supper, daughter. Seems you're mighty particular to git that canoe high an' dry to-night."

The girl wheeled abruptly and strode indoors, flashing at the stranger a covert, half-defiant glance.

"Gals are queer cattle," mused old Crane, drawing off his fisherman's boots. "'Pears to give 'em a kind o' satisfaction to set a man to work. Her mother was just the same, before her."

The guest said nothing; but the realization that the girl who had grudged his taking her basket had afterward suffered him to carry her canoe quite an unnecessary distance, seemed to yield him no unpleasant thoughts.

They sat down to supper in a low-ceiled room of smoked rafters. The stranger ate hungrily and with few words, yet always his gaze followed the girl's slim figure as she moved to and fro, waiting on the board. As the food disappeared, the talk sprang up. The girl brought in a huge pitcher of cider and left the men by the fireplace, while she passed back and forth, clearing away the dishes. Crane set out a decanter of whisky, which spirit he mixed sparingly with his cider, as did also his guest — none too sparingly.

Now was the Man's heart loosened, and he told of all he had seen and done and lived; of his spendthrift youth, passed aboard tramp freighters between Lisbon and Rio, Leith and Natal, Tokyo, Melhourne and the Golden Gate — wherever the sea ran green; of ginseng-growing in China, shellac gathering in India, cattle-grazing in Wyoming. He spoke of Alaskan totem-poles, of Indian sign language, of Aztec monoliths buried in the forest. He sang "Lather an' Shavin's," "La Golondrina," "The Cowboy's Lament," and, clicking his fingers castanet-wise, hummed little Spanish airs whose words he would by no means translate.

Crane marveled that this man should be still on the hitherward side of thirty; and as the stranger sat there, his very clothes, poor rags of civilization, seemed to bulk with heroic lines, his face to reflect man's primal freedom, while his every word rang with the sheer joy of the things he had seen and known.

At a break in the talk, the girl, who, though she had constantly busied herself about the room, had missed not a word, nodded significantly to her father, then walked from the house and out into the night. He glanced after her for a moment, then turned with a queer smile.

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"We're all 'baout the same, I reckon," he said, "so far as furren countries is consarned. That's to say, a man allways conceits thar's a heap o' promise waitin' for him, somewhar over yonder. Naow, you've seen sights enough for a hundred men. Contrariwise, thar's my gal — never been further'n the Caounty Fair. But that don't stop her; no sirree, human nature can't be stopped. Every night, fair or storm, she walks daown an' sits on the rocks, lookin' seaward, before she turns in. She's done it ever since she was so high. Why, thar's nothin' to see but the Atlantic an' a piece o' foreland to the northwest! But her fancy is, the sea's a-bringin' her somethin' — that's what she used to say as a kid — somethin', she don't rightly know what. I say it's just furren countries — pieces she's got outer story books, an' yarns she's heard the fishermen tell — that's what's she's hankerin' for, Mr. McFarlane. So ye see, as I say, we're all 'baout the same, that way."

"When I first seen her," began the Man tentatively, "I could ha' sworn that — See here, now! Ain't thar still the leavin's of a redskin outfit up this way?"

"Why, yes," returned the other, with some compunction. "I don't talk much 'baout it — not that it's a thing to be ashamed of; but I wouldn't give the gal a handle to think herself different from any one else hereabout. The truth is, her mother's mother was pretty near to a full-blooded Ojibway — not the kind you've seen plaitin' baskets for summer boarders, but a clean, straight-backed red woman, an' she claimed descent from one o' their big chiefs. I'm English stock myself, but the wild breed mixes slow: it's in her blood, Mr. McFarlane, and sometimes it worrits me. Thar's days she won't speak nor eat, but just goes off to the woods an' makes little trinkets out o' pine needles an' bark, and then I know the fit's on her. And proud! Thar's not a man hereabout she'd lift an eye at, and one feller that wouldn't take "no" got his head split open with an oar. Sometimes I've thought that ef she was married to a strong man — strong and kind, d'ye see? — 'twould be the best thing for her."

At this the stranger, who had missed no word, leaned quickly forward, the firelight striking his firm face. With the poise of conscious power he said quite simply:

"I'm the man!"

They eyed each other a moment, Crane measuring the Man who had come, the Man inviting measurement.

"You mean — ?" asked the father. He paused as if welcoming interruption, but it was not in this man's slow, sure nature to interrupt. "Tell us what you do mean!"

"I mean," repeated the other slowly, "that I'm the man! I love that little gal, I want to marry her. O' course you object: that's natural, that's right. I like your objectin', an' I'm going to fight it to a show-down. First you'll say, 'You're verrückt — crazy.' See hyar now! I've lived life, I have, and I've seen a drove o' women, hither an' yon, but not one of 'em could hold me, no more'n an ordinary slipknot could hold stuff on a packsaddle. I'm no lightweight, an' I need the diamond hitch. But to-day, when I seen little Peachey in the scrub over yonder, why, it was different, and I knowed it right quick. Ever broke a horse, have you? Well, before you've got your lasso coiled, the critter's eyes'll tell you just what sort o' tea-party you're goin' to have. Thar was a man once — a hoss wrangler — an' the easier a hoss broke, the more he'd mouch around an' hang his head, real melancholy and sad-eyed. The only minutes o' slap-bang-up joy that came his way was when he corralled a buckner whose natural ability to roll on him an' kick his brains out left no percentage o' chance in the player's favor. Maybe that's what I seen in little Peachey to-day. Just now you said the wild breed mixes slow. It does: for it sticks out, waitin' for its own kind. And by that same token, blood talks to blood — aye, even without no Indian sign-language. Maybe all these years Little Peachey, settin' out on them rocks, has been a-watchin' for more than foreign countries."

"Aye, mebbe that's all right." Crane paced the floor, and his voice rose savagely: "Don't know but what your palaver mightn't win plenty o' foolish gals. But who are ye? What's your trade? What's your folks? Thar's lots o' rogues afoot. Do you allow I'd let the first stranger in Ragged Woods talk marriage to my daughter? What have you said? What's between you? Out with it, or I'll have you in Rockledge Jail by to-morrow morning!"

The Man who had come nodded response with imperturbable gravity.

"I like your talk," he said. "It comes straight off the hip, an' it calls for a straight answer. What have I spoke to her? Nothin'! What's between us? Nothin' but the makin's! Next, touchin' myself: Since sixteen I've been kickin' up the dust o' the earth till my home is anywhar immediately convenient. Once I had a brother in New Orleans, another in the Northwest, and another who drank himself accidentally into the British army an' died in the Sudan. We were wanderers, the lot of us. I'm Scotch-Irish, and my old mother used to claim we harked back to the kings o' some outfit I've forgotten. But blood-facts is no more proof than specimens from an unprospected claim."

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Friends? I make 'em everywhar: any one on the top o' the earth who's got the makin's of a man kin call me friend. Yet right here an' now I wouldn't touch the twelve apostles for an assay on my character. 'Cause why? 'Cause I hold that, just like a man lays in his own little square o' earth, so a man stands alone on his own little piece o' reputation. Good or bad, friends or no friends, it's his'n; and the Almighty files a pretty good chart of it right on his face. I want you to size me up accordingly."

Again the father gazed deeply at the Man who had come, and again the Man gave him the full of his eyes. Crane's glance shifted suspiciously from the other's face to the decanter and back again; the Man immediately responded by lifting his glass.

"Fill that up three times raw," he said, "and I'll swaller it in three breaths, just to show you what a drink is. No, sir, it's hot your picayune drop o' spirits that's talkin' — it's me. Acabado! Finished!" And, tossing the contents of his glass into the fire, he replaced it upside down on the table.

"Yes," said Crane wonderingly, "you're sober — and you're honest. You certainly are honest!" He paused as if to steel himself. "But what o' that? Why should you come between me and my child in one night, after these twenty years we've spent — we've spent — " Simultaneously his words failed and his shoulders drooped. "See here, now: Stay along and work for me awhile. I'll give you half shares in the boat. But just wait, wait awhile. Some day you'll speak to her about it, and then — then mebbe I'll see it different."

But the Man rose restively.

"It comes hard on you," he mused, "aye, mighty hard; but it ain't all my doin', Mr. Crane, nor yet Little Peachey's. It's something bigger'n the lot of us: it's nature. You might as well put your back up against a landslide. As to stayin' on here, 'tain't in me: I must hit the trail to-morrow morning. But to-night thar's somethin' in here" — —and he struck his breast — "that won't keep: it's got to be said. I've spoken my little piece, an' you say you size me for a man. Bien! Bein' a man, I take no favors. No sir, I ain't no empty-handed brave. Little Peachey bein' the squaw for me, an' I havin' told you so, an' smoked your tobacco an' drunk your whisky, I hereby deliver."

He drew out a roll of bills and tossed them upon the table, observing whimsically:

"Two hundred an' thirty-odd dollars, honestly come by, an' all the estate, real or otherwise, whereof I stand possessed. Money talks. Take it; it's yours. An' now I'm goin' to find Little Peachey."

He strode out into the night and toward the forelands, his ears guided by the monotonous crash and moan of the long Atlantic swell.

Standing on the cliff was a wind-fluttered figure that turned at the sound of his step, with eyes defiantly alert.

"You knew I'd come," he said simply, drawing close to her. "Peachey, little Peachey, what's them waves a-sayin' to the rocks? It's: 'Me! You! Me! You!' Ain't they always been a-sayin' it? Kin you stop 'em, little Peachey? And that's the words I'm a-standin' here now fer to say to you."

"I ain't a-go'in' to listen," she cried sharply, drawing back. "I don't want none o' your words. You just leave me alone, now, Mister — Mister — — "

"Why, names don't count between us, chiquita," said he, with his great-hearted smile. "I'm just a man, I am, an' you're just a woman; and rightly I don't know no name for the thing that's been a-callin' between us ever since I seen you in the woods. But I kin see it in your face, Peachey, an' you kin see it in mine; it's a-lookin' at me through them eyes o' yourn — — "

"Don't you look at me!" she cried, flinging an arm across her face. "I hate you, you — Man. Don't you come near me, naow! I hate you, I could kill you!"

But he only smiled down upon her kindly, understandingly.

"That's what the father said — aye, or somethin' mighty like it; but I told him, I wrestled with him till he savvied. And — makin' no secrets between us, Peachey — I paid him two hundred dollars down, to call it quits. Why, what's a few dollars? They don't cut no figure between you and me, 'cause I love you, little Peachey, an' I know right down in your heart you love me, too."

His voice quivered deeply as he drew near and laid his hands on her shoulders.

Instantly she raised her face, and their glances met in one quick flare. He felt her shiver in his grasp like some panic-stricken animal, then she turned and fled from him.

He followed, calling after her to stop; yet the lust of the chase swelled within him, and he knew he but loved this woman the more that she was not lying tamed within his arm. Breasting the house, he saw that she had swerved toward the island's long, leeward neck, from whence there was thrown a narrow pile-bridge connecting



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it with the mainland. His feet rang on the planks as she gained the opposite shore; and his heart laughed with joy, for he divined the instinct that had called her, not to her father's side, but to the mysterious heart of the woods.

Now he felt beneath him the soft pad of pine needles, little twigs switched his face, and warm, odorous airs breathed their welcome. Through the dimness he saw her gain the crest of a ridge, running lightly with long strides, and, as he reached the spot, from the hollow beneath there rang her voice flung back in mocking laughter. By the trail's wide curve and the shelving land he perceived that they were skirting the edge of inland waters; more than this he knew nothing save that, through vista after vista, mile by mile, her flying feet beckoned him onward, and that her heart was singing to his the last wild defiance of the almost-won.

At a sharp turn he came suddenly upon a cleared space shoring along the water's edge, lit by a blazing camp-fire. Within the circle of the glow she stood, a spent, panting figure, half supported by two men. A hunting-dog dashed forward, menacing the oncomer with stiffened back and bared teeth. The man strode into the group and said with quiet courtesy:

"Good evening, gentlemen. I am glad you rounded her up, for both consarned. Peachey, my hat's off to you an' all your tribe: you'd have run till you dropped. I see, gentlemen, that you're sizin' me up, which is natural an' gratifyin'. But things is square an' satisfactory between me and her, I do assure you."

The younger of the two — a tall, keen-faced man of city-bred appearance — turned to the girl and said with irritation:

"I don't understand. What does he mean? Are you his wife?"

She was leaning against a tree, her face averted. "No!" she panted vehemently. "No, no!"

"Tell yer it's Crane's gal," insisted the second man. "They live over yonder on the island. I pointed it aout a-comin' through the woods, the day you landed up here, Mr. Hemsley."

"Have you any claim on this girl?" demanded Hemsley, wheeling upon the stranger.

"Touchin' claims," returned the other, with sure emphasis, "I am not for filin' mine with the first party immediately convenient. The claim is filed O. K. elsewhere, and at present, as you're prospectin' on the hither side o' my line, I'll put one straight question to you: Did, or did not, Little Peachey ask you for protection?"

"Why, no," retorted Hemsley, a trifle confused, "she didn't — not in so many words." He turned to the girl. "Who is this man? Tell me everything; you needn't be afraid, Miss Crane."

"I'm not afraid!" she flashed sullenly. "He was a-layin' in Ragged Woods this afternoon, an' he carried my berry basket home an' stayed to supper. And afterward he caught hold o' me, he did, an' tried to kiss me; an' I ran away 'cause — 'cause I hate him. I hate him!"

Her shrill cry ended in a passionate gesture. Wheeling, she marched down the slope to the water's edge, where she stood looking out into the night. All at once the man threw his face up to the sky and burst into a great roar of laughter.

"Right you are, Little Peachey!" he called. "Thar ain't no more to be said than that — just you an' me in the Ragged Woods at sundown. An' now — Blessed if we ain't downright stampeded! It's a reg'lar round-up, Peachey!" And he laughed again uncontrollably.

"Well," said Hemsley at length, "I don't like the looks of things, and I'm going to make it my business to take Miss Crane home to her father. I advise you not to make any trouble until you've proved who you are. Rockledge County Jail is only six miles away."

The other sobered to a statue, then turned, regarding Hemsley with mild fixity.

"Gentlemen," he said, "gentlemen both. I ain't askin' for your help, and, as far as I can see, neither is Peachey. I mean it. Gentlemen, a mule is a most onsafe critter. Even when you go to his funeral, you'll do well to sit at the head of the coffin."

Then all three turned quickly, for there had arisen from below the sound of a grating keel.

"That settles it," said Hemsley with dry satisfaction. "Miss Crane has gone home in the canoe. So much the better: I'm not looking for trouble." And he turned away.

But the Man gave one great laugh, then he was off like a shot, down the slope and into the water. At shoulder-depth he overtook the canoe and clung to its stern.

"Go up forward, Little Peachey," he cried, "an' sit mighty still till I swing in, else we'll be swimmin' in another minute. There!"

And drawing himself up over the stern, he seized the paddle, while the canoe leaped forward beneath his

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powerful strokes. From somewhere along the shore came the sound of voices, but the camp-fire blazed deserted. Gradually its light diminished to a twinkling spark in the blackness. For a while no word was spoken, the man bending to his task, the girl crouching with averted face in the extreme bow. Then a little new moon peered over the distant pine tops, the heavens spread their starry veil, and the hour of Susanna Crane's wooing had come.

"Me! You!" intoned the Man, to the sweep of his paddle. "Me! You! That's what the waves were sayin', that's what you kep' a-callin' to me through the woods, that's what the stars are writin' on the sky — Me! You! Big Chief, oh, you heap Big Chief, somewhar up yonder, ain't you l'arned me some things this day? Peachey, me and another man, down in the marble quarries, got fightin' in liquor, an' he drew a gun on me, an' I killed him with it. Then I got away quick and careless-like; but the Big Chief he leads me up here an' sets me in the woods, an' sends you along the trail. An' while I'm lyin' thar asleep, He tells me in a dream, 'You proud man! You unbroke buckler! Maybe you kin kill a man, but I've got my own good way o' tamin' you and bringin' you home.' Blood for blood I thought He meant, but I wakes up and — Qué gracia! — thar you stands. And your face it says to me, 'Come on, you wicked, red-handed man. God's a-callin'.' And I says to myself real sudden, like I was at a camp meetin', 'Praise God!' Then, when we ran into the camp, just now, who was thar but Hemsley, the county sheriff, whose deputies have been after me for a week! Maybe the Big Chief's savin' me to l'arn me something more. So again I says, 'Praise God!'

"Will you travel with me, camarada?" he went on. "The whole big world's waitin' for us. I kin read an' write, an' my arms are strong. We'll ride the plains an' climb the hills an' swim in the rivers, and when you're tired I'll carry you on my shoulder. Then we'll take in the big, flat cities, Little Peachey, an' walk around 'em at night, lookin' on friendly. Yes, we'll drop in at all of 'em, stringin' out across the country like sideshows on the old Chicago Midway. And one o' these days, when we're gittin' real old, we'll pull up stakes an' start off to locate our last campin' ground. Thar ain't no maps nor surveys to it; it's just somewhar over yonder, and we'll know it on sight, Little Peachey. Maybe it's some picayune island chucked into the middle o' the ocean, with one high rock whar we can sit and watch the sun a-risin' an' the sun a-settin', an' the seagulls flyin'. And we'll talk over old times, Little Peachey, an' we'll just sit an' watch an' wait thar together till — till thar ain't nothin' left at all, only the rocks an' the sky an' the gulls a-screamin' at the sea.

"Peachey, a man read me some pieces out o' a book once, and I wrote 'em down an' learned 'em.

"'For springtime is here,' it says, 'thou soul unloosened — the restlessness after I know not what. Oh, if we could but fly like a bird! Oh, to escape, to sail forth as on a ship!' Camarada, give me your hand. I will give you myself, more precious than money. Will you give me yourself? Will you travel with me? Shall we stick by each other as long as we live?"

The chant of his voice died away upon the night, and there was no sound but the soft ripple of the water under keel. In the bow sat the girl, motionless as a crouched Indian, her face fixed upon the nearing shore.

As the water shoaled, the Man stroked powerfully, landing the canoe sternforemost; then he stepped forth, drew it along the bank, and said:

"Camarada, give me your hand!"

But already the girl had risen, steadyng herself with the bow paddle. With a sinuous movement she eluded his arms, and fled; then voices woke amid the pines, and the Man strode forward, to find his way blocked by two men holding the sobbing girl between them.

"I've seen enough of this," said Hemsley, facing him, "to know what you are. Miss Crane, can you find your way home alone? Jim, you and I will walk this man over to Rockledge."

"Peachey!" called the Man, retreating instantly. "Come on over here; thar's goin' to be trouble. Git behind me, Little Peachey!"

In the landing place there was driven a heavy stake. He drew this forth, then advanced, saying earnestly:

"Gentlemen both, you size me up wrong. Now, I ain't lookin' for trouble, but don't you bank too strong on takin' me anywhar with you to-night."

Hemsley's right hand drew backward, then came the level glitter of a long revolver barrel. "Drop that!" he began.

But suddenly something flashed before his face, and the keen edge of a boat-paddle bit numbingly into his extended hand; then the girl darted forward to where the revolver lay glistening among the pine needles.

"Well struck, Little Peachey," cried the Man; and he stepped protectingly in front of her, with upraised stake.

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But she stood from behind him and leveled the revolver full at Hemsley.

"I don't want your help," she said. The words came torn from her in sobbing whispers. "Git! Don't you come back no more. Don't you send no one lookin' for this man. I kin take care o' myself, I guess."

And the look in her eyes warned them to go. Now the Man and the Woman were alone in the black hush of the pine woods.

"I saved you," she said at length; "now go away from here. Yes, go!" And as her face lifted defiantly to his, her voice slid upward like the lonely, untamed wail of some wild creature. "Go back from whar you come! Don't you never let me see your face again, nor hear you speak; don't you never touch me no more, you Man! 'Cause I'm scairt o' you, I am; 'cause you're big an' strong, an' you'd forgit a gal like me. 'Cause I hate you, an' I hate myself!"

For an instant the man gazed at her, perplexed, irresolute; then he took her right hand and guided it until the revolver muzzle touched his forehead.

"Peachey," he whispered tenderly, "you hate me — but could you kill me; Little Peachey?" And he smiled his great, full-hearted smile.

Then her hand fell, her head sunk upon his breast, and a strong shuddering filled all her young body.

"Oh, Man, Man!" she breathed, as his arms closed about her.