

ALTSHELER JOSEPH ALEXANDER

THE YOUNG TRAILERS: A
STORY OF EARLY
KENTUCKY

Joseph Altsheler

**The Young Trailers: A
Story of Early Kentucky**

«Public Domain»

Altsheler J.

The Young Trailers: A Story of Early Kentucky / J. Altsheler —
«Public Domain»,

Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	10
CHAPTER III	14
CHAPTER IV	24
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	29

Joseph A. Altsheler

The Young Trailers: A Story of Early Kentucky

CHAPTER I

INTO THE UNKNOWN

It was a white caravan that looked down from the crest of the mountains upon the green wilderness, called by the Indians, *Kain-tuck-ee*. The wagons, a score or so in number, were covered with arched canvas, bleached by the rains, and, as they stood there, side by side, they looked like a snowdrift against the emerald expanse of forest and foliage.

The travelers saw the land of hope, outspread before them, a wide sweep of rolling country, covered with trees and canebrake, cut by streams of clear water, flowing here and there, and shining in the distance, amid the green, like threads of silver wire. All gazed, keen with interest and curiosity, because this unknown land was to be their home, but none was more eager than Henry Ware, a strong boy of fifteen who stood in front of the wagons beside the guide, Tom Ross, a tall, lean man the color of well-tanned leather, who would never let his rifle go out of his hand, and who had Henry's heartfelt admiration, because he knew so much about the woods and wild animals, and told such strange and absorbing tales of the great wilderness that now lay before them.

But any close observer who noted Henry Ware would always have looked at him a second time. He was tall and muscled beyond his years, and when he walked his figure showed a certain litheness and power like that of the forest bred. His gaze was rapid, penetrating and inclusive, but never furtive. He seemed to fit into the picture of the wilderness, as if he had taken a space reserved there for him, and had put himself in complete harmony with all its details.

The long journey from their old home in Maryland had been a source of unending variety and delight to Henry. There had been no painful partings. His mother and his brother and young sister were in the fourth wagon from the right, and his father stood beside it. Farther on in the same company were his uncles and aunts, and many of the old neighbors. All had come together. It was really the removal of a village from an old land to a new one, and with the familiar faces of kindred and friends around them, they were not lonely in strange regions, though mountains frowned and dark forests lowered.

It was to Henry a return rather than a removal. He almost fancied that in some far-off age he had seen all these things before. The forests and the mountains beckoned in friendly fashion; they had no terrors, for even their secrets lay open before him. He seemed to breathe a newer and keener air than that of the old land left behind, and his mind expanded with the thought of fresh pleasures to come. The veteran guide, Ross, alone observed how the boy learned, through intuition, ways of the wilderness that others achieved only by hard experience.

They had met fair weather, an important item in such a journey, and there had been no illness, beyond trifling ailments quickly cured. As they traveled slowly and at their ease, it took them a long time to pass through the settled regions. This part of the journey did not interest Henry so much. He was eager for the forests and the great wilderness where his fancy had already gone before. He wanted to see deer and bears and buffaloes, trees bigger than any that grew in Maryland, and mountains and mighty rivers. But they left the settlements behind at last, and came to the unbroken forest. Here he found his hopes fulfilled. They were on the first slopes of the mountains that divide Virginia from Kentucky, and the bold, wild nature of the country pleased him. He had never seen mountains before, and he felt the dignity and grandeur of the peaks.

Sometimes he went on ahead with Tom Ross, the guide, his chosen friend, and then he considered himself, in very truth, a man, or soon to become one, because he was now exploring the unknown, leading the way for a caravan—and there could be no more important duty. At such moments he listened to the talk of the guide who taught the lesson that in the wilderness it was always important to see and to listen, a thing however that Henry already knew instinctively. He learned the usual sounds of the woods, and if there was any new noise he would see what made it. He studied, too, the habits of the beasts and birds. As for fishing, he found that easy. He could cut a rod with his clasp knife, tie a string to the end of it and a bent pin to the end of a string, and with this rude tackle he could soon catch in the mountain creeks as many fish as he wanted.

Henry liked the nights in the mountains; in which he did not differ from his fellow-travelers. Then the work of the day was done; the wagons were drawn up in a half circle, the horses and the oxen were resting or grazing under the trees, and, as they needed fires for warmth as well as cooking, they built them high and long, giving room for all in front of the red coals if they wished. The forest was full of fallen brushwood, as dry as tinder, and Henry helped gather it. It pleased him to see the flames rise far up, and to hear them crackle as they ate into the heart of the boughs. He liked to see their long red shadows fall across the leaves and grass, peopling the dark forest with fierce wild animals; he would feel all the cosier within the scarlet rim of the firelight. Then the men would tell stories, particularly Ross, the guide, who had wandered much and far in Kentucky. He said that it was a beautiful land. He spoke of the noble forests of beech and oak and hickory and maple, the dense canebrake, the many rivers, and the great Ohio that received them all—the Beautiful River, the Indians called it—and the game, with which forests and open alike swarmed, the deer, the elk, the bear, the panther and the buffalo. Now and then, when the smaller children were asleep in the wagons and the larger ones were nodding before the fires, the men would sink their voices and speak of a subject which made them all look very grave indeed. It sounded like Indians, and the men more than once glanced at their rifles and powderhorns.

But the boy, when he heard them, did not feel afraid. He knew that savages of the most dangerous kind often came into the forests of Kentucky, whither they were going, but he thrilled rather than shivered at the thought. Already he seemed to have the knowledge that he would be a match for them at any game they wished to play.

Henry usually slept very soundly, as became a boy who was on his feet nearly all day, and who did his share of the work; but two or three times he awoke far in the night, and, raising himself up in the wagon, peeped out between the canvas cover and the wooden body. He saw a very black night in which the trees looked as thin and ghostly as shadows, and smoldering fires, beside which two men rifle on shoulder, always watched. Often he had a wish to watch with them, but he said nothing, knowing that the others would hold him too young for the task.

But to-day he felt only joy and curiosity. They were now on the crest of the last mountain ridge and before them lay the great valley of Kentucky; their future home. The long journey was over. The men took off their hats and caps and raised a cheer, the women joined through sympathy and the children shouted, too, because their fathers and mothers did so, Henry's voice rising with the loudest.

A slip of a girl beside Henry raised an applauding treble and he smiled protectingly at her. It was Lucy Upton, two years younger than himself, slim and tall, dark-blue eyes looking from under broad brows, and dark-brown curls, lying thick and close upon a shapely head.

"Are you not afraid?" she asked.

"Afraid of what?" replied Henry Ware, disdainfully.

"Of the forests over there in Kentucky. They say that the savages often come to kill."

"We are too strong. I do not fear them."

He spoke without any vainglory, but in the utmost confidence. She glanced covertly at him. He seemed to her strong and full of resource. But she would not show her admiration.

They passed from the mountain slope into a country which now sank away in low, rolling hills like the waves of the sea and in which everything grew very beautiful. Henry had never seen such trees in the East. The beech, the elm, the hickory and the maple reached gigantic proportions, and wherever the shade was not too dense the grass rose heavy and rank. Now and then they passed thickets of canebrake, and once, at the side of a stream, they came to a salt "lick." It was here that a fountain spouted from the base of a hill, and, running only a few feet, emptied into a creek. But its waters were densely impregnated with salt, and all around its banks the soft soil was trodden with hundreds of footsteps.

"The wild beasts made these," said the guide to Henry. "They come here at night: elk, deer, buffalo, wolves, and all the others, big and little, to get the salt. They drink the water and they lick up the salt too from the ground."

A fierce desire laid hold of the boy at these words. He had a small rifle of his own, which however he was not permitted to carry often. But he wanted to take it and lie beside the pool at night when the game came down to drink. The dark would have no terrors for him, nor would he need companionship. He knew what to do, he could stay in the bush noiseless and motionless for hours, and he would choose only the finest of the deer and the bear. He could see himself drawing the bead, as a great buck came down in the shadows to the fountain and he thrilled with pleasure at the thought. Each new step into the wilderness seemed to bring him nearer home.

Their stay beside the salt spring was short, but the next night they built the fire higher than ever because just after dark they heard the howling of wolves, and a strange, long scream, like the shriek of a woman, which the men said was the cry of a panther. There was no danger, but the cries sounded lonesome and terrifying, and it took a big fire to bring back gayety.

Henry had not yet gone to bed, but was sitting in his favorite place beside the guide, who was calmly smoking a pipe, and he felt the immensity of the wilderness. He understood why the people in this caravan clung so closely to each other. They were simply a big family, far away from anybody else, and the woods, which curved around them for so many hundreds of miles, held them together.

The men talked more than usual that night, but they did not tell stories; instead they asked many questions of the guide about the country two days' journey farther on, which, Ross said, was so good, and it was agreed among them that they should settle there near the banks of a little river.

"It's the best land I ever saw," said Ross, "an' as there's lots of canebrake it won't be bad to clear up for farmin'. I trapped beaver in them parts two years ago, an' I know."

This seemed to decide the men, and the women, too, for they had their share in the council. The long journey was soon to end, and all looked pleased, especially the women. The great question settled, the men lighted their pipes and smoked a while, in silence, before the blazing fires. Henry watched them and wished that he too was a man and could take part in these evening talks. He was excited by the knowledge that their journey was to end so soon, and he longed to see the valley in which they were to build their homes. He climbed into the wagon at last but he could not sleep. His beloved rifle, too, was lying near him, and once he reached out his hand and touched it.

The men, by and by, went to the wagons or, wrapping themselves in blankets, slept before the flames. Only two remained awake and on guard. They sat on logs near the outskirts of the camp and held their rifles in their hands.

Henry dropped the canvas edge and sought sleep, but it would not come. Too many thoughts were in his mind. He was trying to imagine the beautiful valley, described by Ross, in which they were to build their houses. He lifted the canvas again after a while and saw that the fires had sunk lower than ever. The two men were still sitting on the logs and leaning lazily against upthrust boughs. The wilderness around them was very black, and twenty yards away, even the outlines of the trees were lost in the darkness.

Henry's sister who was sleeping at the other end of the wagon awoke and cried for water. Mr. Ware raised himself sleepily, but Henry at once sprang up and offered to get it. "All right," Mr. Ware said.

Henry quickly slipped on his trousers and taking the tin cup in his hand climbed out of the wagon. He was in his bare feet, but like other pioneer boys he scorned shoes in warm weather, and stubble and pebbles did not trouble him.

The camp was in a glade and the spring was just at the edge of the woods—they stopped at night only by the side of running water, which was easy to find in this region. Near the spring some of the horses and two of the oxen were tethered to stout saplings. As Henry approached, a horse neighed, and he noticed that all of them were pulling on their ropes. The two careless guards were either asleep or so near it that they took no notice of what was passing, and Henry, unwilling to call their attention for fear he might seem too forward, walked among the animals, but was still unable to find the cause of the trouble. He knew everyone by name and nature, and they knew him, for they had been comrades on a long journey, and he patted their backs and rubbed their noses and tried to soothe them. They became a little quieter, but he could not remain any longer with them because his sister was waiting at the wagon for the water. So he went to the spring and, stooping down, filled his cup.

When Henry rose to his full height, his eyes happened to be turned toward the forest, and there, about seven or eight feet from the ground, and not far from him he saw two coals of fire. He was so startled that the cup trembled in his hand, and drops of water fell splashing back into the spring. But he stared steadily at the red points, which he now noticed were moving slightly from side to side, and presently he saw behind them the dim outlines of a long and large body. He knew that this must be a panther. The habits of all the wild animals, belonging to this region, had been described to him so minutely by Ross that he was sure he could not be mistaken. Either it was a very hungry or a very ignorant panther to hover so boldly around a camp full of men and guns.

The panther was crouched on a bough of a tree, as if ready to spring, and Henry was the nearest living object. It must be he at whom the great tawny body would be launched. But as a minute passed and the panther did not move, save to sway gently, his courage rose, especially when he remembered a saying of Ross that it was the natural impulse of all wild animals to run from man. So he began to back away, and he heard behind him the horses trampling about in alarm. The lazy guards still dozed and all was quiet at the wagons. Now Henry recalled some knowledge that he had learned from Ross and he made a resolve. He would show, at a time, when it was needed, what he really could do. He dropped his cup, rushed to the fire, and picked up a long brand, blazing at one end.

Swinging his torch around his head until it made a perfect circle of flame he ran directly toward the panther, uttering a loud shout as he ran. The animal gave forth his woman's cry, this time a shriek of terror, and leaping from the bough sped with cat-like swiftness into the forest.

All the camp was awake in an instant, the men springing out of the wagons, gun in hand, ready for any trouble. When they saw only a boy, holding a blazing torch above his head, they were disposed to grumble, and the two sleepy guards, seeking an excuse for themselves, laughed outright at the tale that Henry told. But Mr. Ware believed in the truth of his son's words, and the guide, who quickly examined the ground near the tree, said there could be no doubt that Henry had really seen the panther, and had not been tricked by his imagination. The great tracks of the beast were plainly visible in the soft earth.

"Pushed by hunger, an' thinking there was no danger, he might have sprung on one of our colts or a calf," said Ross, "an' no doubt the boy with his ready use of a torch has saved us from a loss. It was a brave thing for him to do."

But Henry took no pride in their praise. It was no part of his ambition merely to drive away a panther, instead he had the hunter's wish to kill him. He would be worthy of the wilderness.

Henry despite his lack of pride found the world very beautiful the next day. It was a fair enough scene. Nature had done her part, but his joyous mind gave to it deeper and more vivid colors. The

wind was blowing from the south, bringing upon its breath the odor of wild flowers, and all the forest was green with the tender green of young spring. The cotton-tailed hares that he called rabbits ran across their path. Squirrels talked to one another in the tree tops, and defiantly threw the shells of last year's nuts at the passing travelers. Once they saw a stag bending down to drink at a brook, and when the forest king beheld them he raised his head, and merely stared at these strange new invaders of the wilds. Henry admired his beautiful form and splendid antlers nor would he have fired at him had it even been within orders. The deer gazed at them a few moments, and then, turning and tossing his head, sped away through the forest.

All that he saw was strange and grand to Henry, and he loved the wilderness. About noon he and Ross went back to the wagons and that night they encamped on the crest of a range of low and grassy hills. This was the rim of the valley that they had selected on the guide's advice as their future home, and the little camp was full of the liveliest interest in the morrow, because it is a most eventful thing, when you are going to choose a place which you intend shall be your home all the rest of your days. So the men and women sat late around the fires and even boys of Henry's age were allowed to stay up, too, and listen to the plans which all the grown people were making. Theirs had not been a hard journey, only long and tedious—though neither to Henry—and now that its end was at hand, work must be begun. They would have homes to build and a living to get from the ground.

"Why, I could live under the trees; I wouldn't want a house," whispered Henry to the guide, "and when I needed anything to eat, I'd kill game."

"A hunter might do that," replied Ross, "but we're not all hunters an' only a few of us can be. Sometimes the game ain't standin' to be shot at just when you want it, an' as for sleepin' under the trees it's all very fine in summer, if it don't rain, but 'twould be just a least bit chilly in winter when the big snows come as they do sometimes more'n a foot deep. I'm a hunter myself, an' I've slept under trees an' in caves, an' on the sheltered side of hills, but when the weather's cold give me for true comfort a wooden floor an' a board roof. Then I'll bargain to sleep to the king's taste."

But Henry was not wholly convinced. He felt in himself the power to meet and overcome rain or cold or any other kind of weather.

Everybody in the camp, down to the tiniest child, was awake the next morning by the time the first bar of gray in the east betokened the coming day. Henry was fully dressed, and saw the sun rise in a magnificent burst of red and gold over the valley that was to be their valley. The whole camp beheld the spectacle. They had reached the crest of the hill the evening before, too late to get a view and they were full of the keenest curiosity.

It was now summer, but, having been a season of plenteous rains, grass and foliage were of the most vivid and intense green. They were entering one of the richest portions of Kentucky, and the untouched soil was luxuriant with fertility. As a pioneer himself said: "All they had to do was to tickle it with a hoe, and it laughed into a harvest." There was the proof of its strength in the grass and the trees. Never before had the travelers seen oaks and beeches of such girth or elms and hickories of such height. The grass was high and thick and the canebrake was so dense that passage through it seemed impossible. Down the center of the valley, which was but one of many, separated from each other by low easy hills, flowed a little river, cleaving its center like a silver blade.

It was upon this beautiful prospect that the travelers saw the sun rise that morning and all their troubles and labors rolled away. Even the face of Mr. Ware who rarely yielded to enthusiasm kindled at the sight and, lifting his hand, he made with it a circle that described the valley.

"There," he said. "There is our home waiting for us."

"Hurrah!" cried Henry, flinging aloft his cap. "We've come home."

Then the wagon train started again and descended into the valley, which in very truth and fact was to be "home."

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST GREAT EXPLOIT

They found the valley everything in beauty and fertility that Ross had claimed for it, and above all it had small "openings," that is, places where the trees did not grow. This was very important to the travelers, as the labor of cutting down the forest was immense, and even Henry knew that they could not live wholly in the woods, as both children and crops must have sunshine to make them grow. The widest of these open spaces about a half mile from the river, they selected as the site of their new city to which they gave the name of Wareville in honor of their leader. A fine brook flowed directly through the opening, but Ross said it would be a good place, too, to sink a well.

It was midsummer now and the period of dry weather had begun. So the travelers were very comfortable in their wagon camp while they were making their new town ready to be lived in. Both for the sake of company and prudence they built the houses in a close cluster. First the men, and most of them were what would now be called jacks-of-all-trades, felled trees, six or eight inches in diameter, and cut them into logs, some of which were split down the center, making what are called puncheons; others were only nicked at the ends, being left in the rough, that is, with the bark on.

The round logs made the walls of their houses. First, the place where the house was to be built was chosen. Next the turf was cut off and the ground smoothed away. Then they "raised" the logs, the nicked ends fitting together at the corner, the whole inclosing a square. Everybody helped "raise" each house in turn, the men singing "hip-hip-ho!" as they rolled the heavy logs into position.

A place was cut out for a window and fastened with a shutter and a larger space was provided in the same manner for a door. They made the floor out of the puncheons, turned with the smooth side upward, and the roof out of rough boards, sawed from the trees. The chimney was built of earth and stones, and a great flat stone served as the fireplace. Some of the houses were large enough to have two rooms, one for the grown folks and one for the children, and Mr. Ware's also had a little lean-to or shed which served as a kitchen.

It seemed at first to Henry, rejoicing then in the warm, sunny weather, that they were building in a needlessly heavy and solid fashion. But when he thought over it a while he remembered what Ross said about the winters and deep snows of this new land. Indeed the winters in Kentucky are often very cold and sometimes for certain periods are quite as cold as those of New York or New England.

When the little town was finished at last it looked both picturesque and comfortable, a group of about thirty log houses, covering perhaps an acre of ground. But the building labors of the pioneers did not stop here. Around all these houses they put a triple palisade, that is three rows of stout, sharpened stakes, driven deep into the ground and rising full six feet above it. At intervals in this palisade were circular holes large enough to admit the muzzle of a rifle.

They built at each corner of the palisade the largest and strongest of their houses,—two-story structures of heavy logs, and Henry noticed that the second story projected over the first. Moreover, they made holes in the edge of the floor overhead so that one could look down through them upon anybody who stood by the outer wall. Ross went up into the second story of each of the four buildings, thrust the muzzle of his rifle into every one of the holes in turn, and then looked satisfied. "It is well done," he said. "Nobody can shelter himself against the wall from the fire of defenders up here."

These very strong buildings they called their blockhouses, and after they finished them they dug a well in the corner of the inclosed ground, striking water at a depth of twenty feet. Then their main labors were finished, and each family now began to furnish its house as it would or could.

It was not all work for Henry while this was going on, and some of the labor itself was just as good as play. He was allowed to go considerable distances with Ross, and these journeys were full of novelty. He was a boy who came to places which no white boy had ever seen before. It was

hard for him to realize that it was all so new. Behold a splendid grove of oaks! he was its discoverer. Here the little river dropped over a cliff of ten feet; his eyes were the first to see the waterfall. From this high hill the view was wonderful; he was the first to enjoy it. Forest, open and canebrake alike were swarming with game, and he saw buffaloes, deer, wild turkeys, and multitudes of rabbits and squirrels. Unaccustomed yet to man, they allowed the explorers to come near.

Ross and Henry were accompanied on many of these journeys by Shif'less Sol Hyde. Sol was a young man without kith or kin in the settlement, and so, having nobody but himself to take care of, he chose to roam the country a great portion of the time. He was fast acquiring a skill in forest life and knowledge of its ways second only to that of Ross, the guide. Some of the men called Sol lazy, but he defended himself. "The good God made different kinds of people and they live different kinds of lives," said he. "Mine suits me and harms nobody." Ross said he was right, and Sol became a hunter and scout for the settlement.

There was no lack of food. They yet had a good supply of the provisions brought with them from the other side of the mountains, but they saved them for a possible time of scarcity. Why should they use this store when they could kill all the game they needed within a mile of their own house smoke? Now Henry tasted the delights of buffalo tongue and beaver tail, venison, wild turkey, fried squirrel, wild goose, wild duck and a dozen kinds of fish. Never did a boy have more kinds of meat, morning, noon, and night. The forest was full of game, the fish were just standing up in the river and crying to be caught, and the air was sometimes dark with wild fowl. Henry enjoyed it. He was always hungry. Working and walking so much, and living in the open air every minute of his life, except when he was eating or sleeping, his young and growing frame demanded much nourishment, and it was not denied.

At last the great day came when he was allowed to kill a deer if he could. Both Ross and Shif'less Sol had interceded for him. "The boy's getting big and strong an' it's time he learned," said Ross. "His hand's steady enough an' his eye's good enough already," said Shif'less Sol, and his father agreeing with them told them to take him and teach him.

Two miles away, near the bank of the river, was a spring to which the game often came to drink, and for this spring they started a little while before sundown, Henry carrying his rifle on his shoulder, and his heart fluttering. He felt his years increase suddenly and his figure expand with equal abruptness. He had become a man and he was going forth to slay big game. Yet despite his new manhood the blood would run to his head and he felt his nerves trembling. He grasped his precious rifle more firmly and stole a look out of the corner of his eye at its barrel as it lay across his left shoulder. Though a smaller weapon it was modeled after the famous Western rifle, which, with the ax, won the wilderness. The stock was of hard maple wood delicately carved, and the barrel was comparatively long, slender, and of blue steel. The sights were as fine-drawn as a hair. When Henry stood the gun beside himself, it was just as tall as he. He carried, too, a powderhorn, and the horn, which was as white as snow, was scraped so thin as to be transparent, thus enabling its owner to know just how much powder it contained, without taking the trouble of pouring it out. His bullets and wadding he carried in a small leather pouch by his side.

When they reached the spring the sun was still a half hour high and filled the west with a red glow. The forest there was tinted by it, and seen thus in the coming twilight with those weird crimsons and scarlets showing through it, the wilderness looked very lonely and desolate. An ordinary boy, at the coming of night would have been awed, if alone, by the stillness of the great unknown spaces, but it found an answering chord in Henry.

"Wind's blowin' from the west," said Sol, and so they went to the eastern side of the spring, where they lay down beside a fallen log at a fair distance. There was another log, much closer to the spring, but Ross conferring aside with Sol chose the farther one. "We want to teach the boy how to shoot an' be of some use to himself, not to slaughter," said Ross. Then the three remained there, a long time, and noiseless. Henry was learning early one of the first great lessons of the forest, which

is silence. But he knew that he could have learned this lesson alone. He already felt himself superior in some ways to Ross and Sol, but he liked them too well to tell them so, or to affect even equality in the lore of the wilderness.

The sun went down behind the Western forest, and the night came on, heavy and dark. A light wind began to moan among the trees. Henry heard the faint bubble of the water in the spring, and saw beside him the forms of his two comrades. But they were so still that they might have been dead. An hour passed and his eyes growing more used to the dimness, he saw better. There was still nothing at the spring, but by and by Ross put his hand gently upon his arm, and Henry, as if by instinct, looked in the right direction. There at the far edge of the forest was a deer, a noble stag, glancing warily about him.

The stag was a fine enough animal to Ross and Sol, but to Henry's unaccustomed eyes he seemed gigantic, the mightiest of his kind that ever walked the face of the earth.

The deer gazed cautiously, raising his great head, until his antlers looked to Henry like the branching boughs of a tree. The wind was blowing toward his hidden foes, and brought him no omen of coming danger. He stepped into the open and again glanced around the circle. It seemed to Henry that he was staring directly into the deer's eyes, and could see the fire shining there.

"Aim at that spot there by the shoulder, when he stoops down to drink," said Ross in the lowest of tones.

Satisfied now that no enemy was near, the stag walked to the spring. Then he began to lower slowly the great antlers, and his head approached the water. Henry slipped the barrel of his rifle across the log and looked down the sights. He was seized with a tremor, but Ross and Shiftless Sol, with a magnanimity that did them credit, pretended not to notice it. The boy soon mastered the feeling, but then, to his great surprise, he was attacked by another emotion. Suddenly he began to have pity, and a fellow-feeling for the stag. It, too, was in the great wilderness, rejoicing in the woods and the grass and the running streams and had done no harm. It seemed sad that so fine a life should end, without warning and for so little.

The feeling was that of a young boy, the instinct of one who had not learned to kill, and he suppressed it. Men had not yet thought to spare the wild animals, or to consider them part of a great brotherhood, least of all on the border, where the killing of game was a necessity. And so Henry, after a moment's hesitation, the cause of which he himself scarcely knew, picked the spot near the shoulder that Ross had mentioned, and pulled the trigger.

The stag stood for a moment or two as if dazed, then leaped into the air and ran to the edge of the woods, where he pitched down head foremost. His body quivered for a little while and then lay still.

Henry was proud of his marksmanship, but he felt some remorse, too, when he looked upon his victim. Yet he was eager to tell his father and his young sister and brother of his success. They took off the pelt and cut up the deer. A part of the haunch Henry ate for dinner and the antlers were fastened over the fireplace, as the first important hunting trophy won by the eldest son of the house.

Henry did not boast much of his triumph, although he noticed with secret pride the awe of the children. His best friend, Paul Cotter, openly expressed his admiration, but Braxton Wyatt, a boy of his own age, whom he did not like, sneered and counted it as nothing. He even cast doubt upon the reality of the deed, intimating that perhaps Ross or Sol had fired the shot, and had allowed Henry to claim the credit.

Henry now felt incessantly the longing for the wilderness, but, for the present, he helped his father furnish their house. It was too late to plant crops that year, nor were the qualities of the soil yet altogether known. It was rich beyond a doubt, but they could learn only by trial what sort of seed suited it best. So they let that wait a while, and continued the work of making themselves tight and warm for the winter.

The skins of deer and buffalo and beaver, slain by the hunters, were dried in the sun, and they hung some of the finer ones on the walls of the rooms to make them look more cozy and picturesque. Mrs. Ware also put two or three on the floors, though the border women generally scorned them for such uses, thinking them in the way. Henry also helped his father make stools and chairs, the former a very simple task, consisting of a flat piece of wood, chopped or sawed out, in which three holes were bored to receive the legs, the latter made of a section of sapling, an inch or so in diameter. But the baskets required longer and more tedious work. They cut green withes, split them into strips and then plaiting them together formed the basket. In this Mrs. Ware and even the little girl helped. They also made tables and a small stone furnace or bake-oven for the kitchen.

Their chief room now looked very cozy. In one corner stood a bedstead with low, square posts, the bed covered with a pure white counterpane. At the foot of the bedstead was a large heavy chest, which served as bureau, sofa and dressing case. In the center of the room stood a big walnut table, on the top of which rested a nest of wooden trays, flanked, on one side, by a nicely folded tablecloth, and on the other by a butcher knife and a Bible. In a corner was a cupboard consisting of a set of shelves set into the logs, and on these shelves were the blue-edged plates and yellow-figured teacups and blue teapot that Mrs. Ware had received long ago from her mother. The furniture in the remainder of the house followed this pattern.

The heaviest labor of all was to extend the "clearing"; that is, to cut down trees and get the ground ready for planting the crops next spring, and in this Henry helped, for he was able to wield an ax blow for blow with a grown man. When he did not have to work he went often to the river, which was within sight of Wareville, and caught fish. Nobody except the men, who were always armed, and who knew how to take care of themselves, was allowed to go more than a mile from the palisade, but Henry was trusted as far as the river; then the watchman in the lookout on top of the highest blockhouse could see him or any who might come, and there, too, he often lingered.

He did not hate his work, yet he could not say that he liked it, and, although he did not know it, the love of the wild man's ways was creeping into his blood. The influence of the great forests, of the vast unknown spaces, was upon him. He could lie peacefully in the shade of a tree for an hour at a time, dreaming of rivers and mountains farther on in the depths of the wilderness. He felt a kinship with the wild things, and once as he lay perfectly still with his eyes almost closed, a stag, perhaps the brother to the one that he had killed, came and looked at him out of great soft eyes. It did not seem odd at the time to Henry that the stag should do so; he took it then as a friendly act, and lest he should alarm this new comrade of the woods he did not stir or even raise his eyelids. The stag gazed at him a few moments, and then, tossing his great antlers, turned and walked off in a graceful and dignified way through the woods. Henry wondered where the deer would go, and if it would be far. He wished that he, too, could roam the wilderness so lightly, wandering where he wished, having no cares and beholding new scenes every day. That would be a life worth living.

The next morning his mother said to his father:

"John, the boy is growing wild."

"Yes," replied the father. "They say it often happens with those who are taken young into the wilderness. The forest lays a spell upon them when they are easy to receive impressions."

The mother looked troubled, but Mr. Ware laughed.

"Don't bother about it," he said. "It can be cured. We have merely to teach him the sense of responsibility."

This they proceeded to do.

CHAPTER III

LOST IN THE WILDERNESS

The method by which Mr. and Mrs. Ware undertook to teach Henry a sense of responsibility was an increase of work. Founding a new state was no light matter, and he must do his share. Since he loved to fish, it became his duty to supply the table with fish, and that, too, at regular hours, and he also began to think of traps and snares, which he would set in the autumn for game. It was always wise for the pioneer to save his powder and lead, the most valuable of his possessions and the hardest to obtain. Any food that could be procured without its use was a welcome addition.

But fishing remained his easiest task, and he did it all with a pole that he cut with his clasp knife, a string and a little piece of bent and stiffened wire. He caught perch, bass, suckers, trout, sunfish, catfish, and other kinds, the names of which he did not know. Sometimes when his hook and line had brought him all that was needed, and the day was hot, he would take off his clothing and plunge into the deep, cool pools. Often his friend, Paul Cotter, was with him. Paul was a year younger than Henry, and not so big. Hence the larger boy felt himself, in a certain sense, Paul's teacher and protector, which gave him a comfortable feeling, and a desire to help his comrade as much as he could.

He taught the smaller lad new tricks in swimming, and scarcely a day passed when two sunburned, barefooted boys did not go to the river, quickly throw off their clothing, and jump into the clear water. There they swam and floated for a long time, dived, and ducked each other, and then lay on the grass in the sun until they dried.

"Paul," said Henry once, as they were stretched thus on the bank, "wouldn't you like to have nothing to do, but wander through the woods just as you pleased, sleep wherever you wished, and kill game when you grew hungry, just like the Indians?"

Henry's eyes were on the black line of the forest, and the blue haze of the sky beyond. His spirit was away in the depths of the unknown.

"I don't know," replied Paul. "I guess a white boy has to become a white man, after a while, and they say that the difference between a white man and the Indian is that the white man has to work."

"But the Indians get along without it," said Henry.

"No they don't," replied Paul. "We win all the country because we've learned how to do things while we are working."

Yet Henry was unconvinced, and his thoughts wandered far into the black forest and the blue haze.

The cattle pastured near the deepest of the swimming holes, and it often fell to the lot of the boys to bring them into the palisade at sunset. This was a duty of no little importance, because if any of the cattle wandered away into the forest and were lost, they could not be replaced. It was now the latter half of summer, and the grass and foliage were fast turning brown in the heat. Late on the afternoon of one of the very hottest days Henry and Paul went to the deepest swimming hole. There had not been a breath of air stirring since morning; not a blade of grass, not a leaf quivered. The skies burned like a sheet of copper.

The boys panted, and their clothing, wet with perspiration, clung to them. The earth was hot under their feet. Quickly they threw off their garments and sprang into the water. How cool and grateful it felt! There they lingered long, and did not notice the sudden obscurity of the sun and darkening of the southwest.

A slight wind sprang up presently, and the dry leaves and grass began to rustle. There was thunder in the distance and a stroke of lightning. The boys were aroused, and scrambling out of the water put on their clothing.

"A storm's coming," said Henry, who was weatherwise, "and we must get the cattle in."

These sons of the forest did not fear rain, but they hurried on their clothing, and they noticed, too, how rapidly the storm was gathering. The heat had been great for days, and the earth was parched and thirsty. The men had talked in the evening of rain, and said how welcome it would be, and now the boys shared the general feeling. The drought would be ended. The thirsty earth would drink deep and grow green again.

The rolling clouds, drawn like a great curtain over the southwest, advanced and covered all the heavens. The flashes of lightning followed each other so fast that, at times, they seemed continuous; the forest groaned as it bent before the wind. Then the great drops fell, and soon they were beating the earth like volleys of pistol bullets. Fragments of boughs, stripped off by the wind, swept by. Never had the boys in their Eastern home known such thunder and lightning. The roar of one was always in their ears, and the flash of the other always in their eyes.

The frightened cattle were gathered into a group, pressing close together for company and protection. The boys hurried them toward the stockade, but one cow, driven by terror, broke from the rest and ran toward the woods. Agile Henry, not willing to lose a single straggler, pursued the fugitive, and Paul, wishing to be as zealous, followed. The rest of the cattle, being so near and obeying the force of habit, went on into the stockade.

It was the wildest cow of the herd that made a plunge for the woods, and Henry, knowing her nature, expected trouble. So he ran as fast as he could, and he was not aware until they were in the forest that Paul was close behind him. Then he shouted:

"Go back, Paul! I'll bring her in."

But Paul would not turn. There was fire in his blood. He considered it as much his duty to help as it was Henry's. Moreover, he would not desert his comrade.

The fugitive, driven by the storm acting upon its wild nature, continued at great speed, and the panting boys were not able to overtake her. So on the trio went, plunging through the woods, and saving themselves from falls, or collisions with trees, only by the light from the flashes of lightning. Many boys, even on the border, would have turned back, but there was something tenacious in Henry's nature; he had undertaken to do a thing, and he did not wish to give it up. Besides that cow was too valuable. And Paul would not leave his comrade.

Away the cow went, and behind her ran her pursuers. The rain came rushing and roaring through the woods, falling now in sheets, while overhead the lightning still burned, and the thunder still crashed, though with less frequency. Both the boys were drenched, but they did not mind it; they did not even know it at the time. The lightning died presently, the thunder ceased to rumble, and then the darkness fell like a great blanket over the whole forest. The chase was blotted out from them, and the two boys, stopping, grasped each other's hands for the sake of company. They could not see twenty feet before them, but the rain still poured.

"We'll have to give her up," said Henry reluctantly. "We couldn't follow a whole herd of buffaloes in all this black night."

"Maybe we can find her to-morrow," said Paul.

"Maybe so," replied Henry. "We've got to wait anyhow. Let's go home."

They started back for Wareville, keeping close together, lest they lose each other in the darkness, and they realized suddenly that they were uncomfortable. The rain was coming in such sheets directly in their faces that it half blinded them, now and then their feet sank deep in mire and their drenched bodies began to grow cold. The little log houses in which they lived now seemed to them palaces, fit for a king, and they hastened their footsteps, often tripping on vines or running into bushes. But Henry was trying to see through the dark woods.

"We ought to be near the clearing," he said.

They stopped and looked all about, seeking to see a light. They knew that one would be shining from the tower of the blockhouse as a guide to them. But they saw none. They had misjudged the distance, so they thought, and they pushed on a half hour longer, but there was still no light, nor did

they come to a clearing. Then they paused. Dark as it was each saw a look of dismay on the face of the other.

"We've come the wrong way!" exclaimed Paul.

"Maybe we have," reluctantly admitted Henry.

But their dismay lasted only a little while. They were strong boys, used to the wilderness, and they did not fear even darkness and wandering through the woods. Moreover, they were sure that they should find Wareville long before midnight.

They changed their course and continued the search. The rain ceased by and by, the clouds left the heavens, and the moon came out, but they saw nothing familiar about them. The great woods were dripping with water, and it was the only sound they heard, besides that made by themselves. They stopped again, worn out and disconsolate at last. All their walking only served to confuse them the more. Neither now had any idea of the direction in which Wareville lay, and to be lost in the wilderness was a most desperate matter. They might travel a thousand miles, should strength last them for so great a journey, and never see a single human being. They leaned against the rough bark of a great oak tree, and stared blankly at each other.

"What are we to do?" asked Paul.

"I can't say," replied Henry.

The two boys still looked blank, but at last they laughed—and each laughed at the other's grewsome face. Then they began once more to cast about them. The cold had passed and warm winds were blowing up from the south. The forest was drying, and Henry and Paul, taking off their coats, wrung the water from them. They were strong lads, inured to many hardships of the border and the forest, and they did not fear ill results from a mere wetting. Nevertheless, they wished to be comfortable, and under the influence of the warm wind they soon found themselves dry again. But they were so intensely sleepy that they could scarcely keep their eyes open, and now the wilderness training of both came into use.

It was a hilly country, with many outcroppings of stone and cavelike openings in the sides of the steep but low hills, and such a place as this the boys now sought. But it was a long hunt and they grew more tired and sleepy at every step. They were hungry, too, but if they might only sleep they could forget that. They heard again the hooting of owls and the wind, moaning among the leaves, made strange noises. Once there was a crash in a thicket beside them, and they jumped in momentary alarm, but it was only a startled deer, far more scared than they, running through the bushes, and Henry was ashamed of his nervous impulse.

They found at last their resting place, a sheltered ledge of dry stone in the hollow of a hill. The stone arched above them, and it was dark in the recess, but the boys were too tired now to worry about shadows. They crept into the hollow, and, scraping up fallen leaves to soften the hard stone, lay down. Both were off to slumberland in less than five minutes.

The hollow faced the East, and the bright sun, shining into their eyes, awakened them at last. Henry sprang up, amazed. The skies were a silky blue, with little white clouds sailing here and there. The forest, new-washed by the rain, smelt clean and sweet. The south wind was still blowing. The world was bright and beautiful, but he was conscious of an acute pain at the center of his being. That is, he was increasingly hungry. Paul showed equal surprise, and was a prey to the same annoying sensation in an important region. He looked up at the sun, and found that it was almost directly overhead, indicating noon.

All the country about them was strange, an unbroken expanse of hill and forest, and nowhere a sign of a human being. They scrutinized the horizon with the keen eyes of boyhood, but they saw no line of smoke, rising from the chimneys of Wareville. Whether the villages lay north or south or east or west of them they did not know, and the wind that sighed so gently through the forest never told. They were alone in the wilderness and they knew, moreover, that the wilderness was very vast and they were very small. But Henry and Paul did not despair; in fact no such thought entered

Henry's mind. Instead he began to find a certain joy in the situation; it appealed to his courage. They resolved to find something to eat, and they used first a temporary cure for the pangs of hunger. Each had a strong clasp knife and they cut strips of the soft inner bark of the slippery-elm tree, which they chewed, drawing from it a little strength and sustenance. They found an hour or two later some nearly ripe wild plums, which they ate in small quantities, and, later on, ripe blackberries very juicy and sweet. Paul wanted to be voracious, but Henry restrained him, knowing well that if he indulged liberally he might suffer worse pangs than those of hunger. Slender as was this diet the boys felt much strengthened, and their spirits rose in a wonderful manner.

"We're bound to be found sooner or later," said Henry, "and it's strange if we can't live in the woods until then."

"If we only had our guns and ammunition," said Paul, "we could get all the meat we wanted, and live as well as if we were at home."

This was true, because in the untrodden forest the game was plentiful all about them, but guns and ammunition they did not have, and it was vain to wish for them. They must obtain more solid food than wild plums and blackberries, if they would retain their strength, and both boys knew it. Yet they saw no way and they continued wandering until they came to a creek. They sat a while on its banks and looked down at the fish with which it was swarming, and which they could see distinctly in its clear waters.

"Oh, if we only had one of those fine fellows!" said Paul.

"Then why not have him?" exclaimed Henry, a sudden flash appearing in his eye.

"Yes, why not?" replied Paul with sarcasm. "I suppose that all we have to do is to whistle and the finest of 'em will come right out here on the bank, and ask us to cook and eat 'em."

"We haven't any hooks and lines now but we might make 'em," said Henry.

"Make 'em!" said Paul, and he looked in amazement at his comrade.

"Out of our clothes," replied Henry.

Then he proceeded to show what he meant and Paul, too, when he saw him begin, was quickly taken with the idea. They drew many long strands from the fiber of their clothing—cloth in those days was often made as strong as leather—and twisted and knotted them together until they had a line fifteen feet long. It took them at least two hours to complete this task, and then they contemplated their work with pride. But the look of joy on Paul's face did not last long.

"How on earth are we to get a hook, Henry?" he asked.

"I'll furnish that," replied Henry, and he took the small steel buckle with which his trousers were fastened together at the back. Breaking this apart he bent the slenderest portion of it into the shape of a hook, and fastened it to the end of his line.

"If we get a fish on this he may slip off or he may not, but we must try," he said.

The fishing rod and the bait were easy matters. A slender stem of dogwood, cut with a clasp knife, served for the first, and, to get the latter, they had nothing to do but turn up a flat stone, and draw angle worms from the moist earth beneath.

The hook was baited and with a triumphant flourish Henry swung it toward the stream.

"Now," he said, "for the biggest fish that ever swam in this creek."

The boys might have caught nothing with such a rude outfit, but doubtless that stream was never fished in before, and its inhabitants, besides being full of a natural curiosity, did not dream of any danger coming from the outer air. Therefore they bit at the curious-looking metallic thing with the tempting food upon it which was suddenly dropped from somewhere.

But the first fish slipped off as Henry had feared, and then there was nothing to do but try again. It was not until the sixth or seventh bite that he succeeded in landing a fine perch upon the bank, and then Paul uttered a cry of triumph, but Henry, as became his superior dignity at that moment, took his victory modestly. It was in reality something to rejoice over, as these two boys were perhaps in a more

dangerous situation than they, with all their knowledge of the border, understood. The wilderness was full of animal life, but it was fleeter than man, and, without weapons they were helpless.

"And now to cook him," said Henry. So speaking, he took from his pocket the flint and steel that he had learned from the men always to carry, while Paul began to gather fallen brushwood.

To light the fire Henry expected to be the easiest of their tasks, but it proved to be one of the most difficult. He struck forth the elusive sparks again and again, but they went out before setting fire to the wood. He worked until his fingers ached and then Paul relieved him. It fell to the younger boy's lot to succeed. A bright spark flying forth rested a moment among the lightest and driest of the twigs, igniting there. A tiny point of flame appeared, then grew and leaped up. In a few moments the great pile of brushwood was in a roaring blaze, and then the boys cooked their fish over the coals. They ate it all with supreme content, and they believed they could feel the blood flowing in a new current through their veins and their strength growing, too.

But they knew that they would have to prepare for the future and draw upon all their resources of mind and body. Their hook and line was but a slender appliance and they might not have such luck with it again. Paul suggested that they make a fish trap, of sticks tied together with strips cut from their clothing, and put it in the creek, and Henry thought it was a good idea, too. So they agreed to try it on the morrow, if they should not be found meanwhile, and then they debated the subject of snares.

The undergrowth was swarming with rabbits, and they would make most toothsome food. Rabbits they must have, and again Henry led the way. He selected a small clear spot near the thick undergrowth where a rabbit would naturally love to make his nest and around a circle about six inches in diameter he drove a number of smooth pegs. Then he tied a strong cord made of strips of their clothing to one end of a stout bush, which he bent over until it curved in a semicircle. The other end of the cord was drawn in a sliding loop around the pegs, and was attached to a little wooden trigger, set in the center of the inclosure.

The slightest pressure upon this trigger would upset it, cause the noose to slip off the pegs and close with a jerk around the neck of anything that might have its head thrust into the inclosure. The bush, too, would fly back into place and there would be the intruder, really hanged by himself. It was the common form of snare, devised for small game by the boys of early Kentucky, and still used by them.

Henry and Paul made four of these ingenious little contrivances, and baited them with bruised pieces of the small plantain leaves that the rabbits love. Then they contemplated their work again with satisfaction. But Paul suddenly began to look rueful.

"If we have to pay out part of our clothes every time we get a dinner we soon won't have any left," he said.

Henry only laughed.

It was now near sunset, and, as they had worked hard they would have been thankful for supper, but there was none to be thankful for, and they were too tired to fish again. So they concluded to go to sleep, which their hard work made very easy, and dream of abundant harvests on the morrow.

They gathered great armfuls of the fallen brushwood, littering the forest, and built a heap as high as their heads, which blazed and roared in a splendid manner, sending up, too, a column of smoke that rose far above the trees and trailed off in the blue sky.

It was a most cheerful bonfire, and it was a happy thought for the boys to build it, even aside from its uses as a signal, as the coming of night in the wilderness is always most lonesome and weird.

They lay down near each other on the soft turf, and Henry watched the red sun sink behind the black forest in the west. The strange, sympathetic feeling for the wilderness again came into his mind. He thought once more of the mysterious regions that lay beyond the line where the black and red met. He could live in the woods, he was living now without arms, even, and if he only had his rifle and ammunition he could live in luxury. And then the wonderful freedom! That old thought came to him with renewed force. To roam as he pleased, to stop when he pleased and to sleep where he

pleased! He would make a canoe, and float down the great rivers to their mouths. Then he would wander far out on the vast plains, which they say lay beyond the thousand miles of forest, and see the buffalo in millions go thundering by. That would be a life without care.

He fell asleep presently, but he was awakened after a while by a long-drawn plaintive shriek answered by a similar cry. Once he would have been alarmed by the sound, but now he knew it was panther talking to panther. He and Paul were unarmed, but they had something as effective as guns against panthers and that was the great bonfire which still roared and blazed near them. He was glad now for a new reason that they had built it high, because the panther's cry was so uncanny and sent such a chill down one's back. He looked at Paul, but his comrade still slept soundly, a peaceful smile showing on his face. He remembered the words of Ross that no wild animal would trouble man if man did not trouble him, and, rolling a little nearer to Paul, he shut his eyes and sought sleep.

But sleep would not come, and presently he heard the cry of the panther again but much nearer. He was lying with his ear to the ground. Now the earth is a conductor of sound and Henry was sure that he heard a soft tread. He rose upon his elbow and gazed into the darkness. There he beheld at last a dim form moving with sinuous motion, and slowly it took the shape of a great cat-like animal. Then he saw just behind it another as large, and he knew that they were the two panthers whose cries he had heard.

Henry was not frightened, although there was something weird and uncanny in the spectacle of these two powerful beasts of prey, stealing about the fire, before which two unarmed boys reposed. He knew, however, that they were drawn not by the desire to attack, but by a kind of terrified curiosity. The fire was to them the magnet that the snake is to the fascinated bird. He longed then for his gun, the faithful little rifle that was reposing on the hooks over his bed in his father's house. "I'd make you cry for something," he said to himself, looking at the largest of the panthers.

The animals lingered, glaring at the boys and the fire with great red eyes, and presently Henry, doing as he had done on a former occasion, picked up a blazing torch and, shouting, rushed at them.

The panthers sprang headlong through the undergrowth, in their eagerness to get away from the terrible flaming vision that was darting down upon them. Their flight was so quick that they disappeared in an instant and Henry knew they would not venture near the site of the fire again in a long time. He turned back and found Paul surprised and alarmed standing erect and rubbing his eyes.

"Why—why—what's the matter?" cried Paul.

"Oh, it's nothing," replied Henry.

Then he told about the panthers. Paul did not know as much as Henry concerning panthers and the affair got on his nerves. The lonely and vast grandeur of the wilderness did not have the attraction for him that it had for his comrade, and he wished again for the strong log walls and comfortable roofs of Wareville. But Henry reassured him. The testimony of the hunters about the timidity of wild beasts was unanimous and he need have no fears. So Paul went to sleep again, but Henry lingered as before.

He threw fresh fuel on the fire. Then he lay down again and gradually weary nature became the master of him. The woods grew dim, and faded away, the fire vanished and he was in slumberland.

When Henry awoke it was because some one was tugging at his shoulder. He knew now that the Indian warriors had come across the Ohio, and had seized him, and he sprang up ready to make a fierce resistance.

"Don't fight, Henry! It's me—Paul!" cried a boyish voice, and Henry letting his muscles relax rubbed the sleep out of his eyes. It was Paul sure enough standing beside him, and the sun again was high up in the heavens. The fire was still burning, though it had died down somewhat.

"Oh, my breakfast!" cried Henry as he felt a sudden pang.

"Come, let's see if we're going to have any," said Paul, and off they went to their snares. The first had not been touched, nor had the second. The bait was gone from the third, and the loop sprung, but there was nothing in it. The hearts of the boys sank and they thought again of wild plums and

blackberries which were but a light diet. But when they came to the fourth snare their triumph was complete. A fat rabbit, caught in the loop, was hanging by the neck, beside the bush.

"It's lucky the forest is so full of game that some of it falls into our trap," said Henry.

They cooked the rabbit, and again they were so hungry that they ate it all. Then they improvised new fishing tackle and both boys began to fish. They knew that they must devote their whole time to this problem of food, and they decided, for the present, not to leave the creek. They were afraid to renew the search for Wareville, lest they wander deeper into the wilderness, and moreover lose the way to the creek which seemed to be the surest source of food. So they would stay a while where they were, and keep their fire burning high as a signal to searchers.

Either the fish had learned that the curiously shaped thing with the tempting bait upon it was dangerous, or they had gone to visit friends in distant parts of the creek, for, at least two hours passed, without either boy getting a bite. When the fish did lay hold it was usually to slip again from the rude hook, and it was at least another hour before they caught a fish. It was Paul who achieved the feat, and it repaid him for being asleep when the panthers came, a matter that had lain upon his mind somewhat.

They persisted in this work until Henry also made a catch and then they gathered more plums and berries. They dug up, too, the root of the Indian turnip, an herb that burnt the mouth like fire, but which Henry said they could use, after soaking it a long time in water. Then they discussed the matter of the fish trap which they thought they could make in a day's work. This would relieve them of much toil, but they deferred its beginning until the morrow, and used the rest of the day in making two more snares for rabbits.

Paul now suggested that they accumulate as much food as possible, cook it and putting it on their backs follow the creek to its mouth. He had no doubt that it emptied into the river that flowed by Wareville and then by following the stream, if his surmise was right, they could reach home again. It was a plausible theory and Henry agreed with him. Meanwhile they built their fire high again and lay down for another night's rest in the woods. The next day they devoted to the fish trap which was successfully completed, and put in the river, and then they took their places on the turf for the third night beside the camp fire.

The day, like its predecessor, had been close and hot. All traces of the great rain were gone. Forest and earth were again as dry as tinder. They refreshed themselves with a swim in the creek just before lying down to sleep, but they were soon panting with the heat. It seemed to hang in heavy clouds, and the forest shut out any fresh air that might be moving high up.

Despite the great heat the boys had built the fire as high as usual, because they knew that the search for them would never cease so long as there was a hope of success, and they thought that the signal should not be lacking. But now they moved away from it and into the shadow of the woods.

"If only the wind would blow!" said Henry.

"And I'd be willing to stand a rain like the one in which we got lost," said Paul.

But neither rain nor wind came, and after a while they fell asleep. Henry was awakened at an unknown hour of the night by a roaring in his ears, and at first he believed that Paul was about to have his storm. Then he was dazzled by a great rush of light in his eyes, and he sprang to his feet in sudden alarm.

"Up, Paul!" he cried, grasping his comrade by the shoulder. "The woods are on fire!"

Paul was on his feet in an instant, and the two were just in time. Sparks flew in their faces and the flames twisting into pyramids and columns leaped from tree to tree with a sound like thunder as they came. Boughs, burnt through, fell to the ground with a crash. The sparks rose in millions.

The boys had slept in their clothes or rather what was left of them, and, grasping each other's hands, they ran at full speed toward the creek, with the great fire roaring and rushing after them. Henry looked back once but the sight terrified him and the sparks scorched his face. He knew that the conflagration had been set by their own bonfire, fanned by a rising wind as they slept, but it was no time to lament. The rush and sweep of the flames, feeding upon the dry forest and gathering strength

as they came, was terrific. It was indeed like the thunder of a storm in the ears of the frightened boys, and they fairly skimmed over the ground in the effort to escape the red pursuer. They could feel its hot breath on their necks, while the smoke and the sparks flew over their heads. They dashed into the creek, and each dived down under the water which felt so cool and refreshing.

"Let's stay here," said Paul, who enjoyed the present.

"We can't think of such a thing," replied Henry. "This creek won't stop that fire half a minute!"

A fire in a sun-dried Western forest is a terrible thing. It rushes on at a gallop, roaring and crackling like the battle-front of an army, and destroying everything that lies before it. It leaves but blackened stumps and charred logs behind, and it stops only when there is no longer food for it to devour.

The boys sprang out of the creek and ran up the hill. Henry paused a moment at its crest, and looked back again. The aspect of the fire was more frightful than ever. The flames leaped higher than the tops of the tallest trees, and thrust out long red twining arms, like coiling serpents. Beneath was the solid red bank of the conflagration, preceded by showers of ashes and smoke and sparks. The roar increased and was like that of many great guns in battle.

"Paul!" exclaimed Henry seizing his comrade's hand again. "We've got to run, as we've never run before! It's for our lives now!"

It was in good truth for their lives, and bending low their heads, the two boys, hand in hand, raced through the forest, with the ruthless pursuer thundering after them. Henry as he ran, glanced back once more and saw that the fire was gaining upon them. The serpents of flame were coming nearer and nearer and the sparks flew over their heads in greater showers. Paul was panting, and being the younger and smaller of the two his strength was now failing. Henry felt his comrade dragging upon his hand. If he freed himself from Paul's grasp he could run faster, but he remembered his silent resolve to take Paul back to his people. Even were it not for those others at Wareville he could never desert his friend at such a moment. So he pulled on Paul's hand to hasten his speed, and together the boys went on.

The two noticed presently that they were not alone in their flight, a circumstance that had escaped them in the first hurry and confusion. Deer and rabbits, too, flew before the hurricane of fire. The deer were in a panic of terror, and a great stag ran for a few moments beside the boys, not noticing them, or, in his fear of greater evil, having no fear of human beings who were involved in the same danger. Three or four buffaloes, too, presently joined the frightened herd of game, one, a great bull running with head down and blowing steam from his nostrils.

Paul suddenly sank to his knees and gasped:

"I can't go on! Let me stay here and you save yourself, Henry!"

Henry looked back at the great fiery wall that swept over the ground, roaring like a storm. It was very near now and the smoke almost blinded him. A boy with a spirit less stanch than his might well have fled in a panic, leaving his companion to his death. But the nearer the danger came the more resolute Henry grew. He saw, too, that he must sting Paul into renewed action.

"Get up!" he exclaimed, and he jerked the fainting boy to his feet. Then, snatching a stick, he struck Paul several smart blows on his back. Paul cried out with the sudden pain, and, stimulated by it into physical action, began to run with renewed speed.

"That's right, Paul!" cried Henry, dropping his stick and seizing his comrade again by the hand. "One more big try and we'll get away! Just over this hill here it's open ground, and the fire will have to stop!"

It was a guess, only made to encourage Paul, and Henry had small hope that it would come true, but when they reached the brow of the hill both uttered a shout of delight. There was no forest for perhaps a quarter of a mile beyond, and down the center of the open glittered a silver streak that meant running water.

Henry was so joyous that he cried out again.

"See, Paul! See!" he exclaimed. "Here's safety! Now we'll run!"

How they did run! The sight gave them new strength. They shot out of that terrible forest and across the short dry grass, burnt brown by late summer days, running for life toward the flowing water. They did not stop to notice the size of the stream, but plunged at once into its current.

Henry sank with a mighty splash, and went down, down, it seemed to him, a mile. Then his feet touched a hard, rocky bottom, and he shot back to the surface, spluttering and blowing the water out of eyes, mouth and nostrils. A brown head was bobbing beside him. He seized it by the hair, pulled it up, and disclosed the features of Paul, his comrade. Paul, too, began to splutter and at the same time to try to swim.

Splash!

A heavy body struck the water beside them with a thud too great for that of a man. It was the stag leaping also for safety and he began to swim about, looking at the boys with great pathetic eyes, as if he would ask them what he ought to do next for his life. Apparently his fear of mankind had passed for the moment. They were bound together by the community of danger.

Splash! Splash! Splash!

The water resounded like the beating of a bass drum. Three more deer, a buffalo, and any number of smaller game sprang into the stream, and remained there swimming or wading.

"Here, Paul! Here's a bar that we can stand on," said Henry who had found a footing. At the same time he grasped Paul by the wrist, and drew him to the bar. There they stood in the water to their necks, and watched the great fire as it divided at the little prairie, and swept around them, passing to left and right. It was a grim sight. All the heavens seemed ablaze, and the clouds of smoke were suffocating. Even there in the river the heat was most oppressive, and at times the faces of the boys were almost scorched. Then they would thrust their heads under the water, and keep them there as long as they could hold their breath, coming up again greatly refreshed. The wild game clustered near in common terror.

"It's a lucky thing for us the river and prairie are here," said Henry. "Another half mile and we'd have been ashes."

Paul was giving thanks under his breath, and watching the fire with awe-stricken eyes. It swept past them and rushed on, in a great red cloud, that ate all in its path and gave forth much noise.

It was now on the far side of the prairie, and soon began to grow smaller in the distance. Yet so great was the wall of fire that it was long in sight, dying at last in a red band under the horizon. Even then all the skies were still filled with drifting smoke and ashes.

The boys looked back at the path over which they had come, and although the joy of escape was still upon them it was with real grief that they beheld the stricken forest, lately so grand a sight. It was now but a desolate and blackened ruin. Here and there charred trunks stood like the chimneys of burned houses, and others lay upon the ground like fallen and smoking rafters. Scattered about were great beds of living coals, where the brush had been thickest, and smoke rose in columns from the burned grass and hot earth. It was all like some great temple destroyed by fire; and such it was, the grandest of all temples, the natural temple of the forest.

"We kindled that fire," said Paul.

"I guess we did," responded Henry, "but we didn't know our spark would grow into so great a blaze."

They swam to the bank and walked toward the remains of the forest. But the ground was still hot to their feet, and the smoke troubled them. Near the edge of the wood they found a deer still alive and with a broken leg, tripped in its panic-stricken flight or struck by a fallen tree. Henry approached cautiously and slew him with his clasp knife. He felt strong pity as the fallen animal looked at him with great mournful eyes, but they were two hungry boys, and they must have a food supply if they would live in the woods.

They cleaned and dressed the deer and found that the carcass was as much as they could carry. But with great toil they lifted it over the hot ground, and then across another little prairie, until they came to woods only partially burned. There they hung the body to the bough of a tree, out of the reach of beasts of prey.

Then they took thought for the future. Barring the deer which would last some time they would now have to begin all over again, but they resolved to spend the rest of the present day, there under the shade of the trees. They were too much exhausted with exertion and excitement to undertake any new risk just yet.

Paul was afflicted with a great longing for home that afternoon. The fire and their narrow escape were still on his nerves. His muscular fiber was not so enduring as that of Henry, and the wilderness did not make so keen an appeal to him. Their hardships were beginning to weigh upon him and he thought all the time of Wareville, and the comfortable little log houses and the certain and easy supplies of food. Henry knew what was on his comrade's mind but he did not upbraid him for weakness of spirit. He, too, had memories of Wareville, and he pitied the grief of their people who must now be mourning them as lost forever. But he had been thinking long and hard and he had a plan. Finally he announced to Paul that they would build a raft.

"I believe this is the same river that runs by Wareville," he said. "I never heard Ross or Shif'less Sol or any of the men speak of another river, near enough for us to have reached it, since we've been wandering around. So it must be the same. Now either we are above Wareville or we are below it. We've got to guess at that and take the risk of it. We can roll a lot of the logs and timber into the river, tie 'em together, and float with the stream until we come to Wareville."

"But if we never come to it?" asked Paul.

"Then all we have to do is to get off the raft and follow the river back up the bank. Then we are sure to reach home."

This was so plausible that Paul was full of enthusiasm and they decided that they would set to work on the raft early in the morning.

CHAPTER IV

THE HAUNTED FOREST

As the two boys sat before their camp fire that night, after making their plan, they were far from feeling gloomy. Another revulsion had come. Safe, for the moment, after their recent run for life, it seemed to them that they were safe for all time. They were rested, they had eaten good food in plenty, and the fire was long since but a dim red blur on the horizon. Ashes, picked up by wandering puffs of wind, still floated here and there among the burned tree trunks, and now and then a shower of sparks burst forth, as a bough into which the flames had eaten deep, broke and fell to the ground; but fear had gone from the lads, and, in its place, came a deep content. They were used to the forest, and in the company of each other they felt neither loneliness nor despair.

"It's good here," said Paul who was a reader and a philosopher. "I guess a fellow's life looks best to him just after he's thought he was going to lose it, but didn't."

"I think that's true," said Henry, glancing toward the far horizon, where the red blur still showed under the twilight. "But that was just a little too close for fun."

But his satisfaction was even deeper than Paul's. The wilderness and its ways made a stronger appeal to him. Paul, without Henry, would have felt loneliness and fear, but Henry alone, would have faced the night undaunted. Already the great forest was putting upon him its magic spell.

"Have you eaten enough, Paul?" he asked.

"I should like to eat more, but I'm afraid I can't find a place for it," replied Paul ruefully.

Henry laughed. He felt himself more than ever Paul's protector and regarded all his weaknesses with kindly tolerance. There the two lay awhile, stretched out on the soft, warm earth, watching the twilight deepen into night. Henry was listening to the voice of the wilderness, which spoke to him in such pleasant tones. He heard a faint sighing, like some one lightly plucking the strings of a guitar, and he knew that it was the wandering breeze among the burned boughs; he heard now and then a distant thud, and he knew that it was the fall of a tree, into whose trunk the flames had bit deeply; as he lay with his ear to the earth he heard more than once a furtive footfall as light as air, and he knew that some wild animal was passing. But he had no fear, the fire was a ring of steel about them.

Paul heard few of these sounds, or if hearing them he paid no heed. The wilderness was not talking to him. He was merely in the woods and he was very glad indeed to have his strong and faithful comrade beside him.

The twilight slipped away and the night came, thick and dark. The red blur lingered, but the faintest line of pink under the dark horizon, and the scorched tree trunks that curved like columns in a circle around them became misty and unreal. Despite himself Paul began to feel a little fear. He was a brave boy, but this was the wilderness, the wilderness in the dark, peopled by wild animals and perhaps by wilder men, and they were lost in it. He moved a little closer to his comrade. But Henry, into whose mind no such thoughts had come, rose presently, and heaped more wood on the fire. He was merely taking an ordinary precaution, and this little task finished, he spoke to Paul in a vein of humor, purposely making his words sound very big.

"Mr. Cotter," he said, "it seems to me that two worthy gentlemen like ourselves who have had a day of hard toil should retire for the night, and seek the rest that we deserve."

"What you say is certainly true, Mr. Ware," responded Paul who had a lively fancy, "and I am glad to see that we have happened upon an inn, worthy of our great merits, and of our high position in life. This, you see, Mr. Ware, is the Kaintuckee Inn, a most spacious place, noted for its pure air, and the great abundance of it. In truth, Mr. Ware, I may assert to you that the ventilation is perfect."

"So I see, Mr. Cotter," said Henry, pursuing the same humor. "It is indeed a noble place. We are not troubled by any guest, beneath us in quality, nor are we crowded by any of our fellow lodgers."

"True! True!" said Paul, his bright eyes shining with his quick spirit, "and it is a most noble apartment that we have chosen. I have seldom been in one more spacious. My eyes are good, but good as they are I cannot see the ceiling, it is so high. I look to right and left, and the walls are so far away that they are hidden in the dark."

"Correctly spoken, Mr. Cotter," said Henry taking up the thread of talk, "and our inn has more than size to speak for it. It is furnished most beautifully. I do not know of another that has in it so good a larder. Its great specialty is game. It has too a most wonderful and plenteous supply of pure fresh water and that being so I propose that we get a drink and go to bed."

The two boys went down to the little brook that ran near, and drank heartily. They then returned within the ring of fire.

They were thoroughly tired and sleepy, and they quickly threw themselves down upon the soft warm earth, pillowing their heads on their arms, and the great Kaintuckee Inn bent over them a roof of soft, summer skies.

But the wilderness never sleeps, and its people knew that night that a stranger breed was abroad among them. The wind rose a little, and its song among the burned branches became by turns a music and a moan. The last cinder died, the earth cooled, and the forest creatures began to stir in the woodland aisles where the fire had passed. The disaster had come and gone, and perhaps it was already out of their memories forever. Rabbits timidly sought their old nests. A wild cat climbed a tree, scarcely yet cool beneath his claws, and looked with red and staring eyes at the ring of fire that formed a core of light in the forest, and the two extraordinary beings that slept within its shelter. A deer came down to the brook to drink, snorted at the sight of the red gleam among the trees, and then, when the strange odor came on the wind to its nostrils, fled in wild fright through the forest.

The news, in some way unknown to man, was carried to all the forest creatures. A new species, strange, unexplainable, had come among them, and they were filled with curiosity. Even the weak who had need to fear the strong, edged as near as they dared, and gazed at the singular beings who lay inside the red blaze. The wild cat crawled far out on the bare bough, and stared, half afraid, half curious, and also angry at the intrusion. He could see over the red blaze and he saw the boys stretched upon the ground, their faces, very white to the eye of the forest, upturned to the sky. To human gaze they would have seemed as two dead, but the keen eyes of the wild cat saw their chests rising and falling with deep regular breaths.

The darkness deepened and then after a while began to lighten. A beautiful clear moon came out and sheathed all the burned forest in gleaming silver. But the boys were still far away in a happy slumberland. The wild cat fled in alarm at the light, and the timid things drew back farther among the trees.

Time passed, and the red ring of fire about Paul and Henry sank. Hasty and tired, they had not drawn up enough wood to last out the night, and now the flames died, one by one. Then the coals smoldered and after a while they too began to go out, one by one. The red ring of fire that inclosed the two boys was slowly going away. It broke into links, and then the links went out.

Light clouds came up from the west, and were drawn, like a veil, across the sky. The moon began to fade, the silver armor melted away from the trees, and the wild cat that had come back could scarcely see the two strange beings, keen though his eyes were, so dense was the shadow where they lay. The wild things, still devoured with curiosity, pressed nearer. The terrible red light that filled their souls with dread, was gone, and the forest had lost half its terror. There was a ring of eyes about Henry and Paul, but they yet abode in glorious slumberland, peaceful and happy.

Suddenly a new note came into the sounds of the wilderness, one that made the timid creatures tremble again with dread. It was faint and very far, more like a quaver brought down upon the wind, but the ring of eyes drew back into the forest, and then, when the quaver came a second time, the rabbits and the deer fled, not to return. The lips of the wild cat contracted into a snarl, but his courage

was only of the moment, he scampered away and he did not stop until he had gone a full mile. Then he swiftly climbed the tallest tree that he could find, and hid in its top.

The ring of eyes was gone, as the ring of fire had died, but Henry and Paul slept on, although there was full need for them to be awake. The long, distant quaver, like a whine, but with something singularly ferocious in its note came again on the wind, and, far away, a score of forms, phantom and dusky, in the shadow were running fast, with low, slim bodies, and outstretched nostrils that had in them a grateful odor of food, soon to come.

Nature had given to Henry Ware a physical mechanism of great strength, but as delicate as that of a watch. Any jar to the wheels and springs was registered at once by the minute hand of his brain. He stirred in his sleep and moved one hand in a troubled way. He was not yet awake, but the minute hand was quivering, and through all his wonderfully sensitive organism ran the note of alarm. He stirred again and then abruptly sat up, his eyes wide open, and his whole frame tense with a new and terrible sensation. He saw the dead coals, where the fire had been; the long, quavering and ferocious whine came to his ears, and, in an instant, he understood. It was well for the two that Henry was by nature a creature of the forest! He sprang to his feet and with one sweeping motion pulled Paul to his also.

"Up! Up, Paul!" he cried. "The fire is out, and the wolves are coming!"

Paul's physical senses were less acute and delicate than Henry's, and he did not understand at once. He was still dazed, and groping with his hands in the dusk, but Henry gave him no time.

"It's our lives, Paul!" he cried. "Another enemy as bad as the fire is after us!"

Not twenty feet away grew a giant beech, spreading out low and mighty boughs, and Henry leaped for it, dragging Paul after him.

"Up you go!" he cried, and Paul, not yet fully awake, instinctively obeyed the fierce command. Then Henry leaped lightly after him and as they climbed higher among the boughs the ferocious whine burst into a long terrible howl, and the dusky forms, running low, gaunt and ghostly in the shadow, shot from the forest, and hurled themselves at the beech tree.

Henry, despite all his courage, shuddered, and while he clutched a bough tightly with one hand put the other upon his comrade to see that he did not fall. He could feel Paul trembling in his grasp.

The two looked down upon the inflamed red eyes, the cruelly sharp, white teeth and slaving mouths, and, still panting from their climb, each breathed a silent prayer of thankfulness. They had been just in time to escape a pack of wolves that howled horribly for a while, and then sat upon their haunches, staring silently up at the sweet new food, which they believed would fall at last into their mouths.

Paul at length said weakly:

"Henry, I'm mighty glad you're a light sleeper. If it had been left to me to wake up first I'd have woke up right in the middle of the stomachs of those wolves."

"Well, we're here and we're safe for the present," said Henry who never troubled himself over what was past and gone, "and I think this is a mighty fine beech tree. I know that you and I, Paul, will never see another so big and friendly and good as it is."

Paul laughed, now with more heart.

"You are right, Henry," he said. "You are a mighty good friend, Mr. Big Beech Tree, and as a mark of gratitude I shall kiss you right in the middle of your honest barky old forehead," and he touched his lips lightly to the great trunk. Paul was an imaginative boy, and his whim pleased him. Such a thought would not have come to Henry, but he liked it in Paul.

"I think it's past midnight, Paul," said Henry, "and we've been lucky enough to have had several hours' sleep."

"But they'll go away as soon as they realize they can't get us," said Paul, "and then we can climb down and build a new and bigger ring of fire about us."

Henry shook his head.

"They don't realize it," he replied. "I know they expect just the contrary, Paul. They are as sure as a wolf can be that we will drop right into their mouths, just ready and anxious to be eaten. Look at that old fellow with his forepaws on the tree! Did you ever see such confidence?"

Paul looked down fearfully, and the eyes of the biggest of the wolves met his, and held him as if he were charmed. The wolf began to whine and lick his lips, and Paul felt an insane desire to throw himself down.

"Stop it, Paul!" Henry cried sharply.

Paul jerked his eyes away, and shuddered from head to foot.

"He was asking me to come," he said hysterically, "and I don't know how it was, but for a moment I felt like going."

"Yes and a warm welcome he would have given you," said Henry still sharply. "Remember that your best friend just now is not Mr. Big Wolf, but Mr. Big Beech Tree, and it's a wise boy who sticks to his best friend."

"I'm not likely to forget it," said Paul.

He shuddered again at the memory of the terrible, haunting eyes that had been able for a brief moment to draw him downward. Then he clasped the friendly tree more tightly in his arms, and Henry smiled approval.

"That's right, Paul," he said, "hold fast. I'd a heap rather be up here than down there."

Paul felt himself with his hand.

"I'm all in one piece up here," he said, "and I think that's good for a fellow who wants to live and grow."

Henry laughed with genuine enjoyment. Paul was getting back his sense of humor, and the change meant that his comrade was once more strong and alert. Then the larger boy looked down at their besiegers, who were sitting in a solemn circle, gazing now at the two lads and now at the venison, hanging from the boughs of another tree very near. In the dusk and the shadows they were a terrible company, gaunt and ghostly, gray and grim.

For a long time the wolves neither moved nor uttered a sound; they merely sat on their haunches and stared upward at the living prey that they felt would surely be theirs. The clouds, caught by wandering breezes, were stripped from the face of the sky, and the moonlight came out again, clear, and full, sheathing the scorched trunks once more in silver armor, and stretching great blankets of light on the burned and ashy earth. It fell too on the gaunt figures of the gray wolves, but the silent and deadly circle did not stir. In the moonlight they grew more terrible, the red eyes became more inflamed and angry, because they had to wait so long for what they considered theirs by right, the snarling lips were drawn back a little farther, and the sharp white teeth gleamed more cruelly.

Time passed again, dragging slowly and heavily for the besieged boys in the tree, but the wolves, though hungry, were patient. Strong in union they were lords of the forest, and they felt no fear. A shambling black bear, lumbering through the woods, suddenly threw up his nose in the wind, and catching the strong pungent odor, wheeled abruptly, lumbering off on another course. The wild cat did not come back, but crouched lower in his tree top; the timid things remained hidden deep in their nests and burrows.

It was a new kind of game that the wolves had scented and driven to the boughs, something that they had never seen before, but the odor was very sweet and pleasant in their nostrils. It was a tidbit that they must have, and, red-eyed, they stared at the two strange, toothsome creatures, who stirred now and then in the tree, and who made queer sounds to each other. When they heard these occasional noises the pack would reply with a long ferocious whine that seemed to double on itself and give back echoes from every point of the compass. In the still night it went far, and the timid things, when they heard it, trembled all over in their nests and burrows. Then the leader, the largest and most terrible of the pack would stretch himself upon the tree trunk, and claw at the scorched bark, but the food he craved was still out of reach.

They noticed that the strange creatures in the tree began to move oftener, and to draw their limbs up as if they were growing stiff, and then their long-drawn howl grew longer and more ferocious than ever; the game, tired out, would soon drop into their mouths. But it did not, the two creatures made sounds as if they were again encouraging each other, and the hearts of the wolves filled with rage and impatience that they should be cheated so long.

The night advanced; the moonlight faded again and the dark hours that come before the dawn were at hand. The forest became black and misty like a haunted wood, and the dim forms of the wolves were the ghosts that lived in it. But to their sharp red eyes the dark was nothing; they saw the two beings in the tree do a very queer thing; they tore strips from themselves, so it seemed to the wolves, from their clothing in fact, and wound it about their bodies and a bough of the tree against which they rested. But the wolves did not understand, only they knew that the creatures did not stir again or make any kind of noise for a long time.

When the darkness was thickest the wolves grew hot with impatience. Already they smelled the dawn and in the light their courage would ooze. Could it be that the food they coveted would not fall into their mouths? The dread suspicion filled every vein of the old leader with wrath, and he uttered a long terrible howl of doubt and anger; the pack took up the note and the lonely forest became alive with its echoes. But the creatures in the tree stirred only a little, and made very few sounds. They seemed to be safe and content, and the wolves raged back and forth, leaping and howling.

The old leader felt the dark thin and lighten, and the scent of the coming dawn became more oppressive to him. A little needle of fear shot into his heart, and his muscles began to grow weak. He saw afar in the east the first pale tinge, faint and gray, of the dreadful light that he feared and hated. His howl now was one of mingled anger and disappointment, and the pack imitated the note of the king.

The black veil over the forest gave way to one of gray. The dreadful bar of light in the east broadened and deepened, and became beaming, intense and brilliant. The needle of terror at the heart of the gray wolf stabbed and tore. His red eyes could not face the great red sun that swung now above the earth, shooting its fierce beams straight at him. The dark, so kindly and so encouraging, beloved of his kind, was gone, and the earth swam in a hideous light, every ray of which was hostile. His blood changed to water, his knees bent under him, and then, to turn fear to panic, came a powerful odor on the light, morning wind. It was like the scent of the two strange, succulent creatures in the tree, but it was the odor of many—many make strength he knew—and the great gray wolf was sore afraid.

The sun shot higher and the world was bathed in a luminous golden glow. The master-wolf cast one last, longing look at the lost food in the tree, and then, uttering a long quavering howl of terror, which the pack took up and carried in many echoes, fled headlong through the forest with his followers close behind, all running low and fast, and with terror hot at their heels. Their gaunt, gray bodies were gone in a moment, like ghosts that vanish at the coming of the day.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.