CHAPTER V.

A VARIETY OF ADVENTURES.—LOST IN A FOREST.

All the world's a stage
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts.

—Shakespeare.

The lunch furnished me by the kind-hearted Mrs. Shaw was ample, and supplied me with the first dinner I had had in many days. At noon I came upon a large spring which gushed from the bosom of the earth, and sent its pellucid stream down the moss-covered banks of a creek, in whose bed the waters came together and mingled. A huge shade-tree, whose leaves were tinted with the bright hues of the autumn, grew near at hand. At this spot I stopped, and furnished with water from the spring, enjoyed my lunch in comparative comfort. When this was done, an hour's repose among the gnarled roots of the oak restored my strength; and with renewed vigor and hope I rose and pursued my journey.

The air was crisp and cold to such a degree that I did not, as usual, suffer from heat; and I was thus enabled to travel a greater distance in a given time with less fatigue. Towards the close of day, on
making inquiries along the road, I was directed to the home of a family named Shaw as being somewhat better prepared than their immediate neighbors to give me accommodations for the night. A long and fertile lane led up to their gate, and as I turned into it I overtook a ragged and greasy negro; and he, mending his pace to agree with mine, walked along with me. I passed a few words with him, and as I neared the front of the house I was seeking, the negro, in pursuance of whatever business he was on, if any, turned aside and went off down a small by-lane which intersected the one I was in.

The lady of the house was in the yard as I came up, and when I had made known the nature of my errand, she looked at me sternly and suspiciously, and demanded:

"Are you not traveling with a negro?"

I hastened to reply, inwardly cursing the block-headed stupidity of the negro who had brought the suspicion of this hard-featured Amazon upon me:

"No, madam, I assure you I am not."

"Yet I saw you," she pursued, looking at me distrustfully, "I saw you come up the lane in company with one."

I opened my lips to speak. She interrupted me without ceremony.

"Do you pretend to say that I didn't?" she exclaimed, raising her voice. "Do you mean to tell me to my very face—"

I interrupted her in my turn.

"Madam," said I, beginning to feel disgusted, "if
you do not intend to allow me to speak, say so, and I will go elsewhere; but if you are—"

Go on, she said.

"Well then," I resumed, "I cannot and do not deny that you saw me with the negro you complain of, but I overtook him, wholly by accident, at the end of the lane down there, and he walked along with me. That is all. I never saw him before. And besides, Mrs. Shaw, he claims to be a resident of your neighborhood."

This explanation appeared to satisfy her upon that score, yet did not wholly remove her distrust of me.

"You know my name, it seems," she replied. "How about that? Or did you guess it?"

"No, madam; I learned your name from one of your neighbors."

"And you want me to take you in for the night?" she next demanded.

I assured her that such was my desire.

"But I do not know you," she declared. "I never even heard of you. I never knew a man named Nall in my life. Besides," she asked, suddenly, and as if struck by a sudden thought, while she looked at me very straight, "how do I know but what you are an escaped lunatic?"

I glared at her in frightened silence for a moment.

"Do I look like one?" I said, desperately, restraining myself by a strong effort from turning about and making off at the top of my speed.

"No," she admitted, "you do not; but last spring a lunatic escaped from the Arkansas asylum, and
came down here and put us to a world of trouble. He didn’t look like a maniac, either.”

A short silence ensued. I did not care to break it.

“But,” she said, suddenly changing her tone after bending her head in thought for a moment, “while I cannot agree to take you in, as my husband is gone from home, and may not get back before late supper time, and there ain’t nobody on the place but us women, you can come in and stay till my husband comes. I expect him in about an hour; and if he will let you stay, why it’s all right with me.”

I thanked her and followed her into the house.

The sun sank behind a wooded ridge in the west as we entered the door, and the air had grown cooler and damper. My conductress preceded me to the sitting-room, where she introduced me to an elderly lady who was knitting by the fire. We passed an hour in friendly chat,—or rather I should say small talk, as I am not so sure about its being very friendly. The good ladies seemed to have an idea that I might yet prove to be a swindler running away from some remote part of Texas; or a murderer; or a kind of monster belonging to the unclassifiables of Natural History; or perhaps they could not decide upon this point. But of one thing they were manifestly very sure; namely, that to whatever known or unknown part of the Animal kingdom I might belong, I nevertheless made it my business to roam about the earth and prey upon unprotected ladies—invading their homes, seizing them and destroying their lives, and forthwith roasting their quivering bodies in their best
Sunday "spiders," and then revelling in a cannibalistic feast.

Under such circumstances our conversation was not very friendly; for how could you expect two unprotected females, with a terrible Oger or Ghoul right before them to exercise their gentle tongues with their wonted irrepressible regularity? But if I go on at this rate the reader will doubtless conclude that my head is not so clear after all.

The ladies waited in some anxiety for Mr. Shaw; but he did not come until the clock was on the stroke of nine. He showed some surprise on seeing me but as soon as matters were explained to him, he told me with much cordiality that I might remain. We then sat down to a late supper.

The disturbing dreams that had haunted my slumbers the night before did not break in upon my repose that night. I slept sweetly and peacefully until the break of day.

On leaving this place after breakfast the following morning, I pursued my way in a southerly direction. The lines dividing the States of Louisiana and Texas were hardly three score miles away, and I expected to cross the Sabine near the close of the next day, or on the morning of the day following. For some reason, however, I missed my way, and got into a road which led me some distance away from the route it was my design to pursue. But unluckily, like most men who lose their bearings under similar circumstances, I neither knew at what point I had turned aside from the proper road, nor even discov-
erected that I had done so until it was too late to turn back. Towards the middle of the afternoon, having reached the environs of an unfamiliar "bottom," which grew out from the banks of a large creek, I so bewildered myself in a maze or network of dim roads, none of which seemed to lead anywhere except into the trackless depths of the forest, that I very speedily came to realize that I was lost. And not merely lost as to the proper roads to follow, but lost as to direction also. The realization or consciousness of this fact which came home to me did not aid me any, but on the contrary, tended to still further confuse me.

The sky had been somewhat dark and threatening from early dawn, and now the sun which might have aided me by indicating which was south and which north, became wholly obscured under leaden drifts of clouds.

With the sky thus lowering in ominous-looking banks above me, and myself hopelessly bewildered in the unknown depths of the forest, my situation was anything but pleasant.

Finally, in order that I might collect my thoughts to decide upon some means of extricating myself from so unpleasant a dilemma, I seated myself upon a huge log which lay along the path I was pursuing. On all sides, as far as the eye could see, the forest extended—dark, silent and forbidding. The part in which I then was—for the whole was seemingly interminable—was particularly wild and lonely. I could see no evidence that human foot had ever
trodden those boundless solitudes before me. A deep silence seemed to brood over it, as if the very spirit of stillness itself had its abode there, save when the piercing call of the quail to its mate, or the sound of dropping nuts was heard. The underbrush grew in the wildest profusion beneath the great oaks or other monarchs of the forest.

A perfect picture of brooding loneliness and profound solitude greeted the eye wherever it was turned, even the semi-tropical verdure which waved in parti-colored masses on every hand having an indescribable air of useless magnificence and wasted grandeur.

Musing for a time upon these things, I was suddenly struck by the fact that even the scant daylight which remained was slowly but surely declining. Starting up upon this I resumed my journey, choosing only the roads which were more clearly defined and avoiding those that were dim and faint, in the hope that they might lead me sooner or later to some human habitation. The best of these roads were little more than bridle-paths, and whether they had been made by man, or by the horny hoofs of wandering quadrupeds was a question I should have liked much to solve. But the knowledge which might have saved me some hours of uneasiness or many miles of walking was wanting, and it only remained for me to trust to chance and patiently await the issue.

I had not gone a great distance when, in looking downward to pick my way around a dark lagoon covered with greenish-colored scum, I found a rusty
pocket-knife lying in my path. Elated by this discovery, which I felt to be indeed a fortuitous circumstance, I picked up the knife and examined it. Originally a jack-knife of considerable size and strength, some accident had reduced the number of its blades from three to one, and deprived it of one handle, while the whole knife was in such condition as to render it almost useless for the purpose it was originally intended for. Yet it was nevertheless a welcome addition to my personal accoutrements. After several failures, I contrived to open the remaining blade, and then scoured it thoroughly in the moist sands under my feet. Thus after half an hour of persistent labor I brightened the rusty steel to a degree that hardly seemed possible at first.

It now remains for me to acquaint the reader with my reasons for attaching so much importance to the finding of the knife, if he has not already guessed them. It will be remembered, no doubt, that mention has been made more than once of the fact that each of the garments I was wearing every day, and would doubtless continue to wear for some time to come, for want of means to obtain new ones, was branded in indelible characters of considerable size, with my own name in full, and the name of the North Texas Insane Asylum; and that these names were so situated as to be readily noticed by almost any one. It had therefore taxed my ingenuity greatly since my escape to so arrange my garments as to conceal these tell-tale characters; and while I had succeeded in doing this to my entire satisfaction thus far, yet I knew that
an accident might at any time betray my secret so long as the letters remained.

Hence I was eager to take such steps as would forever prevent an occurrence so fatal to my hopes, and I knew of but one way to accomplish this; namely, to completely obliterate the damaging words with the blade of a sharp knife.

It will thus be seen why the finding of a cast-off jack-knife gave me such pleasure; and when I had put it in better condition for my purpose, it was with no little satisfaction that I entered upon the pleasant task of effacing the hateful words. This done I pressed forward at a rapid and even pace, pursuing the wanderings of the path as it wound in and out among the trees of the forest in a manner which clearly indicated that no vehicle had ever passed over it. It led me over the broken and rotten trunks of trees, which lay prostrate across the path; around lagoons of stagnant water; past marshy swamps, covered with slime and ooze; over brush, sticks, stumps and stones. In this manner the remainder of the afternoon was spent, and I found myself no nearer the goal for which I had started. It was sufficiently evident that darkness would close down rapidly and soon, leaving me alone in the obscure labyrinths of a forest of which that portion at least was uninhabited save by prowling animals and midnight owls. This thought spurred me on, but the shades of evening were falling rapidly around me, and the least indication of human presence remained yet to be discovered. Fortunately, however, the road
I was following was becoming brighter and broader, and this encouraged me to hope that possibly I might be able to keep to it even in the darkness.

The shades of night were now falling fast, and the darkness was deepening with a speed which seemed to me to be almost fatal. Yet I did not despair, but determined to walk the whole night through, if I could keep to the road, rather than stop anywhere in the lonely precincts of the wood. The darkness, when it came at last, was profound, as such nights always are in the forest. There was no moon, or at least none was visible through the dark banks of cloud, but I pushed on, as I could yet see the vague and dim outlines of the road. My pace was necessarily much slower, and I began to feel the fatigue of the day's journey. Now and then in my haste I ran into shallow lagoons of stagnant, and often ill-smelling water, or into obstructions less unpleasant but more painful. The moments went by, but slowly, and the solemn hush of night settled over the forest. The hooting of many owls, which echoed through the wood, sounded weird and unearthly in the silence, and whatever superstitious fears I might have had—and we all possess them—came back to me now. Other sounds, not so wild or supernatural, but of far deeper import, as coming from animals known to be desperate or dangerous, came to my ears from the distance, faint and soon dying away. Winged creatures whirred past me in the darkness, and innumerable insects buzzed and chirped in the air.

Finally I thought I caught the distant flicker of a
light; but ere I could assure myself of the fact, it
vanished as suddenly as it came. I then retraced my
steps to what I conceived to be the point at which I
had first seen it, and looked searchingly in that direc-
tion, yet nothing but darkness met my eye. Decid-
ing that an optical delusion of some kind, which often
occurs to men under similar circumstances, had
probably deceived me, I gave over the vain attempt
to find a light that very likely did not exist, and pur-
sued my journey. But after walking a short distance,
the light flashed out upon my sight again, and this
time in a manner which led me to conclude that it
was no optical delusion after all, but a real light.
As it appeared to be at no great distance from where
I stood, and was gleaming with a steady and even
glow directly in the path I was pursuing I held on my
way without stopping. As I approached, I could
clearly perceive that the light shone from an uncur-
tained window, and it came from a glass lamp which
burned with a steady flame upon what I took to be a
table. With much satisfaction at the discovery—
which promised shelter, rest and good cheer—I hur-
rried forward, and soon stood before the dark outlines
of a comfortable looking cottage.

Not wishing to enter the yard until I was assured
that no fierce watch-dog would attack me, I called
out the usual formula at the gate. It was necessary,
however, to repeat my halloo before anyone heard
me; and then, after a short silence, followed by the
sound of footsteps and the opening of the door, a
deep voice called out to know “who was there?”
To which I replied, "A stranger."

A dissatisfied "Humph" followed this admission, and the voice demanded:

"And what is a stranger doing here at this hour of the night, and what does he want?"

My interlocutor appeared to be standing upon a sort of piazza in front of the house, and to regard all strangers as objects of suspicion.

I replied that I was an entire stranger in that part of the State, was lost, foot-sore and weary, and in search of a place at which to pass the night.

A silence of considerable duration followed; then the voice demanded:

"Who are you, sir, and where are you from?"

I own that I felt somewhat irritated at his cold and inhospitable reception—this stern and suspicious treatment from a man who was bound, as soon as I made known my distress, to receive me courteously.

"My name, sir," I returned, sternly and curtly, "is Nall. I started with my wagons from Blank, and got lost from them. I attempted to take a shorter road a-foot, and missed my way."

"Where are you going?" he next inquired.

"From Eagletopper to Browntown."

"From Eagletopper* to Browntown!" exclaimed the voice, sharply and suspiciously. "And what are you doing in this out-of-the-way part of——- Bottom, if you are really trying to get to Browntown? The road which leads to that place is twenty miles back."

* These names are fictitious. For reasons entirely personal the true names are withheld.
Then in a sharper, louder tone, full of distrust and suspicion, the man turned about, as if with the intention of immediately entering the house, and added:

"Mr. Stranger, you must give a better account of yourself if you would have me think you an honest man. I don't like your tale!"

I hastened to say that "I had got myself completely lost, and could find no one to set me right, and I had naturally followed the road which appeared to be traveled the most; that I was utterly worn out and exhausted, and among strangers, and could only throw myself upon his mercy."

This appeal had its effect; for though the man did not reply, he came on down the steps and opened the gate. I entered, and he said, speaking in a manner somewhat more civil, "that though he had no accommodations for strangers, he would take me in, and give me the best they had, such as it was."

Upon this, I stopped him for a moment and said:

"I feel it is but fair that I should tell you, here and now, that I have no money to offer you in return for your hospitality, and therefore cannot pay you anything."

"Well," he replied, as we mounted the steps, "that need make no difference. As you have had the honesty to tell me so in advance, I will be as plain with you. You are welcome, sir, to our poor accommodations, and I hope you will not think anything of my manner of receiving you just now. No offense was intended, but the hour was late for us, and this is
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a part of the world where strangers seldom come.”

I could not help thinking that if this were true, it was all the more reason for treating the few who did come with greater courtesy. But, although the excuse he gave was quite as remarkable as my reception had been, I merely thanked him, and we entered the house together.

He conducted me into the room where I had first seen the light, and introduced me to his wife—a white-haired old lady sitting before the fire. She was the only occupant of the room, and I learned that she and my host lived entirely alone. As to the latter, no sooner had he and I reached the light, than, as if by a mutual impulse, we turned and gazed upon each other with some curiosity. Notwithstanding his vigorous step and strong voice, I was surprised to find my host to be a man apparently not far from three score and ten. His hair was white and wavy, and a long beard depended from his chin; but his eyes were clear, resolute and undimmed by age. His long full upper lip was closely shaven, and his mouth set in a firm straight line. Though his shoulders were slightly rounded, he yet held himself with an erectness many a younger man might have envied. His eyes were blue and kindly, and his whole countenance was that of a man honest and firm in his principles, of a nature deeply religious, kind and obliging to his neighbors, but rigid in his ideas of duty and moral behavior, merciless to the wrong-doer, terrible in anger when aroused, and in spirit, bold, daring and dauntless.
This good opinion that I had formed of him increased as I came to know him better; and uninviting as my reception had been, the night spent with the solitary old couple was much pleasanter than I could have anticipated. Their courtesy was blunt, but kindly, and I did not need to be told that it came from their hearts. The old house-wife bustled about and set before me a tempting repast, to which I was disposed to do ample justice; and the steaming cup of coffee she placed upon my right spread its genial warmth over my tired frame. It was pleasant to a wanderer to emerge from the dark, forbidding and owl-haunted forest into the light and warmth of a happy fireside; and a restful feeling of pleased content stole over me as we sat before the blazing hearth. The evening of life, however dark its shadows might have been, had not chilled the hearts nor dimmed the minds of this white-haired couple. They presented a perfect picture of hale and hearty old age, whose hearts were unsullied by the memory of a single unworthy act. The ruddy glow of the firelight played over their sober countenances as they related to me many incidents of their past; and as they talked, each suggesting some episode that the other had forgotten, I could not but feel that every human life, no matter how lowly and obscure, has always its romantic side. However unknown or unsuspected it may be, there is yet, in almost every breast, consecrated but not dimmed by the flight of time, the details of some early romance whose mere memory will thrill and stir the heart.
It was growing somewhat late when we rose from our places at the fireside and retired to rest; and the fatigue of the day's exhausting though fruitless journey overcoming me as I laid my head upon the pillow, I sank at once into a profound and restful slumber.

They roused me in time for an early breakfast, and this meal being over, I and my new-found friends—for as such I could not help regarding them—parted with mutual and sincere expressions of amity and good will. Having received the necessary instructions from my aged host, as to how to set myself straight I set forth upon my journey.

It is a source of much disappointment to me that I cannot recall the names of this good old couple. For in this place if in no other I should like to make some return for their warm and grateful hospitality. But of all the names of the many who gave me the freedom of their homes, without hope of reward, I can only, as has been stated, recall the names of but two or three. This is greatly to be regretted, but cannot be remedied; and when I parted from those kind friends at the time, we parted, in all probability, forevermore.

I crossed the Sabine River on the following day, and breathed freer when I found myself upon the soil of Louisiana. As long as I remained in Texas the danger of pursuit and capture was real, and necessitated a long course of downright deception on my part which became more repugnant every day. And had I been captured, the falsehoods which I had been
obliged to tell would not, had they been found out (and a falsehood, like a boomerang, generally returns to him who sends it) have turned the scale in my favor.

The direction I took was south, and I pursued my way through a dense wooded district. Indeed the forest extended in several directions for more miles than one would have cared to walk, if, like myself, he had already traveled for several hundred miles a-foot. The first night I passed in this State was spent at a farmhouse near the roadside; the second—but let us not anticipate. Yet I may say that I can never recall the occurrences of that second night in Louisiana without a sensation very near akin to horror.

On the afternoon of this second day, having wandered away from the public thoroughfare—which was itself quite dim at times—in consequence of some ambiguous directions given me by a block-headed farmer, I came to a part of the country which was pretty lonely, and from its appearance bade fair to become still more so. While ruminating upon the probable outcome of this new misfortune as well as the best course to be pursued in such an exigency, I met two peasant women coming a-foot along the road, and stopped to ask them some questions as to route, etc. As the information they gave me did not agree with my pre-conceived ideas of the route I designed to pursue, I hesitated somewhat before making up my mind to act upon it. Among those who have ever traveled to any extent on foot or by
private conveyance through the country, it is notorious that directions about roads given by ladies are as often as not—so far as any practical benefit is concerned—a very Sphinx’s Riddle. On this occasion, however, as I had no better authority to appeal to, I received their rambling descriptions of the topography of the country with deference; thanked them, and proceeded on my way.

One of the women had with her a small yellow dog—called by the vulgar a “bench-leg face”—but as there was nothing about it particularly inviting or attractive, I scarce gave it a passing glance. It may be that this was looked upon as an intentional “slight” by the dog, and resented as such; or on the other hand it may be that doggy did not like my appearance. However that may have been, I had gone but a few steps when I heard the swift patter of light feet behind me, and almost at the same instant I felt a sudden, sharp, and stinging pain in my foot just above the heel, and whirling suddenly, was just in time to see a small yellow object flying down the sandy road towards the two women at the top of its speed, and howling at every leap. Then I knew that the small dog had sneaked up behind me and bitten me upon those cords and sinews of the foot most used in walking.

For a moment I was so angry that I could hardly restrain myself; while, to add to my mortification and discomfort, the two females broke out into a loud shout of laughter. They seemed to enjoy the situation very much, and the echoes of their cach-
innation could have been heard, I am sure, almost a quarter of a mile. This was the "last straw;" and too enraged to keep silent, I told them that if I had the dog within my reach, I would kill him. This barbarous proposal shocked them so much, that, calling out encouragingly to their dog, which had probably scented danger in the air, and had struck out in a wild run towards home, its fright increasing with every leap towards safety until it had gone nearly insane through fear,—they turned upon me, heaping upon me every opprobrious epithet, every scurrilous accusation, every vulgar denunciation which their narrow vocabulary could command.

I did not, however, remain to witness this explosion of vulgar and splenetic rage; but turned and walked away, leaving the angry females to follow the footsteps of their cherished dog. The wound in my foot pained me considerably, but I did not stop. The sun had passed the meridian some hours before, and was slowly sinking. The road I was pursuing—if road it could be called—was vague and dim, and there did not appear to be a human dwelling along its entire length. At all events I did not pass any, nor meet a single individual from whom directions could be had. Hoping, however, that a farm-house might come in sight any moment, I pressed on instead of turning back. In this manner the afternoon waned, and the misery in my foot had degenerated to a dull, throbbing ache with a keen dart of pain now and then as I lifted my foot incautiously. The road had become dimmer, and the appearance of the country more wild and lonely.
A sunset approached I entered the outskirts of a forest, and from changes in its aspect, I became aware in about an hour that a considerable stream was near at hand. A few minutes later it was a forest no longer, but a wilderness. Rank vegetation and matted undergrowth were seen on every hand, and small streams meandered in all directions. My road led me finally down into the bed of a considerable creek. The bottom was covered with pebbles and sand, and though the stream was wide, the water was clear and shallow. The bank on the opposite side was sloping, forming a gentle declivity which led from the surface of the earth down to the water below, and I inferred that at this particular spot the stream was usually forded, as above and below the banks were precipitous, and the current deep and swift. After a moment's deliberation I removed my shoes, rolled my trousers up to my knees, and waded across to the other side. The water was cold, but hardly so deep as I had anticipated. On emerging from the water I sat down upon a boulder and replaced my foot-gear. Upon toiling up the sandy bank I found that I had probably committed an error, as no road could be found. It seemed to end abruptly in the pebbly bed of the creek. Hoping, however, to find some trace of it, or perhaps another one somewhere in the vicinity, I hastily searched the woods before me for more than a mile. But all in vain. Not the faintest sign of a road or even a bridle-path could be found. I turned, therefore, to retrace my steps to the ford, which I supposed to be about a mile away,
when suddenly and without the least warning my injured foot gave out, and I sank down upon the ground, unable to advance another step. For a moment I closed my eyes in sheer despair—but only for a moment. Raising myself then to a sitting posture, and looking about me, I saw with something akin to alarm that I had fallen in a veritable wilderness. A jungle stretched away on either hand, the rank undergrowth forming such thickets that no eye could see through them. Small openings, or glades, appeared now and then in the more open parts of the forest, and some yards from where I lay a small stream, partially hidden by an intervening mass of tangled vines and fallen tree-tops, ran brawling along; while only a few feet away, upon my right, a small quantity of water had collected in a sort of minute basin, or sink in the earth.

The sun was setting. His last rays, grown redder now, fell over the dreary prospect, touching everything with golden fire. The dependent vines and matted undergrowth were motionless and still. No air was stirring. A wilder or more lonely spot I had never seen, and a silence that was absolute and oppressive brooded over all. Too wild a spot altogether, I reasoned, for any man, crippled and unarmed, to remain in, and I resolved to make an effort to get back to the ford.

I then examined my wounded foot. Removing the shoe, which had become so tight as to be painful, I found that the ankle and the parts immediately around it were swollen and discolored. The injured
member had not filled up the shoe sooner on account of its being much too large for me. The flesh was burning hot and throbbing painfully. With my shoe in my hand I crawled toward the handful of water a few feet away. The anguish occasioned by the moving of my wounded foot was exquisite, and almost more than I could bear. I progressed but slowly, moving an inch at a time. Reaching the water finally, I found it to be clear and cold, and the grateful cooling sensation imparted to my swollen foot by bathing it in the precious liquid granted me a temporary respite from suffering. I bathed it thoroughly; but when this was done I did not have the fortitude to undergo the acute torture which would inevitably accompany an attempt to return to the spot where I had fallen; and in any case there was no good reason for it that I could see; so I lay down my the water and elevated my injured leg my means of a convenient rise in the ground.

The pain abating, an overpowering sense of fatigue stole over me; I heard the pleasant noise of falling water as one whose senses were enthralled; and then all became blank.

The noise of some animal aroused me. I lay still and listened, and could distinctly hear the footfalls of some heavy quadruped crunching on the dead leaves. The sounds appeared to come from the opposite side of the stream; and as the moon was now shining, though not very brightly, I raised my head softly and peered over the tops of the intervening undergrowth. What I saw filled me with alarm, but
I did not withdraw my head in the fear of making a noise. On the high ground upon the opposite side of the stream a large bear, followed by two cubs, was approaching at a steady pace. She came on down the bank of the creek to the edge of the water, where she paused, sniffed the air, and went to lapping the water. The distance which separated us was about twenty yards, as near as I could judge, and I marvilled that the wonderful instinct common to every member of the animal kingdom, did not warn her of the proximity of a foe. Indeed, I had not the smallest doubt that it would do so and I resolved upon the instant that if the shaggy monster attacked me, I would feign death, as I had read somewhere that bears will not molest a corpse. But this, happily, was not necessary, as the bear did not offer to attack me, nor even appear to be aware of my presence. She drank her fill of water in what I took to be a very leisurely and deliberate manner, and then, turning awkwardly, shuffled on up the bank in the way she had come, and disappeared in the forest.

Waiting some minutes in order to be sure that she did not return, I hurriedly replaced my shoe, which I could now do without inconvenience, I rose to my feet and found that the act of walking did not occasion me greater pain than I could bear. I then limped cautiously but rapidly away in a contrary direction to that which the bear had pursued. The moon rode high in the heavens, shedding a dim uncertain light over the forest. I supposed that the night was more than half gone, and my repose had greatly refreshed me.
Without road, path, or beaten way to guide me, I struck out into the shadowed depths of the forest, choosing my course as best I could over the moss-grown trunks of trees, piles of rotten brush-wood, past swinging vines that hung in my path, and under the green arches of umbriferous trees. Coming after a time to a good-sized creek or bayou, I determined to choose my course along its banks, hoping that it might ultimately lead me to some inhabited place. Accordingly, I went on down its serpentine banks, limping painfully, as my wounded foot still hurt me, but making very fair progress.

I had not gone far in this manner when in passing beneath the widespread boughs of a huge old tree I found that the ground was covered with a large number of immense acorns known in vulgar parlance as the *overcup acorn*. I stopped to gather some, when, hearing a sudden movement in the branches above me, I instinctively paused. The next moment a dreadful scream rang out from some part of the tree above me with bood-curdling intensity. It was a terrible prolonged wailing scream that echoed far and wide through the forest, and which struck the silence and stillness of terror to my heart. I knew the sound. I knew that that fearful scream could come from no other throat but that of a panther. The next moment I heard the fierce animal move, and in the terror and fright of the moment I turned and fled at the top of my speed from the vicinity of the accursed tree. If anything were wanting to complete my terror, it came in less than a minute.
Another fierce scream rose on the air as I ran, and added to my speed. I fled through the forest as fast as my legs would carry me, leaping obstructions that I could never have leaped in calmer moments, and contriving to avoid numerous limbs and thorny vines that blocked my way. In this manner I ran for nearly a mile, taking no thought of direction or distance, but conscious only of a desire to get as far as possible from the panther. Finally I stopped to recover my breath, which was so far spent that I could run no further, and remembering my wounded foot suddenly, which I had completely forgotten in my fright, I found that I could now walk upon it without pain. This astonished me greatly, and I paused to examine the injured flesh more closely, as I could not understand the sudden transition from a state of pain and soreness to a condition in which, whether it was well or not, it no longer pained me.

I found that there was still a sensation of soreness about the ankle, but I could walk upon it without limping. Rejoicing, therefore, at the sudden restoration of the wounded member, I rested a few minutes on a fallen log and proceeded on my way.

In my fright I had run away from the stream I had been following, and I did not attempt to find it again. As earlier in the night I traveled on through the trackless forest with neither path nor road to guide me. At this point the moon, never bright, went behind a cloud low down in the sky, and I found myself in total darkness. I paused in dismay, and knew not which way to turn. But as my eyes became
more accustomed to the darkness I determined to push on my way not deeming it advisable to stop. I went along slowly and carefully, feeling along, as it were, so as to avoid the chance of running into any obstruction.

But presently, in putting out my foot to take a cautious step, I felt it descend upon space, the earth gave way beneath my other foot, and I felt myself slipping down a steep declivity. I endeavored to stay my progress by grasping at tufts of grass and other vegetation which grew out from the bank (for such it was) but vainly, and I slipped on down. Then without warning I felt my feet entering some ice-cold fluid, and in another moment was up to my chin in the chilling current of a stream. Gasping for breath, and chilled to the bone, I made several abortive attempts to scramble out. But the next instant, clutching by accident the trunk of a small sapling growing near the water, I renewed the attempt with better success and got out upon the bank.

I then observed that instead of going behind a cloud, as I had supposed, the moon had sunk, and day was fast breaking. My plight was a sad one. My clothes, dripping with the ice-cold waters of the creek, clung to my flesh with all the tenacity of water-soaked garments and added to my discomfort. My teeth were chattering with cold, and I realized that vigorous muscular exercise was my best resource under the circumstances. For more than an hour I walked rapidly back and forth under the trees, swinging my arms as I went, and contriving to keep
warmer than one might have thought possible.

By this time the sun had risen, and was peeping over the distant tree-tops. His genial rays were warming the world into life, and I turned about and went rapidly towards the east. In less than two hours I came to a ford on another large bayou and, on the dry warm sands which stretched between the water and the banks, I removed my wet clothes. I wrung them out carefully, and laid them upon the sands to dry. While the sun was accomplishing this, aided by the breeze, I resumed my exercise; and looking about me carefully I saw a plain well-defined road leading out from the bed of the bayou and disappearing over the banks above. This welcome discovery renewed my courage and the hope that perhaps I might make my way that morning out of the desolate wilderness, and find some farmhouse or cabin where I might get rest and food, of which latter I stood greatly in need.

In something less than an hour the sun, assisted in no small degree by a warm breeze which blew from the south had dried my clothes sufficiently for me to wear them without a great deal of discomfort. I thereupon dressed myself in my scanty suit, and proceeding to the road which I had observed, followed it up to the firmer ground above me. Here, directing my anxious gaze to the various points of the compass I was delighted to see a small unpainted farmhouse standing in a secluded part of the forest. So far as I could observe it was completely isolated. The distance I judged to be not greater than a quarter of
a mile from where I stood. Overjoyed at the prospect of rest and shelter, for I was very greatly worn and exhausted—so much so indeed that I felt I should have perished in the wilderness or been devoured by wild animals in another day—I hurried on towards the farmhouse—for such I judged it to be.

When I reached the yard gate a few minutes later, I first satisfied myself that there were no fierce watchdogs to seize me, and I then entered and knocked at the door. Presently it opened, and I was surprised to find an old negro standing before me. I knew from the mean appearance of the house, and its neglected and poverty-stricken appearance that its occupants were too poor to keep servants; hence I rightly judged, when the negro appeared in answer to my knock, that he was the master of the house. He greeted me with the old-fashioned courtesy of the aucte-bellum slave, and I made known my wants to him. He replied that I was welcome to all he had, and that I might enter. He then led the way into an apartment—not over clean—used as a sitting-room where his wife, a fat old negress with a dingy handkerchief bound about her woolly head, sat smoking a dirt-begrimed pipe in one corner of a commodious fireplace. I went immediately forward and warmed my chill frame in the homelike glow of the fire.

"Mahse Nall," said the motherly old negress, a typical "black mammy" of the old regeme, as I turned my steaming form before the cheerful blaze, "hab youse had enny breckfuss dis mawnin'?"
I told her that I had not, nor any supper, either, the previous evening, and was nearly famished. Knocking the ashes from her black clay pipe, she laid it on the mantel-piece and went into the kitchen.

The kind old negro, who remained in the room, could not do enough for me, and hovered about offering his services in a hundred ways, and never for a moment allowed me to forget the social chasm between us.

By the time my clothes were thoroughly dried, the old negress set some breakfast before me, and what a breakfast it was to my famished eyes! Delicious ham, fresh-laid eggs, golden butter, and the whitest bread, all laid on a snowy table cloth. A pot of steaming coffee, with cream and sugar, completed the details of the repast, and meal was never enjoyed more heartily. My evident enjoyment of their good cheer obviously gave great pleasure to the kind old couple. They watched me closely, and as I proceeded they nodded and winked at each other and made other signs denoting the highest gratification—keeping up a constant pantomimic communication between themselves comically expressive of the childlike satisfaction they felt in being able to give me so much pleasure. When I had finished, the old negress, with a laugh of gratified vanity, asked me whether I had enjoyed my breakfast, and she waited, with a comic grin of self-complacency, as though she didn’t know just what my answer would be. I praised it so highly that she swelled with pompous self-importance, while her squat black figure bustled about in
various little attentions to the man who had shown so high an appreciation of her cuisine.

I went back with them into their sitting-room and sat for a while before the fire. While thus comfortably toasting myself, the old negro expressed his wonder that I had come out of the forest alive.

"Dem ar painters," he said, "is allers dar. Dey's all ober dem ar woods, an' de swamps is fuller b'ars. We uns here kin hear de painters a-screamin', an' I tells yer, Mahse Nall, whin I se in dem ar woods, an' hears a painter, dis yere nigger am a-gwine fum dat place, an' he aint er gwiner be long 'bout it. No, sir. An' he aint gwine back no mo, I doan want no truck widdum. Dey lubs nigger meat too well." He paused a moment and resumed:

"We's got a boy here—de unly chillun we's got. He's mos grown now, an' he thinks he's biggern we is. He went out in dem woods, two or free miles fum here, wid my gun. Roamin' roun' out dar," he continued, in a tone of lofty contempt, "in sum woods he didn' know nuffin' about, an' den he had ter go an' git loss. An' de fust thing he knowed a big painter got after him. Den he lit out an' run. An,' Mahes Nall," he went on in a tearful voice, "he was skeered so bad dat he dropped de gun—he frowed my gun away."

And the memory of his loss—the gun thus recklessly thrown away—affect ed him so much that the tears started to his eyes.

"Dat boy," he resumed, after a melancholy pause, "he cum a flyin' home, sked nyly ter deff—his eyes
big as dem sassers, an' he couldn' disricerlick whut he done wid de gun. Nebber in dis world," he continued, pathetically, "whar he put dat gun. An' de nex day I say say I: 'Lookee here, nigger, youse my chillun, but you fool, das whut you is. You ain't got no sense, an' you fine my gun. You go hunt my gun, an' you brung hit back here. Ef yer doant, youse 'ud better—

"An' he went, Mahse Nall," he concluded, in the tone of one about to burst into tears, "an' nebber cum back no mo'. We's nebber seed 'im sense."

The recollection of this double misfortune stirred them deeply, and the old negress broke out into a loud fit of weeping. For some moments they wept and moaned in a most disconsolate and heart-broken manner. I endeavored to console them, and presently succeeded to a surprising degree. With the changeable and impulsive feelings of their race, they passed quickly and easily from one extreme to another, and were soon laughing in the most light-hearted manner imaginable.

I then entertained them for an hour with some of the marvelous stories that every negro so loves to hear; and finally, feeling greatly the need of repose, I told them I would like to lie down in some quiet place and sleep for a few hours. My black host thereupon conducted me to a small building in one corner of the yard, apparently used as a granary, and told me I might rest there as long as I pleased. I requested him to wake me about the middle of the afternoon, in case I should still be sleeping at that
hour, in order that I might depart upon my journey. He promised this and withdrew. I threw my tired frame upon a soft pile of "seed-cotton," probably now for the first time used for such a purpose, and in a few minutes was sound asleep.

When I woke the kind hearted old negro was standing beside my improvised couch, regarding me with an expression of simple and childlike benevolence. I started up and inquired the time of day. My question, however, was answered before he spoke. I could see through an uncurtained window that it was near sunset.

"Thunder!" I exclaimed, "I have overslept myself."

"Hit's sundown," said the negro. "I cum in here ter woke yer up awhilergo, but you wus a-sleepin' so soun' dat I couldn' woke yer yit."

"Well," I rejoined, "it is all right. I haven't quite finished my nap yet, anyway, and so will not get up. You need not trouble about rousing me again, until I wake of my own accord."

I then lay back upon the soft pile of cotton and in an instant was unconscious. When I came to myself the second time the sun was shining broadly in upon me, and for a minute I could not remember where I was. But supposing from the situation of the sun that it wanted but a few hours of night, I started up hastily. My long sleep had dazed me somewhat and, I felt a little unsteady upon my feet.

A single glance around, as I became more fully awake, reminded me of my location. Walking towards the door, which had been left ajar, I had
started towards the gate when a familiar voice called after me. I turned and saw my old black host standing on the steps of the farmhouse. After a moment's hesitation I turned and started towards him, a little perplexed in my own mind as to whether I ought to resume my journey at once, or stop for another hour or two. But my host had already decided the question for me.

"Yo' breckfuss am reddy," he said, as I approached. "Breakfast!" I exclaimed. "Supper you mean."
He grinned knowingly.

"No, sah!" he ejaculated, emphatically. "Hit's mawnin', an' breckfuss am reddy."

I looked up at the sun. To me it appeared to be within a few hours of setting in the west, and I said so. My host laughed gleefully in the consciousness of superior knowledge.

"Youse turned roun'," he said. "Dat's whut you is. Youse turned roun'. Dat's de wes'," he continued, with a comical assumption of profound erudition, as he pointed directly away from the sun.

"Dat's de wes', an' dat's de eas'. Youse turned roun' Mahse Nall, das whut you is. An' you tho't," he continued, just as though such a thing had never been heard of before, "dat wus de wes'. But, naw, sah, hit aint. Dat's de wes'," pointing again, and keeping his arm leveled for a long while. "Yas sah. Das hit."

The simple old negro was greatly elated in having so far triumphed over me as to be able to instruct me regarding the art of finding the different points
of the compass, and was eager to have his wife share his triumph with him.

We then entered the house, and in a few moments another delightful breakfast was set before me, the negroes taking seats near at hand where they could watch and enjoy the evident pleasure I found in doing the fullest justice to such admirable cooking. I again expressed my approval in the broadest and most flattering terms, and again my hostess found in herself an object of gleeful self-congratulation. Indeed though I felt sure that I enjoyed the well-cooked repast as only a hungry man could, yet the pleasure they experienced in seeing my enjoyment seemed greater than my own.

When breakfast was over I expressed my purpose of immediately departing upon my journey. They urged me strongly—nay, begged me to remain at least another day, and I was much inclined to do so, but I realized that I ought—and indeed must—set forth upon my journey. Finding their entreaties were of no avail, they ceased to importune me, and the benevolent old negress told me to wait a few minutes and she would prepare a nice lunch for me. This I very willingly did, as I always preferred to have some food with me, so that in any emergency I should not have to go hungry.

Presently she came back, the floor quivering and shaking beneath her solid tread, bringing a great paper full of good things—enough to last two hungry men a whole day. I did not like to receive so much, and protested that half as much would do me, for I
knew they were poor and had none too much, but they pressed it upon me, refusing to reduce the size of the package by so much as a single biscuit, and I accepted it as it was offered.

They then entreated me to find their boy—with whose name and description they furnished me—if I could, somewhere in my travels, and let him understand that he need not, even if he had thrown away their gun, feel obliged to conceal the secret of his whereabouts from them; and that they earnestly entreated him to return. I assured them that they might rely upon me to find him if it were possible, and urge him to return; and this promise manifestly gave them great pleasure.

Having received explicit instructions as to how to proceed, without again losing myself in the forest, I set out on my way with a lighter heart, and with renewed energy. The prospect of presently getting out of an almost interminable forest, in whose dark depths I had gone astray, without again involving myself in a like predicament was so encouraging that I traveled all morning at a brisker pace. The road I pursued led me for another day through a lonely and dreary forest which stretched away for a number of miles on either hand; but the roadway itself was so plain and easily followed that I did not become bewildered in the many paths and small roads which intersected it. During that day I passed, too, an isolated farmhouse at irregular intervals, and thus was spared the desolate feeling of utter loneliness which always oppressed me when traveling through an uninhabited section of country.