the woods. *The gun*, the boy thought. *The gun*. ‘You will have
to choose,’ Sam said.

He left the next morning before light, without breakfast,
long before Uncle Ash would wake in his quilts on the kitchen
floor and start the fire. He had only the compass and a stick
for the snakes. He could go almost a mile before he would
need to see the compass. He sat on a log, the invisible compass
in his hand, while the secret night-sounds which had ceased at
his movements, scurried again and then fell still for good and
the owls ceased and gave over to the waking day birds and
there was light in the grey wet woods and he could see the
compass. He went fast yet still quietly, becoming steadily
better and better as a woodsman without yet having time to
realize it; he jumped a doe and a fawn, walked them out of the
bed, close enough to see them – the crash of undergrowth, the
white scut, the fawn scudding along behind her, faster than
he had known it could have run. He was hunting right, up-
wind, as Sam had taught him, but that didn’t matter now. He
had left the gun; by his own will and relinquishment he had
accepted not a gambit, not a choice, but a condition in which
not only the bear’s heretofore inviolable anonymity but all the
ancient rules and balances of hunter and hunted had been
abrogated. He would not even be afraid, not even in the
moment when the fear would take him completely: blood,
skin, bowels, bones, memory from the long time before it
even became his memory – all save that thin clear quenchless
lucidity which alone differed him from this bear and from all
the other bears and bucks he would follow during almost
seventy years, to which Sam had said: ‘Be scared. You cant
help that. But dont be afraid. Aint nothing in the woods going
to hurt you if you dont corner it or it dont smell that you are
afraid. A bear or a deer has got to be scared of a coward the
same as a brave man has got to be.’

By noon he was far beyond the crossing on the little bayou,
farther into the new and alien country than he had ever been,
travelling now not only by the compass but by the old, heavy,
biscuit-thick silver watch which had been his father’s. He had
left the camp nine hours ago; nine hours from now, dark
would already have been an hour old. He stopped, for the first