Chased by a ——?

We had been sitting for half an hour or so in the dark, over our pipes and the dying embers, telling stories desultorily, now silent, again laughing quietly over some dry remark, when we were broken in upon by Jamie Darlford and his dog Nick. For once the two were coaxed into quietness, and we persuaded Jamie to tell us a story about his experience in the back-woods the winter before.

"Well, fellows," said he, after we had all exhausted our persuasive powers, "if you care about hearing it, I'll tell you an adventure Nick and I had one night, though I don't think I ever told it before. Nick, I preface, is the hero of it; indeed, had it not been for him, I should hardly have been telling you the story now.

"It had been tremendously cold weather for two or three days, and coming as it did immediately after a bad thaw, it caused the ice on the river that was to float our logs down in the spring to be like glass. I had been invited to a merry-making in C——, a considerable logging village about fifteen miles below us, and determined to skate down after supper. I thought I could easily do the distance in an hour each way.

"I said nothing in particular to the men about where I was going; but I wrapped up warm, put my skates under my arm, took care to shut Nick into the hut, and started.

"It was a glorious night; the moon was just approaching the full, and her light was brilliantly reflected from the frozen-crusted snow. The air had just the tingle in it to make the blood dance. The ice was perfect in its absolutely smooth polished surface. A fine night for a skate, thought I, as I shot out into mid-stream, if one only had some company.

"I looked at my watch. Twenty-five minutes of seven,— time enough. The moon was not so high yet but that it cast many a deep shadow of the fir-trees across the rather narrow river; but my way lay mostly in the light, as there were many windings and turns in the stream. As I sped on, my thoughts went back to the stories the men had just been telling of the Northern Canadian woods; then they turned to my home, and I wondered what my friends were doing on this magnificent night,— reading and enjoying themselves quietly, probably, in the dim light of the sitting-room. Harry would be out sliding, I was sure; but I could see my mother plainly, folding her hands so peacefully upon her knitting, a far-off look in her calm eyes. Was it of me she was thinking? And there was baby Tom, ready to go to bed, and say good night to grandma; and Fanny was reading her everlasting novel. Why would she never——

"Bother! my skate was loose; I must stop and strap it tighter. I slackened my speed, and knelt upon the ice a moment. Hark! Did I not hear a curious cracking in the woods up back of me? I listened: there it was again. It might have been the ice or the trees, at first; but now, Hark! Hark! In that moment every slightest sound would have been as loud on my ear as a thunderbolt. I could now distinguish even the slipping, scratching sound of the nails of some animal upon the snow-crust, back a little way from the ice. I felt instinctively at my pockets. Fool! Carelessly I had left my pistols behind, and had nothing with which to defend myself, not even a stout club; the stick I carried was a light, trimmed switch, which was worse than useless.

"I listened no longer, but rose to my feet, and as I started on at almost breakneck speed, I glanced over my shoulder. My fears were realized. Behind me, in the brushwood that skirted the stream, I could distinguish a dark, swift-moving animal. I was in for it, then; and you may believe I did my level best.

"On, on, on, faster, faster, faster than I had ever gone before. I was breathless, yet I could see no signs of any clearing. I felt as if I had skated hours, but was no nearer my destination than before. Did ever stream have so many windings? Scarcely did I get a good headway before a sharp turn compelled me to slacken my speed. But now here was a good mile's stretch, comparatively straight. From time to time for some distance I had heard the animal scraping round the turnings of the