

advice and entreaty, and even when Alec, as a final argument said,

"Colin Chisholm says that wolves have been prowling round the Bend lately."

Charlie only laughed and persisted in going, so his relatives had to give way and allow him to start off about half past seven, feeling thoroughly rested and ready for his journey.

The night was not very promising. The sun had set among a heavy mass of clouds which now covered the whole heavens, permitting very little of the light from the rising moon to struggle through. A dreary, chilling wind had begun to blow from the east, and altogether the prospect looked very different from what it had been in the afternoon. Before he had gone half a mile Charlie felt strongly tempted to turn back, especially as Alec's remarks about the wolves seemed somehow or other to take hold upon his mind, but his pride rebelled against this, and he pushed steadily on, gripping his stick tight and comforting himself with the thought that it would make a very good weapon if properly handled.

One mile, two miles, three miles, four miles, and the sheet of ice that was so broad in front of Uncle Hugh's narrowed down to not much more than a hundred yards. From its edge on either side for a couple of hundred yards more stretched the level fields called intervale, from which great crops of hay were gathered every summer. They were now brown and sere, and overrun with dense withered aftermath. Beyond them rose the old river banks sloping upward to the hills, and covered thick with a heavy growth of tree and underbrush, which extended far as the eye could see on the clearest day; for the country was but little settled about "The Bend," as this part of the river was called, and the forest still afforded protection to many kinds of game. As he reached the half-way point in his homeward journey, Charlie began to feel his exertions telling upon him, and thought he would rest a moment. So he sat down on a stranded log and looked about him. Never in his life before had he felt so utterly alone. Not a sound broke the still solitude save the dreary sighing of the wind in the distant trees. To the very bottom of his heart he wished he had stayed at Uncle Hugh's. But it was too late now. He had no other choice but to go forward. Suddenly, as he sat there, a strange wild howl pierced the air, and, falling upon his ears, sent an icy chill of terror through every limb. It came from the eastern forest, and was followed fast by another, and then another. Charlie had never heard the howl of a wolf, but instinct told him that the dreadful sound which clearly was coming nearer, could be nothing else.

"Gracious goodness!" he exclaimed to himself. "There are the wolves as sure as I'm born! I've got to skate for my life," and springing to his feet he dashed off at his topmost speed. All his weariness had left him now, and the river banks fairly flew past him, as with head bent low and stick swinging he sped over the glistening ice. There was not a boy in all the valley that could outstrip him, and at first he rather exulted in the idea of a race with the wolves. But presently the howls drew nearer and nearer, though he was skating "for all he was worth," as he would say himself, and the feeling of exultation gave place to one of growing alarm. He had three miles to go before reaching the nearest house, and only one mile of this had been covered when, glancing fearfully over his shoulder, he caught sight of three dark forms galloping along the bank not a hundred yards behind him. Go faster he

could not, although the sight almost frenzied him, and he knew the wolves were gaining upon him with frightful rapidity. A quarter of a mile more, and the leader and largest of the three was on a level with him, loping easily along the edge of the bank, but evidently loth to venture out upon the slippery ice. Noticing this, Charlie breathed a little more freely, but his relief soon vanished when he saw the brute dash on ahead to a bend in the river and then pull up. There was no mistaking the purpose of this movement. He meant to await Charlie's approach and then spring at him as he went past. The boy saw it all in a moment, and the same moment there flashed into his mind an idea that made him tighten his grasp upon his stick and summon all his strength as he said, between firm set teeth,

"Ah! you brute, you haven't got me yet."

As he drew near the point he slackened speed slightly and veered out of his course toward the opposite bank. With a fierce, deep snarl, the wolf sprang out upon the ice and shot toward him. At the same instant Charlie wheeled to the right so as almost to face his foe, which, of course, could only go straight ahead, and then just as those cruel jaws seemed ready to fasten upon him he stopped suddenly, turned aside, swung his heavy stick in both hands high over his head and brought it down with tremendous force full upon the brute's head just behind the ears. It was a terrible blow, and without a sound the creature rolled over on the ice as dead as a door-nail.

With a cry of mingled joy and relief Charlie sprang away just in time to escape the onset of the two other wolves, that had followed their leader's example, and bounded across at such a rate that when the boy dodged them they went sliding past him snarling and snapping their jaws, but powerless to do him any harm. When they did regain their feet they paid no more attention to Charlie, but forthwith set to work on the body of their late companion, while the human prey they had sought rapidly disappeared in the distance.

A quarter of an hour later a very much exhausted boy knocked at the door of Fraser the blacksmith. Tired as he was, however, a triumphant look shone in his face that required explanation. The Frasers soon heard his story, and no sooner was it told than the big blacksmith and one of his almost equally big sons shouldered their rifles and went off down the river, while Charlie, feeling himself to be something of a hero, even if a very tired one, gladly accepted Mrs. Fraser's hearty invitation to remain there for the night.

It was pretty late when he awoke next morning, and, O dear, how stiff and sore he felt! As soon as he appeared Hen Fraser shouted to him from the forge.

"Come here, Charlie, and look at this," and there stretched against the side of the forge were three great wolf-skins; one, the largest, rather torn by wolfish teeth, the others showing but a bullet hole apiece.

"You can have all three, Charlie," said the blacksmith, "we're quite content with having killed two of the brutes."

It need hardly be said that when the story came out Charlie was the hero of the South River valley, and his satisfaction was complete when, that Saturday afternoon, the bad weather being good enough to hold off a little longer, stiff and sore as he was, he led his team to a victory over the Easterns at the hockey match, although the latter did have four crack players from the city on their side.