The man's setting is explained. The danger of cold is explained (this is often re-explained or foreshadowed throughout the story). The man's travel plans are explained, and he begins his journey. 

The man starts on the trail toward Henderson Creek. The dog is introduced. The cold is revisited. After traveling some time on the trail, they arrive at the Henderson.

The man and dog enter Henderson Creek. The dog feels apprehension about hiking through the creek. The dangers of water springs under the ice are explained. The man forces the dog to test a part of the creek for traps, and the dog breaks through the ice and gets wet. The man helps the dog to get ice out of its fur. They continue toward the forks of the Henderson.

The man arrives at the forks of the Henderson. The man recalls the advice of an old-timer from Sulphur Creek, who warned of such cold. He starts to have lunch, but the cold prevents him from eating. He builds a fire, and he and the dog relax while the man has lunch.

The man heads up the left fork of the Henderson. The man unexpectedly breaks through the ice and gets his feet wet. The man realizes he will need to build a fire to thaw out his feet.

The man climbs onto the creek's bank and lights a fire to dry out. He recalls the advice of the old-timer and feels smug knowing he is successfully traveling on his own. A tree dumps snow on the fire and puts it out. The man begins to question whether the old-timer's advice was correct. He tries to build another fire, but fails due to numbness in his extremities. Fearing for his life, he tries to kill the dog, hoping to use its body to warm his hands. He fails as he has lost all dexterity due to cold. The man realizes he is going to die, and panics.

The man attempts to run to camp, in a last ditch effort to outlast the cold.