

Two Were Left by Hugh B. Cave

On the third night of hunger, Noni thought of the dog. Nothing lived upon that floating island of ice except himself and the dog.

When the ice broke up, Noni had lost his sled, his food, his furs, even his knife. He had saved only Nimuk, his great devoted husky. And now the two, completely alone, marooned on the ice, eyed each other warily.

Noni's love for Nimuk was real, very real. It was as real as hunger and cold nights and the gnawing pain of his injured leg. But the men of his village killed their dogs when food was scarce, didn't they? And they killed them without thinking about it twice.

He told himself that Nimuk, when hungry enough, would begin to seek food. "One of us will soon be devouring the other," Noni thought. "So..."

He could not kill the dog with his bare hands. Nimuk was powerful and much less tired than he. A weapon, then, was needed.

Noni took off his mittens and unstrapped the brace from his injured leg. When he had hurt his leg a few weeks before, he had made the brace from bits of harness and two thin strips of iron.

He knelt and wedged one of the iron strips into a crack in the ice. Then he began to rub the other iron strip against it with firm, slow strokes.

Nimuk watched him, and it seemed to Noni that the dog's eyes glowed more brightly.

He kept working, trying not to remember why. The strip of iron had an edge now. It had begun to take shape. By daylight his task was completed. He had finished making a knife!

Noni pulled the knife from the ice and felt its edge. The sun's glare reflected from it. Its brightness stabbed at his eyes and, for an instant, blinded him momentarily.

Noni forced himself to call the dog.

"Here, Nimuk!" he called softly.

The dog suspiciously watched him.

"Come here," Noni called.

Nimuk came closer. Noni saw fear in the animal's gaze. He could see hunger and suffering in the animal's labored breathing and awkward movements. Noni's heart wept. He hated himself and fought against it.

Closer Nimuk came, aware of Noni's intentions. Now Noni felt a thickening in his throat. He saw the dog's eyes and they were pools of suffering.

Now! Now was the time to strike!

