

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!



A great sob shook Noni's kneeling body. He cursed the knife. He swayed blindly and threw the knife far away from him. With empty hands outstretched, he stumbled toward the dog and fell.

The dog growled as he circled the boy's body. And now Noni was sick with fear.

In flinging away the knife, he had left himself defenseless. He was too weak to crawl after it now. He was at Nimuk's mercy. And Nimuk was hungry.

The dog had circled him and was creeping up from behind him. Noni heard a rattle in the animal's throat.

Noni shut his eyes, praying that the attack might be swift. He felt the dog's feet against his leg, the hot rush of Nimuk's breath against his neck. A scream gathered in the boy's throat.

Then he felt the dog's hot tongue licking his face.

Noni's eyes opened. Crying softly, he thrust out an arm and drew the dog's head down against his own.

The plane came out of the south an hour later. Its pilot was a young man in the coast patrol. He looked down and saw the large floating iceberg. And he saw something flashing.

The sun was gleaming off of something shiny, which moved. His curiosity aroused, the pilot circled and flew lower. Now he saw, in the shadow of the mountain of ice, a dark, still shape that appeared to be human. Or were there two shapes?

He set his seaplane down on the water and investigated. There were two shapes, a boy and a dog. The boy was unconscious but alive. The dog whined feebly but was too weak to move.

The gleaming object, which had caught the pilot's attention, was a crudely-made knife. It was stuck, point down, into the ice a short distance away, and was quivering in the wind.



Telling About The Story. Complete each of the following statements by putting an x in the box next to the correct answer. Each statement tells something about the story.

1. At the beginning of the story, Noni thought that: ☐] he and Nimuk would be rescued by the coast patrol ☐ he would kill Nimuk, or Nimuk would kill him ☐ the men of the village would send food ☐ a search party would find them
2. When the ice broke up, Noni saved his: ☐ sled ☐ furs ☐ food ☐ dog
3. Noni used thin strips of iron to: ☐ build a fire ☐ make a knife ☐ create a shining signal
4. The pilot's attention was first drawn to: ☐ a shiny object that gleamed in the sun ☐ two figures on the ice ☐ the barking of the dog ☐] a dark spot on the iceberg

New Vocabulary Words. Answer the following vocabulary questions by putting an x in the box next to the correct response.

1. Noni and Nimuk eyed each other warily. What is the meaning of the word *warily*? ☐ in a careful and cautious manner ☐] pleased or happy ☐ tired or exhausted ☐] cloudy or foggy
2. The two were completely alone, marooned on the island of ice. As used in this sentence, what is the meaning of *marooned*? ☐ abandoned and separated from others ☐] very cold or frozen ☐] extremely hungry or starving ☐] on vacation
3. The sun's glare blinded him momentarily. Define the word *momentarily*.
☐ for a long period of time ☐] for a brief period of time ☐] with great harm ☐ happily
4. Nimuk slowly crawled closer, aware of Noni's intentions. What is the meaning of the word *intentions*? ☐ worries ☐ injuries ☐ plans ☐] past

Thinking About The Story. Each of the following questions requires you to *think critically* about the selection. Put an x in the box next to the correct answer.

1. Why did Noni sway and throw the knife blindly away? ☐ He was weak from hunger ☐ He couldn't bring himself to attack the dog ☐ He was confused in the bitter cold
2. At one point in the story, Noni became sick with fear. Probably he felt that way because he: ☐ realized he would soon die of hunger ☐ thought Nimuk would attack him ☐ knew his injured leg was getting worse
3. We may infer that if Noni had attacked Nimuk with the knife, then: ☐ Nimuk would have managed to escape from him. ☐ Nimuk would have killed Noni ☐ the pilot would not have found them
4. What probably happened to Noni and Nimuk?: ☐ They died before being rescued ☐ They were rescued by the pilot ☐ They never trusted each other again.

- At the beginning of "Two Were Left," there is evidence that Nimuk knew that Noni was planning to attack. Still, the dog came closer when called. Why?

- Suppose that Noni *had* attacked Nimuk with his crudely-made knife. What do you think would have happened? How might the story have ended?

- Sometimes a story offers a lesson, or moral. What lesson, or lessons, can be drawn from this story?