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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SEED OF THE ARCTIC ICE ***

Seed of the Arctic Ice

By H. G. Winter

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Sleepily the lookout stared at the scope-screen before him, wishing for something that would break the monotony of the scene it pictured: the schools of ghostly fish fleeting by, the occasional shafts of pale sunlight filtering down through breaks in the ice-floes above, the long snaky ropes of underwater growth. None of this was conducive to wakefulness; nor did the half-speed drone of the electric engines aft and the snores of some distant sleeper help him. The four other men on duty in the submarine—the helmsman; the second mate, whose watch it was; the quartermaster and the second engineer—might not have been present, so motionless and silent were they.

Killer whales and seal-creatures tangle Ken Torrance in an amazing adventure under the ice-roofed arctic sea.

The lookout man stifled another yawn and glanced at a clock to see how much more time remained of his trick. Then suddenly something on the screen brought him to alert attention. He blinked at it; stared hard—and thrilled.

Far ahead, caught for an instant by the submarine *Narwhal's* light-beams, a number of sleek bodies moved through the foggy murk, with a flash of white bellies and an easy graceful thrust of flukes.

The watcher's hands cupped his mouth; he turned and sang out:

"K-i-i-ll-ers! I see killers!"

The cry rang in every corner, and immediately there was a feverish response. Rubbing their eyes, men appeared as if from nowhere and jumped to posts; with a clang, the telegraph under the second mate's hand went over to full speed; Captain Streight rolled heavily out of his bunk, flipped his feet mechanically into sea-boots and came stamping forward. First Torpooner Kenneth Torrance, as he sat up and stretched, heard the usual crisp question:

"Where away?"

"Five points off sta'b'd bow, sir; quarter-mile away; swimming slow."

"How large a school?"

"Couldn't say, sir. Looks around a dozen."

"Whew!" whistled Ken Torrance. "That's a strike!" He pulled on a sweater and strode forward to the scope-screen to see for himself, even as Captain Streight, all at once testy with eagerness, bawled:

"Sta'b'd five! Torpoon ready, Mister Torrance! Mister Torr—oh, here you are. Take a look."

Never in the two years of experience which had brought him to the important post of first torpooner had Ken failed to thrill at the sight which now met his eyes. Directly ahead, now that the *Narwhal's* bow was turned in pursuit, but veering slowly to port, swam a pack of the twenty

to thirty-foot dolphins which are called "killer whales," their bodies so close-pressed that they seemed to be an undulating wave of black, occasionally sliced with white as the fluke-thrusts brought their bellies into view. Their speed through the shadowed, gloomy water was equal to the submarine's; when alarmed, it would almost double.

"Three more of 'em will fill our tanks," grunted Streight, his chunky face almost glowing. He bit on a plug of tobacco, his eyes never moving from the screen. "Now, if only we hadn't lost Beddoes.... Y' think you can bag three, Mister Torrance?"

"Well, if three'll fill our tanks—sure!" grinned Ken.

The other's eyebrows twitched suddenly. "They're speeding up!" he shouted, and then: "That torpoon ready, there? Good." His voice lowered again as Ken pulled his belt a notch tighter and snatched a last glimpse of the fish before leaving. "I want you to try for three, son," he said soberly: "but—be careful. Don't take fool chances, and keep alert. Remember Beddoes."

Ken nodded and walked to the torpoon catapult, hearing Streight's familiar send-off echoed by the men of the crew who were nearby:

"Good hunting!"

The idea of an underwater craft for the pursuit of killer whales—tremendously valuable since the discovery of valuable medicinal qualities in their oil—had been scoffed at by the majority of the Alaska Whaling Company's officials at the time of its suggestion, but the *Narwhal* after her first two months of service had decisively proved her worth. She was not restricted to the open seas, now swept almost clean of the highly prized killers; she could follow them to their last refuge, right beneath the floe-edges of the Arctic Circle; and as a result she could bring back more oil than any four surface whalers.

With a cruising radius of twenty-five hundred miles, she stayed out from the base until her torpoons had accounted for anywhere from sixty to eighty killers. One by one these sea-animals would be taken to the surface and there cut up and boiled down, until her tanks were full of the precious blubber oil. Ever farther she pressed in her quest for the fish schools, dipping for leagues into a silent sea that for ages had been known only to the whale and the seal and their kindred; a sea always dark and mysterious beneath its sheath of ice.

The inner catapult door closed behind Kenneth Torrance, and he slid into his torpoon. Twelve feet long, and resembling in miniature a dirigible, was this weapon that made practical an underwater whaling craft. The tapered stern bore long directional rudders, which curved round the squat high-speed propeller: its smooth flanks of burnished steel were marked only by the lines of the entrance port, which the torpooner now drew tight and locked. Twin eyes of light-beam projectors were set in the bow, which was cut also by a vision-plate of fused quartz and the nitro-shell gun's tube, successor to the gun-cast harpoon.

Ken lay full-length in the padded body compartment, his feet resting on the controlling bars of the directional planes, hands on the torpoon's engine levers. A harness was buckled all around him, to keep him in place. His gray eyes, level and sober, peered through the vision-plate at the outer catapult door.

Suddenly a spot of red light glowed in it; the door quivered, swung out. A black tide swirled into the chamber. There came the hiss of released air-pressure, and the slim undersea steed rocketed out into the exterior gloom, her light-beams flashing on and propeller settling into a blur of speed as she was flung.

Ken turned on her full twenty-four knots, zoomed above the dark bulk of the slower mother ship, whose light-beams flashed across him for a second, and then straightened out in a long, slight-angled dive after the great black bodies ahead.

Aware that some strange enemy was on their track, the killers had become panicky and were darting away at their full speed, which was only slightly under that of the torpoon's humming motors, and which at times even surpassed it. Ken saw that it looked like a long chase, and settled his lean body as comfortably as he could.

His mind was not concentrated on the task ahead, for the first part was mere routine and he could follow his quarry almost mechanically. And so, as his steel shell drove through the ever-shadowed, icy sea, he began to think about the disappearance of Chan Beddoes, the *Narwhal's* second torpooner.

Dead, now Beddoes; it was a week since he had set out on the chase from which he had never returned. Ken could only conjecture as to what had stricken him down. There were countless possibilities: perhaps a blow from a dying killer whale's flukes bursting his torpoon's seams; perhaps a crash into underwater ice. Whatever it was, it had been sudden, for not even a faint radioed S.O.S. had trembled into the ear-phones of the *Narwhal's* radio-man. For two days they had held hopes that the second torpooner still lived, as the sea-suit stored in each torp contained

air-units sufficient for thirty-six hours. But a whole week's passing told them that that vast stretch of glacial sea was now Chan Beddoes' grave.

Ken's reflections brought an urge to get the present job over with as quickly as possible. He squeezed another ounce of speed from the torp, taxing it to the limit and setting up a slight vibration; then he fondled the nitro-shell gun's trigger and studied the huge fish bodies ahead.

"Seems as if they're going to run forever," he muttered indignantly. "We'll be to the Pole if they keep it up!"

Already the *Narwhal* was miles behind. Through the torp's vision-plate a scene of ever increasing mystery and gloom met his gaze. The killers' course had brought them beneath a wide sheet of ice, apparently, for there were no more columns of pale sunlight piercing through. The quarter-light monotone was unbroken, save by deeper drifts of shadow, and as he drummed through it the torpooner wondered at its lifelessness. He discerned no more of the ghostly fish-schools that usually abounded. Some enemy possibly had driven them from the region; but not the whale he was pursuing, for they scorned such fare.

He was scanning the surrounding murk apprehensively, when, of a sudden, his brain and body tensed.

Off to one side, far to the right, he thought he had glimpsed a figure. It was hanging motionless, level with him; and at first it looked like a seal. But the flippers seemed longer than a seal's; moreover, no seal would be anywhere near a pack of killer whales; nor did they poise in an upright position. It couldn't be a seal, he told himself. What, then? Was it only imagination that made it appear faintly human-shaped?

He strove to catch it again with staring eyes, but it was gone, leaving only a jumbled impression of something fantastic in his mind, and the next instant the whole thing was forgotten in the movements of the killer school, now only a few hundred yards ahead.

They suddenly began a great sweeping curve to the right, a typical maneuver before standing for attack or breaking up. At once Ken swerved to starboard and drove the torp's nose for an advance point on the circle the fish were describing. His move swallowed the distance between them; the sleek, thick-blubbered bodies swept close by his vision-plate, their rush tossing the torp slightly. Twelve of them went past in a blur, and then came the thirteenth, the invariable straggler of a school. The thin light-beams pencilled through the darkness, outlining the rushing black shape; Ken gripped the gun's trigger and jockeyed the torp up a trifle in the seconds remaining, always keeping the sights dead set on the vital spot twelve inches behind the whale's little eye.

When only fifteen feet separated them he squeezed the trigger and at once zoomed up and away to get clear of the killer's start of pain and, if the shot were true, its following death flurry.

The shell slid deep into the rich outer blubber; and, wheeling, Ken watched the mighty mammal quiver in its forward rush. This was merely the reaction from the pain of the shell's entrance; the nitro had not as yet exploded.

Now it did. The projectiles carried but a small charge, in order not to rip too much the buoyant lungs and so cause the body to sink, but the killer trembled like a jelly from the shock. The heart was reached; its razor-sharp flukes thrashing and tooth-lined jaws clicking, the killer wheeled with incredible speed in its death flurry. A minute later the body shuddered a last time, then drifted slowly over, showing the white belly. It began a gentle rise up toward the ceiling of ice.

"One!" grinned Ken Torrance. He noted his position on the torp's dials and gave it to the *Narwhal* by radio. They would then follow and pick up the whale.

"I'll have the second in ten minutes," he promised confidently. "Signing off!"

Again the torp darted after its prey.

He found it easy, this time, to overhaul them. Not many minutes had elapsed before he again caught sight of their rhythmically thrusting flukes and the flash of white under-sides. Unaware that one of their fellows had been left a lifeless carcass by the steel fish again nearing them, they had reduced their speed somewhat.

Ken angled down a hundred feet into the deeper shadows, not wanting to apprise them of his presence. He continued at that level until the belly of the rearmost whale rolled white above him; then he veered off to the left, rising as he did so, in order to bring his assault to bear directly on the killer's flanks.

He swung back and streaked in for the kill. It looked like an easy one.

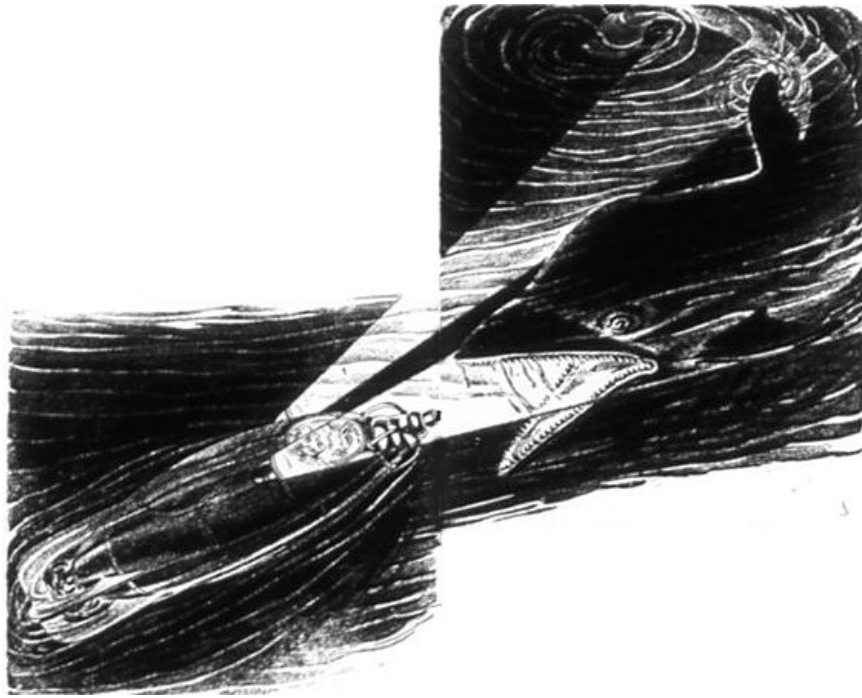
But he was never more mistaken in his life. For, as luck had it, he had chosen a tartar, a fighting fish—literally the "killer" which its kind had been named.

The torpooner knew what he was in for as soon as he fired his first shell. Its aim was bad, and instead of sinking into the flesh it merely ripped across the whale's back, leaving a ragged, ugly scar.

An ordinary whale would have been scared into panic by the wound and doubled its speed in an effort to get away; but Ken Torrance saw this one wheel its six-foot snout around viciously until its beady little eyes settled on the torpoon.

"I'll be damned!" he muttered. "He's turning to fight. All right, come ahead!"

He veered about and fired another shot that missed its mark by feet, but creased the whale's flukes. At once this terrible weapon lashed titanically up and down, and thirty feet of berserk killer came curving towards the lone man inside his shell of steel. Ken tensed himself for combat. He would have to keep a good distance from the fish and fire until he got it, as a square smash from its flukes might crumple the torp like an egg-shell.



Thirty feet of berserk killer came curving towards the lone man.

But his foe gave him no chance. Crazy with pain and anger, it swept up and nipped his dive for the bottom with a fluke-blow that tumbled the torpoon over and dazed its pilot. Before he could get straightened out it was on him again, catching him up into a wild whirlpool, butting the shell and flashing round to get its flukes into position. With a wrench, Ken jammed the rudder over, shoved his accelerator flat, and got free just as the tail thrashed down. He was breathing hard and sweating as he banked around—to see once more the whale, its wicked jaws wide open, charging directly at him.

For a moment he was unable to move. Such a mode of attack was totally unexpected, and the sight held him fascinated. He could see the very wrinkles of the monster's skin as it rushed in, with shadowy flukes thrusting behind; could see the lines of dagger-like teeth, the cavernous maw and gullet. And then all vision was blotted out as the jaws closed around the torpoon's nose.

Ken did not wait for those jaws to crunch shut. He gripped the nitro-shell gun's trigger and squeezed it back.

The weapon hissed, flung its shell. He reversed his engines to try and tear free. Seconds dragged by with no result. Then he felt a mighty jolt; his harness broke; and he was pitched into the torp's engine controls.

That was all he knew, save for a vague feeling of falling, falling over and over, which was ended when a second bone-shaking shock brought complete oblivion....

It was darkness that met his eyes when they opened, the eery darkness of the floor of the Polar Sea.

Darkness! Half-conscious as he was, he started in surprise. He looked for the torp's shaded

control board-lights, but could not find them. Bewildered, he wondered what had happened, and then remembered the whale. In its flurry it had smashed him down.

Pain was thumping his forehead where he had struck the control levers; with a groan he twisted his body around and felt for his hand-flash. At any rate, there was no water inside the body compartment. The seams had resisted the blow. But why were there no lights?

He found his hand-flash, and its beam showed him the reason. Playing it on the small water-tight door which separated the main compartment from that in which the machinery was contained, he looked through its fused quartz peep-hole. He gaped in consternation.

There was, after all, a leak in the torpooon's shell, and a bad one. The machinery compartment was full of water.

"Gosh!" he muttered. "That means no light, no radio—no power! Guess I'm stranded!"

He considered the situation. It was not serious, for he had been in touch with the *Narwhal* after bagging the first whale and had given his position. The submarine would proceed to the kill immediately; then, after a while, not hearing from him, they would scour the neighborhood, just as they had hunted for Chan Beddoes when he did not return.

But they'd find him, Ken told himself—and soon. He had no idea how long he had lain unconscious, but probably by now the mother ship had already hooked onto the first whale; maybe she was already hunting for him.

"Well, I'd better get out and be ready to signal to 'em with the flash," he reflected. "They may miss me here in the mud."

Taking his sea-suit from a long narrow locker, he drew the stiff-woven fabric over his body, turned the air-units on, clamped the face-shield shut, and then, gripping his hand-flash, slowly opened the port in the shell's side.

A weird figure he was, fit for the mysterious gloom into which he came. With casque of steel and lead-weighted feet, staring face-shield and metal belt, and equipped with a knife and two or three emergency tools, the sea-suit transformed him into a clumsy, grotesque giant. He sloshed into the muddy sea bottom, stumbling at first from the heavy water resistance and hardly able to see anything. The torpooon itself was a hazy blur at a short distance, but up above the light was better, being almost bright next to the ice ceiling. He adjusted the air pressure inside his suit, floating his feet off the bottom. A few clumsy armstrokes and he went drifting gently upward.

Knowing that the "bends"—bubbles of air in a diver's veins—come from too rapidly changing pressures when rising, he made his ascent carefully. Up twenty feet, then a pause; twenty feet more and another pause. So he rose some ninety feet, and finally arrived at the underside of the ice floe.

Here he found the water a pale blue-green, increasing, at the limit of his vision, to impenetrable black. Nearby was a great dark blur which he recognized as the killer whale that had struck him down. It bobbed lifelessly against the smooth, light ceiling of ice. Slowly, he swam over towards it.

There was no mark of the havoc his last shot must have wreaked inside. He examined the body with interest, fingering the two inch-long teeth, which even the mighty sperm whale fears and flees from.

"Pretty wicked," he said aloud, just for the companionship of his voice. "And there's a lot of oil in this brute. Streight'll be glad to get him. Maybe he won't need a third to fill the tanks."

Thought of his captain made him look up and around, hoping to see the *Narwhal's* light-beams come threading through the distant murk. He did not see them, but what he did see caused his mouth to drop open, and his veins to chill with a cold that was not that of the sea nor the ice above.

"Good Lord!" he whispered. "That thing—again!"

Like a specter from the deep, some hundred feet away was a form, seal-like in appearance, yet not wholly seal. It poised there motionless, apparently looking straight at him.

Fear came over Ken as he studied it. Its body was perhaps ten feet long, and sleek and fat under a brown-colored hide. But its flippers were not those of a seal; they were too long and slender, especially the hind ones. They unquestionably bore a remote resemblance to human arms and legs.

"Yet it can't be anything but some kind of seal," Ken whispered to himself. "It must be!"

But then, too, it did not have the ordinary seal's bullet head, set squat between smoothly tapering shoulders, but rather something bulbous, half like that of a man, in spite of the layers of fat that stream-lined from it to the broad shoulders. It did have, however, two large, staring eyes, and slitted holes inches below them for nostrils—which showed that it breathed air and was therefore warm-blooded.

Quite motionless, each stared at the other, while minutes passed. Then the creature moved slowly up and forward, impelled by a graceful and hardly perceptible roll of its queer flippers. Very gradually it came towards Kenneth Torrance; and he, peering with fear-tinged curiosity at the animal's bold advance, saw two creases of fat that must have been lips slide open in the smooth brown face, baring strong, pointed teeth.

Not knowing whether it was an attack or merely inquisitiveness, he unsheathed his knife. At this the figure stopped and poised motionless again, perhaps fifty feet away, and after a moment turned its sleek head first to the left and then to the right. Automatically, Ken gazed around likewise. He drew in his breath with a sharp hiss.

Like shadows, additional figures had appeared in the distant murk. Silently they had come; he could see eleven—twelve—even more. He was surrounded! No longer doubting their purpose, he gripped his knife firmly. He knew he could never get down to the torpoon in time.

And then the circle began to close.

There was little he could do to resist them, he realized, for what he had seen of their movements told him that they were swift, effortless swimmers. But he braced himself as best he could against the dead whale, to protect his back. He would at least go down fighting.

As their spectral shapes slid slowly closer he noted something that had escaped his eyes before. Four or five of them were holding dim objects in their arm-like flippers. Spears, he made them out to be, rudely fashioned from bone. And others held dark-colored loops, which they were slowly forming into nooses.

"They're intelligent, all right," Ken muttered. "Spears—of whalebone, I guess. And ropes—probably seaweed. Weapons! Good Lord, what kind of seals are these?"

Easily, gracefully, the silent circle drew in to perhaps twenty feet of him, where they paused again, hanging motionless at regular intervals in the eery, wavering half-light. Ken licked his lips nervously. Then the one whom he had seen first moved its head slightly, in what was apparently a signal. And in a concerted movement, so bewilderingly rapid that his eyes could not hold them, they rushed him.

He had expected speed, but not speed such as this. He had barely swung his knife-arm up when the wave engulfed him.

Doubling, curving shapes looped around him; blubbery bodies pressed against him; eyes flashed by in streaks of brown; he knew that he was being tumbled and tossed and that his knife and hand-flash had fallen under the shock of the attack. And then there was a sharper sensation. As he struggled to break free, taut cords trussed his legs and arms like any captive animal's.

The stream of moving bodies slowed in movement and fell back from a breathless, dazed Kenneth Torrance. He then got his first clear view since the assault was unleashed.

He was upright, many feet away from the killer whale's carcass, his arms bound strongly to his sides with seaweed-rope, his legs locked close together. To one side he glimpsed several of the creatures fastening other rope strands to the whale's flukes. When they had finished, with smoothly thrusting flippers they began to haul the carcass forward, and he felt himself move feet first in the same direction.

He forced a wry smile to his lips. "A swell fight I put up!" he grunted. "Hold 'em off! Yeah—I bet I held 'em for a full tenth of a second."

He still could hardly believe what had so rapidly befallen him. It was difficult to credit eyes that showed him creatures whose bodies were mainly seal-like, and yet whose weapons and co-ordinated movements spoke for human intelligence. But they were certainly real. At his feet he could feel the pressure of a guard's flippers against him.

He was towed in this fashion for some distance when the pressure of the flippers suddenly tightened and he was pulled into a deep-angled swoop toward the sea-bottom below. Previously he had seen his captors' amazing speed, but now he felt it. Down and down he went, and at last, when it seemed he must crash into the sea floor, his momentum was quickly checked, and he found himself standing in the mud, from which position, lacking support from his guard, he drifted to a horizontal one, face up. And there, lying helpless on the bottom, he saw the reason for the sudden dive. Far to the right, piercing faintly through the murk, were two faint interweaving beams of white that preceded a slowly moving dark bulk.

The *Narwhal!* Wild hopes of rescue coursed through him.

Dimly, as he watched the beams, he was aware of the rest of the creatures dropping down, guiding between them the whale's carcass. Then a firm pressure was applied to his side, and he was rolled over, face down in the mud. Unable any longer to see his ship, his momentary vision of rescue vanished.

"Hopeless, I guess," he muttered despairingly. The darkness on the sea-floor was too thick, the wavering shadows too deceptive. And his hand-flash and knife were gone—probably knocked

from his grasp during the struggle, he thought.

He realized that the seal-like animals were lying low until the submarine passed, its size having awed them. The color of the bodies blended perfectly with the gloom, as did that of his own sea-suit. His bonds prevented him from making even the slightest movement to attract attention.

Torturing thoughts raced through the torpooner's brain. He saw, in his mind's eye, straight above, a hazy bulk, with shimmering columns of white angling from its nose. His imagination pictured for him the warm, well-lit interior, and the bunks—the coffee steaming on the fire, the men at their posts and Streight's anxious, beefy face. He saw it all as plainly as if he were inside, cracking jokes with one of the engineers.

The minutes passed. The *Narwhal* must now be gone. Ken's cheek muscles stood out as he pressed his teeth together. "Well, go on!" he exploded in impotent rage. "What are you waiting for? Kill me! Eat me if you're going to!" And he cursed the silent forms around him till his ears hurt from the reverberation.

After the *Narwhal* had vanished in the gloom, the torpooner's captors lifted him from the bottom and propelled him leisurely forward again, the slight, graceful roll of their flippers slipping them along smoothly.

A dull hopelessness came over him. No longer could he hope that his submarine would find him. Only one thing was certain, and that was that death would soon come. For even if his captors did not kill him at once, he had but thirty-six hours before his air-units would be exhausted. Certainly, having captured him, the seal-creatures would not release him. And it was too much to expect them to realize that his sea-unit was only an artificial covering which enabled him to live underwater, and not his own flesh and blood.

And as for the chance of breaking loose—the idea was laughable. His speed was snail-like in comparison with theirs. Even if he did manage somehow to get away, what good would it do? How could he, a puny, helpless mite, ever hope to locate the *Narwhal* in this vast sweep of Arctic sea? His torpooner was wrecked, and he had no means of communication.

His situation was quite hopeless.

Far ahead, a dark shape grew in the foggy murk, and as they neared, spread upwards and outwards. They angled up and up; the sea-floor was higher there. Ken, peering as best he could, made out that the mountainous, looming bulk was the face of a giant underwater mound, whose uneven formation indicated that it was the result of some long-past upheaval. It was the first of a rolling series of such hillocks, six or seven in all, stretching back into the gloom. Their rounded peaks reached to within a few feet of the water's ice-sheathed surface. Surely the creatures' home was among these mounds.

He was skirted round the base of the first hillock and caught a glimpse of something in its face which was apparently of his captors' construction. It was a hole, dark, mysterious, perhaps fifteen feet in diameter, and barring it were three great gray stakes, reaching from top to bottom. Behind the stakes, Ken got a jumbled impression of a body, large and sleek, of black streaked with white, that moved restlessly back and forth in the hole and occasionally seemed to lash out in anger. He wondered what it was. Before long, he knew.

The party of seal-creatures stopped before the second of the row of hillocks. In its face, too, was a hole—a well of blackness—but with no stakes across it. He twisted his head back and saw the carcass of the killer whale he had slain being guided up to the entrance and shoved through. Then, from the upper rim of the hole, three stakes similar to the others he had seen slid down and barred it.

"Storehouses!" he muttered. "Storehouses, I'll bet anything. And killer whales are their food. They keep 'em in the holes until they're needed. But I'll swear it was a live whale I saw in the first one—and how in the dickens could they capture a mighty killer with their dinky spears and ropes?"

There he had to leave the question, for its answer implied greater intelligence in the creatures than he would admit.

Intelligence—in seals!

And now he was guided smoothly forward to the third hillock, where the leaders of the group glided through a V-shaped cleft in its face. His guards brought him along behind.

A wry smile twisted Kenneth Torrance's lips. To him, the cleft was more than an entranceway. To him it signified the beginning of the hopeless, lonely end of his life....

The cleft led into a corridor, and the corridor was softly illuminated with a peculiar light whose source he could not discover. It served to show him a passageway that was wide rather than tall, and gouged from the firm, clayey soil by blunt tools that had left uneven marks. Straight ahead it led, and, as they continued, the mysterious illumination brightened, until suddenly, rounding a turn, its source appeared.

Like will-o'-the-wisps, a score of arrows of light flashed softly into view down the corridor. They were of delicate green and orange and yellow, glowing and luminous, and hovering like humming birds between floor and ceiling. Ken looked at them in some alarm until his nearer approach showed him what they were, and then he exclaimed in amazement:

"Why—they're fish! Living electric bulbs!"

A school of slender, ten-inch fish they were, each one a radiant, shimmering, lacey-finned gem of orange or green or yellow. In concert they shot to the ceiling over the party of seal-creatures, who still swam impassively ahead, paying no attention to them, and from there scattered in quick darts in all directions, showering the cortege with washes of spectral luminosity. Then the corridor crooked again, and with one simultaneous movement they were gone. And the scene that lay revealed before Kenneth Torrance took his breath from him.

In the passageway he had seen a score of the living jewels; now he beheld hundreds. He peered up at a shimmering sheet of brilliance, composed of hundreds of the slender refulgent fish, all swimming in slow rotation. Below them was a large cavern, which he guessed had been created by hollowing out one of the underwater hillocks. The sides were rounded, and pitted with holes that represented other passageways, showing dark against the luminosity from above. And streaming out from these dark holes of corridors came dozens of the seal-creatures, gathering in response to some unheard, unseen signal that had called them to witness the strange captive their fellows had brought in....

Ken's guards gripped him more firmly and he was guided forward and downward to the smooth black floor of soil.

Scores of large, placid eyes stared at him from the slowly undulating, brown-skinned bodies packed close about him. The sight was so weird, so beyond his imagination, that he laughed a little hysterically.

"Dreaming!" he said. "Dreaming! But what a dream!"

Silently, a space cleared in the center of the horde. His bonds were taken away, the guards released his arms and he righted himself and stood there on braced legs, the object of a concerted gaze.

This, the torpooner felt, was the crucial period. Something was about to be decided. If it looked bad he would make a wild—and of course, futile—break for freedom, and die quickly when they punctured his suit. But meanwhile he would stick things out. Anything might happen in that fantastic convocation.

There came a stir in the tiers of brown bodies. An aisle cleared, and down it a single seal-creature glided slowly towards Ken Torrance—undoubtedly the leader of the herd, ruler of the underwater labyrinth.

Gracefully the creature glided up to the lone human, and when only a foot away extended one of its long upper flippers so that its webbed edge rested on his sea-suit's casque. And its placid brown eyes hung close to the face-shield and gazed through inquisitively, intelligently! Intelligently! No longer did Kenneth Torrance doubt that. As he held absolutely motionless under the close-searching scrutiny, his brain rang with the conviction that this creature, this thing of blubbery body and long, webbed flipper-arms and legs—this brown-skinned denizen of the Arctic underseas was, with all its fellows, related to him, a man of the upper world.

Men they were; or, rather, blubber-men!

Previously he had marveled at something suggestively human-like in their appearance; now he recognized human intelligence in his observer's peering brown eyes and questing movements of the flipper over his head casque and suit. Warm red blood flowed in its blubber-sheathed body; an intelligent brain lay in the fat round head. And why not?

Whales, ages ago, were land mammals, animals that walked on the soil of the dim, early world. They had taken to the seas in quest of food, had stayed there and never returned; and Nature had guarded their bodies against the cold and great depths by giving them layer upon layer of oily blubber. The ancestors of these creatures before him might well have lived on the soil, walked and run as he did; then, when the ice came, taken to the sea and made a new home for themselves.

They had enticed the splendent light-fish into their caverns to give illumination. Intelligence

almost human. A brain not as highly developed as man's, but a human brain!

Ken Torrance had been almost apathetic toward his eventual fate, but suddenly, now, a great hope came to him—and twin with it, on its heels, came fear. If, or since, this creature inspecting him had an intelligent, human brain, in some way he might be able to correspond with it. He might be able to show that his real body was inside the sea-suit; that he had to have air; that he would die if he were kept underwater, that he could not survive as a prisoner. These creatures appeared to be friendly; seemed to wish him no harm. If he could show them that he was a man of the upper world, they might let him go.

If he could do it! He had to make known to the herd leader that he breathed air, and that he'd die if they didn't release him at once. On that depended life and death.

Ken trembled as he cast about for some way of putting over his idea, and then the plan came. Smiling through his face-shield at the brown eyes so close, he drew back slowly and took out a short steel crowbar from the belt at his waist. He bent over and made a line on the soft floor.

All eyes watched him; every creature held motionless, apparently interested, eager to understand. Under his suit-clad figure the crowbar traced a rude outline of a man in a sea-suit. The torpooner pointed to the drawing and then fingered his suit, repeating the gesture several times. Then he drew another figure in the soil, this one intended to represent him without the sea-suit. It was not as bulky; the features were sharper and thinner. Ken pointed to the twin dots standing for eyes, then tapped his face-shield; he did this again and again.

For a moment the leader did not move; but then he slid forward and stared through the shield. Rapidly Ken opened and closed his eyes, and pointed again to the dots on the drawing's face.

"Eyes! Eyes!" he said excitedly, voicing the thought his brain was making. "Eyes—inside the suit! The suit's not me; I'm inside! Eyes!" He waited for a reaction, tense and strained. The blubber-man reached out one flipper-arm and took the steel bar from his hand.

A thrill ran through him as the creature dipped its body down and began to draw in the soil. Laboriously, crudely, he outlined another sea-suit, and on the circle representing the face-shield marked two dots—eyes.

"He's getting it!" Ken cried.

The blubber-man went on drawing. He sketched a second suit, similar in all respects, and looked up at the torpooner, inquiringly, it seemed.

Ken nodded rapidly. He tapped the drawings, then his suit; nodded again. "The idea's over!" he told himself. "Now I'll make a move towards that corridor to show them that I want to go, and if —"

But before he could stir, the leader of the blubber-men, with one quick gesture, summoned two creatures from the innermost circle. Swiftly they placed themselves alongside Kenneth Torrance, lifted him and bore him forward, right across the cavern to another of the passageway-entrances.

It was so sudden that for a moment Ken could not think clearly. What had happened? Were they releasing him? Or was he still to be kept a prisoner? No doubt the latter. And he had been so sure that he was communicating with the blubber-man's brain!

His lips pressed tight in a hard white line. It was a tough blow to take.

"Well, that's that," he said. "It was all imagination."

He did not know that his drawings *had* signified something to the leader of the herd—that each had mistaken the meaning of the other. Nor did he have any inkling of the greatest surprise of all that now lay just before him.

The surprise lay in another cavern.

A quick turn through a cleft-like entrance brought them into it. The room was only a fraction of the size of the central meeting place, and its light, from but several of the light-fish, was dim and vague, barely enabling Ken to see what looked like a pile of rocks in the chamber, heaping upwards. The ceiling was flat and strangely blurred, a rippling veil. As he wondered what caused this, his guards lifted him rapidly towards it, up alongside the rocks.

Not only towards it, but through it! His head-casque pierced through; rivulets of water gurgled off it—and he realized that the blurred veil he had seen was the top plane of the water, which only filled three-quarters of the cavern.

Surprise left him breathless. At first he could see nothing, could only feel that his shoulders were above water. Then he was pushed slowly upward until he rested almost completely above the surface. How did the cavern come to be but part-filled with water? he wondered. And was this dim emptiness around him air? Could he breathe it?

Then he was vaguely aware of a presence on the top of the rock heap. He sensed rather than heard a stir of movement. Then suddenly a ray of light stabbed through the darkness and

impinged on his head-casque—white, electric, man-made light!

And there came to his ears, muffled by the suit and distorted by echoes, a call that sounded like his own name!

"Ken! Is it you, Ken?"

Bewildered, he motioned the blinding light to one side. It turned upward and backward, and in its glare a face suddenly appeared out of the darkness.

"Good God!" Kenneth Torrance cried.

It was a pale, drawn face, stubbled with beard, and its eyes were wild.

It was the face of Chanley Beddoes, the lost second torpooner of the *Narwhal*.

Ken stared, his body rigid. Chan Beddoes! The dead brought back! So it at first seemed. And here, in a cavern of the blubber-men!

He pulled himself further up on the rock pile, unfastened the clasps on his helmet and took it off—for Beddoes wore none, and that meant the space was filled with breathable air.

"Chan!" he said. "And we were sure you were dead!"

A high-pitched, hysterical voice cried in answer!

"It's you, Ken! They got you too! Oh, but it's good to see you! It's been so lonely, so dark.... You are there, Ken? I'm not just dreaming again?"

Ken realized that the other's nerves were shot, and he replied gently:

"You're not dreaming, Chan. I'm here with you now. Steady. Take it easy. Lord, this air—it's pretty foul, but it smells good to me, and it'll save our units. How ever do they get it down here?" He asked the question in hope of steadying Beddoes; giving his mind something definite to occupy it.

A soft ripple sounded just then; looking round, Ken saw that his two guards had slipped back beneath the water, leaving them alone.

Chan Beddoes' helmet was off, but the rest of his body was still clad in a sea-suit. He half squatted on the rocks, his face raised and peering at the first torpooner fearfully, as if afraid he would disappear as suddenly as he had come. The beam of light came from a hand-flash held in his hand. Scattered around were pieces of whitish meat—fish—and the air was sickening with its smell. Ten feet above was the chamber's domed ceiling, from which water kept dripping to the slimy rocks below.

"Air?" repeated Beddoes, stupidly. His mind was obviously affected. "They fetch it from the surface with seal-hide bags, and release it. They change it often. All over the caverns. They have to breathe, too. I think they sleep in rooms like this." His voice rose with hysteria. "Ken, they're seals and yet they're human! Human, down here! They have arms and legs and they breathe air, like whales—and they've kept me here for weeks, years—I don't know! They're devils! It's been so dark and cold and—and—" He began to cough painfully.

"I know," Ken told him sympathetically. "Steady, man. How did you get here? How did they catch you?"

Beddoes' eyes wandered. He sucked his lips.

"I can't remember," he said. "No. Yes! We left the *Narwhal*, both of us, chasing those killers. They broke up and we went after different ones, and I lost sight of you.

"I chased mine for a long time, and when I fired I only wounded him. He went like hell, and I after him. After half an hour I was ready to give up; I couldn't get close enough. God! Ready to return! To the submarine! To life!"

His voice broke, and he paused until he was able to go on.

"Then I saw another shape ahead of the whale. A queer looking thing—one of these human seals, though I didn't know it then. It seemed to be fleeing from the killer, just as the killer was from me. There was something big and dark ahead—a shadow, I thought, and kept my eyes on the whale. And the next second my torpoon crashed and I was knocked cold.

"It's a deliberate scheme," he went on at a tangent. "The seal things get a killer chasing them and lead it towards the traps they've got in the sides of these hillocks. They dart in and the whale follows; then bars drop over the entrance and they've got the killer trapped. They eat them."

"But how does the blubber-man get out?" Ken asked.

Beddoes scowled. "Oh, they're clever enough! A passage runs off the trap, big enough for the seal thing, but not for a killer.... Well, my torp had gone into the trap and was stuck in one of the walls. When I came to I reversed my engines full, but I couldn't get free. The impact had ruined my radio.

"Through the after peep-holes I could make out the killer in the trap with me, lashing around like mad. The bars over the entrance were wide-spaced enough to let the torp squeeze through—but I couldn't get loose.

"As I lay there, wondering what to do, I saw some more of those blubber-men in the corridor raising the bars. They had long spears and knives—and in ten minutes that killer was dead and the place black with its blood.

"Well, I thought I saw my chance. I got into my sea-suit, thinking I maybe could dig the torp free and escape before the damned fish caught me. I climbed out the port and was hacking at the mud bank with my crowbar when a rope slipped over my head and they had me."

Ken nodded. "They got me in the same way," he said.

"And gave you the once-over in the big room," Chan declared. "You'll get plenty more of that."

For most of the man's narrative his tone and manner had been sane enough, but now again he broke out wildly.

"And I've been here for days! Weeks! And nothing but fish to eat, and whale meat, and pieces of ice brought for me to drink, and the darkness and the fish smell! God, it's driven me crazy! I can't stand it any longer, Ken, and I won't. I've got to get out right away or kill myself. I've got to!"

Ken gripped his shoulders and shook. "Steady!" he said sharply. "Get control over yourself!"

"Steady!" Beddoes gasped. "You don't know how long I've kept control! Waiting and hoping, for a chance. One little chance to escape!"

"Why haven't you tried before? Don't they leave you alone here?"

Chanley Beddoes laughed harshly. "Just because you can't see them, you think that? Hell, no! Put on your helmet. Look down—down under the water—and you'll see a guard at the entrance. There's always one there—with a spear. And every now and then he comes up, to see what I'm doing. But no matter; now that you're here we can make a break. You've still got your crowbar; they took mine away. I've only had my flash to work with."

In spite of his awful experience and intolerable predicament, Ken was getting drowsy. He had been through much; he had been short on sleep when he had started out. Nevertheless, he forced himself to consider their situation. Since the blubber-men had kept Chan Beddoes a prisoner, they would no doubt keep him one likewise. It did not mean immediate death from suffocation, for there was air of a kind here; and food was brought. But—imprisonment!

All around him was damp darkness; the rocks they lay on were jagged and slime coated all over and there were little pools of water here and there. Gloom; awful water beneath; slimy rocks to lie on; raw whale meat to eat; stench of rotting fish. Imprisonment! Weeks of this! Suddenly he felt deep admiration for Beddoes in having clung to sanity so long.

"Yes," he said slowly, "we've got to get out. But with that guard on duty.... What's your plan?"

The other coughed long, then began:

"It all depends on whether they've moved my torpoon from the trap where it stuck. You didn't see it anywhere? Well, it's got to be still in the trap, and we've got to get to it. It'll carry both of us. The whale that led me into the trap is dead, and we can finish prying the torp loose with your crowbar."

Ken nodded. "But the guard?"

Chanley Beddoes said harshly: "I'm going to kill it!"

Ken looked at him. His pale, drawn face was contorted; his hands clenched and unclenched. He repeated:

"Yes, kill it! I've a score to settle with these devils, anyway. I'll take him unawares. One blow'll do it, if it's placed right. Then, down the corridor and to the trap. I think I remember the way."

Ken thought it out, and shook his head.

"What's the matter?" Beddoes asked.

"We'd better not," he said "Not yet. And never, if we can help it."

"Why not?" Beddoes cried in great surprise.

"Don't you see? They haven't really harmed us. They're friendly. Yes, they've kept you prisoner and they'll keep me, too—but probably they don't think that's any terrible hardship for us. And they don't realize how much we want to get free."

"What will we do then?" Beddoes broke in impatiently.

"When I see the leader again I've got to get it over that we want to be released. It's a better risk than killing this guard, anyway. They're disposed to be friendly; but if you killed one there'd be the devil to pay." Ken paused, and his eyes closed. He said wearily:

"But, I'm dog tired; no sleep for twenty hours. Let me sleep an hour or two; my head'll be much clearer and we'll talk it over."

Chanley Beddoes said nothing. Ken yawned and stretched his body as comfortably as he could on the slime-coated rocks. Dazed from the rush of amazing events his eyelids closed at once, and soon his breathing settled into a regular beat.

Perhaps half an hour later, a shape moved in the dank gloom of the underwater cavern. The top plane of water rippled softly; little wavelets eddied against the rocks and whispered as the shape slipped down underneath. Then there was silence, no movement; and the water again calmed into a black sheet, smooth as glass. For minutes it stayed so, while Ken's deep, regular breathing stirred the air.

Then suddenly the water's calm was broken. Through its rippling waves the shape reappeared, rivulets streaming from it. Quickly hauling itself up on the rocks, it clambered towards the sleeper. For a moment it paused; then its helmet swung back, revealing Chan's tense, pale face. A hand reached out and gripped the sleeper's arm. A voice called:

"Ken! Wake up! Hurry!"

Even as the words reverberated in the close bowl, the black mirror of water stirred once more. Something pierced through and drifted idly on the surface. It was a large brown-skinned shape, apparently lifeless.

"Ken!" called Chan anxiously again.

The first torpooner stirred. Out of the depths of slumber he mumbled:

"What's the matter?"

"We've got to shove off right now! Quick! Put on your helmet!"

Kenneth Torrance sat up and peered through half-open eyes. He saw before him the face of Chanley Beddoes, wild and excited. In one hand he held the steel crowbar. And behind, on the surface of the water, floated the motionless body of a blubber-man, its head beaten in, streamers of red trailing from it.

Ken said sharply:

"You killed him? After what I told you? You fool!"

"Yes, I killed him!" Beddoes answered brazenly. "What of it?"

Ken said nothing for a moment. Bitter reproach trembled on his tongue, but he did not speak the words, for Chan's mind was all too clearly on the thin line this side of insanity. He only said:

"Well, you've forced the issue, and we've got to leave immediately. It may mean our death, but let's forget it. Now—how much of your air-units is left?"

"About two hours. I lost a lot through a leak."

Ken took half of his own store of the little cells from his helmet. "I'll share mine. That'll give us both sixteen hours all told—in case we don't find your torpoon. You're sure they killed the whale in that trap? And you know the way?"

"I think so," said Beddoes excitedly. "You follow me."

"All right. On helmets, then."

The clasps were fastened down, cutting them off from spoken communication with each other. Ken took the hand-flash and crowbar and stuck them in his own belt, and both clumsy, grotesque figures splashed into the water, vanished beneath its surface and ducked under the shadowy body of the dead blubber-man.

Below, in the dim quarter-light, Ken peered out of the entrance to the cell chamber. The corridor seemed safe, there being only the distant colored streaks of light-fish, and occasionally even these disappeared, leaving heaped shadows in the darkened water. He nodded to Beddoes and boldly they began their flight.

Their progress was nerve-rackingly slow, in spite of their utmost exertions. The water that retarded them at times contained unsuspected currents that destroyed their equilibrium and sent them stroking madly with both hands to regain it. Far different, this, than the swift, effortless swimming of the blubber-men. Their weighted feet stumbled often on the floor of the passage, and several times they lost balance and fell towards the sides. Each time that this happened Ken was struck with the fear of ripping the fabric of his sea-suit. And all the time there was the apprehension of imminent discovery.

At last he saw Beddoes wave an arm and enter a dim cleft a few feet ahead in the left side of the wall. In turn he floundered through—and just in time. From around a bend in the corridor shortly ahead there came two blubber-men. In only a few seconds they would pass the niche the two humans had entered. Crowbar ready, Ken flattened himself against the sidewall, pulling his companion back with him. They waited.

The seal-men passed by—two sleek, blubbery shapes, flipper-arms and legs weaving gracefully, bodies rolling slightly, eyes apparently directed ahead. Close!

They had escaped that time, but there was a disturbing thought in Ken's mind and in Beddoes' too, perhaps—as they resumed their slow-motion flight down the second corridor. "What if those two were going to visit us in the cell-chamber? Once they see the dead guard, hell sure will start to pop!"

For a period that seemed to be measured in hours they fought their way forward through the retarding pressure of the water. The corridor described a long curve. They were on the last stretch—and still no pursuit!

"If only the torp's there!" Ken kept exclaiming in his thoughts. "Just that!"

"If only the torp's there!..." Had they come the right way? He had to trust that to the memory of Beddoes. Beddoes, whose mind had clearly been affected by his seven-day nightmare.... He shook his head. He dared not doubt.

They increased their pace a little. Imagination stimulated their weary muscles. The *Narwhal!* Men of their own kind! Sun and air! Life again! Ken could have shouted when he saw his partner stop and gesture excitedly before a dark spot in the wall. It could be nothing but the entrance to a trap.

He pressed forward, flicking on his flash and making sure by the water-waved beam it threw. But Beddoes was attending to some sight down the corridor; and suddenly he pointed in fright. The first torpooner looked in the indicated direction and saw what was meant.

Approaching was a wave of menacing brown-skinned bodies, streaming swiftly through the passage several abreast. Their escape had been discovered. The blubber-men were coming.

At once Ken acted, pushing Chan into the narrow opening and scrambling after himself. They wormed along for several feet, till they emerged in a large dark chamber at the far end of which was a big circular entrance barred by three great pale stakes. They were certainly in a whale trap.

Rapidly Ken played his flash around, looking for the torp, but it was nowhere visible. To one side was an out-jutting rock with a niche beneath it. It was a promising place and he stumbled his way there, followed by the other.

It was then that a most peculiar feeling came over him, a feeling that was instantly a surge of panic. Something else was in the trap! His flash arced around and up, and what lay revealed in its ray caused cold shivers to run down the backs of the two men.

Above them, just over the three-toothed outer entrance, hung a black, sleek body, white-striped. Head-on it was, and motionless, eyeing them. A killer whale—alive!—and poised for a lunge!

It barred the way to the outer entrance. They could not retrace their steps; already the round brown head of a blubber-men showed in the inner entrance. They were trapped, front and rear, and confronted by the deadliest animal in the sea.

A second they watched it, frozen immobile; then the whale's great body curved and its flukes went up, and by purest instinct the men dove for the niche at their feet. Head to head, they arrived in it, and just in time, for the great jaws of the killer barely missed their snap.

As the monster curved past, the swirling water of its passage nearly dislodged the torpooners, and they made haste to jam themselves into the crevice as tightly as they dared for the safety of their suits.

The whale whipped around in a narrow circle and returned. Its pointed teeth gleamed as it snapped shut its jaws and muzzled its hard, wicked snout into Ken's ribs. Again it circled and streaked for the niche; and, helpless, Kenneth Torrance lay there as the beast tried to slide its head into it. He felt more of the terrifying nuzzling of the snout. But the creature could not dislodge him.

"Can't bring his teeth to bear," he muttered with a certain relief. "Niche isn't high enough. We're safe, I guess, for a couple of minutes. Unless the blubber-men come in and kill him like they did the one Chan followed last week."

For several minutes the sea-beast continued its frantic attempt to reach the two humans, and then its attacks became desultory. During one respite Ken managed to get up his flashlight and

send its beam out over the floor—and what he discovered was the essence of irony. Directly opposite, on the floor by the wall, lay a familiar long slim shape, its stern tipped by rudder-planes and propeller, its metal flanks gleaming in the white ray. The torpoen. And utterly useless—a heartbreaking jest—unless they could reach it.

But a slight hope grew in the men at its discovery. They had come to the right trap, after all. Probably the whale had dislodged the shell from the wall with fluke-blows—possibly, too, the blows had sprung its seams and opened the engine-compartment to water....

Ken occupied himself with the problem of how to get to it. It held their only hope. But with all his racking his brains he could think of no way but to make a rush for it. If he could get inside, the torp, lying flat on the ground, would be reasonably safe from the killer until he could get it running.

Through the face-shields, he met his companion's eyes. The same decision had come to both.

There was a tiny space of muddy floor between them. Ken doused it with light from the flash. In the mud, with a forefinger he slowly traced these words one at a time, rubbing each one out to make room for the next:

"I get torp. Kill whale with gun. Only way. I go. I senior. If fail, you try."

He looked at the other inquiringly. Vigorously, Chanley Beddoes shook his head.

He smoothed over the last word Ken had marked and in its place, in the same fashion, began:

"No. Draw lots. Only fair."

Yes, it was fair, and Ken knew it. He wrote:

"How?"

The second torpoener scabbled around with his fingers. Presently he unearthed something, and apparently satisfied showed them to Ken. They were two pebbles, of different sizes. Beddoes pointed to the larger. He wrote:

"Large makes attempt."

Again Ken nodded. He marked:

"Other try keep killer's attention."

From time to time a long sleek body slid down to them and edged back and forth, striving its best to dislodge them with its blunt shout. After each failure it would return to a position just over the outer entrance. At the proper moment Chanley Beddoes jumbled the pebbles in his cupped hands and laid two fists down on the pad.

Unhesitatingly, Ken placed a finger on the left one.

Beddoes turned and opened it. It was the smaller pebble.

Close as was his face-shield to Beddoes', Ken could not see what his reaction was. Ken stretched forth his hand and clumsily touched his companion's shoulder.

"Good hunting!" he said; but Chan never heard that....

The marked man peered out into the trap. The killer was circling slowly. In the escape hole, the faces of three or four blubber-men were dimly visible. They seemed to be watching with interest.

There came a good moment when the killer paused at the three bars of its cell, its head turned in exactly the opposite direction from the two torpoeners. Beddoes seized the opportunity at once. Almost before Ken knew it, he had rolled out of the niche.

Quickly he worked to his feet and started pushing for his goal. The whale had not seen him. Arms and legs straining, he floundered slowly ahead. He nearly made it.

But the killer, restlessly turning, saw him—and Kenneth Torrance winced and cried out.

The black monster struck. With horrible, beautiful grace it curved down. Its snout caught Chanley Beddoes square in the side and butted him up and around, and both disappeared in a swirl of water into the inky shadows of the trap's ceiling.

Ken closed his eyes. He knew what was happening. He could not move. But it came to him, as he lay there sick with horror, that he would never have a better chance than now, while the killer was occupied.

Recklessly he forced himself out of the niche. Up above there was commotion, a whirlpool of churning water. The current helped him: he got caught in it and was swept sprawling right over to the torpoen's side.

He clutched at the port, expecting each instant the tear of monster fangs; but he made the interior and clicked shut the port. No matter the water that had come into the main compartment

with his entrance. He pulled the starter over, and heard the familiar drone of electric engines, safe inside their water-tight division. He felt no relief at this. There was only the same sick horror.

He raised the torpoon a little. There was one thing to do. Perhaps it was mad to try to destroy that killer whale in so narrow a space, but he was going to attempt it. It would not be so bad to join Chan, if he failed....

A terrific blow struck the stern of the torpoon and spun it around dizzily. Ken made out the killer lifting its flukes for a second blow. Quickly he sped the torp ahead, and turned as best he could. Flashing on his powerful bow-beam, he found the killer to his left, slightly above. Carefully he maneuvered into firing position: then coldly, with deadly accuracy, he centered the sights of his nitro-shell gun on the vital spot behind the eyes. He pressed the trigger: again, and yet again. The projectiles hurtled out.

The monster started; its beady eyes settled on the torpoon; with a lunge it darted forward, jaws gaping wide. And as it came another shell sped true into the tooth-rimmed mouth.

It halted then, and doubled in the water. Shock after shock shook the torpoon as the shells exploded in the whale. For a little while the sea-beast flurried, and once or twice the torp shivered from chance fluke-blows. But then at last came peace. The body rolled over, showing its white belly, and drifted towards the trap's ceiling....

The brown-skinned heads had disappeared from the inner entrance. Kenneth Torrance glanced in that direction for a last time, then looked sadly around.

"So long, Chan," he murmured. "So long."

The torpoon squeezed through the bars of the outer entrance and sped forth into the open sea.

So it was that, perhaps an hour later, the light-beams of the whaling submarine *Narwhal*, doggedly scouring the region where last her first torpooner had been heard from, fell across a slim shape of steel that was beating its way at full speed through the foggy murk of the Arctic sea.

Right up to the *Narwhal* she came, swerving at the last moment and hovering outside the starboard torpoon catapult; while, aboard the submarine, an officer whose voice quivered with excitement roused Captain Henry Streight from his bunk, and the men off duty gathered around the inner catapult entrance-port.

Quickly the outer port swung open. And the lone torpoon slid in—slid home.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SEED OF THE ARCTIC ICE ***

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