

Science Under Pressure: Chapter 1*Following the light...***PACIFIC OCEAN: JULY 31, 1984**

She floated alone, just above the edge of darkness. Light and warmth played at the surface above her, while darkness and cold captivated the sea below.

Somewhere between the light and the dark Dr. Edith Widder — “Edie” to her friends — was safely cocooned inside an aluminum dive suit called WASP. Without it, the weight of the sea would crush the young scientist.

WASP was connected to a research ship 500 feet above by a steel cable. Every wave that rocked the ship caused WASP, and Edie inside, to bounce, lunge and spin like a puppy on a leash. The cable provided power and communication lines. It was Edie’s only lifeline and only way to reel the WASP back to the surface.

Edie constantly checked the cable to be sure the

dive suit hadn’t looped around or snagged it. If the cable knotted or worse, was severed, Edie’s safe cocoon would become her casket.

Exhaling through chattering teeth, her breath hung in the air, then faded. The near-freezing water temperature seeped through the WASP’s hull.

The ocean was as dark as a movie theater just after the picture has ended. Though Edie couldn’t see any, some sunlight fought its way down to this depth. The special light measuring equipment she used detected trace amounts. A red glow from the digital numbers, like an alarm clock at night, cast the only light she could see.

Barely aware of the cold or dark, she continued her work, mesmerized by the quiet, seemingly empty world.

Light shattered the darkness. Edie winced, momentarily blinded. Her pupils struggled to respond to the brilliant blue light flooding the WASP.

Was there a short or fire inside the suit? There was no way to escape. Edie's eyes darted throughout the dive suit, but found nothing wrong. Edie's heart and mind raced at hummingbird speed.

The cable. What if the cable had been sheered? She shut her eyes for a moment, almost too terrified to accept the deadly thought. Panic squeezed her like the ocean squeezed the WASP.



WHAT COULD BE CAUSING THE LIGHT? HOW WOULD YOU FEEL IF IT WERE YOU? WHAT WOULD YOU DO NEXT?

Edie looked outside for the first time since the light exploded from the darkness. Recoiling at the sight, she rocked the WASP.

Living light flooded the sea. A glowing creature, three times longer than the WASP, hovered outside. The "siphonophore" (a cousin of jellyfish and coral) stretched through the sea like a string of fireflies.

Edie shivered, tingling from the excitement of discovery. The dark, silent and still world she'd

experienced during past dives belied a world of light and life.

Questions flooded her mind. How did it glow? Why did it glow? How many other animals lit the sea? Edie had to know more about creatures that could produce so much light.

Unwittingly, this creature lit the pathway to a very bright future.

©R.A.Musgrave All Rights Reserved. Permission is only granted for WhaleTimes to use portions of *Science Under Pressure: Edith Widder and the Deep-Sea*. It may not be reproduced, copied, linked, or used in any way without written consent of author.