

(pp 76-82)

Shackleton

Carrying the tray, I take three steps into the room, taking pains not to spill a drop; that would be disastrous. But just then the ship makes a few heavy rolls to port, and I'm hard put to keep the cups and teapot level.

As soon as I walk past him, Green wheezes from behind: "Here he is, Sir!"

I hear the door shut and am left alone with Shackleton.

Walls, bed, table, chair, and shelves all are white. Bright light comes streaming in through a large porthole over the bunk. Shackleton is standing at his desk, reading in a book. He wears heavy lace-up boots, leather trousers with suspenders over a thick green sweater, and is older than I pictured him, also much smaller, so that I without standing on my tiptoes I can look through the part in his thinning hair and see his shimmering scalp. I had imagined him as a tall, gangly, delicate fellow, full of energy and élan, forever young but even-keeled, a man whose manner always bespoke his life experience. Nothing of the sort. Suddenly I realized that every time I pictured Shackleton I was thinking of Mr. Albert, the bos'n of the *John London*. Shackleton is completely different--strong, stocky, almost a little bloated. The man standing in front of me is a middle-aged gentleman like my father, and at first glance Shackleton, too, seems surly and sluggish. But he's not like that at all—quite the contrary! I've hardly had time to catch my breath when Shackleton spins around, anything but slow and weary, and before I can straighten up and get out a greeting, he pulls his arm back and hurls the book he's holding right in my direction. The heavy volume whizzes past my head and crashes into the wall behind me.

"Set that down!" he roars, and charges at me, his bright green eyes wide open and flashing. At first I don't understand, having forgotten all about the tray I'm holding. "Set that thing down, or else I'll knock it out of your hand!"

"Yes, sir! Where should I set it, sir?"

He doesn't stop shouting. The tray with the steaming teapot makes him doubly furious. He curses me and the teapot, the cook, the rain, then me again, my attire, my age and my shameless cheek, the boys that dared to deceive him, the cook,

the teapot, me, my long hair, the goddamned weather, my stupid face, the idiot crew, how dare they, his cabin that's too small for a teapot, my parents, the two stokers, the unbelievable audacity and the weather that makes it impossible, the ship, me and the teapot...

“Sir, with your permission, I'll set...”

“Don't interrupt me!” he roars and then goes silent.

He paces up and down the small white room a few times. I shrink back near the door, unable to take my eyes off him. What a scene. There right in front of me Sir Ernest Shackleton, one of the most famous men in England and Scott's only real rival, is giving vent to his rage, and somewhere inside this little room where he and I have met, rocking in the middle of the ocean, can be found a bible with a personal dedication from the Queen Mother, queen of half the world, and the whole lot of us-- Shackleton, the men, the bible from Queen Mother Alexandra and I--are sailing for the Antarctic. Let him rage and hurl at my head every single volume of the *Encyklopaedia Britannica* that's jumbled all over the floor and stacked in the shelves. What luck! It's incredible.

“What are you staring at?” he yells. “Are you a moron? You must be! And who am I that I have to be dealing... How old are you?!”

“Seventeen, sir.”

“Have you learned any trade?”

“From my father, sir. He's a ship's steward in Newport, Wales.”

“Have you been to sea?”

“On the USS *John London*, sir. She was beating ahead during a storm...”

“As what?”

“As what, sir?”

Shackleton answered in Gaelic. Because that is a language we both speak. Only he speaks Irish and I speak Welsh, so I don't know if I'm understanding him correctly, when he asks, “*Nach dtig leat na ceisteanna is simplí afhreagairt, a amadáin?*”

It sounds like he's asking “Can't you answer the simplest questions, you idiot?”

“Every one, sir.”

“Every what?”

“I’ll answer every question, Sir.”

“But not always correctly!”

“No, that’s true. But I’ll try!”

“Because anyone who can always answer every question correctly must know everything there is to know!” he roars again. “Do you know everything there is to know?”

“No, sir.”

“So what were you sailing as? An idiot? *A amadáin?*”

“Perhaps, sir. In all probability, sir. And as a scullion.”

Shackleton said that the last thing he needed was a scullion who didn’t follow his orders. He needed experienced men with a head on their shoulders, men who take responsibility, both for their own life as well as for that of their comrades, strong, brave men, men with big hearts and good heads, men for whom solidarity wasn’t just an empty word, who were ready to place themselves in the service of an enormous endeavor aiming for no less plumbing the depths of hope!

“Hope. I understand, Sir.”

Did I know his motto?

I didn’t.

“By endurance we conquer. Or to put it with Tennyson, ‘To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.’”

So that I can piece together a little good luck, which is why he changed the name of the ship I’ve stolen aboard from *Polaris* to *Endurance*.

I say, “Makes sense to me, sir” – but at the same time I’m thinking that those are nothing but names, words, what kind of nonsense is he spouting. And he again falls into a rage.

One may never give up anything, no matter how slight. Not one’s self or anyone else, no one!

This is his goal, and his goal is sacrosanct and cannot be forsaken.

You can live without arms or legs, without eyes, without faith and without a penny in your pocket, as long as you stick firmly to your purpose—the attainment of which is what justifies you to yourself and all others. The goal need not be big, not

every one can be a Wright or a Pasteur, and when all's said and done crossing the frozen tip of our planet is as small a goal as a million others, when you stop to think about how easily an albatross masters the same route. He wants to know if I have a girl.

I hesitate, but then nod.

“Poor thing!” he says, mockingly. “What’s her name?”

I tell him.

So what am I looking for here? Every love is a unique adventure. Because I'm very much mistaken if I think he's the brainless chieftain of a band of adventurers. The last thing he needs are egocentric renegades bent on making a name for themselves, but that's exactly what I probably am, a renegade. And a gigantic moron on top of that!

What's wrong with me? I don't feel myself resisting. Only a sobbing howl rising in my throat.

If you can only keep your composure another minute, Merce... Can't you manage that?

“Sir, with your permission, I'll set the tray on your bunk. Shall I pour your tea and then leave you be?”

Shackleton is standing at the porthole, peering out. He doesn't exactly give off a satisfied impression, and he's managed to foil nearly all my good fortune.

If he were my father I'd say: Too bad, Dad. Pity you're such a stubborn mule.

Too bad, Sir Ernest, we could have enjoyed each other's company.

“The greatest difficulties in the ice,” he says quietly, “are all related to the cold. It may get down to 70 below zero if we're unlucky. Our tents and suits are of the best material there is, so the cold won't be able to harm us. But only if we're capable of keeping ourselves warm by having enough to eat. Do you understand what I'm saying to you, boy?”

“I know what hunger can do, sir. Not from the ice, but from being on a wreck. After eight days some of the men were on the verge of attacking the others.”

He doesn't reply to that. Then he makes a sudden movement and in two bounds is standing next to me. There's no place for me to retreat. A soft clinking of the dishes gives me away: I'm shivering, and not just because of the cold and

exhaustion.

“Are you afraid?” he asks, and looks me briefly in the eye before bending over to pick up the book.

“I was afraid in the locker, sir,” I say, when he’s back up and examining the book for damage. He takes it to his desk and places it beside the typewriter, which is sparkling in the light from the porthole.

“You have every reason to be afraid.” He comes back, takes the tray from my hands and places it on his bunk.

“I give you my word, dear friend, that when we run out of food the first one we slaughter and slice into pieces will be you. Do you consider that a worthy ambition?”

“No, sir. But I’ll accept it.”

“Report to Captain Worlsey.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“And get that grin off your face this instant.”

“I’ll never grin again, sir.”

“Now out with you.”

A smile darts across his lips. Shackleton smiles, and in that very moment, so it seems to me, the rain stops, as if there were no longer any reason for crying, not for anything or anybody.

[...]

(pp 186-199)

In the Ice

We spend half a day sailing southward along the rim with our machines throttled back. The ice edge must run right into the middle of the Forster Passage, because with good visibility the peaks of South Thule Island and the small Cook Islands off the bow are exactly as far as those of Bristol Island, which is now behind us. Giant petrels fly back and forth between the two rock outcroppings, and seem only

mildly interested in the fact that a ship is crossing their route. Unlike the skuas, who have come to view Green as their master of ceremonies whenever he tips the kitchen waste over the bulwarks, the blue-gray giants skim towards us just over the surface, sail through the rigging while we lower our heads, and then fly away as if we didn't exist, completely unconcerned with strange birds like us. Sometimes the sea and the ice edge shimmer in the rosiest red, indicating a passing swarm of krill. Often weighing several hundred thousand tons, these schools of tiny crustaceans all swimming in the same direction are what attract the petrels. And I can bet, so Bob Clark informs me with a sinister voice, that just as the birds are pecking on the krill from above, the whales are regaling themselves below.

The barrier has opened at many points, forming leads that would accommodate the *Endurance*, a few even wide enough for the ship to turn around in case it could go no further. But because the edge is moving south, Shackleton gave the order not to sail into the ice. He and Wild take turns spelling each other in the crow's nest, keeping lookout until the midnight darkness, which only lasts an hour, in case the floe changes course. But even in the twilit night, when I start from my sleep every two hours, I cock my ears and hear the engines pounding away quietly and evenly, as the *Endurance* makes slow speed ahead, just as if it were running before the fishing trows up the River Severn towards Newport early in the morning.

The next morning we find the ice has shifted. Now the barrier is drifting northwestward in a wide bow. We follow the edge until noon, to determine whether it's going to change direction again, but then Worsley calls to heave to, and we come about and look for a suitable opening. Finally Frank Wild spots a lead from the crow's nest over three ship's breadths wide. As far we can see it shows no noticeable narrowing, so this may turn out to be a canal between two otherwise undamaged floes. An enormous ice sheet, a white lunar landscape stretching over untold kilometers, which measures its age in years if not decades, must have broken up at some point right along this southward running line.

Sir Ernest gives the command for full speed to the captain and the captain passes it on to First Mate Greenstreet while the entire crew down to the stokers assembles on the foredeck. Every man is peering over the bowsprit, following the blackish-blue wedge pressing into the white flatness, until it finally loses itself as a

hair-thin thread on the horizon.

Only I turn and look back over Bakewell's shoulder, out to the open sea. But by the time I make my way after it has completely disappeared, and with it the swishing of the wind sweeping over the waves and the thunder of the surf pounding ice edge. Because from here on we are surrounded by nothing but ice. And it seems to me, as I cling to the frozen rail, as if I were standing not at the stern of our ship but at the stern of time.

I had imagined that once in the ice it would be quiet. But that's not true. The ice is constantly in motion. Where the floes haven't squashed together and formed towers, they are between one and two meters thick. When a swell from below causes two sheets to collide, the first thing you hear is the dull thud of the impact, followed by prolonged gnashing as the sheets grate against each other. Exactly how much noise there is I realize a few hours later, when we enter an ice-free basin as big as a middle-sized lake, and everything is completely silent, especially since we've cut off the engines so Stevenson and Holness can recover a bit from slaving away at the boilers. We rush south under full sail, and while the deckhands make a sport of climbing further and further out over the bow on the jib-boom, each taking turns to shout back and declare an arm, a hand, a finger as the southernmost body part on earth, I take advantage of the peaceful day in the pack ice lagoon. In Weddell's *Voyage towards the South Pole in the Years 1822-24* I learn what the captain of the *Jane* had to say about the 'stinkers' – which is what he called the giant petrels--as he watched a single flock "devour some ten tons of elephant seal blubber within a few hours."

But the time for relaxation is over. By evening we've crossed the lake in the ice and a great scraping noise that's rising and falling from all sides announces a large field of drift ice. Exactly how large we discover after two days of such a racket it sounded as though we were sailing through gravel, no matter where you try to escape on board to read or simply discreetly stop your ears.

During the week before Christmas, between the 60th and 65th parallels, we pass a fleet of gigantic icebergs, keeping a respectable distance. Some of the bergs are several square kilometers in area, all are over a hundred meters high and completely flat, so that I can see with my own eyes how in the past even the most experienced navigators and geologists believed they had discovered land which, though carefully

charted on the maps, no human ever found again. Seemingly motionless, these tabular icebergs drift to sea, the swells breaking against their white or blue crags and the waves spouting like surf hitting a reef. In some of them the ocean has burrowed tunnels and carved deep caverns you cannot see into, and each breaking wave sends echoes roaring through the night-blue chambers. In the water you make out the shadow of the berg, but you can never be sure whether this dark field reaching up to the ship isn't part of its hidden underwater shelf enclosing a packed mass of ice and scree that swims silently through the sea. "Wrecks from a world destroyed" were what Forster called the Antarctic icebergs. Every time one passes, we breathe a sigh of relief and then listen reassured for a long time to the raw clapping of the waves against the pliable, undulating pack ice.

The days pass by as we look for fissures and leads we might be able to force our way through--and the constantly sobering realization that even the broadest passage is ultimately going to end at a barrier where we either have to turn around to look elsewhere, or else make the next leg with endless, nerve-racking pulling back and ramming ahead. Since that glorious day on the lagoon, the sails, which are useless for ice breaking, have not been taken out of their lockers. We are sailing exclusively under steam, which means that every free man, be he officer, scientist, or Jack Tar, is assigned to shovel coal. And in this way the battering action proceeds—all calculated down to the meter--lifting our bow onto the ice, until it glides back and is steered anew against the squashed and broken spot in the ice, with the result that half of the coal from McNeish's bunker has already been consumed, despite the fact we have yet to cross the Antarctic Circle.

Shackleton had wanted to be moored in Vahsel Bay by the end of December. He had planned to celebrate New Year's in one of the first finished huts. But by Christmas morning we were 500 kilometers away from the entrance to the Weddell Sea, and then we had to cross half of that sea, and no one knowing how much ice was waiting for us there. With his usual sobriety, which refuses to make allowances for anything akin to a festive mood, Greenstreet makes his calculations by candlelight in the decorated Ritz: based on our current daily average of 50 kilometers, we should expect to reach Vahsel by the end of January. We all realize that Greenstreet is only trying to keep our spirits up in his own stiff way. But that doesn't change at all the fact that his

calculation, which affects every one of us, is incorrect: by the end of January our daily performance will be nowhere near what it has been thus far—since by the end of January the southern half of the Weddell Sea is frozen.

Still, despite adequate grounds for concern, in order not to dampen the occasion, Shackleton divides the pack ice watch into one-hour shifts, so that each man may celebrate and enjoy his allotted holiday meal. We wish long life to the royal couple, drink the health of our comrades in the war, and sing. The men pass the menu back and forth above the overturned tablecloth—a bill of fare I devised with our resident specialist in things Epicurean, Dr. James A. McIlroy. Come to think of it, it's the first thing I have penned since my unsuccessful hymn to Ennid's limp.

A Christmas Menu

Aboard His Majesty's unfrozen steamer-sailer Endurance

Appetizer

Skillygolee (oat gruel) or

Diced cracker (softened hard tack, salted)

Entrée

On a bed of carrots, parsley, mangels, and onions

Roasted fork-tailed swallow (pork) or

Emperor Penguin a la Berlin (pork) or

Small deer (rat)

Dessert

Hard Nails (hardtack and salt meat) or

Soft Nails (White bread and butter – officers only!)

The actual holiday meal comes from cans: turtle soup, fried fish, braised rabbit, Christmas plum pudding, mince pie, and candied fruit. *Madame Butterfly*, as interpreted by Orde-Lee's gramophone, plays in the background with a few fits and starts until it is forgotten, and even Crean's well-intentioned suggestion that I regale everyone with tales of Cook unfortunately falls on deaf ears, thanks to the popping flash of Hurley's cameras. What's more I'm certain they would have listened with

avid interest: James Cook in Tahiti, his men giddy with love at the sight of the island beauties, who in exchange for their enthusiastic willingness asked for nothing more than nails—a situation that threatened to unravel the proud *Endeavour's* entire enterprise.

I take my pack ice watch in the dark hour between midnight and 1:00 AM. For a long while I stand on deck alone, listening to the ice. When, inside the Ritz, Uzbird gives everyone a break from his melancholy banjo and Worsley and Bakewell temporarily run out of shanties, I can hear the grunting and groaning of the floes. Now and then it really sounds as if there was a barn in that unending darkness, where my father has set up the kind of small workshop he once owned—just for fun, for a bit of sawing and filing after work.

Clark comes aloft and joins me. Tipsy as he is, and with a Scots accent the likes of which I've never heard from him, he tells about his favorite ice animals, the macaroni penguins. We stare up at the Christmas sky, where Canopus is twinkling over Hydrus' ribbon of stars, and Clark tells me he hopes he'll be able to show me a colony of macaroni penguins sometime.

“Soon as I laid eyes on one,” he says, his speech slightly slurred, “their coloration seemed to be an answer to all the questions that ever mattered to me. And I'm not thinking about the gold on those funny crests that make them look like they had a straw bouquet stuck on their heads. No, it's the black and white feathers that get me, truth is you can find every color there you ever imagined, and each one of those birds has a different—well I don't know if that does anything for you. But that's the way I feel about it.”

I don't think I understand what Clark is trying to tell me, but because I'm not sure, I say: “Yes it does. I think I know what you mean.”

To which Clark says: “Right. That's why I told it to you. I can see why Sir Ernest takes such a liking to you. You're special. You don't ask yourself what more you know about a horse after they taught you that's it's equus in Latin.”

A long and complicated sentence, but he manages to get it out.

“Thanks, Clark.”

“In any case I hope we even get a chance to look at a colony together sometime. You know it just occurs to me... the macaroni penguins have another

claim to fame. You'll laugh when you hear their call. It honestly sounds like they're calling me. That's no joke! Really they call: Clark-Clark! Clark-Clark!"

On New Year's morning I fulfill a wish I've kept as secret as Ennid's fish, ever since I was freed from the locker: I climb up the mainmast rigging and clamber into the crow's nest.

Up there you can't hear anything except the wind whistling through the topmast and yardarms. And despite the warming freedom from care one feels when one is 30 meters closer than anyone else to the magnificence of a vacant heaven, it's still damned cold. To keep from freezing into a panting extension of the iced-over main-royal yard, I flail my light blue grego around me like King Arthur did his mantle embroidered with the twenty-seven dragons. Viewed from above like this, the *Endurance* resembles a large wedge making its way through a narrow channel amidst a whole tangle of waterways. Bright spots for us are the lakes that shimmer black, blue, and silver--small ice-free patches among the floes, which still allow us to make some headway despite everything.

Below, behind the new lean-to protecting the bridge, I see the skipper, all bundled up, one hand on the engine room telegraph, the other on the semaphore McNeish constructed from the slats of the smashed-up kennel belonging to Jakes and Jones. The device, which the captain can use it to signal the constantly necessary course changes to the helmsman without having to shout himself hoarse, looks like a hand that's been broken off a tower clock. But once in a while, when I see Worsley standing there like that, resting his hand on the flat wooden surface, his head turned until Greenstreet at the helm reacts to the signal, I am reminded of my brother Dafydd standing in front of the aeroplane belonging to one-eyed Edward Mannoock, eagerly waiting to start the propeller and leap out of the way. Enchanted by the view, I doze off, dreaming of the past and imagining what might yet lie in store for us. The new year is getting off to a good start: we've made our best distance yet since reaching the pack ice—200 kilometers on a single day.

But we're still left with the old ramming back and forth. On January 6 the *Endurance* is so firmly locked in that Sir Ernest decides to give the dogs a break from their daily diet of kennel and physical exam, Spratt's Dog Cake and Lysol baths.

They're placed into their teams and taken onto the ice, where they're allowed to have a good romp. Five of them fall into the water, but are saved. After that it's another two days of heavy going until we cross the 69th parallel, where we see a blazing white stripe on the horizon of ice lighting up just before sunset, heralding our next obstacle. In the morning we pass an iceberg of such unimaginable dimensions that Shackleton christens it The Rampart Berg. Though we keep it at a distance of several ship's lengths, Wild discovers its underwater shelf and estimates that in places this runs as deep as 300 meters. But Rampart Berg also has a surprise for us that causes everyone who witnesses the moment to break out in cheers. For in its wake the endless white puzzle of ice and furrows has disappeared, leaving nothing but water—the Weddell Sea.

The sails have frozen onto the yardarm, and it takes some time for the boys to kick them free, but then they fall and after being trimmed they billow out, catching the Weddell wind, which breaks the crust off their skin, and we rush southward as if unleashed, while icy crystals rain on deck

The next day--it's the 10th of January, a Sunday—another giant iceberg comes into view, looking like the Rampart's double, and sets us in a panic, since we may again encounter ice once it has passed. But Shackleton, Worsley, and Wild consult and word of their conjectures makes the rounds. We check our position--72° 10 S, 16° 57 W—and ascertain that this is no iceberg jutting out of the bright green water: we have reached Coats Land, discovered by the *Scotia* Expedition in 1904. What we thought was an iceberg is really an icy cliff, a piece of the shelf ice edge of Queen Maud Land. Antarctica.

On January 15, which is ceremoniously declared Greenstreet Day, we are still 350 kilometers away from Vahsel Bay. We sail under the shadow of the white cliff, watching the seals jumping and diving, racing one another around our counter and plowing through the water with their muzzles like a herd of swine. But they refuse to follow us so much as a meter to the south; every one of them is heading north. The departure of the Weddell seals and the crabeaters is a sure sign that winter is approaching.

But as long as the sea is open, we sail. The following day, too, proves to be a special one, as it gives Sir Ernest the opportunity of naming not just an iceberg, but a

newly discovered strip of land. To honor the man who among all the sponsors dug deepest into his pockets, Shackleton names the glacier, which rolls in from the hinterland and ends as a steep cliff towering 600 meters above the ship, the Caird Coast. The icy surface looks bleak and forbidding, and is veined with insurmountable crevasses. No piece of the actual cliff can be seen. But the bay we reach no more than six hours later is another matter entirely. There the ice falls flat into the water, and as we heave to and motor in very close, it becomes clear why a sudden commotion breaks out by the bridge. The edge of the ice is a perfect height for landing, and the glacier's ice field lends itself for building a base station. Shackleton, Wild, Worsley and the icemen withdraw to the Ritz to confer. Even the cat is barred from entering; Worsley shoves her in my arms at the entrance to the galley. I'm not even allowed to serve them coffee. In view of the distance it would take to traverse the continent by sled from this point, Shackleton decides to attempt to sail a little farther south. In case we hit pack ice before reaching Vahsel Bay, we will return here. Worsley takes a bearing to ascertain the exact position: 76° 27 S, 28° 51W—which confirms that we managed over 200 kilometers in 24 hours. After that we set sail.

The next morning a storm comes in from the northeast, and by midday reaches hurricane strength. To escape the blizzard and because we really aren't making headway, we look for shelter in the lee of a grounded iceberg. The stokers and men on the bridge have to slave away maneuvering the ship this way and that, while the rest of the crew shovels snow off the deck and knocks off the ice, only to have it re-cover everything in a matter of minutes. The snowstorm lasts for two days with the *Endurance* hidden behind the grounded iceberg as if in the knee-hollow of a giant with a broken leg. When the hurricane blows over and we venture out, we discover that the bay is filled with pack ice in all directions, as far as the eye can see. Now it makes no difference what course we take, so we try to head further south, where a dark band is hovering over the horizon, a water sky that promises a wide open fairway. On the afternoon of January 18 we push into the ice once more. And we cover a colossal 18 kilometers in six days. This ice is completely different than everything we have encountered so far. The floes are thick and soft, and seem to consist almost entirely of snow. They rise and sink lazily in a broth of grease ice, which the colorless murky water can hardly slosh through. We're left with nothing to do except watch the sea

slowly freeze over, locking in our ship. Around midnight on January 24, Greenstreet announces that a lead is opening in the ice about fifty meters off the bow, and I can tell from his excited reaction how much Shackleton is reproaching himself for having passed up the one place where we might have landed. We set full sail and start the engines. For three hours we stand on deck, keeping ourselves warm by shouting at the coast of Vahsel Bay, a mere 40 kilometers away.

Two hours' sail through open water and we would have reached our goal. But we can't make it a stitch closer to the lead. And finally the channel freezes back up before our very eyes.

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