



Libretto

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Characters

McNish (carpenter, <i>Harry, Chippy</i>)	Tenor
Nick McNish (student)	
Volunteer A (for expedition)	
Orde-Lees (stores)	
Shackleton (<i>The Boss</i>)	Baritone
Hurley (photographer)	
Worsley (captain, <i>Skipper, Wuzzles</i>)	Baritone
McIlroy (surgeon)	
Tom (contemporary scientist)	
Wild (Shackleton's number 2, <i>Frank</i>)	Tenor
Roald (contemporary scientist)	
Thoralf Sorll (whaling Station Manager)	
Crean (second in command)	
Blackborow (stowaway, <i>Perce</i>)	Actor
Sven (contemporary scientist)	
Conrad Anker (contemporary climber)	
Volunteer B (for expedition)	
Mrs Chippy (a male ship's cat)	Puppets

Ensemble

Keyboard
French Horn
Percussion including vibraphone
theremin, wind machine, tubular bells, tam tam
SCENE 1: PROLOGUE

SCENE 2: THE BONES OF A CAT

- SCENE 3: SHACKLETON'S LECTURE
- SCENE 4: MCNISH AND THE CAT
- SCENE 5: RECRUITING
- SCENE 6: BLACKBOROW AND BUENOS AIRES
- SCENE 7: STOWAWAY
- SCENE 8: SORLLE AT THE WHALING STATION
- SCENE 9: ICE-BOUND
- SCENE 10: THE ENDURANCE BREAKS UP
- SCENE 11: DEATH OF MRS CHIPPY
- SCENE 12: MUTINY
- SCENE 13: DIARIES AND DOGS
- SCENE 14: JOURNEY TO ELEPHANT ISLAND
- SCENE 15: ELEPHANT ISLAND
- SCENE 16: FOOD AND FROSTBITE
- SCENE 17: THE JAMES CAIRD
- SCENE 18: CROSSING SOUTH GEORGIA
- SCENE 19: STROMNESS
- SCENE 20: EPILOGUE

SCENE 1: PROLOGUE

McNish looks worn out. He's at the end of his life.

McNish **They say that cats have nine lives
Well this cat certainly had some.**

**Mrs Chippy wasn't a girl cat
But a boy cat named after me,
A carpenter called Chippy.**

**Mrs Chippy was my cat.
I'm McNish. Harry McNish.**

McNish takes off his jacket and reveals a T shirt and modern clothes.

SCENE 2: THE BONES OF A CAT

The RRS James Clark Ross, Weddell Sea, Antarctica, March 15th 2015

Roald and Tom are two scientists inside (wearing t shirts) and Sven is outside on deck (in full thick winter gear) drilling into the seabed. A core sediment sample is about to be produced, while inside the men look at a screen that shows the ocean floor revealed on a map. There is the sound of pings: echoes are sent to and return from the ocean floor.

Meanwhile Nick McNish, a student, is learning the ropes, touching things he shouldn't and getting in the way

Roald **What was your name again?**

Nick **Nick McNish. I'm a student from Scotland.**

Roald **And who did you say you were related to?**

Nick **Harry McNish. Shackleton's carpenter...**

Tom **Harry McNish!**

Roald/Tom *laughing. This is like a familiar song to them*
**McNish. McNish. Harry McNish!
Carpenter! Chippy! Hero!
Went south with the Boss
And thought all was lost
In the world of minus zero.
McNish. McNish. McNish.**

Nick **Actually. I don't think minus zero exists as a scientific term.**

Roald and Tom look at each other in despair.

There is the sound of another ping

Roald **Look at this Nicky McNish,
Relative of Harry McNish...**

Roald/Tom **McNish. McNish. Harry McNish!
Carpenter! Chippy! Hero!**

Roald **This is how we make maps,
Maps of the ocean bed.
We send down a beam...
Sound of a ping...
Down through the sea.
The echo comes back
And shows us how deep's
The ocean under our feet.
Sound of another ping...
251 metres...**

Tom **McNish. McNish. McNish!
Scotland's finest student!
Look out through the window. What do you see?**

Nick **Ice?**

Roald **Yes but how much ice?**

Nick **Well, lots and lots of ice.
And a little bit of rock in the distance.**

Tom **This time last year
That bit of rock wasn't even there.
It was covered with ice...**

Roald **... and colony of gentoo penguins...**

Tom **... and one very angry leopard seal.**

*He holds up a bandaged hand. We see a picture of the seal about to
attack... Animation through the following*

**This is the Larsen Ice Shelf.
Look how it's changed in 25 years.
Do you see how the ice has melted away?
Do you know why?**

Nick **I think I do...**

Roald *Shouting as if through the window. Sven is in his own world, nodding
along to an ipod*

Sven! Do you have the core sample yet?

Sven takes off his ear muffs. Roald repeats.

Do you have the core sample yet?

Sven *Shouting back.* **Yup. Last few metres!**

Sven opens the door. There's a rush of wind. The core sample is produced. They look closely at the sample.

There is something at the top that is strange.

Roald **Odd. That's a bone I think.
Not the bone of a fish.
And not from a whale.**

Tom **More like the tail
Of a very small beast,
But not in the least
Like a seal pup
Or a penguin chick,
A bit too thick for that.
More like a...**

Roald **... puppy?**

Tom **Or like a...**

Roald **... rabbit?**

Sven *Spoken* **Or maybe a rat?**

Nick *Spoken* **Or a cat?**

There is a sound: as if of the cat.

SCENE 3: SHACKLETON'S LECTURE

New York, February 12th 1913

Shackleton is in the middle of a lecture. There is a large map of the Antarctic and Shackleton has a long stick as a pointer

Shackleton **Ladies and Gentlemen. While Mr Amundsen of Norway was the first to reach the South Pole little more than a year ago, we still await news of the fate of my friend and colleague Captain Scott. We trust he will return to us soon. Antarctica remains however a place of majesty and mystery, awaiting the exploration of its unknown regions...**

Wild rushes in with a telegram.

Please! Not now! *Wild insists... murmurs in*

Shackleton's ear

I do beg your pardon. *Shackleton reads*

This telegram informs me Captain Scott is dead.

He died trying to conquer the South Pole.

A moment's silence please. *A moment's silence*

It is my desire to return to the Antarctic,

And cross the continent

From the Weddell Sea to the Ross Sea:

1800 miles by land over snow and ice.

Wild

A feat of unparalleled audacity. *Wild points to the map.*

Shackleton

I humbly beg your support for

The Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition.

I need money and I need a crew.

Volunteers? I need volunteers.

Nmes please to my colleague Mr Wild.

Flyers are handed out to the audience which read

MEN WANTED FOR HAZARDOUS JOURNEY.

LOW WAGES, BITTER COLD,

LONG HOURS OF COMPLETE DARKNESS.

CONSTANT DANGER,

SAFE RETURN DOUBTFUL.

HONOUR AND RECOGNITION IN EVENT OF SUCCESS

Hands go up... a few names are taken

SCENE 4: MCNISH AND THE CAT

Scotland, March 20th, 1914

Harry McNish is working on some carpentry.

A newspaper is thrown his way. He opens it and reads.

McNish

'Men wanted for a hazadous journey.

Low wages. Bitter cold.

Long hours of complete darkness.

Constant danger.'

That has my name written all over it!

The cat appears and nuzzles him.

Shall we go south to the Pole and the cold Mrs Chippy?

With fur like yours you'll never freeze!

I'll be the carpenter and you'll be the cat!

The cat looks confused.

The ship's cat!

SCENE 5: RECRUITING

Burlington Street, London, March 30^h 1914

*Shackleton and Wild are together interviewing candidates.
McNish hovers in the background, with the cat*

Shackleton **Next!**

Volunteer A **I love it when it snows – it's so pretty!**

Shackleton and Wild look at each other... etc

Shackleton **Next!**

Volunteer B *Spoken* **Mummy always said what a terribly brave little boy I was!**

Shackleton **I'm sure you are Sir. Your point being?**

Volunteer B *Spoken* **I've always loved adventures,
And it would be just bliss to cross Africa**

Wild **Antarctica!**

Shackleton **Next!**

Volunteer A **Eskimos, igloos and all that.**

Wild **They live in the Arctic**

Volunteer A **Who?**

Wild **Eskimos live in the Arctic. *The penny drops*
That's the North Pole not the South.**

Shackleton **Next!**

Volunteer B *Spoken.* **Anything's better than prison.**

Shackleton **Next!**

Worsley **I had a dream...**

Shackleton/
Wild *Exasperated.* **Next!**

Worsley **Wait. Please!**
We see an iceberg floating down a street on film
I had a dream of icebergs

**Floating down Burlington Street.
So I had to go and look,
And there was your name on the door!**

Hands Shackleton his papers

Shackleton *Looking at the papers.*
Captain Frank Worsley.

Worsley **Navigator, ship's captain, plenty of experience.**

Shackleton *Thinks for a moment and follows his hunch.*
You'll do.
Pointing to the cast and members of the audience as if they are the crew. All quite fast...
**Gentlemen. This is my crew.
Worsley here's the skipper,
Frank Wild's my number 2,
Tom Crean the second officer,
Stores are Captain Orde-Lees
And Charlie Green's the cook,
Macklin and McIlroy are the surgeons,
And 69 dogs for the sledges.**
To the audience.
**And you'll be the rest of the crew.
26 of the bravest men in England.**
McNish coughs
McNish will be the carpenter
McNish coughs again
**And Mrs Chippy here
Will be the ship's cat.**

McNish **Beg your pardon, Sir. She's a he, Sir!**

Shackleton **The ship will be called... The Endurance!**

All **The Endurance!**

Photograph taken by a child and the men freeze

SCENE 6: BLACKBOROW AND BUENOS AIRES

The docks, Buenos Aires, Argentina, October 26th 1914

*Blackborow steps forward.
The others help to create the boat.
There's another map, this time showing South America, South
Georgia, the Weddell Sea and the Antarctic*

Blackborow *Spoken. In August 1914, while these men were gathered in London, war was declared. Sir Ernest offered to fight but the order came to continue. There was one word: 'Proceed'.*

Telegram given by a child, which the men look at

Queen Alexandra gave them a bible.

Bible presented by a child

And the King sent a Union Jack.

Flag presented by a child: and the men move off

Imagine this. You're a boy from Wales, you've just been shipwrecked far away in South America and you're penniless.

So there I was, desperate for a job, when this beautiful boat turns up in Buenos Aires. It was bound for South Georgia and then the Antarctic. Built by a Norwegian called Ole Larsen it was made for speed and for ice, or so we thought.

The other 4 men are now in position on the boat

The trouble was they didn't want me. Too young and too green they said. But I would have worked for nothing, and I reckoned they could do with a Welsh lad with a bit of common sense between his ears, so I decided to sneak on board and hide. I'm Perce by the way, Perce Blackborow. Quiet now!

He clambers into a shape, covers himself with oil skins, and the cat sits on top of him.

SCENE 7: STOWAWAY

At sea, bound for South Georgia, November 4th 1914

Worsley is using a sextant, Wild is holding the wheel, McNish is doing some carpentry, while Shackleton looks at maps, smoking a pipe

Shackleton **How many miles, Skipper?**

Worsley **Less than one hundred now Boss.**

Shackleton **Never been good with a sextant myself. Glad someone knows how to use one.**

Worsley **A sextant's easy enough Boss. You measure the angle between two objects...**

- Shackleton **Yes Worsley, I know that much!**
- Worsley **You look at the horizon through this mirror,
The sun or the stars through this one,
And calculate...**
- Shackleton **I'm not an idiot Worsley!**
There's a noise
Did anyone hear anything?
- McNish **It's just Mrs Chippy.**

There's another noise
- Wild **Shhh! Slowly lifting the tarpaulin and then jumps in surprise.**
That's a big cat! Get out of there!
Boss, look what I've found.
A very big cat indeed!
- Shackleton *Furious.* **A stowaway is it?**
What the devil are you doing?
Do you have any idea what kind of voyage this is?
If things get tough and the men get hungry
A stowaway's the first thing they'll eat!
- Blackborow *Spoken.* **Looks like there's more meat on you Sir!**
- Wild **What did you say?**

Frightened pause, then Shackleton smiles and all laugh
- Shackleton *Spoken.* **Right, we can't go back,**
So you'd better get to work. You can start with these.
Hands him a pot of potatoes and a peeler.
To the audience. **One of the crew will help.**

A volunteer joins. The cat sits and watches.

Shackleton and McNish and everyone sing
- All (kids) **Standing on the deck**
Of a boat heading south
Leaning on the rails
As we make for the sea
Waiting to meet the pack
Made of ice that's white and blue
Trying not to think about
What will happen when we do!

**Larsen's boat
Last of its kind**

**Looking for the land beyond the sea
Waiting for the sight
Of the far polar shore
Praying you don't fall in
In two minutes you'll be dead
Trying not to think about
What will happen in the end!**

**Larsen's boat
Last of its kind**

Shackleton and McNish continue to hum as the scene changes to the whaling station at South Georgia

SCENE 8: SORLLE AT THE WHALING STATION

Grytviken Whaling Station, South Georgia, December 5th 1914

We see the outline of the whaling station. Smoke comes out of a chimney. We meet Thoralf Sorlle, the factory manager and clearly an old friend of Shackleton. They share a drink together and are merry.

Shackleton **How do you live with the smell of whale meat?**

Sorlle **How do you live with the smell of your crew?**

Sorlle/
Shackleton **You get used to it! Both laugh. Looking at the sea**

Sorlle **You really are set on this journey?**

Shackleton **Never been surer of anything in my life.**

Sorlle **The ice is unusually thick
For this time of year.
Why don't you stay for a bit?
Wait for the weather to clear?**

Shackleton **I'm not scared of ice.**

Sorlle **Yes but think of the terrible price you'll pay if you fail!**

Shackleton **We won't fail!
Give me a ton of blubber for the dogs
And some coal to finish the job
Of getting from here to the bay in 21 days.**

Sorlle **I'm glad I only kill whales for a living!**

Shackleton **See you in a few months.**

Sorlle *To himself. I doubt it. Smokes his pipe as Shackleton leaves.
Calling to him. Don't get stuck in the ice!*

SCENE 9: ICE-BOUND

Weddell Sea, January 24th 1915

*The wind howls. The men and Mrs Chippy are on the boat and run
from one side to the other, looking at the ice*

*Worsley draws a line on the map to show how far they have come and
the fact that they have stopped while Blackborow speaks*

Blackborow *Spoken. 50 days at sea and now we're stuck!*

McNish *Spoken to Mrs Chippy.*

Frozen like an almond in a chocolate bar!

4 men + children

Sung

Stuck fast. Stuck in the ice.

Stuck in the sea we'll never get free of the ice.

Icebergs and humpbacks and finners and blues

The killer whales, kings and long-tailed gentoos

Roam with the leopards wherever they like

While we're stuck fast! Stuck in the ice!

Worsley *He has binoculars.*

Look! There's a gap.

Wild *Taking the binoculars. A gap in the ice over there.*

Shackleton **Onto the ice, men.**

Take saws and axes.

Hack away till there's a channel free.

*The men go into the audience with saws and poles, get help, and
desperately start to cut a path through the ice*

4 men + children

Stuck fast. Stuck in the ice.

Stuck in the sea we'll never get free of the ice.

Stuck fast. Stuck in the ice.

Stuck in the sea we'll never get free of the ice.

Crabeaters, furs and elephant seals,

The emperors and chinstraps and adélies

**Roam with the leopards wherever they like
While we're stuck fast! Stuck in the ice!**

They try again and fail

Worsley **It's no use. Mind and muscle are no match for the ice when it's in a foul mood.**

McNish **What did I tell you Mrs Chippy?**

SCENE 10: THE ENDURANCE BREAKS UP

The Endurance, July to October, 1915

Shackleton **Right! This is where we will stay for the winter. Let's make the best of it.**

Wild **We'll call it The Ritz!**

The men change the set so it seems snug. The men eat.

McNish **The sweet vocal chords of Signor Caruso!** *McNish puts a record on a phonograph which plays La donna e mobile*

Blackborow **No, you can't join in Mrs Chippy!**

One of the crew plays banjo along with it.

At the same time Worsley shows pictures of trips to distant places (Java). Others laugh, clap etc.

Blackborow appears wearing a dress and holding Mrs Chippy.

This is all interrupted by the sound of a creak, then another creak, then another louder bang.

The sound builds until we are in the throes of a full-scale blizzard. The men shout at each other to secure things which move and roll across the stage (ie with the help of the Stage Manager)

Shackleton *Overlapping...* **No need to panic – it's just the ice moving.**

McNish **There's water coming into the forward hold!**

Worsley **The engine room's flooding!**

5 men **Wood splitting
Noise crashing
Splinter smashing
Water rushing**

Wild	We're being crushed from both sides!
Worsley	Look after the dogs on deck!
Wild	Look to the main mast!
5 men	Wood splitting Noise crashing Splinter smashing Water rushing
Worsley	The floor plates are buckling!
Wild	Lash down the fittings!
Worsley	Extinguish the fires!
5 men	Wood splitting Noise crashing Splinter smashing Water rushing
5 men	Wood splitting Noise crashing Splinter smashing Water rushing
Shackleton	Pump out the water. Chippy, hold back the water!
McNish	There's nothing I can do Boss!
Shackleton	Build something – you're a carpenter aren't you?
	<i>Suddenly the sound stops</i>
Blackborow	<i>Spoken.</i> What the devil?
	<i>The men and Mrs Chippy look to one side, where they see and hear a group of Emperor penguins (film)</i>
Blackborow	<i>Spoken.</i> Emperor penguins! <i>The penguins make an unearthly sound.</i>
	<i>Suddenly the huge crushing sound begins again</i>
Wild	<i>Spoken.</i> She's going boys, it's time to get off!
Shackleton	<i>Spoken.</i> Make sure everyone's safe! Get the dogs!
McNish	<i>Spoken.</i> And Mrs Chippy!

Everyone moves fast... We see the boat partly break up (though not completely)

SCENE 11: DEATH OF MRS CHIPPY

On the ice. Ocean Camp, October 26th 1915

- Shackleton *Spoken quietly.*
There are stores 346 miles northwest on Paulet Island. We will drag the lifeboats over the ice, along with all other essentials.
- Wild *Spoken* **That means you can keep the clothes on your back, two pairs of mittens, six pairs of socks, a pound of tobacco, and two pounds of personal gear.**
- Shackleton *Spoken* **You must get rid of everything that is not absolutely vital.**
He takes out gold cigarette case along with gold coins and throws them into the snow. The others look and then start to throw away things they don't need. An axe, a timepiece, a pair of glasses, books...
- Shackleton *Sung to McNish*
Sorry Chippy. The cat.
We can't take her.
We can't feed her,
And the dogs would kill her.
- McNish **Mrs Chippy, Sir, is a he, Sir.**
He can have my rations.
I'll keep him away from the dogs.
He'll be no trouble Sir.
- Shackleton *Trying to take the cat from him.*
That's an order McNish!
- McNish **Please Sir, Mrs Chippy has been with me**
Since he was a kitten
- Shackleton *Taking the cat from him.*
I said that's an order McNish!
Frank, take care of her.
- McNish/
Blackborow **Him!!**
He gives the cat to Wild who takes it off and kills it though we don't hear or see anything – just the noise of the ice and the wind.
- Wild **Ok chaps, cheer up. Let's move off.**
We'll be there in no time at all.

All men and children

The men start to move off 3 times with increasing effort and frustration

**46 miles takes only a while!
Then 300 more to Paulet Isle!
Let's travel in style to Paulet Isle!**

**46 miles takes only a while!
Then 300 more to Paulet Isle!
Let's travel in style to Paulet Isle!**

**46 miles takes only a while!
Then 300 more to Paulet Isle!
Let's travel in style to Paulet Isle!**

Wild *Spoken. Back to the camp.*

Shackleton *Sung The ice ridges are too big for us.
Let's wait for the weather to change.*

Worsley *Spoken The ice floe will move us nearer the island soon enough.*

Blackborow *Scene changes again through this.
Spoken For the next few months we settled into a routine, hunting seals and the occasional penguin – luckily there were enough of them. Cooking, eating. The dogs were fed first. We hear the sound of barking. You get used to seal meat you know, and even the smell of whale blubber, which is what we used for the fire, though it made our faces filthy. After supper we would read to each other out loud. The Boss had a favourite poem...*

Shackleton *Spoken. The trails of the world be countless.*

*Blackborow cooks through the song and the other men eat.
Worsley sings this as if reading the poem (by Robert Service, one of Shackleton's favourites). Other things could happen through this.
Shackleton takes over the singing of the song in the middle*

Worsley **One lies safe in the sunlight,
And the other is dreary and wan,**

Shackleton **Yet you look aslant at the Lone Trail,
And the Lone Trail lures you on.**

All men
join **And sometimes it leads to an Arctic trail,
Where the snow and your torn feet freeze,
And you whittle away the useless clay,
And crawl on your hands and knees.**

Blackborow looks up from the pot as the music stops

Blackborow *Spoken. **Harry, look! It's Mrs Chippy! There in the snow!***
We see the ghost cat

McNish *Spoken. **Don't be daft – what are you talking about?***

Blackborow *Spoken. **He's there, I promise! Can't you see him?***

McNish *Spoken. **I said, don't be daft!***

McNish, very annoyed, goes back to eating. Worsley is using his sextant and making calculations. He interrupts...

SCENE 12: MUTINY

Departing Ocean Camp, December 23rd 1915

Shackleton **How many miles Skipper?**

Worsley **Land 200 miles to the west Boss!**

Shackleton **We will pull the boats over the ridges of ice**
Till we come to the open sea

The men start to harness themselves up again and get ropes ready for pulling. McNish reluctantly joins them

Wild **Right chaps, pull!**

All men **Land to the west boys**
So pull boys
Boots may be wet boys
So pull boys
Blisters are blue
Pull boys pull boys pull boys
Sing with a mighty voice

Land to the west boys
So pull boys
Fingers are numb boys
So pull boys
Think of your chums
Pull boys pull boys pull boys
Sing with a mighty voice

The pulling continues until McNish shouts

McNish **Stop! This is absurd.**

Worsley **Resume your position.**

McNish **I will not. I will not. I will not!**

Worsley/Wild **Resume your position!**

McNish **The ship has gone down,
The contract I signed
Means I no longer
Need to follow orders**

Shackleton **Remember your duty McNish**

McNish **My duty is as ship's carpenter,
Not as ship's dog,
A dog that's alive
Unlike the cat you murdered.**

Shackleton **Exactly the point McNish:
You are alive!**

*The two face each other off...
The ghost of the cat appears and seems to break the tension*

Shackleton **We will stop here.
We need to think about the dogs.**

All **Yes, Boss**

SCENE 13: DIARIES AND DOGS

Patience Camp, January 1st 1916

Shackleton, McNish and Wild huddle together against the cold.

Wild plays the banjo – the start of the tune of Auld Lang Syne

The men write in their diaries. Blackborow draws a route on a map showing the changes in direction of the men on the ice floes, as they drift

Shackleton **New Year's Day, 1916. Drifting. Waiting.
Our best chance now is Elephant Island to the north**

Wild **The pack remains the same.
We are at the mercy of the wind and the currents.
Wuzzles has gone back to Ocean Camp
To see what he can rescue.**

- Worsley *Rushing back with a box and an old book (ie Vol 18 of the 1911 edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica)*
- Spoken* **Look at these treasures!**
Beef stock cubes and an Encyclopaedia!
- Wild *Looking up from his writing*
Spoken **Which volume?**
- Worsley *Spoken* **18! From medals to muscles! He goes off again**
- Wild *Spoken* **Very useful I'm sure!**
Goes back to writing
Sung **A good many of us suffer from flatulence**
And a squeaky gut: too much meat!
Too much seal!
- All men **Too many penguins! All the men belch.**
- McNish **Elephant Island seems to be where we are heading next.**
The sound of the wind is driving us mad.
I am tormented by the dreams of Mrs Chippy.
- The sound of wind is suddenly enormous and once again we see the ghost of the cat*
- Blackborow *Spoken.* **Did you see that Harry?**
McNish has seen nothing and turns away
- Through the following we see film of the dogs and sledges in the snow*
- McNish *Writing*
It seems that the dogs will be shot tomorrow.
The Boss can no longer find any use for them.
It's Wild who will do the dirty work.
- We hear the sound of the dogs barking.*
- Wild *Spoken* **Killing the dogs is the worst part of it.**
- McNish *Spoken* **The Boss is good at killing animals.**
- There's a huge cracking sound, and the men move everything from one side to the other – as the ice cracks under their feet*
- Shackleton **Into the boats! To Elephant Island!**
- All **Into the boats! To Elephant Island!**

SCENE 14: JOURNEY TO ELEPHANT ISLAND

To Elephant Island, 9th April 1916

The atmosphere is eerie. The men try not to get spooked by the weird shapes and noises around them

A storm erupts and suddenly we are at sea, and the men lurch from one side to another

There appear monstrous shadows of giant icebergs, growing in size and bearing down on them

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| Worsley | There are sixty miles as the albatross flies
Sixty miles to where a dry land lies:
Elephant Isle raise your big grey head
Bring twenty-eight men back from the dead |
| All men and children | Let the silver seas throw up their bergs
Let their icy shards do their worst:
Rip us and whip us and tear at our sails
We'll brave the storms, we will ride the whales |
| Worsley | We'll fight the monster called despair
Trust in the Boss to lead us there.
Look out for a shape that's grey and not white
A beacon to ward off endless night |
| All men and children | Let the silver seas throw up their bergs
Let their icy shards do their worst:
Rip us and whip us and tear at our sails
We'll brave the storms, we will ride the whales |
| All men | Land to the north boys
So pull boys
Boots may be wet boys
So pull boys pull boys pull boys
Blisters are blue
Pull boys pull boys pull boys
Sing with a mighty voice. |
| Blackborow | <i>Spoken.</i> I can't feel my feet Boss! |
| Shackleton | <i>Spoken.</i> Keep wiggling your toes! |
| All men | <i>Quietly</i> Land to the north boys
So pull boys
Boots may be wet boys
So pull boys pull boys pull boys |

**Blisters are blue
Pull boys pull boys pull boys
Sing with a mighty voice.**

Suddenly everything is calm as a bird flies overhead. A cliff face rises above them.

Shackleton *Spoken.* **Elephant Island. Blackborow: you're the youngest. You can have the honour to be the first ashore.**

Blackborow *Spoken.* **What about Mrs Chippy?**

Annoyed now, Shackleton pushes him out of the boat, and Blackborow falls, unable to get up. He is helped to his feet as the others climb out of the boat

SCENE 15: ELEPHANT ISLAND

Elephant Island, April 13th 1916

The 5 men stumble dazed and numb onto the beach, while the ghost of Mrs Chippy runs about, and Blackborow watches him delighted but dazed like the others

All men **If you are wondering what on earth these are,
They are circles around my eyes**

**If you are wondering what on earth these are,
They are icicles under my chin**

**If you are wondering what on earth these are
They are men who are frozen within**

Blackborow *Spoken.* **This pebble is warmer than me**

The men ask the audience to warm them up – they hold out their gloved hands for the audience to rub them warmer and so on. They get the audience to help them put up a tent as their hands are so numb, and to build a fire

Shackleton *Spoken.* **We can't stay here, we will never be found.**

McNish *Spoken.* **What do you mean we can't stay here?**

Worsley *Spoken.* **He means we must go and get help.**

Blackborow *Spoken.* **You hear that Mrs Chippy, off on our travels once more!**

Worsley *Spoken.* **Will you stop talking to that cat!**

All 4 *Spoken. Stop talking to the cat!*

Blackborow *Spoken. Sorry!*

Shackleton **He is suffering from delusions. It's frostbite.
Wrap him up warm and look after his feet.
Having a look and reeling at the sight and smell.
Might be gangrene in the left one.**

*Blackborow walks with a stick and is obviously in pain.
Shackleton, Worsley and McNish prepare the stores for the James Caird*

Shackleton **South Georgia is 800 miles,
We will sail there and get help.
As well as McNish and Worsley,
Crean, McCarthy and Vincent
Will sail with me on the James Caird.**

Worsley **Boss, I'm no coward
But you must know these are the worst seas in the world?**

Blackborow *Spoken. Boss, take Mrs Chippy with you. He will remember South
Georgia, and his instincts will lead you there.
They all look at him as if he is insane.*

Worsley *Spoken. Chippy, make the boat ship-shape will you?*

*They prepare the model of the dinghy. Blackborow puts a model cat in
the model of the dinghy. He makes the model dinghy sail off, while the
others wave in silhouette or shadow*

*The music starts loud and then gets quieter as if the boat is
disappearing...*

*Worsley, Shackleton and McNish change to become McIlroy (surgeon),
Orde-Lees and Hurley*

*McIlroy is distinguished by his little round glasses
Orde-Lees by his comic hat
Hurley by his camera*

SCENE 16: FOOD AND FROSTBITE

Elephant Island, May 1st 1916

We see images of the makeshift hut on Elephant Island.

*One of the men has a paintbrush and paints the pictures of the food
they dream of
(First stanza of the song is by Wild himself)*

Wild	My name is Frankie Wild-o; My hut's on Elephant Isle The wall's without a single brick, The roof's without a tile.
All	The only things we dream of Are pastries and strawberry jam, Apple pie and Bakewell tart, And a nice roast leg of lamb
McIlroy	
Wild	Do you like doughnuts!
McIlroy	Certainly do!
Wild	How do you like them?
McIlroy	Cold with jam!
Wild	What about omelettes?
McIlroy	Bally fine!
Wild	Though the floor is made of mud My hut's a grand old pile...
Blackborow	<i>Spoken</i> Is it now?
McIlroy	<i>Spoken</i> Let's get you onto the table.
	<i>They help him onto the table</i>
Wild	Fill the pot with snow for the water. Stoke the fire – the penguin skins will do. Orde-Lees, lend a hand!
Orde-Lees	Can't, too tired! <i>He collapses in the corner</i>
Hurley	He's always like that, damn him. I'll help.
McIlroy	Be brave, there's a good fellow. Breathe deeply. <i>He breathes into a gauze of chloroform</i>
	Pass me the forceps. <i>Wild takes them out of boiling water</i> Peel back the skin... One snip here... <i>There is a clatter as the toe falls into a metal tin</i> Another here <i>Another clatter as the toe falls into a metal tin</i> And another...

Another clatter...

**Scrape back the dead flesh... stitch it up...
All done. The patient can wake up now.**

Blackborow wakes up groggily

Blackborow *Spoken. Can I have a cigarette Frankie?*
Wild gives him a cigarette

Wild *Spoken. It's very bad for you Perce but just this once*

McIlroy *Spoken. Right, no point wasting the water.*
Let's have a wash.
The men wash...

Orde-Lees *Spoken. Well done Perce. Any chance of your ciggy, Perce?*
Blackborow shakes his head as if to say I'd rather not.
What about this: Give me your cigarette and you can have my hat
Blackborow shakes his head
Or this bit of rock – Look how nice it is!
Blackborow shakes his head once more

*McIlroy, Orde-Lees and Hurley go – they change back to Worsley,
McNish, Crean and Shackleton*

*Wild is looking out for signs of the relief ship. Blackborow remains in
his sleeping bag.*

Blackborow *Spoken. Writing. August 20th. On the lookout for the relief ship.*
**Did Mrs Chippy lead them to the island? It's 4 months now since
they left. We must assume they are lost.**

Pause. Meanwhile...

SCENE 17: THE JAMES CAIRD

Drake Passage, 5th May 1916

Instantly dramatic as if in the middle of a storm.

*The 4 men are in the boat, Shackleton at the back with the tiller, Crean
rowing in the middle, McNish crouching, and Worsley at the front with
compass and sextant. Blackborow is at the front, invisible but
puppeting the cat*

McNish *Shouting. Where are we now?*

Worsley *Shouting. The Drake Passage! 200 miles to go!*

All **Land to the east boys**

**So pull boys
Fingers are numb boys
So pull boys
Think of your chums
Pull boys pull boys pull boys
Sing with a mighty voice.**

Crean *Shouting.* **Look out, there's a huge breaker coming!**

All **Take a breath it might be your last
Hold tight as the stormy blast
Tries to crush you, tries to drag you down
What's best? To freeze or drown?**

McNish *Shouting.* **Numb all over Boss!**
Crean *Shouting.* **Keep your spirits up lads.**
Worsley *Shouting.* **Massive wave! Look out!**
Shackleton *Shouting.* **Dead ahead. Look!**

All **Say your prayers they might be your last
Hold tight as the stormy blast
Tries to crush you, tries to drag you down
What's best? To freeze or drown?**

The men look in wonder and horror as a massive wave is about to hit them. Calm before the storm...

Shackleton **I never saw**
McNish **nor shall see**
Worsley **here or elsewhere**
Crean **till I die**
Shackleton **though I live three lives of mortal men**
McNish **or nine lives of a mortal cat**
All **so great a miracle...**

Another great crack as the huge wave breaks over them

Shackleton **Pull together and row!**

All **Pull together and row!**

Shackleton **Row!**

All **Row!**

Shackleton **Row!**

All **Row!**

A huge fireball of sound as if a massive wave hits them

Then calm. A bird flies overhead

Shackleton **A cormorant!**

Worsley **Land must be close!**

McNish **Mountains!**

Crean **South Georgia!**

All **Land to the east boys**
 So pull boys
 Fingers are numb boys
 So pull boys
 Think of your chums boys
 Pull boys pull boys pull boys
 Sing with a mighty voice.

*The men fall to their knees as if coming ashore, desperately thirsty.
 Then above them the mountains start to rise up. Higher and higher.*

SCENE 18: CROSSING SOUTH GEORGIA

Peggotty Bluff, South Georgia, 15th May 1916

McNish **Where are we?**

Worsley **The wrong side of the island that's for sure.
 Stromness is that way.**

Crean **Can we sail to the other side?**
*The cat comes to McNish's side, though he doesn't see it, and looks
 across the mountains as if pointing them in the right direction*

Shackleton **Too far. 130 miles at least.
 The breakers and reefs will finish us.**

McNish **Look at us – we're scarecrows! We can't walk there!**

Shackleton **Why not?**

McNish **It's never been done before.
 Look at the mountains we will have to climb!**

Shackleton **Then stay here. We will come back for you.**

Worsley, Crean and Shackleton get ready for the climb.

While they prepare the ropes and so on Conrad Anker appears. He's a professional climber and is in modern dress.

Shackleton/Worsley/Crean and Anker mimic each other's movements, but look 'polar' opposites in terms of dress and equipment

Conrad ***Spoken* All they had was 50 feet of rope, a carpenter's adze, a compass and some binoculars. They had just survived 17 days in an open dinghy on the worst seas in the world. A few years ago we copied Shackleton's crossing of the island and believe me this was an incredible climb.**

Crean **3,000 feet, fog rolling in!**

Conrad ***Spoken.* There were no maps.**

Shackleton **7 miles the wrong way!**

Conrad ***Spoken.* Lost in the fog, they turned back and began again. These guys weren't even climbers. They had no equipment to speak of, not even sleeping bags. They reached a summit.**

Worsley **At the top and no way down!**

Conrad ***Spoken.* As they looked down the precipice at the glacier on the other side there one was stark choice.**

Shackleton **Either we slide down or die!**

Conrad ***Spoken.* Shackleton threw the dice one last time.**

The men turn their ropes into toboggans and slide down the mountain in one mad rush

Shackleton/
Worsley/
Crean

***Shouting.* Snow rushing
Noise crashing
Voice screaming
Heart rushing**

They gather themselves as if to begin again.

Conrad ***Spoken.* In all my years as a professional climber I never got close to what these people were doing. They were at the edge of what was humanly possible. After 36 hours they heard a sound.**

The faint sound of a whistle

Worsley **Did you hear that?**

Shackleton **It was nothing.**

The sound of a whistle again

Worsley **There it is again!**

Conrad *Spoken.* **The whistle marked the start of the working day at the whaling station.**

Shackleton **Stromness!**

Worsley **Stromness!**

Crean **Stromness!**

SCENE 19: STROMNESS

Stromness Whaling Station, May 13th 1916

They and we see the outline of the whaling station. The three men stop and ask two children where they would find the manager

Thoralf Sorll walks by as if busy. He stops and turns round and scratches his head. He doesn't recognize them.

Sorll **Can I help you?**

Worsley *Spoken.* **Thoralf Sorlle?**

Sorlle **What's it to you?**
You could do with a wash.
I'm very busy.

Worsley **Captain Worsley.** *Offers his hand which isn't taken*

Sorlle **Worsley? Name rings a bell.**
Have you come from the mountains?
No one's ever done that.
Now please excuse me...

He turns to look at Shackleton, who has kept quiet.

Sorlle **Do I know you?**

Shackleton **You used to.**

How do you live with the smell of whale meat?

Sorlle **How do you live with the smell of your crew?**

Shackleton/
Sorlle **You get used to it!** *Both laugh. They shake hands*

Sorlle **Ernest Shackleton, I thought you were dead!**

Shackleton **No I'm not. But dirty. That's true.**
I'm afraid I am going to need your help once more.

SCENE 20: EPILOGUE

New Zealand, September 24th, 1930

McNish is whittling some wood to make a wooden Polar Medal for himself and the cat. The cat is there.

McNish **How did it end?**
I was rescued the next day.

Then the Boss hired a boat
And rescued the other men.
Not one of us perished.

Images of Chilean tug and the rescue

The Boss returned a hero
But he was worn out.
A few years later he went back
And died on South Georgia.

Image of Shackleton's grave

Most of them got a medal,
A Polar medal. Not me.
The Boss didn't like me.
Or the cat.

He picks up a photo, which is the same as the image we see of Blackborow and the cat.

Ghosts! Daft!
No time for them!

Mrs Chippy – the live version – appears.
The cat sees and stalks a mouse.
The cat catches the mouse and dangles it by its tail or holds it in his mouth.
McNish finally sees the cat, which jumps into his lap.
McNish closes his eyes.

END

