



In the memory of the oldest inhabitant no one had ever been adrift on ice in this bay, and unless the team which had gone ahead should happen to come back to look for me, there was not one chance in a thousand of my being seen.

Adrift on a Pan of Ice

SIR WILFRED GRENFELL

ON Easter Sunday, the 21st of April, 1908, it was still winter with us in northern Newfoundland. Everything was covered with snow and ice. I was returning to the hospital after morning service, when a boy came running over with the news that a large team of dogs had come from sixty miles to the southward to get a doctor to come at once on an urgent case. A fortnight before we had operated on a young man for acute bone disease of the thigh, but when he was sent home the people had allowed the wound to close, and poisoned matter had accumulated. As it seemed probable that we should have to remove the leg, there was no time to be lost, and I therefore started immediately, the messengers following me with their team.

My dogs were especially good ones and had pulled me out of many a previous scrape by their sagacity¹ and endurance. Moody, Watch, Spy, Doc, Brin, Jerry, Sue and Jack were as beautiful beasts as ever hauled a komatik² over our northern barrens. The messengers had been anxious that their team should travel

back with mine, for their animals were slow at best, and moreover were now tired from their long journey. My dogs, however, were so powerful that it was impossible to hold them back, and though I twice managed to wait for the following sledge, I had reached a village twenty miles to the south and had already fed my team when the others caught up.

That night the wind came in from sea, bringing with it both fog and rain, softening the snow and making the traveling very difficult. Besides this, a heavy sea began heaving into the bay on the shores of which lay the little hamlet where I spent my first night. Our journey the next day would be over forty miles, the first ten lying on an arm of the sea.

In order not to be separated too long from my friends I sent them ahead of me by two hours, appointing as a rendezvous the log tilt³ on the other side of the bay. As I started the first rain of the year began to fall, and I was obliged to keep on what we call the "ballicaters," or ice barricades, for a much longer distance up the bay than I had anticipated. The sea, rolling in during the previous night, had smashed the ponderous layer of surface ice right up to the landwash. Between the huge icepans were gaping chasms, while half a mile out all was clear water.

Three miles from the shore is a small island situated in the middle of the bay. This had preserved an ice bridge, so that by crossing a few cracks I managed to get to it safely. From that point it was only four miles to the opposite shore, a saving of several miles if one could make it, instead of following the landwash round the bay. Although the ice looked

1. sagacity \se-'gas-at-ē\ smartness; keen judgment.

2. komatik \kō-'mat-ik\ Eskimo sled.

3. log tilt, a lean-to made of logs.



Courtesy of the artist.

"Citadel," Rockwell Kent.

rough, it seemed good, though one could see that it had been smashed up by the incoming sea and packed in tight again by the easterly wind. Therefore, without giving the matter a second thought, I flung myself on the komatik and the dogs started for the rocky promontory some four miles distant.

All went well till we were within about a quarter of a mile of our objective point. Then the wind dropped suddenly, and I noticed simultaneously that we were traveling over "sish" ice. By stabbing down with my whip handle, I could drive it through the thin coating of young ice which had formed on the surface. Sish ice is made up of tiny bits formed by the pounding together of the large

pan⁴ by the heavy seas. So quickly had the wind veered and come offshore, and so rapidly did the packed slob,⁵ relieved of the inward pressure of the easterly breeze, "run abroad," that already I could not see any pan larger than ten feet square. The whole field of ice was loosening so rapidly that no retreat was possible.

There was not a moment to lose. I dragged off my oiskins and threw myself on my hands and knees beside the komatik so as to give a larger base to hold, shouting at the same time to my team to make a dash for the shore. We had not

4. pan, a drifting piece of flat ice.

5. slob, usually mud. Here, mushy ice.

gone twenty yards when the dogs scented danger and hesitated, and the komatik sank instantly into the soft slob. Thus the dogs had to pull much harder, causing them to sink also.

It flashed across my mind that earlier in the year a man had been drowned in this same way by his team tangling their traces around him in the slob. I loosened my sheath knife, scrambled forward and cut the traces,⁶ retaining the leader's trace wound securely round my wrist.

As I was in the water I could not discern anything that would bear us up, but I noticed that my leading dog was wallowing near a piece of snow, packed and frozen together like a huge snowball, some twenty-five yards away. Upon this he had managed to scramble. He shook the ice and water from his shaggy coat and turned around to look for me. Perched up there out of the frigid water he seemed to think the situation the most natural in the world, and the weird black marking of his face made him appear to be grinning with satisfaction. The rest of us were bogged like flies in treacle.⁷

Gradually, I succeeded in hauling myself along by the line which was still attached to my wrist, and was nearly up to the snow raft when the leader turned adroitly round, slipped out of his harness, and once more leered at me with his grinning face.

There seemed nothing to be done, and I was beginning to feel drowsy with the cold when I noticed the trace of another dog nearby. He had fallen through close to the pan, and was now unable to force his way out. Along his line I hauled myself, using him as a kind of bow anchor, and I soon lay, with my dogs around me on the little island of slob ice.

The piece of frozen snow on which we lay was so small that it was evident we must all be drowned if we were forced to remain on it as it was driven seaward

into open water. Twenty yards away was a larger and firmer pan floating in the sish, and if we could reach it, I felt that we might postpone, for a time, the death which seemed inescapable. To my satisfaction, I now found that my hunting knife was still tied on to the back of one of the dogs, where I had attached it when we first fell through. Soon the sealskin traces hanging on the dogs' harnesses were cut and spliced together to form one long line. I divided this and fastened the ends to the backs of my two leaders, attaching the two other ends to my own wrists. My long sealskin boots, reaching to my hips, were full of ice and water, and I took them off and tied them separately to the dogs' backs. I had already lost my coat, cap, gloves and overalls.

Nothing seemed to be able to induce the dogs to move, even though I kept throwing them off the ice into the water. Perhaps it was only natural that they should struggle back, for once in the water they could see no other pan to which to swim. It flashed into my mind that my small black spaniel, which was with me, was as light as a feather and could get across with no difficulty. I showed him the direction and then flung a bit of ice toward the desired goal. Without a second's hesitation he made a dash and reached the pan safely, as the tough layer of sea ice easily carried his weight. As he lay on the white surface looking like a round black fuzzleball, my leaders could plainly see him. They now understood what I wanted and fought their way bravely toward the little "retriever," carrying with them the line that gave me yet another chance for my life. The other dogs followed them, and all

6. traces, straps.

7. treacle \ 'trē-kəl \ molasses.

but one succeeded in getting out on the new haven of refuge.

Taking all the run that the length of my little pan would afford, I made a dive, slithering along the surface as far as possible before I once again fell through. This time I had taken the precaution to tie the harnesses under the dogs' bellies so that they could not slip them off, and after a long fight I was able to drag myself on to the new pan.

Though we had been working all the while toward the shore, the offshore wind had driven us a hundred yards farther seaward. On close examination I found that the pan on which we were resting was not ice at all, but snow-covered slob, frozen into a mass which would certainly eventually break up in the heavy sea, which was momentarily increasing as the ice drove offshore before the wind. The westerly wind kept on rising — a bitter blast with us in winter, coming as it does over the Gulf ice.

Some yards away I could still see my komatik with my thermos bottle and warm clothing on it, as well as matches and wood. In the memory of the oldest inhabitant no one had ever been adrift on ice in this bay, and unless the team which had gone ahead should happen to come back to look for me, there was not one chance in a thousand of my being seen.

To protect myself from freezing I now cut down my long boots as far as the feet, and made a kind of jacket, which shielded my back from the rising wind.

By midday I had passed the island to which I had crossed on the ice bridge. The bridge was gone, so that if I did succeed in reaching that island I should only be marooned there and die of starvation. Five miles away to the north side of the bay the immense pans of Arctic ice were surging to and fro in the ground seas and thundering against the cliffs.

No boat could have lived through such surf, even if I had been seen from that quarter. Though it was hardly safe to move about on my little pan, I saw that I must have the skins of some of my dogs, if I were to live the night out without freezing. With some difficulty I now succeeded in killing three of my dogs — and I envied those dead beasts whose troubles were over so quickly. I questioned if, once I passed into the open sea, it would not be better to use my trusty knife on myself than to die by inches.

But the necessity for work saved me from undue philosophizing; and night found me ten miles on my seaward voyage, with the three dogs skinned and their fur wrapped round me as a coat. I also frayed a small piece of rope into oakum, and mixed it with the fat from the intestines of my dogs. But, alas, I found that the matches in my box, which was always chained to me, were soaked to a pulp and quite useless. Had I been able to make a fire out there at sea, it would have looked so uncanny that I felt sure that the fishermen friends, whose tiny light I could just discern twinkling away in the bay, would see it. The carcasses of my dogs I piled up to make a windbreak, and at intervals I took off my clothes, wrung them out, swung them in the wind, and put on first one and then the other inside, hoping that the heat of my body would thus dry them. My feet gave me the most trouble, as the mooccasins were so easily soaked through in the snow. But I had heard of the way in which the Lapps carried grass with them, to use in their boots in place of dry socks. As soon as I could sit down, I began to unravel the ropes from the dogs' harnesses, and although by this time my fingers were more or less frozen, I managed to stuff the oakum into my shoes.

Shortly before I had opened a box containing some old football clothes which I had not seen for twenty years. I was wearing this costume at the time; and though my cap, coat, and gloves were gone, as I stood there in a pair of my old Oxford University running shorts, and red, yellow, and black Richmond football stockings, and a flannel shirt, I remembered involuntarily the little dying girl who asked to be dressed in her Sunday frock that she might arrive in heaven properly attired.

Forcing my biggest dog to lie down, I cuddled up close to him, drew the improvised dogskin rug over me, and proceeded to go to sleep. One hand, being against the dog, was warm, but the other was frozen, and about midnight I woke up shivering enough, so I thought, to shatter my frail pan to atoms. The moon was just rising, and the wind was steadily driving me toward the open sea. Suddenly what seemed a miracle happened, for the wind veered, then dropped away entirely, leaving it flat calm. I turned over and fell asleep again. I was next awakened by the sudden and persistent thought that I must have a flag, and accordingly set to work to disarticulate⁸ the frozen legs of my dead dogs. Cold as it was, I determined to sacrifice my shirt to top this rude flagpole as soon as the daylight came. When the legs were at last tied together with bits of old harness rope, they made the crookedest flagstaff that it has ever been my lot to see. Though with the rising of the sun the frost came out of the dogs' legs to some extent, and the friction of waving it made the odd pole almost tie itself in knots, I could raise it three or four feet above my head, which was very important.

Once or twice I thought that I could distinguish men against the distant cliffs — for I had drifted out of the bay into the

sea — but the objects turned out to be trees. Once also I thought that I saw a boat appearing and disappearing on the surface of the water, but it proved to be only a small piece of ice bobbing up and down. The rocking of my cradle on the waves had helped me to sleep, and I felt as well as I ever did in my life. I was confident that I could last another twenty-four hours if my boat would only hold out and not rot under the sun's rays. I could not help laughing at my position, standing hour after hour waving my shirt at those barren and lonely cliffs; but I can honestly say that from first to last not a single sensation of fear crossed my mind.

My own faith in the mystery of immortality is so untroubled that it now seemed almost natural to be passing to the portal of death from an ice pan. Quite unbidden, the words of the old hymn kept running through my head:

*My God, my Father, while I stray
Far from my home on life's rough way,
Oh, help me from my heart to say,
Thy will be done.*

I had laid my wooden matches out to dry and was searching about on the pan for a piece of transparent ice which I could use as a burning glass. I thought that I could make smoke enough to be seen from the land if only I could get some sort of a light. All at once I seemed to see the glitter of an oar, but I gave up the idea because I remembered that it was not water which lay between me and the land, but slob ice, and even if people had seen me, I did not imagine that they could force a boat through. The next time that I went back to my flag waving, however, the glitter was very

⁸ disarticulate \,dis-är-'tik-yə-',lat\ disjɔɪnt.

distinct, but my snow glasses having been lost, I was partially snow-blind and distrusted my vision. But at last, besides the glide of an oar, I made out the black streak of a boat's hull, and knew that if the pan held out for another hour I should be all right. The boat drew nearer and nearer, and I could make out my rescuers frantically waving. When they got close by they shouted, "Don't get excited. Keep on the pan where you are!" They were far more excited than I, and had they only known as I did the sensations of a bath in the icy water, without the chance of drying one's self afterward, they would not have expected me to wish to follow the example of the Apostle Peter.⁹

As the first man leaped on my pan and grasped my hand not a word was spoken, but I could see the emotions which he was trying to force back. A swallow of the hot tea which had been thoughtfully sent out in a bottle, the dogs hoisted on board, and we started for home, now forging along in open water, now pushing the pans apart with the oars, and now jumping out on the ice and hauling the boat over the pans.

It seems that the night before four men had been out on the headland cutting up some seals which they had killed in the fall. As they were leaving for home, my ice raft must have drifted clear of Hare Island, and one of them, with his keen fisherman's eyes, had detected something unusual on the ice. They at once returned to their village, saying that something living was adrift on the floe.¹⁰ The one man on that section of coast who owned a good spyglass jumped up from his supper on hearing the news and hurried over to the lookout on the cliffs. Dusk though it was, he saw that a man was out on the ice, and noticed him every now and again waving his hands at the shore. He imme-

diately surmised who it must be; so little as I thought it, when night was closing in, the men at the village were trying to launch a boat. Miles of ice lay between them and me, and the angry sea was hurling great blocks against the land. While I had considered myself a laughing stock, bowing with my flag at those unresponsive cliffs, many eyes were watching me.

By daybreak a fine volunteer crew had been organized, and the boat, with such a force behind it, would, I believe, have gone through anything. After seeing the heavy breakers through which we were guided, as at last we ran in at the harbor mouth, I knew well what the wives of that crew had been thinking when they saw their loved ones depart on such an errand.

Every soul in the village was waiting to shake hands as I landed and even with the grip that one after another gave me, I did not find out that my hands were badly frostburnt—a fact which I have realized since, however. I must have looked a weird object as I stepped ashore, tied up in rags, stuffed out with oakum, and wrapped in the bloody dogskins.

The news had gone over to the hospital that I was lost, so I at once started north for St. Anthony, though I must confess that I did not greatly enjoy the trip, as I had to be hauled like a log, my feet being so frozen that I could not walk. For a few days subsequently I had painful reminders of the adventure in my frozen hands and feet, which forced me to keep to my bed—an unwelcome and unusual interlude in my way of life.

9. An allusion to Matthew 14:28-31. At Christ's command, Peter walked on the water until his faith failed and he began to sink.

10. Floe, floating sheet of ice.

In our hallway stands a bronze tablet:

TO THE MEMORY OF
THREE NOBLE DOGS

MOODY
WATCH

SPY

Whose lives were given
for mine on the ice
April 21st, 1908

The boy whose life I was intent on saving was brought to the hospital a day or so later in a boat, the ice having cleared off the coast temporarily; and he was soon on the high road to recovery.

We all love life, and I was glad to have a new lease on it before me. As I went to sleep that night, there still rang through my ears the same verse of the old hymn which had been my companion on the ice pan:

*Oh, help me from my heart to say,
Thy will be done.*

I
PLAIN SENSE

A Journey Demands Fortitude

1. Why does Sir Wilfred cross the ice pans instead of going along the shore?
2. How close does he come to the far shore? What happens to the sish ice at this moment? Why does he cut his dogs free?
3. What does he do to survive the night?
4. How did his rescuers see him?
5. In one or two words describe your feeling when you finished this account.

II

IMPLICATIONS

Do you agree or disagree? Why?

1. It was cruel of Grenfell to kill three of his dogs.
2. When things begin going wrong in a journey, the person who gets through needs luck on his or her side.
3. A bad decision may trigger unexpected results.

III
READING LITERATURE

Reading with Your Senses

The action in this selection can be very simply stated. The significance lies in the reader's experiencing the same feelings and sensations as the doctor. Did this happen to you as you read? Try the following test on yourself.

1. What was the sequence that your feelings followed as the story progressed?
2. Which sense was most vividly stimulated: sight, sound, feeling?
3. Reread the two paragraphs beginning in column 2, page 485 with the words, "But the necessity for work saved me from undue philosophizing. . . ." Describe the way Dr. Grenfell must have looked as he floated on the ice pan. Now note how he creates this picture — is it by direct description or by detailing a series of actions?

IV
WORDS

Grenfell uses the word *interlude* in this way: . . . my frozen hands and feet, . . . forced me to keep to my bed—an unwelcome and unusual *interlude* in my way of life. What did he mean?

The word part *inter* adds the meaning of among or between to a word. How is such a meaning present in each of the italicized words in these sentences?

1. The reporter *interviewed* the hero.
2. Here is the schedule for *intercollegiate* football.
3. Fourth Street *intersects* Main Street.
4. Take the next *interchange* to reach that town.
5. At this point, he *interposed* a question.
6. The *interplay* of lights was beautiful.
7. In the *interim*, you can think what you are going to say.
8. The coat has a warm *interlining*.
9. She is an authority on *international* affairs.
10. Someday we may have *interplanetary* travel.