

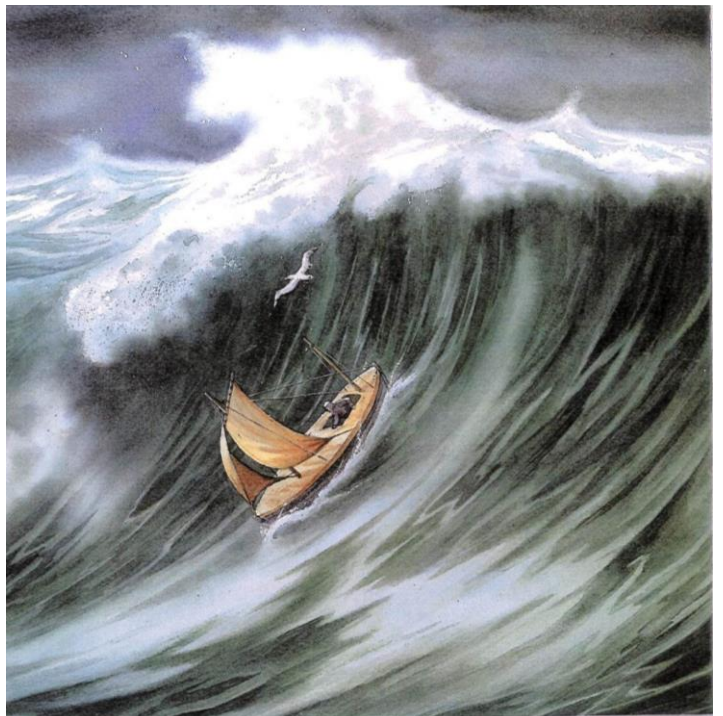
## Leaving the floe

Shackleton paced the floe as it drifted in zigzags north. Summer was almost over. The last of the dogs were shot – there wasn't enough food for them. The men sat in their ragged dirty clothes, fidgety, anxious, watching Shackleton. Their lives depended on his decisions.

At the northern edge of the pack ice the ocean swell bashed at the ice floes, breaking them up. Their floe was drifting ever closer to this treacherous border between ice and open ocean. They would have to take to the lifeboats.

Their floe heaved and tilted in the ocean swell. Bits broke off. Shackleton ordered everyone to sleep fully clothed, with boots on, ready to be out of the tents in 30 seconds. Only absolute necessities could be taken in the boats. But each man still kept hidden his own carefully hoarded treasures – a photograph, or a Bible, or a tube of toothpaste.

The floe split through the camp. It split again. All around them the ice crashed and lurched. Shackleton watched, waiting for a lead – a gap of clear water. Suddenly it came. The boats were launched, the men scrambled in and bent to the oars.



## Leaving Elephant Island

Week after week, Shackleton tried to find a way to rescue his men on Elephant Island. The whalers on South Georgia lent a ship but it couldn't get through the pack ice. Shackleton managed to borrow another ship, and another, but each time the ice won.

In a last desperate attempt, the Chilean Navy lent a little iron steamer, the *Yelcho*. Shackleton promised not to let it touch the ice. "We shall either die, or return with the shipwrecked men," wrote the Chilean commander to his father.

And this time the weather stayed fine, the pack ice moved away. The men on Elephant Island were sitting down to a stew of old seal bones when they heard a yell of "Ship!" from someone outside. The precious soup was kicked over. They tumbled out of the hut, and rushed into the rescue boat. Shackleton allowed no delay. He feared that the pack ice would blow back in, any moment. Just under an hour from arriving at the camp on the sand spit, the *Yelcho* headed out to sea again.

"I have done it," said Shackleton. "At last. Not a life lost."

It is one of the greatest stories of rescue and survival ever.

