January 19th 1915

I woke up this morning to see grim faces on all the crew. Unlike most mornings, no one was teasing me for being the last one up. I sidled up to Bakey (William Bakewell, Able Seaman) and gently enquired what was up. “Stuck.”

“Stuck? What does that mean?” I asked.

“It means we ain’t going nowhere, Percy my boy,” he replied gruffly.

This wasn’t the start I wanted to my day and explained why the rest of the crew were so glum. Over the last week, the going had been getting tougher and tougher but, whilst the crew had been grumbling, Shackleton had maintained his sunny optimism. Even he looked more contemplative than usual this morning. I may be young but I knew enough not to ask too many questions; none of them looked in the mood to be pestered by my (most probably) stupid questions.

After what seemed like an age of standing around staring out across the bleak emptiness of Antarctica, the silence was broken by the arrival of Captain Worsley and several men behind. With a loud clattering and clanging, various tools I had not seen before were dropped to the deck.

“Pick ‘em up, boys. Ice saws and picks, enough for every man. Boss says we are cutting ourselves out,” ordered Worsley.

With a whoop and a cheer, the men dived on the tools, grabbing what they could and climbed down via a rope to the ice sheet. With an energy and vigour I had not seen in them before, they set about attacking the ice from all angles. Maybe there was a way out of this!

January 24th 1915

After 5 relentless and restless days, Shackleton had called us all together on the deck.

“Men, listen up. Over the last 5 days, you have worked tirelessly and I couldn’t ask any more from you. I am so proud to have you as my crew and I will never forget the effort you have put in to try to free us. However, we are stuck. We are well and truly stuck. To continue is futile and puts at risk your health. I can’t have that on my conscience. We need to look at this situation logically. Winter is coming soon, we need to prepare the ship to survive that. When the summer next comes in 10 months’ time, the ice will melt and we will be free again. That is all.”

As soon as he walked off, it sounded like a swarm of bees had arrived as all the men talked to each other in low voices about what this meant. Bakey came and put an arm around me and reassured me that it would be alright. I realised that we starting a whole new adventure now. No longer were we on an expedition: it was only about survival.