

ACT ONE

A ship, in the Arctic.

The ship is icebound, trapped in the ice and lost in fog. A young explorer, WALTON, is looking over the rail.

The ship's MASTER comes close beside WALTON, both of them staring out into the fog.

WALTON. This isn't the Arctic sea I imagined.

MASTER. How did you imagine it?

WALTON. Never-ending sunlight.

MASTER. The sun's still there, beyond the fog.

WALTON. So our destination is still there too.

MASTER. There's a thread of warmth in the air. The ice might thaw soon. The ship might yet float free.

WALTON. Good.

MASTER. But, Captain... I don't think we can continue.

WALTON (*angry, weary*). No. I know you don't.

MASTER. To risk the ship, the men's lives... for what?

WALTON. For knowledge! We're explorers. We're mapping the very edge of human knowledge!

MASTER. To understand what?

WALTON. Our goal hasn't changed.

MASTER (*resigned*). No.

WALTON. We'll find the way to the northern top of the world, the land and sea no human creature has ever found.

(*As the MASTER doesn't respond.*) No. You don't see any value in that, do you? I'm alone here. Friendless on a frozen sea.

MASTER. The men have asked me to talk to you...

WALTON (*cutting him off*). Tell the men we're going to push ahead.

MASTER. Captain, look out there, nothing's changed! There's still nothing ahead of us but sheet ice. Fields of it. The hull hasn't been tried against ice this thick.

WALTON. *I won't turn back.*

(*Startled.*) Look! There's something out there... on the ice.

They both stare.

MASTER. What is it?

WALTON. It's... (*Uncertain, frightened.*) A man? A running man?

MASTER (*horrificed*). It's the shape of a man but... What kind of man could run like that? That fast? On a frozen sea?

WALTON (*calling*). Hullo!

MASTER (*shushing him urgently*). No! No! Don't!

WALTON. It didn't hear me...

MASTER. Did you want to see that creature turn and run at us? Oh God. Is it coming?! What is it?!

Both WALTON and the MASTER freeze with fear...

Then they are actually frozen, stopped in pose, staring out over the ice.

We hear and then see MARY, muttering and breathing with effort. She's dragging a writing desk out onto the ice. She's furious and frustrated.

MARY (*to herself*). What is it? What is it? Do you know, Mary? No. No, you don't. My brain keeps slipping from one idea to another...

This is science

WALTON (*calling*). Hullo!

MASTER (*shushing him urgently*) No! No! Don't!

WALTON. It didn't hear me...

MASTER. Did you want to see that creature turn and run at us?
Oh God. Is it coming?! What is it?!

WALTON (*peering*). It's gone. At least...

(*Peering.*) I can't see it in the fog.

MASTER. But it's out there, isn't it?

God, send us a thaw. Send us a warmer wind.

WALTON. Listen...