And now there came both mist and snow
And it grew wintry cold,
And ice more high came floating by,
As green as emerald.
And through the drifts the money cliffs
Did send a dismal cheer;
Nor shapes of men or beings we saw—
The ice was in between.

The ice was here, the ice was there.
The ice was all around,
Icicles and hoarfrost, and round andหวรี;} saved, the waters in a sound.

Cumberland, "Hymn of the Ancient Mariner"

And as the snow took
In earnest grace and ease,
In shadowy silent distance grew the iceberg too.

Henty, "The Conquest of the North"

albatrosses of the Arctic, grey and white, or smoky brown. The bleak
ice is a desert no longer.

The tongue of ice grows into a land, floating slab, anchored only
by the hinge of ice at its landward end. But the hinge becomes more
and more precariously as the ice pushes farther out and the tides begin
to work on it, up and down, up and down, twice a day. The cracks
which cut across it soon become crevasses, the crevasses deepen,
and the slab of ice heaves and groans under the strain. At last, at one
particularly low spring tide, the deepest crevasse breaks through with
a roar which echoes off the sides of the land like a mountain in
labour. The slab crashes off the face of the glacier, scattering the
souls of all who go. A surge of water, three feet high, runs out ahead
of it and battering its way along the walls of the land. The iceberg is
launched.

The huge slab of ice turns slowly over, rocks and tills. It has a toned
like the roof of a house, but an enormous house made for a giant.
its highest point is 100 feet above the water and its lowest is 650 feet
below. It is 100 yards long and weighs a million tons. Most of the

Once upon a time, half a million years ago, there was a green country,
but it started to snow.

The snow fell very gently in that first fall, as though it hardly
meant to. It left nothing more behind than a dusting of white over
the land, which vanished into the air as soon as the sun touched it. But
the next winter was a little colder and the snow lay a little longer and
gradually, imperceptibly, year after year, the winters grew colder still.

Soon the snow was falling in snowstorms, and after that in blizzards.
When a time each winter’s storms were too deep for the thin sun to
melt them away, and the next winter’s snow made them deeper still.
And still the snow kept falling, winter after winter.

Today it is 1910. After four ice ages Greenland is no longer green,
and not much of a land either. It is nothing more than an enormous
mountain of snow two miles high, encrusted with ice by its own sheer
weight, the land beneath forced down below the level of the sea. All
that shows today of the largest island in the world is a ragged fringe
of mountains and islands which creep out from under the ice.

Greenland is the ice cap, a cold and barren waste of rolling white
plains, deep crevasses and sharp ridges, with the everlasting winds
racing across it like screaming demons. It is a howling wilderness,
and one of the few truly featureless deserts on earth.

The enormous weight of the ice cap bears down on the ice below,
and squeezes it slowly into glaciers that come creeping out to barren
rivers through the fringe of mountains. Today, late in September
1910, the ice that fell as snow a thousand years before Christ was
born has come down through the valleys behind Jakobshavn and
reaches the sea at last.

But the ice does not stop there. The glacier keeps pressing inexorably
forward, sixty-five feet a day, and soon a tongue of ice spreads
out into the firth. It is still only September. The water is warm and so
the ice is melting, slowly, Muddy water and a muddle of ice stream
away, drifting off down the firth. Currents surge up the mountain side
of the glacier, blasting the fierce miniature world of planks and
the little brown polar cod swim at the edge of the ice and brown
on the tiny shallop, and pack of arctic water and the ice on the
shallow and the shallop alike. There are big, bottomless gullies of
ice, almost white in the bright autumn sunshine, and delicate
lines and white and yellowing, Ailsa, like miniature flying
penguins, big black-and-white murres and small black-and-white
dovkies, and black guillemots with feet as red as coral. Pulses, the

bergs from Jakobshavn Ice Fjord are like this. The iceberg is a big one,
though not especially big as arctic bergs go.

It is also beautiful and not just white, but sparkling in the sunlight
like purest crystal. The sun glances on the iridescent facets of a billion
bubbles of air, trapped in the snow that fell on the Ice Cap 5,000 years
ago. But deep down, in the dark, secret waters of the fjord where
the light never comes, the iceberg is as black as jet, grimed with
the dust scraped up by the glacier from a seam of coal, back
in the mountains.

The iceberg is launched. The momentum carries it slowly away,
out into the fjord where it gradually rocks itself into stillness. But the
bergs do not quite stop. Slowly, infinitely slowly, the strain of
the water takes hold of it, swings it around and takes it down
the fjord.

The iceberg is still in Jakobshavn Ice Fjord at the end of October.
The autumn storms from the west have jammed the fjord full of pack
ice from Baffin Bay, and the iceberg is fixed immovably in it. So are
many other bergs, because the iceberg is only one of the thousand
and one bergs that have calved off the ice cap behind Jakobshavn in
the summer of 1910. It is only one of more than 10,000 very large
pieces of ice that are still in Baffin Bay, circling slowly up to the north
and the High Arctic, down again to Davis Strait, past Labrador
to the Grand Banks of Newfoundland.

The western gales roar across the coast of Greenland all through
October, and it is a long time before they blow themselves out. Then,
suddenly, there is one of those bright, sunny days of the Greenland
summer, as blue and cloudless as a summer’s day; but cold, very cold,
and then the last, cold air on top of the ice cap begins to sink, it
comes rushing down the fjord in a hurricane wind, which blasts the
Berings back into Baffin Bay again. The bergs begin to move, slowly
at first, then faster and faster until they are drifting almost as
quickly as a man can walk. The bergs and the ice fragments together
grinding, jostling past the little outpost of Jakobshavn and out to sea
at last. A last gale of the Gulf Stream catches them at the mouth of
the fjord, deep down, turns them slowly around, against the wind,
and carries them steadily off to the north, up the coast to the High

Arctic.

There are few human eyes to watch the iceberg set off on its long,
landfall journey to the Grand Banks. But Captain William Adams is

The sun rises again at the end of January. By then the icebergs are drifting slowly, lazily, in the north of Baffin Bay, starting and

there. He sees it on his way home to Dundee in the whaling ship *Marina* with a bumper load of whalebone and oil. Captain Bob 

Barrett sees it from *Zephis*, streaming back to Newfoundland from a different kind of summer's hunting, with a sweat of wealthy New 

York businessmen on board and a cargo of polar bear cubs, muskox calves and other hunting trophies in his hold. People see it from *Hansa* 

Vegard* and *Goudalhoun* as they finish their last round of the Greenland 

hunting ponies, that all of them see it without seeing, because the 

iceberg is only one among hundreds of bergs in the pack, and being spread 

out along the western horizons, moving majestically northward.

Soon the iceberg is off the deserted ice coast of Melville Bay, where there are no human eyes to see it at all, nor even any light to see it by. It is December and the sun has set for the rest of the year. There is only the moon and the dim, flickering light from the curtains of the 

Arctic horizon.

It is very very cold and the sea begins to freeze.

The sun rises again at the end of January. By then the icebergs are drifting slowly, lazily, in the north of Baffin Bay, starting and


the sea ice again, heading for Tasiassuk on the far side of Melville Bay. They have more than a hundred miles still to go. One of them is 

Miaux, a dependable Inuit, but the other is a Dane; he is Knud 

Rasmussen, the past-year sea from Jakobshavn.

Knud Rasmussen is a most unusual hunter, and he is not exactly a 
typical Dane either. Like most Danes born in Greenland he has his share of mild blood, and he is very proud of it. His mother's grand-

father was the great Paulus Oelstrup, the most famous hunter of his 
time. Knud has inherited a boundless fascination with Greenland and 

its people from his mother side, while his father has given him a love of classical music and classical scholarship. His Greek is as 

fluent as his Inuit. Knud can see no contradiction between his two 

worlds, scholar and dog-driver. His unlikely combination of talents 
have already earned him a reputation as an arctic traveller and anthrop-

ologist, though his friends in Greenland—most of the population—see 
him rather differently. Knud is a handsome man, wiry, articulate, 
something of a dandy, with a smile which charms every truant girl in 
sight into sewing clothes for him as love gifts.

This winter journey is a small but necessary part of his latest 
venture. He came north last summer with Peter Frisch, a footloose 
young Dane, and they set themselves up as footloose traders. The name of 
their port is Knud's own idea. "Thule" is Greek for the unknown 

northern end of the earth and Thule, more or less, is where they are. 

Neither Knud nor Peter is particularly interested in trading as such, 

but they look on it as an excuse to live in the Arctic. What they really 

want to do is to use Thule as a jumping-off place for exploring the 

North and learning the ways of the Inuit peoples. They are going to 

set off next month on an interestingly dangerous trip across the ice 

cap to northeast Greenland, which is still virtually unexplored. But 

there is some housekeeping to be done before that. Even part-time 

traders have to make a living somehow, and Knud and Peter have spent 

the last six months trading fox furs for Inuit needles and 

sealing pots. Now they have to get the piles of pelts down to Tasiass-

uk, so that Hans Vegard can take them back to Denmark in the 
spring. They have been ferrying these seal pelts south all winter— 

the best time of year for travelling in the Arctic—and this is Knud's 
turn to go. He is in a hurry to get back as quickly as he can, though 

not just to start off over the ice cap. There is a risk of arctic witches 
back in Thule and he is collecting follow-up from them, he wants to 

finish the job before they all go off on winter journeys of their own. "I

have come to look at you and see what you are made of"), he tells 

them, and the old ladies cackle with delight. They strike a hard 

bargain with him. For every story, a night-time tune on his wherry new 

grandiose. "Alexander's Ragtime Band" is their favourite record, 

and the journey home keeps running through Tchaikovsky's mind as he, 

Nisseq and the sledgers hurry on past the iceberg, disappearing into 

the gloom.

The polar bear watches them go. He is downwind of the dogs, so 

they do not catch his scent. If they had, Knud would have shot 

him and added his skin to the load. The bear is an old male, prowling 

the ice, his lean form thrusting forward while the young ones 

hobble behind him. They chase each other, though not very often, 

because the dogs are happy, running well and need no encouragement. But it is cold, far too cold to ride for more than a few minutes at a time, and the men keep jumping off and running to stay warm. It is so cold that the air freezes 

the hair in a man's nose, brings tears to his cheeks and freezes them 

there, and freezes his cheeks as well. The wind whirls the scotches of 

ice into the drivers' faces, and the beards of men and dogs steam 

behind them in ghostly plumes.

The two young men riding behind the sledges are hunters from the 

far northwest of Greenland. They have come over from the mountains 

from the trading post at Thule, across a corner of the ice cap, down to

eat infinite patience. The holes are only an inch or two across 

and they vanish in a film of ice as soon as the seal has left them. But 

he has found a hole and laid down beside it to wait. The seal 

knows very well that he is up there, somewhere. He weighs 

over half a ton, so the ice squeaks and groans beneath his 

slightest movement. The seal has heard him come, against 

the cacophony of all the other noises around her, and she has not yet 

heard him go away again. She keeps a network of holes open against 

just such an emergency and when he comes up to breathe again she 

submerges a hundred yards away. The best wait.

The seal is hunting for big shrimp on the underside of the ice, 

swallowing them off by one. After more than an hour of this her 

alarm fades away, and her random movements bring her back to the 

hole where the bear lies in wait. He sees the first rumor of water 

ahead of her as she comes shooting up. His paw smashes down as she 

hurls through the thin film of ice. She is still coming up as he 

bites into her shattered skull and drags her out twisting and thrashing. He growls and worries and dips away at her carcass until his 

stomach is full. Then he turns away, looking somewhere to go and up 

and down. He ambles off toward the iceberg in the complicated way that 

polar bears have: long and snake-like, his back legs almost ever-

taking the front. He vanishes into the night.
A raven and a pair of foxes appear out of nowhere beside the saw remains and tug at the thing on the ice which will never now be a pup. Black bird, white fox, broody snow. The Great bear—old Arcus himself—waits slowly and unimpressed through the sky high above them, endlessly circling the Polie.

It is the middle of April. Suddenly the black winter is over. The sun is up, very low in the sky, but it will not set again until the end of August. The beluga whales which spent the winter as did, hovering, white shapes moving only to breathe, press forward into every lead as soon as the ice opens up. The foxes work the pinemoss carcasses, and both of them make out of their winter white into their summer camouflaging, ready for the last round in their endless mutual battle to survive. The Arctic is slowly beginning to come alive.

Then the birds come. Eight tiny blocks of glistening white, long, low lines of gunning eiders and, very high up, the first skims of snow geese. Thirty million doves and sparrows along the edge of the ice hesitating for Tului, followed by tens of thousands of murres, kittiwakes and fulmars. Black-and-white snow buntings, just arrived from Europe, sing from every outcrop. All of them are driven on by the desperate need to get to food and get breeding, then out again before the short arctic summer is over.

There is also an arctic. Morning has come north again for the arctic whales. Captain Adams brings her up along the Greenland coast, picking his way through the thinner pack ice, until he reaches Melville Bay. There he stops and waits. He is off Devil’s Thumb Rock and the Elder Duck Islands where the Dundie Ice ships always wait in spring.

Adams has arrived at the coast early because, like every whaling captain, he knows that the sooner he gets his ship into the High Arctic, the longer he will have for hunting whales. But he has to admit that from a crew’s new view, the prospect look pretty hopeless. The ice beyond Devil’s Thumb is an impenetrable jumble of3 thick ice, fifteen feet thick and certain to crush any ship foolish enough to enter it. Even one as old and as tough as the Morning which has sailed many times to the Arctic and the Antarctic too. So wonder the old whales called Melville Bay “The Breaking-Up Yard.” But Adams knows what he is doing. Somewhere out there to the north, across a strip of ice that may be a hundred miles wide, or perhaps only twenty, there is an oasis of open sea.

The old whales call it the North Water. The sea freezes here as fast as it does anywhere else in the Arctic, but the winter gates keep blowing the ice away, pushing it south. There are pairs of Haffa Bay that are so big that the pack takes two years to melt. Yet the North Water, a stretch of sea as big as Newfoundland or New Mexico and only 900 miles from the North Pole, stays open throughout the long, bitter winter.

When the sun comes back in the spring, the oasis of open water grows even larger. The sea starts to change at the ice around it, and the more the ice melts, the more sea there is for the sun to warm. Now, in June, the North Water has spread far west into Lancaster Sound, and is pushing north toward Devil’s Thumb, where Captain Adams is patiently waiting and hoping.

With the ice gone now, nothing stops the sun’s rays from reaching down into the depths of the sea to make the plants bloom. These are not the ordinary forms and seaweed of the shore, but phytoplankton, the real plants of the open sea. Tiny, drifting algae, no more than a cell or two long. Like any earthbound weeds, these need only sun, water and fertilizer to start growing, and there is plenty of each in the North Water in June. Their bloom only lasts a month, but more phytoplankton grows in that short arctic season than in a whole year in the barren tracts. This immense bloom sets off an equally immense spawning of the microscopic animals that feed on it, and of higher predators in their turn. The shrimps are so hungry and abundant by July that their swarms can clean the baits out of a fish trap or the fat off a sealskin, so ready as any Alaskan pintatas. Enormous schools of polar cod, hundreds of narwhals and belugas, tens of thousands of seals, murres and kittiwakes, and millions of doves, all gorge on the summer bounty of the North Water.

The bounty also supports a tribe of men—the Siemers and the Savagakivik. The white men call them “Elders,” but to themselves, they are “inuit”—the true human beings. They are spread across the empty country from Tului to Cape York. But they do not think the land is barren at all. It is their Earthly Paradise, the only place in the world where real human beings can or ought to live. They still half believe what they once knew for centuries—that they are the only people on earth.

By the time the icebergs drift past Cape York the pack ice is loosier and studded with bergs of every size and description. The biggest are still the ones from the floors behind Jakobshavn but there are also many smaller bergs that have crumbled off the ice cliffs in Melville Bay. There are humped and cratered bergs, like the backs of dinosaurs, round and ridged ones, like coffee pots, and square blocks like castles, tilted blocks which rise to sheer cliffs, like the rocks of ocean-line. There are tent-shaped, conch-shaped, gable-shaped, and flared bergs. This glittering maze is pushed by the current, stranger, now, westward through the thinner pack.

The ice floes have broken down into pancake and spaghetti of ice, and there is nothing left behind but a thin line of slush. The iceberg, brushes it aside and drifts free into the North Water.
Voyage of the Iceberg

The Story of the Iceberg That Sank the Titanic

Richard Brown