

SHACKLETON

Film One

screenplay by
Charles Sturridge

Revised 14th April 2001

C/o Anthony Jones Esq.,
Peters, Fraser, and Dunlop L
Drury House,
33-42 Russell Street,
LONDON WC1
44-207-344-1000

EXT. ANTARCTIC -- DAY

1

SNOW as far as the eye can see. The CAMERA is gliding over its endless uniformity. Out of the endless waste rise, mountains, glaciers. SPACE.

TITLES START.

INT. THEATRE, BERLIN -- NIGHT

2

CLOSE on a LARGE BRASS SLIDE PROJECTOR as a new slide (53) is slid into its compartment. The PROJECTIONIST is following the text of the lecture with his finger. In the background we hear SHACKLETON continuing in GERMAN.

SHACKLETON

Hier ist eine General-Karte unserer verschiedenen Reisen. Hier liegt der magnetische Pol, hier die von uns erreichte südlichste Punkt und hier ads auf unser Heimfahrt gen Nord entdeckte neue Land. Hier einen kleinen Adelie-Pinguin bei der Besichtigung eines Hundes.

Another laugh. SHACKLETON is standing in front of a large screen which is showing a picture of THREE PENGUINS. There is a LECTERN at one side of the stage but he ignores it and moves confidently round the centre of the stage. He is enjoying himself.

SHACKLETON (CONT'D)

Und hier zwei Kaiser-Pinguine bei der selben Beschaeftigung.

A bigger laugh and some applause. We see FRANKS watching from the side of the stage.

EXT. ANTARCTIC -- DAY

3

The CAMERA still moving, lower now and closer to the glittering surface of the snow as if searching for something.

TITLES CONTINUE.

INT. THEATRE, BERLIN -- NIGHT

4

The auditorium lights are up and we see that it is less than half full.

SHACKLETON is standing centre stage with FRANKS by the lectern conducting a question session at the end of the lecture.

FRANKS

(in German)
Next question please.

A STOUT MAN rises in the auditorium.

MAN IN AUDIENCE

Herzlichen Glueckwunsch, Sir Ernest.

SHACKLETON

Danke, mein herr.

MAN IN AUDIENCE

Nur ein Englaender koennte so stolz sein auf sein Versagen. Sie wollten den Suedpol erreichen, und wie andere haben Sie versagt. Und jetzt kommen Sie her, uns mit Ihrem Versagen zu unterhalten.

Some laughter from the audience.

SHACKLETON

(to Franks)

What does 'Versagen' mean?

FRANKS

(low)

Failure. He's saying...

SHACKLETON

I know what he's saying.

(to audience)

Thank you, for your question...

He pauses. FRANKS is translating into GERMAN, but waits and for a moment it seems that SHACKLETON does not know how to answer.

SHACKLETON (CONT'D)

You are right, sir, we failed. We failed to reach the Pole. I turned back, choosing life over death, for myself and for my friends, which is why I am here to tell you about it tonight. But others follow in our footsteps, Captain Scott following my route and the Norwegian Amundsen from the Bay of Wales, and if they should fail, then I will try again. It's our nature to explore, to reach out into the unknown. The only failure, would be not to explore at all.

The audience is silent. FRANKS starts his translation.

EXT. TENT ANTARCTIC -- DAY

5

Still moving in the distance we can just make out a tiny indentation in the snow and as the CAMERA approaches and circles round it we can see half buried by the snow the grey remains of a TENT.

INT. WINGS, THEATER BERLIN -- NIGHT

6

SHACKLETON is coming off stage, as the curtain comes down. He starts taking of his coat and loosening his tie. FRANKS is with him taking his things.

FRANKS

Your German sounded almost perfect tonight.

SHACKLETON

Really? They didn't seem to understand a word I said.

FRANKS

I think they just don't want to be lectured by an Englishman anymore. The Daily Chronicle have telephoned three times. They are on the line now. Will you take it?

SHACKLETON stops and goes to the phone which is being held by a STAGEHAND.

SHACKLETON

Sir Ernest Shackleton.

(listening)

Yes. Yes. What date exactly? And Scott, where is he? Well it is truly extraordinary news and I believe we must accord him the same praise that the Norwegian people would grant to Scott if the positions are reversed. For my own part I would wish him the heartiest congratulations. Yes you can quote me, thank you.

He hands the phone to FRANKS.

SHACKLETON (CONT'D)

Amundsen is back in Tasmania. He says he reached the Pole on December 14th last year. Looks like my career as a lecturer may be over. Unless I can learn to speak Chinese!

FRANKS

What about Scott?

SHACKLETON

There is no news yet. Amundsen saw no sign of him.

He turns and heads towards his dressing room.

INT. DRAWING ROOM, VICARAGE GATE -- DAY

7

A Kensington house not a grand room but comfortable, filled with mementos and photographs.

SHACKLETON is sitting at a piano surrounded by his sisters. It's after lunch on Sunday and they are trying to remember a tune. SHACKLETON is humming to the youngest, GLADYS(26), pretty with dark hair, who is playing. Around them are GERTRUDE(41), AMY(39), ETHEL(35), CLARA(32) KATHLEEN (29) and HELEN (31). Despite the fact that they are now grown up, their brother ignites the sense of childhood. They are watched by SHACKLETON'S children RAY(8), CECILY(6).

SHACKLETON

No, no...I've got it now. Da-da-da da...Once a mother's love...

(all join in)

Shielded me from all the cares of life. /But a year ago sorrow laid her low.

(pauses sorrowfully)

Mother died a wretched drunkards wife!
One more time please.

They start again.

INT. HALLWAY AND STAIRS, VICARAGE GATE -- DAY

8

SHACKLETON'S wife, EMILY(45), handsome, very dark, is coming down to stairs carrying her baby EDDIE (2), as another sister, ELEANOR (33), comes out of the dining room, closing the door behind her.

EMILY

What's all the noise?

ELEANOR

Oh, something we used to sing in Ireland when we were children. A temperance song, if you can believe it. Mikey made us all march through the streets of Dublin, as if he could change the world.

(quietly)

Frank's here.

EMILY

Oh.

ELEANOR

Don't worry. I'll deal with it. Come in and show off your young man.

She leads the way to the drawing room door.

INT. DRAWING ROOM, VICARAGE GATE -- DAY

9

The group round the piano have collapsed into laughter and applause from the onlookers, as EMILY enters with the baby.

SHACKLETON

And here he is! Eddie, your aunts have come to pay you a visit.

SHACKLETON leaps up putting down his glass and takes baby EDDIE from his wife and proudly turns to his sisters.

SHACKLETON (CONT'D)

They're a terrifying gang and you should never listen to a word that any of them say. In any case they'll all be 102 by the time you grow up so you won't have to ...

(laughter)

This is Aunt Amy, say 'hello' to Aunt Clara, Aunt Kathleen, Aunt Gertrude, Aunt Helen, Aunt Eleanor...

The sisters cluster round SHACKLETON admiring the baby, HELEN holding RAYMOND up so that he can see. EMILY stands slightly apart watching as ELEANOR whispers to him.

INT. DINING ROOM, VICARAGE GATE -- DAY

10

Standing by the fireplace is FRANK (37), SHACKLETON's younger brother, he has dark hair, is pale but handsome with a slightly nervous air. SHACKLETON enters.

FRANK

I suppose I must get used to creeping around like a criminal. They've set a date, you know.

SHACKLETON

I know. I'm glad you came.

FRANK

I couldn't face everybody. Not all at once. I've had enough lectures to last a lifetime.

SHACKLETON

Frankie, you did the best you could. You were just unlucky. It's only money after all. Never been one of our strengths.

FRANK

My solicitor says that I must prepare myself for a prison sentence. How does one do that I wonder? 'Walking round in circles' practice I suppose.

SHACKLETON

I could find you some striped pajamas, make you a bowl of porridge or something. Come on in. It's just us.

FRANK

Mikey? I hope that all of this, is not going to hurt you. I mean your plans.

SHACKLETON

What plans? What can I do? The fashion at the moment is for dead explorers.

EXT. SEASIDE -- DAY

11

RAYMOND and CECILY running along the beach past other families. Behind them SHACKLETON is walking near the water with EMILY.

EMILY

You promised. I have the letter. You said that you would never go back.

SHACKLETON

I know, but things have changed. Besides, I can't lecture anymore. I'm out of date. Just another explorer who failed to reach the Pole, but one who inconveniently happens to be alive.

EMILY

Don't say that. Don't ever say that. What about the cigarette company?

SHACKLETON

(pause)
I don't think I'm much of a salesman.

CECILY
Mama, can we paddle?

EMILY
No, darling.
(to SHACKLETON)
You can do anything when you believe
in it.

SHACKLETON
But that's what I mean. That is why
I need to go back.

RAYMOND
Please Mama.

EMILY
No, darling.

SHACKLETON
(walking forward)
Listen to your mother, children. She
knows best.

He turns back to talk to EMILY pretending not to notice
he is walking backwards into the sea.

SHACKLETON (CONT'D)
One more trip South. That's all it
would be. I'll be too old to go again
after that anyway. I'll stay at home
and never take my slippers off! Nail
them to my feet! I promise!
(looks down)
Oh my goodness. I'm soaking wet.
(to Emily)
Who put all this water here?

She cannot help but smile.

SHACKLETON (CONT'D)
(holding out his
arms)
Help me, children. Please!

The children look to EMILY who reluctantly nods her assent
and they splash towards him. SHACKLETON grabs them by
the hands.

SHACKLETON (CONT'D)
Now let's get out of here.
(going deeper)
This way I think! We mustn't get
lost now.

The children shriek with delight as they splash through
the water. EMILY watches them.

EXT. PROMENADE -- DAY

12

SHACKLETON soaking wet, walking with two very bedraggled
children whose clothes are also soaked. He is coughing.
EMILY is walking with him, amidst the stares of passing
families.

SHACKLETON

I will be in London a few days. To find out if it's possible.

(bowing to PASSER

BY)

Good afternoon, Madam.

He make a face and the children laugh. SHACKLETON coughs again.

SHACKLETON (CONT'D)

It will just be business meetings, very boring. You'd hate it, and anyway, nothing will be definite.

INT. LONDON RESTAURANT -- NIGHT

13

An intimate restaurant with a mixed clientele, we notice several UNIFORMED OFFICERS among the diners.

SHACKLETON is sitting alone at a table for three with champagne. He is doodling on the menu.

FRANK appears at the entrance with ROSALIND CHETWYND, a rich American divorcee in her early thirties. Dark and strikingly beautiful. As the HEAD WAITER appears.

FRANK

Shackleton, I reserved a table for three.

HEAD WAITER

Yes sir.

(acknowledging)

Mrs Chetwynd. Please follow me. Sir Ernest has already arrived.

FRANK

(whisper)

That was definitely a funny look.

ROSALIND

Darling, they don't go in for funny looks here, that's why I come.

SHACKLETON stands to greet ROSALIND.

FRANK

(sitting)

Good God half London seems to be in uniform these days. They can't possibly all be real. There's a costumier somewhere making a fortune.

SHACKLETON

How's school?

ROSALIND

I did my recitation today. Miss Rorke was very pleased.

FRANK picks up his brother's menu and examines the doodle.

FRANK

Who were you?

ROSALIND

Portia.

FRANK

Very stern.
(the doodle)
What's this?

SHACKLETON

Give that back.

FRANK

Oh dear, I think my brother's
developing an interest in modern art.

SHACKLETON

(reaching)
Can I have that back please?

ROSALIND

What on earth is it?

FRANK

I'd say either an elephant with an
arrow through its head, or else it's
the South Pole. No prizes there then,
have you been to the Zoo recently?

ROSALIND

Let me see it.

SHACKLETON

Can we order?

ROSALIND is staring at the drawing.

ROSALIND

You said you'd never go back.

SHACKLETON

Don't worry no one will let me. Can
I have my menu please.

ROSALIND

You said you'd never go back. You
said you didn't want to go back.

SHACKLETON

(looking at her)
I know what I said.

INT. NEWSROOM DAILY CHRONICLE -- DAY

14

A long room filled with reporters desks at which busy
newsmen are working. SHACKLETON moves between the desks
in conversation with PERRIS (35) the news editor whose
restless energy matches SHACKLETON'S own.

SHACKLETON

The race to the pole is over. What
I'm proposing is something much more
important.

PERRIS

The public like races. And the
Chronicle likes what the public like.

SHACKLETON

The public will like this. A crossing of the entire continent. The longest Antarctic or Arctic journey ever attempted, mostly over unexplored territory. I don't believe there's a man in the country who wouldn't like to see a British Flag be the first to cross from one side to the other.

PERRIS reaches the door of his office and holds it for SHACKLETON.

PERRIS

I'd still prefer a race.

INT. PERRIS OFFICE -- DAY

15

A glass fronted office that looks out onto the NEWSROOM. PERRIS follows SHACKLETON in.

PERRIS

How much do you need?

SHACKLETON

To equip the whole expedition? About sixty thousand pounds.

PERRIS

So you want to make a Public Appeal?

SHACKLETON

No. I've tried that before. The accounting is impossibly complicated. I'm looking for a small group of private investors.

PERRIS

Well, if it helps I may know some people who might be interested in the moving picture rights. I might even be interested myself. If there is a war, the newsreel is going to be very important. But what about your brother?

SHACKLETON

The timing of the trial is unfortunate, but it'll be over soon. It's a matter of a thousand pounds. If it wasn't for his bankruptcy no one would have known about it.

PERRIS

Do you know a Frank Hird?

SHACKLETON

Well, I've met him.

PERRIS

Mr Hird is telling anyone who will listen that your brother stole £60,000 from his father, Lord Ronald Gower. He says you introduced Lord Ronald to Frank and knew all about it.

SHACKLETON

Hird is a madman, I put the matter in the hands of my solicitor and he immediately withdrew his allegations. And Lord Ronald isn't his father, he adopted him.

PERRIS

So it's not true?

SHACKLETON

(firm)
That I was involved? Absolutely not.

PERRIS

Good. I'm glad to hear it. The public like their heroes perfect, so does the Chronicle. I'll have a word with to my friends.

They shake hands.

INT. LIVING ROOM, PARK LANE -- NIGHT

16

ROSALIND'S apartment is large and very stylish. SHACKLETON is dressed formally ready to go out. ROSALIND is putting her evening coat on.

ROSALIND

Can you be connected to the trial?

SHACKLETON

Of course I can. He's my brother.

ROSALIND

That's not what I meant.

SHACKLETON

(quiet)
The money he is accused of taking, he gave to me.

ROSALIND

That's a connection.

SHACKLETON

Elizabeth Dawson Lampton gave me a thousand pounds towards the last expedition. Frank invested the money for me in and lost the lot. He didn't want me to find out so he took money from 'Mrs Brown's' account to replace it.

ROSALIND

So, one old lady gives you money. Your brother loses it and steals off another old lady to pay you back?

SHACKLETON

He didn't want to let me down.

ROSALIND

(heading for the
door)

Doesn't sound like the perfect time
to raise fifty thousand pounds from
Jack Morgan.

SHACKLETON opens it.

INT. ANTE ROOM TO SAVOY DINING ROOM -- NIGHT

17

FRANK WILD, a powerfully built man with thinning hair is
paying a group of MUSICIANS who are huddled in the small
serving area by the doorway.

WILD

On my signal you come in and march
round the table. Have you got that.

The MUSICIANS nod.

WILD (CONT'D)

Right.

WILD turns and slips back into the dining room.

INT. PRIVATE DINING ROOM, SAVOY -- NIGHT

18

The CAMERA moves with him as he sits back at the table
which is decorated with ice sculptures, and dusted with
snow, British and American flags everywhere. The guests
of honour are two American businessmen ARCHIE DEXTER,
JACK MORGAN sitting next to ROSALIND, also at the table
are a number of other ANTARCTIC EXPLORERS. SHACKLETON is
finishing his speech.

SHACKLETON

Thus ladies and gentlemen, it my hope
and my intention to make this journey,
to the Pole and beyond crossing the
entire Antarctic Continent from one
side to the other. The final frontier
of our Planet. Close your eyes for a
moment please, everybody. Imagine the
frozen sea, it's waves twisted into
fantastical shapes, vast icebergs
like faery castles shimmering in pearly
shades of cobalt blue and rose. And
silence. Utter. Absolute. Broken
only by the thundercrack of splitting
ice. There, in the distance a great
mountain, glacier thrown carelessly
across it's shoulder, glittering in
the morning sun. The last page of
that great atlas drawn by the explorers
of the ancient world.

(looking round silent
the table)

And what shall we call it, this new
land, we have just discovered?

SHACKLETON taps WILD meaningfully on the shoulder.

WILD

(rising)
We'll call it Archibald Dexter's Land!

SHACKLETON
 Mr Frank Wild, I thank you.
 (triumphant)
 I give you Archibald Dexter's Land!

There is applause and laughter from the table, acknowledged by DEXTER.

SHACKLETON (CONT'D)
 And that heavenly peak that appeared
 out of the mist?

MORGAN
 Mount Jack Morgan!

SHACKLETON
 Exactly Mr Morgan!
 (loud)
 Mount Jack Morgan!

More cheering and JACK MORGAN, bows to the applause, the THREE MAN BAND appears playing the STARS AND STRIPES, everybody stands up at the National Anthem, as the band marches round the table.

EXT. PARK LANE DRAWING ROOM -- NIGHT

19

The room is dark, only the fire burning as SHACKLETON and ROSALIND enter turning on a light.

ROSALIND
 I suppose the band was your idea?

SHACKLETON
 Guilty.

ROSALIND
 Well?

SHACKLETON
 Well what?

ROSALIND
 How did you do?

SHACKLETON
 One invitation to go to the races and
 a request to keep Mr Morgan's office
 in touch with developments. A zero.
 A nought. A nothing.

ROSALIND
 So what next?

SHACKLETON
 I don't know.
 (quick smile)
 Rent an office and get started I
 suppose.

EXT. BURLINGTON STREET -- DAY

20

A LARGE PILE of cardboard boxes making their down the crowded street, they are carried (although we can't see him) by a tall, strong featured Irishman, TOM CREAN. Behind him is WILD carrying a typewriter and finally SHACKLETON with a box of paper.

A young girl MARCIE is waiting nervously at the doorway of the office as they go in.

MARCIE
Excuse me, sir?

SHACKLETON
What is it?

MARCIE
I've come about the job. I'm sorry
I'm early.

SHACKLETON
How did you know who I was?

MARCIE
I seen your picture sir.

SHACKLETON
(pleased)
Well, hold this then.

He hands her a bundle of paper.

INT. OFFICE STAIRWAY -- DAY

21

SHACKLETON leads the way followed by MARCIE, CREAN and WILD carrying the TYPEWRITER.

SHACKLETON
What's your name?

MARCIE
Sparks, sir, Marcie Sparks.

SHACKLETON
How do you spell apostrophe Marcie?

MARCIE
(lost)
Excuse me, sir?

SHACKLETON
Apostrophe how do you spell it?

MARCIE
A-p-o-s-t-r-o-p-h-e.

SHACKLETON
What do you think Frankie?

WILD
No idea, Boss.

SHACKLETON
Me neither but it sounds convincing,
and that's half the battle.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE OFFICE -- DAY

22

SHACKLETON pushes though a door followed by the others.

SHACKLETON
Marcie, Frank Wild, my second in
command, the most experienced Antarctic
man you'll ever meet.

He opens the door and ushers MARCIE in.

INT. OUTER OFFICE, BURLINGTON STREET -- DAY

23

SHACKLETON enters the empty office there's an ante room with a desk and another room beyond. CREAN puts the box of files down.

SHACKLETON

(indicating)
Tom Crean, who was with Captain Scott's party last year, but we don't hold that against him do we Tom?

CREAN

No sir.
(to Marcie)
How do you do?

MARCIE

Pleased to meet you.

CREAN puts out his hand but SHACKLETON whisks her away,

SHACKLETON

Come on then. Let's see what you're made of.

He indicates the paper that she is carrying and she realises that he means her to type.

She is not sure whether to take her coat and hat off first but decides against it and sits down and expertly slides the paper into the rollers.

SHACKLETON (CONT'D)

(dictating)
To the Editor of the Times, Sir , It has been an open secret for some time past that I have been desirous of leading another expedition to the South Polar regions....

MARCIE starts to type, the speed is fast but she can cope.

SHACKLETON (CONT'D)

Tom, be a good fellow, pop down stairs and put a note on the door to say the position is filled.

CREAN leaves and MARCIE still typing looks up at him and smiles.

SHACKLETON (CONT'D)

I am glad now to be able to state that through the...
(he looks across at WILD)
...Generosity of a friend I can announce that such an expedition will start next year....

CLOSE ON TYPE.

INT. COMMITTEE ROOM ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY -- DAY

24

An imposing room with a large polished mahogany table. Around are sat the General Council of the society under the chairmanship of its President the urbane Ex-Viceroy of India, LORD CURZON, among those present is the Secretary, a severe looking Scotsman, Sir John KELTIE and the mountaineer Douglas FRESHFIELD.

KELTIE

I have taken the liberty of calling the expedition: 'The Imperial Trans Antarctic...'. Who the bloody hell does he think he is?

CURZON

Apparently he has been promised ten thousand pounds by the Government.

KELTIE

Only if he raises all the rest of the money first, Lloyd George is no fool. Where is Shackleton going to find sixty thousand pounds. He hasn't even paid for his last expedition yet.

FRESHFIELD

Well, I hope he is not expecting to get any money from this Society. We've already spent quite enough on Antarctic exploration. This is the Royal Geographical Society not the Royal Antarctic Exploration Society. We have other responsibilities.

CURZON

Gentlemen, I would advise caution. It is not in our power to stop him, and if we try and he goes ahead regardless the newspapers who are his friends will only make us look foolish. I propose that we volunteer a small donation, before he asks for a larger one, say one thousand pounds.

There is a murmur of dissent from the table.

CURZON (CONT'D)

Very well I shall make it in two payments of five hundred pounds and I shall make it clear to Sir Ernest that we do not expect him to ask for the second payment.

KELTIE

In writing.

CURZON

I beg your pardon Mr Keltie?

KELTIE

Get him to agree to that in writing. No second payment.

Nods of agreement.