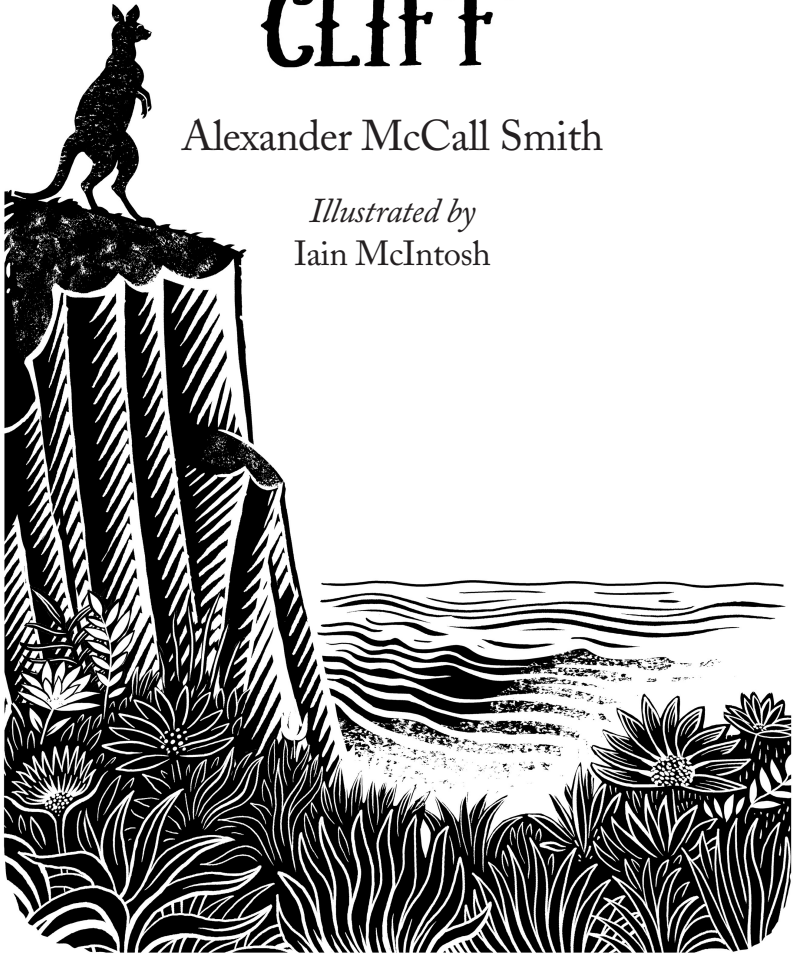
THE RACE TO KANGAROO CLIFF

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BC

First published in 2018 by
BC Books, an imprint of Birlinn Limited
West Newington House
10 Newington Road
Edinburgh
EH9 1QS

www.bcbooksforkids.co.uk

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ISBN: 978 1 78027 453 9

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library

Typeset by Mark Blackadder

Printed and bound by MBM SCS Ltd, East Kilbride



An unusual rescue

"Iceberg ahead!"

They were just two words, but they were enough to make the hairs on the back of Ben MacTavish's neck stand on end.

It was Badger Tomkins who had called out the warning. Ben and Badger shared a cabin on board the School Ship *Tobermory,* and they were good friends. When Badger gave his warning they were both on watch duty, their job being to look out for anything that could imperil the ship. Since they were sailing in the southern oceans, not far from Antarctica, ice was high on the list of dangers.

They were standing together at the prow, the very front of the ship. Above and behind them, secured to the towering masts, was the rigging and the great expanse of sails that drove them on their course. The wind was light, although it had blown strongly earlier that morning, and the ship was travelling slowly. That was just as well, as the last thing you want to do is to find yourself going too fast when there are icebergs about.

Ben strained his eyes. The early morning fog, thick and clammy like a cold white soup all around them, made it impossible to see very far. "Are you sure?" he asked his friend.

Badger nodded. "It was over there," he said, pointing to the bank of swirling fog. "The fog's hiding it now, but I'm sure it's there." He paused. "Or pretty sure."

"One-hundred-per-cent sure?" Ben pressed him.

Badger hesitated. "Ninety per cent," he replied. "Or eighty …"

"Should we tell the Captain?" asked Ben.

Badger hesitated again. Nobody wanted a false alarm, but nobody liked crashing into an iceberg either. At length, he made up his mind. "I think we should warn him," he said. "It's always better to be safe than sorry. You go, Ben – I'll stay here and keep a look-out."



Ben ran back towards the quarter-deck where Captain Macbeth, the skipper – and the school principal – was standing with some of the teachers and the student crew.

"Badger thinks he saw an iceberg," Ben informed him.

Captain Macbeth had been talking to Miss Worsfold, one of the teachers, but he cut off his conversation when he heard Ben's report.

"An iceberg, you say? Where?"

"Dead ahead," said Ben. "But a fog bank has swallowed it up and we can't see it any longer."

The Captain lost no time. Shouting out his instructions, he changed the course of the great ship, causing all but a few of the sails to lose their wind and flap limply about. Almost immediately, the ship was slowed down even more.

"You come with me," said Captain Macbeth to Ben. "We'll find out what's to be seen up there."

They joined Badger at his post.

"Any further sightings?" asked the Captain.

Badger was about to say, "No sir, nothing," but stopped himself. Ahead of them, off their starboard bow, the fog had cleared. And there, appearing from behind its swirling cover, was the steep-sided shape of an iceberg. It was not large by the standards of such things, but it was quite bulky enough to cause serious damage to any ship that collided with it.

"There it is!" shouted Badger.

"Yes," said the Captain. "I see it now."

Looking through his telescope, the Captain was able to tell that the iceberg was hardly moving and

that if they kept on their current course they would not get too close to it.

"Well spotted," he said to Badger. "These things can easily sink a ship."

He looked again at the iceberg. Something had caught his attention.

"Well, well," said Captain Macbeth. "Now there's a sight you don't see very often."

Ben asked him what he had seen, and the Captain's answer was to pass him his telescope. "Take a look at the bottom right-hand corner," he said.

Ben focused the instrument. For the most part, all he could see was white, but then, as he adjusted the eyepiece, something else came into focus – something that was small and black and white. He blinked, and looked again: *Surely not*, he thought, and yet, as he looked again he realised that his first impression had been correct.

"It's a penguin," exclaimed Ben. "There's a little penguin on the iceberg."

The tiny, marooned penguin was standing on the very edge of the ice, looking back at him across the expanse of cold water.

By now they had been joined by others, who had been working nearby and had come to see what the excitement was all about. Poppy Taggart, who was a close friend of Ben's sister Fee, was there, as were their other friends, Angela Singh and Thomas Seagrape.

As the telescope was passed around, they all expressed surprise at seeing a penguin in such a lonely and improbable place.

"It can happen," said the Captain. "I've seen penguins trapped on ice floes before, so I suppose they can end up on icebergs too."

"But how?" asked Poppy.

The Captain explained. "It might have hopped up on it just before that chunk of ice separated itself," he said. "Then, before it knew it, the ice would have drifted off."

"Poor creature," said Thomas Seagrape. "It must be miles and miles from all the other penguins."

For a while there was silence. Ben imagined they were all thinking the same thing, but he was the one who finally put it into words. "Will it die?" he asked.

The Captain frowned. "I'm afraid it won't be able to survive much longer all by itself. So … well, yes, I'm sorry to say, it probably will die."

Again there was silence. The ship was moving very slowly and the ice was drifting along at much the same pace. For a while, at least, they and the little penguin were companions in the middle of this vast ocean.

It was Thomas Seagrape who spoke next. "Can't we rescue it?" he asked.

All eyes turned to Captain Macbeth. He looked at the students: it was clear that he was wrestling with a problem. They had a lengthy journey ahead of them

and it would take at least an hour to lower a liberty boat – one of the *Tobermory*'s small rowing boats – and row over to the iceberg, rescue the penguin and bring it back to the ship. An hour may not seem like a long time, but when you are crossing a great ocean an hour's delay could mean that you miss the wind or wander off course.

And yet there are more important things in life than being on time.

"Are you really keen to do that?" asked the Captain.

The answer came in a chorus of voices which all said the same thing: "Yes!"

"In that case," said the Captain, giving his orders quickly, "Poppy, get a crew together to row over to the iceberg. Thomas, go and tell Miss Worsfold I'd like her to skipper the boat."

With a broad smile on his face, Thomas Seagrape saluted briskly and set off on his errand. For her part, Poppy immediately appointed Fee and Angela to her boat crew, along with Badger and Ben. They all then went off to fetch their lifejackets and their warmest sea clothing. Rowing up to an iceberg would be a chilly business, Poppy warned them. She had never done it herself, but just one glance in the direction of the great chunk of ice was enough to tell her that this was so.

Miss Worsfold spoke to them all before they climbed down the gangway to the liberty boat.

"We're setting out on a dangerous mission," she said. "I want everybody to be extra careful as the water round here is really cold. If anybody falls in, we'll be in real trouble. You don't have much time in water this cold before your muscles stop working. Does everybody understand that?"

They did.

"And another thing," said Miss Worsfold. "When we reach the iceberg, it might be very difficult to get onto it. Icebergs are slippery and you'll need to have a good sense of balance. I'll go myself, but I'll need a volunteer to come with me."

The teacher looked around her. "Poppy," she continued, "you'll have to stay on the boat, as you'll be in charge of the oars. Now, is there anybody here who's ever done any ice skating?"

Fee put up her hand. "I have, Miss Worsfold."

"Would you like to come with me, then?" asked Miss Worsfold. "You'll have developed a bit of balance on the ice rink."

Fee nodded. She was happy to assist, and she listened carefully as Miss Worsfold explained how she planned to catch the penguin. "They're very trusting birds," she said. "Usually you can walk right up to them. But we'll take a fishing net, just in case."

They were now ready to leave, and one by one they made their way down to the rowing boat that was bobbing up and down at the side of the *Tobermory*.

Above them, lining the ship's railings, were most of the other students. When the ship had slowed down they had realised that something was happening and they had all come to witness the rescue in progress. Although excited, they were quiet as they watched the boat, commanded by Miss Worsfold and rowed by Poppy and her crew, move away from the side of the *Tobermory*.

The iceberg had drifted a bit closer to the ship now, and it did not take them too long to row across to it.

"Ship oars!" commanded Poppy, when they were close enough.

This was the instruction to stop rowing, and it brought the small boat to a stop. Now they were within touching distance of the iceberg and Poppy was able to toss a rope across to its side. At the end of this rope was a small grappling hook that dug into the surface of the ice once the rope was given a tug. This anchored the boat and enabled Miss Worsfold and Fee to step out onto a flat section of the floating chunk of ice.

It was a tricky business walking towards the penguin, and once or twice Fee had to stretch out her arms on either side to regain her balance. The penguin was not far away, on a flat section of ice just above the surface of the water, and it watched them inquisitively as they approached.

"I don't think it's frightened," whispered Fee.

"Neither do I," agreed Miss Worsfold. "And I don't think we'll need our net."

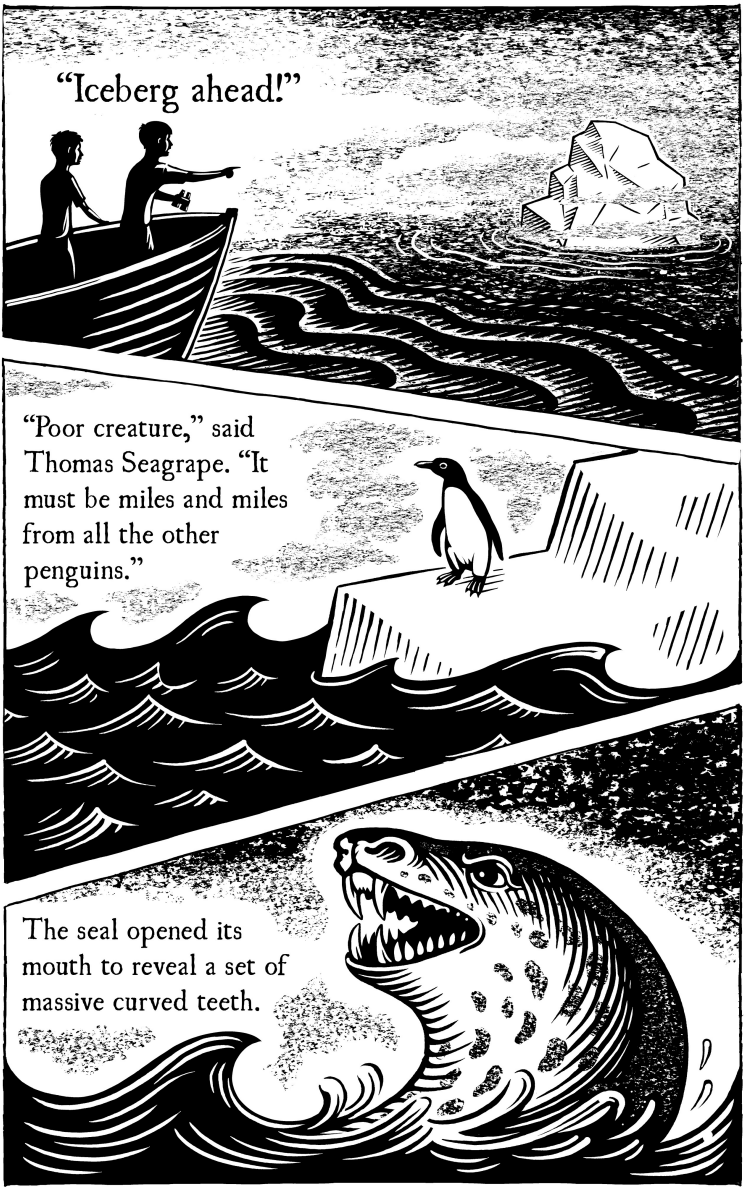
They approached the marooned bird very slowly, Miss Worsfold holding out a hand towards it as if offering it food. Her hand was only a few inches away when there was a sudden splash in the water just beneath the place where the penguin was sitting. And at the same time, there was a loud noise – something between a bark and a snarl.

Miss Worsfold and Fee looked down into the water with horror. There, its head projecting from the water, was the largest seal either of them had ever seen. And as they stared at it, the seal opened its mouth to reveal a set of massive curved teeth.

Miss Worsfold acted instantly, pushing Fee back from the edge of the ice. Then, scooping up the surprised penguin, she shouted out to Fee to follow her back to the waiting boat as quickly as possible.

Once they reached the boat, Miss Worsfold passed the penguin to Poppy, who placed it carefully in the small wooden box they had brought to transport it. The penguin did not struggle, seeming to be quite happy to go along with this unexpected rescue.

As the boat made its way back to the *Tobermory*, they heard a loud cheer come across the water from the ship. Everybody on board had seen what had happened and was applauding the bravery of the rescue crew.


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