

Extremophiles

CAST

ANGELA late thirties, PhD, Microbiologist

BERTRAM late fifties, Professor of Glaciology

LARS early thirties, Communications Officer

FISKLER mid-forties, Base Commander and Meteorologist

All the scenes take place within the confines of the Halley Research Station, Antarctica. The stage is set to replicate a cross-section of the central compartment of the Halley station. Each inhabitant has their own cramped living quarters; a small bed, a work table and some storage space. A cork board in each bedroom displays personal mementoes.

Centre stage is the communal quarters; galley, eating area, table and chairs and the communications console.

A large, central, over-sized porthole is their only window to the outside world; displaying the night sky, the *Aurora Australis* and news flashes from the Shackleton ship. The porthole is also used to convey the passage of time; rapid sunrise and sunset or star movement, as appropriate.

PROLOGUE

The sound of rushing wind. Loud. A lone figure clad in polar explorer gear is man-hauling a heavy sled, trudging slowly. There is the beautiful shimmer of the green Aurora Australis above him.

He stops, takes off his gloves and with some difficulty takes out a Sat Phone and tries to receive a signal. He is frustrated by the effort and puts the Sat Phone away. He is captivated by the aurora above him. He calls out to the shimmering lights.

FISKLER: I understand. I understand everything. It's all so clear now.
Thank you for choosing me.

He puts back on his gloves and continues trudging across to the other side of the stage.

Lights down.

ACT ONE

Scene One

*The main crew galley area on a British Antarctic Survey (BAS) Halley Research Station, situated on the Brunt Ice Shelf, Antarctica. **Lars** and **Bertram** are having tea in the cramped communal area; a chess game in front of them. **Angela** is using a microscope to carefully examine samples at a small, separate table.*

Dim lights illuminate the area around and above the central galley area. Four cramped sleeping bunks are visible in the low light above and around the main area.

It is the start of the Antarctic winter. The relief ship, the RRS Shackleton has recently departed with most of the base personnel and will not return for up to nine months, if at all.

BERTRAM: If you had to?

LARS: I don't.

BERTRAM: But if you did?

LARS: I do not.

BERTRAM: Flip me, he's stubborn.

ANGELA: That he is.

BERTRAM: Draw straws?

LARS: Straws?

BERTRAM: To eat or be eaten?

ANGELA: Short straw gets eaten.

BERTRAM: As it should be.

LARS: But there's no need.

BERTRAM: Be a sport.

LARS: Why should I "be a sport"?

ANGELA: Come on Lars.

BERTRAM: You're no fun.

LARS: We live in the world's largest freezer.

BERTRAM: *(sings teasingly like a child)* "Lars is a spoilsport".

LARS: Even if the power failed ...

ANGELA: Which it won't.

LARS: Even *if* the power was to fail ...

BERTRAM: We'd die.

ANGELA: We all die.

LARS: Why straws?

ANGELA: Please don't Lars.

BERTRAM: In ancient Athens, when the time came to choose positions of power they resorted to choosing by lot.

ANGELA: Glad you asked?

LARS: Not really.

BERTRAM: I have more.

Angela signals "enough", yawns and gets up to go. She methodically packs away her small science station and puts the vials into a freezer unit.

ANGELA: Sleep tight; don't let the microbes ...

Lars makes a biting motion with his hand and smiles. Angela exits. The two men continue their game of chess.

BERTRAM: I had a dream last night.

LARS: Should I care?

BERTRAM: I was hoping you would.

LARS: Dreams are only for ... dreamers.

BERTRAM: Oh my, did you read that online?

Lars smiles and dismisses this.

BERTRAM: You never dream, I suppose? Check.

LARS: Not if I can help it. Discovered checkmate!

BERTRAM: You scoundrel.

LARS: What does that even mean?

Bertram knocks over his king; it falls to the floor. Lars retrieves it. We see Angela, in dim light, getting ready for bed in her bunk.

BERTRAM: She normally has more vim.

LARS: "Vim"?

BERTRAM: Energy. Vitality.

LARS: She is missing Fiskler.

BERTRAM: He had to go with the others.

LARS: Yes. That was the right decision.

BERTRAM: As Commander.

LARS: As Commander.

BERTRAM: Or Vitamin D ...

Off a look from Lars.

BERTRAM: Deficiency ... explains her being maudlin.

LARS: Or just missing Fiskler?

BERTRAM: Why did he leave her in charge? I am the senior person.

LARS: Very, very senior ...

BERTRAM: Careful now young whippersnapper ...

Lars grimaces at the word and then packs away the chess pieces. Bertram rises to go but hesitates. Angela is now in her bunk asleep.

BERTRAM: *(interrupts)* Want to play cards?

LARS: I'm tired.

BERTRAM: One game.

LARS: No.

BERTRAM: Mika and Jorkki?

LARS: Too late for jokes ...

BERTRAM: Spoilsport ...

LARS: Bertram. Good night.

Lars exits. Bertram starts to set up to play solitaire. He mutters to himself, gets up and checks if he can see anything through the porthole window. He returns to the table, fidgets, mutters then returns to the porthole window. He talks to someone through the window. Lars has returned to fill a water bottle.

BERTRAM: Where in the hell are you?

LARS: Who are you talking to?

BERTRAM: *(startled)* What?

LARS: Just now. Who were you talking to?

BERTRAM: No one. Myself.

LARS: I assume you are “someone”?

BERTRAM: You assume correct.

LARS: You make no sense.

BERTRAM: I am glad to hear that.

LARS: I will never understand you Brits.

Lars makes to exit. Bertram holds his hands up in mock surrender. They exchange smiles.

BERTRAM: Our plan is working then.

LARS: But talking to yourself?

BERTRAM: I was merely thinking aloud ...

LARS: Think quietly ... that’s my advice.

Bertram motions to the two seats.

BERTRAM: Mika and Jorkki?

Lars shakes his head and exits.

Lights down.

Scene Two

It is morning time at the base. A dim light comes through from the porthole window.

Lars and Bertram are busy making a breakfast of eggs and bacon in the cramped kitchen area. They have a practiced routine; a choreographed sequence where they do not get in each other's way.

Music is on in the background, low volume. It is bursty; loads, plays, stops and then reloads. Angela arrives in looking tired and bedraggled.

BERTRAM: Look what the cat dragged in.

ANGELA: *(yawns)* Morning.

BERTRAM: Forecast?

Angela motions "why not". Bertram dunks his tea-bag in his cup.

BERTRAM: *(dramatic, mimics BBC announcers voice)* Dark, very dark; minus 30 with the wind chill feels like minus 40. And now we switch over to the news wherever you are.

LARS: Bacon is ready. Eggs?

BERTRAM: And I've just made you coffee.

Angela shakes her head "no". She pours juice for herself. Bertram is surprised she refused coffee; he is about to flag this with her, but she scowls at him and he decides against it. He continues dunking his tea-bag in the cup.

ANGELA: Any news?

BERTRAM: Famine over there, missiles yonder, tensions rising along various borders.

ANGELA: I meant real news?

Angela looks to Lars who signals "No".

BERTRAM: *(looking out the porthole)* I believe war is getting closer.

LARS: Closer to us or ... in general?

Bertram, dunking his tea-bag more rapidly.

LARS: If you keep that up we can use it in the generators.

BERTRAM: I like my tea strong.

LARS: Just leave it in the cup longer.

Lars serves Angela her bacon. She plays with the food on her plate.

BERTRAM: Wouldn't have happened in the old days. Missiles tests and the likes ...

ANGELA: *(to Lars)* A speech?

LARS: Inevitable.

BERTRAM: There was a time, maybe I am just being maudlin, but there seemed to be a better ... world order.

ANGELA: A speech.

BERTRAM: Would you not agree?

ANGELA: Do we have a choice?

LARS: *(to Angela)* The empire.

BERTRAM: In the days of the empire ... there was order.

LARS: He never says which empire.

ANGELA: Was there more than one?

LARS: Yes, Bertram, there was order. Your version of order and everyone else either liked it or lamped it.

ANGELA: *(whispers)* Lumped it.

BERTRAM: Exactly my point.

ANGELA: I may need to invoke Rule 48 here.

LARS: We had an empire once.

BERTRAM: You mean the “Kingdom” of Denmark.

ANGELA: *(citing officially)* The discussion of politics is forbidden when it has, in the opinion of the base commander, the possibility of inciting arguments or escalation thereof.

BERTRAM: And how did that all work out for you Lars?

LARS: We gave it all back, *old boy*, we gave it all back!

Despite herself Angela spurts out a laugh at Bertram’s expense. Bertram looks from one to the other and then back again; realising he will not win this one, he joins in the laughter, unenthusiastically.

BERTRAM: Good show whippersnapper, good show.

ANGELA: I have some news.

BERTRAM: A new microbe?

ANGELA: No Bertie.

BERTRAM: You truncated me!

LARS: I might do the same thing.

ANGELA: Gentlemen, please. I have ... different news.

BERTRAM: Oh, what *different* news?

There is a loud beeping sound. Lars responds immediately, puts down his coffee and opens up a shutter, revealing a communications console.

ANGELA: Is it from the Shackleton?

LARS: It's just audio.

BERTRAM: Is it Fiskler?

Lars adjusts some dials with limited success. It is an audio message, badly distorted.

FISKLER: ... amaz ... mess ... gre ... sha ...

BERTRAM: Is it him?

ANGELA: Hush.

LARS: I'm losing it.

BERTRAM: It sounded like him, yes?

ANGELA: *(excited)* It *did* sound like him. Where is he?

LARS: Too much interference.

ANGELA: Can you boost the signal?

LARS: It's maxed. The radomes could be iced over.

ANGELA: They're heated.

LARS: The coils may have malfunctioned ...

BERTRAM: It definitely sounded like him.

LARS: Who else could it be?

ANGELA: Exactly!

LARS: *(to Angela)* Atmospheric interference ... the signal could bounce around for a time.

Off a look from Lars, Angela bites her lip.

LARS: I'll need to check all the antennae sites. It could take a while.

ANGELA: I'll help you get suited up.

Lars and Angela move left stage where we see them suiting Lars for an EVA (Extra Vehicular Activity). The audio is just static now. Bertram stays and listens closely, fiddling with the tea-bag in his cup starring out the porthole.

BERTRAM: Is it a secret message?

A ghostly image of Fiskler, clad in polar gear appears close up to the porthole window. The green aurora lights shimmer behind Fiskler's head.

Bertram is startled. He drops the metal cup, it does not break, and the tea-bags spill onto the floor.

BERTRAM: Fiskler! You came back!

The image fades slowly and Bertram presses up against the porthole to try to see. The green aurora also fades to complete black.

BERTRAM: Fiskler? You will come back won't you?

Angela returns and sees Bertram pressed up against the window.

ANGELA: Bertram? Whatever are you doing?

BERTRAM: Nothing.

ANGELA: What happened here?

BERTRAM: I dropped my cup.

ANGELA: You? Waste tea?

BERTRAM: I just got startled, for a second.

ANGELA: By what?

BERTRAM: Must have been Lars' flashlight through the porthole.

ANGELA: The porthole?

BERTRAM: I'll make more tea, shall I?

Angela shakes her head and exits. Bertram presses up against the window again.

Lights down.

Scene Three

Angela is at the comms panel. Bertram is rummaging about in the kitchen area.

ANGELA: Lars? Please provide update on your position. Lars? Come in?

LARS: *(muffled voice over radio)* ... radome ... fi...

BERTRAM: Did he say five?

ANGELA: Hush. *(to radio)* Lars, the weather is closing in; please provide ETA?

BERTRAM: I'll heat up some soup, shall I?

ANGELA: *(to radio)* You need to return now Lars.

BERTRAM: There's some tomato ...

ANGELA: Do you copy Lars, over?

BERTRAM: It could be minestrone ...

ANGELA: Bertram! Heat up whatever fucking soup there is. Okay. *(to radio)* Lars? We'd like you back here ASAP.

Bertram is taken aback by her outburst. He tries to read what is on the two cartons he holds in his hands.

Angela ignores Bertram. She moves from the Comms Console to the porthole, trying to see if there is any sign of Lars. She paces back on forth, fretting.

Bertram is singing a made-up song to the tune of Beethoven's Ode to Joy. He sings the first few bars, loses his way, then starts over again.

BERTRAM: “There was a young Dane, out lost in the snow ... he did not know where to go ... oh, no, no no, no, no ...”

ANGELA: Bertram!

BERTRAM: My first tour ... the Commander said we should sing ...

ANGELA: Not this Commander. *(to herself)* Come on Lars.

BERTRAM: For morale, he said.

ANGELA: We have bigger problems than morale.

There is a loud metallic thud off stage. A strong gust of wind blows and then a door slams shut.

ANGELA: Lars!

Angela runs to meet him. Bertram seems momentarily confused that he is on his own. Lars and Angela enter, she is helping him out of the rest of his outside clothing.

BERTRAM: The Dane Man Cometh!

ANGELA: Get him some soup.

BERTRAM: You never said which ...

ANGELA: Quickly!

BERTRAM: Do you like tomato?

Bertram opens a container of soup and smells it, shakes his head and then heats it in a microwave.

ANGELA: You were gone too long.

LARS: I was gone the exact amount of time I needed to be gone.

ANGELA: I say you were gone too long.

LARS: Aye, aye.

ANGELA: Yes, fucking aye, aye.

BERTRAM: Lars? Tomato? Could be minestrone to be honest ...

LARS: No. As in no soup.

BERTRAM: But I'm heating it ...

ANGELA: He said no soup Bertram. Jesus H ...

BERTRAM: *(muttering)* We never wasted food ... on my second tour ...

ANGELA: I'll take the fucking soup Bertram. *(to Lars)* File your EVA report.

LARS: Aye, aye Commander.

BERTRAM: There's also some left-over lasagne?

LARS: I *will* eat that.

ANGELA: Heat that for him.

BERTRAM: That's the ticket.

LARS: What's a ticket?

ANGELA: Just heat the lasagne please Bertram.

BERTRAM: Are we back online old chap?

Angela looks askance at Lars who nods a subtle "no". The microwave bell pings. Bertram goes to the galley, leaving Angela and Lars alone.

BERTRAM: *(to himself, aloud)* Hear not the bells ... that will be the soup
with no name ...

LARS: The radomes are icing over so I need to fix the heaters
otherwise the antennae are useless.

ANGELA: We can run some diagnostics from here, right?

LARS: Some, but the heaters need to be checked in situ.

ANGELA: We need to get the Comms back asap.

LARS: Understood Commander.

ANGELA: If Fiskler is out there ... or the others ...

*The microwave bell pings again. Bertram returns from the galley. Angela and
Lars change demeanour.*

BERTRAM: *(singing)* "There was a young Dane, out lost in the snow ...
he did not know ..." *(trails off under their gaze)*

Angela and Lars exchange looks.

BERTRAM: Morale.

LARS: I'll take a shower. *(Lars exits)*

BERTRAM: I just want to do my bit to ...

ANGELA: Don't. Please.

BERTRAM: Morale is important ... living in each other's ears ... cut off ...

ANGELA: I understand. *(Bertram is about to interrupt her)* And if you mention a previous Commander I put that lasagne in the wrong end of your alimentary canal.

BERTRAM: *(he considers this)* Understood Commander.

ANGELA: Let's try to pull together ... even in all this ... confusion.

BERTRAM: How long?

ANGELA: I was hoping indefinitely, for as long as we have to.

BERTRAM: I meant the lasagne.

ANGELA: What?

BERTRAM: In the microwave?

ANGELA: Until it's cooked.

BERTRAM: Ship shape.

Bertram appears baffled, holding a container, unsure what to do.

ANGELA: Bertie, are you okay?

BERTRAM: "Bertie" this must be serious.

ANGELA: Lars mentioned you were ...

BERTRAM: That I was what?

ANGELA: Talking to someone.

BERTRAM: Oh, he did, did he indeed?

ANGELA: It's his duty. All of our duty ... to report ...

BERTRAM: To report what?

ANGELA: Anything. Unusual. In each other ...

BERTRAM: You didn't drink your coffee.

ANGELA: What?

BERTRAM: The other day. *(she shrugs)* Very out of character ...

ANGELA: That's not un ...

BERTRAM: I thought it most unusual ... I distinctly remember saying it to Fiskler ...

ANGELA: Fiskler?

BERTRAM: The Commander passed on her morning coffee, I said.

ANGELA: Fiskler?

BERTRAM: What?

ANGELA: You said you mentioned it to Fiskler?

BERTRAM: Did I?

ANGELA: You just said it.

BERTRAM: But our Comms are still down.

ANGELA: I am well aware of that.

BERTRAM: Then why would I say that?

ANGELA: You tell me.

BERTRAM: Better check that soup.

ANGELA: Lasagne!

Lights down.

Scene Four

It is morning time at the base. Angela and Bertram are busy making breakfast in the cramped kitchen area. They also have a practiced routine and they do not get in each other's way.

BERTRAM: He won't show too early.

ANGELA: Are you surprised?

BERTRAM: I couldn't tell.

ANGELA: Food can spoil ... even here ...

BERTRAM: I thought the temp ...

ANGELA: Microbes ...

BERTRAM: I asked you ...

ANGELA: We can't afford anyone to get sick ...

BERTRAM: How long I should ...

ANGELA: Enough!

Bertram thinks about arguing his case, but Angela's body language suggests it is not a fight he can win. He makes a vain effort at vocalising his excuse but decides against it. We see Lars getting up from his bed.

BERTRAM: Forecast?

ANGELA: *(shrugs apathetically)* If you must.

BERTRAM: *(subdued, BBC voice)* Dark, very dark; minus 30 with the wind feels like minus 40.

LARS: Bacon ready?

BERTRAM: Lars!

ANGELA: We didn't expect to see you today.

BERTRAM: How's the body, old chap?

LARS: Fine.

BERTRAM: Bit queasy in the tummy?

LARS: No Bertram ... there is nothing in my "tummy".

BERTRAM: Constitution of an ox!

Lars shrugs this off and gets himself some coffee.

BERTRAM: Do I need to ... a report?

ANGELA: We'll let this one go.

BERTRAM: I had no idea. The date.

ANGELA: It won't happen again.

BERTRAM: Pesky microbes ...

ANGELA: Bertram!

BERTRAM: I am sorry, old chap.

LARS: Forget it, I have.

Bertram goes to the fridge and starts rummaging around, taking things out, checking them and putting them back again, mumbling dates to himself. Lars and Angela have a private word.

LARS: I will need to go out again today Commander.

ANGELA: Are you up to it?

LARS: Yes, I am fine.

BERTRAM: *(muttering)* Why Fiskler left her in charge I'll never know ...

ANGELA: Why is VSAT *and* Iridium down?

LARS: We still have VHF.

ANGELA: Don't VHF bullshit me ... why can't we contact the Shackleton? There is nothing!

LARS: I need to check all the antennae again ... including ELF ...

ANGELA: That could take days ...

BERTRAM: *(muttering)* Nepotism if you ask me ...

ANGELA: Lars, is there something I need to know?

LARS: It is ... unprecedented.

ANGELA: Fucking "precedent" me then.

LARS: With the Sats down and the VHF patchy ...

ANGELA: Out with it Lars.

LARS: It could be ... possibly ... ionising radiation.

Angela let's this wash over her. In the following exchange Bertram is out of earshot mumbling dates to himself and he checks containers in the fridge.

ANGELA: Radiation?

LARS: It could be ...

ANGELA: We'd have noticed in the aurora, surely?

LARS: Perhaps not.

ANGELA: But we can't be sure?

LARS: Could be a huge solar storm.

ANGELA: A Carrington-scale event surely ...

LARS: A lot of radiation.

ANGELA: The Sats have protection.

LARS: Yes, but a giant EM pulse ... might be enough ...

ANGELA: You mean an explosion?

LARS: I mean lots of explosions Commander.

Angela emits a long sigh. She observes Bertram still rummaging around in the fridge.

ANGELA: We can't let him know ... until we know for sure.

LARS: Understood.

Bertram has finished and approaches them with a couple of food containers in his hands.

BERTRAM: What's understood?

ANGELA: The solar storm ... it's a bit of a monster.

LARS: One of the biggest.

BERTRAM: We had a huge one back in '89 ... easier then ... we sent stuff by post.

LARS: And fax, we know.

ANGELA: Faxing love letters to Julia ... not knowing who might read them, Bertie.

Bertram puts his hands in the air, good-natured. He bows to Angela gracefully. She nods back.

BERTRAM: I'm Bertie again!

ANGELA: Don't push it.

LARS: I need to go out ... the radomes, Commander?

ANGELA: Let's check the weather.

BERTRAM: Fiskler's message ... is it recorded?

LARS: Everything's recorded.

BERTRAM: I meant in the sense ... it was hardly a message.

ANGELA: It was a message.

BERTRAM: Not a coherent one.

LARS: That's not the point.

BERTRAM: He told me it was coded.

LARS: He told you?

BERTRAM: Yes, he told me. He said only I'd be able to crack it.

LARS: For the fuck man.

ANGELA: Gentlemen!

BERTRAM: I will find out what the message actually means.

ANGELA: We all want that.

LARS: This is fruitless.

BERTRAM: Fiskler said ...

Angela and Lars exchange looks.

LARS: Commander, do I have permission to go out to check the radomes, please?

BERTRAM: *(singing)* "There was a Dane called Lars and he had a baby pig. He dressed her in suspenders and a sexy, curly wig".

Lars looks to Angela in disbelief.

BERTRAM: Morale!

ANGELA: Bertram!

BERTRAM: Fiskler would know what to do.

ANGELA: He's not here, so you are stuck with me.

LARS: We all have to obey the rules.

BERTRAM: Tally-ho.

ANGELA: No, not tally-fucking-ho ... aye, aye Commander. Are we clear?

BERTRAM: Crystal, Commander.

ANGELA: Good. Lars, prepare for an EVA. Bertram, clear up this place and check the dates on the food in the fridge, again!

Lights down.

Scene Five

Each of them is in their cramped living quarters above and beside the main living room area.

Lars listens to music on headphones. Bertram is working with a small whiteboard – the original Fiskler message scrawled on it; he is trying to decode it. Angela is doing yoga.

In the galley area a distorted audio message comes in – it is a voice but quite badly distorted.

FISKLER: Dire ... evac ... deva ... retu ...

Angela hears it and rushes to Lars; pulling out his headphones. Bertram has not heard the message and only notices something is awry when he sees Lars and Angela running by his space. He gets up awkwardly and joins them, with the whiteboard.

BERTRAM: What is it?

ANGELA: Another message.

BERTRAM: What does he say?

They ignore his question. Bertram is annoyed.

BERTRAM: Can you play it back?

LARS: One moment.

BERTRAM: Was it Fiskler? Could you tell that at least?

ANGELA: Did you not hear it?
BERTRAM: Of course, but I ... I mean the message was ...
LARS: Here it is.

The distorted audio plays again. The message content is different, and it is definitely Fiskler's voice.

FISKLER: Dire ... evac ... deva ... retu ...
BERTRAM: It is him!
ANGELA: *(euphoric)* Fiskler! Play it again.
FISKLER: Dire ... evac ... deva ... retu ...
BERTRAM: Good old Fiskler.
FISKLER: Dire ... evac ... deva ... retu ...
BERTRAM: Evac could mean evacuation. Is he still on the Shackleton?
ANGELA: Lars?
LARS: I cannot tell.
ANGELA: He's not left then?
BERTRAM: The ship should be well gone?
LARS: Perhaps their Comms are down too.
ANGELA: *(to herself)* He hasn't left ...
BERTRAM: *(scribbling on his whiteboard)* Deva could be devastation.
ANGELA: Not helping Bertram.
LARS: Or waiting on a break in the weather ...
ANGELA: They might all be coming back! Bertram, I need you to get the most recent audit of the medical supplies.

BERTRAM: What, now?

ANGELA: Follow protocol people and when we re-establish Comms we can find out what's going on. You know the drill.

BERTRAM: Medical supplies?

ANGELA: Yes. All of it.

Bertram skulks off like a truculent boy. Angela checks Bertram is out of earshot.

ANGELA: Is there any way you confirm Fiskler's location?

LARS: Not possible.

ANGELA: But the VHF ...

LARS: He's using a Sat Phone.

ANGELA: But you said the Sats were down ...

LARS: Maybe not all of them ... or intermittent.

ANGELA: Fuck sake Lars!

LARS: Commander, he's not on the ship ...

ANGELA: Not on the ship?

LARS: I have scanned all other bands. Inbound signals are ...
absent.

Bertram returns with a bunch of lever-arch files, which he scatters across the table. Angela and Lars do not notice he is back.

ANGELA: Absent?

BERTRAM: "Absent"?

ANGELA: Bertram! Do your job.

BERTRAM: I'm just asking ... I have a right to know.

ANGELA: The reason I was nominated base commander is because I am *base commander!* Understood?

BERTRAM: *(not without a hint of cynicism)* Aye, Aye ... Commander.

LARS: Yes, Commander.

ANGELA: Right. Are we good? *(raises her voice)* Are we Bertram?

BERTRAM: *(nods reluctantly)* Fiskler never shouted at me.

ANGELA: He's not here, is he?

Angela paces back and forward, wringing her hands. She calms down, takes a sip of water.

ANGELA: We have an added complication. No good time to impart the news, so ... *(another sip of water)* ... I think I'm pregnant.

End of Act One

Lights down

ACT TWO

Scene One

Over a month has elapsed. It is now deep into the Antarctic winter. Through the porthole there is the green shimmer of the beautiful Aurora Australis. It comes and goes during the scene, randomly, unless otherwise directed.

Bertram is unkempt and dishevelled, playing chess in the central area, muttering to himself, playing with the teabag in his cup.

We can see Angela sleeping restlessly, in dim light, in her bunk. She gets up, stretches.

Lars, now sporting a beard, is doing sit-ups near to Bertram, while playing chess with him. He sits up looks at the board then down flat again. Each time he sits up Bertram seems surprised to see him.

BERTRAM: Dire ... evac ... deva ... retu ... "dire" is direction ... it must be ... unless it's just dire ... it could be that I suppose ...

LARS: I wish you'd stop that.

BERTRAM: It's a code.

LARS: It is a distorted, corrupted message.

BERTRAM: "Retu" must be return ...

LARS: What are you talking about?

BERTRAM: Fiskler.

LARS: Fiskler?

BERTRAM: He was trying to tell us something.

LARS: That's what a message usually does.

BERTRAM: You agree with me?

LARS: I agree with the logic.

BERTRAM: That's close enough.

Lars shrugs and stops doing his sit ups, exhausted.

BERTRAM: Fiskler is trying to tell me something ...

LARS: Us, surely?

BERTRAM: But coded!

LARS: Corrupted ...

BERTRAM: Coded ...

LARS: Why would he bother coding it?

BERTRAM: There must be a good reason.

LARS: It's your move.

BERTRAM: This is pointless.

LARS: The game?

BERTRAM: The game.

LARS: *For Satan i helvede*¹.

Lars stands up knocking the chessboard accidentally. He picks the pieces up and tries to replace them on the board.

LARS: I can't remember the set-up.

BERTRAM: I can't remember anything.

¹ A bad Danish curse.

Bertram shrugs to himself, not caring. He plays with the tea-bag in his cup.

Lars observes this and shakes his head, pouring himself a coffee. Off Lars' look.

BERTRAM: Tea is God's drink.

LARS: Then you've nothing to worry about.

They exchange smiles and raise a reluctant toast to each other.

BERTRAM: Will you tell me the joke?

LARS: How many times?

BERTRAM: Please?

Lars shakes his head in disbelief. He sighs, resigned, pulls up a chair in front of Bertram. During the telling Bertram hangs on his every word like a child.

LARS: There were two Finns named Mika and Jorkki working in the woods, far away from any town or city. They drank a large vodka every time they cut down a tree. It was freezing and the work was very hard. But the vodka sustained them and kept them warm.

BERTRAM: Go on, go on.

LARS: When the vodka ran out they were distraught. Jorkki found a bottle of de-icer in the wood shed. Mika was excited, reading that it contained methyl alcohol. Jorkki read out the

warning label that said drinking it would cause instant blindness.

BERTRAM: Instant!

LARS: After a pause Mika passed over the two empty cups for Jorkki to fill and said “Oh Jorkki, haven’t we seen enough of the world?”

BERTRAM: Haven’t we seen enough of the world! *(he slaps his thigh, laughing too loud and too long)*

LARS: My father told me that every year on my birthday.

BERTRAM: Do you miss it?

LARS: My birthday?

BERTRAM: Finland! Finland!

LARS: The joke is *about* Finns. Like your Irish, Scottish, Welsh jokes.

BERTRAM: Not Finland?

LARS: No. I am from Denmark.

BERTRAM: Denmark?

LARS: *(points to the tea)* Is that de-icer?

BERTRAM: No, no, no. Denmark, Denmark. Yes. I knew that. *(beat)* Oh Lars, haven’t we seen enough of the world.

Bertram convulses with laughter.

LARS: I will simply never understand you.

Lars is all business and starts to tidy up the galley area. Bertram is calm now.

He sidles up to Lars.

BERTRAM: We need to talk.

LARS: I do not wish to discuss ...

Angela enters the communal area.

ANGELA: Discuss what?

LARS: Nothing.

ANGELA: How can you discuss nothing?

LARS: Not nothing ... just nothing of substance.

BERTRAM: We were discussing Mika and Jorkki.

Angela is preparing some food and is getting annoyed and suspects the two are holding back on her.

ANGELA: Neither of you are laughing.

LARS: Too many times.

BERTRAM: Finns drinking methyl alcohol.

ANGELA: *(regarding them with mock disdain)* Two blind men.

BERTRAM: Well, we don't know that for sure if they *are* blind. Isn't that the whole point?

LARS: It's just a funny story Bertram.

BERTRAM: But we were discussing if they went ahead and drank the poison.

LARS: No, we were not. We assume they drank the poison and went blind because they would do anything for alcohol. Fuck man, surely you knew that?

BERTRAM: I thought it was a kind of parable; about seeing too much of the world?

LARS: I wish I had never ...

BERTRAM: Do you get the joke commander?

LARS: Yes, of course she fucking gets it ...

ANGELA: Okay, let's settle down.

Beat. Lars tries to busy himself. Bertram is nervous trying to decide what to say next. Angela suspects something and looks to Lars for enlightenment but he merely shrugs.

BERTRAM: Tell her Lars.

ANGELA: Yes, do tell me Lars?

BERTRAM: We need to talk ...

LARS: Don't Bertram.

BERTRAM: We have to.

ANGELA: Do I really have to pull rank here?

Lars sizes up to Bertram who realises he must stay quiet. Angela is exasperated and begins to cut up some fruit. Bertram takes a chess piece and

throws it at her, hitting her on the back. She stops cutting but ignores it. He repeats it and this time she reacts; picking up the piece, rubbing it under her arm and placing it right in front of Bertram without looking at him.

ANGELA: Armpits are a rain forest for microbes.

He is taken aback and looks at the chess piece with disgust. Lars emits a loud guffaw.

BERTRAM: I guess I was asking for that.

ANGELA: Discussing?

BERTRAM: We were merely ...

LARS: Bertram!

BERTRAM: Our options. As a group.

Angela casts a look. She understands what he means but is not rising to it. She approaches Bertram and sniffs.

ANGELA: You need to take a shower.

BERTRAM: I am sick of this cloak and dagger stuff. We need to discuss things. Simple as that. Plain as day. What's that dear? No, I'm in the middle of a meeting. *(not missing a beat)* We need to discuss things out in the open like normal, civilised people.

Angela and Lars exchange looks. Angela motions to Lars not to do anything.

ANGELA: Well, let's *be* civilised.

BERTRAM: For Christ sake Angela. Commander. You're having a baby. Here. At the bottom of the world. Do we even know if there is a world? We have no news. No one is telling us anything. We are as blind as those Godforsaken Finns.

LARS: Control yourself man ...

BERTRAM: Control! Me! She's the one going to have a baby. You call that control?

ANGELA: *(calmly eating her fruit from a bowl)* What do you propose we do Bertie?

In one quick move Bertram grabs her bowl and flings it towards the sink.

BERTRAM: You could stop eating through our rations for a start.

Lars immediately kicks in and comes between the two of them. Bertram knows he is no match for Lars. Despite an initial shock Angela is calm. Bertram looks suddenly lost and confused.

ANGELA: Perhaps you should have that shower Bertie?

BERTRAM: Yes. I think you are right Commander. A nice shower. Wash the old oxters. So dry here in the desert. Pesky microbes.

Bertram exits slowly. He hesitates as if to apologise to Angela, but she waves him on. In dim light we see him undressing to take a shower. Lars and Angela are silent – they want to make sure Bertram is out of earshot.

LARS: Are you okay?

ANGELA: You can't hide things from me.

LARS: It was just Bertram. He is getting paranoid.

ANGELA: He might be forgiven.

LARS: Sorry Commander ... there was no intention to ...

ANGELA: I know ... I think I'm also ... not knowing if Fiskler is ... that message could mean anything ...

LARS: He was alive when he sent it ...

ANGELA: *When* he sent it ... it could be bouncing around up there ...
God only knows ...

LARS: If anyone can survive out there ...

ANGELA: Why was he not on the Shackleton?

LARS: Only he can answer that ... I know this is tough, Angela.

ANGELA: It's the not knowing ...

LARS: I understand.

There is a tender moment; a brother comforting a sister. Angela is glad of it but shrugs it off just as quickly.

ANGELA: Bertram.

LARS: Have you seen it before?

ANGELA: I heard about a case; back in Halley IV.

LARS: It is affecting all of us.

ANGELA: But his age, the rations ... it will be more pronounced.

LARS: What do we do?

ANGELA: Sedatives. In his tea.

LARS: We can try.

ANGELA: If we could just get some news.

LARS: I cannot detect anything out there.

ANGELA: We need to keep him calm.

LARS: Agreed.

ANGELA: We all need to keep calm.

Lights down.

Scene Two

A week later. Evening dinner in the common area. Lars is busy cooking.

Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" plays loudly. A bottle of wine has been opened.

Angela is having a small glass.

Bertram is in fine spirits; the wine and sedatives doing their job. He is

standing on a chair, pretending to conduct an orchestra. Lars is amused but

busy in the kitchen area. Angela is indulging Bertram.

BERTRAM: Imagine ... tone deaf ... and he creates this!

ANGELA: It is very powerful.

BERTRAM: Powerful is not a strong enough word.

ANGELA: Are you musical Bertie?

BERTRAM: I wanted to be. Cello. The girls put a stop to that.

LARS: Two minutes.

BERTRAM: And you?

ANGELA: We had a piano at home.

LARS: I'll be putting the sauce on the side.

BERTRAM: Where are you from? You've told me before, but I'll be damned if I can remember.

ANGELA: Angel.

BERTRAM: Angel?

Lars turns down the music. Bertram is getting visibly tired from his efforts and gets down from the chair.

ANGELA: The Tube Station.

LARS: One minute, thirty seconds.

BERTRAM: Beg your pardon?

ANGELA: The London Underground Tube station.

BERTRAM: An *actual* station?

ANGELA: My birth mother was Irish. They know that much.

BERTRAM: You mean you were born in the actual ...

LARS: One minute.

ANGELA: A driver found me. Adopted me.

BERTRAM: Angela! Of course.

LARS: Thirty seconds.

BERTRAM: A train driver!

ANGELA: They insisted I do college in Dublin. To keep my roots ...

BERTRAM: That is some story.

LARS: Plating up.

BERTRAM: Lars? Did you know about this?

LARS: About what?

BERTRAM: Angel ... the Tube Station.

LARS: I've never been to ... Angel Tube Station.

BERTRAM: On the Northern Line ... Angela ... our Commander, was abandoned in the tube station.

ANGELA: I usually just say "born".

BERTRAM: Yes, yes, yes ... you know what I mean.

LARS: No, I was not aware of that.

BERTRAM: It's just an interesting story. And to see the success she has become. It is awe inspiring.

LARS: If you say so.

BERTRAM: If I say so ... can't you see ... awe inspiring.

LARS: Whatever. Let's eat.

BERTRAM: No, no, no Lars ... you have to see the ... wonderfulness of this story. Julia? Where is that woman; she would love this.

LARS: Born in a tube station, adopted, goes to college, discovers some microbes ... sounds like a movie. More wine anyone?

Angela can't help but spurt out laughing at Lars' summary and even Bertram sees the funny side.

BERTRAM: I should know better than to interfere with a Dane and his food.

LARS: You should but you don't ...

ANGELA: I appreciate your sentiments Bertram.

BERTRAM: A toast ... to the little girl from Angel Tube Station who has gone on to be leader of the known world.

ANGELA: Steady on.

BERTRAM: Well, you might be.

LARS: Pork meatballs with red cabbage.

ANGELA: What about you, Bertie?

BERTRAM: Oh no, I was born in a hospital. What was the bloody name of it?

LARS: Mette's recipe.

ANGELA: I meant here. What brought you here?

BERTRAM: This is my fourth stint. Did you not know that?

LARS: Yes, we knew that.

BERTRAM: Julia? The name of the hospital?

ANGELA: This is very good Lars.

BERTRAM: Red cabbage?

LARS: Mette always cooked it on my birthday.

BERTRAM: A bit too proletarian for me.

LARS: Fine. I will eat yours.

ANGELA: Your birthday?

BERTRAM: Good God man, why didn't you say?

LARS: A birthday self-announced?

ANGELA: That's why I freed up some rations; the meal.

LARS: It is appreciated.

BERTRAM: I was joking. The cabbage is ... very good.

LARS: Mette's recipe ...

Lars has a rare emotional moment and is on the cusp of crying but stops himself. Angela puts her hand on his shoulder. Bertram stops eating.

ANGELA: I'm so sorry Lars. Are you okay?

LARS: Sometimes ... I just can't believe that she is gone.

BERTRAM: We should have made a cake.

LARS: Lasagne cake?

There is a beat. A smile from Lars, then Angela, then Bertram. Angela tops up their glasses (but not her own). Lars puts his hand on Bertram's shoulder; a tender moment.

ANGELA: To Lars, happy birthday.

BERTRAM: To Lars. A birthday toast?

Lars ponders this. He gives it due consideration.

LARS: To seeing more of the world!

ANGELA: *(beat)* To seeing more of the world!

BERTRAM: *(beat)* To seeing more of the world!

They toast each other. Smiles are exchanged. The full import of Lars' toast sinks in. They eat in silence. They exchange more strained smiles. Bertram thinks about doing another toast but decides against it. Lars eats as if it will be his last meal, devouring what is on his plate with clinical precision. The convivial atmosphere dissipates.

Lights Down.

Scene Three

Breakfast – it is the next morning after the dinner last night. The choreography is not as smooth. Lars and Bertram bump into each other. Angela is sitting, the other two attending to her like a Queen bee.

ANGELA: Maybe I was too loose with the wine rations?

BERTRAM: I can't seem to hold my liquor any more.

LARS: It's the altitude ... makes the hangover worse.

BERTRAM: Thought it might have had something to do with this.

Bertram fingers some sediment in the bottom of his cup. Angela and Lars exchange looks but do no comment. Bertram is confused by it but does not overtly appear suspicious.

BERTRAM: Maybe Julia is trying to poison me, what?

LARS: No fear of a hangover for you Commander.

BERTRAM: About that. I've been thinking. Are you sure? I mean ...
definitely?

LARS: Bertram!

BERTRAM: I've heard cases where ... there needs to be certainty ... our
reduced rations ... things can get ... missed ...

LARS: I think the Commander well understands her own body
Bertram ...

ANGELA: I took a test.

BERTRAM: We have those here?

LARS: You're in charge of the medical supplies?
ANGELA: I found one.
BERTRAM: See ... I didn't miss anything!
LARS: *(teasing)* Very fortunate to "find" one all the same.

Angela casts Lars a look. Lars gives her an apology look.

BERTRAM: What would be the point of having tests here?
LARS: Obviously, there is a point.
BERTRAM: Yes, I see that *now*.
ANGELA: Gentlemen, these tests are very accurate so let's take this as a reality.
BERTRAM: Not exactly a "planned" reality is it?
LARS: Bertram! We'll have to let them know, of course ... when Comms are back up.
BERTRAM: Emilio Palma.
LARS: You told us already ...
BERTRAM: 1978.
ANGELA: That as well.
BERTRAM: Imagine being the first person born on a continent.
ANGELA: It must feel quite unique.
BERTRAM: Of course, he was born on a base where they had all the equipment and a doctor and the, eh ...
ANGELA: I get it. I will answer to the powers that be when I need to but for now we need to accept the facts as they are ... as

clear as the blue cross in the test. I am having a baby. Here.
In this isolated place. And you two need to accept it. Are we
clear, Gentlemen?

LARS: Aye, aye Commander.

BERTRAM: Aye, aye.

Bertram rises and claps his hands.

BERTRAM: So? Are you at least going to tell us?

ANGELA: A woman can have her honour Bertie.

LARS: It's not exactly a puzzle.

BERTRAM: The lady wants her honour Lars.

LARS: We need to make plans.

BERTRAM: There's nothing in the manual ...

ANGELA: We have six months.

LARS: Unless it's ... early ...

BERTRAM: Once Lars sorts the gremlins in the system, right?

ANGELA: Yes, the gremlins.

BERTRAM: Excellent. Will you have some tea Julia?

Angela and Lars exchange looks. Bertram is oblivious.

LARS: Julia?

BERTRAM: Beg pardon?

LARS: You called her Julia.

BERTRAM: Why ever would I do that old boy?

ANGELA: I don't need tea, thank you.

BERTRAM: Ship shape. Will I do an audit of the medical stores,
Commander?

ANGELA: But you only did that ... *(off Lars' look)* ... yes Bertram, that
is a good idea.

Bertram ambles off. Lars waits for Bertram to be out of earshot.

ANGELA: At least the sedatives seem to be working.

LARS: For now.

ANGELA: Emilio Palma ... he survived.

LARS: Yes, he did.

ANGELA: But they had facilities.

Lars puts down his cutlery, gets up and looks out the porthole window.

ANGELA: Are you going to be okay with this?

LARS: Do I have a choice? *(beat)* Then yes, I am okay with this.

ANGELA: Lars, I didn't ... I mean the mission ... I didn't want to
imperil anyone ...

LARS: I have accepted the reality of our situation. We have bigger
issues if we do not get Comms back online.

ANGELA: How many babies have you delivered?

LARS: This will be my ... *(pauses pretending to count)* ... first.

ANGELA: Are you worried?

LARS: Only about how Fiskler will look at me afterwards.

They both laugh, a bit too long. Angela joins Lars at the porthole looking out to the black abyss.

ANGELA: I am worried about Fiskler.

LARS: You did tell him about the baby, right?

ANGELA: I sent a message to the Shackleton.

LARS: Did he receive it?

ANGELA: I don't know.

LARS: To the Shackleton? Anyone could have read that.

ANGELA: I used code words ... silly stuff that we'd both understand.

LARS: So, he might know?

ANGELA: And he might not.

LARS: He might not.

ANGELA: We might be the only ones left.

Angela sighs deeply. They exchange long looks. There is a hint they might hold hands. They do not. The weight of their possible situation weighs upon them both.

Lights down.

Scene Four

It is late night; a few days have passed. Green lights shimmer from the Aurora Australis. Dim safety lights illuminate the central galley area. We can see Angela sleeping; tossing and turning. Bertram snores loudly. Lars has his earphones in, viewing videos on his tablet.

A man, clad in full snow gear, sticks his face up against the porthole. He tries to see in through the porthole but then falls and disappears.

There is a low thud. None of them notice. There is a louder thud. Angela awakens and sits up. Another thud. She rises and goes to Lars. He takes out his earphones and she motions him to listen. Another thud; this time very loud.

Lars and Angela hurry to the main galley area, pass through it and into the darker area of the visible stage. There is a commotion; raised, muffled, voices; shocked and then elated.

Bertram remains asleep though the whole event.

Three characters come back into the galley; Lars, Angela and a dishevelled, very cold looking, Fiskler.

ANGELA: Get some blankets, quickly. And the thermal wrap.

Lars runs off stage and goes to his bunk. He pulls whatever blankets he can find. Angela and Fiskler are left alone for a few moments. She is tender and almost overcome with emotion; and hugs him closely.

ANGELA: You came back.

FISKLER: I did.
ANGELA: I am glad.
FISKLER: So am I.
ANGELA: The others?

Lars puts a container in the microwave oven and returns to Fiskler. He warms Fiskler briskly with the blankets, wraps him in the thermal wrap and more blankets and puts him sitting down.

LARS: I'm heating some soup.
FISKLER: Soup!
ANGELA: You came back.
LARS: Commander? *(They answer at the same time).*
ANGELA: Yes?
FISKLER: Yes?
LARS: Protocol. We need to examine him.
ANGELA: Of course. But some soup first.
FISKLER: I would like that.

Fiskler adjusts one of the blankets; still shivering. Angela rubs the blankets to aid the heating process. Fiskler slumps to the floor.

ANGELA: Michael!
LARS: I've got him. Move the chair.

Fiskler comes around and Angela continues warming him. The microwave pings. Lars goes and takes soup from the microwave, piping hot. Bertram snores audibly in his bed.

LARS: Here, drink this. Easy.

FISKLER: Thank you Lars.

LARS: We never expected ...

ANGELA: We thought you were ...

FISKLER: The Sat Phone died.

LARS: We got some garbled messages.

ANGELA: Were they from the Shackleton?

FISKLER: Yes. The first was from the Shackleton ... the second one ...
on my way back here ... *(he wants to change the subject)* ...
the soup is excellent ...

LARS: Minestrone.

ANGELA: You can tell us later.

FISKLER: Where's Bertram?

ANGELA: We had to sedate him.

LARS: He's been hallucinating.

FISKLER: I've seen that before.

LARS: How did it end?

FISKLER: An airlift.

LARS: He's become ... a liability.

FISKLER: Sounds like the pills are working.

ANGELA: We had no options. What with me being ...

Lars senses they need some time together.

LARS: I'll get you some more soup Commander?

Lars exits. Angela moves in closer to Fiskler.

In the exchange below Fiskler is still over-awed by everything and recovering from the arduous journey. They are slightly talking over each other; just enough that it is possible they miss a key meaning of what each is saying to each other.

ANGELA: *(ecstatic)* You got my message!

FISKLER: *(lost in thought)* Your message?

ANGELA: I'm ... we ... we're having a baby!

FISKLER: *(dazed)* A baby?

ANGELA: Yes! I found a test. I am 100 per cent certain.

FISKLER: A baby!

Angela puts Fiskler's hand on her stomach. He is overwhelmed and confused by the news. There is no discernible sign of a bump in her tummy. Nevertheless, he breaks down; a mixture of intense happiness and sadness. There is a tender beat; she wipes away his tears and brushes hair from his face.

FISKLER: You should have told me before I left.

ANGELA: I didn't know before you left ... I only found the test ...

FISKLER: Test?

ANGELA: I sent a message to the Shackleton?

FISKLER: Ah, yes ... the Shackleton.

ANGELA: I even coded it so only you would understand.

FISKLER: *(confused)* A code? I sent you messages, back here.

ANGELA: It doesn't matter ... they must have crossed in all the mayhem. All that really matters is that you came back for me. For us!

FISKLER: Yes, I came back.

ANGELA: Would you have stayed?

FISKLER: What do you mean?

ANGELA: If you had known beforehand.

FISKLER: I would have brought you with me ...

She is overcome with emotion and let's three months of tension loose.

ANGELA: Michael ...

FISKLER: We are so very better off here ...

Off her look.

FISKLER: You really don't know do you?

ANGELA: Our Comms have been down ... we are in the dark.

FISKLER: The radiation?

Fiskler gets up and paces about. He is clearly upset. The microwave pings. Lars returns from the galley; the soup is ready, but he holds back to allow them space.

ANGELA: What is it Michael?

FISKLER: I came back, Angela, because I was ... scared.

ANGELA: You, scared?

FISKLER: What I saw. The news coming in ...

ANGELA: How bad is it?

FISKLER: Bad.

ANGELA: But you *did* come back ...

FISKLER: I did.

ANGELA: *(quietly, touches her stomach)* You got my message?

Fiskler does not answer. Lars decides he can wait no longer. Angela realises that Fiskler has not answered her about the message. She is shell-shocked.

LARS: Do you two need more space?

FISKLER: No Lars, this affects us all.

LARS: Sorry to be so rigorous ... but we need to follow protocol.

Angela and Fiskler look at Lars and then realise what he means. Fiskler nods.

LARS: BAS6 RECORD: It is noted that control of the station is handed back to Commander Michael Fiskler, with immediate effect.

FISKLER: This is Michael Fiskler taking command of the base. BAS6 END.

LARS: Aye, aye, Commander.

ANGELA: Please excuse me, Commander.

Angela rises gracefully; it has dawned on her that Fiskler did not receive her message. She nods to the men and leaves. Fiskler is tempted to go after her but decides against it. Fiskler and Lars share a beat, an elephant in the room.

FISKLER: So, Lars, we are going to have a baby?

LARS: It would *appear* so.

FISKLER: How did Bertram take it.

LARS: I am not sure he understands the ... consequences.

FISKLER: Perhaps none of us fully understand ...

LARS: I admit to being ... surprised. You, Angela ... I presumed the mission and the crew would be paramount.

FISKLER: We will have to answer for this ... but now is not the time. Can you get over that?

LARS: I already have, Commander.

FISKLER: Good. We have a whole world of other issues to deal with.

LARS: Aye, aye Commander.

Fiskler stands and offers his hand. They shake. Fiskler gets up and moves to the porthole window.

FISKLER: Lars. I came back because I had to.

LARS: I understand Commander.

FISKLER: No, you don't Lars. I came back because I am a ...

LARS: That journey would have seen off most men and ...

FISKLER: The journey was the easy part. *(beat)* It's all gone Lars.

LARS: It can't be ...

FISKLER: Take it from me Lars. It most certainly is.

Lars is pummelled by this news. He can hardly stand upright.

LARS: I refuse to accept that Commander.

FISKLER: You must have known ...

LARS: We had so much interference ... I knew it couldn't be solar flare s... even massive ones.

FISKLER: I wish I could tell you otherwise.

LARS: The Shackleton?

FISKLER: They wanted to go on ...

LARS: No one would blame you for coming back in the circumstances.

FISKLER: In the circumstances ... no, no, no Lars ... I didn't know ...

LARS: She said she sent you a message.

FISKLER: I never got it ... it was chaos on the Shack ...

LARS: You never got it?
FISKLER: I never said I did.
LARS: Did you say you didn't?
FISKLER: Angela has worked that bit out.
LARS: Ah, I see.
FISKLER: So, you see ... I came back because I was scared ...

Fiskler looks away, emotional. A beat.

FISKLER: Lars. Listen to me. Listen closely. It is all gone. Everything.
Everyone. All of it.
LARS: *(shouts)* I do not fucking believe that.
FISKLER: I came back here to save myself.
LARS: That journey ...
FISKLER: Fuck the journey! I came back because I am a coward!
LARS: You came back to be a father.
FISKLER: *(pounds the table)* We both know that's not true!

There has to be a tacit suggestion that they both know Angela is not really pregnant and that they both accept that they will play along to give them all some hope. There is a beat.

LARS: Everything?
FISKLER: We can't be sure but it looked like ... Armageddon.
LARS: I can't believe we finally did it to ourselves.
FISKLER: Believe it.

LARS: How many nukes ...

FISKLER: More than enough ...

Lars moves away, disgusted by the revelation. He peers out the porthole window.

LARS: Is there any hope?

FISKLER: We had intermittent data.

LARS: Can you be sure?

FISKLER: What we saw on the screens ...

LARS: But the others went on?

FISKLER: Hoping against hope.

LARS: And only you came back?

FISKLER: I should have stayed with them.

LARS: But you came back for us Commander.

FISKLER: No, no, no ... I came back for myself. To fucking survive.

LARS: For us. For Angela!

Fiskler grabs Lars by the shoulders and shakes him.

FISKLER: A coward, I tell you.

Bertram has awoken. He is dishevelled and wearing boxer shorts and a t-shirt.

He enters the galley area. He is over-joyed to see Fiskler.

BERTRAM: Who's a coward?

Fiskler lets go of Lars and perks himself up and takes a deep breath. Lars is devastated and props himself against the porthole window.

FISKLER: Bertram! Good to see you, old friend.

BERTRAM: Commander!

Bertram rushes to him and hugs him.

BERTRAM: I knew you'd come back. The others didn't believe me, but I decoded the message ...

FISKLER: Message?

BERTRAM: "Dire situation. Devastation. Returning to Base" ... all of it. Am I right?

FISKLER: Message?

BERTRAM: Your message?

FISKLER: *(slowly dawns on him)* The Aurora. The Sat Phone. Yes, I sent a message.

BERTRAM: *(euphoric)* I told them ... a coded message.

FISKLER: Coded? No, I am sure I was hallucinating. Dehydration.

BERTRAM: No, no, no ... I understood it. I got the subtext.

FISKLER: Sorry Bertram ... there was no ... I can't even remember what I said.

Bertram is crestfallen.

BERTRAM: I was waiting for Commander Fiskler to come back.

LARS: I tried to tell you there was no message ...

BERTRAM: But he's here!

Bertram makes a dramatic show of pointing to the person of Fiskler, real, in front of them now. Lars is exasperated.

FISKLER: I did come back.

BERTRAM: What's the news from home?

FISKLER: All is good old friend, all is good.

BERTRAM: Do you have any football scores?

FISKLER: Your team keeps winning Bertie.

BERTRAM: Hah! Did you hear that Julia? The boys are winning. She will be delighted to see you.

Lars and Fiskler exchange looks. Lars merely shrugs.

FISKLER: It is good to see you Bertram.

BERTRAM: We are having a baby. Did you know that? Of course, you did, you old fox! Angela *must* have told you. We are excited ... but of course we know we can't possibly keep it.

FISKLER: Okay Bertram, perhaps we should talk about that later.

BERTRAM: And you back in charge! *(hugs him again)* That makes me so happy.

FISKLER: Your Commander would like a little less hugging. Okay Bertram?

BERTRAM: Aye, aye Commander.

Angela returns to the galley area. She sees Bertram hugging Fiskler and Lars lost in his thoughts, peering out the porthole. She is down beat and lost in thought.

FISKLER: Bertram and I are just catching up.

BERTRAM: He's in command now.

ANGELA: Yes, I know.

BERTRAM: So, none of your airs and graces.

FISKLER: Easy now.

BERTRAM: He will make a proper decision. About it. The other mouth.

LARS: Bertram, shut the fuck up.

BERTRAM: You're not the boss. Commander Fiskler's back. I knew he'd come. I decoded his message!

LARS: What about Julia? She's another mouth as well. But she's not actually here is she Bertram?

FISKLER: Steady now, Lars.

LARS: She's just in that head of yours?

BERTRAM: We can't have another mouth upsetting the apple cart.

LARS: *(shaking his head)* Apple cart?

BERTRAM: Julia?

LARS: Julia! Julia! Tally-ho, ship shape, Athenians drawing lots ...
do come and have a look dear; there's a fucking mental
patient on the loose here!

FISKLER: That's enough Lars.

In a sudden move Bertram rushes and grabs a bread knife and puts Angela in a stranglehold. He has the knife close to her throat. Lars and Fiskler react but do not over-react. Fiskler makes very subtle hand gestures to Lars to get him to move slowly around to try to get blindside of Bertram.

FISKLER: Bertie, do you have a status update on the Brunt?

BERTRAM: Chasm One is still advancing towards the McDonald Ice
Rumples, Commander.

FISKLER: How quickly?

BERTRAM: Over 260 metres per day.

FISKLER: Will she calve?

BERTRAM: Inevitable.

Lars has edged into a good position to attack but Fiskler signals subtly to hold off. Angela is keeping her eyes focused on Fiskler and is not wrestling Bertram.

FISKLER: We are relying on you to let us know, Bertie.

BERTRAM: The measurements ... we have only ground based ... the Satellites are down.

FISKLER: It will be quite a spectacle. Julia would be so proud of you.

LARS: What's that Julia?

BERTRAM: Can you hear her?

LARS: Of course.

ANGELA: We can all hear her Bertie.

BERTRAM: What's she saying?

ANGELA: It's time for tea.

BERTRAM: Tea!

LARS: And cake.

BERTRAM: Cake?

FISKLER: We would need the knife Bertie.

BERTRAM: The knife?

LARS: To cut the cake.

BERTRAM: Of course.

LARS: My Mette's recipe.

ANGELA: That cinnamon one you love.

BERTRAM: I do love that one, don't I?

LARS: What's that Julia?

BERTRAM: You *can* hear her?

LARS: She said let me have the knife. To cut the cake.

FISKLER: On the trek back here, Bertie ... I didn't think I'd make it. I was out of food and the Sat Phone had died. But I pressed on ... the thought of sharing some hot tea with you spurred

me on ... and then a strange thing happened ... the aurora was in full flow ... and I realised the pulses of light were a message ... a coded message for me. It told me I needed to come back, that we might be the only ones and a new child would be born ... and that child would be the future ...

Bertram is transfixed by Fiskler's story. Even Lars and Angela are drinking it in.

BERTRAM: A new Messiah?

FISKLER: Perhaps, Bertie, perhaps!

Lars is now close enough to reach out. He gently touches the handle of the knife. Bertram reacts but Lars manages to grab the knife. Blood spills on the floor.

FISKLER: Angela!

Lights down.

ACT THREE

Scene One

Seven months have elapsed.

The Antarctic summer should be starting but there is no discernible sunshine.

Bertram is in a makeshift straitjacket (a heavy winter coat on backwards and secured with cable ties). He is sedated. He sits on his own away from the others mumbling to himself.

Angela's "baby" has been born; at least that is what we are led to believe. She is working slowly at her science station but is languid and subdued.

Fiskler has let his beard grow long, Jesus-like. He is reviewing documents and using a calculator on the table.

Lars is unkempt and sluggish. Like the others he is feeling the effects of the acute lack of Vitamin D and poor rations. He tinkers with some circuits at the communications panel, with no great enthusiasm.

A baby's cot has been cleverly put together from items at the base and is placed near to Angela.

FISKLER: I've made a decision.

Lars and Angela look up from what they are doing. Fiskler walks to Bertram and observes him closely.

FISKLER: We are running out of options.

ANGELA: We can wait ...

FISKLER: Until when?

LARS: It's come to this?

FISKLER: It has.

LARS: How do we ...

FISKLER: It will be my responsibility.

LARS: I can do it Commander.

FISKLER: No. It has to be me.

ANGELA: When?

LARS: When?

FISKLER: Today. Now.

BERTRAM: Are you making tea Julia?

ANGELA: Look at him.

BERTRAM: A tube station ...

LARS: Because we must.

ANGELA: He's like a child.

BERTRAM: ... did you know that ...

LARS: I accept he is a liability.

FISKLER: The rations ... the drugs, we can't sedate him any longer.

BERTRAM: ... as if there weren't enough microbes ...

LARS: We have no choice.

BERTRAM: ... where is that woman with my tea ...

ANGELA: The sun will come back. You said it yourself.

BERTRAM: ... bit of a cock up with the lasagne ...

FISKLER: I said it was a possibility. That is all.

ANGELA: We can wait; another month, another week?

BERTRAM: ... born in a test tube ...

FISKLER: There are no other options.

BERTRAM: ... a tube station ...

LARS: I'll do it.

BERTRAM: ... remember ye the Athenians ...

FISKLER: No, it has to be me.

BERTRAM: ... draw straws, gentlemen ... *en garde* ...

ANGELA: A man's ... not on the draw of a straw!

LARS: I insist Commander.

FISKLER: No.

ANGELA: Do I not have a say?

LARS: You have a ... I mean you need to look after your child.

Lars and Fiskler exchange knowing looks.

FISKLER: It is my decision.

LARS: I relieve you of your post.

FISKLER: You cannot ...

LARS: Under base rules ...

FISKLER: Don't quote me on base rules or I'll put you in a coat beside him.

Lars and Fiskler square up right into each other's faces, like prized boxers.

Angela is pacing back and forwards wringing her hands. She cracks and screams at them.

ANGELA: Stop it. Stop it you two! You wake Mary-Julia. *(pointing to Bertram)* He's the most civilised one here.

Lars and Fiskler slowly break off their face-off. Angela goes to the cot, there is no movement or sound from it. She takes the cot side stage.

ANGELA: I need to feed her.

FISKLER: *(pointing at Angela)* She will not be drawing a straw?

LARS: Agreed.

Angela takes an obvious doll from the cot and clumsily wraps it in a baby sling.

ANGELA: It might be easier on him if it was me ...

FISKLER: You need to stay.

LARS: Your child needs you.

FISKLER: There is no discussion.

Angela, carrying the baby, defiantly finds three straws and cuts them at her science station. She holds them in her hand and thrusts them into Lars' and Fiskler's face. Straws are drawn. Lars first draws a long one, Fiskler a very short one.

FISKLER: It is decided.

ANGELA: I have a straw too.

They don't even look at Angela. She throws the remaining straw away. Fiskler stands rooted to the spot. Lars goes to the porthole window; desperately hoping to see a flicker of sunlight.

LARS: Commander, I have some doubts.

FISKLER: The straws!

ANGELA: We should do it again. Best of three.

BERTRAM: Clutching at straws now, my dear. *(he guffaws at his own pun. No one else laughs.)* That's very good, old chap, you should write that down.

FISKLER: Enough. It is done!

LARS: What would Mette think?

FISKLER: Does it matter?

LARS: Of course, it fucking matters. What happened to her was random. Some drunk. This is different; pre-meditated.

ANGELA: It's okay Lars, we understand ...

LARS: Do you? Do you really?

FISKLER: It is not easy.

LARS: The very opposite of that.

BERTRAM: Is he still upset about the lasagne?

FISKLER: There is no opposite.

ANGELA: I don't think I can ...

Fiskler stands in the middle of the room and speaks loudly and officially to ensure he is recorded.

FISKLER: BAS6 RECORD: I, Commander Michael Fiskler, take full responsibility for subsequent actions relating to Bertram.
BAS6 END.

ANGELA: Michael. Think. Is there no way we can ...

FISKLER: *(pounds the table)* The situation demands it.

BERTRAM: Why did the glaciologist leave Antarctica? Because he didn't want to end up on the Shelf.

Bertram laughs at his own joke but is confused and disappointed by the others' reactions. Fiskler walks to Bertram, regards him for a beat and turns back to the others.

FISKLER: I will take him for a walk.

LARS: A walk?

FISKLER: A walk.

LARS: To die ...

ANGELA: You mean as he is ...

FISKLER: Yes.

LARS: For fuck man.

ANGELA: Do we tell him?

LARS: Why would we do that?

ANGELA: It is humane.

FISKLER: Would you feel better if you had known about Mette in advance?

LARS: *For Helvede Mand.*

FISKLER: I will do this.

ANGELA: Is there no other way?

Fiskler hangs his head then gathers his thoughts. Angela cradles the doll as if trying to get her to sleep.

FISKLER: We came here because we believed in one thing; science. It brought us here and it may very well leave us here. Science is based on facts and now we have to face some terrible, indisputable and life altering facts.

I have seen what has happened out there ... the news ... the terrifying pictures ... the gut-wrenching sounds. Science devouring itself.

And now another fact confronts us; the real probability that we are the only ones left; the last of our kind; the remnants of a suicidal species and I ask you to look at all the facts and consider this one question; do you or do you not want to live? *(beat)* Do you or do you not want to live?

Lars is like a caged animal. He grabs a chair and goes to throw it then stops himself. Angela is about to stop him but sees she does not have to.

Lars approaches Fiskler, looms over him for a long beat. Fiskler does not look at him. Angela coos to the doll, humming an indistinct lullaby.

Lars observes Angela and deflates; putting his hand on Fiskler's shoulder.

Lars nods "yes" slowly to Fiskler and exits.

Angela and Fiskler stare at each other.

Fiskler moves to put on his EVA suit.

Angela goes to Bertram. She is visibly upset. We can see Lars in dim light picking a picture of Mette from his wall, kissing it and slipping it inside his clothing. Angela pulls a seat up near Bertram.

BERTRAM: What's the weather old girl?

ANGELA: Minus 30, with the wind chill feels like minus 40.

BERTRAM: Ship shape. *(aloud)* Julia?

ANGELA: Bertie?

BERTRAM: She's called me Bertie – there might be cake, Julia.

ANGELA: Bertie. They made a decision. We've made a decision.

BERTRAM: Oxford sponge I should think.

ANGELA: I tried to ...

BERTRAM: Julia, is there any tea?

ANGELA: You know I tried, don't you?

BERTRAM: Cup of tea would be nice.

ANGELA: We have no tea Bertie.

BERTRAM: Bother. It tasted weird anyway. *(she does not react)*

ANGELA: Is there anything you need to say to me?

BERTRAM: Can I be bold?

ANGELA: Of course.

BERTRAM: Am I the father?

ANGELA: No Bertie.

Angela smiles and caresses his head. Bertram smiles back at her, lucid.

ANGELA: A message for Julia?

BERTRAM: Lars fixed the Comms, eh? He's a good egg.

ANGELA: Yes, he is.

BERTRAM: Two hundred words is all ...

ANGELA: "By post and fax ..."

BERTRAM: You listened?

ANGELA: I always listened.

BERTRAM: When I was a young professor ... she thought that ... she misinterpreted ... an affection for a student ... will you tell her that.

ANGELA: Tell her yourself.

BERTRAM: *(hesitant, clears his throat, then aloud)* BAS6 RECORD: Julia darling. Things here are a bit of a pickle. Shortage of food and all that. No bloody tea! That student ... I never, I mean I didn't mean to. Kiss the girls for me. Love them more than all the stars in the sky. Lot of stars to see down here, Julia. That's it. Ship shape. BAS6 END.

ANGELA: You must have been so in love?

BERTRAM: Will you name a microbe after me? *Bertramacillus lactis*.

Persistent bugger; knows everything; useful to no one.

ANGELA: Don't be so harsh.

BERTRAM: *(motions to the bundles Angela is carrying)* Will she be okay?

ANGELA: Of course, she will.

Bertram is overcome with emotion and breaks down crying. He is aware of what is about to happen.

BERTRAM: You know I would never have ... the knife?

ANGELA: Yes, I know that.

BERTRAM: Don't blame Fiskler – he is right about the facts. You must do what is right, for the greater good.

ANGELA: You understood him?

BERTRAM: The sedatives are wearing off Angela.

ANGELA: Bertram!

BERTRAM: Hush now, we both know it's for the best.

ANGELA: You don't have to do this ...

When Bertram sees Fiskler, fully suited for an EVA, coming over he lapses back into delusional Bertram. Angela regards him and is shocked into reality. Lars is in his bunk talking to his tablet, recording a message. Fiskler motions to Angela to bring Bertram to him.

BERTRAM: Where the flip is Julia with my tea?

ANGELA: Michael you need to rethink this. He is lucid. He knows what's going on.

FISKLER: Don't Angela.

ANGELA: We just had a conversation. The facts. He knows about the sedatives.

FISKLER: Please Angela?

ANGELA: He is doing this to save us. Tell him he doesn't have to. *(to Bertram)* Tell him Bertie. Tell him what you just said to me?

She grabs Bertram and shakes him. He will not make eye contact with her.

BERTRAM: ... a test tube or a tube station?

ANGELA: Please Bertie. I beg you. Tell him the truth.

FISKLER: We need to do this now.

ANGELA: Please Michael.

She grabs on to Fiskler and he has to pry her arms off his EVA suit, strong but gentle.

FISKLER: Angela! You have to stop this. Think it through. He would if he could. You should. Lars has done so already. Now stop this and fucking think. Think of her.

BERTRAM: Are we going out?

FISKLER: Yes Bertram, we are going for a walk. You and me.

BERTRAM: Can we buy some tea, Commander?

FISKLER: We can Bertram.

BERTRAM: Be great if you help me out of this thing. Itches like mad.

FISKLER: Leave it on.

BERTRAM: A good walk will blow the cobwebs off.

Angela is crying and cannot look. Bertram is now standing awkwardly in the makeshift straitjacket.

ANGELA: Tell them Bertie, please?

BERTRAM: No. We agreed, remember. *(faux whisper)* About that student.

FISKLER: We need to go Bertram.

Angela still has her back to them and is sobbing.

BERTRAM: Put the kettle on Angela ... my little messenger of the Gods.

Fiskler gently leads Bertram towards the door area. Angela runs after them, stops Bertram and places a tender kiss on his cheek. Lars rushes to the galley area.

BERTRAM: Are we going to check the Shelf? She's going to calve soon!

LARS: I will help you with the door.

BERTRAM: Might break away any day. The size of Manhattan.

FISKLER: Thank you Lars.

BERTRAM: Not as many people mind.

LARS: Put his jacket on the right way. It's the least we can do. (*just to Angela*) Look after Mary-Julia; she is your beautiful child.

Angela is surprised by his words. Fiskler has put Bertram's coat on the right way. Lars leads Bertram slowly off-stage. Fiskler goes to Angela. She is distraught. He goes to kiss her but she retracts. He rubs his hand along her back and she recoils. He turns abruptly to go.

Angela busies herself; setting up the small microscope and the table and removing a few ice samples from the freezer unit.

In the dim light side stage there is a small commotion, a scuffle. A loud thud is heard followed by muffled voices and eventually the clang of a heavy metal door shutting.

After a beat Fiskler appears pulling himself along the floor. His EVA clothes are missing. He hands are tied behind his back with cable ties. Angela sees him and drops the vial she was working on.

ANGELA: Michael!

Lights down.

Scene Two

A week after Lars and Bertram have left. Angela is reading a manual and adjusting controls on the central communications panel, with little success.

Fiskler is leaning against the porthole, languid.

ANGELA: Work damn you.

FISKLER: Is there any point?

ANGELA: I need to try.

FISKLER: Where's Lars when you need him?

ANGELA: Not funny.

FISKLER: At least he left you his manuals.

She casts him a look to say not now please.

FISKLER: We will have to atone someday.

ANGELA: We need to make sure there'll be a "someday".

FISKLER: You can hope.

ANGELA: How long have we got? Tell me the truth.

FISKLER: With rationing and sparse fuel usage. A year, eighteen months.

ANGELA: We will find a way.

FISKLER: Give "her" my rations.

ANGELA: Stop that.

FISKLER: Promise me.

ANGELA: Pull yourself together!

FISKLER: Maybe I'll just go out for a walk ... when you're sleeping.

Angela throws down a screwdriver in exasperation. A brief but definite squawk of static momentarily emits from the speaker.

ANGELA: Did you hear that?

FISKLER: What?

ANGELA: It came to life.

FISKLER: Don't fuck with me ...

ANGELA: It did.

FISKLER: Try it again.

Angela shakes the panel. A briefer squawk emits from the speaker.

ANGELA: Make some coffee. I'll keep at it.

FISKLER: Should we hope?

ANGELA: It was a flicker.

FISKLER: Could have been a ghost signal?

ANGELA: No, not on these bands.

FISKLER: It's not really a message ... we can't say for sure we have received anything?

ANGELA: You're the expert on messages never received ...

Off a look. He is beyond trying to apologise.

FISKLER: Should we dare to hope ...

ANGELA: For Mary-Julia!

FISKLER: Someone will get to judge us.

ANGELA: *(with disdain)* Make the coffee.

Fiskler goes to prepare some coffee. Angela scans pages of the manual.

FISKLER: *(quietly)* Someone might get to judge us.

Angela is entranced by the Comms panel.

ANGELA: Are you going to check on her?

FISKLER: Are you serious?

ANGELA: She's crying, for God's sake!

Fiskler makes a big show of going to where the cot is. Angela remains is at the Comms panel. Another burst of static on the speakers stays for a few seconds, longer than the last time. She adjusts some dials. It clicks off again. She adjusts a different dial and then the static comes on consistently.

ANGELA: Michael! Michael! Quickly!

Fiskler peers down from his vantage and can see Angela. He is unenthusiastic and simply remains with the cot, rocking it aimlessly.

Lights down.

Scene Three

One month later. It should be the middle of the Antarctic summer but no light shines through the porthole window.

Angela is sitting in the galley, adjusting controls on the central communications panel. There is only static.

Fiskler enters from the kitchen area and puts a plate of food on the table.

Angela gets up from the Comms panel and devours the small ration of food, licking the plate clean.

ANGELA: I need to keep my strength up.

FISKLER: And me?

ANGELA: I've stopped caring about you.

FISKLER: We might be all there is.

ANGELA: Should that make me feel different?

FISKLER: No, I guess not.

ANGELA: The only thing I care about now ...

FISKLER: Yeah, yeah ... Mary-Julia, I fucking know.

ANGELA: There may be others out there.

FISKLER: Always the glass half full.

ANGELA: So long as I still have a fucking glass.

She goes back to the Comms panel scanning the bands. Static is all she gets.

FISKLER: Why do you keep doing that?

ANGELA: Lars said ... if the radiation subsides.

FISKLER: We owe him ...

ANGELA: You owe him ...

FISKLER: He gave me no other option.

ANGELA: You said that about Bertram.

FISKLER: Angela, please.

ANGELA: I can't ... a man's life.

FISKLER: It doesn't help ... either of us ...

ANGELA: He knew.

FISKLER: You wanted to believe that.

ANGELA: I know it.

FISKLER: I had no choice. Blame me.

ANGELA: You're damn fucking right I blame you.

FISKLER: It was either him ...

ANGELA: Or us. Go on ... say it. Him or us.

FISKLER: It was not an easy decision.

ANGELA: Like leaving me with the others ... or leaving the Shackleton to come back here?

FISKLER: It ... was ... not ... an ... easy ... decision.

ANGELA: How's that whole "easy decision" thing working out for you?

FISKLER: Leave me be.

ANGELA: If I had a wish ...

FISKLER: Be careful what you ...

ANGELA: Coward.

FISKLER: You are so very right.

ANGELA: And Bertie faked it just to make it easy.

FISKLER: If that is true then he is a hero.

ANGELA: Fuck you.

FISKLER: Angela please ...

Angela returns to the console and starts scanning the bands again. Fiskler goes to the porthole window.

FISKLER: *(to himself)* Damn you Lars, you should have let me go.

Fiskler exits and goes towards the cot upstairs. He takes up a pillow and rocks on his toes. He is distraught and holds the pillow close to the doll's face and then clutches it to himself. He repeats this. He then recoils in shock. Paces.

Thinks. Paces. Angela notices Fiskler's absence and moves to the porthole ...

Fiskler puts the pillow near the doll's head ...

A message starts coming in on the speakers. It is distorted but discernible as Lars. Fiskler cannot hear it as he is consumed by his own actions.

LARS: ... Brunt ... calv ... floa ...

ANGELA: Lars!

Fiskler hears this and is knocked out of his reverie..

ANGELA: Michael! Michael! Come quickly.

She does not want to leave the console.

ANGELA: It's Lars! It's Lars!

Fiskler drops the pillow in self-disgust. He runs towards Angela. As he approaches he can hear the garbled message coming in.

LARS: ... ten ... kil ... oth ...

FISKLER: Lars!

ANGELA: I'm trying to boost it.

FISKLER: Is it a recording?

ANGELA: It's coming in live.

FISKLER: Live ... but how could ...

ANGELA: He must have ... but he couldn't have ...

BERTRAM: Tell them about the Brunt ... she calved, she calved!

ANGELA: It's Bertram!

LARS: Others ... rad ... low ... resc ...

FISKLER: Others! He said others!

The signal stops abruptly, starts again but then stops dead.

ANGELA: It's gone.

FISKLER: Did you record it? Did you?

ANGELA: I don't know. I couldn't figure that out.

The transmission starts again, much clearer.

LARS: Iceberg ... rations ... antennae ... coming back ... many
others ...

ANGELA: *(ecstatic)* They are coming back!

FISKLER: Sounds like it.

ANGELA: There is life.

FISKLER: The Brunt Ice Shelf ... it broke away we're drifting ...

ANGELA: Bertram was right!

*A ray of sunshine floods through the small porthole window; they are both
bathed in its light.*

ANGELA: Look, the sun!

Lights down.

Curtains.