

# ANTARCTICA 1913

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*Four weeks has Mawson fought for life on meagre Husky meat each day.  
The glacial land has slain his friends and swallowed his provisions sleigh.  
With food-filled dreams, with flesh rubbed raw, with soles in pain at every tread,  
he strains across the fissured ice, in lonely harness to his sled.*

*And then the trodden snow bridge breaks: within a deep crevasse he falls.  
He grips the rope four metres down between the jaws of glass-like walls,  
not knowing if the soft snowdrift will next the straining sled dismiss  
and feed him without mercy to the blue carnivorous abyss.*

*With frostbit hands and snow-packed clothes, escape seems just a mocking dream.  
Yet lunging up from knot to knot amidst thick clouds of panted steam,  
with grunts that shock the frozen quiet, he hauls up through the mouth he tore.  
But no! The treach'rous lip of snow now snaps to plunge him down once more.*

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*Condemned to freeze, he pictures slipping from the canvas straps of life,  
to greet the end with one swift fall, released from overwhelming strife.  
But then a poet's lines rebuke: surrender is the easy course.  
With upward glare he spurs spent limbs, impassioned aim his last resource.*

*Each tortured inch that mighty will commands all strength he can afford  
to drag himself with raw bare hands so slowly up the rough hard cord,  
until at last with feet through first he heaves up from the deadly snare  
and falls secure beside his trusty sled, with every nerve stripped bare.*

*When arduous exams crush hope, when virulent disease brings fright,  
when vice-clamped thighs and burning chest rebel against your training plight,  
draw fuel from wasted Douglas Mawson trapped in cruel Antarctic chill,  
commanding nerve and muscle skyward - saved by his Herculean will.*

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Nigel Richards 2013

BRETTON  
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