Edmund the Dreamer

Every morning he would read for two hours on his way to school, and every evening he would read for two hours on the way home. Every day for a number of years he would finish a book. The books filled his young mind with images of action and adventure. There were also some moments of romance, and at times he wished that he lived the lives of the fictional heroes he had read so much about.

*I am just going outside and may be some time.*

Young Edmund was fond of taking long walks without really knowing where he was going. All the while his mind would be miles away, slashing villains with swords and rescuing damsels in distress. It was this imaginative mind that continued to follow Edmund around in his life. Even when he was old enough to start his own adventures, the thoughts of the ones he had read about lingered in his mind. He never thought that doing these things would make him any sort of a hero; he was simply doing them for himself. He was always confident in his abilities to accomplish the task at hand. He thought he was arrogant at times, but he understood that arrogance was necessary.

*And I tell you, if you have the desire for knowledge and the power to give it physical expression, go out and explore.*

It was this sort of thinking that would ultimately help him to climb Mt. Everest along with his Sherpa, Tenzing Norgay. They were the first men to accomplish such a remarkable feat. Edmund was a man that would plunge forward into unknown territory without any concern for himself. Mt. Everest was a target that many experienced climbers dreamed about but few could ever achieve. Finishing the climb left a swirling feeling in his chest, a “quiet satisfaction.” It urged him to do more. Edmund Hilary had climbed Mt. Everest, but he was not ready to stop his adventures. He felt that he still had a lifetime of these trips ahead of him.

*Men wanted for hazardous journey. Low wages, bitter cold, long hours of complete darkness. Safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in event of success.*

As an older man, Edmund would recall a journey that satisfied him more than any other. A journey that had made him feel complete. This journey would be an Antarctic exploration where he would follow in the footsteps of great explorers, many of whom had met a tragic end.

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1 The italicized texts are direct quotes taken from *The Worst Journey in the World* by Apsley Cherry-Gerrard, the book Edmund takes along with him to the Antarctic.
This was a journey he had read about dozens of times, and so he made sure to pack *The Worst Journey in the World*, by Apsley Cherry-Garrard, in his bag to take along with him. Above any textbook or scientific journals, this was the one book he wanted in his bag. It was a memoir of the British Antarctic expedition written by a survivor of Captains Scott’s 1912 expedition. He would use this memoir as he made his own expedition to find the camp that Scott’s expedition had set up in complete darkness.

“You brought along that old thing, huh?” Peter Mulgrew asked through a scarf wrapped tightly around his face. Peter was the one man who had been on several adventures with Edmund and shared the same desire for exploring.

“On this trip, it is our Bible,” Edmund responded. In no way was Edmund religious, so this made Peter chuckle. Edmund’s faith was always in the things he could trust to be true.

The small expedition crossed the Windless Bight in their old snow tractors. Edmund and his crew set out as darkness was approaching, but were blessed with several hours of light. They hoped that the light would make it easier to navigate the frozen bight. Their progress was incredibly slow as the tractors scaled small hills of Cape Cozier. Edmund continued to examine his “bible.” His brow furrowed as he went over the smallest details of text.

The tractors were stopped now as darkness came to the expedition. The men began to strip out of their cold gear and warm up in their tents and sleeping bags. Edmund sat up with a small flashlight in his mouth as he read his book. Every so often he would shake his head to himself, causing the flashlight to rattle between his teeth.

“I do think we have been going the wrong direction this whole time,” he announced to Peter. With a nod, Peter acknowledged he had been thinking the same thing.

“Yes, I think we would find the camp if we headed in that direction,” he said, pointing past Edmund with a mitted hand.

“No, it is, in fact, in that direction,” Edmund said. The two directions contradicted one another, leaving the two explorers at a loss.

Their eyes met for a moment, searching each other’s gaze. Testing. Deciding. There was only one way to tell who was right. They decided the only reasonable thing to do was to put on their cold gear and trek out alone in their own directions. On the surface it was only a matter of finding the camp, but somewhere deeper, it was a friendly competition. Although the book Edmund carried with him had tales of men who had fallen trying to do the same thing as he was doing now, he did not fear death. The air was cold, but the warm feeling in his chest kept him motivated and pushed aside any fears of failure. So he plunged confidently into the ever increasing darkness.
The darkness meant Edmund couldn’t see very far in front of him. The small flashlight he carried didn’t make much of a difference in this kind of open space. Even the whiteness of the snow seemed to have been grayed out and began to blend in with the sky around him. In every direction he looked, everything seemed similar and disorienting. The colors played tricks on him, but he made sure that he was traveling in a straight line. Every so often his boots would catch on a lump of frozen ground, and he would catch himself before falling forward. He stumbled on like this for a short while, still convinced he would find the camp. Never did it cross his mind that he might be lost. He just continued on, one step at a time.

Edmund kept his “bible” in a pocket close to his chest, but didn’t need to consult it. The landscapes described in the text had been painted into his head, and now he began to see similarities with the real world. He came to a small hill that he couldn’t see over until he was nearly at the top. Down the other side, he could make out a large rock wall that seemed out of place. As he approached it, he saw that the rock wall was clearly man-made. It was then that he knew he had made it. Even in the darkness, he recognized the remnants of the old camp. Clothes, old skis, and hundreds of test tubes had been lying there for decades, waiting for Edmund to stumble upon them. It was only then that he took out his treasured book, holding it in his hand as he went through the camp.

He felt accomplished, having reached a place that he had only heard and read about. He knew that when the original party set out in 1912, they did not use motor vehicles, or have flashlights, or enjoy nearly as many comforts. His conditions were cozy compared to that of Scott’s expedition, but just being in the presence of this kind of history was enough to make Edmund’s hair stand straight up.

He stared up at the dark sky and closed his eyes. He began to imagine a young Apsley, writing in a journal, taking account of every detail of this place. Apsley had returned to the Antarctic as a rescue party to recover the frozen bodies of several crew members, and today he had returned again to guide Edmund back to this place.

_Thus ended the worst journey in the world._
References:

*The Worst Journey in the World* by Apsley Cherry-Garrard

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