

A
TALE OF LOVE AND
HEROISM
BY
WILLIAM GORDON
STABLES

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Chapter One Dunallan Towers

Even in the days of his boyhood—I had almost said infancy—there seems to have been much in the character and habits of Claude Alwyn that is unusual in children so young.

Some people tell us that the qualities of mind, developed by the individual, depend entirely on the nature of his associates and associations in early youth. I am not prepared to deny that there is a great deal of truth in this statement. But the facts therein do not account for everything, for individuality is stamped on a child from his very birth, and the power for good or for evil of the accidental association of after life may mould in a great measure, but cannot alter this.

“Many men many minds.”

A true though trite old saying is that, and there were, no doubt, a great many different opinions concerning young Claude among those who dwelt in, or were in the habit of visiting at, Dunallan Towers.

From an old journal or diary, which has been handed to me by its writer, with full permission to make whatever use I choose of it, I have gleaned much information bearing on the boy’s character and peculiarities.

Dunallan Towers, now so gloomy and desolate, was once the happiest and the homeliest, and at the same time the gayest and brightest of all the many beautiful mansions that grace the banks of the winding Nith. This was shortly after the marriage of Lord Alwyn to the only daughter of an English baronet.

There were those, however, about the country-side who did not hesitate to say that Alwyn might have been content to take for himself a bride from among the many fair and high-born dames of the shire in which he lived.

“The goshawk should never mate wi’ the ringdove,” said one stern old Scottish lady, “nor the owl perch low in the nightingale’s bower. Our cauld Highland hills will hardly suit the dainty limbs of Alwyn’s bonnie English bride. Our wild forests are no’ like scented southern groves, and the roaring Nith is no’ the placid Thames. A’thing will be strange

to her, everything foreign, wild, and queer. She'll no' stay lang. You'll see! you'll see! you'll see."

But if this proud and ancient dame really meant to give herself out as a prophetess, she proved to be a false one; only, to her credit be it said, she was the very first to call on the Lady of the Towers, as people named the bride of Lord Alwyn—the first to call, and the first to become one of her best and firmest friends.

As a bachelor hall, the Towers had been somewhat of a failure; all that was altered after Alwyn brought home his young wife—she looked so young, and in years, indeed, was little more than a girl.

But her easy, pleasant manner captivated every one; and, whether it were winter, with the snow on lawns and park, and ice on the river's edge, or summer, with the roses all in bloom, and the wind sighing softly through the birch-clad glens, bright and happy faces never failed to encircle the dinner-table of our winsome Lady of the Towers.

There was great rejoicing throughout all the parish on the birth of Lord Alwyn's heir. Village bells were rung, and a huge bonfire was lighted on the very top of the highest hill: a bonfire that could be seen from house and hut for leagues and leagues around.

The bonfire was kept burning all night long. Meanwhile the village lads and lasses had assembled in a barn gaily bedecked with evergreens and flowers of every hue, and had made quite a ball-room of it. So the fire burned all the livelong night, and as long as the fire burned, the lads and lasses danced, till at last the grey dawn of a summer morning made fire and dancing both seem out of place.

But Alwyn's heir did not cease to be a wonder and a subject for talk for the traditional nine days at least, during which time there was not a living soul in or about Dunallan Towers who had not been honoured with a peep at his little full moon of a face.

His nurse was so proud of her charge that she had even brought him as far as the top of the great hall-stair for Peter, the cow-boy, to have just one glimpse at.

Peter—the diary informs me—had left his boots on the mat; and when he reached the stair-top, and the snowy-white wraps were down-folded from the child's face, the good-hearted cow-boy, thinking he was in duty bound to say something very complimentary in return for the high honour bestowed upon him, lifted both hands and eyes ceiling-wards, and ejaculated—

“My goodness! What a bonnie, bonnie bairn! I never saw the like o’ that before in a’ my born days!”

I pause for a moment here, reader, and raise my head from the table at which I have been writing with the diary mentioned lying open before me. I look up because some one has just glided silently into the room. It is Janet—Janet who wrote the diary; Janet who had been Claude’s nurse. She is very old now, her hair is as white as wreaths of drifted snow, but her face is still pleasant, and her eyes are bright, nor has the weight of years succeeded in bending her form.

She stands by my side, erect. She places one hand—how thin it is!—on the pages of the journal.

“You will not find everything there,” she says, “about my dear boy Claude.”

“Sit down, Janet,” I say to her kindly. “I like to have you near me. Take the book on your lap. Read to me, or talk to me, or do both; I shall listen and presently I shall write.”

The apartment in which I am seated is what is called the red parlour of Dunallan Towers. It is in one of the many gables of the old mansion that abuts upon a green lawn, or brae, sloping somewhat steeply down to the river’s bank.

It is a lovely evening in early autumn. Behind the purple hills in the west yonder, the sun has just set in a golden haze, and high up in the sky’s blue there are a few feather-like clouds of brightest crimson. By-and-by these will change to grey, then shadows of night will creep up from glen and dell, the rooks will cease to caw, and we shall hear only the murmur of the river over its pebbly bed, and the wind moaning through the topmost branches and the crisp leaves of those tall swaying trees.

Janet’s voice falls upon my ear in sad but pleasant monotone. It is like the voice of one chanting some old-world ballad. I do not think her eyes are turned on me as she speaks—mine are looking outwards into the twilight; and she is gazing back, as it were, to the far-distant past.

Why, it is dark! Janet must have been talking for hours and hours, and has glided away as silently as she came.

I awake from the reverie into which I had fallen and step out through the casement. How fresh the air is! How pleasant the wind’s soft whisper and the river’s song! The stars are out, and the round yellow moon is struggling up through a bank of clouds on the horizon. Now and then a bat flits past; now and then an owl hoots mournfully from

some turret or chimney, round which the darkling ivy creeps. Not a light in any window. Silence broods over Dunallan Towers.

“The harp that once thro’ Tara’s halls
The soul of music shed,
Now hangs as mute on Tara’s walls
As if that soul were fled.

“So sleeps the pride of former days,
So glory’s thrill is o’er,
And hearts that once beat high for praise
Now feel that pulse no more.”

The night air is keen. I re-enter the red parlour, close the casement, and light my reading-lamp.

And now I write once more. No need for the journal’s assistance any longer, though. Every word that old Janet said has sunk deep into my mind and rooted itself in my memory, and will never be effaced while I and time have any connection.

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Chapter Two.

Claude Alwyn's Boyhood.

On the very day after the birth of Alwyn's heir something strange occurred: a large flight of curious seagulls alighted in the park around Dunallan Towers. No one had ever remembered seeing such weird-looking birds there before, and Janet had averred that their arrival betokened no good. She was not wrong, for that same night it came on to blow from the north, oh, such a fearful gale! Many of the tallest and sturdiest trees were torn up by the roots, and even tossed about, and the Towers shook and trembled as if the very earth were quaking. It was eerie to hear, at the dark midnight hour, the shriek of frightened wild birds around the house, high above the fitful roaring of the wind.

The Nith, too, came down "in spate;" they could see its white flashing waters, nearly close up to the window of the red parlour in which I now am sitting at work. It brought along with it from the mountains, fallen trees, bushes, heather-clad turf, and boulders of solid rock, tons and tons in weight.

All that night the storm raged, and though the wind went down about sunrise, the terrible rain still fell, and the river continued in raging spate. Great was the damage done to the lower-lying lands seawards; huts and even houses were laid low, sheep and cattle were drowned and borne away, so great is the fury and strength of a Highland river like the Nith when it "comes down," as the people phrase it.

But the sun shone forth at length, and the clouds went driving southwards, leaving lovely rifts of blue between them, and the rain ceased, and the poor people of the glens came forth to view the work of devastation and to mourn their losses.

One of these, while walking in the park and not far from the mansion house, found, crouching under the gnarled root of an old tree, and gazing up at him with its bright crimson eye, or rather first with one eye then with the other, a snow-white gull of most graceful form. (Note 1.)

He caught it—one wing was injured—and brought it round to the kitchen, where it was much admired and tenderly cared for. In little over a week it seemed as well and strong as it must have been before the storm. Yet it was in no hurry to leave.

It stayed on and on and on, and became as tame as a dove, and most affectionate to all it knew. But to Janet in particular it attached itself. One day it followed her into the room where Alwyn's heir lay in his little crib. Janet showed him the bird. He smiled and stretched out his arms with a fond cry, and next moment the snow-bird was nestling quietly on his breast.

There was no keeping the gull out of Claude's room after this, so it came to be called "baby's bird."

When Claude Alwyn was about three years of age, an event happened down the glen that cast that gloom on Dunallan Towers that never yet has left it: Lord Alwyn was thrown from his horse and killed on the spot. Her ladyship left the glen after this, and went south, and Claude, childlike, would insist on taking his pet along with him.

Years flew by, summers passed and winters passed, but smoke was hardly ever seen to hover over the Towers. Then one day the old steward came down to the village all a-quiver with excitement. He wanted tradesmen of all kinds to come forthwith to the mansion house. Lady Alwyn and young Claude—now grown a great lad, the steward felt sure of this—were to return in less than a month.

Smoke enough now began to curl high over turret and tree; even the rooks seemed to feel the importance of the coming occasion, and positively crowed themselves hoarse.

At the appointed time the family carriage, a very stately and gigantic kind of a concern, rattled up the long avenue through the park, and soon after the widow of Lord Alwyn was once more Lady of the Towers. She was greatly altered. Though still young and youthful in appearance, sorrow had stamped itself on her brow and saddened her eye. It was said that she seldom smiled.

But she was even kinder to the poor of the district than she had been in the days of yore, and, wet day or dry day, she was never missed from the pew in church of a Sunday. And beside her always sat a sturdy bright-faced boy of about thirteen, with blue eyes, and short irrepressible locks of soft fair hair, that nothing on earth except scissors could have kept from tumbling over his brow. He was always dressed in the Highland garb as Highland lads ought to be, but his jacket was of black velvet and his kilt of the sombrest coloured tartan.

He was the favourite of every one on the estate, and so was his bird. Wherever young Claude—he was seldom called Lord Claude, because he did not like to be—wherever he went his snow-bird went as well.

And Claude was quite as fond of his pet as his pet was of him, and that was the secret of his success in taming this wild and strangely beautiful creature.

Only those who have seen the snow-bird in its own country, sailing around great icebergs or glittering glaciers, its plumage rivalling the snow in the purity of its whiteness, its shape more graceful than that of a swallow, can have any idea of the extreme loveliness of the creature. No wonder that the humble people of the glens, deeply imbued as they were with that superstition peculiar to the Highland peasantry, often looked upon young Claude and his matchless bird with something akin to awe.

“It is his good angel and nothing else,” one old crone used to remark, “his good angel, Heaven bless the bonnie boy.”

Yes, and a bonnie boy he looked at all times. Had you seen him standing, alpenstock in hand, dressed in Highland garb, on the brow of a hill, well defined against the sky, up to which his face was turned, and in which the snow-bird kept sailing and sailing, following every motion of Claude’s upstretched, waving arm, you could not have helped admiring him.

Claude spent much of his time fishing or shooting, but more particularly the former. Little he recked if the fish did not bite. He would then throw himself on his back among the ferns and flowers on the banks of the stream and pull out his “Burns” or his “Scott.” Meanwhile the snow-bird would perch upon a mossy boulder, or water-washed stone, and watch for the tiny troutlets, which sought for shelter and sunshine in the shallower water.

Young lord though he was, Claude was a “people’s boy.” It would be an exaggeration of speech to say that any of the villagers would have died for him; but it is true that Claude brightened every doorstep he crossed. And this too, all and only, by means of his own handsome face, sunny smile, and kindly words. Not that he did not bring the poor folks gifts, for he was often sent on errands of mercy by his mother, and he brought them also of his own accord many a goodly string of trout.

In a wild country like that in which our young hero dwelt and wandered, there are many dangers to life and limb, and Claude did not always escape quite scot-free. But when, on rushing down a lofty hillside once, he missed his foothold and fell over a crag full fifty feet high, he did not lose his presence of mind, but simply jumped up from the soft turf on which he had alighted, as if on a feather bed, and looked around for his bonnet, which he never saw again. The old shepherd who witnessed the involuntary exploit, told of it all over the parish, and the wise women alleged it was the bird that had saved him.

When Claude's gun burst in his hand and he escaped without a scratch, that too was in some way owing to the bird's protecting care. When a branch on which he was leaning snapped beneath his weight and precipitated Claude into the roaring, foaming torrent beneath, where any one save a Webb would have been drowned, and when bleeding and cut he safely scrambled out, who but the bird, averred the wise old women, helped him out?

Claude rather encouraged than otherwise the belief in the supernatural powers of this wonderful snow-bird of his. Rather mischievous of him, it must be confessed, but then he was only a boy.

"My bird tells me I must do this or that," he would often say; or, "I must consult my bird on that subject."

Then he would pretend to hold communication with it, and the creature looked as though it understood every word he said. During the winter, Claude used to be at a distant school. Then his bird stayed at the Towers; but, although it suffered itself to be fed and petted by Lady Alwyn and by Janet, it did little else but mope until spring returned, and with it Claude.

The library at Dunallan Towers was a very large one, and Claude had the choosing of his own summer reading after forenoon lessons were over, and the books he took with him afield were always those of adventure, or some of the poets. It was often remarked that he never invited any of his tutors to accompany him in his rambles—only the bird.

"Mother," said Claude one evening, "I'm going to be a sailor."

"Dear boy," replied his mother, "what has put such a notion in your head?"

"My bird, perhaps, mother," said the boy, smiling.

"No, Claude, but those books you pore over. Dear boy, hardly half of what you read bears any resemblance to the truth."

"Oh, mother," cried the boy, "if only one half is true I must go and see that half I'm a good sailor already; you know how I enjoyed that voyage down the Mediterranean. I dream of all I saw even till this day. Mother, I must go to sea."

“Mother,” he said again, after a long pause, during which Lady Alwyn was musing, and very sad and gloomy were her thoughts—“mother, do you know where my bird came from?”

“It came from the wild mysterious region around the Pole.”

“Yes, I have been reading about that too, reading about it until I seem to have spent years and years of my life in the country. I have but to shut my eyes, any time I wish, and such pictures rise up before me as few but sailors ever see the reality of.”

Young Claude placed one hand across his eyes as he spoke.

“Here it is again, mother, a vast and lonely trackless waste of snow; great glaciers, against whose sides mountain waves for ever dash and foam; icebergs whose pinnacled heads taper upwards into a sky of cloudless blue. Fields of ice on which white bears roam; dark, inky seas where the walrus plays and tumbles, and through which the solitude-loving narwhal pursues his finny prey; and crystalline caves where sea-bears roar. But the scene is changed: it is night—the long, long, Polar night. Oh, how bright and beautiful the Aurora, with its ever-changing tints of crimson, green, and blue; and the stars, how near they seem; and the silence, how deep, how awful! But see, a storm is coming across the pack, and clouds are banking up and hiding the glorious Aurora; now it is on us, and higher than the stars rise the clouds of whirling, drifting snow. Hark! how the wind howls! There is danger on its wings; there is—”

“Stop, boy, stop?” cried Lady Alwyn, laying her hand on his arm. “Speak not thus; you frighten me.”

There were tears in her eyes. Claude made haste to soothe her.

“Dear mother, forgive me!” he cried. “I am so thoughtless; but I will not transgress so again. Forgive and forget it.”

“You are all I have on earth to care for,” she said, drawing him gently towards her; “but, Claude, your happiness has always been, and ever will be, my first, my chief care. Yes, I will forgive your heedless words. You did not mean to hurt me; but, Claude,”—here she smiled, but it was a very sad smile—“I will not quite forget them. You love the sea.”

Lady Alwyn retired early to her room that evening, but it was long past midnight ere she slept. Her last thoughts ere slumber sealed her eyelids were these—

“And so my boy, even my boy, will be taken away from me. He will be a sailor; it is his bent, and why should I do aught that would mar his happiness? Heaven give me strength to bear my every trial here below, nor forget that on earth I have ‘no continuing city.’”

Lady Alwyn was rich, though not surpassingly so. She could afford her boy a yacht, in which he made many a cruise as owner—not as master—round the British islands and as far north as the Shetlands; indeed more than once they ventured over to Norway.

And so Claude grew up a sailor, so to speak. The smaller yacht gave place to a larger, and still a larger; and in a few years, when young Lord Alwyn had reached his twentieth year, he commanded, as well as owned, his ship himself.

About this time an event occurred that in a great measure altered the old tenor of Claude’s life, and that of his mother too, and on this event our story hinges.

In none of his cruises did his snow-bird accompany its master. Lady Alwyn was glad of this. “So long,” she thought, “as the bird stays with me, my boy will return safely from sea.”

It will be seen that even Lady Alwyn was slightly superstitious.

And Claude’s cruises were ever northwards. He had been several times to Iceland itself, and one day he meant to make a far longer and much more adventurous voyage. In the words of the old Norse song, it appeared as though—

“Nought around howe’er so bright
Could win his stay or stop his flight
From where he saw the Pole-star’s light
Shine o’er the north.”

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Chapter Three.

Among Iceland Wilds.

It was early morning. So early, indeed, that although it was sweet summer-time—and summer can be as sweet in Iceland as in any other part of the world—the birds had hardly yet uttered a note. Only the robin shook the dew from his wings (the American, not the English robin), and uttered a peevish twitter; and far away up among those wild hills, with their strange jagged peaks, you might have heard an occasional plaintive whistle or scream, the cry of the golden plover. Yet, early though it was, though the stars had not yet all fled from the west, sea-fowl were gracefully circling round—the gull, the tern, and the thievish skua. There was no wind, not a breath, but the dew lay heavy on the moss, on the green heather and stunted shrubs, and draggled the snow-white plumes of the lovely cotton grass. The wild flowers had not yet opened their beautiful petals when poor Claude Alwyn opened his eyes. Languidly, yet painfully, he raised himself on his elbow, and gazed dreamily around him. Where was he? How had he come here? These were questions that he asked himself. What is that on a stone yonder? A snow-bird gazing at him with one beautiful eye, and seeming to pity him. A snow-bird? His snow-bird?

“Alba! Alba!” he calls it; but the bird flies away. He was not at home, then, in bonnie Scotland, by the green banks of the Nith, as he had almost thought he was.

No, no; for look, yonder is his horse at the foot of the cliff—dead.

Dead? Surely not dead. He tries to crawl towards it. The movement gives him intense agony. He himself is wounded. And now he remembers all. How he left his yacht at Reykjavik a week ago; how he had been travelling ever since in search of incident and adventure, making sketches, gathering wild flowers, and enjoying the scenery of this strange, weird island; and how he was belated the evening before, and fell headlong over a cliff. That was all, but a dreadful all. He closes his eyes again and tries to think. Must he lie here and die? He shudders with cold and dread, starts up, and, despite the pain, staggers to his feet. He slowly passes the poor horse. Yes, there is death in that glazed eye, death in the drooping neck and stiffened limbs.

It takes Claude nearly an hour to drag himself to a neighbouring knoll, for one limb is smashed, and he has lost blood. He throws himself down now, or rather he falls, and when next he becomes conscious the sun is shining down warm on him from a bright blue sky; birds are singing near, and the wild flowers are open and nodding to a gentle breeze.

And yonder—oh, joy!—down there in the hollow, there is smoke curling up from an Icelandic farm. He shouts till hoarse, but no one appears.

Wearily he leans back, and once again his eyes are closed, and he is back once more in his own room at Dunallan Towers. No pain now, for his sad-eyed but beautiful mother is bending over him, and soothing him.

Is it so? Not quite.

“Jarl! jarl! Wake, jarl, wake?”

The jarl wakes. The jarl looks up.

Over him is bending a huge male figure, dressed in a long-sleeved waistcoat and lofty nightcap. Pained though he is, Claude cannot help thinking he is the ugliest man he ever saw. He is a giant in stature. He kneels beside young Alwyn, and there is a kindness visible in his little grey eyes, as he strokes Claude’s face, just as if he had been a colt. Byarnie, for such is this giant’s name, soon finds out how matters stand, and gently he lifts Claude in his arms and places him on his shoulder, and then marches off.

Preposterous and humorous thoughts will often pass through the mind, even when the body is in agony; and now, Claude could not help recalling the story of Jack the Giant-killer, and fancied himself Jack being carried away on the shoulders of Blunderbore. But not to a castle with a lawn littered with skulls and bones was Claude borne.

He had probably fainted with pain, and when he again became sensible he was no longer on Byarnie’s back, but in a comfortable warm bed in an antique but well-furnished room, and being attended to by a couple of old dames, both dressed alike, in gowns of dark rustling silk, and elevated steeple-like skull-caps of white net. And both, too, were alike wrinkled and ugly. They had almost finished dressing his leg.

“Thou must not speak, dear; thou must lie still and sleep.”

Good enough English, but spoken in a strange monotone—no rising or falling of the voice.

In a few minutes the work was done, and poor Claude found infinite relief. Then they brought him coffee and milk, and made him drink, and a little dram of schnapps which he also had to swallow. They evidently thought him a child, and stroked his face as Byarnie had done. One left the room, and the other took her seat beside the bed, and, still gently passing her hand downwards over Claude's face, began to "croon" over that beautiful English lullaby—

"Hush, my dear, lie still and slumber,
Holy angels guard thy bed;
Countless blessings without number,
Gently falling on thy head."

The voice was quavering, but the music was sweet. How soft the pillows felt—they were eider-down. How light the quilt—that also was of the same. Under such circumstances it is little wonder that Claude soon forgot everything and fell into a deep and childlike slumber.

The scenes, it seemed to Claude, were continually shifting. He did not feel that he had slept, only that he had just closed his eyes and opened them again, when lo! the crones were gone, the sunlight was no longer shimmering in through the crimson and yellow flowers in the little window as he had last seen it. The room was lighted by a lofty lamp that stood on an ancient high-backed oaken piano, throwing a flood of light over all the apartment. A great grey cat was singing herself to sleep on the piano stool, a fire was burning on the low hearth—a fire of peat and wood, that looked very cheerful—and above the window, in a tiny wicker cage, hung a tiny and miserable-looking snow-flea.

Claude took all this in at a glance. But none of these things interested him. His eyes were riveted on the only figure now in the room. A beautiful young girl, almost spirit-like she looked. So thought Claude. She stood leaning against the piano reading a tiny gilt-edged book. She was dressed in a long flowing robe of crimson adorned with snow-white fur. Her fair hair floated free over her shoulders, and her sweet face seemed very sad as she read, all unconscious of Claude's wondering gaze. But presently she became aware of it. A slight tint of crimson suffused her face, but next moment she advanced boldly towards the bed, and laid her hand—such a tiny hand—on his brow.

Claude would have spoken, but she lifted a finger and beckoned him to lie silent.

Lie silent? Yes. Claude would not have disobeyed the behests of so sweet a nurse whatever they might have been.

There was food to be partaken of; he took it. Nauseous brown medicine also; he quaffed it.

Presently, however, there was a change of nurses. One of the droll old ladies came back, and remained an hour. Claude thought it ten, and felt in the third heaven when his young nurse again returned.

She seated herself at a little table facing Claude, and without even knocking at the door, Byarnie the giant stepped in, and placed a zither in front of her. It was a strange household, but, altogether, Iceland is a strange place.

She was going to play to soothe her patient. And sweetly she played too. Old-world airs, but how delicate the touch, how tasteful the fingering. And now she sings. "Who," thought Claude, "can have taught her that wild sad song? Can a girl so young as she have loved and lost?"

"She is far from the land where her young hero sleeps,
And lovers around her are sighing;
But coldly she turns to his grave and weeps,
For her heart with her hero is lying."

But Claude's sorrow was to come. Inflammation was succeeded by high fever, and for days he lay in a state of delirium—dreamful, racking, burning delirium.

Then came peace and calmness.

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Chapter Four.

Idyllic Life in Iceland.

Iceland! land of flowers and sunshine? Ah no; but Iceland! land of storms; land of the thunder-cloud; land of lordly hills, whose strange, jagged peaks pierce the clouds by day, and at night seem to nod to stars or moon; land of rugged shores, around which for ever toss and roll the arctic billows; land of glorious sunsets; land of the Aurora; land of romance too, a romance of the olden time, for do not ancient Vikings slumber on its shores in their wave-rocked graves? Iceland! land of peace and innocence? Yes. Iceland! land of love? Yes, land of love—of love as pure and true, if not so passionate, as ever budded and bloomed beneath the sunny skies of fair Italia.

It was the evening of the eighth day since poor Claude's accident. The fever had all gone and left him. He lay there pale and weak and thin, as quiet and as obedient as a child.

It was very still in that ancient room; the purring of the great grey cat seemed very loud, so did the gentle twitter of the snow-flea in his wee wicker cage, and when an old raven, perched on a stool near the fire, rustled his feathers, the noise sounded harsh and startling.

It was near sunset, for the window was in the west, and the sun shimmered in through the red and green and yellow of the flowers.

"Dear nursie, what is your name?"

The words appeared to fall unconsciously from the lips of our stricken hero.

In his fever dreams, he just dimly remembered hearing it, but he was not quite certain. Anyhow, he wished to hear it from the girl herself.

"Dear nursie, what is your name?"

"My name is Meta?"—this from the maiden, with a blush and a smile.

There was a pause. He would have liked her to have asked, "And what is yours?"

But she did not. She only sat silently there, with the book on her lap, as she had been sitting for the last half-hour.

“Mine is Claude,” he said at last. “May I call you Meta?”

“Ye-es,” with modest hesitation.

“Do call me Claude?”

“Claude,” said the girl, advancing towards him with a very serious countenance, and laying a tiny hand on his pulse, “I think you are going to die. Oh! I trust not. But there is a strange glitter in your eyes to-night—a look I like not, and your pulse flickers feebly. I will call aunt.”

She was hurrying away.

“Meta!”

She came back.

“Meta, I will not die if—”

He paused hesitatingly.

“If what?”

“If you—if you will stay and nurse me.”

“I will; but now sleep. You are very weak, and, see, twilight is creeping up from the fiord. Close your eyes, and I will play to you.”

“Meta,” said Claude next day.

“Yes, Claude.”

Claude felt happy to be called Claude. Remember, he was very weak and ill, and in this condition even men grow childish.

“Tell me something about yourself. You were not always in this island. You even talk sweetly beautiful English.”

“I am Norwegian. My father was a sailor, the captain of a barque. He always took mother and me everywhere. We were all he had. Thus I learned English. We often traded to Reykjavik. My two aunts used to live there.”

“Yes, Meta; and your parents?”

“Alas! we were wrecked on this wild coast; both were drowned. My dear mother lies buried in the little graveyard yonder. My poor father was—never—found.”

Her face was hurriedly buried in her hands, and tears welled through her fingers.

Tears filled Claude’s eyes too, but he spoke not. He knew well how sacred grief and tears like hers are.

But soon she lifted her tearful face.

“They are both in heaven, Claude,” she said.

Claude hastened, with good tact, to change the subject. When he told her of his father’s sad death and of his mother’s perpetual sorrow, then even Meta felt that something had suddenly grown up in their hearts to draw them together in friendship.

We will be brother and sister, she thought; but, alas! he will go, and I shall see him never more again.

After this, though Meta still played, sung, and read to her patient as before, patient and nurse talked more together.

Meta told Claude of her early life, and Claude exchanged confidences.

“I would dearly like to see your great lady mother,” said Meta one day, about two weeks after their first earnest conversation.

“You may one day,” said Claude, thoughtfully.

“What? she may come here?—here in your ship? Is she very, very proud? She might not deign to speak to a sailor’s daughter,” she added.

“Oh yes, dear Meta,” exclaimed Claude, with enthusiasm; “she would speak to you. She would thank you—she would bless you for having saved the life of her only son.”

“My aunts did that; not I,” said innocent Meta.

“No, Meta, no; but you, and you alone, saved my worthless life—worthless to all but my mother.”

There is a joy in returning health and strength that only those who have been really and dangerously ill can understand. It was still the sweet summer time when Claude was able to go out once more. Very feebly went he at first, but in the keen, fresh, mountain air, vigour came fast. He was soon able to take long rambles, then longer rides. How delightful these rides were; how glorious, but sometimes how terrible and awesome, was the scenery!

They rode on ponies, Meta and Claude, while the great, unwieldy Byarnie trotted along by their side, or ran on ahead; for often there were rivers to ford, and gorges to descend, without e’er a path except that found, extempore, by this honest, but ghoulish groom.

Many and many a day after, when imprisoned in the icy North without hope of deliverance, except through the valley of death, did Claude Alwyn look back with joy and pleasure to these excursions. He remembered every feature of the scenery—the frowning cliffs, the towering mountains, the broad, shallow rivers, the deep ravines and glens, the cliffs and rocks, the great boulders that seemed about to topple over and hurry them to destruction, the wild birds, the green, green sward, the beautiful mosses, and the still more lovely wild flowers. But, above all, he remembered the innocent, childlike face of Meta, that used to look into his so trustingly as she called him “brother Claude.”

Sometimes they would seat themselves together by the banks of a stream where Byarnie would be fishing, and Meta would tell her brother such wondrous tales—mostly Icelandic and Norse fairy stories, about which there is so great a charm. Claude loved to hear her talk; there was such an earnestness about her while she related tales of folklore, as if she really believed them all herself. But when she came to speak of the ancient Vikings, and their deeds of valour and prowess, then the maiden’s eyes sparkled, and there came a brighter glow in her cheeks, that told of a bold heart that beat within her breast, a heart that could not only love but dare.

So weeks sped on, so even months passed by, and surely Paul and Virginia led no more idyllic life than did Claude and Meta during this time.

They sat near a geyser one lovely day in July. There was no great eruption that day, no startling and awful upthrow of boiling water, only now and then a bubbling, rumbling sound, which made a rude bass to the song of the birds that hovered near.

Giant Byarnie had boiled some eggs in a spring. Byarnie always provided luncheon for the party of one kind or another. He had placed the eggs in the sun, and had gone away to a distance to milk a cow. I am really afraid that Byarnie was not particular whose cow it was. Cows are often public property in Iceland. Anyhow he found a cow, two of them for that matter, so he went to pull some of the sweetest grass to lay before one to keep her quiet while he filled his pannikin.

Meanwhile Meta and brother Claude sat on a bank near the spring. The sunshine was very soft and warm, and the air was filled with the odour of wild thyme.

Meta was silent and sad, for to-morrow Claude was going away—never, never, she thought to return again. She could not speak much. Very little would have made her cry, and she felt determined not to do that.

Claude was silent also.

And Byarnie, away down in the valley yonder, went on milking his cow—or rather somebody else's cow—and singing in Norse to himself. Presently Claude put out his hand and took that of Meta. It was very cold.

“Dear sister Meta,” he said.

She felt she wanted to cry more than ever now.

“I am going away to-morrow—south to my mother, dear; south to my own bonnie land. I am going away—”

Oh, how the tears rained now! There was no keeping them back. She threw herself on the grass and sobbed as if her heart would really burst.

Claude could say nothing for a moment or two.

“Meta! Meta!” he cried at last, “look up—speak to me. Listen, dear; I am going south to tell my mother I will never marry any one except you, dear Meta. Do not speak; I know you love me as I love you. I will not be long away. You will long for my return, even as my dear mother is longing now. My mother will be your mother, Meta; my home and country will be yours.”

Meta was smiling now through her tears. What more was said, if anything, may never be known, but when Byarnie came floundering back with his pannikin of milk, he found his

mistress and master, as he called them, both happy and gay, and wondered at this very much, because he had left them both sad and quiet.

A little Norse maiden knelt in prayer that night beside her dimity-curtained bed, and thanked the kind Father for the hope and joy of pure love, the hope that as she had a mother in heaven, she yet might have one on earth as well.

And Claude's yacht spread her wings to the breeze, and south and south she flew. Past the Westmann Isles, past lonely Stramoe, past the rugged Faroes, past the Shetlands, past the Hebrides themselves.

And now Claude slackens sail His men notice that he is no longer so buoyant and happy. He treads the deck with a quicker step, as if to keep time with those thoughts.

"Oh?" he was saying to himself, "what will mother say? How will mother take it? How will the proud Lady Alwyn look, when I tell her I am betrothed to a simple Iceland maiden?"

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Chapter Five.

“Will He Never Come Again?”

Not since the bright old days before the death of Claude's father had Dunallan Towers looked so cheerful as it did the week before the arrival of the wanderer himself in Glasgow waters.

“I believe my boy will come to-day,” Lady Alwyn would remark to her maid.

“Something tells me, too, he won't be long,” Janet would reply; “and do you know, my lady, that Alba seems to know it also? He cried, ‘Claude! Claude! Claude!’ last night quite distinctly in his sleep, and the sound thrilled every nerve in my body. Oh! I hope nothing has happened to him, my lady.”

“Hush! hush!” replied her ladyship; “you are superstitious, Janet; but you mustn't try to make me so.”

Even as they spoke there came a patter of tiny feet along the passage, like the rattle of hail on a summer-house roof, and the next moment Alba himself appeared. He flew up, and on to the back of a quaint old chair, and gazed first at Janet and then at her mistress with his garnet eyes.

Lady Alwyn smoothed the graceful creature, and it bent low on its perch, as if enjoying the gentle caress.

“Do you not notice,” said the lady, “how white and snowy its plumage has become of late? It is always thus before my boy arrives.”

“Dear Lady Alwyn, I did not like to tell you before; but all the three days you were at Dumfries Alba was lost, and I never thought to see him again. He was whiter when he came back than the snows on the mountains.”

“How strange!” said Lady Alwyn, meditatively.

“Claude, Claude!” cried Alba.

There is nothing strange in hearing a seagull talking, and Alba's vocabulary was not a small one.

Lady Alwyn held out her hand; the bird perched on it, and presently was nestling fondly on her breast. This did not altogether please Fingal, Claude's favourite deerhound. He must needs get up from the skin on which he had been reclining, and lean his noble head on the lady's lap. And she could spare a hand to fondle the head.

Yes, everything was bright and pleasant. What though the early winter winds were raving through the leafless trees without, where swayed the rooks near their cheerless nests? what though the blasts were biting and cold in the uplands, and the Nith—brown and swollen—roared angrily over its rocky bed? Bright fires burned in every grate, and were reflected in patches of crimson from the massive mahogany furniture.

And Lady Alwyn's face was cheerful too. Resigned and calm though she always appeared, to-day there was a sparkle in her eyes, that made her look almost young.

Rat-tat! It was a double knock at the front hall door which resounded through all the house.

Lady Alwyn started from her seat, and stood eager and expectant. She even went to meet the liveried servant, who presently entered with the telegram.

"Yes, yes!" she joyfully exclaimed in answer to Janet's inquiring look. "My boy is coming to-day. I knew he would be. Alba, your master is coming."

She embraced the bird again. Fingal, sure that something more than usual was on the tapis, began to scamper round the room, jumping over the chairs—a way he had when excited. He jumped all round the room twice, then he playfully snatched the telegram from Lady Alwyn's hand and went jumping round again with that.

How much or how little of the truth Fingal guessed I cannot pretend to say. It was but a telegram. Had it been a letter written by his loved master's hand, Fingal would have known it, even had the wanderer been years away.

So when Claude stepped briskly out of the train at the little station of P—, there, sure enough, was the great stately old carriage, with its two splendid dark bays, in their silvered harness, waiting to receive him.

His mother was not there; but Fingal was, and almost pulled his master down in the exuberance of his joy.

It was a long five-mile drive from the station to Dunallan. Charming enough, in all conscience, during the spring and summer months, and even when autumn tints were on the trees, but cold-looking and dreary now. All the more so that night was coming on apace, the little of lurid light which the sun had left in the west getting quickly absorbed in the heavy banks of rising cloud.

Claude's spirits fell lower now than they had yet fallen. There was something even in the sombre grandeur of the family carriage that brought dark clouds around his heart.

Not one thought except those of love for the fair and innocent maiden far away mingled with these. But his mother? His proud, good, gentle mother?

How would the Lady Alwyn, the Lady of the Towers, herself of ancient family, like the idea of her only son marrying a poor Iceland orphan unblessed with a pedigree?

And he—a lord—Lord Alwyn! Yes, Lord Alwyn. He could not deny it, though he hated the title, hated it now more than ever for the sake of Meta.

There was some relief from his present gloom and doubts and fears in placing his arm round great Fingal—seated so lovingly by his side,—and breathing into his ears the strange story of his love.

Fingal could listen and sympathise, even if he did not know one whit what it was all about.

Fingal was a wise old dog, so he wisely held his peace, and offered no advice on the matter either way. He gave his master one lick on the cheek, however, as much as to say—

“Whatever you think, dear master, must be right, and whatever you do can't be wrong in my eyes, so there?”

Mother and son had much to talk of that night. Lady Alwyn's life since the Alba, her son's ship, bore away for the far North, had been uneventful enough; but he had had adventures numerous indeed—although, mind you, he did not speak of them as such. Hardly ever is a rover off the stage heard making use of the word “adventures.” Modesty is one of the leading characteristics of your true hero.

There were times on this first evening when Claude would suddenly lapse into silence, almost into moodiness. He might be looking at his mother or not, but his mind was

evidently abstracted, preoccupied, and his eyes had a far-away look in them. This did not escape his mother's notice.

"Could he have any grief?" she thought. "Could he be ill and not know it?"

"You are sure," she said once, "my dear Claude, that you have quite recovered from your terrible accident?"

"What, mother? Accident? Oh yes; indeed I had almost forgotten."

"And your nurses, your kindly nurses, Claude: you must never forget them, dear."

"I'm not likely to," he said, with an emphasis which she thought almost strange. "Never while I live."

He gazed into the fire.

"Would not this be the right time," he was thinking, "to tell her all: to tell her I had three nurses instead of only two?"

But no; he dared not just yet. He would not run the risk of bringing a care to her now happy face. He thought himself thus justified in putting the evil day—if evil day it were to be—further off.

Claude was no coward, as I believe the sequel of my story will show, but still he dreaded—oh, how he dreaded!—the effect which the intelligence he was bound soon to give her would have upon her.

Claude slept but little that night, and slept but ill. More than once he started from some frightful dream, in which his mother was strangely mixed up, and not his mother only, but his Meta.

It was about five o'clock, though it would not be daylight for a long while yet. Claude was lying partially asleep: I say partially, because he seemed listening to the wind roaring through the leafless boughs of the trees, and every now and then causing the twiglets to tap and creak against the panes; but he thought he was at sea, and that the rushing sound was the rushing of waves, the creaking the yielding of the ship's timbers to the force of the seas.

Suddenly he sprang half up in bed and listened intently, painfully.

He had distinctly heard some one in the room calling him. He could not be mistaken, and the voice seemed Meta's.

"Claude! Claude!" cried the voice again, and his heart almost stood still for a moment as he saw a figure, which his imagination magnified a hundredfold, near the bed. "Claude?"

Next moment Alba, the snow-bird, alighted on his breast.

He slept soundly soon after this, but still when he appeared at breakfast he was so jaded looking and restless as to cause his mother considerable anxiety. He stoutly refused to see a medical man, however.

"It is nothing," he laughed. "Nothing, dear mother, only slight fatigue. A sailor like myself thinks little of travelling a thousand miles by sea, yet dreads the rolling, jolting train."

There was plenty to do and think about all day, well calculated to banish care. The villagers, the tenants, and neighbours all round were delighted to see the manly face and handsome figure of young Claude Alwyn once more among them, still accompanied by his pet—his spirit-bird, as the older cottagers had come to call it.

Then, although grouse were wild, there were hares in plenty, and fish in the river ready to be wooed by the gentle art of so true a fisherman as Claude Alwyn. And the walking exercise, through the heather hills, the fresh air, and the balmy breath of pine trees, never failed to refresh and invigorate him both in mind and body, so that he always returned to dinner buoyant and hopeful. But ever at the breakfast-table there was that weary look of carking care in his face.

He would go no further, however, in explaining it than confessing he did not sleep very well at night.

"It is the change," he remarked, smiling, "from a hard mattress to one far too soft and luxuriant for a sailor. Besides, mother, I dare say I miss the motion of the ship."

His mother only sighed softly.

There came to Claude one night a dream as vivid as any reality. He was back again in Iceland. He was gazing on the face and form of her whom he loved, though she did not seem to see him. She was seated on a hill-top, a favourite spot, where beside her he had often sat, when the fields beneath were green, the far-off sea an azure blue, when wild

birds sang above and around them, and the perfume of wild flowers filled the summer air.

But snow was all over the landscape now, save where dark rocks jutted through the white, and the ocean, foam-flecked, dashed high over the beetling cliffs. Yes, there sat Meta, but oh! the sad, sad look in those beautiful eyes! She opened her lips and spoke at last.

“No, no, no!” she murmured; “he will never come again.”

He thought he sprang towards her, but she faded away like the mist from a geyser, and he was alone on the snow.

He slept no more that night. But he formed a resolve.

“No,” he said to himself, “I am not a man; not a drop of proud Alwyn’s blood runs through my veins if I hesitate longer. It is a duty I owe to my mother and to her to speak my mind. Yes, Meta, I will come back again.”

Were I an artist, I should delight in painting only beauty and peace: the fairest, holiest faces should be transferred to my canvas; the most smiling summer landscapes, the sunniest seas. But, alas! I am but an author, and no pen-and-ink depiction of life would be complete without the shade and shadow of sorrow.

I will not needlessly dwell on the interview that took place in the very room in which I am sitting writing now, between the proud Lady Alwyn and her son. Indeed, the interview was brief in itself: I have thus some excuse for being brevity personified in my description.

Pass we over, then, Claude’s introduction, his passionate declaration of love for Meta, his glowing panegyrics on her person and mind, and even the statement that only his regard for his mother and fear of hurting her feelings caused him to conceal the truth so long from her, and then we come to the dénouement.

“But, dearest mother, I now know and feel that your constant desire to do everything for my happiness will cause you to receive my Meta when I bring her home as my bride.”

If she had been silent till now, it was because she seemed as if thunder-struck.

“My boy,” she cried at last, “you are bewitched, or I am dreaming some hideous dream. Tell me it is all but an ill-timed joke. You are but a child—”

“I am a man.”

“You have been deceived, put upon, tempted by a designing—”

“Hold, mother, hold! Though the few words you have uttered sound like the death-knell to hopes I have fondly cherished, go no further: forget not yourself so far as to speak one word against my bride-elect, lest I forget I am your son.”

“My son? My son?” exclaimed the proud Lady of the Towers almost tragically. “Oh! would I could forget it, or that your ship had sunk in the blackest depths of ocean, rather than you had lived to bring this disgrace on the noble house of Alwyn.”

“Enough, mother; I will hear no more. You have thwarted me in the dearest wish of my heart, you whose love for a son ought to have conquered family pride. You have thrust me from the halls of my ancestors. I go forth into the world of adventure. I will seek in ambition, in ceaseless change, the only possible balm for the sorrow I have in parting from you.”

He turned on his heel as he spoke. He strode down the hall and through the avenue; he looked neither to right nor left, and never once behind him. His mother watched him with clasped hands, with anxious eyes, and with prayers on her pale and quivering lips.

“Would he turn? Surely, surely he would turn.” But nay; the trees soon hid him from view—hid him, and lastly Fingal, who with tail and head bent low, as if he knew that sorrow had come, followed at young Claude’s heels.

“Widowed and childless!” These were her words as she sank apparently lifeless on the floor.

Janet, her maid, found her thus and lifted her gently on to the couch. But when memory came back, no words her maid could utter could give comfort.

“I forgive him, Janet,” she said, “as he will forgive me. It is fate. He may write, but he’ll never return: too well do I know the pride of the Highland Alwyns. But, but, dear Janet,”—here all the woman’s nature gushed out in tears—“Janet,” she sobbed, “poor Fingal—too—has—gone.”

Sorrow had fallen like a dark cloud on Dunallan Towers, a cloud that was deepened in its darkness when one morning Alba, the snow-bird, was missing. It was last seen flying

listlessly around the great elm trees, then straight as lightning bearing northwards. It was Janet who saw it, and it seemed to say—

“I hear a voice you cannot hear,
That bids me not to stay;
I see a hand you cannot see,
That beckons me away.”

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Chapter Six.

“Grief is the Parent of Fame.”

Claude was miles away from home ere he noticed faithful Fingal trotting near him.

His first thought was to order him back, but this poor dog, as if reading his mind, crouched low at his feet, looking beseechingly up.

“This is my home,” he appeared to plead.

Claude’s next thought was to take him back; his mother might even ere now have relented. But that Highland pride, which has been at once the glory and the curse of Auld Scotland, stepped in and forbade.

Young Claude went on.

“Grief,” says one of England’s greatest novelists—Lord Lytton—“is the parent of fame.”

This is so true! Many and many a grief-stricken, sorrow-laden man and woman in this world would faint and fail and die, did they not fall back upon work to support them. This is the tonic that sustains tens of thousands of sorely stricken ones, until Time, the great healer, has assuaged the floods of their sorrow.

Young though Claude was—but little more than twenty-one—he had already obtained some fame in the fields of literature. He had been a rover, and to some extent an explorer—more especially among those wild and lonely islands in the Norland Ocean. Nor had he been content to merely cruise around these, watching only the ever-changing hues of the ocean, or the play of sunshine and shade on bold bluff crags and terraced cliffs. No, for he was as much on shore as afloat, mingling among their peoples when peoples there were, mingling among the birds if they were the only inhabitants, studying flora, studying fauna, reading even the great book of the rocks, that told him so much, but never yet had caused him to waver in his belief in a Supreme Being, who made the sea and all that is in it, the land and all it contains.

He was a sportsman and naturalist; in fact, “a man of the world,” in the only true and dignified sense of the term.

His was an original mind, and a deep-thinking one, so that the sketches of his life and travels which he had been in the habit of sending from time to time to the organs of higher-class literature were sure to be welcome both to editors and readers.

He was, moreover, a student of Norse lore, and a speculator in the theories—many of them vague enough—concerning the mysterious regions that lie around the Arctic Pole. And it was his writings on these countries that first brought him into real notoriety among a class of very worthy savants who, though seldom too willing to venture into extreme danger themselves, are, to their credit be it said, never averse to spend money in fitting out ships of research.

On the very day of his rejoining his vessel at Glasgow, a letter was handed to him by his chief mate, inviting him to London on important business in connection with discovery in the Arctic regions.

Two hours afterwards Claude was seated in a flying train, whirling rapidly on towards the borders. In nine hours more he was in town. Another half-hour brought him to a shipping office in Leadenhall Street.

“You are Captain Lord Alwyn?” said the grey-haired clerk, looking at him over the rims of a pair of golden spectacles.

“The same, at your service,” returned Claude.

“We did not expect you quite so soon. But if you did come, I was told to hand you this note.”

It was simply an invitation to dine with Professor Hodson and a few friends next evening at Richmond.

When Claude got there, the first person to greet him when announced was the learned professor himself, and a very bustling, dignified little man he was.

“Ha! ha!” he laughed, as he shook Claude warmly by the hand. “I couldn’t have believed it. Really, it is strange!”

“Believe what?” said Claude, bluntly.

“Why, that you were so young a man. Should have thought from your writings you must be forty if a day.”

It was Claude's turn to laugh.

"But there, never mind. Authors are always taken to be older men than they are. No, I don't think that youth will be an insuperable objection. Besides, youth has courage, youth has fire and health, to say nothing of a recuperative power of rising again even after being floored by a thousand misfortunes."

"Difficulties, I dare say," said Claude, "were made to be overcome."

"To be sure. Well, then, having heard and read a good deal about your doings up North, we thought we would send for you, and instead of having a learned day discussion round a green baize-covered table, to invite you to join us at dinner—quite a quiet affair—and just to chat matters over."

It must be confessed that poor Claude did not feel altogether at home among those extremely learned men.

The conversation was all about previous voyages of scientific discovery. Had those gentlemen been more practical and less theoretical, Claude would have been all with them; but it was evident from the way they spoke that not one of them had ever been on blue water, much less on the stormy seas of the Far North.

When, by way of encouraging him to talk more, in the course of the evening they asked Claude's advice concerning the practicability of the plans they had in view, then young Claude spoke out like a man of business and a sailor.

Cool and collected to a degree, boldly banishing all theories, he hung on to facts. He did not ignore dangers and difficulties; he did not despise them, but professed himself willing to meet them, without for a moment holding out any promise of ultimate success in the adventurous undertaking. How dared he, he said, expect to do more than abler and better and braver men who had gone on the same track before him? If he did presume to hope to even a little more, it was because he should have all their bygone experiences to help him. If they entrusted the command of an exploring ship to him, there was but one thing he could boldly promise, and that was to do his best. He said much more to the same effect, and even enlarged upon the necessary equipment, victualling, and armament of a ship of the kind they proposed sending out, and when he at length concluded—

"Spoken like a man and a sailor," said the professor, and a murmur of assent passed round the table:

The savants retired to another room to consult. When they came back, Professor Hodson advanced and shook hands with Claude.

“We are unanimous in thinking, Lord Alwyn,” he said, “that you are just the man we want. The vessel you are to command already lies in Southampton waters. There are doubtless a thousand alterations to be made: these you, with your experience, will be able to see to. Do not spare expense. Draw upon us. We want you to feel that it will be no fault of ours if the expedition be not crowned with success; and I have the support of my colleagues in adding that we sincerely believe it will be no fault of yours. Other details,” added the bold professor, “can be gone into whenever you please.”

It was a quiet little hotel that Claude occupied that night, but one which he meant to make his home while in London. And why? Smile if you like, reader, but the reason is this: the landlord did not object to the presence of noble Fingal in his house.

Claude sat long in his sitting-room before retiring. The state of his feelings may be more easily imagined than described. His mind was by turns here, there, everywhere—back in his boyhood’s home, afloat on the sea, with his mother at Dunallan Towers, then away in the Far North with Meta. His mind reverted to the past, and went forward again to the future. He was sad and hopeful by turns. But he had crossed the Rubicon; he could not now draw back from anything he had done or promised to do.

Before he retired, he knelt and asked guidance from Him in whose hands are all our ways, and he slept more soundly that night than he had done for weeks.

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Chapter Seven.

A Pleasure Sail.

“Oh, mamma, I do hope the weather will be fine!” said pretty Miss Hodson.

“Well, my dear Clara, isn’t it fine? Why, a more delightful day could not well be imagined.”

“Yes, now, mamma; but I mean all along on this adventuresome voyage that we are about to take.”

“Don’t you bother your little head, my mouse,” said her father, fondling one of her little hands in his. “I know enough about the weather to give a forecast a week beforehand, and a good deal about the sea, too, though I confess I’ve never been on it much. Ahem!”

The speakers were seated in a cab that was rattling along the quay of Aberdeen on a lovely morning in April. There were monster boxes on top, another cab filled with luggage only came up behind, and still another containing three gentlemen.

Very distinguished men these were, indeed, though oddly ill-matched in appearance. Number 1, let me call him, was a true type of a middle-aged John Bull—tall, whiskered, stout, strong, yet calm and thoughtful withal. Number 2 might have been a Boston editor or an Edinburgh genius of the old school. He was medium in height, lanky rather, high in cheek-bone, deep in eye. He wore no beard, but had a bushy moustache and very long grey hair. Number 3 was evidently a fat Frenchman, rotund to a degree, black as to hair, which was cropped as short as a convict’s, and moustache, but so fat! You could best describe his outline by letters, thus—take a big O and a little o and two letters l. Now stick the little o on the top of the big O and you have his head and body. Then clap on the two l’s to represent his legs, and you have his lines complete. He was so stout that when he stuck out his little white hands, with their palms upwards, as Frenchmen have a habit of doing in argument, the finger-tips did not project an inch beyond him in front. But Number 1 was no less an individual than Sir Thomas Merino; Number 2 was the Baron de Bamber; and Number 3, Count Koskowskey himself.

The little boys in Aberdeen had never before seen such a strange procession of cabs, nor such a strange crew inside, so that they felt constrained to run alongside and wave their ragged bonnets and shout themselves hoarse.

The savants, for such they were, thought to purchase peace with a shower of coppers. This only increased the crowd, and no beggars in Cairo ever yelled for backsheesh as did those boys for “bawbees.”

But things do not last for ever, and at length the cabs drew up, one by one, at a gangway that stretched from the shore to the quarter-deck of the good ship Icebear. The gangway was covered with scarlet cloth, a neatly dressed sailor stood at each side of the shore end to steady it, and Captain Claude Alwyn stood at the other ready to receive his guests.

He looked very handsome did our Claude, in his peaked cap, reefing-jacket of simple blue, and gilt buttons.

He doffed his cap as he handed the ladies on board, and was rewarded by a smile from Mrs Hodson, and a blushet—let me coin a word—from Clara, her daughter.

Now, it was evident that Professor Hodson was the head of the party; for no sooner had every one of them taken a good look round the gallant ship than he remarked, “Now, gentlemen, what do you say—shall we have an early dinner and then sail, or sail first and have a more comfortable one out at sea! I propose the latter plan.”

“Professor,” said his wife, sternly, “I propose the former; and ladies, I think, should carry the sway.”

“They generally do,” sighed the professor, who looked subdued and henpecked, as distinguished savants are apt to be.

“Your proposal is best, madam,” put in Claude, smiling. “It is best to have it over. You can sup afterwards; that is,” he added mysteriously, “if any of you will care to.”

“Oh, we shall all sup,” said the professor. “The ocean always gives me an appetite.” (N.B.—He had been three times from London to Ramsgate by steamer.)

“Most sartinlee, capitaine,” said the French savant.

To have seen the way the gentlemen, and—pardon me, my lady readers—the ladies also, enjoyed that excellent dinner, one would have said there would be little need for supper.

The saloon was long and comfortable, though there was nothing of the boudoir about it. Claude himself had seen to everything personally. It was a very brilliant and select little

party that assembled on deck about an hour afterwards. The élite, or rather the literary élite, of the city had come to wish the Icebear “God-speed?”

“What am I to do with all these flowers, sir?” the steward asked that same afternoon, when he got a word with the captain.

“Keep the choicest for the saloon,” was the reply, “and distribute the rest impartially for’ard.”

The Icebear was a lovely vessel, both fore and aft. She had been originally intended for a man-of-war to add to the navy of a far-off foreign potentate; but as the potentate in question did not, or could not, pay at the right moment, after waiting a goodly time the builder very properly put her in the market, and she was knocked down at a reasonable figure to our savant friends. About 1500 tons burden she was, low in bulwarks, flush in deck, with no great breadth of beam, though with more than the coffin-ships they often send poor Jack to sea in—things with no breadth at all to speak of, and that go over and down in a breeze, and in sea-way that a Peterhead herring-boat would laugh at. The Icebear was sturdy and strong all over, had good engines, good shaft and screw—she carried a spare one. Forward, the bows were of triple strength, moderately sharp, and shod with iron, to aid in boring through the ice.

She had three respectable masts, not heavy enough to weigh her over on her beam-ends if a squall struck her broadside, nor light enough to snap like pea-sticks if a puff came. When under sail the screw could be hoisted up into a kind of covered well, and the advantage of this will be found when the ship gets farther north.

Not a yard of canvas, not a fathom of cordage, that had not been examined and tested by Claude himself.

So much for the exterior. “Downstairs,” as landsmen would say, she was fitted up with a view to the utmost comfort. The men’s sleeping-berths forward and amidships were bunks and hammocks. The crew all told was ninety men, or would be when the vessel lay in at Kirkwall to ship additional hands.

Remember, there was no lumber of any kind on the upper deck. No unsightly cabins or rooms, only forward was the winch and then the steerage cabin, the capstan, the midship companion; and aft the saloon and cabin skylights and companions, the wheel-house and binnacle. I hope I am not talking Greek to my readers, who are probably not all nautical; but I wish it to be understood that the Icebear’s decks were most roomy, nothing at all unnecessary being built or even lying thereon—a deck on which you could waltz with delight, or fight without discomfort. The captain’s quarters, or rather his

private room, occupied the after-part of the ship under the wheel-house, and was charmingly furnished, with a splendid stove, warm, soft carpets, a lounge, easy-chairs, a swing-cot, a library of choice books, and two ports that looked out over the sea. There, then I what more would you have in a private room afloat? and, mind you, it was the whole width of the ship. It had a private staircase. But the wardroom, or principal saloon, which lay under the quarter-deck, had cabins off it for the officers of the expedition, whose acquaintance we will make in good time.

It may be asked what were two ladies and four learned landsmen doing on board a ship bound for the icy North? It was a proposal of Mrs Hodson, to which her husband knew he dared not say nay, that the party we now see on board should accompany the vessel as far as Kirkwall, for what she called “the pleasure of a sail.”

Well, the pleasure of the sail really commenced before they were beyond the pier-head of Aberdeen. The long granite breakwater, which they were steaming past, was crowded with people, and, greatly to Mrs Hodson’s delight, a lusty shore-porter sprang up to the top of a parapet and, commanding silence by a wave of his arm, proposed “Three cheers for the two gallant ladies, who were sailing away to the North Pole never to return.”

And the cheers were given too—not three, but three times three; and when Mrs Hodson smilingly bowed her acknowledgments, and pretty Clara waved a handkerchief, which the crowd firmly believed to be wet with tears, then the cheering was redoubled, and kept up till the ship was over the bar. Next, guns were fired from the fort; and when this salute was returned from the Icebear, and the flag dipped and hoisted again, the voyage had commenced in earnest.

All the way to Peterhead it was most enjoyable, but as night stole over the ocean, and the sun dipped towards the sea, and just as Professor Hodson was proposing to go down to supper, the wind sprang up; then—let me say it in my own queer way—all on board that were sailors, were sailors, and those on board who were not, were very much the reverse. Surely this is better than saying that certain folks were sea-sick.

But it was a pity that the cruel wind should blow so high, and that the waves should not have respected the savants a single bit, nor Mrs Hodson either, nor even the pretty Clara.

It was not only a pity, but it was excessively annoying; for Professor Hodson, who had once written a treatise on the physical geography of the sea, had meant to give a scientific lecture in the forenoon; while Sir Thomas, the bold Saxon, was to have lectured on astronomy under the stars, the dredging machine was to have been set to work, and the mysteries of the ocean depths revealed to the wondering gaze of poor

Jack; while Mrs Hodson had pictured to herself the pleasure she would have in presiding at the head of the table, and lecturing, not only her husband, but everybody else; and Clara—she, too, had had her dreams. There could be no harm, Clara had thought, in looking her best, and dressing her best, and even engaging in the delicatest of flirtations with the handsome Lord Claude. She had had a lovely sailor costume made, but, oh dear!—my heart bleeds to mention it—it was never worn, and the only miserable consolation left to her was to remember, that this nautical rig would do for Henley Regatta. Ugh!

But oh! the cruel, cruel ocean, and oh! the merciless waves, not one of all those dreamers left his or her cabin till the Icebear lay safe and sound in Kirkwall.

Thus ended the pleasure sail from which so much joy had been expected.

A Tale of Love and Heroism by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Eight.

“Till Frozen Seas do Meet.”

“Mr Lloyd,” said Claude to his first mate, the morning after the Icebear sailed away from the Orkneys on the wings of a favouring breeze, “I am not going to call my men together and make a speech. That style of thing is far too stagey. We have picked our crew, and I believe they will be good men and true, every one of them. Well, I will try to be a kind and considerate captain; and I’ll tell you now what I should like. I want, then, in a word, all the discipline and cleanliness of a man-o’-war, with a good deal of the cheerfulness and light-heartedness you find on a well-appointed yacht or best class of merchantmen. Let them sing below if they like, or even on deck for’ard during smoking hours: I won’t object to a little music. You understand?”

“Perfectly, my lord.”

Claude held up a finger.

“My lord is too formal for a ship’s quarter-deck,” he said.

“Beg pardon, sir. I really had forgotten for the moment.”

The captain and mate were on the quarter-deck, the latter taking his orders for the day.

As shrewd and sturdy a sailor as ever faced the billows was Lloyd. And not only a sailor, but a thorough iceman. He had been going “back and fore,” as he phrased it, to Greenland ever since he was a boy of ten, and he was now nearly thirty. He had come through every peril that one can think of; he had been cast away as often as he had fingers on his left hand—there were only four, one had been shot off—his ship had been burned at sea, and he had drifted for weeks on an iceberg, with nothing to eat at last except boot leather; he had once even been dragged under water by a shark, and was saved by his sea-boot coming off—one of the best pairs of boots he ever had, he used to tell his mates;—but, for all the dangers he had come through, he dearly loved the regions round the Pole.

“Greenland has been like a mother to me,” he had been heard to say; “and I hope to die there, and be frozen up in an iceberg, where I’ll keep fresh till the crack of doom.” (Note 1.)

That first day at sea—for these hardy mariners had not considered themselves afloat till now—was a very busy one. It was a very beautiful one too, for the matter of that, when one had time to look around him.

When any one did, it was when the breeze slackened a bit, or blew stiffer, or changed its course a point or two, or did any one of the score of things that the wind that wafts a ship along is constantly doing.

The captain walked all round the ship about eight bells, and found everything taut and trim and clear, and no complaints.

The second and third officers had been with Claude before for many voyages. The surgeon was a man of over forty, and as grey as a badger. It was not years alone that had changed the colour of his hair, however, but a lifetime of abstruse study. His studies had been of a very mixed nature—better call him a scientist at once and be done with it; but he was a musician and poet also. By the way, every naturalist is a poet, whether he writes or not; for true poetry consists, not in writing verses, but in being and in feeling yourself part and parcel of all the life and loveliness around you, of loving all things and all creatures, and thus, unwittingly it may be, worshipping in the truest Way the great Being who made them.

But the surgeon’s character will come out as we go on in our story; suffice it to say here that although Claude had known him but a very few months, he already liked and respected him very much.

Claude felt happy and contented in having so good a crew, and officers he could trust by night or day. For though I may have seemed in my last chapter to be sneering at good Professor Hodson and his brother savants, they really were men who had the interests of science at heart, and this ship was going on no insignificant errand to the land of the snow bear.

The sea got up towards evening, and sail was taken in; and as the breeze still freshened, still more sail, and she was practically made snug for the night.

Before leaving Aberdeen—some days indeed—Claude had written to his mother, filially and affectionately bidding her good-bye. Thus far he had bent his pride; yes, and had

she asked him to come home for a day—well, perhaps he would have thrown all his pride to the winds and obeyed.

But the time flew by, and there came no reply of any kind, and Claude was sad About an hour before he sailed, a telegram was put into his hand. It was brief, thus—

“Lady Alwyn wishes her son well.”

So far the proud Lady of the Towers had melted. Claude put the telegram in his Bible. It was something precious, for he could read between the words. So he was happy.

But he would not write again.

The ship was steered for the nor'-nor'-west; and as it neared Iceland, Claude grew more and more impatient. How would Meta look when she heard the news?—for in the few letters he had written—there were few mails to Iceland—he had not told her all the truth.

When at length the Icebear cast anchor before the quaint, old-fashioned town of Reykjavik, after what had appeared to Claude an interminable time, they found their store-ship in waiting. Claude boarded her; and finding that everything had gone all right, directed his men to pull him on shore.

Burning with impatience though he was to get away from the town—the reader will guess whither—it was hours before he could leave old friends, so warmly did they welcome him.

Free at last! Free and away, and fleet was the sturdy pony that carried him. Only an Iceland horse could have done so, for even in summer the country is dangerous. Summer had not yet come, and the hills still wore the garb of winter, and the higher paths were often slippery with melting ice.

He sees the strange old cottage at last, and faster still he rides, for it is nearly night. He sees Byarnie. Byarnie sees him, and, after one wave of the arm to bid him welcome, rushes indoors. Poor, innocent, beautiful Meta had had no thought of his coming that night, but, strange to say, she was dressed exactly as he had first seen her. But now the love-light was in her eyes, and tear-drops quivered on their long lashes.

“I thought,” she said, “you would never, never come again.”

Claude remembered his dream.

The quaint old room when it was lit up looked cosier than ever, with the great fire of turf and wood burning on the hearth, the raven nodding on a log, the great cat on a stool, the snow-flea in its cage, the table laid for supper, the aunts—still witch-like and ugly—one sitting spinning like Fate in a picture, the other with book and spectacles in a high-backed chair, and great, awkward Byarnie laying supper.

It was all like a vision of happiness to Claude. He thought he should like to stay here all his life.

Perhaps Meta could read his thoughts in his eyes. I do not myself believe in thought-reading; but if there be such a faculty, it surely is the gift of true lovers.

“Oh! stay with us for ever,” she whispered.

“Would I could,” he answered. “Would that I could.”

“But you will for months?”

“Nay, but for one short week.”

The bright face fell, and tears again bedimmed the eyes.

“Dearest Meta,” he murmured—

“I could not love thee half so much
Loved I not honour more.”

Next day, when alone with her, he bravely told her all. She was convulsed with grief. He knew she would be so. He let her weep on for a time. Tears bring such relief.

“I love you just the same, and will marry you on my return.”

She turned to him, her face very pale and wet with tears, but calmness and heroic determination in her eyes.

“Lord Alwyn,” she said. Then she noticed the pain the words gave him. “Claude, then,” she continued, “I will never marry you without the consent of your mother. That consent will not be given. So I will never marry you—never.”

There was a mournful cadence in her voice that rang through his heart.

“Then,” he said, “you do not, you cannot lo—”

“Stay!” she interrupted; “stay, Claude, stay!” She put her little hand on his as she spoke, and looked into his face with that holy truthful gaze of hers. “I love you. I will never love another. I will love you till frozen seas do meet.”

The earnestness of her voice and manner held poor Claude spellbound for a time—spellbound and speechless. He could only gaze entranced on her lovely face, and never had it seemed to him more lovely than now.

“Sit down, dear Meta,” he said at last; “we still are lovers.”

“Yes,” in a low, sad voice.

“Tell me, Meta, what did you mean by the strange words, ‘Till frozen seas do meet’?”

“There is a legend,” she replied, “that long, long ago there dwelt among the rocks of the hills hereby an ancient but good man. He was called the hermit; he never courted the acquaintance of any one, never left the fastnesses where he dwelt; but people often went to seek advice from him, and brought him gifts of roots and milk. He taught them many things, and many believed him supernatural. I do not think he was so, because his teachings were not all from the Good Book. He told them that the world was very old, but would be ages and ages older yet; that there lay at the South Pole an ocean of ice just as at the North; that the world was cooling down by imperceptibly slow degrees; that these frozen seas were creeping nearer, advancing south and north; that they would encroach on Southern Africa and on Europe; that the torrid zone would become temperate; that nearer and nearer the oceans of ice would creep, till at last they would all but meet on the equator; that ships would then cease to float; that men would even degenerate, and finally live for warmth in caves in the earth; and then the frozen seas would meet, and this world would be all one shining ball of ice-clad snow. But he said that a day would soon afterwards come when the elements would melt—the lost, the final day. That is the legend of the strange words I used. And,”—here she turned once more towards him, for she had been talking hitherto like one in a dream—“and I will love you, Claude, till frozen seas do meet.”

Note 1. Bodies have been found frozen, and in perfect condition, after a lapse of nearly half a century.

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Chapter Nine.

The Parting.

Among the Northern nations, especially the Norse, you meet types of men and women as utterly different from those of Southern climes as if they belonged to another sphere. The same blessed religion nevertheless binds us all with its golden chain. Natures like those of Meta and honest Byarnie—who, be it remembered, are not creatures of the imagination, but true examples of a class—I have never met elsewhere.

The nearest approach to them in manners and ways of thinking, I have found in my own dear Highlands of Scotland.

Very many, both of the Norse, such as those met with in Shetland and Iceland, as well as our Highlanders, are very deeply imbued with the spirit and true sentiment of religion. It is part and parcel of their everyday existence. Religion is the weft in the beautiful web of such lives as these.

When women like Meta love it is very pure love, for the very reason I have stated, for Meta was not ashamed to go on her knees with her love. A very peculiar girl, you say? Would to Heaven there were millions like her in this fair land of ours.

On the very evening of their reunion, Claude left his bride-elect, and went thundering away through the moonlight along the stony path on his sure-footed pony.

He would come again, next day or next, he told her, but duty was duty, and must be obeyed.

He was more happy than might be expected—happy because hopeful.

He found everything well on board, just as he had expected he would.

“I’ve engaged a few more hands, sir,” the mate told him. “The right metal I like a mixture of nationalities, and yet I don’t. Bother the foreign scum that they man British ships with nowadays, sir, leaving honest English Jack on shore to starve.—But give me a crew like what we now have, sir—a crew mostly Scotch and English; then I say one or two Norwegians or Danes don’t do much harm.”

“Right, Mr Lloyd. And now I must tell you I am going to engage an extra hand. Can you make room?”

“Put him in a bunk, sir.”

“A bunk, Mr Lloyd? He’d never be able to get in, and if he did he couldn’t stick his legs out. He is seven feet high and over, and broad in proportion.”

“Ha, ha!” laughed the mate. “But I have it, sir; I’ve got a hammock big enough to hold an elephant.”

“That’ll do. Good night, then.”

As he took down his Book to read before retiring, out dropped the telegram.

He read it again and again with conflicting feelings. Would his mother relent? His own fate, as far as Meta was concerned, he determined should not be altered. She might never marry him, but he himself, in that case, would have but one bride for ever and ay—the sea. Still, as he closed the Bible that night and restored the telegram, he allowed himself to build just one castle in the air. In the cosy drawing-room of this castle his mother was seated, and Meta and he were there, and all were happy.

He slept and dreamt about this.

Duty kept him at Reykjavik next day and the day after, but Meta, lonely and weary through waiting, heard the well-known click-click of the pony’s hoofs on the succeeding evening, and ran to the door to meet Claude.

It was raining, but Byarnie took his cloak and the pony, and in he went, looking rosy, fresh, and beaming with joy.

“Have you got good news?” was Meta’s first question.

She answered it herself before he got time to speak.

“Yes, you have,” she said; “I see it in your eyes. What is it? A letter from your dear mamma?”

Claude’s face fell just a little.

“I wish it were,” he replied. “No, Meta, nothing so good as that, but something I received before I left Aberdeen, and, strange to say, forgot to say a word to you about. A telegram.”

They went and sat down to read it.

“I don’t like it,” she said. “Why didn’t she say more? Why does she use such a funny bit of paper? Why so formal? And how funnily she writes!”

Claude laughed, and explained all about telegrams, telling Meta that people could not say all they wanted to in a semi-public document, but that generally a good deal was left to be inferred, that the receiver must often read between the lines.

Innocent Meta held the telegram up between her and the evening sunshine.

Claude laughed again, and caught her hand.

“I don’t mean in that way, silly child,” he said. “There; we will read between the words in the way I mean.”

Then he told her a good deal of his own history, and how much he knew his mother loved him, and how he believed she really was sorry he had gone away, but that pride forbade her saying so, though she doubtless wanted him to be happy, and not to depart with a sore heart—and a deal more I need not note.

“Don’t you see, Meta?”

“Dark and dim, as through a glass,” said Meta, musing. “Telegrams are queer things, Claude, and I have never seen one before, but you must be right, because you look happy.”

“Well, I am, because I feel she will relent.”

“I wonder what she is doing now?”

And Meta’s question leads me to say a word or two about the Lady of the Towers.

I lay down my pen and ring for old Janet. I am still writing in the old red parlour at Dunallan Towers. I write by fits and starts, but I have been steady at it all day, because it has been raining in down-pouring torrents. I pity the very rooks on the swaying trees. Surely on a day like this they must envy the owl in his shelter in the turret, though they

roar at him and laugh at him on sunshiny days, and call him “Diogenes?” But here comes Janet at last.

“Just one question, Janet, and I’ll let you go. How did Lady Alwyn feel when Claude went away?”

“Oh, sir,” says Janet, “she was far too proud to express her feelings to me in that way. You know, sir, when glad she always told me, but her sorrow she invariably kept to herself.”

“So, as she said nothing, you inferred she was unhappy?”

“For that reason I knew she was. Did I put in the diary, sir, that our poor boy, Claude, told me about his dream—consulted me ere he had that terrible interview with her ladyship?”

“Yes, yes, Janet, that is here.”

“Well, sir, it was first Fingal’s going away, trotting so sad-like after his master, and he never once looking back, and then the snow-bird going next. That, I think, nearly broke her heart. But oh, she was proud, sir.”

“She never owned her grief, then?”

“No, sir; but I’ve caught her often in tears, though she tried to hide them. She grew far more active than ever after that. She seemed to hate the very sight of indoors, and, wet day or dry day, she would be always out.”

“Doing good, doubtless?”

“Visiting the sick, sir; ay, and often sitting down sewing in a sick person’s room. The neighbours noticed her grief. They all loved her, they all pitied her. But it was at night, I think, she suffered most. Her room was next to mine, and it is often, often I’ve heard her pacing up and down the floor till nearly morning. On stormy nights, sir, when the wind was roaring round the old turrets, and howling in the trees then she would send for me.

“‘Janet,’ she would say, with her sad, beautiful smile, ‘I cannot sleep to-night. You must read to me.’”

As Janet is now feeling in her pocket for her handkerchief, and tears are choking her utterance, I gently dismiss her, and go on writing.

“Yes, Meta,” replied Claude, “and I often wonder too; but there is one thing that does give me joy, and that is this: she knows I love her and am not really unfilial.”

Claude found Meta much more hopeful next day, and more happy. Sometimes she was almost gay.

“By-the-by, Claude,” she said, “I’ve something to show you. You must promise to believe all I say.”

“Implicitly.”

“And not laugh at me?”

“Never a smile.”

“Well, follow me.”

Claude did.

She led him round to the back of the cottage, and there in a big aviary—evidently the work of Byarnie’s hands—were seven great sea-birds.

“Now you’re going to laugh,” cried Meta, with a warning finger.

“Well, no wonder. Such queer pets, Meta!”

“But they’re not pets, Claude, though I love them. They are all going with you.”

“All going with me! Those funny old things! Ha! ha! ha! Forgive me, darling, I can’t help it.”

“Well, I do forgive you. And when I tell you that this particular seagull makes the best carrier in the world, far before any pigeon, because it can fly ten times as far, and never get lost at sea—”

“I reared those from the shell,” interrupted honest Byarnie, his big face all smiles. “And I’ve reared many such.”

“Byarnie,” said Claude, “you’ll come with me, and look after these birds, eh?”

Byarnie jumped and laughed, clapped his hand upon his leg, and jumped and laughed again, and then went skipping round with all the grace of an infant elephant, till Claude and Meta also laughed to see his uncouth exuberance.

“My brother will come here, and my sister too, and look after the house and farm,” he cried. “He! he! ho! ho! Byarnie’s the happiest man ’tween Reykjavik and Christiansund.”

Day after day went by, but still Claude was at the little capital of Iceland, or with Meta. He was waiting the arrival of the mail: she had broken a shaft or something, and eager and able though he was to get away to the land of the Northern Lights and the sea of ice, he did not begrudge himself the respite.

The mail was sighted and signalled at last, however, and came puffing and blowing in.

Claude had letters from his employers and from many a friend, but none from his mother.

But Janet’s letter must in some measure have made up for this, else he would not have ridden right away out to Meta’s dwelling.

Ah, well, it was their last day together anyhow!

There they were together now whom seas would soon sunder—two warm, loving, hoping hearts. Would they ever meet again?

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Chapter Ten.

In Norland Seas.

“I shouldn’t wonder if we get it from out yonder,” said Dr Barrett, pointing away south and by west, the very direction in which the Icebear was steaming.

There was a great billowy heave on the blue sea, blue everywhere, except where the light shadow of some white fleecy cloud made a patch of fleeting grey or grey-green. There was not a breath of wind “to swear by,” as Jack Scott unpoetically put it, so the long rolling swell was as smooth as glass. This swell was meeting them too, and the ship rose and fell on it with a gentle dipping motion; only now and then, when a taller wave than usual dipped in under bows and keel, she gave a quick plunge forward.

Along the horizon ahead was a bank of rock-and-castle clouds, while far away astern the jagged snowcapped peaks of Iceland were just visible above the rolling seas.

Flocks of malleys, shrill-screaming kittiwakes, and different kinds of seagulls were tacking and half-tacking round the vessel, afar off, and the dark and ominous-like skua waited his chance to rob the malleys of whatever they might happen to pick up.

“Yes,” the surgeon said; “I think we’ll have it out of yonder.”

“Seems so to me, too,” said Claude. “We are all ready for a blow, Mr Lloyd?”

Mr Lloyd gave one glance forward and smiled.

“Ay, sir,” he replied, “all ready for a buster; and many is the sneezer, sir, I’ve come through in these latitudes, and higher up North too.”

These officers were on the bridge.

This latter was not the great elevated deck you see on passenger steamers right amidships. No, the Icebear’s bridge was but a plank, comparatively speaking. Not more than three feet wide, with a rope railing at one side, and a brass one at the other, with a step-ladder leading up to it from the quarter-deck, for it was between the bulwarks near the mizzen mast.

The glass was going down, and the day was far spent. Already the sun's rays were beginning to fall aslant the waves.

"Had we started sooner," remarked the doctor, "we would have been farther off the land ere now."

"True, my good Dr Barrett, true," replied Claude; "but could we have done so?"

"It would certainly have been difficult I admit; but if anything short of a hurricane comes along we can face it, and the night is short."

No, it had not been easy getting away from Reykjavik indeed. It so happens that the good people of that town are exceedingly hospitable, and it is a hospitality that comes straight away from the heart. So there had been a kind of farewell levée on board Claude's ship, and as there happened to lie in the roadstead a French merchantman and a Danish man-of-war, and the officers from both attended it and talked much, this made matters worse—or better.

But down went the sun, and ugly and angry were his parting gleams. He sank in a coppery haze, which lit up all the sea between. He seemed to squint and to leer at our heroes as much as to say, "You'll catch it before long; something's brewing. Good night; I'm off to bed, for bed is the best place."

Down went the sun and up rose the wind. Twilight is very long in these regions, and before it had quite given place to night, the sea from being rippled got rough. The breeze seemed uncertain at first where to come from, and went puffing about from three to four points of the compass. Then it appeared to say to itself, "First thoughts are best; I'll follow the swell; I'll soon blow that down." So it came roaring out of the north-west. Long before it did blow "a stiffener," as the mate called it, looking up ahead through the gloaming air, you could have seen mysterious-looking great grey blankets of clouds, drifting fast and furiously towards the south-east. They might have been a few miles high, but soon the stream of clouds was lowered and thickened and darkened, till the horizon was hardly three cables' length away all round. Then it was night—night with an ever-increasing breeze and a choppy, frothy sea.

The wind did blow the swell pretty flat, but substituted in its place genuine waves, as ragged and jagged as the mountain peaks of Iceland.

And the good ship by-and-by creaked and groaned in every timber, and thick darkness fell, and Claude had to trust to Providence, to steam, and the compass. There were two men at the wheel at midnight, and at that time probably the gale was at its worst, for on

heaving the log it was found she was barely making one knot an hour. The seas—whole water—were coming in over the bows by tons, and sweeping right aft like a miniature Niagara; but the hatches had been battened down early in the evening, and the boats secured, so there was little injury done, though the load of water sadly hampered the vessel's motion: it was not able to get away fast enough.

About two bells in the middle watch the Icebear struck.

Struck? But what or where? I know not; I cannot tell; it was no island, no rock. It may have been the carcase of some floating monster of the deep; or—who knows?—some wretched derelict or a portion of a wreck. It was a mystery. But she struck with a dull thud that quite stopped her way, and for a time made every heart beat with fear for her safety. She must have struck not only on the bows, but gone over something; all along her keel was the quivering grating felt, as if of a substance underneath.

For a while, too, the rudder and screw were hampered and the vessel's way all but stopped.

As it was she staggered and began to broach to. It was a moment of the greatest danger, but only a moment. Then it was over, and the Icebear was struggling once more with the stormy head wind and raging sea.

By morning light, though the wind still held, it was less furious, and the seas but broke in froth and spray against the descending bows, and went singing aft on each side, their tops twisting and curling in the gale.

Down in the darkened wardroom at breakfast that morning the talk was naturally about the storm. Although Claude retained his own quarters abaft, still he preferred taking all his meals with his officers.

“What was it we struck, do I think?” said the doctor in answer to a question put by Lloyd. “Some unhappy fishing-boat or walrus-hunter on his way to the east shores of Greenland.”

“Heaven forbid!” said Claude, with a slight shudder. “Would we not have heard a scream or yell?”

“Never a scream or yell in that roaring gale,” replied Dr Barrett, coolly. “Bless you, sir, I’ve run them down before. Steward, another cup of coffee, please.”

“You’ve been often to these regions, doctor?”

“I’ve been often everywhere. I’m the veriest old son of a gun of a sea-dog of a doctor.”

“It’s as well no one else said that about you.”

“I wouldn’t mind. My skin is as hard as tortoise-shell. I’ve been married so often, you know.”

“Have you really now?” said the second mate, a merry-eyed little dark man. “Are all your wives dead?”

“What a question!” said Claude.

“Ah! never mind,” quoth the surgeon; “I’ll answer him, if he’ll only cut me another slice of that delicious corn-beef. Mind, it isn’t for a lady, so you may cut it as thick as you please.”

“But about your wives?”

“Oh yes, the wives. I don’t think many of them are dead.”

“Doctor!” cried Claude, “you dreadful man!”

“Well, you see,” said the doctor, tapping the edge of his cup with the spoon as if counting, “I’ve been married just exactly fifty-nine times. My ships, messmates, are my wives.”

“Well, you’ve had many a honeymoon,” said Lloyd.

“Ay,” replied Dr Barrett; “and many more I hope to have.”

An able seaman popped his head in past the door curtain at this moment, and drew it out again.

“Don’t duck your head out and in like an old turtle, man,” cried the doctor; “come right in. Anybody sick?”

“Which I didn’t know, sir, the cap’n was ’ere. Nobody sick, but knew ye liked curios, doctor, sir.”

“Well?”

“Well, beggin’ yer parding, sir, likus the cap’n’s, but there be a bird wot our cook calls a sea-swallow a-perchin’ on the main yard. Shall one of us go up and fetch him? He’s mighty sea-sick I knows, and couldn’t fly to save his life.” (Note 1.)

“Certainly, bring it down.”

The officers went on with breakfast, and had forgotten all about Tom Scott and his sea-swallow, when suddenly the man appeared again, bearing under one arm a beautiful snow-bird.

It escaped almost at once, and fluttering upwards alighted on the compass that depended from the skylight.

All eyes were fixed on it. It did not seem a bit frightened, but looked downwards with one crimson saucy eye at the table.

“It looks like a spirit,” said Lloyd, half afraid, for, like most sailors, he was superstitious.

“It’s a spirit that will bring us luck. They always do,” said the second mate.

“Are you ill, sir?” exclaimed the doctor, addressing the captain.

One might have thought so. His face was pale, mouth a little open, brows lowered, and eyes riveted on the bird.

“Were such a thing possible,” he muttered, “I’d believe that was my snow-bird Alba.”

To the amazement of every one, no sooner were the words uttered, than with one quick glance of recognition, down flew the bird and nestled, as it was wont to do, on its master’s hand, held close up on his breast.

Yes, every one was astonished, but poor McDonald, the third mate, was frightened; and when, after receiving a few caresses, Alba jumped on to the table and began pattering around and saying, “Poor Alba wants his breakfast; Alba wants a sop of food,” McDonald could stand it no longer: he left the table and hurried on deck.

“It’s no canny,” he said to the steward; “it’s no canny, and if I could steal a boat I’d leave the ship and brave the stormy ocean.”

“Lord Alwyn—I mean sir,” said the mate, “a hundred years ago you’d have been burned for a witch.”

“Or a wizard,” remarked the doctor, laughing. “But I am not astonished. The captain has already told me the story of his snow-bird. The wonderful power of sight, scent, and probably hearing in gulls is scarcely yet known to naturalists; and the same may be said about nearly all sea-birds. They either have an instinct that we possess not, or the faculties they possess, in common with other animals, are most marvellously developed. (Note 2.) Just look at that lovely bird now, and listen to its marvellous prattle.”

Pattering round the table went Alba, in a very excited condition, only every now and then flying off to Claude’s breast as if he could hardly believe in his own happiness. He jumbled up his sentences, too, as most talking birds do when excited.

“Alba wants—Alba wants—Alba wants Fingal’s Claude—Fingal’s—Fingal—Claude—Alba wants his breakfast.”

“That’s better, Alba,” said Dr Barrett, lifting the cover from a dish of fish.

Next moment Alba was in the third heaven.

“You’ve made that bird your friend for life, doctor,” said Claude.

Fingal, the deerhound, got up from under the table and laid his great head on his master’s knee.

“Of course I won’t forget you, you silly old Fingal, because Alba has come. I have room in my heart for both.”

Towards sunset that day the weather cleared, the wind having gone round to the nor²-east-and-by-east. The sea too went down with the sun, though it still ran high; a morsel of canvas was got up to steady her, and leaning over to it away she went, cutting merrily through the water as if she had been a veritable living thing. The stars shone that night so brilliantly; it was as though you could have stretched out your hand and touched them, so large, lustrous, and near-like were they. A broad white gleam of auroral light was in the north, above it the sky was of a strange sea-green hue. But a whisper had gone around the ship that a spirit had come on board, and an anxious group was seated round the galley fire to discuss the situation.

“If it’s a spirit,” said Tom Scott at last, “it’s a good one. It has brought us good weather. Hurrah, lads! give us a song somebody.”

The good ship Icebear had no more adventures for nearly a fortnight, by which time she had rounded Cape Farewell and reached the north-eastern ice.

“And now there came both mist and snow,
And it grew wondrous cold,
And ice, mast-high, came floating by
As green as emerald.”

Note 1. Sea-birds are usually unable to fly after they alight. A Cape pigeon, for example, gets giddy and frightened at once when put on deck.

A Tale of Love and Heroism by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Eleven.

Summer on the Greenland Ocean.

There was not an officer nor able seaman on board the good ship Icebear, who had not been in the Arctic regions before.

Mostly Englishmen they were, with just a sprinkling of Scotch—"the leaven that leavened the lump," that is how Rab McDonald, the third officer, expressed it, and it is needless to say that Rab himself was a Scot.

Onward went the Icebear, sometimes in a clear sea, though far into Baffin's Bay—for this was what is called an exceptional year—but at other times she had literally to plough her way through the heavy ice.

When the weather was fine there was but little danger, unless, indeed, a swell rolled in, playing and toying with the monster pieces as schoolboys would with balls.

But when a breeze sprang up, even if only half a gale, then indeed the scene was changed. Then—

"Through the drifts the snowy clifts
Did send a dismal sheen:
Nor shapes of man nor beasts they ken—
The ice was all between.

"The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around;
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
Like noises in a swound."

During calm weather and in the open water Dr Barrett was busy indeed, taking soundings, deep or otherwise, and dredging for living objects at the sea's bottom.

Very lovely and interesting indeed was the collection that soon grew up in his cabinet, under his magic spell. What could be in that tangled mass of mud and weed and sand,

one would have asked, that was hauled on board, the sea-water dripping and trickling out of the bag?

To Dr Barrett—and to the savants at home—treasures more valuable than gold itself.

And after he had secured a haul, washed them, put them up, perhaps on cards of jet to show their beauties off, the clever surgeon would have handed you his great glass and bade you look. It was like gazing at creatures from fairyland. All shapes and colours, but all so minute that they could not well be seen with the naked eye. Here is a little fairy fish—no bigger is it than this letter ‘f.’ Take that glass, please. Now look. No wonder an expression of amazement steals over your face! It is a perfect fish, yet, strange to say, transparent and colourless—that is, there is no fixed colour any more than there is in the Arctic aurora, but greens dance and crimsons flit and play around it; and, stranger still, with a stronger glass, you can see its internal anatomy, see its heart beat and its pulses move! Could anything be more wonderful? And here are shells that, lying on this morsel of black cardboard, are no bigger than the letters “a,” or “e,” or “c.” Look at these. No wonder you smile with delight; they, too, are faultless in shape and curious in form; they, too, are transparent as glass; they, too, display all the colours of the finest pearl.

Put this one—it is no bigger than a comma to the naked eye—under the microscope in a drop of water. Lo! that drop of water is to it a small ocean, and round and round it crawls, legs all out and its shell high up on its shoulders, and of a bright translucent blue. I could sit here all the livelong night and write, sheet of foolscap after sheet of foolscap should flutter from my desk and fall upon the floor, and yet when the grey dawn of morning crept in through the casement of this red parlour, I should not have told you of one-half the mysterious and beautiful beings that this man of science dredged up from the dark depths of that mysterious sea.

I pause here and listen. There was not a sound in the house when I penned the last sentence, only a mouse nibbling the crumbs that I placed for it in the corner, but now there comes from an adjoining room the voice of some one singing. It is only poor old Janet. She does so every night before retiring; and, old though she be, I know she is very happy—happy with a happiness that can never be taken from her. But to-night the words she sings are so en rapport with my own spirit while writing, that I cannot but give a line or two—

“God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps on the sea,
And rides upon the storm.”

As much as it was practicable to do so, the Icebear hugged the western shores of Greenland, but here the ice was heaviest. As the summer advanced, however, the land became bare of snow; it was then that delightful excursions were made inland, up through the long, deep fiords that everywhere indent this coast. I do not like the word “indent,” though I use it; for an indentation means fork-like incision, widest at the mouth—a bay, for example,—but these Arctic fiords are, many of them, narrow at the inlet, then spread out as they go inland.

There are thousands and thousands of them yet unexplored, and which never will be explored as long as the world lasts.

Not altogether for the sake of pleasure were these excursions made, but for the purpose of scientific discovery.

I am sitting here to tell a story, and not to describe scenery, the yachting, the fishing, hunting, and all the pleasures that make a holiday in Greenland north, during the short summer-time, so enthrallingly delightful—a something that once enjoyed can never be forgotten, while the life-blood circulates in our veins.

Claude himself was a lover of nature. In his soul he had all the poetry of a Wordsworth, though there it remained, for he never wrote verses. He could love and admire every tiny flower, every moss or lichen or tender and beautiful saxifrage that clad the rocky uplands. Neither could he classify them.

Dr Barrett both admired and classified. He was ever on the outlook for new species, and I verily believe he dreamed about them by night. So his cabinet, of the rare and lovely specimens found on shore, grew even bigger than did his deep-sea collection.

Cold? No, it was not cold—these regions at this season. Cool sometimes, but never cold.

The Icebear would be cautiously steered up some of those fiords and the anchor let go, in an inland sea or harbour in which all the navies in the world, both mercantile and man-o’-war, could easily have ridden.

While the doctor and his assistants would be prospecting among the hills, leaving the ship in charge of the mate, and, accompanied only by the faithful Fingal and giant Byarnie, Claude would start in a small boat, a kind of elegant dingy, which he had had made on purpose, and go off up the fiords for miles with gun and fishing-rod.

The snow-bird, strange to say, always remained on board. What truth there may be in the statement I do not know, but they say that a snow-bird, or tern, that has once been domesticated by mankind dare not return to its kindred birds under pain of death.

Claude used to enjoy those excursions on the fiords very much. Here is how he generally spent the day: First, Byarnie would pull him slowly about close to the rocks, where the fish were most numerous. A few dozen were speedily caught and thrown in the bottom of the boat. Fingal used to take them in charge, apparently delighting in doing so, for his wise eyes never left them, and if one flopped Fingal held it down with an air of seriousness on his rough hairy face that was highly amusing.

But Claude soon got tired of fishing, and put up the rod. Then he told Byarnie to pull him away out into the centre of the fiord, and let the boat float as she liked in the sweet sunshine. Claude would have a book, perhaps, and very often, when his eyes were riveted on it, it was upside down, which showed where his thoughts were.

Just for fun then he would say to Fingal, "Speak, Fingal."

Fingal would speak with a vengeance, till every hill and every rock re-echoed his bow-wow-wows. But the sound was sure to bring up a great head or two with goggle eyes out of the water, sea-lions, walruses, or saddle-back or bladder-nose seals, for they are all most inquisitive.

Lying very still sometimes, with the oars in, one single seal would pop his head out of the sun-glazed water and have a look at the boat.

"Sit still, Byarnie; don't move," Claude would say.

The seal would come nearer and have another look; then down he would go, tail first, and in three minutes more the sea all around would be black with great heads and sweet, soft, wondering eyes.

"Well," they would seem to say, "we can't make it out. Never mind, let us have a romp; the sunshine is so delightful. Hurrah!"

Then a scene of diving, and chasing, and splashing, such as it is impossible to describe, would ensue; it was, in fact, a seals' ball. If Byarnie would suddenly explode with a loud "Ho! ho! ho!" of merriment, or if Fingal barked, then, hey! presto, every head would sink as if by magic, and in a few minutes the sea would be as smooth as usual, with only the gulls, divers, or grebes floating lazily on it.

Next, Claude would make Byarnie tell him some wild old Norse story—he was full of them—with Sagas, or Vikings, or fairies in it, and then sing. Oh! Byarnie could sing well, but a strange, monotonous kind of lilt it was—very pleasant, nevertheless, for it never once failed to put Claude to sleep. So sure, indeed, was Claude of falling asleep when Byarnie began to sing, that he used to lie down in the stern-sheets with a cushion beneath his head.

Sometimes he awoke with such a happy, happy half-dazed look on his handsome face, and say, “Oh! Byarnie, I’ve had such a pleasant dream!”

Next they would land, and Claude would now read in earnest, while poor Byarnie cooked the dinner in gipsy fashion.

Very often after this Claude would keep his companion talking about Iceland, with Meta always the centre figure, for hours, till, when near sundown, they would probably hear the report of a rifle at some distance off. This was Dr Barrett signalling to his men, and not long after the whaler would come sweeping up, and the boats would return together, often enjoying the fun and frolic of a good race, for Byarnie was a splendid oarsman; his skiff was light, and he, if not a feather, had the strength of three ordinary seamen.

Thus pleasantly passed the summer days on that lonesome Greenland ocean.

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Chapter Twelve.

Among Arctic Fiords—A Strange Discovery.

If the reader happens to possess a map of the polar regions, or even a good map of the world, and will take a glance or two at the discovered lands and seas beyond the Arctic circle, he will be struck at once by their nomenclature. It would be interesting to know the why and the wherefore of many of these names, which I do not believe have, in any single instance, been given at random. The origin of some of them is evident enough—"Lady Franklin's Sound," for example, or "Hayes' Inlet," or "Peabody Bay."

But I do not wish to be told of the exact reasons that determined these names. Knowing what I do about the Polar regions, I would rather let my imagination have a little play.

A little to the south of Spitzbergen lies Hope Isle, or Sea Horse Island; I happen to know that many walruses, sometimes called sea-horses, frequent the ice or the icy land there; but why called Hope Island? Some ship, perhaps, had been long imprisoned, north of this place, provisions exhausted, and the chances of ever getting clear small indeed; but, behold! the ice opens as if by magic, and by sawing and blasting they struggle as far south as this lone isle, where, though locked up once more in the icy embrace of King Winter, they live in hope, and are eventually rewarded.

Down the east coast of Greenland proper there is a point with an ugly name, "Cape Discord." Was it mutiny or only mutiny threatened? did men struggle on slippery blood-bespattered decks, or was the discord confined to muttered threats, to black and angry looks and round-robins? (Note 1.)

"Cape Farewell" again—the southernmost point in Greenland. The ship has been wintered in Baffin's Bay, and the men have undergone cold, misery, and privation; but hurrah! the last land is left behind, the blue open sea is all before them, cheerily sings the wind through the rigging, the sails are full, and the men's hearts are also so full that if they did not sing they would go mad. So "farewell, old Greenland; our dear wives and sweethearts are waiting us at home in merry England. Farewell, farewell."

But round that point is Cape Desolation. Look at those bluff, bare crags that overhang the sea, the home of hardly even a wild bird; see afar off the tree-lands covered with snow, leaden clouds athwart the sky, billows dashing in foam against the black rocks,

and the cold wind blowing. Ugh! let us leave it. It is pleasant to find a Prince Albert Land and a Victoria Land up in the Arctic ocean, side by side; and a North Lincoln and North Devon, separated only by Jones's Sound. We have been told that when the North Pole is eventually discovered a Scotchman will be found at the top of it. I should not wonder, for the most northerly land, if my memory serves me aright, is called Grant's Land, and everybody knows that Grant is the name of a brave old Scottish clan.

Obeying instructions from his employers, Claude worked his ship north and north along the western shores of Greenland, exploring every creek and fiord; the doctor being meanwhile very busy, as we have seen in the last chapter, taking scientific notes and collecting specimens.

In their voyage out, the Icebear had only once spoken the Kittywake. She was a schooner commanded by the ex-skipper of a Dundee whaler, a man who knew the country well, and though but a small craft she was strong, and eminently suited for the work she had to perform, namely, to follow the Icebear with stores. She had received instructions to hug the western land, and, if a flagstaff was seen at the entrance to any creek, there to lay-to until the Icebear came out.

But the Kittywake's powers of sailing were only of a very limited character, and steam she had none. So, after spoken, she was not seen again for a time.

Very few of these wonderful fiords, as I have already mentioned, are even known. Now, it had occurred to our learned savants at home that it would pay, not in one way, but in two, to explore the largest of them. Untold wealth lies buried in Greenland. Scientific wealth, and the dross called gold, mayhap even diamonds, mayhap precious stones of a kind not yet known to the world. For why? Was not Greenland—that vast country which a single glance at the map tells you is as large in extent, as long and as wide as Africa itself—was it not at one time, ages ago, they argued, an inhabited continent as free from ice as our fair England is at the present day? They believed that the mountains which now shoot their jagged peaks, covered with perpetual snow, up into the blue-green sky were once purple and crimson with gorgeous heath; that green valleys and lovely glens lay below, with placid lakes and rolling rivers, and cascades of sparkling water; that gigantic forest lands covered the greater part of the country, forests in which the bison and wild deer roamed and fed; that, in a word, Greenland was once upon a time—while the torrid zone was but a fiery belt, uncrossable, uninhabitable—a fertile land of beauty, a land of mountain, forest, and stream.

They even went farther. Might not man himself, they said, have dwelt in this beautiful country—primeval man—and might not his remains be found even yet? There is, indeed,

no length to which some learned savants will not go, if they once give the reins to their imaginative power.

While not for a moment feeling half so sanguine as his employers, Claude, having undertaken a task, meant to do his duty, his best; and who can do more?

As long as the summer lasted, and before the mists began to rise, Claude continued his explorations. He came at last to a vast wall of solid rock, darkly frowning over the deep. He would have passed along it, never dreaming there could be any opening in there, had he not seen some bears swimming in the water. They disappeared on being followed by a boat, and the officer in charge, on returning, reported having discovered the inlet to a vast fiord. The Icebear was headed for the rock, and found the opening just soon enough to enter with safety.

It was a bright, clear day, with little wind and hardly a cloud in the sky, with every indication that fine weather would continue for a time at least.

All hands were on deck as the Icebear was turned shorewards and headed straight for the rocks. The boat that had gone in pursuit of the bears was ahead, guiding. To go steaming stem on to that adamantine wall seemed courting destruction, but lo! after a progress of a few hundred yards, the cliffs opened up as if by magic, showing a long channel of deep blue water. It got wider inland, but the cliffs were higher; gradually, however, they receded from the water's edge, and got lower and lower.

The ship was now stopped, and a party sent on shore to climb the highest peak adjoining the sea, and plant thereon the flagstaff that should signal to the Kittywake the whereabouts of her consort.

Slowly on and on steamed the Icebear, two men taking soundings from the chains, lest the water should suddenly shoal, but the beach at each side still continued rocky, though no longer high.

"What do you think of this?" asked Claude of Dr Barrett, who stood near him on the bridge.

"I am rejoiced beyond measure at our discovery," was the reply. "Why, this would please Professor Hodson, for no slowly descending glaciers ever made this wonderful cutting—it is volcanic entirely. Behold the rocks, Captain Alwyn."

"You are right, doctor, beyond a doubt."

“And I should not be surprised now what we came to.”

“Nor I.”

“I wish,” said Mr Lloyd, “I could see things with the eyes you seem to possess, doctor. How delightful it must be to be quite at-home-like with everything you see around you! You are a learned man, doctor.”

“Nay, nay,” cried the surgeon, laughing. “I am but a student—a baby student. Were I to live for ten thousand years I should still be only reading in the first book of Nature.”

“You are modest, at all events,” Claude said; “and I believe that is a sign of genius.”

“One cannot help feeling both modest and humble, Captain Alwyn, when standing face to face with the first facts of science, and knowing that the little knowledge he has acquired is to the vast unknown but as the light of a candle to the noonday sun.”

For days the Icebear followed the course of this estuary. Sometimes it narrowed to a mere deep cutting or canal, anon it would widen out into a broad oblong lake. At length it ended in an inland gulf or sea, some thirty or forty miles square.

In latitude this mysterious sheet of water was fully a degree and a half south of the inlet.

Dr Barrett spent days in dredging, and in roaming over the hills, studying botany and geology.

There were high mountains all around, and it was a strange sight for those on the deck of the Icebear, which was anchored at some little distance from the shore, to witness mighty cataracts tumbling sheer over the very summits of these hills, and coming roaring and foaming down their sides. The men looked upon this as magical, but it is easily explained: there were other hills behind these—much higher ones—that were invisible from the ship’s deck, and it was from these the waters poured down.

As might have been supposed, they found the waters of this inland sea less salt than the ocean itself, though by no means brackish.

“I think, sir,” said Dr Barrett, when he came off one evening, “that we need hardly proceed farther north. We can hardly expect to find another such lake as this.”

“Here, then, we shall winter,” replied Claude.

“Here, I believe, we ought, too. For look what I have dredged up.”

“Coal!”

“It is coal. I found it close in shore, and there is more of it. Depend upon it, we have discovered a country rich in mineral wealth; and, if I am any judge, there is gold in abundance here, too. Look at this. There are specimens for you.”

He handed him a few pieces of rock as he spoke.

“Pretty morsels of stone enough,” said Claude, as he bandied and weighed them in his palm. “Would make nice ornaments for a mantelpiece. But do they really represent anything of value?”

“Well, I will tell you. You see I have numbered all these morsels of stone. Here is Number 1.” (Number 1 was a piece of dark brown stone mingled with patches of the darkest blue, in which little stars sparkled and shone.) “That,” said Dr Barrett, “is carbonate of copper ore. Number 2, you perceive, is black with streaks of green; that also is a copper ore of some value. Number 3—take hold of it, Mr McDonald,” continued the doctor, addressing the third mate. “What would you call it?”

“I should call it a chucky-stone,” was the Scotchman’s reply.

“Yes; well, a rose by any other name would smell as sweet, but that rough red-brown-black-spangled chucky-stone of yours is an argentiferous carbonate of lead. Number 3 is very heavy, and not unlike a piece of blacklead, only it shines more. That would give seventy ounces of solid silver from the ton of ore. Here is Number 4, a piece of quartz mixed with dark grey, and streaked with sea-green. That also is silver ore.”

“And this Number 5,” said McDonald, “looks to me like a bit of very bad coal. Is it worth a doit?”

“It is worth many doits. It will assay three hundred ounces or more of solid silver to the ton. Number 6 looks like a lump of petrified rhubarb root. Number 7 is somewhat similar, but mixed with quartz and a reddish brown material. Both are auriferous; the last will yield 300 pounds from each ton of ore.”

Claude shook Dr Barrett by the hand.

“You have indeed made important discoveries,” he said.

Dr Barrett smiled pleasantly.

“My conscience!” cried McDonald. “We’ll be a’ millionaires thegither, every mither’s son o’ us. Wha could hae thocht it, and a’ own to a wheen chucky-stones that I wadna hae gi’en a button for!”

Note 1. A round-robin is a complaint or request, or even threat to the captain, from the men forward; the names to it being signed in a circle, so that no one can be marked as the instigator, though there must be a ringleader.

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Chapter Thirteen.

The Long Dead Arctic Night—The Battle of the Snow-Squalls.

The scene was changed. Summer had fled from the shores and from the braelands around the inland sea, where our travellers have taken up their abode.

“Away hath passed the heather-bell
That bloomed so rich on Needpath fell.”

Thus sweetly sang the Scottish bard. But here no heather-bell bloomed to vanish. But the lovely little stonecrops, white or yellow, the crimson ranunculus, the dark-tufted grasses, the wild dwarf poppies, and even the mosses and the hardy shrubs that blossomed for a time in the sloping rays of the sun—all have gone or lie deeply buried under the snow; they will appear no more till June again melts their covering and awakens them to sunshine and life.

Claude and his crew have not been idle. Every preparation is already made to mitigate the rigours of a winter that is even now commenced. Boats had been despatched to the inlet of the creek, to land and bury ship's stores in a sheltered nook not far from the sea. This was done with all despatch. Captain Watson's men of the Kittywake working with a will born of the knowledge that, as soon as their labours were over, they would once more embark and bear up for their own dear home in England.

They had the good luck to find a cave large enough to contain all the provisions and ammunition on board the store-ship. There was accordingly no digging to be done, except the quarrying from the hillsides of great stones to build up the entrance to the cave. This done, it but remained for Mr Lloyd, who was in charge of the working party, to take his bearings, in order to easily find the place again, and deliver to Captain Watson his written orders to return south.

Lloyd's boats towed the Kittywake out to sea, or, rather, steered her, for the tide was running rapidly out. He remained on board the store-ship until the turn of the tide, then there were farewells said, and ringing cheers were re-echoed from the hills and from tall floating icebergs, and, sail being set, away went the Kittywake southward ho! the crew as merry as schoolboys at play.

They were to bear tidings to the savants in London of the successful voyage made by the Icebear, the strange discovery of the inland sea, and the prospects Claude and Dr Barrett entertained of the perfect success of the expedition.

It may be as well to state here, and state it once for all, that the Kittywake was never more heard of, never more seen by mortal eye.

Whether she had sprung a leak in a gale, and foundered; been caught a-back in a squall, and thrown on her beam-ends, never to recover; or been crushed like a nut between some awful bergs, will never be known until—

“The sea gives up its dead.”

Had our heroes known aught of the disaster to the store-ship, it would have cast a gloom over them that nothing could have dispelled.

As it was they had nothing in their hearts but hope—hope that, when the long, dreary winter wore away, having more than accomplished the object of their cruise, the ice would break up, their imprisonment would be over, and, laden with riches and crowned with honour, they would bid farewell to the land of the aurora, and reach England in peace and safety.

They could, therefore, mark with complacency the ever-shortening days, and the oncoming mists, and mists succeeded by stormy winds, and curling clouds of drifting snow. The sooner winter came the sooner it would be over.

There came a day when these intrepid travellers were to look their last upon the sun for months to come. It was towards the end of October, but not severely frosty. Indeed, the sky was altogether overcast, with the exception of a space on the southern horizon. It was here that the sun last showed. Red, large, and angry looking, he but deigned to cast a glance or two across the dreary landscape, then slowly sank to rest, but for two hours after he had gone down, a long stripe of bare, lurid, orange sky remained over the spot. It gradually assumed the appearance of the reflection of some great fire or burning mountain. The clouds above were purple red, mingled with leaden grey, but all this soon faded. There was neither moon nor stars, and the blackness of darkness was over the land. About noon every day for nearly a week there was a kind of twilight. It was even more than this, for when the sky was partially clear there was all the appearance of coming sunrise, the cloudlets grew crimson, and even the tall mountains were tipped with rosy red, and all between the glens were of a strange blue colour.

But even this mid-day twilight ceased at last, then all was night.

All the way north Meta's gulls had been kept on deck in an aviary built for the purpose, and two had already been despatched with little messages in sealed quills, fastened to their legs. Only one of these reached Iceland. The other probably preferred his freedom.

Claude seldom doubted but that the gulls he sent off would eventually find Meta's home.

Even before the daylight had entirely gone, and the long dead Arctic night had descended upon the land, the birds and beasts migrated southwards, the malleys, and gulls, and terns, and skuas going first; then the guillemot the eider ducks, grebes, and divers. Next went the bears, the wild oxen, and the foxes; finally even the inland sea itself seemed deserted. The walrus and seal no longer popped their whiskered faces above the water, nor courted the sun's rays on the rocky shore, and the lonesome unicorn was seen no more ploughing through the waves.

The blackness of desolation and a silence deep as death was over all the scene.

Think not, reader, that the beautiful stars were always shining, or that even when a full moon was in the sky there was somewhat of light and cheerfulness. No, for there were days—ay, and weeks—when neither moon, stars, nor aurora were visible for the dark clouds and whirling drift and snow.

At other times, perhaps, after a fall of silent snow, without as much wind as would serve to move one downy fleck, the clouds would disperse, and the stars would glitter like a million diamonds, when suddenly a murmuring roar would be heard among the mountains, and on looking in that direction from the ship's deck, or from the huts on shore, a sight would be presented to the wondering gaze of Claude and his crew that my poor feeble pen would struggle in vain to describe. It seemed as if a wind from every point of the compass had marched forth to meet and do battle with each other among the hills, and that each wind was accompanied by a ghostly storm spirit. High as the stars were those whirling sheeted ghosts; if they crossed the moon's disc they looked unearthly and fearful; but see! they meet in fury, and all is a bewildering chaos. Describe to me the foam of Atlantic billows dashing high in the air after striking a black, bare rock in the sea; describe to me in words the smoky spray of a geyser, and I will try to paint to you the battle of the snow-squalls. But, behold! while we yet look, half awed at the rage of elements among the jagged mountain peaks, the chaotic tempest comes nearer and nearer, other ghosts arise and whirl along on the plains, and a moaning sound as if nature were in pain falls upon the ear. This may be but momentary, and ere you can dive below, the tempest is on the vessel, the war of elements is raging around it. The very masts bend and crack and yield, and high above the roar of the wind is heard wild

shrieks and yells and groans, as if demons really danced and fought on every side. These latter sounds are emitted by the ice rubbing against the ship's hull.

Then, even while one is expecting every moment that some jagged edge of ice will penetrate through the vessel's timbers—lo! all becomes hushed and silent. You creep on deck as quickly as the drifted snow will permit you, and look around. The stars are all out again, the moon's rays throwing shadows from the mountain peaks, and all is still. And such a stillness! It is the silence of space—the silence of a dead and buried universe. You can almost fancy the stars are near enough to whisper to; that the flickering aurora borealis will presently emit some sound. If you talk aloud your own voice seems harsh, and you find yourself talking in a strangely subdued tone, as if Nature were asleep—as, indeed, she seems—and you dreaded to wake her. At all times in Greenland, when no wind is blowing, the silence is fearfully impressive; but it is after a snow-squall such as I have endeavoured to depict that it is most so.

“Do you think,” said Claude to Dr Barrett one day—“do you think, doctor, I might venture to send off another seagull?”

“I think,” was the reply, “that the bird will be far more likely to fly southward now—to seek the sun—than it would in summer.”

So a little fond note was attached as usual to a seagull's thigh.

“Go!” whispered Claude, pressing his lips to the soft, warm head for a moment.

“Go, beautiful and gentle bird,
Oh! southwards quickly go;
Though moon and stars shine bright above.
How sad is all below!

“No longer drooping here, confined
In this cold prison, dwell;
Go, free to sunshine and to wind,
Sweet bird, go forth—farewell!

“Oh! beautiful and gentle bird,
Thy welcome sweet will be.
And yonder thou shalt hear the voice
Of Love's fond melody.”

I trust my hero may be forgiven for slightly altering the words of the gentle poet Bowles.

The graceful bird went tacking and tacking for a time around the ship as if he could not quite believe he had obtained his freedom, or were loath to leave his quarters; then, as if memories of a sunnier south had suddenly awakened in his breast, away he darted, and was lost in the darkness.

A Tale of Love and Heroism by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Fourteen.

In Winter Quarters—Football among the Snow.

One portion of the cargo of the unfortunate Kittywake—and a very important one it proved to be—was a pack of Yack or Eskimo sledge dogs. Uncouth-looking rascals they are at the best of times, much given to quarrelling and fighting among themselves, and by no means inclined to be over-friendly to mankind.

With them came two native keepers, who professed to, and I dare say did, know something about their uncouth pets, although their rule of the road proved to be a rough one, as far as the dogs were concerned.

Fingal was at first inclined to regard these animals with extreme distrust. He asked Claude, in his own way of speaking, whether he mightn't begin the fun by charging the pack.

"I am sure, master," said Fingal, "I would soon make short work with one or two of them."

"No," said Claude, holding up a warning finger; "you must never attempt to molest them, Fingal; you will come to love them yet."

"I don't believe that," Fingal seemed to reply.

The dogs were taken on shore at once, and though the Icebear was anchored some little distance from the land, giving her plenty of room to swing round, the row these animals made the first night seemed unearthly. The men could not sleep, and roundly rated the new-comers. Had the noise been a continuous one it would not have been so bad, but it was not so. The deep, deep silence of the Arctic regions would be allowed to remain unbroken for, say, the space of fifteen minutes, then all at once such a chorus of barking, howling, and screaming arose as only the pen of a Dante could describe adequately. This would continue for five minutes, mingled with the cracking of the keepers' whips and their wild shouting, then gradually the unearthly Babel of sounds would die away, the men and officers on board would give sighs of relief and go to sleep once more, only to be disturbed again in the same fashion ere slumber had well sealed their eyelids.

“Frightful!” said Claude, next morning, at the breakfast-table; “I’ll put a stop to it.”

“You’ll be very clever if you do,” said the surgeon.

“Don’t go meddling near them with a whip, captain,” Lloyd remarked. “Poor Sanderson of ours got drunk one night, and went on shore with a rope’s end to settle, as he thought, a rumpus like what those beggars made last night. He was never seen again.”

“They killed him?”

“Yes, sir, and ate him afterwards, every bone of him. We never found a vestige of him, except the soles of his sea-boots, and we couldn’t bury those in a Christian way, you know, so we were saved the trouble of a funeral.”

“Call the carpenter, steward,” cried Claude. “Carpenter Jones,” he continued, when that worthy appeared, “build comfortable kennels for those dogs half a mile from the spot where our shore quarters are going to stand.”

“Ay, ay, sir.”

“To the lee of a rock, you know.”

“Yes, sir.”

And so the pack was soon disposed of, to the great satisfaction of every one.

By the time, then, that the sun had set for the last time, and the long, icy, Arctic winter had fairly commenced, the Icebear and her gallant crew were fairly settled in their winter quarters, and everybody felt as happy and jolly as possible under the circumstances. Nor was their lot to be despised, after all. Had they not every creature comfort that heart could wish? Had not clever Dr Barrett found coals enough to keep fires burning constantly—fires big enough to roast a whole bear or a small ox, were they so inclined? Had he not also discovered a gold and silver mine? Not that much had yet been taken out of it, to be sure. But it gave them hope. Well, they had never a care, although it must not be supposed they did not often think of home, for ah! the sailor does.

To crown all, was there not a kind Providence above them whose eyes could penetrate the darkness of even this dreary land, and watch over them?

One thing, I believe, that contributed greatly to their happiness was this, everybody seemed determined to do the best he could, not for himself only, but for his shipmates as well.

They had built a house of general entertainment on shore. Also a store for extra provision and other things, in case the ship might be destroyed.

In the storehouse one or other of the Indian keepers always slept as sentry, or rather on guard. Not that there was much fear of an attack on the stores by bears, for most of them had gone south, and the others were curled up asleep in caves and corners among the rocks. But Bruin does not—in my poor judgment and experience—sleep all the winter through. When the weather is milder, even to a few degrees, he awakes, yawns, outstretches himself, and goes for a turn round in the moonlight and on the snow. He is but the ghost of his former self; like the ghost of a bear revisiting scenes of a former existence. He stalks about, shaking his mighty head, and looking as melancholy as a barn owl.

“How changed is everything!” he appears to soliloquise. “How dead and drear! How hungry I am too. Shouldn’t I like just one pawful out of the back of a fine fat seal now. (Note 1.) Ah! I would eat a whole seal, even the flippers, though there’s not much on those, to be sure. But, mercy on me, how cold it is! Bed’s the best place, after all.” And away he trots.

But Mr Lloyd knew right well from experience what a hungry rascal like this could do even in a single night.

“It isn’t what they eat so much,” he explained to Claude, “as what they destroy. A bear will stave in the head of half a dozen casks of flour, perhaps, before he comes to a barrow of beef. And that doesn’t satisfy him, for he argues that there may be something better in the other casks, and goes clawing away like an evil spirit.”

“Talking about spirits,” put in the second mate, “he is a strict teetotaller; he won’t touch rum.”

“Tins of soupe-en-bouilli, I suppose,” said Claude, “would also defy him.”

“Not if he gets a tooth in one,” replied Warren; “and as for sardines—my conscience! sir, he is fond of them; if once he tastes them he’ll swallow the boxes at a single bite.”

“Boxes and all?” inquired Claude, laughing.

“Well, I never saw the empty boxes left about anywhere.”

“Must be a capital tonic, anyhow!” said Dr Barrett; “but a rather indigestible one.”

There had been wood enough brought on purpose to build huts on shore—simply rough planks. The house of amusement was a famous one. Built with stone as to its chimney, and with wood, filled in with dry moss, as to its walls. There was a capital fireplace, too, in it.

The general routine of the day was somewhat as follows—that is, when there was any kind of bright star, or moonlight, or aurora gleams; though these last were very intermittent, and, like some of our electric lights, would go out without a moment’s warning. There was breakfast at eight; muster to prayers afterwards, on the upper deck, which was almost entirely covered over.

Prayers are seldom more impressive than when repeated away out in the middle of the boundless ocean, but there is even more solemnity in them when heard amid the eternal silence of Greenland wilds. I don’t think there was one poor soul on board the Icebear who would have missed those morning prayers for anything.

Jack-the-Sailor is a rough stick, I must confess, and, as a rule, a very jolly stick. Yet, nevertheless, he has his solemn moments, as well as you, reader, who, maybe, never were afloat on blue water, have.

“I feels some sentences o’ them prayers, that the captain reads, go kind o’ round my heart,” said Chips one day down in the half-deck mess. “That bit, for instance, ‘O God, at whose command the wind blows, and lifts up the waves of the sea and stills the raging thereof.’”

“You hain’t got the words what you might say altogether correct,” said Bos’n Bowman; “but, howsomedever, you’ve got the main thing, and that’s the sense.”

“Well, Pipes,” replied Chips, “you’re more of a scollard than me.”

“And,” put in Spectioneer Wray, “there’s that bit, you know, ‘When we gave up all for lost, our ship, our goods, our lives, Thou didst mercifully look upon us, and wonderfully command a deliverance.’”

“I’ve often found the truth of that,” said Pipes. “So ’as most on us,” said Chips, solemnly. “But,” continued Pipes, “there’s these words: ‘That we may return in safety to enjoy the

blessings of the land.' Don't they bring old England up before your mind, with her green valleys and flowery fields, and all that kind of thing, eh, maties?"

"Ay, and there's those as follows," said Chips, who was a married man and hailed from Rotherhithe, "'Enjoy the fruits of our labours,' which means, o' course, take the missus and the children to Margate for a whole month."

After prayers, till "pipe for dinner," there were the various duties of the ship to be carried on, and there was not an officer or man, from Claude himself to little saucy Boy Bounce, who emptied the cook's ashes, helped to clean the coppers, and attended to the aviary and the wants of Fingal, who did not find something to do. Dinner and smoking done, if the weather permitted, a pleasure party for the shore would be told off.

The doctor and his merry men could do but little exploring now, and his mines lay some distance in the interior among the wild hills, and, from its colour, the ore could not easily be worked by lamplight.

Sometimes for whole weeks the darkness would be intense (Note 2), then the Icebear's crew had to seek their pleasures indoors or on board the ship. That house on shore was an incalculable boon to these forlorn adventurers. It was devoted, not to games—these could be played on board—but to music, dancing, acting, and to lectures. The musicians were several, and therefore a by no means bad ship's band was formed. Those, therefore, who could not play could listen; moreover, many of those who could not play, could spin a yarn, dance, or sing.

The lectures were given by good Dr Barrett, whose gentleness and thoughtfulness of the men had rendered him a very great favourite.

These lectures of his, although often on such abstract subjects as chemistry, botany, geology, or astronomy, were always simple and always interesting, and often amusing.

But there were games on the snow-covered ice—frolics we might call them—invented by the men themselves, but none the less exhilarating on that account. The sea about them might be as deep as the hills around were high, but no fear could be entertained of any one falling through—a band of elephants might have frolicked and floundered on it without the least danger.

The snow in some places had been swept off the ice by the wind, leaving it but a few inches deep. These were just the spots for a right roaring game of genuine football. But there was another game, invented by Paddy O'Connell, who was the life and soul of his

mess, if not of the whole ship. It was carried on among deep snow, and was very amusing and exciting.

Paddy called it “football.” Well, it was “Irish football,” for the only man in the ship who could kick the thing a yard was gigantic Byarnie. “It was as large as the biggest pumpkin ever you saw, and quite as big as the largest,” so said Paddy. You had to throw it to begin with, and when you got it you had to run with it, and you did not run many yards before you fell with half a dozen on top of you. But the cream of the game lay in the fact that, however much light there might be, before you had played many minutes you could not tell who was your opponent and who not, everybody being as white as the dustiest of millers. When you were struggling for the ball, it was just as likely as not that you were trying to trip up a friend Besides, often when you got it, and could have a fair shy, then, as you could not see well, what with the uncertain light, and what with the powdery snow, you perhaps threw it the wrong way. It was a rare game, and oh! did it not make you hungry!

No wonder that on returning on board you could eat a hot supper with all the appetite of a Highland drover.

“Paddy,” said Dr Barrett once, as he patted him on the back, “you’re a genius!”

“Thru for you, sorr,” says Paddy, “and it’s just that same me mother towld me. ‘Paddy,’ says she, ‘you’re a born ganious, and there ain’t the likes o’ ye ’twixt Killarney and Cork.’”

Note 1. The shoulder of the seal is the bear’s favourite tit-bit, and I have seldom seen him eat more of Miss Phoca, when sport was good and provisions (seal) plentiful—G.S.

Note 2. There are winters and winters in Greenland. Sometimes for two or even three months together the darkness is deep and depressing, the whole country shrouded in a night that seems never-ending.

A Tale of Love and Heroism by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Fifteen.

Paddy's Adventure with the Bear—Fun on the Ice—The Little Purple Cloud.

Tobogganing? A strange word, is it not? We are indebted to the Americans for it, as we are for many other handy, but hardly elegant, additions to our vocabulary. Those who are fond of hunting for the origins of words, and who cannot live happily unless they find out how this is that, tell us that the sport—and fine fun it is—was first suggested to mankind by the beavers. They say that these busy-brained active animals, by way of keeping their blood-heat up in winter-time, go in a crowd to some snow-clad hill, scurry up to the top of it with their broad flat tails behind them, and go sliding down all in a row, rushing up again as soon as they find themselves at the bottom, and joining the other end of the procession, and that they keep “the pot arboiling” for hours with the highest glee imaginable. Well, perhaps the beavers do, but in one form or other the sport is as old, probably, as the days of Noah.

Canada is perhaps the home of tobogganing, for there the frost is severe and lasts long. Now, the scenery all round the “Sea of Dunallan,” for thus had the waters in which our heroes lay been named by them, was very wild indeed. The hills close beside the beach were high and rounded; beyond these they were higher still, many of them rising into peaks that seemed to have their homes among the stars.

It occurred to Paddy O'Connell, who seemed to be the inventive genius of the crew, and foremost wherever fun was to be had, that a species of tobogganing might be got up from which some “rale diversion” could be had.

So one fine moonlight night, with the stars all shining as well as they could, for the tails and ribbons of brilliant aurora that were hanging in the sky, Paddy went prospecting.

“Shall I come with you, Paddy?” said Byarnie, who was the best of friends with the “Oirlander.”

“Not to-night, me bhoy,” replied Paddy. “It's after a bit av diversion I'm going, and I think best when I'm all alone by me swate little self.”

“Well, you might take a gun with you,” suggested Byarnie, “for there may be bears about, you know.”

“Bad cess to them. No. There’s never a fear of Paddy.”

Byarnie watched him disappear round the brow of a high knoll, about a quarter of a mile from the Icebear; then went quietly below.

The weather had been fine for weeks, and no snow had fallen. It was just the season when the sun might soon be expected. Already, indeed, there was twilight at noon, so all hearts were gay and hopeful.

Paddy was in search of a hill, and he was very particular as to both its shape, its height, and its condition. At last his prospecting cruise was crowned with success.

“C’dn’t have been better,” said Paddy, talking to himself, half aloud, as he had a habit of doing; “c’dn’t have been better if me own mother had made it.”

The one drawback was that it was fully a mile and a half from the ship; but, after all, that was a small matter. So Paddy started to go back.

It had been tedious work, and hours of it, and, feeling tired, he began to think of his pipe. To think was to act with this son of Green Erin. He stuck his alpenstock in the snow, and forthwith scratched a match and lit up.

“That’s comforting, anyhow,” he said, after a few whiffs. “Now, if I could only find a stone to sit upon. Troth, I might as well look for a stone in the midst av the say, or the big bay of Tralore, as—Hullo! what’s yonder, anyhow?”

Paddy was on the bare brow of a steep hill; but on rounding a hummock and looking back, he found one side of it was dark and free from snow. He returned, and gave the darkness a poke with his stick, and the stick struck—nothing. It was the entrance to a cave.

“I’ll just light a match and have a look,” says Paddy.

The feeble glimmer revealed only a portion of what seemed a great vault.

“I’ll creep in for a moment, out av the cowl,” says Paddy, “and stand in a corner; sure there can’t be any crayture worse than meself in the cave.”

It was an eerisome situation enough, but our gallant Irishman did not mind it a bit.

For fully five minutes he smoked, when he thought, or fancied he thought, he heard a sigh.

“It’s draining I am entoirely; who could be there; at all?”

Presently the sigh—a heavy, long-drawn one—was repeated. There could be no mistake about it this time.

“Ghost of Saint Patrick!” thinks Paddy; “is it in the cave av an evil spirit I am? But never moind, it’s sleeping he is, anyhow. I’ll have a look, and chance it.”

Taking half a dozen hearty puffs to give him courage, Paddy quietly advanced. He had not gone three paces when—behold, curled up at his feet, a gigantic yellow bear!

“Is it there you are, me darlint?” Paddy whispers to himself. “But troth, I just remember it’s toime I was going, so good night, me dear, and bad drames to ye.”

Now Bruin has excellent scent, and Paddy’s tobacco was good and strong, so no wonder he awoke. He rose to his forepaws, opening a great red mouth that would have sheltered a coal-scuttle, and giving vent as he did so to a yawning roar that appeared to shake the very cave.

Paddy threw the almost extinct match into the gulf and fled, with Bruin at his heels.

Byarnie was very fond of Paddy O’Connell, and when his friend stayed so long away, naturally grew anxious, and finally started off to look for him. He would not take a rifle, “because,” he argued, “if Paddy wasn’t afraid, sure I’m not.” But he armed himself with that most deadly weapon, a seal club, and away he strode. On and on went the giant over the snowy hills; but Paddy’s track, that he tried for a time to follow, was as devious as a rabbit’s. When he was just about to give up in despair, who should he see but his friend himself coming round the brow of the hill—it could be nobody else.

But when Paddy disappeared suddenly from view as effectually as if he had sunk into the bowels of the earth, then no wonder big Byarnie rubbed his eyes and stared in astonishment.

Byarnie was superstitious.

“’Twas his ghost,” he thought; “poor Paddy is dead, and that was his spirit!”

And down there on his knees, under the flickering aurora, knelt big Byarnie to pray. While thus devotionally engaged, he was startled by a roar that made him feel as if the earth was going to open and swallow him, and yonder behold poor Paddy running towards him more quickly than he had ever run before, and followed by something large and yellow.

Byarnie spat on his hands, and threw away his cap.

Well, I do not wonder, mind you, at Bruin's wrath. How would any one like to be wakened from sweet dreamland, and have the fiery end of a lucifer match pitched down his throat?

"Come on, Paddy," roared Byarnie.

"Sure ain't I coming as fast as I can?" cried poor innocent Paddy.

As the bear went floundering past, Byarnie struck at him with terrible force.

The steel point of the club entered his neck, but held there, and both Byarnie and Bruin rolled together on the ground, the former undermost, and the blood flew spattering over the snow.

Paddy was back in a moment. He had all his wits about him, and his first act was to free the seal club.

His next act was one which only a brave, merry-hearted Irishman would have thought of. He thrust the alpenstock into Bruin's mouth as if it had been a horse's bit, and, mounting the brute's back, pinned him by seizing the staff close to the side of each jaw.

"I've got him," he cried.

Crack went the alpenstock, and down went Paddy; but Byarnie was up, and in a second he had felled his terrible antagonist.

There lay the dead bear on his side, his tongue lolling out, his dead eyes turned to the sky, and there stood Byarnie and Paddy, both puffing.

"Did you ever see the loikes?" says Paddy.

"No," Byarnie replied; "but, thank Heaven, you are safe. Let us go home."

But Paddy carried out his tobogganing scheme all the same.

It was a very simple one, but afforded no end of capital exercise and genuine fun. Carpenter Jones, alias “Chips,” manufactured the tobogganing sledges. Chips said he was glad of the job—anything to keep his hands in. With the help of his assistants he made a score of them in a single day. Very simple they were, in shape somewhat similar to those used by the Canadians, only these seated four abreast, so there was, so Paddy said, four times the fun.

The tobogganing hill was high and round, but not very steep; the top of it was a tableland; at the foot was an enormous bank of drifted snow, and here the fun came in again, as you will presently see.

But let us go with the tobogganing party for just once in a way.

It is eleven o’clock in the forenoon. There is a shimmer of yellowish white light in the east. There is a moon also. Fancy moonlight at mid-day! What with these two lights, the aurora, which has been dancing so merrily for many hours, looks slightly pale, though the colours displayed are more glorious than any pantomimic transformation scene your mind could imagine. Alongside the Icebear are two huge sledges; one is laden with the tobogganing boards and a few merry sailors, the other with men and officers, and such a row there is and such a din! What with the wild shouts of Jack and Joe, the Eskimos; the cracking of whips; the snarling, barking, and yelping of the dogs, the noise is deafening and indescribable.

But they are off at last.

The men have breakfasted well, and, although it is very cold—ten degrees below zero—they are happy, nay, even boisterously merry. Paddy starts a song and all join in the chorus. Claude is there; he knows that Paddy is a favourite, and lets him do pretty much as he pleases. The doctor is there also in case of an accident, and he sings and laughs like the rest, for he is quite a boy, although an old and very learned one.

Mercy on us! how those dogs do fly over the ground to be sure. They are as fleet as the reindeer. Now and then one falls and is dragged a little way, but always manages to scramble up again.

“Hoorup, Hooreup, Hooree—e?” screams Joe. Crack, crack, crack goes the whip.

Higher and wilder rises Paddy's song and chorus. Never before were the echoes of the mountains awakened by such boisterous mirth. Even bears asleep in their dens and caves hear and arouse themselves to listen.

"Hoorup, Hooreeup, Hooree—ee—e?"

The sledge goes over a rough bank, and Tom Tatters tumbles out. Boy Bounce waves his cap and laughs at him, but on goes the sledge, over the hills and round the hills and across some frozen streams, and at last straight up the side of the tobogganing hill, and two more men fall out here, and all the rest are thrown on their backs with their heels in the air—what sailors call catching crabs.

"We—e, wee—e, woh—ip!"

The sledge comes to a standstill on the flat top of the mountain, and the dogs stand still also, their tongues lolling out, and panting.

The other sledge is coming up fast and furious, and soon is on the ground.

Then the fun begins.

Four men seat themselves on a tobogganing sledge, and others start them,—with a will too. Down they shoot, the others watching.

The sensation is like that of descending from a balloon with a sense of pleasure substituted for that of danger. The moon and stars are hardly seen by those bold tobogganers. Faster and faster, they can hardly believe they have fairly started till they are at the bottom, and—buried in the wreath of snow.

They are completely buried. Those above for some moments cannot see them at all.

Paddy O'Connell was in the first lot, and he declared that "the dacint burial at the foot av the hill was the best av it entoirely."

The fun has fairly commenced, and sledge follows sledge down the mountain-side, sometimes three abreast. Even Claude himself and the doctor embark at last, both in the same boat, and find the sensation so delightful that they keep it up.

The dogs have exercise at this game too, for they have to gallop along the plateau to haul the sledges up again.

It is a mad scene and a merry one.

But lo! while the fun is at its fastest, “Look! look!” cried Dr Barrett, pointing skywards; and every eye is turned upwards.

A little purple cloud!

It was twelve o’clock and almost daylight.

What a shout rent the air then!

The sun would rise to-morrow.

Claude and Dr Barrett shook hands, but neither spoke; their hearts were too full. Perhaps both were at that moment breathing a prayer of thankfulness to the kind Father who had hitherto protected them from every danger and from sickness itself.

There were great doings that night in the Icebear and in the Icebear’s snow-house. A supper on board, a concert on shore!

Paddy’s Irish jig was pronounced to be “a caution out and out,” so the men phrased it.

Boy Bounce’s “break-down” almost outstripped it.

Even Byarnie must take the floor to dance all by himself a wild Norse “hoolichan.”

If you can imagine a rhinoceros tripping it on the light fantastic toe, then you see honest Byarnie. If you cannot, then I have only to confess that figures of speech fail me.

The doctor played a selection of airs on his violin, that the engineer, who, like most good engineers, was a Scotchman, declared made him “laugh and greet (cry) by turns.”

Why were those mariners—far away in the desolate regions of the Pole—so happy, so gay?

Because they were hopeful. The purple cloud had done it all. The sun was returning. The long Arctic night had received notice to quit, and in two or three months at most summer would be with them; they would accomplish the object of their adventurous voyage, and bear up for home.

Home! What a charm it has for a sailor’s heart!

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Chapter Sixteen.

The Sun's Return—Hopes and Fears.

Both Claude and the doctor were on a high hill-top next day to watch for the coming of the sun. Nor were they disappointed. About noon the sun duly put in an appearance, looking fiery-fierce and angry through a kind of blue-grey haze that lay along the horizon.

The doctor was ready prepared to take sights, and did so coolly enough, despite the sun's angry glare—coolly in more ways than one, for as he could only work with bare hands, whenever his fingers came in contact with the brass parts of his instruments they seemed to freeze thereto, and the sensation was that of touching red-hot metal.

I do not know how it was, but after the sun had once more sunk, and twilight had commenced to deepen into night, the scenery of the bleak world around them—the rugged mountains, the rocks and cliffs that looked like bergs of ice, the wide expanse of snow-clad sea, with their vessel lying so cold and comfortless-looking—had a very saddening effect both on Claude and the doctor.

“It is like going back into the grave,” said Claude.

“Well,” the doctor replied, “we must not forget that the sun will—rise again to-morrow and stay a little longer with us, and so on, longer and longer, until he rises not to set again.”

“While we are here?”

“Yes, while we are here. I pray it may be so, for we ought to be out into blue open water by the beginning of August, and homeward bound.”

“Happy thought!” said Claude, after a pause; “I’ll send off another bird.”

“I would certainly do so; and say in your message the sun has come, that all is well and happy; give latitude and longitude exactly.”

“Do you really think these birds ever reach home?”

“Now,” said Dr Barrett, “that is a question that many would ask. Many doubt the capabilities of flight or home instincts of sea-birds. I am as firmly convinced that a seagull, which has been reared in captivity from an egg procured from the parent nest and hatched under a duck or fowl, can be made the best of carriers of messages over sea and land, as I am that the sun we have just seen will rise again to-morrow.”

“It is not that I altogether doubt it,” said Claude; “but you know the story I have confided to you about my love for Meta and my quarrel with my mother—alas! that I should have to give it so harsh a name. Well, although I do not doubt, I sometimes fear.”

“I can fully appreciate your feelings, my dear sir,” was the reply. “Rough old sea-dog though I be, I, too, have had my little romance in life. Yes, let the poor bird fly; it will reach in safety.”

But it may be as well to say at once here that the good doctor was rather sanguine, for of all the six sea-birds that had been, or would be, let fly, only two reached Iceland safely. One of these had been thrown up near Desolation Point; it was that bird which reached home.

“Ought I to communicate the safety of her son to the proud Lady Alwyn?” had been Meta’s thought on receiving the welcome intelligence. She dreaded doing so; she feared to put harder feelings in the lady’s heart against poor Claude than she already possessed. “Besides,” argued Meta, “the Kittywake will soon return and bring her the news that I do not doubt she is pining to hear, if she only loves him half as much as I do.”

The other bird that made its haven in Iceland, though I ought not to anticipate, was one of the last sent up. Of it I shall have more to say anon.

As soon as the day was an hour long, with about an hour of twilight on each side to back it up, Dr Barrett recommenced his explorations in earnest.

The ground all round the inland sea was of adamant; nor pick nor spade could dare on that. But to continue the mine begun the previous summer was far more feasible, for the snow that had filled it had kept out the frost.

Here, then, work was begun. It would keep the men at earnest exercise, at all events, the doctor said, and prevent sickness.

The mine was soon so far advanced as to be a perfect shelter for the workers, even daring the worst of weather.

When little morsels of nuggets of gold and silver came to be found the excitement grew intense. Even the hands who did not strictly belong to the surgeon's party prayed the captain to permit them to "have a dig," as they called it, in their spare moments.

And Claude did not refuse.

Rab McDonald, the third officer, was the first to make a lucky find. It was a nugget of pure gold as big as his thumb, and that was by no means a small one.

"Man! look!" he cried exultingly, showing it round to his fellows. "I'll soon be as rich as Rothschild."

His face fell somewhat when the doctor quietly told him that all the precious ore found belonged by rights to the company who had sent them out.

A good many more faces fell also, but when Claude explained that he would make such representations as would ensure a goodly percentage of the gold or silver dug out being given to the finders, the enthusiasm was restored, and all hands went to work with a will. For months the gold fever raged among the Icebear's crew, from February till nearly the end of May, and even sports would have been forgotten in the excitement; but about twice a week Claude ordered all hands to play, if the weather was at all propitious. Then football was resumed, and Paddy's wild game of tobogganing also, to say nothing of fishing. Fishing? you may repeat, in some surprise. Yes, dear reader. It was done so: a hole was made in the ice, and baited hooks were lowered through. But Jack and Joe despised such cultivated plans of proceeding to business, and, if the truth must be told, they were quite as successful, if not more so, than the British sailors. The tackle these Indians used and their method of using it were of the most primitive description. Each had his own ice-hole, each had a short gut line with a strong strangely shaped bone hook. This was lowered into the water, and if fish even snapped at it—and many did, for the fish are hungry in Greenland during winter—out they came, and they never got back.

The days got longer and longer now, and the weather got sensibly less cold, till lo, and behold! about the middle of April the sun rose one morning and announced his intention of not going to bed again for three months and more to come. At all events, he did not set that night. He only made pretence he would. He went so low on the northern horizon that our heroes fancied he meant disappearing altogether, then he began slowly climbing round again.

Do not imagine, however, that it was all sunshine even now. Far from it. There were terrible gales of wind now, and whirling, drifting snow that seemed to rise as high as the highest mountain peaks.

Some of these hills were evidently extinct volcanoes, but how long ago it might have been since fire and smoke belched from their lofty summits, even Dr Barrett himself would hardly have dared to guess. But working down in their mine one day, about the end of April, the men were startled at hearing a hollow, rumbling sound apparently far down beneath them; it was like the noise of waggon wheels rattling over a rough road, only muffled.

The surgeon and Claude were both in the mine at the time.

“Don’t be alarmed, men,” said the former; “you may safely go on with your work. It is the noise of steam you hear, or rather of water and steam combined. That sound was sent to tell us summer is coming. It is a way the earth has in Greenland.”

“You have heard something similar before?” asked Claude.

“I have, only not in Greenland proper, but in caves among the hills in Spitzbergen.”

Now, giant cataracts began to tumble down from the cliffs of the mountains, and roaring rivers and torrents appeared where rivers had not been suspected before. Water overflowed the inland sea all around the Icebear, making the snow slush, and rendering the passage to and from the shore not only difficult but even dangerous.

And this state of things increased, the sky being meanwhile thickly covered over with dark rolling cumulus, drifting onwards on the wings of a southern breeze. But in a day or two the wind fell flat, the clouds were lifted like a veil from east to west; in half an hour’s time there was not a cloud in the sky, and the sun shone down cold and clear. Strange adjectives to use when speaking of the sun, but none other could express my meaning, for this silver shield of a sun seemed shorn of its rays; you could look at it without pain or inconvenience, just as, raising my eyes, I now gaze upon the flame of the oil lamp by which I am writing.

At eight bells next morning, everybody both fore and aft having breakfasted once, and the boy Bounce twice at least, all hands were on deck waiting orders for the day. Presently the captain and surgeon came up, and took a turn or two up and down the quarter-deck, laughing and talking.

Then came the order, “Hands, lay aft.”

Claude himself addressed them, laughingly. He did not often say much face to face thus to his men.

“Men,” he said, “we’re going to have a forenoon on the ice.”

“Hurrah!” was the shout.

Round the ship, dear reader, and for no one knows how far out seaward, the water had been frozen into one smooth sheet of ice. Who could resist it?

All the skates in the ship were had up, and, although there were hardly enough, those who went without could slide. While the men waited the next order, there was a scream of terror sounded forward. The mate ran towards the fo’c’sle: there lay poor boy Bounce, bleeding; and standing over him, Datchet, the only black sheep in the ship.

“What do you want with skates, hey?” he was saying.

He had robbed boy Bounce.

When Mr Lloyd ordered Datchet below for the day, the look—nay, scowl—the man gave the mate was not easily forgotten.

But boy Bounce had the skates, his brow was bandaged, and when the order was given, “All hands over the side!” boy Bounce was first to jump, and was the merriest of all the mad and merry crew on that never-to-be-forgotten morning.

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Chapter Seventeen.

Wild Sports of the Far North—An Arctic Storm—Breaking up of the Sea of Ice.

It was a matter of no small wonderment to the men of the Icebear why Dr Barrett should now, in a great measure, forsake the mine, where it seemed that wealth could be accumulated, slow though it might be in coming.

But the worthy surgeon “ken’t his ain ken,” as the Scotch say; in other words, he knew what he was about. He was not a gold-digger nor a silver-miner: he was sent out for the purpose of scientific discovery; not to load the Icebear with the spoils of this frozen wilderness, but to spy out the richness of the land.

Was it not possible, he argued with himself, that at some future day an expedition might be sent out, and a company formed to work mines here. It would give him, Dr Barrett, the greatest pleasure to be in charge of it. Meanwhile he was very busy indeed.

Dr Barrett’s character and habits were such as might well be imitated by the youth of the rising generation, both male and female. Let me give one or two examples of it.

One. He was never idle unless taking wholesome healthful recreation.

Two. He considered the strict performance of duty as a part and parcel of his religion, and its neglect a grievous and cowardly sin.

Three. He was always ahead of the work he had to perform, and therefore always easy in his mind.

Four. He had method and exactness in carrying on his work.

Five. Having done his duty he trusted all else to that kind Providence who guides and rules everything here below.

Yes, the doctor was busy and kept his men busy.

As long as the snow lay on the ground sledging expeditions were made every day, if it did not blow too high, or if the drifting snow was not blinding.

Very pleasant and delightful, sometimes, were those sledging trips, very dangerous at others. The sledges were large and strong; they had been built specially for the purpose, and were furnished, not only with plenty of provisions, but with all that would be necessary in an extended tour of, say, a week, though three days was generally about the limit the doctor gave himself. He was hardy himself, and cared little for fatigue; he was, in fact, an enthusiast, but he hesitated to expose his men too much. Besides, he had sick patients on board, and an accident might happen at any time.

There was plenty of capital sport to be got in these rambles. The animals that had returned to this country, however, were not yet very numerous. Bears there were, but they could certainly as yet have but little to eat. They growled about among the rocks, and wandered by the side of ice-water swollen streams. Probably they caught fish, perhaps they lived on love; but there they were, lean, long, and hungry looking, their great shaggy coats alone preventing them from having the appearance of downright starvation.

But precisely in the ratio of their hunger was their ferocity. The very sight of a man made them howl with anger.

“Come on!” they seemed to cry. “I won’t run away; I’m not afraid of such as you. Come on, and be eaten up.”

There were two “hands” in the ship who took great delight in these pleasure parties; one was Paddy, the other the boy Bounce, and both constituted themselves Dr Barrett’s special attendants and body-guard. Paddy, of course, carried a rifle; and, after some preliminary training, boy Bounce was permitted to do so likewise. And right proud was the lad to march at his master’s heels with his gun and his shot-belts.

His master was terribly absent-minded.

Boy Bounce used to relate of an evening, to his special friend—on board—the cook, how many times a day he saved his master’s life.

“Blowed if he wouldn’t walk right into the river sometimes!” said boy Bounce, “if I didn’t holler at ’im; or over a cliff, if I didn’t pull ’im back by the coat-tails.”

One fine sunny day the doctor was sitting sketching a pretty snow scene—ice, mountain, glen, and waterfall, and the boy Bounce was lying not far from his feet, facing him.

“Ahem!” began the boy. “I say, sir.”

“Well, well, well?” cried the doctor, impatiently.

“It’s a dee-licious morning—ain’t it, sir?”

The surgeon made no reply, but went on sketching.

“Think the frost’ll hold, sir?”

The doctor looked up now—he knew boy Bounce’s ways.

“What else have you to say, boy, eh? Out with it.”

“Oh, nothing sir, only there’s been a bear a-squatting yonder, and a-lookin’ at ye for the last five minutes, and maybe he’s going to spring.”

Dr Barrett sprang first though. The monster was within thirty yards of him. He seized boy Bounce’s rifle, and next moment Bruin rolled over the ledge dead at their feet.

“Why didn’t you hit him, you young goose?”

“Cause as ’ow, sir,” said boy Bounce, coolly, “you told me never to do nought ’athout first consulting you.”

“Is it a bear?” said Paddy, rushing to the scene of action.

“Well,” replied the doctor, smiling as he resumed his work, “it is something very like it, Paddy.”

“Sure and it’s meself ought to have killed him, and not that young spalpeen Bounce.”

Boy Bounce smiled and took all the credit, and Paddy at once set about taking Bruin out of his jacket, singing to himself some wild Irish lilt as he did so.

There was one other individual who attached himself to these sleighing expeditions, who had really no business there, namely, the noble deerhound Fingal.

I have no idea what induced him to do so, unless it was to constitute himself captain over the two teams of dogs, and to enjoy good sport among the Arctic foxes, to say nothing of the grand galloping he had.

Fingal used to fly along at the head of the foremost team, keeping well beyond reach, however, of the leader's fangs and of the driver's cracking thong. He used to hunt the foxes on his own account all day, and spent his whole night in keeping them off the camp.

There is no end to the impudence these little animals possess, especially when snow is on the ground. They are then mostly white. I have an idea that, like Scotch hares, they change their colour with the season of the year; at all events, in summer they are of many different hues, and they then keep farther away from the habitations of men.

At night, in snow time, they are singularly annoying. They yelp and yap, and howl and fight, and unless you are very tired indeed, sleep is all but impossible. If you fire at one and wound it, the chances are he will not run off if he could. You march up to club him, and he grins and whines and fawns at you in the most ridiculous manner; in fact, he argues with you. Well, what can you do with a wounded animal who argues with you? You cannot brain him. No, you simply retire, feeling mightily ashamed of yourself for having fired at him.

Wounded monkeys have this same trick, and several other animals I could name.

Camping out by the River Thames in the sweet summer-time, and camping in the shelter of a rock on the snowfields of the far north, are two very different things. The members of Dr Barrett's sledging parties and the doctor himself slept in the sledges; slept with their bodies in warm flannel-lined bags, with rags over this, and rags right over their heads. Even then it was bitterly, oppressively cold.

The men of the Icebear used to envy Jack and Joe, the Eskimo Indians, who slept on the snow near their dogs with no other covering except the clothes they had worn during the day.

Fingal, poor fellow, never rested by night—if night I dare call it, with the sun ablaze in the sky—he was constantly roaming round the camp doing sentry duty, and keeping off the gangs of foxes. Often a horrid yelling would awaken all hands, and, on looking up, Fingal would be seen shaking a fox as Sarah Jane shakes a mat or a carpet skin.

One evening in May, when the sun was declining, or taking his dip towards the lower part of the northern sky, clouds began to bank rapidly up from the south-west. It had been clear and frosty before this.

It soon grew quite dusk. The clouds were very dense and very black—in great rolling masses that certainly threatened something most unusual.

Dr Barrett gazed with some uneasiness at the gathering storm.

In less than half an hour the sky was entirely obscured, and the wind, which had blown at first as if to place the clouds in position, fell dead. So for a time matters remained, the clouds still in shapeless masses rolling around among each other without any apparent cause. Gradually, however, they lost shape, and the whole firmament merged into one unbroken vault of darkest grey. Then pellets of snow, not bigger than millet seeds, began to fall, faster and faster and faster.

Dr Barrett gave orders for the camp to be made up at once, and supper to be cooked.

The snow-pellets merged into great flakes larger than crown pieces, and it grew darker and darker.

Then there was a thunder-clap that appeared to shake the very earth.

Darker still. What with the gloom of this abnormal night, and the falling snow, the men could hardly see each other's faces. The thunder was now loud, awful, incessant; the lightning spread all round among the still fast-descending snow. It was lightning of a sort you never see except in Greenland. You are enveloped in the blaze; it is around and above you everywhere—a white, dazzling bath of flame.

Poor Byarnie knelt beside the sledge, and buried his head in his hands. The giant was praying, Paddy crossed himself, and boy Bounce began to cry. Meanwhile the doctor sat on a bundle of bags, stolidly smoking, and Fingal crouched close to his feet; and ever, in the intervals of the thunder-claps and their awful reverberation among the mountains, was heard the melancholy howling of the sledge dogs.

“D’ye think, sorr,” said Paddy O’Connell, touching the doctor gently on the sleeve,—“d’ye think there’s any danger at all, at all?”

“The danger is this, Paddy,” replied the doctor: “the snow is very soft and powdery. We are thirty miles from the ship; and if it comes on to blow, we will never reach her alive.”

“Then, the Lord help me mother and me poor sister Biddy,” said Paddy, piously.

But some time after midnight the thunderstorm retired, growling over the distant hills, and with it went every cloud.

Then oh! to see the beauty of the newly fallen snow, its purity, its whiteness, its stars of many shapes and ever-changing colours of light and radiance.

After two days of a wind that blew steadily from the south, the silence of that great inland sea was suddenly broken.

You might have imagined you were on some great battle-field, there was a constant series of rifle-like reports in all directions, with now and then a louder report, as if a piece of artillery had been discharged. And amid these ominous sounds you could hear, as it were, the shrieks of the wounded and the groans of the dying.

It was the breaking up of the inland sea of ice, and the noise continued for a whole day, and still the soft wind blew from the south.

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Chapter Eighteen.

“Summer Comes with one Glad Bound”—Fire!

Spring or early summer is to all a season of hope and joy, but no one who has never lived in the drear cold regions around the Pole in winter could understand or appreciate the glad feeling that is born in the heart when the sun once more ascends his throne and rules triumphant in all the land.

Some reason or other may be ascribed for all religions and forms of worship, even the most heathenish; and I have never been astonished to see a pious Eskimo Indian with his family kneel or throw himself on his face before the god of day, though I have felt sorry for him and for them.

“But yonder comes the powerful king of day,
Rejoicing in the east. The lessening cloud,
The kindling azure, and the mountains’ brow
Illumed with fluid gold, his near approach
Betoken glad.
He looks in boundless majesty abroad
And sheds the shining day, that burnished play,
On rocks, and hills, and towers, and wandering streams
High-gleaming from afar.”

Summer seemed to come to the rocks and hills around the sea of Dunallan with one glad bound. There were some few days of fog or mist, so dense that it was impossible even to see the point of the jibboom. This fog was, as it were, the curtain of Nature’s great theatre, dropped for a time while the grand transformation scene was being put on the stage behind it.

Then it was withdrawn—lifted, and behold summer on the hills, summer in the glens. Glad streams and cataracts sparkling in the sunshine, the mountain-tops capped in silvery snow, streaks of silver running down their brown, white-flecked sides, but the ground all carpeted with green, which in a few days burst forth into the most charming variety of colours.

The sea itself was scarcely rippled by the gentle breeze that blew steadily from the west; the air was so fresh and balmy that it was a pleasure to breathe it. Everything seemed to feel the touch of the newly come summer, and to rejoice. Flocks of birds of innumerable varieties went wheeling and circling round the ship, or floated on the water; there was music even in their wild glad shrieks.

Many a black head, too, popped up out of the water, some tusked and bearded, some as awful as a nightmare. And seals basked on the sunny side of the rocks, or on the sandy beach; while bears by the dozen and score prowled round, warily watching their chance to spring upon and make prey of these innocents. The bears seemed now to have no fear of man. Nor did they appear anxious to attack any one; they were no longer an-hungered.

The snow awnings were now taken down from the decks, a general spring cleaning was instituted, and, after this, even winter garments were put aside, and the men looked gay and felt happy in consequence. But for all this, the temperature was seldom a degree above 45 degrees; and if ever it reached 50 degrees, the men thought it uncomfortably hot.

Alba, the snow-bird, had pined a great deal during the long, dark winter day, and seldom cared to leave the cabin; but now she went screaming and flying all round the ship as if mad with joy, and hardly could Claude tell her from the other birds of the same genus, only she usually came when called.

Fingal, when not on the war-path, used to lie on the snow-white deck and gasp, with about a quarter of a yard of crimson tongue lolling indolently out of his mouth.

The doctor continued busy as ever, only the sledges were put away, and all expeditions had now to be undertaken on foot.

Very much to Claude's surprise, they came one day in their wanderings, while a very long way from the ship, on a herd of tiny horned bisons quietly browsing on the sweet mosses in a wild glen.

The strange creatures lifted their heads and sniffed the air as Claude and Paddy O'Connell approached, but it was surprise, not fear, they exhibited.

Claude waited till the doctor and his party came up.

"What are they, in the name of mystery?" asked Claude.

“They are musk oxen, without a doubt,” was the reply; “but I never saw such small ones before. They are dwarfs of their species. Truly this is a land of wonders. There is certainly,” he continued, “no geological reason why these animals should not be here, only—”

“Look here, doctor,” cried Claude, “while you are preaching to Paddy there, I’ll have a shot.”

“By all means, let us have a specimen.”

“And troth,” said Paddy, “we’ll have a specimen for the cook’s coppers, doctor dear, as well as for the good of science.”

At the very first rifle shot, one of their number bit the dust; but, strange to say, the others fled not. They looked wild and startled, and in dread terror they sniffed at the blood of their dead companion, but they stood still.

Another was shot, and another; then at last there was a wild stampede, not from, but down towards our sportsmen.

Were they charging to take revenge on the murderers of their companions?

Claude thought so. The surgeon knew better.

“Stand aside quickly!” he cried.

Hardly had they rushed a little way up the bank ere the whole herd rolled past.

Paddy had a parting shot, but missed, and looked very foolish.

Fingal could scarcely be restrained from going in pursuit. He thought he could easily pull at least one down, seeing they were but little bigger than Newfoundland dogs.

Deer there were now among the hills in abundance, hares, and a strange kind of rabbit, that even Dr Barrett had never seen before.

On the great lake itself, sport was to be had in abundance. Jack and Joe astonished every one by their marvellous dexterity in harpooning the huge and ferocious bladder-nose seal (*Stenmatopus Crisatus*), the sea bear (*Ursus Marinus*), the little Atak, and the walrus himself.

Not from the boats of the Icebear, however, did these wonderful Indians work. No, for they built themselves kayaks, or light canoes, made principally of hide, and so light you could lift one with a single hand or wear it as a hat. In these frail skiffs they would venture for miles out to sea, and they seldom came back without an animal of some kind.

But once Jack came home without Joe.

“Where is Joe?” asked Claude.

“Joe? You asked for my brooder?”

“Yes, your brother,” replied Claude.

“Oh!” said Jack, indifferently, “he toomble up plenty quick. No can turn hims kayak again. P’r’aps he go drown, ha! ha?”

It had never occurred to Jack to go to his brother’s assistance. When taxed with his callousness—

“What for I go?” he replied. “No plenty good. P’r’aps Jack he catchee my kayak, and den we bof on us toomble. No, no, not plenty good enough.”

“Call away the whalers,” bawled Claude.

“Call both away, Mr Lloyd.”

There was a trampling of feet, and a rattling of blocks and tackle, and in two minutes both took the water with a splash.

“A guinea to the first boat that reaches the kayak,” cried Claude.

There was a race on then—a very exciting one, though only to save the life of a poor Eskimo Indian.

The kayak could be distinctly seen from the masthead, with poor deserted Joe clinging to it.

Claude went himself to the crow’s-nest, to guide the boats by means of the long fan used for such purpose by Greenland-going ships.

The poor fellow was at length rescued, very much exhausted.

By the time he had reached the ship, however, what with the warm sunshine and a stimulant the Spectioneer had administered to him, Joe was all right and smiling.

But his brother Jack, as soon as Joe came on board, pointed at him a stern finger of reproof.

“I ’shamed o’ you,” he said. “I ’shamed o’ you proper. You not can turn your kayak, ha! ha! You no true Indian. Suppose one shark snap your two legs off, dat do you plenty mooch good. Bah!”

The summer passed away only too quickly; it passed, but not in vain, for Dr Barrett had done much good for the cause of science; and, reader, science always does or always should bring us nearer to Him who made all things and rules over them by unchangeable laws that He knows are good, whatever we finite beings may dare to imagine.

The summer passed; Claude and all his crew had enjoyed splendid sport. I wish I had space to tell of the adventures they had, some of them wild enough in all conscience. But while enjoying themselves there had been no neglect of duty, with one sad, solitary exception presently to be mentioned.

“I am very glad to say,” remarked Dr Barrett, one evening at dinner, “that I have succeeded in doing about all I believe that our learned friends in England wanted me to do, thanks to your good judgment, Captain Alwyn, in steering us to this wondrous country.”

“And so am I glad also,” replied Claude. He was thinking of home just then. “Let me see,” continued the doctor, musingly, “I have collected quite a museum of specimens of Arctic flora and even fauna. To the lichen world I have, I think, added not a few species hitherto unknown. I have taken observations of every conceivable kind; there is a record of them in my notes. I have, or, pardon me for my egotism, we have discovered coal—that is of little use, perhaps; iron—that exists everywhere; tin—that is more to the purpose; silver and gold, and these are better still. We have also,” he went on, “found the bones of extinct mammals, and the evidences on all sides that at one time the hills around us, or hills like them, were covered with forest and fern, and inhabited by a race of animals that we human beings too often, I think, call inferior. We have, moreover—”

“I beg your pardon, sir,” said the steward. “May I speak to you half a minute?”

The doctor followed him into the steerage.

He soon returned, looking serious and vexed.

“Beast!” he muttered.

“I hope,” said Claude, “there is no one in this ship deserves that title, doctor.”

“Will you come and see for yourself, sir?”

“I will.”

Claude followed the doctor out to the steerage and into the dispensary. There he pointed to an almost empty bottle of brandy.

He said nothing.

“Do you mean me to infer,” said Claude, “that one of my crew has been guilty of a theft so vile?”

The doctor nodded.

“And who?”

“Who but Datchet?”

“Mr Lloyd,” shouted Alwyn, “bring Datchet before me to-morrow morning.”

Datchet was duly punished, Dr Barrett, however, begging mitigation of sentence on the plea that he had left temptation in the man’s way.

Time went on, and everything was got ready for a start. In a few more days the order would be, “Up anchor, and hey for Merrie England!”

All hands were happy. Small wonder at that. It was Friday night. The Icebear would sail on the Monday, the stores having still to be got on board from the house on shore.

Friday night is, in many northern ships, held somewhat en gala, as the day is a salt-fish day, so to-night there was a huge sea-pie cooked for the half-deck officers, and several such for the men forward.

Everything seemed propitious as regards the weather, for though dense fogs had prevailed for a week or two—it was early in August—the sky was now clear and the glass slowly but steadily rising. So the men were right merry. Paddy O’Connell had never appeared to such advantage. The boy Bounce was even allowed to tell a story and sing a London street ballad; while big Byarnie sat in a corner, beaming over with gigantic smiles.

But by ten o’clock sounds were hushed, and all hands in bed fore and aft. There was not now a sound to break the stillness, for the solitary sentry had gone below to smoke by the galley fire.

An hour passed away; then a solitary figure might have been seen creeping aft on hands and knees.

Two hours. The captain is sleeping sound; his hand is over the coverlet. Into this hand a cold wet nose is thrust.

“Go away and sleep, Fingal,” he mutters.

But the dog whines, and finally barks, and then Claude starts up, fully awake now.

See, across the cabin yonder is the reflection of a strange light in the glass!

He springs to the deck and rushes to the door, which is open.

There is fire in the store-closet between his cabin and the wardroom.

Fire in the spirit-store!

Ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, went the bell two strokes to the second.

Ding, ding, ding, ding, and in a minute the whole ship is alive.

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Chapter Nineteen.

The Burning of the “Icebear.”

All hands worked steadily, willingly, and well. There was not a sound to be heard, except the roar of the flames, the tramping of feet, an occasional word of command, and the steady clank, clank of the little pumping engine. No noise, no bustle, no confusion on board the burning ship.

The flames had soon gained mastery over the captain’s cabin, and over the wardroom as well, for the fire seemed to spread on both sides.

Claude was walking slowly up and down the deck, ’twixt main and foremast, quietly superintending everything. That he was here, and here only, showed the perfect confidence he had in his men and officers to carry out the terrible duties now imposed upon them.

Smoke and flames were pouring up through the companions aft, and it was evident that that portion of the ship was doomed.

Claude was hoping against hope. Were the cabin and wardroom only destroyed and the fire here checked, the hull and the fore-part of the ship would be but little injured, and the voyage home be, after all, made in safety.

The greatest danger of all rested in the fact that the magazine, containing a very considerable quantity of gunpowder and gun-cotton, lay close to—almost in—the seat of fire, and so quickly had the flames spread that it had been found impossible to remove the stores without the almost certainty of exploding the whole.

So among the first orders given was for a volunteer to carry the end of the hose along the lower deck and flood the magazine.

Boy Bounce was the first to spring forward.

“Can we trust him, Mr Lloyd?”

“Certainly, sir.”

“And I’m so small, you know; I can walk where a big ’un would ’ave to creep, sir.”

The boy seemed a long time gone, but he crawled back at last, and fell senseless at Lloyd’s feet. He was badly burned about the hands and even face, but as soon as he came to himself he went on working with the rest.

Hours flew by, one, two, three; still the fire raged; still the men worked steadily on.

All seemed going well, when suddenly the wind shifted, and almost at the same time the smoke and flames came roaring forward, and one mast caught fire. The crew were driven from the pumps, and for the first time something like a panic spread fore and aft.

It was evident now that the ship could not be saved. All further attempts at pumping were abandoned, and all hands set to work to remove stores.

Unfortunately, two of the boats that hung on davits aft were lost, so that only two remained.

One of these boats was commanded by McDonald, the other by Dr Barrett, Claude and Lloyd determining to remain on board till the bitter end.

How bitter that end was to be no one could have guessed.

All the stores that could, with apparent safety, be got out were landed; the boats were returning to the ship. Claude had calculated that hours must elapse before the vessel blew up, or that she might sink without an explosion.

Orders had just been issued for the men to stand by to embark in the boats with regularity and quietness, when suddenly the after-part of the ship was blown up with fearful violence; masts, spars, deck, rigging, and bulwarks flew skywards, in a fountain of crimson flame.

The sea was covered with the wreckage, and the Icebear began rapidly to sink stern foremost.

“Give way, men,” shouted Dr Barrett. “Give way with a will to the rescue.”

Let the curtain drop over the terrible scene. Suffice it to say that everything that man can do, or heroes accomplish, was done and dared by those in the boats to save their friends and messmates from drowning, and from worse—from being devoured by

sharks; but out of all that crew of men, who, only a few short hours before, had been peacefully slumbering, and dreaming, perchance, of home and happiness, only thirty answered to their names that morning in the shore-house.

Some of these, too, were badly wounded, and nearly all exhausted.

Poor Lloyd was among the drowned, so was Warren, the second mate, and both Pipes and Chips had gone to their account.

Big Byarnie had been sent ashore with one of the first boats. He was a giant to work, and did about three men's duty in unloading. He had taken the sea-birds with him.

Fingal had, dog-like, stayed with his master, and swam all the way to the shore with him after the explosion. Boy Bounce came floating on shore stride-legs on a spar, propelling himself with half an oar, which he had managed to pick up somehow or other.

There was so much life and enthusiasm about Paddy O'Connell, that it is almost needless to say he got ashore.

"Somehow," said Paddy; but how, he couldn't remember at all.

A great fire was made in the shore-house, and the men who had been taken out of the water rendered as comfortable as circumstances would permit.

When breakfast had been served and discussed—there was no ceremony now, no distinction between officers and men, those poor mariners in their terrible plight having formed themselves into a little republic—Claude and Dr Barrett went out together.

They walked for a time in silence up and down the beach, Claude hardly daring to cast a glance seawards where the wreckage still was floating.

The doctor was the first to speak.

"This is a sad ending to all our hopes," he said slowly.

"I cannot as yet realise it," replied Claude. "My poor men! my poor men!"

There were tears in his eyes as he spoke, tears of which he had no reason to be ashamed.

Dr Barrett pressed his hand.

“I am older than you,” he said; “let me beseech you not to repine. It is almost cheering for me to think that the bitterness of death is past for those dear brave hearts who, remember, Captain Alwyn, died doing their duty nobly and manfully.”

“True, true, Dr Barrett; theirs must be a merciful judgment: but the drunken brute who caused this terrible accident!”

“Stay, sir, stay; he too is in God’s hand. We cannot, dare not, set bounds or limits to His mercy. Let us turn our thoughts to Him, then,” continued the doctor. “We have to submit to whatever is before us. We must pray, ‘Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.’”

“Yes,” replied Claude, “but that portion of the beautiful prayer our Saviour taught has always seemed to me more difficult than any other to utter from the heart while in grief or expecting grief.”

“I know it, Captain Claude Alwyn, I know it. There are few kinds of grief in this world I have not tasted the bitterness of. But come,” he went on, “you and I are still the chiefs of this expedition. Let us, even now, bravely face the situation. Let us see how we stand.”

“We are imprisoned in a living grave.”

“Not quite so bad as that, my friend.”

“Well, Dr Barrett, what do you propose?”

“Shortly this. We have still stores on shore here, but we must supplement them. Despatch one boat at once; if she returns before the snow falls, well and good. Send her back for a further supply; if the snow falls ere she returns, do not wait, but despatch the sledges across country. As we are about one hundred miles south of the inlet, the sledges will take the short cut, and reach the cave stores in shorter time than the boat can.”

“Good. I will lose no time, and as soon as our poor fellows are buried—”

He paused and glanced seawards. “My dear Captain Alwyn,” said the doctor, “our poor fellows are already buried; that water swarms with sharks.” (Note 1.)

Claude himself went in charge of the boat to visit the Kittywake stores. There would be, he reasoned with himself, about three hundred miles of water to row or sail over. The tide, however, that swept up and down the long creek which joined the ocean to the inland sea, had all the force of a mill-stream. He determined, therefore, to take

advantage of that, and on his voyage out to anchor alongside the banks during the flow, and rush onward when the tide was ebbing.

He returned to the camp far sooner than he had expected.

He returned empty.

A bridge of ice and snow had been encountered which, no doubt, extended all the way to the sea.

“And so, even if my poor vessel had not been doomed to destruction, it would have been impossible to get clear this year.” So spoke Claude.

“True, true,” said Dr Barrett, “and now we must depend upon the sledges to bring us supplies from the stores. But,” he added, “it is only right I should tell you what I think, Captain Alwyn—”

“And that is?”

“That they, too, will return empty.”

This melancholy surmise of Dr Barrett turned out far too true.

They waited till the snow fell. Then, in charge of the spectioneer, who had been among the saved, and Mr McDonald, third mate, the sledges set out. As usual, Fingal trotted off with the rest.

Even to those in the sledges, the time seemed long. Their adventures were many, the whole journey a toilsome and perilous one. But the goal was gained at last. There was the signal pole on the cliff top that had been raised to guide the Kittywake towards the creek, but where was the creek itself?

Nowhere to be seen.

It had been frozen over in the winter, and the ravine, at the bottom of which it lay, filled entirely and completely level with snow.

To find or even to guess at the whereabouts of the cave where the stores were buried under such circumstances was quite out of the question. A thousand men could hardly have found and rescued them.

If the time seemed long for those who went on this expedition, it was doubly tedious for those who waited their return.

At last, one evening, about sunset, amid thickly falling snow, Fingal came bounding into camp. Claude knew the sledges could not be far away. All rushed out to meet them. Alas! and alas! for hope seemed to die even in Dr Barrett's heart at the dire news.

They brought two bears, and these were cut in pieces and stored.

"What is to be done now?" said Claude. "Are we to die like rats in a hole?"

"Not, I think," was the reply, "without making one last effort to save ourselves. Were it the summer, we could live at all events as long as ammunition lasted, but we have hardly food enough to serve us to spring-time. So I propose that we get ready at once, that we provision the sledges, and make an attempt to reach the semi-Eskimo, semi-Danish settlement of Sturmstadt."

"It will be a terrible journey."

"It will, indeed, but both Jack and Joe know the way. I have talked to them. Their people have come on the hunting-path within a hundred miles of this place."

"For myself, I care not," said Claude; "but I grieve to think of my poor fellows, perhaps sinking and dying by the way. Would it not be almost better to rough it here through another winter, then, when the snow is gone, to walk the journey? Every day would then be bringing us into a warmer and better climate."

"No, captain, it would not, and for this one of many reasons. If we take the journey now we can go in almost a straight line, for the creeks and streams will be frozen over in a few days. In summer we know not what détours we might not have to make, what streams or rivers to ford or even swim."

"I will be guided by your experience," said Claude.

Early next morning, outside the wooden tent, Paddy O'Connell and boy Bounce were heard talking together loudly and excitedly.

"Is it true what you're telling me, and sorra a word av a lie in it?"

"Which I walked all the way over, and ran all the way back to see," was the boy's reply.

“Och! bladderips!” roared Paddy; “och! the thieving spalpeens! Bad cess to them evermore. Sure if I had them I’d break every bone in their durty bodies. I’d murder every mother’s son or the two o’ them.”

He entered the tent as he spoke.

“I know what you’ve come to say, Paddy,” said Claude: “the Eskimos have taken the sledges and deserted us.”

“True for you, sorr,” said Paddy. “It’s all up wid us now, sorr. Sure I could tear me hair and cry; and it isn’t for meself either, sorr, I’d be after crying, but for me poor mother and Biddy.”

“This is, indeed, terrible news, doctor,” said Claude.

The doctor whistled a few bars of an operatic air thoughtfully before he made reply.

“It may be all for the best, you know. Hope, sir, hope, hope, hope.

“‘Hope is a better companion than fear;
Providence, ever benignant and kind,
Gives with a smile what you take with a tear.
All will be right; Let us look to the light.
Morning is ever the daughter of night.
Cheerily, cheerily, then, cheer up!’”

Note 1. The *Scymnus Borealis*. Some of these monsters obtain a length of nearly twenty feet, and at certain seasons of the year the sea in some places swarms with them. They are gregarious, and never fail to appear when men are drowning or seals being killed. They are terribly fierce and voracious.

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Chapter Twenty.

Sorrows Never Come Singly.

However cheerful Dr Barrett might try to appear, he was far from feeling easy at heart.

Hopeless he was not. He had seen too much of the world—the wide world, I mean—he had faced too many dangers not to know that there is seldom or never real reason to throw up one's arms in despair.

But it behoved him to assume an air of cheerfulness, even under the distressing circumstances in which he and his companions were now plunged. The survivors of the unhappy Icebear were all his patients, all his charge and care, and he well knew the depressing effects of despondency, so he determined to do his duty, and keep up their hearts if possible.

“Give the men something to do,” he said to Claude on the same morning the news of the desertion of the Eskimos had been brought to camp by busy boy Bounce.

“I'll overhaul stores to begin with.”

“Good?” said the doctor. “And during the time yen are working I'll get on the top of the bench and play the fiddle to them.”

It may seem a menial kind of duty for a surgeon to fiddle to a ship's crew; nevertheless, duty it was, and the doctor did it.

And the men were pleased; the gloomy shadows left their brows; their eyes grew brighter; they even laughed and joked a little as they worked, and I'm quite sure they got through the task in half the time.

A good dinner followed. The cook, poor fellow, had been drowned, but he found a worthy successor in busy boy Bounce.

Boy Bounce to-day had made some excellent pea-soup. It was a good thing for these unfortunate sailors that this house and camp had been built on shore, and that it contained all the necessaries for cooking, etc, that they were likely to want. After the

soup came preserved potatoes and pork, to say nothing of a delightful frizzly relish of young seal's liver. Then all felt happier and more hopeful.

There would be at least a whole month of daylight yet, though every day would be much shorter than its predecessor. Then light would leave them, and merge into the long, long Polar night.

As long as there was anything like a day, the men were employed fishing and hunting. The bears had not yet left, and sometimes a deer was met with. Why some of these animals should occasionally be left behind the migrating flock is a great puzzle. Are they too delicate for the journey south, or are they left behind for punishment?

The bears that meant remaining were already seeking holes and caves.

The doctor knew their tricks and their manners, and had every likely hole and corner searched, often by torchlight, and several fine specimens were thus unearthed.

The brutes always showed fight, and some fierce hand to hand encounters (if I may so name them) were the consequence.

But the days grew shorter, and, despite all that Dr Barrett could do, a gloom settled down on the minds of the men that nothing seemed able to dispel. Even Paddy O'Connell himself lost heart.

"Och! sure," he said one day, "it is our graves we are in already, and it's little use there is in trying to prolong our existence."

Dr Barrett took him aside.

"Paddy," he said, "you must help me to keep up the men's spirits. I depend upon you. I am doing my best. Help me. Will you?"

The tears rushed to the good fellow's eyes.

"Doctor dear," he exclaimed, "I'd lay down my life to please ye, and it's the truth I'm telling you."

"Well, my good honest fellow, there needn't be any laying down of lives, only just you keep up your heart, and I'll lay a wager the men will be merry enough, and that is half the battle. I will not conceal from you, Paddy," continued the doctor, "that there is a

hard struggle before us, a struggle perhaps for bare existence, but with God's help we'll get through it and conquer."

"Deed, then, and well try, sorr."

"Yes, Paddy; and if the worst comes to the worst, we have but once to die, you know."

"True for ye, sorr. I never heard of any one dying twice, sorr."

"No, Paddy. And now you are my assistant—aren't you?"

He extended his hand as he spoke, and Paddy grasped it with the grip of a vice.

But Paddy did not speak, because there was a big lump in his throat. Only from that moment the doctor and he understood each other.

Another faithful fellow whom the doctor greatly depended on was Giant Byarnie.

So now, virtually, the four heads of the expedition were Claude, the doctor, Paddy, and Byarnie.

They used to hold little meetings by themselves, apart from the others, and talk together of their prospects.

"If everything goes fairly well," said Dr Barrett one day, "what with rigid economy and no waste, we will manage to weather the winter, be it ever so hard."

"What say you to bear-steak, Captain Alwyn?"

"Delicious, I'm sure, with hunger as sweet sauce."

"Well, we can have that in abundance, and we have, or can have, fish all the weary winter. The biscuit is scarce, but we have peas, and—"

"And tobacco, sorr," put in Paddy.

"Right you are, Paddy. For that we ought to be thankful indeed.—What I lament most," continued the doctor, "is that our casks of cabbage have gone bad, and that we have saved no lime-juice from the burning ship. However," he added more cheerfully, "let us keep our minds easy, and hope for the best. How are the birds, Byarnie?"

“In fine wing, sir, the two that are left, for one died, you know, sir. But these are the strongest two, and were Miss Meta’s favourites.”

It was determined to start them both—both to bear the self-same message.

Claude would not willingly have brought a tear to Meta’s eyes to own a throne, but it was agreed between the doctor and him that the best plan was to tell the whole truth, to hide nothing of the terrible extremities to which they were reduced.

And Claude took his advice, and with that message of love which those strong-winged birds bore away south with them, was something like a farewell, a long farewell, and a fear that, on earth, he—Claude—would never meet his love again.

“I think I can face death more bravely now,” said Claude.

“And I too,” was the reply.

It will be seen that even Dr Barrett lacked the complete hope of being able to fight against the fearful odds before them.

The men were set to work at the mines, but they did so with very little heart indeed.

What is the good, they said, of slaving here like coal-heavers, for gold that can never benefit either ourselves or our families?

Faddy came to Claude as spokesman.

Claude himself went personally to the men. He assured them that every nugget of gold they found would be their own; that they were now shipwrecked mariners; that they were to some extent, therefore, free agents, and could, if they chose, throw over allegiance to him, their former captain.

“No, sir,” the men cried, “we will never do that. We have lived together happily and cheerily enough, let us die together.”

“Who talks of dying?” cried Paddy O’Connell. “Sure we’ll never die at all, at all. Is it because the winter is with us, and darkness all around us, that we’d go and cry like a choild that has been sent to bed widout a light? Troth, men, it’s meself that’s ashamed av ye entoirely. Won’t the sun come back and shine down on us wid de blessing o’ Heaven in a few or three months? Then won’t we take our guns under our arms and go marching thro’ the country as bould as Inniskilling Dragoons? And won’t there be such sport and

such fun all the way south, as you never had the loikes of before? And sure, won't we reach the say at last, and go off in some ship or another to England and Oirland? And och! won't our wives and sweethearts, if we've got any, be glad to see us just—the darlints that they thought they'd never see in loife again, because the big whales av Greenland had eaten them up? And sure, won't me own dear mother, and Biddy my sister, and the pig, the crayture, go wild wid the joy that'll be on to them when they see their Patrick march in at the door again! Hooch! hurrah! it's myself that's as happy as a king wid the thoughts av it all."

Paddy's speech had even greater effect in keeping up the men's spirits than had Claude's. They resumed their work more cheerfully, and Paddy constantly led them with song or with joke.

Lectures and concerts were resumed in the wooden tent, now their sole abode. But the singing lacked spirit, and the dancing was nil.

They say that sorrows seldom come singly. It appeared even now, in December, that the proverb would hold good in the case of those forlorn mariners. For the winter turned out to be one of awful gloom and darkness.

The aurora, that shone with such radiance the winter before, now showed only occasionally, and that only as a faint white glimmer among the clouds. No moon or stars were ever seen.

Sometimes, for a week at a time, the snow fell and the wind raged with such fearful and bitter force as to preclude the possibility of any one ever putting his head beyond the threshold of the door on pain of instant suffocation.

At such times it taxed all the energies of Claude and the doctor, and even of Paddy himself, to keep the men from sinking into utter despondency.

Even Fingal, and Alba the snow-bird, seemed to partake of a portion of the general gloom. Fingal lying quietly in his corner, dreaming, perhaps, of the bonnie heather hills of Scotland; and Alba, with drooping wings—her head under one—perched over Claude's couch.

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Chapter Twenty One.

A Terrible Time—The Doctor's Dream—The Wondrous Mirage.

It was the month of mid-winter. Sickness had come at last; the sickness that is born of privation and absence of vegetable food. The younger and more weakly of the men were first to succumb. They lost heart, felt weary, tired, depressed. They refused to work. Even Dr Barrett could not find it in his heart to force them. They grew pale and thin, even to emaciation, and their dilated pupils glittered on their sunken eyeballs.

Their stronger companions tried to cheer them, ay, and many a time went without food themselves to give it to them.

One dropped dead, and was carried away and buried in the ice-hole. "Buried by the light of glaring torches," buried at sea you may call it,—a sailor's funeral, but what a sad one!

It was Magnus Jansen, a fair-haired Shetland lad, who had been a great favourite with his messmates, owing to his kind and gentle nature and his ever willingness to oblige.

"We commit his body to the deep," read Claude, "looking for the resurrection, when the sea shall give up her dead;" and more than one horny hand was raised to brush away a tear, as with deep and sullen plash the body sank into the sea.

Two more died in a week—died apparently of utter despondency and weariness.

"I shall soon see the light," were the last words of one of these. He just smiled faintly, and passed away.

Three more in a fortnight.

They nearly all seemed to go in the same way, of utter debility and hopelessness.

Byarnie was nurse-in-chief. He was always with them to the last; the great giant kneeling down beside their pallets, and breathing in their dying ears words that it is to be hoped often deprived even death of its victory.

More than one died leaning against Byarnie's broad breast. I have already said that Byarnie's big fat face was far from handsome. Ah! but it was so honest; and had you seen him there by the bedsides of those dying sailors, you would have said that his face shone at times with almost a heavenly light.

Another, and still another, was borne slowly away to the ice-hole.

Then it seemed as if Death was for a time satiated, and had claimed victims enough.

For almost the first time this winter, the sky cleared, the stars shone like emeralds through the frosty glow, the moon put in an appearance, casting long shadows across the snowfields, from those who walked out.

There was the aurora, too, a brighter display than any one ever remembered witnessing. Away in the north, and overhead, the ever-changing colours shimmered and danced in a way that was magical, marvellous, and it seemed at times that you had but to put up your hand and touch the broad fringes of light that danced and flickered before your eyes.

The sight of the sky evidently gave the men some heart, some hope.

But after a week the stars and aurora disappeared, and the darkness of a Polar night once more descended on the scene.

With so many ill, with so many dead, it would have been but a mockery now to venture on anything approaching to gaiety or merriment. Even Paddy felt that; and though, like boy Bounce, ever earnest, and energetic, and kind, he went about his work quieter and more subdued than probably he had ever been in his life before.

Instead of lecturing, Dr Barrett used in the evenings now to read books to his people; often books of a religious character, though not of the gloomy kind, but rather those that spoke of a Father's love, and carried the thoughts away and away to that bright land where there shall be no more sorrow or crying.

One morning in March, Dr Barrett appeared more than usually cheerful.

There were now so many sick that hardly could those in comparative health attend to their wants.

"I've had a dream," the doctor explained. "No," he added, smiling, "I shall not tell you what it is. You will know by-and-by, for my dream may not come true. Byarnie," he said,

“I’m going mining after breakfast. The morning is still and fine, and there are a lot of stars out. Bring tools and a few men with you.”

“Going mining?” said Claude, in some surprise.

“Yes, mining, captain; but not for gold this time, but for what is ten times more precious—for health. Get ready, Byarnie, and we’ll want torches, as well as a bucket.”

“You excite my curiosity,” said Claude. “May I go along with you?”

“You’ll do me pleasure.”

Straight along the south coast of the inland sea went Dr Barrett, Byarnie following up with his men. For more than half a mile he trudged on without looking either to the right or left. Then he stopped just under a cliff, or rather a rounded braeland.

“Now, men, clear away the snow from the ice close to the edge.”

“I think it was here I saw them in my dream,” he added, turning to Claude.

“I’m all in a fog,” said Claude.

The snow was not very deep, and the ice was soon cleared.

“Now light up your torches, and you other men smash the ice and clear a big hole. No fear of drowning; the tide is well back.”

This was a more difficult task, but it was accomplished at last, all the more easily because there was no water beneath.

“See anything down there?” the doctor asked of a man who had just lifted up a huge piece of ice.

“Only a thickish kind of seaweed, sir.”

“All right,” cried the doctor, quite jubilant now. “Fill this bucket with it.”

This was done, and soon the whole party reached camp again.

“I am to be blamed,” said Dr Barrett, “for not thinking of this marvellous seaweed before. It contains potash in abundance, and while mosses of all kinds are frozen to

death on the hillsides, this, you see, survives. Our poor fellows, now almost dead of the scurvy, may yet revive.”

Not only those who were sick, but all hands partook of the esculent weed. The sick revived, those in health grew brighter, calmer, and happier.

“If our food holds out, I think we may now weather the winter,” said Dr Barrett.

“I sincerely trust so,” said Claude, “and that we may all be well to commence the march.”

It seemed, however, that fate had still further affliction in store for them, for one day Byarnie came to the doctor, and very sad he looked.

No less than two casks of meat were found almost putrid, and the store of bears’ flesh had also gone bad.

This was indeed terrible news.

When the third and last cask was opened it was found like the others, unfit even for the food of starving men!

Tinned meat was all they now had to depend upon, and there was very little of that; so they must go on short allowance at once.

The men were far less cheerful after this, and the summer, that but yesterday had appeared so near at hand, was now apparently an illimitable distance away.

Another expedition was made to the caves among the hills, in the endeavour to find another bear.

All in vain.

Hope now sunk in every heart. Even the doctor himself, who had struggled so long, began to feel that the time was not far distant when he too must succumb, must lie down and—die.

It was April, another month, another long, long four weeks—and early summer and sunshine would come and bring back with them the birds—the grebe, the auk, the wild duck and guillemot.

Two more had been added to the list of the dead.

The boy Bounce fell ill.

“We are not going to let the boy die,” said one of the men. “It is food he wants. Let us make a subscription.”

The subscription was made. Everybody gave a morsel of something for the poor boy, and his allowance came to be double instead of half Big Byarnie even gave up his blanket, and just slept a little closer to the fire and hugged Fingal.

Poor boy Bounce lived, and began cooking again, though in this matter, unfortunately, his labour was not now very arduous.

Claude was looking very pallid and worn; he did not speak much, he suffered in silence. The men would have fain had their captain to live better than they did, but he would not hear of such a thing. Besides, he gave away a goodly portion of his meagre allowance to poor Fingal.

For Fingal was ill.

Indeed, Claude knew that Fingal was dying, and the faithful old fellow appeared to know it himself. One day the hound was very much weaker, very much worse, and Claude knew the end was very near. He was sitting by the couch on which the dog lay. Alba, the snow-bird, jealous perhaps of her master's attentions to Fingal, came and perched upon his shoulder.

Claude took the bird in his hands and slowly rose to his feet.

“For once, Alba,” he said, “I must send you off.” Then he handed her to one of the men. “Take her to the aviary.”

This was all he said. But he went back and knelt by Fingal's bed.

Why did he put the bird away? Those of my readers who love dogs will understand and appreciate his reasons: there was always a slight rivalry between the bird and the dog, and Claude would have grieved to let Fingal in his last moments feel that aught stood between his master's heart and his.

As Claude returned, Fingal recognised him. He attempted to rise, tried even to crawl towards him, and in doing so fell. Claude raised him—how light he was!—and replaced

him in the softest part of his couch. Then he sat beside his dying favourite with one arm over his shoulder.

Fingal knew he was there. He fell quietly and gently asleep.

It was that sleep from which nor dogs nor men ever awaken.

The time rolled drearily on, and at length the sun rose, and the days got rapidly longer and longer; but starvation had done its work.

Not that more died, but several were down with sheer debility, all were weak and poor, Claude could no longer stand.

Paddy O'Connell held out, so did Byarnie and the doctor, but the latter was quieter far than of yore. "The sooner," said Claude, one day, "the sooner, doctor, it is all over the better."

One day from the hill-top, Byarnie saw a sight which suddenly struck him with fear and trembling, and sent him on his knees to pray.

Away in the southern sky, some distance above the horizon, was a wondrous vision.

It faded away at last, and then Byarnie hurried off to the camp, his clothes wet with the sweat of fear, to report the matter to the doctor.

"It is all over with us," he said, "for I have seen a wonderful vision, even as Ezekiel did in the days of the olden time."

"Have you been dreaming?" said Dr Barrett.

"I have not even been asleep," replied Byarnie. "I was there on the mountain-top alone, when suddenly in the sky there appeared before my sight this vision, as of men and sledges and dogs moving rapidly across the sky, among the very clouds."

"Were they all head-down?"

"They were all head-down," said Byarnie, "which makes the awful vision still more wondrous strange."

“Bless you, Byarnie, for this news,” cried the doctor. “Hurrah! Byarnie, we are saved! we are saved! Be they Indians, be they savages, they are coming, and we are saved. What you saw, my faithful fellow, was a mirage.”

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Chapter Twenty Two.

Meta's Strange Adventures.

We are back once again in Meta's cottage in Iceland. There is but little change here since the day Claude bade his betrothed a long farewell.

It is evening. Yonder by the fire sits one of Meta's aunts, working away at her "rock and her reel," as she seemed always working, spinning, spinning, spinning.

Meta near her, with her zither. She had been playing, but her fingers now lay listlessly on her strings, only now and then some sweet wailing notes and chords were brought out as if the hands were en rapport with her heart.

"And you really say you saw him in your dreams, dear auntie?"

Whirr—whirr—whirr, went the wheel.

"I saw him," replied the kindly but ancient dame. "I saw him. I can see him now as I saw him in my dream. He is lying on the ground, and his face hardly less pale than the snow." Whirr—whirr—it—it. "Oh, auntie, don't frighten me, dear!"

"But kindly men are kneeling by him. They raise him. He revives. The blood returns to his cheeks. He will live!"

"Bless you, auntie, bless you!" Whirr—whirr went the wheel. The snow-flea in his cage twittered fondly. The raven on his log, which he seemed never to leave, stretched himself a leg at a time, then both wings at once. He was very old, that raven, and Poe's looked not more weird, and—

"His mate long dead, his nestlings flown,
The moss had o'er his eyrie grown,
While all the scenes his youth had known
Were changed and old."

Meta plays now; she is more happy. Her aunt has given her hope.

But somehow she does not play long; she is easily tired now, so she rises and lays aside the instrument, then stands by the window to watch the snowy mountain peaks changing to pink and to purple in the sun's parting rays.

Summer has fled from the Norland hills. The songbirds have gone—the martin, and woodlark, and robin; the wild flowers have faded—the blue geraniums, the pink-eyed diaspensias, the daisies, and the purple wild thyme; only the green of the creeping saxifrage bedecks the rocks, and hardy sea-pinks and ferns still grow in the glades and by the brook-sides. But autumn winds sigh mournfully through the leafless birch trees and drooping willows, and rustle the withered leaves of the wild myrtle on the braesides.

With a sigh Meta turns away from the window.

Almost at the same time there is a knock at the door, and Guielmyun, brother to Byarnie, and, like himself, a giant, rushed in.

“The bird, the bird?” he cried, “he is—”

But Meta heard no more. Next minute she was standing by the cage.

Panting, ragged, and wretched-looking and dripping wet was the messenger that had flown so far; but oh, bless it! it bore the little quill that contained the missive of sadness and love.

There was no more weariness in Meta's looks now, but stern, firm resolve.

“I'll save him if I can,” she said.

“A young lady in the study wants to see me?” said Professor Hodson to his neat-handed waiting-maid. “Bless my heart, what a strange thing!”

But stranger still, five minutes after this the good old professor was sitting opposite this young lady, and had given orders that no one should come near the door till he rang the bell.

“Dear me, my dear, de-ar me!” he was saying; “and you really tell me that a sea-bird carried this message all the way from the icy north? But there, there, I see, it is his own handwriting. And yours is a strange, not to say a sad story. But it will all come right in the end—perhaps, you know.”

“Oh, sir!” cried Meta, “you will make some effort to save him? You will not let him die in those terrible regions of gloom and desolation?”

“Gloom and desolation, dear? Yes, yes, to be sure, you’re quite right; they must be somewhat gloomy and desolate. No morning paper, no morning rolls or hot toast. Well, well, we will see in a day or two what can be done. The Kittywake, too, she has been posted long ago a lost ship and the insurance paid. But even she might turn up, you know. I only say she might. Stranger things have happened.”

Meta took the professor’s soft white hand as she bade him good-bye in the doorway, and touched it reverently with her lips.

“Good-bye, my dear, good night. You’ve got nice lodgings? Yes, I think you said you had. Good night, good night. God bless you.”

The savants are assembled in the largest room in the professor’s house—a room where lectures are often given and wonderful experiments made, but a cosy room for all that, with two great fires burning in it, and a soft crimson light diffused throughout it from the great candelabra.

There is a stranger here to-night—a stranger to us, I mean—a man about fifty, a sailor evidently, from his build and bronze. He is very pleasant in manner and voice; his face is handsome, and his smile strikes you as coming directly from the heart.

They had been dining; the walnuts and wine were now on the table, and conversation was at its best.

“Well, gentlemen, I shall call the young lady, and you shall hear the marvellous tale from her own lips.”

Somewhat abashed at first to find herself in such august company, and in a room more beautiful than anything she could ever have dreamed about, Meta was soon reassured by the professor’s kindly voice. He sat beside her, and held one hand in his.

Then she told her story, as she had told it to Professor Hodson in his study. She hid nothing, kept nothing back, told all the truth, even about her love and betrothal to Claude, talking low but earnestly, as innocently as a child repeating its prayer by its mother’s knee.

There was no more eager listener than Captain Jahnsen, the sailor I have mentioned. As long as she spoke his eyes were riveted on her face, sometimes he even changed colour in his seeming excitement. When she had finished, he stood up.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “I have been all my life a man of action, not of words; and now what I have to say must be said briefly indeed. For the last many years I have been a sailor and adventurer combined. I have dug gold, ploughed the sea, and searched for diamonds; not unsuccessfully, as you are all aware. For years and years previous to that I was a Greenland sailor, not hailing from any British port; not sailing in beautiful barques or full-rigged ships, but in an open boat from Lapland. What made me so? Fate. I once commanded as splendid a little craft as ever sailed the sea. I had on board my wife and my child-daughter. I was wrecked—a sailor’s luck, you say, but mine was a sadder one than falls to the lot of most sailors. My dear wife—ah! gentlemen, the memory of that terrible night almost unmans me even yet—was killed in my arms by a falling spar; my daughter was swept away. Two sailors and I alone were saved by a Lapland walrus boat. We lay-to for hours. No sign of life was visible; again I dropped insensible; I was ill, mad, raving for weeks. Yet calmness and peace came at last. But never more dared I go near that awful coast. To me the very memory of it and of that night has ever been like a nightmare.”

“Where were you wrecked?” asks Professor Hodson.

“On the Icelandic coast, north of Reykjavik.”

Meta has turned suddenly pale, and her eyes fill with tears.

She timidly advances. “Father,” she murmurs.

There is no wild excitement; no melodrama. Captain Jahnsen stoops and kisses his daughter’s brow.

“I’m sure, dear Meta,” he said, “we’ll love each other very much.”

Yet, though lacking melodramatic effect, the scene was touching in the extreme.

Poor Professor Hodson! he was fain to wipe his eyes.

“Dear me, dear me, dear me!” he said, in his quick, sharp way of speaking, “I never thought that I would shed tears again in my life. Dear me, dear me!”

“Now, my child,” said the professor to Meta next morning, “I’m going to run down to Dunallan Towers, and see her ladyship. No, as you wish me not to, I shall never breathe your name. Good-bye; keep up your heart. I’ll do the best I can.”

Yes, Lady Alwyn was at home, and would see Professor Hodson.

And presently she enters.

Very handsome yet, very stately, very sad withal. She beckons the professor to a seat. “You may not guess what I have come about?”

“Yes, I can,” she says. “You bring no news of my son, but you think of sending a search-party out?”

“That was mooted between my colleagues and me.”

“Professor Hodson, I fear—indeed, I know—I shall never see my son alive or dead again. I live but to mourn for him. I live but to repent the harsh words that drove him from my door—from our door—my boy’s and mine. To see his poor pet dog following him with downcast head; to see even the bird fly away; I— Oh, Professor Hodson!”

Here, woman-like, the poor lady burst into tears, and the tender-hearted professor feels very much inclined to follow suit.

“We may find him yet?”

“Oh! is there a hope, a chance?”

“There is, and we can but try. We have thought of fitting out a yacht.”

“There is his yacht—his own yacht. Take it, and welcome. If not strong enough, do everything for her. And, professor, all the expense must be mine. And I, too, will sail in her in search of my boy.”

“Your ladyship, I—”

“Deny me not. I will not be denied.”

“Your ladyship little knows the danger—”

“Talk not of danger. I’ll be happy every day to think I am braving the dangers my boy has braved before me. Professor Hodson,” she says, after a long pause, during which the savant has been musing on many matters, all of which revolve round Meta—“Professor Hodson, I feel younger, happier since you have come.”

“Your ladyship, then, must not be gainsaid. Well, I will accept the terms you so generously propose. We will at once fit up the Alba. All things promise well. We have in Captain Jahnsen a thorough gentleman, a sailor, and one who knows Greenland well. He has a daughter, too, who has been to sea. Might she not—”

“Oh yes, yes, if she would but come. She would be a companion to me and I to her.”

“Well, well, well. We will consider it all arranged.”

The professor rubs his hands, and laughs a joyous laugh; and the lady, rising, smilingly leads the way to the room where they lunch together.

The Alba is at sea. It is a lovely day in the first week of April. Well off the last of the Shetland Isles is she, and bearing west with a bit of northerly in it. Not steaming, though she has been fitted with engines, and can boast of a funnel elegant and pretty enough for any one to admire.

No, not steaming, for there is a ten-knot beam-wind blowing, and her sails are outfurled to it. White they are, and whiter still they look in the spring sunshine.

The decks are white also, and the very ropes, so neatly coiled thereon, are swirls of snowy-white. Everything about this natty yacht is neat and trim. The capstan is of polished mahogany, the binnacle is fit to be a drawing-room ornament. Whatever ought to be black about her is like polished ebony, and the brasswork shines like burnished gold.

On the deck sit two ladies. One, the elder, leans languidly back in her cane chair; the other—it is Meta—is sitting on a footstool at her knee, reading aloud.

A sailor would say the Alba is a trifle down by the head; only a sailor could notice it. The Alba is heavily fortified with wood and iron around and between the bows. But all water and stores will first be used from the foremost tanks, then she will ride the waves like a sea-bird.

How delightful the breeze! how pleasant the sunshine! and the Alba herself appears to feel the importance of the charge she has on board of her, and is proud in consequence. She nods and curtsies to each passing wave, kisses some, turns coyly away from others, and altogether behaves as if she really were the thing of life the sailors on board half imagine she is.

“So gaily goes the ship,
When the wind blows free.”

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Chapter Twenty Three.

An Adventurous Voyage—"They're Coming! They're Coming!"

From the very day on which Lady Alwyn stepped on board the Alba, and joined the search for her lost son, and for tidings, however meagre, of the good ship Kittywake, a new life seemed to spring up within her. She seemed at once to have lost what she did not hesitate to call her narrow-mindedness.

She began to see that all the world were brothers and sisters, and dependent upon each other, not only for comfort, but for happiness itself. She herself in her pride and exclusiveness had never really known what happiness was before, because she had never been free. Accustomed to exact and to receive homage from almost every one around her, she had been living in a kind of fool's paradise, imagining that she was not as other people, that because she had, not riches, but birth and high pedigree, she was made of different material than the "plebs," the common herd, could boast of.

Now the scales seemed falling from her eyes. She could see aright; she could even notice and learn that the world in general was independent of her, but that she was dependent on the world.

Those hardy seamen, who went merrily about at their work, talking, laughing, often singing, appeared not to know nor care that she, Lady Alwyn, was in existence. If Jack at his duty came on the quarter-deck, and she were in the way, politely but firmly Jack would tell her, "I'll trouble you to shift for a moment, ma'am."

Some of the politest of these offered an arm, and the proud Lady Alwyn was surprised at herself for accepting the kindly offered assistance.

She was surprised at herself, too, for positively feeling lost, unless she had some one to talk to, and to find herself often conversing with Captain Jahnsen as if he had been a brother, or with Meta as if she were a sister.

The latter, indeed, became indispensable to Lady Alwyn even before the ship had reached the longitude of Cape Farewell.

Before another fortnight had passed I think she really loved Meta; for Meta had been so unremittingly kind and attentive to her. She had calmed her fears when the winds or

seas were raging and the storm roaring through the rigging, and when the poor little yacht was surrounded with floating icebergs so tall and so terrible in their tallness and quiet but awful strength, that the vessel looked beside them like a tiny fly on a crystal épergne.

Meta used to read to her, play to her, sing to her, and tell her tales; but she never told her the tale—she never told her the tale of her love.

One day the book drooped listlessly in Meta's lap, and there came such a sad far-away look in her eyes, that—they were alone in the cabin—Lady Alwyn took her gently by the hand.

“What are you thinking about, dear child?” said the lady. “You have something on your mind—some grief, some sadness.”

For answer Meta burst into tears.

Had she dared she would have told her ladyship everything now; for Meta could not get over the idea that she was playing a double part, and night and day the thought troubled and vexed her. But dare she tell her? No, she feared her pride too much.

She consoled herself by remembering her vow, that she would never, never marry Claude without his mother's consent—not unless she joined her hands and blessed them.

But then Claude—might he not even now be lying cold in death? No wonder that Meta wept.

The Alba sailed on and on, or steamed on and on, encountering all the dangers usual to a passage out in these seas.

But every danger was bravely faced by the ladies, every trial was cheerfully met, and but served to bind their hearts closer together in the bonds of friendship.

Then one day, towards the latter end of April, the sun went down in a yellow haze, through which he glared red and angrily. There was ice about everywhere, bergs of every conceivable shape and size, some so big that the Alba took long minutes to steam past them, others with pinnacled top so tall that they caught the sun's rays long after he had dipped down behind the western waves. There was a look of such unwonted anxiety on good Captain Jahnsen's face that Meta must go and embrace him, and ask him if there was any danger.

“A little, dear,” he replied. “You’re a sailor’s daughter, you know, so comfort poor Lady Alwyn if it comes on to blow much, and keep up her heart.”

Meta promised she would.

The glass got suddenly hollow at top, and began to sink at an aggravatingly rapid rate.

The night would not be a very long one, but it would be pitchy dark. A heavy swell, too, was coming in from the south, that showed a storm had been raging far out in the broad Atlantic.

Again and again the captain went to the glass, tapping it uneasily. It fell, and fell, and fell.

A bit of sail was got ready, only a morsel to steady her, and the fore-hatches were battened down none too soon.

The storm came on, accompanied by blinding snow. Lady Alwyn could not sleep, though Meta sang and played to her.

Music below, sweet, soft, and plaintive; on deck the roaring, whistling, and howling of the wind through the cordage; orders being almost incessantly given to the man at the wheel, and the ship’s course thus altered a few points every minute. This was to avoid the clashing ice.

Bump, bump, bump, continually against smaller pieces that could not be avoided.

The ship was proceeding very slowly, and the captain was forward transmitting his orders aft through the trumpet, when suddenly there came a terrible crash, and the shouting and screaming after this was so dreadful that Lady Alwyn was fain to put her fingers in her ears.

The ship had been struck, her planks splintered and staved in right abaft the starboard bow.

It was “two watches to the pumps” now, while the mate and a few hands endeavoured to stem the leak by placing blankets overboard against the hole and over it. In vain; the wind was too high, the waves too merciless. With frozen fingers, the mate and his men had to desist.

Short though the night was, it was a terrible one to the ladies below. They had quite prepared to meet death. But oh! death like this is death in a dreadful form.

After what seemed an interminable time, the daylight shimmered in through the dead light on the deck of the ladies' cabin, and up and down across the glass in the scuttle the green seas could be seen washing and lap—lap—lapping.

By-and-by they heard the captain's voice in the saloon, and immediately after he sent to tell them that the danger was over, and the storm had blown itself out.

By noon next day the sea had gone so far down that temporary repairs were effected, and in a day or two more, in a calm blue sea, the ship was heeled over, and these repairs made good and substantial.

Then the Alba went on her adventurous voyage—adventurous, I mean, for so small a yacht—and the ladies took heart and came on deck to gaze and wonder at the marvels everywhere visible around them.

Into every creek went the Alba searching for tidings of the lost Kittywake.

In very few of these did they find inhabitants, and when they did, they had no news, or only sadly confusing news to give.

One day Captain Jahnsen came off from a little Yack village with a countenance beaming with hope and joy.

“I think,” he told Lady Alwyn, “I have got news of your son. Bad news partly.”

“Oh!” she cried, “it cannot be bad if he but lives.”

“Some months ago he was alive. I have met two Indians, who frankly confess they basely deserted the party after the ship had been burned, and a dearth of provisions followed. They are willing to be bribed to conduct us to the spot.”

The reader already knows who these Indians were. No time was now lost in getting ready, provisioning, and equipping a sufficient number of strong and ice-worthy sledges.

Captain Jahnsen made every endeavour to persuade Lady Alwyn from joining the toilsome and hazardous expedition, but in vain.

The snows yet lay thick on hill and vale, though the sun had risen for the day—the long Arctic day.

The ice on rivers and creeks was firm and safe, so that the course the sledge party took was a straight one. As they had travelled the road before, Jack and Joe could not now mistake it. Fast and well galloped the dogs, and wonderful was each day's work that they put behind them; yet to Lady Alwyn's mind and to Meta's they could hardly go quickly enough.

The camping out at night, or during the hours that should have been night, was terribly trying to poor Lady Alwyn. How much she must have loved her son, how much she must have repented her false pride, ere she could have exposed herself to hardships such as these.

But the journey is nearly at an end, they have passed unscathed through every danger hitherto, and there is but a short fifty miles between them and the inland sea, when suddenly the sky began to darken over and a snow-wind to moan across the dreary wilderness. For days and days they sheltered in a cave.

How trying to nerves and temper! Would the storm never abate? Would the wind never cease to howl and rave? It did at length, and joyfully the journey was resumed.

As soon as they were visible, Byarnie, who had been watching on an icy cliff top, must needs take off his jacket to wave it—a cap would not have met the requirements of the situation; then, still waving his jacket aloft and shouting, he rushed down to the camp like a maniac giant.

“They’re coming! they’re coming! they’re coming!” he cried.

Boy Bounce ran out waving his ladle aloft; Dr Barrett himself ran to meet and welcome the expedition; the men rushed to the tent door, the hale supporting those who were maimed and sick, even Claude being among the number.

But Paddy O’Connell—why, nothing less than dancing a jig could satisfy Paddy O’Connell, or keep his feelings of joy in anything like control.

“Bedad!” he told a messmate many months afterwards, “if it hadn’t been for that jig I’d have bursted entirely, and it’s the truth I’m telling ye, and never a word av a lie in it aither.”

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Chapter Twenty Four.

“It is all like a Dream.”

The journey back from the inland sea to the Yack village had been full of adventure and toil, but all happy; and there is hardly anything a person will not do or encounter when buoyed up with hope and joy.

They had stayed for two weeks at the village, that the invalids might recruit their health and strength; and then, with her sails outspread to a favouring breeze, southward she sped, literally on the wings of the wind.

“It is all like a dream,” said Claude, as he sat by Meta’s side on the quarter-deck of the yacht Alba, one beautiful summer’s day just two months after the events related in the last chapter. “All like a dream, Meta.” The vessel was coasting along the western shores of Scotland, many miles off the point of Ardnamurchan.

There was hardly a breath of air; just a little swell on, and a gentle ripple on each round heaving wave, with the sunshine weaving threads of brightest silver all through, and making rainbows in the spray and bubbles that floated away astern in the ship’s wake.

The Alba and her happy crew were returning to their native land, and if nothing occurred they would cast anchor by next morning, at the tail of the bank.

“Yes, dear,” replied Meta, “it is all like a dream—a long, long dismal dream.”

“I’m not sorry it all occurred, though, Meta; it has tried your faith and mine as well; and perhaps, you know, if things had not turned out as they have done, my mother would never have consented to our union.”

“Oh, I love your mother so, so much!” exclaimed Meta, enthusiastically. “I loved her before we were a week together in the ship; but then—”

“Then what, dearest?”

“I was not happy, because, you must know, I thought I was deceiving her, that I was playing a double part, that I ought to have told her at once who I was.”

“Do you know, Meta,” said Claude, after a pause, “I do not think I shall ever doubt the goodness of Providence again. Oh! you cannot tell, love,” he continued, “how dark my heart felt, how sad and gloomy, and how full of despair when poor Paddy reported the desertion of Jack and Joe, the Eskimo Indians. And yet, Meta, had they not deserted, your father would not have met them in the Yack village, and the probability is you would not have found us, or found us dead.”

Poor Meta shuddered, and the tears rose to her eyes. Claude hastened to change the subject.

“Do you think, dear,” he said, “you will like our country?”

Meta had not been enough in society to be anything else but candid.

“I’m sure I shall not at first,” she replied; “only—”

She paused.

“I will be with you,” said Claude, beaming.

“Yes. And after a time I dare say I shall get used to—to Scotland; but oh! never to England.”

“We will keep this yacht, Meta.”

“That will be delightful.”

“And when tired of one place, we will go to another. I have a home in the wildest part of the Highlands of Ross; we will live much there. And we will sometimes cruise away north to Norway, and to your dear Icelandic home.”

Meta was too happy to reply.

Claude’s thoughts were also very pleasant, so the lovers relapsed into silence.

There are, to my way of thinking, few events more sad than the breaking up of a ship’s company, on her return after a long voyage.

At sea we have been a little community—nay, more, a family almost. We have learned each other’s ways. We have learned to love our messmates, or at all events to regard

them with friendship. We know their peculiarities, their habits, even their weak points and faults. We have been, indeed, more than a community; we have been a little world afloat, knowing as little for the time being of any other people as the inhabitants of one planet do about those of another.

But now with the paying-off of the ship's crew all is over; from the moment the ship sails into the harbour all is changed, and every tie is ruthlessly snapped asunder.

Everything is now bustle, stir, and excitement. The very ship herself begins to look unkempt and untidy. She seems to become reckless and regardless of her personal appearance—ropes anyhow, rigging awry, dirty foot-prints on a deck that erst was snowy-white, tarnished brass and soiled mahogany. Strangers, too, crowd on board—landsmen with long hats and umbrellas; lands-women who care less for a ship than they do for a barn. You feel the vessel is no longer your home, and you long to get away out of her.

The crew is broken up; and on shore, if you meet some of the seamen you sailed with, you will hardly know them, for Jack himself seems to have degenerated, and your smartest and tidiest sailor on board may, on shore, look a veritable rake or lubber.

No; my ship never looks well in dock. Let me have her leagues and leagues away out on the silent sea; be the water rough or smooth—be it blue, green, grey, or foam-flecked, I can love her then and be quietly, serenely happy.

So the men of the Alba and the survivors of the unfortunate Icebear were scattered far and near, the yacht being left in charge of McDonald and two hands.

Meta and Claude parted for a time—Meta going home to her father's beautiful villa at R—, on the banks of the romantic Clyde. Byarnie went with his mistress. Dr Barrett became the guest of the Lady of the Towers and of Claude. The boy Bounce was here also. He took up his abode in the kitchen, and settled down to serious eating, by way, perhaps, of making up for what he had lost in the Arctic regions. And Paddy O'Connell went home to "ould Oirland" to visit his mother and his sister Biddy—"and the pig, the crayture."

My little heroine—the bonnie, winsome, lovesome Meta—had seen many changes even in her short lifetime. And now she is home for a time at her father's house. Though a very beautiful and tastefully furnished mansion, Captain Jahnsen's home was by no means a palace, but compared to Meta's cottage in Iceland, surrounded by wild, bleak, and rugged scenery—scenery nearly as silent as the grave or Greenland—her father's domains were almost a paradise.

But Meta was one of those girls that, however humble their early surroundings, if transplanted to a higher sphere, grace it. Meta, in her Norland home, dressed in homely grey or simple winsey, was a lady. Meta, arrayed in the costliest and neatest garments a fashionable costumier could devise, and, through her father's fondness, "bedecked in jewels rare," was nothing more. She was artless, straightforward, innocent, and candid. What else can you wish for in a lady, young or old?

And by-and-by Meta would be the lady of Dunallan Towers, and Claude's mother the dowager; and none to see her now could doubt she would fit and fill the proud position gracefully and well.

After a few weeks at home, during which, however, he had made many a little run to Captain Jahnsen's house, going with all a lover's joyful ardour, returning with all a lover's sad, sweet reluctance, our hero ran his vessel down the Clyde.

It mattered but very little to Claude where the beautiful yacht Alba lay while being altered and refitted, so she was moored not far from Captain Jahnsen's house. Refitted? Yes, because there were tons of iron and wood to come off her bows, and changes were to be made in her saloon and interior generally. She would sail no longer to the icy regions of the far north, but by way of change—and such a change!—to sunny lands beyond the torrid zone.

There was a deal to be done to the interior of the Alba. Fewer hands would be needed now, and therefore a new saloon for the officers, with cabins off it, was built in the fore-part of the ship. It was by no means capacious, this room, but Claude spared no expense in making it both elegant and comfortable.

The after-part of the ship was to contain Claude's private apartments, and here taste vied with elegance to make a suite of ship-rooms that nothing that is beautiful on board the finest liner could surpass.

What a pleasure it was to Claude, this refitting of what for many months was to be the ocean home of his bonnie bride!

When the last clang of hammer was hushed on board, when every artisan had left the ship, then, and not till then, did Claude invite Captain Jahnsen and his daughter to inspect the Alba.

Is it necessary to say that Meta wondered at and admired everything; asked a great many questions, and felt somewhat like a maiden under the spell of an enchanter?

But honest Captain Jahnsen viewed all in silence. It was certainly the silence of admiration for Claude's cleverness—nay, almost genius—in the art of turning a yacht into a lady's boudoir. But, after all, Jahnsen was a very practical sailor, so no doubt he thought, although he said nothing, that he would just as soon sail in a less costly fitted barque.

But then Captain Jansen was not going in the Alba. His sailing days were over, unless, as he said, something wonderful turned up to cause him to go to sea again.

Well, the Alba being completely fitted, it is only necessary to add that as many of Claude's Arctic messmates as he could find were easily prevailed upon to join the ship.

Among these I need only name boy Bounce, who was rated wardroom steward; Paddy O'Connell, second officer—he was a good sailor, and true, as we already know; giant Byarnie, head steward and general superintendent; and last, but not least, Dr Barrett, surgeon, of course. His duties were bound to be very light, and he was rejoiced to have an opportunity to get that rest in southern climes which his adventures in the Arctic regions rendered a necessity.

It was gay and happy company that sat down to breakfast on that beautiful autumn day on which Claude and Meta were married; and perhaps the happiest, the most calmly, serenely happy face at that festive board was that of the Dowager Lady Alwyn.

And Claude, with his bride, went away to sea.

But one thing is worthy of note in this place. Before bidding his mother good-bye, he took the snow-bird from his shoulder and whispered some words in its ear. I do not for a moment wish any one to believe that the bird knew what was said, but one thing is certain: when Claude placed Alba in his mother's arms, it nestled there, and it never afterwards left Dunallan Towers.

Seated on a mossy bank, in a wooded ravine, I have been writing this last chapter, dear reader mine, while the Nith goes wimpling through the glen close beneath me.

Summer winds are sighing and whispering among the silver birch trees, and their drooping branches, nodding, kiss the murmuring stream. There is a wealth of wild flowers everywhere—great banks of brambles starred over with pink-white blooms, and great banks of green and feathery breckans, up through which tower the crimson-belled stalks of the beautiful foxglove.

Musing on the story I have just completed, lulled by the river's lisping song, and mournful croodle of the wild pigeons in the dark spruce thicket, I have almost dropped into dreamland. But I start as a hand is laid on my shoulder. I start and stand up.

No need to be frightened. It is only Janet who confronts me—Janet, with her silvery hair, her mild eyes, and chastened face.

“Janet,” I say, “I have finished my story—your story.”

“The story of our boy,” says Janet, musingly, almost sadly. “And,” she adds, “you have told all about the death of my dear Dowager Lady, and how Claude never cares now to visit Dunallan Towers? Have you told how weeds now grow in the great old garden, and dark, dank nettles where the roses bloomed? How owls usurp the place of the pigeons in the ivied battlements? How on the drear, dark days of autumn the raven flaps—”

“Stay, Janet, stay,” I cry; “no trace of melancholy or gloom must tinge my last pages. Look, Janet, look up. What does yonder sky forebode, evil or good?”

It was the parting rays of the setting sun I pointed to, gleaming red upon a lovely reach of water far down the strath, and lighting up the dark pine trees and the hills that o’ertopped them with a glory not their own. It lighted up old Janet’s face, too, and her locks of silvery-grey, until her face shone—radiant.

“Ah!” she murmured, “that sky bodes a bright to-morrow.”

So, too, shall the sunset of your life and of mine be, dear reader, if our lives are spent in the discharge of duty—be it high, be it low—and if our hearts are ever brightened with a hope that is not of this world, but lies in—the Far Beyond.

The End

Freeeditorial 