

## Chapter 5.

The morning of the next day--the morning on which the ships were to sail--came bright and breezy. Mrs. Crayford, having arranged to follow her husband to the water-side, and see the last of him before he embarked, entered Clara's room on her way out of the house, anxious to hear how her young friend passed the night. To her astonishment she found Clara had risen, and was dressed, like herself, to go out.

"What does this mean, my dear? After what you suffered last night--after the shock of seeing that man--why don't you take my advice and rest in your bed?"

"I can't rest. I have not slept all night. Have you been out yet?"

"No."

"Have you seen or heard anything of Richard Wardour?"

"What an extraordinary question!"

"Answer my question! Don't trifle with me!"

"Compose yourself, Clara. I have neither seen nor heard anything of Richard Wardour. Take my word for it, he is far enough away by this time."

"No! He is here! He is near us! All night long the presentiment has pursued me--Frank and Richard Wardour will meet."

"My dear child! what are you thinking of? They are total strangers to each other."

"Something will happen to bring them together. I feel it! I know it! They will meet--there will be a mortal quarrel between them--and I shall be to blame. Oh, Lucy! why didn't I take your advice? Why was I mad enough to let Frank know that I loved him? Are you going to the landing-stage? I am all ready--I must go with you."

"You must not think of it, Clara. There will be crowding and confusion at the water-side. You are not strong enough to bear it. Wait--I won't be long away--wait till I come back."

"I must and will go with you! Crowd? He will be among the crowd! Confusion? In that confusion he will find his way to Frank! Don't ask me to wait. I shall go mad if I wait. I shall not know a moment's ease until I have seen Frank, with my own eyes, safe in the boat which takes him to his ship! You have got your bonnet on; what are we stopping here for? Come! or I shall go without you. Look at the clock; we have not a moment to lose!"

It was useless to contend with her. Mrs. Crayford yielded. The two women left the house together.

The landing-stage, as Mrs. Crayford had predicted, was thronged with spectators. Not only the relatives and friends of the Arctic voyagers, but strangers as well, had assembled in large numbers to see the ships sail. Clara's eyes wandered affrightedly hither and thither among the strange faces in the crowd; searching for the one face that she dreaded to see, and not finding it. So completely were her nerves unstrung, that she started with a cry of alarm on suddenly hearing Frank's voice behind her.

"The Sea-mew's boats are waiting," he said. "I must go, darling. How pale you are looking, Clara! Are you ill?"

She never answered. She questioned him with wild eyes and trembling lips.

"Has anything happened to you, Frank? anything out of the common?"

Frank laughed at the strange question.

"Anything out of the common?" he repeated. "Nothing that I know of, except sailing for the Arctic seas. That's out of the common, I suppose--isn't it?"

"Has anybody spoken to you since last night? Has any stranger followed you in the street?"

Frank turned in blank amazement to Mrs. Crayford.

"What on earth does she mean?"

Mrs. Crayford's lively invention supplied her with an answer on the spur of the moment.

"Do you believe in dreams, Frank? Of course you don't! Clara has been dreaming about you; and Clara is foolish enough to believe in dreams.

That's all--it's not worth talking about. Hark! they are calling you. Say good-by, or you will be too late for the boat."

Frank took Clara's hand. Long afterward--in the dark Arctic days, in the dreary Arctic nights--he remembered how coldly and how passively that hand lay in his.

"Courage, Clara!" he said, gayly. "A sailor's sweetheart must accustom herself to partings. The time will soon pass. Good-by, my darling! Good-by, my wife!"

He kissed the cold hand; he looked his last--for many a long year, perhaps!--at the pale and beautiful face. "How she loves me!" he thought. "How the parting distresses her!" He still held her hand; he would have lingered longer, if Mrs. Crayford had not wisely waived all ceremony and pushed him away.

The two ladies followed him at a safe distance through the crowd, and saw him step into the boat. The oars struck the water; Frank waved his cap to Clara. In a moment more a vessel at anchor hid the boat from view. They had seen the last of him on his way to the Frozen Deep!

"No Richard Wardour in the boat," said Mrs. Crayford. "No Richard Wardour on the shore. Let this be a lesson to you, my dear. Never be foolish enough to believe in presentiments again."

Clara's eyes still wandered suspiciously to and fro among the crowd.

"Are you not satisfied yet?" asked Mrs. Crayford.

"No," Clara answered, "I am not satisfied yet."

"What! still looking for him? This is really too absurd. Here is my husband coming. I shall tell him to call a cab, and send you home."

Clara drew back a few steps.

"I won't be in the way, Lucy, while you are taking leave of your good husband," she said. "I will wait here."

"Wait here! What for?"

"For something which I may yet see; or for something which I may still

hear."

"Richard Wardour?"

"Richard Wardour."

Mrs. Crayford turned to her husband without another word. Clara's infatuation was beyond the reach of remonstrance.

The boats of the Wanderer took the place at the landing-stage vacated by the boats of the Sea-mew. A burst of cheering among the outer ranks of the crowd announced the arrival of the commander of the expedition on the scene. Captain Holding appeared, looking right and left for his first lieutenant. Finding Crayford with his wife, the captain made his apologies for interfering, with his best grace.

"Give him up to his professional duties for one minute, Mrs. Crayford, and you shall have him back again for half an hour. The Arctic expedition is to blame, my dear lady--not the captain--for parting man and wife. In Crayford's place, I should have left it to the bachelors to find the Northwest Passage, and have stopped at home with you!"

Excusing himself in those bluntly complimentary terms, Captain Holding drew the lieutenant aside a few steps, accidentally taking a direction that led the two officers close to the place at which Clara was standing. Both the captain and the lieutenant were too completely absorbed in their professional business to notice her. Neither the one nor the other had the faintest suspicion that she could and did hear every word of the talk that passed between them.

"You received my note this morning?" the captain began.

"Certainly, Captain Holding, or I should have been on board the ship before this."

"I am going on board myself at once," the captain proceeded, "but I must ask you to keep your boat waiting for half an hour more. You will be all the longer with your wife, you know. I thought of that, Crayford."

"I am much obliged to you, Captain Holding. I suppose there is some other reason for inverting the customary order of things, and keeping the lieutenant on shore after the captain is on board?"

"Quite true! there is another reason. I want you to wait for a volunteer who has just joined us."

"A volunteer!"

"Yes. He has his outfit to get in a hurry, and he may be half an hour late."

"It's rather a sudden appointment, isn't it?"

"No doubt. Very sudden."

"And--pardon me--it's rather a long time (as we are situated) to keep the ships waiting for one man?"

"Quite true, again. But a man who is worth having is worth waiting for. This man is worth having; this man is worth his weight in gold to such an expedition as ours. Seasoned to all climates and all fatigues--a strong fellow, a brave fellow, a clever fellow--in short, an excellent officer. I know him well, or I should never have taken him. The country gets plenty of work out of my new volunteer, Crayford. He only returned yesterday from foreign service."

"He only returned yesterday from foreign service! And he volunteers this morning to join the Arctic expedition? You astonish me."

"I dare say I do! You can't be more astonished than I was, when he presented himself at my hotel and told me what he wanted. 'Why, my good fellow, you have just got home,' I said. 'Are you weary of your freedom, after only a few hours' experience of it?' His answer rather startled me. He said, 'I am weary of my life, sir. I have come home and found a trouble to welcome me, which goes near to break my heart. If I don't take refuge in absence and hard work, I am a lost man. Will you give me a refuge?' That's what he said, Crayford, word for word."

"Did you ask him to explain himself further?"

"Not I! I knew his value, and I took the poor devil on the spot, without pestering him with any more questions. No need to ask him to explain himself. The facts speak for themselves in these cases. The old story, my good friend! There's a woman at the bottom of it, of course."

Mrs. Crayford, waiting for the return of her husband as patiently as she could, was startled by feeling a hand suddenly laid on her shoulder. She looked round, and confronted Clara. Her first feeling of surprise changed

instantly to alarm. Clara was trembling from head to foot.

"What is the matter? What has frightened you, my dear?"

"Lucy! I have heard of him!"

"Richard Wardour again?"

"Remember what I told you. I have heard every word of the conversation between Captain Holding and your husband. A man came to the captain this morning and volunteered to join the Wanderer. The captain has taken him. The man is Richard Wardour."

"You don't mean it! Are you sure? Did you hear Captain Holding mention his name?"

"No."

"Then how do you know it's Richard Wardour?"

"Don't ask me! I am as certain of it, as that I am standing here! They are going away together, Lucy--away to the eternal ice and snow. My foreboding has come true! The two will meet--the man who is to marry me and the man whose heart I have broken!"

"Your foreboding has not come true, Clara! The men have not met here--the men are not likely to meet elsewhere. They are appointed to separate ships. Frank belongs to the Sea-mew, and Wardour to the Wanderer. See! Captain Holding has done. My husband is coming this way. Let me make sure. Let me speak to him."

Lieutenant Crayford returned to his wife. She spoke to him instantly.

"William! you have got a new volunteer who joins the Wanderer?"

"What! you have been listening to the captain and me?"

"I want to know his name?"

"How in the world did you manage to hear what we said to each other?"

"His name? has the captain given you his name?"

"Don't excite yourself, my dear. Look! you are positively alarming Miss Burnham. The new volunteer is a perfect stranger to us. There is his name-- last on the ship's list."

Mrs. Crayford snatched the list out of her husband's hand, and read the name:

"RICHARD WARDOUR."