

## Chapter 7.

The first sound that broke the silence came from the inner apartment. An officer lifted the canvas screen in the hut of the Sea-mew and entered the main room. Cold and privation had badly thinned the ranks. The commander of the ship--Captain Ebsworth--was dangerously ill. The first lieutenant was dead. An officer of the Wanderer filled their places for the time, with Captain Holding's permission. The officer so employed was--Lieutenant Crayford.

He approached the man at the fireside, and awakened him.

"Jump up, Bateson! It's your turn to be relieved."

The relief appeared, rising from a heap of old sails at the back of the hut. Bateson vanished, yawning, to his bed. Lieutenant Crayford walked backward and forward briskly, trying what exercise would do toward warming his blood.

The pestle and mortar on the cask attracted his attention. He stopped and looked up at the man in the hammock.

"I must rouse the cook," he said to himself, with a smile. "That fellow little thinks how useful he is in keeping up my spirits. The most inveterate croaker and grumbler in the world--and yet, according to his own account, the only cheerful man in the whole ship's company. John Want! John Want! Rouse up, there!"

A head rose slowly out of the bedclothes, covered with a red night-cap. A melancholy nose rested itself on the edge of the hammock. A voice, worthy of the nose, expressed its opinion of the Arctic climate, in these words:

"Lord! Lord! here's all my breath on my blanket. Icicles, if you please, sir, all round my mouth and all over my blanket. Every time I have snored, I've frozen something. When a man gets the cold into him to that extent that he ices his own bed, it can't last much longer. Never mind! I don't grumble."

Crayford tapped the saucepan of bones impatiently. John Want lowered himself to the floor--grumbling all the way--by a rope attached to the rafters at his bed head. Instead of approaching his superior officer and his saucepan, he hobbled, shivering, to the fire-place, and held his chin as close

as he possibly could over the fire. Crayford looked after him.

"Halloo! what are you doing there?"

"Thawing my beard, sir."

"Come here directly, and set to work on these bones."

John Want remained immovably attached to the fire-place, holding something else over the fire. Crayford began to lose his temper.

"What the devil are you about now?"

"Thawing my watch, sir. It's been under my pillow all night, and the cold has stopped it. Cheerful, wholesome, bracing sort of climate to live in; isn't it, sir? Never mind! I don't grumble."

"No, we all know that. Look here! Are these bones pounded small enough?"

John Want suddenly approached the lieutenant, and looked at him with an appearance of the deepest interest.

"You'll excuse me, sir," he said; "how very hollow your voice sounds this morning!"

"Never mind my voice. The bones! the bones!"

"Yes, sir--the bones. They'll take a trifle more pounding. I'll do my best with them, sir, for your sake."

"What do you mean?"

John Want shook his head, and looked at Crayford with a dreary smile.

"I don't think I shall have the honor of making much more bone soup for you, sir. Do you think yourself you'll last long, sir? I don't, saving your presence. I think about another week or ten days will do for us all. Never mind! I don't grumble."

He poured the bones into the mortar, and began to pound them--under protest. At the same moment a sailor appeared, entering from the inner hut.

"A message from Captain Ebsworth, sir."

"Well?"

"The captain is worse than ever with his freezing pains, sir. He wants to see you immediately."

"I will go at once. Rouse the doctor."

Answering in those terms, Crayford returned to the inner hut, followed by the sailor. John Want shook his head again, and smiled more drearily than ever.

"Rouse the doctor?" he repeated. "Suppose the doctor should be frozen? He hadn't a ha'porth of warmth in him last night, and his voice sounded like a whisper in a speaking-trumpet. Will the bones do now? Yes, the bones will do now. Into the saucepan with you," cried John Want, suiting the action to the word, "and flavor the hot water if you can! When I remember that I was once an apprentice at a pastry-cook's--when I think of the gallons of turtle-soup that this hand has stirred up in a jolly hot kitchen--and when I find myself mixing bones and hot water for soup, and turning into ice as fast as I can; if I wasn't of a cheerful disposition I should feel inclined to grumble. John Want! John Want! whatever had you done with your natural senses when you made up your mind to go to sea?"

A new voice hailed the cook, speaking from one of the bed-places in the side of the hut. It was the voice of Francis Aldersley.

"Who's that croaking over the fire?"

"Croaking?" repeated John Want, with the air of a man who considered himself the object of a gratuitous insult. "Croaking? You don't find your own voice at all altered for the worse--do you, Mr. Frank? I don't give him," John proceeded, speaking confidentially to himself, "more than six hours to last. He's one of your grumblers."

"What are you doing there?" asked Frank.

"I'm making bone soup, sir, and wondering why I ever went to sea."

"Well, and why did you go to sea?"

"I'm not certain, Mr. Frank. Sometimes I think it was natural perversity; sometimes I think it was false pride at getting over sea-sickness; sometimes

I think it was reading 'Robinson Crusoe,' and books warning of me not to go to sea."

Frank laughed. "You're an odd fellow. What do you mean by false pride at getting over sea-sickness? Did you get over sea-sickness in some new way?"

John Want's dismal face brightened in spite of himself. Frank had recalled to the cook's memory one of the noteworthy passages in the cook's life.

"That's it, sir!" he said. "If ever a man cured sea-sickness in a new way yet, I am that man--I got over it, Mr. Frank, by dint of hard eating. I was a passenger on board a packet-boat, sir, when first I saw blue water. A nasty lopp of a sea came on at dinner-time, and I began to feel queer the moment the soup was put on the table. 'Sick?' says the captain. 'Rather, sir,' says I. 'Will you try my cure?' says the captain. 'Certainly, sir,' says I. 'Is your heart in your mouth yet?' says the captain. 'Not quite, sir,' says I. 'Mock-turtle soup?' says the captain, and helps me. I swallow a couple of spoonfuls, and turn as white as a sheet. The captain cocks his eye at me. 'Go on deck, sir,' says he; 'get rid of the soup, and then come back to the cabin.' I got rid of the soup, and came back to the cabin. 'Cod's head-and-shoulders,' says the captain, and helps me. 'I can't stand it, sir,' says I. 'You must,' says the captain, 'because it's the cure.' I crammed down a mouthful, and turned paler than ever. 'Go on deck,' says the captain. 'Get rid of the cod's head, and come back to the cabin.' Off I go, and back I come. 'Boiled leg of mutton and trimmings,' says the captain, and helps me. 'No fat, sir,' says I. 'Fat's the cure,' says the captain, and makes me eat it. 'Lean's the cure,' says the captain, and makes me eat it. 'Steady?' says the captain. 'Sick,' says I. 'Go on deck,' says the captain; 'get rid of the boiled leg of mutton and trimmings and come back to the cabin.' Off I go, staggering--back I come, more dead than alive. 'Deviled kidneys,' says the captain. I shut my eyes, and got 'em down. 'Cure's beginning,' says the captain. 'Mutton-chop and pickles.' I shut my eyes, and got them down. 'Broiled ham and cayenne pepper,' says the captain. 'Glass of stout and cranberry tart. Want to go on deck again?' 'No, sir,' says I. 'Cure's done,' says the captain. 'Never you give in to your stomach, and your stomach will end in giving in to you.'"

Having stated the moral purpose of his story in those unanswerable words, John Want took himself and his saucepan into the kitchen. A moment later, Crayford returned to the hut and astonished Frank Aldersley by an unexpected question.

"Have you anything in your berth, Frank, that you set a value on?"

"Nothing that I set the smallest value on--when I am out of it," he replied.  
"What does your question mean?"

"We are almost as short of fuel as we are of provisions," Crayford proceeded.  
"Your berth will make good firing. I have directed Bateson to be here in ten minutes with his ax."

"Very attentive and considerate on your part," said Frank. "What is to become of me, if you please, when Bateson has chopped my bed into fire-wood?"

"Can't you guess?"

"I suppose the cold has stupefied me. The riddle is beyond my reading. Suppose you give me a hint?"

"Certainly. There will be beds to spare soon--there is to be a change at last in our wretched lives here. Do you see it now?"

Frank's eyes sparkled. He sprang out of his berth, and waved his fur cap in triumph.

"See it?" he exclaimed; "of course I do! The exploring party is to start at last. Do I go with the expedition?"

"It is not very long since you were in the doctor's hands, Frank," said Crayford, kindly. "I doubt if you are strong enough yet to make one of the exploring party."

"Strong enough or not," returned Frank, "any risk is better than pining and perishing here. Put me down, Crayford, among those who volunteer to go."

"Volunteers will not be accepted, in this case," said Crayford. "Captain Helling and Captain Ebsworth see serious objections, as we are situated, to that method of proceeding."

"Do they mean to keep the appointments in their own hands?" asked Frank. "I for one object to that."

"Wait a little," said Crayford. "You were playing backgammon the other day with one of the officers. Does the board belong to him or to you?"

"It belongs to me. I have got it in my locker here. What do you want with it?"

"I want the dice and the box for casting lots. The captains have arranged--most wisely, as I think--that Chance shall decide among us who goes with the expedition and who stays behind in the huts. The officers and crew of the Wanderer will be here in a few minutes to cast the lots. Neither you nor any one can object to that way of deciding among us. Officers and men alike take their chance together. Nobody can grumble."

"I am quite satisfied," said Frank. "But I know of one man among the officers who is sure to make objections."

"Who is the man?"

"You know him well enough, too. The 'Bear of the Expeditions' Richard Wardour."

"Frank! Frank! you have a bad habit of letting your tongue run away with you. Don't repeat that stupid nickname when you talk of my good friend, Richard Wardour."

"Your good friend? Crayford! your liking for that man amazes me."

Crayford laid his hand kindly on Frank's shoulder. Of all the officers of the Sea-mew, Crayford's favorite was Frank.

"Why should it amaze you?" he asked. "What opportunities have you had of judging? You and Wardour have always belonged to different ships. I have never seen you in Wardour's society for five minutes together. How can you form a fair estimate of his character?"

"I take the general estimate of his character," Frank answered. "He has got his nickname because he is the most unpopular man in his ship. Nobody likes him--there must be some reason for that."

"There is only one reason for it," Crayford rejoined. "Nobody understands Richard Wardour. I am not talking at random. Remember, I sailed from England with him in the Wanderer; and I was only transferred to the Sea-mew long after we were locked up in the ice. I was Richard Wardour's companion on board ship for months, and I learned there to do him justice. Under all his outward defects, I tell you, there beats a great and generous heart. Suspend your opinion, my lad, until you know my friend as well as I do. No more of this now. Give me the dice and the box."

Frank opened his locker. At the same moment the silence of the snowy waste outside was broken by a shouting of voices hailing the hut--"Sea-mew, ahoy!"