

## **Chapter 14.**

The night had passed.

Far and near the garden view looked its gayest and brightest in the light of the noonday sun. The cheering sounds which tell of life and action were audible all round the villa. From the garden of the nearest house rose the voices of children at play. Along the road at the back sounded the roll of wheels, as carts and carriages passed at intervals. Out on the blue sea, the distant splash of the paddles, the distant thump of the engines, told from time to time of the passage of steamers, entering or leaving the strait between the island and the mainland. In the trees, the birds sang gayly among the rustling leaves. In the house, the women-servants were laughing over some jest or story that cheered them at their work. It was a lively and pleasant time--a bright, enjoyable day.

The two ladies were out together; resting on a garden seat, after a walk round the grounds.

They exchanged a few trivial words relating to the beauty of the day, and then said no more. Possessing the same consciousness of what she had seen in the trance which persons in general possess of what they have seen in a dream--believing in the vision as a supernatural revelation--Clara's worst forebodings were now, to her mind, realized as truths. Her last faint hope of ever seeing Frank again was now at an end. Intimate experience of her told Mrs. Crayford what was passing in Clara's mind, and warned her that the attempt to reason and remonstrate would be little better than a voluntary waste of words and time. The disposition which she had herself felt on the previous night, to attach a superstitious importance to the words that Clara had spoken in the trance, had vanished with the return of the morning. Rest and reflection had quieted her mind, and had restored the composing influence of her sober sense. Sympathizing with Clara in all besides, she had no sympathy, as they sat together in the pleasant sunshine, with Clara's gloomy despair of the future. She, who could still hope, had nothing to say to the sad companion who had done with hope. So the quiet minutes succeeded each other, and the two friends sat side by side in silence.

An hour passed, and the gate-bell of the villa rang.

They both started--they both knew the ring. It was the hour when the postman brought their newspapers from London. In past days, what

hundreds on hundreds of times they had torn off the cover which inclosed the newspaper, and looked at the same column with the same weary mingling of hope and despair! There to-day--as it was yesterday; as it would be, if they lived, to-morrow--there was the servant with Lucy's newspaper and Clara's newspaper in his hand!

Would both of them do again to-day what both had done so often in the days that were gone?

No! Mrs. Crayford removed the cover from her newspaper as usual. Clara laid her newspaper aside, unopened, on the garden seat.

In silence, Mrs. Crayford looked, where she always looked, at the column devoted to the Latest Intelligence from foreign parts. The instant her eye fell on the page she started with a loud cry of joy. The newspaper fell from her trembling hand. She caught Clara in her arms. "Oh, my darling! my darling! news of them at last."

Without answering, without the slightest change in look or manner, Clara took the newspaper from the ground, and read the top line in the column, printed in capital letters:

THE ARCTIC EXPEDITION.

She waited, and looked at Mrs. Crayford.

"Can you bear to hear it, Lucy," she asked, "if I read it aloud?"

Mrs. Crayford was too agitated to answer in words. She signed impatiently to Clara to go on.

Clara read the news which followed the heading in capital letters. Thus it ran:

"The following intelligence, from St. Johns, Newfoundland, has reached us for publication. The whaling-vessel Blythewood is reported to have met with the surviving officers and men of the Expedition in Davis Strait. Many are stated to be dead, and some are supposed to be missing. The list of the saved, as collected by the people of the whaler, is not vouched for as being absolutely correct, the circumstances having been adverse to investigation. The vessel was pressed for time; and the members of the Expedition, all more or less suffering from exhaustion, were not in a position to give the necessary assistance to inquiry. Further particulars may be looked for by

the next mail."

The list of the survivors followed, beginning with the officers in the order of their rank. They both read the list together. The first name was Captain Holding; the second was Lieutenant Crayford.

There the wife's joy overpowered her. After a pause, she put her arm around Clara's waist, and spoke to her.

"Oh, my love!" she murmured, "are you as happy as I am? Is Frank's name there too? The tears are in my eyes. Read for me--I can't read for myself."

The answer came, in still, sad tones:

"I have read as far as your husband's name. I have no need to read further."

Mrs. Crayford dashed the tears from her eyes--steadied herself--and looked at the newspaper.

On the list of the survivors, the search was vain. Frank's name was not among them. On a second list, headed "Dead or Missing," the first two names that appeared were:

FRANCIS ALDERSLEY. RICHARD WARDOUR.

In speechless distress and dismay, Mrs. Crayford looked at Clara. Had she force enough in her feeble health to sustain the shock that had fallen on her? Yes! she bore it with a strange unnatural resignation--she looked, she spoke, with the sad self-possession of despair.

"I was prepared for it," she said. "I saw them in the spirit last night. Richard Wardour has discovered the truth; and Frank has paid the penalty with his life--and I, I alone, am to blame." She shuddered, and put her hand on her heart. "We shall not be long parted, Lucy. I shall go to him. He will not return to me."

Those words were spoken with a calm certainty of conviction that was terrible to hear. "I have no more to say," she added, after a moment, and rose to return to the house. Mrs. Crayford caught her by the hand, and forced her to take her seat again.

"Don't look at me, don't speak to me, in that horrible manner!" she exclaimed. "Clara! it is unworthy of a reasonable being, it is doubting the

mercy of God, to say what you have just said. Look at the newspaper again. See! They tell you plainly that their information is not to be depended on--they warn you to wait for further particulars. The very words at the top of the list show how little they knew of the truth 'Dead or Missing!' On their own showing, it is quite as likely that Frank is missing as that Frank is dead. For all you know, the next mail may bring a letter from him. Are you listening to me?"

"Yes."

"Can you deny what I say?"

"No."

"'Yes!' 'No!' Is that the way to answer me when I am so distressed and so anxious about you?"

"I am sorry I spoke as I did, Lucy. We look at some subjects in very different ways. I don't dispute, dear, that yours is the reasonable view."

"You don't dispute?" retorted Mrs. Crayford, warmly. "No! you do what is worse--you believe in your own opinion; you persist in your own conclusion--with the newspaper before you! Do you, or do you not, believe the newspaper?"

"I believe in what I saw last night."

"In what you saw last night! You, an educated woman, a clever woman, believing in a vision of your own fancy--a mere dream! I wonder you are not ashamed to acknowledge it!"

"Call it a dream if you like, Lucy. I have had other dreams at other times--and I have known them to be fulfilled."

"Yes!" said Mrs. Crayford. "For once in a way they may have been fulfilled, by chance--and you notice it, and remember it, and pin your faith on it. Come, Clara, be honest!--What about the occasions when the chance has been against you, and your dreams have not been fulfilled? You superstitious people are all alike. You conveniently forget when your dreams and your presentiments prove false. For my sake, dear, if not for your own," she continued, in gentler and tenderer tones, "try to be more reasonable and more hopeful. Don't lose your trust in the future, and your trust in God. God, who has saved my husband, can save Frank. While there is doubt,

there is hope. Don't embitter my happiness, Clara! Try to think as I think--if it is only to show that you love me."

She put her arm round the girl's neck, and kissed her. Clara returned the kiss; Clara answered, sadly and submissively,

"I do love you, Lucy. I will try."

Having answered in those terms, she sighed to herself, and said no more. It would have been plain, only too plain, to far less observant eyes than Mrs. Crayford's that no salutary impression had been produced on her. She had ceased to defend her own way of thinking, she spoke of it no more--but there was the terrible conviction of Frank's death at Wardour's hands rooted as firmly as ever in her mind! Discouraged and distressed, Mrs. Crayford left her, and walked back toward the house.