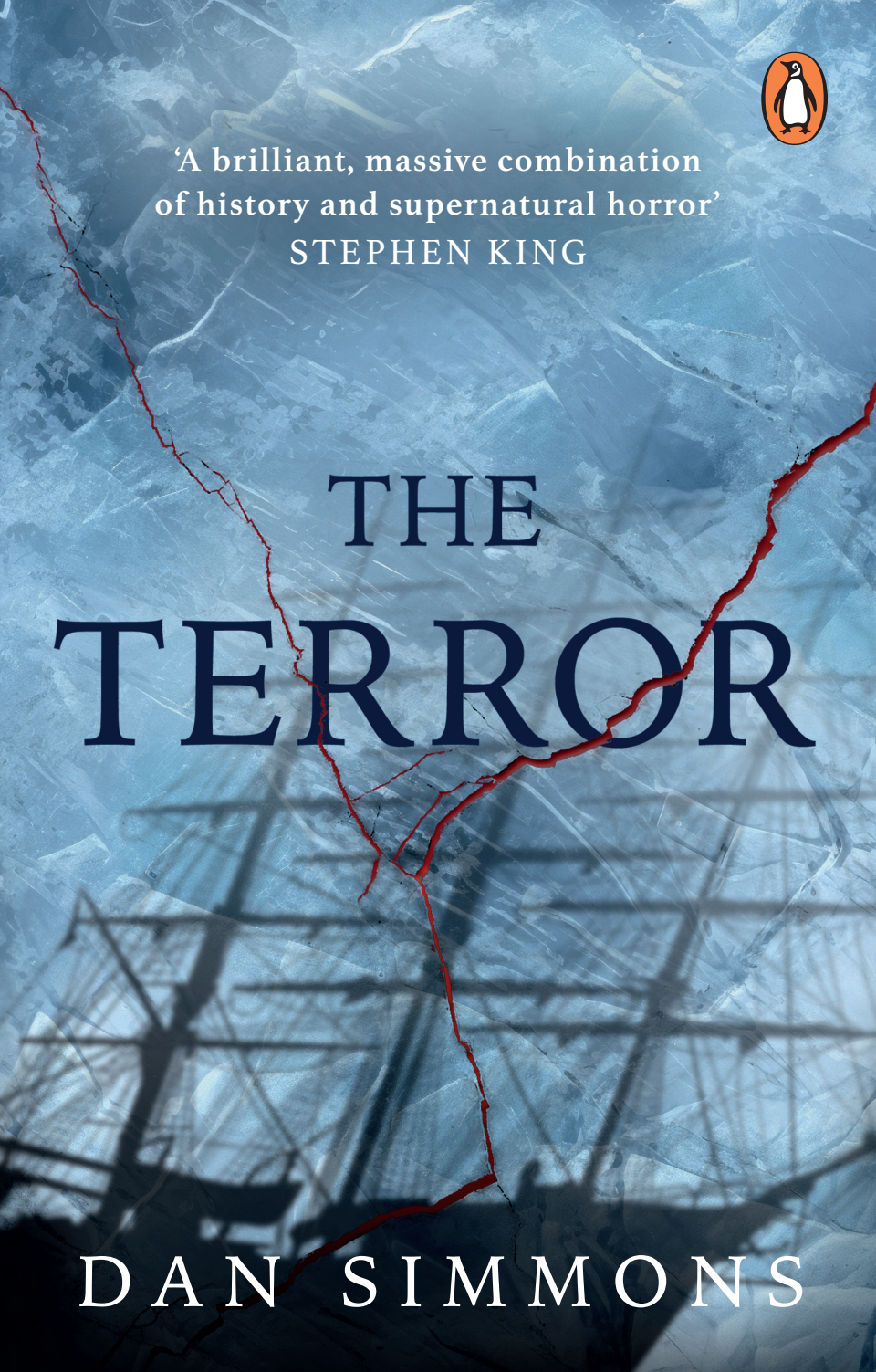

'A brilliant, massive combination
of history and supernatural horror'
STEPHEN KING
THE
TERROR
DAN SIMMONS

Dan Simmons worked in education for eighteen years before becoming a full-time writer. A multi-award winner (including a Hugo, a Bram Stoker and a World Fantasy award), he is the author of novels that span science fiction, suspense, horror, historical and fantasy, including *Song of Kali*, the *Hyperion* Cantos and the *Ilium/Olympos* cycle, *Carrion Comfort*, *Darwin's Blade*, *The Terror*, *Drood*, *Black Hills*, *Flashback*, *The Abominable* and *The Fifth Heart*. He lives in Colorado.

Acclaim for *The Terror*:

'A brilliant, massive combination of history and supernatural horror'
Stephen King

'I emerged from the novel, shivering, terrified and Arctic-obsessed . . . I couldn't put it down . . . a truly chilling horror novel, made even more terrifying when you remember that much of the horror Simmons describes is based on reality'
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'A chilling supernatural novel . . . the horrific trials of their impending icy deaths are vividly brought to life'
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Ken McGoogan, author of *Lady Franklin's Revenge*

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The TERROR

DAN SIMMONS



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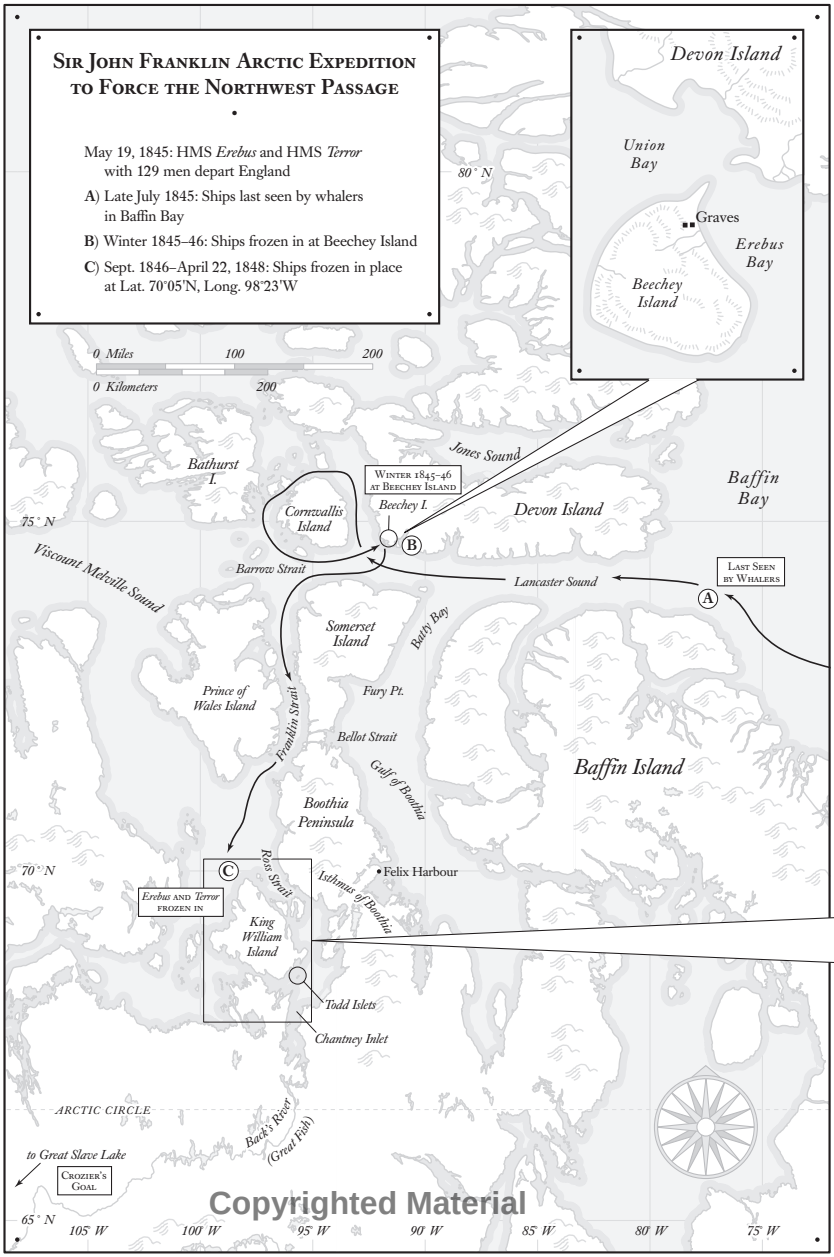
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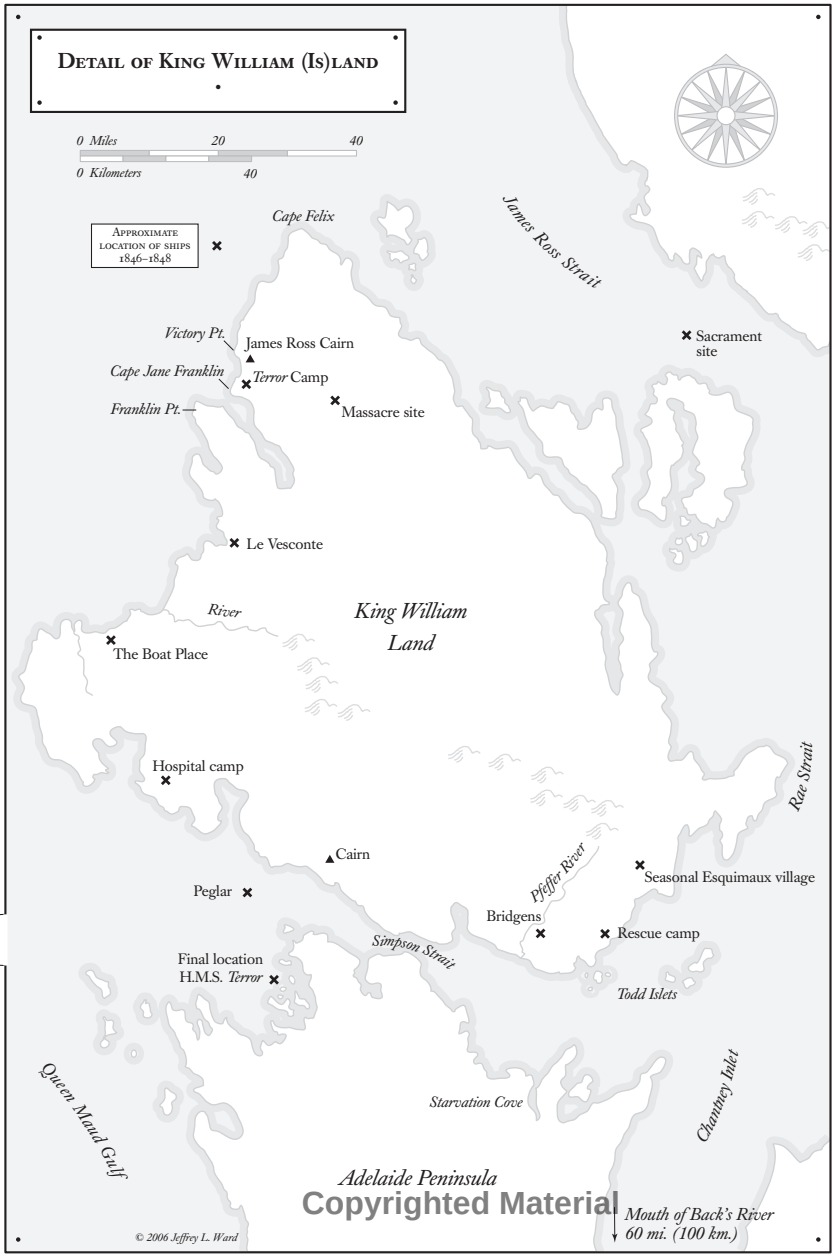


This book is dedicated, with love and many thanks for the indelible Arctic memories, to Kenneth Tobey, Margaret Sheridan, Robert Cornthwaite, Douglas Spencer, Dewey Martin, William Self, George Fenneman, Dmitri Tiomkin, Charles Lederer, Christian Nyby, Howard Hawkes, and James Arness.

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This elusive quality it is, which causes the thought of whiteness, when divorced from more kindly associations, and coupled with any object terrible in itself, to heighten that terror to the furthest bounds. Witness the white bear of the poles, and the white shark of the tropics; what but their smooth, flaky whiteness makes them the transcendent horrors they are? That ghastly whiteness it is which imparts such an abhorrent mildness, even more loathesome than terrific, to the dumb gloating of their aspect. So that not the fierce-fanged tiger in his heraldic coat can so stagger courage as the white-shrouded bear or shark.

—Herman Melville
Moby Dick (1851)

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The TERROR

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1

CROZIER

Lat. 70°-05′ N., Long. 98°-23′ W.
October, 1847

Captain Crozier comes up on deck to find his ship under attack by celestial ghosts. Above him — above *Terror* — shimmering folds of light lunge but then quickly withdraw like the colourful arms of aggressive but ultimately uncertain spectres. Ectoplasmic skeletal fingers extend toward the ship, open, prepare to grasp, and pull back.

The temperature is −50 degrees Fahrenheit and dropping fast. Because of the fog that came through earlier, during the single hour of weak twilight now passing for their day, the foreshortened masts — the three topmasts, topgallants, upper rigging, and highest spars have been removed and stored to cut down on the danger of falling ice and to reduce the chances of the ship capsizing because of the weight of ice on them — stand now like rudely pruned and topless trees reflecting the aurora that dances from one dimly seen horizon to the other. As Crozier watches, the jagged ice fields around the ship turn blue, then bleed violet, then glow as green as the hills of his childhood in northern Ireland. Almost a mile off the starboard bow, the gigantic floating ice mountain that hides *Terror*'s sister ship, *Erebus*, from view seems for a brief, false

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moment to radiate colour from within, glowing from its own cold, internal fires.

Pulling up his collar and tilting his head back, out of forty years' habit of checking the status of masts and rigging, Crozier notices that the stars overhead burn cold and steady but those near the horizon not only flicker but shift when stared at, moving in short spurts to the left, then to the right, then jiggling up and down. Crozier has seen this before — in the far south with Ross as well as in these waters on earlier expeditions. A scientist on that south polar trip, a man who spent the first winter in the ice there grinding and polishing lenses for his own telescope, had told Crozier that the perturbation of the stars was probably due to rapidly shifting refraction in the cold air lying heavy but uneasy over the ice-covered seas and unseen frozen landmasses. In other words, over new continents never before seen by the eyes of man. Or at least, Crozier thinks, in this northern arctic, by the eyes of white men.

Crozier and his friend and then commander James Ross had found just such a previously undiscovered continent — Antarctica — less than five years earlier. They named the sea, inlets, and landmass after Ross. They named mountains after their sponsors and friends. They named the two volcanoes they could see on the horizon after their two ships — these same two ships — calling the smoking mountains Erebus and Terror. Crozier was surprised they hadn't named some major piece of geography after the ship's cat.

They named nothing after him. There is, on this October winter's dark-day evening in 1847, no arctic or antarctic continent, island, bay, inlet, range of mountains, ice shelf, volcano, or fucking floeberg which bears the name of Francis Rawdon Moira Crozier.

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Crozier doesn't give the slightest God-damn. Even as he thinks this, he realizes that he's a little bit drunk. Well, he thinks, automatically adjusting his balance to the icy deck now canted twelve degrees to starboard and down eight degrees by the bow, *I've been drunk more often than not now for three years, haven't I? Drunk ever since Sophia. But I'm still a better sailor and captain drunk than that poor, unlucky bastard Franklin ever was sober. Or his rosy-cheeked lisping pet poodle Fitzjames, for that matter.*

Crozier shakes his head and walks down the icy deck forward to the bow and toward the only man on watch he can make out in the flickering light from the aurora.

It is short, rat-faced Cornelius Hickey, caulker's mate. The men look all the same out here on watch in the dark, since they're all issued the same cold-weather slops: layers of flannel and wool covered with a heavy waterproof great-coat, bulbous mittens protruding from voluminous sleeves, their Welsh wigs — heavy watch caps with floppy ears — pulled tight, often with long comforters — scarves — wrapped around their heads until only the tips of their frostbitten noses are visible. But each man layers or wears his cold-weather slops slightly differently — adding a comforter from home, perhaps, or an extra Welsh wig tugged down over the first, or perhaps colorful gloves lovingly knit by a mother or wife or sweetheart peeking out from under the Royal Navy outer mittens — and Crozier has learned to tell all fifty-nine of his surviving officers and men apart, even at a distance outside and in the dark.

Hickey is staring fixedly out beyond the icicle-sheathed bowsprit, the foremost ten feet of which are now embedded in a ridge of sea ice, as HMS *Terror*'s stern has been forced up by the ice pressure and the bow is pushed lower. Hickey is so lost in thought of cold that the caulker's

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mate doesn't notice his captain's approach until Crozier joins him at a railing that has become an altar of ice and snow. The lookout's shotgun is propped against that altar. No man wants to touch metal out here in the cold, not even through mittens.

Hickey starts slightly as Crozier leans close to him at the railing. *Terror*'s captain can't see the twenty-six-year-old's face, but a puff of his breath — instantly turning into a cloud of ice crystals reflecting the aurora — appears beyond the thick circle of the smaller man's multiple comforters and Welsh wig.

Men traditionally don't salute during the winter in the ice, not even the casual knuckling of the forehead an officer receives at sea, but the thickclad Hickey does that odd little shuffle and shrug and head dip by which the men acknowledge their captain's presence while outside. Because of the cold, the watches have been cut down from four hours to two — God knows, thinks Crozier, we have enough men for that on this overcrowded ship, even with the lookouts doubled — and he can tell just by Hickey's slow movements that he's half-frozen. As many times as he's told the lookouts that they have to keep moving on deck — walk, run in place, jump up and down if they have to, all the while keeping their attention on the ice — they still tend to stand immobile for the majority of their watch, just as if they were in the South Seas wearing their tropical cotton and watching for mermaids.

"Captain."

"Mr. Hickey. Anything?"

"Nothing since them shots . . . that one shot . . . almost two hours ago, sir. Just a while ago I heard, I think I heard . . . maybe a scream, something, Captain . . . from out beyond the ice mountain. I reported it to Lieutenant

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Irving, but he said it was probably just the ice acting up."

Crozier had been told about the sound of the shot from the direction of *Erebus* and had quickly come up on deck two hours ago, but there'd been no repetition of the sound and he'd sent no messenger to the other ship nor anyone out on the ice to investigate. To go out on the frozen sea in the dark now with that . . . *thing* . . . waiting in the jumble of pressure ridges and tall sastrugi was certain death. Messages were passed between the ships now only during those dwindling minutes of halflight around noon. In a few days, there would be no real day at all, only arctic night. Roundtheclock night. One hundred days of night.

"Perhaps it was the ice,"says Crozier, wondering why Irving hadn't reported the possible scream. "The shot as well. Only the ice."

"Yes, Captain. The ice it is, sir."

Neither man believes it — a musket shot or shotgun blast has a distinctive sound, even from a mile away, and sound travels almost supernaturally far and clearly this far north — but it's true that the ice pack squeezing ever more tightly against *Terror* is always rumbling, moaning, cracking, snapping, roaring, or screaming.

The screams bother Crozier the most, waking him from his hour or so of sound sleep each night. They sound too much like his mother's crying in her last days . . . of that and his old aunt's tales of banshees wailing in the night, predicting the death of someone in the house. Both had kept him awake as a boy.

Crozier turns slowly. His eyelashes are already rimmed with ice, and his upper lip is crusted with frozen breath and snot. The men have learned to keep their beards tucked far under their comforters and sweaters, but frequently they must resort to hacking away hair that has frozen to their

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clothing. Crozier, like most of the officers, continues to shave every morning, although, in the effort to conserve coal, the "hot water"his steward brings him tends to be just barely melted ice, and shaving can be a painful business.

"Is Lady Silence still on deck?"asks Crozier.

"Oh, yes, Captain, she's almost always up here,' says Hickey, whispering now as if it made a difference. Even if Silence could hear them, she couldn't understand their English. But the men believe — more and more every day the thing on the ice stalks them — that the young Esquimaux woman is a witch with secret powers.

"She's at the port station with Lieutenant Irving," adds Hickey.

"Lieutenant Irving? His watch should have been over an hour ago."

"Aye, sir. But wherever Lady Silence is these days, there's the lieutenant, sir, if you don't mind me mentioning it. She don't go below, he don't go below. Until he has to, I mean . . . None of us can stay out here as long as that wi—. . . that woman."

"Keep your eyes on the ice, and your mind on your job, Mr. Hickey."

Crozier's gruff voice makes the caulker's mate start again, but he shuffles his shrug salute and turns his white nose back toward the darkness beyond the bow.

Crozier strides up the deck toward the port lookout post. The previous month, he prepared the ship for winter after three weeks of false hope of escape in August. Crozier had once again ordered the lower spars to be swung around along the parallel axis of the ship, using them as a ridgepole. Then they had reconstructed the tent pyramid to cover most of the main deck, rebuilding the wooden rafters that had been stowed below during their few weeks of

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optimism. But even though the men work hours every day shoveling avenues through the foot or so of snow left for insulation on deck, hacking away ice with picks and chisels, clearing out the spindrift that has come under the canvas roof, and finally putting lines of sand down for traction, there always remains a glaze of ice. Crozier's movement up the tilted and canted deck is sometimes more a graceful half-skating motion than a stride.

The appointed port lookout for this watch, midshipman Tommy Evans — Crozier identifies the youngest man on board by the absurd green stocking cap, obviously made by the boy's mother, that Evans always pulls down over his bulky Welsh wig — has moved ten paces astern to allow Third Lieutenant Irving and Silence some privacy.

This makes Captain Crozier want to kick someone — everyone — in the arse.

The Esquimaux woman looks like a short round bear in her furry parka, hood, and pants. She has her back half turned to the tall lieutenant. But Irving is crowded close to her along the rail — not quite touching, but closer than an officer and gentleman would stand to a lady at a garden party or on a pleasure yacht.

"Lieutenant Irving." Crozier didn't mean to put quite so much bark into the greeting, but he's not unhappy when the young man levitates as if poked by the point of a sharp blade, almost loses his balance, grabs the iced railing with his left hand, and — as he insists on doing despite now knowing the proper protocol of a ship in the ice — salutes with his right hand.

It's a pathetic salute, thinks Crozier, and not just because the bulky mittens, Welsh wig, and layers of cold-weather slops make young Irving look something like a saluting walrus, but also because the lad has let his comforter fall

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away from his cleanshaven face — perhaps to show Silence how handsome he is — and now two long icicles dangle below his nostrils, making him look even more like a walrus.

"As you were," snaps Crozier. *God-damn fool*, he mentally adds.

Irving stands rigid, glances at Silence — or at least at the back of her hairy hood — and opens his mouth to speak. Evidently he can think of nothing to say. He closes his mouth. His lips are as white as his frozen skin.

"This isn't your watch, Lieutenant," says Crozier, hearing the whipcrack in his voice again.

"Aye, aye, sir. I mean, no, sir. I mean, the captain is correct, sir. I mean . . ." Irving clamps his mouth shut again, but the effect is ruined somewhat by the chattering of his teeth. In this cold, teeth can shatter after two or three hours — actually explode — sending shrapnel of bone and enamel flying inside the cavern of one's clenched jaws. Sometimes, Crozier knows from experience, you can hear the enamel cracking just before the teeth explode.

"Why are you still out here, John?"

Irving tries to blink, but his eyelids are literally frozen open. "You ordered me to watch over our guest . . .to look out for . . . to take care of Silence, Captain."

Crozier's sigh emerges as ice crystals that hang in the air for a second and then fall to the deck like so many minuscule diamonds. "I didn't mean every *minute*, Lieutenant. I told you to watch her, report to me on what she does, to keep her out of mischief and harm's way on the ship, and to see that none of the men do anything to . . . compromise her. Do you think she's in danger of being compromised out here on deck, Lieutenant?"

"No, Captain." Irving's sentence sounds more like a question than an answer.

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"Do you know how long it takes for exposed flesh to freeze out here, Lieutenant?"

"No, Captain. I mean, yes, Captain. Rather quickly, sir, I think."

"You should know, Lieutenant Irving. You've had frostbite six times already, and it's not even officially winter yet."

Lieutenant Irving nods dolefully.

"It takes *less than a minute* for an exposed finger or thumb — or any fleshy appendage — to freeze solid," continues Crozier, who knows that this is a load of horse cobblers. It takes much longer than that at a mere fifty below, but he hopes that Irving doesn't know this. "After that, the exposed member will snap off like an icicle," adds Crozier.

"Yes, Captain."

"So do you really think there's any chance that our visitor might be . . . compromised . . . out here on deck, Mr. Irving?"

Irving seems to be thinking about this before replying. It's possible, Crozier realizes, that the third lieutenant has put far too much thought into this equation already.

"Go below, John," says Crozier. "And see Dr. McDonald about your face and fingers. I swear to God that if you've gotten seriously frostbitten again, I'll dock you a month's Discovery Service pay and write your mother to boot."

"Yes, Captain. Thank you, sir." Irving starts to salute again, thinks better of it, and ducks under the canvas toward the main ladderway with one hand still half raised. He does not look back at Silence.

Crozier sighs again. He likes John Irving. The lad had volunteered — along with two of his mates from the HMS *Excellent*, Second Lieutenant Hodgson and First Mate Hornby — but the *Excellent* was a damned three-decker that was old before Noah had fuzz around his dongle. The ship

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had been mastless and permanently moored in Portsmouth, Crozier knew, for more than fifteen years, serving as a training vessel for the Royal Navy's most promising gunners. *Unfortunately, gentlemen*, Crozier had told the boys during their first day aboard — the captain had been more than usually drunk that day — *if you look around, you'll notice that while* Terror *and* Erebus *were both built as bombardment ships, gentlemen, neither has a single gun between them. We are, young volunteers from* Excellent — *unless one counts the Marines' muskets and the shotguns secured in the Spirit Room — as gunless as a newborn babe. As gunless as fucking Adam in his fucking birthday suit. In other words, gentlemen, you gunnery experts are about as useful to this expedition as teats would be on a boar.*

Crozier's sarcasm that day hadn't dampened the young gunnery officers' enthusiasm — Irving and the other two remained more eager than ever to go get frozen in the ice for several winters. Of course, that had been on a warm May day in England in 1845.

"And now the poor young pup is in love with an Esquimaux witch," Crozier mutters aloud.

As if understanding his words, Silence turns slowly toward him.

Usually her face is invisible down the deep tunnel of her hood, or her features are masked by the wide ruff of wolf hair, but tonight Crozier can see her tiny nose, large eyes, and full mouth. The pulse of the aurora is reflected in those black eyes.

She's not attractive to Captain Francis Rawdon Moira Crozier; she has too much of the savage about her to be seen as fully human, much less as physically attractive — even to a Presbyterian Irishman — and besides that, his mind and lower regions are still filled with clear memories of Sophia Cracroft. But Crozier can see why Irving, far

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from home and family and any sweetheart of his own, might fall in love with this heathen woman. Her strangeness alone — and perhaps even the grim circumstances of her arrival and the death of her male companion, so strangely intertwined with the first attacks from that monstrous entity out there in the dark — must be like a flame to the fluttering moth of so hopeless a young romantic as Third Lieutenant John Irving.

Crozier, on the other hand, as he discovered both in Van Diemen's Land in 1840 and again for the final time in England in the months before this expedition sailed, is too old for romance. And too Irish. And too common.

Right now he just wishes this young woman would take a walk out onto the dark ice and not return.

Crozier remembers the day four months earlier when Dr. McDonald had reported to Franklin and him after examining her, on the same afternoon the Esquimaux man with her had died choking in his own blood. McDonald said, in his medical opinion, the Esquimaux girl appeared to be between fifteen and twenty years old — it was so hard to tell with native peoples — had experienced menarche, but was, by all indications, *virgo intacta*. Also, Dr. McDonald reported, the reason that the girl had not spoken or made a sound — even after her father or husband had been shot and lay dying — was because she had no tongue. In Dr. McDonald's opinion, her tongue had not been sliced off but had been chewed off near its root, either by Silence herself or by someone or something else.

Crozier had been astonished — not so much by the fact of the missing tongue, but from hearing that the Esquimaux wench was a virgin. He'd spent enough time in the northern arctic — especially during Parry's expedition, which wintered near an Esquimaux village — to know that

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the local natives took sexual intercourse so lightly that men would offer their wives and daughters to whalers or Discovery Service explorers in exchange for the cheapest trinket. Sometimes, Crozier knew, the women just offered themselves up for the fun of it, giggling and chatting with other women or children even as the sailors strained and puffed and moaned between the laughing women's legs. They were like animals. The furs and hairy hides they wore might as well be their own beastlike skins as far as Francis Crozier was concerned.

The captain raises his gloved hand to the bill of his cap, secured under two wraps of heavy comforter and therefore impossible to doff or tip, and says, "My compliments to you, madam, and I would suggest you consider going below to your quarters soon. It's getting a bit nippy out here."

Silence stares at him. She does not blink, although somehow her long lashes are free of ice. She does not, of course, speak. She watches him.

Crozier symbolically tips his hat again and continues his tour around the deck, climbing to the ice-raised stern and then down the starboard side, pausing to speak to the other two men on watch, giving Irving time to get below and out of his coldweather slops so that the captain doesn't seem to be following hard on his lieutenant's heels.

He's finishing his chat with the last shivering lookout, Able Seaman Shanks, when Private Wilkes, the youngest of the Marines aboard, comes rushing out from under the canvas. Wilkes has thrown on only two loose layers over his uniform, and his teeth begin chattering even before he delivers his message.

"Mr. Thompson's compliments to the captain, sir, and the engineer says that the captain should come down to the hold as quick as you might."

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"Why?" If the boiler has finally broken down, Crozier knows, they are all dead.

"Begging the captain's pardon, sir, but Mr. Thompson says that the captain is needed because Seaman Manson is near to mutiny, sir."

Crozier stands up straight. "Mutiny?"

" 'Near to it' were Mr. Thompson's words, sir."

"Speak English, Private Wilkes."

"Manson won't carry no more sacks of coal past the Dead Room, sir. Nor go down in the hold no more. He says he respectfully refuses, Captain. He won't come up, but he's sitting on his arse at the bottom of the man-ladder and won't carry no more coal back to the boiler room."

"What is this nonsense?" Crozier feels the first stirrings of a familiar dark Irish anger.

"It's the ghosts, Captain," says Marine Private Wilkes through chattering teeth. "We all hear 'em when we're hauling coal or fetching something from deep stores. It's why the men won't go down there below orlop deck no more unless the officers order 'em to, sir. Something's down there in the hold, in the dark. Something's been scratching and banging from *inside* the ship, Captain. It ain't just the ice. Manson's sure it's his old mate Walker, him . . . it . . . and the other corpses stacked there in the Dead Room, clawing to get out."

Crozier checks his impulse to reassure the Marine private with facts. Young Wilkes might not find the facts so reassuring.

The first simple fact is that the scrabbling noise from the Dead Room is almost certainly the hundreds or thousands of large black rats feasting on Wilkes's frozen comrades. The Norway rats — as Crozier knows better than the young Marine — are nocturnal, which means that they're active

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day and night during the long arctic winter, and the creatures have teeth which constantly keep growing. This, in turn, means the God-damned vermin have to keep chewing. He has seen them chew through Royal Navy oak barrels, inch-thick tins, and even lead plating. The rats are having no more trouble down there with the frozen remains of Seaman Walker and his five unlucky comrades — including three of Crozier's finest officers — than a man would have chewing on a strip of frigid salted beef.

But Crozier doesn't think it's only the rats that Manson and the others are hearing.

Rats, as Crozier knows from the sad experience of thirteen winters in the ice, tend to eat one's friends quietly and efficiently, except for their frequent screeching as the blood-maddened and ravenous vermin turn on one another.

It's something else making the clawing and banging noises down on hold deck.

What Crozier decides not to remind Private Wilkes of is the second simple fact: while the lowest deck would normally be cold but safe there beneath the waterline or winter line of frozen sea ice, the pressure from the ice has forced *Terror*'s stern more than a dozen feet higher than it should be. The hull there is still locked in, but only by several hundred heaped tons of jagged sea ice and the added tons of snow the men have piled alongside to within a few feet of the railings so as to provide more insulation during the winter.

Something, Francis Crozier suspects, has dug down through these tons of snow and tunneled through the iron-hard slabs of ice to get at the hull of the ship. Somehow the thing has sensed which parts of the interior along the hull, such as the water-storage tanks, are lined with iron, and has

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found one of the few hollow outside storage areas — the Dead Room — that leads directly into the ship. And now it's banging and clawing to get in.

Crozier knows that there's only one thing on earth with that much power, deadly persistence, and malevolent intelligence. The monster on the ice is trying to get at them from below.

Without saying another word to Marine Private Wilkes, Captain Crozier goes below to sort things out.

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2

FRANKLIN

Lat. 51°-29' N., Long. 0°-0' W.
London, May, 1845

He was — and always would be — the man who ate his shoes.

Four days before they were to sail, Captain Sir John Franklin contracted the influenza that had been going around, getting it, he was sure, not from one of the common sailors and stevedores loading the ships at London's docks, nor from any of his one hundred and thirty-four crew members and officers — they were all healthy as dray horses — but from some sickly sycophant in one of Lady Jane's circles of society friends.

The man who ate his shoes.

It was traditional for the wives of arctic heroes to sew a flag to be planted at some point farthest north, or in this case raised upon the completion of the expedition's transit of the NorthWest Passage, and Franklin's wife, Jane, was finishing her sewing of the silken Union Jack when he came home. Sir John came into the parlour and half collapsed onto the horsehair sofa near where she sat. Later he did not remember removing his boots, but someone must have — either Jane or one of the servants — for soon he was lying back and half dozing, his head aching, his stomach more unsteady than it had ever been at sea, and his skin burning

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with fever. Lady Jane was telling him about her busy day, never pausing in her recital. Sir John tried to listen as the fever carried him off on its uncertain tide.

He was the man who ate his shoes, and had been for twenty-three years, ever since he returned to England in 1822 after his first, failed overland expedition across northern Canada to find the North-West Passage. He remembered the sniggers and jokes upon his return. Franklin had eaten his shoes — and he'd eaten worse on that botched three-year journey, including *tripe-de-roche*, a disgusting gruel made from lichen scraped from rocks. Two years out and starving, he and his men — Franklin had dazedly divided his troop into three groups and left the other two bands to survive or die on their own — had boiled the uppers on their boots and shoes to survive. Sir John — he was just John then, he was knighted for incompetency after a later overland voyage and botched polar expedition by sea — had spent days in 1821 chewing on nothing more than scraps of untanned leather. His men had eaten their buffalo sleeping robes. Then some of them had moved on to other things.

But he had never eaten another man.

To this day, Franklin doubted whether others on his expedition, including his good friend and chief lieutenant Dr. John Richardson, had succeeded in resisting that temptation. Too much had happened while the parties were separated as they stumbled through the arctic wastes and forests, desperately trying to get back to Franklin's little improvised Fort Enterprise and the real forts, Providence and Resolution.

Nine white men and one Esquimaux dead. Nine dead out of the twenty-one men young Lieutenant John Franklin, thirty-three years old and pudgy and balding even then, had

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led out of Fort Resolution in 1819, plus one of the native guides they'd picked up along the way — Franklin had refused to let the man leave the expedition to forage for himself. Two of the men had been murdered in cold blood. At least one of them was, without doubt, devoured by others. But only one Englishman died. Only one real white man. All the rest were mere French *voyageurs* or Indians. This was success of a sort — only one white Englishman dead, even if all the others had been reduced to gibbering, bearded skeletons. Even if all the others survived only because George Back, that confounded, oversexed midshipman, had snowshoed 1,200 miles to bring back supplies and — more important than supplies — more Indians to feed and care for Franklin and his dying party.

That confounded Back. Not a good Christian at all. Arrogant. Not a true gentleman, despite his later being knighted for an arctic expedition sailing on this very same HMS *Terror* that Sir John now commanded.

On that expedition, Back's expedition, *Terror* had been flung fifty feet into the air by a rising tower of ice, then thrown down so violently that every oak plank in the hull sprang a leak. George Back brought the leaking boat all the way back to the coast of Ireland, beaching it just hours before it would have sunk. The crew had wrapped chains around it to squeeze the boards tight long enough for the vessel to get them home. All the men had scurvy — black gums, bleeding eyes, teeth falling out of their heads — and the madness and delusions that went with scurvy.

They'd knighted Back after that, of course. It's what England and the Admiralty did after you returned from a polar expedition that failed miserably, resulting in appalling loss of life; if you survived, they gave you a title and a parade. After Franklin returned from his second coastal-

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mapping expedition in the far north of North America in 1827, he was personally knighted by King George IV. The Geographical Society of Paris gave him a gold medal. He was awarded captaincy of the beautiful little 26-gun frigate HMS *Rainbow* and ordered to the Mediterranean, a destination to which every captain in the Royal Navy prayed nightly for posting. He proposed marriage to one of his dead wife Eleanor's dearest friends, the energetic, beautiful, and outspoken Jane Griffin.

"So I explained to Sir James over tea," Jane was saying, "that my darling Sir John's credit and reputation are infinitely dearer to me than any selfish enjoyment of my husband's society, even if he must be gone for four years . . . or five."

What was the name of that fifteen-year-old Copper Indian girl that Back was going to fight a duel over at their winter quarters of Fort Enterprise?

Greenstockings. That was it. Greenstockings.

That girl was evil. Beautiful, yes, but evil. She had no shame. Franklin himself, despite all efforts never to look her way, had seen her slip out of her heathen robes and walk naked across half the length of the cabin one moonlit night.

He was thirty-four years old at the time, but she was the first naked human female he had ever seen and even now the most beautiful. The dark skin. The breasts already heavy as globed fruit but also still those of an adolescent, the nipples not yet raised, the areolae strange, smooth dark-brown circles. It was an image Sir John had not been able to eradicate from his memory — try and pray as he might — in the quarter of a century since then. The girl had not the classic V of pubic hair that Franklin had later seen on his first wife, Eleanor — glimpsed only once, as she prepared

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for her bath, since Eleanor never allowed the slightest light to illuminate their rare lovemaking — or the sparser but wilder wheatcoloured nest that was part of the aging body of his current wife, Jane. No, the Indian girl Greenstockings had only a narrow but pure-black vertical escutcheon above her female parts. As delicate as a raven's feather. As pitch black as sin itself.

The Scotsman midshipman, Robert Hood, who had already fathered one bastard with a different Indian woman during that endless first winter at the cabin Franklin had named Fort Enterprise, had promptly fallen in love with teenaged Copper squaw Greenstockings. The girl had previously been lying with the other midshipman, George Back, but with Back gone hunting, she'd shifted her sexual allegiance to Hood with the ease known only to pagans and primitives.

Franklin could still remember the grunts of passion in the long night — not the passion of a few minutes, as he had experienced with Eleanor (never grunting or making a noise, of course, since no gentleman would do that), or even two brief bouts of passion, such as on that memorable night on his honeymoon with Jane; no, Hood and Greenstockings went at it half a dozen times. No sooner would Hood's and the girl's noises stop in the adjoining lean-to than they would begin again — laughter, low giggles, then soft moans, leading again to the louder cries as the brazen girl-woman urged Hood on.

Jane Griffin was thirty-six years old when she married the newly knighted Sir John Franklin on December 5, 1828. They honeymooned in Paris. Franklin did not especially like the city, nor did he like the French, but their hotel had been luxurious and the food very good.

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Franklin had been in a sort of dread that during their

travels on the continent they might run into that Roget fellow — Peter Mark, the one who gained some sort of literary attention by preparing to publish that silly dictionary or whatever it was — the same man who had once asked for Jane Griffin's hand, only to be rejected like all the other suitors had been in her younger years. Franklin had since peeked into Jane's diaries from that era — he rationalized his crime by thinking that she wanted him to find and read the many calfskin-bound volumes, why otherwise would she have left them in such an obvious place? — and saw, in his beloved's tight, perfect hand, the passage she had written on the day Roget had finally married someone else — "*the romance of my life is gone*."

Robert Hood had been making noises with Greenstockings for six endless arctic nights when his fellow midshipman George Back returned from a hunting party with the Indians. The two men arranged a duel to the death at sunrise — around 10:00 a.m. — the next morning.

Franklin had not known what to do. The corpulent lieutenant was unable to exert any discipline over the surly *voyageurs* or the contemptuous Indians, much less able to control the headstrong Hood or the impulsive Back.

Both midshipmen were artists and mapmakers. From that time on, Franklin had never trusted an artist. When the sculptor in Paris did Lady Jane's hands and the perfumed sodomite here in London had come for almost a month to paint her official oil portrait, Franklin had never left the men alone with her.

Back and Hood were meeting at dawn for a duel to the death and there was nothing John Franklin could do but hide in the cabin and pray that the resulting death or injury would not destroy the last vestige of sanity in his already compromised expedition. His orders had not specified that

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he should bring *food* on the 1,200 mile arctic overland, coastal sea, and river trek. Out of his own pocket, he'd provided enough supplies to feed the sixteen men for one day. Franklin had assumed the Indians would then hunt for them and feed them adequately, just as the guides carried his bags and paddled his birch-bark canoe.

The birch-bark canoes had been a mistake. Twenty-three years after the fact, he was willing to concede that — to himself, at least. After just a few days in the ice-clogged waters along the northern coast, reached more than a year and a half after their departure from Fort Resolution, the flimsy vessels had started to come apart.

Franklin, his eyes closed, his brow burning, his head throbbing, half-listening to the uninterrupted stream of Jane's chatter, remembered the morning when he'd lain in his heavy sleeping bag and squeezed his eyes shut as Back and Hood had stepped off their fifteen paces outside the cabin, then turned to fire. The confounded Indians and confounded *voyageurs* — equally savage in many ways — were treating the duel to the death as entertainment. Greenstockings, Franklin remembered, was radiant that morning with an almost erotic glow.

Lying in his bag, his hands over his ears, Franklin still heard the call to pace, the call to turn, the call to aim, the command to fire.

Then two clicks. Then laughter from the crowd.

During the night, the old Scottish seaman calling the pacing, that tough and ungentlemanly John Hepburn, had unloaded charge and balls from the carefully prepared pistols.

Deflated by the unceasing laughter of the mob of voyageurs and knee-slapping Indians, Hood and Back had stalked off in opposite directions. Shortly after that,

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Franklin ordered George Back to return to the forts to purchase more provisions from the Hudson's Bay Company. Back was gone most of the winter.

Franklin had eaten his shoes and had subsisted on lichen scraped from rocks — a slime meal that would make a self-respecting English dog vomit — but he had never partaken of human flesh.

A long year after the forestalled duel, in Richardson's party after Franklin's group had separated from it, that surly, halfmad Iroquois on the expedition, Michel Teroahaute, shot the midshipman artist and mapmaker Robert Hood in the centre of his forehead.

A week before the murder, the Indian had brought back a strong-tasting haunch of meat to the starving party, insisting that it had come from a wolf that had either been gored to death by a caribou or killed by Teroahaute himself using a deer horn — the Indian's story kept changing. The ravenous party had cooked and eaten the meat, but not before Dr. Richardson noticed a slight hint of a tattoo on the skin. The doctor later told Franklin that he was certain that Teroahaute had doubled back to the body of one of the *voyageurs* who had died that week on the trek.

The starving Indian and the dying Hood were alone when Richardson, off scraping lichen from the rocks, had heard the shot. *Suicide*, Teroahaute had insisted, but Dr. Richardson, who had attended on more than a few suicides, knew that the position of the ball in Robert Hood's brain had not come from a self-inflicted gunshot.

Now the Indian armed himself with a British bayonet, a musket, two fully charged and half-cocked pistols, and a knife as long as his forearm. The two non-Indians remaining — Hepburn and Richardson — had only a small pistol and one untrustworthy musket between them.

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Richardson, now one of the most respected scientists and surgeons in England, friend of the poet Robert Burns, but then only a promising expedition surgeon and naturalist, waited until Michel Teroahaute returned from a foraging trip, made sure his arms were full of firewood, and then lifted his pistol and cold-bloodedly shot the Indian through the head.

Dr. Richardson later admitted to eating the dead Hood's buffalo robe, but neither Hepburn nor Richardson — the only survivors of their party — ever mentioned what else they might have eaten in the next week of arduous trekking during their return to Fort Enterprise.

At Fort Enterprise, Franklin and his party were too weak to stand or walk. Richardson and Hepburn seemed strong in comparison.

He might be the man who had eaten his shoes, but John Franklin had never . . .

"Cook is preparing roast beef tonight, my darling. Your favorite. Since she's new — I am certain that the Irish woman was padding our accounts, stealing is as natural as drinking to the Irish — I reminded her that you insist that it must be rare enough to bleed at the touch of the carving knife."

Franklin, floating on an ebbing tide of fever, tried to formulate words in response, but the surges of headache, nausea, and heat were too great. He was sweating through his undershirt and still-fixed collar.

"Admiral Sir Thomas Martin's wife sent us a delightful card today and a wonderful bouquet of flowers. She's the last to be heard from, but I must say the roses are beautiful in the foyer. Did you see them? Did you have much time to chat with Admiral Martin at the reception? Of course, he is not that important, is he? Even as Controller of the Navy?

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Certainly not as distinguished as the First Lord or First Commissioners, much less your Arctic Council friends."

Captain Sir John Franklin had many friends; everyone liked Captain Sir John Franklin. But no one respected him. For decades, Franklin acknowledged the former fact and avoided the latter, but he now knew it to be true. Everyone liked him. No one respected him.

Not after Van Diemen's Land. Not after the Tasmanian prison and the botch he had made of that.

Eleanor, his first wife, had been dying when he left her to go on his second major expedition.

He knew she was dying. She knew she was dying. Her consumption — and the knowledge she would die from it long before her husband would die in battle or on expedition — had been with them like a third party at their wedding ceremony. In the twenty-two months of their marriage, she had given him a daughter, his only child, young Eleanor.

A small, frail woman in body — but almost frightening in spirit and energy — his first wife had told him to go on his second expedition to find the North-West Passage, this trip by land and sea to follow the North American coastline, even while she was coughing up blood and knowing that the end was near. She said that it would be better for her if he were elsewhere. He believed her. Or at least he believed that it would be better for himself.

A deeply religious man, John Franklin had prayed that Eleanor would die before his departure date. She hadn't. He left on February 16, 1825, wrote his darling many letters while in transit to Great Slave Lake, posted them in New York City and Albany, and learned of her passing on April 24, at the British Naval station at Penetanguishene. She had died shortly after his ship left England.

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When he returned from this expedition in 1827, Eleanor's friend Jane Griffin was waiting for him.

The Admiralty reception had been less than a week ago — no, just precisely a week ago, before this confounded influenza. Captain Sir John Franklin and all his officers and mates from *Erebus* and *Terror* had attended, of course. So had the civilians on the expedition — *Erebus*'s ice master, James Reid, and *Terror*'s ice master, Thomas Blanky, along with the paymasters, surgeons, and pursers.

Sir John had looked dashing in his new blue swallow-tailed coat, blue goldstriped trousers, gold-fringed epaulettes, ceremonial sword, and Nelsonera cocked hat. The commander of his flagship *Erebus*, James Fitzjames, often called the handsomest man in the Royal Navy, looked as striking and humble as the war hero he was. Fitzjames had charmed everyone that night. Francis Crozier, as always, had looked stiff, awkward, melancholic, and slightly inebriated.

But Jane was wrong — the members of the "Arctic Council" were not Sir John's friends. The Arctic Council, in reality, did not exist. It was an honorary society rather than a real institution, but it was also the most select Old Boys club in all of England.

They'd mingled at the reception, Franklin, his top officers, and the tall, gaunt, grey members of the legendary Arctic Council.

To gain membership to the Council, all one had to do was command an expedition to the farthest arctic north . . . and survive.

Viscount Melville — the first notable in the long receiving line that had left Franklin uncharacteristically sweating and tongue-tied — was First Lord of the Admiralty and the sponsor of their sponsor, Sir John Barrow. But Melville was not an old arctic hand.

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The true Arctic Council legends — most in their seventies — were, to the nervous Franklin that night, more like the coven of witches in *Macbeth* or like some cluster of grey ghosts than like living men. Every one of these men had preceded Franklin in searching for the Passage, and all had returned alive, yet not fully alive.

Did anyone, Franklin wondered that evening, *really* return alive after wintering in the arctic regions?

Sir John Ross, his Scotsman's face showing more sharp facets than an iceberg, had eyebrows leaping out like the ruffs and feathers of those penguins his nephew Sir James Clark Ross had described after his trip to the south arctic. Ross's voice was as rough as a holystone dragged across a splintered deck.

Sir John Barrow, older than God and twice as powerful. The father of serious British arctic exploration. All others there that night, even the white-haired septuagenarians, were boys . . . Barrow's boys.

Sir William Parry, a gentleman above gentlemen even when among royalty, who had tried four times to force the Passage only to watch men die and his *Fury* squeezed and smashed and sunk.

Sir James Clark Ross, newly knighted, was also newly wed to a wife who made him swear off any more expeditions. He would have had Franklin's job of commander of this expedition if he'd wanted it, and both men knew it. Ross and Crozier stood slightly separate from the others, drinking and talking as softly as conspirators.

That confounded Sir George Back; Franklin hated sharing sirdom with a mere midshipman who once served under him, and a womanizer at that. On this gala night, Captain Sir John Franklin almost wished that Hepburn hadn't taken the powder and shot out of the dueling pistols

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twenty-five years earlier. Back was the youngest member of the Arctic Council and seemed happier and smugger than any of the others, even after suffering the battering and near-sinking of HMS *Terror*.

Captain Sir John Franklin was a teetotaler, but after three hours of champagne, wine, brandy, sherry, and whiskey, the other men began to relax, the laughter around him grew stronger and the conversation in the grand hall less formal, and Franklin began to feel calmer, realizing that all this reception, all the gold buttons, silk cravats, gleaming epaulettes, fine food, cigars, and smiles were for *him*. This time, it was all about him.

So it was a shock when the older Ross pulled him aside almost abruptly and began to bark questions at him through the cigar smoke and the glint of candlelight off crystal.

"Franklin, why in hell's name are you taking one hundred and thirtyfour men?" rasped the holystone across rough wood.

Captain Sir John Franklin blinked. "It's a major expedition, Sir John."

"Too bloody major, if you ask me. It's hard enough to get thirty men across the ice, into boats, and back to civilization when something goes wrong. A hundred thirty-four men . . ." The old explorer made a rude noise, clearing his throat as if he was going to spit.

Franklin smiled and nodded, wishing the old man would leave him alone.

"And your age," continued Ross. "You're sixty, for God's sake."

"Fifty-nine," Franklin said stiffly. "Sir."

The elder Ross smiled thinly but looked more like an iceberg than ever. "*Terror* is what? Three hundred thirty tons? *Erebus* something like three hundred seventy?"

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"Three hundred seventy-two for my flagship," said Franklin. "Three hundred twenty-six for *Terror*."

"And a draft of nineteen feet each, isn't that right?"

"Yes, m'lord."

"That's buggering insane, Franklin. Your ships will be the deepest draft vessels ever sent on an arctic expedition. Everything we know about those regions has shown us that the waters where you're headed are shallow, filled with shoals, rocks, and hidden ice. My *Victory* only drew a fathom and a half and we couldn't get over the bar of the harbour where we wintered. George Back all but ripped his bottom out on the ice with your *Terror*."

"Both ships have been strengthened, Sir John," said Franklin. He could feel sweat running down his ribs and chest onto his portly belly. "They're now the strongest ice ships in the world."

"And what is all the nonsense about steam and locomotive engines?"

"Not nonsense, m'lord," said Franklin and could hear the condescension in his own voice. He knew nothing about steam himself, but he had two good engineers on the expedition and Fitzjames, who was part of the new Steam Navy. "These are powerful engines, Sir John. They'll see us through the ice where sail has failed."

Sir John Ross snorted. "Your steam machines aren't even maritime engines, are they, Franklin?"

"No, Sir John. But they're the best steam engines the London and Greenwich Railway could sell us. Converted for marine use. Powerful beasts, sir."

Ross sipped his whiskey. "Powerful if you're planning to lay down rails along the NorthWest Passage and take a God-damned locomotive across it."

Franklin chuckled good-naturedly at this, but he saw no

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humor in the comment and the obscenity offended him deeply. He often could not tell when others were being humorous, and he had no sense of humor himself.

"But not really so powerful," continued Ross. "That one-point-five-ton machine they crammed into the hold of your *Erebus* only produces twentyfive horsepower. Crozier's engine is less efficient . . .. twenty horsepower, maximum. The ship that's towing you beyond Scotland — *Rattler* — produces two hundred twenty horsepower with its smaller steam engine. It's a marine engine, built for sea."

Franklin had nothing to say to that, so he smiled. To fill the silence he signaled a passing waiter carrying glasses of champagne. Then, since it was against all his principles to drink alcohol, all he could do was stand there holding the glass, occasionally glancing at the flattening champagne, and wait for some opportunity to get rid of it without being noticed.

"Think of all the extra provisions you could have crammed in the holds of your two ships if those damned engines weren't there," persisted Ross.

Franklin looked around as if seeking rescue, but everyone was in animated conversation with someone else. "We have more than adequate stores for three years, Sir John," he said at last. "Five to seven years if we have to go on short rations." He smiled again, trying to charm that flinty face. "And both *Erebus* and *Terror* have central heating, Sir John. Something I'm sure you would have appreciated on your *Victory*."

Sir John Ross's pale eyes gleamed coldly. "*Victory* was crushed like an egg by the ice, Franklin. Fancy steam heat wouldn't have helped that, would it?"

Franklin looked around, trying to catch Fitzjames's eye. Even Crozier's. Anyone to come to his rescue. No one

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seemed to notice the old Sir John and the fat Sir John huddled here in such earnest, if one-sided, conversation. A waiter passed, and Franklin set his untouched glass of champagne on his tray. Ross studied Franklin through slitted eyes.

"And how much coal does it take just to heat one of your ships for a day up there?" pressed the old Scotsman.

"Oh, I don't really know, Sir John," said Franklin with a winning smile. He really did *not* know. Nor especially care. The engineers were in charge of the steam engines and coal. The Admiralty would have planned well for them.

"*I* know," said Ross. "You'll use up to one hundred fifty pounds of coal a day just to keep the hot water moving to heat the crew's quarters. Half a *ton* of your precious coal a day just to keep steam up. If you're under way — expect about four knots out of those ugly bombardment ships — you'll be burning two to three *tons* of coal a day. Much more if you're trying to force your way through pack ice. How much coal are you *carrying*, Franklin?"

Captain Sir John waved his hand in what he realized was a dismissive — and almost effeminate — gesture. "Oh, somewhere around two hundred tons, m'lord."

Ross squinted again. "Ninety tons each for *Erebus* and *Terror*, to be precise," he rasped. "And that's when you're topped off in Greenland, before you cross Baffin Bay, much less get into the real ice."

Franklin smiled and said nothing.

"Say you arrive at where you winter in the ice with seventy-five percent of your ninety tons unburned," continued Ross, boring ahead like a ship through soft ice, "that leaves you what . . . how many days' steam under normal conditions, not ice conditions? A dozen days? Thirteen days? A fortnight?"

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Captain Sir John Franklin had not the slightest idea. His mind, although professional and nautical, simply did not work that way. Perhaps his eyes revealed his sudden panic — not over coal but over appearing an idiot in front of Sir John Ross — for the old mariner clamped a steel vise grip on Franklin's shoulder. When Ross leaned closer, Captain Sir John Franklin could smell the whiskey on his breath.

"What are the Admiralty's plans for your rescue, Franklin?" rasped Ross. His voice was low. All about them was the laughter and chatter of the reception in its late hour.

"Rescue?" Franklin said, blinking. The idea that the two most modern ships in the world — reinforced for ice, powered by steam, provisioned for five years or more in the ice, and manned by crews handpicked by Sir John Barrow — would or could require rescue simply did not register in Franklin's brain. The idea was absurd.

"Do you have plans to cache depots along your way in through the islands?" whispered Ross.

"Caches?" said Franklin. "Leave our provisions along the way? Why on earth would I do that?"

"So you can get your men and boats to food and shelter if you have to take to the ice and walk out," Ross said fiercely, eyes gleaming.

"Why would we walk back toward Baffin Bay?" asked Franklin. "Our objective is to complete the transit of the NorthWest Passage."

Sir John Ross had pulled his head back. His grip tightened on Franklin's upper arm. "Then there's no rescue ship or plan in place?"

"No."

Ross grabbed Franklin's other arm and squeezed so tightly that the portly Captain Sir John almost winced.

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"Then, laddie," whispered Ross, "if we've not heard from ye by 1848, I'll come looking for you myself. I swear it."

Franklin slammed awake.

He was soaked with sweat. He felt dizzy and weak. His heart was pounding, and with each reverberation his headache tolled like a church bell against the inside of his skull.

He looked down at himself in horror. Silk covered the lower half of his body.

"What is this?" he cried in alarm. "What is this? There's a flag thrown over me!"

Lady Jane stood, aghast. "You looked cold, John. You were shivering. I put it over you as a blanket."

"My God!" cried Captain Sir John Franklin. "My God, woman, do you know what you've done? Don't you know they lay the Union Jack over a corpse!"

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3

CROZIER

Lat. 70°-05′ N., Long. 98°-23′ W.
October, 1847

Captain Crozier descends the short ladder to the lower deck, pushes through the sealed double doors, and almost staggers in the sudden blast of warmth. Even though the circulating hot-water heat has been off for hours, body heat from more than fifty men and residual warmth from cooking have kept the temperature here on the lower deck high — just below freezing — almost 80 degrees warmer than outside. The effect on someone who's been out on deck for half an hour is the equivalent of walking into a sauna fully clothed.

Since he's continuing down to the unheated orlop and hold decks and thus keeping his cold-weather slops on, Crozier doesn't tarry long here in the heat. But he does pause for a moment — as any captain would — taking the time to glance around and make sure that everything hasn't gone to hell in the half hour he's been away.

Despite the fact that this is the only berthing, eating, and living deck on the ship, it's still as dark as a working Welsh mine with its small skylights snowed over in the daytime and the night now twenty-two hours long. Whale-oil lamps, lanterns, or candles throw small cones of illumination here and there, but mostly the men make their way

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through the gloom by memory, remembering where to dodge the innumerable half-seen heaps and hanging masses of stored food, clothing, gear, and other men sleeping in their hammocks. When all the hammocks go up — fourteen inches allowed per man — there will be no room to walk at all except for two 18-inch-wide aisles along the hull on either side. But only a few hammocks are up now — men catching some sleep before late watches — and the din of conversation, laughter, cursing, coughing, and Mr. Diggle's inspired clankings and obscenities is loud enough to drown out some of the press and moan of the ice.

The ship's diagrams show seven feet of clearance, but in reality, between the heavy ship's timbers overhead and the tons of lumber and extra wood stored on racks hanging from those timbers, there's less than six feet of headroom on this lower deck and the few truly tall men on *Terror*, like the coward Manson waiting below, have to walk in a perpetual hunched-over posture. Francis Crozier is not that tall. Even with his cap and comforter on, he doesn't have to duck his head as he turns.

To his right and running aft from where Crozier stands is what looks to be a low, dark, narrow tunnel, but it is actually the companionway leading to the "officers' quarters," a warren of sixteen tiny sleeping cubicles and two cramped mess quarters for the officers and warrant officers. Crozier's cabin is the same size as the others' — six feet by five feet. The companionway is dark and barely two feet wide. Only one man can pass at a time, ducking his head to avoid hanging stores, and heavy men have to turn sideways to shuffle down the narrow passage.

The officers' quarters are crammed into 60 feet of the 96-foot length of the ship, and since *Terror* is only 28 feet

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wide here on the lower deck, the narrow companionway is the only straight-line access aft.

Crozier can see light from the Great Cabin at the stern, where — even in this Stygian cold and gloom — some of his surviving officers are relaxing at the long table, smoking their pipes or reading from the 1,200-volume library shelved there. The captain hears music playing: one of the metal disks for the hand organ playing a tune that had been popular in London music halls five years ago. Crozier knows that it's Lieutenant Hodgson playing the tune; it's his favorite, and it drives Lieutenant Edward Little, Crozier's executive officer and a lover of classical music, absolutely mad with irritation.

All apparently being well in officers' country, Crozier turns and glances forward. The regular crew's quarters take up the remaining third of the length of the ship — 36 feet — but into it are crammed 41 of the surviving able-bodied seamen and midshipmen from the original ship's muster of 44.

There are no classes being taught tonight and it's less than an hour until they will unfurl their hammocks and turn in, so the majority of the men are sitting on their sea chests or heaps of stowed material, smoking or talking in the dim light. The centre of the space is taken up by the gigantic Frazer's Patent Stove, where Mr. Diggle is baking biscuits. Diggle — the best cook in the fleet as far as Crozier is concerned and a prize, most literally, since Crozier had stolen the obstreperous cook right off Captain Sir John Franklin's flagship just before the expedition departed — is always cooking, usually biscuits, and curses and bangs and kicks and berates his assistants all the while. Men are literally scuttling near the giant stove, disappearing down the scuttle there to bring up stores from the lower decks, hurrying to avoid Mr. Diggle's voluble wrath.

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Frazer's Patent Stove itself appears, to Crozier's eye, almost as large as the locomotive engine in the hold. Besides its gigantic oven and six large burners, the bulking iron contraption has a built-in desalinator and a prodigious hand pump to bring water in from either the ocean or the rows of huge water-storage tanks down in the hold. But both the sea outside and the water in the hold now are frozen solid, so the huge pots bubbling on Mr. Diggle's burners are busy melting chunks of ice chipped out of the water tanks below and hauled up for that purpose.

The captain can see, beyond the partition of Mr. Diggle's shelves and cupboards where forward bulwarks had once stood, the sick bay in the forepeak of the ship. For two years there had been no sick bay. The area was stacked from deck to beams with more crates and casks and those crewmen who needed to see the ship's surgeon or assistant surgeon at 7:30 a.m. lubber's time did so near Mr. Diggle's stove. But now, with the amount of stores depleted and the number of sick and injured men multiplying, the carpenters had created a more permanent and separate section of the forepeak to serve as sick bay. Still, the captain could see the tunnellike entrance through the crates where they'd made a space for Lady Silence to sleep.

That discussion had taken the better part of a day last June — Franklin had insisted that the Esquimaux woman not be allowed on his ship. Crozier had accepted her, but his discussion with his executive officer, Lieutenant Little, as to where to berth her had been almost absurd. Even an Esquimaux wench, they knew, would freeze to death on deck or on the lower two decks, which left only the main lower deck. She certainly could not sleep in the crew's berthing area, even though they had empty hammocks by this time thanks to that thing out on the ice.

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In Crozier's day as a teenaged lad before the mast and then as a midshipman, women smuggled aboard were put in the lightless, almost airless stinking hawser room in the lowest and most forward part of the ship, within reach of the fo'c'sle for the lucky man or men who smuggled her aboard. But even last June, when Silence appeared, it was below zero in HMS *Terror*'s hawser room.

No, berthing her with the crew was not an idea to be considered.

Officers' country? Perhaps. There were empty cabins, with some of his officers dead and torn apart. But both Lieutenant Little and his captain had quickly agreed that the presence of a woman just a few thin partitions and sliding doors away from the sleeping men would be unhealthy.

What then? They couldn't assign her a sleeping place and then post an armed guard over her all the time.

It was Edward Little who'd come up with the idea of shifting some stores to make a little cave of a sleeping area for the woman in the forepeak where the sick bay would have been. The one person awake all night, every night, was Mr. Diggle — dutifully baking his biscuits and frying his breakfast meats — and if Mr. Diggle had ever had an eye for the ladies, it was apparent that day had long passed. Also, reasoned Lieutenant Little and Captain Crozier, the proximity to the Frazer's Patent Stove would help keep their guest warm.

It had succeeded in that, all right. Lady Silence was made sick by the heat, forcing her to sleep stark naked on her furs in her little crate-and-cask cave. The captain discovered this by accident and the image stayed with him.

Now Crozier takes a lantern from its hook, lights it, lifts the hatch, and goes down the ladder to the orlop deck before he starts to melt like one of those blocks of ice on the stove.

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To say it's cold on the orlop deck would be the kind of understatement Crozier knows he used to make before he first voyaged to the arctic. A drop of six feet of ladder down from the lower deck has dropped the temperature at least sixty degrees. The darkness here is almost absolute.

Crozier takes the usual captain's minute to look around. The circle of light from his lantern is weak, illuminating mostly the fog of his breath in the air. All around him is the labyrinth of crates, hogsheads, tins, kegs, casks, coal sacks, and canvas-covered heaps crammed deck-to-beams with the ship's remaining provisions. Even without the lantern, Crozier could find his way through the dark and rat-screech here; he knows every inch of his ship. At times, especially late at night with the ice moaning, Francis Rawdon Moira Crozier realizes that HMS *Terror* is his wife, mother, bride, and whore. This intimate knowledge of a lady made of oak and iron, oakum and ballast, canvas and brass is the one true marriage he can and will ever know. How could he have thought differently with Sophia?

At other times, even later at night when the ice's moaning turns to screams, Crozier thinks that the ship has become his body and his mind. Out there — out beyond the decks and hull — lies death. Eternal cold. Here, even while frozen in the ice, there continues the heartbeat, however faint, of warmth and conversation and movement and sanity.

But traveling deeper into the ship, Crozier realizes, is like traveling too deeply into one's body or mind. What one encounters there may not be pleasant. The orlop deck is the belly. This is where the food and needed resources are stored, each thing packed away in the order of its presumed need, easy to hand for those driven down here by Mr. Diggle's shouts and blows. Lower, on the hold deck where

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he's headed, are the deep guts and kidneys, the water tanks and the majority of the coal storage and more provisions. But it's the mind analogy that bothers Crozier the most. Haunted and plagued by melancholia much of his life, knowing it as a secret weakness made worse by his twelve winters frozen in arctic darkness as an adult, feeling it recently triggered into active agony by Sophia Cracroft's rejection, Crozier thinks of the partially lighted and occasionally heated but livable lower deck as the sane part of himself. The brooding mental lower world of the orlop deck is where he spends too much of his time these days — listening to the ice scream, waiting for the metal bolts and beam fastenings to explode from the cold. The bottom hold deck below, with its terrible smells and its waiting Dead Room, is madness.

Crozier shakes such thoughts away. He looks down the orlop-deck aisle running forward between the piled casks and crates. The lantern's gleam is blocked by the bulkheads of the Bread Room and the aisles on either side constrict to tunnels even narrower than the officers' country companionway on the lower deck above. Here men must squeeze between the Bread Room and the sleeves holding the last sacks of *Terror*'s coal. The carpenter's storeroom is forward there on the starboard side, the boatswain's storeroom opposite on the port side.

Crozier turns and shines his lantern aft. Rats flee somewhat lethargically from the light, disappearing between casks of salt meat and crates of tinned provisions.

Even in the dim lantern's glow, the captain can see that the padlock is secure on the Spirit Room. Every day one of Crozier's officers will come down here to fetch the amount of rum needed for that day's doling out of the men's noonday grog — one-fourth pint of 140-proof rum to

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three-fourths pint of water. Also in the Spirit Room are stored the officers' wine and brandy, as well as two hundred muskets, cutlasses, and swords. As has always been the practice in the Royal Navy, scuttles lead directly from the officers' mess and Great Cabin overhead to the Spirit Room. Should there be a mutiny, the officers would get to the weapons first.

Behind the Spirit Room is the Gunner's Storeroom with its kegs of powder and shot. On either side of the Spirit Room are various storage and locker spaces, including chain cable lockers; the Sail Room, with all its cold canvas; and the Slop Room, from which Mr. Helpman, the ship's clerk, issues their outdoor clothing.

Behind the Spirit Room and the Gunner's Storeroom is the Captain's Storeroom, holding Francis Crozier's private — and personally paid for — hams, cheeses, and other luxuries. It is still the custom for the ship's captain to set the table from time to time for his officers, and while the victuals in Crozier's storeroom pale in comparison to the luxurious foodstuffs crammed into the late Captain Sir John Franklin's private store on *Erebus*, Crozier's pantry — almost empty now — has held out for two summers and two winters in the ice. Also, he thinks with a smile, it has the benefit of containing a decent wine cellar from which the officers still benefit. And many bottles of whiskey upon which he, the captain, depends. The poor commander, lieutenants, and civilian officers aboard *Erebus* had done without spirits for two years. Sir John Franklin was a teetotaler and so, when he was alive, had been his officers' mess.

A lantern bobs toward Crozier down the narrow aisle leading back from the bow. The captain turns in time to see something like a hairy black bear squeezing its bulk

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between the coal sleeves and the Bread Room bulkhead.

"Mr. Wilson," says Crozier, recognizing the carpenter's mate from his rotundity and from the sealskin gloves and deerskin trousers which had been offered to all the men before departure but which only a few had chosen over their flannel and woolen slops. Sometime during the voyage out, the mate had sewn wolf skins they'd picked up at the Danish whaling station at Disko Bay into a bulky — but warm, he insisted — outer garment.

"Captain." Wilson, one of the fattest men aboard, is carrying the lantern in one hand and has several boxes of carpenter's tools tucked under his other arm.

"Mr. Wilson, my compliments to Mr. Honey and would you ask him to join me on the hold deck."

"Aye, sir. Where on the hold deck, sir?"

"The Dead Room, Mr. Wilson."

"Aye, sir." The lantern light reflects on Wilson's eyes as the mate keeps his curious gaze up just a second too long.

"And ask Mr. Honey to bring a pry bar, Mr. Wilson."

"Aye, sir."

Crozier stands aside, squeezing between two kegs to let the larger man pass up the ladder to the lower deck. The captain knows he might be rousing his carpenter for nothing — making the man go to the trouble of getting into his cold-weather slops right before lightsout for no good reason — but he has a hunch and he'd rather disturb the man now than later.

When Wilson has squeezed his bulk up through the upper hatch, Captain Crozier lifts the lower hatch and descends to the hold deck.

Because the entire deck-space lies beneath the level of outside ice, the hold deck is almost as cold as the alien world beyond the hull. And darker, with no aurora, stars, or moon

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to relieve the ever-present blackness. The air is thick with coal dust and coal smoke — Crozier watches the black particles curl around his hissing lantern like a banshee's claw — and it stinks of sewage and bilge. A scraping, sliding, scuttling noise comes from the darkness aft, but Crozier knows it's just the coal being shoveled in the boiler room. Only the residual heat from that boiler keeps the three inches of filthy water sloshing at the foot of the ladder from turning to ice. Forward, where the bow dips deeper into the ice, there is almost a foot of icy water, despite men working the pumps six hours and more a day. The *Terror*, like any living thing, breathes out moisture through a score of vital functions, including Mr. Diggle's ever-working stove, and while the lower deck is always damp and rimed with ice and the orlop deck frozen, the hold is a dungeon with ice hanging from every beam and meltwater sloshing above one's ankles. The flat black sides of the twenty-one iron water tanks lining the hull on either side add to the chill. Filled with thirty-eight tons of fresh water when the expedition sailed, the tanks are now armored icebergs and to touch the iron is to lose skin.

Magnus Manson is waiting at the bottom of the ladder as Private Wilkes had said, but the huge ablebodied seaman is standing, not sitting arse-on-ladder. The big man's head and shoulders are hunched beneath the low beams. His pale, lumpy face and stubbled jowls remind Crozier of a rotten white peeled potato stuffed under a Welsh wig. He will not meet his captain's stare in the harsh lantern glow.

"What is this, Manson?" Crozier's voice does not hold the bark he unleashed on his lookout and lieutenant. His tone is flat, calm, certain, with the power of flogging and hanging behind every syllable.

"It's them ghosts, Capn." For a huge man, Magnus

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Manson has the high, soft voice of a child. When *Terror* and *Erebus* had paused at Disko Bay on the west coast of Greenland in July of 1845, Captain Sir John Franklin had seen fit to dismiss two men from the expedition — a Marine private and a sailmaker from *Terror*. Crozier had made the recommendation that seaman John Brown and Private Aitken from his ship also be released — they were little better than invalids and never should have been signed on for such a voyage — but on occasion since, he wished he'd sent Manson home with those four. If the big man was not feebleminded, he was so close to it that it was impossible to tell the difference.

"You know there are no ghosts on *Terror*, Manson."

"Yes, Cap'n."

"*Look* at me."

Manson raises his face but does not meet Crozier's gaze. The captain marvels at how tiny the man's pale eyes are in that white lump of a face.

"Did you disobey Mr. Thompson's orders to carry sacks of coal to the boiler room, Seaman Manson?"

"No, sir. Yes, sir."

"Do you know the consequences of disobeying any order on this ship?" Crozier feels like he's talking to a boy, although Manson must be at least thirty years old.

The big sailor's face brightens as he is presented with a question he can answer correctly. "Oh, yes, Cap'n. Flogging, sir. Twenty lashes. A 'undred lashes if I disobeys more than once. 'Anging if I disobey a real officer rather'n jus' Mr. Thompson."

"That's correct," says Crozier, "but did you know that the captain can also inflict any punishment he finds appropriate to the transgression?"

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Manson peers down at him, his pale eyes confused. He has not understood the question.

"I'm saying I can punish you any way I see fit, Seaman Manson," says the captain.

A flood of relief flows over the lumpy face. "Oh, yes, right, Cap'n."

"Instead of twenty lashes," says Francis Crozier, "I could have you locked up in the Dead Room for twenty hours with no light."

Manson's already pale, frozen features lose so much blood that Crozier prepares to get out of the way if the big man faints.

"You . . . wouldn't . . ." The child-man's voice quavers toward a vibrato.

Crozier says nothing for a long, cold, lantern-hissing moment. He lets the sailor read his expression. Finally he says, "What do you think you hear, Manson? Has someone been telling you ghost stories?"

Manson opens his mouth but seems to have trouble deciding which question to answer first. Ice forms on his fat lower lip. "Walker," he says at last.

"You're afraid of Walker?"

James Walker, a friend of Manson's who had been about the same age as the idiot and not much brighter, was the last man to die on the ice, just a week earlier. Ship's rules required that the crew keep small holes drilled in the ice near the ship, even when the ice was ten or fifteen feet thick as it was now, so that they could get at water to fight a fire should one break out aboard. Walker and two of his mates were on just such a drilling party in the dark, reopening an old hole that would freeze in less than an hour unless rammed with metal spikes. The white terror had come out from behind a pressure ridge, torn off the seaman's arm,

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and smashed his ribs to splinters in an instant, disappearing before the armed guards on deck could raise their shotguns.

"Walker told you ghost stories?" says Crozier.

"Yes, Cap'n. No, Cap'n. What Jimmy did was, 'e tells me the night before the *thing* killed 'im, 'e says, 'Magnus, should that 'ellspawn out on the ice get me someday,' 'e says, "I'll come back in me white shroud to whisper in your ear how cold 'ell is." So help me God, Cap'n, that's what Jimmy said to me. Now I 'ear 'im tryin" to get out."

As if on cue, the hull groans, the frigid deck moans under their feet, metal brackets on the beams groan back in sympathy, and there is a scraping, clawing noise in the dark around them that seems to run the length of the ship. The ice is restless.

"Is that the sound you hear, Manson?"

"Yes, Cap'n. No, sir."

The Dead Room is thirty feet aft on the starboard side, just beyond the last metal-moaning iron water tank, but when the outside ice stops its noise, Crozier can hear only the muffled scrape and push of the shovels in the boiler room farther aft.

Crozier's had enough of this nonsense. "You know your friend's not coming back, Magnus. He's there in the extra sail storage room securely sewn into his own hammock with the other dead men, frozen solid, with three layers of our heaviest sail canvas tied around them. If you hear anything from in there, it's the damned rats trying to get at them. You *know* this, Magnus Manson."

"Yes, Cap'n."

"There will be no disobeying orders on this ship, Seaman Manson. You have to make up your mind now. Carry the coal when Mr. Thompson tells you to. Fetch the food stores when Mr. Diggle sends you down here. Obey all orders promptly and politely. Or face the court . . . face *me* . . . and

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the possibility that you'll spend a cold, lanternless night in the Dead Room yourself."

Without another word, Manson knuckles his forehead in salute, lifts a huge sack of coal from where he's stowed it on the ladder, and hauls it aft into the darkness.

The engineer himself is stripped to his long-sleeved undershirt and corduroy trousers, shoveling coal alongside the ancient 47-year-old stoker named Bill Johnson. The other stoker, Luke Smith, is on the lower deck sleeping between his shoveling hours. *Terror*'s lead stoker, young John Torrington, was the first man of the expedition to die, on New Year's Day 1846. But that had been from natural causes. It seems Torrington's doctor had urged the 19-year-old to go to sea to cure his consumption, and he'd succumbed after two months of being an invalid while the ships were frozen in the harbour at Beechey Island that first winter. Doctors Peddie and McDonald had told Crozier that the boy's lungs were as solidly packed with coal dust as a chimney sweep's pockets.

"Thank you, Captain," says the young engineer between heaves of the shovel. Seaman Manson has just dropped off a second sack of coal and gone back for a third.

"You're welcome, Mr. Thompson." Crozier glances at Stoker Johnson. The man is four years younger than the captain but looks thirty years older. Every seam and wrinkle on his age-molded face is outlined in coal black and grime. Even his toothless gums are soot grey. Crozier doesn't want to reprimand his engineer — and thus an officer, although civilian — in front of the stoker, but he says, "I presume we'll dispense with using Marines as messengers, should there be another such instance in the future, which I very much doubt."

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Thompson nods, uses the shovel to clang shut the iron grate on the boiler, leans on the tool, and tells Johnson to go above to get him some coffee from Mr. Diggle. Crozier's glad the stoker is gone but even happier that the grate is closed; the heat in here makes him slightly nauseated after the cold everywhere else.

The captain has to wonder at the fate of his engineer. Warrant Officer James Thompson, Engineer First Class, graduate of the Navy's steam factory at Woolwich — the world's best training grounds for the new breed of steam-propulsion engineers — is here stripped to his filthy undershirt, shoveling coal like a common stoker in an ice-locked ship that hasn't moved an inch under its own power now for more than a year.

"Mr. Thompson," says Crozier, "I'm sorry I haven't had a chance to talk to you today since you walked over to *Erebus*. Did you have a chance to confer with Mr. Gregory?"

John Gregory is the engineer aboard the flagship.

"I did, Captain. Mr. Gregory's convinced that with the onset of real winter, they'll never be able to get at the damaged driveshaft. Even if they were able to tunnel down through the ice to replace the last propeller with the one they've jury–rigged, with the replacement driveshaft bent as badly as it is, *Erebus* is going nowhere under steam."

Crozier nods. *Erebus* bent its second driveshaft while the ship was throwing itself desperately on the ice more than a year ago. The flagship — heavier, with a more powerful engine — led the way through the pack ice that summer, opening leads for both ships. But the last ice they'd encountered before being frozen in for the last thirteen months was harder than the iron in the experimental propeller screw and driveshaft. Divers that summer — all of

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who suffered frostbite and came close to dying — had confirmed not only that the screw had been shattered but that the driveshaft itself was bent and broken.

"Coal?" says the captain.

"*Erebus* has enough for . . . perhaps . . . four months of heating in the ice, at only one hour of hotwater circulation through the lower deck per day, Captain. None at all for steaming next summer."

If we get free next summer, thinks Crozier. After this last summer, when the ice never relented for a day, he's a pessimist. Franklin had used up *Erebus*'s coal supply at a prodigious rate during those last weeks of freedom in the summer of 1846, sure that if he could smash through those last few miles of pack ice, the expedition would reach the open waters of the North-West Passage along the northern coast of Canada and they'd be drinking tea in China by late autumn.

"What about *our* coal use?" asks Crozier.

"Perhaps enough left for six months of heating," says Thompson. "But only if we cut back from two hours a day to one. And I recommend we do that soon — no later than the first of November."

That is less than two weeks away.

"And steaming?" says Crozier.

If the ice relents at all next summer, Crozier plans to cram all the surviving men from *Erebus* aboard *Terror* and make an allout effort to retreat the way they'd come — up the unnamed strait between Boothia Peninsula and Prince of Wales Island, down which they rushed two summers ago, past Walker Point and Barrow Strait, out through Lancaster Sound like a cork from a bottle, then rushing south into Baffin Bay with all sail set and the last coal being burned, going like smoke and oakum, burning extra spars

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and furniture if need be to get the last bit of steam, anything to get them into open water off Greenland where whalers could find them.

But he'll also need steam to fight his way north through the southflowing ice to Lancaster Sound, even if a miracle occurs and they are released from the ice here. Crozier and James Ross once sailed *Terror* and *Erebus* out of the south polar ice, but they'd been traveling *with* the currents and bergs. Here in the damned arctic, the ships have to sail for weeks *against* the flow of ice coming down from the pole just to reach the straits where they can escape.

Thompson shrugs. The man looks exhausted. "If we cut off the heat on New Year's Day and somehow survive until next summer, we might get . . . six days steaming without ice? Five?"

Crozier merely nods again. This is almost certainly a death sentence for his ship, but not necessarily for the men of both ships.

There is a sound out in the darkened corridor.

"Thank you, Mr. Thompson." The captain lifts his lantern off an iron hook, leaves the glow of the boiler room, and heads forward in the slush and darkness.

Thomas Honey is waiting in the corridor, his candle lantern sputtering in the bad air. He is holding the iron pry bar in front of him like a musket, clutched in thick gloves, and hasn't opened the bolted door of the Dead Room.

"Thank you for coming, Mr. Honey," Crozier says to his carpenter.

Without explanation, the captain throws back the bolts and enters the freezing-cold storage room.

Crozier can not resist lifting his lantern toward the aft bulkhead where the six men's bodies have been stacked in their common canvas shroud.

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The heap is writhing. Crozier expected that — expected to see the movement of rats under the tarp — but he realizes that he's looking at a solid mass of *rats* above the shroudcanvas as well. There is a solid cube of rats, extending more than four feet above the deck, as hundreds of them jostle for position to get at the frozen dead men. The squealing is very loud in here. More rats are underfoot, scuttling between his and the carpenter's legs. *Rushing to the banquet*, thinks Crozier. And showing no fear of the lantern light.

Crozier turns the lantern back to the hull, walks up the slight incline caused by the ship's cant to port and begins pacing along the curved, tilted wall.

There.

He holds the lantern closer.

"Well, I'll be God-damned to hell and hanged for a heathen," says Honey. "Pardon me, Captain, but I didn't think the ice would do this so soon."

Crozier doesn't answer. He crouches to investigate the bent and extended wood of the hull more closely.

Hull planks have been bent inward here, bulging almost a foot from the graceful curve elsewhere along the hull's side. The innermost layers of wood have splintered and at least two planks are hanging free.

"Jesus God Christ Almighty," says the carpenter, who has crouched next to the captain. "That ice is a fucking monster, begging the Captain's pardon, sir."

"Mr. Honey," says Crozier, his breath adding crystals to the ice already on the planks and reflecting the lantern light, "could anything but the ice have done this damage?"

The carpenter barks a laugh but stops abruptly as he realizes his captain is not making a joke. Honey's eyes

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widen, then squint. "Begging your pardon again, Captain, but if you mean . . . that's impossible."

Crozier says nothing.

"I mean, Captain, this hull was three inches of the finest English oak as it was, sir. And for this trip — for the ice, I mean, sir — it was doubled with two layers of African oak, Captain, each one and a half inches thick. And them African oak panels was wrought on the diagonal, sir, givin' it even more strength than if it were just doubled straight-like."

Crozier is inspecting the loose planks, trying to ignore the river of rats behind them and around them as well as the chewing sounds from the direction of the aft bulkhead.

"And, sir," continues Honey, his voice hoarse in the cold, his rumtainted breath freezing in the air, "on top of the three inches of English oak and the three inches of diagonal-laid African oak, they laid on two layers of Canadian elm, sir, each two inches thick. That's four more inches of hull, Captain, and that wrought diagonal against the African oak. That's five belts of serious timber, sir . . . ten inches of the strongest wood on earth between us and the sea."

The carpenter shuts up, realizing that he's lecturing his captain on details of the shipyard's work that Crozier had personally overseen in the months before departure.

The captain stands and sets his mittened hand against the innermost planks where they have come free. There's more than an inch of open space there. "Set your lantern down, Mr. Honey. Use your pry bar to lever this loose. I want to see what the ice has done to the outer layer of hull oak."

The carpenter complies. For several minutes the sound of the iron bar prying at iron-cold wood and the carpenter's grunts almost drown out the frenzied gnawing of the rats

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behind them. The bent Canadian elm tears back and falls away. The shattered African oak is leveraged out. Only the inward-bent original oak of the hull remains now as Crozier steps closer, holding his lantern so that both men can see.

Shards and spears of ice reflect the lantern light through the footlong holes in the hull, but in the centre is something much more disturbing — blackness. Nothing. A hole in the ice. A tunnel.

Honey bends a piece of the splintered oak farther in so Crozier can shine his lantern on it.

"Holy fucking Jesus Christ fucking shit almighty," gasps the carpenter. This time he does not ask his captain's pardon.

Crozier has the temptation to lick his dry lips but knows how painful that will be here where it's 50 below in the dark. But his heart is pounding so wildly that he's also tempted to steady himself with one mitten against the hull the way the carpenter has just done.

The freezing air from outside rushes in so quickly that it almost extinguishes the lantern. Crozier has to shield it with his free hand to keep it flickering, sending the men's shadows dancing across decks, beams, and bulkheads.

The two long boards from the outer hull have been smashed and bent inward by some inconceivable, irresistible force. Clearly visible in the light from the slightly shaking lantern are huge claw marks in the splintered oak — claw marks streaked with frozen smears of impossibly bright blood.

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4

GOODSIR

Lat. 75°-12' N., Long. 61°-6' W.
Baffin Bay, July, 1845

From the private diary of Dr. Harry D. S. Goodsir:

11 April, 1845 —

In a letter to my brother today, I wrote — "All the Officers are in great hopes of making the passage and hope to be in the Pacific end of next summer."

I confess that, however Selfish it is, my own hope for the Expedition is that it may take us a bit longer to reach Alaska, Russia, China, and the warm waters of the Pacific. Although trained as an anatomist and signed on by Captain Sir John Franklin as a mere assistant surgeon, I am, in Truth, no mere surgeon but a Doctor, and I confess further that as amateurish as my attempts may be, I hope to become something of a Naturalist on this voyage. While having no personal Experience with arctic flora and fauna, I plan to become personally acquainted with the lifeforms in the Icy Realms to which we set sail only a month from now. I am especially interested in the white bear, although most accounts of it one hears from whalers and old Arctic Hands tend to be too fabulous to credit.

I recognize that this personal Diary is most out of the ordinary — the Official Log that I shall begin when we depart next month

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will record all of the pertinent professional events and observations of my time aboard HMS Erebus *in my capacity as Assistant Surgeon and as a member of Captain Sir John Franklin's expedition to force the North-West Passage — but I feel that something More is due, some other record, some more personal account, and even if I should never let another soul read this after my Return, it is my Duty — to myself if no other — to keep these notes.*

All I know at this point is that my Expedition with Captain Sir John Franklin already promises to be the Experience of a Lifetime.

Sunday, 18 May, 1845 —

All the men are aboard, and although last-minute Preparation is still going on around the clock for tomorrow's Departure — especially with the stowing of what Captain Fitzjames informs me is more than eight thousand cans of tinned food which have arrived only in the nick of time — Sir John conducted Divine Service today for us aboard Erebus *and for as many of* Terror*'s crew who wished to join us. I noted that* Terror*'s captain, an Irishman named Crozier, was not in attendance.*

No one could have attended the lengthy service and heard the very lengthy sermon by Sir John today without being deeply moved. I wonder if any Ship from any nation's Navy has ever been captained by such a Religious Man. There is no doubt that we are truly and safely and irrevocably in God's Hands on the voyage to come.

19 May, 1845 —

What a Departure!

Having never gone to sea before, much less as a member of such a Heralded Expedition, I had no Idea of what to Expect, but Nothing could have prepared me for the glory of this Day.

Captain Fitzjames estimates that more than ten thousand

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well-wishers and Persons of Importance crowded the docks at Greenhithe to see us off.

Speeches resounded until I thought we would never be allowed to depart while Daylight still filled the Summer Sky. Bands played. Lady Jane — who has been staying aboard with Sir John — went down the gangplank to a rousing series of Hurrahs! *from we sixty-some Erebuses. Bands played again. Then the cheers started as all lines were cast off, and for several minutes the noise was so deafening that I could not have heard an order had Sir John himself shouted it in my ear.*

Last night, Lieutenant Gore and Chief Surgeon Stanley were Kind enough to inform me that it is custom during sailing for the officers not to Show Emotion, so although only technically an officer, I stood with the officers lined up in their fine blue jackets and tried to restrain all Displays of emotion, however manly.

We were the only ones doing so. The Seamen shouted and waved handkerchiefs and hung from the ratlines, and I could see many a rouged dockside Doxie waving farewell to them. Even Captain Sir John Franklin waved a bright red-and-green handkerchief at Lady Jane, his daughter, Eleanor, and his niece Sophia Cracroft, who waved back until the sight of the docks was obstructed by the following Terror.

We are being towed by steam tugs and followed on this leg of our voyage by HMS Rattler, *a powerful new steam frigate, and also a hired transport ship carrying our provisions, Baretto Junior.*

Just before Erebus *pushed away from the docks, a Dove landed high on the main mast. Sir John's daughter by his first marriage, Eleanor — then quite visible in her bright-green silk dress and emerald parasol — cried out but could not be heard above the Cheers and Bands. Then she pointed, and Sir John and many of the Officers looked up, smiled, and then pointed out the Dove to others aboard ship.*

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Combined with the Words spoken in yesterday's Divine Service, this, I have to assume, is the Best Possible Omen.

4 July, 1845 —

What a terrible Crossing of the North Atlantic to Greenland.

For thirty stormy days, even while under tow, the Ship has been tossing, rolling, and wallowing, its tightly sealed Gunports on each side barely four feet out of the water during the downward rolls, sometimes barely making Headway. I have been terribly seasick for Twenty-eight of the last Thirty days. Lieutenant Le Vesconte tells me that we never made more than five knots, which — he assures me — is a Terrible time for any ship merely under Sail, much less for such a Miracle of Technology as Erebus *and our companion craft,* Terror, *both capable of steaming along under the Impetus of their invincible Screws.*

Three days ago we rounded Cape Farewell at the southern tip of Greenland, and I confess that the glimpses of this Huge Continent, with its rocky cliffs and endless glaciers coming right down to the Sea, lay as heavily on my Spirits as the pitching and rolling did upon my Stomach.

Good God, this is a barren, cold place! And this in July.

Our morale is Top Notch, however, and all aboard trust to Sir John's Skill and Good Judgement. Yesterday Lieutenant Fairholme, the youngest of our lieutenants, said to me in Confidence, "I never felt the Captain was so much my companion with anyone I have sailed with before."

Today we put in at the Danish whaling station here in Disko Bay. Tons of supplies are being transferred from Baretto Junior, *and ten live oxen transported aboard that ship were slaughtered this afternoon. All the men of both Expedition ships shall feast on fresh meat tonight.*

Four men were dismissed from the Expedition today — upon advice

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of the four of us surgeons — and will be returning to England with the tow and transport ship. These include one man from Erebus — *a certain Thomas Burt, the ship's armourer, and three from* Terror — *a Marine private named Aitken, a seaman named John Brown, and* Terror*'s primary sailmaker, James Elliott. That brings our total muster down to 129 men for the two ships.*

Dried fish from the Danes and a cloud of Coal Dust hang over everything this afternoon — hundreds of bags of coal were transferred from Baretto Junior *today — and the seamen aboard* Erebus *are busy with the smoothsided stones they call Holy Stones, scrubbing and rescrubbing the deck clean while the Officers shout encouragement. Despite the extra work, All Hands are in High Spirits because of the promise of Tonight's Feasting and extra rations of Grog.*

Besides the four men to be invalided home, Sir John will be sending the June musters, official dispatches, and all personal letters back with Baretto Junior. *Everyone will be busy writing the next few days.*

After this week, the next letter to reach our loved ones will be posted from Russia or China!

12 July, 1845 —

Another departure, this time perhaps the Last One before the North-West Passage. This morning we slipped our cables and sailed west from Greenland while the crew of Baretto Junior gave us three hearty Hurrahs! *and waved their caps. Surely these shall be the last White Men we see until we reach Alaska.*

26 July, 1845 —

Two whalers — Prince of Wales *and* Enterprise — *have anchored nearby to where we have tied up to a floating Ice Mountain.*

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I have enjoyed many hours talking to the captains and crewmen about white bears.

I also had the distinct terror — if not Pleasure — of climbing that huge iceberg this morning. The sailors scrambled up early yesterday, chipping steps into the vertical ice with their axes and then rigging fixed lines for the less agile. Sir John ordered an Observatory be set up atop the giant berg, which towers more than twice as tall as our Highest Mast, and while Lieutenant Gore and some of the officers from Terror *take atmospheric and astronomical measurements up there — they have erected a tent for those spending the night atop the Precipitous Ice Mountain — our Expedition Ice Masters, Mr. Reid from* Erebus *and Mr. Blanky from* Terror*, spend the daylight hours staring west and north through their brass telescopes, seeking, I am informed, the most likely path through the near-solid sea of ice already formed there. Edward Couch, our very Reliable and Voluble Mate, tells me that this is very late in the Arctic Season for ships to be seeking any passage, much less the Fabled North-West Passage.*

The sight of both Erebus *and* Terror *moored to the iceberg below us, a maze of ropes — what I must remember to call "lines" now that I am an old nautical hand — holding both ships fast to the Ice Mountain, the two ships' highest crow's nests below my precarious and icy perch so high above everything, created a sort of sick and thrilling Vertigo within me.*

It was exhilarating standing up there hundreds of feet above the sea. The summit of the iceberg was almost the size of a cricket pitch and the tent holding our Meteorological Observatory looked quite incongruous on the blue ice — but my hopes for a few moments of Quiet Revery were shattered by the constant Shotgun Blasts as the men all over the Summit of our Ice Mountain were shooting birds — arctic terns, I am told — by the hundreds. These heaps and heaps of fresh-killed birds shall be salted and stored away, although Heaven Alone Knows where those additional casks shall be Stored,

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since both our ships are already Groaning and riding low under the weight of all their Stores.

Dr. McDonald, assistant surgeon aboard HMS Terror *— my counterpart there as it were — has theories that heavily salted food is not as efficient and antiscorbutic as fresh or nonsalted Victuals, and since the regular seamen aboard both ships prefer their Salted Pork to all other meals, Dr. McDonald worries that the heavily salted birds will add little to our Defenses against Scurvy. However, Stephen Stanley, our Surgeon aboard* Erebus*, dismisses these worries. He points out that besides the 10,000 cases of preserved cooked meats aboard Erebus, our tinned rations alone include boiled and roast mutton, veal, all forms of vegetables including potatoes, carrots, parsnips, and mixed vegetables, wide varieties of Soups, and 9,450 pounds of Chocolate. An equal weight — 9,300 pounds — of lemon juice has also been brought as our primary antiscorbutic measure. Stanley informs me that even when the juice is sweetened with liberal dollops of sugar, the common men hate their daily ration and that one of our Primary Jobs as surgeons on the Expedition is to ensure that they swallow the stuff.*

It was interesting to me that almost all of the hunting by the officers and men of both our ships is done almost exclusively with Shotguns. Lieutenant Gore assures me that each ship carries a full arsenal of Muskets. Of course, it only makes sense to use Shotguns to hunt birds such as those killed by the hundreds today, but even back at Disko Bay, when small parties went out hunting Caribou and Arctic Fox, the men — even the Marines obviously trained in the use of Muskets — preferred to take along Shotguns. This, of course, must be the result of Habit as much as Preference — the officers tend to be English Gentlemen who have never used muskets or Rifles in their hunting, and except for the use of singleshot weapons in Close Quarters Naval Combat, even the Marines have used Shotguns almost exclusively in their past hunting experience.

Will Shotguns be enough to bag the Great White Bear? We've

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not seen one of those Wondrous creatures yet, although every Experienced Officer and Hand reassures me that we shall encounter them as soon as we enter the Pack Ice, and if not then, certainly when we Winter Over — should we be compelled to do so. Truly the tales the whalers here tell me of the elusive White Bears are Wonderful and Terrifying.

As I write these words, I am informed that current or wind or perhaps the necessities of the whaling business itself have carried both whalers, Prince of Wales *and* Enterprise*, away from our moorings here at our Ice Mountain. Captain Sir John shall not be dining with one of the whaling captains — Captain Martin of* Enterprise*, I believe — as had been planned for this evening.*

Perhaps more Pertinent, Mate Robert Sergeant has just informed me that our men are bringing down the astronomical and meteorological instruments, striking the tent, and reeling in the hundreds of yards of fixed rope — line — which allowed my Ascent earlier today.

Evidently the Ice Masters, Captain Sir John, Commander Fitzjames, Captain Crozier, and the other Officers have determined our Most Promising Path through the ever-shifting pack ice.

We are to cast off from our little Iceberg Home within minutes, sailing Northwest as long as the seemingly endless Arctic Twilight allows us to.

We shall be beyond the reach of even the Hardy Whalers from this point on. As far as the World Beyond our intrepid Expedition is concerned, as Hamlet said, The rest is silence.

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5

CROZIER

Lat. 70°-05′ N., Long. 98°-23′ W.
9 November, 1847

Crozier is dreaming about the picnic to the Platypus Pond and of Sophia stroking him underwater when he hears the sound of a shot and comes crashing awake.

He sits up in his bunk not knowing what time it is, not knowing if it is day or night, although there is no line between day and night any longer since the sun has disappeared this very day, not to reappear until February. But even before he lights the small lantern in his berth to check his watch, he knows that it is *late*. The ship is as quiet as it ever gets; silent except for the creak of tortured wood and frozen metal within; silent except for the snores, the mumbles, and the farts from the sleeping men, and curses from Mr. Diggle the cook; silent save for the incessant groaning, banging, cracking, and surging of the ice outside; and, added to those exceptions to silence this night, silent but for the banshee screech of a high wind.

But this is no sound of ice or wind that wakes Crozier. It is a gunshot. A shotgun — muffled through the layers of oak planks and overlaying snow and ice, but a shotgun blast without doubt.

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Crozier was sleeping with most of his clothes on and

now has pulled on most of the other layers and is ready for his cold-weather slops when Thomas Jopson, his steward, knocks on the door with his distinctive soft triple rap. The captain slides it open.

"Trouble on deck, sir."

Crozier nods. "Who's on watch tonight, Thomas?" His pocket watch shows him that it is almost 3:00 a.m., civilian time. His memory of the month's and day's watch schedule gives him the names an instant before Jopson speaks them aloud.

"Billy Strong and Private Heather, sir."

Crozier nods again, lifts a pistol from his cupboard, checks the priming, sets it in his belt, and squeezes past the steward, out through the officers' dining cubicle that borders the captain's tiny cabin on the starboard side, and then quickly forward through another door to the main ladderway. The lower deck is mostly dark at this time in the morning — the glow around Mr. Diggle's stove the primary exception — but lamps are being lit in several of the officers', mates', and stewards' quarters as Crozier pauses at the base of the ladder to pull his heavy slops from the hook and struggle into them.

Doors slide open. First Mate Hornby walks aft to stand next to Crozier by the ladder. First Lieutenant Little hurries forward down the companionway, carrying three muskets and a saber. He's followed by Lieutenants Hodgson and Irving, who are also carrying weapons.

Forward of the ladder, seamen are grumbling from deep in their hammocks, but a second mate is already turning out a work party — literally tumbling sleeping men from their hammocks and shoving them aft toward their slops and the waiting weapons.

"Has anyone been up top yet to check out the shot?" Crozier asks his first mate.

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"Mr. Male had the duty, sir," says Hornby. "He went up as soon as he sent your steward to fetch you."

Reuben Male is captain of the fo'c'sle. A steady man. Billy Strong, the seaman on port watch up there, has been to sea before, Crozier knows, on HMS *Belvidera*. He wouldn't have shot at phantoms. The other man on watch was the oldest — and in Crozier's estimation, the stupidest — of the surviving Marines, William Heather. At age 35 and still a private, frequently sick, too often drunk, and most frequently useless, Heather had almost been sent home from Disko Island two years before when his best friend Billy Aitken was discharged and sent back on HMS *Rattler*.

Crozier slips the pistol into the oversized pocket of his heavy woolen outer coat, accepts a lantern from Jopson, wraps a comforter around his face, and leads the way up the tilted ladder.

Crozier sees that it is as black as the inside of an eel's belly outside, no stars, no aurora, no moon, and *cold*; the temperature on deck registered sixty-three degrees below zero six hours earlier when young Irving had been sent up to take measurements, and now a wild wind howls past the stubs of masts and across the canted, icy deck, driving heavy snow before it. Stepping out from beneath the frozen canvas enclosure above the main hatch, Crozier holds his mittened hand alongside his face to protect his eyes and sees a lantern gleam on the starboard side.

Reuben Male is on one knee over Private Heather, who is lying on his back, his cap and Welsh wig knocked off and, Crozier sees, part of his skull knocked away as well. There seems to be no blood, but Crozier can see the Marine's brains sparkling in the lantern light — sparkling, the captain

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realizes, because there is already a sheen of ice crystals on the pulped grey matter.

"He's still alive, Captain," says the fo'c'sle chief.

"Jesus fucking Christ," says one of the crewmen crowded behind Crozier.

"Belay that!" cries the first mate. "No fucking profanity. Speak when you're fucking spoken to, Crispe." Hornby's voice is a cross between a mastiff's growl and a bull's snort.

"Mr. Hornby," says Crozier. "Assign Seaman Crispe to get below double-quick and bring up his own hammock to carry Private Heather below."

"Aye, sir," say Hornby and the seaman in unison. The pounding of running boots is felt but goes unheard over the wind screech.

Crozier stands and swings his lantern in a circle.

The heavy railing where Private Heather was standing watch at the base of the iced-over ratlines has been smashed away. Beyond the gap, Crozier knows, the heaped ice and snow runs down like a toboggan ramp for thirty feet or more, but most of that ramp is not visible in the blinding snow. There are no prints visible in the small circle of snow illuminated by the captain's lantern.

Reuben Male lifts Heather's musket. "It wasn't fired, Captain."

"In this storm, Private Heather couldn't have seen the thing until it was right on him," says Lieutenant Little.

"What about Strong?" asks Crozier.

Male points toward the opposite side of the ship. "Missing, Captain."

To Hornby, Crozier says, "Choose a man and stay with Private Heather until Crispe is back with the hammock and carry him below."

Suddenly, both surgeons — Peddie and his assistant,

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McDonald — appear in the circle of lamplight, McDonald wearing only light slops.

"Jesus Christ," says the chief surgeon, kneeling next to the Marine. "He's breathing."

"Help him if you can, John," says Crozier. He points to Male and the rest of the seamen crowding around. "The rest of you — come with me. Have your weapons ready to fire, even if you have to take your mittens off to do it. Wilson, carry both those lanterns. Lieutenant Little, please go below and choose twenty more good men, issue full slops, and arm them with muskets — not shotguns, muskets."

"Aye, sir," Little shouts over the wind, but Crozier is already leading the procession forward, around the heaped snow and vibrating canvas pyramid amidships and up the canted deck toward the port lookout station.

William Strong is gone. A long wool comforter has been shredded, and the tatters of it, caught in the man lines here, are flapping wildly. Strong's greatcoat, Welsh wig, shotgun, and one mitten are lying near the railing in the lee of the port privy where men on watch huddle to stay out of the wind, but William Strong is gone. There is a smear of red ice on the railing where he must have been standing when he saw the large shape coming at him through the blowing snow.

Without saying a word, Crozier dispatches two armed men with lanterns aft, three more toward the bow, another with a lantern to look beneath the canvas amidships. "Rig a ladder here, please, Bob," he says to the second mate. The mate's shoulders are hidden under heaps of fresh — that is, not yet frozen — rope he's carried up from below. The ladder goes over the side within seconds.

Crozier leads the way down.

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There is more blood on the ice and snow heaped along the exposed portside hull of the ship. Streaks of blood, looking quite black in the lantern light, lead out beyond the fire holes into the ever-changing maze of pressure ridges and ice spires, all more sensed than seen in the darkness.

"It wants us to follow it out there, sir," says Second Lieutenant Hodgson, leaning close to Crozier so as to be heard over the wind howl.

"Of course it does," says Crozier. "But we're going anyway. Strong might still be alive. We've seen that before with this thing." Crozier looks behind him. Besides Hodgson, only three men had followed him down the rope ladder — all the rest were either searching the upper deck or were busy hauling Private Heather belowdecks. There is only one other lantern here besides the captain's.

"Armitage," Crozier says to the gunroom steward, whose white beard is already filled with snow, "give Lieutenant Hodgson your lantern and you go with him. Gibson, you remain here and tell Lieutenant Little where we've headed when he comes down with the main search party. Tell him for God's sake not to let his men fire at anything unless they're sure it's not one of us."

"Yes, Captain."

To Hodgson, Crozier says, "George, you and Armitage head out about twenty yards that way — toward the bow — then stay parallel to us as we search south. Try to keep your lantern within sight of ours."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Tom," Crozier says to the only remaining man, young Evans, "you come with me. Keep your Baker Rifle ready but only at half-cock."

"Aye, sir." The boy's teeth are chattering.

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Crozier waits until Hodgson reaches a point twenty yards

to their right — his lantern only the dimmest glow in the blowing snow — and then he leads Evans out into the maze of seracs, ice pinnacles, and pressure ridges, following the periodic smears of blood on the ice. He knows that a delay of even a few minutes will be enough to blow snow over the faint trail. The captain doesn't even bother to remove the pistol from the pocket of his greatcoat.

Less than a hundred yards out, just where the lanterns of the men on the deck of HMS *Terror* become invisible, Crozier reaches a pressure ridge — one of those great heaps of ice thrown up by the ice plates grinding and surging against each other beneath the surface. For two winters in the ice now, Crozier and the other men of the late Sir John Franklin's expedition have watched these pressure ridges appear as if by magic, rise with a great rumbling and tearing sound, and then extend themselves across the surface of the frozen sea, sometimes moving faster than a man can run.

This ridge is at least thirty feet high, a great vertical rubble of ice boulders each at least as large as a hansom cab.

Crozier walks along the ridge, extending his lantern as high as he can. Hodgson's lantern is no longer visible to the west. Nowhere around *Terror* is the view simple any longer. Everywhere the snow seracs, drifts, pressure ridges, and ice pinnacles block one's line of sight. There is one great ice mountain in the mile separating *Terror* and *Erebus* and half a dozen more in sight on a moonlit night.

But no icebergs here tonight, only this threestoreytall pressure ridge.

"There!" shouts Crozier over the wind. Evans steps closer, his Baker Rifle raised.

A smear of black blood on the white wall of ice. The thing had carried William Strong up this small mountain of icy rubble, taking an almost vertical route.

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Crozier begins climbing, holding the lantern in his right hand while he searches with his mittened free hand, trying to find cracks and crevices for his frozen fingers and already icy boots. He hadn't taken time to put on his pair of boots in which Jopson had driven long nails through the soles, giving traction on such ice surfaces, and now his ordinary seaman's boots slip and skitter on the ice. But he finds more frozen blood twenty-five feet up, just below the ice-jumbled summit of the pressure ridge, so Crozier holds the lantern steady with his right hand while kicking against a tilting ice slab with his left leg and leveraging himself up to the top, the wool of his greatcoat rasping against his back. The captain can't feel his nose and his fingers are also numb.

"Captain," calls Evans from the darkness below, "do you want me to come up?"

Crozier is panting too hard to speak for a second, but when he gets his wind back, he calls down, "No . . . wait there." He can see the faint glow of Hodgson's lantern now to the northwest — that team isn't within thirty yards of the pressure ridge yet.

Flailing for balance against the wind, leaning far to his right as the gale streams his comforter straight out to his left and threatens to topple him off his precarious perch, Crozier holds the lantern out over the south side of the pressure ridge.

The drop here is almost vertical for thirty-five feet. There is no sign of William Strong, no sign of black smears on the ice, no sign that anything living or dead has come this way. Crozier can't imagine how anything could have found its way down that sheer ice face.

Shaking his head and realizing that his eyelashes are almost frozen to his cheeks, Crozier begins descending the way he'd come, twice almost falling onto the rising bayonets

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of ice before slip-sliding the last eight feet or so to the surface where Evans is waiting.

But Evans is gone.

The Baker Rifle lies in the snow, still at half-cock. There are no prints in the swirling snow, human or otherwise.

"Evans!" Captain Francis Rawdon Moira Crozier's voice has been trained to command for thirty-five years and more. He can make it heard over a sou'westerly gale or while a ship is white-foaming its way through the Strait of Magellan in an ice storm. Now he puts every bit of volume he can muster into the shout. "Evans!"

No answer except the howl of the wind.

Crozier lifts the Baker Rifle, checks the priming, and fires it into the air. The *crack* sounds muffled even to him, but he sees Hodgson's lantern suddenly turn toward him and three more lanterns become dimly visible on the ice from the direction of *Terror*.

Something roars not twenty feet from him. It could be the wind finding a new route through or around an icy serac or pinnacle, but Crozier knows that it isn't.

He sets the lantern down, fumbles in his pocket, pulls the pistol out, tugs off his mitten with his teeth, and, with just a thin woolen glove between his flesh and the metal trigger, holds the useless weapon in front of him.

"Come on, God-damn your eyes!" Crozier screams. "Come out and try *me* instead of a *boy*, you hairy arse-licking rat-fucking piss-drinking spawn of a poxy Highgate whore!"

There is no answer except the howl of the wind.

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6

GOODSIR

Lat. 74°-43'-28" N., Long. 90°-39'15" W.
Beechey Island, Winter 1845–46

From the private diary of Dr. Harry D. S. Goodsir:

1 January, 1846 —

John Torrington, stoker on HMS Terror*, died early this morning. New Year's Day. The beginning of our Fifth Month stuck in the ice here at Beechey Island.*

His death was not a surprise. It has been obvious for several months that Torrington had been in the advanced stages of Consumption when he signed on the expedition, and if the Symptoms had manifested themselves just a few weeks earlier in the Late Summer, he would have been sent home on Rattler *or even with the two whaling ships we encountered just before sailing west across Baffin Bay and through Lancaster Sound to the Arctic Waste where we now find ourselves wintering. The sad Irony is that Torrington's doctor had told him that going to Sea would be good for his health.*

Chief Surgeon Peddie and Dr. McDonald on Terror treated Torrington, of course, but I was present several times during the Diagnosis stage and was escorted to their ship by several of Erebus*'s crewmen after the young stoker died this morning.*

When his illness became Obvious in early November, Captain

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Crozier relieved the 20-year-old of his duties as stoker down in the poorly ventilated lowest deck — the coal dust in the air alone there is enough to asphyxiate a person with normal lungs — and John Torrington had been in a consumptive invalid's Downward Spiral since then. Still, Torrington might have survived for many more months had not there been an Intermediating Agent of his death. Dr. Alexander McDonald tells me that Torrington, who had become too weak in recent weeks even to allow his short Constitutionals around the lower deck, helped by his messmates, came down with Pneumonia on Christmas Day, and it had been a Death Watch since then. When I saw the body this morning, I was shocked at how Emaciated the dead John Torrington was, but both Peddie and McDonald explained that his appetite had been waning for two months, and even though the ship's surgeons altered his Diet more heavily toward Canned Soups and Vegetables, he had continued to lose weight.

This morning I watched as Peddie and McDonald prepared the corpse — Torrington in a clean striped shirt, his hair recently and carefully cut, his nails clean — binding the usual clean cloth around his head to keep the jaw from dropping, then binding him with more strips of white cotton at the elbows, hands, ankles, and big toes. They did this in order to hold the Limbs together while they weighed the poor boy — 88 Pounds! — and otherwise prepared his body for burial. There was no discussion of Postmortem Examination since it was obvious that Consumption accelerated by Pneumonia had killed the lad, so there was no worry of contamination reaching other crew members.

I helped my two surgeon colleagues from HMS Terror *lift Torrington's body into the coffin carefully prepared for it by the ship's able Carpenter, Thomas Honey, and by his mate, a man named Wilson. There was no rigor mortis. The carpenters had left a residue of Wood Shavings along the bottom of the coffin, so carefully constructed and shaped out of standard ship's mahogany, with a*

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Deeper Pile of shavings under Torrington's head, and because there was yet little Scent of Decay, the air was scented primarily by the wood shavings.

3 January, 1846 —

I keep thinking about John Torrington's Burial late yesterday.

Only a small contingent of us attended from HMS Erebus, *but along with Sir John, Commander Fitzjames, and a few officers, I made the Crossing on Foot from our ship to theirs, and hence the extra two hundred yards to the Shore of Beechey Island.*

I have not been able to Imagine a worse winter than the one we have suffered frozen into this small anchorage in the lee of Beechey Island itself, set in the cusp of larger Devon Island, but Commander Fitzjames and others have assured me that our Situation here — even with the Treacherous Pressure Ridges, Terrible Dark, Howling Storms, and Constantly Menacing Ice — would be a thousand times worse out beyond this anchorage, out where the Ice flows down from the Pole like a hail of Enemy Fire from some Borean god.

John Torrington's crewmates gently lowered his coffin — already covered with a fine blue wool — over the railing of their ship, which is Wedged High on its own pillar of ice, while other Terror seamen lashed the coffin to a large Sledge. Sir John himself draped a Union Jack over the coffin, and then Torrington's friends and messmates set themselves into Harness and pulled the sledge the six hundred feet or so to the ice-and-gravel shore of Beechey Island.

All of this was performed in near Absolute Dark, of course, since even at midday, the sun makes no Appearance here in January and has not done so for three months. It shall be another month and more, they tell me, before the Southern Horizon welcomes back our Fiery Star. At any rate, this entire procession — coffin, sledge, man-haulers, officers, surgeons, Sir John, Royal Marines in full dress

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concealed under the same drab Slops the rest of us were wearing — was illuminated only by bobbing lamplight as we made our way across the Frozen Sea to the Frozen Shore. Men from Terror *had chopped and shoveled away at the several recently arisen Pressure Ridges which stood between us and the graveled beach, so there were few Deviations from our sad Route. Earlier in the Winter, Sir John ordered a system of Stout Poles, ropes, and Hanging Lanterns to line the shortest route between the Ships and the graveled isthmus where several Structures had been built — one to house much of the ships' stores, removed should ice destroy our vessels; another as a sort of emergency bunkhouse and Scientific Station; and a third housing the armourer's forge, set here so that the Flames and Sparks should not ignite our tindered shipboard Homes. I have learned that Sailors fear fire at sea above almost everything else. But this Course of wooden Poles and Lanterns had to be abandoned since the ice is constantly shifting, rising up, and scattering or smashing anything set out on it.*

It was snowing during the burial. The wind was blowing hard, as it always does here on this godforsaken Arctic Waste. Just north of the burial site rose Sheer Black Cliffs, as inaccessible as the Mountains of the Moon. The lanterns lit on Erebus *and* Terror *were only the dimmest of glows through the blowing snow. Occasionally a fragment of Cold Moon would appear from between quickly moving clouds, but even this thin, pale moonlight was quickly lost in the snow and dark. Dear God, this is truly a Stygian bleakness.*

Some of the strongest men from Terror worked almost without pause since the hours right after Torrington's death, using pickaxe and spade to excavate his Grave — a regulation five feet deep, as commanded by Sir John. The Hole had been dug out of the most Severely Frozen ice and rock and one glance at it revealed to me what Labour had gone into its excavation. The flag was removed, and the coffin was lowered carefully, almost reverently, into the narrow Pit.

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Snow immediately covered the top of the coffin and Glistened in the light from our several lanterns. One man, one of Crozier's officers, set the wooden headboard in place and it was driven down into the frozen gravel with a few slams of a giant wooden hammer wielded by a giant of a seaman. The words on that carefully carved headboard read

SACRED
TO
THE MEMORY OF
JOHN TORRINGTON
WHO DEPARTED
THIS LIFE
JANUARY 1ST
A.D. 1846
ON BOARD OF
H.M. SHIP *TERROR*
AGED 20 YEARS

Sir John conducted the Service and spoke the Eulogy. It went on for some time and the soft drone of his soft voice was interrupted only by the Wind and by the stamping of Feet as the men tried to avoid frostbite of the toes. I confess that I heard little of Sir John's eulogy — between the howling wind and my own wandering thoughts, oppressed by the loneliness of the place, by the memory of the striped-shirted body, limbs bound, that had just been lowered into that Cold Hole, and oppressed most of all by the Eternal blackness of the cliffs above the graveled isthmus.

4 January, 1846 —

Another man is dead.

One of our own here on HMS Erebus*, twenty-five-year-old John*

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Hartnell, an able seaman. Just after what I still think of as 6:00 p.m., just as the tables were being lowered on chains for the men's dinner, Hartnell stumbled against his brother, Thomas, fell to the deck, coughed blood, and was dead within five minutes. Surgeon Stanley and I were with him when he died in the cleared part of the forward area of the lower deck which we use for Sick Bay.

This death stunned us. Hartnell had shown no symptoms of scurvy or consumption. Commander Fitzjames was there with us and could not hide his consternation. If this were some Plague or beginning of Scurvy moving through the crew, we needed to know at once. It was decided then and there, while the curtains were drawn and before anyone made ready to prepare John Hartnell for his coffin, that we would do a Postmortem Examination.

We cleared the table in the Sick Bay area, shielded our Actions further by moving some crates between the milling Men and ourselves, drew the curtain around our Labours as best we could, and I fetched my instruments. Stanley, although Chief Surgeon, suggested that I should do the work since I had studied as an anatomist. I made the initial Incision and began.

Immediately I realized that in my Haste I had used the inverted-Y incision that I had used in training on cadavers when I was in a rush. Rather than the more common Y, with the two arms of the incision reaching down from the shoulders and meeting at the base of the sternum, my upsidedown Y incision had the arms of the Y starting near each hip and meeting near Hartnell's umbilicus. Stanley commented upon it and I was embarrassed.

"Whatever is faster," I said softly to my fellow surgeon. "We must do this quickly — the men hate knowing that bodies of their crewmates are being opened."

Surgeon Stanley nodded and I continued. As if to Confirm my statement, Hartnell's younger brother, Thomas, began shouting and crying from just the other side of the curtain. Unlike Torrington's slow decline on Terror, *giving his crewmates time to come to terms*

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with his death, time to parcel out his belongings and prepare letters for Torrington's mother, John Hartnell's sudden collapse and death had shocked the men here. None of them could abide the idea that the ship's surgeons were cutting into the body. Now only the bulk, rank, and demeanor of Commander Fitzjames stood between the angry brother, confused seamen, and our Sick Bay. I could hear that the younger Hartnell's messmates and Fitzjames's presence were holding him back, but even as my scalpel cut through tissue and my knife and rib spreader opened the corpse for examination, I could hear the Muttering and Anger just a few yards beyond the curtain.

First I removed Hartnell's heart, cutting away part of the trachea with it. I held it up to the lantern light, and Stanley took it and washed away blood with a dirty rag. We both inspected it. It looked normal enough — not visibly diseased. With Stanley still holding the Organ close to the light, I made one cut in the right ventricle, then one in the left. Peeling the tough muscle back, both Stanley and I reviewed the valves there. They seemed healthy.

Dropping Hartnell's heart back into his abdominal cavity, I dissected the lower part of the able seaman's lungs with quick strokes of my scalpel.

"There," said Surgeon Stanley.

I nodded. There were obvious signs of scarring and other indications of Consumption, as well as signs that the seaman recently had been suffering from pneumonia. John Hartnell, like John Torrington, had been tubercular, but this older, stronger — and according to Stanley — harsher and louder sailor had concealed the Symptoms, perhaps even from himself. Until today, when he keeled over and died just minutes before getting his salt pork.

Pulling and cutting the Liver free, I held it under the light, and both Stanley and I believed that we noticed adequate confirmation of the consumption as well as indications that Hartnell had been too heavy a Drinker for too long a time.

Just yards away on the other side of the curtain, Hartnell's

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brother, Thomas, was shouting, furious, being held in check only by Commander Fitzjames's stern bark. I could tell from the voices that several of the other officers — Lieutenant Gore, Lieutenant Le Vesconte and Fairholme, even Des Voeux, the mate — had joined in calming and intimidating the Mob of sailors.

"Have we seen enough?" whispered Stanley.

I nodded again. There had been no sign of Scurvy on the body, on the face or in the mouth, or in the organs. While it remained a Mystery how the consumption or pneumonia or a combination of the two had been able to kill the able-bodied seaman so quickly, it was at least obvious that we had nothing to fear from some Plague-like Disease.

The noise from the crew's Berthing Space was growing Louder, so I quickly thrust the lung samples, liver, and other organs back in the abdominal cavity with the heart, taking no care to set them in proper place, more or less squeezing them into a Mass, and then I returned Hartnell's chest plate roughly back in place. (Later I was to Realize that I had set it in upside down.) Chief Surgeon Stanley then closed up the inverted-Y incision, using a large needle and heavy sail thread with a quick, confident motion that would have done credit to any sailmaker.

Within another minute we had Hartnell's clothes back on — rigor mortis was beginning to be a problem — and we thrust the curtain aside. Stanley — whose voice is deeper and more resonant than mine — assured Hartnell's brother and the other men that all we had remaining was to wash their crewmate's body so that they could prepare it for burial.

6 January, 1846 —

For some reason this Burial Service was Harder on me than the first. Again we had the solemn Procession from the ship — with only Erebus *and its crew involved this time, although Dr. McDonald,*

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Surgeon Peddie, and Captain Crozier joined us from Terror.

Again the flag-covered coffin — the men had dressed Hartnell's upper body in three layers, including his brother Thomas's best shirt, but had wrapped his naked lower body in only a shroud, leaving the top half of the coffin open for several hours in the black-creped Sick Bay on the lower deck before the nails were hammered in for the burial service. Again the slow sledge procession from the Frozen Sea to the Frozen Shore, lanterns bobbing in the black night, although the stars were out this Midday and no snow fell. The Marines had work to do, since three of the Great White Bears came sniffing closer, looming like white wraiths out of the ice blocks, and the men had to fire muskets at them to drive them away — visibly wounding one bear in the side.

Again the Eulogy from Sir John — although shorter this time, since Hartnell was not as well liked as young Torrington had been — and again we walked back across the creaking, squeaking, moaning ice alone, under the stars dancing in the Cold this time, the only sound behind us the dwindling scrape of spades and pickaxes filling in the frozen soil in the new hole next to Torrington's nicely tended grave.

Perhaps it was the black cliff face Looming over All that murdered my Spirits this second burial. Although I deliberately stood where my back was to the Cliff this time, closer to Sir John so that I could hear the Words of Hope and Solace, I was always aware of that cold, black, vertical, lifeless and lightless slab of insensate Stone behind me — a portal, it seemed, to that Country from Which No Man Has Ever Returned.Compared to the Cold Reality of that black, featureless stone, even Sir John's compassionate and inspired words had little effect.

The morale on both ships is very low. We are not yet a Full Week into the new year, and already two of our Company have died. Tomorrow the four of us surgeons have agreed to Meet in a Private Place — the carpenter's room belowdecks on Terror *— to*

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