Principles of Magnetism (a Comedy of Manners)

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Principles of Magnetism (a Comedy of Manners)

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Summary

The one where they're married but it's still Victorian times and also it's an accident.

Notes

The prompt is "accidental marriage but it’s still the 1840s and in the arctic" and by god. Accidental marriage it is. Thanks again to sath, the best buddy that there is, for this prompt.

A Slip of the Pen

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"I am not concerned with how (apart from prayer) we may occupy ourselves over the long winters and put it to you thus: Captain Crozier and Commander Fitzjames are by now accustomed to marital conversation with one another which is great sport to witness. The liveliness of their adversarial talk will give me many hours of diversion I do not doubt."

Sir John Franklin, Captain HM Erebus, responds to a reader's question about what there is to do in the officers' mess during an Arctic Winter.

Sir John Franklin looked indifferently at *The Standard*. He was at breakfast, and during the pause he had taken to scrutinize the page, butter slipped from his biscuit onto the imprint.

"Martial, I'm sure I said."

"Wrote," said Crozier hoarsely. He cleared his throat and continued: "Wrote, Sir John, this being—as I have said—your published letter."

"And I think it very impertinent of the fellow to send my letters to print! Here I thought he was simply asking."

Crozier felt the first pains of a headache. His old friend had become dictatorial and sensitive in Van Dieman's Land, and dealing with him was a political enterprise for which Crozier had not the talent, training, or patience. He stabbed the paper with his finger, just avoiding the spreading stain of butter. "You must write to *The Standard* again, Sir John. Clarify yourself and recant your—unfortunate spelling."

"Spelling, sir? Recant, sir? I must do nothing like it! Francis, it is a typesetting error, nothing more. A triviality, and it looks very ill on us to be upset by it, now that we are but months shy of our great journey!"

"I beseech you," Crozier tried more fulsomely, but Sir John lost patience and cut him off.

"And I say I do not hear it. I've half a mind to write anyway and correct only my statement that you will be amusing, for right now I find you very dull— 'pon my honor! Very dull indeed!"

"Perhaps you find me dull," said Crozier in as mild a tone as he might order someone mastheaded, "because the context is not *marital*?"

Sir John's teacup crashed into his saucer as he stood. "I will hear no more of it! Are you an officer in Her Majesty's Navy, Francis? And have you not duties? I have. I go now to the Comptroller of Victualing and I shall hear no more of your pettifogging, do you understand?"

He buttoned his coat furiously and left Crozier alone at his table.

Crozier took a dazed seat in Sir John's now empty chair. "Marital," he said, wonderingly.

The headache had arrived.

Torbath Park, Liverpool
10 February 1845

Well now Francis,

I trust old boy you have seen the enclosed Paper. I have known much of life but never in it (I say never until now) have I known a man to Shit Himself from Laughing such as I have just done. My best to Fitzjames—I am your perplexed old friend

Thomas Blanky

Her Majesty's Ship *Terror* was in Woolwich, dry docked and clad in bright new oak. Even without her masts she was taller than anything surrounding, from the steam factory complex to the clock house to the covered slips, and it lifted Crozier's heart to see her so smart and lofty.

Terror should have sunk on the way back from Hudson Bay, and probably again at the Great Ice Barrier. But each time she had limped home to England and was repaired, revived, rebuilt, and floated again. It soothed some of the melancholy in him to see it—hadn't he himself almost been sunk beyond what seemed worth the effort to salvage, so many times? Three months ago he had been drunk in Italy, writing Sophia unhinged letters from in the meager shade of stone pines and growing a beard.

But they both had come out of it, *Terror* and Crozier. They were returned to seagoing service, were furnishing themselves for another great journey north. It roused his ambition to stand before the graceful new hull, and for a moment he could see a future for himself. Before the details of that future took form, he was slapped on the back so energetically he saw stars.

"Trying to smack that spleen out of you," said Thomas Blanky, who had come up quietly behind him. "Did it work?"

Crozier smiled and took his friend's hand. "Know I would never exert rank on you, Thomas, but I beg you not to smack anything out of me—out of anyone—if that is the force with which you do it. Or we shall all go overboard before we make Greenhithe."

"We shall see, won't we," said Blanky enigmatically. He looked with some mistrust at the steam engine. "When will yon great teapot be stowed?"

Crozier nodded, for he was satisfied with the work. "Very soon. Those cables and that winch there are being prepared to lower it down where the carpenter, the stoker, the caulker and their mates are waiting to affix it. And tomorrow we shall refinish the deck over it."

"Aye," said Blanky, squinting up at the ship's waist, "quite the hole she has through her."

"We shall have whole decks soon enough," said Crozier. "Such as ever we danced a quadrille upon."

"Knocked the spleen out, indeed! I would call that speech *optimism*, Francis."

"Any captain would be glad to see his ship looking so fine."

"Would he indeed? Or can we credit your remarkable mood to—what did Franklin say? Your *marital amusement*."

Crozier scowled at him. "Not more of that. I burnt your letter."

Blanky had dropped his sly look and was fully grinning. "You're a cool one, I must say, slipping it in the papers like you did."

"Thomas," said Crozier, frustrated.

"Francis," Blanky replied.

"Captain Crozier?" said someone else.

They both turned, and Crozier barely held back a groan. Fitzjames waved at them through the toiling crowd of sailors and steam factory workers.

"I suppose," said Blanky confidentially, "we'd spoken of the devil."

"I say, Captain Crozier!" Fitzjames made his way before them.

There was another blue-jacketed man with him, whose graying hair and whiskers did not diminish an overall youthful appearance. Crozier had come to understand that there were a thousand of these fellows, refined and high-spirited young officers fetched up in England with nothing to do but scheme their way back to sea. They were underfoot at Somerset House and Horse Guards Parade, identical and infinite and always laughing—and each and every one of them would swear before a judge that his greatest friend in the world was James Fitzjames.

Blanky touched the brim of his cap to Fitzjames. "Commander."

“Captain Crozier, Mr. Blanky. Of course you both know Lieutenant Le Vesconte? We’ve just managed to appropriate him for *Erebus*, and let me say it took fighting off many a clement revenue cruise to get him his shot at the ice.”

Le Vesconte gave them a modest smile. “Anything at all if I may never see a pile of guano again, gentlemen.”

“Hear, hear,” said Fitzjames.

“There will be *some* guano,” Blanky clarified.

There was a general period of shaking hands. Crozier’s good mood was dimming rapidly. Fitzjames had the general effect on him of a tropical disease, draining his energy and making him desperately thirsty. He had drunk wine in France and Italy while scrawling out his illegible and pathetic letters, and proven once and for all the true necessity of whiskey in putting his mood to rights.

“I see you are skirmishing with the old steam engine, but take heart,” said Fitzjames, squinting at the frustrating work of securing the huge apparatus to the winch. “I attended the *Rattler*’s trials and she made a fair ten knots—I promise you this engine here makes the screw quite worth all the effort.”

“D’you hear that, Francis?” said Blanky without affect. “It makes the screw worth all the effort.”

Crozier stepped on his foot.

“Just so,” Fitzjames continued, his tone momentarily uncertain. “I see you have some work before you, and we two are due at the superintendent’s. But I wonder if you might dine with us later at the Union?”

“Oh, but we would be delighted,” said Blanky.

Crozier was trapped by Blanky’s occasionally sadistic waggishness. “Expect us,” he agreed.

“The height of a man’s chest,” said Blanky to the entranced company. “And more vicious than lions.”

“Vicious?” said Fitzjames incredulously. “I have seen pictures and the bird looks rather like a peer at the opera. Such a farcical contradiction seems more the work of Mayhew and Lemon than Nature and the Almighty.”

“Oh, quite vicious,” Crozier affirmed. “They have beaks like any officer’s dirk and the whole creature is deadly strong and fast.”

“I pray then that we shall see the penguins in their herds as you describe, sir,” said Le Vesconte. “I have a great interest in exotic creatures and delight to see them with my own eyes.”

“The delight is invariably one-sided,” said Fitzjames, “as Henry you express it to all these unfortunates with your loaded musket. Though I shall like to see you take on the fierce penguin, you are quite within your rights! Anyone who dresses for the evening all day long must expect the British Navy or a musket ball sooner or later.”

Le Vesconte and—traitorously—Blanky laughed at this remark.

Dinner had been a social exertion that promised to fatigue Crozier through the rest of the week. As it turned out, Blanky and Crozier completed their business earlier than Fitzjames and Le Vesconte, as labor was ordered to stop by seven o’clock. They therefore had time alone during which they agreed to persuade the polar novices of anything they possibly could. But the fun bled out of it quickly, and by the time their plates were cleared Crozier felt Blanky’s allegiance wavering, won over by Fitzjames’s ready humor.

It was like getting to know James Ross so long ago—sitting in mortification at a man’s plain desperation to be admired. But where Ross had shown himself to be courageous, canny, and a loyal friend, Fitzjames was callow and smirking. A sycophant who had risen too fast. Crozier finished his whiskey in a stinging swallow and glowered.

Fitzjames, who clearly regarded anyone’s failure to laugh at his jests a defect bordering on genuine illness, sent a furrowed brow Crozier’s way. “Crozier, my dear fellow, have we stirred up some awful penguinical nightmare? You do not look at all the thing,” he said, and caught the sleeve of a waiter who was passing by with a decanter. “Whiskey for my friend, if you please, or he will not last the night."

Crozier’s glass was refreshed, and he was about to rebuke Fitzjames for his impertinence when they were suddenly interrupted. The interloper was a clean-shaven and very young man of somewhat upsetting appearance—a patterned waistcoat and his collar askew—who nervously begged their pardon.

“Gentleman, I say again I am so sorry to interrupt your dinner. Am I right to presume that you, sirs, are Captains Crozier and Fitzjames?”

“We are, sir, and so you hold the weather gage over us,” said Fitzjames, remarkably annoyed. He had lost all his animation after the somewhat uncivil interruption and gave the stranger a look of such haughtiness that the man’s fingers went white where they clutched his hat. Even Le Vesconte seemed surprised at his friend’s sudden bad temper.

“The—excuse me, the weather, sir?”

“The advantage,” said Crozier, incongruously kinder than Fitzjames. “We do not know you.”

“Oh of course, I beg your pardon again. My name is Charles Smith, and I work for *The Standard*, a daily evening paper for which I have three farthings a line—”

"—If this concerns Sir John Franklin and '*what there is to do in the officers' mess during an Arctic Winter*,' I shall give you three farthings right now to write a line on something else," said Fitzjames.

Smith became quite pale. "It does," he said, summoning his voice after a grueling silence, "indeed it does concern that."

"By Christ," said Crozier. He took a lengthy taste of his fresh glass of whiskey.

"I wondered, Captains, if you might help our readers to understand what Captain Franklin meant when he wrote that you are 'accustomed to marital conversation with one another.' As you see with—what you said about the weather—we landsmen are all so sadly lost when presented with the nautical dialect, even those of us who studied Greek such as myself, and must impose ourselves on you for translation."

"We have nothing to say, sir," Fitzjames replied coldly.

But Crozier was roused. Sir John had been dismissive of his warning. *Pettifogging*, he had called it, as if Crozier was a whining clerk. And here was proof that the problem had not gone away—that Crozier had been right indeed. He wet his throat and turned his eye on the journalist Smith, who positively flinched. "It is not a nautical term, sir, it is a spelling error —"

"—Take care," said Fitzjames quietly.

"No, I want him to hear it, why would I not?" Crozier heard his own voice rising as he flinched away from Fitzjames, who had touched his arm. "I want this whole imbecilic episode ended. Mr. Smith, it is a spelling error. Sir John wrote *marital* when he meant *martial*, for Fitzjames and I are always at odds. A spelling error, there ends the mystery. Now leave us alone."

"A spelling error?" said Smith.

"Francis," said Fitzjames.

Crozier ignored him. "A spelling error."

Blackheath, London
4 March 1845

My dear Francis,

I am very surprised and happy to hear of your matrimonial situation which when last we met you put to me as the most dismal thing in the world. It is my prayer that it will abate the loneliness you are so often writing me about and see you off to sea with settled affairs.

Forgive me for joking at your expense, the old gentleman's spelling has always been hit-and-miss and I call this one a wide shot indeed. But you must see how you have put yourself in this spot by gainsaying Franklin in the papers. For now he has got his back up against a wall and is insisting before all the Sea Lords his spelling was all correct and it seems this is a matter of honor with him now. On our hearing that Franklin intends to emend nothing I was compelled to assist Sir John Barrow in the collection of his lower jaw from the carpet. Of the Sea Lords in a hysteria I have this to say, any whaleman witnessing the scene would have said, She blows! (there was so much spittle) and I wrote to you following this encounter as soon as I was dry.

My dear Francis you have nothing to do but lie ahull of it for now and pray do not speak to another newspaperman. Ann and I implore you with renewed vigor to come and stay with us at Eliot Place. For one thing it will cut down on the cost of the post and for another I guarantee neither Franklin nor Fitzjames and my own interference should you try again to discourse with the press. Believe I have rebuked myself thoroughly for my earlier amusement and believe me also to be your most devoted friend

James Ross

In a legalistic fulfillment of his promise, Sir James Ross's home in Eliot Place remained free of Fitzjames for only one week.

At the close of this interval he called rather early on a rainy March morning and apparently stood dripping in the hallway as he waited for Crozier to receive him.

"Can't you send him away?" Crozier said in a low voice to Lady Ann Ross when she told him this.

"The weather is Gothic, Francis, I can't send him back out into that."

"Let him get wet. He's a sailor, so he claims."

"He is my guest."

"And then what am I?"

"Vexing, if you want to know! Go down."

There was no argument he could make that did not seem petulant, so he started out of his room toward the stair. Lady Ross followed closely, and Crozier, who had grown up with sisters, drew up before the first step in suspicion.

"You too?"

“You have me, Francis, I plot to listen through a keyhole and make notes about your conversation in Pitman shorthand for the edification of *The Standard's* many interested readers.”

“So—”

Lady Ross stared at him. “So, come down.”

They descended the stair to find that Fitzjames was indeed still waiting in the hall, his peaked cap in his hands and a substantial amount of rainwater under his feet. It was the first time Crozier could recall seeing him alone. He seemed very much reduced without the usual boisterous company, quiet and agitated and not, for once, laughing.

“Has someone died?” said Crozier, feeling Lady Ross’s sharp elbow in his side.

“Hist, Captain Crozier,” she said. Then in a kinder voice: “Captain Fitzjames, won’t you come inside?”

Fitzjames regarded his puddle in a state of heavy cogitation. After a minute he seemed to remember where he was and shook his head. “Yes, of course ma’am, thank you. And know I am awful chagrined about the *mare incognitum* I have left at your door. This weather—I’ll be happy to leave England.”

“I wonder that you do not think it may be worse where you’re going,” said Lady Ross. She led them through to the front parlor. “I’ll have some tea sent in.”

“Thank you but I cannot stay, I’m due shortly in Greenwich,” said Fitzjames, which Crozier found reassuring.

“I shall not impose on any more of your time then,” said Lady Ross, “though I will be just through the door and would delight in offering you such connubial guidance as you may require.”

Crozier closed his eyes. When he opened them, he was standing alone with Fitzjames, both of them distant and upright in the courteous postures they had assumed in Lady Ross’s presence. An uncomfortable silence settled in the room.

For all he had accomplished in his life, Crozier had not made himself amiable. He had nothing to say, not to Fitzjames—this was not a man he knew well, or even particularly liked. But the silence demanded something from him. He cleared his throat, and heard the floorboards creak as Fitzjames shifted. “Well?” he said.

“I have unfortunate news,” said Fitzjames. “And I thought it was best you have it from me. Last night I dined at the Senior with Barrow and Franklin—and a feebler blancmange I declare I never have seen—”

“Surely that is not the news.”

“No of course, I was only trying to—never mind. So there I was, between Franklin and Barrow. The conversation eventually touched on the letter to *The Standard*—Barrow rather

pressed Franklin on it—and then the one gentleman swore to the other that he never wrote anything false or absentminded and was tutored very soundly in spelling. Barrow looked right at me and, well, damme! Was I to contradict my commander to my patron?"

"So," Crozier looked out the window at the sheets of rain and tried to collect his thoughts. The absurdity of the situation repelled his understanding. "You did what, exactly, instead?"

Fitzjames fidgeted. "Well I confirmed what Franklin said."

"Confirmed."

"I tell you I was in a deuced awkward spot, Crozier, after you went after his spelling in the papers!"

"You mean that in all the awkwardness of creation you thought yourself facing something *worse* than telling Sir John Barrow that we are—" he found he could not say it.

"At the time it seemed really the thing to do," said Fitzjames.

"Did it!" said Crozier.

Fitzjames looked chagrined. "So in Barrow's mind at least the matter, and I own my part in it, is settled. We two are—" he made an impatient *et cetera* gesture.

Crozier tried again: "He thinks we are are—"

"Yes. We are—"

"Are—"

"Married, Francis?" said Miss Sophia Cracroft, stepping into the parlor. Crozier felt the floor buck beneath him. "How extraordinary."

Chapter End Notes

There we go folks that's CHAPTER ONE of the labor of my heart, the story I was born to tell. Here are some notes.

1. Crozier had danced at least one quadrille on Terror, at a ball held aboard Erebus and Terror in Hobart 1841, and possibly also on New Year's Day in 1842, though that party was mostly held in a hollowed-out iceberg. Crozier's early Arctic exploration is like. sort of just a Jagermeister brand campaign.

2. Certain civil departments of the Admiralty held offices at Somerset House, the rest being at Whitehall, where Horse Guards Parade might be a good place to catch a

glimpse of Wellington or, maybe, just hang out? Listen I don't live in the 19th century.

3. Penguin shit is apparently called penguin guano. Fitzjames and Le Vesconte just can't avoid guano!

4. The Rattler's trials did indeed make 10 knots! But Erebus's, held in April, made an "estimated" 3 :(Terror seems to have not had any trials

5. Henry Mayhew and Mark Lemon were the joint editors of Punch at the time

6. The weather gage! It means being upwind.

7. Lying ahull is a way of weathering a storm

8. Since Crozier addressed letters to both Rosses, (and lived with them in the three months before the expedition left) it's an ok assumption that he was friendly with Ann and how wacky is it that I'm working to justify that detail in a story where he marries Fitzjames

9. The Senior was the United Service Club, a gentlemen's club for senior officers (at 116 Pall Mall where you can now book meeting rooms that feature some nice-looking business communications solutions)

10. The blancmange actually was the news

OK that's all until next time! Please find me on tumblr!

A Fragile Accord

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"It is very much the morning to come calling on Captain Crozier," said Lady Ross without a hint of apology. She showed her newest guest in.

Sophia had avoided the worst of the rain, and though the hem of her wool skirt had wicked up some water she looked altogether fresh and dry. For all the horrible embarrassment of the situation, she was a welcome sight.

"Sophia," said Crozier, taking her hand.

"Francis," she furrowed her brow at him.

"I have much to tell you," he said very quietly, "later."

Fitzjames cleared his throat and shuffled his hat under an elbow. Crozier took his hand from Sophia's and a step back from her person.

"Miss Cracroft," Fitzjames said, breaking the silence. "What complete pleasure. And Lady Ross. Excuse me all of you, but I must be off, I am overdue at the Observatory. And what do we know but the nature of magnets may be changing by the minute."

"That accords very ill with what I know of nature," said Sophia.

"And magnets," said Lady Ross. "Certainly sir you must know the physical phenomena are quite immutable—the attraction of opposite poles and so forth. The change is rather in our understanding."

"What that I could learn from this fair company! Excluding yourself, Crozier—not for cause, certainly your expertise in these matters is unchallenged—my choice of the word 'fair' I daresay—well—" Fitzjames cleared his throat and seemed to have nothing else to say. He gave the room a self-effacing smile and it was Sophia who laughed. She had a charming laugh, warm and faintly teasing, and her sense of humor was discerning.

Or so Crozier had thought.

"How unfortunate for Commander Fitzjames that he must be going," he said.

"Yes of course," said Fitzjames, making finally for the door. "*Sic parvis magnets*, and everything. Lady Ross. Miss Cracroft. Good morning to you both. Crozier—I don't doubt we shall see one another soon enough."

"Terribly soon," said Crozier.

"Well that was awfully uncivil," said Lady Ross when the door was shut.

“Like my uncle with the puppy,” said Sophia. “When of course the poor thing simply doesn’t know to leave the carpets dry and the grass watered.”

“That is,” said Crozier, “more apt than you could possibly know. Only the carpets are a man’s life and every hope for future happiness, and the grass another man’s—I hope that I am in company where I may call it so—foolish pride.”

“I find your metaphor labyrinthine,” said Lady Ross. “Plain speech suits you much better. Shall I arrange some tea?”

She left them alone in the parlor as blithely as if Crozier had been Sophia’s brother.

“You know I am visiting you against Lady Franklin’s specific wish,” said Sophia, taking a seat on the sofa with a gentle rasp of wool shifting against linen. “She thinks you insulted Sir John before all of London.”

“As I was in Kent at the time,” said Crozier, “I do not see how that is possible.”

“New evidence!” said Sophia. “But of course you’re right—by reason of jurisdiction the two of you have had no trouble and are the best of friends! How silly of me to have thought anything at all was the matter. I should be back at home with my aunt, then. Maybe I am there already, since as you say there never was a reason for me to be anxious.”

“That’s not at all what I meant,” said Crozier, without a real idea of what he had meant. He frowned lamely at his hands. “Nor did I mean to goad Sir John in the press.”

“No, you meant to show off that you are smarter than he is. But Francis can you not see that everybody knows that? Everybody. All of London—and I include Woolwich—knows this. The gazettes know it, Pearce and Back and Sabine and the Rosses know it. And most of all, Sir John himself knows it, so you see he can never admit it.”

“The situation is preposterous,” said Crozier. “Surely even he must see that.”

“Careful with your ‘even,’ sir. A great many things are preposterous,” Sophia replied tartly. “And as British subjects we are expected to bear them with serenity and good cheer.”

“You can’t possibly mean that he has no intention of clarifying himself.”

“None, Francis. Not the slightest intention. You know him. He hoards his personal honor, he scars from every cut.”

“*His* honor! What of my own? What of—” the fist he had made with his hand was inappropriate in Sophia’s company, and he paused to relax his posture. “Will you not intercede?”

“I did not think you would put me in such a position.”

Crozier sighed deeply. “You must know, Sophia, that I would never put you in a position which is in the smallest way uncomfortable to you.”

“Then be dutiful, Francis, and show Sir John your friendship. Extend your hand, he will forgive you, and you will be welcome again.”

She had invoked a powerful deity. Duty had held him upright before, when cold and weariness and might have ended him. Duty had brought him back from the continent and dispersed the clouds of his misery like wind. And while having happiness in the latter years of his life was a cautious hope, duty would be with him to his grave. If it trapped him now, he could hardly resent it.

“You believe *this* is my duty? To apologize to Sir John?”

“Surely you must believe it also.”

“To apologize will confirm this ridiculous fiction. To end, in some circles, the belief that I am a bachelor. To end in all of them the belief that I am not mad. My name will be surrounded with civil and social confusion. And probably spelled ‘Cozier.’”

“Oh certainly,” Sophia agreed. “And what a comforting name in the winter months, or whenever it is cold.”

“And what of you and—”

Sophia shook her head firmly. “Francis, do not. You have my assured friendship and you must be content with it. Now offer Sir John yours. For you have promised not to make me uncomfortable, and if you are forbidden to visit, I will be uncomfortable indeed.”

He had been outmaneuvered by Sir John Franklin. Sir John Franklin, merry, titled, and complacent, who in the whole of his somehow impressive naval career had only ever outsmarted some lichen, and that only allegedly. Crozier thought of duty. “I will make my peace with him. I promise.”

“Oh, bravo,” said Lady Ross, coming back into the room, “nobly said!”

Sophia took his hand. “I am happy to hear it, and my uncle will be happier. He has something for you, by the way, in the event of your reconciliation.”

What Sir John had for him, he discovered later in the week, was a gigantic Newfoundland dog with paws the size of deadeyes and a bark like a broadside. Crozier saw his hand disappear in the black fur when he bent to scratch the creature’s neck.

“I picked him up for the voyage,” said Sir John. “I remember how you and Sir James had something similar in Hobart. However we have now been a week with the creature and it will not do. I cannot abide the indiscipline and Lady Franklin cannot abide the fur. She wanted me to give him to Fitzjames, but you know how that fellow lives—”

“I do *not*,” said Crozier.

Sir John carried on: “And so I suggested, and she agreed, that you might like to take him aboard *Terror*.”

“How kind of you to think of it,” said Crozier, cross at hearing he was the second choice to care for an unwanted dog, of all things. Despite himself, he bent to scratch the creature again. It sat down and thumped the floor with its huge tail.

“Never mind at all, my dear fellow,” said Franklin magnanimously. “You are my first and only choice for the poor unwanted thing.”

“Terror is dry docked still, but I will happily return for him in a month or so,” said Crozier, still scratching the dog. It sat down and thumped the floor with its huge tail.

“Never mind the ship then, you may bring him home with you. He takes a beefsteak or so in the evening, or a grilled bone, whatever is handy. And though he will likely try to sleep in your bed—that is your affair—you must keep him off the carpets.”

“A beefsteak,” said Crozier weakly.

“Or a grilled bone will do him nicely,” Sir John agreed. “His name is Sweetlips.”

The dog let out a long whine. Crozier stared down at him. “Surely not.”

“Not that he answers to it.” Sir John turned his attention down to the dog. “Sweetlips! Sweetlips!”

The dog turned its head from him quite coolly.

“I see,” said Crozier.

“Yes, well, there it is. I thought you’d be pleased,” said Sir John, drawing back. Crozier reflected on Sophia’s prudent words, *he scars at every cut.*

“Oh, I am,” said Crozier awkwardly, trying to arrange his face in an expression of gratitude. “Unspeakably pleased.”

“Good,” said Sir John, and smiled. There was some measure of judgment in it; placated, but not thoroughly duped. He had shown signs in recent months of being cannier than Crozier remembered—had negotiated down the price on the expedition’s provisions to next to nothing, had duped Crozier into publicly agreeing to a fictitious marriage with his fellow officer, and had developed an occasional furrowed expression of serious thought. Taken altogether it was unsettling.

“About the newspaper,” Crozier began.

Sir John lifted his hand. “Say no more about it.”

“You know I am the last person in the world to want to cause you any embarrassment,” he continued. “And had I known your mind—well, had I tried—I did not think, sir, and I am so sorry for it.”

“I am gratified to hear it,” said Sir John. He took Crozier’s hand. “But Francis, be easy. I forgive you freely. We are friends again, the matter is closed. You must be easy, it will be forgotten in a week, and we’ll all laugh about it in Greenhithe.”

Crozier smiled, feeling a now-familiar premonitory dread. “Of course,” he agreed. “A week.”

On leaving Franklin’s townhouse Crozier found that no coach would admit the dog (“Fetch him a harness and he can pull!” said one driver) and they were obliged to walk. Although he clutched the braided leather leash Franklin had given him, he found that the dog walked easily and happily by his side, only occasionally pausing to sniff something unmentionable, and only once barking so loudly that a child across the street began to cry.

“I have decided,” Crozier told the dog, “Sweetlips is no name at all for you. If my fortune is to be tied to every floppy-haired creature to ever lick Sir John’s boots then at least one of them shall be sensibly named. Neptune or Triton, I think, since you’re off to sea. Or Proteus or Rhodes, but what benefit is there to an obscure choice? We are a voyage of discovery, not of classical education. Neptune, then.”

Neptune stuck his face into a hedge. “No, Neptune!” Crozier cried. The dog did not immediately answer to the new name and had to be hauled out, chewing something that was beyond Crozier’s power to retrieve. But there was little to be done about it. About any number of things. Crozier sighed, overcome by a familiar sense that the odds were stacked against him.

“Nothing to be done,” said Crozier. But Neptune barked thunderously in sympathy, and he felt his heart lighten.

On the other side of the hedge, another child began to cry.

Blackheath, London

2 April 1845

My dear Thomas,

It may be that things are looking up and this awful business is behind me. I am left not happy but at least with more mundane problems, engines and crews and iron cladding and Fitzjames whispering in Sir John’s ear that Arctic Service is a capital hobby for gentlemen but nothing at all like real work. On Erebus *I cannot say how much Arctic Experience there is to go around, but it is not an exaggeration to say it could be measured in a teacup. They have*

not an Ice Master yet but the wardroom is as crowded as a ball at Hanover-square. Would that it were Captain Ross and Captain Crozier together again on our old ships. But his choice is quite clear and I cannot begrudge him. He and Lady Ross are the kindest hosts imaginable and say you must join us all soon for dinner and I dearly hope only a little singing. Too much of it and the dog will bark, I have trained him myself. I am less melancholy and still your true friend,

Francis Crozier

"It's a point-to-point, basically," said Fitzjames. He was leaning over a map of the eastern coast of England, gesturing grandly to ports Crozier knew better than his own home. Sir John looked on with interest.

"It isn't," said Crozier.

Fitzjames carried on: "Sailed from Woolwich to Yarmouth Roads. Aboard we will have a small crew making constant note of the speed, the power exerted by the engine, and the forward thrust—this will allow us to later calculate the horsepower of the shaft itself—the depth and the slip of the screw, *et cetera*, but of course the real purpose of the thing is that the last one to Yarmouth Roads is a rotten egg."

"Hear, hear," said Sir John, his eyes brightening.

"No," said Crozier again, trying to break in before Sir John could work up too much enthusiasm about racing two arctic bombers down the Thames and up the coast. "No sir, I believe Fitzjames is being more clever than clear. It is a trial, meant to gauge the practical use of what is—and forgive me but I must say it again—very experimental equipment. The engine will be used only rarely in the ice; if tacking itself is a danger we will hardly be breaking any records or indeed carrying much sail. The speed, therefore, is irrelevant."

Fitzjames cast him an annoyingly patient glance. "Not wholly irrelevant, the—"

"*Mostly* irrelevant," said Crozier. "Speed is less relevant to a trial of an icebreaker's engine than it is, for example, to riding a point-to-point."

"Lieutenant Gore," said Fitzjames, "will you be so good as to make some official note of Captain Crozier's disapproval? Otherwise I fear we shall not be able to move on to other business."

"Gentlemen," said Sir John, but he had nearly laughed at Fitzjames's remark. "Graham, you must do no such thing. Francis, I take your point fully, and of course you're right. It will be slow going through the ice, and we must not exert ourselves overmuch for speed in these trials."

“Thank you for saying so,” said Crozier, savoring the details of even such a minor victory. There had been few in his career, and so far between.

“Anyway I must be going, and you must be off yourselves quite soon I think,” Sir John went on. “I will see you gentlemen in three days’ time. I await the result of your trials most anxiously. God protect you until we meet again.”

“Whatever else,” said Fitzjames as soon as Sir John’s footsteps had retreated, “I’ve got a guinea on *Erebus*.”

“And I on *Terror*,” said Crozier immediately.

Fitzjames lifted his eyebrows, but put out his hand. “I’m surprised at you, Crozier, but I can’t say I’m not pleased. You see, I could do with a guinea.”

“Oh,” said Crozier with the darkest menace he could summon. He shook Fitzjames’s hand. “So could I.”

Later the same morning they left Woolwich under plain sail and in good weather—if with somewhat more wind blowing south than Crozier and his wallet would have preferred. As they made their way past Shoeburyness Blanky found him on deck and offered Crozier a match for his pipe.

“What will elude me until I die,” Blanky said, “is the understanding of why it seemed to you in the moment that a very intimidating thing to say was that you *could do with a guinea*.”

“I wasn’t trying to intimidate anyone,” said Crozier. The southerly wind buffeted the first puff of his pipe back into his face.

“Which gives me great relief, since you did nothing like it. But I wonder do you know how far you went in the opposite direction?”

Crozier scowled. “I’m a sailor, not a character in a novel. What did you expect me to say?”

“Something better than, *‘Oh so could I.’”*

“Better? There are better ice masters.”

“Here?”

Crozier handed him the matchbook. “I could put an advertisement in the newspaper and have one meet us tomorrow.”

“I’d say you’ve put enough things in newspapers lately, but then, I’m only the best ice master available to you at the moment and no philosopher.”

“You seem to think yourself the wit of the age.”

Blanky shrugged humbly. “Mrs. Blanky says much the same thing. Talking of which, how goes your wedded—well, I can’t say bliss, not after *I could use a guinea too*—but, shall I say, your wedded state? You seemed to think it had blown over last you wrote.”

“Thank the lord, I think Sir John may have been right on this one. It seems it is finally out of people’s minds.”

“Not mine.”

“Regular people’s minds.”

“That’s as may be. So all it took was a bit of a grovel to Sir John?”

Crozier took a deep breath of smoke. “That, and a promise never again to contradict him on the subject. And I had to take the dog.”

“Had to, my eye. You love that dog. And never have I seen an animal so loyal, even in the odd hours when you’re not handing him a beefsteak. To be honest, I blush that Sir John has done so much by way of furnishing your future happiness: Fitzjames had been a good prospect, and Neptune is very much a good dog. While true but less grand friends such as I can only offer you good counsel.”

“Happiness? You saw how ready he was to crack up the coast at top speed. Sir John has furnished my future demise, more likely than my happiness.”

“Could be both,” said Blanky philosophically. “But as the queen’s true subject I must say that, over time, your happiness would be of greater benefit to the service than your demise. So you’ll hear my advice?”

“I don’t see how I can avoid it.”

“If you can’t swim, neither can I. Don’t be horrible to him, Frank. We’re against the odds enough as it is without you go a bit easier. And don’t forget I know you; you will wound yourself far worse. Put happiness in your mind rather than demise.”

Crozier turned his face to the windward air, which blew smoke off the bowl of his pipe. It had always been as easy for Blanky to voice his real thoughts and true affections as it was for him to tell the time. Was this how men spoke to one other on whaling ships, without personal agenda or any restraint? In Crozier’s particular naval career there had been little opportunity to take a compliment and even less to declare friendship.

“This is the Royal Navy, Tom. There is much more by way of demise on offer than happiness.”

“Well, there’s nothing worth having they haven’t found a way to be miserly with. Which makes me think, can you actually afford to give anyone a guinea?”

Crozier clutched his pipe more tightly between his teeth.

“Well,” said Blanky. “While I am being generous with my advice, I think we might carry the slightest bit more sail.”

In the end *Terror* made it to harbor a scant twenty minutes before *Erebus*, and Crozier awaited her officers on the quay along with Blanky, his first lieutenant Edward Little, and an unfamiliar lift to his lips that might have been self-satisfaction.

“Well I can’t pay you now,” said Fitzjames, as if that should have been obvious from the start.

“You’ve let Captain Crozier in on the family motto, then?” said Le Vesconte.

“Crozier have I told you,” said Fitzjames, “that the amount of guano we endured on *Clio* was rivaled only by the amount of damnable impertinence? Anyway if Englishmen paid our debts immediately I daresay there would be no reason at all for us to appear in society.”

Immediately Blanky’s words of caution were overcome by a powerful sense of annoyance. Fitzjames was very blithe, very comfortable—had he ever paid a debt in his life? He would have taken Crozier’s money without a second thought. And what was money to gentlemen, who thought it was brought by the rain.

“There’s porter,” Blanky chuckled. Crozier shot him a glare, which Blanky seemed to deign not to see.

“How true,” said Fitzjames. “And Bakewell pudding, though to be honest I don’t really see why one should have to leave one’s home for it. Talking of which, after we’ve wrapped up with our records, there’s rather a good pub on Regent Road where I confess Henry and I are something of a regular sight—”

“I have business with the Board of Ordnance,” Crozier said before Fitzjames could work his way to an invitation to another boisterous dinner party. “It will take me quite late, so I don’t think I will see any of you before tomorrow.”

Fitzjames blinked at him. “Yes of course, we’ve all got quite a lot to do. Mr. Blanky, Mr. Little, may we count on you around nine o’clock?”

“You will find, Commander, that I am always to be counted on around nine o’clock,” said Blanky. Crozier could not help but give him a second resentful look at this fresh betrayal.

“How topping,” said Fitzjames. “You see I’ve been thinking quite a bit about the penguins—and as it seems we’ll be passing the Glorious Twelfth in the Arctic I’ll be glad of a bit more education. Only we shall never be allowed to come home if we don’t do our best for a good bag.”

“Oh, there’s much to know about their ways,” said Blanky. He made a last bid for peace: “Though Captain Crozier might advise you better. Francis, are you sure your meeting will be as late as that?”

“Quite sure,” Crozier replied testily.

“Well, never mind,” said Fitzjames. “Mr. Little?”

“If Captain Crozier can spare me,” said Little. There was a note of hopefulness in his voice that Crozier had never himself heard. Wasn’t that typical of the Royal Navy, to respect a man more for the promise of an entertaining conversation than for diligence and rigor?

“Certainly I can,” said Crozier, “as it is not my place to interrupt anyone’s leisure at the seaside.”

Fitzjames sighed like he was worried they wouldn’t hear him in the loges. Blanky said nothing, only stared at his old friend with indecipherable judgment.

“Of course,” said Little. “Captain Crozier, Commander Fitzjames, forgive me, I was not trying at all to shirk my duties.”

“Nor would any gentleman think it, Mr. Little,” said Fitzjames. Despite these gallant words, he wore a expression of utter bafflement, like no one in his entire life had dared to suggest that one lieutenant in all the Royal Navy might have better things to do than spend the night at a pub with James Fitzjames.

Crozier turned his back to the lot of them.

The Board of Ordnance was in fact a minor errand, and he was back at his desk on *Terror* at the end of sunset, pouring his own whiskey and halfheartedly hoping that Blanky would tire of the merriness before long and seek him out. *Well Francis, weren’t you right about Fitzjames,* he’d say. *What a tiresome prick*. He closed his eyes and thought about it some more.

When a knock came at his door he started sleepily. “Come on,” he said, rousing himself, expecting Blanky.

“Do excuse me,” said Fitzjames as he crossed the threshold, his voice very loud in the gloomy cabin. “On deck they said you were hard at work, but of course I should have known that even the most assiduous of officers do sleep *occasionally*. Another time, perhaps.”

“I wasn’t sleeping,” said Crozier.

Fitzjames looked at the desk, where the single glass was not quite empty. “Of course,” he said. He had probably come in on the tide of some revelry—men cajoling or betting him to go see what in the world Crozier had been up to all night—and without the enthusiasm of a crowd his confidence was bleeding away fast.

Crozier had no interest in making it easier. “What time is it?” he asked.

Fitzjames reached into his coat and glanced at his repeater. “Awfully late. But this need not be a long interview. I owe you a guinea, sir,” he said, and placed a gold sovereign on the desk, “it was well-sailed.”

Crozier stared at him. “You said you didn’t have it.”

“That was earlier,” said Fitzjames like it was any sort of proper explanation.

“So you decided to settle your debt in the middle of the night?”

“Well you seemed so cross about it—Crozier, I wonder if I might blame the incivility of the hour and be very honest with you?”

“I won’t stop you,” said Crozier.

Fitzjames had caught himself fidgeting, and quietly put his hands behind his back. He took a breath. “I know you are a stern man and I admire you for it. I know you think officers who have not seen your service to be far beneath you and I am very sure we are. But whatever else you think of me, I came by this appointment honestly. And—well—it will be a very long voyage if we continue as we have begun, there it is.”

Crozier had expected almost anything else, and took a moment to collect himself. But of course Blanky, being unwilling to venture out with warring captains and seeing that Crozier was implacable, had worked on Fitzjames to sue for peace. Though it was certainly unlike him to act on the wishes of anyone ranking less than an admiral.

“It will be a long voyage no matter what we do,” Crozier said.

“Of course,” said Fitzjames, defeated. “I will leave you to your—”

“But you’re right,” Crozier went on, thinking that actually Blanky was *right*, and Fitzjames just couldn’t stand that someone in the world didn’t like him. “We must wipe the slate clean.”

“Very decent of you,” said Fitzjames, obviously relieved. “Very decent indeed. It has been a rough acquaintance, I don’t mind telling you. And that business with *marital*, well, I am sorry for my part in it.”

“A sorry business,” said Crozier, “but it is behind us now." He reminded himself that he had his position, his small number of true friends, and his loyal dog. Those comforts, meager though they were, could not be taken. Not by John Franklin or Jane Franklin or even James Fitzjames.

But only a week later, he walked through the Ross’s door in London to find a sea chest in the hall ominously engraved with the initials *J.F.*

Chapter End Notes

Yes, this is how long it takes me to write new chapters! but don't worry I will never lose my gigantic arctic boner (ew?) for this pairing. A special final shoutout to PlinytheYounger who came all the way to the best-lit bar in London to understandingly listen to me hand-wring about this plot and overswipe on tinder. It's Time For Notes!

1. *Sic parvis magna* was Sir Francis Drake's motto, and Fitzjames in this story is a nervous punner.

2. Woolwich was part of Kent until 1888 when it became part of London, so Crozier is technically correct, the best kind of correct.

3. I googled "19th century dog names" and discovered Sweetlips, arguably the worst dog name in human history. "Could there be a cuter pet name?" asks the article. I believe there could be.

4. Did Victorians say "last one to x is a rotten egg"? Probably not since they said hardly anything normal.

5. The Glorious Twelfth is the start of the shooting season for red grouse (and was in 1845) but !not! penguins.

6. Though the last few guineas likely remained in circulation in 1845 (they were gone, we know, by 1846, because they had been collected by the Royal Mint along with a large number of underweight sovereigns), they had been officially replaced with the gold sovereign, though people continued to refer to the value represented by both coins as a guinea, because it sounded classier. Isn't this the kind of thrilling sexual detail you are reading fanfiction for? i know i am

An Intramural Chapter

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The scene set itself slowly, like something written by a novelist who got his pay by the word. In the hall, Crozier found a sea chest. Immediately apparent was that it was not his own plain cedar wood chest. Neither was it Ross's. At the front the letters *J.F.* were shallowly carved, and it was not fine enough to belong to Sir John Franklin.

Crozier then heard the sound of laughter. He followed it from the hall to the parlor. Inside, as casual with each another as old shipmates, holding glasses of whiskey and occupying the furniture expansively, were Sir James Clark Ross and James Fitzjames.

From the bloody Wedgwood plate on which Neptune focused his enthusiastic attention, it was to be concluded that they had been feeding Crozier's dog beefsteak on top of everything.

He stood thunderstruck. Had he no solace from this man? Nowhere to go where Fitzjames would not follow, no friends to trust that Fitzjames would not take from him? There was his own dog licking the man's hand.

"We do not but speak of him, and he appears!" said Ross jovially. "Crozier my dear chap, do come in. We were only just lamenting your absence."

"Lamenting," said Crozier. He heard the petulance in his voice as soon as he spoke and gathered himself, straightening his back as he entered the room.

"Lamenting," said Ross firmly, as sensitive to the signs of Crozier's mood as to the weather. "Take a glass with us, won't you? If you will not we will carry on drinking to your health as you stand here and I don't think any of us could bear it."

Neptune let out a whine and thumped his tail on the ground. Fitzjames, infuriatingly, put a hand on his head—and after that, the whining stopped.

"I wouldn't want to be an ungrateful guest," said Crozier, the decanter already in his hand, "but what is the occasion?"

Fitzjames looked down at the dog, who Crozier noted with displeasure returned the glance.

Ross laughed. "Fitzjames here was due a bit of an arduous duty tot, and I thought I'd keep him company while he waited for you to return."

Crozier wet his throat. "Waited for me to return," he repeated. "Why?"

"To speak with you, of course. Really, Francis. And I think you'll like to hear it—Fitzjames when you first told me the story I must have gone unconscious for a minute laughing."

“A long trip to tell me a joke,” said Crozier. He took a place on the sofa next to Ross, establishing absolute at which side of the room was the quarterdeck. He was pleased when Neptune left the foot of Fitzjames’s chair to come greet him.

Ross was grinning. “Not exactly,” he said.

“It is a funny old business in any case,” said Fitzjames, giving them the weak pretense of a smile. “To do with my landlady. You see according to the terms of my tenancy, I must be a bachelor while I have my bed, and—ha. Well, somehow she has got the rather rum notion that I ain’t one.”

Ross, always easily delighted, was laughing outright. “Franklin’s *marital* again, Francis, can you credit it! To think they made our poor friend a governor, never mind where, a governor! How many writs and ordinances do you think he left behind him for a *Van Damen’s Land* or a city called *Herbert*? But go on and give him the rest of it, Fitzjames, weren’t you chased out at dawn? With a rugbeater? Lord, would that I could have seen it.”

Fitzjames tapped a finger on his glass, thinking. It had been apparent that he was the sort of man to compose his lines before delivering them, but rarely was the process so transparent. “As I said sir, it was damnable early, I don’t think anyone had the pleasure of seeing it but possibly the watchman. But you have the plot exact. The poor lady having the most dismal view of seafaring professions generally, believing myself specifically to be guilty of the most profound perjury, and having the rugbeater close at hand, well—taken together it was too much. She found she could not suffer me under her roof a moment longer. And so,” he cast his gaze around the room, and seeming to find no place for it to light he spoke at last with a shrug, addressing no one in particular: *“Me voici.”*

As Ross’s feeble attempts to smother his laughter failed, a part of Crozier’s mind recoiled. These could be the last days he would spend with his greatest friend, the merry homelike memories he had hoped to hoard and gloat over when he went to sea. To have Fitzjames in those memories appalled him.

“Honestly!” cried Ross, clutching his knee.

Crozier ignored him and addressed Fitzjames: “And so the dunnage I observed in the hall?”

“My own,” Fitzjames replied.

“Have you nowhere else to go?”

“I had thought to go to Sir John,” Fitzjames allowed, with a laugh at that folly. “But judged it was not meet, while his niece stays.”

“For which we do not blame you in the least,” Ross interjected. “Really, Francis, a man hardly likes to be questioned in this manner when he had begun his day staring down a, a—”

“—A loaded rugbeater, rather,” said Fitzjames.

Ross's laughter was abrupt enough to make Crozier start, his whiskey sloshing dangerously close to the rim of the glass.

"Come now, Frank," said Ross, catching his breath to appeal more gently to his friend. "It's agreed, anyway, to my wife's delight. It is easier on her if her friends may dine without she must pull gentlemen from hither and yon—or God protect us, my uncle. As for me, I thought, it's the least I can do."

"I see," said Crozier.

Ross smiled. "No less than you would do, I think."

"I wonder," said Crozier.

"I am sincerely grateful to you sir, and to Lady Ross," said Fitzjames to Ross. "And Crozier —as he says. No less. I am heartily sure."

Neptune thumped his tail on the floor with enough force to rattle the plate.

The next day *Erebus* and *Terror* were sailed west into the city to be provisioned. The date of their sailing was now only weeks away, and the panic of the deadline had set in. The men's work hours were all exceeded, the clerks at Goldner's and Fraser's were threatened almost as a matter of routine, and men from what seemed like a hundred newspapers crawled over the ships so that they nearly outnumbered the hands.

Soon they would be sailing. Once Crozier had reflected on that prospect with cheer, but slowly cheer had been diluted with worry, until it often felt like dread.

The dread, he knew, was at the prospect of his loneliness. That this expedition would be made without the comfort of Ross's fellowship hurt more than he could express, more than he had even thought possible.

Ross had done what his honor had demanded—more specifically, what Thomas Coulman had demanded—and Crozier could not hold it against him. Or, as he did at his least generous, hold it against his wife. But the fact remained that Ross was leaving Crozier alone. Alone for years, alone in the bone-cracking cold, alone for months of night. Of course he had Blanky, but Blanky was not a commissioned naval officer, and certain things could never be the same.

Everyone wanted him to befriend Fitzjames, a man who resembled Ross in some scanty ways, and who was being thrust in Crozier's path at every turn besides. Who now lived under the same roof. The situation had every quality of an arranged marriage—down to the detail of the actual marriage, which Sir John stuck to whenever he was asked.

As if it were ever easier to like a man in close quarters. The sight of Fitzjames at the breakfast table, sharing sheets of his newspaper with Lady Ross, or tipping his hat ceremoniously to the dog on his way in at night, made Crozier feel foreign and old. What had

he to say to this energetic young officer, who apparently had never gotten out of bed without embarking on the type of rollicking caper that involved a broken heirloom, an angry vicar, and a cheering village? He had none of Ross's sensitivity, none of his nerve, and Crozier would be alone.

He stormed about his ship and gloomed about Ross's home.

"All well, Frank?" Ross asked him one evening, leaning over Crozier to ash his cigar in his dish. Fitzjames and Lady Ross were across the room at the piano, puzzling over some new sheet she had ordered.

"Our tinned provisions are delayed again," said Crozier, thinking it the better cause for his mood. "Sir John says it is no matter and trusts it to Goldner's ingenuity, but I think we may hardly rely on new solutions for an error of such senior proportions."

Ross gave it some thought, sitting down in the chair beside Crozier and taking charge of the dish. "I've heard about those tins," he said. "Of course if it were me I would delay and leave it to the clerks at the Admiralty to bear the consequence. Those fellows have let themselves be fleeced abominably. But you will hardly be without adequate provisions, why, I've seen your orders. We should have been so lucky in '39!"

"We were lucky enough then. In our men not least of all. Now—well, there is inexperience to go 'round, James. What I would give for just a few more old hands."

Ross smiled, understanding. "I'm afraid you're the old hand, now."

"And I know it," said Crozier with a resentful glance at the piano.

"You must set the example then, I regret to say. Wear your mittens. Keep your spirits up. Find the damned Passage," Ross set down his cigar and looked at him. "You do know I long to be there when you do it?"

Crozier, with deplorable weakness, wished that he would make it so, tell Barrow he had changed his mind and join them.

"But you know better than anyone that I can't," Ross went on, heading him off as if he had read his thoughts. "My honored father-in-law would wring my neck with one hand if ever those words should reach him."

Crozier laughed miserably. "That he would," he allowed.

Ross nodded, picking up his cigar again. "Just so. And I know you will not hear it, but Fitzjames is a steady fellow."

Crozier looked at the piano again. Fitzjames was hammering out the counterpoint to Lady Ross's melody so leadenly that she laughed, knocking his hands away from the keys.

"So everyone says," said Crozier. "I cannot stand still without someone listing all his virtues at me."

“I won’t tire you out with them, then. But I tell you that all those many friends want nothing from him, from what I can tell—he has got his sycophants quite outside the usual way. I believe he will be an ornament to your expedition. And to your circle, if you will but allow it.”

Crozier scoffed. “’Ornament,’ he says! How stupid I was to think you were running a private home here, not a club for handsome men named James where they may flatter each other in comfort.”

Ross winked at him, taking the cigar in his hand so he could grin wider. “I must have something to do with my time now that I am retired from exploration, don’t you know. And if you think that flattering, you should hear what I told him about you, you must have blisters on your ears.”

Crozier gaped, which gave Ross plain satisfaction. “I hope, whatever you said, that it did not include the word ‘ornament.’”

But Ross did not carry on with the joke. “All will be well, my friend. Even without me, hard as it is to say.” He reached over, grasping Crozier’s arm with a shake. “All will be well.”

Crozier had not the heart to tell Ross he had solved nothing, and nodded. “I’ll do as you ask, James. Wear my mittens. Set an example.”

“No man could ask more,” said Ross.

The piano went silent before Ross was finished speaking, so his wife heard enough to interject: “I am no man, my dear, but I am afraid I must ask a little more of *you* than the usual, at least in the way of conduct, for your uncle is coming to dine tomorrow evening.”

Ross, who had been taking a self-satisfied lungful off his cigar, began to choke.

The truth was that Lady Ross had flung open her doors to society as soon as Fitzjames had got his trunk up the stairs.

Crozier was mortifyingly aware that his friends had probably made their lively home quiet these past months to suit his own taste. They were then extending the same tactful hospitality to Fitzjames, who was animated by company almost as a matter of physical law, the way a lamp consumed fuel.

If ever a lamp had consumed so much.

Sir William Parry and Edward Sabine dined, then Admiral Bailie-Hamilton. Eliot Place had become almost a second Somerset House, so far as polar exploration was concerned. And as for the numbers, the navy was nearly outgunned, for Lady Ross had an entire legion of school

friends in uniforms of watered silk and cascading curls, all on their way to or from Bath—where after fifteen minutes of Crozier's conversation they plainly longed again to be.

But all that social exertion was nothing in comparison to the fatal night on which Lady Ross had invited, along with her own dear friend Sophia Cracroft, her husband's uncle Sir John Ross.

It began comfortably enough, for all that Ross had spent the entire day in such a sullen mood that only Neptune could bear to attend him. Crozier made dull remarks to one of Lady Ross's friends about the Arctic climate and the London weather. He answered questions about whether there were any seals or seas named after him and how he thought the fellow who smashed a vase at the British Museum ought to be punished. And while it wearied him to produce this talk, it was almost worse to see his companion's inevitable relief at being released from it, turning with visible gratitude.

Had he chosen to be this grim old explorer? He could recall a time when people found his stories captivating. When he could thrill even himself talking about the icebergs that had floated by him in colossal spires and palisades, the polar lights dripping Scheele's Green across the night sky, the cold so acute he could feel a lit candle across the room. He had lost the wonder of it some time ago, when he learned how the explorer's virtues were pulped and dried when exploration was done. How they turned into fiction in gazettes and promotions for men who hardly needed them. It used to anger him that even discovery could be wrought into something that helped society remain the same. And then even that anger had faded into fatigue.

"Not heroic—you do us too much credit," came Fitzjames's voice, loud enough to break into Crozier's thoughts and, curiously, he was speaking on a similar melancholy theme. "I think the sad fact is that the world grows more modern by the minute. The field of glory has dried up, more or less. Sir John Franklin put it rather well the other day, when he said we sought the open polar *tea*."

Sir John Ross, red-faced before they had even come downstairs, was roused by the invocation of Franklin. He glared down the table at Fitzjames. "He says that, does he?"

Fitzjames could not have appeared more bewildered if Sir John had brandished a pistol at him. "Why, yes sir. I mean, he did, sir."

"He thinks himself a tea merchant then, on some easy cruise?"

Crozier saw James Ross drain his wineglass.

Fitzjames coughed. "I daresay—"

"—So he is the fool we all knew he was," said Sir John, "and the fool I warned him he was—for I warned him, a hundred times I warned him! If he imagines that the ice will open up where it has been locked to all his betters, he is risking all for a fool's hope, and that makes him, didn't I say it, a fool."

The conversations around the table had gone silent.

It was Sophia who spoke. “Dear Ann,” she said, her crisp voice cutting through the quiet, “this table is so magnificently large, I am not at all surprised that Sir John has not noticed that the man he speaks of is not here to answer him. Why, it must have as much timber as a sloop.”

“They had to take it down the stairs disassembled,” said Lady Ross with a look of immense gratitude at her friend. “How is your uncle, pray?”

“He has the most dreadful cold, poor man,” replied Sophia serenely. “I shall tell him you asked. It will cheer him, I am sure.”

“We all pray for his quick recovery,” said Ross, and lifted his glass. “A bumper then to Sir John Franklin and his health.”

They all drank. As they did so, Sophia caught Crozier’s eye to make an eloquently exophthalmic expression at him—the relationship of Sir John Ross and his nephew was as treacherous to navigate as any of the poles. Crozier knew a piece of it, more than almost anyone else. Every time John Ross made bold with some new enemy it was James Ross that he hurt.

Crozier surveyed the wreckage. Fitzjames was gray in the face at how close he had come to contradicting a Companion of the Order of the Bath. Sir John, no stranger to the upset that he had caused, had turned his ire on the bearer who had let his glass run low, leaving his nephew at the head of the table with a smile as honest as a gilded farthing.

But they had been served their final course and Lady Ross had only a little opportunity to steer their conversations to the amiable and seemly. Sir John said nothing much in this interim, but after the ladies had gone there was no way around talk of the expedition. By the time the claret had been cleared and changed for brandy, the old gentleman had waited long enough:

“I hear your provisions are delayed again,” he said.

Crozier nodded. “Indeed they are. Though at least the Admiralty think they have got a bargain.”

Sir John snorted. “Franklin should have pressed them harder. Would have if he’d known any better. Or maybe he has a new preparation of *tripe-de-roche* he’d like to try.”

“Uncle,” said Ross through a clenched jaw. “Please—”

“—I like not to say it in front of the man’s niece, James, it’s true,” Sir John went on, unheeding, “but why shouldn’t I say what I think here, in my own nephew’s home? There has never been any doubt, by God. Franklin is a fool.”

“I say, sir,” said Ross again, with somewhat more energy, “Miss Cracroft has shown us all our duty when you talk so.”

Sir John scoffed and drank. “And why does it fall to you and Miss Cracroft to speak for him? What of his backer Barrow, whose old guts have not the fortitude to hear my warnings? And what of his shipmates?” He turned on Fitzjames, who bit down on his cigar in alarm. “You sir, who say you know him so well, would you really trust Franklin to run a bath?”

Fitzjames inspected the cigar, which was little damaged, and after waiting to see if Judgment Day might be soon forthcoming, replied: “I am flattered by your asking. But it is not for me to have any opinion whatever of my commander, or think of him other than with respectful loyalty and approbation. That I leave to you sir, and to all your experience and honors.”

Though this speech may have served for some, it was precisely the wrong thing to say to Sir John, who placed his glass heavily on the table in a rage. “Such men Barrow trusts!” he growled. “It is a young toady, then, that he has matched with the old fool? You would be more frightened of what awaits you if you had *all my experience and honors*.”

“I see you approve of my cellars, sir,” said Ross. “In any case we had better stand toward the drawing room, certainly they must have expected us an hour ago.”

“Nonsense, I’ve not had my brandy yet,” said Sir John, who indeed was almost at the bottom of his second. He turned back to Fitzjames, and continued: “So tell me then, laddie, where was your service? The Aegean, you will say, and the Nile, and Nanking? There are a hundred ways to die on the ice and you know none of them. None of your agues that you may avert with a nice glass of gin. None of your eight pound shot and splinters. Death that will madden your men with fear of it. And then all your nice manners—your respectful loyalty—will be like your quinine and your gunnery, doing you no good as you die.”

Sir John had said nothing Crozier had not thought. In fact he had often thought much worse. But at this moment it seemed bullying and unfair—Ross would not gainsay his uncle and Fitzjames would not gainsay a knight, least of all one whose memoirs he carried with him in his trunk. Crozier felt the calm and heat of his temper overwhelming him.

“Since you know Commander Fitzjames’s naval service so well,” Crozier said, surprising himself as much as anyone, “then you know that his physical courage exceeds our needs and every standard. What business is it of ours if that courage should come from the Antarctic Circle or the Northern Tropic?”

Fitzjames looked down, tapping his cigar excessively. Ross lifted his eyebrows. From upstairs, the faint sound of the piano could be heard, and over it a great deal of laughter.

Sir John was unmoved. “I thought you had more sense, Crozier,” he said. “Isn’t my nephew here always telling me how much sense you have? Courage is as may be, but what you’ll want is food. And mastery over your men. And a way back. And without them, by thunder, you’ll die.”

Ross stood, losing patience at last. “It has been a long evening. You’ll stay here tonight, Uncle, we have already made ready the room, and my man will help you up the stairs in a minute. Francis—Fitzjames, let us rejoin the ladies, if they are still here.”

But the ladies had gone, leaving only Lady Ross in the drawing room in an attitude of anxious waiting. The room was smoky from the lamps that had burnt all night, and she looked like a very welcome mirage.

"Oh my dear," she said, putting her hand in Ross's. "Oh, I shudder to think—are you all very insulted? Has there been a duel?"

Ross caressed her arm before withdrawing to cross the room. "Drunk," he said, furious in a way he had not given vent to in front of his uncle. He began to pour himself some whiskey, the decanter clanking on the glass. "He's stone drunk. Damme, insulted does not begin to cover it! He will not rest until all the gossip about him is proven true and everyone who would be his friend is turned against him. Your friends, my dear—what they must think of us."

Ann only laughed, taking her place again on the settee. "My friends thought it all very amusing, once Sophia laughed. He has very much the air of Coleridge's mariner—'he holds him with his glittering eye' and then makes all sorts of dire predictions when people are trying to eat. Commander Fitzjames, you were a perfect Wedding-Guest."

"Well I hope I didn't call anyone a grey-beard loon," said Fitzjames.

"I almost wish you had," said Ross. He sat down opposite his wife with a weary sigh, as if he were twenty years older. "Can I excuse my uncle to you both? I fear he is—well, as you witnessed. The quarrel between him and Barrow is a hundred years old, Barrow would forget it, but Sir John cherishes a grudge more than life."

"We have weathered worse," Crozier reminded him, taking the place beside him.

"Hear, hear," said Fitzjames, who seemed to have recovered from the encounter better than Ross. "And it was very fine brandy."

Lady Ross grimaced. "But I fear there is more indignity to come for our poor guests—gentlemen, I've put *the Ancient Mariner* to bed in Commander Fitzjames's room. It was that or the floor in the hall, which I am sure you think is no more than he deserves, but in truth this house is simply not equal to so *much* of the navy as it presently quarters. Berths, I should rather say. May I trust that Captain Crozier's room will suffice both of you for now? I believe it to be quite a large bed, and there is little enough night left."

Fitzjames bowed a little. "It is twice the berth he or I shall have at sea, ma'am, do not trouble yourself."

Crozier found he did not mind overmuch, and as Fitzjames left the room with Lady Ross to assess the new lodging, he watched him go with the same benevolence that had animated him to contradict Sir John Ross.

Ross, next to him on the sofa, was losing his straight posture by degrees until he almost had his head in his hands.

“Can you forgive me,” said Ross, who was occupied in staring at his carpet. It must have been a very small hour; quiet enough through all the house that the drawing room clock could be heard ticking. Ross was leaning forward so the revers of his waistcoat gaped open. Crozier had seen him in worse states of dishevelment, but never in his home.

“What, for your uncle?”

“The devil—not for him, he may say what he likes,” said Ross, shaking his head. “It is for believing he may be right, that I must ask your pardon.”

Crozier felt prophetic tremor of cold. “Trust me more than that, will you, James?”

“I shall no more to sea,” he said, closing his eyes to collect his thoughts. “But Frank—Francis—if you are lost, a thousand Thomas Coulmans will not stop me. I will come there and find you.”

“How I wish—” Crozier drew an unsteady breath, almost throttled by some powerful emotion, and laid a gentle hand on Ross’s knee. “How I wish you could be with us from the start.”

Someone coughed in the doorway, and Crozier flinched back to his place on the sofa as if he was guilty of something. It was Fitzjames, of course, in his shirtsleeves and waistcoat, holding the stickpin from his cravat in one hand. His eyebrows were lifted in surprise, though he composed himself as soon as Crozier met his eyes.

“I do beg your pardon, chaps,” he said with another cough. “Crozier we are at sixes and sevens upstairs, Neptune has taken your place already, and mine too if I’m honest, though it is a damned big bed. And I came to ask if you think I should evict the poor fellow, or let him be?”

Crozier sighed. Ross passed a hand over his eyes, straightening his back and nodding a welcome at Fitzjames.

“You must do nothing,” said Crozier, standing with a tug at his waistcoat. “It is quite late. I will follow you upstairs now and roust him out myself.”

Chapter End Notes

And that's another chapter! This takes me! So long! And this one wasn't very funny! At this rate they will kiss slightly before the heat death of the universe. I hope I will see you all there. A special shoutout again to PlinyTheYounger who held my ass as I agonized over this chapter and the sheer number of Rosses (2), Sir Johns (3!), and Jameses (also 2) who are now in play, and also gave me Crucial Ross Info by way of JCR and John Ross's letters which I was too dumb to find.

And can I just say I feel like I was writing this at a time when we as a fandom are just Appreciating the bejeezus out of James Clark Ross and like how unspeakably valid of us. He just. Wants. Everyone to be OK. ANyway here's what you need to know:

1. "Arduous duty tot" is like, I think a more modern nautical expression but it is funny so here we are.

2. In the show the ships are right there outside Somerset House which I don't think is historical but neither is Victorian fake marriage.

3. In the words of PlinyTheYounger, Blanky does not give Crozier "that commissioned officer feeling" I think we all know what I am talking about.

4. In February of 1845, a drunk guy smashed the Portland Vase at the British Museum and they weren't able to charge him with "willful damage" as that law only applied to things worth less than five pounds, so he was instead charged with the destruction of the vase's glass case. I know this because I read a wikipedia list of things that happened in 1845 when I was looking for dinner party conversation ideas.

5. Scheele's Green is the toxic one. Crozier doesn't know that, but we can!

6. "The open polar tea" is not a funny joke in an 1845 context but it is slightly funnier in a 2019 context where it might mean a bunch of hot fresh gossip.

7. Claret AND brandy? idk seems like a lot even for Victorians but hey the Rosses are Fun

8. Sir John Ross and Sir John (see!) Barrow were not yet in full-on Pamphlet Battle, but Ross was mad that Barrow was mad because he made up a bunch of geographical features. History side of fandom did I do ok?

9. "Mine your courage from a different latitude"

10. The math: # of cigars consumed in this chapter: 6. # of cigars destroyed for comic effect: 2.

Ok that's it see you next chapter, in like 5 months, for Victorian PJs, bed sharing, and ANOTHER party.

Thalatta! Thalatta!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When they arrived in Crozier's room Neptune was snoring lustily, indeed occupying more of the bed than he would have had he been a very thick blanket.

"It is as I told you," said Fitzjames, still holding his stickpin. He waved it at the bed as if presenting a critical piece of exculpatory evidence. "I daresay he would sleep through the end of the world. I've been up here whistling and stomping and saying any nonsense I can come up with—a parcel of beef has just been delivered, the house is on fire, we're down to our last can of food, all that sort of thing, and he did not so much as take a luftpause. It gives me no happiness to suggest to you that while a very decent cove in every other aspect, he may not be cut out for a guard dog."

Crozier sighed, unknotting his cravat wearily. "Did you try telling him to get off the bed?"

"To get off the—" Fitzjames went still. "Well, I must have."

"Neptune," said Crozier sternly, "get off the bed."

Neptune thudded promptly to the floor, where he immediately resumed sleeping.

"Well," said Fitzjames.

"Well," said Crozier. He knelt, with what was to his ears a humiliatingly geriatric groan, and gave Neptune a scratch on the belly.

"Damned clever beast," said Fitzjames, and looked for a moment as if he might say something more, which Crozier hoped he wouldn't. But instead he only crossed the room to the writing desk where his jacket already hung on the chair, and bent over his waistcoat buttons.

The sounds of him undressing nagged at Crozier's attention. There was the efficient friction of kerseymere dragging over linen, a satin cravat tugged free so impatiently that it snapped like a whip, and then Fitzjames was talking again:

"I could say you have a way with intransigent dogs, but that would be beastly unfair to old Neptune," he said. Crozier looked up and saw he was shrugging off his braces, the movement pressing the contours of his body up against his shirt.

Crozier looked swiftly back at the dog and replied: "If I had no method for getting him out of the bed I'd be sleeping on the floor."

Fitzjames did not let it rest: "What I mean is that I must admit—I refer, of course, to the business with Sir John tonight—you had me taken aback somewhat, Crozier, and I am confounded low about it. I am ashamed to have believed that Sir John letting me have it so

soundly would be a kind of Vauxhall evening for you, which makes your intercession, well, *hoc tibi honori est,* I do declare. I judged you ill, sir."

Crozier rose enough to take a seat on his bed, unnerved by this frankness. A Vauxhall evening—of course Fitzjames had every reason to think so, with Crozier pained and short-tempered whenever they were compelled even to breathe the same air. He had promised to wipe clean the slate of their anxious relationship and in fact had done nothing of the sort. It was an embarrassment that Fitzjames should be apologizing.

"You judged me ill, perhaps, but hardly wrongly," said Crozier, hauling off his waistcoat wearily. "I know my temper. I hope I have compensated you somewhat for enduring it."

Fitzjames stood looking at him in absolute silence, and only resolved Crozier's curiosity about whether he had been breathing when he declared, "Well I say," very uncomfortably. Then he coughed, pulling at his cuffs, and spoke in a voice that was more like his own: "That is a fine waistcoat, I had meant to mention."

Crozier was incredulous. "Mine?"

"Certainly, unless I am in the habit of talking aloud to myself about my own waistcoat."

"I would hardly know," said Crozier.

Fitzjames gave him a wide-eyed, baffled stare, then burst out laughing. "You—I—you would hardly know, indeed! Capital. That was devilish like wit, Crozier. But it is a fine waistcoat."

Crozier joined him, shaking his head, although it was hardly so outlandish a prospect as Fitzjames plainly took it to be. "No finer than yours," he said, on the wake of the laughter. And then he began taking off his trousers and boots as swiftly as he was able, lest they draw some further comment.

"And there you're right, of course," said Fitzjames, predictably. "So fine I wrote it into my will. It was a gift," he elaborated, regarding somewhat pensively the waistcoat in question, which lay folded on the desk. "But you see one rather wishes one's debts forgotten. Instead—ha, our modern age!—we must wear them every night to dinner."

Crozier was halfway into his nightshirt by the conclusion of this remark, and there was a little silence as he pulled it down around his neck. "It is hardly a gift, that carries obligation to the giver."

Fitzjames laughed again, this time with the sort wondering surprise he might have shown a child who had made a precocious remark. "You cannot have come by that *charmant* philosophy anywhere in the British Empire. Perhaps in your youthful service you had the happy luck to put down your anchor by the shores of Utopia?"

"I saw nowhere that could not be found now on any map," said Crozier, prickling at the condescension. "The Marquesas, Rio de Janeiro, Valparaiso. Even Pitcairn, very briefly, and none of these places was what you would call Utopia."

“I know well,” said Fitzjames, “there is vanity enough in those latitudes.”

“I took a little philosophy away from it, though. I learned I do not care overmuch for hot weather and,” Crozier flicked back the Marseilles quilt pointedly and got into the bed, “to take rest when I can.”

“I agree wholeheartedly about that. Lord, what an awful dinner. One of the worst I have endured—I include in that tally an incident where Lord Minto choked on a bilberry and we all thought he’d died. Which reminds me I must compliment Lady Ross on the trifle.”

Crozier could only shake his head. He had not, in the tense atmosphere created by Sir John’s haranguing, Ross’s misery and Sophia’s displeasure, noticed the trifle.

Fitzjames was lining up his boots beside the chair, and Crozier surprised himself somewhat with the reflection that he had expected a more expansive toilette from the Brummell of the navy. He had no aversion to physical vanity—he could hardly have called Ross a friend if he had—but it was conspicuous and extreme in Fitzjames. Who was this man when there was no one to look at him, Crozier had often wondered. The answer to the mystery was that he looked like anyone else who had been insulted at an interminable dinner: his posture fatigued, his dress reduced to his shirt and sagging stockings, making conversation.

“It leads one to contemplate,” Fitzjames continued on saying, “is it she, or Sir John who better deserves our compassion tomorrow? The lady is blameless, but I cannot imagine the gentleman will make it out without a headache at least.”

“Lady Ross is amused and Sir John will be all recovered by noon at least. It is Sir James who is most injured tonight.” Crozier regretted, immediately, that he had mentioned Ross.

“Sir James, of course,” said Fitzjames. His voice was thoughtful. “When I came downstairs, I saw—”

“—Have a care how you speak of that man in his own home,” Crozier interrupted hastily. He had no appetite for this conversation and was almost desperate to avoid it. It humiliated him to have been witnessed in a moment of such impotence. He saw himself in his mind’s eye, pitiful and mawkish, his hand on Ross’s knee the moment his friend had seemed to need his comfort. It was that awful old affection, unreturned and unwanted, on lurid display. He had no illusions about what Fitzjames had seen.

“Well yes of course,” Fitzjames said, shaking his head in confusion. “I only meant to say that I saw how hard it must be on him, with such relations. But he is lucky to have such a friend.”

“He has a great many friends.”

“A great many friends are a chorus of so many frogs when a fellow is low. But to have among them one true friend—I say, it is damned lucky.”

“Merit, rather than luck,” said Crozier. “There is no man more deserving.”

It seemed that Fitzjames had nothing to say to that, and after a moment fidgeting with his cuffs he finally started toward the bed. “Merit, of course. Shall I put out the lamp?”

“If you would,” Crozier replied, and the room went black. “Mind you don’t tread on the dog in the dark.”

“I shall hardly,” said Fitzjames haughtily, and then there was a crash as he collided with the desk chair.

“At last!” said Blanky, clapping Crozier on the shoulder. “So the marital bed at last has been consecrated. Lost your voice, my lad? Odd season for a cold.”

“Damn your eyes,” said Crozier when he could speak, “this is not one of your whalers.” Indeed they were in *Terror*’s great cabin, counting in the charts.

Blanky stared at him. “No,” he said, a little gently. “It is Her Majesty’s *Terror* of Devon, 325 tons burthen, engaged in particular service. I know well where I am, Francis, are you sure you’re feeling well? Could it be fever? Mrs. Blanky always says you cannot be too suspicious of fever.”

Crozier sighed. “I am perfectly healthy. I mean that this is a ship of the line of the Royal Navy, and your duty when aboard it is to show your captain respect.”

“I’ve embarrassed you.”

“Only with your impudence!”

“By alluding to your bed?”

“Thomas, I beg you.”

“It cannot be because I have mentioned the honorable estate of marriage, which should make no honest man blush. Tell me—”

“—Will you please—”

“—Do you feel you are a more settled man, no more to go a-roving? I didn’t either. Doesn’t quite take, I think, when one is of the exploring temperament.”

“Will you please stop talking about it,” Crozier nearly shouted.

Blanky relented with heavy sigh. “Frank,” said he gravely, holding Crozier with his keen gaze. “Let me speak plain for a moment, as becomes old friends. This affair with you and Captain Fitzjames is—no, you must let me have my say, I must be understood— this affair with you and Captain Fitzjames is the most comical thing that has happened to me in my entire *fucking* life. I will talk about it as long as I draw breath on this earth. And I cannot tell you certainly that even the grave will buy my silence.”

Terror, the keeper of more of Crozier's secrets than even Blanky, groaned and rocked on a swell. A suspicious man could have read laughter in it.

Crozier gave Blanky a glare he knew well was fiendish. "I'm not impartial to finding out."

"But I will happily talk about it later," Blanky relented with a sympathetic noise. "A long evening you had, I don't doubt. I am acquainted better than most with Sir John's ways. Your suffering in this manner gives me no joy. Were Captain Ross—Sir James, I mean, isn't it—were he here I would tell him the same, the poor fellow."

Crozier sat down with a deflating sigh. "It really was awful, Tom. There is nothing that man hasn't contempt for—and all in front of the ladies. Sir James took a hard sea over the bow."

"He does not deserve it and neither do you. You have my trust, Frank, more than ever did Sir John. Any Sir John."

A smile took him by surprise, crooked and likely as pleasant as his glare. "Hist," said Crozier, shaking his head.

"Sounds like regular stuff for the quarterdeck of quarterdecks. A disastrous dinner in lofty nautical company for the legends, like that evening Lord Minto died."

"What?"

"Choked on a bilberry, so he did. Don't touch them myself."

"Lord Minto is very much alive."

"Heard he'd died. And don't you have another such fete tomorrow?"

Terror's beloved bulkheads seemed to close in on him. "What?" Crozier gasped.

Blanky cast him another concerned look. "The Admiralty is giving you a dinner at Somerset House. Can you really be well? I've never in my many days seen a man stop breathing so much."

Crozier wanted to go to sea. It was every sailor's curse, that land alone could not satisfy him. But though he strongly felt that compulsion to sail, a pull at the wetness of his blood, his primary motivation was that he had run out of patience for society.

But his luck was as bad as ever. Society was far from finished with him.

On the night of the Admiralty dinner, society took one of its most dreadful forms: a hoary, titled, epauletted throng. The throng wanted to be flattered and amused, and though Crozier could sail a bomb vessel through walls of sea and lancing ice, he could no more tell an amusing anecdote than the devil could speak the name of the Christ.

"Having fun, Crozier?" someone asked over his shoulder, startling him.

“Christ!” he said, holding onto his glass of whiskey as if bracing for heavy weather.

Fitzjames smiled at him, lifting a kid-gloved hand in warm contrition. “I say, hold your fire sir! Only me.”

Crozier acknowledged him with a lift of his eyebrows, surprised at how relieved he felt to see Fitzjames’s friendly face among the teeming lords. “If only I had fire to hold.”

Fitzjames shrugged. He had a half-drunk glass of champagne in his hand, and could not have sat through the same dinner Crozier did without it being at least his fifth. “You could always shout at someone. Hold your *ire*, I should have said, and next time, perhaps I shall. Quite an evening, quite an evening, I daresay. What grizzled company. It amazes me how old some men are able to grow. Not for me, I do declare.”

“What, growing old?”

“If the prospects do not improve somewhat. I tell you, some of these fellows, they close their eyes for a moment over their brandy and—but that is by the by, how are things carrying on for you?”

“I would sail tonight if I could,” Crozier admitted.

“Hear, hear,” said Fitzjames. “That ought to give them a shock. Some circumstance with their pomp. There is Le Vesconte—” he raised his voice to something only marginally quieter than a quarterdeck yell “—I say, Dundy! Come hither and collude with us, if you will, sir.”

Lieutenant Le Vesconte, red-cheeked and as ebullient as Fitzjames, joined them directly. “Captain Crozier,” he nodded politely. “James, I believe these men to be Titans of roysterers, and this the Olympus of revelry. I heard a story or two off Sir George Back at dinner and thought perhaps that fellow is singularly fast, but since then it has been flag officer after flag officer telling me the most profoundly shocking tales—I blush to recount them! One might call them *unflagging* officers, if their own reports of their exploits are even half-true.”

Fitzjames drank some of his flattening champagne. “Half-true may be over-generous. It is my judgment that these men like to tell tales of scandal more than they suffer to dirty their hands with it.”

Le Vesconte considered it. “Even if you’re right—by Jove, the imagination alone would put Mr. Dickens to shame. How were your dinner companions?”

“Not half so entertaining as yours, it appears. And Captain Crozier’s were worse.”

Crozier, thrust into the conversation unprepared, took a moment to respond. “I fear they will say the same about me.”

“Never, old boy, they are only saying how envious they are and perhaps that this champagne is beastly bad stuff.”

“It is filthy,” Le Vesconte agreed immediately, and drained his own glass.

“Deuced *doux*,” said Fitzjames, and they both laughed.

Crozier, who understood but was unmoved by the joke, did not. The fond feelings which had been directed at Fitzjames had cooled watching him exchange drolleries with Le Vesconte, replaced with an embarrassment that he had mistaken politeness in such a man—entertaining, handsome, young—for an overture of friendship. Fitzjames could hardly think him less grizzled than the lords of the Admiralty.

It was then that they were interrupted by Edward Little, *Terror*’s first lieutenant, whose customarily dour countenance seemed in this case justified with some dourness of news.

“Captain Crozier,” he said urgently, “Captain Fitzjames, I thought you ought to know. It’s the captain—Sir John, sirs. May I trouble you to come with me?”

They arrived in time to find Sir John Franklin, drawn up in supercilious self-defense, being harangued by Sir Edward Parry and Sir George Back.

“How can we, sir,” Sir George was saying, his attitude one of an angry headmaster, “have it put about that the senior officers of Her Majesty’s Navy do not know the difference between a martial and marital state! The business of the service is martial, sir!”

Sir John looked plaintively toward Heaven. “I protest, sir, that is hardly—”

“So you know it sir? Or you have made an error? It cannot be both.”

“I,” said Sir John. Then he drew up his shoulders and rebounded: “I know the difference very well.”

“Perhaps,” said Sir Edward, “if Sir John were to produce the deed of marriage, it would prove quite to our satisfaction that he spoke only true and did not err.”

Sir George considered it.

“I think you have it,” Sir George agreed. “The deed, Sir John, show us the deed. Show us tomorrow, and you’ll hear no more from me, sir, as to this affair.”

“The deed,” said Sir John.

“Of marriage,” Sir Edward clarified.

“You shall have it,” Sir John said, his eyes bright. “You shall have it tonight, sir, for the sooner this sorry business is behind us the better, ‘pon my honor, sir, this is most irregular.”

“It is very much,” said Sir George, not very kindly, *“’pon your honor.”*

It was then that they noticed Crozier and Fitzjames, standing shoulder to shoulder in shared, speechless horror. Le Vesconte blinked as if he did not quite follow, and Little's doleful eyes seemed to grow more doleful.

Sir John composed himself first. “Francis,” he said, smiling woodenly. “James, how happy I am to see you. Will you join me a moment to take a glass of sillery?”

“Champagne, Sir John?” said Fitzjames. His voice was not in the right octave.

“Champagne, James, do you know it?” said Sir John, and took Fitzjames firmly by the elbow. “I do not normally indulge but—circumstances—follow me, gentlemen, if you will. Do excuse us, Sir George, Sir Edward, I have business with my captains. Every hour is of crucial importance to us now, we cannot tarry.”

He led them to waiter who furnished them all with fresh glasses. For a moment they stood in awkward silence, their glasses and bullion and medals gleaming in the candlelight.

“Gentlemen,” said Sir John. “I would be very obliged if you could take your leave now, and join me aboard *Erebus*.” He then turned on his shining heel and headed for the door.

“Sir John,” Crozier began, following him to protest. “What is the meaning of this?”

“What is going on?” asked Le Vesconte, appearing at the periphery of their urgent trio, and with him Little, who looked even sadder than he had before.

“I require assistance from my captains,” said Sir John, moving with such purpose he likely did not notice who had spoken, “with a clerical matter."

Fitzjames cast Crozier a wide-eyed glance. “Sir John,” he tried.

“I have asked for my captains, I require them with *all haste*,” Sir John grit his teeth.

They had reached the door, which after a moment of obeisance by the men attending it, opened to admit them to the much cooler air of the evening. It was a mild day in May, but the candlelit, crowded atmosphere of Somerset House had been stifling. Crozier inhaled the wet harbor air.

Before them, rocking gently in the river, were *Terror* and *Erebus*. Sir John strode swiftly forward.

They were aboard in a matter of minutes and stood silently in the eerie dark of the great cabin, Sir John grim and purposeful as Crozier had ever seen him, Fitzjames visibly discomposed, Little no more outwardly uncomfortable than he ever was, Le Vesconte still holding the fresh glass of champagne he had appropriated just inside the door.

Sir John, setting down a pen and inkwell on the table, spoke: “Do you know, gentlemen, the powers of a captain aboard his own ship?”

“Sir John?” said Fitzjames, flicking a nervous glance at the windows of the transom. Sir John had unlocked his desk drawer and brought forth a sheet of writing paper and the unspoiled ship’s log.

“The law entitles me to the power of a king on my own vessel, and more importantly than that powers to perform certain eccuminical services,” Sir John continued, wetting a pen. He

began to write on the sheet of paper, the agitation with which he did so flicking a blot of ink very near to Crozier's sleeve. "Certain services which have, on shore, all proper legal validity and correctness. One of these services is marriage, gentlemen."

Another drop of ink fell and bled on the paper.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah! So that's my big idea. If you are reading this, you are a paragon of perseverance and an example to us all. Thank you for sticking with me, I hope this wasn't too _too_ disappointing.

1. I don't know if I've revealed this embarrassing thing about me in this fandom yet but I am weak for textiles. What are the curtains in the Only One Bed room? Dimity. How dare I even TALK about that room when I didn't even write any good bed sharing? Haha, well, ha h

2. Fitzjames is a nervous foreign languages person because I mean, right? But mainly this is one of the 2 ways I know to make period-sounding jokes. The other way is to have someone fall over.

3. Which also happens in this chapter.

4. Francis Crozier canonically does not appreciate the glory of a good pudding and I've carried that important character detail into my work. Thrilling stuff! I am so tired.

5. Lord Minto never choked on a bilberry. I made that up, I've never even had a bilberry. It just sounded like the right fruit for the moment. I hope that the current Earl of Minto, the CEO of Paperchase stationary products, should he read this fanfiction, is not too offended, and takes my suggestion that he consider being CEO of something mint-related like, just mints, or maybe gum. I don't wanna belabor the point but it's 4:55 in the morning as I'm writing this

6. Titans don't live on Olympus Le Vesconte god read a fucking book

7. Captains can't perform marriages and never could. It's a misconception so common, though, that some of them believed it enough to do it -- mainly to legitimize babies born on the crossing to Australia, but these marriages were often subject to legal challenges due to the fact that ship captains actually can't perform marriages. And even if they could it would only be at sea, which they're not. The important thing here is that Sir John believes he can, so by god he's going to move my plot forward

L'Homme Propose

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"I say, what on Earth were you fellows up to?" said Le Vesconte when they were back safely on the quay. Though he had come aboard the ship with a glass of champagne, he left it with a bottle of gin with which he gestured precariously. The glass had been lost hours ago. "I couldn't hear a word, but by Jove! What an infernally long parley. Do you know, James, that I signed something or other as your witness? Sir John Franklin himself asked us to do him that honor in an awful hurry—I say, old fellow, did he owe you money? Wouldn't that make a change, someone owing to you. Or, you haven't been promoted again, have you?"

"Promoted? Not—" Fitzjames cleared his throat. "No, not promoted, nothing like that." When Crozier tried to catch his eye he looked straight ahead.

Crozier turned instead to address Le Vesconte: "You brought nothing but gin?"

"I asked him not to bring even the gin, sir," said Little regretfully.

"Well what do you mean by asking him something like that?" said Fitzjames. "Henry, will you pray give me that bottle? As quick as you can."

"Give you a bottle? I would never," said Le Vesconte, and there was a brief but dramatic tableau wherein the gin almost went into the water but for Little's deft intervention. Le Vesconte was left to right himself alone, swearing.

"A glass to *Terror's* first lieutenant! Though he be but Little," said Fitzjames, "that was quite a fierce defense of the gin which I prescribe and he would proscribe."

"I judge it very low to call the man little," said Le Vesconte. "Pray call him Edward, as I do."

"Only gin?" Crozier repeated. His voice was on the humiliating cusp of complaint. "Not a drop of whiskey?"

"We ought not even have the gin," said Little, but no one heard him.

"So come on then," said Le Vesconte, "tell us what happened?"

"I shall tell you when you are likely to remember it," Fitzjames replied with uncommon abruptness. He had stopped walking until Crozier was at his side.

"You haven't stopped to offer me whiskey, have you?" Crozier asked.

"Indeed no. I'm not Christ, able to turn water to wine and gin to whiskey and all the drinks a fellow could want into different ones. I am only very keen to leave, and I wondered if we

might share a carriage, assuming one is still to be found."

"Of course," said Crozier. "We are going in the same direction, after all."

"And that is not the only logic to it. If we stay a moment longer I am sure Dundy will want to share with us, and he is a terrible vomiter."

H.M.S "Terror"
Woolwich, 9th May 1845

My darling sister Elizabeth Jane,

I pray you are well and your family, and as you write to them, my beloved sisters and brothers Sarah, James, & Margaret & Jane & Charlotte & Archie & Simon & Dick & Louisa. And our mother and father. Will you forgive me for my long silence? I find even if I write once a day someone is angry with me for my "cruel & extended inattention" (Louisa). Is it not so with the rest of you? Well here is a tale to recompense you for any inattention you believe you have endured, which I dispute.

Last night I had the unhappy luck to witness one of the strangest events as ever I have in this service, one I doubt will be supplanted by all the sights in store of my coming adventure. As you know our Captain Sir John Franklin KCH has put it about that my own Captain Francis Crozier has married the Commander of our second ship HM Erebus*. You may remember or you may not that his name is Cmdr. Fitzjames. Sir John F has been dogged on this point & to say more would be not be very honorable.*

I had been at the Admiralty dinner for our expedition earlier and the Sea Lords were putting it pointily to Sir John & I could tell when he had quite enough! I tell you in confidence I saw the man take a glass of Champagne. And then he all but took my Captain Crozier and Cmdr Fitzjames by the ears & marched them to his ship Erebus *with myself following & my fellow Lieutenant Henry Les Vicomte. He is English however his name appears and my opinion of the fellow is half-formed I admit. He has an old friendship with Cmdr Fitzjames and they address one another in the most informal manner imaginable (my dear sister I implore you not to imagine it for I would hate to track mud into the clean threshold of your fancy. But you know this is often how it goes with sailors, even the grandest of us is unfit sometimes for dry unsalted society & Fitzjames & Leviconte have otherwise the most elegant manners. But how they do address each other!)*

So we followed Sir John & Cpt Crozier & Cmd Fitzjames to Erebus *and there Lt Leviconte and I were kept to the wardroom while in Sir John's personal quarters he unpacked his writing instruments and the ship's log. I could somewhat see in for we have no proper doors even for the Captain on any of our ships, so do not think of me with my eye at the keyhole. What I observed was in the course of accident.*

Picture this if you can, nothing still & the whole room dim. We rocked (I mean the ship rocked) on the tide and groaned, at harbor we make no forward progress and so while the ship on the whole is more still it seems sometimes more animated, like a cork bobbing on the water. I could hear Sir John's pen scratching with histrionic quickness, I have never before seen him in a temper but for some men it is expressed thus, in the tempo of our writing.

Captain Crozier & Commander Fitzjames stood before him with their backs to the door & I could see neither of their faces for which I am grateful for I would hate to see a Captain or a Commander ashamed. Capt. Crozier stood upright and still though I could see the gold bullion on Cmdr. Fitzjames's shoulder shaking. Finally the pen was silent.

"Gentlemen pray what are your ages?" said Sir John.

"Sir," said Cpt. Crozier & Cmdr Fitzjames at more or less the same time. It was Cpt. Crozier who went on:

"Sir John, I implore you, think for a moment."

"I have thought the whole way here sir, so do not question what I am about," said Sir John. "And so your ages? We must have everything proper. Everything quite legal. James?" (It is Cmdr Fitzjames's Christian name if you will believe it!) "If you would obleege me?"

"I am thirty-two sir," replied Cmdr Fitzjames.

Then Sir John looked again at the pair of them for a long time as if measuring Captain Crozier's distance from that prime of life which had been invoked by his fellow officer. Finally he said: "And you, Francis?"

To my great surprise it was Cmdr Fitzjames who replied. "Captain Crozier is of full majority as well sir, I am certain," he said (I thought quite stoutly.)

"Yes of course," said Sir John. The pen was set again to scratching. "Of course he is. Of legal age and more. A bachelor perforce. The date is—well, we must hardly agree upon it—and never mind your residences, and there we have it," so speaking he set the pen in the inkwell and was reaching into one of the drawers of his desk. He produced, I know now, a bible, and when he saw it Capt. Crozier muttered an obscene word which I shall not write, most especially for your reading.

At this interval I will relate the actions of my fellow Lieutenant, Mr. Le Victime, he had found a bottle of gin and had measured out his dosage but did not seem to care a bit for the goings on just beside him, and was asking me persistently: "What's happening, Mr. Little?"

I did not reply for I would hate for Cptn. Crozier to think I had been gossiping, though I did through rough pantomime convey that my fellow lieutenant should be quiet if he wished his life to go on. When this had been done to my satisfaction I turned my attention once again to the three principals of my story.

"Dearly beloved," said Sir John, "we are gathered together here in the sight of God—" I shall not bore you with the details of what he said next, I am sure you are a better expert on

the subject of weddings than I am & know by heart what is next. For my own part it passed me by somewhat.

I heard Capt. Crozier say "I will," when he was bade to, and then Cmdr. Fitzjames say the same. They did not have rings of course, and so for a long minute of silence Sir John pried off his own and handed it to Capt. Crozier. Cmdr. Fitzjames I think had forgotten to take off his gloves and so he was occupied when the ring was given to him by Capt. Crozier. You must understand how small are our rooms aboard a ship, these two officers stood so close to each other that their shoulders were touching, so as Comdr. Fitzjames pulled off his glove he caused Capt. Crozier to drop the ring on the floor.

There ensued a few minutes of the three of us looking for the ring (Lt. L.V. at this point was uninterested in what did not concern his glass of gin but briefly asked me what we fellows had lost) & it was found under the desk of its proper owner. The ceremony resumed to the legal particulars which bored me again. Each said, "I deliver it as my act and deed," and there was more swearing as sailors are unaccustomed to sharing an inkwell.

"The long-awaited deed," said Sir John finally, and I heard him blow hastily on the certificate of marriage and then his log. "If you would be so good as to give me back my wedding ring, I don't doubt my lady wife would be put out if I should come back without it. As for the matter of your own rings I leave that to a more congenial hour and one more convenient to your duties, though I do recommend Kitching's on Conduit Street, though he is a touch—perhaps upon our return, then, once you've been paid," by this point he was standing up. "Very good, gentlemen, very shipshape. Very orderly, your affairs are now, and I can hardly fault either of you in your choice. What a very happy day. I regret," he said, putting the deed hastily into his pocket, "that I have business with the Sea Lords, else I would raise the first glass to your health. Oh, how very happy."

"I, married," I heard Commdr. Fitzjames say. "And I have not yet even got my K."

Sir John laughed heartily at this. "What did you tell me the other day, James? Home—*something and* Doo—*something else?"*

"L'Homme propose et Dieu dispose," *said Comdr. Fitzjames, speaking French quite well.*

Sir John here made earnestly for the door (I say "door" but I hope you understand I only mean out of the cabin) and was saying, "There it is, yes of course, home *and* Doo—*I wrote it down, you'll be happy to know. Life is not always on our own terms, gentlemen but duty is duty, and it gladdens my heart to see it done. Well, good evening, James. And you Francis. A very good—oh, how happy—well I must be off."*

He wedged his way past them and then in quite a rush obtained the signatures of we two witnesses & was no more to be seen.

Weather passing fine. I hope you are in good health. The next I write will be at Greenhithe.

God protect you. Your affectionate brother,

"Crikey, what a circus," said Fitzjames when he and Crozier had crammed themselves into the hansom cab's single bench. "I tell you, I am liking my chances in the Arctic better and better if this is what England has come to. Did you see Sir John drink that champagne? I think Socrates liked the taste of hemlock better."

"I have known him to take a sip or two," said Crozier.

"And did these previous incidents of pot-valiance result in any marriages to your knowing? Or are we the lone casualties of that honor?"

Crozier felt a hot shock of shame. Of course it was a reasonable characterization—Sir John had done them a phenomenally bad turn—but pride did not bend to reason, and it hurt to see Fitzjames's open displeasure. Crozier knew he was no attractive attachment, and the confirmation stung awfully.

"I'll remind you, sir, that we suffer equally," he said shortly.

Fitzjames had nothing to say to that.

Crozier leaned forward into the night air that rushed at them, distinctly horse-scented but fresher than anything to be breathed below the deck of a ship at harbor. The sound of the horse's hooves, the cobbles under their wheels, and the driver's whip filled the silence.

Fitzjames did not withstand it for long: "I say, isn't it awful squashed in here?"

"It is," said Crozier. He looked straight on at the horse's twitching tail.

"Though I suppose we have suffered and will suffer worse than a comfortable open carriage."

Crozier, amazed by the inanity of this comment, had no reply.

They went on in silence for almost a half-mile before Fitzjames heaved a sigh of such feeling that it nearly shook the cab. "Francis I have no shots left in my locker. The sorry thing is done, it has happened, and it is as hard on me as it is on you, but surely you must see the inconvenience it will present if you will no longer condescend even to talk to me."

"I condescend to *you?"* Crozier was throttled by temper. "I shall do so, sir, if you could answer my conversation even once without telling me what an awful disappointment you find me and how hard are the circumstances on yourself! As if I do not already know it—as if I had any more choice than you!"

Far from the swinging carriage lamp, with his somewhat austere face in the shadow of his hat, Fitzjames looked remote and indifferent. But the hand he had on his knee clenched fiercely.

"Disappointed?" he replied. His voice rose as he spoke, and the kidskin glove stretched thinly over his knuckles. "Francis, I, disappointed? Aren't you the one who has said hardly a civil

word since putting pen to the deed of marriage? This sullen silence—from the evidence it is not I, sir, who has been disappointed."

"And why shouldn't you be?" Crozier snapped. "You think I don't know my value just as well as everyone else does? I am Irish, I lack birth, and any hope of position wanes fast. My age advances faster than my rank, and I have been near publicly rejected not six months ago."

"Francis—"

"I am not ignorant to gossip on top of everything, and I know well enough what folk will think. Surely you must think too, that old Crozier should be glad to get anything more than his pay!"

Fitzjames drew a harsh breath. "More, sir? I wonder if you don't know the full truth of my dismal prospects. In the world I have only *my* commission and my person, and a few shirts into the bargain. I have not family, reliable connections, or expectation."

"Really sir," said Crozier. "You have at least a fine coat from Firmin's and a place at the Senior."

"Think you that I pay at Firmin's, or the Senior?" said Fitzjames hotly. "Even my bed I have as a favor, and God knows favors come with the most appalling interest. What credit I had in patronage I have all but overdrawn. But I had thought this was all quite plain to you from the first."

Crozier felt the steam come out of him all at once. Fitzjames had of course alluded to a certain meanness of circumstance before, but it was impossible to take seriously. Certainly, Crozier had believed, a commander who sat in a loge with the Barrows did not live on his pay. But he had heard it put plainly, and he did not think the man dishonest.

"I had not thought," said Crozier, embarrassed to have assumed so much. In his whole life, his bitter cynicism had only served him well, a buffer from the disappointments fate was so eager to deal him and the melancholy that followed. He felt dismasted; he could think of nothing more to say.

"No, of course not," said Fitzjames, the hand on his knee relaxing, "why should you have. But Sir John should have told you. How very let down you must feel."

"I'm not let down. Aren't you?"

"Nonsense, of course you are. But I am nothing of the sort."

"Oh?" Crozier replied. "Well then why can I not be nothing of the sort?"

"Because you—I say, what?"

Crozier cleared his throat and tried again: "I mean to say, why can I not be not let down if you aren't?"

“I recognize the words—but, well—” Fitzjames went silent. Then, abruptly, he began to laugh and went on laughing, leaning so far over his knees that his hat brushed the fender.

Crozier pondered the muddle of words he’d said that should have been a sentence, saw the joke in it, and started in laughing as well. As he did, he felt the fantastic vertigo of relief.

It was extraordinarily late when they made it to Eliot Place, and only a half-awake footman was abroad in Ross’s home. They handed him their hats and made their way to the parlor still laughing off and on at the severity of their misunderstanding and the wound they had done to the English tongue.

“Bring sherry wine and brandy if you please,” said Fitzjames grandly to footman, “for we are new married.”

“Sir?” said the footman, pausing in his unaccustomed business of lighting the parlor lamps.

“There is no need for that,” said Crozier. “You may bring only a bottle of whiskey and a pair of glasses.”

“As for gin, you will observe we have contrived to furnish our own, and have no need to draw from your master’s,” Fitzjames went on. He set this bottle on a table with almost a magician’s flourish, and it was plain he had benefited from carrying it with him from the ship to the carriage.

“Yes, sir,” said the footman, and went off for the whiskey.

The lamps had begun to burn brightly. After so long in the shadows of the ship and the quay and the carriage, Crozier felt conspicuous and illuminated as he stripped off his gloves and sword belt. When he looked up, Fitzjames was watching him with unreadable attention.

“I’m happier out of this damned costume,” Crozier said, feeling it necessary to explain himself. He began to unbutton his jacket.

“Quite right,” said Fitzjames, immediately starting in on his own belt. “Quite right. Epaulettes look ill in a private home, and we have only each other to impress, after all.”

When Crozier had last seen Fitzjames without his coat he thought him rather ordinary, but this second occasion surprised him. The man's sleeves were mortifyingly wet, translucent with perspiration almost halfway to the elbow, and worse, he made no sign of noticing. This heedlessness was so out of character that Crozier would have laughed at him if they were closer friends—someone like Blanky or Ross who would trust his good intentions.

But they had misunderstood each other too much for that, perhaps so much that they could never be so easy.

“Tropical hot in here,” said Crozier.

“Is it?” said Fitzjames. “I hadn’t noticed.”

Crozier was spared crafting a reply when the footman then arrived with the bottle.

“Shall I stay and pour for you?” he said, much troubled to keep himself from yawning.

“You shall go to bed,” said Crozier. “We can pour well enough alone.”

“My mistress has asked me to see you are looked after, whatever the hour.”

“She could not have meant so late. I will answer to her tomorrow should it come to that,” Crozier replied.

“Only take these frock coats and have them brushed, if you please,” said Fitzjames, handing the footman his coat in a flash of gilt buttons and gold lace.

“And *then* go to bed,” said Crozier, handing over his own coat.

“Sir—”

“Be assured, lad, If I may be trusted to proceed in full sail around a pack of icebergs as tall as Westminster, I may be trusted to pour my own drink.”

“Ha!” said Fitzjames, laughing as if this was an excellently witty thing to say, though the footman’s blank look suggested it was not.

“And we shall put out the lamps as well,” Crozier continued.

“If you like,” said the footman, and after a moment more of hesitation he left them to it.

“Gad, but you were decent to that fellow. Very decent, I do declare, ” said Fitzjames once the footsteps had retreated. He had taken a seat on the sofa and was fiddling with the chain of his repeater, watching Crozier again with the same cryptic attentiveness he had employed earlier.

Crozier gave him a glass and filled his own before hastily drinking from it. “He was yawning. I would be very hard if I asked him to stand and wait on us, it is gone three o’clock.”

“Three o’clock indeed? Well, up spirits! But you are a keen observer. I regret I would not have given it a second thought if he’d stayed—but then, it is not the first time you have been upstanding when no one else would think to be.”

“You sound like Sir James,” said Crozier, taking his own accustomed chair. “He cannot get enough of telling me I am too easy on my junior officers.”

Fitzjames lifted his brows. “You know I would never contradict Sir James Ross, but I have not seen you be easy on anyone. Only what I said: upstanding, and when others will not be.”

“I am satisfied to hear it,” Crozier replied, feeling himself flush. “You would think I was handing out sugarplums, the way he tells it. But to my mind it is simple fairness.”

Fitzjames started laughing again. “What a picture! I got my start as a volunteer, and I would have liked my condition in life a damned sight better if you had been my captain. I mean to

say, if there had been sugarplums on offer. I mean if my captain had been the sort of man to hand out—"

"I understand you, I think," said Crozier.

"Thank the lord, because I'm not sure I do. We are becoming very well-traveled in the worst uncharted latitudes of English grammar. Did you not say the room was hot? I am very sensible of it now."

"Damned hot," Crozier agreed wholeheartedly. Even without his coat, the whiskey warmed him. "I tell you, I care so little for England. The cold suits me much better."

"So you will be glad to put it to our rudder?" Fitzjames had begun to work at the once-neat knot of his cravat.

"Glad indeed, it is the sort of service I have longed for. The weather is—I do not say it is good, or even tolerable, but survivable, with long acquaintance. There is a strange beauty to ice when there is enough of it. And when there are few enough people."

"Hear, hear! A glass to weather that is survivable with long acquaintance, some ice to look at, and not very many people. Why, you make it sound a positive paradise. How felicitous that we are to travel there directly," Fitzjames was laughing as he raised his glass, abandoning his attempt at unknotting his cravat with only a little progress made.

Crozier laughed with him. "It will do well enough for me," he said. "But others do not agree with me. I did not take you for the sort of man who would prefer an iceberg to the delights of society."

"Society," said Fitzjames with a little contempt, "has few delights. I am heartily weary of it."

"I am all astonishment. What do you mean by that?"

"This damned cravat," said Fitzjames. "The fellow tied it for me at the toilet club and he must have been a rigger. It is a clove hitch, I think."

"Clove hitch, nothing. What do you mean by—well, what you said? You are weary of what?"

Fitzjames got the knot loose, and drew off the cravat with an inelegant sigh. "Of society. It is the most wearisome enterprise in the world, you know. Sir So-and-So has but to mention it is his fancy to dine, or to play cards, to attend the opera, and one must—well one must black one's boots, isn't that so? And sport one's lace, and come running."

Crozier topped off his drink. "You must do nothing, I think, which you do not care to do, if it is beyond your duty and within the law."

"There again, you are upstanding where others are more craven. The simple fact is that I want promotion, and the navy shrinks by the hour, so I go where I am bade. But the Arctic will take me out of it. If I cross the Passage I'll be knighted and I'll not come running again."

It was the same thing Crozier had thought, almost constantly since he'd been abroad. That this voyage, one way or another, would be an end to his misery—an end to derision expressed openly and muffled laughter when he left the room. An end to the overwhelming disappointment he felt at all times, which he had not yet contrived to escape.

"I tell you," he said, and wet his throat when he heard the rough sound of his voice. "I have had the same thought so often. Although we are not certain to return, it is certain that if we do our positions in life will be much changed."

"You are more than surely right. There will be 'KCB's enough to go around, I ween."

Another of his old hopes occurred to him, and Crozier could barely hold back laughter as he related it: "You know, I had planned to marry on my return."

They both laughed in an uproar.

"There but for a slip of the pen!" Fitzjames exclaimed, wiping a tear from his eye. "For my own part I am not sure I had any fancy to marry. It is an unhappy business, to take a wife, if one does not—I say, if one is not inclined to be thorough about it. If you understand me."

Crozier swallowed. He did understand. "I have some sympathy with that, I think," he said.

"Indeed I know you do," Fitzjames went on. "I have seen—I have—well, never mind. I wonder then if Sir John hasn't saved us both a lot of trouble in the end. I would be a desperate fortune-hunter, and you would certainly wait for love, and between us I think we would never get another thing done."

"You think you are not fortune-hunting now? Why, I have twice before received the discovery service's customary double pay."

Fitzjames laughed gratifyingly at this. "Oh! We are rich, then. We ought to buy a peerage. And an estate—a very cold and lonely one to suit your taste—and a string of ancestors for the wall. Dundy can be our butler."

"And Blanky shall keep the grounds."

"Neptune we may call our wayward heir, and despair of his ever steadying himself. Connubial bliss!"

They went on in this fashion for some time, Crozier laughing as sincerely as he ever had with those few friends he counted true.

When the Ross's maid came down in the morning she found them asleep beside each other on the same sofa and, thinking them dead, screamed.

Chapter End Notes

I cannot express enough that I really, actually am, exactly this fucking slow! I have no excuse. Like this is a slow burn on its own but made slower though the slowness on my side of the fourth wall. I'm sorry!

Enormous thanks to wildcard_47 enormously for listening to me complain pathetically about the 10-12 words I write per week. My aggressive complaining schedule is part of the reason the fanfiction is not filed reliably. Go read her work, it is brilliant.

Notes? Notes! Not a lot.

1. *"Give you a bottle? I would never," said Le Vesconte* "bottle" is naval slang for a reprimand, so he's confused, but also like, wasted, and possibly trying to joke.

2. Edward Little really does have that many siblings apparently! Thank you to tautline-hitch and radiojamming for opening my eyes to how many Littles there really are. It is of interest that not one of them is a mouse named Stuart.

3. Is "crikey" period? Let's not think about it too hard!

4. Firmin House is a military uniform supplier that I assume is like, expensive because they made Nelson's uniform.

5. I don't know what a footman does! Is it this! It might be!

6. Where is Neptune? I struggled with this. I wanted to bring him in, but it seemed out of character* to wake up when presumably he is luxuriating in having Crozier's crappy little Victorian bed all to himself. So he's upstairs, asleep. (*yes)

7. A clove hitch is a knot that ties a rope onto...a thing, and I don't think it's a terribly difficult one but if your neck is the thing it's reasonable that you think the knot is hard to get off. I spent about 10 minutes looking up "nautical knots - hard to untie" and this is where we landed.

8. "Lace" refers to the gold designs on their uniforms, apparently it was super expensive and when the navy launched a concerted effort to Make the Uniforms Sexier (or something) it caused a lite uproar because they suddenly became more expensive, largely due to the amount of gold lace. Bummer!

That's all for now! I hope you are well. Stay safe, stay happy, healthy, etc etc. Luv u all.

England Expects

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Crozier started awake in a panic, hearing, on the margin of his conscious awareness, a woman's scream. He had no time to consider if it was real or imagined, for as he made a wretched snorting sound and opened his eyes the source of the scream was revealed.

"God protect me," said the maid, clutching her hands to her chest as Crozier struggled upright, "I didn't expect—I am so awfully sorry, sirs! I thought you a pair of corpses."

Fitzjames had risen with more care, and was attempting to straighten his waistcoat. "Do not be over-hasty, madam," he said. "For if you cannot bring me some small beer considerably soon your thought will be proven entirely correct. And one for—one for each of us, I do implore you."

With a curtsey more wobbly than otherwise, the maid left the room as quickly as she was able.

By this time Ross had come downstairs in his slippers and nightcap, a cutlass in his hand. "Did somebody scream?"

"The maid," said Crozier wretchedly.

"Maid?" Ross stared at them. The maid had gone.

"It wasn't me," said Fitzjames, and he threw Crozier a conspiring glance. "I am reasonably sure. Can it really be morning?"

"Something like it," said Ross, lowering his arm. He squinted at them and then out the window to judge the level of the light. "An hour or so before I'd rather be abroad, though, so if you're sure all's well I'll return to my bed. Shall I leave you my sword?"

"We are quite well," said Crozier. "There are two of our own in the vicinity, I don't doubt."

Ross touched his nightcap. "Goodnight then, or rather good morning," he said, and narrowly avoided colliding with the maid as she returned.

The maturity of that morning was somewhat kinder than its infancy, but Crozier rose with a headache. He had at some point made his way up the stairs to bed, but had failed to undress beyond removing his boots, his waistcoat, and a single stocking which was improbably clutched in his hand.

But this all felt very tolerable, because it was not accompanied by bitter regret. He had insulted no one, he had revealed no heartache he wished in daylight to make private. Indeed

he felt satisfaction more than the pain—but when he came downstairs the pain rallied efficiently.

Lady Ross's breakfast table was crowded, not with her visitors or any of Ross's sycophants, but with Crozier's own friends.

Thomas Blanky and his wife were seated next to Edward Little, who observed with great poignancy the slice of ham on his plate. Fitzjames was among them, buttering a piece of a muffin, with an empty place beside him.

But it was Sophia Cracroft who first caught his eye. She winked, and his foggy brain stopped working.

"Francis," she said. "I hope you didn't think you could get away without your wedding breakfast."

"Without his *what?"* said Le Vesconte, very gray in the face.

Little heaved a sigh but did not break confidence with the ham.

"In the sense that it is a breakfast which we celebrate before you leave on your tour. Come, your place is set," said Lady Ross.

"Indeed it is," said Fitzjames, pulling back the chair, "though we have been waiting for you somewhat, and so it has transpired that you are light a glass of sekt and a muffin."

"Sir John will not join us?" asked Lady Ross.

"He is abed with a dreadful headache, poor man," Sophia reported.

At this moment Neptune emerged slobberously from below the table and began to lick Crozier's hand. It occurred that much would be explained if he had died earlier in the evening and arrived in a very unsought afterlife.

Attempting to dry his hand on Neptune's fur, he stared at Sophia. "Surely he did not have more than a glass."

Sophia sipped her tea. "It must have sufficed," she said, and did not elaborate. "Won't you sit down, Francis?

Hating to have so many eyes on him, Crozier did so.

"There now. I am not entirely sure who should be the more congratulated," said Lady Ross. "It seems a very equal match."

"Oh, we all benefit, ma'am," said Blanky with a courtly inclination of the head. "As I said to Mrs. Blanky just the other night, 'What greasy luck it is that our Frank's unfortunate domestic question might be resolved in such a way as has provided me more entertainment than I shall ever again know in life.'"

“What?” said Le Vesconte. “Has Captain Crozier bought a house?”

“It is an interesting question,” said Fitzjames, ignoring his friend to address Lady Ross. “We have learned that neither of us has benefited particularly in standing, property, people, or morality. Neither one of us—forgive me, Crozier—has got a single splendid shilling, I dare not speculate on the comparative value of a number of sisters weighed against a considerably eccentric foster brother, and old Nep is very much his own man. I should say that taken together, the only benefit of this whole affair has been this very kind breakfast and especially this most praiseworthy gooseberry jam.”

Fitzjames raised his glass and proposed a toast to the Rosses, and as they were drinking this with three times three, a maid flew into the room in a state of great alarm. Dimly, Crozier recognize her and pitied her that so much should upset her before the noon hour.

“Whatever do you mean by this?” cried Lady Ross.

The maid wrung her hands. “Madam, forgive me. It is Sir John Ross, he is at the threshold shouting to be let in, and he—” she looked around the room, but had no alternative but to continue, albeit in a lower voice: “he is dreadful drunk.”

“Damn him!” Ross interjected in a foul weather shout, slapping the table with his palm so crystal, china, and silver all rattled. Many of the sea officers seized their glasses, well-accustomed to the rescue of sundry fragile objects from leaping tables, and Little had the conscientiousness to shelter the gooseberry jam as well. Chagrined by the horrified face of his wife and her friends, Ross tugged on his sleeves and collected himself. “Ladies, please forgive me.”

At this moment Sir John Ross entered the room, leaving behind him a crowd of male servants as scattered as billiard balls in the wake of a wild cue, their sleeves rolled up but unwilling to touch the old gentleman.

At the table, several of the ladies made noises of alarm, and there was a general sound of people rearranging their limbs for expedient exits.

Ross stood up, flushed with fury. “Uncle, good morning. Come with me to my drawing room, and I will send for some coffee.”

Sir John Ross surveyed the room with a protuberant eye and ignored his nephew. “I have been turned away at the door by Sir John Barrow’s people,” he pronounced. “Refused at the threshold. In all my years I have never seen such an impudent thing. I have never imagined such brazen-faced, brass-necked, smug-arsed—”

“Sir!” Ross roared, rounding the table and striking his thigh hard on the corner in his haste, setting everything rattling once again. “That is the very limit!”

And then they were both shouting, the younger Ross advancing so that the elder was bullied through the doorway and into the drawing room. The door slammed behind them but provided almost no barrier at all to their argument. This was not helped by the stunned

silence of the breakfast table. Lady Ross sat with a hand to her mouth, very plainly near tears.

In the resounding silence, Neptune began to bark.

"James,*"* said Le Vesconte in a very timorous voice, more gray than he had been before, *"tu as aussi vu le fantôme?"*

"On pourrait dire," Fitzjames replied.

"Come, ma'am, and take heart," said Blanky to Lady Ross, avidly sawing into his ham. "They'll not come to blows, you need have no concern."

"You have experience of these altercations, Mr. Blanky?" Lady Ross asked.

"Aye—forgive me, ma'am, I should say *yes*, Mrs. Blanky tells me all the time it is not right to use the seagoing language ashore—"

"You do quite right, Mr. Blanky," said Mrs Blanky with glowing approbation.

"Why thank you, Mrs. Blanky," her husband beamed, then continued: "I have heard a good deal of this, and in less comfortable circumstances. They will only yell for a bit and the elder may throw one or several things, but they will hardly part brass rags for having quarreled."

"To part brass rags is to break," Crozier explained to Lady Ross. "And I agree with Mr. Blanky. Sir John Ross, to his credit, never shows a different face in public than he does in private."

This seemed to have little quelling effect, and they lapsed into silence again as the argument rang through the door. At irregular intervals Neptune produced his deafening bark.

"—At my home, before my family, before my *guests*, by God! It cannot be countenanced!"

"Oh aye? Countenanced? Will you countenance, then, your friends to die so long as they be not your guests? You stand in your hall, with your servants behind you, and tell me what may be countenanced, yet you are not half so bold as Barrow pushes through this folly—fie, Jim, fie. You bring me more shame than ever you have blushed for me."

Crozier's heart foundered. It was not the first time he had heard such from Sir John Ross—nor even the first time he had heard Sir John Ross yell such to his nephew in a state of colossal inebriation—but it put ice in his blood just the same. He looked at the assembled men of the expedition which was being so volubly denounced. Blanky gave him a very pointed grimace before employing all his focus on a piece of toast. Little bore his customary expression of great suffering, but perhaps somewhat greater suffering than was usual. Of the *Erebuses*, he discounted Le Vesconte who clung only barely to life. Fitzjames was perfectly impassive, but his lowered gaze was less unreadable than it might have been—he knew what sort of luck this called down on them. Surely they all knew.

Ross's voice, tense with the effort of reason, interrupted these thoughts: "And what ought those objections to be, Uncle, other than a dislike of Barrow and a low opinion of Franklin?

You have not said them."

"I will not be put off. I will oppose this folly however so long I have breath to name its author: Barrow's folly—Barrow's prideful, idiot folly."

At these words Fitzjames plainly flinched, looked around the table to determine if anyone had seen it, and raised his hand as if he might start speaking. Like the first time comprehending a conversation in a foreign language, Crozier felt a veil drawn from his understanding, and knew at once that Fitzjames was searching for a lighthearted remark that would make everyone laugh, draw their attention from the argument and the wisdom of Sir John Barrow and especially the qualifications of his protégés. When the hand was lowered with no such remark, it was equally plain that he had come up sadly short.

Crozier raked and ransacked his mind, and finding himself more insolvent of wit than even Fitzjames might have been, said, perhaps unimpressively: "Neptune, come here for some ham."

The dog's attention moved from the argument beyond the door to the table with the alacrity of a cracking whip, and he was instantly at Crozier's side, drooling on his trousers. Crozier carved him a generous portion and was spared the decision of whether he should place it on the floor when the dog, tall enough so his head rose above the height of the table, engulfed it directly from the fork.

"I say," said Fitzjames, impressed.

"And you think I would be silent, if I saw the danger that you think you do?" The younger Ross spoke almost at a normal volume, and none at the breakfast table pretended they did not strain to hear. "That I will bear myself less than malice if some misfortune—God forbid it—comes that I might have prevented? But then you are drunk, and it is breakfast-time, and I have heard nothing like reason from you, only the name of Barrow and the most absurd contumely."

"I promise you, laddie, there are a score of reasons to object, but that name should be enough."

The argument was well and truly winding down.

"I have heard it the last time. Repair to your home and I shall repair your damage to mine."

Sophia seized the moment and lifted her glass. "I hope you will all drink with me to Mr. Coleridge. What that he had lived to see his work come so vividly to life."

And then a morning came as easily as any other, and they said their farewells.

Fitzjames, who would be remaining behind until Greenhithe, had already gone out. Crozier had a faint memory of half waking in the dim first light of dawn to Fitzjames wishing him the very best good luck and desiring him by no means to rise. Then he had a more vivid memory

of Fitzjames barking his shins on Crozier's sea chest and shouting some of the more appalling curses he had heard uttered on land.

Ross took his hand on the quay and said, "Francis, take every care. Keep your spirits high and expect my letters. Know that I will look for yours as long as they may be sent."

Crozier gave a smile, knowing it to be more than usually unsightly.

"I will write," said Crozier. "Well after mail may be sent."

The iron grip on his hand became for a moment a vice. "Give you fair winds and following seas, my dear friend. My heart will travel with you."

Leaving Woolwich was an affair of mixed and high emotion. Sir John made three equally grandiose speeches: the first to the companies of *Erebus* and *Terror*, the second to the crowd assembled on the quay, and third just as their moorings were cut away, at an astonishing volume, to whoever might be able to hear among the expedition, their escorts, and the still-assembled crowd.

Crozier kept himself apart from the performance of this towering sentimentality, though he was not immune to it, and had feared a mawkish farewell from Ross only because it would too closely resemble his private thoughts. Every soul aboard, he knew, was leaving behind the man he was ashore, and enduring the uncomfortable but blessedly brief transfiguration to the man he was at sea. Vices and virtues they all had still, but new ones, in different balance, and according to a different measure.

After they had been sailing nearly an hour, Little reported that *Erebus* had raised a signal.

"'England expects we shall all' well, 'triumph' was what they intended to convey," said Little after some hesitation. "They have spelt out the final word, as Lord Nelson did."

They were being towed nearly side by side, and Crozier did not need a glass or a signal book to read:

ENGLAND EXPECTS WE SHALL ALL TRIMUPH

He pronounced these words aloud as he read them, for no purpose but to vent his sheer astonishment, then repeated the word 'trimuph' at a lower volume two or three times.

"Try-muff," said Blanky wonderingly. "It has a ring to it, I must say."

"Shall we make any reply?" Little asked.

"We shall not," said Crozier, gazing at the message, which quite separate from its intended effect had the feeling of an omen. He thought of Sir John Ross shouting about folly. He watched the mortifying word TRIMUPH flutter proudly in the breeze of their movement.

Erebus left the signal up for days.

Though he dined more on *Erebus* than in his own wardroom, Crozier could not bring himself to suggest any correction—did not know with what words he might introduce the subject. But from the chagrined, schoolboyish looks the *Erebus* officers bore on their faces when they welcomed him to their deck, he had the sense that he alone might have been capable of addressing it.

So one day at Franklin's table, marshaling himself to duty, he said:

"Your signal, Sir John, is still flying?"

Franklin raised his eyes. "Indeed it is, Francis. This is a time of great moment, and I seek to inspire the men."

"And has any signal been made back to you?"

"The *Baretto Junior* has made so bold as to reply, 'WE SHALL ALL TRY IT,' which I think very apt."

Le Vesconte made a sound like a dog sneezing and then began to cough wretchedly.

Crozier stared into his wineglass, aware that Franklin had closed the subject. When he lifted his eyes, he saw the dreary wardroom to which he was to be summoned again and again for what would likely be years. Those years stretched before him now, uncertain in number and furnished with no details beyond the surety that he would never know again the John Franklin who had been his friend.

He did not yet feel joy in sailing.

Since he had left Eliot Place he had not felt capable of it. In fact he felt capable of very little joy, and the old melancholy had become very close. In moments of inattention it loomed nearer and nearer, certain and dreadful as a lee shore.

This feeling was given justification when, after several days' sailing, a parcel of mail was delivered containing some final instructions and good wishes from the Admiralty, a list of merchants and whalers that might be encountered along their course, and a small personal letter, from Sir James Ross to Crozier.

H.M.S "Terror"

Greenhithe, 20th May 1845

Francis,

I have been dogged since you sailed by a bit of staircase wit, something I had meant to say to you but when we parted had not the words for. Such words as I do have now are still somewhat broad of the mark here but I shall put them down. They are these:

I know I have not been and cannot be to you the friend that you require and deserve. I have spread myself too thin I think and I tell you it seems I cannot be to anybody what they require. Nor yet to those I love what they deserve. This defect of my character is well-known to me, but I lament that you have suffered for it. This I wish I had said to you and for this I wish I had begged for your forgiveness. It must now be enough that I have written it.

How is your cruise? How glad you must be, being soon out of sight of land, and with it all the old honours and cares of terra cognita. *It occurs as if you were standing here and had said it, that I must acknowledge of honours I have too much, and you too little. But there will be such awaiting you on your return as will eclipse my own. What that there could not be cares, but it would not do to put such a foolish thing on paper.*

In your bed at Eliot Place you have left behind a single silk stocking, should you wonder at the uneven number of such articles you possess. I have not sent it with Fitzjames for it has only just now been discovered. Anne has also sent you a jar of bilberry jam quite against my caution and I pray you to be easy in your soul if you should pitch it into the sea. Of the married state I shall say this, there are many jams which must be suffered with Roman resolve.

It is my hope that I will have some letter from you before you do truly leave sight of land. If you write that you are cheerful and do not detest my faults and that your breeze is favoring they shall be the best words of comfort that might be read.

My best to Neptune. I renew to you my wish of good sailing and give you the most sincere assurance that I will always remain

Your friend,

James Clark Ross

Alone, at his writing desk, he gazed at this letter. Though it had no power to harm him, it lanced deep, piercing some vital organ containing his pride and worthiness—how humiliating, to be rejected by everyone he had known love for. Sophia twice, and Ross without Crozier having ever breathed a word.

How utterly fitting, that his own marriage should be not of convenience or pity but in fact the most colossally stupid joke he had ever heard.

But along with the mail had come Fitzjames, and he must have been summoned by the thought. Crozier had not put the letter in his desk before Jopson was informing him that Commander Fitzjames was soon to be on *Terror's* deck.

Fitzjames, when he presented himself, wore the immaculate uniform in which he must have reported, gilt and brass and polished boots all winking in the noonday sun. Very recently, Crozier might have found this personal glitter aggravating in the extreme. But he saw in this gesture a performance of respect and deference that was the same to Crozier as it had been to Sir John. It occurred startlingly that this was a man he now knew—whose general thoughts

and earnest beliefs he could guess with some confidence, with whom he had shared the prosaic intimacies of breakfasts, of sleep, of dressing and undressing. Whose absence had given him no pleasure, and who now grinned unreservedly as he took Crozier's hand in two of his own, as surely he had not greeted Sir John.

"Francis!" He cried. "And doesn't that sound odd! But Sir John has made well plain to me that he will tolerate only the strictest informality at sea. I say, you're looking well. Very rested. Quite bung-up and bilge-free. You have had a pretty good cruise, I wean? Calm seas, auspicious gales?"

"James," said Crozier, doubting that he looked either rested or well. But this dubious judgement was delivered at such a nervy volume that without forethought or great consideration, his free hand joined the handshake and held on with force. "You are so very welcome."

Fitzjames's grin took on a stunned asymmetry. "I cannot say how much—how sincerely—but I do give you leave to withdraw your welcome when you have heard what I have brought you. The first thing is Sir John Barrow's very best regards. I need not know at what value you set those regards, though they really were sincerely meant. The second is a pot of Lady Ross's gooseberry jam, which I will have sent to your steward. The hell of it is, neither I nor Lady Ross could remember if you had particularly enjoyed the jam, or if it was only that you were in the room when the rest of us did. And then we put this question to Sir James and he said, 'Francis don't know a gooseberry from a bilberry, and he's not likely to learn, if he has any sense, not after what happened to poor old Minto.' Thereafter occurred a small discord of the married genus, on the subject of whether or not Lord Minto was at the present moment still living and I daresay I gave a respectable imitation of Cornwallis at Belle Île."

"I do not think I recall the jam," said Crozier, and although Fitzjames gave no outward reaction, he had the peculiar and unpleasant sense that he should not have said it. "But I am very grateful," he concluded, cringing inwardly at the lubberly, unaccustomed sound of his courtesy.

"It defies my understanding that you should not recall a jam," Fitzjames replied. He began to rummage around in the breast of his jacket, and for a surreal moment Crozier thought he was about to produce the jam itself. Instead he revealed a stack of letters, sorted through them, and handed several to Crozier. "Your Lieutenant Little has also received an astonishing number of letters, all from different ladies I presume to be his sisters. I wonder if I might entrust them to you? There was one for you—not from a Miss Little—but it has been delivered already with your orders."

"You are very kind to bring them, he will be most pleased," Crozier said. The substantial stack of mail he was handed bore a quickly-fading warmth.

"It is nothing like kindness, quite by accident I have taken up a career in a bumboat, I have brought so many trinkets and jams and billets-doux—or -aigres, as they may be, I haven't read them. I can sell you a Sally Lunn for a sixpence, I am quite sure."

Crozier barked out a creaky laugh, and then they stood in silence long enough to hear the strike of the bell.

“Have you been well, James?” he asked at last.

“Tolerably, thank you, very tolerably. Quite a bit shattered today, I don’t mind telling you, to fete my leaving last night a dreadful quantity of champagne was necessary. But sea air is the very thing, is it not? Sea air and an hour or so of rowing, gad but you fellows have made good time riding so low.”

Whatever Crozier had been scraping together by way of reply was interrupted by the arrival of Lieutenant Little, who informed him that the gig had been stowed and that *Erebus* had signaled, conveying an intent to carry more sail and a desire that *Terror* do likewise. He then greeted Fitzjames, creating for Crozier the opportunity to fume in silence over Franklin's incautious mania for sail, and for Fitzjames the opportunity to deliver an embellished reprisal of the quip about the bumboat. The letters were delivered to their ultimate destination, and Little concealed them in haste.

“Please carry on as Sir John bids, Edward,” said Crozier. After a breath or so to ensure he was beyond any outward display of displeasure, he said, “James, will you take a glass of whiskey with me?”

As the orders to increase sail were bellowed above, the joke about the bumboat was aired once more for Jopson, they drank Lord Minto’s health, and then sat in quiet contemplation for a few moments.

Fitzjames, breaking the silence, said: “I like canvas well enough myself. But I like more to see that the dreadful ‘trimuph’ has been pulled down.”

Crozier sputtered, choked, and set down his glass. “Hist, James! *Trimuph*, I tell you, I cannot speak of trimuph, I am haunted by trimuph. It has been up for days.”

“So I heard. The fellows on the *Blazer* have found some pretty rude jokes in it—I cannot blame them—and I would venture that it has not done our flagship quite as much honor as may have been intended.”

Crozier shook his head, laughing almost breathlessly with relief. The wound done to him by the letter in his desk seemed at once less mortal, and indeed almost healed by the prospect of candidly venting his frustrations to someone of near-equal rank and sympathetic opinion.

He had the unaccustomed feeling of inventing a joke, and pursued it to its fruition: “Well, we must take comfort that he has no cause to signal any martial intentions.”

“Hear, hear,” said Fitzjames, “Lady Franklin would no doubt take great exception.” And nearly at the same instant they both began to laugh.

Crozier waved away the laughter before it died, and as they were composing themselves he heard a fast, thundering, scuffing footfall, and then Neptune was at the threshold. By convention, the dog entered unannounced where he pleased—and sometimes where he did not please, as he had mastered neither the plan of the ship nor the ladders between the decks—and he did so now with his nose to the planks, sniffing with great attention and leaving

behind him a rather slick trail. On identifying Fitzjames, he burst into a dripping smile and thrust his face between his knees.

Fitzjames knelt on the deck and began to exchange one-sided pleasantries touching upon Neptune's comfort and diet aboard the ship, his treatment by the sailors and Crozier, and the general effect on his happiness that Fitzjames had joined the expedition so late.

"Leave off, Neptune, and come here," said Crozier, conscious of the considerable amount of drool and black wool Neptune could deposit on one's best uniform. Neptune, with his typical obedience to the spirit of the command but not the letter, collapsed in the shape of a great bearskin rug and immediately began to sleep.

Fitzjames gazed down on the dog, who had in this fashion obstructed many a doorway at Eliot Place, and then, with a more encompassing look around the wardroom, observed, "It is uncommon peaceful in here, for a ship called *Terror."*

Crozier had, of *Terror*, more pride than a host, or even an ordinary captain. This longtime, intimate companion had absorbed from him a thousand private thoughts, had sheltered him in a hundred calamities, and on those rare occasions of wonder, awe, or joy, had been beneath his feet. He would never have accepted an admiring comment about himself, but found it was easy to accept one about his ship.

"She has always been so," he said.

"I may then impose on you more often, for I believe an hour or even a minute of peace will soon become a precious commodity."

"You will be welcome."

As Crozier heard himself say this, he realized that he did indeed mean it sincerely. Though he had thought to take a reef in the matter of complaining about Sir John, a painful fact of Neptune's history occurred, and at the same time the certain knowledge that this fact would amuse greatly. "Did you know," he said, "that before Neptune came to me, Sir John had named him Sweetlips?"

Fitzjames looked down at the dog, then at Crozier, and then they laughed again in earnest.

As Crozier began to feel some pain from this unaccustomed exertion, Fitzjames caught his eye and lifted his glass.

"Let us drink, then," he said, "to Sweetlips and wives."

Chapter End Notes

Well everyone seemed so chill about this updating so slowly...

Without further excuses, and without saying "if anyone is still reading," a comment I can think quietly to myself, I present the next chapter of my exceedingly slow farcical Victorian enemies-to-accidental-husbands-to-friends-to-work-friends-with-a-common-enemy-to-lovers fanfiction! What a niche.

They actually leave in this one, and if you think that will prevent me from writing exclusively people sitting around and drinking, well. Well.

1. A Victorian wedding breakfast was not (generally? at all?) a sit-down affair but rather you grabbed your Victorian breakfast items and congratulated the couple. In several other ways this one is atypical. Also originally I wrote someone buttering an entire muffin which I think we can all agree would have ruined the story.

2. Sekt was indeed a popular Victorian sparkling wine. Fitzjames in this story wouldn't know AOC Certified Champagne from a tequila High Noon but maybe someone mentioned it earlier.

3. Yes I know we've already been through "Sir John Ross ruins a party and argues with his nephew and then someone references the Rime of the Ancient Mariner" but thaT wAS yeARS AGo.

4. Blanky, as a frequent whaler and knower-of-whalers, could be reasonably expected to be full of whaling idioms like "greasy luck," a phrase we should all really use more.

5. I had great difficulty creating a signal flag typo so some suspension of disbelief may be required. There's almost no way all of these words wouldn't have had existing codes, so I went with "spelling out the last word in tribute to Nelson." Would you pronounce "trimuph" as rhyming with "buy stuff" or "Plymouth"? In this case it is the former and no one even considers the latter.

6. By "a dog sneezing" I mean reverse sneezing, not regular sneezing.

7. "Bung-up and bilge-free" is apparently an idiom taken from the proper stowage of grog barrels, and almost makes sense if you squint at it.

8. "Calm seas, auspicious gales" are promised by Prospero in his final lines in The Tempest, and have no ulterior significance here other than Fitzjames has probably read The Tempest.

9. The thing that Cornwallis did at Belle Île was retreat, and apparently it was very well-received.

10. Do I know what a Sally Lunn would have cost in 1845? No! Did I try to find out? Yes, a little, but all I can confirm is that they did definitely exist. This proceeds from the

assumption that there would have been a considerable markup on bumboat goods. Probably not that much. It's one banana, what can it cost?

11. "Franklin liked to carry too much sail" is I think really the only drama of which we are aware during this part of the trip so, as usual, Sir John is going to advance the plot (ironically, not very quickly.)

12. I have been sitting on "Sweetlips and wives" for. ever. it is on my very first page of notes. I hope it has found its moment.

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