

# Chapter VIII

Chapter VIII unfolds in April 1848, as Commander Gore, believed to be dead for the past eight months, is overwhelmed by a vivid imagining of the tragedy that has unfolded in his absence. He pores over the grim accounts of Franklin's ill-fated expedition, which was stranded in the unforgiving Arctic aboard the ships *Erebus* and *Terror*. The expedition's skilled sportsman has perished, and a single violent storm wipes out another hunting party of officers and men. As temperatures plummet, isolation takes its toll on the crew, driving some to madness while others succumb to starvation, scurvy, and an unrelenting yearning for warmth and food. The air surrounding the ships reeks of decay, mirroring the despair and hopelessness that have gripped the expedition, as they are trapped in a seemingly endless night.

As spring breaks, the casualties mount, with nine officers and fifteen men dead, marking the highest mortality rate of any polar expedition in recorded history. In the face of this overwhelming calamity, Crozier, despite his deteriorating health, resolutely orders the abandonment of the *Erebus* and *Terror*. Franklin's expedition, still referred to only as "Franklin's expedition" and not yet the "lost expedition," prepares to embark on a perilous 800-mile trek toward what they hope is safety. However, the expedition is woefully ill-equipped for such a journey, carrying supplies that are barely sufficient for half the distance. The men load whaleboats with essential items, including tents, sealskin sleeping bags, canned food, spare clothing, and hunting rifles, yet the boats are overloaded and the men suffer from the weight as they drag them across the ice. What had begun as a journey of hope quickly deteriorates into a desperate struggle for survival, with frostbite, dysentery, and death dogging their every step.

As the journey progresses, survival becomes increasingly difficult. With their strength waning and morale at an all-time low, marines are tasked with guarding medical

supplies against the increasingly desperate sailors, while also overseeing the rationing of their dwindling provisions. Goodsir, one of the surviving surgeons, ultimately succumbs to a tooth infection, further decimating the already reduced crew. As they continue their trek, the men are forced to adopt makeshift burial practices, but soon, the dead are left where they fall, marking a haunting reminder of the tragedy that has befallen them. They abandon much of their gear in a futile attempt to lighten the load, leaving behind bizarre scenes of abandoned equipment scattered in the frozen wilderness, like remnants of a lost civilization. Hope continues to fade with each passing day, as exhaustion and despair settle in, and the men begin to feel more and more disconnected from their surroundings, wandering further into the bleak, unforgiving landscape.

Gore, having learned that around thirty survivors eventually make it to a camp dubbed "Starvation Cove," far from any civilization, is haunted by disturbing memories of the expedition's doomed fate. In vivid, surreal dreams, he confronts the faces of his lost companions, including a horrific vision of Le Vesconte, dismembered and mutilated. These dreams blur the lines between life and death, serving as a grim reflection of the lengths to which humans will go to survive when pushed to the edge. The sight of his fallen comrades, consumed by desperation and cannibalistic instincts, fills him with horror and guilt. Meanwhile, surviving Inuit offer assistance, yet the expedition's poor preparation leaves them exposed and vulnerable in the harsh, unforgiving landscape. Gore is burdened by the weight of memory and guilt, grappling with the responsibility for the loss of his comrades as he clings to the hope of reaching safety before the dark, cold void of the Arctic consumes him completely. He is haunted by the faces of those who perished, their deaths a constant reminder of the tragic failure of the expedition. Determined to survive, he pushes onward, but the weight of his responsibility and the constant reminders of his fallen comrades seem to close in on him, making each step forward feel like a struggle against inevitable darkness.