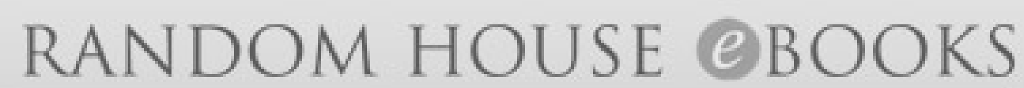

Nevil Shute

Contents

Cover
About the Book
About the Author
Also by Nevil Shute
Title Page

Chapter I
Chapter II
Chapter III
Chapter IV
Chapter V
Chapter VI
Chapter VII
Chapter VIII
Chapter IX
Chapter X

Author's Note
Copyright

About the Book

Young pilot Donald Ross has little in common with the Oxford don who has employed him on an expedition to the Arctic – and still less with his beautiful but stubborn daughter, Alix. But once the three of them reach the treacherous shores of Greenland their destinies are inextricably bound by the events that unfold there.

About the Author

Nevil Shute Norway was born on 17 January 1899 in Ealing, London. After attending the Dragon School and Shrewsbury School, he studied Engineering Science at Balliol College, Oxford. He worked as an aeronautical engineer and published his first novel, *Marazan*, in 1926. In 1931 he married Frances Mary Heaton and they went on to have two daughters. During the Second World War he joined the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve where he worked on developing secret weapons. After the war he continued to write and settled in Australia where he lived until his death on 12 January 1960. His most celebrated novels include *Pied Piper* (1942), *No Highway* (1948), *A Town Like Alice* (1950) and *On the Beach* (1957).

Also by Nevil Shute

Novels

Marazan
So Disdained
Lonely Road
Ruined City
What Happened to the Corbetts
Landfall
Pied Piper
Pastoral
Most Secret
The Chequer Board
No Highway
A Town Like Alice
Round the Bend
The Far Country
In the Wet
Requiem for a Wren
Beyond the Black Stump
On the Beach
The Rainbow and the Rose
Trustee from the Toolroom
Stephen Morris and *Pilotage*

Autobiography

Slide Rule

NEVIL SHUTE

An Old Captivity

VINTAGE BOOKS
London

I

THIS CASE CAME before me quite by chance in the spring of last year. I was travelling out to Rome for a consultation. I might have saved time and fatigue if I had gone by air, but it was early in the year and I had decided against it on account of the high winds and rain. Instead, I booked a sleeper in the first-class *wagon-lit*, and left Paris on the midday train.

The journey was a normal one as far as Dijon, and a little way beyond. But as the darkness fell and the line began to climb up into the Jura mountains the train went slower and slower, with frequent stops for no apparent reason. It was that difficult hour in a railway train, between tea and dinner, when one is tired of reading, reluctant to turn on the lights and face a long, dull evening, and conscious of no appetite at all to face another meal. It was raining a little; in the dusk the countryside seemed grey and depressing. The fact that the train was obviously becoming very late did not relieve the situation.

Presently we stopped again, and this time for a quarter of an hour. Then we began to move, but in the reverse direction. We ran backwards down the line at a slow speed for perhaps a couple of miles, and drew into a little station in the woods that we had passed through some time previously. Here we stopped again, this time for good.

I was annoyed, and went out into the corridor to see if I could find out what was happening. There was a man there, a very tall, lean man, perhaps thirty-five or thirty-six years old. He was leaning out of the window. From his appearance I guessed he was an Englishman, so I touched him on the shoulder, and said: “Do you know what’s holding us up?”

Without turning he said: “Half a minute.”

There was a good deal of shouting in French going on outside between the engine-driver, the guard, the head waiter of the restaurant car, and the various station officials. I speak French moderately, but I could make nothing of the broad, shouted vowels at the far end of the platform. My companion understood, however, for he drew back into the corridor and said:

“They’re saying up there that there’s a goods train off the lines between here and Frasne. We may have to stay here till the morning.”

I was irritated and concerned, and immediately thought, of course, that I must telegraph to my colleague in Rome to tell him that I had been delayed. I exchanged a few remarks about French railways with my new companion, and then said:

“You must speak French very well. I couldn’t understand a word of what that fellow was shouting.”

He nodded. “I worked for some years in the French part of Canada, in Quebec. I got used to queer sorts of French out there.”

Presently the conductor came down the corridor and repeated to us the substance of what we had already learned. He passed on, and we stood chatting together for a few minutes. Then I said:

“If you’re travelling alone, we might have dinner together.”

He smiled. “I’m all by myself; I should like to. It seems about the only thing to do—to have a damn good dinner and make the best of it.”

I nodded. “Well, I’ll join you presently. I must see if I can send a telegram.”

He said: “They’ll send it from the booking-office for you.”

I went and sent my telegram, and came back to the train. My new acquaintance was still standing in the

corridor; from a distance I had time to make a quick inspection of him. He was dressed quietly and well, in a dark suit. He was a tall man, six feet or six foot one in height, of rather a slender build. He had black hair, sleek and brushed back from a high forehead. His face was lean and tanned, and rather pleasant. I judged him to be of a highly strung, rather sensitive type, probably with a very short reaction time. I took him for an officer on leave, possibly in the Air Force. It was no surprise to me when I heard later that he was of a Scotch family.

We chatted for some minutes in the corridor; then they came to summon us to dinner and we went through to the restaurant car. Darkness had fallen; there was nothing to be seen from the windows of the train but the little station platform on one side, and the swaying of the branches of the trees on the other. We were marooned right in the middle of a forest, miles from anywhere.

I pulled down the blind beside our table, and turned to the wine list. “It’s a great nuisance, sticking here, like this,” I said absently, studying the card. “I ought to have gone out by Imperial Airways.”

“So ought I.”

There was a turn in his voice that drew my attention from the Burgundy and made me raise my head.

“Do you usually go by air?”

He hesitated. “I ought to explain. I’m one of the Senior Masters in Imperial Airways. I’m going out to pick up a flying boat at Brindisi.”

I said: “Indeed? I should have thought you would have flown out.”

“I would have done normally, but all the boats this week are leaving with full loads. We’re doing a lot of business these days.” He paused, and then he said, “I don’t suppose you know my name. It’s Ross—Donald Ross.”

I smiled. “My name is Morgan. I’m going out to Rome.”

The waiter came to my elbow, making an interruption; I turned again to the wine list, consulted Ross, and gave our order to the waiter. Then I turned back to the lean tanned man opposite me. “That’s really very interesting. Were you with Imperial Airways when you were in Canada?”

He shook his head. “They don’t operate in Canada. No, that was with a much smaller concern, some years ago. In Quebec. We used to run down as far as Rimouski, and up to Eastmain and Fort George in Hudson Bay, and on to Churchill. Those were the regular routes. On special trips, of course, we used to go anywhere—all over the north.” He smiled. “That’s where I learnt my French.”

“But were there many passengers up there?”

“Not many. Trappers and prospectors, mostly, and hunting parties in the summer.” He paused. “But then, we carried everything they needed: kerosene, mining machinery, sacks of flour, tinned foods, petrol, dresses for the squaws, pigs and goats—everything you can think of.”

“Extraordinary.”

“It’s cheaper to take those things in by air than by canoe, with a portage every ten miles.”

The waiter came and took away the soup plates, and brought the fish. We ate in silence for a time. I was thinking, not for the first time, of the wide lives open to the young men of to-day. With their experience behind them, the world should be well governed when they come to power.

In the end I remarked: “I’ve lived a very different life to you. I’m a psychiatrist—a doctor, of a sort.”

He said hesitantly: “That means a brain specialist, doesn’t it?”

“That’s right.”

“I suppose you’re on holiday now?”

I said: “Not a bit. I’m on my way to Rome for a consultation.”

He digested that in silence for a time, probably wondering how much I got for going out to Rome. The fish plates were taken away, and they brought the *gigot*. When the waiter had gone, he said:

"You'll forgive me, but I don't know much about these things. Do you do dreams, and all that?"

I smiled. "To some extent. Dreams are useful, if you don't try to read too much into them."

"I see."

We went on with the meal in silence. From time to time I shot a glance at my companion; he now had something on his mind. I was convinced of that; he was in a brown study. The courses came and went; he ate them mechanically, and several times refilled his glass with Burgundy. He was not the type to grow irresponsible or excited under liquor, but presently I knew, he would begin to talk. He did.

Over the dessert he said suddenly: "Would you say that dreams—exceptionally vivid dreams—meant that a chap was mentally unstable?"

I was very cautious in reply. I know that method of approach so well. I said: "It depends. If a patient reaches a condition when his dreams have more reality for him than his waking state—then, of course, he may be getting to a point when he will want some help."

For all my care, I could see that he was worried by my answer. He was silent for a minute, and then he said:

"This only happened once. But it was all so real and vivid that the chap thought it was true, although, of course, it was really only a dream." He paused, and then he said: "Would that mean that the patient was abnormal mentally?"

I replied: "Not necessarily. Many of us have strange experiences once or twice in our lives, and we don't call ourselves abnormal. When did this thing happen?"

"Nearly five years ago."

“And since that time, has the patient been quite normal?”

“Absolutely.”

“No other realistic dreams, or delusions?”

“Nothing at all.”

I smiled. “Then he should set his mind at rest. Whatever his dream was, he’s quite all right.” I paused, and then I said: “The mind heals like the body, you know.”

He stared at me across the table; there was a strained look about him, and I knew we were coming to the root of things. “You don’t think he’d be likely to go crackers as he got older?”

I met his gaze. “Not in the least.”

“I see.”

I said gently: “We’ve got a long evening before us. Would you like to tell me about it?”

Donald Ross is the son of a solicitor of Scotch descent, who was killed in 1915 at the battle of Loos. His mother was an Irish girl, from somewhere in the neighbourhood of Athlone. She did not survive her husband very long, dying of influenza in the epidemic of 1918. The young man therefore is of Celtic ancestry on both sides of the family, and he was left an orphan at an impressionable age, facts which may be significant.

He was brought up by his aunt, Janet Ross, a tall gaunt spinster who lived at Guildford and eked out a tiny income by teaching mathematics at a girls’ day school. She made great sacrifices for him, being Scotch. Out of her small means she gave him a good education, keeping him at school till he was nineteen years of age. It was not possible for her to find the money to send him to a boarding school; during his adolescence they lived together in a small house in a row upon the outskirts of the town. He seems to have been fond of her, so far as was permitted by so bleak a character as hers.

She would have sent him on to Oxford had the funds permitted, but that was quite impossible. So she did what seemed to her to be the next best thing, and one which coincided with his own desires. She sent him into the Royal Air Force for five years, on a short-service commission.

"Ye'll live with folks of your ain station in life," she said, "which ye'll nae do if you bide with me in Guildford. And mind ye make gaid use of the time, for it's costing a mint of money."

He passed into the Royal Air Force without difficulty, for he was intelligent and well educated, and superbly fit. He became a pilot officer and learned to fly; after a year or so he was promoted to flying officer and sent to Egypt. He spent practically the whole of his service in Egypt and Iraq. During this time he flew about a thousand hours. He had one or two small accidents, but nothing serious; he suffered no injuries. He had one slight touch of sunstroke at Basra due to going out without his topee; with this he was in hospital for about a week. He had no malaria. Being of so spare a build, he was not much worried by the heat.

He left the Royal Air Force with a small gratuity early in 1929. At that time aviation was booming in the United States and Canada. The rise in stock values brought a great flood of money to the speculative aviation market, and enterprises were promoted and subscribed for companies and air lines of all sorts, the majority of which had very little hope of making profits. This flood of money meant the purchase of new aeroplanes in great numbers; with that there came the need for men to fly them. For a few months there was an acute shortage of experienced pilots in the States and Canada.

Donald Ross went forward on this tide. With his gratuity he crossed the Atlantic economically, and had no difficulty, the day that he stepped off the ship, in securing a position as one of seven pilots of the Quebec and Hudson Bay Air Services Incorporated. He was business-like and efficient

as a pilot, and well liked by the management. He stayed with them for four years until the Company, having lost the whole of its capital and a good deal more, was finally wound up.

In those four years Ross learnt a lot about his job. He learnt to fly an aeroplane on skis in winter, and on floats in the summer; in the awkward intermediate seasons of the break-up and the autumn he learnt to dodge the floating ice when putting down his seaplane on the water, and to match his floats when he had failed to dodge it. He learned to operate an aeroplane in the incredibly severe conditions of the Canadian winter. With temperatures of thirty below and more, he learned that if the oil was not drained from the engine and the oil tank within five minutes of landing the machine would probably stay where it was till spring, because no power on earth would make the solid oil move in the passages and ducts. He learned to get his engine started up each morning in the short time of an hour and a half, with a firepot in a tent over the nose of the machine, a pint of ether, and oil steaming in a can upon the stove ready to pour into the tank when the engine fired.

He learned to deal with drunken French-Canadian and Slovak labourers, usually making their first flight, usually sick. He learned to deal with stretcher cases going out, with tourists coming in, and with imminently pregnant women rushing to the hospital at Churchill. He learned how to take live goats and pigs and calves in his frail aeroplane without mishap. He learned to speak a little Indian and a little Eskimo, mostly by signs, and he learned to repair the structure of his aeroplane when it had been damaged by some awkward piece of cargo in a spot remote from all repair facilities.

He learned all these things and a good deal more, but he did not learn how to save money. His flying background militated against his Scotch descent. Being a pilot he drove a very large two-seater Packard round about Quebec; apart

from that he had an ice yacht and a sailing boat. In the four years that he was in Canada he had two love affairs, neither of which touched him very deeply, both of which cost him a good deal of money. As he put it, it was a good time while it lasted, but it didn't last long enough.

It came to an end in 1933. The Air Line had been declining for some time as Canada grew poorer in the slump. As it became more difficult to make ends meet the pilots were laid off one by one till only two of them were left, Ross and the managing director. Then the end came; the machines were seized by the creditors in partial payment of their claims, and the Company became a memory of a good effort stultified by world conditions.

With many other pilots, Ross decided to go home. Internal air lines were beginning to spring up in England; the depression did not seem to be so violent over there. He put his affairs in Canada in order. The Packard went back to the overstocked, disgruntled dealer who had given it to him upon hire purchase, the sailing boat paid off his debts, and the ice yacht bought his passage back to Liverpool upon a cargo boat. He landed in England with a good outfit of clothes, a slight American turn of speech, a vast experience of flying in the frozen north, and seventeen pounds, six shillings, and fourpence in his pocket.

He went straight to Aunt Janet at Guildford, glad to be back with her again. She greeted him unemotionally but made him genuinely welcome. He told her his situation on the first evening and counted his money in her presence; it was a trifle under sixteen pounds. She reached across the table and took eight of them.

"Ye'll not be needing these," she said; "I'll keep the money by me. Eight pounds will pay your food and washing for the next three months, Donald—maybe four. If ye get another job before that time I'll gie ye back the change."

"All right," he said. "But can you do it on that money?"

"Oh aye." She sighed. "I'd like fine to have you free, Donald, but things are deeficult. The lassies dinna take the mathematics as they used to. I have but the twa afternoons a week to work, this term."

He saw that she was looking tired and frail. He was very sorry that he had not run a Chevrolet in Canada.

It was late in March. He made several journeys up to London on a workman's ticket; within a fortnight he succeeded in getting a job as pilot to an air circus. It was not a good job, and it was poorly paid. The circus was a very small one, a thin imitation of the highly successful National Aviation Day run by Sir Alan Cobham. It was financed by an East End clothier, and managed by an unsuccessful theatrical producer. It was badly advertised, badly equipped, and badly managed. It started operations in the Midlands at the end of April; within the first week two children had been killed, wantonly and unnecessarily, at Leamington. At the end of the second week Ross left the show, without his money.

He went to see his friend Clarke at the Guild of Air Pilots.

"The thing's a regular menace," he declared indignantly. "There's no discipline, and no maintenance, and no money in the show. The ships aren't even airworthy, let alone the rest. They're trying to run on motor gasoline."

"'Petrol' in this country, old boy."

"'Petrol,' then. And there isn't an air-speed indicator working in the whole outfit."

"Why did you leave them? What reason did you give?"

"I told them I was afraid of being killed. And that's the truth."

The other smiled. "They still owe you fifteen pounds, do they?"

"That's right."

"I'll ring up Morrison and see if he can help you. What are you going to do now?"

“Anything that I can get.”

The other nodded slowly, tapping his pencil on the table. “You’re a bit late for this season, you know. Most operators have booked up the pilots they want this year.”

“I know that. But I couldn’t stay on in that show. Better to be a live coward than a dead hero.”

“Of course new things are always coming up. I’ll let you know if I hear of anything.”

“Good enough. Let it be soon.”

The other glanced at him keenly. “It’s like that, is it?”

“A bit.”

“All right. I’ll let you know the minute that I hear of anything that would suit you.”

Ross went back to Guildford, and began writing letters in answer to the advertisements for pilots in the flying papers. For want of other occupation he took to the domestic life. He got up early in the morning and cooked breakfast for Aunt Janet before she went to work at the school; he swept and dusted for an hour after breakfast, and washed the kitchen floor. Later in the morning he went marketing with her shopping basket, and returned in time to lay the lunch. The work amused him, and kept him from worrying too much about the future. She had sense enough to realise this and acquiesced in this disturbance of her household, grumbling and finding fault with all he did.

“I doubt ye’ll never make a housewife, Donald,” she would say, “buying butter at elevenpence the pound.”

“What ought I to have got, Aunt Janet?”

“Why, Sunray Margarine of course. Threepence three-farthings for the half-pound. There’s no reason to go buying a whole pound at once.”

A fortnight later, when he was worrying about his future a good deal, a telegram arrived from Clarke. It read:

CONTACT LOCKWOOD PAUL’S COLLEGE OXFORD FOR JOB PILOT GREENLAND EXPEDITION.

He sat down in the kitchen on a chair and stared at the message. A great feeling of relief swept over him, succeeded by a pleasurable anticipation. His first reaction was that a Greenland expedition would suit exactly the experience that he had. He knew all the hazards of flying aeroplanes and seaplanes in the north, the difficulties of maintenance. Very few pilots in England had the knowledge of such things that he had. He could hold a job like that if anybody could, and do well in it. Perhaps the pay might not be very good, but then the cost of living would be practically nil. It would be difficult to spend much money in Greenland.

In his later reflections there was solid genuine pleasure. That was the time just after the successful British Arctic Air Route Expedition, and very soon after the tragic death of its leader in Greenland in the following year. Greenland was in the news; Ross, and the world with him, knew all about these Greenland expeditions. They were recruited from young men, very young; at the age of twenty-nine, Ross might well be older than any other member of the party. It would be a light-hearted affair of youth, a brave business nonchalantly carried out. It would probably be a year of freedom from anxiety and of good fellowship; a time that he would look back upon with pleasure for the remainder of his life.

The name Lockwood meant nothing to him. At that time he had very little knowledge of the universities. From the first he was prepared to find that this man Lockwood was much younger than he was himself; he would have to adjust himself to that. He did not think he would have any difficulty in doing so.

In any case he must get on with this at once. There was no time to be lost. He mustn't let a chance like this one slip away.

His aunt's house had no telephone, of course. He went and changed into a dark lounge suit, packed a dinner jacket

and a few things for the night into a suitcase, and caught the next train up to London. He telephoned to Clarke from Waterloo.

“I don’t know any more about it than I said in the telegram,” Clarke told him. “We got the letter in the post this morning, and I thought of you at once. The letter just asks if we can recommend a pilot for an air expedition to Greenland. It’s a funny sort of phrase to use—an air expedition.”

Ross frowned. “Who is this chap Lockwood—do you know?”

“I’ve no idea. I’ve never heard of him before.”

“Well, anyway, I’m going after it. It’s just the sort of thing I want.”

“I thought you’d feel like that. Would you like me to send him a telegram?”

“If you would. I’m speaking from Waterloo; I thought of going down to Oxford right away.”

“That’s the stuff. Nothing like getting after these things right away. I’ll send him a wire to say you’re coming.”

Ross went by underground to Paddington, and took the next train down to Oxford. He got there about five o’clock. He did not know the city and he had no money to spare for a taxi; he enquired the way to St. Paul’s College, and walked up from the station carrying his suitcase.

It was the middle of May and a warm, sunny afternoon. The streets seemed to be full of young men and young women dashing about on bicycles. It struck Ross as a very pleasant town. The grey stone walls of the colleges stood cheek by jowl with very large shops and enormous cinemas; before them the streets were packed with cars. On that sunny evening there was an atmosphere of wealth, virility, and youth about the place. It seemed to Ross to be a busy, cheerful town; he wished that he knew more about it.

He was amused to see a hansom cab, the first that he had seen since he was ten years old. He stood and watched

it as it ambled down the street.

He found St. Paul’s College and asked at the lodge for Mr. Lockwood.

“I don’t think Mr. Lockwood’s in his rooms, sir. You might find him at his house.”

“Where is that?”

“In Norham Gardens.”

“And where’s that?”

The porter told him. “I’ll ring up the house, sir, if you like, and find out if he’s at home.”

“Thanks a lot.”

There was an interval while the porter telephoned. Ross stood by the lodge and looked around him. He had never seen a college before. He saw a grey stone, cloistered quad with a carpet of very smooth green turf in the middle; in the centre of this there was a little round pond with goldfish in it, and a fountain of weathered stone. Above the cloister there were rooms with open windows; on the window-sill a young man was carefully painting golf-balls white, and arranging them in a row to dry. At another window a young man was talking earnestly to a girl, a very young girl with a queer black cap upon her head. Somewhere there was a gramophone playing dance music.

The porter came to him. “Mr. Lockwood said, would you go down to his house, sir?”

“All right.”

He turned and walked down through the pleasant streets still carrying his bag. He found Norham Gardens after walking for a quarter of an hour, and stopped for a moment before the house. A puzzled little frown appeared between his eyes; this was not at all the sort of house he had expected. It was a very large, brick house half covered in ivy; the brickwork was ornamented at the corners with stone insets. It had a Gothic stone porch over the front door, giving it a half-hearted mediæval effect; before the house there were a few clipped laurels. The path up to the

door had been newly laid with gravel; the steps were very white, and the brass upon the door was very clean. It looked a solid, prosperous, substantial house, built in the more spacious Victorian age, and kept up in the manner that its style demanded. It was not quite the house that he had expected to find as the home of the young leader of a Greenland expedition. Unless, of course, there was a son.

His immediate reception did nothing to encourage him. A grey-haired old servant, infinitely prim and neat in a black dress and a white cap and apron, opened the door to him.

Ross said: “Can I see Mr. Lockwood?”

She eyed him severely. “Mr. Lockwood is giving a tutorial,” she said. “You can’t see him now.”

Ross said mildly: “I think he’s expecting me. They rang him up from the college a quarter of an hour ago. He asked me to come down here.”

She looked very doubtful, but motioned him to enter. “Wait here,” she said, indicating the exact position on the hall carpet. “I’ll see how long it will be before he will be free.”

She went up to a door opening off the large hall, and knocked reverently. A murmur of voices inside ceased, with a clearer invitation to come in. The old parlourmaid slipped inside the door, and closed it behind her.

Ross was left standing in the hall alone. He was bewildered. This was like his headmaster’s house at the Guildford school. He must have come to the wrong place.

The elderly maid came out again, and closed the door softly behind her. “Mr. Lockwood will see you in a little while,” she said primly. “Now, will you wait in here? No, leave your bag there.” She led him to a drawing-room, opened the door, and showed him in. The door was closed carefully behind him.

The drawing-room was unoccupied, and a little cold. It was a large, white room opening with french windows on to

a garden. Deep brocaded chairs and settees stood about the room, each cushion uncreased and most beautifully smooth. Ross felt that it would be a social blunder to sit down on any of those chairs. The room itself seemed hardly meant for use. It was too precious. A fine gilded clock under a glass bowl swung a low pendulum upon a pure white marble mantelpiece; in a corner a white marble head of Justinian stood five feet from the ground on a white marble column. A long case of Sèvres china stretched along one wall. A fine oil painting of the Colosseum at sunset occupied another wall. It was a fine, wealthy room, furnished in advanced Victorian taste. It was a room in which one could have entertained royalty, and it looked as if it had never been used for anything else.

The pilot moved over to the window, and looked out into the garden. It was a large suburban garden between high brick walls, with a couple of fine old beech-trees at the end of it. It was infinitely neat and tidy. The flowers stood regimented in the beds in neat array. The lawn was mown and trimmed as primly as a tablecloth. In the shade of the beech-trees two cane chairs and a cane table stood mathematically arranged upon the lawn, with a polished brass ash-tray precisely in the middle of the table. The centre of the lawn was laid out for clock golf, the figures beautifully white.

Ross turned away depressed. He was sensitive to atmosphere, and this atmosphere was far removed from that of flying seaplanes in the north. However, he took a small grain of comfort from one feature of the place. It might be frigid and schoolmasterly, but it was not a poor house. Seaplane-flying cost a lot of money. No one knew that better than Ross.

He waited for some time, puzzled and a little worried.

Presently there was a sound of movements in the hall outside; a door opened and closed. A few minutes later the elderly parlourmaid came to him.

"Would you kindly step this way?"

He followed her out into the hall. She knocked at the study door, waited for a moment, and then showed him in.

Ross went forward into a large room. The walls were lined with books and the furniture was dark, but the room was light and airy from very large windows opening on to the garden. A man got up from the desk and came to meet him, a man about fifty-five or sixty years of age. For his years he was a well-set-up man, tall and broad-shouldered, with iron-grey hair thin on the top but still not bald. He was clean-shaven, with a firm, slightly humorous expression; he wore rimless glasses.

He came towards Ross, holding the glasses in one hand.

"Ross? Good afternoon—I'm sorry you had to wait so long. It's Captain Ross, I suppose?"

The pilot shook his head. "Plain Mr. Ross," he replied. "I was only a flying officer."

Lockwood said vaguely: "Oh, really? I thought all you flying people were captains." He motioned to a chair. "You've been very prompt in coming down. I only wrote to the—the—er—the Guild or something or other yesterday. Or was it the day before? No, it was yesterday."

Ross smiled. "I was very interested when I heard what you had written to them."

"Capital—capital. Have you had tea, Mr. Ross?"

The pilot hesitated. "Well, I haven't. But don't bother about that for me. I don't often take it."

The other pulled a watch, a silver hunter, from the pocket of his rather shabby waistcoat, opened it in his palm, and looked at it. "Oh, it's only six o'clock." He rang the bell; the parlourmaid appeared almost immediately. "Tea," he said. He turned to Ross. "Do you like Indian or China tea, Mr. Ross?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I like Indian. But it really doesn't matter."

"Indian for Mr. Ross, Emily, and China for me."

He made the pilot sit in a deep leather chair, and sank down himself into the chair at his desk. “I understand that you know all about aeroplanes, Mr. Ross,” he said conversationally.

The pilot said cautiously: “I’ve been messing about in them for quite a while. I was in the Air Force for five years, mostly in Iraq. Since then I’ve been flying for the last four years in Canada.”

“In Canada? How interesting.”

Ross had nothing to say to that.

The don put on his glasses. “Well, now let’s get to business.” He bent down, pulled open one of the drawers of his desk, and took out a large, untidy portfolio. He put this on the desk before him and opened it; it was stuffed with a great mass of manuscript. He turned these papers over talking half to himself as he did so. “There are several things here that I must show you presently. But this—no, this—and where is the other one? Where can it be? Here we are. These two will do to start with.”

He thrust two large photographs across the desk to Ross. “Now, what do you make of those?”

The pilot took them in silence. One was an air view of a field, taken vertically downwards from about two thousand feet, with a bit of a wood across one corner of the area. There was nothing on the photograph to show where it was. The other was an oblique downwards view taken from a lower altitude, possibly from a hill-top, of a barren-looking stretch of land running into the sea at a little promontory. Again there was no information on the print.

The pilot looked at these two photographs in silence, and his heart sank. It was clear that he was expected to say something intelligent, and at first glance he could think of nothing to say. They were just photographs. He was no good at puzzle pictures, but he couldn’t say that. He scrutinised them in silence; there must be something in the

prints to connect them with each other, or they would not have been given to him together. Presently he remarked:

"I don't know what these are of course, I see there seems to be a similar pattern here. The lumps and ridges in this field make a sort of cross in double lines with a circular thing in the middle. And in this other one there seems to be the same pattern, in a kind of way. Is that what you mean?"

Lockwood smiled gently, and took the photographs from him, scrutinising them himself. "You have remarkably sharp eyes, Mr. Ross. But I suppose you must be very well accustomed to air photography?"

Ross hesitated. "I've done about a hundred hours of survey flying. But I'm not a skilled photographer—I only did the flying. I've seen a good bit of it, of course."

The other nodded. "You must have done. Very few people see the connection between these photographs at first sight."

He raised his head, and stared at the pilot over the top of his glasses. He held up one of the photographs. "This one of the field is the remains of the Celtic monastery of Imchuin, near Galway, in Ireland." He held up the other. "This one is a part of Brattalid."

Ross asked: "Where is that?"

"It was the original centre of the Eastern Settlement of the Norwegians, in Greenland."

He mused over the photographs. "Imchuin was completed in the year 932," he said. "According to the Land-namabok the Norwegians went to Greenland fifty years later."

There was a silence. Ross hesitated to break it, afraid of speaking foolishly. He had never heard of the Land-namabok. He sat in his chair trying to work out what the don was driving at; presently he ventured:

"Do you mean that there is a connection between Galway and Greenland? Is that what these photographs show?"

The don stared at him over his glasses. “It may be so. But what sort of connection?”

The pilot shook his head. “I don’t know anything about these things. But I suppose these marks in the field in the one print, and on the moor in the other—I suppose those are the walls of ruined buildings, aren’t they?”

“So I think.”

“I don’t know if I’m speaking out of turn. But if the buildings are the same design, I suppose the same folks might have built the one as built the other.”

Lockwood eyed him keenly. “In a very few words, Mr. Ross, that is the suspicion.” He took up the Brattalid photograph and thrust it across the desk. “There’s nothing Nordic about that. Pure Celtic, every line of it. Look at it for yourself.”

The pilot took it diffidently. “I suppose that is so.”

The other leaned his arms upon the desk. “The early Irish, Mr. Ross, were very much greater travellers than is generally supposed. They had a civilisation, forms of religion, and a culture far in advance of this country at that time. Their literature—they had a great literature—is full of references to the Happy Lands. Aircthech, the beautiful place, which lay far out over the Atlantic to the west. The Elysian Fields, Mr. Ross—the land beyond the sunset, where everything was clean and good, and happy. It was a cardinal part of their beliefs that such a place existed. They were always trying to find it, always sailing out into the sea in search of it.”

He was silent for a moment; when he spoke again it was in a softer tone. “They never found it, Mr. Ross. They found Iceland. That was not the place they were looking for, but they built towns there, and monasteries, Mr. Ross—monasteries.” He paused. “Did they go further, and find Greenland? There’s our problem.”

He picked up the Brattalid print again. “And now we have this photograph. One little piece of evidence, taken

almost by chance. It was by the merest chance it came to me. But there it is. It’s like a little chink of light in a dark room, seen through the crack of a door.” He eyed the pilot steadily. “I’m going to pull that door a little wider open, Mr. Ross. There’s something waiting here to be found out.”

There was a silence in the study after that. Absently the pilot took a cigarette packet from his pocket, pulled one out, and lit it mechanically. Suddenly he was confused. “I’m so sorry,” he said awkwardly. “Do you mind if I smoke?”

“By all means.” The older man picked up a battered half-smoked pipe himself and lit it.

Ross said: “What do you want to do?”

The don blew out his match, and puffed a cloud of smoke from his foul pipe. Presently he said: “Archæology to-day depends upon air photographs. I want an air survey made of the entire Brattalid district—say, forty miles long by fifteen miles wide. While that is going on I want to spend a month upon the site myself.”

“I see. Where is this place Brattalid?”

“About seventy miles north-west of Julianehaab. Not far from Cape Desolation.”

“Oh.” There was a momentary silence. “That’s on the south-west coast, isn’t it?”

“That is so.”

They sat and smoked in silence for a time; the pilot stared at the books upon the wall in front of him. It was not the job that he had thought it would be. There would be none of the good young fellowship that he had looked forward to, nor would there even be the comradeship of a commercial company. It would be a lone-hand expedition; he would be a sort of private pilot, engaged for a relatively short job. But what a job! Already he could see that the whole work of the expedition would inevitably fall on him. He would have to do everything—organisation, flying, photography—every single thing except the archaeology. He knew from his experience that the work would be

immensely hard, the responsibility enormous, and the danger to life quite considerable. He had too long an experience of the north to undertake this lightly.

His mind went off at a tangent, and he said: “Didn’t you say this was the Eastern Settlement?”

“Yes.”

“Cape Desolation’s on the west side of Greenland.”

“I know. But the early Norwegians called it the Eastern Settlement, all the same. There was another up the coast to the north-west, by Godthaab—they called that the Western Settlement.”

“I see.”

There was another silence. Presently Ross said: “When do you want to go?”

“This summer. I am told that August is the best month for weather. I want to be there for the whole of August.”

The pilot raised his eyebrows. “You’ve left mighty little time for preparation. It’s the middle of May now.”

“Is that so short a time? I should have thought that it was ample.”

The pilot shook his head. “It’s very short.” He thought about it for a minute. “How do you propose to get the machine out there? Put it on a boat, or fly it out?”

The don looked at him uncertainly. “I’m afraid I really hadn’t thought about it. The boats are so very irregular—I had assumed that we should fly out in the machine.”

Ross thought of the pack ice off the Greenland coast, and thought grimly to himself that this was going to be a lot of fun. He nodded slowly, and said aloud: “How many of us will there be?”

Lockwood hesitated. “I should like to take an assistant, but he isn’t really essential. The basic points are—I must go myself, and we must get a good set of photographs. Then, during the winter I can study the air photographs, in preparation for a digging party next year.” He paused.

“This air survey is really a preliminary to the main work, which will be next year.”

Ross nodded. “I see.”

Presently he said: “Have you considered at all what a survey like this is going to cost?”

The archæologist shook his head. “I really have very little idea. How much would it cost?”

Ross had to think quickly. He liked Lockwood, in spite of the fact that the don was grossly ignorant of what he was proposing. The pilot could see a mass of difficulties ahead already. Still, he liked the man and he liked the idea of the expedition; in spite of all the difficulties and dangers, he would like to have a crack at it. He did not want to kill the proposition at this stage by giving an inflated cost. What would it run out to, now? He would have to have a single-engined cabin seaplane. He could pick up a Bellanca or a Cosmos second-hand in Canada for five or six thousand dollars in that time of slump—not much to look at, but sound enough, Petrol, oil, shipping the seaplane and erecting it, moorings to be laid at all the harbours they would visit—the camera, and all the photographic gear; the making up of the mosaic from a couple of thousand photographs. He calculated quickly in his head.

“I think you’d have to reckon on at least four thousand pounds,” he said.

To his relief Lockwood smiled. “These expeditions always cost more than one thinks,” he observed. “You’ll have to talk it over with my brother.”

“Oh!”

The pilot ground his cigarette out in an ash-tray. “You won’t mind if I speak plainly?”

The other looked surprised. “Not at all, Mr. Ross.”

Ross said: “I’m not sure that you quite realise what it is that you’re proposing.”

The don nodded slowly. “Would the flight be so difficult?”

The pilot said: “It’s not impossible, but it’s very unusual. Only four or five aeroplanes have ever been to Greenland, and those have met with difficulties and troubles that you don’t get normally. Maintenance is difficult, because there’s literally nothing there at all. The ice is a devil, I believe. The machines that have been there have been taken by powerful and wealthy expeditions after six months of preparatory work. And even then they had difficulties, and crashes. You want to go without the backing of a ground expedition, and with only six or seven weeks from now before we have to start.”

Lockwood took off his glasses and polished them on his handkerchief. “There seem to be more difficulties than I had supposed,” he said mildly.

Ross smiled. “I think that is so. Don’t think I’m saying that the flight can’t be done, or that we can’t get your photographs. I think we probably can. But you’ll have to realise from the start that there’s a good bit of risk about it.”

The don said: “I suppose you mean—danger to life?”

The pilot shrugged his shoulders. “Well, of course, there’s that as well. It won’t be as safe as sitting in this chair. But I wasn’t thinking about that. I was thinking of the money risk. You may spend thousands of pounds, and still get no results. We may get out there, and lose the ship at her moorings in a gale of wind. We may crash her. Anything could happen on a flight like that, with any pilot that you like to give the job to. Then you’ll have spent your money, but you won’t have any photographs to show for it.”

There was a momentary silence.

“But is there any other way to get these photographs?”

The pilot laughed shortly. “No, there’s not. To get a survey of that district, somebody’s got to take a machine there and do the job.”

“Well, that’s what I want to do.” The don looked curiously at the pilot.