GREENLAND

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CONTENTS

Prologue
Chapter 1. The Polar Bear
Chapter 2. The Crevasse
Chapter 3. Interlude in Tanilaq
Chapter 4. Return to the Crevasse
Chapter 5. The Ship
Chapter 6. After the Storm
Chapter 7. Off At Last
Chapter 8. Diary Extracts
Chapter 9. Day Ten
Chapter 10. Camp Tunu
Chapter 11. Journey Continued
Chapter 12. Diary Extracts
Chapter 13. Return
Chapter 14. Back to the Beginning
Chapter 15. Boarding Party
Chapter 16. Prisoners
Chapter 17. Press Cuttings

Prologue

‘Greenland, it has to be Greenland,’ Aggie persisted. We three were sitting in the beer-garden under the shade of a tall, willowy osier, the calm waters of the Thames slowly gliding by in marked contrast to our anything but calm discussion. We three friends who had often travelled together to little-known parts of the world, little-known to outsiders, that is. Aggie, dark-haired, stolid, always fighting his tendency to portliness, gulping his thick beer, Jørgen, fair-haired, slim and lean, not an ounce of fat on him, barely sipping his lager; and myself… well, I will leave that to the imagination! An unlikely trio, I mused: as friends, what had we in common? Not much, perhaps, other than a common interest in exploring this planet, particularly the colder extremities… Maybe we had kept together so long because we each tended to keep to ourselves…

‘Yes, Greenland,’ Jørgen repeated, interrupting my thoughts.

‘But, but…’ I responded. ‘It will take a lot of planning. The ice sheet, it’s big…’

‘You’re just afraid, Jim,’ cut in Aggie with surprising insight. ‘You’re just nervous that the whole project is too big for us. We can do it! Be more confident! After all, people have now skied across the ice cap in wheelchairs.’

‘He is right,’ added Jørgen. ‘It is not a difficult thing to do these days. In Nansen’s time it was an epic crossing, but with modern equipment we could do the whole thing in a couple of months.’

‘Which is all we have,’ I sighed. We drank our beers in silence, Aggie and Jørgen eyeing me intently awhile. ‘I guess you’re both right,’ I said eventually. ‘It would be a great thing to do, a great achievement.’

‘Well done!’ exclaimed Aggie, jumping up and slapping me on the back. He raised his glass. ‘To Greenland, then.’

We all held up our glasses. ‘To Greenland!’

And so it was decided. But if we had known…

Chapter 1. The Polar Bear

Even from that distance I could see the body was human and I watched in horror as the jaws chewed through the bones as if they were paper. To this day, I can hear in my mind the crunching of those bones against the utter silence of the Arctic air – a memory that haunts me still. I continued to watch in horror and saw a limb, clad in red leggings, being swallowed. I was rooted to the spot and it never occurred to me to rush in to help, or even to rush away for my safety. Instead I stood spellbound, observing a sequence of events that has been oft-repeated since the beginning of time, the primeval event of predator eating prey, albeit in this case the hapless dismemberment of a human being. The report of a gun made me jump, physically jump, and as the bear collapsed to the ground, I awoke from my trance. Instantly I ran over the snow, reaching the fallen animal at the same time as the man with the gun, a man I had not up to now noticed, a short, dark-haired man, dressed in a dirty, greasy, grey anorak. I did not want to, indeed could not, look down at what was in front of me. I could imagine it, though: a corpse, in pieces, blood staining the snow, and littering shreds of torn clothing all around, maybe a camera nearby, or an ice axe, or some personal possession to remind me that I was no different from him, that I was lucky it was not me lying half-eaten on the snow. It could have been.

For it had been me that the bear had noticed first: he had seen me while he was padding over the pack ice, alert, sniffing the air, hungry, looking for prey, raising his head, and waving his nose side

to side, a bad sign, made worse because I was upwind and alone. Quick mental arithmetic, say half a mile distant and a charge of thirty miles an hour, that made it, let me see, a mile in two minutes, half a mile in a minute. A minute! I had one minute! I knew all the theories, run, dropping one item of clothing at a time, gaining valuable seconds as the bear stopped to sniff each one. Or lie down, pretending to be dead. Or stand your ground, and stare your bear in the eye, confusing him by upsetting the standard predator-prey reaction. But theories were no good when instinct took over – I just ran! When I hastily looked back over my shoulder, he had reached the shore and was ambling effortlessly up the slope at his thirty miles an hour!

I put all the effort I have ever had into that run, although the instinctive imperative made it seem effortless for a short time, at least until my body realised I was exceeding its limits and I had to stop to draw breath. I risked another glance back, and immediately, in a strange way, felt cheated, for the bear was no closer, appearing to have abandoned the race. He was on the shore where I had last seen him and appeared to be shaking something. But even from that distance I could see the body was human...

The Eskimo ignored me at first and, what seemed shocking to me at the time, he also ignored the dead man. After checking that the animal was indeed dead, he took out a long, sharp knife and proceeded to skin the bear. I nudged his shoulder, and pointed to the human corpse which I now had the courage to look at closely for the first time. He merely smiled at me, shook his head, and carried on with his job. There being no English between us, or

indeed any common language, I was at a loss what to do. I went to the head of the bear, grabbed its jaws, and tried without success to open them, perhaps hoping to find a leg to pull out. But the jaws would not open, so I turned round to examine the state of the victim, and was promptly sick on the snow. The Eskimo looked up briefly, and then carried on with his task. I have never liked the sight of blood, and I am even afraid sometimes to look at a cut on my own hand in case I will find a wound deeper than I care to think about. There was plenty of blood around this body, blood that had stained the surrounding snow red, blood around the gored neck, and blood around the missing leg. I moved away, and sat down on a nearby rock, my head in my hands.

What to do, what to do. Think, man, think! But my mind remained obstinately blank, and several minutes passed before it began to clear and I looked up, seeing the distance first, seeing the Arctic ocean with its stream of ice imperceptibly moving south, seeing distant icebergs, seeing a sea infinitely more interesting than the featureless plain of temperate waters; seeing sunlight streaming off strange, variable shapes, seeing patches of deep blue stand out against the brilliance of the pack ice – home of the seal and the polar bear. The polar bear! I forced my eyes to the near horizon, where the ice met land, to the tracks in the snow, two tracks, one suddenly diverting left, to a rock, to a brightness of colour standing out in the snow, a brightness of red, a red jacket, red snow...

I left the Eskimo then, still intent on his task, and decided to head back to my companions, a half mile trudge through the snow to our tent at the edge of the settlement. Augustus, or Aggie as he was

universally known, must have heard me coming because his head popped out of the tent.

‘Hi, Jim!’ he called. ‘Hey, what's up? You look terrible. Your face, it's white...’

‘Don't ask. No, I mean, I have just seen somebody killed.’

‘Killed? Who?’

‘And eaten?’

‘Eaten?’

‘Yes,’ I responded resignedly. ‘Eaten by a polar bear. And who? I don't know who. Nobody I have seen before, in any case.’

‘You just left him?’

‘Give me time. Time to get over it.’

‘But? Was there any of...’

‘Shut up,’ I said sharply, thinking he were going to ask if there was anything left of the body, and at the thought of what I had seen I was promptly sick again on the snow. Aggie was now fully out of the tent, embracing me around the shoulders.

‘Jim, Jim, are you alright?’ he persevered. ‘And how far away? Is the bear going to follow you?’

I pointed in the direction of the bear. ‘About five hundred metres away, and no, he's dead.’

‘Dead? The bear?’

‘Yes, killed by an Eskimo,’ and I finally managed to give him the gist of what had happened, concluding that we ought to tell someone, presumably the Danish authorities.

‘Where's Jørgen?’ I asked, Jørgen being our third companion, a Swede, but who also, of course, was able to understand Danish – which helped in Greenland.

‘He left a short while back to test out his sledge. I don't know exactly where he is now,’ replied Aggie. ‘In any case, will the Eskimo not tell them?’

‘I've no idea. But I was a witness, and will be needed at some stage.’

After some further discussion, we decided to go back to the scene of the attack, find the Eskimo, and then, between us, tell the local police – if they existed, which we weren't sure about.

‘You don't have to come, Aggie,’ I suggested, ‘it is a bit gruesome,’ but he insisted.

When we got there we found that the Eskimo had finished skinning the bear, and greeted us with a smile, ‘Li, li, ajingilaq!’

We nodded, but without any smiles on our faces, and it took me a great effort of will not to look down at the corpse. Aggie, though, appeared to take in the whole scene without flinching as we watched the Eskimo gather up the bear's pelt and beckon us to follow him. He headed off in the direction of the settlement with a surprising turn of speed considering the soft snow and his short legs. We did not speak much on the way, other than a muttered ‘Yes, gruesome,’ from Aggie.

We were led into a small hut, where the still smiling Eskimo proudly displayed the pelt to a short, dark-haired woman. There followed a long conversation between the two of them, before he turned round and introduced us to her. We smiled in return,

without understanding a word of what was said. As if from nowhere, beers were thrust into our hands, and he raised his can in the universal gesture of salute, before drinking. I was hesitant, feeling sick rather than thirsty, but Aggie whispered into my ear, ‘Go on, drink, it will do you good. Leave it to me.’ And before I was aware what was going on, he waved to the Eskimos and left.

I felt trapped, not really wanting to drink, but at the same time not wanting to appear impolite, or to hurt anyone's feelings. But Aggie was right, I did begin to feel better with drink inside, and I began to feel cross with myself for getting so upset at the sight of a corpse. I soon found I had another beer in my hand, and was starting the third when the door opened and Aggie returned. With him was another man, a tall, thin, blond-haired individual whose appearance could not be more different from the stolid Aggie.

Aggie gave a brief nod in my direction, then introduced his companion to the Eskimos, ‘This is Jørgen.’

‘God dag,’ said Jørgen politely.

‘God dag,’ was the reply, followed by an offer of beer, which was declined.

‘I think their names are Kanileq and Tigagut,’ I whispered, ‘but I'm not sure.’ Jørgen conveyed to me that he and Aggie had found a phone, and had managed to contact the authorities in Tanilaq. Officials would come over as soon as possible, but there was no helicopter immediately available for them.

‘Might as well have a beer then?’ I ventured.

‘No thanks. You stay here a bit longer, if you wish, but Aggie and I must go back to the camp. We must test the sledges, they are not

quite right yet.' And after a farewell handshake with our guests, he and Aggie breezed out.

In fact I soon followed, although it took a while to extract myself from the handshakes and hugs, and I tramped back to the tent to find it empty. I crawled inside, took off my boots and lay down on the warm sleeping bags. I was not intending to go to sleep, but I was woken up by the unmistakable throb of a distant helicopter. The noise steadily increased and passed right overhead. I peered out of the tent to see it landing a short distance away, for, to save hauling our gear further than we had to, we had camped as near the landing pad as possible. I saw Aggie standing nearby and he saw me at the same time.

'Hi, Jim,' he shouted across, 'had a good sleep?'

'Yes, thanks,' I shouted back. 'Hey, what's the time?'

'Nearly four o'clock, you've been asleep nearly four hours.'

'Gosh, have I?'

'Yup. I looked into the tent once or twice, but I didn't want to disturb you.'

'Where's Jørgen?'

'He's taken his sledge for a walk, he wanted to test it further. He left just before you went to sleep.'

'Has he got a gun?'

'Yes.'

'Good.' I put on my boots, and then emerged, stretching, from the tent. By now the helicopter rotors were slowing and it was easier to talk above the din. Aggie and I agreed that this was probably the chopper bringing over the officials, which appeared to be confirmed

when the door opened and two men climbed out. One was short, stocky, and dark, in the unmistakable uniform of a policeman, and the other was tall and fair, wearing a tie but not in uniform. They were followed by three other men who were dressed in the same kind of kit as us, obviously expeditioners like ourselves; they immediately started unloading skis, sledges, rucksacks, and all the other paraphernalia that goes with expedition travel in the Arctic.

'Have you seen Tigagut around recently?' I asked Aggie.

'Who?'

'The Eskimo who shot the bear.'

'No, not since I left his house.'

'Should I tell them about him?'

'Of course.'

We walked across to introduce ourselves to the officials.

'God dag,' I said.

'God dag,' was the reply from the tall man.

'God dag,' I continued, 'Do you speak English?'

'I do.'

'I am the person who saw the attack, the polar bear attack, that is. My name is Jim Ashworth, and this is my friend Augustus Moncrieffe.'

'My name is Anton Laursen, and this is Kangunaq, the chief of police at Tanilaq,' he replied, introducing his colleague.

The policeman nodded, but did not say anything. There and then I explained all that had happened, although I found it hard to give some of the details and felt nauseous again at the recent memory. When I had finished Mr Laursen asked me to take him to Tigatuq's

house, and we all trooped over. The policeman knocked loudly on the door, shouting '*polalee*,' but getting no reply, we walked in. Tigatuq and his wife were both sound asleep in their chairs, the scattering of beer cans indicating what had happened. The large polar bear skin was draped prominently in the room and the policeman went over to finger it. He then spoke to the Danish official, who translated for us.

'He says this is a good skin, from a big bear – an old male. He has not seen one this big for a long time. The Eskimo is lucky.' Unlike the dead man, I thought. Anton continued, 'Can you now take me please to where the attack took place; we can come back here later.'

The scene was still a gruesome sight, so that Aggie and I stood a little away while the officials made notes. It was then that we noticed recent ski tracks, the tracks of someone towing a small sledge.

'It looks like Jørgen came this way,' I said.

'Looks like it,' he agreed.

Our eyes followed the tracks. The skier had obviously stopped by the dead bear for a while, and then paralleled the footprints of the dead man. We concluded that Jørgen must be trying to find out where he had come from. There was a shout from Mr Laursen, and we went over.

'Look,' he said, pointing to the corpse, 'do you see that badge on his jacket?'

We looked down to see something I had not noticed earlier, a blue, circular badge with the motif of a snow-capped mountain, rain

on one side and a bright sun on the other; there was writing round the side.

'That,' he continued, 'is the badge of the CCDP, the Climate Change Drilling Programme.'

'The what?' we exclaimed together.

'Have you not heard of it? The Climate Change Drilling Programme. They are up on the ice cap, drilling, they have been there all winter.'

'Drilling, drilling for what?' asked Aggie.

'Drilling for ice,' Mr Moncrieffe.

'Ice? Why would they want to drill for ice?'

'It is a United Nations programme, the Climate Change Convention. They are taking a core all the way through the ice sheet to see how the climate has changed.'

'Ah yes,' I surmised, 'this must be research into global warming.'

'Yes, that is it. Global warming. This man is part of that expedition.'

'Then what is he doing here?' queried Aggie.

'I do not know, Mr Moncrieffe. But there is a party expected down from the ice cap soon, to meet their relief ship. Maybe he is one of them?'

'Ship, what ship?'

'It is to bring in new supplies for the expedition. The ship was expected here in two days' time, but I hear it is now delayed because of the ice, or maybe engine trouble.'

'It must be a strong ship to try to get in this early in the year,' I put in.

‘It is. It is a Russian icebreaker, the *Bolchorsky*.’

‘I've heard of that,’ I continued. ‘Hasn’t it been all the way to the North Pole? It's not nuclear-powered, is it?’

‘You are right,’ said Mr Laursen, ‘it has been to the North Pole, but it is not nuclear-powered, we would not allow it in Greenland.’

‘Oh? Why not...’ I was interrupted by the policeman, who was tapping Anton Laursen on the shoulder and pointing inland up the frozen fjord. We all looked, and could just make out a faint speck in the distance. Again, the official translated for us, ‘There is a man on skis, coming this way fast.’

‘That must be Jørgen.’

‘ Jørgen?’ questioned Anton.

‘He’s the third member of our expedition. We think he must have followed the tracks of the dead man to see where he came from.’

‘Well, we will wait to see what your man has found out, but before then there are a few details I want to check with you.’ I reluctantly went again through the sequence of events until he was satisfied with my story. Meanwhile Jørgen had made surprisingly good time over the ice and it did not seem long before he reached us. He was agitated, but so out of breath at first that he could not get anything out except in short bursts between gulps of air. ‘A snocat... a large one... in a crevasse... must be people inside... I could not see... a kilometre or two up from the sea... we must go immediately... it is not safe for one person... we must take a rope...’

Chapter 2. The Crevasse

So it was, that, twenty minutes later, we were all in the helicopter heading at speed up the frozen fjord, skimming the tops of icebergs trapped in the ice. We were flying low so the pilot could see the tracks in the snow, where they were visible, retracing them to the site of the accident. This we found easily, although all that was visible of the snocat, with its nose buried deep in the crevasse, was its red back. We circled it once before landing and, looking down from above, you could easily see what had happened. You could trace the vehicle's tracks coming down the glacier on smooth snow, and then see them disappear into a deep crevasse, the back of the snocat ending up level with the surface of the snow. Over its whole length the crevasse was bridged with snow, visible as only a faint depression, and it was the first of a whole field of crevasses stretching across the last three kilometres of the glacier as it made its final descent to the sea. Some crevasses were almost invisible, similar to the one the snocat had ploughed into, whereas others were gaping holes disappearing into the depths.

It seemed amazing that someone had managed to walk from the snocat down through this maze without being swallowed up, but there was the evidence before our eyes, a wandering line of footprints leading down to the sea, sometimes clear-cut, sometimes faint or invisible, weaving this way and that, sometimes crossing a snow bridge, sometimes backtracking where an open crevasse barred the way. Paralleling the footprints were the tracks of a skier – Jørgen's tracks, of course.

We landed only feet away from the stricken vehicle in the crevasse, and were all out before the rotors had stopped whirling. Unlike Jørgen on his earlier visit, we were not wearing skis, which would have spread the load evenly on the snow, so we had to tread gingerly forward to the edge of the crevasse, not being quite sure whether there was any more of the snow bridge to give way. It proved impossible, however, to get to right up to the snocat without endangering ourselves so we had to back away.

'It's no good,' I called out, 'we'll have to get the rope out and set up a good belay.' Using a couple of ice-axes we produced a firm belay by burying the axes securely in the snow and then attaching a rope to them. While doing this, a thought occurred to me. 'By the way, Jørgen, how did the dead man, I mean the man we found, how did he get out of the snocat?'

'I've been thinking about that as well, and I don't think he did, at least not after it had fallen into the crevasse.'

'That is true,' put in Anton. 'There are no footprints coming from the snocat.'

'Yes,' agreed Jørgen, 'this is why I think there must be people still in the vehicle. I think I've worked out what happened. You can see the man's footprints cross the bridge a short distance away from where the snocat went down, and then follow them to opposite the vehicle. I think he must have got out of the vehicle when they saw the first sign of the crevasse, and he then walked across the snow bridge, probing its strength with a pole – you can see its mark beside his prints.'

‘Then he must have thought it strong enough, and waved them on,’ I suggested.

‘We can only assume so,’ Jørgen replied.

‘But why would they come this way at all,’ asked Aggie, ‘if it leads into a crevassed area?’

‘That is a good question,’ said Anton, ‘especially as there is a safe route only half a kilometre to the west. Did you not see it from the helicopter? They must have been off course.’

‘Perhaps they were in a whiteout,’ I added, immediately countering with, ‘but the weather’s been fairly good here. One thing, though, if you look down the glacier from just here you can't tell there's a whole field of crevasses ahead. Maybe they thought they were on course.’

By now a rope was securely in place, and I volunteered to be the one to go down the crevasse to investigate the snocat, perhaps trying to prove to myself that my experience earlier in the day had not unnerved me. I was belayed by Aggie, a fact that I was glad of because of his bulk and strength.

I walked gingerly to the edge of the hole and managed to scramble onto the back of the snocat.

‘Try the door,’ shouted Jørgen.

‘What do you think I am about to do,’ I replied tersely. The vehicle gave a little shudder and I started, but luckily it seemed to be only settling down more firmly into position. I tried the door handle, gently at first, but then more violently as it did not budge.

‘Hold the rope tight,’ I shouted, then hit the door with my boot. Still no movement. ‘I need an ice axe.’

Jørgen passed one over to me and, once I had banged the door handle a few times, thankfully, it moved. Then it was plain sailing, the door opened easily, and I peered inside. When my eyes were accustomed to the dark, I quickly assessed the situation.

'It's full of what looks like pipes,' I called across. 'They look heavy and there appears no way into the cab this way, at least not using the equipment we have. I'll have to go down the outside of the snocat to get to the front doors. Can I have some prussiks?'

I returned to the others and Jørgen then placed a rucksack under the rope at the edge of the crevasse to stop the rope cutting down into the snow when I went down. I placed a couple of prussik slings in front of me (short-lengths of thin rope that slide up and down the main rope to assist climbing), gave the thumbs-up sign and Aggie belayed me down the rope. This crevasse narrowed quickly and I could see that the machine was well wedged in and unlikely to drop down further; however, this did mean that the cab had become crushed, not excessively so, but enough to break the windscreen, and warp the doors. I tugged on the rope to indicate to Aggie to stop lowering. Even in the blue-tinged gloom I could see one person through a shattered side-window and reluctantly put a hand through to touch him or her. It did not take me more than a second to confirm that this person was stone cold. I immediately prussiked back up the rope and was roughly hauled back over the lip of the crevasse.

'Dead,' I reported, 'stone cold. My second body of the day! Quick, I must check the other side.'

'Are you sure you want to?' asked Jørgen. 'I could go?'

‘No. I've started so I'll finish. Now let’s get a move on.’ The procedure was repeated on the opposite side of the snocat and again I could see a person inside, although this time through an unbroken window. The door was jammed, indeed the whole door was warped, with the shattered windscreen firmly pressed up against the ice. I shouted back for an ice axe, but in a crevasse sound is deadened so I had to prussik up and my head was almost at the surface before I was heard. I was quickly lowered back down, raised the axe to break the window and then I hesitated. What if he were still alive, and flying glass injured him? What if he were still alive, but we could not remove him? Would a broken window not let in too much cold air, and hasten his death? As these thoughts flashed through my head, I knew that the all-important thing was to ascertain whether or not he was alive. I hit the window with the axe, gently at first, and then with more and more violence until it shattered – all at once, it just shattered. I put my hand through but could not reach him, he was slumped towards the other person. I grabbed the side of the window with one hand and tried again, stretching my other arm as far as I could. I felt a beard. Was it warmer than a dead man's? I moved my hand up, and could just catch the end of a nose. This felt cool, but frostnip can cool a nose, and this does not mean anything. I was at full stretch and could not quite reach his forehead. Arms, I found an arm and followed it down to the hand. Cool, but limp and not stiff. But was he still alive? I grabbed his arm, put a foot against the door and pulled and pulled. His body shot across, his head coming to rest on the broken window, but I was not worried about new cuts at this stage. I

touched his forehead, and there definitely seemed to be a residual warmth. I felt for the pulse on his neck, but if there was a pulse it was very faint.

I decided to go back up for consultation with the others because even if he were alive I could not pull him out by myself – indeed I was not even sure if he would fit through the window at all. I climbed back up the rope as speedily as possible and was hauled out of the crevasse as soon as my head surfaced. I explained the situation.

'He's probably still alive, only just, but unconscious. No sign of any injury, although I can't see his bottom half. The problem is the door's jammed, buckled in fact, and the side window's probably too small to get him through.'

'What about the windscreen?' asked Anton.

'No way. The snocat is too tightly jammed in.'

'What then?' said Aggie. 'Could two of us pull open the door?'

'I doubt it.'

'But still worth a try?' he persisted.

'I suppose so.'

'In any event,' put in Anton, 'we will need a doctor. We must send the helicopter for one now. I have already asked for a doctor to be on standby at Tanilaq. If we decide there is anything else we need, we can radio to the helicopter after it has taken off. We have about twenty minutes to decide before we lose reception as it goes behind the hills.'

He ran over to the helicopter, which still had its rotors running and talked to the pilot, after which it straightaway flew off. It was

about half an hour's flight over the fjords and hills to Tanilaq, so the round trip would take an hour. Meanwhile the rest of us had been discussing how to get the injured man out, and concluded that he would probably have to be cut free.

'But to get an oxyacetylene torch down there would be a big job,' Aggie was arguing. 'Is it in fact possible, Jim?'

'I don't really know. You would need a kind of platform. Does anyone know how far away the cutting torch can be from the cylinders? I mean, could the cylinders be at the surface, with the torch down below? I imagine it is about five metres down to the cab, so the pipes would have to be at least five metres long.'

'You could always lower the cylinders down on ropes,' suggested Jørgen.

'That is true,' agreed Anton. 'I will radio now for an oxyacetylene torch.'

'Don't forget the ropes,' I put in. 'Ask for plenty.'

'I will.'

'And don't forget to ask for someone to work the torch,' I added.

We began to set up a rope system for two people to descend. I had decided it was somebody else's turn to have a go, so it was Anton and Jørgen who went down. Anton took off his tie and gave it to me, saying, 'I think this is unnecessary at this time!'

Aggie and myself held their safety ropes as they disappeared into the depths, helped by the policeman, but he was obviously not very experienced with the technical business of ropework.

For about a quarter of an hour we stood at the surface, not knowing how Jørgen and Anton were getting on, although feeling

their ropes joggle about. Because of the muffling effect of the ice we could hear nothing from them and when they eventually reappeared they both looked unhappy.

'No luck?' I asked.

'No,' answered Jørgen. 'The door has not moved one bit. It will have to be cut open.

'How is he?'

'He still feels warm. Other than that we cannot say.'

There was still half an hour or so until the helicopter was expected back. We tried again to see if there was a way into the cab through the back door of the snocat, but it looked impossible, and Anton thought that this design of vehicle in any case had no connecting door into the cab. 'I think the back is designed to be lifted off – straight onto the ship, if I remember rightly.'

'What are all those pipes?' I asked. 'Ice cores?'

'I think so,' agreed Anton. 'This is certainly the Climate Change Drilling Programme's snocat, I saw their motif on the door.'

After the heat gained from our exertions began to wear off we started to feel cold standing around on the glacier waiting for the chopper. A wind had got up, coming down off the inland ice, gentle at first, but beginning to strengthen.

'*Pitaraq*,' said Kangunaq the policeman.

'What?' we asked.

'*Pitaraq*,' Anton repeated for us. 'Katabatic, what they call a katabatic wind in east Greenland. Kangunaq believes that this is the

start of a katabatic wind, the people of Tanilaq say they have been expecting one these past few days.'

'They can get up quickly?' I queried.

'Yes, very. It can be very calm one minute, then blowing a gale a minute later.'

'How strong?'

'Can be up to a hundred and fifty kilometres an hour.'

'Wow! And the helicopter couldn't fly.'

'Yes,' replied Anton, 'but more than that, standing here you would not be able to see your feet because of the blowing snow. Of course, you would not be able to stand up either.'

We seemed to be getting colder and colder, and I was just wondering whether we should not take it in turns to shelter down the crevasse when we heard at last the distant throb of the helicopter. Although the wind was strong, luckily the full gale still held off. Several men clambered out, the first one immediately identifiable as a doctor because of the bag he was carrying and we had previously decided that he should go down as soon as he arrived. Jørgen would accompany him, being the most experienced at ropework, as well as being able to communicate with him in Danish. Once Anton had explained the situation and described what we were going to do, the doctor appeared nervous. 'He does not like the thought of going into a crevasse at the end of a rope,' said Anton. Nor would most people, I thought.

But within five minutes that was just what he was doing, with Jørgen showing him the ropes, and five minutes later he was back up.

‘He is dead,’ the doctor immediately said in English. When prompted he added probably for not more than an hour.

So the poor man had been alive when we first arrived. Could we have done anything more, anything that could have saved him? Unlikely, but that thought still troubles me to this day.

It felt an anticlimax after this. One of the other men who got off the helicopter, an Eskimo, went down with Jørgen and reported that it would be difficult to cut open the doors. There then followed a long discussion, in three languages, which it was difficult to follow, especially as no one appeared to be in charge, or perhaps more correctly, no-one was being accepted as the leader. I suddenly felt tired and had a desperate urge just to go and lie down in a warm sleeping bag in our cosy tent. I also felt hungry and realised that none of us had brought any food with us onto this God-forsaken glacier.

After what seemed like hours of discussion it was finally decided that the helicopter would take everyone who had just arrived back to Tanilaq, as well as Anton and the policeman Kangunaq. As there was not space for everyone, the three of us, Aggie, Jørgen and myself, would stay here for the helicopter to return, which would then fly us back to the settlement. Thereafter we would pick up the dead man, the one eaten by a polar bear, that is, and fly on to Tanilaq. Anton offered us official accommodation there for the night, as it would be easiest for us to stay in Tanilaq to help with paperwork, official reports, *et cetera*. 'Official reports!’ snorted Aggie. ‘Was that not why were in Greenland, to get away from official reports'?

Once the three of us were alone on the glacier we remembered Kangunaq's prediction that a *pitaraq* could get up, which meant that it would become too stormy for the helicopter to come back for us. In that case we would just have to climb into the back of the snocat and huddle together for warmth – where the storm could perhaps keep us trapped for several days. The idea, though, of staying in that confined space for even half a day with two dead men next door appalled me!

We used the ice axes to dig out a sheltered hollow in the snow, making sure it was not facing the stricken vehicle, exercise that soon warmed us up. Using Jørgen's sledge as a seat, the one he had left behind here after first discovering the snocat at the beginning of this long day, we sat down, leaning comfortably back against the snow. The wind, instead of strengthening, dropped, and the sun came out from behind its veil of high cirrus. Its low light lengthened the shadows of the icebergs in the distant fjord, and highlighted every indentation in the pack ice. We sat back, enjoying a view to which any written description can never do justice, a view that can only be experienced in polar regions and is one of the causes of that polar fever, an incurable disease that draws you back year after year to the Arctic – or to the Antarctic, it does not really matter which. We sat in silence at first, enjoying the space, and mulling over in our minds much that had happened on that first eventful day.

It was Aggie who broke the silence first. ‘I cannot understand. To carry on like that, to skin the bear with a dead man, a gory one at that, with a dead man right next to you. How could he do it?’

‘I don't know,’ I responded. ‘When you are dead, you are dead, I suppose. Nothing he could have done would have helped the dead man. And a polar bear in this part of the world represents riches – food, clothing, status.’

‘Yes,’ agreed Jørgen. ‘I know the area can look modern with helicopters and things but we must not forget the people are poor, that they are still a subsistence economy of hunter gatherers. I suppose they have to take advantage of every situation, which may look selfish, but it's survival.’

‘Perhaps you're right,’ agreed Aggie, albeit reluctantly, I thought.

We relapsed into silence with me wondering if I would have done the same in that Eskimo’s situation. And then I remembered that it could have been me that the bear had been eating and I felt queasy again. Maybe I had not fully regained my mental strength after the trauma of the sinking and rescue in the Antarctic last year. This expedition of ours, our planned crossing of the Greenland ice sheet, was meant to be a holiday, perhaps a strange 'holiday' in many people's eyes, but something I had been looking forward as an enjoyable challenge. But maybe it was not meant to be that way.

Chapter 3. Interlude in Tanilaq

Again, it must have been at least another hour before the helicopter returned, and for much of that time I was dozing. Anton and Kangunaq came out of the craft to meet us and then we all clambered aboard for the journey back to the settlement. As we retraced our flight over the frozen fjord we saw beneath us three men heading towards the glacier, all leaning forward in the time-honoured manner of those towing heavy sledges.

'Who are they?' shouted Aggie above the roar of the engine.

'Maybe they are the three we saw getting out of the chopper when Anton first arrived,' I replied. 'They looked as though they were kitted out for a crossing.'

'I think so,' agreed Anton. 'This party is the same as you, they are to cross the ice cap. Americans.'

Well, unlike us, they have managed to get started quickly, I mused. How long would it be before we could get away?

We were soon back at the landing pad adjacent to our campsite and Anton and the policeman went off to see Tigatuq while we collected a few necessities for our night in town and made sure our tent was secure against storms. Tigatuq came with us as the helicopter flew us the short distance to the scene of the polar bear attack.

We surprised a scavenging Arctic fox as we landed, the animal still a pristine white in its winter coat, matched by the white plumage of the ivory gulls that had also been getting their share of the kill. However, the whiteness of these animals and of the surrounding

snow was in contrast to the stark red of the blood that bespattered them all. We found, though, that the dead bear was now just a pile of bones, having been efficiently butchered, presumably by Eskimos from the settlement for use as human or dog food. We placed the dead man in a polythene survival bag, together with his severed leg, for whoever had butchered the bear had extracted and laid aside his leg. Then we lifted the corpse into the back of the helicopter, and squeezed in beside him for the flight to Tanilaq.

I did not enjoy that flight, in spite of the intense beauty of the sea ice below, glowing pink in the fading light. It is hard to relax when sharing a confined space with a dead man. I think we probably all felt that way, for there was no conversation between us and you could sense the relief as we finally climbed out of the helicopter and could again breathe in the sharp, cold air. We helped unload the corpse into the back of a pick-up that was waiting at the air terminal, and Anton announced that he and Kangunaq would take the corpse to the hospital, which doubled as a mortuary.

'Then,' he said, 'either I can come back and take you straight to your quarters,' for we were to be billeted in the accommodation block of the Danish consulate, 'or, and I would suggest this, I can pick you up later from the hotel. There you can get a meal as it is now too late to get food in our canteen.'

We decided on the latter course of action, and set off along the snow-covered road to walk the mile to the hotel. Tigatuq, meanwhile, had gone off with some friends he had met at the terminal.

'What a day!' said Jørgen as we walked.

‘Yes,’ agreed Aggie, ‘and now we are back where we started. No nearer the ice cap!’

‘I know,’ I sighed, ‘I just want to get going! How long do you think we will be stuck here?’

‘A day at the most,’ said Jørgen.

‘I hope so, I really hope so,’ I replied, ‘but knowing Greenland, anything could happen. There may not be a chopper to take us back tomorrow, the paperwork may take days, a *pitaraq* could get up...’

‘Do not be so gloomy,’ put in Jørgen. ‘Relax. I know you have had a hard day...’

‘We all have,’ cut in Aggie.

‘Yes, we all have,’ continued Jørgen. ‘But here we are in Greenland. We still have plenty of time in hand to do what we came to do... Let us just see what comes, and just enjoy being here. Look up there,’ and he pointed to the sky over the northern mountains. ‘Look! Is that not a fine display?’

It was. The Northern Lights in a ghostly shimmering green, against a darkening sky that was beginning to collect its stars and start them shimmering as well in the crystal-clear Arctic air. It seems improbable, but until then I had been so immersed in reliving the events of the day in my mind that I had not noticed the aurora. We stopped in silence for a while and watched the display.

At the hotel we took off our boots in the entrance lobby, and, as the stifling heat hit us, our jackets as well. ‘A drink first’, Aggie had suggested and a drink first it was! But I was the last to the bar, not because I did not want or need a drink, but because sitting at the bar was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. Our eyes met as

soon as I entered the room, and she smiled. I just stood still, mouth agape. Long blonde hair, wide blue eyes, a clear-cut Scandinavian face, softened slightly by just a hint of chubbiness. Wearing a simple white t-shirt and blue jeans. I do not know how long I would have stood staring if Aggie had not shouted across, 'What'll you be having, Jim, a beer?'

'Yes,' I replied automatically, breaking out of my trance to join him and Jørgen. But, although Aggie and Jørgen were talking to me, I was not listening. I was wondering whether to pluck up the courage to move along to the girl and chat to her. I had just decided 'yes', when she herself came towards me.

'Hi,' she said, 'you must be James Ashworth.'

'What? Yes, Jim,' I spluttered. 'How, I mean...'

'Can I introduce myself? My name is Christina Andersson. I am administrator for the CCDP.'

'CCDP?'

'Sorry, I forget. The Climate Change Drilling Programme.'

'Ah yes, CCDP,' I said, and my face must have whitened as vivid images of polar bear attacks and doomed snocats reared up in my mind. She appeared to sense this, and put her hand on mine. 'Yes, I have heard what you found today, it must have been very terrible. Let us talk about something else.'

We were both silent for a while and I made no effort to remove my hand from hers, and she seemed happy to leave it there. 'Tell me about your expedition,' she said.

So I started to give her the rundown of our plans, how I had started thinking about a trip to Greenland while stranded on an

iceberg in the Antarctic last year. ‘Wow, were you on the *Isis* when she sank?’ she asked.

‘Yes.’ And so I recounted the story for about the hundredth time, and, although now generally bored with its retelling, I did not find it so this time. Another beer or two must have been consumed, but I was only about half way through the adventure when I was dragged away by Aggie and Jørgen to a table.

‘They are about to stop serving meals,’ Aggie told me, ‘so we must eat now.’

I was not really hungry, but it was Christina who said, ‘Come on now, James, you must keep your strength up.’

Christina was invited to join us, and, although she had already eaten, was happy to keep us company.

She introduced herself to Aggie and Jørgen and during the meal told us all about the UN Climate Change Drilling Programme. They had set up a base inland from here, named Camp Tunu. Over two years they would be drilling the full thickness of the Greenland ice sheet, about two and a half kilometres, which would produce ice cores that could be used to chart climate change over the past, say, fifty thousand years – the estimated age of the ice at the bottom of the ice sheet; its age could be determined accurately for, like rings in a tree, it was possible to see each year's snowfall as a distinct band in the ice. It was also possible to extract carbon dioxide from bubbles of air trapped in the ice, so you could see how CO_2 levels had fluctuated over the millennia. Additionally, oxygen could be extracted from these bubbles, and by measuring the ratio of oxygen isotope O^{16} to isotope O^{18} it was also possible to determine how

temperature had fluctuated over the millennia; more O^{18} in the air indicated a warmer climate.

Taken together, the information would be used to confirm the relationship between global temperature and carbon dioxide levels, and hence finally convince the sceptics that there was a direct relationship between increasing CO_2 in the atmosphere (from burning fossil fuels) and global warming. A related ice-drilling programme had been completed in the Antarctic, and the result of this did appear to confirm the link between CO_2 and global temperature. It was expected that the Greenland drilling programme would corroborate the Antarctic findings, and so put the final nail in the coffin for sceptics of global warming.

'And what is your role in all of this?' Aggie asked Christina.

'I have been the administrative link between the expedition's drilling base, Camp Tunu, on the top of the ice cap and the outside world.'

'Have been?' I asked.

'Yes,' she replied. 'The expedition started last spring, with the drilling itself starting in the summer. The chief administrator, an Australian called Doug Dawson, was here in Tanilaq during the set-up phase and then returned to Australia for the winter. I have been in charge of the administration this winter as there is still a small team on the ice doing some drilling. However, Doug came back last week and has taken over again.'

'Putting you out of a job?' I queried.

'Not quite. Doug says I can stay here to help him out.'

'And will you?'

‘Certainly, while we sort out this disaster with the snocat.’

‘And after that?’

‘I would like to go onto the Greenland ice cap myself.’

‘You mean, you’ve not been up to the expedition base?’

‘No! No, space is limited, and Doug says I do not have enough experience. I have come all this way...’

‘From where?’ interrupted Aggie.

‘From Norway, Oslo,’ she continued, ‘where I live. And now I am so near the ice cap, but cannot reach it.’

‘Why do you want to?’ asked Aggie.

‘Why do you? Is that not where you are going?’

We all smiled, knowing that there was no real answer to that 'why'. I have often wondered myself what the answer might be. Maybe the great wide open spaces of an ice cap, high-up in the mountains, a traditional abode of the Gods, white, virginal purity, maybe there is some deep symbolism involved...

‘Yes,’ I replied, adding instinctively. ‘Why not come with us?’

Aggie and Jørgen stopped eating and stared at me, and one or both of them said, ‘Jim, what are you saying?’

‘No offence,’ said Jørgen to Christina, ‘but we have our plans, our food, our tent...’

‘I understand,’ she said, and then turned to give me a dazzling smile. She stood up, ‘I must go now. Doug and I must get the snocat out of the crevasse. Goodbye.’ And she was gone, but with the harshness of 'Doug and I' ringing in my ears.

‘Are you mad?’ asked Aggie. ‘We meet a stray blonde, God knows who, and you ask her to join us on a crossing of the Greenland ice

cap! It's not a Sunday afternoon saunter in the park, you know! You don't even know if she can ski.'

'Well, she's from Norway,' was the only reply I could muster.

'He's had a long day,' said Jørgen. 'We all have. Tiredness, the strain, gruesome events. You are not quite yourself, Jim.'

I did not reply but, for the first time ever, I felt there was a tension between us, although was not sure whether it was mutual. However, hindsight has shown this episode to have been a defining one for me, and my life, perhaps, would have been very different if I had not asked that question of her. We finished the meal with strong coffee and, there being no sign of Anton and his lift to the consulate, we arranged with the hotel for a taxi to take us there. We were dropped off outside a long, two-storeyed building, and again, after going through a porch, took off our boots and jackets. The heat was stifling but the building was quiet and we found no-one to guide us; in the end, we happened upon three adjacent empty rooms and bedded down for the night.

I was asleep almost instantly but, in the middle of the night, awoke sweating from a dream. I was skiing in the dark, the snow swirling all around the way it does in a blizzard, when, out of nowhere, came a huge vehicle, headlights blazing, windscreen wipers going at a frenetic pace, and through the windscreen I could see a huge, bearded man, staring straight at me. The vehicle was heading for me while making no attempt to slow down...

I awoke again at first light and then dozed on and off, various images coming into, was it consciousness?, when dozing – angry polar bears, threatening crevasses, *rigor mortis*, large vehicles

bearing down, and Christina. Christina! I awoke for the final time with an almost headache, the kind that is incipient and never far off, and tried to keep the image of Christina in my mind to keep depression at bay. Christina. Was she real? Had I really invited her to cross the ice cap with us? Would it work? Could we share a sleeping bag? Could we maintain a romance in the presence of Jørgen and Aggie? Indeed, how would I persuade them to bring along a fourth, virtually unknown person with us? What were the next steps?

The next steps. I knew that I had to see her again, that I had also to hold our expedition together. Now, instead of being impatient to get back to our tent in the settlement and finally set off on our crossing, now I felt I needed a few days here. As it turned out providence was with me for it had not occurred to me that Christina would also be staying in this building. I found my way to the canteen, to find at this time of day nothing more than a 'help yourself' pot of coffee and fresh rolls and jam. Aggie and Jørgen were already there. ‘Good morning, Jim,’ they called, and also, at a table by herself, sat Christina. ‘Good morning, James,’ she called.

I bandied a few pleasantries with my friends and then, without hesitation, joined Christina. ‘Did you sleep well?’ she asked.

‘Yes and no,’ I replied noncommittally. ‘Have you got the snocat out of the crevasse yet?’ She shook her head. ‘Where’s Doug?’ I continued.

‘Oh, he has been up for ages,’ she replied. ‘He has been in contact with the *Bolchorsky*, she is now due in about three days’ time.’

‘The *Bolchorsky*? She's the expedition's support vessel, isn't she? I hear she’s delayed?’

‘Yes, that is right, some minor engine trouble and some thick ice. Although she has our supplies for the coming year she has no spare snocat on board – obviously we were not expecting… And, of course, she has no extra staff to take the place of Alex, Ravji and Helmut.’

‘The dead men?’ I queried.

‘Yes.’

‘Is the drilling programme to continue on as normal?’

‘Yes, of course. But we are not sure yet whether the cores in the snocat are so damaged that we will have to repeat all the drilling we have done so far.’

‘I've seen the cores.’

She looked at me sharply. ‘You have? How did they look? Damaged?’

‘I don't know.’

` ‘Think, James, think. It is important. If the cores are exposed to the air, then they could become contaminated with modern-day air. Then they become useless. Had they broken out of their containers?’

‘I can't say for sure. Some may have broken out, but I think most were intact.’

‘Good. As soon as possible we must get to those cores and assess the damage.’

At this moment a tall, dark-haired and bearded man entered the canteen who, seeing Christina, called, ‘Ah, there you are. Come quickly. We may have some help.’

Christina spoke quietly across to me, ‘That's Doug. Bye James, see you soon’, then rose from the table. I nodded, saw her go out of the room, and then joined Aggie and Jørgen for the rest of my breakfast.

‘My God, Jim,’ said Aggie as I sat down, ‘you are smitten.’ I made no reply.

As it turned out, we spent two days in Tanilaq before we could get a helicopter back to our camp. But, from my point of view, these days were not wasted. First, we had to attend an inquiry into the circumstances of the death of Alex, the man killed by the polar bear. Then we had to produce a written statement summarising all that had happened concerning the finding and survey of the stricken snocat, with its complement of dead men. Once this had been completed Anton assured us that we were free to go, and that he would arrange places for us on the next helicopter to the settlement. Unexpectedly, though, we were summoned to the CCDP headquarters, a room in the Danish consulate building as it turned out. Doug was there to meet us, and after formally introducing himself he explained the situation.

‘It's like this. Are you in a hurry? I mean, can you spare a day or two to help us?’

‘Of course,’ I replied. ‘We’ve flights booked out of Søndre Strømfjord, but not for two months. We’ve plenty of time in hand.’ Jørgen and Aggie nodded in agreement.

‘Good. We have managed, by sheer coincidence, to find a replacement snocat for the expedition.’

‘How?’ I asked.

‘Well, by chance the Naxos Oil Company has a ship in the vicinity, up to carry out geological survey further north. Oil exploration, I believe. They have heard of our problems, presumably through the world media, as I issued a press release yesterday. Better to scotch the rumours before they get out of hand! In any case, they have a snocat aboard which they are prepared to loan the CCDP.’

‘At no cost?’ I questioned.

‘We haven't finalised terms yet,’ continued Doug, ‘but certainly it will be within our budget.’

‘What nationality is the Naxos Oil Company?’

‘American,’ replied Doug. ‘That’s good, though, as the Americans have not been party to the CCDP, and it's time they contributed something.’

‘Why not?’ queried Aggie. ‘I mean, why haven't the Americans contributed?’

‘They don't believe in global warming. Like Australia, they refused to join the United Nations programme.’

‘Do you?’ I challenged. ‘Do you believe in global warming, that is?’

‘Of course,’ he replied hurriedly. ‘Anyway, we should not look a gift horse in the mouth, and if the Americans want to contribute now, we should let them.’

‘And the company can spare a snocat?’ I queried.

‘Yes,’ replied Doug simply, ‘and a driver. Anyhow, why I asked you guys here was to see if you could help us. The new snocat could be here in three days' time, aboard the company's ship, the *Naxos Explorer*.’

‘An icebreaker?’ queried Jørgen.

‘Yes. However, before she arrives it would be good to have everything ready at the site of our stricken snocat, so that it can be pulled out straight away. I hear from Anton that you are good with ropes, and it would superb if you could have everything ready so that it can be pulled out as soon as help arrives.’

‘Is that all?’ I queried rather dubiously.

‘No,’ continued Doug. ‘While you are there could you investigate the state of the ice cores in the back of the snocat, and give us an initial report on them. Christina tells me, Jim, that you have already seen them?’

‘Yes,’ I confirmed.

‘She has probably told you how important it is that they do not become contaminated with air. Don't touch anything, our experts can do that, but just report what you can see. Finally, we do not know yet why the vehicle was off course. Last week we asked a reliable Eskimo, Tigatuq...’

‘Tigatuq? The one who shot the bear?’

‘I believe so. I saw him in town today, he flew over with you didn't he?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well we asked Tigatuq last week to flag a route through the crevasse field at the end of the ice cap, so there should have been no problem with the route. Indeed, I helped him do it. Anton would like someone to check the route, and see if we can find out what went wrong. Maybe the marker flags had blown down, for instance. We have checked your credentials, and you all seem experts in polar travel. Would you be willing to do this?’

Jørgen, Aggie and I exchanged glances, then we all nodded assent.

‘Good,’ said Doug. ‘We cannot get a free helicopter until the day after tomorrow, so I am afraid you will be stuck here until then. I will ask Tigatuq to go with you back up to the snocat, as he laid out the original route, and I have asked Christina to go along with you as an official representative of CCDP. I also gather that this winter she has picked up enough of the local lingo to communicate with Tigatuq. Right then, that’s all, I think.’ I began to look forward to the next few days. Christina with us!

We managed to borrow some cross-country skis and spent the time touring the area, skiing over the smooth sea ice of the bay, and also up onto the frozen lakes behind the town. We pushed ourselves quite hard, getting our skiing muscles into shape for the crossing. I did not see much of Christina, as she was too busy with Doug sorting out the problems of the expedition, but we did arrange to meet on the second afternoon at the town's ski slope. There was one ski tow, a modern Poma, which was mainly used by the Eskimo children who would hurtle down the slope at full speed, not bothering with poles at all. But even they stopped and watched

Christina as she skied down the *piste*, seemingly hardly moving a muscle in her body; but the grace was deceptive, for she was by far and away the fastest. I felt clumsy in comparison, struggling down the hard slope in my cross-country skis, unable to turn at speed.

She noted my embarrassment. ‘Do not worry, James. I have also been learning to *langlauf* this winter, and I also find it difficult on this slope.’

‘But where did you learn to ski? You're brilliant!’

‘Oh, family holidays in the mountains and the Alps. I have always enjoyed skiing. Can you downhill? I can borrow a pair for you – there are some in the hut below.’

‘Yes, yes of course. Why not?’

What better way to spend an afternoon? Skiing in the sunshine, surrounded by snow, mountains and frozen sea, the town below, a colourful settlement of wooden houses, the joy of controlled speed, of hard-earned skill, of skis carving through the snow, of enjoying what nature has given us, the sheer joy of existence. And Christina.

Chapter 4. Return to the Crevasse

Anton Laursen told us to be at the air terminal at nine o'clock next morning and that he would be coming with us as well, representing the Danish authorities in their investigation of the circumstances of the snocat's demise. There was the inevitable delay and we did not actually leave until midday, but frustration at this was minimised for me owing to the presence of Miss, I assumed it was 'Miss', of Miss Andersson. We did not broach again the subject of my invitation to her, but while consuming endless cups of coffee, we talked generally about the disaster, its possible causes, and how the CCDP would cope with the setback.

'It all depends,' said Christina, 'on whether the ice cores have been damaged. If not, then the programme remains on stream, assuming Naxos fulfil their promise and loan us their snocat.'

'And if they are damaged?' queried Jørgen.

'Then we shall see. Maybe it will be that the expedition will have to start drilling again, and spend another season in Greenland.'

'When was it due to finish?' I asked.

'All being well, the end of this summer. The cores were to come out in shifts. The first load, well you have seen that, it is down a crevasse, and the last one is due out at the end of this summer – before days get too short and the weather gets too bad.'

'What do you think is the most probable reason the snocat crashed?' asked Anton.

'Lost the route,' replied Jørgen promptly, and we all nodded.

‘But Tigatuq only flagged it the week before,’ continued Anton. ‘He is reliable, and so the route should have been clear.’

‘Let us ask him,’ said Christina, for Tigatuq was flying back with us today. She walked over to him, sitting at a separate table with the airport officials, and talked for a while. I noticed she was speaking slowly, obviously not fully understanding first time everything he said, but even so it was impressive – the language sounded so alien to my ears, having not a word in common with English.

‘Yes,’ she said when she returned. ‘He and Doug marked the route very carefully, and he will take us back over it this afternoon. The flags could not be missed.’

We were glad to see our tent intact as we circled the settlement and as soon as we landed Aggie, Jørgen and I went to put on our skis. For it had been agreed that Tigatuq would harness up his dog team and take Anton and Christina along on his sledge while we skied to the site of the crash.

As it turned out we reached the scene before the sledge, Christina telling me later that it had taken some time for Tigatuq to get his dogs sorted out. However, it is always a lovely sight to see a team of huskies in full flight, the sledge racing across the snow with the dogs pulling with all the keenness that only dogs can show. Today the snow was hard, mainly windslab, and the dogs seemed to be hardly noticing the slope up the glacier. We could hear Tigatuq, standing on the back of his sledge, we could hear his instructions coming across the clear air, ‘Lililililililili...’, then ‘Jujujujujujuju...’, finishing as he reached us with ‘Aaj, Aaj!’

The sledge came to a halt, Christina's face glowing with joy. She climbed off and gave Tigatuq an impulsive hug. Tigatuq grinned in return, and gave the lead dog a friendly cuff round the neck. This made all the dogs want his attention, and a round of barking broke out – there was an obvious bond between him and his dogs. Indeed, I had come to Greenland expecting the dogs to be fierce and aggressive, but all the ones I had met to date had been only too pleased to see me.

'I do love sledging,' Christina announced. 'Why don't we – you – sledge across the ice cap instead?'

Before we could answer, Anton started organising us, saying we were here with a job to do and that Tigatuq should take his team and investigate the flags while we went and looked in the snocat. Anton had brought some ropes with him on the sledge and we set up a safety system which we would use when going onto the snocat.

We took it in turns to look into the back of the snocat, trying to forget that there were two dead men in the cab. The cores in the back were a jumble, but none seemed to have broken open or become exposed to the air.

'Well,' said Christina after we had all peered in, 'this is a not too much of a disaster, for the drilling I mean. Three deaths, though, that is a disaster!'

'Well, Greenland can be a dangerous place,' I said. 'I suppose accidents are inevitable. It's strange, though, I don't remember the cores being so jumbled up when we were last here.'

'Are you sure?'

‘No, I'm not sure – there were a lot of things on my mind then. But I'm sure they were more neatly arranged. I couldn't swear by it, though.’

‘Perhaps the snocat has settled into the crevasse?’ queried Anton. ‘And things got shaken up?’

‘I don't think so. As we saw previously, the vehicle's trapped tight. What do you think, Jørgen? You had a look last time as well.’

‘I agree,’ he replied. ‘They look more upset than before.’

‘Are you certain?’ said Christina and Anton together.

‘No, not certain.’

‘Maybe the whole glacier shook?’ suggested Christina.

‘It might move, but it wouldn't shake,’ I replied.

‘Could somebody else have been here? It's been three days now. Maybe some Eskimos have come up from the settlement to see what's happened?’

‘No,’ said Anton. ‘Most of the Eskimos are away hunting at this time and we have seen no other sets of dog tracks. They would not come up here without dogs.’

‘There were those three expeditioners, remember we saw them heading up the fjord when we were flying back by helicopter,’ suggested Aggie. ‘They might have come this way.’

There was such a jumble of ski tracks and footprints by now that it was hard to test this theory. If it were true that the cores had moved since we were last here, we concluded the only possible scenario was that the three expeditioners had been trying to get through to the cab to reach the dead men.

We worked out the best way to pull the snocat out of the crevasse, where to attach ropes and so forth, and then waited for Tigatuq's return.

'Look!' shouted Aggie. 'Out at sea, coming through the ice. A ship.' We looked where he was pointing.

'It must be the *Naxos Explorer,'* said Anton. 'Once we have finished here we'd better go and meet her. She will be anchoring offshore and tomorrow will be unloading the new snocat onto the ice.'

Shortly after, Tigatuq's dog team returned, screaming to a halt beside us in a flurry of snow. Christina spoke to him and translated. 'Yes, the flags are all in place, marking a safe route through the crevasse field but, and this is strange, some of the flags seem to have moved out of line.'

'Ask him if he is sure about this,' I said.

She spoke with him further and announced that he was sure, adding that the flagged route is definitely safe from crevasses. It was decided that Tigatuq would show us himself and we set off as before, three on skis and three on the sledge. He agreed that we skiers could *jor* along behind, so we attached ropes to the sledge and were hauled along at great speed. 'This is the life!' I announced to no one in particular.

Following the tracks of the snocat that came and went from under the drifted snow, we met the flagged route after about half a mile and followed them up to the end of the crevasse field. We looked down the row of flags as far as we could see, and Tigatuq pointed out a slight bend in the line which he said were the flags which were

no longer in position. He also pointed out a line of ski tracks that were visible in a few places following the flags, presumably from the three explorers we had seen before.

We discussed that bend in the line of flags but as it was so slight we concluded it must have been caused by movement of the glacier. We then talked over how the snocat driver could have lost the route, with various theories being suggested such as him falling asleep, whiteout conditions, obscuring spindrift, or travelling by night. I mentioned that travelling long distances on featureless ice, or against blowing snow, could do strange things to your eyes and mind, resulting in sensory disorientation. It did not seem possible to reach any definite conclusion on the matter and we decided to go up the glacier a bit further, over the next long rise of the ice, to see if we could see the American expeditioners – although this was unlikely as they should be a long way ahead by now. However, as it turned out, we did come across a tent.

We banged on its sides in the standard way of attracting the attention of tent occupants but, on receiving no reply, opened its flaps and peered in. Although there were three sleeping bags laid out, and all the gear of three people scattered around, there was no-one inside. Outside it was hard to make out ski tracks and we could not be sure whether they were on ahead, reconnoitring, or had skied back down the glacier. Realising we could gain no more by being here, I suggested a race down the glacier, boasting that we skiers could easily beat the dog team.

It was a close run thing, exhilarating and out of control on the steeper bits, I could not have stopped even I had wanted to, but we

skiers lost too much speed on the flatter areas. Once on the level ice of the frozen fjord the sledge party forged ahead, leaving Jørgen and myself way behind. I suddenly realised we had no rifle with us and what if there were another polar bear prowling?

However we reached the settlement without mishap and after taking off our skis we eventually tracked down the sledge party at a hut that combined the one shop, if that is what you could call it, post office and radio office. The small room was crowded, not only with the sledge party, but also with a couple of Eskimos – postmaster and radio operator I concluded – and with three large, bearded men. I recognised them as the three American expeditioners and Anton explained the situation to us.

'It's like this: these three came in a few hours ago to report that they found a snocat stuck down a crevasse with two dead men in it, who they had tried to get out, but failed. They noticed lots of tracks in the snow around it, so assumed we knew about it, but thought they had better report it just in case, and have offered their help if it is needed.'

'How did they find it?' I asked. 'It's away from the safe, flagged route.'

'Oh, they told me they had got to the top of the crevassed area and decided to set up camp for the day. They then went out for a ski, when one of them spotted a red thing in the distance – the snocat.'

'Yea, that's right. Let us introduce ourselves. I'm Mark, and this is Chuck and this is Randy.'

We all shook hands and I introduced our party. Mark continued, ‘I hear you guys are planning the same as us, but have been held up, caught up in this business.’

‘That's right. Once we've helped get the snocat out, we will be on our way across the inland ice.’

‘I've offered Anton here our help as well.’

Tigatuq appeared from somewhere with mugs of hot tea and we stood around drinking, discussing the finer points of expedition travel with the Americans while Anton was on the radio.

‘Mark,’ called Anton from the radio cubicle. ‘Come over here. You are wanted, there's someone from the *Naxos Explorer* who wants to talk to you?’

‘Me?’ he replied. ‘Who?’

‘I don't know. Here's the handset.’

It turned out that the *Naxos Explorer* was now offshore, moored against some fast ice in the bay. By chance, it would seem, one of the crew was a friend of Mark's and, knowing he was in the area, was trying to contact him. He invited Mark and his party to come aboard and, as it was getting late, suggested they stay the night on the ship. They accepted.

We laid our plans for the next day, with us three and the American three agreeing to be up at daylight to help unload the new snocat from the ship, and thereafter travel up the glacier with it. Doug Dawson would be ferried over from Tanilaq tomorrow on the Naxos helicopter to oversee operations and Anton would spend the night in this hut, there being a couple of spare beds. And

Christina? She had been invited to stay the night with Kanileq and Tigatuq.

‘Best polar bear meat for you tonight, then?’ I suggested to her.

‘Probably. I've had it before, it is good!’

‘Is it? I've never tried it.’

‘Well, why don't you come with me to Tigatuq's tonight, I am sure he would not mind?’

‘Come over for a meal, you mean?’

‘What else?’ and she smiled.

‘I'd better ask him, though. By the way where is he?’ for, looking around, I saw Tigatuq had left.

‘Were you planning on going back to your tent?’ Christina asked.

I looked at the others and they nodded. ‘Okay, James, I will find Tigatuq and ask him to invite you, and then come to your tent to tell you his answer. I am certain it will be yes.’

We dispersed after this and I walked back to our campsite with Aggie and Jørgen.

‘We hadn't thought of that, had we?’ said Aggie as we strolled along.

‘Thought of what?’ I asked.

‘Realised that the Americans wouldn't have known about the snocat. That, finding it, they would check it out and then come back here to report what they'd found.’

‘No,’ I replied. ‘We hadn't... After tomorrow, thank goodness, we can be on our way... It was beautiful on the glacier today, wasn't it?’

‘Yes,’ Jørgen replied. ‘It was. That view up to the ice cap was stunning, and snow conditions are perfect.’

‘They were,’ I concurred. ‘It will be good to be on our own again, just the three of us.’

‘And what about Christina?’ put in Aggie.

I stopped. I had forgotten her for a moment and Aggie could not help rubbing it in by adding, ‘Is she still coming with us?’

‘Of course not,’ I replied curtly.

‘But it is what you want, isn't it?’ persisted Aggie.

‘Yes, I mean no...’

‘She's a gold-digger, only looking for some sucker to take her up onto her beloved ice cap. Besides which, she has probably been alone all winter, unless she and Doug...’

‘Shut up Aggie,’ I shouted, feeling a genuine anger, and the conversation lapsed into silence, nothing more being said until we were at our tent. We lay down for a while on our sleeping bags, and the warmth creeping over me and the gentle flapping of the canvas in the breeze caused me to relax somewhat. I apologised to Aggie for shouting at him, and he said he had probably been speaking out of turn. But it was true, for the last day or two I had been planning in my mind the feasibility of Christina coming with us, but had not dared broach it to the others.

As if reading my thoughts, Jørgen said, ‘Remember Oates? That extra man was Scott's downfall. You British are too sentimental – that's why Amundsen won.’

‘Scott wasn't racing,’ Aggie defended. ‘It was Amundsen.’

‘Still, it was Amundsen who got home!’

‘It would be cosy in this tent with four,’ I ventured.

‘It certainly would be,’ agreed Aggie.

‘So you would put up with her after all?’ I asked.

‘If I was the one next to her, or she was in the middle. In fact, to be fair, if she were in the middle we could take it in turns to be the cold one on the edge!’

‘It would make it easier for us,’ I continued. ‘One extra to share the loads with, although we would need a little more food...’

‘And,’ interrupted Jørgen, ‘and more fuel, and a bigger pan, and another mug, not to mention concerns about her fitness, her ability to cross-country ski, to avoid crevasses, coping with blizzards...’, but before he could finish his list there was a banging on the side of the tent.

‘There's your girlfriend now,’ said Aggie, adding with a shout, ‘come in.’

Her head appeared through the door, and my heart lost a beat. ‘Hello, yes Tigatuq says you can all come. He has invited you all back for a meal.’

‘Come in for a bit,’ suggested Aggie, ‘and lie down with us – we want to see if you’ll fit in! Come here, next to me.’

Christina looked puzzled. ‘It's okay,’ I said, ‘Aggie's only joking. Let's go, that polar bear meat is calling.’ But Jørgen caught Aggie's eye and they exchanged glances.

‘I think,’ said Jørgen, ‘Aggie and I will stay here. We need to check our stove and supplies. Christina, you and Jim, go and have a good time.’

‘Are you sure?’ she questioned.

‘Yes,’ I said for both of them, getting up, pulling on my boots and joining her outside.

‘Why didn't they want to come? The meat is good and from now on you will be on dry rations for days and days.’

‘I don't know,’ I lied.

The air was crisp and cool, a slight breeze blowing, and dusk was just begin to darken the polar sky. I breathed in deeply, then sighed. I wanted to put my arm round her, but lacked the courage. Perhaps she was a gold-digger after all? Was she using me? Was there genuine affection? I looked sideways at her at the same time as she looked at me. I was longing to kiss her.

‘It's been a long winter, James.’

‘What does that mean?’

‘There's been no-one I could really talk to.’

I took her hand then, ‘Talk to me.’

I cannot remember a word of what we talked about after that although conversation flowed easily. It may have been serious or it may have been frivolous, or both. It was only when we reached the door of Tigatuq and Kanileq's house that I realised my arm was around her.

‘Don't knock, just go in,’ she said, and we were still holding hands as we entered their living room, the only significant room in the house and which appeared to double as kitchen, bathroom, dining room and bedroom. We were greeted enthusiastically, sat down at the table and were handed beers. Christina was able to translate much of the conversation for me, and I learnt about the way of life in this area, and the conflict of combining both the modern and the hunter-gatherer lifestyles. I remember thinking that perhaps, in the long term, the two lifestyles were incompatible, something would

have to give, and what future for East Greenland then? The polar bear meat was good, and as we started eating, Tigatuq, grinning said a few words to me, which Christina translated as ‘it is lucky it was not the other way round, the polar bear eating you!’ I winced. But I remember mainly spending a whole evening in Christina's company, her all to myself, and I think I must have appeared rude, spending the whole time looking at her and not fully responding to my hosts. They seemed to understand, though, and later in the night, when we had had our full of beer and bear, when I was in that pleasant state of repleteness, mild drunkenness and tiredness, and maybe Christina as well, they insisted I stay the night, indeed pointed out rugs in that very room that we could use. I did not refuse. I will not say how far we went that night, but when awake at first light I was glad it had not all been a dream. I shook her gently, whispering, ‘Christina,’, indeed whispering it twice because I liked the sound of it, ‘Christina, it is light. We must go to the ship.’

‘What? Oh yes.’ And I kissed her again.

Chapter 5. The Ship

It was a beautiful clear sky with alpenglow on the mountains to the north as Christina and I walked over the frozen bay in the dawn. But I also noticed a haze over the distant ice cap showing the characteristic spumes of spindrift, and a raggedy cloud of the type I call 'spider clouds'.

‘It must be blowing hard up there,’ I said pointing.

‘Do you think we are in for a *pitaraq*?’

‘I'm not sure, I don't know this area well enough.’

‘Well, the local people have been predicting one for several days.’

‘That's true. In fact the weather's been remarkably good while we've been hanging around, although once we set off on our trek it's bound to break!’

‘We?’

‘Our expedition, I mean.’

‘And me?’

‘I'm working on them and I think they may be coming round.’

‘Coming round?’

‘They may be coming round to the idea of you joining us.’

She stopped, and looked at me. ‘James, are you being serious?’

‘Of course,’ I replied as I pulled her towards me, embraced her and tried to kiss her.

But she pushed me away. ‘I feel rude, imposing myself on you like this.’

‘Imposing? It's no imposition, it's a pleasure.’

‘But you hardly know me. I do not want to get in the way of your expedition, and I am sure there will not be space in your tent for another. I don't know how I would manage on the ice cap, whether I could keep up with you or I would hold you up. It was silly of me to ask. Please forget it.’

‘Christina, listen! There will be space in our tent and I've been thinking – I'm sure there's a way. I've looked at the map and it would not really be much off our course if we crossed the ice cap via your Camp Tunu which is about halfway over. If you came up with us, and I am serious, if you came with us you could go as far as the camp and arrange to get a lift back from there while we went on to complete our crossing.’

‘Yes, I'd thought of that as well.’

‘You had? Is there anything useful you could do at the camp? I mean, if you could persuade Doug that you could get up there at no cost to the CCDP, and then help out up there, then he may be willing to fly you back? It's worth a try, isn't it?’

‘Perhaps, yes. But you will be leaving soon, and I will need skis, sleeping bag, food...’ She paused. ‘This will take time to arrange – and you still need to persuade your friends.’

‘I'm sure these problems aren't insurmountable.’

We walked on in silence, with me wondering whether my last statement was true. Eventually I said, ‘Let's think about it. Make a list of what you will need, and how to get them. We'll have to find time today to talk it over with the others.’

The red bulk of the *Naxos Explorer* loomed over us, the ship moored to the edge of the fast ice in the bay. A gangway led from

the fore-deck down onto the ice, and, as there was no-one about, we climbed it to find a deck cluttered with containers, crates, oil drums and a large snocat – but no people. We entered the nearest open door and a sound of voices led us directly to the mess.

'Ah, there you are Jim!' shouted Aggie as we entered. 'We wondered if you had been eaten by a polar bear.' I flinched, and Aggie also flinched as Jørgen had obviously kicked him under the table. 'Sorry, Jim,' Aggie continued, 'thoughtless of me. Come and have breakfast. Good morning, Christina. Slept well?'

'Yes, thank you,' she replied.

'I bet you did!'

There was a self-service breakfast bar where Christina and I filled our trays and went to join Aggie and Jørgen. It did not seem the right time to discuss what Christina and I had been talking about on the way to the ship and we ate largely in silence. I noticed the American party, Mark, Chuck and Randy were also here, as well as Anton and some of the ship's crew. While still eating we heard a helicopter fly overhead and land on the ship and soon after Doug entered, together with another man, a dark-bearded man wearing a red-checked lumberjack shirt, a huge man in both length and breadth, the biggest man, I think, that I have ever seen. My heart dropped a beat, and my face drained white.

Christina must have noticed for she asked, 'What is it, James? Has someone walked over your grave? Have you seen a ghost?'

'Yes,' I replied. 'Or maybe not. But that man, that big man, I saw him in my dream the other day, I'm sure of it, a nightmare. He was trying to run me down!'

‘In a dream? Then it's not real. Don't be silly, James, it's only a coincidence.’

She had to be right, of course, but it was uncanny all the same. I was becoming an emotional wreck, too much, both good and bad, had happened in the last few days and my brain could not cope.

Doug joined us for breakfast and I noticed the big lumberjack was talking to Mark and his party. Doug, who came across as organised and efficient announced that, once we had all finished breakfast, and before unloading the snocat, there would be a briefing in here so that we all knew what was going on.

‘Right,’ he said as he began the briefing, ‘this is the plan. The snocat on deck's ready for lifting and as soon as we're out of here we'll get it down on the ice. Telford,’ he continued, pointing to the lumberjack, ‘Telford is the snocat driver...’ I flinched again at this news – it could not be coincidence – ‘... he will be taking it up to the ice cap. There's plenty of space and he can take Jim and his party, and Mark and his party, up to the scene of the accident, together with Anton, Christina and myself. We'll then unload all the cores from the damaged vehicle into Telford's snocat and bring them back here. Mark, you can stay up there if you like and carry on with your trip, but, Jim, you will probably want to come back down to pick all your gear up?’ I nodded. ‘Once back here, the *Bolchorsky*, the CCDP's supply vessel, should have joined us and we can unload the cores straight onto her – she's due to get here in about three hours. We'd better be quick in all this, for the temperature's rising and we

don't want to risk the cores melting; if they do, they become useless.

'After that, well, thank you Jim, Aggie and Jørgen, you can carry on with your own expedition. CCDP staff will take over. They've large sledges which will be loaded with stores from the *Bolchorsky* for the drilling team, which the snocat will then tow to the drilling camp. I think that's all, we'd better get started.'

'What about the other snocat,' I asked. 'The one in the crevasse?'

'Good point. We'll try to tow it out when we first get there. The Naxos helicopter will be on standby to fly the bodies to Tanilaq, and the CCDP boys will later see if it can be repaired. If so, the Naxos snocat, on its return from the drilling camp, can be returned to the *Naxos Explorer*.'

That all seemed clear enough and we trooped outside to start operations. Very soon we had all trooped back in for in the last few minutes, out of nowhere, a katabatic gale, a *pitaraq*, a gravity-fed wind off the ice sheet, had descended. You could hardly stand-up on the deck and blown snow was scouring across the ship. Even if it had been possible to work the crane, it would have been unsafe to lower the snocat in this wind, it would just get battered against the side of the ship. We repaired back to the mess and back to hot coffee.

'This could go on for days,' announced Anton, 'or it could be stopped in an hour. I do not think it safe for any of you people to go back to the settlement. Even though it is only a half mile, you could easily get lost amongst the spindrift and frostbite would soon follow. We had better all sit it out onboard. You don't mind do

you?' he added, addressing the ship's first officer who was sitting with us.

'No, of course not, it's only sensible. Meanwhile...' The officer was interrupted by his radio coming to life. 'Now?... Straightaway?... Yes. I'll see to it.' Turning to us, he said, 'It's the wind. It's causing us to pull our moorings, and the captain is unhappy having the ship in this confined bay while it is blowing. We are leaving straight away. You all will have to come with us.'

It is an ill wind that blows nobody any good and, as it turned out, we were stuck on the ship for a day and a half before resuming operations. This gave Aggie, Jørgen and myself plenty of time to talk through our plans, and I eventually persuaded them that Christina could join us as far as the drilling camp, and Christina persuaded Doug that there was plenty of administrative work for her to do once she got to the camp in the light of all that had happened, and he agreed that she could stay on the ice cap until the end of the season. Christina, easily as it turned out, managed to cajole crew members and Naxos staff out of supplies so she was fully equipped to join us by the time the ship returned, except for skis and boots which she arranged to have flown over from Tanilaq at the first opportunity.

The Americans were hospitable and that evening I even found myself talking to Telford over a beer. Soon we were joined at the bar by Mark, Chuck and Randy, and also Mark's friend who had first invited them aboard. It turned out that this friend, the ship's radio operator, had been working with Mark at the oilfields in Prudhoe Bay soon after oil had been discovered in the area. It is strange, I

mused, but I have often found it the case that the remoter the area you are travelling in, particularly in polar regions, the more likely it is that you meet someone you know. But maybe it is not so improbable if people with similar passions are drawn to similar places. This thought turned my mind to Christina. Similar passions? Passion?

There was no passion for us that night for I had drunk too much beer and went to sleep it off in a spare cabin that had been allotted to me. As I left the mess I noticed, with a stab of jealousy, that the beautiful Christina was sitting at a table talking happily to members of the ship's crew. Had I the right to start feeling possessive, I wondered?

Although getting to sleep straightaway, I awoke in the middle of the night and slept lightly and badly thereafter. I dreamed on and off, with one particularly vivid dream of a pile of ice cores on a table, and other dreams of being chased down crevasses by polar bears. Although still feeling tired and slightly nauseous, I had to get up when I could sleep no longer and found lying in bed was no longer relaxing. However, once up, the vision of ice cores on a table remained vivid in my mind. Had I in fact dreamt this? I began to get vague recollections of wandering about the ship last night before I had managed to track down my cabin, of peering into doorways, of a look of surprise from the occupant of a cabin. Now, feeling uncertain about what was or was not a dream, I made my way to the mess, which I found easily, and brewed myself a cup of strong coffee. I had only myself for company which was perhaps not surprising as, although it was beginning to get light outside, the

clock on the wall indicated only a half past five. The coffee slowly unfuddled my brain and recollections of last night began to return.

I remembered leaving the mess, turning left along the corridor, coming to stairs going up and down, choosing... which way, up or down? To find out if I had really been dreaming it, I decided to see if I could retrace my steps of the night before. The ship appeared deserted but, as is the case in all ships, the gangways were brightly lit and there was the constant throb of engines below and the softer whirr of air vents above. I turned left out of the mess, the opposite direction from my cabin, and walked down the corridor, passing many cabins, all with shut doors. Eventually I did come to a stairway and hesitated, still unsure of my previous route. I chose down, which led me to a deck that was obviously no longer an accommodation area, having dirtier floors and chipped paint, but still brightly lit. Although all the doors had numbers on them there was no clue as to what was inside, so I opened the first one and looked in. It was obviously a workshop, with a wooden bench, vices, lathes and the like, and racks of tools. Another room was obviously a geological laboratory with shelves upon shelves of rocks, all labelled and held in place by batons against the pitching and rolling of the ship – although today the ship was steady as is the case in any ship in pack ice, which dampens the swell. One door I passed did have a name on it, 'Cold Room', but as its handles looked heavy I did not venture in.

However, I had my hand on the handle of the next door along when the door opposite opened and a large man, a very large man, Telford, emerged. He saw me at once and for a brief second I

noticed intense anger in his eyes, and he shouted ‘What the...’ before he reined himself in. ‘Hi Jim, what're you doing here?’

I had not got a ready excuse – 'excuse', why that word? I was not quite sure myself what I was doing, so I replied meekly, ‘I couldn't get back to sleep. I thought I would take a look around the ship. No reason, really.’

‘Let me show you round, then, I've time to spare.’

‘Okay, why not?’

‘Right then. This deck houses our laboratories which are mainly used for analysing rock samples and ocean sediment cores, the ship spending most of her time doing geological and geophysical survey. For oil, of course.’

Telford appeared genuinely helpful, and showed me into the laboratories and workshops at that level, finishing with a general tour of the ship. We ended up on the bridge, where I was introduced to the captain.

‘Coffee?’ the captain asked.

‘Yes please,’ for I was still suffering from the over-indulgence of the night before. The captain poured me a cup from an almost-full coffee machine, and we stood in silence for a while staring out of the bridge windows in the time-honoured way of seamen the world over. It was, though, the first time I had looked outside today.

‘I see we are still way offshore,’ I commented.

‘Yes,’ replied the captain, ‘it's quite calm here, but look at the shore – it is still lost in a haze of blown snow. Blowing a full gale at least.’

‘So no chance of going back in yet?’

‘Nope, not a hope in hell.’

I noticed that there was very little ice around us, the *pitaraq* having blown it seawards, leaving an area of almost clear water parallel to the coast.

‘So we just cruise around here for a bit?’

‘Yup, that's right.’

‘Hey, what's that over there? A ship?’ I said, pointing to a distant object I had just noticed to the north of us.

‘Yes, the CCDP's supply ship.’

‘Ah yes! The *Bolchorsky*?’

‘Yup, that's right. She's weathering the storm, same as us.’

We sipped coffee in silence after this conversation, just watching the sea. Suddenly a wave of tiredness swept over me, so I gave my thanks to the captain and Telford, and found my own way back to my cabin, this time with no detours. I lay down on my bed and, without really planning to, drifted quickly into sleep.

When I awoke I felt comfortable and warm even though I had gone to sleep fully clothed with no covers pulled over me.

‘What happened to you last night?’ a voice whispered in my ear as I came to with the realisation that Christina was lying down beside me.

‘What happened to you?’ I riposted. ‘I hardly saw you, when I left you were with...’

‘Are you jealous?’

‘Of course.’

‘That is good!’ and she kissed me.

We lay there for a long time, saying nothing, for myself I was just enjoying being close to her.

‘I missed you at breakfast,’ she said eventually, ‘and have come looking for you.’

‘Breakfast, that's a jolly good idea!’ I responded, which indicated I was feeling better. ‘You've had yours?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well, will you join me for a second one?’

Aggie and Jørgen were still supping coffee when we arrived in the mess.

‘Ah, there you are,’ called Aggie. ‘We sent Christina to look for you. Drank too much last night?’

‘No! Well, er, yes!’

‘Can't take your drink? We've been up for hours!’

‘I'm sure!’

I went to get some food and coffee from the hotplate, before rejoining them at table where we talked a bit about the weather, and they told me it was still too windy to return to the shore.

‘I know,’ I replied. ‘I was on the bridge earlier.’

They all looked at me, so I told them about my early morning venture, finishing with, ‘but I can't be sure. I feel I definitely did see some of the CCDP cores on the table last night, but there was nothing there when Telford showed me round.’

‘How do you know they were CCDP cores?’ asked Christina. ‘As you said, this ship does a lot of drilling of ocean sediment, and is bound to have similar looking cores, or at least core containers.’

‘I suppose so.’

‘Also,’ said Jørgen, ‘did you go in the cold room either last night or today?’

‘No, I'm sure of it. I would have remembered opening all the big door handles.’

‘Well, that proves it,’ he continued. ‘They couldn't have been ice cores or they would have melted. And containers are containers, as Christina says, you just saw some empty containers.’

‘But where were they this morning?’ I persisted.

‘Put away, of course.’

‘Yes,’ put in Aggie. ‘You said you were dreaming of polar bears and crevasses, and you've just been dreaming of ice cores as well. Otherwise you will be trying to convince us there is a polar bear on the ship as well! In fact,’ he said, turning round, ‘here he comes now.’

‘Do not joke with Jim about polar bears,’ Jørgen defended. ‘How many times do I have to tell you this?’

‘I'm sorry, Jim,’ Aggie apologised, ‘but you have been dreaming a lot, and been under stress.’

‘Don't patronise me,’ I responded sharply. ‘And what about my dream of Telford?’

‘What dream?’ they asked, and I realised I had not told them. I hesitated. I had dreamt of Telford before I had even seen him. Or maybe, like Mark's radio operator, I had seen him before in some remote, far-flung corner of the world. In my dream he was trying to kill me, whereas in reality he had mostly been friendly. But what about that angry look when he first saw me below decks? But wouldn't anyone be angry to find a stranger prowling around their

ship? And an oil company was bound to have some commercial secrets. I decided to change the subject and turning to Christina asked,

'Why did you abandon me last night?'

'Me, abandon you? You seemed more fond of your beer than me. You never...'

'Now, now,' cut in Aggie, 'you two stop arguing!'

Chapter 6. After the Storm

The gale stopped as suddenly as it had begun. We were all in the mess finishing lunch when Doug came in to say that the *pitaraq* appeared to be over and in about half an hour the ship should be back alongside the fast ice in the bay.

But that was not to be. When we steamed in, we found the storm had broken up all the ice and blown it out to sea. On deck, we leaned on the handrail and appraised the situation.

'Yes,' said Anton, 'it is unusual at this time of year for there to be so little ice.'

'How then,' asked Doug, 'are we to get the snocat ashore? We've certainly no boat big enough to take it.'

'What about the helicopter?' suggested Aggie.

'No way,' replied Doug. 'It's far too small.'

We all stared for a while in silence at the open water of the bay as the captain took the ship as near as he dared to the shore. We could see the full length of the fjord up to the foot of the glacier, and there still appeared to be a narrow band of sea-ice below the ice-cliffs. But there was a bar across the mouth of the fjord, and the captain would not risk his ship going over it. There were, however, a few large floes, remnants of the broken ice, still floating around in the bay which gave me an idea. Could we not lower the snocat onto one of these floes, and then use the ship's tenders to tow it up the fjord?

I suggested this to the assembled company, who were sceptical at first.

‘Don't be silly,’ said Aggie. ‘You can see how the ice has broken up, it would just break under its weight.’

‘No it wouldn't. It only broke up because of the force of a hundred mile an hour wind. As you know, floes can last ages in the Arctic ocean without breaking up.’

‘True,’ agreed Doug. ‘I think Jim may have an idea. It will probably be no problem to keep a floe pushed alongside while we lower the snocat. The difficulty will be getting the snocat off again – it would have to be driven off, and then there is a danger of the floe breaking at the edge.’

‘Yes, but snocats are designed to spread their weight,’ I persisted. ‘If we had the ship's boats pushing the floe hard against the fast ice, and perhaps also ropes attached it to the fast ice, I am sure we could drive it off.’

‘Mm... To lose one snocat is bad enough, we wouldn't want to lose two! Maybe we could try a dry-run without the snocat. Anton, what do you think are the chances of the wind getting up again? Obviously we couldn't tow it up against a headwind.’

‘I think we have a few hours grace,’ he replied. ‘Once a *pitaraq* has blown itself out it generally stays calm for a day or two. Although,’ he added, looking up at the sky, ‘there appears to be a weather front coming in. We should have a few hours, though.’

We talked my suggestion over for a bit longer and then agreed that we would test it out by carrying out a dry run. While we were discussing this the CCDP's own supply ship, the *Bolchorsky*, steamed into the bay. She was about the same size as the *Naxos Explorer*, and also had a red-painted hull, designed to show up in the pack

ice. However, like ourselves, she would be unable to moor against fast ice to unload her goods. Doug told us that the CCDP's supplies were in two large containers that were to be put on sledges and towed up to the drilling camp, but the *Bolchorsky* now faced the same problem as us in getting the sledges and containers ashore. The containers could probably be emptied, and their contents taken ashore in small loads, and it might even be possible to ferry the sledges ashore, but all in all it would be much easier if everything could be offloaded as originally planned. There were also the ice cores from the stricken snocat to be got on board.

All depended on finding a suitable floe and on the weather staying calm. The captain of the *Naxos Explorer* sent the ship's helicopter up to prospect for floes and then her two boats were launched to bring in the best candidate. We discussed whether it was best to use a floe with a long straight edge, which would be strong but might have difficulty matching exactly the edge of the fast ice, or one with a more pointed edge that could be pushed tight against the ice but which might more easily break. In the end we decided on the long straight edge. Luckily the test run proved the system worked and also showed that it was easier for the two boats to push the chosen floe rather than tow it.

At first the operation went without a hitch and we were all impressed by the efficiency of the *Naxos Explorer's* officers and crew. The wind stayed calm while the floe was pushed up the fjord with the snocat on it, although progress was slow as even a small floe is heavy and not designed for moving in a straight line. However, at the head of the fjord we suddenly realised that the floe

had been given too much momentum and there was no way to slow it down in time. As it collided with the stationary ice a crack appeared and spread quickly along its entire length, just missing the snocat. We had visions of the snocat disappearing into the depths of the fjord but our luck held as Telford gingerly drove the snocat over the now cracked floe and onto the fast ice, although he kept the door open and had a rope round his waist in case of a sudden sinking.

The weather remaining good, we decided there and then to drive up to the crevasse. As we had planned before the *pitaraq* struck, Telford would drive the snocat, and our party, that is Aggie, Jørgen and myself, and Mark's party, that is Mark Chuck and Randy, together with Doug and Anton, would go up to help with hauling the snocat out of the crevasse. Christina had decided not to come with us as she wanted to go to the settlement to sort out and test the equipment she had garnered, and also to collect her skis which were coming over from Tanilaq on the next helicopter flight.

Telford was a good driver, faithfully following the flagged route, but not driving too fast in case we crossed unseen snow bridges over unseen crevasses. One or two flags were missing, presumably blown away by the storm, and all our previous tracks had disappeared, except in a few places where ski tracks, sledge tracks and dog footprints stood proud of the snow like footprints in reverse, the surrounding snow having been eroded away by the wind. We directed Telford off the flagged route when we thought we were near the site of the accident, cursing ourselves for not having marked it with flags. A short stretch of old ski tracks sticking

out of the snow confirmed we were on course but these soon disappeared under a new snow drift. They never reappeared. Neither did the crevasse with the snocat. The whole area was smooth snow, a large drift having formed from the hundreds of tons of snow that would have spun down the glacier during the height of the storm.

We were at a loss as to what to do and nervous about taking the snocat too far into this area in case it encountered the same fate as the previous one.

'We could go ahead, probing with sticks,' suggested Randy.

'But we've no idea how deep this drift is,' I pointed out, 'and we don't have any suitable sticks with us.'

'And we do not know exactly where to start looking,' added Jørgen. 'To probe properly we would need lots of people in a long line.'

'We could look from the helicopter,' suggested Anton. 'Things might be clearer from the air.'

We agreed that this was probably the best thing to do and radioed to the ship for helicopter support. The chopper was soon with us but, although we were all taken up in turn, none of us could be quite sure of our bearings because so much snow had been moved by the gale, and snow bridges were hard to see having not had time to settle down into their crevasses.

'What we need,' said Aggie after our abortive flights, 'is to be able to see through the snow.'

'That's it Aggie!' I cried. 'The ship's bound to have a sonar or some gadget that sees through snow. After all, it is a geological survey

ship... Telford,' I said turning to him, 'would the ship have something suitable?'

'Mebbe,' he replied. 'I'll radio our chief scientist and see what he says.'

While Telford was on the radio, Anton came up with another idea. 'I would not underestimate our Eskimo friends,' he said. 'Tigatuq has been to the scene of the accident and snow is his life. He may be able to tell us where to look in spite of the new drifts.'

'And his dogs may be able to help by sniffing it out,' I added.

'I'm not so sure,' put in Doug. 'We've all spent a lot of time in snow before, and I don't see why Tigatuq would be better placed than any of us in finding the snocat.'

'Oh, come on!' exclaimed Aggie. 'The Inuit have fifty different names for snow, or whatever, and I bet these chaps have as well. Tigatuq, in any case, has lived in this area all his life and must have come up this glacier many times. He'll know. In fact, I'd put my money on Tigatuq and his dogs anytime against new-fangled gadgetry!'

When Telford finally came off the radio he announced that, yes, the ship did have suitable equipment which could speedily be flown here. Thus it was we agreed a two-pronged approach, with the helicopter sent back to collect both the sonar equipment and also Tigatuq with a dog or two – 'if he's around,' cautioned Anton. 'He may by now be away hunting with his team.'

It was a long wait but this time we had the new snocat to shelter in; indeed, being designed for long journeys over the ice, oft-times, no doubt, stormbound by blizzards for several days, it had full

cooking facilities so that we could enjoy endless cups of coffee. We discussed what we would do once the lost vehicle was found and concluded we would have to dig down for it by hand; this entailed another radio-call to the ship to ask for shovels to be brought.

I will not recount in detail how the snocat was found and the long tedious process of digging down to it; suffice it to say that we located it through a combination of airborne echo-location and Tigatuq's sense of place. It was buried about five metres down, and we soon realised that there was no way we would be able to haul it out with the resources we had. What we would do was take out the cores, send them to the *Bolchorsky,* and then the ship's engineers could cut through to the cab and remove the dead men. We felt that this last thing would have to be done sooner rather than later, at least before the relatives of the dead men started insisting they be brought out; indeed we thought it likely that they might want to come out here in any case 'together with planeloads of journalists' added Doug sourly. The stricken snocat itself would probably best be left until the summer after much of the covering snow had melted away.

But this was not our problem, our expedition's, I mean. After we had helped get the cores out and loaded them into the new snocat, a long and tiring job, we felt our duty was done. Telford offered us a lift by helicopter back to the settlement, which we accepted gratefully.

Mark and his team were also leaving, for they had persuaded the helicopter pilot to fly up the glacier a short way to check out their tent and I think they were surprised to hear that it was still standing

after the *pitaraq*. So, as we got ready to board the helicopter they donned skis.

We shook hands, wishing them good luck. 'We'll race you across the ice cap,' challenged Aggie. 'First group across buys the beer in Søndre Strømfjord.'

'You're on,' replied Mark.

'Of course,' added Aggie, 'you must allow for the fact that you've at least a day's start on us – not that it will make any difference. I'm sure we'll overtake you in any case.'

'Well make sure you don't. Goodbye, and good luck yourselves.'

We watched them ski away, envious that they had broken free before us, and then we were away ourselves, flying effortlessly over the ice in the opposite direction. It was a bit of a squash in the small helicopter, especially as Tigatuq was also flying back with his two dogs, who appeared as interested at looking out of the window as we were. Flying down the fjord we saw below us boats pushing an ice floe loaded with two large sledges on it, the CCDP's supplies which would soon be towed up to Camp Tunu.

Strange as it may seem, I had forgotten about Christina, so my heart gave a sudden jump as I saw her come out of our tent and watch the helicopter land. She rushed up to greet Tigatuq and his dogs, embracing all three at different times. I felt strangely jealous until she saw me and rushed up to me as well.

'Ah, James,' she exclaimed, giving me a kiss, 'there you are!'

'Yes,' I replied kissing her in return, 'here I am!' But she rather spoilt it by embracing and kissing Aggie and Jørgen as well.

Aggie responded as one might expect. ‘Yes, you can certainly come with us.’

‘Well, I am now ready,’ she declared to us all. ‘My skis came over this afternoon on the chopper. And I have sorted out all my food and things.’

‘Was the tent still standing this morning?’ asked Jørgen.’

‘Good point,’ I added.

‘Yes,’ replied Christina. ‘There was a lot of spindrift in it, which I have spent the day getting out, and everything has now dried off.’

‘Thank you,’ said Jørgen. ‘You have saved us hours.’

‘I was not sure what time you would be getting back, but I have cooked some food – it just needs heating up.’

‘Wow!’ started Aggie. ‘I hope...’

‘But do not expect me to cook for you every night,’ she interrupted, ‘although I will do my fair share.’

‘Bother!’

The evening was drawing on, it had been a long day, and we were all tired but eternally grateful to Christina for getting the meal ready. Having eaten, we were seated on food boxes outside our tent, drinking coffee in the late evening sun, enjoying that special contented feeling that can only be gained when relaxing outside on the snow after a long day’s work. But while the others were chatting away, my contentment began to fade and I foresaw problems, for myself, that is. There was no way that I would be able to have Christina all to myself in the days ahead, for the tent would be small and cramped, and we would all be rubbing shoulders with each other. Likewise, there would be no privacy on the exposed ice

sheet, and there was a chance that, seeing us all three at close quarters for a long time, she might eventually decide on Aggie, God forbid it, or, more likely, Jørgen. She and Jørgen were both Scandinavian, after all, and she must have more in common with him than me. And maybe she was a gold-digger as Aggie had suggested, only chatting me up to fulfil her selfish ambition of getting onto the Greenland ice cap. I was beginning to regret inviting her.

'You look serious, James,' Christina called across to me at that moment. 'Tell me what you are thinking?'

I jumped! 'It's nothing. I was only thinking of that polar bear,' I lied, 'and that poor dead man.'

'Oh James, poor you,' and she came across to sit next to me, putting her arm over my shoulders. We sat silent for a while but my thoughts did become less gloomy, and a warmth began to seep over my whole body. And then I had an inspiration. 'Christina, why don't we go and say goodbye to Tigatuq?'

'That is a good idea, James.'

'Hang on,' put in Aggie. 'We haven't finished discussing our plans yet.'

'That is true,' added Jørgen. 'Do we take up the offer of the boat? And we really should start packing tonight.'

We had been debating about the boat earlier, for Doug had offered us the use of the *Bolchorsky's* boat to ferry us and our gear to the foot of the glacier as a thank you for all our help. Now that the sea ice had all gone we would have a much harder job manhauling our gear to the foot of the glacier, but it would still be

possible to do it – over land rather than smooth sea ice. But the ground was rough, and it might add an extra day or two to our journey.

'But it's cheating,' argued Aggie. 'It means that we won't have done the crossing under all our own steam.'

'That's not true, Aggie,' I countered. 'We will still be crossing Greenland from coast to coast without help, and, after all, we have already got this far by helicopter.'

'And,' added Jørgen, 'we have used up several days with all that's been happening. We should take advantage of the boat.'

'But the Americans, Mark's team,' Aggie persisted, 'they started from here.'

'But that was over smooth sea ice.'

For some reason, Aggie had not been convinced at first. However, after supper he now seemed to have relented, and we all agreed to take the boat. Thereafter we discussed timetables, and concluded we would spend the next morning sorting and loading our equipment onto our sledges, and test our sledging technique in the afternoon. It was important to get it right, to make sure finally that everything was working, for we could be on our own for nearly two months. We agreed to try to book the boat for the late afternoon so that by the end of tomorrow we could feel we had finally started. None of us felt like packing that night, though, and while Christina and I went over to say goodbye to Tigatuq, Jørgen and Aggie decided to go for a ski in the gloaming.

Christina and I were in no hurry and as we walked she told me all her about her day, mainly small details of equipment and packing, and I recounted our adventures in return.

'Gosh, James, so much has happened to you in the last few days. And none of it was expected.'

'No, none of it. Now I just want to get going.'

'Me two. Finally to see the top of the Greenland ice cap.'

'And be with me?'

'Of course, I could not get there without you!'

I was not quite sure this was the answer I wanted but, rather than pursue it further, I let the subject drop and we walked on in silence for a while. We found Tigatuq outside his house, with a mass of dogs, all attached, as far as I could make out, to a dog sledge. He greeted us warmly, and Christina found out from him that he was about to set out on a hunting trip. Although the *pitaraq* had blown out most of the ice, there was still fast ice to the south which he wanted to make use of before it too broke out. 'It might be the last time he can go out with his dogs this season,' she translated for me.

She told him that she would be setting off with us tomorrow to the ice cap, at which news he shook his head and hugged her tightly. She told me later that he had asked 'why do you want to go up there? There is nothing to see, and it is a wild place, and no-one should go there.'

'I do not fully understand him,' she said, 'for he goes away himself for long trips.'

‘But he has a purpose, food, survival, visiting friends, and so on. I don’t think he understands why us westerners want to cross the ice, let alone go up there.’

‘I am not sure I understand myself,’ she added, and we both agreed on that.

Meanwhile Tigatuq was giving Christina more advice, telling her to follow exactly the flagged route through the crevasses. He still thought the route he had flagged had been moved by someone, albeit only a little. When asked by whom, he replied he did not know, and as far as he knew only he and Doug had been on the glacier before the snocat went down; they had both gone up the glacier putting the flags in, then double-checked them coming down, he with his dogs and Doug behind him on his skis.

Obviously, though, Tigatuq was impatient to be off so we said our goodbyes and watched him and his team disappear off at full speed.

‘Dog sledging is so much fun,’ said Christina, ‘and is probably the one thing I will miss most about Greenland.’

We went over to Tigatuq’s house and Christina greeted his wife, Kanileq, who was still standing at the door watching the way he had gone. She seemed disinclined to talk so we said goodbye and headed slowly back to camp, where we found the others getting into their sleeping bags. After cleaning our teeth, we both did likewise, sleeping in our thermal underclothes, as is the custom on expedition, unless it is cold when more clothes are kept on. Tonight, with four bodies jammed up tight in the tent, it was warm. I went to sleep quickly, but not before wishing that I had brought along a double sleeping-bag.

Chapter 7. Off At Last

We had not at this stage started a cooking rota, so it just happened that Jørgen woke first and, being nearest the door, lit the primus, scooped-up some snow into a billy and melted it for our wake-up tea. The Arctic may be a cold desert but you are never short of water while camping on snow or ice, although melting uses up valuable fuel. We breakfasted in our sleeping bags on the normal expedition diet of porridge and then leapt out of bed, keen to get going. Ablutions are kept to a minimum on this kind of trip, although teeth cleaning is *de rigeur*. Aggie had even cut his toothbrush in half, 'to save weight' he argued, although Jørgen and I had thought this was going a little too far. 'Just you see,' he added. 'Once we are hauling our sledges up the glacier, if I'm ahead, you will know why!'

Outside, instead of the sparkling scene of the day before, we found a dreich, chill day, a grey veil of cloud covering the sky and all colour washed out of the landscape. There was a sharp wind that cut straight through our clothing, so, in contrast to the previous evening, there was no incentive to sit around and chat. Unlike the 'heroic age' of polar exploration when everyone teamed up to pull one large sledge, we preferred the modern method of smaller individual sledges, or '*pulks*' as the Norwegians call them. You can tow over snow a much greater weight than can be carried on your back, which, of course, makes polar travel possible, and now we had to divide up all our gear and decide who would take what, trying to be fair in terms of weight.

Of course, as an expedition progresses, the overall load gets lighter as food and fuel is used up, so, to avoid dissent in the ranks you have to be scrupulously fair at the start to ensure everyone has an equal weight of these reducing items as well as non-reducing ones such as the tent, safety rope, rifle, stove and cooking pots. For comfort and ease of travel you want to keep your rucksack as light as possible, filling it mainly with relatively light items such as sleeping bags and spare clothes.

Having Christina with us, but keeping to only one tent, did help spread the load, but also complicated matters as we had pre-packed all our food into three-day man-packs – that is one pack per day for three people. The odds and ends of food Christina had rustled up for herself had to be sorted out as it would be silly for her to cook separately from us; after much discussion we decided that she should sort it into one-day packs, so that each day we would have one of our packs together with one of hers. I always find it amazing how seemingly small discrepancies in the distribution of food can create major tensions on expeditions, and we would be no exception. Meanwhile, we realised that Christina had no polythene bags to put her sorted food into, although by the end of the morning she had managed to rustle some up from the *Bolchorsky*. We also debated whether we would need more fuel for our primus stove to allow for the extra person, even though we had previously over-budgeted somewhat to allow for contingencies; to be safe, we obtained a few extra litres, again from the *Bolchorsky* as none was available in the settlement.

All this sorting and packing took time, not helped by the drab, grey light and the penetrating wind of a kind that chills the bones, makes rational thinking difficult and can easily lead to frayed tempers. The body tells the brain not to worry about the detail, but just to fling everything on the sledge and get moving! With the four of us, it was often the case that one or two people were busy on something, while the others hung around getting cold and impatient.

'Come on Christina,' said Aggie, 'just put those biscuits in the bag with the dried fruit and be done with it.'

'I cannot, the biscuits are more than a day's rations for one person, and I first need to split the packet in two. Then I need to add the meat.'

'Let's worry about that later.'

'No, I must sort it out now.'

'Can I help, then?'

'Yes,' replied Christina. 'You see those packets of meat? Divide them up into man-day rations.'

'You mean woman-day?'

'What is that?'

'No matter.'

After a few moments, Aggie asked, 'There're no labels, do you know which meat is which?'

'Yes.'

'Does it matter which packet I put in which pack?'

'Yes.'

'How do you tell without the labels?'

‘Well, the silver packets are curry. The plain ones are stew. The ones with... No, it would be quicker if I did it.’

‘Is there anything else I can do, then? It’s bloody freezing just hanging around.’

‘If you stopped talking to me I would get on quicker,’ she replied tersely.

So Aggie wandered over to Jørgen and me who were busy measuring out the primus fuel into containers. ‘Shall I take the tent down now?’ he asked.

‘Not yet,’ I responded. ‘Let’s leave it to the last minute.’

‘Why?’

‘We’ll need it to have lunch in.’

‘We can lunch sheltered against that shed.’

‘No!’

‘Why not?’

‘Because...’, and then I realised that there was no real reason why the tent could not come down now, but I was reluctant for some reason to change my mind. However Jørgen interjected with, ‘Come on Jim, there is no reason why he should not.’

‘I suppose not... Go on, then Aggie.’

‘Thank you.’

It was with such almost ill-tempered exchanges that we packed up to go, a pity really as we had all been good-natured up to now. It reflects, though, how moods can change with the weather and maybe illustrates that we are far more bound up with nature than we care to believe. It also shows that many, if not the majority of challenges on expedition, tend to be psychological rather than

physical: keeping groups working amicably together is a more difficult skill than the relatively straightforward business of fighting the elements.

But our sledges were loaded to our satisfaction eventually, and we settled down to lunch against the shed.

'Right, who's got it?' asked Aggie.

'I haven't,' I answered.

'Nor me,' said Jørgen.

'I have not seen it,' Christina added.

'Well, that's very good then, we've lost our lunch!' said Aggie constructively.

'Now come on, think, everybody,' I cut in. 'What happened at breakfast, Jørgen, when you opened one of our food packs? What did you do with the lunch items?'

'I opened the packet under the flysheet, and only took out the porridge, dried milk and sugar. Lunch and supper I left there.'

'Who saw them afterwards?' asked Aggie.

But nobody could remember seeing them, although Christina said that she might have collected them up with all her food items by mistake.

'So our lunch is now all packed up in your food parcels?' Aggie continued.

'I suppose so.'

'That's very good then,' he added caustically.

'Cut it out, Aggie,' I said sharply. 'It's obviously a mistake. Christina, can we break into your food parcels?'

‘Yes, but you will have to use four, as my food is sorted into one-day packs. Why not open one of your three-day packs, and I will open one of mine?’

‘That is sensible,’ put in Jørgen. ‘And we will keep the supper items for this evening.’

‘That will give us a spare breakfast,’ Aggie pointed out, ‘unless we arrange to finish our ice cap crossing before lunch!’

‘Let’s get on then,’ I said. ‘The sooner we get going, the sooner we’ll get that extra breakfast!’

Our moods slowly lightened while we ate and realised we had now finished all the tedious organisational chores. It was not particularly warm by the hut as the wind was of a kind that goes round everything, leaving no shelter, so we finished the meal quickly, biscuits, sardines, raisins and a Mars bar, donned skis and connected ourselves up to our *pulks*.

We had set aside some time after lunch to finally test all our equipment. It was the first time we had pulled full loads, and I was certainly nervous about how heavy they would feel: it was too late now to change anything major, but would we be able to pull the loads at the necessary pace? Certainly the loads would get lighter as the expedition progressed, but they would be heaviest for the first part of the trip when we would be going uphill. Would I manage? Would Christina manage, for she had insisted she would pull the same weight as everyone else? I looked across at her, and she caught my glance and smiled. I smiled back, pushed my doubts aside, and concentrated on testing out my sledge.

Our trials went well and, after minor adjustments, we decided that there was nothing for it but to set off!

'Hang on a minute,' called Aggie, 'we must take a setting-off photo.' So we all posed, grinning, in front of the self-timer, myself with an arm round Christina – for the first time that day, I realised.

'Right chaps,' I called out, 'you can be an honorary chap, Christina, right chaps, we are off! Across Greenland!'

'Across Greenland it is,' Jørgen and Aggie shouted together, and we were off, admittedly only the short distance to the shore where we had agreed to meet the boat. This took no time and, of course, was mainly downhill. Jørgen was the first to arrive, followed by Aggie.

'Well, that was no trouble,' Aggie said, 'crossing the ice cap will be a doddle!'

'Bound to be,' I agreed as I pulled up. 'Everyone happy with their sledge?'

There were no problems, except for the fact there was no sign of the boat that was to take us up the fjord.

'I bet they've forgotten,' said Aggie, but as soon as he said this we saw a boat pulling away from the *Bolchorsky*.

'No,' put in Jørgen, 'they were just waiting until they saw us.'

'Probably,' I agreed.

Although we had pulled the sledges easily over the snow, it took three people to lift each one onto the boat, although everything was loaded without mishap. There was a short choppy sea against us up the fjord, and the accompanying wind was strong; it was an open boat and every now and then freezing spray would come up

over the bow. We huddled down, backs to the wind, and Aggie said that maybe we should have gone overland to the foot of the glacier after all! Still, it was a lot quicker than manhauling.

I do not think the boat's crew envied us at all as we unloaded onto the fast ice. The sky was a uniform grey, and colour and contrast were absent from the landscape. There was no shelter whatever and the wind here, streaming down the glacier, appeared to be stronger and colder, carrying within it a few small ice pellets to sting the face. As the crew waved goodbye and headed the boat back down the fjord, we wasted no time in getting on our skis, attaching our sledges and heading to the foot of the glacier. We passed the two containers on sledges destined for the CCDP camp. There was no talking, each person lost in their thoughts, perhaps wondering, like me, if we were really sane.

Were we sane? No-one had forced us to come here, to haul a heavy sledge uphill to over two and a half thousand metres above sea level, to cross a featureless windswept plateau, and then down again the other side, a journey of six hundred kilometres. And it is not as though it had not been done before – the route has been followed numerous times since Nansen's first crossing. Instead, we all could have been safely at home, not risking ourselves, and Christina and I... Wait a minute! If I had not been intent on this expedition, if it were not for this passion for ice, then Christina and I would not have met... We were skiing, as is customary, in a single line, Christina was directly ahead of me and I looked at her bottom – a normal practice when manhauling for, unless you are leading, you have the choice of either looking down at the snow

immediately in front of you or of staring fixedly at the back of the person in front. I thought gloomily that staring at her behind was probably the nearest I would get to her in the next couple of months: there would be plenty of time for thought but little opportunity for action! I was, of course, to be proved wrong on the action side of things, although not in the way I was thinking then.

In the boat we had discussed our immediate plans and decided that we would ski for four hours and then set up camp for the night, which would be at about seven o'clock; it was our first day hauling, after all, and we wanted to break ourselves in slowly. We would be following our by now standard route up the glacier, the route originally flagged by Tigatuq and Doug: this was a pity in a way, for it meant following the tracks of the snocat, and we would not have the feeling of breaking trail in a pristine wilderness. But it could not be helped. We progressed quickly over the level sea ice, but once on the glacier it was a different thing as our *pulks* forced us to take notice of them.

'Only another two hundred miles uphill,' announced Aggie cheerfully.

Aggie, Aggie. At the back of my mind I was concerned that he seemed to have taken exception to Christina, and it appeared to me that she could not do anything right in his eyes. 'I hope their relationship improves, but not too much!' I sighed to myself. 'And mine also,' I added! With Christina present, the dynamics of our whole expedition seemed to have changed and I was unsure what the long-term consequences would be. I was fully aware, though, of the short-term consequences of going uphill! Skiing uphill very

quickly tests the adequacy of your equipment and general health, and any weak spots soon come to light – boots that rub, sore knees, unstable sledges, skis that slide backwards instead of gripping the snow, *et cetera*. At the start of a trip, even a small thing can create a worry: as we started uphill, I felt an ankle rubbing against the inside of my boot. Would it get worse and turn into a blister? What then? There was no opportunity to give it a day or two's rest. Could I survive three hundred miles with a blister? What would my ankle be like at the end? I felt next a twinge in my knee. Would my knee get worse, would two month's sledging make it worse? Or would I end up with it fitter and healthier?

Expeditions such as this tend to focus the mind on the immediate and the rest of the world becomes an irrelevance; maybe this is one reason why we go on them – modern civilised living is so easy, with no effort needed to survive day to day, that perhaps we do need now and then to practice just how to survive. You soon realise that patience can be sorely tried just by the general cussedness of things, even though, deep down, you realise that inanimate objects are not really out to get you, apart from, that is, my sledge. As we began the ascent of the glacier we traversed across the slope and my sledge, being top heavy, rolled over. Unless you have been manhauling you do not realise how incredibly annoying this is: the sledge is heavy to begin with and should be satisfied with just being pulled along, but it decides to tip over with a jolt, dragging you sideways and causing you to slip downhill on your skis. I happened to be at the back of the line, and cursed the indifference of the others while I struggled with my intransigent toboggan. Of course

they could not see what was happening behind them, and as we were heading into the wind, by the time I called for them to stop, they were too far away to hear. It thus became a battle just between me and my sledge. I righted it a few times, but it was not content with this. Skiing straight up the slope would have stopped it tipping, but it was too steep here to do this, so I was forced to traverse with the unhappy sledge. Eventually I had to re-pack the thing, itself a difficult task on the slope, but finally I managed to lower its centre of gravity until it was content. By this time the others were well out of sight, and I cursed them again for abandoning me, and cursed the insistent wind that was forever coming against me down the glacier.

Finally I was able to set off and, as the slope lessened, I at last caught sight of the others, standing around looking cold.

'Where've you been?' demanded Aggie.

'I was fighting my sledge.'

'Fighting your sledge?' queried Christina.

'Yes, fighting it. It kept rolling over but it's okay now. I had to re-pack it.'

'Well, we're cold,' said Aggie unnecessarily.

'Yes,' agreed Jørgen. 'Are you ready now?'

'Yes,' I answered even though I could have done with a rest. It was the normal situation of group expeditions: by the time the person at the back has caught up, those at the front, tired of waiting, move on. It is a pity that everyone is not genetically predisposed to walk at the same pace! But the wind was penetrating and it was sensible to keep moving, so we trudged on, the slope continuing to lessen

after the initial ramp onto the glacier. We were now level with the top of the ice-cliffs and could see the glacier ahead in its long undulations, almost level areas alternating with steeper rises, but none as steep as those we had just come up, so my sledge and I would probably now become friends. This was only sensible as we would be attached to each other for the next two months.

As we trudged on, our party became spread-out in the order of speed of travel, Jørgen at the front, Aggie next, then Christina and finally me. We had not really discussed how to organise ourselves on this expedition, whether to take it in turns to lead, or let everyone go at their own pace, with its attendant problems of the fastest waiting for the slowest. Although I had done most of the organising of this trip, I was not seen as the leader by the others, indeed Aggie and Jørgen jealously guarded their independence. But trudging along at the back, I realised that I would have to suggest that we keep together more, ideally everyone taking it in turns at the front. This would probably happen naturally if the snow were soft, for in such conditions it is hard work for the leader, who soon tires and gives way to somebody else, with those at the rear benefiting from the prepared *piste*. In bad weather, also, we must keep together and we should really at all times be within shouting distance in case of problems or a sudden change in the weather. I realised we would have to talk this through tonight but meanwhile it was heads down and one ski in front of the other, following the tracks of the snocat.

We did not stop again until our four hours were up when, ahead of me, I saw Aggie and Jørgen putting up the tent. This cheered me

considerably and did show that there were some advantages in coming in last!

'Oh there you are,' said Aggie, as I pulled up shortly after Christina. 'What kept you?'

'I was contemplating Christina's bum,' I answered without thinking.

'What?' she exclaimed.

'Well, there's not much else to look at when pottering along at the back!'

'Really, James!' said Christina.

The wind was still streaming down the glacier, if anything stronger than before, so we did not hang around. Christina and I looked out the food and the cooking things and then we all piled into the tent.

We laid out our karrimats on the ground-sheet to insulate us from the snow below, and placed the primus on a food-box in the middle of the pyramid tent; this is the correct way of doing things on polar expeditions, and you hang your socks to dry in the roof-space above the heat of the stove, for dry and comfortable feet is the secret of polar travel, indeed the secret of expedition travel generally.

'Well,' said Jørgen, once we had all sorted ourselves out. 'How did you all find the first day hauling?'

'Fine,' replied Aggie immediately. 'The crossing will be a mere stroll!'

'I don't know about you, Aggie,' I countered, 'but I'm tired, knackered in fact.'

'I am tired too,' added Christina, 'but *only* tired. My muscles are fine.'

‘That is good to hear,’ said Jørgen, ‘and it is the same with me.’

Were we all being truthful, I wondered? We were all tired, certainly, but obviously no-one was going to admit to worries about fitness, muscle-strain or blisters. After a hard day’s work, it is great just to lie down on your sleeping bag, out of the wind, with a warm glow suffusing through your body, relaxing while somebody else is doing the cooking. We had agreed that from now on the rota of cooking for the day would be in alphabetical order of Christian name, so it was Aggie who had drawn the short straw for this first night of travelling.

After our meal of three portions of rehydrated curry and rice mixed with one portion of beef stew, followed by cooked apple and sugar, we were soon in our sleeping bags, packed tight together on the groundsheet. I do not know if I was the first to get to sleep, but if not I must have been a close second, for the stress of the past few days now seemed to be behind me, and with today’s fresh air and exercise, I relaxed more easily.

But in the middle of the night I was awake, listening to the flapping of the tent against the wind and it seemed to be louder than before, an almost feverish thumping of the canvas. Had the wind got up? Was another *pitaraq* about to start? I could hear the soft sighing of spindrift blowing onto the side of the tent, an almost gentle sound that belies the harsh conditions outside. I realised that we should have built protective walls of snow around the tent as soon as we had arrived, standard practice on the ice cap, but for some reason none of us had thought of it, maybe we were just in too much of a hurry to get out of the wind. While these thoughts

circulated in my mind, the flapping appeared to get louder and louder, penetrating my brain so that all I could think of was the wind, an ever-increasing gale. Should I wake the others? Should I get up and build the walls myself? I lay there wide awake for hours, unable to decide, but I must have dozed off eventually for I awoke again to daylight and to sound the Aggie's voice saying, 'Jim, are you awake?'

'Mm?' I muttered.

'Time to get up, it's half past six, as we agreed.'

There appeared to have been no let-up in the wind, the sounds of flapping and spindrift as before, but the others seemed unworried by this. Jørgen undid the strings and stuck his head out of the door. 'Much as yesterday,' was his report. 'Still overcast, the wind perhaps a little bit stronger, with snow in the air.'

'It seemed much stronger in the night,' I ventured.

'I do not think so. I awoke once or twice, and it has not changed much. In the tent it always sounds stronger than it is.'

'I suppose so.' Perhaps the trouble is that I worry too much, with the result this morning that I did not feel as refreshed as I should have done. I snuggled down into my sleeping bag, cuddling against Christina, and could feel her body respond in unison. But I had no time to enjoy a cuddle with her, for Aggie shouted across, 'Come on Christina, time to get up. You're on cooking duty today.'

'What? I thought you were on duty today?'

'No! We do a day at a time, and my day was yesterday.'

'But you only cooked supper,' I pointed out.

‘Ah yes, luck of the draw. There are some advantages of being top of the alphabet but don’t worry, I’ll sort out breakfast and lunch on our last day.’

‘Do you promise?’ asked Christina.

‘Yes.’

‘Very well then, I will cook. What do want, everybody? There is a choice of porridge or porridge!’

‘Let’s have porridge, then,’ Aggie suggested.

‘I agree,’ I added. ‘Do you, Jørgen?’

‘Yes!’

‘That’s decided, then, Christina,’ I concluded. ‘Porridge it is.’

‘Right,’ she replied. ‘Hey Jørgen, could you put your hand outside the tent and fill this billy with snow. Let’s get going.’

She managed to cook without getting out of her sleeping bag, and was soon passing round hot tea, followed by porridge. We were all glowing with warmth when we finally got up, but this very quickly dissipated when we were outside, taking down the tent, reloading our sledges, and getting our skis on. As we set off I realised that we had not discussed how we should travel over the ice, taking it in turns to lead, but I just had time to shout ‘remember to keep together’ before Jørgen led off.

All morning we were carrying on uphill against the bitter wind, which was still flecked with minute ice pellets, and our loads got heavier and heavier. Heads were down and there was no incentive for talking. We continued following the snocat tracks, that came and went under new drifts, and passed occasional flags, ones that had survived the *pitaraq* of two days ago. I was mainly at the back,

but was glad that occasionally the others would stop so we could all get together for a biscuit break. But with five minutes of standing around, we would be cold enough to set off again. Head down, sledge pulling backwards, body pulling forwards.

My mind was in neutral, when I looked up with a start. Bearing down on me, or so it appeared, was a large, red snocat, a big, bearded man at the wheel. I froze. But it passed well clear of me, the driver, Telford, waved, and it was gone. I felt faint, the event as vivid as my dream. I looked up the glacier and saw that the others were stopped together, waiting for me. I set off towards them, telling myself that there was nothing ominous about this, it was merely the snocat returning from the crevasse, presumably with two bodies on board, the two dead drivers.

Christina was staring at me as I caught up with them.

'You look faint, James? Was it your dream?'

'Y-yes. Yes. That snocat, bearing down on me...'

'But you see, it was nothing to worry about, nothing happened?'

'Yes, nothing happened, did it?' said Aggie. 'Come on, I'm freezing.'

'Yes, you're right of course. Let's go.'

'That is the spirit, James' Christina encouraged. And once more it was head down, back to the harness.

Chapter 8. Diary Extracts

Day 2 [*of travel*]

By mid-morning we were finally level with the crevasse where the snocat was lost – taking us about half a day to travel a distance that had previously taken us only an hour or two without sledges. But this is the steepest part of the journey. Skiing conditions have been good, the *pitaraq* having provided us with good wind slab so that skis are gripping well and not sinking in. Still a strong headwind, giving us no incentive to stand around and chat, but at least it stops too much of a sweat building-up.

I was at the back all day, which is where I am normally quite happy to be, as here you are in the best position to see all that is happening. Although maybe this is an excuse for not being able to travel as fast as the others? They never seem to wait long enough when I catch up with them, but on balance, I suppose, they have used up more energy going faster than me, so it evens out in the end.

Concerned about an incipient blister on my left ankle, but at least my feet are dry. Also a slight ache in my right knee.

Christina's turn to cook. She seems to be coping well, and says she has no aches and pains. We were all tired after the first full day's travel and conversation was sparse after supper. Soon asleep.

Day 3

Wind today stronger if anything, enough to raise a constant spindrift at my feet, and immediately icing-up anything left on the ground. Still overcast and dull, and a bit depressing.

Just as we thought we were near the end of the initial steep pull up the glacier we encountered an area of bare ice, blown clear of snow by the wind. It was too steep to haul our sledges over without sliding backwards, and we could not get round to the right because of a gaping crevasse. Hence we had to do a long detour round to the left, involving much traversing which is always awkward and tiring when towing a sledge.

It was not until late afternoon that we finally covered new ground as we passed the area where we had previously found the American's tent. We are now through the main area of crevasses, and thankfully the slope has begun to lessen. But though the going is less steep, the constant headwind does not seem to make the going any easier.

Virtually no conversation during the day, except at lunchtime when we decided to put up the tent and shelter. I've put a plaster on my heel, which appears to have stopped the blister getting any worse, which is a relief, but Christina appears to be getting blisters on both her heels. This is a worry, as maybe her borrowed boots don't fit as well as they should. She laughs it off though, saying she has put on plasters which should sort it. But Jørgen looks concerned, and Aggie appears cross with her for allowing them to develop so far. Neither of them appear to have any problems, at least none that they admit to.

My turn to cook tonight, which is a chore when all you want to do is to lie down and rest. However, at least the cook is allowed to get into the tent first and get the primus going, while the others are building the sheltering wall of snowblocks round it. It is good to be out of the spindrift and wind, although their presence is still felt with the incessant hiss and flapping.

While cooking, I was concerned to see Christina apparently snuggling up to Jørgen, but the tent is so cramped perhaps I am imagining things. She is looking very red-faced from windburn, indeed we all are. Not much conversation, except a discussion on how far ahead the Americans might be. No sign of their tracks today, although not surprising because of the drifting snow.

Day 4

Wind even stronger today, still dead against us, pouring off the ice sheet. To give ourselves a rest, we decided on only half a day's travel, stopping after lunch, unless the wind dropped. It didn't!

As soon as we were out of the tent in the morning, we froze up, and even putting skis on was difficult as the spindrift caused everything to immediately choke up with ice. Aggie always seems to be the last to load his sledge, and we all got absolutely frozen waiting around for him to get ready. Jørgen lost his temper because of this, and Aggie replied tartly that everyone had his own pace and that if he, Jørgen, knew this, he would not pack up so quickly himself!

We are now taking it in turns to take the lead because the one at the front has to look up into the headwind every now and then to

check our compass bearing, while those at the back just plod along, head down, trusting the leader. Christina seems to be going slower today, travelling just in front of me, with the result that, when I'm not leading, Aggie and Jørgen tend to get far ahead, and then welcome us crossly when we meet up. It's the incessant wind causing these problems, which means we can never relax and enjoy ourselves unless in the tent. However, these conditions are nothing unusual for ice cap travel. My right knee feels sore, not helped by the fact that, with head down, and hauling hard, there is not much else to think about. One imagines the worst, that the knee will slowly deteriorate until I will be unable to go on.

At lunchtime the wind is noticeably increasing, with spindrift at times obscuring everything. We decided to call it a day, to everyone's relief, I am sure, although in practice we tell each other what a pain it is to waste half day when we have hardly started!

After lunch everyone drifted off for a sleep for a while, but I wake at the sound of an incessant banging, dreaming that I am trapped in a snocat down a crevasse and that someone is banging at the door. I turn round to look, it is Telford leering in at me... The banging was just the flapping of the tent, magnified in my dream. But it is loud, even as I write, and the spindrift, as usual, is hissing loudly on the canvas. It is cosy and warm, and I would be enjoying the sense of security the tent brings if it weren't for the fear that this weather could last for days, and we might never achieve our objective.

Jørgen asked Christina why she was skiing so slowly, and she admitted, reluctantly I thought, that it was her blisters on her ankles. 'Well, we must see them,' said Aggie, 'or you will hold us all

up.' I helped her take her socks off and noticed that they were damp, wet in fact. She admitted that they had been wet most of the time, and then Aggie got into an argument with her, saying it was not surprising she had blisters, and didn't she know the first thing about skiing, that it was imperative to keep your feet as dry as possible? Christina looked suitably chastened and then, to everyone's surprise, burst into tears. I put my arm round her, and she sobbed into my shoulders, while Aggie turned away in disgust, pretending to be interested in reading the book he had brought along for lie-up days such as this, while Jørgen remonstrated with him.

Christina's ankles were red, and the skin had broken, not a good sign. I said we should let her blisters dry out today, and we should bandage them tomorrow. Meanwhile we must get all her socks dry. Obviously her ski boots were not as waterproof as they should be for this kind of trip, and I told her that she should have been hanging her socks above the primus each evening, and kept in her sleeping bag overnight to dry out. I also suggested that she wear polythene bags over her socks when skiing: these should keep them dry, although it depended how much her feet sweated.

Unlike the tent itself, we were mostly silent the rest of the afternoon, dozing, reading, writing diaries, or merely cogitating. I find it frustrating that Christina and I are unable to have a private conversation.

Jørgen's turn on cook duty. It is in weather like this that you regret the necessity of bodily functions, for just to go outside to relieve yourself becomes an epic expedition in itself.

Day 5

The wind must have been full gale force this morning, so no chance of travel, but good for Christina's blisters! Aggie's turn to cook the porridge, and he appeared over-cheerful at breakfast, probably trying to make up for his churlish behaviour yesterday; I can't stand people who are cheerful at breakfast! A slight mishap at breakfast when Christina by mistake tipped some of her porridge onto Jørgen's sleeping bag, and I was unnecessarily jealous as I watched Christina make it up to Jørgen, especially when they spoke a few words in Norwegian/Swedish, which I could not understand.

The morning dragged on for ever, as did the afternoon. At some stage we relived the events at the start of the expedition, but it is amazing how quickly they are fading from my mind; I seem to be getting-over the horror of the polar bear attack and the dead men in the snocat.

The wind seems finally to be dropping. We have decided to have an early supper, and then try to travel for an hour or so in the evening. Anything to get moving again!

This idea proved a failure, for we had just gone through all the palava of taking the tent down, digging out and loading our sledges, and were about to set off, when tremendous gusts of wind attacked us from the side, almost blowing us over, and raising impenetrable spindrift. Almost as soon as it had started, the wind dropped again, before another gust came along, stronger than the first. We managed to re-erect the tent between gusts, and all piled in. Eventually the wind steadied, still strong, from the south. The

earlier calm must have been the eye of the storm, but we have hope for the morrow because at least the weather has changed.

Day 6

We were all awake early, and it took me a while to realise why – the tent was not flapping, everything was silent! I peered out of the door. Not a cloud in the sky, the white plateau stretching out before us, incredibly bright, and to the right the eastern mountains in all their glory. There appeared to have been some snow in the night, a few centimetres of the softest, whitest down.

It took no discussion for us to agree to be up at once, and for the first time we could eat our breakfast outside, enjoying the warmth of the sun on our bodies. This is why we were here! Christina looked happy, and hugged everybody when she first came out of the tent.

We were away by seven, gliding over the new snow, and new, cold snow is always a delight to ski over. However the delight did not last long for, as the sun rose higher, the snow warmed up and began to stick to skis and sledges. This meant a short stop to take off and wax our skis. As we set off again I noticed that there was high cloud to the south, approaching rapidly, so that by mid-morning the brightness of the sun had been curtailed. A breeze also appeared from nowhere, making itself felt by a gentle brush on the cheeks.

By lunchtime we were back to the familiar headwind, and dull, overcast skies, so much so that we had to put up the tent for shelter to eat in comfort. As we were still in sight of the eastern mountains, before we set out this morning we took sightings of some

identifiable summits and, by triangulation, worked out our location. Before we left for Greenland we had decided not to take a global positioning handset, but to navigate the old-fashioned way. Somehow the use of the technology seemed inappropriate, as its use depended on other people's infrastructure, i.e. satellites, which to us took away our independence. I am sure Bjartur of Summerhouses would have sympathised!

We were exactly where we thought we should be from our compass bearings and dead reckoning! However, we have only travelled about thirty kilometres so far – a slow pace, but expected as we were still climbing up the edge of the ice cap, our loads are full, and we haven't yet gained full fitness. We should start making better time now as the slope is lessening significantly.

Only just over two hundred kilometres to Camp Tunu, only another two hundred kilometres with Christina! What then? There was little chance of our relationship developing at present, and after Camp Tunu I would be abandoning her. When would I next see her? If ever? Would she want to? What could I do to help things along? I am sure she resents too much help and support on this trip, resents being seen as only a 'weak female'. However, the blisters episode indicates that she is not really experienced in this kind of travel. It was going to be difficult to tread the line between offering advice and being seen as interfering! But this is always the problem with women!

In mid-afternoon, looking back the way we had come, I noticed a black speck on the horizon. This soon grew bigger, and we realised it was the Telford's snocat. I think we all resented its appearance, as

up to then we had had the ice sheet to ourselves, and were feeling possessive about it. And of course it was reintroducing the outside world, and memories of the start of the expedition.

As the huge vehicle, towing its two sledges, caught up with us I noticed with a shudder the bearded face of Telford in the driving seat. He stopped the vehicle alongside us and shouted, 'Want a coffee?' We, I think reluctantly, accepted as it would have seemed churlish not to. There were three others apart from Telford, CCDP staff heading up to work on the ice-drilling. We unhitched sledge and skis, and climbed in the side door to the accommodation area. Like a snail that carries all that it needs around with it, this vehicle held all the wonders of civilisation within its curtilage so that here, alone in the midst of the wilderness of Greenland, we could sit in armchairs and drink coffee out of a china cup! Luxury indeed!

But we did not stay long, I think each group not particularly envying the other, and after polite conversation we left. The snocat was soon off, leaving obvious tracks in the snow which then led us to debate whether we should follow them, and thus be beholden to technology, or keep our own counsel off to the side. We unanimously decided on the latter course of action.

The rest of the day was a bit of a trudge, the appearance of the snocat having interfered with our own expedition. Christina's blisters are still sore, but she swears that they are not getting any worse. As we settle down for the night, we are back to the familiar flapping of the tent and the hiss of spindrift.

Day 7

The weather turned much colder today and our incipient beards (excepting Christina, of course!) became iced up. We had to keep checking each others' noses for frost-nip, and frequently had to stop, putting our backs to the wind, to give our faces a chance to thaw out. To think that the snocat should be at Camp Tunu by now, while we were about a fortnight away, trudging along at our own behest! Were we mad? And was Tigatuq right after all? Why would anyone want to come up here?

Grey, with snow pellets in the air. I suppose that with this weather there is no incentive to hang around enjoying the view, but a constant headwind is tiring, both physically and psychologically. The polythene bags on Christina's feet seem to be keeping her socks dry.

Day 8

Not much to report today. Wind perhaps a little lighter, and the sky brighter, but still very cold with snow pellets. I think we are getting fitter, as we are stopping for rests less often. My knee no longer aches, which is a good thing.

All but the highest coastal mountains have now disappeared, so that the only view is a flat plateau in all directions, although with slight undulations ahead. There is an immensity and loneliness to this the place. We are alone in the world, and the outside world and its happenings are but an irrelevance.

Most of the talk in the tent is about food, which shows that the expedition is following the correct procedure. The volume of grub appears to be declining, but it is only that we are getting hungrier!

The increased hunger to some extent compensates for the increasing pall of dried food.

Christina appears quiet and withdrawn, but when asked if she is okay, she says she's fine. Maybe it is that time of the month.

Day 9

Wind, wind, wind! Why cannot we have a calm day, or at least a following wind?

Chapter 9. Day Ten

My plea must have been heeded by a higher authority for I awoke in the middle of the night, unsure why at first. The tent was still, and everything was quiet, apart from a very gentle background purr. Of course! The wind had dropped, and it was snowing hard.

It was darker than normal in the tent when we finally awoke, and appeared more cramped. Christina, whose turn it was to cook, opened the door and announced that there was at least twenty centimetres of new snow, and it was still snowing hard. She banged the side of the tent, and, as the snow slid off, it brightened considerably inside. I think we all appreciated the calm, finding it easier to relax and make conversation.

The mood was jovial at breakfast, and the day started well. I love snow, and the soft flakes were just how they should be. Because it was snowing so heavily, we had decided to take it in turns to be at the front and take the continual compass bearings that would be needed. Aggie agreed to lead for the first hour, and thereafter it would go in alphabetical order. The skiing was perfect, and I hardly noticed my sledge.

When it was Christina's turn to hand over to me, a wind was beginning to pick up and the snow was beginning to stream past, but luckily, for the first time since we had been on the ice, the wind was behind us. I was enjoying being at the front, forging through the virginal snow with ease as, although deep, it was as light as down. I had probably gone for more than my hour when I stopped

for the others to catch up. Aggie was right behind me, and we stood and chatted for a bit.

'They're taking a long time to catch up, I wonder what's happened to them?' commented Aggie.

'Oh, nothing much, probably just enjoying the weather,' I replied frivolously, but I was beginning to get a little bit worried, and, with a strengthening wind and blowing snow, it was becoming difficult to look back the way we had come. While skiing along at the front, I had not really realised how much conditions were deteriorating, and now there was a hiss of spindrift as well; our tracks were fast disappearing.

Aggie and I faced a dilemma. The others should catch up if we waited here, but what if they had lost our tracks? What if we back-tracked to find them, and then lost the tracks ourselves? In either case, both parties could end up permanently separated. Aggie was towing the tent, so if something had happened to them, they would have no shelter. At times like these you always imagine that it is the worst that has happened. But what could have happened? It was hard to see what could be holding them up. I cursed myself for getting out of earshot, and not making sure we were always in contact with each other.

After about half-an-hour of waiting, we decided that we had to do something, for, amongst other things we were getting cold and inaction was no longer a possibility.

'I suppose we'll have to retrace out steps.'

'I don't see what else we can do,' Aggie replied. 'We'll just have to risk that we meet up. They've a compass and know the bearing, so,

in spite of the lack of visibility, they should be heading in the right direction – tracks or no tracks.'

'But they'll not have to wander far off course for us to miss them completely.'

'I know, but is there any alternative? I suppose we could put up the tent, and hope they find it. But, then, if something has happened, they will quickly get hypothermia, and we will never forgive ourselves.'

'I've been thinking, and there are, as far as I can work out, only three possibilities. Firstly that they have some physical injury, which seems unlikely, bearing in mind today's easy going. Secondly, that they have fallen down a crevasse, and that seems unlikely as well because we haven't seen one for days. Or lastly,' and I shuddered, 'they have been attacked by a polar bear.'

'Up here?' queried Aggie.

'It's unlikely, I agree, but we can't rule it out.'

'I suppose not. And there is, of course, a more likely explanation, that they got too far behind, chatting or something, and lost sight of us, and then could no longer see our tracks.'

'So they could even be ahead of us?'

'It's possible.'

'Hm.'

'It's not sensible to stay here, or to go on, so retracing our steps is the only option.'

We calculated that it was certainly more than an hour since either of us had seen them for sure, so we would head back for an hour and a quarter. If we still had not found them, we would return on a

parallel course, and then repeat the manoeuvre on a different parallel course, so quartering the ground – but if they were actually ahead of us...

Our tracks had disappeared remarkably quickly so we had to travel on a back-bearing, although the snowy headwind meant our faces became plastered with snow and our eyelashes froze together every time we looked up. As we back-tracked I was occupied with Aggie's suggestion that maybe Jørgen and Christina had got behind because they were chatting, and as I mulled this idea over in my mind I became unreasonably jealous. If something serious had happened, Christina might at this very moment be looking after Jørgen, or *vice-versa*, and I became even more jealous! I was not quite sure if it were worse that Jørgen had been attacked by a polar bear or that Christina would be comforting him!

We had been trudging along for half an hour, and there was a tension in my stomach brought on by a fear of what we would find – or would not find – when during one of my frequent stops to check the compass, Aggie pointed out that it was getting lighter ahead: 'The sky must be clearing, so maybe the snow'll stop.'

I looked up but something did not seem quite right, there was a pink glow to the light, which immediately began to fade. 'No, hang on,' I shouted excitedly, 'it's a flare! They must have fired a rescue flare! Let's get going.'

We set off immediately in its direction, although it had only been a glow in the sky and did not pinpoint them exactly. But at least it showed that there was life on this ice cap other than us! I was instantly cheerful. To give us more chance of finding them we skied

in line abreast, although you can hardly call two people a line! Conditions were still bad, and the goggles we had put on to protect our eyes from the snow were not much help as they were continually misting-up. There were no more flares and my instant cheerfulness began to wane after a while, although nothing could detract from the fact that Christina and Jørgen must be nearby.

A greyness loomed out of the driving snow and I was just about to shout out 'There they are!' when I immediately changed it to 'Stop, stop!' For right in front of my skis, indeed my skis overhung, right in front of me was the gaping hole of an open crevasse. Aggie had stopped just in time as well. We both edged back a little and he said, 'Well that's it then!' Although I thought the same, my mouth in fact came out with 'no, no! They are probably trapped on the other side, let's follow along it.'

'Which way, left or right?'

'It doesn't really matter. Why not right?'

'Okay.'

We trudged on, paralleling the crevasse which did not seem particularly wide, although impossibly wide to attempt a crossing, and for short lengths was bridged with snow too weak to hold our weight. As normal, I was imagining the worst case scenario, we would never find them, both lost in the depths of the Greenland ice sheet, perhaps to emerge five thousand years from now from a glacier snout at the head of one of the fjords. They would not grow old in the ice, and would emerge as young as they were now whereas I would continue ageing...

It was not quite the worst case scenario but not far off it. I took in the scene instantly. Jørgen had disappeared up to his armpits, with a gaping, dark hole between him and his sledge behind, the sledge itself, still attached to him by his tow-rope, on solid ground but teetering on the overhanging edge of the crevasse. The snow bridge on either side of him had remained intact when it had collapsed under his weight and it was this that had saved him; his arms were stretched out sideways, supported by the snow on either side. I noticed also a thin rope round his waist attached to two skis stuck endways in the snow on firm ground in front of him – obviously a hastily prepared belay set up by Christina, using her sledge's tow-rope. Her sledge was nearby, but where was she?

My heart missed a beat, Christina gone! Aggie, who had more presence of mind than me, shouted across, 'Jørgen, Jørgen, where's Christina?'

Jørgen looked up, obviously far gone with cold, and I am not sure he had until now noticed our arrival. He managed to get out 'She's gone, she's gone, looking for a way to get across,' and he pointed to our right.

'How long ago?'

But Jørgen shook his head – it looked like his strength was fast failing and hypothermia setting in. However we could not reach across to him without the risk of ourselves falling into the crevasse and we dare not help him out by hauling on the thin belay rope round his waist because, as well as the risk of this breaking, his sledge would be dragged forward as well; it would topple into the

depths of the crevasse and, in all probability, take him with it to the bottom.

We began to realise the dilemma that had faced Christina and Jørgen. Presumably Jørgen had been unable to untie himself from his sledge and was hampered by still having his skis on; he could not get them off, and so haul himself out, although that would be risky as the remaining bridge could collapse any minute. Even if he could, he would drag the sledge into the crevasse. Worst luck, our only strong rope was on his sledge; presumably Christina must now be trying to find a way to re-cross the crevasse and get to the sledge, detach Jørgen from it and get the rope. As it was, all that was belaying Jørgen was Christina's tow-rope, and not a particularly strong one at that; certainly not designed to take the full weight of someone hanging in a crevasse. Her skis made a suitable belay but, because of the shortness of the rope, the skis were stuck in dangerously near the edge of the crevasse.

Stretching away to the left you could just see through the falling snow the depression representing the sagging snow bridge of the crevasse, but it was not obvious unless you looked carefully – easy to miss in whiteout conditions. Aggie and I had crossed it without noticing and, although Christina had presumably done the same, it was just bad luck that Jørgen had fallen through. However, without wearing skis to spread the load, attempting to cross the crevasse without them would be courting further disaster and Christina had taken hers off to use as a belay for Jørgen.

The wind and the blowing snow made it difficult to think, but we had to act quickly. I made some quick decisions: 'Aggie, you stay

here with Jørgen. Untie your sledge and strengthen his belay with your tow-rope. I'll go and look for Christina, her tracks may still show up in places. Failing that, I will find a strong enough bridge and ski across and see you from the other side. Give me, say, fifteen minutes.'

'Okay,' and he set to work immediately.

'Failing that...' , I did not like to consider the full import of those words. How far would she go? What if she had wandered too far to the left and fallen in? Or too far to the right and was now lost on the plateau?

As it happened, I had only been skiing for a few minutes when I came across her, a snow-encrusted phantom stumbling in my direction. She showed little emotion when she saw me, presumably no longer having any to spare. She stared at me for a second, then said, 'I could not find a way across. I have been probing with my ski sticks and it is all too soft.'

I put my arms around her as best as I could. She too seemed to suffering from near hypothermia. 'There's no time to waste, we must get back to the others. We must all keep together', adding under my breath that it was a bit late for saying that!

I led the way back to Jørgen, it taking an immeasurably long time as Christina was sinking in the snow with each step as she followed my tracks. I thought of offering her my skis, but this would lose us valuable time, and in any case her boots were a different size. I had to concentrate on keeping the route as my ski tracks were hardly visible through the eternally moving spindrift which had filled them with snow in the short time since I had come out. I risked only an

occasional look back to see if Christina was still there and had no time for a sense of relief when Aggie and Jørgen at last came into view.

'Aggie, here's Christina, hypothermic I think. I'm going to go back a bit and risk skiing across, I don't think we have any other choice.' He nodded.

I set off through the snow and before they were lost to view, I turned round to see Aggie comforting her. I did not go far, for I had previously noticed a narrow stretch of bridged crevasse where I might risk a crossing. I skied away from the crevasse a short distance, then turned around and set off towards it at speed, attacking it at right angles. Luck was with me and, once safely on the far side, I turned left to get opposite the others. As soon as I saw them, I shouted across, but there was probably no need as Aggie and Christina were looking my way. I had been working out what to do as I skied along, so as soon as I arrived I took off my skis and stuck them end-on into the snow and gingerly edged forward on my stomach to the back of Jørgen's sledge. I managed to tie a prussik-sling onto his sledge, I crept back and then used the sling to belay Jørgen's sledge to my skis. At last, there was no danger of Jørgen's sledge falling into the crevasse and pulling him down.

Thereafter, moving carefully in case the edge of the snow bridge gave way, I got our main climbing rope off Jørgen's sledge and threw an end across, shouting to Aggie to belay it to Christina's up-ended skis, while I tied my end to my up-ended skis. Luckily Jørgen had enough strength left to grab hold of the rope once this was

done, so the immediate danger of him disappearing into the depths of the crevasse was averted.

I now belayed myself with a short length of the free end of the rope and crept forward on my stomach: stretching out full length, I could just reach the very front of Jørgen's sledge and managed to cut it free from its tow-rope with my knife. Phew! We were getting there! I let out a deep sigh and slithered back from the edge until it was safe to stand upright. Aggie meanwhile had been busy, had thrown the other end of the rope around Jørgen, got it under his arms, and was now hauling him up. I watched, but there was a problem: Jørgen's skis were catching under the overhanging edge of the snow bridge and preventing Aggie pulling him out.

'I'll come and help,' I shouted. I pulled Jørgen's sledge back from the edge, untied it, put on my skis, and dashed back the way I had come. Luck was still with me so that I did not join Jørgen in his crevasse! Once back with Aggie, I took off my skis and again belayed myself to them. Crawling forward, I broke the snow bridge where it joined the crevasse, so I could reach down and grab the front of Jørgen's skis, 'Now, Aggie, haul!', and haul he did! I guided the skis out of the crevasse and out popped Jørgen. He immediately collapsed to the ground and Christina went up to him.

Aggie and I both agreed that there was no time to lose and the tent went up in no time. We got the other two in, stripped off their outer clothes, and manhandled them into their sleeping bags. We decided it best to bring all the sledges together before settling down ourselves – we did not want them to disappear into snowdrifts of their own making. This time Aggie did belay me as I

went across to collect Jørgen's sledge, although the snow bridge remained unbroken as I crossed. Jørgen must just have been unlucky, but at least he was luckier than those in the snocat ! To date we had not been roped-up on the ice cap because we had not assessed the crevasse danger to be great enough on the route we had chosen. We would have to be more careful in the future!

It was not long before Aggie and I were back in the tent. We got into our sleeping bags and then lay in a tight huddle, Christina and Jørgen in the middle and Aggie and me on the outside; our body warmth should help warm up the others, who luckily did not seem too far gone with hypothermia. But Jørgen had been in the hole for over an hour without moving, and Christina had been exposed to the full force of the wind and driving snow for the same period, with little activity to keep her warm, so their core temperatures must have dropped significantly. I think Aggie and I were so relieved at finding them safe that a wave of relaxation passed over us as we lay down. Soon we were all asleep, to the familiar rustling of the tent and the hiss of blowing ice crystals.

Chapter 10. Camp Tunu

We must have slept or dozed for a few hours and it was Aggie who stirred first, bringing us all back to reality with, 'Who would like a cup of tea? And some grub?'

'That is a good idea,' said Christina. 'What do you think, Jørgen?'

'Yes, I am starving.'

I was glad to hear their responses, spoken in a tone that indicated they had recovered, at least from their hypothermia. 'Do you think your temperature's back to normal?' I asked them both.

'Yes,' they answered. 'At least it feels like it,' added Jørgen.

'Great!'

I volunteered to go to the sledges to bring in the food and cooking gear. It was still much the same outside, blowing and snowing, the sledges were disappearing under drift, and it took me some time to extract the cooking gear. The first thing I noticed as I came back into the tent was Christina with an arm round Jørgen. I pretended not to see it and carried on with a cheerful, 'Here's the primus, and some snow, Aggie, let's get a brew up.'

'Right-ho!'

I helped Aggie sort out the food, watched by Christina and Jørgen who were lying side by side in their sleeping bags. Was I jealous? Like hell I was!, but I could not say anything after their recent ordeal.

Christina's next remark caught me by surprise. 'James, what happened? You should have waited! I was hours with Jørgen, but I could not... One person...'

‘Yes,’ added Jørgen. ‘You should not have been so far ahead.’

I almost blurted out ‘you are the one to talk, when you are leading, you never wait for the others’, but I managed to bite back my tongue. However Aggie came in with, ‘What kept you Jørgen? Why were you so far back in the first place? Having it off with Christina?’

‘Aggie,’ I defended, ‘that’s not fair. Jørgen had fallen into a crevasse, remember?’

‘Yes, that is true. I was not in it for the fun of the thing!’ added Jørgen hotly.

‘Yes, Aggie,’ put in Christina, ‘while you were skiing blindly on ahead, Jørgen was stuck in the crevasse. I did my best, but there was nothing...’ and she burst into tears.

Jørgen comforted her and I, with great strength of will, apologised: ‘I am sorry. It was such lovely skiing, I just kept on going. I have no excuse really!’

It was all I could say. Conversation lapsed after that and there was a tense atmosphere in the tent all evening; I think we all must have been suffering from delayed shock and said the first things that came into our heads. So much had happened on this trip that our emotions had become overloaded. On a positive note, though, Christina and Jørgen seemed to be suffering no physical effects from their ordeal.

Next morning I awoke feeling hot and sweaty and there was an unusual brightness in the tent: the sun must be shining! Without leaving my sleeping bag, I crawled over to the door, opened it and tied it back. A surge of cool air entered the tent and I could lie back

looking out to the two-dimensional world beyond – flat, white ice stretching to the horizon meeting a uniform, deep blue sky – nothing else; and it was bright, a contrast to the grey gloom of the days since we had started our crossing (apart from that one morning). My exertions had woken the others and, although my spirits had immediately risen with the weather, they immediately fell when I noticed that Christina was snuggled up against Jørgen. She was the first to speak.

'Ah, sunshine, just what we are all needing, James.'

'Yes,' I agreed, 'about time too! Let's hope it lasts.'

'Let's enjoy it for a bit,' suggested Aggie. 'We can have a leisurely morning drying clothes and things, and set off after lunch. By the way,' he added, turning to Christina and Jørgen, 'how're you feeling? I don't mean feeling Jørgen, Christina!' he said, suddenly noticing their cuddling, 'But how well are you feeling?'

'A leisurely morning would be a good idea, Aggie,' replied Christina, and we were all agreed. There was not a breath of wind outside and, as is the case on snow, although the temperature was well below freezing, it felt hot in the sun. In fact the warmth on our bodies was so blissful that, after rigging up a washing line for drying and airing our clothes and bedding, we lay outside on our karrimats after breakfast and sunbathed. We spoke little, keeping our thoughts to ourselves or committing them to our diaries, and spent the time reading, writing and dozing.

At one stage we went and inspected the crevasse, peering into its sharp blue depths, but it looked relatively harmless in the sunshine. However, as it appeared there were undulations in the ground

ahead, when we set off after lunch we made sure we were roped together. ‘A good thing too,’ said Christina, ‘I wish we had been before!’

Things now finally settled down and there were no further incidents to break up the daily routine. The sun shone unbroken day after day so that, in spite of gallons of sun-cream, our faces blackened and noses peeled in the intense glare. Although at times there was a hint of coolness from the vaguest of northerly winds, over-heating was the main problem and we mostly travelled in shirt sleeves. As the undulations in the ice passed behind us, the danger of crevasses receded and, with the clear weather, we were soon travelling unroped again; it did not really matter if we spread out over the ice cap – there was certainly no premium on space! We decided to pace ourselves at twenty kilometres a day, and as the going had become easy, we could afford a short doze and a sunbathe at lunchtime and still cover our distance. There was an exception to this on a couple of days when large fields of sastrugi held up our progress; skiing over sastrugi, that is hard ridges and hollows of eroded windblown snow, is like skiing over a ploughed field and is particularly wearying.

But the last of the coastal mountains slowly faded from view, in fact until we lost them they were the only feature that relieved the monotony of the landscape! Now the horizon was the same in all directions, and we felt, and we were, on the top of the world. The horizon never changed, there was no sense of time or distance travelled, for the beginning of one day was no different from the beginning of the next.

The only cloud on the horizon was my relationship with Christina. Trudging over the ice left me a lot of time for thinking, my thoughts perhaps becoming obsessive so that I could not fully enjoy my surroundings, my thoughts generally centering on whether her current interest in Jørgen was merely temporary, a result of a shared experience, perhaps touched with a hint of guilt that she had been unable to help him more, or whether it was the beginning of a long-term infatuation. What about her initial feelings for me when we first met? Had there been genuine attraction there, or was she just using me, as Aggie had suggested? Did she now blame me for what had happened to Jørgen in the crevasse? Had she really transferred her affection to Jørgen, and would it be permanent? You could see how someone could fall for Jørgen's clean-cut lines, his manly, muscular, leanness, but would she realise that, underneath all this, Jørgen was, ultimately, boring!? Would this worry her? Maybe she was looking for stability, not excitement? But, in that case, why had she wangled herself onto our trip? Why was she now expeditioning in one of the most remote parts of the world? No, I could only hope that Jørgen's boringness would finally shine through and she would fall into my arms again! But if she did not? I had not come to Greenland, after all, to fall in love, but to enjoy the challenge of one of the epic journeys of this planet. If Christina did go off with Jørgen, would it really matter to me? But that night in Tigatuq's hut, that was real... Such were the thoughts jostling around my head as we skied, apparently motionless on the ice sheet while the world rotated beneath our feet.

The good weather we were now having enabled us to be more sociable, to ski side by side and chat rather than being stretched out in a long line. In practice sociability came and went, sometimes we would be alone with our thoughts, other times chatting away. With Christina my conversations were always superficial, whether marvelling at the good weather, or discussing ski resorts she had been to. I had not the courage to raise all the questions bubbling away beneath the surface and neither did she – always assuming she had similar doubts and certainties of her own; it is never safe to assume that other people are thinking the same way as you!

After we had been on the march for nearly three weeks dark specks became visible in the far distance which slowly resolved themselves into a campsite – Camp Tunu. We congratulated ourselves on our navigation but at the same time I think we all resented this intrusion onto the ice cap, an ice cap we had to come think of as our own; the outside world was about to re-impose itself, although there had already been a brief incursion the day before when we had seen a small airplane fly by in the distance.

From the sighting of the camp to our eventual arrival took a whole day of travel. The first thing we came across when we arrived was a tent very like our own, placed a few hundred metres from the camp itself. The tent looked vaguely familiar and there were a couple of figures pottering around its vicinity.

'Hey,' said Aggie. 'That's the American's tent isn't it? We've caught them up.'

‘It looks like it,’ I concurred, and, sure enough, as we drew level, a familiar figure, Mark, called out, ‘So you’ve caught us up, I see!’

We exchanged greetings with Mark and Chuck, and then I added, ‘I hadn’t realised you were heading for Camp Tunu as well.’

‘We weren’t originally, it wasn’t in our plan,’ Mark replied, but Randy here, he developed a sore back, I think he pulled a muscle while coming up the glacier.’

‘Poor chap! Where is he?’

‘In the tent, flat on his back. We’ve decided to stay here a few days while Randy gives his back a rest, after that we’ll see. Mebbe go on, mebbe head back, mebbe arrange for a flight to Tanilaq, it all depends...’

‘What bad luck,’ said Aggie. ‘It means we’ll get there first and probably miss the beer you owe us! But, seriously, is there anything we can do to help?’

‘Not really,’ replied Mark. ‘Chuck and I will just have to hang around, perhaps we can lend a hand here at the camp. Randy’s had a sore back before, and says all it needs is rest.’

We stayed and chatted a bit longer and then noticed a figure striding out from the nearby camp. ‘Hi everybody!’ it shouted when still some distance off. ‘Glad you could make it!’ It was Doug.

I had not expected to see him here as I thought his job was to organise things from the Tanilaq end. The first thing he did when he reached us was to give Christina a kiss.

‘What do think of this epic expedition stuff, my girl? Had enough? Come to enjoy the luxuries of Camp Tunu?’ Turning to us, he added, ‘Let me show you all around.’

‘That would be good,’ Christina replied.

‘I didn’t expect to see you here,’ I said. ‘Up for a jolly?’

He smiled. ‘No, of course not! Unlike you lot, some of us have work to do – and that applies to you now, Christina. Your holiday’s over! No, we’ve finally got our charter plane, a Twin Otter, and I’ve come up with it to check the airstrip, and to check over the camp generally – to see if there’s anything they need, anything we can do to improve it. Once I’m back at base, Christina can take over from me up here.’

‘Were you expecting us today?’ queried Jørgen.

‘No, of course not, well not exactly. I was expecting you about this time, estimating two to three weeks. Anyway, how’ve you all got on?’

We stood around chatting for a bit, us recounting the more interesting bits of our trip, and then Doug took us over to the camp.

‘I’ll start by introducing you to the base commander, an interesting bloke, an Austrian, Professor Hermann Waldblick.’

‘He’s a bit out of place up here!’ I joked.

‘What? He has a small office in the mess building over there.’

The mess building, like all the buildings at the camp, was in effect a portakabin on skis, having been towed up by snocat from the base. Doug explained that the Americans, the USA that is, not really believing in global warming, had not supported the ice-drilling programme, and thus had refused to help with logistical support. ‘The obvious way to have set up this base,’ explained Doug, ‘was not to have used the rather old-fashioned method of towing everything up from the coast on sledges, but to have flown

everything in on ski-based Hercules aircraft, like they do in Antarctica. But the Yanks would not loan the CCDP their planes, and they also persuaded the Canadians not to do likewise. And no other nation has any suitable planes, or if they did, the Yanks put a stopper on them.'

'And the Twin Otters?' I asked.

'Easy enough to charter from Iceland once the weather improves after winter, but only good for light loads. We've six planned flights this summer, but all the heavy stuff, mainly the ice-cores, will go overland to the coast.'

We entered the mess which consisted mainly of a long table with chairs all around; at the far end was a dividing wall containing a hatch and a door which led to the galley. Squeezed in beyond this was a small office, big enough only for one man, a desk, a shelf and a laptop. Professor Waldblick, a small, plump man with a red face and balding hair, greeted us jovially.

'Ah yes, I have heard about you all. You tried to rescue Ravji and Helmut from the snocat. Thank you. It must have been trying. And you, Mister Ashworth, you saw Alex meet his end, that must have been terrible. What can I say?... Ah Christina,' he continued after a pause, looking at her as if for the first time. 'The beautiful Christina. Welcome!', and he gave her a big hug and a kiss, 'you have got here at last. I hope you will keep us all in order! I have missed your lovely voice over the radio, keeping our spirits up through the long winter days, but this is much better, to have you in person! I do not know if Doug has told you, but I have arranged for you to be with us all summer, not leaving us until the last flight. You will help with the

data-logging, Ravji, that was his job, and the new man Telford has brought up, he is no good. Not conscientious enough. It is essential in our drilling to record everything accurately. If one core gets muddled up with the next, what good will our work be? Then we will not be able to prove this global warming. But you Christina, I know, you are very thorough, your attention to detail...'

'Yes, thank you,' said Doug, interrupting the professor in full flow. 'Christina and the others, I was showing them around the base. Would you like to take over?'

'Delighted! It is not often we get visitors! There have only been nine of us here over the winter, and our conversation is running out! Let me introduce you to the others. It is not a very big camp, but interesting in the extreme. You have obviously seen the small galley and mess. It is difficult as Helmut was our chef, so now we take it in turns to cook. I was on duty yesterday, we all share duties equally. It was wonderful – tinned stew and potatoes, followed by rice pudding. Christina, would you...'

Before he could say anymore, Christina replied that yes, she would be willing to do her fair share, but no more!

We had the benefit of the professor's voluble and effusive conversation all the way round the camp. Apart from the mess hut, there was an accommodation hut with bunks for fifteen, a work hut where equipment was stored and maintained, and a generator plant with its nearby stack of forty-five gallon oil drums. Next to the generator shed the snocat was parked. The buildings were all laid out in a horseshoe shape, close-together, we were told, so that it would be difficult to get lost when moving between them in a

blizzard. As it was, large snowdrifts were thrown-up against the sides of most of them, witness to the continual ice cap wind that, over the past few days, had apparently departed us for a short spring-holiday.

On the fourth side was the drilling rig itself. Here, the top layers of snow had been dug away, so that the rig base was well below ground level; above the ground, there was a roofed retaining wall of corrugated aluminium which protected the whole structure from the elements. We walked down a sloping path to the drilling area, passing on our left a passageway cut into the snow with a door at the end.

'What's in there?' asked Aggie.

'Oh, that is where we keep our cores,' answered the professor. 'They come up in five-metre lengths and in there we cut them into manageable one-metre lengths. They are then stored until we can take them down to the coast in the snocat. Of course we must be careful to log the details of each one as they all look the same. Below ground level, the ice here is a constant temperature, minus ten degrees, and ideal for storing them. We keep the door shut at all times, and only go in when we have to. We must be very careful to avoid contamination with modern day air. That is why the drilling rig is roofed. You cannot have blowing snow around the rig, as it may stick to the cores as they come out and so contaminate them with modern-day material,' he explained. 'Also, we do not want the sun on the cores as it may melt the ice.'

'It means as well,' I pointed out, 'that working conditions up here can't be too bad, sheltered from the wind.'

‘That is right! They are excellent working conditions, except when it is very cold outside and our equipment can freeze up. But at this time of year, it is perfect.’

We stood and watched the drilling process for a while. It was very much how I imagined drilling for oil must be. A tall derrick, with drilling rods, which, as the depth got deeper, meant a lot of connecting and disconnecting of the rods. There was a hollow drill bit at the end, which could bring up the ice in five-metre lengths and, with about two and a half kilometres of ice underneath us, that would mean a lot of drilling.

‘In fact,’ said the professor, ‘although we are about two and a half kilometres above sea level, the ice is thicker than that as its weight is causing the land underneath to be pushed below sea level.’

‘How far have you got so far?’ asked Aggie.

‘Now? We are... What depth have we reached, Ed?’ he shouted across to the man standing at the bottom of the derrick.

‘When we next bring the rods up,’ replied Ed, ‘we’ll have reached seven hundred and sixty metres.’

‘Still a long way to go, then,’ I commented. ‘When do you expect...’ I was interrupted by a hand dumped strongly on my shoulder and a loud voice booming in my ear, ‘Hi there, Jim, good to see you.’

I instantly recognised the voice as Telford’s, and turned round to see the large man towering over me.

‘Hello,’ I responded.

‘Had a good trip? I don’t know why you chaps want to slog it all that way on foot when, as you know, you could have been sitting in comfort all that way drinking tea!’

‘Did you meet any crevasses after you passed us?’ I asked.

‘No, plain sailing!’

‘Well, we must’ve just been unlucky,’ and I recounted the story of how we had almost lost Jørgen.

Chapter 11. Journey Continued

Professor Waldblick invited us all to stay for lunch and we accepted gratefully.

'We had better tell our cook,' said the professor. 'Make yourselves at home. We normally have lunch at midday. Christina, why not come with me, and I will show you your quarters.'

We stayed for a while, watching the drilling progress, but there was not much to see and I thought the routine must get pretty tedious up here, drilling day after day, with not much to do in your spare time. This would be Christina's lot for the next few months, and I wondered how she would cope. She would be the only woman in a group of men who had been up here on the ice sheet for a whole winter, and I instantly became jealous of all of them: it was not fair, I had only recently met her, and now I would be leaving her again! In fact, would I see her again? Would she want to meet up with me in the autumn, or did she still blame me for the crevasse episode? I hated to leave here without being sure of her feelings towards me and there were now only a couple of hours left before we would be leaving. I must find an opportunity to talk to her alone.

But this was easier thought than done. She was now with Professor Waldblick and my impression of him was that he was a difficult man to drag yourself away from; Aggie, Jørgen and myself now thought it best to go back to our sledges and tow them into the camp. Doug appeared to be at a loose end, and we volunteered him to bring in Christina's sledge, as we would need to sort through her load and extract the stuff we would be taking on with us. We told

him it would give him a feeling for real expedition travel, none of this cheating using aircraft and snocats!

It was still the glorious sunshine we had been enjoying on the ice cap these last few days, and it was difficult to imagine it could be otherwise; it felt positively hot in the camp, and everyone was walking around in shirtsleeves. Heading back to our sledges, ambling along rather than the pulling heavy loads we were used to, with far-distant horizons in all directions, with pristine snow and bright blue skies, this was why we were in the Arctic! To the far south, however, I noticed a cloud on the horizon, a real cloud, that is, additional to my clouded relationship with Christina.

We were soon back at the camp site of Mark, Randy and Chuck, where we had left our sledges, and, once there, Mark offered us all a mug of coffee. I had a quick look in the tent to see Randy stretched out flat on his back, and exchanged a few words with him: he told me it would probably be a week before he was up and about as he did not want to risk moving about too soon in case it made his back worse again. I commiserated and took my leave. The rest of us then sat on the sledges and chatted for a while, and I heard Doug tell Mark that the staff at Camp Tunu would be grateful for some help later today, and probably tomorrow as well, helping load empty oil drums onto sledges for towing back down to the coast. Mark said he and Chuck would be happy to oblige.

Thereafter we returned to the camp with our *pulks* and began to rearrange our gear in the light of Christina leaving us. We had by now eaten through about half of our food supplies and also made considerable inroads into our fuel, so our sledges should be lighter

than when we first set out even though the load would only be divided amongst three. We had not been at this chore long when we were joined by Professor Waldblick and Christina.

'Hello,' said the professor. 'Lunch will be in twenty minutes. I warn you, though, it is Claude's turn to cook today, and his food is terrible. Yes, I mean that, terrible! He hates cooking, but he does not mean his food to be terrible. I am sure he tries his best, but he has not got a clue. I was telling Christina that the last time he was on duty he forgot to put yeast into the bread and it came out as hard as rock. He assures me that lunch today will be edible, it is chilli con carne, sausages and beans that is, and I cannot see that he can go wrong with this. And then….'

'Are you getting another cook to replace Helmut?' interrupted Aggie.

'Oh yes, that is the plan. But of course it is not that long since the accident, and Doug has been trying, haven't you Doug? Doug has been trying to get hold of one, but it will take time – and then we have to get him from Europe to Iceland to Greenland to here... How are we getting on in finding someone Doug?'

'We've tracked one down, but he won't be able get here for three or four weeks.'

'That is a pity,' continued the professor, 'because giving up a day to do the cooking, that slows up the programme. And we will have to continue to put up with Claude's cooking when it's his turn...'

He carried on in this garrulous vein, which I think was his nature rather than the result of a winter spent with a small audience, but it made it difficult for us to concentrate on our packing. However, as it

would have been impolite to ask him to go away, we gave up on the attempt to pack and enjoyed his company and the sunshine until lunch was announced.

I walked to the mess with Christina, but only had time for neutral questions about what she thought of her accommodation and the people she had met so far. Whatever the professor's views of Claude's cooking, even though he seem to have overdone the chilli powder, I at least found it edible – anything would have been, after three weeks of dried food! There was space at table for us because the drilling crew ate in shifts to ensure that work at the rig was not interrupted, and, once we were seated, I took the opportunity to have a good look at Christina's companions for the next five months. Except for the professor himself, they were all bearded as is generally the case on polar expeditions, not only out of laziness, or because in traditional male-dominated expeditions there is no woman to say otherwise, but also because beards did noticeably help to keep the face warm in the Arctic winds. They looked a friendly bunch and even the over-sized Telford seemed more human when seated. However, they were keen for first-hand accounts of what had happened on the coast, so we had to relive the events again and put up with what seemed like an interrogation, although I suppose this was fair enough as they had shared a winter here with the deceased men.

It appeared only a short time, though, before we were once more out on the snow sorting our gear, this time without the benefit of the professor's presence, who had gone off to instruct Christina in the data-logging process.

By mid-afternoon we were ready to set off once more into the boondocks, bound for the eastern side of the ice cap and our eventual arrival at Søndre Strømfjord airport. A crowd gathered to see us off – Mark, Randy, Doug, Telford, Professor Waldblick, Christina, and all the other Camp Tunu members not directly involved in the drilling. Everyone wanted to shake our hands, and I gave Christina a tight hug and a kiss, who responded with, 'Why, James, you have not done this for a long time!' This gave me some hopes for our future, although they were immediately dashed as it appeared to me as if she was hugging Aggie and Jørgen equally passionately. I was also annoyed with myself as I had not found an opportunity to speak to her alone.

Although we set off with loud cheers from the crowd, my thoughts were not cheerful as we took up the strain and skied off into the great white yonder. But I was determined to put Christina behind me and concentrate my efforts on enjoying the Arctic and completing the crossing; there were plenty of girls in the world, after all, and I would have ample opportunity in the future to meet many of them – but I might not have the opportunity again to be in the middle of the Greenland ice sheet. We took the positions that were to turn out to be constant for the rest of the trip, Jørgen at the front, Aggie in the middle and myself at the back, and it was not long before Jørgen was way ahead: was he thinking about Christina as well?

As we pulled away from the camp I noticed that the small cloud I had seen earlier had decided to bring along its friends, who were now joining forces in their competition to cover the whole sky. The

sun soon gave up the struggle and the landscape slowly retreated from its blue-white brightness to the drab grey it had taken on at the beginning of the crossing; contrast was lost so that you could not see where the sky ended and the snow began, or see the sastrugi that began to litter our path. It took concentration to negotiate this rough field of sastrugi, and the continuous staring down at the snow that this necessitated had a mesmerising, almost hallucinatory effect, not helped by the sledge making its presence felt by oft-times refusing to follow the route you had taken, or pulling you back suddenly with a jolt. As a result, although progress was fast at first, it soon slowed, so that it was a tired, almost dispirited group that finally stopped to set up camp. Additionally, a wind was picking up from the south, leaving little inclination to stand around outside and talk.

However, once the tent was up and Jørgen had the grub underway, we did lie down and discuss things.

'The tent's certainly more spacious now,' commented Aggie.

'Yes, but it is less cosy,' Jørgen replied.

'That's true! I'll just have to snuggle up against Jim!'

'No you won't,' I riposted.

'Are you missing Christina, Jim?' asked Aggie. 'I bet you are! And I'm sure Jørgen is as well, aren't you Jørgen?'

'Oh shut up,' I answered irritably.

'Yes,' replied Jørgen, ignoring me. 'Yes I am missing Christina. But I do not care. We have this crossing to complete, and that will take up my mind.'

‘And you Jim? She has been going cold on you, hasn’t she, ever since Jørgen fell down his crevasse?’

I was tempted to say ‘shut up’ again, but I changed my mind as I needed to talk, and if I could not talk to my friends, who could I talk to? Better than having my thoughts whirling around my head day after day as we trudged over the ice cap.

‘Yes,’ I eventually replied, ‘I think she has. She still blames me for abandoning her and Jørgen... She is fond of you, isn’t she, Jørgen?’

‘Yes, and I am fond of her.’

‘How fond?’ Aggie interjected.

‘Mm. Very,’ Jørgen answered. ‘But I do not think I am in love, not yet. You have been in love with her ever since you first saw her in the hotel, haven’t you Jim?’

‘Head over heels, I would say,’ added Aggie.

There was a pause before I replied. ‘Yes, yes I am. And now I don’t know what to do. I think she’s in love with you more than me, Jørgen, and I made no plans to see her again when we get back, I’ll probably never see her again. But no matter, we have this ice cap to cross, one thing at a time.’

‘Don’t be ridiculous, Jim,’ put in Aggie. ‘Jørgen says he is fond of her but not in love, and look at that hug she gave you as we set off after lunch. She’s madly in love with you, but got frightened and confused at the crevasse incident, blamed you unfairly, and is now waiting for you to kiss and make up. Like a fool you didn’t, too proud or too shy, I don’t know which! If I were you, as soon as we get to Søndre Strømfjord and fly out, I would arrange a stopover at Tanilaq, wangle a flight to Camp Tunu – remember, old Waldblick

said she would be there all summer – grab her round the waist and ask her to be yours forever. Be quick about it, and make sure you get there before Jørgen! However, if you've no inclination to do this in a month's time when we've reached the east coast, then I would drop the idea, and never think of her again.'

I was stunned, Aggie seemed to be revealing an understanding of which I had never thought him capable. Was he right, though? But unless I carried out his course of action, perhaps I would never find out...

'And think, Jim,' he continued, 'you'd better arrange to see her straight away, think of her alone all summer with lots of eligible men; unless you get back to her as soon as possible, she might forget you and go off with one of them.'

This was more like the old Aggie, unable to stop rubbing salt into the wounds, but he surprised me again by adding, 'On the other hand, absence makes the heart grow fonder. She will have time to forget the crevasse incident, and think of all the times she was with you, yes, even as we speak, she will be lying on her bunk, her eyes shut, dreaming of you, wishing she had made up to you before you left, and being cross with herself for being so cold towards you recently. You were as bad as each other – obviously made for each other! Sorry Jørgen, you only caught the rebound!'

We were all silent for a bit, the hissing of the primus gaining a sudden prominence in the tent.

'I think Aggie is right,' said Jørgen. 'I enjoyed her company. But I will not take her away from you, Jim. You asked her to come with us, and I was cross with you for this, but she kept me company

when I was stuck in the crevasse, and I might not have survived if she had not been there. This has created a bond between us but, I think, a bond of comfort, of friendship, not of love. At least I do not think so...' and he tailed off.

'Come on now,' put in Aggie. 'We didn't come to Greenland to get woman trouble! Trust you Jim, to bring this upon us! Don't fight over her Jørgen, let Jim have her. Just because you've fallen in a crevasse together, doesn't mean you're entitled to her! Now, back to the expedition. How many miles should we aim for per day? With five weeks before we fly out...'

Chapter 12. Diary Extracts

Day 21

Our discussion last night cleared the air, at least for me. I feel happier than I have for days, so much so that I have been dogging Aggie's tail all day. Most of the time I have been thinking about what I shall say to her when I fly, unexpectedly, into Camp Tunu and surprise her!

I have not really noticed the weather today, although it appears grey with a chill wind from the south. The sastrugi field we were ploughing through yesterday unexpectedly petered out soon after we set off, so we easily achieved our target of twenty kilometres a day, which we had decided last night to maintain: this should give us a fortnight in hand for eventualities.

Day 22

Eventualities seem to have begun today, with a strengthening wind from the south and a return of the sastrugi. Very slow and tiring progress, some of the ridges being almost a metre high. Only about ten kilometres.

Day 23

Only another ten kilometres or thereabouts, and the hiss of spindrift has been with us all day. This at times makes it hard to see the sastrugi, so we stumble over them, it's almost like skiing through rough pack ice. Aggie got a bruised ankle when his sledge rushed down a ridge and caught the back of his boots. He is limping

badly, and slowing us down, although I must say it gives Jørgen and me more time for rests.

Aggie grumpy in the tent tonight. His ankle does look badly swollen, but he says there is no muscle, tendon or bone damage. I hope he's right.

Day 25

We had to give up today at lunchtime, partly because of Aggie's ankle, and because of tiredness from endlessly pulling sledges over a ploughed field made of sandpaper, made worse by a chilling wind: travelling this slowly, we could not generate enough heat to keep warm.

I think we all enjoyed a restful afternoon in the tent, mainly reading and sleeping. Jørgen cheered us up by announcing that, although we had only covered about five kilometres today, we had now passed the halfway mark – three hundred and twenty five kilometres out of six hundred and fifty.

'All downhill from now,' Aggie pronounced at this news, and he was right: our loads were getting noticeably lighter, and over the coming days gravity would begin to be in our favour.

Day 26

The rest seemed to have done Aggie's ankle some good, but going still rough so we did not manage more than ten kilometres today.

Day 28

Woke to a full blizzard, tent wildly flapping, and no chance of even thinking of going out. Snow and spindrift beating against the side of the tent all day. We went outside, visibility zero, for a short period to heighten the wall of snow-blocks round the tent, which caused less flapping, but the added shelter means that snow now drifts up on the roof, squashing it down and making the tent much smaller inside. Every hour or so one of us goes outside to clear off the snow to stop the tent collapsing and to stop our entrance from drifting-up, which at least gives you something to do even though you ice up instantly once outside. Not sure what we shall do about this overnight.

It is now afternoon, and no sign of the blizzard easing-up. We are getting bored.

While lying on my back, retracing in my mind some of the happenings on this expedition, I realised that what had happened – polar bear attacks, *pitaraqs,* snocats down crevasses, Jørgen down a crevasse*, et cetera* – made a good story, perhaps exciting enough to write-up as a book? To this end, I have spent the afternoon going back through my diary, adding notes and *aide-memoires,* but often getting side-tracked by my thoughts, particularly when recalling my times with Christina at the start of things: I spend a lot of time daydreaming about our future together.

Jørgen and Aggie spent the afternoon reading and I have decided not to tell them about my thoughts on turning our exploits into a book, at least not yet – at the moment I want to keep the idea to myself.

I plan an exciting start – a polar bear attack, and also a love interest with a happy ending, of course! But I would also like to try to explain the thrall of polar regions – if that is possible!

Day 29

Weather as bad as ever, very frustrating as we are keen to get going. We still take it in turns to go out every hour or so to stop the tent drifting up, but otherwise lie-around feeling bored and restless. We talk over the expedition to date, we discuss other expeditions, we write diaries, we read, but nothing can take away from the cooped-up feeling. I am beginning to get bedsores from all this lying around, or so it seems!

Day 31

It is now the fourth day of lie-up. Although lie-up days are something you have to plan for, and look forward to when the going is hard, you never really enjoy them after the second day. Like waiting for a bus or train – at the time it seems interminable, but when you finally get moving, it is as if all the waiting never existed! At least, I comfort myself with this thought.

The blizzard must blow itself out soon. Jørgen and I are getting tired of Aggie's jokes and we seem to have exhausted all conversation and reading material, having read each other's books. In desperation, Aggie asks if he can read my diary, but I say no! Even meals are no longer a high-point, as we are not hungry from all this lying around and do not have the hunger to enjoy the dehydrated grub.

I am getting nervous that this delay, added to the slow travelling of the previous days, means we will miss our flight.

Day 32

I awoke with a start in the middle of the night, dreaming I had fallen down a crevasse, being smothered by snow, silently drifting into oblivion... But once awake, I realised that the silence was real: the wind had dropped. I heard my companions move in their sleeping bags and realised they were awake also. It was four in the morning, and, as it would be light enough to travel by six and we certainly did not need any more sleep, we decided to have breakfast there and then.

There was a very gentle snow falling, harmless now, and not a breath of wind as we emerged from the tent to dig out our sledges. It felt great to be outside and, as if glad to escape as soon as possible from our prison of four days, once loaded and packed, we set off at a great pace. At least we tried to! Although now appearing smooth, the travelling conditions were no better than the rough sastrugi fields we had previously been skiing over; worse in some respects – the most trying skiing conditions possible – breakable crust. There must have been a mild thaw at the end of the blizzard, but it had now turned colder: the crust of hard snow was not strong enough to take your weight, and broke just as you tried to ski forward. Energy sapping! Additionally, the jagged edges of the hard crust caught the sledges, making them a struggle to pull. It was okay for the person at the back, following the hard-won tracks, but a

nightmare for the person at the front, so we have taken it in half-hour turns to lead.

Still, we have managed ten kilometres, respectable for the conditions, and it was good to get into my sleeping bag feeling tired again!

Day 33

Even slower today, only five kilometres. There has been a thaw all day, even at this altitude, and the going really heavy. Nothing else to report, really.

Day 34

Much colder, and we scoot along over the frozen snow. Best skiing conditions for days, although grey with little contrast.

Day 38

Best day yet for skiing – thirty kilometres. Our loads are getting noticeably lighter, and it seems as if we are going downhill. Weather, like the past few days, good for travelling with a light following wind and a few snow pellets falling out of a grey featureless sky. It would be nice to have some sunshine, but at least there is no temptation to hang around and chat.

We seem to have used up conversation for the present and conversation is sparse in the evenings. It tends to be eating and sleeping only. I have not even thought much about Christina – she is far distant, both physically and mentally, and the outside world is fading away, almost an irrelevance. Day-to-day things are all

important – waxing skis, drying socks, checking supplies, worrying about blisters and aching joints, calculating distances travelled, talking about the weather... Even polar bear attacks and crashed snocats are now but distant memories.

Day 39

In the middle of the night we were all awoken by a sudden flapping of the tent. A gale had got up from nowhere, and the sound of the wind was soon joined by that of heavy snow and spindrift. We hoped it would have blown itself out by morning, but no such luck. We had got careless, and not bothered with a sheltering wall around the tent the previous evening, so in particularly strong gusts the whole tent would get squashed almost flat, its canvas jostling our noses as we lay in our sleeping bags. We decided to risk it until morning and at least did not have to keep getting up to clear the snow off.

We all must have dropped off to sleep again, but were awoken again by the feel of cold canvas on our faces: our guy ropes were pulling out, and we spent a miserable hour or so getting dressed and going outside into the blizzard to re-erect the tent before it all blew away, putting snowblocks on the valence, belaying our guys into the snow, building a protective wall of snowblocks, and getting generally cold and cross in the dark. We brought a lot of snow into the tent with us, always something to try and avoid.

I have been spending most of the day worrying about this blow, the fiercest blizzard to date: will the tent blow down again, will the guys break, what happens if the canvas rips? It has been too noisy to concentrate on reading or writing, or even to hold conversations without shouting. The one good thing is that the gale this time appears to be keeping the tent free of snow, so we don't have to go outside to keep it clear. We don't even venture out to answer the calls of nature, using a poly bag instead.

Day 41

The wind has been dropping all day, and I certainly do not want to experience another day like the previous two. Maybe it is time to give up camping!

The tent seems to have survived, I don't know how, but disaster struck when we discovered in the late afternoon that one of Aggie's skis was missing. He had left them, as is normal, up-ended in the snow, and one must have blown away. We spent all evening, until the light failed, quartering the ground and probing the snow with ski sticks (baskets removed), but no sign of it. This is serious – can we get Aggie off the ice cap with only one ski? Maybe eventually, but our food will have run out before he's down. There is at least another hundred and fifty kilometres of snow before we are likely to reach the hard ice at the edge of the ice cap.

We discussed various options, and concluded that it was worth spending at least two days looking for the missing ski. But with such a strong gale, it could have blown miles away. Nobody is blaming Aggie, it could have been anyone of us – we all kept our skis up-ended the same as he did, and he was just unlucky.

Day 42

Gloom and doom! We have spent the whole day in line abreast carrying out a systematic search, and what is particularly frustrating is that it has been perfect weather: a veil of high cirrus preventing the sun getting too hot, smooth windslab ideal for skiing, just the lightest of breezes. We have taken it in turns to be the one without

skis, experience showing that it is easier to walk on foot than ski with only one ski. However, this has indicated how essential it is to find Aggie's ski: although the windslab takes the weight of a man on skis, a walker sinks in with every pace and very quickly tires.

We have been circling the camp, slowly getting further and further away, so when failing light caused us to stop, we were about half a mile out. Back in the tent, we spent a lot of time discussing what to do tomorrow. Unfortunately we are not in agreement amongst ourselves as to whether the wind direction was constant during the blizzard. Certainly the wind was from the north east yesterday, but none of us is sure as to its direction during the height of the gale. This means we have to search in all directions at once! One school of thought, mine, is arguing that it would be best to split up, be less systematic, and take wide circles round the camp, on the basis that the gale could have blown the ski miles downwind – it would be better to search a large area quickly than a smaller area more systematically.

The other school of thought, Jørgen's, is that it is best to be more thorough, slowly covering the whole area. Aggie has pointed out, though, that we could easily have missed the ski, even in areas we have searched, either because it was buried in a drift deeper than we were probing, or we might have just probed round it. Was it worth searching any longer? Should we not just set off? Stalemate!

Day 43

I was on cook duty today and I was up early to get a ration pack from my sledge. My sledge was still drifted-up as I had not needed it

since the blizzard, so I had to clear the snow away. Joy, oh joy! While doing this I unearthed Aggie's ski – lying only a few metres away from where it must have fallen. Obviously we had erroneously believed it had blown far away when it had just fallen down where it stood! This news energised us all, so we were quickly up and away, covering thirty kilometres in the still excellent skiing conditions.

Day 47

After the superb skiing of the past few days, and with only fifty kilometres to go, the going has become more difficult. The descent off the ice cap has now markedly steepened and the snow is wearing thin, with areas of lethal bare ice. Also crevasses are beginning to appear.

On the icy bits our sledges tend to overtake us and the only way to stop this is to ski downhill at full speed – exciting but scary.

We can now see the ice-free coastal tundra ahead and this appears to have given us a feeling of lightheadedness – we have done it! Our goal is in sight!

Day 48

Soon after we set out this morning we came to an area of bare ice and decided to ski down across it, a dangerous manoeuvre as there is no way of stopping on the frictionless surface. I was accelerating over it when I noticed a small crevasse in front of me: it was not big enough to fall down, but big enough to trip me up. My sledge and I ended up in a tangled heap and I thought I had broken my left leg.

We had to set up camp on a nearby snowdrift and I was helped across to the tent by Jørgen and Aggie. I have been in agony all afternoon, but after much probing by the other two, we have concluded that it is not broken, which I suppose at least is something. Later I took some painkillers from our first aid kit, and spent a reasonably comfortable afternoon and evening.

Day 49

We decided we did have the time in hand to wait a day here for my leg to recover and most of the day I was left alone in camp while Jørgen and Aggie reconnoitred a route down the glacier, trying to avoid bare ice and crevassed areas. When they came back, they announced that they had found a route, although in a couple of places it would probably be best to set up a belay and lower ourselves and sledges down on the end of a rope. This we managed successfully.

Day 53

Our last day on snow! We have gone as far as we can on glaciers and snowdrifts, and tomorrow will have to portage the last ten kilometres to the airport at Søndre Strømfjord. It is hard to believe, but we have crossed the Greenland Ice Cap, all under our own steam. Success! When we stepped off the ice, we raised a loud cheer and hugged each other.

We have set up camp on the tundra, and it is strange having vegetation around, and not have to worry about putting things down on the snow and losing them. After two months on the ice,

even the sparsest of vegetation creates a homely feeling and its smell is noticeable – the smell of lushness and life, in contrast to the ice cap which is sterile and lacking any smells.

My leg is better, but I am still limping and not up to my normal speed. However, there should be no problem in reaching the airport tomorrow and catching our flight out the day after. At least we have an easier exit than Nansen, who, after his crossing, had to go all the way to the coast and spend the winter with the local populace before getting home!

We celebrated with a small bottle of whisky brought specially for the occasion, unfortunately drunk inside the tent as the mosquitoes were bad outside: there are advantages in being on the sterile ice cap! I suppose the mosquitoes are there to prepare us for our return to civilisation, something I am not looking forward to at all. After a long abstinence, the alcohol went straight to our heads, and we all went to sleep in a euphoric mood.

Day 54

A hard slog over the tundra, with some muddy moraine to cross as well: it is certainly much easier to tow your gear than carry it. However as we neared the settlement, we decided to postpone our return to civilisation as long as possible and so camped a short distance away.

We spent the rest of afternoon sorting out all our gear ready for the flight back. We have a few days food and fuel in hand which we decided to leave behind to save weight.

As our thoughts began to adjust themselves to the outside world, I started to think of Christina again. We had a stopover in Tanilaq, and I had to decide what to do: she was, after all at Camp Tunu, and what would I gain by staying on in Tanilaq, miles away on the coast? I could talk to her by radio just as well in Søndre Strømfjord, Tanilaq, or back in Britain. If I stayed over in Tanilaq, I may be able to arrange a visit to the camp, but I doubt it: what reason could I give for them to fly me up to the camp, especially as flights and space were limited? But I was tempted to try. How else was I to persuade her to come and see me when she returned to Europe in three months' time? On the other hand, she might stay on in Tanilaq over winter, providing logistical support as before, and then I would not see her until next year. In which case it might be best to stay in Tanilaq to wait for her. But what would I do, and how would I pay for it?

The outside world had certainly reemployed itself on me: I went to sleep in a dither instead of a celebratory glow of achievement.

Chapter 13. Return

We had an easy flight back to Tanilaq, taking not much more than an hour to retrace the route that had taken us nearly two months overland. As we flew over Camp Tunu, the buildings mere specks in the whiteness below, I thought of Christina down there, so near and yet so far, and debated with myself for the hundredth time whether my final decision to head back home today was the right one. She would be on the ice cap until the end of the season and I did not see any way that I would be able to visit her unless, and it was a long shot, unless they were needing another pair of hands at the drilling camp. My previous imaginations when of rushing into her arms as soon as we had finished our expedition would remain just that, imaginations!

We had a few of hours to spare in Tanilaq before our onward flight to Iceland and I had decided to contact Doug when we arrived there; this would be on the off chance that, through him, I could indeed wangle a visit to Camp Tunu. If so, I would stay in Greenland, leaving Aggie and Jørgen to return without me. Second best, and much more likely, I would ask Doug if he could arrange for me to talk to her on the radio: I would, of course, tell her that I loved her, I was desperate to see her, and we must meet up as soon as she was off the ice cap!

There was the fear in my mind that Doug would not be around when we landed and I would be leaving Greenland without making any contact with her at all, although, in that case I consoled myself

with the thought that I should be able to get in touch with her from Britain, perhaps by e-mail.

Arriving at Tanilaq the plane flew low, past the brightly-painted houses where the fjord and much of the surrounding land was now clear of ice and snow, and over the short stretch of sea to the neighbouring island where the airport is situated. Like Søndre Strømfjord, the airfield here is a relic of the Cold War, built by the Americans as part their northern defensive shield. It is not particularly well situated for Tanilaq itself, reached by an onward helicopter flight, which meant that, between our flights, I would have no time to go to the town, so would have to contact Doug by phone. We circled the mountains once, getting a brief glimpse of the open sea with its pack ice eternally marching south, and then touched down on the tarmac.

I was half hoping that there would be a message from Christina herself waiting for me, but there was nothing. I eventually managed to track down from an airport official the phone number of the CCDP office in Tanilaq but, I got no reply from their number. Doom and gloom! Aggie and Jørgen managed to persuade me not to leap onto the next helicopter flight to the town to try and find Doug in person, but told me to keep my cool and phone again in half an hour. I spent the rest of the morning by the telephone, unsuccessfully trying to make contact, while Aggie and Jørgen went for a walk to the nearby Eskimo settlement. I still had had no success when they returned and it was with a feeling of great frustration that I queued up to board our flight out.

We were waiting in the lounge as the passengers from the inward flight from Iceland disembarked and I noticed that one of them was wearing a jacket with the CCDP logo.

'Hi, there,' I called out, 'I see you're part of the CCDP team.'

'Yes, that's right. I'm just joining them.'

'What'll you be doing?'

'Oh, cook. Their previous cook unfortunately was killed when their snocat went down a crevasse.'

'Yes, I know. We found him! Let me introduce myself and my colleagues to you. Jim, that's me, Aggie and Jørgen. It was us who found the snocat.'

'Golly! That must have been terrible!'

'It was.'

He said his name was Norman and while we were shaking his hand we heard our flight called.

'To be honest,' continued Norman, 'I'm a bit nervous about going. The whole expedition seems to be dogged by bad luck.'

'Why, has something else happened?' I asked, with a sudden feeling of apprehension.

'Oh yes, haven't you heard? The missing girl.'

He had our attention then. 'What girl?' we all chorused.

'I forget her name, Kirsten, or something like that, disappeared mysteriously at the camp.'

'When?' I asked.

'Yesterday, or the day before, I think.'

I made an instant decision. 'Right then, everybody, we're going! Norman, how are you getting to Camp Tunu?'

‘Flying out from here, I’m not sure when, today or tomorrow, perhaps. But I was told that when I arrived here I was to go over to Tanilaq to meet Doug and get kitted out.’

‘Okay then, we’re coming with you. Aggie, Jørgen, you’re agreed?’

‘Yes, of course,’ replied Jørgen, and Aggie nodded. ‘We must find Christina.’

‘Good. You two, quickly, go to the check-in and have them get our baggage. Say it’s an emergency. I’ll go and get some tickets for Tanilaq. Norman, we knew, we know that girl, Christina, she was travelling with us for a month. We must find her, we must!’

It takes several helicopter relays to get a planeload of passengers to Tanilaq, and waiting our turn was interminable. We spent the time telling Norman our story, and he in return told us that, although he had no polar experience, he was a keen hill walker and climber – although he had so far got no further than the mountains of Wales!

Eventually it was our turn for the shuttle helicopter, which sped us in a matter of minutes to the heliport at Tanilaq. As we walked into the terminal, the first person we saw was Doug, and he looked surprised to see us. Anton was with him.

‘Why, it’s Jim, Aggie and Jørgen. Am I glad to see you!’

We all shook his hand in greeting, and he continued. ‘You are just in time. Terrible news, Christina, she’s...’

‘We know,’ I interrupted. ‘Norman told us...’

‘Norman, is he here?’

‘Yes,’ and we introduced him to Doug.

‘Right,’ continued Doug urgently. ‘This is how we’ll play it. You three, could you help us in our search, the search for Christina, that is?’

‘Of course.’

‘Excellent! I rustled these folks here from the hostel to help, they are all experienced mountaineers, but you lot, you know the ice cap, you know Christina, I can rely on you. I’ll tell them they’re no longer needed, no, on second thoughts, can you Anton? Anton’s coming with us, and also the chief of police, Kangunaq. There is always so much paperwork in these cases, even in Greenland! Norman, you’d better straightway come with me in the truck back to the office and I’ll get you kitted up. Jim, your team better take the next helicopter back to the airfield. The Twin Otter is flying down from Constable Point and should be landing any time now. There is no time to lose.’

‘What equipment shall we take with us?’ I asked. ‘A tent?’

‘No, don’t bother with that,’ replied Doug, ‘we’ll squeeze you into the camp. Just bring suitable clothing and your skis, rope, *et cetera*. See you at the airport. Come on Norman, this way.’ And he rushed Norman out of the building.

As soon as Doug had gone, Anton came up to us to say hello, and then spoke to a few bearded individuals nearby.

‘I am sorry, chaps,’ he told them. ‘Thank you for volunteering your services, but an experienced team has just turned up and there isn’t space in the plane for everyone. They will help us carry out the search.’ I thought they looked a little disappointed as they said their goodbyes and left the terminal.

While waiting for the helicopter, Anton filled us in with the details of Christina's disappearance. She had last been seen the evening before last, at about eleven o'clock, going out for a ski: she had finished the day's work, and said that she wanted some exercise. It was not until the next morning that anyone realised she had not come back. Her skis were not in the rack, and her bunk had not been slept in.

'The only conclusion,' said Anton, 'was that something must have happened to her away from the camp and that she must still be out there.'

'What was, is, the weather like at the camp?' asked Jørgen.

'Apparently not too bad the evening she left – overcast, but not blowing or snowing. Yesterday it was still calm but, unfortunately, there has been snow falling all day, reducing visibility.'

'And have they been searching for her?' I put in.

'Of course,' said Anton testily. 'Drilling was immediately stopped, and the whole camp has been searching. No sign of her, though, and we have been unable to help from this end until now. There's been no available plane. We will fly straight up to the camp, and, after dropping us off, a couple of people will stay on the plane and carry out an air search. You lot, you have the experience, and would be better on skis.'

'Is it still snowing at Camp Tunu? If so, will the plane be able to land?' Jørgen asked.

'I don't know, but we must try. It was snowing first thing this morning, but I do not have up-to-date information.'

‘So we may fly all the way up, and then have to fly all the way back without landing?’ queried Aggie.

‘Yes, that is possible.’

‘But what could have happened to her?’ I asked, and there then followed a general discussion of the possibilities. We concluded that the most likely thing was that, before she got back to camp, it had started snowing, she had lost her bearings, and was now wandering aimlessly round the ice cap. Crevasses and polar bears were considered, but ruled out as unlikely. ‘I am told,’ said Anton, ‘that no crevasses have ever been seen around the camp, and it is too far away from the coast for bears.’

Once we had flown back to the airport, Aggie, Jørgen and myself sorted out the gear we would take with us, the airport officials allowing us to depot the remainder of our equipment in a nearby warehouse. We then stood around outside, feeling tense and impatient, while watching to the north for the Twin Otter to fly in. Doug and Norman had returned from Tanilaq, and were standing with us, when the distant sound of a small aircraft was heard. A small red dot against the mountains slowly metamorphosed itself an aeroplane, which came straight in and landed without any messing about, finishing up almost on our toes. Immediately the cockpit door opened and a tall, lanky, blonde-haired man emerged. Like an old-fashioned flying-ace, he had a pale scarf streaming from his neck.

‘Hello,’ he announced loudly and enthusiastically, in a noticeable German accent. ‘I am Gustav. Anywhere in Greenland, no problem. We need to refuel, first, I am afraid, and then away.’

‘Thank you for coming early, at such short notice,’ said Doug.

‘No problem! I am as keen as anyone to find the lovely Christina. To think of her wandering about in the snow, all alone. I am here to help. You there,’ he shouted across to a man dressed in overalls standing nearby, ‘fuel please. Fill her up. And you lot,’ he said, turning back to us, ‘you had better move away. Regulations, you know.’

Half an hour later we were once more in the air, flying back east, retracing our flightpath of the morning. There was little conversation in the cabin during the flight back and I spent most of it staring out of the window with worst-case scenarios going through my mind. As we left the coastal mountains the featureless ice sheet appeared, completely lacking in contrast so that it was hard to tell whether you were looking down at the snow surface thousands of feet below, or looking at mist just in front of your nose. I was jostled out of my thoughts by a sudden blaring from the cockpit intercom.

‘We will be over Camp Tunu in five minutes. It is snowing lightly, and I cannot see a thing. But what the hell! We will try to land. If you feel a bump, you will know we are down.’

This was not reassuring, and an agitated murmur went round the passengers and you could feel an increase in tension in the air. I had heard too many stories of planes crashing in whiteout conditions, a pilot thinking he had plenty of clearance when in fact the invisible snow surface was right upon him... The plane was fitted with skis as well as wheels, but I was thinking how even an apparently smooth snow surface could be rough with sastrugi. Did the pilot know?

We landed without a hitch, the pilot coming onto the radio to announce we were safely down: ‘no problem, not even a bump, as you can see.’ When we emerged, I noticed that we were parked right next to the camp buildings. There was not a breath of wind, but a light snow falling, giving a visibility of a hundred metres or so.

Gustav emerged from his cockpit, smiling. ‘I thought I would save you a walk to the terminal! For some reason, they had marked out the runway about a kilometre away.’

A group soon emerged from the camp, the familiar figure of Professor Waldblick at the front, and the tall figure of Telford towering over him. I was surprised, though, to see Mark, Randy and Chuck; although I had not thought about them for a few weeks, at the back of my mind I had imagined that they would have left the camp by now, either carrying on, following our route, or having headed back for the coast.

‘Terrible news, this is terrible, terrible!’ said the professor as he bustled up. ‘I’m so glad you are here. Terrible, terrible. We have been looking, searched everywhere, but no sign, not a sign. Now we have to look further and further away, and it is getting dangerous in this snow – we might get lost ourselves, we are not experienced skiers, except for, that is, Mark and his friends. And there is only three of them. Jim, Aggie, Jørgen, welcome, welcome – you must start looking straightaway. You have skis? You will join them, Doug? And you, Anton?’ They both nodded. ‘That is good, good.’

‘The plane can stay here the rest of the day, if need be,’ said Doug, ‘and also tomorrow. But I’m not sure it’s worth flying in this weather, is it Gustav?’

‘We can try, we can fly low, but yes, I will have to admit we will not see much. But we will try. We have an infrared camera, but it does not work through snow. If the snow clears, we will find her easily. Maybe we will wait to see if it clears, but if not, maybe we can look for half an hour .’

‘Okay, professor,’ I put in. ‘Tell us where you have looked so far, and we will get started.’

‘You will see our tracks. No perhaps maybe not,’ he said, looking down at the ground. ‘Even this light snow covers things up. We circled the camp, maybe now for two kilometres out. Mark put poles up and moved them out each time we went round, so you go straight out to the sticks and...’

‘That’s right,’ interrupted Mark. ‘We can ski straight out until we meet the poles, and then circle around in an extended line, keeping in sight of each other. We have only four radios, but they will help prevent us getting lost.’

‘And you are certain she is not in the camp, you have looked everywhere?’ I asked of the professor, but I knew it was an unnecessary question.

‘Yes, yes of course,’ he replied. ‘Many times. We have looked in every place. She must be out on the ice, I am sure of it. There is nowhere else she can be.’

Thus it was that eight of us, myself, Aggie, Jørgen, Mark, Chuck, Randy, Anton and Doug were soon in a long line, slowly quartering the area round the camp. Visibility was poor and deteriorating, with the snow, small round pellets, increasing in intensity. Luckily the wind held off.

We were silent in our thoughts as we trudged round, our eyes becoming almost hallucinated by staring at a featureless white background completely lacking in contrast, our eyes seemingly losing the ability to focus. We had agreed on breaks every two hours, when Telford would come out in the snocat and we could huddle inside for hot drinks – with the aid of GPS and radios he could easily track us down as needed. If only Christina had taken a radio with her, I thought. They had tried searching with the snocat at the beginning, but visibility through the windscreen was so poor while it was snowing that it proved easier to search from the ground. It would have been awful if they had unwittingly driven over the body.

During one of the welcome coffee breaks in the snocat, we learnt that Randy's back had recently recovered enough for him to ski again, although it would not be strong enough for him to tow his loaded sledge. Meanwhile Mark and Chuck had made themselves so useful round the camp that the CCDP, as a thank you, had offered them all a lift back down to the coast on the next fuel run.

We spent the whole afternoon on the go, and, as it did not really get dark at this time of year, our search continued into the evening. I spent most of the time wondering whether, if Christina was still wandering around, this search pattern was the best one to have adopted with the current poor visibility. She could by now have walked through an area we had previously searched without us seeing her. If she was still up and about I was not convinced we would ever find her, she could have wandered miles; but if she were collapsed in the snow somewhere then I suppose our plan was the

best. I was not sure which was worse, to find her in a heap somewhere, probably far gone with hypothermia, if alive at all, or to know she was alive and well, but wandering alone in this trackless waste.

It was the third time we had been out searching on the ice cap this trip, and luck had been with us the previous two times: when we had found Jørgen in the crevasse, and when I had found Aggie's missing ski. However, in the case of the lost ski, we had not found it in a systematic search like this, but back at our base – through sheer luck. What if she really were back at the camp? – although it was hard to see how she could be as it was not a big area to search. Maybe trapped in the underground cave where the ice cores were stored? But they were bound to have looked there, weren't they? I had just convinced myself she had in fact been at the base all along when there was a shout from down the line, and the person to my left waved for me to come over. I passed the signal up the line, and raced over to where there was a huddle of people.

In the middle of the group, sticking out of the snow, I saw two ski tips. 'What are you waiting for,' I exclaimed impatiently, 'get digging!' But there was not much digging to do. The skis were not deeply buried, only covered by the new snow. I recognised them instantly as Christina's. 'Come on, come on,' I shouted, 'she must be nearby. Everyone, get looking.'

We called up the snocat to act as a base for a search centred on this area, about five kilometres from the camp, and, although we searched all night, there was no sign of her. Come morning I looked up wearily to notice a brightening in the sky and the hazy outline of

the sun; by midday the snow was gone and the sky was clearing. We stopped and scoured the horizon with binoculars. Later Gustav flew his plane back up, and quartered the ground with his infrared camera. No sign, not a sign!

We voted then to give up and I was in a minority of one for wanting to continue. 'Unresolved,' was all that we could conclude. Most likely, for some reason unknown, she had taken off her skis and walked on, and was now covered in the new snow, invisible to all, frozen, lifeless, sinking down into the ice as the snow piled on top of her, becoming one with the ice. Without her skis to support her, maybe she had fallen down a crevasse, maybe a stray bear had taken her, for it would be bound to be hungry if up here. But the new white snow, soft and virginal, this had covered all, smothered the evidence in its indifference.

It was a silent group that returned to the camp in the snocat. I was in tears, thinking of our short time together, thinking of might-have-beens...

There was no need for us to linger up here, particularly as Gustav was ready to fly us out, telling us he was keen to leave this dreadful place. We heard also that Mark, Chuck and Randy would be leaving tomorrow as Telford would be taking the snocat down to the coast for the next fuel run. I asked, I do not really know why, I asked if I could collect up her all her things – maybe I wanted to hang on to her for as long as possible. I was still in tears as I packed her belongings into her rucksack, not much, mainly clothing and a few odds and ends of personal effects, including a pair of gloves whose significance I did not immediately realise. As I cleared them away, I

found, at the last, hidden under her pillow, I found her diary. I put this in my pocket, perhaps I would read about our happy days together, skiing in Tanilaq, walking together over the frozen sea, our meal with Tigatuq and his wife... Or maybe I would find that, after all, she had merely used me for her own ends, to get herself onto the ice cap... I wondered if I would dare read it?

On the flight back, I did dare.

Chapter 14. Back to the Beginning

I got a shock when I opened it – it was all in Norwegian, of course it would be! I sat for a while staring out of the plane's window and decided that I must know what it contained, so I asked Jørgen, who was sitting beside me, to translate it, at least the bits I was interested in.

I had forgotten that she had already been in Greenland over the previous winter, so my appearance in her diary occurred about half way through. Jørgen read out 'I was sitting in the hotel tonight, feeling lonely, and wondering whether it was time to go home. I dislike Doug more and more, and wonder whether I can last the summer with him. I am not sure I can trust him, and it hurts me to see him doing my job, not very well at that, in spite of his efficient appearance. I had a drink or two, and then this man walked into the bar. He was gorgeous...'

'Stop there,' I said, 'stop there. That's enough. I don't want to hear more.'

'Why not?' asked Jørgen.

'I can't bear it. She's no longer with us... Might-have-beens...' and I tailed off. After a pause, and further staring out of the window, the blankness of the view matching my mood, I added, 'Of course, you loved her as well. You must miss her.'

'Yes, yes, I do, I did. Do you mind if I read more of her diary?'

'No, of course not. Go on!'

I drifted off into a comfortless sleep, not having had any for twenty four hours, but was woken by Jørgen poking my ribs.

‘Jim, Jim, listen to this!’

‘What?’

‘This, it’s in her diary.’

‘Read it, then.’

‘Okay. ‘Something strange has happened tonight. I could not sleep and went outside for a walk. It must have been between midnight and four in the morning, as it was quiet and this night there is no drilling. I was standing in the shadow of a hut, looking up at the stars, when I saw three figures come up the ramp from the drilling rig. I recognised Mark and Chuck from the way they moved, and the third looked like Randy. But that is impossible! He is still in the tent, unable to move. They seemed to be carrying something, it looked like a core-tube, and took it over to the snocat, and then disappeared inside. I thought about going over to see what they were doing, but somehow suddenly felt frightened.’ What do you make of that, Jim?’

‘I have no idea! What does she say next?’

Jørgen read on for a bit. ‘Nothing more, at least not here. I will read on.’

But my mind was suddenly alert. For some reason I was thinking back to the happenings at the start of the expedition, and the bearded face of Telford inserted itself into my mind, and his angry expression when he had found me prowling around the ship. I had seen core-tubes in an unexpected place. So had Christina! This could not be coincidence, could it? Coincidence, coincidence! Other coincidences, which must have been stored in my unconscious, emerged. Telford, first in a dream, then shortly after, in person.

Snocats! One is lost, and then another one just happens to be on hand. We set off across the ice cap, a group of three, at the same time as Americans, a group of three. The Americans turn up at the settlement at the same time as an American ship. One of the Americans has a chance meeting with a friend on board, the radio operator. 'Chance'? What had been happening? What were the facts? A man eaten by a polar bear, that must be chance? A snocat down a crevasse, was that chance? Tigatuq thought the flags were out of line, but not enough to cause it to lose its way in a field of crevasses. Had it got lost by chance? There was no reason why the *Naxos Explorer* could not have been in the area, the Greenlandic people were certainly trying to develop their resources, and oil and mineral prospecting in the area were only to be expected. But chance? Oil, the CCDP, global warming, Americans! My mind stopped with the enormity of the thought. What had Doug said? That the Americans had refused to support the CCDP programme?

What had Christina seen? And her gloves, I suddenly remembered her gloves. She always wore those ones when out skiing. And she had become lost when out skiing.

I grabbed Jørgen's arm. 'We must go back. It's Christina. She's not lost on the ice cap. I know... Her gloves... It's Telford,' and I instinctively knew this to be the case. 'Telford, he's got her. Unless, unless... No, it can't be that!'

Jørgen stared at me. 'Jim, are you mad?'

'No, I am not mad. It is beginning to make sense.'

'What is?'

‘Christina’s disappearance. What you just read out. She had seen something. And now they have taken her.’

‘Taken her? Who? Where? What are you talking about? There is nowhere to take her.’

‘That is true. So she must still be there. I knew it. We must go back. Give me time to think. Have there been any more clues in her diary?’

‘Clues, what clues? Nothing more about seeing people wander around at night, if that’s what you mean. Come on Jim, what are you talking about.’

‘Hang on, let me think.’

I lapsed back into thought, and Jørgen went back to the diary – was he trying to find out what her feelings were towards him? Was reading it really an invasion of her privacy? My mind was in a whirl, I was wanting to talk through everything with Aggie and Jørgen, but at the same time I wanted time to think. Before further conversation took place we came in to land.

As there was no flight out to Iceland for a few days, Anton had offered us accommodation in the consulate where we had stayed before, an offer which, after two month’s camping, we had accepted gratefully. ‘But there will be more paperwork, I am afraid,’ he told us gravely.

I had decided that we should call into the hotel on the way to the consulate, and hold a planning meeting over a round of drinks, to which the others agreed, although Aggie wanted to know what had suddenly got into me.

‘One minute you are in tears, not a word out of you, and now you look like a whirlwind, unable to stay still for a second.’

‘I know. Wait. Not here. In the hotel, we will discuss it all there.’ And until we had taken the helicopter flight over to Tanilaq and walked up to the hotel, Aggie had to be content with that.

We entered the bar. This is where we had first met, and now I knew that her feelings on first seeing me had been the same as mine. It was my mad suggestion, though, that had got her caught up in this business, it was because of me she was no longer with us. I had to rescue her.

‘Rescue her?’ said Aggie incredulously. ‘You know what we found!’

‘I know what we didn’t find. We didn’t find her, only her skis and gloves. And her gloves were back at the camp. I think she never left the camp that night...’

‘Never left the camp? But Doug said she disappeared while out skiing – she went out in the evening and never came back.’

‘What Doug says...’ and another thought entered my mind. ‘Who was the last person to see her?’

‘I don’t know,’ said Aggie. ‘I wasn’t there, was I?’ Jørgen shook his head as well.

‘Listen. She herself says, in her diary, that she saw Mark, Chuck and Randy behaving suspiciously when Randy was meant to be flat on his back with a sore back.’

‘She only said that he looked like Randy,’ put in Jørgen.

‘I am sure it was him. It all makes sense. All three of them had travelled to the CCDP camp on purpose, they probably planned

never to complete the crossing, and Randy probably never did have a sore back.'

'Why?' asked Aggie.

It was time for me to drop my bombshell. 'Because they wanted to sabotage the drilling, to sabotage the whole programme. The same way that they, or someone, sabotaged the snocat.'

Aggie and Jørgen both gaped at me. There was a short silence while we sipped at our drinks.

'Sabotage?' said Aggie. 'Are you mad?'

'Not you as well! No, I am not mad. I have found a pattern to all the events that have interposed themselves throughout our expedition. Starting with the polar bear attack, and finishing with Christina's disappearance.'

I must have spent the best part of an hour convincing them of my theory, while they questioned me from every angle. At the end they had to admit that the story was internally consistent, and we had even worked out how the snocat had strayed off course, although agreeing that they must have been taking a gamble with this incident, as there was no guarantee it would end up down a crevasse. Maybe they had a back-up plan? Had they meant to kill the occupants? We were not sure about this last point, although it must be true that they were prepared to gamble with people's lives. Christina's life? We could only pray that this was not the case. One thing about which we were not certain is exactly how they were to sabotage the drilling programme; dynamiting the rig would be too obvious, so there was obviously something more subtle afoot, something, I was sure, to do with the ice cores themselves – and

then I remembered how someone had disturbed the cores in the stricken snocat, the Americans saying it was them, trying to see if there were anyone trapped in the vehicle – a plausible story at the time.

I eventually persuaded my friends that we must take action ourselves, that, until we had proof, our story would be laughed out of court. Anton would never believe us, it was too far-fetched, without strong evidence, and Doug – well, Christina had not trusted Doug and I now had my doubts about him: who else could have moved the flags?

We had heard the snocat would be leaving Camp Tunu tomorrow so, following my plan, we must get to the foot of the glacier by the end of tomorrow at the latest; once the snocat had rendezvoused with the *Naxos Explorer* it would be too late. I assumed the *Naxos Explorer* was still in the area for a *rendezvous*, and if this indeed proved to be the case, it would only confirm my theory. This would mean we would have to arrange a helicopter flight to the settlement. Would there be one available?

Luckily we had spotted a flight schedule in the foyer of the hotel and Aggie went to check.

'Yes, we're in luck,' he reported. 'There's one scheduled for midday tomorrow. Let's hope it's not booked up.'

'We had better go down to the heliport and book now,' Jørgen suggested and we all agreed to that.

However, when we got there it was locked up for the night. Another problem was that our tent was still in the warehouse at the airport and the only gear we had with us was that we had taken

with us when we went up to Camp Tunu. I persuaded my colleagues that we would have to solve each problem as it came up, and it was more important to get to the glacier than worry about how we would spend the night when we got there – we could build an igloo, or snow-cave, or something. Although we had no food, this was easily solved as we could buy supplies at the local supermarket.

We walked back to the hotel where we had booked an evening meal, and the discussion at table centred on what we would do when we encountered the returning snocat.

'Jim would like to stand in front of it with a gun, and when it hove into view, tell Telford to 'stick em up'!' said Aggie.

'Yes, but our rifle is back at the airport,' I replied seriously.

'Tigatuq has a gun,' put in Jørgen.

'Tigatuq...' I mused. 'He may be able to help us, but we don't want guns. He could run us up the fjord in his boat, I'm sure he has a boat, all the Eskimos around here appear to.'

'Good idea,' Aggie agreed. 'Let's hope he's not away hunting.'

'No, I think not. Remember, when we left he was away on his last trip of the season.' I pointed out.

'But that was with his dogs. He could have gone out hunting or fishing from his boat.'

'Mm. That's true. We'll just have to wait and see.'

'Shouldn't we take a gun, in any case,' queried Aggie. 'What about polar bears?'

'Yes, of course we must,' I replied quickly. 'Maybe we can see if Anton can loan us one.'

‘Well, anyhow,’ said Jørgen, ‘what do we do when we meet the snocat? We need to search it, but they are bound to be suspicious if they see us there. We are meant to be on our way home.’

‘The traditional thing to do is to stage an incident. You know, to stop a car you feign an accident...’

‘Or show a leg!’ put in Aggie.

‘Or show a leg,’ I continued, ‘although it's not going to stop when it sees your leg, Aggie!’

‘We could stay hidden,’ suggested Jørgen, ‘until they start unloading oil drums, and then find an opportunity to creep aboard.’

‘Hidden? In this landscape?’ queried Aggie.

‘It may be possible,’ I replied. ‘We could hide behind a rock, or dig a snow-hole – we won’t know the possibilities until we get there. But I think Jørgen’s right. We don’t really want to be seen; we should try to creep aboard when no-one’s looking.’ And we eventually agreed on this.

I was not certain what we were letting ourselves in for, but I saw real danger ahead. There was a lot at stake, perhaps a lot of powerful interests involved, perhaps some of the most powerful in the world. We were but three pawns, accidentally in the way. It was ridiculous to think that we could take them on. Should we? Could we? We had a personal involvement and maybe we should stick to that. But I was not sure this was possible: could we become involved, while pretending not to know the wider picture?

That night I wrote everything down and put it in an envelope, addressed to Anton Laursen, Danish Consulate. Next morning I told Anton that, instead of waiting around in Tanilaq for our flight out,

we were planning to fly over to the settlement for one last time, perhaps meeting Tigatuq and Kanileq, and he agreed to loan us a rifle. I gave him the envelope.

'Could you do me a favour?'

'I will try. You have helped us.'

'I know you have kindly booked us on the next flight to Iceland in three days' time, but, you know how it is in Greenland, there is always the chance of getting delayed. If we are not back in time, could you transfer us to the next flight? The tickets are in this envelope for reference.'

'Yes of, course, but you are only going to the settlement for one day, are you not?'

'No, we hope to stay two days, as we like it better than here. We should have time to get the helicopter back and catch our flight, but in case of delay...'

'Very well then. Now, about this report I have written on poor Miss Andersson's disappearance. I would be grateful if you could read it, and sign it if you are happy with it. Aggie and Jørgen as well.'

'Certainly.'

From the report I learnt the last people to have seen Christina had been Mark and Chuck. After finishing the data-logging for the day, she and they returned to the galley for a cup of coffee before retiring for the night; she then told them that she was not tired, and had decided to go out for a ski. Apparently no-one had seen her set out, and her disappearance was only noted next morning at breakfast when it was found that her skis and outdoor clothing

were missing. I guessed it had been something like that, but what had she seen that night to arouse suspicion?

We were lucky, there was space on today's flight to the settlement, so we made our bookings and then went to the supermarket for supplies, buying either ready-cooked food or food that could be eaten raw as we did not have our stove. Compared to last time, we had little equipment with us, only our skis and rucksacks with food, spare clothing, sleeping bags and rope. After shopping we went to the heliport and hung around until our flight was called which, for once, was on time. It seemed a world away since we had first made this flight, eager in anticipation for our expedition and totally unaware of what would follow.

We shared the helicopter with some tourists on their first trip to Greenland, keen not to miss anything, and I listened to them pointing out the sights to each other. We flew up the valley, now green with vegetation that was making the most of the short Arctic summer, and over the lakes, for a brief time unfrozen and sparkling as their ripplets caught the sun. We flew over the barren rocks beyond, to the small glacier at the head of the valley, now largely bare of snow and its gaping *bergschrund*; I heard the tourists discuss global warming, saying that small glaciers like the one below were contracting, although the ice sheet itself was probably expanding. Beyond the glacier the helicopter gained altitude suddenly, the rotors almost touching the cliffs beside the col, the three-dimensionality of the knife-edge *arête* clear-cut as we whirled round to descend to the valley beyond, and out over a sea, still littered with bergs of all sizes and flat floes, the latter now brown,

rotten and worn-out out in mid summer. I saw the tourists point down, one saying, 'Look, look, a polar bear. No, it's only a lump on the ice!' And then they looked up, pointing through the mountains to the great expanse of inland ice, 'Look, isn't that the ice cap?'

I nodded unconsciously, the ice cap. Was Christina still up there? Frigid, frozen in eternity? And I thought, in contrast, of life, warm, cosy, vibrant, energised, how remarkable it is, and how we humans always made it more difficult than it had to be. Should we not at all times be celebrating life? Is this not what living is about? Why did we humans always have to make it worse? Why was the living, vibrant Christina not next to me now? I was still in this train of thought when the pilot announced over the headsets that we were about to land. I looked out of the window and noticed, with a start, a familiar ship anchored a short way off shore – the *Naxos Explorer*.

The area of pristine snow by the helipad where we had pitched our tent was now merely a piece of dirty gravel, and the settlement, once a collection of brightly-painted wooden huts against the snow, now looked dingy against the muddy tundra, with litter strewn here and there: with the absence of snow to provide a hiding place for human carelessness, summer is not the best time to visit an Arctic settlement.

We made a depot of our gear and as we had agreed that the first thing to do would be to find Tigatuq, we made a beeline for his hut. I knocked at the door, and Kanileq emerged. Not being quite sure of the correct kind of greeting in this situation, we all shook her hand and she beamed at us in return, beckoning us to come in. She indicated for us to sit down, and spoke probably the only word of

English she knew, ‘Hello,’ and we responded in kind. I asked, ‘Tigatuq, Tigatuq?’, and she shook her head and smiled at me in return.

I realised this was going to be difficult: how were to find him, and get him to help us, when we had no common language. Jørgen tried talking to her in Danish, but to no avail. If only Christina were with us! We sat around in silence for a while, and then Jørgen volunteered to go to the store and see if he could find anyone who knew where to find Tigatuq. Aggie and I nodded in agreement as we felt it would be rude if we all left so soon after having arrived. I found it frustrating sitting here when there was so much to do, but we did need Tigatuq’s help. Kanileq offered us a drink of beer, but we declined – this was no time to drink – so we sat around in silence, waiting for Jørgen’s return.

He returned after what seemed an age, bringing a stranger with him, at least a stranger to us for he went up and hugged Kanileq. He was short and wiry, with dark hair and a moustache.

‘Let me introduce Andropolos,’ said Jørgen.

‘Delighted to meet you,’ he said to Aggie and me, bowing slightly, ‘although please call me Andy – most Englishmen do.’ I did not think now was the time to explain that, although Aggie was English through and through, at least half of me was Scots!

We shook hands, and Jørgen went on to say that he had met Andropolos at the store, who had overheard his inquiries about Tigatuq.

‘Tigatuq has gone fishing,’ Andropolos told us. ‘He normally is out in his boat at this time of day, and gets back about four o’clock. Is

that not so, Kanileq?' and he repeated his statement to her in, what to us, at least, sounded like fluent East Greenlandic.

She beamed, and nodded effusively.

'He speaks fluent Danish as well,' added Jørgen.

'Yes, that is true,' said Andropolos, shaking his head. 'I have been in Greenland now many years, I love the Eskimos. It is difficult times for them, and I am here to help.'

'What, you live here all year round?' I asked.

'Yes, for the past fifteen years I have made my home in Tanilaq. I came here first for the mountaineering, but fell in love with the place and the people, and I have never gone home. I am over here for a few days to visit my friends, is that not right Kanileq?' and he spoke again in the local language.

'I hear you have just come back from a crossing,' he said, turning back to us. 'Well done! I first did it in eighty seven. I have also heard about the terrible problems of the CCDP programme, and your involvement. You probably came to Greenland to get away from things! You can never get away from things!'

We had an hour or so before Tigatuq was likely to return, so, before heading for the jetty, we stayed-on in Kanileq's house, talking with Andropolos about our expedition, about Camp Tunu and about Greenland generally. We were not sure at first how much to tell Andropolos about our theories, as we had decided to mention them to as few people as possible; however we soon realised that, if was going to be our interpreter for Tigatuq (and we would have to tell Tigatuq), then Andropolos would soon enough

find out. So we began to appraise him, but before we had finished Kanileq indicated we should go outside.

Tigatuq had obviously seen us from the distance, and was waving frantically as he brought his boat into the shore. It was not the open boat I was imagining, but of fibreglass construction with a small cabin at the front. As soon as it was made fast, he came up and embraced us all and then, unexpectedly, burst into tears. Andropolos explained that he was crying for Christina, he could not bear the thought that she was no longer with us. It seemed to me that most people in East Greenland were in love with Christina, and therefore would do anything to help our cause!

Tigatuq proudly showed us the fish he had caught, and Andropolos explained that they would be hung up to dry to provide food for the winter – the flesh for humans, and the head and bones for the dogs. We returned to Tigatuq's house where Kanileq took the fish to slice open and gut while we sat down in preparation for telling Tigatuq what we would like to ask of him. There seemed no alternative to Kanileq listening in, so it seemed that, after all, most people in East Greenland would soon know our plans – but perhaps no matter as the next twenty-four hours were all that were important.

We explained the situation, arguing that we had to be at the head of the fjord before the snocat arrived. Having seen Tigatuq's boat, I now had the idea that we could all remain hidden in the cabin while Tigatuq went innocently about his business of fishing, something with which he readily concurred. It also solved the problem of having no tent.

‘There is no time to waste, then,’ I said. ‘The snocat should be leaving Camp Tunu today and if it left first thing this morning, say six o’clock, and it is about two hundred and fifty kilometres at, say, twenty kilometres an hour – that’s about twelve hours.’ I looked at my watch. ‘It could arrive any time now.’

‘You’re right, Jim,’ said Jørgen. ‘Twenty kilometres an hour is probably fast for that kind of travel, but it is possible. We must get going. Is Andropolos coming with us?’ and we all looked across at him.

‘Would you like to?’ I asked. ‘It might be dangerous.’

‘Greenland is a dangerous place, one does not worry about that! Yes, I would like to come, if I can help.’

‘You’ll be a great help. Eskimo-ese is not our strong point!’

Half an hour later we were in the boat heading up the fjord to the foot of the glacier. The sun of the morning was giving away to a grey pall and there was cool wind off the glacier giving a chop to the now grey sea, although this time we could shelter in the cabin – albeit it a bit of a squash with the five of us.

The layout of the fjord-head had changed since our last visit two months ago: the ice-cliffs had moved forward noticeably, and one or two blocks of ice were precariously perched, looking as if they were about to fall into the sea at any moment; the sea ice had virtually all disappeared, leaving only a narrow belt of fast ice in a bay by the shore.

At the edge of the bay we noticed a depot of oil drums, presumably off-loaded from the CCDP’s ship, the *Bolchorsky,* and now awaiting uplift to Camp Tunu on the snocat; from the depot

there was still a smooth ramp of snow down from the glacier and this was obviously the route the snocat would be using.

We looked around to see if there was a nearby place onshore where we could remain hidden, but the ground was only smooth tundra with no rocks big enough to hide anything larger than an Arctic hare. I suppose we could have kept out of site by crouching down behind the oil drums, but this looked cold and uncomfortable, so we decided to follow the original plan of staying in the boat. While waiting we broke into our food supplies, Tigatuq offering us some dried cod which proved chewy and tasted of concentrated fish – which, of course, it was!

We could see that this waiting could become tedious, with the added uncertainty of not knowing whether the snocat would be arriving within the next five minutes or the next five days. I suggested Tigatuq take the boat back down the fjord until we could get a good view up the glacier, perhaps seeing the snocat creeping down through the crevasses, but having sailed back up there was no still no sign of it. Jørgen then suggested we could equally well wait at the settlement, watching the glacier with binoculars and heading off again as soon as we saw the descending vehicle. As long as the weather remained clear, this idea had a lot going for it, the thought of waiting in a warm hut being a lot more appealing than remaining huddled in the unheated boat, although of course we would have to take our turn outside on watch. We put Jørgen's suggestion to the vote and the motion that we wait onshore was carried unanimously.

As we motored back, we saw a fast-moving Zodiac speedboat heading down the fjord, one man at the wheel and one passenger. It streamed past, its wake rocking our boat, turned to circle us once, and returned the way it had come. On its bow was the name *Naxos Explorer*, which unsettled Aggie, Jørgen and myself: did they know we were here? Did they recognise us? Or was it just some crew members out for a spin?

I asked Tigatuq, through Andropolos, how long the ship had been around, and whether they often took Zodiacs out into the fjord. He replied that it had been at anchor for two days, and boats put out from it occasionally, mainly when crew members went ashore to stretch their legs at the settlement.

We did not know what the *Naxos Explorer* was up to, and there was nothing we could do about it in any case, but I now had doubts about going ashore – what if someone from the *Naxos Explorer* saw and recognised us? But we had no reason not to be there, a bit of research on their behalf would show that we had merely come back here to fill in time before our flight out to Iceland, and we were visiting our old friend Tigatuq, who had agreed to take us for a run up the fjord – for old time's sake, of course. In the end, the thought of returning to a warm hut overpowered my fears and we continued our journey back.

Apart from Andropolos, we all slept in Tigatuq's hut that night, and I could not help thinking of the last time I had slept here: how different it had been then! Overnight we decided on two hour stints of watch-keeping and although the settlement is south of the Arctic Circle and thus just missing out on the midnight sun, it was now

midsummer and there was plenty of light around even at midnight to see across to the glacier. Tigatuq insisted on taking his turn, but refused the offer of binoculars, his eyes obviously keen from spending most of their life focussing on the far distance of polar bear, walrus and seal. Tigatuq's dog team was tied-up near his hut so every time one of us went outside to change watch an excited howling and barking took place, waking up whoever was not on watch, but at least they kept the watch-keeper company on his vigil.

Visibility had declined by next morning, making it hard to see the top of the glacier from the distance, so we gathered up Andropolos and set out once more in Tigatuq's boat. Over breakfast we had discussed how to relieve the tedium of waiting, and Aggie had suggested we follow the flagged route up as far as the area where the snocat had been lost, and look more closely at the flags, working out whether it would have been possible to move them so as to lead an unsuspecting snocat to its fate. I was dubious at first – what if Telford and his snocat came down while we were up there?

'Well,' had replied Aggie, 'we ski down behind it – they won't be looking behind them.'

'What if it comes across us while we are still skiing up? They're bound to see us then.'

'If we check the glacier first from the boat,' I continued, 'and see no sign of it, it's only an hour or two up to the crevasse; the chances are that the snocat will be travelling down slowly, so that even it did start its descent as we set out, we should be up before it meets us.'

'There is a risk, though, of meeting it.'

'Only a small one.'

‘However, I suppose at least we would be doing something, rather than hanging around waiting which doesn’t exactly excite me! The snocat could have broken down, or got delayed by bad weather, and may be hours or days away... Mm... Let’s go for it!’

Jørgen was in agreement, so Tigatuq deposited us on the fast ice and we set off. Tigatuq said he could not himself come with us, as he would have to stay with the boat– it was not safe to moor it against the ice in case the ice broke up. He and Andropolos would go fishing, but he did say that if they saw the snocat coming down he would blow the hooter on his boat – and there was a chance, at least, of us hearing that.

Because the sea ice looked rotten and untrustworthy we put on our skis immediately so as to spread our weight, left the boat and went across to the fuel depot, our skis clattering over the ice. There was nothing much to see, and no evidence that anyone had been here recently, so we carried straight on up the snow ramp. I remembered the last time I had struggled up this slope with my recalcitrant sledge holding me back, but today, with no load to tow, we sped up. Although the temperature was above freezing and the snow wet and heavy, the going was easy – except for the person breaking trail, that is. On the glacier proper we found there had been considerable snow melt, with large areas of smooth and slippery ice. Sometimes we found it quicker to ski round these on the remaining areas of snow, and sometimes, where it was not too steep, it was easier just to take off our skis and walk over the hard ice. In any event we made good progress and it was no problem

following the line of flags which someone was obviously maintaining throughout the summer.

We made it to the crevasse in about an hour and a half, finding it easily because still visible in the melting snow were obvious vehicle tracks leading off. The crevasse itself was empty, which was no surprise as Tigatuq had told us that the stricken vehicle had finally been hauled out when the snocat was last here, about three weeks ago. They had found, amazingly, that there was only superficial damage to the rescued vehicle, its engine had started first time and it had reached the sea under its own steam – from where it had since made its way overland to the settlement and was now parked behind one of the buildings.

There was no reason for us to hang around at the site of the accident, so we returned to the line of flags and studied them intently. It had all been so easy. The route from the ice cap came over a convex slope and any vehicle coming down would be heading straight for the crevasse, until it reached the bottom of a slope when the flags curved away. You would only need to move a couple of flags for the snocat to have kept going in a straight line, with the driver seeing no immediate reason to do otherwise. You would be in the crevasse field before you noticed it.

We sat down on our skis for a snack of dried cod and as we chewed on it a few large snowflakes began to fall.

‘That settles, it, Jim,’ said Aggie. ‘I believe you now. Tigatuq said visibility was good at the time, but any responsible driver in this area would be keeping to the flags like a limpet. An unsuspecting driver, and...’

‘It must have been Doug who moved them,’ put in Jørgen. ‘Tigatuq said he went down first, leaving Doug to follow.’

‘I agree,’ I added, ‘it must have been him. There is no one else it could have been. And,’ I added hesitantly, ‘he is Australian. And the Australians have been...’

‘Have been in league with the Americans in pooh-poohing global warming,’ interrupted Aggie. ‘Of course we should not stereotype all Australians...’

‘Easy to do.’

‘Yes, easy to do, but just because Doug is Australian doesn’t mean we should immediately suspect him. Our evidence is pretty thin.’

‘It is,’ agreed Jørgen, and we all lapsed into our thoughts. The snow had suddenly increased in intensity, large, wet heavy flakes, coming done straight and visibility reducing to zero; it quickly formed into a wet layer on our clothing and hair and we all agreed it was time to go. We stood up, and had just put on our skis when, out of nowhere, came a huge vehicle, headlights blazing, windscreen wipers going at a frenetic pace, and through the windscreen I could see a huge, bearded man, staring straight at me. The vehicle was heading for me while making no attempt to slow down. I leapt to one side, falling over as I did so, and it just missed the edge of my skis as it swept past, snow swirling in its wake, before disappearing into the gloom.

‘Wow!’ exclaimed Aggie loudly. ‘What was that, what was that!?’ but of course he knew, we all knew.

My heart was beating wildly as I got shakily to my feet. ‘The bastard!’ I shouted, waving my first down the way he had gone,

‘he’s out to get me. He was heading straight for me, I saw the gleam in his eyes.’

‘How do you know it was intentional?’ asked Aggie. ‘In this snow he wouldn’t have seen you until the last minute.’

‘But at the speed he was travelling...’

‘He knows the route by now.’

‘Even so...’

‘Of course, that’s it!’ I continued. ‘We’d been spotted from the ship, and they’d radioed up to Telford. Come on, let’s go and get the bastard!’

‘But Aggie is right,’ put Jørgen, ‘in this snow, they would have no idea we were sitting right on his route...’

‘Why didn’t he stop, then? If he almost ran us over, surely it was natural that he would stop and apologise?’

‘That is true,’ Jørgen replied, ‘but maybe he did not see you. In this snow, through the windscreen...’

‘I saw the whites of his eyes, he definitely saw me,’ I persisted.

Although Jørgen and Aggie were prepared to give Telford the benefit of the doubt, one thing we were agreed on was that we must follow him down to the coast. If we had been seen, the element of surprise was now lost, but if, in spite of my belief, no-one in the snocat had seen us, then we might be able to approach them unannounced. Unfortunately the snow was beginning to ease off – intense falls of wet snow rarely last long – and visibility was improving; it had become colder, with a breeze picking up, and the large snowflakes were turning into finer, dry snow pellets.

We set off and about halfway down the glacier visibility had improved enough to see the fuel depot. We saw the snocat parked by the drums and were in time to witness something not expected: a helicopter coming into land which we recognised as the one from the *Naxos Explorer*. A couple of people get out and we watched them go over to a group of four standing near the snocat – obviously Telford, Mark, Chuck and Randy. They all stood around talking for a while, some packages were then loaded onto the helicopter, the four climbed aboard, and the aircraft was off back down the fjord, leaving behind the two new arrivals.

'That's torn it!' I exclaimed.

'Yes, it has, hasn't it,' agreed Aggie.

'Well, what are we going to do now? How are we ever going to catch up with Telford and his mob?'

'For a start,' suggested Jørgen, 'we could go and talk to the new arrivals.'

'And give ourselves away?' I questioned.

'Well, they are almost bound to have seen us from the helicopter,' said Aggie, 'if not when you were run-over. We have nothing to lose in any case – we've lost Telford and his team for good.'

'I suppose so,' I agreed reluctantly.

It was a fast ski down to the depot, skis alternately clattering loudly over bare ice and gliding silently over wet snow. The newcomers looked up in surprise when they saw us hurling down the final snow-ramp to the shore, so maybe we had not been observed after all. They introduced themselves as Stephen and Chang, new members of the CCDP, come to take over from Telford

as snocat drivers. Telford himself was returning to his work on the *Naxos Explorer*, and apparently Mark, Chuck and Randy were being given a lift homewards on the ship. Stephen and Chang told us that they would be taking the snocat up to Camp Tunu once they had unloaded the empty oil drums from the sledge and loaded on the full ones, a big task for only two people, and Aggie volunteered us to help. I wondered why Telford and his gang had not stayed behind to do this.

As we talked, we heard the helicopter returning and watched it land beside us. It had come back to pick up the expedition equipment of Mark and his team, as there had been no space on the first flight. We spoke a few words with the pilot, who recognised us from when he had earlier flown us up to the crevasse, we helped him load it, and then were buffeted once more by the downdraft as the chopper took off and quickly disappeared to rejoin the *Naxos Explorer*. The pilot had informed us that the ship would be sailing early tomorrow morning.

Tigatuq and Andropolos had obviously watched the whole proceedings and were waving to us from their boat now moored on the ice edge. I skied over and told them that we would join them once we had finished helping load the CCDP sledge. With five of us at it, it did not take long to roll the oil drums on and off and, having given our farewells to Stephen and Chang, we were soon once more in Tigatuq's boat sailing down the fjord. Tigatuq proudly showed us the fish that he and Andropolos had caught and we in turn told them what had happened.

‘It looks as if Telford is going to get clean away,’ concluded Aggie, ‘and we’ll never know what really happened to Christina.’

‘Why not get the authorities, Anton that is, why not ask Anton to board the ship and talk to him?’ suggested Andropolos.

‘No-one is going to believe us,’ I answered. ‘We have no real evidence of any fishy going-ons, and Anton is very cautious. He’ll take a lot of convincing, and I don’t think he’ll do it. What would it achieve, anyway? If he goes up to Telford and asks ‘where is Christina?’, or says to Randy ‘I gather your back is not really sore’, or asks Mark if he moved any flags, all they have to do is to deny it all, and Anton will go away with egg on his face, and possibly a diplomatic incident as well. No, we ourselves have to tackle Telford and the others, and if the ship sails before we can do this... Well we will have lost!’ I paused, an idea occurring to me. ‘No, wait a minute. The pilot said the ship’s not sailing until the morning. Maybe we could board her.’

‘Board her?’ said Aggie in astonishment. ‘Like pirates, with knives in our mouths?’

‘No, don’t be silly! We could creep aboard stealthily, at night.’

‘But it doesn’t really get dark. They would be bound to see us approaching.’

‘Not necessarily. Everyone will be asleep.’

‘Apart from the watchman.’

‘Apart from the watchman. But you know how it is. When at anchor nothing much happens and the watchman often spends little time looking at the sea. His main job would be looking out for

drifting icebergs, and there don't appear to be many around at present.'

'We could stage a diversion,' suggested Jørgen.'

'What sort of diversion?' asked Aggie.

'Jim is right. Watchmen easily get bored at anchor. If there is something to see, say Tigatuq's boat, he would be watching this while we board by other means.'

'You mean, we just swim out with knives in our mouths, commando-style, and climb up the anchor chain, while Tigatuq motors around in his boat? You must be joking!'

'No! Kayaks!' Jørgen continued. 'Did you not see them down at the jetty? We could paddle out quietly. Andropolos, could you ask Tigatuq if anyone would mind if we borrowed three kayaks?'

But before he could do this there was a sudden shout from Tigatuq, who was pointing excitedly to the shore. We looked where he was indicating and saw a dark speck on an old ice floe.

'A seal,' said Andropolos. 'Tigatuq will want to shoot it. There have not been many around this year, and it takes a lot of meat to feed a hungry dog team.'

Tigatuq turned the boat towards the floe and slowly took it in to within rifle range. We noticed the seal look round suspiciously, and then it was up, slithering towards the sea. But before reaching the water's edge, Tigatuq's rifle rang out and the seal was suddenly stilled. Tigatuq and Andropolos thumped each other on the back, and Tigatuq's grin became even wider than normal. He took the boat up to the edge of the ice and Andropolos held the wheel while Tigatuq clambered on to the floe to flense the animal. His

movements were precise and well practised, and I thought back to the time when I had first seen him wield his knife in this manner – while butchering the polar bear: I felt nauseous, and turned away.

To take my mind off this, I thought through Jørgen's idea of using kayaks to reach the *Naxos Explorer*. Aggie did seem right in one way, it was like a commando raid. And what would we do once we were aboard? March up to Telford's cabin, knock on the door, and ask to come in? Put our whole theory to him there and then? He would admit it all and give himself up? Would he hell! Maybe we should first investigate the laboratory I had stumbled into on my previous snoop around: find some convincing evidence of tampering with the ice-cores, and then present it to them? At least I knew the layout of the ship. Or maybe I should go and quiz Randy about his sore back, tell him that Christina had seen him acting suspiciously, and ask him what it was all about. Or perhaps we should look for Christina herself, if, joy oh joy, she had really been taken aboard the ship and was not lying frozen in some crevasse. But if I were them, why bring her aboard? Why not dump her in a crevasse? She would not be found until ten thousand years from now, if it all; it would be a low-risk strategy...

I cogitated, then suddenly made up my mind – we would board, using the kayaks. Our task once aboard must be to find Christina: if she were not there – well we would cross that bridge when we came to it. I discussed this with Aggie and Jørgen, and Jørgen was certainly willing to give it a go. Aggie, although agreeing to join in with the plan, was less certain.

‘I’ll come along,’ he had said, ‘but don’t expect any heroics from me. As soon as there’s any sign of trouble, and there’s bound to be, I’ll immediately stick up my hands and agree terms.’

‘And there is another thing,’ added Jørgen, ‘they may be waiting for us. Even if we had not been observed before, the helicopter pilot will certainly let Telford know we are in the area.’

‘But they’ll not be expecting a boarding party, at least not a surreptitious one,’ I said. ‘It’s unlikely they’ll have watches posted out all night looking out for us.’

‘Unlikely, but not impossible,’ put in Aggie.

‘Well, we’ll just have to take the chance,’ I concluded. ‘If they do see us, there is not very much they can do, other than send us back to the shore. We will just have to bluff it out.’

Meanwhile Tigatuq had finished butchering the seal, and we helped him to stow the skin, blubber and meat aboard. On the final leg of the journey back to the settlement Tigatuq readily agreed to us borrowing the kayaks, although to this day I do not know if they belonged to him; in his current jovial mood, after a successful day fishing and hunting, I am sure he would have agreed to anything!

Chapter 15. Boarding Party

Tigatuq did agree to take his boat out at three in the morning, and to motor about in front of the *Naxos Explorer*, pretending to fish; well, not actually pretending, but fishing for real! Using binoculars, we inspected the ship closely from the shore and planned our assault. We would carry the kayaks to a launching point as near the ship as possible, which, and the thought made me shudder, which happened to be the site of the polar bear attack, and then we would paddle cautiously up to the stern, a distance estimated at about two kilometres. The next stage was going to be difficult. Climbing the anchor chain was ruled out at once – for several reasons: it would be difficult to climb in practice, it would mean climbing aboard right underneath the bridge, and lastly it was hard to see how we would be able to negotiate the final overhang under the hull.

The ship was lowest in the water at the stern, but how were we to board? Throwing up a rope was the obvious answer, but this would be difficult from an unstable kayak, and, additionally, how would we attach the rope? All the action movies we had seen showed that grappling irons were the answer, but there was a danger that these would clatter noisily onto the deck, waking all and sundry. After much discussion, we decided on using a knotted rope to make climbing easy and attaching a simple metal hook to the end, bound round with cloth to prevent any sound when thrown; we were fairly confident we would be able to hook it round the handrail, about three metres above the water.

We found a piece of scrap metal lying around by the jetty and, with much banging and hammering, managed to bend it into a passable hook, covered it with strips torn from an old tarpaulin, and tied it to our rope. We took to the kayaks and practised throwing the rope, using the jetty for practise. It was difficult, as anticipated, but we proved that, with a bit of luck, it would be possible to hook it over the ship's handrail. Jørgen was the best thrower, and so drew the short straw. Finally, we paddled the kayaks round the point to our proposed starting point.

Tigatuq had invited Andropolos and us to his hut for supper and we joined him and his wife for an excellent meal of fresh fish, washed down with beer. We had planned on a short sleep before embarking on our adventure, but this proved impossible – it would have been rude to break up the party. As it was, it was difficult to avoid drinking too much beer, so we might not have been in the best of states when we set out, although at least we had Dutch courage!

At about half past two in the morning Tigatuq set off to the jetty and we set off to the kayaks. But disaster! The ship had swung round on its anchor and was now pointing straight towards the shore and our kayaks. This was an eventuality that, foolishly, we had not considered. Anyone standing on the bridge would be bound to see us paddling out to the ship, especially as the sea was a mirror calm. We heard the distant sound of a motor and saw Tigatuq's boat heading out to sea.

‘Oh no,’ exclaimed Aggie. ‘He’s carrying on as planned. If he stops to fish in front of the ship now, the eye of anyone on the ship will be drawn straight on to us.’

‘Let’s go then. Now!’ I said.

‘To the ship?’

‘No, not yet. We’ll paddle along the shore – we’re so low in the water that there’s a very good chance we won’t be seen from the ship if we hug the coastline.’

‘That is true,’ contributed Jørgen, ‘we must go at once.’

‘Agreed, Aggie?’

‘Yes.’

‘What are we waiting for, then?’ I said. ‘Come on!

We paddled along the shore back towards the harbour and from there we planned to cross the mouth of the fjord, and so come on the ship from the rear. I began to get twitchy, fearing that the ship might swing round to face us again, or that she might up anchor any minute – had we left it too late? However, the beauty of the scene to some extent assuaged my fears. There was not a ripple on the sea, only an occasional floe and bergy bit, there were exact reflections of mountains along the coast and the distant ice sheet with its oh so familiar glacier tumbling to the sea glistened under the cloudless sky. All that was missing to make the scene perfect was Christina, paddling beside me, drifting along in a contented silence...

In spite of my fears we got to the ship without a hitch, although it was nearer four o’clock than three o’clock when we reached it. We saw no-one on deck or any evidence of life on board, but in spite of

this I felt my heart beginning to thump as we neared the stern. The hull seemed huge, towering above us, and Aggie and I held on to Jørgen's canoe to stabilise it as he prepared to throw the rope. He would never manage it – and he did not, at least not at first. We were too near the ship, and the hook came tearing down, landing on Jørgen's canoe with a loud thump. We collectively held our breath, but there were no sounds of shouting or footprints running on the metal deck above. We paddled away from under the stern, becoming more visible to any potential observer in the process, and Jørgen tried again. It was an easier angle, but the hook failed to contact, although hitting the rail and falling into the sea to what seemed like a loud splash.

It caught on the sixth attempt, although we got wet in the process of pulling the rope out of the sea each time. We paddled back to the hull until the rope was hanging vertically down. I suddenly realised that we would become mincemeat if the propellers turned. 'Quick, quick,' I urged, 'the engines could start any minute now!' Again, Aggie and I held onto Jørgen's canoe to stabilise it while Jørgen stood up and climbed the rope without mishap. We tied Jørgen's canoe to the rope with its painter and then it was Aggie's turn; he wobbled a bit while trying to stand up in his kayak, but he made it successfully. Finally it was me. I made sure that Aggie's and my canoes were tied up, hauled myself on the rope and started climbing. My wet and cold hands found it hard to maintain my grip, but I was soon with the others on the still-deserted deck. Luck was with us so far!

Anyone coming along, however, would spot our rope hanging off the rail, so we moved the hook down to the bottom rung where it would be less visible. They would only be able to see our canoes in the unlikely eventuality of peering straight down over the stern. I looked around. We were in an area of ropes, bollards, and capstans, the area used for the stern moorings when alongside.

'Where first?' whispered Aggie, for our plans had not developed much beyond this.

'To the corridor,' I replied. 'Below the mess – where I went before, with the laboratories, storerooms and so on.'

'Should we keep together, or search separately?'

'Let's keep together – for the moment at least. Do you agree, Jørgen?'

'Yes.'

'I agree, there's safety in numbers,' said Aggie. 'Things always go wrong when groups split up! Lead on Macduff!'

We tiptoed up the companionway to the deck above, then along the gangway towards the bow, ducking under many portholes as we did so. We found the door to the mess-deck, the one we had first entered when the ship had been moored alongside the ice, and crept in. We heard a rumbling noise as we passed the mess, but this proved only to be the water boiler talking to itself, the room itself being empty. I looked at my watch, quarter past four, and had another sudden panic: presumably they changed watches at four, and the watchman could be down for a cup of cocoa anytime now! 'Hurry,' I whispered back to the others.

We crept past the cabins, sounds of snoring coming from some of them even above the background noise of the ship's ventilation system, and I found the stairway down to the laboratories. We went down. This was the deck where Telford had found me snooping last time. Would he be in wait this time? We opened the door of the workshop and went in. A quick look around showed nothing suspicious.

'What exactly are we looking for?' asked Aggie.

'I'm not sure.'

'What?'

'Shhh!'

We looked in the geological laboratory next, the room in which I had previously seen the core-tubes. There was one tube lying on the bench, but of a different design to any I had seen before. It was made of metal rather than plastic and of a larger diameter than the normal core-tube. There were numerous holes on the outside, the size of pinpricks, and looking down the tube you could see a forest of thin needles. At one end there were a couple of electrical connections and piece of thin plastic tubing sticking out.

'What is it?' whispered Jørgen.

'I don't know,' I replied. 'There's nothing else here, let's move on.'

The cold room was next and, unlike the previous time I looked inside; it's temperature was well below freezing, minus twenty on the dial, but there was little in it apart from a few ice cores on the shelves, looking very like the ice cores I had seen at Camp Tunu. But why would this ship have ice cores?

We searched the rest of the deck but found nothing more of note, although there were some locked doors we could not enter. At the end of the gangway we came to another set of stairs leading up to the deck we had been on earlier. We were not sure what to do next. Should we go up? We could not really break into cabins with sleeping occupants. However, on the principal it was better to do something than nothing, we ascended to find ourselves opposite a door marked 'Hospital'. I turned the door handle quietly and as I did so I felt the ship's engines vibrate below me. So did the others.

Aggie tugged at my sleeve. 'Come on Jim, we must go. Quick! Or we'll be trapped on board.'

'But we haven't achieved anything yet!'

'The propellers could turn any minute,' said Jørgen. 'Can we risk getting back into our canoes?'

'We could haul them clear, to the side, and get in safely,' persisted Aggie urgently.

'Um! Dangerous,' replied Jørgen. 'We could be sucked back.'

Just then we heard someone approach down the gangway and instinctively we all collapsed through the door of the ship's hospital, Aggie quickly shutting it behind him. It was a standard sick bay, with four hospital beds – three empty and the other hidden by curtains. I went over and drew back the curtains. There was an occupant, eyes shut and apparently sleeping, and I could not help crying out, 'Christina, Christina! Oh, Christina!'

I heard a gasp from Jørgen and heard Aggie mutter 'My God' under his breath. I stroked her cheek and then shook her gently. No

response. Aggie also gave her a shake, but likewise no response. She did not stir.

'She must be drugged,' said Jørgen, and he lifted up her eyelids. 'Dilated pupils. Yes she is drugged.'

'I agree,' I added, and then said vehemently. 'Right, that does it! I'm going to tackle Telford now! Come, on, let's find him.'

And before the others had time to react, I marched out of the room with no attempt at stealth or concealment. I was not sure which was Telford's cabin, so I opened the first one I came to. There was someone asleep on the bunk who, when I shook him violently, I realised was Chuck.

'Right, Chuck,' I shouted, 'which is Telford's cabin?'

A surprised and sleepy voice replied, 'Two doors down, on the other side... Hey, Jim! What in God's name are you doing here?'

'Never mind,' and I stormed out, bumping into Aggie and Jørgen in the doorway. Opening Telford's door, I shouted, 'Telford! Explain yourself! We've found Christina, and you've drugged her, you bastard!'

He appeared to wake instantly and sat up, peering at me through sleepy eyes. 'Jim! What the hell are you doing here? And Jørgen and Aggie?'

'You know,' I replied, 'you know only two well!'

'What are you talking about?'

'You kidnapped Christina, and have her aboard. We've seen her, in the hospital, she's drugged...'

'Kidnapped?' he interrupted. 'What on earth are you talking about?'

‘You, Mark, and the others, are all in it together...’

‘All in it? I don’t understand. We found Christina...’

‘Found her?’

‘Yes, a few miles out of Camp Tunu we came across her by chance. Hypothermic, frostbitten. We drugged her of course, painkillers and the like, and brought her here to recuperate...’

‘I don’t believe you one bit! And why haven’t you told anyone?’

‘We have!’

‘What?’

‘Yes, the radio on the snocat was not working, but as soon as we got her safely to the ship, we radioed Tanilaq to tell her she was safely on board, in hospital, the best place for her to be. Anyhow, what are you doing on our ship?’

I hesitated. Telford had certainly taken the wind out of my sails. What if he were telling the truth?

‘Looking for Christina, of course,’ I eventually answered.

‘Yeah, but how did you know she was here?’

‘Guessed – it seemed possible. And we were right!’

‘Yes, but... Hey, why don’t we discuss this sensibly over a cup of coffee? Let’s go to the mess. Hi there Jørgen! Hi there Aggie! Good morning to you both,’ he added. He swung his legs out of his bunk and stood up, towering over me. Grabbing a jacket, he indicated the door and we all piled out, following him meekly to the mess. I noticed that Chuck had also been listening in the doorway and was following us.

‘Do you believe him?’ Aggie whispered to me as we walked along. ‘Could he be right?’

‘No, no, of course not,’ but doubt had entered my mind.

‘While you were arguing with Telford, I noticed some interesting papers on his desk. I’ve got them here, under my jacket.’

‘What?’

‘Shhh! We’ll look at them later.’

We trooped into the mess and for a while the everyday task of making coffee occupied us, ‘two sugars, no milk, please’; ‘black for me...’

I felt we were in a difficult situation, and I am sure Aggie and Jørgen thought so as well. It was ‘showdown time’, when the detective confidently stands up in front of the assembled crowd and tells them why he is right. Was I right? Should I tell Telford all my theories, everything? Put all our cards on the table? Had I the confidence? What if he just said ‘no’? Or should we say that, now we had found Christina, that was the end of it? Of course, once Christina had recovered she could tell us herself what she had seen up at Camp Tunu. Maybe we should wait until then.

These thoughts were bubbling in my mind as we sat down round a table, to the noticeable sound of the anchor chain coming up and the throb of the ship’s main engines through the deck. The ship was leaving and we were still on board! I needed time to think.

For a short while there was an almost embarrassed silence while we supped our coffee, then everyone started talking at once. I got in first with, ‘Tell me Telford, where did you find Christina? Why didn’t you take her back to the camp?’

‘We thought we could get her to hospital quicker on the snocat – there would be no guarantee of a quick flight out from Camp Tunu. We made the coast in record time.’

‘You nearly ran us over. Didn’t you see us?’

‘What?’ and I thought I detected genuine surprise in his voice.

‘Coming down the glacier, in a snowstorm, you were heading straight for us. I could see the whites of your eyes!’

‘Well, I never saw you, and that’s God’s truth! You know visibility’s not good in that machine when it’s snowing – remember, that’s why it wasn’t used when we were originally searching for her.’

‘How did you find her, then?’ I persisted.

‘Sheer chance. About fifteen miles out from camp. Lying in the snow. She had a pulse, but only just. We brought her in, laid her down on a bunk, and raced here. Phoned Doug as soon as we got to the ship. We’re leaving now, as you will have noticed. We’ll drop Christina off at Tanilaq later this morning. Thought we’d let her sleep before moving her again, otherwise we’d have flown her straight to Tanilaq. We’ll drop you off as well, if you like. Incidentally, how the hell did you get aboard? And why were you looking for Christina here?’

‘Canoes,’ put in Aggie. ‘We came aboard from canoes. They’re...’ He stopped because I had kicked him under the table.

‘Where are they?’ asked Telford.

There seemed no point in evading his question, they would be bound to find them in any case.

‘At the stern,’ I replied.

‘Why didn’t you hail the ship? We’d have picked you up.’

‘It was the middle of the night, a lovely night as you can see, we were out canoeing, it was a spur of the moment decision.’ I knew this was a weak answer, so hurriedly went on to say, ‘It was Stephen and Chang. They said Christina was flown out to the ship in your helicopter. That’s why we came aboard. It was a spur of the moment decision, I tell you.’

‘Stephen and Chang?’ said Telford with a surprised look on his face, and across the table I thought I saw Chuck raise his eyebrows as well. However, I hoped it would be an answer that would keep him quiet for a while; after all he could not deny that Stephen and Chang would have seen her if they had taken her openly, that we were not wrong in our surmise that she was be aboard. My gut instinct at present was not to tell Telford all our suspicions.

Silence fell once more round the table while we drank our coffee, and during this a crew member peered into the mess. On seeing us, he came in, eyeing myself, Aggie and Jørgen with obvious suspicion.

‘We’ve found three Eskimo canoes at the stern, Telford,’ he said. ‘I assume they belong to these gentlemen?’

‘Yes they do,’ he answered. After a pause, he turned to us, ‘Well, what do want to do? Paddle back in them now, or let us drop you off in Tanilaq?’

I looked at the others. ‘Paddle back,’ said Aggie hastily.

‘And you Jørgen?’ I asked.

‘We might as well accept Telford’s offer of a lift.’

‘I agree. I would like to stay with Christina. But you don’t have to, Aggie.’

‘Sure, Aggie,’ put in Telford, ‘it’s up to you. But we can certainly give you a lift back.’

‘What about the canoes?’ queried Aggie.

‘There was an Eskimo out fishing when we came aboard.’ I said. ‘Maybe if the ship hailed him, he could take our canoes back. Is that possible to arrange, Telford?’

‘Yes, of course,’ he replied. ‘Is that settled then, you are all hitching a lift with us?’ We nodded. ‘Can you see to that, Johnson?’

‘Very well, sir.’

‘Well chaps. It is still early in the morning, and you must be tired, up all night! Why not take a nap? We'll be arriving off Tanilaq mid-morning, I'm sure we can offer you a cabin and breakfast before then.’

‘Thanks,’ I replied. ‘I could certainly do with some sleep. But first I would like to see Christina again. Is that possible?’

‘Me too,’ said Jørgen.

‘Certainly,’ agreed Telford. ‘Why not go down now – you obviously know where she is. I'll show Aggie an empty cabin you can use, and then he can come with me to check the canoes are safely sent on their way.’

We rose from the table and Aggie went off with Telford, looking, I thought, a little worried at the prospect, while Jørgen and I went along to the hospital. We quietly opened the door and padded over to Christina's bed. There was no change in her condition, she was still looking as if she were in a drugged sleep.

Jørgen challenged me. ‘What are you playing at? Is it safe on the boat? Would it not be better if we had left when we could – Telford seemed perfectly willing to let us go!’

‘I'm not quite sure,’ I replied. ‘Playing for time. That's one reason why I suggested we came down here: to get some time to think. Sure we now know that Christina is safe and well, but, even though I'm convinced Telford is lying through his teeth, we have no evidence to challenge him. What we need is some hard evidence.’ A sudden thought struck me. ‘Wait a minute, I've got an idea. You know that strange, metal corer we saw in the laboratory – we do not know what it is, but I'm sure it has something to do with all this. Why don't we sneak down and send it ashore with the canoes.’

‘With the canoes? How on earth...’

‘No, I've a better idea! We drop it overboard, quietly, tied to a buoy, there were some on the stern deck where we landed, remember? We drop it overboard, and retrieve it later. Quick, let's go before the whole ship wakes up.’

Jørgen hesitated. He looked dubious. ‘Carry it to the stern, and drop it overboard. What if somebody sees us?’

‘We'll have to take that risk. I'm sure one person can lift it, the other can keep watch. Come on!’, and I virtually dragged Jørgen out of the sick bay.

We looked left and right, saw that the way was clear, crossed the corridor and went down the stairs to the deck below. This deck too appeared deserted, so we hurried along to the lab and I went to pick up the corer. I could just manage it by myself, so told Jørgen to go ahead and warn me of any one coming.

‘Wait!’ he whispered. ‘Should we not try and disguise it? Cover it with something?’

‘Good idea! What with?’

We glanced round the room, but there was nothing obvious except a lab coat hanging on the back of a door; not quite big enough, but perhaps better than nothing. I draped it round the top of the corer, and then told Jørgen to lead on. We tiptoed along the corridor to the stairs nearest the mess, up these, and then past the mess itself to get to the bulkhead door leading onto the main deck. I followed gingerly behind Jørgen, feeling that everyone in the universe was watching me. As we headed back to the stern on the outside deck, not bothering to duck under portholes this time, the corer began to slip from my grasp. I could not hold it, and it slipped to the deck with a clang. I froze, waiting for every crew member to immediately pounce on me, but nothing happened. As I began breathing again, Jørgen waved urgently for me to get moving again, so I picked it up and followed him.

As we neared the companionway down to the stern, Jørgen indicated for me to halt. I put the corer down and went up to where he was standing. Below us, on the other side of the ship, we could see Telford, Aggie and Johnson peering down over the rail. Just at that moment Aggie looked round, saw us and waved. The other two turned round at the same time, and Telford beckoned us to come down. I glanced back at corer lying on the deck, half-hidden under the lab coat. I went back and tried to cover it completely, but whatever I did, one end or the other obstinately stuck out.

‘We'll have to risk leaving it,’ I whispered to Jørgen, ‘but let's first put it behind that air vent. The chances are that no-one will see it there.’ He nodded in agreement and it only took a matter of seconds to hide.

We descended the stairs and went over to the others. Below us we could see Tigatuq tying the painters of our kayaks to his boat, and I wondered how they had managed to attract his attention and tell him what to do. He looked up, saw Jørgen and myself, grinned and waved. We waved back, and then watched him head off to the settlement with our canoes in tow. ‘We've really burnt our boats!' I said quietly to myself.

As he left, Johnson spoke into a radio to the bridge, and immediately the propellers of the *Naxos Explorer* began to turn and we were under way.

‘Time for our bunks, I think,’ said Aggie.

‘Yes,’ I replied. ‘But before that I would just like to watch us depart. It's a such a beautiful morning.’

And it was. The sea a mirror calm, a few ice floes lying carelessly on the water, distant mountains clear-cut in the golden morning sun, defying us to leave, and the ice cap hovering as an undefined haze in the background. The ice cap! No longer an impenetrable barrier, but tamed through our experience of it.

As I had hoped, while we were watching the scene Telford and Johnson left to go about their business and we three were alone on the deck.

‘Quick, now's our chance,’ I urged. ‘We most get it overboard before the ship gets up too much speed.’

‘What?’ asked Aggie.

‘No time to explain. See that buoy over there? Go with Jørgen and see if there's any rope attached. If not, find some and tie it on. Make sure the rope's as long as possible. Hurry, hurry!’

I rushed across the deck, up the ladder, retrieved the corer, and was back in no time. Jørgen was tying a piece of rope to the end of a round, plastic ship's fender, so I grabbed the other end, threaded it through the corer and tied it off.

‘Right, overboard with it!’ I lowered the corer gently down into the water, Jørgen threw the fender overboard.

‘Phew! That's that.’ I gasped. ‘Now, Aggie, where's this cabin of yours?’

‘I hope it does not drift away,’ put in Jørgen. ‘Then we will have no evidence at all.’

‘So do I,’ I replied. ‘The rope should be long enough to reach the bottom, so hopefully it will act as an anchor. Anyhow, with luck we should be back here this afternoon. Or we can phone up Tigatuq and ask him to retrieve it.’

Aggie led us to the cabin Telford had provided for us, and I lay down gratefully on the bunk. I looked at my watch. It was only five o'clock; in spite of all that had happened, we been aboard less than an hour. As I shut my eyes and settled down for a snooze, Aggie called out, ‘I've just remembered. Those of papers I nabbed from Telford's cabin, they're still in my jacket pocket.’

‘Well, get them out then,’ I replied.

‘Okay, here they are.’

Aggie read in silence for a while before a 'wow' echoed round the cabin. ‘Just look at this!’

It was only a couple of sheets of paper stapled together which Jørgen and I read while looking over his shoulder. The first had the letterhead of the *Naxos Oil Company* and was signed at the bottom by Bill Leatherhead, Company President, and was titled 'Operation Hawaii'. It read:

> “The company has put at the disposal of Mr Robert Telford all the resources necessary to fulfil the objectives of Operation Hawaii. All company employees shall, at his request, assist Mr Telford in the provision of ships, helicopters, personnel, finance and other support. All billing associated with this should be marked 'Hawaii' and forwarded to the Directorate at company headquarters in Illinois.”

‘Operation Hawaii?’ I murmured.

‘Must be a code name,’ suggested Aggie. ‘Hawaii, to put you off the scent. Turn over.’

The next page, headed 'Strictly Confidential' read: “Extract from minutes of meeting between the White House, the Department of Energy and the Oil Liaison Group, dated April 20 2001.

> “Item 3. The Department of Energy brought to the attention of White House officials and the Oil Liaison Group the request from the United Nations for assistance from the USA for the final stages of the Climate Change Drilling Programme. The UN have

requested a contribution of $2 million to help set-up and run the proposed international drilling facility on the Greenland Ice Cap.

"Department officials stated that scientific opinion had it that, on completion, this programme should, once and for all, prove the link between enhanced carbon dioxide levels and global warming.

"Speaking on behalf of the Oil Liaison Group, Mr Leatherhead said that the Group did not support the drilling programme, adding that action by the Group could in fact demonstrate that there was no proven link.

"On being asked by White House officials what action the Group had in mind, Mr Leatherhead replied that if they would trust in the Group then the results of the drilling programme could be nullified.

"Officials said they invested full confidence in the Group, and that it did not seem appropriate for the USA to support the UN programme.

"Item 4..."

'My God', I gasped. 'What have we got involved in! Why did the fool leave the papers lying around?'

'What if he finds we've got them?' said Aggie, noticeably turning pale. 'He'll murder us! This plot, if it is what I think it is, this goes right to the top. We can't let Telford know we've got it. We must take it back, straightaway!'

‘I agree,’ put in Jørgen. ‘Here, give the papers to me and I will take them back to his cabin. If anyone sees me, I'll pretend I was on the way to the mess for a drink of coffee.’

‘And what if he finds out the corer thing is missing before we go ashore?’ I added, ‘All hell will break lose.’

‘You should have thought of that before you dropped it overboard,’ retorted Aggie bitterly. ‘We'll just have to pray that no-one goes into the laboratory before then. Otherwise I'm sure they won't let us off the ship: they may not know where it is, but they are bound to suspect us.’

‘I'm going now,’ said Jørgen and he slipped out of the cabin,

‘I won't be able to sleep,’ continued Aggie. ‘And until we are safely ashore I will be a nervous wreck.’

‘Me as well,’ and we both lapsed into silence.

‘Telford was lying through his teeth,’ I said eventually. ‘If they...’

I was interrupted by the door opening and Jørgen came back in. ‘It's no good, he is in his cabin, at least I think he is, and I dare not go in.’

‘We'll take the papers ashore as evidence, then,’ I suggested. ‘As I was saying, to Aggie, Jørgen, Telford has been lying through his teeth: if they really had found Christina, they would have flown her straight to the hospital in Tanilaq, not back to the ship. And Stephen and Chang would definitely have told us if they had seen her loaded onto the helicopter.’

‘Yes,’ agreed Jørgen. ‘Unless, of course, they were in on it as well.’

‘Unlikely!... Do you think they would have infiltrated the CCDP that much?’

‘Let's hope not.’

‘That's all we can do...’ I paused. ‘Telford knew she suspected something up at Camp Tunu, drugged her, and brought her here.’

‘Yes. And then what would they have done with her, if we had not found her?’

‘I've no idea. At least they didn't kill her, which means they probably won't kill us.’

‘You bet?’ put in Aggie gloomily.

‘Come on, this is getting morbid,’ I said. ‘I'm sure Telford doesn't yet know he's lost his papers, or the corer. We'll be ashore before midday, and then we'll be safe.’ And we lapsed into silence for a while.

‘I am sure none of us can sleep now,’ said Jørgen eventually. ‘There is too much to think about. Let us go down and sit with Christina.’

‘That's a good idea,’ I replied, wishing I had thought of it first, so we all trooped down to the hospital.

There was no change in her condition. She looked as beautiful as ever but she did not somehow look relaxed in her drugged sleep. I lay down on the neighbouring bed, and Aggie and Jørgen did likewise on the other two empty beds. We lay in silence, each to their own thoughts, until finally tiredness must have caught up with us and we drifted off to sleep.

We were woken with a ‘oh, there you are! Time for breakfast. We'll be off Tanilaq in an hour. See you in the mess.’ It was Telford, who, after putting his head through the door, immediately retreated back out.

We left Christina still sleeping as we dragged ourselves along to the mess, only half awake. There were a few crew members enjoying breakfast and we walked over to a table where Telford was sitting alone, waving for us to join him. A welcome jug of coffee, bacon, eggs and toast beckoned, which we ate and drank in silence.

I do not know how long it was before I woke up again. I was lying on a bunk, in darkness, with a horrific headache and feeling terrible. I sat up, hanging my legs over the edge of the bed, and got a shock. My legs were shackled together. There was a crack of light where the door must be and I hobbled over to it, groping for the light switch which must be nearby. Lightness flared into the room as I flicked the switch and looked around. It was a cabin on the ship, you could tell this by the throbbing of the ship's engines, but not a cabin I had been in before. It was smaller, only one bunk, but with its own shower-room and toilet, and the standard fittings of any cabin – desk, cupboard and chair. There was a porthole, but the metal cover was clamped tight over it and I could not open it.

I looked down at my feet, standard handcuffs used as shackles for my legs: simple but effective. I would not be going anywhere for a while, and if I did manage to break through the porthole I would surely drown.

I sat on the bunk, and put my sore head on my hands. I realised I had not checked the door, hobbled over to it and, of course, it was locked. I returned to the bunk. So this was it. Kidnapped, and separated from my friends, and absolutely nothing I could do about

it! It did confirm, though, all my suspicions about Telford and the *Naxos Explorer*, which was some comfort.

I have never been so bored or frustrated in my whole life as during the next few days. I had no one to talk to, no books to read, nothing but myself and my thoughts. Many a time I went through all that had happened to us in Greenland, and as time went on I thought more and more of Christina. Was she still drugged? Or was she being kept in solitary confinement like me and, I assumed, like the others? Perhaps she was in the next cabin, although banging on the wall brought no response. I lay dreaming of having her beside me in the bunk, warmly cuddling and enjoying each other's company…

No one ever came into the cabin, although in the middle of every night someone quickly opened the door and put in a tray of food, which had to last the next twenty-four hours. Mainly sandwiches and fruit – no drink – tap water had to do. I did at least catch up on my sleep, having a residual tiredness from our ice cap crossing and also not having slept much the previous few days.

Although I could not see out of the porthole, I could tell by the movement of the ship when we left the zone of pack ice and entered open water, steaming south I imagined. And then what would happen? They couldn't kill us, could they? I was sure our trail was too obvious and, in any case, they could have bumped us off already, and dropped us over the side. It was some consolation that they had not. No, they were keeping us prisoner – perhaps they did not know what to do with us?

Chapter 16. Prisoners

It was six days before the monotony was broken. I knew something was imminent when I heard the ship's engines change tone, followed by the characteristic clangs and batters of docking. A stillness permeated the ship as the main engines were stopped, although the whirr of the ventilation system in my cabin then seemed louder.

Another couple of hours of boredom passed and then I heard the door unlocked and a uniformed official entered, with Telford following immediately behind. The official was a dark-haired, unsmiling, bulky individual, although not as large as Telford, and on his epaulettes I noticed the writing *Department of Homeland Security*. 'Will you come with me please? You are charged with unlawfully breaking into American property.'

I began to protest, but he gave me a dirty look and said I had better remain silent for the time-being – I would be able to present my case later on. Telford, without looking directly at me, bent down and unlocked my shackles. I collected up my belongings, which only amounted to my outdoor jacket, and we proceeded out of my now claustrophobic cabin. Outside the door were two uniformed policemen who followed on behind as we went along the corridor, out onto the deck and down the gangplank.

I luxuriated in the fresh air, and looked around. It was a breezy day, with low clouds scudding in off the sea and occasional bursts of short-lived sunshine. The port looked like any port the world over –

ugly, with warehouses, containers, cranes, abandoned oil drums, and so on.

'Where are we?' I ventured to ask, for we could have been anywhere.

'Providence,' replied the official.

'Where?'

'Providence, Rhode Island.'

'Ah!'

I was led into a waiting car and driven off, sandwiched on the back seat between the two policeman, with the official at the wheel. Telford stayed behind on the dockside and I had noticed that he had not caught my eyes once during this episode. Was he feeling guilty?

It was a short drive, finishing at what was obviously the main police station of Providence. Providence! What providence had brought me here? I was led round to the back of the building, past waste bins and unprepossessing concrete walls, and through a door that opened into a long corridor. It looked ominously like a prison, and so it turned out. I was taken to about the fifth door on the left, pushed into a cell, and the door shut behind me.

The room was about ten feet square, of white-painted breeze block, with a smaller room off one side containing a basin and toilet. The only furnishing was a bed and there was no window, only a single bare light bulb, high up and way out of reach. Standard issue, I surmised. There was an air vent in the ceiling, but my hopes of following the traditional route of escape through this were dashed owing to its small size. The door was metal, with a single inspection

window, shut from the outside. I sighed. My cabin had been luxurious in comparison to this hole!

What was going on? Here I was in America, shut up in prison, while nefarious play was afoot, the real criminals at large. I, or rather, we, were innocent bystanders, caught up in something way out of our depth.

I must stick up for my rights, I thought, demand a lawyer, they could not keep me here indefinitely – there was the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, and so on, although I realised I was a little hazy about the American legal system. Yes, I must demand a lawyer – this always happened in films – do not say anything without legal representation present!

I paced my prison in frustration, at least I was no longer shackled, and got more and more angry. I was just about to shout loudly at the door that I demanded a lawyer, when I heard steps outside and a shout from the corridor. It was a familiar voice – Aggie's! So they were bringing us all here! Christina as well? I shouted back and Aggie must have heard me for I could have sworn he shouted back, 'Hi Jim, it's me, Aggie,' followed by silence and a door banging.

Nothing happened for a further hour or so until a grumpy policeman unlocked the door and handed me a greasy hamburger and a can of coke. He refused to make conversation. After this miserable lunch I lay on the bunk and waited – what else could I do?

Later, much later, I heard the door being unlocked and three people were let into the cell – the official who had brought me ashore, a dapper man with a moustache, wearing a dark suit and a

sombre tie, and another younger man, equally suited. They were all equally unsmiling.

'Mr Ashworth,' started the dapper man, 'the charges are serious. You illegally entered America property without authority, and have now entered the country without a passport, papers or a visa.'

'That… that…' I spluttered, 'is preposterous. I was kidnapped. I had no plans to come to America...'

'Then why did you board the ship?'

'I wanted to find...'

'So you admit you boarded the ship?'

'Yes, I mean...'

'That is enough for the moment, thank you.'

And before I had time to take in what was happening they had left the room and the door locked behind them. So much for me not saying anything without my lawyer! Within fifteen seconds I had admitted to illegally boarding a ship!

But they could not do much, could they? Deport me, at worst? Had I, though, actually committed a crime? Was it a crime to board an American ship in foreign waters? Did American law apply on American ships?

I thought of Operation Hawaii, and shivered. I had been spending a lot of the past week thinking about Operation Hawaii, putting together all the links in my mind. It had backing, at least by default, all the way up to the President. Murder, or at least manslaughter, had been committed in its name, not to mention the kidnapping of four people. If they let us go, and we talked, if we told the whole story... Could they, the Naxos Oil Company, the President of the

USA, could they risk letting us go? On the other hand, could they keep us locked up indefinitely? What justification could they possibly have? Would not the British Embassy, the Swedish and Norwegian Embassies not have something to say? But what if they did not tell anyone we were here? Might we not rot away in an American jail for ever? In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre, was America now less circumspect in upholding an individual's human rights? Things I had read suggested this might be the case.

Surely, though, someone else must know we were aboard? I thought back to Greenland. Tigatuq had seen us on the *Naxos Explorer*, but no-one else. Andropolos knew we were planning to board. And that letter I had written to Anton. I had spent a long time recently thinking about that letter. Had he opened it? If so, had he acted on it? Or maybe he had lost it? And the corer thing I so casually dropped over the side – maybe this was now lost – helping the Americans by destroying evidence?

If in future Telford denied that we had ever come aboard, and with the general supposition that Christina was dead, could they get away with denying we were here at all? We could easily have drowned, for example, in Greenland – it was, after all, a dangerous place!

So many unknowns, so many unanswered questions, and being in solitary confinement made it even worse: to have been with the others, to talk it all through, that must be better than this. I thought of stories I had heard about prisoners being kept in solitary confinement for a year or more. How, in God's name, had they

survived? The boredom after only six days of being shut up seemed almost enough to kill me!

I spent much of the time thinking of Christina. I seemed to have dismissed the possibility that she would go off with Jørgen once we were free, taking it for granted that she and I would get together immediately. I hatched grand plans in my imagination, losing myself in romantic and erotic fantasies, which, to avoid embarrassment, I will not go into now!

On the second day I began shouting and banging at my door, but soon gave up as it elicited absolutely no response. The only contact I had with the outside world was when the same surly jailer put in a tray of unappetising food morning, noon and night. I compared in my mind the feeling of space, indeed the reality of space on the vast, white Greenland ice sheet, the sense of freedom, equal in all directions, and was it only ten days ago? I compared that with this white space I was now in, small, cramped, claustrophobic, no freedom, at least physical freedom, in any direction. I knew how a polar bear must feel when transferred from the expansive polar wastes to a small compound in the zoo, and I realised that prison was not about how comfortable it was, but was about the prohibition of doing what you wanted when you wanted.

Things changed on the morning of the third day when, after what stood for breakfast, I was led out the way I had come in to a waiting van. It was black and unmarked with no windows. The rear door was opened and I was told to sit at one of the two benches along each side. A policeman joined me, and the door was shut.

A couple of minutes later the door was opened, and, joy oh joy, Jørgen was ushered in.

'Hello,' I said. 'How...'

'Shut up,' ordered the policeman. 'No talking!'

We sat in silence, stupidly smiling at each other, although Jørgen made a strange gesture to his jacket, which I did not understand at the time. Soon the door was opened once more and in came Aggie.

'Hi folks!' he exclaimed cheerfully. 'Been having a good time?'

'Shut up,' put in the policeman. 'No talking!'

'To hell with that!' replied Aggie. 'What are you going to do about it if we do? It's not against the law to talk, in this land, is it?'

'Orders! You are not to speak to each other.'

'Who says?' answered Aggie, glaring at him challengingly. 'Wow, James! What has been going on! Am I glad to see you both!' And he hugged both Jørgen and me in turn.

The door opened for the last time, and Christina climbed in. She looked up and gave us all a wan smile. It was not the Christina we had known and loved, but a hollow shadow of herself. What had the bastards done to her?

'Come and sit here,' I indicated. 'Come and join me.'

She sat down beside me without protest, and then her body fell against mine. 'James!' she expostulated in a whisper, glancing briefly up to my face and then bursting into tears.

Another policeman climbed in, the door was shut and the van set off.

'What next?' queried Aggie.

‘What next, indeed,’ I replied, and we lapsed into silence. The presence of the two policeman seemed to put a stopper on conversation, and we remained silent most of the journey. However, I think we were all glad to be together again, and the feeling of togetherness was enough to make conversation unnecessary for the time-being.

Christina spent most of the journey with her body pressed against mine, and every now and then I could feel a spasm of shivering run through her.

‘I have been drugged a long time,’ she whispered, ‘and my body has not liked it. I do not yet feel well.’

‘Don't worry,’ I replied, adding the standard *cliché.* ‘Everything will turn out alright.’

‘I am sure it will, now we are together again,’ and she looked into my eyes and smiled. Now it was my turn to shiver as an instinctive feeling of intense happiness passed through me. ‘I am sorry if I was cold towards you back on the ice cap,’ she continued. ‘I was being silly.’

‘No you were not! Forget about it.’ We relapsed into silence, although my mind had returned to its fantasies that had kept me occupied in prison. Maybe they would come true?

The journey must have taken a couple of hours or so and when we were finally ushered out, I noticed we were in a wooded landscape, mainly aspen, maple and birch. Somewhere in New England, obviously, but where? The van had parked next to a single-storey wooden house, surrounded by lawns and shrubs, but with a high,

barbed wire fence all around about a hundred metres away. It looked like 'house-arrest', although still a prison.

One of the policemen pointed to the house and said, ‘Make yourselves at home,’ that was all; he then walked down the driveway and stood at the gate. Meanwhile the van turned around and drove through the gate, stopping only for it to be shut and locked and for the policeman to clamber aboard.

‘Hurrah!’ whooped Aggie. ‘Am I glad to see the back of those folks.’

‘I'm sure we haven't,’ I responded. ‘Look, we are still held captive.’

‘But an open prison is better than solitary confinement,’ put in Jørgen and with that I had to agree. ‘Look what I have still,’ he added after fumbling in his pocket and drawing out a piece of paper.

‘My God!’ exclaimed Aggie. ‘You still have it!’

‘Yes, they did not search me.’

‘Maybe Telford doesn't realise he hasn't got it. If he had, I'm sure they would have gone through us with a fine tooth-comb.’

They were referring, of course, to the letter and memo that Aggie had taken from Telford's cabin.

‘We must keep this,’ I said. ‘Whatever we do, we mustn't let on that we have it.’

‘Maybe also,’ added Jørgen, ‘we should not make them realise we know about Operation Hawaii.’

‘I agree – if they know that we know it goes all the way to the president, they may be more reluctant to let us go.’

‘Absolutely!’ agreed Aggie. ‘No mention of Operation Hawaii, even amongst ourselves... Enough standing around outside, let's explore the house.’

‘What is this Operation Hawaii you talk about?’ asked Christina.

‘Top secret – all the way from the White House. It probably explains what happened to you,’ I replied. ‘Come on, let's go inside as Aggie suggested. We can talk about it later.’

It was a standard American house, with an expansive kitchen/ living area, a large bathroom, and four bedrooms. The fridge was well-stocked with food, there were books and magazines on the shelves and there was a television, although we soon found out it was only good for videos – not for television reception itself, and neither could we find a telephone. In effect, we had been given all the home comforts we needed, but seemed to be allowed no contact with the outside world.

‘I don't think they know what to do with us,’ said Aggie, once we had finished our exploration.

‘How long will they keep us here?’ asked Christina quietly.

‘We've no idea,’ replied Aggie. ‘It all depends whether the outside world is clamouring for our release.’

‘That's my conclusion as well,’ I added.

‘Do you think Anton opened your letter, and has acted on it?’ asked Aggie. ‘Or is he part of the conspiracy?’

‘We can only hope not,’ put in Jørgen. ‘I think Anton is honest.’

‘He struck me that way,’ I answered.

‘Anyone care for a beer?’ called out Aggie. ‘There seems to be a fridge-full here.’

‘There's nothing else to do. Yes please!’

‘A shower first for me,’ said Christina, ‘and I must get changed,’ and she disappeared off into her bedroom.

We had no belongings with us, of course, only the clothes we stood up in, but we had noticed clean clothes set out in all the bedrooms..

Aggie, Jørgen and myself sat down on the sofas, beer in hand, and we finally began the post-mortem on the previous week. We each recounted what had happened to us, and the others' stories were virtually the same as mine. At one stage Aggie suddenly exclaimed, ‘Do you think this place is bugged?’

‘Bound to be,’ I replied, without any evidence.

‘In that case, should we not be looking behind pictures, in flower pots, and...’

‘We've nothing to hide,’ I interrupted, and then added in a whisper, ‘but no mention of Operation Hawaii.’

Christina joined us after her shower, and had regained some of her former colour. Her long blonde hair fell down over her shoulders, she was wearing a sweatshirt and jeans, which only emphasised her figure, and my desire for her was almost unquenchable. However, I merely smiled at her, and she smiled back.

I asked her to recount what had happened up on the ice cap, ‘but only if you are ready,’ I added. She was reluctant to talk at first, but her story slowly emerged. Yes, she must have been drugged for at least four days, from when she had been kidnapped on the ice to when we had found her on the ship. She could remember nothing

of that journey, after which she had felt very ill for a few days, but was now recovering, albeit slowly. No, apart from being drugged, no-one had mistreated her; like us, they had mostly ignored her when held captive. However, she was not yet herself, and had hated being shut up, thinking she was slowly going mad.

Of course we all wanted to know what she had seen on the ice cap to make Telford kidnap her. After hearing that we had spent two days looking for her, and had thereafter given her up for dead, she said she was sorry.

'You thought I was dead? That must have been terrible!' She turned to look at me, and then kissed me, and then looked around at the others. 'I am so sorry I have caused so much trouble.'

'It was not your fault,' I replied.

'Of course not,' said Aggie. 'But tell us then, tell us what you saw.'

I did not think it the right time to tell Christina that Jørgen and had been reading her diary, so we kept quiet about what we knew already.

She explained that, after finishing work at Camp Tunu, when the weather was good enough, she often liked to go for a walk or ski round the camp. On one occasion she could have sworn she had seen Randy up and about when he was meant to be lying flat on his back with a sore back. She followed him from a distance. He joined Mark and Chuck at the top of the ramp down to the drilling rig and helped them carry a long, thin object over to the snocat. They all disappeared inside.

'I assumed the long, thin object was an ice-core. I waited outside the snocat for a long time, but nothing happened, and when I got

cold, I went to bed. I had not the courage to challenge Mark or Chuck the next day, and, as I was busy at work, the incident was pushed to the back of my mind.'

'What happened after that?' I could not help myself interrupting.

'A week or two later, I was again out skiing sometime after midnight. It was a calm evening, and I skied about a kilometre out of camp. As I skied back, I happened to pass the snocat, and this time I almost bumped into Randy and Mark – it definitely was Randy – as they came out of the snocat carrying an ice core. I remember asking what they were doing with one of the CCDP ice-cores, and that is all I remember – until I woke up on the ship.'

'It must have been serious, what you saw, that is, for them to kidnap you,' I said. 'However, I think we have pieced together most of the story now, although what they were doing to the cores remains a mystery.'

We told Christina all that had happened, how they had made it look as if she had got lost and perished, and about our adventures back on the glacier, aboard the *Naxos Explorer* and, in whispers, about Operation Hawaii. We discussed what it was that they could be doing that made them resort to kidnap and murder, and could only conclude that they must be tampering with the ice-cores in some way to invalidate the results of the CCDP drilling programme.

'That corer thing we dropped overboard is the key,' I concluded. 'Let us hope Tigatuq found it. If the drilling programme shows no correlation between carbon dioxide levels and global temperature, then the oil companies can rest easy, knowing that scientific

evidence does not support the link between greenhouse gases and global warming.'

'That is true,' agreed Christina. 'Maybe they are changing the isotopic composition of the cores.'

'And if it had not been for Christina here, they might have got away with it,' concluded Aggie.

'They still might – if they hold us here indefinitely, and deny all knowledge of our whereabouts.'

'Oh, don't be such a pessimist, Jim,' said Aggie.

'Well, the Seventh Cavalry can't come to our rescue – we're being held by them!'

We spent the rest of the day talking through our experiences and speculating about the future. While I showered and dressed, Aggie cooked us a delicious meal of steak, chips and peas, liberally washed down with beer, and by the end of the day there was a lot more colour in Christina's cheeks. I spent much of the evening trying to decide whether I should ask Christina if she wanted to share my bedroom or whether she wanted to have a room to herself. In the end I need not have worried for, without prompting, she joined me in bed. That night, I am sure, she just wanted to be with somebody, wanted reassurance after all she had been through, wanted somebody to hold and comfort her. I did that willingly. And that is all I did, in spite of an almost unstoppable desire to do more.

Nobody came to see us that day, or the day after. The second day we spent mainly watching videos, and we began to get bored again. We investigated the grounds – not much there – and inspected the surrounding fence. It said it was electrified, but we were not keen

to put this to the test! We speculated whether there was anyone surreptitiously guarding us or watching us from the woods, and concluded that there were probably remote cameras trained on the house.

We had visitors on the third day. A smiling, suited man, flanked by two individuals in the now familiar uniform of the Department of Homeland Security.

Before the suited man, presumably a lawyer, had even opened his mouth, Aggie had started demanding access to the British Embassy – and the Swedish and the Norwegian Embassies ...

'Calm down,' interrupted the lawyer. 'I recognise that your rights may not have been upheld at all times in the correct manner, but I am here to let you go.'

'What?!' exclaimed Aggie. 'We can go now? With no explanation?'

'Yes, I'm here to let you go. My name is John, by the way,' and he shook us all by the hand. 'Just sign the papers I have here, and I'll take you to the airport in my car. We have arranged flights – no need to worry about expenses.'

'Did I hear you right? You are about to fly us home?' I queried.

'About time too!' added Aggie.

'Yes, yes. Just sign these papers and you can all go home. Here – there's one for each of you. Read it first, then sign at the bottom,' and he handed round the documents.

We read in silence for a while, but it was Aggie who responded first. 'Wow! Three million dollars!' I soon read the same in my papers, and likewise Jørgen,

'I am being offered five million dollars,' Christina added.

‘Right, let's go!’ suggested Aggie.

‘Wait, wait!’ I cautioned. ‘Read the small print.’

There was a further silence while we all digested what had been offered to us:

> “The Government of the United States will pay into your bank account ...[account details followed]... the sum of three million US dollars on July 31 2003. This is in the way of compensation for time spent at the behest of the United States Government June 23 through June 28 2003, with the *proviso* that at no time in the future will details of the events of this period, or the preceding period from April 9 2003 through June 22 2003 in Greenland, or aboard the *Naxos Explorer*, involving citizens of the United States be divulged to other parties. In the event of such events being divulged to other parties, the Government of the United States of America reserves the right to reclaim all the above money, plus any compound interest gained at an annual rate of 4%, subject to imprisonment on non-compliance. Signed ... Secretary for Homeland Security.”

It was Christina who broke the silence with a simple, ‘No.’

‘No, I cannot do it,’ she said quietly.

‘I agree,’ I added. ‘This is blackmail, or some such. I will not sign.’

I saw John the lawyer look intently at Aggie and Jørgen.

‘Christina and Jim are right,’ said Jørgen eventually. ‘I cannot take this money.’

I heard Aggie sigh. ‘Yes, you are all right! Much as I could do with three million dollars, I'm sure I could not stay silent the rest of my life.’

‘Come on,’ said the lawyer. ‘This money means you would be financially secure the rest of your lives. You would never have to work again. And just for compensation for five days in an American jail!’

‘And a week held prisoner on the ship,’ I added.

‘That was nothing to do with the US Government.’

‘Yeah?’ questioned Aggie. ‘What's all this about keeping mum about happenings in Greenland? Was that the Naxos Oil Company as well? No – you, the Government, are obviously in league with them.’

‘Listen! The pertinent point is that you can all walk out of this room now – as rich men.’

‘And women,’ I muttered.

‘Yes, of course, and women!’

‘What have we done to deserve it?’ asked Christina.

‘Well... Hm...’ This question seemed to leave John at a loss for words.

‘Nothing,’ she continued. ‘No, I cannot take the money. I will not sign away my rights for blood money.’

‘Blood money?’ queried John, lifting his eyebrows. ‘There has been no blood...’

‘Three men dead,’ Aggie interrupted, ‘and it might as well have been the US Government’s doing.’

‘I deny that absolutely, what...’

‘Let us not argue,’ I broke in, not wanting Aggie to divulge how much we knew. ‘The point is, John, we do not want your money, only our freedom and our rights. Can we go now?’

‘I may be able to negotiate a better deal for you. In fact, I will go away and do that now.’

‘There's no point,’ said Aggie, ‘it will make no difference. We don't want your money, only our freedom, our democratic rights. If you are not letting us come with you now, I demand to see today the British ambassador...’

John was no longer smiling and interrupted Aggie to ask us to return the documents if we were not going to sign them. Jørgen collected them up from us and handed them back to John, who then departed. As he walked out of the door, Jørgen suggested we follow him. ‘Come on, let us see if he will give us a lift after all.’

We followed Jørgen out to the gate, seeing John's car parked on the other side of the enclosure fence. But the two burly officials looked threatening as they unlocked the gate and let John through, so we did not attempt to follow further, but instead watched John and the officials climb in and drive off.

‘Phew! What do you make of all that?’ I asked when the car had disappeared into the trees.’

‘Guilty! Guilty as hell!’ replied Aggie. ‘The Government's in it up to their neck.’

‘They will never let us go now,’ Christina predicted gloomily.

I put my arms round her shoulders. ‘They can't keep us here indefinitely.’

‘No, they will come back with more money first,’ suggested Aggie. ‘How much before we say yes? Six million? Ten million, that'll do me!’

‘Do not joke,’ put in Jørgen. ‘But look here. I have kept one of the papers. The man – John – did not notice I handed back three documents only. We can keep this as evidence for the future.’

‘If they don't find it missing, and come back for it,’ I said. ‘But good thinking in any case, Jørgen! You're good at squirreling away incriminating papers! Hide it with the others. By the way, where are the others hidden?’

‘Don't tell him, Jørgen, Then he can't reveal it under torture!’

‘That is not funny, Augustus,’ said Christina seriously.

I turned round to her and gave her a hug and then asked, ‘Well, what next?’

‘All we can do is wait,’ answered Jørgen. ‘I will go in and make some coffee.’

That night I lay awake a long time wondering whether we had been sensible in letting our principles override the possibility, nay certainty, of financial security. But Christina was right, what had I done to deserve it? And being unable to reveal the truth for the rest of my life would exert an unpredictable toll on me: it was probably for the best not to take that risk. At least, that is how I rationalised it to myself!

We were left alone for a further four days – the lawyer did not come back with a higher offer, and our general conclusion was that they did not know what to do with us. We spent a lot of time talking through the offer that had been made, and discussing what we

might have done with the money, and, to tell the truth, I think the offer, and its refusal, had unsettled us.

There was one bonus about being quietly left alone in this house in the woods, and that was that the peace and the lack of clamour appeared good for Christina. She was recovering well, indeed, at the end she was almost back to her normal self. Our relationship blossomed, and I think at times Jørgen and Aggie were embarrassed to be sharing a house with us. Jørgen showed no resentment, or if he did, he kept it to himself, and Aggie was his normal blustering self. They spent the time sitting on the patio outside reading books, there was a good collection, while Christina and I spent the time enjoying each other's company: not necessarily physically – just the pleasure of being together. We spent a lot of time discussing plans for the future, marriage, of course, and maybe a house in the hills, high up, with a vista down the long fjord, over to the sun setting in the westering sea. In winter we would ski from our back door to the hills and onto the ice cap behind, in summer we would take to the sea, maybe sailing to the edge of the world at Røst in the far Lofoten.

They came for us at night. We were asleep, or some of us were, when there was a banging at the door and muffled shouts from outside. We all got out of bed and went to the door. On opening it a man in uniform standing outside said, in a friendly manner, ‘Come on let's go. Home it is for you!’

‘What?!’ we all exclaimed simultaneously in a Greek chorus.

‘I am here to fly you home. Collect your belongings – we are leaving in five minutes.’

‘Belongings? What belongings?’ said Aggie. ‘Let's make it two minutes.’

‘Fine by me!’

‘I am not believing this,’ said Jørgen.

‘Me, neither!’ I replied. ‘But let's go.’

There is not much more to tell. We were in the car for an hour or so, but it was too dark to see much, other than to realise the first part of our journey was through a relatively uninhabited wooded countryside, and the second half the landscape was more built up. The driver although friendly, did not say much and refused to answer any questions, other than admitting that he was a member of the US Airforce. Eventually the car stopped at a checkpoint, the driver announced his name, a barrier was lifted and the car drove out onto an airfield to a waiting plane. We were invited to climb up steps leading into the aircraft's rear, and were then shown to a row of seats. The cabin was relatively basic, obviously designed for carrying military personnel, but the seats at least were comfortable. We appeared to be the only passengers.

Our driver appeared to double as an air steward and he was soon asking us to fasten our seat belts. Almost immediately and without ceremony the engines fired, we accelerated down the runway and were airborne. I was sitting next to Christina and she squeezed my hand as we took off.

The flight was uneventful, our steward offering us a basic meal and soft drinks at one stage, but I think none of us would really believe we were going home until we arrived. The steward did

divulge that we would be landing in England, at the Brize Norton base, at about eleven in the morning.

We clambered out of the aircraft to a bright and breezy day and I think Aggie cheered as we hit the tarmac. A dour-looking and moustached officer of the Royal Air Force was waiting at the bottom of the steps, who shepherded us onto a Landrover and drove us across to a terminal building. We were ushered into an office, where another officer asked if we had any identification with us. After replying in the negative, we were asked to fill in forms giving our personal details. With these formalities completed, we were told we were free to go.

‘However, there is a car laid on to take you to Whitehall, the Foreign Office that is, where there are diplomats waiting to talk to you. Would you like to go?’

‘We haven't any money,’ said Aggie, ‘so it seems as good a way as any to get to London!’

I took Christina's hand, and we walked across to our chauffeur-driven limousine.

Chapter 17. Press Cuttings

The Daily Telegraph 23rd April 2001

US DISMISSIVE OF CLIMATE CHANGE PROGRAMME

The United States has finally confirmed it will not join in with a United Nations-sponsored programme to detect global warming. This Climate Change Drilling Programme involves drilling a mile or so down through the Greenland ice cap to extract a core of ice, which will then be analysed to see how the climate has changed during the thousands of years it has taken the ice to build up.

Professor Waldblick who is leading the team of international scientists carrying out the work says he is bitterly disappointed with the American decision. 'As the Greenland ice cap is a remote and difficult place to work, we were hoping on logistical support from USA, particularly the use of their Hercules transport aircraft. However most other countries support the work and we will be certainly be going ahead regardless.'

A spokesman from the US Department of Energy said that they were not convinced that the drilling programme would come up with any new evidence, and the money could be better spent elsewhere. He added, 'We have supported the recently completed Antarctic drilling programme, and the Greenland drilling will add nothing new.'

New Scientist 18 March 2002

CLIMATE RESEARCH PROJECT GETS UNDER WAY

Next month scientists on the Climate Change Drilling Programme (CCDP) embark for Greenland. Over the next two years it is planned to take an ice core from the full depth of the ice sheet, over two and a half kilometres deep. Each year's annual snowfall is clearly visible in the core, which makes it easy to accurately date the ice at any given depth. Analysis of air bubbles trapped in the ice, essentially fossil air, indicates atmospheric composition at the time the ice was laid down.

Oxygen occurs in two isotopes, the common O^{16} and the rarer O^{18}. O^{18} is heavier than O^{16}, so less prone to evaporation when the climate is cooler. By comparing the level of CO_2 in the atmosphere with the ratio of O^{16} to O^{18}, and relating this to the date of the ice, the relationship between atmospheric temperature and CO_2 levels can be determined over the past several thousand years.

Initial analysis of similar work in Antarctica illustrates a strong correlation between global temperature and CO_2 levels, and if the Greenland core confirms this relationship in the northern hemisphere, then the case that increasing carbon dioxide levels leads to global warming will, in effect, be proven.

The Glasgow Herald 12 April 2003

DEATHS IN GREENLAND

Three scientists from an international climate project in Greenland have been reported dead. Early reports indicate that the snocat they were driving fell into a crevasse, killing the occupants instantly. The snocat was resupplying the base on top of the ice cap when the accident happened.

The Sun 13 April 2003

GRISLY DEATH IN GREENLAND

A boffin has been eaten by a polar bear while his friends stood by unable to help. ‘If I had tried to rescue him, the bear would have eaten me as well,’ said a colleague.

The man had gone to seek help after the snowmobile he was travelling in fell into a crevasse. ‘It was bad luck that he met a polar bear when he had almost reached the safety of the town,’ added the colleague. ‘I was lucky, it could have been me!’

The man is part of a team trying to prove global warming by drilling into the frozen ice cap.

The Glasgow Herald 14 April 2003

GREENLAND DEAD NAMED

The three scientists who died recently in Greenland have been named as Alex MacFarlane (41) from Falkirk, Helmut Kluger (53) from Austria and Ravji Anwarrie (28) from India.

Alex MacFarlane's family have been devastated to hear that their son was killed by a polar bear. His mother, Anne, said today, ‘He loved the Arctic and was always going out there. I knew it was a dangerous place, but I never thought this would happen.’

The leader of the expedition, which is researching global warming, is Professor Waldblick from Austria. ‘It is a terrible tragedy,’ he says. ‘Helmut was a great friend of mine, and we have carried out research together for many years all over the world. It must be

terrible for Alex's and Ravji's families as well, and I offer them all my sincerest condolences.'

It is thought that the snocat they were travelling in, lost its way in the mist and tumbled into a crevasse. One man, Alex, managed to escape but, before he could get help, was attacked and eaten by a polar bear. Peter Stigman of Glasgow University, who has studied polar bears extensively in the Arctic, said, 'To a polar bear, a human is merely prey and a hungry bear will not think twice about attacking a man.'

The Daily Telegraph 15 April 2003

AMERICANS TO THE RESCUE

An American oil company has come to the rescue of the ill-fated Greenland Global Warming Expedition. Three men were killed recently when the expedition's snocat was lost down a crevasse. The vehicle is a write-off and was the expedition's only means of transport to and from their base on top of the ice cap, two hundred miles away.

However, by good fortune, the Naxos Oil Company had a ship carrying out survey work nearby off the Greenland coast and the company has now offered to loan the expedition their snocat.

'We are only too willing to help,' said Mr Leatherhead, President of Naxos. 'I know that the States has gained unpopularity in certain quarters for not supporting this research programme, but I hope we can now make amends. I have put our snocat, our ship and its crew at the full disposal of the expedition.'

‘We are very grateful,’ says Doug Brand, the expedition's administrator. ‘In spite of the recent tragedy, the drilling programme can now continue as planned.’ Efforts are now being made to fly the relatives of those killed to the scene of the accident.

The Glasgow Herald 19 June 2003

DISASTER STRIKES AGAIN IN GREENLAND

Christina Andersson (29) is feared dead after disappearing from a research station on top of the Greenland ice cap. She is a member of an international expedition drilling through the Greenland ice cap to test the theory of global warming.

It is thought Christina went for a walk after finishing work for the day, and then got lost as the weather deteriorated. Searches to date have failed to find her. Professor Waldblick, expedition leader, said, ‘I am devastated, just devastated. This is the third mishap to befall the expedition, we can but hope that she is still alive and well.’

Disaster struck the expedition a couple of months ago when a snocat on a supply-run to the cost fell into a crevasse, with the loss of two men. A third man who survived was subsequently eaten by a polar bear before he could get help.

The Sun 20 June 2003

GIRL MISSING ON ICE

A young, blonde Norwegian scientist has gone missing in Greenland. Christina Anderson (27) walked out into the snow three nights ago and has not been seen since.

‘All of Greenland is sad,’ says Gustav, a local pilot. ‘Everybody loved her. We found her skis, but she must be lying out there all alone in the snow. It is terrible.’

She is a member of an expedition which appears to be jinxed – three other of its members died two months ago when their snocat fell down a glacier. One man survived, only to be eaten by a polar bear before he was rescued.

‘The Arctic is a dangerous place,’ says polar expert Pete Stigman, ‘and these kind of things are only to be expected.’

The Glasgow Herald 24 June 2003

MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE OF THREE MEN IN GREENLAND

Three expeditioners are reported missing on the east coast of Greenland. Details are sparse at present, but it would appear that they disappeared in the same locality as the Norwegian girl who was lost a week ago. Her body has never been found and she is now feared dead.

It would also appear to be the same place where three men were killed in a crevasse two months ago.

The Sun 25 June 2003

MYSTERIOUS 'GREENLAND TRIANGLE'

Over the last three months, seven people have died or gone missing in East Greenland. Four of them have disappeared in the past week. Is this a northern 'Bermuda Triangle'?

Polar expert Pete Stigman says that Greenland is a dangerous place, and you should not be surprised if one or two people go missing – but to lose seven is unheard of! It is said that all those missing have some link with a research programme into global warming.

The Daily Telegraph 26 June 2003

DIPLOMATIC ROW IN GREENLAND

American diplomats have responded angrily to allegations made by a United Nations-sponsored expedition that they have been sabotaging a research programme into global warming.

'It is complete nonsense,' said a spokesman. 'America came to the aid of the expedition when it was in trouble, and we did everything it could do to help.'

The row has surfaced with the recent disappearance of three expeditioners who were last seen aboard the *Naxos Explorer*, a ship belonging to the US-owned Naxos Oil Company. The Danish Consulate in Greenland states that these three had evidence that indicated that the earlier accident involving the researchers' snocat, in which three men died, was no such thing – it was deliberate sabotage – carried out by the oil company.

‘It can only be assumed,’ says Anton Larsen, a Danish official in East Greenland, ‘that it was in the interests of the oil company for the expedition to fail in its objective – that of proving that global warming is caused by burning of fossil fuels such as oil.’

The oil company denies that the three missing men were aboard their ship, although they do admit they saw the three men shortly before they went missing. ‘They were out kayaking,’ says the spokesman, ‘but they never came aboard. Greenland is a dangerous place, and they probably got blown out to sea, or capsized and drowned. These allegations are absolute nonsense, and we will be responding at the highest level.’

Britain is involved in the row as two of the missing men, who have not yet been named, are thought to be British; the other is believed to be Swedish. To date, the British and Swedish governments have refused to comment.

The Glasgow Herald 27 June 2003

MISSING BRITONS NAMED

The two Britons who went missing in Greenland earlier this week have been named as James Ashworth (31) from Castle Douglas and Augustus Moncrieffe (31) from Cheltenham. A Swedish man, Jørgen Lundqvist, is also missing. Speculation that they have been kidnapped by the Naxos Oil Company is rife, although the company denies this absolutely. A week previously, a Norwegian scientist with the Climate Change Drilling Programme (CCDP), Christina Andersson, also disappeared in mysterious circumstances in the same area of Greenland.

It has emerged that the missing men were not members of the CCDP, but were on an independent expedition to cross the ice cap, following the route that the Norwegian explorer Nansen pioneered in the early part of the last century.

Our reporter in Greenland says that there are links between the missing men and the research programme. They were the first to discover the CCDP snocat that had fallen into the crevasse, and, additionally, Christina Andersson, the missing girl, had travelled with them up to the CCDP drilling site.

However, Doug Brand, administrator of the CCDP base at the town of Tanilaq in East Greenland, doubts there is any link between the disappearance of the three expeditioners and Miss Andersson, or that there is any foul play afoot. 'It is most likely coincidence,' he says. 'Greenland is a dangerous place – as you know, we have already had a snocat fall down a crevasse.'

But Gustav Reinholf, an experienced Greenland pilot who has worked for the CCDP, is not so sanguine. ‘There are a lot of rumours going round Tanilaq that the mishaps that have beset the CCDP are not accidents – that there is conspiracy afoot.’

So far the British government has refused to speculate. ‘We are keeping our minds open,’ says a spokesman. ‘We have no evidence either way of how the men disappeared.’

The Glasgow Herald 28 June 2003

EXCLUSIVE: GREENLAND MYSTERY DEEPENS

by Nick Douglas

There is increasing evidence that the three missing men in Greenland have been kidnapped by an American oil company. A local Eskimo, Tigatuq, told me that they were definitely aboard the *Naxos Explorer* when she set sail from Greenland to the States. ‘I was out fishing,’ he says, ‘and as the ship took up its anchor they were standing on the deck. They waved to me.’

He is supported in this by Andropolos, a Greek who has made his home in Greenland: ‘Yes, they definitely went out to the ship, and were aboard when it left. Tigatuq brought their canoes back, so the oil company is lying when it says they were never aboard and that they were probably swept out to sea in their canoes.’

A story going around Greenland is that the Naxos Oil Company arranged for the climate researchers' snocat to crash so that they could replace it with their own, and so get some of their own men up to the researcher's camp. There is also speculation that the

missing Norwegian scientist, Miss Andersson, was killed because she discovered what was going on.

All this is being vehemently denied by the Naxos Oil Company, with the company president, Mr Leatherhead, issuing a formal denial and threatening legal action against any organisation or individual that broadcasts these rumours.

The Daily Telegraph 29 June 2003

OIL COMPANY ACCUSED OF KIDNAP

Wild speculation over the past week that the Naxos Oil Company kidnapped three men, including two British, has gained credibility since a crew member said yesterday that four people had been held captive on the company's ship when it sailed from Greenland. He says that he, and many other crew members, saw four people being led off the ship in the company of an American policeman, when it docked in Rhode Island.

It is hard to validate this claim as the crew member in question refuses to give his identity, and has only been in contact with the press by phone. ‘If the company finds out who has been giving away its secrets, I will no longer have a job,’ he has said.

The fact that four rather than three people were seen leaving the ship gives hope that the other person recently gone missing in Greenland and assumed dead, the Norwegian, Miss Andersson, may be alive after all.

No one from the oil company has been available to respond to these allegations. Meanwhile, Greenpeace is demanding a full inquiry, adding that the apparent involvement of the American

police force in the kidnap shows collusion between Naxos and the US Government. ‘The US and oil companies have been against this Climate Change Drilling Programme from the outset,’ says Jay Ashbury, Greenpeace international co-ordinator. ‘It would appear they will do anything to disrupt the research, even, it would appear, resorting to kidnap.’

British, Swedish and Norwegian diplomats in Washington have requested a formal meeting with the American authorities to discuss the disappearance of their citizens.

The Glasgow Herald 30 June 2003

NEW TWIST IN GREENLAND KIDNAPPING SAGA

There has been a formal complaint from the United Nations to the Naxos Oil Company, accusing the company of attempting to sabotage their climate research programme in Greenland.

This has come about after scientists analysed a piece of equipment that was allegedly thrown overboard from the oil company's ship. ‘The equipment was especially designed to invalidate our research findings,’ says programme director Professor Waldblick. ‘It was seen being thrown overboard when the ship left Greenland, and has subsequently been recovered and analysed. The existence of this equipment indicates a detailed plan to undermine our research, and so give sceptics of global warming, or those with a vested interest such as the oil companies, a little more time to carry on playing havoc with the climate of our planet.’

Mr Leatherhead, president of Naxos, was not available for comment.

The Financial Times 1 July 2003

NAXOS SHARES FALL

As allegations of nefarious dealings by the Naxos Oil Company continue to circulate, with no explanation from the company being forthcoming, institutional investors have been offloading their holdings. As a result, the company's share price is plummeting.

If explanations are not given soon, sources suggest that some shareholders may demand an extraordinary meeting and the resignation of company president, Bill Leatherhead.

New Scientist 2 July 2003

EXTRAORDINARY ATTEMPT TO DISCREDIT CLIMATE RESEARCH

Scientists involved in the Climate Change Drilling Programme (CCDP) in Greenland have revealed the design of an extraordinary piece of equipment that must have been used to help sabotage the research findings.

The CCDP is drilling through the Greenland ice sheet in order to extract a core of ice that can be used to analyse global climate change over the past few thousand years [18 March 2002]. Fossil air trapped in bubbles in the ice will be analysed for carbon dioxide and for two isotopes of oxygen, O^{16} and O^{18} . The isotope ratio is related to global air temperature at the time the ice was laid down, so that the relationship between CO_2 and temperature can be analysed. It is expected that the research findings will confirm that there is a link between atmospheric carbon dioxide levels and global temperature. Hence it will show that burning fossil fuels, which releases CO_2 , will almost certainly lead to global warming – the 'greenhouse effect.'

However, those with a vested interest in the production and use of fossil fuels, particularly oil companies, and also certain governments whose economies are heavily dependent on fossil fuels, are keen to see the theory of global warming discredited. It now looks as if they will stop at nothing to discredit research that tends to confirm the theory, as the recent shenanigans in Greenland indicate.

It would appear that the equipment allegedly used by the Naxos Oil Company was designed to modify the composition of gases in

the ice core. It consisted of a hollow tube, into which a core of ice from the drilling programme could be put. Along the inside of the tube was an array of heated, retractable needles, which could quickly melt their way into the ice. The needles were hollow, and connected up to reservoirs of O^{16}, O^{18} and CO_2, so that different proportions of these gases could be injected into the ice.

'The design was very simple, and also remarkably effective,' says Professor Waldblick of the CCDP. 'It would appear that the saboteurs kept the tube in their snocat, and at night took our ice cores from the store and put them through their machine. This would leave no visible trace, so that when the cores were later analysed in our laboratory in Linz, we would suspect nothing – and no correlation between carbon dioxide and temperature would emerge.

'You have to admire their ingenuity, but it must be remembered that their sabotage has caused the death of at least three of my team. Criminal charges must be brought. Meanwhile, we will have to repeat the drilling work carried out this summer as we cannot be sure which cores have been tampered with. This will add a year to the programme, and we may well be seeking compensation from Naxos to pay for this.'

The Naxos Oil Company is still refusing to comment on the allegations.

The Sun 3 July 2003

EXTRAORDINARY ALLEGATIONS BY BOFFINS

UN boffins have made amazing allegations against an American oil company. They state that the company has attempted to undermine a two-year project studying global warming by injecting the wrong sort of air into the ice, using specially constructed apparatus.

This is on top of allegations that the same company has kidnapped four people and also caused a snocat to fall into a crevasse – killing two occupants, and leaving one to be eaten by a polar bear. Greenpeace is arguing that the American government is also involved.

Can all this be true? Is fact indeed stranger than fiction?

The Glasgow Herald 5 July 2003

GREENLAND-GATE: FIRST STATEMENT FROM US GOVERNMENT

Last night the US administration finally admitted that it was holding the missing persons from Greenland – the Britons, James Ashworth and Augustus Moncrieffe, the Swede Jørgen Lundqvist, and the Norwegian, Christina Andersson. It is the first confirmation that Miss Andersson is still alive, and did not die after mysteriously disappearing on the Greenland ice cap three weeks ago.

The short statement issued by the US Department of Homeland Security merely said: 'This Department is holding four individuals for questioning after they were found to have illegally boarded the US-registered ship *The Naxos Explorer*.'

The British, Norwegian and Swedish governments have all demanded immediate release of the individuals involved. Meanwhile, shares continue to fall in Naxos, the company at the

centre of the allegations, and it is rumoured its chairman, Mr Leatherhead is about to resign.

This tends to confirm collusion at the highest levels between Naxos and the US government. It is well known that Mr Leatherhead is a great friend of the president. As this remarkable story continues to unfold, who will be next, we ask?

The Glasgow Herald 10 July 2003

GREENLAND-GATE: GOVERNMENT LINK CONFIRMED

The 'kidnapped four' have stated that, as well as holding them in custody for ten days, the US Government offered them a bribe of three million dollars each to remain silent about the events in Greenland.

If this is confirmed, it proves that the US government and Naxos Oil conspired together to sabotage the UN Climate Change Programme.

'This has serious implications,' says our political editor, Gordon Naismith. 'We have seen how Naxos shares have suffered in the wake of the allegations, and if the US government is involved as well, then the implications for the administration could be serious.'

Greenpeace's international director, Jay Ashbury, says it confirms what his organisation has been saying for a long time: 'The world's largest polluter of greenhouse gases is not taking global warming seriously. Indeed, it seems now to be resorting to illegal means to ensure 'business as usual'.'

The Daily Telegraph 12 July 2003

US PRESIDENT RESIGNS

In the light of the publication of the correspondence confirming the link between the White House and the Naxos Oil Company, and the subsequent political storm surrounding 'Operation Hawaii', the President today announced that he was stepping down...