

Start

SCOTT. ~~Did they~~ (*Pause*) I've spoiled it for you. I've embarrassed you in front of your friends, haven't I?

KATHLEEN. Con, it was for you. I wanted you to enjoy your birthday. I wanted a big occasion.

SCOTT. Yes, well I like your artistic friends—really, very much—only I just don't have much patience for that society chatter. (*They laugh.*) 'Fraid I'll never make a go of it as a celebrity.

KATHLEEN. Oh nonsense, people are charmed by you. They all think it's terribly proper for an "explorer chappie" to be enigmatic and withdrawn.

SCOTT. Rude.

KATHLEEN. Withdrawn. (*Pause.*) It's lovely out. The air is so still. (*She sits, takes a breath.*) What's that smell, do you notice?

SCOTT. Lilacs. The whole place reeks of them, I can barely breathe.

KATHLEEN. Don't be so sentimental.

SCOTT. (*Sitting beside her.*) Look at it all, Kath. The goldfish pool, your sculptures, these bizarre flowers. It's the gaudiest terrace in Belgravia.

KATHLEEN. It is not gaudy. It's Italianate. (*He smiles, takes out a pipe and lights it.*) Are the stars as nice in the southern hemisphere? I suppose they're not the same ones at all. (*Pause.*) Is it really so different, looking at them with the world turned wrongside-up?

SCOTT. The air is so much cleaner. Makes them look larger, brighter somehow. Sometimes they actually sparkle, with those little points on them, like a drawing in one of Peter's books. Still. (*Pause.*) I've been happier here, I think, in this garden—than anywhere else in my life. Every flower in its place, I suppose.

KATHLEEN. But you will go back, and very soon. Won't you?

SCOTT. (*After a pause.*) Am I as obvious as that?

KATHLEEN. Obvious! When you can't eat, can't sleep—when you curse yourself a hundred times a day for some half-imagined clumsiness and won't look your own son in the eye, obvious, yes, I should say so! You've never had a thought that could keep itself from your face, Con.

SCOTT. Tell me you want me to throw it over and I shall. I promise you have only to say it, even now.

KATHLEEN. Yes, that would certainly make it easier. That would give you what you've been searching for. A reason not to go.

SCOTT. (*After a pause.*) We've only been married two years . . .

KATHLEEN. Yes.

SCOTT. And there's Peter—they can't expect . . .

KATHLEEN. No, of course not.

SCOTT. Well surely the press can see that, and the blessed British public. What in God's name do they want from me? I've been there already!

KATHLEEN. Half-way, yes. (*Pause.*) It isn't the press, Con. There are a thousand excuses sufficient for them. But not one sufficient for you.

SCOTT. You. (*Pause.*) You are sufficient for me.

KATHLEEN. (*Gently.*) No. You'd always measure me against what might have been. I'd always come out wanting. (*Pause.*) Well you're going back, of course you are. You're the best man for the job, anyone can see that. "Scott of the Antarctic!" But I wonder—is there a single person in this country who can guess how you actually despise that place?

SCOTT. Kath, I don't . . .

KATHLEEN. (*Angrily.*) Despise it, yes, and yourself, until you have it! Well, go back and take it! Go, or stay, Con, I don't care, I don't care, so long as you'll only be happy again. It's that I can't bear. You walk through your days like a man in a dream. I talk to you but you hear nothing. I look in your eyes and see nothing. I wonder who you are. (*Pause.*) And I am very much afraid I shall stop caring.

SCOTT. (*After a pause.*) Inside tonight at the party—it was full of ghosts, Kath. They all looked like me, but their faces were younger. (*He knocks the ash from his pipe and puts it away.*) When you lit the candles on the cake, I cringed with every flame. Forty-one charges. Forty-one counts of guilt by mediocrity. (*Pause.*) I ought to be in the Admiralty, Kath, a man my age, twenty-eight years of service—or at the very least a commodore on active duty. Duncan was a commodore at thirty-two! I'm not

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