

POLHEIM

by

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CAST

CON - Robert Falcon 'Con' Scott - Male, 40s, Naval Officer, Explorer

KATH - Kathleen Scott - Female, 30s, Film maker

BOB - Male

AYA - Female

LOCATION

Kitchen of Scott's flat, Chelsea.

TIME

Evening of Friday 27th July 2012, shortly before the Opening Ceremony of the 2012 Olympic Games.

POLHEIM is set in a world where Amundsen reached the South Pole in December 2011 instead of 1911, Scott in January 2012 instead of 1912.

ACT I**SCENE 1**

Kitchen, table and chairs. Door stage rear. Table piled with crisps, snacks.

Con and Kath enter, Con conventionally casual, Kath barefoot, dress bohemian, possibly self-made.

KATH: I can't believe you forgot!

CON: I didn't forget.

KATH: How could you forget?

CON: I didn't.

KATH: Emily's party's been on the calendar for months, Con. Why did we bother sharing Gmail accounts if you never bother to check the calendar?

CON: I didn't forget. A meeting got moved, that's all.

KATH: You forgot, just admit it. You forget things all the time, I'm always having to text you. Even the notes I leave on the fridge.

CON: Don't go on.

Silence.

KATH: So what do we do about Peter? How are we supposed to get him to the party?

CON: Can't you reschedule?

KATH: No. I only have Martin for 2 days.

CON: So find somebody else. Bristol must be full of people willing to act in your little film.

KATH: I will pretend I did not hear you say that.

CON: Well... you're not shooting a major movie. It's only a ten minute thing.

KATH: Martin likes the script. And for your information, the last short film he made won a BAFTA. He's doing me an enormous favour and working for practically nothing, so no. I am not recasting.

Silence.

CON: Mum could take him?

KATH: Your mother doesn't drive, Con. And she detests the Tube. How's she supposed to get Peter to IKEA and back? They're going to a movie afterwards, did you forget that too?

CON: Who's idea was it to track half way across London to throw a birthday party for a three year old.

Silence.

KATH: How about Wilf?

Con clearly not keen.

What's that look for? He is Peter's uncle, plus he's going to be here any minute? We could just ask.

CON: The guy who managed to lose Peter in Hamley's.

KATH: That wasn't his fault, the lift door shut when he wasn't expecting it. Can't you get out of this meeting? Surely it's more important to spend time with Peter? I thought you'd been signed off until the end of the Year. Sorting out the Book of the Expedition? Getting it in the shops for Christmas?

Beat.

What's it about anyway?

Con begins fiddling with crisps, snacks, avoiding her gaze.

CON: Is this enough food? Weren't you going to shop?

KATH: I have had Peter all day, on top of packing for tomorrow.

She checks out the crisps and snacks.

It'll be fine. They'll probably bring something with, you know Wilf.

CON: What kind of something?

KATH: Does it matter?

CON: I just hate not having enough in, that's all.

KATH: We'll sort it out when they get here. Try and relax, OK.

Con nods.

Promise me you won't start banging on about Chris Hoy?

CON: So long as Wilf doesn't bang on about that sodding coat.

KATH: Which coat?

CON: That flash Polartec thing.

KATH: Ah...

CON: Why does he even need it? It's July.

KATH: They're going skiing. If you don't want it, stick it on eBay. Or take it to Cancer Research.

CON: I'm just fed up with him acquiring stuff. *My* stuff.

Silence.

KATH: Relax, OK? It's going to be fine.

CON: I know.

KATH: We'll have something to eat, something to drink, we'll watch the Opening Ceremony and everything will be fine.

Beat.

Did you call Orianna?

CON: Why do you say it like that? 'Orianna'.

KATH: I *don't*! There's still time for the Boys to come round... The Boys!

CON: What about them?

KATH: They can take Peter tomorrow, he'd love that. What do you think? Shall I phone Orianna?

CON: No.

KATH: Well... you're just going to have to move the meeting. Since when did the Admiralty schedule meetings on Saturdays anyway? Is it about a Posting?

Con reacts to a noise offstage.

CON: Was that the door?

KATH: I didn't hear anything?

Con moves towards the door.

CON: The door.

Con exits, leaving Kath suspicious.

ACT I**SCENE 2**

After a silence, Bob and Aya enter singing the 2012 fanfare, followed by Con. Both wear hats, tracksuits bearing the 2012 logo; around their necks 2012 mascots Wenlock and Mandeville.

BOB: Hiya!

AYA: Good evening.

CON: Kath, this is... ?

BOB: Bob. Hi.

AYA: Aya.

KATH: Hi...?

CON: Bob and Aya are from next door, they've had a bit of an emergency.

KATH: Are you OK? Do you need the First Aid box?

CON: Their TV blew up.

BOB: Up the spout.

AYA: Blown a gasket.

CON: And as the Opening Ceremony's about to start, I thought we could let them watch it here?

KATH: Oh... right.

AYA: Screwed the pooch. Our TV.

BOB: Thrown a wobbly.

AYA: Kicked the bucket.

BOB: Jumped the kidney!

Con and Kath stare at Bob.

CON: Anyway. A chance to get to know the neighbours.

Kath stares at Con who avoids her gaze.

Be right back.

Con exits.

Bob fascinated by the space, Aya breaths in, hungry for every scent. Kath intrigued by their costumes.

KATH: I see you're dressed for the occasion.

BOB: What occasion?

KATH: The Opening Ceremony?

Bob and Aya look at each other, bemused.

Doesn't matter. Which flat are you?

BOB: The neighbours, yes.

AYA: That's us.

KATH: I don't remember seeing you around? Have you lived here long?

BOB: We've definitely seen you.

AYA: Absolutely.

BOB: You and your little boy.

AYA: Such a sweet child.

KATH: You've met Peter?

BOB: Oh, we're great chums.

AYA: Your little boy and us.

Con enters brandishing bottle of wine.

CON: Here we go. Something nice, in honour of the occasion.

BOB: You must say if we're a bother.

AYA: We'd hate to be in the way.

CON: It's no problem.

Con opens bottle.

KATH: (To Bob and Aya) Why don't you go through to the other room? Make yourselves comfortable?

CON: They're fine here.

KATH: (To Con) So tell me? This meeting tomorrow?

CON: Can we talk about it later? We have guests.

Con pours wine into glasses.

BOB: We could just go home.

AYA: Leave you in peace.

CON: It's fine.

BOB: We could listen to the radio radio.

AYA: We could find somewhere else.

BOB: Or go out.

AYA: Find one of those big screens.

CON: You're fine here.

Con distributes glasses.

KATH: (To Con) Tell me?

CON: (To Kath) It's just a meeting.

KATH: So it'll be easy to reschedule then. As it's just a meeting?

CON: Give it a rest.

KATH: You know I'm going to keep asking until you tell me?

BOB: Are you sure we're not intruding?

AYA: We could watch it under the stars.

CON: I insist you stay. Cheers.

Con sips, Kath ignores her's, Bob and Aya drain their glasses with relish.

CON: (To Bob) What did you have? Your TV?

BOB: Completely dead.

AYA: As a doornail.

CON: But what kind?

Bob and Aya look at each other, confused.

Ours is a Sony, 34 inches.

BOB: What a coincidence!

AYA: That's what we have! Exactly the same.

CON: Well, it's a good make. I was thinking of getting something bigger, you know? For the Ceremony, but...

BOB: Just like us.

AYA: Exactly the same. Oh, yes!

Con realises their glasses are empty, looks at the 3/4 empty wine bottle.

CON: Can I give anybody -

ACT I**SCENE 3**

Bob signals a Time Out - lights on him & Aya, Con & Kath frozen in semi-dark.

Bob and Aya place their glasses on the table; Bob begins moving about the space, stretching muscles. They circle Con and Kath, studying them.

BOB: So which of them has it?

AYA: Well I don't know, do I. Probably him.

BOB: Are you sure?

AYA: If she had it she'd be much more pissed off already. OK?

Bob nods agreement. Under the following lines Aya begins patting Con down, searching his clothing while Bob gingerly does the same for Kath.

BOB: What was that stuff we drank?

AYA: What stuff?

BOB: What we drank. It was *foul*.

AYA: Just to be clear, I make the decisions.

BOB: Since when?

AYA: I'm just saying, I'm in charge.

BOB: We're a team. That should mean equal billing. And shouldn't there be three of us?

AYA: Two of them, two of us.

BOB: It just feels like we're one short.

Bob stops patting Kath down, gestures to his own clothing.

And what is all this stuff?

AYA: Don't get distracted.

BOB: But what if it's important?

Bob holds up a Wenlock figure studies it.

It's so ugly. Doesn't that look ugly to you? It's only got one eye. Something that ugly, has to mean something.

AYA: Are you helping or what? Aha.

Aya retrieves letters from Con's inside pocket. She checks each, selects one, replaces the others. She holds it up for Bob to see.

BOB: So... that's what's going to kick everything off is it?

AYA: Absolutely. Are we good to go?

Bob nods, thumbs up.

Just remember, I'm in charge. Positions.

Bob and Aya move back to their original positions.

BOB: Hang on.

Bob retrieves their wine glasses, hands one to Aya, resumes his position. Aya clicks fingers to undo the Time Out. Lights return to normal, neither Con nor Kath have noticed anything out of the ordinary.

CON: - a top up?

Aya remember something, rather theatrically.

AYA: Before I forget.

BOB: We found something.

Aya waves letter.

AYA: It looked rather important,

BOB: So we thought we'd better mention it,

AYA: As it's addressed to you.

Aya brandishes the letter. Kath intrigued, Con jolted, taps his pockets.

(Reading envelope) To Captain Scott, care of the Saudi Arabian Polar Expedition.

BOB: Very impressive letterhead! SAPOL 2013. What does that stand for?

A loud silence. Con approaches, takes letter and exits. Kath waits a moment then follows.

Aya prepares to make a Time Out signal.

BOB: What's the point?

Aya gestures to the empty room around them.

AYA: I need the practice.

ACT I**SCENE 4**

Aya signals a Time out. Lights solely on Bob and Aya, rest of room dark.

Bob moves about, muscle stretching. Aya remains still, breathing in the atmosphere, ignoring him.

BOB: I was expecting more of a reaction, if I'm honest. It's like we're... like them. Ordinary.

AYA: We've only just got here. We need to give it time.

BOB: You said the letter would get the ball rolling. Not make them disappear. That stuff we drank, do you think it affected our powers?

Bob alarmed, comes to an abrupt halt.

Have they poisoned us?

AYA: Don't be so dramatic.

BOB: Before they get back, can't we grow extra heads or something?

AYA: The aim is to mess with their heads, not drive them into psychosis. Just because we're not from here, doesn't mean we can break the rules. We need to give the letter time to sink in. And in the meantime, we need to up our game.

Bob confused.

Make more of an impression, but on their terms.

Bob resumes moving about.

BOB: I thought he'd be taller.

AYA: Taller than who?

BOB: Nobody in particular. I just thought he'd be taller.

AYA: What does that have to do with anything?

BOB: I had formed an impression in my mind. Of *height*. Are you sure we're all that's coming?

AYA: Two of them, two of us.

BOB: They usually send us in threes. Norns, Disir, Valkyries. Summoners of the dead, selectors of the slain. Official messengers of the Gods. You remember them, I hope?

BOB (cont'd): Odin and Freya, Loki and Thor, the good old fashioned Norse gods. None of this peace, love and forgiveness shit.

Beat.

Eyes on our fingers? That would get their attention.

AYA: No.

Bob studies the logos on their shirts.

BOB: Do you think all this stuff has to do with religion? Some post-Christianity type deal? I mean look at it. No normal person would wear something like this would they?

Beat.

Are you ready? Or are you going to do this all night?

AYA: What?

BOB: All this... sniffing about. It's *weird*.

AYA: Hang on...

BOB: We have a job to do.

AYA: Did you say... Valkyries?

BOB: What's our angle? And when do we do the joke?

AYA: What joke?

BOB: The recognising him joke. Him and the other one? Actually, now I've seen him it makes sense. The other one isn't tall either.

AYA: Stop going on about *tall*.

BOB: I'm just saying, tall is why the joke works. How long has it been?

Aya confused.

Since you were last here?

AYA: Stop changing the subject. Why are you going on about Valkyries? What have they got to do with anything?

BOB: Been ages, I think. Centuries. It's hard to tell, do you get that? Not being able to remember how long it's been since your last visit? Judging by the decor it's been quite a while. Look at it.

Bob gestures around the space.

BOB (cont'd): Soft furnishings and colour matched appliances. It's really gone to the dogs, this place.

Aya alarmed.

AYA: Shit.

BOB: I was probably a pretty big noise, back then. Top Dog. Pillaging, plundering, laying waste, all of that. Mountains of skulls, rivers of blood. Mixing it up with Gods and monsters. Those were the days.

AYA: *Shit.*

BOB: Any way, what's first?

AYA: You don't know what you are? Seriously? You think we're *Valkyries*?

BOB: It'll come back, sooner or later. What's first?

AYA: *SHIT.* That's all I need. These two to deal with and now I have to carry you too. You need to snap out of this, I need you match fit. I can't do this all on my own.

BOB: Just chill, OK? What's first?

Silence.

AYA: Gratitude.

BOB: I thought the letter was first?

AYA: The letter's just our way in. Gratitude is the real start, once we've got their attention. Gratitude, the Warning, the ordeal - first him, then her. And finally... the Offer.

BOB: What, right at the end?

AYA: We can't start with the Offer.

BOB: Why not?

AYA: We have to give it context. Otherwise it makes no sense.

BOB: If you say so.

AYA: I am in charge.

BOB: Whatever. Gratitude, the Warning, the ordeal -

AYA: First him, then her.

BOB: Then the offer. Got it.

Aya prepares to undo the Time out.

And the Joke? Please?

Aya considers, then nods. She clicks fingers to undo the Time out.

ACT I**SCENE 5**

Kath enters, followed by Con, holding the letter. Kath moves about the space upset, angry and confused, while Con static.

KATH: How could you.

CON: I can explain.

KATH: How could you do this, Con? Without telling me. Without discussing it.

CON: Please, Kath.

KATH: You've just come *back* from the Pole.

CON: That was the South *Geographic* Pole. This is... different.

KATH: Different how? You pissing off to Antarctica for two more years while I look after Peter sounds exactly like what happened the last time.

AYA: We need to talk about Gratitude...

Con and Kath ignore her/them.

Excuse me?

BOB: They're not listening. One extra head? See how that works?

Aya shakes her head.

Horns. Small ones?

CON: The Southern Pole of Inaccessibility is the most remote point in Antarctica. On the entire Southern Hemisphere. Nobody has ever been there. Tomorrow I have to meet the financial backers.

KATH: Tomorrow you are taking Peter to Emily's party.

AYA: Excuse me, but we're here to talk about Gratitude...

BOB: You already said that. Can't we just tell them the truth?

AYA: Let's try singing again?

Bob and Aya sing the Olympic fanfare but Kath and Con ignore them.

KATH: So you're happy spending two years getting to this...

CON: The Southern Pole of Inaccessibility.

KATH: But you won't make time to get your only son around the North Circular to bloody IKEA? Peter is three, Con. You've been away longer than you've been here. He barely knows you.

CON: Tomorrow I have to get the funding signed off, I have to be there in person.

KATH: The Saudi Arabian Polar Expedition? It sounds like something out of Monty Python.

CON: One of the Royal family will be there. A Prince. They'll want photos, people shaking hands, it would be very tactless of me not turning up. People are relying on me.

KATH: *I'm relying on you.*

Beat.

Since when were the Saudis interested in Antarctica? They don't have enough oil, they want to look for it there too? Peter's been looking forward to Emily's party for weeks, Con. Planning how to get there, drawing maps, packing rations... it was supposed to be a real treat, a proper expedition, just the two of you.

CON: I'll make it up to him, I promise.

Beat.

It's just... I need everything signed and sealed now, if we're going to make next Summer in the Southern Hemisphere.

BOB: The joke? We'll do the joke, that'll get their attention?

AYA: I don't actually see why the joke is funny, if I'm honest.

BOB: It's not meant to be, not to us.

CON: Please, Kath. It's the most remote point in the entire Southern Hemisphere. I would be the first person to reach it.

KATH: That's what you said the last time. And what if you get there and someone's beaten you again? Are you going to start looking for *another* Pole? Christ, how many are there?! You promised me.

CON: I would be back inside 18 months.

KATH: *You promised.*

Beat.

I put everything on hold to support you going South. Even a chance to work with Martin Freeman.

KATH (cont'd): Because you promised me the Pole would be your last expedition. Once you were back you would apply for a shore-based posting. So you could avoid going back to sea. So you could commit to supporting me, looking after Peter so I could get on with my career, my *film*.

Silence.

Is this why the Boys don't come round? They know you're going South again and they can't lie to my face? Christ, don't tell me they're going with you?

ACT I**SCENE 6**

CON: Being back... it's just not working.

KATH: But it is! You've been so much better over the last month. I told you we should have carried on seeing Diana.

CON: We weren't getting anywhere with her.

KATH: It takes time, Con. It's not like the Navy, you can't just issue an order and stuff happens.

CON: Nothing was changing. Even now, it all keeps going round and round in my head, keeping me awake. What did I do wrong, what could I have done differently.

AYA: Could you please listen to us?

BOB: It's actually quite important.

AYA: We need to talk about Gratitude.

CON: What it would have felt like to have got there first.

KATH: You got there, Con. You and the Boys. You got there and you got back again. Isn't that enough?

CON: But I wasn't first.

KATH: Well... Nobody said anything about a Sequel. What were you going to call it, South Pole 2: The Penguins Strike Back?

AYA: We're going to be here all night.

BOB: Are we in the right place? Should we try somewhere else?

KATH: I even put up with you taking Ponting.

BOB: This is getting ridiculous.

AYA: We have to wait for the letter to do its stuff.

BOB: That letter's done all the good it was ever capable of doing. You keep saying you're in charge, so do something.

AYA: We just need to be... more assertive.

KATH: You know where I trained, you've seen my films. And despite all that, you took Ponting.

CON: Ponting's good.

KATH: But there's nothing he shot that I couldn't have done just as well. You knew that and you still took him south instead of me.

Aya and Bob confer front of stage.

AYA: I have an idea.

BOB: I'm all ears.

CON: We couldn't have both gone South. What if something had happened?

KATH: So you get to risk your life but I don't? I'm just the little woman, who looks after Peter, keeps the house tidy?

AYA: You have to trust me...

BOB: Just tell me!

KATH: And my films, Con? What are they? Some little hobby? Some safe wifely pastime, like macrame? Or knitting?

Beat.

I kept my end of the deal, now it's your turn. I am not postponing my filming, I've even got Danny *Boyle* interested.

CON: Eighteen months, Kath. Twenty tops.

KATH: Danny might agree to exec-produce. Do you know what that would be worth, his name on the credits? You cannot go back on your word now.

AYA: I mean, really trust me.

Bob gestures to get on with it.

CON: Think of the bigger picture, Kath. All the extra publicity.

Beat.

When I come back. My name, it'll be everywhere. Think about what that could do for your film? Who wouldn't want to see a film made by the wife of the Famous Polar Explorer?

Silence.

KATH: I do not need your reflected glory to make my way, OK?

AYA: Are you ready?

BOB: Yes!

KATH: Look... Keeping the faith is how we work, Con. When I was doing VSO, in Yugoslavia, sharing tents with the guys, sharing sleeping bags to keep warm, I always kept the faith.

Beat.

And I know what happens on board ship, on an expedition. The pressure you come under, the opportunities, the temptations. But I trust you. I have always trusted you. And you have never let me down. If you do this, if you go back on your word... No. You can't. You just can't.

CON: Second place isn't enough, Kath. Being runner up... it's not going to get me a Vice Admiral slot. I need a win.

KATH: That's what this is about? Making Vice Admiral? So I get to socialise with even older and less interesting people.

Beat.

I don't buy that. You didn't go South for that. I don't believe you.

AYA: I just hope it's as weird as it seems to me.

BOB: What is?

AYA: We have to try it.

BOB: I don't care, provided we do the joke, OK?

KATH: You have nothing to prove. Not to me or to Peter.

CON: It was mine. And he took it from me. No warning, just a fucking *Tweet*. Hash tag Heading South Amundsen.

Silence.

KATH: You lost to the better man, is that so hard to process?

CON: You think I don't see people in the street, recognising me? I know what they're thinking.

AYA: Follow my lead, OK?

CON: (Making L sign on forehead) *Loser*.

KATH: And the next time, Con. The next time I'm out on location, filming with the guys? Sharing tents, sharing sleeping bags for warmth. What if the next time I'm put to the test, I fail. Because you went back on your word. Is this other Pole worth that?

ACT I SCENE 7

Aya climbs up on to the table, closely followed by Bob. Kath and Con gobsmacked.

CON: What are you doing?

BOB: It's so kind of you, helping us out.

AYA: We're so grateful.

KATH: That's... OK.

CON: What are you doing up there?

KATH: I really think you should come down.

Bob stares at Con, a penny drops.

BOB: It's *him!* (To Aya) You didn't tell me it would be *him*.

AYA: You know... I thought he looked familiar.

Bob and Aya bend down to shake Con's hand in turn.

BOB: It's an honour to meet you.

AYA: It really is.

BOB: We've heard so much about you.

AYA: All your adventures, down in Antarctica.

BOB: The one and only Earnest Shackleton himself.

Beat.

CON: It's Scott.

Bob and Aya look at each other, confused.

 You're confusing me with someone else.

BOB: But... you are the explorer?

AYA: The one who went to Antarctica?

CON: Yes, but I'm not *that* explorer.

BOB: So... which one are you?

AYA: If you're not Shackleton, who are you?

CON: I am Robert Falcon Scott, OK?

BOB: I'm sorry...?

AYA: Robert who...?

CON: *Scott.*

Silence.

KATH: Anyway... can you come down? It's not safe up there -

Bob and Aya break into manic laughter.

BOB: Look at your faces!

AYA: Your *faces!*

BOB: We know who you are, really.

AYA: We were just pulling your leg.

BOB: Just our little joke!

Bob and Aya sing the 2012 fanfare, loud, jarring.

I was so delighted when they picked him as flag bearer, weren't you?

AYA: Chris Hoy, we mean.

BOB: Hang on... are we allowed to talk about him?

AYA: Of course *we* are. It's not *us* who has a problem with Chris Hoy.

BOB: Fair enough.

AYA: There's nothing we're not allowed to talk about.

BOB: That's good.

AYA: Chris Hoy, special Winter coats.

BOB: We get to talk about them *all*.

Silence. Con and Kath confused, staring at Bob/Aya.

Didn't *you* ever think of doing it?

CON: Doing what?

AYA: Being Flag Bearer.

BOB: Keep up, Con. Being Flag bearer for Team GB. Surely they offered you the job?

AYA: Surely you were in the running?

BOB: After everything you achieved?

AYA: Down in Antarctica?

BOB: Second man at the Pole, after all.

AYA: Quite an achievement.

BOB: Nothing to be sneezed at.

Beat.

It's just that we're surprised to see you here, if we're being honest.

KATH: Surprised? Why?

CON: What do you mean, surprised?

AYA: Well, you're both still here, at home. What happened?

BOB: Couldn't you get a sitter? We would have done it for you.

AYA: As we're the neighbours.

BOB: Little Peter and us, we're such great pals.

AYA: It would have been no bother.

KATH: I don't understand?

BOB: It's not complicated, Kath. Why are you here?

AYA: Why are you both still at home.

BOB: On the night of the Opening Ceremony.

AYA: The 2012 Olympic Games.

BOB: Because even if you weren't flag bearer...

AYA: Even if the athletes hadn't picked you...

BOB: Surely you would have been invited to the ceremony?

AYA: To watch the whole thing live?

KATH: Seriously, can you -

ACT I**SCENE 8**

Bob signals a Time out. Lights on Bob and Aya, Con and Kath in semi-dark.

AYA: What?

BOB: I've got an idea.

AYA: We don't need ideas *now*. We're getting somewhere, no thanks to you.

BOB: Listen...

AYA: And for the record, I don't think the joke was all that funny.

BOB: It's a great idea. Absolutely brilliant. You'll love it.

AYA: Why are you messing about when we're up and running? Do you want to be in charge, is that it?

BOB: But it's a brilliant idea.

AYA: I'm not interested.

Bob sulks.

Oh, come *on*. I let you do the joke. But play time's over and we need to get on with the job in hand, OK? Have you managed to remember yet?

BOB: Remember what?

AYA: Who we are? I'm being serious now, you need to be focusing on that and not interrupting me with stupid ideas.

Beat.

If it helps, we are not Disir or Norns and we are definitely not Valkyrie.

Aya undoes the Time out.

ACT I SCENE 9

KATH: - come down?

CON: What are you even doing here?

AYA: Let's play a game.

BOB: How about we give you three guesses.

AYA: To work out who we are.

BOB: And why we're here.

Silence.

CON: So... if we get it right, you'll come down?

AYA: Possibly.

BOB: Maybe. So have a go.

AYA: Try your luck.

BOB: Give it your best shot.

Beat. Bob and Aya eager for their response, Con and Kath look at each other.

CON: Wilf. This is something to do with Wilf. Isn't it?

KATH: Christ, Con. Wilf would never do something this stupid.

CON: Oh really? Had you forgotten being thrown out of that hotel after our wedding reception, all thanks to him? Is that it? Wilf sent you, to mess with our heads. Christ, are you him? Are those masks?

BOB & AYA: Wrong. Next?

Beat.

KATH: This is some kind of flash mob.

BOB: Flash... ?

AYA: What's that?

CON: People performing, with hidden cameras, but in public, without telling people what's happening.

KATH: And then putting it on Youtube. Am I right?

CON: Jesus... Is someone filming this?

AYA: No.

BOB: Still wrong.

AYA: Although, it does sound rather fun. Maybe we could give it a go?

BOB: Last chance.

Silence.

KATH: Well, I know our neighbours, and you are definitely not them.

CON: Are you journalists? This had better not be some kind of sting.

KATH: Which paper are you from? You may as well tell us.

CON: I bet it's the bloody Guardian.

BOB & AYA: Wrong, wrong and wrong again.

AYA: Was that their three guesses?

BOB: I think it was.

AYA: Not very impressive.

CON: *Jesus.*

KATH: Just... spit it out.

BOB: I guess it's time we came clean.

AYA: I think you're right.

BOB: Don't be alarmed.

AYA: We mean you no harm.

CON: What are you talking about?

BOB: Sit down, Con. Relax.

AYA: Please. Sit down, Con.

CON: Do not tell me to sit down, in my own house. And don't call me Con. Con is a nickname. Only family and friends get to use it.

BOB: So lets get to know each other, Con.

AYA: Let's be friends.

BOB: So we can get through this with a minimum of unpleasantness.

KATH: Just tell us why you're here.

BOB: Well if you'd been listening, you'd know we are here because of Gratitude.

AYA: Exactly.

BOB: Or rather, a lack of it. Our sensors indicate a major failure of gratitude around these here parts, Con.

AYA: By you, Con.

CON: What are you talking about?

BOB: So we have come to restore order to the Universe.

AYA: To restore balance.

CON: Sent by who?

AYA: That's point 1. If you're taking notes.

BOB: Gratitude. Point 2 is the warning. Because we're also here to warn you, Con.

AYA: Of events to come. Harbingers of doom...

BOB: That's us.

AYA: Point 3 is the ordeal, first him... then her.

BOB: Because we're here to put you to the test.

AYA: Both of you. An ordeal by fire and by water.

BOB: And ultimately... to make you an offer.

AYA: That's Point 4.

BOB: A very important offer.

Silence.

KATH: Hang on... this is like something out of Dickens.

CON: What?

KATH: You know... Dickens. The spirits visiting Ebenezer Scrooge?

CON: A Christmas Carol?

KATH: Is that what this is? The pair of you are some kind of ghosts?!

BOB: Might be.

AYA: Possibly.

KATH: But... shouldn't there be three of you?

BOB: (To Aya) See? Didn't I tell you?

Aya waves him away.

KATH: You'd better not be here to harm us.

BOB: We're not here to harm anybody.

AYA: Not *physically*.

BOB: Some discomfort certainly.

AYA: Discomfort, embarrassment...

BOB: Unease, foreboding and guilt.

CON: Guilt?

KATH: Why guilt?

BOB: Bags of guilt. Guilt by the hundredweight.

AYA: Speaking of guilt, Con. How much does guilt weigh?

BOB: Approximately?

AYA: How much guilt could you drag behind you?

BOB: On a sledge, Con. I hear you're into that kind of thing.

AYA: How much guilt could you drag behind you, a party of men...

BOB: Setting off on their own, to accomplish some great feat...

AYA: Some great endeavour...

BOB: Through their own unaided efforts.

Silence.

CON: Why am I supposed to be feeling guilty?

AYA: Naughty boys feel guilty. Con. Have you been a naughty boy?

BOB: Have you been just a little bit naughty?

CON: And what's this offer?

AYA: We'll get to that, Con.

BOB: We'll get to the offer in our own sweet time.

Beat

Well, if we're not allowed to use 'Con', how about... Robert.

AYA: A fine old fashioned name.

BOB: Germanic.

AYA: Original meaning, Bright Fame. We're into the meaning of things, where we're from, Robert.

BOB: The derivation of names is very important where we're from. Robert. Bright Fame, a perfect name for a Hero. Especially a hero and a military man like yourself.

AYA: A Naval Officer, no less.

BOB: Now where we're from...

AYA: Warriors still wear helmets.

KATH: This is getting ridiculous.

BOB: We're very old fashioned, where we come from.

AYA: And speaking of warriors, speaking of helmeted warriors...

KATH: No, I've heard enough. I am not interested.

CON: Can we just hear them out?

BOB: (To Aya) What would be a good name for a Helmeted Warrior? Could that translate into a name, what do you reckon?

AYA: I think you're right, Bob. How about... Helmer. Or even, Hjalmar.

KATH: Just... stop speaking. I want you out of here. Con, tell them.

BOB: Obviously not an English name. *Hjalmar*.

AYA: Ever met anybody of that name? *Hjalmar*.

KATH: Both of you. Out now. Con, do something.

BOB: Damn few is my guess. Has he known any Hjalmars, Aya?

KATH: Or I'm phoning the police.

AYA: He's known one, Bob. Hjalmar Johansen.

Both Con & Kath instantly recognise the name.

AYA: You know that name, don't you Con?

BOB: I think you do, Con?

AYA: Maybe seen him on the TV?

BOB: Maybe heard about him on the radio radio?

AYA: Or... maybe even met him in person?

Silence.

BOB: Of course, by Hjalmar Johansen, I mean the *late* Hjalmar Johansen.

AYA: Sadly yes. The Hjalmar Johansen who shot himself in a Hotel room in Oslo this very evening. May he rest in peace.

BOB: Not thirty minutes ago. Which is why we're here, talking about gratitude and guilt, Con.

AYA: Because Hjalmar Johansen is dead.

CON: I want you both -

ACT I SCENE 10

Bob signals a Time out. Lights on Bob & Aya, Con and Kath frozen, in the dark.

Aya gives Bob a look that clearly means 'What the fuck?'

BOB: You didn't let me explain my idea.

AYA: I don't care about your idea. We have a job to do, can we get back to -

BOB: A bet. A wager, on the outcome. We bet on what they chose, when we make the offer. What do you say?

Silence.

AYA: That is the craziest...

BOB: Come on, it'll be a *laugh*.

AYA: What...?

Bob holds up a Wenlock mascot

BOB: And I'll tell you what these are?

AYA: I don't care what they are.

BOB: I worked it out.

AYA: Instead of wasting my time, could you maybe focus on remembering what you are? It's actually very important.

Aya undoes the Time out.

ACT I**SCENE 11**

CON: - Out of here.

BOB: Hjalmar Johansen, Captain Scott?

AYA: Do you remember him, Captain Scott?

BOB: Coming back to you, is it?

AYA: Ringing any bells?

KATH: Father Christmas.

Kath studying Con suspicious, he avoids her gaze.

That's what Peter called him. He was Amundsen's second in command.

BOB: Top marks to you, Mrs Scott.

AYA: Amundsen's second in command. And what else?

Silence.

KATH: Johansen and Amundsen are the ones who came south. To rescue Con and the Boys.

BOB: The *Boys*, Kath?

AYA: A bit vague? Don't they have names?

KATH: You *know* who I mean. The British Antarctic Expedition. Ed Wilson and Birdie Bowers, Taff Evans and Titus Oates.

CON: Why are you going over all this? It's past history. It's none of your business. I want you gone.

BOB: Bear with us, Con.

AYA: We're just doing our job.

BOB: Causing mischief.

AYA: Playing tricks.

BOB: Incidentally, how long has it been, since you last saw the Boys?

AYA: Ed Wilson and Taff Evans

BOB: Birdie Bowers and Titus Oates?

AYA: Been a while hasn't it?

BOB: Doesn't that strike you as a little odd?

AYA: After everything you've been through together?

BOB: Fourteen hundred miles to the Pole and back.

AYA: The Geographic South Pole, of course.

BOB: We don't call it anything else, not in this house.

AYA: An English name...

BOB: For an English Pole.

Beat.

Fourteen hundred miles of hard travelling.

AYA: Over the Ross Ice Shelf and up the Beardmore Glacier.
Fourteen hundred miles!

BOB: To the Pole and back. But since you got home, not a word from the Boys? Why is that?

AYA: Not a word in months, why is that, Con?

BOB: Did you run out of things to say?

CON: This is none of your business.

KATH: They're busy people. They have families, careers. It was a very intense experience, for all of them. Sometimes... you have to move on.

AYA: And why did they have to rescue you and the boys, Con?
Hjalmar Johansen and Roald Amundsen.

BOB: What happened to you and the Boys to require rescuing, Con?

Silence. Kath looks at Con who refuses to respond.

KATH: Taff and Titus fell sick. On the way back from the Pole. They couldn't pull, they could barely walk. Amundsen heard about the situation and he came south. Him and Johansen.

BOB: 'Came south'?

AYA: Bit of an understatement, Kath.

BOB: They saved your life, Con.

AYA: They rescued you and the Boys. The British Antarctic Expedition.

BOB: You tried to call it Team GB, except the Olympics people got there first. Seb Coe seriously pissed off, I heard. Threatening lawyers.

Silence.

AYA: What are they doing, Amundsen and Johansen, when they hear the distress call?

BOB: They're packing up, Amundsen and his men, preparing to head for home.

AYA: They've won the race.

BOB: Why should they hang around?

AYA: Except... a message, a call for help.

BOB: From Birdie Bowers' satellite phone.

AYA: A call for help, Mayday.

BOB: From the French, did you know? M'aidez.

AYA: Literally, 'Help me'.

BOB: And what does Amundsen do?

AYA: After two months hard travelling, after fourteen hundred miles to the Pole and back, what does Amundsen do?

BOB: What is his first reaction, one sailor to another?

Beat.

Amundsen and Johansen pack food and winter clothing.

AYA: Harness dogs to sledges.

BOB: And head back south. Amundsen and Johansen. Despite the beginning of winter.

AYA: The coldest winter in Antarctic history, they head south.

BOB: They have a bearing on the British Antarctic Expedition...

AYA: And they find them.

BOB: Despite the weather, in the nick of time.

AYA: They find Shambles Camp.

BOB: At the foot of the Beardmore Glacier.

AYA: 83 degrees, 29 minutes south.

BOB: 172 degrees, 14 minutes East.

AYA: They find Con and the Boys. Find them and save them.

BOB: Amundsen and Johansen feed them, clothe them.

AYA: Which reminds me, where did you get your nice warm coat, Con?

BOB: That lovely, fleecy coat you're so keen not to give to Wilf?

AYA: That coat you never wear yourself?

BOB: Who gave you that, Con?

Silence.

BOB: Amundsen and Johansen get Con and the Boys back to safety.

AYA: All the way to the Bay of Whales.

BOB: Where a relief aircraft is already waiting, courtesy of the Argentinian Airforce.

AYA: Two days later they land at RAF Brize Norton.

BOB: To a Hero's welcome.

AYA: Amundsen the Hero.

BOB: Amundsen and all his men, we can't forget them: Amundsen and Bjaaland...

AYA: Wisting and Helmer-Hansen, Hassel and Prestrud

BOB: Lindstrom and Johansen.

AYA: Especially not Johansen.

BOB: Hjalmar Johansen.

AYA: The *late* Hjalmar Johansen.

KATH: He was on the plane.

AYA: He certainly was.

BOB: Absolutely correct.

KATH: I couldn't wait, when it landed. The engines were shrieking, people were messing about with a gangway, but I ran up the ramp, before anybody could stop me, pushing crew out of my way, Peter in my arms. And this man, this big, bearded man... Father Christmas, that's who Peter thought it was. Like a Father Christmas who'd been sleeping in doorways. And he looked at us and he smiled, this big smile and he waved us down the corridor. And he put a hand on Peter's forehead, so *gently*, and he said something, I didn't understand it, Norwegian, I guess.

Beat.

Did he have children? Johansen?

CON: What has all this got to do with me?

BOB: Get him!

AYA: He's got a nerve!

BOB: What a chancer!

AYA: What a cheeky monkey!

BOB: Our Con.

AYA: Our Captain Robert Falcon Scott RN.

BOB: Captain Robert Falcon Scott RN MBE. You know exactly what it's got to do with you, sunshine.

AYA: You just don't want to admit it.

BOB: But you're going to have to.

AYA: Because we're here to warn you, Con.

BOB: Because you've been naughty, Con.

AYA: Ever such a naughty boy.

BOB: So we are here to warn you

AYA: To put you to the test.

BOB: To put you through the fire and help you confront your sins.

AYA: And to make you an offer.

CON: Get the fuck out of here. Both of you.

Silence.

BOB: I think it's time.

AYA: I think you're right.

BOB: When people start dropping the F word, in front of their wives, well... what else is there left to say?

AYA: You're not on your battleship now, Con.

KATH: Time for what?

BOB: Time to start the ball rolling.

AYA: Time to say the magic word.

BOB: So are you ready?

AYA: For the main attraction?

CON: Just... go.

Bob and Aya take a deep breath and speak simultaneously.

BOB & AYA: RandyPenguin123!

ACT I SCENE 12

Kath laughs, relieved.

CON: That's it, that's enough. Out!

AYA: RandyPenguin123.

BOB: Sound familiar?

CON: I don't know what that means. I don't want to hear another word, I want you out, the pair of you. Just get down from there and get out.

KATH: It's that guy on the Internet, Con. Going on about Amundsen, about... that place?

AYA: Con's telling porkies.

BOB: Con's being economical with the truth.

CON: Are you listening to me? I want the pair of you out.

AYA: Surely you've head what RandyPenguin123 has been up to?

BOB: All those Conspiracy theories, all over Social Media?

CON: Who do you think you are? Bulshitting your way in here?

AYA: On the TV even, thirty four inches?

BOB: And all over the Radio radio

AYA: About Cardington.

BOB: Cardington!

KATH: *That's it...*

BOB: Cardington, a small town, to the north of London.

AYA: Cardington, home to two vast aircraft hangers.

BOB: Where they built the R100 Airship.

AYA: And the R101.

BOB: Cardington airfield, Con.

AYA: Ringing any bells?

CON: I don't know what you're talking about.

Silence.

- BOB:** Why are we talking about Cardington, Con?
- AYA:** Because Cardington is where Amundsen faked his arrival at the Pole.
- BOB:** That's where Amundsen's shot all his footage, inside the aircraft hanger at Cardington.
- AYA:** According to RandyPenguin123. That famous clip.
- BOB:** Those five bearded Norwegians raising their flag?
- AYA:** All over Youtube.
- BOB:** According to RandyPenguin123.
- AYA:** All of it filmed inside the 800 foot long aircraft hanger at Cardington.
- BOB:** According to RandyPenguin123.
- AYA:** All according to RandyPenguin123. So many stories about Amundsen.
- KATH:** But they're just conspiracy theories. Nobody takes them seriously.
- BOB:** Really, Kath?
- AYA:** Are you sure, Kathleen?
- BOB:** RandyPenguin123.
- AYA:** Just another angry voice on the internet...
- BOB:** Except...
- AYA:** Apart from the fact...

Bob and Aya point at Con.

- BOB:** That he's standing in the room...
- AYA:** That he's right here, right now.
- BOB:** RandyPenguin123. Also known as Robert Falcon Scott, RN.
- AYA:** Captain Robert Falcon Scott RN, MBE.
- KATH:** Bollocks!

CON: I want you gone. Is that understood? Gone. Now.

BOB: And it might not even matter.

AYA: What's another conspiracy theory, in a world full of them?

BOB: What's another contrarian narrative?

AYA: But this one's different.

BOB: So very different.

KATH: Con?

AYA: Because Hjalmar Johansen is dead.

BOB: By his own hand.

AYA: Lying on the floor of a cheap hotel in Oslo.

BOB: Nobody heard the shot. Because he had the radio radio on.

AYA: Nobody knows he's dead yet.

BOB: Except us, Con.

Silence.

AYA: And why is he dead?

BOB: Because RandyPenguin123 accused him.

AYA: Which means you accused him.

BOB: Accused all of them. Amundsen and Bjaaland, Wisting and Helmer-Hansen. You called them all liars.

AYA: Hassel and Prestrud, Lindstrom and Johansen. Every one of them a liar. According to you.

BOB: According to RandyPenguin123, the entire Norwegian expedition a fake. A bunch of beardy Norwegians, hidden away in an aircraft hanger in Bedfordshire.

Beat.

Because if you want to fake a journey to the South Pole...

AYA: The Geographic South Pole.

BOB: You wouldn't pick a remote part of Norway, where there's genuine snow and ice, all year round? Where's the logic in that?

AYA: A remote part of your native land, where you speak the language?

BOB: If you want to fake a journey to the Pole, where better than *Cardington*.

AYA: Just outside Bedford off the A421, an hour's drive north of London.

BOB: Where there's no snow, no ice. Where eight beardy Norwegians would stick out like sore thumbs.

AYA: Just a silly conspiracy theory.

BOB: But not so silly.

AYA: Because Johansen couldn't take it, Con. All those accusations.

BOB: Amundsen could, and all his beardy crew. They know what they did.

AYA: But Hjalmar Johansen couldn't.

BOB: Hjalmar Johansen was more fragile than he appeared. And he took his own life.

AYA: So it turns out spreading rumours...

BOB: Can have unintended consequences.

AYA: And now it's time for RandyPenguin123 to answer for his sins.

BOB: Time for RandyPenguin123 to accept responsibility.

AYA: And to show some gratitude.

BOB: To the men who saved his life.

AYA: It's our favourite thing, gratitude. The Universe runs on it.

Silence.

BOB: You crossed the line, mister.

AYA: You messed with one Scandinavian too many.

BOB: You messed with one of *ours*. What did you call them, what was that word?

AYA: Scandiwegians! Very funny.

BOB: You've had your fun, Con. But now it's time to face the music.

AYA: Time for a reckoning. Did you really think you'd get away with it?

BOB: You can't just use a funny name and hope to get away with stuff.

AYA: We may not be from this reality, but even we know about tracking IP addresses

BOB: And now, the wheels are in motion.

AYA: Or they will be, very shortly.

BOB: There have been rumblings, since you got back from Antarctica.

AYA: But a suicide? Nobody can ignore that.

BOB: By this time tomorrow, the media will be all over it.

AYA: Because Hjalmar Johansen wasn't just any dead Norwegian.

BOB: Hjalmar Johansen helped Fridtjof Nansen reach his furthest North. Hjalmar Johansen is a name to be reckoned with,

AYA: Hjalmar Johansen's suicide will rock any number of boats. Particularly yours.

BOB: Questions will be asked.

AYA: Inquiries made.

BOB: So. Is RandyPenguin123 ready to face the spotlight?

Silence.

CON: I didn't mean -

ACT I**SCENE 13**

Bob signs a Time out. Con and Kath frozen, lights only on Bob and Aya.

AYA: If you keep doing this, I swear I'm going to get violent.

BOB: A bet. A wager. *Please.*

AYA: *No.*

BOB: It'll be a laugh, it'll be exciting.

AYA: Isn't this exciting enough?

BOB: Seriously? This? Haggling with mortals about Conspiracy theories? Is that really putting fire in your belly? We used to converse with *Gods*. This... it's just all so fucking domestic.

AYA: Are you still on this Valkyrie thing? You're wrong. You really need to snap out of it, seriously.

BOB: I told you we should have waited for the third one, that's what's causing all the confusion, I bet that's why it took so long for them to pay attention.

Beat.

We're not from here, from this... world. If we're not Disir or Norns or Valkyrie, what are we? Go on, tell me. If you're so clever.

AYA: And just because we're not from this world doesn't make us Valkyries, or Norns, or... whatever.

Silence.

Nobody else is coming. You just need to focus. It'll all come back to you, what we are. And me telling you wouldn't work. You wouldn't believe me, you wouldn't accept it. You have to get there under your own steam.

BOB: A bet, just a little one. Pick an a side, for when we make the offer. They say Yes, they say No. Just pick one, please.

AYA: There's no point. I already know what they're going to choose and so do you.

BOB: (Confused) No I don't.

Aya undoes the Timeout.

ACT I**SCENE 14**

CON: - for it to go like this. I never meant for him... to kill himself.
That's not what I wanted.

Kath stares at Con, aghast, lost for words.

Happy now?

AYA: So what made you do it, Con?

BOB: We're genuinely interested.

CON: Do you know how many years I dedicated to reaching the Pole? What I went through? The planning, the effort. And he swanned in and took it away from me. Hash tag heading South Amundsen. I wanted to hurt him, not anybody else. Johansen... that wasn't all my fault, Kath. He was a recovering alcoholic.

KATH: Christ...

CON: He was sacked from the expedition, as soon as they got back. It was in the news. So him... killing himself, it could have happened any time. For all you know, it could all be Amundsen's fault. (To Bob) Maybe you should be in *his* house, putting *him* through the ringer?

Beat.

What did you mean by Facing the Music?

BOB: Wheels are in motion, Con.

AYA: Or they soon will be.

CON: And what's this Offer? I have to pay you or it all ends up in the papers? That sounds like Blackmail to me.

BOB: We'll get to the Offer, Con.

AYA: But we've lots of ground to cover first.

BOB: After all, you did invite us in to watch the Opening Ceremony.

AYA: You have been very generous.

BOB: Be a shame not to watch it.

AYA: Be a shame for us to appear ungrateful.

BOB: We so hate ingratitude.

Beat.

Although now I think about it, I don't understand why you want to watch the Opening Ceremony at all.

AYA: Considering the athletes rejected you as Flag Bearer, we mean.

BOB: Considering they picked Chris Hoy instead.

AYA: I like Chris Hoy, he's a real champion.

BOB: And so charming. Despite being Scottish. You can trust him to do the job.

AYA: To lead Team GB into the Olympic stadium.

BOB: To walk round a track, carrying a flag.

AYA: Imagine the embarrassment, Chris Hoy having to be *rescued*...

BOB: Half way round the track...

AYA: Is that why Hjalmar Johansen died, Con?

BOB: Is it, Con?

AYA: Because the athletes of Team GB chose Chris Hoy over you?

BOB: Despite all that schmoozing, all those calls to influential people.

AYA: All the favours you called in.

BOB: All those drinks and dinners.

AYA: Gift cards, subscriptions to Amazon Prime. And they didn't pick you.

BOB: Bottles of wine, hampers from M & S. And they didn't pick you.

AYA: Such ingratitude.

BOB: Maybe they were pissed off at you trying to use Team GB?

AYA: Instead of the British Antarctic Expedition?

BOB: Or maybe they just didn't trust you?

AYA: To carry a flag around a track?

BOB: Or maybe... the *Boys* had a word?

AYA: Maybe the Boys dripped enough poison to swing it away from you.

BOB: And how are the Boys? Ed Wilson and Titus Oates?

AYA: Taff Evans and Birdie Bowers? How are they all?

BOB: How long has it been?

AYA: Since they dropped in for a chat and a cup of tea?

BOB: And you weren't even invited to be there in person. London 2012!

AYA: The Opening Ceremony of the Thirtieth Olympiad and you weren't invited.

Beat.

Or were you? In a roundabout way?

They turn to address Kath.

BOB: Kath!

AYA: Is there anything you'd like to share with the group?

Silence.

KATH: Danny offered me tickets.

BOB: Ouch.

AYA: *Ouch.*

Con angry.

KATH: And this is exactly why I said no, Con. Because I knew how you would react.

BOB & AYA: (to the tune of Danny Boy) 'Oh Danny Boyle, the pipes, the pipes are calling...'

KATH: Would it really have been so humiliating, Con? Going to the Opening Ceremony as my plus one?

BOB: So what happened?

AYA: Couldn't you get a sitter for Peter?

BOB: We could have done it, as we're the neighbours.

AYA: It would have been no trouble. Little Peter!

BOB: Our little chum! Poor Con. Do you resent it so much?

AYA: Not being invited personally?

BOB: Tickets offered to your *wife*?

AYA: At second hand?

BOB: Like charity?

Silence.

CON: Maybe.

BOB: Is that why Hjalmar Johansen died, Con? Because of Danny Boyle's charity?

They sing the 2012 fanfare, quietly.

AYA: So why are you so keen to watch the Opening Ceremony?

BOB: I mean, three hours of TV? Boring, right?

AYA: What do you think you're going to see, Con?

BOB: What's our Danny going to show?

Beat.

I bet I know.

CON: I'm not interested.

AYA: I think I know too.

BOB: Imagine, the arena goes dark...

AYA: All the lights go down...

BOB: Except for a single spotlight.

AYA: Revealing a small band of explorers.

CON: (To Kath) Can we just ignore them?

KATH: What?

CON: Why don't we just... I don't know. Go next door, actually put the TV on? Leave them to say their piece?

KATH: I want to listen.

BOB: Five British explorers, setting off on their own...

AYA: To accomplish some brave feat. Some great endeavour...

BOB: Through their own unaided efforts.

AYA: But who are these struggling, manly, British men?

Silence.

KATH: Con and the Boys. Con and Ed, Birdie, Taff and Titus.

BOB: Bravely, they haul their sledge towards the centre of the arena...

AYA: Amidst the plastic snow and synthetic ice. He does a good job, does Danny Boyle.

BOB: He's a born entertainer. He knows how to put on a show.

BOB & AYA: (To tune of Danny Boy) 'Oh Danny Boyle, the Games, the Games are calling!'

AYA: But alas, all is not well with our brave British explorers.

BOB: Watch as they stumble to a halt.

AYA: As they struggle to move their sledge.

BOB: Setting off on their own, to accomplish some great feat...

AYA: Some great endeavour...

BOB: Through their own unaided efforts.

AYA: But all for nothing.

BOB: The stadium goes dark.

AYA: It's best to draw a veil over such suffering.

BOB: Of men whose final hour has come.

AYA: Who would want to watch that?

Beat.

But now what's happening?

BOB: Spotlights pick up two new figures, approaching at speed.

AYA: Each one driving a sledge, each sledge pulled by dogs.

BOB: Brave, cheerful, infuriating dogs, from Greenland.

AYA: Noisy Greenlanders, twelve to a sledge.

BOB: And of course, Danny uses real dogs.

AYA: Although they say you should never work with children and animals.

BOB: But these dogs are so well trained.

AYA: And driven by men who know what they're doing.

BOB: And of course you know who they are?

AYA: These men driving the sledges? Who they represent?

Beat.

BOB: Come on, Con. Don't let me down.

CON: I don't care.

KATH: Amundsen and Johansen.

BOB: Exactly. Roald Amundsen and Hjalmar Johansen.

AYA: The late Hjalmar Johansen. Late these past thirty minutes.

BOB: Late by his own hand.

AYA: In a cheap hotel in Oslo. An empty bottle of cheap wine upside down in the sink.

BOB: A Radio radio playing to an empty room. But here in the arena, look at the reception they get.

AYA: As they orbit the British Antarctic Expedition, at the centre of the Olympic Stadium?

BOB: Con and the Boys, who set off on their own, to accomplish some great feat.

AYA: Some great endeavour.

BOB: Through their own unaided efforts.

AYA: But who now need to be rescued.

BOB: The entire arena are on their feet.

AYA: A tear in every eye.

BOB: Applauding the brave Norwegians, come to the rescue.

AYA: All thanks to Birdie Bowers' satellite phone.

BOB: Is that why Hjalmar Johansen died, Con?

AYA: Because he dared help rescue you?

CON: Is that...

BOB: Is that what you think is going to happen?

AYA: Do you think that's what Danny Boyle is planning for tonight?

BOB & AYA: (To the tune of Danny Boy) 'Oh, Danny Boyle, the Dogs, the Dogs are calling...'

BOB: Is that why you're so keen to watch it? The Opening Ceremony...

AYA: Of the 2012 Olympic Games?

BOB: Because Danny Boyle's going to tell your story?

AYA: Brave Captain Scott and his not-so-merry men?

BOB: Sadly not.

AYA: In a word, no.

Silence.

BOB: Because it's not just your story.

AYA: Scott of the Antarctic, reaching the Pole?

BOB: That's only half the story.

AYA: Half an arch. And half an arch won't stand.

BOB: You need the whole thing, the whole story.

AYA: And your story involves other events

BOB: The British Antarctic Expedition, setting off on their own, to accomplish some great feat.

AYA: Some great endeavour.

BOB: Through their own unaided efforts.

AYA: Except... what happens?

BOB: What do the audience see?

AYA: The arena goes dark again as we return to December 2011.

BOB: A single spotlight on five brave Norwegians as their dog teams pull them safely...

AYA: Efficiently...

BOB: Cheerfully, even.

AYA: To the Pole, to Ninety Degrees South.

BOB: To the Home of the Pole, or as they say in Norwegian...

BOB & AYA: POLHEIM.

BOB: Their journey is over. Look.

AYA: Together, their cold mittened hands clasp the flag. Look.

BOB: The Norwegian flag, *look*.

AYA: Together they plant their flag in the ice.

BOB: Is that why Johansen died, Con?

AYA: Is that why RandyPenguin123 came into being?

BOB: Because Amundsen beat you to the Pole?

AYA: Hash tag Heading South Amundsen.

Silence.

AYA: But what's happening now? In the arena? Where's that spotlight going?

BOB: Who has it found, sitting quietly in the audience?

AYA: Not up in the posh seats...

BOB: With the Nobs and the Nobility. Nothing to do with Danny Boyle.

AYA: Who is that?

BOB: Recognise that face, out there? Because you should.

AYA: Because it's the man himself. Roald Amundsen. In person.

BOB: Captain Roald Gravening Amundsen, sitting quietly in the crowd, with every eye in the Olympic Stadium turned towards him.

AYA: Every face. Every spectator as one, standing, jumping to their feet, tears in their eyes, applauding.

BOB: And that's why you're here, isn't it Con? Watching it all on TV?

AYA: Remote control in hand, just in case?

BOB: Your worst nightmare. Amundsen getting even more acclaim.

AYA: With you there to see it, in person. Witnessing that adulation, the tears flowing freely from the eyes of men.

BOB: And duty bound to stand up and join in the applause.

AYA: Isn't that the truth?

BOB: Isn't that why you're still here?

AYA: At home? Watching it on TV?

Silence.

BOB: Because everybody's crazy about Scandinavia right now.

AYA: How are the Boys, Con?

BOB: Norwegian is the new Black.

AYA: How are the Boys?

BOB: The new Sexy. Ever since Amundsen saved you. Scandinavia is the only game in town.

AYA: How are the *Boys*?

CON: Stop going on -

ACT I SCENE 15

Bob signals a Time out. Con and Kath left motionless as before.

AYA: What *now*?

BOB: This Danny Boyle? Is *he* a Valkyrie?

Angry, Aya prepares to undo the Time out.

A simple wager. I'll stick by whatever you pick, honest.

AYA: Stop distracting me! You have other things to worry about.

BOB: Just one tiny little *bet*.

AYA: But there's no *point*.

BOB: Wagers are traditional. Listen... I've worked it out. We're *trickster* spirits.

Aya tries to butt in.

Look at what we've been doing, messing with their heads. A wager would be so us. Like that guy, remember? He made a deal with... someone. If he didn't keep his word, they could take his head.

AYA: Who would agree to anything so stupid?

BOB: They're gods, the normal rules don't apply to them. Anyway, the point is, he didn't keep his word, he didn't do what he was supposed to. So the guys he made the bet with came to collect his head...

AYA: And?

BOB: And he talked his way out of it. He said, you can have my head, but you can't have any part of my neck, that wasn't part of the deal.

AYA: That is just so -

BOB: And they spent so much time arguing about where his neck ended and his head began, that in the end he just legged it.

Beat.

AYA: So you want to wager on the outcome, but if you lose you're not going to keep your end of the bargain?

BOB: It'll be a *laugh*. It's the kind of thing we're always doing. Tricksters, that's us.

AYA: They are not going to accept the offer, I guarantee it. She will turn it down. And when he hears why, he will turn it down too. He will have no choice.

BOB: Why would she turn it down?

Aya points at Kath, mimics an enormous pregnant belly. Bob gobsmacked.

Curtain.

ACT II**SCENE 1**

As before, Bob and Aya standing on the table, Con and Kath staring up at them.

CON: - about the Boys!

Beat.

I don't believe any of this. I haven't heard anything. I would have heard something, if people were asking questions.

AYA: So why was the meeting brought forward, Con?

BOB: The Saudi Arabian Polar expedition.

AYA: SAPOL 2013.

BOB: Why the change of date, Con?

AYA: Maybe they've heard things.

BOB: Rumours.

Beat.

Lets talk about Amundsen, Con.

CON: I'm sick of hearing his name.

AYA: Amundsen the Hero, first to reach the Geographic South Pole.

BOB: Who risked his life to rescue the British Antarctic Expedition.

AYA: Who rescued you and the Boys. Setting off on your own, to accomplish some great feat...

BOB: Some great endeavour...

AYA: Through your own unaided efforts.

BOB: The hero of the hour. Amundsen!

AYA: The name on everybody's lips: *Amundsen*.

BOB: To the victor, the spoils. To Amundsen, the fame, the adulation and the renown.

AYA: The rewards. The Film deals, book deals...

BOB: Sponsorship deals, merchandising. All the big names...

AYA: Apple, Land Rover, Rolex.

BOB: Is that why RandyPenguin123 came into being, Con?

AYA: Is that why Hjalmar Johansen is dead?

BOB: Because Amundsen got to make adverts for Rolex?

Norwegian accents.

AYA: 'My name is Roald Amundsen...'

BOB: 'This is my story...'

AYA: 'This... is my Rolex.'

Silence.

AYA: Awards, honours, medals and money. Even...

BOB: An honorary knighthood. Ouch. From her majesty the Queen.

BOB & AYA: Arise, Sir Roald Amundsen!

Silence.

BOB: Of course, you didn't go empty handed.

AYA: What did you get, again?

BOB: You survived, for one thing.

AYA: You lived to fight another day.

BOB: A safe return to wife and family.

AYA: Plus an MBE.

BOB: Your own sponsorship deals.

AYA: Mountain Warehouse.

BOB: Milletts.

AYA: An advert for Tesco's...

BOB: Every little helps! Dara O'Briain taking the piss...

AYA: On Mock the Week. Plus a new series on the BBC...

BOB: Rowan Atkinson in 'Blackadder Goes South'. Plus the ultimate accolade...

AYA: The prize surpassing all others...

Bob and Aya sing the Desert Island Disks theme.

BOB: Is your favourite track really Jeff Wayne's War of the Worlds, Con?

AYA: I always saw you as a Dire Straits kind of a guy.

CON: Very funny.

Beat.

BOB: You still get recognised, when you're out in public...

AYA: But confused with Earnest Shackleton.

BOB: *Sir* Earnest Shackleton.

AYA: How that must sting.

BOB: Shackleton being knighted.

AYA: But not you, Captain Scott.

BOB: Still only a Captain?

AYA: Still not made it to Vice Admiral?

BOB: Is that why Hjalmar Johansen is dead? Because the Queen knighted Amundsen?

AYA: Leaving you to queue behind Gary Barlow to collect a humble MBE?

BOB: It's almost like charity.

AYA: You didn't even get it from the Queen.

BOB: What was their name, Con? Can you remember?

AYA: The Duke of... something?

BOB: Princess... thing?

AYA: And how are the Boys, Con?

BOB: Ed Wilson and Titus Oates.

AYA: Taff Evans and Birdie Bowers.

BOB: How are they these days?

AYA: But how long has it been since you last saw them?

CON: Christ, give it a rest!

KATH: Can you stop going on about them?

CON: They have their own lives to lead, OK?

KATH: They're busy people.

BOB: And how's the book coming along?

AYA: The book of the expedition.

BOB: That nice, fat coffee table book you'd set your hopes on?

AYA: Will it be in the shops for Christmas, Con?

BOB: Or will the rumours bring you down, Con?

AYA: All those wagging tongues, asking questions?

ACT II**SCENE 2**

CON: What have you heard? Tell me.

AYA: About what, Con?

CON: Who's making enquiries? Why did the Saudis bring the meeting forward?

KATH: And what's this Offer?

BOB: We'll get to that soon enough.

AYA: In our own sweet time.

BOB: All you need to know is that Wheels are in motion, Con.

AYA: But it's not a done deal. You still have time to repair the damage.

BOB: You still have an out. And we're having so much fun.

AYA: Messing with your heads. It's what we're good at, it's why we're here.

BOB: Our purpose.

AYA: Our mission.

Silence.

BOB: You see, in some ways it's the best thing that could have happened to you.

AYA: As strange as it might seem.

CON: What is?

BOB: Amundsen in the spotlight.

KATH: Seriously?

AYA: Amundsen hogging all the attention.

BOB: It's such a distraction.

AYA: Keeping people's minds busy.

BOB: People are so obsessed with Amundsen, with all things Scandinavian...

AYA: They're not thinking about you, Con. It's almost as though Amundsen has rescued you all over again.

BOB: Because there's so many questions people just aren't asking.

AYA: About the British Antarctic Expedition.

CON: What questions?

AYA: Little questions, little doubts.

BOB: Ever since you came back from the south.

KATH: Why would they be asking questions?

AYA: The questions *you* have been pondering, all these months, Kath!

KATH: Me?

Beat.

BOB: About Greenwich, for instance.

AYA: Tell us about Greenwich, Kath.

BOB: Tell us about the Boys.

AYA: The Boys you can't stop thinking about. Birdie and Ed.

BOB: Titus and Taff. Why are they so much in your thoughts, Kath?

KATH: Who says they are?

AYA: Why can't you stop thinking about them, Kath? Tell us.

BOB: Not forgetting Peter, our little pal. He misses them so much.

AYA: All his extra uncles.

BOB: So it's time to ask the question, Kath.

AYA: Time to get it off your chest.

Silence.

KATH: (To Con) Why don't they come round any more?

CON: What?

KATH: The *Boys*, Con. They used to be here all the time, before the expedition. We used to joke about charging them rent. Taff reading Peter Harry Potter, doing Hagrid with a Welsh accent. Peter pinching Titus' iPhone, watching Toy Story on Birdie's laptop. Ed helping him with his drawing?

Beat.

KATH (cont'd): We used to have such fun. All that planning, all those details. Where to source stuff, sledges, food and clothing. Working out the lead times for getting it to the right place at the right time. Peter fascinated by it all, insisting on helping.

Beat.

And come evening, we'd open some beers. You'd send Taff out for takeaway and make bets on what he'd come back with. Pizza, Thai or Indian. Chinese or Jamaican. He even found South African once, remember? That weird curry thing Peter wouldn't touch.

Beat.

You've been back for months and they haven't been here once. No phone calls, no texts, nothing. Peter misses them, and I miss them too.

CON: The expedition is over, Kath. It's all over, that's all.

KATH: But not a single visit? Is it this Pole of Inaccessibility? Is that why they've stopped coming round?

BOB: How are the Boys, Con?

AYA: And why does Greenwich keep calling?

BOB: Alice Hinks of the Royal Observatory at Greenwich?

CON: She's just some academic trying to justify her salary.

BOB: I don't think Kath is convinced, Con.

AYA: Hard to ignore, all those phone calls, all those tense conversations.

BOB: Between her beloved husband, the Polar explorer.

AYA: And the clever, curious scientist at the Greenwich Observatory.

BOB: So keen to get hold of your logs, Captain Scott.

AYA: But you seem so unwilling to hand them over. Amundsen has already given her his.

BOB: And don't forget, Dr Hinks has an official position. When it comes to people claiming to have reached the Geographic South Pole...

AYA: She's the umpire. Appointed by the RGS.

BOB: The Royal Geographic Society.

AYA: She has the final say.

BOB: So it makes us curious...

AYA: It makes us wonder.

BOB: What's the hold up...

AYA: In handing over your data?

CON: It's nothing.

Silence.

AYA: I don't think our Kathleen thinks it's just nothing. I think Kath harbours doubts.

BOB: Doubts about her husband, about his odd behaviour since his return from the south.

AYA: So much odd behaviour.

BOB: Especially regarding all things Scandinavian.

AYA: Scandiwegian! So amusing.

BOB: So tell us, Kath. What's on your mind?

AYA: Get it out into the open.

BOB: Share those dark imaginings at the back of your mind?

Silence.

AYA: Nothing to say, Kath? Surely that can't be right?

BOB: Alice from Greenwich and the Boys who never call?

AYA: Birdie and Ed, Titus and Taff. And Greenwich. Give a name to the doubts, Kath. Get the poison out of your system.

BOB: What scares you? At night? In the dark?

AYA: Not Peter falling ill.

BOB: Not the cost of living.

AYA: Not the rate of knife crime in London.

BOB: What truly scares you?

CON: Just ignore them -

KATH: (To Con) You didn't get there. The Pole. Something went wrong, with a sighting, or something. Because I can just see you looking at Amundsen's tent and Amundsen's flag and refusing to accept it. Insisting on working it all out for yourself. Because what true Englishman could accept a Pole created by a foreigner? The Geographic South Pole, none of this *POLHEIM* crap. But you were cold and angry...

Silence.

... and you got something wrong, but didn't realise until it was too late. There's something in the logs, something you can't tell anybody about. And you won't hand them over, because when Greenwich check, they'll spot the error and they'll go public. And that's why the Boys don't come round. They know you got it wrong and they're refusing to cover it up.

CON: How can you say that!

BOB: I bet that felt good.

CON: How could you even think that?

AYA: I bet that felt *wonderful*.

BOB: Venting your spleen...

AYA: Draining the poison.

CON: I am an officer in the Royal Navy, Kath. Do you really think I could lie about a sighting?

KATH: I didn't think you'd be stupid enough to spread conspiracy theories on Facebook, but what do I know? So did you?

BOB: Yes, Con! Did you?

AYA: We're dying to know.

CON: Did I what?

KATH: Did you get there! You never talk about it, Con. The Pole, what happened there.

CON: Of course I talk about it.

KATH: No you don't. Just tell me. So I know the worst. So I can deal with it, so I can move on, so we can all move on.

CON: I talk about it all -

ACT II**SCENE 3**

Bob signs a Time out. Con and Kath frozen, in the dark.

BOB: How could you know that?

AYA: What?

Bob indicates Kath, signs pregnant belly.

BOB: And why does it even matter?

AYA: If she's (Signs belly) she's not going to accept the offer, is she?
And once *he* knows, neither will he.

Aya prepares to undo the Time out.

BOB: But I'm *bored*. You're so boring. And you're ignoring all my ideas. We're Tricksters! It's obvious. A wager is exactly the kind of thing we should do. He's definitely not as tall as I was expecting.

AYA: What is it with you and height? You're *obsessed*.

BOB: It's more the idea of... dimension, I guess. It's like I haven't been *here* for so long, I've forgotten the rules, about scale.

AYA: Have you remembered yet?

Bob puzzled.

What you are, what *we* are? What happens once we're done?

Bob still puzzled.

To us. After we make the offer?

BOB: It's a test. Obviously. We're on probation. We're only messing with these two to prove ourselves, to prove that we've still got the stuff. Once we're done here, they'll send us somewhere else. Somewhere more exciting, hopefully. Anyway, how did you know about (Signs belly). Are you making it up?

Silence.

AYA: Tell me something about him.

She indicates Con.

Something I couldn't possibly know.

Aya undoes the Time out.

ACT II**SCENE 4**

CON: - all the time! Jesus... OK. Fine. *Fine*. Are you ready? I'll talk about it now, then. If it will make you happy.

Beat.

I got us so close. That's what truly pisses me off. We were barely an hour away when Birdie spotted it. A black spot, ahead of us. A sledge runner with a black flag, rippling in the wind. A note tied to it, with a message and a compass bearing for their camp. All we had to do was follow instructions. Like there was an arrow, or a sign: 'Geographic South Pole, Five miles. 24 Hour Services. Have exact fare ready.' Like taking Peter into town on the Tube. Reading the station names out, one by one.

Beat.

A horrible place. You cannot imagine it. Blizzard, temperature dropping by the minute. And none of it would have mattered, if only we'd been first. And it wasn't enough to beat us there, he had to twist the knife in the wound. He'd put a tent up, some flash designer thing, Norwegian flag on top. And all this stuff inside. Gloves and boots and odds and ends. And letters.

Con retrieves letters from a pocket.

BOB: Dear Captain Scott...

AYA: As you will be the first to visit this place after us...

BOB: Please could I ask you to forward this letter...

Con holds letter aloft.

AYA: To his Majesty, King Harald the fifth of Norway.

Kath takes the letter from him, stares at it.

CON: Whatever Pole *he* got to, I got there too. So maybe my arithmetic was out by a couple of hundred yards, what does it matter. I walked into that tent a leader of men. Captain Robert Falcon Scott RN. Leader of the British Antarctic Expedition. Years commanding ships, men, expeditions. And reading that letter, it all meant *nothing*. I walked into that tent an explorer and I walked out of it a sodding Postman.

Beat.

The logs can't go to Greenwich because if they go, the letter has to go with. That is why I need the Pole of Inaccessibility.

CON (cont'd): Do you understand? I refuse to go down in history as a fucking postman.

KATH: Why didn't you tell Diana this?

Beat.

It could have made all the difference. And why didn't you send it to Norway?

CON: What would be the point? The whole world knows he got there.

KATH: Amundsen wouldn't waste time trying to humiliate you, he's a Pro. You've spent years telling me how dangerous the Polar plateau is. This was just him taking precautions. I send you emails like this all the time: 'Back in an hour, Peter at child minder's'. If Amundsen had really wanted to humiliate you, he'd have written this to *Shackleton*.

Bob and Aya applaud.

BOB: Nice one!

AYA: Touché!

CON: This offer. Is it about Greenwich?

KATH: So... that's why the boys don't come round? This letter?

CON: Is there going to be some kind of enquiry?

BOB: Hold your horses, Con.

CON: Who's asking questions? The RGS? The Saudis? Just tell me?

BOB: It's time for a change of direction.

AYA: An alternative point of view.

CON: For Christ's sake...

BOB: First Gratitude...

AYA: Tick.

BOB: Then the Warning and the Ordeal. Him...

AYA: Tick.

BOB: Then her...

AYA: And *then* the Offer.

KATH: What have I done?

BOB: Over to you, Captain Scott!

AYA: It's your turn now.

BOB: Time to get things off that manly chest.

CON: Maybe the Boys don't come round because of you?

KATH: What's that supposed to mean?

Silence.

CON: You've never got on with the wives, Kath. Admit it. You've always managed to rub them up the wrong way.

Beat.

It was different during the planning. We could ignore all that other stuff. But that argument, the day we left New Zealand? I thought Orianna was going to take a swing at you.

KATH: That wasn't my fault.

CON: The things you said, I could not believe what I was hearing. Without any kind of warning, without consulting me...

BOB: 'What does it matter if you don't make it back...'

AYA: ...reaching the Pole is worth any sacrifice.'

CON: They were making their last farewells to their loved ones. Have you any idea how you sounded? I didn't know where to look.

KATH: They took it completely out of context, they deliberately misunderstood what I was trying to say.

Silence.

CON: I know you're not... like them.

KATH: So what am I, Con? Do tell.

CON: You're an artist. You're... Unconventional. You resent them.

KATH: Can you blame me? Nice respectable girls, from nice respectable families, keeping nice respectable homes for their men and doing what they're told. Is that what you wanted from me Con? Conventional?

CON: You were an orphan, you had it tough growing up. I have always admired what you've achieved, how hard you've worked. Compared to you, they had it easy... and you resent them. You can't help pushing your own interests and sometimes, you sound a little... Affected. Especially when you start going on about your films.

KATH: Christ! This is your mother sticking her oar in. Admit it. The woman who thought I'd spent 3 years in art school so I could make episodes of *Midsummer Murders*.

CON: It's her favourite, Kath. She was trying to pay you a compliment.

Beat.

Sometimes... it's like you always have to be the artist, to be seen to be pushing the envelope. Like that party you threw for them, before we left London? Jesus... Male strippers, I mean really?

KATH: They weren't male strippers, they were from the Royal Ballet. That was a special production of *L'Après-midi d'un Faun*. Bloody Orianna. She couldn't tell a male stripper from Kermit the Frog.

CON: You were supposed to be the wife of the Expedition leader, I expected more of you.

KATH: You... *shit*. I have been playing Mrs Expedition Leader for two sodding years. I shut down every single project for your sake. I even put off Martin *Freeman*.

Beat.

They were pathetic. *Pathetic*. Their men, their brave resourceful men were about to risk their lives, attempt something that had never been done before and all they could talk about was what they were going to *wear* in the official photographs and who was supposed to sit next to *who*. Like it *mattered*.

CON: Or maybe they were just trying to distract themselves from the pain of saying good bye?

KATH: I was proud of what you were trying to achieve, all of you. I wanted to show that I was proud, to smile and laugh and support you. Not snivel into a handkerchief.

CON: At least none of the wives went to *Berlin*.

KATH: Christ...

CON: None of them flew off for cozy holidays with Fridtjof *Nansen*.

BOB: Kathleen?

AYA: Our Kathleen?

KATH: This is bollocks.

CON: While I was slogging my guts out in Antarctica, you were swanning about in posh hotels with yet another bloody *Norwegian*.

Beat.

What is it about Norwegians, Kath? What's the attraction, tell me? Is it the beards, the knitwear? The Scandi-Noir TV? All that rye bread and dried fish? Frozen meatballs from IKEA?

KATH: It was work, Con. It was never a secret. It was just work. A commission from the UN. A profile of Fridtjof Nansen: explorer, scientist, diplomat, humanitarian.

Beat.

Anyway, IKEA is Swedish.

CON: That's not the *point*.

BOB: I love a good fight.

AYA: Nice not to have to do all the talking for a change.

CON: All the film makers in the world and they just happened to pick you?

KATH: They picked me because Nansen used to be an Explorer, and I'm both a film maker and an explorer's wife. You've seen the film, you know it was a job. You came to the fucking premier! And it was a paying gig... I don't remember you complaining about the MacBook it paid for. You can't keep bearing a grudge against the whole of Scandinavia.

CON: Oh, can't I?

KATH: Christ... I knew we should have kept on seeing Diana but Oh, no. You knew better. Are we going back to the bad old days, Con? Is that what this is? Throwing out my Bjork CDs? Shouting every time you hear Abba on the radio? Is this whole sodding Pole of Inaccessibility thing just an excuse to get out of taking Peter to IKEA?

CON: I've read Nansen's emails. Quite a turn of phrase he has, for an explorer, scientist, diplomat, humanitarian. Perhaps you should let these two take a look?

BOB: Yes please!

KATH: And how did you get hold of my emails?

CON: Because I know your PIN -

KATH: Because I *gave* you my PIN! Because I have nothing to hide.

Beat.

You were making such good progress, that's why I agreed to stop seeing Diana. Last month you were so much better. Calmer. It felt like you were getting back to normal, you were... happy. What happened?

CON: Nothing.

Silence.

KATH: Christ... RandyPenguin123? Was that it?

CON: No.

KATH: *Christ.* That's almost funny. For months, I've been singing Diana's praises to everyone I know: 'She really knows her stuff, Con's in such a good place right now'. When all that was really making you happy was dumping virtual shit on Amundsen.

Beat.

Once again, you are completely over-reacting to a situation due to its high content of Scandinavians. Nothing 'happened' in Berlin. I did not sleep with Fritdjof Nansen.

CON: Well he uses a lot of emojis for a supposedly platonic relationship.

KATH: You're only making a fuss because bloody Orianna read some article in Hello magazine. Nansen was going through a tough time. We both were. You were in Antarctica, Peter was at your mother's, Nansen had just lost his wife.

CON: And he was making great efforts to acquire somebody else's.

KATH: Nansen understood what I was going through, what *you* were going through. He's an intelligent man. Funny, accomplished. Wise. I was fortunate to get the chance to spend time with him.

Beat.

You should have been so lucky.

CON: Meaning?

KATH: If you'd spent time with Nansen, maybe you wouldn't have had such a tough time in Antarctica. Woof, woof.

Beat.

I like men, Con. I refuse to apologise for it. Like it or not, men make most of the decisions in this world. They go out and they do stuff. I find men interesting. Fascinating, stimulating, I enjoy working with them and they enjoy working with me. You have known this from the day we met. But I have never crossed the line. You are my husband, you are the father of my child. Before the Pole you would never have made such a fuss. Before... I could trust you to stick to your word.

Beat.

Nansen is in the running for a Nobel prize for his humanitarian work. The UN are about to adopt the Nansen Passport. For the first time refugees will have paperwork that will allow them to cross borders to find places of safety. Nansen would never risk that, not for the chance of getting his leg over with *me*.

Beat.

That's the kind of project I thought you'd get involved with, once you were back. Not risking your life trying to get to some even more pointless bit of the Earth's surface. Before tonight, I had never heard of the Pole of Inaccessibility and I bet 99% of the world's population haven't either. Even if you get there, Con... who's going to care? You need to move on, Con. Like Nansen did. You know what he told me? Nobody even remembers what his first expedition was. It used to bother him, but he managed to move on. Now he laughs about it.

Beat.

The Pole was the big one, Con. The Geographic South Pole. And Amundsen got there first. Anything else would be meaningless. And he rescued you. Have you forgotten that? He made it possible for you to get home. To me and Peter. Are you angry about Nansen because you're not allowed to get angry with Amundsen? Because he -

ACT II SCENE 5

Bob signals a Time out.

BOB: A secret?

AYA: Something only he would know.

BOB: Why is it important? Why do you want to know?

AYA: I'm proving a point. I'm hoping it will help you remember what you are. So I don't have to remind you.

Beat.

Something big, something important.

BOB: Why can't we just make them the offer?

AYA: We've not covered all the points yet. Anyway they are not going to accept it. I told you, she's...

Signs pregnant belly.

BOB: I still don't believe you.

AYA: So tell me a secret... and we'll do the bet.

BOB: Seriously?

Beat. Bob considers.

He can't stand her films.

AYA: Really?

BOB: Doesn't understand them. What they're about, why she even bothers. I mean, he tells her likes them, obviously.

AYA: Obviously.

BOB: Too arty for him, all loud music and swearing. He took his mother to see one and it was the most embarrassing evening of his life. The only thing he really likes about them is that she uses her maiden name, they all have 'Directed by Kathleen Bruce' all over them, and not his name. He didn't take her south, because he didn't trust her to get the shots he wanted.

Beat.

Good enough?

AYA: Keep going.

BOB: OK... the coat.

AYA: What coat?

BOB: That flash hi-tech thing her brother's got his eye on.

Beat.

He destroyed it.

AYA: Seriously?

BOB: Cut it up while she was out, dumped it in some skip.

AYA: Why?

BOB: Because he got it from Amundsen.

AYA: Interesting. Anything else?

BOB: What?

AYA: I said *big*.

Silence.

BOB: He's lying about why he wants to go back south.

AYA: That's more like it.

BOB: It's nothing to do with promotion. Well, it might have been, originally. Climbing the greasy pole -

AYA: Pole?! Very good!

BOB: Making Vice Admiral, a chance of a knighthood, Gold Medal from the RGS... once upon a time that's what he wanted. But not now.

Beat.

When the plane landed at Brize Norton, watching people reacting to Amundsen. I mean, soldiers and airmen, tough military types. Watching them staring at Amundsen, tears in their eyes the moment they recognised him, applauding and cheering, completely spontaneously. That's what he wants, that power.

Aya nods.

Forget about the money and the merchandising. Even the Science. He would give his soul for such power, to be able to bring tears to mens eyes.

Silence.

AYA: I guess we're having a wager. What are your stakes?

Bob confused.

What are you going to bet? I won't ask for your head.

Bob still confused.

What's the point of a wager if you've nothing to wager with?

BOB: OK, I bet this!

Bob grabs his 2012 mascot. Aya looks at hers, nods in agreement.

Deal? After you.

AYA: They will reject the Offer.

BOB: They will accept it.

They shake on the deal.

AYA: I'm just taking your money. They are so obviously not going to accept it.

BOB: Why not?

AYA: Has it worked? have you remembered yet?

Bob confused.

Come *on*. I knew about her (Belly sign), and you knew about him. What does that tell you about us? What do you remember? From before? You keep going on about gods and monsters but what do you actually remember?

BOB: It's been too long, I've been... asleep. It plays tricks with the memory. What do you remember?

AYA: Nothing, but then I'm not worried about it. Because I understand why. I know what I am, what we are.

BOB: I know what I am.

Aya prepares to undo the Time out.

Wait!

Aya halts.

If you know she's... (belly sign), does that mean she knows?

AYA: Obviously.

BOB: So why hasn't she told him?

Aya gives him an 'why indeed' look and undoes the Time out.

ACT II**SCENE 6**

KATH: - he saved your life?

Silence.

CON: They had such blue eyes.

KATH: Who did?

CON: The dogs. This incredible light blue colour.

Beat. Con struggles with what he's going to say.

When we got to the foot of the Beardmore, Taff collapsed. Titus was barely able to walk. We had almost no food, nothing to cook it with. Gnawing at frozen pemmican. After I made the call on Birdie's phone, the battery died. I had no idea if anybody had even heard us. And I gave up hope. And I know that sounds selfish, maybe it was a defence mechanism. But I had no choice. When we heard barking outside, we thought we were going mad. Fighting to get out of the tent, getting in each other's way, until Titus shouted 'Enough!' And he said 'I am just going outside.' He had to crawl out, his feet were so bad. And we waited and he poked his head back in and he didn't say anything, he just had this smile on his face. The first real smile I'd seen in weeks.

Beat.

Outside, two sledges and all these dogs, so many dogs, I couldn't count them. Full of energy. Two tall shapes, not interested in us, too busy with the dogs, sorting out harnesses, food. When they finally approached, they pushed their hoods back, these shy smiles, almost like they didn't think we'd be pleased to see them. They checked out Taff and Titus, they cooked and it was so *warm*. And all the time I felt this anger. Because I'd given up. After so many months of having to be in charge, I had allowed myself the luxury of shedding all responsibility. Because there was nothing more I could do. I felt so *free*, even if it meant I would never see home again. They put us into these thick jackets and they sat us on the sledges. They lashed us to the woodwork like we were cargo. And they shouted to the dogs and we set off. I have never seen dogs run like that. Like they were part of the team, not just beasts of burden. And I hated them, Amundsen and Johansen. I *hated* them. Not because of losing the Pole or having to be rescued. I hated them, because it meant I would have to pick up that burden again, be in charge again.

Beat.

CON (cont'd): I stared at whoever it was standing on the leading sledge, shouting at the dogs... no, calling to them, communicating with them. I looked at them and for the first time I understood what the word 'Professional' meant. I was looking at a consummate professional. Someone in whom I could place absolute trust. And from nowhere I felt this absolute joy, like nothing I have ever known before. I knew at that moment, that I was going to make it home, to see you and Peter.

ACT II**SCENE 7**

Bob and Aya rouse themselves, fascinated by what they've seen and heard.

BOB: Now we're getting somewhere.

AYA: Now we're making progress.

BOB: The ground prepared...

AYA: Truths emerging...

BOB: Although I'm still not seeing much gratitude.

AYA: Our favourite thing, gratitude.

BOB: Disappointing.

CON: OK, so I shouldn't have done it... Cardington. I'm sorry, OK?

Beat.

So... what happens next?

KATH: What did you mean by facing the music?

CON: What is this Offer?

BOB: What if we could take you back?

Aya not expecting this.

Back in time, back in space.

CON: To where?

BOB: What if we could take you back, in time and space. Where would you like to go?

Aya not pleased, but plays along.

AYA: What if we could take you back to the ice.

BOB: Back to Shambles Camp.

AYA: At the foot of the Beardmore Glacier.

BOB: 83 degrees, 29 minutes south.

AYA: 172 degrees, 14 minutes East.

BOB: Back to Shambles Camp, five short months ago.

AYA: Back to the 18th February, 2012.

CON: Back...?

Silence.

BOB: It's not complicated, Con. We can take you back in time.

AYA: And back in Space.

BOB: If you want to go.

KATH: Why would he want to go back?

BOB: You know why, Con. A chance to take the other path.

AYA: Make the other decision.

BOB: Deciding not to make the call.

AYA: Deciding to stay.

BOB: No rescue, no sledges, no dogs.

AYA: No Amundsen, No Johansen.

BOB: Because that's why we're really here.

AYA: Our mission. That's the Offer. Another chance.

BOB: Another shot at the title. So what do you say?

AYA: Both of you. You both have a say, because that's the way of it.

BOB: Because we have the power, Aya and me.

AYA: We have the power to take you back.

BOB: And with that in mind...

Bob and Aya take each other's hands and for a few seconds the stage becomes the Ross Ice Shelf in a raging blizzard.

Con and Kath both shocked, Aya and Bob well satisfied.

BOB: So what do you think?

AYA: Do you want to go back? Take the other path?

KATH: You're not serious?

BOB: No rescue.

AYA: No return to civilisation.

BOB: Instead, a noble death on the ice.

KATH: Ignore them, Con.

AYA: Deciding not to use Birdie Bowers' Satellite phone.

BOB: Kept safe for just such an eventuality, against all your orders.

AYA: Instead, death in the tent, Eleven miles short of One Ton.

KATH: This is perverse! How can you even think he'd want to go back?

AYA: Not Mayday message, no call for help.

BOB: Taff Evans lying sick at your feet, close to death.

AYA: Titus Oates' feet turning black from necrosis.

BOB: No last minute rescue.

AYA: By those brave Norwegians.

BOB: No Amundsen and Johansen, appearing from nowhere.

AYA: No sledges dragged by dogs, no hot food and warm clothing.

BOB: We can make it all disappear...

AYA: As though it never happened.

Silence.

BOB: And think of the advantages...

AYA: No RandyPenguin123.

BOB: No Cardington.

AYA: No enquiry by the RGS.

BOB: No Admiralty goons asking questions. This time a Glorious Death...

AYA: Instead of an ignominious survival.

BOB: A Dead Lion...

AYA: Instead of a Live Donkey.

BOB: The power to stop conversations.

AYA: The power to bring tears to men's eyes.

BOB: It could all be yours. Even if you're not technically here to see it happen.

KATH: What?

BOB: (To Aya) Shall we do it again?

AYA: (To Bob) Lets.

Bob and Aya repeat the Blizzard trick.

BOB: Because that's the risk you take. Setting off on your own, to accomplish some great feat.

AYA: Some great endeavour.

BOB: Through your own unaided efforts.

CON: You're serious?

KATH: But what about the Boys?

BOB: We're very serious.

AYA: Because we have the power. Because we seriously can.

BOB: But it's up to you.

AYA: It has to be your decision.

KATH: But what about the Boys?

BOB: Death and Glory...

AYA: Or life and an MBE. Mock the Week.

BOB: Adverts for Tesco's...

AYA: Every Little Helps!

BOB: Rowan Atkinson in Blackadder Goes South.

Bob and Aya hum the Desert Island Disks theme.

AYA: Accept the Offer and it would all be different.

BOB: No rescue, no return.

AYA: No RandyPenguin123. No Cardington.

BOB: No enquiry.

AYA: Death with honour.

KATH: But what would happen to the Boys? Would they have to go back too?

Beat.

BOB: Of course they would.

AYA: Obviously. But that's the way the pemmican crumbles.

BOB: All's fair in Love, War and Polar Exploration.

KATH: We can't do that. How can we take them back if they're not here to make the decision for themselves? Con?

BOB: Imagine it Con, a glorious death.

AYA: Out on the ice.

BOB: Clean.

AYA: Painless.

BOB: A final defeat over Amundsen, the ultimate vengeance.

AYA: Who's going to take him seriously now?

BOB: The Villain of the piece.

AYA: Instead of the Hero of the hour.

BOB: The man who robbed you of the prize? Hashtag Heading South Amundsen.

KATH: (To Con) Tell me you're not taking this seriously?

AYA: He can kiss all those awards good bye.

BOB: Apple, Land Rover, Rolex. Not to mention...

BOB & AYA: The Knighthood.

Silence.

BOB: A shocked nation rises as one...

AYA: To care for the heartbroken widow...

BOB: And her orphaned son. To open their hearts...

AYA: And their wallets...

BOB: To ensure their survival.

AYA: And you, Mrs Explorer. What do you say?

BOB: What's it to be, Kath? What are your thoughts? The Dead Lion?

AYA: Or the Live Donkey?

BOB: The Widow of a hero.

AYA: All those projects, put on hold while you backed your man?

BOB: Martin Freeman, Emma Thompson and Anthony Hopkins in a Kathleen Bruce film.

AYA: The Academy Award for best director goes to Kathleen Bruce.

BOB: A title! Lady Scott.

AYA: Elevation, respect. And who knows?

BOB: A single woman.

AYA: Free to re-marry.

BOB: Nansen still there.

AYA: Still available.

BOB: Nansen the hero.

AYA: Scientist, explorer, diplomat, humanitarian. Nobel Prize laureate.

BOB: And eligible bachelor.

AYA: And somehow appropriate, the explorer and the explorer's widow?

BOB: (To Aya) Once more, for luck?

Aya nods and they do the blizzard trick once more.

BOB: So there we are.

AYA: So now you know.

BOB: That's the Offer.

AYA: That's what we can do for you.

BOB: How does that sound?

AYA: Are you tempted?

BOB: Survival, and the dishonour of a Public Enquiry.

AYA: Or immolation on the Ice. It's that simple.

ACT II SCENE 8

Aya signs a Time out. Angry, she tries to clout him, but he fends her off.

BOB: Get... off!

AYA: What did I say? Right at the start? I'm in charge! I say when we make the Offer.

BOB: What does it matter? We had to do it sometime.

AYA: But we missed something, *you* missed something.

BOB: No I didn't.

AYA: What's the point of agreeing a plan if you just ignore it? You jumped in before we'd covered all the bullet points.

BOB: Bullet points?! Will you listen to yourself? This is all your fault. I knew where I was before you opened your gob. I knew what I was.

AYA: You thought you knew. Doesn't make you right. We missed something.

BOB: I don't care what you say, he's going to say yes. Did you see that look on his face? He would have accepted there and then if you hadn't stuck your oar in. You're only making a fuss because you were going to lose the bet.

AYA: I keep telling you. She's... (Pregnant sign) she will turn it down. Which means he will turn it down too. He will have no choice.

BOB: I still don't believe you.

AYA: I know about her, you know about him. What does that tell you about us? Please. You've got to start remembering.

BOB: And we didn't miss anything. You're just...

Bob realises something.

AYA: I'm sorry, you were saying?

BOB: Shit.

Bob undoes Time out.

ACT II**SCENE 9**

BOB: We apologise.

AYA: We're really sorry.

BOB: We forgot something.

AYA: So before you make your decision...

BOB: A few morsels for you to chew on.

AYA: Some last crumbs. It's time to talk about the Boys.

BOB: Ed Wilson and Titus Oates.

AYA: Taff Evans and Birdie Bowers.

BOB: Imagine the place, Shambles Camp.

AYA: Imagine the time, the 18th February, 2012

BOB: Five short months ago.

CON: Do we have to?

BOB: Taff Evans lies in his sleeping bag, lapsed into unconsciousness...

AYA: Titus Oates' feet have turned black from necrosis. There's almost no food, no fuel left to cook it with. But then, from the depths of his sleeping bag, Birdie Bowers produces...

BOB: A satellite phone! Wonder of wonders. Now you can call for help.

AYA: Now you can get the word out and to hell with setting off on your own, to accomplish some great feat.

BOB: Some great endeavour.

AYA: Through your own unaided efforts. Screw that, when death awaits outside the tent.

Beat.

But what happens then? As you stare at that priceless object in Birdie's hand? What do you do, Con?

BOB: Do you take the phone from him, give thanks to the Lord, give thanks to the resourceful Birdie who has saved your lives? Poor Birdie, so certain he'd done the right thing.

Silence. All look at Con.

CON: I made the call.

BOB: But not immediately, Captain Scott. Remember? You spend an hour insisting that to call for help is the wrong thing to do. Because the only help at hand...

AYA: Is Amundsen. And death on the ice is preferable to rescue at his hands.

BOB: Rescued? By the man who robbed you of the Pole?

AYA: And robbed you of the Glory? Hashtag Heading South Amundsen.

BOB: What could be more humiliating?

CON: I made the call.

BOB: Better to seek immolation in the tent.

AYA: Better to be a dead Lion than a live donkey.

BOB: What do you have to look forward to now?

AYA: As the runner-up?

Bob and Aya both sign L for Loser on their foreheads.

BOB: The *Loser*?

CON: I made the call.

BOB: After an hour. You risked Oates' life, Evans' life. All your lives. You delayed and shouted down every argument.

AYA: Your own men, Con. Birdie and Ed.

BOB: Titus and Taff.

AYA: Begging you to make the call.

BOB: Your friends, Con. Pleading for their lives.

AYA: For their only possible chance of rescue.

BOB: The legendary Amundsen, a few hundred miles to the North.

AYA: The greatest Polar traveller of the age.

BOB: Still at the Bay of Whales, not yet departed.

AYA: But for how long?

Silence.

BOB: They could have overpowered you.

AYA: Taken the phone, made the call themselves.

BOB: But you were their leader.

AYA: They owed you their obedience.

BOB: It had to be your call. The Captain of the ship.

AYA: The Owner.

CON: I made the call.

KATH: Oh, Con.

BOB: Yes, you did.

AYA: And the rest is history.

BOB: But then what did you do?

AYA: To the Boys? The final insult? On the plane? Heading for Argentina? What did you do?

BOB: Antarctica to Argentina, Argentina to Brize Norton and a hero's welcome? What did you do?

KATH: Con?

AYA: Come on, Con. Confession is good for the soul.

BOB: Although it does nothing for the figure.

AYA: Did you forget the Joy?

BOB: Is that what happened?

AYA: Is that what made you do it?

Silence.

CON: I panicked. Strange how quickly you can get used to something? Even surviving. On the plane, I panicked. I forgot the joy. All I could think about was being laughed at. About the Boys revealing how I had argued against making the call. It seemed so important, getting to the Pole and back under our own steam. Failing on our own seemed so much more important than getting back with someone else's help. Especially his.

BOB: Because no journey can approach the height of that fine conception which is realised...

AYA: When a party of men go forth to face hardships, dangers and difficulties

BOB: With their own unaided efforts.

Silence.

CON: The plane had internet access. I went online, I found some template NDAs... Non Disclosure Agreements. I printed some out and I used my authority as Expedition leader to make the Boys sign them. So they wouldn't be able to tell what I had done at Shambles. How I delayed the distress call. But I made the call, Kath. I made the call.

Silence.

And then we got back and it was all for nothing. Because nobody cared. All they wanted was *Amundsen*. He got all the glory, despite Hash tag Heading South Amundsen. All the sponsorship deals, Apple and Land Rover and Rolex, he got it all. The book deals, the film deals, the knighthood. The Gold Medal from the Royal Geographic Society. He took it all. Nobody cared about us, nobody gave a shit.

ACT II SCENE 10

Bob signals a Time out.

BOB: Why hasn't she told him? About... (belly sign)

Aya says nothing, remains still while Bob increasingly agitated.

Why would a wife not tell her husband something like that?

AYA: It's time.

BOB: And how did you even know? About her? What else do you know?

AYA: Think about it.

BOB: So we're not Tricksters, we're not Valkyrie, or Disir or Norns or fates or whatever. What does that even leave? Are we anything at all? Just tell me?

Silence.

AYA: It's time.

BOB: This is a test, isn't it? After we've proved ourselves here, we'll get to go out and do it again? Other missions, other people. I'll do it with you, I'd be happy to do that. You've done a good job, that's what I'll tell them.

AYA: You knew his secrets, I knew hers.

BOB: But how?

AYA: We're not tricksters. We're not Valkyrie, or Disir or Nurns. What does that leave?

Silence, Bob realises something painful.

BOB: Wraiths?

Aya nods.

AYA: Soul wardens. Vordr, in the old tongue. We are the Watchers of their souls. Tied to them as they are tied to us. To them and no other. Tonight is a special offer. A one-off. We're only here to provoke a reckoning. Once it's been done, the Offer accepted or declined...

BOB: We leave the stage? Go back in the box?

AYA: I'm sorry.

Beat.

It's time.

BOB: Wait. Why would a wife not tell her husband she was pregnant?

AYA: I expect she's been saving it for the right moment.

Bob undoes the Time out.

ACT II SCENE 11

AYA: Decision time.

BOB: And just to be clear about the rules...

AYA: It's a case of either or. If either one of you accepts the Offer...

BOB: That commits both of you.

AYA: So. Anything to say?

BOB: Any comments before we get down to brass tacks?

Silence.

KATH: The Boys have families, Con. We can't do this. Not without giving them a say... it would be wrong.

BOB: We don't make the rules.

AYA: We just carry them out.

BOB: (To Aya) Shall we?

AYA: (To Bob) One last time? Yes.

Bob and Aya link hands, summon the Blizzard again.

BOB: So. What's it to be?

AYA: Stay here and survive...

BOB: Face an enquiry and the wrath of Amundsen?

AYA: So many angry people, Con. Amundsen and the Boys, the Royal Geographic Society, the Admiralty. Not forgetting the Saudis, you can kiss SAPOL2013 and the Pole of Inaccessibility goodbye.

BOB: Or... go back to the Ice.

AYA: Back to Shambles Camp.

BOB: Avoid the whole mess by not making it in the first place... (To Aya) Is that right?

Aya nods.

CON: Would they know? The Boys? That it was me?

Silence. Bob and Aya do not react.

CON (cont'd): I can't be the Loser, Kath. It's killing me. Day by day. If it had to happen, I'd sooner it happened down there.

AYA: Because no journey can approach the height of that fine conception which is realised...

BOB: When a party of men go forth to face hardships, dangers and difficulties with their own unaided efforts.

KATH: Stay.

CON: And look on the bright side -

KATH: What bright side!

CON: If I go back, it would mean no enquiry.

KATH: Stay.

CON: No fallout from... Greenwich and the letter. Cardington, Johansen. RandyPenguin123. Everything I got wrong, the Boys, the NDAs. It would all just go away.

KATH: Stay.

CON: A chance for you to take the limelight, get your film made. You could even... you know... Nansen?

KATH: Stay.

CON: No Mock the Week, or Blackadder Goes South.

KATH: Stay.

Kath stares at Bob and Aya. Aya gives her a wink, a thumbs up, rubs her belly. Kath realises they know about her pregnancy. She cups her stomach for a single moment then glares at them, defiant.

I used to think you were still down there. Some small part of you was still down there at 90 degrees south. But it's worse than that.

Beat.

You brought it back with you, Con. The Pole. On your sledge, on that Argentinian Air Force plane, to Brize Norton. This is where the Geographic South Pole ended up.

Kath gestures around them.

CON: You're beginning to sound as daft as them

KATH: 56 Oakley Street, Chelsea. That's why you can't move on. Because this is Polheim and you're stuck here. But it doesn't have to be, Con. We can still fix this. RandyPenguin123, Cardington, Johansen, the Boys, Greenwich. I will stand by your side and hold my head up and help you get through it, support you every step of the way. But only if you want me to. You've never been a coward, so don't take the coward's way out now.

Aya looks smug, waiting for Kath to reveal her pregnancy. Kath stares at them, and shakes her head. Slowly, Bob and Aya realise she isn't going to do it.

AYA: You don't have anything else to say?

KATH: I'm quite done, thank you.

AYA: You're sure?

KATH: Positive.

BOB: Don't pester the lady.

AYA: I'd just hate to think we were rushing you, that's all.

Silence.

CON: Shall we say it together?

KATH: That seems appropriate.

They take a hand, the first physical contact between them.

CON: Shambles.

KATH: Chelsea.

Aya shocked, hands over her Olympic mascot to Bob. Bob & Aya descend from the table and exit.

Con and Kath stare at each other, release each other's hands.

CON: It's better this way. Trust me.

Beat.

Tell Peter I'm sorry.

KATH: And the Wives, Con? What do I tell them?

Con takes a deep breath, closes his eyes, preparing for his jump back to Shambles.

CON: Come on. Get on with it.

*A long silence until a penny drops, and they understand Bob and Aya's final joke:
Con is going nowhere. Con shouts after the now vanished Bob and Aya*

Is that supposed to be funny? Is that supposed to be *funny*?

Silence.

Cut to black.

CURTAIN.