

ANTARKTIKOS

By
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“Victory awaits him who has everything in order -- luck, people call it. Defeat is certain for him who has neglected to take the necessary precautions in time; this is called bad luck.”

--from The South Pole, by Roald Amundsen.

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Time: The Present

Settings:

The Amundsen-Scott research station, Antarctica
Scott's Tent, Antarctica
A hospital room, Salem, Oregon
Mt. Bachelor, Oregon

Characters:

Susan: A writer in her late 40s

Hilary: a 21 year old college student, Susan's daughter

Alex: a 22 years old EMT

Robert Falcon Scott: The Antarctic explorer, 40s

SETTINGS/SCENE changes: The first time we shift from the Antarctic world to the Oregon world should have the feel as if "the camera lens has expanded" showing something that was always there but can now be seen. Once both worlds are present on stage there should be a fluidity between worlds so that the Oregon locations (hospital, mountain) and the Antarctic locations (research station, tent, outside) are overlapping worlds that both exist in the same time and place inside and outside each other.

RUNNING TIME: The play is approximately 90 minutes long and should be performed without an intermission.

This play is dedicated to Brenda Engler and Alan Stolowitz who grace us in our dreams.

ANTARKTIKOS was developed at Artists Repertory Theater (OR), Key City Public Theater (WA), The New Harmony Project 2011, White Pines Productions 2011, the 2011 JAW Festival at Portland Center Stage, The High Desert New Play Workshop, and Seattle Repertory Theater. The play was a finalist for 2011 PlayPenn and Premiere Stages. Thanks to Mead Hunter, Paul Walsh, and Anita Montgomery for dramaturgical support.

*Antarctic sound track. Whale sounds. Wind.
Weddell seals. Russian hymn singers.
Glaciers calving. Susan appears in her room
at the Amundsen-Scott research station,
Antarctica. She makes some notes, flips on
her computer and begins her talk.*

SUSAN

I am preparing this introduction in order, well in order to introduce myself to you. Since we are to be neighbors, base mates, for the next several months, I thought I would introduce myself.
Well that sounds idiotic.

She takes out a pen and crosses out.

I am so pleased to have gotten this fellowship-
It has long been a dream of mine-
I have come to find out-
God fucking damn it

She picks up her clicker to flip through slides

70 million years ago Antarctica was part of the super continent Gondwana.

Slide of Gondwana

25 million years ago this continent broke apart forming Antarctica.

Slide of Antarctica

The Greeks, in their ever pursuit of a logical world named this fictitious Southern land. Antarktikos, or opposite of the north. This is a place for dreamers, where reality is like a dream and the dream becomes the reality.

Slide of Antarctic ice

SUSAN (CONT'D)

The flip side.

That was my proposal. Or part of it. In coming here. I had a resume of course. I told them I would not be writing a book about penguins. Maybe they liked the honesty. Perhaps they went through 1000 proposals from writers with writers block who've recently been liberated from a complicated divorce, about penguins. I told them that I would not be undertaking some great physical adventure. I don't want to sky dive out of a plane like those poor bastards in '97, not being able to differentiate the sky from the ground because there was everywhere, only white. I do not want to re-do the Scott expedition this time making it work.

I did write that I can imagine him sitting there in his tent, writing letters, while all his companions drift off to death, sitting upright in his sleeping bag arm outstretched waiting to be saved.

Slide of Scott's tent.

What were those last moments? What do you do when you realize the ground is careening towards you, your parachute is closed and you are going to hit? 10. 9. 8. 7. 6. 5. 4. 3. 2. 1. And then nothing. I wrote that I came here to find out.

She shakes her head, shaking off a headache.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

The funny thing about being down here is the altitude and the lack of humidity. Upon first arrival, like now, people like me often have headaches. Altitude sickness and dehydration.

She drinks water.

My daughter always says I should drink more water. Headache aside I feel fine. Except for my leg which hurts and I think got banged in the cargo plane on the way down here.

Scott died on March 29th 1912, incidentally 18 KM away from a giant food cache called one ton depot that would have guaranteed his survival if he could only have reached it.

March 29th is my daughter's birthday.

Scott had a small child. And a young wife. He wrote to them from the tent, good natured in his boy scout adventurer heroic way. I don't think he knew his son. Maybe he saw him once before he ventured off to the Pole.

Things are different now. I can call from the south pole to my daughter which I have been trying to do for the last 27 hours. Every time the plane stopped. Even from New Zealand. I've been leaving messages.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Hilary.

Hilary's skinny.

She would prefer that I say thin. When she was born she was no light weight. 9 lbs 2 oz. 98th percentile. Which made her the biggest baby in the neo natal intensive care.

She drinks water. She breathes

Steady. The South Pole is at 9,306 feet. Pretty high.

We thought she might die. She couldn't breathe. I can't remember all the details now, but I remember walking around the supermarket after she was born and there I was, no longer pregnant nothing inside, but no baby in my arms. And my husband. Ex. Hilary's father. Jason. He was in architecture school. And we were young and in love. And this was our baby. And she could die. We sat at her bedside. We couldn't touch her. We weren't allowed. She had feeding tubes and breathing machines so we just sat there and held hands and sang. We sang her lullabies, Beatles songs, the state song of Louisiana.

She hums a few bars of the one of the two official state songs which is "You are my sunshine..."

SUSAN (CONT'D)

And then it happened. And she was fine. Like she was sick and could die and eight days later she was fine and we took her home in her little car seat. So tiny sitting in there. She looked just like a torso, her little legs were so tiny in that thing. A torso with legs.

Slide of newborn baby in a car seat.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

And we laughed, Jason and I did, our perfect little torso with legs.

She drinks water. Touches her head.

I can't remember what happened now or how we fought and why. Just before I came down here. I was leaving and we argued. Or she was leaving and we argued. Or we argued. We argued about turkey bacon and egg whites. Because she's so skinny. So we slammed some doors and said some words and she left to go back to school. She said this thing. She said, "you know Susan, you never make any sense. You're a writer but you haven't published anything in ten years. And you know you leave everything unfinished. All your projects, all your ideas, your marriage. Even the groceries you buy make no sense. Who has only ketchup and olives in the fridge?" It wasn't true by the way. I had bought vegetables. And there were the eggs and bacon. And how could you explain that you don't feel much like eating after a divorce. Even three years after a divorce you might not feel much like eating. Or projects might be hard to finish because something has been interrupted and everyone else has moved forward. How do you explain that you bought the eggs and bacon because she liked it as a little girl and since she was coming for the weekend you wanted to make her breakfast. How can you explain what it's like when she won't pick up the phone and you're at the bottom of the fucking Earth, in the unknown land to the South trying to write your first book in ten years and you're so scared because inside maybe there's nothing, and you're just empty. Is that how Scott felt sitting there in his tent, dying, writing letters which may never be found, trying to connect one last time with his wife, his infant son? Back then it was called the heroic age. Racing off to uncover, discover, find out about new worlds. A misguided heroism, but still. What would this age be called?

Slide of Antarctica. Susan looks up. Alex is there. He's been there a while. A deer caught in headlights. She squints at him. He stares at her. She squints.

ALEX

I-I-knocked-

They stare.

SUSAN

Did you-How long have you been-Who-

ALEX

I-

Silence.

ALEX (CONT'D)

I didn't want to interrupt. I came to...but then you were...so I thought maybe I could...but then it kind of went on for a while-

She stares

ALEX (CONT'D)

Uh- I need to uh-I need to check your...vitals.

Susan stares

ALEX (CONT'D)

I-I'm the EMT. Here. On the base. I'm also the greenhouse tech. I'm supposed to-I'm supposed to check everyone. When they first get here. To make sure everyone's- I'm supposed to do the intake eval.

One guy came down here with a simple herpes blister and next thing you knew he was having his tonsils out.

Open please.

Susan looks at him. He demonstrates.

Aaaaaagh.

She stares. He tries again.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Aaaaaagh.

She opens her mouth.

SUSAN

Aaaaagh?

He look inside her mouth with his pupil gauge light.

ALEX

Good. Eyes.

Alex checks her eyes. There is a beeping. She twists her face away.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Pain?

SUSAN

What's that noise?

ALEX

What?

SUSAN

The beeping.

ALEX

Oh. Luggage. It's the luggage being unloaded.

He puts away his light

SUSAN

And?

ALEX

And?

SUSAN
Am I OK?

ALEX
Well, how do you feel?

SUSAN
Why do doctors always ask that? It's like a test.
I don't know how I feel, how does it look like I feel? I mean when you look in my eyes?

Beat.
My head hurts.
Damn altitude.
Where is everyone?

ALEX
It's 3 AM.

SUSAN
Oh.

ALEX
I can't sleep. That's why they assigned me to do the intake evals. I'm always awake no matter what time the planes come in.

SUSAN
The insomnia. I read about it. Your body's attempt to deal with 24 hours of darkness. Or light. I read about it all. The vitamin deficiency, the skin lesions, the sleep disruption. The altitude sickness upon arrival.

ALEX
The dreams.

SUSAN
The dreams?

ALEX
Your mind, in an effort to regulate itself with the strange surroundings, creates extremely life-like dreams. So you're not always sure what is the dream and what is reality. There is a counselor for you to talk to down here if you feel depressed. He's also one of the neutrino researchers.

Susan sighs. Sits.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Tired?

SUSAN
No.

ALEX
Hope you don't get the insomnia thing.

SUSAN

I think-I think I'm hungry. That's so weird. I'm never really hungry. Or maybe my stomach hurts. Sometimes you can't really tell if you're hungry or if your stomach hurts.

Alex checks her eyes with his light. She turns away.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Hey. I thought we were done with that.

ALEX

I'm supposed to keep checking.
You probably are hungry. Lots of people are hungry when they first get here.

He finishes her eyes.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Come on.

SUSAN

Where to?

ALEX

The greenhouse. You've got to see it. You won't be able to believe what we can grow down here on the ice.

SUSAN

This is very strange. I feel like in a second I'm going to be offered a cookie and start growing or shrinking.

She gets up to walk. She limps.

Ow. My leg hurts. It's the leg cramps. I read about this.

ALEX

Rub it.

She rubs her leg. They wait. She tries to stand. Still a cramp.

Stretch.

She stretches her leg.

SUSAN

The strange thing is that I don't remember so much about coming here. I remember the flight from New Zealand. Everything was bumpy. And ever since I left I've been so worried about Hilary. And now I can't contact her. She's very young.

Looks at Alex

Well, you're very young too.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

I guess I was young once. Somehow you and Hilary look younger than I ever was, but I guess you're not.

She rubs and tries to stand.
This isn't going away.

She tries to stand and then sits down.

SUSAN (CONT'D)
I can't make any of my muscles work.

ALEX
I'll carry you. It's good practice for me.

SUSAN
You're not going to carry me.

ALEX
But we're trained for-

She shakes her head no.

SUSAN
I don't think so.

Beat.

ALEX
Fine.

He starts to exit

SUSAN
Wait-

*He exits. Susan looks around the room. Sits on the floor,
rubs her leg.*

SUSAN (CONT'D)
Day 1. Sometime after 3 AM. I guess that's actually DC time. There are 15 different time zones in the Antarctic. Each country preserves its time. At the US bases they are on DC time. At the Australian base 20KM away they are on Australian time. Must make it hard to organize lunch meetings. I felt the air on my face when we got out of the plane.
-47 degrees c. Without protective gear you would be dead within 12 minutes.

*Alex re-enters with a sledge for hauling Antarctic
supplies. He has the runners covered with sliding plastic
wheels.*

ALEX
Get in. I'll pull you.

Susan looks at the sled

ALEX (CONT'D)

Very similar to the one Scott used. Ours has indoor/outdoor capacity though. The sides are always loaded for a three day expedition. Something Scott probably wished he had. Come on, didn't you come here for the adventure.

SUSAN

Oh what the hell.

*She climbs into the sled; he gives her a sleeping bag.
She points to her books and notebooks. Her purse.*

Give me those, would you?

He hands her items. She takes them.

ALEX

Off we go.

He pulls, she sits there.

Ho-ho?

SUSAN

What?

*Alex hands her a ho-ho cake. She looks at it critically.
He pulls her over the stage.*

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Is this thing food?

ALEX

Is it food? It might be the best food that exists that also has a shelf life of 60 years.

She sniffs it. She takes a bite. Alex pulls her.

SUSAN

Not bad.

ALEX

See.

He pulls.

SUSAN

Is it snowing outside? When I arrived they said it would snow.

ALEX

Blizzard. They're expecting a blizzard.

Alex pulls.

Of course blizzards down here now are nothing like they were in the past. I mean the blizzards are the same, it's just now we have buildings and electricity. Still there is something to the fact that you can walk outside and just be lost. Disappear somewhere in the ice. Poof.

Pause. He pulls her.

SUSAN

Dear Hilary...

Dear Hilary, I am sorry about our fight. Of course you're old enough to decide what you want to eat. I just want you to be happy. Of course I realize that eating breakfast might not guarantee happiness.

Alex stops pulling.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Are we there?

ALEX

No, just taking a rest. How are you feeling?

SUSAN

Funny. I feel funny.

Susan rubs her head. Alex comes around to her and pulls out his light.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

I didn't mean we had to do this again.

He tilts her head back. He looks in to her eyes.

What do you see in there anyway? Can you see into my head?

ALEX

I'm watching the response time of your pupils.

SUSAN

Oh. That's less exciting than I imagined.

He takes the light away.

May I?

She takes the light. She turns it towards him. He closes his eyes. She lifts up his eyelids.

I see. Your pupils react right away.

She plays with it a little, lifting up his eye lids, pretending to try to trick the pupils.

Smart little buggers.

She hands the light back to him. He touches her neck, checking her pulse. He looks at his watch.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Why are you here anyway?

Here?
ALEX

SUSAN
Yeah. I mean in this place. Lots of places to live that aren't -47 degrees Celsius.

ALEX
It's gravity I guess.

SUSAN
Gravity.

He continues to monitor her pulse.

ALEX
Sometimes you get shaken around so much you just fall to the bottom. This is it. The bottom of the earth. All the people who've been shaken out of their roots eventually fall down here.

He finishes with her pulse.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Tomato?

SUSAN
Tomato?

He pulls out two small but very red tomatoes from his pocket.

ALEX
From the greenhouse.

SUSAN
This is some world you've got here.

ALEX
It's easier sometimes. This world I mean. Fewer, well, fewer possibilities. Fewer entanglements. Everything is temporary here. People come and go. Moment to moment. I just wish I could sleep. But even that, you kind of get used to it. People think you can't function without sleep, but you do, you kind of function in a muted kind of way. Just like Antarctica--a little muted. Nothing is really very clear. You kind of exist in the semi-dark recirculated air. One day, it will happen. I'll do it. Eat dinner, read the paper, go to bed, warm and safe and sleep. And wake up the next day with sunlight streaming through the window. But until then, I'm here. And it's alright.

Susan holds up her tomato to toast.

SUSAN
Neither here nor there.

ALEX
Neither here nor there.

They toast.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Ready to try walking?

Susan stands, limps, twists her head, squeezes her eyes shut.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Head worse?

Susan nods.

We're going to have to move soon.

SUSAN

I thought we were going to the greenhouse?

ALEX

Change of plan. We're going outside. The air will be the best thing for you. We'll need Polar suits. I'll be right back. We'll bring the sled just in case you need it.

He goes to get Polar suits. Susan returns to her Antarctic presentation.

SUSAN

In 1977 Air New Zealand offered tourist flights from Auckland to Antarctica circling Mt. Erebus.

Slide of Mt. Erebus

SUSAN (CONT'D)

The last of these scheduled flights, Flight TE 901, with 237 passengers and 20 crew, crashed into the side of Mt. Erebus killing everyone. The crash site was painstakingly cleared but because ice is a permeable surface, bits of wreckage and debris appear new each summer as the surface ice thaws.

They were flying in white out conditions just like the skydivers. Again, they couldn't tell the sky from the ground. And they believed they were in the right place until the collision warning started to go off. They must have had only about 90 seconds between when they all realized what was going on and when they crashed. What did they do in those moments? Did they pray? Did they sing? Did they say their good-byes? Did they put down their cigarettes and martini glasses? Did they curse the fact that they didn't stay put nicely at home going no farther than their legs could carry them?

Alex re-enters with two giant Polar suits. He helps Susan put hers on and he puts his on.

ALEX

When we go outside it will feel unbelievably cold. Although the sun is up, it is snowing heavily with heavy gusts of wind. There will be ice buckles to go over. Everything will be white.

He hands her ski goggles. She puts them on.

ALEX (CONT'D)

We will proceed due South for 2000 ft to the barbershop pole which marks the location of the south pole. We will secure polar ice and we will put it on your head. Can you hear me?

SUSAN

Yes.

*Alex pulls the sled with the sleeping bag and supplies.
Susan limps. He supports her.*

ALEX

Here we go.

And they are outside and it is snowing. Wind.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Look, there it is.

He points.

SUSAN

The point they all came looking for.

*Beat. Susan touches her head, winces. Alex bends down
and picks up the polar ice and puts it on her head.
There's a beeping.*

Do you hear that?

ALEX

Yes. It's the machines.

SUSAN

The machines?

They approach a tent. Scott's tent.

Is this...?

ALEX

Scott's tent. A model of Scott's tent. Left here as a tribute to him.

Beeping is heard.

SUSAN

I need to rest.

ALEX

No no. Don't rest here. Come with me.

SUSAN

But I need to rest here. My head hurts. And the tent is warm.

Beeping

ALEX

Susan-

She bends to enter Scott's tent.

SUSAN

What machines?

She shakes her head. Beeping, bright lights. She sits on the snow outside the tent.

ALEX

Susan can you hear me?

Siren.

SUSAN

What is that?

Alex pulls out the light for her eyes.

Stop that.

ALEX

Susan-

SUSAN

I'm just resting.

ALEX

Susan, listen to me.
There was an accident.
You were in an accident.

SUSAN

I'm at the Pole, at Scott's tent.

ALEX

Susan. You were biking. It was raining. A truck didn't see you. I'm an EMT. My name is Alex. Can you hear me?

SUSAN

I'm not in the Antarctic?

ALEX

You were in an accident. We've just arrived at the hospital.

SUSAN

I just want to rest for a little in the tent.

ALEX

Come with me.

Susan looks at the tent. She starts to open the flap. She looks backwards at Alex.

SUSAN

Hilary.

ALEX

There was an accident. You were in an accident.

Susan grabs Alex.

SUSAN

Go to Hilary.

Stay with her until I get back. Tell her I am on my way.

He stares. Siren is screaming, beeping, lights. Susan is holding on to him.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Go to her.
Please.

Siren.

ALEX

I will.

SUSAN

Promise.

ALEX

I promise.

And then she lets go. Susan crawls in the tent. Light emanates from within.

Scene 2. The stage now has the tent from scene one and the hospital room. Alex sits in the chair, head tipped back, eyes closed, ear buds in. Hilary enters sees Alex and exits. She re-enters, this time coughing. Alex doesn't move. She stands in front of him and coughs again. He opens his eyes, sees Hilary towering over him, and takes out his ear buds.

HILARY

I'm sorry.
I think there's been some kind of a mistake.

He stares

HILARY (CONT'D)

This is room 561 west. This is my mother's room.

ALEX

I-

She holds out a paper to him.

HILARY

See. 561.
It's a private room.

ALEX

Yeah, well-I-uh...see...

HILARY

If you ask at the nurse's desk they can probably help you find the room you're looking for.

It's right out the door, down the hall, to the left. Can't miss it.

ALEX

I-uh-I...

HILARY

Look, I'm tired and it's late. Do you think you could just utter a complete sentence?

ALEX

Yeah.

HILARY

Now?

ALEX

Umm-hi. I'm Alex.

He holds out his hand. Hilary stares. He stares.

HILARY

I'm going to get a nurse.

ALEX

Wait-
I was on call.
I brought her in.
I was the EMT on call.

HILARY

So you work here-

ALEX

Well-
EMTs are contract employees through ambulance companies.
It doesn't matter.

Hilary stares.

ALEX (CONT'D)

I was in the back of the ambulance with her. We hit traffic. I was in with her for almost two hours.

Pause

ALEX (CONT'D)

She made me promise-well she was worried- It was hard to understand her.

HILARY

What happened to her?

ALEX

There was a bicycle accident.

HILARY

Yes. I know that. I mean what's wrong with her?

ALEX

I don't-we don't. They're running tests. I just brought her in.

HILARY

So you don't know anything either. Of course.

Pause.

ALEX

She made me promise to- to make sure to-

He looks at Hilary.

To stay with her.

HILARY

To stay with her?

ALEX

To not leave her.

HILARY

I see. Well my mother's a very emotional person. And it was, I'm sure, an emotional time. And I imagine this must happen a lot. In an ambulance I mean.

ALEX

Well she was...she asked...So I promised.

HILARY

Right. I see.
Well I'm here now.

ALEX

Right.

Alex pauses.
It's just-

HILARY
I'll tell her you stayed till I got here.

ALEX
It's just I-well I promised.

Hilary stares.

HILARY
My mother's in the hospital. I'm really tired. I want to be here alone. In this room. Not with a complete stranger who looks like he hasn't showered in a month. I drove four hours to get here so get out of my mother's room.

Beat.

ALEX
I can pull out the sofa-bed for you if you like.
And look

Holds out his ear buds
I'll just wear my earphones. I won't bother you at all.

Hilary looks at him and starts to exit. He calls after her.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Wait-I'm sure we can work out something that's mutually-

She exits.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Fine, You go. But you'll never be able to say I've broken a promise.
Yeah. You go ahead. A promise is a promise and a friend is a friend and a friend stays true to a promise till the end. That was Horton Hear's A Who. So there. Blah, blah blah. God, if your mother had told me a little more about you I never would have agreed to this. You don't need any help.

She re-enters. She gives him a look.

HILARY
No one's there. Not like anyone in this place would need to speak with a nurse or something.

She stands there. Alex sits in the chair. She looks around and then kicks the side of the bed. Alex watches as she hops around.

Shit. Fuck.

ALEX
Do you want me to help you with the bed or not?

No. HILARY

Fine. ALEX
There are some blankets in the closet.

I don't care. HILARY

Look- I know this must be- ALEX

Headphones. You said headphones. HILARY

Alex looks at her.

Fine. ALEX

He puts in his ear buds. Hilary grabs a blanket from the couch and sits down on it. She pulls the blanket over herself.

Sleep well.

She looks at him. Glares.

I'll kick you if you snore. HILARY

Really? That's all? ALEX
I thought you'd cut out my tongue.

I'm sleeping now. HILARY
Asshole.

Hilary rolls over. Alex plays with his i-pod. He looks around the room and settles in for a sleepless night.

Scene 3. The tent is now strewn with Susan's belongings. Susan is in her sleeping bag sitting up. She is clearing away a space to boil water on her stove for tea.

Tea. I'm in the Antarctic drinking tea. SUSAN

She checks under the side of the tent.
There's a blizzard. I don't remember much about how I got here and my head still hurts. There are two competing theories that I am exploring.

(MORE)

SUSAN (CONT'D)

One is that I am in the Antarctic on a research trip for artists funded through the national science foundation. The other is that I think I'm in the Antarctic on a research trip for artists funded through the national science foundation. My head hurts either because I have altitude sickness or because I've been in an accident. I met someone named Alex. He either works at the American South Pole research station as an EMT or-

She makes tea

This is beginning to get complicated.

She pours loose tea into a cannister. Suddenly a moan is heard from the back side of the tent. A sleeping bag shifts. Susan gets ready to throw boiling water at the figure.

SCOTT

Mmmm. Tea. Smells like tea. Make me some tea.

Scott sits up. He looks like a cross between a boy scout and a member of the British Antarctic Expedition from 1912. He is either real or not. Or maybe he is real and Susan is not. Or both. Or neither. He looks at Susan.

Who the hell are you?

He looks at her again.

Are you a woman? There are no women at the Antarctic. And what are you wearing?
This is a dream.

He picks up the tent corner and sticks his hand out.

But it's cold out there.

He looks at his hand.

And wet. I don't feel cold and wet in my dreams.

Looks at the tea brewing.

And that's tea. I can smell it.

He looks around.

Where are the others?

He touches his face.

I feel better than I have in some time.

He checks his feet.

And the feet are fine. Maybe the other one is a dream. The one where I am in the tent with the others and my feet are frozen and we have no food. Maybe I dreamed the Norsekies got to the Pole first. Maybe I dreamed Evans went crazy and wandered off into the snow?

He looks at Susan.

Well better not examine these things too closely I say.

(MORE)

SCOTT (CONT'D)

Just work with what you've been given. So- Now then. It's a blizzard and I am here in the Antarctic trying to make it to the next depot.

To Susan

Are we trying to make it to the next depot?

SUSAN

Who are you?

SCOTT

Oh Sorry. Excuse me.

He offers his hand

Robert Falcon Scott. Leader of the 1912 British Antarctic Expedition. Very nice to meet you.

SUSAN

Ok. Ok.

SCOTT

Like I said, better just to work with it and see what happens.

SUSAN

But I can't really be here.

Looks at her

SCOTT

But somehow you are.

SUSAN

Right.

Scott looks around.

SCOTT

I'll be honest. I see you've got lots of food there.

He points.

It's been a long time since I've had lots of food. Or really any food. So whether or not this is real I want the pleasure of eating in a hallucination, or dream, or whatever this is. What have you got there?

Susan picks up a package of freeze dried food.

SUSAN

Beef Stroganoff.

SCOTT

What? In that little package?

Susan reads package.

SUSAN
Add boiling water. Let sit.

SCOTT
In the bag?

SUSAN
Watch.

Susan takes the tea water and pours it into the bag. Scott is on edge, sure this will fail. Susan seals the ziplock part of the bag.

SUSAN (CONT'D)
Now we wait.

They wait. They look at each other.

SCOTT
Before I woke up here, I was in the tent. Our tent. We were in a tough spot. Or are. I mean maybe this is a dream and I am still there. Or maybe this is real and that's a dream. Or maybe I'm dead. Am I dead?

SUSAN
I'm probably not the right person to answer these questions.

SCOTT
Right.
Could be the morphine. I didn't think I took it, but maybe I did. Either way we're dying. There. In the tent. Or were. We're in bad shape. No more fuel. No more food. A blizzard. I don't know why I would dream, or hallucinate being in some tent in the future. With an American woman. I guess we don't really know the contents of our own minds. Still, all being told, I'm glad you're here. I didn't want to be alone.

SUSAN
I-Well. Thank you.

SCOTT
You may be the last dream I ever have. And that thing, in the bag there, might be my last meal.

SUSAN
I've been in an accident.

SCOTT
You look fine.

SUSAN
Yeah, but so do you.

SCOTT
Point taken.

SUSAN

And then I don't know much more. I might be dead.

SCOTT

I guess you never know, do you?

SUSAN

And I have another admission. I've read all about you. And your book.

SCOTT

Book-

SUSAN

So it could be that I'm imagining you. That you exist in my mind.

He kicks her

Owww.

SCOTT

Now then.

She rubs her leg

You didn't invent that, did you?

Tell me though. Tell me more. About my book. Does it detail the journey home-to England?

Susan stares

Does it? Do I write about my journey home?

Pause

SUSAN

No.

SCOTT

I thought not. One can always hope though, right?

She checks the food

It ends there in the tent then? My journal ends there.

SUSAN

Yes.

She pours the food.

SCOTT

Nasty business isn't it? Failing. Failing and dying.

Susan offers him a bowl of the food. They eat.

I believe everyone else has died in my tent. Things got quiet. No one said anything. I couldn't hear their breathing. I was writing. Writing letters. Saying goodbye, leaving records. I must have closed my eyes for a minute and-

Gestures around. They eat.

This is quite good. And made only from powder. The future holds astonishing advancements.

He looks under the tent.

Still a blizzard out there.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

We should have gone on to one-ton depot.

Points outside

The weather.

SUSAN

Later on they did weather data studies. To see if it could explain...your situation.

SCOTT

And?

SUSAN

Your weather was no worse than others. An average year.

SCOTT

I see.

Well one can't be perfect, now can one?

He pouts

I think I'll go back to writing.

He pulls out papers

I've got letters to write on behalf of the men. And then there are my thoughts to set down about the expedition.

SUSAN

I'm writing too.

SCOTT

What are you writing?

SUSAN

I'm writing about the Antarctic.

SCOTT

Right. And?

SUSAN

I'm writing about being neither here nor there.

SCOTT

Fascinating.

SUSAN

Was that sarcasm?

SCOTT

In Britain we call it wit.

She's silent.

Oh come on. I was just joking. I'm sure it's very good.
Just a little unspecific no?

SUSAN

Well starting is always the hardest part. Especially when it's been a long time since you've started.

SCOTT

Start at the beginning. That's what I did. Kind of logical isn't it.

SUSAN

Yes because you did yours in journal entries.

SCOTT

So?

SUSAN

Hardly literature.

SCOTT

Well, maybe not but I have a book out, don't I?

Pause

People don't think it's literature? I mean I thought some of the ideas, the sentences, well yes, maybe about travel but...

SUSAN

No they do. They do think it's literature. I was just-

Pause

SCOTT

I'm sorry if my thoughts are so prosaic. It's true. I'm a navy man, not an Oxford scholar. But in my view one just starts at the beginning. The beginning of the expedition. Your expedition. Day 1, hour 1. Go!

Susan stares.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

OK. Let's try it another way.
You know, this is strange. I'm not used to talking to women and yet it's fairly easy to talk to you. Are you sure you're really a woman?

SUSAN

Yes. Quite sure. Thank you.

SCOTT

Right.
Alright then. Onwards.

He thinks.

Do you remember the day you decided to come here?

SUSAN

Yes.

SCOTT

And?

He gestures to the notebook.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

Start with that. Start writing with that.

He hands her her notebook and takes his.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

And don't forget the details of travel and the food rations. I personally enjoy reading those.

They prop themselves up in their sleeping bags. He writes. She starts writing. She stops.

SUSAN

I'm scared.

SCOTT

Fear is what drives us into the unknown. That is the cloth from which heroes are cut.

She looks at him. He sighs.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

I am too my dear. I am too.

*Scene 4. Alex and Hilary. Morning. Early.
Alex is covered with a blanket not sleeping.
His headphones are on and he is pretending
to sleep while Hilary whispers loudly on the
phone, pacing.*

HILARY

Fine. Fine. No. I'm not. I understand. I'm fine. I slept fine. The room is

She glances over at Alex

Yes. Of course. A private room. You know me. I can sleep anywhere. Whispering?
No.

She glances over at Alex who hasn't moved.

HILARY (CONT'D)

They said they were keeping her downstairs for more tests.
Like she's sleeping. No. There's nowhere to run around here. No trails or anything.

She looks out the window
And they might bring her up. And anyway I forgot my sneakers.

She stretches her legs, doing runners stretches.

You will? Thanks. Maybe a pair of shorts too? I love you too.
What? No, no, now's fine. What about it? Did the caterers raise the fee? Oh. Well how many more? What?

Pause
Of course I'll think about it. Yes. I love you too. Bye.

She hangs up her cell phone, paces. Alex rolls over, looks at her and pretends to be asleep. She doesn't notice. He opens his eyes to watch her. She throws the phone in her bag and kicks the bed.

Owww.

Alex watches her. She does some more leg stretches. He watches her. She leans over, stretches her back. Alex watches. She stands up. He's just about to sit up. She turns and he immediately closes his eyes. She looks at him. She moves closer. He stays still. She studies his face. He pretends to sleep. She looks out the window. Paces. Waits. Stretches. She looks over at Alex sleeping in the chair and then kicks it. He doesn't move. She kicks it again. He pretends to wake up, opens his eyes, takes out his head phones and yawns.

ALEX
Oh. Hey.

He stretches.

HILARY
Sorry. Did I wake you. I caught my foot on the chair.

ALEX
No worries.

Pause. He points to the sofa.
Did you sleep-

HILARY
I can sleep anywhere.

ALEX
Oh.

HILARY
Listen, I'm sorry if I seemed difficult last night.

ALEX
No, it's fine-

HILARY
I just like to have my privacy.

ALEX
Right-of course-

HILARY
So now that it's day time and the nurse's are here do you think you could just leave?
Please.
Look, I have a fiancé. His name is Dean. He's in law school. He's coming tonight and there won't be room for three. So thanks for everything but now you can go.

Pause. They look at each other.

ALEX
Djeet?

HILARY
Djeet?

ALEX
Did you eat? Breakfast?

Hilary shakes her head. Alex pulls two granola bars and little boxes of OJ out of his backpack. He hands her one of each.

HILARY
I hate breakfast.

ALEX
Suit yourself.

Alex begins to eat and drink. Hilary stares.

HILARY
You're a really loud chewer.

He eats. She stares. She points to the granola bars.

HILARY (CONT'D)
You always carry these around with you?

ALEX
I like to be prepared.

She looks at him.

ALEX (CONT'D)
You should eat. You'll feel better.

HILARY

I'm fine.

ALEX

What'd he say? The doctor.

HILARY

I'm not going to talk to you about every little thing the doctor says.

ALEX

Fine.

*He eats. He opens a granola bar and passes it to her.
He pretends it is an animal of some sort. He uses a high
pitched voice for the next bit.*

Don't eat me. I'm innocent. No, Help, don't eat me. I'm an innocent little granola bar.
Help!

He makes the JAWS music.

Aaggghhh. Help.

He puts the granola bar in her hands. She stares at him.

HILARY

You are seriously weird.

ALEX

Yeah.

She takes a bite of the granola bar.

HILARY

Non responsive state. They did a CAT scan. MRI. She's just not waking up. And they
don't know why.

They eat.

I'm not sure what I'm supposed to do now.

ALEX

You're supposed to call her people.

HILARY

Her people?

ALEX

Your people.

HILARY

We don't...We don't have people. My father's in South Africa. Building shopping
malls. I called his secretary. She said he was temporarily out of contact. She said she'd
get word to him. I texted. I think he's temporarily out of contact.

She drinks juice.

You know, you don't have to stay here. I'll tell her how you tried to keep the promise but I wouldn't let you. OK? Go. You're absolved from all promises you've made.

ALEX

We went through this last night.

She stares

ALEX (CONT'D)

When your guy comes, I'll

Holds up earphones

Earphones. You won't even know I'm here. Be like you have the room to yourselves. Anyway, I'm on a duty in a few hours. You'll get to be alone then.

HILARY

Don't you want to go home? Get cleaned up?

He touches his face, checking for cleanliness.

ALEX

No, I'm fine. Got my toothbrush here.

He pulls it out of his backpack.

HILARY

Of course.

Pause

I'm supposed to be in class now.

ALEX

Should I-I could stay here if you need to go. Or I could drive you if-

HILARY

I go to school four hours away.

ALEX

Oh.

HILARY

And I don't want to be there.

ALEX

You should call. Your advisor or someone. You know so your teachers know and all that.

HILARY

Yeah.

She doesn't move.

ALEX

I can call for you.

HILARY

You don't have to help me you know. I'm a grown up. I've been a grown up for a long time.

ALEX

I know.

HILARY

I've done lots of things on my own. I like it that way.

Alex nods.

That's what Dean likes about me. Tough as nails. Self sufficient.

ALEX

That's something to admire.

HILARY

Driven. That's what Dean says.

Alex sighs.

What?

ALEX

I'm not. My sister says I'm wishy washy. She's like you. She's got it all together. Nice house, good job, nice family, nice husband. Car with tinted windows. She just-it all works for her. It just makes sense. She makes sense. I live with her.

Hilary stares. Beat.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Would you mind...

He gestures towards the bathroom.

I kind of thought I could shower here. I don't always sleep so well and I find a shower helps.

Hilary looks at him.

HILARY

One shower. Today. Only.

ALEX

Right. Got it.

Do you want me to-after this-we could go down stairs--I mean I could talk to the doctor with you.

HILARY

I'm fine.

ALEX

It's just-you know-I know all the medical terminology. All the words. I'll know what to ask. And who knows when you'll get to see him again.

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER

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