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Love Over Scotland

Alexander McCall Smith

44 Scotland Street: The story so far

At the end of the second series of 44 Scotland Street we saw Domenica leaving for the Malacca Straits for the purposes of anthropological research. We saw Bruce safely departed for London. Now Pat is about to start her course in history of art at the University of Edinburgh. She moves out of Scotland Street to the South Side, but this does not mean that she breaks off all connections with the New Town.

Poor Matthew. Even with the recent substantial gift which his father has given him, he is still restless and unfulfilled. Matthew, of course, would like to be fulfilled with Pat, but Pat does not wish to find fulfilment with Matthew.

In the second series, Angus Lordie got nowhere. He is missing Domenica, though, and hopes that the part which she played in his life will be taken by Antonia Collie, a friend whom Domenica has allowed to move into her flat in her absence. However, Antonia proves to be a somewhat difficult character.

We saw Bertie spending more time with his father, Stuart, who had managed to wring some concessions out of Irene, but some dawns, alas, are false. Irene does not change; to change her would be to deprive this story of the strong air of reality which has pervaded it thus far. For this is no fanciful picture of Edinburgh life, this is exactly as it is.

1. Pat Distracted on a Tedious Art Course

Pat let her gaze move slowly round the room, over the figures seated at the table in the seminar room. There were ten of them; eleven if one counted Dr Fantouse himself, although he was exactly the sort of person one wouldn't count. Dr Fantouse, reader in the history of art and author of The Discerning Gaze in the Quattrocento was a mild, rather mousy man, who for some reason invariably evoked the pity of students. It was not that they disliked him – he was too kind and courteous for that – they just felt a vague, inexpressible regret that he existed, with his shabby jacket and

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his dull Paisley ties; no discernment there, one of them had said, with some satisfaction at the wit of the remark. And then there was the name, which sounded so like that marvellous, but under-used, Scots word which Pat's father used to describe the overly flashy – fantoosh. Dr Fantouse was not fantoosh in any respect; but neither was . . . Pat's gaze had gone all the way round the table, over all ten, skipping over Dr Fantouse quickly, as in sympathy, and now returned to the boy sitting opposite her.

He was called Wolf, she had discovered. At the first meeting of the class they had all introduced themselves round the table, at the suggestion of Dr Fantouse himself ("I'm Geoffrey Fantouse, as you may know; I'm the Quattrocento really, but I have a strong interest in aesthetics, which, I hardly need to remind you, is what we shall be discussing in this course"). And then had come a succession of names: Ginny, Karen, Mark, Greg, Alice, and so on until, at the end, Wolf, looking down at the table in modesty, had said, "Wolf", and Pat had seen the barely disguised appreciative glances of Karen and Ginny.

Wolf. It was a very good name for a boy, thought Pat; ideal, in fact. Wolf was a name filled with promise. And this Wolf, sitting opposite her, fitted the name perfectly. He was tall, broad-shouldered, with a shock of golden hair and a broad smile. Boys like that could look – and be – vacuous – surfing types with a limited vocabulary and an off-putting empty-headedness. But not this Wolf. There was a lambent intelligence in his face, a light in the eyes that revealed the mind behind the appealing features.

Now, at the second meeting of the seminar group, Pat struggled to follow the debate which Dr Fantouse was trying to encourage. They had been invited to consider the contention of Joseph Beuys that the distinction between what is art in the products of our human activity and what is not art, is a pernicious and pointless one. The discussion, which could have been so passionate, had never risen above the bland; there had been long silences, even after the name of Damien Hirst had been raised and Dr Fantouse, in an attempt to provoke controversy, had expressed doubts over the display of half a cow in formaldehyde. "I am not sure," he had ventured, "whether an artist of another period, let us say Donatello, would have considered this art. Butchery, maybe, or even science, but perhaps not art."

This remark had been greeted with silence. Then the thin-faced girl sitting next to Pat had spoken. "Can Damien Hirst actually draw?" she asked. "I mean, if you asked him to draw a house, would he be able to do so? Would it look like a house?"

They stared at her. "I don't see what that . . ." began a young man.

"That raises an interesting issue of representation," interrupted Dr Fantouse. "I'm not sure that the essence of art is its ability to represent. May I suggest, perhaps, that we turn to the ideas of Benedetto Croce and see whether he can throw any light on the subject. As you know, Croce believed in the existence of an aesthetic function built into, so to speak, the human mind. This function . . ."

Pat looked up at the ceiling. At the beginning of the new semester she had been filled with enthusiasm at the thought of what lay ahead. The idea of studying the history

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of art seemed to her to be immensely exciting – an eagerly anticipated intellectual adventure – but somehow the actual experience had failed so far to live up to her expectations. She had not foreseen these dry sessions with Dr Fantouse and the arid wastes of Croce; the long silences in the seminars; the absence of sparkle.

Of course there had been numerous adjustments in her life. She had left the flat in Scotland Street, she had said goodbye to Bruce, who had gone to London, and she had also seen off her friend and neighbour, Domenica Macdonald, who had embarked on a train from Waverley Station on the first leg of her journey to the Straits of Malacca and her anthropological project. And she had moved, too, to the new flat in Spottiswoode Street, which she now shared with three other students, all female. Those were enough changes in any life, and the starting of the course had merely added to the stress.

"You'll feel better soon," her father had said when she had phoned him to complain of the blues that seemed to have descended on her. "Blues pass." And then he had hesitated, and she had known that he had been on the verge of saying: "Of course you could come home," but had refrained from doing so. For he knew, as well as she did, that she could not go home to the family house in the Grange, to her room, which was there exactly as she had left it, because that would be conceding defeat in the face of life before she had even embarked on it. So nothing more had been said.

And now, while Dr Fantouse said something more about Benedetto Croce – remarks that were met with complete silence by the group – Pat looked across the table to where Wolf was sitting and saw that he was looking at her.

They looked at one another for a few moments, and then Wolf, for his part, slowly raised a finger to his lips, and left it there for a few seconds, looking at her as he did so. Then he mouthed something which she could not make out exactly, of course, but which seemed to her to be this: Hey there, little Red Riding Hood!

2. A Picture in a Magazine

At the end of the seminar, when Dr Fantouse had shuffled off in what can only have been disappointment and defeat, back to the Quattrocento, the students snapped shut their notebooks, yawned, scratched their heads, and made their way out of the seminar room and into the corridor. Pat had deliberately avoided looking at Wolf, but she was aware of the fact that he was slow in leaving the seminar room, having dropped something on the floor, and was busy searching for it. There was a notice-board directly outside the door, and she stopped at this, looking at the untidy collection of posters which had been pinned up by a variety of student clubs and societies. None of these was of real interest to her. She did not wish to take up gliding and had only a passing interest in salsa classes. Nor was she interested in teaching at an American summer camp, for which no experience was necessary, although enthusiasm was helpful. But at least these notices gave her an excuse to wait until Wolf came out, which he did a few moments later.

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She stood quite still, peering at the small print on the summer camp poster. There was something about an orientation weekend and insurance, and then a deposit would be necessary unless . . .

"Not a nice way to spend the summer," a voice behind her said. "Hundreds of brats. No time off. Real torture."

She turned round, affecting surprise. "Yes," she said. "I wasn't really thinking of doing it."

"I had a friend who did it once," said Wolf. "He ran away. He actually physically ran away to New York after two weeks." He looked at his watch and then nodded in the direction of the door at the end of the corridor. "Are you hungry?"

Pat was not, but said that she was. "Ravenous."

"We could go up to the Elephant House," Wolf said, glancing at his watch. "We could have coffee and a sandwich."

They walked through George Square and across the wide space in front of the McEwan Hall. In one corner, their skateboards at their feet, a group of teenage boys huddled against the world, caps worn backwards, baggy, low-crotched trousers half-way down their flanks. Pat had wondered what these youths talked about and had concluded that they talked about nothing, because to talk was uncool. Perhaps Domenica could do field work outside the McEwan Hall – once she had finished with her Malacca Straits pirates – living with the skateboarders, in a little tent in the rhododendrons at the edge of the square, observing the socio-dynamics of the group, the leadership struggles, the badges of status. Would they accept her, she wondered? Or would she be viewed with suspicion, as an unwanted visitor from the adult world, the world of speech?

She found out a little bit more about Wolf as they made their way to the Elephant House. As they crossed the road at Napier's Health Food Shop, Wolf told her that his mother was an enthusiast of vitamins and homeopathic medicine. He had been fed on vitamins as a boy and had been taken to a homeopathic doctor, who gave him small doses of carefully-chosen poison. The whole family took Echinacea against colds, regularly, although they still got them.

"It keeps her happy," he said. "You know how mothers are. And it's cool by me if my mother's unstressed. You know what I mean?"

Pat thought she did. "That's cool," she said.

And then he told her that he came from Aberdeen. His father, he said, was in the oil business. He had a company which supplied valves for off-shore wells. They sold valves all over the world, and his father was often away in places like Houston and Brunei. He collected air miles which he gave to Wolf.

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"I can go anywhere I want," he said. "I could go to South America, if I wanted. Tomorrow. All on air miles."

"I haven't got any air miles," said Pat.

"None at all?"

"No."

Wolf shrugged. "No big deal," he said. "You don't really need them."

"Do you think that Dr Fantouse has any air miles?" asked Pat suddenly.

They both laughed. "Definitely not," said Wolf. "Poor guy. Bus miles maybe"

Inside the Elephant House it was beginning to get busy, and they had to wait to be served. Wolf suggested that Pat should find a table while he ordered the coffee and the sandwiches.

Pat, waiting for Wolf, paged through a glossy magazine which she found in a rack on the wall. It was one of those magazines which everyone affected to despise, but which equally everyone rather enjoyed – page after page of pictures of celebrities, lounging by the side of swimming pools, leaving expensive restaurants, arriving at parties. The locales, and the clothes, were redolent of luxury, even if luxury that was in very poor taste; and the people looked rather like waxworks – propped up, prompted into positions of movement, but made of wax. This was due to the fact that the photographers caked them with make-up, somebody had explained to her. That's why they looked so artificial.

She turned a page, and stopped. There had been a party, somebody's twenty-first, at Gleneagles. Elegant girls in glittering dresses were draped about young men in formal kilt outfits, dinner jackets and florid silk bow-ties. And there was Wolf, standing beside a girl with red hair, a glass of champagne in his hand. Pat stared at the photograph. Surely it could not be him. Nobody she knew was in Hi! magazine; this was another world. But it must have been him, because there was the smile, and the hair, and that look in the eyes.

She looked up. Wolf was standing at the table, holding a tray. He laid the tray down on the table, and glanced at the magazine.

"Is this you, Wolf?" Pat asked. "Look. I can't believe that I know somebody in Hi!"

Wolf glanced at the picture and frowned. "You don't," he said. "That's not me."

Pat looked again at the picture then transferred her gaze up to Wolf. If it was not him, then it was his double.

Wolf took the magazine from her and tossed it to the other end of the table.

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"I can't bear those mags," he said. "Full of nothing. Airheads."

He turned to her and smiled, showing his teeth, which were very white, and even, and which for some rather disturbing reason she wanted to touch.

3. Co-incidence in Spottiswoode Street

"Your name," said Pat to Wolf, as they sat drinking coffee in the Elephant House. "Your name intrigues me. I don't think I've met anybody called Wolf before." She paused. Perhaps it was a sore point with him; people could be funny about their names, and perhaps Wolf was embarrassed about his. "Of course, there's nothing wrong with . . ."

Wolf smiled. "Don't worry," he said. "People are often surprised when I tell them what I'm called. There's a simple explanation. It's not the name I was given at the beginning. That's . . ."

Pat waited for him to finish the sentence, but he had raised his mug of coffee to his mouth and was looking at her over the rim. His eyes, she saw, were bright, as if he was teasing her about something.

"You don't have to tell me," she said quietly.

He put down his mug. "But you do want to know, don't you?"

Pat shrugged. "Only if you want to tell me."

"All right," said Wolf. "I started out as Wilfred."

Pat felt a sudden urge to laugh, and almost did. There were more embarrassing names than that, of course – Cuthbert, for instance – but she could not see Wolf as Wilfred. There was no panache about Wilfred; none of the slight threat that went with Wolf.

"I couldn't stand being called Wilfred," Wolf went on. "And it was worse when it was shortened to Wilf. So I decided when I was about ten that I would be Wolfred, and my parents went along with that. So I was Wolfred from then on. That's the name on my student card. At school they called me Wolf. You were Patricia, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Pat. "But I can't remember ever being called that, except by the headmistress at school, who called everybody by their full names. But, look, there's nothing all that wrong with Wilfred. There's . . ."

Wolf interrupted her. "Let's not talk about names," he said. He glanced at his sandwich. "I'm going to have to eat this quickly. I have to go and see somebody."

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Pat felt a sudden stab of disappointment. She wanted to spend longer with him; just sitting there, in his company, made her forget that she had been feeling slightly dispirited. It was about being in the presence of beauty that seemed to charge the surrounding air; and Wolf, she had decided, was beautiful. They had been sitting in that seminar room, she reflected, talking about beauty – which is what she thought aesthetics was all about – and beauty was there before their eyes; assured, content with the space it occupied, as beauty always was.

She picked up her sandwich and bit into it. She could not let him leave her sitting there – that was such an admission of social failure – to be left sitting at a table when somebody goes off. It was the sort of thing that would happen to Dr Fantouse; he was the type who must often be left at the table by others; poor man, with his Quattrocento and his green Paisley ties, left alone at the table while all his colleagues, the Renaissance and Victorian people, pushed back their chairs and got up.

At the door, Wolf said: "Which way are you going?" and Pat replied: "Across the Meadows."

"That's cool," said Wolf. "I'll walk with you. I'm heading that way too."

They walked together, chatting comfortably as they did. They talked about the other members of the class, some of whom Wolf knew rather better than Pat did. Wolf was a member of the University Renaissance Singers and had been on a singing tour with one of the other young men. "He's hopeless," he said. "All he wants to do, you know, is go to bars and get drunk. And he keeps going on and on about some girl called Jean he met in Glasgow. Apparently she's got the most tremendous voice and is studying opera at the Academy there. He can't stop talking about her. You watch. He'll probably bring her name up in the seminar: 'Jean says that Benedetto Croce . . . '"

There were other snippets of gossip, and then he enquired about what Pat had been doing the previous year. She told him about the job in the Gallery, which she still had on a part-time basis, and about Scotland Street too.

"It's more interesting in the New Town," he said. "Up in Marchmont everybody's a student. There are no . . . well, no real people. The New Town's different. Who did you share with?"

Pat wondered how one might describe Bruce. It was difficult to know where to start. "A boy," she said. "Bruce Anderson. We weren't . . . you know, there was nothing between us." But there had been, she thought, blushing at the memory of her sudden infatuation. Was that nothing?

"Of course not," said Wolf. "People you share with are a no-no. If things get difficult, then you have to move out. Or they have to."

Pat agreed. "And I knew everybody else on the stair," she said. "There was this woman called Domenica Macdonald. She lived opposite. And a couple called Irene and Stuart who had a little boy called Bertie. He played the saxophone and I used to

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hear 'As Time Goes By' drifting up through the walls. And two guys on the first floor."

They had now crossed Melville Drive and, having walked up the brae past the towering stone edifice of Warrender Park Terrace, with its giddy attic windows breaking out of the steep slate roofs, they were at the beginning of Spottiswoode Street. A few doorways along was Pat's stair, with its communal door and list of names alongside the bell-pulls. She assumed that Wolf would be going on, perhaps to Thirlestane Road, where so many people seemed to live, but when she indicated that she had reached her destination, he stopped too, and smiled.

"But so have I," he said.

Her heart gave a leap. Was there some other meaning to this? Did he expect her to invite him upstairs? She would, of course. She did not want him to go. She wanted to be with him, to be beguiled.

"I live here," she said, hesitantly.

"What floor?"

"Second. Middle flat."

Wolf swept back the hair that the wind had blown across his brow. "But that's amazing," he said, his eyes wide with surprise. "So does my girlfriend, Tessie. You must be sharing with her."

4. At Domenica's Flat

Angus Lordie, portrait painter and occasional poet, walked slowly down Scotland Street, looking up at the windows. He liked to look into other people's houses, if he could. It was not nosiness, of course; artists were allowed to look, he thought – no artist could really be considered a voyeur. Looking was what an artist was trained to do, and if an artist did not look, then he would not see. The evening was the best time to inspect the domestic arrangements of others, as people often left their lights on and their curtains open, thus creating a stage for passers-by to see. And the New Town of Edinburgh provided rich theatre in that respect, especially along the more gracious Georgian streets where tall windows at ground floor allowed a fine view of drawing rooms and studies. Of course curtains could have been pulled across such windows, but often were not, and Angus Lordie was convinced that this was because those who lived within wanted people to see what they had, wanted them to see their grand pianos, their heavily-framed pictures, their clutters of chinoiserie. Heriot Row and Moray Place were good for this, although the decoration of most Moray Place flats was somewhat dull. But there was a particularly fine grand piano in a window in Ainslie Place and a Ferguson picture of a woman in a hat in Great Stuart Street.

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As he walked down Scotland Street, Angus Lordie reflected on the melancholy nature of his errand. So many times I have walked this way, he thought, to call on my old friend, Domenica Macdonald, and now I make my way to her empty flat. But then he reminded himself: Domenica is not dead, and I must not think of her in that way. She has simply gone to the Malacca Straits, and that is not the same thing as being dead. And yet he wondered how long it would be before he saw her again. She had not said anything about when she would return, but had hinted that it could be as much as a year, perhaps even longer. A year! He had wanted to say to her: "And what about me, Domenica? What am I to do in that year?"

Angus looked down at his dog, Cyril, and Cyril looked back up at him mournfully. Cyril was an intelligent dog – too intelligent for his own good, according to some – and he knew that this was a dull outing from the canine point of view. Cyril liked going for a walk up to Northumberland Street, where he could lift his leg against the railings at each doorway, and he also liked to go to the Cumberland Bar, where he was always given a small glass of beer and where there were people to look at. He was not so keen on Scotland Street, where he knew he would be tethered to a railing while Angus went upstairs. And there were cats in Scotland Street, too; outrageous cats who, understanding the restraint of his tethered lead, would saunter across the street with impunity, staring at him with that feline arrogance that no dog can stand.

Angus reached the front doorway of No 44 and was about to press Domenica's bell out of habit when he remembered that he had no need to do this, and that there was no point. He had the key to her flat up on the top landing and could let himself in. He sighed, and pushed open the outer door. Inside there was that familiar smell that he associated with her stairway: the chalky smell of the stone, the sweet smell of the nasturtiums that somebody on the first floor grew in a tub on the landing.

He made his way up the stair, pausing for a moment on one of the lower landings. Somebody was playing a musical instrument, a saxophone, he thought. He listened. Yes, it was un¬mistakable. 'As Time Goes By'. Casablanca. And then he remembered that this was the home of that little boy, the one Domenica had told him about, the one with that ghastly pushy mother whom Cyril had bitten on the ankle in Dundas Street. He smiled. She had made such a fuss about it and he had been obliged to wallop Cyril with a rolled up newspaper to show her that he was being punished. But it had been hard to suppress his laughter. That woman had insulted Cyril and he had bitten her: what could she expect? But dogs were always in the wrong when they bit somebody – it was part of the social contract between dogs and man. You can live with us, yes, but don't bite us.

He continued up the stair and stood before Domenica's doorway, slipping the key into the lock. There was mail to be picked up – a small pile of letters and some leaflets from local traders. He shuffled through these, tossing the leaflets into the bin and tucking the letters into the pocket of his jacket. He would place those in one of the large envelopes left him by Domenica and send them off to the address in the Malacca Straits. He was not sure whether her mail would ever reach her – the address she had given him seemed somewhat unlikely – but his duty was done once he posted them.

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He walked through the hall and went into Domenica's study. She had left it scrupulously tidy and the surface of her desk was quite bare. They had spent so many hours there, with Domenica talking about all those things she liked to talk about, which was everything, he thought; everything. And now there was silence, and nobody to talk to.

"I come alone to this room," he said quietly.

"This room in which you sat

And filled my world with images.

I would reply, but cannot speak,

I would cry, but cannot weep."

He stopped himself, and looked at his watch. He would not allow himself to become maudlin. Domenica was just a friend – that and no more – and he would not pine for her. I am not here to think about her, he said to himself. I am here to let her new tenant into the flat and to tell her about the hot water system. Life is not about thoughts of loss and separation; it is about hot water systems and remembering to put out the rubbish, and making siccar in all the other little ways in which we must make siccar.

5. The Judgement of Neuroaesthetics

"Now then," said the woman on the doorstep of Domenica's flat. "You must be Angus Lordie. Thank you for letting me in. I hope I haven't kept you waiting."

"You have not," said Angus, looking at the woman standing before him. "Not at all." His portraitist's eye, from ancient habit, noted the high cheek bones and the slightly retroussé nose; noted with approval, and with understanding too, as he knew that a feminine face such as this was subliminally irresistible to men. Men liked women whose faces reminded them of babies – a heightened brow, a pert nose – these sent signals to men: protect me, I'm vulnerable. 'Neuroaesthetics' was the term he had seen for this new discipline; not that such a science could tell him any¬thing that he did not already know as a painter and connoisseur of the human face. Regularity was good, but not too much regularity, which became tedious, almost nauseating.

Of course, there was far more that Angus was able to read into the physical appearance of Antonia Collie as she stood before him. They had barely introduced themselves, and yet he was confident as to her social background, her interests, and her availability. The clothes spoke to the provenance: a skirt of cashmere printed in a discreetly Peruvian pattern (or, certainly, South American; and Peru was very popular); a white linen blouse (only those with time on their hands to iron could wear linen); and then a navy-blue jacket with a gold brooch in the form of a running hare. The navy-blue jacket indicated attachment to the existing order, or even to an

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order which no longer existed, while the brooch announced that this was a person who had lived in the country, or at least one who knew what the country was all about. Of course, the fact that this Antonia Collie was a close friend of Domenica's would have told Angus Lordie all this, had he reflected on the fact that people's close friends are usually in their own mould. Antonia would thus be a blue stocking, a woman of intellectual interests and marked views.

Angus smiled at the thought, relishing the prospect of a replacement for Domenica. It was all most convenient; his visits to Domenica, his enjoyment of her conversation – and her wine – would now be replaced by the exact equivalent, provided by Antonia Collie. It was a very satisfactory prospect.

"Please let me take that for you," he said, pointing to the small brown case beside her. "Is this all you have?"

"Sufficient unto the day," said Antonia, stepping aside to allow Angus to pick up the suitcase. "I didn't need to bring much of my own stuff. Domenica and I are the same size, you see. She said I could just wear her clothes if I liked. And drive her car too. She's such a generous friend!"

Angus nodded. He did not show his surprise, but it seemed a very odd arrangement to him. Clothes were very personal and he could not imagine being happy in the knowledge that somebody else was wearing his clothes. He had once found himself wearing a pair of socks that he did not recognise and had been appalled at the thought that he had inadvertently taken his host's pair of socks when he had stayed with friends in Kelso. What a dreadful thought! For the next few days he examined his toes carefully for signs of fungal infection; or would a normal wash effectively rid socks of lurking fungus? His host had been a perfectly respectable person – a lawyer, no less – but athlete's foot was no respecter of professional position: it could strike even a WS. Of course, women were much more relaxed about these matters, he thought; they shared clothes quite willingly. Perhaps this was because they did not find one another physically disgusting. Men, in general, found one another vaguely repulsive; women were different.

With these thoughts in mind, Angus carried Antonia's small suitcase through to the study and laid it down near the fireplace. Antonia had moved to the window and was peering down to the street.

"It's a long time since I was in this flat," she mused, craning her neck to look. "I seem to remember Domenica having a slightly better view than this. Still, no matter. I doubt if I shall spend my time gazing out of the window."

She turned and looked at Angus. "Domenica often spoke of you," she said. "She enjoyed the conversations the two of you had."

"And I too," Angus said. "She was . . ." He looked at her, and she saw the sadness in his expression.

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"Let's not use the past tense when speaking of her," said Antonia cheerfully. "She's not exactly dead yet, is she? She's in the Malacca Straits. That, I would have thought, amounts to being amongst the quick."

"Of course," said Angus hurriedly, but added: "That does seem a long way away. And it's going to be months and months before we see her again."

Antonia shot him a glance. Was this man Domenica's lover? It was difficult to imagine Domenica with a lover, and she had never seen her with him. But people such as Domenica liked a certain amount of mystery in their personal lives, and he may have been something special to her. Curious, though, that she should choose a man like this, with his intrusive stare and those disconcerting gold teeth; to have a lover with gold teeth was decidedly exotic. And yet he was a handsome man, she thought, with that wavy hair and those eyes. Dark hair and blue eyes were a dangerous combination in a man.

And Angus, returning her gaze, thought: she's younger than Domenica by a good few years; younger than me, too. And she's undoubtedly attractive. Does she have a husband? Presumably not, because a woman with a husband would not come to stay for six months in a friend's flat and not bring the husband with her. A lover, then? No. She had that look, that indefinable yet unmistakable look, of one who was alone in this world. And if she were alone, then how long would that last, with that concise nose of hers that would break ilka heart, but no the moudie man's? It was a play on a poem about the moudie and the moudie man, and it popped into his mind, just like that, as off-beat, poetic thoughts will break surface at the strangest moments, leaving us disturbed, puzzled, wondering. The mole's little eyes would break every heart, but not the molecatcher's.

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