

CONSTELLATION OF THE RAT

(RAT PLAY)

by

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CHARACTERS:

PARKIE: a musician.

MARY: his wife.

FRANK: his brother, a businessman.

All in their late twenties.

THE SET:

The stage is bare with an open playing area and a black bare wall. There is an anvil which is up-stage-centre and steel-caged-cot up-stage-right. A percussion section is downstage-right; bizarre and elaborate or may well be representative in the form of a single drum. Down-stage left is a bank of recording equipment, synthesiser and cello. Down-stage are two old armchairs and a coffee-table. Bathroom and kitchen are in the wings.

MUSIC FOR THE PLAY:

Parkie's composition: excerpts from the Rat Symphony. There is a great similarity between the noises from behind the wall and his own music. The play itself is like a piece of chamber-music and its dominant tonal mood is set by the cello. Parkie's music is modern and instrumental with strings dominating and lugubrious.

TIME AND PLACE:

Dublin, the 70's or 80's.

Though the play has a definite time and place there are two distinct worlds. The conscious real world of Parkie, Frank and Mary and the subconscious, mythical world of Mango Parkie and the Rat Catcher.

Scene 1

(The lighted stage goes to full black out. For a couple of minutes squeaking and tearing sounds are heard behind the wall as though they were that of a rat. These rat sounds die and the cast comes on. Parkie in a boiler-suit will be amongst his drums. Mary in a worn fur will be between him and Frank who is dressed sombrely. Parkie moves to anvil where he picks up hammer and as he does so rodent-like sounds: the grating of metal over metal is heard coming from behind the wall. As the sounds grow he and the anvil is spot-lit. Frank moves to stand by his side.)

FRANK

He couldn't catch him.

PARKIE

He did his best.

FRANK

It wasn't enough.

PARKIE

He tried everything.

FRANK

It shouldn't have been there in the first place.

PARKIE

It wasn't his fault.

FRANK

Whose fault was it then?

PARKIE

God only knows.

FRANK

Did he ask for help?

PARKIE

Mango wasn't one to go on his knees.

FRANK

Why?

PARKIE

Because he was too much of a man.

FRANK

So it took that to lay him low.

PARKIE

It didn't lay him low.

FRANK

He went on his knees didn't he?

PARKIE

He never went on his knees.

FRANK

Yes he did. In the end he was crawling on all fours.

PARKIE

He tried everything.

FRANK

Everything within his puny powers.

PARKIE

Mango was not puny. He was big, a terrifying giant of a man.

FRANK

All the more to be laid low.

PARKIE

He did everything that was humanly possible.

FRANK

Humanly. That's the point.

PARKIE

Don't rub it in. You had your victory.

FRANK

One has to be compliant and humble.

PARKIE

All the time?

FRANK

Some of the time.

PARKIE

You believe in machines.

FRANK

I do. But I also believe in them.

PARKIE

Them?

FRANK

Yes. Them. They are life.

PARKIE

They'll overrun us.

FRANK

Only if we let them.

PARKIE

And how do we stop them?

FRANK

By outbreeding them.

PARKIE

Mango tried.

FRANK

Indeed he did.

PARKIE

He tried to trap and kill.

FRANK

I know he did. But in doing he didn't know what he was doing.

PARKIE

He couldn't get rid of it.

PARKIE

None of the poisons worked.

FRANK

They were man-made.

PARKIE

None of his traps worked.

FRANK

They were man-made.

PARKIE

He was a great giant of a man. A blacksmith.

FRANK

More muscle than brain.

PARKIE

He had brains.

FRANK

Who did he call on in the end?

PARKIE

You know who.

FRANK

You see. He had to call on somebody. In saving a child he became a man. In becoming a man he begot a child. He saved the race.

PARKIE

From them?

FRANK

Yes. And from those who will not breed.
(Frank and Parkie step forward.)

PARKIE

We once knew a blacksmith.

FRANK

Picture him.

PARKIE

The blacksmith Mango.

FRANK

His sleeves rolled up, bursting on his arms from hammering.

PARKIE

Winter evenings you'd see him, his face lit by the flames of his forge.

FRANK

Showers of sparks raining on him as he beat and twisted red hot iron.

PARKIE

Boy there was nothing he couldn't do with metal. He would mould it, shape it, tune it.

FRANK

Night after night you'd find him there, dedicated to his craft.

PARKIE

Burning and cutting.

FRANK

Fitting and welding.

PARKIE

Riveting and hammering.

FRANK

His cap on the back of his head.

PARKIE

Sweat beading on his brow.

FRANK

His eyes like cobalt.

PARKIE

God we used to stand by his side for hours watching him with tongs and sledge-hammers.

FRANK

Tapping and banging. A song of iron. A dance of steel.

PARKIE

Not for a minute could they keep me out of his smithy.

FRANK

You have never seen such a place; a converted railway-wagon that he'd brought from the port on the back of a huge truck.

PARKIE

God do we remember that day.

FRANK

It was like a carnival with hundreds of kids coming to see what Mango was up to.

PARKIE

All watching our hero as he gave orders and directions to men in blue smocks with long crowbars as they uprooted pailings, greased tracks and prepared ramps.

FRANK

Then with a nod from Mango and a heave and a ho the wagon was slid to its final resting place.

PARKIE

Up went a big cheer and Mango produced a bottle of whiskey for the workmen and lemonade for us kids.

FRANK

Boy you never saw a man as happy as Mango.

PARKIE

He was just like a king with his subjects about him.

FRANK

But things didn't run as smoothly as he thought they would.

PARKIE

He'd built his smithy over a river.

FRANK

So some blamed Mango's misfortune on that.

PARKIE

They got in underneath the smithy and built nests.

FRANK

Within in no time they were in their hundreds.

PARKIE

We used to ride down there in posses.

FRANK

To wage war against them.

PARKIE

Bringing big bricks and stones with us.

FRANK

Spending whole afternoons pelting them.

PARKIE

Squashing and crushing them.

FRANK

Dousing them with petrol.

PARKIE

Setting them alight.

FRANK

Neighbours started to complain.

PARKIE

Some said children would be bitten.

FRANK

So Mango set about exterminating them.

PARKIE

He dropped everything. The thought of a child being bitten and he responsible!

FRANK

He did everything in his powers.

PARKIE

He invented all kinds of ingenious devices.

FRANK

You'd wanted to have seen their ferocity.

PARKIE

Some managed to gnaw through the wires of their cages.

FRANK

But Mango would not be beaten.

PARKIE

He tracked them down, patiently putting down bait after bait after bait.

(Parkie moves back to anvil and puts down hammer, the spot-light over it goes out and he moves to the percussion-section. Frank exits. Mary moves to armchair. She pulls her coat closely around her for warmth. She shivers.)

MARY

It's cold in here.

(Parkie is now absorbed by his musical instruments.)

Did you get oil for the heater?

PARKIE

I forgot.

MARY

It's freezing outside.

PARKIE

Who needs heat when you've got music?

MARY

I do.

PARKIE

Sorry. I was just so excited.

MARY

The central-heating isn't working.

PARKIE

Listen. See what difference my new sound-mixer makes.

MARY

No. I want to talk to you.

PARKIE

Have a listen first.

MARY

No. I've something important to tell you.

PARKIE

The Rat Symphony.
(He plays the piece.)

MARY

Lower the music Parkie.
(It grows louder.)

Lower it. It'll wake the baby.

(It grows even louder and lasts long enough for Frank to come in. He goes straight to the recording-deck and pulls out the plug.)

PARKIE

Frank!

FRANK

Where did he get it?

MARY

Not your shop.

FRANK

Who's he renting it from?

PARKIE

I own it.

MARY

He got it on credit.

FRANK

(To Parkie.)

What about the rent?

(Advancing on Parkie.)

How many months do you owe me?

PARKIE

Ask Mary.

MARY

Why me?

FRANK

(Insisting.)

How many months?

(He turns to go.)

PARKIE

Don't go Frank.

(He goes to his recording-deck.)

This is what's going to pay the rent.

(He takes out the cassette.)

It's all here.

It wasn't my fault.

It was a distribution problem.

FRANK

(He stops.)
Every flunkey in the music-business says that.

PARKIE

I need to work.

FRANK

(He turns and confronts him.)
Work! You call that work! I know what you need. A job!

PARKIE

I've got one.

MARY

(Intervening.)
Did you get that shop Frank?

FRANK

What shop?

PARKIE

The one Reynold's after.

FRANK

News doesn't half travel.

MARY

Did you?

FRANK

Not yet.

MARY

Are you going to?

FRANK

That's where I was going before he tore the house down.

MARY

He could well manage it for you.

FRANK

Him!

MARY

You could show him. Couldn't you? He has to start somewhere.

FRANK

That's the keyword. Somewhere. Sorry Mary.

(He turns to go.)

PARKIE

Take a break Frank.

FRANK

I can't. I've got mouths to feed.

PARKIE

So have millions.

FRANK

Be a part of them.

PARKIE

Don't want to.

FRANK

Scared?

MARY

(The baby cries.)

It's the baby. She's woken up. And she's still teething. Oh I'm so sorry Frank.

FRANK

Aren't you lucky?

MARY

She doesn't bother me.

FRANK

She would if she got you up at all hours.

MARY

She wouldn't.

FRANK

That remains to be seen.

MARY

I'm looking forward to it.

FRANK

With him around!

MARY

He'll change.

FRANK

He'd better.

(Frank goes. Parkie returns to his music.)

MARY

I told you to keep the music down.

PARKIE

It wasn't that loud.

MARY

It was enough to wake the baby.

If you'd one yourself you'd know all about it.

Frank is far too patient with you.

PARKIE

He's keeping his options open.

MARY

For what?

PARKIE

One day ...

MARY

Fat chance.

PARKIE

We will.

MARY

I've been listening to that for years.

PARKIE

Just a little while longer.

MARY

What do we do in the meantime?

PARKIE

Live Mary. Live. Do what you're meant to do. Live.

MARY

What about the bills?

PARKIE

Let others worry about the bills.

MARY

I can't.

PARKIE

Learn to. Let's have another run through.

MARY

No.

PARKIE

Think of it. It's never been heard before.

MARY

I said no. I want to talk to you.

PARKIE

About what?

MARY

About us.

PARKIE

Haven't we said everything?

MARY

No.

PARKIE

What's there left to say?

MARY

I'm going to have a baby.

I said I'm going to have a baby.

Do you hear me? I said I'm going to have a baby.

PARKIE

A baby?

MARY

Yes. A baby.

PARKIE

When?

MARY

In six months.

PARKIE

Who told you?

MARY

The doctor.

PARKIE

What doctor?

MARY

At the Rotunda.

PARKIE

The maternity hospital.

MARY

Yes.

PARKIE

I don't believe it.

MARY

You will.

(She smiles and holds her tummy.)

It's here.

PARKIE

Why didn't you tell me?

MARY

I knew what you would have said.

PARKIE

What would I have said?

MARY

You've never shown any interest in children.

PARKIE

I haven't.

MARY

No. You haven't.

PARKIE

I know I haven't. We decided against them didn't we?

MARY

That's the past.

PARKIE

No it's not. It's the present.

MARY

Things change.

PARKIE

They don't. You're changing.

MARY

I'm not. I want a little more from life. I'm fed up scrounging. I'm fed up with this music-business.

PARKIE

I'm not.

MARY

I've a life to live too.

PARKIE

No one's stopping you.

MARY

You are.

PARKIE

How am I?

MARY

You show no interest in ...

PARKIE

You knew that when we were marrying.

MARY

But we were so young, so childish, taking this, expecting that.

PARKIE

I'm not taking anything. I'm only giving what I've got.

MARY

So have I got something to give.

(She feels her tummy.)

This. Me. And what comes out of me. A child. Ours.

PARKIE

Why now?

MARY

Before it's too late.

PARKIE

You're still young.

MARY

I'm twenty eight.

PARKIE

We can wait a few more years.

MARY

This is the right time.

PARKIE

We can wait.

MARY

No. We can't wait.

PARKIE

Well I think I should have some say in the matter. After all I'm the ... I don't want it.

MARY

What?

PARKIE

You can have an abortion.

MARY

An abortion! Never. Never. I want to have a child. I want to have children.

PARKIE

Children?

MARY

Yes. Children. And I'm going to make this place a fit home for them. I want you to get that stuff out of here.

PARKIE

My musical equipment.

MARY

Yes.

PARKIE

Where can I move it to?

MARY

Somewhere else.

PARKIE

I can't afford somewhere else.

MARY

I don't care. It's about time you started thinking of others.

PARKIE

Others?

MARY

Yes. Others. Besides yourself and your music.

PARKIE

My music.

(She leaves. He doesn't know what to do or to think. He wanders amongst his instruments. He touches them as though they were the only things left to him. He sets one of his tapes in motion, slow movement from the Rat Symphony. Dejectedly he listens to it but into the piece creep unfamiliar distortions and noises. He reruns and rechecks but the artefacts still remain. He checks the tape and goes to investigate. As he listens and tracks the elusive sounds grown into the Rat Music. Frank comes in, this time as the Rat Catcher. He stands in deep shadow.)

RAT CATCHER FRANK

Listen. Listen. Do you hear? No. Not that way. This way. Follow me. That's it. Quietly. Ever so quietly. Be careful now. Don't become too excited. She'll smell you. Carefully. Carefully. Ever so carefully. Do you hear? Listen. Listen carefully. That's her breathing. Yes. Her breathing. All warm. All curled up in there. Do you hear? Do you? Not yet? Try again. Come this way. She won't hurt you. I promise. Come along now. Be ever so quiet. Be ever so gentle. Soon she'll fill all of you. Overflowing. Filling out. Don't be afraid. Come closer. Come closer. Go in closer. Press your ear in against her. ' Listen. Listen to her heart beat. Isn't it wonderful? So wonderful. How rapid and warm. Do you hear? You do. Yes. You do. Press your ear in closer. So warm. So full. That's she. She. And you. You. That's you. Press

yourself into her. Into her. Into her. Deeper. Deeper. Tighter. Tighter. Till you can go no deeper. That's you. That's she. Do you feel her? Do you hear her?

(The music dies. Mary comes in to find him on his hands and knees listening to the wall.)

MARY

What are you doing?

PARKIE

Listen. Do you hear?

MARY

(She comes closer to him.)

No.

PARKIE

(He kneels so that his head comes close to her tummy.)

Listen carefully. It's moving. Listen.

MARY

I don't hear a thing.

PARKIE

Quiet. It's moving again.

MARY

I don't hear a thing.

PARKIE

I do.

MARY

What are you talking about?

PARKIE

Don't you hear it?

(He moves to pick up hammer lying on anvil.)

MARY

No.

PARKIE

Well it's there.

MARY

Where?

PARKIE

There.

MARY

What's there?

(They both look at each other. The lights come slowly down as we hear scratching and tearing.)

BLACK OUT

Scene 2

(Lights come slowly up on Parkie listening to the wall. He's moving from one place to the next.)

MARY

Oh give over will you?

PARKIE

Give over what?

MARY

You know what. There's no rat there.

PARKIE

There is. I hear him.

MARY

How come I can't hear him?

PARKIE

You're hearing isn't as good as mine.

Why don't you listen?

MARY

No.

PARKIE

Why not?

MARY

I don't want to.

PARKIE

Why don't you want to?

MARY

There's no rat. That's why.

PARKIE

For my sake?

MARY

No.

PARKIE

Go on. Please.

MARY

All right. On one condition.

PARKIE

What?

MARY

If I can't hear the rat there's no rat.

All right?

All right?

Promise.

Promise.

PARKIE

I promise.

MARY

Where'll I listen?

PARKIE

Right here.

MARY

(She listens.)

I can't hear a thing.

PARKIE

Move about a bit.

MARY

Still can't hear a thing.

PARKIE

You will.

MARY

Still can't.

PARKIE

Try this spot.

MARY

(She does.)
No. It's no good.

PARKIE

You have to know what to listen for. It's like listening to someone's heart.

MARY

You're going too far.

PARKIE

I'm not. Try listening to mine.

MARY

No.

PARKIE

Please.

MARY

No.

PARKIE

Go on. Please Mary. Come close to me. Go on.

(She does.)

Closer. Come closer. Press yourself into me.

(She does.)

Listen to my heart beat.

(She puts her head on his chest.)

Do you hear?

MARY

Yes.

PARKIE

Now listen to the wall.

Here.

MARY

No.

PARKIE

Come on. For me?

MARY

Why for you?

PARKIE

Because you love me.

MARY

Is that so?

PARKIE

Yes. That is so.

MARY

Do you love me?

PARKIE

Yes. I love you.

MARY

And the baby?

PARKIE

Mary. Listen to the wall. He's just moved.

MARY

Where?

PARKIE

Here. And here. Listen.

MARY

(He guides her to the spot and she listens.)
I can't hear a thing.

PARKIE

Listen more.

MARY

I'm listening.

PARKIE

Maybe he's not excited enough.

MARY

I still can't.

(The silence is broken by a loud blast of Rat Music from behind the wall.)
Help me. My ears.

PARKIE

(He rushes to comfort her.)
Mary!

MARY

Stop the music. My ears. The pain. Oh the pain.
(The music continues at a feverish pitch.)
FRANK

(He comes cheerfully in.)
Well you love birds. What do you think of the music?

PARKIE

Turn it off.

Turn it off.
(Frank goes. Parkie turns to Mary.)
Are you all right?

MARY

What?

PARKIE

Are you all right?

MARY

What?
(The music stops.)

PARKIE

Can you hear me?

MARY

(She holds her hands to her ears.)
No.

PARKIE

Take your hands away.
(She does.)
Can you hear me?

MARY

A bit muffled.

PARKIE

Will I call the doctor?

MARY

What for?

FRANK

(He comes back.)

What's the matter children? Didn't you like it?

PARKIE

You nearly burst her eardrums.

FRANK

Don't worry Mary. It won't hurt the baby.

PARKIE

What baby?

FRANK

Your baby.

PARKIE

Why did you tell him?

MARY

He's going to be the godfather.

PARKIE

It was supposed to be a secret.

FRANK

A secret!

PARKIE

Yes.

MARY

Like the rat.

FRANK

What rat?

MARY

We've got a rat behind the wall.

FRANK

A rat?

MARY

Yes.

He was afraid to tell you.

FRANK

Why?

MARY

On account of the baby.

FRANK

(To Parkie.)

Since when do we have a rat behind the wall?

MARY

He says he hears it.

That's why I was listening.

FRANK

(To Mary.)

Did you?

MARY

No.

FRANK

He's hearing things.

PARKIE

I'm not hearing things.

FRANK

Why can't I hear it? I'm next door.

PARKIE

Frank.

You're a very busy man aren't you?

FRANK

Yes.

PARKIE

You're out most of the day?

FRANK

Yes.

PARKIE

You work every night?

FRANK

Yes.

PARKIE

I'm here night and day.

FRANK

And so?

PARKIE

Is that not proof enough?

FRANK

No. Bernice would have heard it.

PARKIE

Would you like to try?

FRANK

Try what?

PARKIE

Listening to the wall.

FRANK

What do you take me for?

PARKIE

The landlord.

FRANK

There's no rat.

PARKIE

There are such things as health inspectors.

You'd want to watch it.

FRANK

Watch what?

PARKIE

What do you think?

FRANK

There's no way there could be a rat in here.

PARKIE

What about the river that flows under the house?

FRANK

The Poddle?

PARKIE

Yes Frank. The Poddle.

FRANK

Where did you hear it?

PARKIE

(He goes to the wall.)
Here and here.

FRANK

Is he there now?

PARKIE

I don't know. Try listening.

FRANK

Where?

PARKIE

Here. There.

FRANK

(He listens.)
I can't hear a thing.

PARKIE

Let me.

(He listens.)
He's silent.

MARY

I didn't hear it.

PARKIE

How could you? He wasn't moving.

MARY

Make him move then.

PARKIE

I intend to.

(He goes back to Frank.)

Frank.

Remember our days in college together? Me reading your medical texts? Remember? All you thought of was being a doctor.

MARY

Don't bring that up. You know it's a sore point.

PARKIE

That he dropped out because of Bernice and the baby?

MARY

That's history.

PARKIE

Well and truly.

Remember you telling me about the flight and fight response?

FRANK

What are you getting at?

PARKIE

Go on Frank. In all innocence. Tell her.

FRANK

What's it got to do with me?

PARKIE

You want me to prove he's in there.

FRANK

I couldn't care less.

PARKIE

That's not true. You care a lot.

Tell Mary about the baby's, sorry the body's automatic nervous system.

MARY

The what?

PARKIE

It controls you automatically. Go on Frank

It's divided into two distinct systems; the sympathetic and the parasympathetic.

Go on Frank. Please.

FRANK

The sympathetic releases adrenaline.

PARKIE

And makes your heart beat faster.

FRANK

You're more alert.

PARKIE

Everything is heightened.

FRANK

You hear more.

PARKIE

You see more.

FRANK

You feel more.

PARKIE

You're ready for fight.

FRANK

Or flight.

PARKIE

You either run.

FRANK

Or stay.

PARKIE

Like to see it work?

FRANK

On the rat?

MARY

Oh no.

PARKIE

Oh yes. Let's excite him.

FRANK

With what?

PARKIE

Whiskey. Where's the bottle Mary?

MARY

Oh go look for it.

(He goes.)

PARKIE

I have it.

(He comes back.)

Take a slug.

FRANK

Me?

PARKIE

Yes. Come on.

(He drinks.)

More. More.

FRANK

(He stops drinking.)

You'll kill me.

PARKIE

Let me listen you your heart.

FRANK

My heart?

PARKIE

Yes. Come on. Open your shirt.

FRANK

My shirt!

PARKIE

Yes. Here. Let me do it for you.

FRANK

Hold on. You're stripping me.

PARKIE

(He listens.)

Not fast enough.

FRANK

What about your own?

PARKIE

Listen.

(He rips open his shirt.)

FRANK

(He listens to Parkie's chest.)

Jesus.

PARKIE

Like the first night I heard him.

FRANK

You don't need me.

PARKIE

I do.

MARY

Why?

PARKIE

I want to get you both close to the wall.

FRANK

So he'll sense us?

PARKIE

Yes. Right up against it.

FRANK

Our backs to it?

PARKIE

No. Your chests. Move closer. Not enough. He won't bite you. Closer. Closer. Press your bellies into it.

FRANK

This way?

PARKIE

Yes. That's bound to excite him.

(He listens to the wall.)

Got him. He's flying. Hold on. Keep steady. Where's that felt pen?

(He goes to look for it.)

MARY

What do you want the felt-pen for?

PARKIE

To mark his position.

(He comes back with the pen. He makes a star.)

Listen to that.

FRANK

Can't hear a thing.

PARKIE

He's moved. Let me check your heart.

Not fast enough.

FRANK

Why?

PARKIE

Your present life-style.

FRANK

What about it?

PARKIE

No fun.

FRANK

Who has no fun?

PARKIE

You don't.

FRANK

Since when?

PARKIE

Since you know when.

FRANK

Yes I have.

PARKIE

Remember all those girls?

FRANK

Which ones?

PARKIE

Stud.

FRANK

Who was?

PARKIE

You were.

FRANK

Jealous.

PARKIE

Never was into that kind of thing.

FRANK

Liar.

PARKIE

Quick. Let me listen.

(He listens to Frank's chest. He then listens to the wall.)

He's fighting.

(He makes a star.)

Listen.

FRANK

(He listens to the wall.)

Can't hear a thing.

PARKIE

(He listens.)

He's moved.

FRANK

There's nothing there.

PARKIE

There is. Mary have a go.

MARY

I don't want to.

PARKIE

Come on quickly. You've better ears than Frank.

FRANK

Prove him wrong.

MARY

(She listens.)

Can't hear a thing.

PARKIE

(He listens.)
He's moved.

FRANK

There's nothing there.

PARKIE

There is. Mary have a go.

MARY

I don't want to.

PARKIE

Come on quickly. You've better ears than Frank.

FRANK

Prove him wrong.

MARY

(She's listens.)
Can't hear a thing.

PARKIE

(To Mary.)
Let me listen to your heart.

MARY

Go away.

PARKIE

You said you would.

MARY

All right.
(He listens.)

PARKIE

Not beating fast enough. Remove your blouse.

MARY

My blouse!

PARKIE

Remove it. Come on.

MARY

Get away.

PARKIE

Let me help you.

MARY

Get away.

PARKIE

I'll rip it off.

MARY

Get away from me.

FRANK

That's enough Parkie.

PARKIE

Nothing like undressing to get your heart going. Isn't that right Frank? Okay Mary. Let me. Gently. Tenderly.

MARY

You brat. Go on.

PARKIE

(He listens to her chest.)

What did I tell you?

(He returns to the wall. He listens.)

He's fleeing.

(He makes a star.)

Quick Mary. Listen.

MARY

(She listens.)

I can't hear a thing.

PARKIE

What! Frank. You try.

FRANK

(He listens.)

He's dead silent.

PARKIE

Let me.

(He listens.)

He's there.

(He makes a star.)

Look.

(He joins up all the stars.)

Look how he's been moving.

MARY

Parkie!

PARKIE

He's in there. I can hear him.

(Frank shrugs his shoulders. He turns to go.)

MARY

Frank. Please. You're his brother. What'll I do?

FRANK

Why ask me? You're the one who married him.

MARY

It may be true. There is a river under the house.

PARKIE

I can hear it.

FRANK

Well if you can hear it why don't you catch it?

MARY

And have it in the house!

PARKIE

Do you want me to?

MARY

No.

FRANK

Prove it. Trap it.

PARKIE

Like Mango?

MARY

You're encouraging him.

FRANK

Yes Parkie. Like Mango.

(Lights come down .)

BLACK OUT

Scene 3

(Lights up on Parkie working on the Rat Symphony. Rat Catcher Frank comes in.)

PARKIE

Like Mango. You said like Mango.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

I know I said.

PARKIE

What do I do?

RAT CATCHER FRANK

Listen.

PARKIE

To what?

RAT CATCHER FRANK

Listen.

PARKIE

To what?

RAT CATCHER FRANK

I said listen and you will hear.

PARKIE

What?

RAT CATCHER FRANK

His heart beat.

PARKIE

His heart beat?

RAT CATCHER FRANK

Her heart beat.

PARKIE

Her heart beat?

RAT CATCHER FRANK

Its heart beat.

PARKIE

Its heart beat?

RAT CATCHER FRANK

Our heart beat.

PARKIE

Our heart beat?

RAT CATCHER FRANK

Yes. Ours. Hers. Its. Mine. Yours. It's all yours and all ours. Listen.

PARKIE

Listen. I'm listening.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

Do you hear?

PARKIE

Sometimes.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

All times?

PARKIE

No. Only sometimes.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

You know who I am?

PARKIE

Frank.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

Frank who?

PARKIE

Frank the Rat Catcher.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

And you. Who are you?

PARKIE

Parkie.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

Parkie who?

PARKIE

Mango-Parkie.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

That's it. That's you. You're becoming you. Parkie. Mango-Parkie. Parkie.

PARKIE

That's me.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

Good. That's you.

Do you hear him?

PARKIE

Yes.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

Listen closely.

PARKIE

I'm listening closely.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

Do you hear him?

PARKIE

Yes.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

Now that you hear him you'll catch him. Yes?

PARKIE

Yes.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

Listen closely.

PARKIE

Listen?

RAT CATCHER FRANK

Yes. Listen closely. I'm the Rat Catcher. Rat Catcher Frank. And you're Parkie. Mango-Parkie.

PARKIE

Mango-Parkie.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

Mango-Parkie.

PARKIE

I'm becoming.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

You're becoming.

PARKIE

Mango-Parkie.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

Mango-Parkie.

(Rat Catcher Frank goes. Rat Symphony continues. Parkie fails to hear loud ringing at the door. Mary comes in.)

MARY

It's Frank. Will you turn that off?

(Parkie stops the music.)

Hold on Frank. Just a minute. I'm coming.

(She goes to the door.)

Come in.

(He comes in wearing a well-cut black overcoat.)

Here. Let me take your coat.

FRANK

It's all right Mary. I won't be staying along.

MARY

Was the traffic heavy?

FRANK

Fridays. Well Parkie? How are you?

PARKIE

The same.

FRANK

You should be on top of the world. Only two months away.

MARY

Don't remind him. He'll get the jitters.

FRANK

Why should he? I was present at both of ours.

MARY

He'll faint.

FRANK

No he won't.

MARY

Have you got good news for me Frank?

FRANK

Excellent news. And for you too Parkie.

He doesn't know.

MARY

Has the deal come through?

FRANK

Signed, sealed and delivered.

PARKIE

What are you both talking about?

MARY

Just a minute Parkie.

FRANK

It's finally mine.

MARY

Frank just clinched the sale on that shop in Mary Street.

PARKIE

What's that got to do with me?

MARY

You're going to be working for him.

PARKIE

Me!

MARY

When does he start Frank?

FRANK

Next week?

PARKIE

Now hold on.

FRANK

Does he not want it?

PARKIE

What are you two up to?

MARY

We're not up to anything. We're trying to be of help.

PARKIE

I don't need help.

MARY

You do. Frank is putting himself out on a limb.

PARKIE

Frank!

MARY

He's offering you a job.

PARKIE

I told you before I'm not going into any business. I'm staying the way I am.

MARY

You can't stay the way you are.

PARKIE

Why can't I?

MARY

Who'll support you?

PARKIE

I'll support myself.

MARY

You've been making a great job of it up 'till now.

FRANK

Who's going to look after the baby?

PARKIE

Mary.

MARY

And what are we going to live on?

Music?

PARKIE

We can go on the way we used to.

FRANK

She'll be spending her time with the baby Parkie. At least for the next three or four years.

PARKIE

We can make do.

MARY

I'm no longer prepared to make do.

PARKIE

You can find somebody else then.

MARY

Do you want me to?

FRANK

Okay Mary. Parkie didn't mean anything.

MARY

What'll you have him do Frank?

FRANK

He can work in repairs.

PARKIE

Repairs!

FRANK

It's a good place to begin.

MARY

Will he be well paid?

FRANK

Sure. I'll give him a basic salary and commission. He'll be able to bring his wages up that way.

PARKIE

You can shove your job Frank.

MARY

Don't mind him Frank. I'll straighten this out. The only thing is I don't want him buried in the electronics department for the rest of his life. He's got more than that going for him. I'd prefer if he could learn the business-side.

PARKIE

I'm becoming deranged.

FRANK

You were born deranged.

MARY

Don't say things like that Frank. Everybody encourages his eccentricity.

PARKIE

I'm getting out of here.

MARY

You're staying right here.

FRANK

Do what you're told Parkie.

PARKIE

Do what I'm told?

MARY

You've now got responsibilities.

PARKIE

To who?

MARY

To me and your child.

FRANK

You heard the woman Parkie.

PARKIE

This is not funny. You've been plotting against me.

FRANK

It was bound to happen.

PARKIE

What?

FRANK

That's life.

MARY

He'll start Monday.

PARKIE

I won't start Monday.

MARY

Tell him Frank.

FRANK

Okay Parkie. I didn't want it to come to this but I'm going to have to be straight with you.

PARKIE

That'll be a change.

FRANK

Where's the rent Parkie? What's it now Mary? Seven to eight months? I could have had you evicted.

PARKIE

You'll never now. Not with a child on the way.

FRANK

So you're not totally innocent of your rights. What squatter isn't?

PARKIE

I'm no squatter.

FRANK

You can work for me. I'll make the appropriate deductions. Don't worry. You'll have enough left over to support your family and pay the mortgage.

PARKIE

What mortgage?

MARY

On the flat.

PARKIE

What flat!

MARY

This flat.

PARKIE

This flat!

MARY

We're going to buy it.

PARKIE

I can't believe my ears.

FRANK

That'll be a change.

MARY

Frank is going on to higher things. He promised us first option.

PARKIE

On this place?

MARY

It's a start.

PARKIE

You must be mad.

FRANK

Why?

PARKIE

It's built over a river.

FRANK

It hasn't bothered me.

PARKIE

The minute you came in here you changed.

FRANK

So I have. So will you.

PARKIE

It's jinxed.

FRANK

Why don't you leave then?

PARKIE

Where can I go?

FRANK

Here's my shoulder. Cry on it.

PARKIE

Fuck off Frank.

FRANK

Well that's gratitude.

MARY

Don't mind him Frank. One step at a time. Parkie. Frank is your brother. He's willing to be of help. Both of us can steer you in the right direction. It was me who suggested the idea of buying the flat. And who knows? After that? The house?

PARKIE

The house! This ramshackle ruin. The bricks are like sponge. The mortar is flaking away. Only a few months ago it was infested.

MARY

It was never infested.

PARKIE

It was. And it probably still is. They come and go at will.

FRANK

It's your imagination.

PARKIE

It's not my imagination.

FRANK

We've never heard them.

PARKIE

Will no one ever believe me? I've lain awake at night listening to their coming and going; squeaking, gnawing, tearing. Right through the night while Mary slept like a log.

FRANK

Don't buy the flat then.

MARY

He will buy the flat. There are no rats here. There have never been any rats here.

PARKIE

They're fucking well here.

MARY

How do you know they're here?

PARKIE

Because I fucking well hear them.

MARY

He hears them. He hears the house moving. He can hear everything but he can't hear my ...

PARKIE

I said they're fucking well here.

MARY

Anyway I think it's an excellent idea. Frank has agreed to write you some references for the building-society or the bank or whoever we negotiate the loan with.

PARKIE

References?

MARY

Yes. References. With regards to your financial standing.

PARKIE

I don't have one.

MARY

We're going to invent one. Aren't we Frank?

FRANK

No trouble. I'll say he makes X-thousands a year. He'll have to lodge monthly to give a good solid impression. Then he gets the loan. Twenty thousand, thirty thousand over twenty one to twenty five years.

PARKIE

I'll drown.

MARY

Thousands do it.

PARKIE

I'm not thousands. I'm me.

MARY

Frank can dock the mortgage repayments from your salary. The balance he'll send me by cheque.

PARKIE

And what do I get?

MARY

Pocket-money.

FRANK

Family-life Parkie.

PARKIE

You can lump it. I'm not having any of it.

MARY

Don't mind him Frank. He'll never survive on his own.

FRANK

(He sits down.)

It's all about lumping it Parkie. That's what it's all about. Having your loaf and lumping it. Hah. Hah. I like that. Having your loaf and lumping it. Isn't that right Mary? Here. Come and sit down beside me. How's your little lump to-day?

MARY

(She sits down beside him.)

Active.

FRANK

Like a volcano?

MARY

About to erupt any minute.

FRANK

Let's hope it's not to-night.

MARY

Wish it was.

FRANK

Eager to have it over and done with?

MARY

Yes.

FRANK

Bernice gets a bit like that towards the end.

MARY

Speak of the devil. He gave me a kick.

FRANK

Whereabouts?

MARY

Just here.

FRANK

Is the head down?

MARY

According to Nurse Pennycook.

FRANK

Is she doing the delivery?

MARY

Yes.

FRANK

Here?

MARY

I finally got my way. The right kind of persuasion and the gynaecologist agreed.

FRANK

You'll be safe enough. We're only a stone's throw from the hospital if something should go wrong.

MARY

Nothing will go wrong.

FRANK

Is Parkie going to help?

MARY

We'll see.

FRANK

Is he attending classes with you?

MARY

He's afraid of his life to come near me let alone sit amongst expectant couples.

FRANK

You mean he hasn't heard his heart beat.

MARY

Oh he's tried.

FRANK

And you haven't heard?

PARKIE

Heard what?

FRANK

The heart-beat. The baby's heart beat. Have you heard it?

PARKIE

No.

FRANK

It should be dead easy by now. God, myself and Bernice used to sit up at nights listening to it, ticking away. It's fantastic. And you haven't heard the heart-beat? But you have Mary?

MARY

I don't need to. I can feel him kicking his way round the shop.

FRANK

But that's a shame Parkie. You don't know what you're missing. Do you know what myself and Bernice used to do? We used to have great fun positioning the baby, tracing his heart and making out a wall-chart.

PARKIE

A wall-chart?

FRANK

Yes. A sort of map. A tracing on the wall.

PARKIE

What wall?

FRANK

Any wall. Bedroom. Living-room. Bathroom.

PARKIE

You mean you could draw it here?

FRANK

Of course.

MARY

On the living-room wall!

FRANK

Why not?

MARY

Wouldn't the bedroom be better?

PARKIE

No. Here would be much better.

FRANK

Frank. Are you sure?

PARKIE

Let's do it on the living-room wall.

FRANK

You won't be embarrassed will you Mary?

MARY

Why should I be embarrassed? Five years living with Parkie. I'm ripe for anything.

FRANK

Get some chalk Parkie.

PARKIE

Will a felt pen do?

FRANK

Anything that writes Parkie.

MARY

Well. Don't look amazed. It's right up your alley.

PARKIE

What is?

MARY

Listening to and writing on walls.

Go get it for him.

(He goes.)

FRANK

Okay Mary. Over here. Up against the wall.

MARY

My back to it?

FRANK

No. Your side. Like this. Have you got the pen Parkie?

PARKIE

I'm looking.

FRANK

That's it Mary. Right Parkie?

PARKIE

I'm coming.

FRANK

Draw Mary's outline.

PARKIE

Her what?

FRANK

Her profile. Give me the pen. Hold her dress tightly in around her.

MARY

Like this Parkie. Hold it in at the knees.

FRANK

That's it.

(He draws her profile from shoulders to feet.)

Right. Away from the wall Mary.

(She comes away from the wall.)

See. What are you now Mary? Seven months?

MARY

Yes.

FRANK

So that's how much you've grown in seven months. Now you can bring this further by measuring weights and measuring girths but this is quite sufficient. Turn your face to the wall Mary. Parkie draw her outline.

(He gives him the pen.)

PARKIE

Me?

MARY

Yes Parkie. You.

(He hesitates.)

FRANK

Come on Parkie. Give me back the pen. Keep steady Mary.

(He draws.)

MARY

Coward.

Are you finished Frank?

FRANK

Just a second. Right, that's it. We now have two outlines. Two pictures if you like and by means of them we can trace the baby's growth and development.

MARY

(To Parkie.)

How come you didn't think of this? With all your brilliant ideas.

(Parkie absorbed in thought doesn't hear.)

PARKIE

(Excited.)
And the heart?

FRANK

Like the rat!

MARY

There is no rat.

PARKIE

It's movements!

MARY

I said there is no rat.

FRANK

(To Mary.)
Will we?

MARY

Why not? After all I'm just the bag.

FRANK

Where's the stethoscope?

PARKIE

Yours?

FRANK

Yes. Mine.

MARY

You had it the other day. It's behind the recording-deck.
(He goes to get it.)

FRANK

Up against the wall?

MARY

In a different place or the same place?

FRANK

The same place. Side to the wall. You don't mind me feeling your tummy do you Mary?

MARY

Of course not Frank. You're my brother after all.
(Parkie comes back and hands him the stethoscope.)

FRANK

(He gets down on his hands and knees in front of Mary.)
Parkie. Come down beside me.
(Parkie does so.)
Watch what I do. Feel Mary in there. Like this. Just push firmly in.
(Frank demonstrates; feeling with his fingers and palm.)
Be firm but gentle. Right? I feel it. That's the head. Want to have a go?
(Parkie hesitates.)
Come on.

MARY

Go on Parkie. Be a man. Be my man.
(Parkie feels her.)

FRANK

Do you feel the hard part there?

PARKIE

No.

FRANK

Move your hand about a bit. Don't be afraid.

PARKIE

I can't feel anything.

MARY

Jesus you can feel a bump can't you? It's hardly a balloon.

FRANK

Let me. No trouble at all. Don't worry Mary. He'll get used to it. Anyway it's a bit soon yet. Right, the baby is lying crossways or obliquely, head down in this corner, floating, feet up there, that's where you feel the kicking isn't it Mary?

MARY

About here.

FRANK

Around this time they can move about a bit. Next week you might find his head here and his feet there. Okay Mary, just step back from the wall. So, we found the head about here and the feet about there. So, let's think of some symbols. How about a moon for the head, planets for the feet and stars for the heart.

(He starts to draw in symbols.)

Myself and Bernice used to have just great fun. Planets here, moon there, stars; now these we'll have to track.

PARKIE

What are you up to Frank?

FRANK

In against the wall Mary. This time back to it.

PARKIE

You're tracking ...

FRANK

Give me the stethoscope. I should hear his heart about here.

(He listens.)

MARY

Can you hear anything?

FRANK

Not yet. Just a second. Hold on. Yes. I think I've got him. Hold it. It's him Mary. Ticking away. Bounding away. By god he's a healthy fellow Mary. Do you want to listen?

MARY

Of course. He's mine isn't he?

FRANK

I'll hold the stethoscope in position.

(She listens.)

Do you hear?

MARY

Fast isn't it?

FRANK

About twice our rate.

MARY

I've got him. Ripping away. Oh it's marvellous. Just marvellous. Can you imagine he's all alone inside me. Living away in there. All alone. Snugly, warm in my belly. Oh Parkie. Have a listen.

PARKIE

To the baby?

MARY

What else?

FRANK

Go on Parkie. He's waiting for you.

MARY

Come closer. He won't bite you. He'll only love you. Take the stethoscope. Go on. Take it.

(He takes it.)

FRANK

Ready?

PARKIE

Not yet.

FRANK

I'll hold it in position.

(Parkie listens.)

Have you got it?

PARKIE

Not yet.

FRANK

I'll press the stethoscope in a little deeper.

(Parkie listens.)

Have you got it?

PARKIE

I can't hear a thing.

MARY

You can't hear a thing. With your big ears! Here Frank. Let me.

FRANK

Give him a minute Mary.

MARY

Give them back to me Frank. You hold the stethoscope.

(She puts them on and listens.)

There he is. I can hear him. How could you possibly miss him? Oh the dear little man.

(To Parkie.)

Here.

(She hands him the stethoscope.)

Try. Keep the stethoscope in position Frank.

(Parkie takes the stethoscope and listens.)

Do you hear?

FRANK

Give him a second Mary.

PARKIE

I can't hear a thing.

MARY

Frank. Listen to the baby's heart.

FRANK

(He takes the stethoscope.)

I can hear him all right.

MARY

I knew you would. Give him the stethoscope again Frank.
(He takes the stethoscope and listens.)

Well?

FRANK

Patience Mary.

PARKIE

All I can hear is a blowing. A blowing.

MARY

(She steps out from the wall and confronts him.)
A blowing! A blowing! That's all you can hear. What you want to hear. You had no trouble hearing your blooming rat had you? But you can't hear my baby.

FRANK

Okay Mary. Okay. It's only a matter of technique. He'll soon learn.

MARY

I hope so. What do we do next Frank?

FRANK

Just plot where we heard the heart.

MARY

Inside my tummy?

FRANK

It was just about here. Remember? Here on this chart and there on that chart. So you see. We now have two stars and by means of the stars, the planets and the moon we can track the baby's progress.

MARY

Wonderful Frank. Wonderful. It's just like a big constellation. Like the heavens Frank. A great big Constellation of the Baby in the Firmament of the Heavens. Oh you're marvellous Frank. You're absolutely marvellous. You're absolutely marvellous.

(She hugs him, then pulls away and hands Parkie the stethoscope.)
And you. Here's the stethoscope. Maybe you'll have more luck with your rat.

SLOW BLACK OUT

Scene 4

(Lights up. The back-wall is now covered with the progressive charts of Mary's gestation; a veritable constellation of stars. Parkie preoccupied by his Rat Symphony listens and checks re-recordings of it in search of the rat-sounds that have eluded him in the past. As he does so he tracks more outlines of the rat-foetus and becomes increasingly excited and transforms into Mango Parkie in his search for the ever elusive rat. He himself is like a caged rat and as he moves about the smithy he should use the steel-cot as a symbolic cage of both baby and rat.)

MANGO PARKIE

See will she fool me this time. How can she possibly escape? From these steel walls? From these steel wires? It has taken me months to make this trap. You've seen me. Work day and work night. How will she avoid it? How can she? And what temptations I've thrown to her, bait of all descriptions. She's had them all. Nothing. Nothing draws her out. Hand me that hammer. This needs straightening. A few deft smacks will do the trick. Watch your eyes son. Be careful, a spark from this grinder could blind you.

What time it takes. Time in which I should be doing my own work; inventing, designing, building new machines, not hunting this infernal rat that has thrown my life out of gear.

Give me that drill. Watch it. It's heavy. Give it to me. There. Don't worry. I'll show them. I'll bring the rat to them. Won't I? When I've caught her in this steel-cage I'll bring her to them and then we'll see. But I must. I have to. It must. How can she avoid it? Once inside there'll be no way out. But then how do I get her out? How do I tempt her out of there? Tell me. How will I do it? How will I get her out of her nest? She who produces faster than I can destroy. How? How will I draw her out? No food will attract her. None. What? Tell me boy what will I use for bait? I must know. I have no time, I must know now the bait that will draw her out and rid myself of her once and for all.)

(The music dies and Mango Parkie returns to a more subdued but evidently worried Parkie who moves downstage to sit in the armchair close to that of Mary's where she is contentedly and maternally knitting away. She is at term.)

MARY

Look.

(Parkie is absorbed.)

Look.

(He still doesn't hear.)

Look.

PARKIE

Yes.

MARY

(She holds up her knitting.)
This little cardigan.

PARKIE

Just a woollen to me.

MARY

It's not difficult to tell is it?

PARKIE

It looks like a sock.

MARY

Do you even like the colour?

PARKIE

It's too cold.

MARY

Blue is for a boy.

PARKIE

Is that what you're expecting?

MARY

I'd like to start off with a boy.

PARKIE

Start off?

MARY

Yes.

PARKIE

It's a bit premature all the same.

MARY

What's premature?

PARKIE

Thinking like that.

MARY

(She winces.)

That pain again.

PARKIE

You've had it all day.

MARY

I know.

PARKIE

Are you sure it's a sign?

MARY

Sure I'm sure.

PARKIE

What comes next?

MARY

Don't say it or it will.

(She knits. She gets another pain.)

Again .. oh no .. it's coming .. it's coming ..it's coming to the front.

(She holds her side.)

Aaaah .. it is .. it is.

(She doubles up.)

Christ. It's come.

PARKIE

What?

MARY

A contraction. That was one.

PARKIE

Are you sure?

MARY

Yes. It's beginning.

PARKIE

The birth?

MARY

Yes. Call the midwife will you?

PARKIE

Nurse Pennycook?

MARY

Yes. Call her. She'll tell me for sure.

PARKIE

(He gets up.)

What's her number?

MARY

It's in my address book.

PARKIE

Where is it?

MARY

By the phone.

(He goes to get it.)

Have you got it?

PARKIE

I'm looking.

MARY

The first page. In red ink.

PARKIE

756374

MARY

That's it.

PARKIE

She mightn't be in.

(He starts to ring.)

MARY

She will be.

PARKIE

What if she's not?

MARY

She will be.

(She feels pain. She presses her side.)

Is it ringing?

PARKIE

No. It's engaged.

MARY

Try again.

(He rings again.)

Is it still engaged?

PARKIE

Yes.

MARY

Put it down.

(He listens.)

Put it down. You can try in a minute.

(He puts the phone down.)

PARKIE

What'll we do?

MARY

You can get the place ready.

PARKIE

Here?

MARY

The bedroom. I'm hardly going to have it on the floor.

PARKIE

What do you want me to do?

MARY

Get linen from the press and put it on the bed.

(He goes into bedroom. She bends up with the wave of contraction.)

PARKIE

(From the bedroom.)

What else?

MARY

Put on lots of water. We'll need it boiling.

PARKIE

(He returns.)

Boiling?

MARY

Yes.

(He goes into the kitchen.)

And lots of towels. Antiseptic. There's a couple of bottles in the cupboard.

(She doubles over. He returns.)

Ring again will you? Christ that was worse. Jesus .. it took my breath away.

(Parkie rings.)

Is it ringing?

PARKIE

Yes.

MARY

Thank god.

PARKIE

Nurse Pennycook? My wife. Yes. See you.

(He puts the phone down.)

She's on her way.

MARY

Christ .. Christ ..

(She feels something beneath her skirt.)

Parkie .. quick .. quick ..

PARKIE

What?

MARY

A towel. Quick. Fetch me a towel.

PARKIE

A towel?

MARY

Yes. I've just .. I'm all ..

PARKIE

What's wrong?

MARY

(She puts her hand up beneath her skirt.)

I'm all wet.

PARKIE

What!

MARY

(She feels.)

It's not .. I hope it's not .. blood.

(She takes her hand out and looks. Relieved.)

It's not. It's not. Thank god it's not blood. Oh thank god. I got a fright. I thought it was blood.

PARKIE

What's it?

MARY

My waters. I've broken them.

PARKIE

You've broken them?

MARY

Yes. I've broken them. Get me a towel will you?

(He goes to the bedroom to get it. There's a ring at the door.)

It's her.

PARKIE

(From the bedroom.)

Nurse Pennycook?

MARY

Yes. It's Nurse Pennycook. She's here. Oh thank god she's here. Open the door will you?

PARKIE

(He returns with the towel.)

Here.

MARY

Hurry.

(She puts the towel beneath her. He goes and opens the door.)

PARKIE

It's Frank.

MARY

Oh Frank. Oh Frank. I'm glad you've come. Nurse Pennycook. What's happening to her?
We're waiting on her.

FRANK

Isn't she coming?

PARKIE

She said she is.

FRANK

Calm now Mary. She'll be along any minute.

MARY

I can't wait any longer Frank. I've just broken my waters.

FRANK

Not to worry. We still have lots of time. Either fast or slow. You've rung?

PARKIE

Yes.

FRANK

And she said she's on her way?

PARKIE

Yes.

FRANK

Let's get you to the bedroom.

MARY

Would it not be better to go straight to the hospital?

PARKIE

I don't trust this place.

MARY

There's nothing wrong with this place. We're staying.

FRANK

That's the spirit Mary. You've gone this far with home delivery you might as well go the rest.

MARY

At least you've got some experience.

FRANK

Three times with Bernice. Went through it all the way. Here Parkie. Give me a hand. Mary needs some steadying. Take her under the arm.

MARY

What's wrong Parkie? Parkie. Parkie. What's wrong?

FRANK

Let me take him Mary. He just feels faint. Little brother was never used to the sight of gory things. Over here boy. Over here. All right Mary? Can you manage?

MARY

Yes Frank. Yes. I'm all right. Is he all right?

FRANK

Steady now. Steady. Down on the chair. Head between your legs. Down with it. Down. No. No. Don't come up. Keep it down there till the swimming stops.

MARY

Oh Frank. Who's going to get Nurse Pennycook?

FRANK

She's on her way.

MARY

How do you know?

FRANK

Parkie said so.

MARY

He may have gotten the call wrong.

FRANK

He's your husband Mary. Trust him.

MARY

Would you?

FRANK

Let's get you to the bedroom and into bed before she gets here. As soon as Parkie comes round I'll go and get her.

MARY

No Frank. You stay here. I feel safer with you.

FRANK

Okay.

MARY

Bernice. Will you call her up?

FRANK

She's at her mother's.

MARY

Just when you need someone.

FRANK

Stop worrying. Nurse Pennycook'll be here soon and Parkie'll come round.

MARY

Doesn't look like it.

FRANK

Come on now. Straight to the bedroom.

MARY

Oh Frank. What would I do only for you? If Parkie was only like you.

FRANK

You had your chance.

MARY

And chose a screwed up musician.

FRANK

But he's good fun.

MARY

That's the problem. I married him because he made me laugh. Oh Jesus. Oh Jesus. Not another one.

FRANK

Steady Mary. Steady. Big breath. Hold it. Is it gone?

MARY

It's going.

FRANK

Come on. Into the bedroom before the next one.

MARY

What about Parkie?

FRANK

Don't mind Parkie.

MARY

Nurse Pennycook. What'll we do if she doesn't come?

FRANK

She will come. Beside I know a few tricks myself. Remember I did make it to Final Medicine.

MARY

You should have qualified Frank. You would have made a great doctor.

FRANK

Water under the bridge Mary. Come on now. Let's get you into bed.

(They pass into the bedroom come birthroom which is behind the back-drop or wall. Parkie is left outside. He is between two worlds; in one he can hear the cries of Mary and in the other the Rat Music which slowly starts up. The anvil is spot-lit. He gets up. He is distraught.)

MANGO PARKIE

Nothing will work. Nothing. Nothing. I've tried everything. I've racked my brains. I'm helpless against her. Even to the dying seconds of this late hour I've persisted. Haven't I? And now I must give in. I thought, yes, I thought I could avoid his coming. No. No. Like you I don't want him here. Yet, what could I do? I had to, I had to call on him. Have you got everything ready? Water and towel and basin? Yes. You have. Clean sheets and carbolic-soap? Good, we'll need all that. So he said. He's exacting, demanding, domineering. The place he said must be spick and span. My workshop! How else could it be? It's always been. No. No. It's no use. Don't look at it anymore. My invention. My trap. It's failed me. Even me! I've failed me! What? Do you hear? It's him. It must be him. I hear his wagon draw up in the lane. Go see.

Is it him? Let me see.

It is. Who else? At this hour of the night when everything living is dying. Stand over there. Keep away from him. The less we have to do with him the better. Let him do his filthy job and go.

(We hear three loud knocks.)

Come in.

(The knocks we hear again.)

Come in.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

(He comes in. He wears a long black overcoat and carries a black leather doctor's bag, a Gladstone. He leers.)
So, this is the place.

MANGO PARKIE

Yes. This is the place.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

Why all this gimmickry?

MANGO PARKIE

It is not gimmickry. I made them. With these hands.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

You! You are only a man. Who is this boy?

MANGO PARKIE

My apprentice.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

Get rid of him.

MANGO PARKIE

No. He stays.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

He won't like what he sees.

MANGO PARKIE

He can stay.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

He'll frighten and cower.

MANGO PARKIE

He's brave.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

He'll be as sick as a dog.

MANGO PARKIE

I said he stays.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

Let's to work. Take my coat.

(Mango Parkie refuses.)

It won't bite you.

(Like the altar-cloth he drapes it over the anvil.)

So you've failed.

MANGO PARKIE

Why else would you be here?

(The Rat Catcher takes from his bag a long green gown and pair of rubber gloves. Like a priest-surgeon he puts them on.)

RAT CATCHER

Never get a boy to do a man's job.

MANGO PARKIE

What are you insinuating?

RAT CATCHER FRANK

Don't be impulsive. That was your problem.

MANGO PARKIE

Just get rid of the rat and be gone.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

I intend to. Yours is not the only rat. They all get them. Sometime or other. Down along the line. Now, where is the rat-hole?

MANGO PARKIE

There.

(He points to the base of the wall.)

RAT CATCHER FRANK

You've tried ripping it out?

(He goes over to the rat-hole.)

PARKIE

It's in too deep.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

I know. The only way is to draw it out. Scraps and crumbs. What useless bait.

How long has it been here?

MANGO PARKIE

Months.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

So it seems. It's invaded your house.

MANGO PARKIE

(With each of the Rat Catcher's gibes he grows increasingly angry and frustrated.)

Yes.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

You live to serve it.

MANGO PARKIE

Yes.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

To feed and nourish it.

MANGO PARKIE

Yes.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

It keeps you awake.

MANGO PARKIE

Yes.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

You're at its beck and call.

MANGO PARKIE

Yes.

RAT CATCHER

It's destroying your work.

MANGO PARKIE

Yes.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

You want to be independent?

MANGO PARKIE

Yes.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

You want to be free?

MANGO PARKIE

Yes.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

Free?

MANGO PARKIE

Yes.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

Free?

MANGO PARKIE

Yes. Yes.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

Good. Then I can help you.

MANGO PARKIE

How?

RAT CATCHER FRANK

Be patient. Listen.

(Through the Rat Music comes the birth-pangs of Mary.)

The only way. The one and only way is the following ...

(The birth agony of Mary comes to dominate. The spot-light goes out. Frank moves back to Mary; music bridging this transitional gap, the actual birth taking on a shadow-like rat-form within the Constellation.)

FRANK

Won't be long now Mary. Take a deep breath now. Take a deep breath now and push. Keep going. It'll be born before she gets here. Come on. Wait for the next contraction and give a big push. Push. Push.

(Parkie trembles as he witnesses her labour and reacts to the pulsating shadow behind the wall that seems to be coming out of the Constellation.)

MARY

(She screams.)

Help me. Good god help me.

FRANK

You just have it. Take a big breath now.

MARY

Help.

FRANK

Take a big breath now and push.

MARY

Help.

FRANK

Push. Push.

MARY

I can't.

FRANK

You can. Do.

MARY

I can't.

FRANK

Yes you can. Come on.

MARY

No. I want to stop.

FRANK

You can't. Not now. It's too late.

MARY

It's not.

FRANK

It is. There's no turning.

MARY

I won't be able. I'll die.

FRANK

You won't. You'll live.

MARY

I won't.

FRANK

You will.

MARY

It's coming again.

FRANK

Take a deep breath now.

MARY

No.

PARKIE

(In sympathy but restrained, attempting to visualise what's happening behind and within the Constellation.)

No.

FRANK

Keep forcing. The head's coming.

MARY

No.

PARKIE

No.

FRANK

It's coming.

MARY

No.

PARKIE

No.

FRANK

It's just there. Push.

MARY

No.

PARKIE

No.

FRANK

It's just there. Push.

MARY

No.

PARKIE

No.

FRANK

It's nearly there. Push.

MARY

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhh. Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.

FRANK

It's come Mary. It's come. It's all over. The head is born. Everything is dead easy from now on.

(With the birth of the head there is silence. Parkie, shaken, looks and listens to the Constellation. He's terrified.)

MARY

(Feebly.)

Is it all right?

FRANK

Yes. Just a minute now. Everything is dead simple. Just a little push and it slides out. Look.
(The baby cries.)

MARY

(Excited.)

What is it?

FRANK

It's a girl. A baby girl.

MARY

(Joyfully shouting.)

Parkie. Parkie. It's a baby girl. A baby girl. Parkie. Come to me.
(Parkie slowly makes for the bedroom.)

FRANK

Look at her Mary.
(The baby cries.)

MARY

Let me see. Can I hold her?

FRANK

Wait'll I separate the chord.

MARY

Can you do it?

FRANK

Of course I can.
(He does so.)
Now. Hold her close to you. Feel her. Put her to your stomach. Put her to your breast.

MARY

Oh it's marvellous. It's just marvellous. Oh I love her. Oh god. How I just love her.

FRANK

It wasn't that bad after all. Was it?

MARY

What would I have done without you Frank?

FRANK

Would you go through it again?

MARY

Of course I will.

FRANK

With Parkie?

MARY

Where is he Frank? Where's Parkie?

FRANK

I'll get him. He's probably eating his fingers.

(Parkie reaches the bedroom.)

Ah there he is.

(He walks slowly in. We never lose sight of him.)

MARY

Parkie. Look at her. Isn't she gorgeous. Isn't she beautiful?

(Parkie slowly approaches her and the baby.)

FRANK

Another Mary. Let him hold her for a bit.

MARY

Should I?

FRANK

Why not? He'll hardly eat her.

(She hesitates.)

Let him.

(She hands him the baby.)

MARY

Be careful Parkie. Be careful.

FRANK

Don't worry Mary. He'll be careful.

(He takes the baby in his arms.)

MARY

Oh Parkie. Don't let her fall.

FRANK

Of course he won't.

(Parkie comes in with the baby.)

Lie back Mary. Get yourself some rest.

MARY

I don't know how to thank you Frank.

FRANK

Don't worry. You will.

(Lights go out over Frank and Mary. The Rat Music starts up and the rat-like shadow begins to pulsate behind the wall. Parkie slowly approaches the anvil and the music increases as the shadow grows more menacing and dangerous. Rat Catcher Frank appears.)

RAT CATCHER FRANK

I have him.

I have him.

I have him.

He just needs some more baiting.

Some more baiting.

Give me the bait.

PARKIE

The bait?

RAT CATCHER FRANK

Yes. The bait.

PARKIE

The rat?

RAT CATCHER FRANK

No. The baby.

PARKIE

What baby?

RAT CATCHER FRANK

Mary's baby.

PARKIE

Mary doesn't have a baby.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

What has she got?

PARKIE

A rat.

RAT CATCHER FRANK

Then give me the rat.

PARKIE

What do you want the rat for?

RAT CATCHER FRANK

For bait.

PARKIE

To catch the rat?

RAT CATCHER FRANK

Yes.

PARKIE

Mango's rat?

RAT CATCHER FRANK

Yes.

Over here with it.

Over here.

Come.

Place it on the anvil.

PARKIE

On Mango's anvil?

RAT CATCHER FRANK

Yes. On the blacksmith's anvil.

Take his hammer.

PARKIE

His sledge hammer?

RAT CATCHER FRANK

Yes. The blacksmith's sledge-hammer.

Take it. Take it.

Raise it. Raise it. Raise it above your head.

(As he does so the rat shadow and accompanying rat sounds begin to emerge from the wall to encroach the baby on the anvil.)

Get ready. Get ready. Get ready to strike.

Strike. Strike. Strike.

(As both sound and rat shadow seem about to engulf the baby and he to crush its skull he brings the hammer down slowly not being able to execute the final stroke. He shields the baby's body with his own. Frank slips back to Mary's side. Darkness turns to light. He cries out.)

PARKIE

My child. My child.

MARY

Parkie. Parkie.

FRANK

Don't worry Mary.

MARY

Oh tell him to come with the baby Frank. I want to put her to my breast.

FRANK

(Frank goes to Parkie.)

Well Parkie by brother. It wasn't that bad after all.

PARKIE

No. It wasn't.

FRANK

Would you go through with it again?

PARKIE

Maybe.

FRANK

Again and again?

PARKIE

Maybe.

FRANK

Is that its cot?

PARKIE

No. It's cage.

MARY

(From the bedroom.)

Parkie. What are you doing with my baby?

FRANK

He's feeding it to the rat.

MARY

(Laughing.)

Oh Frank.

PARKIE

What rat?

FRANK

Your rat.

PARKIE

My rat?

FRANK

Yes. The one behind the wall.

PARKIE

(He listens.)

Funny.

FRANK

What's funny?

PARKIE

I don't hear it anymore.

FRANK

You don't?

PARKIE

No. I don't.

FRANK

Are you sure you're not hearing things.

PARKIE

No Frank brother. I'm not hearing things.

(He gently places the baby in the steel cage-like cot and pushes it to Mary. Frank looks on..)

LIGHTS DOWN TO BLACK OUT

End of Play