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Heat

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Abstract

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HEAT

by
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Draft 5b

Current Revisions March 2009

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Heat

Draft 5b March 2009
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Dedicated to Aurora (3rd June 2004)

Playmarket Playwright's Agency PO Box 9767, Te Aro,
Wellington

CHARACTERS:

DR STELLA CLARK (K98)
Mid thirties. A Biologist - studying mammals and birds, particularly the mating systems of the Emperor Penguin and the effect of melting sea-ice due to global warming, on their survival.

DR JOHN CLARK (K121)
Late thirties, Stella's husband. A Physicist - studying the ozone hole, thermal waves and the thermal conductivity of sea ice in relation to global warming.

BOB
A lone Emperor penguin 'adopted' by Stella. (Played by a male actor, possibly naked throughout)

VHF - DARREN (Scott Base Manager) can be pre-recorded voice-over or a live feed from the Stage Manager backstage

ICE ROCK FM DJ - American accent, pre-recorded voice-over by the actor playing BOB.

PRODUCTION NOTES:

This play is meant to be performed without an interval.

A hut chained to the rocks, somewhere near Cape Crozier, the Ross Ice Shelf, Antarctica. The hut is filled to the minutest detail with equipment needed to survive 'wintering over'. The entire interior of the hut fills the stage. The walls of the hut form the edge of this world. The only entrance and exit to the hut is through the obscured "freezer door" upstage. Nearby, a single window. Eerie blue light filters in. The outside world with it's changing light and seasons are partially viewed through the window. To the audience nothing exists beyond the perimeter of these walls but empty blackness.

A double bunk stretches along the far wall of the hut. Near to the bunk is a small shelf; on it sit personal effects. On the opposite side of the hut, perched on several shelves in the far corner are the VHF radio system and a video camera.

JOHN and STELLA'S workstation is a small two-sided bench. They have a laptop each. DVD's are viewed on their laptops, a web camera sits on one. Sprawling across the table: a radiosonde, science journals, survival manuals, medical

journals and a small collection of Antarctic poetry. The table is littered in an orderly fashion, with objects of STELLA'S work as a Doctor of Biology; a microscope, thermometers, latex gloves, a penguin muzzle, specimen bags, small containers filled with various poisonous looking substances and a stills camera (wrapped in a baby's blanket). Several small chilli bins are piled under the table with "SAMPLES" stamped on the sides. A small extension to this worktable serves as the dining area.

The kitchen consists of a small sink with several labelled waste buckets underneath (plastics, paper etc), a small gas stove, and several boxes of kitchen utensils, pots and pans. The bathroom and first aid area is next to this. The plumbing is simple, aided by buckets. Off to one side is the toilet: a toilet seat positioned over two buckets labelled 'Poos' and 'Wees'. There is shelving, a mirror and a small drying rack for underwear above. A door separates the toilet from the inside of the hut but one side of the toilet is open, revealed to the audience. A sign on the door reads: "Gentle Annie". Plastered around the walls: an Apsley Cherry-Garrard quote "...this journey had beggared our language: no words could express its horror.." - clashes with a poster of scantily clad bodies on a hot, tropical white sand beach. A road sign on the door reads: "GO SLOW, Penguins crossing".

(Offstage and unseen) JOHN'S research equipment is situated just outside the hut near the main entrance, in a heated annex for drying clothes, hydroponics, storage and 'Puss' the generator - heavy outdoor boots are left here. Any scenes OUTSIDE THE HUT are played far downstage, next to a large block of real ice, direct to the audience under a tight spot of cold light, assisted by sound effects.

Costumes for STELLA and JOHN: Both wear military issue body-tags. Indoor: Thermal underwear, tracksuit pants, and a mish-mash of casual clothes, heavy socks, ugg boots. Outdoor extreme cold: Balaclava, leather gloves, fur-lined leather hats, nose wiper, goggles, outer jacket, Mukluks (Sorrels) - leather boots, salopettes, crampons, ice picks.

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 Carson McCullers for *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe*.

PROLOGUE:

Darkness, creaking and moaning of the ice. Music.

Eerie blue light falls across a huddled shape shivering in the gloom.

BOB squats, alone out on the ice. He turns slowly, arching his neck.

He tips his head back and opens his mouth as if to let lose an unearthly cry. Silence. Bob is mute.

Lights fade to black. Music and whining of the wind swells.

SCENE TRANSITION

SCENE 1: LAT.77*51'SOUTH

February, late Antarctic summer.

Deep throbbing of helicopter rotors and growls of a Hagglands moving across the ice surround the audience. A single bulb lights the interior of the hut. Several provisions boxes sit in a pile in the centre of the hut.

Suddenly the hut door flies open, glaring white light fills the space, a flurry of drift. JOHN, clad in Antarctic overalls, face obscured by goggles, enters holding a provision box. He stumbles, dumping the box on the pile, then lurches out, whistling to a Bruce Springsteen number.

The hut is empty, muffled roar of the helicopter and Hagglands offstage.

A moment later STELLA (similarly clad) enters clutching a box. She dumps this on top of JOHN'S.

JOHN enters with the last box and dumps it on top of the pile.

JOHN

Fuck it stinks out there. Good waft. Did you get it? Fucken penguin guano. Oh, that's right. You're immune.

STELLA

You're lucky, if we lived in the Tristan da Cunhas we'd be doing guano trips. Good for potatoes apparently.

The throbbing sounds of helicopter and Hagglands fade away. STELLA and JOHN stand at the doorway, waving and calling goodbye to the retreating helicopter.

STELLA

Thank you! See ya' mate!

A beat as they eye the bunks. They both scramble for the top one, giggling wildly. JOHN claims it first, STELLA resigns herself to the bottom. JOHN reaches down, they kiss, savouring the moment.

Profound silence.

STELLA

My god. (Beat) It's so quiet.

JOHN turns the transistor on. A burst of music. They dance. STELLA busies herself, sorting the boxes against a checklist. She closes one box, heaving it towards the wall by the kitchen.

JOHN picks up the camcorder, he starts recording, highly excited.

JOHN

Hello to everyone back home, mum, dad.

JOHN swings the camera in Stella's direction.

JOHN

Well, we've finally made it. Kilo98's sorting our provisions. Winter manager Darren Harvey did our last "drop off" from Scott Base this morning, 7 Hours by Hagglands!

STELLA waves briskly at the camera.

JOHN

We're on our own now, won't see another soul for months!

She grimaces playfully at the camera. JOHN shoots the room.

JOHN

Here's the communications desk, VHF radio, our web cam. The VHF links us to Scott Base.

* * * * *

SCENE 3: ANTARCTIC CONVERGENCE

The separate scenes play down simultaneously.

Late autumn, twilight. Sense of mist.

STELLA stands downstage, a tight spot on her face - she's outside with the penguin colony.

STELLA

Everyday. Expanding, ebbing, this low-salinity body of highly-oxygenated water, creeping around us, sinking below the subantarctic surface. A cool, cool darkness, ever flowing Northwards. And now sea ice everywhere; Larsons, the Wordie, Wilkins, Prince Gustav, the Peninsula, all breaking up. Melting like icecream on hot pavement. (Beat) My poor, poor birds, how will you live when it all finally disappears?

The blue light of permanent dusk filters through the window of the hut.

JOHN is upstage, on the VHF radio to Scott Base. The Base Manager's broad Kiwi accent crackles back.

JOHN

Scott Base, Scott Base, this is Kilol21 on Channel Six, how copy? Over.

VHF - DARREN(V.O.)

"Roger Kilol21, Darren here. Howsit going out there in the Bahamas John? Over.

JOHN

Roger Darren, gid'day, temperatures today at minus 10, wind speed one knot, wind-chill factor nil. A balmy day mate, over!

VHF - DARREN(V.O.)

Sounds like paradise, over.

Krilling sounds from the darkness. STELLA pulls out her camera from it's baby blanket. She snaps photos of the Emperor colony.

JOHN

Any news of the Crusaders? Over.

VHF - DARREN(V.O.)

Just heard we spanked the Blues. Over.

JOHN

Fantastic. What's the score? Over.

VHF - DARREN(V.O.)

35, 18: Merhtz slotted six penalties. Over

JOHN

Excellent. Old Merhtzes still proving his worth eh. Cause for celebration. Hey, had your polar plunge yet?

Across the stage STELLA wraps the camera back in the blanket, shoving it into her jacket. She pulls a small record book from a pocket and scribbles notes, fumbling in the cold.

STELLA

Pairbond's A4, C7. Pink plate on lower bill scarred. (beat) Arching necks, cloaca contacting.

JOHN

Data on sea ice temperature variations been hard to get up to now, over.

VHF - DARREN(V.O.)

Be the herbies holding you up?

JOHN

Yeah, been blowing constantly 'til yesterday. Finally got some peace and quiet.

VHF - DARREN(V.O.)

Weather's been foul here too. Hear about the Aussie ship? Aurora got held up, nearly iced in. Had a close call with several growlers as she was leaving Mawsons, bergy bits everywhere.

JOHN

Shit that's a close call. Over.

STELLA

B6, H3. (beat) Two mutual calls, a bow, pat, pat.

Across the stage STELLA is beginning to edge closer to the penguins, trying not to startle them. Sounds of penguin chattering.

VHF - DARREN(V.O.)

What's the numbers like? She know? Over.

JOHN

A thousand and thirtyish last count. Over.

VHF - DARREN(V.O.)

Kilo98 happy with that? Over.

JOHN

Not good, colony's down a bit. There's hope though. She's predicting three quarters will produce eggs.

STELLA

L12, J5. (beat) Neck, bum, neck, high pitched call, cloaca contacting.

The light on JOHN dims, growing hotter on STELLA. She forgets herself. She begins to imitate the penguin's movements and sounds.

VHF - DARREN(V.O.)

Sounds like the horny little buggers have been busy.

JOHN

(laughs) Yeah, it's gonna be a bumper crop. You know she gets this weird kick out of watching them root ...

Across the stage STELLA is completely immersed. A small shadow in the darkness shuffles towards her. STELLA'S reverie is broken; she stops her movement, disconcerted.

STELLA

Bob? Is that you?

She peers into the darkness. A pale child's face seems to emerge from the gloom.

STELLA

(recoiling) Cam?

The face disappears, krilling sounds, distinctly penguin.

Lights down on STELLA.

Sounds of the penguin colony and creaking ice gradually turn into the whine of wind.

Music swells and continues into the next scene.

SCENE 4: FISH, FLOE, FLOWER AND FOG

Some days later. Early winter. Music sounds cooler.

JOHN'S a little bored. He checks temperature gauges by the entrance. STELLA enters holding her clipboard, she's energised. Sounds of penguin hooting offstage.

STELLA
Last of the girls left today. The boys have the clutch now.

JOHN fidgets with the gauges then scribbles the results on the record sheet by the VHF. STELLA looks out the window with the binoculars.

STELLA
Bob's been a bit funny.

Thoughtful silence, STELLA'S absorbed by what she's seeing. JOHN waits. He turns the radio on. Static and intermittent music.

JOHN
And? Why's Bob funny?

STELLA
Oh, he had no mate. Kept being shunted out of the colony. Never seen that before.

JOHN
(peevishly) How do you know "it's" a 'Bob'?

STELLA
He's the one with a scar, on his right flipper.

JOHN
(shrugging) Maybe it's an adolescent.

STELLA
No, he's old enough to breed.

JOHN
(beat) Temperatures dropped again.

STELLA
Hm?

JOHN
Temperatures dropped. Minus 14.

STELLA
(vaguely) That's nice.

JOHN
What's up now?

STELLA
Herbie by the ridge - nah. It's moving away. (beat) Saw a funny thing, the other day ...

She sighs heavily.

STELLA
Probably nothing, just shadows.

The radio interrupts her reverie. The American DJ's voice an urbane drawl.

RADIO (V.O.)

(Static) ... And if you aren't already out there on the ice, drop what you are doing right now and head up to Observation Hill to witness the most stunning sunset ...

STELLA looks stricken, she puts the binoculars down.

STELLA

My god. We almost forgot.

Intermittent radio continues under the dialogue.

RADIO (cont'd)

Let's say farewell to our friendly orange lady. It's April 25th - officially the last day of the sun here in this chilly antipodean deep freeze. We won't be seeing the light from her beautiful face for the next five months.

The song "You Are My Sunshine" (Jimmy Davis) plays down. It crackles, tinny from the small transistor.

JOHN moves to the shrine by the bed, taking the wooden box.

JOHN

It's time.

STELLA

Yes. (beat) No.

JOHN

I thought we discussed this earlier. (beat) Okay, just a tiny bit, like sprinkling pepper.

STELLA

(forcing a laugh) And the protocol? Darren would have a hernia.

JOHN

I've seen a lot worse.

STELLA stops him.

STELLA

Wait.

JOHN

(urgent) C'mon Stella, we need to do this. It feels right -

STELLA

I can't - No, stop John.

JOHN
But it feels right -

STELLA
Not to me. Please.

JOHN hesitates.

STELLA
Lets just read the poetry.

JOHN
(impatient) You know what the counsellor said.

STELLA
(angry) Fuck her.

JOHN
Stella -

STELLA
Yeah, whatever.

She tries to take the box, JOHN pulls it away.

JOHN
(hurt) We had an agreement -

JOHN hugs Cam's ashes, STELLA tries to take the box again, gentle.

STELLA
Well I've changed my mind. I'm allowed to do that aren't I?
Give him to me John -

She places a hand on his cheek. JOHN resists silently.

STELLA
Please ...

They stare at each other. JOHN silently hands STELLA the box and exits. STELLA picks up the poetry book, offering it.

STELLA
(placating) You can still read the poetry ...

JOHN has gone. Immediately a flaming glow lights STELLA'S face, bathing her in rich pink and violet hues.

STELLA
Jim-Boy ...

STELLA holds the box of ashes, pressing it hard into her chest. She stands in the doorway, taking a deep breath. The

sun sinks below the horizon - light travelling down her body.

A shadow passes over the hut. The light through the window creates dark cut-out shapes of her body, silhouetted against deep blue.

Lights fade.

"You Are My Sunshine" (Jimmy Davis) continues to play down on their radio, throughout the transition.

TRANSITION: JOHN enters, shining a flashlight at her. STELLA begins to strip down, laughing, JOHN mirrors her movements.

JOHN

Ohh yeah. C'mon baby ... you're a bad scientist!

They cram onto the lower bunk, giggling, making love under the blankets with the flashlight.

Lights out, music fades.

* * * * *

SCENE 6: THE GREAT ICE BARRIER

Permanent twilight gleams through the window. The ice creaks outside.

Lights up on STELLA waking alone in bed. She's dishevelled and half dressed. She begins pulling on her clothes, ugg boots last.

A banging sound comes from the annex - sounds like JOHN fixing the generator.

STELLA glances towards the sound, irritated. She moves towards the kitchen area. A bright red waste bucket sits under the sink, catching her eye.

STELLA pulls out a used condom. She holds it up, inspecting it. It appears to be broken, frozen into a gooey 'cumsicle'. Some gunk gets on her fingers.

STELLA

Gross!

Fuming she tosses it back into the bin.
Offstage JOHN continues his hammering.

Abruptly she moves to the bathroom area, picking up her small toilet bag. She goes into the Gentle Annie, sits, opens the toilet bag and pulls out a pregnancy test kit. She pees onto the stick, tinkling sounds. She waits, studying the stick for a result.

JOHN can be heard at the entrance.

STELLA fumbles, looking around for somewhere to place the pregnancy kit. She puts it on the toilet shelf and emerges, zipping up the toilet bag. STELLA replaces the bag in the bathroom area.

JOHN enters - wearing a "Silly Hat" he has created from kitchen implements and a stainless steel pudding bowl.

He walks up behind her, showing off.

JOHN

Made a hat.

She glances at him, not impressed.

JOHN

Wotcha up to?

STELLA

None of your business.

JOHN

If you need some space, just say.

STELLA sighs loudly.

JOHN

Okay. I've gotta take a piss anyway -

JOHN enters the toilet. He exits, holding up the pregnancy test stick.

STELLA

(accusingly) You keep breaking condoms.

JOHN grins sheepishly.

STELLA

It wouldn't be good, not here.

JOHN

Not now of course, but once we're home?

STELLA

(hesitates) Yeah.

He gathers her in a fierce bear hug.

JOHN

God, it makes me so glad to hear that. I love you.

STELLA

(squirming) Ditto. I have to go -

She kisses him quickly, then grabs her camera. She heads to the annex, grabbing her outer jacket (dressing offstage). JOHN calls after her.

JOHN

Lets make a night of it. I'll cook, make us a romantic dinner.

He whistles cheerfully as he regards the test stick in his hands, hesitating before he chucks it into the plastics waste bin. He rummages in the kitchen area, pulling out a packet of spaghetti. He looks up, notices the web-cam, smiles up at the camera, suddenly self conscious.

JOHN

Hi Howick Primary, year 8, for whenever you're watching this. Excellent question from Tammy C - about the 2nd law of thermodynamics. It says that heat travels from hot to cold bodies and not the other way around. Heat is really a measure of disorder and, in physics, disorder is often quantified as 'entropy'.

He grabs the spaghetti, holding it up to the camera.

JOHN

Take this packet of spaghetti for instance, uncooked, it's a bundle of aligned pasta sticks. It has low entropy because it shows high order ...

Lights fade on JOHN.

Lights up on STELLA by the penguin colony. She is crouching on the ice, engrossed, filming a large male with an egg.

STELLA

(softly) Yeah baby, that's the one I want.

Sounds of krilling and shuffling. STELLA struggles with the camera, it appears to have frozen over.

STELLA

Damn it. Don't do this to me now.

STELLA tries to clear the lens, cursing. She doesn't notice the shadow emerging from the darkness behind her. A pale face of a boy flickers in the gloom. A soft sound like a child's voice, STELLA turns, peering into darkness.

STELLA

Oh my god.

She holds her breath. The boy appears still, beyond reach in the gloom.

STELLA

(whispers) Cam, is that you? (beat) Sweet Jesus, it is.

STELLA edges closer to the child. He doesn't move. She breathes carefully.

STELLA

Cam, come to mummy.

She shifts closer. The boy appears to shimmer, turning into the shadows.

STELLA

No, don't go.

She reaches for him.

STELLA

Please, stay. I miss you. (smiles) Hey Cammy, Butzy Buh. (beat) Butzy Buh.

STELLA stops suddenly, peering into the gloom, confused.

STELLA

Bob? (disconcerted) Bob? I thought ...

She rubs her eyes. The shadow retreats into darkness. Sounds of a shuffling mass, krilling.

Lights snap back to JOHN as he finishes his speech.

JOHN

So the second law is tied to the progression of time, the unfolding events and the ultimate fate of the universe ... just like spaghetti!

Lights and sound change.

TRANSITION: Lights dim, JOHN opens the hut door, a snowball narrowly misses his head, smashing on the door.

He yells, exiting. Through the open door the audience can see weaving torchlight. A snowball fight - STELLA and JOHN chase each other, giggling, squealing.

* * * * *

SCENE 8: THE GLACIER'S FISSURE

A few days later. Darkness, howling wind.

The inside of the hut is dimly lit by the heater and lamp. STELLA is alone, hanging her big undies on the drying rack in the toilet.

She looks slightly crazy and dishevelled. She ignores the noises from outside even though the hut shudders. A sudden noise at the door makes her start.

JOHN, heavily clad, gropes his way into the hut. A blast of snow follows him. He lurches up against the heavy door, slamming it behind him. They avoid looking at each other, tense.

JOHN
Fucken skidoo broke down again.

STELLA
(offhand) Shit. You okay?

JOHN
Had to leave her there.

STELLA
Where?

JOHN struggles to remove his large gloves and outer jacket.

JOHN
Not far. By the grumpy bog.

STELLA
Fuck you. I would've had to do an S.A.R.

JOHN
Rubbish.

They avoid eye contact

STELLA

It's pitch black out there. You could have -

JOHN

It's just a tiny herbie -

STELLA

I could have lost you.

JOHN

Don't be hysterical. Anyway, someone was accusing me of not doing any field work -

STELLA confronts him

STELLA

And now's a good time to go out there -?

JOHN

(changes subject) Looks like they were chasing Bob around again. (Laughs)

STELLA

Don't pretend you didn't hear.

JOHN

Is it ... (points to camera) turned on?

STELLA

Don't give a pig's arse if it is.

JOHN

Okay, okay.

STELLA

Why do we always go round in circles?

JOHN

A little louder perhaps?

STELLA

It's turned off.

JOHN

I'm not the one who's been in a bitch of a mood lately.

STELLA fumes silently.

JOHN

Fine.

He makes a move for the door, STELLA, half laughing, tries to bar his way. They wrestle for the handle; the wind howls louder outside.

STELLA
(laughing) John! I'm sorry okay?

JOHN
(laughing) Get out of my way.

STELLA
This is stupid.

JOHN
(laughing) Get. Go on.

STELLA
Please - I'm sorry, don't -

JOHN
(attempting to joke) I may be some time.

They become serious, jostling.

STELLA
Please.

He pushes her aside and yanks open the door, snow blasts in again. JOHN tries to shut himself out. They have a tug of war with the door.

JOHN
(overlapping) let go.

STELLA
(panicking) Come on, you can't be serious -

JOHN disappears into the night

STELLA
John!

She stands at the door for a moment, the wind howling. Then she slams it shut, slumping against it. The wind continues to whine outside. A strange krilling sound starts up; the penguins calling to each other. STELLA becomes keenly focused on the sound. Suddenly a scraping noise can be heard from the other side of the door. STELLA starts, she scrabbles to open the door.

STELLA
John?

She yanks the door open. BOB the penguin thrusts himself into the hut.

STELLA
Bob?

He approaches STELLA, aggressive. STELLA backs away, alarmed. He surveys the hut, then collapses. STELLA stares at the naked form huddled at her feet, awed.

Strange, sad music begins under.

STELLA regards BOB cautiously. After a moment she moves to him, reaching out. Slowly, very gently, stroking his back. BOB moves slightly, STELLA withdraws. She strokes again, her actions bolder. Suddenly BOB rears up, pecking viciously. STELLA gasps, clutching her hand. BOB lurches aggressively then stops, swaying, eyes fixed on her.

STELLA springs into action, searches through her equipment, finds a harness, using it to bind BOB'S flippers behind him. STELLA backs away, nervous, groping for the penguin muzzle.

STELLA and BOB struggle, BOB rears, nipping, she muzzles him. BOB squirms and goes limp. STELLA picks up a pair of latex surgical gloves, sheathing her hands ominously. She hovers over BOB with a thermometer, checking the reading.

With one swift expert movement she twists BOB around, sliding the thermometer up his arse. BOB rears up, startled, but STELLA keeps him pinned down. She murmurs comfortingly. BOB settles in her grip.

STELLA pulls out the thermometer, noting the temperature. She frowns, eyeing the secretion on the thermometer. She rubs a little between thumb and forefinger, studies it. She looks down at BOB.

STELLA

It's okay honey. It's okay. We'll get you well again. Just you see.

STELLA puts away her instruments. BOB huddles on the spot, eyeing her warily.

STELLA rummages in the "SAMPLE" bins for a small bottle filled with medication and a feeding tube. In the kitchen area she rifles through a provisions box for a tin of tuna (or sardines), which she opens.

Using an eye-dropper she mixes the medication and tuna. She spoons the goop into the feeding tube, approaching BOB.

STELLA

There's a good Bob. No more biting please.

Cautiously she removes the muzzle. He is still. She holds up the feeding tube, enticing. He arches away, disdainful. She tries again, coaxing.

STELLA

Please Bob; it'll build your strength up. It's not fresh, but it's the best I can do.

BOB eyes her as if she's insane.

STELLA

Sorry, but I can't very well go and catch the bloody stuff can I?

STELLA moves away leaving the food in front of him. BOB sniffs, then tastes it. STELLA watches him struggle, then she moves to help him. He guzzles the food greedily. She begins stroking gently. This time he doesn't bite.

STELLA

(cooing) God, you're starving. Poor baby.

BOB finishes feeding. STELLA gently wipes away the spilt food on his body. He begins to nip at her fingers, and then stops. She continues wiping him down, lovingly.

STELLA

I know what you want. I do. I've been watching you for a while now. Didn't know that did you Bob? I've been watching you too.

Lights and sound change. Time passes.

TRANSITION: Looking like a giant Michelin Man, JOHN enters the hut fully clad. The wind swells with his entry. JOHN and STELLA hold the table as BOB rears up, lurching at them. Suddenly he becomes feral, cat-like. He leaps over the table, removing his muzzle on the way. As BOB lands he becomes penguin again. Lights snap back on.

SCENE 9: TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

A day later. STELLA moves around the kitchen area, rummaging for cans of tuna. BOB pecks curiously at objects in the room. He wears STELLA'S silly hat.

JOHN sits apart from them, at his laptop. He flicks it on. A DVD of an old All Black game plays down (1987 World Cup with Buck Shelford).

JOHN
God, anyone one would think it was human the way you carry on.

BOB becomes riveted by the rugby, squatting in front of the screen. He stretches, keening silently. JOHN tries to avoid him, shifting away.

JOHN
Fuck it's freezing in here. Do we have to have to leave the heater off?

STELLA
Yes. I don't want Bob overheating.

JOHN
Why didn't you tell me about the pregnancy test?

Silence

JOHN
Don't you trust me?

STELLA
Do we have to talk about it now?

She indicates BOB. JOHN looks at the penguin and back at STELLA.

JOHN
What are you afraid of?

Silence. STELLA speaks casually, without looking at him.

STELLA
I forgot to tell you. Bob will need to stay a while.

JOHN
Eh?

STELLA
He's sick. He needs to be separated from the group or else -

JOHN
You're joking. It's been almost two days already Stella, it's bloody long enough.

STELLA

He'll die. I can't risk that.

JOHN

'It' is a bird. It's the laws of nature. (beat) Where are we going to put it?

Turning to him, quietly.

STELLA

We can make the room. He can sleep in here, with us. I thought I'd make a separate area and then you and I can take turns huddling with him -

JOHN

(disbelief) Huddling? (Laughs) Fuck off!

STELLA silent. JOHN starts laughing.

JOHN

God sweetie, you're too much sometimes. (laughs harder) that's why I love you -

JOHN moves up behind her, kissing her neck affectionately, still laughing.
STELLA jerks open a can of tuna.

JOHN

(faltering) You're not - I don't believe this. You'd be breaching your permit.

STELLA

Permit's fine. Bob's tagged.

JOHN

What about the, the Madrid - ?

STELLA

What about it?

JOHN

Within 5 meters, minimal environmental impact, \$10,000 fine, jail for a year -!

STELLA

Don't patronize me. This is different. Bob came to us. He came to us and I will not turn him out.

JOHN

But huddling ...

JOHN shuts his laptop, ending the rugby. He looks at BOB, snatching STELLA'S hat from BOB'S head when she's not looking.

JOHN

(sarcastic) Sure you're not suffering from polar ennui darling?

STELLA shrugs indifferently. JOHN picks up his rugby ball, rubbing it anxiously.

STELLA

I'm talking about taking turns keeping him company. He's a community creature; he needs to feel part of the group. A group huddle. It's the best way to make him feel at home -

BOB has seen JOHN'S rugby ball; he becomes fixated with it, watching JOHN'S every movement.

JOHN

Oh he's at home all right. I am not going to sleep near that fucken putrid pile of feather and shit - Stella, for gods sake, it'll stink us out, we'll get fucken diseases, Hep B, campylobacter, please tell me you're joking, Jesus.

STELLA

(quietly) I'm not going to beg.

JOHN sulks.

STELLA

(firmly) It's important. This is my work.

JOHN fumes silently. BOB shuffles awkwardly towards him, JOHN backs away, still massaging his ball.

STELLA

I've made sacrifices for you.

JOHN

This is not right. It's not natural. You don't have fucken penguins in your bed -

Pointing at BOB with the ball, BOB is riveted.

STELLA

(matter of fact) I used to sleep with our family Labrador -

JOHN

I don't - Labrador? Fuck.

STELLA

You have a cesspit for an imagination.

JOHN

It's a wild creature, a big one, with a razor sharp beak - Bet the E.I. Supervisor would love to hear about this - a wild bird, trussed up, kept captive by an insane researcher.

STELLA flinches. She moves across to the web cam and switches it off.

STELLA

He'll die. You've seen for yourself how he's been rejected -

JOHN

Yeah, wonder why? Probably sodomized some poor innocent chick last summer. He's a rapist, that's why he's been kicked out -

STELLA

Emperors don't do that. On the other hand Adelies have been known to (have homosexual encounters) -

JOHN

Oh, so now he's a penguin. Bet he's a fucken chick molester or something. How do you know this one's Bob anyway? How'd you know you haven't got Terry or Dave or - or - Rupert! They all look the bloody same to me.

STELLA stubbornly dishes up three portions of tuna goop. She holds one out to JOHN. He puts the rugby ball on its shrine, taking the plate.

JOHN

Please, honey.

Looks at the plate, it looks like shit.

JOHN

What the hell's this?

STELLA

Dinner. (Placating) I think it helps if we don't eat um, red meat or chicken in front of him. Please John, just for a little while?

JOHN is speechless. The three begin to eat. BOB keeps shuffling towards JOHN, nudging him. JOHN pushes him away with his foot each time. STELLA is trying to help BOB to feed.

STELLA

(smiling) He seems to like you.

JOHN

Feeling's not mutual.

STELLA

Be nice to him John, please.

JOHN sulks. When STELLA'S not looking, he gives BOB a vicious little kick and moves across the room to finish eating in silence. He puts the plate on the table. BOB pecks at it curiously.

Lights and sound change.

TRANSITION: JOHN retires onto the top bunk. STELLA gets a blanket. BOB and STELLA stand opposite each other, downstage, mirroring movements. They kneel together into a huddle, heads and necks arched over each other.

* * * * *

SCENE 14: INCUBATION

Inside the hut JOHN and STELLA stare balefully at furniture, avoiding each others gaze. They sit at the small dining table, a bottle of bourbon almost empty between them, their speech slurred.

BOB attempts to shuffle closer to JOHN. Each time he touches JOHN, JOHN pushes him away with his foot.

JOHN

So we're not talking.

JOHN grabs the bottle and swigs hard. STELLA snatches it back, wiping the top aggressively on her sleeve. She swigs.

STELLA

What's to talk about.

JOHN

Us.

STELLA

What's the point. All you do is whine, whine, whine. I'm the one that does all the work around here. You think it's easy taking care of him?

JOHN

Kick him out -

STELLA

You'd like that wouldn't you. Maybe you should give me a hand sometime instead of bitching -

JOHN

Listen to yourself -

STELLA

It's always the same. You think your work's more important than mine. You leave the hard stuff to me -

JOHN

What are you on about?

STELLA

Look at him, he's sick. He's been rejected by his colony. Cam needs us, we need to pull together -

JOHN

You just said Cam -

STELLA

I did not.

JOHN

You did too.

STELLA

Whatever. You know who I'm talking about.

She looks at BOB.

STELLA

Don't you worry Bob, I won't let the mean man kick you out. No I won't. Mummy loves you, she does, yes she does ... Mummy (laughs) Silly me.

JOHN stares at her.

JOHN

Nothing's going to bring -

STELLA

(snaps) I know!

Silence. JOHN breaks it.

JOHN

We all know you love your work Stella, but this is beyond a joke. That bird's been squatting in our hut for weeks -

STELLA

Days.

JOHN

What?

STELLA

Days. Not weeks. (beat) I need some space.

JOHN

Like I said, kick him out and we'll have our space back.

STELLA

Not from Bob.

Silence. JOHN registers.

JOHN

Jesus.

STELLA

Bob's not going anywhere. Not until winter's over.

STELLA grabs the bourbon bottle and the video camera and lurches towards the Gentle Annie.

JOHN

Stella -

STELLA

Leave me alone. I'm going to talk to someone who understands.

She staggers into the toilet, slamming the door behind her.

JOHN stares at the closed door for a while. He looks down at BOB, still nudging his leg.

JOHN gets to his feet, unsteady. He pulls on his boots, outer jacket. He rummages through the grog box, pulling out another bottle of Bourbon. He cradles it. BOB sidles up to him. JOHN is about to close the box when he spots the condoms. He pulls a packet out. Looks at BOB.

JOHN

After you.

JOHN and BOB exit.

Lights cross fade to STELLA, sitting on the toilet. She struggles, starts recording, addressing the camera.

STELLA

(Slurring) Ap-Apeno (correcting herself) Aptenodytes forsteri ... Bobby baby. You know, I can't understand why you like John better than me.

STELLA

I'm the one that feeds you, cleans up your shit, I do so much for you ... god fuck-fucken damn it!

She swigs the bottle ferociously, then slumps, passing out against the toilet wall.

Lights fade on STELLA.

TRANSITION: A short while later. Music swells. The strange moaning and creaking of the ice can be heard, echoing eerily.

Lights fade up on the interior of the hut.

Piles of blown-up condoms are suddenly thrust through the entrance. JOHN staggers in with BOB, very drunk.

JOHN

We're home darling. Your boys are back.

His arms are full, brimming with blown-up prophylactics. They scatter about the hut like macabre balloons. JOHN leans awkwardly against the bunk struts, blowing up another condom. BOB waddles around him, delighted, attempting to sit on each one, popping them as he does.

JOHN

If you can't beat em, join em, eh Bob?

JOHN sits on one too, popping it, laughing raucously.

BOB pounces on another balloon, anxiously trying to squeeze it under his brood pouch. BOB becomes increasingly frustrated as the condoms burst. JOHN picks up the Bourbon bottle for a good swig. He regards BOB for a moment.

JOHN

You're a strange one, aren't you?

He offers the bottle to BOB. BOB sniffs it curiously, tastes the liquor.

JOHN

My dad taught me this old poem about you guys once, how'dit go again? (mock Irish accent)

"O Creature which in Southern waters roam,
To know some more about you I would wish,
Though I have seen you in your limpid home,
Don't think I can rightly call you "fish"!
To taste your body I did not decline,
From dainty skimmers fingers coming fresh,
'Twas like show leather steeped in turpentine,
But I should hardly like to call it "flesh"!"

He laughs raucously. BOB arches his neck in response. JOHN sobers for a moment.

JOHN

'Spouse that was a bit insensitive. (Sincerely) Sorry mate.

He places a condom over BOB'S beak, BOB shakes his head, the condom goes flying. JOHN laughs, ruffling BOB'S head affectionately.

JOHN
Not such a bad bird after all.

STELLA emerges from the toilet holding the video camera and nursing her head. JOHN stares at her hungrily. She stares at the broken condoms littering the floor.

STELLA
Bob?

The VHF crackles into life. All three stare at it.

VHF - DARREN(V.O.)
Come in Kilo191? Roger John, you there? It's Darren, you got your daily stats yet? Over.

JOHN rushes to the VHF, fumbling with the clipboard next to it.

JOHN
Roger Darren. Uh, yeah. Somewhere. Here, here. Temperature today, minus 42 - sorry mate, 22 (struggles).

BOB sidles up to his leg.

JOHN
(Under his breath) Piss off. Look I don't have any more rubbers.

STELLA puts the camera down, picking up JOHN'S rugby ball, absent-mindedly playing with it.

VHF - DARREN(V.O.)
How's Kilo98? Over.

JOHN
Stella's okay. She's right here. Want to chat? Over.

VHF - DARREN(V.O.)
Roger John, put her on.

STELLA signals no, but JOHN holds the radio piece out. She lurches over, takes the VHF. She puts the ball on the floor under her foot, rolling it. BOB immediately waddles over to investigate. JOHN hovers behind her.

STELLA
Darren. Over.

VHF - DARREN(V.O.)
Hey Stella, you've been very quiet lately. We were wondering why your web cam's been switched off?

STELLA looks over at BOB. He has claimed the rugby ball, perching on it. He tucks it protectively beneath him. JOHN hasn't caught on.

STELLA
(giggling) Technical hitches, wiring. No biggie, we'll sort it. Over.

VHF - DARREN(V.O.)
Just that one of the guys thought he saw a penguin in your hut the other day. Over.

STELLA
Roger Darren. A tagged bird followed me back. He was eggless. Got really broody but he's found a surrogate egg now, so all's well. Over.

VHF - DARREN(V.O.)
Must be a relief, over.

JOHN looks down at BOB squatting happily on the rugby ball.

JOHN
What the fuck?

JOHN tries retrieving it but BOB instantly flares up, pecking viciously.

JOHN
Get off. Pesky bird. Get the fuck off my ball!

VHF - DARREN (V.O.)
Stella copy - what's up? Over.

STELLA
Copy Darren, sorry what was what? Over.

BOB nips fiercely at JOHN again.

VHF - DARREN(V.O.)
What's all that noise? Over.

JOHN
Stella!

STELLA
Oh John's watching footie, balls gone off side. Hey, gotta go, he's losing it. Over.

STELLA switches the VHF off.

JOHN
FUCK! My ball. Stella, make him give my ball back!

STELLA
Nup.

JOHN

What do you mean nup?

STELLA

It's his now. Losers keepers.

They stare at BOB as he squats, settled protectively over the ball, a strangely natural spectacle.

TRANSITION into bedtime, while STELLA and BOB prepare to sleep/huddle, JOHN moves to the toilet. Lights down on STELLA and BOB.

Lights up on JOHN.

JOHN sits in the toilet, sulking. Underwear is strung along a drying rack above his head. A large, ugly pair of STELLA'S hang in his face. He snatches at them, throwing them onto the floor. (Beat) He picks them up, sniffing gingerly. Then he buries his face, breathing hard.