

## The Nut

Petra is standing a little way from a farmhouse which she is renting for a few weeks. Some distance behind her is a long, high basalt rock known locally (Stanley, NW Tasmania) as 'The Nut'.

Petra (thinking of her husband and children) They'll be in the air, in sight of the mainland by now, and I've put myself here, in sight of the rock. (She turns to look at it.) The Nut. You need to be nutty to live here, they say, because they're proud. The nuts are those who don't cling to it as they do. I'll paint it, and once I've gripped its secret, I'll go.

The Nut is suddenly almost on top of us, and Petra's setting up an easel and a piece of board.

Petra I'll steal it from itself, and when people want to know what it's like, they won't need to come here, they can look at my picture. (laughing) Isn't that so, my nut?

A fisherman heading for the boats at the jetty stops for a look.

Peter What's that you're doing?

Petra You know very well.

Peter Made a good start.

Petra Come back when you've caught some fish and you can tell me how well I've done.

Peter You've got skill. We rely on luck.

Petra Rubbish. You know where to fish.

Peter (laughing) But we never know if they're there or not!

Petra So why don't you go anywhere the winds take you?

Peter Might be a good idea, but we're stuck in the mud.

Petra You need to escape.

Peter Maybe, but there's no way to do it ... that I know of.

Petra I'll show you how to paint.

Peter What good would that do me? I'm only a fisherman ...

Petra Never say you're only anything. If we put limits on ourselves, we're tying ourselves down.

Peter You might have something there, but I'm late. Seeya in a couple of days!

Petra Here!

Peter Anywhere ya like! Wherever ya paintbrush takes ya!

He's gone, and Petra is left comparing The Nut with what she's made of it.

Petra Only a likeness, nothing more. I haven't got it yet! Back to the farm, and back again tomorrow.

She disappears, and The Nut remains. For a few bars, the music describes the place by night, burdened by itself and beset by wind. There is a tidal movement, too, and when Petra returns, the tide is out, the water she's looking at is shallow, and the waves have given way to ripples through which she can see the sand.

Petra It's changing all the time. That's how it stays the same. (She takes up her brushes.) All right, my Nut, how are you today?

Peter (returning) Talking to yourself!

Petra There was nōone else.

Peter I was here all the time. Where you're standing, that's a part of me.

Petra Shall I move?

Peter No, I like you being there.

Petra You know why I'm here?

Peter No, but I'm pleased.

Petra Good!

Peter (altering) A man feels challenged when a woman puts herself in his place.

Petra This place is a mystery to me, and I need to be at the heart.

Peter (a little uncertainly, and with some aggression) So you're standing in my spot.

Petra (cheekily, boldly) I've taken possession.

Peter I might have to take possession of you.

Petra (appraising him for what he's proposing) You're very confident. You've never faced your own limitations.

Peter I never thought I had any ...

Petra ... until?

Peter ... I saw you.

Petra What did you see?

Peter Someone who wanted to see into me in a way I'd never seen myself.

Petra And that made you curious?

Peter (stepping closer) I am.

Petra The tide's out. It's a moment when the world feels weak.

Peter I'm going to my wife, now. She'll have seen the boat get in.

Petra You're married?

Peter You've got a family. I saw them, before they went away.

Petra (considering him) You knew I was on my own.

Peter I had to get on my own to be with you.

Petra You're not there yet, if you're going to your wife ...

Peter I'll be back tonight. Don't you let me down.

Petra (folding her easel) I'm going now.

Peter Tonight!

Petra I'll paint you, and tonight I'll show you what you are.

Peter (going) In the dark?

Petra That's when we know each other best.

Both leave. The day stretches out, the tide comes in, the sky darkens, and the music considers the rock, again. Eventually Petra returns, and sits on the rock she associates with the man she's agreed to meet. She has with her a board which she's painted during the day.

Petra (of her painting) It's too dark to see. He won't know what I've done with him.

Peter (coming on) She thinks I'm drinking. That's all right. She'll find out in a while.

Petra She only exists if she joins us here. Lie beside me.  
Peter I've wanted this all my life.  
Petra What, exactly, do you want?  
Peter To be inside myself and outside myself at one and the same time.

As Petra answers him, The Nut moves further away until we see it as we did at the beginning, from a couple of kilometres distance; the two voices, though, are still close to us.

Petra See how I painted you.  
Peter The rock's got my face.  
Petra You've become the rock.  
Peter I want to go away with you and lead another life.  
Petra Something you cannot do.  
Peter Then you can live inside the rock, the spirit that emerges, the fairy that hovers, and people will imagine they've seen you, but only I can touch ...  
Petra Hold me now.  
Peter This will change us.  
Petra Then let it happen. I want to be inside you. I've always lived on the outside, looking in, and I want to be within, within, within ...  
Peter Together with me, our boundaries gone ...  
Petra Waves, winds, falling rain, sunrise, clouds, boats drifting past, fishermen coming home, lamps and torches, stories, boasts and lies ....  
Peter ... and the truth of entering each other ...  
Petra ... to find out what we are!

Their loving preoccupies them for a time.

Peter The rich man doesn't know what it is to be rich until he's given it all away.  
Petra A woman doesn't know what a man is until she's held his life in her hands.  
Peter Let me live. I want to be with you.  
Petra Pin me to the rock. Don't let me fly away.  
Peter I'll be at sea tomorrow night.  
Petra I'll be here when you come home.  
Peter We'll have an audience if we do this by day.  
Petra Then come to my farmhouse and we'll be alone.  
Peter We'll come here at night ...  
Petra ... leaving crushed grass in the morning ...  
Peter We wouldn't be the first to do that, you can take it from me.  
Petra Nor the last, I dare say ...  
Peter It'll go on ...  
Petra ... so it's what we make of it that matters. I'll paint you again, tomorrow, Peter, while you're getting ready for the sea ...  
Peter ... and when I come back, you'll show me what I am.  
Petra You're trembling ...  
Peter I'm afraid ...  
Petra What's your wife's name?  
Peter Julie ...  
Petra You're thinking of her now.

Peter           She's close to us. I can tell.

Julie appears, climbing up the side of The Nut.

Julie            (claiming her husband) Peter.

Peter says nothing.

Petra           His silence tells you he's not yours.

Julie           Peter. Come home with me now. She doesn't belong.

Peter           That's why I want to stay.

Julie           Then find your own way home. There may be nothing there.

Julie leaves.

Peter           (desperately) It doesn't sound much of a threat to you. But it's the ultimate, believe you me.

Petra           So what are you going to do?

Peter           I'll take every risk I can, and I'll find out what my fate's to be.

He leaves, and after some ominous rock-music, Petra leaves too, while The Nut continues its brooding on the foolishness of humanity, clustered about it on its away-from-the-sea side.

Julia           (in one of the houses of the town) The boat got in an hour ago. The men are finishing at the pub.

The Nut       (a bass voice) They're pressing me, they're murmuring, and filling the air with sighs.

Julia           He was like that with me. For a while. She's a tough-nut to crack. She knows more than he does.

The Nut       She wants to take him away.

Julia           ... and he's afraid. That's where I've got him. But if I hold him, and she goes, what's left for him? She'll have emptied him, and sucked him dry.

The Nut       He's scared. I can feel his fear.

Julia           He knows she's draining him, and he's giving himself away. He thinks if he gives her everything, she won't keep asking for more. Fool.

The Nut       Humanity. Is lost when it tries to go away. You must cling to what you know.

Julia           He knows nothing but you ... and me.

The Nut       (musing humorously) An empty horizon, then, it seems.

Julia disappears, darkness takes over, then the sky of late afternoon, at the top of The Nut. Petra's there, with her easel and a painting, and Peter's lying on the grass.

Petra           I won't know until I show it to friends who've never been here.

Peter           I want you to leave it with me.

Petra           Your wife would throw it in the fire.

Peter           I'd keep it on the boat.

Petra           It'd never have a home.

Peter           It'd be like us, then.

Petra           We have a home, Peter. It's in creation every picture I paint ... every time we merge our minds ...

Peter           Lie beside me love. You woman with my name!

Petra (Getting on the grass with him) You're another form of me. You're the rest I never knew until you gave me my completion. Finding you is being allowed to love myself.

Peter We had a storm last night. Robbo said, we'll ride it out here. The wind's in the wrong quarter to head for the Nut. So we headed into the wind, which is the roughest way to survive, and half a dozen times we were swallowed up in water and I thought we wouldn't get out ...

Petra Could you feel me close to you? I knew you were in trouble ...

Peter I thought, even if the boat goes down, I'll grab a mast and stick to it until I see the land, and then I'll swim! You know what? Never for one moment did I feel weak. What they say about faith is true. I felt invincible because I had you. I was there, on the ocean's terms, and I had something pulling me through. I had you, my love, your love, your belief in me, your strength, your arms, your desire, the power of your will, pulling me home.

Petra I suppose, if you think about it, fish don't have a home, except the whole wide sea.

Peter Humans do, because we belong on land, and there's some part of the land that's where we belong ...

The music overwhelms their voices for a short time, reminding them and us of the ambivalence of their situation: The Nut is the

home of their love, and yet it is also the embodiment of the town's identity, and Peter is a part of the town, with a tiny house and a wife who shares it with him. There are also the fishermen he works with who can, perhaps, imagine themselves 'having a fling' as they would call it, but would never leave to be with an outsider. Some lights go on in the town, and a couple of cars move about, headlights flickering between the buildings.

Peter What's going on down there?

Petra (joking) Julie's sending out a search party?

Peter She knows where I am.

Petra They might be going to my house.

Peter They know where you are too.

Petra Should we feel scared?

Peter The forces haven't gathered, yet, to strike us down. They will, but tonight we're safe.

Petra Lie in my arms, then, and give me the skies above ...

Peter ... the water that nearly drowned me, the earth that makes us safe ...

Petra It's the combination, isn't it ...

Peter ... nothing pushed out of sight ...

Petra ... nothing denied ...

Peter There's a price to be paid for everything ...

Petra ... but ...

Peter ... if we pay it, and we're prepared to, then ...

P & P ... we can make the whole world shake with love!

They love, and the music tells us that the sea is swirling, the stars are blazing, and the earth where they are loving, the big basalt Nut,

is trembling with and for them. The lights continue to move below them for a time, and then they go out, leaving the scene in darkness. Then dawn breaks, we're on a jetty, and Peter is with three fishermen: Robbo, John, and Nick.

Robbo        Get any sleep?  
Peter        None of your business mate.  
Robbo        I can't put you at the wheel if you're going to nod off.  
  
Peter        Nodding off's the last thing I've been doing lately.  
John        Makes it all the more likely, then.  
Robbo        You're a fool, Peter, a fuckin fool.  
Peter        Whatever you say.  
Robbo        You've got everything you want. Lead a normal life, that's all you need to do.  
  
Peter        You have got no idea of what's driving me.  
R,J & N      No. No.  
Peter        (feeling desperate) If you want to throw me overboard, wait till we're too far out to swim.  
  
Robbo        We've been together for years. Good times and bad. We've lost you, and we don't like what's happening. Julie's one of us.  
  
Peter        She's a part of me. I can't break away ...  
Nick        (sarcastically) ... no matter how hard you try!  
Peter        I'd like to flatten you for that!  
Nick        I don't mind if you have a go!  
Robbo        Calm down you bastards. When we get out to sea, Peter, you've got to tell us what you're feeling. As often as you like, and we'll stop if we can, to listen.

Peter        I must owe you something, but you won't like what you hear.

It's the middle of the same day, and Petra is painting in her rented farm house. The Nut can be seen in the distance, and again on the board she's working on.

Petra        Painting is a prelude to loving, and a memory that lingers after. My life's got a centre now and I'm mining it for all it's worth. His wife says I'm selfish; well, what's wrong with that? We have to live by the truest thing that's in us, and that's what I'm doing now. He's got to see this. Peter!

He's there, unexpectedly. He's wild, desperate, confused.

Peter        Let me go! Let me go, for God's sake!  
Petra        Who have you had in your ear?  
Peter        I've been on that boat for years. They know me like the back of their own hands.  
  
Petra        They hate me, because I've broken in. You're mine, now, Peter. We've got the same name, did you notice?  
  
Peter        Let me go. Stop hanging onto me. Let me be as I was.  
  
Petra        You're changed, my love. You've looked into my soul, it was a mirror, and you saw yourself, properly, the very first time.  
  
Peter        Give me back to myself!  
Petra        (passionately) If I give you back, I destroy myself!

Peter Then die, if you love me, and let me live!  
 Petra (shocked) Die?  
 Peter Go away. You've got a family. Find them, follow them.  
 Petra No!  
 Peter Then let's die here, both of us, this very day. I've got a gun.  
 Petra No!  
 Peter Then what ... I've got a question in my mind so big, it's not in my power to say!  
 Petra Then talk about something else.  
 Peter What else is there?  
 Petra (firmly) There's always love.

This drives him mad. He puts his hand to his empty, wordless head, and he slumps on a sofa, a bed, or even the floor.

Petra Peter. Why have we got the same name?  
 Peter (limply) We were made for each other.  
 Petra I want to have your child.  
 Peter What does it matter, when we're lost?  
 Petra The child won't be lost. The child will find itself, when it comes here. A man with your name or a woman with mine, will see this rock – our rock, Peter – and know that she, that woman, or he, that man, was brought into being here. The rock will last forever, and he, that man, or she, that woman, will find itself in him.

Peter It's only a bloody dead rock! What good can it do for us?  
 Petra We've brought it to life, Peter, and it will live in our child. Is it unsafe to go there tonight?  
 Peter Yes. That's why I'm here.  
 Petra Tell me how much you love me.  
 Peter To the point where I wish I was dead. I'm as silly as that.  
 Petra You think you're mad, but your madness has made you sane.

She leads him into the room where she sleeps, and after they've gone the music ponders what they're doing; in particular, Petra's fancy – or is it more realistic than that? – that their lives and the resolution of their situation, is somehow a function of the rock where they've loved on many nights before. When the darkness lightens, we are again on the jetty, near the fishing boats. Robbo, John and Nick are there, with Peter; they are about to go to sea.

Robbo Your lady's gone. (Peter is silent.) Or didn't you know?  
 Peter How would I know what's going on? My life's been taken over.  
 John She was seen at Devonport. They reckon she flew out a couple of hours later.  
 Nick Bloody good riddance.  
 Peter Gone?  
 Nick (vehemently) Gone!  
 Peter Gone?

Nick           Gone!

Peter           Gone?

R, J & N       Gone. Gone mate, gone.

Peter           If she'd taken me with her ...

Robbo          What then, mate? What then?

Peter           I'd be dead.

Nick           But she didn't take you ...

Peter           So I'm dead then, aren't I? Dead.

John           (exasperated) Tip yourself over and have a look, willya? Scratch yourself and see how you sound!

Peter           I can't sing.

Robbo          Who gives a fuck? Here's Julie.

Enter Julie.

Julie           Pete?

Peter           No.

Julie           Pete?

Peter           No.

Julie           (tenderly) We're both still here, Pete.

Peter           Something's been stolen.

John           Everything looks the same to me.

Peter           Everything's been changed.

Robbo          Julie? See if you can bring him back the way he was.

Julie           Pete? What's happened, darling? What's she taken away?

Peter           A child.

There is a long silence between the five of them, with a sombre orchestral musing.

Peter           (to Julie) I can't face you after what I've done.

John           None of us can face each other.

Robbo          We've got a boat to get into the water. We've got a load of fish to catch.

Nick           (glaring at Peter) And we're a man short! A fuckin screw loose, you might as well admit!

Julie           I've worked on boats. I'm coming with you.

Nick           And leaving him behind, is that the plan?

Robbo          I don't think that's what she meant, mate ...

Julie           Pete's coming with me. When he sees me working he'll remember what to do.

Robbo          Come on then. It's the only thing to do. (reminding a helpless Peter) Waterproof, mate. Boots. All aboard. Thanks Julie. Let's see how we go today.

They           get on the boat, and it heads out to sea. High above, in a plane, Petra looks down on the water.

Petra          They closed their ranks. They knew they could shut me out. Make it impossible for Peter, make it impossible for me. I withdraw. There's no winner for now. But in twenty years this little one will go back, enquiring, looking for herself. What will she decide? To live there, or to fly away? I'll be a hollowed-out rock, by then, as her father is now, and she'll be firm. Her identity will need her to be hard. To be hard, we need to be soft and to be soft we have to be hard. How impossible we are, but do you hear me Peter? Are you listening, Peter, on the water down there? I'm

proud of what I've done. I'm proud of what I made you do. And when our little one comes to find her father, and meets a hollowed out man with the leathery skin of sailors, you'll be proud, too, of our passion and what it's bringing into the world. Goodbye Peter, for now.

The plane and the boat on the ocean fade from sight, there is a brief glimpse of The Nut, and then there is nothing but the expectation aroused by Petra's final prophecy.