

## **Mothers of the Nation**

(When I Hear My Baby Cry, I Hear It Sware)

On a newly-built maternity ward two babies are born; one a child of the estates, one the child of the professional classes. Their worlds meet and collide. From two ends of the social spectrum the mothers look across their children and see themselves afresh.

1. Opening Sequence: Sound of a womb from baby's point of view (as re-created in "Baby-Relaxation" tapes). Peace. Music..... Sudden crash of water and yawning light. Two women giving birth. One, Alison, with an encouraging and weeping husband, breathing deep, obeying orders; the other, Kelly, sending boyfriend out, swearing, screaming, ripping sheets. The babies are born. They cry.
2. On the ward. Alison has Baby-Relaxation cd on "It makes him feel at home in the world". Quiet. The women talk. Both calling their sons "David". United in appreciation of each other's child and their own. The distinctions between their lives are lightly drawn.
3. Their partners visit: Richard, a surveyor, and Jason, a teenage dad. Their idle chat draws the distinctions clearer. Different worlds.
4. The women alone with their babies. Swap magazines. Conflict deepens.
5. Their mothers visit: Kelly's mother takes offence at the other mother's looks. The conflict becomes open and aggressive. Alison and Kelly are drawn in. Builds and ends on the babies crying.
6. Next day. Kelly asks Jason to take baby for a little walk. Alison is elsewhere with a consultant. Kelly plays the Baby Relaxation cd for a moment. She takes it out and scratches it with a key. "My baby can't be "at home in the world". Neither can yours". She puts it back and plays it laughing. It jumps and distorts. Over this Jason is talking to his new son and promising the world. Crying. Kelly turns it off and climbs back into bed.
7. Later. Alison and Kelly talk again. Understanding. Kelly regrets that her baby will never get what Alison's baby will. Alison says he may. Tries to give hope. Education. Kelly laughs at the idea. Feels like she's "trapped". "Me baby's born in a prison. When I hear him cry, I hear him sware." She wants him to have everything.... but he won't. Alison defends her life. Kelly isn't attacking her. "It's just.... In the modern world.... Everything's shiney and young.... But still not for us all."
8. Alison is going again for an appointment with the consultant! ("How come I've not seen him once? There something going on?") She intends to leave her baby in the nursery. Kelly asks her to leave him with her. Alison doesn't want to but agrees in an attempt to show trust. She goes. Kelly picks up Alison's baby and talks to it. Sings: Hush Little Baby. "Daddy is gonna buy you everything. I hope you appreciate it, cos there's another little David, gonna get crap." She lies Alison's baby beside her own. They stir. She pushes away in the cot.
9. Later. Richard arrives with more flowers. The bay is empty. He reads Kelly's magazine. Laughs. Alison returns. The baby is gone. Where did she leave it? With Kelly! A row. Alison is hysterical. Kelly has taken the

baby. "I know she hates us!" Richard saw Kelly at the end of the ward. By an open window. Staff are running to the screaming. Alarms are sounded. Panic. They are searching for Kelly. Richard leads Alison to where he has seen Kelly. They are running towards her. Screaming. Alison accuses Kelly. Kelly defends herself. Richard joins in. ("What did ya think I'd do to a little baby!") Their shouting wakes the babies. They are crying. Alison takes hers back to the bay saying she's going to discharge herself.

10. Kelly holds her baby. She is crying. Shocked at what Alison believed she was capable of. She feeds the baby. The window is still open. A smell like pork crackling is coming through. She talks to her child. "People like that are scared of people like us.... Cos we've got nothing. Nothing but this milk to give ya." "Do we know what we're doing when we bring ya in? Do we know?" A nurse closes the window... keep the baby out of the draft... besides.... That's not pork crackling... it's the hospital incinerator."
11. Alison sends Richard home for the night. She intends to leave first thing in the morning. Alone she feeds her baby who has begun to cry. She puts the Relaxation cd on. It jumps and distorts horribly. She tells the baby to listen and leaves it running. "You're in the world now, David."

## **John Doona**