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WHAT POLITICAL AND THEATRICAL CONSIDERATIONS ARE REQUIRED TO  
WRITE A PLAY INSPIRED BY ELIZABETH COLENZO AND THE VICTORIAN  
SUFFRAGISTS IN ORDER TO SHOW THE CONFLICTS OF EMANCIPATION  
FOR 21ST CENTURY WOMEN IN POSITIONS OF POWER.

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of**

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## *Abstract*

I am intrigued with the question of whether 21<sup>st</sup> century liberated women who have broken the glass ceiling are able to sustain positions of power within current social and political contexts. In planning this thesis there were two objectives. Firstly, I wanted to see whether I could write a New Zealand play that showed some aspects of the cost of emancipation through the social and political powers enacted upon both 19<sup>th</sup> century and 21<sup>st</sup> century women and create a narrative that would be relatable for a contemporary audience. Secondly, I wanted to reflect on the research and writing process.

*Stand in Her Shoes* has employed both literary and historical research. To be able to write with any understanding of the social and political factors which affected 19<sup>th</sup> century suffragists and 21<sup>st</sup> century women in power I have drawn research from books, scholarly articles, photographs, internet databases and the National Library. My thesis essay provides an analysis and overview of my findings.

My thesis reports the artistic and dramatic choices made as I shaped my findings *Stand in Her Shoes* into a theatrical play. I focussed briefly on two seminal plays during my literary research *Top Girls* by Caryl Churchill, and Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and her Children*. I have chosen these two plays to see how they might inform the construction of my female protagonists as well as to enhance my thematic around gender politics.

This thesis also provides an overview of the strengths and weaknesses in the play script provided by participants at the first play reading workshop 9 February 2018 at Greytown Little Theatre, South Wairarapa, New Zealand. Finally, I critically reflect on the overall process of writing the play.

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## INTRODUCTION

*What political and theatrical considerations are required to write a play inspired by Elizabeth Colenso and the Victorian suffragists in order to show the conflicts of emancipation for 21<sup>st</sup> century women in positions of power?*

### STAND IN HER SHOES: THE EARLY RESEARCH

I am interested in how our historical events affect us today and particularly as they relate to gender politics. I am interested in those voices that have largely been silenced in our historical literature, those of 19<sup>th</sup> century women. What drove many of them to become suffragists fighting for a political voice and how has the subsequent emancipation impacted on 21<sup>st</sup> century women? After studying post-colonial literature at Massey University my enthusiasm for the subject led to a chance conversation with Mr. Tom Williams of Te Parae, Masterton. Tom revealed that he was a direct descendant of William and Jane Williams, founding pioneers in New Zealand. He was a fountain of familial knowledge and we spoke of Henry Williams, William's brother, and his wife Marianne who had also emigrated from Britain to New Zealand in 1826. Henry and William had come to work as missionaries with the New Zealand Church Missionary Society (CMS). Jane and Marianne were responsible for domestic duties, teaching, midwifery, nursing and running the mission station in their husbands' frequent trips to convert the Maori to Christianity.

It is through Jane's predilection for writing a prodigious number of letters, diaries and journals about the daily life of pioneering women that I began to think it might be possible to write a play about Jane and William Williams. During my research into the Williams family I first became aware of Elizabeth Colenso who was a young student of Marianne Williams at the mission school in Paihia. At first, I took no notice of this fact until, quite by chance, I came across a remarkable letter written by Elizabeth.

I had been reading a book *Missionaries, Wives and Roses* by Ann Chapman concerning New Zealand rose breeder, Ken Nobb who had named his roses in honour of the early missionaries, settlers and their wives. That was when I discovered a rose named after Elizabeth Colenso (Chapman 38). Born Elizabeth Fairburn, in Keri-Keri in 1821,

she was wife of William Colenso, a CMS missionary, botanist, politician and the first printer in New Zealand. Their marriage was one of convenience rather than love and was to become a sad story of betrayal. Unbeknownst to Elizabeth, William had been having an affair with their Maori maid, Ripeka, and a child, Wiremu, was born. William was ridiculed by both the Maori, and English, for flouting Christian family values and dismissed from the CMS. Elizabeth returned to Auckland from their Mission Station in Waitangi, Ahuriri, Hawkes Bay and wrote William a letter (p 39-40) severing all ties and refusing to accept any money from him. Elizabeth was never to speak to William again in her lifetime. It was highly unusual in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century for the CMS to support a separated woman and to appoint her a missionary in her own right. Although I do not think she would have been aware of it at the time, Elizabeth was a pioneer for woman in the workforce. She was treated equally with the male missionaries and was paid for her work.

I sensed there might be a story which could possibly show the earliest stages of New Zealand women's emancipation. The challenge was that Elizabeth's diaries of that period had been lost. In order to write a play about Elizabeth, it was important that it represented her voice. Unfortunately, the reliance on the words of others such as the William's sisters, William Colenso and her daughter Francis Swabey would make this a much bigger project. From the tone of Elizabeth's letter, I suspected she had been a woman who was not prepared to be any man's chattel and that she was possibly a trail blazer for women's emancipation. As a missionary she was well acquainted with the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Led by Kate Sheppard it was a major driving force behind the suffrage movement. It is possible she was in favour of women's equality although there is no record of her having signed the 1893 suffrage petition for women's right to vote. This may be due to her age and health at the time or perhaps her loyalty to the CMS. We will never know. Elizabeth's letter and the photograph would become the catalyst for writing the play *Stand in Her Shoes*.

## **SHAPE AND FORM OF THE THESIS**

This thesis deals with the crafting of a play inspired by Elizabeth Colenso and the Victorian suffragists. It attempts to show some of the conflicts of emancipation for 21<sup>st</sup> century women in positions of power in a way which resonates and engages with a contemporary audience. When women gained the right to vote in 1893, and with it a

political voice, how did this affect gender politics for New Zealand women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Motherhood was a virtue to the Victorians, as was staying out of politics and in the domestic sphere. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century women who have chosen career over children, or family over career, are often criticised in the media and by society. I am particularly interested in how women have coped with motherhood in relation to job opportunities and personal satisfaction. I wanted to explore whether 21<sup>st</sup> century professional business women were able to balance motherhood and a career, and how I might write a play which interrogated these issues. It became clear as my research progressed that to show the struggle for emancipation I would need to move the play forward in time, past Elizabeth, and closer to the suffragist struggle.

2018 is the one hundred and twenty fifth anniversary of the 1893 woman's suffrage vote in New Zealand. This is something that is likely to resonate with a modern New Zealand audience. It opens the possibility of telling a story of the fight for emancipation from a gendered perspective. As my research progressed, the challenge became how to write a play that would bring alive characters who lived one hundred and twenty-five years ago in a way that would make their story relevant and engaging. Kate Sheppard became a symbol for women's emancipation in New Zealand. Introducing her as a character in the play would give credence to my narrative and locate the play in a specific time in New Zealand history.

As I began to synthesise my findings it became clear that I needed to set my play in two time-frames: one in the late 1800s and one in current times. There would be two female protagonists whose stories would play out to provide comparison and contrast with then and now. If my contemporary protagonist, Ruth, was a politician then gender, power and politics could become part of the narrative. This would provide an opportunity to place Ruth's personal story within the larger scene of New Zealand politics. It would also enable me to make political commentary without the play becoming too didactic.

As I researched I saw an opportunity to create two intertwining stories. Both would be set in Christchurch, one in 19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian era and the other in contemporary 21<sup>st</sup> century. But still in the back of my mind was the photo of the four women who represented four generations. What links and legacies might there be? How could I make the links between the two eras clear in my play to show how the past influences

the present? How could I do this in a way that would help to universalise these two stories to convey a larger truth?

My research for the play *Stand in Her Shoes* has been both literary and historical. To write authoritatively I needed to explore the issues of equality, gender and power in both social and political contexts for both eras. Through exploration of literary and dramatic texts I was able to draw upon theatrical influences that would assist in the dramatic construction of the play.

The thesis is in four chapters. In Chapter 1 I look at social and political influences on Victorian and 21<sup>st</sup> century women and the impact on women's emancipation. I do this by examining 'the ideal woman' expectation placed upon Victorian women and the roles of the CMS and the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) to determine if they were oppressors or emancipators of 19<sup>th</sup> century women. The research gathered informs the relevance to my characters and identifies the conflicts which have been instrumental in shaping both characters and the play *Stand in Her Shoes*. Chapter 2 reflects on the literary and dramatic texts which informed the writing process. I consider various dramatic devices and stagecraft that will help me to develop my own play text. In Chapter 3 I discuss the reasons I chose to study each play and explain why I used specific aspects of the writing in shaping my play. Finally, I reflect on the play reading reception and feedback and ask: does the play work theatrically: was the question of whether liberated women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can hold positions of power clearly understood: does the play relate to a modern audience?

Chapter 4 is the result of my research in the form of the play *Stand in Her Shoes*. It results in a play which explores the issues of motherhood and power. Firstly, the role of patriarchal power over women and the desire for women to emancipate in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to gain a political voice and secondly the conflict for 21<sup>st</sup> century women in positions of power when trying to balance work and life.

## CHAPTER 1

### SQUARE PEGS IN ROUND HOLES

The decision to create two protagonists came early on in my journey. Finding the voice of my two protagonists and giving them authenticity and contrasting perspectives would prove challenging. As Sarah Waters, author of *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) says, "...it was about finding a voice for my characters that felt authentic, that belonged to the period I was writing about, that sort of rang true [and...] I know it's an illusion, obviously, but I think the whole point of writing a historical novel is to make the leap into a slightly different mentality and a different cultural landscape" (Dennis p 48). Although Waters is a novelist the same criteria apply to playwriting. It is necessary to know what forces have made characters believe in something, act or react to certain situations. If we think of ourselves as characters, we all differ according to the culture, social milieu and the life experiences that have shaped us. To find the right voice for my characters, especially those in the Victorian era, I began researching identity and power women of in 19<sup>th</sup> century New Zealand.

New Zealand's raw and untamed environment, far removed from the tight strictures and traditions of English Victorian society may well have given birth to the tenacity, stoicism and adaptation required by pioneer women for their basic everyday survival. Women's voices were largely excluded from the literature of the period. In New Zealand religious cultures their voices were notably absent. Peter Lineham notes, for example, that "religious history has tended to be left out of scholarship on New Zealand social history" (qtd. in Coleman p 4) and Coleman herself considers that "Within this limited field of New Zealand religious history, women's religious history has received even less attention" (p 4). To understand the extent of the exclusion of women's scholarly contributions we need look no further than that of French missionary and nun, Mother Suzanne Aubert, founder of the Order of the Sisters of Compassion and Home of Compassion in Wellington. Sister Clothilde, a co-worker with Aubert wrote that,

In all the articles of Bishop Pompallier and his missionary companions, there was no mention of Mother Aubert or the Order she founded, for example. Also, in the well-illustrated and comprehensive programme arranged for the centenary functions, the absence of any reference to her,

her great work amongst the Maoris [sic] and later of the poor and afflicted of both races, was very marked. (Qtd. in Munro p 398).

This was not the only example I found of women's exclusion from contemporary documents. Church records, newspaper, and business records credit little of the educational, religious, or scholarly achievements of pioneering missionary women during this period. Elizabeth Colenso was a fluent Maori speaker, writer and translator. She was instrumental in the translation and editing of both Bible Testaments into Maori. Historical records credit Rev. Maunsell with the translation. The only exception was a note in the *Appendix to The Life of Henry Williams, Archdeacon of Waimate*, Vol. 1:

The Old Testament was carried through the press, in England, by the Rev. George Maunsell (son of Archdeacon Maunsell), the Rev. W. T. Mellor (since deceased), and Mrs. Colenso, daughter of Mr. Fairburn, the catechist, a very able and intelligent Maori scholar. In 1867, another committee was appointed, William Williams, Maunsell, and Leonard Williams, for the revision of the New Testament. This third and last revision was prepared for the press by Mrs. Colenso, writing in the corrections on a printed copy, herself suggesting several, which were adopted" (Carleton p xii).

Women were reading publications which reinforced the male domination of women, including Mrs. Sarah Stickney Ellis's *The Women of England, their Social Duties and Domestic Habit*, who decreed women's behaviour should be,

By custom, tradition and nature of their sex, women had the function of preserving the moral fibre of the nation. They were to carry out this function within the walls of two sanctified institutions, home, and family. Women were 'the guardians of the comfort' of the home, the creators of havens of peace and order to which men, sullied by their contacts with the outside world, could retreat for solace and consolation. Around this fortress women must erect a 'wall of confidence' which 'no internal suspicion could undermine' and 'no external enemy could break through'. Within it they must maintain a pure and gracious atmosphere

with unruffled serenity and a strong moral purpose. Their success rested on their remembering that they were always inferior to men. (Dalziell p 112).

Changes brought about by the industrial revolution often placed women within the home while men frequently became breadwinners outside it. Female “piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity” was emphasised in the “cult of true womanhood” or the “cult of domesticity” (Grimshaw, 1989, p 22; McClintock, 1995) (qtd. in Middleton 4). Whilst this may have worked in a British society it certainly did not fit with the reality of colonial life for New Zealand women where the hours were long, the conditions basic and the work varied and arduous.

The Church Missionary Society established the first religious missionary service in New Zealand in December 1814 with the objective of converting the Maori to Christianity. Initially women were in an auxiliary role to men, “Missionary women as wives and mothers were incorporated into the work of the mission station which primarily involved responsibility for domestic and familial tasks” (Fitzgerald p 161) and the CMS had quite definitive views on the role of women as Angela Middleton clarifies,

Within Evangelical Christianity, and the British middle class in the early nineteenth century, women held an idealized position where their domestic role was emphasised (Davidoff and Hall, 1991).

These idealistic views conflicted with the reality of colonial life. Women working within the CMS and elsewhere, needed to move outside traditional cultural and societal norms to survive. McClintock writes that “It is important also to remember the agency of colonised women in the imperial experience and their active role in the negotiation and redefinition of power relations within colonised societies” (qtd. in Coleman p 11). Male missionaries were often absent for extended periods on evangelical business leaving women to undertake more masculine roles of managing a mission station. The CMS allowed greater independence and perceived women “as having a limited role in the public sphere, in the area of social reform and conversion to Christianity, as the one public field from which they were not excluded” (Middleton p 4). This was possibly the first small step towards changing the gender power balance. New Zealand society

was struggling to find its own identity because the values it inherited were largely British values.

Elizabeth Colenso became the model on which I based my Victorian protagonist. In Elizabeth's biography her daughter, Frances Simcox, says of Elizabeth, "This is the story of a woman, sincere, humble, unselfish and generous. One who lived for others and never spared herself in any way" (Ross p 7). This shows a woman of self-effacement as befits the role of a missionary but her actions in leaving her husband challenge the promoted role of Victorian women as "solely in the role of wives, mothers, homemakers and housekeepers" (Dalziel p 113). In another unusual move, certainly by New Zealand CMS standards, Elizabeth, a separated woman, and here we must remember that monogamy was the overriding message of the CMS, was to become one of the first CMS Missionaries in her own right in 1875,

Elizabeth Colenso joined the Melanesian Mission on Norfolk Island, where she was to spend twenty-three years. Although married to William Colenso, disgraced (Anglican) Church Missionary Society missionary, Elizabeth, herself the daughter of CMS (CMS) missionaries, had been separated from him for a number of years. (Crawford p 1).

As I tried to find my Victorian protagonist's voice I realised that she could well have absorbed into her psyche the injustices towards women which she would have seen and experienced as a child growing up in a patriarchal society where women took on a fair share of burden but did not receive equal rights with men. If she were to experience similar injustices in her marriage, it could awaken a latent subconscious desire to be part of the burgeoning emancipation movement fighting for women's rights to vote and have a voice for future generations. At the same time, she would have absorbed the moral certainties of her time which would create conflict between her awakening revolutionary spirit and society's expectation of a woman's role in 19th century New Zealand.

There were several memorable events which changed the course of New Zealand history in the middle and late half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. New Zealand became a dominion of Britain. The Treaty of Waitangi, Te Tiriti o Waitangi became cemented in law. In 1854 the first parliament met; in 1867 Maori males over 21 attained universal suffrage;

in 1879 all males of 21 attained universal suffrage. European and Maori women were excluded from suffrage rights. Women's emancipation would not happen until 1893.

What had caused New Zealand women to feel sufficiently aggrieved to answer the emancipatory call? The answer may lie in the events outlined above or because women felt they had earned the right to equality with men. The rise of women's emancipation began in the 1880's and brought about the biggest change for women in New Zealand's history. Emigrants came to New Zealand to escape class bound systems. They were open to new ideas and their attention focussed towards creating opportunities. Often, the British way of life was customary and entrenched in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For immigrants recently arrived in New Zealand it was very different. Their need to settle, look for employment and in some cases, buy land, created a fluid movement of people from place to place. They collected, shared and spread ideas as they moved, creating an atmosphere of social activism which may have been one of the greatest drivers of emancipatory success in New Zealand.

I began to ask myself what issues would cause my protagonist to feel strongly enough about emancipation to want to be part of it. How could I portray this in a way that would resonate with a contemporary audience? To be able to portray the social and political climate in the 1880s and 1890s, which is where I decided to place my Victorian protagonist, I made use of a historic journal. I made the decision to focus my attention on the period 1880 to 1893. The journal in my play became an important device for linking the contemporary and historic periods. I needed to discover what was influencing my protagonist's environment during that period.

The 1880s were a time of change with New Zealand society now beginning to find its feet. The influx of immigrants saw urban populations growing as they sought work. Gender inequality was still a major issue in late 19<sup>th</sup> century New Zealand. Although divorce was possible since 1867 there was serious discrimination in the way it was applied to women.

...a wife could be divorced for a single act of adultery, a woman could only divorce a man if his adultery was combined

with cruelty, desertion, bigamy, incest, rape, sodomy or bestiality. (Else. Web).

The father held all rights over the children and a mother's rights were precarious at best if the father died, "a woman did not automatically have guardianship of her children, for her husband had the right to appoint someone else." (Coney. Web).

I decided these were major issues that could be written into the play. The lack of legal recourse for women over marriage, divorce and children could lead to some interesting outcomes as to how the protagonist and antagonist would conflict or solve such problems.

The Matrimonial Property Act 1884 allowed women the right to own property but very few did.

In the mid-19th century a married couple was a single financial and legal entity, controlled by the husband. All of a wife's money and property, whether acquired before or after marriage, was her husband's. A wife had no right to a share of her husband's (or their joint) earnings or property during marriage, or to part of his estate after he died. (Else p 2)

Free primary schooling began in 1877 but access to secondary schooling for girls was not automatic and required 'vigorous campaigning' (Else) but the greatest barrier to women's education was from societal perceptions,

Educating girls was seen by many 19th-century parents as a waste of time. Their daughters would marry, keep house and raise children, none of which needed formal schooling. At both primary and secondary levels, girls were less likely than boys to attend school. The help they gave with household tasks was a significant reason for this. (Else Web).

However, some women were challenging the status quo and highly educated women were beginning to speak out. In New Zealand, the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) formed with Kate Sheppard leading the way. Earlier feminists, writing under pseudonyms for their safety such as Mary Muller (alias Femina) and Mary Colclough (alias Polly Plum) had raised issues on women's rights and faced criticism

and ostracism from many, including women. Their aim was equality for women. The original purpose of the Temperance movement was the abolition of alcohol which had been ruining many families. Could the Temperance movement be an area of conflict for my characters? The WCTU offered women a chance to gather, have a voice and to be leaders in the organisation. It was the perfect vehicle for women's emancipation and a well-known point in New Zealand history. It would be instantly relatable for a modern audience.

Out of this research came the idea of using the journal as the ancestral link between the two eras. Thinking back to the early women missionaries the one constant for all women was their journals and diaries. I decide that the journal could be a central symbol around which the Victorian story could revolve. A journal carries secrets, conveys truths about the inner life, and can be lost and found by future generations. It can convey a unique testimony of the past and defy the evidence of mainstream history. It could be a way of linking past and future. I also remembered that the Victorians were heavily into spiritualism.

There was an evangelical revival in the Christian church but also a host of dissenting, heterodox and millenarian cults. It was a golden age of belief in supernatural forces and energies, ghost stories, weird transmissions and spooky phenomena. (Luckhurst. 2014)

I decided that although my Victorian protagonist was grounded in the 1890's, the journal could become the spiritual connection to my contemporary protagonist.

My next focus was on the creation of the voice of my contemporary protagonist, Ruth. To what extent would she be the agent for the social message on women's equality? Victorian women were fighting for the power to have agency over their lives. Had women reached the dreamed for equality with men? Had they escaped the 'nurturer' label in society one hundred and twenty-five years later? Had women achieved full equality with men in the workforce? Research indicates they had not. There were women who had reached the top echelons of organisations but the percentage was still relatively small in New Zealand.

Although New Zealand consistently ranks in the top half-dozen countries in the world when it comes to equality between men and women, it is not complacent in terms of gender equality. New Zealand women still do not experience the full equality guaranteed by the law. Across the economy women's skills are under-used in leadership and women continue to earn less than men – even if they have the same qualifications, and similar job descriptions. (The 2014 General Election Results).

This reminds me of my own experiences as a manager of female staff in 2007. There were often issues around equality for working mothers requiring time off work or more flexible working arrangements, especially for a solo mother, to care for children. To me the expectancy from the management was always that the mother would take time off rather than the father. Many employers are not flexible in these matters. An interesting 2016 study in the United Kingdom conducted by The Guardian Jobs found some interesting results,

43% of women felt that having children made them focus on family rather than career. 42% of men felt they had to provide for their family. Women felt more pressured to achieve their careers before having a family; [this is because] 71% of women took time off if children were sick compared to men. [and] the single most important factor in equality between men and women in child care was that both men and women thought that more flexible working opportunities would encourage women to continue their careers after starting a family (67%), followed by encouraging men to take up greater share of childcare (45%) (Williams 2016).

Whilst this dealt with careers for women there was also the issue around parental leave. Currently Sweden offers parents the opportunity to share between themselves a total of 480 days subsidised leave per child. However, to increase gender equality,

Swedish fathers have been told to take five months off work after a government investigation suggested increasing the country's parental

allowance to encourage fairer sharing of leave between men and women (Crisp Web).

This is a more positive move towards equal parenting responsibility than New Zealand's starkly different figures. In New Zealand a mother may get up to 365 days subsidised leave but a father's entitlement is only 14 days unpaid leave.<sup>1</sup> Given our statistics on the split between the amount of time spent by mothers in childcare versus fathers there is room for major improvement in our gender equality for parents.

'Mother only' childcare is 7 to 9 times that of the 'father only' with a young child. When both parents work the 'mother only care' is double that of the 'father only' and during the weekends it is three to four times the amount of 'father only' time. (Findlaw. Web).

Clearly perceptions towards equal parenting responsibilities in New Zealand need major social and political shifts towards more balanced opportunities for parents. I decided to make this the major political statement of my play.

I wanted to find an occupation for my contemporary protagonist that would show a 21<sup>st</sup> century career focussed woman fighting for equal parenting. If I could make this fight part of her story as well as it being an objective in her career, it would enable me to embody the politics of the play in the protagonist's own journey. One of the highest profile public office roles for a woman that has good media attention is that of a politician. In an article written by Victoria University of Wellington's Associate Professor in Comparative Politics, Hilde Coffé states that "31.4% of women were elected to parliament in 2014 election [and that] the struggle for equal representation still remains. She continues that it is important for women to be represented because 'Research has indeed shown that women MPs are seen as role models and encourage women to engage in politics and increase women's political interest and knowledge' (Coffé 2017). This may be so in theory but for some women Members of Parliament (MP) it was easier said than done as former New Zealand Green Party MP Holly Walker found.

I decided to draw on Walker's experience to get an idea of how life was for a woman Member of Parliament in recent history. Holly had tried to balance having a young child and a parliamentary career. Her experience was not pleasant, as she says,

Unfortunately, a recent unexpected change in my family life has made it very difficult for me to continue as a Green MP. Under these circumstances, I have chosen to put my family first and withdraw myself from the Green Party list, she said.

As most of you know, I've been juggling being a mum with being an MP for the last six months, and while I've had awesome support from my caucus colleagues and from the party, we've had a recent additional challenging family circumstance, she said. (Kirk. Web. 2014).

She spoke of the need to be away 30 weeks of the year, late nights, the inability to get leave for children and family crises. Her view was that politics and a young family do not work.

Issues around equal opportunity and the need to balance motherhood with career pressure gradually became key to the creation of my protagonist, Ruth. Her struggle to be a mother while managing a stressful political portfolio and marriage would provide the basis for Ruth's narrative and underpin the play's major themes in *Stand in Her Shoes*.

## CHAPTER 2

### SYNTHESIZING RESEARCH INTO A PLAY

I decided to call the play *Stand in Her Shoes* because it is only when we look at challenges from the ‘other’ point of view that we can make rational and informed decisions. Ruth, my contemporary protagonist, stands in the shoes of her Victorian counterpart and when she does so, her own world changes and begins to take on a whole new meaning. She is strengthened and enabled by the efforts of her historical sisters who fought to achieve her freedom. By standing in their shoes she is advanced and given greater power and agency. I realised that my characters would need a strong purpose to be worthy adversaries in the political debate. Ultimately, I hoped to encourage my audience to consider whether the imbalance between men and women so prevalent in the Victorian era, and which our 19<sup>th</sup> century women challenged to gain the vote in 1893, had created equality for women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. If not, why not? I wanted *Stand in Her Shoes* to leave an imprint on the mind of the audience and possibly raise the consciousness around women’s inequality and continued gender bias.

The naming of my two central women happened early on in my process. I chose Ruth for my contemporary protagonist. Merriam Webster online dictionary defines the name Ruth as meaning, ‘Compassion for the misery of another and sorrow for one's own faults: remorse.’ (“Ruth” Merriam Webster). As Ruth was fighting for women’s inequality it seemed an appropriate choice. I chose Katie for my Victorian protagonist. Her name means ‘pure’ which reflects her original innocence towards woman’s equality and her pureness of heart in her fight towards emancipation. (“Katy” Merriam Webster). Now that I had chosen symbolic names I could begin to flesh out the characters.

Ruth is a millennial. I began to look for the characteristics of that age demographic to see whether there was sympathy or antipathy about women’s equality and/or concerns regarding gender bias. A 2010 Pew Research Centre study found that the top priority for millennials was being a good parent. 52% said it was one of the most important goals in their lives, well ahead of having a successful marriage, and 30% said it was one of their most important lifetime goals. (Livingston. Web). Three years later there was still been little advancement for millennial women. A later 2013 Pew Research Centre study found in a Unites States study that,

75% say this country needs to continue making changes to achieve gender equality in the workplace, compared with 57% of Millennial men. Young working women are less likely than men to aspire to top management jobs: 34% say they are not interested in becoming a boss or top manager; only 24% of young men say the same. The gender gap on this question is even wider among working adults in their 30s and 40s, the age at which many women face the trade-offs that go with work and motherhood.

[Furthermore], young women view this as a man's world—just as middle-aged and older women do. Roughly half of Millennial women (51%) and their older counterparts (55%) say society favors men over women; just 6% of both groups say it favors women over men. (Pew 2013).

Despite millennials being one of the most socially connected generations there were still unresolved gender issues. Although this information is from an American study it can be applied to New Zealand millennials as Charles D. Shewe et al., (2013) concluded in their study “‘If Youve Seen One, Youve Seen Them All!’ Are Young Millennials the Same Worldwide?” stating that New Zealand millennials were similar to American millennials. Raising issues which millennials feel strongly about was clearly going to be an important part of Ruth's story and a way of engaging a younger audience.

Creating Katie's character raised different issues. Patriarchal power and subjugation of women in stories, films and plays of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beyond have been well documented. I wanted to avoid stereotyping and wanted Katie to have realistic but distinctive qualities. I decided to situate her in an upper middle-class context. I decided that with no occupation other than that of being decorative, managing the house and raising her child, Katie would have only a passing knowledge of the world outside her sphere. I wanted Katie to represent a life trajectory loosely based on Elizabeth Colenso's personal life without the religious aspects. I decided that this was achievable if, as a newly married wife of an older husband, she was adjusting to married life. It would allow her story to follow her challenges and sacrifices as she broke free, as Elizabeth did, towards becoming an independent woman.

I needed to understand what was socially influencing Katie's world in the 1890's so that I could flesh out her story. I discovered one of the interesting developments in Christchurch, 1890, was the forming of the Atlanta Ladies' Bicycle Club by Kate Walker and Alice Burn which 'reflected the wider aspirations articulated by many New Zealand women in the 1890s, not only for political enfranchisement but also for a

degree of physical freedom and independence” (Else 408). There was an influenza epidemic in 1891 and 1892 with 354 deaths (Rice. Web). Kate Sheppard was also leading the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and was bringing the political suffrage message to women. I decided that including all three facts in the play in some form would give some authenticity to Katie’s story.

The research brought to light three themes which I decided to promote throughout the play: power, gender bias and women’s equality.

## **POWER**

To understand the dynamics of power and how I could interpret them in the play I turned to *The Will to Knowledge*, by French philosopher, Michel Foucault who suggested that,

Power consists primarily not of something a person has, but rather is a matter of what people do, subsisting in our *interactions with one another* in the first instance [and that] As such, power is completely ubiquitous to social networks... [people] are as much *products of power* as they are wielders of it. Power thus has a relative autonomy apropos of people, just as they do apropos of it: power has its own strategic logics, emerging from the *actions* of people within a *network* of power relations (Michel Foucault. Kelly. IEP).

How could I make the characters in my play both wielders and products of power? For instance, male oppression of women is evident in both 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, yet men are also products of power, often confined to a limited set of roles, constrained by societal expectations. How would I build the story to show this through the interpersonal relationships of the characters? In my play, women were often at the mercy of male authority, but they also exerted their power in order, ultimately, to make a difference for all women.

It would not be possible to cover all areas on women’s inequality in a short play so I decided to focus on the importance of the mother’s sacrifice in trying to balance a career and family and particularly the issue of equal gender opportunity in childcare. I would achieve this by exploring Ruth’s relationship to her work, her child, and her marriage. As a politician she would have the *power* to drive for legislative change which would enable parents to have more equitable sharing of the child care role. She would also be a

victim of limited childcare facilities that would constrict what she could achieve. She would be both the wielder and the product of power.

## **GENDER BIAS**

As gender bias was another issue in my play, I needed to ask myself what gender roles would I assign to my characters? Would they be traditional roles or would I challenge the societal norms? Both protagonists would be fighting for the same thing, women's equality, and Ruth would also fight for an end to gender bias. It was important that Ruth was the torchbearer for future generations of young women who could follow her. As I thought more about Ruth I realised that she would have witnessed strong female role models holding positions of power. Born in the early nineteen eighties she would have known of two female Prime Ministers of New Zealand, Jenny Shipley and Helen Clark, and also seen women holding the posts of Chief Justice, Speaker of the House of Representatives and Governor General. I decided that she would be a wife, mother, and politician. As a young politician her *ambition* would lead her to conclude that reaching the highest political and legislative levels was attainable. Ruth's life prior to motherhood was in politics and in her self-confidence and ambition she would feel that balancing politics and a family would be possible. As this was a drama I decided that motherhood, career and equality would be points of conflict. What is the reality for mothers who find childcare support lacking? How would I show this dilemma through the action of the story? One thing was certain, she must believe in women's right to equality and have the courage and tenacity to fight for it.

## **MOTHERHOOD**

I wanted to show different types of maternal relationships between mothers and daughters. I decided to include the character of Ruth's mother. It was important for Ruth to be able to see the value in her relationship with her own mother and be able to compare it to the relationship she was building with her own daughter, Susie. Ruth's mother, as a retired widow, would be available to provide childcare on an ad-hoc basis and she would also represent the older woman who had stayed at home to raise a family. Retired grand-parents providing childcare assistance to working parents is a reality for many 21<sup>st</sup> century families. I could see complications and conflict for Ruth if such a relationship were to end. This would place additional strain on Richie and Ruth's relationship and raise the issue as to how much childcare both parents were contributing towards raising their daughter.

## FATHERHOOD

If I were to show both sides of the debate I needed to consider how fathers' relationships worked with regards to raising their children. Were they prepared to step up and take on an equal share of the child care, or did their career and a perception that the mother should take on the lion's share of childcare pervade societal norms? I considered the best way to show how modern patriarchy still created stress for professional business women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I decided that Richie, Ruth's husband, was the best antagonist to represent the challenges of a working mother trying to keep a relationship and career in balance. He would be, for the most part, a well-meaning husband and father. His flaw would be his resentment towards Ruth's long absences from the home, their daughter, and their marriage. He would believe that Ruth should spend less time focussing on her career and more time building a mother/daughter relationship with Susie. Because Richie was able to spend more time with Susie this would make his relationship with Susie stronger than Ruth's. This strong bond could become a weapon he could use against Ruth. I wanted to know how I could show the impact Ruth's career was having on their relationship? After some research I discovered a surprising fact. An article by Hana Shank and Elizabeth Wallace in the Atlantic Daily cited a 2016 study by Robert Mare at the University of California, Los Angeles found the following:

We believe that couples often behave as though there is a set limit on the amount of ambition that can be contained within one union. Sometimes this limit is clearly articulated; sometimes it is unspoken, and the ambition can be distributed in different ways. (Shank: Wallace. Web)

I decided to use unspoken ambition as a point of conflict in Richie and Ruth's relationship. If Richie agreed to support Ruth's career but had unspoken ambition of his own it would be a great stress factor in their relationship.

If politically Ruth was pushing for equal parenting how would I show this in the play? I mulled this over and decided that the opposing attitudes of both parents, Richie's patriarchal attitude which expects Ruth to take a more hands-on role in raising their daughter Susie versus Ruth's drive for success and equality, could define their different

attitudes towards their daughter Susie, and towards each other. If Ruth was pushing for equal parenting, then Susie could be the catalyst around which their debate would revolve.

## **THE SUPPORTING ANTAGONISTS**

To create strong conflict and character motivation I needed antagonists who either represented and/or challenged power and gender bias for Katie and Ruth.

One of my concerns in shaping Ruth's character was that she be well rounded and believable. She could not be completely ruthless, ambitious, and self-centred, she also needed an empathetic, softer side to her personality if she was to connect with the audience in a meaningful way. She needed relationships with others outside her family who could show her strengths and vulnerabilities.

As Ruth was to be a politician it would be necessary to show the pressures a politician faced when work must come before family. Ruth's relationship with her Personal Assistant, although one of power wielded with a velvet glove, was to be one of mutual respect and professional friendship. In her political role Ruth shows masculine traits. She is direct, assertive, and totally focussed on her career. The relationship between Ruth and her Assistant highlights the power imbalance between the two women. It is with her Assistant that we see Ruth's ambition, her professional life, and her political nous.

The person that Ruth would feel most comfortable to share her secrets with, to show her strength and share her vulnerability with, should be a strong female 'best friend' capable of showing the opposite of Ruth's belief about work and marriage. I decided to create the character of Claire. She would challenge Ruth's self-belief and expose her vulnerability. As another successful working professional, Claire, a psychologist is of a similar age and their relationship is one of equality and would be one of open, truthful, and honest exchanges, as friends often do.

If Katie, my Victorian suffragist, were to represent the changing face of women's emancipation I needed conflict for her story. There was considerable opposition to women attaining the vote from both men and women. Many foresaw the erosion of traditional male roles by women entering the workforce. Others were afraid that domestic life would fall into chaos. It was important in Katie's story to show that antagonism towards emancipation was not only from those in the lower classes but also

by those in middle and upper-class people in society. I decided that Alec McDonald, Katie's husband, would be a lawyer who would represent the political and patriarchal opposition to women's emancipation. In his own right he would be a good father and husband but would be intolerant of his wife being involved with the suffragists. He would be intent on his own respectability and standing in society, with a strong belief in a women's subjugation to men. His presence would be an oppressive, dominating force which he would use to retain the status quo in their marriage.

I also needed a character who would take Katie on an emancipatory rite of passage from passive to active in the suffragist movement. The character needed to introduce Katie to the suffragist movement and to represent the new emerging order of women demanding equality. I decided on a stronger, older woman who had seen the effects of alcohol, poverty, and the oppression of women and children. She would be someone who would understand the need for social and political change. I settled on Alec's Aunt Bessie. I decided she would be unmarried, assertive, educated, practical and an early feminist. As an independent thinker Bessie would not be afraid of Alec's posturing against suffragists. She could provide a maternal figure for Katie whose mother had died and introduce Katie to a world where women had a voice and could gain power and equality alongside men. She, in some ways, channels the older Elizabeth Colenso with her ability to stand up against society's accepted view of women.

My research showed that not all women were in favour of the suffragists' aims. I liked the idea of Katie caught between two opposing female views on suffragist issues. I needed a character who would represent the repressed Victorian woman and who believed in the 'ideal' of Victorian motherhood. I did not want a clichéd mother figure. I wanted a one who showed the powerlessness of women who had no security of their own and were dependent on family for their living. I saw Abigail, a spinster sister of Alec's, straitlaced and with no empathy for motherhood. She would represent female anti-suffragists and the narrow-minded view of the role of women in Victorian society based on British, rather than New Zealand ideals.

The suffragist story in New Zealand would not be complete without Kate Sheppard. She was the leader of the women's suffrage movement and although her role would be small in the play she would be pivotal as a turning point in Katie's life. Her influence would be what changed Katie's perspective on her own marriage and opened her eyes to the possibilities for women.

Finally, there was the journal itself. It would be the central dramatic device around which Katie and Ruth's story would revolve and would provide the link between Katie and Ruth. It would link past with present. It would create a magical connection between then and now, showing that our relationship with our forebears can be both spiritual and illuminating. Ultimately, it would be an agent of change because Ruth's life would turn upside down soon after reading the journal and she would be forced to reconcile her politics with her personal journey.

## **STYLE**

I wanted *Stand in Her Shoes* to be a relatable play for a modern audience. I needed the audience to identify with my characters and to find them believable. I did not want any heightened language but a modern 21<sup>st</sup> century vernacular and a more formal style for the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I wanted the characters to have psychological and emotional depth that would suit a realistic style of play. There were other stylistic elements that I wanted to use to drive the story forward. I decided to borrow from Brecht's epic theatre style by using short vignettes to allow for the interweaving of my two storylines. I also borrowed the use of narration through the journal as a stylistic element which would break the fourth wall.

## **BORROWING FROM THE PLAYS OF BRECHT AND CHURCHILL**

Despite occupying two different time frames, I wanted the two central women in my play to meet. Thinking back to the opening scene of Churchill's *Top Girls* and the six historical women meeting with Marlene at the restaurant as a stylised dream, I decided that a dream sequence would provide an opportunity for the two mothers to meet in a figurative way. The dream meeting would become a pivotal point in Ruth's understanding of Katie's story and what she could learn from her and show the cost of emancipation for 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century women in a deeply personal way.

In the overall shape of the story I needed to ensure that I gave equal weight to both storylines. Although Churchill had used two different eras in *Top Girls* she had not interwoven her storyline but used linear progression in terms of time and events. I needed to find a way to plot each of my storylines and then find critical points where I could interweave them without breaking the continuity of the narratives. I decided that my two stories were like a DNA chain. Each chain was equally weighted and had

connecting links. I decided that taking two differently coloured sticky note pads I could write the critical points for each story and shift them around to see whether I had an even flow of information for each story.

In the dream I wanted the sense of a psychological crisis in Ruth's mind. I had seen a National Theatre Live 2017 production of Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus* and wanted to borrow the stylistic use of whispering voices. I imagined the sound of whispering voices and banging of props building to a crescendo before fading as Katie appears on stage with her daughter. I felt the sound of natural voice in an enclosed theatre space would add great atmosphere and further enhance the mood of the dream sequence.

In Circa Theatre's 2009 production of *Blood Wedding*, written by playwright Federico Garcia Lorca, a sandbag was used to create an on-stage circle of sand which became the 'acting space'. The actors and stage crew sat outside the circle in the semi dark and moved in and out of the acting space, shifted props, and set pieces, as required. I decided a circle of light could provide a similar effect, especially if different lighting colours were used to depict the three different locations in the play, Ruth's lounge, Katie's lounge, and Ruth's parliamentary office plus it would allow for mood lighting for the dream scene.

## LITERARY ANALYSIS

I would need to create two strong mothers who could show the sacrifices mothers face when they challenge women's inequality with men. I became intrigued by four women: Anna Fierling, (Mother Courage) and Katrin, her daughter, in Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* and Marlene and Joyce, sisters and mothers, in Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*. Both Anna and Marlene represent mothers opposing patriarchal dominance and gender stereotyping. Joyce represents the binary opposite, although not a biological but an adoptive mother, she possesses qualities that indicated she has maternal instincts. Both Katrin and Angie had interesting relationships with their 'mothers' and I wanted to explore the impact career-driven mothers had on the mother/daughter relationship. To help me build, develop, and shape my own protagonists, Katie and Ruth, I was specifically searching for the conflicts motherhood caused within relationships and career and what sacrifices Anna, Marlene and Joyce had to make for their career and family. In Brecht's play, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, the issues of motherhood are problematised, for although Anna, the

protagonist, appears to love her children this love is compromised by the pressures of war and her need to survive.

### **BERTOLT BRECHT (1939) *Mother Courage and Her Children***

*Mother Courage and Her Children* is a political play in which Brecht shows the impact of war through his exploration of the character of Anna. The play opens with the recruiting officer and a sergeant bemoaning the hardship of finding recruits for the Swedish army. A covered cart rolls onto the stage with Anna and her dumb but not deaf daughter, Katrin, sitting on it. Pulled by two young men (Anna's sons, Swiss Cheese and Eilif). Anna then sings,

SERGEANT *blocking the way*: Morning, all. And who are you?

MOTHER COURAGE: Business folk. *Sings*:

You Captains, tell the drums to slacken,

It's Mother Courage with her waggon

Full of the finest boots they make. (1:1 2).

It is interesting that Brecht first introduces Anna, not as a mother, but a business woman. In doing this he sets the tone of her role from the outset. Anna has earned the name Mother Courage for driving her cart loaded with fifty loaves of bread through a bombardment at Riga because she “hadn't any choice really” (1:1 3). The irony is that Mother Courage is not a heroine because of heroic acts in the name of motherhood, but because of her tenacity and resourcefulness in the midst of war. In Anna we see a contradiction of motherhood, a distortion of what a mother should be as a loving, nurturing guardian of her children. Anna is a victim of war but also a survivor who, against all the odds, provides for her family. She is admirable in that she survives in a man's world but deplorable in the way she constantly exposes her children to danger. Her three children are born to different fathers which suggests she is intent on retaining her personal independence. 17<sup>th</sup> century societal norms for a mother were based on early 17<sup>th</sup> century Protestantism when women observed,

the ‘three Ks’ of social and family life: Kinder (children), Kirche (church), and Küche (kitchen). Early Lutheran ideology saw marriage-based family life as ‘heaven on earth’. Women were supposed to be obedient, self-sacrificing others who were solely dedicated to the education and rearing of their children. (SIRC 2012).

We cannot assume that she does not care about her children. She attempts to redirect, advise, or deflect danger from them. For example, when the sergeant in the opening scene asks Anna why Eilif is not in the Swedish army, she reacts quickly,

MOTHER COURAGE: Nowt doing, sergeant. Yours is no trade for my  
kids (1.1 5)

She goes as far as drawing a knife, to stop the sergeant from recruiting her sons. It is futile. While haggling over the price of a belt buckle, she does not notice her son being dragged away to be enlisted into the Swedish army. In act three, she protects the innocence of her daughter, by warning her, “Don't you start anything with them soldiers” (3:1 21). She also cares enough for her less intelligent son Swiss Cheese by installing values of duty and honesty to protect him. There is one incident where she does show she cares for her daughter. The Cook, who also travels in the vanguard of the army had inherited a small inn and invited Anna to marry him but declared that Katrin was not welcome because she was dumb and disfigured. Anna shows maternal love when she throws the Cook's things out of the wagon and refused to allow Katrin to leave on her account.

Each time she loses a child it is because she is doing business. After Anna sells her wagon she remains behind to count her merchandise while her son, Swiss Cheese, is captured on suspicion of stealing a cash box. He is executed because Anna chose to try and haggle for a lower price than the 200 guilders required for his release. When her son's dead body is returned she has to sacrifice any emotion and deny him as her son. To acknowledge him would have made her complicit in the crime Swiss Cheese had been accused of which would have caused her own and Katrin's death. In act two scene 8 peace has come and ruined Anna's business. Trying to sell off as much merchandise as she can for the highest price she is in town when Eilif her son arrives to speak to his mother. He has been captured and to stand trial for murder for committing the same crime in peace as he had during the war. She would never see her son alive again. Similarly, Anna is away bartering for supplies when a Catholic regiment arrives to destroy the town near the farmhouse where Anna and Katrin have their wagon. Katrin, climbing onto the roof of a farmhouse frantically beats drums to warn the townspeople of the approaching danger. She is shot and dies. Mother Courage is in denial over her daughter's death saying, “I think she's going to sleep” (2:2 81) which shows some maternal regret over her death but to survive she had to keep moving with the army.

Paying a peasant family to bury her daughter, she sacrifices time to mourn for her daughter to “Get back to business” (2:2 82).

Where we can sympathise with Anna is that she has no control over war. She is as much a victim of war as are her children. We can relate to her as a mother who cares for her children. Yet when she abandons them for her business she appears monstrous. She had sacrificed her humanity chasing profit and success and learned nothing from each subsequent loss of a child. She has placed greater value on her own survival as she leaves the stage shackled to the business which had caused such tragedy.

Understanding the dynamics of Anna’s character in Brecht’s plays had a significant influence in the shaping of my protagonist, Ruth. Like Anna, Ruth’s role as a mother is in direct conflict with the prevailing political situation. War determines and limits Anna’s ability to care for her children. Ruth’s political reality is a society which discriminates against women who choose to be working mothers. While she loves her child, motherhood limits her ability to be a successful politician. Like Anna, her circumstance requires her to choose and the consequences of that choice can be tragic.

The character of Anna is full of ambiguity: her actions are both morally acceptable and questionable; she can be loveable and hateful; she is both victim and perpetrator; she loves her children but is capable of profound neglect. A contradictory character, like Anna, is admired for some qualities and despised for a lack of others. In my creation of Ruth, I wanted to create similar ambiguities. I wanted the audience to empathise with Ruth’s fight for women’s equality and her desire for personal independence as well as to dislike her ambitious attitude towards her work and lack of empathy towards her child. This would be a deliberate construct to show how Ruth negotiated the political difficulties associated with trying to balance her role as a mother with that of having a professional career.

### **CARYL CHURCHILL (1982) *TOP GIRLS***

I was interested in exploring the play *Top Girls* because I wanted to understand how Churchill had shaped the mother/daughter/career relationships of Marlene, her sister Joyce, and their daughter Angie.

I was looking for examples of the sacrifices women made for motherhood and career. The play opens in a restaurant with Marlene celebrating her promotion to Managing Director of Top Girls recruitment agency. Her isolation from family and friends is

evident by their absence. Five historical and mythical women of influence from the 9<sup>th</sup> century to 20<sup>th</sup> century dine with Marlene. Each woman has made sacrifices. Pope Joan, sought knowledge and repressed her femininity. "First I decided to stay a man. I was used to it." (p 11) and states that "I think I forgot I was pretending" (p 9). She was betrayed by her woman's body, just as Marlene was, when she becomes pregnant. Lady Nijo, was raised from a poor background to become a Japanese courtesan by submitting to masculine domination. She is perhaps the character that represents Marlene's climb from her poor background to her successful life in the city. However, Nijo, had to give her children up, the same as Marlene gave up her daughter Angie. For Marlene to succeed under a patriarchal system she had to devalue her role as a mother just as Nijo did. Griselda is perhaps the character who most resembles Marlene's early struggle against domination. Griselda's paranoid husband constantly tested her loyalty. Only through compliance to the will of her husband, the Marquis, did she achieve a happy conclusion. If the Marquis represented patriarchal domination then Churchill appears to suggest that a woman can only truly be happy if she is prepared to be submissive, or alternatively, that fulfilment can only be reached after a great struggle. Isabella Bird, the Victorian adventurer, was escaping the suffocation of religious evangelism and sought life on her own terms. Marlene also seeks to escape a life of suffocation away from her family. Dull Gret has lost numerous children and shows her frustration by leading an army of peasant women to the gates of hell. Perhaps this could represent Marlene's fight for the rights of women, that perhaps she sees herself as a warrior for women's rights and is prepared to lead the way for all women. In all these characters being a woman has meant sacrifice, compromise, and inequality. Each has had to behave in an individualistic way, either rejecting masculine domination or accepting feminine submissiveness. Churchill appears to be saying that women cannot achieve equality with men and personal fulfilment under a patriarchal system whether they behave with masculine or feminine traits.

Churchill develops this thesis further in her portrayal of the two sisters, Joyce and Marlene. Their relationship towards motherhood suggests opposing attitudes and explores the tension between maternal sacrifice and personal ambition.

JOYCE. You say Mother had a wasted life.

MARLENE. Married to that bastard (2:2 84)

Marlene's motivation to leave home and make her own way in life is due to their poverty and the domestic violence perpetrated on her mother by their father. Her desire to live a life of independence drives Marlene to reject a male dominated environment.

JOYCE. You started, I was talking about her. She had a rotten life because she had nothing. She went hungry.

MARLENE. She was hungry because he drank the money. / He used to hit her. . . She didn't hit him. . . I had to get out, . . . I knew when I was thirteen, out of their house, out of them, never let that happen to me, / never let him, make my own way, out (2:2 85).

Marlene's attitude suggests that she sees motherhood as being submissive which leads to her adoption of the patriarchal attributes of control and domination in her career. Marlene had wanted a better life saying that she would 'never let that happen to me' and that she 'hates the working class.' Joyce's attitude is the opposite, 'I'm ashamed of you, think of nothing but yourself'. Marlene scorns working class habits. She hates 'beer guts and football vomit and saucy tits' whilst Joyce is scathing of the affluent, 'I spit on a Rolls Royce, scratch it with my ring / Mercedes it was' (2:2 85). Marlene and Joyce represented the class divide caused by economic power. Marlene can afford the luxuries. Joyce works four jobs to earn enough income to support herself and Angie. Joyce had sacrificed any chance of a career like Marlene's to raise Angie and look after an ailing mother.

Marlene's rise to the top is on the shoulders of her sister Joyce. Without Joyce supporting Marlene by raising Angie, Marlene would have been 17 years old, unmarried and pregnant and her life would have been the same as Joyce's. Marlene sacrifices her role as a mother to gain the power and prestige of a top management job.

JOYCE You was the most stupid, / for someone so clever You was the most stupid, get yourself pregnant, not go to the doctor, not tell.

MARLENE You wanted it, you said you were glad, I remember that day, you said I'm glad you never got rid of it, I'll look after it,

you said that down by the river. So what are you saying,  
sunshine, you don't want her? (2.2.80)

Marlene's rejection of motherhood denies her sister, Joyce, the only chance to have a natural child of her own. Joyce is resentful that she lost her own child because she was raising Marlene's 'fucking baby' (2:2 81).

Women's oppression is evident in Joyce's bully husband who "was always carrying on" and who would go mad if she "wanted to go out in the evening" or wanted to educate herself at a night class. He eventually leaves her for a 21-year-old. (2:2 82). Joyce is under-valued and disrespected just as her own mother was. Angie had grown up watching Joyce being treated like a door mat and repeats the behaviour, calling her, "A slag" (1:3 36) Joyce, in turn, uses verbal abuse to Angie calling her a, "Fucking rotten little cunt. You can stay there and die. I'll lock the back door" (1:3 37). This toxicity undermines their mother/daughter relationship to such a degree that Angie says, "I put on this dress to kill my mother." (1:3 44) without realising that Marlene had abandoned her or the enormity of Joyce's sacrifice to raise her.

It is hard to like Marlene. She is cold, callous, calculating and obsessed with success. Like Anna in *Mother Courage and Her Children* her desire for success has left her bereft of any friends or family. We are able to feel some sympathy for Joyce and Angie since are both are victims of financial poverty and a lack of education and opportunity.

In my play, I needed a protagonist who would express the politics of gender bias against mothers fighting patriarchal domination. Ruth's character is most closely associated with Marlene rather than Joyce. Both women fight for equality. Marlene fights for women's rights to break the glass ceiling and Ruth for an end to gender bias against working mothers. Both are uncompromising and sometimes callous in pursuit of their career over motherhood. Marlene challenges the idea that all women should be mothers and consciously negates any maternal instincts. Ambitious and totally focussed on her career, almost to the total exclusion of her family, she is prepared to make any sacrifice to rise to the top. When shaping the character of Ruth, I chose to give her more warmth and compassion than Marlene, so that she sometimes exhibits the qualities of Joyce. Ruth demonstrates similar traits in her career trajectory to Marlene but takes on some of Joyce's traits with regards to motherhood. Ruth, made aware of the potential loss of a relationship with her daughter, also considers giving up her career. In this way, I hoped

to create a character with whom the audience could emotionally identify, but one who has the capacity to pose questions around issues of gender politics in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## CHAPTER 3

### CRITICAL REFLECTION

I set out to write a play which would inform, entertain, engage and challenge an audience to think about the pressures of inequality and gender bias for women in positions of power. I have been amazed at how topical this play turned out to be. Since I started writing New Zealand has elected a female Prime Minister, who is pregnant and been challenged on whether she can have a child and run the country. There are worldwide movements against women's sexual harassment. Our world is changing and I hope this play will in some way contribute towards highlighting the inequality which still exists around career and motherhood.

I originally considered a two act play where Katie's and Ruth's stories were told separately, one in each act. After beginning to write on this premise it soon became clear that I needed a link between the two stories if I wanted the impact of Katie's experience to have any effect on Ruth. What would work best was for Ruth to learn from Katie's story in her 21<sup>st</sup> century world through reading the journal. As the journal was the lynchpin around which both Katie's and Ruth's stories revolved the challenge became how to link the two interweaving stories successfully whilst maintaining separate linear time frames.

This was solved after reading Churchill's *Top Girls* in which Churchill used the dramatic device of flashback to tell the stories of six women, either historical or literary heroines at a dinner party. The purpose of the six women characters was to show the exploitation of women through the ages and to encourage the audience to reflect on Marlene's sacrifices, revealed later in the play, as she fought to reach the top position in the company. I realised that using flashback could be an interesting way of interweaving Katie and Ruth's stories instead of using static narration. I began to write with Ruth narrating from the journal at each transition point into the 19<sup>th</sup> century vignette which would segue into Katie acting the journal contents.

Further shaping of the play resulted in cutting characters, dialogue and some vignettes to create a play which followed Freytag's dramatic structure of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and denouement. My first draft dialogue was for the most part, easy to read and sounded natural. I had escalating conflicts for my two central women and motivation for their actions. The antagonists helped to escalate the rising tension.

There were problems with some of the scenes being overly long. The result was that sometimes a character appeared to be labouring a point and slowing the rhythm and tempo of the play. The solution was to take a red pen and remove any unnecessary dialogue. This was a process which continued until the final copy of the play.

As writing progressed unnecessary characters were deleted from the play. My primary aim was to ensure that the focus remained on the theme and plot. For the most part this was easy to do until the removal of two reporters. Their function had been to advance the story timeline, recap or fill in backstory. Unfortunately they were not working well in advancing the realism of the play. They continually broke the fourth wall and when combined with the narration of the journal there was too much talking and not enough action. Their removal caused the whole play structure to collapse. I had to find a way to reinstate their exposition by reassigning essential parts of their dialogue, necessary for the continuity and clarity, to other characters.

## **FINDING THE CHARACTERS**

The characters I had the most difficulty writing were the contemporary characters of Ruth and Richie. I had been able to write their conflicts but struggled with writing their vulnerability. The original characters were too strong, too clear about their direction and purpose and I needed to imbue them with uncertainty and greater confusion to make them believable and to show a clearer pathway of personal discovery. It was important that I got that right because I needed to demonstrate the psychological impact of their conflicts. It seems so obvious but it was a weakness in the writing which I will be aware of in the future.

## **SHAPING THE STRUCTURE**

The new structure resulted in the cutting several vignettes which were no longer working to escalate the conflicts in Katie and Ruth's stories. A scene between Ruth's husband, Richie, and her best friend Claire, in which they discussed Ruth's state of mind was deleted because, although it created a backstory, it was *telling* rather than showing what was happening in Ruth's life. I replaced it with a vignette showing Ruth's depression caused by the stress in her life piling on top of her (p 70). Another discarded vignette was one in which Claire and Ruth chatted informally over drinks. The play up until this point had focussed on Ruth's political ambition. I had thought I needed to introduce a softer, more human side of Ruth. The problem was that it provided no action

which challenged Ruth's journey towards self-realisation. This happened because I had not given my antagonist, Claire, a strong enough motivation for conflict with Ruth. The result was the tempo and mood of the play decreased. It was at this point I was given a valuable piece of advice which was 'come in late and get out early'. This would prove to be a godsend. Ruth's vulnerability was rewritten into a later scene between Ruth and Claire. In the vignette Ruth admits she has doubts as to whether she would return to politics and Claire responds by challenging her to get back to work and finish what she started.

RUTH I'm not sure, Claire. What if I'm wrong. I could lose Susie and that's not an option for me.

CLAIRE Bollocks! Ruth. Put your bloody violins away and wake up! Every day, I face mothers stretched to breaking point trying to balance work and family.

RUTH You know the more I think about it, the sillier I realise I am. After all, it was just a dream. Maybe Richie was right. Politics and family don't mix.

CLAIRE Ruth, talk to Richie. Work out a way to look after Susie that works for both of you. You don't have to do this on your own. If Kate Sheppard could mobilise 32,000 women in 1893 I'm damn sure you could better than that today. You need to change women's perceptions (p 74).

Both major cuts served the dramatic structure well and the replacement scenes added a much stronger through-line in the play.

## **CLIMAX AND DENOUEMENT**

Whilst dialogue, conflict and rising action were falling into place, finding a suitable place to locate the climax and getting the denouement right was not. What I had not done early enough in the planning process was to write out the whole story. This initially hindered shaping the ending of the play. I had listed my conflict points but not thought incisively about how I was going to tie all the storylines together.

In *Stand in Her Shoes* the two protagonists, Ruth and Katie, have parallel storylines: both are mothers: both face opposition from their husbands: both women have created

problematic relationships with their daughters. Where their storylines differ is that they diverge in different directions in the final outcome of their relationship with their daughters and their marriage. Katie sacrifices her relationship with her daughter to continue her quest for emancipation. Ruth, who had focussing on her career, comes to the realisation that she would suffer a metaphorical ‘death’ of her relationship with her child if she did not change her path. I had always wanted this point in the play to be the climax and the catalyst for Ruth’s change. This eventually became the dream sequence (p 72). The difficulty lay in where to position the climax. After a lot of trial and error and becoming so frustrated I considered deleting it, the eventual solution was to add an extra vignette in which Ruth has a bout of depression. She lies down, drifts into sleep and dreams about Katie and her dead daughter (p 70).

## **LANGUAGE AND DIALOGUE**

Writing in two different eras required two different styles of language: the more formal Victorian speech and the contemporary vernacular. There were no issues with keeping the two styles separate when spoken which strengthened the aural aspect for the audience. Bessie’s Scots accent was interesting to write (p 53). There had to be a trade-off over what was ‘correct’ and what the audience would be able to understand. I had based her on the way my maternal grandfather spoke and chose to use an accent which would be familiar with a New Zealand audience. I will apologise to the Scottish people later. I wanted my dialogue to be as natural as possible and I borrowed from Churchill to give added tension during Ruth’s vignettes where she argues with Richie and Claire. Churchill uses the symbol / to denote that the second character speaks during the dialogue of the first character (p 53). I used this to create a natural sounding argument. During arguments people often cut each other off or over talk each other. I wanted this level of authenticity in the dialogue.

We all play characters every day in the way we interact with each other depending on the role we play. The dialogue was key for me in defining the characters. For Ruth, I wanted her professional voice and tone to be different to her ‘home’ voice. Churchill’s Marlene has two distinct tones when she speaks. A formal, direct and confident professional businesswoman and as a sister and aunt who negotiates the tricky waters of dysfunctional family life in a far more low-key style of speech. I wanted Ruth’s dialogue with the Assistant to show her professionalism but her dialogue with her mother, best friend Claire and Richie I wanted the tone and feeling in her speech to

reflect her state of mind and status with each character. For the character of Mother, I wanted to have a caring and warm nurturing tone. The use of endearments such as 'dear' when she speaks with Ruth was to indicate the informality of their relationship (p 62). I needed Claire to be equal to Ruth but to give the audience the perception of a long-time friend with the use of a light, more casual, tone and a stronger voice to deliver home truths to Ruth. The relationship between Marlene and Joyce shows this dynamic. They know each other too well and are not prepared to stop the punches rolling on an emotional level. For Katie I needed her to have a simpler style of language compared to Alec to give the perception of her being submissive in the early part of the play. Katie undergoes a rite of passage from naiveté to understanding her world around her. It is with Abigail that we start to see her confidence growing (p 67 - 68). The final speech needed an oratorical tone compared to the rest of the play's dialogue. For the most part I used shorter sentence structure to indicate anger and energy and longer sentence structures for reflective pieces.

## **THE JOURNAL**

The journal was the link between past and present and contained the lessons Ruth needed to learn. As a foreshadowing device, it worked well. It also gave rise to one of the most atmospheric parts of the play: the dream sequence. It is hard to get an idea of what this will look like in production. It reads well and I hope adds an element of surprise for the audience both visually and aurally. In an early draft both Katie and Ruth met and spoke to each other. Angie, my supervisor, and I discussed the dramatic implications of this section several times. I was adamant that the scene should be included. Again, I received more valuable advice. "Less is more, Lynn, less is more." Simple action speaks louder than words. There is a tendency to invest too much into a favourite character or scene at the expense of the clear flow of narrative or the tight rhythm of the words and action. If I have learned anything about playwriting it is to always have an open mind.

## THE PLAY READING WORKSHOP

I had circulated the script to each reader and allocated roles so they had some familiarity with the play before we began. I had deliberately chosen people who knew how to ‘cold read’ a script. Each reader was asked to make notes as we progressed through the first read-through so that we could discuss concerns or suggestions at the end.

After the reading, everyone in the group appeared to understand the central themes in the play as they related to power and gender bias. Readers found the antagonists served their purpose well providing opposing arguments and giving the characters opportunities to clarify and elaborate on their positions. An interesting discussion ensued at the end over which characters were liked or disliked. I found this to be valuable and an endorsement that the character had been sufficiently robust for the readers to have some emotional attachment to them in such a short space of time. Bessie, Assistant, Katie, Mother and Claire were all liked. Alec, Abigail were both disliked. Ruth and Richie received a mixed reception. It became clear that I needed to strengthen Ruth and Richie’s psychological dynamics so that both characters had more humanity and a greater sense of confusion around their beliefs and motivations. Ruth, in particular, came over as harsh, uncompromising and lacking in self-reflection. I needed to be able to show her foibles and weaknesses as well as her strengths so that the audience would have greater identification with her.

The interweaving stories in a linear time sequence was understood by most of the readers but one issue which arose concerned the transitions in which Ruth narrated from the journal. There were too many. Not only did Ruth’s narrations create too much focus on her at the expense of Katie, it limited the ability to transition into the physical world of Katie’s past. After discussion it was decided that Ruth would only narrate the first entry in the diary and then Katie would do the rest. It was suggested that we refine this further by dropping Katie’s narration after the first few which allowed her to directly act her story. This was a great improvement and would make staging the story much clearer and more dramatic.

Comments to improve the script included the need to make alterations where the dialogue could be more incisive and/or simpler, e.g.,

RUTH Excellent, that's what I like to hear, people's votes are a pretty strong incentive for politicians who care more about their job come the next election than any desire to see social change

This became,

RUTH Excellent, that's what I like to hear. Let's face it, we all know politicians care more about their jobs than social change but if the public demand it, they'll vote for it. (p 48).

Richard, our director, thought there needed to be more action and less talk. There were scenes that seemed to lack energy. There was often too much exposition where the scene was set up, the time of day established and the characters' motivations delineated. So out came the red pen and we made some serious cuts. As an example, the opening vignette which had been between Ruth and Richie had; established that Ruth was a politician; Richie was taking a new job in Antarctica and, Susie, their daughter was staying at her grandmother's. This was deleted from the play. The original opening lines had been,

RUTH Mummy will be home soon. Did you brush your teeth? ... Good girl.

I cut most of the exposition in this scene and started it in Ruth's office with the Assistant walking into Ruth's office saying,

ASSISTANT And you've got an 11am meeting with the Finance Minister, Select Committee meeting at 1pm, 3pm interview on National 3 radio, followed by a 4.30 pm meeting with the American Ambassador. Your flight is at 7.30pm. I sent a reminder to your phone and here (*handing her the coffee*) is your soy latte. (p 47).

This was an active rather than passive opening to the play and immediately establishes Ruth as a politician under pressure of time and expectation. We continued looking for areas where deletions could be made to increase the pace and energy of the play.

We then discussed the shape of the play. We discussed the trajectory of Ruth's and Richie's story. It was felt that the primary focus on Ruth being driven in her work at the expense of her child needed to be given greater complexity. There needed to be a

stronger sense of journey: times when she struggled, times when she appeared to prevail. Like a traditional hero's journey, we needed to have a clearer sense of the obstacles she had to face and how she would overcome them.

After the second reading of the play, there was consensus that the amendments had improved the tempo and the dialogue was more active. Less exposition gave each scene a clearer dramatic focus and sharper sense of narrative.

With the workshop editing completed I began to concentrate on Ruth's trajectory in the last half of the play. One of Ruth's problems was the constant juggling between her personal life and work. I needed to make it clear that the pressures were building for Ruth in a way that would build tension and lead to a point of climax where Ruth has no choice but to pull herself together and change her destiny. At the beginning of the play, we see Ruth in a place of relative harmony: Richie is taking on most of the childcare, her mother is providing crucial support and Ruth appears to be juggling a career and motherhood in ways that are stressful but mostly harmonious. It was then necessary to create a world in which Ruth's structures break down, her mother decides to leave, Richie walks out, the pressures at work become insurmountable and, to top it all, her daughter is injured as a result of a negligent nanny resulting in Ruth feeling the guilt of Susie's hospitalisation. The pressure builds to such a pitch that Ruth withdraws and becomes depressed. These events became crucial in building the trajectory of tension that was largely lacking in the first reading.

In the process of rewriting the script, I also changed the ending so that rather than have Richie moving away, I had him move to Wellington so that, even though the couple had separated, he could play an equal role in their childcare arrangements. I also left open the option of Ruth and Richie getting back together at some future date. This arrangement then made it possible for Ruth to have a career and take her place as a mother while campaigning to improve conditions for all parents in her role as a politician. She had been a victim of circumstances, but at the crucial point in the story, was able to pull herself together and work towards a modest solution.

I have learned to write my story out in full first so that I can get see the shape of the play before I begin the dialogue. Not doing this cost a lot of time and rewriting. I will be far more confident in cutting scenes and dialogue which don't have enough action in

future. I found the readings to be invaluable for feedback and next time I would start that process earlier in the play's development. I feel the play is the best it can be at this stage in the process. I know there are still some rough edges and there will be more cuts and rewrites once we begin the workshopping. I couldn't have done it without the people who generously gave up their time and I now look forward to getting *Stand in Her Shoes* through to becoming performance ready.

My hope was to create a New Zealand play that would show some aspects of the cost of emancipation through the social and political powers enacted upon both 19<sup>th</sup> century and 21<sup>st</sup> century women. I also wanted to create a narrative that would be relatable for a contemporary audience. The journey of writing this play has been labour-intensive, illuminating and challenging, but I hope *Stand in her Shoes* has achieved its objective and that those who eventually see the play in performance will be informed and engaged.

## CONCLUSION

I wanted to see if I could write a New Zealand play inspired by Elizabeth Colenso and the Victorian suffragists which showed the conflicts of emancipation for 21st century women in positions of power in a play which would resonate and engage a contemporary audience. Overall, I would say that this has been successful. Human conflict stories where heroes overcome great difficulty or flawed heroes suffer great sorrow have resonated with audiences for centuries. Although the initial inspiration was drawn from historical events then contrasted with modern societal attitudes towards working mothers *Stand in Her Shoes* it is an entirely original piece of literature. Extensive research provided the background to the political and social environments which helped shape Ruth and Katie's psychological profiles. It also located the play firmly in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

Refining a literary work requires rewriting and editing many times. As this play moves forward to the workshopping and production stages I am sure there will be more honing of the script. It required more than a good story to engage with an audience. The play must be well crafted, lively, exciting and able to connect emotionally with the audience. Have I achieved this? Time will tell. I look forward to that challenge.

CHAPTER 4

STAND IN HER SHOES

Written by  
Lynn Bushell

(c) 2018

# STAND IN HER SHOES

A One Act Play

For Maria

A story inspired by New Zealand pioneer Elizabeth Colenso and the Victorian suffragists who believed in the right of women to be more than the chattels of men.

## INTRODUCTION

What happens when past and present collide? Two women, from two different eras, linked by blood, strive for fulfilment in their lives. Both are wives and mothers, one seeks a voice; the other has a voice, both share a passion for independence on their own terms.

New Zealand suffragists fought for women to have a political voice. One hundred and twenty-five years later 21<sup>st</sup> century women have shattered the glass ceiling but at what cost.

The photograph referred to in the trunk is based on the Victorian practice of taking post-mortem photos of their deceased to keep for posterity.

The people in this play, their characters, their passions and opinions are fictions.

## **PRODUCTION NOTES**

The set should be minimal with no walls to allow actors to transition quickly between vignettes. Actors should freeze or walk in and out of the action as required.

Costumes design should be simple but easily able to adapt to the Victorian era should any actor play multiple roles.

If desired, placards held by stage crew at the beginning of each vignette tell the location and time of each scene. Alternatively, a projection may be used if available.

Stage crew and actors not in a scene are seated outside the acting area but on stage. They can be used to provide live sound as required.

A New Zealand flag must show in all parliamentary office scenes.

## CHARACTERS

RUTH	Richie's wife. Susie's mother. Politician. Mid 30s
RICHIE	Ruth's husband. Scientist. Late 30s
CLAIRE	Ruth's friend. Psychologist. Mid 30s
BESSIE	Alec's aunt. Victorian suffragist. 50s
KATIE	Alec's wife. Lily's mother. Victorian suffragist. Mid 20s
ALEC	Katie's husband. Lily's father. Victorian lawyer. Late 40s
ASSISTANT	Ruth's parliamentary personal secretary.
MOTHER	Ruth's mother. Susie's grandmother. Mid 60s
ABIGAIL	Alec's spinster sister. 50s
KATE SHEPPARD	Suffragist. Late 40s

/ denotes when two characters begin to speak at the same time.

## STAND IN HER SHOES: THE PLAY

### ACT 1

*LXX fade. RUTH's Parliamentary office. TIME: morning.*

*PLACARD: OFFICE – MINISTER for CHILD and FAMILY*

*RUTH sits at her desk reading a document and marking comments. ASSISTANT, speaking as she enters, carries a file and takeaway soy latte.*

- ASSISTANT.           And you've got an 11am meeting with the Finance Minister, Select Committee meeting at 1pm, 3pm interview on National 3 radio, followed by a 4.30 pm meeting with the American Ambassador. Your flight is at 7.30pm. I sent a reminder to your phone and here (*handing her the coffee*) is your soy latte.
- RUTH.                 Ahh, you're an angel. Just what I need, thank you. Now, tell me, any changes I should know about before the Cabinet meeting?
- ASSISTANT.           Not really. I've put a file together with stuff you might need (*pats file*) so you can just go with the flow.
- RUTH.                 No ambushes lurking?
- ASSISTANT.           Not that I've heard about.
- RUTH.                 What about the opposition? What's their latest push back on the Equal Parenting Bill?
- ASSISTANT.           Scaremongering about higher taxes.
- RUTH.                 Typical.
- ASSISTANT.           I think it's great. Did I tell you my brother-in-law was hounded out of a parent's room – told it was for women only?
- RUTH.                 Really? Who by?
- ASSISTANT.           A couple of mothers.
- RUTH.                 Honestly, if women want equality that's not the way to do it. Hope he told them to get with the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- ASSISTANT.           Nope, too embarrassed. Said it made him feel like a sexual deviant.
- RUTH.                 They should have been applauding him.
- ASSISTANT.           That's what I said. Thought you might like to know we're getting positive Press and social media comments indicate strong public support.



RUTH. And no one deserves it more than you but I thought we'd agreed to move to Wellington.

RICHIE. Yeah, I know, but opportunities like this don't come up very often. We can move when I get back.

RUTH. But you had a job all lined up.

RICHIE. There'll be others. I'll look for another one after I get back. It'll be fine.

RUTH. I just wish we'd had more time to discuss it properly, that's all.

RICHIE. I'll be team leader on this one.

RUTH. I thought Jack Orange was team leader?

RICHIE. Poor bastard's been diagnosed with terminal cancer.

RUTH. Really?

RICHIE. Yeah. Two kids, 12 and 14 years old.

RUTH. How awful.

RICHIE. Best prognosis, 6 months tops.

RUTH. Not what you'd wish on anyone.

RICHIE. No.

*There is silence as they absorb the news.*

RICHIE. By the way, have you seen the latest *Women of Influence*?

RUTH. No. Why?

RICHIE. *(handing her a copy)* You're on the front cover.

RUTH. *(derisively)* "Rising Star at 35." They make it sound as though age is a prerequisite for success.

RICHIE. They also say you're ambitious, focused, driven and the sexiest woman in Parliament.

RUTH. *(snorts and rolls her eyes)* Sexiest woman?

RICHIE. *(teasing)* Talent and intelligence don't sell magazines.

RUTH. Ha! Look at Helen Clark? They even airbrushed her. Ridiculous, *(noticing the trunk)* what's that?

RICHIE. I was looking for my backpack in the attic and found it under a pile of junk. Do you know how much crap's up there?

RUTH. Heaps. Four generations of it. I tried sorting it out once but gave up.

RICHIE. I thought you might be interested. It's got some of that old vintage stuff you like.

RUTH. *(intrigued)* Really?

RICHIE.                   Wanna have a look now or leave it till tomorrow.

RUTH.                    Let's do it now.

*RICHIE lifts trunk onto the table. RUTH opens it and begins sifting through the contents. Blankets, vintage dresses.*

RUTH.                    This stuff is so cool.

*She picks up an old handbag. The chain handle is stuck. Ruth tugs on it but it doesn't budge.*

RUTH.                    Hey Richie, can you give me a hand?

*RICHIE pulls the chain and reveals a false bottom.*

RUTH.                    A false bottom!

RICHIE.                  *(joking)* Maybe it's the long-lost family jewels.

*RUTH pulls out a Victorian baby's nightgown and photograph.*

RICHIE.                  Or, maybe not!

RUTH.                  *(examining garment)* Oh, look at this needlework, isn't it lovely?

RICHIE.                  *(picking up the photo)* Who's this?

RUTH.                  *(puzzled)* I don't know, *(turning it over, looking for information)* That's great-great-grandma Katie but the child, I'm not sure. Whoever she is, she's wearing this nightgown.

RICHIE.                  Looks Victorian. Your great-grandmother perhaps?

RUTH.                  Hardly, she was born later than that. I'll have to ask Mum, she might know. *(picks up an old leather-bound journal and reads the fly-cover)* Oh my goodness, I don't believe it.

*Ominous music underscores the action. RUTH, puzzled, looks around, sees nothing, shrugs and continues. RICHIE is totally unaware.*

RICHIE.                  What?

*RUTH opens the journal.*

RUTH.                  *(excitedly)* Do you remember me telling you about Katie's journals all being lost, burnt?

RICHIE.                  Nope.

RUTH.                  Yes, you do. *(RICHIE shakes his head)* Oh, never mind. *(reading out loud from the fly cover)*. Look, this is hers. Katie McDonald, 1889. How exciting. She was a formidable woman by all accounts. Didn't take shit from anyone.

RICHIE.                  *(sotto voice)* Wonder who that reminds me of!

*RUTH shivers and rubs her arms. RICHIE notices.*

RICHIE.                  What's the matter?

RUTH. Aren't you cold?

RICHIE. No.

RUTH. I hope I'm not getting the flu, (*listening*) what **is** that?

RICHIE. (*laughs*) **That** is my tummy rumbling. I'm starving.

RUTH. I'm serious.

RICHIE. So am I. Makes you hallucinate (*as if mesmerised*) STeeak, I see Steeak!

RUTH. (*laughs*) You're an idiot. Help me put this stuff away and then we'll see what we can rustle up.

*Ominous music fades as they replace everything in the trunk except the journal which RUTH keeps.*

RICHIE. Back in the attic?

RUTH. No... no leave it there. Who knows, the journal might explain what some of this stuff means.

*Phone rings OS*

RICHIE: (*annoyed*) Why does everyone always ring at dinner time? I'll get it.

*RICHIE exits*

*RUTH sits and begins to read the journal. Ominous music underscores only RUTH's dialogue.*

RUTH: (*out loud*) Christchurch. 4 December 1889. Today we reached a milestone. Our first wedding anniversary. It has been a year of change, compromise and accustoming ourselves to married life. (*she stands*) Although it has been a blessing there have been times when we are like oil and water.

*KATIE's voice blends with RUTH's from OS*

*KATIE's LOUNGE*

RUTH/KATIE. Finally, after a year of suffering my cooking

*RUTH's voice stops and she freezes. Ominous music fades and LXX fade to flashback and a pregnant KATIE continues to speak as she enters carrying a shawl.*

Alec has agreed that we shall employ a cook. No more stew which tastes like boiled socks. We shall have a memorable Christmas dinner.

*KATIE sits on the chaise longue embroidering a shawl.*

KATIE. 4 weeks and we are to be parents. Alec is convinced it will be a boy. I find myself wishing for my mother's wise counsel especially with the baby due. It will be 2 years next month since she passed on. It is Alec's Aunt Bessie who provides comfort and soothes my fears as an expectant mother. My only regret is that we must meet in secret.

*There is a knock as if on a front door and BESSIE calls as she enters.*

BESSIE. Yoo-hoo, Katie, 'tis just me.

KATIE. Bessie? Is that you?

BESSIE. Aye, lassie.

KATIE. How lovely, come in, come in (*they embrace*) sit down.

BESSIE. Och, that nor'wester is nae pleasant (*moving to the table she uncovers her basket with a flourish*) fresh scones and cream, thought we'd ha' a wee treat. (*She looks at KATIE, shocked*) Lassie, what have ye doon? That's some clout on yuir heid!

*The audience see she has a bruised face.*

KATIE. It's nothing, honestly. I tripped, hit the cupboard door, that's all.

BESSIE. Mmm, well, ye need t' take care, 'specially with a wee bairn on tha' way.

*During the next section they eat the scones.*

KATIE. I know, that's what Alec says.

BESSIE. And where is that braw nephew o' mine?

KATIE. He's in court today representing one of the rangatira over a land dispute.

BESSIE. I haired he got into a wee altercation. I dinnae ken the man. He's nae stupid.

KATIE. No, but sometimes the whisky talks.

BESSIE. Och weel, I s'pose there's nae much ye can do when he's scuppered. His brains gae oot the door.

*There is a pause as BESSIE considers KATIE.*

Ye should come tae one of our women's temperance meetings lassie, Kate Sheppard makes a lot o' sense.

KATIE. You know Bessie, I may do that one day, (*deliberately changing subject she picks up her embroidery*) I've nearly finished. What do you think?

BESSIE. Och 'tis the work of an angel. Ye have a true talent. Just like yuir mither.

KATIE. I don't think I'll ever be as good as her.

BESSIE. Wheesh't, Katie McDonald, there's muir of your mither in ye than y' ken.

KATIE. (*reflective*) I miss her Bessie. Sometimes I think I hear her voice and I turn... but she's not there.

BESSIE. Lassie, she'll always be guiding ye. I ken she would have been verra proud of ye and the wee bairn in yuir belly.

*OS a town clock strikes 4 o'clock.*

Och, is that the time? I had nae noticed. I best be on ma' way home.

*The sound of a horse and carriage can be heard approaching.*

KATIE. *(panicking)* That must be Alec!

*KATIE clears away the scones away, grabs the plate out of BESSIE's hand leaving her holding half a scone and rushes OS to the kitchen. She runs back in and quickly bundles her embroidery out of sight.*

BESSIE. *(bemused)* Whatever is the matter with ye Katie?

*ALEC enters, KATIE stands nervously smoothing her hair and dress.*

ALEC. *(good humouredly)* Well, now, there's a beautiful sight for sore eyes.

KATIE: *(nervously)* Alec... you're home already.

ALEC. The court adjourned early, *(pulls Katie to him and kisses her)* Oh, I nearly forgot, these are for you.

*He hands her a posy of flowers and suddenly notices Bessie.*

ALEC: *(belligerently)* What are you doing here? *(to KATIE)* What is she doing here? I have told you, she is not welcome in this house.

BESSIE. It's yuir lucky day then, I dinnae come to see ye.

ALEC. I'll have no suffragist agitator in this house. I have a reputation to uphold in this community and I expect my wife's full support. You will do well wife to remember who provides the roof over your head before/

BESSIE. /Alec McDonald! That is nae the way t' speak to /your...

ALEC: *(snarling)* /You, stay out of this! She is **my** wife and she does as **I** say!

*BESSIE, KATIE, and ALEC freeze. RUTH lowers the journal.*

RUTH Jesus, what a misogynistic prat!

*RUTH freezes*

*LXX fade. RUTH's Parliamentary Office. TIME: Morning.*

*RUTH unfreezes and is talking on her mobile phone as she moves to sit at her desk.*

RUTH. Absolutely...I agree. Thank you.

*RUTH disconnects. ASSISTANT enters with some letters for signing and places them on RUTH's desk.*

ASSISTANT. Another vote?

RUTH: *(laughs)* Ha! If only politics were that easy.

ASSISTANT. I admire your ability to handle all this uncertainty. I like all my ducks lined up in neat little rows.

RUTH. It's why we're such a good team. Like Yin and Yang.

ASSISTANT. I like that! So, what's our plan moving forward?

RUTH. Talk to my speech writer. I want something for the employer's association and business leaders. Push the flexible parenting hours, work from home, remote offices. Appeal to the father in them. Oh! And find me stats on the ratio of women to men looking after kids as well.

ASSISTANT. Ok. I think it's 'women do 7 to 9 times more than fathers' but I'll double check.

RUTH. Good idea. Have a look at Sweden, see what their stats are. I'm sure I read somewhere they're giving fathers 5 months parental leave.

ASSISTANT: *(astonished)* What? Our dads only get a few weeks.

RUTH. They're social policies are very family orientated.

ASSISTANT. Do you think we'll get this Bill through?

RUTH. Absolutely - preparedness, persistence, and positivity - that's what we'll need and doing our homework on the questions the opposition are likely to throw at us.

ASSISTANT. And the media.

RUTH. And the media. What have we got?

ASSISTANT. Cost overruns, loss of skilled workers, the usual stuff.

RUTH. I think we'd better get the policy wonks onto this. Tell them I want plain English answers.

ASSISTANT. When's the deadline?

RUTH. End of the week. And no mistakes. We don't need any surprises derailing us.

ASSISTANT. Right, then. I'd better get on to it. If you could just sign those before you go.

*RUTH nods and begins checking and signing the letters. ASSISTANT exits and calls from OS.*

Do you want a Press briefing?

RUTH. Why not. Let them have their fun. I'll give them facts and they'll print fiction.

*RUTH, picking up the letters and her phone, exits.*

*LXX fade. RUTH's lounge. TIME: evening.*

*RUTH enters with her computer and bag. RICHIE follows, dressed in smart casual clothes and carrying a newspaper.*

RICHIE. But, Ruth, I've organised drinks at the pub tonight to celebrate my trip, remember?

RUTH. No, when did you do that? You didn't tell me.

RICHIE. *(getting annoyed)* Yes, I did, Ruth. Yesterday.

RUTH. You can't have, it'd be in my schedule.

RICHIE. That bloody schedule! It's your whole life. Everything has to be scheduled, including me.

*RUTH ignores his comment. RICHIE throwing the newspaper onto the table grabs his car keys.*

RICHIE: *(bitterly)* Fine, suit yourself! I don't even know why I thought you'd like to come!!

*RUTH, exasperated, stands.*

RUTH. Richie, trying to make me feel guilty won't work. I'll come down when I've finished, ok?

RICHIE. Don't bother. Everyone's used to seeing me on my own anyway!

RUTH. Richie, wait!

*RICHIE exits. A door slams. A car leaves. RUTH's mobile phone rings. She checks the message.*

RUTH. Oh, for goodness sake not now!

*Throwing the phone on the desk she sets up her laptop and begins typing.*

*The clock ticks. We are given the impression time has passed. It is obvious RUTH is tired and cranky. It is now the early hours of the morning.*

RUTH. No, no! Delete, delete, delete.

LATER THE SAME EVENING

*We hear footsteps approaching from OS. Clock ticking fades. RICHIE enters, hair tousled and in his pyjamas.*

RICHIE: *(yawning)* You still working? Do you know what time it is?

RUTH. Mmmm?

RICHIE. It's nearly 2am.

RUTH. I'm sorry, did I wake you?

RICHIE. No. the cat did, purring in my face, *(standing behind RUTH massaging her shoulders)*, can't all this wait until tomorrow?

RUTH. No. Cabinet meets in the morning.

RICHIE. Yeah, well it's just, *(pauses and stops massaging)* never mind.

RUTH. No go on, what?

*RICHIE walks towards the bedroom exit.*

RICHIE: Nothing...

RUTH: *(annoyed)* Don't do that!

*RICHIE turns back.*

RICHIE. Do what?

RUTH. Say, nothing, when obviously there **is** something.

RICHIE: *(challenging)* You really want to know? Really?

*RUTH nods, waiting for RICHIE to continue.*

RICHIE: *(pauses)* Ok. Sometimes I don't feel you're aware of what Susie and I need anymore.

RUTH. What? *(laughs)* That's ridiculous.

RICHIE. Don't believe me? Alright. Susie's 4<sup>th</sup> birthday party. You told her you'd be there. Remember? So, you tell me, Ruth, what was I meant say to our daughter when she asked why everyone else's mother was at her birthday party but hers wasn't? You don't make it easy on any of us, Ruth.

RUTH. Is that all? Richie, she's four years old, she'll get over it. She won't even remember it for God's sake. Susie knows she's loved, what else does she need?

RICHIE. Her mother. She misses you, Ruth.

RUTH. As long as we have quality time together Susie will be fine. Stop fussing.

*RUTH turns back to her work. RICHIE watches her for a few moments. He can't believe her disinterest.*

RICHIE: *(exasperated)* I'm going back to bed!

*RICHIE exits. RUTH turns back to her computer and freezes.*

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*LXX fade. RUTH's Parliamentary office. TIME: morning.*

*RUTH unfreezes and closes her laptop. ASSISTANT enters, singing to herself. She is surprised to see RUTH.*

ASSISTANT: *(cheerfully)* Oh! Good morning, isn't it great to see the sunshine?

RUTH: *(morosely)* If you want melanoma.

*ASSISTANT notices RUTH's lethargy.*

ASSISTANT. Oh dear, all-nighter, was it?

RUTH. 3.00am before I got to bed *and* I forgot it was Richie's farewell 'do' last night which went down like a lead balloon.

ASSISTANT. I can imagine. I'm sorry, but there's more bad news. The PM wants all senior ministers at Question Time as a show of solidarity.

RUTH. Great! I'll try not to fall asleep. (*handing ASSISTANT a file*) Can you make sure the Speaker of the House has my questions.

ASSISTANT. Sure.

RUTH. Wait a minute, what time do I have to be in the House?

ASSISTANT. 2 pm. I updated your schedule.

RUTH. But, I can't. My flight home is at 3pm.

ASSISTANT. Leader of the Opposition is calling for the PM's resignation.

RUTH. Not again. Pompous prick!

ASSISTANT: (*laughing*) Can I quote you?

RUTH: Not a career move I'd recommend. Any chance you can change my flight?

ASSISTANT. When I booked there was nothing after 3pm until 7pm tomorrow night. All Blacks versus Australia game in Christchurch. All flights are full.

RUTH. You're joking?

*ASSISTANT shakes her head.*

RUTH. It's my daughter's school interview tomorrow morning and Richie leaves for Antarctica in the afternoon. I promised them I'd be there. Damn! (*checks her watch and groans*) Aargh! Sometimes I hate this job! Don't suppose you could hit the fire alarm at 1pm?

*ASSISTANT shakes her head.*

No? Oh well, worth a try. (*sighs*) This isn't going to be a pleasant conversation.

*ASSISTANT grimaces and exits. RUTH reluctantly picks up her phone and is dialling RICHIE as she exits.*

\*\*\*\*

*LXX fade to flashback: KATIE's lounge. TIME: morning*  
*KATIE enters and stands CS in a SPOT.*

KATIE. I am so tired. Lily is teething. She is very fractious. and waking throughout the night. Alec declares child rearing is woman's work and disappears into his library for peace. His lack of sympathy so annoyed me today that I rebelled at the unfairness of it all. I accepted Bessie's invitation to a WCTU meeting to hear Kate Sheppard speaking.

*BESSIE enters and stands with KATIE facing DS as if at a meeting.*

*Loud applause.*

*VO of KATE SHEPPARD.*

...and women must unite as one voice and say to our politicians and those who speak against us that 'All that separates, whether of race, class, creed, or sex, is inhuman, and must be overcome'.

*BESSIE and KATIE clap enthusiastically to the sound of cheering and wild applause.*

KATIE: *(excited)* Oh bravo, isn't she wonderful?

BESSIE. Aye lassie.

*KATE SHEPPARD enters briskly from DSF. BESSIE greets her.*

BESSIE. A bonnie speech, Kate.

K. SHEPPARD. A standing ovation. Let's hope those newspaper reporters print that!

BESSIE. *(notices Kate Sheppard's interest in Katie)* Och, where's my manners. Let me introduce ye to Katie. Ye'll ken I spoke to ye about her?

*BESSIE pulls an awed KATIE forward.*

K. SHEPPARD. Of course. Your first meeting?

KATIE: *(Shy)* Oh, yes. It was wonderful. It's given me so much to think about.

K SHEPPARD. Excellent, that's what we like to hear. Bessie tells me your husband is an anti-suffragist? *(KATIE nods)* Well, we shall just have to change his mind, won't we? Tell me, do you have a bicycle?

KATIE. Oh no. My husband disapproves of women/ who...

K SHEPPARD. /Bicycling, my dear is so liberating. You really should try it.

KATIE. I'm not sure I'd be brave enough.

K SHEPPARD. Of course you are. Anti-suffragists might twitter on about depravity and boldness in women who wear trousers and ride bicycles but we know it's all nonsense.

BESSIE. Aye. It's prejudice against women, puir and simple.

K SHEPPARD.           Cycling symbolises our message. Freedom from restrictive clothing, participating in an activity on the same level as a man, not to mention the sheer enjoyment of physical exercise.

*KATE SHEPPARD turns to BESSIE*

K SHEPPARD.           I'm sorry I can't stay and chat but I have another meeting.

*KATE SHEPPARD exits calling back over her shoulder.*

Remember! Sign that petition!

KATIE.                 She's not like the newspapers say she is at all. She's very genteel.

BESSIE.               Kate kens that a woman's wiles are muir effective w' a dose o' sugar.

KATIE.                 Imagine being 11 years old and prostituting yourself for food.

BESSIE.               If ye feel that strongly Katie, then join us, help gie those puir wee bairns a better life.

KATIE.                 I'd like to but if Alec found out...

BESSIE.               Wheesht! That man cannae see the end of his nose. Change is coming Katie.

*KATIE is quiet as they collect their bags. BESSIE notices.*

BESSIE.               Ye've gone verra' quiet lassie.

KATIE.                 I've been thinking, *(pause)* would you mind Bessie if I borrowed your bicycle?

BESSIE.               Och now, that's the spirit. I cannae wait to see Alec's face.

*They exit. BESSIE laughing, enjoying the moment,*

\*\*\*\*

*LXX fade. RUTH's office. TIME: afternoon.*

*ASSISTANT enters carrying a bottle of champagne, two glasses and a large file which she places on RUTH's desk. ASSISTANT's mobile phone rings. Annoyed, she turns her phone off. She is pouring champagne as RUTH enters triumphantly.*

RUTH.                 Yes! *(fist pumps)* We did it! Reading 2 of the Equal Parenting Bill is a done deal.

*ASSISTANT hands RUTH a glass of champagne.*

ASSISTANT.           Congratulations.

RUTH                 Thanks.

*They clink glasses in salutation.*

I'm absolutely knackered. That was brutal and so close. It came down to the final two votes.

ASSISTANT. There were a few turncoats.

RUTH. Yes. I'll remember that next time they want a favour.

*RUTH throws herself into her chair, rubs her face and stretches.*

RUTH. I don't want to know how many palms I had to grease, promises I had to make, hands I had to shake or backs I had to slap but it was worth every one.

ASSISTANT. At least you didn't have to kiss them.

RUTH. Thank God! We're making history.

ASSISTANT. I've put the phone on hold – there's been so many calls.

RUTH. I'm not surprised. One more reading to go. That'll be a slugfest, sorting out the detail. I think I deserve a treat, a massage, hot bath, candles and bubbles in that order.

ASSISTANT. Nice try but I'm afraid you'll have to hold that thought; the PM wants this read (*patting the file on the desk*) and your recommendations on his desk by 5pm tomorrow.

RUTH. You've got to be joking, how many pages?

ASSISTANT. 302.

RUTH: (*groans*) Really? You're not winding me up?

*ASSISTANT shakes her head*

RUTH: (*sighs*) No rest for the wicked. I was going home tonight. (*flicking through the report*) I guess not. You'd better book me into a hotel and phone my mother, see if she can have Susie overnight again.

ASSISTANT. Do you think that's a good idea? Your Mum's been looking after her nearly every night for the last few weeks.

RUTH. (*sighs*) I know but I can't read this and get home and back as well. Look, just tell her I'll explain later.

ASSISTANT. Ok. Anything else?

*RUTH shakes her head, takes the file, collects her handbag and computer bag and exits followed by her ASSISTANT.*

\*\*\*\*

*LXX fade to flashback: Katie's lounge. TIME: evening.*

*KATIE enters with her embroidery and sits sewing. After a few moments ALEC, carrying a newspaper, strides into the room.*

ALEC: (*very angry*) What is the meaning of this?

*He slaps the newspaper onto the table.*

- KATIE. Alec? What's the matter? Is there something wrong?
- ALEC picks up the newspaper thrusting the front page in front of KATIE. A photo of Bessie, Katie and Kate Sheppard is on the front page.*
- ALEC. Kate Sheppard, Bessie, and Katie McDonald attend the WCTU meeting in Lichfield Hall. Well? Explain yourself.
- KATIE: *(defensive)* Please don't be angry. I just went with Bessie to hear Kate Sheppard, that's all.
- ALEC. After I expressly forbade you to have anything to do with Bessie.
- KATIE. In the house, yes. You didn't say that I couldn't meet her elsewhere.
- ALEC. Don't split hairs with me.
- KATIE. I only went along to / see if...
- ALEC. /To what? Make a laughing stock of me?
- KATIE. No.
- ALEC. Then why?
- KATIE. Alright. I went because I was annoyed at you and I wanted to find out for myself what it /was all about.
- ALEC. /Politics is men's work!
- KATIE: *(defensive)* But Alec, it was just one meeting.
- ALEC. That is irrelevant. Make no mistake Katie, the WCTU is meddling in politics and I will not have my wife agitating and making a spectacle of herself in public or there will be consequences. Do you understand?
- KATIE:*(angrily)* Oh yes Alec, I understand. Believe me I fully understand!!
- ALEC. Make sure that you do if you want to continue to live in this house.
- KATIE. What do you mean?
- ALEC. There will be no suffragist under this roof whilst I draw breath. That includes you, wife. I forbid you to go to any those meetings or rallies. If you do you will find yourself locked out.
- KATIE: *(shocked)* You wouldn't dare!
- ALEC. You will have no legal recourse to override my decision.
- KATIE. What about Lily? You could not be so cruel as to deny a child her mother.
- ALEC. I would and I will. Think hard Katie. I do not play games. The consequences of your choice will be of your own making!

*ALEC and KATIE stand measuring each other's resolve. LXX fade to a SPOT on both. Neither will give in and they turn and exit in opposite directions.*

\*\*\*\*

*LXX fade. RUTH's lounge. TIME: night.*

*RUTH's LOUNGE*

*MOTHER enters from the bedroom carrying her knitting bag. She sits and begins knitting. A car arrives and departs. A door slams. RUTH enters with her suitcase, computer, bag etc.*

RUTH. Mum, Hi, (*they embrace*) thanks for bringing her home. How did her school orientation visit go?

MOTHER. She was a bit clingy to start with, kept asking when you were coming, then she settled down and had a great time.

RUTH. I really wanted to be there.

MOTHER. Let's hope she forgets you weren't there.

RUTH. I'm sure she will.

MOTHER. Let's hope so. Tell me dear, what's all this stuff about Katie's journal.

RUTH. You know it's weird but every time I read it I get a feeling, like a premonition, that something disastrous is about to happen.

MOTHER. You're probably just imagining it.

RUTH. That's what Claire thinks.

MOTHER. You've seen her? How is she?

RUTH. Claire's Claire. She wants to read the journal. You don't mind?

MOTHER. Why would I? She's practically family.

RUTH. Thanks Mum. Oh, I nearly forgot, there's something else I want you to look at.

*RUTH gets the photograph and Victorian nightgown out of the trunk.*

RUTH. Do you know anything about these?

*RUTH hands MOTHER the nightgown and photograph.*

MOTHER. Well – (*looking at the photo*) that's obviously Katie, but the child I have no idea.

RUTH. It's not great-grandma?

MOTHER. No, not likely. She was a fair headed baby.

RUTH. Well, what about this gown, ever seen that before?

*MOTHER looks closely at it before handing it back to RUTH.*

MOTHER. No, sorry dear, I haven't. It's beautiful though isn't it?

RUTH. *(disappointed)* It is. Oh, well. I guess they'll just have to remain a mystery.

*RUTH returns the nightgown and photograph to the trunk.*

MOTHER. Maybe if we still had all Katie's journals we could have worked it out. Does that make you wonder why she kept this one. I'd like to read it sometime.

RUTH. Of course, it's a part of our family history.

MOTHER. Ah, yes, talking of family...

*There is an awkward pause as MOTHER stands looking at RUTH, obviously wanting to say something but not sure how to start.*

MOTHER. Ruth, there's something I've been meaning to tell you. I've decided to sell my apartment and move to Hawkes Bay.

RUTH. *(shocked)* What! Sell? No! You can't.

MOTHER. Your brother has a nice little granny flat next to the main house which will suit me fine. I don't need as much space since your father's gone.

RUTH. Oh Mum! Why not stay here? Live with us.

MOTHER. No, Ruth dear, I've thought/ this through.

RUTH. /You could rent your place out. It would give you an income.

MOTHER. I'm not getting any younger, Ruth and as much as I love Susie I find all the running around is getting too much for me. I want to take things more slowly and I want to be close to family.

RUTH. But you are. We're family. We're here.

MOTHER. No dear, you're not. You and Richie are both so busy with your careers you're hardly ever home.

RUTH. What about Susie? You mean the world to her.

MOTHER. As she does to me but now is the right time. She'll be starting school soon.

RUTH: *(close to tears)* But Mum, with my job, I need you here. *(pleading)* I need you. We need each other.

MOTHER. I know dear, but there come times when we have to make decisions for our own wellbeing.

*MOTHER and RUTH exit*

\*\*\*\*

*LXX fade to flashback: KATIE enters. She is annoyed and paces.*

KATIE Alec has installed a watch dog. His sister, Abigail. She has been prying into my private journal, follows my every move and reports my slightest transgressions to Alec.

Alec believes that I have accepted his rules. I have not. Abigail abhors exercise so I employ the subterfuge of taking Lily for long walks so I can continue working with the WCTU. Tomorrow there is to be a large rally and march. I intend to be there.

*KATIE sweeps out with purpose written on her face.*

\*\*\*\*

*LXX fade. RUTH's office. TIME: morning.*

*RUTH enters carrying a thick file. She sits at her desk and begins reading, occasionally making notes in the margin. Her mobile phone rings. Her ASSISTANT enters halfway through the conversation.*

RUTH. Hello? Ruth Wilson. Slow down, slow down. What's happened?... Oh my God (*panicking*) is she alright? ... Put the doctor on the phone. Then ask him to call me. I want to know immediately if anything changes.

*Disconnects. RUTH is agitated and anxious.*

ASSISTANT. Is everything ok?

RUTH. That was the nanny. Susie's had an accident.

ASSISTANT. Oh, no. Is it serious?

RUTH. She's in hospital, broken leg and concussion.

ASSISTANT. Poor little thing.

RUTH: (*angry*) What was the nanny thinking letting her ride on the road unsupervised?

ASSISTANT. She didn't did she?

*RUTH ignores the question.*

RUTH. It's my fault. I didn't check the nanny's references. Oh God, I was too busy and I never checked. Is there any way you can get me home earlier? I'm her mother. I should be there.

ASSISTANT. I'll do my best.

*ASSISTANT exits. RUTH's hands are shaking as she rings Richie.*

RUTH. C'mon Richie, pick up the phone, pick up, pick up, pick up!! (*no reply*) For God's sake Richie where are you when I need you?

*RUTH exits.*

\*\*\*\*

*LXX fade. RUTH's lounge. TIME: morning.*

*RICHIE enters. He is fed up.*

RICHIE. We're co-habiting Ruth. That's the sum of our relationship.

RUTH. You're just pissed because I wasn't here when you came back from Antarctica. Is this your way of getting back at me?

RICHIE. No, but I do question your priorities, Ruth.

RUTH. What do you mean?

RICHIE. Susie's still in hospital. Shouldn't you be with her?

RUTH. I was. The nurse said to go home.

RICHIE. Ok, but what about tomorrow and the day after that?

RUTH. In case it has escaped your notice. I happen to have a job that/ takes up...

RICHIE. / and that's it Ruth, in a nutshell. The job! It's always the bloody job!

RUTH. So what? I'm expected to chuck it in, is that it?

RICHIE. Of course not, but you need to face the truth. Your job is more important to you than our marriage or Susie.

RUTH. That's bullshit. Tell me you didn't put your work ahead of this family when you buggered off to the Antarctica!

RICHIE. Yeah, well there was more than one reason for taking that trip.

RUTH. Really? What?

RICHIE. To give me time to think about what I want out of my life.

RUTH. I'm all ears!

RICHIE. Ruth, I don't want a marriage of one. I'm over it. I think we should take a break - create some space.

RUTH. Space, what do you mean, space?

RICHIE. I've decided to move out.

RUTH:(angry) You're such a hypocrite, Richie, you really piss me off! Life's not all about you. It takes two to tango in a relationship.

RICHIE. And you never could dance!

*RICHIE storms out. A door slams.*

*RUTH, unmoving, holds her emotion in check until she hears a vehicle leaving. Her face crumples as she turns US and freezes.*

\*\*\*\*

*LXX fade. RUTH's lounge. TIME: evening. Two days later.*

*CLAIRE is hammering on the door. She is calling out to RUTH.*

CLAIRE. (OS) Ruth, are you in there? RUTH? Open up! RUTH!

*RUTH unfreezes.*

RUTH Hold on, hold on. It's not locked, come in.

*CLAIRE enters carrying two takeaway coffees. She wears a wet raincoat. CLAIRE puts the coffees on the table, takes her coat off and drapes it over a chair.*

CLAIRE. Good lord Ruth, you had me worried, I've been calling and you haven't answered. I thought something might have happened.

*Picking up the coffees she turns to RUTH.*

RUTH. Like what? I'd slashed my wrists?

CLAIRE. Don't be such a diva. Here, drink this, *(hands her a coffee)* you look like you need it.

RUTH. I'm sick of everyone telling me what to do.

CLAIRE. It's just a coffee.

*CLAIRE sits.*

RUTH. I don't think any of you have the slightest idea of the pressure I'm under.

CLAIRE. C'mon Ruth, you went into this with your eyes wide open.

*RUTH sits.*

RUTH. Yes, but Richie and I agreed we'd always raise Susie together. Now he's gone and says it's all my fault.

CLAIRE. I know it's been a hard time/ for you

RUTH. / Susie's coming home from hospital. How do I manage that on my own? And on top of that he's filing for custody.

CLAIRE. I'm sure he's/ only...

RUTH. /Telling the lawyer I can't provide Susie with a stable home environment.

CLAIRE. And can you? Now your Mum's not here?

RUTH. Whose side are you on?

*CLAIRE, is annoyed at RUTH's attitude and stands.*

CLAIRE. If I'm on anyone's side it's Susie's. She's the reason the two of you need to grow up, pull on your big panties and behave like adults.

*RUTH stands. She is all set to have a go at Claire.*

I'm appalled to think that my two best friends can be such idiots as to score points off each other at the expense of their own daughter. You know what Ruth, you're so self-centred sometimes, you sicken me, you really do!

*THEY are face to face.*

RUTH: *(furious)* You sanctimonious bitch! Get out!!

CLAIRE. Ruth, calm down! I'm trying to help you /see that...

RUTH. /Bullshit. Take your psychoanalytic crap and get out.

CLAIRE. Fine, if that's how you feel/ I'll

RUTH. I do!

*CLAIRE grabs her coat and leaves. A door slams. RUTH stand CS realising she has gone too far. She turns and runs US calling out to Claire.*

RUTH. Claire wait! Claire, come back! CLAIRE!

*Door slams.*

RUTH. Shit! SHIT!

*RUTH visibly upset, exits.*

\*\*\*\*

*LXX fade slowly to flashback: KATIE's lounge. TIME: afternoon.*

*KATIE enters followed by ABIGAIL.*

ABIGAIL. Did you have an enjoyable walk this afternoon?

KATIE. Yes. Not that I see it as any of your business.

ABIGAIL. Polite interest, nothing more.

KATIE. *(sarcastically)* Of course it is. You can report to Alec that we walked along the river and played in the park.

ABIGAIL. I went to the tea rooms with the Fitzgerald sisters.

KATIE. You must be exhausted.

ABIGAIL. Oh, no. Quite the contrary. I had a most enlightening afternoon. There was a suffragist's march today. Did you know that?

KATIE. *(wary)* I had heard, yes.

ABIGAIL. Bessie was there of course. She does tend to stand out in a crowd wouldn't you say? *(KATIE is silent)* As do those beside her.

KATIE. Speak plainly Abigail. What is it that you are suggesting?

ABIGAIL. I saw you striding down the street like a strumpet which is bad enough, but to expose your daughter to all manner of danger as well, that is utterly reprehensible!

KATIE. Not an opinion I share.

ABIGAIL. Then it will be your folly! I am sure Alec will be interested to hear of the flagrant flouting of his wishes.

KATIE. It will be your word against mine.

ABIGAIL. You think yourself so clever, but your conceit will be your undoing.

KATIE. *(angry)* And your mind is so narrow I'm sure you can look through a keyhole with both eyes.

*KATIE exits.*

*ABIGAIL - calling after KATIE as she exits.*

ABIGAIL. You will regret that, Oh, yes, my dear, you will regret that.

*ABIGAIL stalks offstage.*

\*\*\*\*

*LXX fade to a CS SPOT. KATIE moves into the SPOT and addresses the audience.*

KATIE. I have no words to describe how much I hate Abigail. Her prying is one thing but to maliciously and blatantly lie to Alec; embroidering the truth is truly unforgivable.

*KATIE turns US and freezes. ALEC enters, followed by ABIGAIL.*

ABIGAIL. I do not enjoy being the bearer of such news.

ALEC. Perhaps you are mistaken?'

ABIGAIL. Others have witnessed your daughter being exposed to all manner of disreputable places and people. Prostitutes, drunkards, diseased.

ALEC: *(surprised)* She takes Lily with her?

*KATIE unfreezes, overhearing the end of Alec's question*

KATIE. What about Lily?

*KATIE noticing ABIGAIL's smirking face, is wary.*

KATIE. *(to ABIGAIL)* You look like a cat who's swallowed cream. What have you done?

ALEC. So, it is true. You *were* at the march? *(pause)* Answer me!  
*If KATIE's look could kill. Abigail would be dead.*

KATIE. Yes.

ALEC. After I trusted you, you have deceived me.

*KATIE is silent, she has no defence.*

ALEC. Why Katie? *(pause)* Explain yourself or you leave me no choice.

KATIE. You could choose compassion and listen to my / side

ABIGAIL: *(derisive)* / Betrayal does not deserve compassion / brother.

KATIE: *(angry)* / May God strike you dead, Abigail!

*ABIGAIL is shocked into silence.*

ALEC. Katie!! Apologise!

KATIE. No! I will not! I'm tired of being a-a-a pawn, between you two. Choose Alec, it's me or her!

*ALEC turns and walks away from KATIE.*

KATIE. Alec?

ALEC. Abigail, leave us please.

*ABIGAIL goes to speak but Alec holds up his hand to stop her. She glares at KATIE as she exits.*

KATIE. Thank you.

ALEC. I do not condone your behaviour, Katie. Your actions show a total lack of good judgement.

KATIE. Alright Alec, alright. I'm sorry. I should not have gone. There. I've admitted I am to blame. Now can we stop all this nonsense?

ALEC. I warned you that your actions would have consequences. I will allow you one week to decide whether you wish to remain in this marriage.

KATIE. And if I choose not to, what then?

ALEC. You will leave this house and forfeit all rights to your daughter.

KATIE. You wouldn't dare!

ALEC. Those are my terms.

*ALEC briskly exits. KATIE, stunned, stands for a few moments as her anger grows. Defiantly she marches OS.*

\*\*\*\*

*LXX fade. RUTH's lounge. The room is semi-dark as if all the curtains are closed.*

*TIME: Three weeks later.*

*RUTH enters. She is depressed, dishevelled and barefoot. Totally unlike her normal self. She carries a packet of potato chips. Grabbing the TV remote from the table she plonks herself on the chaise longue and stares into space as eats.*

*The phone rings. RUTH ignores it. It goes to answer phone.*

RUTH's VO.           Hi this is Ruth. You know the drill. Leave a message.

ASSISTANT's VO.    Hi Ruth. Hope you get this message. Great news! Turn your TV on, right now. It's about the Bill. Talk soon. Bye.

*RUTH switches on the TV. Her whole demeanour is one of disengagement.*

TV Presenter VO.    In other news, Minister for Child and Family, Ruth Wilson's Equal Parenting Bill has passed another crucial vote today. If passed into law after its final reading in three weeks it will bring about the biggest social change for parents and children since women got the right to vote.

*Expressionless, RUTH switches off the TV. Slowly she gets up and goes to the answer phone and switches it on.*

CLAIRE'S VO.        Hi Ruth. It's Claire. Call me. I haven't heard from you in weeks. Hope you're ok. Bye.

*RUTH shows no reaction as she starts to exit.*

MOTHER's VO.       Hello, it's Mum. I know you'll think I'm a silly duffer but I'm worried you're not returning my calls. Is everything ok? Please call me. Bye-bye dear.

*LX X fade to flashback.*

*KATIE enters wearing a black shawl and stands CS in a SPOT facing DS.*

KATIE: *(aloud)*     I am still at Bessie's. Influenza is spreading like wild fire throughout the city and I am very worried about Lily. Yesterday's newspaper reported that another 6 people had died. It is the young and elderly who are most at risk. Such was my concern for Lily's health that I decided to appeal to Alec's better nature.

*OUTSIDE KATIE's House*

*LX closes to a tight SPOT on KATIE's face and upper body. ALEC enters and stands offset from KATIE in a SPOT lighting only his upper body.*

KATIE.               Alec, I'm worried, please, let me see Lily.

ALEC.                I am perfectly capable of ensuring Lily's safety.

KATIE.               If you will not let me in then at least bring her to the door so I may see her.

ALEC.                She is feeling poorly and Abigail has put her to bed.

KATIE.               Alec, she needs her mother, you have no experience with sick children.

ALEC.                Abigail is quite capable of attending to her needs.

KATIE.               Abigail has never had children, Alec. Open this door, now!

ALEC. You know my terms.

*SPOT fades on ALEC. He exits.*

KATIE. Alec? (silence) ALEC!!

*SPOT begins to fade as KATIE calls loudly as if to an upstairs bedroom.*

KATIE. Lily? It's Mama. Lily? Can you hear me? I love you.

\*\*\*\*

*SPOT XF to a DSF SPOT. KATIE pulls the shawl over her head and then walks into the light. She stands head bowed. There is a pause before she finally raises her head and addresses the audience.*

KATIE Friday September 12<sup>th</sup> 1892.

Lily passed into the hands of God today.

*She pauses. We see her sorrow.*

There is no light in my world.

*Black out. KATIE exits.*

\*\*\*\*

*LXX fade in to RUTH's lounge. TIME: evening.*

*RUTH enters. She is tidily dressed, hair done. She dumps her handbag and a bag of groceries on the table, takes a small cardboard cake box from the groceries and places it in front of her. She sits looking at it.*

*The house phone rings. She does not answer. It goes to answerphone.*

RUTH's VO. You know the drill. Leave a message.

ASSISTANT's VO. Ruth, where are you? The PM's on the warpath. No one's heard from you for three weeks. The next reading of the Equal Parenting Bill is coming up. We need you back urgently. Please phone me back.

*RUTH ignores the message. Removing a single, iced, red velvet cupcake from the cakebox, she finds matches, lights the candle, and watches it burn.*

RUTH, Happy birthday, Ruth.

*She blows out the flame. She sits for a few moments before standing, then leaving the cake on the table, she takes the journal from her bag, moves to the chaise longue, lies down, and begins reading but quickly drifts into a restless sleep.*

**The Dream** – *The mood should be surreal and ethereal. Mist roils across the floor.*

*Whispering voices underscore the scene.*

RUTH: (mumbles) Katie? (louder) Susie! (becoming entangled in her throw)  
Susie!

*KATIE enters dressed in black. In her arms she cradles Lily, dressed in the white Victorian nightgown.*



RUTH. After Mum and Richie left, I tried to be superwoman and crashed and burned.

CLAIRE. Shit, Ruth, why didn't you call me?

RUTH. I'm seriously considering giving up politics.

CLAIRE: *(astonished)* You're joking! Anyone but you, Ruth and I might believe it.

RUTH. I know, but I'm also a mother, Claire.

CLAIRE: *(disbelieving)* You want to be a stay-at-home mum?

RUTH. I had an epiphany. Katie came to me in a dream. It was so powerful. She stood there holding her dead daughter in her arms. Then she held the child out *(Ruth holds out her arms as Katie did in the dream)* as if saying - is this what you want?

CLAIRE. Her daughter died?

RUTH: *(nods)* I thought you knew.

CLAIRE. No, haven't finished the journal yet.

RUTH. Katie joined the WCTU and refused to stop so, Alec kicked her out of the house.

CLAIRE. Well, there's your answer.

RUTH.. What is?

CLAIRE. Katie didn't give up, she kept on fighting for women's rights. That's what she's telling you.

RUTH. I'm not sure, Claire. What if I'm wrong. I could lose Susie and that's not an option for me.

CLAIRE. Bollocks! Ruth. Put your bloody violins away and wake up! Every day, I face mothers stretched to breaking point trying to balance work and family.

RUTH. You know the more I think about it, the sillier I realise I am. After all, it was just a dream. Maybe Richie was right. Politics and family don't mix.

CLAIRE. Ruth, talk to Richie. Work out a way to look after Susie that works for both of you. You don't have to do this on your own. If Kate Sheppard could mobilise 32,000 women in 1893 I'm damn sure you could better than that today. You need to change women's perceptions.

RUTH. What do you mean?

CLAIRE. Equality is not a choice, it's a right!

*CLAIRE and RUTH exit.*

\*\*\*\*

*LXX fade. Ruth's lounge. TIME: Day*

*A Christchurch radio station is playing. RUTH enters with a carton marked lounge. She is packing up the things on the table. After a few moments there is a knock at the door.*

RUTH. It's open.

*RICHIE enters.*

RUTH:(*surprised*) Richie? What are you doing here?

RICHIE. Hello, Ruth.

*There is an awkward pause.*

RICHIE. (*nervous*) I'm sorry, I should have rung first, (*notices the packing carton*) you're packing?

RUTH. I'm moving in with Claire until I can get into my new place.

RICHIE. What new place?

RUTH. I've bought an apartment - in Wellington.

RICHIE. Wellington!

RUTH. It means I can spend more time with Susie.

RICHIE. I thought we agreed that raising Susie would be our joint responsibility.

RUTH. Yeah well, so far, I think we've both pretty much stuffed that up.

RICHIE. And how does me in Christchurch and you in Wellington make it better?

RUTH. Maybe if you'd discussed going to Antarctica with me BEFORE you chucked in a job in Wellington we wouldn't be in this situation.

RICHIE. So that's what this is all about is it?!!

RUTH. No, it's not.

RICHIE. What then?

RUTH. I want a relationship with Susie like I've got with my Mum.

RICHIE. Susie is not going to Wellington. No way.

RUTH. I'll fight you tooth and nail if I have to.

RICHIE. It's not all about you Ruth. She's my daughter. We have a 'special bond' that you are not going to come between.

RUTH. Then you should have thought about it before you walked out the door and threw our marriage away.

RICHIE. What choice did I have with your job? The insane hours. What about my career?

RUTH. There you go again, putting the blame on me. News flash Richie. I am not your whipping boy! Not anymore.

RICHIE. Alright I'll admit I shouldn't have put all the blame on you. It wasn't fair.

RUTH. At least we agree on something.

RICHIE. And that bringing Susie up together is important?

RUTH. Yes. I guess I can rip these up then.

*RUTH gets the custody papers out of her bag and rips them in half.*

RICHIE. You didn't sign them?

RUTH. No.

RICHIE. When do you have to be in Wellington?

RUTH. Three weeks.

RICHIE. I suppose that means I need to start looking for a job in Wellington.

RUTH. It'd be a step in the right direction.

RICHIE. You better get that bloody Bill passed so I can get some flexible hours.

RUTH. You could get a flat close to us.

RICHIE. A cheaper option would be to buy a property together.

RUTH. Let's take one step at a time, see how things work out.

*RICHIE considers the option for a moment.*

RICHIE. It'll be better for Susie.

RUTH. Yes.

*RICHIE nods.*

RICHIE. Right, well, I guess that's it.

*They both hesitate. There is nothing left to say.*

RICHIE. We had some good times, didn't we?

RUTH. Yeah. We did.

RICHIE. A new beginning for both of us?

RUTH. Yes. I guess it is.

RICHIE. You know Ruth, sometimes you just have to say what you mean. I'm not a mind reader.

RUTH. And you need to listen.

RICHIE. Forgiven?

RUTH. Don't push your luck.

*The embrace as friends.*

RICHIE. Right well, do you need a hand?

RUTH. No need, this is the last box.

RICHIE. I'll keep you posted then. (*RUTH nods*) Take care Ruth.

RUTH. Yeah, I'll be in touch.

*RICHIE takes a last look around.*

RUTH. Bye Richie.

*RICHIE nods and exits. RUTH watches him go. It is the end of their life together in this house. There is regret.*

*RUTH picks up the journal, opens the trunk and takes out the photo. She gently places it inside the journal before taking out the nightgown, neatly refolding it and returning it with the journal to the trunk. Slowly and gently she closes the lid.*

RUTH. Goodbye Lily, Katie. Rest in peace.

*RUTH stands and picks up the packing carton and her bag. She looks around for the last time, her emotion is evident. Then she takes a big breath, squares her shoulders, turns, and exits.*

\*\*\*\*

*Slowly the LXX fades to a SPOT CS. The sound of applause.*

*Women's Equality Conference.*

VOICE OVER. Ladies and gentlemen. It is with great pleasure I introduce the Minister for Child and Family, The Honourable, Ruth Wilson.

*Applause. RUTH steps into the light.*

RUTH. Today we have made history. The Equal Parenting Bill ends discrimination by employers and institutions on the grounds of simply being a parent.

We have achieved much but we must do more. Women must achieve equality. We need a Ministry which works for all women irrespective of age, income, occupation. or ability.

Domestic violence, sexual harassment, exploitation - domination of women must stop. We give birth to men - not monsters. We must educate, legislate. and drive for change. We must make people listen. I ask you all to think of the future and imagine your children and grandchildren with equal rights in all things, pay, jobs, the list goes on. In 1893, New Zealand led the world in women's suffrage driven by a desire for women's equality. New Zealand can lead the way again. We must make equality a reality. Women have a voice. We must use it. We must roar. Equality is not a choice. It is our right. *(pause)* It is our right!

*LX fade to black out.*

**END**

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*Figure 1. Stand in Her Shoes - play reading workshop. Greytown Little Theatre. Feb 2018.*

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