

Sheer Silence

© Bruce Goodman 1999

Frederick Lightoller – *father, aged late sixties early seventies*
Jane Clay nee Lightoller – *daughter, aged 28*
Janet Lightoller – *daughter, aged 25*
Alice Lightoller – *daughter, aged 22*
Joyce Lightoller – *daughter, aged 18*

1912. Waipawa, New Zealand. A dining area. There is a dining table and chairs. An armchair (usually with Frederick's straw hat sitting on it) is to the side of the room. There is a sideboard with drawers. There are three exits: one to the hall, one to the kitchen, one to the outside. Perhaps we can see down the hallway a little, with its different doors leading to different rooms.

First presented by Stage 2 Production, Auckland University, Maidment Theatre,
August 28 – September 7, 2002.

Director - Lex Matheson

Frederick Lightoller – Blair Cooper
Jane Clay – Angenita Pia Holzke
Janet Lightoller – Nadine Tibbetts
Alice Lightoller – Rebecca Cowley
Joyce Lightoller – Charlotte Everett

Act One, Scene One

Alice is sitting at the table reading a newspaper – the Waipawa Mail. Janet enters from outside door and drops another morning paper on the table. She holds three letters which have arrived in the morning post.

Janet: Paper.

Alice: *(still reading)* What?

Janet: Paper.

Alice: *(still reading)* I'm reading it.

Janet: You can't be.

Alice: Why?

Janet: I've just brought it in.

Alice: I'm reading it.

Janet: Must be yesterday's.

Alice: What?

Janet: The Waipawa Mail!

Alice: No.

Janet: Strange. Must have got two.

Alice: *(still reading)* Two what?

Janet: Papers!

Alice: *(not interested, reading)* They've launched the biggest passenger ship ever. In England.

Janet: Why did we get two papers?

Alice: We didn't.

Janet: We did. You've got one. I've got one.

Alice: *(back to reading)* Called the Titanic.

Janet: Since when were you interested in ships?

Alice: I'm not.

Janet: Why did we get two papers? There's three letters here for father.

Alice: It's luxurious.

Janet: Getting two papers?

Alice: *(Reading)* "She left Southampton on Wednesday with nearly three thousand aboard. She was built in 1911 and is, with the Olympic, the largest vessel afloat."

Janet: I should open them. They're for father. They'll be about Helen.

Alice: *(wanting to read the paper)* Open them, Janet. Just open them. Father won't mind.

Janet: Why do they call them "she"?

Alice: Forty-five thousand tons.

Alice turns the page of the newspaper. Janet opens a letter.

Alice: I'd like to go on a trip. On a cruise.

Janet: It's from the Bibby's.

Alice: That's very heavy.

Janet: *(reading)* "Dear Mr Lightoller, Jane, Janet, Alice, Ann and Joyce."

Alice turns the page.

Alice: "You too can have shiny pots".

Janet: "Words, let alone at a distance, cannot express our sympathy on the death of Helen."

Alice: Poor Helen. They're all the same. These letters. There's only so much that can be said, and they've all said it nine times.

Janet: "To lose a daughter and sister at the beginning of her life is a great..."

Alice: I would like to go on a cruise. To be one of the three thousand. That's the population of Waipawa.

Janet: Is it?

Janet stops reading the letter.

Alice: I don't know.

Janet: Alice, you don't seem to care that Helen died. You don't seem to mind that...

Alice: I mind. Of course I mind, Janet. She was my sister as much as she was yours.

Janet: Then why are you so callous? We're all in mourning and ...

Alice: We're out of mourning.

Janet: You don't seem to care. Father hasn't been the same and you're not...

Alice: Precisely. Father hasn't been the same. Father hasn't been the same since Helen died. It's sad that Helen died. None of us have been the same since Helen died. Ann won't come out of her room. Father mopes around the house and won't reply to any of the letters. You stand out at the mail box waiting for letters. As if Helen will arrive back with a postage stamp on her forehead.

Janet snorts disdainfully.

Alice: It is exactly as when mother died. We've never been the same, Janet. Of course we're not the same. Nothing ever is after someone dies. But we can't...

Janet: It's as I said, you don't seem to care if...

Joyce barges in from the hallway.

Joyce: Morning.

Alice: *(back to looking at newspaper, but not reading)* They've launched the largest passenger ship in history.

Janet: Morning, Joyce.

Alice: Called the Titanic.

Joyce: Is that the mail?

Alice: Waipawa Mail.

Joyce: Not the paper. The post.

Janet: This one's from the Bibby's. I've opened it.

Janet hands Joyce the letter.

Joyce: Is Ann still in bed?

Alice: No other news.

Alice closes the paper. Janet opens another letter.

Alice: *(to Joyce)* Breakfast.

Joyce: What?

Janet: It's from the Ramsey's.

Alice: Joyce, it's your turn to do breakfast.

Joyce: *(reading)* "Dear Mr Lightoller, Jane, Janet... Ann and Joyce. Words, let alone at a distance, cannot express our sympathy on the death..."

Alice: I've heard it. I've heard it. I've heard it ninety-nine times.

Joyce: It wasn't addressed to you.

Alice: It was.

Joyce: "To lose a daughter and sister at the beginning of her life is a great..."

Janet: The one from the Ramsey's is lovely.

Janet hands Joyce the second letter and goes to open the third.

Alice: They're all the same, these letters. Father will be down soon. It's your turn to get breakfast, Joyce.

Joyce: *(reading)* Mmmmm. It's terribly sad. Poor Helen.

Alice: We can't sit around moping. Life goes on. Ann should get out of bed. Tell her to get breakfast, Janet.

Janet: Helen was our sister. You can't expect us...

Alice: She died two weeks ago. It was the same when mother died.

Janet: This one's from England. Father never hears from England.

Joyce: *(putting second letter on table)* Yes, it's a pretty letter.

Janet: I'd better not open it. Father might not like that. *(Reading envelope)* F.J. Lightoller Esquire, Ruataniwha Street, Waipawa, New Zealand. No return address.

Joyce: It wouldn't be about Helen anyway. They wouldn't know yet.

- Janet:** Of course they would.
- Alice:** Who's they? We don't know anyone in England. Father doesn't know anyone in England. It's twenty-five years since father left England. He never hears. He never writes.
- Janet:** Someone in the family in England must have heard about Helen and written a letter. Simple.
- Alice:** No one wrote when mother died. I don't know why any one would write now.
- Joyce:** You always bring up mother. It's sad enough Helen passing on without you mentioning mother all the time.
- Alice:** Father will be down soon and will want breakfast.
- Joyce:** I'm in no fit state...
- Alice:** For goodness sake.
- Janet:** I wish father would hurry. I want to know why someone's written.
- Joyce:** Family. Family.
- Alice:** (*snapping*) There's not enough time!
- Janet:** What family? In England? We have no family in England.
- Alice:** At last! Everyone agrees with me.
- Joyce:** Why have we got two papers?
- Janet:** I don't know.
- Alice:** Why have we got two papers? We haven't got two papers.
- Janet:** We have. That's what I said.
- Alice:** You didn't.
- Janet:** I did. That's what I said. I got the paper. I brought it in. I said...
- Alice:** I got the paper.
- Janet:** We both got the paper. That's why there's two.
- Alice:** Why did you get another paper?
- Janet:** I didn't. There was another one in the letter box. You don't listen.

- Alice:** Strange.
- Joyce:** It can't be about Helen.
- Alice:** Must be a sign.
- Joyce:** The letter?
- Alice:** I must be meant to cruise on the Titanic.
- Joyce:** What Titanic? What's that?
- Alice:** I told you.
- Joyce:** No you didn't.
- Janet:** She did, Joyce. I heard her.
- Joyce:** I never heard.
- Alice:** Typical.
- Janet:** She was going on and on and...
- Alice:** You were going on and on about Helen.
- Joyce:** I wish father would come down. I wonder who would be writing from England.
- Alice:** Probably some handsome stranger inviting me as a guest passenger on the Titanic.
- Janet:** I suppose Jane got back alright.
- Alice:** What does one wear on ships?
- Janet:** To Opotiki.
- Silence.*
- Joyce:** Why would we get two papers?
- Alice:** Joyce! Breakfast!
- Joyce:** I suppose father reads it, and we read it. That's one each.
- Silence. Frederick enters from the hallway. Tension. He sits at the table.*
- Janet:** There's a letter. From England.

He takes it and looks at the envelope.

Alice: (to Frederick) Do you want the paper, father?

Janet: Who's it from?

Alice: We got two.

Silence.

Fred: Any other letters?

Janet: None.

Silence. Joyce exits to kitchen, presumably to make breakfast.

Alice: There are two letters. One from the Bibby's and one from...

She peters out. Silence. Tension.

Fred: Helen would... would...

Silence.

Fred: You need your mother.

Silence. He opens the letter from England and reads. They wait.

Janet: You never get letters from England.

Frederick finishes reading the letter and holds it. Silence.

Alice: There's a new ship in the paper. The Titanic. It's the largest passenger ship on the sea.

Silence.

Fred: (folding up letter) I'll read the paper later. Where's your mother?

Janet: (puzzled about Frederick's question) She's... (Then changes the subject) Who would've written from England?

Silence. Joyce enters from kitchen with breakfast – toast, tea, etc on tray. She places it on the table.

Janet: Ah! Breakfast, father!

Silence.

Fred: *(getting up from chair)* I'll breakfast later.

He goes towards the hallway door shaking the letter at them.

Fred: Is Ann still in bed?

Janet: She's sleeping.

Frederick puts the letter in his coat pocket.

Fred: *(exiting)* I don't know.

Joyce: Who was it? Did he say? Who wrote?

Janet: He didn't say.

Alice: He doesn't have to.

Joyce: Of course he would've said. Who was it?

Janet: He didn't say.

Joyce: He must've.

Alice: Jane would know.

Janet: But Jane's in Opotiki with... *(She sighs)*.

Silence.

Joyce: I hate it when you don't tell me things.

Alice begins to butter toast.

Joyce: That's father's. I got it for father.

Janet: Alice, Alice, Alice.

Act One, Scene Two

The next morning. Joyce sits at the table eating breakfast. Janet enters from outside and drops the newspaper on the table.

Janet: Paper.

Joyce: Any news?

Janet: About what?

Joyce: The paper.

Janet: Haven't opened it.

Janet sits and starts breakfast. Alice enters.

Alice: Morning.

Alice sits at table as if to read paper. Joyce instantly/nonchalantly grabs it and begins to read it. Alice is annoyed.

Alice: Has Ann had breakfast?

Joyce: No.

Alice: *(wanting newspaper)* You should take her some.

Joyce: Why?

Alice: You're the youngest.

Joyce: You want the paper.

Janet: We should starve her out.

Alice: Ann?

Silence. Alice tries to look at paper. Joyce shields it.

Joyce: Don't. I'm reading.

Alice: You hardly ever read the paper.

Joyce: I've changed.

Janet: I think I'll tell Ann.

Janet goes to exit to hall.

Alice: Ann what?

Janet: Never mind.

Janet exits. Silence. Joyce turns the page.

Alice: Don't get marmalade on the paper. I hate marmalade on the paper. Janet always gets marmalade on the paper. It...

Joyce: Keep quiet. I'm reading.

Alice: *(small silence, then realising how to be annoying)* Marmalade on the classifieds. Butter on the news. Don't put the paper in the breakfast, Joyce.

Joyce: Well, move it.

Alice goes to move the paper.

Joyce: The breakfast, Alice!

Alice: The table's for breakfast, not the paper. I hate crumbs in the paper. I'm eating breakfast. I can't have breakfast in a civilised way with you spread all over the table.

Joyce: You read at the table.

Alice: You're not even reading it.

Joyce: *(shoving the paper towards Alice and purposely pushing it into Alice's breakfast)* Have it then. Have it.

Alice: If you insist.

Silence.

Alice: Ah – it's sticky.

Alice rises and exits to kitchen to get a cloth. Joyce eats toast, looking smug. Janet enters from hall, putting on coat.

Janet: Ann seems to be sick.

Janet heads towards the outside door. Joyce rises.

Janet: I'll get the doctor.

Joyce: Is it serious?

Janet: Probably not.

Janet exits outside followed by Joyce. Joyce enters again and exits to hall. Brief pause. Alice enters from kitchen with dishcloth. She looks surprised at no one being there, then wipes marmalade off paper. She goes to kitchen door, opens it and flings the dishcloth presumably into the distant kitchen sink. She shuts door and returns to table. She sits and reads.

Alice: Ugh – how horrible.

Reads to self.

Alice: Ugh – that’s horrible.

She butters a piece of toast and puts marmalade on it. She goes to bite it, engrossed in reading. She drops the piece of toast face down on paper.

Alice: Ah!

She picks up toast, places it on plate and exits to kitchen. Joyce enters from hall. She sees no one there and exits again. Alice enters with cloth and wipes paper. She leaves dishcloth on table. She reads.

Alice: *(reading)* Yuk.

Joyce enters.

Alice: Where’s Janet?

Joyce: Gone to get the doctor.

Alice: Why?

Joyce: Ann’s sick.

Alice: *(rising)* Why didn’t you say.

Joyce: You weren’t here. Not that important.

Alice exits to hall. Frederick enters from outside. From the door he flings his straw hat onto the armchair. It is a well-practised ritual.

Fred: Morning.

Joyce: You up?

Fred: Went for walk.

Joyce: Why?

Frederick sits and butters toast.

Joyce: *(tentatively)* What was that letter?

Fred: What letter?

Joyce: Yesterday. That one from England.

Pause.

Fred: You should go for walks. Get a bit of exercise. You look pale. Go out and meet someone. No good sitting at home.

Pause.

Joyce: Father, what...

Pause.

Fred: Be like Jane. Get married. Go and live in Opotiki or somewhere and start a family.

Joyce does not know what to say.

Fred: Six daughters. Three old maids.

Joyce: I'm only eighteen.

Fred: Three old maids, one dead, one in bed, and one happily married and presumably in bed with a bit more energy than Ann.

Joyce: *(genuinely horrified)* Father!

Fred: Mm? Mm? Something wrong?

Silence. Alice enters.

Alice: Ann's sick.

Fred: You should get married too, Alice. You should get married like Jane and live in Opotiki or somewhere.

Alice: Why?

Joyce: He's in one of those moods.

Fred: You should go for a walk, Alice. Get some air. You're looking pale.

Alice: Ann's sick.

Fred: Anything in the paper? Bigamy? Scandal? Has that new boat of yours sunk?

Silence. Janet enters from outside.

Joyce: Well?

Janet: Later.

Alice: Later what?

Janet: The doctor.

Fred: You should walk, Janet. Get a bit of air.

Janet: Father, I've just walked. To the doctor's.

Fred: Looking a bit pale. Meet someone. Get married. Like Jane. Live in Opotiki. Have a family. The doctor's next door.

Silence.

Fred: (*rising*) Must go. Have a letter to post.

Joyce: To England?

Fred: (*taking straw hat from armchair*) Get some air on the way. You should get some air. You're stuffy. You'll die of tuberculosis like Helen.

He exits outside.

Alice: What did the doctor say?

Janet: He hasn't been, Alice. He wouldn't have a clue.

Alice: I'll tell her.

Alice exits to hall. Silence.

Joyce: Janet? Do you think...

Silence.

Janet: Think what?

Joyce: The letter. From England. Do you think... in father's room.

Janet: What's Alice going to tell her?

Joyce: We could.

Janet: It's not right, Joyce.

Joyce: Hasn't stopped you before. It's in his jacket pocket.

Janet: He's wearing it!

Alice enters from hall. Joyce hastily picks up paper and reads. Janet sits. Silence.

Alice: What's going on here?

Joyce: *(reading)* Ugh!

Janet: What?

Joyce: That's disgusting.

Janet: What?

Joyce: *(referring to paper)* In here. In Opotiki. I wonder if Jane knows him.

Janet: What?

Alice: Probably can't read for marmalade.

Act One, Scene Three

Later that day. Empty room. Frederick enters from outside. From the door he flings his straw hat onto the armchair. He takes off his jacket and places it on the back of a dining chair. He sits at the table and reads the newspaper. Alice enters from outside.

Fred: Been out walking?

Alice: There's no other way.

Fred: The doctor been yet?

Alice: No. Not as far as I know. She needs to get up. Moping in bed since Helen died. It's not... it's not...

Fred: *(reading)* Quite so. Quite so.

Alice sits.

Fred: *(suddenly)* Have you read this?

Alice: What?

Fred: You shouldn't have. You shouldn't be reading the paper. It's not... it's not...

Alice: Not what?

Fred: It's not suitable.

Alice: What?

Fred: It's not suitable. They shouldn't print such stuff.

Alice: Print what?

Fred: Scandal. It's not suitable.

Joyce enters from outside.

Joyce: What's up?

Alice: Nothing.

Fred: *(to Joyce)* Have you read this?

Joyce: Have I read what?

Fred: It's not suitable.

Alice: Has the doctor been yet?

Joyce: *(pausing)* No.

Fred: We should stop the paper. Cancel it.

Janet enters from hall.

Alice: Has the doctor been yet?

Janet: Yes.

Alice: Is she all right?

Janet: No.

Fred: You read this?

Janet: What?

Fred: Disgusting. We should burn it.

Alice: It's the only paper we get.

Frederick stands and heads for the outside door.

Fred: I'm throwing it away. I'm cancelling it.

Alice: *(to Janet)* What's wrong?

Janet: Nothing.

Silence. Frederick pauses dramatically at the door.

Fred: Better that a millstone be tied around his neck.

Frederick exits, having gathered his hat, but he leaves his jacket on the back of the chair.

Janet: What was that about? Not the first time.

Joyce: I don't know. What was that about?

Alice: *(standing)* What did the doctor say?

Joyce: It was something about the paper. He didn't like the paper.

Janet: Father's getting odd.

Alice: What did the doctor say?

Janet: Alice. Sit!

Alice sits.

Janet: Joyce should've told you.

Alice: What? She said the doctor hadn't been.

Alice glares at Joyce.

Janet: Earlier. Earlier.

Alice: What?

Janet: She's lost it, Alice.

Alice: (*looking at Joyce*) I know she's lost it. She lost it years ago.

Janet: She's lost the baby, Alice.

Alice: What baby?

Pause.

Alice: Who? Joyce?

Joyce: Ann.

Alice: What baby?

Janet: Ann's.

Alice: What baby?

Janet: Ann was expecting.

Alice: Ann? When? Who's the father?

Pause.

Alice: Ann expecting a baby? But no one told me. That's awful.

Janet: Joyce said she'd told you. She's lost it.

Alice: Does father know? Where will she go?

Janet: She's lost it Alice. She's not expecting any more.

Alice: She lost it?

Janet: Lost it?

Pause.

Alice: Why didn't someone tell me? No one ever tells me.

Pause.

Alice: She miscarried?

Janet: No.

Alice: What?

Janet: She...

Alice: What?

Alice realises.

Janet: When Helen died.

Alice: Does father know?

Janet: It need not be mentioned

Alice: *(to Janet)* Did you know?

Alice heads for hall door.

Janet: Stay out. Stay out a while.

Alice: *(to Joyce)* Did you know?

Joyce: Know what?

Janet: Stay out.

Alice exits.

Janet: You said you'd told her.

Pause.

Joyce: She'll be all right. In a few days.

Janet: Alice?

Joyce: Ann.

Pause.

Janet: What was in the paper?

Joyce pouts.

Janet: That upset father?

Joyce: Something in the paper.

Janet: I know that. What was it? Something he read.

Joyce: Obviously.

Janet: But what?

Joyce: Must've been about what happened in Opotiki.

Janet: Jane?

Joyce: No! Jane's not in the paper! A man and his daughter.

Janet: What?

Joyce: A man...

Janet: What?

Joyce: Touched.

Pause.

Joyce: Touched. His daughter.

Janet: Ugh.

Joyce: She was... young.

Janet: Molested. The word's molested.

Alice enters.

Alice: She wants tea.

Alice heads towards the kitchen.

Joyce: Did you say anything?

Alice: Cup of tea.

Joyce: To her?

Alice: No.

Alice exits into kitchen. Silence.

Janet: Joyce! The coat!

Joyce: What?

Janet: Father's jacket. The letter'll be in it.

Pause. They stare at the coat on the back of the chair.

Janet: The letter from England.

Alice enters with a tea. They wait. Alice passes through. Joyce feels through the side pockets, while Janet stands guard near the outside door.

Janet: The inside pocket, Joyce.

Joyce takes letter from the inside pocket.

Joyce: Here!

She begins to open the letter.

Joyce: It's from Lancashire. Yarrow House. Chorley. Dear Frederick.

Janet: Father's coming!

Joyce hastily stuffs the letter back into the jacket. They both rush to the table and sit. Frederick enters from outside door. He flings his hat to the armchair.

Fred: No more paper. It's chilly outside.

Frederick takes coat from the back of the chair and heads for the hall door.

Fred: Is Ann up yet? She needs a bit of air. That's what she needs. And a husband. Like Jane.

He exits.

Janet: I wonder, if she hadn't died, I wonder if we'd tell mother.

Act One, Scene Four

The next morning. Janet and Joyce are seated at breakfast. Alice enters from outside. She is holding a letter.

Alice: He did. He cancelled.

Alice paces.

Alice: We need a paper. Go to the shop, Joyce, and get a paper.

Joyce: No.

Alice: We'll have to hide it. It was nothing. Just a little news item. How will we know what's going on?

More pacing from Alice.

Alice: You go, Janet.

Janet: Just go!

Joyce: I'm taking Ann her breakfast.

Alice: I haven't any money. Who's got some money? Father's got the money.

More pacing.

Alice: It's not much. Someone must have some money.

Janet: There's some in the sideboard.

Alice searches.

Alice: Where?

Janet: In the drawer.

Alice searches.

Janet: Other drawer.

Alice: Here. I'm off. Where are we going to hide it?

Joyce: It's no big deal, for goodness sake.

Janet: Just go.

Alice: *(about to depart)* There's a letter from Jane.

She drops the letter on the table and exits.

Joyce: She drives you mad. She'll hide it in the hydrangeas outside and come back in. You bet. She's scared of father.

Janet: Why?

They eat in silence.

Joyce: What was father before he came here? Before he married mother out here?

Janet: He had cotton mills.

Joyce: I know that. But he was in his forties or something. Why wasn't he married?

Janet: Mother said the mills took up his time.

Joyce: We have to get that letter. We have to learn our past. A man doesn't live till his forties and not get married if he owns cotton mills. And the letter was from Chorley. That's where the cotton mills are.

Janet has opened Jane's letter.

Janet: "Dearest Father and All". I hate being called "All". It's like we haven't names. It's like she's the only one to have escaped, and we're just nothings sitting here in Waipawa. I'm stuck in this place. Sometimes. Most times.

Joyce: And without a newspaper!

Janet laughs.

Janet: *(reading)* "Frederick and Mamie are well". Marrying a Frederick! It would be like getting married to father. The whole world's called Fred.

Joyce: Stupid name, Mamie! If I had a daughter...

Janet: *(reading)* "We had a safe and uneventful trip back to Opotiki. It was lovely to visit Waipawa again, even though the occasion was..." Oh, Helen! Poor Helen!

Joyce: Why was it Helen? Why didn't Alice die?

Janet: Joyce!

They laugh.

Joyce: Poor Helen.

Janet puts the letter down, puzzled.

Janet: Where does Jane come from?

Joyce: What?

Janet: I've never thought of it before. Stupid me.

Joyce: What?

Janet: Where does Jane come from?

Joyce: Why?

Janet: Why have I never thought of it before?

Joyce: What?

Janet: Mother and father were married in Auckland. They said they met in Auckland. Mother was from Manchester. Father was from Chorley.

Joyce: Yes?

Janet: They were married in 1887.

Joyce: Yes?

Janet: I arrived early. Premature. But I wasn't. That's twenty-five years.

Pause.

Janet: And Jane is twenty-eight. If they came out to New Zealand twenty-five years ago, and they met in Auckland, why is Jane twenty-eight?

Silence.

Janet: Why haven't I thought of it before? Where does Jane come from?

Silence.

Joyce: Jane would know.

Janet: It must've crossed her mind.

Joyce: I wish mother was still alive. I know nothing.

Silence. Alice enters from outside.

Alice: Is father in? I've hidden it in the hydrangeas.

Janet: Did you know that Jane is twenty-eight?

Alice: (*suspicious*) It's not her birthday, is it? Is it safe for the paper?

Janet: Well, mother and father met twenty-five years ago!

Alice: So?

Janet: So where does Jane come from?

Pause.

Alice: Oh! Why haven't I thought of this before? I wish mother was still alive.

Joyce: Jane would know.

Alice: Isn't that strange!

Frederick enters from hall, in shirt sleeves but carrying jacket which he places on the back of the chair.

Fred: Morning.

Alice: Morning.

Fred: No paper I see. That's good.

He sits at the table.

Fred: Ann had her breakfast? What's wrong with her? Tell her she's been ill for long enough.

Silence.

Joyce: Why did you leave England?

Fred: Mm? Weather. Too damp. You should walk. Much healthier. Helen got tuberculosis because she didn't get enough fresh air.

Janet: (*pushing him*) But what about family?

Fred: Mm?

Alice: I'm sick, sick, sick of knowing nothing. Sick of knowing nothing. You've told us nothing. You've told us nothing of your brothers. You've told us nothing about life in Lancashire. Or the cotton mills. You treat us like children. Like stopping the paper. Like blathering on about nothing.

Janet: Alice!

Alice: We don't know how to meet anyone. We don't know who we are. I'm sick of it. I'm sick of all the mess. I'm sick of... of... everything. Nothing.

Pause, then Alice plummets for the outside door and exits. Long silence.

Fred: Helen. Helen would know what to do. Helen. Sweet Pea.

Silence. Then Alice enters from outside with the paper. She sits at the table, still angry, and opens it. She pretends to read but is too angry to concentrate.

Janet: I'll see to Ann.

Janet exits through hall door.

Fred: I'll be in my room.

Joyce: Who cares?

Pause.

Joyce: *(regretfully)* There's a letter from Jane.

Fred: I don't care.

Frederick exits through hall door. Silence. During the following, Joyce takes the letter from Frederick's jacket pocket.

Alice: *(reading paper)* The Titanic has sunk! That's what it says. The Titanic has sunk. "The steamer Titanic, inward bound, has sent a wireless message that she collided with an iceberg and is in need of assistance. The liner Virginia is hastening to her aid. The Titanic is off Cape Race and is sinking by her head. The women are being taken off."

Joyce is not listening. She is reading the letter.

Alice: "The Titanic struck on Sunday evening. She carried thirteen hundred and eighty passengers, including three hundred first class and a crew of six fifty. The weather is calm."

Joyce: No!

Alice: "The passengers include W.T. Stead, James Ismay, of the Ismay Company and White Star Line, Colonel J. Astor and several New York bankers."

Joyce: Alice!

Alice: “All passengers left the Titanic at three o’clock this morning.”

Joyce: Alice! No!

Alice: Goodness! But they’re all safe!

Joyce: No, Alice. The letter! Father’s letter!

Alice: From Jane?

Joyce: The letter. From England.

Janet enters.

Joyce: The letter, Janet.

Alice: The Titanic’s gone down.

Joyce: *(holding out letter to Janet)* Father’s letter. From his brother.

Janet takes it and reads.

Alice: What letter? That’s father’s.

Janet: *(reading)* “I write with the sad duty to inform you that your wife, whom you so callously abandoned in England, has passed away.”

Alice: What wife?

Janet: “Margaret died on...” *(she mumbles to herself as she reads)*...

Alice: What wife?

Janet: “You are free to marry that Manchester maid whom you seduced and with whom you eloped.”

Joyce: Father was married. He was still married when he married mother.

Alice: They were never married then?

Janet: “Your son wishes you to be informed. He... he is away at sea.”

Joyce: We have a brother?

Janet: “Your brother in blood but not in affection. My duty done. T.H. Lightoller.”

Pause.

Janet: Put it away! Put it away!

She hands the letter to Joyce who returns it to the jacket pocket. Long silence. Frederick enters from hallway. He takes his hat and jacket as he passes towards the outside door.

Fred: *(exiting outside)* I'm going for a walk. You girls should get some air.

Alice: Oh dear! Oh dear! *(Catching a fragment in the paper)* "You too can have shiny pots".

Act One, Scene Five

Later that day. Empty room.

Janet: *(calling offstage from hallway)* Joyce! Alice! Here! Quick!

Pause.

Janet: *(offstage)* Joyce!

Janet enters from hallway door.

Janet: Alice! Joyce! Quick!

Janet exits back to hallway. Pause.

Janet: *(offstage)* Alice!

Alice appears from the kitchen holding cake mixing bowl and spoon. Janet enters from hallway.

Alice: What?

Janet: Get the doctor!

Alice: Why? What is it?

Janet: It's Ann.

Alice follows Janet to hall.

Janet: No! Get the doctor! Next door!

Alice exits outside.

Janet: *(offstage)* Joyce!

Alice enters, places the cake mixing bowl on the table, and exits again.

Janet: *(offstage)* Joyce!

Joyce enters hallway door.

Janet: *(offstage)* Quick!

Joyce exits hallway door, having located Janet's voice. Empty stage. Joyce enters, rushes to kitchen, reappears and exits hallway. Empty stage. Janet enters from hallway door then exits again. Empty stage. Alice enters, puffed, from outside, as Joyce enters from hallway.

Joyce: Where's the doctor? She's haemorrhaging.

Alice: He's not in.

Joyce: God!

Alice: He's away.

Alice and Joyce exit hallway door. Empty stage.

Janet: *(offstage)* Get anyone!

Joyce enters room and exits outside. Empty stage. Frederick enters from outside. He flings his hat, takes the paper and sits in the chair to the side. He reads the paper. Long silence. Joyce enters from outside.

Fred: What's wrong?

Joyce: No one! No one!

She exits to hallway. Alice enters from hallway.

Alice: Father, it's Ann. She's bleeding.

Alice exits hallway. Frederick sits there.

Fred: Ann? Too much. Too much.

Frederick rises and goes to the kitchen. He enters and returns to seat. There is a knock on the door. Silence. There is another knock.

Jane: *(opening and peering around outside door, cheerily)* Is anybody home?

Jane enters.

Fred: *(as if in an unreal world)* Jane!

Frederick stands. Jane and Frederick stand helplessly looking at each other. Alice enters from hallway.

Alice: Jane? God! Why?

Alice enters hallway. Jane stands there, then exits through hallway. Very long silence, during which Frederick turns a page of the paper, although he is not reading.

Joyce enters and stands dazed.

Alice enters.

Fred: What? What?

Silence.

Janet and Jane enter.

Long silence.

Jane: I've left him. I've left my husband.

Fred: Ann! Petal!

Frederick bawls in the stillness.

INTERVAL

Act Two, Scene One

Next morning. The daughters (except for Jane), when they appear, are dressed in mourning. Alice is seated at the table. There is no breakfast, but a pot of tea. Frederick sits in the armchair dressed as for a funeral, except he is wearing his straw hat.

Alice: You can't wear the hat, father. Not to the funeral.

Fred: Ann gave me the hat, Tuppence.

Alice: Don't call me Tuppence.

Fred: It's her funeral. It doesn't matter what people think.

Alice: But you can't wear the hat.

Fred: Well, the funeral's not till tomorrow, Tuppence... Alice. We'll think about it.

Joyce enters from hallway door. She sits at the table.

Fred: Morning.

Silence.

Joyce: You can't wear the hat to the funeral, father.

Silence.

Joyce: What hat should *I* wear? What hat *can* I wear?

Alice: Wear the hat you wore for Helen. I am.

Joyce: It was a silly hat. I really need another.

Fred: Not more than once I hope.

Joyce: What?

Fred: A new hat?

Silence.

Fred: Get yourself a hat, Joyce.

Joyce: *(ignoring her father)* It's times like this one realises how out of date we are. If mother were still alive we wouldn't be out of date. We would've learned to sew properly and have a few graces. We've no social graces. We weren't brought up properly.

Fred: Stop, Joyce. Not today. You've done very well for the circumstances.

Joyce: We've done very well despite the circumstances. We would've done better if mother had brought us up.

Fred: (*hurt*) Yes, dear. Yes, you're right, dear.

Joyce: I'd have a proper hat.

Silence. Jane enters from hallway.

Jane: Morning.

Alice: Morning.

Jane sits.

Jane: You must eat something decent. You can't live on tea.

Jane rises and exits to kitchen as Janet enters from hallway. She holds a black dress.

Janet: Jane, I thought you might like to... (*recognising others*) Morning. Where's Jane?

Alice: In the kitchen.

Janet: (*calling out*) Jane. I thought you might like to try this dress?

Jane appears from kitchen.

Jane: What dress?

Janet: This.

Jane: I should've packed more stuff. I was in a hurry. Yes, that'll do.

Jane exits back into kitchen. Janet follows her into the kitchen.

Joyce: (*calling out*) Janet, have you got a spare hat?

Janet: (*looking out from kitchen*) I don't think so. I'll look. Alice has got one. You know that lovely one with...

Joyce: It's not suitable.

Janet disappears.

Fred: Buy yourself a hat, Joyce.

Alice: We could fix it.

Joyce: I don't want your hat. I've just got hand-me-downs. That's all I've ever had. Second-rate used stuff from older sisters.

Fred: Buy yourself a hat, Joyce.

Joyce: Janet's got a spare hat.

Silence.

Alice: (*sniggers*) Ann had a nice hat. Wear that.

Joyce rises and exits through hallway door, upset. Jane and Janet appear from the kitchen with breakfast.

Janet: Where's Joyce?

Alice: In a pout.

Jane: Today of all days.

They sit.

Jane: Come, father. Breakfast. You can't live on air.

Frederick rises and goes to Alice.

Fred: (*handing Alice coins*) Get yourself a paper, Tuppence. Tell the shop to resume deliveries, eh?

Alice refuses the money.

Alice: No, father. No.

Frederick does not know what to do.

Fred: I'll get myself some air. Air is what I need. No breakfast. Not breakfast yet.

He heads towards the outside door.

Fred: I'll... I'll... I'll get a paper.

Janet: Father! The hat!

He exits.

Alice: He'll wear it to the funeral.

Janet: He'd better not.

Alice: Ann gave it to him. He'll wear it to the funeral.

Janet: We should be used to it by now. He's an odd man.

Jane: He's allowed to be.

Janet: It's embarrassing.

Joyce enters and sits.

Joyce: He's gone.

Jane: Joyce, you shouldn't have upset father like that. Not today.

Joyce: He's not the only one upset. I've had enough. Enough. Enough!

Alice: *(audibly under her breath)* I've had enough of you.

Joyce: That's right. Take father's side. I've always been beaten down because I'm the youngest. Second hand everything, that's me. It's alright for you. I was only twelve when mother died.

Alice: You've always been spoilt.

Joyce: Speak for yourself, Daddy's-little-pet.

Alice: Brat.

Silence.

Jane: I suppose Mamie's fine. Yes, she'll be fine with her grandmother. She'll be fine.

Silence.

Janet: Are you going to stay here now?

Jane: I don't know. I don't know. He's on the farm in Hikutaia with that...

Silence.

Jane: I have no money. He'll never see Mamie again. He'll... oh...

She breaks down, and recovers. Silence.

Alice: I must admit, a funeral seems quite cheerful.

They smile. Frederick enters with paper. He places it on the table. He leaves his hat on.

Fred: Better that a millstone.

Frederick exits through hallway. The paper lies untouched.

Alice: Mamie can come down here and live. With us. That would be fun. A little girl in the house. We should all travel up to Opotiki and return triumphant with Mamie from her grandmother's. Like a Royal Procession. It'll be a holiday.

Janet: We can't leave father.

Silence.

Janet: Jane? Is your mother our mother?

Jane: That's out of the blue.

Janet: It's the arithmetic. It doesn't...

Jane: I know. I've often wondered. I asked mother once. She simply said, "I'm your mother. I'll always be your mother." Poor mother. And leaving father to bring up six daughters.

Silence.

Janet: There's a letter you should see. From England.

Silence.

Alice: Why does the rain sound heavier in the dark?

Act Two, Scene Two

Later that day. Frederick sits in the armchair with the paper next to the chair. Sound of the four daughters approaching from outside. They enter, having been for a walk.

Jane: ...It was!

Janet: Tea.

Janet and Joyce exit into the kitchen. Alice and Jane sit at the table.

Fred: Nice walk?

Jane: Down by the river.

Alice: The old swimming hole, you know, the old swimming hole. It's not there now. It's all filled with shingle in a flood or something. The river goes on the other side of the bed now. Near the bank. Near our picnic spot. You know, the picnic spot you used to take us after mother died.

Frederick has taken the paper and is waving it as if he wants to speak.

Alice: We tried to get there to sit in the long grass. But the grass is too wet now. We were going to sit there and talk about Ann and old times, and get rid of our crying before the funeral. But we couldn't cross there because it's too deep. And Helen! How she used to wear your hat.

Alice goes to cry, but recovers.

Alice: So we threw stones in the water instead. We ended up laughing instead of crying, and Joyce almost fell in.

Janet and Joyce enter with tea.

Alice: It's quite sad.

Fred: Jane?

They begin pouring the tea.

Fred: Jane? Have you read the paper?

Jane: No. Too busy. Too busy throwing stones.

Fred: You should read the paper.

Jane: That's a turn around.

Fred: There's something in here.

Jane: What?

Fred: Here.

Janet takes the paper.

Janet: Where?

Fred: It mightn't be.

Jane: What?

Fred: Is there another Clay in Hikutaia?

Jane: Just Fred, I'd say.

Fred: There must be someone else with the name of Clay.

Janet: Where? Where is it?

Fred: (*showing*) There.

Janet: (*reading*) "The circumstances connected with the discovery of H. Clay's body in a creek at Hikutaia have caused the police to make further investigations, and developments are expected. It appears that a heavy stone was attached to deceased's neck when the body was recovered from the creek."

Jane: Is that all? Is that it?

Silence.

Jane: H. Clay. H. Clay. He was Fred. There can't be two Clays in Hikutaia. H. Clay. Give me a look.

Jane looks at the paper.

Jane: (*reading*) "The circumstances connected with the discovery of H. Clay's body in a creek at Hikutaia..." They would say, wouldn't they? I would've heard.

Janet: It wouldn't be Fred. You would've heard.

Jane: Not that I care, to be honest. Not after what he did to Mamie...
(*breaking down*) "The discovery of H. Clay's body in a creek." It can't be the same person.

Joyce: It can't be your husband.

Jane: (*turning on Joyce*) He's not my husband.

Alice: *(now looking at paper)* It reads like murder.

Jane: I would've heard.

Alice: *(reading)* "A heavy stone attached to the deceased's neck". It must be murder.

Janet: It can't be an accident. Or... suicide?

Jane: It can't be Fred. It says H. Clay. I don't know an H. Clay. His brother's Edward.

Janet: Tea!

Jane: How can I find out?

Alice: Telegraph from the Post Office.

Jane: What do I telegraph? Who do I ask?

Janet: Go to the Waipawa Mail. Ask them.

Fred: I wouldn't bother a hoot about the man. Better that a millstone...

Sudden silence of realisation.

Alice: Better that a millstone be tied around his neck.

Joyce: Than one of these little ones...

Jane: It'll be Fred.

Alice: *(reading)* "A heavy stone was attached to the deceased's neck".

Joyce: It'll be murder.

Jane: It'll be Fred.

Silence.

Janet: We'll go. Come on. We'll go down to the newspaper.

The daughters head for the outside door.

Fred: I think Janet and Jane should go. You other two stay.

Janet and Jane exit outside. Alice reads the paper. Joyce glares at her father. Silence.

Alice: *(reading, but the others are not listening)* Look! Not everyone was rescued off the Titanic like it said yesterday. “Captain Smith shot himself on the bridge. The officers had previously wrested a revolver from him in the library. The captain then broke away, dashed on the bridge and shot himself through the mouth. The chief engineer likewise committed suicide. Three Italians were shot dead in the struggle for the lifeboats.” And then... *(scanning the page)* da, da, da, da.

Fred: Poor Jane.

Alice: “The captain jumped overboard when the decks were awash. A shot was heard prior to the sinking of the Titanic”. Da, da, da... “The evening papers published rumours that the officers had committed suicide, but the crew discredited the rumour.”

Fred: Poor Jane, you know. I’ll have some of that tea, Joyce.

Joyce pours tea.

Alice: Things will get better after Ann’s funeral tomorrow.

Fred: It’s an interesting patch we’re passing through. Isn’t it?

Alice and Joyce laugh. Frederick is pleased with his little joke.

Fred: *(to self)* A patch of *(the childhood name for “thistles”)* sistles.

Act Two, Scene Three

The next morning. Jane enters from hallway and exits outside. She returns with the paper, which she opens on the table, sits and scans. She obviously finds something, for she stops and pores over it. She gets up and goes into the kitchen. She returns and rereads. She returns to the kitchen and reappears with tea. She rereads. She exits to the hallway. She enters again with Janet, who is wearing a dressing gown.

Jane: There.

Janet: It's half a page!

Jane: It's him. It's Fred. He's dead. He's dead. It's Fred.

Janet is reading.

Jane: Do you think it's murder? Do you think it's murder?

Janet: *(reading)* "William James Thomas, also known as William James Boon, was Frederick Allan Clay's partner on the farm at Hikutaia."

Jane: That's Fred.

Janet: "They were milking sixteen cows. Thomas claims that Clay threw a cup at him when he was angry." *(Scanning page)* Da, da, da...

Jane: Sounds like Fred.

Janet: "A neighbour claims that Thomas had said, 'I will kill the old b..... and chuck him in the b..... river and no one will ever know anything about it.' The deceased had given a sealed note to a neighbour which stated, 'I, F.A. Clay, wish this note to bear evidence that if anything happens to me it will likely be by my partner known as W.J. Thomas as he has on several occasions said he would take my life. This morning he said he would shoot me. I therefore deposit this with Mr E. Scott'."

Jane: It sounds like murder, doesn't it? It sounds like murder.

Alice enters from hallway.

Alice: Morning.

Jane: It's here. In the paper.

Alice: What?

Jane: Fred. He's dead. Oh!

Jane weeps. Alice comforts her. Janet continues to read.

Janet: “Police Constable Baker said from Paeroa that the head of deceased was lying towards the bank on the western side, the body being inclined down stream. The hands were tightly clasped, clenched, the arms being raised on the level of the chin, the body on its back, being dressed in dungaree trousers, shirt, singlet, boots and socks, drawers and braces. He procured a drain drag and with assistance got the body out.”

Alice: God! Fred!

Janet: “A rope about two feet long and tied with a slip knot round the neck was tied to a stone weighing about fifty pounds. There was no sign on the bank of a struggle.”

Silence.

Jane: Go on.

Janet: “Constable Baker said that they were not aware of the deceased having a family, and that he possibly originated from Opotiki. Although a neighbour, Mr Frank Summers, said that the deceased had recently been in the news. The news he referred to, was the trouble between a man and his daughter. An inquest is to be held.”

Silence.

Jane: I’m not wearing black to the funeral. I’m not wearing black to Ann’s funeral.

Pause.

Jane: I’m going to the funeral and it’s as if he doesn’t exist. I’m going to Ann’s funeral. That’s all. If I cry it’s not for him. I don’t know him. I’m coming straight back. I’m not wearing black. I’m having breakfast.

Jane marches to the kitchen. Joyce enters from hallway.

Joyce: Morning.

Alice: It’s in the paper.

Joyce: What?

Alice shows her. Joyce reads. Jane enters from the kitchen.

Jane: Where’s the teapot?

Alice: It’s here.

Jane takes the teapot back to the kitchen. Frederick enters from hallway.

Janet: It's in the paper.

Fred: I read it. Early. I put it back in the box.

He sits in the armchair.

Fred: Don't know why. I'm odd like that. Sometimes. Was going to hide it.

Jane returns with tea.

Jane: It's in the paper.

Joyce: He's read it.

Fred: I've read it, Jane. Big day today. Big day.

Jane: I'm not going to the funeral.

Janet: Fred's?

Jane: No. Ann's. It's in the paper. I can't face it.

Silence.

Jane: I *can* face it, but...

Silence.

Jane: I don't want people to think I'm mourning for Fred. I don't want them to think I care. They don't know I'm here.

Alice: You must go, Jane. For Ann.

Jane: Ann's dead. I'm not.

Fred: I'm staying here. With Jane.

Janet: You can't. You've got to go.

Jane: You must go.

Joyce: *(to Jane)* It's your fault. You've got to go. Father's got to go.

Fred: *(firmly)* Jane is staying here. And I am staying here. The end of the matter.

Janet: It doesn't seem right.

Fred: Nothing seems right. Nothing's ever right. A daughter dies once, only once in a man's life. If at all. To miss Ann's funeral is to forever miss Ann's funeral. That's life. I'm staying here with Jane. No more discussion.

Jane: Then I'm going.

Joyce: Home?

Fred: You'll stay here, Jane. With me.

Alice: Bugger!

Janet: Alice!

Joyce weeps.

Jane: What's wrong?

Joyce: I have no hat!

Fred: *(with a great deal of mustered energy)* I think Alice and Joyce have time to shop for a hat.

Silence. They are still.

Janet: There's a great silence before a funeral. I remember it at Helen's and at mother's. The stillness. As if heaven waits for the funeral to let them in. Like the quietness before a quake, or the distant rumblings in the mountains before a flood. It's a great waiting, waiting. Like time has stopped. That's what I think.

Silence.

Janet: I'd better get dressed.

Joyce: I think the hat I wore to Helen's will do.

Alice: *(under her breath)* At last!

Act Two, Scene Four

Later. Janet, Alice and Joyce are at the funeral. Frederick sits in the armchair. The straw hat is on his knee. Jane is in the kitchen. She enters.

Jane: It'll be starting now. The minister's sermon.

Fred: Janie, bring a chair over.

Jane: You haven't called me Janie since I was small.

Fred: Bring a chair over.

Jane places a dining chair next to the armchair. She sits. The dining chair is taller than the armchair and makes Frederick look small and frail. He reaches out and holds Jane's hand.

Fred: We'll sit here, Janie, and think. And remember. Ann.

Pause.

Fred: It's been a long time.

Pause.

Jane: The minister will be saying, *(in low, solemn tones)* "Ask not for whom the bell tolls."

Fred: *(imitating)* "It tolls for thee."

Frederick giggles. Jane giggles. Pause.

Fred: There's something I want to show you. Something you should know.

He reaches into his jacket pocket and takes out the letter from England.

Fred: Here. Read this. Don't be angry, Janie.

Frederick gives Jane the letter. Pause.

Jane: I've read it, father.

Fred: Read it?

Jane: Janet saw it.

Fred: They all know?

Jane: Yes.

Fred: For the best. Poor things. Poor things, Janie. Why did I never tell them?

Pause.

Jane: Was she my mother? Margaret? In the letter?

Fred: No. Margaret was my second wife.

Pause. Jane waits, holding his hand again.

Fred: Your mother was Sarah. Sarah Jane Widdows. A long, long time ago. When I was young. When I was twenty. Years. I married your mother. We had a son called Richard, and then Caroline, Gertrude, and Ethel and you. And then a son called Charles. Sarah died when she had Charles. I married Margaret. Margaret Barton. Men did in those days. Marry again. It was... well, shall we say, it was cheaper than a nanny. She was very fat, Margaret. As big as a carriage.

Jane giggles. Pause.

Fred: I liked her. But I didn't love her. A nice person. We had cotton mills. In Chorley. You know, the bottom fell out of the cotton market. It was my fault. I felt... I felt...

Frederick stands and goes to the dining table.

Fred: Then Richard died. He was your brother. He was ten. And Caroline died. She was seven.

Jane: My sister?

Fred: Yes.

Pause.

Fred: I ran away, Janie. I left them. I left with the maid. She was from Manchester. That's your mother. The one you know. And as I left the house I went back, suddenly. Like I never thought. I can still feel the cold of the night. There was going to be a frost. I went into the nursery and you were lying there, asleep. The others were asleep there too. But I took you. I don't know why I took you. I don't know why I took you rather than the others. You were the nearest perhaps. Or the sweetest. I don't know why I took you. I don't know why I was leaving England. I never meant to. I came for a last look. It just happened. At night. In the dark.

Jane: You swept me away like a knight in armour.

Fred: And we came to New Zealand. The rest is history.

Jane: It changed my life.

Fred: Everything changes a life, doesn't it? I don't know what happened to Gertrude and Ethel. I never heard. I thought everyday I might hear. Down on the river bank at our picnics I would look at my daughters and think of the other ones in England. I knew I would never hear. It was like a sentence.

Pause.

Fred: I remember Alice and Helen chasing you at a picnic with a thistle. And with all the screaming and delight I remembered my other daughters, my English daughters, doing the same thing. I couldn't tell one from another. I couldn't remember their faces.

Pause.

Fred: And then today. Today.

He picks up the paper and waves it.

Fred: Today, all the chickens come home to roost. Alice will read it, sure as eggs. She never misses a beat, that girl.

Jane: What?

Fred: In here. Where is it?

He searches the paper.

Fred: Here. Just a little item. *(Reading)* "At the Titanic enquiry, Second Officer Charles Herbert Lightoller said the Titanic was going at reduced speed at the time of the accident, several boilers being off." That's it. That's all. Second Officer Charles Herbert Lightoller. That's your brother. That's my son. Alice would notice. She'd see the unusual name. Why couldn't we have a name like Smith.

He leaves the paper on the table and returns to the armchair. Pause.

Fred: Your mother would've told you, had she lived, no doubt. Your New Zealand mother. The Manchester maid. A man is not meant to bring up six daughters on his own.

Silence. A church bell is heard tolling in the distance. Shock.

Jane: It's over.

They listen.

Fred: Helen. And Ann. All over.

The bell stops.

Fred: I want you to tell the others. Can you do that, Janie? Better from you. A man is not meant to bring up daughters. I want you, all, to go away. Leave the nest. Go away. Together. Tomorrow. Start a new life. Tomorrow. Not to wear black. Start a new life. Pick up Mamie.

He stands.

Fred: A new life, Janie. For... my family.

Jane: You'll come too?

Fred: No! No! That's an order.

Jane stands.

Fred: They'll be home soon. We'll make tea. They'll want a cup of tea.

They begin to go arm in arm to the kitchen.

Fred: You could perhaps show me where the teapot is kept?

They exit into the kitchen. Brief empty stage. Janet, Alice and Joyce enter from the outside. They take off their hats and coats. Frederick and Jane enter with tea.

Janet: It's over. It's all over now. We all cried. But only one at a time.

Alice: It was very sad.

Janet: But only one at a time. We were very good father. You would've been proud.

Jane begins to pour tea. Alice sits at the table and habitually/nonchalantly opens the paper.

Jane: Did you get, "Ask not for whom the bell tolls"?

Janet, Alice and Joyce: It tolls for thee!

They all laugh. Silence.

Alice: Hey! There's a Lightoller in the paper. *(Reading)* "At the Titanic enquiry, Second Officer Charles Herbert Lightoller said..." Second Officer Lightoller. An important man! Must be a relation!

They laugh again.

Joyce: There weren't many there. At the funeral. A dozen or so.

Janet: It's over! It's over! It's sad but it's over! Like a cloud has lifted! Like Ann is in heaven. Like some sunshine... some sunshine... (*she struggles for a word and laughs*) somewhere!

Act Two, Scene Five

The next day. The paper lies untouched on the table. Breakfast is eaten but the table is uncleared. There is a great busyness. The daughters are dressed for travel, but not for mourning. As the lights rise, they bring a collection of luggage near the outside door, Frederick sits in the armchair. Janet and Joyce gather the breakfast things and exit to the kitchen – constantly – almost a cup at a time. Alice picks up the paper but puts it down again. She exits to the hallway. Jane goes from the kitchen to the hall and back again. Alice goes from the hall to outside.

Janet: Is the man here yet?

Alice: I've looked. No sign of him.

Joyce: He must be here soon.

Janet: Father, you must come with us.

Fred: No, no, no.

Joyce: Is Opotiki near the sea? Do they swim there?

Alice: *(to Frederick)* Will you be alright?

Fred: I'm fine, Tuppence. Have a holiday.

Janet: It's so soon. Is it too soon?

Alice: *(looking out outside door)* Still no sign.

The pace slows. Jane sits at the table.

Jane: *(to Frederick)* You sure you'll be alright?

Fred: Fine. Fine. Yes, yes, yes. I know where the teapot is.

Janet and Joyce finish in the kitchen and seat themselves at the table. Alice, who has made one last foray into the hall, returns. She stands.

Janet: Have a look, Alice. Is the man here yet?

They laugh, but Alice still goes to the outside door and looks.

Alice: Nothing.

Alice sits at the table.

Janet: *(calling out, mockingly)* Dinner! Waiter! Bring in the dinner! The daughters are waiting!

Alice: We're waiting. But not waiters!

Jane: Clever, Alice.

Pause.

Fred: Come back for your weddings.

Joyce: We won't be that long.

Fred: We'll see. *(Rising)* We'll see.

He puts on his hat and gathers his jacket from the back of a dining chair.

Fred: Air is what I need. You should get some air in Opotiki. Not like this damp Waipawa air. I'm going for a walk.

He heads for the outside door.

Alice: But you must wait.

Fred: Daughters die once in a man's life, Alice. No waiting. No goodbyes.

Frederick flings his hat to the armchair. He exits. Silence of held back tears. There is a knock on the door. They all stand.

Joyce: That'll be him!

Joyce races to the door and opens it.

Joyce: *(to outside)* We've got our stuff.

There is much quiet activity as they remove their luggage outside. Eventually the room is empty, although the door remains open. Alice enters and stands in the centre of the room. She lifts up the newspaper, as if to take it, but returns it.

Alice: *(to self, feeling the room)* Goodbye little room. I'll see you at weddings.

Janet: *(from outside)* Come on, Alice!

Alice takes her father's straw hat and puts it on. She goes to the outside door. She has second thoughts, and flings the hat on the armchair in the manner of her father. She exits, closing the door. Empty room. Perhaps a window curtain moves in a breeze. Lights fade.

THE END