

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Bethany

by Daryl Peebles

EXTRACT

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Synopsis:

Bethany is set in 1830 in Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania). It is the story of a young woman transported from England for a menial crime and now in the service of exploitative landowners in the new colony.

In her short life, many people in positions of authority, including her current employer, Mr Hewett, the landowner, have sexually abused Bethany. Now the landowner's son, approaching his mid-teens, is attempting to do likewise. The wife and mother of these unscrupulous men is either blind to their crimes or feels it necessary to protect them. She does so using the family's professed, but not practised, faith in God and adherence to His teachings.

The daughter of the landowners, Ruth, is treated little better than Bethany. She appears to be a bit "slow" and is the shame of the family; someone to be hidden away.

The play looks at the way three different women cope (or do not cope) with the abuses in their lives.

Characters:

Bethany Convict girl, now in her early 20s. Brought up in poor circumstances outside London and transported to Van Diemen's Land for a minor offence. Upbringing may have lacked any finesse but she is good-hearted and basically honest.

Mrs Hewett A harridan hiding behind a holy veneer as the wife of a Primitive Methodist free settler. Sees herself as a model of virtue and goodness but in fact is quite cruel, cold and unforgiving. Would like the world to see her as a fine pioneer of the new colony; one bringing God-fearing ways to the brutality and evil that actually exists.

As one of the new landed gentry, Mrs Hewett imagines her station being much higher than the truth of her situation dictates.

Mrs Hewett could be any age from late 30's upwards. She is the mother of several children, although only two, Ruth (her eldest, around 20) and Walter, a youth of about sixteen, are mentioned.

Ruth Around 20 years old. Initially Ruth does not say much and when she does speak, it is a slow, deliberate and laboured effort as if she may have some impediment. With the growing love of Bethany (and Tom), she is increasingly able to think rationally and is again learning to clearly express those thoughts.

Notes about *Bethany*:

The premiere performance of *Bethany* was at the Tasmanian Drama Festival, Deloraine, on Saturday 14 October 2000. It was directed for Razzle Dazzle Productions by John Xintavelonis. The cast featured Andrea Moody as Bethany, Judith Smee as Mrs Hewett and Rebecca Thompson as Ruth. The production won four awards; Best Original Script, Runner-up Best Actress (Judith Smee) and two Merit Awards for Andrea Moody and Rebecca Thompson respectively.

Scene:

A simple colonial kitchen setting. The only essential furniture is a wooden table and chairs and a copper, with fire under, for boiling clothes.

A dresser or sideboard could also be used. The table has an old Bible and a candle on it. A bucket or dish for fetching water is also in the kitchen.

Access to the outside is PS and OP leads to the rest of the house.

Situated DS on one side is an artist's easel placed such that an artist seated at it, would actually be off stage. The area around the easel should be capable of being illuminated separately.

SCENE 1

Mrs Hewett is standing OP, hands on hips, yelling into the house.

MRS HEWETT: *(screaming to offstage)*

You just wait until your father returns from Hobart Town, young man. We'll get to the bottom of this, even if he has to take your hide off with the whip.

I'll have no son of mine cavorting with the likes of her. The Good Lord will take a horrible vengeance on those tempted to such abominable sin.

(turns and storms back to CS removing an apron as she does so. She flings the apron onto the table, moves to PS and shouts)

Bethany Hopkins! Bethany Hopkins, you come here into this house this instant. You hear!

(storms back to CS and sits at table. She clutches the Bible to her breast with one hand and holds her other hand to her forehead. She mutters an unintelligible prayer. A timid knock comes from PS)

(shouts) Wait there and don't you dare move one inch. I'm talking to our Lord.

(more unintelligible mutterings finished with a loud "Amen". She rises and moves to PS)

Come!

(She moves back to CS followed by tentatively by Bethany)

MRS HEWETT: Sit!

(Bethany sits on the edge of a chair, Mrs Hewett hovering over her.)

MRS HEWETT: You are a whore and a harlot, Bethany Hopkins. Is this the thanks we get in return for our kindness?

BETHANY: Please, Ma'am. It ain't as it seems ...

MRS HEWETT: Not as it seems! It is as it seems, slut! All legs and thrashing about like ... like the pigs in the pen. Like two animals. Of course you ... you are nothing but an animal. A creature from the slums o' Thameside. A throwback with no fitter purpose on God's Earth than to be sent out here for your crimes and villainy.

And if that's not enough to bring His horrible wrath down upon your sinful head, you wantonly try and corrupt my son. My own flesh and blood.

BETHANY: It ain't true, Ma'am ..

MRS HEWETT: *(cuffing Bethany)* Do not interrupt, girl.

My boy, barely sixteen years and you, thirty if a day ...

BETHANY: Twenty-three, come November ...

MRS HEWETT: *(shouts)* Quiet. You are in enough trouble without speaking out of turn.

(threatening) When the master returns from Hobart Town, he will give you such a flogging as you'll wish your mother had killed you at birth.

BETHANY: But I have done nothing wrong

MRS HEWETT: I saw with my own eyes. Rutting! So don't you compound your sinning further by your lies. The Good Lord will have you suffer ...

BETHANY: I was taking a piss

MRS HEWETT: *(cuffs her again)* Hold your tongue, harlot!

BETHANY: *(stands to confront Mrs Hewett)* I was taking a piss and your boy .. your precious Walter, was hiding in the hedgerow. Hiding there to look upon me as Nature called.

MRS HEWETT: Enough!

BETHANY: No! You speak of truth. I'll tell you a truth you don't want to hear!

(Mrs Hewett takes a swipe at Bethany who ducks. They chase around the kitchen, Bethany desperate to tell the story of the earlier event)

BETHANY: "I can see your thatch," he said from the thicket.

"I can see your thatch and now I'm going to enter your cottage!"

MRS HEWETT: *(angry)* Enough, I said!

BETHANY: I told him "No!". I picked up my skirt and ran for the house.

He caught up with me at the bottom of the lane. Threw me to the ground and tried to mount me.

(she chokes back her tears) Tried to rape me!

Where was your Merciful God when your own son tried to have me by his force?

MRS HEWETT: *(stops, stunned)*

How dare you question me! How dare you speak of my Walter spying in such a lustful way. Oh, no. We know the true story, you trollop. It's you! You who have brought your wicked ways into this house. You who would try to lure my son into the sins of the flesh. The whoring that had you sent from England should have stayed there! Not brought into this God-fearing home.

It's just as well I came upon you both in time.

BETHANY: You came only when I screamed. Would I have screamed if I had started it?

MRS HEWETT: Screams of delight!

BETHANY: There was no delight. I screamed and scratched and bit. And try as he might, he did not get his piece anywhere near mine.

He spilt it! Look! Here on the hem of my dress!

(She picks up her hem and thrusts it as far as it will reach into Mrs Hewett's face)

Your son's seed. That's about as close as he got

(quietly)

.... unlike your husband!

MRS HEWETT: What was that?

BETHANY: Nothing, Ma'am.

MRS HEWETT: Nothing indeed! You mentioned my husband. What of him?

BETHANY: I said “Don’t tell him”, Ma’am.

MRS HEWETT: And why not? You have sinned against God and acted against our good grace. You have lured our own flesh and blood into the ways of the Devil and you plead that I not tell my husband.

BETHANY: You haven’t listened to a word I have spoken, have you? I tell you, I am the innocent ...

MRS HEWETT: Enough! I will hear no more of this. Now sit!

(Bethany hesitates, then sits)

I **will** tell my husband and he will punish you as he sees fit. It’s back to the women’s prison for you, no doubt.

BETHANY: To pay again for a crime I have not done!

MRS HEWETT: *(shouts)* Quiet!

(Mrs Hewett stands over Bethany, lecturing her)

You have chosen to ignore our God-fearing ways and our wise counsel. You have chosen to stick by your own creed, the creed of the corrupt. The word of the Devil.

MRS HEWETT: God be praised that this colony has people like us. Sent to tame the savages and lead those who have sinned, to the light of His salvation. But if you choose not to hear, then you deserve His wrath. And until His judgement day, you will suffer the wrath of those of us chosen to lead.

BETHANY: *(thumps the table and stands to confront Mrs Hewett)*

So! I will suffer the wrath of your husband for something I had no say in. Your husband! Your good, God-fearing husband ...

MRS HEWETT: Aye! And don’t you doubt a word of it!

BETHANY: Your husband who sometimes gets up from his knees after praying at your bedside and steals into my chamber in the dead of night to do to me what your son couldn’t ...

MRS HEWETT: Enough of your lies ...

BETHANY: Your merciful husband who like many others thinks that to tame the natives of this land is to round them up and shoot them like so many animals.

MRS HEWETT: *(raising voice menacingly)* Enough, I say!

BETHANY: I may not know a lot about your God missus, but I know right from wrong and

(Mrs Hewett slaps Bethany)

MRS HEWETT: *(screams)* Out! Get out of this house, you sinful lying, whore! Get out of this house this instant!

(Bethany runs out PS. Mrs Hewett falls to her knees and starts to pray as before. This turns into uncontrolled sobbing. She takes a lace handkerchief from inside the back cover of the Bible and dabs at her eyes.

Ruth enters PS and tries to sneak past behind her praying mother and into the house. She almost reaches the door OP when Mrs Hewett lifts her head and sees Ruth.

MRS HEWETT: Ruth! Where do you think you're going?

RUTH: Bed.

MRS HEWETT: Bed? But its the middle of the afternoon girl. Have you finished in the vegetable patch?

(Ruth nods)

MRS HEWETT: Have you taken the slops to the pigs?

(She nods again)

MRS HEWETT: You'll soon be having to feed the fowls and there's the water to draw for the copper. There's no time yet for bed, d'you hear?

(Ruth stands still, looking at her feet)

MRS HEWETT: Come on now, girl! Be alert! There's no time for mopin' about!

RUTH: Walter is bad.

MRS HEWETT: Walter is not bad! He's your brother! You must never say evil things about your brother!

(She turns and walks away from Ruth, wringing her hands as she tries to justify Walter's actions)

He's he's walked a way with the Devil, it's true, but your father will have that sorted soon enough when he returns.

MRS HEWETT: *(angry)* Lured into temptation by a wanton whore!

RUTH: Not Bethany.

MRS HEWETT: Yes! Bethany! Dirty scum-o'-the Earth, Bethany!

RUTH: Walter pushed her. Pushed her over. I saw him. He was watching Bethany doing

MRS HEWETT: *(turning on Ruth and waving her finger under her nose)*
Stop! Don't say it girl! Don't use the words of that gutter-rat in my house. You are already a burden on my soul, Ruth! Don't you dare speak for her. A felon ... a common criminal and a harlot to boot!

RUTH: And Father **is** shooting the blacks!

MRS HEWETT: *(dismissive)* Don't be stupid, girl!
(realises) You were listening, weren't you? You listened to that whore and her evil ramblings. Lies about your father.
(shakes Ruth) You were listening!

RUTH: No! I ran away. I ran away when Walter pushed Bethany. I knew it would be trouble.

MRS HEWETT: Then, where did you get this rubbish about your father shooting the natives. He's in Hobart Town buyin' and sellin' and well you know it!

RUTH: Tom told me.

MRS HEWETT: Tom? Who is this Tom?
(Ruth does not respond)
Answer me girl, or I'll have your father whip you too!

RUTH: Tom the picture man. Painting down at the river. He said all the men made a big line. They shoot the black-fellas as they walk.

MRS HEWETT: Blatherskite! What rubbish and rot! And don't you go talking to strange men d'you hear. They fill your brain with such nonsense and fiddle-faddle.
And more if they had a mind to! Don't you go near the river if this ... this picture man is there, d'you understand?
(Ruth does not answer. She stares down at her feet)

MRS HEWETT: *(shouts)* D'you understand, girl?

(Ruth still does not answer. She turns and dashes off OP ... presumably into her bedroom.)

MRS HEWETT: Heaven preserve us!

(She sighs, defeated, picks up an old bucket and exits PS. Lights cross-fade to easel and Bethany standing addressing artist behind easel. She has been crying.)

BETHANY: I didn't think you would mind. You .. you always understand, Tom. Thank you for that.

I know we must make the most of our lot. I do try, Tom. I try very hard. But there is always this this load we are forced to carry.

Because we came as convicts, no matter how unfair, they would still tread us down ... down with the swine.

(brighter) Still, those who would try to push us under are themselves much lower!

(laughs) Much rather I kissed a pig, than old man Hewett!

(pensive) It's the knowledge of this truth that keeps me going, Tom. Like the truth you capture in your paintings, so many eyes are shut to the beauty of it. You have taught me much.

(suddenly) The old sow will be looking for me. I must be getting back and see if she has mellowed. Thank you, Tom. You do open my eyes to the beauty. Thank you.

(Ruth exits as lights cross-fade to empty kitchen. From within the house, OP, Ruth is heard, soft but firm initially)

RUTH: *(off)* No Walter!

(pause) It is bad Walter, no!

(pause) No!!

(screams and rushes into kitchen from OP) No Walter! No! No! No!

(Bethany rushes into the house from PS. She is carrying a large piece of wood, a handle off a garden tool or similar)

BETHANY: *(passing Ruth who has stopped CS)*

It's all right Ruth. I'm here ..

(storms to OP and shouts)

You weak mongrel dog! Step out here and I'll knock your stinkin' head off your scrawny shoulders

RUTH: *(holding her hands near her groin as if holding a penis)*

He has his thing ...

BETHANY: Then I'll knock the head off that and all ...

(shouts) Come then, you lily-livered bastard!

RUTH: *(goes to OP, looks off and laughs)*

He's getting through the window.

(shouts, laughing)

Put your breeches on Walter, or the laughing birds will get your snake!

(Ruth laughs momentarily but her laughter turns to gentle sobbing)

BETHANY: *(moves to Ruth and puts her arm around her)*

Be calm, Ruth ...

RUTH: *(sobs)* Why Beth? Why do they do that?

BETHANY: Men?

RUTH: *(nods)* And boys.

BETHANY: Don't know. They just do. I expect nothing better from most of 'em. It's been part of my life ever since that stinkin' judge listened to the pack o' lies and sent me out here in the first place.

(reminiscing) For sure, Ruthy, I wouldn't have been charged if I had spread my legs for the old squire. Fat, smelly an' horrible, he was. Tried to force himself upon me when I was but fourteen.

I was too quick for the likes o' him. Waited till his breeches and boots were on the floor, rolled out, gathered 'em up as quick as lightnin' and ran for me life.

BETHANY: *(laughs)* Ran for the river and threw 'em in and him chasin' me in his shirt-tails shoutin' "Stop! Thief!"

(pensive) Then in the jail an' on that leaky bucket they sailed us out here in, it wasn't a case of "Will I?" but "How many?", "How often?"

Ev'ry night some rum-sodden "gentleman" would come sniffin' for his little bit o' tail.

I got used to it! I can turn myself off to it all. Be a real cold fish, I can.

(confiding) You see, the secret for me, Ruthy, is that those bastards may get to my cunny but they'll never get to my heart.

And that's what I hold precious.

RUTH: He's been tryin' for months, now.

BETHANY: Walter?

(Ruth nods)

You shouldn't have to put up with that! Not from your own brother.

RUTH: He's tryin' to be like our father.

BETHANY: Like your father and what he does to your mother?

RUTH: *(with shame)* ... and me.

BETHANY: Your father and you?

(Ruth nods and bows her head)

Ruthy! How long? When did he start?

(Ruth does not reply. She stands, head bowed.)

Oh you poor darlin'. What's he done to you?

RUTH: You know what he's done to me!

BETHANY: *(horrified)* Yes. But not just that. What else?

(she taps Ruth's head) In here?

(Bethany lays Ruth's head in her lap)

RUTH: When I was little it started. Eight. Perhaps ten. I mustn't tell. Father will hurt me

(Ruth starts to cry softly, using her skirt to wipe her tears.)

BETHANY: *(comforting)* So that bastard is at you as well! That doesn't surprise the likes o' me, but what is it doin' to you?

(She cradles Ruth and strokes her hair)

It's different for me. That's my lot. What I've come to expect ... and I can cope with it, in my own way.

But you shouldn't have to

RUTH: Tom isn't like that.

BETHANY: No. Tom ain't like that at all.

RUTH: I talk to Tom. He makes me laugh. Makes me happy.

BETHANY: He makes me happy too.

RUTH: I told Tom things

BETHANY: What things?

(Ruth moves to easel. Lights cross-fade to this area.)

RUTH: They think I'm not right. Mother calls to God to make me whole but I am whole.

(indignant) I'm not "a punishment" as she would call me.

You speak well of love, Tom. And of Bethany.

I love Bethany too. She makes me feel aright.

I ... I do get muddled. Sometimes. Sometimes I don't think well.

But only when my father ...

I mustn't speak more, now. My mother said that our family must come before all things ... after God.

Nothing else matters.

Not even that what makes me muddle.

(Lights cross-fade to kitchen. Ruth lays her head back in Bethany's lap. Bethany cradles Ruth and strokes her face. She is emotionally moved)

BETHANY: You told Tom that you love me?

RUTH: You make me feel proper. Tom too. He talks softly, you stroke softly. I feel happy with you. With you both.

(Ruth breaks free and excitedly holds Bethany's hands)

You and Tom should marry and have a baby.

You could call her Ruth and love her. Love me.

BETHANY: Dear, dear Ruth. I wish it were so simple. But there is much to be righted before it can be so.

(Ruth shows disappointment. Bethany tries to reassure her)

Still, Tom has taught me much. I was so hardened to it all, I thought my heart was now a stone. But it ain't. It's learning to love again.

And if it's so for me Ruth, for all that has happened since I was fourteen, then it may be for you too.

(Bethany cradles Ruth again)

Try to push away those awful things that haunt you.

(Bethany gently takes Ruth's face in her hands)

Tom says that if you open your heart to true love, you will have more chance of finding it and of it finding you.

It has for me, Ruth ... I do feel it has for me.

(Ruth suddenly pulls back from Bethany in fright. She has seen Mrs Hewett running in from PS to lunge at Bethany. Bethany, who has her back to the door and therefore to Mrs Hewett, reacts to Ruth's fright by grabbing the piece of wood she had used to threaten Walter and spins around to face the aggressor.)

MRS HEWETT: What do you think you are doing, hussy. Give that to me!

BETHANY: *(side-stepping and avoiding Mrs Hewett's grab for the wood)*

Oh no!

(threatening) You stand your ground and listen to what Ruth has to say. Come, Ruth. Tell her! Tell your Mother what happened between you and Walter.

(Ruth stares at her feet momentarily then runs off OP)

RUTH: *(running off)* No! No more! She'll just call out to Jesus and not hear me.

(off) She never hears me!

MRS HEWETT: *(turning on Bethany)*

Now look, trollop. Look at what you have done ...

BETHANY: I done nothin' missus. Except save your girl from the same fate what Walter had in his mind for me!

MRS HEWETT: Stupid girl!! It's his sister ...

BETHANY: She's got a cunny ain't she?

MRS HEWETT: Shut your mouth! In this house I will have no such talk ..

BETHANY: *(moving towards Mrs Hewett with the wood raised, quietly threatening)*

In this house you will have no truth! Ruth is right. You never hear.

Well, I'm tellin' you missus. I have packed what little is mine. I'm off. To where, I don't know, but I'm off!

But first you will listen or I'll knock you're silly God-fearin' head off!

(Bethany raises the wood menacingly and gestures towards the chair. Mrs Hewett sits down, frightened.)

BETHANY: I heard Ruthy shouting "No!" and looked in to see Walter trying to lift her skirts. And him with just his shirt on ...

That's twice. Twice in one day. And when himself returns from Hobart Town, you know how he'll punish me? In much the same way.

BETHANY: With nothing but his shirt on and his stinking proddin', pokin' pole making me pay cos you're gutless. Because you would rather live your life as a lie. Hidin' behind your precious Bible while your husband and now your son behave like the worst sinners I ever did meet in the prisons o'England.

MRS HEWETT: *(wails)* No!

BETHANY: There's no doubt in it, missus. You know the truth. You know what's been happenin'. To me at least!

Oh .. I can understand you turnin' your back when he's at me. I'm only scum in your eyes. But Ruth? How could you let that happen?

MRS HEWETT: *(weeps)* You wouldn't understand.

(she reaches for the Bible, pulls out the silk handkerchief and dabs her eyes)

BETHANY: I might. I know what little you think of me but I'm a woman, no less.

MRS HEWETT: What would you know of the vows I have taken ... to honour and obey?

BETHANY: I know those vows don't mean you've got to stand fast and watch him do such things. She's your daughter, for pity's sake. He's been at her since she was a child!

And you, you with your nose stuck in the Bible and doin' nothin'.

You're as bad. If I knew I wouldn't swing for it, I'd think nothin' o' knockin' your head off your shoulders this very minute. And that would not be punishment enough, for your own crime.

MRS HEWETT: Stop now. I beg of you.

BETHANY: Knowin' this makes me sick! It makes the women's prison seem like paradise. It will be a pleasure to get back there after this place. Ruthy is your daughter. She's been so soiled by this, she may never be well again from it.

I may be scum from Thameside, but I have given her more love in the few months I have been here, than you have given her in her lifetime.

MRS HEWETT: *(defiant)* Love! What do you know of love?

BETHANY: It's true. I haven't known much of it since a drunken squire tried to have me when I was a mere girl. It was his crime against me that lost me my family and had me brought to this land. But for all that, missus, I've kept my heart intact.

(sings) Some women have hardened, some women have died
But I've kept my heart and my hope and my pride!

MRS HEWETT: Where did you learn that?

BETHANY: *(proud)* I made it up. Sometimes I think about my lot. It could get a body down but I won't let it! So I make things up .. just to remind me that I am a good person but there's villainy all around. And the likes o' you, with all your preaching and prayin' don't come close to understandin'.

You speak of love? Well, I've found it missus. It's got nothin' to do with the thrustin' and tearin' I've had to put up with, nor the honourin' and obeyin' you speak of!

MRS HEWETT: You've found love?

BETHANY: I have. It's gentle and true and washes all over you like the spray of a waterfall.

MRS HEWETT: What rubbish! Where would you find love?

BETHANY: By the river. A ticket-o'-leave man. A beautiful, gentle man. Just like me. Brought here for no crime at all. But he's one who can still see beauty in things.

MRS HEWETT: *(suspicious)* Is he the painter?

BETHANY: *(surprised)* Yes. He says this place, with its strange bushes and birds and animals is so beautiful. I hadn't seen it like that before.

MRS HEWETT: It's harsh and brown and unforgiving!

BETHANY: Tom says it is so different to the woods of England, his paintings will be wanted by the rich back home.

MRS HEWETT: I doubt it. This .. this Tom. How long have you known him?

BETHANY: Few weeks.

MRS HEWETT: He's a waster and a scoundrel. It was he who spread the lies about the settlers shooting the blacks.

BETHANY: Lies? Oh, there were no lies. Just another shameful act in the name of the King. And a laugh to boot.

Word has it that their famous “black line” captured one old man and a small child. The might of all the Governor’s men with their muskets, horses and dogs pitted against these poor simple people, and the best they could come up with was an old man and a child!

When he returns, you give your big, brave husband a hero’s welcome, won’t you? While the rest of us laugh at their stupidity.

(Bethany throws the wood to the floor and exits PS. Mrs Hewett looks momentarily at the wood, then lunges to pick it up and follow Bethany.)

BETHANY: *(off, in horror)* Ruth! Ruthy darlin’!

(Mrs Hewett stops at the door and looks out PS. She drops the wood, horrified.)

MRS HEWETT: Dear God! Ruth!

(she runs out as lights fade to black)

SCENE 2

Lights come up on easel. Mrs Hewett is addressing the artist behind the easel.

MRS HEWETT: I came by to thank you. Thank you for pulling Ruth from the river. I have heard much about you, Tom.

(looks at painting on easel)

You have captured this place accurately on your canvas. Still, I do not see it as beautiful.

(soft) You may not understand, Tom, but it is hard for me to see a beauty here. I long for the green pastures we left behind. For the oaks and willows, the fox and the hare. But all that is lost to me now.

I never thought that I would one day find myself in this place with its blazing sun and scorched earth. It's strange trees and animals and spiders enough to make the dead afraid.

(regaining composure) But I have my role. My place was always to honour my father and now my husband and so I shall. Above all else. I have vowed to do so before God and I shall live by it.

(She finishes what she has to say, looking and feeling quite uncomfortable. She stands for a few moments wringing her hands then turns and exits PS. Lights cross-fade to kitchen as Mrs Hewett walks back into it from PS. Bethany enters from OP holding a mug of hot tea.)

BETHANY: Here missus. Drink this. It'll make you feel better.

MRS HEWETT: *(ignoring her)* Why? Why would she do such a thing?

BETHANY: I think we may well know the answer.

MRS HEWETT: *(turning on Bethany)* Heavens be praised! The good Lord saved her. You see, we can all be saved, no matter what our sin!

BETHANY: *(thrusting the mug into Mrs Hewett's hand)*

It wasn't the good Lord who threw himself into the river. It was Tom. An' besides, Ruthy has no sin that I am aware of.

(Mrs Hewett stands mute, clutching the Bible and holding her tea, staring blankly)

BETHANY: *(backing out of the room)* Well, there's nothin' more for me here. Ruth's abed now and I trust asleep. I'll leave her in your care missus. Watch over her, won't you?

MRS HEWETT: *(vacantly)* Yes.

BETHANY: I'll do as you bade earlier. I'll go now.

(Mrs Hewett does not acknowledge Bethany but continues to stare vacantly. Bethany exits PS. After a pause, Mrs Hewett places the Bible and tea on the table and sighs. She exits PS and returns immediately with some kindling which she places under the copper. She lights the kindling as Ruth emerges from OP. Ruth is now wearing a long calico night gown.)

RUTH: Bethany?

MRS HEWETT: Bethany's gone, child.

RUTH: Where?

MRS HEWETT: I know not. Nor do I care.

RUTH: I need her.

MRS HEWETT: She'll not be back, so don't even dream of it.

(Mrs Hewett picks up the mug of tea and hands it to Ruth)

Here. Drink this. It'll make you feel better.

(Ruth knocks the mug from Mrs Hewett's hands)

RUTH: *(distressed)* No! I don't want it!

MRS HEWETT: Your precious Bethany made that for you!

RUTH: *(kneels and picks up the mug or pieces of it, desperately)*

No!

MRS HEWETT: *(standing over Ruth)*

Why did you do such a thing, girl? You know the Lord does not smile favourably on those who are so weak as to take their own lives.

They are the children of the Devil!

(Ruth cowers on the floor, clutching the mug)

MRS HEWETT: Oh, there have been times in my life when such an act seemed the only way out. The easy way out. But no! A lifetime of sacrifice on Earth is little price to pay for eternal life in the glory of God's kingdom.

The quicker you learn that, child, the happier will be your lot.

(Mrs Hewett drags Ruth to her feet)

MRS HEWETT: Look at me when I'm talkin' to you, girl!

We have a chance to be someone here... a whole new start in a new place where our name will be remembered amongst those who tamed it and brought this land into God's good light.

And I'm not going to allow your snivellin' to stop that!

MRS HEWETT: There's many worse off than you left in the slums o'London. In this new land, we are the gentry and if you've suffered a little for the chance of it, that's the price that must be paid.

RUTH: Why do we pay a price? Is there no choice?

MRS HEWETT: No.

RUTH: It shouldn't be!

MRS HEWETT: Says who? That whore, Bethany? She's had more astride her than a constable's horse.

RUTH: Not only Bethany. Tom!

MRS HEWETT: Tom! Tom the painter! Ha! He's a dreamer, girl. Thinks his paintings of this God-forsaken scrub will sell in the manor houses of England. What would he know of such matters? What would he know of the life determined for women to follow?

RUTH: He's kind. He knows things. Beautiful things.

MRS HEWETT: Nonsense. And I've warned you before, don't you go talkin' to such men.

RUTH: I haven't spoken to him since.

MRS HEWETT: No? Just threw yourself into the river in front of him.

RUTH: I'm not stupid ...

MRS HEWETT: *(realises)* Oh! I can see it now. You didn't plot to die!

RUTH: I had no plan. I didn't think ...

MRS HEWETT: You never do!

RUTH: I do think! But when I think it makes me sad. Horrible thoughts. Again and again. Pushing me down. Tearing at my clothes. Hurting. Hurting, horrible, hurting!

(holds hands to face and screams.)

Leave me alone. *(sobs)* They won't leave me alone.

MRS HEWETT: Listen my girl! There's little you can do about these things. Do as I have done. Be strong. Put up with it and get on. Ask the good Lord for the inner strength and understand that's the way your life is to be.

RUTH: Bethany says I shouldn't have to ...

MRS HEWETT: Bethany is meddlin' in affairs of which she knows nothing. She is nothing save a harlot. Taken from her miserable family and her country and stopped from the love of God. Listen to her, my girl, and you're listening to the Devil himself.

RUTH: She talks about love. Real love. Love where your fancy becomes a part of you so you are as one when you fuck.

(Mrs Hewett slaps Ruth.)

MRS HEWETT: *(shouts)* Hush your mouth! Such profanities in my house! I will not allow it! On your knees girl and pray to the merciful Father for his forgiveness.

RUTH: *(defiant)* No!

MRS HEWETT: *(pushing down on Ruth's shoulders)* On your knees, I say!

RUTH: *(breaking free and running to another part of the kitchen)*

I will not pray! Why should I pray for saying a bad word when Father and Walter do bad things and you say nothing.

Is talking about it worse than doing it?

And when Father prays and then rapes Bethany within a minute of his "Amen", do you think God is fooled?

No! It is you who are fooled. You! You who have this misery as your lot and wants me to have it as mine.

Well I will not!

MRS HEWETT: You will do as I bid you to do!

RUTH: *(drops to her knees, sobbing)* I don't know if Bethany is right. But I do know that you are wrong. What happens in this house is wrong!

And God knows it to be so, no matter how much you clutch your book and pray.

What will I ever know of love? If some man should ever want to hold me like Bethany told it, will I be able to forget those horrible nights. My own father. The hurt! The terrible, terrible hurt.

(Mrs Hewett is shocked. She stands over Ruth who is sobbing on the floor. She looks to the sky)

MRS HEWETT: Dear God in Heaven. Is this your will for me? Your humble and obedient servant?

Am I to put up with this as well as my own miserable life? I will not have her speak to me thus!

(Mrs Hewett drags Ruth to her feet) Look at me, girl! Look at me and tell me what you see!

RUTH: *(through her sobs)* The hate and anger what you try to hide by looking in the pages of your Bible. I see what is before me in this life ...

(quietly) and I don't like what I see!

MRS HEWETT: What we are and what the world sees in us, must be two things, Ruth. Our family, this family, will be lauded as the true pioneers. The ones who brought salvation along with civilisation to this wasted island.

Your father will be known for his good works as I will for mine.

We will be written in the pages of this place's history and honoured for what we have done in the name of our Lord!

RUTH: But it's all a lie!

MRS HEWETT: How would you have us known?

RUTH: For what you are. And I ... I will go out and tell all!

MRS HEWETT: *(loosing her temper and belting Ruth, forcing her backwards towards the copper and fire as she does so)*

You wicked, ungrateful child!! You would dare to speak to your mother as such.

“Thou shalt honour thy father and thy mother”, saith the Lord and again you defy Him.

You will surely die and the flames of Satan will punish you with a pain the likes of which you will never suffer on God’s Earth

(Ruth has backed up to the copper avoiding Mrs Hewett’s blows. Her night gown appears to catch fire and she screams, falling to the floor and writhing in pain.)

Lights snap to black.

SCENE 3

Mrs Hewett is sitting at the table, again clutching her Bible. The Candle is now alight. She stares blankly ahead. There is a knock. Mrs Hewett does not respond. There is a second knock.

Bethany enters PS.

BETHANY: *(hovering by the door)* Beg pardon, Ma'am. I came by to see if there is anything ...

MRS HEWETT: *(as if coming out from a trance)* No. There is nothing.

BETHANY: I loved Ruthy, missus. I came by as soon as I heard ...

MRS HEWETT: I loved her too ...

BETHANY: To be saved from the river but taken by the fire ...

MRS HEWETT: *(matter-of-fact)* She was determined to finish it ...

BETHANY: You mean she

MRS HEWETT: she threw herself upon the copper so her night-dress caught the flames.

(she nods, pensively)

The magistrate may wish to ask you questions, Bethany. You must tell him. Tell him of Ruth's near drownin' at her own hand and of her being possessed when that man brought her here.

BETHANY: You mean Tom?

MRS HEWETT: Yes. Tom. The magistrate may wish to talk to him as well.

BETHANY: Tom doesn't believe Ruth was trying to take her life at the river, Ma'am. He said she ran right by where he was painting before she leapt into the swirl. It was as if she knew he would fetch her.

MRS HEWETT: Who would know? She said herself she couldn't think.

BETHANY: Tom said when they do such things, some people are calling for help.

MRS HEWETT: Help! What help could this Tom have given her?

BETHANY: Perhaps not Tom. Perhaps you ... or me.

(distressed) I fear we have failed her, Ma'am.

MRS HEWETT: Nonsense. There was nothing we could do for her. The Devil had his hold. She only had to open her heart to the Lord and things would have been different.

BETHANY: She remembered happiness as a little girl. She shared that with me.
(she pauses) It wasn't the Devil who had his hold, Mrs Hewett. It wasn't the Devil who watched her grow into a delicate flower to be so cruelly plucked.

MRS HEWETT: *(firm)* Please, don't.

BETHANY: He should have been as a caring gardener, tending to that flower so she could grow into the beautiful bloom that God intended.

Instead
(she starts to weep wiping her tears on her dress)

...instead she has been burned like the brambles in autumn.

MRS HEWETT: *(fumbles with her Bible and produces the silk handkerchief from the back)*

Here child. Enough of your snivellin'. Use this.

BETHANY: *(uncertain of this gesture)* But ... but that is your treasured silken handkerchief. You have told me of its worth. It's value to you. I cannot use that.

MRS HEWETT: I say you can and you must.

(Bethany takes the handkerchief but does not use it. She holds it as if it most precious)

MRS HEWETT: What is it that you want from me?

BETHANY: To be released from your service so that I may marry Tom.

MRS HEWETT: And not go back to the prison?

BETHANY: Please Ma'am. And not go back to the prison. With your blessing, the Governor can allow this and we can start our lives afresh.

MRS HEWETT: If you believe that, you are a fool, Bethany Hopkins.

BETHANY: I don't believe it to be foolish.

MRS HEWETT: Well, it's nothing to me! But I cannot release you. You will have to wait until my husband returns. He may not wish to release you.

BETHANY: But surely, you would wish my release. To remove the temptation from him. And now that Ruth ...

MRS HEWETT: Say no more! I will speak to him when he returns. We will first have to deal with the matter of Ruth. You will tell the magistrate what he needs to hear and so will your Tom if you are to have him.

(Bethany is concerned by this suggestion)

You are perplexed girl. What is it?

BETHANY: We must tell the truth, Ma'am.

MRS HEWETT: I'm not asking you to lie. There are some things that are of no matter to the magistrate. I merely ask that you ignore them.

BETHANY: You mean, your husband? And what he does?

MRS HEWETT: You think upon it, girl. You think upon your loss should you say anything unkind about our good grace whilst you were in our service.

Think also about Ruth and the love we had for her within our family and tell it so.

There is no harm in it.

BETHANY: I will think upon it.

MRS HEWETT: Think well and speak wisely and you may have your wish, God willing. You do want this life with Tom do you not?

BETHANY: Yes. I do. More than anything I've ever known, I do.

Tom speaks of new beginnings. Our chance for something pure and good and honest.

(enthusiastic) It's the good against evil you told me of. From your Bible. It could be a fight well fought here.

MRS HEWETT: In Van Diemen's Land?

BETHANY: Yes.

MRS HEWETT: The Good Book does not mention Van Diemen's Land.

BETHANY: No. Not in fact. But in it's Word. It's meaning ...

MRS HEWETT: What would you know of God's Word? You have mocked it!

BETHANY: *(with respect)* I never meant to mock the Word, Ma'am.

MRS HEWETT: I am pleased to hear it.

BETHANY: *(excited)* Tom says that there is time. We have but thirty years of evil history to undo in this place. There are good men and women here too.

MRS HEWETT: *(dismissive)* The man's a dreamer.

BETHANY: Then I would rather live by his dreams than by my own nightmares.

MRS HEWETT: As you wish, girl. I'll not stand in your way. Unless of course, you betray me.

BETHANY: Then I can go?

MRS HEWETT: Until the master returns. Then we must do things as the law dictates before you are fully free of your obligations.

BETHANY: *(curtsies)* Thank you Ma'am.
(she turns to leave, she turns back)
What I was just sayin'. About new beginnings. I haven't the schoolin' or ... or Tom's tongue to explain it proper.

MRS HEWETT: *(agitated)* Best you leave now, before you say too much.

BETHANY: I meant no offence. I was hoping to help.

MRS HEWETT: For two score years I have managed, girl. I need no-one's help. Especially yours! I deal with my life in my own way.

BETHANY: Yes Ma'am. Sorry Ma'am. Good day to you.
She turns to leave and realises that she still has Mrs Hewett's handkerchief. She moves to give it back.
Beg pardon, Ma'am. Your kerchief.

MRS HEWETT: No. You may have it.

BETHANY: But ..

MRS HEWETT: I am through with tears.

BETHANY: Yes, Ma'am.

(she turns, hesitates and turns back again)

Might I come to Ruth's burial, Ma'am.

MRS HEWETT: Yes. Do that.

BETHANY: *(curtsies again)* Thank you.

(Bethany exits PS. Mrs Hewett stares out PS after Bethany. She then resolves on her next action, picks up her Bible and throws it into the fire. She then runs to OP)

MRS HEWETT: *(shouting)* Walter! Walter come quick! You must ride and fetch the constable. That whore, Bethany Hopkins has thrown the Lord's Word upon our fire and no doubt, stolen my treasured silk handkerchief!

(Mrs Hewett runs back to the fire, looks momentarily at the Bible, and turns, smiling, sits behind the table, leans forward and blows out the candle as

lights fade to BLACK OUT)