

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



# Conviction

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by Stella Kent

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EXTRACT

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This script is distributed by The Australian Script Centre  
77 Salamanca Place Hobart 7004 Tasmania Australia  
email [admin@ozscript.org](mailto:admin@ozscript.org)  
[www.ozscript.org](http://www.ozscript.org)  
ph +61 3 6223 4675  
fax +61 3 6223 4678

## **CHARACTERS**

LADY JANE FRANKLIN    Wife of Governor, 37 and in her late 40s  
 SIR JOHN FRANKLIN    Governor, in his 40s  
 CAPTAIN JOHN MONTAGU   Colonial Secretary  
 CAPTAIN ALEXANDER MACONOCHIE   Franklin's Private Secretary  
 SARAH MILLER            Former convict  
 SIR JOHN EARDLEY-WILMOT   New Governor, in his 60s

The parts of Maconochie and Eardley-Wilmot can be played by the same actor so that in all 2 female and 3 male actors are required.

## **STAGING**

The play concentrates on the period 1837-1843 when the Franklins were in Van Diemen's Land, but ends in 1854 when Franklin had been missing for seven years in the Arctic. Most scenes should flow without major interruption so changes such as those from Government House to the Women's Factory can be minimally suggested.

Wherever possible, the characters remain onstage after their initial entrance, even when not taking part in the action, to reflect their sometimes suffocating entrapment in the small colonial settlement.

JANE AND FRANKLIN ARE SURROUNDED BY BUNDLES OF BOOKS, ONE OF WHICH IS AN ATLAS THAT JANE IS CONSULTING. SITTING APART FROM THEM IN AN ELEGANT REGENCY DINING CHAIR IS MONTAGU.

JANE                   An island that is heart-shaped!

FRANKLIN             All I really want, Jane....

JANE                   Yes?

FRANKLIN             Is another ship.

JANE                   Governing a colony can't be so different from governing a crew. Besides, you are now *Sir* John Franklin.

FRANKLIN             But when the King spoke to me I trembled like a leaf.

JANE                   I will be by your side, dearest love. Was I not correct in preventing you from throwing yourself away on the governorship of Antigua. The world must be allowed a true vision of your heroism.

FRANKLIN             I don't want to be thought a hero. I don't even look like a hero... I can take Alexander! He has such strong good sense.

JANE                   He is very blunt.

- FRANKLIN            He is my most trusted friend. *(WITH A TOUCH OF THE DECISIVENESS THAT DEVELOPS LATER)*  
I will make him Colonial Secretary.
- MONTAGU            *(SUAVELY)* Alas, the Colonial Secretaryship is  
already taken. By me.
- FRANKLIN            It's already taken by a Captain John Montagu.  
Then Alexander will be my Private Secretary.
- MONTAGU            Tick, tock, tick. You will see, Father, when you  
come to stay with us in Battery Point - four  
clocks ticking identically. Routine, order – all  
the things you taught me. And thanks to me,  
that is how the entire colony now functions. A  
free settler arrives. Tick. We grant him land.  
Tock: we assign him some convicts. The  
convicts chop down the trees, till the land,  
build stone bridges and tick - the colony  
prosperes. Father, you will be as proud of me as  
you are of my brothers.
- FRANKLIN            I do hope Captain Montagu will approve of me.
- MONTAGU            Father, how amused I was at your account of  
Franklin's men being reduced to chewing their  
own boot leather. How could the Colonial Office  
appoint as Governor Arthur's successor a man  
whose only distinction in life is to have failed to  
find the northwest passage – twice. Fortunately  
he need do nothing. Sir John and Lady Jane  
will be the gilding on my sleekly running  
machine.
- JANE                 I cannot bear to leave a single book. *(SHE  
READS FROM WHERE HER COPY OF VOLTAIRE*

OPENS NATURALLY.) "We can by speech and pen make men more enlightened and better."  
(PICKING UP A SHAWL) Should I take this?

FRANKLIN It's very ...

JANE Sensual? I got it in Italy.

FRANKLIN Not from...?

JANE Not from the Italian. I told you dearest love, I could never have married him. His mouth was large and ... (DISTASTE) voluptuous. Even if my sister pointed out I was nearly 37! Oh my dear, it is my sacred mission to be your dutiful wife. (OF THE SHAWL) Van Diemen's Land will be warm. I won't have need of it.

MONTAGU They say he enjoys his food. I'll invite them to dinner. No-one can resist my new cook. They have no children. The rumour is, when he went to the North Pole, his member got frost-bitten.

FRANKLIN When I was a boy travelling with my uncle charting Australia, it was – we named places - Flinders Island after Uncle Matthew. That gave me my taste for exploration. It was... it was as if ...

JANE What boundless good work we will be able to perform!

FRANKLIN As if...

JANE We will establish Greek temples, and British societies. We will encourage paintings in the newest French style.

FRANKLIN It was as if we were creating a new being.

JANE Together we will create a new being.

JANE TIES ON FRANKLIN'S CRAVAT FOR HIM.

MONTAGU They say when one of his men needed to be flogged, he would take to his cabin and busy himself with charts. I will protect you, Sir John. You need never stray beyond the walls of Government House.

JANE SHUDDERS, AS IF WITH A PREMONITION.

FRANKLIN What is it my love?

JANE Nothing! (OF THE SHAWL I will take it – I feel the cold. Oh John! (SHE WRAPS THE SHAWL ROUND HIM IN AN ATTEMPT TO BIND THEM TOGETHER. HE RESPONDS AWKWARDLY.)

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DISTANT CHEERS. A CANON FIRES.  
MONTAGU PREPARES TO GREET THE FRANKLINS.

MONTAGU All the pops and thumps of full military honours. Exactly how they greeted Governor Arthur, before they turned against him. That was a hot day too. Tonight we'll all gather on the lawns and marvel at the whiz-bang of fireworks.

CLOSER CHEERS AS THE FRANKLINS WAVE.

JANE                    So cold. Who would have thought it of February. (SHE DRAWS HER SHAWL ROUND HER.) But the children are so uncouth. When I asked that young girl what her interests were, she could think only of pickling cucumbers.

MORE CHEERS. FRANKLIN AND JANE COME OVER TO MONTAGU.

FRANKLIN            Captain Montagu, we are... absolutely...

JANE                    Delighted –

FRANKLIN            Delighted to have come ashore on your...

JANE                    Entrancing –

FRANKLIN            Entrancing island.

MONTAGU            All of us have awaited your arrival breathlessly, Sir John, Lady Jane. In honour of the occasion, may I offer you a glass of burgundy, a special vintage from my cellar –

JANE                    Oh no, Captain Montagu, Sir John and I never take alcohol.

MONTAGU            (VERY QUICKLY) Indeed, I scarcely touch it myself.

JANE                    Hobart Town is so prettily set. The bay. Mount Wellington so close!

MONTAGU            And we are certain your governorship will be prosperous and long.

FRANKLIN            Prosperous?

JANE                    But you have such strange birds. Do they sing?

MONTAGU                (UNCERTAIN) Why...

JANE                    Do they sing as tunefully as a blackbird?  
Dearest love, we must import blackbirds so we  
can wake to their call.... My books - safely  
arrived!

MONTAGU                Be assured, Sir John, the books balance  
beautifully. I have completed a special report  
containing every detail of the colony's situation.

FRANKLIN                I look to you, Captain Montagu, to advise me  
on the details of....the....

MONTAGU                Of the administration? You may rely on me  
totally, Sir John. The colony runs by policies,  
rules, schedules. It is my task to rule the lines  
over the empty map, the grids that transform  
scrub into roads and villages and neat little  
farms. You need do nothing.

JANE                    Oh but Captain Montagu, there is so much to  
do. We had in mind a scientific society, didn't  
we, Sir John? We could publish a journal.

MONTAGU                The state coffers, alas, could not –

JANE                    Oh we would raise subscriptions. But you must  
advise me, Captain Montagu. You are so  
experienced, and I am only a weak and helpless  
woman.

MONTAGU                (CHARMED) I would regard it as a privilege,  
Lady Jane. I can provide you with a list of  
names.

JANE                    But I want everyone!

MONTAGU              What – the convicts?

JANE                    Oh, of course not them.

FRANKLIN              We wish to visit the new prison.

MONTAGU              At Port Arthur?

JANE                    We hear it is a model of its type.

MONTAGU              A place of absolute regularity, but you needn't  
trouble yourself -

JANE                    Sir John and I wish to see everything. And we  
must arrange public lectures.

FRANKLIN              On board ship, Lady Jane organised a most  
impressive lecture program.

MONTAGU              Or perhaps entertainments?

JANE                    Entertainments?

MONTAGU              Teas, dinners, dances.

JANE                    Life is not just a series of balls and dinners.

MONTAGU              The citizens of Hobart Town enjoy their social  
life.

A ROGUISH FLIRTATION IS DEVELOPING  
BETWEEN MONTAGU AND JANE.

JANE                    ‘Hobart Town’ is such a mouthful! Why not just  
‘Hobart’?