

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



# Frank'll Kill Me

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by Stephanie McCarthy

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EXTRACT

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# **FRANK'LL KILL ME**

## **SCENE 1**

### **OUTHOUSE LAUNDRY, Night**

*A small mousey woman, drab in the extreme, with thin lank hair drawn behind in a bun. She wears a loose grey woollen dress over clumsy rubber boots.*

*MARY talks to us nervously from her laundry as she works, prodding the near-dying fire to life under the copper, lifting pieces of male clothing from a copper with a wooden stick. As she speaks, she feeds the shirt, trousers, etc through a mangle and into the dry concrete troughs. Beads of perspiration adorn her fine forehead, or maybe it's steam, but the work looks far too arduous for someone of her meagre strength, and her ungloved hands are red and chapped.*

*This is an archaic outhouse farm laundry, complete with rabbit traps slung on the wall, dull brass hooks, big brass taps, mangle made to swivel over concrete sinks, and a kero lantern casting soft yellow light.*

MARY: He's asleep now, the young man.... Sleeping out there in the sleepout...exhausted. He must be, utterly exhausted. [*smiles faintly, relishes the name*] Jim, Jim Mars...the man from Mars, who would have thought? [*childish*] It's like he dropped in from another planet.

*She looks up at a small window - steam droplets condensing on the inside, rain and wind beating and rattling to get in from the outside - and turns back to her work.*

And what a night to choose! Mind you, is there a choice in these things? It seems to me events have little to do with choice. [*thinks*] Is it fate, perhaps, sent him to me? Is fate another name for God?

*She smiles, excited.*

MARY: If so, maybe it's time to start believing in God again. And Frank being away, how lucky, what incredible luck! [*whispers*] Thank you God.

**[fervently, feverishly]** Please please God, don't take Jim Mars away from me, don't let him leave, don't let him get scared, don't let him run away, please please God! **[suddenly aggressive]** Don't you **dare** take him away from me!

***She is puffing with the exertion of winding the mangle and handling the dripping clothing.***

Frank's shirt...I never did like this shirt. **[thinks]** He wore it the day Banjo disappeared...I watched this red and black shirt get smaller and smaller through the trees as he walked off to set the traps...I was happy because Banjo was happy, trotting along and sniffing the fresh air, giving Frank's boot a wide berth. I loved patting Banjo. First thing every morning I'd go out to his kennel. He was always so pleased to see me. He had a kind of sound he'd make, a kind of whimper, just for me. He wouldn't do it for anyone else. Sometimes I'd let him off the chain - when Frank wasn't around. **[bard]** There has been too much taken away from me, too much. **[puffs]** I deserve this, I deserve this small happiness, please God let me keep this small happiness, let me keep this young man ...for a while –

She ***guides the last piece of clothing into the trough.***

Thank you! **[as it falls]** Amen!

***Stepping back, she wipes her brow and dries her hands on an old towel banging from the wall.***

There. All clean. They can be hung out in the morning. Frank gets very messy with the farmwork, naturally, but he does like a clean change of clothes every day.

***She takes a drab cardigan from a wall hook, putting it on as she speaks.***

MARY: Frank says I'll catch a chill if I get a sweat-up and then let myself get cold. He says if I get a chill who'll be around to do the chores and get him his meals? **[thinks]** It's true. It's got so I'm the only one who can do these things.

***She looks up at the clinking window.***

I made him a pretty good meal tonight, that young man, if I do say so