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Dramatic Publishing

FRANK'S LIFE

A Play in Two Acts

by

MARK DUNN



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • London, England • Melbourne, Australia

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MARK DUNN

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FRANK'S LIFE was first presented at The Thirteenth Street Repertory Company on May 22, 1992. It was directed by Laura Josepher. Set design was by Ms. Josepher. The lighting was by Susan Hamburger. Original music was written for the production by Michael Whalen. Program and flyer art was by Selena McKeVitt. The assistant director and stage manager was Judith Bierhuizen. The cast, in order of appearance, was as follows:

Frank	BOB DILLON
Corley	DAVID CSIZMADIA
Pruett	EDWARD G. HUGHES
Stace	BARBARA BAYER
Shelly	WANDA WIESELER
Gladys	DELORIA RUYLE
Joy	JUDY TURKISHER

FRANK'S LIFE

A Play in Two Acts
For 3 Men and 4 Women

CHARACTERS

FRANK 30 years old
CORLEY . . . 31, his best friend and former college roommate
PRUETT 30s, a television producer
STACE late 20s, Corley's wife
SHELLY early 30s, Frank's wife
GLADYS 50s, Frank's mother
JOY mid-20s, Frank's sister

TIME and PLACE

The play is set in early December in the not-too-distant future in New York City. Several locations should be indicated on the stage, perhaps in a multilevel setup. The most prominent and most clearly realized of these locations should be Frank and Shelly's living room with its contemporary furnishings, including a couch and television set. This area should have three doors (or suggestions of doors): a front door, a door leading to the bedrooms, and another leading to the kitchen. Other locations where scenes will be played may be suggested as indicated: a table and two chairs for Frank and Corley's favorite tavern, a dining room table and chairs for Corley and Stace's dining room, and a desk for Pruett's office.

The action of the play should proceed in a smooth, seamless manner except where blackouts are indicated; for this reason there is no division of scenes in the script.

For
Laura Josepher
and the cast of the original production,
Barbara, David, Bob, Huey,
Deloria, Judy and Wanda.

ACT ONE

AT RISE: *LIGHTS* come up on FRANK and CORLEY sitting at a table in a midtown pub.

CORLEY. Okay, here's a crazy one... (*Takes a big gulp of beer.*) I'm back in high school again, and it's fall—football season, and I'm sitting on the bench, which as you know, was like the only position I seemed to be adept at before the growth hormones kicked in. And it's third quarter—we're trailing by fourteen and it's looking like that bench is gonna be my home away from home for the rest of the whole fucking game, when all of the sudden Coach What's-his-face walks up behind me, lays a hand on my shoulder and goes, "I want you out there, son." "Terrific," I say, "who do I go in for?" "Judy," he says. And I'm like tripping myself to get out on that field and do my bit for the ol' silver and blue, when it hits me—boom! *Judy?* *Judy who?* And Coach seems kinda annoyed at this, you know, stares me down. Then like almost under his breath: "Judy Garland." Christ is he pissed. "Can't you seen the poor thing's really taking a beating out there?" And I look out onto the field, and there she is—dressed formally, you know, but this sequiny, shiny thing she's wearing—it's ripped to rags, and God she looks bad. Really bad. Bruised up. One of her eyes swollen shut.

FRANK (*interrupting*). That's a sick dream, Corley.

CORLEY. Gets much worse.

FRANK. Heard enough. You tell it to that shrink friend of yours—Irving?

CORLEY. Irwin.

FRANK. He interpret it for you?

CORLEY (*nodding*). I'm a latent homosexual.

FRANK. The guy's really good at this, isn't he?

CORLEY (*laughing, sarcasm*). Yeah, right on the money. Okay, craziest dream you ever had—

FRANK. That I can remember. (*Thinking*.) I'm remembering one.

CORLEY. Okay.

FRANK. I'm walking down the street.

CORLEY. Wearing a tutu, right?

FRANK. Right—borrowed it from you. And I see this, this mob of people coming towards me from about a block away—and you know how this really bugs me—

CORLEY. Sidewalk hogs.

FRANK. Yeah. Three, four abreast. Like that happy little band of tourists I had to play red rover with the other day—

CORLEY. The Swiss Family Robinson.

FRANK (*nodding*). Totally oblivious to everything around them but the architecture. If I hadn't stepped off the curb and into the parking lane I got a feeling Big Klaus would have rolled right over me. (*Takes a big gulp from the bottle*.) Shelly won't give an inch—she sees a line of people coming at her like that, if it doesn't look like they're gonna give a little leeway, she starts yelling major insults at them: "What the hell do you think you are—a goddamned *phalanx*!" So that's what's coming at

me in the dream—this—this *legion* comprised of—are you ready for this, Corley?—everybody I ever knew. I'm not kidding you. Rows of familiar faces coming at me military-style. I'm seeing my mother, my sister Joy, Bill from work, a couple of my cousins back in Texas. You were like front row, I think.

CORLEY. First assault. I appreciate that, Frankie.

FRANK. And I stop. And they stop, and now we're into this silent face-off, nobody saying a word.

CORLEY. Not even Gladys? What happened—somebody tape your mother's mouth shut?

FRANK. Let me get through this before I forget it.

CORLEY (*hands-off gesture*). Sorry.

FRANK. I mean, it didn't even come back to me until a couple minutes ago.

CORLEY. Okay. We're all staring you down.

FRANK. Right. Then somebody—I don't know who—somebody's hands, they go up to his face. And then this person, he just sort of lifts it totally away.

CORLEY. The face.

FRANK. Right.

CORLEY. It's a mask.

FRANK. Yeah.

CORLEY. And what's underneath—Frankenstein's ugly sister?

FRANK. Nothing's there, Corley. Nothing at all.

CORLEY. Like the invisible man.

FRANK. Like I don't know what.

CORLEY. And then the other masks come off and you've got this whole phalanx of invisibles.

FRANK. Yeah.

CORLEY. And then you try to peel *your* mask away.

FRANK. Gets a little predictable, doesn't it?

CORLEY (*on a roll*). And you can't get it off...

FRANK. Because I don't have one.

CORLEY. So you ...

FRANK. Nothing. End of dream.

CORLEY. To be continued.

FRANK. Hope not.

CORLEY. You know, Irwin could have a field day with this one.

FRANK. A little spooky, huh?

CORLEY. Yeah, if you take it literally. Because literally, I guess it means everybody but you is dead.

FRANK. I'm not that literal. Give me another one.

CORLEY (*thinking*). All right: The masks symbolize... deception. We're all deceiving you in some way, Frank. You're the only honest man you know. You know what that's called, buddy? That's called paranoia.

FRANK. All right. My dreams are paranoid. Yours are gay.

CORLEY. Hey, I'll take Judy and cleats any old day.

FRANK. I've got to get home and feed the cat. (*He gets up.*)

CORLEY (*also getting up*). When did you say Shelly was getting back?

FRANK. Sunday night.

CORLEY. Oh, Stace wants you to come over for dinner tomorrow night. She's doing something weird with sun-dried tomatoes.

FRANK. Sounds interesting. What time?

CORLEY. Seven okay?

FRANK. Sure. (*CORLEY begins to smile.*) What?

CORLEY. Did we get to choose?

FRANK. Choose?

CORLEY. Our masks. Or did we just sort of get stuck with what was given to us?

FRANK. I don't know. Why?

CORLEY (*rubbing his cheeks*). Don't you ever get a little tired of shaving the same ugly face every morning?

FRANK. I don't hear Stace complaining, Corley.

CORLEY. She's attracted to my intellect. What's Shelly attracted to?

FRANK. She's attracted to your intellect too, Corley. That's why I have to keep my eye on the two of you.

CORLEY. Good night, Frankie.

FRANK. 'Night, Corley.

(LIGHTS dim as the MEN start away from the table. LIGHTS come up on PRUETT sitting behind his desk talking on the phone.)

PRUETT. I'm looking right at it, Powers. Your secretary faxed it over this morning... You want the truth? I'm totally, absolutely—I'm looking for a gun, Powers. I'm going to find a gun and shoot myself until dead. You don't do this to a person like me. Not after all the time and effort I've put into this show... Because I think they're going to walk, that's what I think. I think I'm going to have a mass exodus on my hands. Then what am I supposed to—... Well, there's got to be some sort of recourse here. It just sounds incredibly arbitr—... You know, I haven't gotten one ounce of cooperation from you ever since I came on board this show. *I am saying*—... We are in the middle of a call here, Andrew. Don't put me on h— Shit!

(He has been put on hold. He fumes in silence as LIGHTS dim here and come up on Corley and Stace's dining room table. FRANK and CORLEY are seated. STACE enters carrying a serving dish, and sets it down on the table.)

STACE *(to CORLEY)*. And the salad, honey. Then we'll be set. *(CORLEY goes out as STACE sits down. To FRANK.)* Let me guess, Frank: Mushroom Monday night. Pepperoni Tuesday night—

FRANK. Stouffers Tuesday night. Celantano Wednesday.

STACE. And last night you got so desperate for a home-cooked meal—

FRANK. That I went for Polish in the East Village.

STACE. Now I cannot believe that you're such a rotten cook, Frank. Corley says—

(CORLEY enters with salad.)

CORLEY. What does Corley say?

STACE. When you two shared that apartment in college, I thought you said Frank whipped up all these great meals for the two of you.

CORLEY. Breakfasts. Frank made great breakfasts. Breakfast for lunch. Breakfast for dinner...

FRANK. Breakfast for breakfast.

CORLEY. You think my cholesterol count is high *now*.

STACE. I just can't picture it, putting up with each other for three straight years like that.

FRANK. Four if you count Corley camping out on the floor of my dorm room our Freshman year.

CORLEY *(to STACE)*. I told you about Ragsdale.

STACE. The one who'd lock you out every night.

CORLEY. Look, it was okay. The guy snored like a freight train. Whereas good ol' Frank here was a total corpse.
(A TELEPHONE rings.)

STACE. Excuse me. (STACE exits.)

FRANK (as she goes). This is good. (To CORLEY.) What is it?

CORLEY. Endive-walnut something salad. How's Shelly's mother?

FRANK. The doctor thinks she'll pull through. They're not really sure how much nerve damage was done, though.

CORLEY. I wouldn't wish that kind of shit on anybody. How's *your* mother getting along these days, Frank?

FRANK. She's okay. She and Joy are coming up for a visit on Tuesday.

CORLEY. I thought Gladys hated New York.

FRANK. Joy talked her into it.

CORLEY. Joy gonna be okay up here?

FRANK. Translated: Is she gonna do something stupid like throw herself off the top of the Chrysler Building?

CORLEY. I recall, good buddy, that you were more than a little worried the last time there was talk of her coming up.

FRANK. Mama'll be with her. Mama keeps a very close eye on her. (Beat.) She wanted to see the tree at Rockefeller Center. And, well, Mama got to thinking maybe *she'd* like see the tree too. So, they're coming up.

CORLEY. To see the tree.

FRANK. To do the Christmas thing.

CORLEY. Is that okay with Shelly?

FRANK. Yeah, she gets along with Mama okay.

CORLEY. What about Joy?

FRANK. Shelly doesn't connect with Joy very well. She doesn't have patience for people with—well, I should say Shelly doesn't really *understand* people like Joy. (*Gets up.*) I didn't wash. (*Holds out his hands.*) I've brought the stinking subway into your lovely home.

CORLEY. Hey, it ain't that lovely.

FRANK. Be back.

(He leaves. CORLEY sits thinking. STACE enters.)

STACE. Where's Frank?

CORLEY. He's washing the subway off his hands. Who was it?

STACE. Pruett. He wants to see us tomorrow morning.

CORLEY. I can think of probably a thousand people I'd rather spend the morning with.

STACE. Something's wrong.

CORLEY. What do you mean?

STACE. He's being mysterious. He won't talk about it on the phone.

CORLEY. So what do you think he's gonna lay on us this time?

STACE. Let's discuss it after Frank leaves, okay?

(She takes a sip of wine. CORLEY concentrates on his salad. A moment passes. FRANK enters.)

FRANK *(to STACE, indicating the salad)*. It's really good, Stace.

STACE. Thanks. It's a new recipe.

(BLACKOUT. LIGHTS come up over Pruett's desk. PRUETT is seated behind it, staring ahead, lost in thought. The PHONE rings. He answers.)

PRUETT. Yes? ... Send them in.

(CORLEY and STACE enter. He shakes hands with both.)

PRUETT. I'm glad you came down. Have a seat. *(They all sit.)* Look, I wanted to tell all the principals first: there's been a reorganization of sorts.

CORLEY. What kind of reorganization?

PRUETT. Some of the money budgeted for our show is being shifted elsewhere.

CORLEY. What do you mean elsewhere?

PRUETT. They're not saying.

CORLEY. Can they do that?

PRUETT. They can do whatever they want to. We're all just going to have to tighten the belt a little.

CORLEY. The belt is just about as tight as it can get, Pruett.

PRUETT *(to STACE)*. Maybe cut back a little on the sun-dried tomatoes.

STACE. You mean, unless Frank comes to dinner.

PRUETT. We'll still be able to reimburse you for all approved expenses. We just can't keep paying you the same salary we always have.

CORLEY. So what kind of a pay cut are we looking at here?

PRUETT. Half.

CORLEY (*bounding up from his chair*). Fuck you in hell, Pruett!

PRUETT. Sit down, Corley.

CORLEY. Screw *this*! We have contracts.

PRUETT. Have you ever *read* your contract, Corley? Your salary's not set in stone. (*Beat, then conciliatory.*) Look, I know it's going to be difficult.

CORLEY. *Difficult*? That kind of pay cut, we're talking fucking food stamps!

STACE (*to PRUETT*). Who else have you spoken to?

PRUETT. Bill, a couple of the others. I'll see Shelly tomorrow, Gladys and Joy on Monday morning. I'll be meeting with the rest of the principals over the next two weeks.

CORLEY. This is across the board? Everybody gets a cut?

PRUETT. Everybody on *our* show.

CORLEY. But not the freelancers.

PRUETT. You know they're paid out of a different account.

CORLEY. And to think how happy I was the day I quit freelancing. (*He sits back down.*)

STACE. No mention of when the money might be restored?

PRUETT. Not very likely.

CORLEY. What'd you do, Pruett? Just sit there and nod your little head while they flushed the whole damned show down the toilet?

PRUETT. I did everything I could, Corley. You know where I come in the chain of command.

CORLEY. You got mouse balls, Pruett.

PRUETT. Look—it is completely out of my hands.

STACE (to CORLEY). We're just going to have to make do.

CORLEY. We can quit.

PRUETT. You leave this show, you can't return to New York. Not as long as Frank is here.

CORLEY. Like I'm gonna have major regrets saying good-bye to ol' Calcutta on the Hudson.

PRUETT. You'll be under permanent surveillance to make sure you never come near Frank again.

CORLEY. I know that.

STACE. You'd really give it up? You know what it's like on the outside. Is that the kind of life you want?

CORLEY. So okay, maybe I'll miss the Knicks.

STACE. I meant your *career*, Corley.

CORLEY. I can find other work that pays a hell of a lot better than what I'm making here. You could too.

STACE. I'm not leaving. I happen to love very much what I do for a living.

CORLEY. More than you love me?

STACE. Is that a joke?

CORLEY. I'm not talking—I'm referring to our *friendship*, Stace. You work with a person for six years, there's a bond there.

STACE. And I'm supposed to hop up and quit the show, quit my career on the basis of *that*? Corley, honey, we're not that good of friends.

CORLEY. You wouldn't have to quit your career. I'm sure there's work for actors out there.

PRUETT. Actors are not welcome in most blue-zone cities, Corley. That's how they came to *be* blue-zone cities.

CORLEY. Community theatre.

STACE (*exasperated, to PRUETT*). He's not even listening to you.

PRUETT (*to CORLEY*). They don't have community theatre. They pass ordinances. There's a deep-seated animosity out there toward members of your profession. Just last week two mimes were—

CORLEY. Shot to death somewhere in Oklahoma. Had to be self-defense.

PRUETT. I really need you two, Corley. Because we're going to lose some of the others. Already have, in fact. And those closest to Frank are going to have to be there to hold him together.

STACE. Who, Pruett? Who have we lost?

PRUETT. Felipe Montenegro for one.

CORLEY. Plays the homeless man on Frank's corner? The bearded guy, looks kinda like Santa Claus?

PRUETT. Real beard by the way. Quit this morning.

STACE. Frank really liked that guy.

PRUETT. Felipe's decided to move back to New Mexico. He's going to work in his brother's tire store.

STACE. Frank's going to worry that something happened to him. He makes a habit of stopping off to talk to him every night on his way home from work.

CORLEY (*overlapping*). Yeah, we're all aware. Look, I'll tell him I saw the old coot get hit by a truck.

STACE (*to CORLEY*). You'd really do that, wouldn't you?

CORLEY. You want me to tell him the truth, dear—and have the network slap me with a monster civil suit—(*Stops, turns to PRUETT.*) The clause is still there, isn't it?

PRUETT. Yes, it's still there.