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Dramatic Publishing

"Likely to leave you speechless!"

—New York Times

Mary



Drama/Comedy by Thomas Bradshaw

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Mary

Drama/Comedy. By Thomas Bradshaw. *Cast: 4m., 2w.* At the height of what *TIME* magazine dubbed “AIDS hysteria” in 1983, college student David invites his boyfriend home to his parents’ house in Maryland where nothing has changed since the 1800s—including the slave quarters. Confronting hypocrisy and oppression with exhilarating wit, Bradshaw’s incendiary work is “likely to leave you speechless!” (*New York Times*) “An avant-garde exploration of racism, homophobia and religion.” (*Chicago Now*) “Clearly attacking the homophobia in the African-American community while exclaiming that deep-seated prejudices remain unconsciously latent in all of us, Bradshaw has created an entertainment—and, make no mistake, this is an entertaining work—that views theatre as a forum for goading audiences out of complacency, refusing to provide the pat but satisfying ending where everyone learns to be nice to each other.” (*Variety*) *Area staging.* *Approximate running time: 90 minutes. Code: MN8.*

*Cover photo: Goodman Theatre, Chicago, featuring (l-r) Scott Jaeck, Alex Weisman, Eddie Bennett, Mary Lucretia Taylor (standing) and Barbara Garrick.
Photo: Richard Hein. Cover design: Jeanette Alig-Sergel.*

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Mary

By

THOMAS BRADSHAW

Please Note: This excerpt contains
offensive language.



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(MARY)

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“*Mary* received its world premiere at the Goodman Theatre, Chicago, Ill., on Feb. 14, 2011, Robert Falls, artistic director, Roche Schulfer, executive director.”

Mary premiered at the Goodman Theatre, Chicago, Ill., on Feb. 14, 2011.

Cast

James..... Scott Jaeck
Dolores..... Barbara Garrick
Mary..... Myra Lucretia Taylor
Elroy..... Cedric Young
Jonathan..... Eddie Bennett
David..... Alex Weisman
Priest..... Steve Pickering

Production Staff

Director..... May Adrales
Artistic Director..... Robert Falls
Executive Director..... Roche Schulfer
Set Design..... Kevin Depinet
Costume Design..... Ana Kuzmanic
Sound Design..... Andrew Hansen
Lighting Design..... Keith Parham
Dramaturg..... Tanya Palmer
Production Stage Manager..... Kimberly Osgood
Dialect Coach..... Christine Adaire
Casting..... Adam Belcuore

Mary

CHARACTERS

MARY: black, 50s, a maid in the family household.

ELROY: black, 50s, Mary's husband, a worker on the estate.

DOLORES: white, 50s, Mary's employer.

JAMES: white, 50s, Dolores' husband.

DAVID: white, 20, gay, Dolores and James' son.

JONATHAN: white, 20, gay, David's boyfriend.

PRIEST

SETTINGS

A small town in southern Maryland, 1983

Wedding in Massachusetts, 2005

College graduation ceremony, 2011

AUTHOR'S NOTE

All characters should be played with the utmost honesty and sincerity. The irony in the play should be underplayed rather than overplayed at all times. The characters in this play feel that all their actions are completely necessary and unavoidable. The play should be directed in a straightforward and realistic manner.

Mary

SCENE 1

AT RISE: *DAVID is packing in his dorm room at a small liberal arts college. JONATHAN knocks on the door.*

DAVID. Who is it?

JONATHAN. It's Jonathan.

(DAVID opens the door.)

JONATHAN *(cont'd)*. Hey.

DAVID. Hey.

(DAVID gives JONATHAN a quick kiss on the lips.)

JONATHAN. What are you doing?

DAVID. Packing.

JONATHAN. Cool.

DAVID. You know, I was thinking, maybe you could come to my house for a few days after Christmas?

JONATHAN. Oh. I was thinking that we could go camping for a week, or something like that.

DAVID. Well, we've been dating for a year now and I'd really like you to meet my parents.

JONATHAN. Will that be weird?

DAVID. Why would it be weird?

JONATHAN. You know, bringing a guy home.

DAVID. My parents have no idea that I'm gay. They're totally clueless. They won't think it's weird at all.

JONATHAN. Yeah. OK. I'll fly down on the 27th or something like that.

DAVID. Awesome! My parents are going to love you!

JONATHAN (*clear that something is on his mind*). It'll be fun.

DAVID. What's wrong, honey?

JONATHAN. Jared went to the hospital because his glands are swollen.

DAVID (*alarmed*). Yeah.

JONATHAN. And when he got there the doctors diagnosed him with pneumonia.

DAVID. Oh, man. What do you think?

JONATHAN. I think this may be the first case of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome on our campus.

DAVID. Holy shit.

JONATHAN. I'd like to call a meeting of the gay and lesbian association as soon as we get back to campus in January.

DAVID. That's a good idea.

JONATHAN. And at this meeting I want to figure out ways to raise awareness about the dangers of this disease in our community. We've got to start protecting ourselves.

DAVID. How do you think he got it?

JONATHAN. Well, everyone knows that our voice teacher Mr. Roberts is gay, and he's missed a lot of classes this semester because he's been sick.

DAVID. Yeah. And?

JONATHAN. I heard that Jared has been sleeping with Mr. Roberts.

DAVID. Holy shit! I hope that we don't have it too.

JONATHAN. How would we have gotten it?

DAVID. You know those mats that we lie on to do our voice exercises?

JONATHAN. Yeah.

DAVID. Mr. Roberts puts his hands all over those things and lies on them too.

JONATHAN. Holy shit! I never even thought of that! What are we gonna do?

DAVID. We should get tested right away.

JONATHAN. OK. Let's take a deep breath. There's no reason to freak out yet. We should wait to find out Jared's diagnosis.

DAVID. You're right. Do you think that we should start using condoms?

JONATHAN. I think it might be a little too late for that.

(They both laugh.)

DAVID. You have a point.

JONATHAN. We can call everyone to arrange the meeting while we're at your house over break.

DAVID. That sounds good. *(Pause.)* Oh, and if you really want to impress my parents you should bring them a Cabbage Patch doll as a present.

JONATHAN. Are you kidding?

DAVID. I'm dead serious. My parents love Cabbage Patch dolls. They collect them.

JONATHAN. Your parents sound like total weirdos.

DAVID. Tell me about it.

JONATHAN. All right, I've got to go pack. See you in a couple of weeks.

DAVID. I love you.

JONATHAN. I love you too.

(They kiss.)

SCENE 2

(JAMES is alone in the living room of his house. His wife, DOLORES, enters.)

JAMES. How was work?

DOLORES. Since when are you interested in what I do at work?

JAMES. Since I retired two months ago.

DOLORES. But the first question you normally ask me is “what’s for dinner?” Not “how was your day?”

JAMES. I’m trying something different I guess.

DOLORES. Well, if you must know, droves of homeless veterans have been seeking assistance from the VA since Reagan’s welfare cuts kicked in. I’ve never seen anything like it.

JAMES. What can you do for them?

DOLORES. If they’re sick we can send them to the VA hospital, but other than that all we can do is find them a bed in a homeless shelter. It’s very sad.

JAMES. It is sad that some people don’t have the discipline and work ethic to take care of their families, but Reagan is doing the right thing. If you give people handouts then they become dependent on the state, and that’s not good for anyone. Besides, he’s protecting this country. Before I retired, my budget at the department of defense almost doubled.

DOLORES. I know that, dear. I just think that you should be provided for if you’ve served this country.

JAMES. So, what’s for dinner?

DOLORES. Now that you’re retired, you can ask Nigger Mary that question yourself.

JAMES. But I don’t want to ask Nigger Mary. I’d rather ask you.

DOLORES. I told Nigger Mary to make a pot roast for dinner.

JAMES. I sure do love Nigger Mary’s pot roast.

DOLORES. Oh! I got you a present!

(DOLORES leaves the room and comes back with a wrapped box. She hands it to JAMES.)

JAMES. What’s the occasion? It’s not Christmas yet.

DOLORES. Open it.

JAMES (*opens it. It is a penis pump. He has no idea what it is.*)
What on earth is this?

DOLORES. It's a penis pump.

JAMES. What!? What am I supposed to do with this?

DOLORES. It's supposed to help you with your problem.

JAMES. Really?!

DOLORES. My co-worker's husband had his prostate removed three years ago, and she said that this device helped her husband regain his erectile function.

JAMES. You're talking to your co-workers about my dick!?

DOLORES. She and I have become close because you had prostate cancer and her husband had it a few years ago. She's really helped me out a lot.

JAMES. Which co-worker is this?

DOLORES. Her name is Melba. You don't know her.

JAMES. Oh.

(JAMES pulls DOLORES into his lap.)

JAMES (*cont'd*). When do you want to try this out?

DOLORES. Later tonight?

(They kiss.)

JAMES. It's a date.

(They kiss again.)

JAMES (*cont'd*). You know, I've been thinking about writing a book.

DOLORES. About what?

JAMES. This experience with prostate cancer has been very difficult. It's been difficult and revelatory. I'd like to write a book about my experiences in order to help other men with prostate cancer work through their fear.

DOLORES. I think that's a very nice idea.

JAMES. Men don't really talk about this sort of thing. But I want everyone to know that there's nothing to be ashamed of. This process is just another obstacle to overcome in life.

DOLORES. Do you need me to buy you a notebook?

JAMES. Nope. I've already got one. I'm going to start writing tomorrow.

(MARY enters.)

JAMES *(cont'd)*. Where on earth have you been?

MARY. I've been at the grocery store, Mr. Jennings. Had to get that pot roast that Missus wanted for dinner.

(DOLORES goes to MARY and looks at the pot roast.)

DOLORES. This pot roast is as big as a pumpkin. How are we going to eat all this food?

MARY. Mr. Jennings can eat the leftovers for lunch for the rest of the week.

JAMES. I love your pot roast, Mary.

DOLORES. You and Elroy are going to have to eat this for the rest of the week also.

MARY. Thank you, ma'am. I'm gonna get this pot roast started.

JAMES. Are you going to make a blueberry pie for dessert?!

You know I love your blueberry pie!

MARY *(amused and flattered)*. I'll see what I can do.

(MARY exits with the pot roast into the kitchen.)

SCENE 3

(MARY is alone onstage cleaning the house. Offstage we hear JAMES shout.)

JAMES *(offstage)*. God damn!

MARY. Is everything all right, Mr. Jennings?

JAMES (*walks onstage and sits down*). Writing is hard!

MARY. I wouldn't know anything about that, sir.

JAMES. No, I guess you wouldn't.

MARY. What are you writing about?

JAMES. I decided that I was going to write a book about my experiences with prostate cancer, but it's too hard.

MARY. What's so hard about it?

JAMES. I don't know where to start.

MARY. The best place to start is always at the beginning.

JAMES. That's true, Mary. Very true. (*Pause.*) You know, I was thinking, maybe it would be better if I went on a talk show to talk about my experiences. That way I could reach a much wider audience. Yes, I think I'd like to do that.

MARY. How do you go about getting on TV?

JAMES. I'm not sure. But I think that's a better goal to pursue rather than writing a book. With a book, even if I write it, I can't be sure that it'll ever get published. I think that I'm going to spend my time practicing what I'm going to say when I get on TV.

MARY. That sounds like a worthy plan. I've never known anyone who was on TV.

JAMES. That's going to change very soon, Mary. (*Pause.*) Will you ask me some questions like a talk show host would?

MARY. Sure, Mr. Jennings. I don't really know what to ask though.

JAMES. Just sit down in that chair.

MARY. OK. (*Sits.*)

JAMES. Begin.

MARY. Oh. All right. (*Pause.*) Mr. Jennings, it's a pleasure to have you on the Mary Wainwright Louis show. How did you feel when you first learned that you had prostate cancer?

JAMES. That's a good question, Mary. It felt like a dark storm cloud paused over me and released torrents of rain. It felt as if the earth split open beneath me, sucked me in, and imprisoned me in Satan's lair. I felt as if all that I loved in this world was about to vanish. For what is death, Mary? What is death? The end of beauty; the end of time, joy and love.

MARY. That's a very inter—

JAMES. But I knew that God was with me. I could feel his presence deep in my soul. And I knew that it was not my time to go. You can only be taken if he wills it, and I sensed that this was just another trial to overcome. There's a passage from the Bible that really helped me through this difficult time.

MARY. What is it?

JAMES. It's from Thessalonians: "But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled,"

JAMES & MARY. "Putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet."

(DAVID enters wearing a suit jacket with a button missing and a bag.)

MARY. Hello, David!

(MARY goes over to DAVID and gives him a hug.)

DAVID. It's good to see you, Mary.

JAMES. Hello, son!

(JAMES gives DAVID a hug.)

DAVID. Hi, Dad.

JAMES. How was your trip?

DAVID. The train was nice. I always like to look out the window and see the countryside.

JAMES. Is there much countryside to see from upstate New York to Baltimore?

DAVID (*laughs*). There's plenty, Dad. You and Mom really should try taking the train instead of flying.

JAMES. We don't have time for that.

DAVID. You're retired now! Just do it once. It's so beautiful.

JAMES. You have a button on your jacket missing. Maybe Nigger Mary can sew that for you. (*To Mary.*) Mary, can you sew a button on his jacket. We don't want David walking around looking like he's homeless.

MARY (*looks at the area where the button is missing*). Yep. This'll take about five minutes.

(*MARY helps DAVID to take off his jacket.*)

DAVID. Thanks, Mary.

(*MARY exits.*)

DAVID (*cont'd*). What time will Mom be home?

JAMES. She'll be home about 5. Hey, let's go to my shed. I want to show you my new shotgun.

DAVID. OK.

(*They exit.*)

SCENE 4

(*It is Christmas day. The whole family is there, including MARY and her husband, ELROY. It is clear that many presents have already been opened.*)

DOLORES. Here's your last gift, David. It's extra special.

DAVID (*opening his gift*). Wow! A new violin.

JAMES. It was made in Italy in the 17th century by Niccolò Amati.

DAVID. Oh, my God! This must have cost a fortune.

DOLORES. You're going to have a great career as a violinist. We want you to have the best.

ELROY. That sure is a pretty violin.

DAVID. Thank you, Mom!

(DAVID hugs DOLORES.)

JAMES. You're welcome, son.

DAVID. Thank you, Dad!

(DAVID hugs JAMES.)

MARY. Why don't you play something for us? Show us what you've been doing at that college of yours.

ELROY. Yeah, Davie, play somethin'.

(DAVID plays the violin for a minute or so. After he is done everyone claps.)

DOLORES. That was beautiful.

JAMES. I'm glad that our money isn't going to waste.

(DAVID laughs.)

DOLORES *(picks up two gifts from under the Christmas tree).*

This is for you.

(DOLORES hands one box to MARY.)

DOLORES *(cont'd).* And this is for you.

(DOLORES hands the other box to ELROY.)

DOLORES *(cont'd).* Open yours first, Mary.

MARY *(opens her gift. It is a beautiful new dress).* Thank you, ma'am. This is so beautiful, but you shouldn't have. I don't have much occasion to wear a pretty dress like this. What's this made out of? Is this silk?

DOLORES. It is silk. Now open yours, Elroy.

ELROY (*opens his gift. It is a new suit*). A new suit! You Jenningses are really too generous. The only suit I have is about 27 years old. Thank you so much.

DOLORES. You're both welcome. Cousin Sarah's wedding is coming up in February, and I thought that it would be nice for you to have some new clothes.

MARY. That is so thoughtful. Thank you so much.

(*DOLORES kisses MARY and ELROY on the cheek.*)

DOLORES (*to DAVID*). So when is your friend coming?

DAVID. He's coming on the 27th.

DOLORES. Where's he coming from?

DAVID. He's flying in from Chicago.

JAMES. Do you know what time?

DAVID. I'll have to check, but I think he's flying in around 3 p.m.

JAMES. It's awfully nice that your friend is flying all the way from Chicago to see you.

DOLORES. It is very nice. You two must be close. What's his name?

DAVID. Jonathan.

DOLORES. That's a nice name.

JAMES. How long have you known him for?

DAVID. I've known him for about a year. He's a music major also.

JAMES. Do you make music together?

DAVID (*pauses*). Uh. You could say that. He plays the cello.

MARY. It's too bad we don't have a cello round here or we could have a concert.

DAVID (*laughs*). I have to go to the bathroom. (*Exits.*)