

Acting Edition

Mary Jane

by Amy Herzog

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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MARY JANE had its New York premiere at the New York Theatre Workshop in September 6, 2017. The performance was directed by Anne Kauffman, with scenic design by Laura Jellinek, costume design by Emily Rebholz, lighting design by Japhy Weideman, and sound design by Leah Gelpe. The stage manager was Lisa Ann Chernoff. The cast was as follows:

MARY JANE	Carrie Coon
RUTHIE / TENKEI	Brenda Wehle
SHERRY / DR. TOROS	Liza Colón-Zayas
BRIANNE / CHAYA	Susan Pourfar
AMELIA / KAT	Danaya Esperanza

CHARACTERS

MARY JANE – a woman in her thirties

Part One

RUTHIE – a building superintendent

SHERRY – a nurse

BRIANNE – a Facebook friend

AMELIA – Sherry's niece, a college student

Part Two

DR. TOROS – a pediatric intensivist

CHAYA – a Hasidic woman

KAT – a music therapist

TENKEI – a Buddhist nun

Besides Mary Jane, all the roles are doubled, so that five actors are required: Ruthie/Tenkei (sixties or seventies), Sherry/Dr. Toros (forties or fifties), Brianne/Chaya (thirties or early forties), Amelia/Kat (twenties).

SETTING

New York City

Part One

The living room/kitchen of a junior one-bedroom apartment in Queens.
Mary Jane also sleeps in this room.

Part Two

The “parents’ room” on the pediatric floor of a Manhattan hospital.
A shared room in the Pediatric ICU or PICU (pronounced PICK-you).

Ideally, the play is performed without an intermission.

TIME

Now-ish, June – October

AUTHOR'S NOTE

A forward slash (/) indicates overlapping dialogue, where the following line should interrupt.

PART ONE

Scene One: I'd be better off dancing in a forest

(Mary Jane's apartment. The living room/kitchen of a small one-bedroom apartment in Queens. In the living room is a pull-out couch that serves as Mary Jane's bed.)

(RUTHIE is plunging the kitchen sink and trying to fish muck out.)

(MARY JANE has a genuine, easy cheer.)

MARY JANE. And you know when the train stops underground, and you're waiting, like okay, train traffic ahead or whatever, but there's no announcement and after a while the engine cuts out and the lights dim and there's this collective groan of – "Ohhhhhh no" –

RUTHIE. *(Plunging.)* Mm-hm.

MARY JANE. And we had these kids in our car, these breakdancers – you know: "Showtime! What time is it? Showtime!" And they had already done their little – well not little, these guys were actually – I notice some people don't watch, on principle, they bury their heads in their books or their phones, but I always feel like they're kids, and I'm sorry, I can't stand on my hands while the subway car is moving, so I admit it, I'm impressed –

RUTHIE. *(Same.)* Right.

MARY JANE. So the train is stopped, and they had already done their – and I was the only person who had given them anything – sixty cents, or what was in my pocket, so they're sort of *seething*, and the doors to the next cars are locked so they're stuck, and they're *mad* at us, they're so mad –

RUTHIE. Uh-huh.

MARY JANE. One of them says, *really* loudly, he says, "I'd be better off dancing in a forest!"

(She laughs delightedly.)

Which I thought was so funny. "In a forest." But we were stopped more than twenty minutes due to a sick passenger, they said.

RUTHIE. That happened to me last week.

MARY JANE. Uh-huh?

RUTHIE. We were stopped, thirty, forty minutes?

MARY JANE. Yeah?

RUTHIE. He said it was someone under the train.

MARY JANE. *(Horried.)* What?

RUTHIE. Yeah, he finally came on, he said we're delayed due to, uh, due to someone under the train.

(Pause. She goes back to plunging.)

MARY JANE. It's been draining slowly for a while...

RUTHIE. Yup.

MARY JANE. I guess I should've called you earlier.

(RUTHIE keeps plunging.)

RUTHIE. It's usually the bathroom sink.

MARY JANE. Hm?

RUTHIE. That gets clogged.

MARY JANE. Right, because of the...

RUTHIE. Hair. Yup. Dead skin.

(Brief pause.)

I might have to call the plumber.

MARY JANE. Sorry, Ruthie.

RUTHIE. Not your fault. Old pipes.

(Pause.)

MARY JANE. You want a Coke?

RUTHIE. Yeah.

(MARY JANE gets two cans of Coke. They open them and sip.)

You alone here tonight?

MARY JANE. Ronda called out sick.

RUTHIE. Which one's Ronda?

MARY JANE. Um. Short hair?

RUTHIE. Nose ring?

MARY JANE. Nose ring?

RUTHIE. Yeah.

MARY JANE. Oh no – Luisa. She moved to Florida.

RUTHIE. I don't think I met Ronda.

MARY JANE. You want to meet her?

RUTHIE. Yeah, she's gonna be coming in and out of the building.

MARY JANE. I'll introduce you.

(Pause.)

RUTHIE. Florida.

(RUTHIE makes a face.)

MARY JANE. You always lived here, Ruthie?

RUTHIE. I was born up in Troy. You know Troy?

(MARY JANE shakes her head.)

It's, uh – never mind. I've lived here since I was a teenager. Ran away from home.

MARY JANE. Yeah?

RUTHIE. Yeah.

(She laughs like it's a funny memory.)

MARY JANE. Why?

RUTHIE. The usual reasons.

MARY JANE. Do you have kids?

RUTHIE. Uh-huh.

(She doesn't elaborate. Pause. A monitor beeps offstage. MARY JANE goes into the bedroom for ten or twenty seconds. The loud drone of the

suction machine can be heard, then the sound of it sucking up some saliva. The beeping stops. MARY JANE returns, resumes her seat and her Coke.)

RUTHIE. You seem to be...

You seem to be someone who's carrying a lot of tension in her body.

MARY JANE. Really?

RUTHIE. I'm partly inferring and partly it's what I see in your body.

MARY JANE. Okay.

RUTHIE. You're very nice, very pleasant, you're very pleasant and with what you're dealing with I wonder if you have an outlet for expression or if you're absorbing that all in your body. It's just a thought. It might not be a useful thought.

MARY JANE. No, it's / really –

RUTHIE. Because that's how my sister got cancer.

MARY JANE. Oh.

RUTHIE. Not to scare you. It was Hodgkin's Lymphoma, which is the good kind, you don't want non-Hodgkin's. You don't want non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma.

MARY JANE. Right.

RUTHIE. She's doing well. She's NED, that means no evidence of disease.

MARY JANE. Great.

RUTHIE. They don't say cancer free, that's not the right, the right thing to say, because actually no one is cancer free, you have cancers in your body right now, springing up all the time, then your body shuts them down. They say NED, no evidence of disease. She's doing well.

MARY JANE. I'm so glad.

RUTHIE. But chemo was...

MARY JANE. Sure.

RUTHIE. It's poison. They dump poison in your veins. My sister said she could taste it in her mouth, it tasted like metal. Now she does a lot of different things, she's changed her life around, she meditates, she does tai chi. It's very inspiring, it's inspiring to me, because she didn't have to take such a positive – she could've just – a lot of people do.

MARY JANE. Mm-hm.

RUTHIE. I thought maybe I don't have to get cancer first, I can learn from her. It's something I wanted to share with you. It might not be useful. It's an offering. It's just an offering.

MARY JANE. (*Sincerely.*) Thank you.

RUTHIE. You're welcome.

(*Brief pause.*)

MARY JANE. So you –

RUTHIE. I do yoga, I swim at the Y, I get deep tissue massage. But that's just me. There are all different ways to...

MARY JANE. Right.

RUTHIE. But it's the body. That's what I've learned. Your trauma's written in the cells of your body.

(*Pause.*)

MARY JANE. I feel...I feel...

RUTHIE. Uh-huh?

MARY JANE. I feel pretty okay most of the time. I'm tired?

RUTHIE. Sure.

MARY JANE. But I think, I think sometimes when other people look at me – ha! People who know what's going on in / my –

RUTHIE. Uh-huh.

MARY JANE. They're like, *whoa*, but actually, being inside it? I don't know, it's not so...

I think they'd be surprised.

RUTHIE. As I said it was an offering.

MARY JANE. *Thank you.*

RUTHIE. You're welcome.

(Pause. The monitor beeps offstage. MARY JANE stands, it stops beeping, she sits back down.)

What about the closet door, is that –?

MARY JANE. Perfect. No problem since you fixed / the –

RUTHIE. Good.

(Brief pause.)

MARY JANE. I am very tired.

RUTHIE. Well / yeah because you –!

MARY JANE. I used to be someone who treasured sleep, I *cherished* it. Before, if you had asked if there's one thing I couldn't do without, I would have said sleep. But...

RUTHIE. But you adjust.

MARY JANE. It's amazing.

RUTHIE. It is amazing. It is / amazing.

MARY JANE. Yeah! The things that become just –

RUTHIE. What they are.

MARY JANE. When Alex was born a friend of mine, she's since moved to San Diego, her father was – anyway she had been through a lot of stuff, and when Alex was born, she said to me, "Mary Jane, you'll still have good days and bad days." And at the time I was like what kind of thing is that to say, I couldn't understand it at all.

RUTHIE. Your brain / was –

MARY JANE. I mean it wasn't a *bad* thing to say, it just wasn't...

RUTHIE. *(Finishing her sentence.)* Great.

MARY JANE. *(Correcting her.)* No, it wasn't...

RUTHIE. Timely.

MARY JANE. No, uh...

(She looks for it.)

But anyway, now I think, what my friend said...now I think that was the best thing, maybe, that anybody said to me at that time, or the truest.

RUTHIE. Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

(Pause. RUTHIE notices something.)

MARY JANE. What?

(MARY JANE looks where RUTHIE is looking.)

RUTHIE. You don't, uh. You don't have the window guards up.

MARY JANE. I...oh.

Sorry, Ruthie. I took them down. I'm sorry.

RUTHIE. Just in here, or in the bedroom too?

MARY JANE. It's just that he loves looking out the windows, especially when he's sick and I can't take him outside? And it seems like such a small thing but the bars actually do bother him.

RUTHIE. I understand. It's just – it's the law.

MARY JANE. I know.

RUTHIE. Even if he can't climb up, I know that.

MARY JANE. I know you know.

RUTHIE. But I checked. I did check, and there are no exceptions for...for kids like Alex.

MARY JANE. I just thought – you did your job, you installed them, you're in the clear, it was me who took them down, and if anything happens – I can't imagine how anything could – but I'll take responsibility.

RUTHIE. But now I saw it. I saw that they're not in there.

MARY JANE. Right, but...

(She laughs. This is so silly. Oh well.)

Right. I understand.

(Pause.)

RUTHIE. I mean I guess – I guess it's possible I wouldn't have noticed.

MARY JANE. Yes! You were in here ten minutes / before –

RUTHIE. Let's not talk about it. Let's not talk about it anymore.

MARY JANE. Okay.

(RUTHIE adjusts her body to not see out the window.)

Can I just say that I admire your seriousness when it comes to your job. You're an excellent superintendent. You're easily the best superintendent I have ever had.

RUTHIE. Thank you.

(She finishes her Coke and goes to the sink. She plunges one more time. No dice. She puts down the plunger, resigned.)

Okay.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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