

What Would Mary Do?

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ACT 1

Scene 1

SETTING: JONI ROBERTS' DARKENED
APARTMENT.

AT RISE: JONI ROBERTS, sleeps at her
desk, hunched over a laptop and
neatly stacked piles of papers.

LIZ CONROY, Tab can in hand,
quietly opens the door, steps
into the apartment.

She stops and smells the flowers
on the table and holds up one of
the color coordinated dishes.

Liz examines a sleeping Joni
then moves to the videotapes.
She pops one in the VCR, cranks
up the volume. *Love is All
Around (The Mary Tyler Moore
Show Theme)* SHATTERS THE
SILENCE.

Joni jolts awake, grabs a
baseball bat and rushes Liz.

Liz runs around dodging
Joni. She holds her Tab can in
one hand and pitches books with
the other.

JONI
Who the...heck...are you?

LIZ
Guess.

JONI
How did you get in?

(Liz points to the door.)

JONI (CONT'D)
It was locked...

LIZ
Easy to pick.

JONI

Leave now and I promise not to call the police.

LIZ

That and my good looks gets me a one-way ticket to the slammer.

(throws a book at Joni)

Still haven't found that first edition, have you?

JONI

(catches the book)

Ngaio Marsh first editions are very hard to --

(Joni eyes the Tab can,
then Liz. Liz slowly
moves towards her.)

LIZ

(calmly strokes the bat)

Ya still use this as a burglar alarm? Would Mary use this? Nah, she'd hire one of those security companies.

JONI

(lifts the beret up)

Liz?!

LIZ

In the flesh, kid.

JONI

Liz! I haven't heard from you in so long. I wasn't sure if you were still in --

LIZ

(bounds to the couch)

-- Africa. I was, until yesterday, I think...Hope my wheels are safe outside. I've got some valuable merchandise in them.

(laughs at the TV)

That Ted Baxter...always thought he could nail Mary but she put him in his place.

(darts out the door)

Be right back.

JONI

(pinches herself)

Ow!

(Liz wheels a shopping
cart filled with cases of
Tab and a duffle bag,
inside.)

LIZ

Guess I'll park this inside. Never know who's lurking around.

(Liz, pops open a Tab then bops around handling all of Joni's possessions. Joni, on her heels, straightens up after her.)

JONI

It's good to see you. So good...Why didn't you call?!

LIZ

Thought surprisin' you'd be more fun. And the time was right for comin' home. Things were getting a little too hot there, my work visa expired and...I was being hunted. If anyone comes lookin', you haven't seen me in decades. Figured the minute I landed I'd go see my oldest and dearest friend.

JONI

(blocks Liz's view of the TV)

I haven't heard from you in over two years. You never answered any of my letters but I just kept on writing, sending them to your old address, hoping to hear something, anything...

LIZ

Did ya know the only years ending in "00" that are leap years are the ones divisible by four hundred? In Caesar's time somebody screwed up and made the year a little too long. They figured this was the best way to correct it. Of course those schmucks figured this out in the year seven-thirty but didn't do a thing about it for over eight hundred years. By then they'd lost ten days so they decided that the day after October fifth would be October fifteenth.

(pause)

What the hell happened to those ten days?

JONI

We were so worried, didn't know where you were or...if you were --

LIZ

-- dead. I'm not! And I'm here now...the perfect place for healing.

JONI

Wasn't that why you returned to Africa?

LIZ

Yeah, except I ended up hiding from immigration. Two years of always having to keep one step ahead of them, sleeping in caves, the bush, with different tribes. I barely made it out of there.

JONI

I'm so sorry. I lost track after MSNBC let you go.

LIZ

Let me go? They canned my ass! No sympathy for the grieving widow. Or maybe it was the potential Emmy winning news special that I was producing...an objective report about the true nature of the hippopotamus.

JONI

You advocated the elimination of an endangered species.

LIZ

I presented evidence proving their docility masks vicious killers.

JONI

All you filmed were shots of hippopotamuses sleeping in the river.

LIZ

Lying in wait.

JONI

You had no proof.

LIZ

What do you call a dead husband?

JONI

It was an accident...a rogue hippo...

(Liz pulls a stack of
"hippo shaped" cards from
her duffle bag.)

LIZ

(recites by rote)

What animal sleeps during the day and maintains activity at night?..The hippopotamus. What animal frequently raids agricultural crops and inflicts so much damage that the villagers starve?..Hippos. What is the leading cause of animal mutilated deaths in Africa?..You guessed it, that same, ugly, mud colored massive animal, the hippopotamus! And what is one of the most valuable food sources for the natives in Africa? That one and only killer, the hippo!

LIZ (CONT'D)

(throws the cards on the floor)

The last tribe I stayed with, the Barangees, definite communication problem but that didn't matter...the food, just what the doctor ordered. Did you know there are thirty-three ways to prepare hippopotamus? Spent four weeks gorging myself on Horace and some of his pals.

JONI

(picks the cards up and organizes them)

Horace?

LIZ

Chase's murderer.

JONI

You named the hippo?

LIZ

Those animal rights freaks did. Horace! What a lame name for a killer.

(pulls a video tape from her duffle bag)

And the chicken shits refused to air this. They were afraid they'd lose the support of those freaks and that obviously outweighs the victim's families. Victim's rights my...I sure as hell told them, in graphic detail, where they could put Horace before --

JONI

Liz...

LIZ

Figured I'd crash on the couch, at least for tonight. We'll figure out the permanent sleeping arrangements tomorrow.