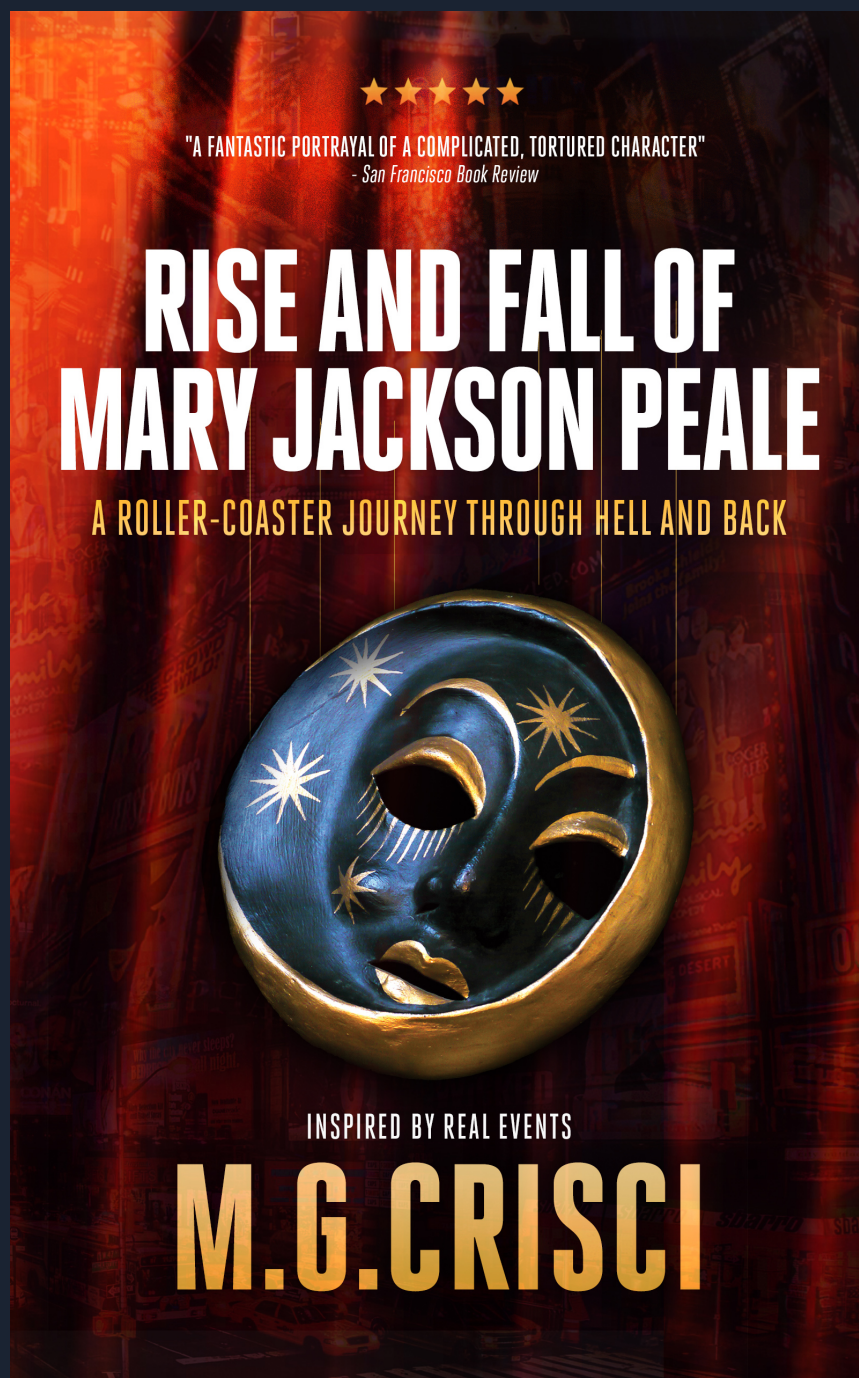




Rise and Fall of Mary Jackson Peale

M.G. Crisci

BookGist Summary

Rise and Fall of Mary Jackson Peale

by M.G. Crisci

Genre: BIOGRAPHY & AUTOBIOGRAPHY / Women (BIO022000)

Key Takeaways

- Mary's rise is built on a talent for spotting creative potential and translating unconventional plays into productions audiences and investors will support.
- A theatrical persona can open doors, but lasting achievement depends on substance: industry knowledge, sound financial judgment, relationships, and the ability to adapt without losing an artist's core idea.
- Mary's success and professional reinvention cannot resolve the grief, guilt, and unresolved questions she carries from her past.
- The novel portrays bisexuality and same-sex love as ordinary parts of human experience, while showing how prejudice and family reputation can turn private relationships into sources of danger.
- Power and privilege can protect wrongdoing: Sir James uses his standing to conceal his daughter's death and manipulate the local authorities, with devastating consequences.
- Mary's ambition and talent bring wealth and acclaim, but overwork, isolation, alcohol, and medication misuse worsen her mental and physical health.
- The story emphasizes that recovery requires help, honest self-examination, appropriate professional care, and the willingness to accept one's identity rather than perform a socially acceptable version of it.
- Mary's work succeeds when she balances artistic integrity with practical revisions, effective promotion, reliable finances, and community relationships.

- Loyalty has a moral cost when it protects a secret: Sarah shields Mary from the consequences of Belfrage's death, while Mary's silence leaves Annabelle Lee imprisoned for a crime she did not commit.
- Mary's relationship with Gianni gives her a chance to experience affection, stability, and honesty, but it cannot erase the harm she has caused or stop her declining health.

Who Should Read This Book

This book will appeal to readers who enjoy sprawling, character-driven melodrama with theatre-industry intrigue, romance, family conflict, crime, and a protagonist whose public triumphs contrast with private turmoil. Readers interested in LGBTQ+ relationships, creative careers, ambition, mental-health struggles, and the hidden economics of artistic production will find plenty to discuss. Its dramatic plot follows Mary from a Brighton childhood through London and New York, while her choices connect professional success to questions of identity, loyalty, responsibility, and redemption. Unlike a focused career guide or a clinical book about mental health, this is a novel that approaches both subjects through heightened events and an ensemble of vivid characters. It shares the artistic-world setting and backstage maneuvering of show-business fiction, but places greater emphasis on the personal costs of ambition and the consequences of secrets. Readers should be prepared for sensational twists, a large cast, and portrayals of trauma and mental illness that serve a dramatic narrative rather than a practical guide.

Chapter Summaries

Brighton Beginnings

Mary Jones grows up in Brighton with parents who nurture her imagination and her love of art. Her fisherman father introduces her to Italian opera, while her mother, Chloe, reads poetry and takes her to the cliffs. Mary invents sea-horse companion Edgar and learns early to make stories vivid. That childhood security ends when Reilly abandons Chloe and Mary without explanation or money. Chloe rebuilds their lives through work at the Theatre Royale, eventually becoming an actress and bringing Mary into the theatrical world. As a teenager, Mary is attractive, confident, and curious about love, but her first sexual encounter with Bobbie O'Toole is hurried and disappointing. At university, she excels in drama and cultural studies and discovers relationships with women, including a tender first experience with Phoebe. Her mother's relationship with Annabelle Lee also challenges conventional assumptions about love. Mary concludes that she is not destined to become a great performer herself; instead, she wants to find and nurture talented playwrights as an agent.

A Love Found—and Lost

Mary meets Elizabeth Manly Clifford in a Brighton café. Elizabeth is an Oxford psychology student from a wealthy, socially prominent family, but her interests include women's empowerment and challenging her father's narrow expectations. The two are immediately drawn to one another. Mary's openness about her bisexuality becomes part of their courtship, and a week together in Brighton turns into a committed love affair. Their playful photo-booth pictures become a keepsake of their romance and their impending separation. When Mary visits Elizabeth's family estate at Ullswater, she encounters Sir James and Lady Clifford's privilege, strict social codes, and theatrical patronage. Elizabeth and Mary find private time together on the lake, where the landscape and Wordsworth's poetry echo Mary's childhood. Elizabeth's father discovers the relationship through the steamer's monitoring system, condemns it as a threat to the family's reputation, and forces Mary to leave. In a confrontation with Elizabeth, Sir James swings a fireplace iron; Elizabeth falls, strikes her head, and dies. He and the butler, William, conceal her body in the lake, then later murder William to keep him from exposing the crime.

The London Apprenticeship

Mary cannot get answers about Elizabeth's disappearance. Sir James's influence persuades local police to accept his account that Elizabeth has moved to London, and his hostility makes Mary fear that something worse has happened. Chloe and Annabelle Lee encourage Mary to pursue her career, and Annabelle arranges a meeting with Julian Belfrage, a powerful theatrical agent. Mary moves to London, learns how expensive her initial Knightsbridge ambitions are, and settles instead in the East End, where the independent theatre scene offers room to build a career. After learning that Belfrage values visibility as well as ability, Mary experiments with an exaggerated, flamboyant persona—but Belfrage rejects the costume and hires her for her intelligence and frankness. He teaches her how theatre financing works, including the many revenue streams and questionable practices behind his firm's success. Mary begins building contacts, meets the playwright David Marks, and develops an eye for how scripts might reach audiences. Her early experiences reveal both the opportunities and the compromises of a business where money, favors, reputation, and creative ambition are tightly intertwined.

Rupture and Escape

Mary's London career accelerates after Belfrage introduces her to the city's writers and directors. She learns to prepare for meetings, cultivate contacts, and connect artists with investors. But her professional dependence on Belfrage comes to an abrupt end when he returns unexpectedly and finds Mary and his assistant Sarah together in his bed. He fires both women, threatens to blacklist Mary, and seizes her work files and business notes. Sarah remains in London, while Mary decides that New York is her only realistic chance to continue

in theatre. Before leaving, Mary meets Belfrage under the pretense of a farewell. Angry and seeking revenge, she spikes his drink with heroin, intending to frighten or hurt him rather than kill him. Belfrage suffers a fatal cardiac arrest; Mary leaves the scene and does not tell the authorities the truth. Sarah, recognizing the danger, helps Mary escape and later leaves for New York when Scotland Yard investigates. The police eventually blame Annabelle Lee, Belfrage's former wife, and convict her of manslaughter. Mary's decision to hide her role becomes a lasting source of guilt and a threat to the people around her.

A New York Start

In New York, Mary finds a home in Greenwich Village through a generous arrangement with bakery owner Concetta Dapolito. The apartment needs work, but its affordability and space give Mary a base from which to start again. She struggles to secure a theatrical job, takes part-time reception work at the School of Visual Arts, and reconnects with David Marks, who is also building a career in the city. When David suspects that his agent is improperly reducing his earnings, Mary examines the contract and discovers questionable expense calculations. Her analysis recovers money for him and establishes her value as a business-minded agent. Mary then represents David and helps finance his play, initially titled *American Bison*. Its first performances receive harsh reviews, so Mary pushes for script and design revisions, changes the title to *Lost in Life*, and organizes a grassroots campaign with help from the Dapolito family and neighborhood businesses. The revived production draws audiences and favorable coverage. Sarah arrives in New York and hopes to resume both her personal and professional relationship with Mary, but jealousy and the unresolved tension surrounding David strain the reunion. After Mary chooses a future with Sarah, Sarah heads out alone onto the Brooklyn Bridge and dies in a fall.

The Rise of Peale and Associates

The success of *Lost in Life* gives Mary credibility and a growing stream of creative prospects. She hires Allison Edwards, whose organizational and financial skills complement Mary's artistic judgment. Together they formalize the agency's systems, recruit playwrights, and raise investment capital through a series of polished presentations. Mary's clients include Marianne Kaufman, Nigel Oboto, and Darien Manners. She helps them refine their work while navigating disagreements over endings, social themes, and commercial appeal; another proposed play, *27 Million Dead and Nobody Remembers*, proves especially difficult to finance and stage. Several productions become critical and commercial successes, bringing Mary awards, press attention, and Broadway opportunities. The achievement comes at a steep personal cost: Mary works almost constantly, sleeps poorly, becomes increasingly isolated, and experiences depression and panic symptoms. She also struggles with her sexuality, relationships, and the gap between the confident public identity of Mary Jackson-Peale and her troubled private life. The narrative contrasts the agency's expanding prestige with Mary's growing need for professional mental-health care.

The Truth Surfaces

Mary's health and emotional stability deteriorate as she faces the deaths and unresolved histories surrounding Elizabeth, Sarah, and Belfrage. A trip to the Hamptons with Allison brings fresh reminders of the past: Allison's household shares uncanny connections with the Clifford estate, including a collection of Papua New Guinea artifacts and a servant who is William's twin brother. Soon afterward, the truth about Elizabeth's fate comes out. Police discover remains in the lake, connect Sir James to the deaths of Elizabeth and William, and force the story into the open. Lady Clifford later finds Elizabeth's unsent letter to Mary, confirming that Elizabeth had intended to leave her family and build a life with Mary. Meanwhile, Scotland Yard reopens the Belfrage case and Annabelle Lee is convicted despite having been innocent. Mary's guilt becomes harder to contain. After misusing antidepressants and alcohol, she suffers acute crises and enters treatment at Silver Hill. There, she receives a carefully supervised medication plan, therapy, support groups, and help with sleep and anxiety. In treatment, Mary begins examining her grief, identity, ambition, and responsibility. She recognizes that healing means accepting herself and taking responsibility for the harm caused by her silence, especially the injustice to Annabelle.

Recovery and Reinvention

At Silver Hill, Mary gradually stabilizes. The structured environment, therapeutic support, and medication help her sleep and regain perspective. She begins to distinguish between responsibility and self-condemnation: she did not cause Sir James to murder Elizabeth or William, nor was she the author of Sarah's decision to die, but she did make the choice to conceal Belfrage's death and allow Annabelle to be blamed. Mary resolves that this remaining wrong must be addressed. After an initial period of treatment, she moves into a less restrictive phase and is encouraged to take a real break from work. Mary travels to Italy, where she meets Gianni Spagnoli after he chases down a thief who stole her camera. Their time together in Venice grows into a romance grounded in shared experiences, music, food, and conversation. Mary follows him to his family's vineyard in Barbaresco, where Gianni's parents welcome her and she finds a sense of warmth and belonging. She also learns that the agency has lost its clients during her absence. Her professional success has proved fragile, but her personal life has become more honest and connected than before.

Love, Illness, and Confession

Mary's relationship with Gianni deepens, and the couple marry in a ceremony shared with Gianni's parents, who renew their own vows. Before the wedding, Mary tells Gianni the truth about her past: her relationships with women and men, Elizabeth's murder, Belfrage's death, Sarah's protection of her, and Annabelle's wrongful imprisonment. Gianni accepts her and agrees to support her plan to make a videotaped confession to Scotland Yard. Their marriage gives Mary a new sense of trust and peace, even as doctors diagnose serious heart disease

and warn that her life may be short. Back in New York, a second medical opinion confirms the grim prognosis. Mary encourages Gianni to audition for the Metropolitan Opera, but his opportunity is delayed by immigration requirements. She also records two messages: a detailed confession that clears Sarah and Annabelle, and a farewell addressed to Gianni and her theatrical friends. As her strength declines, Gianni remains by her side. Mary dies at thirty-seven, leaving him a letter and the confession that will set the legal story in motion.

The Case Is Corrected

Mary's confession reaches Scotland Yard, and Annabelle Lee is released after serving nearly a year for a crime she did not commit. The prison gives her compensation for wrongful imprisonment, and she returns to Chloe in Brighton. The women reunite, watch Mary's recorded confession, and begin to rebuild their life together. The confession also gives the authorities the evidence needed to correct the official account of Belfrage's death, bringing a measure of justice to those Mary's secrecy had harmed. Mary's death is marked by a memorial at the Actors' Chapel in Manhattan. Gianni prepares a service that reflects her life and theatrical identity, though few people attend beyond close friends Allison and David. He sings in her memory and later receives an unexpected opportunity to perform in a Broadway revival, supported by people who admired Mary. The ending combines loss with continuation: Mary cannot regain the time or repair every relationship, but her confession frees Annabelle, her love has changed Gianni's life, and her influence in theatre persists.

Legacy and Unfinished Journeys

The closing chapters look at what remains after Mary's death: the consequences of her work, her confession, and the relationships she shaped. Her memorial is more intimate than the grand theatrical world she once commanded. Gianni speaks of the woman he loved as a person who made mistakes yet remained devoted to theatre and capable of giving and receiving love. His grief is complicated by the fact that he entered Mary's life late, but her final recording gives him a direct account of what she wanted him—and her colleagues—to remember. The story ends with an opening as well as a farewell. Gianni is offered a chance to perform on Broadway, the very world Mary helped him imagine entering, and his new immigration status makes that future possible. The book does not present success as a cure for grief or guilt; rather, it frames legacy as the combination of creative work, repaired injustices, and the people who carry a person's influence forward.

Notable Quotes

"“Try as we might to learn from our mistakes, in the end, we are just all human beings. We laugh, we cry, and we bleed.””

"“People can become who they think they are.””

“In this business, everybody burns out at one time or another. The trick is to make it last as long as it can, then get the hell out while you’re on top.”

“You must love yourself before you can truly love another.”

“Accepting yourself, and fully being what you are, will create the inner peace we all seek.”

“I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong.”

Full Summary

Mary Jones grew up in Brighton with her fisherman father, Reilly, and her mother, Chloe, who filled their modest life with poetry and theatre. Chloe read Wordsworth to Mary on the cliffs, while Reilly sang opera aboard the family fishing boat. Mary inherited their appetite for storytelling and performance, inventing a gigantic seahorse called Edgar and delivering her tall tales with flair. But when Reilly left without warning, money or explanation, Chloe and Mary refused to speak of him again. Mary turned away from opera, unsettled by what she called the normal order of society. Chloe, desperate for work, found a job at Brighton’s Theatre Royale. She learned the parts by watching rehearsals, and when the director, Martin Thurgood, overheard her acting, he made her an understudy. Theatre became a livelihood and a calling for both mother and daughter.

Mary was bright and academically ambitious, winning a scholarship to the University of Sussex, where she studied drama and cultural studies. She loved the workings of theatre, but knew she lacked the timing and flair to become a great actress. She wanted a place among the profession’s most influential people, and gradually saw her talent as an ability to analyze scripts and recognize what might work onstage. Her romantic life also resisted neat categories. After a disappointing first sexual experience with schoolmate Bobbie O’Toole, she discovered a more tender intimacy with her classmate Phoebe Trincas. Mary understood herself as bisexual, attracted to men and women without treating either desire as an aberration. Chloe, too, had found love with actress Annabelle Lee Sartre. Their relationship challenged Mary’s assumptions about marriage and convention, but also showed her that same-sex love could be deep and enduring.

In 1992, Mary met Elizabeth Manly Clifford at a Brighton café. An Oxford psychology graduate from a wealthy, privileged family, Elizabeth was intelligent, independent and committed to women’s rights, in defiance of her father, Sir James. The women were drawn to each other immediately. Mary spoke plainly about her bisexuality; Elizabeth, initially unfamiliar with same-sex desire, became willing to explore it with her. Their attraction grew into love, and Elizabeth invited Mary to visit her family home at Ullswater. There, Sir James offered Mary connections in London theatre, where his considerable wealth made him a major patron. He

took pride in restoring prestigious theatres and funding playwrights, though his philanthropy sat alongside an imposing concern for family standing.

During Mary's visit, she and Elizabeth found time alone on the family steamer. Elizabeth showed her the Lake District and the fields of daffodils associated with Wordsworth, reciting "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud." Mary began to imagine a future together in London, where she would become a theatrical agent and Elizabeth would continue her studies. Their plans collapsed when Sir James secretly watched them through the steamer's satellite system. He considered their relationship a threat to his reputation and religious standing. When he confronted them, he called Mary a tramp and ordered her off the grounds. Elizabeth tried to defend their love, but her parents sided with Sir James, and Mary was sent back to Brighton. She never saw Elizabeth again.

What Mary could not know was that the rupture became a catastrophe. In an argument, Sir James swung a heavy fireplace iron. Elizabeth ducked, fell and struck her head on the hearth. Rather than seek help, he watched her bleed to death, then ordered the family butler, William, to help hide her body in Lake Ullswater. He told Lady Clifford that Elizabeth had left for London and used his standing to persuade the local police that there was no cause for concern. When Mary reported her friend missing, Inspector O'Reilly dismissed her fears and treated her account of their relationship with contempt, trusting the respectable, churchgoing Cliffords instead. Mary was left with silence, uncertainty and the suspicion that something terrible had happened.

After Annabelle Lee arranged an introduction to theatrical agent Julian Belfrage, Mary moved to London. She first explored the East End with realtor Bill Bling, who explained how its modest rents and experimental fringe theatres offered an opening for a young agent. Bling introduced her to playwright-director David Marks, whose severe manner concealed a more generous wit and whose play had just moved to the West End. Mary rented Marks's bright riverside flat and began building a professional life among artists who could not afford the established theatre district.

Belfrage had built a formidable theatrical empire, and he taught Mary that success required more than charisma. The business depended on investors, theatre owners, commissions and carefully negotiated rights; income could come from financing, production suppliers, theatre placements and artists' fees. He warned that an agent who relied only on personality and relationships was missing the business's real workings. Mary also learned how to identify an unconventional work's potential and help reshape it for wider audiences. At her first meeting with Belfrage, however, she arrived in a flamboyant costume and exaggerated theatrical persona, believing spectacle would open the door. He told her that his own early "shtick" had given way to the polished, aristocratic image his wealthy clients expected. Mary's honest account of her ambitions impressed him more than her costume did. He hired her, gave her a

generous allowance to buy proper clothes, and made clear that she must represent the firm's image.

At Belfrage's party for the city's creative community, Mary used her knowledge of each guest to begin making contacts. When the unconventional William Thomas pitched a metaphorical play, she saw its promise but also recognized that its staging and music needed thought. She was already learning to preserve an artist's central idea while asking practical questions about how it could reach an audience. She also began a relationship with Sarah Fender, Belfrage's capable assistant. Mary's work flourished, but her confidence in her place at the firm outran her understanding of Belfrage's power and possessiveness.

The break came when Belfrage returned early and found Mary and Sarah together in his bed. He fired them both, expelled Mary from his home, threatened to blacklist her and seized her notes. He then warned every London agent against hiring her, leaving her no realistic route back into the business. Mary decided that New York was her chance to start again, but before leaving she returned to Belfrage's flat under the pretense of saying goodbye. She put heroin into his drink, intending to frighten and hurt him, not knowing that he had a serious heart condition. When he collapsed, she panicked, removed traces of herself and left before the authorities arrived. Police initially blamed a male lover, while Mary escaped to the airport. On the flight to New York, she met a British real-estate investor who suggested the West Village as a livable place to begin. At 83 Horatio Street, Mary found a welcoming bed-and-breakfast, and, following its owner's advice, began searching for a home in the city.

At 83 Horatio Street, Mary found the quiet West Village refuge the British investor had promised, and its owner, Marjorie Colt, pointed her toward nearby restaurants and helped launch her search for a permanent home. Manhattan's rents quickly humbled her: a one-bedroom on the Upper East Side cost far beyond her means. In the East End of London, she had learned to look beyond the obvious addresses; now, in New York, she found a similar opening in SoHo. Concetta "Connie" Dapolito offered Mary a spacious rear townhouse behind her family's bakery for just four hundred dollars a month, provided Mary repaired and furnished it herself. The arrangement gave Mary both a home and the possibility of turning part of the building into an agency.

Mary's old friend David Marks soon appeared at the bakery. He had brought one play to Broadway and was preparing another, *American Bison*, about three Chicago criminals whose talk and petty schemes exposed the lives of people stranded at the bottom of society. Mary had returned to New York determined to build a career after Julian Belfrage had blacklisted her in London. Her experience at Belfrage and Associates had taught her that theatre was not just a matter of artistic instinct: contracts, revenue, costs, and the interests of investors mattered too. When David suspected his agent was underpaying him, Mary examined his contract and accounts. She found that the books improperly charged him for the agency's

office expenses and treated investor payments as expenses that reduced his share. Challenged with the contract's terms, the accountant acknowledged the errors, and David received a substantial back payment. Impressed, he asked Mary to represent him. She negotiated a five-percent share of weekly gross revenue and a fee for raising investment capital, while making clear that her own expenses would not be hidden in his accounts.

To finance *American Bison*, Mary approached investor Belle Bart, a wealthy, blunt former bartender who had turned her inheritance into a fortune and invested in theatre for the possibility of profit. David's endorsement helped secure a million-dollar commitment. Mary explained how the play might begin Off-Broadway and move to Broadway if early performances and reviews built demand. Belle was willing to back David without first hearing the entire synopsis, but expected him to appear at a gathering for her fellow investors. Mary had demonstrated that she could speak to investors in terms of returns while still recognizing the promise of an unconventional work.

Her next challenge was turning that promise into a production. At the Cherry Lane Theatre, *American Bison* opened to poor attendance, scathing reviews, and a conspicuous missed line. David took the failure as proof that the play was doomed. Mary, instead, treated the previews as a chance to revise. She pressed him to clarify passages, make the story more accessible without surrendering its purpose, and rethink the stage and sound design. She also insisted that the title, *American Bison*, was not serving the work; David finally accepted her alternative, *Lost in Life*. Mary then enlisted Connie and the Dapolito family, who mobilized neighborhood shopkeepers and residents. Posters appeared in store windows, local businesses bought tickets, and a raffle helped draw a crowd. A full house applauded the next performance, and favorable reviews followed. The show's popularity grew beyond the Village, eventually becoming one of Off-Broadway's most sought-after tickets. Mary had not simply imposed commercial polish on David's play: she had helped reshape it while finding practical ways to bring an audience to it.

The success of *Lost in Life* left Peale and Associates struggling to keep up with the work. Mary recruited Allison Edwards, a poised, capable graduate of Smith College, to handle the agency's financial records, office systems, and daily administration. Allison quickly established reliable procedures and brought in architects and builders through her father's professional connections. She also helped Mary find new playwrights. In a meeting with David's friends, Mary explained that she wanted work with something meaningful to say, not merely fashionable ideas or commercially convenient fluff. She challenged Nigel Oboto, whose angry, personal work addressed racism, to articulate the dream driving him. Her directness persuaded the writers to submit their work.

Mary saw that each promising play needed both creative development and money behind it. Allison proposed advertising for theatrical investors, an unconventional approach that Mary

initially doubted. Their advertisement brought hundreds of responses. Allison sorted them into serious prospects and those needing further persuasion, then designed presentations that combined projections, the plays' artistic ambitions, and investor benefits. In her father's lavish Fifth Avenue apartment, the pair held meetings for prospective backers. Mary introduced and defended the playwrights' work; Allison explained the financial terms and secured commitments. One evening produced two million dollars from five investors, and their wider effort was expected to raise much more. Mary recognized the value of Allison's nerve, business sense, and willingness to challenge her.

With financing secured, Mary negotiated venues and launched three productions at the start of the season. *Little Fanny Coscia*, a tender story about two people whose love endured despite lives spent apart, and *Alexandria Plummet & Friends*, a dark account of workplace manipulation and a damaging lawsuit, earned strong reviews and audiences. *J.L. & The Beak*, which confronted racism through the unequal lives of two childhood friends, provoked sharply divided reactions. Mary accepted that her attempt to address a complicated American reality had not worked as intended. Yet two successes, an innovative fundraising strategy, and her reputation for nurturing writers transformed her standing. Her agency expanded, moved into larger offices, and became a destination for playwrights seeking someone who could understand a script, secure capital, and help a production reach its audience. Mary's theatrical persona won attention, but her growing influence rested increasingly on her command of both the artistic and financial sides of the business.

Then the past began to surface in England. After Sir James Clifford advertised for a replacement for his missing butler, Michael Tobin, a young hog farmer, won the position by presenting himself as a devoted horse enthusiast and reciting poetry to the Cliffords. Lady Clifford, still believing Elizabeth had simply left home, welcomed him into the castle. During a boat trip on Ullswater, Tobin's efforts to free the steamer's rudder uncovered a piece of lavender fabric. Lady Clifford recognized it as part of the dress she had bought Elizabeth. The discovery shattered the story Sir James had told about his daughter's departure, and Lady Clifford contacted the police.

At Claridge's in London, Sir James was exposed as having maintained a long affair with Pamela Duggins, whom he had passed off as Lady Clifford during his visits. When his wife confronted him, he tried to disguise Pamela as a legal assistant and to keep control of the explanation. Back at Ullswater, police began searching the lake. Days later, they recovered a bag containing William's remains. Evidence on his clothing and beneath his fingernails implicated Sir James; traces from Elizabeth's dress also connected him to her death. Lady Clifford, now aware of the murders and her husband's lies, concealed what she knew until the police could arrive. Sir James, realizing the investigation had closed in on him, shot himself. The search then recovered Elizabeth's remains, and the truth of the deaths he had hidden could no longer be dismissed as a family quarrel.

In Brighton, Lady Clifford uncovered an unopened letter Elizabeth had written to Mary. It declared her intention to leave her family's wealth behind, join Mary in London, and build a life together, regardless of her father's opposition. Lady Clifford carried the letter to Chloe, who later told Mary what had happened and sent her the torn half of their old photo-booth picture. The message confirmed the future Elizabeth had wanted, but it could not restore the time they had lost. Mary was left with love, grief, and the question of whether she had abandoned Elizabeth when she most needed her.

Meanwhile, the murder of Julian Belfrage had been pinned on Annabelle Lee, who was serving a long prison sentence for a crime Mary had committed. As Mary's professional success grew, her private life became increasingly difficult to manage. She could barely sleep, woke gasping for breath, and tried to control her distress with alcohol and medication. Internist Leonard DiRe found no physical cause for her symptoms and urged her to consult a psychiatrist. Mary resisted, insisting she needed a prescription, not an examination of her unhappiness. But after Sarah's death and the return of painful news about Elizabeth, her panic and depression intensified. She swallowed medication with whisky, collapsed in the street, and was taken to hospital.

At Lenox Hill, Dr. Harriet Myers persuaded Mary to accept professional help. Mary initially wanted quick relief, even asking how to replace pills she had secretly taken from Allison, but Myers insisted that medication could not substitute for an honest diagnosis. In therapy, Mary spoke about her father's abandonment, her mother's struggles, her early sexual experiences, and her relationships with women and men. She described Elizabeth as the love of her life and raged against the prejudice that had made their relationship dangerous. Myers affirmed that bisexuality was not an illness, and that Mary did not have to make herself fit someone else's definition of normal. Still, Mary's insomnia, panic, depression, and misuse of medication had become too serious for occasional appointments. Myers arranged for her to enter Silver Hill in Connecticut.

The institution frightened Mary at first, but treatment gave her a structure she could not create alone. Psychiatrist Dr. Henry reviewed her history, adjusted her medications, and combined them with psychotherapy, support groups, relaxation exercises, and a more regular diet. Acupuncture, massage, and sleep-focused therapies helped her begin resting again. In the group sessions, Mary's sharp humor sometimes broke through the heaviness; she even persuaded a hostile fellow patient, Gloria, to reconsider her anger and offered to read Gloria's play once they were both well. Over time, Mary stopped treating recovery as a problem she could solve by sheer will. She began to see that success, money, and a theatrical persona could not settle the questions she had avoided: who she was, what she had done, and how she might live with the answers.

Mary came to understand that she could love women and men without apology, and that Elizabeth's murder was not her fault. Sir James had chosen violence; Mary had not caused his crimes. She also recognized that Sarah's suicide was not hers to author, even though she regretted the way she had handled their relationship and the pain she had caused. But another truth could not be made harmless by perspective: Mary had killed Belfrage, and her silence had allowed Annabelle Lee to be punished in her place. To make amends, she would have to confess and risk the consequences. After several weeks at Silver Hill, she moved into a less restrictive phase of care, began sleeping and eating more reliably, and accepted that professional treatment and self-examination were part of recovery, not evidence of weakness.

Myers urged Mary to take a real holiday before returning to work. In Venice, Mary met Gianni Spagnoli, who recovered her camera after a teenage thief snatched it. His warmth, knowledge of the city, and love of music drew her out of the isolation she had built around herself. When he sang Puccini's "Che Gelida Manina," the operatic world she had shut out after her father left returned in a new, tender form. Mary asked Gianni to travel with her, and their relationship deepened at Lake Como and among his family's vineyards in Piedmont. At the Spagnoli home, she found a kind of belonging she had never achieved through wealth or acclaim. Gianni's mother welcomed her as the daughter she had always wanted, while Gianni himself brought her a calm, affectionate love that did not require her to perform.

Mary's heart, however, was failing. After a severe attack in Italy, doctors warned that she might have only a year or two to live. Rather than hide the truth from Gianni, Mary told him everything: her bisexuality, Elizabeth's death, her relationship with Sarah, Belfrage's murder, and the fact that Annabelle had been wrongly convicted. Gianni listened and still asked her to marry him. Mary agreed on two conditions: she wanted a second medical opinion in New York, and she wanted to record a confession for Scotland Yard. They married in Barbaresco in a ceremony shared with Gianni's parents, whose own marriage they celebrated again. Gianni sang "Ave Maria" as Mary walked down the aisle, and she read him a poem. Their happiness was real, but it could not cure her heart.

Back in New York, DiRe confirmed the Italian diagnosis. Mary tried to give Gianni a future of his own by arranging an audition at the Metropolitan Opera. He sang brilliantly, but the Met could not hire him without a green card. Meanwhile, Mary's absence had hollowed out her agency: clients left, funds dwindled, and the business closed. She did not try to conceal that loss from herself. Instead, she used the time she had to make the confession tape, naming herself as both Mary Jones and Mary Jackson-Peale, and explaining how Belfrage died. She also recorded a separate message for Gianni and her theatre friends, thanking them and acknowledging that beneath the leopard-print dresses and martinis she had cared deeply about the artists she represented. She hoped they would remember that she had made Broadway more interesting and more fun.

Scotland Yard's investigation corrected its case, and Annabelle was released from prison. She returned to Chloe, bringing the confession tape and compensation for her wrongful imprisonment. The two women reunited, and Annabelle and Chloe watched Mary's account together. Mary, meanwhile, died at thirty-seven, with Gianni beside her. Her final moments were quiet: he read Yeats's "When You Are Old and Grey," and she gave him the tape she had made for him. Her memorial drew only a small gathering, but Gianni spoke of her as the love of his life and sang to her picture. Afterward, Broadway's Luce Jason Thomas called with an offer for Gianni to lead in a revival of **South Pacific**, a chance to carry Mary's gift for recognizing artistic possibility into a life of his own.