# THE TENTH SON

A PLAY IN TWO ACTS

BY

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**DIALOGUE SAMPLE**

*The tenth son is compelled to roam the world…*

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CHARACTER BREAKDOWN (6)

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN 16. Brilliant, determined,

a teenager in all that that

implies

MARY BEEKMAN 24. Witty, beautiful, opinionated.

JAMES FRANKLIN 25. Benjamin’s brother. Unwavering, dedicated, hot-tempered.

DR. WILLIAM DOUGLASS 31. Edinburgh-trained physician. Activist. Member of the Couranteers.

JOHN CHECKLEY 42. A bookselling apothecary,

propagandist, leading advocate for the Church of England in Boston. Member of the Couranteers.

REV. COTTON MATHER 59. Politically and socially

influential Puritan minister.

NOTE: Due to the graphic nature of the play, the actor portraying Ben Franklin must not be a minor.

TIME

April 17, 1724 & Late March through early October, 1722

PLACE

Boston, MA

Cotton Mather’s home, a bedroom, a printing house, a sitting room

NOTE: The use of / within the dialogue indicates a point where dialogue overlaps and the next character begins his or her speech. // indicates a new pairing.

ACT ONE

Prologue

Evening, April 17, 1724.

A small courtyard outside of

Cotton Mather’s home in Boston.

JAMES FRANKLIN, JOHN CHECKLEY

and WILLIAM DOUGLASS move

stealthily into view

CHECKLEY

This is a dangerous game, James.

DOUGLASS

You make it e’en the more so, John, if you don’t lower your voice.

CHECKLEY

They keep close watch since the attack.

DOUGLASS

That was more than two years past.

CHECKLEY

He is still detested by many.

JAMES

As are we. Now, please, gentlemen, quiet.

DOUGLASS

Why do you bring us here, James?

JAMES

You wouldn’t believe me without proof. I bring you to the proof.

CHECKLEY

Of…?

JAMES

Look. There. (beat) Easy.

CHECKLEY and DOUGLASS move to

peer through the window

CHECKLEY

It can’t be.

DOUGLASS

I’ll be damned.

JAMES

It’s Ben.

CHECKLEY

With Mather. Good god.

DOUGLASS

How did you find him here?

JAMES

Word came to me that he was home again.

CHECKLEY

Where, I’ve no doubt, he found a firm reprimand from your father.

JAMES

He has not yet seen my father. Or me. Or anyone else that I foolishly thought he regarded as family.

DOUGLASS looks through the

window again.

CHECKLEY

William, please.

DOUGLASS

Hush.

Beat

JAMES

I went to the docks ready to give him hell for his disappearance.

DOUGLASS

The way he is dressed…

JAMES

The first evidence that this is a changed man.

DOUGLASS

In six months time?

JAMES

I’m sure the transformation started well before he ran away. Seeing him like this… Instinct told me to follow rather than confront him. He came straight to this place.

CHECKLEY

What will you do?

JAMES

What can I do? He’s no longer my apprentice.

CHECKLEY

He’s your bro—

JAMES

--Don’t, John. That is a word I can’t abide right now.

DOUGLASS

At the very least, he is still indentured.

JAMES

Not by any contract that can be made publick or that the law will uphold, William. You know that as well as I. I no longer hold sway over him. I wish to God that I never did!

CHECKLEY

Then, cast him from your mind. He’s here for his own purpose. No longer your concern.

DOUGLASS

Let us go before we’re discovered.

JAMES does not move

CHECKLEY

James.

Beat

JAMES

How can this be? There were nine of us before him. Nine sons. And, he the last. And, as each came into this world, our father’s praise and favor became more and more diluted. I thought… I… (beat) I gave this boy no serious consideration. Quite possibly, gentlemen, that was to his advantage.

Time shifts back to…

Scene 1

Late evening, March 26, 1722.

Bedroom of MARY BEEKMAN.

There is a bed. On it are strewn various books – Thomas Tryon’s *The Way to Health*, the third volume of Joseph Addison’s and Richard Steele’s *Spectator* and one or two books by Cotton Mather – including *Essays to Do Good*.

A chair sits by a table on which can be found paper and writing utensils.

Lighting in the room is from one or two wax candles in holders.

BEN and MARY are in the throes

of aggressive love-making.

BEN seems to be working through

some issues

MARY

(doing her best to keep up)

Oh, God in Heaven, Ben. You have. Ahhhh. Nothing. To prove. To… Goddddddd. Might I. Do something to. Help?! (long beat) It seems. Not. Oh. Owwwwwwww! Ben! I. You’re hurting… Ben!

She pushes him off of her

MARY (cont.)

What has control over you tonight? I admire the occasional game – even a somewhat forceful one. But I am not interested in anything that assumes the guise of rape.

She begins to dress in her

undergarments

BEN

That wasn’t my intention. I’m sorry. Truly. My mind was elsewhere.

MARY

On the battlefield? It felt as if you were determined to push a cannonball into place.

BEN

My rammer can be forceful.

MARY

Hide yourself.

(she throws him his undergarment)

You are such a child.

BEN

--I am not! I am a man despite my youth and can stand with any person twice my age. Or, at the least, nine years my senior.

MARY

Oh, good lord. Your brother yet again.

BEN

Damn him! God damn him and his self-righteous arrogance!

MARY

So, I can blame James for my inability to walk properly tomorrow? What has he done this time?

BEN

Belittled me. In the company of two important men.

MARY

Which blowhards this time?

BEN

Checkley and Douglass.

MARY

I can assure you they are only important in the eyes that gaze back at them in the glass.

BEN

I should be writing for the *Courant*!

MARY

Then do.

BEN

He published an advertisement for additional articles. And, even now, his friends devise commentaries. Friends of their friends contribute. I have no doubt passing acquaintances have their opinions in print. But not me. Not his brother. His blood. He called me a puff. How could my head swell when I’m forbidden to any action that might warrant me praise?!

MARY

You are sixteen.

BEN

I’m old enough for you to beg for my prick. You’ve cried out my name multiple times in one session.

MARY

I was mimicking your brother’s thoughts on your age. Not offering mine.

BEN

So, you believe I should be permitted to write.

MARY

Ben, there is no doubt in my mind that you have ideas and thoughts that these others cannot fathom. But, your brother has rule over his paper. And, by contract, over you. Have you appealed to your father?

BEN

Yes. He sides with James.

MARY

Your charm didn’t persuade him?

BEN

My charm is apparently only apparent to you. If given the chance—

MARY

Make the chance.

BEN

What?

MARY

You sit idly by, accepting your brother’s decision. Prompting you to take my vagina for your enemy.

BEN

Such a word. And, you pass yourself as a lady.

MARY

I am a lady when ‘tis necessary. Would you rather I were coy and shyly refer to my ‘tender part’? My ‘delicate flower’? Or would ‘little monkey’ stay the blush from your cheek? In private, my dear, our heat gets the better of me. I enjoy the naughtiness.

BEN

Let’s go once more, then. You have my attention.

MARY

My innards plead for a stay of execution.

BEN

But I’ve yet to complete the task at hand.

MARY

Then, put your hand to the task, Sir. These folds are impenetrable for the remainder of the evening.

BEN

You are a tease, Madame.

MARY

You would better your cause by concentrating on spilling ink onto paper rather than your seed onto my breast.

BEN

I would temper my action. I’m no longer angry. Just in need.

MARY

You should be angry. I won’t allow you to surrender so easily.

BEN

What would you have me do?

MARY

His admirers – those radicals who contribute to the *Courants’* reputation – do they pen under their own name?

BEN

No.

MARY

Insipid monikers such as Ichabod Henroost. Homespun Jack.

BEN

Tabatha Talkative.

MARY

Fanny Mournful. They have the public’s attention regardless of their ridiculousness.

BEN

Or maybe because of it.

MARY

Yes. So, you do the same.

BEN

Truly?

MARY

Why shouldn’t you? Seize your opportunity. Directly under your brother’s watchful eye. You meet with me. Does he give his blessing to our romps? Is he aware?

BEN

No. He can never be. ‘No fornication’ is part of our contract.

MARY

You defy him with your cock. Why not, then, with your pen?

Beat

BEN

What would I compose?

MARY

All that you feel, think. You have observations waiting to pour forth.

BEN

I have studied. (picks up the book) *The Spectator*. I’ve improved on its writings. Humbly I say this but, in all reality, it’s the truth.

MARY

It’s why you brave your brother’s admonitions and his condescension. It is here, Ben. Inside of this beautiful, boyish head. I love this head.

He turns his head and begins to

nuzzle her breasts. Things get

heated. They end up on the bed

amongst the books

MARY

Owww.

BEN

Again? My approach was gentle.

MARY

It isn’t your mouth. (she pulls a book out from under her) It seems Minister Mather has taken me from behind.

BEN

Might I attempt that next?

MARY

Why must you be such a dog?

BEN

Why must you be such a distraction?

MARY

In. due. time. Now, Reverend Mather. He is an enemy to your brother.

BEN

Indeed. Mather holds no love for James. Checkley and Douglass spoke hard against him and the paper followed suit.

MARY

Are their views your own?

BEN

I support them. They are free-thinkers and speak the mind of many readers. Readers who well-deserve a voice.

MARY

There are others who search the *Courant* for support of their beliefs. Those followers of Mather.

BEN

I can commiserate their stance as well. Mather has ideas worth noting.

MARY

Provide another voice, Ben. Show your mind even if it’s in opposition to your brother’s. (beat) Choose.

BEN

Choose?

MARY

What persona will you assume? Who will Benjamin Franklin use to speak to the *Courant* readers?

BEN

This is exciting!

MARY

I know! What is his name?

BEN

His?

MARY

Of course. (beat) Cornelius Chatterbox. No, no, no. Abernathy… Drivel.

BEN

Seymour Babble.

MARY

Benjamin Squabble.

BEN

Moses Malcontent!

Beat

MARY

Dogood.

BEN

Dogood?

MARY

(holding up the Mather book)

*Essays to Do Good*.

BEN

Interesting.

MARY

Reverend Mather provided a thorn for my delicate backside. It’s only fitting he provide the alias by which you can be a thorn in others’.

BEN

Dogood…

MARY

Prattle.

BEN

It must be a woman.

MARY

Why?

BEN

James made me feel less than a man today. He would prefer me to remain in the background.

MARY

Silent.

BEN

Yes. No. (beat) Silence.

MARY

Dogood.

BEN

Paper.

She scrambles to get paper

as he sits at the desk to

write

BEN

To the Author of the *New England Courant*. Sir. (beat) This won’t do.

MARY

It’s a perfect beginning.

BEN

He’ll recognize immediately its origin.

MARY

You’ve written nothing with personality as of yet. How would he know?

BEN

My handwriting. It’s much like his own. He comments on it often.

MARY

He doesn’t know mine.

BEN

Yes! Brilliant! Sit!

MARY takes his place at the

table

MARY

What will be your subject?

BEN

Nothing specific at the outset.

MARY

I don’t understand.

BEN

(indicating *The Spectator*)

Addison made clear that a reader takes pleasure in the essay after finding familiarity with its writer. Our initial subject is Silence Dogood herself. Her history will endear her to the readers and bind them to her in such a way that her ideas and sentiments will seem their own.

MARY takes a new sheet of paper

and rewrites the beginning

MARY

“To the Author of the *New England Courant*. Sir.”

BEN

She is…

MARY

Widowed.

BEN

Of course.

He kisses her gently

MARY

However, more is to be learned first. We should know her from birth.

Long beat

BEN

Take this. We can determine the beginning later. But, for now… “At the time of my Birth, my Parents were on Ship-board in their Way from London to North England.”

MARY

Yes.

BEN

“My Entrance into this troublesome World was… (beat) …was attended with the Death of my Father, a Misfortune, which—“

MARY

--Your brain is far more nimble than my hand.

BEN

I know this woman.

MARY

If the writing is illegible it will matter not what you know of her. Now, “…attended with the death of my Father…”

BEN

“…a Misfortune—“

MARY

/“which”

BEN

/“which tho’ I was not then capable of knowing, I shall never be able to forget;”

MARY

To. Forget.

BEN

“for as he stood upon the Deck rejoycing at my Birth, (beat) a merciless Wave entred the Ship—“

MARY

Dramatic.

BEN

“…and in one Moment carry’d him beyond Reprieve.”

MARY

Poor man.

BEN

Yes. Make that an addition. “Poor man.” This is arousing, Mary! I feel myself hardening with only my wits teasing at the flaccid meat.

MARY

I will be more impressed if your virility remains above the waist for now.

BEN

Yes! Right. Continuing. Ummmm…

MARY

“The wave entered and carried him beyond reprieve.”

BEN

“Thus, was the *first Day* which I saw, the *last* that was seen by my Father; (beat) and thus was my… my…” The descriptive for her Mother escapes me. Not “sad.”

MARY

Melancholy. No. Disconsolate.

BEN

“Thus was my disconsolate Mother at once made both a *Parent* and a *Widow*.” Ohhhhh, James. James, I design to take the piss right out of you, dear brother!

Lights fade on the revelry

(possibly with BEN jumping

on the bed)