VOX MACHINAL

Adapted from *Machinal* by Sophie Treadwell
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SCENE 1: OFFICE

(Typewriter sound, telephone ringing)

REPORTERS
Mrs. Snyder found guilty in the first degree in swift verdict to get death sentence/First ballot
dooms her/Mrs. Snyder victim of hysteria/Says she watched in dark/Murder, Madness, and Mayhem.

OFFICE WORKERS
Hello?/Hello?/Hello?/ George H Jones Company, hello?/Good morning/ Hello?/What number do
you want?/Hello?/Hello?/ George H Jones Company, hello?/

(Loud ring)

OFFICE WORKERS
Shh!/ Yes, Mr. J? No, Ms. A ain’t in yet. I’ll tell her Mr.J the minute she gets in./She’s late again
huh?/ She doesn’t belong here/She’s inefficient/She’s got J going-going-going and coming/Out
with her sweetie last night/Hot dog!/She ain’t got a sweetie/How do you know?/I know/Hot
dog!/She lives alone with her mother.

HUSBAND
Good morning, everybody.

OFFICE WORKERS
Good morning!/Good morning!/Good morning!/Morning, Mr.J!

HUSBAND
Ms.A isn’t in yet?

OFFICE WORKERS
Not yet/not yet/not yet/She’s late

HUSBAND
When Ms.A gets in, tell her I want her to take a letter. Tell her it’s important.

OFFICE WORKER
Ms.A, important.

HUSBAND
And I don’t wanna be disturbed.

OFFICE WORKERS
You’re late/You’re late/you’re late/and yesterday/the day before/and the day before/you’ll lose
your job.
WOMAN
No, I can’t

OFFICE WORKERS
(indistinct chatter)

WOMAN
Why? The Subway.. No! I had to get out! In the air. All those bodies pressing. I thought I would faint. I had to get out in the air. Like I’m dying. What am I going to do?

OFFICE WORKERS
Take a taxi/call a cop/Mr.J wants you.

WOMAN
Me?

OFFICE WORKER
You/ Do you think she’ll marry him?/If she’ll have him/If she’ll have him/If she’ll have him/Why don’t you get to work?

WOMAN
Work? Can’t. My machine’s out of order

OFFICE WORKERS
Ain’t it all set?/You and Mr.J/You and the boss/You and the big cheese/Did he tell you?

WOMAN
No. It isn’t so. No.

OFFICE WORKER
Not yet/But soon/Why did you flinch?/Did he pinch?

WOMAN
Flinch? No, nothing. Just his hand.

OFFICE WORKERS
No, tell him no/If she does, she’ll lose her job/Fired/The sack/And if she doesn’t?/She’ll come to work in a taxi/work/no work

(Phone rings)
OFFICE WORKER
Yes, Mr.J? J wants you.

WOMAN
I can’t. I’m not ready.
(radio static)

SCENE 2: INTERLUDE 1

WOMAN
Marry me. Wants to marry me. George H Jones. Do you take this man to be your wedded husband. I do. No. I can’t. How would you like to marry me. Let me look at your little hands. Let me look at your pretty little hands/ (begins to loop, become indistinct) Bodies press/bodies/trembling/hair/stop/no/please don’t touch me/job/no job/fired/later/alarm clock/alarm clock/alarm clock/earn/all girls/nagma/ma/installments due/all women/most women/I can’t/must/maybe/must/somebody/something/Ma/breathe/Ma/rest/can’t I, Ma?/sleep, Ma/something/somebody

(echos out)

SCENE 3: MOTHER

(Mother’s song plays)

WOMAN
Ma, I want to talk to you.

MOTHER
Aren’t you eating a potato?

WOMAN
I don’t want one

MOTHER
Why not?

WOMAN
I don’t want it. Ma, I wanna ask you something. Something important/ Ma tell me/Because I don’t want it/I want to ask you something/something important/Ma, tell me/No/Because I don’t want it/Ma, let me alone/Ma, don’t nag/

MOTHER
What would become of you, I’d like to know if I didn’t nag.

WOMAN
I’m grown up, Ma.

MOTHER
Grown up, what do you mean by that?

WOMAN

Ma, listen! There’s a man wants to marry me.

MOTHER

What man?

WOMAN

He says he fell in love with my hands.

MOTHER

In love, is that beginning again? I thought you were over that? Who is he? Where did you come to know him?

WOMAN

In the office

MOTHER

In the office?

WOMAN

Mr.J

MOTHER

Mr.J?

WOMAN

The vice president.

MOTHER

Vice president? His income must be. Does he know you’ve got a mother to support?

WOMAN

Yes

MOTHER

What does he say?

WOMAN

Alright?

MOTHER

How soon you going to marry him?
I’m not going to.

MOTHER

Not going to?

WOMAN

No! I’m not going to. I’m not going to.

MOTHER

Are you crazy?

WOMAN

I can’t, Ma. I can’t

MOTHER

Why can’t you?

WOMAN

I don’t love him, Ma.

MOTHER

Oh love, will it pay the bills?

WOMAN

No, but it’s real just the same. If it isn’t, what can you count on in life?

MOTHER

You can count that you’ve got to eat and sleep and get up and put clothes on your back and take them off again and that you’ve got to get old and you’ve got to die. That’s what you’ve got to count on.

WOMAN

But, Ma.

MOTHER

All the rest is in your head.

WOMAN

Didn’t you love Pa?

MOTHER

What difference does it make now? He’s a decent man.

WOMAN
I don’t care whether he’s decent or not, I’m not marrying him.

MOTHER

But you just said you wanted to marry/

WOMAN

Not him, I don’t know, I haven’t found him yet.

MOTHER

You talk like you’re crazy.

WOMAN

Oh ma, tell me. Your skin oughtn’t to curl just when he comes near you, ought it. That’s wrong, ain’t it? You don’t get over that, do you? How is it, Ma, do you? Do you get used to it, so after a while it doesn’t matter or don’t you? You ought to be in love oughtn’t you, Ma. That change everything doesn’t it? When he puts a hand on me, his blood turns cold. His hands are fat, Ma, don’t you see? His hands are fat. He’s the only man thats ever asked me and I suppose i gotta marry somebody. All girls do. I can’t go on like this such longer. Going to work, coming home, going to work, coming home, I can’t. Sometimes in the subway I think I’m going to die. Sometimes even in the office/

MOTHER

You’re crazy

WOMAN

Ma! If you ever say that to me again, I’ll kill you! I’ll kill you!

MOTHER

If that ain’t crazy!

WOMAN

Maybe I am crazy! Sometimes I think I am. The thoughts that go on in my mind. I can’t help it if I am. I do the best that I can and I’m nearly crazy. Go away! Go away! You don’t know anything about anything. You haven’t got any pity. No pity! You just take it for granted that I go to work everyday, and come home every night, and bring my money every week, you just take it for granted. You’d let me go on forever, and never feel any pity! (burner sparks) Oh Ma, forgive me. Forgive me.

MOTHER

I brought you into the world. You’re flesh of my flesh.

WOMAN

I know. I know, Ma. You rest now, Ma. You rest.

MOTHER
Now I got to do the dishes.

WOMAN

I'll do the dishes. You listen to the music, Ma. I'll do the dishes.

MOTHER

I've been washing dishes for 40 years and I've never worn gloves. But my lady's hands! My lady’s hands!

WOMAN

Sometimes you talk to me like you're jealous, Ma.

Jealous?

MOTHER

It's my hands got me a husband

WOMAN

A husband? So you're going to marry him now?

I suppose so.

MOTHER

If you ain't the craziest.

(Mother's song)

SCENE 4: HONEYMOON

(radio show applause, music box melody)

HUSBAND

Well here we are

WOMAN

Yes, here we are.

HUSBAND

Aren't you going to take your hat off, stay a while? This is all right, isn't it? Huh?

WOMAN

It's very nice.
HUSBAND

Twelve bucks a day! They know how to soak you in there pleasure resorts. Twelve bucks! Well, we’ll get our money’s worth out of it all right. *(music box stops)* Say, pull that blind down! They can see in!

WOMAN

I thought you said there’d be a view of the ocean.

HUSBAND

Sure there is.

WOMAN

I just see people dancing.

HUSBAND

The ocean’s beyond.

WOMAN

I was counting on seeings it.

*(music box slowly comes back)*

HUSBAND

You’ll see it tomorrow. What’s eating you? We’ll take in the boardwalk. Don’t you want to wash up?

WOMAN

No.

HUSBAND

It was a long trip, sure you don’t? Better make yourself at home, I’m going to. Say, pull down that blind! *(music box stops)*

WOMAN

It’s close don’t you think it’s close?

HUSBAND

Well, you don’t want people looking in, do you? *(laugh track)* Huh?

WOMAN

No.

HUSBAND

I guess not, huh? Say, you look a little white around the gills, what’s the matter?

WOMAN
HUSBAND
You look like you’re scared. Nothing to be scared of. You’re with your husband, you know.

WOMAN
I know.

HUSBAND
You happy?

WOMAN
Yes.

HUSBAND
Then come here and give us a kiss. Thats the girlie. Like that? Say, stay there! What you moving for? You know, you got to learn to relax, little girl. *(music box begins)* Say, what you got under there?

WOMAN
Nothing *(laugh track)*

HUSBAND
Nothing? That’s a good one, nothing. That reminds me of the story of the pullman and the porter and the, what’s the matter, did I tell you that one?

WOMAN
I don’t know

HUSBAND
The pullman porter and the tart

WOMAN
No

HUSBAND
It’s a good one, well, the train was pulling out and the tart

WOMAN
You did tell me that one *(laugh track)*

HUSBAND
About the/

WOMAN
Yes, yes, I remember now

HUSBAND

About the/

WOMAN

Yes.

HUSBAND

Alright, if i did. You’re sure it was the one about the/

WOMAN

I’m sure. *(laugh track)*

HUSBAND

When he asked her what she had underneath her seat and she said/

WOMAN

Yes, yes, that one.

HUSBAND

Alight, but I don’t believe i did. *(music box stops)* You know you have got something under there, what is it?

WOMAN

Nothing, just my garter.

HUSBAND

Your garter! Your garter! Say did I tell you the one about? *(laugh track)*

WOMAN

Yes, yes!

HUSBAND

How do you know which one I meant?

WOMAN

You told me them all! *(laugh track)*

HUSBAND

No, I didn’t! Not be a jugful! I got a lot of them up my sleeve. That’s a part of what i owe my success to, my ability to spring a good story. You know, you got to learn to relax little girl, haven’t you.

WOMAN
Yes.

HUSBAND
You haven’t got much on, have you? But you’ll feel better with em off. (cheer track) Want me to help you?

No.

WOMAN

HUSBAND
I’m your husband, you know.

I know.

WOMAN

HUSBAND
You aren’t afraid of your husband, are you? (laugh track)

No, of course not.

WOMAN

HUSBAND
We can talk here. I’ll tell you all about myself. Go along now. Where are you going?

In here.

WOMAN

HUSBAND
I thought you’d want to wash up.

I just want to get ready.

WOMAN

HUSBAND
You don’t have to go in there to take your clothes off! (laugh track)

I want to.

WOMAN

HUSBAND
What for?

WOMAN

I always do.
HUSBAND
What?

WOMAN
Undress by myself.

HUSBAND
You’ve never been married til now, have you? *(laugh track)* Or have you been putting something over on me?

WOMAN
No.

HUSBAND
I understand, kinda modest, huh? Huh?

WOMAN
Yes.

HUSBAND
I understand women. Go along. Don’t close the door, I thought you wanted to talk. *(music box starts)* You’re awful quiet, what are you doing in there?

WOMAN
Just getting ready.

HUSBAND
Well hurry up then! I thought you women didn’t wear much of anything these days, huh? I’m coming in.

WOMAN
No, no, just a minute!

HUSBAND
Alright, just a minute. 13, 14, *(laugh track)* I’m counting the seconds on you, that what you said, didn’t you, just a minute! 49, 50, 51, 52, 53/

WOMAN
*(music box stops)*

Here I am.

HUSBAND
Are you crying? What you crying for?

WOMAN
Ma! Ma! I want my mother!
HUSBAND
I thought you were glad to get away from her.

WOMAN
I want her now. I want somebody.

HUSBAND
You got me, haven’t you?

WOMAN
Somebody, somebody/

HUSBAND
There’s nothing to cry about. There, there. There’s nothing to cry about.
(Music begins, applause track)

SCENE 5: HOSPITAL
(heart monitor beep begins)

HUSBAND
Well how are we?

NURSE
She’s getting strong.

HUSBAND
Of course she is.

NURSE
See what your husband brought you!

HUSBAND
Better put them in water right away. Everything okay? Now see here, my dear, you’ve to to brace up, you know! And face things! Everybody’s got to brace up and face things! That’s what makes the world go round. I know all you’ve been though but. Oh, yes I do! I know all about it! I was right outside all the time! Oh ye! But you’ve got to brace up now! Make an effort! Pull yourself together! Start the up-hill climb! Oh I’ve been down, but I haven’t stayed down. I’ve been licked, but I haven’t stayed locked! I’ve pulled myself up by my own bootstraps, and that’s what you’ve got to do! Will power! That’s what conquers! Look at me! Now you’ve got to brace up! Face the music! Stand the gaff! Take life by the horns! Look it in the face! Having a baby’s natural! Perfectly natural thing, why should/

NURSE
What’s the matter?

HUSBAND
She’s get that gagging again, like she had the last time I was here.

NURSE
Better go sir.

HUSBAND
I’ll be back

NURSE
She needs rest

HUSBAND
Tomorrow then. I’ll be back tomorrow, tomorrow and everyday. Goodbye.

NURSE
How are you feeling today? Better? No pain? You’re getting along fine, such a sweet baby you have, too. Aren’t you glad it’s a girl? You’re not! Oh my, that’s not way to talk! Men want boys, women ought to want girls. Maybe you didn’t want either, eh? You’ll feel different when it begins to nurse. You’ll just love it. Your milk hasn’t come yet, has it? It will! Oh, you don’t know Doctor! Anything else you want? Draft? The noise? Oh that can’t be helped, hospital’s got to have a new wing. We’re the biggest Maternity Hospital in the world! I’ll close the window though. No?

WOMAN
I smell everything then.

DOCTOR
How’s the little lady today?

NURSE
She’s better, Doctor.

DOCTOR
Of course she’s better, she’s alright, aren’t you? What’s the matter? Can’t you talk?

NURSE
She’s a little weak yet, Doctor.

DOCTOR
Milk hasn’t come yet?

NURSE
No, doctor.

DOCTOR
Put the child to breast. No? Don’t you want to nurse your baby? Why not? These modern neurotic women, eh? What are we going to do with them? Bring the baby!

NURSE
Yes, Doctor. She’s behaved very badly every time, Doctor, very upset. Maybe we better not?

DOCTOR
I’ll decide what we better and better not here, Nurse.

NURSE
Yes, Doctor.

DOCTOR
Bring the baby!

NURSE
Yes, Doctor.

DOCTOR
Gagging, you mean nausea?

NURSE
Yes, Doctor, but/

DOCTOR
No but’s, Nurse.

NURSE
Yes, Doctor.

DOCTOR
Nausea, change the diet! What is her diet?

NURSE
Liquids.

DOCTOR
Giver her solids.

NURSE
Yes, Doctor. She says she can’t swallow solids.
DOCTOR

Give her solids.

NURSE

Yes, Doctor.

DOCTOR

Wait, I’ll change her medicine. After meals, bring her baby.

WOMAN (VERBAL)

NO!

(beeping stops, faint ringing starts, static follows)

SCENE 6: INTERLUDE 2

WOMAN (VERBAL) (cont’d)

LET ME ALONE/LET ME ALONE/ I’VE SUBMITTED TO ENOUGH/I WON’T SUBMIT TO ANY MORE/CRAWL OFF/CRAWL OFF IN THE DARK/VIXEN CRAWLED UNDER THE BED/WAY BACK IN THE CORNER UNDER THE BED/ THEY WERE ALL DROWNED/PUPPIES DON’T GO TO HEAVEN/HEAVEN/GOLDEN STAIRS/LONG STAIRS/LONG/TOO LONG/LONG GOLDEN STAIRS/CLIMB THOSE GOLDEN STAIRS/STAIRS/STAIRS/STAIRS/CLIMB/TIRED/TOO TIRED/DEAD/NO MATTER/NOTHING MATTERS/DEAD/STAIRS/LONG STAIRS/ALL THE DEAD GOING UP/GOING UP TO BE IN HEAVEN/HEAVEN/GOLDEN STAIRS/ALL THE CHILDREN COMING DOWN/COMING DOWN TO BE BORN/DEAD GOING UP/CHILDREN COMING DOWN/GOING UP/COMING DOWN/GOING UP/COMING DOWN/GOING UP/STOP/STOP/NO/NO TRAFFIC COP/TRAFFIC COP/CAN’T YOU GIVE US A SMILE/TIRED/TOO TIRED/NO MATTER/IT DOESN’T MATTER/NO MATTER/IT DOESN’T MATTER/I’LL REST/I’LL LIE DOWN/DOWN/ALL WRITTEN DOWN/DOWN IN A BIG BOOK/NO MATTER/IT DOESN’T MATTER/I’LL LIE DOWN/IT WEIGHS ME/IT’S OVER ME/IT WEIGHS/WEIGHS/IT’S HEAVY/IT’S A HEAVY BOOK/NO MATTER/LIE STILL/DON’T MOVE/CAN’T MOVE/REST/FORGET/THEY SAY YOU FORGET

WOMAN (VOICE OVER)

Let me alone/let me alone/(indistinct)/little girl/curls all over his head/little bald girlgoing up/coming down/stop/stop/no traffic cop/doesn’t matter/nobody loves God/please don’t/let me rest (indistinct)/even if he’s got fat hands/ outside/all around/wait/I’m under it/Vixen crawled off under the bed/I’ll not submit anymore/I’ll not submit

SCENE 7: MACHINE

HUSBAND

Record production

WOMAN

Girl turns on gas
Sale hits a million

Woman leaves all for love

Market trend steady

Young wife disappears

Owns a life interest

Prisoner escapes, lifer breaks jail, shoots way to freedom. Woman finds husband dead.

(channel change, gavel hit)

Order!/Order!

Then there was a light in the room?

A sort of light.

What do you mean a sort of light? A bed light?

No, no there was no light on.

Then where did it come from, this sort of light?

I don’t know.

Perhaps from the window.
Yes, from the window.

PROSECUTOR

Oh, the shade was up!

WOMAN

No, no the shade was down.

PROSECUTOR

You’re sure of that?

WOMAN

Yes, Mr. Jones always wanted the shade down.

PROSECUTOR

The shade was down, there was no light in the room, but the room was light, how do you explain this?

WOMAN

I don’t know.

PROSECUTOR

You don’t know?

WOMAN

From the moon!

PROSECUTOR

The moon!

WOMAN

Yes! It was a bright moon!

PROSECUTOR

It was a bright moon, you are sure of that?

WOMAN

Yes!

(channel change)

HUSBAND

What’s the matter?

WOMAN
Nothing, what?

You flinched when I touched you

No.

You haven’t done that in a long time.

Haven’t I?

You used to do that everytime I touched you.

Did I?

My, you’re nervous tonight.

I try not to be.

You inherit that from your mother.

Poor Ma.

What would she do without me?

(channel change)

Who is that woman?

Your mother/your mother

She’s a stranger, take her away, she’s a stranger.
JAILER/MATRON
She’s come to say goodbye/To say goodbye.

(Mother’s song starts)

WOMAN
But she’s never known me, never known me ever. Go away! You’re a stranger! Stranger! Stranger! (Mother’s song stops) Mother?

JUDGE
Order!/Order!

(channel change, gavel hit)

WOMAN
I try to be a good mother

HUSBAND
Of course you do!

WOMAN
I try! I try!

HUSBAND
A mother’s a very precious thing. And a child’s a very precious thing. Precious jewels. What’s the matter?

WOMAN
I feel as though I were drowning.

HUSBAND
Drowning?

WOMAN
With stones around my neck.

HUSBAND
You just imagine that.

WOMAN
Stifling.

HUSBAND
You don’t breathe deep enough. Breathe now, look at me. Breath is life, life is breath.
And what is death?  

(channel change, gavel hit)

JUDGE

Order!/Order!

(heart monitor beeping)

JAILER/MATRON

Very neat/very neat

BARBER/DOCTOR

How is she?

JAILER/MATRON

Calm/ Quiet/ The rule/ Regulations/ Routine

BARBER/DOCTOR

No, we ain’t the death guard, we’re the doctors.

JAILER/MATRON

Your hair must be cut/ must be shaved

BARBER/DOCTOR

Just a patch/ Fix ya right up

REPORTERS

Suppose the machine shouldn’t work!/ It’ll work, it always works!

(channel change)

HUSBAND

Close the window, will you?

WOMAN

It isn’t open.

HUSBAND

Don’t you feel cold air?

WOMAN

No, you just imagine it.

HUSBAND

I never imagine anything.
I can’t sleep. I haven’t slept.

That’s nothing.

And the moon, when it’s a full moon.

That’s nothing.

I can’t sleep.

It’s the light.

I don’t see it. I feel it. I’m afraid.

Nonsense, come here.

I want to go away.

But I can’t get away now.

Alone.

You’ve never been away alone.

I know.

What would you do?

Maybe I’d sleep.

(electrocution sound)
SCENE 8: INTERLUDE 3

END OF PLAY

(live folley of wind chimes)