

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 pressing/bodies/trembling/hair/stop/no/please don't touch me/job/no job/fired/late/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. WOMAN

Not going to? MOTHER

No! I'm not going to. I'm not going to. WOMAN

Are you crazy? MOTHER

I can't, Ma. I can't WOMAN

Why can't you? MOTHER

I don't love him, Ma. WOMAN

Oh love, will it pay the bills? MOTHER

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

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.

But, Ma. WOMAN

All the rest is in your head. MOTHER

Didn't you love Pa? WOMAN

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

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 that's 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.

MOTHER

Jealous?

WOMAN

It's my hands got me a husband

MOTHER

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

WOMAN

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

Nothing

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. That's 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.

WOMAN

I know.

HUSBAND

You aren't afraid of your husband, are you? (*laugh track*)

WOMAN

No, of course not.

HUSBAND

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

WOMAN

In here.

HUSBAND

I thought you'd want to wash up.

WOMAN

I just want to get ready.

HUSBAND

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

WOMAN

I want to.

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

Here I am. (*music box stops*)

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 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/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 girl/going
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/I'll not submit

SCENE 7: MACHINE

HUSBAND

Record production

WOMAN

Girl turns on gas

Sale hits a million HUSBAND

Woman leaves all for love WOMAN

Market trend steady HUSBAND

Young wife disappears WOMAN

Owens a life interest HUSBAND

Prisoner escapes, lifer breaks jail, shoots way to freedom. Woman finds husband dead.
(channel change, gavel hit) WOMAN

Order!/Order! JUDGE

Then there was a light in the room? PROSECUTOR

A sort of light. WOMAN

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

No, no there was no light on. WOMAN

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

I don't know. WOMAN

Perhaps from the window. PROSECUTOR

WOMAN

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?

HUSBAND

You flinched when I touched you

WOMAN

No.

HUSBAND

You haven't done that in a long time.

WOMAN

Haven't I?

HUSBAND

You used to do that everytime I touched you.

WOMAN

Did I?

HUSBAND

My, you're nervous tonight.

WOMAN

I try not to be.

HUSBAND

You inherit that from your mother.

WOMAN

Poor Ma.

HUSBAND

What would she do without me?

(channel change)

WOMAN

Who is that woman?

JAILER/MATRON

Your mother/your mother

WOMAN

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.

WOMAN

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.	WOMAN
That's nothing.	HUSBAND
And the moon, when it's a full moon.	WOMAN
That's nothing.	HUSBAND
I can't sleep	WOMAN
It's the light.	HUSBAND
I don't see it. I feel it. I'm afraid.	WOMAN
Nonsense, come here.	HUSBAND
I want to go away.	WOMAN
But I can't get away now.	HUSBAND
Alone.	WOMAN
You've never been away alone.	HUSBAND
I know.	WOMAN
What would you do?	HUSBAND
Maybe I'd sleep.	WOMAN
	<i>(electrocution sound)</i>

SCENE 8: INTERLUDE 3

(live folley of wind chimes)

END OF PLAY