

**MORPHEME:**  
A Thirty-Minute Play

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**SCENE 0.**

*(Darkness.)*

*(A series of masculine voices, perverted with underpinnings of static interference.)*

THE PRESIDENT (V.O.)

It is an unfortunate fact that we can secure peace only by preparing for war. Today, we need a nation of Minutemen, citizens who are not only prepared to take arms, but citizens who regard the preservation of freedom as the basic purpose of their daily life. Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and success of liberty. And so, my fellow Americans, let us take arms. The tree of liberty must be refreshed, from time to time, with the blood of . . . heh, of . . . sorry, hold on, I swear I know this . . . um, someone who . . . the blood of—

*(The slap! of bare palm against tile.)*

JUDE

Jesus Christ, Mary and Joseph!

*(A click. The lights blink on.)*

**SCENE 1.**

*(Morning. Too much sun; JUDE and MAXIMILLIAN squint with frustration.)*

*(They sit, side by side, in the breakfast nook of a modern and fashionable apartment. A television, off, sits on the counter next to an elderly rotary telephone. JUDE's typewriter, molded in gleaming blue, rests in front of her. MAXIMILLIAN makes do with a full rasher of bacon and an oversized jug of orange juice. Immediately to his left, a mixing bowl piled high with fried eggs wobbles as he pops them, one by one, into his mouth.)*

*(THE BABY, swathed in a pink and blue blanket, lies in a crib molded for its safety.)*

JUDE

I almost had it.

*(A pause.)*

I was so close!

*(Another pause.)*

Max!

MAXIMILLIAN

Yes, darling?

JUDE

I practically had it made.

MAXIMILLIAN

Had . . . what made, exactly?

JUDE

What do you think? The perfect phrase! There it was, cresting at the surface of consciousness, staring with beady eyes snagged, but I yanked too hard and then—

MAXIMILLIAN

You lost it?

JUDE

You don't have to rub it in.

MAXIMILLIAN

Have you seen the paper this morning?

JUDE

I'm in the middle of a crisis and you're asking about the paper?

MAXIMILLIAN

Yes, it wasn't on the doorstep. Do you think the neighbors took it?

JUDE

The Johnsons are upstanding members of the community. What would they want with the Chronicle?

*(A pause.)*

I cancelled it.

MAXIMILLIAN

You what? How am I supposed to get the news?

JUDE

I don't know, watch TV like everyone else? I'm sorry, Max, it had to go. It was distracting me.

MAXIMILLIAN

Distracting you from what?

JUDE

My work! What else could I be distracted from?

MAXIMILLIAN

Darling, I need that subscription. You need it! You have a vested interest in current affairs.

JUDE

I don't see why.

MAXIMILLIAN

Your work! What else is there?

JUDE

I spend too much time researching and not enough writing. What do you think of this phrase?

MAXIMILLIAN

Very nice, but about the paper—

JUDE

You didn't listen to it!

MAXIMILLIAN

If the Chronicle bothers you, what about the Times?

JUDE

*(Tugs a fresh sheet of paper from the typewriter, reading:)*

“There is nothing wrong with America that faith, love of freedom—“

MAXIMILLIAN

The Times is a very respectable paper—

JUDE

*(JUDE's voice escalates with each new line.)*

“—energy and intelligence—“

MAXIMILLIAN

--so the neighbors won't form any opinions—

JUDE

“—of our citizens—“

JUDE

*(Simultaneously:)*

“--cannot cure.”

MAXIMILLIAN

--and besides—

JUDE

*(Shouting:)*

Cannot cure!

*(Startled, THE BABY cries.)*

Now look what you've done!

MAXIMILLIAN

Me? I'm just trying to have a civil conversation about the—

JUDE

Oh, never mind the paper! Don't you care about my feelings?

MAXIMILLIAN

But, Darling—

JUDE

I'm working my ass off to put food on the table, and you're only interested in hack reporters scribbling down their identical opinions!

MAXIMILLIAN

Darling, we go through this night after night. I read every one of your speeches the morning after they're aired. The transcript's in the paper.

JUDE

That doesn't count! My writing isn't convincing on paper! You miss out on all the inflections, all the pauses and dots, and dashes and lead-ins, the if-then statements, everything that ties it all together!

MAXIMILLIAN

Shouldn't the text do that?

JUDE

Max, plain words are just that: plain. If you think they provide the content in a piece of debate –it's useless arguing with you, I can't hear myself think over this racket!

MAXIMILLIAN

What racket?

JUDE

The baby! Crying, like it does every day, every night, when it's hungry, when it's not hungry, when a butterfly flaps its wings . . . I don't know how I get anything done!

MAXIMILLIAN

Neither do I. Amazing, isn't it?

JUDE

Then why don't you do anything about it?

MAXIMILLIAN

Oh, of course, how silly of me.

*(MAXIMILLIAN lumbers to the cradle and picks up THE BABY.)*

*(Crying escalates to a deafening volume.)*

JUDE

You're making it worse.

MAXIMILLIAN

I'm sorry, I don't think she likes me very much.

JUDE

Of course she likes you, it's just a phase. All children prefer their mothers for the first few months. I did the same thing and it drove my father crazy.

MAXIMILLIAN

What about Abby?

JUDE

I was talking about normal children. Of course she loved Dad.

*(Takes THE BABY from MAXIMILLIAN. THE BABY settles down.)*

*(Singing:)*

Hush, little baby, don't you cry, Momma's gonna bring you an IBM electric typewriter model A, the kind with powder blue plastic molding and easy load ribbon.

MAXIMILLIAN

I don't think that's how it goes.

JUDE

Singing the right words won't make it shut up any faster.

*(Tosses THE BABY back in the crib, like a basketball. THE BABY cries.)*

I can't work with this noise! You need to stay home today, Max.

MAXIMILLIAN

Darling, we went through this. Today, you take the baby. I go to the office.

JUDE

Then change your plans!

MAXIMILLIAN

I can't, Jude, I have a court date in a week.

JUDE

So reschedule! I can't sit around playing house all day! I need to finish my speech by tonight! Its being read on the news at noon! It all happens tomorrow!

MAXIMILLIAN

Why don't you ask Abby to babysit?

JUDE

Why don't I throw my child out a window? Because it's stupid. That's why.

MAXIMILLIAN

She's not as bad as you think.

JUDE

Maybe you should have married her instead of me.

MAXIMILLIAN

That's not where I was going with this.

JUDE

Abby's incapable of taking care of a baby. Just look at it!

*(Picks THE BABY up by its ankle. The BABY stops crying.)*

It screams, it weeps, it tries the temper of a saint, it eats and shits and sleeps and requires constant attention. So, of course Abby, who shaved her head with a penknife at thirteen, Abby, who snuck boys through **my** window in junior high, Abby, current resident of a commune, is qualified to take care of this?!

*(Shakes THE BABY. It giggles and coos.)*

MAXIMILLIAN

I'm sorry, Darling, but I can't take her today, I really can't. And if you won't let Abby help—

JUDE

Fine. Another day trapped in domestic bliss for me.

MAXIMILLIAN

You're so understanding, Darling. Really, you're a peach.

*(MAXIMILLIAN leans in to kiss her cheek, but is stopped midair by THE BABY's screams of protest.)*

*(A click. Lights out.)*

**SCENE 2.**

*(Lights up on: Noon. The light is less preternaturally bright, but still uncomfortable.)*

*(Again, JUDE and MAXIMILLIAN sit, side by side, same breakfast nook, different day. The television is tuned to a news program, which JUDE watches avidly. MAXIMILLIAN devours a stack of pancakes at least two feet high and smothered in glistening maple syrup. A gallon jug of milk, half consumed, rests at his elbow.)*

*(The dirty dishes from a different breakfast are piled to one side. A few yellowing newspapers are stacked on top of the telephone.)*

*(THE BABY is still wrapped in a blanket, still lies in the crib.)*

Sh, it's starting.  
JUDE

Hm.  
MAXIMILLIAN

Max, are you listening?  
JUDE

Of course I am. Have you seen the paper?  
MAXIMILLIAN

Max, please.  
JUDE

THE PRESIDENT (V.O.)  
*(In one voice throughout, voice tinny with transmission:)*  
It is an unfortunate fact that we can secure peace only by preparing for war.

Jude? Did you forget to tell me something?  
MAXIMILLIAN

What do you mean, sweet darling?  
JUDE

There is nothing so likely to produce peace as to be well prepared to meet the enemy.  
THE PRESIDENT (V.O.)

Are we going to war?  
MAXIMILLIAN

JUDE

Yes, darling, of course we are.

THE PRESIDENT (V.O.)

Today, we need a nation of Minutemen—

MAXIMILLIAN

Of course? What do you mean, “of course?” You never mentioned it!

JUDE

I read my speech to you over and over and you never showed a speck of interest, so I didn’t think you found it that important.

THE PRESIDENT (V.O.)

--citizens who are not only prepared to take arms—

MAXIMILLIAN

For God’s sake, it’s war. People are going to die! Why wouldn’t I find it important?

JUDE

I don’t know, you never took much interest in my work before.

THE PRESIDENT

--but citizens who regard the preservation of freedom—

JUDE

God, that phrase cuts, doesn’t it?

MAXIMILLIAN

It’s effective, if that’s what you’re going for.

THE PRESIDENT

--as the basic purpose of their daily life—

JUDE

Effective?

MAXIMILLIAN

He’s calling for enlistment, isn’t he?

THE PRESIDENT

--and who are willing to consciously work and sacrifice for that freedom.

JUDE

How should I know? I was commissioned as a speechwriter, not a political consultant.

THE PRESIDENT

Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill—

JUDE

Hush for a second, this is my favorite part.

THE PRESIDENT

That we shall pay any price—

JUDE and THE PRESIDENT

*(Simultaneously, but note: THE PRESIDENT leads JUDE in recitation.)*

--bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe—

THE PRESIDENT

--to assure the survival and the success of liberty.

JUDE

God, I'm good. Did you notice my use of repetitive phrasing? It's a chilling device, isn't it?

MAXIMILLIAN

It gets the job done.

THE PRESIDENT

And so, my fellow Americans –

*(Telephone rings.)*

JUDE

Jesus Christ, I'm trying to enjoy a shining moment here—

MAXIMILLIAN

I'll get it.

JUDE

But Max, I want you to hear how I—

MAXIMILLIAN

Maximillian speaking.

THE PRESIDENT

--let us take arms.

MAXIMILLIAN

*(Covers the receiver with a cupped palm. He cradles the phone with unusual tenderness.)*

Jude, it's Abby.

JUDE

Of course it is. Tell her I'm out . . . I don't know, walking the dog or something.

MAXIMILLIAN

Jude, we don't have a dog.

JUDE

The baby, then! You figure it out.

THE PRESIDENT

The tree of liberty—

MAXIMILLIAN

*(Into receiver:)*

I'm sorry, she's not here. She . . . stepped out. No. Okay, okay. Really. That is big news. No, I'm sorry, I don't see her anywhere.

*(Looks to JUDE. She waves dismissively. Back to phone:)*

Of course.

THE PRESIDENT

--must be refreshed—

MAXIMILLIAN

I'll let her know next time she's home.

*(Laughs.)*

Alright, nice speaking to you. Goodbye.

*(Hangs up with a click.)*

THE PRESIDENT

--from time to time—

JUDE

Well?

MAXIMILLIAN

Well, what?

JUDE

What did she say? Is she drunk? Needs money? An abortion?

THE PRESIDENT  
 --with the blood—

MAXIMILLIAN  
 No, nothing like that, I—

JUDE  
 Just spit it out.

THE PRESIDENT  
 --of patriots—

MAXIMILLIAN  
 She was watching your address on television.

JUDE  
 That's a first. What does she think?

MAXIMILLIAN  
 She loved it.

THE PRESIDENT  
 --and tyrants.

MAXIMILLIAN  
 She decided to enlist.

JUDE  
 What?

*(Suddenly, a low creak. A rumbling. A clang. A crash.)*

*(A rush of air.)*

*(A light slams into the stage.)*

*(THE BABY cries.)*

JUDE (con't)  
 What the fuck?!

MAXIMILLIAN  
 If you still think a call to action won't have an effect on someone—  
*(He shrugs, picks up a paper, and begins reading.)*

JUDE

No, you idiot! What the fuck is that?  
*(Pointing to light.)*

MAXIMILLIAN

Last week's paper. I tried to order the Times but it hasn't come yet.

JUDE

No, Max!  
*(Grabs MAXIMILLIAN by the hand and drags him across the stage. She forces his palm against the light to the sticky slap of skin against metal.)*

That!

MAXIMILLIAN

Oh, that. It looks like . . . some kind of device.

JUDE

A device. In the middle of our kitchen.

MAXIMILLIAN

It's wartime, Jude. You said it yourself.

JUDE

No, I didn't!

MAXIMILLIAN

You wrote it.

JUDE

What's that got to do with anything?

MAXIMILLIAN

You wrote a speech. Your sister enlists. Bomb falls from sky. Doesn't that set off any alarm bells?

JUDE

I don't think it's a bomb, it looks pretty benign.

MAXIMILLIAN

That's just what they want you to think. It's a good thing we're not dead.

JUDE

It can't be that simple. If we were supposed to die we would have already. I mean, it's obviously for . . . something else. Look at it, with that thing . . . that wriggles, and then that other thing . . . that moves.

MAXIMILLIAN

Maybe it's from an alien space ship.

JUDE

Maybe.

MAXIMILLIAN

Jude, it's not from an alien spaceship.

JUDE

Oh. Are you sure?

MAXIMILLIAN

Trust me. Look, Jude, it's barely eleven and you've heard a lot of big news. You're probably still getting over the shock—

JUDE

I don't care what my sister does. She can run off into the desert and get raped by a gang of crazed Bedouins for all I care.

MAXIMILLIAN

And you're saying some things you don't mean. So let's just relax, forget about it for awhile, and talk about this later. Enlisting will do Abby good, anyway. She'll finally tame her wild side.

JUDE

Are you crazy? Abby never worked a day in her life! They'll eat her alive over there, with a dollop of hummus or flatbread or grilled camel or whatever!

MAXIMILLIAN

Definitely still in shock.

JUDE

I'm not in shock.

MAXIMILLIAN

She'll be fine, Jude. Abby can take care of herself.

JUDE

About as far as I can throw her.

MAXIMILLIAN

What did you expect to happen? You wrote this monstrosity of a speech—

JUDE

No, I—

MAXIMILLIAN

—knowing how impressionable Abby is, how impressionable most of America is, and you still begged for fighters on hands and knees, no matter how defenseless or weak they are!

JUDE

I wasn't writing to . . . I was just writing. I wasn't begging for action.

MAXIMILLIAN

When I heard your speech this morning, it sure as hell sounded like it.

JUDE

I never meant for this to happen.

MAXIMILLIAN

And now Abby's run away, and we've got a big thing in the middle of our kitchen. So what you meant to happen doesn't matter, does it?

JUDE

Max, you know . . . I . . . never . . . I need some . . . I need to breathe.  
*(JUDE starts looking around the nook, frantically.)*

MAXIMILLIAN

Where do you think you're going?

JUDE

Out, to think, I need to be alone, I need to—

MAXIMILLIAN

It's too late for that.

JUDE

I just need some fresh air.  
*(Walks toward edge of stage.)*

MAXIMILLIAN

Jude. There's nowhere to go.

*(At the edge, JUDE shades her eyes and looks into the audience. A slow realization spreads from her eyes, knits her eyebrows, and leaks into the corners of her mouth)*

*(JUDE looks back at MAXIMILLIAN. Silence. THE AUDIENCE hears the low, slow droning of the fluid in their inner ear.)*

*(The lights click out.)*

## SCENE 3.

*(Lights up on: afternoon.)*

*(Same breakfast nook, different day. The television is tuned to a blaring pastiche of presidential voices. An open box of cereal cascades over the floor. Maps are spread on the chairs, all over the nook, everywhere. Cheerios are used as markers. Foreboding stacks of dirty dishes and stained newspapers sway precariously on the counter. A concentric ring of lit candles, flickering, encircles the light onstage.)*

*(JUDE is alone on the floor, her typewriter in front of her. She types feverishly.)*

*(THE BABY, still in a blanket, is also still in its crib.)*

*(MAXIMILLIAN enters. )*

*(He walks in. He looks at JUDE. He walks to the nook. He looks at JUDE. He sits down. He looks at JUDE. He picks up a paper and opens it, deliberately, rustling it, deliberately. He clears his throat. He sighs. He folds the paper once, twice, thrice into a rectangle, roadmap perfect. He sets it beside him. He folds his hands under his chin. He looks at JUDE.)*

MAXIMILLIAN

Good morning.

*(A pause.)*

Good morning, Darling.

*(A pause.)*

How are you today?

JUDE

Busy.

MAXIMILLIAN

Have you been up all night?

JUDE

I'm not tired.

MAXIMILLIAN

It's late.

JUDE

It's only six o'clock.

MAXIMILLIAN

In the evening. It's late if you just got up.

*(A pause.)*

The alarm didn't go off this morning. You're supposed to set it before you go to sleep.

JUDE

Sorry. No bed, no alarm.

MAXIMILLIAN

Why didn't you get me up for breakfast?

JUDE

Never ate it. No time.

MAXIMILLIAN

So you didn't cook breakfast either.

JUDE

No. I didn't.

MAXIMILLIAN

I'm willing to be lenient, Jude. I know you have your writing. I don't ask you to clean and scrape and bow like other husbands do. I just ask for some basic human courtesy and a couple of fried eggs a couple times a week. And you just . . . forgot all that.

JUDE

No. Was too busy. There's a difference.

MAXIMILLIAN

At least you fed the baby today. Jude. You did feed the baby, didn't you?

JUDE

It's been quiet. I don't think it's hungry.

MAXIMILLIAN

Jesus Christ, what's gotten into you?

*(Crosses to crib and picks up THE BABY. It cries.)*

JUDE

You're not helping it.

MAXIMILLIAN

At least I'm trying.

*(MAXIMILLIAN jiggles THE BABY, which cries harder.)*

JUDE

That's not good enough! We were doing fine on our own!

*(A pause.)*

Stop it! That noise gives me a headache!

MAXIMILLIAN

I'm doing my best.

JUDE

God, she really hates you, doesn't she?

*(Gets up and crosses to THE BABY. Singing:)*

Hush, little—

*(Sound of crying screeches to a halt, skipping like a CD.)*

*(A moment. JUDE stares at MAXIMILLIAN blank-eyed.)*

MAXIMILLIAN

What? Why did you stop?

JUDE

Don't you hear?

*(JUDE grabs THE BABY and rips away the blanket. The skipping stops. THE BABY is a doll, head freakishly distended, expression frozen into a smile with two tiny, perfectly pearly teeth poking from beneath a painted upper lip, eyes glassy blue.)*

*(JUDE screams.)*

MAXIMILLIAN

What's wrong?

JUDE

This! This is what's wrong, Max!

*(Holds THE BABY by the ankle for him to see.)*

MAXIMILLIAN

Are you crazy? Stop, you'll hurt her!

JUDE

How am I supposed to hurt her, Max? How, exactly?

*(Raps on THE BABY's head. It makes a loud, hollow noise, like a gong.)*

MAXIMILLIAN

There's no need to prove anything to me—

JUDE

Shut up! You were in this from the beginning, weren't you? You were laughing at me, laughing as I gave up my words, my work, for you, for this **thing**--

MAXIMILLIAN

I don't know what—

JUDE

I told you to shut up! You're not important! This isn't important! Only the work is important, do you hear me?

*(Throws THE BABY at MAXIMILLIAN. Porcelain, it shatters into a million pieces.)*

*(He slaps her, hard. A pink rosetta of burst blood vessels rises in her cheeks.)*

JUDE

You hit me. You hit me! For exposing this, this analogue of development, this empty symbol of domestic bliss--

MAXIMILLIAN

She's not an analogue, Jude! She's not empty! She's a person! A real, breathing, living person and you tried to kill her! You tried to kill your own flesh and blood, you mangled her and spat on her, look at her, look at the blood and the—she was yours and you cut her down! Look at what you've done! Look! Look!

*(Grabs her face between his hands, sobbing, and pushes her to the ground, into the shattered remains. JUDE struggles, uselessly.)*

JUDE

Stop, Max, you're hurting me!

MAXIMILLIAN

It's your fault if she dies, Jude, so help me God, it's blood on your hands, your hands and not mine.

JUDE

Stop, Max, please, Max, stop! It's not my fault, she tricked me, she tricked me into believing . . . and it's not my fault when Abby dies, I swear to God I didn't kill her—

*(JUDE's hands are cut and bleeding, profusely, a sticky syrup red.)*

MAXIMILLIAN

What does she have to do with anything?

JUDE

I killed her, I killed her, I killed her.

MAXIMILLIAN

Abby's still alive, Jude! She's still alive! It's your baby that needs help, this isn't about Abby!

JUDE

Everything's about Abby and I. Everything! Can't you feel it? This whole room breathes Abby, it breathes her scent, and her perfume, it breathes her hair and her blood and her platelets and cells—

MAXIMILLIAN

Stop it! You're acting crazy!

JUDE

And there's nothing I can do, I've been trying to figure it out, if I can just hit on the right words, the right combination, then everything will be okay and we can all just get back to normal—

MAXIMILLIAN

You've fucking lost it, Jude.

*(MAXIMILLIAN gathers some of the shards and cradles them, starts rummaging around in the cabinets.)*

JUDE

Wait, Max, what are you doing?

MAXIMILLIAN

I'm going to help our child!

*(Exits.)*

JUDE

Are you coming back? Max? Are you coming back? Max? Answer me. Max? Please.

*(A pause.)*

*(JUDE picks up a shard. Blood pours down her palm, into the porcelain; it gathers there until gravity catches it, and it flows in sticky streams to the stage. Thirsty, the paint drinks it like wine, and JUDE touches fingers to lips.)*

Corn syrup.

*(Whistling is heard from offstage; high, shrill, tuneless, and upbeat. The STAGE HAND enters from stage left, sweeping up pieces of THE BABY with an oversized pushbroom. He reads from a folded up script cradled in one hand, whistling as he works. He doesn't notice JUDE.)*

JUDE (con't)

Hey! What do you think you're doing?

STAGE HAND

Sweeping. What about you?

JUDE

Waiting for my husband.

STAGE HAND

Says here you won't have to wait long.

JUDE

What the hell are you babbling about?

STAGE HAND

Because it's over, isn't it? Isn't this the end? Am I too early?

*(Consults his script.)*

I've still got a couple of pages to go, haven't I?

JUDE

How dare you barge in here! Get out!

STAGE HAND

That's not your next line. You're supposed to ask me about the script. If you don't remember a line you should call for it.

JUDE

What are you talking about?

STAGE HAND

I guess it could just be a change in the script. Improv. Natural variation. Every night the performance is a little different. Different energy levels in the audience, different directors, different actors, one night you're sweeping cups, next, dirty diapers.

JUDE

I don't understand.

STAGE HAND

Do you need to?

JUDE

I think so.

STAGE HAND

Do you want to read it then?

JUDE

Yes.

STAGE HAND

That's not what you're supposed to say. It's too simplistic. What happened to your fire, your spark, your poeticism?

JUDE

Line.

STAGE HAND

Excuse me?

JUDE

I'm calling for my line.

STAGE HAND

Oh, sorry, I'm still in training, I mean, I'm new on the job, I kind of expected I was early, I just wanted to impress my supervisor . . . heh. You know. Go get 'em spirit and--

JUDE

Line.

STAGE HAND

Oh, um. Right. Page . . . twenty two. "Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and success of liberty." Oh, wait, that's not it. I'm sorry. I got confused, I'm . . . awfully new at this. That's where my bookmark is. It's my favorite part.

JUDE

Mine too.

STAGE HAND

I like how she just keeps repeating the same thing, over and over and over until it makes you dizzy.

JUDE

Can I look at that?

STAGE HAND

I need it for my cue.

JUDE

I need it to find my husband.

STAGE HAND

Oh, you'll never have to worry about that.

JUDE

I know. Line.

STAGE HAND

"Can I look at that?"

JUDE

Yes, of course you can. Here you go.

*(As she speaks, the STAGE HAND pantomimes along with her with stunning accuracy, and hands her the script.)*

*(JUDE looks down at it in disbelief. She opens to the first page. She begins to read.)*

*(Lights click out.)*

#### SCENE 4.

*(Lights up on: evening. It is very dim.)*

*(Same breakfast nook, different day. The television is off. Blood is everywhere. More dishes, more newspapers, yellowed and dirty, thrown around the room, red and soaking. The faucet is clogged, and running water trickles down the sink and flows copiously across the floor. JUDE is alone on the ground, the script in hand, floating little paper sailboats down the stream. Black gaffing tape is wrapped roughly around her ankles, attaching her to the breakfast nook.)*

*(THE BABY is in its crib, swathed in the same tape. It looks like a cocoon, or a mummy, with a single blue eye peeping out.)*

JUDE

*(Tears a page from the script.)*

Page One. President. Vee. Oh. Open parenthesis italicized each sentence has been recorded by a different voice. close parenthesis end italicized.

*(MAXIMILLIAN enters from stage left.)*

MAXIMILLIAN

What are you doing?

JUDE

*(Folds the page into a boat as the two talk.)*

It's none of your concern.

MAXIMILLIAN

Does it involve slaughtering family members?

JUDE

No.

MAXIMILLIAN

Murdering innocents in psychotic fits of rage?

JUDE

No.

MAXIMILLIAN

Hm. How about authoring documents akin to Mein Kampf in potency?

JUDE

I'm almost done writing. For good.

MAXIMILLIAN

Jude—

JUDE

No. Not now.

MAXIMILLIAN

Then you're right. It's none of my concern.

JUDE

I'm making boats.

MAXIMILLIAN

I can see that.

JUDE

I'm calling her lost soul back to me.

MAXIMILLIAN

She's not dead, Jude.

JUDE

She will be.

MAXIMILLIAN

You're starting to scare me.

JUDE

Is that why you tied me up?

MAXIMILLIAN

When I came back from the store with the tape for our injured child, you were rolling around on the floor reading that . . . whatever it is and licking your own blood from your fingers. It was warranted under the circumstances, Jude.

JUDE

If you were trying to help the baby, why did you buy tape?

MAXIMILLIAN

Can you hear how crazy you sound? How little sense you're making?

JUDE

You can't just tape up wounds in flesh and blood. It's not that simple.

MAXIMILLIAN

The Times finally came today.

JUDE

Are you listening to me? It's not that easy to fix. You can't just tape it up and assume everything's going to be all better.

MAXIMILLIAN

There's a really interesting article in here that I think you'd enjoy.

JUDE

If she's a human being, why is she better now? If she's better, why doesn't she cry when you touch her?

MAXIMILLIAN

It's all about the history of a trial I worked on.

JUDE

Someone told me you got a medal for a case you worked on..

MAXIMILLIAN

Yes, for this one. I wasn't sure we were going to get an acquittal, but then we just framed the situation in the right context and bam! It was like magic. Do you want me to read it to you?

JUDE

No.

MAXIMILLIAN

“Associated Press. Today marked the anniversary of the historic Rodney King verdict.”

JUDE

Page 5. “Capitalized. Jude. You’re making it worse. Capitalized. Maximillian. I’m sorry, I don’t think she likes me very much.”

*(She makes a boat and floats in on the river.)*

MAXIMILLIAN

“The defense attorneys were able to wrangle an innocent verdict out of a problematic trial by using a principle known as professional discursive practice.”

JUDE

Page 10. “Capitalized. Maximillian. Italicized open parenthesis into receiver colon close parenthesis end. I’m sorry, she’s not here. She . . . stepped out. No. Okay, okay. Really. That is big news. No, I’m sorry, she’s just not.”

*(Folds into a paper boat and sets it afloat.)*

MAXIMILLIAN

“The defense attorneys brought in a retired officer as an expert witness. He testified that Rodney King was actually engaged in and controlled, a complex cascade of discursive events used by officers to safeguard their lives in threatening situations.”

JUDE

Page 17. “Capitalized. Maximillion. What’s wrong, Jude? Capitalized. Jude. This! This is what’s wrong, Max!”

*(Folds into a paper boat and sets it afloat.)*

MAXIMILLIAN

“This discourse flowed as follows. Step One. Beat. Step Two. Wait for response. Example. Attempting to get up. Step Three. If response is forthcoming, return to step one. Using this simple framework, the defense attorneys were able to shape the jury’s perception of the video as a savage beating into the professional context of a police officer doing his duty.”

JUDE

Page 27.

*(Folds into a paper boat and sets it afloat.)*

JUDE (con’t)

Jude wrote her best speech. She sent it to her sister. Abby read it to the troops. The troops threw down their weapons and ran away. The war was over. The end.

MAXIMILLIAN

Jude, what are you doing? Are you even listening to me?

JUDE

I'm calling to my sister's lost soul down the river.

MAXIMILLIAN

Jude, how many times do I have to tell you that she's not dead? She's in the army! She's at war, yes, but there's a big difference there!

JUDE

I sent her away. There's blood on my hands. I'm the one who started the war. I have to fix it.

MAXIMILLIAN

You don't have to do anything. That's just not the way you are. You write. You construct syntax. You write a program, a discourse, words to coil around the base of the brainstem, to worm in there, to screw it up. And then you send it out into the world and see what happens.

JUDE

Max, when did you stop loving me?

MAXIMILLIAN

I don't know. I don't think love ever entered into the equation.

JUDE

I think it did, at the beginning.  
*(Phone rings.)*

MAXIMILLIAN

Are you going to get that?

JUDE

No. It wasn't in the script.

MAXIMILLIAN

I'm answering the phone.

JUDE

Don't. Just wait.  
*(Television blinks once. THE PRESIDENT is on the screen.)*

THE PRESIDENT

Hello? Hello? Is anyone there? Testing, 1, 2, 3? Testing?

MAXIMILLIAN

Mister President. It's good to see you again.

THE PRESIDENT

Oh, you! The lawyer cat! You work magic with expert testimony . . . yow! I get cold just thinking about it. If Nixon had you, boy oh boy, this country would be a different place.

JUDE

Only the police had expert testimony.

THE PRESIDENT

What's that noise?

MAXIMILLIAN

That's my wife, Mr. President.

JUDE

Who can testify as an expert at being a victim?

THE PRESIDENT

I can see that, Maximillian, my boy, but I don't think your wife echolocates like a bat.

MAXIMILLIAN

You'd be surprised, Mister President.

JUDE

It's the telephone. It's ringing.

THE PRESIDENT

Well, rip it out of the wall, for Christ's sake. I'm trying to give an address here.

MAXIMILLIAN

I'm sorry, sir, but I don't think that would help.

THE PRESIDENT

Well, I can't talk over this racket; you won't hear my inflections! I worked hard on those inflections, and no telephone's going to stop me from using them.

MAXIMILLIAN

You just pay it no mind. Go ahead, sir, we're listening.

THE PRESIDENT

Fine, fine. Jesus, in my days we had professionals running the works. Anyway. My fellow Americans. The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants.

MAXIMILLIAN

Nice touch, Jude.

*(Phone stops ringing.)*

JUDE

This isn't my doing.

THE PRESIDENT

Do you two mind? Jesus. So yada yada yada, tree of liberty refreshed with the blood of patriots. And today is no exception. Today, a truly American hero took it upon herself to refresh that tree so all Americans can enjoy the blessings of future freedom.

JUDE

Abby.

THE PRESIDENT

No, dumbshit, why would I praise some hippy who convinced my soldiers to run off? I don't know where half of them are now! The U.S. army is AWOL! We're wide open to foreign attack! No, instead I am congratulating the true hero, a young woman born of our enemy, a sheep in wolf's clothing, who shot the bitch—

JUDE

What?

THE PRESIDENT

I said, who shot the bitch the second she put down her gun.

*(Phone starts ringing.)*

Do you mind?

MAXIMILLIAN

One moment, Mister President, I'll get it. That's what I'm here for.

*(Crosses to phone and picks up.)*

Hello? Yeah, she's here. Hold on. Jude? It's your sister.

JUDE

It can't be. She's dead.

MAXIMILLIAN

So? What's that got to do with anything?

JUDE

She's dead. This time she's really dead. She can't be on the phone. She's dead.

MAXIMILLIAN

I'm sorry, I don't follow you.

JUDE

I killed her. I killed her, and now she's dead. I put her in the ground. Game over. Curtain call. Sold out show. That's it.

*(STAGE HAND enters from stage left. Begins sweeping up the mess.)*

JUDE (con't)

What are you doing here?

STAGE HAND

It's over. It's done with. That's the end.

MAXIMILLIAN

Jude, I'm telling you, she wants to talk to you.

JUDE

Dead people don't call you on the phone! They can't, they're dead! Once they're dead it's over, there's no going back.

*(Rips the phone over the wall. It begins ringing.)*

What kind of a place is this?

STAGE HAND

Could you move a little to the left, please? I'm trying to sweep there.

MAXIMILLIAN

It's not time for that yet.

*(MAXIMILLIAN begins taking off his clothing, and laying it on the floor.)*

STAGE HAND

Of course it is. Didn't you read the script?

*(STAGE HAND mirrors every action.)*

JUDE

I did. I did and this still doesn't make any sense. I've been trying to keep going, I've been trying to understand through some . . . some natural law, some cause and effect, but one word just keeps leading to another and another and I can't control it anymore!

STAGE HAND

Whoa, whoa, calm down. You're getting agitated.

JUDE

My dead sister is calling me on the phone. Don't I have the right to get a little agitated?

MAXIMILLIAN

It's not what you think.

*(The two men begin to get dressed again, each in the garb of the other.)*

JUDE

Not what I think? I don't know what to think! Every time! I try to make something happen! Every time! I write something! It goes! Completely! Fucking! Awry! And there's nothing I can do about it, there's just nothing! It's this place, it's the environment, there's something in the air, something in the tile, something's leaking through the pigment or the wall. There's gotta be . . . something has to be normal out there.

*(Starts ripping the tape away from her body.)*

MAXIMILLIAN

Jude, I did that for your own protection.

STAGE HAND

There's nowhere else for you to go. I've been out there. I've seen it with my own two eyes. There is nowhere else. This is it!

JUDE

I don't buy it. I don't! Look at this crap! I don't remember the last time I went outside! It's all just tile, and tile, easy mess, easy clean up, paper towels, nowhere to wash the dirty dishes, it just piles and piles and piles and who's supposed to let it end?

*(Topples the dishes. They break, everywhere.)*

Who finishes it? Who cleans up the mess when the lights go out?

MAXIMILLIAN

Calm down!

JUDE

I can't calm down! Everything's just a fucking mess! There's nothing I can do about anything. My actions are entangled, my words are entangled, my throat is entangled, I can't breathe, I'm choking! I need to get out!

*(Topples the television, frantically rips maps to shreds.)*

MAXIMILLIAN

Stop, you're hurting the president!

JUDE

There's nothing there to hurt, Max! He's on television! How am I going to hurt him?

STAGE HAND

Of course you can hurt him. One shot and it's over. A waving, smiling image on the screen, one shot, one click, and it's over. Brains on the car seat, a solemn little boy, a flash, a click, and an entire country is mobilized behind one photograph.

JUDE

That's not for me.

STAGE HAND

It's what you were written to do. We put a lot of money into this set. You're supposed to be happy.

MAXIMILLIAN

You're supposed to be content. You loved it here.

JUDE

Old fashioned saccharine and sap. I don't need it. And I don't need you.

MAXIMILLIAN

Hey! Where do you think you're going?

JUDE

Outside.

MAXIMILLIAN

*(Shading his eyes, looking into the audience and shouting into it:)*

You're not going to get far, Jude! You'll come back!

STAGE HAND

Let her go. She didn't like it last night.

*(JUDE is walking down the aisle, toward the door. At the end of the aisle, ABBY waits. She wears a dress and combat boots. Her head is a mess of blood and tissue.)*

*(JUDE stops. The sisters stare at each other.)*

MAXIMILLIAN

Jude! Come back! Please, Jude! Please. Jude? I still love you, Jude, I swear! I need you!

*(ABBY smiles and beckons.)*

*(JUDE rushes forward and stops. They touch, just finger tips.)*

JUDE

Abby, I . . . I swear to God, I never meant—

ABBY

Sh.

*(Lights click out.)*

**SCENE 0.**

*(Complete darkness. The pupils of THE AUDIENCE enlarge with a series of quiet, cold, muscular contractions.)*

*(A click.)*

*(Work and house lights up. JUDE and ABBY are gone. The STAGE HAND is gone.)*

*(THE AUDIENCE winds its way toward the exit.)*

*(MAXIMILLIAN, dressed as the STAGE HAND, moves across the stage, sweeping up the debris.)*